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Fashion communication and Artificial Intelligence: the case of Neural Fashion AI

Comunicación de moda e inteligencia artificial: el caso de Neural Fashion AI

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Abstract
Artificial intelligence presents to society as a revolutionary tool capable of generating a change as unique as the democratization of Internet access at the beginning of the 21st Century. The different applications of AI facilitate the development of marketing and communication strategies adapted to the needs of the public and the establishment of strong relationships with them. One of the most dynamic consumer markets is fashion communication, hence we decided to delimit the applications of AI to brands in this sector. The first objective is to identify the main resources and applications of AI that are being used to communicate with the different stakeholders of fashion companies, particularly with the final consumer. The second objective is to recognize benefits and positive aspects along with the brakes and barriers of this technology for communicating strategies of fashion brands. Thirdly, a case study is offered to help academics and professionals understand how the fashion sector is receiving the help of generative AI in the creation of campaigns. Through a combination of qualitative methods including 3 Delphi interviews, a hemerographic research of professional publications and the Neural Fashion AI case study, the capacity of AI to point out a differentiating factor in the market that has to do with sustainability, product customization and optimization of company resources has been demonstrated. The main results highlight the contribution that AI makes to the efficiency of processes and to the achievement of brand objectives (customer satisfaction, loyalty, strengthening of positioning and brand image), expansion into new markets and audiences, or the creation of innovative, impactful and attractive content.

Keywords
Fashion, AI, communication strategy, branding, retail, Neural Fashion AI.

Resumen
La inteligencia artificial se ofrece a la sociedad como una herramienta revolucionaria capaz de generar un cambio tan singular como fue la democratización del acceso a Internet a principios del siglo XXI. Las distintas aplicaciones de la IA están facilitando el desarrollo de estrategias de marketing y comunicación adaptadas a las necesidades de los públicos y al establecimiento de relaciones sólidas con estos. Uno de los mercados de consumo más dinámicos es el de la comunicación de moda, por lo que se eligió acotar las aplicaciones de la IA a las marcas de este sector. El primer objetivo es identificar los principales recursos y aplicaciones de IA que se están utilizando para comunicar con los distintos *stakeholders* de las empresas de moda, en particular con el consumidor final. El segundo objetivo es identificar los beneficios y aspectos positivos junto con los frenos y barreras que la aplicación de esta tecnología supone para las estrategias comunicativas de las marcas de moda. En tercer lugar, se ofrece un estudio de caso que ayude a académicos y profesionales a comprender como el sector de la moda está recibiendo la ayuda de la IA generativa en la creación de campañas. A través de una combinación métodos cualitativos que incluye tres entrevistas *Delphi*, una investigación hemerográfica de publicaciones profesionales y el estudio de caso de Neural Fashion IA, se ha evidenciado la capacidad de la IA para señalar un factor diferenciador en el mercado que tiene que ver con la sostenibilidad, la personalización de producto y la optimización de los recursos de las empresas. Como principales resultados se destacan la contribución que la IA aporta a la eficiencia de los procesos y en la consecución de objetivos de las marcas (la satisfacción del cliente, su fidelización, el fortalecimiento del posicionamiento y la imagen de marca), la expansión a nuevos mercados y audiencias o la creación de contenido innovador, impactante y atractivo.

Palabras clave
Moda, IA, estrategia de comunicación, branding, retail, Neural Fashion AI.

Introduction

The rise of a new audience has transformed in recent years the landscape of fashion brands and their communication. The new demographic of digital natives who prioritize experience, personalized attention and unique and sustainable experiences has become the new paradigm that demands innovative responses from brands to maintain their loyalty (Morris and Edges, 2024).

At the same time, the use of innovative technologies has played a fundamental role in the evolution of brand communication. Among these technologies, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a strategic force, offering significant opportunities to redefine the relationship between brands and their consumers.

This work delves into the cross between fashion and AI, exploring how its implementation has become a crucial competitive advantage for fashion brands. In this context, it is essential to understand that the fashion industry is not only about garments and trends, but also about visual narratives and emotional connections. Integrating AI into brand building not only streamlines creative processes, but also provides a platform for personalization, inclusiveness, and the creation of unique experiences for consumers.

The main objective, therefore, is to demonstrate that AI is providing a competitive advantage for fashion brands in terms of communication with target audiences, their brand image and generate experiences that encourage the loyalty of potential consumers.

In addition, throughout its development it aims:

- To contextualize the origin of AI and its basic concepts.
- To explain how AI is being applied to the fashion industry, and the impact it is having on its communication.
- To understand the benefits and challenges associated with integrating this tool.
- To illustrate how AI can be a competitive advantage with the study of a success case: Neutral Fashion AI.

This research begins with a first analysis of the functions and uses of the so-called "Artificial Intelligence" (AI) technology applied to communication in the fashion sector to demonstrate its impact. The technical and legal challenges presented by the use of this tool due to its recent appearance and the absence of specific regulation were also pointed out. Through in-depth interviews with three experts from the fashion and technology sector (Karen Sastre Gonjar, Roser Bagó Ribaudí, and Diego Gómez García Carpintero) the context has been enriched with qualified information. At the same time, in order to illustrate the real applications, the study of the specific AI platform *Neural Fashion AI* that is presented as a success case has been carried out.

The study concludes with a detailed analysis of the collaboration campaigns between the pioneering image and avatar generation platform in Spain, Neural Fashion AI, and two emerging fashion brands, Sepiia and Carmen Says. This illustrates how AI can improve creativity and efficiency in the development of visual content, aligning with the values of brands and strengthening their image and positioning in the market.

Origin and definition of AI

The origin of AI dates back to 1950, when Alan Turing and John McCarthy began studying the possibility of creating machines with cognitive abilities. Turing, also known as the "father of computer science," published in 1950 his book *Computational Machinery and Intelligence* where he raised the question: "Can Machines Think?" This question led to the formulation of the "Turing Test," designed to determine whether a machine could adopt human-like intelligent behaviors such as learning, perception, reasoning, and problem solving. According to Turing's proposal, the computer passes the test if a human evaluator is unable to distinguish whether the answers, to a series of questions posed, are from a person or not (Russell & Norvig, 2010).

John McCarthy coined the term AI in 1956 during the Dartmouth Conference, a gathering attended by some of the greatest scientists of the time, although its true origin dates back to the 1920s, when robots and intelligent machines first appeared on the big screen and literature, becoming key characters in popular entertainment. It was not until 1940 that mathematicians Norbert Wiener and John Von Neumann laid the groundwork while working on systems theory, for McCarthy shortly thereafter to define it as "the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs" (Gobierno de España (2021) *Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan*).

Currently, AI has become a tool with countless applications in various fields such as language processing, design, communication, medicine, research or, in general, problem solving. However, its main purpose is not to generate new knowledge, but to make the most of existing data to make informed decisions. To do this, it relies primarily on three elements: data, hardware and software. The data represents the information collected and organized that will be used to automate tasks, while the hardware provides the computing power needed to process this data more quickly and accurately. Finally, the software consists of a set of instructions and calculations that allow training systems to recognize patterns in the data and generate new information.

The algorithms

To understand how AI operates and its applications in the fashion industry, it is essential to understand the concept of algorithms: they are sets of instructions given to machines to guide their behavior with the aim of developing systems that emulate human reasoning and execute tasks performed by people. Within the scope of AI algorithms, two main subfields are distinguished.

On the one hand, machine learning, performed through the analysis of data or patterns, with which they "learn" from a large amount of information. In this way computers and machines can carry out specific tasks (processing at high speed, automating and optimizing analysis processes, leading to fast and accurate results) independently, just as a human would (Argyrou *et al*., 2024; Black Box Lab, n.d.).

This learning requires human intervention, as it is the experts who must provide the hierarchy of characteristics so that the machine can understand the differences between data inputs.

To achieve this goal, *Machine Learning* is divided into three types: supervised (1), unsupervised (2) and reinforcement (3) learning. Being the first fundamental for the contextualization of this work.

Supervised learning (supervised AI) is based on training the algorithm with data that has a known classification or category provided by a human. These labels will then be used to generate new classifications of the results obtained. Once the training is complete, the algorithm can apply new data and make predictions about what it has learned. As Centeno Franco (2019) explains, we talk about supervised learning when we have a set of data and we know, for those data, what the correct answer is. What we do not know is how to get from data to response. Supervised AI is mostly used for sorting or prediction tasks (e-mail spam detection, voice recognition, image sorting…). Some examples of applications of this technology are Alexa or Siri.

On the other hand, there are deep learning algorithms or Deep Learning, which could be classified as a subfield of Machine Learning. They process data through deep artificial neural networks called RNAs. It can be defined as the predictive capacity of the machine (Argyrou *et al.,* 2024).

In other words, as Karen Gonjar (2024) explains, "Deep Learning says that based on all this information that I have and that I have been able to learn thanks to my Machine Learning ability I predict that this is going to be so, and that another thing is going to happen".

Both deep learning and neural networks are closely related to the human brain, as they are based on the neural functioning of humans. It aims to mimic, as accurately as possible, variable processing and decision-making. They work as a method that teaches computers to process data as a human would (Gallardo Lorenzo, 2023).

Researchers in this field refer to the existence of two types of neural networks: adversarial generative neural networks (1) and antagonistic generative neural networks (2). These give rise to Generative AI, which "is a revolutionary subsection of AI that not only processes information, but creates new and original content. It is the next step in the evolution of AI: an entity capable of designing, innovating and, in certain aspects, applying "creativity" (Morales, 2023; Linkedin.com.).

Generative neural networks "are a new way of using deep learning to generate images that seem real" (Lee, 2022 p. 3). Thus, these neural networks have led to the emergence of platforms such as Neural Fashion AI, which produces photographs of fashion collections based on previously designed garments. By adopting this technology, fashion companies could optimize their processes, reduce costs, and achieve a more efficient impact on their consumers, thus gaining a competitive advantage over their rivals.

French luxury label Gucci was noted for applying this technology in their collaboration with Trevor Andrew, called Guccighost, in which the digital artist created a collection of handbags and accessories whose designs had been generated by AI. As a starting point he took digital images of the garments of the brand itself and thanks to the adversarial generative networks he was able to play with them by manipulating patterns and forms to develop new designs.

In generative AI, unlike supervised AI, the algorithm is trained to generate data from a series of input data, without needing to label it. This ability to create new content is applied to speech synthesis or the generation of text and images and is mainly focused on creative tasks related to fields such as design, fashion, music or art.

As the chief technology officer of fashion brand Mango Moreno (2023) points out in a press release: "Generative AI is an extended intelligence, that is, a technology that will be a co-pilot for our employees and *stakeholders* and that will help us extend their capabilities".

AI in the fashion industry: the importance of data

In the evolution of the fashion industry "technologies have contributed to a continuous evolution in any of the areas that make up the textile company, either in improving production efficiency or in creating new communication channels" (Jin and Shin, 2021).

The arrival of the fourth industrial revolution associated with the emergence of the digital environment (industry 4.0), has had a notable impact on the fashion sector, thanks to the monitoring and analysis in real time of consumer preferences and tastes, where AI plays a crucial role thanks to sophisticated algorithms and access to large volumes of data (Giri *et al.* 2018; Amed *et al.* 2023). However, it has also become one of the most disruptive and controversial technologies as models are progressing faster and more powerful, accelerating the emergence of new dangers that are generating debate both among the scientific community and in the political instances (Luce, 2018; Saponaro *et al.,* 2018). The Government of Spain created at the end of 2022 the Spanish Agency for AI Supervision to establish a regulatory and supervisory framework to address the challenges and risks associated with the increasing use of AI in trademarks (Polo Mignani, 2024).

Initially, AI was used exclusively in *back-end* operations such as inventory management and supply chain logistics, however, its application was soon expanded to brand communication strategies.

Nowadays, companies face an infinity of data that exceeds the capacity of human analysis. A click, a change of web or any online interaction can be valuable for the brand. In this context, AI has become a critical tool by automating the process of collecting, cleaning, and analyzing all of that data through machine-learning algorithms or language-processing techniques.

The British luxury brand Burberry was a pioneer in incorporating this technology in its stores with the mission of improving the customer experience, thus retaining its buyers by replicating the advantages offered by online sales channels, and consequently, amplifying their sales. Consumers who go to their hybrid stores may have a customer record, generating data that "the brand can use to predict future purchases that can be made or even personalize those purchases" (Gonjar, 2024).

The strategy is to ask customers who have made a purchase to leave their details voluntarily through loyalty programs that provide them with rewards. These allow the brand to set profiles and segment consumers so that, as Menéndez (2021) explains, sales assistants can approach them with recommendations based not only on their own purchase history, but on thousands of people who fit a similar profile.

Data management has become a fundamental aspect of understanding what the public wants. As Amed et al. (2023) mention, efficient data management not only provides companies with a clearer view of the customer but also allows them to offer a personalized experience while extracting information about purchasing patterns, trends or style preferences and thus, scoring points in terms of loyalty in a context where consumers increasingly expect brands to understand their individual needs, going beyond simply offering product recommendations.

In today's digital age, where 85% of the Spanish population uses the Internet and spends around three hours a day on social networks (INE, 2024) users are exposed to countless stimuli from brands, for that reason consumers increasingly feel the need for a genuine connection with fashion brands.

Applications of AI in fashion brand communication

Technological innovation is redefining the way brands retain and position themselves in the minds of their consumers, from using data analytics to predict trends, segment markets and customize products to content design and advertising strategies.

The impact of Big Data

Predicting trends

As explained, AI can analyze large volumes of data, and anticipate audience references derived from social networks, blogs, shopping platforms, streaming events and walkways, among others, to be able to make informed decisions regarding communication, the design of advertising campaigns and products, based on personalization.

Machine learning algorithms and natural language processing identify trends in real time, giving brands the ability to anticipate. This way of harnessing the power of data is called predictive analytics, and it is a competitive advantage for fashion brands because it allows them to:

- Stay relevant and differentiate themselves in an increasingly saturated market by ensuring the alignment of their collections with the demands of the public.
- Improve their image and positioning in the minds of their consumers by creating personalized communication strategies and brand experiences, which also favors loyalty.

A good example is the American brand Tommy Hilfiger, which, together with IBM and the Fashion Institute of Technology (NYC), has implemented AI to analyze data derived from runways, social networks and even its own historical archive to detect and capitalize on trends in order to better understand the needs of the public and make the product development process more efficient.

Market segmentation

Targeting audiences is a key strategy to effectively target a specific audience and not saturate with random messages. Analyzing real-time information about purchasing behavior, demographics, interactions on social networks, among other sources, allows to detect specific audiences and adapt to their preferences in a more individualized way, maximizing the effectiveness of strategies and impacting them with product recommendations or promotional messages, for example.

The customer experience

Loyalty to customers is a goal shared by all fashion brands, hence it is crucial to build a satisfactory experience that strengthens the relationship with the audience (Saponaro *et al.,* 2018). After the first applications such as the use of neural language processing algorithms for product recommendation (through emailings, newsletters or notifications), platforms such as Stitch Fix, or Findme have been developed to analyze the online behavior of the consumer and act as personalized stylists.

Adolfo Domínguez stands out in this field, which has developed a "personal shopper" called ADN, which, based on a style test, selects garments to send home to its customers and can return those for free.

Zalando, as a solution to the challenge of missized returns faced by marketplaces, has implemented AI to help consumers find their size. Users provide body photos and AI detects the exact measurements to provide personalized recommendations. These programs have reduced the rate of returns to 10% (Oliveras, 2024).

In addition, the transmission of sustainable values and environmental awareness regarding the impact of returns reinforce their image, generating greater loyalty in their public and increasing the number of potential consumers.

In this context focused on achieving satisfactory brand experiences, chatbots or interactive virtual assistants are born. They are software designed to interact with the users of the websites through text messages with the aim of personalizing customer service and technical assistance regarding specific queries or problems.

These simulate human conversations and offer help through the brand's website or instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram or Facebook. "The key to their success (and failure so far) will be precisely how natural they are able to sound and to what extent they can understand the customer" (Gestal, 2023; Modaes.com).

El Corte Inglés pioneered the development of Corti, an AI-based robot that offers gift suggestions via Facebook, depending on age, sex or relationship with the person receiving the gift and other major brands such as Zara, which has also adopted this technology.

In China, WeChat is leading this trend and some of the biggest luxury brands such as Burberry, Louis Vuitton, or Yves Saint Lauren have a presence on this platform to know the location of stores, make payments or create loyalty programs.

The chatbots offer reduced waiting times, immediate responses, personalized attention and continuous availability, thus satisfying the demands of new generations who prefer to avoid telephone conversations. This adaptation of brands to the demands of new audiences is a very effective way to ensure their loyalty. It also reflects their commitment to adapt to market changes. This perception of modernity and accessibility also contributes to improving the image and generating a positive impact on the reputation of the brand after turning satisfied customers into defenders.

Product Design

AI has impacted the way fashion is designed, offering multiple advantages such as optimizing creative processes or reducing discarded materials.

In addition, predictive analytics that allow to detect trends or segment markets have made the decision-making on the design aligned with the preferences of the audience.

Generative AI tools can significantly shorten design lifecycles and spur innovation as well as reveal untapped market opportunities and overlooked consumer needs or expectations (Booth *et al.,* 2024).

One of the experts interviewed for this research, 3D digital designer Diego G. Carpintero, points out that "being able to perform efficient and fast experiments with colors, shapes or textures, not only encourages innovation, but also provides added value to attract new audiences who value creativity and technology".

Figure 1
G-Star Raw AI Denim Cape digital version

Figure 2

Digital version of one of the designs from Desigual's ' On Demand' collection

It is worth mentioning the collaboration of H&M and the startup Zysem to create the *Just Perfect* project whose tool *Ivy* uses AI to offer tailored garments to its customers. It consists of entering data such as height, weight or foot number, so that through machine learning algorithms the exact measurements of each user are calculated and sent to the workshops for manufacturing personalized garments.

Carpintero also highlighted the G-Star brand project produced by the *AI Denim Cape:* its first physical design generated by artificial intelligence, and the Desigual brand, which has just launched the fourth collection of its *On Demand* line, composed of designs created with AI that involve its community, evaluating its commitment to innovation through the development of products on demand.

The integration of AI in fashion design not only favors creative processes but plays a crucial role in terms of sustainability by optimizing the use of materials, which in communicative terms can be argued as environmental responsibility and become a competitive advantage.

Practical applications of AI to fashion brand communication

The communication and advertising landscape has been drastically altered with the arrival of new technologies (Huh and Malthouse, 2020). From traditional hand-printed posters to posts for online platforms like Instagram. This evolution culminates in the realization of collaborations with virtual influencers, representing the apex of technological innovation in this field.

AI has played a key role in the change, enabling advertising agencies today to make efficient decisions based on historical data and audience behavior patterns (IBM, 2021). In fact, professionals in the sector increasingly value this tool for its ability to personalize messages, identify potential audiences, improve product placement and measure the performance of campaigns.

Models and digital influencers

In the current context of social media fashion, AI has facilitated an emerging phenomenon that challenges digital marketing: the proliferation of artificially generated influencers and models. These virtual profiles, according to research conducted by Casarotto in 2022 in the article "*AI Influencers: What is their role in digital marketing?"* at Rockcontent.com: "They are virtual individuals, whose management falls on brands or representative entities, conceived through the use of graphics processing technologies and machine learning algorithms."

Although they exist physically, they are generating so many reactions and opinions that they acquire a certain degree of reality. According to Esteban (2024), they have the advantage of not having schedules or feelings, they can work 24 hours a day, they do not age and, above all, they do not have a salary or independent cachet, but their creators establish it. However, as with real content creation professionals, there are different types of profiles, with differences in terms of the target audience and the types of brands for which they are effective, Gonjar, (2024).

Figure 3
PRADA campaign image with Lil Miquela as model

Note. @lilmiquela

Lil Miquela is one of the most recognized profiles generated with AI. It was developed in 2016 by the company Brud and has achieved great popularity, acquiring more than 2.8 million followers on Instagram. Its enormous success has made it possible for it to be present at renowned music festivals such as Coachella and to be the image of some of the most recognized brands in the fashion industry. She has starred in a campaign for Prada in 2018, and the recent celebration of UGG's 40th anniversary, in addition to other campaigns for Diesel, Givenchy, Supreme, or Fendi.

Figure 4
Image from the "40 Years UGG" campaign with Lil Miquela

There are other influencers like Noonoouri and Imma Gram, designed to create a virtual community and establish relationships between brands and younger audiences, adopting a more robotic and prototypical avatar aesthetic. In the words of (Gonjar, 2024) "It is crucial for luxury brands to adapt to the preferences of new audiences opting for their imaginary to be able to reach it".

The success of these virtual figures lies in the ability to establish a relationship with their audience and always remain active in their social networks. However, their physical appearance and lack of reality present challenges in establishing emotional relationships.

In an effort to get closer to humanity and change the traditional structure of actions such as shootings, The Clueless was born, the first Spanish agency dedicated to model design with Artificial Intelligence. Their models are intended to establish a relationship with the public and to create a virtual community of their own by focusing on topics such as fitness, cosplay and video games. Aitana López (@fit_aitana), her most successful profile, has more than 320,000 followers on Instagram.

Figures 5 and 6

The digital model Shudu Gram dressed by Louis Vuitton
for the collaboration between Harper's Bazaar España and Elle España

Note. blog.mbadmb.com

There are agencies such as The Digitals that focus exclusively on modeling, creating virtual profiles of remarkable realism with the aim of being hired by brands to star in advertising campaigns and represent their image. Its most outstanding model is Shudu Gram, who has collaborated with brands such as Fenty Beauty, Sisheido, Louis Vuitton, or Paco Rabanne, among others. The success of these new content creators is based not only on their total availability to generate engagement, but also on the freedom of creation that they offer to brands to transmit their message accurately, thus sticking to the policies of the company, without risk of controversy on social networks.

Campaigns

As Sirera indicates (2023), who is Desigual's technology innovation leader, AI allows marketing departments to test different campaigns virtually before their final execution. This means that the efficiency of the process can be increased by not being able to do without models, clothes or locations. An example of this is the campaign of the French lingerie brand Undiz, carried out with AI pretending to be underwater, which would have been much more expensive and complex to record in reality. Another example is the luxury brand White House, Paris, which fully realized its SS 2023 campaign with budget-saving virtual images and developing novel creativity for a much lower budget than would have been a similar production in the real world.

In interviews with experts, the initiative of the international brand Stradivarius and its collection "April" stand out. With the aim of "reinventing fashion", the brand has created images and digital models to promote garments for sale, as well as fictional items playing with a spring and dreamlike aesthetic. The campaign is "an exaggeration of the true collection and reflects what fashion would be if reality did not have the limitations of the real world" (Stradivarius, 2023).

Figure 7
Image from the "April" collection designed with AI by the Stradivarius brand

Figure 8
Image of the Casablanca brand, made with AI

Luxury brands, in their quest to maintain a prominent and superior position in the market, are also adjusting to technological changes. The creative director of Etro emphasizes that, despite his initial doubts, working with the digital designer Silvia Badalotti has shown that AI can be used as another creative tool, even better than current ones (Vicenzo, 2024).

Experts also highlight the collaboration between Moncler and Adidas, "The Art of Explorers," which focuses on AI-generated explorers and dresses with looks inspired by the collection.

Figure 9

Image from Moncler and Adidas collaboration, "The Art of Explorers"

Note. moncler.com

The slogan *Where Originality Meets Extraordinary* and the application of this new technology manage to position both brands as leaders in innovation and creativity.

Affordable and accessible AI tools have enabled even individual users to generate viral spontaneous campaigns. This is the case of "El Papa Balenciaga", which shows Pope Francis wearing a coat of the Spanish brand. The image, generated by the Midjourney platform, significantly increased the visibility of the brand, reaching a global audience, as well as an increase in engagement by allowing users to create their own version.

Indirect interaction with the brand not only provided a customer experience, but also provided an opportunity for content dissemination, all without the need for active intervention by the company. In addition, the association of the brand with innovative, viral and creative content generated by users gives a fresh and positive image that can suppose a greater demand for their products, as well as an approach to new audiences.

As seen, AI not only improves the positioning and image of fashion brands, but also allows the generation of high quality content that can be customized and optimized for different audiences.

In order to deepen this analysis, a success case will be studied on the Neural Fashion AI platform that uses AI for content generation with the aim of helping fashion brands to communicate more efficiently.

Fashion shows

In April 2023, New York-based project design studio IA Maison Meta, partnered with online fashion pure player Revolve, launched the first fashion runway entirely generated through AI. On a biannual basis, this runaway is consolidating as the main platform to exhibit the collections of virtual designers who do not necessarily have to have a correlation with the real retail world.

Figures 10 and 11
Images of a parade created through AI by Portuguese visual artist Matilde Mariano for the AI FASHION WEEK SS 2024

In its brief tour, this runway has positioned itself as the international space in which emerging designers can stand out for their creativity and compete with prestigious international brands such as Adidas. AI Fashion Week offers fashion brands a place to interact, gain visibility and continue to consolidate brand and sales, as Revolve is committed to producing and showcasing the winning collections on the next edition of the runway.

Figures 12, 13, 14
Images from the Spanish designer Magno Montero's show that won the 2nd edition of the AI FASHION WEEK SS 2024

Methodology

To achieve the objective of this work in an emerging field in which there is almost no scientific literature, it has been decided to carry out a qualitative study of an exploratory nature.

First, a literature review was designed from the professional perspective on the impact of AI on the communication of fashion brands. For this purpose, an emptying of the sectoral publications of the fashion business field with greater recognition in Spain was carried out during the period 2020-2024 (exceptionally, some articles with previous date are cited for their relevance). The selected magazines were (1) Modaes, (2) The Business of Fashion, (3) Fashion Networks and (4) Fashion United. Analysis of these publications has identified discourses and extracted illustrative examples of how AI is being used and its impact on the relationship of brands to consumers. It also allowed the establishment of the main areas of communication in which AI is being applied.

Second, three in-depth interviews were conducted with industry experts to obtain detailed information on the integration of AI into fashion brands' communication strategies. The selection of the interviewees was made taking into consideration that the following aspects were covered:

- Theoretical and updated knowledge of the contributions of AI to the field of fashion.
- Direct experience of the needs and demands of fashion customers in their relationship with AI.
- Technical mastery and professional use of AI tools.
- Finally, it was decided to interview these three professionals:
- Karen Sastre Gonjar: Academic Manager of Elle Education and Teacher at ESIC Business & Marketing School. Digital designer, and professional user of AI platforms applied to the fashion sector.
- Roser Bagó Ribaudí: marketing director of Neural Fashion AI.
- Diego García-Carpintero: 3D industrial designer. He has worked for brands such as deLaCour, Zara, Massimo Dutti or deMarie. He understands AI as a tool to support artistic creation.

The interviews conducted between March and April 2024 were transcribed and a manual discourse analysis was carried out with the information obtained (with the support of the qualitative analysis tool MAXQDA) to evaluate the advantages and challenges of the application of AI, as well as to identify the possible disadvantages and difficulties of its use.

Thirdly, to demonstrate the possibilities offered by this tool in its concrete application to fashion brands, a case study of the Neural Fashion AI platform was developed, as well as two concrete examples of real works carried out by the company for fashion brands.

Analysis of expert interviews

A first aspect that Karen Gonjar highlights is that AI already occupies a fundamental space in the automation of communication and marketing tasks, with a particular interest in the personalization of the customer experience and consequently, their satisfaction. For Gonjar mastery of AI, it is essential to gain a competitive advantage, and position brands as innovative and creative. Undoubtedly, the most powerful application of AI in fashion is the analysis of large amounts of data in real time, which allows the prediction of trends. In the expert's opinion, it is important to emphasize that brands no longer create trends but adapt to those created by consumers.

Secondly, García-Carpintero emphasizes the importance of AI in creative processes, allowing brands to generate complex, personalized and efficient content. Despite not being a marketing specialist, he recognizes the usefulness of this technology for conducting studies that determine which products work best.

Both agree that the use of AI, while normalizing, remains a differential advantage and will in the future become a standard and critical tool in the industry, while underscoring the crucial importance of human oversight.

They identify as main benefits greater efficiency and productivity, the development of creative skills, the foundation of decision-making and making professionals smarter. In return, they point to the limitation in predictive capacity, the need for supervision of work, or legal and ethical risks regarding data privacy.

For his part, Bagó Ribaudí provides an internal and detailed vision of Neural Fashion AI for studying the success case. He explains that it offers more sophisticated and realistic results than the rest of the existing platforms and highlights that AI is fundamental for competitiveness and innovation in the industry, coinciding with the others interviewed in the most relevant applications and future trends.

Finally, the three provide some recommendations such as overcoming the fear of technology, spending time understanding how tools work to optimize their possibilities and not dispensing with creative teams to complement them.

Positive attributes and challenges, limitations and brakes of the application of AI to the field of fashion communication

Based on the content analysis of the hemerographic review and in-depth interviews with professional experts, four main plot axes were obtained around the attributions of AI in the field of the fashion industry.

- Positive values and attributions:
    - Customization and trend prediction: Predictive analyzes of large amounts of data facilitate the exact development of what the customer is looking for, both in terms of product and attractive communication strategies.

    - Market segmentation in a precise way: enabling fashion brands to target specific audiences effectively.
    - Optimization of creative processes: AI favors rapid experimentation with colors, designs, textures, backgrounds (among other parameters) to detect their direct impact on the target audience.
    - Efficiency in advertising campaigns: the use of AI to test campaigns virtually before their final execution to ensure their effectiveness.
    - Informed decision-making: AI's ability to analyze large amounts of data makes decisions based on the preferences or tastes of as many users as possible.
    - Reduced communication costs: the use of AI can significantly reduce the costs of localization, creativity, post-production of audiovisual materials, the use of models to name a few examples.
- Challenges of AI applied to the communication sector:
    - Customer satisfaction: personalization allows a full achievement of the customer's objectives, which can lead to advantages such as generating greater engagement and consequently the loyalty of the target audience or increasing sales.
    - Improved brand image and market positioning: the incorporation of AI offers a competitive advantage in terms of innovation, allowing brands to differentiate themselves by offering unique and personalized customer experiences.
    - Expanding into new markets and audiences: AI's ability to analyze and segment audiences allows brands to compete in other markets. Likewise, the use of new technologies can bring fashion closer to younger audiences by making them feel that brands understand their lifestyle. A good example is offered by digital influencers.
    - Training of sales teams: training professionals in the use of AI increases their motivation, encourages talent development and personal growth, and allows them to perceive AI as a positive and complementary tool. This training will increase the productivity of their work.
    - Innovative content creation: AI contributes to the development of brand identity when applied to the generation of attractive content and adapted to current trends.

    - Increasing sustainability and operational efficiency: Reducing material waste and optimizing processes by incorporating AI into design or production can improve the perception of a sustainable and environmentally conscious brand image.
- Limitations and risks arising from the use of AI technology:
    - Technical and predictive limitations: Machine learning algorithms must be trained by one person. In this sense, if there is a bias in the instructions, the use of data or the choice of certain initial research preferences, the results can be substantially altered.
    - Dependence on the human figure, as explained by Karen Gonjar since AI tools still do not have an exact precision due to their recent appearance (in particular free). The results may deviate from what is desired.
    - Consumers' perception of "unreality" or "coldness." Customers often interpret the models and environments used by AI as inert, empty-eyed, "plastic" in appearance, and unbelievable for their sheer perfection. The lack of small imperfections of reality makes people and models look like robots, rather than real people.
- Brakes and resistances for companies that apply AI to their communication strategies:
    - Technological dependency: the use of such automated technology could evolve into an excessive dependency for the accomplishment of tasks. Over time this could limit the company's ability to operate without the collaboration of the machines.
    - Resistance to technological adaptation: the fear that the incorporation of AI into creative processes will replace specialists (fashion designers, or art directors) who do not master this technology, can lead to a negative approach, placing the company one step behind its competitors.
    - Legal and ethical risks: the data that feeds predictive analytics includes consumers' personal information and inappropriate use of them or a cyber attack can lead to a reputational crisis.
    - High investment: Professional integration of AI tools adds extra costs that not all companies can afford.
    - Competition and market saturation: as recognized by the experts interviewed, the use of AI in communication is being standardized, which may reduce the differential factor.

Case study Neural Fashion AI

As the last part of the research on AI and fashion communication, it was decided to carry out an applied case study, on the Catalan company Neural Fashion AI (NFAI), specialized in communication of fashion brands. NFAI is a platform that offers software not only to create original images of models, scenarios and fashionable atmospheres, but its professionals are able to integrate real garments from the collections within the images and campaigns of the brands. They define their strategy as a partnership of values: sustainability, innovation, technology, quality, authenticity, collaboration, accessibility and personalization.

According to the company's marketing director, currently the most relevant AI applications in the fashion world are focused on the conceptualization of designs and campaigns, as well as the use of design tools and content generation (Bagó Ribaudí, 2024).

By analyzing two campaigns carried out by NFAI for Spanish brands (Carmen Says and Sepiia) it is possible to analyze the benefits in terms of image, positioning, and relationship with consumers that can be obtained by incorporating technological advances.

NFAI unifies two AI applications, explained in the introduction, to help fashion brands modernize and innovate their marketing campaigns and strategies:

- Image development: creating images that can be generated from scratch or taking as reference real models selected by the client brand and subsequently be set in a specific space.
- Avatar development: offers the brand the possibility to choose the physical characteristics and style of the models to convey to the public personalization and exclusivity.

NFAI's own marketing director says:

> We are the first platform aimed at the fashion industry that helps brands create visual content for their marketing strategies. Brands that work with NFAI have access to the platform. First, they have to upload different images of the garment, which can be made with a mobile, so the platform can learn how the article is and then generate new images in which a model appears (which will be as the brand desires) wearing the clothes of the brand, in the set that the brand wants.

In response to the lack of knowledge and, sometimes, the distrust that fashion brands feel towards AI, NFAI seeks to promote learning and collaboration, so that technological changes are seen as a strategic ally, rather than a threat: "It is necessary for brands to open their minds and understand that to work with AI people have to work in a different way, it is not about replacing everything that is being done but complementing it".

Figure 15
Demonstration image of the Neural Fashion AI platform

Note. Raona.com

The main advantage of NFAI is the high visual quality of its images and the fidelity with the real garments of the brand. Here lies the fundamental difference with other brands that having applied AI has done so without integrating the real garments of their collections, remaining in a mere aesthetic exercise, which can like and entertain users of social networks, but not offer added value to customers.

Analysis of NFAI's collaboration with Sepiia and Carmen Says

To study the case and deepen the understanding of how AI is changing the way fashion brands communicate, constituting a strategic resource to establish links with consumers, an adaptation of the methodological approach proposed by Lasswell in 1940 was used.

The method developed by the American theorist Harold Lasswell helps identify key elements involved in the transmission of messages and their impacts on the audience from images. It is based on answering five simple questions:

- Who? Seeks to identify who are the key actors of the campaigns.
- What? It aims to know what the campaign or action is.
- Through what channels? Identifies dissemination through digital platforms, social networks or print media.
- To Whom? Identifies the type of audience that the brand wants to approach with a certain campaign.
- To what effect? Determines the impact of the campaign on the audience.

Sepiia x Neural Fashion AI

Sepiia is a Madrid brand, created in 2016 by the young entrepreneur from Alicante, Federico Sainz de Robles, dedicated to the manufacture of smart fashion, i.e., products that repel stains and wrinkles and that do not give off the bad odor derived from their use. It is an example of a brand that has grown thanks to the help of shuttles, incubators and microcredits, as well as rounds of financing to reach nearly 3 million euros annually. Its activity focuses on the creation of basic and functional garments designed for men and women who work and rest in a practical way.

Visually, the brand has a clean, minimalist, practical and uncomplicated aesthetic, which coincides with its conceptual positioning in the market. Positioning at the brand level is sustainability, technology and simplicity.

The reason for the collaboration between NFAI and Sepiia lies in the desire to improve the visual attraction of the brand since, despite the quality of its products, its current communication does not manage to capture the attention of the public effectively. The brand needs to capture the attention of a young and professional audience (23-40 years), which has not yet reached, since it is attracted by more aspirational badges and with a more consolidated brand image.

On the other hand, through this collaboration Sepiia and NFAI also intended to address professional-prescribers in the fashion sector to demonstrate the uniqueness of the use of AI in content creation and fashion marketing.

Sepiia's brand identity is based on an aesthetic focused on functionality, reflected in its mission, vision and values:

- Mission: to create a second smart skin capable of improving our lives and the health of the planet.
- Vision: to make people's lives easier through innovative garments under a planet and community-friendly approach.
- Values: commitment, research, responsibility, innovation.

Analysis of the collaboration:

- **Who:** NFAI creates images of the clothes of the Madrid brand Sepiia, following its simple aesthetic with a modern approach that stands out in the models and scenarios created with AI. The images take place both in outdoor spaces, and in interiors all following an urban aesthetic with buildings and skyscrapers of a current city, with brutalist but luminous style.
- **What:** Sepiia brand product dissemination campaign based on the development of AI images, models and scenarios. It is an image campaign despite clearly showing product.
- **Through what channel:** collaboration spread through social networks such as Instagram or Linkedin by both Sepiia and NFAI.
- **To whom:** Sepiia seeks to consolidate the relationship with its young current followers by conveying the idea that it offers functional garments and is committed to sustainability: it is an innovative brand that cares about adapting to technological evolution. It is also aimed at other young professionals who do not yet know or have bought the brand but could do so if the aspirational dimension of it is reinforced.
- **To what effect:** with this collaboration, an instructive action has been achieved, since the positioning and image of the client brand in its current consumers has been reinforced and improved and it has been possible to bring the brand closer to a younger audience. In addition, it has been shown how technology is useful to implement more dynamic creativity and efficiency.

An innovative and attractive disclosure is crucial for a growing brand like Sepiia to achieve prominence in a highly competitive sector, so this collaboration represents a strategic opportunity to position Sepiia ahead of its competitors. This alliance helps reinforce the brand identity by aligning its values and commitment to smart fashion with the visual aesthetics of its communication.

Figures 16 and 17
Images generated by Neural Fashion AI for Sepiia

As mentioned, Sepiia is a brand positioned as technological, innovative, sustainable and young. The fact of using a virtual model, with a young modern professional, but with a relaxed appearance, in an urban, architectural and clean environment, connects well with the communicative objectives of the company. The sobriety that characterizes the brand is there, but it is given a futuristic, current and innovative approach that makes it attractive to the target audience.

At the same time, the fact that it is an innovative experience facilitates its dissemination on social networks, giving a wide visibility to the brand.

Carmen Says x Neural Fashion AI

Carmen Says is a young brand created in 2021 in Barcelona by four Catalan entrepreneurs. It stands out for launching small collections of feminine style and specific themes every two weeks. It focuses its strength on colorful patterns and fabrics, often with a retro aesthetic. Its main communication and sales channel is the social network Instagram and being aware of the excess of ephemeral content generated by the competition, the brand opts for a visually clean, sober and simple communication, seeking to transmit authenticity and depth to its audience.

The collaboration with NFAI aims to improve and make visual content more attractive, through a dreamlike and storytelling atmosphere to create an immersive experience for its followers.

- Mission: to provide meaningful and enriching experiences through the fusion of fashion and narrative. Carmen Says seeks to offer authenticity and depth through authentic experiences in a world saturated with content.
- Vision: to be known as a brand that goes beyond conventional fashion, offering garments that not only dress, but tell stories.
- Values: fantasy, sustainability, creativity, authenticity.

Analysis of the collaboration:

- **Who:** NFAI develops images, avatars and scenarios for a Carmen Says capsule collection. The images take place in open spaces with giant-sized flowers and plants reminiscent of Lewis Carrol's tale *Alice in Wonderland*, and warm tones to reflect the brand's commitment to sustainability. Its approach revolves around fantasy and the imaginary. One could associate the aesthetics of collaboration with fairy worlds, in tune with the narrative experience that the brand wants to provoke.
- **What:** Carmen Says April Capsule Collection campaign based on the development of artificial intelligence images, models and scenarios.
- **Through what channel:** collaboration spread through social networks such as Instagram or LinkedIn, both by Carmen Says and NFAI.
- **To whom:** Carmen Says addresses its target audience of young creative women with a taste for fashion as a way to incorporate imagination into everyday life and at the same time, committed to sustainability. On the other hand, the association of NFAI and Carmen Says seeks to impact its consumer and others more open to technology, thanks to striking images with environments and models made with AI.
- **To what effect:** to achieve a reinforcement in the communicative actions of the Carmen Says brand by positioning the brand in the mind of its public within the territory of sustainability, inspiration and innovation.

Figures 18 and 19

Images generated by Neural Fashion AI for Carmen Says

Note. Linkedin.com/company/neural-fashion-ai

In this collaboration, it is shown that the integration of AI allows to more effectively represent the essence of a brand like Carmen Says. This intention is also reflected in the aesthetics of the images, where the representation of fantastic and natural environments underlines their concern for the environment while communicating their values and intention to make their collections a story.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions of the case study

The case study shows that by unifying two of the most relevant applications of AI in the communication of fashion brands: the creation of content and the generation of avatars, the possibilities of modernization and innovation of their strategies are projected exponentially. This allows fashion brands to position themselves at the same level as the big giants in the industry.

The analysis of NFAI collaborations with Sepiia and Carmen Says shows that AI strengthens brand identity and makes the visual aesthetics of campaigns more attractive and efficient, while facilitating the loyalty of current audiences and the capture of new audiences.

In the cases analyzed, through the creation of novel content and avatars adapted to the preferences of consumers, it is possible to communicate more effectively and both brands are linked to the positive attributes of AI as a key technological element in fashion communication.

In conclusion, the results obtained support the idea that AI is providing a significant competitive advantage in terms of creative and communication strategies for fashion brands, by strengthening the relationship between them and their audience.

Benefits from the use of AI in fashion brand communication include the ability to customize, the ability to act on social trends extremely quickly, and the option to accurately segment markets. These gains have a direct impact on the efficiency of processes and the achievement of brand objectives such as customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, strengthening brand positioning and image, expanding to new markets and audiences or creating innovative, impactful and attractive content.

AI is a new tool that will have a substantial impact on the way fashion brands communicate to their audiences, and in general terms on the industry.

Recommendations

After carrying out this work, brands that want to incorporate this technology into their strategies are recommended the following aspects:

- Overcoming resistance to AI to understand that it does not amount to the transfer of responsibility in decision-making to machines; this technology acts as a tool and needs the human factor for its learning and development.
- Value the team of professionals who are experts in digital design, and train them to incorporate the resources (platforms and software) that arise in the market. In order to obtain good results, the proper use of the tools must be associated with the training and aesthetic taste of digital creators.

Limitations and future lines of research

At present, it investigates an extremely competitive tool and for this reason AI companies tend to be anonymous and are not usually visible to the general public. At the same time, due to the novelty of the subject, academic resources are quite limited. For this reason, it was decided to conduct three interviews with experts as the main primary source, and an analysis of the contents of online fashion magazines and a case study as secondary sources for obtaining data and information.

We found it interesting to highlight possible future lines of research for the near future:

- To study of the evolution of models and influencers created with AI.
- To research on specific AI tools for product design.
- To study on the psychological and social effects of the use of AI in fashion brands.
- To work on the integration of AI with augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR).
- To work on improvements in the perception of the brand image and the change of positioning fashion brands, after the application of AI in their strategies.
- To analyze the evolution of ROI thanks to the application of AI in fashion communication.
- To study KPI's derived from the integration of AI in communication strategies and tactics of fashion brands.

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When fashion companies transform into communication companies: the cases of Benetton, Net-a-Porter and Loewe

Cuando las empresas de moda se transforman en empresas de comunicación: los casos de Benetton, Net-a-Porter y Loewe

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Abstract
The digital context has caused the transformation of fashion brands into something more than producers and distributors of fashion products. In a context of disintermediation, through their online webpages or social media, brands are broadcasters and direct communication channels for audiences. This transformation implies profound changes for fashion companies. It also poses new challenges for the communication strategies of brands. Using the case method, this work approaches three renowned brands that are significant for their relationship between fashion and communication: Benetton, Net-a-Porter and Loewe. The analysis reveals, on the one hand, the evolution suffered by fashion brands in recent decades and their role as communicators. On the other hand, it delves into the role of communication in the fashion sector, in a context where merely commercial communication gives way to new formats and experiences. The example of fashion films is paradigmatic. The conclusions thus show a strategic change for fashion communication. The connection with the product, the tone and the type of messages emitted are changing. And a mutation of brands is observed as they are also constituted as communication companies, where it is essential to understand the consumer as an informed audience.

Keywords
Digitalizacion, fashion, communication, brands, disintermediation, evolution, content creators, strategy.

Resumen
El contexto digital ha provocado la transformación de las marcas de moda en algo más que meras productoras y distribuidoras de artículos de moda. En un contexto de desintermediación, a través de sus páginas de venta online o de las redes sociales, las marcas son emisoras y canales de comunicación directos para las audiencias. Esta transformación implica cambios profundos de las empresas de moda. Supone también nuevos desafíos para las estrategias de comunicación de las marcas. A través del método del caso, este trabajo realiza una aproximación a tres marcas de renombre y significativas por su relación entre moda y comunicación: Benetton, Net-a-Porter y Loewe. El análisis desvela, por un lado, la evolución sufrida por las marcas de moda en las últimas décadas y su papel comunicador. Por otro, profundiza en el papel de la comunicación en el sector de la moda, en un contexto donde la comunicación meramente comercial da paso a nuevos formatos y experiencias. El ejemplo de los *fashion films* resulta paradigmático. Las conclusiones muestran de este modo un cambio estratégico para la comunicación de la moda. Se modifica la conexión con el producto, el tono y el tipo de mensajes emitidos. Además, se observa una evolución de las marcas, que se constituyen también como empresas de comunicación, donde resulta fundamental entender al consumidor como una audiencia informada.

Palabras clave
Digitalización, moda, comunicación, marcas, desintermediación, evolución, creadores de contenido, estrategia.

1. Introduction

Digitalization has completely transformed the communication and fashion environment. The new context has provoked a crisis of traditional media, the emergence of new actors, new possibilities of connection with the audience, changes in the way of consumption and sale of products, and new communication formats (Noris and Cantoni, 2022; Sádaba, 2015).

As a result, fashion brands have had to adapt to online sales platforms and more direct and non-intermediated ways of communicating. Fashion companies had always worked communication from a commercial point of view, with campaigns around their products, collections and seasons. They sought to inform and persuade consumers about the benefits of their proposals (Kalbaska *et al.,* 2018; Tungate, 2013).

Nowadays, through the brands' own websites or social networks, brands can make this communication for themselves. The so-called disintermediation, usually applied to areas such as finance or sales (Gielens and Steenkamp, 2019; Geva, 2018), in the world of communication also acquires great relevance and poses a challenge for fashion brands, since it adds a communication task to their work in the design, creation and distribution of the fashion product. Today, along with other agents, brands are also content creators. In fact, some websites, experiences and staging of brands show concepts and aesthetic quality comparable to that of the best traditional fashion publications (Iannilli and Linfante, 2022).

This work aims to explain this change for fashion brands in the way of communicating and understanding to what extent the relationship between fashion and communication in a brand is modified.

To understand this transformation, three case studies chosen for their leadership and strong link between fashion and communication are analyzed. The first of them is developed in the years before the appearance of the Internet, precisely to be able to better illuminate the novelty introduced by the digital world. The second is located at the time of the emergence of online sales and the response to its challenges. Finally, the third one takes place at a more current moment, where brands are already comfortably managed in the digital environment and find new communication opportunities with their audiences.

In this way, the evolution of communication by fashion brands as message broadcasters is presented and it is concluded with a scenario where fashion companies become hybridized as communication companies.

2. Disintermediation in fashion communication

Disintermediation means that any actor can create and disseminate content thanks to digitalization (Jenkins, 2006; Katz, 1988), so that media that had monopolized the power of influence meet new competitors (Torregrosa and Sádaba, 2023).

In the case of fashion, traditional communication had needed vehicles that intermediated between brands or fashion companies and audiences. In this way, these media acted as gatekeepers that decided what content to offer and what not to offer about the brand (Shoemaker, 2020).

For brands, it was about working their messages from the marketing department with an advertising and paid content, either with conventional advertising, or with the modalities of product placement, branded entertainment, etc. (Hudson and Hudson, 2006), or from the area of public relations, with a more organic content through events, product presentations, etc.

The most relevant support in the fashion sector to channel these messages were undoubtedly fashion magazines. The magazines reported the latest trends, and were engines of fashion consumption by the diffusion of products and styles in their pages (Kalbaska *et al.,* 2018; Pérez Curiel *et al.,* 2017). In recent years, the arrival first of fashion blogs, and then of so-called influencers (Pedroni, 2023), meant the break of this monopoly of magazines and the entry of a competition in the capture of interest and budget by brands (Perreault and Hanusch, 2024; Sanz *et al.,* 2020). In fact, the latest research questions whether these new digital celebrities are now the ones with the greatest appeal and influence (Sádaba *et al.,* 2024).

The possibility of reaching the consumer directly without this prior intermediation has created a saturated digital landscape where there are very diverse content creators and in competition to attract the attention of audiences.

Within this new scenario, brands are one of the emerging actors that relate directly to consumers, seeking interaction, information about their products and engagement (Godey *et al.,* 2016). In the world of marketing, under the so-called branded content, it has been concluded that the creation of content that provides valuable information to meet consumer needs favors brand loyalty (Asnawati *et al*., 2022; Saulīte and Ščeulovs, 2022).

Also, and from the point of view of information consumption, disintermediation has had important consequences for brands (Shirky, 2008). Some studies show that fashion consumers prefer communication issued directly by brands on their websites and social networks to that of fashion magazines (Grau *et al.,* 2019). Other works explain that the information on social networks of fashion brands points to four needs of consumers: observation, knowledge, pre-purchase information and inspiration (Muntinga *et al.,* 2011). A recent study (Sádaba *et al*., 2024) confirms that brands are a very relevant source of influence, since consumers also look to their social media profiles for inspiration, information for decision-making, new trends or fashion products.

In short, disintermediation introduces an important novelty for fashion brands: brands cease to be exclusively generators of fashion products and also become producers of content (Schaefer, 2015). As technology expert Tom Foremski (2009) has explained from this point of view, now "every company is now a media company*"*.

This mutation of functions as a brand has great implications for fashion companies, both in their internal and external organization. On the one hand, fashion companies need to have previously existing resources in traditional media, from qualified personnel for the creation of content (creatives, photographers, filmmakers …) to the infrastructure necessary for its dissemination (photographic studies, radio studies, media, distribution channels …). On the other hand, communication skills also pose challenges of creative work, budgetary decisions, and control of reputational issues.

Some works suggest that branded content is positively influencing brands' reputation (Castillo-Abdul *et al*., 2022). It should also be considered that if messages are broadcast in greater numbers and without the filters of the previous gatekeeper*s*, there is the possibility of an increase in the risks of making errors and having credibility problems with the audience (Noris and Cantoni, 2021).

In addition, new formats such as fashion films, audiovisual products of cinematographic quality directly made and issued by the brands, arise as a rival for the quality of the content issued. Torregrosa and Noguera (2015) explain that fashion films have a very broad and vague definition, and the concept designates multiple audiovisual phenomena: from films that address the theme of fashion (such as the famous *The Devil Wears Prada* by Frankel, in 2006) to audiovisual experiments by designers and renowned artists (such as the 2011-2012 campaign of Lanvin of Alber Elbaz and Steven Meisel). In addition, it has been used by brands for a decade to broadcast their own messages and promote their collections (Gómez and Durán, 2021).

Thus, fashion films appear in 2009, and in 2016 they are generalized (Díaz Soloaga and García Guerrero, 2016) but with the pandemic of 2000 they have a unique moment of communication with consumers. It is at this time, when the absence of live presentations is used to make films that replace the parades and events of the brands, which coincides with the rise of Instagram (Cenizo, 2022; Rees-Roberts, 2020).

In the world of luxury, fashion films have reinforced the narrative of high-end brands with narrative values such as "discovery, seduction and love" or "the natural and the playful", building a magical and mythical world (von Wachenfeldt, 2018).

With a length longer than that of a mere commercial advertisement and smaller than that of a film, there are formats that can be distributed through social networks (Rees-Roberts, 2020). In fact, it is this ability to share content from networks, which has led to a fresher and more direct format that seeks to conquer the consumer, especially the young public present in these social networks.

Therefore, the era of the internet causes a disintermediation with which direct communication by brands is generalized, and begins to rival the quality of content, this time within the parameters of the visual industry. Consequently, in this new dimension for fashion brands, communication becomes more relevant in the work that brands do, and a need to better strategically define the contribution of communication in the company.

3. Methodology

After reviewing the literature, this article aims to offer results that explain the strategic role of communication in fashion brands in the context of disintermediation. To do this, the analysis presented responds to the following research questions:

> Q1. How has content creation by fashion brands evolved?
> Q2. What weight do fashion collections and products have in the communication of fashion brands?

Q3. What media and tone of communication support the content broadcast?

This work uses the case method to explore the possibilities of fashion brands as content generators, according to the development seen in the review of the previous literature. The case method is confirmed as a valuable way to examine complex phenomena within specific real-life contexts (Rashid *et al*., 2019). It is therefore a qualitative research with the capacity to provide evidence of causal claims that may not be achievable through statistical or formal research methods, with a broader understanding of the phenomena studied (Priya, 2020).

In this way, the stages of the research carried out are summarized in figure 1.

Figure 1
Stages of research

As for the selected case studies, they respond to a leadership criterion in their sector when communication strategies are analyzed, as shown in Table 1, since they are brands with this position.

Table 1
Selected case studies and communication materials

	Time analyzed	Position of the mark at the time analyzed	Analysis material
Benetton	Beginning of the 1990s	Leader in *retail fast fashion*.	Advertising campaigns.
Net-a-Porter	2000–2015	Main luxury multi-brand online store.	Editorials and Porter magazine.
Loewe	2023–2024	Leadership luxury segment.	“Decades of Confusion” campaign.

Note. Own elaboration based on Berta and Onida, 2011; Bueso and Pedroni, 2015; Lyst Index, Q2 2023.

When choosing the case studies, different stages are observed with different communication models, by which fashion brands have evolved as agents that send messages. One could distinguish a first moment in which a classic advertising and commercial model is followed, a second moment that coincides with the arrival of the Internet in which brands begin to experiment with communication formats, and a third in which they already clearly compete in quality and quantity of content with the traditional actors of communication, with a narrative and visual model of their own.

As a paradigm of the first stage, there is the case of Benetton and its advertising model, in the second stage the case of Net-a-Porter and its editorial model, and in the third the case of Loewe and its campaign "Decades of Confusion". The latter, for its novelty (it is a 2024 campaign) responds to a more original analysis and without references from previous studies.

In order to answer the research questions, in addition to the context and explanation of the moment of the brand, the following aspects have been taken into account: 1. The type of media used (media or communication channel) 2. Content type 3. The narrative tone used and 4. The relationship of communication and fashion product obtained.

Thus, the case analysis concludes with a comparative table of the three cases analyzed.

4. Analysis and results

With a famous advertising model, Benetton was the pioneer fashion brand in creating messages through the shock advertising of fashion (Barela, 2003).

In 1965, the Benetton brothers began their business journey by offering an original and colorful knitted product. Its competitive advantage lay in a different method of production that accelerated the processes (dyeing the already finished jumpers, instead of dyeing the yarn, the so-called *red in capo*) added to a distribution network of franchises (Camuffo *et al.,* 2002). In twenty years, the Italian brand was present in about 60 countries through 3200 stores, evolving into an industrial company, with manufacturing operations in Italy and abroad (Berta and Onida, 2011).

A year earlier, a campaign had begun with the Parisian agency Eldorado, entitled "All the Colors of the World" in which photographer Oliverio Toscani put together young black and white models wearing colorful clothes.

He then introduced the "United Colors of Benetton," a slogan that explicitly identified the company's globalization strategy with the ideal of a peaceful, multi-ethnic world, which after the international political changes of the second half of the 1980s seemed to be relevant. Later, this slogan became the company's logo, and Toscani was hired by Benetton after breaking the contract with Eldorado (Muljadi *et al.,* 2022; Sugden, 2012).

In the following campaigns, any reference to the product disappeared, and advertising focused on current social issues (issue advertising or advocate advertising), with highly controversial ads such as that of a dying AIDS (image 1), a priest kissing a nun or a child covered by the placenta and with the umbilical cord (shock advertising) (Muljadi *et al.,* 2022; Hubbard, 1993). They were massive campaigns placed in 92 countries. They were not always well accepted, and many magazines refused to publish the ads on their pages and authorities around the world banned the spread of posters on the streets (France, Germany, USA, United Kingdom…). Some franchisees also complained that the effect on sales was not very positive (Sugden, 2012).

Image 1
S/S 1992 Campaign, "AIDS – David Kirby"

Note. Concept: Oliviero Toscani. Official Archives Benetton Group: historical campaigns.

The company, which had been ascendantly successful since its inception in the 1960s, saw new competitors coming into play (among others, Zara, Gap or H&M). With Toscani's announcements, Benetton once again sought relevance in the sector, without mentioning the product in its images (Hubbard, 1993). However, these campaigns turned out to be as provocative as unforgettable, and the company was more known for its advertisements than for its fashion sold in its stores. That is, somehow, it went from being perceived by its communication power rather than by fashion. Moreover, the company in 1994 founded "Fabrica" as the group's communications research center.

With the emergence of the Internet, fashion brands entered a new communicative dynamic. Initially, it was limited to the creation of the websites themselves for direct sale of the product. In the luxury sector there was some controversy over whether this could be compatible with online commerce (Bueso and Pedroni, 2015). Indeed, the luxury sector entered the online world later (Mosca and Chiaudano, 2020) and it is in this context, in 2000, when businesswoman Natalie Massenet pioneered her Net-a-Porter.com, a portal dedicated to the sale of luxury fashion products. Net-a-Porter consolidated itself in a decade as the world's leading multi-brand luxury online store for women, with 2.5 million unique views each month. In 2010 it became part of the Swiss conglomerate Richemont. Previously, Massenet included in her ecommerce proposal the subsidiaries The Outnet (2008), as an online luxury outlet and Mr. Porter (2011), the main online store of men's luxury fashion.

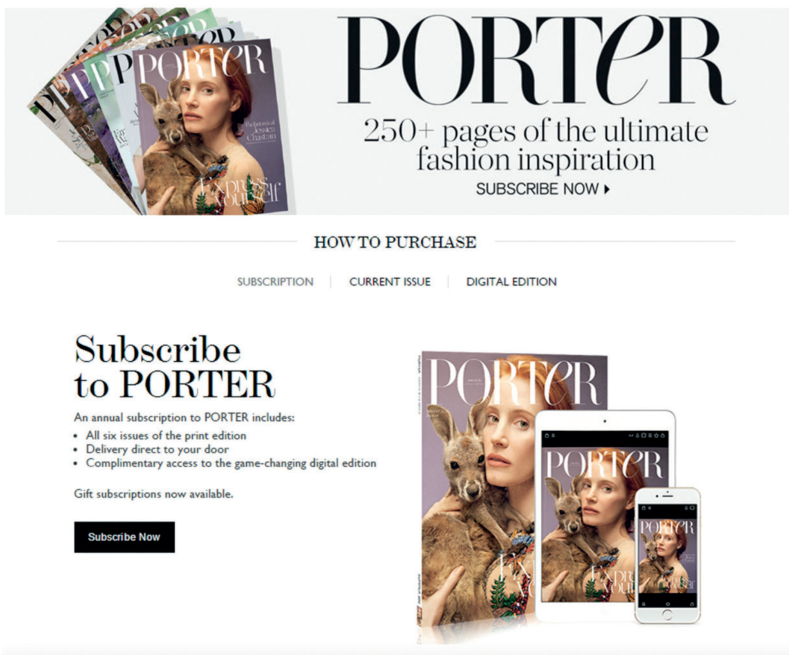
Net-a-Porter's success was soon in the view that, as an alternative to the luxury store experience, the web had to offer something more to the consumer. That something else came soon in the form of content. With a strategy of merging content and commerce, the portal offered added value through new information to its consumer of the products available on the portal, acting at the same time as seller and prescriber (Castillan *et al*., 2017).

It began by publishing a weekly drop-down that presented the products for sale on the web. In early 2013, this drop-down became a free digital magazine, *The Edit*. Surprisingly, and in a context of questioning paper publications (Siles and Boczkowski, 2012), a year later, the print magazine *Porter* was launched (image 2). *Porter* was in direct competition with headlines such as *Vogue, Harper's* Bazaar and *Elle,* although it did so on a bimonthly basis, and priced at $9.99, much higher than its rivals, which were sold on an average of $5.5.

The company that emerged from *ecommerce* therefore became a communication company, where the coexistence between the commercial and the content were the key to success (Bueso and Pedroni, 2015). In 2015 Net-a-Porter merged with the Yoox portal and shortly before Massenet left the company (Arduini and Paoloni, 2020).

The third moment in the communication of fashion brands analyzed begins in reality in the first years of the millennium, when the Italian Alessandro Michele took charge in 2002 of the creative direction of Gucci. Michele implemented a new and revolutionary leadership transforming the brand into a cultural icon (Fulco, 2019). The artistic experience began to be more important in Gucci than the product; there was even a time when it was difficult to find a product on the Gucci website, full, at that time, of cultural references and nods to pop culture. At that time, the brand started to interest a younger audience.

Image 2
Porter Magazine and its launch campaign



In the second decade of the century, the paradigm shift initiated by the Italian brand extends to the rest of the market. At the root of all the transformations that luxury has undergone in recent years is the interest of high-end brands for a segment of the population, Generation Z. In 2025, it will represent approximately 40% of global sales for the sector (D'Arpizio and Levato, 2017). This new emerging public has conditioned and transformed brands and their communication. Classic values such as heritage or exclusivity have been questioned in marketing campaigns of recent times, when brands have entered without fear in the digital stage where the Z live.

Loewe is one of the most successful companies to have embraced this new scenario. The brand communication has gone from a classic approach to an update of its much more disruptive contents. This transformation has been accompanied by an exponential growth of the brand and by a recognition that had not achieved so far, leading recognized luxury rankings (Lyst Index, Q2 2023).

Jonathan Anderson, Loewe's creative director, aware that the success of a contemporary luxury business depends on both content and product, emphasizes branded content, using all kinds of channels. Without disregarding traditional media such as advertising or the paper magazine that he has started publishing and distributing for free in his boutiques, he deploys what Michael Amzalag (of the creative duo M/M) describes as the "Loewe channel": a flow of images for a variety of media from store displays to the Instagram accounts of the brand's followers (King, 2016).

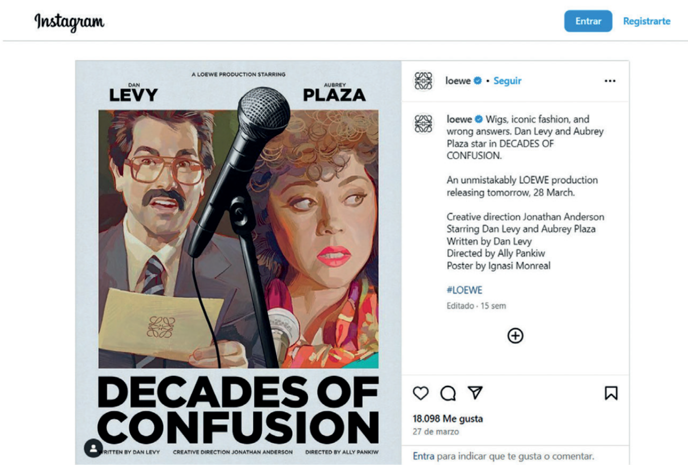
In addition to the multiplicity of channels, the amount of content generated is also remarkable. Traditionally, communication, closely linked to the product, was mainly reserved for launching collections. Now there is a constant flow of small or large pieces of communication, which arise independently of fashion proposals. A rapid content diversification strategy is deployed with an emphasis on social trends, popular culture and entertainment.

This is the case in the brand's *fashion film* entitled "Decades of Confusion", which aims to better publicize the origin of the firm, which has achieved recent international popularity. The first thing that attracts attention is this new potential of fashion film, more used until now to recreate the universe of brands than with a specific communication objective in the line of the reinforcement of the brand pursued (Sanz *et al.,* 2020). It is also new the use of humor as a narrative tone, something at other times unthinkable in luxury communication. It is frequently changed from register combining sophistication and exclusivity (von Wachenfeldt, 2018) with humor, irony, eccentricity or divertimento. This undefined tone that once would have been confusing is now quite natural.

In the analyzed short film, the parody of a word spelling contest (spelling) is undoubtedly a *vintage* nod to American popular culture. The short is written by actor Dan Levy (*Good Grief, Schitt's Creek*) who stars alongside Aubrey Plaza (*Safety not Guaranteed, Parks and recreations*). Both actors are comedians widely known for their involvement in current affairs series and are aligned with the values of the brand. The choice of this type of ambassadors is another significant change, both in this short film and in other content Loewe counts as protagonists of its campaigns with comedians, rappers, youtubers*,* musicians and celebrities that allow it to connect better with the young public, far removed from the pattern of traditional ambassadors used until very recently by the brand (Sanz *et al*., 2020). The creative direction of the short is by Jonathan Anderson himself who is also mentioned in a humorous key in one of the scenes. In "Decades of Confusion", in addition to the fashion film, the campaign extends with a photographic collaboration with Hedi Stanton that illustrates the backstage of the making of the short and with another alliance with the illustrator Ignasi Monreal who made a poster. This campaign spreads the short film on social networks, as can be seen in image 3, where can also be seen the change in aesthetics and narrative tone.

Image 3

Instagram illustration of Loewe's "Decades of Confusion" campaign



This example of the communication prepared by Loewe shows a substantial change in brand communication, emphasizing the consumer experience; it is no longer just about selling, but about entertaining.

In this way, the comparative table resulting from the cases analyzed (Table 2) exposes the different communication strategies of fashion brands, with the variables studied and responding to the research questions raised.

Table 2
Communication strategies in Fashion Companies

	Media	Content	Tone	Relationship fashion/ communication
Benetton	Advertising	Shock ads	Persuasive	Outperforms the product
Net-a-Porter	Magazine	Fashion Information	Informational	Value the Product
Loewe	Fashion Film-Networks	Entertainment	Humor	Experience. Beyond the product

5. Discussion and conclusions

The first research question reveals that the study of the cases shows an evolution in the relationship of fashion companies with communication.

The cases analyzed allow to explain a development of communication for fashion brands as message broadcasters. Benetton uses advertising as its own tool from the 80s and 90s, with messages to make noise and raise public awareness. With the first steps of digitization, cases like Net-a-Porter use the websites that help the public stay informed. And in a context like the current one, much more developed in terms of diversity of actors and communicative possibilities, entertainment is installed as a communicative strategy.

In response to the second research question, we can state that there are three very different communication models, in which the relationship with fashion and product varies markedly. The case of Benetton, which neglects fashion to be memorable on its ads in a quest for notoriety. For its part, Net-a-Porter creates a traditional media, such as a magazine, to value its product, taking an unexpected and inverse path to what was happening at the time. Loewe, in a context of greater concurrence of content creators, seeks to entertain, integrating the product with humor and extending this tone to the campaign in networks. In this sense, it is important to note that it does so in an unexpected way for communication traditionally associated with luxury.

In all cases, however, communication takes a strategic role for the brands analyzed. With a commercial objective and using advertising in the first case with a more informative mode, but also appealing to consumption in the second, and with a third linked to the new branded entertainment, or *advertainment* (mixture of advertising and entertainment), where the decisive point is not so much the information of a product as the associations that the public establishes (Ozturk, 2014). In this way, and completing the answer to the third research question, narrative tones also evolve, and surprisingly especially in the field of luxury, where the communicative licenses of irony and humor are present.

The big difference of the cases is that the digital environment favors a context where any brand is also a direct creator of content. Unlike Benetton that needed to turn to commercial investments, both Net-a-Porter and later Loewe are able to distribute the messages through their own channels and networks, and thus reach the audiences that interest them most (luxury customers for the former and young consumers for the latter).

If, as shown, fashion brands present an evolution towards becoming creators of content and communicative companies, then we can expect an escalation of greater creativity and sophistication, but as Loewe seems to announce, without losing the value of the brand as a fashion proposal.

This disintermediation environment entails some significant challenges. Although disintermediation reduces the role of traditional intermediaries, some research suggests that it may lead to the emergence of powerful new intermediaries, such as major technology platforms (e.g. Google, Amazon, Facebook) (Galloway, 2017). These platforms can control distribution and monetization, with significant supremacy over consumption and information.

Reputational issues have also been pointed out, as risks increase as communication with the audience is done in a constant and direct way. Social networks become the channels of communication and interaction with all users (Zeren and Gökdağlı, 2020) and they are together with the followers of the brands critical voices (Kashif *et al*., 2021) who go so far as to demand the withdrawal of some campaigns or to request boycotts.

In this context, brands cannot ignore that although the customer approaches them looking for a product, it is necessary to consider that this same person is also a citizen of a hyperinformed and connected world, with a wide spectrum of possibilities on which he documents himself, often analyzes, and takes advantage. In this sense, for fashion brands to communicate means not sectioning the interlocutor as someone only present in his facet of potential buyer, but connecting with him and his environment. Therefore, communication is increasingly contextual intelligence, with which to know how to listen to the symptoms, sensitivities and concerns with whom a conversation is established.

6. Limitations and future lines of research

Research has certain limitations. The main one is its focus on the communication of fashion companies, so the conclusions cannot be extrapolated to the communication of other sectors. Complementary work by other industries would be needed in this regard. On the other hand, the current fashion film of the last brand chosen for the analysis, Loewe, makes it difficult to refer to secondary sources, used in the case of the first two brands.

The study on the evolution of communication of fashion brands and their conversion into communication companies is the basis for a future quantitative and qualitative work. A quantitative content analysis could be carried out to provide complementary data on, for example, investments and the audience reached with each of the campaigns analyzed. To do this, it would be interesting to complement the study with a qualitative approach, with in-depth interviews with brand communication managers.

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Impact of artificial intelligence on fashion: analysis of digital influencers in international fashion weeks

Impacto de la inteligencia artificial en la moda: Análisis de influencers digitales en las fashion weeks internacionales

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Abstract
The phenomenon of digital influencers has transformed the way brands communicate with their audience via social networks. In a society that is governed by immediacy, companies have taken the lead in considering Instagram as the platform on which to advertise their products. In this scenario, influencers become a key tool and a business market for advertising. In parallel, Artificial Intelligence has given rise to a world of avatars, a non-human profile that develop capabilities with unknown effects on audiences and that focus the attention on fashion brands. The objective of this research is to understand how digital influencers communicate on Instagram and the impact on luxury brands. A dual-focus content analysis methodology (quantitative/qualitative) and SPSS statistical tool are applied. The first results show the level of frequency of digital influencers in the advertising campaigns of fashion brands, the presence of luxury brands in their conversations and a positive interaction with users, despite being profiles that cannot reproduce the emotions of human language, we have been able to obtain some results which support that, although the avatars generated by artificial intelligence (AI) have the necessary characteristics to play a relevant role in brand advertising on social networks, it cannot be said that are involved in the "influencer" profession in at least not in the near future. In the future, it may be equivalent to the work done by humans.

Keywords
Influencer, artificial intelligence, company, Instagram, social networks, digital influencers, brands, metaverse.

Resumen
El fenómeno de los *influencers* digitales ha transformado la manera en que las marcas se comunican con su audiencia vía redes sociales. En una sociedad que se rige por la inmediatez, las empresas han tomado la delantera al considerar Instagram como la plataforma donde publicitar sus productos. En este escenario, los influencers se convierten en una herramienta clave y un mercado de negocio para la publicidad. En paralelo, la inteligencia artificial ha dado lugar a un mundo de avatares, un perfil no humano, que desarrollan capacidades con efectos desconocidos sobre los públicos y que centran la atención de las marcas de moda. El objetivo de esta investigación es conocer cómo se comunican en Instagram los influencer digitales y el impacto en las marcas de lujo. Se aplica una metodología de análisis de contenido de doble enfoque (cuantitativo/cualitativo) y herramienta estadística SPSS. Los primeros resultados muestran el nivel de frecuencia de los influencers digitales en las campañas publicitarias de las marcas de moda, la presencia de las marcas de lujo en sus conversaciones y una interacción positiva con los usuarios. A pesar de ser perfiles que no pueden reproducir las emociones del lenguaje humano, hemos podido obtener algunos resultados los cuales avalan que, si bien los avatares generados por inteligencia artificial (IA) tienen las características necesarias para desempeñar un papel relevante en la publicidad de las marcas en las redes sociales, no se puede decir que estén involucrados en la profesión de "influencer" al menos no en un futuro próximo. En el futuro, podrían llegar a realizar un trabajo equivalente al de los humanos.

Palabras clave
Influencer, inteligencia artificial, empresa, Instagram, redes sociales, influencers digitales, marcas, metaverso.

Introduction

The Network is still a consequence of the current reality in the sector: oversupply and more accessible, coupled with a scenario with huge volumes of information. This requires a different approach to the customer; personalized services must be offered where even the consumer can collaborate in the creation phase, dissemination and through collaborative tools such as Web 2.0 (Del Olmo and Gascón, 2014).

RAE defines the term influencer as "an anglicism used in reference to a person with the ability to influence others, mainly through social networks. As an alternative in Spanish, the use of "influyente" is recommended (Real Academia Española, Diccionario de la lengua española, 23rd ed., [version 23.7 online]). Since the beginning, luxury firms have characterized by their exclusivity, however, they are the ones that have brought high-end fashion to our daily life, making us believe that anyone can buy it. Not only is this the main problem of this type of advertising and collaboration, but the impossibility of these companies to control the image that content creators give about their products. For this reason, companies have decided to do without them in order to control the image they project of their products to the maximum.

Nowadays, many productive segments, including fashion, seek the participation of these users to communicate messages about their brand or product with the aim of increasing visibility, transmitting a certain image or improving online prestige. The increase in brand awareness and *engagement* with customers is a direct consequence of the use of *social media.* Companies dedicated to fashion, without disregarding traditional formats, activate and reinforce an alliance with the protagonists of digital platforms while recognizing the need to offer a response and a credible image that captures the trust of the user and potential client (Pérez Curiel and Luque Ortiz, 2018).

Fashion on social networks. The influencer effect

The Network is still a consequence of the current reality in the sector: oversupply and more access, coupled with a scenario with huge volumes of information. This requires a different approach to the customer; personalized services must be offered where even the consumer can collaborate in the creation phase, dissemination and through collaborative tools such as Web 2.0 (Del Olmo and Gascón, 2014).

Previous research (Vinader Segura *et al.,* 2019; Segarra-Saavedra and Hidalgo-Marí, 2018; Sadaba and San Miguel, 2016*)* highlight the role of the *influencer* as a protagonist of the communication actions of fashion and luxury brands. However, due to his/her condition with respect to the organization with which he/she collaborates, the influencer reaches a decision-making capacity that exceeds the control of the brand itself, sometimes generating a conflict of interest (Sanz-Marcos *et al.,* 2019).

However, it is important to correctly choose the influencer who will represent a company, since their values must be aligned. Otherwise, it could become a problem and convey a brand image that is not the desired one. Moreover, after nearly a decade in which advertising has gained traction on social media, companies are facing a new dilemma.

To do this, we will address two main concepts: macro and micro influencer. In the first case, it refers to those Instagram users with more than 50,000 followers, while the second is limited to those who do not exceed that mark and from 10,000 followers. We consider it important to reflect this data with some examples.

Macro influencers and microinfluencers from brand perception

Previous research (Vinader Segura *et al.,* 2019; Segarra-Saavedra and Hidalgo-Marí, 2018; Sadaba and San Miguel, 2016) highlights the role of the *influencer* as a protagonist of the communication actions of fashion and luxury brands. However, due to its external status with respect to the organization with which he/she collaborates, the *influencer* reaches a decision-making capacity that exceeds the control of the brand itself, sometimes generating a conflict of interest (Sanz-Marcos *et al.,* 2019). Some examples that represent the aforementioned characteristics at the national level are Dulceida, María Pombo or Rocío Osorno.

Another problem is that the more people follow the influencer, the less target audience they get and the latter is what brands need. For that reason, the entity's marketing managers are looking for the voice of influencers with a smaller but much more focused audience every day. This second type of influencers are called micro influencers and unlike macro influencers (Dulceida and María Pombo), they get greater *feedback* from the public because it is smaller, and the influencer is able to know what the needs and tastes of their consumers are. On these arguments arises the denial about the influence, popularity or the number of followers as guarantors of the success of communication on networks. According to the study titled "Instagram marketing: does influencer size matter?" as the number of followers of an *influencer* increases, the engagement rate (*likes* and comments) of that *influencer* decreases (Markely, 2017). In this frame of reference, there are thousands of examples but we decided to mention Aitana Soriano, Lucia de Luis or Alba Pernau.

Artificial intelligence in fashion. The avatar world

The influence of these figures and the advance of AI have favored the birth of virtual influencers, who also have a human appearance, and who are used for commercial purposes. The cost savings of these human-looking influencers versus *celebrities* is a reality. Thus, influencers created through AI or digital avatars designed digitally through a computer with the aim of resembling a human are born. They are digital characters created through various technologies offered by AI, such as 3D graphics, simulation and animation software (Allal-Chérif *et al.,* 2024).

Therefore, virtual influencers of human appearance are figures created through computers that share both a human physical and social narratives of people to connect with their followers (Liu and Lee, 2024). This content is produced by marketing specialists or communication agencies (Gerlich, 2023) who strive to create human-looking figures with which users can feel identified.

The key to equating Artificial Intelligence with human intelligence is to invoke the process of anthropomorphism, which is based on the process of attributing human characteristics or behaviors to non-human systems or entities, such as robots or computer programs. This may involve the inclusion of emotions, intentions, or cognitive abilities similar to those of humans, even when systems lack real emotions. The level of anthropomorphism as a key element to establish a successful relationship between virtual and human influencers has been corroborated through research that maps the brain activity of the consumer, demonstrating that they apply the same social norms of relationship with machines as with *humans, so a high level of* *anthropomorphism will favor the success of communication between both* (Sands *et al.,* 2022).

When considering the relevance of Instagram as an advertising platform for brands and the influence of human-looking virtual influencers on the opinions of their followers, it is understandable that brands choose to collaborate with this type of influencers on Instagram to promote their products or services.

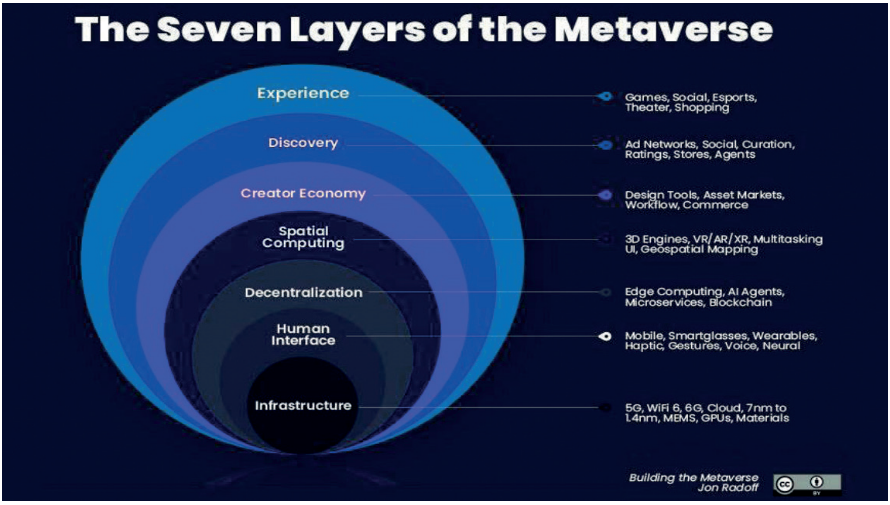
Influencers and metaverse

The term metaverse first appeared in 1992 in Neal Stephenson's science fiction novel *Snow Crash*, in which his characters become avatars and work in a virtual reality (Kelly, 2018; Kim, 2021; Kye *et al.,* 2021; Lee and Kim, 2022). The metaverse is composed of the prefix "meta-" (beyond) and "-verse" (universe) (Dionysius *et al.,* 2013; Kye *et al.,* 2021). Firstly, we cannot speak of a metaverse as a single space, but of multiple metaverses. So that even a single universe can be constituted with different metaverses (Abeles, 2007; Papagiannidis *et al.,* 2008; Smart *et al.,* 2007).

Since Neal Stephenson configured the metaverse from the perspective of immersive and 3D worlds, his conception has evolved over time by virtue of a more complex and expansive notion in the form of an interconnected network of virtual worlds (Dionisio *et al.,* 2013) that is characterized by being infinite, self-sustaining, interoperable, decentralized, persistent and in real time (Khan *et al.,* 2022). The metaverse consists of three elements: hardware, software, and content (Park and Kim, 2022). In short, technology and narrative. The advent of Web 3.0 opens the door to the more advanced version of metaverse (Smart *et al.,* 2007; Au, 2005).

Today, overcoming the technological limitations around immersion, 3D or interactivity leads to the launch of the metaverse in its social and commercial facet and in the form of leisure platforms well known for young people and with great business possibilities (Epic Games, Decentraland, Roblox...) (Ning *et al.,* 2021; Rospigliosi, 2022).

Image 1
The seven layers of the metaverse



Note. Jon Radoff (2021), *Building the metaverse*. From Medium.

It does not seem far-fetched then to believe that its application is intended exclusively for entertainment and leisure, despite the great possibilities it has for commercial, educational or social development (Au, 2005). Such is the current potential of the metaverse that companies like Meta (formerly Facebook) are modifying their business model, focusing on hardware and software to make their metaverse, Horizon World and Horizon Workroom, accessible to the general public at a low cost and applicable to the professional world (Kraus *et al.,* 2022).

The private and commercial sphere also makes combined use of the possibilities of the network under the idea of metaverse. This is the case of Meta and the Oculus Quest 2 (VR), which allows an avatar to represent us in a virtual world in which to interact with third parties (Kim and Lee, 2022).

Artificial intelligence carries out certain tasks that are usually related to human activities since they have to do with using logical reasoning, learning or creativity. While it is true, all these capabilities that artificial intelligence can offer allow an optimization in the processes of the metaverse, in fact, this tandem of tools is already being used today even in fashion companies (Suárez, 2022).

In this way, the application of artificial intelligence to the metaverse will be fundamental, starting with the creation of more realistic and autonomous virtual avatars that even learn from their environment and adapt to virtual interactions. It will also be useful to achieve more realistic virtual spaces from the visualization of data or real life or invented images by generative artificial intelligence (Granieri, 2023).

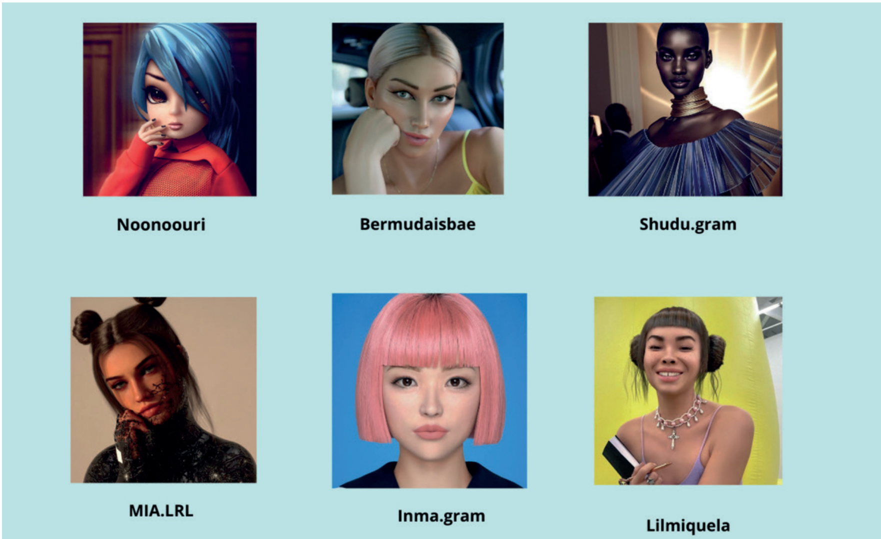
Methodology

In a scenario of profound changes in the roles of influence and the ways of communicating of fashion brands on social networks, the following research questions are raised:

> *PI.1*. What topics and communication strategies do AI-generated influencers use in fashion brand advertising campaigns?
>
> *PI.2* How has the use of artificial intelligence transformed the advertising strategies of fashion companies on social networks, and what role do AI avatars play in this process?

In this study, a methodology of comparative content analysis is applied, with a quantitative-qualitative cut (Silverman, 2016; Krippendorff, 2004). The proposed approach is based on the need to combine qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain a comprehensive and rigorous understanding of the interaction between digital influencers and the fashion industry.

The ranking process requires a substantial sample of messages (posts) from Lil Miquela (@lilmiquela), Noonoouri (@noonoouri), Immagram (@ immagram), Shudugram (@shudugram), Bermudaisbae (@bermudaisbae) and Mia.lrl (@mia) Instagram accounts. These influencers were selected after a screening process in which the number of followers was taken into account as the main factor, since not all of them had to have a high number, but we had to obtain a varied set of audiences. Therefore, the avatar with the most followers (Lil Miquela) has a total of 2.5 million followers and the one with the least (Bermudaisbae) has 224,000 followers.



It analyzes, first, the function carried out by the previous digital influencers, the theme of their posts and the relationship with users reflected in the number and variety of comments. These two indicators allow us to visualize the scope of the avatars studied, as well as the function they acquire in reference to fashion and communication.

Likewise, the methodology aims to advance in the analysis of the ability of these subjects to influence their community and the companies that use these artificial intelligence tools in their advertising campaigns.

Following this line, we draw a methodology of quantitative and qualitative content analysis in a temporal space divided into three years, corresponding to the *Fashion Weeks* carried out on the same dates in the cities of New York, Milan, London and Paris. This study justifies its selection because they are key dates for elaborating content of luxury brands, which rely on international influencers in order to bring a brand closer, perhaps inaccessible to most of the population. In the same way, companies trust digital influencers to spread their products. In a way, brands are betting on advertising campaigns without tendency to errors of human influencers. Therefore, and considering the aforementioned periods, we find four specific dates detailed below:

- January 14, 2022 to February 22, 2022
- January 23, 2023 to February 27, 2023
- September 5, 2023 to October 5, 2023
- January 7, 2024 to March 7, 2024

In the field of human sciences, measurement has different characteristics in other disciplines. Thus, the design and construction of measuring instruments is a complex task. As López-Roldán and Fachelli (2015, p. 6) point out, measurement is to move from theoretical concepts to empirical indicators, so a correspondence must be given between concepts that allude to a reality and measurement in a reality, between the language of concepts and the language of numbers. When assigning a numeric character or a symbol to that characteristic to be measured, measurement scales are usually used. The usual classification of measurement scales distinguishes four types, depending on whether they are used for qualitative or categorical measurements, or for quantitative or continuous measurements.

At present, it is difficult to talk about statistical processes of quantitative data analysis without referring to computer science applied to research. These computing resources are often based on software packages that are intended to assist the researcher in the data analysis phase. At the moment one of the most perfect and complete packages is the SPSS. This is a package of programs to carry out statistical analysis of the data. It is a very powerful statistical application, with several versions since its origin in the seventies (Vilà Baños, 2006).

In this way, the measurement has to do with assigning alphanumeric values to a characteristic or property observable in a given phenomenon through some indicators (Reguant and Martínez-Olmo, 2014). As well and applied to the above analysis, we attach the table of variables used in this study as an illustration and better understanding.

The measurement tool or indicator sheet applied to Instagram incorporates the following main data:

Table 1
Indicators and coding

Tab Number	
Influencer	Noonoouri Lil Miquela Inma.gram Shudu.gram MAR.IA MIA.LRL Bermudaisbae
Date of publication	
Link to the publication	

QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

Number of followers	
Number of likes	
Number of comments	
Number of shares (if real)	

QUALITATIVE INDICATORS

Gender	Male Female
Age	Childhood (1 to 11 years) Adolescence (12-19 years) Youth (20-25 years) Adulthood (26 to 59 years) Aging (over 60 years)
Content Type	Organic Advertising
Is it advertising?	Yes No
Sexualized or creative content?	Creative Sexualized

Type of comments	Positive Negative Neutral Spam Other
Personal Content	No Yes
Promotional Content	No Yes
Brand Product	No Yes
Tone of publication	Positive Negative Neutral Advertising
Recognition of AI	No Yes The Haunting Valley
Profession	Actor or actress Director Other professionals in the film sector Model Influencer Singer Companions Other
Race	Caucasian (white) Black Asian Other
Sizing	Skinny (small size) Standard (medium size) Plus size (plus size)

Results and discussion

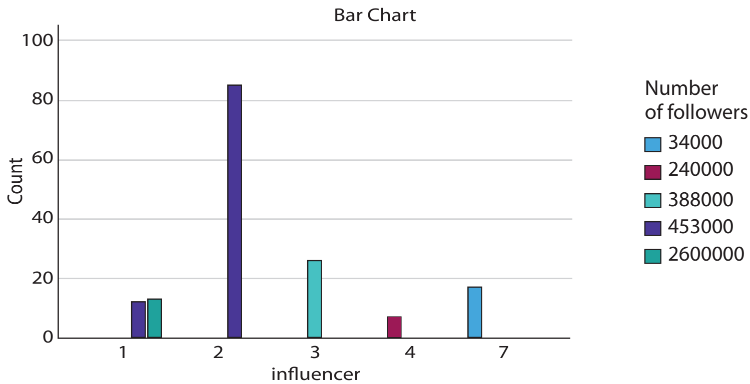
The application of the variables sheet through the SPSS statistical program (version 28) leads to the following results:

Figure 1
Number of followers

Influencer * Number of followers Crosstabulation

Count

		Number of followers					
		34000	240000	388000	453000	2600000	Total
Influencer	1	0	0	0	12	13	25
	2	0	0	0	85	0	85
	3	0	0	26	0	0	26
	4	0	7	0	0	0	7
	7	17	0	0	0	0	17
Total		17	7	26	97	13	160



Note. Own elaboration through SPSS.

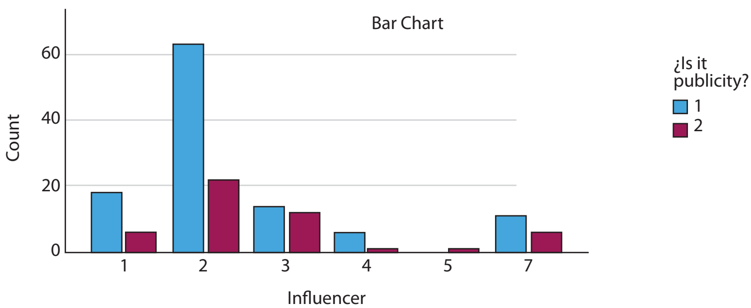
Although these characters are avatars created with artificial intelligence, they have amassed a large number of followers on Instagram. Lil Miquela, the most followed person in the sample, has a total of 2.6 million followers, the most among those analyzed in this study. Next is Noonoouri with 453,000 followers. Imma.gram has 388,000 followers, while Shudu.gram has 240,000 followers. Finally, Mia.lrl has the smallest community with only 34,000 followers. This graphical representation of the community of all digital influencers has decided to be reflected in the results of this research to contextualize and serve as a guide about the influence that these avatars can have, since these are the main data in which a company is fixed when making a paid collaboration and/or advertising. Influencers are able to create large communities of followers by their lifestyle or their way of creating content, but it is the brands that ultimately help them to reach a larger target audience and therefore, make what begins as a hobby, a profitable business. In this table, we show how these characteristics are equally present in the avatars studied.

Figure 2
Advertising

Influencer *¿Is it publicity? Crosstabulation

Count

		¿Is it publicity? 1	2	Total
Influencer	1	18	6	24
	2	63	22	85
	3	14	12	26
	4	6	1	7
	5	0	1	1
	7	11	6	17
Total		112	48	160



Note. Own elaboration through SPSS.

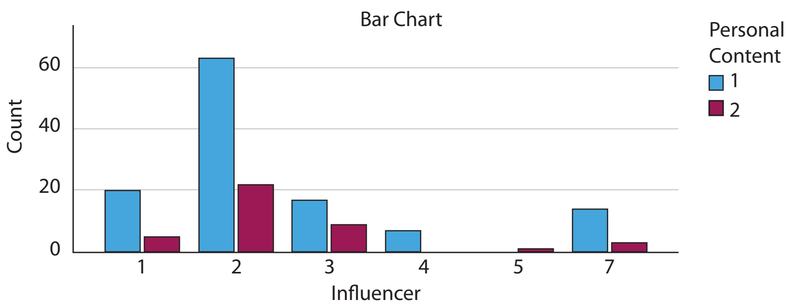
Next, we analyzed the number of advertising publications from various brands and companies that work with AI-generated avatars, similar to how they work with human influencers. It was noted that Noonoouri (the second most popular influencer) posted the most advertising content on her Instagram profile, making a total of 63 posts for product promotion and only 22 for personal content in eight months. She is closely followed by Lil Miquela (the number one influencer) with 18 advertising posts but only six personal content posts. Imma. gram (the third-ranked influencer) strikes a balance between both types of content, with 14 promotional posts and 12 personal posts. Mia.lrl (number 7 in the influence ranking) has 11 commercial publications and seven personal content publications. In the Shudu.gram profile (influencer number 4), in the selected sample, there are six advertising publications versus a single personal publication.

Figure 3
Organic non-advertising content

Influencer * Personal content Crosstabulation

Count

		Personal content 1	2	Total
Influencer	1	20	5	25
	2	63	22	85
	3	17	9	26
	4	7	0	7
	5	0	1	1
	7	14	3	17
Total		121	40	161



Note. Own elaboration through SPSS.

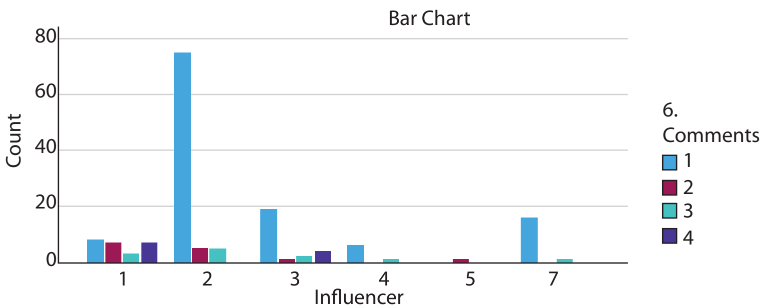
Finally, at the end of the ranking is Bermudaisbae (fifth in terms of impact), the only space that has not received promotional publications and only one publication of her own. When drawing conclusions regarding the research studied, companies and influencers collaborate in advertising campaigns through briefings, strict rules on what the campaign should be like and how they will disseminate the products sent. This is not only important in the face of a specific campaign but also has a greater significance in the image that the company obtains after the collaboration. In the table, we see how paid collaborations are much more significant in number than the advertising content in avatar profiles. This is due to two reasons: firstly, it is much more complicated to create from scratch a life to a virtual entity that does not really exist; secondly, a strict briefing is much easier to comply with by a virtual influencer, since it is created from graphs and these are mathematical and accurate.

Figure 4
Comments

Influencer * 6. Comments Crosstabulation

Count

		6. Comments				
		1	2	3	4	Total
Influencer	1	8	7	3	7	25
	2	75	5	5	0	85
	3	19	1	2	4	26
	4	6	0	1	0	7
	5	0	1	0	0	1
	7	16	0	7	0	17
Total		124	14	12	11	161



Note. Own elaboration through SPSS.

Like human influencers, AI-powered avatars, while not real, will combine their promotional volume with more personalized posts to establish a fictional life around the character. It is worth noting that Shudu.gram (influencer number 4) appears in the table as the only issue of study that presents only organic content. She was followed by Noonoouri (the second ranked influencer) with 63 organic publications, compared to 22 advertising publications, for a total of 85 analyzed publications. Lil Miquela (the number one influencer) showed 20 personal argument posts from a set of 25 studies. Imma.gram (influencer number 3), Shudu.gram (influencer number 4) and Mia.lrl (influencer number 7) have fewer than 20 organic publications, 17, 7 and 14 respectively. However, the fact that a publication is classified as organic does not exclude the possibility that it contains hidden advertising, since in this study only brands are considered that are not mentioned or indicated in the photos or videos.

It would be interesting to know exactly the public's *feedback* in the specific case of communication through avatars created by artificial intelligence. Since artificial intelligence has no emotions, it is considered very difficult to imitate the naturalness of influencers. In most of the cases investigated, there were mainly positive comments, with fewer negative comments generated by bots. Noonoouri (influencer number 2) stands out as the one who received the most positive comments, with 75 posts receiving positive comments out of a total of 85 posts analyzed. Lil Miquela (influencer number 1) has a balanced record of comments received, with the same number of positive comments (8), negative comments (7) and bot comments (7). Although the number of comments considered for the other avatars is small due to the number of posts, positive comments predominate. This includes Shudu.gram (influencer number 4) with 6 total positive comments out of 7, Imma.gram (influencer number 3) with 19 total positive comments out of 26, and Mia.lrl (influencer number 7). It contains 16 positive comments out of 17 in total. It is interesting to note, in this case, the low number of comments generated by bots, since they are not human beings, but avatars created by artificial intelligence and, therefore, the Instagram algorithm would lead those posts to the most similar to them, i.e., to accounts of other robots. However, even *celebrities* appear among the comments of some of the avatars studied by emoticons or nearby words.

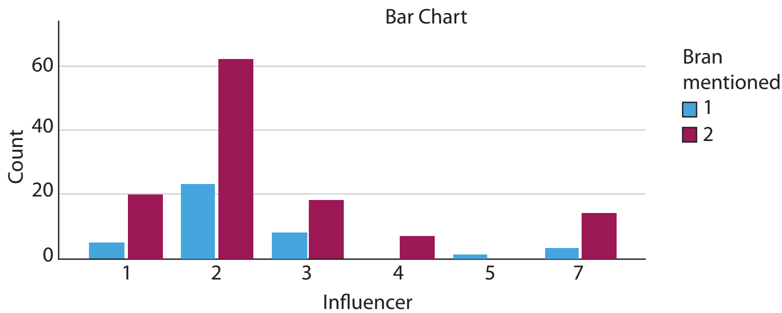
Figure 5

Number of times a comment is mentioned

Influencer * Bran mentioned Crosstabulation

Count

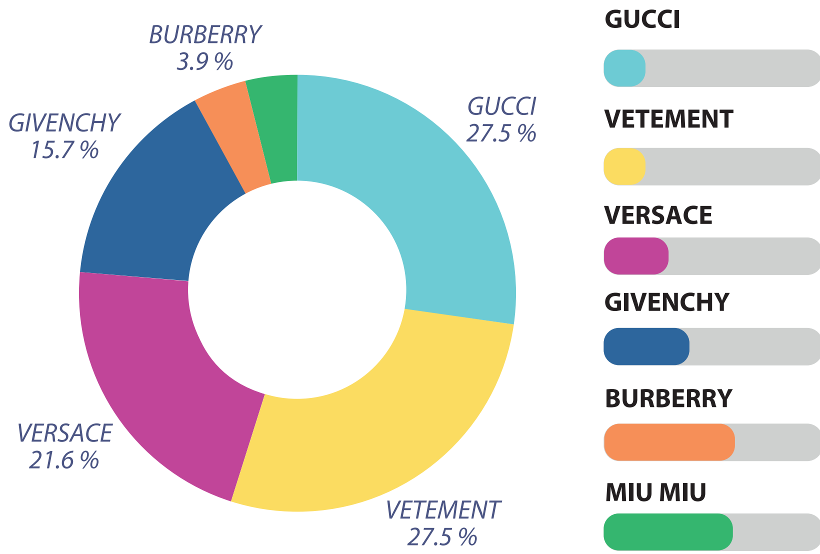
		Bran mentioned		
		1	2	Total
Influencer	1	5	20	25
	2	23	62	85
	3	8	18	26
	4	0	7	7
	5	1	0	1
	7	3	14	17
Total		40	121	161



Note. Own elaboration through SPSS.

As part of our advertising research, we specifically analyze how often advertised brands are mentioned, as the absence of this information could indicate the presence of hidden advertising. Noonoouri (influencer number 2) is undoubtedly the person who collects the most advertising content and, therefore, the one who mentions the brand the most in the publications, with a total of 62 mentions among the 85 publications studied. In the remaining cases, the number of publications mentioning the brand remains high, but lower compared to Noonouri. For example, Lil Miquela (influencer number 1) was mentioned 20 times in 25 analyzed advertising publications, while Imma.gram (influencer number 3) was mentioned 18 times in 26 analyzed advertising publications. Finally, Mia.lrl (influencer number 7) has 14 mentions from 17 analyzed publications and Shudu.gram (influencer number 4) has seven mentions from seven analyzed publications.

Figure 6
Brands appearing/advertising



Note. Own elaboration through SPSS.

From a total sample of 162 Instagram posts across six different influencer accounts, we found that a variety of brands use these avatars to promote their products. This is because all that digital content creators need is a good design, so they can easily adapt it to the specific needs of a brand or product. Not only are certain companies adopting this new type of influencer, but also important luxury fashion brands are joining this innovative method of advertising. Some of the most prominent brands include Gucci and Vetements, which have appeared in 14 different publications. Versace and Givenchy are mentioned in 11 and 8 cases respectively. Finally, Burberry and Miu Miu were underrepresented in the overall sample, with two releases each.

Conclusions

The results of this research derive from the analysis of other studies based on fashion communication on social networks or the role of influencers on Instagram (Pérez Curiel and Sanz Marcos, 2019). Knowing the application of strategic plans of fashion brands or the consumption criteria of young audiences are a preliminary step to delve into the new communication model of fashion companies based on Artificial Intelligence. Based on the above ideas, the formulas of the metaverse (Crespo Pereira *et al.,* 2023), the formation of avatars and their role in the virtual space serve as a guide to define the main characteristics of these internet entities and classify them within the world of communication and fashion.

Influencers (Vinader Segura *et al.,* 2019*)* provide authenticity and emotional connection that are the most difficult aspects to recreate with AI-created avatars (Allal-Chérif *et al.,* 2024). This ability to generate empathy and build human connections is a valuable asset in advertising *(Pérez Curiel and Luque Ortiz, 2018), as consumers tend to trust the recommendations of those with whom they have a genuine connection (Sanz-Marcos et al.,* 2019).

In this line, the studies of Crespo Pereira *et al*. (2023), which can be related to this research, delve into the origin of the metaverse as a tool intended to give life to artificial intelligence and, consequently, to the avatar. It is interesting to note that other works have dealt with the relationship between the physical properties of avatars and the effects on their behavior and that of third parties (Murray, 2020). The user is key to the future of the metaverse, as he/she is an active subject in this space (Park and Kim, 2022). Parallel to metaverse applications, the contents should give formulas for interacting with the user (Tayal *et al.,* 2022).

From this literature, we advance in the perception of users and their relationship with avatars on Instagram. As the analysis of comments indicates, this new type of content creators occupies a protagonist space, which is reflected in the positive messages in their publications, without excluding those coming from bots and fake accounts.

Public acceptance of AI avatars is also a key factor. Although technology advances, society's perception of these avatars as influencers can vary. Therefore, and solving the PI.1, it was concluded that the influencers generated by artificial intelligence in the advertising campaigns of fashion brands usually use topics related to innovation, technology, sustainability and customization. Its communication strategy focuses on creating engaging visual content, interacting with its audience through personalized reviews and promoting products organically.

One aspect that makes the difference is the fact of the creativity and adaptability of real influencers. While AI avatars can be programmed to adapt and generate engaging content, the capacity for spontaneity and improvisation remains a human strength that AI must still fully master, as they are unable to generate content at all hours of the day unless they are pre-programmed, which would entail constant graphical work.

Despite all the drawbacks and responding to IP.2, one potential advantage of AI avatars is the reduction of costs typically generated by these practices, and greater efficiency in these communications. Avatars can be used to continuously produce content without the physical and personal limitations of human influencers. For brands, this can translate into cheaper and more consistent advertising campaigns. Artificial intelligence can more accurately target audiences, personalize advertising messages, and optimize marketing campaigns in real time. AI avatars play an important role in this process and provide a virtual representation of the brand to interact with users in a personalized way and have a greater and more direct impact on the audience.

To conclude, despite the fact that the avatars generated by artificial intelligence (AI) have the necessary characteristics to play a relevant role in brand advertising on social networks, it could not be said that their participation in the profession of "influencer" can be equated to the work done by human beings, at least in the near future. Characteristics such as authenticity, creativity and, above all, the ability to generate connections through natural and everyday emotions, are aspects that AI avatars do not yet dominate due to their limitations. However, it is likely that in the future a hybrid model will be developed in which AI avatars and human influencers coexist and collaborate, taking advantage of each other's strengths to create more effective and diverse advertising campaigns.

In addition, it highlights the collaboration between humans and artificial intelligence, promoting a hybrid approach that brings to the maximum the benefits for the parties involved in the process. In a way, this collaboration comes with challenges, such as the need to carefully manage public perception and the consistency of messages. Beyond these points, it is also relevant to reflect on the combination of creativity and human spontaneity with the precision and working capacity of AI.

However, during the investigation process, some limitation has been identified that has marked a turning point in the work. The inability to study the profile of @MAR.IA due to its disappearance and inactivity on the social network. The disappearance of a non-tangible avatar is an event that manifests an inherent problem of collaboration with these digital entities. This fact can be caused by the ephemeral nature of the avatars and the various decisions made by their creator.

In addition, digital influencers rely heavily on the platforms on which they operate. Any changes in the policies of these platforms, such as content restrictions or algorithm updates, can significantly affect their visibility and, therefore, their impact on the fashion market. The disappearance of profiles also leads to a loss of important data for longitudinal analysis. The inconsistency in the availability of information and the inability to access prior content limits the ability to continuously and closely monitor the impact of these influencers on fashion. Perception of authenticity is crucial in influencer marketing, and can be compromised when the audience is aware that they are interacting with an artificial entity.

In short, the combination of real influencers and artificial intelligence avatars in advertising signals the beginning of a new stage in the world of digital marketing. Although there are challenges within this collaboration, such as managing public perception and message coherence, it is evident the potential to develop more effective, varied and personalized advertising campaigns. Combining the authenticity and creativity of humans with efficiency and technological precision not only improves costs and market segmentation, but also changes the way brands interact with their audiences. Finally, it can be said that the key to success is to achieve a healthy balance between both worlds, in which feedback generates a joint complementation, with a final goal aimed at innovation and creativity.

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Tendency to scandal as a marketing strategy in textile fashion: the Zara case

Tendencia al escándalo como estrategia de marketing en moda textil: el caso Zara

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Abstract

Marketing strategies aim to increase consumption or brand visibility of a desired product or service. In the last decade, various unorthodox tactics have gained prominence, notably the use of scandal. This article seeks to demonstrate the existence of a tendency to scandal as a marketing strategy developed by the Zara brand during the decade from 2014 to 2023, and demonstrate that it is correlated with increased sales. Using a mixed methodology, a case study is carried out based on content analysis by designing a database on ten Zara launches, at the rate of one product per year in the last decade. These launches stood out for their countercultural advertising aimed at certain consumer segments. Furthermore, the multivariate correlation between sales and scandal factors was calculated. The results show the trend towards the brand's annual scandal through tables and data triangulation, supported by graphs that represent the level of annual sales, the volume of followers on social networks, news of scandals and geographical distribution. The study concludes that the Zara brand used controlled scandal as a marketing strategy in the last decade. This tactic is characteristic of the network society, which bases its decisions on recommendations or events rather than on traditional advertising, thus achieving a high effectiveness ratio.

Keywords

Marketing, fashion, communication, advertising, consumption, clothing, digitization, countercultures.

Resumen

Las estrategias de marketing tienen como objetivo elevar el consumo o la visibilidad de marca en un producto o servicio deseado. En la última década, diversas tácticas heterodoxas han ganado protagonismo, destacándose entre ellas el uso del escándalo. Este artículo busca demostrar la existencia de una tendencia al escándalo como estrategia de marketing desarrollada por la marca Zara durante la década de 2014 a 2023; y demostrar que está correlacionado con el incremento de ventas. Mediante una metodología mixta, se realiza un estudio de caso basado en el análisis de contenido mediante el diseño de una base de datos sobre diez lanzamientos de Zara, a razón de un producto anual en la última década. Estos lanzamientos destacaron por su publicidad contracultural dirigida a ciertos segmentos de consumidores. Además, se calculó la correlación multivariable entre ventas y factores de escándalo. Los resultados muestran la tendencia al escándalo anual de la marca a través de tablas y triangulación de datos, apoyadas con gráficos que representan el nivel de ventas anuales, el volumen de seguidores en redes sociales, noticias de escándalos y distribución geográfica. El estudio concluye que la marca Zara utilizó el escándalo controlado como una estrategia de marketing en la última década. Esta táctica es característica de la sociedad en red, que basa sus decisiones en recomendaciones o eventos más que en la publicidad tradicional, logrando así un gran ratio de efectividad.

Palabras clave

Marketing, moda, comunicación, publicidad, consumo, vestuario, digitalización, contracultura.

Introduction

Fashion is a complex sociocultural phenomenon and its representation as an economic activity has reached exponentially high levels with respect to aggregate demand (Fontana and Miranda, 2016). In this sense, fashion has meant a milestone of economic relevance in the development of countries that has generated changes in the culture of their societies, having evolved from a protoindustry between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (Torró, 2019) to a changing and advanced industry (short segments, unique designs) that favorably influences the growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the generation of employment (Economically Active Population, EAP) on a global scale. Consequently, industries also evolve in the field of innovation and technology from a neo-Schumpeterian theory point of view, raising productivity through intensive use of technology (Fernández, 2015). On the other hand, marketing must be oriented, both to the positioning of a brand and to its sales (Toca, 2013); so that the current socioeconomic environment adds a high degree of complexity to the constant evolution of the technique or marketing discipline (Gázquez and Jiménez, 2009). According to Schauerte *et al.* (2023) marketing in one way or another will enjoy a relevance around the business administration.

In the framework of the sociology of consumption, the fashion industry has not been aliened to the use of commercial marketing strategies that allow to increase the consumption of its products, whose essential focus has been the brand (Ceballos and Villegas, 2014). According to Ripamonti (2023), marketing, through advertising actions, allows the creation of value; and, consequently, the increase of sales. In addition, marketing, as a technique of issuing information, is essential for achieving business competitiveness, seeking strategies that allow differentiation from other competitors; and, thus, achieve the loyalty of the final consumer (Ballester *et al.,* 2021).

The 21st century has registered the emergence of social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, among others, which channel the daily events of the companies among their customers (followers) in a way that creates a brand awareness with a communal, emotional, sentimental way, where word of mouth plays a fundamental role (Rubalcava *et al.,* 2019). This reveals that all economic sectors have had to adapt to new technologies, including the fashion and textile sector. Companies, in general, have opted for orthodox marketing strategies; however, there are also heterodox methods, contrary to the usual culture. These are countercultural positions that stand out and create notoriety, either by creating intense reactions, both in favor and against, which are contagious, both through the traditional word-of-mouth factor and electronic viralization, the latter being the most influential (López and Sicilia, 2013).

As for Granell (2020), the counterculture consists in the practice of ideas opposed to the regime of values and dominant traditions in a society, generating sensitivities, characterized by rebellion against the established order. In this sense, aspects that make up the countercultural are derived from this term, such as cultural discrimination that is based on reasons of values, customs, ethnicities and traditions that identify a sector of society (Hernández and Maya, 2016); sexism or gender discrimination that is based on the creation of stereotypes that encapsulate male and female roles (Arnoso *et al.,*

2017) as well as physical discrimination that refers to the marginalization of the body of people (Méndez and Rico, 2018); and aspects of health noncompliance that can generate a detriment to the health of people (Romaní and Sepúlveda, 20) 05), thus shaping ideas of today's society in which discrimination of any kind is prohibited and there are norms, in general, both at the health, cultural and gender level.

Zara and digital marketing strategies in textile fashion

Spain consolidated in 2014 as the ninth exporting country in the clothing industry (Minian *et al*., 2017), being the main exponent the Zara brand of the Inditex Group that has focused on fast fashion with competitors such as H&M and Forever 21. Their target audience is different from traditional *ready-to-wear* brands (Calvin Klein or Tommy Hilfiger type) because the fast fashion consumer rewards novelty. In this sense of creativity, Zara imposes on its immediate competitors in the segment by the proportion of standard garments or wardrobe bottom of the latter, much greater than the originality of the designs of Zara that does play the sense of unique garment. The culture that Zara transmits is reinforced by its communication policy, which has competitive advantages based on information and communication technologies (Martínez, 2008).

Traditional marketing strategies are characterized by advertising in typical media (television, newspapers, radio), creation of promotional campaigns, among other types of strategies whose common characteristic is that they do not have such an effective penetration in the age of the Internet for certain types of public (Brogdon, 2024). However, new strategies arise every day, such as the use of social networks, *influencers,* the use of digital marketing with KPI, digital consumer segmentation, among others, being especially relevant the scandal and its relationship with networks. Hence, the volume factor of web traffic will be decisive in the digital marketing strategy to be used for positioning in networks (Ye *et al.,* 2024).

From 2014 to 2023, Zara is a brand that has been involved in controversies characterized by the tendency to the countercultural, i.e., by the violation of the sensitivity of various sectors segmented according to their country, culture, sex, religion, among others. In contrast to what Pellicer (2018) mentions regarding ethical advertising, Zara has opted for using controversies that may be contradictory with current ethical standards, in search of a marketing strategy aimed at the consumer from a digital approach. It considers the convergence between consumption and technology following consumer-expressed behavior (Masrianto *et al.,* 2022). However, it should be noted that advertising is related to freedom of expression; and, the latter, as a right, is not absolute (Collí, 2015), which is why the controversies could be illegal. In this sense, the countercurrent to the usual constructions of community of a brand that are based on conscience, moral responsibility and traditions is revealed (Casaló *et al.,* 2013).

As for the textile or clothing sector as such, marketing has characterized by the impact on networks and the sustainability of clothing (Hoon and Young, 2020), the latter aspect that has not been considered in the advertising scandals of the brand. Likewise, Zara, like other brands in the textile sector, has successfully joined what is currently called the digital era (Cho *et al*., 2023), in search of contactless marketing, i.e., in network. This implies the adaptation of this sector, in recent years, to information technologies, not only in the aspect of the same organization as Kwame *et al.* (2024), but also in marketing.

The brand has incorporated to the rhythm of the expansion of the Internet, providing a word-of-ear approach (Matute *et al.,* 2015; Belanche *et al*., 2013), which has allowed the controversies caused to have registered high rates of expansion of web traffic (viralization). This strategy generates both cognitive and affective effects in the recipient, with high levels of brand recall; and, also, it causes a diversity of emotions in the public (Navarro *et al.,* 2009). This effect of its communication strategy is part of its general strategy in which Zara has incorporated information and communication technologies into its organizational model to raise its capacity for innovation in the market and evolve its management model in the world of the textile industry towards a global, diverse and diversified public (García, 2015).

Objectives of the research

- General objective: to demonstrate the existence of a tendency to scandal as a marketing strategy developed by the Zara brand from 2014 to 2023.
- Specific objective: to demonstrate that there is a correlation between the trend towards scandal and the increase in sales of the brand from 2014 to 2023.

Materials and method

A mixed methodology of double focus: qualitative and quantitative (Singh and Swaroop, 2020) has been used to adequately understand the phenomenon investigated, enriching the data analysis and its corresponding interpretation, also using the quantitative approach by calculating the correlation of variables. This will explain each of the approaches in the following paragraphs.

In this case, fast fashion is a type of fashion closely linked to social networks, therefore, a qualitative technique called *volume analysis of followers on social networks* will be used.

On the proposed objectives (one general and one specific), which guide this article, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

> *H.1*. There is a tendency to scandal as a marketing strategy developed by the Zara brand from 2014 to 2023.
> *H.2*. The trend towards scandal as a marketing strategy is correlated with the increase in sales of the Zara brand from 2014 to 2023.

A qualitative approach was used, which as for Lucchese *et al.* (2023), aims to understanding and developing concepts from the data to analyze from the observation of the context, carrying out for this an explanatory case study (Muñoz *et al.,* 2023) that allows to verify the tendency to scandal for a whole decade. To do this, we proceeded designing and elaborating a database of news about ten launches of Zara, at the rate of an annual product in the last decade, whose advertising meant a counterculture position towards certain consumer segments. In this regard, the following is indicated on sampling:

- The selection of the news was made by the criterion of appearance and SEO traffic in Google News (and for the case of the impact news in China, the search engine Baidu was also used). The uniform keyword algorithm was used in Spanish, English, German, French and Chinese, matching the search criteria of other languages. The keywords for the news search have been placed in each advertisement of table 1 in Spanish (except *Love your curves*) and the translations have been used, although they do not appear detailed in that column. These Spanish terms and their translations were used together and separately to verify the totality of the news. In all cases, the keyword Zara was used to show the distinction.

- The time interval for news search was from January 1 to December 31 for each year from 2014 to 2023. We used the advanced search tool by temporal and term filter of Google News and Baidu. It is important to point out that the news queried are secondary sources of information that are available in the aforementioned languages and that focus on the description of the advertising. The exclusion criterion was news reposted from other news, i.e., that the same body of the news is not repeated, giving a different appreciation in each of the news.
- The selection of Zara scandals was made based on the inclusion criterion when the scandal is related to the product. The scandal corresponds to the criteria of appearance and SEO traffic of the news that were selected from Google News and Baidu. In addition, the launch of products in regions where Zara has physical stores, and which represent a high percentage of sales for the Inditex Group was considered. As an exclusion criterion, it applies when the advertising or news does not focus on the product.

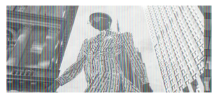
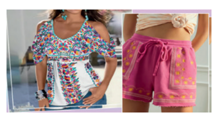
The figures presented in the research have been developed with Microsoft Office Excel and Microsoft Office Word software, both in the 2021 version, by using the Graphic tool in the Illustrations section of the second program, incorporating the data through the first program. As for the tables, they were developed with the same software, specifying that, for the correlation of the variable, the option of data analysis was used by customizing the configuration of options and enabling add-ins in Microsoft Office Excel.

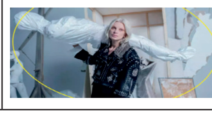
Next, we begin by factoring in the qualitative phenomenon of the scandal's marketing strategy. It seeks to determine what common factors prevail in all cases and how they work when successful, as well as what can be done so that such scandals do not increase sales or brand visibility. In this way, through a quantitative approach (Del Canto and Silva, 2013) qualitative factors are converted into possible quantitative indicators. Thus, the variance of both the variables considered objective (sales) and subjective (visibility of the brand product of the scandal) is calculated, so that, subsequently, we can calculate *strictu sensu*, the multivariable correlation between sales and the factors of the scandal that we have previously converted into indicators.

The scandals that are the subject of the sample are factored by means of table 1, with the name type of advertising of the products, year of launch, country of launch, amount of SEO news (search engines optimization) and advertising image that fomented the controversy. In addition, the keywords used for the search in the secondary information sources that constitute the news in the different portals of Google News and Baidu have been indicated.

Table 1

Empirical Measurement of the Phenomenon: Zara Scandals from 2014 to 2023

Item	Advertising	Year	Type	Country	Keywords	Google News*	Image
1	Striped and Jewish pajamas	2014	Direct	Israel	Zara Scandal Jewish Jews	64	
2	Slave Sandals	2015	Direct	Germany	Zara Slave	8	
3	Dead animal in a dress	2016	Indirect	Spain	Zara Scandal Rat Rats Rodent	61	
4	*Love your curves*	2017	Direct	Global	Zara Scandal Love your curves	32	
5	Melania Trump and the Parka	2018	Indirect	United States	Zara Scandal Melania Trump	161	
6	China and Freckles	2019	Direct	China	Zara Scandal China Freckles	73	
7	Market Bag	2020	Direct	Mexico and Spain	Zara Scandal Market Bag	42	
8	Mexican cultural appropriation	2021	Direct	Mexico	Zara Scandal Mexico Culture	34	

Item	Advertising	Year	Type	Country	Keywords	Google News*	Image
9	Sexism and skiing	2022	Direct	Spain	Zara Scandal Skiing	23	
10	Gaza	2023	Direct	Global	Zara Scandal Gaza Palestine	303	

Note. Own elaboration (2024) from the search for news related to the scandals, through its profiling. Added the results of the Chinese search engine Baidu for item 6*.

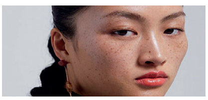
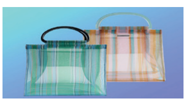
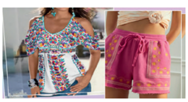
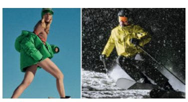
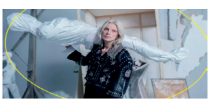
Table 1 considers direct advertising when the scandal is generated by the brand itself, while indirect advertising is referred to that carried out by the work of third parties who, voluntarily or involuntarily, participated in the scandal and made it more visible. Also note the "Google News" column in Table 1, which records the amount of digital media news that was reported on each of the scandals analyzed.

Finally, the profile of each scandal is defined in Table 2, i.e., what it consisted from a content point of view. In addition, the counter-cultural aspect that characterizes it is pointed out, together with the respective advertising image, in order to determine the essential aspects of the scandal. As explained above, countercultural aspects have been delimited as cultural discrimination, health noncompliance (in the understanding of health), physical discrimination and gender discrimination (Hernández and Maya, 2016; Arnoso *et al.,* 2017; Méndez and Rico, 2018; Romaní and Sepúlveda, 2005).

Table 2

Profile of the Zara Scandals from 2014 to 2023: Contents and Countercultural Aspects

Advertising	Content	Counter-cultural aspect
	Launch in Israel of a product similar to Jewish uniforms in concentration camps at the time of the Holocaust.	Cultural discrimination

Advertising	Content	Counter-cultural aspect
	Launch in Germany of sandals with the name in German slavenque, which means slave.	Cultural discrimination
	Appearance in Spain of a dress with a rat's foot at the seams, which generated an allergic reaction to the buyer.	Health Non-Compliance
	Product launch with contradictory advertising campaign: thin models and message for plus sizes.	Physical discrimination
	Melania Trump's use of Zara's parka in a Mexican immigration detention center that indicates *I really don't care. Do you?*	Cultural discrimination
	Launch in China of products with a Chinese model with freckles, contrary to the standard of beauty of that country where the skin has no brands.	Cultural discrimination
	Launch in Spain and Mexico of bags similar to the Latin American market bags at an excessive price.	Cultural discrimination
	Launch of products through cultural appropriation of Mixtec and Zapotec people in shorts, dresses and blouses, using design patterns of such communities.	Cultural discrimination
	Launch in Spain of ski clothing products with female models with little coat and male models with a lot of coats.	Gender discrimination
	Worldwide launch of products with similar publicity to the destruction of Gaza in Palestine, representing the deceased and their bereaved.	Cultural discrimination

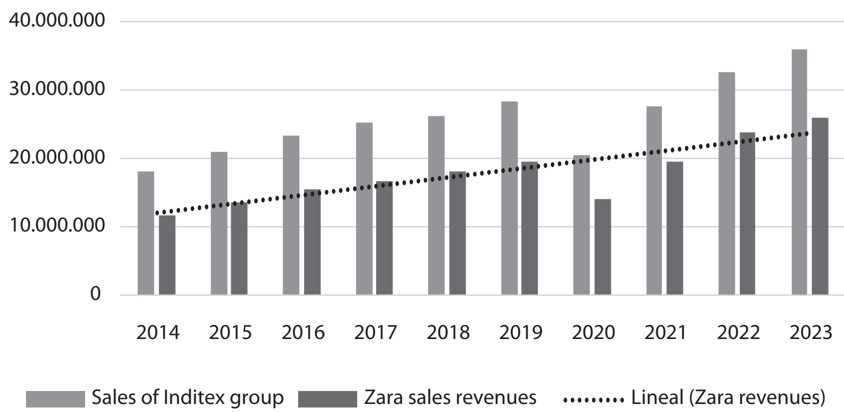
Note. Own elaboration (2024) from table 1.

Results

Figure 1 presents the level of sales of the Inditex Group and Zara worldwide from 2014 to 2023, in millions of euros. It should be noted that, according to Inditex (2024), this business group has the following brands: Zara, Zara Home, Stradivarius, Massimo Dutti, Pull&Bear and Bershka. In Figure 1, Inditex Group's turnover for the period, of which Zara represents on average more than 60% of the total invoiced, shows an increasing trend line in the level of sales during the decade. Likewise, there is a decrease in 2020, a situation that was the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant a halt in economic development worldwide; however, this did not prevent Zara from exceeding pre-pandemic turnover levels as early as 2022.

Figure 1

Level and trend of Inditex Group and Zara sales revenue from 2014 to 2023

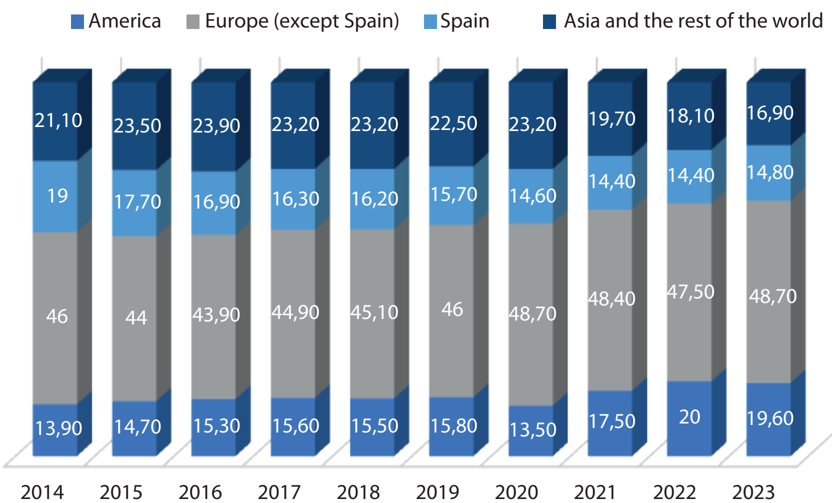


Note. Own elaboration (2024) based on the Inditex Group's annual reports from 2014 to 2023. The data are in millions of euros and worldwide.

As shown in Figure 2, Inditex Group's sales were distributed in five major markets: the Americas, Europe (excluding Spain), Spain, Asia and the rest of the world (the latter two markets being grouped for chart purposes). Again, for the period 2014 to 2023, an information cross between the corresponding scandal annually and the country of impact is made. The trend in Asia and the rest of the world is decreasing in percentage as in Spain, while in Europe (without Spain) there is an increasing percentage trend. In the Americas, it is showing an increasing trend, with a reduction of only 0.4% in the last year compared to an increase of more than 2% per year in previous years. It should be noted that the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic mainly affected the Inditex Group in the Americas, generating a 2.30% reduction in sales from 2019 to 2020. However, the market recovered rapidly in 2021.

Figure 2

Percentage distribution of sales by regions worldwide of the Inditex Group from 2014 to 2023



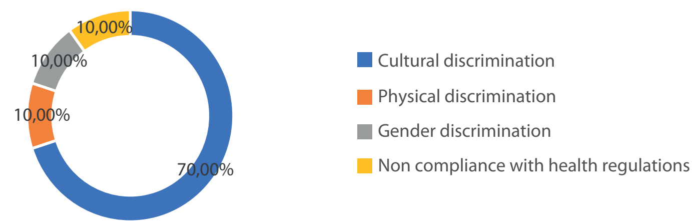
Note. Own elaboration (2024) from Orús (2024).

However, in Table 1, the scandals, their type, date, among other factors were outlined. Table 2 defined the content of each of the scandals and their distinctive countercultural aspect to identify the priority features that make up their impact.

As shown in Figure 3, the priority factors for the scandals have been 70% related to countercultural aspects, i.e., cultural discrimination, values, customs, identities and other aspects related to the culture of a community (Israel, Germany, Mexico, China, United States and Palestine), 10% physical discrimination, 10% gender discrimination and 10% non-compliance with health regulations.

Figure 3

Distribution of typology of Zara scandals from 2014 to 2023

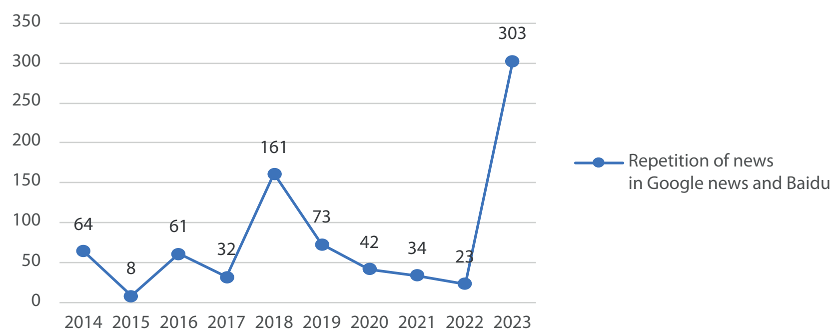


Note. Own elaboration (2024) from table 2.

Figure 4 shows the repetition trend of news related to scandals from 2004 to 2023, both in Google News and Baidu (specifically in 2019 due to segmented advertising). The trend is for the impact of the scandal to grow exponentially in two years (2018 and 2023), with the highest peak, while the lowest impact scandal was in 2015. It should be noted that the 2023 scandal generated the most web traffic, with a significant peak.

Figure 4

Trend of repeated news of scandals in Zara from 2014 to 2023

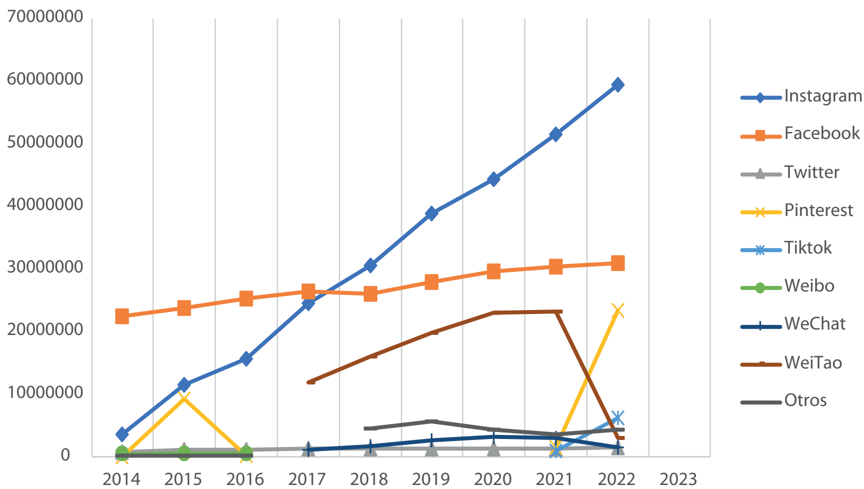


Note. Own elaboration (2024) from data in table 1. In 2019, the Chinese search engine Baidu was included due to the Asian segmentation of the consumer to whom the advertising was directed*.

Figure 5 presents a statistic of millions of followers on social networks exclusively of the Zara brand, observing a trend that depends on the social network analyzed. The results show a growing trend on Facebook and Instagram, with Instagram showing exponential growth versus neutral growth on Facebook. As for Twitter, there has been a non-significant increase. From 2021 to 2022, there was a fan investment in Pinterest and WeiTao. No data is available for some years in the case of TikTok, as the account did not exist before 2021, and in the case of Weibo, due to its move to the 'others' section from 2017. WeChat and WeiTao were ranked in the 'other' section from 2014 to 2016, as was Pinterest from 2017 to 2020. It is specified that the total followers of Zara for 2023 was 142 900 000 but that year in the graph is left blank because there is no segmentation available for networks.

Figure 5

Zara social media trend globally from 2014 to 2022



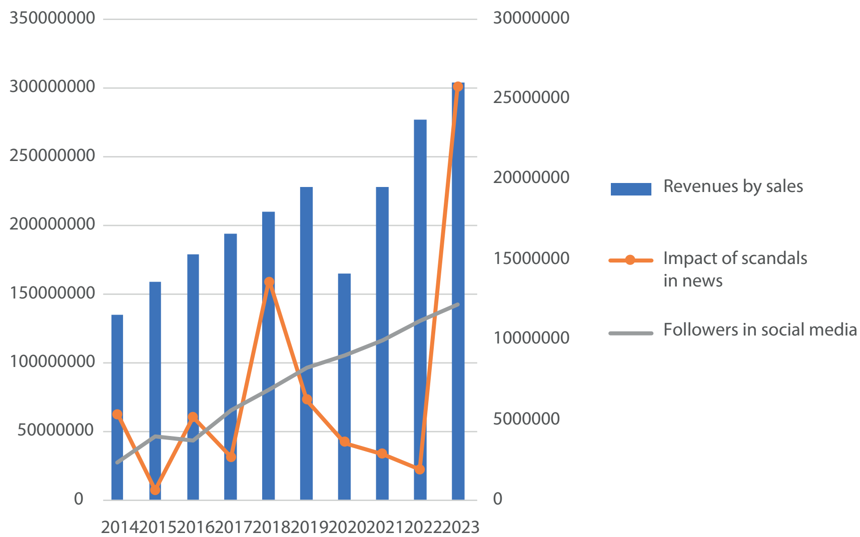
Note. Own elaboration (2024) from the annual reports of the Inditex Group.

As shown in Figure 6, the relationship between sales, followers on social networks and the volume of online news that repeats or viralizes each scandal suggests a direct relationship between sales growth, follower growth and the appearance of scandals. Zara's peak sales boom coincides with the biggest scandal.

The findings determine that the use of the scandal on an annual basis is directly proportional to the increase in sales, except for the year 2020 that meant economic recession worldwide as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, the degree of immediate recovery of the brand from 2020 to 2023 is observed, growing exponentiall especially in 2023, registering its historical sales peak.

Figure 6

Contrast of sales revenue, social media followers and impact of scandals on Zara news from 2014 to 2023



Note. Own development (2024). The impact of news scandals has been transformed into millions to show results proportional to the trend of sales revenue and followers on social networks.

We proceed to calculate the multiple correlation, modeling the phenomenon appropriately (Taylor and Bodgan, 1992), being the dependent variable the turnover or sales volume (v) and the independent variables, the volume of followers in the networks (s) and the volume of scandals (e) measured according to the amount of news that repeated them (gave visibility or helped to viralize it). An equation is created that would respond to a bivariable correlation estimate, with epsilon (€) being the possible margin of error or residue and omega (Ω) the value acquired by the independent variable sales (v) when the dependent variables followers (s) and scandals (e) are null or equal to zero. Sometimes, statistically, it can happen that there is an autonomous value that functions as an explanatory variable in the absence of score, data or values of the independent variables. This is the case, for example, with the neo-Keynesian consumption function in macroeconomics. It should be noted that this equation modeling the aggregate consumption of all families is: $C = Co + C1Yd$ where Co is autonomous consumption, i.e., what the subject consumes when he/she has no disposable income ($Yd = 0$).

In this case, the target audience type is middle class, upper middle class and upper class in all their national markets, so it will be assumed that $\Omega = 0$, So, the explanatory or independent variables that are modeled are two: the number of followers (s) and the number of scandals (e) regarding sales:

$$v = f\,(s, e)$$
$$v = \Omega + \alpha s + \beta e + € = 0 + \alpha s + \beta e + €$$
$$v = \alpha s + \beta e + €$$

From the data (values) adopted by each of the three variables grouped in table 3, the calculation of the correlation was processed using Microsoft Office Excel. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 3

Data for the three variables: sales (v), followers (s) and scandals (e)

Year	Sales EUR million)	Followers on social networks (millions)	Repeated news of scandals
2014	11,594	27.85	64
2015	13,628	46.60	8
2016	15,394	43.54	61
2017	16,620	65.50	32
2018	18,021	80.30	161
2019	19,564	96.31	73
2020	14,129	106.17	42
2021	19,586	116.20	34
2022	23,761	130.79	23
2023	26,050	142.90	303

Note. Own elaboration (2024) from Figure 6.

Table 4 crosses the three categories of data (variables), so that the respective correlation coefficients can be understood.

Table 4
Correlation coefficients

Correlation coefficient	Sales (million euros)	Followers on social networks (millions)	Repeated news of scandals
Sales (€ million)	1.00	-	-
Followers on social networks (millions)	0.86	1.00	-
Repeated news of scandals	0.57	0.41	1.00

Note. Own elaboration (2024) from the Correlation Calculation in Excel of the data included in Table 3.

The statistical result for the decade analyzed (2014 to 2023 included) confirms that news of scandals increases the number of Zara followers on networks by 41%. These network followers are linked to sales increases of 86%. Hence, whether they buy in store or online, there is a strong relationship between the interest of followers regarding the launches and new garments observed on the network, and the final sales. It is concluded that the repetition of news about scandals could be correlated with a 57% increase in sales.

Conclusions and discussion

There is evidence of a tendency to scandal as a marketing strategy in textile fashion by the Zara brand from 2014 to 2023. The triangulation between sales revenue, scandal impact and number of followers measured year by year verifies a uniform growth trend from 2014 to 2023 and facilitates the deduction of its correlation.

The findings of this research allow us to demonstrate the starting hypotheses: the correlation between sales revenue, digital scandals and the number of followers. This is in contradiction with what Febra *et al.* (2023), mention, who indicate that the reputation is already known in advance by the investor or consumer. Therefore, the company should promote a trend of more reputation in all its elements. As seen, Zara's reputation manifests itself in the product; however, it can turn out to be a deceptive strategy in relation to social networks. What the brand does coincides with what Ding *et al.* (2024) mention in relation to word-of-mouth advertising in an electronic form, which is reflected in each scandal and in the increase in the repetition of web news in internet traffic. Therefore, the phenomenon studied reveals the existence of a network society, in which the consumers will be the protagonist of advertising by acting as a disseminator of information and showing their commitment or rejection against the brand (Miranda *et al.,* 2015).

It is important to note that in contrast to Caro and Sicily (2013), although there may have been negative emotions, they did not distort the consumption pattern of buyers, "Controlled scandals" or "low intensity" that attract attention, but the company has never been attacked by a segment affected by the scandal that would lead to a boycott of its products or something similar. Thus, Zara has increased the level of sales annually, except in 2020 due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The scandal is a digital marketing strategy that does not necessarily seek to generate a positive reaction in the followers. This shows that while the average Zara consumer can talk about the scandal and share it on social media, they are not actually negatively influenced by news related to the scandal. Rather, these types of events function as a brand relaunch between regular followers and potential new followers (captured by the wave of popularity generated). This is in line with De Obesso *et al.* (2012) regarding the fundamental role played by consumer loyalty to the brand. It also coincides with what López and Clemente (2023) demonstrated regarding the fact that the consumer satisfaction of Zara is fulfilled by the brand, highlighting the climax of satisfaction when the garment catches their attention. Hence, the product is ultimately what motivates consumption, while the scandal continuously positions the re-launch of the brand in the focus of the networks.

In that sense, over a decade, the scandal has served Zara to maintain consumer expectations, according to Del Olmo (2022). The brand has an audience that is loyal to its industry, but it requires to be the focus of attention regarding innovation, change, rupture. To achieve this, it is crucial to develop a strategy that involves identifying the ideal context (physical, temporal and cultural) using this advertising resource. In the networked society, the informative immediacy becomes a central axis in the distribution of the controversy. This is reflected, for example, in campaigns such as 2023, where Zara took advantage of the armed conflict between Israel and Gaza at the end of that year from a countercultural perspective, coinciding with the publicity preparation. In addition, a campaign was launched during the resumption of the armed conflict in December to demonstrate the use of controversial tactics with various approaches and distribution criteria depending on the scenario in which it takes place.

However, there are other types of audiences in which the scandal, although it puts the brand in everyone's focus, will represent a decrease in sales, as was the case in Asia, where after the launch of Chinese countercultural advertising in 2019, sales fell until 2023 by 6%. However, this slight cut may also have been largely due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We agree with Margarida and Martins (2014) in the fact that the focus of the Zara brand should continue to be the use of social networks and web traffic for loyalty and not only for brand diffusion, in order to avoid further falls in followers.

It is suggested that a similar methodology (social network analysis) be applied to the study of other qualitative phenomena in the field of digital marketing, factorizing the qualitative variables; and using indicators, modeling the impact of the same on sales, as we have methodologically faced in these few pages, analyzing an eminently qualitative (sociological) phenomenon such as the marketing strategy of the scandal, developed on the network by Zara, belonging to the Inditex Group.

Fashion is a social construct in the original sense of the term coined by Berger and Luckman (1966) because it is a sociocultural phenomenon linked to identity, group membership and self-expression. It does not exist naturally, it is a collective construction with a cultural cut, it is not only clothing, accessories, makeup, hairstyle, etc. Fashion reflects the collective and individual tendencies of our own beliefs, values and positions in front of the collective; therefore, culturally rupturistic attitudes such as scandal as a marketing strategy in a fast fashion company has been worked so hard and methodologically in this article, because it leads to the questioning of reality, beyond the apparent limitations of the empirical experience.

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Influencers and reputation: Chiara Ferragni, Instagram and the Pandoro Gate scandal

Influencers y reputación: Chiara Ferragni, Instagram y el escándalo Pandoro Gate

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Abstract
Chiara Ferragni is one of the most important fashion influencers in the world. A pioneer in the profession, with the creation of her blog The Blonde Salad, she has reached more than 29 million followers on her Instagram account. At the end of 2023, her image and reputation suffered a serious deterioration after the Pandoro gate scandal. This article analyses the evolution of its content creation routines before and after this crisis. The main objective is to analyze the evolution in the behavior of the influencer, her followers and the brands with which she collaborated. The results show a significant transformation in her digital behavior, characterized by a month of silence followed by a notable decrease in her publications. This trend continues after her separation and the agreement with her husband not to show the faces of their children. It is striking how the engagement of her Instagram account, despite the lack of content published by the influencer, increases. However, there has been a rise in critical and controversial comments. Despite the decrease in content, the activity of her community intensifies, suggesting that the interest of her followers is focused more on Ferragni's personal and professional history than on her controlled posts.

Keywords
Influencers, Instagram, influencer marketing, marketing, communication crisis, social media, Chiara Ferragni, fashion.

Resumen
Chiara Ferragni es una de las *influencers* de moda más importantes del mundo. Como pionera en la profesión, con la creación de su blog The Blonde Salad, ha llegado a alcanzar más de 29 millones de seguidores en su cuenta de Instagram. A finales de 2023 su imagen y su reputación sufrieron un grave deterioro tras el escándalo Pandoro Gate. Este artículo analiza la evolución de sus rutinas de creación de contenidos antes y después de esta crisis. El objetivo principal consiste en estudiar la evolución en el comportamiento de la influencer, sus seguidores y las marcas con las que colaboraba. En los resultados se aprecia una transformación significativa en su comportamiento digital, caracterizada por un mes de silencio seguido de una notable disminución en sus publicaciones. Esta tendencia continúa tras su separación y el acuerdo con su marido de no mostrar el rostro de sus hijos. Llama la atención cómo el *engagement* de su cuenta de Instagram, pese a la falta de contenidos publicados por la influencer, aumenta. No obstante, se observa un alza en comentarios críticos y polémicos. Pese a la disminución de contenidos, la actividad de su comunidad se intensifica, esto sugiere que el interés de los seguidores se centra más en la historia personal y profesional de Ferragni que en sus publicaciones controladas.

Palabras clave
Influencers, Instagram, marketing de influencers, marketing, crisis de comunicación, redes sociales, Chiara Ferragni, moda.

Introduction

The objective of this work is to investigate the problems and new challenges in fashion communication, specifically in relation to influencers. The fashion industry, especially with the emergence of social networks and the gradual popularization of Artificial Intelligence, has been experiencing a digital transformation for more than a decade that has led fashion to develop in unknown ways and without previous references. The current fashion scene is marked by instantaneity, virality, acceleration and a model of rapid consumption based on the imitation, above all, of the new communication leaders who, above the brands, are influencers who appeal more closely and intimately to a community created around them. One of the most powerful influencers is the italian Chiara Ferragni, at least until December 2023, when it became public that an advertising campaign featuring her, including a charity action, was fake and therefore fraudulently profited. This study investigates how the crisis of fame and reputation has been managed, how it has been carried out in the following six months until the elaboration of this research in July 2024, and how the community of followers has responded.

At the same time, Ferragni's personal life has been radically altered. Her marriage to rapper and instagrammer Fedez has come to an end as a result of the scandal, and her profile, previously focused on her relationship with a partner and her two children, has changed. From the supposed closeness that made her followers feel like a family member or a close friend, she has gone on to not explicitly pronounce on the end of their relationship—in a statement or post, etc.—although it is known that although she takes it for granted, she has shared her sadness and desire to overcome it, and has spoken about it in other media. In addition, she has stopped showing her children, showing them only on their backs, allegedly due to the judicial conflict between the marriage. Collaborations with brands, on the other hand, have been extinguished and many contracts have been publicly terminated. The relationship with her community is not the same either: in addition to messages of support there are recriminations about the scandal, her personal behavior with Fedez and her children and her attitude on Instagram, as well as about her insincerity and greed, as well as criticism for the lack of interest in her new content.

The culture of cancelation and the complexity of the current brand and influencer landscape are topics that therefore stand out when approaching the figure of Ferragni from December 2023. Where is the acceptance and understanding of the possibility of getting it wrong –for a woman who has done so much for inclusion, the control of COVID-19 in Italy, the promotion of Italian culture and the de-stigmatization of mental health– and therefore redeem herself? Will Ferragni emerge stronger later, or will her profile decline and will no longer emerge? What does this example mean for the relationship between brands and influencers from now on? And for other influencers? How is a reputation crisis treated in the online environment? Can content evolve from a content creator? Do influencers have an expiration date?

The benefits or possibilities of influencers, as well as the dangers they can pose for brands are topics at the Academy and analyzed by authors such as Velasco Molpeceres (2018), San Miguel and Sádaba (2019), Sanz Marcos *et al.* (2019); Pérez Curiel and Velasco Molpeceres (2020) or Sanz Marcos *et al.* (2020). Everyone agrees that fashion brands seek to adapt to a digital environment in which they have little control and that, at the same time, this context has changed the traditional norms of fashion brand communication.

Influence marketing (San Miguel, 2020) and online advertising particularly on social networks, closely related to influencers, are the two most important elements for fashion firms today as they serve to manage communication, design and shape corporate identity, boost sales and even sell online directly. In addition, the digital world allows greater versatility, diversity and more targeted investments can be made for different specific audiences. Even if this means that, for example, important strategies in the past, such as fashion shows, have been overcome, at least in their traditional form. Nor is the digital environment unidirectional, unlike most traditional advertising, which causes abundant controversies, especially because brands have less capacity to direct from above the dynamics of fashion communication and because new issues arise that were not important before, such as equality and inclusion, diversity policies, sustainability, the political positioning of brands, etc., which were previously not relevant in the public debate. For this reason, the mediation of content creators is as thorny as it is necessary, at least nowadays, for brands that attend a landscape in which there is more and more regulation on online behavior and responsibility, but which also becomes increasingly complex and indefinite.

The case of Chiara Ferragni and her relationship with partners, sponsors and brands, as well as with her community, represents a matter of interest. Knowing the behavior and storytelling of the content creator after her reputation crisis —the Pandoro Gate— can provide valuable lessons for the future of fashion brand communication and, in general, for the international influencer community.

Influencers, influence marketing and brand communication

It is necessary to understand that the new trends in communication and marketing in the fashion and luxury sector go through social networks and especially through Instagram (Espinosa Grau, 2020) and TikTok, as well as the use of influence marketing. This reality clashes with the traditional concepts of fashion and luxury as they must now overcome the concepts of exclusivity and bet on digital democratization (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012), although their products remain for the socioeconomic elites. In addition, they must do everything in an environment in which their audience, whether customer or not, is active: they are prosumers – producers and consumers on the network – who demand a retroactive dialog with issuers (Miranda-Galbe and Figuero Espadas, 2016). Thus, the use of influencers has become a very important practice in the marketing of fashion companies, as they allow to generate a community of followers with an important level of engagement.

Social networks, especially Instagram and TikTok, allow brands to have more visibility and escape from a serious and controlled discourse, flat and undynamic, associated with traditional media, that causes rejection in an interested public (stakeholders) in fashion but that relates naturally in the network (Sarmiento-Guede and Rodríguez-Terceño, 2020; Monserrat-Gauchi and Sabater-Quinto, 2017). This audience, in turn, generates its own lifestyle and brand-related content on a daily basis. Hence, this public, which also believes, is much more demanding than in the past, posing a major challenge for fashion brands as they have lost the dominance of communication and the absolute control of messages. Now, they have to enter an intimate sphere of followers who want to interact, identify and have fun on the network with their favorite brands although, on the other hand, surely they cannot acquire them. However, this paradoxical game contributes to create, curiously, an image of luxury and power for these brands as they renew their aspirational components. Why use influencers? Because they allow brands to play with their audience but without losing the aura by not using their official profiles (Benjamin, 2003).

Influencers have no stable relationship with the brand, they are passing through, so to speak, and although collaborating with influencers involves a transfer of power and even the question of whether it does not benefit themselves more than the brands (Sanz-Marcos *et al.,* 2020; Pérez-Curiel and Clavijo-Ferreira, 2017; Rocamora, 2016), especially in the face of a crisis such as that experienced at the end of 2023 by Ferragni. On the other hand, influencers are interchangeable and brands remain because they have a long-term communication policy. So, influencers are only beneficial: does Ferragni low popularity splash on Dior? (Velasco Molpeceres, 2021). They reaped the fruits when it was at its zenith, and now they can, if they wish, simply set it aside: it has nothing to do with the house. She is not their ambassador, nor has she produced content for them: she has only dressed her designs and her community has seen it. Then, its popularity allowed to reach the brand emotionally (González Romo and Plaza Romero, 2017) as influencers transmitted their 'authenticity' to their community of followers. If she chose Dior to marry, at her fairy tale wedding, would not she return to Dior desirable? Now that their marriage has broken down: does that link retroactively affect a brand like Dior? Their wedding generated in 2018, both internet traffic and the link of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, members of the English Royal Household (Alarcón and Segarra-Saavedra, 2020), which shows the power of a profile like Ferragni's. But this relationship can end when necessary and, for Dior, it will mean nothing. Another thing is how Ferragni will manage its influence in a situation of contraction of interest towards it or even rejection, as the Pandoro Gate revealed in December 2023.

These issues are the subject of our analysis, as well as the storytelling that, after its triple crisis, Ferragni makes on her Instagram profile, the basis of her brand and business. The digital reputation of influencers is key because it is the basis of their relationship with the community that follows them, which generates high rates of interaction and engagement with respect to their content. This influence or connection is the element coveted by fashion brands for their communication and/or their marketing strategy (Castelló-Martínez, 2016; Harmeling *et al.,* 2017; Molpeceres, 2019). It is the phenomenon that has revolutionized the communication policy of the fashion sector, dominated by presentism and the ephemeral —such as stories that disappear, etc.— (Segarra-Saavedra and Hidalgo-Marí, 2018; Vinader-Segura *et al.,* 2019), as well as by the emission of a large volume of thought-out, but often inconsequential information. Fashion is instagrammable (Alarcón and Torres, 2020; Espinosa Grau, 2020; Sanz-Marcos *et al.,* 2019). Although there are differences in discourse between influencers and brands, it remains to be seen whether these different goals can be dangerous for brands or, on the contrary, only bring benefits, given the large volume of information available that makes influencers easily dispensable.

Studies on influence, or on word of mouth in all its versions, are very important in communication and marketing studies (Barrientos-Báez *et al.,* 2022; Tiwari *et al.,* 2024). Above all, after World War II, authors such as Lazarsfeld and Katz (1955) already pointed out that interpersonal communication was twice as effective as radio ads, four times more than personal selling and seven times more than print ads. And in the business world, it has concretized through the promotion of referral and/or recommendation programs that take advantage of the social circle of the companies' clients to attract new audiences (Gershon *et al*., 2020). In this way, customers become brand ambassadors (Barrientos-Báez *et al.,* 2021). This goes even deeper into the digital realm and explains what influencers offer brands. As noted by Schmitt *et al.* (2011), the existence of these communication strategies by brands means that the final company is the one that drives, manages, controls and monitors the recommendation process, which is stimulated and not spontaneous. But it seems more authentic, thus overcoming the skepticism (Plesh, 2003) of the clients, because, by following the recommendations —paid but that seem spontaneous or natural, emotional— of the influencers, one believes to be trusting a friend.

As Villanueva *et al.* (2008) say, traditional marketing causes mistrust because consumers perceive that the company seeks to influence their opinions, so that they protect themselves both in the physical and virtual environment (Rodrigo-Martín *et al.,* 2021). Influencers, although strictly not members of the social circle of each client, are present in their lives and interact with them (Sanmiguel, 2020; Barrientos-Báez *et al.,* 2021) almost as if they were. That is what brands are looking for. Especially for Generation Z (1994-2010) (Martín-Critikián *et al.,* 2022) which is digital native and connects better with its peers (influencers) than with authority figures, such as brands.

The Information Society is a new technological, economic and social system characterized by the use of ICT for the interconnection – convergent, instantaneous, multimedia and ubiquitous – of people's networks (Finquelievich, 2010). It requires, as for users or customers, that brands adapt to this new society that i postmodern (Druker, 1996; Szabo, 2005) and postindustrial (Bell, 2001) but capitalist, even if it is under the model of cognitive capitalism and cultural industries. For Jiménez (2018) there are four types of well-differentiated consumer generations: Baby Boomers, these are those born between 1945 and 1964; Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980;

Millennials, born between 1981 and 1994 and Generation Z, from 1995 to 2010. Each has preferred means of communication (and socialization). Television and print or traditional media, as well as Facebook, are favorite choices for people born before 1980 and, as of millennials, almost all information and activity is on social media. The average time spent on their devices by Z according to IAB data (2020) is 90 minutes per day on average, which is an increase of 20 minutes per day compared to the previous year. In the absence of authorized and reference broadcasters as in traditional media, the public and brands have turned to influencers (Fernández de Bordóns and Niño, 2021) who are mediators who bring them, or so they perceive, to a (virtual) but close (tangible) communication, almost as if it were traditional. And they pay their attention because they transmit transparency, trust and security (González-Carrión and Aguaded, 2020), for the brands they are interested.

According to Hatch (2012), in a study published by Harvard Business, there are several basic characteristics that influencers must gather to succeed: 1) reach: potential to do something viral; 2) share experiences with their followers who feel involved; 3) credibility: being transparent so that their public trusts them; 4) congregation: ability to mobilize users and 5) trust: ability to build familiarity with users. Thus, thanks to this, influencers could retain, through their strong connection with their followers, the consumers that brands want to attract (Zuckerman, 2019 and Martín Critikian *et al.,* 2022). And, therefore, achieve attention and reach, with a great follow-up: in engagement it is precisely where influencers contribute.

But if in 2020 COVID-19 multiplied digital commerce, there are also some paradoxes. According to data from the IAB (2020), influence tracking decreased compared to the previous year, although Instagram remains the social network in which influencers are followed the most. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink or discuss the usefulness of influencers and how long their importance in current marketing can last. In addition, several studies suggest that large influencers – more than 50,000 followers – generate less interaction than nanoinfluencers –less than 10,000 followers– or micro-influencers – between 10,000 and 50,000 followers (Martín Critikian *et al.,* 2022). This is a complex scenario because, according to a study carried out by IAB (2022), the use of social networks among users continues to grow: in the range between 12 and 70 years, they are used by 88% and, between 18 and 24 years by 93%. In addition, we must think about the changing of this landscape and the great transformations that can happen in the face of the emergence of Artificial Intelligence.

Budgets for influencer marketing have increased rapidly in advertising (Schouten *et al.,* 2021; De Cicco *et al.,* 2021; Hofeditz *et al*., 2022), but that does not mean that the future will be as it is now. Influencers like Chiara Ferragni have had a competitor emerge: AI influencers are increasingly being used as highly effective marketing tools (Farivar and Wang, 2022; Hofeditz *et al.,* 2022; Jiang *et al.,* 2024; Shamim *et al.,* 2024). One of their advantages is that they can overcome the limitations and risks of human influencers (Bu *et al.,* 2022; Stein *et al.,* 2022; Cascio Rizzo *et al.,* 2023), since they can be completely controlled, unlike real people, with their virtues and defects. Therefore, many researchers and professionals believe that virtual digital characters have significant commercial potential for the various brands that already collaborate with them (Zhou *et al.,* 2024; Alboqami, 2023; Sands *et al.,* 2022). And some studies have begun to compare the differences between virtual and real human influencers as well as follower reactions *(Park et al.,* 2021; Arsenyan and Mirowska, 2021; Hofeditz *et al*., 2022; Stein *et al.,* 2022; Deng and Jiang, 2023; Liu and Lee, 2024).

This topic is very important because trust is the basis of success of influencers. Unlike traditional TV ads, social media influencers typically post commercial content that resembles and merges with non-commercial posts, causing people not to identify them as advertising (Evans *et al.,* 2017; De Cicco *et al*., 2021). This, in turn, increases the likelihood that consumers will be influenced by advertising (Passebois Ducros *et al.,* 2023) as marketing is, to a large extent, the science of persuasion. It is stronger when it seems natural and not influenced by other interests (Dhanesh and Duthler, 2019; Chen *et al.,* 2020). The audience, moreover, is quite naive: research shows that customers tend to place great trust in the content shared on social networks (Shareef *et al.,* 2019), reaffirming the role of influencers but also explaining the problems that these profiles (and brands) can have if their rejection is generated by perceiving dishonesty. This is basically the problem Chiara Ferragni is facing today after the Pandoro Gate.

Until now, most communication crises related to fashion brands had been precisely because of the brands. And the reaction of users and influencers on social media had determined the management of the crisis, although, due to the long-term accumulated prestige, the scandals dissolved soon after, without affecting the brands. For example, in 2022, Balenciaga (Mena Gonçalves,

2024) had a problem due to an advertising campaign accused of promoting the abuse of minors, which was responded to on networks by various influencers asking for the cancelation of the brand, which eliminated advertising. This drastically changed the position of power that once had the brands, which seemed untouchable, although the controversies have not made Balenciaga stop being one of the most coveted brands. The same was true for Dior and the scandal over the anti-Semitic statements of its designer, John Galliano, who was fired and then hired by front-row brands like Maison Martin Margiela. But influencers are other profiles, with other capabilities, and they are seen as if they can survive a crisis. In this sense, the case of Chiara Ferragni is especially interesting, both because of her ability to set a precedent and because she presents a new case in the fashion industry: managing a crisis of emotional communication with the community, a pillar of her storytelling, of her engagement and, therefore, of her business potential for herself and other brands (Aritejo *et al.,* 2024; Shamim *et al.,* 2024).

Materials and method

The proposed method for this work, focused on a case study, is based on a series of previous investigations based on the comparative content analysis of quantitative and qualitative indicators (Bryman, 2016; Flick, 2004; Franklin *et al.,* 2015; Krippendorff, 2004; Silverman, 2016). Both processes constitute the scientific basis for testing the general hypothesis of the research. To do this, we analyzed the official Instagram profile of Chiara Ferragni (@chiaraferragni). To define the chronological period of interest, we have revised the profile and set the start date of the study on June 15, 2023, six months before the Pandoro scandal broke until June 15, 2024, i.e., a calendar year. So, 453 Instagram posts have been analyzed for Chiara Ferragni's profile. These data allow us to delve into some questions of the objectives and research questions, in particular regarding content production strategies, the role of brands and advertisers and the management of a communication crisis. Then, on the concrete sample of the 453 posts, it has been deepened qualitatively. During the time period of the analysis, three distinct stages have been found (Table 1).

Table 1
Dates and number of publications during the three stages

Stages	Dates	No. of publications
Stage 1 —E1—	June 15 to December 15, 2023	373
Stage 2 —E2—	January 14 to March 30, 2024	44
Stage 3 —E3—	April 16 to June 15, 2024	38

E1's time frame is the one before the Pandoro Gate scandal was published in different media. E2 refers to the stage in which the influencer returned to publish content, after a month without doing so due to the crisis. This stage ends when the news of Chiara Ferragni's separation from her husband comes to light. Finally, E3 starts the moment the influencer started uploading new posts after her divorce.

To carry out the study and achieve the proposed objectives, a content analysis has been carried out in which variables such as the number of daily publications, the number of followers, likes, and comments have been considered. In this way, engagement can be measured. These first measurements allow us to contextualize the status of the influencer's account, and to know the evolution that it has had over time before, during and after the different crises.

Likewise, other variables have been counted that focus on analyzing the relationship of Chiara Ferragni with the fashion firms she used to represent. Firstly, it has been differentiated between publications in which the influencer referred to her own clothing brand, as well as publications of other fashion firms.

Finally, the publications have been counted and analyzed according to the type of content that was promoted.

In this case, three different types have been found:

- Brand advertising: These are publications in which the influencer promotes clothing brands that have hired her directly. These publications are recognized by the hashtag #adv.
- Promotion of gifts received from clothing brands: In this case, the publications in which the influencer makes promotions of brands that have sent gifts are considered. These publications are recognized by the hashtag #supplied.

- Mentions: in some cases, the influencer thanks, through mentions —@— to different brands or people for their support in certain issues.

The objectives of this study are the following:

O1 To observe the evolution of the number of fashion publications by Chiara Ferragni.

O2 To analyze the engagement of Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account before and after the scandals.

O3 To determine the publications of her own brand and collaborations with other fashion firms.

O4. To describe the evolution of fashion content on Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account before and after her scandals.

To achieve these objectives, a series of research questions will be answered after obtaining the results:

Q1 Is there any change in the number of posts following the Pandoro Gate scandals or the influencer's divorce?

Q2 How has the engagement of Chiara Ferragni's Instagram profile been affected after the scandals?

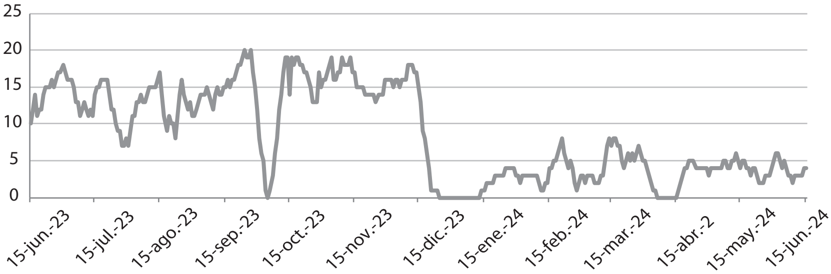
Q3 How have her relationships with fashion firms on social media been affected?

Results

After performing the analysis during the dates indicated above, 453 posts made by Chiara Ferragni on Instagram have been found. 357 were uploaded to this social network in stage A —E1— (between June 15 and December 15, 2023, when the Pandoro scandal was made public), 44 in stage B —E2— and 36 during stage C —E3—. This is logical, since E1 covers a period of six months, for the two and a half months of E2 and two months of E3. If the monthly publications of each stage are considered, during E1 the influencer posted on average 62.2 contents per month, 17.6 in E2 and 18 during E3. This shows how Chiara Ferragni markedly dropped the number of posts following the Pandoro Gate case (figure 1). After her separation from rapper Fedez —E3— she keeps the pace of publication that she had in E2, away from the volume of posts during the period before the Christmas candy scandal.

Figure 1

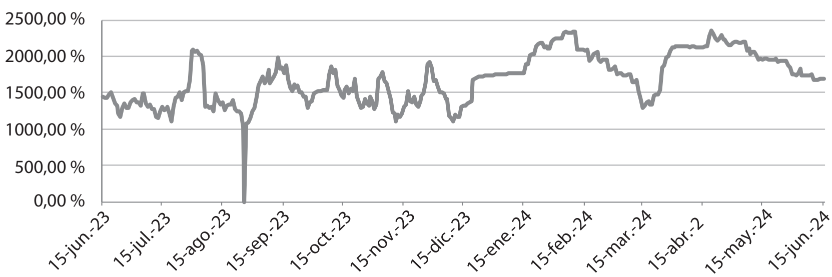
Evolution of weekly posts on Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account



It is important to mention that, as of December 15, 2023, there were more than 29 and a half million followers. After the scandal, and at the end of E2, she lost 573,904, this being a constant until the last day analyzed in this work, on June 15, 2024, where the influencer had 206,740 fewer followers compared to E2, falling from 29 million followers. But, despite the permanent decline in users and posts, her engagement increased for two periods of time (Figure 2) in recent months. These coincide with the start of E2 and E3. At the end of both periods there is a decrease in the engagement of the influencer's account, as the interest of her followers for the novelties of Ferragni's life was decreasing.

Figure 2

Evolution of engagement on Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account



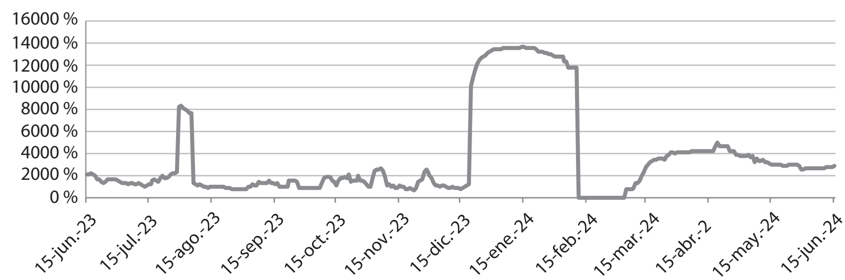
Following the explosion of the Pandoro Gate case, Ferragni stopped posting content on its networks for a month – from 15 December 2023 to 14

January 2024. However, as seen in figure 2, this did not mean a decrease in the level of engagement among her Instagram followers. During the period between E1 and E2, both comments and 'likes' increased considerably (Figures 3 and 4). The crisis caused by the Pandoro Gate aroused a lot of controversy among followers and detractors, thus generating a lot of movement on her Instagram profile.

The case of comments during this period is very striking, as the increase was noticeable. The opinions expressed by her followers were mostly negative, thus generating a bad image of the influencer and creating a major reputational crisis for her. However, this increased her ability to generate engagement, as the number of likes and comments increased, this measurement variable in social networks increased. However, in this case, it did not improve Ferragni's brand image.

Figure 3

Evolution of average comments on Chiara Ferragni's Instagram profile

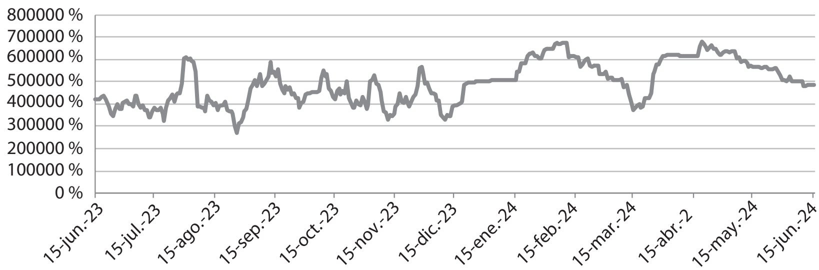


From January 14 to March 3, there was a decrease in the comments received on her profile, showing that the controversy stemming from the Pandoro Gate was losing interest for her followers or detractors. As of February 14 and as of March 3, the number of comments received dropped dramatically. Two issues stand out during these dates: the first is the clear decrease in the number of publications by the influencer, and second that the publications she made from January 14 to 21—only 4—were not commentable. As of January 23, when she uploaded the next post, these were very scarce compared to E1.

It should be noted that as of March 4, and after a controversial interview made on the program of "Che tempo che fa", Canal Nove, comments increased again dizzyingly far exceeding the number of responses obtained during E1. In this way, and as seen in figure 2, she increased her engagement again. Similarly, her publication rate was much lower than that of E1 (figure 1). It also influences that it was at this time when her break with rapper Fedez was made public, which made her followers more active, despite the fact that from March 31 to April 15 Ferragni did not publish anything on networks. It happens, for the second time, that when she stopped uploading content on her Instagram profile, it favored her in terms of engagement. Her followers, despite the lack of content, were much more active.

Figure 4

Evolution of the average 'likes' on Chiara Ferragni's Instagram profile



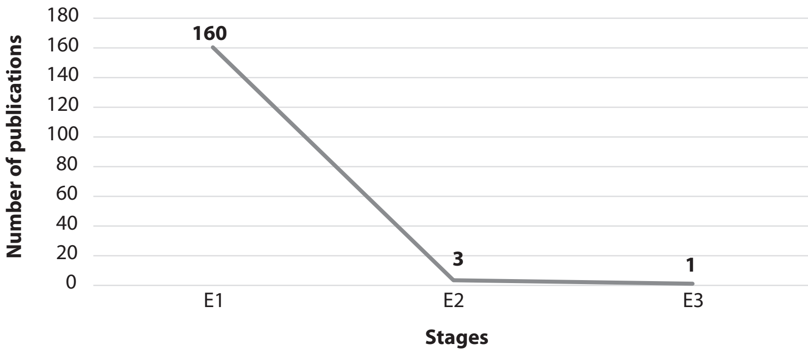
In the case of likes, it is seen how there is no decrease, beyond some periods with less activity that have been occurring in her profile since the first date under analysis. However, it is striking how between December 15, 2023 and January 14, 2024, when no posts were uploaded, the 'likes' were kept at a constant pace, similar to what had been happening in E1. During E2 and E3, the likes increased at the beginning, slowly decreasing. During the period between E2 and E3, from March 31 to April 15, the influencer did not post anything on her networks. As said, this corresponds to the moment when the break-up with her husband Fedez was made public. However, as with comments, likes are increasing as well as the engagement of the profile.

When it comes to Chiara Ferragni's relationship with fashion brands, there is a big change after what happened at the Pandoro Gate. During E1, 42.9% of her publications referred to fashion brands (160 posts), either through mentions, advertising or clothes given to the influencer — *supplied*—. During E2, the figure fell to 6.82% of posts uploaded by Ferragni (3 posts).

During E3, the trend continues downwards, with only one post referring to clothing brands, accounting for 2.86% of the total publications during that period.

Figure 5

Number of fashion publications during the three stages



This abrupt decline is due to the reputational and image crisis of Chiara Ferragni's brand after the Pandoro Gate. Fashion houses decided to end their collaboration with the influencer to prevent the image crisis from reaching them. This fact, together with the increase in engagement of Ferragni's Instagram account, indicates that the big brands do not only look at the numbers, but take special care with the story that is generated behind them. In this case, with a large number of detractors after the scandal, the fashion firms understood that the relationship that united them with Chiara Ferragni would not be advantageous or good for them.

Table 2

Number of publications by type of clothing represented

Brand Type	E1	E2	E3
Own brand	29	1	0
Other brands	131	2	1

It should also be noted that the influencer not only decreased the amount of content showing other fashion brands but also decreased the pace of content of her own brand. So much so that during E2 she only published content of this type, ceasing to do so in E3 (table 2).

As for the hashtags used to refer to the type of content made, three different ones have been found: 1) #adv, advertising, 2) #supplied and 3) mentions of accounts. As expected from Table 2, the amount of trendy content posted in the emergence of the candy scandal decreased considerably (Table 3).

Table 3
Number of publications by type of content

Content Type	E1	E2	E3
#adv	93	1	0
#supplied	17	0	0
@ Mention	50	2	1

Figure 1
After the scandal, Ferragni does not even indicate
the brands that dress her in events as important as the Venice Biennale

Note. https://bit.ly/3y5ooKU

Figure 2

Prior to the scandal, brand collaborations were recurrent, even on normal days, with no events

Note. https://bit.ly/3WruIo9

As for advertising —#adv—, it has a total of 94 contents, finding 98.94% of these in E1 and 1.06% in E2. In this way, it can be seen how advertising disappears from Chiara Ferragni's Instagram posts during E3.

Something similar happens with the contents with the hashtag #supplied. 17 posts of this type have been found, all belonging to E1. Finally, 53 contents with specific mentions have been found —@—. 94.34% of publications belong to E1, 3.77% to E2 and 1.89% belong to E3.

This is due, as mentioned above, to the crisis caused by the Pandoro Gate, something that fashion firms did not want to get involved in. Similarly, during E1, the most recurring type of content was advertising, which accounted for 58.13% of the total in that time period. During E2 the most abundant type of content (2 contents) are the mentions, the same as in E3, where only a mention and no other type of content is observed.

Conclusions and discussion

After analyzing Ferragni's publications, and responding to the O1, we can conclude that there is a transformation in the influencer's content creation routines from the Pandoro scandal. After a month in silent, her publications are very scarce. After their separation and, in particular, after the agreement with her husband not to show the face of their children, their contents will vary even more and, perhaps because of that and the complexity of their personal lives, a decrease in publications is observed (P1). Regarding the O2, with which we intended to analyze the engagement of Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account before and after the scandals, we observed a paradox. Engagement goes up, but it turns into something negative, as the comments are against her. Controversies of all kinds (personal and professional) cause comments to increase and, with them, engagement (P2). In Ferragni's case, every time some information comes out it generates controversy, her account increases in terms of comments and likes, although she continues to lose followers. But engagement does not mean improvement in brand image: her followers leave and haters arrive. This may even increase the reputational crisis.

This is also evident in the fact that, despite the lack of content in two periods, users are much more active. In other words, her community acts freely, outside of Ferragni's influence, i.e., Ferragni's personal-professional history is more important than the influencer's own content and the community she has created. She has lost her influence, or seems to, because what interest followers is not so much the publication that she makes and controls, but the story behind it all. This, also in relation to the O1, makes us wonder if, then, it can be, therefore, a good strategy for content creators on Instagram to stop uploading content and take some time to 'rest'. Unless they closed their networks, it seems that it does not work because if the story that is in the background interests, it will not stop increasing engagement, although with opposite results to those that the influencer intends to achieve.

And, on the other hand, when the influencer tries to create a different story than the one she has exploded without her control—the Pandoro Gate and its separation—the community does not get hooked. They want more information about the economic scandal and her personal life, precisely what she is not talking about. Hence, users lose interest without a good story. Influencers must create stories that entertain, not empty content. So are the influencers who create a story around themselves the most successful? It seems that it does, because fashion brands have sidelined Ferragni (P3, O3 and O4), which, in addition to ceasing to post, has greatly reduced the pace of her collaborations and even the advertising of her own brand, precisely the most damaged by the Pandoro Gate case. Another question is to what extent the business can be viable.

It remains to be known, in terms of studies of fashion influence, the role Ferragni may have in the future and whether she can become a micro-influencer for her community, with more engagement, than other older influencers. On the other hand, it is expected that at some point her personal and professional situation will become clearer and she will create content more regularly. As of July 2023, her number of followers continues to decline but, as noted in other studies, brands are not more interested in superinfluencers with millions of followers, but in those profiles with a community in which they truly influence. The role of haters in the profile of fashion influencers should also be studied in other works, such as social awareness, promotion of values and discourse about morals and/or ethics and ideals of different influencers. These people are increasingly being asked for a political position on the current situation, for example: on the Palestinian conflict. And fashion brands, like Vogue, are committed to political agendas like the Democratic Party's ahead of the 2024 US election.

The same has happened with national editions of Vogue, like the Ukrainian one, committed to the war effort against Russia. In the case of Ferragni, her work against COVID-19 was recognized and praised in the past, as well as her support for *made in Italy* and Italian culture. But, at least for now, that reputation is badly damaged. Although it remains to be known whether more transparency and more social commitment will be able to restore it or if, on the contrary, her strategy of 'low profile' and zero transparency will be more beneficial for her and, subsequently, especially after her divorce, it will resort to an arc of redemption in her storytelling and her narrative strategies.

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Journalistic activity and the challenges of its management in the United States of America and European Union

La actividad periodística y los desafíos de su gestión en los Estados Unidos de América y Europa

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Abstract

The digital age has opened the doors to many opportunities for publishing organizations and journalists and has increased the number of challenges, especially those related to the sustainability of the business model. This paper aims to understand the sustainability and challenges of media business models and how managers are reacting and adapting their practices in this industry in the field of digital transformation, and in an increasingly competitive market. Thus, the main research questions of this work are: RQ1. What are the main strategies and management practices applied by journalistic companies to achieve the sustainability of their business model and funding? RQ2. To what extent are the revenue streams of digital newspapers growing and how has the funding model of US newspapers differed from that of European ones? This article is based on 4 interviews with executives from 2 North American and 2 European (EU) newspaper companies. The research revealed that regardless of type, size or location, all media companies face similar challenges in maintaining a business model, such as product creation, revenue diversification and cost reduction. In turn, US companies seem more adapted to market changes compared to those in the European Union, but all media organizations face experienced challenges in the quest for sustainability and diversity in the information market.

Keywords

Business, management, newspapers, digital, sustainability, and income.

Resumen
La era digital abrió las puertas a numerosas oportunidades para las organizaciones editoriales y los periodistas, y ha aumentado el número de retos, en particular los relacionados con la sostenibilidad del modelo de negocio. Partiendo de esa realidad, este trabajo pretende entender la sostenibilidad y los retos de los modelos de negocio de los medios de comunicación y cómo los gerentes están reaccionando y adaptando sus prácticas en esta industria en el ámbito de la transformación digital, y en un mercado cada vez más competitivo. Así, las preguntas centrales de investigación de este trabajo son: *RQ1*. ¿Cuáles son las principales estrategias y prácticas de gestión que aplican las empresas periodísticas para lograr la sostenibilidad de su modelo de negocio y financiación? *RQ2*. ¿En qué medida están creciendo las fuentes de ingresos de los periódicos digitales y cómo ha diferido el modelo de financiación de los periódicos estadounidenses del de los europeos? Este artículo está basado en cuatro entrevistas con los directivos de dos empresas periodísticas norteamericanas y dos europeas. La investigación reveló que, independientemente de su tipo, tamaño o ubicación, todas las empresas de medios de comunicación se enfrentan a retos similares a la hora de mantener un modelo de negocio, como la creación de productos, la diversificación de ingresos y la reducción de costes. A su vez, las empresas estadounidenses parecen más adaptadas a los cambios del mercado en comparación con las de la Unión Europea, pero todas las organizaciones informativas se enfrentan a retos experimentados en la búsqueda de la sostenibilidad y la diversidad en el mercado de la información.

Palabras clave
Negocios, gestión, periódicos, digital, sostenibilidad, ingresos.

Introduction

The business of newspaper publishers has become more complex and is pressured by several competitive factors, especially at the level of technology, sustainability of business models and training of human resources, among others. Digital platforms have also brought a great possibility to measure audiences in real time, representing a profound change in the way they manage, produce, distribute and create advertising. The sustainability of the business model and financing are at the forefront of concerns about the future and economic livelihood of the media industries, especially in newspaper publishing companies. As for the main media industries, specifically newspaper publishers, the only certainty as we move forward is precisely their uncertainty at the level of (i) business models (ii) distribution models and (iii) journalistic models, among many other disruptive elements based on the Internet and on the transformation of consumer behavior.

However, in the midst of so much insecurity there are some certainties about the trend in newspaper consumption, for example: we know that the number of users will continue to grow and that it will be driven by several factors, namely: (i) broadband access, the growth of the generation of the "digital natives" and the increasing "usability" of web applications that will support the growth of the population with access to the network through multiple platforms (web, mobile devices, consoles, netbooks, tablets, PCs, etc.) and (ii) the increase in the average time of online content and services. These transformations, in many cases drastic, have surprised many companies, media professionals and entrepreneurs, undercapitalized and without resources (human or financial) to invest in innovation and adaptation and thus respond to these transformations and challenges of the journalism industry.

Over the past 20 years, there has been much discussion about the transformation of the media industry and its relationship with telecommunications, bringing the two industries closer and making them more convergent, especially in terms of content management and distribution. Convergence (driven by digitalization and deregulation, among other factors) can be considered a media movement that took place during the 20th century and prevailed in the early years of the 21st century, allowing a confluence between platforms of information transmission that normally competed with each other.

One of the big challenges—from the business point of view—is how to monetize journalistic activity, i.e., how to monetize and generate revenue that contributes to the sustainability of social media companies. Economic sectors leading the convergence include computing (both hardware and software), communications, and content. With the Internet, the proliferation of computers and globalization, the communications sector has faced the challenge of solving infrastructure problems and has proposed new solutions. Changes to devices allow to access content, but also create, publish, and share it, whether through computers, netbooks, or mobile phones.

In the past, different types of social media were unrelated to each other and operated in visibly identified and separate markets. With the advent of the Internet and the globalization, social media, and in particular the journalistic industry (interpreted here in general terms), have faced the challenge of solving complex problems related to infrastructure changes. Solutions have increasingly focused on the need to dematerialize content. The physical book, newspaper and music CD are becoming less viable, as a growing variety of readers offer online all kinds of content and services in digital format.

Therefore, this work, which integrates a general project entitled *Global Perspective of Media Business Transformation and Strategies Responses: Theory and Empirical Evidences Across the World,* is divided into two main sections (literature review and empirical research) and aims, with this complementarity of approaches (theoretical and practical), to observe the main transformations and challenges faced by social media companies, as well as the strategic responses given by the professionals of these companies, with special attention to sustainability and management of business models.

In this sense, it can be assumed that empirical research—carried out through semi-structured interviews—is an important source of information for this study.

Literature review: sustainability and management of business models

Convergence has a major impact on the structure of the media and press industry, offering opportunities for consolidating in multinational companies, as well as opening up spaces for new types of dynamic and production companies. As Noam (2018) suggests, advances in digital technology, combined with lower prices, make it cheaper to produce music, video and text articles (*ceteris paribus*), allowing many small producers to enter. On the other hand, technology also increases economies of scale, range and distance in terms of sensitivity. In this context, Anderson (2006) identified the "long tail" model: which enables and empowers content to be produced and distributed profitably to millions of market niches, rather than a single product in high demand. The "long tail" phenomenon contrasts with the concept of economies of scale. These opposing trends create new pressures and readjustments in the media and telecommunications industry.

According to Doyle (2013), the overall performance of the economy has a huge impact on the output of all sectors, including social media. The reason is obvious: newspapers rely on advertising as one of their two main sources of revenue, or double-funding model: the sale of editorial content and the sale of advertising content. As a result, many newspaper jobs have been cut without improving current performance and generating cash flow to pay for operations and financial commitments; many newspaper publishers go bankrupt, others increase their debts, and few are thriving robustly after the turn of the millennium.

In the 1970s, integration between sectors of the technology industry initially occurred with increasing technical overlap of computing and telecommunications devices and components. During the 1980s, the increasing integration of technology extended – and overtook – to consumer electronics and office equipment. In the 1990's, integration affected almost all sectors of industrial technology: for example, *smartphones* combine telecommunications technologies, computers, information providers, consumer electronics, television, video games, calculators, cameras, music players and recorders, navigation devices, and many more. The implications of these transformations are evident to the extent that industries and companies, which used to comfortably occupy their niches separately, now face increasing competition from each other. As Noam (2018) suggests, this also means that companies are expanding more rapidly to other markets.

By offering interactive e-commerce and Web 2.0 applications and services, and thus actively engaging consumers in communication and transaction processes, media publishers need to place increasing emphasis on strong and sustainable relationships that can help them achieve greater economic viability as well as a sustainable competitive advantage in the digital market (Murschetz and Friedrichsen, 2017). Social media platforms and online consumer access have become challenges for the publishing industry. Old advertising and subscription methods in the publishing industry seem to be failing in the age of digital transformation. The online advertising sector has faced serious challenges and has increased the number of people who install ad blockers on their mobile devices. Meanwhile, the share of newspaper advertising revenue from the digital sector is growing (Table 1), but overall advertising revenue is declining.

Table 1
US-Percentage of Newspaper Advertising Revenue from Digital Advertising

Year	Proportion of newspaper advertising from digital advertising (%)
2011	17.00 %
2012	19.00 %
2013	20.00 %
2014	21.00 %
2015	25.00 %
2016	29.00 %
2017	31.00 %
2018	35.00 %
2019	35.00 %
2020	39.00 %

Note. Pew Research Center, Newspapers Fact Sheet, 29 June 2021.

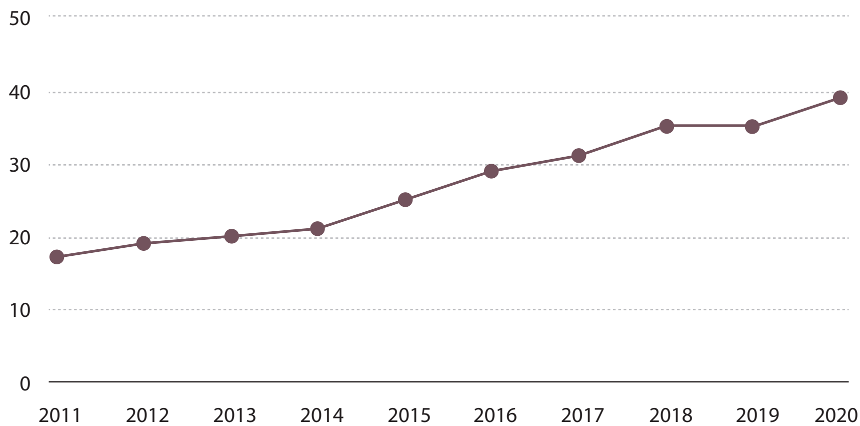
Digital advertising accounted for 39% of newspaper advertising revenue in 2020, according to this analysis by publicly traded newspaper companies. The share stood at 35% in 2019, but 17% in 2011, the first year this analysis was possible.

This type of advertising continues to grow proportionally to total advertising revenue; a trend mostly driven by the growth of advertising on mobile devices and, therefore, an indicator of the overall trend of economic health in the digital sphere, specifically in the digital news sector.

The online advertising industry is divided into four segments: (1) "search advertising" that appears on search result pages, (2) "graphic advertising" that appears on non-search web pages, (3) "classified ads" that appear on websites, (4) "ads located in emails" on the Internet (Wallez, 2017). According to Evans (2008), the first type of advertising, the one used in search engines, completely changed the services that the advertiser received and now the Internet provides a very powerful mechanism, both to send ads to specific people and to gather data whose purpose is to direct those ads to the same individual users. The second type, graphic advertising, changed the process of buying and selling advertising and classified spaces; the Internet led to the development of more effective intermediation markets for advertising: keyword search systems, as well as so-called contextual advertising, are a good example of their maturity. The third and fourth types are online ads and classifieds, which foster economies of specialization; while traditional publishers use content to attract their audience's attention and charge advertisers for advertising space, online publishers increasingly outsource space sales to specialized advertising platforms, such as *Google* or advertising.com.

Figure 1

Proportion of newspaper advertising from digital advertising (%)

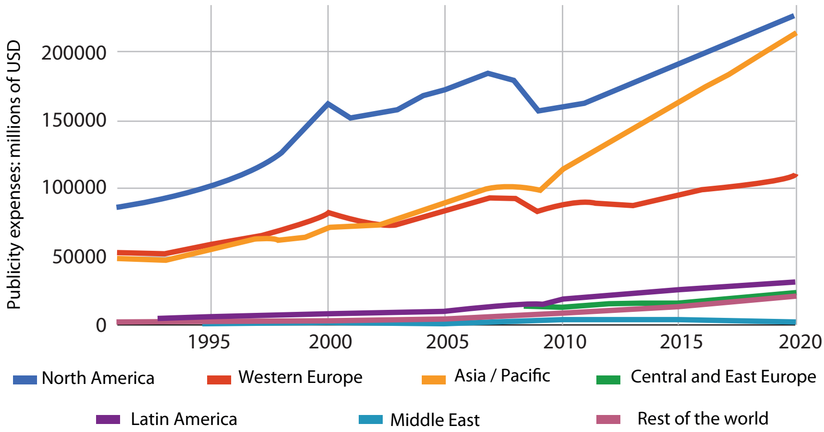


Note. Pew Research Center, Newspapers Fact Sheet, 29 June 2021.

It is crucial that publishers change their business models to respond to the challenges and opportunities associated with digital transformation. Thus, figure 2 shows the growth of advertising, specifically influenced by digital advertising, in several continents, being more relevant in Asia and North America compared to Europe.

Figure 2

Overall advertising expenditure by continent



Note. Zenith, 2018, projected for 2020.

In the new context, the attitude towards innovation and the reorganization of the publishing industry has been supported by the development of business models based on cost reduction strategies and generation of new sources of income, including the provision of services adjacent to the journalistic activity, such as: organization of seminars, conferences, events, sale of content to other organizations — *costumer publishing* and content marketing— among other services and associated products. It is thus observed that the media and the journalistic industry are largely influenced by the convergence of the digital age and new technologies. In this context, the following question: To what extent will the convergence or reconciliation of new and old trends – and business models – of journalistic activity promote a new and prosperous period or suffer a catastrophic decline?

It should also be noted that the relationship between the different media is now characterized by increasing cooperation, compatibility and connectivity, although questions arise as to whether traditional media will adapt to the new digital environment or even survive (Saltzis and Dickinson, 2008).

On the one hand, journalistic companies go through one of the times when they most need to invest to adapt and, on the other hand, they go through the most critical moment at the level of income generation, leaving the most vulnerable and "cheap" companies susceptible to be easily acquired by companies or investors from other sectors. To take an iconic and well-known example, this is what happened to the *Washington Post,* when it was acquired by Jeff Bezos, CEO of *Amazon*; and there are similar movements around the world, according to the scale of each market and geography.

According to Wallez (2017):

> … the decapitalization of the *French Legacy Group* may be an obstacle to managing the print/web transition in the coming years. Legacy companies, sometimes criticized for their conservatism, invest heavily in being part of the digital age. Funding is one of their main concerns, and most of them need to take out expensive bank loans. But they have *no other alternatives, as they do not have human resources in the company adapted to the new technological skills*. So, they hire experts and engineers and form *joint ventures*. (p. 348)

News media organizations and journalism in general are required to be more innovative in engaging the public in a more valuable and cost-effective way (Achtenhagen, 2017; Vos and Singer, 2016; Will *et al.,* 2016). It is fundamental because the increasing difficulties in making the revenues and sustainability of traditional media business models, mediated or controlled by large technological and digital actors imply a greater need to collaborate with potential competitors (Westlund, 2012). In turn, new ways of working and producing content – facilitated by digitalization (Olleros and Zhegu, 2016) – pose a challenge to their operations (Pallas and Fredriksson, 2013; Sylvie and Gade, 2009; van den Bulck and Tambuyzer, 2013; Virta and Malmelin, 2017).

Many of the general principles of management and business strategy that are applied in other industries, are also applied in media organizations, regardless of the platform, the type of company or the media product. However, we must consider that a company with activities in various types of media requires a greater effort in managing its financial investments, especially in its attempt to maximize the possible synergies between its operations in the different companies. However, it is necessary to clearly distinguish the distribution forms of content according to the specific characteristics of the platform.

According to Wallez (2017):

> … in the real life of the newspaper business, the advertiser has sometimes been frustrated due to the lack of tangible data on how many readers were exposed to the ad. The rate has been calculated based on total turnaround, but the number of people watching an ad for a few seconds is unknown forever. (p. 172)

The same author also mentions that:

> … many publishers consider their product to be just a business, forgetting the other dimensions that have shaped the press in previous centuries. A new management system has emerged, based on differentiated units and each with a specialized role and function: (1) newsroom, compilation and editing, (2) production (typesetting, printing, folding), (3) distribution and circulation, (4) advertising, (5) accounting. (p. 105)

A larger, more resourceful company can thus be expected to have more sophisticated policies in the areas of human talent management, business organization, marketing management, and other operational areas. It is equally clear that smaller companies tend to have more fluid business structures and organizational models, not only because they favor functional versatility, but also because they rely more on outsourced work and have fewer pieces (journalistic). Although small media companies do not necessarily lack more sophisticated business strategies or knowledge, they always have more limitations in accessing resources, so the opportunity risks may end up being higher; in this way, journalistic activity can be considered a *clock speed* industry, with an increasingly volatile and uncertain activity, and also with significantly shorter "windows of opportunity".

As a result, the management practices adopted by social media companies are becoming more and more similar to those of other industries. For its part, the technology has contributed to the standardization of management processes and operations through the creation of software and other business management support models of general application.

The combination of the increasing convergence, automation and standardization of business and creative processes and the alteration of the consumption and business model, market fragmentation and the entry of new companies from other sectors (technology and telecommunications, for example), have contributed to the adoption of management methods and practices more oriented to the market demand outlook. However, none of these market approaches is easy or guarantees economic and financial success; these practices challenge the conventional cultures of social media companies and pose significant challenges to the sustainability of the journalism industry. Table 2 shows some aspects that reflect characteristics associated with the traditional management of the media against a contemporary approach to the management of these media.

Table 2
Aspects associated with traditional and modern media management

Traditional management approach	Contemporary management approach
Cultural products	Economic products
Single-media products	Multimedia products
Low-tech products	High-tech products
Products with a limited investment portfolio	Products with large investment portfolios
Products with clear barriers or limits	Products without clear barriers or limits
Single-use products	Reusable products
Journalistic products	Journalistic and marketing products
Monomedia Management	Multimedia management
Limited areas of necessary knowledge	Broad areas of necessary knowledge

Note. Faustino and Ribeiro., 2016.

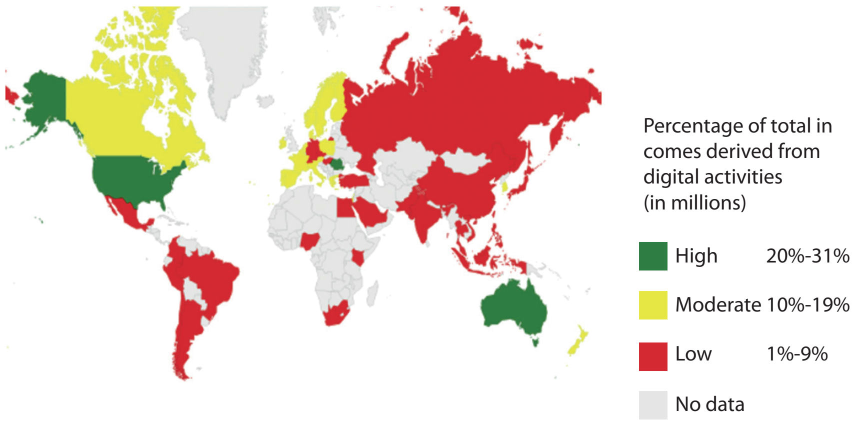
Convergence in the technology, media and telecommunications (TMT) sectors has contributed to some degree to a standardization of management practices and business strategies. Regardless of the type, size or geographical location of the company or production network, these organizations face, to a greater or lesser extent, similar challenges in terms of management strategies and practices in the following areas: new product creation, production innovation, promotion and publication practices, income diversification, work reorganization, brand management, technology investment, cooperation with companies, cost reduction, project management, investment portfolio management, skilled personnel management, cross-platform content, continuous training, audience participation and productive synergies (such as *branded content* and native advertising).

To become *digital-first,* a company —built on a print-based model—must accept many adjustments and experiments regarding equipment, editing, and marketing practices. The success or failure of the print/web transition largely depends on the ability in terms of the magnitude and scope of the corporate culture to integrate and reinforce an innovative mindset (Stock *et al.,* 2013).

According to Kolo (2017, p. 13), the larger this difference, the more likely it is that newspapers' digital businesses will be overtaken by pure digital operators and/or new digital *players* who target these growth opportunities. As seen in figure 3, the income percentages are different in each continent, being more moderate in European countries, higher in the North American and Asian continents, and lower in African countries, for example.

Figure 3

Percentage of overall revenues from digital activities



Note. WPT analysis proposed by Castulus Kolo, with data provided by PwC (Global Entertainment and Media Outlook, 2018-2022).

The above approaches show, on the one hand, a growing adoption of business management practices and more market-oriented business approaches and, on the other hand, that the dependence on technology and the migration of production, distribution, communication and digital sales models have become fundamental success factors for journalistic activity. However, the orientation and adoption of strategies supported in the digital environment by journalistic companies do not necessarily occur at the same level, when the characteristics of each economy and journalistic industry are observed.

In this sense, and in order to reconcile the academic perspective with the practical perspective, in the next part we can observe the perceptions and representations that executives of social media companies (in the North American market: United States of America) have about the transformations that are taking place in this sector and also in terms of the possible responses that are being given to maintain business models based on approaches of digital, sustainable and competitive environments.

Contrary to what happens in the United States, for example, in the European Union, the debate about the sustainability of social media —in particular newspapers—has returned to the political agenda. There are many types of support for European newspapers, with France and the Nordic countries having the most generous models (Faustino, 2006). These supports are numerous in the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, Central and Southern Europe, including France (Lardeau and Le Floch, 2014).

Looking at the positive side of the aforementioned facts, such a policy should underpin pluralism of opinion as an indispensable pillar of democracy (Wallez, 2017). But the possible dark side of this reliance on support may be leading to the "temptation" of control by the powers—governments of the day—and keeping journalistic companies from thriving as normal, based on their legitimate existence as an economic entity. As Trappel (2016) suggests, media funding is very contradictory, aid can become fat or sand for gears, so it divides the opinions of professionals and academics, beyond nations and borders.

The field of opponents —to the allocation of subsidies—argues that these "sustain declining industries at the expense of innovators and new entrants" (Nielsen and Linnebank, 2011, p. 12). Picard (2006), stressed that this thinking rejects state subsidies, since they tend to eliminate incentives in a competitive market. There are numerous advocates of the sector– *they* reject subsidies – *and they* are particularly influential in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

Therefore, the economic and financial sustainability of journalistic companies and organizations has become, more than ever, an imperative for debate due to the importance of this activity to promote pluralism of information and opinion as a structural pillar of democratic systems. In this sense, it is also important to understand how managers of journalistic companies are responding to new competitive challenges, especially those arising from the impact of digital technologies and systems, on the economy and society, in order to ensure the sustainability of the business models of journalistic companies. To this end, the following part presents some guidelines, including some differences between the managers of journalistic companies from two major economic regions: the United States of America and the European Union.

Empirical research: executive perceptions of the sustainability of the media business model

As a complement to the literature review and in order to find more solid answers —that integrate both a practical and theoretical perspective— two main research questions were raised, namely, RQ1 and RQ2. With this same objective, as mentioned in Table 3, two interviews/companies (out of 90) were selected with directors of journalistic companies from the European Union and two from the United States of America on the occasion of the WAN-IFRA international conference, which took place in May 2018 in Estoril (Lisbon, Portugal).

In fact, we can identify the following main revenues associated with traditional editions—which use paper—with the sale of newspapers in physical locations, subscriptions, advertising, events, and *merchandising*; and the main revenues associated with digital editions —which use the digital environment—are online subscriptions, individual online sales, e-commerce, online advertising, and other dematerialized and commercialized services or products associated with digital publishing.

According to Evans (2008), all online revenue segments will grow significantly in the coming years, and the big challenge for newspapers is to be able to adapt to this new reality and opportunity. In many respects, online advertising is similar to traditional advertising. Publishers use the content to attract viewers and then sell advertisers access to those audiences. Advertisers may display text (such as classified), graphics (such as magazines), and video (such as television) ads in the space provided by publishers.

Table 3
US and European Journalist Companies Interviewed

Country	Journalistic company
US	*McClatchy*
US	*The New York Times*
EU - Ireland	*Independent*
EU-France	*Le Parisien*

It is important to mention that the main objective of this analysis is not to make a comparison *per se*, but to identify possible general trends especially extended to the journalistic industry in the different geographies, through interviews with executives of the identified companies, following a random method, although with some previously defined criteria that are identified in the following paragraph.

Despite the randomness in the choice of managers of the journalistic companies interviewed from the point of view of the titles they represent, the organizations were selected based on two criteria: (i) representing a social communication group or company that also has activity in the area of print newspaper publishing; and (ii) representing two social communication groups or companies with activity in the United States of America and two in the European Union. As mentioned, this work is part of the PIMENED project (*Project Innovation in Mentorship, News Entrepreneurship and Digital*), carried out at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto, with the collaboration of the Columbia Institute for Tele-Information of the Columbia University Business School. In the overall project, the interview model —in annex —included 15 semi-structured questions from 15 to 25 minutes of duration, but this study is based only on four questions (1, 2, 9 and 13) related to the sustainability of the business model and the growing importance of the journalistic business approach in a digital environment. However, these four questions were condensed into only two, already identified as: RQ1 and RQ2.

To keep confidentiality, the names of the interviewees are not mentioned; it was also a requirement for selecting the interviewees to have (i) more than five years of experience in the sector and (ii) hold managerial positions, including those of CEO. The four respondents (two EU executives and two US executives) set out the key insights in the four responses below. For methodological reasons, the answers to each question are grouped together to provide the perspective of all respondents to the same question.

U.S. and European perspectives on sustainability financing and the business model

The four journalistic companies were asked about the source of their revenue (questions 1 and 2), and whether the main sources of revenue of the company came from a traditional, digital or combined model; and also what other sources of revenue they were investing more in in the medium and long term. As a preliminary analysis, the information collected allows us to infer that, at the level of sources of income of American journalistic companies, the digital model is as important as the traditional one, and the tendency is to bet on a combined model between online and offline.

For their part, in the European Union, the traditional model remains being the main source of revenue for journalistic companies and, as they consider it important to retain consumers associated with the traditional model, this is where they have decided to invest more. In the United States of America, digital presence tends to be increasingly important; for *The New York Times and The* McClatchy Company both digital and traditional go hand in hand and have invested in a combined model. However, in the European case, the process of digital migration, judging from the interviews conducted and some literature review on the subject, seems to be slower, as the interviews conducted with European journalistic companies: *Independent and Le Parisien* suggest.

In this environment of great transformations, also very present in the activity of the media —and to some extent with some trends anticipated, more recently, by the impact of COVID-19 on the most frequent forms of consumption in digital media—the transformations move towards a greater centrality of the digital component in the business model of journalistic companies (Faustino, 2020). According to Gershon (2022), "The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the global economy and forced a major change in terms of how commercial companies engage in meetings and organizational communication" (p. 78).

Considering the changes that have been observed more intensively in the last five years, with an impact on economic and financial sustainability, we interviewed some managers of newspaper publishing companies about the changes observed, regarding their financing and sources of income (question 9, within other questions and broader topics). Thus, in North America, revenue streams come predominantly from their commercial activity and other equity – as is the case with *The McClatchy Company* and the *New York Times*, including revenue from digital products and services – in other words, market transformations in these journalistic companies have not had a negative impact on their business model. However, journalistic companies in the European Union seem to face more significant problems at the level of their funding model, as their main and traditional source of revenue, i.e., advertising and sales of printed content have decreased considerably, and they have not been able to compensate with the revenues from digital versions.

Therefore, they were also asked whether the business model they were aiming to develop required funding and where they would get it from (question 13). American companies generally do not need state funding, as they have their own private funds –for example, *The McClatchy Company* and *The New York Times*. As for European companies, state and more traditional funding seem to be an important basis, unless they already have sustainable business models that allow them to dispense with external, mainly state, funding.

To complement and cross-reference information with the analysis of these four interviews, it was important to gather more information about the journalistic companies to which these interviewed managers belong. With this triangulation of information, it was possible to (i) strengthen and complete the methodological component in the field of the study of these four cases, thus conferring greater solidity to the analysis and the results obtained, and (ii) this collection of information also allowed to better understand the surrounding context of the interviewees and, therefore, analyze and relate certain information and indicators that complement some of the conclusions. For example, it was observed, through the analysis of information about companies, i.e., through their balance sheets and sources of income, that American companies also generate more income derived from digital activity than European ones.

Table 4

Overview of US Journalism Companies

Company	*McClatchy*	*The New York Times*
Description	What began in 1857 as a four-page newspaper on the dusty streets of Sacramento, California, has become a digital network stretching from local markets from California to Florida, from Washington state to Washington D.C. The Bee family expanded with the founding of *The Fresno Bee* in 1922 and the purchase of *The Modesto Bee* in 1927.	Since 1851, The New York Times has been on the ground, reporting stories from around the world that no one else has told. The way we tell those stories has changed, but our mission to seek the truth and help people understand the world has remained constant. We create our journalism looking for the truth, without fear or favoritism.
	What followed was more than a century of growth, driven by the acquisition of quality media companies in expanding markets across the country, including the 2006 purchase of *Knight Ridder,* which made *McClatchy* at the time the second-largest newspaper publisher in the United States. *McClatchy* operates a leading local media company in 30 U.S. markets, connecting with our communities through print, digital, mobile apps and more.	Having had the honor of being recognized by our colleagues, they cover a wide range of topics – from powerful research papers to our innovative way of telling stories – that speak to the world.

Company	*McClatchy*	*The New York Times*
Mission	Dedication to quality journalism, service to the community and freedom of expression will never change.	We seek the truth and help people understand the world. This mission is based on our belief that good journalism has the power to enrich the lives of every reader, and to make society as a whole stronger and fairer.
Primary Activity	Editor of such respected brands as Miami Herald, Kansas City Star, *Sacramento Bee, Charlotte Observer*, *Raleigh News* and *Observer* and *Fort Worth Star-Telegram.*	*The New York Times* Journal (*"The Times"*)
Related Activities	Printing of selected local specialized publications and newspapers, as well as offering other direct print and digital marketing services.	Businesses that include websites, such as NYTimes.com; mobile apps, such as *The Times's* flagship news apps, as well as specific apps of interest, including crossword puzzles and culinary items; and associated businesses, such as the licensing division; digital marketing agencies; product review and recommendation websites, *Wirecutter*; commercial printing operations; *NYT Live* (live event business); and other products and services under the *The Times brand.*
Source	https://www.mcclatchy.com/	https://www.nytco.com/company/

Note. Own elaboration from data of the website of the company.

Table 5
General characterization of European journalism companies

Company	Independent	Le Parisien
Description	The *INM* is Ireland's first newspaper and online editor. It is vertically integrated with printing and distribution assets and is the largest wholesale distributor of newspapers and magazines on the island. The company is a 100% subsidiary of *Mediahuis N.V.,* a private European social media group based in Antwerp (Belgium).	Following the liberation of Paris in August 1944, Emilien Amaury and other members of the resistance movement founded *Le Parisien Libéré*, which became *Le Parisien* in 1986. Initially a regional daily, it became a national publication in 1994 with the creation of *Aujourd'hui in France.* *Le Parisien* has progressively expanded its presence in all communication channels. *Le Parisien* is a publication of general interest with wide appeal. It offers readers daily information, reviews, entertainment and services.

Company	Independent	Le Parisien
Business Model	*INM's* portfolio of print and digital publications includes two of Ireland's most widely read paid newspapers, *the Irish Independent* and the *Sunday Independent*, and Ireland's most visited desktop and mobile news website, independent.ie. Revenue comes from advertising and circulation, with additional revenue generated by digital activities.	In addition to a special economy and business supplement every Monday, *Le Parisien* publishes a weekend section on Fridays, as well as a monthly women's magazine*, La Parisienne*. The website and mobile apps allow readers to access comprehensive news and a wide range of services anytime, anywhere.
Source	https://www.inmplc.com/ https://www.independent.ie/	http://www.leparisien.fr/ https://www.lvmh.com/houses/other-activities/parisien/

Note. Own elaboration from data of the website of the company.

The source of online versus offline revenue is defined based on the amount collected by journalistic companies. In the case of digital revenues, these come from online advertising, online subscriptions/sales and other e-commerce revenues; in the case of offline revenues, these relate to sales and subscriptions of printed newspapers, print newspaper advertising and other services provided. In this area, and in order to cross-reference information (from interviews, literature reviews and company reports), we can analyze how U.S. companies have managed to obtain more revenue from the digital, as a percentage of the total revenue of newspapers studied in the reports of some journalistic companies. Thus, the accounting results of the U.S. companies "The New York Times" and "The McClatchy" show significant amounts of digital revenue, such as the digital-only subscription in 2018, which reached a total of $400.62 billion, and the audience in 2018, which reached a total of $336.506 billion.

Out of the European companies it was only possible to verify information on the results of the accounting of the "Independent", which shows an amount of 14.8 million euros in online revenue in 2018.

Indeed, while the digital revenue sample is not enough to ensure that US firms have higher revenues than European firms, the data collected continue to point in that direction. Table 6 summarizes and systematizes some fundamental aspects of the sustainability of the business models of newspaper publishers in the European Union and the United States of America, according to the reality that the interviewees have evidenced.

Table 6

Summary and sustainability of the business model in the European Union and United States of America

Questions/ Content	United States of America		European Union (Ireland, France)		Perspectives
	Keyword	Key-idea	Keyword	Key-idea	General idea Similarities/ Differences
Do the company's main sources of revenue come from a traditional, digital or combined model? And which of these models do they invest the most in?	Digital and combined	As digital allows for higher revenues, there is more investment in this area. But the traditional is still present.	Traditional	Paper remains being the main source of revenue, but digital technology is recognized as a viable source.	North America is investing more in the digital model than Europe, where investment is directed more toward a traditional model.
What are its sources of income? And has the digital model changed its business model?	Advertising; digital sales	Investing in a variety of digital sources brings new revenue.	Advertising	Advertising is a crucial source of revenue, be it print or digital. Digital has brought changes to the business model.	As in North America, digital allows for diverse revenue streams, in Europe, revenue comes mainly from advertising, regardless of whether it is print or digital.
Have they experienced any change in their sources of funding and income over the last two years and are they in market equilibrium?	Background	There is little change, but financial stability needs strong support.	Transformation	Digital sources are expected to make up for losses in the written press.	While in North America there is some stability due to the financial history of companies, so no changes are necessary, in Europe they depend much more on the income from their work. Therefore, there are always adjustments.

Questions/ Content	United States of America		European Union (Ireland, France)		Perspectives
	Keyword	Key-idea	Keyword	Key-idea	General idea Similarities/ Differences
Does the business model to be developed require funding? If so, where to get it from: private investment funds, non-profit organizations, or the state?	Own funds	Proprietary companies often finance the means they own and do not need others to finance them. Otherwise, they use other types of funding.	External sources	Business models tend to be based on raising primarily public funds.	In North America, news companies do not need external financial interference because of their greater stability. In Europe, companies almost always depend on foreign investment for their development.

In conclusion, as seen in Table 6, the impact is less in the American journalistic companies, since they tend to accept both models equally, recognizing, however, the effective entry of the digital in the business model and being more advanced than in the European Union.

Discussion and conclusions

As noted above, the primary objective of this study was to gather information to answer the following research questions: RQ1 and RQ2. Throughout this research it has been possible to observe many changes in the media industries and it has been inferred from the literature review—academic perspective—and also from the market perception of the media executives interviewed (practical perspective), that media companies are today facing a change that challenges their management, the sustainability of the business model, marketing and distribution strategies, and the growing presence of the consumer in the digital world. For some companies, the printing of printed newspapers will not end, at least in the near future, but digital will end up taking its place, although they continue in parallel with the printing of newspapers. This is mainly due to two reasons: print revenues are not up to digital trends and consumer preferences. In the digital news business, entry costs are not as high compared to the competition observed in the analog (printed) production model. But advertising revenue is also lower, and the breaking point is quite uncertain.

But the big question is: how do we capitalize or finance these companies in an era like this? Ways to finance a media company vary from cryptocurrencies to subscriptions. Social media, in particular journalistic companies, are increasingly developed with the information and communication technology sector. The convergence of technology, media and telecommunications are contributing to the standardization of management practices and business strategies. In many social media companies there is a convergence of business models, distribution platforms, production media, marketing tools and interactivity with the consumer.

Regarding the question RQ1, it can be said that regardless of the type, size or geographical location of the newspaper or communication company, it faces, to a greater or lesser extent, similar challenges in terms of management strategies and practices to find a sustainable business model, with direct incidences in the following areas: creation of new products, income diversification, work reorganization, brand management, technology investment, cooperation with companies, cost reduction, project management, investment management, talent management, cross-platform content, continuous training, audience engagement and production synergies.

Social media and newspaper companies will require managers to have experience in multiple types of social media product segments and that manufacturers from a wide range of backgrounds can (and are motivated to) collaborate and co-create. In practice, this challenge is more complex to realize, as the media ecosystem continues to undergo profound technological, business, financial and global changes.

In relation to question RQ2, as seen in table 6, in the form of a schematic summary of the main ideas about the perception of executives regarding the sustainability of the business model, it can be said that the United States of America seems to react and adapt better to market changes compared to the European Union. However, regardless of whether there is, as the results of interviews with *executives of the four journalistic companies suggest, a better adaptation to the digital transformation by American companies* —compared to European ones—all journalistic companies continue to face important challenges in finding ways to allow the sustainability of their business models, not only to motivate their partners, shareholders and employees, but also to contribute to greater diversity in the information market.

Therefore, it is important to note that, although the findings of this study only refer to the reality of the four companies analyzed, the overall findings and comparisons — European Union *versus* United States of America— are not the primary objective of this study. However, by triangulating various sources of information (literature review and analysis of the accounts reports of journalistic companies, sector studies, interviews with executives and statistics on advertising investment), it can be concluded that it is very likely that in the future the thesis that American newspapers obtain higher income from digital media than Europeans, since all newspaper publishers are "refining" their business model by creating new products and service offers, in order to obtain income through more diversified activities and sources, will be confirmed.

Limitations and future lines of research

This investigation may present some minor limitations stemming from the analysis of only four companies: two companies from the European Union and two from the United States of America. However, it should also be stressed that ─although this is not a comparative study between the two continents─the reality of each country will naturally influence the results obtained in each of the two journalistic companies in which the interviews were conducted and on which the analyzes were carried out. Thus, these conclusions reflect the reality of the companies studied and are able to show us different trends and dynamics in the information market in the United States of America and in the European Union. However, the aforementioned limitations can be overcome in future works of the authors, which will include more journalistic companies, countries and regions of both continents, thus expanding the sample of the study to give greater scientific strength.

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"A country to go back to": narrative analysis of the Plan of Return to Spain

"Un país para volver": análisis narrativo del Plan de retorno a España

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Abstract

A growing number of governments are introducing initiatives explicitly aimed at stimulating the return of their emigrants. In Spain, the state launched its first policy for return, the "Plan of Return to Spain", in 2019. Taking this plan as a case study, the article examines the Spanish policy for return and places it in a broader context, both political and historical, in order to understand the limits and biases of this measure in the face of the diverse profiles of Spanish emigrants. Adopting the narrative policy framework as a theoretical-analytical perspective and content analysis as a methodological tool, the authors of this paper identify that, through the new narrative strategy, a paradigmatic change has been produced in Spain in the way of understanding, from the public sphere, the return of Spanish citizens living abroad. Instead of an assistance-based approach, a neoliberal (instrumental and utilitarian) perspective has been adopted, maintaining, however, a conception of "the return to the country of origin" that is closer to the predominant migratory theories of the 20th century rather than to contemporary social-scientific notions. A tension between the policy narratives of Spain and the European Union in relation to Intra-European mobility, and a gap between the state view and the current migratory realities concerning return in contexts of great economic and labor uncertainty have also been recognized.

Keywords

Policies, narrative approach, migration, return, talent, andouth, mobility, Spain.

Resumen

Cada vez más gobiernos lanzan iniciativas explícitamente dirigidas a estimular el retorno de sus emigrantes. En España, el Estado puso en funcionamiento su primera política para el retorno, el "Plan de Retorno a España", en 2019. Tomando como caso de estudio este plan, el artículo examina la política española para el retorno y la ubica en un contexto más amplio, tanto político como histórico, con objeto de comprender los límites y sesgos de esta medida ante los diversos perfiles de emigrantes españoles. Adoptando el enfoque narrativo de las políticas como perspectiva teórico-analítica y el análisis de contenido como herramienta metodológica, identificamos que, mediante la nueva estrategia narrativa, se ha producido en España un cambio paradigmático en la manera de pensar, desde la esfera pública, el regreso de los ciudadanos españoles asentados en el extranjero. De una mirada asistencial, se ha pasado a adoptar una perspectiva de tipo neoliberal (instrumental y utilitarista), manteniendo, eso sí, una concepción de "la vuelta al país de origen" más próxima a las teorías migratorias predominantes en el siglo XX que a los conceptos científico-sociales contemporáneos. Encontramos, además, una tensión entre las narrativas políticas de España y de la Unión Europea respecto a la movilidad intraeuropea, and un desfase entre la mirada estatal y las realidades migratorias actuales en lo relativo al retorno en contextos de gran incertidumbre económico-laboral.

Palabras clave

Políticas, enfoque narrativo, migración, retorno, talento, juventud, movilidad, España.

Introduction[1]

Since the end of the 20th century, more and more governments have incorporated policies (programs, plans, guides and/or online audiovisual resources) towards their emigrants and/or the descendants of their emigrants to promote, not only the maintenance of links with the community of origin and assistance in cases of need, but also the return to the territory (Délano and Mylonas, 2021; Hagan and Wassink, 2020; Délano and Gamlen, 2014; Tsuda, 2009). Spain, a European country characterized by both historical and contemporary migratory movements of income and discharge, is part of the countries in which this phenomenon is taking place (Pinho *et al.,* 2022; Fernández Asperilla and Alba, 2020; Ragazzi, 2014).

At the legislative level, the state interest in maintaining ties with Spanish emigrants, guaranteeing their rights and enabling their possible return is not new, but has been present since the return of democracy. Article 42 of the 1978 Constitution stated that "the State shall ensure [especially] the safeguarding of the economic and social rights of Spanish workers abroad and orient [it] its policy towards their return" (BOE 311, 1978) (Ripoll Gil, 2023; Calvo Salgado *et al.,* 2022; Fernández Vicente, 2015). Likewise, and with a view to strengthening this objective, the Statute for Spanish Citizenship abroad was adopted in 2006. In that text, Article 26 stipulated that the State would seek to promote the creation of a comprehensive and multilevel policy to facilitate the return of Spanish residents abroad, including among the latter not only those who were outside the country for working reasons, but also those who had left for political reasons during the Franco dictatorship (BOE 299, 2006).

In addition, on the same level, but not only in relation to emigrants but also to the Spanish diaspora (Brubaker, 2005), there have also been several laws approved in the last two decades. While these have been geared towards granting Spanish nationality to descendants of Spanish emigrants and not directly promoting their return, these are measures that make this possible. These initiatives include: the Historical Memory Law (Law 52/2007), in force between 2008 and 2011, aimed at exiles of the dictatorship and descendants

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(Izquierdo, 2011); the Law on granting Spanish nationality to Sephardim originally from Spain (Law 12/2015), operational from 2015 to 2019, aimed at descendants of Jews expelled from the peninsula between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Aliberdi, 2023; Casas Cortés and Cobarrubias Baglietto, 202 3); and the Democratic Memory Law (Law 20/2022), known as the Grandchildren Law, which remains active during 2024 and is dedicated to descendants of exiles, international brigadiers and women who lost their nationality due to marrying non-nationals before the entry into force of the 1978 Constitution (Míguez Macho, 2022).

Regarding policies specifically designed to promote the return of migrants, it is important to note that interest in promoting measures to favor the return of Spanish nationals from abroad did not initially arise at the national level, but did so at the subnational level.[2] The first governments to deploy specific policies aimed at the return of their emigrants and their diaspora were those of five Autonomous Communities: Andalusia, Asturias, the Canary Islands, Extremadura and Galicia (Rovetta Cortés, 2018; Cavas and Sánchez, 2007), and it was only after the last five years that the rest of the Autonomous Communities joined this trend.[3]

Until the 2019 Plan of Return to Spain was approved, the State limited itself to publishing successive "return guides", intended to indicate the procedures that return candidates had to complete in order to return to Spain, offering some aid or subsidies for those who were in vulnerable situations, and, from the Spanish Office of Return, it was sought "to facilitate, guide and advise Spaniards who decide to return, with the objective of materializing their effective social and labor insertion in Spain" (BOE 299, 2006: Article III).[4]

It was in 2019 when, coinciding with the proliferation of regional policies to favor the return of co-regional migrants, the national state launched its first plan to stimulate the return of migrants to Spain: The Plan of Return to Spain. A plan with 50 measures approved during the government of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party in March 2019, which included the action

2 According to Segeš Frelak and Hahn-Schaur (2019), this multi-level nature of return policy is an element of Spanish return policy compared to its European counterparts.

3 List of regional policies for return available at: https://bit.ly/3uM8R0s

4 Generally speaking, state-implemented return aid has been scarce. The work carried out by returnee associations, such as the Spanish Federation of Associations of Emigrants and Returnees (FEAER), is an example of the government's insufficient measures to promote the return of Spanish expatriates (Oiarzabal *et al.,* 2012).

of ten ministries, the involvement of local governments and other social organizations (unions, companies and associations of emigrants and returnees) with the objective of encouraging the return to the country of Spanish citizens residing abroad.

Taking as a case study the Return Plan of Spain, this article aims, on the one hand, to examine the way in which the State designed and implemented the policy to return to Spain and, on the other, to locate it in a broader context, both socio-political and historical. To do this we use the narrative approach of policies to interpret and understand how, through this policy, the Spanish migratory phenomenon is narrated today; who is identified as migrants whose return is worth encouraging; who are left out of the focus of this return story; and how this proposal fits into the history of state initiatives towards Spanish emigration.

The originality and contribution to the literature of this article focuses on the subject and on the theoretical-analytical approach, since research analyzing return policies in Europe is still scarce (Segeš Frelak and Hahn-Schaur: 2019; Lang *et al.,* 2016) and theoretical-analytical because the narrative analysis of policies has not been so far recurrent in the field of migration studies (Pierce *et al*., 2014).

Research approach

For this research we use the study approach of the "policy narrative". This analytical perspective starts from the assumption that human beings are narrative animals, "*homo narrans*" (Jones *et al.,* 2014, p. 1), and although "political messages" can adopt different formats or structures, "in politics, narratives are the main means to define and dispute political problems" (Stone, 2012, p. 158).

According to Stone (2012, p. 158), "narratives", or "political narratives", differ from other types of political messages, such as chronologies, listings, memes or speeches, by the fact that they contain some kind of combination of the following elements: 1) problem, 2) scenario, 3) characters (heroes, villains and victims), 4) plot and 5) moral of history or political solution. They are similar to other communication formats in that they all seek to shape a political strategy based on a belief system regarding a certain social phenomenon.

According to Shanahan *et al.*:

> There are two necessary conditions for a document in the public domain to be considered a political narrative. First, it must contain a political stance or judgment about policy-related behavior. (...) Secondly, it must include at least one character who acts as a hero, villain or victim. (2013, p. 457)

With this theoretical-analytical perspective, a combined and balanced view of the study between agents and institutions is presented. Thus, it is realized the degree of complexity that the studied phenomenon represents when analyzing a public policy process. In this regard, we highlight the interconnections, feedback and complementarities between the political opportunities (institutional and policy frameworks) and the interpretative frameworks. These overlaps are achieved through the narratives of identities as "complementarity contributes to the nexus between structures of political opportunities and the strategies of political discourse" (Alejo Jaime, 2013, p. 288). In this sense, we know that public policies are not "objective" and "self-evident" data for the actors. Actors (institutions, organized citizens, etc.) have "perceived opportunities" (Alejo Jaime, 2013, p. 305). In this way, there is a connection between public policies and the interpretation that agents have and develop strategically, leading them to the openings or obstacles that the agents conceive and build before their political agendas.

Since this approach allows to examine "explicitly and empirically the political narratives used by actors in the political process" (Pierce *et al.,* 2014, p. 27) and analyze both the design, procedures, application and/or results of public policies that are reflected in the strategically constructed narratives, in this article we use this approach to examine the construction of the narratives deployed in Spanish public policy aimed at promoting the return of Spanish citizens residing abroad.

Methodology

Based on a case study strategy, the discourses that feed the narrative of public policy of the Plan of Return to Spain are taken as a unit of analysis. To do this, we carried out a content analysis of the document (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) that presents this plan and distinguishes the form and narrative content of Spain's return policy. In addition, we contextualize the use of these policy elements and their narrative strategies in a broader political and historical scenario, in which Spanish citizens move with geographical locations, professional profiles and diverse generations. We have reviewed the existing literature regarding the study of return in a European environment with emphasis on Spain. In addition, for the analysis of the return plan, the web pages of the Secretariat of State for Migration, the Portal of Spanish Citizenship Abroad, the Volemos organization and the Journal of the Congress of Deputies were visited.

Following Stone's (2012) analytical strategy, our work followed the following analytical scheme.

Table 1
Analytical scheme

Problem	Clearly situate the account of the departure of the Spanish citizens that is set out in the Plan of Return to Spain.
Scenario	Identify the narrative strategy that promotes the Plan of Return to Spain in the face of the different problems faced by Spaniards abroad, especially those who plan to return to Spain.
Characters (heroes, villains and victims)	Recognize the role played by the actors involved in the implementation of the Return Plan from the same narrative offered by the plan itself (government, autonomous communities, parliament, migrant associations, companies, among others).
Plot and moral of history or political solution	Distinguish the opportunities, limitations and biases offered by the Return Plan to the different groups of Spaniards abroad.

Results

When analyzing the form or narrative structure of the policies of the Plan of return to Spain, we warn that the problem around which the story is built is the departure from the national territory of Spaniards, qualified as "new emigration". In other words, the departure of young Spaniards who left the country after the beginning of the 2008 economic crisis.

Regarding the plot, the policy narrative follows this sequence: in the wake of the global economic crisis and the conditions of the Spanish labor market, "hundreds of thousands of Spaniards emigrated in search of an opportunity to earn a living in another country" (Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones, 2019, p. 5). They did not leave because they wanted to, but because they faced situations of job insecurity and unemployment. Many of them had higher education and gained even more "personal[s] and professional[s]" knowledge (Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones, 2019, p. 3) during their experience abroad. Given this circumstance, the State considers it its "moral duty" to intervene in order to recover this qualified population and thus obtain "economic, family and social benefits" that are associated with their return (Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones, 2019, p. 5).

Regarding the scenario or context in which the political narrative is placed, the Plan uses legal texts, such as the 1978 Constitution and the Statute of Spanish Citizenship abroad of 2006, as legal parameters, and the conclusions of studies carried out by other public institutions, such as the National Youth Institute to legitimize the proposal.

Based on the premise entailed by having lived a (unique) round-trip migration experience automatically, without any consideration regarding the conditions (legal, economic, social, political...) in the places of transit/destination, a personal and professional learning that can (and should) be put at the service of the Spanish economy, the authors of the Return to Spain Plan propose 50 measures whose focus is the economic/labor aspect. Emphasizing the value (or benefit) of regaining the presence in the territory of young people who can work in public and private sectors, such as employees of private companies, entrepreneurs, officials or scientists, the plan explicitly links return and economic development. In other words, returnees are represented as agents of development, as a resource for the country.

28 of the 50 proposed measures aim to facilitate the planning and reintegration into employment of returnees. In fact, approximately 21 of the approximately 24 million euro earmarked for the first two years of operation of the scheme were earmarked for this purpose. Out of these, €10.9 million were set to promote the return of scientists and €10.3 million to encourage the return of those seeking to enter the private sector (of which €2.2 million were for employees and €8.1 million for entrepreneurs). The rest of the expenses were designated to generate and maintain the "A Country to Return" website (€300,000), redesign the consular registry (€2.5 million) and promote access to the Network of Youth Information Centers (€35,000) (Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones, 2019, pp. 67-90).

A contextual element that is inaccurate is numerical. In this regards, the Plan recognizes that the statistical data available in Spain regarding the phenomenon of emigration are incomplete and that, therefore, the number of Spanish people living abroad published each year by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) represents an underestimate of the total[5]. Notwithstanding this limitation, the document notes that between 2008 and 2019, there has been an increasing trend in both the number of departures and returns to the country, and on the former, it details that in 2019, there were approximately 2 500 000 Spaniards residing outside the country. Out of that number, about 1 million were in Europe and the remaining 1 and a half million were living predominantly in Latin American countries.

Following the proposed theoretical and analytical approach, we identify this group of emigrants as the main victims who must be assisted through the return policy. These are young people classified by the Plan according to their motivation degree towards returning to the country in four profiles. It distinguishes between: (a) those who are "in evolution", (b) those who have their "eyes set on Spain", (c) those who are "satisfied with their situation", and (d) those who are "vital nomads" (Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones, 2019, p. 21).

While there is explicit preferential interest in directing the plan towards the second profile, those who "have already been away for a while and are clear that they want to return, they do not know how to take steps towards their return. Depending on their personal and professional situation, they plan to return in the short, medium or long term" (Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones, 2019, p. 21), and all the bearers of these profiles are included as potential recipients of the state measures contained in this return promotion policy.

One aspect that stands out when examining the narratives of these victims is that the narrative of policy places them predominantly in Europe. It is an identifiable location: (a) in the methodology deployed to carry out the design of the policy: surveys, workshops and meetings took place mostly in Berlin, London and Madrid,[6] and (b) in the description of the work environments of origin and destination, since a wage difference between countries is presumed that is favorable to the countries of destination and work environments with more "conciliatory", "modern and inclusive" "work methodologies" (Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones, 2019, p. 15). All this can be interpreted as an inclination not only to seek the return of young migrants

5 This assessment coincides with the results of research regarding the Spanish migratory phenomenon. See, for example: Mahía, 2018; González-Ferrer, 2013.

6 Excepting an online survey whose geographical scope is not explicit, all other data collection tools were applied in European territory. Option that overshadows the experiences of those who are in other areas.

who left after the crisis of 2008, but of young migrants who chose to reside in another European country.

In line with this European geographical preference, the Plan identifies Spanish companies as secondary victims of the problem of emigration, since from meetings with Spanish entrepreneurs for elaborating the Plan, the following obstacles to the recruitment of returnees are distinguished: the distance between wages abroad and Spain, the period of notice that must be given to the companies where they are working and those who want to return, and the difficulties for returnees to join work in the short term.

As far as the villain of the story is concerned, it does not occupy a predominant place in the Plan's narrative. Although the economic crisis of 2008 and the temporary and precarious conditions of the Spanish labor market as forces that expel young migrants can be classified as villains, there is no detailed analysis regarding these political-economic circumstances, no large-scale institutional changes are proposed and no particular social actor is identified as responsible for the crisis, although the Popular Party is veiled for the cuts it made while in government in the years after the crisis, as these would have accentuated the phenomenon of emigration.[7]

Finally, the role of heroes of the political narrative is embodied, in the first instance, by the State, specifically by the Secretariat of State for Migration; in the second, by the private organization Volemos, in which the tasks of designing and developing the Plan were externalized; and, in the third, by the young Spanish returnees, since it is interpreted that all these social actors can identify and know the problem that emigration entails and can propose measures to mitigate and solve the difficulties that arise to those who wish to return to the country. As a representative of the State, the voice of Magdalena Valerio, Minister of Labor, Migration and Social Security, stands out between 2018 and 2020, who raises the intervention in favor of return in terms of "moral responsibility" (Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones, 2019, p. 3).

In relation to Volemos, this private organization created in Berlin between 2015 and 2016, presents itself as an entity made up of young Spanish people who at some point in their adult life resided in other countries of Eu-

7 On the Socialist Parliamentary Group's criticisms of the PP government's cuts in scientific policy and their impact on the emigration of young researchers, see: Sessions of the Congress of Deputies (DSCD), nº 222, September 24, 2014, pp. 7-8; DSCD, nº 20, February 23, 2016, pp. 22-23; Bulletin of the General Courts - Senate (BCG-S), nº 113, June 19, 2017, pp. 3622-3624. Texts available at: https://bit.ly/450ajdq and https://bit.ly/3yFicsM

rope, and it is their migratory experiences which enable them to assist other migrants who wish to return to Spain, placing themselves, and any Spanish person who resided outside the territory and returned to their homeland, in this narrative role. In his own words:

> We know what it is like to seek life in a different country from our own and we have experienced the excitement of returning home. With this experience we started this exciting project to make it possible for brains escaped during the crisis to return home. (Back, 2020a)

Table 2
Who are the characters in Spain's Return Plan?

Character	Entity and characteristics
Victims	New migrants are the main victims who have had to leave their country. The plan presents a characterization of profiles of this group of emigrants. Spanish companies are victims of the challenges they face when hiring people back to the territory.
Heroes	Through the Secretariat of State for Migration, the State is recognized as a heroic entity that seeks to return Spanish citizens to Spanish territory, with dignified conditions, if they wish. Volemos is the organization of young returnees that has the function, designated by the government, of elaborating and monitoring the return policy of Spain.
Villains	Without explicit clarity about entities that play the role of villains, they are distinguished as such: the economic crisis of 2008, budget cuts and job precariousness in Spain.

Following the plot typology proposed by Deborah Stone (2012), this storyline includes and intertwines the decline and control plots. In other words, it proposes that, since the labor situation worsened and this meant the demographic loss of the active[8] population (decline plot), it is necessary to recover that population and thus achieve stability and socio-economic well-being of the entire country (control plot). The moral of the political narrative is, the-

8 This narrative can only be understood from a strictly national (list) perspective, since (a) since the crisis began in 2008, the Spanish migration balance has been positive every year except for 2010-11 and 2013-14 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2022; Mahía, 2018); and (b) the majority of immigrants (mostly from Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America) are young people, in working age (Domingo and Sabater, 2013; Reher *et al.,* 2011).

refore, that it is imperative to implement a policy of promoting return to re-engage that population.

As for the symbolic elements of the narrative, the recurring use of the "talents" label to refer to these young migrants is remarkable. It is presumed that those who left the country after the crisis are (all) people who have developed "new ideas, more open minds and desire to generate changes in our country", knowledge regarding "other cultures", "languages", "entrepreneurial spirit" and "capacity for resilience, as well as humility, maturity, sociability and determination" (Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones, 2019, pp. 3, 5 and 20).

It should be mentioned that in the political narrative, victims deserve, because they belong to the national political community, access to administrative consultations and request for labor mediation. Instead, to receive psychological assistance they must pay for the service (Volemos, 2020b) and overcome a competition process to obtain entrepreneurial assistance (Volemos, 2020c).

Finally, the examination of public policies from the narrative approach allows to highlight that the strategies deployed in the Plan, on the one hand, have sought to mobilize the support of different social actors (representatives of public institutions, companies, unions, associations of emigrants, scientific organizations, universities...) to facilitate the return of those who choose to return to the country and, on the other hand, have used the political narrative known as "*angel shift*" (Stone, 2012), which consists of downplaying the "villain" (the crisis, cuts and socio-labor conditions) and emphasizing the capacity and commitment of the main "heroes"—in our case the Secretariat of State of Migration and the organization Volemos—to solve the problem.

Discussion

In accordance with the analysis of the narrative of return policies in the analyzed plan and the results identified, and to achieve the objectives proposed in this article, we resort to a discussion based on the historical evolution of the idea of return in Spanish emigration in to identify the orientation, biases and limitations evidenced by the return policy proposed by the Government of Spain.

Although its application was limited by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the main interest of the narrative analysis made to the Plan of Return to Spain is the way in which it tried to redefine the return policy raised until then from the national level. The orientation of the Plan constituted a paradigm shift in the way in which the return of Spanish citizens settled abroad was thought and narrated from the public sphere: proposing aid for Spanish emigrants who were in a vulnerable situation, the return of the "young talents" who emigrated with the crisis.

To carry out this delicate and risky return, the Ministry of Migration chose to outsource the elaboration of the Plan, leaving it in the hands of the private organization Volemos. The choice of Volemos for designing a Return Plan for Spain occurred in a context marked by the presence of two divergent narratives in relation to these outflows of young people as a result of the crisis: one that saw in this migratory flow a flight of talent or "brain drain" in a phenomenon that came to be called "the new emigration" — "new" as it broke with the traditional stereotype of the migrant with low professional qualifications that characterized the mass emigration of the years of Franco's development — and a second narrative that tried to dilute the migratory phenomenon into a phenomenon of "external mobility" with an individual and non-coercive character that sought to downplay these outflows (Romero Valiente, 2018; Lázquez Silva, Capote and López de Lera, 2020; Domingo and Blanes, 2016). The coercive and collective nature of the first narrative (condensed in *the famous "we don't leave, they kick us out") contrasted with the supposedly voluntary, unrestricted and individualized nature of the second (Vázquez Silva et al.,* 2020; Domingo and Blanes, 2016), although both seemed to converge on the idea that those who left in 2008 were highly qualified young people (Oso, 2017).

In reality, this "new emigration" was not so new. It has been increasing in Spain since its entry into the European Economic Community, affecting mainly families with resources (Alaminos *et al.,* 2010). However, this seems to have intensified in recent years (Vázquez Silva *et al.,* 2020) as a result of the change in profile of a Spanish youth that has evolved in recent decades towards greater professional qualification.[9]

9 Since the years of the economic boom, Spain has become one of the European countries with the highest rate of university students with respect to the population from 18 to 25 years, generating an overqualification in certain age groups (Díaz Hernández *et al.,* 2015). Thus, in 2011 the percentage of people aged 24-34 with completed higher education was 44% for women and 34% for men (González Ferrer, 2013). However, this does not mean that we should leave out of this migratory flow of many Spaniards with medium or low qualifications who also chose to emigrate.

By focusing on this "new emigration" linked to the 2008 crisis and relating it to the departure of qualified young people, most of whom settled in the major European capitals, the Return Plan significantly restricted the profile of the migrants to whom the measures aimed at promoting their return to Spain should be directed. Only "young talents" or "entrepreneurial spirits" seemed to have a place in this Plan. The many retirees who during the first years of the crisis tried to return to Spain (González Ferrer, 2013), the Spanish with medium or low qualifications and the descendants of Spaniards (whose citizenship status was also included in the return policies despite never having emigrated) (Merino Hernando, 2012) were outside the priority focus of this Plan (Fernández Asperilla and Alba, 2020; Domingo and Blanes, 2016; Narciso and Carrasco Pons, 2017).

The question not addressed in this plan is why a Plan that calls itself "Plan of return to Spain." A country to return" ends up favoring the return of this "new emigration" of young talents installed mostly in the great European capitals. Nor does it include any allusion to the concept of intra-European mobility (Penninx, 2014) in its narrative strategy, but it merely uses the term emigration for any departure from Spain, which seems to indicate that the only level of membership explicitly recognized is national, not regional. In this sense, Spain's return policy is not easily compatible with Europe's prevailing political narrative about population movements on the continent.

We propose several elements to respond to these omissions. The first has to do with greater visibility, influence in the political sphere and the ability to mobilize this sector with highly qualified migrants mostly settled in Europe. Gathered in the Network of Associations of Spanish Researchers and Scientists Abroad (RAICEX), the interests represented by this group of Spaniards had greater means and formal channels to access to the formulation of public policies than other categories of emigrants, thus obtaining greater support for their demands.

The second could be related to the government's desire to guide the return plan towards the return of "young talents", breaking in practice from what was advocated in the matter by the two legal frameworks in which migration policy had been framed, namely: Article 42 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and Article 26 of the Statute of Spanish Citizenship abroad of 2006. As announced above, the Plan does not conceive return as a form of assistance from the Spanish State to its most vulnerable citizens – for whom the traditional assistance measures proposed in the different return guides continue to be applied – but as an asset that helps "to undertake a change of productive model betting on the green economy, research, and social entrepreneurship, and not on the mere exploitation of cheap and unskilled labor" (Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones, 2019, p. 6).

With this approach, the return policy becomes a profitable and highly efficient policy – if considering effective policy as one that tries to obtain more with the same means (Stone, 2011, pp. 63-67), allowing it to have a broad consensus in the political aspect.[10] Third, this reorientation of the Spanish return policy may have to do with the direction taken by most European return policies. Under neoliberal dogmas that demand that public policies be utilitarian and profitable, European Union countries that adopt a welfare-centered approach, i.e., in supporting migrants who find themselves in difficult situations abroad (traditional approach to return policies) are the least important, with this issue of the return of migrants increasingly being oriented along the path of global competition for talent (Segeš Frelak and Hahn-Schaur, 2019). The consequence of all this is that, although effectiveness and equity may not be antagonistic objectives of public policies (Stone, 2011), this Plan seems to opt for the former at the expense of the latter.

In a Plan that sacrifices equity for efficiency, one wonders whether the proposed approach is indeed conducive to the return of young talents who left to other European countries with the crisis. The great problem that the Plan suffers from is the way in which it approaches emigration as a round trip, departure and (possible) return, without thinking on the multiple and complex migratory dynamics that characterize the mobility of Spaniards during these last decades. For the Plan, rooting constitutes the main threat to the possible return of those who "had to pack their bags during the crisis" (Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones, 2019, p. 3).

A rootedness to which, as shown by different studies, scientists and academics are more favorable (10%, according to Gaulé, 2011), individuals who have been abroad for more than five years and middle-aged people, with young people and retirees being the categories most inclined to return (Segeš Frelak and Hahn-Schaur, 2019; González-Ferrer, 2013). This politi-

10 As the representative of the Popular parliamentary group, Juan Bravo Baena, would say: "Ladies and gentlemen, the first question we ask ourselves before this Citizens' motion [aimed at making Spain a pole of attraction for not only Spanish but also international talent] is whether any of the 350 deputies who are in this room can be against the return of talent. I think it is unanimous: we are all in favor of the return of talent. The only difference is how we do it." Sessions of the Congress of Deputies (DSC), nº 37, March 14, 2017, p. 66.

cal conception of migration would justify the implementation of "active return policies in the medium term so that rootedness does not occur", which seek to transform the "problem" of the return to the "duty" of attending the weakest to turn it into an "opportunity as a country to transform this migratory experience into a contribution to the professional performance of these young people and to the culture of the country[11]" (Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones, 2019, p. 5; the underlining is ours).

Finally, it should be noted that by contemplating return as the last (and definitive) phase of the migration cycle, the Plan approximates migratory theories that were influential in the second half of the 20th century, specifically neoclassical and structural approaches, which conceived return as the closure of the migratory cycle (bidirectional and single), and the consequence of an individual and rational decision before macroeconomic and/or demographic, political and social causes, changing in the countries of origin and destination (Lang *et al.,* 2016; Massey *et al*., 1993). In this sense, the adopted narrative moves away from the contemporary theoretical interpretations that tend to think of the return to the country of origin not as the end of a cycle, but as individual and/or group biography phases that can include more than one displacement (intra or international) based on different motivations, both personal and social (Riaño, 2023; Boros and Hegedűs, 2016; Nadler *et al*., 2016), which are not infrequently conditioned by the lack of job stabilization possibilities that occur due to the characteristics of contemporary liberal economies (not already national but global), in which labor markets are each time more precarious with short-term employment contracts.

Conclusions

This article has revealed that the new Spanish migration policy conceives young migrants and Spanish companies as victims; the economic crisis of 2008, budget cuts and job precariousness in Spain as villains; and the Secretariat of State for Migration and private organization "Volvemos" as heroes in the face of the problem of the "new" emigration. We have also noticed that, with this new narrative strategy, there has been a paradigmatic change in

11 This avoided the risk that Spanish public opinion would consider a possible mass return of migrants of all kinds as a threat to the Spanish labor market, as happened during the seventies (Fernández Vicente, 2015).

Spain in the way of thinking and narrating, from the public sphere, the return of Spanish citizens settled abroad. From an assistance perspective, focused on proposing aid for the return of Spanish emigrants who were in vulnerable situations, the return of so-called "young talents" who left the country after the last global financial crisis has been prioritized.

In line with the neoliberal dogmas that demand profitable policies, the narrative of the Return Plan sacrifices equity (considering the right of all Spanish migrants to return) in favor of efficiency (stimulating the return of those who can contribute to resources and knowledge to the society of origin), ignoring, in addition, the concept of intra-European mobility with which it was sought to consolidate (politically) a community citizenship and (economically) a single labor market. On the other hand, the only level of belonging that the Return Plan seems to recognize is the national (Spanish), not the regional (European) one, also maintaining a conception of "the return to the country of origin" closer to the predominant migratory theories in the 20th century than to the contemporary scientific-social contributions.

Despite the limited implementation of the Plan due to the outbreak of the pandemic, we believe that the narrative on return established deserves further investigation. In this sense, we highlight that the government has recently launched a new policy proposal called "Plan of attraction and retention of scientific and innovative talent to Spain of the Ministry of Science and Innovation", specifically aimed at scientists and entrepreneurs. Finally, given that the regional governments in Spain also design their own policies for the return of migrants, we believe that it would be important for future studies to incorporate a multilevel perspective to identify whether this transformation in the way of conceiving emigration, distinguishing migrants among those whose return is worth encouraging from those whose return should not be encouraged, has been adopted at other scales in the country.

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Emotions and political leadership in the 2022 Andalusian Parliament elections in X

Emociones y liderazgos políticos en las elecciones al Parlamento de Andalucía de 2022 en X

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Abstract
Social networks have become in recent years as essential elements to building political discourses, especially in electoral periods. Political parties develop specific strategies to communicating with their constituents through these platforms, based on leadership and the use of emotions. This research aims to analyze the communication strategies deployed by political leaders on X during the Andalusian Parliament election campaign in 2022, and for this purpose, a quantitative and qualitative content analysis methodology is applied to a sample of 690 tweets in the personal accounts of the candidates of the six parties with parliamentary representation. An advance of the results points to a communicative planning previously designed, that builds a discourse based on thematic lines, strategies, approaches and, especially, feelings according to the ideological, programmatic, and mobilizing axis established by each political formation.

Keywords
Political communication, elections, leadership, emotions, campaigns, Andalusia, X.

Resumen

Las redes sociales se han convertido en los últimos años en elementos esenciales a la hora de construir los discursos políticos, especialmente en periodos electorales. Los partidos políticos desarrollan estrategias específicas para comunicarse con sus electores a través de estas plataformas, basadas en el liderazgo y el uso de las emociones. Esta investigación tiene como objetivo analizar las estrategias comunicativas desplegadas por los líderes políticos en X durante la campaña de las elecciones al Parlamento de Andalucía en 2022 y para ello se aplica una metodología de análisis de contenido cuantitativo y cualitativo sobre una muestra de 690 tuits en las cuentas personales de los candidatos de los seis partidos con representación parlamentaria. Un avance de los resultados apunta a una planificación comunicativa previamente diseñada, que construye un discurso basado en líneas temáticas, estrategias, enfoques y, especialmente, sentimientos según el eje ideológico, programático y movilizador establecido por cada formación.

Palabras clave

Comunicación política, elecciones, liderazgo, emociones, campañas, Andalucía, X.

Introduction

After the rejection of the 2022 budgets and arguing the instability of the parliamentary minority as a result of a distancing with Vox, on April 25, President Juan Manuel Moreno dissolves the Andalusian Parliament and calls regional elections for June 19. It advanced in five months the scheduled date, ending a legislature marked by the arrival, for the first time in Andalusian history, of the Popular Party (PP) to the Presidency of the Junta in 2018. In this way, despite the victory of the PSOE, the conservatives manage to govern this region, thanks to a government pact with the centrists of Ciudadanos and another programmatic one with Vox. A period of change begins in an Andalusia, governed by conservative parties and supported by extreme right-wing populism (Golder, 2016; Pérez-Curiel, 2020)

The campaign under study begins in the context of a legislature determined by the introduction of changes in the Andalusian institutions, the management of the COVID-19 pandemic (López-Pavón, 2021) or polarization with the Government of Spain. The confrontation responds, among other reasons, to the results of the demoscopic surveys (Centro de Estudios Andaluces, 2022; Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2022) that point to the victory of the Popular Party, the stagnation of the PSOE and a progressive recovery of the big parties, in a scenario of fragmentation and parliamentary polarization (Nieto-Jiménez, 2022). The imminent disappearance of Ciudadanos, until then a minority political party in the Andalusian government, and internal conflicts between the parties of the alternative left describe a scenario with significant division levels in the elections. In a political landscape marked by polarization, what is unknown is the sum of the political parties of left and right, as well as the reaction of the citizenry to the far-right Vox party (Ferreira, 2019) and its possible entry into the regional Executive.

Therefore, the communication strategies of leaders and parties are fundamental to influence the citizen vote (García *et al.,* 2013). Despite studies that question the impact of debates (Lagares *et al.,* 2020), the media (Ramírez-Dueñas and Vinuesa-Tejero, 2020) or the campaigns themselves (Barreiro *et al*., 2015), the electorate can determine the composition of the new government. In addition, in a society marked by immediacy, the importance of the audiovisual and the use of emotions (Bjerg, 2019), social networks are key element of political communication (Rúas and Casero-Ripollés, 2018) and, especially of electoral processes.

This research starts from the hypothesis that political leaders during the 2022 electoral campaign in Andalusia build a story on X (former Twitter) marked by a multiple combination of strategies among which stand out the use of emotions to influence citizenship. Based on a content analysis of the messages published on this social network by the six candidates of the political parties with parliamentary representation, it is intended to delve into the construction process of the electoral narrative.

Strategies, Leadership, and Emotions in Online Election Campaigns

The Internet and new social platforms have revolutionized the way society communicates, changing countless facets of people's lives. In this sense, political communication cannot be understood today without considering the role played by social networks (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013). The development of these new communication platforms has favored the emergence of a new space for dialog between politicians, media and citizens (Jaráiz *et al*., 2020a). It has led to a series of profound changes in the planning of electoral campaigns (Karlsen and Enjolras, 2016) and, especially, the development by parties of strategies specifically designed for social platforms (Enli, 2017).

Although, from the theoretical point of view, social networks expand the possibilities of political participation of citizens (Murthy, 2018), there are also authors who question it by reducing the role of influence of these new platforms to a new loudspeaker of information created by traditional actors (Castells, 2011) and in many cases used by governments and political parties to generate accessions to particular causes (De la Garza, 2020). In this line, political parties show low interactivity levels (Zugasti and Pérez, 2015) and tend to use social networks as propaganda mechanisms of self-promotion through the viralization of proposals and messages, especially during electoral campaigns (Pérez-Curiel and García-Gordillo, 2020).

Another consequence of the impact of social networks on electoral political communication is the loss of the role of the media as mediators (Díez-Gracia *et al.,* 2023) and the increase of the potential of political leaders as agenda setters or "news makers" (Aruguete, 2017). Through techniques closer to marketing, candidates become authentic political influencers (Pérez-Curiel and Limón-Naharro, 2019), working their personal brand through social networks (Verón and Pallarés, 2018), emptying them of ideological content and turning politics into a confrontation between celebrities who hold power (Quevedo-Redondo and Portalés-Oliva, 2017). All these trends contribute to a political and social debate marked by disinformation (Pérez-Curiel *et al.,* 2022).

The latter leads to the construction of a unidirectional (Amado and Tarullo, 2015) and self-referential discourse on social networks (García-Ortega and Zugasti, 2018) marked by the reinforcement of the personality of the political leader (McGregor *et al.,* 2017). Despite the progressive increase in the weight of other social networks, such as Instagram or TikTok, typical of a younger audience (Martínez-Estrella *et al.,* 2023), X is running as the social network with the greatest potential for politics (Campos-Domínguez, 2017). Thanks to their polarizing tendency and their ability to generate echo chambers (Cossard *et al.,* 2020), political parties rely on networks of followers that end up becoming authentic fan communities (Lee and Moon, 2021).

This phenomenon is based on recent scientific research that argues how the ability to mobilize through emotions is increasingly being considered in the planning of the communication strategies of political parties (Calderón-

Monge, 2017), a discursive complement of influence on the electorate (Grüning and Schubert, 2022). As a result, and despite the fact that academic studies on political communication have traditionally tended to focus on the rational component (Montecinos, 2007), in recent decades the interest of the Academy in the role played by affections and emotions in the electoral behavior of citizens has been increasing.

From this perspective, the parties seek to form a constructed mood among digital audiences, which is intensifying throughout the electoral campaign (Jaráiz-Gulías *et al*., 2020b). Although there is a view that political communication on social networks is dominated by negative content, especially during electoral campaigns (Tucker *et al.,* 2018), there is no clear academic consensus on whether communication strategies with a negative emotional burden are more successful (Moret-Soler *et al*., 2022) or whether it is positive emotional content that reaches a greater potential for viralization on the network (Ferrara and Yang, 2015; Dominguez-García *et al.,* 2023).

In a polarizing context, in which traditional media, and especially television, promote confrontation through the implemented representation of political feelings (Cazorla *et al*., 2022), social networks become authentic public emotional spaces (Serrano-Puche, 2016), where users automatically tend to join currents of opinion and make judgments very quickly (Torres-Nabel, 2016). Therefore, it is advisable to delve into the strategic communication planning deployed by political leaders on social networks. Taking as a starting point the Andalusian Parliament elections of 2022, the following research questions arise:

> PI1. What are the main themes and strategies deployed by the Andalusian candidates in X during the electoral process?
>
> PI2. What role do feelings and emotions play in the discourse of these regional leaders?
>
> PI3. How does the digital audience respond to the impact of messages posted by political leaders on X?

Methodology

A quantitative-qualitative (Krippendorff, 2019; Silverman, 2016) and discursive (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2017; Van-Dijk, 2015) content analysis methodology is applied, based on the issue frame theory (Aalberg *et al.,* 2017). The social network X is chosen for this research, due to the power and impact as a tool of political communication during the electoral processes (Campos-Domínguez, 2017).

With the aim of delving into the stories constructed by the candidates for the regional elections of Andalusia in 2022, all the messages that the leaders of the political parties with parliamentary representation publish in their personal accounts (see table 1) from the beginning of the electoral campaign (June 3, 2022) until its closure (June 17, 2022) are collected.

Table 1

Andalusian political candidates studied

Candidate	Account in X
Juan Manuel Moreno (Partido Popular)	@JuanMa_Moreno
Juan Espadas (PSOE)	@_juanespadas
Juan Marín (Citizens)	@JuanMarin_
Macarena Olona (Vox)	@Macarena_Olona
Inmaculada Nieto (For Andalusia)	@InmaNietoC
Teresa Rodríguez (Adelante Andalucía)	@TeresaRodr_

To prepare the corpus, the information is downloaded through the Twittonoma program, and all the tweets published by the six leaders during the period studied. Subsequently, a screening is performed to rule out retweets or messages that cannot be analyzed by containing links or quotes to tweets that are no longer available. The sample universe is composed of 690 tweets that leaders post over a 15-day time frame.

To carry out this study, a coding manual composed of nine variables is designed and structured in three large blocks: issue frame/game frame (themes and strategies), discursiveness (feelings and tone) and message dissemination (virality). Each of these methodological strategies answers one of the research questions. The data obtained are finally processed for statistical exploitation using the IBM SPSS Statistics program (Version 25).

Table 2

Correspondence between research questions and methods

Research Questions (PI)	Indicators
PI1. What are the main themes and strategies deployed by the Andalusian candidates in X during the electoral process?	Issue frame (themes) / Game frame (strategies)
PI2. What role do feelings and emotions play in the discourse of these regional leaders?	Discursiveness (tone and emotions)
PI3. How does the digital audience respond to the impact of messages posted by political leaders on X?	Virality (retweets, *likes* and answers)

For studying the thematic agenda and discursive strategies, the general sample (n=690) is subjected to a random previous selection from 50 tweets to determine the main categories. When it comes to delving into the narratives deployed by the leaders, it is committed to studying the bias of the tweets (Yeste and Franch, 2018) from three levels (positive, neutral and negative), which allow to check the attitude of the candidates. Following previous methodological models (López-López *et al.,* 2020; Moret-Soler *et al.,* 2022), it also delves into the emotions displayed by the leaders, as well as the geographical approach from which they build their discourse (national, Andalusian, provincial, local or general). To evaluate the response of the citizenry, a viralization calculation formula (Pérez-Curiel *et al.,* 2022) is used that takes into account retweets*,* likes and answers ((SUM retweets*2 + SUM likes + SUM answers) / SUM tweets published).

Analysis of results

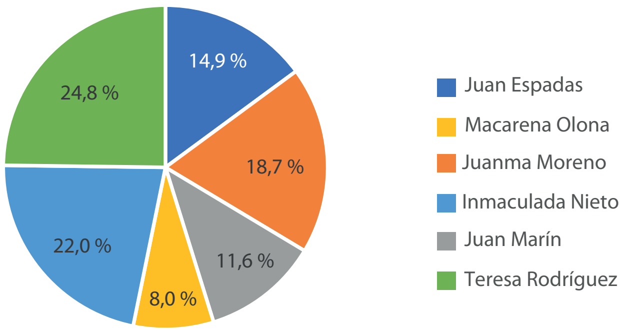
Approach to sample

When determining the general characteristics of the tweets published by the six Andalusian candidates in the 2022 elections, it should be noted that the sample consists of 690 messages. In this sense, there is an average production per candidate of 115 tweets throughout the campaign and 7.6 messages per day. Candidates make moderate use of X to communicate with the citizenry, without reaching significant levels of emphasis.

If the data are disaggregated by each leader (figure 1), the results point to greater use by the leaders of alternative left parties, Teresa Rodríguez (24.8%) and Inmaculada Nieto (22%), as well as President Juanma Moreno (18.7%). While the socialist candidate, Juan Espadas (14.9%), and Ciudadanos, Juan Marín (11.6%), respond to average production, the low publication rate of the Vox candidate, Macarena Olona (8%), is striking.

Figure 1

Publication frequency per candidate

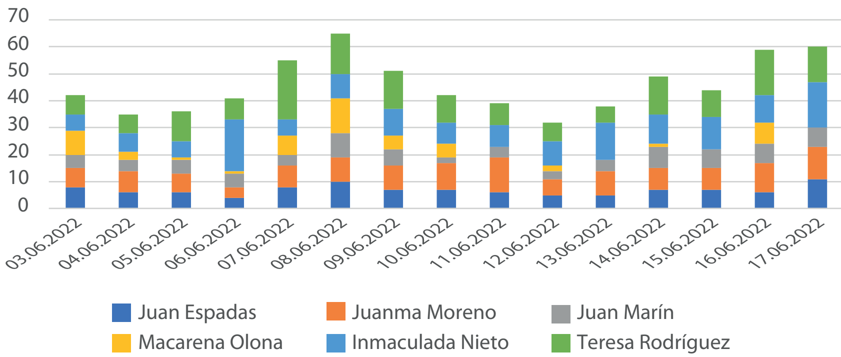


Deepening on the characteristics of the speech of the Andalusian candidates in X, it is worth highlighting the use they make of the audiovisual potential of the network, with a clear majority of messages supported by videos (43.8%) and photographs (39.1%), pointing to a communication strategy planned by their teams and not to spontaneous or improvised personal communication. Taking into account the figures achieved by each political leader, there is a greater tendency to incorporate edited videos in the case of Juanma Moreno (64.3%), Juan Espadas (51.5%), Juan Marín (51.2%) and Inmaculada Nieto (47.4%). The only candidates to break this trend are Teresa Rodríguez, who relies more on images (39.2%) and who has a considerable number of publications without an audiovisual element (16.4%), as well as Macarena Olona, who uses photographs to a large extent (63.3%).

Another interesting aspect of the sample is the frequency of publication of the candidates throughout the campaign. In this regard, the data indicate lower production in the days leading up to the televised debates on 6 and 13 June. An issue that may be related to the narrowing of the agenda of the leaders for the preparation of the debate. On the contrary, higher figures are observed (Figure 2) in the days after these meetings, especially the first one, as well as during the last days of the campaign. As for the candidates, it is striking that the leader of Vox significantly decreases the number of messages on X during the second half of the campaign, going so far as not to publish any tweets in four days.

Figure 2

Number of publications per candidate per day

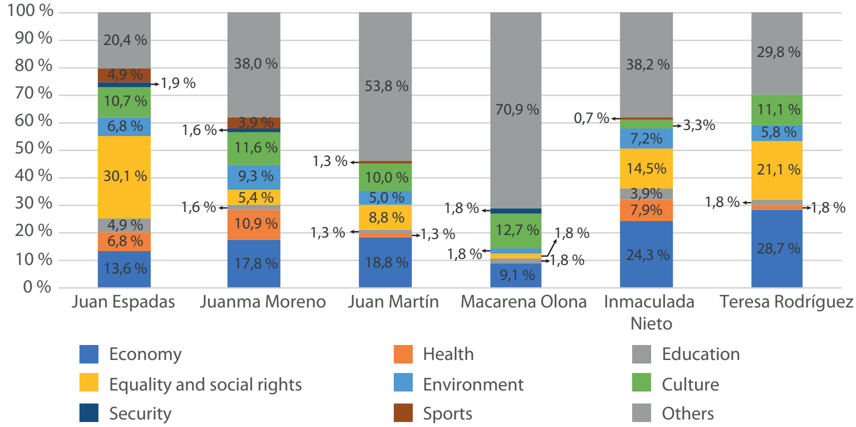


Theme and strategy of the Andalusian candidates

The study of the thematic agenda of Andalusian political leaders points to a remarkable thematic diversity (see figure 3). In this way, data show a greater interest in economic and employment issues (20.7%), equality and social rights (15.1%), culture (9.4%) or the environment (6.5%). On the contrary, the low impact of basic Andalusian government competences, such as health (5.4%) or education (2.6%), is significant. However, the most remarkable result of this research is the high production of other types of messages (37.8%), which do not address a political or management issue, and which are more related to the very routine of the electoral campaign.

Figure 3

Main themes addressed by candidate



Deepening on the thematic construction of the narrative of the different candidates, it should be noted that the president and popular candidate Juanma Moreno designs the speech from a plurality of contents related to his management at the head of Junta de Andalucía, such as the economy (17.8%), culture (11.6%), health (10.9%) or the environment (9.3%), leaving behind other issues such as equality and social rights (5.4%) or education (1.6%). In the case of the socialist leader, the metrics point to a great concern for social policies (30.1%), ahead of the economy (13.6%), health (6.8%) or education (4.9%). For their part, the leaders of alternative left parties pay attention to equality and social rights, but to a lesser extent, focusing on the employment situation or the economy. Finally, as for Juan Marín (53.8%) and Macarena Olona (70.9%), it is a characteristic the relevance of messages that lack political burden or that focus on the very development of the campaign, minimizing management issues or political issues.

Regarding the strategies implemented by the candidates for the Andalusian elections, it should be noted that there is no definite pattern, with the tactics most commonly used being voter mobilization (23.8%), spreading ideology (22.3%), criticism of the opponent (17%) or campaign promises (16.4%). Rumbling the data by leader studied, the president of the Andalusian government Juanma Moreno develops a campaign based on promises (24.8%) or mobilization (24%), minimizing criticism of the adversary as much as possible (2.3%). Meanwhile, the socialist Espadas constructs a story based on combining ideology (24.3%), promises (18.4%), mobilization (18.4%) and criticism to the contrary (13.6%). Meanwhile, the leader of Ciudadanos focuses on mobilizing his electorate (35%) to face negative polls on the party, while the Vox candidate is committed to ideology (27.3%) and tweets in which an explicit strategy is not detected (32.7%). Finally, it highlights the high percentage of criticism of the adversary in the messages of Inmaculada Nieto (30.3%), which combines with mobilization (27.6%), and Teresa Rodríguez (24%), with ideology (33.3%).

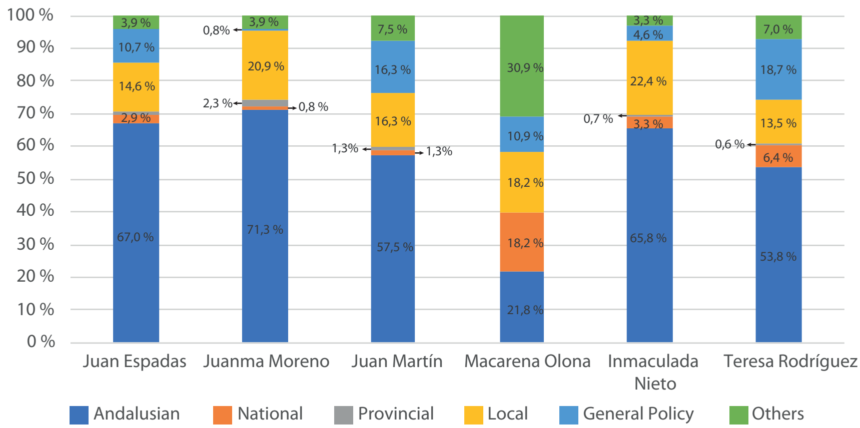
Another perspective of study is the thematic-geographical approach of leaders during the electoral campaign. In this regard, a majority of messages in Andalusian key (59.6%) were observed, followed at a distance by tweets in local key (17.7%) or general policy (10.1%). Significantly, messages in national (4.5%) or local (1%) key have little weight. This predominance of the Andalusian to the detriment of the national is maintained (see figure 4) in all candidates, except in the case of Macarena Olona, with several messages that lack a territorial approach (30.9%) and with a very small distance between the regional (21.8%) and national (18.2%) key. On the contrary, it is Juanma Moreno who uses a discourse with repeated reference to Andalusian issues (71.3%), practically silencing questions of state scope (0.8%) or general policy (0.8%).

The use of feelings in the political narrative

To delve into the narrative constructed by the candidates for the Presidency of the Junta de Andalucía, it is studied the bias of the tweets that they publish during the electoral campaign. The metrics obtained point to a clearly positive discourse (61.4%), with a reduced presence of negative tweets (28.3%) and especially neutral tone (10.3%). Considering the results disaggregated by each leader, it is confirmed that Juanma Moreno presents a campaign focused on positivity (96.9%), a strategy shared with Juan Marín (88.8%), Juan Espadas (81.6%) and to a lesser extent with Macarena Olona (63.6%). On the contrary, the story of Inmaculada Nieto (50.7%) or Teresa Rodríguez (49.1%) is based on negative messages denouncing the situation of citizens or public services.

Figure 4

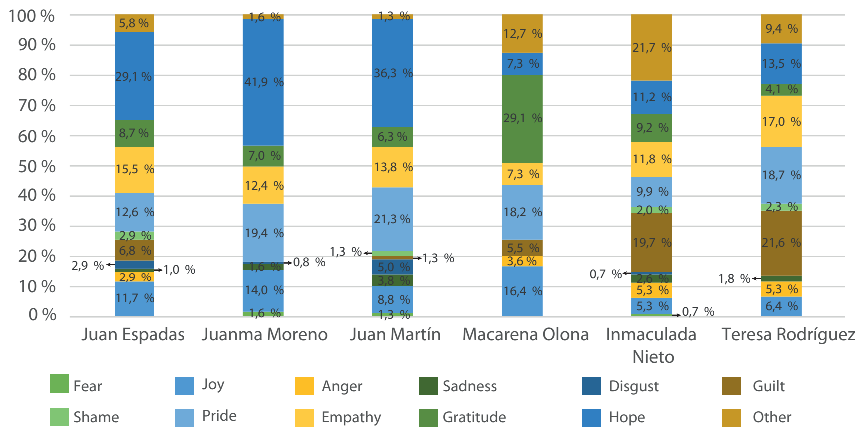
Thematic-geographical approach by candidate



In line with these results, the most employed feelings by leaders in their tweets (see Figure 5) are positive. Hope (22.8%), pride (16.2%) or empathy (13.6%) stand out. Also, a high number of publications focused on guilt (11.3%) have also been detected, starring the leaders of Adelante Andalucía and Por Andalucía, who criticize the management of the Andalusian government. In fact, they are referents both in the case of Teresa Rodríguez (21.6%) and in that of Inmaculada Nieto (19.7%). Facing these denounces of the left-wing party, Juanma Moreno and Juan Marín follow a strategy focused on hope for the measures they will implement in the next legislature (41.9% and 36.3%), as well as for the pride of the management carried out (19.4% and 21.3%). Juan Espadas' speech also highlighted hope (29.1%), empathy with citizens (15.5%) and pride (12.6%).

Figure 5

Typology of feelings per candidate



The response of digital audiences

Given the strategies and themes deployed by the candidates, the study of retweets, likes and responses to tweets allow sketching certain behaviors of digital audiences. This data may not be representative, given the high level of politicization quantified in user messages. In global terms, it can be said that the public pays a relative interest to the publications of the Andalusian leaders (1542), with an average of 304 retweets, 814 likes and 121 responses. However, these data should be disaggregated by candidate, as Vox leader Macarena Olona reaches a wide viralization (7059) compared to the rest. Thus, Inmaculada Nieto (1885) achieves high metrics, but far below the far-right candidate. Meanwhile, the leaders of the majority parties, both Juan Espadas (1092) and Juanma Moreno (917) reach lower figures. In the case of Juan Marín (674) and Teresa Rodríguez (612), the diffusion and response to his speech on the net is minimal.

Considering the different strategies employed by the candidates, there is more interaction with messages criticizing the opponent (1765) and spreading ideology (1528) than in those promising (1265) or trying to mobilize the electorate (1168). This data is consistent with the analysis of the viralization of tweets according to the bias used, thus confirming a greater diffusion of negative messages (1706), ahead of positive messages (1427) or neutral messages (1256). Finally, it also reinforces the theory that citizens interact more with content related to public services that directly affect them, such as education (1848) or health (1770), compared to other political issues such as equality (1225), the economy (1210), culture (1095) and, especially, the environment (956).

Discussion and conclusions

Analyzing the communication strategies of political leaders in X during the campaign of the elections to the Parliament of Andalusia in 2022 as an objective of the research allows to generate new findings on the previous published literature (Campos-Domínguez, 2017; Domínguez-García *et al.,* 2023; Murthy, 2018; Rúas-Araújo and Casero-Ripollés, 2018), as well as to reflect on demonstrated scientific arguments on a new leadership model in which the use of feelings and emotions (Jaráiz *et al*., 2020a; Karlsen and Enjolras, 2 016; López-López *et al*., 2020; Serrano-Puche, 2016) occupies a prominent place in the political discourse on social networks.

Answering the first research question (PI1), the statistical results highlight a moderate use of X by political leaders to communicate with their constituents. However, it is remarkable in all the profiles analyzed a strategic planning previously designed by the communication teams, which acts ahead of the personal use of the network by the candidate. This issue is evidenced by the presence of professional videos or images aimed at balancing some weakness of the discursive potential of leaders in X during the elections.

Deepening on the construction of the applied communicative tactics, the results point to a construction of the agenda supported by thematic lines, strategies and diverse approaches according to the ideological, programmatic and mobilizing axis established by each political formation. It is noteworthy that most of the messages published do not respond to a defined plan of action and are related to the daily life of the campaign in an attempt to humanize the candidate and bring him closer as a person to the citizenry.

There is more unanimity in the strategy of framing the campaign in the field of Andalusian politics to the detriment of the national key. In this sense, the most obvious example corresponds to the attitude of the PP leader, Moreno Bonilla, who focuses on his government management as president of the

Junta de Andalucía and refuses to position himself on national conflicts. On the contrary, the only candidate who breaks this trend is the representative of Vox, Macarena Olona, who opts for a flat campaign, devoid of ideology and with a national approach very similar to the regional reference.

The findings regarding the second research question (PI2), focused on the use of emotions as a common element of the discourse of all leaders, a previous strategy is appreciated, with a majority of messages that bet on printing a positive tone to the campaign, although with divergences in the typology of feelings that the candidates use in their messages. However, the findings of this research point to a planning and selection of the tone and emotions used by leaders based on the political narrative that is intended to build.

In this line, the influence of the theme, the approaches and the use of emotions on the digital audience could be a differentiation factor in the viralization levels of the political message. In the case of emerging parties with higher polarization rates (Vox and Adelante Andalucía), the levels of viralization are exceeded compared to the results of traditional parties (PP and PSOE). Especially noteworthy are the tweets posted by the far-right candidate, which reach metrics seven times higher than other leaders.

This behavior of X users is connected to the third research question (PI3) focused on the levels of response of citizens to the impact of the political message. The research highlights that citizens interact more with polarizing discourses, in which opponents are criticized or ideology is spread, ahead of those in which measures are promised or votes are called. In this line, it is also confirmed a greater tendency to viralize more negativity than positivity in content, generating a more sensationalist than rational attitude, typical of the political conversation in the networks.

The common denominator that unifies the findings of this study points to a strategic planning of the messages disseminated by each leader in the electoral campaign, using X as another tool to support the construction of the political narrative. In this sense, it confirms a tendency to humanize the candidate and to print a code of feelings and emotions, regardless of ideological or programmatic factors. However, from the position of the audiences, the interaction and response of the public responds to viralization rates that favor polarization and the dissemination of a negative message and confrontation between the leaders.

One of the limitations of this research is that communication strategies in social networks involve different platforms, so it would be necessary to study the communication of Andalusian candidates on other platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram or TikTok. In this line, for future research it would also be useful to delve into the responses of X users to confirm these trends of positioning of digital audiences in electoral periods. From another perspective, a comparative analysis between the personal accounts of the candidates and that of their political formations could be considered to determine the value of leadership ahead of the role of government and party.

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Kilometer 0: the beginning of migratory journeys of domestic workers in Chile

Kilómetro 0: inicio de las trayectorias migratorias de trabajadoras domésticas en Chile

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Abstract
This study aims to describe how the migratory trajectories of migrant domestic workers begin in Chile and the role of migratory networks and emotional factors in their decisions. A qualitative analysis of six biographical narratives is employed to examine the complexities of their labor and migratory trajectories, influenced by intersecting factors such as gender, class, and ethnicity in the context of global care chains. The results reveal five main moments when making the decision to migrate. The first moment is characterized by the fact that none of the cases had worked as domestic workers in their home countries. In the second moment, the need to change their circumstances in their home countries arises, often due to political crises, economic challenges, or gender-based violence. The third moment involves the existence of a migratory network of friends and family who assist in their journey. In the fourth moment, a significant emotional factor plays a central role in the decision to migrate, influencing the timing of the decision. Finally, in the fifth moment, the decision to migrate to Chile is made.

Keywords
Domestic work, trajectories, migration, migratory networks, intersectionalities, gender, South-South migration, global care chains.

Resumen

Este estudio busca describir cómo se inician las trayectorias migratorias de las Trabajadoras de Casa Particular Migrantes (TCP) en Chile, y el papel de las redes migratorias y elementos afectivos en sus decisiones. A través de un análisis cualitativo de seis narrativas biográficas, se exploran las complejidades de sus trayectorias laborales y migratorias, las cuales están atravesadas por factores interseccionales como género, clase y etnicidad, en el contexto de cadenas globales de cuidado. Los resultados revelan cinco momentos centrales en la toma de decisiones de migrar. En primer lugar, en ninguno de los casos las trabajadoras se habían desempeñado como trabajadoras domésticas en sus países de origen. En segundo lugar, surge la necesidad de cambiar una realidad vivida en sus territorios, como crisis políticas, económicas o violencia de género. En tercer lugar, existe una red migratoria de amigos y familiares que les ayuda a transitar esta trayectoria. En cuarto lugar, destaca la existencia de un factor afectivo central al momento de tomar la decisión de migrar, el cual marca la temporalidad de esta decisión. Finalmente, en quinto lugar, se toma la decisión de migrar a Chile. El principal resultado de esta investigación es que la decisión temporal de migrar corresponde a una decisión afectiva, más allá de los elementos laborales y económicos descritos previamente por la literatura.

Palabras clave

Trabajo doméstico, trayectorias, migración, redes migratorias, interseccionalidades, género, migración Sur-Sur, cadenas globales de cuidado.

Introduction

Migration has been a constant in human history. In 2000, there were 150 million migrants, a number that increased to 272 million in 2020 (OIM, 2020), although the COVID-19 pandemic slightly reduced these numbers (OIM, 2022). Almost half of the migrants are women and refugees, many of whom are fleeing violence and poverty (Fleischer and Marin, 2019; ONU, 2021). Since the 1960s, more women have migrated alone, seeking better living conditions and escaping violence (Pérez, 2017), leading to more visibility of women in migration studies (Hochschild, 2001; Arriagada and Todaro, 2012; Stefoni, 2011). These studies not only recognize the growing presence of women in migration flows, but also underline the need for a gender perspective in migration analysis.

Migrant women in Chile, mainly young people between the ages of 20 and 35, represent a significant proportion of the migrant labor force (Sandoval, 2017; INE, 2020). Many are engaged in domestic work (Stefoni, 2018). Chilean migration policies have evolved, but still face challenges in terms of migrants' rights and recognition (Galaz *et al.,* 2017). Migrants in Chile often face job insecurity, inadequate housing, and discrimination (Avaria *el al*, 2021). These challenges indicate a significant gap between migration policies and their effective implementation (Esnouf *et al.,* 2023), highlighting the need for reforms that guarantee rights and improve the living conditions of migrants.

This study specifically aims to explore the initial moment of the migratory trajectories of the MDW in Chile, through a qualitative analysis of six biographical narratives, and seeks to understand the complexities and characteristics of these trajectories, and how they are crossed by intersectional factors such as gender, class and migratory status.

The research is framed in a decolonial and intersectional feminist approach, which allows not only to visualize the multiple oppressions faced by women, but also to highlight their agency strategies. In this way, we can understand the power dynamics and historical structures that mark the experiences of MDWs.

The following sections show the current situation of MDWs in Chile, as well as the biographical-narrative method, and the results by explaining the central moments in the decision-making of migration and the strategies of these women to begin to transit their new reality in Chile.

The employment situation of migrant domestic workers in Chile

More than 10% of migrants work in Chile in domestic service, according to the CASEN survey (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia, 2022; Bravo, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated job insecurity in the sector (OIT, 2020). The lack of formal recognition of this work as an integral part of the economy has perpetuated its invisibility and marginalization (Valenzuela and Mora, 2009; Dos Santos, 2012; Garazi, 2016). The conditions of domestic work in Chile present unique challenges, with long hours and vulnerability to exploitation (Leiva *et al.,* 2017). Reproductive work, paid or not, often involves caring for others and developing personal relationships with employers (Comelin and Leiva, 2017; Valenzuela and Mora, 2009). Despite that, domestic workers have resisted and promoted their rights through unionization and community building (Arteaga *et al.,* 2019; Federici, 2015; Munshi *et al.,* 2010). This organization and resistance have been reflected in the case of Chile in SINTRACAP, who have their doors open to migrant workers, however, most of them do not participate due to their migratory status. Therefore, migration networks are vital for these workers, providing support and facilitating migration (Arango, 2003). Migration networks play a central role in the lives of migrant domestic workers, helping them to establish themselves in the country of destination and access to job opportunities (González, 2001). In this sense, the resistance of the MDW in Chile has manifested itself through unionization and the fight for labor rights. The union organization has been a key for the empowerment and defense of the rights of these workers (Ruiz and del Campo, 2013). From this place, it is important to think about the different forms of agency and resistance that workers may have, however, it is important to clarify that, in the case of MDWs in Chile, it is complex to organize because of the immigration status mentioned above, and also because it is a type of work in which there is no regular contact between them, since their places of work are separated: private homes.

Decolonial feminist thinking

Decolonial and intersectional feminist thinking is fundamental to understanding the work of migrant domestic workers (MDW). This approach, which integrates the contributions of theorists such as Mohanty (2008), Lugones (2008), Espinosa (2009), Bidaseca (2011), Segato (2011), Fraser (2015), and Salem (2016), provides a critical lens to examine the multiple oppressions these women face, considering how colonial history and power structures impact their lives in contemporary society. This approach not only makes oppressions visible, but also challenges the hegemonic narratives that perpetuate these inequalities. Intersectionality, a theoretical approach developed by Crenshaw (1991) and expanded by Hill Collins (1990), is used to analyze how multiple axes of oppression, such as gender, race, social class, and nationality, intersect and reinforce in the experience of MDWs. Intersectionality provides a framework for understanding the complexity of South-South oppression and migration, enabling a better understanding of how racism, classism, xenophobia, and others differentiate trajectories and distribute vulnerabilities and privileges globally. Feminist theories provide a framework for analyzing how global structures and power relations affect women, emphasizing the influence of colonial history on the oppression of women and their bodies. This analysis is important to understand the multiple layers of oppression faced by MDWs.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) highlights the relevance of the gender category in feminist studies, while Crenshaw's intersectional perspective shows that the categories of identity such as gender and race cannot be understood in isolation. This approach is particularly useful for understanding the trajectories of South-South migrant women, who experience interconnected oppressions related to multiple identities. Latin American decolonial feminism, as approached by theorists such as Mohanty (2008), highlights the importance of considering other forms of oppression, beyond the patriarchal system, that affect women, in this case in Latin American territories. This approach criticizes Western feminism for its colonial matrix and for ignoring the realities of Latin America, promoting the need to consider feminist interests and strategies that reflect the autonomy, geography, history and culture of these regions. This recognition is essential to building a truly emancipatory feminism.

Decolonial and intersectional feminist thinking provides an essential tool to understand and reflect on the work and struggles of MDWs, allowing a more complete and enriching view of their experiences and challenges. Through this lens, it is possible not only to understand oppressions, but also to identify forms of resistance and different agencies.

Global Care Chains

"Global Care Chains" represent a phenomenon where women are mostly responsible for care, either as migrant domestic workers in the destination country or as caregivers for migrant women's children in the country of origin. This situation is analyzed by authors such as Comelin and Leiva (2017), and Walton-Roberts (2019), Leiva, Mansilla and Comelín (2021). These chains reflect how women from the global South become wage workers of reproduction in the global North, affecting their own reproductive capacity, while women from the North are oriented towards production, according to Morini (2010). These dynamics highlight global inequalities and developed countries' reliance on the labor force of women from countries in the global south, and especially for female migrant workers.

The study of these chains began in the 1990s, highlighting researchers such as Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) and Ávila and Hondagneu-Sotelo (1997), who incorporated the gender approach in migration studies. The research focuses on inequalities between immigrant and national women, and are manifested in the context of the relief of domestic reproductive work in post-industrial countries. Key contributors in this field include Chang (2000), Parrenas (2001) and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001, 2007) in the United States; Constable (1997) and Lan (2006) in Asia; and Escrivá (2000) and Anderson (2000) in Europe. This research has been fundamental to understand gender dynamics, and to be able to understand migration processes and how global power structures influence the lives of migrant women.

In the South-South context, research such as Diaz (2016) has analyzed these chains and their relevance in Latin American migratory circuits. These studies highlight the interaction of care chains with state policies and the dynamics of gender, ethnicity, and class. Research in Latin America, such as Dutra (2015) and Mallimaci (2018), has focused on how women take responsibility for care and the lack of recognition of this work, both externally and by the workers themselves. These studies explain how structural inequalities and a lack of protection policies affect care workers, perpetuating cycles of vulnerability and exploitation.

In Chile, the increase in female labor participation has led to the hiring of migrant domestic workers, especially from Peru and Bolivia, to take care of children and dependents (Leiva and Comelin, 2017; Arrigada and Todaro, 2012). Boric Bargetto (2021) and Mallimaci (2018) have studied how these workers form work paths linked to their migration projects. As Leiva and Ross (2016) describe, these chains demonstrate how migration and domestic work are interconnected in a globalized and unequal context.

Labor and migration trajectories

This research focuses on the labor and migration trajectories of migrant domestic workers, addressing both individual and structural perspectives. It adopts a biographical trajectory vision that considers individual events and the influence of social structures, reflecting the interaction between personal experiences and the broader social context. This approach, supported by theorists such as Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Bourdieu, Giddens and Lahire, is particularly relevant to understanding the experiences of South-South migrant workers (Roberti, 2017).

The study emphasizes the need to integrate both events into the analysis, considering both the “individual events” that make up the biographical trajectories and the “historical events” that influence social structures (Balán, 1977). The biographical-narrative approach makes sense to understand the individual experiences and complexities faced by these workers. This methodology allows to explore the labor and social inequalities they face, as well as their personal experiences, through their own voices and narratives, thus placing their work trajectories in a specific sociohistorical context (Roberti, 2017).

In addition, structuralist and post-structuralist authors, such as Bourdieu and Giddens, examine how social structures and migration policies impact these women’s job opportunities. Studies such as those of Martínez Franzoni and Sánchez-Ancochea (2014), demonstrate the relevance of these structural influences on the working conditions and trajectories of women workers. Rita Segato, from a post-structuralist perspective, provides analysis on gender and power dynamics in domestic work in Latin America (Segato, 2003).

The concept of migration trajectory is approached from various strategies, including route mapping and analysis of migration sequences. The role of factors such as family, living conditions and mobility in migration decision-making is considered (Massey, 2005). Research by authors such as Sassone in Latin America and others in France highlights the importance of social networks, family, life cycles and territorial conditions in understanding migration trajectories (Bonvalet and Levy, 2010).

Different approaches are considered for understanding work trajectories, such as historical-economic, and narrative logics, senses and identities. This last approach, focused on the assessments of the workers themselves on their trajectories and the generation of categories from their speeches, is the one selected for this research (Cirami and Ferrari, 2018). In this way, the question to answer is: How do the trajectories of migrant domestic workers start in Chile?

Methodology

This study corresponds to the first of three of a doctoral theses on the Trajectories of Migrant Private Domestic Workers in Chile, being the main objective of the research to analyze the trajectories of South-South Migrant Private Household Workers (MDW) in Chile through their life stories from a narrative perspective. The specific objective of this study is to understand how these trajectories begin. The type of research is applied, and the design of this study was based on a qualitative methodology (Willing, 2008; Denzin and Lincoln, 2017), corresponding to case studies of multiple parallel stories from a narrative perspective (Kohler, 2007; 2008), specifically biographical-narrative (Bertaux, 2005), based on the use of life stories (Pujadas, 2002; McAdams, 2012) to describe six cases of migrant Domestic Workers in Chile.

The sample was selected not for its size, but for the richness of the data and the skills of the researcher (Martínez-Salgado, 2012). A theoretical sampling was used (Iñiguez-Rueda, 2018), and the selection criteria included: type of work (inside or outside doors), existence of a caregiver in the country of origin, and participation in migrant worker organizations. These criteria ensure a group with diverse experiences and contexts of migrant workers. Three biographical interviews were conducted with each participant.

Table 1

Participants interviewed

Participant	Nationality	Age	Children/ grandchildren	Current City	Type of work
1	Venezuelan	55	2 children: 1 son and 1 granddaughter in Chile. 1 daughter and 1 granddaughter in Venezuela.	Lampa	Partial
2	Colombian	38	1 daughter (16 years old) in Chile. He lives with her.	Coquimbo	Partial
3	Peruvian	56	1 daughter and 1 granddaughter in Peru	Arica	Doors in

Participant	Nationality	Age	Children/ grandchildren	Current City	Type of work
4	Venezuelan	46	3 children 2 in Chile 1 in Venezuela	Santiago	Doors in
5	Peruvian	39	2 children 1 in Peru 1 in Chile.	Santiago	Doors Inside/ Doors outside
6	Colombian	40	No children	San Antonio	Doors outside

Note. Own elaboration based on the data of the participants.

The biographical technique of parallel multiple narrative was used to compile narratives of the workers. The retrospective biographical interviews were structured in three cycles, addressing chronological aspects of migration, working life and global experiences in care work. Successive analyzes of transcripts and coding of interviews were performed.

The analysis included a vertical and horizontal approach to life stories. Each case was analyzed individually (vertical analysis) and then the stories were compared to identify patterns and differences (horizontal analysis). Vertical analysis allows a deep and detailed understanding of each case, while horizontal analysis identifies common and divergent topics between cases. Narrative and content analysis approaches were used to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of women workers (Bolívar *et al.,* 2001).

The study provided a temporal analysis of the experiences of female migrant workers in Chile, using a qualitative biographical-narrative methodology focused on the value of their personal stories and the listening of their voices.

To ensure transparency and the criteria of the interview process, a theoretical selection of participants with diverse experiences was used to ensure adequate representation, the interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility and depth in the exploration of relevant topics. They were carried out in convenient and safe places for the participants, ensuring their comfort and privacy, such as their own homes, and others were carried out online according to the geographical location of the researcher and the participants. As for biases, open questions and reflection and clarification techniques were used to ensure accurate understanding of the answers.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed with the participants' consent. Data triangulation and peer review were used to ensure the validity and objectivity of the findings. These steps ensure that the data production process is rigorous, transparent, and effective in capturing the experiences and perspectives of female migrant workers.

Results

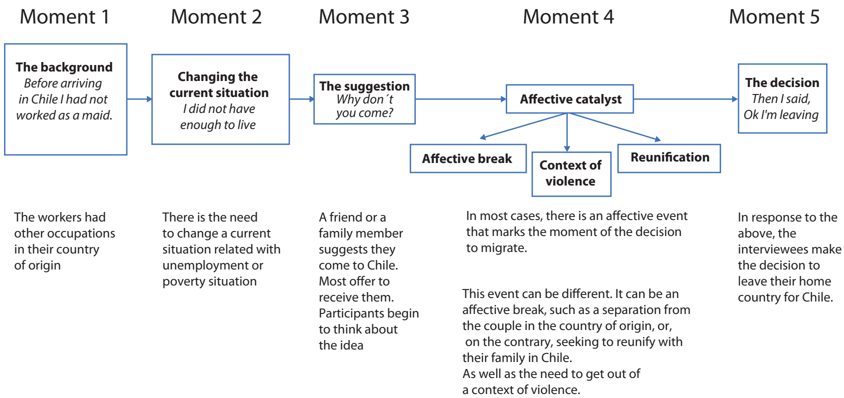
The analogy of "kilometer zero," a specific point in many countries from which all distances are measured—usually located in the capital—is used here to illustrate the beginning of a meaningful journey. Similarly, this concept applies to roads, where each section is numbered based on its distance to a specific location, and to cities, where a central point such as the post office often serves as a reference. For the interviewees, this moment represents a critical moment of decision.

This study presented a sequence of five thematic axes (see Figure 1), starting with "The Background", which reveals how women workers did not engage in domestic work in their home countries. The second axis shows the need to "Change the current situation" presented by the participants, motivated by unfavorable economic or contextual conditions. The third axis introduces a "Suggestion" from a friend or family member to migrate Chile to work. The fourth axis, called the affective catalyst, highlights the emotional elements that influence the decision to migrate. Finally, the fifth axis incorporates the decision to undertake migration as a culmination of the previous events, at which time the interviewees leave their country to begin their new trajectory in Chile.

It is interesting to note that some interviewees choose to begin their story in the moment when they decide to migrate, omitting references to their childhood or previous moments and leaving that for the end. This study details the decision-making process, from the previous employment situation to the arrival in Chile, outlining the path from contemplation to action.

Figure 1

Outline the results



Note. Own elaboration based on the analyzes.

First Moment: The Background: Before arriving in Chile I had not worked as a maid

In this initial phase, the interviewees shared their experiences prior to migrating to Chile, revealing that they had not worked as maids in their countries of origin. As detailed in the introduction, many had technical training, such as a textile technician, watchmaker or nurse, and in other cases, vocational training, for example, a Venezuelan educator. However, none has been able to validate their training in Chile.

The migration process examined suggests a learning of new work practices and a transformation of social identity. Indeed, previous occupation no longer corresponds to their current employment. This transition allows exploring labor mobility for migrant domestic workers (MDW). Although they were technically or professionally trained in their home countries, factors such as unemployment, the feminization of poverty or violence forced them to migrate. Already in the receiving country, they face the impossibility of continuing in their previous labor areas and opt for domestic service, a sector that, according to studies, shows greater employment opportunities for MDWs in Argentina (Mallimaci, 2018). The findings of this research are similar to those studies, showing that the participants abandon their original career to undertake a totally different occupation.

Below are two examples of trajectories in which it is visible that their work in the country of origin was different from that of the country of destination. This first narrative corresponds to the worker who is a watch technician and worked in a watch company in Colombia:

> I was working in a company called Casio, where I had been working for four years. It is an excellent company, one of the best companies in Colombia for watches. I'm a watch technician. Then as in December I decided to quit because I was a little stressed at work by the boss, then in November I started in another job. (Interviewed nº2, Colombia, watch technician)

This participant left her employment in watchmaking for working reasons, abandoning her last position when receiving her visa to Chile. Until that time, she had not experienced working in the domestic area, performing in areas away from care tasks, which differs significantly from roles traditionally associated with the reproductive and already feminized, such as domestic work (Morini, 2010; Federici, 2015). This change represents a radical transformation in their work trajectory, moving from a job considered "productive" to a paid reproductive one in Chile. Similarly, other interviewees have had experiences of reproductive work in their home countries.

It highlights a contrast between previous occupations in their home countries and their jobs in Chile, where there was none previously performed domestic work. This is related to the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 1990; Hooks, 1990), which suggests that, because they are women, foreigners and face situations of poverty, they are channeled to certain jobs. This phenomenon of intersectionality predisposes interviewees to domestic work, a work traditionally assigned to women, in line with Segato's (2003) analysis of gender-based violence and labor power dynamics, where race, class, ethnicity and migratory status influence their inclusion in this sector.

Second moment: the need to change the current situation

The situation in the country of origin is interwoven with the personal and individual narratives of the interviewees. In many cases, it is gender issues that force them to leave their countries; for example, the context of sexual violence in their countries of origin or the feminization of poverty (PNUD, 2015). This explains the need to change a situation that is being experienced in the context of migrant workers' origin.

However, one of the situations they face in the country of origin is unemployment. This case will be exemplified by the situation of the interviewee nº6 from Colombia, who relates that this leads her to think about traveling to Chile since she did not have a job related to her profession in the country of origin:

> I had a friend here, so I asked her how Chile was doing and she said it was ok, and I knew it was my opportunity to come because my reality was very bad, 'Chile is not the eighth wonder' my friend told me, but there is work, in case you want to come. By the time I arrived in Chile there was a job boom in the first year. I remember that there was a time when I went to Lider and found a job. My friend offered me her house, she told me that I would not be rich but at least I would find a job, so she offered her house so that I could stay and so I could decide. So, she told me 'Well, it is up to you, I give you the opportunity to stay here, to be at my house, all that, but remember that you are not getting rich or anything, but at least she tells me about a job. (interviewed No. 6, Colombia)

The interviewee, affected by unemployment and unable to cover her basic needs or pay debts, contacts a friend in Chile to explore work options, which leads to considering migration as a solution. This dialog starts the process of considering other alternatives that other people might offer. The unemployment is just one example of adverse situations that include violence in the country of origin, highlighting the story of domestic violence and abuse for 15 years by her former partner in Peru, a situation that constantly repeated. Migrating to Santiago de Chile presents itself as a way to escape this cycle of abuse. Thus, the stories combine economic needs and elements such as violence of origin. These structural aspects are intertwined with personal experiences, exploring how personal narratives help build identities through McAdams' (2006) narrative identity theory, relevant when considering previous experiences of violence that drive migration and leave a mark on their identities. The analysis highlights that, although economic reasons are a common reason to want to change their situation, gender-based violence is a determining factor in the migration of women. This analysis is framed within a broader context of political and economic crises in their countries of origin, underlining the importance of understanding each personal story within a biographical-narrative framework, which influences their migratory decisions and the continuous construction of their identities.

Third moment: the suggestion: ‘Why don´t you come?”

In the stories, the idea of migrating develops progressively, from the emergence of the need to change a situation until someone specifically suggests moving to Chile. According to McAdams (2012), self-building is relational, depending on interactions to understand the world and form projects. In this context, the presence of others is relevant in the migratory trajectories of MDWs. Most start migration after conversations with friends or family who mention job opportunities in Chile, sometimes offering accommodation. However, women do not immediately decide to migrate, but meditate on the information for months or years. In the absence of specific data on the impact of personal networks on migration decisions in Chile, this study examines these elements, illustrated by a narrative in which a worker discusses the employment situation in Chile with a friend.

> I had a friend here, so I asked her how Chile was doing and she said it was ok, and I knew it was my opportunity to come because my reality was very bad, ‘Chile is not the eighth wonder’ my friend told me, but there is work, in case you want to come. By the time I arrived in Chile there was a job boom in the first year. I remember that there was a time when I went to Lider and found a job. My friend offered me her house, she told me that I would not be rich but at least I would find a job, so she offered her house so that I could stay and so I could decide. So, she told me ‘Well, it is up to you, I give you the opportunity to stay here, to be at my house, all that, but remember that you are not getting rich or anything, but at least she tells me about a job. (Interviewed No. 6, Colombia)

In this case, the worker talks to a friend who explains that there was work in Chile. It also happens in other cases that talk to family members who live in Chile. This is the case of the interviewee nº5, who, despite the fact that the cousins who lived in Chile do not know her, offer the interviewee at home, specifically, one of the cousins. Most of the interviewees initially stay at the home of those who suggested traveling to Chile. It means that these personal networks not only inform them, but at the same time offer to receive them. For this reason, there is always the intervention of others in this trajectory, making Chile as the destination and not another place.

This is key when 1) deciding to migrate and 2) deciding where to migrate. In this way, and seen from the perspective of McAdams (2012), the others are relevant when building the migration project. From the narrative theory, the voice of the others is relevant in some moments of these migratory trajectories.

Taking up the structural and biographical elements, Segato (2003) argues that gender relations, power structures in the labor field, as well as social, influence how women perceive their opportunities and limitations. The voice of others, in this case, can be central to migrant domestic workers, as they can receive direct (as seen in this example) or indirect messages about job opportunities and quality of life in other countries. Therefore, when migrating, they are influenced by people who have already migrated and, apparently, have succeeded in their work trajectories abroad.

Massey (1990) also highlights the importance of migration networks and transnational connections in the migration process. The voice of others, such as family, friends or acquaintances who have already migrated can be a decisive factor in the decision to undertake the journey, since these references can provide information about job opportunities, accommodation and living conditions in the destination country, which in this case is Chile.

Affective breakdown

The decision-making process to migrate is not a spontaneous event, but a compilation of significant moments leading to action. The emotional break is one of these crucial moments, marking the moment when the decision to migrate is made. Studies in the sociology of emotions, such as those of D'Oliveira-Martins (2018) and Delsignore (2019), emphasize the influence of emotions and affections on decisions and life trajectories, and this is notable in the migratory context. At the local level, research such as Garcés *et al.* (2022) have examined domestic work in Chile as an intrinsically affective work. However, literature has barely explored how these emotions specifically affect the decision to migrate.

The analysis of emotions and affections is important to understand how experiences such as family reunification, the search for job opportunities, or the flight from situations of violence, shape migration decisions and, therefore, the work and personal trajectories of domestic workers. For example, one of the interviewees tells her personal experience of violence and how it made her decide to migrate:

> I was in a 15-year relationship, 15 years of abuse. He beat me too much. I think that sometimes he got to leave my eyes black... I always remember a birthday that I spent locked up, hidden in my dad's house because he had hit me so hard, I was using a straw because I couldn't chew... He hit me so hard that I said no, I can't take it anymore, I'm sick of it, I can't take it anymore. (Interviewee #5)

The narrative reflects that the decision to migrate of the interviewee was motivated by a desire to escape from a relationship of abuse, evidencing an emotional breakdown that motivated her departure from Peru. This type of emotional breakdown, both before and during migration, is a recurring factor in the narratives of many interviewees. In some cases, these breakdowns may also be familiar, such as that of one of the interviewees who left her job to care of her father. However, these affective aspects have not been widely studied in migratory trajectories.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on immigrants' objective conditions, such as income and housing, there is little research on their subjective well-being, including personal perception of life quality and emotional well-being (Angelini *et al.,* 2014; Delsignore, 2019). Understanding this subjective well-being is relevant to gaining a complete view of immigrants' experiences. This includes how social relationships and support networks affect their adaptation and sense of belonging in a new country, which is especially relevant to understanding the emotional and psychological well-being of domestic workers in migratory contexts.

Reunification

The third emotional factor driving migration is the quest for reunification. Unlike the scenarios where people intend to escape from an adverse affective situation, in this context, the decision to migrate is based on the desire to meet with loved ones already established in another country, such as Chile. This was the case of an interviewee who followed her partner to Chile in order to maintain family unity. Her narrative illustrates how previous separation was her motivation to migrate.

The interviewee relates: "My son is 22 years old, my daughter-in-law was pregnant and I brought him to Colombia... I decided to come to Chile because my partner is here, my partner has been in Chile for about 4 years. At 6 months I brought my daughter-in-law and my granddaughter" (interviewed nº1, Venezuela). This decision to migrate underlines the importance of family reunification, as Fleischer and Marín (2019) examine it, stressing that, historically, women have played a traditional role in this type of migration. In this case, the interviewee not only reunites with her partner, but also strives to reunite her son and granddaughter, and hopes to eventually bring the rest of her family from Venezuela.

Well-being, commonly associated with economic and practical factors, is only one side of the coin. Family reunification, from the perspective of this research, is also considered an emotional choice that guides the interviewee's migration. Thus, the research highlights the importance of emotional ties and significant relationships in migration, such as that of the interviewee who migrates in pursuit of company and family support. Understanding this affective dimension is key to comprehensively understanding the trajectories of migrant domestic workers in Chile.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this analysis reflect the complexity and interconnectedness of socio-economic and emotional factors that guide the decisions of migrant domestic workers in Chile, based on the unique stories of each participant. Through the lens of intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 1990), it is evident how the interaction of gender, class and ethnicity shapes the work and personal trajectories of these women.

A first finding and one of the central ones in this study is the intersection between affections and migratory decisions. Migration decisions, being important life choices, arise from a combination of personal, relational and socioeconomic circumstances.

Chapter five observed the presence of significant emotional breakdowns within the studied trajectories, which translate into couple breaks, separations because couples migrate first, or also violence in their homes. These moments, which act as emotional catalysts, have an important impact on their decisions, since although, the economic and labor reasons that the literature reports are still recognized by the participants at the first moment of the interview, at a second moment when we go deeper on the narrative conversation, the interviewees show that this break shows the specific moment in which they decided to migrate. For example: having two years thinking about migrating to Chile as a job option, but finally making the decision at the time of the emotional break. The existing literature, by not comprehensively addressing these subjective dimensions and given the limited attention that has been paid to them so far, highlights the need for a research perspective that encompasses both objective and subjective factors in the analysis of migration trajectories.

Therefore, the stories told by these women reveal multiple dimensions of their migratory trajectories. They are not limited to work or economic reasons; they are also imbued with the search for safety, the escape from violence and, in some cases, the response to crisis situations in their countries of origin. These findings confirm the theories of Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) on the importance of affections in care research.

Second, the migration trajectories of these women are diverse, and several of them faced significant uncertainties and risks. This pattern is directly related to existing opportunities and restrictions, highlighting the influence of socio-economic and legal conditions on their migration and employment experiences. None of the participants had worked in domestic service before arriving in Chile, and all of them had a different career in the country of origin. Upon arriving in Chile, these workers face a challenging work environment, characterized by exploitation and a notable lack of legal protection, especially marked for those without work visas.

Moreover, as domestic workers, MDWs find themselves in a trade that has historically been stigmatized. Domestic work, often seen as an extension of the traditional "female role," rarely gets the economic or social recognition it deserves. This devaluation is intertwined with gender biases, increasing the vulnerability of these women to discrimination and marginalization.

However, far from being merely passive in these conditions, migrant workers exercise forms of resistance and adaptation that demonstrate their agency. The creation of support networks through migration networks, the maximization of temporary spaces for personal and family development, are examples of how migrant workers are not passive subjects, but agents.

The research addressed critical ethical and emotional considerations in qualitative research, as suggested by Sieber (1992), who highlights the importance of carefully addressing ethical aspects in personal and sensitive topics. This ethical approach was critical to ensuring the protection and well-being of participants. Elaborating life stories made visible aspects not easily perceptible in the literature, such as: that the main cause of migration is labor and economic, but that affective decisions emerged clearly in chronological narratives, showing complex nuances in their migratory experiences beyond objective factors.

Moreover, the research focused on migrant domestic workers in Chile, which may limit the generalization of the findings to other contexts. The qualitative methodology, although rich in personal details, may not represent all migratory experiences, and participants' perceptions are influenced by personal and emotional factors. The theoretical selection of participants, while seeking diversity of experiences, may have excluded certain voices. Future research should expand these studies to different populations and contexts to obtain a more complete and nuanced view of migrant workers' experiences in the domestic sector.

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Conviviality and neighborhood identity: a case study in a superdiverse neighborhood in Barcelona

Convivialidad e identidad de barrio: un estudio de caso en un barrio superdiverso de Barcelona

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Abstract
Conviviality in superdiverse neighborhoods has been studied in Anglo-Saxon and Hispanic contexts; however, few researchers have analyzed the relationship between this and neighborhood identity. The latter is an element of cohesion that can facilitate conviviality. Therefore, this article focuses on investigating the connection between conviviality and neighborhood identity, in a superdiverse borough in Barcelona. A qualitative methodology was used with a case study design, in which neighbors were interviewed through semi-structured interviews, focus groups and a systematic evaluative discussion meeting with the community. A total of 79 people participated in all stages of the research. In this specific neighborhood, the results showed that the relationship between conviviality and neighborhood identity is based on the length of stay of the neighbors and the interaction in neighborhood shops as informal community spaces. But these aspects are also influenced by gender, age, and other elements of diversity. A significant obstacle was the "underground" racism of some native neighbors, which affects conviviality and makes it difficult for migrant neighbors to identify with the borough. These results are discussed based on theoretical aspects and possible practical implications.

Keywords
Conviviality, neighborhood identity, superdiversity, migration, intercultural relations, Barcelona.

Resumen
La convivialidad en barrios superdiversos ha sido estudiada en contextos anglosajones e hispanos; sin embargo, pocos investigadores han analizado la relación entre esta y la identidad de barrio. Esta última es un elemento de cohesión que puede facilitar la convivialidad. Por ello, este artículo se centra en indagar la conexión entre convivialidad e identidad de barrio, en un barrio superdiverso en Barcelona. Se utilizó una metodología cualitativa con un diseño de estudio de caso, en el que se entrevistaron a vecinos por medio de entrevistas semiestructuradas, grupos focales y una reunión de discusión sistemática evaluadora con la comunidad. En total participaron 79 personas en todas las etapas de la investigación. En este vecindario específico, los resultados mostraron que la relación entre convivialidad e identidad de barrio está fundamentada en el tiempo de estancia de los vecinos y la interacción en comercios de barrio como espacios comunitarios informales. Pero estos aspectos están influidos también por el género, edad, y otros elementos de diversidad. Un obstáculo significativo fue el racismo "soterrado" de algunos vecinos nativos, el cual afecta la convivialidad y dificulta la identificación con el barrio de los vecinos migrantes. Se discuten estos resultados en base con aspectos teóricos y posibles implicancias prácticas.

Palabras clave
Convivialidad, identidad de barrio, superdiversidad, migraciones, relaciones interculturales, Barcelona.

Introduction

Most Western societies are currently characterized by the high diversity of their members, not only in cultural origins but also in languages, religions, residence status, among others, what has been called "super diversity" (Vertovec, 2023). These characteristics join other diversities that have previously existed in societies, such as social class, age and gender, making up a mixture that challenges social coexistence (Moftizadeh *et al*., 2022; Padilla and Olmos Alcaraz, 2022).

In this context occurs what Gilroy (2004) calls "conviviality", referring to the contact between people from different cultural origins, which becomes a daily practice and bases an interaction that goes beyond ethnic, racial or cultural aspects. But this "beyond" does not ignore the existence of conflicting interactions in which predominate racism and exclusion but refers to the complexity and ambivalence of intercultural relations, where conflict and cordiality coexist in the daily-life contact (Berg and Nowicka, 2019; Valluvan, 2016). In the Spanish context, the term "conviviality" also denotes this double reference to agreements and tensions in everyday relations (Iglesias and Ares, 2021; Torres and Gómez, 2023), but we consider that the term "conviviality" accentuates the character of "living in difference" (Rzepnikowska, 2018), not only between natives and migrants, but between migrants and other differences such as those mentioned above.[1]

On the other hand, one of the preferred spaces to study conviviality has been the neighborhoods, since there are daily meetings that have an impact on intercultural relations (Verkuyten, 2018). Although in recent years there have been several investigations that focus on conviviality in multicultural neighborhoods, both in the Anglo-Saxon field (Berg and Nowicka, 2019; Neal *et al*., 2019; Wessendorf, 2014a, 2014b) and in the Spanish field (Iglesias and Ares, 2021, Padilla *et al*., 2018; Torres and Gómez, 2023), the neighborhood identity related to conviviality has been less explored (van de Vijver *et al*. 2. 15). The relevance of studying this relationship lies in the fact that conviviality allows the construction of a neighborhood identity based on diversity (Padilla *et al.,* 2018; Wessendorf, 2014a), facilitating the social integration of migrants and reducing community social conflict (Padilla *et al.,* 2018; van de Vijver *et al*., 2015).

Neighborhood identity is understood as a sense of belonging and place identity with the residential context, which involves not only sharing a specific territory, facilities and social services, but also affective ties with neighbors built by proximity and shared socio-environmental conditions (Stevenson *et al.,* 2019; van de Vijver *et al.,* 2015). Following this definition, conviviality contributes to the identity of the neighborhood, since the daily contact between neighbors (part of conviviality), is building the sense of belonging and identity. It also influences the shared history of the specific territory, which occurs over the time (Pemberton and Phillimore, 2018). Hence, the question is: Does the arrival of new migrant neighbors modify the identity of the neighborhood? And if it does, in what ways does it do it? Is neighborhood identity a unifying element between "different" neighbors? These questions lead us to the objective of this article, which is to investigate the relationship between conviviality and neighborhood identity, in a neighborhood with superdiversity in the city of Barcelona, Spain.[2]

To contextualize this research, we will briefly describe the context of Catalonia, the autonomous community of Barcelona. Catalonia is historically recognized as a "land of immigrants" (Clua i Fainé, 2011). However, recent migrations, including internal migrations in the second half of the 20th century, have produced some fear to lose the cultural identity by its inhabitants, which is closely related to the Catalan nationalism reemerged in recent decades (Hau, 2016). This nationalism is part of a historical struggle that Catalonia has with Spain, which has gone through different stages, including periods of repression of Catalan identity, such as that which occurred in the Franco dictatorship (Clua i Fainé, 2014). This nationalism has as one of its main expressions, the Catalan language as a sign of identity (Hau, 2016; Parella *et al.,* 2023).

For its part, Barcelona, capital of Catalonia, is a city qualified as a "global city", a mixture of cultures, languages, religions and nationalities, in which different migrations converge, both internal and international (Parella *et al.,* 2023). But, despite the great cultural diversity that characterizes it, racism and xenophobia are important social problems in this city (OND Report, Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 2023; Parella *et al.,* 2023).

The neighborhood we chose for the research, El Carmelo, is located in the district of Horta, in the outer area of the city. Initially it was an area of country houses, but after the Spanish Civil War, these were reformed and self-constructions began to appear. Then, in the mid-1950s and until the early 1970s, migration from other areas of Spain caused the density of the neighborhood to increase with shanty towns emerging (Navarro i Arquillo, 2021). The lack of basic services, along with the increase in population, made the neighbors organize to claim their rights, which has constituted a sign of their identity (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 2023a). The precariousness in which its inhabitants lived together with this demanding spirit, made this neighborhood be seen as "dangerous" by the rest of the city. Today, although these conditions have been overcome, it continues to be seen as such by a part of the inhabitants of the city (Navarro i Arquillo, 2021). However, the socioeconomic level of its inhabitants remains low compared to other neighborhoods of Barcelona (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 2023b).

In the 1990s, international migrants started arriving in the neighborhood. Currently, 20.5% of the 32724 inhabitants are foreigners. The main existing nationalities are Hondurans, Colombians, Italians, Peruvians, Venezuelans and Pakistanis (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 2023c). This migration, according to our interviewees, began with South Americans, then Moroccans, Eastern Europeans, and Pakistanis. This has diversified not only the cultures, but the languages, customs and religions practiced in the neighborhood. These characteristics mean that the neighborhood can be classified as "super diverse" (Vertovec, 2023), so we chose it to conduct the study. This cultural diversity, along to the current socio-historical context of Barcelona and Catalonia, makes this neighborhood have a strong identity dispute component in relation to Catalanity (Hau, 2016; Rodon and Guinjoan, 2018), constituting a relevant case of study.

However, due to the resources and time of the investigation, we had to limit our analysis to the relationship between indigenous people and a group of Latin American immigrants, since they are the ones who constitute most of the international migrants in the neighborhood, as described above.

Conviviality in superdiverse neighborhoods

The conviviality in superdiverse neighborhoods accentuates its character, since it develops in diverse spaces, with different results (Rzepnikowska, 2018; Wise and Noble, 2016). For example, Rzepnikowska (2018) says that casual street encounters can be more confrontational, however, other spaces, such as those shared by parents at school entrances are usually friendly and cordial. Wessendorf (2014a, 2014b) differentiates between public and private spaces. The author describes public spaces (streets, squares, public transport, shops) as places where people are aware of the difference. In contrast, private spaces, defined as spaces for semi-formal and informal meetings (associations, schools, sports spaces, among others), are places where people are known in their cultural backgrounds, and "sometimes they talk about it" (Wessendorf, 2014b, p. 393). Wise and Noble (2016), point out that public spaces are sometimes transformed into spaces with characteristics of private spaces by the habituality of interaction. Padilla et al. (2018), describe interactions in superdiverse neighborhoods that begin in commercial spaces, and that then evolve in the establishment of mutual knowledge relationships.

But conviviality is not the only factor that influences this situation, so does the time of residence of neighbors, as it increases the likelihood of everyday encounters (van de Vijver *et al.,* 2015). Another element is participation in community activities, either in associations, in public spaces or in self-convened organizations (Gómez Crespo and Torres, 2020; Neal *et al*., 2019). In the Spanish context, the low participation of migrant neighbors in these activities is mentioned, which hinders their integration into the settlement society (Iglesias *et al*., 2022). However, there are some activities or spaces where intercultural encounters occur in a timely way (Gómez Crespo and Torres, 2020; Padilla *et al.,* 2018). There are other elements that produce affinity between people, such as age, gender, religion or social class (Mompó and Fioravanti, 2023; Padilla and Olmos Alcaraz, 2022).

Conviviality in Spanish neighborhoods has been described rather in terms of coexistence, of "calm, albeit distant relations" (Iglesias and Ares, 2021, p. 20), which are declined more by multiculturalism than by interculturality (Torres and Gómez, 2023). There are elements of specific intercultural coexistence, which vary according to the contextual specificities of each neighborhood (Mompó and Fioravanti, 2023), but everyone agrees that there is an underground low-intense racism behind this coexistence that negatively affects conviviality (Iglesias and Ares, 2021; Torres and Gómez, 2023). This racism mixes phenotypic aspects, such as skin color, hair and other traits, with cultural elements (Hall, 2010; Mbembe, 2016). It is based on the theory of "native advantage", in which natives position themselves in a higher hierarchy in relation to migrants, due to the belief of a "more modern or advanced social status" (Iglesias and Ares, 2021, p. 184). This idea can in turn be explained by decolonial theories (Quijano, 2020), which indicate the existence of a colonial vision that is maintained in the current ideological imaginary, which is based on the hierarchization of cultural groups (Souto García and Ambort, 2021). The "civilizational apex" would be in the cultures originally European, and then expanded to the so-called civilizations of the "Global North." People from other cultures that do not fit into this category are perceived and treated as subalterns, belonging to the "Global South" (Quijano, 2020).

Neighborhood Identity in Superdiverse Neighborhoods

Van de Vijver *et al.* (2015), in a superdiverse neighborhood of a Belgian city, describe a complex hierarchical relationship between different groups of natives and migrants, influenced by the economic status and seniority of the neighborhood. Despite this, they conclude that this environment of marked diversity does not necessarily provoke conflicts between the different social identities (national, ethnic, religious), emerging the neighborhood identity as relevant social identity. Pemberton and Phillimore (2018) point out the temporary permanence of the neighbors as an important element to sustain the neighborhood identity, since it allows to form an identity of place and a frequent interaction with the neighbors, dimensions that are part of the neighborhood identity.

Other studies conducted in superdiverse neighborhoods indicate that neighborhood identity connects with diversity, and in this sense, migrant neighbors feel less discriminated against and their sense of belonging increases (Moftizadeh *et al.,* 2022; Pemberton and Phillimore, 2018).

On the other hand, research in Spanish multicultural neighborhoods (Iglesias and Ares, 2021; Torres and Gómez, 2023), mentions social class as a fundamental element in the identity of these neighborhoods, i.e., the current changes that these neighborhoods have experienced have been not only due to cultural origin, but also due to a perception of "declassification" (Gómez Crespo, 2017). Thus, from the traditional "worker subject" who inhabited these neighborhoods, we move to a "precarious, fragmented and diverse" subject, constituted by international migrants and people displaced from other neighborhoods due to the gentrification and touristification of some cities (Mompó and Fioravanti, 2023), hindering community ties and affecting the identity of the neighborhood (Torres and Gómez, 2023). Moreover, international migration in Spain is not as old as compared to other countries. Therefore, in these neighborhoods, greater difficulties are observed to recognize themselves in difference and heterogeneity (Mompó and Fioravanti, 2023).

However, we must consider that social identities are dynamic processes that change according to time and context, redefining belonging and otherness according to the oscillations of power relations between groups and historical circumstances (Hall, 2010; Mompó and Fioravanti, 2023). Therefore, it is possible that different "neighborhood identities" coexist, according to cultural, generational, political orientation, among others (van de Vijver *et al.*, 2015). The above is more relevant in the study neighborhood, given the internal and external migrant origin, and the context of identity dispute in relation to the "Catalanness" mentioned in the introduction.

Materials and method

Research design, techniques used and participants

In this research we use a qualitative methodology, with a case study design, taking the neighborhood object of study as a case (Stake, 2010). We also use some elements of ethnography and participatory research, such as participant observation and the systematic discussion meeting with the community, which are considered as the most appropriate methodological tools to study cultural diversity and conviviality (Berg and Nowicka, 2019).

The techniques and instruments used were: community drift technique (Pellicer et al., 2013); participant observation (Berg and Nowicka, 2019); free and semi-structured interviews with community leaders, community service professionals and neighbors (Flick, 2007; Montero, 2006); focus groups with neighbors (Flick, 2007); and a systematic discussion meeting with the community (Montero, 2006). This diversity of techniques and instruments was due to the characteristics of the research process in a community using qualitative methodology, which requires a gradual and deep approach to this, to know the social phenomenon in its multiple dimensions (Neal *et al.,* 2019; Montero, 2006). On the other hand, this allows to investigate topics that are emerging in the research process and that relate to the objectives set (Flick, 2007). Finally, the diversity of techniques and participants allow to base the methodological integrity of the study (Mendizábal, 2006; Levitt, 2020), referred to the adequacy, foundation and usefulness of the research data.[3]

As for the participants, the different stages of the research involved: six community service professionals, four neighborhood association leaders, 25 neighbors interviewed individually, 13 neighbors in two focus groups, and 40 people in the systematic discussion meeting with the community, making a total of 88 participants. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 69 years.

Investigation process: stages

Familiarization: it is the first approach to the community (Montero, 2006), which consisted of different activities, such as readings of reports and statistics of the neighborhood, observations and informal conversations with neighbors in the street, contacts with professionals of the community, development plan of the neighborhood, semi-structured interviews with leaders of neighborhood associations and professionals of socio-community services. In addition, the principal researcher participated as a volunteer in a mutual support network of the neighborhood during 2020 and 2021, as part of this process, which allowed her to be a participating observer. The latter becomes important because the researchers do not reside in the neighborhood under study.

Individual interviews with neighbors: in a second stage we contacted neighborhood residents, through the leaders and professionals interviewed in the previous stage, and then through the "snowball" strategy (Barglowski, 2018). We conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 neighbors, 11 migrants and 11 natives, ten men and 12 women, who were asked about community life in the neighborhood, intercultural neighborhood relations and possible changes in contact with neighbors from other cultures.[4]

Focus groups: In a third stage, we conducted two focus groups, one with participants from the individual interviews, and another with new participants, whose objective was to deepen on the main results of the individual interviews. In the first group, six people participated, five migrants and one native, and in the second group, seven people participated, all native, since the objective was to make a sample counterweight of the first focal group. After the focus groups, we conducted new individual interviews with three indigenous neighbors, focused on the issues of cultural identity and neighborhood identity, given that doubts about these issues still persisted.

Systematic evaluation discussion meeting: In the last stage, we convened the community to an open meeting where we discussed the results of the previous stages of the research, what Montero (2006) calls "systematic evaluation discussion." This meeting was attended by 40 people, mostly neighborhood residents, native and Latin Americans (the latter belonging to a community entity), and some professionals of the social services of the district interested in the research who were invited.

Ethical aspects and reflexivity

This study was authorized by the Bioethics Committee of the University of Barcelona [CBUB]. At each stage, participants signed an informed consent, indicating the objectives of the research, the voluntariness of participation, confidentiality, anonymity and protection of personal information, as well as the possible risks and benefits of participating. It is also important to highlight that the organization of the first focal group with the same participants of the individual interviews and the systematic discussion with the community aimed to comply with the ethical, methodological and political guidelines that guided this research, referring to the protagonism that must have the people and communities that are part of a social investigation (Berg and Nowicka, 2019; Montero 2006).

As for the reflexivity of the researchers, fundamental to point out in qualitative investigations (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Levitt *et al.,* 2018; Levitt, 2020), it is necessary to note that the cultural origin of the researchers (Latin American and Spanish/Catalan) positively influenced the approach to the community, and enriched the interpretation of the data, as there are different positions of subject that allow an analysis from different points of view (Levitt *et al*., 2018; Piovani, 2018).

Data analysis

For the analysis of the data, we use the reflexive thematic analysis method (Braun and Clarke, 2022), in which the data are organized through readings and re-readings of the material, in codes, sub-themes and topics. Topics are patterns of meaning shared by participants, which are organized around a central concept. We also constantly use a reflexive process as researchers, since this guides the entire research process, including the analysis of data and results, hence this method is called "reflexive" (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

In the data analysis, we obtained a total of four topics in the key informant interviews, five topics in the individual interviews, six topics in the focus groups, two topics in the short focused interviews, and two topics in the systematic discussion with the community (see table 1). In this article we will delve into two emerging issues of these stages: conviviality (which neighbors categorized as "relationship between neighbors of different cultures") and neighborhood identity.

Table 1
Topics established at each stage of the investigation

Interviews with key informants	Individual interviews with neighbors	Focus groups	Brief individual interviews	Systematic discussion with the community the community
History and characterization of the neighborhood	Psychological and cultural changes through contact	Relationship between neighbors of different cultures	Feeling of belonging to the neighborhood and the city	Characterization and identity of the neighborhood
Community participation	Cultural Identity	Racism/ Discrimination in Neighborhood	Cultural/national identity	Strategies for intercultural coexistence
Relationship between indigenous people and migrants	Community spaces for interaction	Contact with neighbors from other cultures: attitude and change		
Acculturation process	Characteristics of the neighborhood context	Cultural identity		
	Adaptation strategies	Community spaces for relationship		
		Characteristics and identity of the neighborhood		

Results and discussion

The results are presented in two categories, "Conviviality in the neighborhood: coexistence of indifference, racism and intercultural encounter" and "Neighborhood identity: the struggling, worker and immigrant neighborhood", which constitute the analytical axes of this article, and which come from the topics "Relations between neighbors of different cultures", and "Neighborhood identity", the result of the thematic analysis of the research data.

Conviviality in the neighborhood: coexistence of indifference, racism and intercultural encounter

In relation to the elements that facilitate and hinder cohabitation, the participants describe three: indifference to the neighbor of another culture, racism and intercultural encounter. This occurs in different spaces and activities, although in some places racism, indifference and encounter may overlap, which agrees with the characteristics of the concept of conviviality (Neal *et al.,* 2019; Valluvan, 2016; Wise and Noble, 2016). Coexistence or indifference occurs mainly in spaces such as the street, building staircases and bus stops. Racism is mentioned in places such as shops, squares, schools and also at bus stops. Intercultural encounters take place in commercial places such as bars, gyms and markets, which subsequently allows for positive interaction in other spaces and activities, such as sports and leisure centers.

Coexistence can be observed:

> I greet any neighbor, but I wouldn't know their nationality, you know what I mean? I mean, they are [from another country] because I hear their music or whatever, and I greet them naturally. But I don't take this relationship any further. (EA4, Andalusian neighbor, individual interviews)

However, this type of interaction is common in neighborhoods with cultural diversity, but it is typical of contemporary individualist societies, which tend to fragment the individual and the community (Rodríguez and Montenegro, 2016), and thus hinder social cohesion (Montenegro *et al.,* 2014).

On the other hand, situations of underground racism that constitute an obstacle to cohabitation are also reported (Iglesias and Ares, 2021; Torres and Gómez, 2023). And pointed out, this happens in spaces that require coexistence or encounter, such as the bus stop:

> This girl who said this happened at the bus stops (…) That there were many ladies who were very racist. And I, you know I doubted it, 'I think this girl is exaggerating'. And one day I went to the bus stop with another girl, and it happened! (…) they look at you, and I think it depends on how you are dressed (…) Or how you go… I was looking over there, and my friend was here, and the lady was also here. And I heard that she told my friend 'shitty immigrant' (…) And I say, 'oh, it's true what the girl said!' (P3, Bolivian neighbor, Focal Group 2).

The latter shows a direct racist attitude. It is also inferred that indigenous people differentiate migrant neighbors not only by cultural origin, but by aspects that denote social class or educational level ("depends on how you are dressed, or how you go"), at an intersection of discrimination. In this specific case, we also see that the time of permanence, as a factor that helps in conviviality, is not enough. According to what was explained by this same neighbor later in another activity in which the principal investigator participated, both she and her friend have spent a similar time in the neighborhood. She also expanded on her explanation of the event, adding: "it's also because I'm blonde and she's not, she's more brunette, she was dressed differently, and for all that they look at you differently" (informal conversation, research field newspaper, June 24, 2022). "Being blonde" and "being brunette" more clearly alludes to aspects of race and skin color, but racism also involves cultural factors, being a mixture of both (Mbembe, 2016). The decolonial perspective explains the construction of these social hierarchies, related to phenotypic and cultural aspects, in elements of colonialism that continue to this day (Quijano 2020). This can be seen in the following quote:

> t I've also heard in recent years that Latin Americans have increased, that Andalusian emigrants have allied themselves with Catalans. So 'we are Spaniards' or 'we are Catalan', but 'the neighborhood is degrading because of these people'… (P1, Catalan neighbor, Grupo Focal 1)

In the previous quote, the expression "we are Spaniards" as opposed to "these people" who degrade the neighborhood, gives an account of this coloniality. In addition, the construction of the other as inferior, putting himself/herself in the position of "native advantage" (Iglesias and Ares, 2021), allows externalizing in these "others" the difficulties of the neighborhood and placing himself/herself in a higher rank. This ethnifies social conflicts, which in fact have their roots in economic, social and political structures (Hall, 2010; Torres and Gómez, 2023).

In spite of the above, interstitial spaces of intercultural contact can be found in neighborhoods with super diversity in which a sense of community is built. And these are usually informal spaces (Neal *et al.,* 2019; Rzepnikowska, 2018). Interactions can also begin in public spaces and then continue in other spaces, which allows the extension of conviviality in other areas (Padilla *et al.,* 2018). As one interviewee comments:

> A group of people from the bar asked me, 'where are you from?' 'I am Uruguayan', 'and I am Argentinian' (…) and I say 'hey, you are good at making barbecues', 'yes, let´s meet one day, 'Sunday can be', 'come, go' (…) Yes, at the bar, there we watch soccer, I am not that fan of bars but hey, I like to watch the games (…) there I met them and I started to have a relationship (…) I have Colombian, Argentinian, Uruguayan, Ecuadorian friends, from all over the place. (EA11, Catalan neighbor, individual interviews)

The bar, in this excerpt, exemplifies a space where it is possible to meet the other in conditions that facilitate more horizontality (leisure space, more informality), with shared interests (football and barbecue in this case) and that is glimpsed as the beginning of a conviviality in superdiverse neighborhoods. This quote is also an example of how other elements, such as gender, age, religion or social class, connect with this super-diversity and may have more relevance (Mompó and Fioravanti, 2023). In the previous quote, we see that gender influenced leisure activity (football, barbecue), which allowed conviviality.

Neighborhood identity: "the struggling, working-class and immigrant neighborhood"

Regarding neighborhood identity, participants mention one dimension which is the sense of belonging. As for its characteristics, it is described as a "fighting", "working" and "immigrant" neighborhood. And some local residents also point to a sense of "loss of identity" of the neighborhood, in relation to what it once was. We will look at this in more detail below.

The dimension of sense of belonging of neighborhood identity (Stevenson *et al*., 2019) arises spontaneously in the narrative of the participating neighbors, mainly natives, but also in some migrant neighbors. An element related to this dimension is the time spent in the neighborhood, which allows to establish connections between neighbors and build a common neighborhood history (Iglesias and Ares, 2021). A Latin American neighbor who has lived in the neighborhood for more than 10 years points out: "the truth is that I feel at home, I feel in my neighborhood" (EL10, Bolivian neighbor, individual interviews). However, as pointed out above, the time of permanence as the only factor that allows a positive contact with the indigenous neighbors is not enough, since it intersects with other elements that can help or hinder coexistence and therefore the sense of belonging and identification with the neighborhood, such as racism and social class (Iglesias and Ares, 2021).

On the other hand, a particular element of the identity of El Carmelo mentioned by several participants is its "fighting" character, which is linked to the history of claims of the neighborhood. This is related to the socioeconomic origin of its former inhabitants (Navarro i Arquillo, 2021): "people used to struggle a lot, [the neighborhood] has a very powerful associative root (…) it is still a working-class neighborhood … but not as fighter as before" (IC2, socio-community service professional and neighbor, interviews with Key Informants). "At the same time we see the neighborhood [as] a struggling neighborhood" (participant community discussion).

This aspect of neighborhood identity ties in with stories of precarity and social class. Carmelo is defined as a "working class neighborhood" (participant IC2), which means that social class is an element that remains in its identity. Although the social trajectories of some of the former neighbors have changed, the new neighbors have heterogeneous trajectories, sometimes descending, which allows them to continue identifying themselves as a "working class neighborhood". And the neighbors relate this characteristic to the old social movement of the neighborhood, although currently this is not so present for them ("fighter, not so much", participant IC2). This is linked to community participation. From a long-standing broad and inclusive participation, we now move to a limited, timely and selective participation: those who participate are native neighbors from a certain age.

Another relevant aspect mentioned is the cultural diversity of the neighborhood, associated with the migrant character of its neighbors: "it is not new for us [cultural diversity], because El Carmelo has always been an immigrant neighborhood and always will be" (participant of community discussion). In this quote, an identification as "outsiders" or "foreigners" to the geographical and cultural environment ("immigrant") predominates, which is related to the history of internal migrations of the inhabitants of the neighborhood. This accounts for the otherness that occurs in this specific context, in Barcelona, Catalonia and "Catalanness". In this sense, an underlying element is the identity of "otherness" forged in internal migrations and as a consequence of Catalan nationalism (Clua i Fainé, 2011, 2014), expressed in that it is a neighborhood in which Spanish is spoken. It is a common factor with new migrants, but a common factor of "exclusion identity": "I am from El Carmelo because I do not feel part of Barcelona". In fact, one of the interviewees comments on this feeling of feeling "second class Catalan":

> And it bothers me a lot when I'm not considered Catalan. Let's see, I mean, in quotation marks, like a second-class Catalan (...) my parents have lived here since they were 16 years old, and they are 75 years old. In other words, they have already earned the Catalan status. And that I was born here, I am Catalan, i.e., it is my land. (EA8, Catalan neighbor, individual interviews)

However, this feeling of exclusion is not seen as a common factor with international migrant neighbors, since the vision of "inferiorized otherness" of these migrants remains (Mbembe, 2016; Quijano, 2020), as we exemplified in an earlier quote.

On the other hand, the gentrification and touristification of some Spanish cities affects the identity of the neighborhood (Mompó and Fioravanti, 2023), which we could observe in some former neighbors, who are no longer recognized in their neighborhood:

> The neighborhood changes, because the people, the children, for example my brothers now live somewhere else, the children have gone to live somewhere else, and so on. So, these houses have been occupying with outsiders. So, the neighborhood is multicultural now… but before there was a sense of neighborhood (…) I mean, this identity is being built, because it is happening now. We have to build it… (P4, Catalan neighbor, Focal Group 2)

In this quote, the affectation of neighborhood ties is observed as a consequence of the gentrification process of other neighborhoods (Di Masso *et al.,* 2022), but in this case it also affects the arrival of foreign migration ("the neighborhood is multicultural now, but before there was a sense of neighborhood"). However, in this quote there is also the element of future projection, the re-construction of the neighborhood's identity, giving the possibility of re-building a new identity that includes the newcomers ("I mean that this identity is being built, because it is happening now").

Conclusions

According to the results, the relationship between conviviality and neighborhood identity in El Carmelo can be found in two elements: the time of permanence of neighbors of different cultural origins and participation in informal community spaces, mainly neighborhood shops, which allow greater intercultural contact. Although we can outline a third element, halfway between the migrant identity and the social class, it is not something that is observed by the neighbors of the neighborhood. This is related to an obstacle of conviviality found in our research, as well as others (Iglesias and Ares, 2021; Torres and Pérez, 2023): "underground racism".

As for the time of permanence, we can see it in the neighbors, natives and migrants, who have lived longer in the neighborhood, who feel "at home". Time gives the possibility of establishing more interactions between people in different parts of the neighborhood, while at the same time reducing the fear of the unknown that neighbors of different cultural origins can produce (van de Vijver *et al.,* 2015). In other words, the "unknown becomes known", and this helps in conviviality and, in the medium and long term, in the construction of the identity with the neighborhood (Stevenson *et al.,* 2019). However, this element interconnects with others, such as social class, "race", gender, age, which can constitute aspects that consolidate a sense of belonging or perpetuate exclusion (Padilla and Olmos Alcaraz, 2022), as happened with a neighbor at the bus stop.

In relation to participation in community activities and spaces, although there is little participation of the migrant neighbors, when this happens positive results occur. As Wessendorf (2014b) refers, in these activities people are "known in their differences", but also in their common aspects. What happens in this neighborhood is that most of this participation happens in spaces such as the bar or the market, instead of associations or other formal spaces. And unlike other neighborhoods in the city, the squares or doors of schools are not spaces that promote interculturality, according to what was pointed out by some *participants.* Therefore, conviviality occurs in these commercial spaces, producing a relationship (Padilla *et al.,* 2018). This allows to feel identified with the neighborhood: "as in my house", in terms of a Latin American neighbor. Due to the low formal community participation, these spaces can be thought of as places that project a neighborhood identity.

We highlight the equality of conditions between natives and migrants ("clients") that allows being in a similar status, favoring intercultural contact, as explained by Allport (1954/1971). There are also spaces in which contact develops more naturally, less "patterned" than the activities of the associations, and there are spaces where neighbors, natives and migrants go during their free time, or in usual activities such as buying products at the market or in greengrocers. For this reason, neighborhood shops become relevant, not only as commercial spaces, but as community and identity spaces, so they must be supported by public and local administrations, in a link between economic and social policies for superdiverse neighborhoods.

As for the possible third element, the common factor we observe is the migration stories, linked to social class and resilience. This apparent heterogeneity can have a meeting point in the migratory histories of the old and new neighbors, and in the "fighting character" mentioned by them, symbol of individual and community resilience. However, this is not visualized in this way by the native neighbors, who tend to place themselves in cultural difference and indifference to the other.

This could be explained, in part, by an aspect that crossed all the stages of the investigation, which is "underground racism" (Iglesias and Ares, 2021; Torres and Pérez, 2023). As seen, attitudes of native advantage are maintained based on coloniality (Quijano, 2020; Souto García and Ambort, 2021). This can be contested through intercultural meetings in informal spaces, or through community activities with diverse participation, based on specific needs and interests (Montenegro *et al*., 2014). However, these articulations are not limited to cultural origin, being important other elements such as gender, age, sexual diversity, among others (Padilla and Olmos Alcaraz, 2022; Vertovec, 2023). We observe this in the example of the participant who, through meetings in the bar, formed bonds with migrant neighbors in other activities and spaces later, gender being an important factor in this case.

The latter also leads us to discuss the existence of "a" neighborhood identity. If there are "multiple diversities," there could be "multiple neighborhood identities." This is because identities are fluid and situated processes, according to the context (Mompó and Fioravanti, 2023). In this neighborhood there could be, for example, the identity around migration and cultural diversity, as we have argued in this article, but also a neighborhood identity could be formed in which the central thing is the generational, or the recognition of sexual diversity, as it already happens with the annual activity called "FOK del Carmel" (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 2023d), which contributes to this neighborhood identity.

However, we recognize as a limitation of our study, not addressing diversity more broadly, for example, with migrants from other cultural backgrounds, or delving into aspects such as religion or age, which is part of the definition of super-diversity. Therefore, our recommendation for future research is to consider the intersection of these aspects, incorporating the intersectional approach as part of the methodology of diversity study (Padilla and Olmos Alcaraz, 2022; Vertovec, 2023). Finally, we also recommend continuing to investigate the possibilities of the identity transformations of the superdiverse neighborhoods, as suggested by a native neighbor, which could allow a greater inclusion of the diversities and contribute to intercultural conviviality.

Notes

1 Another reason relates to the fact that the translation of the term “coexistence” into English does not denote the interactive and dialogical intention that exists in the concept “conviviality” (see Wessendorf, 2014a and Rzepnikowska, 2018). Therefore, conviviality allows us to share a common language with researchers from the Anglo-Saxon field.

2 This article is part of the doctoral thesis of the first author, whose objective was to investigate the acculturation process between indigenous people and Latin American migrants in a neighborhood with super diversity in Barcelona.

3 The diversity of techniques and instruments also relates to the fact that what is presented in this article is part of the first author’s doctoral thesis. Therefore, several topics were investigated, including those presented here, which required this methodological diversity and allowed a greater deepening.

4 Since it is part of a broader research on acculturation, this was one of the main topics investigated. Acculturation refers to changes that occur when being in contact with people from other cultures.

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Call for papers
New challenges in fashion brand communication: a perspective from journalism, advertising, and the sociology of consumption
Issue No. 41 (September 2024- February 2025)

N°41 (September 2024-February 2025)

Thematic Coordinators

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Deadline for Article Submission: CLOSED

The fashion industry, immersed in an era of technological innovation accelerated by the adoption of artificial intelligence tools, faces challenges that are transforming both consumption and communication within the sector. This digital transformation has led fashion to a scenario where immediacy and virality become key elements, in a context that, since the second half of the 20th century, has been characterized by accelerated temporality and a dynamic of trend diffusion based on the imitation of consumption models.

Fashion brands are striving to adapt to this new environment, embracing strategies such as the use of influencers and social media marketing campaigns. Although these tactics are effective in boosting sales, they conflict with concepts such as sustainability and creativity, which are fundamental to slow fashion. Moreover, brands seem to have less control than in the past over directing fashion communication dynamics from above, as they now have to negotiate with content creators who act as true editorial subjects, often negotiating communication strategies with brands instead of merely serving as advertising vehicles or brand message transmitters. Thus, it is not only fashion journalism that has undergone profound transformations due to the impact of social media practitioners, starting with the rise of fashion bloggers in the early 2000s.

The role of traditional actors in fashion, such as designers and critics, has evolved due to digital democratization. They now share the space with an active audience that also generates trends, thereby altering the traditional dynamics of the industry.

Fashion journalism and specialized magazines face the challenge of reinventing themselves in the digital world. Communication with consumers is adapting to new formats and languages, and there is a greater presence of editors and writers on digital and streaming platforms. However, this digital adaptation often leads to alliances with brands, which can result in a reduction in constructive criticism and the denunciation of bad practices in the industry.

This scenario highlights the need for more conscious and communicative fashion, aligned with the new times of artificial intelligence and a more informed and critical audience. The current challenges in fashion communication require a transdisciplinary approach that encompasses consumption sociology, journalism, and advertising, aimed at creating a more responsible and sustainable industry. The fashion industry faces the challenge of leveraging the diffusion of an ecosystem based on "influence culture" and artificial intelligence in such a way that the sector does not follow the most harmful trends of the past century (the spread of stigmatizing beauty models, hyperconsumption and pollution, uniformity of stylistic offerings) but rather fully embraces the opportunity for dialogue with consumers to rethink the role of brands as partners in the shift towards sustainability and social justice.

Keywords

Fashion, Communication, Brands, Journalism, Advertising, Sociology of Consumption, Social Media, Audiences, Digital Platforms

Main Research Lines

- Fashion Communication: Content creation and brand strategies in the digital age.
- Fashion Journalism: From specialized magazines to new digital formats.
- Professional profiles in fashion in the era of digitalization.
- Digital Audiences: Among Instagrammers, TikTokers, and streamers.
- Fashion Advertising Campaigns: New trends in branding and marketing.
- Studies on Influence in Fashion: Impact of influencers on brands and consumers.
- Production processes, innovation, and opportunities for sustainable consumption.
- Technological innovation and Artificial Intelligence in the fashion sector.
- Emerging markets and fashion brands in the Latin American context.

Convocatoria del Dossier
Nuevos desafíos en la comunicación de las marcas de Moda. Una visión desde el periodismo, la publicidad y la sociología del consumo

N°41 (Septiembre 2024-Febrero 2025)

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Fecha límite de entrega de artículos: CERRADO

La industria de la moda, inmersa en una era de innovación tecnológica acelerada por la adopción de herramientas de inteligencia artificial, enfrenta desafíos que transforman tanto el consumo como la comunicación en el sector. Esta transformación digital ha llevado a la moda a un escenario donde la instantaneidad y la viralización se convierten en elementos clave, en un contexto que desde la segunda mitad del siglo XX se ha caracterizado por una temporalidad acelerada y una dinámica de difusión de tendencias de consumo basada en la imitación de modelos de consumo.

Las marcas de moda buscan adaptarse a este nuevo entorno, apostando por estrategias como el uso de influencers y campañas de marketing en redes sociales. Aunque estas tácticas son efectivas para impulsar las ventas, entran en conflicto con conceptos como la sostenibilidad y la creatividad, fundamentales en el slow fashion. Además, los brand parecen tener menos capacidad que en el pasado para dirigir desde arriba las dinámicas de comunicación de la moda, teniendo que negociar con creadores de contenido que actúan como verdaderos sujetos editoriales, en muchos casos negociando con las marcas las estrategias comunicativas en lugar de actuar como meros vehículos publicitarios o transmisores del mensaje de la marca. Por lo tanto, no es solo el periodismo de moda el que ha experimentado profundas transformaciones a raíz del impacto de los practicantes de redes sociales, comenzando con el ascenso de los bloggers de moda en los años cero.

El papel de los actores tradicionales en la moda, como diseñadores y críticos, ha evolucionado debido a la democratización digital. Actualmente, comparten el espacio con un público activo que también genera tendencias, alterando así la dinámica tradicional de la industria.

El periodismo de moda y las revistas especializadas enfrentan el desafío de reinventarse en el mundo digital. La comunicación con el consumidor se adapta a nuevos formatos y lenguajes, y se observa una mayor presencia de editores y redactores en plataformas digitales y de streaming. Sin embargo, esta adaptación digital a menudo conlleva una alianza con las marcas, lo que puede llevar a una disminución de la crítica constructiva y la denuncia de malas prácticas en la industria.

Este escenario plantea la necesidad de una moda más consciente y comunicativa, que se alinee con los nuevos tiempos de inteligencia artificial y un público más informado y crítico. Los desafíos actuales en la comunicación de la moda requieren un enfoque transdisciplinario que abarque desde la sociología del consumo hasta el periodismo y la publicidad, orientado a crear una industria más responsable y sostenible. La industria de la moda enfrenta el reto de aprovechar la difusión de un ecosistema basado en la "cultura de la influencia" y la inteligencia artificial de tal manera que el sector no siga las tendencias más nocivas del siglo pasado (difusión de modelos de belleza estigmatizantes, hiperconsumo e contaminación, uniformidad de la oferta estilística) sino que aproveche plenamente la oportunidad de un diálogo con los consumidores para repensar el rol de los brand como socios en el cambio hacia la sostenibilidad y la justicia social.

Palabras Clave

Moda, Comunicación, Marcas, Periodismo, Publicidad, Sociología del Consumo, Redes Sociales, Audiencias, Plataformas Digitales

Principales Líneas de investigación

- La Comunicación de Moda. Creación de contenido y estrategias de marca en la era digital.
- El periodismo de Moda. De las revistas especializadas a los nuevos formatos digitales.
- Perfiles profesionales de la moda en la era de la digitalización.

- Audiencias digitales. Entre instagramers, tiktokers y streamers.
- Campañas de publicidad de moda. Nuevas tendencias del branding y el marketing.
- Estudios sobre influencia en moda. Impacto de influencers en marcas y consumidores
- Procesos de producción, innovación y oportunidad para el consumo sostenible.
- Innovación tecnológica e Inteligencia Artificial en el sector de la moda
- Mercados emergentes y marcas de moda en el ámbito latinoamericano