

**INSTAGRAM IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGY OF FASHION
RETAILERS**

Rocío Bonsón-Fernández

Tomás Escobar-Rodríguez (*)

(*) Corresponding Author
Tomás Escobar-Rodríguez
Departamento de Economía Financiera, Contabilidad y Dirección de Operaciones
Universidad de Huelva
Plaza de la Merced
21002 Huelva (España)

Área Temática: G) Nuevas Tecnologías y Contabilidad

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the incorporation of the social media platform Instagram into the communication strategies of top fashion retailers, and subsequently, to study the reactions of the audience to social Instagram actions by such companies. In a quantitative analysis, official company profiles on Instagram of 57 brands belonging to the 14 leading fashion-retailing groups were researched through observation of their number of posts, their number of followers and their variations. Data were analysed using correlation tests. Results show that the size of the company is related to its audience on Instagram. Companies with higher activity on their Instagram pages reach broader audiences. The size of the company and its activity in this social media platform are not related.

1. Introduction

The increasing importance of social media as marketing tools is leading to significant changes in companies' communication strategies. Social media allows for transformation in the marketing strategy and communication models, enhancing word-of-mouth (WOM) and the speed of dissemination of information. Academic experts in this field and WOM marketing and brand community theorists have broadly shown the impact of social media, whether or not it is integrated in companies' communication strategies (Kozinets et al., 2010; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2013). Social media allows a larger social construction and plays a key role in the brand's assets.

Among social media channels, Facebook is the most widely used platform. With an average daily figure of 1.08 million active users, Facebook is considered the most popular social networking website. This media accounts for 1.71 billion monthly active users (22.8% of the world's 2016 population) and an 18.75% increase over June 2015 (Smith, K., 2016). More than 92% of companies use Facebook, and more and more are incorporating this tool in their marketing strategies. As reported by Escobar-Rodriguez and Bonson-Fernandez (2017), in the fashion industry, 100% of the top retailers have incorporated this tool, which is not surprising given the enormous user database it provides. In this industry, the main content posted by companies and the most viral (liked, shared or commented) is the visual: photo and video posts. Visual resources help spread the fashion retailer's content, mainly due to the nature of the product, because of its aesthetics, and the social trend of showing everything that happens through images. Facebook posts of top fashion retailers are basically driven by photos and photo albums (Escobar-Rodriguez and Bonson-Fernandez, 2017). This type of post seems to have a direct impact on the visitor's concept or perception about the company, its philosophy and its product. In just a few seconds, a picture posted on Facebook has not only entered the mind of the visitor but has been shared and has reached hundreds of other users on the network. Now more than ever, an image is worth more than a thousand words. Not only for the content of the image itself, but for the speed of disclosure allowed by social media.

In this sense, the most visual social media platform is Instagram (Brandwatch, 2016). Although it is not the first in audience, Instagram is one of the fastest growing communities online today. As a community of more than 500 million who capture and share more than 95 million photos every day, Instagram is an effective way to build brands and increase customer loyalty (Cision Navigator, 2013). The fashion industry is seen as a sector that can benefit from visual social media messages like Instagram posts. Started in 2010, Instagram is the third most popular social media channel, right after Facebook and YouTube and followed by Twitter (Brandwatch, 2016).

Little academic research has been conducted on Instagram as part of social media marketing (SMM) strategies of companies, especially focusing on the fashion industry. Past literature mostly discusses social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter (Akar and Topcu, 2011). With regards to Instagram, previous studies focused on this platform as a new crisis information form in the fast food industry (Guidry and Robertson, 2014), and in the use of Instagram by different generation cohorts in developing markets (Ting et al., 2016). This study analyses for the first time the use of Instagram in the world of fashion. In particular, our research focused on the study of Instagram as an active part of the social media marketing strategy (SMMS) that allows fashion companies to spread the word and their trends, serving as a listening instrument to gather feedback from users and stakeholders.

The aim of this paper is to assess the extent to which the world's top fashion retailers are incorporating Instagram into their communication strategies. Therefore, our research will focus on i) analysing the level of Instagram usage among the main players of the fashion industry; and (ii) identifying significant relationships among retailers' size, the size of their audience, and their activity and use of the social media platform Instagram.

The structure of the paper proceeds as follows; section 2 sets the theoretical foundations of the research: the social media marketing framework and Instagram as part of the social media strategy. Our research questions are formulated in section 3. Section 4 outlines our research methodology and section 5 provides our results. Finally, section 6 contains a summary of the paper, an in-depth discussion of the results and explains our conclusions, highlighting the theoretical and practical implications of each of our research questions. The limitations of this study and recommendations for future research are presented in section 7.

2. Theoretical Foundations of the Research

2.1. Social Media Marketing Framework

Social media has become a marketing tool of great relevance for most companies (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Thomas and Akdere, 2013; Ananda et al., 2016). The features of social media have influenced and improved the way that businesses communicate, providing new opportunities for companies to engage with consumers effectively by interacting with their audience. Social media tools perform a key role in receiving and exchanging information without restrictions (Kim et al., 2014). Visual information has led to a greater influence on the consumer decision-making process (Sema, 2013). Consumers have gradually become advertisers or promoters through social media (Roberts and Kraynak, 2008) and they currently tend to rely more on peer opinions than on direct business communication when it comes to making a purchase decision (Akar and Topcu, 2011; Castronovo and Huang, 2012).

Current literature has sufficiently studied WOM marketing, brand communities, viral marketing and social media each on an individual basis, as an antecedent of the social media marketing phenomenon (Kozinets et al., 2010; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2013; Escobar-Rodriguez and Bonson-Fernandez, 2017, and references therein). Social media takes advantage of social interaction, and its role in companies' communication strategies can have significant business results if implemented properly. Castronovo and Huang (2012) frame social media in the WOM strategy of companies. Advertising has become about engaging in conversation with customers, as the most trusted sources of recommendation come through word-of-mouth communication (Castronovo and Huang, 2012).

From an organisational point of view, the adoption and use of SMM by companies has been studied by several authors (Mergel, 2013; Guidry, 2013; Constantinides, 2014; Ananda et al., 2016). Focusing on the managerial, executive or decision-making perspectives, as well as perceptions of firms about the use of SMM in organisations, there are two main studies that are especially relevant in the establishment of a conceptual framework for SMM. First, Mergel (2013) describes three main types of social media activities: representation of the institution on the social media platforms, engagement of the audience, and networking and listening to the network's users. These three can be subclassified depending on the means used for each of the actions. The first two options belong to the so-called active strategy, where the company takes an active role in the social media strategy by creating and disclosing content. The representation strategy is considered as a push strategy, and

engagement as a pull strategy. On the other hand, the networking and listening activities are considered as a passive strategy.

From a different perspective, Constantinides (2014) classifies corporate marketing activities in social media according to the type of platform used, and the relation between SMM activities and marketing objectives. Additionally, Constantinides (2014) establishes different marketing purposes of the active SMM approach: first, a public relations approach and use of social media as direct marketing tools; second, social media tools as a means to influence the audience through brand or product promoters, also called influencers; third, customisation of the online experience of customers and enabling product personalisation; and last, engaging the customer in the co-creation and innovation process, as well as in product reviews or advertising concepts.

Market intelligence actions through social media helps gather feedback and makes the necessary adjustments to the strategic decisions. In order to achieve an effective SMMS that fulfils their marketing goals, companies should make some strategic decisions to orient its marketing actions, which are: market segmentation, marketing and positioning and marketing mix orientations. Ananda et al. (2016) summarises three main factors that companies should consider when building and developing an SMM strategy: (i) the platform they should use to conduct its marketing activities; (ii) social media users' attitudes, behaviours and influence as well as their relevance in their own social media networks; (iii) social media word-of-mouth that may affect users' attitudes and behaviours and, therefore, their decision-making process.

Social media enables the enrichment of communications between companies and stakeholders. Brands no longer control one-way communications about themselves and their products and actions, but it is e-WOM allowed by social media that encourages social influence within social networks. Nowadays, marketing is more based on long-term relationships with consumers than on attracting consumers just for specific, punctual transactions. Relationship marketing is based on interactive marketing supported by marketing mix activities instead of the dominant marketing mix function in transactional marketing (Grönroos, 1994). Firm and market characteristics can have an influence on marketing practices, and firms often seek a balance between both marketing strategies (Coviello et al., 2002). Businesses perceive SMM as a means to enable customer participation by improving customer feedback and support (Pentina et al., 2012). It is up to the companies' ability to manage social media so that they can capitalise to a greater extent on the opportunities brought by social media.

2.2. Instagram and Social Media Marketing Strategy in the Fashion Industry

Different social media platforms are appropriate for different companies. Each of them has its own characteristics, functionalities and features, and depending on the sector, the product, the audience and the type of content. Some social media channels can be more adequate when it comes to planning the marketing strategy.

Fashion is a sector that generates a lot of conversation online, and social networks are the new channels of commerce with a great influence on this phenomenon. Additionally, fast fashion requires a business structure that supports product ranges in a coherent and consistent way. Fast fashion retailing requires a fast response in terms of products but also in terms of promotions and ranging supports. In this context, marketing becomes a key element when it comes to merchandising, pricing, new product introduction and promotion (Sheridan et al., 2006), and Instagram is a very suitable tool to this end. The term 'fast fashion' denotes, among other things, the strategies that retailers adopt to show current and emerging trends quickly and effectively in current merchandise assortments. Visual content allowed by Instagram

seems to be the appropriate tool for this purpose. What is more, the content that sells the most in fashion is visual (Escobar-Rodriguez and Bonson-Fernandez, 2017), which is why Instagram is the leading social platform in the fashion sector (Brandwatch, 2016).

Instagram is a photo and video-sharing platform as well as a social networking channel that allows users to take and share photos after applying a choice of digital filters to their pictures via an Instagram smartphone app. The resulting images are easily shared on other social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr. Instagram has grown rapidly, reaching 500 million monthly active users (Instagram.com, 2016), who on a daily average post 95 million photos and contribute 4.2 billion 'likes' to the platform (Instagram.com, 2016). 'Instagram and Twitter have a significantly smaller number of users than Facebook does, but users of these sites also tend to visit them frequently. Some 52 percent of Instagram users visit the site at least once a day (with 35 percent doing so several times a day), and 42 percent of Twitter users are daily visitors (with 23 percent visiting multiple times per day)' (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2016).

The platform Instagram has surpassed Facebook in popularity. The sharing of images rather than just words has made communication and networking with friends and wider social groups who share similar interests more convenient, animated and entertaining (Bakhshi et al., 2013). By connecting physical environments with the digital realities, Instagram enhances one's online presence and identity, and allows more interactive communication and effective dissemination of information (Abbott et al., 2013; Chante et al., 2014). Accordingly, numerous organisations exploit it to create organisation-consumer networks so as to make their products more relevant to consumers' values and lifestyles. It is found that organisations with a high level of presence in social media are likely to have more consumers following them and their products (Lariviere et al., 2013). With the increasing amount of followers, all brand-related photos, events and updates that the users have posted on their profiles can be easily seen, shared, talked about and disseminated (Goor, 2012).

For public relations and marketing professionals, Instagram is an effective way to build brand identity and brand loyalty. The use of new social media platforms often allows a brand to reach new segments of the audience (Cision Navigator, 2013). Image content tends to be more attractive and engaging than text itself (Abbott et al., 2013), and the fashion industry is one of the major industries that benefits from the visual nature of Instagram. As a strategy of attracting traffic to their websites, companies are no longer trying to draw a consumer to their own platform and, instead, they are starting to be in what, they consider, are the new channels of commerce. So far the most popular, social networks, which are increasingly integrating buttons to make a purchase without abandoning its application; secondly, conversational commerce platforms such as Messenger, or Google Now; and, thirdly, in immersive commerce, like virtual reality glasses (Gestal, 2016).

As there is little academic research regarding the use of Instagram in the fashion industry, this study attempts to explore Instagram as an emerging form of business communication in the area of marketing and sales for firms in this industry.

3. Research Questions

This paper contributes to the state of the art by analysing and presenting the variables that affect the use of Instagram among top fashion retailers, both at the individual level of each company and at the group level of the business group to which they belong. No research has yet been conducted about Instagram usage in the fashion sector.

Therefore, to focus on this type of company in the fashion industry, our study asks the following research questions:

RQ1: A company's size is positively related to the size of the audience on Instagram.

The size of the company is a measurement of the retailer's influence in the market, and could, therefore, determine its audience on Instagram. This variable has previously been used in the literature to examine Facebook in several different sectors (Bonsón et al., 2015) even in fashion (Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonson-Fernandez, 2017). In our study, company size is measured by the number of shops owned or franchised by the retailers as an indicator of the exposure of the brand name on the market. The greater the number of stores, the greater the visibility of the company on the market, the greater its reachability among the potential consumers of fashion and the greater the entity of the brand in the fashion market. This exposure of the retailer's brand will increase the likelihood of it being thought of by the potential consumers, the likelihood of being the top-of-mind brand among the potential audience and the probability of conversion from reachability to actually following the company's page on Instagram. The interest of the audience in being informed about news and promotions on social media could increase, gaining the corresponding popularity on Instagram. Therefore, the larger the number of stores of a brand, the larger its number of followers on Instagram, and thus, its audience.

RQ2: A company's activity on Instagram is positively related to the size of the audience.

As a powerful WOM tool, Instagram makes it easy for companies and stakeholders to spread the word about a brand or product. As a consequence of the speed of the information flows allowed by the Internet and social media, a positive relationship can be established between the number of posts in the retailers' page and the number of its followers. Virality helps companies benefit from the enormous database which is social media. Companies' websites and corporate Instagram pages have the option to voluntarily disclose (Singht et al., 2008; Magrath and McCormick, 2013) and recommend products and share information with friends and acquaintances over their virtual communities (Jayawardhena and Wright, 2009). Thus it seems logical to think that the more activity the company has on Instagram (number of posts) the more the audience will grow (number of followers).

RQ3: A company's size is positively related to its level of activity on Instagram.

Companies' marketing budgets are often associated with their size. Retailers with more stores would be thought to have more active marketing and community managing teams, building a proportional dynamism in social media. Brick and mortar brand exposure through its stores may also have an impact on the size of their audience, and the better the chance of virality, causing its effect of increasing conversation about the company, either directly from the company or by customers' re-posts, or word-of-mouth. The larger the number of stores of a brand, the more intense its level of activity on Instagram (number of posts).

4. Methodology

4.1. Sampling and Data Collection

Our research analyses the usage of the social media channel Instagram among the companies listed on the fashion map of Modaes.es, a guide produced by the publishing group with the same name, and a leader in the fashion industry in Spain.

The fashion players analysed belong to the leading business groups of the industry in terms of turnover, international penetration and strength of their brands. Studying the corporate communication strategies of the main companies in the sector could illuminate the future of commerce, the economy and the world of business. The 57 companies belonging to the top fashion groups listed in this media tool were searched between 31 October and 1 December 2016. The reason for analysing this period over another was to focus on a period of time when companies are more active on this platform, basically for promotional purposes and sales. In 2016, mid-season sales were in October and Black Friday was on the 25th of November.

Our sample is made up of company groups and brands from different countries from Europe, the United States and Asia: Denmark (one group, four brands), Germany (one group, one brand), Ireland (one group, one brand), Spain (one group, eight brands), Sweden (one group, six brands), UK (two groups, one and eight brands, respectively), US (five groups, one brand, four brands, five brands, five brands, nine brands), Japan (one group, three brands); and different areas of specialisation, in order of importance in our sample: fashion for all (women, men, children and young fashion; 12), womenswear (10), men and womenswear (5), menswear (5), young fashion (him and her; 5), sportswear (4), accessories (3), underwear (3), young fashion (her; 2), jeans (2), shoes (2), kids wear (1), home wear (1), swimwear (1) and body care (1) (see Table 1).

Country	Business group	Name of company	Speciality
Germany	C&A	C&A	Fashion for all public
Denmark	Best Seller	Vero Moda Jack & Jones Name it Pieces	Womenswear Menswear Kids wear Womenswear
Ireland	Primark	Primark	Fashion for all public
Japan	Fast Retailing	Uniqlo Comptoir des Cottonniers J Brand	Fashion for all public Womenswear Fashion for all public
Spain	Inditex	Zara Bershka Stradivarius Pull&Bear Massimo Dutti Oysho Zara Home Uterqüe	Fashion for all public Young fashion (Him and Her) Young fashion (Her) Young fashion (Him and Her) Men and women Underwear Home wear Accessories
Sweden	H&M	H&M Cos Monki Weekday &Other Stories Cheap Monday	Fashion for all public Men and women Womenswear Men and women Womenswear Young fashion (Him and Her)
UK	Arcadia	topman dorothy perkins wallis evans miss selfridges outfit topshop burton menswear Next	Menswear Womenswear Womenswear Womenswear Young fashion (Her) Fashion for all public Womenswear Menswear Fashion for all public
US	Esprit	Esprit Forever 21	Fashion for all public Young fashion (Him and Her)

	Gap	Fashion for all public
	Old Navy	Fashion for all public
	Banana Republic	Young fashion (Him and Her)
	Athleta	Sportswear
	Intermix	Womenswear
	Bath&Body Works	Body care
	Victoria's Secret	Underwear
	La Senza	Underwear
	Henri Bendel	Accessories
	Calvin Klein	Men and women
	Tommy Hilfiger	Fashion for all public
	Speedo	Swimwear
	Van Heusen	Menswear
	Izod	Sportswear
	The North Face	Sportswear
	Lee	Jeans
	Reef	Menswear
	Timberland	Shoes
	Kipling	Accessories
	Majestic	Sportswear
	Wrangler	Men and women
	7 for all mankind	Jeans
	Vans	Shoes

Table 1. Sample

The criteria to assess a company's having of an Instagram account or not was established by Barnes and Mattson (2009); a company would be considered to be a user of Instagram 'if they had an official corporate account with posts made within the past thirty days'. In the first place, this paper checked the existence of corporate Instagram accounts of the listed companies. In order to carry out this task the procedures previously used by Barnes (2010) and Barnes and Mattson (2009) were followed. First, all company home pages were examined for links to, or mention of, a corporate Instagram account. If none were found, a site search was carried out with the keyword 'Instagram'. If still none of these methods worked to find the existence of a company's Instagram account, we used Google to search for Instagram accounts using the listed company name and the word 'Instagram' as keywords. If no Instagram accounts were found this way, a search on the Instagram website was conducted using the listed company name.

For all accounts, the following variables were observed: audience, activity and size. In our study, a company's size is measured by the number of shops owned or franchised by the retailers. The audience of a company's Instagram account was measured by its number of followers and the activity by its number of posts. Finally, the variation of the number of posts and the number of followers of the different companies was calculated as: $(\text{activity on December} - \text{activity on 31 October}) / \text{activity on 31 October}$ and $(\text{audience on December} - \text{audience on 31 October}) / \text{audience on 31 October}$

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

This research found that 98% of the international top fashion retailers were using Instagram. Except for Majestic, a very small North American sportswear firm from the group VF Corporation, which did not show any presence on this social network, the rest of the firms made regular use of their Instagram pages, at least as a one-way communication tool. Table 2 summarises the main descriptive statistics for the 57 companies observed.

01/12/2016	Min	Max	Average
Size	5	3261	619
Activity	413	5,624	1,833
Audience	6,408	48,000,000	2,867,979
Variation in Activity	0.14%	13.54%	2.77%
Variation in Audience	0%	20.00%	3.48%

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

The results of our research show that the values that measure the different variables vary widely. Our sample ranges from fashion retailers with broad audiences, like Victoria's Secret, H&M and Zara with 48, 17.7 and 14.7 million fans, respectively, to those with less than 10,000 fans, such as Izod or Jack and Jones. The activity of the different retailers was also very uneven among the companies researched in this period. In our sample, the number of posts ranged between 5,600 and 413 posts. The top three companies in the number of posts were Primark, Next and Topshop with 5,625, 4,974, 4,511 posts, respectively. Those with fewer publications were Jack and Jones, COS and Kipling. The third main variable analysed in this study is the size of the company. As the average number of stores was 619, our sample is made up of different sized companies. The larger ones regarding the number of stores were H&M, Vero Moda, Zara and Calvin Klein, with more than 2,000 stores: H&M: 3,261; Vero Moda: 2,734; Zara: 2,085 and Calvin Klein: 2,010. On the other end, there are companies with less than ten physical stores like J Brand from Fast retailing and Cheap Monday from the H&M group, with six and five stores, respectively.

The firms with a greater increase in activity in the period observed were Van Heusen, a North American company of the PVH group with a 13.5% increase in the number of posts during the period analysed, COS from the Swedish group H&M with a 9.5% increase, and Uterqüe, the Spanish accessories brand from Inditex group with a 6.9% increase. Wallis, 7 For All Mankind and Oysho experienced the smallest variations. At the same time, the largest audience variations were those of Zara Home, Uniqlo and Stradivarius with a 20%, 12% and 9% increase, respectively, during the period under research; and Timberland, Jbrand and Intermix were the ones with smallest variation in the number of followers.

At a business group level, the largest business groups were Inditex, Bestseller and PVH with 6,683, 4,158 and 4,150 stores, respectively. The smaller ones are Primark, Next and Forever 21 with 290, 728 and 800, respectively. The groups with the largest audience were LBrands, Inditex, H&M and Forever 21 with 51, 33.5, 18.5 and 11.9 million followers respectively. The smallest ones were Esprit, Bestseller and Next, with 126,000, 310,684 and 424,000 followers, respectively. With regards to business groups' activity on Instagram, the most active ones were Arcadia, Inditex and VF Corporation with 14,766, 13,008 and 12,893 posts, respectively. The ones who posted the least were Esprit, Bestseller and Forever 21.

At the country level, the most active ones were Ireland, the UK and the US with an average number of posts of 5,456, 2,106 and 1,735, respectively. The less active are Germany, with 411 posts; Denmark, with an average of 913 posts, and Japan. On the other hand, the most followed countries were Spain, the US, Ireland and Sweden (4, 3.9, 3.6 and 3.2 million followers, respectively). The smaller audiences account for Denmark, Japan and UK (76,125, 259,366 and 1 million followers, respectively).

Concerning to the area of specialisation of the brands, the type of companies better represented in our sample are those specialised in fashion for all public (women, men and children) with 14,230 stores, followed by those in womenswear and young fashion for him and her (4,365 and 3,359 stores, respectively). Those with less of a brick and mortar presence are the sectors kids wear, accessories and jeans with 172, 198 and 225 stores, respectively. The areas with a broader audience were underwear, fashion for all public and men and women’s fashion, which accounted for 47.9, 41.5 and 15.5 million followers, respectively. At the other end, kids wear, jeans and swimwear were the least followed (10,900, 131,000 and 248,000 followers, respectively). Furthermore, the most active specialties were fashion for all, womenswear and underwear (24,020, 16,815 and 8,302, respectively) and the least ones, kids wear, home and swimming wear with 733, 912 and 1,425 posts, respectively.

5.2. Statistical Analysis

In order to assess significant relationships among the analysed variables, a statistical test was conducted using Spearman’s rho correlation analysis for the 54 active fashion retailers (Table 3). The correlation coefficient results are as follows.

	Size	Activity	Audience
Size	1		
Activity	0.154	1	
Audience	0.507(**)	0.495(**)	1

Table 3. Relationship between variables **Bilateral significance ($p < 0.01$), * Bilateral significance ($p < 0.05$)

The results show that a variable audience is related with the variables size and activity. As expected, there is a relation between the number of stores and the number of followers (RQ1: 0.507), and between number of posts and number of followers (RQ2: 0.495). However, there is a lack of a significant relation between the number of stores and the number of posts. Our correlation analysis does not confirm the relation between size and activity (RQ3: 0.154).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study is the first to analyse the popular social media platform Instagram as a relevant part of marketing strategies for companies in the fashion sector. Based on Ananda et al. (2016), the N-Rel framework about how companies develop their social media marketing strategy, this study analysed the use of alternative marketing communication through Instagram by leading fashion companies. The findings shed light on the extent to which top fashion retailers use this social media tool in order to spread the word, latest trends and brand’s information and on the impact that Instagram posts generate in the audience and site activity.

Ninety-eight per cent of companies in the sample of this research use Instagram at least as a one-way communication tool posting about the brand, its products and/or its promotions. Social media marketing and in particular Instagram marketing is leading to significant changes in companies’ communication strategies in the fashion industry, providing and reinforcing inter-relations among the different elements of the marketing organisation. Marketing messages are no longer unidirectional within a consumer network (Kozinets et al., 2010); instead, organisations and business stakeholders have shown to prefer two-way social media communication (Saxton and Waters, 2014; Guidry, 2013). Social networks are one of the most important consulting tools for online

customers. Online shops must have a reliable and solid profile in social networks, especially taking into account the integration of ads that some of them allow. This is not only the case of Instagram but also of Facebook and Twitter (Observatorio de ecommerce y transformación digital, 2016).

Marketers can capitalise on this social resource for the use of social influencers within the social media network, thus increasing the impact of the marketing actions on consumers. Information on fashion trends and promotions are transmitted by firms, consumers and customers via Instagram as a new form of marketing. Exploring how companies in the fashion sector develop their social media strategies through the Instagram network and the implications of such strategies in the marketing activities of the company and consumers reactions becomes crucial and could enlighten the future of marketing, fashion retailing and ultimately, commerce. Top fashion retailers have a great online presence and are able to grow in the networks in an organic way. Fashion is a sector that creates a lot of conversation online, and they are leaders.

As was shown, our sample is made up of companies of different sizes, origins and areas of specialisation. This translates into a wide range of different communication strategies: companies with different levels of activity on Instagram and a different reach to their audience. Our sample ranges from Primark, Next and Top Shop with 5,625, 4,974 and 4,511 posts, respectively, to Jack and Jones, COS y Kipling with less than 500 posts. As shown, there are active and passive strategies according to the purposes and experience (Mergel, 2013). There are companies that focus on representation of the brand on the social media platforms following push strategies, and others focused on gaining engagement of the audience through pull strategies. A push strategy on Instagram is based on posting pictures of the collection and looks to invite followers to directly buy the product. This is the case of Next, Victoria's Secret, Zara or Calvin Klein. Pull strategies have been observed to invite followers to engage with the brands through different activities like a users' photo contest using the products of the brand. Primark and Top Shop are some of the cases. Passive strategies of companies that post less are based on listening and networking activities. It is about being present in the social networking site and being able to understand and take advantage of the audience's comments. In the case of H&M, it interacts with its audience, responds to the doubts of its audience and creates content at the right time.

The firms that had intensive activity during the period under study were not the larger ones and neither were they the ones with the broader audiences. On the contrary, they were smaller companies and less popular brands that belong to larger groups. It is common in our sample that smaller companies have greater increases, which could be explained by the intensity of the marketing and communication strategy when the brands are either recent or at least recent on this platform, Instagram, and it is in the first stage of development where it needs to become known. This is an example for professionals in the sector and owners of small fashion firms and/or shops, still in their early stages of growth. The more they post, the greater the exposure of the brand in social networks and its scope to different audiences.

Variations in the audience often seem to be related to the increase in activity of the companies. Companies that experienced the largest increase in their audience posted more than the average (2.77%). Most of them had an activity increase above 4%. On the other hand, the companies with the smaller audience increase posted below the average, around 2%.

Regarding to the marketing purpose of the SMM usage, in our sample, we found that there are companies that use Instagram for public relations and direct marketing – Zara

or H&M are some examples; and engaging personalities as brand or product promoters or influencers, such as Rafa Nadal for Tommy Hilfiger.

Three main variables were observed in the 57 companies reviewed: company size, company activity on Instagram and company audience on Instagram. Our research studied these variables and their interconnections. To that end, Spearman's rho correlation test was applied, leading to the following results:

RQ1: A company's audience on Instagram is positively related to its size.

There is a significant relation between a company's size and its audience, between the number of stores and the number of followers. However, we cannot confirm that the relation is strong, as the correlation coefficient is just 0.507. There is a slightly better chance for this relation to be positive, and further investigation should be done. However, the positive relation could be explained by the visibility of the company. When a company has a large amount of brick and mortar stores, it is usually well known in the sector, has a good reputation and keeps opening new stores. The more stores a company has the greater the chance of the audience knowing the brand.

In the social media era, 100% of top fashion retailers use at least Facebook as a marketing tool (Escobar-Rodriguez and Bonson-Fernandez, 2017) and 98% of them integrate Instagram into their communication strategies. Chances are high that a well-known company with a large number of stores has a large number of Instagram followers. Out of the four largest companies of our sample – companies with more than 2,000 stores – two of them were also in the top five in the number of followers: H&M and Zara with 17.7 and 14.7 million followers, respectively. However, the number one in the number of followers is Victoria's Secret who, with 1,118 stores, counts on an audience of 48 million followers. Calvin Klein ranks number seven in the audience ranking, surpassed by much lower firms in the number of stores and even some well below the average of the sample, as is the case of Topshop with only 66 stores and 7.8 million followers, which is 0.4 million followers more than Calvin Klein. Veromoda is a good example of the lack of a relation between size of the company and the size of the audience on Instagram. With 2,734 stores around the world, the firm has only 246,000 followers on Instagram, which seems to indicate the impact of other relevant factors that affect the size of the audience. As can be seen, our results do not completely support that relation.

RQ2: A company's audience on Instagram is positively related to its activity.

Correlations between the number of posts and the number of followers are also significant. That is to say, a company's activity on Instagram is related to the size of the audience. Although the intensity of this relation could not be confirmed merely with this result, as the correlation coefficient is still low (0.495), a positive relation could be established. The more a company posts, the more information becomes viral, and the higher the chances of getting to a higher number of stakeholders through re-posts and comments of current followers. Taking advantage of virality allowed by Instagram, companies could reach a higher number of consumers or potential consumers who could become new followers. On the other hand, the opposite reasoning could also apply. Companies' excessive or inappropriate usage of the social media platform could lead to a decrease in the number of followers, who, unhappy with the type of content received, could stop being part of the company's community by no longer following its Instagram account.

Further research is needed to reach a conclusion about this relationship, and a content analysis of a company's Instagram account could help reveal this information.

Nevertheless, in our sample, some of the firms that post the most are in the top of the audience ranking, such as Victoria's Secret, Topshop and Primark. There are also companies like Zara, posting below the average of the sample, obtain a very good position in the audience ranking – third place; and others like Next, who is second in the number of posts and obtains only 424,000 followers, which is far below the average of 2.8 million.

RQ3: A company's level of activity on Instagram is positively related to its size.

The results of our research do not support this relation (0.154). Our correlation analysis does not confirm the positive relation between size of the company and its activity on Instagram. An in-depth content analysis would contribute to determine the extent to which fashion retailers are using Instagram. In a preliminary analysis, it seems that larger companies limit their strategies on Instagram to representation and brand presence on social networks, most of them posting below the average. It is smaller companies such as Primark, Next or Topshop that take advantage by spreading their brand on Instagram.

To sum up, our research was an initial approach to companies' usage of the social media platform Instagram as a relevant part of their marketing and communication strategy. Although 98% of the companies studied have integrated Instagram into their communication strategies, quantitative analysis of the usage of Instagram by top fashion retailers does not yet reveal conclusions with the degree of significance predicted. Correlations were found between size of the companies and Instagram actions and between a company's activity on Instagram and its audience. Our results provide ideas of how world leaders in the fashion industry are integrating and benefiting from this social media tool. Instagram has become a marketing tool of great relevance for most companies. Consumers have become prescribers and promoters to other consumers who rely more on peers' opinions than on direct business communication. Advertising is now about conversing with the audience and the most important tool for consumers is word-of-mouth, which is improved by the multiplier effect of social networks. Instagram has the added speed of the greater virality of the image content, which is so important in the fashion industry.

From a practitioner's point of view, this study encourages retailers to consider Instagram as a relevant part of their social media marketing strategy. This tool is a crucial part of the business strategy of fashion companies that support growth by providing strong market responsiveness. The findings stress the importance for public relations and marketing practitioners to include this channel in their social media plans, and to monitor posts and conversation on Instagram. Public relations professionals in the fashion industry clearly need to engage actively with their public on Instagram.

7. Future Research

Research could benefit from qualitative analysis. Content analysis of Instagram posts would provide further information about Instagram strategies followed by top fashion retailers. Additionally, there is still a need for further investigation about the effect of firm/brand generated content from social media marketing actions on consumer behaviour.

The study is also limited by the period of time observed – a one-month time period. A longitudinal study with a larger dataset could enrich the results of this research, contributing to broader knowledge of the issue and to deeper analysis of both marketing actions on Instagram and their consequences

Finally, although Instagram continues to be the network that dominates in the fashion industry, the latter is one of the sectors that is most influenced by influencers, and they are the ones that decide which network fits the most. As for the social network that best fits the needs of fashion, it is different for each brand. The content that sells the most in fashion is the visual, and Snapchat is having a great push. First it was Facebook, then Twitter and now Instagram, but it seems that in the not too distant future the way to 'viralise' fashion will be Snapchat. The great inconvenience of Instagram and Facebook is the historical memory. Brands do not want to have a history on the Web that limits them to making content. Snapchat is instant and ephemeral, rebellious and spontaneous, ephemeral and transgressive. This is what defines Snapchat: pictures and videos that self-destruct in 24 hours.

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