Personal style bloggers: the most popular visual composition principles and themes on instagram

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Abstract

Instagram is one of the main social networking services personal style bloggers choose for interacting with followers. The goal of the present study is to detect the most common principles of visual composition and themes used by the world's ten most influential bloggers. To achieve this goal we have employed a content analysis, using a sample of 503 Instagram images. The results indicate that the bloggers' visual pattern of choice on Instagram corresponds to a wide shot with a full body view of the blogger against a significant background. The shot is taken at eye level angle and the predominant visual elements —the blogger and/or the product— are located in the centre of the photograph.

Keywords: visual semiotic, content analysis, Instagram, fashion blogger, influencer, brands.

Introduction

In 2014 Instagram topped 300 million users. This is a considerably high number given that the social networking service was launched in 2010. According to its own statistics, 70 million photos and videos are shared on the platform every day. Kevin Systrom, Instagram's CEO, commented this data on the company's blog (2014). According to data from DMR (Digital Marketing Ramblings), 51% of Instagram's users are men and 49% are women (Smith, 2015), which shows an even distribution between the sexes, especially when compared to other online photo and video-sharing social networks such as Pinterest, whose user base is 85% female (Emarketer, 2014). So, one could say that Instagram is the most popular online photo and video-sharing social networking service today (2015). But it is not only important in terms of the number of its users; the platform also has the most active users: "61% of its users 'like' at least one piece of content per day. Thirty per cent of users are truly active and 'like' over ten pieces of content per day" (Iconosquare, 2015). According to the same study, Instagrammers normally use the application for an average 21 minutes a day. Additionally, it is a 'young' social networking tool: most of its users —73%— are between the ages of 15 and 35. Unlike other social networking platforms, Instagram was created and designed for mobile phones, which, on the one hand, confirms its success with young people and on the other hand, the growth of internet access through mobile devices (Bossonworth, 2015). Regarding its commercial and communicative interest, 70% of its users have consulted a brand name on Instagram and 37% of these use the app to follow between 1 and 5 brands. This coincides with data from a study by Forrester (Elliott, 2014) which revealed that Instagram achieved a higher percentage of user

engagement in comparison to other social networking services — at a rate of 4.21%. However some sectors are more interesting to users than others. By order of importance, these sectors are fashion, (87%), beauty (65%) and home decor (65%) (Iconosquare, 2015). That is why it is no coincidence that the 10 most influential fashion bloggers are assiduous users of this service. For instance, in the month of January alone, Chiara Ferragni shared more than 200 photos on Instagram. Even though the bloggers publish content on their own websites, they use platforms like Instagram to maintain more intimate contact with their followers and to provide exclusive information. The objective of this article is to analyse the most recurrent visual composition principles and themes the world's ten most influential fashion bloggers use on Instagram. Therefore, this initial objective will be widened relating the visual composition with fashion bloggers´success.

Theoretical framework. Fashion and influencers

Web 2.0 technology has facilitated not only the creation of user content —User Generated Content (UGC)— but it has also strengthened Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). According to the study Total Retail 2015, by Price Waterhouse Coopers (2015), 70% of consumers search the internet before making a purchase in a physical store. Traditionally interpersonal communication has been considered more influential than mass media (Weimann, 1994); the internet and social media have only multiplied this impact. More recent theories take into consideration both interpersonal communication and mediated communication. (Livingstone, 2011). Therefore, they coexist simultaneously. Specifically, bloggers, as content creators, have become digital influencers who are skilled at connecting with users through social media networks (Uzunoglu & Misci Kip, 2014). Accordingly, social media networks are used to tell a story. Thus, the bloggers use storytelling (Salmon, 2008) to show part of her personal life.

Therefore, in this article we take the two-step flow theory of communication (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) and the mediation communication (Livingstone, 2011) and convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006a) as references for explaining the importance of the influence of certain individuals on public opinion. Opinion leaders exercise greater influence on people's opinions than mass media or those media which are controlled by the fashion industry. Thus, we consider these bloggers to be opinion leaders (Rogers, 2003; Weimann, 1994) because, on the one hand, they are early adapters of determined fashion trends which they accommodate to their own style, while on the other hand, they are very good at propagating their opinions through social media (Lyons & Henderson, 2005) and influencing others, who at the same time will influence other people and so on. Fashion is a sector where we can see the effects of the influence of UGC and EWOM more clearly. Just like in other sectors of the blogosphere, fashion bloggers have become quite influential, as well. For this reason, "changes in fashion involve a combination of personal adoption at the micro-level and social diffusion at the macro-level" (Kim et al, 2008). As a matter of fact, some personal style bloggers have become so influential that they are invited to fashion shows, as true celebrities. This is due to a more general tendency known as 'the democratization of fashion' (Ramos-Serrano & Jiménez-Marín, 2014). Low-cost fashion has been revolutionary in globalizing trends and making fashion more affordable. But it has also accelerated the rhythms of an industry accustomed to working 3 or 4 months in advance. For example, the Spanish textile group Inditex, with Zara at the lead,

offers new garments every week. Thus, the internet and the blogosphere are especially suited to an environment of growing demand for disposable fashion designs and trends. The fashion industry has witnessed how the consumer has become the 'designer', and has thereby, assumed a more active role, which implies greater power of choice and a higher turnover of garments (Tungate, 2008).

One of the most important sub-genres within independent blogs that has emerged from this panorama — in contrast to corporate— is the personal fashion blog or personal style blog (Rocamora, 2011). Characteristically this kind of blog is a personal space where the author or authors share their particular vision of fashion. Generally these blogs are hosted on independent websites and maintained by "young students, with a certain amount of purchasing power, and who have proved themselves to be social media experts" (Ruiz Molina, 2012). The key to the blogs' success lies in, on the one hand, their quality of representing a kind of personal journal, and on the other hand, in their independence from the official tendencies set by the industry. However, the bloggers still use magazines and fashion shoots of professional models as reference points; which they usually imitate (Ramos-Serrano & Jimenez-Marín, 2014). Even though the majority of personal style blogs manage to maintain a personal character, their media echo and ability to influence others has allowed for their professionalization and this has had negative repercussions on their independence. Yet, their capacity to influence others continues to grow, at the same rate as they gain followers on social media. Although we consider that the influence happens at all levels, from top to bottom, from bottom to top, even horizontally. According to the convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006a) and the principle of variability (Manovich, 2005) the influence between fashion bloggers and industry is a round trip.

Academic literature on fashion blogs is very up-to-date despite the maturity of the sector. Thus, we can find studies on blogs from the perspectives of gender (Rocamora, 2014); exploratory and descriptive analyses which try to explain the phenomenon (Ruiz Molina, 2013; Engholm & Hansen-Hansen, 2013; Ramos-Serrano & Jiménez, 2014); as well as studies focused on the methods of communication fashion bloggers use (Bunina, 2013). Lastly there have been a few semiotic approaches that contribute to further understanding of fashion blogs (Ruiz Molina, 2012; Kretz, 2010). The academic journal *Fashion Theory: the Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, published a monographic issue in 2015 about fashion blogs with various articles treating different points of view: history, gender or fashion communication, to name a few.

Concerning studies on Instagram, we should emphasise Lev Manovich's work (2014, 2015) which uses computational methods for analyzing large quantities of images uploaded to social media with the objective of detecting cultural patterns. By using these methods we can obtain all the data Instagram's application programming interface (API) compiles, such as filters and hashtags or geolocation information, along with other data. This kind of analysis allows for the discovery of cultural differences thanks to the volume of the data analysed. On the other hand, we find exploratory studies. Silva (2014) approaches Instagram as a communication tool for luxury brands. Gibbs et al (2014) conduct a study of funeral images on Instagram. Alper (2014) analyses the use of Instagram in war photojournalism. De Moraes Weidlich (2014) conducted a study on how the magazine Vogue uses Instagram as a means to distribute content. This master dissertation focuses on how traditional media are using new media in the era of participatory culture. However we have not found academic studies about how fashion bloggers use Instagram, which as we mentioned above, is one of the most important social networking tools for the

promotion of this kind of blog. Therefore, this article aims to study the image as a key element in the communicative panorama of fashion today.

Nowadays we live in an eminently visual world; as Howells says (2008) "We are surrounded by increasingly sophisticated visual images". Fashion bloggers use photography, and through it the illusion of reality is guaranteed by the own process. Nevertheless the relationship between the photograph and reality is considerably less than simple, although it may be considered a mechanical recording device and it can only record the truth. According to this argument, photography is simply a medium through which we observe the natural or real world. That´s exactly why fashion bloggers use photographs to make people think that they are a part of their "real" daily life. Photography is thought to be a "mirror", a "reflection"of reality and that idea has traditionally implied that it doesn´t usually transform things in a aesthetic way. This leads us to think that photography is a meeting place for reality and imaginary, where they complement each other and they became something different.   The relationship between photography and reality is, therefore, very complex (Howells, 2008).

The image could be considered a construct. That is to say, it is created with some internal specificities to be decoded in a concrete sense. Furthermore, it could be considered as an independent element with respect to the represented objects (Carmona, 2010). One can conceive that an image is not a reality in itself, but is rather a representation created though visual language (Ávila, 2011: 21) in such a way that the bloggers we analyse rely on defined visual characteristics that distinguish them from the others and from themselves in real life.

Zunzunegui (1995: 22) says that an image is a "visual communication support on which a fragment of the perceptive universe is materialised and that presents the characteristic of prolonging its existence through the course of time". The image, then, is the presence of an absence and this is how the beholder interprets it, who in a certain way always believes in the imaginary world represented by the image (Aumont, 1992). The bloggers (who have become pseudo-professional models over the years) use Instagram images to achieve a closer connection to their audiences. Thus, the intention of their pictures on Instagram is to put together an array of more intimate and personal snapshots from their professional profiles. The images are used to create a universe with their followers that is intimate and all their own.

Thus, the essence of the image is defined by three elements which at the same time are identified with the concept of iconic nature (Villafañe and Mínguez, 2009):

- A selection of reality: The image supposes a fragment of an infinite reality that extends before our eyes through a "frame" formed by the four sides of the iconic representation. The bloggers select an area of their personal and/or professional lives and they "frame" it to transmit it to their followers.

- A repertoire of elements and structures of specific iconic representation: such as colour, texture, rhythm and relationships scaled to the image. Each of the bloggers has her own identity which is marked, not so much by the piece of reality framed in the image, but by how it is codified through the choice of some elements but not others; such as warm colours instead of cool, or medium shots instead of wide shots, depending on each individual.

- A visual syntax: that is, a way of placing and relating the elements that make up the iconic structure which become a determining factor in the significant result of the image. On this point

each blogger will play with a normative composition in which the outstanding elements seek a privileged place in the framing of the photo to reach her followers in an effective way.

Nevertheless, Lister y Wells say (2004) that "It is not possible to separate out "what is said" from "how it is said"". That is the reason why the essence of the image cannot be considered apart from the content chosen by the fashion bloggers. Consequently, both what they say and how they say it become their distinguishing mark, their personality.

Research questions and methodology

We have channelled the main objectives of this study through the following research questions:

What are the predominant composition elements used by the world's ten most influential bloggers when they upload images to Instagram?

The spatial structure of the image is composed of a series of elements that have tangible and material presence. They are what formally and materially construct the iconic space. The value of each element is variable and always depends on the context. This study aims to isolate some of these elements without losing sight of the fact that what determines the global meaning of the image is the interaction of the elements with each other. Here we refer to the type of shot used (wide shot, medium shot or close shot), to the type of camera angle (eye level angle, high angle or low angle) and to the predominant colour (cool/warm) of each image. Additionally this should be contemplated as a whole to which the rules of composition may be applied (or not) to organise the relationships between the elements within the image.

What is the image's content? What is the predominant theme of the images the bloggers upload?

On the one hand, we need to determine whether the most important component of the image is a human element or by contrast, a product. From there we consider distinct highlighted themes, such as landscape, a collection of items, etc. In the case where the human element is highlighted, we determine whether the human figure appears alone or with company.

Are brands present in the photographs uploaded by the bloggers? Are brands visible and/or recognizable in the images?

Ultimately, a fashion blog's purpose is very closely related to the ambit of advertising. With this in mind, our goal in asking this question is to determine whether the logo and/or brand name of the featured products —clothing and accessories or cities and hotels— appears in the image in a clearly distinguishable manner or not.

On the basis of those research questions, this work about fashion bloggers on Instagram is based on the semiotic analysis of the selected photographs. This becomes a very complex task, as "it is very hard to

argue that the relationship between a photograph and the thing photographed is "arbitrary"" (Howells, 2008). As Bazin argued (1990), however, the photographic image both is and yet is not "the object" itself", and therein lies the root of the complication". As Howells (2008) says photographs are profitable open to ideological interpretation and we have to assume to carry out this research in a successful way that the "literal meaning of a photograph may not be its complete and total meaning". Therefore we have tried to value that fashion bloggers´ photographs are also a reflection of their identity and cultural values.

The sample we selected is based on a list elaborated by Fashionista published on 2 February 2015 (Sherman, 2015). To compile the list the website's collaborators consulted social networking platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Pinterest, as well as web traffic. These figures served to provide a panoramic view of the number of people these bloggers reach every day. Additionally, special attention was paid to those bloggers who used their influence to create their own product lines. They also took into account where advertisers were placing the most interest and who was moving the most product through links with acquaintances/friends. Lastly, they used Google News searches and paid attention to those who made headlines, recognizing these people as bloggers who were capable of reaching beyond their own networks.

All of the criteria seem solid enough for elaborating a reliable list of the world's ten most influential fashion bloggers, which we attach below:

Table 1. The most influential bloggers according to an analysis by Fashionista, 2015.

Blogger	Blog	Number of followers on Instagram	Klout popularity index
Chiara Ferragni	The blonde salad	3.1 m	66
Aimee Song	Song of style	1,9 m	62
Julie Sariñana	Sincerely Jules	1,8 m	56
Kristina Bazan	Kayture	1,3 m	62
Nicole Warne	Gary Pepper Girl	1 m	65
Wendy Nguyen	Wendy´s Lookbook	609 k	47
Blair Eadie	Atlantic Pacific	550 k	61
Rumy Neely	Fashion Toast	519 k	78
Julia Engel	Gal meets Glam	402 k	78
Nicolette Mason	Nicolette Mason	61,4 k	78

For this study we compiled a total of 503 photographs from the ten most influential personal style bloggers' Instagram feeds. The chosen images are from January 2015. From the total count of each blogger's images we applied a random stratified sampling of proportional allocation to determine if the number of images to be analysed was representative.

Table 2. Sample selection.

Blogger	Total number of photos (January 2015)	Number of Photos analysed
Chiara Ferragni	216	114
Aimee Song	101	53
Wendy Nguyen	43	23
Kristina Bazan	196	104
Julie Sariñana	101	53
Rumy Neely	43	23
Nicole Warne	60	32
Blair Eadie	41	22
Julia Engel	116	61
Nicolette Mason	33	17
TOTAL	950	503

The selection of the final images was made from the ones that received the most 'likes' from followers. However, we did not take descriptive texts or comments into consideration because the objective of this study was to focus on the value of the images.

For the collection of the data, we made use of content analysis, because this kind of analysis provides quantitative information (Kress y Van Leeuwen, 1996). For this we defined the criteria, expanded upon below, which are based on a series of previously determined values.

The values were organised in a coding book, elaborated ad hoc for this investigation. Additionally, after the creating the analysis grid, we carried out a coding test to ensure the reliability of the subsequent content analysis, the result of which was above 90% (0.9294%).

We interpreted the collected data through visual semiotics, because it provides a much richer analysis of the texts by focusing on the formal relationships between the elements that make up the image, and therefore, on what the images mean (Arnheim, 2008; Aumont et al, 1992; Carmona, 2010; Casetti and Di Chio, 1994; Howells, 2008; Malins, 1983; Moles, 1981; Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004; Zunzunegui, 1995).

In the left-hand column at the top, we included the name of the blogger, underscore and the day of the month of the photo. If there was more than one photo analysed for that day we added the letter a, b, c, and so on. For example, mason_23b corresponds to a Nicolette Mason photograph from 23 January, and it is the second photograph analysed from that date.

Operatively the following variables were defined. We chose two elements concerning the scale of the image. On the one hand, the types of shots and, on the other, the camera angle. With types of shots (A) (See the table below) we refer to the size of the subject in relation to the image represented (Carmona,

2010; Fernández and Martínez, 1999; Gil and Segado, 2011) which was again divided into four distinct values: CS, which stands for Close-shot where you can see the person from the neck up (at an intimate distance); MS which is Medium Shot, where you can see the person from the knee and above (at a social distance); WS which is Wide Shot where you can see the person's entire body (at a public distance), and lastly, CIS which is Cut-In Shot. In the Cut-In Shot you can see an object or part of the human body but the facial expression is not shown. For Camera Angle (B), we contemplated three values: High Angle, Low Angle and Eye Level Angle. Camera angle has to do with the height of the point of view in relation to the photo's subject. The subjects photographed from above are coded as HA (High Angle). The ones photographed from below are coded as LA (Low Angle) and the ones shown at approximately the same level as the observer are coded as ELA (Eye Level Angle).

In considering the image's constitutive elements, we took only one value into account: colour (C) (Kandinsky, 1985; Villafañe and Mínguez, 2009). Four different variables were taken into account for colour: Cool, when the predominant colours were green, blue or purple; Warm when the majority of the tones were reddish, yellow or orange; and two more, White and Black, if one of these colours was the most predominant in the image. The researchers came to an agreement determining that a maximum of two of these four variables could be chosen within the value colour as an exception.

Visual Composition (D) refers to the rules that organise the relationships between the different elements in the image and, as a consequence, regulates the construction of the visual space to achieve a given aesthetic, informative or narrative effect (Corbalán, 2012). Within this variable we have distinguished two levels: the Rule of Thirds and Highlighted. The Rule of Thirds divides the screen into three equal parts, vertically and horizontally. The dividing lines cross each other at four points known as strong points which are the points at which the centers of interest stand out. Here we have distinguished between Human and Product, and if these in turn are placed at the Centre of the image or in its Strong Points. On the other hand, for Highlighted we contemplated two levels: Human and Product, in function of one or the other being the more striking element in the image.

When considering the variable Theme (E), referring to a recognizable theme in the image, we considered three distinct levels: Landscape, Still-life and Model. Landscape refers to an image depicting broad surroundings in which the human figure is not especially distinguishable. Still-life refers to a group of elements shot at close range, which in turn is divided into Object, if the highlighted element stands out from the rest of the image; Food, if food is the focus of the image; and Flowers, if this is what predominates. Lastly Model refers to images in which the blogger is the protagonist of the photo. On this level we have distinguished three categories. Alone, if the model/blogger appears without company; Accompanied, if she appears with someone else, and lastly Selfie, if the blogger takes her own picture and her face explicitly appears. In this sense, we should specify that we understand *Selfie* as "a photograph that one has taken of oneself typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website (Oxford Dictionaries Blog, 2013). And since we did not analyse text information, we only considered selfies to be those images where it is clear that the blogger is the one taking the picture - whether because you can see her arm or because the picture has been taken in front of a mirror, for example.

Lastly, two levels were considered for the value Brand (F); Visible, if the logo and/or name of the brand is clearly distinguishable, Not visible, if the logo and/or name of the brand is not clearly distinguishable in the iconic representation analysed.

Below is the content analysis grid which was used to gather the data:

Table 3. Content analysis grid.

Image code	Blogger name and image number			
Elements of scale	Types of shots (A)	Close shot		
		Medium shot		
		Wide shot		
		Cut-in shot		
	Camera angle (B)	High Angle		
		Low Angle		
		Eye-level Angle		
Constitutive elements	Colours (C)	Warm		
		Cool		
		White		
		Black		
Visual Composition (D)	Rule of thirds	Human	Centre	
			Strong point	
		Product	Centre	
			Strong point	
	Highlighted	Product	Human	
Theme (E)	Land-scape	Still-life	Flowers	Model	Alone
			Objet		Accompanied
			Food		Selfie
Brand presence (F)	Visible		Not visible		

Results and discussion

Before analyzing the results, we should specify that the sample was obtained from the images marked as favorites by the bloggers' followers. That is to say, those that obtained the most "likes". Therefore, the

results are more relevant because we are analyzing the visual aspects that are most valued by the audience.

The following section provides an overview of the findings of the content analysis divided by variables. Although we have tried to find out visual standards shared by all bloggers, sometimes generalization has been difficult to carry out.

The data we obtained indicates that the type of camera shot the bloggers use the most is the wide shot. This is the predominant shot, reaching 85% and 77% of the most popular photographs in January, as in the cases of Nicole Warne and Blair Eadie, respectively. That is, 6 of the 10 analyzed bloggers have used this type of shot. This shows a user preference for images that depict a full body shot of the blogger in a given context, emphasizing a public distance quite separated from the intimacy of the spectator. So, the observer is interested in the complete picture —he/she wants to know what the blogger is wearing, about fashion and accessories— and he/she is interested in the context in which the scene is taking place. Thus the locale becomes yet another important element in the photograph.

Table 4. Types of shots.

	CS	MS	WS	CIS
Aimee Song	1,89%	11,32%	52,83%	33,96%
Wendy Nguyen	4,35%	21,74%	60,87%	13,04%
Blair Eadie	0,00%	4,55%	77,27%	18,18%
Julia Engel	1,64%	34,43%	40,98%	21,31%
Nicole Warne	0,00%	12,50%	84,38%	3,13%
Julie Sariñana	1,89%	7,55%	43,40%	47,17%
Rumy Neely	8,70%	47,83%	30,43%	13,04%
Niccolette Mason	0,00%	11,76%	64,71%	23,53%
Kristina Bazan	9,62%	46,15%	36,54%	7,69%
Chiara Ferragni	5,26%	50,00%	32,46%	12,28%
CS: close shot; MS: medium shot; WS: wide shot; CIS: cut-in shot.				

There are cases such as Julie Sariñana's (47,17%), where cut-in shots are comparable to wide shots. In this case, the predominant elements of the images are fundamentally objects, more than the human figure, which is not seen, except for the hands or feet which are only partially visible. Chiara Ferragni (50%), Rumi Neely (47,83%) and Kristina Bazan (46.15%) use more medium shots than wide shots, thus conveying a tendency towards social distance as opposed to public distance in their images. These data are relevant because Chiara Ferragni and Cristina Bazan are two of the most popular bloggers in the analyzed sample. Generally, bloggers tend to combine the use of shots depending on the content of the images. But generally they use shots where the blogger is the protagonist, even in cut-in shots where the bloggers show part of her body.

Image 1. Published on Instagram by Nicole Warne (29 January 2015)

When we consider the camera angle or the observer's point of view, eye level angle is the most commonly used. One has to take into account that Instagram is inextricably linked to the mobile phone and that in many cases the photos are (supposedly) taken by the bloggers themselves. In this respect we should clarify that sometimes the pictures are taken by professional photographers. We also have to refer to exceptional cases, like that of Wendy Nguyen, who uses low angle shots in 30,43% of the cases, which reveals that this blogger's spectators prefer images of the blogger where her figure is magnified by placing the camera below the horizon.

Contrarily, Julie Sariñana (49,06%) and Nicolette Mason (41,18%) are two bloggers who mostly use high angle shots, which are sometimes framed, especially in the case of the first blogger, in such a way that they show their outfits subjectively by placing the camera so that the photo is at the height of the eyes as though the blogger were looking at her own feet. What this achieves is identification with the spectator from the point of view of the blogger.

Image 2. Published on Instagram by Suri Sariñana (25 January 2015)

Before delving into the data on colour, we should reiterate that this value contemplated up to two dominant colours in the bloggers' photographs. In general, warm colours are predominant in the majority

of the photos analysed, which is associated with cheerfulness, warmth and even excitement. In some specific cases, these colours make up more than half of each of the bloggers' images. For example, Julia uses warm colours 65,57% of the time and cool colours 27,87% of the time. The preponderance of warm colours is associated with the bloggers' intentions to create warm friendly ties with their audiences.

Table 5. Predominant colour.

	Cool	Warm	White	Black
Aimee Song	26,42%	52,83%	26,42%	41,51%
Wendy Nguyen	13,04%	43,48%	65,22%	47,83%
Blair Eadie	27,27%	50,00%	31,82%	59,09%
Julia Engel	27,87%	65,57%	34,43%	13,11%
Nicole Warne	71,88%	25,00%	37,50%	12,50%
Julie Sariñana	39,62%	52,83%	43,40%	24,53%
Rumy Neely	30,43%	34,78%	56,52%	69,57%
Niccolette Mason	29,41%	35,29%	58,82%	64,71%
Kristina Bazan	17,31%	56,73%	30,77%	51,92%
Chiara Ferragni	28,95%	64,91%	19,30%	47,37%

On the other hand, black is the second most common colour, in some cases such as Rumi Neely, who uses it 69,57% of the time, it is the most predominant. This is due primarily to two reasons. On the one hand, in the fashion world, black is considered elegant and flattering to the figure. On the other hand, Instagram has filters that can change colour photos to black and white. But as we have commented elsewhere, some bloggers use determined visual aspects in a way that is all their own. Cooler colours, associated with calm and balance, are what stand out on Nicole Warne's blog, which she employs in 71,88% of her images. Wendy Nguyen stands out by using white —65,22%— which transmits purity and innocence.

However we must not only analyze the colour of the picture as a whole, but also the items shown in the photo and the interaction between them. These bloggers make a proposal for the most popular colours of the season. They also propose a personal colour scheme. The bloggers as opinion leaders must show their expertise about colours. The bloggers are key to interpreting trends coming from the industry. Thanks to 'The democratization of fashion' they can now propose their personal vision of colours.

Image 3. Published on Instagram by Rumy Neely (13 January 2015)

The most popular images are those that, according to the rule of thirds and normative composition, place the women and/or products at the centre of the image. This coincidence is logical if we keep in mind that for Instagram users the important thing is not what the blogger is wearing but who she is —her personality and identity are created ad hoc by what she is wearing. The relevant point is the choice the blogger has made and what the user confirms when she shares it. Nicole Warne (50%) and Rumi Neely (65,22%) distance themselves from this trend by placing the product at the strong points of their photos, thereby giving the product a more prominent role. This definitely contributes to a noticeable advertising quality in the image. According to participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006b), fashion bloggers have a personal and creative style to interpret trends set by the industry. Creativity is the key to determining personality as discussed above. Furthermore, according to the two-step flow theory of communication (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) the bloggers should have a recognizable image for their audience. It is therefore very important to have a personal style of composing images on Instagram.

This coincides with the results obtained under the variable "Highlighted" in which the element that stands out against all the rest is the human figure. These results accentuate the fact that these young women are true opinion creators in that what the users find interesting is seeing the bloggers in determined contexts, wearing specific clothes and accessories.

Of course, there are exceptions. Aimee Song (43,40%) along with Nicole Warne (53,13%) feature the product. The most relevant photos are the ones that show a landscape or an object more than the blogger, thus diverting the user's attention from the blogger herself to the product.

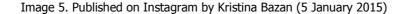Image 4. Published on Instagram by Blair Eadie (3 January 2015)

When considering the results related to the followers' preferred themes, we observe that images where the blogger poses by herself, as a model predominate. This makes sense because the bloggers we have analysed in this paper are personal style bloggers, meaning women who show their particular vision of fashion and propose styles to their followers. With this in mind, wide shots where the blogger's entire body is shown, are used regularly. Two bloggers who stand out, employing this theme, are Blair Eadie (90,91%) and Wendy Nguyen (78,26%).

Table 6. Main themes.

	Theme						
	Landscape	Still-life			Model		
		Objects	Food	Flowers	Alone	Accompanied	Selfie
Aimee Song	9,43%	7,55%	15,09%	1,89%	56,60%	7,55%	1,89%
Wendy Nguyen	0,00%	4,35%	4,35%	0,00%	78,26%	13,04%	0,00%
Blair Eadie	0,00%	4,55%	0,00%	4,55%	90,91%	0,00%	0,00%
Julia Engel	27,87%	6,56%	4,92%	3,28%	44,26%	3,28%	8,20%
Nicole Warne	37,50%	3,13%	3,13%	0,00%	53,13%	3,13%	0,00%
Julie Sariñana	0,00%	3,77%	9,43%	5,66%	75,47%	0,00%	5,66%
Rumy Neely	4,35%	21,74%	0,00%	4,35%	69,57%	0,00%	0,00%
Niccolette Mason	23,53%	11,76%	5,88%	0,00%	23,53%	23,53%	5,88%
Kristina Bazan	4,81%	2,88%	3,85%	0,00%	61,54%	6,73%	18,27%
Chiara Ferragni	4,39%	2,63%	3,51%	0,00%	58,77%	13,16%	15,79%

On the contrary, the Accompanied Model is a relatively infrequent theme in the majority of the bloggers' images, which could be a consequence of the personal profile of these accounts. However, in Nicolette Mason's case it is used 23, 53% of the time. There are other themes that are also widely used by some bloggers. Landscapes are predominant in Julia Engel and Nicole Warne's Instagram feeds, appearing 27% and 37,50% of the time, respectively. The importance of the surroundings is understandable given that Instagram has become a kind of online personal journal, allowing these *influencers* to connect to their followers on a day-to-day basis. Increasingly these fashion bloggers are becoming prescribers, not only of fashion and accessories, but of cities and experiences as well. This is linked with what is said in the theoretical framework about the importance of storytelling in nowadays new media. Fashion bloggers display content that is linear and expresses, in fact, a clear narrative. According to this research, photographs published by fashion bloggers made together some kind of "chain" where every image is connected with the previous one and the one after in such a strong way that all of them made up a discourse, something that flows for the audience, who is seduced not only by the impact of every image, but also by a story. We mean every fashion blogger´s story whom the spectator is connected with as if he were looking at himself in a mirror. This is a way of telling stories based on the power of images, which is much more persuasive than words, which are secondary on Instagram as a social network.

When we look at the Still-life variable —Objects, Flowers or Food— we find that these images do not receive as many 'likes' as others yet they are still present in the sample. Still-life are found in Rumy Neely's feed 21,74% of the time. Lastly, the use of Selfies is not common, although two of the most important bloggers, Kristina Bazan (18,27%) and Chiara Ferragni (15,79%) stand out in their use. Two of the most popular bloggers and therefore the most influential use selfies in order to have a more personal and intimate relationship with their followers. The selfies subjectively reflect the personal story shown through their Instagram profiles.

Image 5. Published on Instagram by Kristina Bazan (5 January 2015)

The last of the variables we analysed has to do with the presence of brands. We remind the reader that this study concentrates on visual analysis, therefore descriptions of the photos or hashtags were not considered. The data reveal that the majority of the images we analysed did not show brands in an explicit way, however this does not mean that brand names are not mentioned in the descriptive texts

accompanying the photos. Nevertheless, Instagram is an online photo and video-sharing social networking service, and therefore, image composition is a key factor to seduce the audience. The captions and comments show details of the images, but when they have already gotten the attention of their followers. Hence this research has focused on the visual elements.

Table 7. Brand presence in the images.

	Brand	
	Visible	Not Visible
Aimee Song	24,53%	75,47%
Wendy Nguyen	4,35%	95,65%
Blair Eadie	18,18%	81,82%
Julia Engel	3,28%	95,08%
Nicole Warne	0,00%	100,00%
Julie Sariñana	11,32%	88,68%
Rumy Neely	8,70%	91,30%
Niccolette Mason	17,65%	82,35%
Kristina Bazan	15,38%	84,62%
Chiara Ferragni	33,33%	66,67%

Generally brands are not shown in the images analyzed because the bloggers know the power of the image to seduce and get the attention of their followers. If they are interested, they will go on reading the description of the images where brands are named. Deliberately the bloggers avoid showing brands or logos clearly because they know that the most important thing is to seduce their followers through their personal selection of garments and the photos composition.

Thus, in the totality of Nicole Warne's images, logos are not shown and there are no visual references to any brands. Brand presence is more evident in the images of other bloggers, however. Aimee Song shows brand names in 24,53% of her images. Yet the most striking case is Chiara Ferragni, who figures at the top of the list of the world's most influential personal style bloggers. She is the most inclined to display brands in an explicit way: Brands are discernible in 33,33% of her images. The presence of brands attests not only to a blogger's prescriptive ability, but also to how brand names take advantage of their influence and offer some bloggers the possibility of creating their own collections. On that note, some bloggers have used their influence to create their own line of fashion and accessories. This is what Chiara Ferragni has done. Her collection of shoes is very present in the sample analysed.

Image 6. Published on Instagram by Chiara Ferragni (12 January 2015)

Based on the results obtained, we have concluded that the most popular images amongst those analysed —the ones that received the most 'likes'— are those where you can see the blogger's full body against a significant background. The photo is taken with the camera at eye level angle and the predominant visual elements —either the young woman and/or the product— are placed at the centre. Additionally, the human figure stands out against the product, i.e., clothes and/or accessories. Warm colours are more widely used than other colours, as they transmit warmth and intimacy to the followers. Taking into account the former, it is consistent that users prefer themes where the blogger stands alone, as a model. Lastly, brands do not usually appear in an explicit manner in the photographs we analysed; that is, you cannot see a logo or brand name. However, this does not mean that followers do not know where the clothing in the images comes from, because complementary information is usually found in the descriptions of the photos or in the blog. Therefore, the image is used as a hook to lead the followers towards the complementary information that will allow them to purchase the clothing and accessories. We should also point out that the bloggers use their Instagram accounts for maintaining and promoting their influence. The reality is that these bloggers are personal brands in themselves and as such, they use visual composition elements to highlight their personalities.

It would also be very interesting to include in this discussion a critical reflection about how these values can be correlated and offer interesting results. For example, the case of Nicole Warne shows how crossing data between the types of shots —wide shots are predominant— the colour —warm colours and white are widely used— and main topics —landscape is the most important— a peculiar profile appears. Nicole Warne is a fashion blogger that usually shows landscapes near the sea in her photographs; the most popular images —those which have been analyzed— are focused on where this girl is and they less emphasis on the girl or on what she is wearing. On the other hand, Chiara Ferragni is completely different. Her most popular images shows the girl in medium shot, using warm colours and giving more importance to the human over the product. In this case the girl herself is more remarkable for her followers than the place where she is.

Conclusions

Instagram is one of the most important photo and video sharing social networking services bloggers use for maintaining sustained contact with their followers and as a kind of personal online journal. For this reason we should specify that despite this study's attempt to provide general results on the use of visual language in the images uploaded by the bloggers —and the approval of these images by the followers— we have detected that each blogger uses her account in a specific way. This means that each personal online journal has a particular way of expressing normative composition principles and as a consequence, leaves her own mark on the way she interacts with her followers. The bloggers are halfway between a celebrity and an opinion leader. Social media networks like Instagram have allowed anonymous people become true leaders of opinion, whom at the same time are influenced by the fashion industry. These days everything is mediated and the bloggers have the ability to create personal proposals that help the fashion industry to spread their designs. That´s the reason why our main findings emphasize that the success of the blogger is their personal style, i. e., the ability to combine clothes and outfits that are shown through the composition of the photos. They are considered fashion fans, according to the terminology used by Jenkins (2006b). Fashion bloggers as fans use their knowledge to create innovative recommendations. 'The democratization of fashion' discussed above has made the fast fashion industry accessible for bloggers. These leaders´ first intention is not to reach traditional media, but rather get followers. Followers are the key to reach the fashion industry and get collaborations with brands. Therefore, the bloggers struggle to get their personal style to achieve popularity. This popularity will be decisive for collaborations with brands, and therefore to get into the fashion industry as mediators. An example of the professionalization of personal style bloggers is that there are agencies that connect bloggers with brands.

We can conclude that these bloggers are not professional in the media or in photography but they have a very good command not only of fashion but also of social networks as far as they make their expertise visible. Although they are not supposed to have audiovisual skills, one can deduce from the quality of the photographs they publish that they work together with a team that includes professionals and tries to keep what is considered to be the key to success: not to lose their personal style. One can conclude from the analysis of the images that every fashion blogger make up a series of attractive images which are part of a neverending story that keeps every follower constantly captivated.

Limitations

As we have pointed out before, this study has focused on the analysis of visual aspects on Instagram, and therefore it has not considered the written content that makes up the complete message the bloggers transmit. For this reason, we believe future investigations should conduct a global study including these aspects.

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