

**1st International Congress and Exhibition on
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The Role of Digital Influencers in Fashion Consumption in Brazil

Assoc. Prof. Ítalo José de Medeiros Dantas

Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

Iara Sofia Silva Dantas

Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

Íris de Faria Mariz

Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

Karen Cristina Andrade de Araújo

Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

Maria Helene Dutra de Medeiros

Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

Sarah Marta da Nóbrega Medeiros

Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

Yslla Jhanny De Medeiros Cavalcante

Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

Assoc. Prof. Lívia Juliana Silva Solino de Souza

Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

Abstract

The expansion of the internet has given rise to new forms of communication and consumption. In the meantime, one of the main features is the role of digital figures responsible for influencing a particular audience, be it food products, hospitality, and fashion products in this project's context. With that in mind, this paper aims to understand digital influencers' role in consuming clothing products in Caicó (Rio Grande do Norte – Brazil). Methodologically, it is applied research with exploratory-descriptive objectives and a qualitative-quantitative approach. We conduct a virtual survey with 103 potential fashion consumers. We test the relationship between two variables (source credibility (reliability, style, expertise) and personal connection) and their influence on purchase intention. With that, it was possible to conclude that 73% of the respondents agreed they are highly likely to buy fashion products promoted by local digital influencers. Reliability awakens about 54% of agreement as an item that directly influences the purchase intention endorsed by digital influencers. The digital influencer's style

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evokes 72% agreement on its importance on purchase intention. The expertise dimension showed 67% agreement. Personal connection showed 51% agreement. Therefore, we can conclude that the style of digital influencers has a higher impact on the purchase intention endorsed by such individuals, followed by expertise. The results of this study provide important insights into the effects of digital influencers on fashion consumption in Brazil. The findings suggest that digital influencers significantly shape consumer behavior and trends in the fashion industry. We also find that source credibility with influencers may significantly impact purchase intention more than personal connection. The study also underlines the importance of understanding the role of digital influencers in shaping consumer behavior and trends. Nevertheless, this study highlights the need for businesses to consider the impact of digital influencers on their marketing strategies.

Keywords: communication, digital influencers, consumption, fashion, source credibility.

Introduction

The current way of life is marked by growing globalization, which implies strengthening interpersonal relationships that were impossible before due to geographic distance and low access to multimedia communication. This is due to technological advances in telecommunications and transport, for example, which evoke connectivity in a virtual environment, making the whole world interrelated (Burdek, 2010). In this sense, the emergence of the internet and its improvement over the years began to influence many people's lives in different ways, changing their way of living, thinking and even their values. Therefore, the possibility of choosing products and services has become more expansive in the face of virtual access parameters.

From this perspective, creating digital media such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, among others, implied the emergence of figures responsible for handling them. Characters become prominent on multimedia platforms from a series of factors that make them known, follow and influence a particular target audience. In this context, living in a capitalist world, the need to expand the market is increasing more and more. Thus, the existence of bloggers

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and, more every day, digital influencers has become extremely important for this movement of capital since its work consists of promoting services and products of specific brands around the world, having an audience made up of loyal consumers, who take what they have been told as something to be acquired.

Thus, for Lipovetsky (2003, p. 24), fashion is a phenomenon that encompasses the language and manners of society, from its tastes to its ideas, artists, and cultural works. Therefore, it is related to the different sociocultural influences of consumption and how these individuals, who guide an audience's particular taste or purchase demand, bring to light the aspect of fashion as a need to belong, to be part of a group. Rech (2002, p. 29) complements this thought by stating that advances in science also encompass the phenomenon of fashion and are present in the sociological, psychological, and aesthetic changes that occur in society, with digital influencers being one of the contemporary traits of this form of change.

For Castilho (2004, p.17), "fashion is an abstract entity that mobilizes ways for the subject to materialize as presence; proposes continuities and ruptures; inaugurates, recovers, and anticipates trends and perspectives". The man becomes present in a group when he adopts a costume that goes against his identity, belonging to the whole and making himself individual (Erner, 2015).

In this way, through a temporal and logical analysis, it is possible to perceive and understand why and for what these people, digital influencers, just called bloggers, emerged. Concerning fashion parameters, the role of this part of the population is to create content for other people to consume, using their popularity among social networks to give visibility to stores, brands, products, and services, converting them into a desired product, necessarily to be consumed. Thus, they use fashion and clothing as work tools, and the people who accompany them use them for inspiration and reference, whether in their dressing style or way of living.

Fashion, nowadays, is one of the most important and present industries in our daily life, being necessary for the formation of a unique and exclusive style and a way of expressing tastes, opinions, ideologies, and social issues. Bearing this in mind, the influence carried out by influencers has become an extremely decisive factor for the marketing and promotion of a given brand. In this way, today's consumers consider the entire process when making a

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purchase, ranging from well-elaborated disclosure, which draws their attention, to qualified service.

Considering that technological advances have made social networks take over everyday life, consumers currently prefer to research and purchase online. Therefore, the role of the digital influencer in the fashion sector becomes essential because, through it, the consumer will consequently be influenced by their opinions and tastes. When this influence is carried out in a well-elaborated way, it influences other people, thus becoming an endless cycle of opinions formed around social media posts. For the local context, this paper brings a series of research that tries to understand the role of digital influencers in the consumption of fashion in that city, taking mainly the region around us, commonly known as Seridó, which has its particularities in the fashion sector.

Therefore, this paper aims to identify the role of local digital influencers in local fashion consumption.

Methodology

Regarding technical procedures, this research is a survey which was conducted in a virtual environment and disseminated only among residents of the Serido region (Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil). Santos *et al.* (2018, p. 178) define this type of research as “a quantitative research method that seeks to profile a known population about a limited number of questions” and complements by saying that “this method is applied when there is a need to purpose of profiling a group of people about their demographic characteristics, attitudes, activities, or opinions”. This investigation appropriates this type of research by directly questioning potential consumers of Fashion products about how their relationship with local ID develops.

In this context, to access the self-perception of individuals, a replica of the questionnaire was used in the research conducted by Silva and Costa (2020), who investigated the role of ID in hotel chains, as previously discussed, but in this case, bringing to the context of Fashion products. In such a way, the possible relationships of these individuals were verified from the identification of the correlation between the psychometric scales of source credibility,

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containing in this medium the reliability, style/attractiveness, experience, and parasocial relationship. As a dependent variable, the purchase intention scale was used (Table 1).

Table 1. Questions/Dimensions studied in the survey

CREDIBILIDADE DA FONTE
Confiabilidade
<i>Considere o quanto você concorda que as características abaixo representam as influenciadoras digitais de Moda de Caicó.</i>
Confiáveis
Honestas
Transparentes
Sinceras
Fidedignas
Estilo/Atratividade
<i>Em quais estilos ele (o digital influencer) mais se encaixa</i>
Esportivo/Casual
Clássico/Tradicional
Elegante
Romântico
Criativo
Moderno/Urbano
Experiência
<i>Considere o quanto você concorda que as características abaixo representam as influenciadoras digitais de Moda de Caicó.</i>
Especialista
Experiente
Conhecedora
Qualificada
Habilidosa
Relação parassocial
<i>Agora, selecione o seu grau de concordância com as afirmativas abaixo, tendo como base a sua percepção sobre a(as) influenciadora (as) de moda de Caicó RN</i>
Eu me sinto perto o suficiente para entrar em contato com ela (as)
Eu me sinto confortável com uma mensagem dela (as)
Eu posso confiar em informações que recebo dela (as)
Eu me sinto fascinado(a) com ela (as)
No passado, senti pena dela (as) quando ela cometeu um erro
Eu acho que ela é útil para os meus interesses
Intenção de compra
<i>Agora, selecione o seu grau de concordância com as afirmativas abaixo, tendo como base a sua percepção sobre a(as) influenciadora (as) de moda de Caicó RN</i>

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Há uma grande probabilidade de que eu compre produtos de Moda anunciado pelos influenciadores digitais de Caicó
Eu recomendaria o produto de Moda anunciado pelos influenciadores digitais de Caicó para meus amigos ou parentes
O produto de Moda anunciado pelos influenciadores digitais de Caicó seria uma boa compra

Source: Adapted from Silva e Costa (2020)

To classify the statements during the questionnaire response process, a Likert scale of five positive points (1; 2; 3; 4; 5) was used, ranging from “totally disagree” (1), “neutral” (3) and “totally agree” (5).

In addition, a section of the questionnaire aimed at sociodemographic issues was also used for a better definition of consumption profiles. The questions dealt with the definition of age, gender, marital status, level of education, city, frequency of consumption, most used forms of consumption (physical, online or thrift store), monthly income and the amount you are willing to pay for garments. Such data could be crossed with the delimited segmentation, pointing out marketing characteristics.

The questionnaire was built using the Google Forms platform, being disseminated in the leading digital media (Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp). All volunteers agreed to a Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE). As inclusion/exclusion criteria, it was defined that respondents should have an active account on Instagram, follow at least two DIs in the city of Caicó (Rio Grande do Norte), and live in the Seridó region of the state of Rio Grande do Norte, as they are more susceptible to ID considered local.

Responses were collected from 147 individuals; however, after considering the established inclusion/exclusion criteria, particularly the need to follow at least two digital influencers from Caicó, this sample was reduced to 103 people (71%). For data collection, non-probabilistic sampling was used for convenience due to the subjective quality of the research.

Regarding the sociodemographic profile, it was observed that 80.6% (83) of the respondents were female, while 19.4% (20) identified themselves as male. The age of the individuals varied between 15 and 65 years old. About 84.8% of the respondents comprised people from Generation Z (between 15 and 27 years old). The remaining 15.2% were aged between 31 and 65. Therefore, it is worth emphasizing that these results more significantly

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reflect the perspective of younger individuals than a broad and normal age distribution. Marital status did not vary considerably, with a significant predominance of single people (82.5%), followed by married (15.5%) and divorced (1.9%). On the other hand, the level of education showed a high variation between elementary (39.8%), secondary (33%) and higher (20.4%), even reflecting a relationship with the predominant age group.

Results and discussions

In the first section of our form, applied to the public in the Seridó region, we obtained 147 responses from people willing to participate in our survey. However, in the second section, about 1.4% (2 people) of the initial total stated that they did not have an account on the social network Instagram, reducing our sample to 145. In the third section of the questionnaire of the 145 respondents who claimed to have an account active on the network, only 71% (103 people) followed at least two fashion influencers in the region and were classified according to the inclusion criteria.

In the third section of the form, respondents should mark at least two fashion influencers who most follow from Caicó - the project's members chose the influencers indicated in the survey. Through these answers, it was possible to list Bruna Maia as the fashion influencer most followed by the respondents, with a percentage of 40.7% of the answers (59 people), followed by Letícia Isadora with 32.4% (47 people), Lohayne with 30.3% (44 people), Karinna Guedes with 25.5% (37 people), Jéssica Araújo with 20.7% (30 people), and finally Tayane Ramos with 13.1% (19 people).

Still, in the third section, with 103 respondents, it was observed that the purchase intention scale reached 73% agreement. In this context, it was observed that 51.5% agreed there is a high probability that they buy fashion products advertised by digital influencers from Caicó. In comparison, 21.4% said they were neutral, 20.4% ultimately agreed, disagreed 3.9%, and only 2.9% strongly disagreed.

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Of these 103 participants, 59.2% agreed they would recommend the Fashion product Caicó’s digital influencers advertised to their friends or relatives. In contrast, 22.3% said they were neutral, 16.5% strongly agreed, and only 1.9 % disagreed. When asked if the Fashion product advertised by digital influencers from Caicó would be a good buy, still in the third section, 60.2% of the 103 respondents agreed. In comparison, 27.2% of this public said they were neutral, 10.7% agreed utterly, and finally, only two people (1.9%) disagreed.

Moving on to the fourth section, data was collected about the characteristics that most represent the respective digital influencers of Moda de Caicó, mentioned in the third section of the form. For the reliability scale, 54% of the agreement was identified (Figure 1).

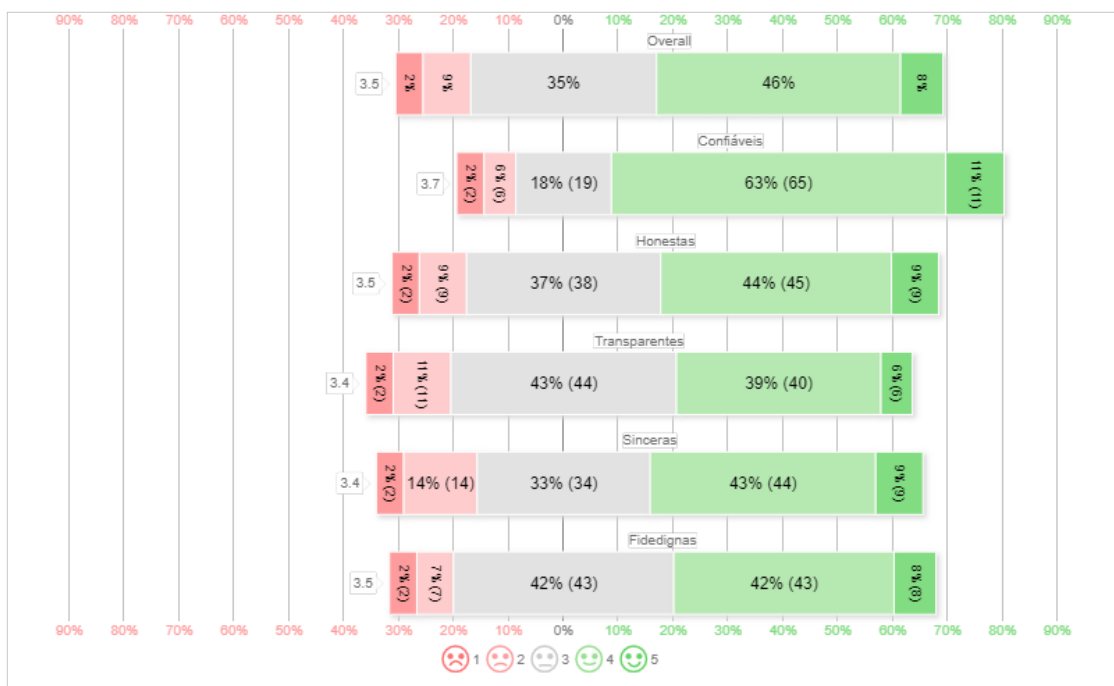


Figure 1. Results of the Reliability Scale of the Speech of Digital Influencers

Source: Prepared by the authors according to research data (2022)

When asked if influencers are reliable, of the 103 respondents, 65 agreed, 19 had a neutral position, 11 agreed, six disagreed, and only two totally disagreed; In terms of being honest, the vast majority (45) agreed, 38 were neutral, 9 strongly agreed, 9 disagreed, and 2 strongly disagreed; Regarding transparency, 44 had a neutral opinion, 40 agreed, 11 disagreed,

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6 strongly agreed and 2 strongly disagreed; As for sincerity, 44 answered that they agree, 34 were neutral, 14 disagreed, 9 totally agreed, and 2 totally disagreed; Finally, when asked if they consider themselves to be trustworthy people, 43 had a neutral opinion, 42 agreed, 8 totally agreed, 7 disagreed, and only 2 totally disagreed. Thus, it was observed that “reliability” aroused greater agreement among respondents, while “transparency” was the variable observed with less agreement.

Still remaining in the fourth section, they should select the styles that best fit with the digital influencers that were mentioned in section 3. The styles that stood out the most were elegant, creative, and classic/traditional. Meanwhile, the least mentioned were sexy and romantic (Figure 2).

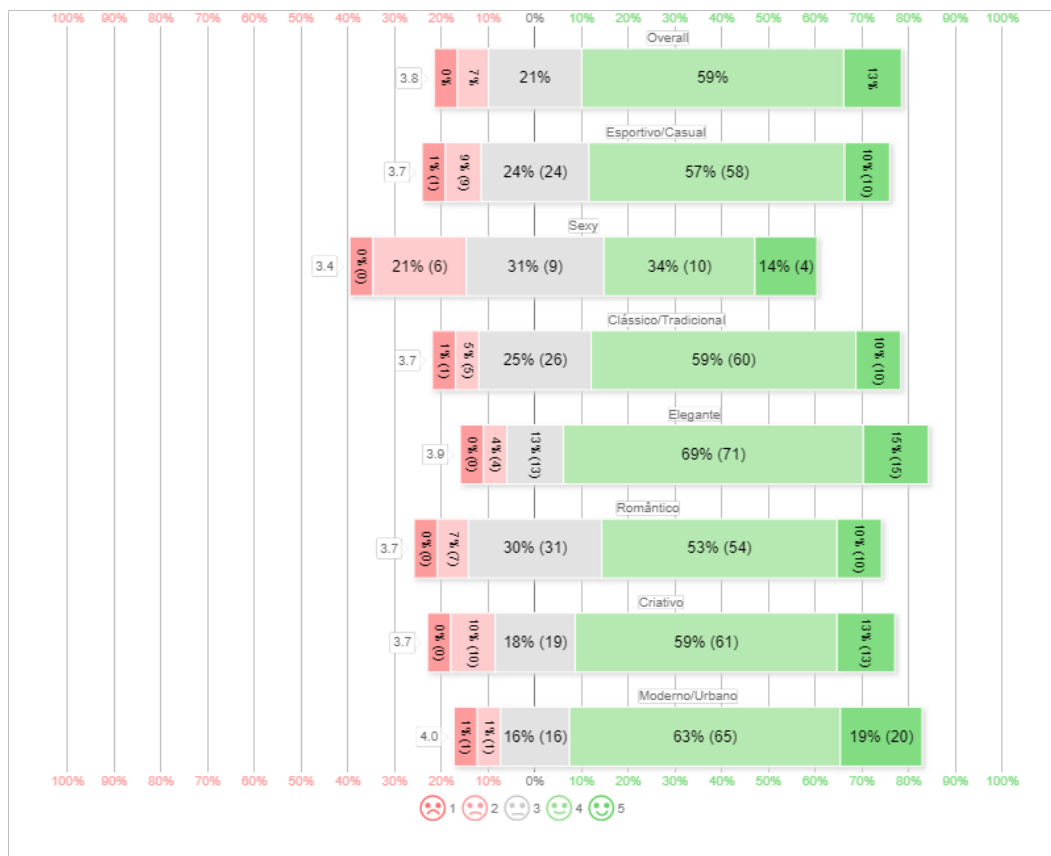


Figure 2. Results of the style scale of digital influencers

Source: Prepared by the authors according to research data (2022)

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Concerning the sporty/casual style, of the 102 respondents, 68 agreed, 24 were neutral, 10 completely agreed, 6 disagreed and 4 strongly disagreed; In the classic/traditional style, 60 agreed, 26 opted for the option of being neutral, 10 completely agreed, 4 disagreed and only 2 strongly disagreed; On the question of being elegant, the vast majority (71) agreed, 15 strongly agreed, 13 were neutral and 4 disagreed; On being romantic, 54 agreed, 31 were neutral, 10 strongly agreed, 5 disagreed, and 2 strongly disagreed; As for creativity, 61 agreed, 19 were neutral, 13 completely agreed, 8 disagreed and 2 strongly disagreed; Finally, when asked if the respective digital influencers belonged to the modern/urban style, 64 agreed, 20 completely agreed, 16 had a neutral position, 1 disagreed and 1 totally disagreed.

Concluding the fourth section, it is questioned the level of experience the digital influencers most seem to have. Regarding this dimension, respondents expressed 67% agreement (Figure 3).

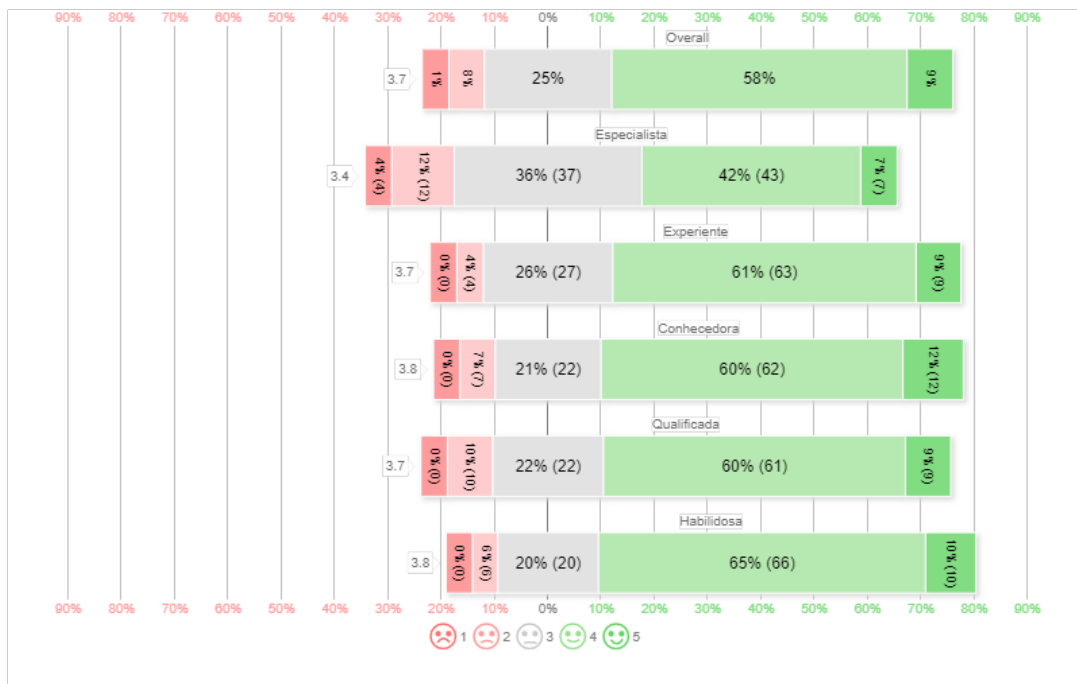


Figure 3. Results of the experience scale of digital influencers

Source: Prepared by the authors according to research data (2022)

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In the “expert” style, 4 strongly disagreed, 12 disagreed, 37 answered neutral, 43 agreed and 7 strongly agreed. In the “experienced” style, no one selected the option “completely disagree”, 4 disagreed, 27 responded neutral, 67 agreed and 9 strongly agreed. In the “knowledgeable” style, no one strongly disagreed, 7 disagreed, 22 responded neutral, 62 agreed and 12 strongly agreed. In the “qualified” style, the “completely disagree” option remained unselected, 10 disagreed, 22 responded neutral, 61 agreed and 9 completely agreed. And finally, ending section 4, we have the “skilled” style, which had the highest percentage of agreement. Once again, the “completely disagree” option was not used, 6 disagreed, 20 responded neutral, 65 agreed and 10 strongly agreed.

In the fifth section, data were collected on the degree of agreement based on the interviewee’s perception of their proximity to fashion influencers from Caicó (Rio Grande do Norte). In this context, it identified a level of 51% agreement (Figure 4).

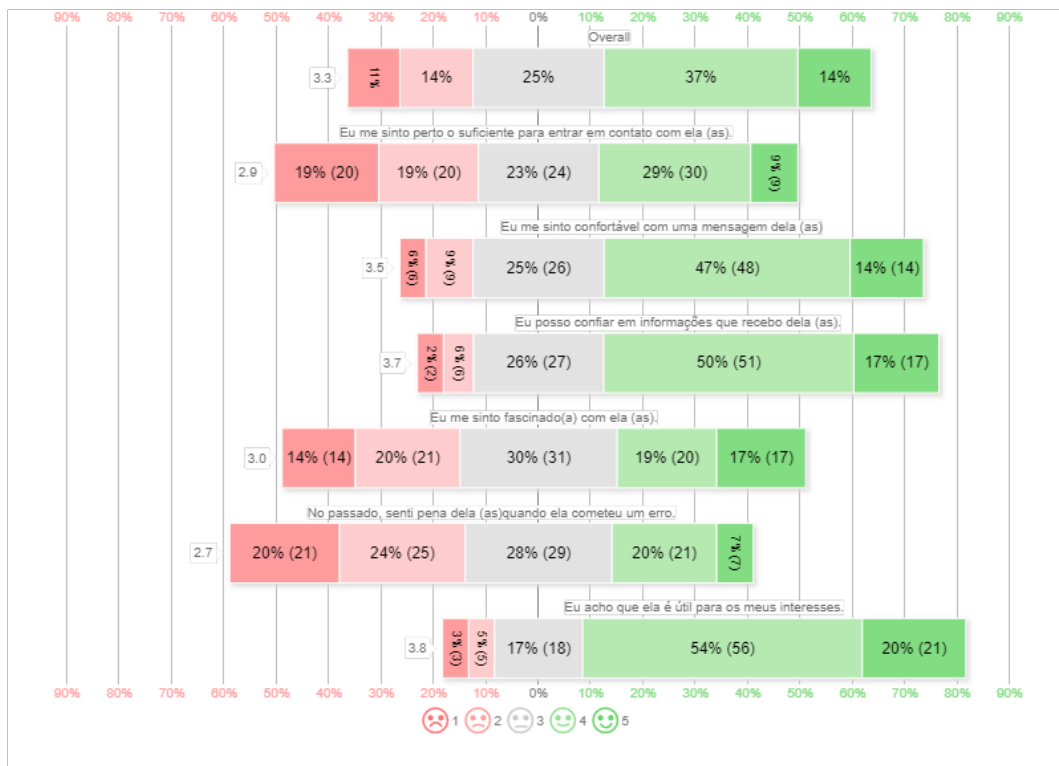


Figure 4. Results of the parasocial relationship scale with digital influencers

Source: Prepared by the authors according to research data (2022)

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Of the 103 respondents, 30 agreed when asked if they felt close enough to contact the influencers, 24 had a neutral opinion, 20 strongly disagreed, 20 disagreed and only 9 strongly agreed. When asked if they felt comfortable receiving a message from such an influencer, the vast majority agreed (48), 16 people strongly agreed, 26 answered neutral, 9 disagreed and 6 strongly disagreed. 51 people agreed that they could trust the information passed on by influencers, 27 had a neutral opinion, 17 strongly agreed, 6 disagreed and only 2 strongly disagreed. When asked if they felt fascinated with the chosen influencer, 31 indicated a neutral statement, 21 disagreed, 20 agreed, 17 totally agreed and 14 totally disagreed. When questioning whether in the past, they felt sorry for influencer x when she made a mistake, 29 had a neutral response, 26 disagreed, 21 strongly disagreed, 20 agreed and 17 responded that they strongly agree. Finally, we asked if the respondents think that the influencer is helpful for their interests. The majority of respondents accounting for 56 people, agreed, 21 strongly agreed, 18 had a neutral opinion, 5 disagreed and only 3 of the 103 respondents strongly disagreed.

In section 6, 4 questions were asked related to the scale of use of social media. This level of 63% of the agreement was noted (Figure 5). When asked about liking to verify their social media accounts, 2 people strongly disagreed, 4 disagreed, 11 responded neutral, 43 agreed, and 43 strongly agreed. Regarding not liking using social media, 57 people strongly disagreed, 25 disagreed, 7 answered neutral, 10 agreed, and 4 strongly agreed. On using social media as part of their daily routine, 4 people strongly disagreed, only 1 disagreed, 7 responded neutral, 37 agreed, and 54 strongly agreed. Finally, regarding whether they respond to content others share on social media, 8 strongly disagreed, 7 disagreed, 22 responded neutral, 37 agreed, and 29 strongly agreed.

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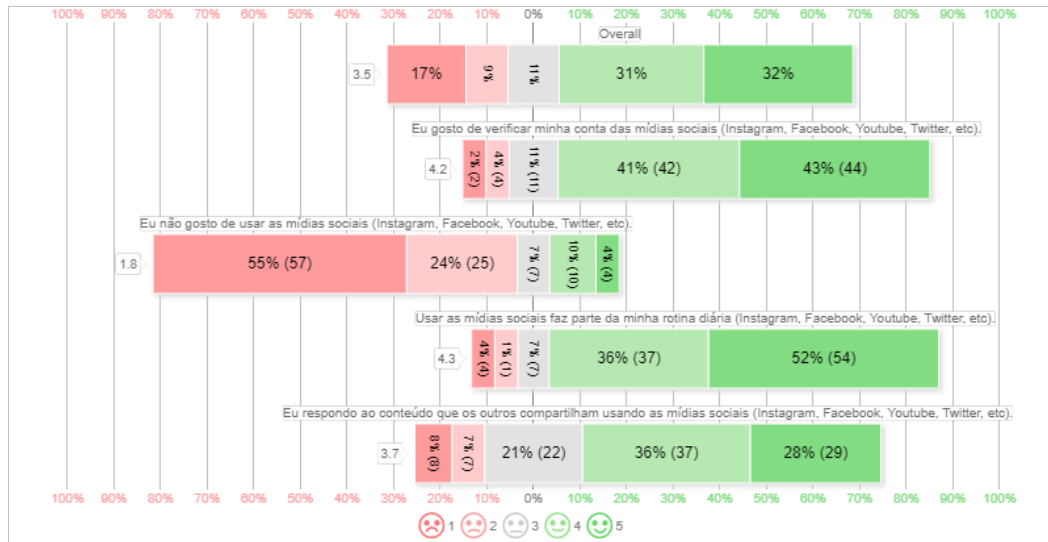


Figure 5. Results of the scale of use of social media by respondents

Source: Prepared by the authors according to research data (2022)

Final Consideration

Considering these aspects, this paper consists of research on the influence played by digital influencers in the consumption of Fashion in Caicó (Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil). In this sense, the objective was to identify the role of local digital influencers in endorsing fashion consumption, considering the perception of potential consumers/followers and local shopkeepers about this process. This way, these objectives were achieved by applying the questionnaire to the target public to determine their opinions.

Through the results of the questionnaire applied to the public, descriptive analyses were carried out. From this, it was possible to conclude that more than half of the respondents (51.5%) agreed that there is a high probability that they will buy fashion products advertised by digital influencers from Caicó. The analysis pointed out that the dimensions of reliability, attractiveness/style and parasocial relationship play significant factors in the purchase intention endorsed by digital influencers. Therefore, we notice that these influencers' experience is not essential for supporting the purchase intention.

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