"Decoding Luxury Fashion Influencers (LFIs): A Typology of Influencer Fashion Communication Practices for Luxury Brands"

How can the fashion communication practices of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) be decoded and categorised to understand how they communicate luxury brand narratives as part of the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’?

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how Luxury Fashion Influencers (LFIs) construct and communicate luxury fashion meaning on Instagram. It is situated within the transformation of fashion communication from a system historically shaped by editorial gatekeepers and institutional fashion authorities to one increasingly organised through platforms, algorithmic visibility, and influencer -led content. Within this shifting landscape, LFIs have emerged as important cultural intermediaries who translate the symbolic codes of luxury into digital, platform-specific forms. Despite their growing prominence in both industry and academic discourse, limited research has systematically examined how luxury is communicated through their Instagram practices.

The thesis therefore aims to develop a theoretically informed and empirically grounded account of how LFIs construct and circulate luxury meaning as part of the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm and an abductive research design, the study adopts a qualitatively driven hybrid methodology combining visual content analysis with quantitative co-occurrence mapping in SPSS. The dataset comprises 390 Instagram posts from three prominent LFIs. Analysis focuses on recurring visual, textual, spatial, and performative patterns, including pose, styling, captioning, and location, in order to examine how these practices communicate aspiration, exclusivity, authenticity, and symbolic value.

The thesis makes four original contributions. First, it develops a typology of LFI communication practices, providing a structured framework for understanding how luxury is performed and mediated on Instagram. Second, it advances the concept of the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’ by showing how fashion authority is being reconfigured through platform cultures, influencer labour, and algorithmic governance. Third, it contributes methodologically by demonstrating the value of combining qualitative interpretation with quantitative pattern mapping in the study of digital fashion communication. Finally, it contributes to fashion and influencers scholarship by positioning LFIs as strategic cultural actors involved in the production and circulation of contemporary luxury meaning. In doing so, the thesis offers a rigorous account of how luxury is visualised, negotiated, and sustained within platformed digital culture.

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QR Code 15 @victoria (29 December 2023) A lot can happen in a year. These are some of my highlights of 2023 with a few shots from the year before – projects I was so proud to work on and campaigns that sum up what my team and I love to create.. .. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/C1cIs-OIO8w/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 270

QR Code 16 @leoniehanne (9 July 2022) Valentino The Beginning 🫶🏻 Thank you @maisonvalentino for making me part of this most beautiful experience. The Haute Couture, the venue, Labrinth, the emotions, the MAGIC! Grazie Mille @pppiccioli 🫶🏻 #ValentinoTheBeginning #Valentino. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/CfyVcEKl2Qv/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025)..... 280

QR Code 17 @victoria (14 September 2023) Wasn't going to miss this one @carolinaherrera ❤️ Strutting to the show channeling #tubegirl energy 😘. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/CxKvd4EotDn/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 285

QR Code 18 @leoniehanne (6 December 2023) Made it to Shanghai for Prada-ah-ah 🖤 @prada #pradasphere. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/C0glqcpoN09/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 285

QR Code 19 @leoniehanne (7 July 2022) Show ready in 3, 2, 1 💥 @giambattistavalliparis #pfw #giambattistavalli #hautecouture. Instagram.

Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/CftzGFmjnQi/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 290

QR Code 20 @leoniehanne (25 January 2024) Anzeige/Ad Getting ready for Valentino Couture with @valentino. beauty 🖤 Final touches with the new #borninroma fragrance 'Green Stravaganza' #valentinobeauty. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/C2iRBJprVMF/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 290

QR Code 21 @leoniehanne (19 April 2023) Can't believe this was my 7th year of Revolve Festival 🦋🖤✨ Anzeige/Ad Thank you to the whole @fwrd @revolve team for all the love over the years – You guys killed it as always! #RevolveFestival. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CrOajVVrcZb/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 295

QR Code 22 @leoniehanne (5 October 2023) Another season as Ambassador of @parisfashionweek 🫶🏻 Anzeige/Advertising Which look is your fave? 1. Victoria Beckham 2. Miu Miu 3. Valentino 4. Isabel Marant 5. Givenchy 6. Loewe 7. Mugler 8. Acne Studios 9. Elie Saab 10. Hermés. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CyBL4I9o5fy/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 295

QR Code 23 @victoria (23 August 2023) It's almost time for my favourite week of the year. My sixth time attending Venice Film Festival with @armanibeauty. I look so young in 7 🧐 Which look was your favourite?. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CwNohYyo6zy/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 295

QR Code 24 @leoniehanne (12 March 2024) Short but unforgettable @atlantistheroyal ✨ Anzeige/Tag Loved being back at Atlantis The Royal after being part of the big opening last year – wish we had more than 48hrs (but we made it count!) #AtlantisTheRoyal. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/C4acx5dysCY/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 305

QR Code 25 @victoria (7 May 2023) I can't write a caption that would succinctly describe how much I love this human. What a holiday in paradise with the love of my life. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/Cr8AZmDol09/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 305

QR Code 26 @victoria (5 November 2023) Retracing the steps that brought me to where I am today. Meeting my husband, starting my degree, finishing my PhD and starting my career, from place to place along the streets of Manchester. I can't wait to make the next step forward! (wearing @Calzedonia of course) 🧐 #calzedonia #EveryStepIsAStepForward {AD}. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/CzRNyEXorcp/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 310

QR Code 27 @leoniehanne (2 June 2022) Chanel summer – Which one would you pick? 💗. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CeT278OD8sk/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 314

QR Code 28 @leoniehanne (6 June 2022) Greens of the past days 💚. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CeemGRKL1r8/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 317

QR Code 29 @leoniehanne (11 May 2023) Hamburg for the heart 🖤 Last days at home might have been my happiest days of 2023. Happiness most often is in the purest and most simple things: a homecooked meal or waking up in your own bed on a sunny day. 🫶🏻. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CsGO03tIo_j/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 317

QR Code 30 @tamara (9 November 2022) Milanese days 🫶🏻. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/Ckv7N7Gtpza/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 317

QR Code 31 @leoniehanne (19 October 2023) [Instagram post – caption not provided]. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/Cyl3ulLLF90/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 321

QR Code 32 @victoria (25 January 2024) Last photo is my fave. Too many great moments to fit in here. Thank you for a beautiful Scottish experience @vievemuse. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/C2iJHbporUv/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 321

QR Code 33 @leoniehanne (19 August 2022) Two Versace vibes – Look 1 or 2? ✨ @versace #versace. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/ChcSJeqj1gw/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 330

QR Code 34 @leoniehanne (11 December 2022) London coziness 🧉. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CmB1CsmjgL_/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 334

QR Code 35 @leoniehanne (1 May 2023) NY food 🧉 Some favourite eats: @matchaful only matcha I'm honestly obsessed with!... @ladybird_nyc for plantbased perfection. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/Crsg0PyrwDr/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 334

QR Code 36 @leoniehanne (7 July 2022) Moments from @eliesaabworld 💚 #eliesaab #pfw #hautecouture. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CfuXQsLL54G/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 339

QR Code 37 @tamara (30 January 2023) My @eliesaabworld show look – swipe up to the end to see me the HAPPIEST, captured by @sametgorgozfilms. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CoDblBAt6xr/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 339

QR Code 38 @leoniehanne (17 January 2024) When they ask why I turned my kitchen into a walk-in closet… 😳🎀✨. Instagram. Available at:

https://www. instagram. com/reel/C2NG3xDoTtT/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 343

QR Code 39 @tamara (7 November 2022) Yesterday I did a little reveal of my wardrobe and I am so overwhelmed with incredible messages from you guys!... So grateful to @formato. sustainable who helped me design and create a perfect room for my belongings.. .. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/Ckqo58OACDZ/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 343

QR Code 40 @victoria (12 February 2023) When you have @larrykinghair with you and you fancy a change 😍 What do you think?!! In @aliceandolivia #blondebob 📌 @1hotel. bklynbridge. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/Cokj8sCLTVO/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 348

QR Code 41 @leoniehanne (25 September 2023) An iconic red lip glam moment for a night out with @dolcegabbana_beauty 🌹 Anzeige/Ad New DEVOTION beauty collection with the WOW factor from the first application and just look at the packaging! #DGBeauty #DGDevotion. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/Cxnqm1TIbZ-/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 348

QR Code 42 @leoniehanne (9 July 2022) Life is more fun in Valentino pink 💗. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CfzjbvRICU0/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 353

QR Code 43@tamara (23 May 2024) Third slide is my favourite Cannes moment 😍🫶🏻. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CidNM61uu6h/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 353

QR Code 44 @tamara (8 August 2023) Off for some quality time with some quality people 💕. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CvslWI8NFka/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 358

QR Code 45 @victoria (3 May 2023) {ad} beach ootd @maxmara ❤️ #MaxMara #MaxMaraSS23. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CryYpyrscHf/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 358

QR Code 46 @tamara (14 February 2023) Two completely different people, strong characters, loud personalities, yet sometimes so same and united as one. With Q & K by @dolcegabbana_beauty this Valentine's Day – we wanted to remind you to always keep your head and your crown high. #OwnYourCrown #DGBeauty ad. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CopDGM0O-Wt/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 362

QR Code 47 @victoria (6 October 2023) Before @hermes, wearing my new @hollandcooperclothing suit and fourth collection drop, launching October 11th ✨ Who's on the waiting list?! {ad}. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/CyDRvFIIz_N/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 362

QR Code 48 @leoniehanne (29 September 2023) Night time at @plaza_athenee 🥂 Anzeige/Tag @iamamyjackson @dorchestercollection. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/CxxsLgjozdk/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 363

QR Code 49 @tamara (2 July 2022) Sapore di Mare powered by @gucci @salotto. studio #gucci. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/Cfha5UFtINs/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 371

QR Code 50 @victoria (17 July 2023) An outfit to match the golden light. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/CuyoGBqInXe/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 371

QR Code 51 @leoniehanne (20 June 2022) The reason why I'm always late for dinner… 😬 Which dress would you choose? ✨ 1. @jamemme 2. @leslieamonswim 3. @versace 4. & 5. @the_attico. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/CfCpQ7UltDQ/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 376

QR Code 52 @victoria (23 January 2023) Save this for the morning you need some outfit inspiration. 32 layered looks for the colder weather. Comment your favourite look and if you'd like a part 2…. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/CnxHy3zhLJ8/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 376

QR Code 53 @leoniehanne (23 September 2023) New character unlocked for Versace, Versace, @versace 🖤 #Versace @sametgorgozfilms Glam: @amir. mkp @sandrahahnel. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/Cxhu7RBIDmS/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 381

QR Code 54 @tamara (11 March 2023) Parisian nights @isabelmarant 📸 @sametgorgozfilms. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/CpqRnHZATbw/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 381

QR Code 55 @victoria (22 June 2023) Treated to a weekend in the countryside and some extra bouncy hair by @larrykinghaircare ❤️. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/CtyOugaIQOw/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 382

QR Code 56 @victoria (8 March 2023) So honoured to have been there @louisvuitton ✨ this outfit deserved another moment 📍 @thepeninsulaparis. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/Cphb26ooANa/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 386

QR Code 57 @tamara (24 January 2024) Boom! The new @audemarspiguet in collaboration with @tamararalph is here 💥. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/p/C2fgtilNTOH/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). .. 386

QR Code 58 @tamara (23 September 2023) My first look for #mfw this year was @fendi 🫶 Starting with a bang Captured by @sametgorgozfilms. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/Ci11L8sgjNT/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 391

QR Code 59 @leoniehanne (4 September 2022) Black swan in @albertaferretti 🖤. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram. com/reel/CiGVfOjuDaA/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025). 391

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

"Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure. "
— Thorstein Veblen (1899), The Theory of the Leisure Class, Chapter IV

1.1. KEY DEFINITIONS

For clarity and analytical precision, this thesis establishes the following working definitions.

Luxury and heritage fashion in this study refers to the upper tier of the fashion industry characterised by high levels of craftsmanship, controlled scarcity, symbolic value, and institutional authority. This category includes both conglomerate-owned brands such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Dior, operating within groups including LVMH, Kering, and Richemont, and independent maisons such as Chanel and Hermès. These brands combine heritage narratives, elevated price points, selective distribution, and tightly managed brand communication with global marketing strategies that sustain their cultural and economic dominance. This segment is distinguished from niche artisanal luxury, which prioritises small-scale craft and limited circulation, and from premium or mass fashion, which operates through volume-driven accessibility and broader market reach (Berry, 2022; Dubois, Jung and Ordabayeva, 2021; Wang, 2022; Shukla et al., 2025).

Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) are defined as digital content creators whose communicative practices are primarily oriented towards luxury and heritage fashion brands. Their influence is structured through sustained access to elite fashion spaces, including couture and fashion week circuits, luxury retail environments, and brand-hosted cultural events, alongside the visual mediation of high-value goods, locations, and experiences. LFIs differ from mainstream fashion influencers in that their content is not organised around affordability or mass accessibility, but around the performance and circulation of symbolic, aesthetic, and spatial capital within luxury hierarchies. Their authority is produced through proximity to institutional fashion power, long-term brand affiliations, and the ability to translate luxury's cultural codes into platform-native visual narratives (Pedroni, 2020; Rocamora, 2025).

The **''new digital fashion system''** is conceptualised in this thesis as a platformed communication ecology that consolidated after 2016 and intensified following the Covid-19 pandemic. Building on Rocamora's (2017, 2025) work on the mediatisation and acceleration of fashion, the term describes a system in which influencer labour, algorithmic governance, and platform-based storytelling function as primary mechanisms through which fashion visibility, legitimacy, and value are produced and circulated (Manovich, 2017; Noble, 2018). This system marks a shift away from the dominance of legacy editorial and journalistic gatekeeping towards decentralised, data-driven modes of fashion mediation, where cultural authority is shaped by platform metrics, strategic collaborations, and algorithmic amplification. Within the scope of this study, the term refers specifically to the communicative and

symbolic dimensions of the fashion system, rather than the full material processes of design, manufacture, and distribution.

1.2. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

This thesis investigates how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) construct and communicate luxury fashion narratives on Instagram, examining their role within the shifting configurations of the contemporary fashion communication landscape. LFIs are understood here as a distinct category of fashion influencers who engage specifically with luxury brands and operate within the 'prestige economy' of fashion (Mensitieri, 2020). They function as 'cultural intermediaries' (Bourdieu, 1984; Entwistle, 2009; Rocamora, 2017) who translate luxury's symbolic, aesthetic and cultural codes into 'platform-native' visual forms (Gibbs et al., 2014; Bucher and Helmond, 2018) that circulate within global, networked environments. In doing so, they contribute to the reconfiguration of fashion communication, extending the field beyond traditional editorial structures and situating meaning-making within digital, participatory spaces.

The focus on luxury fashion is deliberate. Luxury fashion is conceptualised in this thesis as a cultural field organised around symbolic scarcity, heritage, craftsmanship and the management of difference through aesthetic, economic and social distinction (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012; Dubois, Jung and Ordabayeva, 2021). Its value rests less on material utility than on the culture

of desirable identities and aspirational worlds. Luxury fashion influencers are therefore distinguished from mainstream influencers by their proximity to heritage brands, participation in elite industry circuits, and the heightened symbolic stakes of the products and narratives they circulate. Examining how LFIs visually construct luxury on Instagram offers insight into how meaning, aspiration and value are produced within a contemporary media environment where visibility is increasingly algorithmic and commercially mediated.

The motivation for this research stems from a profound shift in how fashion meaning is produced, circulated and legitimised. For much of the twentieth century, editorial magazines such as *Vogue*, *Elle* and *Harper's Bazaar* functioned as central agents of fashion communication, mediating taste, value and authority through institutional gatekeeping (Rocamora, 2009; Entwistle, 2009). In the past decade, however, the consolidation of digital platforms has repositioned influencers, engagement metrics and algorithmic visibility as key arbiters of exposure and prestige (Rocamora, 2017, 2025; Mensitieri, 2020). While existing research has examined the commercialisation and gendered precarity of influencer labour (Abidin, 2016; Duffy, 2017), comparatively less attention has been paid to how luxury's symbolic value is constructed at the intersection of aesthetic labour, platform governance and brand mediation. This study therefore addresses not a gap in the application of foundational theory to digital contexts, but a need to understand how luxury itself is rearticulated through influencer communication.

The central research question differs from traditional influencer marketing scholarship by positioning LFIs not primarily as persuasive agents within

promotional ecosystems, but as cultural actors who shape the symbolic landscape of contemporary luxury. Whereas marketing studies often foreground consumer response, engagement metrics or purchase intention, this thesis examines the semiotic, cultural and spatial practices through which LFIs construct meaning, negotiate industry hierarchies and sustain luxury's aspirational value within digital environments. This distinction reflects the dual cultural and strategic orientation of the study, which analyses both influencer communication practices and the implications these practices hold for the evolving luxury sector.

The 'new digital fashion system' is conceptualised here as a communicative ecology that crystallised after 2016 and intensified following the 2020 pandemic. Drawing on Rocamora's (2017, 2025) work on the digital acceleration of fashion media, the term refers specifically to the discursive and symbolic layer of fashion rather than to material production or distribution. It encompasses influencer labour, platform vernaculars, datafication and algorithmic governance as the dominant mechanisms through which visibility and cultural value are produced. Platforms such as Instagram, governed by opaque algorithmic logics, shape whose images become legible, desirable or professionally valuable (Noble, 2018; Bucher and Helmond, 2018). In Bourdieu's (1984) terms, LFIs operate within the 'heteronomous pole' of the fashion field, where symbolic prestige and commercial imperatives intersect. They do not rupture traditional industry hierarchies, but extend and adapt them, channelling long-standing dynamics of distinction, aspiration and symbolic capital into digital environments.

Instagram is selected as the analytical site because it remains the platform most closely aligned with the aesthetic, spatial and symbolic priorities of luxury fashion (Rocamora, 2017). Its image-led format, stable archival architecture and emphasis on carefully composed visual storytelling support the long-standing photographic tradition through which luxury brand identity has been shaped. While TikTok facilitates discovery and short-form entertainment, its ephemerality and rapid churn render it less suited to historical and comparative analysis; YouTube and X (previously known as Twitter) support adjacent but distinct communicative practices. Instagram's affordances therefore provide the most coherent environment for examining the aesthetic and symbolic work of luxury fashion influencers .

This research is situated within broader debates concerning visibility, inequality and the cultural labour of fashion. Mensitieri's (2020) ethnography demonstrates that the glamour of fashion work is sustained by structural inequalities and that visibility is actively produced rather than neutral. These dynamics persist in digital contexts, where algorithmic systems privilege particular bodies, narratives and aesthetics while rendering others less legible. Rocamora (2025) further shows that visibility metrics operate as forms of symbolic and social capital within influencer economies, structuring both professional trajectories and cultural hierarchies. For LFIs , aesthetic labour is inseparable from navigating the demands of algorithmic amplification, commercial partnerships and audience expectations.

Authenticity, long emphasised within branding scholarship (Banet-Weiser, 2012), takes on heightened complexity within luxury contexts. LFIs must

appear relatable while maintaining the symbolic distance expected by high-end brands, negotiating a tension between accessibility and aspiration that is characteristic of contemporary luxury communication (Shukla et al., 2025). This negotiation underscores the need for closer examination of the semiotic and cultural mechanisms through which influencers construct luxury identity within platform environments.

Finally, this thesis approaches Instagram as a heterotopic space [1]in which curated digital realities intersect with material fashion cultures. Drawing on Foucault's (1986) notion of heterotopia and Crewe's (2017) analysis of fashion's geographies, Instagram is conceptualised as a site where the spatial, symbolic and affective dimensions of luxury are performed, negotiated and reimagined. Examining LFIs through this lens reveals how contemporary fashion meaning is produced at the intersection of digital aesthetics, cultural labour and algorithmic visibility. In addressing these dynamics, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how luxury fashion is mediated and transformed within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

[1] Heterotopia is employed here in a conceptual rather than strictly spatial sense, extending Foucault's (1986) notion of 'other spaces' to digitally mediated environments. Instagram does not operate as a bounded physical site but as a relational and performative space in which multiple temporalities, geographies and regimes of value coexist. Drawing on Crewe's (2017) work on the geographies of fashion, this framing foregrounds how luxury is produced through spatial imaginaries, symbolic boundaries and affective attachments, even when articulated through screen-based, algorithmically governed platforms. Instagram may therefore be understood as a heterotopic assemblage in which material fashion cultures, embodied practices and digital representations are continuously folded into one another rather than held apart.

1.3. THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

Instagram[2], launched in 2010 and acquired by Meta in 2012, has become a defining platform in digital visual culture. Its evolution from a simple photo-sharing application into a multi-functional media environment incorporating Stories, Reels, hashtags and integrated shopping has positioned it as a central site for fashion communication and influencer marketing. Its image-led architecture intersects directly with the visual and symbolic priorities of the fashion industry, making it a significant platform for examining how contemporary fashion meaning is produced and circulated[3].

Fashion scholarship has long recognised that imagery forms a crucial link between production and consumption, shaping how garments acquire cultural value. Mensitieri (2020) demonstrates that fashion photographs construct imaginative worlds that frame garments as desirable, mediating fantasies that organise aspiration. Instagram extends this lineage by transforming visual representation into a continuous, participatory flow of meaning making. The

[2] Instagram's evolution from a photo-sharing app to a commercialised, multi-functional platform has been central to the rise of influencer culture. Following its acquisition by Facebook in 2012, Instagram increasingly integrated features designed to enhance user engagement, monetisation, and platform stickiness. The launch of *Stories* mirrored Snapchat's ephemeral model, encouraging frequent posting; *IGTV* attempted to compete with YouTube's long-form video format; *Reels* was introduced in response to TikTok's popularity; and *shoppable posts* enabled seamless in-app purchasing. These features not only shaped user behaviour but also formalised influencer-brand collaborations and embedded commerce within everyday visual culture. Scholars have noted that such changes reflect the broader platformisation of social life, where digital spaces become structured by monetisation, data extraction, and content optimisation. See: Bucher, T. and Helmond, A., 2018. The affordances of social media platforms. *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, pp.233–253.

[3] For an overview of Instagram's evolving affordances see Bucher and Helmond (2018).

platform functions not merely as a distribution channel but as an active site where aesthetic, symbolic and commercial value are produced and negotiated in real time.

Within this environment, Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) have emerged as key actors in what this thesis conceptualises as the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’. Unlike traditional fashion journalists who worked within editorial logics, LFIs communicate through multimodal storytelling that merges personal expression with commercial collaboration. Their content blends visual composition, narrative captions and short-form video to create promotional yet affective forms of communication. As de Perthuis and Findlay (2019) note, influencers occupy a hybrid space as cultural producers, consumers and models, signalling a reconfiguration of media authority within fashion. Yet this expanded visibility is shaped by broader inequalities: LFIs often reproduce dominant ideals of beauty, affluence and exclusivity, while algorithmic systems reinforce hierarchies by privileging profiles embedded in networks of cultural and economic capital (Carah and Angus, 2018).

For luxury and heritage brands, this reconfiguration presents both opportunity and tension. Luxury communication historically relied on controlled storytelling and symbolic distance (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012). The digital turn required brands to balance this with increased visibility, a shift accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic as virtual campaigns, livestream events and influencer collaborations became essential (Campbell and Farrell, 2020). LFIs adapted rapidly, producing home-based editorials, digital event coverage and curated brand content that functioned as real-time media channels.

These developments highlight why LFIs are central to understanding contemporary post pandemic luxury fashion communication. Acting as intermediaries between brands and audiences, they help redefine the brand–consumer relationship through platform-specific strategies. Their work demonstrates how luxury meaning is increasingly co-created through narrative immersion, audience engagement and algorithmic visibility (Godey et al., 2016; Enke and Borchers, 2019). Yet LFIs must navigate the inherent paradox of luxury's digital turn: sustaining an aura of exclusivity while remaining accessible and visible. This tension reveals the need for research that moves beyond performance metrics to examine how LFIs negotiate luxury's symbolic and commercial logics within platform environments.

By addressing this gap, this thesis analyses how luxury's systems of meaning and distinction are being rearticulated through influencer -driven, algorithmically governed forms of fashion communication. The following section outlines the research questions, overarching aim and objectives that guide this study.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Saunders et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of clearly articulated research aims and objectives in guiding the research process. By establishing focus and direction from the outset, they help ensure the study remains aligned with its intended purpose and limits the risk of unnecessary divergence. This is particularly important when investigating complex and interdisciplinary topics, where rigour and coherence rely on sustained methodological and conceptual focus.

This research aims to decode and categorise the fashion communication practices of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) on Instagram, in order to understand how they construct and communicate luxury brand narratives within the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’*. By codifying and interpreting both the visual (images and videos) and textual (captions) elements of influencer content, the study develops a typology of LFI practices that illuminates how symbolic meaning, brand values, and aspirational aesthetics are mediated through digital fashion communication. It also examines how these decoded practices can inform culturally resonant and strategically grounded approaches to luxury branding within the digital marketplace.

1.4.1. Research Question

How can fashion communication practices of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) be decoded and categorised to understand how they communicate luxury brand narratives as part of the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’?

From this overarching research question, the following subsequent questions have been formulated:

- How can the textual (captions) and visual (images and videos) content strategies used by Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) on Instagram be codified and decoded to understand how they construct and communicate the values, aesthetics, and desirability of luxury fashion brands?
- What are the key fashion communication practices employed by LFIs , and how can these practices be categorised through codification and interpreted through decoding to make sense of how luxury narratives are communicated within digital platforms?

- How can the decoded communication practices of Instagram LFIs inform the development of effective, culturally resonant social media strategies for luxury fashion brands in the digital marketplace?

1.4.2. Research Objectives

To achieve this aim, the following research objectives have been developed:

- **To codify and analyse** the textual (captions) and visual (images and videos) strategies employed by Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) on Instagram to construct and communicate the values, aesthetics, and desirability associated with luxury fashion brands.
- **To identify, categorise, and interpret** the key fashion communication practices used by LFIs , developing a typology that decodes how luxury fashion narratives are structured and communicated within the digital marketplace.
- **To evaluate how decoded influencer practices** can inform the development of culturally attuned and strategically effective fashion communication strategies for luxury brands operating within the *"new digital fashion system"*.

1.5. RESEARCH APPROACH

This study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, grounded in the view that fashion communication on social media is socially constructed, symbolically encoded, and contextually situated. The research follows an abductive logic of inquiry, moving iteratively between empirical observation and theoretical reflection to examine how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) construct and circulate luxury brand narratives on Instagram. This logic of movement allows theory and data to remain in dialogue, where unexpected empirical patterns provoke theoretical reconsideration and established conceptual frameworks guide interpretive focus.

The study adopts a qualitatively driven hybrid design that combines visual content analysis with quantitative co-occurrence mapping using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Qualitative coding forms the interpretive foundation, while quantitative mapping supports the identification of recurring configurations across the dataset of 390 Instagram posts. This combination strengthens both analytic depth and methodological transparency. It also aligns with abductive reasoning, where interpretation evolves through a continual process of comparing theoretical expectation with empirical discovery. While quantitatively supported, the study remains interpretivist in orientation, with numerical outputs used to guide rather than determine analytical interpretation.

Triangulation plays a critical role in supporting this process. Methodologically, it integrates qualitative and quantitative phases to validate emerging interpretations from multiple perspectives. Epistemologically, it supports abductive reasoning by connecting observation, reflection and theorisation in a reflexive loop. Through this approach, SPSS co-occurrence mapping identified recurrent visual and textual combinations such as pose location caption relationships that became central to the typology's development. These empirical patterns illuminated how LFIs construct symbolic hierarchies through gesture, setting and narrative tone, prompting further theoretical exploration of how distinction operates within platform logics.

The research design proceeds through two analytical stages: codification and decoding. Codification refers to the structured categorisation of visual and textual data using a detailed codebook. This framework was developed through iterative engagement with the dataset to capture recurring stylistic, compositional and discursive features, such as post structure, aesthetic techniques, activities, poses and caption strategies. Each coding category is conceptually grounded, translating theoretical constructs into observable analytical dimensions. For example, pose operates as a signifier of bodily capital and the performance of ease; location type signals spatial and cultural capital, while caption strategy indexes communicative modes that negotiate between relatability and prestige. In this way, the coding framework operationalises key constructs drawn from semiotics, Bourdieu's concept of capital and Veblen's notion of conspicuous display.

Decoding constitutes the interpretive stage of the analysis. Drawing on Barthes' semiotics, the process examines how meaning is produced through compositional signs, gestures and visual rhetoric. Bourdieu's theory of distinction provides a lens for understanding how taste, cultural literacy and self-presentation function as symbolic resources, while Veblen's notion of conspicuous consumption contextualises how visibility and display perform social value in the digital field. Decoding therefore extends beyond identifying stylistic choices to interrogate the underlying cultural and symbolic work they perform within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

While codification establishes the analytical structure, decoding provides the interpretive depth through which the findings acquire theoretical significance. This integrated and reflexive approach ensures that the typology developed is not only empirically substantiated but conceptually grounded in the cultural logic of luxury communication. Triangulating qualitative interpretation with quantitative mapping therefore strengthens both methodological rigour and epistemological coherence, enabling the study to reveal how LFIs produce and sustain luxury's symbolic economy within platform-based media environments.

1.6. ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

While influencer marketing has become an established field of academic inquiry, research specifically addressing Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) remains comparatively limited. Much existing scholarship privileges metrics-driven perspectives focused on engagement, trust and authenticity (Audrezet et al., 2020; De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017). Within fashion, attention has largely centred on early blogging cultures (Rocamora, 2011; Findlay, 2015) or on the commercialisation of influencer labour (Abidin, 2016; Carah and Angus, 2018). Yet, the symbolic language of luxury, encompassing heritage, prestige and aesthetic distinction, remains under-examined within digital contexts. Although recent studies of luxury consumption recognise the shifting balance between inclusivity, accessibility and symbolic scarcity (Dubois, Jung and Ordabayeva, 2021; Wang, 2022; Shukla et al., 2025), these ideas have rarely been applied to the communicative practices of influencers representing luxury fashion brands. This study therefore isolates luxury as a distinct field marked by conglomerate ownership, heritage codes and symbolic capital, positioning LFIs differently from mainstream influencers operating in mass or prestige markets.

This thesis responds to this lacuna by developing a Typology of LFI Communication Practices, offering an empirically grounded and theoretically informed framework for understanding how LFIs construct and circulate luxury meaning within Instagram's visual economies. The study draws upon Barthes' *The Fashion System* (1967), Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the*

Judgement of Taste (1984), and Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). Together, these foundational perspectives illuminate the semiotic, sociological and economic dimensions of luxury communication. Barthes provides tools for decoding the fashion image as a signifying system. Bourdieu situates influencers within the field of cultural production, revealing how they convert social and cultural capital into digital distinction. Veblen contextualises visibility and consumption as performances of status and prestige. These classical frameworks are extended through recent debates on algorithmic governance (Noble, 2018; Bucher and Helmond, 2018), aesthetic labour (Duffy, 2017; Rocamora, 2025) and authenticity (Haimson et al., 2021), ensuring the analysis remains responsive to contemporary digital conditions.

The coding framework developed for this study operationalises these theoretical foundations. Each coding category, including pose, location, caption strategy, editing technique and cultural reference, translates a theoretical construct into an observable analytical dimension. For example, pose functions as a signifier of bodily capital and self-stylised agency (Bourdieu, 1984). Location acts as a marker of spatial and cultural capital, revealing the semiotics of access and belonging. Caption strategy expresses the balance between relatability and distinction, where self-presentation and brand discourse intersect. Through this translation of theory into code, the research builds a bridge between empirical observation and conceptual interpretation, ensuring that the typology is grounded in both theoretical rigour and visual evidence.

The research employs an interpretivist paradigm and abductive reasoning, combining qualitative and quantitative phases in a process of triangulated analysis. Visual content analysis enables systematic codification of symbolic, aesthetic and narrative elements across 390 Instagram posts, while co-occurrence mapping using SPSS supports the quantitative exploration of recurring relationships. This triangulation facilitates the identification of patterns, such as correlations between pose, location and caption, which reveal the communicative structures underpinning luxury fashion content. These data-driven insights prompted theoretical reflection and refinement, forming the abductive link between empirical patterning and conceptual development that guided the typology's construction.

The resulting typology identifies eight interrelated categories of communication strategy, each reflecting a distinct mode through which LFIs negotiate luxury's cultural logic within digital environments. These range from exclusive access and performative mobility to aesthetic curation and aspirational intimacy, capturing how LFIs translate the codes of luxury into platform-native vernaculars. A central conceptual contribution emerging from this synthesis is the theorisation of 'Strategic Adaptability', defined as the capacity of LFIs to preserve the symbolic authority of luxury while accommodating the participatory and algorithmic demands of social media. This adaptability manifests through hybrid practices that blend editorial precision with personal narrative and interactive engagement, sustaining luxury's aura while ensuring its circulation in networked publics.

The typology therefore functions as both an analytical instrument and a theoretical contribution. It offers a systematic means of decoding how luxury meaning is produced through influencer mediation while extending theoretical understanding of fashion communication in the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’. No existing study has developed a typology specifically for luxury fashion influencers that integrates visual semiotics, field theory and platform governance, and this research addresses that gap. The study’s contribution is threefold. It advances fashion studies by connecting classical theory to platform cultures. It informs digital marketing practice by revealing the strategic mechanisms of luxury influence. It refines cultural theory by demonstrating how symbolic and commercial logics coalesce within the algorithmic infrastructures of contemporary fashion communication.

In doing so, the thesis aligns with the expectations of doctoral research as outlined by Baptista et al. (2015)[4], who emphasise the importance of originality, creativity, and innovation (see Figure 1, page 16). This research is original in developing a codified, interpretive typology that attends specifically to the under-theorised space of luxury fashion influencers. It demonstrates creativity by drawing together diverse disciplinary perspectives to construct a methodologically rigorous and conceptually rich framework. Finally, it contributes innovation through its practical applicability, offering a strategic

[4] Baptista, A. et al. (2015) ‘The doctorate as an original contribution to knowledge: Considering relationships between originality, creativity, and innovation’, Frontline Learning Research, 3(3), pp. 55–67. Available at: https://doi.org/10.14786/flr.v3i3.147. This article examines the concept of originality in doctoral research, considering its intersections with creativity and innovation.

diagnostic tool for brands operating in the platformed luxury space. As illustrated in Figure 1, the doctoral contribution emerges through synthesising disciplinary insight with broader cultural and commercial relevance. This study meets that standard by critically examining how LFIs negotiate, reproduce, and reframe the codes of luxury within the dynamic conditions of digital media.

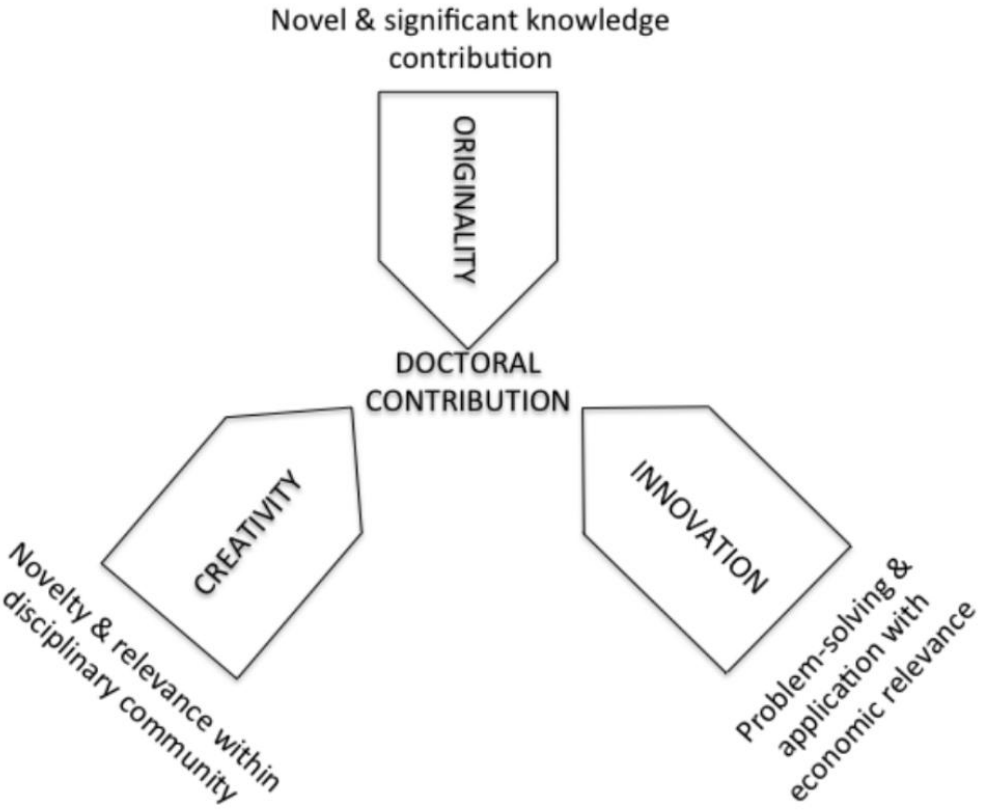

FIGURE 1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORIGINALITY, CREATIVITY, AND INNOVATION. ADAPTED FROM BAPTISTA ET AL. (2015).

1.7. THESIS STRUCTURE

The thesis comprises six chapters, organised as follows:

TABLE 1 CHAPTER STRUCTURE AND OBJECTIVES, AN OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH CHAPTERS, OUTLINING THEIR PURPOSE AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE RESEARCH.

CHAPTER	TITLE	OBJECTIVE
Chapter 1	Introduction	To establish the research rationale, outline the research questions, aims, and objectives, and define the research's original contribution to knowledge.
Chapter 2	Literature Review	To critically examine the evolution of fashion studies, the role of digitalisation in fashion communication, and the emergence of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) within the *"new digital fashion system"*. This chapter positions the research within broader theoretical debates, including cultural capital, semiotics, and digital labour.
Chapter 3	Methodology	To present the research strategy and design, justify the mixed-methods approach, and outline the qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. This chapter also addresses ethical considerations and research reliability.
Chapter 4	Analysis	To systematically present the empirical findings derived from the qualitative and quantitative analyses, illustrating the key patterns, themes, and strategic fashion communication practices employed by LFIs.
Chapter 5	Discussion	To interpret the findings in relation to the research objectives, critically engaging with theoretical perspectives and industry implications. This chapter proposes an empirically derived but conceptually established typology of LFI fashion communication practices.
Chapter 6	Conclusions	To synthesise the research's contributions to academic discourse and industry practice, acknowledge its limitations, and suggest future research directions within digital fashion communication.

1.8. CONCLUSION OF THE INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

This thesis makes an original contribution by developing a Typology of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) Communication Practices and introducing the concept of ‘Strategic Adaptability’. These contributions are supported by a hybrid methodology that combines qualitative visual content analysis with SPSS-supported co-occurrence mapping, and by a theoretical framework that integrates semiotics, cultural capital and digital labour with contemporary debates on algorithmic visibility, aesthetic labour and authenticity.

Triangulation plays a critical role in supporting abductive reasoning within this framework. The SPSS co-occurrence mapping provided an empirical means of identifying recurring relationships across coded data, revealing how specific combinations of pose, location and caption strategy appeared consistently across influencer posts. These quantitative patterns informed theoretical reflection, guiding the development of the typology by linking visual form to communicative function. This iterative movement between observation, statistical patterning and conceptual interpretation allowed the study to remain both data-driven and theoretically grounded, strengthening the analytical validity of its findings.

The following chapters expand this foundation. Chapter 2 reviews literature on luxury, influencer cultures and digital fashion media. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological design and explains the hybrid process of qualitative coding and quantitative mapping. Chapters 4 and 5 present and discuss the findings,

identifying six thematic strands that are synthesised into a typology of LFI communication practices. Chapter 6 reflects on the contributions, limitations and directions for future research, considering the implications for both academic understandings of fashion communication and the strategic operations of luxury branding within digital contexts.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

“When I first moved to New York and I was totally broke, sometimes I bought Vogue instead of dinner. I found it fed me more. ”
— Parker, S. J. (as Carrie Bradshaw), Sex and the City (2000), Season 4, Episode 2: “The Real Me”, HBO.

2.1. INTRODUCTION

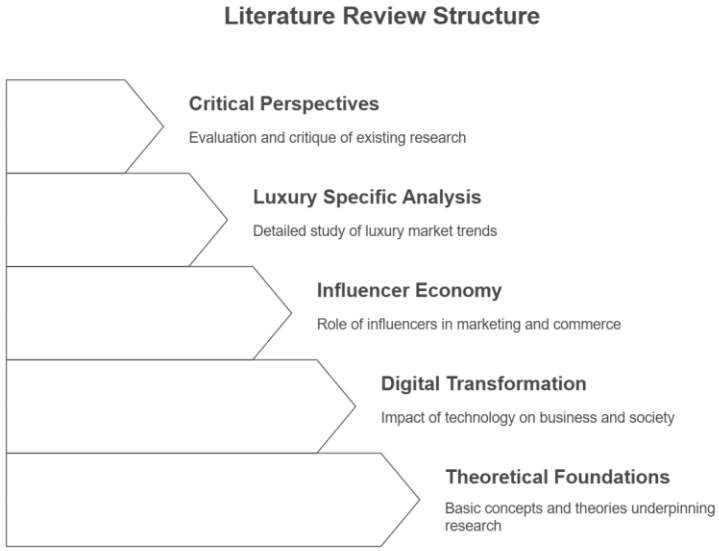

FIGURE 2 THIS FIGURE ILLUSTRATES THE CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW, OUTLINING ITS PROGRESSION THROUGH FIVE KEY THEMATIC AREAS. SOURCE: AUTHOR.

This chapter establishes the conceptual foundation for the thesis by situating Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) within fashion studies, digital media scholarship and influencer marketing research. It addresses the overarching research question: How can the fashion communication practices of LFIs be decoded and categorised to understand how they communicate luxury brand

narratives within the evolving ‘‘new digital fashion system’’. By assembling a theoretical framework for interpreting their visual and symbolic strategies, the chapter positions LFIs as both promotional agents and cultural communicators who perform luxury as a lived and digitally mediated experience on Instagram.

As outlined in Figure 2 (page 25), the literature review is organised around five core strands: theoretical foundations, digital transformation, the influencer economy, luxury-specific scholarship and critical perspectives. It begins by grounding the study in fashion theory through the work of Roland Barthes (1967), Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and Thorstein Veblen (1899). Their contributions conceptualise fashion respectively as a system of signs, a field structured through social distinction and a site of aesthetic labour and consumption. Together, these perspectives frame fashion as a symbolic, culturally embedded practice that produces and circulates meaning through images, bodies and commodities.

The chapter then traces the shift from traditional editorial media to platform-led forms of influence, drawing on theories of platform vernaculars (Gibbs et al., 2014) and affordances (Bucher and Helmond, 2018) to understand how LFIs operate as contemporary intermediaries. Their content translates the symbolic values of luxury into formats shaped by Instagram’s visual culture, technical affordances and algorithmic pressures. In this repositioned media environment, influencers increasingly assume roles once associated with fashion magazines, offering audiences aspirational visual narratives that sustain taste and desire within digital contexts. This cultural resonance is reflected in popular media, such as Carrie Bradshaw’s claim in *Sex and the*

City that she “bought Vogue instead of dinner” because it “fed [her] more.” The reference illustrates the affective nourishment that fashion media historically provided, a function that influencers now enact through digitally mediated forms of aesthetic and emotional engagement.

The concluding section engages critical perspectives on digital labour, cultural capital and visibility economies to conceptualise LFIs as entrepreneurial agents whose work is shaped by both opportunity and precarity. These perspectives illuminate how symbolic value, labour and algorithmic governance intersect within platform cultures, providing essential theoretical grounding for the typology developed in later chapters. Collectively, these strands locate LFI practices within the broader transformations of the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’ and establish the conceptual parameters for the empirical analysis that follows.

2.2. FASHION AS EPISTEMOLOGY AND CULTURAL SYSTEM: FROM SEMIOTIC FOUNDATIONS TO THE DIGITAL TURN

2.2.1 Fashion As Symbolic System And Cultural Knowledge

This section situates fashion within its broader epistemological and cultural framework, foregrounding its role as a system of visual meaning making. Drawing on semiotic theories of fashion, particularly the work of Barthes (1967 [1983]), fashion is understood here as a signifying practice through which social identity, distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), and cultural value are communicated. Attention is given to the circulation of fashion images within this system, with a particular focus on their mediation through visual and digital platforms. Informed by fashion studies scholarship, the analysis considers how fashion operates as both an aesthetic and embodied practice shaped by personal expression and institutional structures. While these theoretical frameworks emerged within pre-digital fashion systems structured around print media and institutional gatekeeping, they remain analytically valuable for examining how fashion meaning continues to be produced through visual codes, symbolic distinction, and cultural hierarchies, even as these processes are now mediated through platform-based environments. As Rocamora argues, fashion meaning is sustained through processes of symbolic production that involve “the production of the value of the work or, which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of the work” (Rocamora, 2002, p. 349), a process historically supported by institutions of diffusion and

consecration. This establishes the conceptual basis for examining how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) mobilise fashion imagery on Instagram, drawing on the visual codes of traditional editorial fashion while also engaging with emerging digital vernaculars.

Building on this, Mensitieri (2020) offers a compelling account of fashion's capacity to reshape social identity through symbolic transformation. Drawing on Bourdieu, she observes that "Pierre Bourdieu defines this process as a power of transmutation. The dream fabricated by fashion consists in the artifice of the transformation of the social nature of individuals" (Mensitieri, 2020, p. 26). This framing positions fashion as the production of material goods or aesthetic images and as the construction of a symbolic universe in which individuals are invited to inhabit reimagined forms of social being. The dream of fashion is sustained through carefully crafted visual and material narratives that promise elevation, refinement, and distinction. Central to this promise is the image itself, which stages bodies, commodities, and aspirations within idealised frames that render symbolic transformation conceivable. This understanding is particularly relevant for analysing how LFIs operate within digital environments, where curated visual storytelling performs and circulates precisely the kinds of aestheticised aspiration that Mensitieri (2020) identifies as fundamental to fashion's broader ideological project.

Fashion imagery carries considerable cultural and communicative weight, yet the academic study of fashion has long contended with questions of legitimacy. Historically, it has been dismissed as methodologically imprecise or lacking in theoretical seriousness. As Kawamura (2015) observes, fashion

and dress were once marginalised within scholarly discourse, regarded as trivial or beyond the scope of serious intellectual inquiry. However, this perception has shifted significantly in recent decades. Fashion studies has emerged as a robust interdisciplinary field, drawing on sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, art history, and marketing, among others. This growing body of work affirms the scholarly value of fashion as a meaningful site of cultural production and critique, lending support to the present study's focus on the semiotics and strategies of fashion imagery in digital contexts.

2.2.2 From Marginal Object To Fashion Studies: Institutionalising The Field

The institutionalisation of fashion studies is reflected in its intellectual foundations, which trace back to Renaissance-era analyses of dress (McNeil, 2008; Johnson *et al.*, 2003) and, later, research on dress history in the mid-twentieth century. The emergence of 'new art history' in the 1980s further legitimised fashion as a scholarly subject by positioning clothing and style within broader cultural, political, and visual economies (Breward, 1995; Taylor, 2002). In the United Kingdom in particular, the rise of cultural studies played a decisive role in shaping fashion research and reinforcing its interdisciplinary character (Paulicelli and Wissinger, 2013; Kaiser, 2012).

Despite these early developments, the field of fashion studies did not fully unite until the late twentieth century. Seminal texts such as Barthes' *The Fashion System* (1967 [1983]), Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), Wilson's *Adorned in Dreams* (1985), and Evans and Thornton's *Women and Fashion: A New Look* (1989) marked a critical turning point by establishing fashion as a legitimate site of academic inquiry. These works foregrounded fashion's cultural, social, and semiotic dimensions, demonstrating that dress and style are not superficial phenomena but are embedded within broader structures of meaning, power, and identity.

As the field expanded, it diversified across multiple disciplinary approaches. Historical analyses (Steele, 1988; Breward, 1999; Arnold, 2008), sociological

perspectives (Crane, 2000; Entwistle, 2000), and anthropological insights (Eicher, 1995; Woodward, 2007) collectively strengthened fashion's academic legitimacy. Fashion studies also developed productive intersections with film and media studies (Bruzzi, 1997; Rocamora, 2009) and psychology (Tseëlon, 1995), reinforcing its interdisciplinary scope.

Methodological contributions, most notably Kawamura's *Doing Research in Fashion and Dress* (2011), further consolidated the field by offering systematic frameworks for qualitative and theoretically grounded analysis. However, much of this scholarship was developed prior to the platformisation of fashion communication, leaving questions of algorithmic visibility, influencer labour, and digital mediation comparatively under-theorised within this body of work.

While fashion studies is now well established within academia, a persistent gap remains between theoretical inquiry and the realities of contemporary fashion communication. The rapid digital transformation of the industry has profoundly reshaped how fashion is produced, communicated, and consumed, yet this shift does not render existing theories obsolete. Rather, it necessitates their critical extension and adaptation to new digital contexts. This research responds to this limitation by demonstrating how established theoretical insights can be operationalised to analyse contemporary influencer -led luxury fashion communication, particularly within environments shaped by platform governance, datafication, and algorithmic visibility.

In an industry increasingly structured by social media platforms, influencer branding, and e-commerce infrastructures, fashion communication has moved decisively away from traditional print media towards digitally mediated forms

of cultural production. Influencers now occupy a significant role in shaping brand narratives, aesthetic norms, and aspirational identities. By critically examining how digital marketing practices, influencer culture, and technological infrastructures reconfigure fashion branding and consumer meaning-making, this research reinforces the importance of sustained dialogue between academic theory and industry practice. In doing so, it positions fashion studies as a critical interpretive field, as well one capable of engaging productively with the evolving conditions of the digital fashion economy.

2.2.3 Fashion, Western Modernity And Multiple Modernities

Fashion has frequently been positioned as emblematic of Western modernity, reflecting the social, cultural, and economic transformations associated with industrialisation, capitalism, and mass media in Europe and North America (Mora et al., 2014; Niessen et al., 2003; Rabine, 2002). As Solomon and Mrad (2018, p. 34) note, the Industrial Revolution transformed the way goods were made and gave birth to mass production, fundamentally reshaping clothing production, circulation, and consumption within emerging capitalist societies. This association, however, does not suggest that fashion is exclusive to the West. Rather, it reflects the historical dominance of Western frameworks in defining what counts as fashion within academic discourse. As Eisenstadt's (2000) theory of multiple modernities makes clear, modernity is neither

singular nor linear, but emerges differently across cultural and geopolitical contexts, producing diverse aesthetic systems, symbolic economies, and communicative practices.

Despite fashion's global circulation, this research focuses explicitly on Western fashion communication practices. This emphasis is not based on an assumption of Western universality, but on the intellectual genealogy of fashion studies itself. As Mora *et al.* (2014) note, the predominance of English as the language of international academia has contributed to a concentration of influential fashion scholarship within Western theoretical traditions. Consequently, many of the conceptual tools most commonly used to analyse fashion meaning, value, and representation have emerged from Western intellectual contexts.

Working within these traditions, the study necessarily centres forms of fashion communication shaped by Western aesthetic norms, commercial infrastructures, and media systems. This focus enables analytical coherence and theoretical consistency, particularly given the study's engagement with luxury fashion, a sector historically rooted in Eurocentric systems of heritage, distinction, and symbolic value. At the same time, it requires critical acknowledgement of its limitations. The privileging of Western perspectives risks marginalising non-Western fashion systems and obscuring alternative modernities in which fashion operates according to different logics of value, visibility, and identity.

This research approaches these tensions reflexively. Positioned within Western modernity, it recognises that its analytical assumptions are shaped

by specific cultural and disciplinary inheritances. While this positioning affords detailed insight into Western luxury fashion communication, it does not claim universality. Instead, it defines the boundaries of the empirical work with transparency, examining LFI content embedded within Eurocentric luxury cultures while explicitly acknowledging the existence of other fashion modernities beyond this scope.

This reflexive positioning also underpins the development of the coding framework outlined in Chapter 3. The selection of Barthes' (1967 [1983]) semiotics, Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital, and Veblen's (1899) concept of conspicuous consumption reflects their historical relevance to Western fashion systems. These frameworks were operationalised through coding categories designed to capture visual and textual signs, spatial hierarchies, and practices of display specific to Western luxury fashion communication. In this way, the framework aligns with the cultural context under investigation while remaining explicit about its epistemic boundaries.

Building on this critical awareness, the following sub-sections conceptualise fashion as both a system of signs and a field of distinction, shifting the focus towards how fashion operates as a cultural language through which meaning, value, and hierarchy are produced and communicated.

2.2.4 Fashion As A System Of Signs

This research approaches fashion not simply as clothing but as a dynamic system of cultural communication. Fashion extends beyond the production and wearing of garments to operate as a language composed of signs, codes, and performances through which identity is expressed, social values are mediated, and forms of belonging and distinction are signalled (Bourdieu, 1984). Drawing on Kawamura's (2005) conceptualisation, fashion is understood here as both material and representational, shaped by designers, brands, and media institutions. This semiotic and symbolic dimension is particularly salient for the study of LFIs , whose practices are embedded in processes of meaning production rather than material manufacture. While fashion's representational logic has long structured its presence within visual and discursive culture, its significance has intensified in the digital era. Meaning is now produced, circulated, and negotiated through image-driven platforms such as Instagram, where curated visuals, performances, and narratives operate within competitive economies of attention. Understanding fashion as a cultural language is therefore essential to analysing how LFIs construct brand narratives and articulate value within platformed environments.

Barthes' *The Fashion System* (1967 [1983]) was foundational in exposing fashion's semiotic logic. His tripartite distinction between the real garment, the image-garment, and the written garment demonstrated how fashion functions as a structured language rather than a purely material practice. Barthes (1967

[1983]) conceptualised fashion imagery as a semiotic system in which garments are abstracted from their physical form and reconstituted as signs through visual and textual mediation, particularly within fashion media. This research repositions Barthes' framework within a platformed media context, conceptualising a ''new digital fashion system'' shaped by multimodal content, algorithmic curation, and participatory engagement.

Beyond its structural dimensions, Barthes' (1967 [1983]) theorisation also attends to fashion's poetic capacity. Clothing does not merely denote function or social position but evokes affect, mood, and imagination. Fashion's poetic meaning lies in its ability to gesture beyond the literal, summoning metaphorical and symbolic associations through cut, texture, movement, and styling. Garments operate as figures of speech, capable of connoting elegance, rebellion, nostalgia, or sensuality without explicit verbal articulation. A silk blouse, for example, may suggest softness or intimacy through its visual and tactile qualities rather than through linguistic description. Meaning emerges not simply from what is worn but from how it is worn, staged, and framed, a logic intensified in digital contexts where imagery is curated for affective resonance.

Barthes' distinction between denotation and connotation further illuminates how fashion objects accumulate meaning beyond utility (Barthes, 1977). At the level of denotation, a handbag functions as a practical object designed to carry belongings. Through connotation, however, symbolic, cultural, and emotional values are attached. A Chanel handbag may signify luxury, heritage, exclusivity, and cultivated taste. Its value is therefore not reducible to material

function but resides in what it symbolises: participation in elite fashion narratives, alignment with established codes of distinction, and access to cultural capital. Importantly, such connotative meanings are unstable. As trends shift, objects may lose symbolic currency, becoming overexposed or culturally fatigued. Fashion meaning is thus dynamic, anchored in denotation but rendered socially powerful through connotation, which allows objects to rise and fall in value according to their contextual framing and reception.

Within contemporary digital culture, the image-garment is no longer confined to the static editorial photograph. It appears instead as a looping video, filtered image, or stylised Reel. The written garment, once the preserve of fashion journalism's specialised lexicon, is now articulated through captions, emojis, hashtags, and brand tags. Even the real garment is increasingly abstracted into atmosphere, gesture, or spatial arrangement. This development echoes Alber Elbaz's observation that fashion is now designed with the image in mind, prioritising photographic circulation over corporeal experience (Rocamora, 2017). While Barthes (1967 [1983]) sought to decode a relatively stable sign system rooted in print culture, digital fashion communication resists fixity, characterised instead by ephemerality, circulation, and continual recalibration.

McCracken (1988) reminds us that fashion symbolism is never accidental. Designers, stylists, and, increasingly, influencers embed abstract values of aspiration, prestige, and desirability into commodities, which are amplified through visual culture. Fashion thus functions as a cultural artefact shaped by intention and interpreted within specific social contexts. Wilson (1985) further positions fashion as a cultural mirror that both reflects and shapes social and

political values. LFIs participate in this ideological work by curating aspirational narratives and circulating fashion imagery that draws on discourses of success, taste, and legitimacy. Their content may reinforce dominant cultural values or introduce moments of symbolic tension, a dynamic examined in this thesis through indicators such as brand alignment, narrative tone, and visual dissonance, discussed further in Chapter 4.

Atik and Firat (2013) conceptualise fashion not merely as a marketing activity but as “an institution of modern society that involves all social elements together with consumers and marketing organisations” (Atik and Firat, 2013, p. 836). Within this system, processes of trickle-up, trickle-across, and trickle-down diffusion operate simultaneously rather than hierarchically. Svelte (2022) extends this critique by framing fashion as a self-sustaining ideological system in which cycles of novelty and obsolescence aestheticise change while remaining anchored in familiar structures.

Taken together, these perspectives reveal fashion as a symbolic terrain governed by the interplay of structure and improvisation, tradition and transformation. Meaning is not inherent in garments or images but produced through styling, gesture, captioning, and spatial presentation. Within this system, LFIs function as semiotic agents. Their posts are not merely visual displays but cultural texts that perform, transmit, and rework the codes of contemporary fashion. The codebook developed for this research reflects these symbolic dynamics, with categories designed to capture how meaning is embedded in clothing, pose, spatial staging, and visual framing. In this way, Barthes’ (1967 [1983]) semiotic model is directly operationalised within the

analytical framework through variables relating to pose, styling, product visibility, and caption discourse.

2.2.5 Fashion, Distinction And Digital Hierarchies

While Barthes (1967 [1983]) illuminates the semiotic logic of fashion, Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital provides a valuable lens through which to examine how fashion operates within fields of power. As the expansion of industrial production and consumer culture intensified visible distinctions, fashion increasingly functioned as a mechanism through which social hierarchies were expressed and reproduced. In this context, "new styles became a visible status symbol of wealth" (Solomon and Mrad, 2018, p. 34), situating dress within a structured space of symbolic struggle where taste, style, and embodied display are mobilised to mark and maintain social difference. Rocamora's (2002) *Fields of Fashion* provides a critical foundation for this analysis. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of capital, field, and habitus, she positions fashion as a legitimate field of cultural production shaped by ongoing struggles over meaning, authority, and legitimacy. From this perspective, fashion is not peripheral but central to understanding the operation of symbolic power and processes of social distinction. The digital turn has reconfigured, rather than dissolved, these hierarchies. Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) argue that fashion's fields of visibility are increasingly mediated by new technologies. The emergence of influencers as cultural intermediaries who translate cultural goods for broader audiences has

prompted scholars to reconsider how distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) operates within digital contexts (Abidin, 2016; Duffy and Hund, 2019; McQuarrie, Miller and Phillips, 2013). These actors function within a dynamic attention economy, where symbolic capital is accrued not solely through institutional endorsement but through metrics of popularity, aesthetic fluency, and strategic self-performance on social platforms.

As Rocamora (2011) notes, early fashion bloggers disrupted established editorial hierarchies by asserting aesthetic authority beyond traditional media channels. However, rather than dismantling the logic of distinction, the influencer economy frequently reproduces it through digitally mediated performances. Abidin (2016) and Duffy and Wissinger (2017) argue that influencers tend to embody idealised forms of taste and lifestyle that reflect enduring socio-economic privileges such as whiteness, slimness, affluence, and heteronormative femininity. These performances accrue symbolic capital through institutional validation and platform metrics: follower counts, brand partnerships, aesthetic coherence, and algorithmic visibility. Kavka and West (2020) extend Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus by proposing a "neo-habitus" shaped by platform logic, affective labour, and ongoing processes of self-curation. Within this recalibrated field, influencers must carefully negotiate authenticity and aspiration, strategically balancing relatability with distinction.

This thesis contends that the influencer economy does not democratise fashion's symbolic order so much as reconfigure its mechanisms. As LFIs increasingly act as arbiters of taste on Instagram, they embody a digitally updated logic of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984): one that is no longer confined to

fashion's elite institutions but enacted through lifestyle branding, curated access, and the strategic negotiation of aspirational visibility. Bourdieu's (1984) framework remains vital for decoding these structural dynamics but must be read through the lens of contemporary platform culture.

In methodological terms, Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of cultural and spatial capital underpin several dimensions of the coding framework developed in Chapter 3. Codes relating to location, event access, and industry social capital operationalise these ideas by tracing how elite spaces, fashion weeks, and branded environments function as markers of status within LFI content. In parallel, Veblen's (1899) theory of conspicuous consumption informs the coding of visible displays of luxury, providing a theoretical basis for identifying and categorising posts where consumption operates as symbolic display. Together with the semiotic categories outlined above, these constructs are embedded in the codebook and later quantified through SPSS-supported co-occurrence mapping, ensuring that the subsequent empirical analysis remains conceptually grounded in debates on distinction and display.

2.2.6 From Cyclical Fashion To The Digital Fashion System

Fashion has long been conceptualised as a cyclical phenomenon, characterised by trends that emerge, peak, and decline (Solomon, 2007; Hines and Bruce, 2007). Foundational theories, such as Simmel's (1904)

trickle-down model, positioned fashion trends as originating within elite circles before diffusing to broader social strata. As once-exclusive styles become adopted by the masses, the upper classes abandon them in pursuit of new distinctions, sustaining fashion's continual turnover. Veblen's (1899) theory of conspicuous consumption complements this framework by framing fashion as visibly signalling economic status, where the affluent engage in extravagant consumption to denote distance from manual labour.

These linear models have faced increasing scrutiny. Carter (2003) argues that fashion diffusion operates through a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, continually renegotiating social boundaries. He contends that fashion is not simply a reflection of class-based mobility but a symbolic negotiation of modern identity, where individuals oscillate between practices of assimilation and differentiation. This critical turn is particularly pertinent in digital culture, where the mechanisms of fashion diffusion have been fundamentally transformed. The traditional biannual fashion calendar has been disrupted by accelerated production cycles and instantaneous dissemination via social media platforms. Atik and Firat (2013) suggest that fashion no longer adheres to a strictly hierarchical diffusion model in this environment. Instead, trickle-down, trickle-up, and trickle-across dynamics operate simultaneously, producing a decentralised and multi-directional system. This conceptual shift aligns with Bulmer's (1969) collective selection theory, which posits that fashion reflects a plurality of evolving societal tastes, allowing competing trends to coexist.

Within this altered landscape, the perceived value of fashion has also shifted. Where once it was grounded in material craftsmanship and exclusivity, value is increasingly constructed through narrative and association. Barnes (2014) notes that luxury consumers are willing to pay a premium not solely for the product but for its aspirational meanings, status, cultural capital, and sense of belonging. This perceived value is sustained and amplified through mediated practices, with LFIs playing a pivotal role in its articulation and circulation. Far from being passive conduits of brand messaging, LFIs operate as cultural intermediaries who shape meaning through carefully curated self-presentation and narrative construction. By blending personal expression with promotional content, they embed luxury goods within stylised lifestyle imaginaries. Their use of visual and textual strategies deliberately blurs the line between authenticity and advertisement, reinforcing the symbolic economy of fashion while promoting intimacy, aspiration, and consumer desire among their audiences.

Moreover, the rise of LFIs signals a broader transformation in how fashion is socially and culturally positioned within digital culture. As Levy and Czepiel (1990) argue, fashion extends beyond garments, functioning as a mechanism for identity formation and social navigation. This is evident in the evolving self-identification of influencers, many of whom now adopt the label ‘lifestyle influencer ’ to align themselves with adjacent aspirational domains such as wellness, travel, and interior aesthetics. Such repositioning reflects fashion’s integration into broader lifestyle narratives, underscoring its communicative and affective power in the platform era.

However, while the digitalisation of fashion appears to expand access and participation, it does not inherently democratise the system. Svelte (2022) cautions that the online circulation of fashion content reconfigures rather than eradicates entrenched hierarchies. Although influencers may seem to decentralise traditional fashion authority, their visibility and success are shaped by algorithmic systems, platform logic, and brand alignments that privilege certain voices and aesthetics. Carter (2003) similarly notes that digital infrastructures accelerate the diffusion of fashion yet reinforce new forms of exclusivity, revealing a complex interplay between technological openness and curated access.

These developments demand a critical reappraisal of fashion's communicative functions. As LFIs mediate between brands and audiences within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’, they occupy a dual role: challenging traditional industry structures while being shaped by emerging platform economies. The symbolic and cultural dimensions of fashion communication must therefore be understood as contingent upon a complex interplay of production, mediation, and consumption, increasingly governed by both human creativity and algorithmic control.

This section has traced the development of fashion studies as an interdisciplinary field concerned with the cultural, social, and communicative dimensions of dress and style. Examining fashion through the lenses of symbolic meaning, social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899), and fashion as a semiotic system (Barthes, 1967 [1983]) provides the intellectual grounding for interpreting how fashion

operates within digital environments. These classical theories remain central to this research, not as historical artefacts but as conceptual tools for decoding contemporary forms of mediated fashion performance.

The review has also highlighted the increasing relevance of digital platforms, influencer economies, and algorithmic infrastructures. While fashion studies has long emphasised semiotic and sociological interpretation, the field must now engage with how digital systems reshape the production, dissemination, and consumption of fashion meaning. The rise of LFIs as cultural intermediaries exemplifies this shift, offering a new lens through which to understand the reconfiguration of fashion authority, taste, and value.

Methodologically, these frameworks underpin the qualitative visual content analysis detailed in later chapters. The coding schema draws directly on these theories: Veblen's (1899) account of conspicuous consumption informs how visible markers of luxury and display are identified; Bourdieu's (1984) cultural capital guides interpretations of taste, distinction, and social positioning through codes relating to location, elite event access, and industry social capital; and Barthes' (1967 [1983]) semiotic analysis structures the reading of visual and textual signs captured in codes for pose, styling, product visibility, and caption strategy. Together, these constructs support a systematic examination of how LFIs perform and circulate luxury meaning on Instagram. By integrating foundational theoretical scholarship with the evolving dynamics of digital fashion communication, this research positions itself at the intersection of conceptual inquiry and applied analysis and establishes the

theoretical–methodological scaffold for the codebook and analytical procedures developed in Chapter 3.

2.3. PLATFORMED INFLUENCE: INSTAGRAM'S VISUAL LOGIC, ALGORITHMIC GOVERNANCE, AND THE CULTURAL LABOUR OF LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCERS

2.3.1. Instagram As A Platformed Fashion Environment

Section 2.3 turns to Instagram as the central platform through which LFIs operate, considering its technical affordances, visual culture, and algorithmic dynamics. It explores how Instagram has reshaped the modes through which fashion is produced, displayed, and consumed, foregrounding how influencers co-create visual narratives alongside brands and audiences. Key literature on platform vernaculars (e. g. Gibbs et al., 2014) and social media affordances (e.g. Bucher & Helmond, 2018) informs this analysis. The section considers how Instagram encourages particular forms of self-presentation, attention economies, and aesthetic conventions, which LFIs must navigate. This understanding is crucial for interpreting how influencer fashion content is shaped not only by style and taste, but also by the operational logic of the platform itself. Within this context, the proliferation of digital media has given rise to a new class of cultural intermediaries: social media influencers, whose visibility, authority, and aesthetic choices are increasingly mediated by algorithmic systems and data-driven performance metrics. These figures play a significant role in contemporary fashion communication by bridging the gap between brands and consumers through curated, platform-native content .

2.3.2. Algorithmic Governance And The Visibility Game

Building on this theoretical foundation, the following section turns to the algorithmic structures that increasingly shape the conditions of fashion communication. As the role of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) becomes increasingly entwined with platform governance, it is crucial to examine how visibility, influence, and symbolic capital are mediated through Instagram's socio-technical infrastructure. Cotter's (2018) concept of the visibility game provides a compelling framework for analysing how LFIs engage with these dynamics, shedding light on the strategic manoeuvring required to remain visible within algorithmically governed spaces.

The relationship between digital influencers and algorithmic systems has emerged as a significant focus within social media studies, where scholars interrogate how influence is shaped by the hidden logics of platform design. Cotter's work contributes to these debates by illustrating that visibility on Instagram is not solely a product of user agency or creativity, but rather a highly structured negotiation shaped by opaque and shifting platform mechanisms. Her analysis builds upon existing scholarship on digital labour, self-branding, and algorithmic culture, foregrounding the tactical responses influencers develop in pursuit of sustained reach and engagement. Positioning her study within the field of algorithmic governance, Cotter aligns with theorists such as Bucher (2012) and Gillespie (2014), who conceptualise algorithms as gatekeeping devices that condition online visibility. Instagram's ranking systems, for example, serve to regulate which content circulates and how it is encountered. Yet Cotter extends this line of inquiry by theorising the

visibility game as a form of labour in which influencers decode, interpret, and adjust to platform constraints in real time. In doing so, her work echoes Beer's (2009, 2017) argument that algorithms exert disciplinary power through the establishment of implicit norms, guiding user behaviour and shaping modes of digital participation.

2.3.3. Algorithmic Power, Self-Branding, And Digital Inequality

Beer (2017) conceptualises algorithms as technical artefacts embedded within broader socio-political and economic structures, challenging the assumption of algorithmic neutrality. Drawing on Pasquale's (2015) notion of the black box society, he argues that algorithms reinforce existing power hierarchies by privileging certain forms of engagement while marginalising others. Similarly, Banet-Weiser (2012) critiques the self-branding imperative within postfeminist consumer culture, arguing that while branding oneself on social media is framed as a path to visibility and success, it reinforces traditional gender hierarchies and labour expectations. Both scholars highlight how digital infrastructures regulate social participation, demonstrating that visibility is not equitably distributed but is contingent upon one's ability to align with platform logic.

Cotter (2018) extends these discussions by analysing how influencers construct visibility within the algorithmically mediated Instagram environment. She identifies two primary approaches: relational influence and simulated

influence. The relational approach aligns with self-branding literature (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Marwick, 2013), emphasising authenticity as a key factor in sustaining audience engagement. Influencers who employ this approach cultivate perceived sincerity through direct interaction with followers, prioritising affective labour and community-building (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Marwick, 2015). In contrast, simulated influence is rooted in an entrepreneurial logic, where influencers engage in tactical behaviours, such as engagement pods and follow/unfollow strategies, to manipulate algorithmic metrics. Cotter (2018) connects these tactics to neoliberal ideals of self-optimisation and competitive advantage (Hearn, 2008; Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015), illustrating how influencers navigate algorithmic constraints by adopting efficiency-driven, quantifiable engagement strategies.

A key contribution of Cotter's research is her focus on algorithmic literacy, defined as influencers ' ability to interpret and adapt to platform changes. This aligns with Bucher's (2017) work on algorithmic imaginaries and Rader et al (2018) research on user knowledge production, suggests that users construct informal, collective understandings of algorithms' functions. Cotter (2018) demonstrates that influencers do not passively accept platform governance but instead engage in empirical testing and peer discourse to develop working theories of Instagram's algorithmic architecture. Her findings echo Van Dijck's (2013) argument that social media platforms are co-constructed by users and owners, reinforcing that digital visibility is the outcome of both individual and structural agency.

The visibility game framework also extends discussions on digital inequalities. Cotter (2018) critiques Instagram's post-algorithmic landscape, arguing that it

disproportionately benefits established influencers with the resources to invest in visibility-maximising tactics. This reinforces findings within platform economy research (Andrejevic, 2014) and digital labour scholarship (Duffy, 2017), highlighting how algorithmic curation consolidates power among those with existing digital capital. Beer (2017) and Banet-Weiser (2012) similarly foreground the unequal distribution of digital capital, demonstrating that self-branding demands disproportionate aesthetic and emotional labour from marginalised groups, particularly women. Gill and Orgad's (2018) concept of the confidence cult further illustrates how influencers are compelled to self-optimise under the guise of empowerment, presenting themselves as aspirational figures of independence, ambition, and success. Yet, much like broader postfeminist expectations placed on career women, this performance of confidence often coexists with demands to remain aesthetically pleasing, emotionally available, and domestically competent. Influencers must not only appear professionally accomplished but also effortlessly stylish, nurturing, and self-managing, echoing the persistent ideal of the woman who can 'have it all' while still being metaphorically chained to the kitchen sink. This tension raises critical questions about whether such visibility and self-expression truly reflect empowerment, or whether they merely reproduce traditional gendered expectations in a digital guise.

2.3.4. Visual Culture, Instagram Aesthetics, And Computational Analysis

While Cotter (2018) foregrounds Instagram's algorithmic governance and its implications for inequality and visibility, Manovich's *Instagram and Contemporary Image* (2017) approaches the platform from a different angle. His focus is not on labour or precarity, but on the visual patterns that emerge at scale. Instagram is treated primarily as a cultural image system rather than as a structured site of platform labour. The book is methodologically ambitious and remains important for understanding the platform's early visual consolidation. However, its emphasis lies in aesthetics rather than in the socio-economic conditions under which those aesthetics are produced.

Manovich employs what he terms a "Big Cultural Data" approach (2017), analysing approximately fifteen million images from sixteen cities between 2012 and 2015. Through computational analysis, he identifies recurring patterns in measurable attributes such as saturation, brightness and composition. This large-scale mapping provides insight into Instagram's developing visual grammar and the circulation of shared stylistic conventions across global contexts. It captures the platform at a particular moment of aesthetic stabilisation.

Yet the methodological strength of scale also introduces limitation. By focusing on quantifiable image properties, the analysis necessarily abstracts photographs from the labour, commercial alignment and algorithmic

governance that shape their production. What becomes visible are formal regularities. What is less visible are the negotiations of visibility and value that underpin them. The result is a predominantly formal account of Instagram culture. It describes aesthetic outcomes without fully examining the structural incentives that help produce those outcomes.

A central contribution of *Instagram and Contemporary Image* is Manovich's classification of Instagram photography into three dominant types: casual, professional and designed images. Casual photographs are defined as spontaneous and unpolished, aligned with everyday documentation (Manovich, 2017, p. 73). Professional images display technical refinement and compositional control. Designed images are highly curated and edited, closely aligned with branding and commercial self-presentation.

This taxonomy is useful in identifying broad stylistic tendencies, particularly in Instagram's earlier development. However, influencer practice demonstrates that these categories are rarely stable in practice. Influencers move deliberately between registers. Apparent spontaneity often coexists with careful staging. Casual aesthetics can be strategically deployed to signal authenticity, while designed images may incorporate platform-native conventions to increase engagement. The boundaries between these types are therefore negotiated rather than fixed.

Manovich's concept of "Instagramism" describes the emergence of a platform-specific sensibility, a recognisable tonality produced through the fusion of form and content (Manovich, 2017). This remains a valuable insight. However, the commercial and algorithmic infrastructures that intensify and reward certain

aesthetic choices are less fully explored. While affordances are acknowledged, the economic incentives embedded within visibility regimes receive limited attention.

In the contemporary luxury influencer context, aesthetic decisions are closely tied to platform logics. A fast-paced transition Reel featuring multiple luxury outfits, trending audio and seamless editing is not only stylistic. It is aligned with algorithmic preference for movement, rhythm and audio integration. A slower, conceptually driven fashion film may offer greater creative depth, yet it is less likely to circulate widely. The difference is not simply one of taste. It reflects the conditions under which visibility is structured and monetised.

Revisiting Manovich from this later vantage point does not undermine his contribution. Rather, it situates it. His work captures Instagram during a period of visual consolidation. Subsequent developments, including intensified commercialisation and algorithmic recalibration, require a closer engagement with labour, governance and strategic adjustment. Aesthetic patterns do not emerge independently of these forces. They are shaped through them.

2.3.5. Digital Capital, Distinction, And Instagram's Aesthetic Economy

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) Theory of Distinction, one could argue that Instagram's aesthetic norms function as a form of digital capital, where access to high-quality equipment, advanced editing techniques, and curated spaces

operate as a status marker. The rise of polished, aspirational aesthetics suggests that Instagram is not merely a neutral visual platform, but an ecosystem structured by platform capitalism, where visibility is a commodity optimised, monetised, and regulated. Without accounting for the economic and algorithmic structures sustaining Instagram's visual economy, Manovich's analysis remains partial, offering a valuable but surface-level engagement with digital aesthetics.

Cotter (2018) and Manovich (2017) offer distinct yet intersecting perspectives on Instagram's role in structuring digital culture. While Cotter foregrounds platform governance, algorithmic literacy, and influencer labour, Manovich maps the formal aesthetic patterns that emerge through computational visual analyses. Their work highlights Instagram's dual nature as an economic and aesthetic system governed by algorithmic constraints and platform logic that shape what is seen, valued, and circulated in digital spaces.

2.3.6 Authenticity, Intimacy, And Influencer Self-Presentation

As Hearn and Schoenhoff (2016, p. 194) note, social media influencers generate celebrity capital by "cultivating as much attention as possible and crafting an authentic 'personal brand,'" a process that must resonate with audiences while aligning with commercial objectives. Breves et al. (2019) further describe influencers as a hybrid form of native advertising, branded entertainment, and highly credible word of mouth. However, as influencer marketing becomes increasingly professionalised, maintaining the

appearance of authenticity becomes more complex. Duffy and Hund's (2015) concept of calculated authenticity captures this tension, highlighting how influencers strategically present a sense of genuine selfhood while remaining responsive to platform norms and commercial partnerships. Patterson and Ashman (2020) advance this discussion by framing influencer culture as structured around 'mediated intimacy,' whereby curated self-disclosure becomes a central aesthetic and affective device. Their netnographic findings demonstrate how influencers commodify personal revelation and aesthetic vulnerability, blurring the lines between private authenticity and strategic self-presentation. This friction between self-presentation and monetisation invites a critical re-evaluation of influencer trustworthiness and cultural legitimacy within digital economies.

2.3.7 From Fashion Theory To The ''new digital fashion system''

This section has traced the conceptual evolution of fashion as a signifying system, moving from semiotic and sociological foundations towards a contemporary understanding shaped by digital infrastructures. Grounded in the legacies of Barthes, Bourdieu, Veblen and Simmel, the discussion has demonstrated how fashion operates as a cultural language through which identity, value and distinction are encoded, communicated and contested. As the analysis has shown, fashion is not merely reflective of aesthetic trends or material consumption, but a dynamic symbolic field, shaped by institutional

structures, mediated practices and socio-technical change. By foregrounding the emergence of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) as cultural intermediaries, this research repositions long-standing theoretical models within the conditions of the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’. In doing so, it highlights the interplay between affect, algorithm, and authority in the construction of fashion meaning on Instagram. The platform era has not displaced traditional hierarchies of taste; rather, it has reconfigured them, embedding fashion communication within data-driven economies and participatory logics. This reconceptualisation calls for fashion studies to remain reflexively attuned to the aesthetic, technological, and ideological shifts shaping contemporary cultural production. Within this restructured landscape, the influencer economy has emerged as a key site where these shifts materialise and are made visible through everyday practices of self-presentation, branding, and digital labour.

2.3.8 Defining Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs)

While much of this terrain has been examined through broader frameworks of digital transformation, platform affordances, and the evolution of fashion communication, the following section narrows its focus to consolidate key academic definitions and to delineate the specific term Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI). It foregrounds the unique pressures LFIs face in navigating the contradictions of authenticity and visibility within a commercialised digital ecosystem. Particular attention is paid to influencer classification systems, the

implications of algorithmic visibility, and the paradoxes of authenticity that characterise influencer labour in the luxury context.

2.3.9 Instagram's Commercial Affordances And Influencer Marketing Infrastructure

These dynamics are especially pertinent to Instagram, which has emerged as the dominant platform for influencer marketing due to its visual affordances, integrated e-commerce functionalities and consistently high engagement rates (Droesch, 2019; Klassen et al., 2018).

Initially launched as a photo-sharing app, it has developed into a multifaceted commercial space where influencers construct aspirational identities while promoting branded content (Gullbekk, 2022). Features such as shoppable posts , swipe-up links, and live shopping have streamlined the consumer journey and enabled direct brand engagement (Feldman, 2019). Engagement-driven algorithms shape content visibility on Instagram, encouraging influencers to curate content that combines aesthetic appeal with strategic optimisation (Gullbekk, 2022). Levin (2019) outlines four core influencer marketing objectives: awareness, consideration, conversion, and content production. Each requires specific engagement strategies aligned with Instagram's technical affordances. This compatibility has contributed to the rapid expansion of influencer marketing, which reached an estimated global value of $16. 4 billion in 2022 (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2022). Influencers frequently develop parasocial relationships with followers, promoting a sense

of accessibility and trust (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Interactive tools such as Q&A sessions, polls, and product demonstrations advance engagement and increase brand loyalty. However, this sense of intimacy can obscure the line between authentic and sponsored content, raising concerns about transparency and consumer manipulation (Boerman et al., 2017). Many users struggle to recognise paid posts, particularly when disclosures are unclear (ASA, 2018). influencer often embed advertising within personal narratives, creating an "advertorial " format that blends authenticity with commercial intent (Abidin, 2015).

These blurred boundaries have prompted regulatory responses. Authorities such as the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in the United Kingdom and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the United States have introduced guidelines mandating more transparent disclosure of paid content. Algorithmic systems that prioritise engagement often amplify sponsored content, reducing the visibility of organic posts (Gullbekk, 2022). As a result, influencers must continually navigate the tension between maintaining perceived authenticity and securing brand partnerships (Levin, 2019). This environment favours macro-influencers with high visibility, reinforcing hierarchies and limiting opportunities for emerging creators (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017).

2.3.10 Luxury Branding, Exclusivity, And Platform Contradiction

This research seeks to understand how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) strategically mobilise Instagram's affordances to construct exclusivity and communicate aesthetic distinction. Drawing on Barthes' (1983) semiotic theory and Bourdieu's (1984) concept of distinction, it explores how LFI content frames luxury products as symbols of cultural and social capital through carefully curated visual narratives (Barthes, 1983; Bourdieu, 1984; Gullbekk, 2022). However, the platform's participatory logic challenges traditional luxury branding, historically relying on top-down, highly controlled communication (D'Arpizio et al., 2021). Instead of scarcity and restraint, LFIs must sustain consistent content production and audience interaction, performing a model of "accessible exclusivity" that blends aspiration with relatability (Voorveld, 2019).

While Instagram currently structures much of the visual labour of LFIs , recent shifts in platform preference and monetisation models raise questions about the long-term stability of these practices. The increasingly saturated and commercialised nature of influencers paces and the emergence of new content formats (e. g. Reels, Stories and now Threads) demands an approach that considers both the temporal precarity and cultural specificity of Instagram-native luxury communication. In this context, influencer practices are shaped not only by aesthetic norms and brand strategies but also by the platform's affordances, constraints and shifting algorithmic demands.

This shift poses strategic risks, including overexposure and the erosion of brand prestige (Schouten et al., 2020). Influencer marketing is now a key component of luxury brand storytelling, particularly in campaigns focused on building awareness and interest rather than immediate sales (Levin, 2019). While such collaborations can reinforce brand identity, over-reliance on influence risks diluting the symbolic value that luxury brands depend upon. Instagram's ascendancy reflects a broader transformation in digital fashion communication, where branding is increasingly shaped by algorithmic logic and participatory aesthetics. For LFIs , this presents opportunities and constraints as they navigate a system in which authenticity, visual curation and commercial intent must be continually negotiated within a highly monetised and closely scrutinised environment.

2.3.11 Influencer As Cultural Intermediaries In Fashion Media

Within this evolving landscape, the term 'influencer ' has gained prominence yet remains conceptually fluid, frequently overlapping with adjacent roles such as content creator, brand ambassador and digital entrepreneur. Scholars and industry professionals continue to refine its meaning, recognising that influencers operate at the intersection of digital media, marketing and cultural production (Kozinets, Gretzel and Gambetti, 2023). For this research, establishing a clear definition of what an LFI in this context is critical to ensure analytical precision and to support the specific focus on Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs). Influencers are inseparable from the affordances of social

media platforms, where they produce, distribute, and circulate content (Abidin, 2015). Their cultural and economic visibility is shaped by follower counts, engagement metrics, and algorithmic reach (Rocamora, 2022). Instagram, in particular, has become the dominant platform for fashion communication due to its visual orientation and marketing potential (Tomovska, 2020). Through influencer -generated content (IGC) , individuals construct a consistent and recognisable digital persona, combining self-branding with promotional intent (Cotter, 2019). Their influence relies on maintaining audience attention and translating visibility into capital (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017). LFIs represent a specific category within this broader economy. As outlined in Table 2, definitions of influencers vary across scholarly and industry sources, reflecting the term's conceptual fluidity and the diverse functions influencers perform within digital ecosystems. LFIs , in particular, are defined by their engagement with luxury brands and capacity to produce aspirational narratives grounded in exclusivity, heritage and aesthetic curation (Kim & Ko, 2012). Their content is typically less transactional than that of mass-market influencers, but instead, they reinforce the symbolic value of luxury through stylised storytelling, selective affiliations, and performative authority (Findlay, 2017; Rocamora, 2011). While partnerships with brands are common, such collaborations must be carefully curated to preserve perceived authenticity and maintain brand alignment (Audrezet et al., 2020). In many respects, LFIs perform a function akin to traditional fashion magazines, blending editorial content with commercial imperatives. Like fashion journalists, they position themselves as tastemakers, offering aesthetic guidance and lifestyle inspiration while engaging in strategic relationships with luxury brands (Findlay

& Reponen, 2023). This dual function underscores the complexity of their role within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’, which contrasts with earlier fashion hierarchies where roles and positions were more fixed and widely understood.

TABLE 2 DEFINITIONS OF INFLUENCER FROM VARIOUS SOURCES

This table provides a range of definitions of the term "influencer " from different scholarly and industry sources. It highlights various perspectives, from those who shape audience attitudes through social media and blogs to individuals who monetise their personal online presence by leveraging their influence. The definitions emphasise influencers ' roles in content generation, marketing value, and their impact on consumer behaviour across digital platforms.

Definition: An influencer is.	**Source**
"One who exerts influence: a person who inspires or guides the actions of others; often, specifically, a person who is able to generate interest in something (such as a consumer product) by posting about it on social media. "	Merriam- Webster dictionary (2021)
a new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media.	Freberg, Graham, Mcgaughey and Freberg (2011:90)
Individuals who post to their social media accounts in exchange for compensation.	Campbell and Grimm (2019:110)
Individuals who are in consumer social graph and have direct impact on the behaviour of that consumer.	Ge and Gretzel (2018:1273)
Every day, ordinary internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in "digital" and "physical" spaces, and monetise their following by integrating advertorials into their blog or social media posts and making physical appearances at events.	Abidin (2015: para. 1)
Someone in your niche or industry who wields influence. Influences have specialised knowledge, authority, or insight into a specific subject.	Influencer Marketing Hub (2022a)
A content generator who has the status of expertise in a specific area, who has cultivated a sizable number of captive followers who are of marketing value to brands by regularly producing valuable content via social media.	Lou and Yuan (2019:59)
"A third-party actor that has established a significant number of irrelevant relationships with a specific quality to and influence on organisational stakeholders through content production, content distribution, interaction, and personal appearance on the social web. "	Enke and Borchers (2019:267)
"A type of micro celebrity a style of online performance where individuals attempt to gain attention and popularity by employing digital media technologies, such as webcams, blogs and social media. "	Drenten, Gurrieri and Tyler (2020:42)

“A type of micro celebrity who has accrued a large number of followers on social media and frequently uses this social capital to gain access to financial resources. ”	Cotter (2019:896)
“Social media influencers are referred to as people who have built a sizeable social network of people following them. In addition, they are seen as a regard for being a trusted tastemaker in one or several niches. ”	De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudder (2017:798)

For this research, a Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) is defined as follows:

“A Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) is an individual who strategically uses social media platforms, most notably Instagram, to curate and disseminate content centred on high-end fashion. Their influence is grounded in a distinctive and consistent visual identity, shaped by personal style, aesthetic expertise, and an ability to communicate the symbolic value of luxury goods. Unlike generic lifestyle influencers, LFIs focus predominantly on luxury fashion houses, heritage brands, and aspirational consumption. While they often engage in brand collaborations, their role extends beyond product promotion; they act as digital tastemakers who merge the editorial authority of traditional fashion media with the immediacy and intimacy of social platforms, positioning themselves as cultural intermediaries within the luxury fashion system.”

2.3.12 The Transformation Of Fashion Journalism And Editorial Authority

Understanding the nuanced positioning of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) within the influencer economy is essential for definitional clarity and for tracing broader historical shifts in fashion media and communication. As digital platforms reconfigure infrastructures of visibility and authority, LFIs exemplify a longer transformation in which influence has moved beyond promotion towards forms of cultural mediation historically associated with fashion journalism. This shift provides a critical entry point for examining how fashion journalism itself has been restructured, from a field once governed by institutional gatekeepers such as magazine editors, critics, and industry insiders, to a more fluid, platformed media ecology in which authority is increasingly dispersed across digital content creators, influencers, and algorithmically visible tastemakers.

Fashion journalism has undergone a profound historical transformation over the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Once defined by institutional authority, editorial hierarchies, and professional gatekeeping, it is now increasingly shaped by digital acceleration, audience interactivity, and commercial pressures. Within this evolving media landscape, the influencer emerges not merely as a promotional actor but as a hybrid figure occupying roles traditionally held by editors, stylists, and brand ambassadors. This reconfiguration blurs the boundaries between editorial and advertorial content, authority and relatability, signalling a redistribution of cultural power from

legacy institutions to digitally native actors operating within platform economies.

Collins (2022) offers a historically grounded account of this transition. She describes late twentieth-century fashion journalism as a structured, analogue practice reliant on institutional media infrastructures including newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. Editorial workflows were labour-intensive and hierarchical, involving manual production processes, intensive sub-editing, and clear professional demarcations between editorial judgement and commercial influence. Authority was consolidated within legacy institutions that controlled both access to the field and the circulation of fashion discourse. The rise of digital platforms, however, rapidly destabilised these arrangements, reshaping journalistic labour and undermining the legitimacy of traditional media gatekeepers.

The emergence of the internet in the 1990s, followed by the expansion of social media, marked a decisive historical turning point. Digital platforms transformed how fashion knowledge was produced, distributed, and consumed. As Collins (2022) notes, new formats such as blogs, online video, and podcasts expanded journalistic possibilities while simultaneously destabilising economic models. Many print publications initially retreated from digital ventures as anticipated audiences and advertising revenues failed to materialise. This uncertainty reflected a broader crisis in journalism, in which engagement metrics increasingly displaced subscription-based models, often privileging speed, visibility, and volume over critical depth. Journalists were

expected to operate across multiple platforms, compromising editorial rigour in the pursuit of immediacy and relevance.

Within this context, social media influencers emerged as a significant challenge to established forms of journalistic authority. Collins (2022) characterises their rise as a disruption to long-standing professional hierarchies, as digital content creators developed personal brands and claimed cultural authority beyond the structures of legacy media. This development further blurred the boundaries between editorial and promotional content, as self-branding, sponsorship, and personal voice became integral to fashion communication. In response, legacy media increasingly adopted influencer -style practices, including personality-led features and expectations of journalist self-branding, signalling institutional adaptation to platform logics rather than resistance to them.

Crucially, Collins situates these developments within the broader commercialisation of fashion communication. Brands increasingly exert control over their narratives, often bypassing both journalists and influencers in favour of direct-to-consumer strategies. This complicates earlier claims that digital fashion media would democratise discourse. Instead, visibility is now shaped by algorithmic systems, and authority is frequently measured through commercial viability rather than critical expertise. The convergence of journalism, influencer culture, and platform capitalism thus raises pressing questions about the future of independent critique in fashion media.

At the same time, Collins (2022) resists a narrative of total decline. She argues that while editorial safeguards have weakened, the demand for trust,

credibility, and accountability persists. She identifies the emergence of “journalist-activists” who seek to challenge ethical shortcomings within the industry, suggesting the possibility of a recalibrated form of fashion journalism that reasserts investigative and critical functions. Whether such efforts can meaningfully counter the structural pressures of platform economies, however, remains uncertain.

Taken together, Collins’ reflections provide a historically situated framework for understanding the reconfiguration of fashion journalism under digital conditions. Yet her analysis focuses primarily on internal journalistic transformations, leaving scope for further interrogation of the broader power relations shaping contemporary fashion communication. As legacy institutions struggle to sustain authority within a media ecology increasingly dominated by influencer economies and brand-controlled narratives, the critical role of fashion journalism demands renewed scrutiny, particularly in relation to the rise of Luxury Fashion Influencer and their embeddedness within platform logics.

These pressures are intensified by Instagram’s affordances, which privilege visibility, repetition, and engagement over reflective or investigative content (Abidin, 2016; Bucher & Helmond, 2018). Journalists and influencers alike operate within regimes of continuous content production, where algorithmic design rewards aesthetic coherence, affective appeal, and consistency. In this environment, profile-building becomes a necessary form of labour, and editorial authority is increasingly contingent, precarious, and attuned to platform rhythms rather than institutional validation.

2.3.13 Fashion Criticism, Cultural Capital, And Legitimacy

The historical reconfiguration of fashion journalism is mirrored in the evolution of fashion criticism itself. Van de Peer's (2022) longitudinal analysis of 1,301 fashion reviews from *The New York Times* and *The International Herald Tribune* challenges the assumption that fashion journalism has always lacked critical capacity. In the mid-twentieth century, critics evaluated collections primarily through tangible criteria such as beauty, functionality, and craftsmanship, reflecting the material priorities of haute couture. By the late twentieth century, however, evaluative discourse shifted towards a more intellectualised register that prioritised conceptual depth and artistic innovation. Menkes (2010) argues that twenty-first-century fashion demands more than surface appeal, suggesting that aesthetic refinement alone is insufficient without a distinctive and authoritative creative vision, as discussed by Van de Peer (2022).

While this rhetorical shift can be read as an expansion of critical ambition, Van de Peer argues that it also reinforced cultural hierarchies by privileging narrative sophistication over material practice. This repositioning functioned as a strategic response to journalism's increasingly unstable position between cultural authority and commercial dependency. Within contemporary platform environments, this tension becomes more pronounced. Fashion criticism must now compete with, and often emulate, the surface-level content rewarded by algorithmic visibility.

Despite its emphasis on intellectual discourse, fashion journalism remains tethered to a teleological model of progress that privileges novelty and innovation while marginalising retrospective or historically grounded approaches. Van de Peer (2022) identifies a persistent contradiction in contemporary criticism: fashion's engagement with its own history is frequently dismissed as creative stagnation. White (1999) contends that fashion achieves cultural legitimacy when it extends beyond surface appearance to engage more substantively with meaning and value, reinforcing a hierarchical distinction between depth and surface that continues to shape judgements of quality within fashion culture. This distancing from fashion's past is not merely aesthetic but ideological, reflecting the field's ongoing struggle for legitimacy through alignment with 'serious cultural discourse. This dynamic closely echoes Bourdieu's (1984) theorisation of cultural capital and distinction, underscoring how authority in fashion communication continues to be historically structured, contested, and unevenly distributed.

2.3.14 From Blogging To Influencing Legitimacy And Digital Fashion Labour

These logics of legitimacy, privilege, and symbolic capital can be read historically through the trajectories of early digital fashion labour, as explored in Findlay's (2025) study of North American fashion bloggers. Rather than treating influencer culture as a novel rupture, Findlay situates blogging as a transitional formation within a longer reconfiguration of fashion media

authority. Like traditional journalists, bloggers negotiated tensions between creativity, visibility, and commercialisation. However, their legitimacy emerged less through institutional affiliation than through embeddedness in digital affordances, peer recognition, and proximity to cultural and geographic centres such as New York and Toronto.

Challenging meritocratic narratives, Findlay foregrounds the relational, contingent, and infrastructural conditions that enabled a select group of bloggers to transition into established media roles. Success, she argues, was not solely a function of talent or engagement metrics but developed through what she terms an “accidental apprenticeship,” a process of acquiring credibility via self-directed writing, community-building, and alignment with networked aesthetic norms. This framing historicises digital fashion labour as uneven, situated, and structurally conditioned rather than individually earned.

Importantly, Findlay demonstrates that bloggers initially dismissed as amateurs or “interlopers” gained legitimacy through practices that blurred the boundaries between personal expression and editorial authority. Many later wrote for legacy outlets such as *Vogue*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New York Times*, illustrating the porous and shifting boundaries between amateur and professional fashion media during this transitional moment. However, access to these pathways was uneven. Her concept of “proximity privilege” highlights how financial resources, social capital, and spatial access to key fashion centres shaped who could convert visibility into media work.

Read historically, this analysis provides a critical lens for understanding contemporary influencer culture. While LFIs now operate within more explicitly

commercialised and metric-driven environments, their claims to authority echo earlier struggles over legitimacy, visibility, and cultural value. Influencer practices, increasingly professionalised and platform-optimised from the outset, can thus be understood not as a departure from blogging culture but as its structural intensification within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’. This perspective is central to assessing whether influencers represent continuity, escalation, or reconfiguration within fashion’s evolving media ecology.

2.3.15 Quantification, Metrics, And Influencer Classification

The contested nature of influencer authority is further complicated by the quantification of influence itself. Within Instagram’s metrics-driven economy, visibility and legitimacy are increasingly shaped by follower counts, engagement rates, and algorithmic amplification. Numerical indicators function not simply as measures of popularity, but as structuring devices that organise hierarchies of value. They shape how influencers are ranked, how brands assess partnership potential, and how audiences interpret status.

This research focuses specifically on Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) with follower counts exceeding one million, commonly categorised as “mega” influencers. While the broader influencer landscape is diverse and stratified, this upper tier offers a particularly clear site through which to examine the relationship between metrics and symbolic capital. At this level, numerical scale operates as both economic leverage and cultural credential. High

follower counts signal reach, but they also perform distinction. They position the influencer as already validated within the platform's visibility regime.

A common method for classifying influencers is therefore based on follower count. Although thresholds vary slightly across industry reports and academic sources, classifications typically follow a tiered structure, moving from nano and micro influencers to macro and mega categories. This system reflects the platform's tendency to translate influence into measurable scale, reinforcing the idea that authority can be quantified, ranked and compared.

TABLE 3 INFLUENCER CATEGORIES BY FOLLOWER COUNT FROM VARIOUS SOURCES

This table compares the categorisation of influencers based on follower counts across various sources. The categories range from nano-influencers with the smallest following to mega/celebrity influencers with over one million followers. The data is drawn from Sprout Social (2023), Ismail (2023), and Moffitt and Azarfar (2021), showing slight variations in follower thresholds for each influencer type.

Source	Nano	Micro	Macro	Mega/ Celebrity
Sprout Social (2023)	1k<	10k<	100k<	1 million<
Ismail (2023)	1k>	1k <	100k<	1 million<
Moffitt and Azarfar (2021)	1k<	10k<	100k<	1 million<

Follower counts and engagement rates directly influence how influencers are categorised and, by extension, shape their accumulation of both financial and symbolic capital within the digital economy. These metrics serve as key indicators in determining brand partnerships and investment decisions, while also affecting an influencer's perceived status and earning potential. Studies indicate that influencers frequently experience pressure to sustain or expand their visibility, often leading to strategic behaviours such as purchasing

followers or adopting clickbait-style tactics to enhance engagement (Chang & Wu, 2024; Firos, 2024; Gräve & Greff, 2018; Pittman & Abell, 2021; Rocamora, 2022). Nevertheless, some brands increasingly recognise the strategic value of micro-influencers with smaller yet highly engaged audiences, who are often perceived as more trustworthy and capable of promoting deeper consumer loyalty (Firos, 2024).

This evolution in the valuation of visibility reflects broader shifts in the fashion media landscape. Where fashion magazines once dominated the construction of aesthetic authority and brand narrative, these functions are now increasingly shaped by digital content creators operating across platformed environments. The influencer ecosystem is therefore not simply a collection of individual actors, but a networked system of meanings, technologies, audiences, and practices (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020), in which authority, authenticity, and aspiration are continually negotiated through algorithmically mediated forms of labour and expression.

influencer leverage their visibility and perceived authenticity to shape consumer perceptions and drive engagement with branded content. However, this relationship is problematic, as it often reflects the commercial imperatives of digital capitalism rather than organic cultural production. The extent to which influencers retain agency in this system remains debatable, particularly in the face of brand-driven content constraints and algorithmic pressures that shape their reach and visibility.

2.3.16 Datafication, Metric Power, And Influencer Labour

Agnès Rocamora's *The Datafication and Quantification of Fashion: The Case of Fashion influencer* (2022) critically examines how numerical metrics structure fashion influencers ' visibility, labour, and value, conceptualising the influencer as a quantified self. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) field theory, Rocamora situates influencers within a digital ecosystem in which symbolic capital is increasingly translated into quantifiable forms of economic and social value. Her analysis demonstrates how platform algorithms, marketing analytics, and audience engagement metrics impose new constraints on digital fashion labour, reinforcing the datafied logic of the contemporary influencer economy.

Central to Rocamora's argument is the claim that digital influence is not merely measured through metrics but actively constituted by them. Visibility is neither organic nor evenly distributed; it is algorithmically produced through systems of numerical validation, including follower counts, likes, and shares, which function as forms of digital capital (Rocamora, 2022). Beer's (2017) concept of metric power is instructive here, illustrating how platforms deploy metrics as instruments of social sorting that determine who gains prominence and who remains unseen.

These mechanisms remain largely opaque, operating within what Gillespie (2014) terms black-boxed algorithms, where users lack access to the logics governing visibility. Rocamora's interview data reinforces this condition, showing how influencers engage in speculative, trial-and-error strategies to

sustain their digital presence, continually second-guessing shifting platform priorities (Rocamora, 2022). The result is an intensified climate of self-monitoring and adaptation, in which influencers are compelled to optimise their content, interactions, and digital selves in response to an unknowable algorithmic script.

Rocamora's positioning of influencers as quantified workers intersects closely with broader debates on digital labour, particularly Duffy's (2017) theorisation of aspirational labour. Duffy's critique highlights how digital workers internalise demands for constant self-optimisation under the guise of creative autonomy. Rocamora's findings demonstrate how influencers experience engagement with metrics as both opportunity and necessity, with success framed through an entrepreneurial discourse of individual responsibility, continuous self-branding, relentless productivity, and sustained algorithmic visibility.

This model of labour is, however, deeply precarious. As Duffy and Hund (2015) argue, the feminised nature of influencer work, rooted in aesthetic production, affective engagement, and emotional labour, renders it particularly vulnerable to exploitation. influencers are expected to remain continuously active, responsive, and strategically visible, yet their digital capital remains contingent upon platform logics beyond their control (Rocamora, 2022). Livelihoods thus become inseparable from metric-driven self-performance, where deviation from platform-optimised behaviour risks algorithmic marginalisation.

Rocamora's (2022) discussion of influencer marketing agencies such as Influencer.com and Meltwater further highlights how third-party platforms intensify the marketisation of digital influence. While her analysis foregrounds

the role of analytics in shaping influencer labour, deeper engagement with Couldry and Mejias's (2019) concept of data colonialism would extend this critique. Their argument that digital platforms extract and monetise user data under the guise of participatory culture is particularly pertinent, as influencer labour is increasingly structured through external analytics firms that translate engagement into commercial value.

This logic is reinforced by Instagram's monetisation strategies, which prioritise paid visibility over organic reach and compel influencers to invest financially in maintaining audience access (Rocamora, 2022). Van Dijck's (2013) critique of platform capitalism is salient here, emphasising that social media infrastructures are not neutral intermediaries but profit-driven systems designed to maximise data extraction and advertising revenue. Despite their apparent agency, influencers operate within an ecosystem that consistently privileges corporate stakeholders over individual creators.

While Rocamora offers a compelling critique of *The Datafication of Fashion* influence, her analysis leaves open the question of resistance. Beer (2017) argues that although algorithms exert significant control over digital labour, users are not entirely passive and may develop strategies to subvert or evade algorithmic constraints. Some influencers have turned to alternative platforms such as Patreon and Substack, where monetisation is less dependent on algorithmic visibility (Duffy and Poell, 2020), while others pursue collective initiatives, including influencer unions, to contest exploitative practices.

Such strategies, however, remain marginal within an economy dominated by quantification. As Abidin (2021) suggests, the turn towards slow social media

represents an emergent critique of hyper-visibility and metric-driven culture, yet its capacity to reshape labour conditions remains uncertain. Within the prevailing influencer economy, success continues to be measured numerically, and alternatives that resist metricisation struggle to gain traction.

Overall, Rocamora's work provides a critical lens for understanding metrics not as neutral indicators of success but as instruments of governance that actively structure visibility, labour, and value. When read alongside Beer's (2017) critique of algorithmic power and Duffy's (2017) theorisation of aspirational labour, metrics emerge as central agents in shaping the opportunities and precarities of influencer work within the digital fashion economy.

2.3.17 Platform Affordances And Vernaculars In Influencer Communication

Building on this, the construction of visibility on Instagram is not neutral but deeply embedded within the platform's socio-technical logics. To analyse Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) communication practices within this environment, it is necessary to consider how platform design conditions user behaviour, aesthetic choices, and the distribution of symbolic capital associated with particular forms of content. This section draws on two interrelated conceptual frameworks, affordance theory and platform vernaculars, to examine how LFIs operate within Instagram's algorithmically mediated environment. By attending to both material constraints and culturally

specific norms, this approach enables a more nuanced understanding of how LFIs strategically navigate, perform, and at times resist the logics shaping their communicative practices. These perspectives provide a critical foundation for analysing how luxury is performed and made visible in platform-native ways, an issue examined empirically in Chapters 4 and 5.

Affordance theory has become central within media and platform studies as a means of examining how digital environments enable and constrain user action. Bucher and Helmond's (2018) platform-sensitive framework conceptualises affordances not as static technical features but as emergent and relational properties shaped through interactions between users, designers, and socio-economic systems. This approach moves beyond technologically deterministic readings by positioning affordances as culturally embedded and context dependent. Their distinction between high-level affordances, such as visibility, persistence, and searchability, and low-level affordances, such as tags, filters, and buttons, is particularly useful for analysing influencer content on Instagram. For LFIs , features such as brand tagging or shopping stickers are not merely functional tools but are embedded within a broader visibility logic that is both algorithmically regulated and commercially inflected.

This layered understanding reflects the relational origins of affordance theory in Gibson's ecological psychology (1979 [2015]) and its later reinterpretation within Human-Computer Interaction by Norman (1988). While Gibson emphasised affordances as action possibilities relative to user capacity, Norman's focus on perceived affordances foregrounded interface design and

user cueing. Rather than resolving this tension, Bucher and Helmond (2018) extend it by introducing social, communicative, and imagined affordances, highlighting the interpretive labour users undertake in aligning their practices with what platforms are perceived to reward.

The concept of imagined affordances (Nagy and Neff, 2015) is particularly relevant to this research. LFIs produce content with an acute awareness of platform expectations, curating posts, captions, and visual styles in response to audience behaviour and anticipated algorithmic preference. These imagined affordances shape content production temporally, aesthetically, and emotionally, from posting schedules to engagement prompts via hashtags, Stories, and stylised captions. This anticipatory labour is central to the performance of influence, where visibility depends not only on cultural capital but also on the ability to interpret and adapt to platform logic.

Bucher and Helmond (2018) further expand the notion of the “user” to encompass a spectrum of subject positions, including content creators, audiences, advertisers, and developers, each interacting with platform affordances through different interfaces and intentions. LFIs embody this multiplicity. They function simultaneously as cultural producers, brand collaborators, data generators, and platform users. A single post therefore activates multiple affordances across these layers, underscoring the complex and multi-directional labour embedded within influencer communication.

To extend this analysis, Bucher and Helmond’s framework can be productively read alongside the concept of platform vernaculars, as theorised by Gibbs et al. (2014). While affordances describe what platforms enable, vernaculars

account for how users stylistically and culturally express those possibilities. Each platform develops its own compositional and affective grammar, its characteristic look, tone, and rhythm, emerging through user improvisation in response to design constraints and shared cultural norms.

For LFIs , fluency in Instagram's vernacular is essential. The use of soft lighting, elevated minimalism, curated colour palettes, and stylised captioning signals both aesthetic sophistication and platform-native literacy. Beyond visual cohesion, vernacular practices include tactical strategies such as carousel posts, Story Highlights, Reels, and "link in bio" conventions, all of which navigate platform constraints while maximising exposure and maintaining brand alignment. These practices are not merely technical but communicative, signalling cultural capital and platform competence in ways that echo Bourdieu's (1984) theory of *Distinction* and Veblen's (1899) critique of *Conspicuous Consumption*. In this sense, LFIs do not simply operate within Instagram's communicative logic but actively participate in shaping and reinforcing it.

Together, Bucher and Helmond's (2018) theorisation of affordances and Gibbs et al.'s (2014) account of platform vernaculars provide a robust conceptual framework for this research. They foreground how visibility, influence, and meaning are co-constructed through the interaction of platform infrastructure, user interpretation, and culturally coded practices. This framework underpins the analysis of how LFIs encode luxury through Instagram's visual grammar and structural cues, a process examined in detail through visual content analysis in the chapters that follow.

Finally, while affordances shape what influencers can do on a platform, algorithmic governance determines what is seen, by whom, and when. Instagram's opaque recommendation systems privilege cohesive, engaging, and frequent content, conditions that disproportionately reward those able to align production with platform rhythms. For LFIs , this requires reconciling the symbolic imperatives of luxury fashion with the algorithmic imperatives of visibility. In this context, aesthetic labour and 'Strategic Adaptability' emerge as central to sustaining influence within the ''new digital fashion system''.

2.3.18 Algorithmic Visibility, Gendered Labour, And Aesthetic

These demands are not experienced equally. Maintaining visibility and curating aspirational content are deeply embedded within broader structures of gendered labour. While this research focuses primarily on typologising the visual and strategic practices of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs), it is important to foreground the gendered dynamics that underpin the influencer economy.

Much of the labour performed by Influencers, particularly within fashion contexts, is aesthetic, affective, and relational. Although often naturalised as everyday self-presentation, these forms of labour are historically feminised within cultural production and service industries (Gill & Elias, 2014). As Duffy (2017) argues in her analysis of aspirational social media work, Influencers, who are predominantly women, are required to perform a mode of polished authenticity that is emotionally engaging, visually appealing, and commercially

strategic. Crucially, this labour is frequently obscured, sustaining the illusion of effortlessness upon which luxury branding depends.

The performance of femininity in digital spaces is rarely neutral. It is shaped by platform logics that privilege specific visual and affective registers, such as softness, glamour, and accessibility, while marginalising others. influencers are incentivised to adopt gendered expressions that align with platform norms and luxury brand aesthetics. In this way, luxury influencer culture often reproduces normative beauty standards and narrow ideals of femininity, even as it appears to celebrate individuality and self-expression.

Theoretical frameworks such as glamour labour (Wissinger, 2015) and self-commodification (Banet-Weiser, 2012) are particularly instructive. Wissinger conceptualises glamour labour as continuous bodily and emotional work that is precarious and inseparable from visibility within neoliberal cultural industries. LFIs exemplify this condition: their visibility depends on making disciplined aesthetic maintenance appear spontaneous and desirable. Similarly, Banet-Weiser (2012) demonstrates how self-branding on digital platforms reinforces postfeminist ideals of self-responsibility, empowerment, and market-oriented identity. Together, these frameworks position the influencer as both a cultural intermediary and a gendered subject navigating contradictory demands of appearance, affect, and capital.

While this research engages with Duffy's (2017) critique of aspirational labour and the concealment of work within influencer content, it does not adopt a fully feminist analytical framework. Nevertheless, foregrounding these perspectives is important for situating LFI practices within wider debates on gendered digital

labour. This acknowledgement also opens space for future research to examine how race, class, and other intersecting axes of difference shape who is recognised as legitimate, desirable, or influential within the luxury fashion space. In this study, gender is therefore not treated as a peripheral variable, but as a structuring condition that shapes the performance, visibility, and valuation of influencer labour within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

2.3.19 Luxury Fashion, Industry Transformation, And The Need For Typology

These intersecting dynamics are particularly salient in the current context, as the luxury fashion industry undergoes significant structural transformation. Drawing on insights from *The Business of Fashion* and McKinsey (2025), contemporary luxury is increasingly shaped by shifting consumer expectations, economic volatility, and the growing dominance of digital culture. While traditional retail environments remain central to luxury’s symbolic economy, digital platforms have become critical sites of engagement, with fashion influencers emerging as key intermediaries between brands and consumers.

Despite their growing strategic importance, there remains a limited systematic understanding of how influencers communicate luxury in ways that sustain exclusivity while engaging audiences at scale. This section therefore examines the evolving landscape of luxury fashion retail, drawing on recent

industry reports to highlight the need for more rigorous academic insight into influencer fashion communication practices.

Luxury fashion has long been differentiated from mass-market fashion through an emphasis on craftsmanship, heritage, and exclusivity. More recent industry discourse, however, reframes luxury consumption as shaped as much by affective and experiential dimensions as by material value (Malkin and Balchandani, 2024). From this perspective, luxury retail prioritises the cultivation of personalised, emotionally resonant encounters that seek to preserve the perceived integrity of the brand experience while fostering pleasure and attachment. Luxury consumption is therefore positioned not simply as transactional, but as a form of sensory and emotional engagement.

This shift reflects broader transformations in consumer behaviour, in which engagement with luxury fashion is increasingly mediated through platformed digital experiences. influence function as cultural intermediaries who translate luxury's affective and symbolic qualities into visually compelling narratives optimised for Instagram. While scholars such as Findlay (2019) have examined how brands deploy strategies of 'aspirational realness is to render luxury relatable, this work focuses primarily on corporate and brand-owned communication. This research extends such scholarship by foregrounding third-party content producers, specifically LFIs , who actively author and circulate aspirational narratives through curated self-representation.

LFI communicative practices are characterised by a central paradox: the need to sustain exclusivity while performing algorithmically visible intimacy. This tension remains underexplored within fashion studies. Although existing

research has addressed the semiotics of fashion advertising and influencer aesthetics, there is limited empirical analysis of how LFIs construct meaning within the digital luxury field. This research addresses that gap by offering a typological and theoretically grounded account of LFI rhetorical and visual strategies, bridging traditional luxury branding logics with the performative demands of platformed consumption.

The economic landscape of luxury fashion has also become increasingly complex. The State of Fashion 2025 report (Business of Fashion and McKinsey, 2024) outlines how inflationary pressures, shifting regional consumption patterns, and growing price sensitivity are reshaping the fashion sector. It highlights the arrival of a cyclical slowdown, noting that luxury brands can no longer depend primarily on price increases as a strategy for maintaining profitability.

This economic uncertainty has intensified the need for more sophisticated digital communication strategies. influencer offer brands a means of cultivating personalised consumer engagement, particularly within emerging luxury markets such as India and Japan (*Business of Fashion* & McKinsey, 2024). Simultaneously, the decline of the Silver Generation necessitates new approaches to making luxury meaningful across generational divides.

Historically, luxury brands approached digital retail with caution, concerned that online accessibility might dilute exclusivity. However, online shopping is now firmly embedded within the luxury ecosystem, with digital touchpoints influencing approximately half of all luxury purchasing decisions (Schmidt et al., 2015). Multi-brand e-tailers such as Net-a-Porter and Farfetch have

become central to luxury distribution, yet they also pose risks of overexposure and symbolic dilution. This enduring tension between accessibility and exclusivity is one that influencer must actively negotiate within their content practices.

Luxury Fashion Influencer engage in forms of digital curation that mirror the selectivity of traditional luxury retail spaces. Through controlled aesthetics, limited brand affiliations, and managed audience engagement, they reinforce luxury desirability while leveraging the reach of social media platforms. However, there remains a need for more systematic analysis of the semiotic techniques through which influencers sustain exclusivity within an inherently accessible digital environment. Without such frameworks, brands risk adopting influencers strategies that fail to resonate or that dilute luxury value through overexposure. Drawing on Crewe's (2017) work on the geographies of fashion, this thesis treats brand-owned flagship spaces as continuing centres of luxury authority, while positioning influencers as intermediaries who translate the symbolic meaning of luxury space into platformed visibility. influencer do not replace retail or institutional power, but mediate and circulate spatialised signs of access, heritage, and distinction through image-led storytelling. A more rigorous analytical understanding of these practices is therefore essential for grasping how luxury fashion consumption is shaped through the interaction of place, representation, and algorithmically governed visibility.

2.3.20 Section Summary And Methodological Implications

This section has examined the emergence and institutionalisation of social media influencers key actors within the digital fashion economy, with particular attention to their role in luxury fashion communication. Tracing the development of influencer culture through platform affordances, algorithmic visibility, and shifting labour structures, it has defined the Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) as a distinct category whose cultural authority is shaped by the interplay of aesthetic distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), perceived authenticity, and commercial alignment. It has also mapped the multiple functions LFIs perform as tastemakers, content creators, and brand intermediaries, drawing on both academic and industry definitions.

Instagram's visual infrastructure and marketing affordances have emerged as a central site of influencer visibility and labour. Operating within a datafied economy governed by opaque algorithms and quantified performance metrics, influencer convert cultural and symbolic capital into measurable forms of engagement and reach. This platform-driven context reshapes traditional models of fashion authority, requiring LFIs to perform authenticity while sustaining aspirational appeal under commercial pressure. Influencer labour thus emerges as simultaneously entrepreneurial and precarious, structured by continuous content production, self-surveillance, and strategic audience management.

Crucially, this discussion directly informs the methodological orientation of the research. The theoretical frameworks foregrounded throughout this chapter

are operationalised within the visual coding framework used for empirical analysis. Barthes' semiotic approach informs the identification of visible signs such as pose, setting, and object display. Bourdieu's concept of *Distinction* structures the analysis of aesthetic cues, spatial markers, and embodied performances of taste. Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption underpins the coding of display-oriented practices through which luxury, access, and prestige are made visible. Together, these constructs guide the qualitative visual content analysis, enabling a systematic examination of how luxury is visually encoded, circulated, and culturally sustained within digital environments that appear participatory while remaining highly stratified.

2.3.21 Neoliberal Creative Labour And Feminist Critique

As digital content creators operating within the luxury fashion sector, Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) navigate a precarious landscape shaped by neoliberal market forces, where self-branding, aspirational labour, and algorithmically governed visibility function as necessary conditions for success and recognition. This dynamic aligns with Angela McRobbie's (2016) critique of the creative industries, in which ideals of autonomy, passion, and self-expression are mobilised to legitimise insecure and often exploitative labour practices, particularly within feminised cultural fields. While this research does not adopt a primarily feminist framework, it is important to acknowledge that the gendered dimensions of influencer labour, especially the aesthetic, emotional, and affective demands placed on female-identifying influencers,

raise critical questions concerning visibility, value, and inequality within the platform economy. These concerns lie beyond the immediate scope of the study but signal a significant avenue for future feminist inquiry.

McRobbie's analysis is grounded in her concept of the creativity dispositif, adapted from Foucault's notion of dispositif as an assemblage of discourses, practices, and institutions that regulate subjectivity and labour (McRobbie, 2016). Within this framework, creativity is not treated as an innate human capacity but as a disciplined mode of work, organised around flexibility, insecurity, and continuous self-promotion. The creativity dispositif normalises precariousness by framing instability and self-exploitation as the cost of participation in the creative economy, reinforcing a neoliberal logic in which responsibility for risk and failure is displaced onto the individual worker.

A central strand of McRobbie's critique addresses New Labour cultural policy, which positioned the creative economy as a driver of economic growth while failing to confront the exploitative realities of cultural work. Aligning with scholars such as Hesmondhalgh et al. (2015), McRobbie demonstrates how policy discourses celebrating "passionate work" depoliticise labour by obscuring structural inequalities and reframing precarity as personal choice. Within this context, young cultural producers, including luxury fashion influencer and bloggers, are encouraged to undertake multiple, often unpaid roles in pursuit of visibility and professional recognition, while inequalities of gender and class remain largely unaddressed (McRobbie, 2016).

McRobbie's ethnographic engagement with London and Berlin provides a comparative lens through which to examine these dynamics. Whereas

London's creative sector exemplifies the competitive, individualised ethos of neoliberal cultural production, Berlin's independent fashion scene offers a partial counterpoint through its emphasis on collective and community-based practices. This contrast is instructive when considering the contemporary influencer economy, where LFIs must negotiate intense pressures of self-branding, competition, and market alignment within highly stratified digital environments.

McRobbie's critique also targets the ideological foundations of the "creative class" thesis advanced by Richard Florida (2002). She exposes how urban development strategies premised on attracting creative workers often intensify gentrification and social inequality, rather than fostering inclusive cultural economies. This critique resonates strongly with influencer culture, where visibility and success are unevenly distributed and closely tied to existing forms of economic, social, and cultural privilege. As Neff (2012) similarly argues, the rhetoric of "doing what you love" obscures the structural conditions that make creative careers viable primarily for those with access to financial security and institutional support.

These arguments align with David Harvey's (2005) broader account of neoliberalism as a political and economic project aimed at restoring class power. Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession highlights how neoliberal systems transfer value from the many to the few through privatisation, deregulation, and financialisation. This process is evident in the influencer economy, where luxury fashion influencers are expected to monetise their personal brands and sustain high levels of aesthetic and

affective labour, often without stable compensation or long-term security. Harvey's critique of neoliberal freedom further underscores how discourses of autonomy and self-reliance frequently produce heightened precarity and inequality, a contradiction that McRobbie's analysis of creative labour makes particularly visible.

Taken together, McRobbie's interdisciplinary approach, drawing on feminist theory, cultural studies, and political economy, offers a nuanced critique of contemporary creative labour. While this research does not centre feminist analysis as its primary framework, engaging with these debates provides critical context for understanding the structural conditions under which LFI labour operates within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

2.4 FASHION IMAGERY AND THE DIGITAL VISUAL ECONOMY: AESTHETIC LABOUR, REPRESENTATION, AND THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY

2.4.1 Fashion Imagery as Cultural and Symbolic Mediation

This section examines the cultural, aesthetic, and ideological functions of fashion imagery within the evolving fashion system, with particular attention to its role in luxury influencer communication. It traces the historical development of fashion photography and examines how digital media have transformed its production and circulation, shifting visual authority from institutional gatekeepers to algorithmically positioned individuals. Drawing on theories of representation, *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984), and *Conspicuous Consumption* (Veblen, 1899), the section analyses how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) construct visual narratives that articulate status, aspiration, and taste. In doing so, it positions imagery as a strategic and symbolic practice central to meaning and value production in digital luxury fashion culture.

Fashion imagery operates at the intersection of visual culture, consumer psychology, and aesthetic labour. Across art history, media studies, and sociology, scholars have demonstrated that fashion photography does not merely reflect style but actively produces ideals of identity, taste, and class. Historically, fashion media mediated relationships between industry, culture,

and the consumer, positioning images simultaneously as cultural artefacts and commercial instruments.

As Mensitieri observes, magazines operate as both commercial and cultural products, creating the conditions through which fashion functions as a system both economically and symbolically. Without fashion imagery, fashion as it is understood would not exist (Mensitieri, 2020, p. 24). Images therefore do not simply document trends but generate the symbolic vocabulary through which fashion becomes legible as a system of value, power, and aesthetic authority.

This historical function provides the conceptual basis for understanding how contemporary digital actors, including LFIs , inherit and reconfigure fashion's mediating role within platform environments such as Instagram. Where editorial institutions once governed visual authority, platformed visibility redistributes this power to individuals operating within algorithmically structured economies of attention.

2.4.2 Platformed Visual Authority and influencers Cultural Intermediaries

The digital turn necessitates a reassessment of established frameworks of visual authority. De Perthuis and Findlay (2020) conceptualise influencers as hybrid cultural producers who combine the roles of model, consumer, and creator. Molerova (2023) similarly argues that influencer imagery actively constructs virtual identities, marking a shift from analogue fashion media to

digitally mediated self-representation. Together, these accounts demonstrate that visual authority is no longer institutionally conferred but produced through engagement metrics, perceived authenticity, and platform fluency.

Where fashion editors and photographers once governed taste through institutional legitimacy, influencers now perform comparable cultural labour through strategic visual storytelling. Their authority derives not from editorial appointment but from algorithmic validation and audience recognition. As Molerova (2023) notes, audiences engage with influencer content as both consumers and participants, contributing to the co-production of meaning within networked fashion cultures. This dynamic reshapes not only how fashion imagery circulates but how it is produced, evaluated, and legitimated.

Like their editorial predecessors, influencers employ styling, lighting, framing, and post-production to construct aspirational imagery that appears spontaneous while concealing intensive aesthetic labour. De Perthuis and Findlay (2020) note that influencer aesthetics render glamour accessible while obscuring the work required to sustain it. Molerova (2023) therefore calls for interpretive frameworks capable of decoding these visual strategies within digital fashion media.

Building on this foundation, the present research moves beyond questions of circulation to examine who produces fashion imagery, under what conditions, and through which symbolic logics. LFIs are not passive carriers of fashion content but agents of symbolic production who shape fashion discourse through calibrated performances of taste, exclusivity, and self-branding. Their

visual output is engineered for circulation, structured to attract algorithmic visibility while sustaining aspirational appeal.

Accordingly, this research positions LFI imagery as a site of symbolic production in which fashion knowledge, cultural capital, and aesthetic value are visually articulated and negotiated. Framing influencer content as semiotic and cultural labour enables analysis of imagery not merely as visual output but as performative acts of value-making, where class, taste, and authenticity are continuously staged in public view.

2.4.3 From Editorial Photography to Algorithmic Aesthetics

Fashion photography has long functioned as a mechanism of aesthetic and economic value production within the fashion system. From its early twentieth-century emergence in haute couture to its contemporary manifestation within influencer economies, fashion photography has structured how fashion is seen, consumed, and understood. Early figures such as Edward Steichen and Cecil Beaton established visual codes of glamour, exclusivity, and aspiration, embedding fashion within broader discourses of modernity and class (Muir, 2015; Marriott, 2015).

Mid-century developments led by photographers such as Richard Avedon and Irving Penn expanded the aesthetic and conceptual scope of the fashion image, repositioning it as dynamic, performative, and aligned with artistic experimentation. Later ruptures in the 1990s, associated with figures such as

Corinne Day and Juergen Teller, challenged polished glamour through documentary-inflected aesthetics that foregrounded intimacy and imperfection. As Entwistle (2009) argues, however, such aesthetic disruptions were rapidly absorbed into fashion's aesthetic economy, demonstrating the industry's capacity to incorporate critique into commercial form.

Digital platforms have further reconfigured fashion photography's production and authority. Instagram introduces a participatory, algorithmically mediated visual environment where immediacy, relatability, and aesthetic coherence shape visibility. While this shift appears to democratise fashion imagery, it does not dismantle hierarchies but reconfigures them through platform logics that reward those able to align aesthetic labour with algorithmic demands.

LFIs operate within this environment by blending high-fashion visual conventions with platform-native intimacy. Findlay and de Perthuis (2019) argue that LFIs accrue cultural capital by appropriating editorial aesthetics, including controlled composition, atmospheric lighting, and polished post-production. This replication sustains aspirational hierarchies while repositioning influencers as cultural intermediaries between industry and audience.

A central tension within digital fashion imagery lies in the negotiation between authenticity and aspiration. influencer must balance relatability with luxury's aspirational distance, curating images that appear spontaneous while remaining commercially viable. This paradox echoes long-standing tensions within fashion photography, now intensified by algorithmic visibility and monetisation pressures.

2.4.4 Representation, Visibility, and the Politics of Aesthetic Labour

Fashion imagery has long been criticised for reproducing narrow ideals of beauty, youth, and Eurocentric standards (McRobbie, 1998; Gill, 2007). These critiques remain salient in digital contexts, where influencers frequently reproduce, reframe, or selectively resist dominant visual norms. Digital manipulation and aesthetic optimisation intensify these pressures, reinforcing what Bordo (1993) describes as the disciplinary power of visual culture.

Although diversity has gained increased visibility within fashion media, scholars caution that inclusion is often instrumentalised as marketable aesthetics rather than structural transformation (Titton, 2015; Banet-Weiser, 2012). Influencer culture, despite its participatory promise, frequently sustains dominant hierarchies through curated self-presentation and aspirational branding (Duffy, 2017; Rocamora, 2011).

Theoretical frameworks addressing mediatisation (Rocamora, 2017), aestheticisation (Matteucci, 2016), and promotional culture (Powell, 2013) therefore provide essential tools for understanding how fashion imagery operates within platformed environments. Instagram emerges as a mediatised space where aestheticisation, self-performance, consumption, and promotion converge, shaping the visual politics of contemporary luxury fashion communication.

2.4.5 Methodological Implications: Coding Fashion Imagery as Symbolic Production

For this research, these shifts carry direct methodological implications. The empirical analysis in Chapters 4 and 5 treats LFI imagery as symbolic production shaped by semiotic codes, aesthetic labour, and social distinction. The theoretical frameworks of Barthes (1983), Bourdieu (1984), and Veblen (1899) were operationalised within the coding schema used for visual content analysis.

Semiotics informed the coding of visible signs such as pose, setting, and product display. Cultural capital structured the identification of aesthetic cues and spatial markers associated with taste and distinction. Conspicuous consumption guided the identification of display-based practices related to luxury visibility and aspirational value.

By embedding these theoretical constructs within the coding framework, the study ensures that visual data are interpreted through a critical lens attentive to power, taste, and value within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’. This section therefore functions as both the theoretical foundation and methodological scaffold for analysing how Luxury Fashion Influencer construct and circulate meaning through imagery on Instagram.

2.5. CONCLUSION TO THE LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter has demonstrated how overlapping shifts in media infrastructures, cultural capital, and platform labour shape contemporary fashion communication. The emergence of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) must therefore be understood not as an isolated phenomenon but as part of a broader reconfiguration of fashion mediation, in which actors move fluidly between journalism, branding, and platform-based visibility. LFI practices operate at the intersection of evolving aesthetic norms, performative self-presentation, and algorithmic architectures that structure attention online. Recognising these entanglements is essential to understanding how luxury is now communicated not solely through design or editorial authority, but through the semiotic, spatial, and narrative choices enacted by influencers within platform economies.

This chapter does not directly answer the research question, which asks how LFI communication practices can be decoded and categorised to understand how luxury narratives are constructed within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’. Instead, it establishes the conceptual and theoretical groundwork required for that analysis. Through critical engagement with interdisciplinary scholarship, the review has identified the key paradigms, debates, and tensions that inform the thesis’s interpretive framework.

Drawing on foundational theorists including Barthes (1967 [1983]), Bourdieu (1984), and Veblen (1899), the chapter conceptualises fashion as a cultural

and symbolic system structured through signification, distinction, and performative display. These classical frameworks provide a critical vocabulary for interpreting how LFIs mobilise signs, space, and styling to produce meaning in digital contexts. Crucially, they are not treated as static or exhaustive explanations but as conceptual tools extended through dialogue with contemporary scholarship on algorithmic governance, platform vernaculars, influencer labour, and datafied visibility. Together, these perspectives enable the thesis to approach LFI content as both cultural production and strategic brand mediation.

Importantly, this theoretical foundation directly informed the empirical research design. The coding framework developed in Chapter 3 translates these concepts into observable analytical categories. Semiotics was operationalised through codes capturing signifying motifs such as pose, styling, and mise-en-scène. Bourdieu's account of cultural and symbolic capital shaped spatial and aesthetic codes identifying how distinction is performed through location, composition, and visual hierarchy. Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption guided the inclusion of codes addressing display, brand visibility, and aspirational performance. In this way, the codebook provides a systematic and theoretically grounded means of examining how luxury meaning is visually and textually constructed on Instagram.

The chapter also clarifies the specific conceptual gap addressed by this research: the lack of detailed, empirically grounded analysis of the semiotic, aesthetic, and strategic dimensions of luxury influencer content. While existing literature has examined influencer labour, branding, and platform economies,

there remains limited attention to how luxury is actively produced through visual and spatial practices at the level of content itself. This study situates its contribution within ongoing tensions between authenticity and commercialisation, exclusivity and accessibility, and symbolic capital and algorithmic visibility, arguing that these dynamics require an interpretive approach attentive to visual codes, platform logic, and affective labour.

Finally, the review articulates the study's interdisciplinary positioning across fashion studies, digital marketing, and media theory. LFIs are approached not merely as commercial actors but as cultural intermediaries who perform aspirational narratives, negotiate brand affiliations, and operate within the constraints and affordances of platform design. This analytical stance informs the methodological decisions outlined in the following chapter, including the development of a typology that captures how luxury is visualised, encoded, and circulated within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

In this sense, the chapter functions as both a theoretical foundation and a methodological scaffold. By tracing the evolution of fashion studies alongside its intersections with digital culture, it prepares the ground for the empirical analyses that follow, which extend and refine this body of scholarship by examining LFIs as both products and producers of fashion's contemporary digital transformation.

TABLE 4 SUMMARY OF KEY LITERATURE INFORMING THE RESEARCH

Author(s) & Date	What the Research Is About	Why It is Relevant to the Research Gap
Abidin (2016, 2018)	Explores influencer cultures and the performance of 'calibrated amateurism' in digital spaces.	Offers foundational context for understanding LFIs ' hybrid identities and their post-authentic appeal.
Barthes (1983)	Semiotics of fashion and cultural mythologies.	Used to decode visual communication in luxury influencer content.
Bourdieu (1984)	Social Distinction through cultural capital and taste.	Frames how LFIs perform elite aesthetics and position themselves in digital hierarchies.
Veblen (1899/2007)	Theory of conspicuous consumption and status display.	Underpins analysis of how LFIs display wealth and luxury for social gain.
Duffy (2017)	Labour and gender in social media industries.	Highlights the often-invisible, gendered labour in influencer fashion work.
Findlay (2015, 2017)	Fashion blogging as affective, embodied, and personal practice.	Informs comparisons between earlier blogging practices and today's more curated influencer culture.
Rocamora (2011, 2017, 2021)	Digital fashion media and the aesthetic logics of fashion blogs.	Provides theoretical foundation for understanding fashion mediation on Instagram.
Leaver, Highfield & Abidin (2020)	Platform studies and the influencer industry.	Helps situate Instagram as a platform-specific context for LFIs ' communication practices.
Bucher & Helmond (2018)	Social media affordances and platform vernaculars.	Key to theorising how platform features shape the ways LFIs communicate visually and verbally.
Marwick (2013, 2015)	Online celebrity and self-branding.	Supports the notion of LFIs as strategic self-branders engaging in aspirational labour.
Gibbs et al. (2014)	Instagram vernacular and the visual tropes of the platform.	Helps identify platform-specific styles that influence LFI content creation.
Djafarova & Rushworth (2017)	The credibility and influence of fashion influencer on Instagram.	Useful in mapping out how LFIs affect consumer perceptions of luxury brands.
McQuarrie et al. (2013)	Visual branding and the rise of 'style bloggers.'	Lays groundwork for understanding the evolution from blog to Instagram in fashion influence.
Titton (2015)	Fashion bloggers and vernacular criticism.	Inspires the focus on the communicative modes of LFIs beyond mere promotion.
Carah & Shaul (2016)	Algorithmic brand cultures and visibility.	Illuminates how Instagram's algorithms impact influencer practices and audience reach.
Pham (2015)	Racialised consumption and the performance of taste.	Encourages critical reflection on the intersection of taste, race, and cultural capital in LFI work.
De Veirman et al. (2017)	Influencer popularity and branding impact.	Highlights the significance of follower count and perceived authenticity in influencer effectiveness.

CHAPTER THREE - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology designed to examine how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) communicate luxury brand narratives on Instagram. The approach builds on the theoretical foundations established in Chapter 2, where fashion communication was conceptualised as a symbolic, affective and strategic practice embedded within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’. In response to gaps in existing scholarship, particularly the limited analysis of how LFIs perform and visualise luxury through platform-native practices [5], the chapter presents a methodological strategy capable of codifying and interpreting influencer content across both visual and textual modes.

[5] *Platform-native practices* refers to communicative and aesthetic conventions that are shaped by, and calibrated to, the specific affordances, vernaculars, and governance structures of a given digital platform. In this thesis, the term is used to describe practices that are optimised for Instagram’s visual formats, interactional cues, and algorithmic logics, such as feed composition, Reels, caption length, and engagement prompts. While many of these practices have antecedents in earlier forms of fashion mediation, including blogging and magazine imagery, they are described as platform-native here to signal how they are intensified, standardised, and rendered strategically necessary within platform environments rather than invented by them.

The chapter begins by restating the research questions and objectives, situating them within the conceptual terrain mapped in the literature review. It then outlines the study's philosophical orientation, grounded in interpretivism and guided by abductive reasoning. This orientation supports a research process that moves iteratively between empirical observation and theoretical interpretation, enabling both the identification of patterned relationships within the dataset and the analysis of their symbolic significance.

From this epistemological standpoint, the rationale for adopting a mixed-methods design is presented. The study brings together qualitative visual content analysis and quantitative co-occurrence mapping to examine a dataset of 390 Instagram posts. Qualitative analysis provides the interpretive depth needed to explore meaning-making within luxury communication, while SPSS-supported co-occurrence mapping facilitates pattern recognition across visual and textual codes. While quantitatively supported, the study remains interpretivist in focus, with numerical outputs used to guide rather than determine analytical interpretation.

Subsequent sections detail the sampling strategy, coding procedures and analytical techniques employed. Particular attention is given to the development of the coding framework, which operationalises core theoretical constructs introduced in Chapter 2. Semiotics informs the identification of signs and stylistic markers (Barthes, 1967 [1983]); Bourdieu's concept of capital shapes the categorisation of poses, locations and spatial cues (Bourdieu, 1979 [1984]); and Veblen's notion of conspicuous display underpins the analysis of visibility, performance and modes of presentation

(Veblen, 1899 [1994]). In this way, the coding schema translates theory into observable analytical dimensions, ensuring coherence between conceptual framing and empirical execution.

The chapter also reflects on the researcher's positionality as both observer and participant within digital fashion cultures. Drawing on Findlay's (2025) work on embodied reflexivity, it acknowledges how personal and professional proximity to the field influences interpretive judgement, and how this positional perspective is managed to support analytical rigour.

Collectively, these elements establish the methodological foundation for addressing the thesis's central research question: How can the fashion communication practices of Luxury Fashion Influencer be decoded and categorised to understand how they communicate luxury brand narratives within the evolving ‘‘new digital fashion system’’. By operationalising codification and decoding within a robust and transparent empirical framework, the chapter lays the groundwork for the analytical chapters that follow. Each methodological decision from sample selection to the construction of the coding schema supports the development of a theoretically informed typology, enabling a systematic and conceptually aligned exploration of LFI communicative strategies.

3.1.1. The Research Questions Revisited

This section revisits the guiding research questions, aims and objectives in response to the conceptual and empirical gaps identified in the literature review. As established in Chapter 2, existing scholarship has tended to focus either on the commercial utility of influencers within marketing frameworks (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; De Veirman et al., 2017) or on broader sociocultural dynamics of digital labour and self-presentation (Abidin, 2016; Duffy, 2017). However, there remains limited research that systematically codifies and critically decodes the visual and textual strategies through which Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) construct luxury narratives on Instagram. The communicative mechanics of how luxury is performed, visualised and made culturally meaningful through influencer -generated content therefore require further investigation. This study addresses that gap by asking what LFIs do and how and why these practices function symbolically within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

By integrating fashion theory, digital marketing and platform studies within a mixed-methods design, the study seeks to develop a typology that captures the complexity of luxury communication in platform environments. The research questions and objectives reflect this interdisciplinary orientation and establish a clear analytical pathway for examining influencer communication as a form of cultural production. This pathway is further detailed in Table 5: Methodological Overview, which maps the study’s design and analytical procedures against its conceptual priorities.

Research Aim

This research aims to decode and categorise the fashion communication practices of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) on Instagram, in order to understand how they construct and communicate luxury brand narratives. By analysing visual and textual content, the study develops a typology that demonstrates how symbolic meaning and brand value are mediated digitally, offering insights for culturally attuned and strategically informed luxury branding.

Main Research Question

How can the fashion communication practices of Luxury Fashion Influencer be decoded and categorised to understand how they communicate luxury brand narratives within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

Subsequent Questions

• **How can the textual and visual content strategies used by LFIs be codified and decoded to understand how they construct and communicate the values, aesthetics and desirability of luxury fashion brands.**

This question directs attention to the coding framework, which operationalises theoretical constructs from Barthes, Bourdieu and Veblen. Semiotics informs the identification of signs and compositional markers; Bourdieu’s concept of capital shapes the categorisation of poses, locations and spatial cues; and Veblen’s notion of conspicuous display underpins the analysis of visibility and status performance.

• **What are the key fashion communication practices employed by LFIs , and how can these practices be categorised and interpreted to reveal how luxury narratives are communicated within platform environments.**

This aligns codification with decoding, demonstrating how theoretical constructs translate into analytical dimensions of practice.

• **How can the decoded communication practices of LFIs inform the development of effective and culturally resonant social media strategies**

for luxury fashion brands.

This question connects empirical findings with strategic and cultural implications.

Methodological Overview

This research adopts a mixed-methods design that brings together qualitative visual content analysis and quantitative mapping techniques to address the research objectives and support the development of a theoretically informed typology. The methodological approach is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm and guided by abductive reasoning, enabling an iterative movement between empirical observation and theoretical reflection.

The coding framework explicitly operationalises the theoretical constructs introduced in Chapter 2. Semiotics informs the identification of key signs, stylistic cues and narrative features; Bourdieu's concept of capital shapes categories relating to bodily, social and spatial positioning; and Veblen's account of conspicuous consumption structures attention to displays of luxury, visibility and prestige within influencer content. These constructs are translated into coded variables to ensure conceptual coherence throughout the analysis.

Triangulation strengthens this approach by integrating qualitative and quantitative phases. Qualitative coding identifies meaning-rich elements, while SPSS-supported co-occurrence mapping highlights recurrent relationships such as pose–location–caption patterns. These quantitatively identified

patterns informed abductive interpretation by highlighting unexpected connections that guided the refinement of the typology.

Objective 1 – Analysing visual and textual strategies

Addressed through in-depth qualitative coding of influencer -generated content, examining how images, videos and captions construct luxury brand values, aesthetic worlds and desirability. The coding schema directly operationalises semiotic, cultural capital and conspicuous display frameworks.

Objective 2 – Identifying and categorising communication practices

Supported by a structured codebook and SPSS co-occurrence analysis, enabling the codification of recurring communicative patterns and the development of an empirically grounded typology. Triangulation clarifies which combinations of visual and textual cues shape luxury meaning within platform contexts.

Objective 3 – Evaluating strategic implications

Explored through the interpretation of the typology, drawing on fashion theory, platform studies and branding scholarship to examine the symbolic logic and strategic potential of LFI communication practices for luxury fashion brands.

TABLE 5 METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW: STEP-BY-STEP WITH JUSTIFICATIONS

Stage	Focus	Details	Rationale
Philosophical Position	**Interpretivism, Abductive Reasoning**	**Guided the exploratory and iterative nature of analysis.**	**Supports rich meaning-making in emerging digital cultures.**
Research Design	**Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods**	**Qualitative VCA first, followed by SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) - based co-occurrence mapping.**	**Allows for both decoding and codification of influencer content.**
Data Selection	**Purposive Sampling of 3 LFIs (390 posts)**	**Sampled across May 2022 – June 2024, capturing seasonal and platform trends.**	**Enables in-depth case analysis while managing scope.**
Data Collection	**Visual and Textual Content**	**Static images, videos, and captions.**	**Ensures multimodal reading of fashion communication.**
Analytical Framework	**Visual Content Analysis + Template Analysis**	**Thematically coded via structured proforma and binary coding.**	**Captures aesthetic nuance and allows for pattern recognition.**
Data Management	**SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Dataset Construction**	**Conversion of codes into categorical variables.**	**Supports co-occurrence analysis and typology development.**
Typology Construction	**Eight Communication Practices**	**Synthesised into editorial, platform-native, and hybrid categories.**	**Addresses research gap in systematising LFI communication.**
Ethics	**UCLan Ethical Approval**	**Only public content used; no engagement or personal data collected.**	**Aligns with BSA (2017) guidelines for ethical social media research.**

3.2. PHILOSOPHICAL POSITIONING

This section outlines the philosophical foundations underpinning the research, including its ontological and epistemological assumptions. It clarifies the study's positioning within an interpretivist paradigm, the adoption of abductive reasoning as its logic of inquiry, and the implications of these choices for both research design and analytical approach. Collectively, these elements frame the study’s understanding of knowledge production within the context of digital fashion communication.

3.2.1. Ontological and Epistemological Positioning

Interpretivism, which centres on meaning-making and the social production of knowledge, provides the philosophical foundation for this research. It adopts a relativist ontology and a social constructivist epistemology, recognising that reality is not singular or objectively fixed but is multiple, negotiated and contextually produced (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Carson et al., 2001). Within this paradigm, meaning is understood as the outcome of cultural interaction rather than an inherent property of objects or images. This position aligns with the study’s focus on how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) construct and circulate symbolic meanings of luxury through the visual, linguistic and affective resources of Instagram.

This interpretivist foundation is reinforced by the theoretical perspectives outlined in Chapter Two. Barthes' *The Fashion System* (1967), Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984) and Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) together frame fashion as a social language through which cultural values are communicated and hierarchies maintained. Each offers a distinct lens that informs the methodological orientation of this study. Barthes (1967) positions fashion as a system of signs. Bourdieu (1984) situates fashion communication within structures of taste, symbolic capital and field relations. Veblen (1899) conceptualises fashion as a performative practice of display and differentiation. Interpreting LFI content through these interconnected frameworks requires a methodology capable of decoding symbolic communication while remaining attuned to its social and economic conditions of production. An interpretivist and abductive approach therefore provides an appropriate foundation for exploring how meaning emerges across these domains.

Abduction, as described by Merriam (1998), supports the study's iterative movement between empirical observation and theoretical interpretation. Rather than seeking to test hypotheses or generate universal laws, abductive reasoning aims to develop plausible explanations for how LFIs ' visual and textual strategies communicate luxury. In this research, abduction operates through cyclical engagement with the dataset. Patterns observed in the qualitative phase prompt theoretical reflection, which in turn informs further empirical refinement. The coding framework functions as a bridge between theory and observation. Codes relating to pose, location, product display and caption discourse operationalise the conceptual triad of signification (Barthes,

1967), cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and conspicuous display (Veblen, 1899), enabling systematic exploration of how meaning, status and value are performed through LFI communication practices.

A limited deductive phase complements this abductive process within the quantitative element of the study. Once the interpretive coding schema was established, it was imported into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for descriptive frequency and co-occurrence mapping. This procedure did not seek to test hypotheses or claim generalisability. Instead, it visualised relational patterns among variables. For example, correlations between pose, location and caption highlighted recurrent stylistic clusters that informed the development of the typology. The integration of SPSS-supported mapping enhanced analytical transparency and provided a secondary form of triangulation, ensuring that abductive insights were substantiated by systematic pattern identification.

The combination of interpretivist philosophy and abductive reasoning positions the research to account for both the symbolic complexity and social contingency of digital fashion communication. Structuralist or positivist paradigms would risk reducing meaning to fixed systems or quantifiable effects, overlooking the fluid, participatory and algorithmically mediated nature of Instagram. Interpretivism therefore offers the most coherent foundation for examining how LFIs produce, perform and circulate meanings of luxury within the evolving ‘‘new digital fashion system’’, where the interplay of aesthetic labour, cultural capital and conspicuous display is continually rearticulated through platformed visibility.

3.2.1. Axiological Stance

A researcher's axiological position reflects the values, assumptions and motivations that guide the research process (Easton, 1995). In this study, two primary commitments shape the inquiry. The first is the aim to contribute to academic knowledge within fashion studies and digital media. The second is to generate practical insight for professionals working within the luxury fashion industry. These commitments align with the study's original contribution to knowledge and inform the development of a typology that advances both conceptual understanding and applied practice.

The academic orientation of the research is reflected in its aim to develop a systematic typology of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) communication practices. Grounded in empirical analysis and informed by interdisciplinary theory, the typology extends existing scholarship on fashion communication (Barthes, 1983; Rocamora, 2009; Findlay, 2017) while addressing a notable gap in the literature. Although LFIs have been examined in marketing and digital labour studies, there is limited work that categorises their content practices within the specific context of luxury. By introducing the concept of 'Strategic Adaptability', the research provides a critical lens through which to examine how LFIs negotiate the competing demands of platform visibility, brand alignment and symbolic value within the ''new digital fashion system''. This conceptual contribution forms a central element of the study's original intervention.

The research is also motivated by a commitment to producing practically relevant knowledge for luxury fashion practitioners. As influencer marketing becomes increasingly integral to brand strategy, there is a need for conceptual tools that help practitioners navigate digital communication, audience engagement and value creation. By analysing how LFIs construct luxury through visual and textual content, the study offers insight into how symbolic capital is communicated and perceived within platform environments. These insights support industry actors seeking to balance broad visibility with the cultural authority required to sustain luxury prestige, particularly within a crowded and competitive digital landscape (Bourdieu, 1984; Veblen, 1994 [1899]; Abidin, 2016).

These motivations reflect an axiological stance that values intellectual rigour and applied relevance. The study is underpinned by an interpretive and abductive design that recognises meaning in fashion communication as fluid, relational and co-constructed through social, technological and cultural processes. Positioned within the broader framework of the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’, this stance supports a critical investigation of LFIs as cultural intermediaries who shape, circulate and contest the symbolic narratives of luxury within platform-based environments.

3.2.2. Research Approach

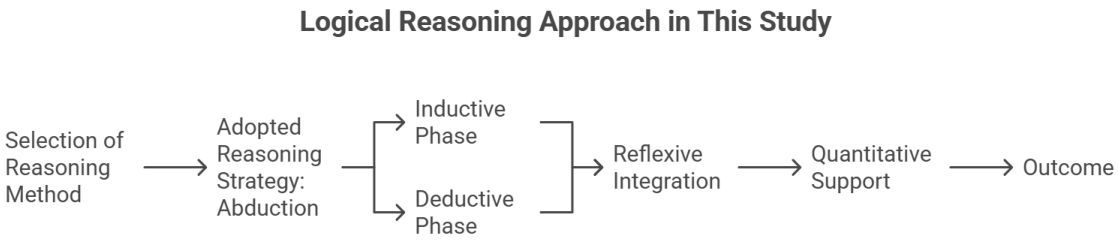

FIGURE 3 LOGICAL REASONING APPROACH FOR THIS RESEARCH. SOURCE: AUTHOR

Selecting an appropriate mode of reasoning constitutes a vital element of the study's metatheoretical foundation. Perry (1998) describes this as a theories developing approach, emphasising that reasoning should align with both the philosophical orientation and strategic aims of the research. Easterby Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2014) similarly highlight the value of methodological flexibility, particularly when research engages interpretive epistemologies that require sensitivity to context and meaning.

This study adopts an abductive reasoning approach, which integrates inductive exploration with deductive engagement through an iterative dialogue between theory and data (Hanson, 1958; Chalmers, 1999; Buchanan and Bryman, 2009; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Abduction is well suited to the study's aim of developing a typology of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) communication practices, as it supports the discovery of novel insights while ensuring that interpretation remains grounded in empirical observation.

The abductive logic unfolded across successive stages. The process began inductively through qualitative visual content analysis of 390 Instagram posts. Using a bespoke codebook, visual and textual elements were systematically categorised into themes such as post structure, caption strategy, aesthetic technique, cultural signifier and spatial setting. This stage revealed recurring motifs, including walking poses situated in cosmopolitan environments and the strategic use of branded landmarks, forming an empirical foundation for the emerging typology.

Abduction then guided the transition from observation to theoretical interpretation. Apparent anomalies, such as the coexistence of commercial modelling acts and highly stylised editorial poses, prompted deeper reflection. Drawing on Barthes' fashion semiotics (1967), Bourdieu's theory of *Distinction* (1984) and Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption ([1899] 1994), these gestures were reconceptualised as practices of symbolic elevation and cultural display. Their exaggerated forms and aesthetic precision enacted the performance of luxury value through visible mastery of high fashion codes. In this way, abduction enabled the reinterpretation of non-commercial gestures as essential components of luxury performance within digital culture.

A subsequent deductive phase involved using these theoretical insights to refine and reorganise the emergent categories, placing them within the longer histories of fashion representation and social hierarchy. As Schwandt (1993) argues, theory functions as both analytic lens and reflexive prompt, shaping and reorienting interpretation through continual engagement.

This cyclical reasoning culminated in a hybrid analytical step, in which qualitative interpretation was triangulated through quantitative mapping using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Co-occurrence and frequency analyses were used to visualise relationships among coded variables, particularly combinations of pose, location and caption tone. This mapping revealed patterned associations such as the tendency for highly stylised editorial poses to coincide with recognisable luxury landmarks and restrained caption narratives centred on taste rather than access. These findings provided empirical corroboration for the theoretical argument that digital displays of luxury rely on a calibrated balance of aspiration, scarcity and performative distance.

The integration of SPSS analysis reinforced the abductive process, providing an evidential layer that validated interpretive insights while maintaining coherence with the study's interpretivist orientation. The interplay between inductive discovery, theoretical reflection and empirical refinement is represented in Figure 5 (p. 127), which visualises the cyclical reasoning process. This abductive strategy enabled the research to remain responsive to the symbolic complexity and platformed nature of digital fashion communication while constructing a theoretically grounded typology of LFI practices.

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This section outlines the research design adopted in this study and explains the rationale for selecting a sequential exploratory mixed-methods approach. This design was chosen to support the investigation of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) communication practices, an area that remains theoretically and empirically underdeveloped. It aligns with the study's interpretivist and abductive orientation by allowing qualitative insights to guide subsequent quantitative exploration. The qualitative phase facilitates the inductive identification and coding of visual and textual strategies, while the quantitative phase supports systematic pattern recognition through co-occurrence analysis. By detailing the sequence, purpose and integration of these phases, this section demonstrates how the research design enables the development of a conceptually grounded and empirically substantiated typology of LFI practices within the rapidly evolving conditions of the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

3.3.1. Mixed Methods Exploratory Research Design

FIGURE 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR LFI COMMUNICATION THIS DIAGRAM OUTLINES THE MIXED-METHODS RESEARCH DESIGN EMPLOYED TO INVESTIGATE LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFI) COMMUNICATION PRACTICES. QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS IS USED TO DECODE AESTHETIC, SEMIOTIC, AND NARRATIVE STRATEGIES EMBEDDED WITHIN INSTAGRAM POSTS, WHILE QUANTITATIVE STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES IDENTIFY DOMINANT PATTERNS AND RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS THE DATASET. TOGETHER, THESE APPROACHES SUPPORT A COMPREHENSIVE EXPLORATION OF HOW LFIS CONSTRUCT AND COMMUNICATE DIGITAL LUXURY NARRATIVES. SOURCE: AUTHOR

This research adopts a sequential exploratory mixed methods design to investigate Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) communication practices, addressing the limited theorisation of LFIs within academic literature. Although influencer marketing has received increasing scholarly attention, the specific role of LFIs as cultural intermediaries within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’ remains under examined. Stebbins (2011) argues that exploratory research is particularly appropriate for emergent domains characterised by conceptual ambiguity and the absence of established patterns. A sequential exploratory design therefore offers methodological flexibility well suited to the evolving conditions of digital platforms, including the shifting affordances of Instagram and the platform’s embedded branding logics.

As outlined in Figure 4 (page 121), the study proceeds in two interconnected phases. It begins qualitatively, using visual content analysis to decode the aesthetic, semiotic and narrative strategies embedded within a purposive sample of LFI Instagram posts. This inductive stage generates a bespoke codebook that captures key visual and textual features across 390 posts, including variables such as pose, location, caption strategy and brand visibility.

The second phase introduces quantitative statistical analysis using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to identify dominant patterns, co-occurrences and thematic relationships. The two phases are interdependent. Qualitative insights guide the structure and focus of the quantitative mapping, while the statistical visualisation of relationships refines and substantiates the interpretive findings. This sequence aligns with Creswell and Plano Clark’s

(2011) complementarity model, in which qualitative and quantitative methods interact to provide a fuller understanding of a complex research phenomenon.

The mixed methods design is justified not simply by complementarity but by its alignment with the study's interpretivist and abductive foundations. An interpretivist approach requires sensitivity to symbolic and cultural meaning making, best accessed through qualitative visual analysis. However, influencer communication is shaped by patterned combinations of pose, spatial setting and caption discourse that necessitate a structural lens capable of identifying recurrent configurations across a large dataset. Quantitative co-occurrence mapping therefore complements interpretive depth by visualising relational patterns that may not be evident through qualitative analysis alone. This integration reflects the logic of abductive reasoning, which relies on iterative movement between empirical observation and conceptual interpretation.

Co-occurrence mapping within SPSS was used to visualise relationships between coded variables, most notably the interaction between pose, location and caption tone. These analyses revealed that stylised editorial poses frequently coincided with luxury landmarks and minimal captions, while more relatable poses appeared in everyday urban environments accompanied by expressive or narrative captions. These patterns empirically substantiated the interpretive insight that luxury is performed through a calibrated balance of distance and intimacy, exclusivity and relatability. In this way, the quantitative phase did not merely verify qualitative findings but actively shaped theoretical

refinement by indicating which constellations of meaning warranted further exploration.

This triangulated approach supports abductive reasoning by looping continuously between interpretation and evidence. Qualitative observation generated theoretical propositions, which were then revisited through quantitative mapping to confirm, nuance or extend their plausibility. The statistical patterns illuminated recurrent configurations that underpinned the typology's development, providing both analytical rigour and conceptual depth.

A purely qualitative approach would risk insufficient structure across a dataset of this scale, while a quantitative only design would fail to capture the situated, affective and symbolic dimensions embedded in visual influencer content. The mixed methods design therefore combines interpretive richness with empirical verification. By allowing the typology to emerge from a process that is theoretically sensitive and empirically robust, the study remains grounded in an interpretivist philosophical stance while benefitting from the clarity and transparency introduced through systematic triangulation.

This design is grounded in abductive reasoning, facilitating an iterative dialogue between empirical data and conceptual frameworks. It allows the researcher to remain open to emergent insights while situating interpretation within established theoretical traditions. In this case, findings are decoded through the lens of Barthes' semiotic theory (1967), Bourdieu's concept of *Distinction* (1984) and Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption ([1899] 1994). These frameworks collectively enable a critical reading of how luxury is constructed, signified and circulated in digital spaces.

The sequential exploratory design supports a conceptually robust and empirically grounded typology. It addresses a significant gap in the literature by providing a systematic and theoretically coherent account of how LFIs construct and communicate luxury brand narratives within the aesthetic, symbolic and commercial logics of the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

3.3.2. Developing A Typology: Methodological Approach and Theoretical Foundations

A central aim of this research, addressed through sub question 2, is to systematically identify and classify the communication strategies used by Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) on Instagram. A typological approach was adopted as a core methodological step to achieve this aim. The typology provides a structured framework for analysing how LFIs communicate luxury brand values, aesthetics and exclusivity, extending the conceptual foundations established in Chapter 2. By categorising recurring visual and textual strategies, the typology functions as an analytical tool for decoding the semiotic, social and commercial dimensions of influencer content within the evolving ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

As established in the literature review, typological classification is necessary to address the limited number of systematic frameworks for understanding influencer practices in luxury contexts. While scholars such as McQuarrie, Miller and Phillips (2013), Marwick (2015) and Leaver et al. (2020) have identified recurring influencer personas and branding behaviours, many

existing analyses remain descriptive rather than interpretive. This study builds on and extends that work by developing a theoretically informed and empirically grounded typology that integrates qualitative visual content analysis with quantitative validation.

Typologies are a longstanding analytical tool for identifying and explaining patterned behaviour within complex cultural systems. Drawing on Kluge's (2000) four stage model of type construction case selection, multidimensional analysis, grouping and characterisation this study employs a hybrid interpretive and empirical approach. Central to this process was the development of a coding framework that translated theoretical constructs into observable analytical categories. Codes such as pose, location, product display, caption strategy and editing technique operationalise three theoretical pillars: semiotics (Barthes, 1967), cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and conspicuous consumption (Veblen, [1899] 1994). Pose and spatial setting capture the semiotic performance of luxury and taste. Caption strategies reveal discursive expressions of cultural capital. Product display exemplifies Veblen's logic of aspirational visibility within digital economies. In this way, the codebook operates as a bridge between theory and data, allowing abstract conceptual debates to be anchored in systematic empirical categorisation.

Triangulation through SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) further strengthened this abductive process. Once qualitative codes were established, they were converted into binary variables and analysed using frequency and co-occurrence mapping. This analytical stage visualised relationships among variables, particularly the combination of pose, location

and caption tone, revealing recurrent configurations that informed the typology's structure. For example, the mapping demonstrated that stylised editorial poses frequently appeared in prestigious or branded urban spaces accompanied by minimalist captions emphasising aesthetic autonomy. Conversely, mobile or casual bodily gestures were often situated in everyday environments and paired with expressive captions foregrounding relatability. These relational clusters provided empirical corroboration for theoretical insights, demonstrating how digital luxury is performed through a calibrated interplay of exclusivity, scarcity and accessibility.

This mixed methods triangulation supported abductive reasoning by enabling movement between qualitative interpretation and quantitative pattern identification. Qualitative analysis generated theoretical propositions about symbolic and aesthetic strategies, while SPSS mapping refined and verified these propositions, ensuring that the typology was conceptually coherent and empirically substantiated. The process-maintained interpretivist integrity while introducing structural clarity and analytical transparency.

Typological analysis is particularly suited to researching influencer branding because it facilitates comparative examination of how LFIs differentiate their content from other fashion spheres, such as high street or fast fashion. This comparative function responds directly to the literature gap identified in Chapter 2, where luxury-oriented influencer studies have often treated digital content as homogenous rather than shaped by recurring stylistic and discursive distinctions.

The construction and interpretation of the typology were further informed by additional theoretical frameworks explored earlier in the thesis. Barthes' semiotics (1983) and Kawamura's theory of fashion as language (2005) underpin the reading of image based and captioned content as systems of signs. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (1984) shapes the classification of symbolic positioning strategies, while Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption ([1899] 1994) frames the analysis of aspirational performance. Abidin's account of visibility labour (2016) illuminates how influencers curate aspirational selves through continual engagement practices. Rocamora's conception of cultural intermediaries (2017) positions LFIs as translators of brand value into affective digital displays. Couldry's theory of media as structured practice (2004) and Hesmondhalgh's work on digital cultural labour (2006) further contextualise LFI activity within broader economies of visibility and value production. Together, these frameworks reinforce the recursive relationship between theory, method and data that defines this study's abductive methodology.

In conclusion, the typology developed through this research is both a methodological outcome and a theoretical contribution. It operationalises semiotic, social and economic theories through a rigorously coded and triangulated analytical process, offering a replicable model for decoding luxury influencer communication. By synthesising insights from fashion studies, digital media theory and influencer research, the typology provides a structured yet flexible framework for understanding how LFIs construct, circulate and sustain luxury brand narratives on Instagram. This directly addresses the study's second research sub question and advances

conceptual thinking about fashion communication within platformed digital environments.

3.3.3. Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

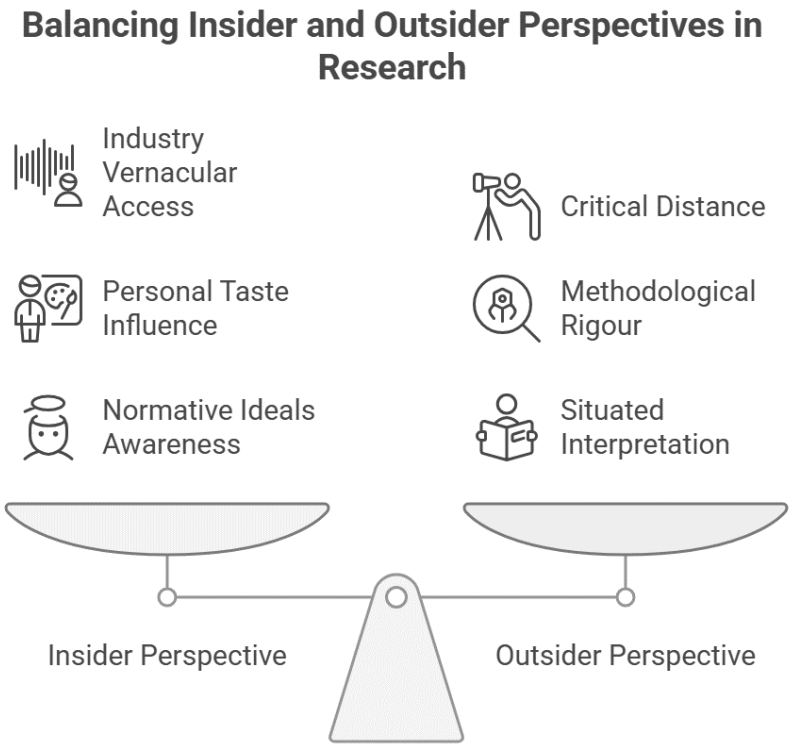

FIGURE 5 BALANCING INSIDER AND OUTSIDER PERSPECTIVES IN RESEARCH THIS DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATES THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL TENSION AND COMPLEMENTARITY BETWEEN INSIDER AND OUTSIDER POSITIONALITIES WITHIN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH. THE INSIDER PERSPECTIVE OFFERS ACCESS TO INDUSTRY VERNACULAR, PERSONAL TASTE DYNAMICS, AND NORMATIVE IDEALS AWARENESS, WHILE THE OUTSIDER POSITION CONTRIBUTES CRITICAL DISTANCE, METHODOLOGICAL RIGOUR, AND SITUATED INTERPRETATION. BALANCING THESE STANDPOINTS SUPPORTS REFLEXIVITY AND ANALYTICAL DEPTH IN INTERPRETIVE INQUIRY. SOURCE: AUTHOR

A dual positioning informs this study. The researcher is both an academic working in digital marketing and a scholar of fashion studies, and this hybrid perspective enables a distinctive approach to the intersection of luxury branding, platform cultures and influencer practices. Reflexivity is a critical principle in qualitative and interpretive research, particularly when examining visual and cultural meaning making. Acknowledging positionality is both an ethical responsibility and a methodological strength, offering transparency and contextualising interpretive decisions (Berger, 2015; Rose, 2016). This dual perspective resonates with Findlay's concept of embodied reflexivity (2025), which positions the researcher not as a detached observer but as a participant whose bodily, affective and professional experiences shape the interpretive process.

Positioned simultaneously as insider and outsider, the researcher brought industry familiarity, aesthetic fluency and cultural literacy to the analysis of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) content on Instagram. Insider knowledge supported an informed understanding of platform vernaculars, visual conventions and the commercial logics underpinning digital influence. This fluency was valuable when interpreting subtle or implied luxury cues, spatial hierarchies and stylistic decisions embedded within influencer generated imagery. The outsider stance enabled theoretical distance and critical interrogation of taste hierarchies, brand narratives and representational politics. Reflexivity therefore became an ongoing negotiation between immersion and critique, experience and analysis, intuition and theory, shaping the methodological and interpretive decisions made throughout the research.

This reflexive stance supported the abductive reasoning at the heart of the study. The interpretive approach relied on iterative movement between theory and data, with triangulation across qualitative and quantitative strands transforming interpretive insight into structured analytical evidence. Once the visual codebook was developed, codes such as pose, location and caption tone were operationalised within SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to identify co-occurrence patterns. These analyses revealed clusters in which stylised editorial poses aligned with recognisable luxury spaces and minimal captions, while casual or mobile bodily gestures coincided with everyday backdrops and narrative captions. These recurrent patterns empirically substantiated theoretical constructs of semiotic display (Barthes, 1967), cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and conspicuous consumption (Veblen, [1899] 1994), confirming that digital luxury is performed through a calibrated interplay of exclusivity and relatability.

The coding framework operationalised theory by translating abstract conceptual debates into observable features of influencer communication. Semiotic readings guided the identification of symbolic motifs. Bourdieu's (1984) notion of capital informed the interpretation of spatial and stylistic hierarchies. Veblen's analysis of display ([1899] 1994) shaped understandings of aspirational visibility and prestige. This integration of theory and method ensured that the analysis remained grounded in empirical observation while being driven by critical social theory.

Figure 5 (page 129) illustrates this epistemological balance between insider knowledge and outsider critique. The diagram demonstrates how

methodological design and critical reflexivity intersect to produce an interpretive stance that is both situated and self-aware. This positioning deepened engagement with the field, enabling the researcher to uncover the affective and normative undercurrents of influencer culture while maintaining analytical integrity.

The selection of influencers also reflected this dual orientation. Choosing Victoria Magrath, Leonie Hanne and Tamara Kalinic drew upon the researcher's familiarity with digital marketing networks and the circulation of luxury fashion across online platforms. Yet this closeness required critical scrutiny of the ideological assumptions these figures represent, including Eurocentric, aspirational and heteronormative ideals of luxury femininity. The analysis adopted a reflexive stance that recognised how processes of selection, categorisation and interpretation are shaped by embodied knowledge, disciplinary training and cultural positioning.

The researcher's professional background in digital marketing further informed attention to themes such as brand alignment, storytelling and symbolic capital. To mitigate interpretive bias, findings were cross referenced across qualitative and quantitative datasets. Triangulation revealed tensions between aesthetic curation and algorithmic performance, reinforcing the abductive cycle in which theoretical insight and empirical patterning continually inform each other.

This study does not claim objectivity or neutrality. Instead, it embraces a situated interpretive position consistent with feminist and critical methodologies, which view reflexivity as central to scholarly integrity. Following Findlay (2025), the research demonstrates how embodied reflexivity

enriches digital fashion inquiry by recognising the researcher's presence as integral to the production of knowledge. Making this positionality visible affirms reflexivity not as a limitation but as an epistemological resource, enabling nuanced understanding of power, representation and meaning within contemporary digital fashion systems.

3.3.4. Qualitative and Quantitative Integration

Mixed methods research combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of complex social phenomena. As Creswell (2023) observes, integrating open ended and closed ended data allows for more nuanced interpretations than either method alone, capturing both contextual depth and empirical scope. A central feature of mixed methods research is the systematic integration of data across collection, analysis and interpretation stages. Creswell (2023) outlines several integration strategies, including sequential, concurrent and embedded designs, chosen according to the research aims and the relationships between datasets.

In this study, a sequential mixed methods design was adopted to align with the interpretivist and abductive orientation of the research. The qualitative phase generated the foundational codes and interpretive insights, while the quantitative phase validated and refined those insights through statistical mapping. This sequential logic supports abductive reasoning, as theoretical propositions arising from qualitative analysis are revisited and examined

against empirical evidence, producing an iterative cycle of interpretation, validation and refinement.

The qualitative phase was used to decode the symbolic, aesthetic and cultural dimensions of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) communication on Instagram. Drawing on a purposive dataset of 390 posts by three prominent LFIs Leonie Hanne, Victoria Magrath and Tamara Kalinic the study applied visual content analysis supported by a detailed codebook. The coding framework captured stylistic and discursive features such as pose, location, product display, editing style and caption strategy. These codes operationalised core theoretical constructs by embedding them directly into the analytical process:

- Semiotics (Barthes, 1967) through the identification of recurring visual signs and symbolic motifs.
- Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) through the analysis of taste hierarchies, aesthetic distinction and the visual performance of expertise.
- Conspicuous consumption (Veblen, [1899] 1994) through the representation of luxury as social display and aspirational visibility.

Embedding these theoretical pillars within the coding framework ensured that interpretive abstraction remained grounded in observable communicative practice.

The quantitative phase then used SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to reinforce and triangulate the qualitative findings through descriptive and relational analysis. This included:

- Conducting frequency analysis to identify dominant visual and textual strategies.
- Using ranked co-occurrence tables to explore relationships between variables such as pose, location and caption tone.
- Generating heat maps and network diagrams to visualise clusters and relational patterns within the dataset.

This triangulation supported abductive reasoning by visualising how meaning making patterns intersected across different modes of expression. Co-occurrence mapping revealed, for example, which stylised editorial poses were frequently associated with recognisable luxury landmarks and minimal brand aligned captions, whereas candid or mobile poses were more often situated in everyday urban settings and paired with narrative captions emphasising personality and relatability. These recurrent configurations informed the typology's construction, confirming that digital luxury communication relies on a dynamic interplay between exclusivity and accessibility.

By integrating theory, qualitative insight and quantitative validation, the mixed methods framework strengthened methodological rigour and interpretive credibility. The iterative dialogue between coding and statistical mapping exemplified the abductive logic of the research. Theoretical ideas informed observation, empirical patterns challenged or refined theory, and both developed recursively through sustained engagement with the data.

This approach enabled a holistic and empirically grounded understanding of how LFIs construct luxury brand narratives within the ‘‘new digital fashion

system''. By combining interpretive depth with statistical precision, the research contributes to broader debates on luxury branding, influencer marketing and digital cultural production, demonstrating how mixed methods approaches illuminate the symbolic and structural logics of fashion communication in platformed environments.

TABLE 6 SWOT ANALYSIS: INTEGRATION OF QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE METHODS

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Enables a holistic understanding of LFI communication practices by capturing both symbolic nuance and measurable trends. • Enhances validity through triangulation, strengthening theoretical inferences. • Supports the generation of meta-inferences that bridge empirical observation with conceptual insight (Creswell, 2023). • Offers flexibility in design (sequential, concurrent, embedded), adaptable to research objectives.	• Requires considerable time and resource investment in coding, statistical processing, and synresearch. • Risk of uneven integration, qualitative richness may be diluted or quantitative findings overemphasised. • Complexity may challenge clarity in presentation and coherence in interpretation.
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Enables interdisciplinary dialogue between fashion studies, cultural theory, and data analytics. • Positions the typology for academic rigour and industry relevance, aligning interpretive insight with empirical validation. • Allows for joint displays and matrix comparisons, facilitating layered interpretation of LFI strategies.	• Possibility of paradigmatic tension, differing assumptions about knowledge between interpretivist and positivist strands. • Statistical significance may overshadow qualitative depth if integration is imbalanced. • Risk of reader misinterpretation if integration is not clearly articulated or visualised.

3.3.5. Theoretical Framework and Triangulation

Creswell (2023) observes that theory plays a distinct yet integrative role across research paradigms. In quantitative studies, theories commonly underpin hypothesis testing and form the basis for empirical validation. In qualitative research, theory operates more fluidly, functioning as an interpretive lens or an emergent outcome of analysis, as seen within ethnographic, constructivist and grounded theory traditions. Mixed methods research bridges these orientations by both generating and refining theoretical ideas, positioning theory as an organising framework that informs data collection, analysis and interpretation.

Within this study, theories from fashion studies provide a critical interpretive lens through which Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) communication is examined as both a cultural and commercial phenomenon. Drawing on Barthes (1967), Bourdieu (1984) and Veblen ([1899] 1994), the research situates digital influencer communication within intersecting systems of semiotic representation, social distinction and conspicuous display. These theoretical constructs shape the analytical process by informing the development of a structured codebook that operationalises concepts into empirical categories.

Semiotics guided the identification of recurring visual signs, compositional tropes and stylistic motifs that communicate meaning beyond the material product. Cultural capital, conceptualised by Bourdieu (1984), informed the classification of aesthetic hierarchies and symbolic expertise performed

through image curation, spatial positioning and caption tone. Conspicuous consumption, derived from Veblen ([1899] 1994), provided a framework for examining aspirational display, exclusivity and the performance of wealth and taste within digital visual economies. Embedding these theoretical categories within the coding framework ensured that interpretation was grounded in established critical discourse while remaining responsive to emergent data patterns.

Triangulation was employed to enhance the credibility, validity and analytical rigour of the study. Methodological triangulation was achieved by integrating qualitative visual content analysis with quantitative statistical techniques, enabling theoretical interpretation to be tested and refined through empirical validation. Data triangulation was applied across a diverse dataset of 390 Instagram posts collected between May 2022 and June 2024, encompassing multiple content formats including images, carousels and Reels, and three established LFIs : Leonie Hanne, Victoria Magrath and Tamara Kalinic. This strategy mitigated over reliance on a single source and allowed comparison across aesthetic, stylistic and temporal variations.

The study also applied theoretical triangulation, combining multiple frameworks to construct a multi layered interpretation of influencer practices. Barthes' semiotics (1967), Bourdieu's social field theory (1984) and Veblen's critique of consumption ([1899] 1994) intersected with contemporary perspectives on visibility labour (Abidin, 2016) and platform affordances (Bucher and Helmond, 2018). This synthesis produced a holistic analytical model that accounted for both symbolic meaning and digital mediation.

Triangulation played a significant role in supporting the study's abductive reasoning, ensuring a continuous dialogue between theory and data. Once qualitative codes were established, they were quantitatively mapped using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to explore relationships between coded variables. Co-occurrence analysis identified significant patterns linking pose, location and caption tone. For example, stylised editorial poses frequently appeared in recognisable luxury landmarks accompanied by minimal or brand aligned captions, while candid or mobile poses were situated in urban or everyday environments and paired with narrative captions that emphasised accessibility and relatability. These patterns substantiated interpretive propositions drawn from qualitative analysis and directly informed the typology presented in Chapter 5.

This iterative process exemplified abductive logic in practice. Theoretical understanding evolved through recursive movement between empirical observation and conceptual reflection. SPSS mappings offered visual and statistical confirmation of interpretive insight, grounding abstractions such as distinction, capital and display in observable communicative behaviours.

By embedding triangulation within an abductive and interpretivist framework, the research achieved both depth and reliability. Qualitative interpretation illuminated symbolic and aesthetic meanings, while quantitative mapping provided structural clarity and empirical corroboration. Together, these processes ensured that the findings were theoretically coherent, empirically grounded and methodologically transparent.

Through this approach, the study advances understanding of how LFIs construct, circulate and sustain luxury narratives within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’. It contributes to broader theoretical debates in fashion communication, demonstrating that the integration of triangulation and abductive reasoning offers a powerful methodological strategy for decoding contemporary digital practices where culture, commerce and creativity converge.

3.3.6. Reliability: Ensuring Consistency and Replicability

Reliability is supported through the use of a structured and theoretically informed codebook that focuses on observable and replicable features of influencer content. The coding framework translates theoretical concepts into empirical categories, ensuring that the analysis is both conceptually grounded and systematically applied. Drawing on Barthes’ semiotic model (1967), Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital (1984) and Veblen’s notion of conspicuous consumption ([1899] 1994), each coding category operationalises a distinct theoretical construct.

Post structure, including static images, carousels and Reels, together with editing techniques, captures the semiotic organisation of fashion imagery. These features illustrate how composition, repetition and digital enhancement signify taste, authenticity and prestige. Cultural references and aesthetic strategies reflect Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of cultural capital by evidencing how influencers accumulate symbolic value through alignment with particular

visual codes, fashion histories or artistic traditions. Activities, poses and locations demonstrate the performative enactment of social distinction and aspirational lifestyles, aligning with Veblen's ([1899] 1994) theorisation of conspicuous consumption as a public display of taste, leisure and economic privilege. Caption content and branding elements express how linguistic tone and narrative positioning reinforce these symbolic performances, merging self-presentation with commercial intent.

Embedding these theoretical dimensions within the coding process enables the study to move beyond descriptive classification and to examine the social and cultural mechanisms underpinning digital luxury communication. The resulting codebook operates as both an analytical and interpretive tool, allowing systematic comparison across the dataset while preserving the richness of symbolic meaning.

Quantitative methods support the reliability and validity of the qualitative findings. Ranked co-occurrence tables quantify the frequency and interaction of key communicative elements, while heat maps and network analyses visualise clusters of related strategies. For example, the statistical mapping of pose location caption relationships demonstrated that stylised editorial poses commonly appear in exclusive urban settings with minimal captions, whereas casual poses occur in more relatable contexts accompanied by narrative or emotive language. These recurrent configurations show how meaning is constructed through the alignment of visual and textual codes, providing empirical corroboration for theoretical insights on distinction, capital and display.

By combining structured coding with statistical validation, the research ensures methodological rigour and replicability. This integration of qualitative interpretation and quantitative mapping embodies the study's abductive reasoning process, in which theory informs observation and observation refines theory.

QR codes linking to the analysed influencer posts are embedded within the dataset to enhance transparency and credibility. These links allow external readers to verify the visual material directly, supporting auditability and reinforcing the validity of the interpretive analysis.

3.3.7. Platform-Specific Methodological Considerations: Instagram as Field site

Although digital influencers typically operate across multiple platforms, this research focuses exclusively on Instagram. This decision is grounded in both theoretical rationale and methodological necessity. Instagram continues to dominate luxury fashion communication due to its visual centric interface, alignment with aspirational aesthetics and its function as a primary site for brand influencer collaborations (Findlay, 2017; Rocamora, 2018). The platform foregrounds the image as a central communicative mode, supporting the semiotic and symbolic analysis that underpins this study.

Instagram's affordances shape the production and interpretation of influencer content in methodologically significant ways. Drawing on platform studies literature, particularly Bucher and Helmond's (2018) conceptualisation of affordances as relational and dynamic, this research treats Instagram as both a container and an active structuring context. Features such as the algorithmic feed, visibility metrics including likes, saves and impressions, and engagement based ranking mechanisms influence what content is surfaced, valued and promoted. Although often opaque, these socio technical conditions form part of the communicative ecosystem in which Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) operate and calibrate their self-presentation.

Instagram's multimodal affordances also enable layered storytelling strategies. Carousels support sequential visual narratives that combine outfit

imagery with contextual lifestyle scenes. Stories provide ephemeral, behind the scenes content, while Reels introduce short form video performances shaped by algorithmic trends. While this research centres primarily on the grid, it remains attentive to how these features interact to construct a cohesive digital fashion persona. The affordance of archivability is particularly crucial. Grid posts tend to function as curated and enduring self-branding artefacts, making them well suited to close visual content analysis.

By contrast, platforms such as TikTok and YouTube operate through distinct content logics. TikTok privileges trend replication, rapid iteration and audio-visual mimicry, while YouTube supports long form storytelling and subscriber-based relationality. Each platform cultivates its own vernaculars (Gibbs et al., 2015) and value regimes that shape how cultural meaning and social capital are produced and circulated. Their inclusion would require alternative analytical frameworks and coding protocols.

A single platform focus ensures methodological and theoretical coherence. Instagram's emphasis on visual curation, aesthetic labour and symbolic display aligns closely with the theoretical underpinnings of the research, which draw from Barthes' semiotics (1967), Bourdieu's cultural capital (1984) and Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption ([1899] 1994). The coding framework operationalises these constructs by categorising observable elements such as pose, location, product visibility and caption strategy that signify distinction, taste and aspirational value within the visual economy of luxury fashion.

Through this alignment, the analysis captures how meaning operates on Instagram as both a semiotic and social process. Images function as signs that communicate prestige (Barthes, 1967). Styles of self-presentation accumulate symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Displays of exclusivity enact forms of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, [1899] 1994). Focusing on a single platform therefore strengthens analytical precision and ensures consistency in data collection, coding and interpretation.

It is acknowledged that LFIs often employ cross platform strategies, adapting their personas and practices to the expectations of each site. While such fluidity is beyond the immediate scope of this project, it represents an important avenue for future research. Comparative studies could explore how Instagram's curated luxury aesthetic converges with, diverges from or is redistributed across the more casual, trend led dynamics of TikTok and other emerging visual platforms.

In sum, Instagram functions not merely as the empirical site of data collection but as a structuring condition of the influencer practices examined in this thesis. Its technical affordances, aesthetic conventions and platform specific rhythms shape both the methodological design and the semiotic strategies employed by the LFIs studied.

3.3.8. Epistemological Positioning and the Role of Triangulation in Qualitative Validity

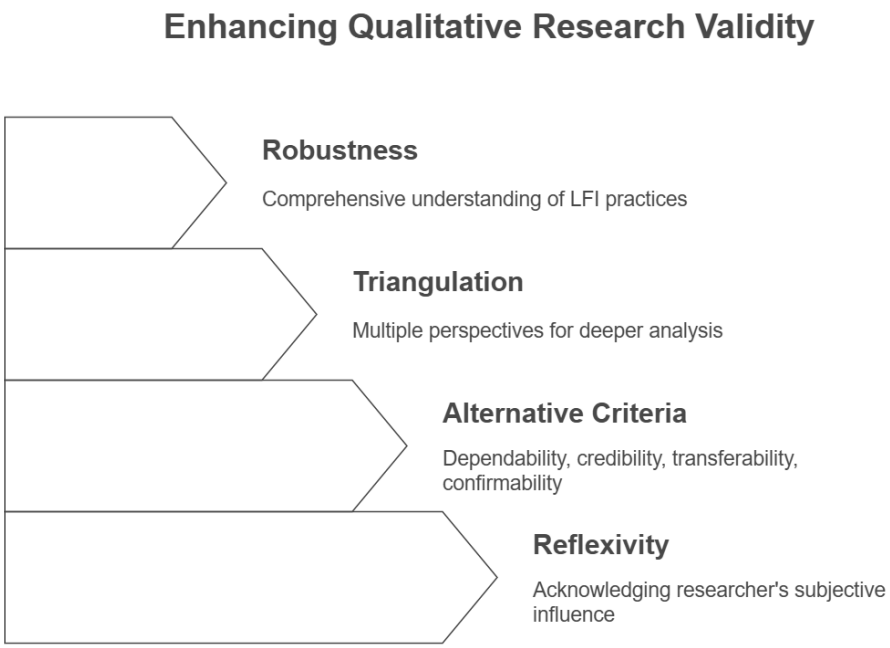

FIGURE 6 ENHANCING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH VALIDITY

THIS DIAGRAM PRESENTS FOUR KEY STRATEGIES USED TO STRENGTHEN THE VALIDITY OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN THIS RESEARCH. ROBUSTNESS ENSURES A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFI) PRACTICES. TRIANGULATION INCORPORATES MULTIPLE DATA SOURCES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR RICHER ANALYSIS. ALTERNATIVE CRITERIA SUCH AS DEPENDABILITY, CREDIBILITY, TRANSFERABILITY, AND CONFIRMABILITY REPLACE TRADITIONAL NOTIONS OF VALIDITY. REFLEXIVITY ACKNOWLEDGES THE RESEARCHER'S POSITIONALITY AND SUBJECTIVE INFLUENCE, PROMOTING TRANSPARENCY AND INTERPRETIVE INTEGRITY. SOURCE: AUTHOR

Complete objectivity is widely acknowledged in qualitative research as unattainable, since researchers inevitably bring their experiences, disciplinary frameworks and interpretive positions to the research process (Jackson, 1990). Denzin (1978) argues that these subjectivities, shaped by broader social and political contexts, make value free research impossible and challenge postpositivist assumptions of neutrality and universality. Within interpretivist inquiry, questions of objectivity shift toward epistemological reflection: whose perspective is foregrounded, whose experience is represented and what knowledge is legitimised through interpretation. Addressing these questions requires a critically reflexive stance in which validity is understood not as fixed truth but as coherence, transparency and positional accountability.

Different qualitative traditions articulate alternative markers of rigour. While some retain elements of postpositivist reliability, constructivist paradigms emphasise evaluative criteria such as dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Within this paradigm, validity becomes a process of ongoing negotiation between positionality, theoretical alignment and interpretive integrity.

Triangulation functions within this framework as both a mechanism of validation and an interpretive strategy that deepens analysis. Fusch, Fusch and Ness (2018) argue that triangulation adds depth by enabling multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon, while Denzin (2009) cautions that triangulation must remain theoretically informed rather than purely procedural. In this study, triangulation underpins the recursive movement between

qualitative insight, theoretical reflection and quantitative pattern identification that characterises abductive reasoning.

Triangulation supports abduction by linking interpretive coding with quantitative mapping through SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Co-occurrence analysis visualised relationships among key communicative features, particularly pose, location and caption tone, revealing patterned configurations that informed the construction of the typology. Editorialised poses frequently appeared in high prestige environments, such as luxury retail districts or cultural landmarks, accompanied by minimalist captions that signalled restraint and authority. Conversely, spontaneous or mobile poses were commonly situated in everyday or transitional spaces and paired with narrative captions that emphasised accessibility, self-expression and relatability. These patterns demonstrated how visual, spatial and textual elements collectively perform what Barthes (1967) defines as fashion's signifying system, how they accumulate what Bourdieu (1984) terms cultural capital and how they enact the aspirational visibility associated with Veblen's ([1899] 1994) theory of conspicuous consumption.

The triangulated integration of these findings within an abductive framework allowed theoretical concepts to be refined in response to empirical observation. This exemplifies Schwandt's (1993) assertion that theory functions both as a lens and as a reflexive prompt guiding interpretation while remaining open to modification through engagement with the data. Triangulation therefore not only validated the coding framework but also

extended theoretical understanding by evidencing how semiotic, social and economic logics coalesce within digital luxury communication.

Critical reflexivity was essential to maintaining epistemological transparency throughout this process. Findlay (2025) argues that researchers embedded within digital fashion cultures must acknowledge their embodied participation in the systems they analyse. The present study is shaped by the researcher's dual positioning as a digital marketing academic and an active participant in fashion culture, particularly within vintage and Western fashion spheres. This positioning afforded insider knowledge of digital fashion vernaculars, brand aesthetics and influencer strategies, while also requiring a conscious negotiation of critical distance.

Reflexivity thus became both a methodological and ethical imperative. It guided decisions related to sampling, interpretation and typology construction, ensuring awareness of how personal aesthetic fluency and professional expertise might inform meaning making. Balancing insider familiarity with outsider critique enabled a situated understanding of the digital fashion system as both a site of symbolic production and a space of cultural labour. This aligns with Findlay's (2025) notion of embodied reflexivity, which views the researcher's presence not as bias but as an interpretive resource that enriches the analysis of mediated experience.

In conclusion, rigour within this study is achieved not only through structured procedures but through epistemological integrity. The combined use of triangulation, abductive reasoning and critical reflexivity ensures that interpretations of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) practices are empirically

substantiated and theoretically nuanced. This approach situates the study within contemporary methodological debates in fashion communication, where embodied knowledge, cultural context and interpretive transparency are recognised as essential for understanding digital cultures of visibility, taste and distinction.

3.3.9. Methodological and Data Triangulation: Strategy and Rationale for Method Selection

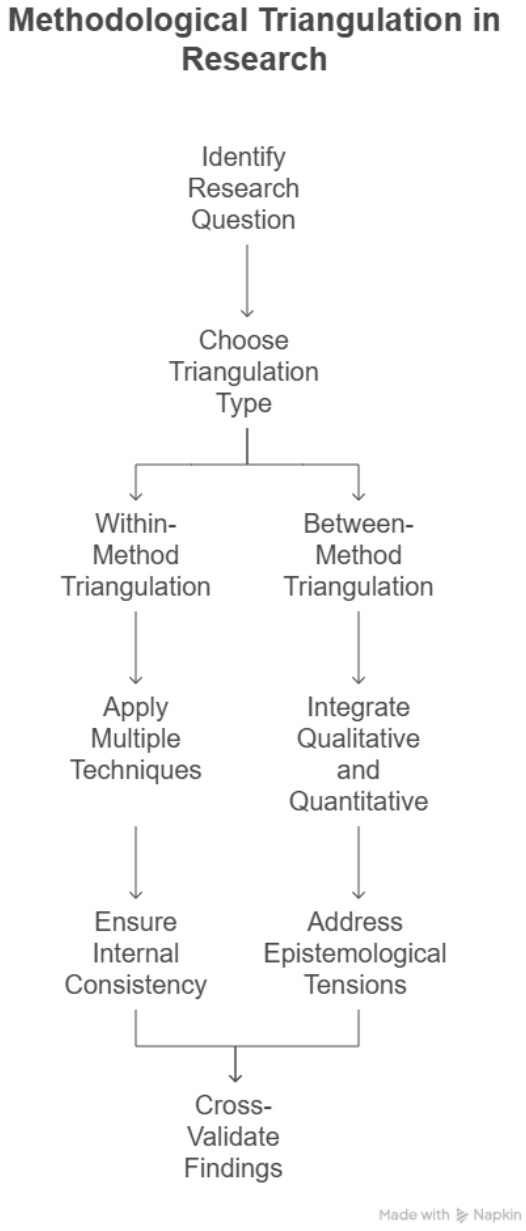

FIGURE 7 METHODOLOGICAL TRIANGULATION IN RESEARCH ; THIS DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATES THE PROCESS OF METHODOLOGICAL TRIANGULATION USED TO ENHANCE VALIDITY AND CREDIBILITY. SOURCE: AUTHOR

This study employs a multi-dimensional triangulation strategy that encompasses within method, between method and data triangulation (Denzin, 1970, 1978; Flick, 2018). Guided by a pragmatic epistemology (Morgan, 2007), this approach combines interpretive depth with analytical precision to enhance validity, coherence and methodological transparency.

Within method triangulation integrates Visual Content Analysis (VCA) with Template Analysis. VCA attends to the aesthetic and semiotic composition of influencer imagery, capturing gestures, spatial cues and stylistic motifs. Template Analysis provides a hierarchical thematic structure that organises recurring communicative patterns. Together, these approaches support abductive reasoning by linking visual observations to developing theoretical interpretations of how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) construct and communicate luxury and identity.

Between method triangulation connects qualitative coding with quantitative mapping. Codes generated through VCA and Template Analysis were imported into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for frequency and co-occurrence analysis. The mapping revealed strong correlations between pose, location and caption combinations. Editorialised poses most often appeared in luxury retail or event spaces accompanied by minimal captions that signalled restraint and exclusivity. In contrast, candid or movement-based poses situated in casual environments aligned with narrative captions that emphasised accessibility and relatability. These constellations informed the typology's development by demonstrating how symbolic and

spatial cues intersect with narrative tone to produce distinct communication strategies.

This iterative process exemplifies abductive reasoning in which theory and data inform one another. Quantitative mapping refined qualitative interpretation and directed engagement with key theoretical constructs. Barthes' semiotics (1967) explains how visual signs communicate status and prestige. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (1984) clarifies spatial and stylistic hierarchies. Veblen's analysis of conspicuous consumption ([1899] 1994) illuminates luxury as a form of symbolic display. The coding framework operationalises these theories by translating them into measurable categories such as pose, location and caption strategy, revealing how LFIs produce meaning and distinction within digital fashion culture.

Data triangulation further strengthens validity by incorporating diversity across people, time and space. The dataset includes three Western LFIs , 390 Instagram posts and a two-year period from May 2022 to June 2024, encompassing global fashion capitals and everyday lifestyle settings. This range offers representational breadth while capturing shifts in post pandemic digital fashion communication.

Together, these layers of triangulation enable the study to balance interpretive and empirical logics. Codification converts visual and textual elements into analysable data, while decoding interprets their symbolic and strategic significance. The SPSS mapping made visible recurring configurations that grounded theoretical interpretation, providing a typology that is both conceptually informed and empirically validated.

Triangulation therefore functions not as a claim to objectivity but as a reflexive strategy for maintaining rigour across methodological perspectives (Stavros and Westberg, 2009). It anchors the study's abductive logic, linking observation, theory and analysis in a recursive process that decodes how luxury is performed and communicated within the evolving digital fashion system.

3.4. INFLUENCER SAMPLING STRATEGY AND RESEARCH SCOPE

The study adopts a purposive, non-probability sampling strategy aligned with its interpretivist and abductive orientation (Patton, 2002). This approach prioritises theoretical relevance and analytical depth over statistical representativeness, enabling close examination of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) who exemplify dominant communicative and aesthetic practices within the digital luxury sphere.

3.4.1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

influencer were selected according to explicit inclusion criteria designed to ensure methodological coherence and theoretical alignment with the study's foundations in semiotics, cultural capital and conspicuous consumption. Eligible influencers were required to:

- Possess a minimum follower count of 500,000 to ensure significant reach and visibility.
- Maintain an engagement rate of 2 to 5 percent, indicating audience resonance and relational capital.
- Produce fashion centred content with a sustained focus on luxury branding, styling and visual culture.

- Demonstrate ongoing partnerships with luxury brands such as Chanel, Dior and Louis Vuitton, indicating alignment with elite fashion economies.
- Exhibit consistent activity through recent posts, collaborations and participation in flagship fashion events including Paris and Milan Fashion Weeks.
- Be located within Western Europe (UK, Germany, France) to ensure cultural and linguistic consistency within the Eurocentric luxury system.

influencer outside these parameters, including those focused on lifestyle, beauty or mass-market branding, or those with limited engagement or niche regional followings, were excluded to preserve conceptual clarity and maintain alignment with the definition of Luxury Fashion Influencer developed in Chapter 2. The resulting sample does not represent the full diversity of luxury fashion influence, but instead captures a dominant, institutionally legitimised segment within Western luxury fashion culture, which is precisely the field this thesis seeks to decode.

3.4.2. Sample Composition and Theoretical Justification

Three internationally recognised LFIs Victoria Magrath (@victoria), Leonie Hanne (@leoniehanne) and Tamara Kalinic (@tamara) were selected as the sample. This decision follows the principle of theoretical saturation (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006), which prioritises depth of interpretation over numerical breadth. A sample of three allowed for sustained semiotic and

narrative analysis across 390 Instagram posts, balancing feasibility with interpretive rigour.

The inclusion of these influencers aligns directly with the study's theoretical framework:

- •Barthes' semiotics (1967) informs the coding of visual signification through poses, locations and captions.
- Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital (1984) structures the classification of symbolic hierarchies across spatial and brand contexts
- Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption ([1899] 1994) underpins the analysis of performative luxury and aspirational display

Together, these theoretical lenses shaped the coding framework and guided the SPSS supported mapping of pose location caption interactions, revealing patterns of symbolic differentiation and brand alignment.

3.4.3. Temporal Scope and Rationale

The two-year data collection window from May 2022 to June 2024 captures the post pandemic stabilisation of digital branding practices and the emergence of new platform affordances such as Reels and AI mediated visibility. This timeframe offers temporal sensitivity to recent algorithmic and aesthetic shifts while maintaining analytic coherence. Longer periods risked diluting contemporaneity, while shorter periods would have restricted pattern identification.

3.4.4. Reflexive Limitations

The study's focus on Western, female presenting LFIs reflects the predominance of Euro American visual regimes within luxury fashion and its associated influencer economies. While this delimitation enhances conceptual consistency, it necessarily excludes alternative aesthetic, cultural and geopolitical frameworks. Recognising these boundaries clarifies the study's interpretive scope and identifies opportunities for future comparative research across gender, geography and platform ecologies.

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TABLE 7 SWOT ANALYSIS SUMMARISING THE RATIONALE FOR SELECTING THE 2022–2024 RESEARCH PERIOD. THE TABLE OUTLINES THE METHODOLOGICAL STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS OF FOCUSING ON A TWO-YEAR TIMEFRAME, HIGHLIGHTING HOW THIS WINDOW SUPPORTS A RELEVANT, FOCUSED, AND ANALYTICALLY COHERENT INVESTIGATION INTO CONTEMPORARY LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFI) COMMUNICATION PRACTICES ON INSTAGRAM.

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Reflects latest Instagram features (Reels, AI-driven visibility, in-app shopping) Captures stable, post-COVID digital branding strategies Covers four fashion seasons and key luxury campaign cycles Enables manageable qualitative analysis of 390 posts	Limited ability to track pre-2022 historical evolution May miss early influencer strategies pre-dating Reels or post-pandemic recovery Some rapid trends might not fully establish long-term relevance Smaller timeframe may limit broader generalisability
Opportunities	**Threats**
Offers highly relevant insights for luxury brands developing current strategies Enables future comparative research with pre-2022 or multi-platform datasets Establishes a focused empirical baseline for theorising the post-pandemic *"new digital fashion system"*	Rapid future platform changes may quickly date findings Omission of pandemic-specific influencer content may overlook crisis communication strategies Risk of missing hybrid practices that bridge pre- and post-2022 approaches

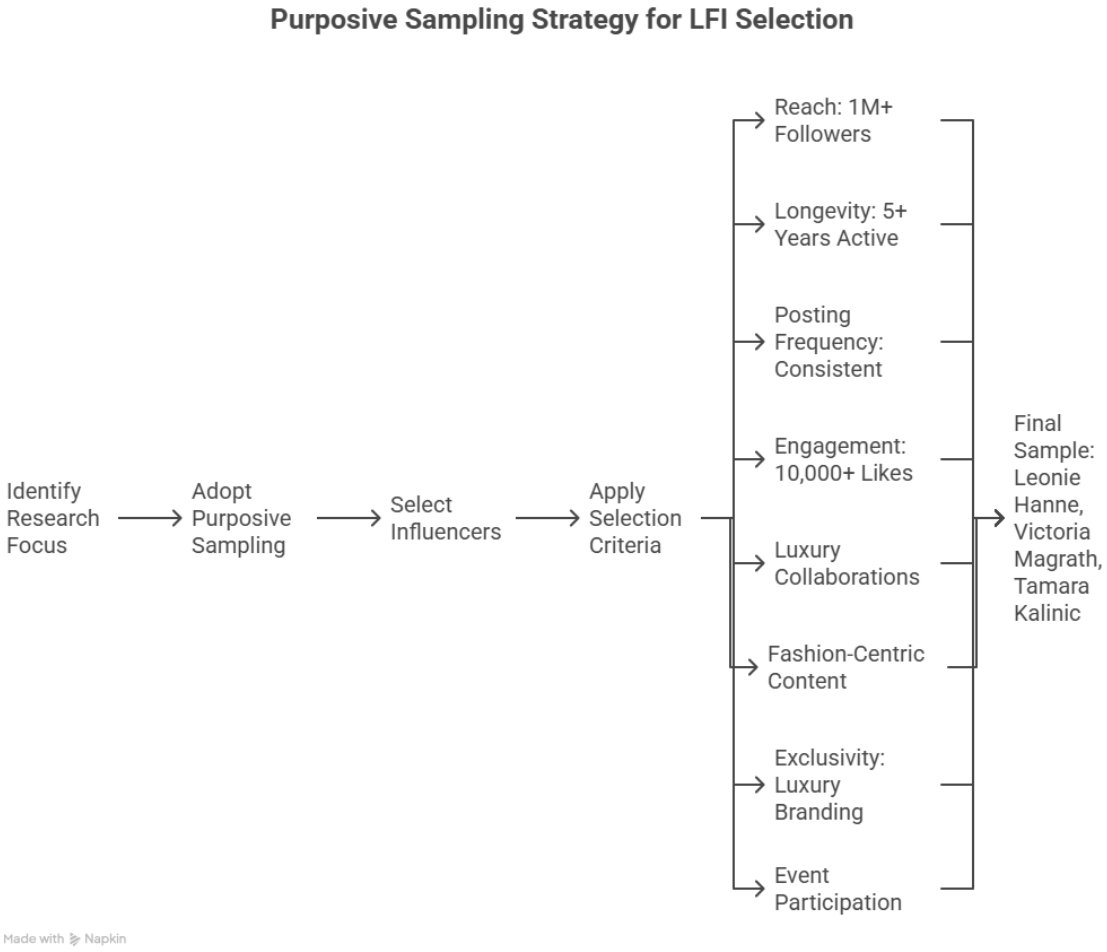


FIGURE 8 PURPOSIVE SAMPLING STRATEGY FOR LFI SELECTION. SOURCE: AUTHOR

The working definition of an LFI, developed in the literature review, frames the analysis:

"A Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) is an individual who uses social media platforms to curate and share content, building audience relationships through a consistent and distinctive voice and image. Their influence, extending beyond commercial interests, informs, inspires, and entertains, akin to fashion magazine roles, blending editorial with advertorial content to establish digital-age taste leadership. "

This definition guides the empirical investigation, ensuring coherence between theoretical framing and practical methodological application. Table 8 presents a summary of influencer details, including their Instagram handles, follower counts, and activity duration. Further detailed profiles are included in the Appendix to enhance methodological transparency and depth.

In summary, this purposive sampling approach ensures a robust, methodologically sound, and theoretically insightful exploration of LFIs ' roles in shaping contemporary digital luxury communication, achieving a careful balance between empirical focus and interpretive depth.

TABLE 8 LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER UNDER OBSERVATION FOR THIS RESEARCH (CORRECT AS OF JULY 2024)

This table presents key information about the luxury fashion influencer observed for this research, including their Instagram handles, number of followers, years active, blog websites, and number of posts.

Instagram Handle	Number of followers	Years active	Blog website	Number of posts
@Victoria	1. 2M	2012 - Present	www. inthefrow. com	1,744
@leoniehanne	4. 8M	2014 - Present	www. leoniehanne. com	4,829
@tamara	1. 7M	2010 - Present	www. theglamandtheglitter. com	3,716

3.4.5. Instagram Profile Overview of Victoria Magrath (@victoria)

Victoria Magrath is a leading UK-based luxury fashion influencer , recognised for her refined visual style, academic credibility, and strategic positioning within the high-end fashion sector. She holds a PhD in Fashion Marketing from the University of Manchester, where her research focused on fashion consumer behaviour and mobile commerce (Magrath, 2022). This academic grounding informs her content, blends scholarly insight with aspirational branding.

Magrath launched her blog *In the Frow* in 2012, which has since evolved into a multi-platform brand spanning Instagram, YouTube, and print media. Her work has earned significant recognition, with *Vuelio* (2024) naming *In the Frow* the UK's top fashion blog for five consecutive years. She has collaborated with various luxury brands, including Dior, Bvlgari, Louis Vuitton, and Net-a-Porter, and has co-created capsule collections with Strathberry, Edge of Ember, and Holland Cooper (Magrath, 2022).

In her bestselling book *The New Fashion Rules*, Magrath (2018) explores how digital platforms have transformed the fashion industry, highlighting shifts in visibility, inspiration, and consumer engagement. She presents influencers digital-era tastemakers who blend editorial authority with commercial agility. Her reflective commentary on the pressures of influencer labour, such as the criticism levelled by traditional fashion media, adds depth to her public persona (Magrath, 2022). Through consistent fashion week attendance, global brand ambassadorships, and a sophisticated online presence, Magrath exemplifies the symbolic labour and curated self-branding central to luxury fashion's influence in the digital age.

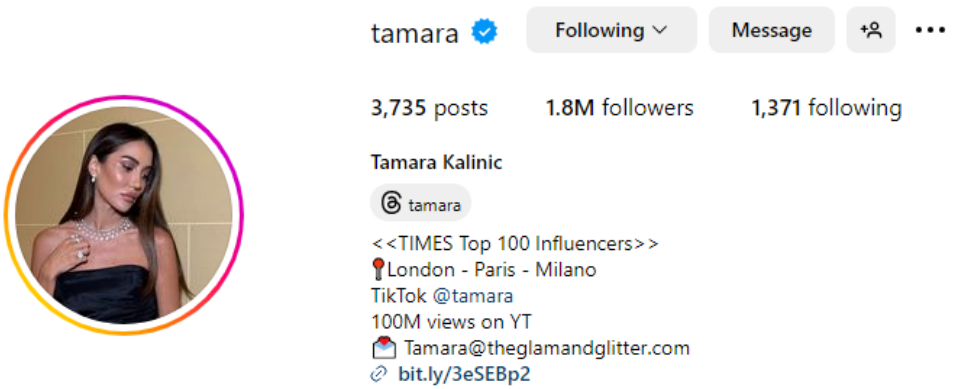
3.4.6. Instagram Profile Overview of Leonie Hanne (@LEONIEHANNE)

Leonie Hanne is a German-born luxury fashion influencer based in London, active since 2014. With a background in strategy consultancy, she transitioned into digital fashion influence through her blog *Ohh Couture*, a platform blending fashion, travel, and lifestyle content. Hanne's distinct aesthetic and high

visibility position her as a key figure in the global fashion system. Recognised for her “impeccable taste and style” (Hello, 2023), she has collaborated with numerous prestigious fashion houses, including Louis Vuitton, Dior, Fendi, Givenchy, and La Mer. Her influence extends across campaigns, red carpet appearances, and brand-led platform takeovers, such as Dior’s Instagram, demonstrating her integral role in brand storytelling and visual fashion communication.

Hanne maintains a strong presence at major international fashion events, including Paris, Milan, and New York Fashion Weeks, as well as regular appearances at the Cannes Film Festival. Her elaborate red carpet looks and consistent content production contribute to her high Media Impact Value (MIV®), a metric quantifying her commercial and cultural impact in the luxury fashion industry (Hello, 2023). In interviews, Hanne (2023) reflects on her career origins, noting how her early styling posts “blew up” before she had a formal social media presence, leading followers to “follow her closet” before she even joined Instagram. This organic audience interest catalysed her decision to create a dedicated profile, signalling the bottom-up dynamics of early influencer branding.

3.4.7. Instagram Profile Overview of Tamara Kalinic (@tamara)



Tamara Kalinic, a Serbian influencer , initially launched her blog "The Glam&Glitter" while studying, marking the beginning of her ascent to become a prominent figure in the global fashion scene. Her platform has evolved into a hub where she shares her daily fashion discoveries, style tips, glamorous fashion week front row reports, and personalised shopping selections, captivating a dedicated audience on her blog, Instagram, and YouTube, boasting over 1. 4 million followers and subscribers.

Tamara's influence spans beyond her digital presence; she is recognised as a style ambassador for esteemed fashion brands such as Bottega Veneta, Christian Louboutin, and Emporio Armani. Her collaborations have solidified her status and demonstrated significant impact, notably generating $681K in Media Impact Value (MIV®) for Bottega Veneta in 2021 alone. Additionally, she has ventured into entrepreneurship by launching her premium eyewear brand, So Shady. Tamara Kalinic has been featured in the covers of several

prestigious fashion magazines, including Cosmopolitan, Grazia, Marie Claire, and Elle.

Her career highlights include a diverse portfolio of campaigns and ambassadorships with prestigious brands worldwide, including Chanel, Dior, Louis Vuitton, MiuMiu and more (Glam & Glitter, 2024). Tamara's involvement ranges from international fashion weeks to exclusive brand collaborations and high-profile events, consistently displaying her influence and affinity for luxury fashion and beauty. Her entrepreneurial spirit, sophisticated taste, and dedication to empowering women through fashion and beauty continue to define her journey as a leading influencer and entrepreneur in the global fashion landscape.

3.5. INSTAGRAM POST SAMPLING STRATEGY

FIGURE 9 A SAMPLING AND POST-SELECTION PROCESS FLOWCHART VISUALLY REPRESENTS THE SYSTEMATIC METHOD USED TO RANDOMLY SELECT 15% OF MONTHLY INSTAGRAM POSTS PER INFLUENCER. SOURCE: AUTHOR

Sampling content from Instagram presents both methodological challenges and opportunities, shaped by the platform's evolving rhythms, algorithmic recalibrations and the cyclical tempo of influencer labour. As illustrated in Figure 9 (page 161), this study employed a purposive yet systematic post selection process designed to balance analytical rigour with responsiveness to platform dynamics.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure that the dataset accurately reflected each influencer's communicative practice, the sample was limited to fashion related posts that visually or narratively engaged with luxury branding, styling and fashion events. Posts focused exclusively on lifestyle, beauty, travel or food were excluded to maintain thematic and theoretical coherence.

Ephemeral formats such as Stories and Lives were excluded because they are not persistently archived and therefore do not support reliable retrospective analysis. By contrast, grid posts including static images, carousels and Reels provide curatorial continuity and a traceable record of self-presentation over time. Their persistent visibility ensures interpretive consistency and facilitates systematic coding of semiotic, social and economic cues.

This decision aligns with the study's semiotic orientation. The grid functions as a curated tableau through which influencers construct symbolic capital and perform distinction (Bourdieu, 1984; Veblen, [1899] 1994). Barthes' semiotic

framework (1983) further supports this focus by positioning the grid post as a signifying unit where connotation, style and consumer meaning converge.

Sampling Logic and Rationale

The dataset captures a two-year period from May 2022 to June 2024, reflecting the stabilisation of post pandemic digital branding practices and the emergence of Reels as a dominant visual form. Sampling followed a consistent fifteen % rule applied monthly to each influencer's total number of eligible posts. This proportion ensured representation across both active and slower posting cycles while preserving analytical manageability. A minimum threshold of three posts per month was applied during low activity periods to sustain comparative validity.

The sampling approach reflects a commitment to remaining responsive to Instagram's platform rhythms while maintaining methodological coherence. Rather than imposing artificial uniformity, it accommodates the temporal unevenness inherent in digital fashion content, particularly seasonal peaks aligned with the fashion calendar. Variability is treated as meaningful data rather than noise. Through stratified random sampling and clear inclusion criteria, the method generates a representative and manageable dataset. This enables identification of patterned relationships across formats and between editorial and performative content, while accounting for how LFIs adapt to shifting platform affordances and brand demands.

This design supports the study's broader aim to map and interpret how luxury fashion is constructed, circulated and made meaningful on Instagram. It

establishes the foundation for a typological analysis attentive to both content and the cultural logics shaping fashion communication within the digital economy.

Temporal fluctuations were treated as analytically significant. During fashion weeks, influencers tended to post branded event access, runway attendance and high fashion styling. Off season months foregrounded reflective, editorial or lifestyle inflected narratives. These variations reflect fashion's cyclical temporality and align with the interpretive logic of the study.

Format Differentiation

Although the same analytical framework was applied across content formats, Reels were interpreted holistically with attention to gesture, sequencing and narrative rhythm. Static images and carousels were analysed for compositional structure and the relationship between image and caption. These distinctions were embedded in the codebook and SPSS mapping, where pose, location and caption strategy emerged as recurrent clusters informing typology development.

Theoretical and Methodological Integration

The sampling design operationalises the study's theoretical foundations:

- Semiotics (Barthes, 1983) guided the identification of visual signs and connotative codes.
- Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) informed the analysis of symbolic hierarchies and aspirational spatiality.

- Conspicuous consumption (Veblen, [1899] 1994) framed the reading of performative display and luxury self-presentation.

These frameworks shaped both the inclusion parameters and the coding schema, ensuring alignment between empirical data collection and theoretical interpretation.

Theoretical Justification for Sample Size

The final dataset of 390 posts achieves theoretical saturation, offering sufficient depth for cross case comparison while maintaining interpretive precision. This scope reflects qualitative principles that privilege analytical richness over numerical breadth (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006; Rose, 2016). Focusing on three influencers enables sustained engagement and triangulated insight into symbolic and strategic variation across style, platform behaviour and brand alignment.

This sampling framework aligns with contemporary methodological approaches in fashion communication research (Schreier, 2012; Kozinets, 2015; Salo, 2020), providing transparency, replicability and theoretical coherence. It produces a dataset that is both empirically robust and conceptually grounded, capturing how LFIs curate digital presence, perform distinction and contribute to the semiotics of luxury within a platform governed media landscape.

TABLE 9 SAMPLING DATA FOR VICTORIA MAGRATH'S INSTAGRAM POSTS (JUNE 2022 - MAY 2024)

This table displays the total number of posts made by Victoria Magrath each month, the calculated 25% sample size for analysis, and the actual sample size used in the research of her Instagram activity. The sample size represents the portion of posts selected for detailed content analysis over a 24-month period.

Influencer	Victoria Magrath		
Month	Total posts	15%	Sample size
May-24	19	2. 85	3
Apr-24	20	3	3
Mar-24	26	3. 9	4
Feb-24	32	4. 8	5
Jan-24	11	1. 65	3
Dec-23	16	2. 4	3
Nov-23	24	3. 6	4
Oct-23	27	4. 05	5
Sep-23	46	6. 9	7
Aug-23	22	3. 3	4
Jul-23	26	3. 9	4
Jun-23	25	3. 75	4
May-23	29	4. 35	5
Apr-23	26	3. 9	4
Mar-23	27	4. 05	5
Feb-23	35	5. 25	6
Jan-23	8	1. 2	3
Dec-22	23	3. 45	4
Nov-22	19	2. 85	3
Oct-22	28	4. 2	5
Sep-22	51	7. 65	8
Aug-22	19	2. 85	3
Jul-22	10	1. 5	3
Jun-22	21	3. 15	4
Total	590		101

TABLE 10 SAMPLING DATA FOR TAMARA KALINIC'S INSTAGRAM POSTS (JUNE 2022 - MAY 2024)

This table presents the total number of posts made by Tamara Kalinic each month, the calculated 25% sample size for analysis, and the actual sample size used in the research of her Instagram activity. The sample size represents the portion of posts selected for detailed content analysis over a 24-month period.

Influencer	Tamara Kalinic		
Month	Total posts	15%	Sample size
May-24	32	4. 8	5
Apr-24	25	3. 75	4
Mar-24	30	4. 5	5
Feb-24	44	6. 6	7
Jan-24	28	4. 2	5
Dec-23	26	3. 9	4
Nov-23	25	3. 75	4
Oct-23	26	3. 9	4
Sep-23	44	6. 6	7
Aug-23	25	3. 75	4
Jul-23	20	3	3
Jun-23	24	3. 6	4
May-23	28	4. 2	5
Apr-23	32	4. 8	5
Mar-23	30	4. 5	5
Feb-23	41	6. 15	7
Jan-23	28	4. 2	5
Dec-22	27	4. 05	5
Nov-22	27	4. 05	5
Oct-22	23	3. 45	4
Sep-22	34	5. 1	6
Aug-22	28	4. 2	5
Jul-22	21	3. 15	4
Jun-22	29	4. 35	4
Total	697		116

TABLE 11 SAMPLING DATA FOR LEONIE HANNE'S INSTAGRAM POSTS (JUNE 2022 - MAY 2024)

This table outlines the total number of posts made by Leonie Hanne each month, the calculated 25% sample size for analysis, and the actual sample size used for the research of her Instagram activity. The sample size represents the portion of posts selected for detailed content analysis over the 24-month period.

Influencer	Leonie Hanne		
Month	Total posts	15%	Sample size
May-24	44	6. 6	7
Apr-24	35	5. 25	6
Mar-24	41	6. 15	7
Feb-24	40	6	6
Jan-24	29	4. 35	5
Dec-23	37	5. 55	6
Nov-23	27	4. 05	5
Oct-23	34	5. 1	6
Sep-23	62	9. 3	10
Aug-23	32	4. 8	5
Jul-23	32	4. 8	5
Jun-23	38	5. 7	6
May-23	58	8. 7	9
Apr-23	50	7. 5	8
Mar-23	53	7. 95	8
Feb-23	43	6. 45	7
Jan-23	47	7. 05	8
Dec-22	50	7. 5	8
Nov-22	38	5. 7	6
Oct-22	41	6. 15	7
Sep-22	74	11. 1	12
Aug-22	46	6. 9	7
Jul-22	48	7. 2	8
Jun-22	51	7. 65	8
Total	1050		170

3.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH

Researching digital environments, particularly highly curated and commercialised spaces such as Instagram, raises complex ethical issues concerning visibility, consent, and representation. Although the analysed content is publicly accessible, ethical visibility does not necessarily equate to ethical permission. Consequently, this study adopts a reflexive ethical stance informed by emerging internet research frameworks (Boyd & Crawford, 2012; University of Glasgow, 2018[6]), explicitly foregrounding the responsibilities of working with commercially oriented influencer content. Rather than treating publicness as a universal justification for data use, influencer posts are recognised as strategically crafted digital marketing artefacts explicitly intended for public consumption, monetisation, and brand building, thereby reducing ethical risks associated with private or sensitive content.

Formal ethical approval was secured from the University's School of Arts and Media Ethics Board in 2023, reviewing the project's research design, data management, and participant privacy safeguards. Ethical rigour was maintained through GDPR-compliant practices, securely storing digital trace data in a password-protected institutional environment. Influencers, publicly

[6] Ethical considerations for this study were informed by the University of Glasgow's Guidelines on Internet Research, which outline best practices for ensuring privacy, consent, and responsible data usage in digital research contexts. For further details, see University of Glasgow (2018), Ethics in Internet Research. Available at: https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_487729_smxx.pdf.

recognised as professional figures explicitly engaged in commercial self-branding, were openly identified. In contrast, incidental appearances of non-influencer users (e. g., commenters or likers) were systematically anonymised or excluded to protect privacy.

Ethical considerations explicitly shaped analytical decisions. For example, the interpretative framework intentionally avoided subjective speculation about influencers ' narratives, focusing instead on observable visual, textual, and structural strategies employed within luxury brand communications. This approach ensured analytical integrity and respected influencer identities, maintaining ethical clarity by avoiding misrepresentation. Where relevant, QR codes linking directly to original posts provided additional transparency and allowed readers to engage independently with the original contexts.

A deliberate methodological and ethical choice was made to exclude audience engagement metrics (likes, comments, follower counts). Although these metrics frequently underpin digital marketing analyses, their incorporation introduces complexities related to opaque platform algorithms, shifting norms, and ethical risks associated with non-consenting audience data (Marwick & Boyd, 2014; Markham, 2012). Therefore, the research's analytical scope intentionally prioritised the constructed meanings within influencer -generated content, preserving clarity and privacy. While the exclusion of engagement metrics represents a recognised limitation, it also highlights a potential avenue for future scholarship to develop ethically robust methodologies for studying content reception and user interactions, particularly within more sensitive or controversial digital contexts.

Throughout the research process, ethical integrity was reinforced by embedding quality-control measures, such as refining the coding schema through pilot testing, reliability verification via cross-coding, and systematic dataset auditing with SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Continuous dialogue around ethical issues and researcher positionality was maintained with supervisory mentors, reinforcing the study's adaptive responsiveness to emerging ethical concerns.

In summary, the research advances ethically conscientious scholarship on digital influencer practices by integrating reflexive interpretation, rigorous data management, and methodological transparency. Explicit reflection on ethical decision-making underscores methodological precision. It contributes to broader discussions about ethically responsible digital research practices, informing future scholarly engagement within the rapidly evolving landscape of digital fashion cultures.

3.7. DATA COLLECTION AND DATASET CONSTRUCTION

This section outlines the structured and transparent approach adopted to collecting and constructing the dataset used to examine Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) communication practices on Instagram. A systematic and methodologically rigorous process underpins this dataset, ensuring analytical consistency, transparency, and replicability.

Drawing on Creswell's (2023) recommendations for qualitative data recording, data collection was planned and structured prior to analysis. A preliminary data collection proforma (see Appendix D) was developed and applied to fifty randomly selected Instagram posts, facilitating early familiarisation with influencer content and initial thematic identification. The proforma captured variables such as postdate, format (static image, carousel, or reel), captions, hashtags, brand affiliations, visual content, and observational notes. Figure 10 presents a blank example of the proforma used. In contrast, Figure 11 shows a completed entry from one of Leonie Hanne's posts, illustrating how visual and textual features were recorded for each item in the dataset.

Leonie Hanne – April 2024

Date of Post	Post Type EG. Video/ Static / Mixed	Caption	Link URL	Image	Notes

FIGURE 10 COLLECTION PROFORMA EXAMPLE FOR LEONIE HANNE – APRIL 2024.

This table provides a structured format for collecting data from Leonie Hanne's Instagram posts. It includes columns for the date of the post, post type (e. g., video, static, or mixed), caption, link URL, image, and notes. This proforma is designed to organise and track detailed content for analysis as part of the research on influencer fashion communication practices.

15/06/2022	STATIC_CAROUSEL	Fashion & food from my last days in Hamburg □□	https://www.instagram.com/p/Ce1lSSzrD1U/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBlNWFlZA==		WALKING_ACT ZEBRA_CROSSING_LOCATION DAILY_LIFE STILL_LIFE_ACCESSORIES AUTHENTIC_ACT STREET_LOCATION CAFÉ_ACT PHONE_IMAGE MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT

FIGURE 11 EXAMPLE OF A POPULATED SECTION OF THE DATA COLLECTION PROFORMA.

This figure shows a completed portion of the data proforma for a post made by Leonie Hanne on 15 June 2022. The post type is a static carousel, and the caption reads, "Fashion & food from my last days in Hamburg. " The link to the post is provided, along with accompanying images. The notes section details various activities and locations, such as walking, a zebra crossing, daily life, and accessories, highlighting the thematic elements and context of the post.

After refining the proforma and finalising the codebook, the research progressed to a large-scale data collection comprising 390 Instagram posts from three internationally recognised LFIs ; Victoria Magrath, Leonie Hanne, and Tamara Kalinic, from May 2022 to June 2024. This timeframe provided sufficient scope to analyse shifts in influencers strategies, platform affordances, and fashion discourse following the post-pandemic stabilisation of luxury branding.

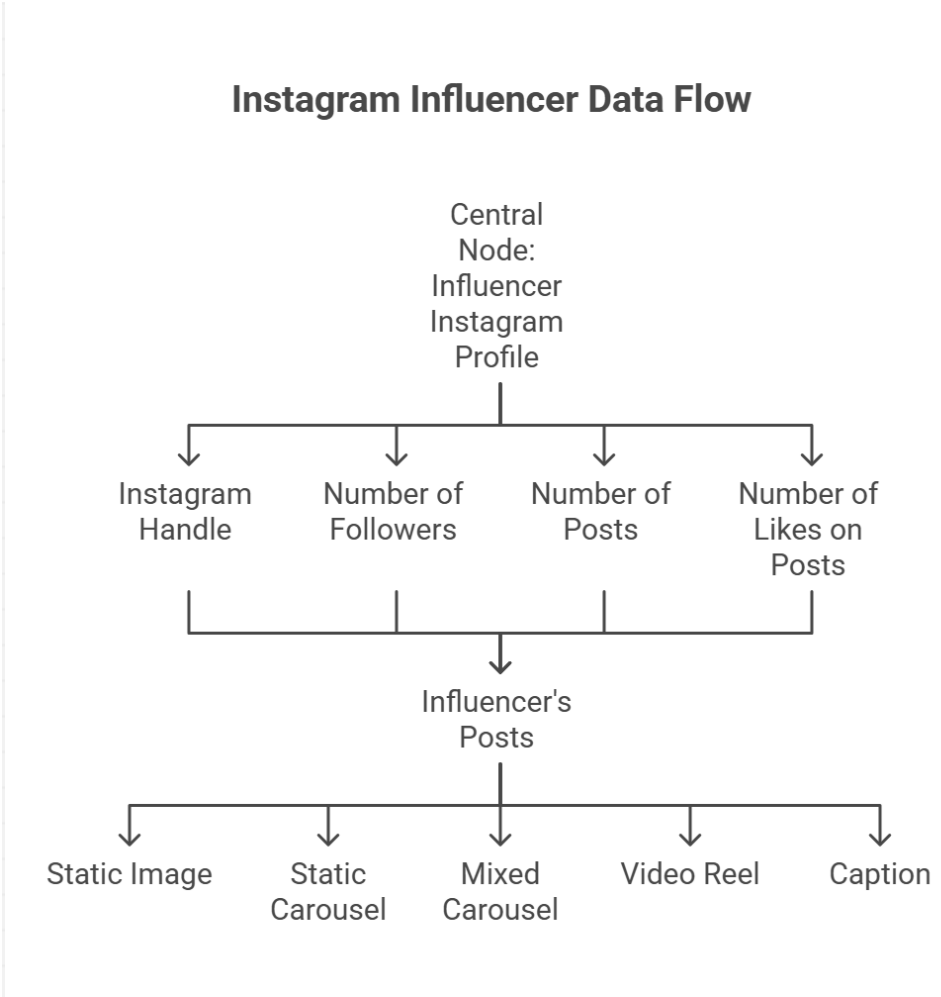


FIGURE 12 DATA SOURCES FOR INFLUENCERS' INSTAGRAM PROFILES. THIS DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATES THE VARIOUS DATA SOURCES AND TYPES OF CONTENT EXTRACTED FROM INFLUENCERS' INSTAGRAM PROFILES FOR ANALYSIS. SOURCE: AUTHOR

Instagram was selected as the primary data source for its richness in multimodal content, combining visual aesthetics with textual narratives (Rocamora, 2017; Abidin, 2016). The platform enables a detailed investigation of how influencers communicate brand identity, stylistic authority, and aspirational lifestyle. Figure 12 summarises the core data sources used in this study; categorising types of content extracted for analysis. To illustrate how data points were captured from influencer profiles and posts, Figure 13 provides a visual breakdown of key features such as post type, caption structure, branding indicators, and carousel content, highlighting how each was operationalised within the dataset.

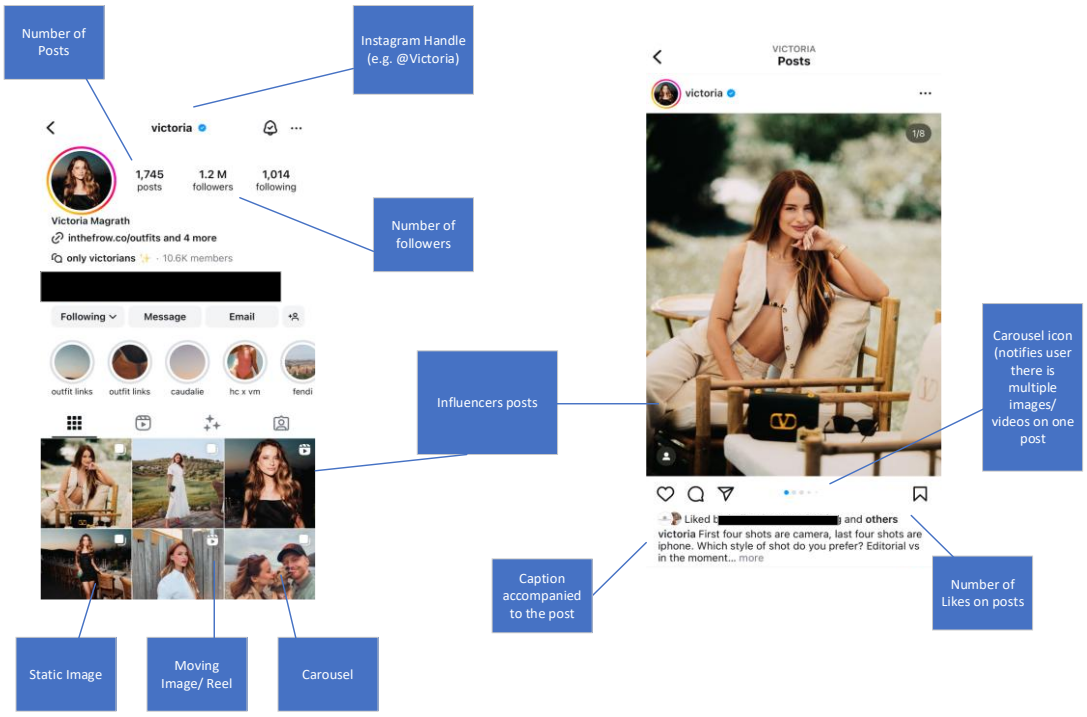


FIGURE 13 INFLUENCER INSTAGRAM PROFILE AND POST ANALYSIS. THIS FIGURE DEMONSTRATES THE KEY DATA POINTS COLLECTED FROM AN INFLUENCER 'S INSTAGRAM PROFILE. SOURCE: AUTHOR

Audience interaction metrics (e. g., likes, comments) were excluded from the dataset, a methodological and ethical decision made to avoid the interpretive instability associated with algorithmically influenced engagement data (Marwick & Boyd, 2014; Markham, 2012). This exclusion ensured analytical clarity and focused the study on content strategies rather than audience response.

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was selected to manage and analyse the data due to its suitability for handling large-scale, categorically coded datasets. While SPSS is conventionally aligned with quantitative research, its functionality in managing binary variables was well suited to this study's hybrid framework. Visual and textual content from each Instagram post was translated into binary codes (1 = present; 0 = absent) across sixty-seven thematic variables. Figure 14 (page 177) shows an example of the SPSS data view, demonstrating how post-level attributes and codes were organised for analysis.

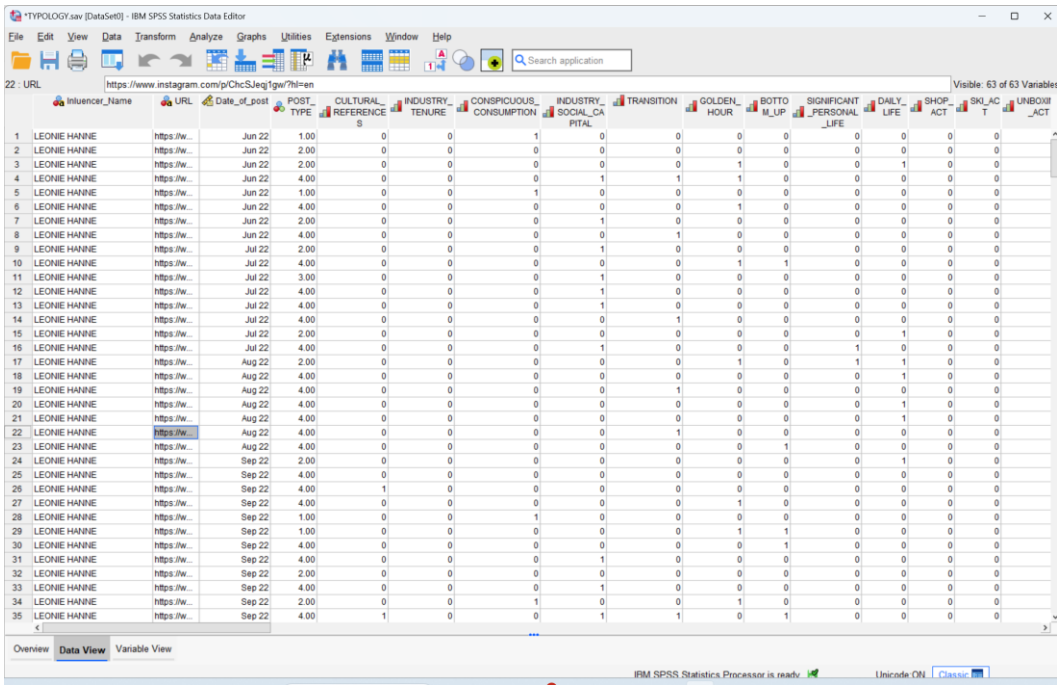


FIGURE 14 SPSS (STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES) DATA VIEW OF CODED INFLUENCER POSTS SOURCE AUTHOR.

The categorical and structural nature of the data informed the decision to use SPSS over qualitative tools such as NVivo or MAXQDA. SPSS supported co-occurrence mapping and pattern identification, such as the recurring use of WALKING_POSE in STREET_LOCATION settings by two influencers, which prompted deeper qualitative analysis. These patterns contributed directly to constructing the study's typology of influencer communication strategies.

Several measures were taken to enhance reliability by recognising the interpretive subjectivity inherent in thematic coding. A single researcher coded the whole dataset to ensure consistency, and the codebook was refined through iterative testing. A subset of posts was re-coded after a two-week interval as a check for intra-coder consistency. In addition, a supervisory review of a sample of coded posts validated the coding logic and thematic

coherence. These steps ensured internal reliability, even though formal intercoder reliability testing was not employed.

Quality control and data validation were embedded throughout the process. Frequency distributions were generated to identify outliers or inconsistencies in coding, while cross-checks ensured that variables were applied uniformly across all cases. Figure 15 provides an overview of the SPSS variable view, illustrating the structure and organisation of coded themes. This transparency supports replicability and reinforces the empirical foundation of the analysis.

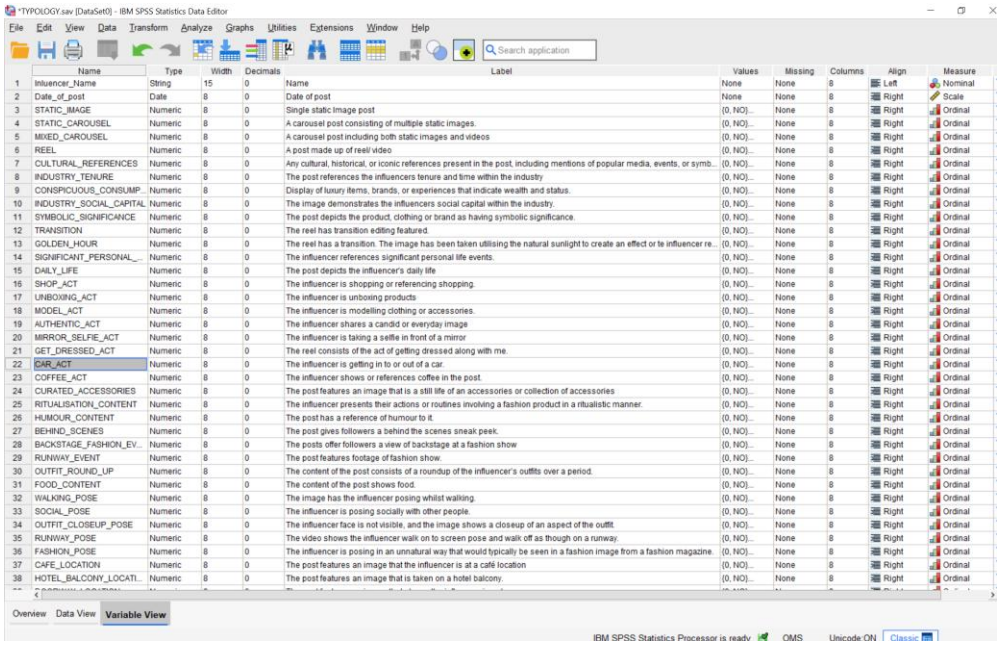


FIGURE 15 SPSS (STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES) VARIABLE VIEW OF INFLUENCER FASHION COMMUNICATION DATASET. SOURCE: AUTHOR

Each Instagram post was recorded as a discrete case in SPSS, with associated metadata including influencer identity, URL, post type, and date.

Chronological segmentation enabled the tracking of content trends over two years, allowing the study to examine what influencers do and how their practices evolved in response to changing platform dynamics and luxury branding logic.

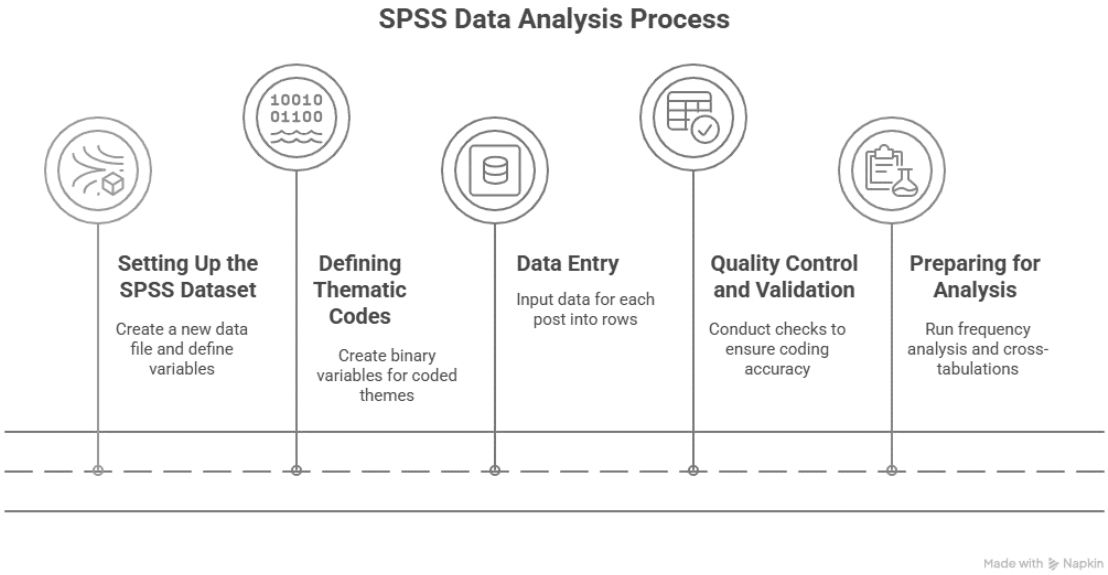


FIGURE 16 SPSS (STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES) DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS. SOURCE: AUTHOR

This procedural structure (Figure 16) ensured methodological transparency and analytical consistency across the dataset. By documenting each stage of the SPSS setup, from variable definition to quality control and analysis preparation, the research facilitates full replicability for future scholars undertaking similar multimodal content analysis. The clarity of this process enables a systematic approach to coding large volumes of visual and textual data while minimising errors through repeated validation and cross-checking. As such, it reinforces the reliability of the dataset and ensures that findings are

grounded in a rigorously constructed and verifiable empirical base.

The methodological approach outlined here offers a robust framework for examining LFI communication practices through a structured dataset that integrates visual and textual content analysis. Combining qualitative familiarisation and binary-coded thematic mapping enabled interpretive depth and analytic precision. This approach directly contributed to developing the study's typology by identifying recurring semiotic patterns and stylistic variations across influencer content. While a single researcher undertook the coding to maintain coherence, coder validation was addressed through internal re-coding and supervisory review. Despite recognised limitations, particularly the exclusion of engagement metrics, the dataset remains a methodologically sound basis for investigating how luxury brand narratives are constructed and communicated on Instagram within the evolving *''new digital fashion system''*.

3.8. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: VISUAL SEMIOTICS, TEMPLATE ANALYSIS, AND TYPOLOGY CONSTRUCTION

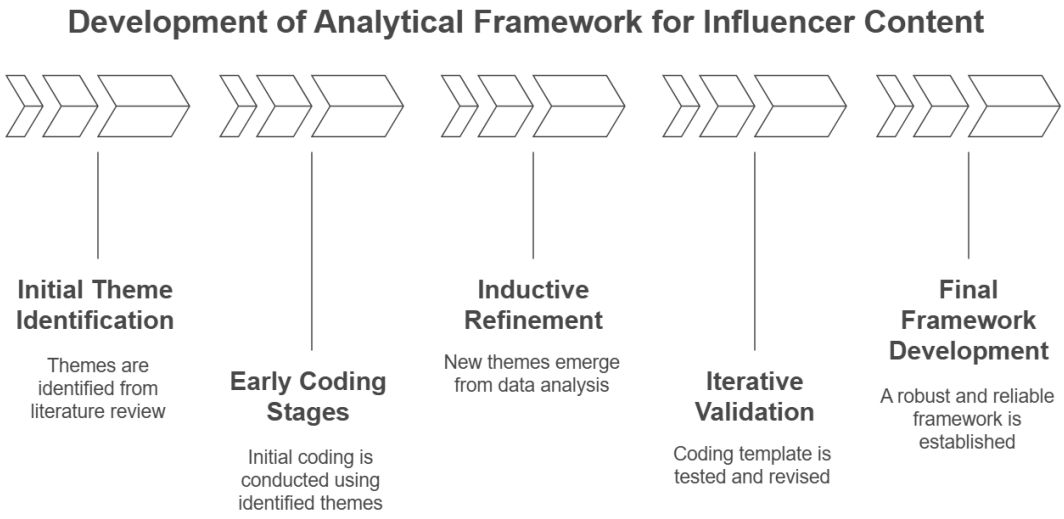


FIGURE 17 DEVELOPMENT OF ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR INFLUENCER CONTENT. SOURCE: AUTHOR

This section outlines the analytical framework developed to investigate how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) communicate brand narratives on Instagram. Situated within an interpretive paradigm and guided by abductive reasoning (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018), the framework integrates visual content analysis with template analysis to support both close semiotic reading and broader empirical mapping. This hybrid approach responds to the study's dual aim: to decode how luxury meanings are constructed and to categorise communicative practices into an analytically grounded typology.

Visual content analysis (VCA) forms the foundation of the interpretive process by treating fashion imagery as both visual text and cultural artefact. Drawing on Barthes' (1967; 1983) semiotic model, the analysis began with denotative coding of visible features such as pose, setting, styling and caption content. These descriptive annotations informed the construction of the codebook, which captured recurrent elements including WALKING_POSE, FASHION_POSE, MODEL_ACT, RUNWAY_POSE, OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE, SOCIAL_POSE and MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT. Spatial and contextual codes such as STREET_LOCATION, HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION, HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION, RED_CARPET_LOCATION, ZEBRA_CROSSING_LOCATION and CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION charted how LFIs position themselves within symbolic geographies of luxury. Caption-level codes such as BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION, FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION, FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION, AMBASSADOR_CAPTION and INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION identified linguistic markers that signal authority, cultural literacy and audience engagement.

Connotative readings then examined how these features operate symbolically, reflecting key theoretical constructs. Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital informed the interpretation of spatial hierarchies and aesthetic cues, where locations such as HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION or RED_CARPET_LOCATION indexed elite cultural access. Veblen's ([1899] 1994) analysis of conspicuous consumption contextualised codes such as CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION, CURATED_ACCESSORIES and RUNWAY_EVENT as forms of aspirational display. Barthes' (1967; 1983)

semiotics guided analysis of how poses such as FASHION_POSE or VIEW_POSE function as signs of fashion literacy and embodied distinction. This integration ensured that codes did not remain descriptive but operated as analytical tools that bridged image, meaning and theory.

Template Analysis (Brooks et al., 2015; King, 2012) complemented the semiotic reading by enabling structured comparison across influencers, time periods and content types. The initial template, developed through a pilot analysis of 50 posts, was refined iteratively to incorporate emergent motifs such as BEHIND_SCENES, RITUALISATION_CONTENT, DAILY_LIFE and INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL. Hierarchical coding captured the layered nature of meaning-making, recognising, for instance, that a WALKING_POSE at a STREET_LOCATION could simultaneously communicate mobility, urban belonging and symbolic ease. As in constructivist applications of Template Analysis (Madill et al., 2000), reflexivity informed decisions where coding ambiguity required interpretive judgement.

The codebook served as the operational bridge between semiotic interpretation and empirical structure. It translated theoretical constructs into observable variables, ensuring coherence across the qualitative and quantitative elements of the study. Once coding was completed, all codes were transformed into binary variables for SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) analysis. Co-occurrence mapping revealed patterned relationships across variables. Strong associations emerged between MODEL_ACT and BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION, FASHION_POSE and MODEL_ACT, WALKING_POSE and MODEL_ACT, and

HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION and MODEL_ACT. Caption-level clusters such as BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION with FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION or FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION highlighted linguistic strategies through which LFIs assert industry legitimacy.

These patterns did not function as statistical generalisations but as prompts for abductive interpretation. For example, the high co-occurrence between MODEL_ACT and STREET_LOCATION illuminated how LFIs borrow editorial fashion tropes to perform distinction in public space. The alignment between RUNWAY_POSE and INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL indicated how backstage or event-based content signifies insider status. The clustering of EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION with SIGNIFICANT_PERSONAL_LIFE highlighted how relational cues merge with luxury narratives to sustain audience intimacy. These associations confirmed the centrality of pose–location–caption configurations in constructing luxury meaning on Instagram and directly guided the typology's development.

Throughout the analytical process, theory and method remained in continuous dialogue. Bourdieu's (1984) cultural capital was operationalised through codes that captured status-bearing environments and modes of self-presentation. Barthes' (1967; 1983) semiotics informed the interpretation of mise-en-scène, gesture and sartorial detail. Veblen's ([1899] 1994) emphasis on spectacle shaped understanding of CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION and aestheticised displays of wealth. Reflexivity was embedded throughout, drawing on Findlay's (2025) concept of embodied reflexivity to articulate how

the researcher's professional and cultural expertise informed interpretive decisions.

This integrated analytical framework enables the development of a typology that is both conceptually grounded and empirically validated. Visual content analysis uncovers the symbolic grammar of luxury; template analysis synthesises thematic structures; and SPSS co-occurrence mapping identifies recurring configurations across the dataset. Together, these methods illuminate how LFIs strategically construct, circulate and consolidate luxury meanings within the evolving ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

3.9. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AND TRIANGULATION

This section presents the quantitative phase of the analytical strategy and demonstrates how structured statistical analysis extended and validated the qualitative findings. While the philosophical and methodological underpinning for the mixed-methods design is discussed in Section 3.3, the present discussion shows how quantified insights were used to identify recurring patterns in Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) communication and to support the development of an empirically grounded typology.

3.9.1. Mixed-Methods Integration and Rationale

The rationale for adopting a mixed-methods approach rests on the need to examine luxury communication as both an interpretive and patterned phenomenon. The qualitative phase captured symbolic, aesthetic and cultural meaning through visual content analysis, while the quantitative phase allowed these meanings to be mapped structurally across the dataset. Integration occurred through systematic data transformation. Once qualitative codes had been finalised, each code was converted into a binary variable and imported into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for descriptive and relational analysis. This transformation enabled the interpretive insights

developed in the qualitative stage to be examined for consistency, recurrence and clustering across the full sample of 390 posts.

This process reflects the abductive logic guiding the study. Qualitative insights generated initial theoretical propositions which were then revisited through quantitative mapping. Patterns that appeared frequently gave empirical support to interpretive claims, whereas unexpected associations prompted further reflection and refinement, ensuring that theory and data remained in continuous dialogue.

3.9.2. Quantitative Analysis Procedures

Quantitative procedures were conducted using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Frequency analyses identified the most commonly occurring visual and textual strategies, while co-occurrence testing and cluster analysis examined how different elements aligned within posts. These analyses enabled a structured understanding of how LFIs deploy poses, spatial cues and caption strategies to communicate luxury.

This quantitative strand was not intended to produce predictive models or generalisable claims but to generate a statistical representation of qualitative phenomena. In this way, quantitative analysis extended the interpretive work by revealing patterned behaviour across large volumes of visual data.

Triangulation, Abductive Reasoning and the Emergence of Pose–Location–Caption Patterns

Triangulation played a significant role in supporting abductive reasoning. Once codes such as WALKING_POSE, FASHION_POSE, MODEL_ACT, STREET_LOCATION, HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION, BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION and FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION were mapped within SPSS, clear relational patterns emerged.

For example, the mapping revealed that:

• **MODEL_ACT** had the highest level of overlap across the dataset, frequently co-occurring with STREET_LOCATION, HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION, HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION and ZEBRA_CROSSING_LOCATION. This suggested that embodied performance is a structuring feature of LFI communication, supporting a semiotic reading of pose as a key signifying practice (Barthes 1967; 1983).

• **WALKING_POSE** and **RUNWAY_POSE** were most often situated in recognisably prestigious spatial contexts, confirming that bodily movement signals cultural capital and fashion fluency, consistent with Bourdieu's (1984) account of distinction.

• **BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION** frequently co-occurred with curated poses and high-status locations, illustrating how linguistic markers of brand affiliation reinforce conspicuous display and aspirational signalling (Veblen [1899] 1994).

• **EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION**, **SIGNIFICANT_PERSONAL_LIFE** and **DAILY_LIFE** formed a secondary cluster associated with more informal spatial

contexts such as HOME_LOCATION or COFFEE_ACT, demonstrating how LFIs balance exclusivity with relatability.

These recurrent patterns demonstrated that luxury communication on Instagram is constructed through specific combinations of visual, spatial and textual cues. The alignment of pose, location and caption emerged as the core structural mechanism across which luxury meaning is performed.

This insight directly informed the typology's development. The identification of clusters allowed the researcher to group communication practices into conceptually meaningful categories, each reflecting how LFIs negotiate prestige, intimacy and symbolic value in digital environments.

The mapping process also gave empirical support to the theoretical foundations of the study. Semiotic codes (Barthes 1967; 1983) were visible in patterns linking pose and mise-en-scène. Cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) was enacted through spatial hierarchies evident in the frequent association of high-status locations with editorialised poses. Conspicuous consumption (Veblen [1899] 1994) was reflected in codes such as CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION, CURATED_ACCESSORIES and RUNWAY_EVENT, each of which clustered around content designed to display luxury visibility and symbolic prestige.

Through triangulation, these theoretical constructs were not merely applied but empirically substantiated. Patterns revealed through SPSS supported the abductive refinement of theory, demonstrating how symbolic, spatial and narrative cues coalesce to produce luxury's digital semiotics.

By combining qualitative interpretation with quantitative mapping, the research achieves analytical clarity and methodological rigour. The quantitative phase substantiated interpretive insights, prompted refinement where unexpected clusters emerged, and ensured that the typology was grounded in structured evidence rather than descriptive intuition. This strengthened the credibility of the analytical framework and confirmed the centrality of pose–location–caption configurations in luxury fashion communication on Instagram.

Cross-tabulations and frequency counts were used to analyse how often specific codes appeared together within posts. This co-occurrence analysis uncovered the symbolic and strategic pairings most common in LFI content, such as the intersection of brand name captions with prestige aesthetics or the mirror selfie with emotional captioning.

- **Total Overlap Count**: The table below ranks pairings of coded variables that appear most frequently together, highlighting dominant content relationships.

TABLE 12 TOTAL OVERLAP COUNT

Category	Most Overlapping Category	Overlap Count
BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	MODEL_ACT	203
INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL	MODEL_ACT	110
FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	104
STREET_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	76
AD_CAPTION	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	67
FASHION_POSE	MODEL_ACT	66
CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION	MODEL_ACT	64
WALKING_POSE	MODEL_ACT	62
EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION	MODEL_ACT	62
INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION	MODEL_ACT	58
OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE	MODEL_ACT	53
AUTHENTIC_ACT	MODEL_ACT	48
HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	48
CURATED_ACCESSORIES	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	45
RUNWAY_POSE	MODEL_ACT	43
HOLIDAY_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	43
OUTFIT_ROUND_UP	MODEL_ACT	38
DAILY_LIFE	MODEL_ACT	36
RUNWAY_EVENT	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	36
FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	35
HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	35
RITUALISATION_CONTENT	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	34
FASHION_KNOWLEDGE_CAPTION	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	33
INDUSTRY_TENURE	MODEL_ACT	32
MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT	MODEL_ACT	31
SOCIAL_POSE	MODEL_ACT	31
TRANSITION	MODEL_ACT	30
GET_DRESSED_ACT	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	29
BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT	MODEL_ACT	29
BEHIND_SCENES	MODEL_ACT	27
SALE_LANGUAGE_CAPTION	MODEL_ACT	27
PRODUCT_TAG	MODEL_ACT	26
RED_CARPET_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	25
SIGNIFICANT_PERSONAL_LIFE	EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION	25
CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	20
VIEW_POSE	MODEL_ACT	20
FOOD_CONTENT	DAILY_LIFE	20
COFFEE_ACT	DAILY_LIFE	20
CLOSET_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	19
ZEBRA_CROSSING_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	19
GOLDEN_HOUR	MODEL_ACT	18

DOORWAY_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	17
HUMOUR_CONTENT	MODEL_ACT	15
CAFE_LOCATION	FOOD_CONTENT	15
CULTURAL_REFERENCES	MODEL_ACT	14
COUNTRYSIDE_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	13
STAIRCASE_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	13
HOME_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	12
CAR_ACT	MODEL_ACT	12
AMBASSADOR_CAPTION	MODEL_ACT	11
BOTTOM_UP	MODEL_ACT	11
DOUBLE_ENTENDRES_CAPTION	MODEL_ACT	9
STUDIO_LOCATION	INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL	6
VENETIAN_BOAT_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	6
UNBOXING_ACT	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	6
LONDON_PROPERTY_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	5
SKI_ACT	MODEL_ACT	4
SHOP_ACT	CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION	4

Ranked Co-occurrences: This analysis aggregated co-occurrence counts across the dataset to identify which themes, poses, and captions had the highest total visibility across the 390 posts.

TABLE 13 TOTAL RANKED CO-OCCURRENCES

Category	Total Co-Occurrences
MODEL_ACT	2279
BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	1884
INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL	1117
FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION	975
CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION	813
STREET_LOCATION	740
EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION	645
FASHION_POSE	638
INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION	638
CURATED_ACCESSORIES	630
AD_CAPTION	618
AUTHENTIC_ACT	592
HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION	536
OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE	503
WALKING_POSE	490
DAILY_LIFE	450
HOLIDAY_LOCATION	434
FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION	404
OUTFIT_ROUND_UP	395
MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT	393
FASHION_KNOWLEDGE_CAPTION	388
SOCIAL_POSE	376
RUNWAY_POSE	357
RUNWAY_EVENT	347
HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION	344
RITUALISATION_CONTENT	344
BEHIND_SCENES	331
BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT	324
PRODUCT_TAG	313
INDUSTRY_TENURE	309
RED_CARPET_LOCATION	292
FOOD_CONTENT	289
TRANSITION	286
SALE_LANGUAGE_CAPTION	275
SIGNIFICANT_PERSONAL_LIFE	263

CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION	263
GET_DRESSED_ACT	253
COFFEE_ACT	242
HOME_LOCATION	214
VIEW_POSE	210
CLOSET_LOCATION	207
GOLDEN_HOUR	199
ZEBRA_CROSSING_LOCATION	197
DOORWAY_LOCATION	183
AMBASSADOR_CAPTION	167
HUMOUR_CONTENT	159
CAFE_LOCATION	152
CAR_ACT	149
STAIRCASE_LOCATION	146
CULTURAL_REFERENCES	138
COUNTRYSIDE_LOCATION	131
DOUBLE_ENTENDRES_CAPTION	116
BOTTOM_UP	108
LONDON_PROPERTY_LOCATION	96
STUDIO_LOCATION	85
UNBOXING_ACT	66
SHOP_ACT	66
VENETIAN_BOAT_LOCATION	54
SKI_ACT	37

3.9.3. Heat Map and Data Visualisation

To support pattern recognition, a heat map was created to display the intensity of co-occurrence between variables visually. While a full network graph could not be generated due to data complexity, the heat map provided a clear and accessible representation of overlapping strategies across influencer content.

- Identifying dominant clusters reinforced key conceptual insights, such as luxury fashion's dependence on performative space, aestheticised ritual, and status-aligned language.

- These patterns directly informed the development of the typology in Chapter Five.

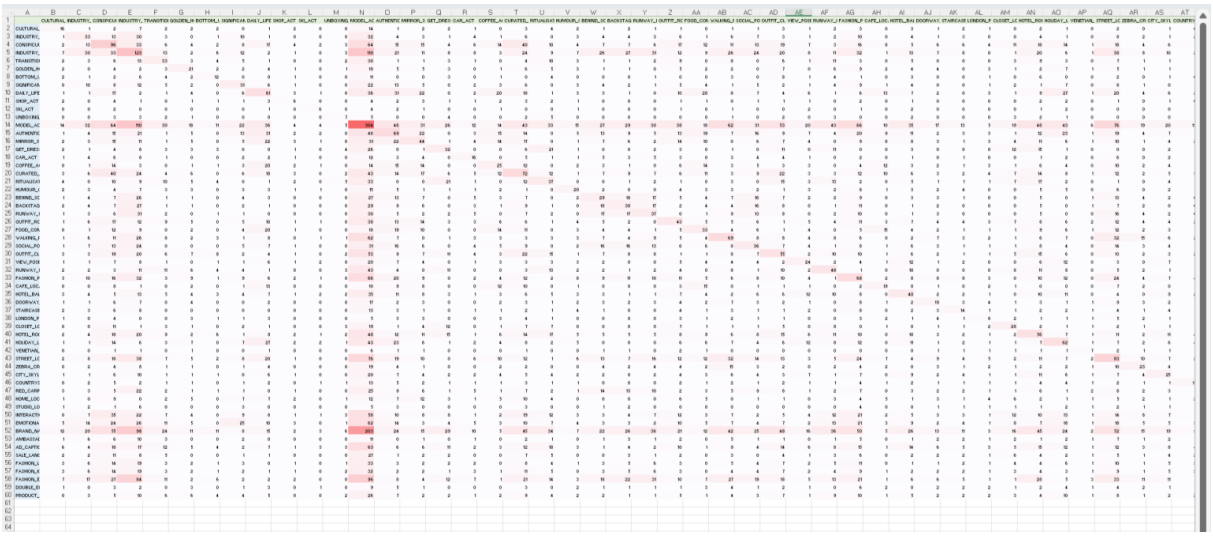


FIGURE 18: HEATMAP OF CO-OCCURRENCE PATTERNS IN LFI COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES. SOURCE: AUTHOR

This heatmap visualises the co-occurrence of key themes and attributes in Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) Instagram posts, highlighting the frequency and relationships between coded variables.

3.9.4. Inferential Analysis and Interpretation

To move beyond descriptive patterning, inferential techniques were employed, Cluster Analysis grouped posts based on shared variable characteristics, enabling the identification of content archetypes such as:

- *Aspirational branding* (e.g., luxury travel, skyline views)
- *Brand-centred promotion* (e.g., ambassador roles, tagging)
- *Affective storytelling* (e.g., curated daily life, emotional captions)

These clusters offer insight into how LFIs tactically adapt content forms to communicate prestige and relatability, reinforcing the research's central concept of 'Strategic Adaptability'.

3.9.5. Triangulation with Qualitative Findings

Triangulation was employed to validate qualitative interpretations with empirical data, increasing methodological reliability and coherence. Key thematic findings, such as the use of the mirror selfie as a prestige performance device or the symbolic layering of locations, were substantiated by their statistical prominence across the dataset. Yet triangulation served not only as a means of verification but also as a core mechanism through which abductive reasoning was enacted. The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) co-occurrence mapping identified patterned relationships between pose, location and caption tone, revealing recurrent constellations

that prompted deeper theoretical interpretation. For example, editorialised poses frequently aligned with high prestige environments and minimal captions, whereas more mobile or candid gestures tended to appear in everyday settings alongside narrative captions. These empirical patterns functioned as generative prompts, directing attention to the semiotic, spatial and textual work through which luxury is performed on Instagram.

As detailed in Section 3.10, this triangulated approach combines:

• Methodological triangulation, integrating visual content analysis, template coding and SPSS testing. The qualitative stages identified symbolic cues, while the quantitative mapping visualised their patterned relationships, supporting abductive movement between observation and theory.

• Data triangulation, incorporating multiple influencers across time to ensure that emergent patterns were not idiosyncratic but reflective of broader communicative tendencies within luxury fashion influence.

• Theoretical triangulation, drawing on Barthes (1983), Bourdieu (1984) and Veblen ([1899] 1994) to interpret the empirical patterns surfaced through SPSS. Semiotic theory illuminated the signifying role of poses and mise en scène; cultural capital framed spatial hierarchies and stylistic markers; and conspicuous consumption guided interpretation of visibility and display.

Through this process, triangulation transformed interpretive insight into structured analytical evidence. The co-occurrence patterns did not function as

predictive indicators but as catalysts for conceptual refinement, enabling the typology to emerge from an iterative dialogue between data and theory. This integration demonstrates how triangulation not only enhances methodological rigour but also deepens analytical reasoning within an abductive framework, ensuring that theoretical constructs are grounded in observable features of influencer communication.

3.10. CONCLUSION TO THE METHODOLOGY

While this chapter does not directly answer the research question, it establishes the methodological pathway through which the inquiry is addressed. It has developed a mixed-methods design that combines qualitative visual content analysis with quantitative categorisation, enabling a systematic investigation into how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) communicate luxury brand narratives on Instagram. This approach reflects the study's theoretical commitment to understanding fashion communication as both symbolic and strategic, allowing influencer practices to be codified and their cultural significance interpreted.

The chapter has articulated the researcher's positionality, drawing on Findlay's (2025) concept of embodied reflexivity to acknowledge how a dual identity as both a digital marketing academic and a participant in fashion culture shaped interpretive decisions. This reflexive stance supported the abductive process by allowing insider familiarity with fashion vernaculars to inform coding, while

maintaining critical distance when theorising symbolic and commercial strategies within LFI content.

Sampling procedures, coding protocols and analytical techniques have been outlined in detail, demonstrating how the methodological design aligns with the thesis's conceptual priorities. The coding framework operationalised key theoretical constructs. Semiotics (Barthes 1967; 1983) guided the identification of visual signs captured through codes such as WALKING_POSE, FASHION_POSE and MODEL_ACT. Cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) informed the classification of spatial hierarchies evident in codes such as HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION, STREET_LOCATION and RED_CARPET_LOCATION. Conspicuous consumption (Veblen [1899] 1994) framed the interpretation of aspirational display within codes such as CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION, CURATED_ACCESSORIES and RUNWAY_EVENT. These translations ensured that theoretical abstraction became analytically operable within the dataset.

Triangulation reinforced the coherence of this design by linking qualitative interpretation with quantitative validation. The SPSS-supported co-occurrence mapping visualised relationships between pose, location and caption variables, revealing recurrent configurations that informed typology development. Patterns such as the alignment of MODEL_ACT with STREET_LOCATION or the association of WALKING_POSE with BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION confirmed that luxury is communicated through specific combinations of bodily display, spatial symbolism and linguistic cues. These findings strengthened the abductive reasoning process by allowing

theoretical propositions to be revisited in light of empirical evidence, ensuring that interpretation and pattern recognition remained dynamically connected.

In establishing this operational foundation for the following analytical chapters, the methodology ensures that the empirical work is both rigorous and theoretically aligned. It provides the necessary tools to decode and categorise influencer communication practices and thereby supports the structured exploration of the research questions:

- How can the textual and visual strategies used by Luxury Fashion Influencer on Instagram be codified and decoded to understand how they construct and communicate the values, aesthetics and desirability of luxury fashion brands
- What are the key communication practices employed by LFIs , and how can these be categorised through codification and interpreted through decoding to make sense of how luxury narratives are communicated on digital platforms
- How can the decoded communication practices of LFIs inform the development of culturally resonant social media strategies for luxury brands

By grounding the analysis in a coherent methodological framework, this chapter prepares the conditions through which the thesis can offer a theoretically informed and empirically substantiated account of how luxury fashion communication operates within the evolving digital fashion system.

CHAPTER FOUR - EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

4.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE DESCRIPTIVE OVERVIEW OF DATA AND THEMES

This chapter presents the study's empirical findings and initiates the first stage of analytical interpretation. Its primary objective is to decode and thematically organise the fashion communication practices employed by Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) on Instagram, drawing on the dataset generated through the visual content analysis outlined in Chapter Three. In doing so, it addresses the overarching research question: *How can the fashion communication practices of LFIs be decoded and categorised to understand how they communicate luxury brand narratives within the evolving ‘‘new digital fashion system’’?*

Based on a systematically coded dataset of 390 Instagram posts across three LFIs , the chapter identifies dominant, mid-range, and emergent patterns in both visual and textual content. The analysis is grounded in the bespoke codebook developed for this study and supported by SPSS-based mapping of thematic co-occurrences, frequency distributions, and post structures. Rather than offering a purely statistical account, these patterns are interpreted as meaningful indicators of how LFIs construct luxury narratives through curated poses, spatial settings, aesthetic strategies, caption practices, and content

formats. Together, these findings provide the empirical foundation for the typology developed in Chapter Five by evidencing the recurring communicative strategies that characterise LFI content within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

For analytical clarity, each theme is presented individually. However, these practices rarely operate in isolation within influencer performance. Visual, spatial, and narrative strategies often intersect within a single post, combining pose, location, caption tone, and brand context. Their separation therefore reflects a methodological decision rather than rigid boundaries in practice. When read collectively, the themes reveal an underlying logic that structures luxury fashion communication on Instagram, demonstrating how LFIs draw on overlapping aesthetic, spatial, and narrative conventions to produce aspirational yet accessible forms of digital luxury fashion communication.

The chapter is organised around six thematic strands:

- Aspirational Branding and the Performance of Luxury
- Digital Fashion Narratives: Luxury as Storytelling
- The Blurred Lines of Relatability and Exclusivity
- The Spatial Language of Luxury: Location as a Status Symbol
- Visual Aesthetics and Editing Techniques in Digital Luxury
- The Tension Between Commercialisation and Editorial Identity

These themes build analytical momentum, moving from broad narrative and branding strategies towards more granular examinations of symbolic tension. Each strand foregrounds key patterns within the dataset and highlights the

semiotic, spatial, and affective mechanisms through which luxury is constructed, communicated, and consumed on Instagram.

Methodologically, the analysis draws on Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic framework, which supports detailed empirical description alongside deeper interpretative engagement. Operating at both semantic and latent levels, this approach enables examination of what LFIs communicate and how meaning is produced through the interplay of image, caption, gesture, and platform affordances. In doing so, the chapter advances the study's aim to identify and categorise communication practices specific to luxury fashion influencing.

The chapter is guided explicitly by the study's research questions:

- How can the textual (captions) and visual (images and videos) content strategies used by Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) on Instagram be codified and decoded to understand how they construct and communicate the values, aesthetics, and desirability of luxury fashion brands?
- What are the key fashion communication practices employed by LFIs , and how can these practices be categorised through codification and interpreted through decoding to make sense of how luxury narratives are communicated within digital platforms?

- How can the decoded communication practices of Instagram LFIs inform the development of effective, culturally resonant social media strategies for luxury fashion brands in the digital marketplace?

4.1.1. The Code Book

Before presenting the thematic analysis, this section briefly revisits the analytical function of the codebook introduced in Chapter Three. While its development and refinement have already been detailed, its operational role in structuring the empirical analysis warrants clarification here. The codebook functioned as the primary bridge between theory and data, supporting an abductive logic of inquiry in which empirical observation and theoretical interpretation remained in continuous dialogue.

Qualitative coding provided the interpretive foundation for identifying recurring visual, spatial, and textual practices, while SPSS-supported co-occurrence mapping enabled systematic comparison across the dataset. This triangulated approach ensured that emerging patterns were not treated as isolated observations but as relational configurations shaped by platform affordances, aesthetic labour, and symbolic value. Reintroducing the codebook at this stage therefore clarifies how the thematic structure of Chapter Four was inductively grounded in the data while remaining theoretically informed, ensuring transparency in how the subsequent themes were derived and analytically justified.

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TABLE 14 THIS TABLE PRESENTS THE DETAILED CODEBOOK USED FOR THE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF INFLUENCER FASHION COMMUNICATION PRACTICES ON INSTAGRAM. THE CODEBOOK INCLUDES THEMES, CODES, DESCRIPTIONS, AND EXAMPLES TO GUIDE THE CATEGORISATION OF VARIOUS POST ELEMENTS. SOURCE: AUTHOR.

Theme	Code	Description	Example
Post Structure	STATIC_IMAGE	Single static Image post	A single image of the influencer.
	STATIC_CAROUSEL	A carousel post consisting of multiple static images.	A series of photos from a photoshoot.
	MIXED_CAROUSEL	A carousel post including both static images and videos	A mix of photos and short videos from an event.
	REEL	A post made up of reel/ video	A reel showing a day in the life of the influencer.
Cultural	CULTURAL_REFER	Any cultural, historical, or iconic references present in the post, including mentions of popular media, events, or symbols that resonate culturally or historically.	E. g., Breakfast at Tiffanys/ Sex and the city
	INDUSTRY_TENURE	The post references the influencer tenure and time within the industry	E. g., Caption – “Keeping the hotel concierge busy since 2016”.
	CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION	Display of luxury items, brands, or experiences that indicate wealth and status.	E. g., Image that displays many handbags.
	INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL	The image demonstrates the influence social capital within the industry.	Eg. An image within the post that shows a handwritten note to the influencer from the fashion brand or designer.
	SYMBOLIC_SIGNIFICANCE	The post depicts the product, clothing or brand as having symbolic significance.	The post shows a suitcase of handbags as a carry on; the bags are significant to her as they are going in the carry on rather than the holdall.
Editing	TRANSITION	The reel has a transition.	The influencer puts their hand Infront of the camera and is suddenly dressed.
	GOLDEN_HOUR	The image has been taken utilising the natural sunlight to create an effect.	The influencer references the golden hour to take images
Activities	DAILY_LIFE	The post depicts the influencer 's daily life	"Having my morning coffee. "
	SHOP_ACT	The influencer is shopping or referencing shopping.	Pictured with shopping bags or in a store.
	UNBOXING_ACT	The influencer is unboxing products	Video of the influencer unboxing a new handbag.
	MODEL_ACT	The influencer is modelling clothing or accessories.	The influencer is modelling an outfit – these images do not depict daily activities but are solely for the purpose of showing a new outfit or a bag.

	SKI_ACT	The influencer is on a Ski trip.	The post depicts the influencer skiing.
	AUTHENTIC_ACT	The influencers hares a candid or everyday image	Casual pictures with minimal editing/ filters.
	MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT	The influencer is taking a selfie in front of a mirror	A mirror selfie showing the day's outfit.
	GET_DRESSED_ACT	The reel consists of the act of getting dressed along with me.	Get Ready with me for a Tiffanys event.
	CAR_ACT	The influencer is getting in to or out of a car.	The influencer is shown getting her large red-carpet dress out of a small chauffer driven vehicle.
	COFFEE_ACT	The influencer shows or references coffee in the post.	Eg. The caption references the influencer going for coffee and the outfit she is wearing to get coffee.
	SIGNIFICANT_PERSONAL_LIFE	The influencer references significant personal life events.	E. g., I said yes!!!! I got engaged.
	CURATED_ACCESSORIES	The image is a still life of an accessories or collection of accessories	Image consists of a bag on the influencer.
Post Content	RITUALISATION_CONTENT	The influencer presents their actions or routines involving a fashion product in a ritualistic manner. This approach emphasises the repetition, significance, and almost ceremonial nature of their engagement with the product, making it appear as an integral and meaningful part of their daily life or personal practice.	Slowly putting a ring on, during a getting dress with me post.
	HUMOUR_CONTENT	The post has a reference of humour to it.	It is not the dresses being too big…. It is the cars being too small.
	BEHIND_SCENES	The post gives followers a behind the scenes sneak peek.	Image shows influencer on a fashion shoot.
	BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT	The posts offer followers a view of backstage at a fashion show	Front row footage of a fashion show.
	RUNWAY-EVENT	The post features footage of fashion show.	The post features footage of a fashion runway show.
	OUTFIT_ROUND_UP	The content of the post consists of a roundup of the influencer's outfits over a period.	e. g., Round up of Cannes Film Festival Red-carpet looks
	FOOD_CONTENT	The content of the post shows food.	Eg. A photo of an influencer's handbag on the table next to a place of food.
	WALKING_POSE	The image has the influencer walking.	The photo shows the influencer walking.
Poses	SOCIAL_POSE	The influencer is posing socially with other people.	A photo of the influencer with friends or colleagues.
	OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE	The influencer face is not visible, and the image shows a closeup of an aspect of the outfit.	The influencer post shows the bottom half of the outfit with the bag and shoes.

	RUNWAY_POSE	The video shows the influencer walk on to screen pose and walk off as though on a runway.	The influencer is seen walking into the frame and standing still for a moment to pose.
	FASHION_POSE	The influencer is posing in an unnatural way that would typically be seen in a fashion image from a fashion magazine.	The influencer is posing in an unnatural way holding a bag Infront of half of her face.
	VIEW_POSE	The influencer turns around to look at the view.	The influencer is looking at the view not the camera.
	CAFÉ_LOCATION	The image shows the influencer at a café location.	“Going for my morning coffee”
Location	HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION	The image is taken on a hotel balcony.	The influencer is stood on a balcony in Paris.
	DOORWAY_LOCATION	The image shows the influencer in a doorway	Influencer s sat Infront of a doorway with cup of coffee.
	STAIRCASE_LOCATION	The image is on or near a staircase.	Posing on a grand staircase.
	LONDON_PROPERTY_LOCATION	The post is located outside a London property.	Image outside a London property or street.
	CLOSET_LOCATION	The post's images are within the influencer 's closet or wardrobe.	The image is taken inside the influencer closet or wardrobe.
	HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION	The post is in a hotel room	Posing in a luxurious hotel room during a trip.
	HOLIDAY_LOCATION	The image is taken at a holiday destination.	Beachside photos or vacation snapshots
	STREET_LOCATION	The images are taken on a street.	The image depicts the influencer walking down a street.
	ZEBRA_CROSSING_LOCATION	The image depicts the influencer crossing a zebra crossing.	The image shows a zebra crossing.
	CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION	The images consist of a city skyline backdrop.	Influencer is posing on top of a city building with a city in the backdrop.
	COUNTRYSIDE_LOCATION	The image is taken in a countryside location	The influencer is posing in a field.
	RED_CARPET_LOCATION	The post shows the influencer on a red carpet	Image at a red-carpet event.
	VENETIAN_BOAT_LOCATION	The post shows the influencer in a Venetian Boat.	The influencer is shown travelling in a Venetian boat.
	STUDIO_LOCATION	The image is taken in a professional studio	The influencer is being photographed for a magazine cover or professional studio shoot.
	INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION	The caption includes a question aimed at encouraging follower interaction.	Posing a question. E. g., Which bag do you like? What is your favourite colour?

	EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION	The caption evokes an emotional connection with followers or a product.	"Retracing the steps that brought me to where I am today. Meeting my husband, starting my degree, finishing my PhD, and starting my career, from place to place along the streets of Manchester. I cannot wait to make the next step forward! (wearing Calzedonia of course) “
Caption	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	Whether a luxury brand is mentioned	Chanel Summer – which one would you pick?
	AMBASSADOR_CAPTION	The post references the influencer as having ambassador status.	Thank you for making me a new brand ambassador and for having me for the Vision & Virtuosity Exhibition!
	AD_CAPTION	Posts indicating advertisements.	#AD
	FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION	Use of fashion-specific language.	"Exploring the latest haute couture. "
	FASHION_KNOWLEDGE_CAPTION	Demonstration of deep fashion knowledge.	"This collection pays homage to... "
	FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION	The post mentions or depicts a fashion event	Attending Paris Fashion Week!
	DOUBLE_ENTENDRES_CAPTION	Phrases that can be understood in two diverse ways, often with one meaning being humorous or risqué.	Daily Greens in LDN
	PRODUCT_TAG	The products are either tagged or mentioned	The influencer has used the tagging function to tag the products or the brand/ collection

4.1.2. Code Theme Mapping

Following the inductive coding phase, a second stage involved grouping individual codes into six overarching thematic categories. This thematic organisation enabled a more layered interpretation of how influencer construct and negotiate luxury within digital fashion communication. Each code was mapped onto one of the following themes:

- **Aspirational Branding and the Performance of Luxury** – Encompasses codes highlighting the display of affluence and status, including conspicuous consumption, brand alignment, and fashion industry social capital.
- **Digital Fashion Narratives: Luxury as Storytelling** – Captures editorial-style communication practices that draw on fashion-specific language, insider knowledge, and event-based content to position influencers credible tastemakers.
- **The Blurred Lines of Relatability and Exclusivity** – Reflects the strategic interplay between accessibility and aspiration, where authenticity is curated alongside an elite fashion persona.
- **The Spatial Language of Luxury: Location as a Status Symbol** – Groups codes exploring how physical and digital spaces, such as iconic travel destinations and exclusive events, function as signifiers of luxury.

- **Visual Aesthetics and Editing Techniques in Digital Luxury** – Includes stylistic and technical choices, such as composition, lighting, and post-production, which shape the visual language of luxury.
- **The Tension Between Commercialisation and Editorial Identity** – Addresses how influencer navigate brand sponsorships while sustaining an aura of exclusivity and editorial autonomy.

This thematic mapping supports a more structured understanding of influencer luxury communication, highlighting the complex ways LFIs mediate aspirational identity, industry legitimacy, and brand affiliation within the *"new digital fashion system"*.

TABLE 15 CODEBOOK TO THEMATIC CATEGORISATION SOURCE: AUTHOR.

Theme	Code
Aspirational Branding and the Performance of Luxury	CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION
	INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL
	MODEL_ACT
	AMBASSADOR_CAPTION
	RITUALISATION_CONTENT
	CAR_ACT
	GET_DRESSED_ACT
	SOCIAL_POSE
	SKI_ACT
	VIEW_POSE
Digital Fashion Narratives: Luxury as Storytelling	CULTURAL_REFERENCES
	INDUSTRY_TENURE
	FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION
	FASHION_KNOWLEDGE_CAPTION
	FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION
	RUNWAY-EVENT
	BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT
	SYMBOLIC_SIGNIFICANCE
	BEHIND_SCENES
	OUTFIT_ROUND_UP
	STATIC_IMAGE
	STATIC_CAROUSEL
	MIXED_CAROUSEL
	REEL
The Blurred Lines of Relatability and Exclusivity	AUTHENTIC_ACT
	DAILY_LIFE
	HUMOUR_CONTENT
	INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION
	EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION
	MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT
	FOOD_CONTENT
	SIGNIFICANT_PERSONAL_LIFE
The Spatial Language of Luxury: Location as a Status Symbol	CAFE_LOCATION
	HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION
	LONDON_PROPERTY_LOCATION
	HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION
	HOLIDAY_LOCATION
	RED_CARPET_LOCATION
	CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION
	DOORWAY_LOCATION
	STAIRCASE_LOCATION
	CLOSET_LOCATION
	STREET_LOCATION

	ZEBRA_CROSSING_LOCATION
	COUNTRYSIDE_LOCATION
	HOME_LOCATION
	STUDIO_LOCATION
	VENETIAN_BOAT_LOCATION
The Tension Between Commercialisation and Editorial Identity	AD_CAPTION
	PRODUCT_TAG
	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION
	SHOP_ACT
	UNBOXING_ACT
	DOUBLE_ENTENDRES_CAPTION
	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION
Visual Aesthetics and Editing Techniques in Digital Luxury	TRANSITION
	GOLDEN_HOUR
	OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE
	RUNWAY_POSE
	FASHION_POSE
	WALKING_POSE
	CURATED_ACCESSORIES

4.1.3. Overview Of the Data

TABLE 16 TOTAL OVERVIEW OF THE DATA INCLUDING TOTAL COUNTS AND STATISTICAL PERCENTAGES SOURCE: AUTHOR.

Code	Total Count	Percentage
MODEL_ACT	304	77. 9
BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	234	60. 0
INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL	123	31. 5
FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION	113	29. 0
CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION	96	24. 6
STREET_LOCATION	83	21. 3
EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION	75	19. 2
INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION	75	19. 2
CURATED_ACCESSORIES	72	18. 5
AD_CAPTION	70	17. 9
AUTHENTIC_ACT	69	17. 7
WALKING_POSE	69	17. 7
FASHION_POSE	68	17. 4
HOLIDAY_LOCATION	62	15. 9
DAILY_LIFE	61	15. 6
HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION	56	14. 4
OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE	55	14. 1
RUNWAY_POSE	48	12. 3
MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT	44	11. 3
OUTFIT_ROUND_UP	43	11. 0
HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION	40	10. 3
FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION	38	9. 7
RITUALISATION_CONTENT	37	9. 5
RUNWAY_EVENT	37	9. 5
FASHION_KNOWLEDGE_CAPTION	37	9. 5
SOCIAL_POSE	36	9. 2
INDUSTRY_TENURE	33	8. 5
FOOD_CONTENT	33	8. 5
TRANSITION	33	8. 5
GET_DRESSED_ACT	32	8. 2
SIGNIFICANT_PERSONAL_LIFE	31	7. 9
PRODUCT_TAG	30	7. 7
BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT	30	7. 7
BEHIND_SCENES	29	7. 4
SALE_LANGUAGE_CAPTION	28	7. 2
CLOSET_LOCATION	28	7. 2

RED_CARPET_LOCATION	26	6. 7
CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION	25	6. 4
COFFEE_ACT	25	6. 4
VIEW_POSE	24	6. 2
HOME_LOCATION	24	6. 2
ZEBRA_CROSSING_LOCATION	23	5. 9
GOLDEN_HOUR	21	5. 4
HUMOUR_CONTENT	20	5. 1
DOORWAY_LOCATION	19	4. 9
CAFE_LOCATION	19	4. 9
CAR_ACT	16	4. 1
COUNTRYSIDE_LOCATION	15	3. 8
STAIRCASE_LOCATION	14	3. 6
AMBASSADOR_CAPTION	13	3. 3
DOUBLE_ENTENDRES_CAPTION	13	3. 3
BOTTOM_UP	12	3. 1
LONDON_PROPERTY_LOCATION	8	2. 1
VENETIAN_BOAT_LOCATION	7	1. 8
STUDIO_LOCATION	7	1. 8
UNBOXING_ACT	7	1. 8
SKI_ACT	6	1. 5
SHOP_ACT	6	1. 5

The table provides a quantitative dataset summary of the 390 LFI Instagram posts that were coded using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) , showing each code's total counts and percentages from the qualitative content analysis. Below is a brief interpretation of the results:

4.1.4. Most Dominant Practices (Above 50%):

- MODEL_ACT (77. 9%): This code dominates the dataset, indicating that most influencer posts professionally display clothing or accessories. This suggests that LFIs primarily function is digital brand ambassadors, where the emphasis is on polished and aspirational imagery.
- BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION (60. 0%): Over half of the analysed posts explicitly reference brand names within their captions, highlighting the integral role of influencer in directly marketing luxury brands and reinforcing their association with specific labels.

4.1.5. Mid-Range Frequencies (10–50%):

- INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL (31. 5%): A notable percentage of posts emphasise Influencers' relationships with brands or designers, displaying their connections within the fashion industry to build authority.
- FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION (29. 0%): Mentions of high-profile fashion events reflect Influencers' deliberate alignment with luxury fashion calendars, increasing their status as tastemakers.
- CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION (24. 6%): Almost a quarter of the posts involve overt displays of luxury items, indicating that aspirational, wealth-signalling content remains a key strategy for engagement.

- STREET_LOCATION (21. 3%): Posts in street settings point to Influencers' use of everyday environments to create relatable yet aspirational narratives.

4.1.6. Strategic Relatability (10–20%):

- Codes such as AUTHENTIC_ACT (17. 7%), DAILY_LIFE (15. 6%), and MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT (11. 3%) indicate that influencers strategically incorporate relatable, candid content into their posts. These elements develop a connection with their audience while balancing aspirational content.
- CURATED_ACCESSORIES (18. 5%) and WALKING_POSE (17. 7%) shows how influencer highlight details and incorporate dynamic imagery to maintain visual interest and aesthetic cohesion.

4.1.7. Less Frequent Practices (<10%):

- GOLDEN_HOUR (5. 4%) and TRANSITION (8. 5%) reflect selective editing and stylistic choices. While rare, these practices carry strong symbolic associations with luxury, exclusivity, and innovation and appear to be trend lead.

- UNBOXING_ACT (1. 8%) and SKI_ACT (1. 5%) represent niche content types that may appeal to specific audience segments or align with specific brand campaigns.

4.1.8. Emergent Themes and Patterns:

- The presence of RITUALISATION_CONTENT (9. 5%) and FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION (9. 7%) indicates that influencer integrate storytelling techniques and specialised language to reinforce their authority and connection to the luxury fashion world.
- High percentages for EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION (19. 2%) and INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION (19. 2%) show that many posts aim to increase engagement and emotional connections with followers, blending commercial goals with community-building.

4.1.9. Analysis Implications

At this stage of the analysis the following implications arise, these require further interrogation.

- Codes such as MODEL_ACT, CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION, and BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION suggest that LFIs primarily position themselves as aspirational figures tightly aligned with luxury branding narratives.

- Including AUTHENTIC_ACT, DAILY_LIFE, and MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT highlights a deliberate diversification of content strategies to maintain relatability and broaden appeal.
- Though rare, codes such as GOLDEN_HOUR and UNBOXING_ACT carry significant symbolic weight in constructing the allure of luxury. Their infrequent use aligns with the semiotic principle of rarity as a marker of exclusivity.
- Interaction-focused codes such as INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION and emotional cues (EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION) suggest that the LFIs in this research prioritise audience engagement alongside visual storytelling.

4.1.10. Ranked Co-occurrences

TABLE 17 RANKED CO-OCCURRENCES SOURCE: AUTHOR.

Category	Total Co-Occurrences
MODEL_ACT	2279
BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	1884
INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL	1117
FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION	975
CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION	813
STREET_LOCATION	740
EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION	645
FASHION_POSE	638
INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION	638
CURATED_ACCESSORIES	630
AD_CAPTION	618
AUTHENTIC_ACT	592
HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION	536
OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE	503
WALKING_POSE	490
DAILY_LIFE	450
HOLIDAY_LOCATION	434
FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION	404
OUTFIT_ROUND_UP	395
MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT	393
FASHION_KNOWLEDGE_CAPTION	388
SOCIAL_POSE	376
RUNWAY_POSE	357
RUNWAY_EVENT	347
HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION	344
RITUALISATION_CONTENT	344
BEHIND_SCENES	331
BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT	324
PRODUCT_TAG	313
INDUSTRY_TENURE	309
RED_CARPET_LOCATION	292
FOOD_CONTENT	289
TRANSITION	286
SALE_LANGUAGE_CAPTION	275
SIGNIFICANT_PERSONAL_LIFE	263
CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION	263

GET_DRESSED_ACT	253
COFFEE_ACT	242
HOME_LOCATION	214
VIEW_POSE	210
CLOSET_LOCATION	207
GOLDEN_HOUR	199
ZEBRA_CROSSING_LOCATION	197
DOORWAY_LOCATION	183
AMBASSADOR_CAPTION	167
HUMOUR_CONTENT	159
CAFE_LOCATION	152
CAR_ACT	149
STAIRCASE_LOCATION	146
CULTURAL_REFERENCES	138
COUNTRYSIDE_LOCATION	131
DOUBLE_ENTENDRES_CAPTION	116
BOTTOM_UP	108
LONDON_PROPERTY_LOCATION	96
STUDIO_LOCATION	85
UNBOXING_ACT	66
SHOP_ACT	66
VENETIAN_BOAT_LOCATION	54
SKI_ACT	37

The ranked co-occurrences table provides another opportunity for analysing the dominant themes and communicative strategies of luxury fashion influencer (LFIs) on Instagram. The table highlights the recurring semiotic and textual elements that structure influencer content by quantifying how frequently specific categories appear alongside others.

The prominence of *MODEL_ACT* (2,279) and *BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION* (1,884) underscores the centrality of modelling practices and explicit brand affiliations in influencer communication, reinforcing their role as aspirational figures who blend self-presentation with commercial imperatives. Similarly, the high frequency of *INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL* (1,117) and

FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION (975) suggests that LFIs leverage their embeddedness within the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’* to authenticate their status, aligning with Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of cultural capital.

Moreover, the presence of *CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION* (813) within the top-tier categories confirms the sustained relevance of Veblen’s (1899) theory of conspicuous consumption, indicating that luxury consumption remains a key narrative device.

Meanwhile, *STREET_LOCATION* (740) signals the continued aestheticisation of urban space, reinforcing the performative nature of fashion communication in digital culture. The co-occurrence of *EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION* (645) and *INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION* (638) also suggests that LFIs actively develop audience engagement, blending exclusivity with relatability to sustain their influence.

This ranking is particularly useful as it reveals dominant thematic patterns and enables further comparative analysis. For example, the positioning of *HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION* (536) and *HOLIDAY_LOCATION* (434) relative to industry-driven categories suggests a tension between professional legitimacy and leisure-based lifestyle branding. Similarly, lower-ranking categories such as *SHOP_ACT* (66) and *UNBOXING_ACT* (66) indicate that direct commercial transactions are less emphasised than more performative, aspirational forms of consumption. This structure allows for a more in-depth investigation into the semiotic strategies that distinguish luxury fashion influencer from mainstream fashion content creators, offering insights into the evolving language of digital fashion communication.

4.1.11. Total Overlap Count

TABLE 18 TOTAL OVERLAP COUNT SOURCE: AUTHOR.

Category	Most Overlapping Category	Overlap Count
BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	MODEL_ACT	203
INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL	MODEL_ACT	110
FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	104
STREET_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	76
AD_CAPTION	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	67
FASHION_POSE	MODEL_ACT	66
CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION	MODEL_ACT	64
WALKING_POSE	MODEL_ACT	62
EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION	MODEL_ACT	62
INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION	MODEL_ACT	58
OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE	MODEL_ACT	53
AUTHENTIC_ACT	MODEL_ACT	48
HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	48
CURATED_ACCESSORIES	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	45
RUNWAY_POSE	MODEL_ACT	43
HOLIDAY_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	43
OUTFIT_ROUND_UP	MODEL_ACT	38
DAILY_LIFE	MODEL_ACT	36
RUNWAY_EVENT	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	36
FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	35
HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	35
RITUALISATION_CONTENT	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	34
FASHION_KNOWLEDGE_CAPTION	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	33
INDUSTRY_TENURE	MODEL_ACT	32
MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT	MODEL_ACT	31
SOCIAL_POSE	MODEL_ACT	31
TRANSITION	MODEL_ACT	30
GET_DRESSED_ACT	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	29
BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT	MODEL_ACT	29
BEHIND_SCENES	MODEL_ACT	27
SALE_LANGUAGE_CAPTION	MODEL_ACT	27
PRODUCT_TAG	MODEL_ACT	26
RED_CARPET_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	25
SIGNIFICANT_PERSONAL_LIFE	EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION	25
CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	20
VIEW_POSE	MODEL_ACT	20
FOOD_CONTENT	DAILY_LIFE	20

COFFEE_ACT	DAILY_LIFE	20
CLOSET_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	19
ZEBRA_CROSSING_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	19
GOLDEN_HOUR	MODEL_ACT	18
DOORWAY_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	17
HUMOUR_CONTENT	MODEL_ACT	15
CAFE_LOCATION	FOOD_CONTENT	15
CULTURAL_REFERENCES	MODEL_ACT	14
COUNTRYSIDE_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	13
STAIRCASE_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	13
HOME_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	12
CAR_ACT	MODEL_ACT	12
AMBASSADOR_CAPTION	MODEL_ACT	11
BOTTOM_UP	MODEL_ACT	11
DOUBLE_ENTENDRES_CAPTION	MODEL_ACT	9
STUDIO_LOCATION	INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL	6
VENETIAN_BOAT_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	6
UNBOXING_ACT	BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	6
LONDON_PROPERTY_LOCATION	MODEL_ACT	5
SKI_ACT	MODEL_ACT	4
SHOP_ACT	CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION	4

4.1.12. Heat Map of Co-Occurrence Matrix

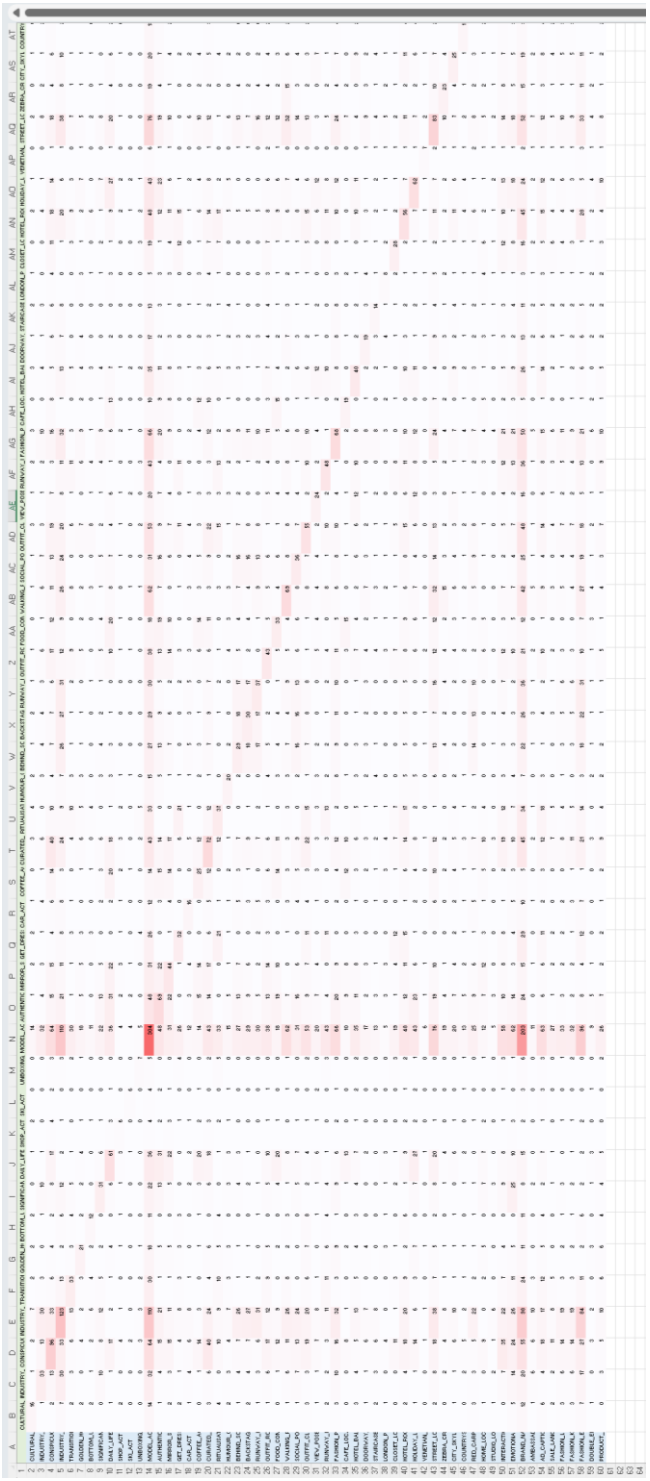


FIGURE 19: HEATMAP OF CO-OCCURRENCE PATTERNS IN LFI COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES SOURCE: AUTHOR.

QR Code 1 This QR code will give access to a Pdf of the Heat map. Greenwood, C. (2025) Heat map of co-occurrence data. Available at: https://storage2. me-qr. com/pdf/e67dc99f-27b4-4692-890b-a71879350fef. pdf (Accessed: 11 March 2025). Source: Author

4.1.13. Mapping Co-Occurrences: Strategic Intersections in LFI Communication

A combined analysis of the total overlap count table and co-occurrence heat map offers a detailed view of how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) coordinate their content strategies on Instagram. These tools reveal the frequency and intensity with which specific practices co-occur, demonstrating the underlying logic of visibility, status signalling, and branding characterising the influencer economy.

The total overlap count table establishes MODEL_ACT as the most dominant category, frequently appearing alongside BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION (203 overlaps), INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL (110), and STREET_LOCATION (76). These combinations point to the foundational role of self-modelling in luxury fashion communication, where bodily performance functions as a vehicle for brand visibility and symbolic affiliation. LFIs construct aspirational identities through curated self-presentation, using their bodies to showcase clothing and enact luxury itself.

Brand visibility emerges as a key strategic focus. BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION overlaps extensively with FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION (104), AD_CAPTION (67), and CURATED_ACCESSORIES (45), underscoring the integration of brand signifiers across both visual and textual layers. While SHOP_ACT is notably underrepresented (4 overlaps), its limited presence alongside CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION (64) suggests that luxury is

performed more through aesthetic display than through direct representations of shopping. This supports Veblen's (1899) notion of conspicuous consumption as a symbolic, rather than practical, mode of distinction.

Beyond performance and branding, the data reveals additional narrative strategies. The co-occurrence of SIGNIFICANT_PERSONAL_LIFE and EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION (25) suggests that personal disclosures are often leveraged to engage audience intimacy, positioning LFIs as relatable and aspirational figures. Similarly, overlaps between FOOD_CONTENT and DAILY_LIFE (20) point to the aestheticisation of the mundane, where everyday moments are transformed into visual expressions of lifestyle and taste.

These quantitative patterns are visually reinforced through the co-occurrence heat map, which reveals the strength of these interconnections and highlights dominant thematic clusters. Once again, MODEL_ACT is the central axis around which other practices coalesce. Its strong associations with INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL (110), CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION (64), and BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION (203) point to a performative economy where influencer identity is carefully crafted through combinations of self-styling, brand alignment, and elite social positioning.

This composite performance echoes the editorial persona traditionally constructed in fashion media, where the model figure is both a muse and a marketer. LFIs replicate and adapt this logic for digital platforms, presenting themselves as passive endorsers who embody luxury through visual cues and implied affiliations. Their self-branding strategies rely on aesthetic polish and

proximity to fashion institutions, whether through Fashion Week attendance, brand collaborations, or product placements.

At the same time, the heat map highlights the calculated use of authenticity as a complementary tactic. AUTHENTIC_ACT frequently co-occurs with DAILY_LIFE (31 overlaps), MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT (22), and EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION (19), indicating that relatability is deliberately woven into influencer content. These overlaps show how authenticity functions not as a spontaneous expression but as a performative strategy designed to promote engagement and develop parasocial intimacy with followers. LFIs blend exclusivity with carefully curated “realness,” using everyday aesthetics to humanise their otherwise aspirational personas.

Spatial context also plays a significant semiotic role. The heat map reveals that luxury is communicated through styling, branding, and location choices. STREET_LOCATION (76 overlaps) and HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION (48) emerge as dominant settings, each carrying distinct connotations. The former often appears alongside MODEL_ACT, BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION, and CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION, reinforcing a high-fashion, street-style aesthetic that retains elite status markers. Meanwhile, HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION and HOLIDAY_LOCATION (43 overlaps) reflect the ongoing significance of travel as a symbol of affluence. Other spatial categories, such as CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION (20) and RED-CARPET_LOCATION (25), extend this by signalling event-based exclusivity and access to elite urban spaces.

The total overlap count and heat map data provide a granular understanding of how LFIs construct their digital presence. The core themes of performance, branding, authenticity, and spatial capital emerge not in isolation but through dense interconnections. This analysis reveals the semiotic mechanisms through which influencer discourse is produced: a carefully balanced interplay between aspirational display, commercial alignment, and the aestheticisation of everyday life. In mapping these patterns, it becomes possible to trace the evolving narrative structures that underpin luxury fashion communication in the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’*.

4.1.14. Date of Posts

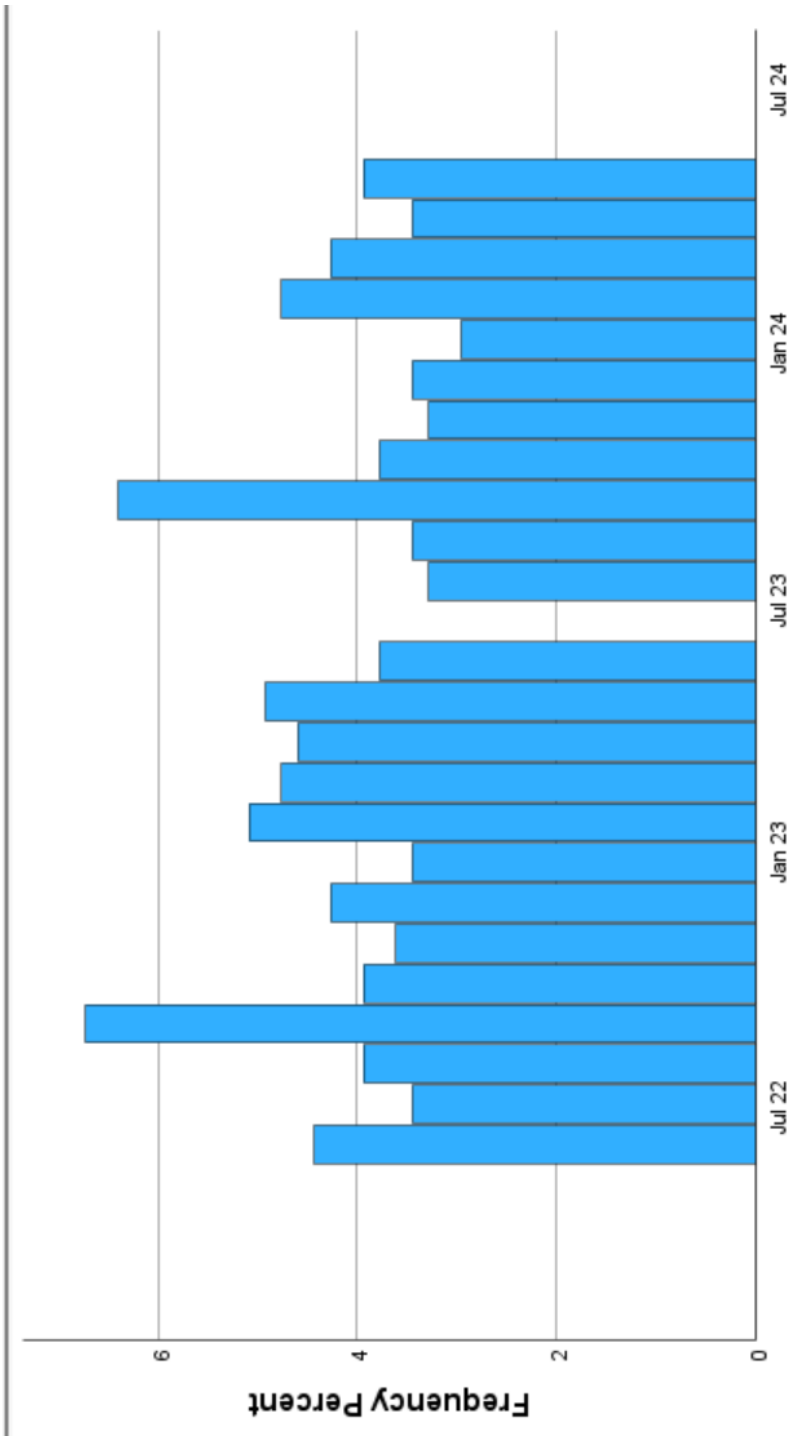


FIGURE 20 BAR CHART SHOWING THE FREQUENCY PERCENTAGE OF INFLUENCER POSTS PER MONTH OVER A TWO-YEAR PERIOD, HIGHLIGHTING FLUCTUATIONS IN POSTING ACTIVITY, WITH PEAKS OBSERVED IN SEPTEMBER 2022, SEPTEMBER 2023, AND FEBRUARY 2024. SOURCE: AUTHOR.

This research additionally examines the posting behaviours of luxury fashion influencer (LFIs) between May 2022 and June 2024, providing a two-year snapshot of their engagement with Instagram. The bar chart illustrates their monthly posting frequency, highlighting key trends and patterns. Notably, spikes in activity coincide with significant milestones within the fashion industry, such as the September and March issues of leading fashion magazines, including *Vogue* and *Elle*, which have long played a pivotal role in shaping seasonal trends and presenting new collections (see Findlay, 2019; Rocamora, 2022). These months also align with the internationally recognised fashion weeks in New York, London, Milan, and Paris, reinforcing the industry's cyclical nature and embedded temporal structures (see Kawamura, 2005).

The synchronisation of LFIs ' activity with these established industry events suggests a deliberate content strategy wherein influencer align their posts with high-visibility moments in the fashion calendar to maximise reach and engagement (Rocamora, 2022). While often framed as disruptors to traditional media, LFIs appear to function within existing industry rhythms rather than outside them (Findlay, 2015). This raises questions about their perceived independence from traditional fashion media: To what extent do LFIs challenge legacy fashion institutions, and to what degree do they remain tethered to their structures of influence? Their role may not represent a radical break from the past but rather an adaptation of conventional media practices into a digital landscape (Abidin, 2016; Duffy, 2017).

Moreover, this data invites scrutiny of whether traditional fashion media continues to dictate fashion discourse. Despite the emergence of digital platforms and influencer culture, the enduring influence of traditional media suggests a negotiation rather than a complete rupture between old and new communication systems (Rocamora, 2009; Duffy, 2017). If LFIs deliberately post during these key moments, are they leveraging traditional media's authority or inadvertently reinforcing its dominance? This reflects a broader tension within the luxury fashion system: while digital influencer have reconfigured modes of engagement, they remain bound to the institutional logic of the industry (Bourdieu, 1984; Rocamora, 2022).

Critically, this alignment challenges the notion of influencers purely disruptive forces in fashion communication. Rather than entirely dismantling traditional gatekeeping structures, LFIs may be engaged in a process of co-optation, where digital influence is legitimised through adherence to pre-existing fashion cycles (Barthes, 1983; Findlay, 2019). This calls for further interrogation of the shifting power dynamics within luxury fashion: Does this interconnectedness indicate a transformation in fashion narratives, or does it reveal a continuity of symbolic and structural dependencies? This research highlights the evolving yet interdependent relationship between digital and traditional media in shaping contemporary luxury fashion communication.

STATIC_IMAGE	A single static image post structure is the simplest format, allowing LFIs to display an outfit or luxury product in a highly controlled, visually curated setting.	 ***QR Code 2 @tamarakalinic. (2022) 'What drink would you carry with you at all times?', Instagram post, 10 August. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/ChC-5tmtHhP/ (Accessed: 11 March 2025).***
STATIC_CAROUSEL	This code refers to a carousel post structure with multiple static images, allowing LFIs to show several outfits, angles, or moments in a single post	 ***QR Code 3 @victoria. (2023) '10 photos cannot sum up this place. Honeymoon is off to a flying start. Feeling so in love and so grateful ❤️', Instagram post, 31 October. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy2w_uOPSi1/ (Accessed: 11 March 2025).***
MIXED_CAROUSEL	These carousels post structures combine static images and videos, offering a dynamic mix of content that can communicate more storytelling.	 ***QR Code 4 @leoniehanne. (2023) 'Nights at @principesavoia 🖤 Anzeige/Tag Had to post the original audio of Alex filming this video! Wearing @gcdswear 🫶 @dorchestercollection', Instagram post, 21 September. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CxQE_I5RkIu/ (Accessed: 11 March 2025).***
REEL	A short-form video post structure that often shows LFIs in motion, offering a more immersive and interactive experience for followers.	 ***QR Code 5 @leoniehanne. (2024) 'Back to Paris and excited [to] create more memories at @plaza_athenee 🌹 Anzeige/Tag Found these moments on my phone - what was your fave? #plazaathenee #DCmoments @dorchestercollection', Instagram post, 5 March. Available at: https://www.instagram.***

		COM/P/C38FWV_OA-Y/ (ACCESSED: 11 MARCH 2025).

4.1.15. Overview of Post Structure and Distribution

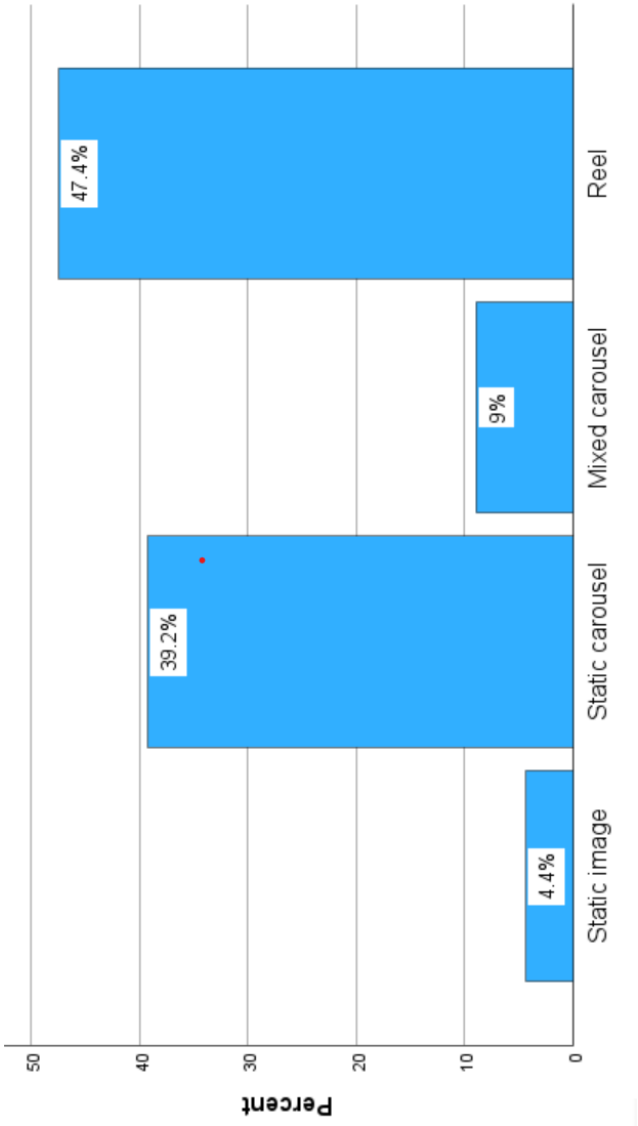


FIGURE 21 THE BAR CHART ILLUSTRATES THE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF POST STRUCTURES UTILISED BY INFLUENCER ON INSTAGRAM, SHOWCASING THE VARIETY IN POST STRUCTURES. SOURCE: AUTHOR.

Figure 23 presents a bar chart illustrating the percentage distribution of post structures employed by the LFIs on Instagram over two years. This visual representation highlights the varied use of content formats, a key insight into how LFIs strategically tailor their content to communicate luxury fashion narratives and engage their audiences.

- **Static Image (4. 4%)**: Representing the least used format, static images account for only 4. 4% of posts. While offering aesthetic control, their limited engagement potential accounts for this low usage. This aligns with Instagram's platform-wide shift towards video content, evidenced by a Statista (2024) report showing increased engagement for Reels (from 4. 5% to 6. 92%) and decreased interaction with static posts.

- **Static Carousel (39. 2%)**: As one of the most popular formats, static carousels make up 39. 2% of posts. Their ability to showcase multiple visuals within a single post makes them well-suited to detailed storytelling, allowing LFIs to communicate a layered narrative without video.

- **Mixed Carousel (9%)**: Combining still images and video, mixed carousels account for 9% of posts. This format improves storytelling abilities through multimodal content and is often utilised during high-activity periods such as fashion months. However, its lower uptake may stem from production demands or a lack of coherence across media types.

- **Reels (47. 4%)**: Reels dominate the landscape, comprising 47. 4% of all posts. These short-form videos align closely with Instagram's algorithmic preferences and user behaviour trends, allowing influencer

to display motion, trend alignment, and creativity, essential attributes in the competitive luxury fashion space.

The data reveals a substantial shift toward dynamic content, particularly short-form video, reflecting Instagram's algorithmic prioritisation of Reels. This is less an aesthetic evolution than a response to platform capitalism's influence on influencers strategy (Beer, 2017). As Rocamora (2022) observes, engagement logic now governs visibility, prompting influencer to adapt formats to maintain reach.

However, the ongoing popularity of static carousels signals the lasting appeal of image-based storytelling. Reminiscent of editorial spreads, carousels represent a digital recalibration rather than a departure from pre-digital visual codes (Findlay, 2017; Rocamora, 2009). They blend luxury's aesthetic coherence with enhanced interactivity, bridging legacy media and platform demands.

In contrast, mixed carousels remain underused, due to tensions between narrative cohesion and the distinct semiotic logics of image and video. As Abidin (2016) argues, while platforms offer new modes of engagement, influencer content often remains anchored in established visual norms. Mixed formats may disrupt the visual harmony luxury fashion typically upholds.

Though rare, single static images serve a strategic role. These posts emphasise products, outfits, or intimate moments with clarity and restraint. Their simplicity evokes luxury's traditional associations with exclusivity and

distinction (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Rocamora, 2012), acting as semiotic anchors within an otherwise saturated visual landscape.

This section has examined how LFI post structures reflect a negotiation between platform affordances and luxury aesthetics. While Reels dominate due to algorithmic pressures, carousels and static images persist as meaningful formats. These insights inform the typology developed in Chapter 5 (Section 5. 3), where most structures are theorised as key semiotic forms within the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’*.

4.1.16. The Caption as Strategic Discourse in the "new digital fashion system"

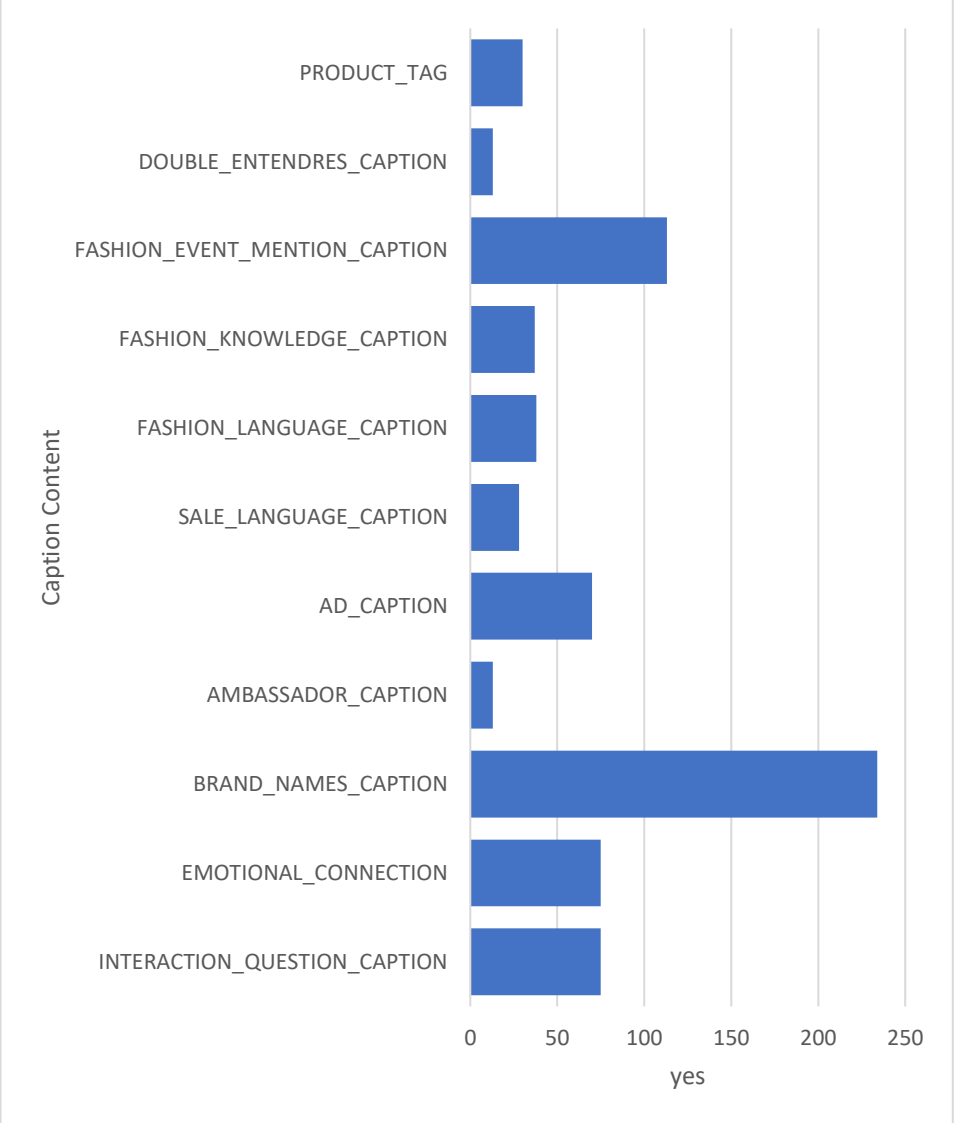


FIGURE 22 BAR CHART SHOWING THE FREQUENCY OF VARIOUS CAPTION CONTENT TYPES USED BY LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER ACROSS 390 INSTAGRAM POSTS. SOURCE: AUTHOR.

While much of luxury fashion influence is visually constructed through styling, location and composition, this section foregrounds the caption as a crucial yet often under-analysed site of meaning-making. More than textual support, captions operate as strategic spaces where commercial intent intersects with self-expression, and where branding logics converge with digital identity work. Within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’, captions function to describe, direct, perform and optimise. They shape engagement, articulate brand narratives and reinforce influencer authority.

The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) analysis highlights the intentionality underpinning caption use. BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION (60.0 %) is the most frequent code, confirming brand visibility as a consistent communicative priority, even when articulated subtly. This tendency aligns with visual strategies such as OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE and OUTFIT_CLOSE_UP_POSE, where branding is present yet controlled. FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION also appears with high frequency, signalling the continued importance of aligning posts with fashion weeks, product launches and industry moments to affirm insider status and cultural legitimacy.

Triangulation between qualitative interpretation and quantitative mapping strengthened the abductive reasoning that guided this study. Co-occurrence analysis revealed clear pose–location–caption patterns. For example, posts coded as MODEL_ACT and FASHION_POSE frequently coincided with STREET_LOCATION or HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION and were paired with BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION or FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION. This

clustering indicated that textual strategies reinforce the symbolic cues communicated visually, confirming that captions and imagery operate together as a unified semiotic system. These triangulated findings guided the refinement of the typology by demonstrating how textual markers participate directly in signalling taste, status and brand affiliation.

Notably, EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION and INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION appear frequently, illustrating that captions also work to cultivate reciprocity and relatability. This pattern parallels visual motifs such as the WALKING_POSE, which blends spontaneity with stylised control. Caption practices thus reveal layered communicative work: part affective, part aspirational, part algorithmically strategic.

Less common codes, including PRODUCT_TAG (7.7 %), AMBASSADOR_CAPTION (3.3 %) and DOUBLE_ENTENDRES_CAPTION, suggest a broader preference for strategic vagueness. As discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.7), this tendency reflects luxury's long-standing reliance on mystique rather than explicit disclosure. Consistent with Dion and Arnould's (2011) argument, connotation rather than clarity drives symbolic value, a pattern evident in minimal tagging and oblique narrative framing.

Barthes' Fashion System (1967 [1983]) provides a productive interpretive lens. His distinction between the real garment, the image garment and the written garment translates effectively to the digital field, with the caption functioning as the contemporary written layer. Yet, unlike traditional fashion journalism, Instagram captions are shaped by platform governance and optimisation

demands (Cotter, 2019). They become hybrid communicative forms, combining narrative voice with algorithmic awareness.

This hybridity is particularly evident in the way luxury is suggested rather than stated. Captions often imply exclusivity, emotional tone or insider knowledge rather than directly naming products or prices. As explored in Section 4.6 on RUNWAY_POSE, luxury influence frequently relies on the connotative force of absence or allusion, aligning with Barthes' emphasis on the symbolic richness of the unstated.

Captions also act as a site of identity performance. Through personal anecdotes, brand references and affective cues, LFIs practise what this research terms 'Strategic Adaptability', the ability to adjust tone and content in response to audience expectations, platform rhythms and brand partnerships while maintaining a coherent personal brand. This extends earlier analyses of MODEL_ACT and TRANSITION into the textual domain, demonstrating how bodily performance and linguistic styling work together to sustain an influencer's digital persona.

Taken together, these findings show that the caption is central to luxury digital branding. Far from peripheral, it is a strategic and symbolically charged layer where meaning is crafted, circulated and sustained. The next section examines how these textual practices intersect with visual codes to construct the layered, platform-responsive narratives that define contemporary luxury fashion influence.

4.2. ASPIRATIONAL BRANDING AND THE PERFORMANCE OF LUXURY

This category encapsulates codes that highlight the modelling of affluence and status, including conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899), brand affiliations, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1984) within the fashion industry.

Key Codes:
CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION,
INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL,
MODEL_ACT,
AMBASSADOR_CAPTION,
RITUALISATION_CONTENT,
CAR_ACT,
GET_DRESSED_ACT,
SOCIAL_POSE,
SKI_ACT,
VIEW_POSE

Key Findings:

- The Model Act category dominates, comprising (77. 9%) of posts, indicating that influence primary position themselves as aspirational figures who display clothing and embody desirable fashion aesthetics.
- *Brand Names Caption* (60%) reinforces brand affiliation and marketing intent.
- *Conspicuous Consumption* (24. 6%) highlights overt luxury displays (e.g., staged handbag collections, designer wardrobe displays).
- *Industry Social Capital* (31. 5%) demonstrates influencer leveraging elite networks (e.g., handwritten notes from designers, exclusive invitations).

FIGURE 23 HIERARCHY OF ASPIRATIONAL BRANDING AND LUXURY PERFORMANCE PRACTICES IN LFI CONTENT.

THIS FIGURE ILLUSTRATES THE SUB-COMPONENTS OF ASPIRATIONAL BRANDING PERFORMED BY LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER(LFI'S) ON INSTAGRAM. EACH BRANCH REPRESENTS A DISTINCT COMMUNICATIVE DEVICE, SUCH AS MODEL ACT, BRAND NAMES CAPTION, CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION, AND INDUSTRY SOCIAL CAPITAL, THAT COLLECTIVELY CONTRIBUTES TO CONSTRUCTING AN ASPIRATIONAL IDENTITY. THESE ELEMENTS REINFORCE INFLUENCERS' ALIGNMENT WITH ELITE FASHION CODES BY STAGING OVERT LUXURY, AFFILIATING WITH PRESTIGE BRANDS, AND SIGNALLING INCLUSION WITHIN INDUSTRY NETWORKS. THE BOTTOM LAYER DEMONSTRATES HOW THESE STRATEGIC ACTS FUNCTION SYMBOLICALLY: TO POSITION THE INFLUENCER AS AN ASPIRATIONAL FIGURE, TO REINFORCE BRAND ALIGNMENT, TO SHOWCASE LUXURY CONSPICUOUSLY, AND TO LEVERAGE SYMBOLIC CAPITAL THROUGH PROXIMITY TO FASHION INSIDERS.

SOURCE: AUTHOR.

4.2.1. The Fashionable Ideal and influencers Digital Models

QR CODE 6 @LEONIEHANNE (13 OCTOBER 2022) ONE DAY IN PARIS DUMP #PARIS. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/CJQP-_7V8TW/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).	***QR CODE 7 @TAMARA (28 JANUARY 2023) I CAN'T GET OVER THIS @MAISONVALENTINO LOOK FOR THEIR HAUTE COUTURE SHOW AND AFTER PARTY. CAN WE PLEASE REPEAT THE VALENTINO CLUB? #VALENTINOCLUB #VALENTINOCOUTURE. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/CN971KKTUBP/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).***

FIGURE 24 EXAMPLE OF THE MODEL ACT IN INFLUENCER POSTS

The predominance of MODEL_ACT posts (77.9 %) confirms the central role of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) as visual mediators of luxury fashion. Identified through the systematic coding of 390 Instagram posts, this category is characterised by highly curated imagery that draws on the aspirational aesthetics foundational to luxury branding. Within these posts, LFIs perform hybridised roles as model, producer, and consumer, constructing what Titton (2015) describes as a 'fashionable persona' that merges self-expression with established industry conventions. As discussed in *Aspirational Branding and the Performance of Luxury*, these performances sustain the ideological grammar of luxury while concealing the labour required to produce such imagery.

These patterns directly operationalise the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. Through Barthes' (1967 [1983]) semiotic lens, MODEL_ACT functions as a signifying unit in which pose, gesture, and framing work together to produce meaning. Codes such as WALKING_POSE, RUNWAY_POSE, VIEW_POSE, and OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE operate as visual signs that communicate ease, exclusivity, and embodied mastery of fashion aesthetics. Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital is enacted through spatial indicators including STREET_LOCATION in elite districts, HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION, and RED_CARPET_LOCATION, each signalling proximity to prestigious fields of cultural production. Veblen's ([1899] 1994) notion of conspicuous consumption is encoded through CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION, CURATED_ACCESSORIES, and BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION, where luxury is rendered visible as symbolic

value. The coding framework thus translates abstract theoretical constructs into systematically identifiable empirical patterns across the dataset.

The concealment of labour evident in MODEL_ACT posts aligns with Abidin's (2016) concept of tacit labour, which describes the continuous, strategic curation of a digital self, designed to appear effortless. LFIs operate simultaneously as aspirational figures and brand intermediaries, a duality reflected in recurring patterns of stylised posing, editorial framing, and cohesive colour palettes. As explored further in *Visual Aesthetics and Editing Techniques in Digital Luxury*, these strategies produce images that are highly polished yet carefully choreographed. Rather than expressing personal style alone, they oscillate between relatability and exclusivity, producing a form of contrived authenticity sustained through narrative captions, visual consistency, and the strategic performance of casualness, as discussed in *The Blurred Lines of Relatability and Exclusivity*.

The remaining 22.1 % of posts introduce more informal or behind-the-scenes content intended to soften the high-gloss aesthetic of MODEL_ACT imagery. However, as analysed in *Curated Imperfection*, these moments are similarly constructed. Even depictions of everyday activities, such as COFFEE_ACT or DAILY_LIFE scenes, function as tools of engagement and algorithmic optimisation. This reflects Abidin's (2016) notion of subversive frivolity, where seemingly inconsequential content sustains visibility within platform economies.

Across the dataset, authenticity emerges not as sincerity but as performative credibility, achieved through visual consistency across commercial and non-

commercial posts. The editorial polish of MODEL_ACT content ensures aesthetic coherence and brand alignment even in the absence of explicit advertising. As discussed in *The Tension Between Commercialisation and Editorial Identity*, this blending of editorial conventions with influencers elf-presentation softens commercial intent while preserving aspiration.

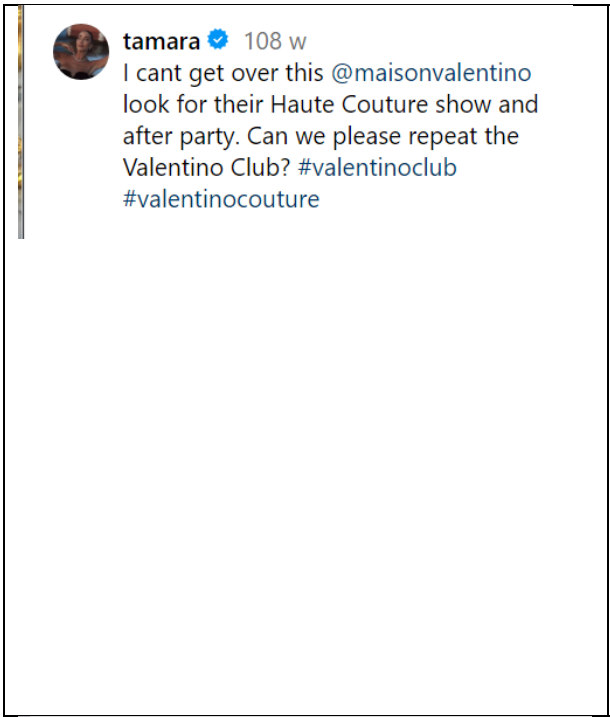
This mimicry raises questions of creative autonomy. While influencer content appears personalised, it frequently reproduces the visual codes of luxury advertising. Recurring techniques such as golden-hour lighting, controlled posing, and seamless transitions suggest that aesthetic choices are shaped as much by branding imperatives and platform affordances as by individual style. As shown in *Aspirational Branding and the Performance of Luxury*, these practices reinforce rather than disrupt dominant visual ideologies. The aesthetic labour underpinning digital glamour remains obscured, yet it is central to sustaining luxury's desirability online.

These practices intersect with broader critiques of digital labour, particularly within feminised forms of online work. As explored in *The Tension Between Commercialisation and Editorial Identity*, influencer branding operates as an economic performance in which the curated persona functions as a monetisable asset, requiring sustained strategic and commercial competence despite its frequent trivialisation.

Finally, the dominance of MODEL_ACT posts highlights the symbiotic relationship between LFIs and luxury brands. As de Perthuis and Findlay (2019) argue, influencers 'package and disseminate the fashionable ideal' through a combination of editorial polish and curated intimacy. This dual

function, as tastemakers and marketing conduits, underpins the typology developed in this study. Influencer content is neither spontaneous nor incidental but constitutes a calculated form of digital storytelling shaped by labour, branding imperatives, and platform logics. Through systematic coding, co-occurrence mapping, and thematic analysis, this research demonstrates how LFIs construct and communicate luxury within the contemporary ‘‘new digital fashion system’’, operationalising semiotics, cultural capital, and conspicuous display as observable empirical practices.

4.2.2. The Referencing of Brand Names



QR Code 8 @tamara (28 January 2023) I can’t get over this @maisonvalentino look for their Haute Couture show and after party. Can we please repeat the Valentino Club? #valentinoclub #valentinocouture. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cn971KktUBp/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025).

QR Code 9 @victoria (15 June 2023) How to

	MAKE YOUR LEGS LOOK LIKE THEY GO ON FOR DAYS... @VICTORIABECKHAM WIDE LEG TROUSERS FOR THE #VBSUMMER PARTY 🎈. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/REEL/CTGIC31IOEZ/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).
	QR CODE 10 @LEONIEHANNE (5 OCTOBER 2023) ANOTHER SEASON AS AMBASSADOR OF @PARISFASHIONWEEK ANZEIGE/ADVERTISING WHICH LOOK IS YOUR FAVE? INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/CYBL4I9O5FY/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 25 EXAMPLE OF THE BRAND NAMES CAPTION CODE IN INFLUENCER POSTS

The BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION category, present in 60.0 % of the dataset, highlights the strategic prominence of explicit brand visibility within LFI communication. By naming luxury labels directly in captions, LFIs assert affiliation with high-end fashion and reinforce their cultural positioning within the luxury field. This practice is not simply descriptive but performative, signalling inclusion within elite fashion circuits. As explored further in *The*

Blurred Lines of Relatability and Exclusivity, brand-affiliated presence operates as a marker of industry capital rather than simple product reference.

The frequency of brand naming invites critical reflection on how luxury communication is being reshaped within digital environments. Historically, luxury branding has relied on scarcity, discretion, and symbolic distance (Bourdieu, 1984; Kapferer, 2012). Social media, by contrast, operates through logics of visibility, repetition, and algorithmic optimisation. As analysed in *Digital Fashion Narratives: Luxury as Storytelling* and *Post Structures for Fashion Communication*, influencer culture functions within participatory and metric-driven systems, where repeated brand visibility does not necessarily erode exclusivity but can reconfigure how luxury value is accrued and recognised. In this study, this shift is understood analytically as a move towards digitally mediated forms of distinction, rather than as a new theoretical model of capital.

This shift is evidenced by notable overlaps between BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION and INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL (31.5 %) and FASHION_EVENT_MENTION (29.0 %). These co-occurrences suggest that brand naming is closely tied to moments of symbolic participation, such as fashion week attendance or campaign involvement. As discussed in *The Blurred Lines of Relatability and Exclusivity*, such moments enable influencers to accrue cultural capital by aligning themselves with prestigious fashion institutions. Brand naming thus functions simultaneously as audience-facing engagement and as a performance of elite affiliation.

The form of these brand mentions is also significant. Rather than relying solely on tagging conventions, influencers frequently adopt conversational and interactive caption styles, for example, “Obsessed with this @Dior runway look what do you think?” This mode of address blurs promotional intent with personal expression, reflecting Barthes’ (1967 [1983]) understanding of fashion as a coded language. Unlike traditional luxury advertising, which operates through suggestion and mystique, this approach foregrounds immediacy, interaction, and algorithmic compatibility. As examined in *Post Structures for Fashion Communication*, this shift signals a transformation in how luxury is signified, moving from distance and restraint towards continuous presence.

This visibility strategy, however, introduces a tension. While repeated brand mentions can reinforce cultural legitimacy, they also risk overexposure and audience desensitisation. Drawing on Baudrillard’s (1993) theory of hyperreality, *Platform-Native Practices in Luxury Influencer Communication* considers whether such repetition transforms luxury from an exclusive symbolic marker into a digitally performed spectacle, where value becomes anchored in saturation rather than rarity.

Commercial imperatives further complicate this dynamic. BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION overlaps with AD_CAPTION (17.9 %) and PRODUCT_TAG (7.7 %), indicating that many brand mentions are commercially motivated even when not explicitly disclosed. *The Tension Between Commercialisation and Editorial Identity* examines this ambiguity, highlighting how blurred boundaries between personal endorsement and

sponsored promotion raise questions of transparency, authenticity, and consumer trust.

These patterns also reflect a broader redistribution of branding control. Where luxury brands once tightly curated their media presence through controlled campaigns and exclusive partnerships, influencers now circulate brand meaning across fragmented, semi-autonomous channels. As discussed in *Post Structures for Fashion Communication*, this shift offers new opportunities for reach and engagement while simultaneously reducing brands' narrative authority.

The dataset suggests that influencers increasingly function as unofficial brand ambassadors, even in ostensibly non-sponsored content. This raises a critical question addressed in *Platform-Native Practices in Luxury Influencer Communication*: to what extent is brand affiliation now recognised through sustained visibility rather than formal endorsement or institutional validation? Within this platformed context, algorithmically mediated visibility can operate alongside, and in some cases partially displace, traditional forms of fashion gatekeeping in shaping who is perceived as influential within the luxury sector.

Ultimately, BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION exemplifies how digital fashion communication is reconfiguring the symbolic function of luxury. Explicit brand naming strengthens influencer credibility and engagement, yet it also signals structural shifts from elite control to participatory branding, from scarcity to saturation, and from implicit distinction to algorithmic presence. This category must therefore be understood not simply as a marketing tactic, but as a key

site where the meaning and value of luxury fashion are actively negotiated within platformed media environments.

4.2.3. The Evolution of Conspicuous Consumption in Digital Fashion Influence

QR CODE 11@VICTORIA (10 APRIL 2023) {AD} COME ALONG WITH ME, @DIORBEAUTY AND THE NEW #DIORSPA ON BOARD THE @BELMONDROYALSCOTSMAN AS THE SCOTTISH COUNTRYSIDE ROLLED BY. A TRIP I'LL NEVER FORGET 🖤. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/REEL/CQ2Z7AUIQ0V/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

QR CODE 12 @LEONIEHANNE (10 JUNE 2022) WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE COLOR? ⚡🌈🎀🐸🌸. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/P/CEOY593DDHB/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 26 EXAMPLE OF THE CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION CODE IN INFLUENCER POSTS

The CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION findings reveal a nuanced relationship between aspirational imagery and the broader branding strategies employed by luxury fashion influencer (LFIs). Approximately one-quarter of posts

(24. 6%) feature overt displays of luxury goods or experiences, signalling status through visible wealth. However, the majority (75. 4%) adopt alternative tactics, suggesting a more diversified and strategic approach to influencers elf-branding that blends aspiration with relatability. This dynamic invites a contemporary re-evaluation of Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class (1899) in digital luxury culture, where visibility, engagement, and access function as forms of status capital (see Platform-Native Practices in Luxury Influencer Communication).

Veblen's (1899) notion of conspicuous consumption, the public display of wealth to assert a class position, reflects with influencer practices, especially in posts showcasing designer goods, couture pieces, and exclusive event access. These prestige performances align with what Veblen ([1899] 1994) termed pecuniary emulation and continue to underpin aspirational communication online (see Steele, 2018). However, unlike purely material displays, the dataset indicates a shift towards experiential consumption, such as invitations to fashion shows, brand collaborations, and backstage content that signal cultural legitimacy within the luxury ecosystem. This shift is further unpacked in The Blurred Lines of Relatability and Exclusivity, which explores fashion event participation as a form of industry capital.

Barthes' (1983) semiotic analysis provides a valuable framework for interpreting these evolving displays. While traditional luxury relies on implicit signifiers such as rarity and craftsmanship (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012), social media demands performativity and visibility. Meaning is constructed through ownership and how that ownership is staged and shared. As discussed in The

Hierarchy Typology, influencer engage in visual storytelling that codes luxury as a lifestyle, foregrounding their status within a networked symbolic system.

The dataset suggests that CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION operates through material display and symbolic participation. While a post featuring a Dior handbag functions as an aesthetic object and status marker, greater emphasis is now placed on access, e. g., attendance at Paris Fashion Week or collaborations with heritage brands. This evolution reflects Dion and Arnould's (2011) argument that experiential rarity, not just object possession, is key to sustaining luxury's allure in digital contexts. It also suggests that the status of luxury has shifted from static ownership to performative visibility (see Post Structures for Fashion Communication).

This reconfiguration complicates Veblen's original framework. While the logic of conspicuous consumption persists, it is increasingly mediated by algorithmic infrastructures that privilege visibility, circulation, and engagement rather than scarcity alone (Rocamora, 2022). In this context, visibility itself functions as a form of status signalling, as influencers accrue symbolic value through sustained exposure, recognisability, and platform legibility. The term *algorithmic conspicuousness* is used here analytically to describe this shift, capturing how conspicuous display is recalibrated within platform economies where attention and engagement operate as forms of capital. It is not proposed as a new theoretical model, but as a heuristic for understanding how established logics of conspicuous consumption are reshaped by algorithmic governance. This dynamic is examined further in *Platform-Native Practices in Luxury Influencer Communication*.

Interestingly, most influencer posts avoid overt displays of wealth, instead adopting a strategic balancing act that blends aspiration with relatability. This approach echoes Bourdieu's (1984) cultural capital theory, where taste and social distinction are signalled through symbolic fluency rather than material excess. Theorising 'Strategic Adaptability' explores this balancing act in depth, highlighting how influencer mitigate the risk of alienating audiences by tempering luxury displays with humility, humour, or personal storytelling.

This dual strategy is evident in posts where influencer frame luxury travel or designer garments within narratives of hard work or emotional resonance, making aspirational content more palatable. As Woodside (2012) observes, brands must appeal to consumers with varying appetites for conspicuous consumption. Influencers, accordingly, curate elite and approachable personas, toggling between glamour and groundedness to maximise engagement (see The Tension Between Commercialisation and Editorial Identity on hybrid branding tactics).

Such content also redefines the boundaries of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899). Rather than signalling status solely through ownership, influencer accrue symbolic capital by displaying access, affiliations, and insider knowledge. Presence at elite fashion events or collaborations with high-status figures become currency, indicators of one's embeddedness in the luxury system (see The Blurred Lines of Relatability and Exclusivity). This mirrors Bourdieu's (1984) understanding of distinction, where social value is increasingly tied to access and embodied cultural knowledge.

As Steele (2018) reminds us, Veblen ([1899] 1994) understood clothing as a key indicator of pecuniary repute. In the contemporary influencer economy, however, status is less tightly bound to garments themselves and increasingly articulated through experiential privilege and sustained digital visibility. The performance of high-status lifestyles, documented, edited, and circulated for maximum exposure, functions as a contemporary marker of distinction. Rocamora (2022) observes that such forms of digital self-presentation convert visibility into symbolic advantage within platform economies, where recognition and reach operate as key resources for differentiation (see *Thematic Categories of LFI Fashion Communication Practices*).

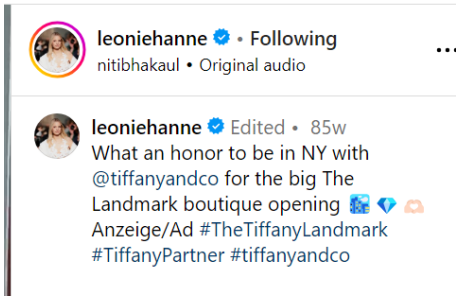
Finally, the findings suggest that conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899) within influencer culture is being reframed. While luxury goods remain central, their function is now complemented by experiential branding, social proximity, and digital storytelling. This evolution reflects the broader logic of the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’ (see Rocamora, 2019), where exclusivity is constructed not through scarcity alone but through constant, curated presence.

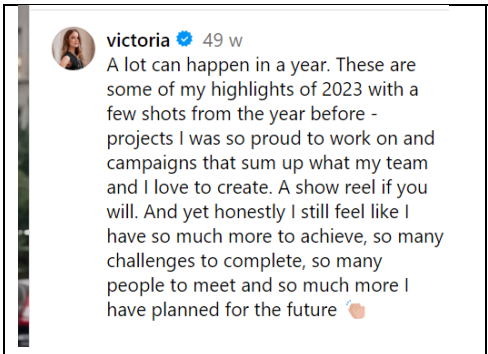
However, this transformation raises ongoing tensions: Can luxury retain its aspirational status when its value is mediated through engagement metrics? Does algorithmic visibility displace traditional fashion gatekeeping? Moreover, how sustainable is this mode of branding amid increasing scrutiny of digital labour and environmental impact? These questions are taken up in Platform-Native Practices in Luxury Influencer Communication and Motivational

Framework for LFI Content Creation, which assess the implications of conspicuous content for the future of luxury branding.

While the logic of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899) endures, it has been recalibrated for the digital age, manifesting in new forms of status performance that are as much about access, narrative, and algorithmic capital as they are about material display.

4.2.4. The Performance of Industry Social Capital in Digital Luxury Influence

	QR Code 13 @leoniehanne (8 June 2022) Hot collab alert: GUCCI x adidas 🤍 Anzeige/Ad @gucci #adidasxGucci. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/CejnP7ppuyz/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025).
	*QR Code 14 @leoniehanne (27 April 2023) What an honor to be in NY with @tiffanyandco for the big The Landmark boutique opening 🎆 💎 🤍 Anzeige/Ad #TheTiffanyLandmark #TiffanyPartner #tiffanyandco. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/CrJcL30pC0_/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025).*



QR CODE 15 @VICTORIA (29 DECEMBER 2023) A LOT CAN HAPPEN IN A YEAR. THESE ARE SOME OF MY HIGHLIGHTS OF 2023 WITH A FEW SHOTS FROM THE YEAR BEFORE – PROJECTS I WAS SO PROUD TO WORK ON AND CAMPAIGNS THAT SUM UP WHAT MY TEAM AND I LOVE TO CREATE.. .. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/REEL/C1CIS-OIO8W/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 27 EXAMPLE OF THE INDUSTRY SOCIAL CAPITAL CODES IN LFI POSTS

The INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL code identifies influencer posts that explicitly showcase relationships with luxury brands, designers, and fashion events. Present in 31. 5% of the dataset, this category reveals the strategic significance of social capital as a performance of authority and embeddedness within luxury fashion's elite circles. Whether through brand collaborations, front-row appearances, or personalised gifts, these displays reinforce the influencer's credibility and integration within the fashion hierarchy (see The Blurred Lines of Relatability and Exclusivity for a discussion of event participation as symbolic capital).

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) theory, social capital is accrued through affiliations and networks, and when publicly displayed, it affirms one's legitimacy and access to exclusive spaces. Within influencer culture, these relationships are often visualised through semiotic cues, handwritten notes from designers, tagged images at fashion weeks, or co-created content, as

markers of symbolic privilege. The motivation behind such displays, however, is more than documentation. It is a calibrated form of digital positioning that blends aspiration with narrative control (explored further in Theorising ‘Strategic Adaptability’ on self-branding strategies).

However, this performative display of access poses a question central to digital luxury communication: can influence maintain relatability while exhibiting their elite affiliations? The dataset suggests that influencer often soften exclusivity through rhetorical strategies such as humility and gratitude. For instance, captions expressing appreciation for brand invitations or using inclusive hashtags like #FAMILY create an impression of intimacy and authenticity. However, as discussed in The Tension Between Commercialisation and Editorial Identity, such linguistic choices may mask commercial imperatives, repackaging exclusivity in emotionally resonant terms without truly dismantling access barriers.

The case of Tamara Kalinić’s Milan Fashion Week post exemplifies this duality. Her reference to her “#Etro family” constructs a narrative of strong brand connection that aligns seamlessly with the Maison’s heritage values. Simultaneously, this framing elevates her symbolic capital, positioning her as a collaborator and insider. This strategy reflects with Kapferer and Bastien’s (2012) observation that luxury branding increasingly relies on heritage, intimacy, and community traits now performed through influencer -brand alignments. However, Theorising ‘Strategic Adaptability’ raises the question of whether such narratives genuinely promote inclusivity or reinforce new forms of digital gatekeeping.

While appearing personal, the emotional vocabulary of #FAMILY and gratitude serves as a brand-aligned discourse that merges affect with marketing. This blurring of personal and professional identity is a recurring theme in influencer culture, discussed in Thematic Categories of LFI Fashion Communication Practices, where the performance of authenticity is shown to be part of a broader strategy of aesthetic labour and cultural production. Rocamora's (2019, 2022) work on digital fashion further underscores this shift, arguing that influencer authority is increasingly built on visibility and affiliation, two intertwined currencies in the influencer economy.

This interplay of authority and access is most visible in fashion week content, where influencer foreground their symbolic inclusion through visual cues (e.g., front-row seating, exclusive invites) while maintaining audience engagement through humility-inflected narratives. As Barthes (1983) suggests, fashion communicates through coded signifiers. Here, the influencer's physical presence at a prestigious event operates as a non-verbal claim to legitimacy, while the caption mediates this claim through a tone of approachability.

However, this strategy is not without contradiction. On the one hand, influencer democratise luxury by making backstage access and designer relationships visible. On the other, they reinforce exclusivity through these very acts of disclosure. As discussed in Platform-Native Practices in Luxury Influencer Communication on algorithmic capital, the influencer's symbolic labour is increasingly tied to how well they navigate visibility, access, and effective performance in a saturated digital marketplace.

Moreover, the commercial formalisation of these relationships raises concerns about authenticity. As influencer -brand collaborations become increasingly institutionalised, the boundary between organic affinity and paid partnership continues to blur. While influencer gain legitimacy through brand alignment, brands benefit from the influencer's perceived relatability. However, as Rocamora (2022) notes, this symbiotic relationship intensifies the demands of digital labour, placing further pressure on influencer to maintain their relevance through consistent self-performance.

To conclude, INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL posts function as more than personal milestones; they are curated acts of affiliation that construct and sustain the influencer's authority in the *''new digital fashion system''*. These access displays are not incidental but central to the production of influencer identity and luxury branding. While familial language and humility-inflected captions attempt to soften the optics of privilege, they reinforce the influencer's elite position within a hierarchical system of symbolic capital.

As the digital luxury landscape evolves, critical questions persist: does this strategy challenge traditional fashion hierarchies by making insider access more visible, or does it reproduce them in new, palatable forms? Moreover, how sustainable is this performative model in a cultural climate increasingly attuned to authenticity, inclusivity, and labour transparency?

These findings contribute to a broader argument developed across this chapter: that luxury fashion communication on Instagram is not only about style, status, branding, and belonging. The strategic articulation of

INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL is one of the most explicit expressions of how influencer negotiate this complex terrain.

4.2.5. Conclusion

Drawing on a thematic coding schema applied to 390 posts; this cluster synthesises multiple visual and textual categories to examine how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) strategically perform luxury. Their content deploys visual, linguistic and relational cues that mirror the established logics of aspirational branding while responding to the platform dynamics of Instagram. The overwhelming dominance of MODEL_ACT posts (77.9 %) demonstrates how LFIs continue to embody the fashionable ideal, positioning themselves as digital models whose primary function is to aestheticise affluence and enact exclusivity. These highly curated portrayals reaffirm enduring tropes of fashion imagery, echoing de Perthuis and Findlay's (2019) argument that influencers do not constitute a rupture from fashion media tradition but a remediation of it, aligned with editorial codes, commercially embedded and ideologically aspirational.

This pattern is made analytically visible through the integration of the coding framework and the study's theoretical foundations. Semiotic readings drawn from Barthes (1967; 1983) are operationalised through codes such as MODEL_ACT, WALKING_POSE, RUNWAY_POSE and VIEW_POSE, each of which functions as a visual sign that communicates distinction, ease or embodied fashion literacy. Spatial codes, including STREET_LOCATION,

HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION and RED_CARPET_LOCATION, translate Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital into observable indicators of prestige and field-specific legitimacy. Veblen's ([1899] 1994) theory of conspicuous consumption is similarly enacted through CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION, CURATED_ACCESSORIES and BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION, which signal aspirational display and symbolic value through product prominence, luxury alignment and branded language. Through this alignment of codes and theory, the coding framework enables the empirical identification of how luxury is performed and circulated through multimodal influencer content.

However, the visibility of these performances is not solely visual but also linguistic and relational. The high prevalence of BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION (60 %) foregrounds the shifting semiotics of luxury from implicit signification to explicit brand affiliation. Within an algorithmically governed economy in which visibility equates to value, brand repetition becomes both a marker of prestige and a mechanism of engagement. Yet this strategy introduces a paradox. In amplifying brand names as a means of signalling status and increasing reach, do influencers risk diluting the exclusivity they are tasked with sustaining?

Similarly, codes such as CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION (24.6 %) and INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL (31.5 %) reveal evolving contours of elite display. Although Veblen's nineteenth century critique of pecuniary emulation remains relevant, its digital rearticulation prioritises access over ownership, experience over acquisition and visibility over scarcity. Luxury becomes something enacted through association and networked legitimacy, not simply

possessed. This aligns with Rocamora's (2022) observation that the contemporary visibility economy reshapes how cultural capital is accrued, recognised and amplified in fashion.

Importantly, this performance of luxury is not confined to overtly glamorous displays. Codes such as RITUALISATION_CONTENT and GET_DRESSED_ACT illustrate how LFIs aestheticise everyday routines through dressing rituals that elevate the mundane into symbolic demonstrations of taste, effortlessness and distinction. These gestures reflect Barthes' (1983) conceptualisation of fashion as a coded system in which meaning is produced through signs that connote refinement and aspiration. Yet the seamlessness of these rituals masks the labour required to construct them, reinforcing the ideological illusion that luxury is inherently effortless rather than industrious.

This thematic analysis reveals a central paradox within digital luxury branding: the simultaneous requirement for accessibility and aspiration, visibility and exclusivity, authenticity and performance. influencer must navigate all these competing demands while operating within platform dynamics that reward consistency, repetition and engagement. Their digital persona therefore becomes a site of negotiation, strategically calibrated to sustain their authority as tastemakers without eroding the aspirational distance essential to luxury's symbolic economy.

Moreover, the increasing emphasis on INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL through behind-the-scenes access, branded events and insider affiliations suggests a recentring of traditional fashion hierarchies within influencer

culture. Although influencer economies were initially framed as democratising fashion authority, the patterned display of social and cultural capital points to a re-entrenchment of elite structures, albeit through new digital aesthetics and communicative formats.

Aspirational branding within luxury fashion influence thus emerges as a performance of power, where visuality, language and networked legitimacy converge to reaffirm luxury's symbolic status. While the digital shift has transformed the forms and rhythms of fashion communication, its underlying function to construct and uphold distinction remains fundamentally intact. Whether this model can remain sustainable amid growing demands for transparency, inclusivity and ethical accountability is an open question for the future of the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

4.3. DIGITAL FASHION NARRATIVES: LUXURY AS STORYTELLING

This theme encompasses codes demonstrating how influencer engage in editorial-style communication, drawing on fashion language, industry knowledge, and event-based content to assert their credibility as tastemakers.

Key Codes:
CULTURAL_REFERENCES,
INDUSTRY_TENURE,
FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION,
FASHION_KNOWLEDGE_CAPTION,
FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION,
RUNWAY-EVENT,
BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT,
SYMBOLIC_SIGNIFICANCE,
BEHIND_SCENES,
OUTFIT_ROUND_UP,
STATIC_IMAGE,
STATIC_CAROUSEL,
MIXED_CAROUSEL,
REEL

Findings:

- *Fashion Language Caption* (9. 7%) and *Fashion Knowledge Caption* (9. 5%) show that influencers niche terminology to reinforce expertise.
- *Fashion Event Mention Caption* (29%) highlights participation in Fashion Week and other high-profile events, signalling status.
- *Ritualisation Content* (9. 5%) presents fashion consumption as a meaningful act (e. g., unboxing luxury goods ceremoniously).
- *Industry Tenure* (8. 5%) is a minor but strategic reference point, where influencer highlight longevity in the field to build credibility.

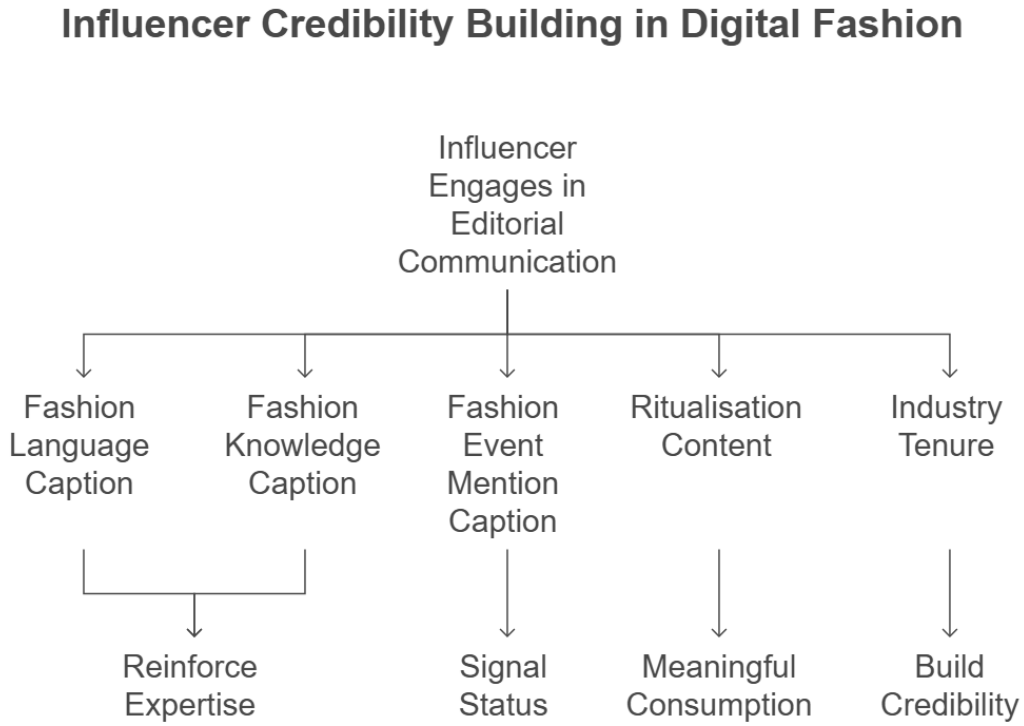


***FIGURE 28** HIERARCHY OF INFLUENCER CREDIBILITY STRATEGIES IN DIGITAL FASHION COMMUNICATION.*

THIS FIGURE VISUALISES HOW LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFIS) CONSTRUCT CREDIBILITY THROUGH EDITORIALISED COMMUNICATION ON INSTAGRAM. THE TOP-LEVEL INFLUENCER ENGAGES IN EDITORIAL COMMUNICATION AND REPRESENTS THE OVERARCHING COMMUNICATIVE MODE. THIS BRANCHES INTO SPECIFIC CONTENT PRACTICES, INCLUDING FASHION LANGUAGE CAPTION, FASHION KNOWLEDGE CAPTION, FASHION EVENT MENTION CAPTION, RITUALISATION CONTENT, AND INDUSTRY TENURE. EACH SUBCATEGORY FUNCTIONS AS A CREDIBILITY-SIGNALLING DEVICE: REINFORCING EXPERTISE, SIGNALLING INSIDER KNOWLEDGE, ASSOCIATING WITH PRESTIGIOUS FASHION EVENTS, FRAMING CONSUMPTION AS MEANINGFUL, AND DEMONSTRATING SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT WITH THE INDUSTRY. TOGETHER, THEY REFLECT HOW LFIS BUILD AUTHORITY BY ALIGNING THEIR PERSONA WITH THE VALUES OF EDITORIAL LEGITIMACY, STATUS, AND CULTURAL CAPITAL WITHIN THE ''NEW DIGITAL FASHION SYSTEM''.

SOURCE: AUTHOR.

4.3.1. From Expertise to Engagement: The Linguistic Shift in Luxury Fashion Influence

QR Code 16 @leoniehanne (9 July 2022) Valentino The Beginning Thank you @maisonvalentino for making me part of this most beautiful experience. The Haute Couture, the venue, Labrinth, the emotions, the MAGIC! Grazie Mille @pppiccioli #ValentinoTheBeginning #Valentino. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/CfyVcEKL2Qv/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025)

Figure 29 Examples of fashion language in LFI posts

The FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION code captures posts where influencer employ industry-specific terminology, references to trends, designers, or technical design elements, such as signalling engagement with fashion's professional discourse. However, such linguistic engagement is rare: only 9. 7% of captions in the dataset use fashion-specific language. This departure from traditional fashion journalism, which historically prioritised technical

precision and craftsmanship (Van de Peer, 2014a, 2022), reflects a broader transformation in how fashion knowledge is communicated on digital platforms.

According to Rocamora (2009), fashion media is a discursive space where symbolic boundaries are negotiated. Within influencer culture, however, these boundaries are increasingly redrawn through lifestyle-oriented language, humour, and metaphor. Rather than replicating the lexicon of traditional fashion critique, influencer often adopt a casual, accessible tone, framing outfits through analogies (“shrimp dress”), seasonal references (“Christmas tree vibes”), or playful captions designed for engagement. This aligns with broader shifts in digital culture, where inclusion and entertainment often supersede formal expertise (see Findlay & Reponen, 2022). The implications of this shift are explored further in Theorising ‘Strategic Adaptability’ on influencer tone and narrative control.

The move away from technical vocabulary may signal an intent to democratise luxury fashion by making it more relatable to broader audiences. However, it also invites critical reflection. Does this simplification open the space to new forms of participation, or does it risk eroding the symbolic capital traditionally tied to fashion’s artisanal and design literacies? Theorising ‘Strategic Adaptability’ further interrogates the implications of this transformation for perceptions of authenticity and authority in luxury fashion communication.

Notably, when influencers fashion-specific language, it tends to be strategic, demonstrating insider fluency to reinforce credibility within niche or expert audiences. This selective engagement is a performative tool, reinforcing the

influencer's cultural capital without alienating less fashion-literate followers. Such dual positioning reflects the influencer's ongoing negotiation between accessibility and authority, explored in more depth in The Tension Between Commercialisation and Editorial Identity on hybridised branding strategies.

Unlike traditional journalists, who articulate expertise through precise cut, tailoring, or textile innovation analysis, Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) communicate fashion literacy through visual storytelling and strategic consumption. Securing 'it' pieces, attending exclusive events, or styling luxury items with creative flair often supersedes linguistic explanation. As Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) argue, the accumulation of fashion capital has increasingly shifted from textual to visual domains. This logic underpins many influencers strategies explored in The Blurred Lines of Relatability and Exclusivity on event participation and Post Structures for Fashion Communication on conspicuous consumption.

This visual-first approach redefines expertise in luxury fashion. If knowledge is now demonstrated through taste, styling, and platform fluency rather than descriptive analysis, what does this mean for the role of language in fashion communication? To what extent does the absence of technical vocabulary in influencer fashion discourse *flatten* the field by reducing it to surface-level aesthetics, commercial legibility, and platform-friendly expressions devoid of conceptual depth, or might this shift instead signal a reconfiguration of fashion's cultural register, reflecting more contemporary forms of participation rooted in visual fluency, affective engagement, and digitally mediated self-styling?

Moreover, influencer captions often integrate luxury into the mundane. For example, a Kelly bag 7is worn on a coffee run, couture casually captioned as “running errands.” These juxtapositions construct an illusion of effortlessness, blurring the line between elite fashion and everyday life. As discussed in Post Structures for Fashion Communication, this rhetorical normalisation of luxury may make high fashion feel aspirationally accessible, but it also raises questions about performative wealth and unrealistic consumer expectations.

While this transformation supports inclusivity, it also signals a shift in what is culturally valued in fashion discourse. Once central to fashion’s cultural legitimacy, technical mastery and material knowledge are increasingly displaced by personal storytelling and self-branding. This evolution echoes concerns raised in Motivational Framework for LFI Content Creation regarding the commodification of digital identity and the growing dominance of performative relatability over traditional forms of expertise.

The infrequent but deliberate use of fashion-specific language within influencer captions exemplifies their ‘Strategic Adaptability’. Rather than consistently adopting traditional fashion media's lexicon, influencers electively deploy industry terminology, signalling insider fluency when contextually advantageous. This reflects a capacity to shift between registers to speak to fashion-literate audiences and the broader public while maintaining brand alignment and narrative cohesion. Such linguistic modulation underscores the

[7] The Kelly bag is an iconic handbag designed by the French luxury brand Hermès. Originally introduced in the 1930s as the "Sac à dépêches," it was renamed in the 1950s after actress and Princess of Monaco Grace Kelly, who famously used the bag to shield her pregnancy from paparazzi.

influencer 's agility within a platformed media environment, where authority is no longer anchored in technical vocabulary but in the ability to navigate and negotiate cultural capital across multiple domains.

The infrequent use of fashion-specific terminology in influencer captions marks a reconfiguration of luxury fashion communication. As influencer assume the role of brand intermediaries, their linguistic practices favour engagement, accessibility, and self-presentation over craft-based authority. This does not necessarily signal a loss of fashion literacy but rather a re-articulation shaped by algorithmic culture, platform vernaculars, and the ongoing recalibration of who gets to speak and with what authority in fashion’s evolving media landscape.

4.3.2. Exclusive Access or Digital Engagement? The Shifting Role of Fashion Events in Luxury Influence

QR CODE 17 @VICTORIA (14 SEPTEMBER 2023) WASN'T GOING TO MISS THIS ONE @CAROLINAHERRERA ❤️ STRUTTING TO THE SHOW CHANNELING #TUBEGIRL ENERGY 😍. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/REEL/CXKVD4EOTDN/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

QR CODE 18 @LEONIEHANNE (6 DECEMBER 2023) MADE IT TO SHANGHAI FOR PRADA-AH-AH 🖤 @PRADA #PRADASPHERE. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/REEL/C0GLQCPON09/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 30 EXAMPLES OF FASHION EVENT MENTION CAPTION IN LFI POSTS

Fashion events have long been fundamental for industry legitimacy, cultural capital, and brand alignment (Bourdieu, 1984; Findlay, 2019). The FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION code identifies captions referencing key moments of institutional access, such as Paris Fashion Week, private brand launches, and exclusive gatherings, which function as symbolic gestures of prestige and insider affiliation. However, while these events hold cultural weight within the luxury system (Barthes, 1983), the dataset indicates that they do not dominate the influencer content landscape.

Only 29% of posts explicitly mention a fashion event, a modest proportion reflecting both the seasonal nature of the fashion calendar and the strategic selectivity with which such content is deployed. Unlike product showcases or everyday styling posts, event-related content is temporally and institutionally constrained and anchored to Fashion Month or curated brand moments. This infrequency, as examined in more detail in The Blurred Lines of Relatability and Exclusivity on event-based influencers strategies, enhances the symbolic value of such posts, aligning with the logic of scarcity central to luxury branding (see Kapferer, 2012).

Rather than flooding their feeds with industry imagery, influencers event content to punctuate their broader narrative. These mentions, whether direct ("Attending Dior SS24") or subtle ("Paris in September hits differently"), act as social signifiers, positioning the influencer within elite circles without alienating wider audiences. This calibrated visibility reflects the broader tension discussed in Post Structures for Fashion Communication, where influencer must balance conspicuous access with relatability. As Dion and Arnould

(2011) note, luxury branding increasingly relies on a blend of exclusivity and lifestyle integration, a dynamic also explored in Hybridised Branding Strategies in LFI Content.

Drawing on Barthes' (1983) semiotics, fashion event captions operate as coded statements of legitimacy. An image from the Gucci front row or a glimpse backstage at Chanel signals more than attendance; it constructs a semiotic narrative of authority, reinforcing the influencer 's role as participant and tastemaker. However, access alone does not guarantee engagement. influencer often frame these elite moments with gratitude or humility, "honoured to be invited," to sustain emotional significance and soften the exclusivity on display. This rhetorical strategy mirrors those discussed in The Tension Between Commercialisation and Editorial Identity, where curated intimacy reinforces symbolic power without risking audience alienation.

Still, the selective nature of event-based content points to a broader transformation in the symbolic economy of luxury influence. Historically, fashion events functioned as gated domains of cultural production (Breward, 1999), with legitimacy flowing from proximity to industry power. However, the rise of influencer -first marketing metaverse shows, pre-release collaborations, or digital unboxings has shifted the status of fashion visibility away from the physical runway. As Rocamora (2019) argues, digital platforms increasingly mediate fashion authority, decentring traditional gatekeepers. Whether this signals the decline of the fashion show as the ultimate prestige marker is a question further explored in Platform-Native Practices in Luxury Influencer

Communication, where algorithmic influence is examined as a new form of cultural capital.

This evolution raises further questions about inclusivity and the performativity of access. On the one hand, the event mentions offer aspirational content that heightens brand prestige. Conversely, their scarcity reinforces exclusivity and may risk disconnecting influence from their followers' everyday realities. Many Influencers, therefore, intersperse event coverage with more everyday moments, such as café visits, shopping trips, and travel, embedding luxury into the rhythms of lifestyle content. This hybridisation strategy, discussed in The Tension Between Commercialisation and Editorial Identity, reflects a digital recalibration of luxury branding, where elite status is performed through physical access, curated self-presentation, and platform fluency.

In this shifting landscape, the role of fashion events remains significant but is increasingly recontextualised. While front-row appearances and exclusive invitations still carry symbolic weight, their impact is now supplemented by digital-first practices, extending fashion's prestige beyond traditional circuits. As influencer gain access to collections before runway presentations and curate pre-event narratives, the question becomes about who attends, how the experience is framed, and where the cultural capital circulates. As explored in Fashion Communication as Narrative Control, influencer influence is now as much about narrative control as it is about physical presence.

In conclusion, the relative infrequency of FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION posts does not signal a decline in importance but reflects their evolving function within digital luxury branding.

These curated moments punctuating broader influencer narratives continue to demonstrate status but do so in dialogue with more accessible content forms. This strategic variation of content reinforces the influencer 's dual identity as an industry insider and an audience proxy. In the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’*, prestige is no longer solely anchored in institutional validation. However, it is increasingly shaped by the influencer 's ability to render exclusivity as aspirational, relatable, and shareable content.

4.3.3. The Aestheticised Ritual: Performing Luxury Through Influencer Dressing Narratives

	QR CODE 19 @LEONIEHANNE (7 JULY 2022) SHOW READY IN 3, 2, 1 💥 @GIAMBATTISTAVALLIPARIS #PFW #GIAMBATTISTAVALLI #HAUTECOUTURE. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/REEL/CFTZGFMJNQI/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).
	QR CODE 20 @LEONIEHANNE (25 JANUARY 2024) ANZEIGE/AD GETTING READY FOR VALENTINO COUTURE WITH @VALENTINO. BEAUTY ❤ FINAL TOUCHES WITH THE NEW #BORNINROMA FRAGRANCE 'GREEN STRAVAGANZA' #VALENTINOBEAUTY. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/REEL/C2IRBJPRVMF/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 31 EXAMPLES OF THE RITUALISATION CODE IN LFI POSTS

The RITUALISATION_CONTENT code identifies posts where Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) transform dressing into a stylised, ritualistic act. These sequences are often captured in slow motion, with soft audio cues and curated settings, recasting self-styling as a symbolic performance rather than a mundane routine. In doing so, they elevate luxury fashion from mere consumption to a form of cultural distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). Through this aestheticisation, influencer -enchant the act of dressing, aligning with traditional luxury narratives that frame fashion rituals, couture fittings, boutique visits, and fragrance applications as sacred and exclusive (Benjamin, 1936). [8]

Such content mirrors the symbolic logic of traditional advertising but is recontextualised within the vernaculars of social media. As Barthes (1983) argues, fashion is a coded system wherein meaning is constructed through visual cues and repetition. Influencer ritualisation performs this logic digitally, with repeated gestures of zipping boots, tying belts, and applying lipstick as semiotic markers of taste, access, and elite status. This recalibration of routine as spectacle links closely to Theorising ‘Strategic Adaptability’ and Post Structures for Fashion Communication, where fashion capital is accrued not through technical language or overt displays of wealth alone, but through controlled performance and stylistic fluency.

[8] Walter Benjamin’s concept of the "aura" refers to the unique presence and authenticity of an artwork that is rooted in its singular existence in time and space. In his 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin argues that mechanical reproduction diminishes this aura. However, in the context of luxury fashion, influencer paradoxically revive or simulate this aura by aestheticising everyday acts like dressing or shopping, transforming them into rituals imbued with meaning, exclusivity, and a sense of reverence.

This aestheticisation aligns with Veblen's (1899) theory of conspicuous consumption but extends it into the affective and performative realm. influencer no longer own luxury. They perform it. While appearing effortless, the staging of these rituals often obscures the labour behind them. Veblen's concept of conspicuous leisure becomes particularly relevant here: influencer frame dressing as a pleasurable escape from necessity, masking the intensive branding, editing, and algorithmic strategies underpinning each post. As Duffy (2017) emphasises, influencer culture is driven by "aspirational labour," which must remain invisible to maintain the fantasy.

This paradox is also evident in the evolution of Get Ready With Me (GRWM) content. Initially spontaneous and intimate, GRWM videos have been absorbed into luxury branding strategies, evolving into choreographed displays of affective prestige. While they often retain a veneer of informality through confessional captions or chatty voiceovers, their visual language increasingly mirrors commercial aesthetics. As Wong (2023) observes, "When an influencer says, 'get ready with me,' it's never just about makeup. " This transformation exemplifies the dual imperative of relatability and aspiration, explored further in The Tension Between Commercialisation and Editorial Identity on hybrid branding tactics.

Ritualised content also compensates for the loss of physical engagement in luxury consumption. As Rocamora (2018) notes, the shift to online shopping has disembedded fashion from the tactile experiences of boutiques and showrooms. influencer counter this by enhancing sensory immersion through

extreme close-ups, luxurious textures, and sound design that evokes ASMR9. However, this emphasis on affective pleasure raises critical concerns: Does such content advance appreciation for craftsmanship and heritage (Kapferer, 2012), or does it reduce luxury to visual indulgence, further detaching the product from its social, environmental, and ethical contexts?

Indeed, while influencer may gesture toward tradition, their content often elides the material labour and systemic inequalities behind luxury fashion. This selective framing parallels critiques discussed in Brand Visibility as Cultural Capital, where commercial strategies masquerade as organic self-expression. In both cases, influencer navigate a fine line between democratising access to fashion and reproducing its most exclusionary logic.

Therefore, RITUALISATION_CONTENT embodies a digital paradox: while dressing rituals create a heightened sense of intimacy and visibility, they also re-secure fashion's symbolic distance. By aestheticising everyday acts, influence reinforce their status as tastemakers, preserving the aura of luxury even as they invite audiences to "get ready" with them. This dual strategy

[9] ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) refers to a calming, often pleasurable tingling sensation typically triggered by auditory or visual stimuli such as whispering, tapping, or soft textures. In digital fashion contexts, ASMR aesthetics are increasingly employed to simulate sensory intimacy and evoke affective responses, particularly in environments where physical touch is absent. This sensory strategy has gained traction in marketing, where researchers have demonstrated its potential impact: Gotsch and Gasser (2024) conducted experiments showing that ASMR elements in sponsored content can enhance brand perception and consumer intention, positioning ASMRtists as effective brand ambassadors. Similarly, De Kerpel, Van Kerckhove, and Tessitore (2023) found that incorporating ASMR cues in video advertising increases purchase intention by promoting immersion and emotional engagement. Chen and Lee (2023) explored consumer reactions to ASMR-inspired advertising among college students, highlighting its appeal as calming and attention-grabbing when deployed via digital media. More recently, Zheng (2025) examined the role of ASMR in emotion-driven purchase behaviour, revealing heightened consumption of non-essential goods and raising important ethical questions about sensory manipulation in marketing.

blending proximity and privilege sustains the aspirational economy that underpins digital fashion influence.

In conclusion, ritualised dressing reflects the continued recalibration of fashion communication within the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’*. As influencers stage slow, sensual narratives of self-styling, they produce a semiotic space where luxury remains desirable, performative, and emotionally resonant. Whether this content will evolve toward greater transparency or continue to refine its aesthetic distance remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that the symbolic power of luxury persists, anchored not only in what influencer wear but in how they choose to dress.

4.3.4. Longevity as Legitimacy: Industry Tenure and the Paradox of Digital Influence

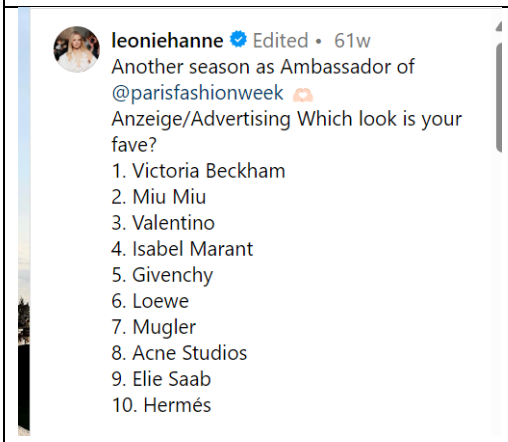
	QR Code 21 @leoniehanne (19 April 2023) Can't believe this was my 7th year of Revolve Festival 🦋 🖤 ✨ Anzeige/Ad Thank you to the whole @fwrd @revolve team for all the love over the years – You guys killed it as always! #RevolveFestival. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CroAjVVrcZb/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025).
	QR Code 22 @leoniehanne (5 October 2023) Another season as Ambassador of @parisfashionweek Anzeige/Advertising Which look is your fave? 1. Victoria Beckham 2. Miu 3. Valentino 4. Isabel Marant 5. Givenchy 6. Loewe 7. Mugler 8. Acne Studios 9. Elie Saab 10. Hermés. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CyBL4I9o5fy/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025).
	QR Code 23 @victoria (23 August 2023) It's almost time for my favourite week of the year. My sixth time attending Venice Film Festival with @armanibeauty. I look so young in 7 🥹 Which look was your favourite?. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CwNohYyo6zy/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025).

Figure 32 examples of industry tenure code in LFI posts

The INDUSTRY_TENURE code identifies posts where influencer explicitly reference their long-term engagement with the fashion industry through captions marking Fashion Week milestones, retrospective image carousels, or references to early career moments. While digital influence is often characterised by its privileging of novelty and immediacy, the dataset reveals that sustained participation remains a powerful form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). In contrast to dominant assumptions that algorithmic visibility rewards only short-term virality, LFIs frequently mobilise tenure to construct legitimacy, authority, and insider status.

This finding complicates critiques of platform temporality discussed earlier in Post Structures for Fashion Communication, where the emphasis on experiential luxury was shown to reframe status performance. Here, too, influencers are seen to engage in temporal storytelling, using the past as a symbolic resource in a digital economy that rewards continual presence.

As Duffy and Hund (2017) note, “platform cultures reward perpetual newness, making long-term credibility a paradox within digital labour economies,” while Cotter (2019) argues that “algorithmic visibility favours frequent engagement over historical authority. ” However, influencers such as Victoria Magrath and Tamara Kalinić strategically foreground their tenure to assert distinction within a saturated digital landscape. Magrath’s references to her PhD in fashion and Kalinić’s documentation of attending over 20 Fashion Weeks exemplify this performative positioning. As Rocamora (2022) observes, influencer increasingly “construct narratives of legitimacy through data-driven self-

presentation," whereby tenure becomes both a credibility marker and a branding asset.

This mobilisation of longevity functions as a form of performative capital. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) *Theory of Distinction*, influencer do not simply accumulate experience, they stage it. Visual and textual self-representations such as nostalgic captions, then-and-now comparisons, and reflections on early brand partnerships contribute to the aesthetic performance of expertise. This echoes the semiotic strategies analysed in Platform-Native Practices in Luxury Influencer Communication, where every day acts such as dressing are similarly transformed into visual signifiers of authority and cultural capital.

Moreover, tenure is shown to be not just self-referential but commercially strategic. The dataset reveals a 21. 3% overlap between INDUSTRY_TENURE and BRAND_AFFILIATION, suggesting that influences narratives of experience to secure and legitimise long-term partnerships. These claims serve dual functions: they reassure audiences of authenticity while signalling to brands that the influencer is a reliable and established collaborator. This dynamic is also evident in Influencer Branding as 'Strategic Adaptability', where brand repetition serves audience engagement and commercial alignment.

However, this strategic framing is not without its contradictions. While influencer often present themselves as self-made digital entrepreneurs, their longevity is frequently underpinned by structural privileges such as timely access, economic capital, or industry connections. For instance, although Magrath's academic credentials reinforce her intellectual legitimacy, her

sustained visibility has also been shaped by longstanding brand relationships. Kalinić's decade of Fashion Week attendance may symbolise resilience but also reflects recurring brand endorsement. These complexities mirror the tensions discussed in The Performance of Industry Social Capital, where access is both a sign of earned distinction and a marker of embedded privilege.

The tension between longevity as merit and privilege raises critical questions about the evolving nature of expertise within digital fashion. Does the emphasis on tenure reflect a maturing influencer culture where experience is increasingly valued? Or does it risk reasserting exclusionary logics that privilege legacy figures over emerging voices? Rocamora (2022) argues that tenure "is increasingly leveraged as both a status symbol and a gatekeeping mechanism," suggesting that long-term credibility is as much about maintaining access as it is about demonstrating value.

This strategic mobilisation of tenure also signals a broader negotiation between disruption and tradition within the digital fashion economy. While influencer culture initially promised a democratisation of fashion authority, the reassertion of experience-based legitimacy suggests a return to hierarchical norms. As Rocamora (2022) notes, "while digital disruption initially created new pathways to legitimacy, long-term success still hinges on integration into traditional networks of power. " Tenure therefore becomes both a sign of survival and a re-entry point into established systems of symbolic capital.

Nevertheless, LFIs are not simply reproducing legacy structures but also reshaping them. In claiming tenure, influencer blend intellectual credentials,

aesthetic branding, and narrative construction to produce hybrid forms of authority. This cross-over is evident in other codes such as INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL and RITUALISATION_CONTENT, where influencer position themselves as fashion insiders and as narrators of luxury culture. These strategies illustrate how influencer curate a composite identity that integrates past achievement with present relevance.

In conclusion, INDUSTRY_TENURE underscores how longevity is not a passive measure of experience but a curated legitimacy narrative. Within the logic of digital influence, where novelty is prized, influencers strategically render tenure as a badge of distinction, reinforcing their embeddedness within the fashion system. This paradox, where digital disruption coexists with institutional continuity, sits at the heart of the luxury influencer economy. The analysis here complements earlier discussions of cultural capital (The Performance of Industry Social Capital), experiential legitimacy (Post Structures for Fashion Communication), and aesthetic authority (Platform-Native Practices in Luxury Influencer Communication), together illustrating how contemporary influence is enacted at the intersection of tradition and innovation.

4.4. Conclusion

This thematic category demonstrates how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) draw on editorial tropes, fashion-specific language, and strategic positioning within industry events to construct digital legitimacy. While traditional markers

of expertise, such as industry tenure and technical knowledge, persist, they are selectively embedded within broader narratives of lifestyle branding and aesthetic storytelling. The dataset reveals that captions referencing *Fashion Event Mentions* (29%) and *Ritualisation Content* (9.5%) are more prevalent than overt uses of *Fashion Language* (9.7%) or *Industry Tenure* (8.5%), indicating that LFIs prioritise symbolic participation over explicit demonstration of expertise. This reflects a shift in the status of fashion authority, from mastery of technical language to mastery of narrative and aesthetic codes.

The limited use of fashion-specific terminology (FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION) highlights a significant linguistic transition. Influencers increasingly favour humour, metaphor, and lifestyle-oriented storytelling over the technical vocabulary traditionally associated with fashion journalism (Van de Peer, 2022). While this shift makes fashion discourse more accessible to broader audiences, it raises critical questions about whether the role of the fashion expert is being redefined. Does the erosion of linguistic precision reflect a genuine democratisation of fashion knowledge, or does it simply reframe exclusivity in more playful and palatable terms?

Event-based content remains a powerful, if temporally limited, mechanism for asserting institutional affiliation. FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION's 29% inclusion rate of FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION confirms that Fashion Week and brand activations are key symbolic resources in digital self-branding. However, their rarity suggests a broader recalibration of prestige, where influencer blend high-fashion moments with lifestyle content to avoid

alienating audiences. This balancing act reflects the paradox of digital luxury branding: prestige must be visible, but not overwhelming; exclusivity must be signalled yet softened.

The rise of RITUALISATION_CONTENT and dressing performances further reveals the aestheticisation of consumption, where acts of self-styling become digital rituals laden with symbolic capital. These highly choreographed sequences translate the sensory dimensions of luxury into visual spectacle, simultaneously reinforcing traditional fashion hierarchies and compensating for the tactile loss of in-store experiences. However, as these performances become increasingly formulaic, they risk reproducing the aesthetics of advertising rather than offering meaningful engagements with craft or creativity.

Industry tenure, though less frequent, remains a potent legitimising device. Including INDUSTRY_TENURE (8.5%) illustrates that LFIs strategically deploy longevity narratives to assert credibility and reinforce their status as industry insiders. However, as Rocamora (2022) notes, these narratives often obscure the structural privileges underpinning long-term participation in luxury fashion. The performative framing of tenure highlights the extent to which influencer credibility is not merely a function of visibility but of sustained alignment with legacy fashion structures.

This thematic analysis reveals that fashion storytelling within luxury influence is not only about narrative variety but symbolic positioning. LFIs construct legitimacy not solely through technical knowledge or industry affiliation, but through a hybridised discourse of experience, access, and aesthetic control.

This convergence of self-branding, editorial curation, and narrative authority underscores a broader redefinition of fashion expertise within the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’*.

As luxury communication continues to evolve within platform cultures, future research might consider how audiences receive these narrative strategies: Are they viewed as authentic demonstrations of fashion credibility or as carefully managed performances of digital prestige? Moreover, if storytelling has become the primary medium through which fashion authority is enacted, what new literacies are required to decode its codes, cues, and contradictions?

4.5. THE BLURRED LINES OF RELATABILITY AND EXCLUSIVITY

Codes within this theme reflect the strategic balance between accessibility and aspiration, incorporating moments of authenticity while maintaining an elite, high-fashion image that is credible.

Key Codes:
AUTHENTIC_ACT,
DAILY_LIFE,
HUMOUR_CONTENT,
INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION,
EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION,
MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT,
FOOD_CONTENT,
SIGNIFICANT_PERSONAL_LIFE

Findings:

- *Authentic Act* (17.7%) and *Daily Life* (15.6%) indicate strategic use of "real-life" moments.
- *Emotional Connection* (19.2%) and *Interaction Question Caption* (19.2%) show efforts to promote direct engagement.
- *Mirror Selfie Act* (11.3%) represents aestheticised self-documentation, reinforcing intimacy and personal style.

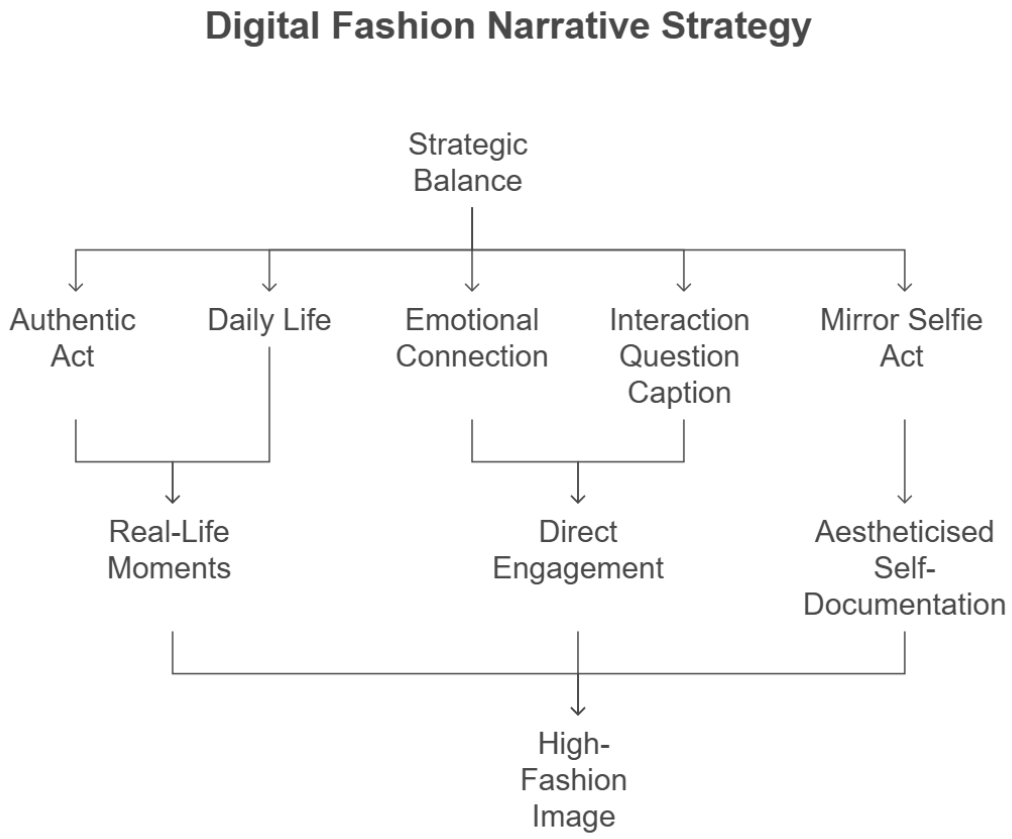


FIGURE 33 DIGITAL FASHION NARRATIVE STRATEGIES USED BY LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFIS).

THIS FIGURE PRESENTS A HIERARCHY OF NARRATIVE STRATEGIES LFIS EMPLOY TO CONSTRUCT HIGH-FASHION PERSONAS THROUGH EVERYDAY CONTENT. CENTRED AROUND THE PRINCIPLE OF STRATEGIC BALANCE, THE DIAGRAM IDENTIFIES FIVE KEY CONTENT PRACTICES: AUTHENTIC ACT, DAILY LIFE, EMOTIONAL CONNECTION, INTERACTION QUESTION CAPTION, AND MIRROR SELFIE ACT. THESE PRACTICES SUPPORT THREE UNDERLYING FUNCTIONS: PORTRAYING REAL-LIFE MOMENTS, PROMOTING DIRECT ENGAGEMENT, AND ENABLING AESTHETICISED SELF-DOCUMENTATION. DESPITE THEIR SURFACE RELATABILITY, THESE STRATEGIES COLLECTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO PRODUCING A CURATED HIGH-FASHION IMAGE. THE FIGURE HIGHLIGHTS HOW LFIS BLEND AUTHENTICITY AND ASPIRATION TO MAINTAIN AUDIENCE INTIMACY WHILE PRESERVING THEIR SYMBOLIC ALIGNMENT WITH THE ELITE FASHION SPHERE.

SOURCE: AUTHOR.

4.5.1. Curated Imperfection: The Aestheticisation of Authenticity in Digital Luxury Influence

	QR CODE 24 @LEONIEHANNE (12 MARCH 2024) SHORT BUT UNFORGETTABLE @ATLANTISTHEROYAL ✨ ANZEIGE/TAG LOVED BEING BACK AT ATLANTIS THE ROYAL AFTER BEING PART OF THE BIG OPENING LAST YEAR – WISH WE HAD MORE THAN 48HRS (BUT WE MADE IT COUNT!) #ATLANTISTHEROYAL. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/REEL/C4ACX5DYSCY/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).
	QR CODE 25 @VICTORIA (7 MAY 2023) I CAN'T WRITE A CAPTION THAT WOULD SUCCINCTLY DESCRIBE HOW MUCH I LOVE THIS HUMAN. WHAT A HOLIDAY IN PARADISE WITH THE LOVE OF MY LIFE. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/CR8AZMDOL09/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 34 EXAMPLES OF THE AUTHENTIC ACT CODE IN LFI POSTS

The AUTHENTIC_ACT code captures influencer posts that foreground candidness, minimal editing, and an everyday aesthetic to construct relatability. Although this content appears in only 17.7% of the dataset (69 instances), its presence signals an emerging tension within luxury influencer branding: how to balance aspirational polish with audience demands for authenticity. While most LFI posts remain highly stylised see MODEL_ACT (77.9%) and FASHION_POSE (17.4%) these more casual moments introduce a contrasting aesthetic that appears to disrupt, or at least soften, the hyper-curated norms of digital luxury. As shown in Figure 34, LFIs construct a digital fashion narrative through a balance of intimacy and aesthetic curation. These practices serve to humanise the influencer without compromising the polished, aspirational tone of luxury branding.

However, drawing on Duffy and Hund's (2015) notion of calculated authenticity, these seemingly spontaneous acts often serve strategic purposes. Rather than reflecting organic self-expression, they are carefully curated to satisfy platform demands for engagement and relatability. This strategic framing aligns with Abidin's (2016) concept of calibrated amateurism[10], where 'unpolished' content remains tethered to underlying brand imperatives.

[10] *Calibrated amateurism* is a term coined by Abidin (2016) to describe the intentional presentation of influencer content as casual, spontaneous, or 'unpolished,' while in fact being carefully curated to serve commercial goals. This aesthetic of authenticity maintains the appearance of relatability and ordinariness, even as it operates within highly professionalised and monetised digital ecosystems. It enables influence to retain audience trust while promoting brands, thus masking the labour and strategy behind seemingly effortless content. For a full discussion, see: Abidin, C., 2016. "Aren't These Just Young, Rich Women Doing

Luxury fashion's traditional emphasis on exclusivity and perfection sits uneasily alongside this push for intimacy. However, as explored in The Performance of Industry Social Capital, the industry increasingly negotiates status through soft power, blending prestige with approachability. AUTHENTIC_ACT posts play into this dynamic, reflecting how influencers shift their aesthetic registers while remaining within the aspirational framework of luxury.

Fundamentally, authenticity here functions as performance. Drawing on Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model,[11] these posts constitute a form of backstage presentation that appears unscripted while remaining carefully controlled. The overlap with EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION and INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION (19.2%) indicates that these acts are not simply visual departures but emotionally charged tactics that advance audience engagement. This effective strategy aligns with Audrezet et al. 's (2020) notion of passionate authenticity, where influencers blend personal narratives with brand alignment to preserve credibility.

Examples such as the "no-makeup makeup" look or "everyday luxury" aesthetic illustrate how casual presentation is rarely detached from luxury

Vain Things Online?": Influencer Selfies as Subversive Frivolity. *Social Media + Society*, 2(2), pp.1–17. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116641342.

[11] Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model conceptualises social life as a theatrical performance, in which individuals manage impressions through 'frontstage' and 'backstage' behaviours. While frontstage actions are consciously curated for an audience, backstage regions allow for the appearance of spontaneity, informality, or authenticity. In the context of influencer culture, content that appears unscripted or intimate often draws on this backstage mode yet remains strategically crafted to sustain audience engagement and align with brand partnerships. For more, see: Goffman, E., 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

signifiers. influencer may appear relaxed in bathrobes or loungewear, but these moments often feature meticulously arranged backgrounds or discreetly positioned designer goods. As seen in Ritualised Dressing as a Visual Strategy, the visual economy of luxury thrives on subtle codes of status, even when cloaked in informality.

Moreover, the overlap with CURATED_ACCESSORIES (18. 5%) reveals how even ‘authentic’ posts retain key visual cues of wealth and taste. This echoes Findlay’s (2015) observations on the evolution of fashion bloggers into commercialised Influencers, where authenticity becomes another layer of marketability rather than a rejection of branding altogether.

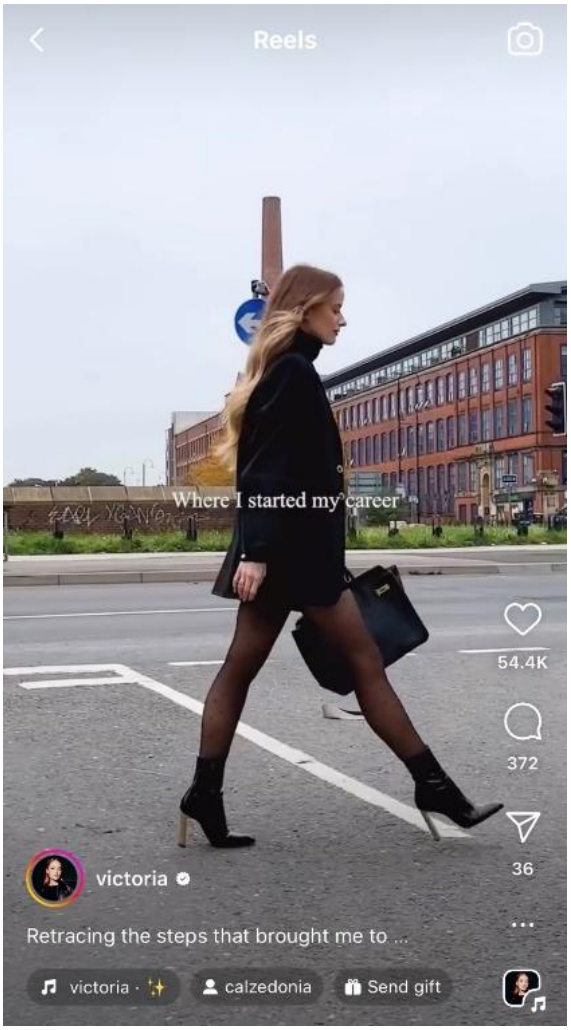
This aestheticisation of authenticity also underpins a broader shift in influencer -brand relations, explored further in Influencer Strategies for Brand Visibility. Here, the goal is emotional investment, building trust through relatability while subtly reinforcing product value. In AUTHENTIC_ACT posts, influencer often use captions to ask rhetorical or inclusive questions (“What’s your lazy Sunday look?”), deploying emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) to humanise luxury.

However, this shift raises pressing questions. If relatability becomes a branded asset, does authenticity still function as a challenge to traditional luxury, or is it simply a more emotionally attuned form of aspiration? Moreover, does the influencer’s performance of candidness genuinely disrupt luxury’s exclusivity, or does it repackage it in a more palatable, audience-friendly form?

In conclusion, the presence of AUTHENTIC_ACT within the dataset suggests not a wholesale rejection of traditional luxury values but a recalibration of one

where relatability and aspiration are no longer oppositional. As the influencer economy evolves, this fusion of curated imperfection and strategic branding signals a broader transformation in luxury communication. While digital audiences increasingly demand transparency, it remains unclear whether such authenticity can or will exist outside of carefully constructed frames. Further research could examine how audiences interpret these performances: as genuine self-expression or simply another polished product in the influencer's branding toolkit.

4.5.2. Strategic Sentiment: The Selective Use of Emotional Connection in Luxury Influence



QR CODE 26 @VICTORIA (5 NOVEMBER 2023) RETRACING THE STEPS THAT BROUGHT ME TO WHERE I AM TODAY. MEETING MY HUSBAND, STARTING MY DEGREE, FINISHING MY PHD AND STARTING MY CAREER, FROM PLACE TO PLACE ALONG THE STREETS OF MANCHESTER. I CAN'T WAIT TO MAKE THE NEXT STEP FORWARD! (WEARING @CALZEDONIA OF COURSE) #CALZEDONIA #EVERYSTEPISASTEPFORWARD {AD}. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/REEL/CZRNYEXORCP/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 35 EXAMPLE OF EMOTIONAL CONNECTION CAPTION CODE IN LFI POSTS

Emotional connection captions, appearing in 19.2% of the dataset, reveal that while Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) engage in affective storytelling, they do so selectively. This restrained use reflects the fundamental tension that underpins luxury fashion communication: the careful balancing of relatability and exclusivity. As Dion and Arnould (2011) observe, the symbolic capital of luxury hinges on maintaining an aura of inaccessibility, one that too much emotional transparency could erode.

Rather than constituting a dominant strategy, emotional captions are strategically deployed at high-impact moments such as life transitions, personal milestones, or brand anniversaries. This aligns with the platform logic prioritising content eliciting strong user engagement (see Rocamora, 2022), especially on Instagram, where likes, comments, and shares influence algorithmic visibility. Whilst personal posts may not align with the visual grammar of high fashion, their occasional use allows LFIs to humanise their image without undermining aspirational branding.

This selective mobilisation reflects with Barthes' (1983) notion of fashion as a coded system of signs[12]. Here, emotional captions function not as open

[12] Barthes (1983) theorises fashion as a coded system of signs through which garments communicate meanings that extend beyond function or materiality. In *The Fashion System*, he distinguishes between the actual garment (the 'real'), the photographed garment (the 'image'), and the written garment (the 'language'), proposing that fashion operates as a semiotic structure that constructs desire, social positioning, and distinction. Importantly, Barthes also gestures toward a *poetics of clothing*, a sensuous, affective dimension in which garments are imbued with mood, atmosphere, and emotion. In the context of influencer culture, emotional captions can be read not as transparent expressions of interiority but as textual signs that contribute to the garment's narrative aura. These personal touches become semiotic devices that support product storytelling and symbolic resonance, allowing influencer to produce a digital spectacle of luxury that feels emotionally intimate while preserving aspirational distance. See: Barthes, R., 1983. *The Fashion System*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

windows into influencer interiority but as semiotic devices, personal touches that enhance product storytelling and symbolic resonance without compromising luxury's exclusivity. As discussed further in *Exclusive Access or Digital Engagement? The Shifting Role of Fashion Events in Luxury Influence*, the blending of effect and aspiration is central to how LFIs produce a digital spectacle of luxury that feels intimate but remains inaccessible.

Importantly, this 19.2% figure gains meaning when read comparatively. As explored in *Curated Imperfection: The Aestheticisation of Authenticity in Digital Luxury Influence*, direct engagement tactics comprise a minority of captions, suggesting that LFIs avoid oversaturating their feeds with audience-facing or overtly personal content. Instead, they favour aesthetic and product-centric posts discussed in *The Code Book* and *Code Theme Mapping*, maintaining a visual coherence aligned with luxury values.

Moreover, the limited use of emotional storytelling helps LFIs maintain a tiered relationship with their audiences. Unlike micro-Influencers, who rely heavily on everyday relatability, LFIs maintain aspirational distance by ensuring that disclosures remain infrequent, curated, and brand aligned. As with *Strategic Sentiment: The Selective Use of Emotional Connection in Luxury Influence*, these moments are less about raw vulnerability and more about constructing a sense of strategic intimacy that Hochschild (1983) might consider emotional labour, carefully curated for public consumption.

In summary, EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION_CAPTIONS are not a contradiction to luxury branding but a calibrated supplement. Deployed cautiously, they offer a fleeting sense of access, advancing emotional

resonance while preserving symbolic distance. This illustrates a broader trend in LFI communication: the ability to integrate intimacy without collapsing aspiration, sustaining the delicate duality at the heart of digital luxury fashion communication.

4.5.3. The Selective Use of Interaction in Luxury Influence

QR CODE 27 @LEONIEHANNE (2 JUNE 2022) CHANEL SUMMER – WHICH ONE WOULD YOU PICK? 💗. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/CET278OD8SK/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 36 EXAMPLE OF INTERACTIVE QUESTION CAPTION CODE IN LFI POSTS

Interaction questions in 19. 2% of captions exemplify how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) strategically incorporate participatory content while maintaining the exclusivity central to luxury branding. Their relative rarity present in fewer than one in five posts reflects a deliberate communication strategy. Rather than diminishing the aura of aspiration, these selective moments of engagement serve as calculated tools for sustaining algorithmic visibility and audience connection without compromising brand prestige.

The platform logic underlying this strategy is clear. As Rocamora (2022) observes, content that encourages interaction is prioritised by social media algorithms, which reward posts that drive engagement. Questions such as

"Chanel Summer, which one would you pick?" subtly invite responses without disrupting the aspirational tone. This preference-based interaction preserves symbolic capital while leveraging the benefits of platform visibility, a balancing act also seen in *Strategic Sentiment: The Selective Use of Emotional Connection in Luxury Influence*, where personal disclosures are deployed cautiously to enhance relatability without overexposure.

This restraint aligns with luxury's semiotic logic. As Barthes (1983) argues, the allure of fashion is constructed through suggestion rather than overstatement. LFIs ' avoidance of overt prompts in 80. 8% of the dataset signals an adherence to this principle. Unlike influencer in fast fashion or lifestyle sectors, whose frequent conversational cues maximise relatability (Abidin, 2016), LFIs uphold a refined distance. Findlay (2019) similarly notes that digital luxury relies on maintaining a tension between availability and unattainability, an insight further elaborated in *From Expertise to Engagement: The Linguistic Shift in Luxury Fashion Influence*, where linguistic restraint maintains brand authority.

Instead of relying on interaction alone, LFIs often favour alternative engagement strategies such as visually rich storytelling and curated lifestyle content. These approaches, discussed in *The Code Book* and *The Fashionable Ideal and influencers Digital Models*, allow influence to sustain engagement through spectacle and symbolic positioning rather than conversational intimacy. This editorial approach mirrors traditional fashion media, where aspirational distance is preserved through visual language rather than verbal outreach (Rocamora, 2009).

Nevertheless, the selective inclusion of interaction questions signals a broader shift in digital luxury communication. As digital media transforms consumer expectations, luxury brands are increasingly required to reconcile exclusivity with interactivity (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016; Godey et al., 2016). While LFIs do not fully embrace the dialogic culture of mainstream Influencers, their use of subtle prompts, particularly around product preference or fashion events, suggests an evolving hybridity in influencer branding.

This hybridity is tactical and tonal; rather than requesting direct engagement (e.g., "like this post"), LFIs favour aestheticised, brand-aligned prompts that preserve aspirational distance while encouraging participation. As Berry (2018) argues, such refined interactivity aligns with the discursive codes of luxury branding, reinforcing elite positioning even as they court engagement.

In conclusion, the INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION code underscores the nuanced recalibration of audience engagement in luxury influencer culture. While interactivity is increasingly vital to digital visibility, its implementation within the luxury sphere remains cautious, refined, and highly strategic. As with *Curated Imperfection: The Aestheticisation of Authenticity in Digital Luxury Influence*, these tactics reveal how LFIs blend intimacy and aspiration, subtly reshaping the contours of exclusivity in the platform era. Whether this understated engagement can sustain long-term loyalty remains uncertain. However, it marks a critical moment in the evolution of luxury fashion communication where prestige and participation are no longer opposites but elements of a complex branding choreography.

4.5.4. Curated Everydayness: The Strategic Mediation of Daily Life in Luxury Fashion Influence

	QR CODE 28 @LEONIEHANNE (6 JUNE 2022) GREENS OF THE PAST DAYS 💚. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/P/CEEMGRKL1R8/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).
	QR CODE 29 @LEONIEHANNE (11 MAY 2023) HAMBURG FOR THE HEART 🖤 LAST DAYS AT HOME MIGHT HAVE BEEN MY HAPPIEST DAYS OF 2023. HAPPINESS MOST OFTEN IS IN THE PUREST AND MOST SIMPLE THINGS: A HOMECOOKED MEAL OR WAKING UP IN YOUR OWN BED ON A SUNNY DAY. 🫶. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/P/CSGO03TIO_J/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).
	QR CODE 30 @TAMARA (9 NOVEMBER 2022) MILANESE DAYS 🫶. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/P/CKV7N7GTPZA/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 37 EXAMPLE OF DAILY LIFE CODE IN LFI POSTS

The Daily Life code in 15.6% of the dataset highlights how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) strategically aestheticise the everyday. These posts depicting mundane activities like coffee runs, gym visits, or city strolls offer curated glimpses into the influencer 's routine, functioning less as spontaneous disclosures than as calculated integrations of lifestyle into luxury branding. As such, they exemplify the recalibration of exclusivity within digital fashion communication, where relatability is carefully managed to enhance engagement without compromising aspirational value.

This controlled mediation of daily life supports Barthes' (1983) conception of fashion as a system of signs, where even the most everyday scenes, such as sipping coffee beside a designer bag, carry symbolic significance. The visual rhetoric of these posts aligns with Findlay and de Perthuis" (2019) notion of curated imperfection,[13] staging casualness to maintain elite positioning. A similar logic is evident in *Curated Imperfection: The Aestheticisation of Authenticity in Digital Luxury Influence*, where gestures toward unfiltered spontaneity are embedded in highly polished brand narratives.

[13] In their 2019 article *How Fashion Travels: The Fashionable Ideal in the Age of Instagram*, Rosie Findlay and Karen de Perthuis discuss the concept of "curated imperfection" in the context of digital fashion imagery. They examine how influencer craft images that appear spontaneous and authentic yet are meticulously staged to align with prevailing fashion ideals. This approach involves presenting a fashionable ideal that seems effortless and relatable, while concealing the labor and curation behind the scenes. The authors argue that such imagery reflects a contemporary iteration of the fashionable ideal, fluid, aspirational, global, and simultaneously embodied and disembodied.

For a comprehensive analysis, refer to:

Findlay, R. and de Perthuis, K., 2019. How Fashion Travels: The Fashionable Ideal in the Age of Instagram. *Fashion Theory*, 23(2), pp.219–242.

Despite their mundane themes, "daily life" posts remain deeply aspirational. The co-occurrence of this code with AUTHENTIC_ACT (17.7%), EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION (19.2%), and CURATED_ACCESSORIES (18.5%) demonstrates how LFIs use these moments not only to humanise themselves but to embed emotional and symbolic capital into everyday aesthetics. Echoing Abidin's (2016) concept of calibrated amateurism, such content simulates informality while adhering to underlying commercial imperatives. This creates a paradox of proximity: the influencer appears relatable yet remains distant, using their "ordinary moments style to maintain exclusivity.

The visual structure of these posts often mirrors diary-like compositions, an assemblage of thematic codes (e. g., Coffee Act, Mirror Selfie, Street Location) woven together to suggest narrative continuity. However, as Rocamora (2011) argues, digital self-representation in fashion involves aesthetic self-surveillance, and these spontaneous updates function as stylised performances. The inclusion of MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT (11.3%), while suggestive of intimacy, remains rare in this dataset, signalling that even when LFIs adopt broader influencer tropes, they do so selectively, maintaining visual cohesion with luxury's polished codes (see *The Café as a Curated Space in Luxury Fashion Influence*).

Notably, the aspirational quality of these daily routines is sustained through product placement and spatial cues. Settings such as five-star hotels, high-end cafés, or scenic urban backdrops are not incidental; they serve as visual signifiers of status. This spatial dimension of influence echoes Bourdieu's

(1984) notion of *Distinction*, wherein cultural capital is performed through material and environmental framing. A similar dynamic is explored in *Public Spaces: Fashion Performed in Urban Life*, where public space becomes a backdrop for fashion storytelling.

Ultimately, Daily Life content operates as narrative labour. It blends casual familiarity with visual opulence, constructing an aspirational yet approachable lifestyle. By embedding luxury into seemingly mundane routines, LFIs extend brand storytelling beyond the product into the rhythms of everyday life. Yet this representation is never neutral. It continues to foreground exclusivity through aestheticisation, reinforcing the influencer 's elite status even in moments of supposed informality.

This strategic use of everyday imagery reflects the broader tensions shaping digital luxury branding between intimacy and distance, interaction and aspiration, relatability and prestige as explored throughout this chapter, such negotiations are not anomalies but constitutive features of the influencer economy, revealing how LFIs navigate the contradictions of digital visibility within an inherently hierarchical fashion system.

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4.5.5. Reflected Prestige: The Mirror Selfie as a Strategic Tool in Luxury Influence

QR CODE 31 @LEONIEHANNE (19 OCTOBER 2023) [INSTAGRAM POST – CAPTION NOT PROVIDED]. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/CYL3ULLLF90/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

QR CODE 32 @VICTORIA (25 JANUARY 2024) LAST PHOTO IS MY FAVE. TOO MANY GREAT MOMENTS TO FIT IN HERE. THANK YOU FOR A BEAUTIFUL SCOTTISH EXPERIENCE @VIEVEMUSE. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/C2IJHBPORUV/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 38 EXAMPLES OF THE MIRROR SELFIE ACT IN INFLUENCER POSTS

The MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT code, identified in 11.3% of the dataset (44 instances), marks a distinct yet marginal strategy within Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) content. While the mirror selfie is a staple across general social media culture, its selective adoption in luxury reflects LFIs ' ongoing negotiation between accessibility and aspiration. This relative scarcity underscores the tension between audience expectations for authenticity and luxury branding's demand for aesthetic polish (Findlay & de Perthuis, 2019).

Though often associated with spontaneity, the mirror selfie within LFI content remains highly curated. influencers stage these moments with deliberate angles, branded accessories, and aspirational interiors, constructing a visual that gestures toward intimacy while maintaining exclusivity. This supports Duffy & Hund's (2015) concept of calculated authenticity and mirrors patterns observed in the *Strategic Sentiment: The Selective Use of Emotional Connection in Luxury Influence* section, where commercial imperatives structure apparent informality.

The mirror selfie introduces a unique visual dynamic: the influencer becomes the subject and photographer, producing what Barthes (1983) would describe as a coded signifier, a controlled performance of self. It also aligns with Rocamora's (2011) reading of digital fashion content as a site of self-surveillance and aestheticised self-presentation. This double gaze, simultaneously inward and outward, echoes Foucault's (1977) notion of

panopticism, where influencer internalise the audience's gaze to regulate their digital identity[14].

Although it may appear casual, the mirror selfie is not a departure from luxury aesthetics but a reframing of them. For instance, Leonie Hanne's wardrobe selfies integrate visual cues of wealthy designer bags and polished interiors that maintain her elite positioning. These images enact Bourdieu's (1984) Distinction through carefully displayed cultural and material capital. In this sense, the mirror selfie is a form of self-representation and a semiotic tool reinforcing luxury's symbolic boundaries.

Mirror selfies' performative intimacy distinguishes them from other visual modes such as MODEL_ACT (77.9%) and FASHION_POSE (17.4%). They evoke the illusion of unscripted everydayness, yet as the chapter's discussion of *Exclusive Spaces: The Private Realm of Luxury* demonstrates, this 'everyday' is never neutral. It is aestheticised, spatially coded, and brand aligned. Like other forms of calibrated amateurism (Abidin, 2016), the mirror selfie simulates spontaneity while preserving the influencer 's status as a luxury tastemaker.

[14] Foucault's (1977) concept of panopticism, derived from his analysis of Bentham's Panopticon, describes a mechanism of surveillance in which individuals internalise the gaze of an imagined observer and self-regulate their behaviour accordingly. In *Discipline and Punish*, he argues that modern power operates not through overt force but through subtle, continuous observation that produces compliant subjects. Applied to influencer culture, this logic is reflected in the internalised gaze of the digital audience. influencer anticipate, curate, and manage their self-presentation in response to constant visibility, blurring the boundary between authentic expression and calculated performance. See: Foucault, M., 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin.

Brands have begun capitalising on this format, explicitly designing products such as the Rhode lip oil iPhone case [15]for mirror selfies. Commercialising so-called trivial acts points to broader shifts in luxury branding's engagement with digital vernaculars. As discussed in *The Selective Use of Interaction in Luxury Influence*, this reflects luxury's adaptation to a participatory media environment, where dialogue and performativity carry value but must remain carefully managed.

However, mirror selfies remain strategically marginal. Their infrequent appearance suggests that while LFIs recognise their potential to humanise their personas, they are cautious of overuse, lest they dilute the symbolic power of third-party validations of professional photography, backstage access, and brand collaborations which confer legitimacy in the luxury space (see *Longevity as Legitimacy: Industry Tenure and the Paradox of Digital Influence* and *The Performance of Industry Social Capital in Digital Luxury Influence*).

Therefore, the mirror selfie reflects the paradox at the heart of digital luxury influence: the need to appear relatable without relinquishing status. Its careful deployment reveals how LFIs negotiate authenticity within the confines of brand strategy, using visual formats that simulate immediacy while sustaining prestige. Whether this format remains peripheral or becomes more central

[15] The Rhode Lip Case, launched in February 2024 by Hailey Bieber's skincare brand Rhode, is a silicone iPhone case designed to hold the brand's Peptide Lip Treatment or Tint. Beyond its functional purpose, the case serves as a visual accessory, prominently featured in mirror selfies and social media posts. This design choice aligns with contemporary luxury branding strategies that integrate products into digital vernaculars, transforming everyday items into symbols of status and identity. By embedding the lip product into the phone case, a device central to content creation, the brand capitalises on the aesthetics of casual self-presentation, blurring the lines between utility and promotional display.

depends on how authenticity continues to be defined and commodified within the evolving *“new digital fashion system”*.

4.5.6. Conclusion

This section has explored how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) strategically negotiate the blurred lines between relatability and exclusivity in their digital self-presentation, revealing that moments of 'authenticity' are often as meticulously curated as traditional luxury branding. Through content coded as AUTHENTIC_ACT, DAILY_LIFE, EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION, and INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION, the dataset illustrates that relatability is not a spontaneous trait but a calculated aesthetic and affective strategy. These selectively intimate posts, whether framed through mirror selfies, diary-style narratives, or emotion-laden captions, construct an illusion of access while maintaining the aspirational distance that defines luxury fashion communication.

A complex relationship with curated imperfection emerges, where Fearfully embed signifiers of everyday life (e.g., coffee rituals, mirror selfies, emotional disclosures) within aesthetically polished and brand-aligned content. As theorised by Abidin (2016), Duffy & Hund (2015), and Rocamora (2022), these gestures towards spontaneity and relatability function not as rejections of the luxury system, but as recalibrations that align with algorithmic visibility, consumer expectations, and shifting platform norms. Emotional and interactive content appearing in 19. 2% of posts suggests that connection is valuable, but

only when its expression does not compromise the influencer 's elite positioning.

Moreover, the dataset reveals a recurrent tension: as audiences increasingly demand transparency, relatability itself becomes a form of emotional, cultural, and symbolic capital. Authenticity is commodified and made visible through polished storytelling that serves both the platform and the brand. Even the candid mirror selfie or a personal caption about a life milestone is revealed as part of a broader branding logic, where aesthetic control, spatial signifiers, and the inclusion of subtle luxury cues preserve exclusivity.

This tension raises critical questions about the future of luxury influence. If authenticity becomes too stylised, does it lose its power to resonate? Moreover, if relatability is always tethered to exclusivity, can luxury fashion fully accommodate social media's participatory ethos without diluting its mystique? This analysis makes clear that the performative balancing act between intimacy and aspiration is not just a stylistic concern but a structural feature of digital luxury branding.

Finally, this section affirms that authenticity and aspiration are not opposites but co-dependent forces in the influencer economy. Together, they form a new aesthetic logic within the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’* that blurs the boundary between real and performed, intimate and elite, reshaping how luxury is felt, narrated, and consumed.

4.6. THE SPATIAL LANGUAGE OF LUXURY: LOCATION AS A STATUS SYMBOL

This category group codes that examine how physical and digital spaces contribute to the visualisation of luxury, from iconic travel destinations to exclusive event settings.

KEY CODES:
STREET_LOCATION,
HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION,
HOLIDAY_LOCATION,
RED_CARPET_LOCATION,
CAFÉ_LOCATION,
CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION,
CLOSET_LOCATION

A bar chart (See Fig 41) accompanies this analysis, showing the frequency of different post locations used by LFIs. As Figure 39 demonstrates, spatial symbolism plays a significant role in influencer -brand alignment. Each location acts as a site of signification, enabling LFIs to narrate luxury as both a lived reality and a visual ideal. These settings range from familiar, everyday environments such as city streets and cafes to more exclusive, carefully staged locations utilised as a form of spatial capital[16]. Examples of the latter include red carpet events, Venetian gondolas, film festivals, and luxurious hotel balconies in Paris. The choice of location by LFIs is deliberate. It connects their personal brand to the ideals of luxury while aligning their image

[16] *Digital spatial capital* refers to the symbolic value associated with appearing in or referencing desirable physical or virtual locations within social media content. Like Bourdieu's cultural capital, spatial capital confers distinction through association with aspirational environments. See: Duffy, B.E. and Hund, E., 2019. Gendered visibility on social media: Navigating Instagram's authenticity bind. *International Journal of Communication*, 13.

with the values of the brands they promote. This careful curation reflects the strategic use of visual storytelling in luxury branding.

Findings:

- *Street Location* (21.3%) and *Hotel Room Location* (14.4%) show luxury fashion being contextualised in everyday and high-status spaces.
- *Holiday Location* (15.9%) and *Red-Carpet Location* (6.7%) highlight aspirational travel and event-based fashion.
- *City Skyline Location* (6.4%) and *Café Location* (4.9%) reinforce urban luxury aesthetics.

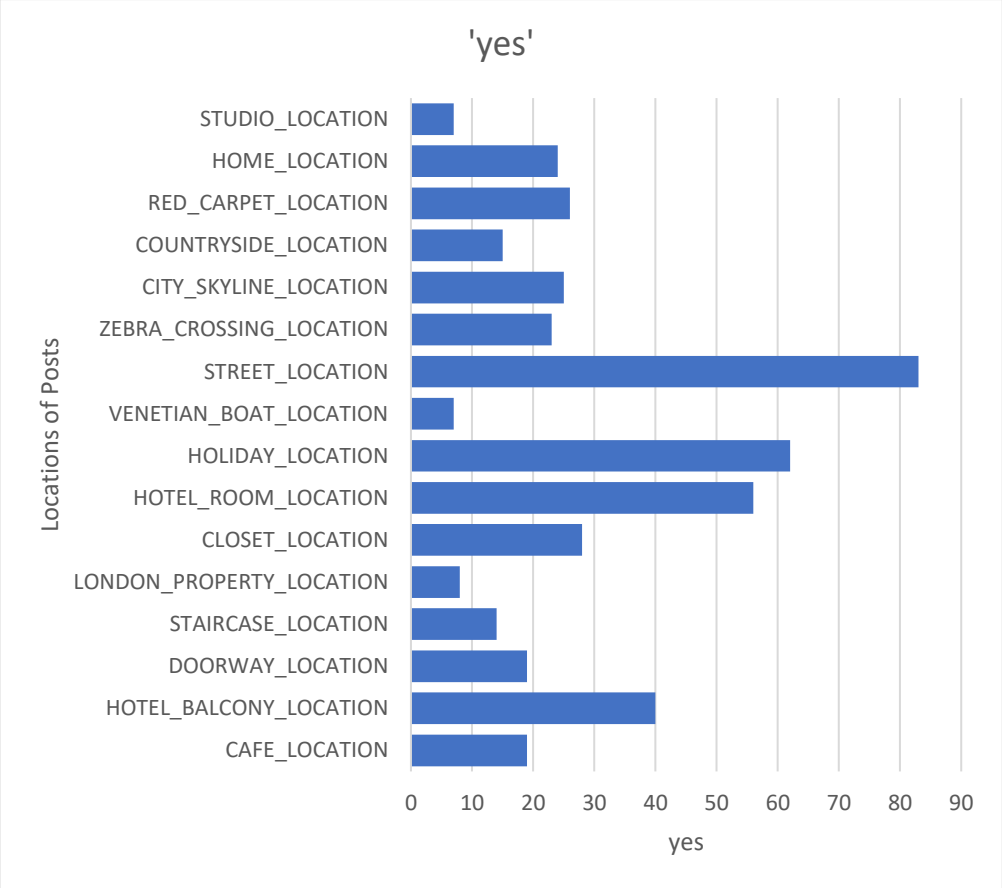


FIGURE 39 FREQUENCY OF DIFFERENT POST LOCATIONS. SOURCE: AUTHOR.

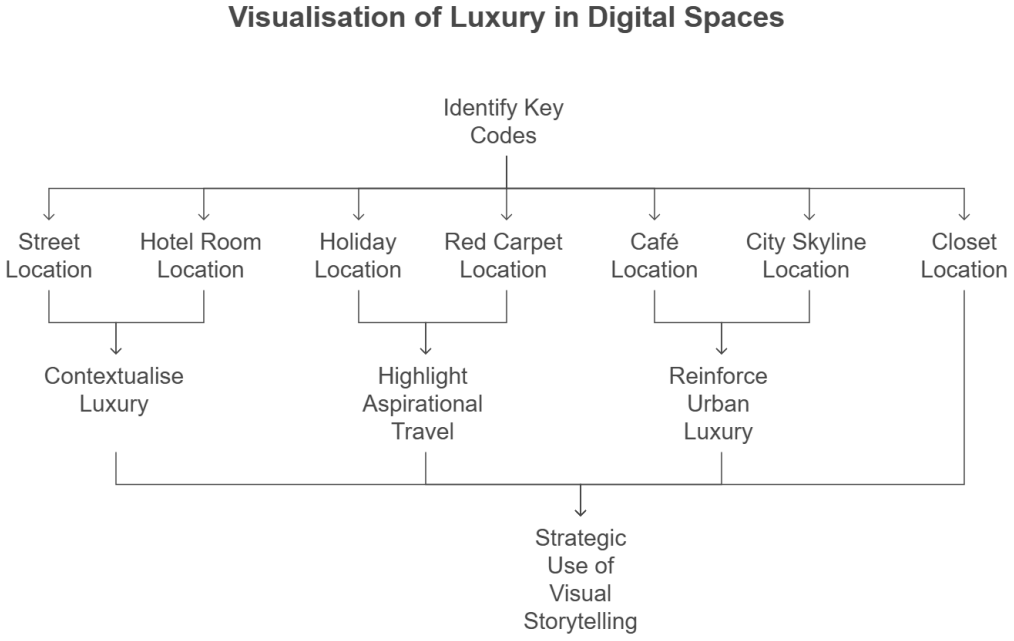
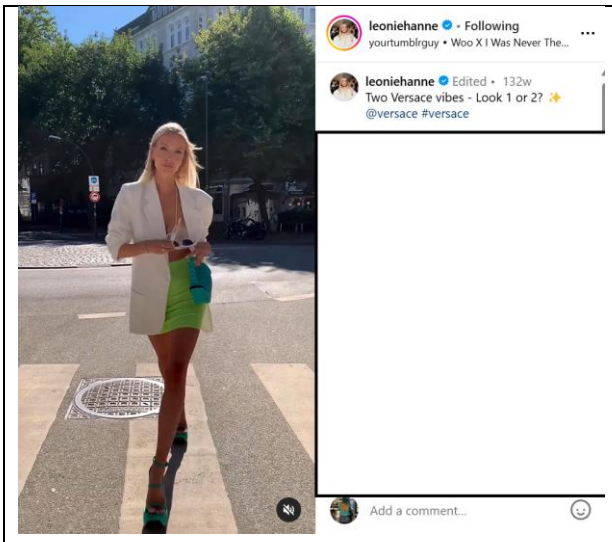


***FIGURE 40** VISUALISATION OF LUXURY THROUGH SPATIAL CODES IN INFLUENCER CONTENT.*

THIS FIGURE IDENTIFIES THE SPATIAL STRATEGIES LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFIS) USE TO COMMUNICATE LUXURY VISUALLY IN DIGITAL CONTEXTS. IT MAPS KEY INSTAGRAM LOCATION TROPES SUCH AS STREET LOCATION, HOTEL ROOM LOCATION, HOLIDAY LOCATION, RED CARPET LOCATION, CAFÉ LOCATION, CITY SKYLINE LOCATION, AND CLOSET LOCATION AND CONNECTS EACH TO THEIR SYMBOLIC FUNCTIONS. THESE INCLUDE CONTEXTUALISING LUXURY, REINFORCING ASPIRATIONAL TRAVEL, ALIGNING WITH URBAN PRIVILEGE, AND STAGING DOMESTIC INTIMACY. COLLECTIVELY, THESE LOCATIONS FUNCTION AS SEMIOTIC CUES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO A STRATEGIC USE OF VISUAL STORYTELLING. BY EMBEDDING BRANDED PERFORMANCES WITHIN VISUALLY RECOGNISABLE SETTINGS, LFIS CREATE A CODIFIED LANGUAGE OF SPATIAL LUXURY THAT BOTH SITUATES AND LEGITIMISES THEIR STATUS WITHIN THE ''NEW DIGITAL FASHION SYSTEM''.

SOURCE: AUTHOR.

4.6.1. Public Spaces: Fashion Performed in Urban Life



QR CODE 33 @LEONIEHANNE (19 AUGUST 2022) TWO VERSACE VIBES – LOOK 1 OR 2? ✨ @VERSACE #VERSACE. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/REEL/CHCSJEQJ1GW/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 41 EXAMPLE OF ZEBRA CROSSING CODE IN LFI POSTS

At just 5.9% of the dataset, the ZEBRA_CROSSING_LOCATION category represents a minor but telling visual motif in Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) content. Despite the ubiquity of urban backdrops in digital luxury aesthetics, zebra crossings appear infrequently, suggesting their use is highly selective, a visual strategy that negotiates movement, familiarity, and editorial polish.

Framed through Barthes' (1983) semiotic lens, the zebra crossing becomes more than a setting. It is transformed into a signifier of cosmopolitan chic. LFIs are shown in motion yet composed, embodying a curated spontaneity that

evokes the energy of street-style photography while maintaining the aspirational poise typical of luxury fashion. This echoes Rocamora's (2009) claim that digital fashion imagery reconfigures public spaces into symbolic stages of self-performance, where urban elements serve as extensions of the influencer 's brand aesthetic.

However, this visual device is not widely adopted. The vast absence (94. 1%) of zebra crossing imagery suggests that, while street-based fashion content is central to digital luxury branding, more iconic or stylised urban settings discussed further in *Exclusive Spaces: The Private Realm of Luxury* and *The Selective Use of Interaction in Luxury Influence* are favoured for their consistent alignment with the exclusivity and polish that luxury demands (Findlay, 2017). While visually distinctive, the zebra crossing introduces an element of casualness that must be carefully controlled.

This selectivity underscores Bourdieu's (1984) *Theory of Distinction*: cultural capital is expressed through what is worn and the framing of space and posture. The zebra crossing, when deployed, is transformed from mundane infrastructure into an ephemeral runway, an extension of the influencer 's self-styling. Here, Entwistle's (2000) framing of fashion as a situated bodily practice becomes relevant: movement, space, and context merge to construct symbolic meaning[17].

[17] Entwistle (2000) conceptualises fashion not merely as a system of signs or a set of garments, but as a *situated bodily practice*, a lived, spatial, and embodied activity embedded in specific social and cultural contexts. She emphasises how clothing gains meaning through its interaction with the body, movement, and everyday settings. In the context of digital fashion

Importantly, these moments are highly choreographed, not unlike those in the MODEL_ACT or FASHION_POSE codes. While appearing spontaneous mid-step, glancing away, these images are products of deliberate staging. This aligns with Rocamora's (2022) analysis of influencer labour, wherein 'effortless' imagery conceals the labour-intensive processes behind content creation. The limited presence of BEHIND_SCENES (7.4%) and BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT (7.7%) further affirms that visibility in luxury fashion is calibrated to minimise exposure of production effort echoing Veblen's (1899) logic of conspicuous leisure.

The restrained use of zebra crossings also reflects content saturation awareness. Godey et al. (2016) argue that luxury branding depends on balancing innovation with heritage; overuse of any motif risks diluting its impact. In this way, the zebra crossing offers occasional visual freshness within a broader aesthetic system that privileges stability and recognisable luxury cues.

Ultimately, the zebra crossing is a symbolic hinge bridging spontaneity and strategy, movement and control. It encapsulates the broader logic of digital luxury fashion influence, where even the most mundane aspects of urban life are recontextualised as aesthetic capital. Its selective use mirrors similar tactics discussed in *Strategic Sentiment: The Selective Use of Emotional Connection in Luxury Influence* and *Public Spaces: Fashion Performed in*

imagery, locations such as streets, hotel rooms, or cafés are not neutral backdrops but active components in the performative display of style, reinforcing the symbolic value of luxury through spatial and corporeal expression. See: Entwistle, J., 2000. *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Urban Life, where moments of casualness or movement are not breaks from branding but calculated performances of it.

4.6.2. The Café as a Curated Space in Luxury Fashion Influence

QR Code 34 @leoniehanne (11 December 2022) London coziness ☕. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CmB1CsmJgL_/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025).

QR Code 35 @leoniehanne (1 May 2023) NY food ☕ Some favourite eats: @matchaful only matcha I'm honestly obsessed with!... @ladybird_nyc for plantbased perfection. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CrsG0PyrwDr/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025).

Figure 42 Examples of Cafe location code in LFI posts

Appearing in just 4.9% of the dataset (19 instances), the CAFÉ_LOCATION category reflects a carefully calibrated interplay between accessibility and exclusivity in Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) content. While seemingly informal, the café setting is rarely neutral. Instead, influencers elect aestheticised, elite cafés typically in fashion capitals like Paris, Milan, or London, transforming everyday rituals like coffee drinking into performative acts of luxury living. This aligns with broader findings across the chapter, particularly in *Curated Everydayness: The Strategic Mediation of Daily Life in Luxury Fashion Influence* and *Strategic Sentiment: The Selective Use of Emotional Connection in Luxury Influence*, where routine moments are aestheticised and strategically staged.

The café location offers the illusion of intimacy and relatability, yet its selective use and stylised composition signal status and distinction. Drawing on Barthes' (1983) theory of fashion as a system of signs, sipping coffee symbolises a performance of taste, refinement, and social capital. This is compounded by the branding of cafés by fashion houses, which, as Chen, Kim & Schuckert (2023) show, act as physical extensions of luxury brands, offering immersive experiences that allow influencer to embody the brand's lifestyle rather than just showcase its products.

This shift reflects Veblen's (1899) concept of conspicuous leisure, where slow, intentional consumption becomes a marker of elite status[18]. However, as in

[18] Veblen's (1899) theory of *conspicuous leisure* describes the display of time-consuming, non-productive activities as a means of signalling social status. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, he argues that members of the elite demonstrate their position not only through material

INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL, even relaxed moments remain tethered to brand visibility: designer logos, curated accessories, and tagged locations frame the influencer within a world of ritualised privilege. This raises the question: Does the café setting humanise luxury or subtly reinforce fashion's embedded social hierarchies, where access to specific urban spaces is a form of symbolic capital?

The dataset supports this tension. Café content often overlaps with FASHION_POSE (17.4%), WALKING_POSE (17.7%), and OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE (14.1%), reinforcing that even casual content remains governed by editorial aesthetics. Moreover, the high frequency of BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION (60. 0%) within these posts indicates that product visibility remains central, even when presenting leisure. As Chen, Kim, and Schuckert (2023) note, luxury food and beverage spaces are often designed with Instagrammable aesthetics, transforming real-life environments into stages for branded storytelling. [19]

wealth (*conspicuous consumption*) but also by showcasing their exemption from labour and urgency. In digital luxury contexts, this is reflected in slow, curated consumption rituals, such as unboxing, spa visits, or leisurely café moments, that communicate refinement, exclusivity, and control over time. See: Veblen, T., 1899. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Macmillan.

[19] Chen, Kim, and Schuckert (2023) examine how luxury hospitality venues, particularly cafés and restaurants, are increasingly designed with visual culture in mind, incorporating elements such as statement interiors, colour-coordinated plating, and branded backdrops to encourage user-generated content. These highly aestheticised environments serve as immersive stages for digital self-presentation, blurring the line between consumption and content creation. Such spaces enable influencer and consumers alike to participate in branded storytelling by embedding luxury into everyday lifestyle narratives. See: Chen, R.J.C., Kim, H. and Schuckert, M., 2023. Instagrammable luxury: Understanding aesthetic experiences in luxury food and beverage services. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 112, 103351. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103351

In this sense, the café pose exemplifies strategic authenticity, a form of calculated informality that gestures toward relatability without undermining aspirational value. It mirrors the dynamics discussed in AUTHENTIC_ACT, where authenticity becomes a performance of imperfection carefully managed to increase engagement. Similarly, like the MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT (*Reflected Prestige: The Mirror Selfie as a Strategic Tool in Luxury Influence*), the café setting introduces intimacy only as far as it aligns with the luxury aesthetic. The result is a paradox: leisure appears spontaneous, yet every frame is curated.

Platform algorithms further shape this curated spontaneity. Posts situated in cafés often perform well due to their balance of aesthetic cohesion and emotional relatability, which drive visibility within social media feeds (Rocamora, 2022). As such, influencer may deploy the café pose at key points, for instance, to celebrate collaborations or announce milestones, therefore maximising engagement without compromising their brand's editorial tone.

However, this raises critical questions: When even coffee becomes content, does LFI communication risk veering into Baudrillardian hyperreality (1993), where life is rendered into a series of stylised simulations? Does the constant ritualisation of daily life also *Curated Everydayness: The Strategic Mediation of Daily Life in Luxury Fashion Influence* create aesthetic fatigue, diminishing relatability through repetition? Or does it reflect a shift in luxury branding, where lived experience and lifestyle imagery are now as valuable as product placement?

Ultimately, the café location offers a snapshot of luxury fashion's evolving

visual economy. It reframes leisure as a performative act, where status is communicated not through material display alone but through how and where everyday life is consumed. As Chen, Kim, and Schuckert (2023) suggest, branded cafés signify the increasing importance of experiential and spatial branding, where lifestyle performance becomes a central tenet of digital luxury communication.

4.6.3. The Street as a Stage for Luxury Fashion Influence

	QR CODE 36 @LEONIEHANNE (7 JULY 2022) MOMENTS FROM @ELIESAABWORLD 💚 #ELIESAAB #PFW #HAUTECOUTURE. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/CFUXQSLL54G/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).
	QR CODE 37 @TAMARA (30 JANUARY 2023) MY @ELIESAABWORLD SHOW LOOK – SWIPE UP TO THE END TO SEE ME THE HAPPIEST, CAPTURED BY @SAMETGORGOZFILMS. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/CODBLBAT6XR/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 43 EXAMPLES OF STREET_LOCATION CODE

Appearing in 21.3% of the dataset (83 instances), the STREET_LOCATION code is a central visual motif in Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) content. It signals not just fashion visibility but urban integration, positioning the influencer as a tastemaker and participant within the cultural life of global

fashion capitals. Unlike controlled interior settings such as HOTEL_ROOM (14.4%) or aspirational HOLIDAY_LOCATION (15.9%), the street is a semi-public, dynamic space where LFIs perform efficiently, confidently, and legitimacy. This framing reflects Rocamora's (2018) argument that fashion influence is deeply tied to spatial aesthetics, where physical presence within iconic cities is key to digital authority.

However, the consistent tethering of influence to cities like Paris, Milan, London, and New York prompts a critical question: Does this urban aesthetic make luxury fashion feel more wearable, or does it entrench geo-cultural hierarchies[20]? As Findlay and de Perthuis (2019) and McRobbie (2016) argue, the continued privileging of Western fashion capitals risks reinforcing traditional structures of access, where legitimacy is granted through style and the ability to occupy elite spaces. This spatial anchoring of influence is echoed elsewhere in the chapter, particularly in *Public Spaces: Fashion Performed in Urban Life* and *The Café as a Curated Space in Luxury Fashion Influence*, where urban settings serve as backdrops for displaying symbolic capital.

The dataset supports this reading. Street posts frequently co-occur with FASHION_EVENT_MENTION (29.0%), BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION

[20] *Geo-cultural hierarchies* refer to the symbolic and material stratification of regions and cultures based on their perceived prestige, influence, and alignment with dominant aesthetic or economic norms. In fashion and digital media, these hierarchies privilege certain global cities, such as Paris, Milan, New York, and London—as arbiters of style and cultural capital, while other regions are often marginalised or selectively exoticised. These dynamics reflect ongoing postcolonial, capitalist, and racialised structures that influence which places and bodies are granted visibility, authority, and aspirational value. For further discussion, see Niessen, R. (2014) on fashion's globalising structures; Phu, T. (2022) on racialised aesthetics in digital self-fashioning; and Rocamora, A. (2017) on fashion media and symbolic power in the digital age.

(60.0%), and INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL (31.5%), suggesting that urban space is not incidental but a carefully chosen site of symbolic alignment. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1984) notion of cultural capital: to be seen in the right place is to be seen as legitimate. In this context, the city becomes a backdrop and a signifier of belonging, where mobility and geographic access serve as unspoken markers of fashion credibility.

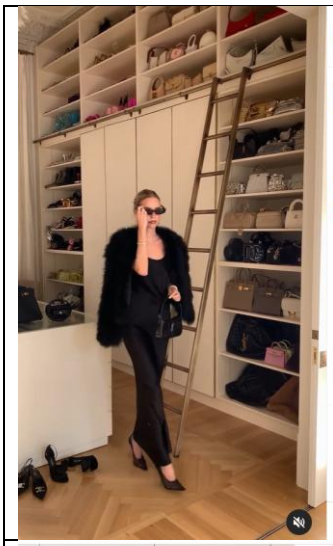
Street content often incorporates dynamic visual strategies. MODEL_ACT (77.9%), WALKING_POSE (17.7%), and FASHION_POSE (17.4%) appear prominently, aestheticising movement as a luxury gesture. These representations construct a narrative of effortless navigation, which Baudrillard (1993) might term hyperreality, where the influencer walks the city and transforms it into a stylised runway. Similar dynamics are discussed in *Crossing as Catwalk: The Zebra Crossing as Mobile Stage*, where movement through the city becomes content and capital, signifying cultural embeddedness.

However, this circulation within select global cities also raises concerns about exclusion. If digital fashion influence consistently centres on recognisable urban locales, it omits alternative geographies and narratives. As Findlay (2015) warns, digital platforms may appear democratising, but their visual language often reproduces traditional fashion hierarchies privileging Euro-American aesthetics, elite mobility, and spatial exclusivity. The absence of content from peripheral or non-Western locations in the dataset underscores this point.

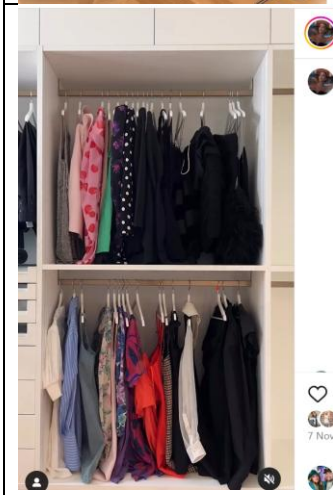
The street becomes a contested terrain, a symbol of mobility and belonging, yet one that is carefully constructed and regulated. As with the

CAFÉ_LOCATION and DAILY_LIFE codes, what appears accessible is tightly curated, reinforcing the aspirational nature of digital luxury branding. Even spontaneity is staged. Movement is stylised. Urbanity is reimagined not as a shared public experience but as a controlled prestige performance. Ultimately, the street location reflects the evolving logic of luxury branding in the digital age. It no longer suffices to display products; influencer must now embody a spatial lifestyle existing within urban prestige that affirms their fashion capital. As the chapter has shown, this dynamic plays out across multiple spatial codes, from hotel balconies to cafés and from backstage to zebra crossings. However, this negotiation between visibility and distinction becomes most pronounced in the street, open yet selective, public yet performative.

4.6.4. Exclusive Spaces: The Private Realm of Luxury



QR CODE 38 @LEONIEHANNE (17 JANUARY 2024) WHEN THEY ASK WHY I TURNED MY KITCHEN INTO A WALK-IN CLOSET… 🤓🎀✨. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/REEL/C2NG3XDOTTT/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).



QR CODE 39 @TAMARA (7 NOVEMBER 2022) YESTERDAY I DID A LITTLE REVEAL OF MY WARDROBE AND I AM SO OVERWHELMED WITH INCREDIBLE MESSAGES FROM YOU GUYS!... SO GRATEFUL TO @FORMATO. SUSTAINABLE WHO HELPED ME DESIGN AND CREATE A PERFECT ROOM FOR MY BELONGINGS. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM.COM/REEL/CKQO58OACDZ/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 44 EXAMPLE OF CLOSET LOCATION CODE IN LFI POSTS

Though only appearing in 7.2% of the dataset (28 instances), the CLOSET_LOCATION category holds significant symbolic significance in Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) content. Unlike more publicly visible luxury contexts such as HOTEL_ROOM (14.4%) or RED_CARPET (6.7%), the influencer's closet offers a curated portrayal of fashion as an intimate, behind-the-scenes practice. Here, luxury becomes deeply personal yet remains carefully choreographed.

Posts were coded under CLOSET_LOCATION when the influencer's wardrobe, dressing room, or closet space was the primary setting of the visual content. These instances were then examined for staging techniques, aesthetic indicators, and co-occurrence with other relevant codes such as MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT, enabling a structured interpretation of how fashion is communicated through the spatial logic of domestic luxury.

Despite its relative rarity, the closet setting is a powerful signifier of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). The influencer's wardrobe, especially when presented as an opulent walk-in or meticulously styled collection, visualises fashion as a form of aesthetic authority. Ownership is not merely material but communicative: a display of taste, discernment, and industry proximity. However, its infrequency may be strategic. As with the selective use of *MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT* (11.3%), scarcity heightens exclusivity, reinforcing the closet's mystique as a privileged site within the influencer's branded universe.

Recent examples from Tamara Kalinić and Leonie Hanne exemplify how the

closet is mobilised for personal branding and industry credibility. Kalinić's 2022 reveal of her walk-in wardrobe, created with sustainable designer @formato. sustainable, fused the visual spectacle of accumulation with the discursive appeal of ethical fashion. Similarly, Hanne's 2024 decision to convert her kitchen into a closet underscores how domestic space is reimagined not for functionality but for digital performance.

The closet location reflects with Veblen's (1899) theory of conspicuous consumption, which states that its contents are not merely worn but staged as symbolic capital. However, in contrast to the transience of event-based glamour, the wardrobe is positioned as a lasting archive, a material record of taste and access. influencer frame their fashion collections not just as professional tools but as personal achievements, a move that blends relatability with aspirational distance. This dual positioning raises key questions explored in *Curated Imperfection: The Aestheticisation of Authenticity in Digital Luxury Influence* and *Strategic Sentiment: The Selective Use of Emotional Connection in Luxury Influence*: When relatability and privilege intertwine, does this dilute the aura of luxury or repackage it as meritocratic?

However, the closet's portrayal is never neutral. Its aestheticised design transforms it from a private utility into a public asset, from colour-coded shelves to designer-stacked displays. This echoes Rocamora's (2011) analysis of self-fashioning as self-surveillance, where private interiors become part of a visual economy that prizes control, order, and beauty. The closet becomes a mise-en-scène crafted to inspire envy and emulate museum-like reverence.

At the same time, the closet functions as a cultural contradiction. Kalinić's collaboration with a sustainable designer suggests alignment with ethical consumption narratives, yet the visible volume of clothing challenges such claims.

Hanne's reimagining of the kitchen as a fashion space invites reflection on the erosion of traditional domestic roles. Historically, gendered spaces have been repurposed for branding, echoing shifts discussed in *Performing Prestige: The Mirror Selfie and Self-Curation*, where the personal becomes performative. As influencer prioritise the visual utility of their homes over lived domestic experience, the boundaries between private identity and public content collapse, giving rise to what could be described as the domesticated spectacle of luxury branding.

However, for all its intimacy, the closet remains a gatekept space. These curated wardrobe tours offer symbolic access but preserve real distance. The influencer's narrative often positions the wardrobe as the reward for personal hustle and creative labour. However, this framing can obscure the structural privileges of industry access, capital, and connections that underpin such accumulation.

In conclusion, the CLOSET_LOCATION category encapsulates the contradictory imperatives of digital luxury branding: to appear intimate yet untouchable, curated yet authentic, and abundant yet ethical. As luxury fashion increasingly transitions into a digital-first model, where symbolic value may soon eclipse material ownership, the role of the physical wardrobe may shift. Will the influencer's closet remain a central marker of status, or will it be

displaced by virtual closets, digital fashion, and immersive brand environments?

4.6.5. The Hotel Room as a Performative Space in Digital Fashion Influence

QR CODE 40 @VICTORIA (12 FEBRUARY 2023) WHEN YOU HAVE @LARRYKINGHAIR WITH YOU AND YOU FANCY A CHANGE 😍 WHAT DO YOU THINK?!! IN @ALICEANDOLIVIA #BLONDEBOB 📌 @1HOTEL. BKLYNBRIDGE. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/REEL/COKJ8SCLTVO/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

QR CODE 41 @LEONIEHANNE (25 SEPTEMBER 2023) AN ICONIC RED LIP GLAM MOMENT FOR A NIGHT OUT WITH @DOLCEGABBANA_BEAUTY 🌹 ANZEIGE/AD NEW DEVOTION BEAUTY COLLECTION WITH THE WOW FACTOR FROM THE FIRST APPLICATION AND JUST LOOK AT THE PACKAGING! #DGBEAUTY #DGDEVOTION. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/REEL/CXNQM1TIBZ-/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 45 EXAMPLE OF HOTEL ROOM LOCATION CODE IN INFLUENCER POSTS

The HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION appears in 14.4% of the dataset (56 instances), serving as a liminal visual setting in Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) content, neither fully public nor wholly private. Unlike the HOLIDAY_LOCATION (15.9%), which foregrounds expansive leisure, or the RED_CARPET_LOCATION (6.7%), which centres on public prestige, the hotel room presents a scene of curated seclusion. It stages luxury as intimate and mobile, positioning the influencer as someone who occupies rarefied spaces as routine. Rocamora (2019) suggests that such spatial framings are central to digital luxury performance, crafting a narrative of exclusivity that is visible yet unattainable.

This portrayal raises a central question: Does the hotel room provide a glimpse into an influencer's private world, or is it another backdrop repurposed for aesthetic performance? The tension between authenticity and branding, explored earlier in *Curated Imperfection: The Aestheticisation of Authenticity in Digital Luxury Influence* and *Strategic Sentiment: The Selective Use of Emotional Connection in Luxury Influence*, becomes particularly acute here. The hotel room appears intimate, but its portrayal is anything but spontaneous. As Findlay (2019) argues, digital self-representation frequently masks its constructed nature under the guise of personal access.

Indeed, the dataset shows that hotel room content adheres closely to high-fashion visual conventions. MODEL_ACT (77.9%), OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE (14.1%), and FASHION_POSE (17.4%) dominate within this location, indicating that these interiors are treated as studios rather than sanctuaries. This supports Veblen's (1899) theory of conspicuous leisure, where elite travel becomes a status symbol. However,

the contradiction emerges: if hotel rooms signal to rest, why have they consistently aestheticised sites of labour-intensive performance?

The boundary between interior and exterior becomes further blurred through HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION (10.3%), where influencer toggle between introspective solitude and outward display. As with CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION (6.4%) and STREET_LOCATION (21.3%), these semi-public settings are carefully chosen to frame the influencer within aspirational mobility. Like the street, the hotel room becomes a site of elite circulation rather than a static presence. This dynamic can be understood through Baudrillard's (1993) theory of hyperreality, where the image of leisure replaces any real engagement with the experience itself.

Co-occurring codes such as GET_DRESSED_ACT (8.2%), RITUALISATION_CONTENT (9.5%), and BEHIND_SCENES (7.4%) reinforce the performativity of the hotel room. These acts, ostensibly spontaneous, mirror the logic found in *Curated Everydayness,* where routine behaviours such as getting dressed, sipping coffee, and pausing in a doorway are transformed into performances of lifestyle distinction. If leisure demands perpetual readiness for digital documentation, the question becomes: Can rest exist under the regime of luxury influence?

Moreover, hotel rooms function as mobile signifiers of privilege. LFIs are not just travelling. They are inhabiting elite interiors, from suites in Paris to beachfront resorts. The dataset highlights how hotel spaces often align with FASHION_EVENT_MENTION (29.0%) and INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL (31.5%), reinforcing Bourdieu's (1984) argument that symbolic capital is

accrued not just through objects but through spatial affiliation with prestige. Fashion influence is no longer anchored solely in what one wears but in the seamless occupation of desirable places[21].

These dynamics suggest that hotel room imagery marks a shift in digital luxury branding from owning luxury goods to performing positional mobility. As seen in *The Mirror Selfie as a Strategic Tool in Luxury Influence* and *The Hotel Room as a Performative Space in Digital Fashion Influence*, the space of fashion becomes as significant as the garments themselves. Like the closet, the hotel room reflects a controlled fantasy: a private moment made public, always lit, always posed, always ready.

However, this raises further tensions. The repetition of editorialised poses undermines the promise of intimacy the hotel setting offers. Suppose the bedroom becomes a stage, and the view from the balcony becomes a set piece. In that case, luxury branding operates less as an expression of personal experience and more as a cycle of pre-set visual codes. In such a scenario, the influencer ceases to inhabit luxury; they must constantly perform it.

Crucially, this aspirational aestheticism may increase the exclusivity of luxury fashion branding. While hotel imagery appears accessible, it reinforces a more

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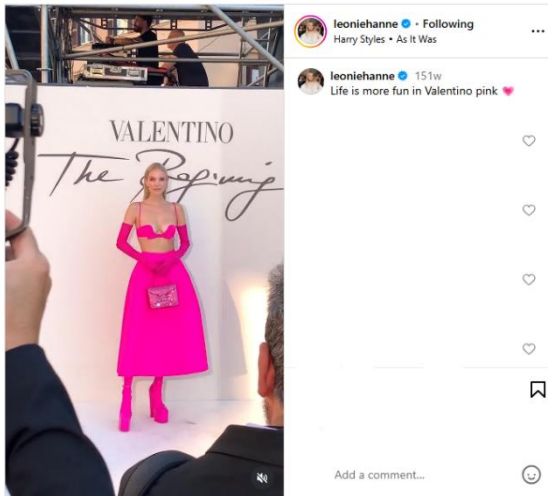
[21] Bourdieu (1984) argues that *symbolic capital*—the form of capital derived from honour, prestige, and recognition—is not solely attached to objects or possessions, but also to spatial and social affiliations. In *Distinction*, he shows how taste is expressed through a habitus that includes where one goes, what one does, and how one presents oneself in particular environments. In the digital fashion landscape, this logic persists: influence is no longer rooted solely in clothing, but in the ability to stage oneself within prestigious locations, luxury hotels, exclusive events, iconic cityscapes, that signify status, access, and cultural legitimacy. See: Bourdieu, P., 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

profound logic of inaccessibility. As explored in *The Street as a Stage for Luxury Fashion Influence*, the influencer's mobility is less about spontaneity and more about curated belonging within elite global networks. What appears as personal travel is, in fact, a symbolic enactment of status and taste, a visualisation of belonging to the transnational circuits of fashion power.

In conclusion, the HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION category encapsulates the paradox at the heart of digital luxury influence: it invites viewers into a seemingly personal space to reveal yet another layer of curation. The influencer remains perpetually at home' within luxury, even as they are constantly in transit. Whether lounging in a robe or posing by the window, the message is clear: luxury is not what you wear but where you are and how convincingly you appear to belong.

4.6.6. Event Spaces: The Industry Stage



QR CODE 42 @LEONIEHANNE (9 JULY 2022) LIFE IS MORE FUN IN VALENTINO PINK 💗. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/CFZJBVRLCU0/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

QR CODE 43@TAMARA (23 MAY 2024) THIRD SLIDE IS MY FAVOURITE CANNES MOMENT 😍🫶. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/CIDNM61UU6H/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 46 EXAMPLE OF RED-CARPET LOCATION IN INFLUENCER POSTS

The red-carpet location appears in 6.7% of the dataset (26 instances) and is a visual shorthand for exclusivity, institutional access, and prestige within luxury fashion influencer (LFI) content. Unlike lifestyle-oriented backdrops such as the CAFÉ_LOCATION (4.9%) or CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION (6. 4%) that construct an aspirational and accessible aesthetic, the red carpet marks a shift: here, the influencer is not simply adjacent to fashion's elite but embedded within it. This spatial positioning reflects Bourdieu's (1984) concept of social capital, where proximity to culturally sanctioned spaces is a symbolic resource that legitimises social distinction. As evidenced by the prominence of FASHION_EVENT_MENTION (29.0%), these appearances are not incidental but are strategically deployed to affirm affiliation with the formal circuits of fashion culture.

This negotiation of spatial prestige introduces a tension that recurs throughout the chapter (see *Performing Prestige: The Runway Pose and the Spectacle of Digital Luxury*): specifically, does influencer access to elite spaces signal a shift in fashion's power dynamics, or does it reproduce them through new, digitised modalities? While influencer discourse is frequently framed as democratising (Rocamora, 2019), the dataset suggests that visibility rather than expertise or editorial gatekeeping now functions as the primary credential. The regular presence of BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION (60.0%) within red-carpet posts supports this, illustrating how branded storytelling is embedded within these moments of high visibility. Rather than resisting commerciality, influencer tactically embed it within cultural belonging and legitimacy narratives.

Undeniably, the dataset's frequent co-occurrence of red-carpet imagery with INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL (31.5%) reinforces that these appearances serve as content and performances of professional proximity. As discussed in *Elevated Influence: The City Skyline Pose as a Visual Strategy in Luxury Fashion Communication*, elevation spatial, symbolic, or visual therefore functions as a key trope through which influencer articulate distinction. Here, the red carpet operates not just as an event space but as a stage upon which legitimacy is claimed and reiterated through the careful orchestration of image and association.

However, what appears to be a moment of industry participation is often revealed to be a hyper-curated spectacle of presence. Whereas traditional celebrity access to red-carpet spaces was filtered through the fashion media, influencer now self-document and distribute these moments, transforming them into algorithmically optimised content. This aligns with Baudrillard's (1993) notion of hyperreality, wherein the image displaces the event itself; the appearance is consumed not as a social reality but as its stylised, performative double.

This self-curation, however, hides much of the labour that underpins such visibility. As discussed in *Seamless Spectacle: Transition Effects and the Performance of Digital Luxury*, a central mechanism of influence lies in rendering work invisible. The dataset supports this, with minimal presence of BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT (7.7%) and BEHIND_SCENES (7.4%) content, suggesting a preference for surface display over process transparency. This aesthetic of effortlessness echoes Veblen's (1899) concept

of Conspicuous Consumption, where the value of participation lies in its apparent spontaneity rather than the strategic labour required to secure it[22].

Furthermore, the substantial prevalence of MODEL_ACT (77.9%), FASHION_POSE (17.4%), and RUNWAY_POSE (12.3%) within these posts indicates that red-carpet content is rarely candid. Instead, it is approached with the choreographic precision of editorial imagery, another blurring of boundaries between industry practice and influencers elf-styling, as seen in the *Fragmented Luxury: The Outfit Close-Up Pose and the Aestheticisation of Fashion Objects*. These repeated visual strategies suggest that influencers are not documenting participation but performing it, enacting a form of professional legitimacy through aesthetics.

Interestingly, the AMBASSADOR_CAPTION code occurs rarely (3.3%), implying a reluctance to foreground commercial affiliations even when they exist. As explored in the caption analysis (*The Caption As Strategic Discourse In The "new digital fashion system"*), this discretion contributes to the cultivation of mystique, an approach in line with luxury's broader semiotic strategies, favouring suggestion over disclosure (Barthes, 1983; Godey et al.,

[22] Veblen's (1899) concept of *conspicuous consumption* describes the practice of displaying wealth and status through visible, often wasteful, expenditure on goods and experiences. Crucially, this display is most effective when it appears natural or unintentional, what Veblen terms the performance of *leisure*. In influencer culture, the aesthetic of effortlessness similarly conceals the strategic labour behind brand partnerships, curated imagery, and access to elite spaces. The value of participation lies not merely in what is consumed, but in making that consumption appear casual, instinctive, and innately deserved. See: Veblen, T., 1899. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Macmillan.

2016)[23]. In this context, the red carpet becomes a hybrid site where editorial and commercial imperatives merge within a framework of symbolic capital.

Therefore, these Influencers' red-carpet content encapsulates several contradictions at the heart of digital luxury branding. While these images suggest access and legitimacy, they are also highly stylised simulations curated to maintain prestige through the language of the visual. While the red carpet may appear to flatten fashion's hierarchies by offering broader access to visibility, it more often stages a reorganisation of distinction, increasingly governed by algorithmic visibility, aesthetic mastery, and semiotic control. Within this recalibrated space, the influencer's power lies not merely in their appearance but in their capacity to shape the conditions through which appearance is rendered meaningful, credible, and valuable. Their presence is not passive but performative, actively negotiating the codes of prestige and relevance within the logic of the *"new digital fashion system"*.

[23] Godey et al. (2016) highlight how luxury brands rely on subtle, experience-driven forms of social media marketing that prioritise brand image, prestige, and symbolic value over overt promotional content. Their cross-cultural study shows that the effectiveness of luxury branding lies in its ability to generate engagement and loyalty through aesthetic appeal and emotional resonance, rather than direct calls to action or explicit advertising. This aligns with luxury's semiotic preference for suggestion over disclosure, supporting influencer strategies that obscure commercial intent in favour of cultivating mystique and symbolic capital. See: Godey, B., Manthiou, A., Pederzoli, D., Rokka, J., Aiello, G., Donvito, R., & Singh, R., 2016. Social media marketing efforts of luxury brands: Influence on brand equity and consumer behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), pp.5833–5841. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.181

4.6.7. Aspirational Spaces: Travel as Luxury

QR CODE 44 @TAMARA (8 AUGUST 2023) OFF FOR SOME QUALITY TIME WITH SOME QUALITY PEOPLE 💕. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/P/CVSLWL8NFKA/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

QR CODE 45 @VICTORIA (3 MAY 2023) {AD} BEACH OOTD @MAXMARA ❤️ #MAXMARA #MAXMARASS23. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/P/CRYYPYRSCHF/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 47 EXAMPLE OF HOLIDAY LOCATION CODE IN LFI POSTS

While STREET_LOCATION remains the most dominant spatial code in the dataset, the HOLIDAY_LOCATION category (15.9%, 62 instances) introduces a contrasting imagery of luxury; one rooted not in urban sophistication but in curated escape and spatial privilege. This section examines how travel-based

imagery operates not as a background for fashion but as an ideological extension of aspirational branding, where mobility, leisure, and affluence are rendered as aesthetic values. In contrast to the more accessible connotations of the CAFÉ_LOCATION (4.9%) or the institutional prestige evoked by the RED_CARPET_LOCATION (6.7%), the holiday setting recasts luxury as an immersive, borderless lifestyle. In this context, fashion is performed within geographies coded as elite, aligning with Findlay and de Perthuis's (2019) argument that digital fashion ideals are increasingly structured through perpetual travel and global movement.

This notion of spatially encoded luxury is further reinforced through co-occurrences with HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION (10.3%) and CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION (6.4%) settings that visualise height, exclusivity, and elevated perspective. These choices are rarely incidental; they recall Veblen's (1899) concept of conspicuous leisure, where the ability to display one's mobility and detachment from labour becomes a key signifier of status. As discussed about the RED_CARPET_LOCATION), it is not the attendance that signals legitimacy, but the manner and context of self-display. Similarly, in holiday content, the prestige of the location often supersedes sartorial detail, prompting a critical question: Has the symbolic power of place displaced traditional markers of craftsmanship and garment value?

Rocamora's (2019) work on digital fashion culture offers insight here. She argues that fashion's aura of exclusivity is no longer tethered solely to objects but emerges through performative spatiality. The holiday setting exemplifies this shift: it is less about showcasing what is worn than demonstrating where

it is worn and, by extension, who has access. While these spaces are associated with spontaneity and leisure, the data reveals otherwise. The persistent presence of MODEL_ACT (77.9%), FASHION_POSE (17.4%), and WALKING_POSE (17.7%) suggest a continuation of polished, editorialised self-presentation. As with the RED_CARPET and RUNWAY_POSE content, these images reproduce industry aesthetics, staging leisure not as downtime but as a performance of style, control, and social capital.

This production of visual leisure is further marked by absence: BEHIND_SCENES (7.4%) and RITUALISATION_CONTENT (9.5%) codes appear infrequently, reinforcing the notion that logistical or emotional labour is intentionally obscured, such concealment maintains the illusion of ease central to luxury's visual grammar. Baudrillard's (1993) theory of hyperreality resonates strongly here, as these holiday images offer no documentary evidence but stylised simulations, content optimised for consumption rather than reflection.

The spatial logics of holiday content also raise broader tensions around authenticity and sustainability. As McRobbie (2016) notes, access to mobility increasingly defines participation in fashion culture. Although digital platforms claim to democratise access, the dataset's clustering around globally recognisable luxury destinations points to persistent exclusions like class, race, and geographic access. Moreover, as Findlay (2019) argues, the sustainability claims of digital fashion culture often sit uneasily alongside the imagery of excessive travel and lifestyle branding. The aspirational tone of these posts simultaneously markets environmental consciousness and

carbon-heavy consumption, creating a dissonance that reflects the contradictions at the heart of luxury's digital evolution.

Furthermore, while the personal tone of holiday captions may suggest intimacy, this is belied by the consistent presence of BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION (60.0%). *The Referencing of Brand Names* shows that this tactic signals that such posts are not spontaneous travel diaries but commercial spectacles. Therefore, the influencer's digital self is not just a narrator of experience but a branded persona performing cultural capital. These posts consolidate the LFIs authority not through expertise but through aesthetic mobility, the ability to move between elite spaces, visually and narratively, with apparent ease.

This way, HOLIDAY_LOCATION content offers a distilled example of digital luxury's evolving logic. It exemplifies how luxury is increasingly performed through spatial fluency, with fashion as a passport and proof of belonging. Like the CITY_SKYLINE and HOTEL_BALCONY categories, the holiday post collapses leisure and labour, intimacy and branding, creating a seamless privilege narrative. Whether these moments reflect lived experience or images, they reaffirm that luxury fashion is not solely about garments or designers but about inhabiting and documenting a lifestyle of continuous, curated access.

4.6.8. Elevated Influence: The City Skyline Pose as a Visual Strategy in Luxury Fashion Communication

	QR Code 46 @tamara (14 February 2023) Two completely different people, strong characters, loud personalities, yet sometimes so same and united as one. With Q & K by @dolcegabbana_beauty this Valentine's Day – we wanted to remind you to always keep your head and your crown high. #OwnYourCrown #DGBeauty ad. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CopDGM0O-Wt/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025).
	QR Code 47 @victoria (6 October 2023) Before @hermes, wearing my new @hollandcooperclothing suit and fourth collection drop, launching October 11th ✨ Who's on the waiting list?! {ad}. Instagram. Available at: https://www. instagram.

	COM/P/CYDRVFIIZ_N/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).
	QR CODE 48 @LEONIEHANNE (29 SEPTEMBER 2023) NIGHT TIME AT @PLAZA_ATHENEE ANZEIGE/TAG @IAMAMYJACKSON @DORCHESTERCOLLECTION. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/REEL/CXXSLGJOZDK/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 48 EXAMPLE OF CITY SKYLINE LOCATION IN INFLUENCER POSTS

Complementing the aspirational mobility depicted in HOLIDAY_LOCATION content, the CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION code (6.4%, 25 instances) situates luxury influence within a distinctly metropolitan register. These images position the influencer against panoramic urban backdrops, typically from rooftops, balconies, or high-rise locations, framing urban elevation as a symbolic device of status and distinction. Functioning as more than aesthetic preference, this upward gaze visualises authority, global access, and elite lifestyle, echoing Rocamora's (2011) reading of the fashion city as a symbolic stage for legitimacy.

Frequently paired with HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION (10.3%) and RED_CARPET_LOCATION (6.7%) (see *The Hotel Room as a Performative Space in Digital Fashion Influence* and *Event Spaces: The Industry Stage*),

the city skyline image extends the influencer 's spatial narrative of mobility and privilege. These co-occurrences, alongside FASHION_EVENT_MENTION (29.0%) and STREET_LOCATION (21.3%), suggest that spatial codes are central to how LFIs construct a presence within fashion's institutional and aspirational geographies. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital, the city skyline signals elevated perspective and spatial consecration, visibility within environments coded as prestigious.

The vertical orientation of this pose introduces a powerful semiotic logic. As Barthes (1983) argued, the fashion image operates as a system of signs, and here, height denotes more than physical elevation. It symbolises symbolic dominance. The influencer is not just geographically in the city but above it, visually asserting control and exclusivity. The frequent appearance of MODEL_ACT (77.9%), FASHION_POSE (17.4%), and RUNWAY_POSE (12.3%) (see *The Fashionable Ideal and influencers Digital Models* and *Performing Prestige: The Runway Pose and the Spectacle of Digital Luxury*) reinforces the city skyline as an editorialised space, where the influencer performs a poised, stylised body language associated with professional fashion media.

However, this performance introduces a critical paradox. While influencer culture is often celebrated for democratising fashion discourse, the skyline pose frequently reproduces established hierarchies. Rather than disrupting fashion's exclusivity, it repackages it in spatial terms, raising the question: if geographic elevation becomes a prerequisite for visual legitimacy, is this a new exclusion mode masquerading as accessibility (See Baudrillard, 1993).

The dataset's frequent co-occurrence of BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION (60.0%) and INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL (31. 5%) supports this reading, indicating that city skyline imagery is tightly entwined with commercial affiliation and symbolic power.

This deliberate curation also prompts reflection on authenticity. Much like HOLIDAY_LOCATION and HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION (14.4%) content, skyline posts appear intimate but are hyper-staged, less expressions of lived experience than simulations of lifestyle branding. The scarcity of BEHIND_SCENES (7.4%) content suggests that the labour of access and production is obscured, preserving luxury's illusion of effortlessness. As Rocamora (2019) contends, the influencer becomes a figure of aesthetic surface rather than authentic mediation.

Consumer research supports this reading. Pebriani and Larashati (2020) argue that location significantly influences brand perception, with prestigious urban settings enhancing perceived value[24]. Within this framework, the influencer functions as both stylist and spatial curator, selecting elite vantage points to maximise symbolic capital. This aligns with the broader shift in luxury

[24] Pebriani and Larashati (2020) argue that location plays a crucial role in shaping brand perception, particularly within fashion and luxury contexts. Their research shows that consumers associate prestigious urban settings, such as high-end retail districts or iconic city landmarks, with elevated brand value, exclusivity, and trustworthiness. These spatial associations contribute to symbolic meaning-making, where the environment becomes an extension of the brand's identity. In digital influencer culture, tagging or appearing in such locations reinforces perceived status and aligns the individual with aspirational urban aesthetics. See: Pebriani, W. and Larashati, T.K., 2020. The effect of store location and visual merchandising on brand image in fashion retail. *International Journal of Business and Society*, 21(3), pp.1067–1083.

branding identified by Findlay (2019), where the value of fashion increasingly resides not in materiality but in its associations with experience and visibility.

Critically, this shift reframes the influencer 's role within the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’*. As their content increasingly adopts the visual codes of fashion editorials, influence risk becoming indistinguishable from traditional fashion models, with fewer narrators of meaning and more aestheticised surfaces (Rocamora, 2018). This suggests a potential erosion of influencer authenticity, particularly as luxury branding becomes more dependent on geographic performance than personal voice.

In conclusion, the city skyline encapsulates the spatial hierarchies underpinning digital luxury culture. It literalises distinction through height, visibility, and cosmopolitan presence while reinforcing the ideological logic that luxury is performed through garments and across rarefied spatial coordinates. Like the RED_CARPET_LOCATION and HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION poses, the city skyline image privileges vantage points from which fashion can be seen and can see itself. In doing so, it maps luxury not onto the body but onto space, elevating the influencer both visually and symbolically within fashion's digital landscape.

4.6.9. Conclusion

This section has traced how the spatial language of luxury operates as a visual strategy through which Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) communicate status,

legitimacy, and cultural capital within the *"new digital fashion system"*. Drawing on various settings, from the urban street and intimate hotel room to the red carpet and aspirational holiday location, the analysis demonstrates that space is not simply a backdrop. It is an active signifier of influence. Locations are selected, framed, and aestheticised to reinforce the influencer 's alignment with the values of luxury branding: exclusivity, mobility, aesthetic refinement, and symbolic distinction.

The dataset underscores a significant trend: LFIs embed themselves within elite, recognisable spaces to construct narratives of authority and desirability. These spatial performances are rarely spontaneous; instead, they are meticulously choreographed to mirror the visual codes of high-fashion media. Whether through a carefully timed golden hour cityscape, a fashion pose on a Parisian boulevard, or a curated glimpse into a walk-in closet, Lifeform luxury through clothing and through where and how they appear. This finding aligns with Bourdieu's *Theory of Distinction*, as spatial access becomes a visible marker of taste and legitimacy, reinforcing hierarchies within influencer culture.

However, this spatial branding also reveals contradictions. The performance of intimacy in hotel rooms and closets is revealed to be just as curated as red-carpet appearances. At the same time, the seeming accessibility of cafés and city streets is tempered by the elite geographies where they are situated. As Rocamora and Findlay have noted, influencer culture often reconfigures rather than dismantles traditional fashion hierarchies, with space functioning as a new terrain for symbolic control.

In conclusion, space is currency in the digital luxury economy. The capacity to inhabit and aestheticise specific environments, fashion capitals, exclusive interiors, and curated moments of leisure functions as both a narrative device and a gatekeeping mechanism. This spatial logic challenges assumptions about social media's democratising potential and instead suggests a re-inscription of exclusivity via visibility, mobility, and geographic privilege.

Therefore, the spatial language of luxury is not neutral. It shapes who can be seen as credible, aspirational, or influential in the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’*. As Licentious to negotiate its positions within this economy, the settings it chooses and those it excludes will remain central to how luxury is constructed, experienced, and consumed in the digital age.

4.7. Visual Aesthetics And Editing Techniques In Digital Luxury

This theme clusters codes that pertain to the stylistic and technical strategies influencer employ, including photographic composition, lighting, and post-production techniques. As shown in Figure 49, influencers strategy involves both visual manipulation and embodied styling. These gestures are not incidental but deliberate forms of digital labour that reflect and reproduce the aesthetic logic of contemporary luxury branding.

Key Codes:
TRANSITION,
GOLDEN_HOUR,
OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE,
RUNWAY_POSE,
FASHION_POSE,
WALKING_POSE,
CURATED_ACCESSORIES

Findings:

- *Golden Hour* (5.4%) and *Transition* (8.5%) highlight aesthetic techniques for reinforcing luxury imagery.
- *Walking Pose* (17.7%), *Fashion Pose* (17.4%), and *Runway Pose* (12.3%) show how bodily performance aligns with fashion marketing visuals.

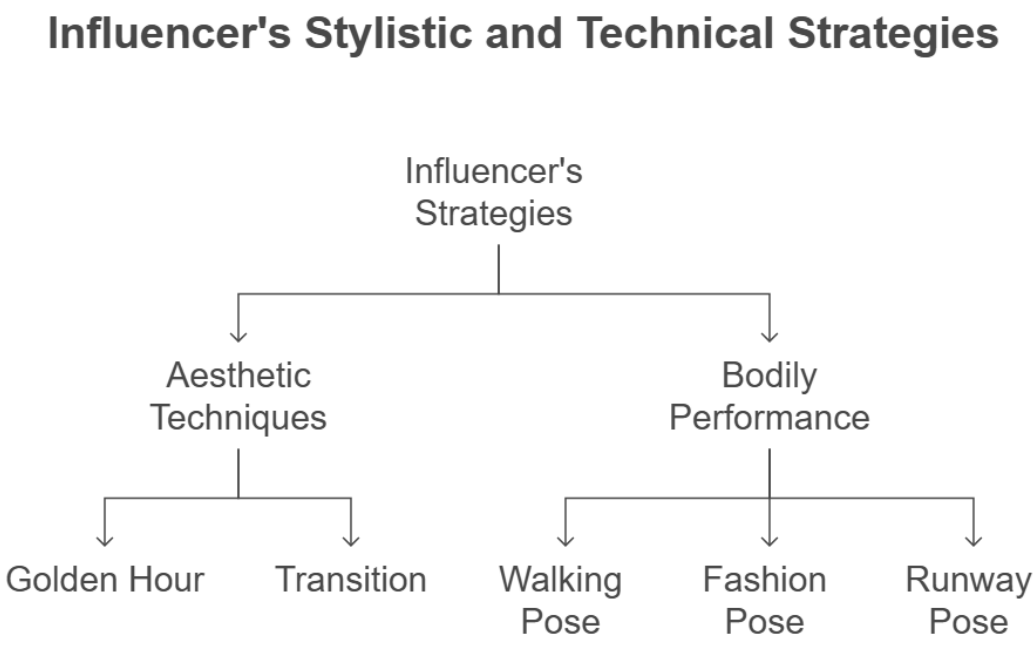


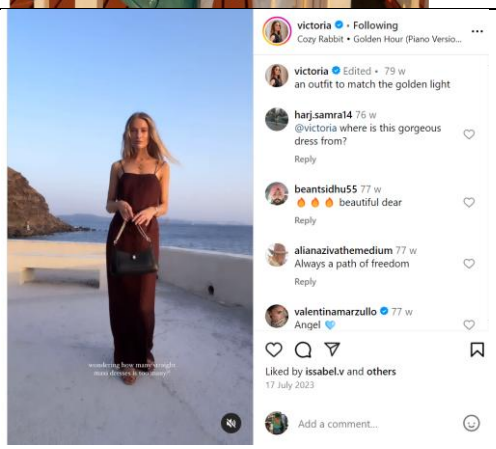
FIGURE 49 STYLISTIC AND TECHNICAL STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY LFIS.

THIS FIGURE CATEGORISES THE AESTHETIC AND PERFORMATIVE STRATEGIES LFIS USE TO CRAFT A VISUALLY COHESIVE AND CULTURALLY RESONANT LUXURY PERSONA ON INSTAGRAM. IT DISTINGUISHES BETWEEN AESTHETIC TECHNIQUES SUCH AS GOLDEN HOUR LIGHTING AND TRANSITION EFFECTS AND BODILY PERFORMANCE, WHICH INCLUDES GESTURES LIKE THE WALKING POSE, FASHION POSE, AND RUNWAY POSE. THESE TECHNIQUES OPERATE AS BOTH SYMBOLIC AND TECHNICAL DEVICES, ENABLING INFLUENCERS TO GENERATE AFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND VISUAL IMPACT WHILE ALIGNING WITH THE VISUAL CODES OF EDITORIAL FASHION. THE FRAMEWORK REFLECTS HOW STYLISTIC AND EMBODIED CHOICES CONTRIBUTE TO INFLUENCER AUTHORITY, SIGNALLING DISTINCTION, VISIBILITY, AND ALIGNMENT WITH HIGH-FASHION AESTHETICS.

SOURCE: AUTHOR.

4.7.1. Illuminating Luxury: Golden Hour as a Symbol of Exclusivity in Digital Fashion Influence

QR Code 49 @tamara (2 July 2022) Sapore di Mare powered by @gucci @salotto. studio #gucci. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CfHa5UFtINs/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025).



QR Code 50 @victoria (17 July 2023) An outfit to match the golden light. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/CuyoGBqInXe/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025).

Figure 50 Example of Golden Hour code in Influencer posts

Golden hour [25] content, though numerically rare, carries high symbolic weight. This section investigates how the temporality and scarcity of golden hour light function as an analogue for luxury's constructed rarity and aesthetic value. Only 5.4% of the dataset contains golden hour imagery, which represents a rare but symbolically rich visual strategy within Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) content. While its low frequency might suggest impracticality or niche appeal, its use aligns closely with the semiotic and symbolic foundations of luxury branding. Defined by its fleeting occurrence and soft, cinematic light just after sunrise or before sunset, the golden hour provides a visual shorthand for exclusivity, refinement, and aesthetic mastery.

This rare lighting is a digital corollary to luxury's traditional codes of scarcity and Distinction. As Bourdieu (1984) argues, aesthetic preferences signal social position; the golden hour becomes a performative sign of cultural capital in the influencer economy. Capturing oneself in this light is not only an act of visual self-presentation. It becomes a declaration of taste, timing, and control over ephemeral beauty. In this sense, the golden hour mirrors the scarcity logic central to luxury fashion (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016; Dion & Arnould, 2011), reinforcing exclusivity through temporal and aesthetic constraints rather than material rarity.

Much like CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION (6. 4%) or HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION (10. 3%), golden hour content contributes to

[25] *Golden hour* refers to the period shortly after sunrise or before sunset when daylight is softer, warmer, and more flattering. This natural lighting condition is widely favoured in photography and videography, particularly by influencer and content creators, because it enhances skin tones, softens shadows, and imparts a romantic or ethereal glow to imagery.

the broader visual economy of elevated experience. However, where these locations symbolise physical and social altitude, golden hour imagery communicates temporal privilege, a fleeting natural resource captured and aestheticised for digital consumption. Its use reinforces Findlay's (2019) observation that influencer branding increasingly centres not on ownership but on curating aspirational experiences. In this framing, luxury is no longer what one wears but how one captures and shares light, moment, and mood.

This aligns with Barthes' (1983) notion of fashion photography as a system of signs. The golden hour becomes a symbolic register through which luxury is not simply presented but felt. Posts coded with MODEL_ACT (77.9%) often show poised, reflective body language, foregrounding stillness and elegance in contrast to the more mobile WALKING_POSE (17.7%) or STREET_LOCATION (21.3%). This stillness, paired with warm light, creates a serene, almost mythologised vision of influencer life that appears effortless yet is the product of highly structured aesthetic labour.

Captions such as "Chasing Golden Hour" or "Found the Light" underscore this illusion of spontaneity. As Duffy (2017) and Abidin (2016) describe, influencer are skilled at producing what appears to be casual, aestheticised content that Abidin terms "calibrated amateurism. " These linguistic cues acknowledge the labour of content creation while maintaining the illusion of ease. Pursuing the golden hour therefore becomes both metaphor and method: a fleeting moment to be chased, captured, and converted into social and symbolic capital.

The golden hour also exemplifies the dematerialisation of fashion within the *''new digital fashion system''*. Rocamora (2019) contends that visual

representation has superseded materiality as the dominant currency of fashion. In this framework, golden hour content does not emphasise garment construction or heritage. Instead, it situates fashion within mood, atmosphere, and experience. This shift aligns with the dataset's broader emphasis on lifestyle-led content strategies, seen in the prominence of HOLIDAY_LOCATION (15.9%), CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION (6.4%), and RITUALISATION_CONTENT (9.5%).

This temporal and affective logic marks a departure from traditional luxury branding. While heritage brands once relied on tangible markers such as craftsmanship and exclusivity of access (Kapferer, 2012), influencer generate luxury value by evoking emotion and ambience. Golden hour imagery elevates the influencer and the setting itself, infusing landscapes, architecture, and everyday rituals with a stylised glow that feels otherworldly and deeply desirable.

However, this strategy also reveals tensions at the heart of influencer fashion communication. If luxury becomes defined by the ability to aestheticise light and time, what remains of its material basis? Can symbolic capital alone sustain the aspirational appeal of fashion, or does this reliance on aestheticised ephemera risk detaching fashion from its tangible roots? Findlay (2022) suggests that the dematerialisation of fashion raises questions about authenticity and sustainability, particularly as influencer aestheticise excess under the guise of natural beauty.

In conclusion, golden hour imagery is not merely a visual embellishment but a symbolic technique that encapsulates the evolving logic of digital luxury.

influencers communicate Distinction, emotional resonance, and aesthetic authority by leveraging rare, ephemeral light. This technique transforms time into a luxury good that is fleeting, beautiful, and captured only by those attuned to its symbolic potential. In doing so, golden hour content reaffirms the influencer's role as a curator of aspirational lifestyles within the increasingly immaterial architecture of the *"new digital fashion system"*. Much like OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE and TRANSITION_EFFECT, golden hour imagery reveals how influencer content blurs the line between spontaneity and strategic visual curation, reinforcing the research's broader argument about the hyperreal logic of digital luxury performance.

4.7.2. Seamless Spectacle: Transition Effects and the Performance of Digital Luxury

QR Code 51 @leoniehanne (20 June 2022) The reason why I'm always late for dinner… 😅 Which dress would you choose? ✨ 1. @jamemme 2. @leslieamonswim 3. @versace 4. & 5. @the_attico. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/CfCpQ7UltDQ/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025).

QR Code 52 @victoria (23 January 2023) Save this for the morning you need some outfit inspiration. 32 layered looks for the colder weather. Comment your favourite look and if you'd like a part 2…. Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/CnxHy3zhLJ8/ (Accessed: 2 June 2025).

Figure 51 Examples of Transition effect code in LFI posts

Adding a temporal and technical layer to the typology, the TRANSITION_EFFECT code (8.5%, 33 instances) marks a distinct visual strategy within Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) content. Typically featured in “getting dressed” reels or branded transformations, these effects signify more than visual play. They serve as digital performances of luxury, where fluid shifts in outfit, mood, or location stand in for the seamlessness long associated with privilege, refinement, and control. As explored in *Exclusive Spaces: The Private Realm of Luxury* and *The Hotel Room as a Performative Space in Digital Fashion Influence*, the appearance of effortless transition conceals significant behind-the-scenes labour, extending the logic of invisible work as a hallmark of digital luxury branding.

What appears spontaneous is highly orchestrated. Transition content demands technical proficiency in editing software, narrative pacing, and digital aesthetics, often requiring collaborative production. The co-occurrence of transition effects with CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION, INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL (13 instances), and BRAND_COLLABORATION (6. 2%) underscores their function as signifiers of symbolic and digital capital positioning the influencer as both curator and producer of lifestyle spectacle.

rom a Bourdieuian lens, these effects operate as hybrid capital: cultural, digital, and symbolic. The polish of these edits masks their complexity, recalling Veblen’s (1899) theory of conspicuous leisure, where effort is erased to sustain an image of ease. Likewise, the transition effect mirrors the editorialised choreography of the RUNWAY_POSE (12.3%) and the golden

hour image (*Illuminating Luxury: Golden Hour as a Symbol of Exclusivity in Digital Fashion Influence*); both hinge on the concealment of technical effort to heighten the visual impact.

This concealment is historically embedded in fashion. As Paulicelli (2016) observes, aristocratic dress always relied on invisible labour systems. [26]Today, influencer enact a similar erasure of effort while maintaining the appearance of solitary authorship. In doing so, they reproduce what Baudrillard (1993) conceptualises as hyperreality: moments of transformation detached from the real stylised into perfection for platform consumption.

Algorithmic logic intensifies this demand. Rocamora (2022) argues that digital fashion is increasingly governed by platform expectations, where visibility metrics reward high-engagement formats such as seamless transitions. The dataset supports this, revealing a clustering of transition content around FASHION_EVENT_MENTION (21.5%), suggesting that these effects are strategically deployed at moments of heightened relevance and brand alignment.

This imperative aligns with Duffy's (2017) concept of aspirational labour: influencer must continually produce engaging, aesthetically coherent content while maintaining the illusion of effortlessness. As with the GOLDEN_HOUR

[26] Paulicelli (2016) highlights how aristocratic fashion has historically relied on systems of invisible labour, such as seamstresses, embroiderers, and domestic attendants, to construct garments and appearances that exude effortless elegance. This separation between the spectacle of dress and the labour behind it has long served to maintain class distinction, reinforcing the illusion that elite style is innate rather than produced. In contemporary influencer culture, this logic persists: aesthetic labour, planning, and digital production are often obscured to sustain the illusion of spontaneity and naturalised taste. See: Paulicelli, E., 2016. *Fashion under Fascism: Beyond the Black Shirt*. London: Bloomsbury.

code (5.4%), transition effects are emblematic of a broader shift wherein technical skill is central but hidden, reinforcing the influencer's role as both a visual authority and an invisible labourer.

However, this aesthetic fluency complicates digital fashion's promise of inclusivity. If influence increasingly depends on access to editing tools, production resources, and algorithmic literacy, then the field reintroduces exclusivity via technological means. Disparities in production quality across influencer tiers suggest that symbolic capital is now tethered to brand affiliation and mastery over digital spectacle.

This shift reorients the basis of fashion credibility. As Atik and Firat (2013) suggest, fashion is increasingly about staging desire, not material garments. Suppose prestige now resides in the ability to produce high-impact, seamless transformations. In that case, visibility becomes a form of value that privileges those able to translate style into algorithm-friendly content[27].

Therefore, transition effects are not ancillary; they are foundational to the contemporary visual lexicon of digital luxury. Their execution signals prestige, their seamlessness affirms status, and their concealment of labour sustains the ideological distance at the heart of luxury branding. In conjunction with

[27] Atik and Firat (2013) argue that contemporary fashion increasingly operates as a symbolic and experiential system in which the staging of desire takes precedence over the materiality of garments. Rather than focusing solely on the ownership or craftsmanship of clothing, fashion becomes a performative act centred on transformation, image production, and narrative appeal. In this context, visibility itself becomes a form of cultural capital, particularly on digital platforms where algorithmic relevance rewards those who can translate style into compelling, high-impact content. See: Atik, D. and Firat, A.F., 2013. Fashion creation and gatekeeping in the market: A critical review of cultural production and consumption. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(7–8), pp.806–832. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2012.715091

GOLDEN_HOUR aesthetics and the performance logic of RUNWAY_POSE, transitions exemplify how symbolic capital today is as much about digital fluency as it is about taste or exclusivity. This evolving relationship between effort, spectacle, and legitimacy marks a defining tension in the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’*.

4.7.3. Luxury in Motion: The Walking Pose as a Performance of Digital Fashion Influence

	QR CODE 53 @LEONIEHANNE (23 SEPTEMBER 2023) NEW CHARACTER UNLOCKED FOR VERSACE, VERSACE, @VERSACE #VERSACE @SAMETGORGOZFILMS GLAM: @AMIR. MKP @SANDRAHAHNEL. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/REEL/CXHU7RBIDMS/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).
	QR CODE 54 @TAMARA (11 MARCH 2023) PARISIAN NIGHTS @ISABELMARANT @SAMETGORGOZFILMS. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW. INSTAGRAM. COM/REEL/CPQRNHZATBW/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

QR CODE 55 @VICTORIA (22 JUNE 2023) TREATED TO A WEEKEND IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AND SOME EXTRA BOUNCY HAIR BY @LARRYKINGHAIRCARE ❤️. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/REEL/CTYOUGAIQOW/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 52 EXAMPLES OF WALKING POSE CODE IN LFI POSTS

In contrast to the highly choreographed stillness of the FASHION_POSE (17.4%) and the stylised theatrics of the RUNWAY_POSE (12.3%), the WALKING_POSE introduces a visual rhetoric of motion, spontaneity, and embodied ease. For 17.7% of the dataset, it represents a prominent mode through which Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) articulate luxury not as a static display but as an active, lived performance similar to how designers utilise the model on the runway to display garments in motion. This section examines how the walking pose[28] negotiates the paradox between naturalism and control, constructing a visual grammar of luxury that is dynamic and meticulously curated.

Within the broader typology, the walking pose is a symbolic device that transforms everyday movement into a stylised enactment of high-end living.

[28] The *WALKING_POSE* draws on fashion's long-standing visual language, particularly catwalk photography and street style imagery. This pose suggests movement, freedom, and status while also functioning as a performative display of sartorial mastery. See: Entwistle, J. and Rocamora, A., 2006. The Field of Fashion Materialized: A Study of London Fashion Week. *Sociology*, 40(4), pp.735–751.

Echoing Barthes' (1983) view of fashion as a system of signs, it repositions motion as a semiotic tool. Luxury is not simply worn but inhabited, embodied, and performed. In this framing, walking becomes a choreography of Distinction, signalling cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984)[29] through gestures that suggest freedom and refinement.

The pose is often staged in prestigious urban settings, frequently co-occurring with STREET_LOCATION (21.3%), HOLIDAY_LOCATION (15.9%), or CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION (6.4%). These spatial codes, explored in *Public Spaces: Fashion Performed in Urban Life* and *The Café as a Curated Space in Luxury Fashion Influence*, reinforce luxury's entanglement with elite geography, where the influencer is positioned not just in but above or moving through culturally significant locations. The city becomes a symbolic runway, echoing the performative spatiality discussed in *Event Spaces: The Industry Stage*, where presence in exclusive settings signals legitimacy. Despite its appearance of spontaneity, the walking pose is the product of deliberate image-making. Wind-blown garments, blurred motion, and off-centre framing simulate casual imperfection, yet these elements are carefully composed to retain aesthetic harmony. This tension recalls the editorial discipline of MODEL_ACT (77.9%) and the visual finesse of *Illuminating Luxury: Golden Hour as a Symbol of Exclusivity in Digital Fashion Influence*,

[29] Bourdieu (1984) argues that cultural capital is expressed through taste in objects and embodied dispositions, which he calls *habitus*. This includes posture, gait, gesture, and comportment, all of which signal social positioning and distinction. Walking, often stylised as a languid, confident strut through affluent urban or leisure spaces, is a form of embodied distinction in fashion influencer content. These choreographed movements communicate ease, autonomy, and access, reinforcing the influencer's alignment with luxury through performance rather than overt material display. See: Bourdieu, P., 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

illustrating how visual narratives of effortlessness are underpinned by strategic orchestration.

Baudrillard's (1993) notion of hyperreality is particularly relevant here. The influencer captured mid-step appears immersed in real life, yet the image is less about action than an aura, a stylised projection of ease, affluence, and chic mobility. The walking pose, therefore, functions as a cinematic shorthand for luxury as an aspirational lifestyle, where the garment gains value through movement, and the viewer is invited to consume not just fashion but a projected way of being.

This curated naturalism raises important questions about access and production. While the walking pose appears to democratise luxury by embedding it in motion and public space, it simultaneously reaffirms exclusion through its reliance on professional photography, time, and access to elite backdrops. Like *Seamless Spectacle: Transition Effects and the Performance of Digital Luxury*, it conceals labour through the illusion of spontaneity, sustaining luxury's ideological association with unburdened elegance. Veblen's (1899) theory of conspicuous leisure is again instructive: the influencer must appear at ease, even as that image results from considerable and hidden effort, no trips, no falls and no stumbling. Moreover, the pose signals a broader shift in luxury fashion communication: from craftsmanship and material value to symbolic capital and narrative appeal. As Rocamora (2019) notes, digital fashion is increasingly structured through the image, with influencer operating as style authorities and lifestyle narrators. The walking pose encapsulates this shift, where value lies not in the garment per se but in the story told through its movement.

Therefore, the walking pose plays a critical role in the semiotics of digital luxury, bridging editorial aesthetics with gestures of wearability. Positioned at the intersection of performance and naturalism, it reinforces luxury's visual codes while softening them with simulated authenticity. Closely aligned with MODEL_ACT and frequently staged in STREET, SKYLINE, or HOLIDAY locations, the pose exemplifies the dual logic of influencer fashion content: to appear unstructured while remaining tightly controlled. In doing so, it sustains the illusion that luxury is attainable and effortlessly lived so long as one has the access, the means, and the visual fluency to perform it.

4.7.4. *Fragmented Luxury: The Outfit Close-Up Pose and the Aestheticisation of Fashion Objects*

	QR CODE 56 @VICTORIA (8 MARCH 2023) SO HONOURED TO HAVE BEEN THERE @LOUISVUITTON ✨ THIS OUTFIT DESERVED ANOTHER MOMENT 🎈 @THEPENINSULAPARIS. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/CPHB26OOANA/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).
	QR CODE 57 @TAMARA (24 JANUARY 2024) BOOM! THE NEW @AUDEMARSPIGUET IN COLLABORATION WITH @TAMARARALPH IS HERE 💥. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/C2FGTILNTOH/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 53 EXAMPLE OF OUTFIT CLOSE UP POSE CAPTION IN LFI POSTS

Earlier codes such as MODEL_ACT and STREET_LOCATION foreground bodily presence within curated environments, and the OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE reorients attention to the material object, foregrounding garments and accessories as aesthetic and symbolic anchors of luxury. Appearing in 14. 1% of the dataset, this pose is a deliberate visual strategy in Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) content, where framing and abstraction elevate fashion objects as signs of status, detached from the embodied self.

Unlike full-body images that place the influencer within aspirational spatial contexts such as *Event Spaces: The Industry Stage* or *Elevated Influence: The City Skyline Pose as a Visual Strategy in Luxury Fashion Communication*, the close-up crop fragments the body, often omitting the face-to-centre accessories, fabric textures, or sartorial details. This approach mirrors Shinkle's (2008) and Evans' (2003) [30] readings of fashion's visual fragmentation, where meaning accrues through composition, detail, and surface. In doing so, LFI content echoes high-fashion editorial aesthetics while aligning with commercial conventions in e-commerce and product placement. This pose is rarely neutral. Frequently paired with gestural elements such as hands grasping handbags or feet positioned to display footwear, it retains continuity with MODEL_ACT (77.9%) and FASHION_POSE (17.4%), casting

[30] Evans (2003) and Shinkle (2008) explore how fashion photography often relies on visual fragmentation cropping, close-ups, and disjointed framing to produce meaning through surface, detail, and absence. This technique disrupts narrative coherence and centres visual pleasure on texture, silhouette, or material, aligning fashion imagery with surrealist aesthetics and commodity fetishism. See: Evans, C., 2003. *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*. New Haven: Yale University Press; Shinkle, E., 2008. *Fashion as Photograph: Viewing and Reviewing Images of Fashion*. London: I.B. Tauris.

the influencer as a framing device rather than the focal point. In this visual hierarchy, luxury objects are not worn. They are presented and elevated through calculated composition. This logic reflects Bourdieu's (1984) notion of cultural capital: mastery lies not only in ownership but in the ability to perform that ownership with aesthetic sophistication visually. However, this abstraction produces a semiotic tension. The close-up invites appreciation of luxury's materiality, stitching, finish, or texture while simultaneously reducing the item to a symbolic image detached from use or embodiment. As Baudrillard (1993) suggests, fashion becomes pure signification under hyperreal conditions: the handbag, shoe, or detail functions not through its utility but as shorthand for aspirational identity. This is particularly apparent in the dataset's overlap between OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE and BRAND_COLLABORATION (6.2%) or CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION (6.0%), where close-ups serve as both aesthetic artefacts and commercial signals.

This dual function aligns with recent analyses of digital luxury marketing. De las Heras Romano and García-Ergüín (2024)[31] note the increasing use of close-up framing to blur editorial and promotional boundaries, situating the object as a visually desirable commodity. Within Instagram's algorithmic environment, such imagery enhances visibility and engagement through

[31] De las Heras Romano and García-Ergüín (2024) examine how contemporary fashion photography employs close-up framing to blur the lines between editorial content and promotional material. Their analysis highlights how such visual strategies transform fashion objects into desirable commodities, enhancing their appeal in digital marketing contexts. This approach underscores the shift towards imagery that prioritises aesthetic allure and consumer engagement over traditional narrative structures. See: De las Heras Romano, D. and García-Ergüín, M., 2024. Fashion Photography Ontology through a Methodological Approach. Revista de Comunicación de la SEECI, (57), pp.1–20.

clarity, resolution, and shareability, affordances particularly valuable when showcasing recognisable and aspirational items like handbags or footwear (see Findlay & de Perthuis, 2019).

These objects also operate as entry points into the luxury brand ecosystem. Dion and Arnould (2011) argue that accessories represent accessible thresholds of luxury, carrying symbolic value without the economic burden of full couture. The close-up pose amplifies this logic, offering proximity to luxury while sustaining its exclusivity. It performs a delicate balancing act between reach and aspiration, mirroring strategies observed in *Illuminating Luxury: Golden Hour as a Symbol of Exclusivity in Digital Fashion Influence* or *Seamless Spectacle: Transition Effects and the Performance of Digital Luxury*, aestheticising luxury through controlled visual storytelling.

At the same time, minimising the influencer's identity raises critical questions about the role of embodiment in digital fashion culture. As with the golden hour's depersonalised spectacle or the curated neutrality of *The Hotel Room as a Performative Space in Digital Fashion Influence*, the outfit close-up sidelines the human subject, focusing instead on surface and abstraction. This signals a broader shift in the influencer economy, where luxury is increasingly articulated not through personal narrative but through the symbolic power of the image.

This strategy also complicates claims of relatability. While LFIs ostensibly offer a more accessible and intimate form of fashion communication than legacy media, the erasure of the body and the emphasis on the product distil the image into a promotional fragment. As Rocamora (2017) and McDowell (2020) argue, digital fashion continues to uphold exclusivity through visual codes,

even as it adopts the rhetoric of authenticity. The outfit close-up encapsulates this contradiction, inviting closeness to the product while withholding intimacy with its wearer.

Ultimately, the OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE encapsulates the evolving dynamics of digital luxury. It reflects a visual logic where symbolic value, algorithmic legibility, and aesthetic control converge. Closely aligned with BRAND_MENTION_CAPTION (60.0%) and *Illuminating Luxury: Golden Hour as a Symbol of Exclusivity in Digital Fashion Influence* (5.4%), this pose demonstrates how visibility and desirability are increasingly produced through fragmentation and stylised abstraction. In privileging the object over the body, the pose distils digital luxury to its visual core: not about how fashion is worn but how it is seen and, more crucially, how it is staged.

4.7.5. Performing Prestige: The Runway Pose and the Spectacle of Digital Luxury

QR CODE 58 @TAMARA (23 SEPTEMBER 2023) MY FIRST LOOK FOR #MFW THIS YEAR WAS @FENDI STARTING WITH A BANG CAPTURED BY @SAMETGORGOZFILMS. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/REEL/CI11L8SGJNT/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

QR CODE 59 @LEONIEHANNE (4 SEPTEMBER 2022) BLACK SWAN IN @ALBERTAFERRETTI. INSTAGRAM. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/REEL/CIGVFOJUDAA/ (ACCESSED: 2 JUNE 2025).

FIGURE 54 EXAMPLES OF RUNWAY POST CODE IN LFI POSTS

Building on the themes of movement and performance introduced in *Luxury in Motion: The Walking Pose as a Performance of Digital Fashion Influence*, the *Runway Pose* more explicitly draws from the visual lexicon of high-fashion institutions. This section considers how LFIs translate catwalk codes into digital performance to assert industry legitimacy. In 12.3% of the dataset (48 instances), the runway pose functions as a performative strategy in Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) content. Distinct from more casual or naturalistic influencer poses, it draws directly from the stylised choreography of the fashion show. Typically involving a walk into frame, followed by a pause to showcase the outfit, the pose mimics the format of professional runway presentations, aligning the influencer with high fashion's visual codes and cultural authority.

This visual performance appropriates the semiotic prestige of the catwalk, long a symbol of fashion's institutional exclusivity, and repackages it for digital consumption. Findlay and de Perthuis (2019) argue that digital fashion remains structured by aesthetic traditions inherited from the industry, and the runway pose exemplifies this continuity. Its translation of catwalk theatrics into Instagram Reels or TikTok formats reveals how LFIs borrow and adapt high-fashion conventions to construct aspirational identities suited to platform-specific engagement. This performance is not simply imitative but strategic, designed to signal industry fluency and algorithmic awareness.

The runway pose must be understood within a broader constellation of performative tactics. It frequently co-occurs with FASHION_POSE (17.4%) and MODEL_ACT (77.9%), reinforcing a visual alignment with editorial and

catwalk aesthetics. These poses elevate influencer content beyond every day, situating it within the spectacle-driven logic of luxury branding. This convergence supports Rocamora's (2022) argument that digital fashion is increasingly shaped by choreographed self-performances rather than static photography. It is about what is worn and how it is presented dynamic, theatrical, and meticulously curated for visibility.

These practices also complicate the boundary between professional and amateur fashion performance. Historically, the runway has been the domain of trained models whose movements are choreographed to display a designer's creative vision. In contrast, LFIs engage in aspirational imitation, performing fashion's visual codes without necessarily being embedded within its institutional structures. While some collaborate with luxury brands, many remain outside traditional gatekeeping mechanisms, reinforcing Findlay's (2017) depiction of influencers liminal figures simultaneously central and peripheral to fashion's core.

At the same time, the editorialisation of influencer content, as exemplified in the runway pose, raises questions about fashion's digital accessibility. While social media platforms are often positioned as democratising, reproducing high-fashion tropes may reassert exclusivity. The runway pose privileges aesthetic control over relatability, echoing the aura of glamour and inaccessibility long associated with professional fashion media. This aligns with Baudrillard's (1993) notion of hyperreality, where luxury performance becomes more significant than the lived experience of fashion.

The pose also connects with broader visual patterns in the dataset. For example, the frequent appearance of *Fragmented Luxury: The Outfit Close-Up Pose and the Aestheticisation of Fashion Objects* (14.1%) suggests that fashion is increasingly mediated through fragmentary and stylised imagery. The rise of aesthetic fragmentation detailed shots of handbags, shoes, or garment textures mirrors de Perthuis and Findlay's (2019) concept of the "flat dress," where fashion is designed for the camera rather than the body. Such visual strategies shift the focus from wearability to image production, privileging symbolic capital over material craftsmanship.

This dynamic further reflects the pressures of algorithmic culture. As Rocamora (2019) notes, digital capitalism privileges those who master platform-specific aesthetics over those with conventional industry credentials. The runway pose exemplifies this shift. It functions as a performative display of fashion fluency and a strategic response to content economies that reward motion, spectacle, and editorial polish. High-engagement posts increasingly favour high-production content, raising concerns about creative saturation and visual sameness. If all influencers replicate the same high-fashion tropes, does this reinforce aesthetic homogeneity rather than promoting innovation?

Despite this, the runway pose remains a powerful signifier of aspiration and legitimacy. It positions LFIs as not just participants in digital fashion but as curators of prestige, capable of mimicking traditional fashion media's affective and visual charge. However, this raises critical tensions. Does the pose offer LFIs a form of cultural participation within the fashion industry, or does it merely allow for aspirational mimicry? If digital fashion reproduces the visual

languages of exclusivity, does it truly democratise access or reconfigure hierarchy in new forms?

Ultimately, the runway pose encapsulates the shifting terrain of digital luxury branding. It reflects an ongoing negotiation between influence and aspiration, participation and exclusion. While the pose enables LFIs to perform legitimacy through carefully choreographed spectacle, their position remains ambivalent, both empowered by and tethered to the aesthetic codes of the industry they seek to emulate. The runway pose not only extends the theatricality of the FASHION_POSE but also advances the dataset's broader theme of aesthetic editorialisation. This visual strategy ultimately reveals a tension between fashion's democratising digital reach and its persistent hierarchical frameworks.

4.7.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this section has explored how visual aesthetics and editing techniques shape the presentation of digital luxury within Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) content, revealing that influence in the contemporary fashion landscape is less about material possession and more about curating an image-driven spectacle. Across techniques, whether the romantic glow of golden hour, the seamless choreography of transition effects, or the embodied movement of walking and runway poses, LFIs strategically perform exclusivity through visual storytelling, reinforcing their cultural capital and aligning themselves with elite fashion codes. The dataset underscores that digital

luxury is deeply embedded in symbolic performances: aesthetic mastery, technical fluency, and algorithmic optimisation are all key to sustaining visibility and authority in this space.

While these stylistic choices emulate high-fashion conventions, they also signal a shift in the meaning of luxury itself. Increasingly, luxury is consumed not as a physical experience but as a visual performance, fragmented, stylised, and platform optimised. Techniques such as the outfit close-up and the runway pose demonstrate how LFIs selectively foregrounds design details and bodily performance, constructing a hyperreal vision of fashion that privileges image over function, aesthetic over materiality. Drawing from the theoretical lenses of Barthes (1983), Bourdieu (1984), and Baudrillard (1998), this analysis shows how luxury fashion, in the digital age, becomes a sign system where prestige performance is more significant than the garments themselves.

However, these practices also expose tensions within digital luxury communication. The technical sophistication required to produce seamless visuals, whether through editing software, lighting mastery, or choreographed poses, suggests that access to luxury influence remains unequally distributed, shaped by invisible labour and production resources. This complicates narratives of democratisation, often associated with social media. The research reveals a paradox: while digital platforms invite broader participation, the successful performance of luxury still relies on replicating exclusionary aesthetics inherited from the traditional fashion system.

Concluding this section, we highlight that the aesthetics of digital luxury are not just stylistic embellishments but active signifiers of value, legitimacy, and aspiration. In the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’*, LFIs are not simply wearing fashion; they are performing it, producing highly curated visual narratives that transform the everyday into the extraordinary. This performative shift has significant implications for how luxury is defined, consumed, and contested in digital culture, raising urgent questions about visibility, authenticity, and the future of fashion influence.

4.8. THE TENSION BETWEEN COMMERCIALISATION AND EDITORIAL IDENTITY

This category includes codes that address negotiating commercial partnerships and brand sponsorships while maintaining an air of exclusivity and editorial credibility. Figure 55 shows that LFIs adopt nuanced strategies to signal partnership while retaining symbolic power. This balance between commercial transparency and aspirational storytelling is central to their role as hybrid actors, part marketers, and part tastemakers.

Key Codes:
AD_CAPTION,
PRODUCT_TAG,
BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION,
SHOP_ACT,
UNBOXING_ACT,
DOUBLE_ENTENDRES_CAPTION,
BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION

Findings:

- *Ad Caption* (17.9%) and *Ambassador Caption* (3.3%) show various levels of brand collaboration disclosure.
- *Product Tag* (7.7%) suggests embedded commerce but is less frequent than direct brand mentions.
- *Sale Language Caption* (7.2%) is low, indicating a focus on aspirational marketing over direct sales.

FIGURE 55 STRATEGIC NEGOTIATION OF COMMERCIAL PARTNERSHIPS IN LFI CONTENT.

THIS FIGURE MAPS THE WAYS LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFIS) NAVIGATE BRAND PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH A DUAL STRATEGY OF MAINTAINING EXCLUSIVITY AND EDITORIAL CREDIBILITY. THESE PARALLEL AIMS ARE OPERATIONALISED THROUGH VARIOUS CAPTION AND TAGGING PRACTICES, INCLUDING AD CAPTIONS, PRODUCT TAGS, AND BRAND NAMES CAPTIONS. WITHIN EXCLUSIVITY-BASED STRATEGIES, AMBASSADOR CAPTIONS AND SALE LANGUAGE CAPTIONS FURTHER DIFFERENTIATE THE TONE AND INTENTION OF SPONSORED CONTENT. ON THE EDITORIAL SIDE, MENTIONING LUXURY BRANDS WITHOUT OVERT PROMOTIONAL CUES MAINTAINS ALIGNMENT WITH HIGH-FASHION PUBLISHING NORMS. THIS DIAGRAM REFLECTS HOW LFIS MUST SIMULTANEOUSLY SATISFY COMMERCIAL OBLIGATIONS AND UPHOLD SYMBOLIC AUTHORITY, REVEALING THE BALANCING ACT REQUIRED TO REMAIN MARKETABLE AND CULTURALLY CREDIBLE WITHIN THE ''NEW DIGITAL FASHION SYSTEM''.

SOURCE: AUTHOR.

4.8.1. Strategic Avoidance of Overt Promotional Language in LFI Captions

Beyond visual strategy, captions offer insight into how LFIs navigate the tensions between commercial influence and brand mystique. This section analyses the notable avoidance of overt promotional language, positioning luxury as an aspirational narrative rather than a transactional exchange. The findings reveal a notable avoidance of overt promotional language in Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) captions, aligning with the visual and textual strategies outlined earlier in sections *The Referencing of Brand Names* and *From Expertise to Engagement: The Linguistic Shift in Luxury Fashion Influence*. This restraint mirrors broader codes of luxury branding, which privilege exclusivity, symbolic capital, and mystique over accessibility and direct persuasion. Unlike the fast fashion sector's direct appeals, luxury brands embed products within aspirational narratives that sustain cultural capital while avoiding commercial immediacy.

This strategic omission aligns with Dion and Arnould's (2011) framing of luxury marketing as a symbolic meaning system, where desire is cultivated through myth and image rather than transactional language. Explicit sales-driven captions were among the least frequent, appearing in only 7. 2% of the dataset (28 instances). In comparison, brand name mentions discussed further in *The Spatial Language of Luxury: Location as a Status Symbol* appeared in 60. 0% of captions (234 instances), reinforcing the emphasis on prestige and brand reinforcement rather than sales. The visual correlates of this textual

minimalism can be seen in *Performing Prestige: The Runway Pose and the Spectacle of Digital Luxury* and *Fragmented Luxury: The Outfit Close-Up Pose and the Aestheticisation of Fashion Objects*, where imagery, rather than copy, carries the weight of luxury communication.

Rather than replicating Veblen's (1899) overt displays of conspicuous consumption, LFIs engage in more coded distinctions, consistent with Rocamora's (2019) argument that digital influencer operate as cultural intermediaries. The preference for aspirational over commercial captioning complements the use of highly stylised poses like MODEL_ACT (77.9%) and FASHION_POSE (17.4%), where the influencer visually asserts symbolic capital while avoiding overt promotional gestures.

The subtle use of promotional cues also extends to advertising disclosures. Captions explicitly tagged as advertisements accounted for 17.9% of cases (70 instances), while brand ambassador captions were rare (3.3%, 13 instances). These disclosures, while present, are often integrated into aspirational content formats, ensuring that regulatory compliance does not disrupt the performative tone. This reinforces the findings in *The Tension Between Commercialisation and Editorial Identity*, where caption narratives often centre around compelling storytelling and lifestyle alignment rather than sales-focused calls to action.

This complex balancing act introduces a tension between exclusivity and transparency; a theme further explored in Chapter Five's discussion of aspirational labour and digital trust. The influencer's strategic avoidance of direct promotional language might uphold brand mystique but could also compromise perceived authenticity; a concern echoed in Boerman et al. 's

(2017) [32] work on influencer trust. This tension also reflects with the performative strategies observed in *Luxury in Motion: The Walking Pose as a Performance of Digital Fashion Influence* and *Performing Prestige: The Runway Pose and the Spectacle of Digital Luxury*, where gestures of effortlessness conceal the labour behind aesthetic production.

Furthermore, the restraint in ambassadorial signposting highlights a distinct branding logic. Whereas mainstream fashion often centres collaborations for visibility, luxury brands use these partnerships discussed in *Visual Aesthetics And Editing Techniques In Digital Luxury* and connected to elite events mentioned in *Exclusive Access or Digital Engagement? The Shifting Role of Fashion Events in Luxury Influence* as subtle status markers. This connects to Findlay's (2019) assertion that luxury fashion communication privileges aesthetic authority over explicit promotional rhetoric.

Finally, this section's findings converge with broader patterns in the dataset that demonstrate how visual and textual strategies in luxury influencer content reinforce symbolic capital. Much like the emphasis on high-production-value visuals discussed in *Seamless Spectacle: Transition Effects and the Performance of Digital Luxury* and the semiotic framing of elite space in *The*

[32] Boerman et al. (2017) explore how disclosure of sponsored content affects consumer trust in Influencers. Their findings suggest that when commercial intent is made explicit through hashtags like #ad or #sponsored, audiences often respond with increased scepticism, which can reduce the influencer's perceived credibility and authenticity. This creates tension within influencer marketing: while transparency is ethically and legally encouraged, it may undermine the persuasive effectiveness of the content. This concern is particularly pronounced in the luxury sector, where mystique, subtlety, and the performance of organic affinity remain central to brand value. See: Boerman, S.C., Willemsen, L.M. and Van Der Aa, E.P., 2017. "This Post Is Sponsored": Effects of Sponsorship Disclosure on Persuasion Knowledge and Electronic Word of Mouth in the Context of Facebook. Journal of Interactive Marketing, 38, pp.82–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2016.12.002

Hotel Room as a Performative Space in Digital Fashion Influence, the avoidance of overt marketing language illustrates how luxury fashion branding maintains a consistent logic across mediums: to persuade without appearing to sell, and to signify without disrupting the aspirational fantasy. As explored further in the analysis of PRODUCT_TAGGING and AD_CAPTION categories, this reluctance to foreground commerce reflects luxury branding's symbolic economy, where scarcity, mystique, and cultural capital take precedence over visibility and sales immediacy.

4.8.2. The Absence of Product Tagging as a Strategic Choice

Following the analysis of promotional caption avoidance, this section turns to product tagging as a further site of strategic omission within Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) communication. One of the most striking findings of this study is the notable absence of product tagging within LFI posts. This rarity does not signal a lack of commercial intent, but rather a refusal to equate luxury with convenience. Instead, exclusivity is maintained through deferred access, where desire is cultivated without facilitating immediate purchase.

This practice stands in clear contrast to the norms of mainstream influencer marketing, where product tags are routinely deployed to enable frictionless purchasing and maximise algorithmic visibility. While fast fashion and mid-market influencers frequently integrate shopping tags as part of their

promotional strategy, LFIs largely eschew this affordance, despite operating on a platform increasingly structured around social commerce.

The significance of this omission becomes clearer when considered against Instagram's commercial architecture. As Koyande et al. (2025) observe, Instagram has evolved into a platform where features such as product tagging and in-app shopping are designed to "streamline the buying process, enhancing the social commerce experience" (p. 1183). Product tags are explicitly positioned as mechanisms that reduce distance between inspiration and acquisition, allowing brands to transform their profiles into "digital storefronts" (Koyande et al., 2025, p. 1186). Within this context, the avoidance of product tagging by LFIs should not be read as technical oversight, but as a deliberate resistance to platform-native e-commerce logics.

Empirically, posts were coded under PRODUCT_TAG when one or more commercial tags, including brand shopping tags or Instagram product links, were visibly embedded within the image. This variable was analysed in relation to co-occurring features such as BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION and AD_CAPTION, enabling patterns of commercial signalling to be identified even within ostensibly organic posts. The findings confirm that product tags appeared in only 30 posts (7.7 %), making PRODUCT_TAG one of the least frequently occurring caption features across the dataset.

This strategic absence aligns closely with the broader reluctance toward overt promotional tactics identified earlier in the chapter. It reflects a core principle of luxury branding, whereby exclusivity is sustained through absence rather than accessibility. Rather than enabling immediacy, LFIs preserve distance,

encouraging aspiration over acquisition. This finding supports McCracken's (1988) argument that luxury meaning is transferred through symbolic association and cultural coding rather than through direct facilitation of purchase.

The contrast between low levels of product tagging and the high frequency of brand name mentions further reinforces this logic. Brand names appeared in 234 captions (60.0 %), indicating that luxury identity is asserted through association rather than transactional signalling. The brand is named, but the pathway to purchase remains obscured. In this way, LFIs maintain the performative illusion that luxury is something to be recognised and admired, rather than actively marketed.

This pattern can be understood as a form of selective engagement with Instagram's commercial affordances. While the platform increasingly prioritises visibility, conversion, and data capture, LFIs exploit its aesthetic economies without fully subscribing to its transactional imperatives. As Rocamora (2022) argues, digital fashion operates within regimes of datafication where visibility and access are tightly governed. Here, luxury branding does not reject digital culture outright, but instead subverts its conventions, maintaining symbolic distance while remaining visually present.

However, this strategy is not without tension. As Dion and Arnould (2011) and Godey et al. (2016) note, digital-native consumers increasingly expect seamless interaction with brands and reduced barriers between inspiration and acquisition. Instagram itself positions shopping features as a benefit to users, enabling them to research products and make purchasing decisions

directly from influencer content (Koyande et al., 2025). The absence of product tags therefore introduces friction into the consumer journey. While this friction may preserve mystique and symbolic capital, it also raises a recurring question across this chapter: does exclusivity in digital luxury depend on withholding access, or must it adapt to evolving norms of visibility and immediacy?

This tension echoes patterns identified elsewhere in the analysis, particularly in the strategic avoidance of overt promotional language and in visual practices such as *Fragmented Luxury: The Outfit Close-Up Pose*. Across these textual and visual strategies, luxury is communicated through under-communication. Desire is cultivated through delay, partial disclosure, and aesthetic restraint, rather than through immediacy or ease of access.

In conclusion, the avoidance of product tagging should be understood as a calculated communicative strategy rather than an absence of commercial intent. It reinforces the chapter's wider themes of restraint, symbolic capital, and mediated visibility, demonstrating that within digital luxury branding, what is withheld often communicates as powerfully as what is shown. Product tagging thus operates simultaneously as a functional absence and a symbolic assertion, confirming that luxury on Instagram is designed to be seen, recognised, and aspired to, rather than seamlessly accessed.

4.8.3. Balancing Exclusivity and Digital Relevance

This research underscores a central paradox within luxury influencer marketing: the tension between preserving brand mystique and responding to the expectations of an interactive, convenience-oriented digital environment. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) overwhelmingly avoid direct sales appeals, product tagging (7.7 %), and overt advertising cues (17.9 %). Rather than functioning as inefficiencies, these omissions operate as communicative strategies that reinforce the idea that luxury is not actively marketed but symbolically signalled, positioned as something to be recognised and desired rather than immediately pursued.

Such practices play a critical role in sustaining symbolic capital in Bourdieu's sense, where value is accrued through distance, rarity, and controlled access rather than visibility alone (Bourdieu, 1979 [1984]). However, this approach increasingly sits in tension with broader shifts in digital culture. As consumers grow accustomed to immediacy, transparency, and frictionless interaction, luxury branding faces a structural challenge: how to participate in digital economies of engagement without eroding the very conditions of exclusivity on which luxury depends.

This tension becomes more pronounced when considered alongside empirical research on trust and influencer credibility. Jin, Ryu and Muqaddam's (2021) experimental study of Instagram influencer marketing demonstrates that brand trustworthiness is shaped less by overt promotional tactics than by perceived parasocial interaction and social presence. Crucially, their findings show that

content promoted by influencers can sustain trust even in the absence of explicit product cues, as audiences continue to experience relational closeness and perceived authenticity through the influencer persona itself (Jin, Ryu and Muqaddam, 2021). This helps explain why LFIs can withhold product tags and direct calls to purchase without undermining their persuasive power. Trust is generated relationally and symbolically, rather than transactionally.

At the same time, this symbolic strategy must operate within a platform environment increasingly structured by algorithmic visibility and commercial optimisation. Rocamora's (2022) critique of fashion's datafication highlights how audience expectations are reshaped by platform logics that privilege access, metrics, and engagement. In parallel, Duffy's (2017) analysis of aspirational labour draws attention to the intensifying pressures placed on influencers to continually produce affective, relational content while navigating blurred boundaries between authenticity and commerce. LFIs are therefore required to balance luxury's slow, symbolic temporality against the accelerated rhythms of digital consumption.

The management of disclosure emerges here as particularly significant. As Jin et al. (2021) show, influencer content can generate trust even when the influencer is not visually present or when promotional cues are muted, because followers continue to imagine the influencer behind the post. This finding resonates strongly with the strategies observed in this study, where LFIs rely on subdued commercial signalling and aesthetic coherence to maintain intimacy without transparency tipping into overt salesmanship.

Looking forward, the findings suggest that luxury brands may need to experiment with selective and controlled forms of digital accessibility. Rather than embracing full transactional openness, strategies such as limited-time tagging, personalised experiences, or invitation-only digital previews may allow brands to maintain scarcity while acknowledging evolving norms of interaction. These approaches would build upon existing LFI practices identified in this chapter, including *Elevated Influence: The City Skyline Pose*, *Seamless Spectacle: Transition Effects and the Performance of Digital Luxury*, and *Fragmented Luxury: The Outfit Close-Up Pose and the Aestheticisation of Fashion Objects*, while responding more carefully to digitally literate consumer expectations.

Findlay's (2019) conceptualisation of digital luxury as symbolic storytelling remains highly salient, yet the field increasingly demands models that can hold exclusivity and interactivity in tension. If luxury fashion is to thrive within what this research defines as the ''new digital fashion system'', it must continue to stage intimacy without ubiquity and accessibility without availability. Whether through curated ambassadorial roles, immersive yet bounded digital touchpoints, or sustained innovation in influencer aesthetics, the future of luxury marketing lies in its capacity to mediate this tension, to be visible without becoming fully tangible.

4.8.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this section has examined the persistent tension between commercialisation and editorial identity in the digital practices of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs), revealing a careful curated avoidance of overt promotional cues in favour of maintaining symbolic capital and brand mystique. While commercial relationships are evident through advertising captions, brand mentions, and selective product visibility, these elements are embedded within narratives of aspiration and distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) rather than transactional appeal. This strategy reflects the enduring values of luxury branding, yet it also introduces friction in a digital environment increasingly shaped by immediacy, transparency, and algorithmic visibility. The data indicates that LFIs and the brands they partner with are walking a tightrope: sustaining the illusion of exclusivity while navigating the pressures of digital relevance. As expectations for authentic and seamless interaction grow, luxury brands may need to evolve their communication strategies without diluting the cultural and symbolic value that underpins their market status. The challenge is not whether to embrace digital commerce, but how to do so while preserving the editorial identity that defines luxury influence.

4.9. CONCLUSION TO THE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter has examined how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) communicate brand narratives on Instagram, revealing a layered interplay between branding, aesthetics, platform logic and authenticity performance. Through a thematic analysis of 390 posts, the study identified recurring symbolic strategies and visual–textual patterns that LFIs deploy to perform luxury. These include semiotic devices such as WALKING_POSE, GOLDEN_HOUR and MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT, which function as strategic gestures within a broader fashion communication repertoire shaped by platform vernaculars and algorithmic visibility.

In doing so, the chapter supports the first and second research sub-questions by decoding how LFIs construct and communicate the aesthetics and desirability of luxury fashion through Instagram content, and by identifying the key communicative practices that render these narratives culturally legible and symbolically effective. Patterns such as MODEL_ACT, FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION and HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION show how LFIs strategically align themselves with elite fashion circuits while simultaneously sustaining relatability through codes such as DAILY_LIFE, MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT and AUTHENTIC_ACT.

The coding framework operationalises the study's theoretical foundations and enables these insights to be interpreted through established conceptual lenses. Drawing on Barthes' (1967; 1983) semiotics, codes such as

MODEL_ACT, WALKING_POSE, RUNWAY_POSE and TRANSITION operate as signifying practices that communicate fashion meaning through gesture, mise-en-scène and temporal pacing. Spatial codes including STREET_LOCATION, CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION and HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION translate Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital into observable indicators of prestige and field-specific legitimacy. Veblen's ([1899] 1994) concept of conspicuous consumption is enacted through CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION, CURATED_ACCESSORIES and BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION, each illustrating how influencers perform luxury through visible display, symbolic association and branded discourse. These theoretical constructs underpin the interpretation of the dataset, ensuring that empirical patterns are grounded in a coherent framework of meaning-making, hierarchy and display.

The analysis reveals that LFIs operate as hybrid cultural actors: models, marketers and intermediaries who translate luxury into platform-native formats. Drawing on Veblen's critique of aspirational display and Bourdieu's account of symbolic hierarchy, the findings show that luxury, as enacted by LFIs , depends less on material ownership and more on symbolic access, spatial privilege and aesthetic labour. influencer blend aspirational imagery with emotionally resonant self-styling, producing hybridised brand personas aligned with contemporary audience expectations for prestige coupled with relatability.

Barthes' (1983) semiotic framework further illuminates how luxury meaning is co-authored through image, caption and audience engagement, shifting from

a fixed brand narrative to a participatory model of storytelling. Place operates as a powerful semiotic resource in this process. Codes such as STREET_LOCATION, CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION and HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION signal exclusivity and taste by situating the influencer within aspirational spatial contexts that connote cultural capital.

Stylistic devices such as GOLDEN_HOUR, TRANSITION and RITUALISATION_CONTENT illustrate the aesthetic and affective labour required to craft the digital spectacle of luxury. While presented as effortless, these techniques reflect deliberate visual curation and strategic branding, resonating with Findlay's (2019) argument that influencer labour is at once emotional and aesthetic while often rendered invisible.

Taken together, the thematic findings demonstrate that LFIs are central agents in shaping a new, digitally mediated language of luxury. Their communicative practices construct a multidimensional visual identity that is aspirational, emotionally compelling and attuned to the demands of platform culture. By decoding these practices, this chapter provides the empirical foundation required to address the overarching research question of how LFI fashion communication practices can be categorised and understood within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

The typology presented in Chapter Five builds directly upon these findings. It offers a systematic framework for categorising and theorising LFI communication practices and responds to the third research sub-question by considering how these practices can inform the development of effective, culturally resonant digital branding strategies for luxury fashion. As such, this

chapter lays the essential empirical and interpretive groundwork for the thesis's core contribution: decoding the fashion communication practices of LFIs as cultural and strategic phenomena operating within platform capitalism.

CHAPTER FIVE - THE TYPOLOGY

5.1. INTRODUCING THE TYPOLOGY: A THEMATIC FRAMEWORK OF LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER COMMUNICATION

This chapter introduces the typology that forms the central conceptual contribution of this research: an empirically grounded and theoretically informed framework for decoding the fashion communication practices of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) on Instagram. Its primary objective is to synthesise the thematic findings presented in Chapter 4 into a structured model that categorises the symbolic, aesthetic and strategic devices through which LFIs perform and communicate luxury. In doing so, it responds directly to the thesis's overarching research question: *How can the fashion communication practices of LFIs be decoded and categorised to understand how they communicate luxury brand narratives within the evolving ‘‘new digital fashion system’’?*

The typology has been developed through iterative visual content analysis of 390 posts and refined through thematic co-occurrence mapping. It organises the key influencer communication strategies identified in Chapter 4 into eight interconnected categories, offering a systematic interpretive lens through which luxury may be understood as a digitally mediated, affectively charged and symbolically coded construct. Rather than replicating traditional fashion

communication logics, the typology reveals how these logics are recalibrated for the platform environment through curated intimacy, algorithmically attuned visibility and aesthetic labour.

The coding framework underpinning this typology directly operationalises the study's core theoretical constructs. Drawing on Barthes' (1967; 1983) semiotics, codes such as MODEL_ACT, WALKING_POSE, RUNWAY_POSE, HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION and BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION capture how influencers deploy visual and textual signs to communicate luxury through gesture, spatial framing and linguistic style. Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital is expressed empirically through spatial and compositional codes such as STREET_LOCATION, CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION and INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL, which index affiliation with elite fashion circuits and the accumulation of symbolic prestige. Veblen's ([1899] 2007) notion of conspicuous consumption is operationalised through categories such as CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION, CURATED_ACCESSORIES and PRODUCT_TAG, which illustrate how influencers perform aspirational display, visibility and social differentiation within the digital field. In this way, the typology is grounded in classical theoretical frameworks while being responsive to the specificities of platformed media culture.

These classical perspectives are extended through contemporary scholarship on digital labour and authenticity (Abidin, 2016; Duffy, 2017), algorithmic visibility and platform vernaculars (Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Gibbs et al., 2014), and influencer branding and perceived credibility (Marwick, 2015;

Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Together, these perspectives illuminate how LFI communication practices merge aestheticised self-presentation with commercial collaboration, affective intimacy and strategic adaptation to platform affordances. The typology therefore reflects not only what LFIs do but *how* and *why* these practices function symbolically within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

The chapter addresses the third research sub-question by examining how the communication practices identified in the typology can inform culturally attuned and strategically effective social media strategies for luxury brands:

How can the decoded communication practices of Instagram LFIs inform the development of effective, culturally resonant social media strategies for luxury brands within the digital fashion marketplace?

It also directly supports the first two sub-questions by offering a categorisation of the visual and textual strategies that LFIs use to construct, communicate and sustain luxury meaning within platform environments. In doing so, the typology provides both a conceptual toolkit for scholarly analysis and a practical model for understanding how luxury is visualised, narrated and performed in the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

- *How do LFIs use textual (captions) and visual content (static images and videos) strategies to construct and communicate the values, aesthetics, and desirability of luxury fashion brands on Instagram?*

- *What are the key fashion communication practices employed by LFIs to communicate luxury fashion narratives on digital platforms, and how can these practices be categorised?*

The typology built upon six thematic strands identified in the analysis of chapter 4: aspirational branding, relatability, spatial symbolism, visual styling, editorial heritage, and commercial alignment, by mapping them into a broader relational structure. It extends the analysis from post-level observations to a macro-level conceptual model that accounts for how influencer -generated content operates symbolically, commercially, and strategically within the *"new digital fashion system"*.

This is visually represented in the "Luxury Fashion Influencer Communication Framework" (Figure 56, page 407), which illustrates how various theoretical lenses converge around the concept of 'Strategic Adaptability' and inform the communication practices of LFIs on Instagram. The framework is shaped by the foundational perspectives of Barthes (1983), Bourdieu (1984), and Veblen ([1899] 1994) and extended through critical scholarship on influencer culture (Abidin, 2016; Duffy, 2017), algorithmic governance and digital visibility (van Dijck, 2013; Gillespie, 2014), and fashion mediation in the digital sphere (Findlay, 2019; Rocamora, 2022). LFIs are thus positioned not merely as content creators but as cultural intermediaries who negotiate the tensions between prestige and participation, spectacle and relatability.

This typology is also grounded in the mixed-method approach outlined in Chapter 3, which combined template analysis with co-occurrence mapping to identify clusters of interconnected content practices. This methodological

layering ensured empirical robustness while allowing for theoretical abstraction. The typology thus emerges as both a conceptual and interpretive framework, enabling a deeper understanding of how luxury is constructed, circulated, and made meaningful within platform-specific economies of style, value, and visibility.

The framework organises Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) communication into eight interrelated categories:

- Rare and Exclusive Practices
- Dynamic and Playful Content
- Cultural and Symbolic Capital
- Industry Connections
- Lifestyle Narratives
- Visual Storytelling
- Relatability and Engagement
- Aspirational Branding

Three structuring principles shape these categories:

1. **Hierarchical organisation** – from brand-centric exclusivity to audience-oriented engagement.

2. **Thematic differentiation** is based on the dominant communicative function of each category.

3. **Mode of mediation** – distinguishing traditional, hybrid, and platform-native practices.

Informed by the cognition–affect–conation model of consumer response (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961), the typology also suggests a progression from brand awareness and aspiration to emotional engagement and consumer action. Although grounded in a robust empirical base, it remains interpretive rather than predictive, offering a foundation for further research across influencer tiers, brand contexts, and platforms.

This chapter develops the typology through four analytical stages:

- Post structures and content formats
- Temporal synchronisation with the fashion calendar
- Thematic content patterns
- Modes of fashion communication

Together, these layers formalise the typology as both a scholarly contribution and a practical tool. They illustrate how luxury is constructed through visual strategy, symbolic labour, and platform fluency, offering a critical vocabulary for interpreting luxury fashion communication in the age of social media.

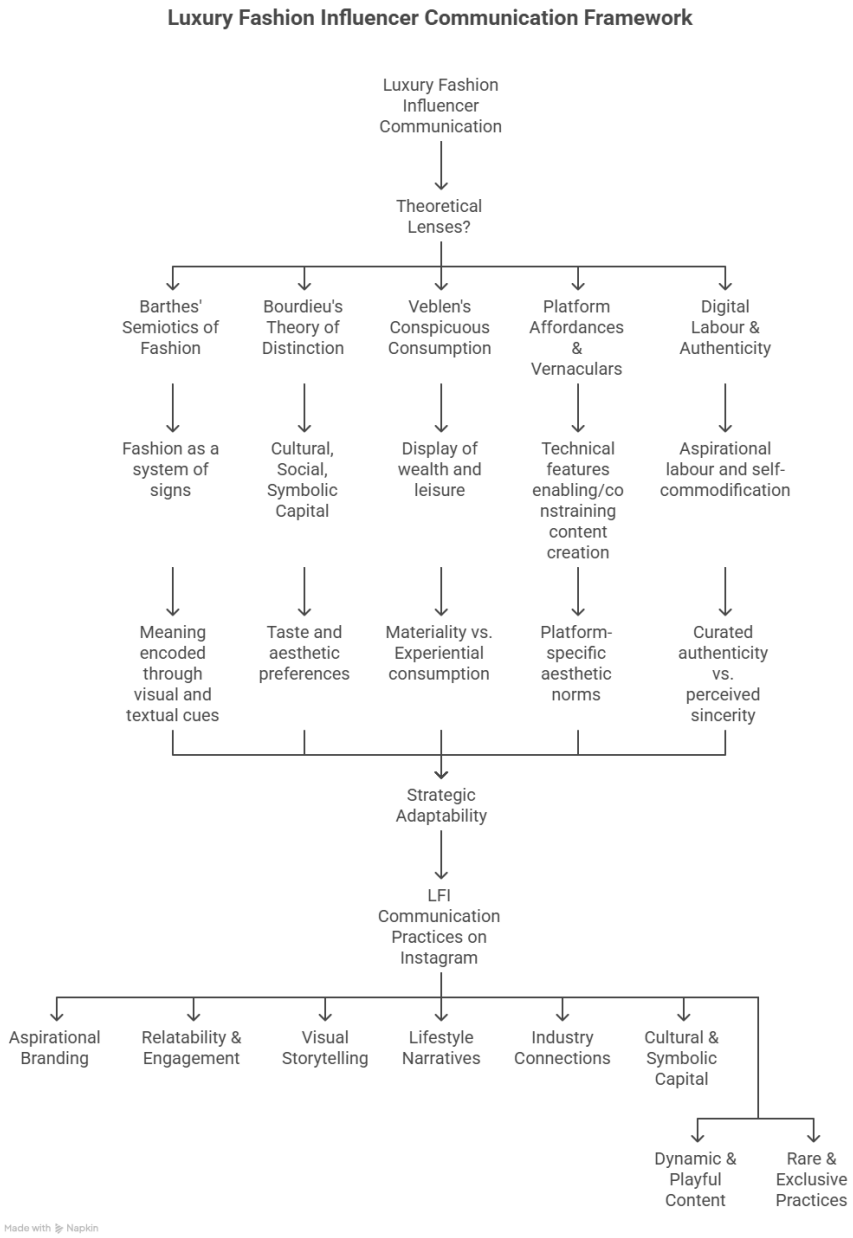
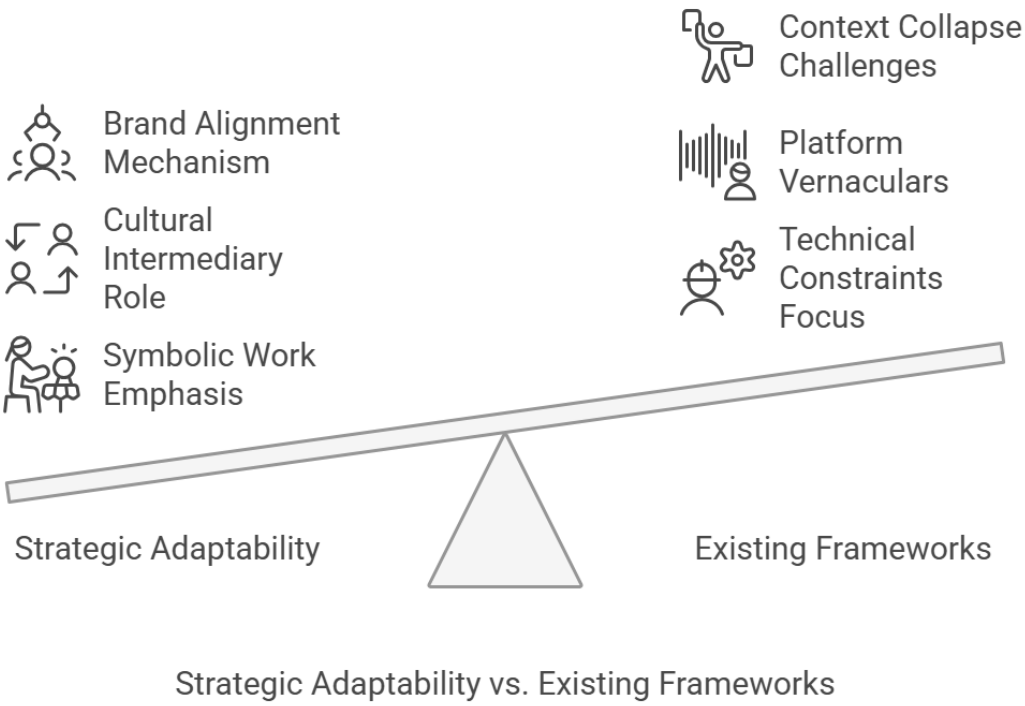


FIGURE 56 LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK.

THIS FIGURE PRESENTS A UNIFIED FRAMEWORK LINKING THE THESIS'S KEY THEORIES AND FINDINGS ON LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFI) COMMUNICATION. DRAWING ON BARTHES, BOURDIEU, VEBLEN, PLATFORM AFFORDANCES, AND DIGITAL LABOUR SCHOLARSHIP, IT OUTLINES HOW LFIS EXERCISE 'STRATEGIC ADAPTABILITY' TO MANAGE TENSIONS BETWEEN AESTHETICS, ASPIRATION, AND PLATFORM LOGIC. SIX TYPOLOGICAL DOMAINS—ASPIRATIONAL BRANDING, RELATABILITY, STORYTELLING, LIFESTYLE, INDUSTRY LINKS, AND CULTURAL CAPITAL—CAPTURE THEIR ROLE AS CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES IN THE ''NEW DIGITAL FASHION SYSTEM''.

SOURCE: AUTHOR.

5.1.1. THEORISING 'STRATEGIC ADAPTABILITY'



Strategic Adaptability vs. Existing Frameworks

FIGURE 57 'STRATEGIC ADAPTABILITY' VS. EXISTING FRAMEWORKS IN DIGITAL FASHION COMMUNICATION.

THIS FIGURE CONTRASTS EXISTING CONSTRAINT-FOCUSED FRAMEWORKS WITH THE THESIS'S MODEL OF 'STRATEGIC ADAPTABILITY'. WHILE PRIOR WORK HIGHLIGHTS PLATFORM LIMITATIONS AND CONTEXT COLLAPSE (GIBBS ET AL., 2014; BUCHER & HELMOND, 2018; MARWICK & BOYD, 2011), THIS MODEL POSITIONS LFIS AS ACTIVE AGENTS OF BRAND ALIGNMENT AND CULTURAL INTERMEDIATION. THE SEESAW METAPHOR CAPTURES THIS SHIFT, OFFERING A MORE DYNAMIC ACCOUNT OF INFLUENCER AGENCY WITHIN LUXURY FASHION COMMUNICATION ON INSTAGRAM.

SOURCE: AUTHOR.

This research introduces and theorises the concept of 'Strategic Adaptability' in response to Research Question 3: How can the fashion communication practices of Instagram Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) inform effective strategy within the digital fashion marketplace?

‘Strategic Adaptability’ describes the communicative agility with which LFIs negotiate the competing demands of symbolic prestige and platform visibility. It captures a reflexive form of cultural labour that enables influencers to preserve brand alignment and cultural capital while remaining relatable and engaging within Instagram’s algorithmically governed environment.

The term ‘Strategic Adaptability’ is used here as a conceptual tool developed specifically within the context of this study to describe the calculated, culturally attuned adjustments made by LFIs in response to shifting platform affordances, brand demands and audience expectations. While similar terminology appears in disciplines such as organisational theory and negotiation studies, its usage here is distinct and grounded in the digital fashion communication practices examined throughout this thesis. It emerges directly from the coded dataset and interpretive analysis rather than from external theoretical importation.

‘Strategic Adaptability’ was developed abductively through the integration of qualitative thematic coding and quantitative co-occurrence mapping. During the visual content analysis of 390 posts, specific combinations of codes began to recur. For example, MODEL_ACT, the most prevalent category in the dataset, frequently appeared alongside BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION, INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL, HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION, and CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION. These pairings evidenced visually curated performances of luxury, spatial privilege and fashion-world embeddedness.

At the same time, MODEL_ACT also co-occurred with more accessible or platform-native categories such as EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION,

MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT, DAILY_LIFE and WALKING_POSE, all of which signal gestures of relatability and informality. This pattern indicated that LFIs were deliberately blending elite signifiers with every day or conversational modes of self-presentation.

Triangulation through SPSS co-occurrence mapping strengthened this insight. When coding categories were translated into binary variables and analysed statistically, consistent pose–location–caption clusters were visible. For example:

• MODEL_ACT + HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION + BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION
• WALKING_POSE + STREET_LOCATION + EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION
• CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION + CURATED_ACCESSORIES + PRODUCT_TAG

These patterns confirmed that LFIs routinely integrate symbolic markers of luxury with more accessible, audience-facing textual strategies. This iterative process, grounded in both coded observation and statistical mapping, led to the conceptual articulation of ‘Strategic Adaptability’ as the organising logic behind these combinations.

The concept is anchored in the theoretical foundations established in Chapters 2 and 3.

• Drawing on Barthes’ (1967; 1983) semiotics, ‘Strategic Adaptability’ describes how influencers combine signs across image and caption to generate connotations of aspiration, refinement and emotional resonance.

• Through Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital, it accounts for how spatial categories such as STREET_LOCATION, CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION and HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION function as indicators of taste, status and industry belonging.
• Veblen's (1899 [2007]) analysis of conspicuous consumption is reflected in categories such as CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION, CURATED_ACCESSORIES, and PRODUCT_TAG, which express luxury through visible display and material association.

'Strategic Adaptability' integrates these frameworks to explain how LFIs balance exclusivity with relatability. Rather than disrupting luxury's symbolic logic, LFIs recalibrate it within Instagram's vernacular and visibility structures, blending glossy, editorialised fashion imagery with casual or emotive captioning that supports engagement.

As visualised in Figure 57 (page 408), 'Strategic Adaptability' operates across three dimensions that directly reflect empirical patterns:

• Brand Alignment: seen in the co-occurrence of MODEL_ACT, BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION and INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL.
• Cultural Intermediation: evidenced through categories such as RUNWAY_POSE, BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT and RITUALISATION_CONTENT.
• Aesthetic and Affective Labour: shown through WALKING_POSE, EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION, SOCIAL_POSE and MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT, all of which communicate curated intimacy and accessibility.

These dimensions emerged directly from the coded data and were substantiated through SPSS mapping. They therefore form the foundation for defining ‘Strategic Adaptability’:

‘Strategic Adaptability’ (noun)

A communicative capacity demonstrated by Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) to reconcile the competing demands of symbolic prestige and platform visibility. It involves the deliberate calibration of visual, spatial and textual practices to maintain brand alignment, cultural capital and audience engagement within participatory, algorithmically governed environments.

Finally, ‘Strategic Adaptability’ reinterprets the classical theories drawn upon in Chapter 2 by showing how Distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), conspicuous display (Veblen, 1899 [2007]) and semiotic signification (Barthes, 1967; 1983) operate within contemporary digital contexts. Instead of relying solely on scarcity, LFIs maintain symbolic exclusivity through adaptive combinations of luxury-coded visuals and platform-native forms of accessibility. The concept therefore offers a historically informed and empirically grounded account of how luxury is communicated in the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

5.2. POST STRUCTURES FOR FASHION COMMUNICATION

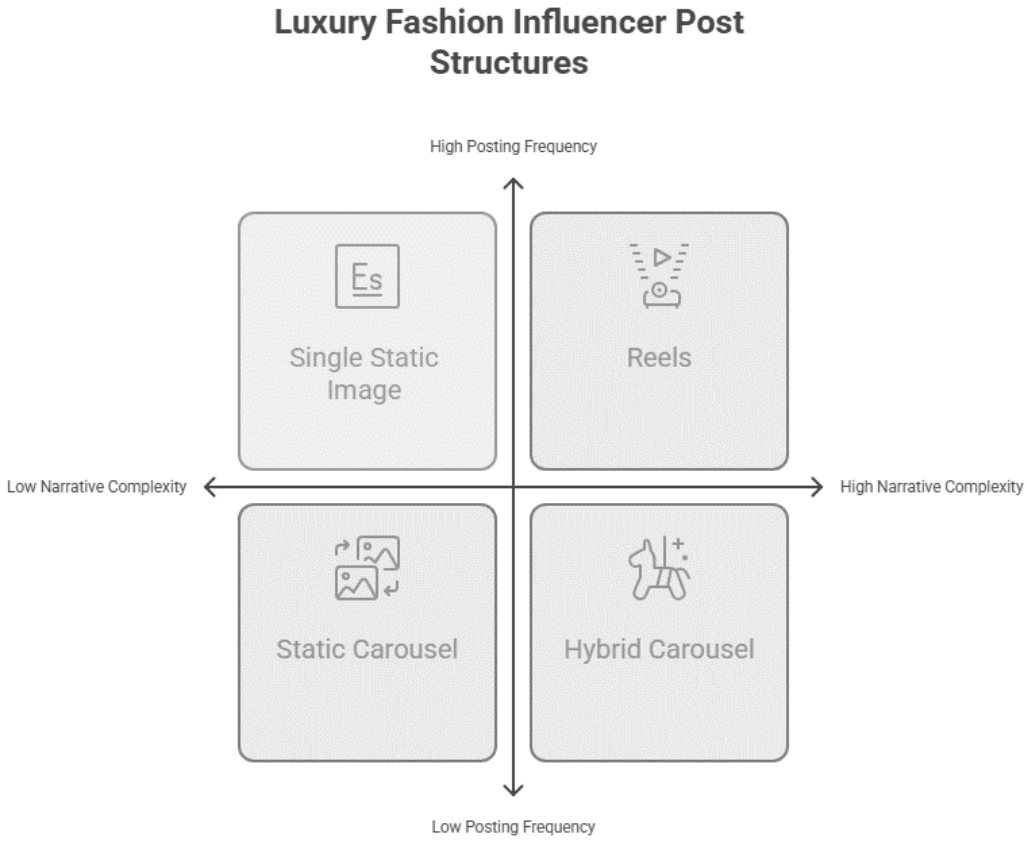


FIGURE 58 THE MATRIX OF LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER POST STRUCTURES ON INSTAGRAM WAS PLOTTED ACCORDING TO LEVELS OF POST FREQUENCY (VERTICAL AXIS) AND NARRATIVE COMPLEXITY (HORIZONTAL AXIS). THE VISUAL HIGHLIGHTS THE SINGLE STATIC IMAGE FORMAT AS OCCUPYING THE QUADRANT OF HIGH AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AND LOW NARRATIVE COMPLEXITY. OTHER POST TYPES, REELS, STATIC CAROUSELS, AND HYBRID CAROUSELS, ARE IN ALTERNATIVE QUADRANTS, REFLECTING DIFFERENT STRATEGIC BALANCES BETWEEN STORYTELLING AND PLATFORM INTERACTION. SOURCE: AUTHOR.

The research typology begins with post structures and content formats, which form the foundational architecture through which Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) curate visibility, guide narrative flow, and signal brand alignment within Instagram's image-led interface. These formats structure meaning, shaping

how luxury is communicated, perceived, and emotionally registered by audiences operating within a fast-moving visual economy.

Instagram offers various post types, each with its own affordances, aesthetic expectations, and strategic implications. This section examines four dominant formats: the single static image, the static carousel, the hybrid carousel, and the Reel. Each serves a particular communicative function, mediating between the poles of aspiration and accessibility that continue to define the digital luxury space.

5.2.1. Post Format as Semiotic Form

Within the digitally saturated fashion system, post format functions as more than a container; it is part of the message. Chapter Four's co-occurrence data revealed that content structure is critical in reinforcing symbolic capital and sustaining algorithmic visibility. In this sense, selecting post type becomes a communicative choice, encoding and shaping luxury meaning in ways that extend traditional fashion media logics into the vernacular of social platforms.

5.2.2. Single Static Image: Curating Exclusivity through Simplicity

The single static image remains one of Instagram's most enduring forms of luxury fashion communication. When executed precisely, it is a contemporary distillation of the editorial shot, a tightly composed visual statement that centres the product and eliminates distraction. It signals restraint, control, and elevation.

Drawing on Barthes (1983), the image is never just what it shows. A handbag becomes a semiotic vessel indexing status, taste, and aspirational identity. Within this format, the LFI functions as a model and a curator of visual codes, composing imagery that aligns with personal brand and house aesthetic. This mode echoes traditional luxury advertising, where absence and minimalism speak louder than excess (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

5.2.3. Static Carousel: Narrative Curation and Editorial Continuity

The carousel post expands the temporal and visual scope of luxury communication. It offers a narrative progression inviting viewers to swipe through different angles, details, and moments. This structure mirrors the logic of print fashion editorials, where multiple images work sequentially to communicate texture, silhouette, and sensibility (Wilson, 1985).

Within influencer branding, the static carousel enables a layered narrative of self-styling. Close-ups of embellishments, fabric drape, and coordinated accessories translate the tactility of luxury into screen-based visual language (D'Arpizio et al., 2021). This format is often used in brand partnerships, reinforcing cohesive storytelling through visual repetition and aesthetic harmony. The LFI is a stylist, muse, and marketer interweaving personal expression with commercial alignment.

5.2.4. Hybrid Carousel: Performing Access and Industry Embeddedness

Combining still imagery and video, the hybrid carousel has emerged as the preferred format for documenting events, fashion week appearances, and behind-the-scenes access. It does not merely record presence; it performs it. Strategically curated to blend glamour with relatability, this format positions the influencer within the fashion field (Bourdieu, 1984), leveraging social capital through digital proximity.

Typically sequenced to suggest a fluid experience, the hybrid carousel might open with an arrival shot, shift to a brief clip of a runway walk, and conclude with a candid or casual image. This layered structure sustains the illusion of intimacy while reinforcing industry legitimacy. As Abidin (2016) notes, influencers cultivate "perceived connectedness"; that intimacy is refracted through the spectacle of elite access.

5.2.5. The Reel: Motion, Metrics, and the Affective Turn

Reels represent a significant pivot in LFI content strategy, not only because of user engagement but also because Instagram's algorithm now privileges video, shifting the mechanics of visibility (Rocamora, 2022). Within luxury fashion, the Reel enables a fusion of curation and immersion, functioning as both a narrative and affective device.

Reels allow for:

- **Garment movement and material expression**: Fluid textiles, structural silhouettes, and light interplay are captured in motion, bridging the sensorial gap left by static images (Findlay, 2017).
- **Insider access**: Short, stylised glimpses into backstage spaces or exclusive events play into the audience's desire for access, even as they preserve luxury's scarcity logic (Duffy & Hund, 2015).
- **Narrative branding**: "Get Ready With Me" formats and cinematic vignettes weave luxury consumption into lifestyle performance, aligning the brand with aspiration through story rather than overt sales (Voorveld, 2019).

Through Reels, influencers enact a subtle choreography of authenticity and aspiration, intimacy and spectacle, visibility and control. Here, algorithmic optimisation meets emotional resonance, producing luxury as an object and an experience.

Each post structure examined here constitutes a distinct mode of communication, encoding luxury through visual, temporal, and interactive cues. Whether through a single image's minimalism or a Reel's immersive appeal, LFIs strategically select formats that best communicate brand alignment, audience engagement, and narrative control. As this analysis demonstrates, post structure is not a neutral choice; it is a key site of symbolic negotiation. It enables LFIs to navigate Instagram's evolving affordances while retaining the visual authority and affective intimacy that define luxury influence in the digital age.

5.3. PLATFORM-NATIVE PRACTICES IN LUXURY INFLUENCER COMMUNICATION

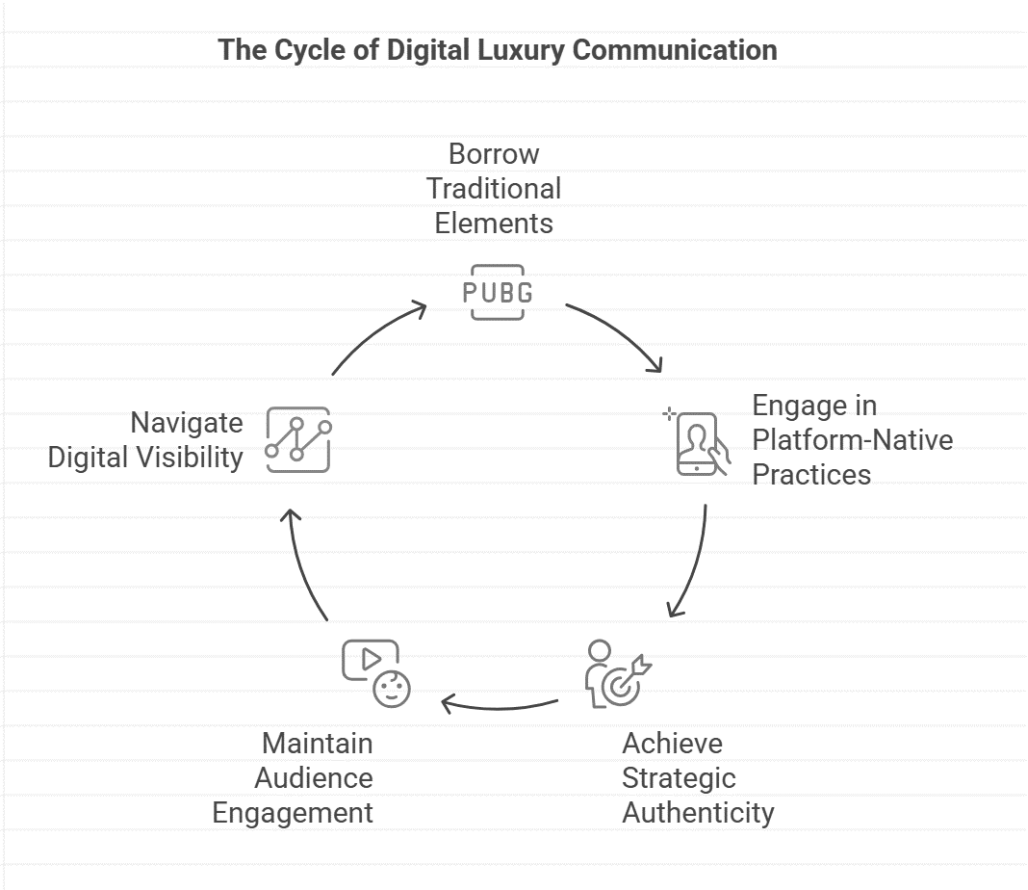


FIGURE 59 THE CYCLE OF DIGITAL LUXURY COMMUNICATION
THIS DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATES HOW LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFIS) BUILD AND SUSTAIN INFLUENCE IN DIGITAL SPACES. STARTING WITH THE APPROPRIATION OF TRADITIONAL FASHION CODES (E.G. RUNWAY AESTHETICS, EDITORIAL STYLING), LFIS ADAPT THESE TO PLATFORM-NATIVE FORMATS SHAPED BY SOCIAL MEDIA AFFORDANCES. THIS ENABLES STRATEGIC AUTHENTICITY—A CURATED RELATABILITY THAT ALIGNS WITH LUXURY VALUES. SUCH AUTHENTICITY PROMOTES ENGAGEMENT, BOOSTS VISIBILITY WITHIN ALGORITHMIC SYSTEMS, AND REINFORCES INFLUENCER LEGITIMACY. THIS, IN TURN, RENEWS THEIR USE OF TRADITIONAL FASHION CODES, SUSTAINING THE CYCLE.

SOURCE: AUTHOR.

This research demonstrates that while Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) routinely draw on the visual and rhetorical conventions of traditional fashion media, such as editorial poses, branded tagging, and event-based content, they also engage in a set of distinctly platform-native practices that shape how luxury is communicated within the digital environment. Though often visually aligned with the prestige aesthetics of fashion publishing, these strategies are not mere translations of pre-digital modes of communication. Instead, they emerge from the specific affordances, rhythms, and audience expectations of Instagram as a participatory, algorithmically mediated platform.

As the typology developed in this research illustrates, LFIs continue to reference the stylistic logics of fashion editorials, aligning themselves with the institutions, aesthetics, and events historically associated with fashion's inner circle. This borrowing accrues symbolic capital by positioning the influencer within a recognisable ecosystem of legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1984; Rocamora, 2011). However, several LFI communicative strategies identified, such as MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT, GET_DRESSED_ACT, and INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION, have no direct equivalent within traditional fashion communication. These codes indicate a shift towards performative, relational, and episodic content, inviting followers into the influencer's narrative while maintaining the visual codes of luxury.

Such practices reflect what Duffy and Hund (2015) call *strategic authenticity*: carefully curating spontaneous, candid, or affectively resonant content designed to promote audience identification. The presence of informal or interactive captions, ephemeral routines, and mobile-first visual techniques

signals a move away from hierarchical, broadcast-style messaging and towards a dialogic and audience-aware communication mode. These gestures are highly attuned to the expectations of digital spectatorship and the algorithmic imperatives of visibility (Carah & Angus, 2018).

Further, content forms such as TRANSITION, OUTFIT_ROUND_UP, and stylised behind-the-scenes posts reveal a platform fluency that operates independently of traditional fashion hierarchies. These practices are deeply embedded in the culture of Instagram, where rhythmic posting, aesthetic variation, and light humour often drive engagement more effectively than formal displays of luxury. Within the typology, these moments are not marginal but central: they enable influencers to maintain audience attention and diversify their narrative tone while continuing to communicate status and brand alignment.

This research contends that platform-native practices constitute a hybrid mode of fashion communication where symbolic capital is accrued through visual association with luxury and the influencer's ability to navigate the technical, cultural, and social demands of digital visibility. These practices mediate the tensions between exclusivity and accessibility, heritage and contemporaneity, performance, and perceived authenticity. In doing so, they reflect a broader reconfiguration of fashion communication under digital conditions, one where the influencer must function simultaneously as a stylist, content producer, strategist, and brand partner.

While LFIs retain many visual grammars of traditional fashion communication, the research finds that their most effective content strategies often adapt to

the platform's communicative logic. Through these platform-native practices, LFIs strategically sustain engagement but actively shape the evolving aesthetics and narrative forms of digital luxury branding.

5.3.1. Expanding the Typology: Media Histories and Platform Cultures

The communication strategies employed by Luxury Fashion Influencer do not exist in isolation from the visual traditions of fashion media, nor does the logic of social media platforms shape them. Instead, they represent a complex relationship between borrowed conventions, platform-specific formats, and hybridised practices that bridge the two. The table below (Table 17) offers a conceptual mapping of the coded practices identified in this research, organising them according to their alignment with traditional fashion communication, platform-native trends, or hybrid forms. This framing allows for a more in depth understanding of how influencers navigate the shifting expectations of prestige, authenticity, and engagement.

In addition to categorising influencer content thematically (e. g. branding, lifestyle, engagement), this research identifies a further layer of meaning by considering how media histories and platform cultures shape communication practices. The codes developed through visual content analysis may be understood in terms of what they express and how they reflect inherited conventions from traditional fashion media or emergent, platform-specific strategies shaped by Instagram's participatory logic.

To articulate this dimension more clearly, influencer communication practices have been classified into three broad groups: traditional fashion practices, which align with the stylistic logics of legacy editorial and runway media; platform-native practices, which have emerged from the affordances and norms of social media; and hybrid practices, which draw on both sets of influences to produce a flexible, responsive mode of digital luxury communication.

This additional layer of analysis helps to clarify how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) position themselves as both inheritors of fashion's symbolic authority and innovators of its evolving digital language. Practices such as RUNWAY_POSE and BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT echo traditional fashion editorial and event coverage, signalling the influencer 's proximity to institutional power and aligning with what Bourdieu (1984) describes as symbolic capital. By contrast, platform-native strategies such as MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT, TRANSITION, or DOUBLE_ENTENDRES_CAPTION reflect a mode of communication rooted in platform fluency, audience intimacy, and algorithmic adaptability, practices that have no direct analogue in pre-digital fashion communication.

However, hybrid practices are particularly significant. These strategies occupy the overlapping space between tradition and innovation, producing content that is visually polished but narratively informal, aspirational, and emotionally accessible. For example, GET_DRESSED_ACT and OUTFIT_ROUND_UP translate the editorial language of outfit styling into episodic, mobile-first formats that invite audience identification while maintaining aesthetic control.

These hybrid forms exemplify what this research identifies as ‘Strategic Adaptability’ : the influencer 's capacity to rework fashion's visual grammar to meet the demands of an attention-driven, participatory platform such as Instagram.

‘Strategic Adaptability’ refers to the influencer 's capacity to rework the symbolic and aesthetic conventions of fashion communication in response to Instagram's participatory, affect-driven nature. It manifests in the integration of traditional prestige markers, such as MODEL_ACT, RUNWAY_EVENT, and FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION with platform-native techniques, including MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT, INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION, and TRANSITION. These combinations demonstrate a deliberate effort to maintain symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984) while engaging audiences through formats that feel spontaneous, affective, and native to the platform.

Several hybrid codes within the typology, such as GET_DRESSED_ACT, OUTFIT_ROUND_UP, and FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION, embody this adaptability in particularly explicit ways. These practices retain the formal clarity of editorial content but are recalibrated to suit Instagram's scrollable, rhythmic, and relational structure. Rather than diluting the meaning of luxury, this reworking serves to amplify its relevance within the social media landscape by rendering it legible, interactive, and emotionally significant.

This research finds that ‘Strategic Adaptability’ is a quality of successful LFI fashion communication and a mechanism through which LFIs sustain cultural authority in an attention economy. It allows influencers to present themselves as *tastemakers* and *participants* who curate prestige and remain responsive

to audience cues, brand dynamics, and platform logic. ‘Strategic Adaptability’ operates as cultural labour, enabling LFIs to maintain visibility, credibility, and symbolic power within the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’*.

By viewing the typology through this lens, it becomes clear that these layers are not simply content strategies, but they are expressions of a broader communicative logic. It requires constant negotiation, agility, and fluent speaking across media registers. Therefore, ‘Strategic Adaptability’ is not a residual theme but a communicative capacity through which luxury is made visible, desirable, and socially meaningful in a platformed age. Therefore, hybrid practices reveal how LFIs sustain their status within the symbolic economy of luxury whilst also remaining responsive to digital culture's evolving aesthetics, rhythms, and relational dynamics. They serve as communication artefacts and evidence of how cultural capital is now co-produced through negotiation between legacy media values and platform-native demands.

FIGURE 60 LUXURY INFLUENCER COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES - THIS DIAGRAM OUTLINES THE THREE OVERARCHING STRATEGIC CATEGORIES EMPLOYED BY LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFIS) ON SOCIAL MEDIA. TRADITIONAL STRATEGIES DRAW FROM ESTABLISHED FASHION COMMUNICATION PRACTICES, SUCH AS EDITORIAL STYLING AND RUNWAY REFERENCING. PLATFORM-NATIVE STRATEGIES ARE TAILORED TO THE AFFORDANCES AND VERNACULARS OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS, INCLUDING FORMATS LIKE REELS, STORIES, OR INFLUENCER -GENERATED MEMES. HYBRID STRATEGIES COMBINE ELEMENTS OF BOTH TRADITIONAL AND PLATFORM-NATIVE APPROACHES, DEMONSTRATING HOW LFIS NEGOTIATE AESTHETIC AUTHORITY, RELATABILITY, AND COMMERCIAL VISIBILITY WITHIN THE EVOLVING DYNAMICS OF THE ''NEW DIGITAL FASHION SYSTEM''. SOURCE: AUTHOR.

TABLE 19 CLASSIFICATION OF INFLUENCER COMMUNICATION PRACTICES ACCORDING TO THEIR ALIGNMENT WITH TRADITIONAL FASHION MEDIA CONVENTIONS, PLATFORM-NATIVE STRATEGIES, OR HYBRID FORMS. THIS CATEGORISATION ILLUSTRATES HOW LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFIS) DRAW UPON LEGACY AESTHETICS WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY ADOPTING OR ADAPTING PRACTICES SHAPED BY THE AFFORDANCES, NORMS, AND PERFORMATIVE EXPECTATIONS OF INSTAGRAM. SOURCE: AUTHOR.

Code	Classification
CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION	Hybrid
STREET_LOCATION	Hybrid
EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION	Hybrid
CURATED_ACCESSORIES	Hybrid
AD_CAPTION	Hybrid
AUTHENTIC_ACT	Hybrid
WALKING_POSE	Hybrid
FASHION_POSE	Hybrid
HOLIDAY_LOCATION	Hybrid
DAILY_LIFE	Hybrid
HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION	Hybrid
OUTFIT_CLOSEUP_POSE	Hybrid
HOTEL_BALCONY_LOCATION	Hybrid
FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION	Hybrid
RITUALISATION_CONTENT	Hybrid
FASHION_KNOWLEDGE_CAPTION	Hybrid
SOCIAL_POSE	Hybrid
INDUSTRY_TENURE	Hybrid
FOOD_CONTENT	Hybrid
SIGNIFICANT_PERSONAL_LIFE	Hybrid
BEHIND_SCENES	Hybrid
CLOSET_LOCATION	Hybrid
CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION	Hybrid
COFFEE_ACT	Hybrid
VIEW_POSE	Hybrid
HOME_LOCATION	Hybrid
ZEBRA_CROSSING_LOCATION	Hybrid
GOLDEN_HOUR	Hybrid
DOORWAY_LOCATION	Hybrid
CAFE_LOCATION	Hybrid
CAR_ACT	Hybrid
COUNTRYSIDE_LOCATION	Hybrid
STAIRCASE_LOCATION	Hybrid
LONDON_PROPERTY_LOCATION	Hybrid
VENETIAN_BOAT_LOCATION	Hybrid
STUDIO_LOCATION	Hybrid

SKI_ACT	Hybrid
SHOP_ACT	Hybrid
INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION	Platform-Native
MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT	Platform-Native
OUTFIT_ROUND_UP	Platform-Native
TRANSITION	Platform-Native
GET_DRESSED_ACT	Platform-Native
PRODUCT_TAG	Platform-Native
SALE_LANGUAGE_CAPTION	Platform-Native
HUMOUR_CONTENT	Platform-Native
DOUBLE_ENTENDRES_CAPTION	Platform-Native
BOTTOM_UP	Platform-Native
UNBOXING_ACT	Platform-Native
MODEL_ACT	Traditional
BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION	Traditional
INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL	Traditional
FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION	Traditional
RUNWAY_POSE	Traditional
RUNWAY_EVENT	Traditional
BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT	Traditional
RED_CARPET_LOCATION	Traditional
AMBASSADOR_CAPTION	Traditional

5.4. A STRATIFIED TYPOLOGY MODEL OF LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

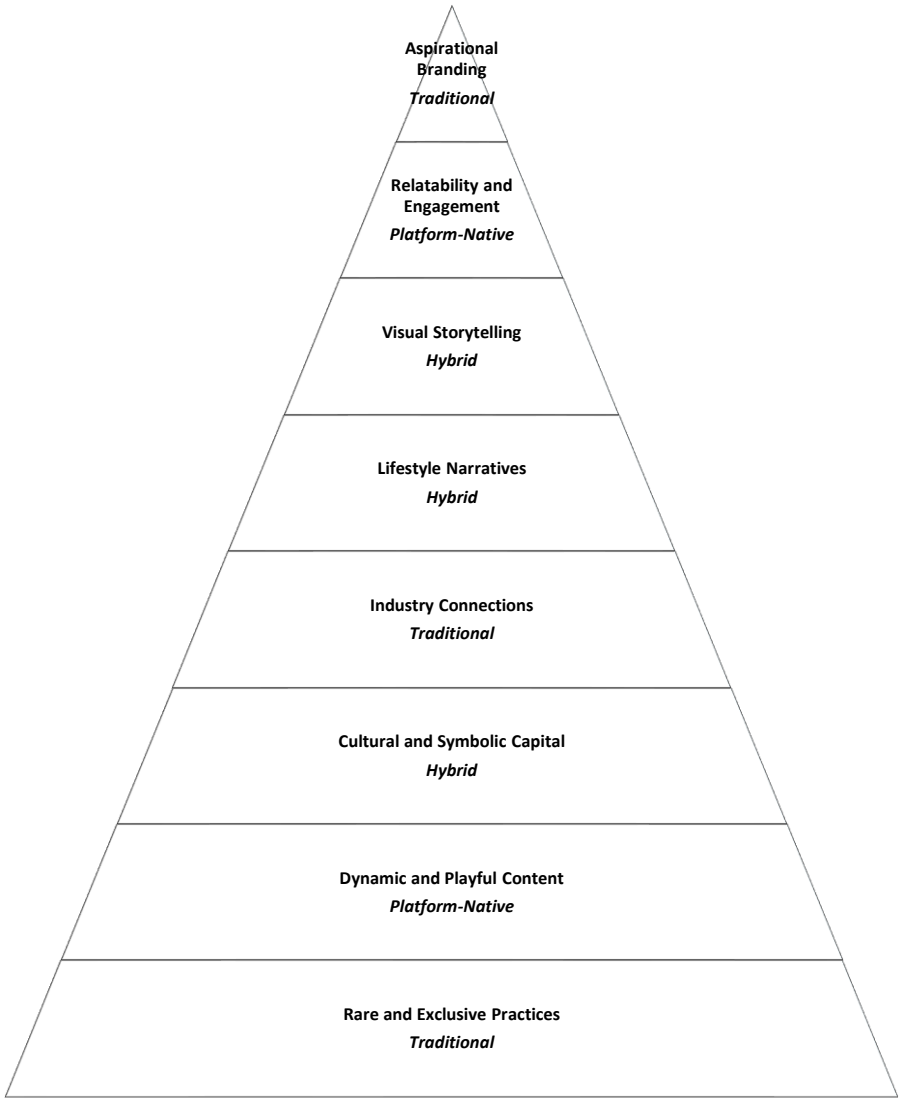


FIGURE 61 A STRATIFIED COMMUNICATION TYPOLOGY MODEL OF LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER ON INSTAGRAM

THIS PYRAMID VISUALISES THE LAYERED STRUCTURE OF FASHION COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFIS) ON INSTAGRAM, ILLUSTRATING THE HIERARCHICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASPIRATIONAL, PLATFORM-NATIVE, AND HYBRID PRACTICES. SOURCE: AUTHOR.

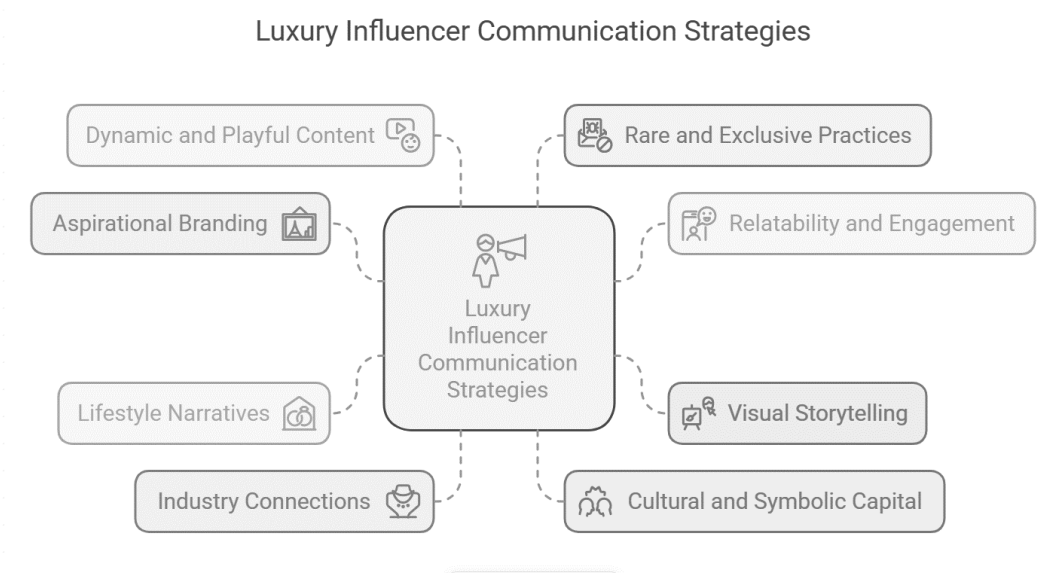


FIGURE 62 DIMENSIONS OF LUXURY INFLUENCER COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES SOURCE: AUTHOR.

This diagram expands upon the overarching communication strategies employed by Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs), highlighting eight key practices that underpin their digital performance. These include:

– **Aspirational Branding**, where luxury lifestyles and curated aesthetics project exclusivity;

– **Dynamic and Playful Content**, often aligned with platform trends and affordances;

– **Rare and Exclusive Practices**, such as front-row attendance or brand collaborations;

– **Relatability and Engagement**, which promotes parasocial intimacy;

– **Visual Storytelling**, using cohesive and immersive image narratives;

– **Cultural and Symbolic Capital**, referencing art, architecture, or fashion history to signal distinction (Bourdieu, 1984);

– **Industry Connections**, which establish legitimacy and insider status;

– **Lifestyle Narratives**, embedding luxury into everyday routines; and

TABLE 20 THEMATIC CATEGORIES OF LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFI) COMMUNICATION ON INSTAGRAM SOURCE: AUTHOR.

Theme	Key Codes in Group	Description
Aspirational Branding	*MODEL_ACT*, *BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION*, *FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION*, *CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION*, *RUNWAY_POSE*, *BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT*	These codes represent the overt luxury-focused strategies used to project aspirational imagery and position influencer as part of the elite fashion ecosystem.
Relatability and Engagement	*AUTHENTIC_ACT*, *DAILY_LIFE*, *MIRROR_SELFIE_ACT*, *EMOTIONAL_CONNECTION*, *INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION*	These codes highlight efforts to connect with audiences on a personal level by displaying relatable and interactive content alongside aspirational imagery.
Visual Storytelling	*TRANSITION*, *GOLDEN_HOUR*, *GET_DRESSED_ACT*, *CURATED_ACCESSORIES*, *OUTFIT_ROUND_UP*, *FASHION_LANGUAGE_CAPTION*	These codes emphasise the use of editing techniques and storytelling strategies to communicate the aesthetic appeal and symbolic meaning of luxury fashion content.
Lifestyle Narratives	*STREET_LOCATION*, *COFFEE_ACT*, *ZEBRA_CROSSING_LOCATION*, *CITY_SKYLINE_LOCATION*, *HOLIDAY_LOCATION*, *HOME_LOCATION*	This group captures the use of everyday and lifestyle elements to situate luxury fashion within aspirational but relatable contexts.
Industry Connections	*INDUSTRY_SOCIAL_CAPITAL*, *RUNWAY_EVENT*, *INDUSTRY_TENURE*, *AMBASSADOR_CAPTION*	These codes signify the Influencers' alignment with the luxury fashion industry through collaborations, event participation, and ambassadorial roles.
Cultural and Symbolic Capital	*RITUALISATION_CONTENT*, *UNBOXING_ACT*, *CONSPICUOUS_CONSUMPTION*, *SIGNIFICANT_PERSONAL_LIFE*, *FASHION_KNOWLEDGE_CAPTION*, *SOCIAL_POSE*	These codes highlight Influencers' performances of cultural and social capital to reinforce their authority and exclusivity within the luxury fashion system.
Dynamic and Playful Content	*HUMOUR_CONTENT*, *DOUBLE_ENTENDRES_CAPTION*, *BEHIND_SCENES*, *BOTTOM_UP*	These codes reflect playful or behind-the-scenes content that adds levity or surprise to the influencer's broader luxury narrative, enhancing audience engagement.
Rare and Exclusive Practices	*SKI_ACT*, *SHOP_ACT*, *LONDON_PROPERTY_LOCATION*, *VENETIAN_BOAT_LOCATION*, *RED_CARPET_LOCATION*, *STUDIO_LOCATION*	This group highlights niche or location-specific content that reinforces exclusivity, scarcity, and rarity as markers of luxury.

This table presents the core themes and associated codes identified in the visual content analysis of Luxury Fashion Influencers' (LFIs) Instagram posts. Each theme represents Influencers' distinct communicative strategy to navigate and reinforce their position within the luxury fashion ecosystem. As Rocamora (2022) highlights, digital visibility is central to influencer branding, with strategic content curation shaping perceptions of exclusivity and aspirational appeal. The codes within each theme illustrate specific practices, ranging from conspicuous consumption and industry alignment to relatability and playful engagement, reflecting the dual imperatives of Distinction and audience connection (Bourdieu, 1984; Abidin, 2016). These categories offer a structured framework for understanding how influencer develop and mediate their luxury fashion narratives, bridging symbolic capital with digital engagement (Findlay & Reponen, 2023). This classification aligns with broader discussions on how digital influencer negotiate authenticity, visibility, and commercial partnerships within the evolving luxury fashion landscape (Audrezet et al., 2020). By structuring these communicative strategies, the framework provides a theoretical foundation for examining luxury fashion influencer content's performative and symbolic dimensions (Rocamora, 2022). Further research could explore how these themes evolve in response to changing platform affordances and shifts in consumer engagement (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016).

5.4.1. Aspirational Branding

This category encapsulates the overt strategies employed by Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) to construct their alignment visually and narratively with the elite fashion system. Codes such as MODEL_ACT, FASHION_EVENT_MENTION_CAPTION, and BACKSTAGE_FASHION_EVENT underscore the performative integration of LFIs into the traditional circuits of fashion prestige. These acts can be understood through Veblen's (1899) concept of conspicuous consumption, whereby value is communicated not through utility but through the visible display of wealth, exclusivity, and cultural alignment. Posts tagged with brand names or runway imagery signify more than mere participation; they represent a visual claim to institutional legitimacy within the fashion field.

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) notion of symbolic capital, these posts function as public performances of Distinction, visually encoding markers of taste, access, and aesthetic fluency. This aligns with Rocamora's (2022) assertion that influencer now function as mediators of digital fashion narratives, assuming roles once held by traditional fashion editors. Through semiotic gestures, the strategic deployment of branded clothing, elite settings, and curated captions, LFIs depict luxury and embody its social and cultural codes, sustaining the aspirational appeal of fashion in the algorithmically mediated environment of Instagram.

5.4.2. Relatability and Engagement

In contrast to aspirational exclusivity, the codes grouped under this category, such as AUTHENTIC_ACT, DAILY_LIFE, and INTERACTION_QUESTION_CAPTION, signal an intentional strategy of relatability. These posts foreground curated glimpses of the influencer 's private or mundane life, offering followers a sense of accessibility and affective proximity. As explored in the literature review (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Abidin, 2016), such gestures constitute a form of strategic authenticity, where influencer carefully perform the ordinary to reinforce audience connection and maintain relevance within platform logics that reward engagement.

These practices can be understood through Bourdieu's (1984) concept of social capital: influencer accumulate symbolic resources that enhance their influence and visibility by promoting perceived intimacy. Moreover, these performances navigate what Carah and Angus (2018) describe as the algorithmic visibility economy, where emotional resonance and interactivity are critical to sustaining audience attention. While appearing spontaneous, such content is meticulously calibrated to balance the fantasy of luxury with the familiarity of the everyday.

5.4.3. Visual Storytelling

This category reflects the strategic use of visual techniques and platform-native storytelling to enhance influencer content's aesthetic and symbolic dimensions. Codes such as TRANSITION, GOLDEN_HOUR, and CURATED_ACCESSORIES reveal how influencer employ cinematic editing, symbolic lighting, and stylistic cohesion to embed luxury within visually seductive narratives. As discussed in the literature review, this aligns with Rocamora's (2022) framing of Instagram as a space of aesthetic labour and Findlay's (2017) notion of the influencer as a visual curator.

Through the lens of Barthes (1967), these posts function as semiotic systems wherein signs are carefully layered to connote taste, refinement, and narrative fluency. Poses, transitions, and captioned language work together to construct a coherent luxury identity that appears both personal and professionally curated. Bourdieu's (1984) aesthetic capital is particularly relevant here, as the influencer 's capacity to compose beautiful, symbolically rich content becomes a marker of Distinction.

5.4.4. Lifestyle Narratives

The codes within this group ('STREET_LOCATION, COFFEE_ACT, HOLIDAY_LOCATION') map onto what the literature review identifies as embedding luxury into aspirational but attainable lifestyles. These posts

transform everyday activities into stylised rituals of taste, situating LFIs within urban, mobile, and culturally literate contexts. Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus is central here: influencer visually express classed dispositions through their spatial routines and consumer choices.

This content aligns with the shift described by Duffy and Hund (2015), where influencer present a domesticated and aspirational image of luxury. Every day is re-signified as aestheticised lifestyle content, a strategy that allows LFIs to appear elevated and relatable. These posts blur traditional binaries of public/private, luxury/ordinary, and consumer/creator, reinforcing the influencer 's role as a lifestyle mediator.

5.4.5. Industry Connections

This category centres on accumulating and displaying field-specific capital, as evidenced by codes such as RUNWAY_EVENT, AMBASSADOR_CAPTION, and INDUSTRY_TENURE. These content types demonstrate LFIs ' embeddedness within the formal structures of the fashion industry. As discussed in the literature review, influencer are increasingly legitimated through collaborations and institutional affiliations (Findlay, 2017; Rocamora, 2011), reflecting a reconfiguration of fashion's gatekeeping apparatus.

Using Bourdieu's (1984) framework, these posts accrue social and symbolic capital, signalling who influencer know and how the field recognises them. Attendance at events, ambassadorial roles, and tenure claims are more than

content; they are strategic assertions of authority and cultural capital. Within the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’*, such posts contribute to what the literature review terms the recalibration of legitimacy, where digital visibility and institutional ties work in tandem.

5.4.6. Cultural and Symbolic Capital

The codes in this group ('RITUALISATION_CONTENT, UNBOXING_ACT, FASHION_KNOWLEDGE_CAPTION') reveal how LFIs mobilise cultural knowledge and ritual performance to assert their authority within the luxury system. These posts are deeply intertextual, often referencing fashion history, editorial conventions, or brand heritage. They align with Bourdieu's (1984) concept of symbolic capital and the importance of cultural literacy in accruing status.

This content also reflects Barthes' (1967) fashion semiotics, where fashion becomes a language of signs. The influencer 's pose, caption, and styling each function as semiotic units that construct a coherent identity of informed Distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). Veblen's (1899) framework is equally relevant: while these posts often display goods, their actual value lies in the influencer 's capacity to contextualise and narrate them, to turn consumption into a performative, culturally legible act of taste.

5.4.7. Dynamic and Playful Content

Codes such as HUMOUR_CONTENT and BEHIND_SCENES demonstrate how LFIs inject levity, self-awareness, and tonal variation into their content repertoire. This theme reflects the flexibility demanded by platform cultures, where audience engagement is driven as much by entertainment as by aspiration. These moments are strategic ruptures in the polished luxury narrative, humanising the influencer while reinforcing their creative range.

Following Bourdieu (1984), playfulness can be seen as a sign of secure cultural capital, a stylistic manoeuvre available to those with already established legitimacy. As noted in the literature review (Abidin, 2016), such content also operates within the attention economy, where tonal shifts can sustain engagement and refresh audience interest. These posts disrupt without undermining, creating space for irony, humour, or candidness within the broader prestige architecture.

5.4.8. Rare and Exclusive Practices

Finally, the codes grouped here, including SKI_ACT, RED_CARPET_LOCATION, and VENETIAN_BOAT_LOCATION, signal the apex of luxury signification within influencer communication. These posts are predicated on scarcity, spatial privilege, and event-specific access, offering

followers vicarious proximity to forms of experience that are materially and symbolically out of reach.

These practices resonate with Veblen's (1899) emphasis on the visibility of rarity as a mechanism of social stratification. They also reaffirm Bourdieu's (1984) idea that luxury consumption is never about goods but about knowing how and where to consume. As noted in the literature review, such posts are visual assertions of digital prestige, functioning as symbolic boundary markers that distinguish the influencer from peers and followers. In the *‘‘new digital fashion system’’*, exclusivity is not just performed; it is rendered scrollable, sharable, and strategically replicable.

5.5. MOTIVATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR LFI CONTENT CREATION

FIGURE 63 TYPOLOGY OF INFLUENCER MOTIVATIONS IN LUXURY FASHION COMMUNICATION THIS DIAGRAM CONCEPTUALISES THE INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATIONS SHAPING LUXURY FASHION INFLUENCER (LFI) PRACTICES. INTRINSIC DRIVERS INCLUDE AESTHETIC EXPRESSION, FASHION EXPERTISE, COMMUNITY CONNECTION, AND IDENTITY PERFORMANCE—OFTEN PROMOTING RELATABILITY THROUGH CURATED IMPERFECTION. EXTRINSIC DRIVERS INVOLVE BRAND PARTNERSHIPS, PLATFORM VISIBILITY, AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT, ENACTED THROUGH STRATEGIES LIKE LUXURY LOCATION USE. THESE MOTIVATIONS CONVERGE IN ASPIRATIONAL LABOUR, WHERE AUTHENTICITY IS BLENDED WITH IDEALISATION TO SUPPORT BRAND CO-CREATION. THE FRAMEWORK HIGHLIGHTS HOW LFIS NEGOTIATE PERSONAL EXPRESSION AND COMMERCIAL DEMANDS WITHIN DIGITAL LUXURY CULTURE.

SOURCE: AUTHOR.

5.5.1. The Role of Motivations in LFI Communication Practices

While the structural and thematic dimensions of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI) content reveal much about how luxury is articulated on Instagram, a deeper understanding of these practices requires attention to the underlying motivations that inform content creation. These motivations shape the selection of post structures and thematic emphasis and the strategic decisions that govern self-presentation, brand alignment, and audience engagement.

Existing research on influencer labour and content production highlights the complex relationship between creative autonomy and commercial expectation (Duffy, 2017; Abidin, 2016). influencer are positioned within a digital economy that values both visibility and consistency. However, their output is rarely the result of spontaneous expression. Instead, it is often guided by what could be termed *platformed intention,* a mode of aesthetic and communicative decision-making shaped by personal ambition, algorithmic demands, brand relationships, and audience expectations.

In this context, influencer motivations fall into two broad and overlapping categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. These are not binary opposites but rather heuristic categories that help to explain the layered rationales behind influencer behaviour and the strategic composition of luxury fashion content.

Intrinsic motivations refer to internally driven forms of meaning-making, such as personal aesthetic expression, fashion expertise, community engagement,

and identity performance. These motivations often reflect the influencer 's desire to maintain credibility, authenticity, or creative satisfaction. For example, influencer may craft editorial-style posts or narrate emotional connections to a brand not purely to fulfil a commercial obligation but to reinforce their fashion authority or to sustain relational capital with their audience (Audrezet et al., 2020).

Extrinsic motivations, by contrast, relate to commercial partnerships, platform visibility, and reputation management within the influencer economy. These include strategic alignment with brand narratives, the cultivation of algorithmic relevance through post-frequency or trend participation, and the navigation of sponsorship disclosures. LFIs must maintain a public persona that is both desirable and professional, often modulating the overt visibility of brand affiliations to preserve the appearance of editorial distance or organic enthusiasm.

This typology of motivation helps to contextualise the thematic categories outlined in the preceding sections further. For instance, the recurring strategy of curated imperfection, where influencers hare candid moments or 'flawed' imagery, is best understood not merely as a visual aesthetic but as a performative negotiation between intrinsic self-expression and extrinsic branding goals. Similarly, using specific luxury locations, such as high-end hotels or first-class flights, may satisfy an extrinsic imperative to signal prestige while aligning with an intrinsic desire to craft a coherent and aspirational lifestyle narrative.

Motivations are also mediated by what Duffy (2017) refers to as the "aspirational labour" of digital creatives, labour which is emotionally invested, future-oriented, and permanently embedded within structural inequalities of access, visibility, and reward. influencer often work to anticipate audience desires, curate aspirational moods, and deliver polished content while adhering to the unwritten expectations of the platforms they inhabit and the brands they represent. Therefore, motivations should not be seen as individual or autonomous choices alone, but as negotiated responses to digital fashion influence's economic and algorithmic structures.

Finally, the role of motivation in LFI communication intersects with emerging discussions on brand co-creation (Ind et al., 2013), where influencer are not simply brand messengers but active participants in shaping and translating brand meaning. Their motivational frameworks, whether rooted in personal aesthetics or commercial imperatives, directly affect how luxury is defined and experienced by audiences. In this way, motivations are not ancillary to the typology but central to understanding its functional operation.

By conceptualising motivation through the lens of symbolic labour and affective production, this chapter extends the typology beyond surface-level content patterns into the intentional logic that sustains influencer cultural authority. Future research might explore how these motivations shift across platform environments or evolve throughout an influencer 's career, particularly about changing brand expectations and follower demographics.

5.6. LINKING ‘STRATEGIC ADAPTABILITY’ AND THE TYPOLOGY

The typology developed in this research is more than a categorisation of recurring influencer practices. It functions as the empirical terrain through which the concept of ‘Strategic Adaptability’ is enacted, made visible, and theorised. As discussed earlier in this chapter, ‘Strategic Adaptability’ refers to the influencer’s capacity to negotiate the demands of symbolic prestige and participatory platform culture. This negotiation is not static but involves an ongoing recalibration of visual, narrative, and affective cues in response to shifting brand affiliations, platform affordances, and audience sensibilities.

The typology provides the scaffolding through which this adaptability becomes legible. Each category reflects a distinct communicative strategy, yet the movement between them and the ability to weave together multiple categories within and across posts marks an influencer as strategically adaptable. In this sense, the typology is a means of tracing the operational logic of adaptability itself.

For instance, consider an influencer who fuses *Aspirational Branding* with *Relatability and Engagement* in a single post. A visually polished carousel might open with a high-fashion editorial image foregrounding luxury product placement, followed by a candid behind-the-scenes frame and a conversational caption. This juxtaposition allows the influencer to maintain brand prestige while cultivating approachability and promoting audience connection. Similarly, aligning *cultural and symbolic capital* with *industry*

connections allows influencer to consolidate their authority by demonstrating fluency in fashion history and theory codes while signalling professional proximity to the fashion establishment.

These combinations are not incidental but indicative of a more complex reading of platform visibility, one that recognises that cultural capital in digital spaces is produced through multifaceted performances rather than singular aesthetic strategies. ‘Strategic Adaptability’ emerges, then, as a mode of content authorship that is both reflexive and responsive. It requires an awareness of when to lean into platform vernaculars and when to invoke the more stylised, curated language of luxury and, crucially, how to do so without eroding either symbolic integrity or audience rapport.

This capacity to shift registers to operate fluidly across the typology’s categories while retaining narrative coherence and brand alignment is central to how value is constructed and sustained within the influencer economy. As such, the typology provides a critical foundation for recognising and evaluating this labour. It renders visible the nuanced practices through which LFIs accrue and maintain digital cultural capital, offering a vocabulary for interpreting influencer content in terms of what is seen and what is strategically being done.

5.7. INDUSTRY FACING IMPLICATIONS

This research offers a critical framework with clear implications for luxury brands responding to the demands of the digital fashion marketplace. The typology developed here, and the concept of 'Strategic Adaptability' provides grounded yet flexible tools for shaping social media strategy and enabling more considered, effective collaborations with Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs).

5.7.1. Strategic Insights for Brand Collaborations with LFIs

By identifying key communication practices such as *Aspirational Branding*, *Relatability and Engagement*, *Visual Storytelling*, and *Industry Connections* the typology offers an empirically grounded lens through which brands can assess influencer content with greater depth and nuance.

Content Alignment with Brand Values: Luxury brands may use this framework to identify influencer approaches that correspond with their positioning. Those seeking to reinforce exclusivity might favour LFIs who engage in *Rare and Exclusive Practices*, whereas those aiming to expand reach prefer content that centres on *Relatability and Engagement*.

Selective Partnerships Based on 'Strategic Adaptability' : Rather than relying on follower numbers, brands can assess how effectively an LFI combines traditional luxury aesthetics with platform-specific engagement

practices. This supports collaborations that preserve brand distinctiveness while remaining effective in digital spaces.

Format-Specific Storytelling: Understanding the communicative potential of different Instagram formats, including still images, carousels, and Reels, can support narrative design. Reels may be most effective for communicating movement or experiential storytelling, while carousels allow for multi-layered editorial content that echoes fashion magazine traditions.

5.7.2. Ethical Considerations in Influencer Collaborations

Alongside strategic concerns, the research raises ethical questions regarding transparency, authenticity, and consumer trust all essential in sustaining brand equity in an increasingly saturated visual environment.

Disclosure and Consumer Clarity: The low frequency of product tagging (7. 7 %) and the tendency to avoid overt promotional language suggests a purposeful ambiguity. While such approaches contribute to the aspirational tone of luxury, brands must still meet advertising standards to ensure consumer confidence and regulatory compliance.

Performative Authenticity: This research identifies how "authenticity" often appears as deliberate styling, curated imperfection, or composed effortlessness. Brands should approach this critically, ensuring that partnerships communicate a genuine connection rather than an overly staged

transaction, thereby supporting deeper emotional engagement with audiences.

5.8. CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the typology that forms the central analytical contribution of this thesis. Drawing upon the thematic findings established in Chapter 4 and situated within the theoretical frameworks of Barthes (1957/2013), Bourdieu (1984), and Veblen ([1899] 2007), the typology offers a systematic structure through which the fashion communication practices of Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) may be decoded and categorised. In doing so, it directly responds to the overarching research question: *Can the fashion communication practices of LFIs be decoded and categorised to understand how they communicate luxury brand narratives within the evolving ‘‘new digital fashion system’’?*

The typology comprises eight interrelated categories that reflect the complex symbolic, aesthetic, and strategic devices employed by LFIs to mediate luxury on Instagram. These categories are not simply descriptive groupings but conceptual lenses illuminating the intersection of influencer labour, visual culture, and digital branding. They demonstrate how LFIs curate aspirational narratives through spatial symbolism, editorial aesthetics, and semi-public intimacy while navigating algorithmic pressures and audience expectations. As such, the typology responds to the first and second research sub-questions

by identifying the textual and visual strategies LFIs use to communicate luxury and by categorising these strategies into analytically distinct but interconnected practices.

This framework also advances the third research sub-question: *How can LFI practices inform the development of effective social media strategies for luxury brands within the digital fashion marketplace?* By offering a vocabulary for interpreting influencer content as a form of cultural labour, the typology provides a resource for brands, marketers, and scholars seeking to engage with influencer communication not merely as content but as a symbolic mode of meaning-making embedded in platform culture. It also contributes to the theorisation of luxury as an affective and performative economy, wherein value is constructed through signs of access, exclusivity, and aesthetic capital rather than solely through material goods.

The typology is informed by a methodological framework combining visual content analysis with co-occurrence mapping, enabling empirical granularity and theoretical synthesis. It embodies the interpretive logic outlined in Chapter 3, in which analytical rigour is paired with conceptual abstraction to produce a model responsive to the data and the broader theoretical concerns of the thesis. In particular, the typology extends the application of classic theories to the digital realm: it adapts Barthes' (1983) semiotic reading of fashion signs, applies Bourdieu's (1984) Distinction theory to algorithmically structured visibility, and repositions Veblen's ([1899] 1994) concept of conspicuous consumption within the affective economies of Instagram.

Crucially, the typology also foregrounds the dual nature of LFIs as both marketing instruments and cultural intermediaries. Drawing on contemporary scholarship (Abidin, 2016; Duffy, 2017; Findlay, 2019; Rocamora, 2022), the chapter demonstrates how LFIs balance editorial authority with commercial collaboration and how they construct hybrid identities that function within the prestige economy of fashion while remaining responsive to the participatory dynamics of platform culture. In this regard, the typology serves as a bridge between empirical evidence and conceptual understanding, providing the foundation for the final chapter's broader discussion of how LFIs contribute to and are shaped by the *''new digital fashion system''*.

In sum, this chapter has articulated the structural logic of LFI communication as it unfolds on Instagram. It offers a model for critically decoding influencer content, recognising the 'Strategic Adaptability' , aesthetic sophistication, and cultural labour that underpin luxury branding in the digital age. The following chapter will return to the thesis's broader conceptual aims, drawing together the empirical and theoretical contributions to reflect on the broader implications for fashion communication scholarship and digital marketing practice.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

6.1. Conclusion to the Research

This concluding chapter consolidates the thesis's conceptual, empirical, and methodological contributions, synthesising how the findings respond to the overarching research question and situating the study within contemporary debates on digital fashion communication. It examines how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) shape and circulate luxury fashion narratives on Instagram within the wider dynamics of the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’.

Drawing together the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 and the empirical analyses presented in Chapters 4 and 5, the research demonstrates that LFIs operate as key mediators of luxury meaning in digital contexts. Their work involves translating symbolic value into platform-native forms through a combination of aesthetic, affective, and strategic labour. In doing so, LFIs sustain luxury's cultural authority under conditions of algorithmic visibility.

6.1.1. Evaluation of Research Questions and Objectives

Research Question 1 examined how the textual and visual strategies employed by LFIs could be codified and decoded to reveal the construction of luxury value, aesthetic meaning, and desirability. Through the development of a structured codebook, the study demonstrated that LFI practices are patterned and symbolically organised rather than incidental. Codes such as WALKING_POSE, HOTEL_ROOM_LOCATION, BRAND_NAMES_CAPTION, and MODEL_ACT revealed the aesthetic and discursive structures through which luxury narratives are produced. This addressed the first research objective by evidencing how multimodal elements combine to form a recognisable grammar of digital luxury fashion communication.

Research Question 2 focused on categorisation. The typology developed in Chapter 5 synthesised these empirical patterns into eight thematic clusters, including aspirational branding, strategic authenticity, and spatial signalling. Each cluster operationalised the study's theoretical framework, enabling systematic interpretation of how pose, location, styling, and display function within luxury influencer communication. In doing so, the second research objective was met by identifying the communicative logics that underpin LFI fashion communication practices.

Research Question 3 examined how decoded practices may inform strategy within the digital luxury marketplace. The findings highlighted the importance of balancing prestige with relatability, maintaining aesthetic distinction while

engaging participatory fashion cultures. The typology, alongside the concept of ‘Strategic Adaptability’, demonstrates how LFIs reconcile these competing demands within algorithmically governed environments. This addressed the third research objective by offering insight into the cultural and commercial mechanisms shaping contemporary luxury communication.

Taken together, the findings point to a broader transformation in fashion communication, marked by a shift from hierarchical editorial mediation towards influencer distributed, platform-native cultural production. Within this configuration, LFIs emerge as central actors in the circulation and stabilisation of luxury meaning.

6.1.2. Contributions to Knowledge

This thesis contributes to knowledge through three interconnected advances: theoretical, methodological, and applied.

Theoretical contribution

The study introduces *‘Strategic Adaptability’* as a conceptual lens for understanding how Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFIs) make culturally attuned adjustments in response to changing platform affordances, brand expectations, and audience dynamics. Drawing on empirical analysis of 390 Instagram posts and informed by semiotics, cultural capital, and conspicuous consumption, the concept explains how LFIs negotiate the tension between exclusivity and accessibility. In doing so, it accounts for how symbolic prestige

is maintained while engaging with the temporal and affective rhythms of digital culture. By framing influencer labour as simultaneously aesthetic, affective, and platform-aware, the research extends existing debates on fashion mediation and luxury communication in digital contexts.

Methodological contribution

The thesis develops a systematic mixed-methods approach to analysing LFI communication practices. By combining visual content analysis, template analysis, and SPSS-supported co-occurrence mapping, it offers a replicable framework for decoding digital fashion imagery. Quantitative mapping is used as a triangulation tool, identifying recurring pose–location–caption configurations that support and refine qualitative interpretation. The methodological contribution lies in demonstrating how classical theoretical frameworks can be operationalised through empirical coding to analyse visual and discursive data without reducing interpretive depth.

Applied contribution

For industry practitioners, the typology and the concept of ‘Strategic Adaptability’ provide a means of evaluating influencer practices beyond surface indicators such as reach or engagement. Instead, LFI content can be assessed in terms of narrative coherence, aesthetic labour, spatial signalling, and alignment with luxury’s symbolic codes. For educators, the typology functions as a structured analytical tool for teaching contemporary digital fashion communication, offering a clear bridge between theoretical insight and industry-facing practice.

6.1.3. Methodological Reflection and Researcher Positioning

The research was shaped by a critically reflexive stance informed by my dual positioning as a digital marketing academic and a fashion scholar. Drawing on embodied reflexivity, the study acknowledges that taste, habitus, and disciplinary training shape interpretive practice. Reflexivity was managed through a transparent audit trail, iterative memoing, a theoretically anchored codebook, and triangulation across qualitative and quantitative datasets.

This dual positioning enabled close attention to aesthetic cues, influencer vernaculars, and branding nuance, while maintaining critical distance from commercial imperatives. The abductive reasoning process, supported by SPSS visualisation, ensured that interpretive claims remained accountable to patterned evidence.

6.1.4. Limitations of the Research

The study's limitations are acknowledged across three principal areas.

Sample Homogeneity

The sample comprises three Western, macro-level, white European LFIs. While this reflects the dominance of Eurocentric luxury aesthetics within global fashion branding and supports theoretical coherence, it excludes POC

influencers [33] and non-Western luxury formations that may operate through different symbolic codes and platform practices. Future research should broaden cultural scope to diversify the typology.

The analysis centres on influencer output rather than audience interpretation. While this enabled depth of semiotic analysis, questions remain regarding how authenticity, prestige, and relatability are perceived by followers. Future research may address reception through interviews, surveys, or digital ethnography.

The research is confined to Instagram. Although theoretically and methodologically justified, this scope excludes comparative analysis across platforms. As TikTok, YouTube, and emerging AI-mediated environments continue to shape fashion communication, further research should examine how luxury meaning adapts across divergent platform vernaculars.

Together, these limitations clarify the interpretive boundaries of the study while identifying avenues for future exploration.

[33] *People of Colour (POC)* is used in this thesis as an umbrella term referring to individuals who identify as non-white, including but not limited to Black, Asian, Indigenous, Latinx, Middle Eastern, and mixed-heritage backgrounds. The term is employed here to acknowledge structural patterns of racialisation and representation within fashion and digital media, rather than to imply a homogenous set of experiences or identities.

6.1.5. Directions for Future Research

Future research could extend this study by:

- examining micro- and nano-influencers across diverse cultural contexts to assess how localised luxury codes intersect with global platform cultures
- incorporating audience reception studies to explore how ‘Strategic Adaptability’ shapes perceptions of authenticity and brand credibility
- analysing the impact of AI-generated influencers, lo-fi aesthetics, and gamified retail formats on the symbolic economy of luxury
- conducting cross-platform comparisons to evaluate how luxury communication adapts to differing technical affordances and vernaculars

Such work would refine the typology and test the adaptability of ‘Strategic Adaptability’ across broader cultural and technological contexts.

6.1.6. Concluding Remarks

This thesis has examined how luxury fashion meaning is produced, circulated, and sustained within digital culture, positioning LFIs as central mediators

within the ‘‘new digital fashion system’’. Through the development of a typology of influencer communication practices and the conceptualisation of ‘Strategic Adaptability’, the research provides frameworks for understanding how luxury operates under conditions of platform governance and mediated visibility.

As digital fashion communication continues to evolve, these frameworks offer a foundation for future inquiry rather than a closed model. They invite further examination of how symbolic value is negotiated across platforms, cultures, and emerging technological conditions, and how luxury continues to adapt without relinquishing its defining logics of distinction and aspiration.

6.2. Personal Reflection

I first encountered fashion blogging as a fashion student at the London College of Fashion in 2010. I remember spending long periods engaging with sites such as *Fashion Toast*, drawn to Rumi Neely’s instinctive and atmospheric aesthetic. At the time, it felt like a new way of engaging with fashion, one that brought together spontaneity, style, and personal authorship. Figures such as Victoria Magrath later introduced bold colour, clarity, and playfulness, shaping digital spaces that felt both intimate and experimental. These early creators

were not simply displaying clothing but developing visual languages that sat outside established structures of fashion media.

With greater academic distance, it is now clear that what felt new was part of a wider moment in digital fashion culture. Scholarship has since documented how early blogging practices foregrounded informality, self-styling, and creative autonomy in ways that contrasted with traditional editorial mediation. By the mid-2010s, however, the rise of Instagram and second-wave blogging began to professionalise these practices. Viewed within this longer trajectory, the shift towards curated, brand-aligned, and strategically coordinated content appears less abrupt and more indicative of a field consolidating around commercial imperatives and platform governance.

Spending several years researching this space has made the ambivalence of this evolution more apparent. Digital fashion communication has matured, refining practices that once appeared spontaneous. In doing so, it has reduced some of the unpredictability and openness that characterised early blogging cultures. What has emerged is a form of visual communication that is highly intentional, polished, and closely aligned with both brand expectations and platform logics.

This trajectory underpins one of the central contributions of the thesis. ‘Strategic Adaptability’ names the communicative skill through which influencers negotiate these shifting conditions, maintaining symbolic prestige while responding to platform rhythms and brand demands. Rather than idealising earlier phases of digital fashion culture, the research seeks to make visible the cultural and structural forces shaping contemporary practice. By

articulating these dynamics, it becomes possible to consider how future forms of digital fashion communication might reintroduce experimentation, emotional resonance, or creative risk within an environment that continues to evolve alongside technological, economic, and cultural change.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Aesthetic Labour

The work involved in curating, producing, and maintaining a visually compelling digital presence. In the context of Influencers, aesthetic labour includes styling, photography, editing, and aligning one's content with platform expectations and brand aesthetics.

Algorithmic Visibility

The extent to which influencer content is surfaced to audiences via platform algorithms. influencer must strategically navigate platform logic (e. g. frequency, engagement, content type) to optimise visibility and reach.

Authenticity

A performed and strategic quality often associated with relatability, transparency, and perceived sincerity. In influencer culture, authenticity is a key currency, but one that is increasingly commodified and calibrated to audience expectations and branding goals.

Cultural Intermediary

Originally defined by Bourdieu, this term refers to agents who shape taste and consumption by translating cultural value. influencer act as digital cultural intermediaries, mediating between luxury brands and audiences through aspirational yet accessible content.

''new digital fashion system''

A reconfigured network of production, mediation, and consumption of fashion that is shaped by social media, platform logics, influencer culture, and data-driven branding. It challenges traditional gatekeeping structures within fashion.

Influencer-Generated Content (IGC)

Visual and textual content created by Influencers, often self-produced and circulating on social platforms. Unlike brand-produced content, IGC is perceived as more authentic and is central to influencer marketing strategies.

Luxury Fashion Influencer (LFI)

An influencer whose content centres on luxury fashion, often blending high-end branding, personal style, lifestyle curation, and digital storytelling to cultivate authority, aspiration, and engagement within niche fashion publics.

Parasocial Relationship

A one-sided connection where audiences feel a sense of intimacy, familiarity, or trust toward an influencer , despite no reciprocal relationship. This phenomenon underpins much of influencer marketing's effectiveness.

Platform Affordances

The technical and symbolic possibilities and constraints of a digital platform. On Instagram, this includes features like Stories, Reels, hashtags, and shopping tools, all of which shape how fashion is performed and perceived.

Platform-Native Content

Content created to align with the stylistic norms, temporal rhythms, and interactive features of a specific platform. It contrasts with repurposed or generic media and is central to influencer success within algorithmic systems.

Quantified Self

A mode of self-representation based on data tracking and numerical visibility, such as likes, followers, views, and engagement metrics. For Influencers, these metrics are both a performance of influence and a form of labour evaluation.

Strategic Authenticity

A calculated performance of realness, relatability, or vulnerability designed to promote audience trust and engagement. It reflects the paradox of authenticity within commercialised digital spaces.

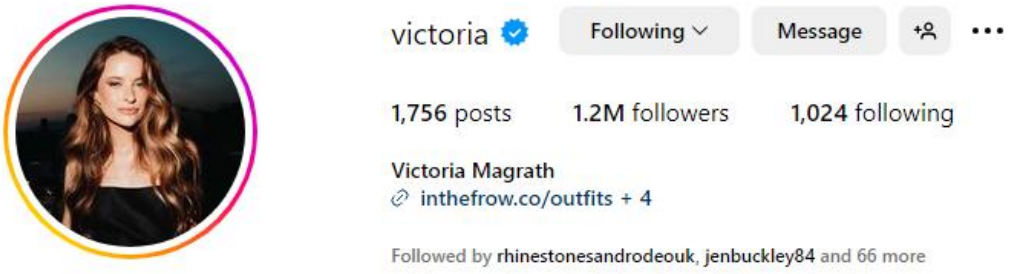
Visual Economy

A system where images circulate as sources of value, labour, and meaning. Within

Instagram’s visual economy, Influencers’ images become aesthetic commodities that generate visibility, engagement, and commercial return.

APPENDIX

Appendix A - Instagram Profile Overview of Victoria Magrath (@victoria)



Victoria Magrath is a leading UK-based luxury fashion influencer , recognised for her refined visual style, academic credibility, and strategic positioning within the high-end fashion sector. She holds a PhD in Fashion Marketing from the University of Manchester, where her research focused on fashion consumer behaviour and mobile commerce (Magrath, 2022). This academic grounding informs her content, blends scholarly insight with aspirational branding.

Magrath launched her blog *In the Frow* in 2012, which has since evolved into a multi-platform brand spanning Instagram, YouTube, and print media. Her work has earned significant recognition, with *Vuelio* (2024) naming *In the Frow* the UK's top fashion blog for five consecutive years. She has collaborated with various luxury brands, including Dior, Bvlgari, Louis Vuitton, and Net-a-Porter, and has co-created capsule collections with Strathberry, Edge of Ember, and Holland Cooper (Magrath, 2022).

In her bestselling book *The New Fashion Rules*, Magrath (2018) explores how digital platforms have transformed the fashion industry, highlighting shifts in

visibility, inspiration, and consumer engagement. She presents influencer as digital-era tastemakers who blend editorial authority with commercial agility. Her reflective commentary on the pressures of influencer labour, such as the criticism levelled by traditional fashion media, adds depth to her public persona (Magrath, 2022). Through consistent fashion week attendance, global brand ambassadorships, and a sophisticated online presence, Magrath exemplifies the symbolic labour and curated self-branding central to luxury fashion's influence in the digital age.

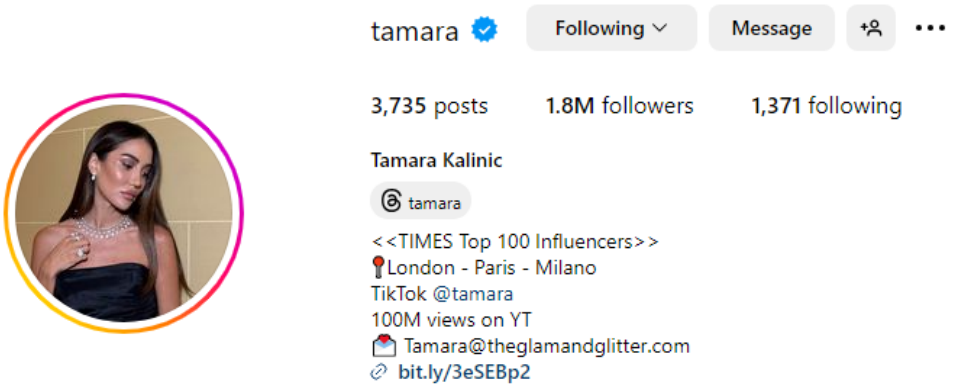
Appendix B - Instagram Profile Overview of Leonie Hanne (@LEONIEHANNE)

Leonie Hanne is a German-born luxury fashion influencer based in London, active since 2014. With a background in strategy consultancy, she transitioned into digital fashion influence through her blog *Ohh Couture*, a platform blending fashion, travel, and lifestyle content. Hanne's distinct aesthetic and high visibility position her as a key figure in the global fashion system. Recognised for her "impeccable taste and style" (Hello, 2023), she has collaborated with numerous prestigious fashion houses, including Louis Vuitton, Dior, Fendi, Givenchy, and La Mer. Her influence extends across campaigns, red carpet appearances, and brand-led platform takeovers, such as Dior's Instagram,

demonstrating her integral role in brand storytelling and visual fashion communication.

Hanne maintains a strong presence at major international fashion events, including Paris, Milan, and New York Fashion Weeks, as well as regular appearances at the Cannes Film Festival. Her elaborate red carpet looks and consistent content production contribute to her high Media Impact Value (MIV®), a metric quantifying her commercial and cultural impact in the luxury fashion industry (Hello, 2023). In interviews, Hanne (2023) reflects on her career origins, noting how her early styling posts “blew up” before she had a formal social media presence, leading followers to “follow her closet” before she even joined Instagram. This organic audience interest catalysed her decision to create a dedicated profile, signalling the bottom-up dynamics of early influencer branding.

Appendix C - Instagram Profile Overview of Tamara Kalinic (@tamara)



Tamara Kalinic, a Serbian influencer , initially launched her blog "The Glam&Glitter" while studying, marking the beginning of her ascent to become a prominent figure in the global fashion scene. Her platform has evolved into a hub where she shares her daily fashion discoveries, style tips, glamorous fashion week front row reports, and personalised shopping selections, captivating a dedicated audience on her blog, Instagram, and YouTube, boasting over 1. 4 million followers and subscribers.

Tamara's influence spans beyond her digital presence; she is recognised as a style ambassador for esteemed fashion brands such as Bottega Veneta, Christian Louboutin, and Emporio Armani. Her collaborations have solidified her status and demonstrated significant impact, notably generating $681K in Media Impact Value (MIV®) for Bottega Veneta in 2021 alone. Additionally, she has ventured into entrepreneurship by launching her premium eyewear brand, So Shady. Tamara Kalinic has been featured in the covers of several prestigious fashion magazines, including Cosmopolitan, Grazia, Marie Claire, and Elle.

Her career highlights include a diverse portfolio of campaigns and ambassadorships with prestigious brands worldwide, including Chanel, Dior, Louis Vuitton, MiuMiu and more (Glam & Glitter, 2024). Tamara's involvement ranges from international fashion weeks to exclusive brand collaborations and high-profile events, consistently displaying her influence and affinity for luxury fashion and beauty. Her entrepreneurial spirit, sophisticated taste, and dedication to empowering women through fashion and beauty continue to

define her journey as a leading influencer and entrepreneur in the global fashion landscape.

Appendix D - Proforma Example

Leonie Hanne – April 2024					
Date of Post	Post Type EG. Video/ Static / Mixed	Caption	Link URL	Image	Notes

Collection Proforma Example for Leonie Hanne – April 2024.

This table provides a structured format for collecting data from Leonie Hanne's Instagram posts. It includes columns for the date of the post, post type (e. g., video, static, or mixed), caption, link URL, image, and notes. This proforma is designed to organise and track detailed content for analysis as part of the research on influencer fashion communication practices.

Appendix E – Proforma

Date of Post	Post Type EG. Video/ Static / Mixed	Caption	Link URL	Notes/ Codes
01/06/2022	Static carousel (4)	Côte d'Azur days with the @versace x Cannes bag 👜 Anzeige/Ad #VersaceCannes #VersaceLaVacanza	https://www. instagram. com/p/CeQ3IlojSMg/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Brand_Names Static_Carousel Daily_Life Street_Location Mirror_Selfie_Act Shop_Act Phone_Image Golden_Hour Holiday_Location Zebra_Rossing_Location
02/06/2022	Static Image (1)	Chanel summer - Which one would you pick? 💚	https://www. instagram. com/p/CeT278OD8sk/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Phone_Image Interaction_Question Curated_Accesories Brand_Names_Caption Static_Image Phone_Image
03/06/2022	Static Carousel (2)	Daily greens in LDN 🌿	https://www. instagram. com/p/CeWBi0rD7rN/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	London_Property_Location Authentic_Act Fashion_Pose Model_Act Double_Entendres Static_Carousel Phone_Image
06/06/2022	Reel	Too stunning not to unbox: Gucci Blondie ♡ Anzeige/Gift #Gucci #GucciBlondie #Gucci	https://www. instagram. com/reel/Ced1yGGDURo/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Unboxing_Act Brand_Mention Humour_Content Industry_Social_Capital Ad_Caption???? Says Gift Reel Phone_Image Golden_Hour Fashion_Knowledge_Caption
06/06/2022	Static Carousel (9)	Greens of the past days 🤍	https://www. instagram. com/p/CeemGRKL1r8/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Authentic_Act Fashion_Pose Model_Act Double_Entendres Daily_Life Mirror_Selfie_Act Static_Carousel Cafe_Location Outfit_Round_Up Outfit_Close_Up_Pose Golden_Hour Home_Location Phone_Image
07/06/2022	STATIC_IMAGE	Rainbow carry-on 🌷💚✨	https://www. instagram. com/p/Cef51TIL5v0/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Phone_Image Curated_Accessories Conspicuous_Consumption Home_Location Emotional_Connection Symbolic_Significance
08/06/2022	STATIC_CAROUSEL (5)	Happy colors 💚🌷✨	https://www. instagram. com/p/CejVM5xLwPg/?utm_source=ig_w	Still_Life_Accessories Model_Act London_Property Phone_Image

			eb_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Mirror_Selfie_Act Outfit_Closeup_Pose Curated_Accessories Emotional_Connection
08/06/2022	REEL	Hot collab alert: GUCCI x adidas ♡ Anzeige/Ad @gucci #adidasxGucci	https://www. instagram. com/reel/CejnP7ppuyz/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Hotel_Balcony Brand_Names Unboxing_Act Model_Act Still_Life_Accessories Industry_Social_Capital Ad_Caption Transition Runway_Pose Phone_Image
10/06/2022	REEL	Last night's look for a special night in London with @tiffanyandco 💎 Anzeige/Ad Thank you for making me a new brand ambassador and for having me for the Vision & Virtuosity Exhibition! #tiffanyandco #VisionAndVirtuosity	https://www. instagram. com/reel/CenwuWxFAB7/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Event_Mention Get_Dressed_Act Transition Brand_Names Social_Capital Ad_Caption Ambassador_Caption Ritualisation Home_Location
10/06/2022	STATIC_IMAGE (1)	What is your favorite color? 🌷🌈🎀🐸🌸	https://www. instagram. com/p/CeoY593DDHb/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Phone_Image Closet_Location Still_Life_Accessories Conspicuous_Consumption Interaction_Question
15/06/2022	STATIC_CAROUSEL (9)	Fashion & food from my last days in Hamburg 🏎	https://www. instagram. com/p/Ce1ISSzrD1U/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Walking_Act Zebra_Crossing_Location Daily_Life Still_Life_Accessories Authentic_Act Street_Location Café_Act Phone_Image Mirror_Selfie_Act Conspicuous_Consumption Coffee_Act Food_Content
16/06/2022	MIXED_CAROUSEL	Hi Amsterdam, so happy I finally made it to this beautiful city! ✨ #Amsterdam	https://www. instagram. com/p/Ce3MG5fLh4t/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Walking_Act City_Skyline_Location Model_Act Phone_Image Candid Authentic_Act Fashion_Pose
17/06/2022	STATIC_CAROUSEL	Amsterdam photo dump ♡ From shooting the most fun editorial to taking the boat during sunset - what an amazing city!	https://www. instagram. com/p/Ce50ie1rkpd/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Behind_Scenes Daily_Life Model_Act Still_Life_Accessories City_Skyline_Location Phone_Image Mirror_Selfie Fashion_Pose Food_Content Social_Pose Industry_Social_Capital Authentic_Act

17/06/2022	REEL	Darker than usual ❤	https://www. instagram. com/reel/Ce6kuurlSHE/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Get_Dressed_Act Hotel_Balcony Ritualisation Golden_Hour Runway_Pose
18/06/2022	REEL	Ciao Amalfi Coast - My forever fav place! 🏖	https://www. instagram. com/reel/Ce8Zt7pFE-T/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Runway_Pose Hotel_Balcony Holiday_Location Phone_Image
19/062022	STATIC_CAROUSEL (9)	Sorrento fashion shrimp 🍤 Thank you for having me @mytheresa.com @aquazzura @edgardoaquazzura 🏖	https://www. instagram. com/p/Ce_67o4rlsx/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Fashion_Language Model_Act Fashion_Pose Brand_Names Phone_Image Holiday_Location Social_Capital Authentic_Act
20/06/2022	REEL	The reason I'm always late for dinner… 😂 Which dress would you choose? ✨ 1. @jamemme 2. @leslieamonswim 3. @versace 4. & 5. @the_attico	https://www. instagram. com/reel/CfCpQ7UltDQ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Transition Interaction_Question Brand_Names Hotel_Balcony Holiday_Location Runway_Pose Model_Act Humour_Content
21/06/2022	REEL	Italy favourites 🦋 Team shoes or bags? 🏖	https://www. instagram. com/reel/CfFAOWElZ3v/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Still_Life_Accesories Conspicuous_Consumption Transition Interaction_Question
24/06/2022	STATIC_IMAGE (2)	Pinch me!!! 🥹🏖 Feeling so incredible honoured to be on the cover of @bazaarbr in @maisonvalentino BR The biggest thank you to the whole Valentino family for all the love & support - This is unreal! Fotografia: @anthenorneto Direção criativa: @alemontanher Styling: @brunouchoa21 Beleza: @ajanamarques	https://www. instagram. com/p/CfLwCwlLX8c/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Significant_Personal_Life Social_Capital Model_Act Professional_Image
30/06/2022	STATIC_CAROUSEL (3)	Summer colors 🌸🤍 Anzeige/Ad @luisaviaroma #LVRFamily #luisaviaroma	https://www. instagram. com/p/CfcaaUmr76p/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==	Ad_Caption Doorway_Location Holiday_Location Fashion_Pose Authentic_Act