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## Micro-influencers' impact on engagement levels for fashion retail brands on Instagram

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Micro-influencers' impact on engagement levels for fashion retail brands on Instagram

by

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Certificate of Approval

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## Table of Contents

Certificate of Approval .....	2
Acknowledgements .....	3
Abstract .....	4
Introduction .....	5
Literature Review .....	9
Research Questions.....	18
Methods .....	18
Findings.....	23
Discussion and Conclusion.....	33
References.....	36
Appendix.....	43

### Abstract

With the increase of social media usage and its relevance for the millennial generation, social media influencers rise as credible sources who influence their followers purchase behaviors. Micro-influencers have up to 400,00 followers and fashion brands are constantly collaborating with them to generate brand awareness. The purpose of this study is to analyze how micro-influencers impact engagement levels on fashion retail brands' accounts on Instagram and what common visual patterns the posts with higher levels of engagement present. A sample of 817 posts from three different brands were analyzed to provide insight in what kind of posts generates higher engagement levels: motivational posts, product posts, model/catalog, micro-influencer, influencer, or none of the above. A content analysis was conducted and after all the posts were coded, the top 100 with the highest engagement levels were submitted to a frame analysis so common patterns and themes could be recognized among the top engagement posts.

*Keywords: Instagram, Micro-influencers, Engagement levels.*

It is already common knowledge the power and importance of social media in today's society when trying to reach the millennial audience. This generation is very digitally oriented and checks their phones at least 43 times a day (Rouse, 2017). Social media has become an extremely important part of millennials' lives and it is not only used for connecting with friends, but also as a source for news, entertainment, research, and, most importantly, shopping.

In an attempt to reach the millennial target audience, companies and organizations are making use of paid advertisements that are displayed on social media feeds, such as Facebook and Instagram. The amount of money U.S. companies spent on advertising in social media was around \$5.1 billion in 2013, and this number is expected to grow around \$15 billion by the end of 2018 (Zhu & Chen, 2015). However, researchers have found that paid ads are not influencing the majority of people as it was expected, and that is simply because millennials prefer indirect sales messages to traditional advertising (Krasniak, 2017).

One of the main reasons why social marketing campaigns are usually not very successful is due to incompatibility between the nature of social media and the type of advertising messages shared by businesses (Zhu, Chen 2015). Even though the purposes for social media use are very diverse, the main reason why people join a network is to connect with other people. When marketers share products on people's feed they will not reach their audience' attention simply because they are not interested in this type of content (Rohampton, 2017).

The key to reach millennials on social media is to make use of content marketing, where brands create content such as videos, photos, blog posts that are relevant for their

target audience (Steimle, 2016). Millennials are looking for value in brands and they will rely on trusted sources and reviews before purchasing a product or service (Krasniak, 2017). Millennials recognized as trustworthy sources users with a large amount of followers (thousands or more), which falls in line with the social credibility theory as well as with Electronic Word of Mouth theory (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

The Electronic Word of Mouth theory explains how technology impacts the phenomenon of customers passing along information to others by making use of electronic devices and social media platforms instead of communicating their preferences and recommendations in person (Thorsten et al, 2004). This is the main reason why digital influencers are such a valuable resource for companies trying to target the millennial generation. Referrals on Instagram, which is a type of eWOM, can increase purchase intentions for products (Danniswara, Sandhyaduhita, & Munajat, 2017), and many types of individuals, from celebrities to bloggers, use their Instagram posts to influence buying behavior among their followers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Digital influencers are a third party who can shape the audience's attitude by using blogs, Instagram, and other social media networks to share their perspective on the most varied subjects (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011).

Influencers are able to incorporate products into their social media profile in a much more natural and personal way that directly talks to their audience, and are also the type of content that their follower base go online to see. Among the digital influencers sphere there are different levels of follower base and engagement numbers that business should pay attention to before partnering up or endorsing one of them.

With the rise of social media many people are so-called digital-celebrities and take advantage of self-branding to promote their lives (Khamis, Ang, Welling, 2017). They have hundreds of thousands and sometimes millions of followers but do not really engage with their audience since it is such a diverse and larger group. Micro-influencers, on the other hand, are people with a smaller follower base, from a thousand up to 400,00 followers, but that are very specialized in a specific content, such as beauty or fashion. Having a smaller number of followers indicates a more segmented and targeted audience and therefore the content posted really reaches an audience that cares about it (Bernazzani, 2017).

Taking into account the amount of time spent by millennials on social media and how much this audience values peer recommendations and interesting content, it is safe to assume brands trying to reach this audience should focus their attention on social media platforms. The millennial generation is all about visual content, such as videos and pictures, and therefore Instagram is a very popular network among them (Simpson, 2017).

The value of peer-recommendation for the millennial generation ties with the importance of brands utilizing micro-influencers in their online social campaigns. Micro-influencers are seen as a close friend by their followers (Maheshwari, 2018), and when they share their opinion or preference about a certain brand/product their followers see it as a genuine advice. In the same way word of mouth is one of the most powerful advertising and promotion strategy (Bart, 2017), electronic word of mouth is also just as powerful and just as important in a time where online interactions take place every day.

The purpose of this research is to analyze how micro-influencers can impact engagement, number of likes and comments a picture gets, on fashion retail brands accounts, and analyze if the posts have visual common patterns that would also explain their performance.

The study focusses specifically on three fashion retail brands: Natural Life, Francesca's and Anthropologie. The main point of the research is to understand how the Natural Life Instagram account is performing compared to two of its competitors that are currently making use of micro-influencers in their feed.

The method utilized in this study to answer the research question is a content analysis, where the three brands' Instagram accounts are analyzed and compared in order to recognize whether posts where micro-influencers are featured generate more engagement than the posts where no micro-influencer is featured and what kind of posts in general generate higher engagement numbers. This is followed by a frame analysis where the top 100 posts by engagement level are going to be analyzed in order to recognize common patters that could drive engagement among the posts.

## Literature Review

### *Opinion Leaders*

The term opinion leader was first presented by researchers regarding the two-step flow communication theory and is defined as someone who has a significant amount of power to influence a specific group by selecting, modifying, and transmitting a message previously received by the media (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The Two-step flow theory assumes a two-way communication flow between the media and the opinion leader. It was criticized by the fact that the communication process contains many more steps and it is way more complex than Katz and Lazarsfeld had previously concluded (Bostian, 1970).

Opinion leaders are able to influence opinions, attitudes, beliefs, motivations, and behaviors of people who rely on them for information and advice (Rogers, 1961). People will recognize an opinion leader by identifying the following factors: personification of factors, competence, and strategic social location (Rogers, 2003). An opinion leader will likely have credentials or background to talk about a certain topic, he or she will appear to have knowledge of what he or she is talking about, and will also know relevant people in the group where that certain topic is valued.

Micro-influencers are seen as opinion leaders in the social media sphere. They are able to influence their audience's attitudes and motivations simply by sharing their own opinion. Micro-influencers are recognized by their followers as more knowledgeable and credible in the subject they talk about, and therefore end up attracting even more followers that are also interested in the same subject they share. With this influence

power micro-influencers are able to affect their audience purchasing behavior and intentions (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

### *Electronic Word of Mouth*

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) happens when customers communicate about products/companies in the online environment, sharing their opinion and experiences, and passing along information using electronic devices. (Thorsten et al, 2004). With the growth of social media networks, people are now using Instagram to share their opinions and consequently can affect other consumer's purchase decisions. However, the effectiveness of eWOM and its impact on purchase decisions are tied with source credibility, meaning if the person recommending a product/company is perceived as credible by the audience the impact on their decision-making process is greater than someone who is not perceived as credible (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Historically word of mouth has always been one of the most valuable forms of marketing and it plays a very important role on the consumer decision-making process since people tend to take into account peer recommendations (Thorsten et al, 2004). With the development of social networks, basic interactions are now taking place in the online setting, and social media users take advantage of the connectivity available to share their recommendations with their family, friends, and also with their followers (Chu & Kim, 2011).

Social media networks allow users to share their interests by simply liking, commenting and posting content they relate to. In this way consumers are constantly engaging with brands they like and consequently passing along their preferences to their

followers (Chu & Kim, 2011). The act of opinion giving, as well as opinion seeking, have been previously defined as important behaviors impacting word of mouth. Consumers that present an opinion-seeking behavior are more likely to search for recommendations before making a purchase (Flynn et al, 1996), while consumers who present a higher level of opinion-giving behaviors are more likely to share their opinion and influence other people to make a purchase, they can also be defined as opinion leaders (Feick & Price, 1987). However, in the social media setting people can assume both behaviors as they seek for recommendation at the same time they pass along theirs. Since the line between opinion-givers and opinion-seekers is so blurred online, consumers will value source credibility when looking for information (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Another factor that impacts the credibility and effectiveness of eWOM is homophily. Homophily is the concept that explains how individuals who interact with one another have similar attributes, attitudes, and overall congruent social-demographic characteristics (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). Homophily explains why influencers on social media are able to impact their followers' tastes and purchase patterns. Since people connect with users that they share a high level of homophily with, they are more likely to trust and value their recommendations (Chu & Kim, 2011).

Studies have shown that in the online sphere traditional types of homophily (age, gender, and education) are not as relevant and influential as shared group interests (Brown et al, 2007). Individuals are more likely to associate and relate to each other when they are in similar situations and share similar attitudes and tastes. Micro-

influencers share common interests with their followers and are constantly talking about those topics, such as beauty or fashion, in that way presenting high levels of homophily.

### *Digital Influencers*

Opinion leaders, or opinion-givers, are seen as digital influencers in the social media sphere (del Fresno Garcia, Chegado Sanchez-Cabezudo, Daly, 2016). However, how is it possible to identify a digital influencer among so many social media users? Researchers came up with a formula that leverage influencers' following number, likes, and retweets on Twitter to reach tangible data. However they did note that they were only able to measure quantitative (such as followers number, likes, and retweets) data while there is also internal motivation to when people perceive someone as a digital influencer. The type of connection created when people decide to follow someone online goes beyond merely following, they feel as a close friend who they actually trust and value (del Fresno Garcia, Chegado Sanchez-Cabezudo, Daly, 2016), they will follow users who they share a higher degree of homophily with.

Digital influencers build their followers base by actively engaging and sharing their opinion on the most diverse subjects and industries. They will gather followers that are interested in the subject that they also are, and therefore the information they share online is valuable in both ends. The fact that the content shared by influencers are genuine and relatable to their followers is what makes them the perfect medium for companies to promote their products to their specific niche.

Some influencers have reached a celebrity status online and might once have had a selected target audience when they had just started to share their opinion online,

however after a long time their follower base grew so much that their audience is no longer segmented (Bernazzani, 2017). Micro-influencers usually have a smaller follower base, around the thousands and hundreds of thousands, and are genuinely passionate about the subject they post. Their audience is more segmented and presents a high level of homophily. While influencers with one to ten million followers earn likes at a 1.7 percent of the time rate, micro-influencers with one to 10,000 followers earn likes at a 4 percent of the time rate (Chen, 2016).

### *Content Marketing*

Content marketing is defined as “the marketing and business process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action” (Content Marketing Institute, 2015). Before simply creating content marketing it is necessary to conduct an extensive target audience analysis to know exactly to whom the company is creating the content for (Patruti Baltes, 2015). Content marketing can be used for the most different purposes such as increasing brand awareness, building a relationship based on trust with the audience, creating a need for a specific product, developing customer loyalty, generating new leads, testing a new idea/product, etc (Patruti Baltes, 2015).

On the social media sphere content marketing is about creating posts that the audience wants to see. Digital influencers come into play because their followers’ base is made of people that share their same interests, homophilous, and therefore will find value on their postages. Finding the correct influencer who is reaching the same audience as the

company is aiming for is crucial. In the same way a target audience analysis should be conducted before coming up with the content, the right influencer should be also identified beforehand.

Recent researches indicate that marketers should focus on Instagram when trying to target the millennial generation. Nearly 60 percent of Instagram users are between the ages of 18 and 29, and around one half of the users visit the platform once a day (Simpson, 2017). Videos are also a must when creating the content marketing, and influencers know how to do it well in a natural and genuine way. By creating quick reviews and tutorials of products they are able to really show the consumer/follower what to expect and their immediate response is visible. The word-of-mouth spread content is much more powerful for the millennial audience, and by using content marketing such as review videos on Instagram they are able share experiences and opinions with other customers (Alalwan, 2017).

#### *Micro-influencers and Their Value*

Brands such as Maybelline and Estee Lauder already have a loyal customers base and make use of the most-wanted influencers such as famous models and reality show stars. For their latest collection Maybelline partnered up with Gigi Hadid, a famous millennial model with over 44 million followers on Instagram, while the brand Estee Lauder endorsed the model and reality show star Kendall Jenner as the face of their new campaign (Strugatz, 2016). However, at the same time the big companies are taking advantage of the most followed influencers, they still reach out to micro-influencers to test their products and create content to share with their segmented audience. Going

through Maybelline's Instagram posts it is noticeable the amount of endorsed micro-influencers that get Maybelline's products and create video tutorials for their 10,000 of followers or so.

Going through the Maybelline Instagram profile it is noticeable the variation of influencers they use on their posts. Actually, most of the influencers that are reposted on Maybelline's Instagram account have from 10,000 to 120,000 followers (micro-influencers). These micro-influencers profiles are very focused on makeup tutorials, reviews, as well as posts about the influencer's personal life and their audience is constantly interacting (commenting and liking) with their posts.

Aside from the fact that the big influencers do not necessarily reach the aimed audience, because of the number of followers, it is also very expensive for companies to partner up with them (Dinesh, Writer & Media, 2017). Digital celebrities, in the million followers base, can charge thousands of dollars per post (Barker, 2017), while micro-influencers could easily agree on posting a product/brand they like in exchange for products or a much smaller amount of money statistics have shown that an Instagram influencer charges \$1,000 per each 100,000 followers they reach (Johnson, 2017).

Micro-influencers are individuals who are connected to the business' target audience and post from five to ten times a week (Johnson, 2017). According to Experticity's research, 82 percent of consumers are likely to act on a micro-influencer's suggestion (Dinesh, Writer, Media, 2017), and the recommendations most likely to lead to a purchase are the ones from trusted connections (Rohampton, 2017).

Another point to consider is that as the number of followers increases the number of direct engagements between the influencers and their followers decreases (Patrutiu

Baltes, 2015). According to Marketing Dive's research, engagement levels (number of likes and comments per post) drop as social media follower numbers increase. Micro-influencers with 1,000 followers get about 4 percent more engagements than influencers with 10,000 followers (Dinesh, Writer, Media, 2017).

One example of big brands working with micro-influencers and content marketing is Forever 21. The big fast-fashion retail brand has over 15 million followers on Instagram and scrolling through their feed it is noticeable posts that feature micro-influencers wearing Forever 21 clothes. They encourage their follower to use a specific hashtag for a chance to also be featured and in that way making their followers feel like a part of the branding as well.

Authenticity is another factor business should consider when selecting micro-influencers. They are real people with real jobs that do not solely rely on their social media posts to make a living, therefore they post about products and services that they actually have tried and are more likely to give their honest opinion (Bernazzani, 2017). Followers do notice when a post is sponsored, especially when big digital influencers are the ones promoting it, people are more likely to think it is not a genuine recommendation and are less likely to buy it (Rohampton, 2017).

Instagram algorithm have recently changed and now gives priority to show users posts of the people they interact with the most, like friends and family (Chen, 2016). Taking this factor into account is also one more reason to look for influencers with a more engaged, yet smaller, follower base. More research on how business profiles should approach the algorithmic change should still be conducted.

How micro-influencers frame their messages is another area worth examination. According to Entman (1993), framing involves selecting certain topics or themes to be covered in the media or by individuals. By making use of frame analysis the researcher can try to identify the meaning behind the theme (Palmer, 1981). Entman (1993), identified the four-location model in order to recognize in which location of the communication process framing works: communicator; text, which presents frames such as keywords, pictures, and phrases; receivers, who interpret the frames according to their own personal frames; and the larger culture, which contains personal frames that are also defined as schemas and established perceptions of certain themes. In this study the main framing location being examined is in the second location, text, where key words, images, and phrases that are constantly presented to the audience on Instagram.

Goffman (1974), defined frames to be cultural determinations of reality that people use to understand and make sense of events and objects. He also defined frames as being either primary frames, which is part of the larger culture all people share and see it as a norm, or a transformation of the primary frameworks, which are intentionally fabricated to play with the audience. Macro-influencers would be an example where they make use of the text location (their posts on Instagram), to present a transformed frame of their reality in order to convince their followers that a product is worth buying.

## Research Questions

RQ1: To what degree do engagement levels vary on posts featuring micro-influencers versus posts not featuring micro-influencers on fashion retail brands' accounts?

RQ2: What common visual patterns do the posts with the most likes have on fashion retail brand accounts?

## Methods

### *Content analysis*

In this study, the quantitative research method used to address the impact of micro-digital influencers on retail/lifestyle brands profile on Instagram is a content analysis, where each brand profile is going to be analyzed to generate data to compare how much engagement their posts generate. By conducting a content analysis, it is possible to recognize meaning and relationships for behaviors and information. The information is first collected, then coded, then divided into categories in order to analyze their importance and relevance, if existent.

For this study, the Instagram account of Natural Life, Antrophologie and Francesca's were analyzed. The main point of the research is to understand how making use of a micro-influencer social campaign on Instagram would impact the engagement numbers on Natural Life's Instagram.

Instagram handles:

@NaturalLife

@Antrophologie

@Francescas

Natural Life (NL) is a lifestyle brand that sells basically the little things every girl/woman loves, including apparel. The strength of the brand is in always bringing positive messages with every product they sell. The brand headquarters is based in Ponte Vedra Beach, FL, and its flagship store is located in Jacksonville, FL. Anthropologie and Francesca's are two of NL's main competitors, and by analyzing their Instagram account it will be possible to determine which practices the competitors have been implementing on their Instagram account that are impacting their engagement levels, and how it compares to NL practices. It is important to note that while Anthropologie and Francesca's have hundreds of stores located around the country, Natural Life relies heavily on e-commerce and re-sellers. The two brands were picked to contrast how well-known brands, that have the same target audience as Natural Life, are performing on social media in comparison to the smaller brand.

The posts from November 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 to February 26<sup>th</sup> of 2019 of each account, totaling 817 posts, were examined by two coders and the data of each post was recorded on an excel spreadsheet divided by number of likes and number of comments, type of post (product, inspiration/quote, model/catalog, influencer type, none of the above), total number of followers per account, total interaction: likes + comments, and finally engagement rate. Total interaction is the sum of likes and comments a post has, and the engagement rate is the total interaction value divided by the amount of followers the account has. The average engagement rate on fashion posts on Instagram is 1.36% per post (Schwartz, 2019). The time frame chosen to be analyzed included the holiday season, which is an intense sales time for retail brands.

The type of posts the coders coded for were:

- Product: a product is the main focus of the picture. Usually there is no person in the picture, and if there is the person is not fully pictured.
- Inspiration/quote: it is a motivational quote. It can be graphic or just words. No person pictured.
- Model/catalog: there is a person in the picture, however he or she is not tagged in the post. The picture usually comes from a catalog or photo shoot where the brand hired a model to pose with products.
- Micro-Influencer: there is a person in the picture and he or she is tagged in the post or caption. The influencer tagged has less than 400,000 followers.
- Influencer: there is a person in the picture and he or she is tagged in the post or caption. The influencer tagged has more than 400,000 followers.
- None of the above: the post doesn't fall in any of the categories above.

With the data collected it will be possible to analyze what kind of posts generated the most engagement on the accounts, and also conclude if posts featuring micro-influencers performed better than the other type of posts. To calculate engagement the formula used is  $(\text{Likes} + \text{Comments})$  divided by number of followers the account has multiplied by 100 (Hudson, 2018).

The posts were selected based on a date range where there would be enough content to be analyzed. Ranging from November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, to February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019. It is important to note that the time frame consists of a period during a high sale season, holiday, and it is exploratory. The amount of posts varied from one account to another since the quantity of posts per day/week changes from brand to brand. Anthropologie had

a total of total 470 posts in the time frame; Natural Life had a total of 238 posts, and Francesca's had 110 posts.

### *Intercoder Reliability*

To assure the reliability of the data analyzed, as well as the results found, it is necessary that at least two coders take part in the coding process of a content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). Two coders analyzed the posts from the pre-selected time frame; both coders are Brazilian and graduated from the University of North Florida with a bachelor's degree in Communication. Before the second coder started the coding process, the first coder fully explained the purpose of the research and how the different type of posts categories were defined, and also how to fill out the spreadsheet.

The main purpose for inter-coder reliability in this study was to analyze if the type of posts, which was a subjective category open to the coder interpretation, were coded the same. A total of 26 posts, 3.17% of the total posts, varied in the type of post category from one coder to the other. The main variation was type of post 2, products, and type of post 3, model/catalog. The method used to calculate the level of intercoder reliability was first presented by Holsti (1969), where the formula is  $CR = \frac{2M}{N1+N2}$ , M being the number of posts the two coders categorized the same and N1 and N2 being the total number of posts analyzed for coder one and two, respectively. After the calculations the intercoder reliability level of confidence for this study is 96.81% where M= 791, N1=817 and N2=817.

### *Frame analysis*

In the second part of the research a qualitative frame analysis was conducted to determine, from the top 100 posts that performed better (highest engagement number), what common visual themes they present and, if an influencer is pictured, how they are being portrayed. The frame analysis method is useful to make sense of process used by the media to influence the public (Allen, 2017) by finding a main theme and story line it is possible to understand what the posts have in common and why they performed a certain way. The visual themes the coder should be looking are “keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments.” In addition, close attention should be paid to how the posts and tweets chose to: “Promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p.52). After the coder analyze the posts it will be possible to find the common themes in the posts, and what the posts with higher engagement have in common.

The first step to find the common themes in the posts is to analyze each post individually and describe what is pictured in it. So, for example, one of the posts with higher engagement is a girl holding a mug. The coder would then go about it to describe what is in the picture: the colors he or she is seeing, how the product is placed, if the girl is smiling or not, the more details the better.

The coding process is to determine common themes into label or tags (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), in order to condense all of the data collected during the post analysis

process into “analyzable units by creating categories with and from our data” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p.26).

By using the constant comparative method the researchers can systematically analyze the data and develop concepts from it (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). When using this method it is important to pay attention to what stands out, open coding, and group into categories similar patterns, selective coding. By reading the description for each post it is possible to recognize words that were repeated many times, and also common visual patterns in the posts. A negative case analysis is conducted in the case the data found contradicts the theory and the expected results.

## Findings

### *Content Analysis*

A total of 817 Instagram posts were analyzed in order to find out what kind of posts generate the most engagement on the fashion retail brand accounts. The three profiles analyzed were Natural Life, Anthropologie, and Francesca’s. The posts analyzed ranged from November 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 to February 26<sup>th</sup> 2019 and every post posted during the time frame was coded for number of likes, number of comments, type of post, and number of followers the account has by two different coders. The type of posts could vary from 1 to 6: 1 being inspirational post, 2 being product post, 3 being model/catalog post, 4 being micro-influencer post, 5 being influencer post, and 6 being none of the above type of post, did not fall into the previous categories. In total Anthropologie had 470 posts in the time frame, while Natural Life had 238 posts, and Francesca’s had 110 posts.

About 28.8% of the posts recorded were posts that fit in the none of the above category (type 6): that varied between videos, landscape pictures, and other unrelated photos. It is reasonable that the majority of the posts fell in to this category because it included more than just one type of post.



About 28% were product posts (type 2), meaning the main focus of the picture was the product:



About 14.5% of the posts were micro-influencer posts (type 4), meaning the person in the picture had less than 400,000 followers and his or her account was tagged in the caption:



A total of 14% of the posts were mode/catalog posts (type 3) meaning there was a person in the picture but he or she was not tagged:



A total 12.46% of the posts were inspirational quotes (type 1):



And lastly, only 1.9% of the posts were influencer posts (type 5), meaning the person in the picture had more than 400,000 followers and his or her account was tagged in the caption:



After all the posts were recorded the engagement rate per post was calculated. The engagement rate is calculated by dividing the total interaction per post (likes + comments) by the number of followers the accounts has, and then multiplying it by 100. The engagement rate formula is the same for all types of posts.

Type 1 posts, inspiration posts, generated the higher engagement rates, averaging 2.37. Type 6 posts, none of the above category, generated the second highest engagement rates, averaging 1.48. Type 2 posts, product posts, came in third place with an average engagement rate of 1.25. Type 5 posts, influencers with more than 400 thousand followers, generated an average engagement rate of 0.61, while type 3, model/catalog posts, and type 4 posts, micro-influencers posts, came last with an average engagement rate of 0.59. The average engagement rate for all posts under study was 1.26.

Another interesting find is that Natural Life has considerable fewer followers than the other accounts being analyzed, but still had more engagement than the other brands. While Natural Life has only 218,000 followers, Anthropologie has 3.7 million and Francesca's has 426,000 followers.

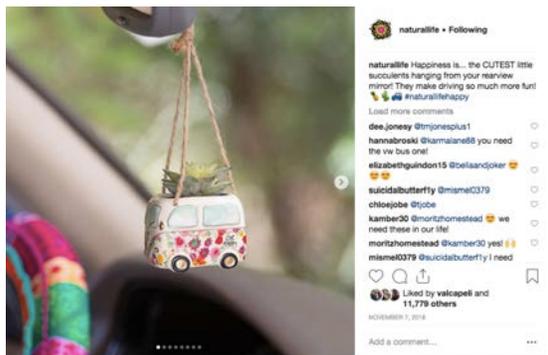
### *Frame Analysis*

After all the posts from the determined time frame were analyzed, a frame analysis with the top 100 posts by engagement number was conducted. The point of the frame analysis was to find common visual patterns among the posts with the highest engagement levels. Type 1 posts, inspirational/motivational quote, made up 43% of the most engaged posts, followed by 27% of type 2 posts (product post), 25% of type 6 posts (none of the above category), and lastly 2% of type 4 posts (micro-influencer post).

The posts were described with as much detail as possible, and then a constant comparative analysis was conducted to identify common words and themes.

The common patterns between the top 100 posts by engagement rate are: colors, product flat lay, motivational, cute animals, flowers, drawings, video, centered, bed as a background, giveaway, outfits, GIFs, and graphics.

The highest engagement rate posts have the product/quote/girl centered in the frame:



The most repeated colors are pink, orange, green, brown, grey, black, blue, yellow, and white:



The most used background for the outfit combinations is a white bed:



Cute animals such as sloths, llamas, dogs, and bears are also a common theme among the top 100 posts:





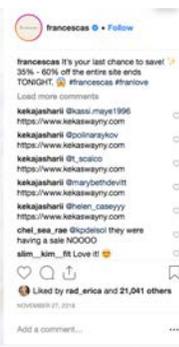
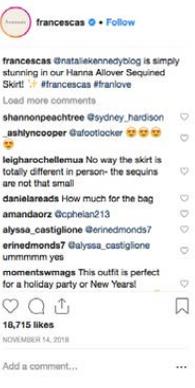
Lastly, for the few posts that featured a girl it is relevant to note that they were always smiling and happy, looking natural and candid:



After analyzing the most repeated patterns in the posts that had the highest engagement rate it is possible to conclude that the story line presenting motivational words that embraces happiness, kindness, and an effortless vibe influenced followers the most:



People engaged more with posts that make them feel good and inspired and also with posts that do not look staged or forced, like outfits on a bed, girls smiling, videos that looked like a routine:





The bright colors such as yellow, pink, blue and green are present on the posts that inspire people. Also, when the product was featured on a background that was bright and looked like a bed, it generated more engagement than the other backgrounds.



## Discussion

Against what was expected, the posts featuring micro-influencers, type 4, did not present a higher engagement than the other posts. In fact, the posts with a motivational and inspirational message, type 1, generated the highest engagement of all types with an average of 2.37 per post, while the average rate on Instagram is 1.36 (Schwartz, 2019). The second highest engagement rate is for type 6 posts, none of the above category, with an average engagement rate of 1.48, which can be explained by the fact of many of the post being videos or posts regarding current events, which attract more people to watch and comment (Patel, 2019). The fact that people engage so much with Type 1 posts, motivational and inspirational quotes, is directly related with the e-WOM theory and how people share messages they perceive to be credible or personally relate to. (Chu & Kim, 2018; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). The inspirational messages talk personally to people and are very relatable to any personal experience, which makes it more likely they will share and interact with this type of post.

Another interesting find is that Natural Life has considerable fewer followers than the other accounts being analyzed, but still had more engagement than the other brands. While Natural Life has only 218,000 followers, Anthropologie has 3.7 million and Francesca's has 426,000 followers. The rationale behind this finding is directly related with homophily, which, explains how people interact and engage with those who share the same interests (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). Natural Life shared 101 type 1, motivational and inspirational quotes, posts during the time frame analyzed, which explains why the level of engagement was so much higher for the brand since the

motivational posts personally relate to people and, therefore, they are more likely to interact with it.

One aspect that could explain why micro-influencer's posts did not perform as expected in the brand profiles is that they present a higher level of homophily among their own followers, and even though it is expected that a brand would only post pictures of influencers that fit their audience profile, that still does not mean the brand's audience developed a relation with them. People will like posts that they care about (Agrawal, 2016), therefore if they do not recognize the influencer pictured in the brand's profile they are very likely to not engage with it.

When the brands make use of the content generated by influencers on their own feed it does not mean the influencer's followers are also following the brand and would engage. In fact it would make more sense that the influencer's followers would start engaging with the brands after the influencer posts a picture featuring the brand's products. There is definitely room for continuous research to analyze how the engagement on the influencer's profile impacts brand awareness for the fashion brands, so instead of focusing on the brand's profile and how they make use of micro-influencers, the other way around would be studied.

After conducting the frame analysis the main theme that generated the most engagement found was posts that presents a happy and hopeful vibe, that are very bright in color, and that have words that make people motivated and happy. From all the posts analyzed the predominant frame overall was happiness and motivation and, as it was discussed regarding eWOM and homophily levels, people are more likely to share and engage with posts that they personally relate to.

This study has several limitations, such as the different level of followers between the brands, as well the different style between the brands. While Natural Life has the happy and motivational vibe, that generates lots of engagement all over their feed, Anthropologie and Francesca's also present their own distinct style. A deeper study analyzing each brand individually, how each type of post performs in their own account, and how their audience interacts with each type of post would be an interesting take. Another limitation is the time frame of the posts analyzed. The four months period make this a exploratory study, further research should expand the time frame.

Some other limitations are the different type of posts that fall into the type 6 post, none of the above categories. Videos bring a lot of engagement and should be the norm for social posts in the future since people engage with it way more than regular pictures (Ahmad, 2018).

Another limitation is that Anthropologie was the only brand to actively make use of influencers on their posts, therefore it would be interesting and valuable to analyze how Anthropologie influencers' post perform compared to other brands that also actively make use of influencers, and also analyzing how influencers perform on Natural Life's profile in comparison to other posts. Future research suggestions include analyzing the process for brands choosing the right influencers to work with and how they track ROI, and also how the time in which a post is uploaded impacts engagement levels. Sales numbers have not been analyzed, but influencers could also impact sales when they post about a brand in their own profile.

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## Appendix

### Code Sheet

#### Code Sheet Instructions

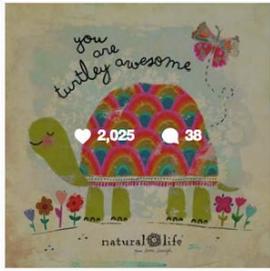
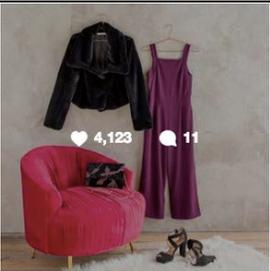
The purpose of the content analysis is to find out to what degree micro-influencers impact the engagement on fashion/retail Instagram accounts. You will receive an excel spreadsheet containing the posts from November 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 to February 26<sup>th</sup> 2019 from three different fashion retail brands: Natural Life, Anthropologie, and Francesca's.

The posts should be coded for number of likes, number of comments, what kind of post: inspiration/quote, product, model/catalog, influencer, user generated content, total number of followers the account has. Example below:

Specifications for type of post:

- Code as 1: Inspiration quote or motivational quote. It can be graphic or just words. No person pictured.
- Code as 2: A product is the main focus of the picture. Usually there is no person in the picture, and if there is the person is not fully pictured.
- Code as 3: Model/catalog when there is a person in the picture, however he or she is not tagged in the post. The picture usually comes from a catalog or photo shoot where the brand hired a model to pose with products.
- Code as 4: Micro-Influencer when there is a person in the picture and he or she is tagged in the post or caption. The influencer tagged has less than 400 thousand followers.

- Code as 5: Influencer when there is a person in the picture and he or she is tagged in the post or caption. The influencer tagged has more than 400 thousand followers.
- Code as 6: None of the above, post that doesn't fall in any of the categories above

Brand:	Likes	Comments	Type of post	Number of followers	Post
Natural Life	2,025	38	1	218,000	
Francesca's	4,123	11	2	426,000	
Anthropologie	13,000	53	4	3,700,000	
Natural Life	2,660	44	3	218,000	

After this analysis it will be possible to know what kind of posts present higher number of likes and comments, and conclude if posts featuring micro-influencers generated higher engagement.