The Impact of Authenticity and Credibility Factors on Consumer Behavior in the Sustainable Fashion Industry on Weibo

--Taking Micro-Influencers and Mega-Influencers as Examples

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Abstract: This study investigates the comparative influence of micro-influencers against mega-influencers on consumer behavior within the sustainable clothing industry on Weibo, and tries to reveal how authenticity and credibility factors shape purchasing decisions. This study utilizes qualitative research through semi-structured interviews with 8 participants (influencers and consumers) to highlight the integral key functions of influencers' authenticity and marketing strategies in the sustainable fashion sector. It is found that micro-influencers who are believed to be genuine and more trustworthy, affect consumer buying decisions more than macro-influencers who have a wide reach but may not be seen as genuine enough. The study emphasizes the significance of strategic relationships with influencers, highlighting the imperative process of aligning with influencers whose values resonate with the brand and the audience. Nonetheless, the research realizes the limitations, namely, the small sample size and focus on a specific social media platform and proposes other studies to consider a wide population and different social media platforms.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior, Sustainable Fashion Industry, Micro-Influencers, Mega-Influencers

1.   Introduction

In the era of digital, platforms such as Weibo have brought about a major change in marketing field alongside the engagement of consumers, particularly in areas like eco-fashion [1]. Influencer marketing in recent years has brought about this new dimension where brands can build more connections with their potential customers through influencers or popular figures who are known as influencers [2]. This piece of research is devoted to exploring the influence of these two types of influencers on sustainable fashion on Weibo and gives a view into the level of reliability and authenticity endowed by the influencers which may determine consumer purchasing decisions.

Sustainable fashion, a market niche that emphasizes environmental sustainability and ethical manufacturing processes, has gained significant traction on platforms like Weibo, making it an ideal case study for this research [3]. The thesis of this study is that micro-influencers with small followers

appear to have a much stronger impact on consumer behavior in the sustainable fashion sector as compared to mega-influencers. On the other hand, this might be due to the higher levels of interactivity and personal connectedness seen among their audience. This research intends to achieve this goal by conducting case studies using interviews with influencers with varying levels of followers and their consumers who were influenced by the campaign.

The aim of this research is to reveal the differences between the genuine and reliable impacts of micro-influencers and mega-influencers in the sustainable fashion sector on Weibo. It brings to light the effect of the kind of influencer (micro versus mega) on consumer purchase decisions in the context of eco-fashion on this channel. Furthermore, the report concentrates on marketing tactics used by micro and mega influencers which facilitate consumer engagement and behavior towards sustainable clothing on Weibo. This research follows the objective of depicting the mechanisms of influencer marketing from the perspective of sustainable fashion, such as authenticity, credibility, and marketing strategies.

This research has both theoretical and practical implications for both the sustainable fashion industry and research into marketing strategies that involve influencers. Through examining the varieties of influence of both micro and mega influencers in customer behavior, the study will help brands in the sustainable fashion sector to optimize their marketing campaigns on Weibo in terms of effectiveness on social media. Concretely, the evidence proves that authenticity and trustworthiness are top elements consumers pay attention to while making purchasing decisions, showing the possible effect of micro-influencers in improving engagement and sales via their apparent genuineness. In addition, this paper explores the influencer marketing strategy through a comparative analysis of influencer characteristics and their respective strategies, serving as a base of reference for future studies on influencer dynamics in different industries or fields.

2.   Literature Review

As shown in Figure 1, Through social media, marketing has undergone a tremendous change, and the popularity of influencer marketing as a central strategy for engaging and affecting consumers has grown [4]. Influencers, especially Weibo's influencers, attract large numbers of fans who are ready to believe what they say, and this feature makes them desirable partners for brands that want to expand their presence [5]. Conde and Casais focus on the variety of Influencers, from micro to mega, analyzing the benefits and challenges they contribute to the campaign [6].
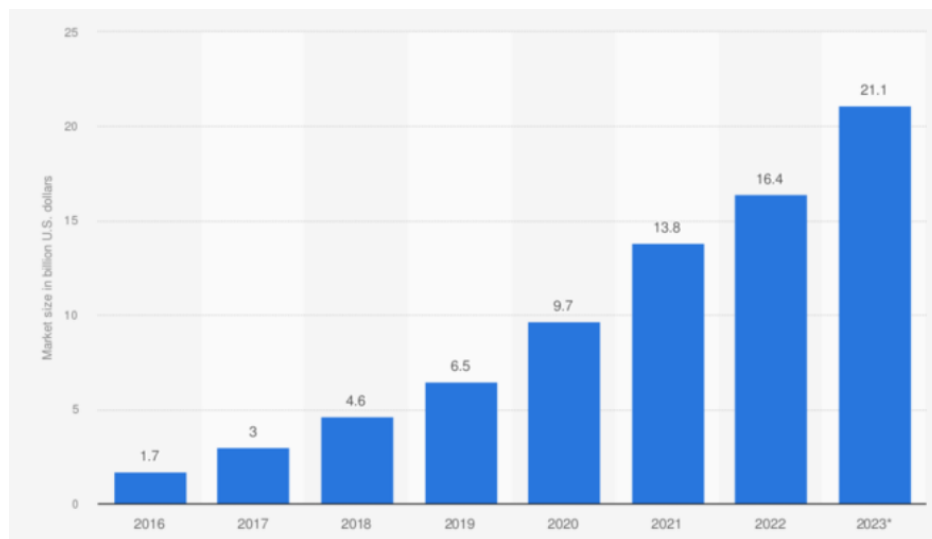

Figure 1: Influencer Marketing Market Size Worldwide [4].

In the field of sustainable fashion, influencers have arisen as the key participants in the promotion of environmental awareness and ethical consumerism [7]. Johnson's analysis highlights the trending consumer demand for the environment-friendly practices and the vital role of social media influencers in leading opinions and the adoption of sustainable purchases. This shift towards sustainability is also presented by the expanding number of sustainable clothing brands that team up with Weibo influencers to reach the Chinese market [8].

The classification of micro and mega influencers has become a subject that has captured the attention of scholars. Micro-influencers (those with a small but more devoted follower base) are also known for their authenticity and intimacy with their community [4]. The findings of Park et al. imply that the role of product influencers may be deeper in the niche markets including sustainable fashion, as they are more trustworthy and relatable [9]. Though mega influencers enjoy unmatched visibility, their endorsements may lack the individuality of the micro-influencer ones (see Figure 2).
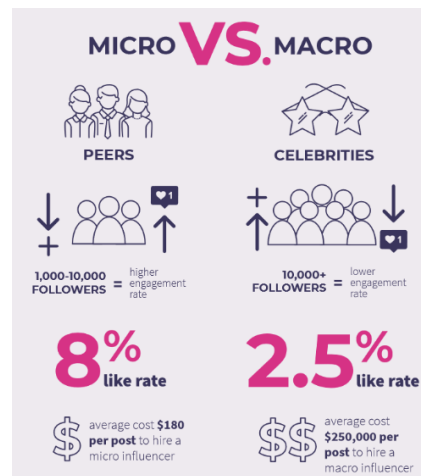

Figure 2: Micro-Influencers vs. Mega-Influencers [6].

However, whether or not influencer marketing is effective in influencing consumer behavior is a complex interplay of trust, authenticity, and engagement. Ge's study on Weibo campaigns shows that the trust of the influencer has a vital role to play in the credibility of their endorsements [10]. This level of trust can be established by consistently and sincerely engaging with their audience, which indicates how much the authenticity of interactions plays a crucial role in influencer marketing.

In addition, the emergence of digital platforms has enabled the fast transmission of sustainable fashion trends where influencers have taken the center stage of this movement [11]. Davis signals that the path to ethical shopping lies in the hands of influencers as they demonstrate, demonstrate, and use their platforms to educate and inspire their followers about sustainability. This educational role is most powerful on Weibo, where influencers frequently participate in meaningful discussions that touch on the ramifications of fashion on the environment. In summary, the literature brings out the transformative role that social media influencers play in molding consumer opinions and behaviors, including those for niche markets like sustainable fashion.

3. Methodology

This study aims to evaluate the micro-influencers as well as mega-influencers effect on consumer behavior in the sustainable fashion industry on Weibo. This investigation is more or less based on the framework of the research onion, which provides a systematic means, and uses the qualitative research strategy involving in-depth interviews to collect data [12].

This research involved a total of eight participants who were interviewed: four micro-influencers, two mega-influencers, and two followers who follow sustainable fashion influencers on Weibo. For selecting the influencers, it is guided by their number of followers, with micro-influencers being between 1,000 to 10,000 and mega-influencers having over 1 million followers. All the influencers were very much into promoting sustainable fashion brands when the study was conducted. The consumer participants, as shown in Table 1, were chosen according to their engagement in sustainable fashion content on Weibo, which was the evidence of their interaction with posts and participation in relevant discussions.

Table 1: Participant Background Information

Participant ID	Role	Age	Followers	Industry Focus
P1	Micro-Influencer	29	4,500	Sustainable Fashion
P2	Micro-Influencer	32	7,000	Sustainable Fashion
P3	Micro-Influencer	26	3,200	Sustainable Fashion
P4	Micro-Influencer	30	8,500	Sustainable Fashion
P5	Mega-Influencer	34	1.2M	Sustainable Fashion
P6	Mega-Influencer	28	5M	Sustainable Fashion
P7	Consumer	25	N/A	Follows Sustainable Fashion Influencers
P8	Consumer	27	N/A	Follows Sustainable Fashion Influencers

The interview format chosen is semi-structured because of its flexible nature, it provides room for in-depth exploration of topics as well as room for further probing of areas of interest that may emerge during the interview sessions. The interview questions were designed so as to discover the views of the authenticity and credibility of micro and mega influencers together with how they bring about consumer choices and the overall impact of influencer marketing in popularizing sustainable fashion on Weibo.

The data was processed via thematic analysis, which is a method of identifying, analyzing and presenting data themes [13]. Through this method, the fact that there were several similar themes of discussion among interviewees made me understand that influencer type plays a role in Weibo consumers' behavior in relation to sustainable fashion.

An ethical component was a crucial part of the entire research. Every participant gave their informed consent, and confidentiality was ensured through anonymising personal identities and interview data [14]. The ethical standards of APA are used which guarantees the methodological and ethical requirements of the research.

4. Findings and Discussions

This study discovers various aspects of the impact of micro-influencers and macro-influencers on consumer behavior in the sustainable fashion industry on Weibo. The interviews brought to light a number of critical issues, underscoring the relationship between influencer authenticity, trustworthiness, and the power of their marketing strategies (see Table 2).

Table 2: Thematic Analysis Results

Theme	Micro-Influencers	Mega-Influencers	Consumers
Authenticity and Trustworthiness	Perceived as more authentic and relatable, fostering trust.	Seen as less authentic due to their broad audience and less personal content.	Value authenticity and relatability in influencers, leading to trust.
Impact on Purchasing Decisions	Greater influence on specific purchasing decisions due to authenticity.	Raise awareness effectively but less influence on specific purchasing decisions.	More likely to be influenced by micro-influencers when making purchases.
Influence of Marketing Strategies	Personalized content and engagement strategies viewed as effective.	Generic marketing strategies, less personalized engagement with audience.	Prefer engaging and personalized content from influencers.

Normally, people regard micro-influencers as more genuine and truthful than those mega-influencers. This was mainly because micro-influencers produced more intimate and shareable content that built connections and trust among their followers [15]. This finding conforms to the fact that micro-influencers might be better perceived by consumers as close and relatable, thus providing them with greater influence on the shoppers' choices [9].

Also, the factor of influencer type took place in the consumer buying decisions which was reflected with respondents stating a higher likelihood of buying products recommended by micro-influencers. This inclination is mostly due to the trustworthiness and legitimacy micro-influences carry along as consumers tend to think that these are the most important aspects that drive consumers toward the sustainable fashion segment [6]. It should be noted that mega-influencers with powerful endorsements and a large reach have tainted their authenticity for their promotion of sustainability.

From the point of view of marketers, the research showed that micro and mega-influencers use different techniques for advertising. Micro-influencers could make their posts very appealing short and impactful stories on their sustainable lifestyle and comments from them. This tactic saw a better use of sustainable fashion, which is a factor closely linked to the finding that stories and personalization are the two major aspects of successful influencer marketing [8]. Furthermore, mega-influencers' strategies were usually characterized as more general and less captivating, which helped them to increase product awareness, but did not create an emotional connection with consumers to the extent that drove specific consumer actions such as buying decisions.

This study's implications are critical for brands, influencers, and marketers who participate in the sustainable fashion segment of the Weibo platform. On the one hand, the study points out the significance of genuineness and credibility in influencer marketing by illustrating that brands have to recommend influencers whose values are similar to their own and who have the ability to authentically communicate with an audience. This lens helps in developing trust and credibility among the consumers especially in the market as sophisticated as sustainable fashion [10]. Moreover, the observations suggest that mega-influencers are good at creating awareness because of their extensive reach while micro-influencers have a greater impact on actual purchasing decisions because of their authenticity and the amount of engagement between them and their followers. Thus, the brands have a need to involve both micro and macro influencers for their optimal marketing strategies that will, on the one hand, expand their audience reach and, on the other hand, improve their engagement with the potential customers [16].

5.   Conclusion

To conclude, this study has examined the different effects of micro-influencers and macro influencers on consumers' attitudes when it comes to sustainable fashion on Weibo, providing vital information about the role of authenticity and trust in influencer marketing. This observation emphasizes how the kind of micro and mega influencers matter, with micro-influencers perceived as more authentic and hence having the greatest impact on the buying decisions of consumers. These observations however shed light on the undisputed role of influencer partnerships in integrating brand values and consequently, enhancing consumer trust and engagement.

Nevertheless, this research has its limitations. The sample size, though diverse, was small relatively speaking and as such, the generalizability of the findings could be affected. Moreover, by choosing Weibo as the only social media platform the research findings may become inapplicable to other platforms or social settings. Future studies may look into increasing the number of influencers and consumers included, as well as the influence of influencer marketing across different social media platforms and regions.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, the proposal for further research entails the investigation of long-term impacts of influencer marketing on consumer behavior in the sustainable fashion world and the effect of emerging trends such as AI in influencer marketing. Further research into the psychological mechanisms that underscore the impact of authenticity and reliability on consumer behavior could however provide deeper insights into efficient marketing strategies in the digital age.

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