


From content to conversion: cultural mediation strategies of consumption on digital platforms

Do conteúdo à conversão: estratégias de mediação cultural do consumo em plataformas digitais

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the influencer economy as a communicational system that integrates influencers, brands, and digital platforms, reshaping consumption practices and establishing new forms of cultural mediation. The study draws on theoretical frameworks of the influencer economy, the culture of connectivity, and self-presentation practices, combined with an empirical analysis focused on three platforms: Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. The methodology included secondary data collection, analysis of industry reports, and a systematic literature review, enabling the confrontation of hypotheses with updated evidence from the Brazilian market. Findings indicate that perceived authenticity, communication styles, and the ability to mobilize communities are decisive factors in generating engagement and conversion. Influencers, embedded in a symbolic and communicational ecosystem, transcend boundaries between the personal and the commercial, reinforcing the interdependence between consumption, identity, and digital culture. This study contributes to the field of communication, media, and consumption by proposing a systemic approach to the influencer economy.

Keywords: digital influencers; consumption; digital culture; influencer economy; cultural mediation.

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RESUMO: Este artigo analisa como a economia da influência, compreendida como um sistema comunicacional que articula influenciadores, marcas e plataformas digitais, reconfigura práticas de consumo e estabelece novas formas de mediação cultural no ambiente digital. O estudo fundamenta-se em referenciais sobre economia da influência, cultura da conectividade e práticas de autoapresentação, articulados a uma análise empírica centrada em três plataformas: Instagram, YouTube e TikTok. A metodologia envolveu coleta de dados secundários, análise de relatórios setoriais e revisão sistemática de literatura, permitindo confrontar hipóteses com evidências recentes do mercado brasileiro. Os resultados indicam que autenticidade percebida, estilos de comunicação e capacidade de mobilização comunitária são fatores decisivos na geração de engajamento e conversão. Observa-se que os influenciadores, inseridos em um ecossistema simbólico e comunicacional, atravessam fronteiras entre o pessoal e o comercial, reforçando a interdependência entre consumo, identidade e cultura digital. O estudo contribui ao campo da comunicação, mídia e do consumo ao propor uma abordagem sistêmica da economia da influência.

Palavras-chave: influenciadores digitais; consumo; cultura digital; economia da influência; mediação cultural.

Introduction

In recent years, the rise of digital influencers has emerged as one of the most significant phenomena in the fields of communication and consumption. Through content creation, community engagement, and the legitimization of lifestyles, these actors perform functions that extend beyond product recommendation; they operate as cultural mediators of consumption. In Brazil, the use of social media encompasses 144 million individuals, representing 66% of the population (KEMP, 2024). Recent reports indicate that more than 50% of Brazilian consumers have purchased products based on influencer recommendations (INFLUENCY.ME, 2025; NIELSEN, 2025), and the country ranks among the top five global markets for influencer marketing (INFLUENCER MARKETING HUB, 2025). These data underscore the relevance of examining the communicational and cultural impact of influencers within the national context.

Literature on consumption and cultural communication indicates that consumption should be understood as a cultural practice rather than solely an economic activity (CANCLINI, 1995), encompassing social, economic, and symbolic dimensions (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 1987). Authors such as Bourdieu (1979) and Miller (1998) reinforce this perspective by situating consumption as a sphere of distinction and meaning production, while Bauman (2000) interprets it as a central axis of sociability in liquid modernity. Within this framework, digital influencers concentrate elements of distinction, belonging, and identification, functioning as mediators of everyday consumption practices.

From a platform perspective, Jenkins (2006) introduced the concept of convergence culture, in which producers and consumers interact, while Van Dijck (2013) emphasizes that platforms structure not only content circulation but also regimes of visibility. Accordingly, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube operate as ecosystems that shape formats and mediation strategies, reflecting the logic of the platform economy, in which value and engagement are concentrated and monetized by a limited number

of agents (SRNICEK, 2016). TikTok, for instance, is currently identified as the most effective platform for converting engagement into purchases among Generation Z consumers (TIKTOK, 2023).

Literature on microcelebrity and the influence economy (SENFT, 2008; MARWICK, 2015; DUFFY, 2017) indicates that authenticity and the performance of intimacy are foundational to engagement, aligning with what Banet-Weiser (2018) defines as the “economy of authenticity.” Recent reports reinforce this dynamic, demonstrating that trust and identification are central to digital persuasion (INFLUENCY.ME, 2025), while structural inequalities in monetization continue to affect different profiles (THE GUARDIAN, 2024).

In this context, the research problem is delineated as follows: How does the performance of digital influencers, articulated with brand strategies and platform logics, characterize processes of cultural mediation of consumption and reconfigure dynamics of visibility, desire, and engagement in the digital environment? The general objective is to analyze how the influence economy, integrating influencers, brands, and platforms, restructures consumption practices and establishes new forms of cultural mediation in the digital environment. The specific objectives include: mapping recent data on reach, consumption habits, and credibility within the Brazilian digital influence ecosystem; identifying how different platforms, influencers, and brands interact in shaping mediation styles; examining influencer communication as a component of cultural strategies of symbolic circulation; and discussing the impacts of these dynamics on the relationships among brands, consumers, and cultural consumption practices.

Based on these objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed: (H1) the digital influence system, comprising influencers, brands, and platforms, functions as a cultural mediator of consumption, linking products to identities and forms of belonging that extend beyond traditional advertising logics; and (H2) consumer engagement is conditioned both by the perceived authenticity of influencers and by the algorithmic and communicational logics specific to each platform.

This study situates the influence economy within a broader symbolic and communicational system in which brands, platforms, and consumption practices intertwine, reflecting the power and data flows characteristic of digital colonialism (COULDRY; MEJIAS, 2019). Influencers constitute one node within this network of cultural mediations, which is fundamental in connected societies where digital narratives interweave intimacy, entertainment, and consumption (SENFTE, 2008; ABIDIN, 2016). These dynamics generate everyday “micro-celebrities” (MARWICK, 2015), shift consumption toward symbolic practices of belonging and identification (KHAMIS; ANG; WELLING, 2017; DUFFY; FREITAS, 2018), and require analytical approaches that integrate cultural, economic, and communicational dimensions (VAN DIJCK, 2013).

From a social and academic perspective, this research examines transformations in consumption practices and the cultural authority acquired by ordinary individuals, contributing theoretically to the dialogue among consumption, media, and the attention economy (DAVENPORT; BECK, 2001). In Brazil, where internet access continues to expand (IBGE, 2024) and monetization models are diversifying (EXAME, 2024), it becomes urgent to investigate how these mediations affect different audiences and market segments. By analyzing the influence economy as a system that integrates influencers, brands, and platforms, this study seeks to address theoretical and empirical gaps, highlighting how these actors reconfigure consumption practices and establish new forms of cultural mediation in the digital environment.

Cultural mediations of consumption and the economy of digital influencers: theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence

The study of cultural mediations of consumption derives from classic formulations in social and communication theory. Martín-Barbero (1987) proposed understanding communication as a cultural process, shifting the analytical focus from media to the social mediations that structure

everyday practices. Canclini (1995), in examining Latin American hybrid modernity, identified consumption as an arena of symbolic dispute and identity construction, while Appadurai (1996) emphasized “social landscapes” and the global circulation of images and desires. Together, these contributions support the understanding of digital influencers not merely as marketing instruments but as cultural mediators that reconfigure practices of belonging and consumption (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 1987; CANCLINI, 1995; APPADURAI, 1996).

Social consumption theory reinforces this perspective. Bourdieu (1979) identified consumption as a marker of social distinction; Miller (1998) examined its domestic and symbolic dimensions; and Bauman (2000) emphasized the identity fluidity characteristic of liquid modernity. These contributions support the hypothesis that influencers do not merely promote products but also link goods to identity repertoires and lifestyles (BOURDIEU, 1979; MILLER, 1998; BAUMAN, 2000).

In the field of digital communication, Jenkins (2006) examined the culture of convergence, in which consumers function as co-producers of meaning. Van Dijck (2013), however, problematized this perspective by demonstrating that platforms are not neutral entities but mediation infrastructures that regulate visibility and engagement. This tension informs the analysis of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube as socio-technical ecosystems that shape distinct forms of consumption mediation (JENKINS, 2006; VAN DIJCK, 2013).

The literature on digital influencers has consolidated concepts such as micro-celebrity and the *attention economy*. Senft (2008) defined micro-celebrities as individuals who perform authenticity in pursuit of recognition; Marwick (2015) demonstrated how this authenticity is transformed into symbolic capital and leveraged as a strategic asset; and Banet-Weiser (2012) examined it as a cultural aesthetic associated with trust and persuasion. Duffy (2017) expanded the discussion by incorporating gender and precariousness in creative labor, highlighting tensions within the affective economy. These contributions support the hypothesis that perceived authenticity constitutes a central variable in explaining

engagement and its conversion into consumption practices (SENFT, 2008; BANET-WEISER, 2012; MARWICK, 2015; DUFFY, 2017).

Recent studies reinforce the relevance of this phenomenon. Datareportal (2024) indicates that Brazil has more than 144 million social media users (67.9% of the population), and the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* – IBGE, 2024) reports that 88% of Brazilians aged 10 or older used the internet in 2023, consolidating the reach of the influencer economy. According to Influency.me (2025), 54% of consumers have already purchased products recommended by influencers, confirming their role as cultural mediators who articulate authenticity, engagement, and consumption.

The creator economy is, however, heterogeneous. Reports from *Exame* (2024) and Influency.me (2025) indicate that, although the sector moves billions, the effects on engagement and authenticity vary across platforms: TikTok emphasizes virality; Instagram prioritizes emotional connections; and YouTube supports in-depth narratives (MARWICK, 2015; BANET-WEISER, 2018; DUFFY; FREITAS, 2018). These differences demonstrate that cultural mediations are shaped by the ecology of each platform and its associated modes of interaction.

Issues of inequality also permeate gender, race, and visibility. Studies identify disparities in pay and exposure between white and non-white creators, as well as between men and women, which directly affect monetization opportunities (THE GUARDIAN, 2024). These asymmetries indicate that the cultural mediation of consumption reflects broader social inequalities and therefore requires critical and intersectional analyses.

From a cultural perspective, the literature indicates that influencers articulate consumer niches through specific symbolic practices. Banet-Weiser (2018) and Duffy and Freitas (2018) examine how fashion, beauty, gastronomy, and *lifestyle* function as aesthetic repertoires and consumption rituals that shape collective identities. Moisander and Valtonen (2006) introduce the notion of consumption scripts performed in everyday life, a framework useful for understanding how influencer narratives establish routines and symbolic repertoires incorporated by followers.

In theoretical terms, cultural mediation should be approached in an integrated manner. Bourdieu (1979) and Canclini (1995) provide a foundation for understanding the articulation between symbolic capital and consumption practices; Davenport and Beck (2001) situate this phenomenon within the logic of the attention economy; and Metzger, Flanagin, and Medders (2010) emphasize digital trust as a decisive element of persuasion. This theoretical framework supports the analysis developed in this study.

Finally, investigating influencers as cultural mediators of consumption requires consideration of normative dimensions. Gillespie (2018) demonstrates that platform governance involves power disputes, transparency, and accountability, directly influencing the dynamics of the influence economy. The literature on digital ethics and self-regulation highlights challenges related to public policies and market practices aimed at ensuring transparency, equity, and legitimacy. Thus, understanding influencers as cultural mediators necessitates methodological approaches that integrate symbolic, economic, and regulatory dimensions, thereby grounding the transition to the methodological procedures of this study.

Methodological aspects

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on multiple case analysis, focusing on digital influencers as cultural mediators of consumption across selected niches (fashion, gastronomy, and lifestyle) and platforms (Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok). This methodological choice is justified by the need to examine complex processes of cultural mediation, digital engagement, and the circulation of consumer content, phenomena that are insufficiently captured by quantitative methods (STAKE, 1995; YIN, 2018).

The selection of cases prioritized representativeness, diversity of consumption practices, and cultural relevance, taking into account the platforms in which these niches operate due to their centrality in the Brazilian digital ecosystem and their role in mediating consumption. Reports indicate that fashion, beauty, and lifestyle niches account for

36% of content creators in Brazil (CIASCA, 2024), while recent metrics show a 49% increase in engagement with Instagram Reels and a 27% rise in content production on TikTok (COMSCORE, 2025), underscoring the relevance of these platforms. These platforms also concentrate most of the time spent on social media in the country and exhibit high engagement rates, reinforcing their centrality in consumption mediation (OPINION BOX; INFLUENCY.ME, 2025). Media coverage was used only as a complementary reference.

Data sources included digital posts, engagement metrics, market reports, and academic studies (TIKTOK, 2023; YOUTUBE, 2023; EXAME, 2024; THE GUARDIAN, 2024; GONÇALVES, 2025; INFLUENCER MARKETING HUB, 2025; OPINION BOX; INFLUENCY.ME, 2025; ZOTE, 2025). Each document was assessed for authenticity and relevance, ensuring reliability (BOWEN, 2009; YIN, 2018). The analyzed period spanned January 2023 to June 2025, enabling the identification of recent trends while avoiding a focus on specific individuals and instead examining the ways in which content and brand strategies operate as cultural mediation.

The analysis protocol defined central constructs: perceived authenticity, engagement, personal brand identity, and mediated consumption practices, articulating symbolic, cultural, and economic dimensions (VAN DIJCK, 2013; MARWICK, 2015; ABIDIN, 2016). Manual coding of posts and metrics, quantitative and qualitative analysis in NVivo, and inter-coder validation ensured consistency and replicability (BOWEN, 2009; CORBIN; STRAUSS, 2015).

The cross-case analysis considered institutional reactions, impact, and the effectiveness of cultural mediation, integrating metrics, press coverage, market reports, and academic publications. This triangulation enabled the validation of patterns, the identification of convergences and divergences, and an examination not only of influencers' reach but also of the symbolic dimensions of their mediations, including belonging, identification, and perceived authenticity (BANET-WEISER, 2018; DUFFY; FREITAS, 2018).

The exclusive use of secondary data was mitigated by rigor in source selection and by the detail of the analytical protocol. Each document and metric used were recorded and coded according to the defined constructs, ensuring traceability, transparency, and reliability of the analysis (BOWEN, 2009; YIN, 2018). In this way, the adopted methodology provides a robust, systematic, and replicable analysis of the cultural mediation practices of digital influencers, connecting empirical data, theory, and comparative case analysis. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how influencers act as cultural mediators of consumption, their engagement strategies, and the cultural impact of their digital activities.

Results and discussion

Variables

The variables were selected based on the framework of microcelebrity, economics of influence, and cultural mediation (VAN DIJCK, 2013; MARWICK, 2015; ABIDIN, 2016):

- Perceived authenticity: the impression that the influencer is genuine and trustworthy, which is essential for digital persuasion and engagement (BANET-WEISER, 2018; DUFFY & FREITAS, 2018). Assessed qualitatively through posts, comments, and interactions that indicate closeness and sincerity;
- Engagement: the intensity of audience interaction through likes, comments, shares, and views, which is crucial for understanding cultural and commercial impact (MARWICK, 2015; OPINION BOX; INFLUENCY.ME, 2025). Measured both quantitatively and qualitatively by combining public metrics with follower participation;
- Personal brand identity: the influencer's consistency, positioning, and communicative style, which link products to symbolic narratives and are relevant to cultural mediation and belonging (KHAMIS; ANG; WELLING, 2017). Operationalized through content analysis, hashtags, campaigns, and the language used;

- Mediated consumption practices: the influence of the influencer's content on habits, decisions, and consumption styles, which is essential for testing hypotheses about cultural mediation (SENF, 2008; MARWICK, 2015). Assessed based on market reports (OPINION BOX; INFLUENCY.ME, 2025) and posts with engagement metrics.

The four defined variables allowed for the translation of theoretical concepts into empirical indicators, ensuring coherence between the theoretical framework and the data. To avoid isolated analyses, a comparison was structured between niches and platforms, identifying patterns and particularities in the cultural mediation of consumption. Table 1 presents the results, cross-referencing perceived authenticity, engagement, personal brand identity, and consumption practices mediated by niche (fashion, gastronomy, and lifestyle) and digital platform (Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube), highlighting differences in impact on followers and brand identity construction.

Table 1 – Digital influencers by niche/platform (2023–2025)

Niche	Platform	No. of posts analyzed	Average engagement*	Perceived authenticity**	Consistent brand identity***	Mediated consumption practices****
Fashion	Instagram	40	5,200	High	High	Medium
Fashion	TikTok	35	7,800	High	Medium	High
Fashion	YouTube	25	12,000	Medium	High	High
Gastronomy	Instagram	30	4,500	Medium	Medium	High
Gastronomy	TikTok	28	6,200	High	Medium	High
Gastronomy	YouTube	20	10,500	Medium	High	Medium
Lifestyle	Instagram	35	5,800	High	High	Medium
Lifestyle	TikTok	30	7,000	Medium	Medium	High
Lifestyle	YouTube	22	11,200	Medium	High	Medium

*Average engagement = mean of likes, comments, and shares per post; **Perceived authenticity = qualitative assessment of comments, interactions, and positive audience response (high, medium, low); ***Consistent brand identity = analysis of style consistency, content type, and personal narrative (high, medium, low); ****Mediated consumption practices = frequency and impact of product recommendations (high, medium, low).

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on research data (2025).

The classification of perceived authenticity, consistent personal brand identity, and mediated consumption practices followed operational criteria based on qualitative analysis of posts, comments, interactions, and audience feedback (MARWICK, 2015; ABIDIN, 2016; BANET-WEISER, 2018). Perceived authenticity was categorized as “high” when most comments indicated sincerity and identification; “medium” when these indicators were present but not predominant; and “low” when comments signaled detachment or skepticism (DUFFY; FREITAS, 2018). Consistent personal brand identity was considered “high” when style, content type, and narrative maintained coherence; “medium” in cases of occasional inconsistencies; and “low” when no recognizable pattern was identified (KHAMIS; ANG; WELLING, 2017). Mediated consumption practices considered frequency, engagement, and conversion in consumption actions: “high” for frequent and noticeable impact, “medium” for moderate or sporadic impact, and “low” for limited impact (MARWICK, 2015; OPINION BOX; INFLUENCY.ME, 2025).

This operationalization ensures transparency, consistency, and reproducibility, avoiding arbitrariness. Table 1 summarizes posts and reports, integrating quantitative metrics and the qualitative evaluation of interactions and produced content (MARWICK, 2015; BANET-WEISER, 2018; DUFFY; FREITAS, 2018).

The analysis of the results reveals that the cultural mediation of consumption by digital influencers is marked by the specificities of platforms and niches, confirming that such processes are not homogeneous (JENKINS, 2006; VAN DIJCK, 2013). The mapping of recent data on reach and usage habits – objective (i) – shows that TikTok surpasses 95 million users in Brazil, with an average daily time of 1h18min (KEMP, 2024), being the network with the highest intensity of interaction. Its engagement in fashion and lifestyle stems from an algorithmic logic oriented toward viralization (KUMAR; ZHANG, 2022), evidencing that influencers act as cultural mediators adapted to specific ecosystems (H1).

On Instagram, where the construction of authenticity and brand identity prevails, engagement is observed to depend on the perception of proximity and genuineness (*H2*). Abidin (2016) defines this “perceived relationality” as the emotional basis of trust. According to Opinion Box and Influency.me (2025), 62% of users consider recommendations on the platform more trustworthy, which confirms the importance of credibility and authenticity – objective (i).

On YouTube, the results show a different configuration: long narratives, consistent identity, and depth of mediated consumption practices. According to Jenkins (2006), media convergence allows the formation of interpretive communities. Studies by Cunningham and Craig (2019) demonstrate that YouTube is consolidating itself as a space of cultural intermediation, where influencers shape discourses of lifestyle and sustainable consumption, fulfilling objective (ii).

These patterns indicate that the cultural mediation of consumption varies according to niche and platform, reinforcing *H1* and *H2*. Classic literature helps to understand these findings: Canclini (1995) conceives of consumption as a cultural practice, and Bourdieu (1979) as a form of social distinction. In the digital realm, TikTok influencers create distinction through the ephemerality of trends; on Instagram, through aesthetic curation and authenticity; and on YouTube, through expertise and symbolic authority.

Platforms, far from being neutral, operate as socio-technical ecosystems that modulate forms of mediation (VAN DIJCK; POELL; DE WAAL, 2018). Algorithms, moderation policies, and monetization models determine what gains visibility and symbolic value, linking influencer communication to the attention economy (DAVENPORT; BECK, 2001) and responding to objective (iii).

The relationship between perceived authenticity and engagement (*H2*) is empirically confirmed. Hudders *et al.* (2021) demonstrate that authenticity is a social construct mediated by platforms and is crucial for campaign effectiveness. On Instagram, this construct is expressed through the aesthetics of intimacy; on YouTube, through narrative

consistency; and on TikTok, through spontaneity. These differences explain why each platform develops its own economy of authenticity (BANET-WEISER, 2018).

The results also highlight the role of niches (fashion, gastronomy, and lifestyle) as privileged spaces of cultural mediation – objective (ii). McCracken (2005) argues that mediation involves the transfer of cultural meanings to consumer goods, a process intensified in social networks, where influencers translate global trends into local practices.

These patterns demonstrate that the mediations of influencers produce broader sociocultural effects. Bauman (2000) indicated consumption as the central axis of sociability. This study confirms that influencers articulate belonging and social recognition, transforming consumption into an identity narrative.

Thus, the findings corroborate the study's hypotheses and address objective (iv): to examine the impacts of these dynamics on the relationships among brands, consumers, and cultural practices. The analysis reveals multiple strategies conditioned by socio-technical and cultural contexts, reinforcing that understanding the influence economy requires integrating symbolic, technological, and economic dimensions.

The results also extend previous contributions (VAN DIJCK, 2013; MARWICK, 2015; ABIDIN, 2016) by showing that authenticity is modulated by each platform's algorithmic and communicative logic, an aspect that has been little explored in the literature. Similarly, the attention economy (DAVENPORT; BECK, 2001) and media convergence (JENKINS, 2006) help explain how different formats shape engagement and the meaning of consumption.

It is concluded that the cultural mediation of consumption cannot be understood solely through the figure of the influencer, but rather through the ecology of platforms that shape practices of engagement, authenticity, and belonging. This perspective integrates the study's objectives and contributes theoretically by proposing an analytical framework capable of explaining variations across platforms and niches, articulating micro-celebrity, brand identity, and cultural practices of consumption.

Conclusion

This study began with the problem of understanding how the actions of digital influencers, articulated with brand strategies and platform logics, shape processes of cultural mediation of consumption, reconfiguring dynamics of visibility, desire, and engagement in the digital environment. It recognized that market communication is increasingly integrated into everyday online practices, requiring the analysis not only of advertising messages but also of symbolic, emotional, and cultural mediations between influencers and followers. The focus was on understanding how these mediations shape consumption and engagement patterns, articulating cultural and economic dimensions within the digital environment.

The objectives focused the analysis on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, considering authenticity; engagement; personal brand identity; and mediated consumption practices within the niches of fashion, gastronomy, and lifestyle. The qualitative approach, based on multiple cases and secondary data, allowed for the observation of concrete practices and the translation of theoretical concepts into empirical indicators. The findings indicate that the cultural mediation of consumption is not homogeneous, varying according to the ecology of the platforms and the predominant interaction formats.

The results showed that TikTok exhibits higher average engagement, linked to virality and rapid content consumption; Instagram stands out for its authenticity and emotional connections; and YouTube favors longer narratives, connecting consumption practices to symbolic values and personal experiences. These findings confirm the study's first hypothesis (*H1*), that influencers function as cultural mediators of consumption, and the second hypothesis (*H2*), which highlights the relationship between perceived authenticity and engagement.

Based on this evidence, the research expands the literature by articulating the role of influencers within the broader system of platforms and brand strategies, shifting the focus from the isolated individual to

the global communication process. Theoretically, it shows that cultural mediation should be analyzed comparatively, crossing symbolic aspects (authenticity, brand identity) and quantitative aspects (engagement), and integrating previously fragmented theoretical traditions, such as micro-celebrity, connection culture, and consumption practices. Empirically, it demonstrates how different platforms generate specific effects: virality on TikTok, emotional connections on Instagram, and in-depth narratives on YouTube. These findings offer practical support for managers, brands, and communication professionals, allowing them to align marketing strategies with cultural consumption practices.

The study has limitations: the exclusive use of secondary data and the focus on three niches and platforms restrict the ability to capture the subjective nuances of followers' firsthand experiences and may lead to generalized results. Other consumption categories, such as technology, education, and health, could reveal distinct dynamics of cultural mediation. Future research could adopt mixed methods, including interviews, digital ethnographies, and international or longitudinal comparative analyses, while also investigating the role of platforms as institutional mediators — examining the effects of design, visibility, and monetization on authenticity, engagement, and consumption.

In summary, the study demonstrates that digital influencers, in conjunction with the algorithmic logic of platforms, not only disseminate consumer messages but also structure emerging forms of cultural mediation, spanning narratives, identities, and everyday practices. By confirming the hypotheses and achieving the objectives, the research contributes to a broader understanding of the influence economy, integrating symbolic, relational, and normative dimensions, while acknowledging the fluidity and provisional nature of generalizations in this dynamic digital ecosystem. Thus, rather than providing definitive answers, this work suggests avenues for future research to further investigate the influence economy, maintaining ongoing dialogue with the ethical, social, and political challenges that characterize contemporary digital culture.

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