

# INFLUENCERS ON INSTAGRAM: ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF OPINION LEADERSHIP

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## **Abstract**

Opinion leaders are important sources of advice for other consumers. Instagram is the most used platform by opinion leaders in the fashion industry, and this trend is expected to continue in the near future. This study aims to identify some key antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership in this context. Our results, based on data collected from 808 followers of a fashion focused Instagram account, suggest that originality and uniqueness are crucial factors if a user is to be perceived as an opinion leader on Instagram. In addition, opinion leadership influences consumer behavioral intentions toward both the influencer (intention to interact in the account and recommend it) and the fashion industry (intention to follow fashion advice posted). Finally, the perceived fit of the account with the consumer's personality strengthens the influence of opinion leadership on the intention to follow published advice. These results have interesting implications for the fashion industry.

**Keywords:** Instagram, opinion leadership, fashion industry, originality, uniqueness, consumer behavioral intentions.

# **INFLUENCERS ON INSTAGRAM: ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF OPINION LEADERSHIP**

## **1. Introduction**

Consumers are increasingly using social media to gather information on which to base their decisions. A number of opinion leaders have emerged as influential members of online communities and have been shown to be a source of advice for other consumers (Casaló, Cisneros, Flavián, & Guinalú, 2009; Thakur, Agriawan, & Summey, 2016). In the fashion industry, fashion blogs have received the greatest attention since their emergence at the beginning of the century (Delisle & Parmentier, 2016). In addition, among the several social networking sites (SNS) currently available, Instagram is experiencing a steady increase in number of active users related to the fashion industry (Yesmail, 2015) and fashion brands have significantly more followers and interactions than other types of brands (Socialbakers, 2016). Furthermore, Instagram is the platform that is most used by opinion leaders (influencers), due to the sense of immediacy that is generated and because of its creation of communities; and it seems that this trend will continue in the near future (#Hashoff, 2017a). It has also been shown that engagement rate is higher on Instagram in comparison with other SNS (Locowise, 2017) and this percentage is even greater in the case of influencers (Influence.co, 2017).

Fashion is regarded as one of the most important industries since it accounts for a significant part of the worldwide economy (McKinsey&Company, 2016). Everyone needs to dress and, in order to meet that need, clothes are required. Wearing fashionable and stylish clothes is a way in which people gain and show their status (Kim, Lloyd, & Cervellon, 2016). As the industry changes rapidly, because people like wearing new clothes, companies promote their products to position their brands in the mind of customers (Rahman, Saleem, Akhtar, Ali, & Khan, 2014). Consumers use the content published on SNS as sources of

inspiration for clothing, so that these technologies can affect their shopping behavior (Aragoncillo & Orús, 2018). Additionally, social influencers have an important role in the fashion industry (Wiedman, Hennings, & Langner, 2010). Consumers talk to each other about new trends and styles, exchange information and put forward suggestions, which highlights the role that social communication plays in diffusing fashion trends (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008).

Because of the fact that fashion (“style, outfits, fashions, clothing and shop”) is one of the incentives for using image-sharing SNS (Mull & Lee, 2014), such as Instagram, and taking into account that the site has recently reached the figure of 800 million users (Instagram, 2017), it seems reasonable to think that Instagram plays a crucial role in this context. Unlike other SNS, Instagram offers brands the opportunity to post aesthetically pleasing, creative and charming content (photos, videos, stories, life stories, etc.), focusing exclusively on visuals, and to showcase their products in an appealing way (Lyfe Marketing, 2018). Consumers seem to react and behave differently on Instagram compared to other SNS, since they seem to take more actions (follow the brands, visit their websites, etc.) and purchase more often after looking at brands’ posts (Globalwebindex, 2015) and their rate of engagement is higher (Locowise, 2017). However, the academic research into this social networking site is still limited (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). In addition, most studies have focused on the content published on Instagram (Highfield, 2015), the motives for using Instagram (Järvinen, Ohtonen, & Karjaluoto, 2016; Lee, Kim, & Kwahk, 2016; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016), the antecedents of consumer interaction in a brand’s official Instagram account (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2016) or the effects of the characteristics of the brand generated content on the actual consumer behavior (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2017a).

Previous research about opinion leadership, both offline and online, has followed two main streams: (1) identifying the characteristics and motivations of opinion leaders, focusing, among others things, on the role of personal traits (Chan & Misra, 1990; Flynn, Goldsmith, & Eastman, 1996; Gentina, Butori, & Heath, 2014; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008), social processes (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008) and trust related aspects (Chan & Misra, 1990; Kim & Tran, 2013); and (2) outlining opinion leaders' influence on areas such as decision making (Belch, Krentler, & Willis-Flurry, 2005) and the diffusion of new products and innovations (Valente & Davis, 1999; Zhang, Fam, Goh, & Dai, 2018). The advent of the Internet and related technologies has even increased the role of opinion leaders (Turcotte, York, Irving, Scholl, & Pingree, 2015) and, in turn, the research related to this field. Several studies have been undertaken in relation to online opinion leaders (Lyons & Henderson, 2005; Zhao, Kou, Peng, & Chen, 2018), particularly in more textual platforms such as virtual communities (Li, Ma, Zhang, & Huang, 2013), blogs (Li & Du, 2011) and SNS, such as Twitter (Park, 2013; Park & Kaye, 2017). Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, studies into opinion leadership on a more visual SNS, such as Instagram (e.g. De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017), are scarcer, in spite of this being the most used platform (92%) by influencers, due to the fact they are provided with better creative tools, its visual appeal and overall popularity (#Hashoff, 2017b). In addition, influencer marketing on Instagram is considered an effective advertising channel in which advertisers invested \$1.07 billion in 2017, and are projected to increase their investment to \$1.60 and \$2.38 billion respectively in 2018 and 2019 (Mediakix, 2017). First, regarding the antecedents of opinion leadership on Instagram, it has been stated that the number of followers has an impact on a user's popularity and, in some cases, it leads them to be considered as an opinion leader (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017). Turning to its consequences, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) note that Instagram celebrities have an impact on the

purchasing behavior of young female users, non-traditional celebrities' profiles being seen as more influential since they are considered to have more credibility. In addition, it has been noted that when influencers admit they are being paid for publishing a brand-based post their followers recognize it as advertising and this may have negative impact on their attitude and intention to share that content (Evans *et al.*, 2017), probably because the credibility of the influencer is diminished. However, a deeper understanding of both the antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership on Instagram is still needed.

Taking all this into account, there is both a managerial and an academic need to better understand the role played by opinion leadership in the fashion industry. In particular, we focus on those leaders who use SNS, specifically Instagram, to build their leadership profiles, because Instagram, due to its inherently visual nature, provides a great opportunity to spread new fashion trends.

This research extends previous research on opinion leadership on Instagram and is designed with a twofold objective. First, what type of content published on a fashion Instagram account can cause a user to be perceived as an opinion leader? The characteristics of the content published on Instagram accounts (perceived originality, uniqueness, quality and quantity), an under researched topic, are considered first as the antecedents of being perceived as an opinion leader. Specifically, creativity and being unique seem crucial, in this visual context, in making content appealing (Lyfe Marketing, 2018). Second, how does the public perception of being an opinion leader affect the behavior of followers? The intention to interact, to recommend and to follow the advice obtained on an Instagram account are taken into consideration as consequences of opinion leadership. This way we consider the consequences of opinion leadership in relation to both the leader (intention to interact and recommend the account) and the consumer's behavior (intention to follow the advice). We also include two moderators, online interaction propensity and perceived fit with the

consumer's personality, which could reinforce the influence of opinion leadership on its consequences.

This article contributes to the literature by being – to our knowledge – one of the first studies that jointly analyzes the antecedents and consequences of being an opinion leader on a fashion orientated Instagram account. Firstly, this research offers interesting results that highlight the features that content posted on an Instagram account should have in order for the author to be perceived as an opinion leader by other users. Secondly, our study emphasizes the various ways in which opinion leadership influences consumer behavioral intentions, including two moderators which could strengthen these relationships.

Our findings also represent a guideline for effective influential marketing development. Based on the results, we provide recommendations for both companies and opinion leaders as to how they might collaborate to generate better outcomes. Companies may benefit from a deeper understanding of the process by which a user becomes to be perceived as an opinion leader on a fashion orientated Instagram account and the outcomes generated as a result of this perception.

This work is structured as follows: first, we propose hypotheses regarding the antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership. Second, we explain the data collection and measurement validation processes. Finally, we present the results and conclusions and outline some possibilities for future research to better understand the role of opinion leadership in the fashion industry.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Opinion Leadership**

Opinion leadership plays a key role in new product adoption and diffusion of related information (Chan & Misra, 1990; Wang, Ting, & Wu, 2013), so it is an essential element in marketing communications (Tsang & Zhou, 2005). Opinion leaders are seen to have public

recognition (McCracken, 1989) and, according to Leal, Hor-Meyll, and de Paula Pessôa (2014), they should have at least one of these characteristics: be considered as an expert on a product or service; be an active member of an online community; to participate with high frequency and make substantial contributions; or to be regarded by other users as having good taste in relation to purchasing decisions.

Opinion leaders can be defined as individuals who have a great amount of influence on the decision making of other people (Rogers & Cartano, 1962) and on their attitudes and behaviors (Godey *et al.*, 2016). Opinion leadership is related to what extent an individual is perceived to be a model for others, the degree to which the information provided by him/her is considered interesting and their persuasiveness. The root of this concept is the study of Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Guadet (1948), who stated that the influence of mass communications on people's behaviors may well not be as direct as had been previously supposed. They argued that opinion leaders picked up information from the mass media which they, in turn, disseminated directly to other members of the general public via word of mouth. This process was called the "two-step flow model". This was further developed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), who asserted that people's reaction to messages in the media were mediated by communication with members of their social environment and, thus, their final purchase decision was a combination of these influences.

However, today, interactions can be carried out both online and offline, so the role of opinion leaders might be even greater (Turcotte *et al.*, 2015). Goldenberg, Lehmann, Shidlovski, and Barak (2006) stated that opinion leaders could either be people with a wide knowledge of a particular topic (experts) or who have many connections with others (social connectors). People who are regarded as opinion leaders by their peers probably truly influence them (Iyengar, Van den Bulte, & Valente, 2011), so a celebrity might serve as a high-arousal stimulus which, in turn, may lead to greater effectiveness in the case of



skippable video ads (Belanche, Flavián, & Pérez-Rueda, 2017). On the other hand, we might find opinion seekers, that is, people who are looking for information or advice from others who are considered opinion leaders (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1990).

Focusing on fashion opinion leadership, fashion clothing has been regarded as a consumer good open for all to see which may indicate to other consumers aspects of the personality and status of the wearer (Dodd, Clarke, Baron, & Houston, 2000; Kim *et al.*, 2016). Leading figures have thus been widely recognized as crucial in transmitting new clothing habits to other customers because they are supposed to exert a powerful influence on their buying behavior (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). On the other hand, fashion opinion seekers, to avoid risk in the purchase process, look for information from opinion leaders because they are regarded as having more knowledge of the topic (Flynn *et al.*, 1996). In addition, opinion seekers help to spread this information to other customers (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). In conclusion, fashion opinion leaders have been regarded as key to the diffusion of new fashion trends, as they have great influence on their followers because of their knowledge, expertise and are considered a reliable sources of information (Mowen, Park, & Zablah, 2007; Thakur *et al.*, 2016).

## **2.2. Formulation of hypotheses**

First, we focus on the perceived characteristics of the account as the main antecedent factors of opinion leadership. According to previous literature (e.g. Casaló, Flavián, Guinalú, & Ekinci, 2015), characteristics of the content generated in social media may affect the consumer's perceptions. Specifically, originality could be defined as the degree of newness and differentiation that some individuals achieve by performing certain actions. Originality is the extent to which these actions are perceived as unusual, innovative and sophisticated. Original new products have been considered as more interesting and surprising (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003). In addition, individuals are more willing to share their comments or

anecdotes if the degree of surprise or interest aroused is greater (Peters, Kashima, & Clark, 2009). It has been also shown that the higher the degree of originality of a product, the higher is the amount of WOM generated (Modovan, Goldenberg, & Chattopadhyay, 2011).

Opinion leaders seem to score higher in innovativeness, defined as being on the lookout for what is new and unconventional (Thakur *et al.*, 2016), and it has been stated that people tend to follow these avant-garde trends (Kucukemiroglu & Kara, 2015; Thakur *et al.*, 2016). In addition, sharing posts with original content could help a fashion blog to become successful (Mendola, 2014), which could generate a greater number of followers, turning the blogger into an opinion leader. Creating original and authentic content has been regarded as a way for influencers to resonate with their audience (#Hashoff, 2017a). In summary, the originality of the content posted on an Instagram account can have a direct impact on the user's perception that the author is an opinion leader. Therefore, we propose that:

*H1a: Perceived originality has a positive effect on perceived opinion leadership.*

Uniqueness has been considered as a state in which a person feels differentiated from other people around him or her (Maslach, Stapp, & Santee, 1985) and involves using behaviors that others will pay attention to. It is connected to the extent to which these behaviors are perceived as being specific, really special and different. As a result of being perceived as unique, a personal image might be created that is admired by others (Gentina, Shrum, & Lowrey, 2016). It has been used as a way to distinguish between opinion leaders and non-leaders (Chan & Misra, 1990; Tsang & Zhou, 2005). The desire to be perceived as unique has been noted as a motivation in the case of fashion opinion leadership (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008); so these individuals look to be radically different to others, with the aim of enhancing their own self-image and social image (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001).

It is supposed that fashion opinion leaders innovate to feel unique and seekers look for their opinions and recommendations because they pay attention to these social cues (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006). In addition, it has been proved that uniqueness is an attribute that male adolescents take into account when endorsing opinion leader roles (Gentina *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the degree of uniqueness of posted content on an Instagram account can be related to the perception of being an opinion leader. Thus, we propose that:

*H1b: Perceived uniqueness has a positive effect on perceived opinion leadership.*

The quality of contributions has been regarded as being important in constructing a reputation in a community which, in turn, may lead the user to be considered as an opinion leader (Leal *et al.*, 2014). Sharing high quality posts (photography, writing, consistent use of logos, etc.) is a means by which a professional and successful fashion blog can be created (Mendola, 2014); in this way, the blogger can become to be considered as an opinion leader in this field. Some characteristics of the shared content, such as the attractiveness, quality and the composition of the images, are crucial for users to make the decision to follow a specific profile (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Other aspects related to quality, such as the comprehensiveness of the content (Lu, Jerath, & Singh, 2013), the level of talkativeness, linguistic diversity, assertiveness and affect (Huffaker, 2010), have also been shown to be drivers of opinion leadership. In sum, online influencers state that the quality of the content they share with their followers is crucial in increasing the success of an account (#Hashoff, 2017a). Bearing all these in mind, it is proposed that the quality of the content published on Instagram will influence the perception of opinion leadership:

*H1c: Perceived quality has a positive effect on perceived opinion leadership.*

Previous studies also show the existence of a relationship between the volume of the communications made by group members and their perception as opinion leaders. According to Tsang and Zhou (2005), self-reported opinion leaders posted a greater number of online

messages in comparison to their followers. In addition, in the context of Twitter, it has been noted that self-reported opinion leaders tend to be more motivated to broadcast their opinions on this SNS, by posting more frequently (Park, 2013).

More specifically, a high level of communication activity (number of posts and replies) is related to the capacity to influence others in the online context (Huffaker, 2010). As Leal *et al.* (2014) state, active participation is essential in order to be identified as an opinion leader. Due to the fact that these leaders are considered to have more knowledge and expertise (Rahman *et al.*, 2014), they need to post messages more frequently to construct their reputation in the community (Leal *et al.*, 2014). Thus, the amount of publications can have an impact on the perception of being an opinion leader. Therefore, it is proposed that:

*H1d: Perceived quantity has a positive effect on perceived opinion leadership.*

Second, we propose that opinion leadership may influence consumer behavioral intentions (Park, 2013). Due to the fact that opinion leaders are thought to have a great understanding of a specific product category (Thakur *et al.*, 2016), people may be more motivated to interact with them and recommend others to follow them. Intention to interact, in this case, reflects the strength of a person's willingness to interact in the future with the account. In the context of Facebook, Turcotte *et al.* (2015) noted that receiving recommendations from a friend who is regarded as an opinion leader is positively related to the act of looking for additional information. This means that users are more prone to carry out actions, such as interacting in the account and to look for new information. In addition, opinion leaders are thought to have more knowledge and expertise in relation to a specific topic (Rahman *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, as a consequence of being regarded as an expert on that issue, followers could recommend the account to others as they share the same needs and interests (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2017b). New technologies have facilitated and increased the importance of these processes (Serra-Cantallops, Ramon-Cardona, & Salvi,

2018). Intention to recommend is connected to the extent to which individuals will recommend an account to others. By following this account, peer consumers will be able to get up-to-date and important information from an opinion leader who is considered to have a great degree of credibility (Gentina *et al.*, 2014) and involvement (Rahman *et al.*, 2014) with that topic.

In addition, previous studies suggest that opinion leaders exert an unequal amount of influence on the decisions of those (Thakur *et al.*, 2016) who might follow their advice. Intention to follow advice is related to the extent that individuals will follow, take into account and put into practice the suggestions of the opinion leader. The impact that opinion leadership has on the customer's intention to buy new fashion clothes (Rahman *et al.*, 2014) has been noted. Opinion leaders tend to buy new fashion clothes, so they are able to advise other customers about new fashion trends that they might follow. It also seems that consumers' self-esteem is increased when they buy products which have been previously recommended by a celebrity on Instagram (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). As a result, focusing on the Instagram context, we propose:

*H2a: Opinion leadership has a positive effect on user intention to interact in the Instagram account.*

*H2b: Opinion leadership has a positive effect on user intention to recommend the Instagram account online.*

*H2c: Opinion leadership has a positive effect on user intention to follow the advice obtained in the Instagram account.*

Interaction also plays a key role in developing online communities where communications take place by means of computers or devices (Blazevic, Wiertz, Cotte, de Ruyter, & Keeling, 2014). Online interaction propensity is defined as the general tendency of a member to interact in an online environment with people they have not previously

personally met (Wiertz & de Ruyter, 2007). Therefore, it is connected to the extent to which individuals like to get involved in online discussions. Blazevic *et al.* (2014) noted that it is an individual trait that differentiates individuals with regard to their predisposition to interact with others on online communities. Therefore, members of these communities can be classified according to their presence (posters) or lack of willingness (lurkers) to engage in online interactions with others on these platforms (Schlosser, 2005).

Wiertz and de Ruyter (2007) showed that if customers are online interaction prone, they tend to make more and more knowledgeable contributions, so this variable is a crucial attribute in relation to online community members' participative behavior. In addition, Blazevic *et al.* (2014) noted the existence of a relationship between online interaction propensity and providing information and giving advice to other members. Similarly, Dessart (2017) showed that there is a positive relationship between online interaction propensity and carrying out some behaviors, such as communicating with others, sharing ideas and endorsing official pages of brand communities on Facebook. Therefore, online interaction propensity may strengthen the influence of opinion leadership on those variables that involve online communication (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalú, 2011); in our case, the intention to interact in the Instagram account and the intention to recommend it. Thus, it is proposed that:

*H3a: The consumer's online interaction propensity strengthens the influence of opinion leadership on his/her interaction intention.*

*H3b: The consumer's online interaction propensity strengthens the influence of opinion leadership on his/her recommendation intention.*

Finally, the higher the congruence between the contents of the account and the consumer's thoughts and personality, the greater will be the psychological closeness between the consumer and the opinion leader, which may result in a higher influence of the latter on the former. Perceived fit with personal interests is related to the extent that content is

regarded as relevant to an individual's values, congruent with his/her interests and matches his/her personality. This is similar to the literature on advertising that suggests that when a consumer perceives that there is a great match-up between his/her self-image and that of the endorser (for example, a celebrity), the assessment of the advertisement and the intention to purchase a product is higher (Choi & Rifon, 2012). In the online context, Hahn and Lee (2014), undertaking a study in a female clothing blog, showed that a consumer's perception of being psychologically close to a fashion blogger has a positive relationship to their attitude toward the blog and, finally, the products displayed there by the fashion blogger. Thus, a consumer may feel more comfortable following advice on an Instagram account whose opinion leader publishes content that matches his/her personality and interests and, thereby, they might achieve an aspirational self-image as portrayed by the opinion leader (Pradhan, Duraipandian, & Sethi, 2014). To sum up, if the contents posted by an opinion leader on Instagram are congruent with the consumer's personality, he or she will tend to follow to a greater extent the ideas and behaviors suggested by the opinion leader. Based on these points, we propose in our last hypothesis the following interaction effect:

*H3c: The perceived fit of the account with the consumer's personality strengthens the influence of opinion leadership on his/her intention to follow the advice offered by the account.*

### **3. Methodology**

The data to test these hypotheses was collected from a fashion focused Instagram account in which a potential influencer posts pictures related to new trends in the fashion industry that can be imitated by the account's followers. The selection of this specific account was not random (Eisenhardt, 1989); the selection was based on some important characteristics (it has a growing number of followers, is focused on the fashion industry, is increasing in popularity in the media [magazines and newspapers have published several

news items about the account]) and its accessibility (the influencer agreed to collaborate with the research project, distributing a questionnaire among the account followers). From the limited number of cases that might have been accessible to the authors, we selected this Instagram account since it can be categorized as an influencer in the fashion industry. Specifically, this account belongs to a non-traditional celebrity, with more than 76,000 followers, who were invited to participate in the research. In addition, the selection of a specific case is appropriate when analyzing a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 1994), it may be used to test theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) and can be combined with quantitative evidence (Yin, 1981) and a questionnaire (Eisenhardt, 1989), as in our case.

808 participants answered the questionnaire (Appendix A), which included multiple-item measurement scales adapted from previous literature that help to ensure the content validity of the measures. The questions asked about their perceptions of the opinion leadership (Gentina *et al.*, 2014; Park, 2013; Thakur *et al.*, 2016), originality (Moldovan *et al.*, 2011) and uniqueness of the account (Franke & Schreier, 2008), their online recommendations (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Belanche, Casaló, & Flavián, 2014), their interaction intentions (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005), their intention to follow the account's advice, their online interaction propensity (Casaló *et al.*, 2011) and the perceived fit of the account with their personalities (Lee, Park, Rapert, & Newman, 2012). The scales used seven-point Likert-type response formats, which respondents rated from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). One item was used to measure the perceived quantity and quality of the posts, which were rated from 1 ("not at all") to 7 ("very much").

Partial Least Square (PLS) was used as the estimation procedure because it is especially useful in situations with limited theoretical information, or when the phenomenon under research is relatively new (Roldán & Sánchez Franco, 2012), as is the case with the antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership in the Instagram context. Data analyses



were carried out using SmartPLS software version 3.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015). In accordance with Davcik (2014), our sample (808 participants) meets the sample size requirements of PLS; that is, 10 observations multiplied by the maximum between the construct that has the highest number of indicators (in our case, originality and opinion leadership have 6 indicators each) or the endogenous construct with the largest number of exogenous constructs (in our case, opinion leadership, which is explained by four exogenous variables). First, we analyzed the data to check the validity of the measures. A confirmatory factor analysis corroborated the initial factor structure, with all item loadings scores above the recommended benchmark of .7 (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009) on their respective construct. In addition, the composite reliabilities of all the reflective constructs, which should be higher than .65 (Steenkamp & Geyskens, 2006), are higher than .87 (see table 1), proving their internal consistency. As an additional indicator of convergent validity, average variance extracted (AVE) values are also above the benchmark of .5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) for all reflective constructs (see table 1). Finally, to confirm the discriminant validity of the reflective constructs, we checked that the value of the square root of the AVE is greater than the shared variance among constructs (correlations) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All pairs of constructs satisfy this criterion (see table 2), supporting the discriminant validity of the measures. Once the measures were validated, we estimated the effects proposed in the model and their significance using PLS with the recommended bootstrap of 500 iterations (Chin, 1998).

#### **4. Results**

The results of the proposed model (Table 3) reveal that opinion leadership is positively affected by perceived originality ( $\beta=.380$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and uniqueness ( $\beta=.298$ ,  $p<.01$ ), supporting our hypotheses H1a and H1b. However, the influence of both perceived quality ( $\beta=.014$ ,  $p>.05$ ) and quantity ( $\beta=.053$ ,  $p>.05$ ) is non-significant; therefore, H1c and H1d are

not supported. In turn, opinion leadership has a significant influence on the intention to continue interacting in the account ( $\beta=.558$ ,  $p<.01$ ), the intention to recommend the account online ( $\beta=.482$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and the consumer's intention to follow the advice offered by the Instagram account ( $\beta=.232$ ,  $p<.01$ ). As a result, H2a, H2b and H2c are supported. Lastly, while the interaction effects of online interaction propensity and opinion leadership on the intention to continue interacting in the account ( $\beta=.038$ ,  $p>.05$ ), and the intention to recommend the account online ( $\beta=.040$ ,  $p>.05$ ), are not significant, the interaction effect of perceived fit with personal interests and opinion leadership on the consumer intention to follow the advice received ( $\beta=.078$ ,  $p<.01$ ) is significant. Therefore, H3c is supported, but H3a and H3b are not. In terms of explained variance, the proposed model presents substantial levels of  $R^2$  for most of the dependent variables ( $R^2$  should be .26 or above; Cohen, 1988), opinion leadership ( $R^2=.437$ ), intention to follow the advice received ( $R^2=.317$ ), intention to recommend the account online ( $R^2=.239$ ) and intention to continue interacting in the account ( $R^2=.314$ ).

Looking at these results, perceived account characteristics (quantity, quality, originality and uniqueness) may have indirect effects on consumer behavioral interactions, mediated by opinion leadership. In this case, since there is no direct link between perceived account characteristics and consumer behavioral interactions, indirect effects will be equal to total effects. Therefore, these potentially mediated relationships were analyzed, again using SmartPLS software version 3.0 (Ringle *et al.*, 2015). As can be seen in Table 4, opinion leadership mediates the influence of both originality and uniqueness on the three dependent variables considered (intention to interact, intention to recommend the account, and intention to follow the advice provided in the account). However, the indirect effects of perceived quantity and quality are not significant.

All in all, the results suggest that perceived originality and uniqueness play a key role in developing opinion leadership on Instagram which, in turn, influences consumer behavioral intentions related to both the account (intention to interact and recommend the account) and the fashion industry (intention to follow the advice).

## **5. Conclusion**

Despite the increasing number of opinion leaders who have emerged in the fashion industry due to the development of SNS, this is – to our knowledge – one of the first studies analyzing the antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership on Instagram. First, this work confirms that, instead of perceived quality or quantity, perceived originality and uniqueness of the posts on an Instagram account are the key factors that lead a poster to be perceived as an opinion leader in this SNS. Therefore, aspects such as creativity, or being one of a kind (Gentina *et al.*, 2014; Thakur *et al.*, 2016), seem to be crucial to becoming an online influencer in the fashion industry. This result is consistent with previous literature suggesting the essential role that an authentic, creative and personal public image plays in achieving this aim (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016). Second, our findings suggest that opinion leadership influences consumer behavioral intentions in several ways. On the one hand, it serves to increase the consumer's intention to interact in the Instagram account and recommend it to others, benefiting the opinion leader. In other words, followers are involved in the value-creation process – they can contribute with their knowledge if they interact with the account, and the number of followers may increase if they recommend the account to others, increasing the value of the opinion leader, which is a key aspect of the new dominant logic for marketing (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a). In this new service-centered logic, the consumer is viewed as a co-producer (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and, consequently, the influencer not only creates value for customers, but the customers also create value for the influencer (Auh, Bell, McLeod & Shih, 2007). That is, both parties –the influencers and their followers–

reciprocally co-create value (Vargo & Lusch, 2008b). On the other hand, opinion leadership increases consumer intention to follow the fashion advice posted on the account, which may have an impact on companies' sales, due to the fact that consumers may trust the opinion leader's posts because of their product experience and perceived knowledge (Bao & Chang, 2014). This influence is even greater when the consumer perceives that the content posted on the account matches his or her personality and interests (Choi & Rifon, 2012). These results confirm the fact that influencers should be taken into account in the fashion industry as many consumers follow them and imitate their fashion sense (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). However, an unexpected result is that online interaction propensity does not strengthen the influence of opinion leadership. This may be explained by the fact that the use of the Internet is general nowadays, and most people may have routinized online interaction in their daily lives (e.g. Roldán, Sánchez-Franco, & Real, 2017).

As for managerial implications, this study identifies opinion leaders based on the content they publish. Opinion leaders must upload original content to be perceived as unique by their actual and potential followers. This content can lead their followers to experience flow while surfing in these opinion leaders' accounts which, in turn, can create optimal experiences resulting in more positive behaviors (Herrando, Jimenez-Martinez, & Martin de Hoyos, 2018). In this way, an attractive image will be created that can both capture their followers' attention and foster future cooperation with companies. In addition, the subsequent behaviors of followers are connected with their perception of a user being regarded as an opinion leader. This evaluation should lead to a rise in their intention to interact and to recommend that online account, as well as intention to follow the advice given by the opinion leader. That is, consumers who follow an opinion leader who publishes original and unique content may develop subsequent behaviors that may benefit both the opinion leader and companies. Therefore, companies must take into account the match between the lifestyle and

the kind of content usually published by opinion leaders and their own image when they want to involve them in an advertising campaign (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017; #Hashoff, 2017b), as well as the fit between the influencers' audience and their own target audience. If this is not done, the effect can be counter-productive; if users perceive that the opinion leader is sponsoring that specific product/service only due to the compensation he/she receives, this can negatively affect the consumer's perception of both the opinion leader and the company (Evans *et al.*, 2017; "Chriselle Lim and Volvo case": Curalate, 2016). In addition, opinion leaders know what resonates best with their audiences, so company managers should provide them with the specific aims and guidelines of their campaigns and then allow them to develop original and authentic content (depending on the objectives companies want to accomplish, influencers may use visual content, such as Instagram stories, or they may promote participation by holding contests, etc.), which should then best fit and engage their audiences (#Hashoff, 2017b). Therefore, influencers should not directly endorse, but they might weave a particular brand product into a personal story in an original and authentic way. There should be an ongoing relationship between companies and influencers, where the influencers are incorporated earlier into the collaboration process. They should also be consulted to generate better creative outcomes (#Hashoff, 2017b).

This research has several limitations that offer possibilities for further research. First, the respondents are followers of just one opinion leader's official Instagram account. Therefore, following Eisenhardt (1989), to generalize and confirm the results obtained in this study, it should be replicated with a wider sample of influencers' fashion centered Instagram accounts. In addition, to extend the research, accounts using traditional celebrities (we have focused on a non-traditional one), other industries and other SNS (for example, a more textual SNS such as Twitter) could be analyzed. In addition, although intentions are the main antecedents of behaviors (e.g. Ajzen, 1991), future research could analyze the influence of

opinion leadership on actual behaviors. Furthermore, the number of antecedents of opinion leadership could be larger. For example, the kindness, knowledge contribution, reciprocity (e.g. Xiong, Cheng, Liang & Wu, 2018), trust, reputation, expertise or credibility (e.g. Thakur *et al.*, 2016) of the account may influence consumer perceptions about it. Finally, it might be useful to research whether the antecedents and the consequences of “micro-influencers” are the same as for opinion leaders, due to their distinctive characteristics (normally less than 10,000 followers [Norris, 2017], focused on a really specific topic of interest and a major rate of engagement [Markerly, 2016]).

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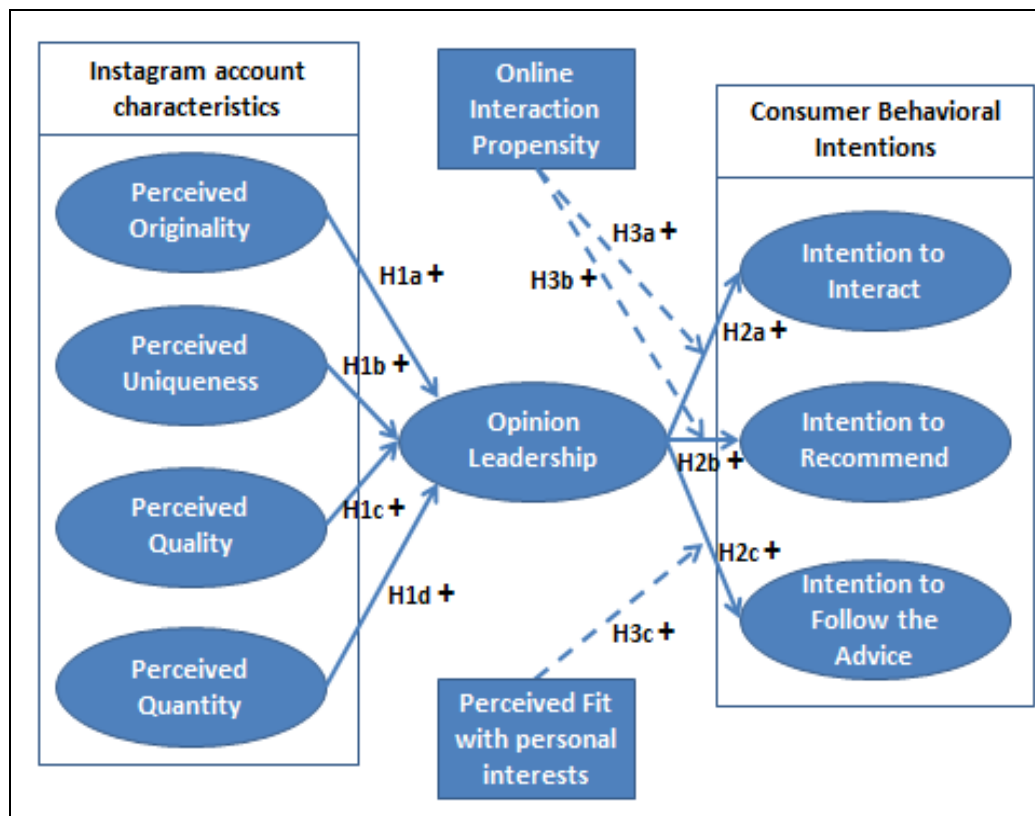
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**Figure 1.** Research Model.



**Table 1.** Construct reliability and convergent validity

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Composite Reliability</b>	<b>AVE</b>
Opinion Leadership	.874	.698
Intention to Interact	.905	.827
Intention to Recommend*	N.A.	N.A.
Intention to Follow the Advice	.940	.796
Originality	.929	.687
Uniqueness	.945	.851
OIP*	N.A.	N.A.
Perceived Fit	.914	.781
Quality*	N.A.	N.A.
Quantity*	N.A.	N.A.

*Notes: \* Variables were measured with just one item. NA: Non-applicable. OIP = Online Interaction Propensity.*

**Table 2.** Discriminant validity

<b>Variable</b>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
OL (1)	<b>.835</b>									
Quantity* (2)	.193	<b>N.A.</b>								
II (3)	.559	.157	<b>.910</b>							
IR* (4)	.486	.179	.568	<b>N.A.</b>						
IFA (5)	.455	.121	.389	.392	<b>.892</b>					
Originality (6)	.633	.204	.565	.526	.393	<b>.829</b>				
Uniqueness (7)	.615	.184	.530	.459	.379	.801	<b>.923</b>			
OIP* (8)	.222	.082	.141	.139	.390	.163	.166	<b>N.A.</b>		
Perceived Fit (9)	.611	.168	.549	.449	.529	.513	.463	.251	<b>.884</b>	
Quality* (10)	.218	.556	.210	.210	.119	.282	.227	-.025	.175	<b>N.A.</b>

Notes: Diagonal elements (bold figures) are the square root of the AVE (the variance shared between the constructs and their measures). Below-diagonal elements are the correlations among variables.  $\rho_c$ : composite reliability. NA: Non-applicable. \* Variables were measured with just one item. OL = Opinion Leadership, II = Intention to Interact, IR = Intention to Recommend, IFA = Intention to Follow the advice, OIP = Online Interaction Propensity.

**Table 3.** Summary of Results.

Antecedent Factors	DEPENDENT VARIABLES							
	Opinion Leadership		Intention to interact		Intention to recommend online		Intention to follow the advice	
	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
Originality	.380*	8.196						
Uniqueness	.298*	6.895						
Quality	.014	.390						
Quantity	.053	1.542						
Opinion Leadership			.558*	16.057	.482*	13.779	.232*	5.743
OIP			.009	.293	.024	.638		
Perceived Fit							.416*	10.742
OL x OIP			.038	1.287	.040	1.186		
OL x Perceived Fit							.078*	3.496
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.437		.314		.239		.317	

Notes: \* Coefficients are significant at the .01 level. OL = Opinion Leadership, OIP = Online Interaction

Propensity.

**Table 4.** Indirect effects

Indirect effect path	Estimated indirect effect	t	p-value
Quantity → OL → II	.029	1.541	.124
Quantity → OL → IR	.025	1.512	.131
Quantity → OL → IFA	.012	1.475	.141
Originality → OL → II	.212	6.626	.000
Originality → OL → IR	.183	6.693	.000
Originality → OL → IFA	.088	4.704	.000
Uniqueness → OL → II	.166	6.341	.000
Uniqueness → OL → IR	.144	5.800	.000
Uniqueness → OL → IFA	.069	4.270	.000
Quality → OL → II	.008	.387	.699
Quality → OL → IR	.007	.387	.699
Quality → OL → IFA	.003	.388	.698

Notes: OL = Opinion Leadership, II = Intention to Interact, IR = Intention to Recommend, IFA = Intention to Follow the advice.

## Appendix A

Rate from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) the following statements in relation to the selected Instagram account:

	Strongly Disagree			↔	Strongly Agree		
<b>Opinion leadership</b> (adapted from Gentina <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Park, 2013; Thakur <i>et al.</i> , 2016)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. This Instagram account serves as a model for others.							
2. This Instagram account is one step ahead of others.							
3. This Instagram account offers interesting pictures that suggest new ideas about fashion.							
4. This Instagram account persuades people to dress like the account pictures suggest.							
5. This Instagram account influences people's opinions about fashion.							
6. I used this Instagram account as a source of information.							

## ANTECEDENTS

	Strongly Disagree			↔	Strongly Agree		
<b>Perceived uniqueness</b> (adapted from Franke & Schreier, 2008)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. This Instagram account is highly unique							
2. This Instagram account is one of a kind							
3. This Instagram account is really special and different to others							
	Strongly Disagree			↔	Strongly Agree		
<b>Perceived originality</b> (adapted from Moldovan <i>et al.</i> , 2011)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Publications on this Instagram account are original							
2. Publications on this Instagram account are novel							
3. Publications on this Instagram account are unusual							



4. Publications on this Instagram account are innovative							
5. Publications on this Instagram account are sophisticated							
6. Publications on this Instagram account are creative							
	<b>Very Low</b>			<b>↔</b>		<b>Very High</b>	
<b>Account characteristics</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
1. Quantity of publications on this Instagram account							
2. Quality of publications on this Instagram account							

## **CONSEQUENCES**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>			<b>↔</b>		<b>Strongly Agree</b>	
<b>Intention to interact</b> (adapted from Algesheimer <i>et al.</i> , 2005; Belanche <i>et al.</i> , 2014)	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
1. I have the intention to interact with this Instagram account in the near future.							
2. I predict that I will interact with this Instagram account.							
	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>			<b>↔</b>		<b>Strongly Agree</b>	
<b>Intention to recommend the account</b> (adapted from Algesheimer <i>et al.</i> , 2005)	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
1. I would likely recommend this Instagram account to friends and relatives interested in fashion.							

	Strongly Disagree				↔	Strongly Agree		
Intention to follow the advice (adapted from Casaló <i>et al.</i> , 2011)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1. I would feel comfortable dressing as shown in the pictures published on this Instagram account.								
2. I would not hesitate to take into account the suggestions about clothing I can find in the pictures published on this Instagram account.								
3. I would feel secure in following the suggestions about clothing made by this Instagram account.								
4. I would rely on the recommendations about clothing made by this Instagram account.								

## **MODERATORS**

	Strongly Disagree				↔	Strongly Agree		
Perceived fit with personal interests (adapted from Lee <i>et al.</i> , 2012)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1. Publications on this Instagram account are relevant to my values								
2. Publications on this Instagram account are congruent with my interests								
3. Publications on this Instagram account match my personality								
	Strongly Disagree				↔	Strongly Agree		
Online interaction propensity (adapted from Casaló <i>et al.</i> , 2011)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1. In general, I like to get involved in online discussions								