

**Instagram as a digital tool for communication
and positioning of fashion brands:
A case study in Ecuador**

*Instagram como herramienta digital para la comunicación
y posicionamiento de marcas de moda: estudio de caso en Ecuador*

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Abstract

The present study examines Instagram as a strategic tool for communication and brand positioning in the fashion industry, focusing on the accounts of Ropa Gallardo and Afrikana. This research is justified by the rise of digital marketing and the need to design effective strategies on visual platforms like Instagram, which have redefined interactions between brands and audiences. The objectives are to analyze the communication strategies implemented, identify the most effective tactics, and evaluate the impact of these actions on market positioning.

The adopted methodology is mixed, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses. Over 2,400 posts from both brands were examined between 2023 and 2024, analyzing variables such as content formats, posting frequency, hashtag usage, and interaction rates. The analysis focused on identifying engagement patterns and the effectiveness of the implemented strategies.

Among the findings, Afrikana stood out for achieving higher engagement proportional to its follower base, driven by the use of formats such as Reels and personal narratives. Ropa Gallardo, despite having a larger number of followers and posts, showed a lower interaction rate. Afrikana recorded a 67,6% increase in its follower base, while Ropa Gallardo grew by 5,6%. The study concludes that the use of emotional narratives, storytelling, and collaborations with influencers are essential to enhancing engagement and brand positioning.

Keywords

Instagram, marketing, digital communication, engagement, narratives, influencers, fashion, brand positioning.

Resumen

Esta investigación aborda el análisis de Instagram como herramienta estratégica para la comunicación y el posicionamiento de marcas de moda, tomando como objeto de estudio las cuentas de Ropa Gallardo y Afrikana. Este trabajo se justifica por el auge del marketing digital y la necesidad de diseñar estrategias efectivas en plataformas visuales como Instagram, que han redefinido la interacción entre marcas y audiencias. Los objetivos planteados son analizar las estrategias comunicativas implementadas, identificar las tácticas más efectivas y evaluar el impacto de estas acciones en su posicionamiento de mercado. La metodología adoptada es de tipo mixto, combinando análisis cuantitativo y cualitativo. Se examinaron más de 2400 publicaciones realizadas por ambas marcas entre 2023 y 2024, analizando variables como formatos de contenido, frecuencia de publicación, uso de *hashtags* y tasas de interacción. El análisis se centró en identificar patrones de *engagement* y efectividad de las estrategias implementadas. Entre los hallazgos, Afrikana destacó por un mayor *engagement* proporcional a su base de seguidores, favorecido por el uso de formatos como *Reels* y narrativas personales. Ropa Gallardo, a pesar de su mayor número de seguidores y publicaciones, mostró una tasa de interacción menor. Afrikana registró un crecimiento del 67,6 % en su base de seguidores, mientras que Ropa Gallardo creció un 5,6 %. La investigación concluye que el uso de narrativas emocionales, *storytelling* y colaboraciones con *influencers* son fundamentales para potenciar el engagement y el posicionamiento de marca.

Palabras clave

Instagram, marketing, comunicación digital, engagement, narrativas, influencers, moda, posicionamiento de marcas.

Introduction

In a context of accelerated changes conditioned by immediacy and participation (Sidorenko-Bautista *et al.*, 2021), social networks are important digital tools for communication and brand positioning, making individual and collective experiences visible (López *et al.*, 2023; Pérez-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2022). In this sense, it is considered that benefits such as the creation of communities, interactions, participation with the establishment of strategies, among others, contribute to the positioning and recognition of the brand (Pacheco-Montúfar, 2021; López *et al.*, 2023).

In addition, the characteristics of the digital culture of the audiences – acquired and derived from previous processes—the way in which they negotiate, disseminate and position their identity and sense of belonging in the different digital platforms (Pérez-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2022; Barredo *et al.*, 2020) are added, which allows decision-making processes to be motivated by their level of participation and interaction in the platforms. In this context, the influence of social networks covers all types of market and its relevance is not alien to fashion companies (Villena *et al.*, 2020).

Taking as a basis that the characteristic of fashion is associated with a process of individualization and socialization: “it is a means to differentiate from others and a way of sharing socially” (Pacheco-Montúfar, 2021, p. 21), in addition to being related with cultural aspects that coexist in a consumer society (Pérez-Curiel and Sanz-Marcos, 2019). Therefore, narratives constantly aim to innovate and update according to new demands, with multimedia and interactive formats (Sidorenko-Bautista *et al.*, 2021), since communication in social networks is mainly “visual, connective and interactive” (Pérez-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2022, p. 3). Thus, it can be said that the visual experience is one of the key factors in the purchase decision and *engagement* process. Following this idea, studies show that users take images and videos into account (Pacheco-Montúfar, 2021, p. 30) However, other studies, such as Velar-Lera *et al.* (2019) show that some luxury brands still do not design specific strategies to act on social networks such as Instagram, sharing images, for example, expressionless.

It is evident that sometimes the importance of the visual as a basic aspect of the content is forgotten, being more important the adaptation to the immediacy and speed of digital changes. In this sense, this study seeks to evaluate the use of Instagram as a digital tool for communication and posi-

tioning of fashion brands called Ropa Gallardo and Afrikana; OE1: Analyze the communication strategies used by Ropa Gallardo and Afrikana on Instagram, identifying the most effective tactics used in their publications and OE2: Determine the impact of these communication strategies on the positioning of both brands within the fashion market.

Communication and digital audiences

The digital era has transformed communication processes, thanks to the convergence and divergence of communicative environments that give rise to more interactive and diversified content, making audiences go from passive viewers to active users, who interact with companies that place a product on the web to be sold anywhere in the world (Millan, 2005; Castells, 2000). Therefore, the transformation of communication in the network society (Castells, 2000) leads to new forms of reception, dialog and production of content by audiences, which increasingly become producers and issuers of content (Orozco-Gómez *et al.*, 2012). Spaces where the digitization of the contents produced by the industry modifies the consumption habits of the audience, since the user has become a multitasking person who: consumes content, seeks additional information about it, comments and values for other users (Lastra, 2016). But user activity does not end here, once it has commented and valued it also generates its own content to be shared on platforms, giving rise to the figure known as prosumer, having the ability to be an audience, producer, user and consumer (González, 2021).

All this context promoted by the network or information society occurs thanks to the existence of digital platforms that generate impact on social structures, transforming everyday life, communicative environments, and media practices (García, 2022). Although the outlook appears promising, the digital environment has created a generational gap between digital natives and migrants, and young people are usually self-taught in digital skills, but lack comprehensive media competence, all of which causes society to demand the need for literacy and inclusion mechanisms to address all the challenges of the information society (Sandoval and Aguaded, 2012; Díaz *et al.*, 2022).

In addition to what was mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Covid-19 pandemic has further accelerated these changes, affecting media systems, content production and distribution processes (Piñeiro-Otero, 2022), becau-

se actions such as quarantine led many businesses to close their physical stores and maintain electronic commerce, mainly promoted by social networks.

However, continuing with digital audiences, these exhibit various characteristics and behaviors in their online presence, because the interactivity offered by digital media allows them to participate in various ways (Castillo, 2014), becoming a challenge for small, medium or large companies that seek to attract potential consumers of their brands.

Thus, social networks consolidate a change within the traditional communicative paradigm (Villena *et al.*, 2020, p. 97), with characteristics such as interactivity, immediacy, usability, among others; above all highlighting that digital “brings together different senses (hearing, sight, touch) and ends up transgressing them” (Pérez-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2022, p. 4).

All this context of interaction and digital participation has made audiences identify themselves by immediacy and demand; in this sense, authors explain that “the *millennial* public warns of a scenario in social networks starring *influencers*, new leaders/opinion capable of conditioning the image of fashion and luxury brands” (Pérez-Curiel and Sanz-Marcos, 2019, p. 2).

Additionally, several authors agree on certain characteristics when it comes to consumer behavior within *e-commerce*, it is about: egocentrism, characterized by social acceptance through their purchases; hyperconnectivity, since all the time they are consuming information about brands and products; motivation and experience, because they act according to product details and previous experiences of other consumers, among others (Martínez and López-Rúa, 2016; Mercado *et al.*, 2019), all measured by the cognitive and emotional responses to the brand (López and Ruíz de Maya, 2008). In short, it is digital marketing, promoted through the same networks that drives user interaction, influencing consumer behavior, interactions and purchasing decisions (Sarmiento-Guede and Rodríguez-Terceño, 2020).

In addition, user satisfaction and perceived hedonism are key factors in determining the intentions and behaviors of interaction with brands on different platforms and social networks (Casaló *et al.*, 2017). Then, brands seek the participation of their followers or consumers by making the collective experiences visible, being that in some cases “these contents become a trend, generating dialog and debate, or in challenges that promote brands and influencers, thus constituting true digital cultures...” (Pérez-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2022, p. 5).

Fashion marketing and communication on social networks

It is evident that social networks “have transformed the marketing landscape, hence affecting not only the commercial sphere, but even transcending cultural aspects such as social relations” (Pérez-Curiel and Sáenz-Marcos, 2019, p. 3). In addition to this, the capitalist characteristics of fashion and its direct relationship with consumerism (Jiménez-Marín and Elías, 2019) are added, since the philosophy of fashion demands constant innovation to be able to meet the flexible and changing needs of consumers (Martínez and López-Rúa, 2016), and in this environment the idea that companies effectively position their fashion brands on digital platforms becomes a real challenge.

Before the information society, companies were the ones who controlled their image, this being possible thanks to the unidirectional discourse, making the voice of consumers practically invisible (Cristófol *et al.*, 2019). However, in an interconnected world characterized by immediacy, it is practically impossible to control the flow of information since the consumer acquires the characteristic of prosumer and sometimes influencer (Pérez-Curiel and Sanz-Marcos, 2019; Cristófol, 2019; Sarmiento-Guede and Rodríguez-Terceño, 2010).

If the aforementioned is combined with the accelerated growth of consumerism and diversity of tastes, fashion brands are obliged to evolve the communicational approach and adapt to what their audience demands, mainly under the premise that “what is consumed is not the object but the image it reflects” (Cristófol *et al.*, 2019, p. 236).

And the way is clear, it is not enough to have a need or create it, once the product or service is invented/developed to meet the need, it must also be communicated to the target audiences (Paricio *et al.*, 2019).

In addition, recent research shows that the frequency of online purchases increases every day, because users who bet on this modality do so influenced by the adoption of electronic commerce, the use of technology, the motivation to buy, among others (Ramírez-Lemus *et al.*, 2024; Guña *et al.*, 2015).

It has already been understood that the fashion industry aims at digital marketing, which is developed strictly within the Internet, which according to López *et al.* (2023), there are three dimensions: “Content marketing, social media marketing and email marketing” (p. 2). It is precisely under the characteristic of *social media marketing* that the role of social networks enters (Jindal, 2020), since, through them, among other *benefits, communities can be created, interact with brands, participate in the establishment of strategies,*

achieve recognition, retain customers, engage the consumer, create attractive content, among others (Pacheco-Montúfar, 2021; Buenaño and Valle, 2022; Cabezas-Molina, 2024; León-Alberca et al., 2024; Rivera-Rogel et al., 2020).

In addition, the multimodality of social networks is added, which “refers to the sound, visual, textual and iconic character of the language that characterizes these platforms” (Pérez-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2022, p. 7), allowing to experience something similar to reality and multiplying the communicative action” (Barredo *et al.*, 2020).

Consumers demand personal experience, i.e., what they perceive of that product, and that way is how the brand is built, obtaining the key messages to possess the component of the emotion-aspirational that is where this factor is concentrated to generate connections with individuals (Calvo, 2016; Pacheco-Montúfar, 2021). For this reason, the fashion industry is working every day to innovate in its digital marketing and promotion strategies, and some authors consider that Instagram is one of the most effective to respond to this need (Velar-Lera *et al.*, 2019).

Instagram in the positioning and perception of fashion brands

Taking as a background that for the communication of brands in the digital environment, and more pointedly in social networks, it is important to highlight that the consumer is very perceptible and must be allowed to feel that the brand involves him/her and enters his/her life through the content received (Cristófol *et al.*, 2019). For a brand to remain in time “it is necessary that it has a differentiated and relevant positioning in the mind of the consumer” (López *et al.*, 2023, p. 1), otherwise it would become an advertising failure.

Although Instagram was created as a social network designed and used mainly by young people to share photos and videos (Campines, 2024), it is currently one of the platforms that has grown the most in recent years, mainly thanks to the fact that it has managed to merge the benefits of different social networks, becoming multiformat, i.e., with benefits such as: *Instagram story*, *Instagram reels*, suggested content for you, image posting with audio, geotags, stories and live videos, metric analysis, collaborations and alliances, among others (Pérez-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2022; Doval-Fernández and Sánchez-Aamboage, 2021).

There are several benefits Instagram offers, and according to Kotler and Keller (2012) the success of the positioning of the company is achieved when

the brand is differentiated in the mind of the consumer. If taking this to a digital context, to develop a communication that is oriented to build the brand “it is necessary to know well the characteristics of the channel and produce characteristics that fit its uniqueness” (Velar-Lera *et al.*, 2019, p. 5), without forgetting that a brand is more than a marketing strategy, it is about the link and constant relationship that is based on the perception and experience of the customer when interacting with it (López *et al.*, 2023).

Some authors highlight the benefits of using Instagram to position fashion brands and achieve a good perception in their audiences, highlighting among them: 1) it creates a brand space that contextualizes communication 2) it allows listening and knowing the public 3) it promotes the creation of brand communities 4) it promotes the identification of brand prescribers 5) it promotes the direct interaction of users with the brand 6) it creates brand awareness 7) it helps identify points of improvement in content strategies 8) it promotes inclusion efforts (Velar-Lera *et al.*, 2019; Urrutia-Ramírez and Napán-Yactayo, 2021; Sánchez-Labela, 2021).

However, going back to Kotler and Keller (2012), it is necessary to take into account that in order for all these benefits to be perceived by the brands, authors such as Jai *et al.* (2022) mention the use of strategies based on trans-media narratives and user-generated content as an anchor to strengthen emotional connection with audiences. Fashion brands should focus on creating meaningful engagement experiences to foster customer loyalty: creating engaging content and active engagement with followers (Molina Prados *et al.*, 2022; Al-Haddad *et al.*, 2023). Added to this is the constant updating, such as the use of artificial intelligence to know customers and motivate their purchase decision (Yeo *et al.*, 2022).

In short, Instagram is a key platform for fashion brands to interact with consumers and communicate their brand identity. The literature review shows that publications and the creativity that the public perceives through them can generate positive reactions and improve the levels of participation and feedback from followers (Casaló *et al.*, 2021).

Emphasis is placed on the importance of visual content, innovation and emotional connection in fashion marketing, aiming at an intelligent use of Instagram to create loyal followers, obtain market intelligence and potentially increase sales by effectively communicating their identity and engaging their audiences/followers (Duarte, 2021; Carcavilla and Aguirre, 2022; Pacheco-Montúfar, 2021).

Materials and method

Taking advantage of the visual nature of the platform, these brands share attractive content with a clear objective: to capture the attention of users, generate interaction and strengthen their brand identity. In this context, this research focuses on a case study of the Instagram profiles of two Ecuadorian brands prominent in the fashion sector: Ropa Gallardo (@ropagallardo_ec) and Afrikana (@afrikana_ec). These accounts have been selected due to their relevance in the national market and the high number of followers that have managed to consolidate, being among the most influential in the country in this field. In addition, the brands represent relevant cases in the Ecuadorian market for their differentiated strategies in social networks. Afrikana focuses on niche audiences with aspirational content, while Ropa Gallardo prioritizes mass outreach.

The methodology adopted is the case method, defined by Yin (1994) as a suitable tool to analyze social phenomena that are not completely delimited. According to the typology proposed by Yin (1994), this work has a descriptive and exploratory approach. It is descriptive because it seeks to document and analyze the current strategies used by both brands on Instagram, including the type of content published, the techniques of interaction with users and the use of visual and narrative resources. At the same time, it is exploratory because it investigates the most effective tactics to achieve a better brand positioning, as well as the impact of these practices on the perception and loyalty of consumers. Based on this methodological framework, and following the recommendations of Yin (1994), the following research questions are raised:

Q1: How is Instagram used as a digital tool for the communication and positioning of fashion brands Ropa Gallardo and Afrikana?

Q2: What are the most effective tactics used in the posts based on engagement and engagement analysis?

Q3: How do communication strategies on Instagram influence brand recognition and consumer perception of Gallardo and Afrikana Clothing?

To meet these objectives and answer the research questions raised, a mixed approach is proposed, which according to Hernández Sampieri and Mendoza (2020), combines elements of the qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study, allowing to take advantage of the strengths of both. This methodological design will include the analysis of data through a non-participant observation sheet. The factsheet will be used to examine

the type of content published by the brands Ropa Gallardo and Afrikana on Instagram from January 2023 to December 2024, selected as a recent and representative timeframe of the most recent updates of the platform (León-Alberca *et al.*, 2024).

The analysis will include key variables such as the type of content published (e.g., images, videos, stories or reels), the frequency of posts, the use of hashtags and the wording of the text (*copy*). These variables will allow to identify effective patterns and tactics, as well as their impact on the interaction and engagement of publications, contributing to the understanding of communication strategies and their influence on brand recognition and perception. The variables are detailed below:

Table 1
Research variables based on research questions

Research Question	Variable	Description
Q1	Frequency of publication	Number of publications made during the study period.
	Content types	Most used formats by brands (carousel, image and publications with video).
	Publication Schedules	Hours of the day and days of the week when brands publish content.
	Topics of the content	Analysis of the most used hashtags and their impact on the visibility of publications.
Q2	Rate of engagement	Average interactions per post in relation to the number of followers in the Top 50 posts. It identifies which publications have the greatest impact.
	Interaction by content type	Relationship between format (image, video, carousel) and level of interaction
	Mentions and labels	Use of mentions to users, influencers or collaborators.
Q3	Number of followers	Monthly growth in the number of followers as an indicator of audience attraction.
	User Generated Content (UGC)	Publications, mentions or labels made by users that reflect the impact of communication strategies on brand perception.

Results

In response to question 1, all publications made by both accounts during the study period were identified. The results show a total of 2469 publications, of which 483 correspond to Afrikana and 1986 to Ropa Gallardo. To analyze the monthly frequency of publications of both brands, the calculation of the monthly average was used. This is defined as the sum of a set of values divided by the number of elements in that set, being a descriptive measure that facilitates the analysis of general trends in temporal data (Moore *et al.*, 2021). In this study, the monthly average was used as an indicator to standardize the frequency of publications and compare it in a uniform way, considering that the analysis period comprises 24 months (from January 2023 to December 2024).

The calculation of the monthly average is made by applying the following formula:

Figure 1

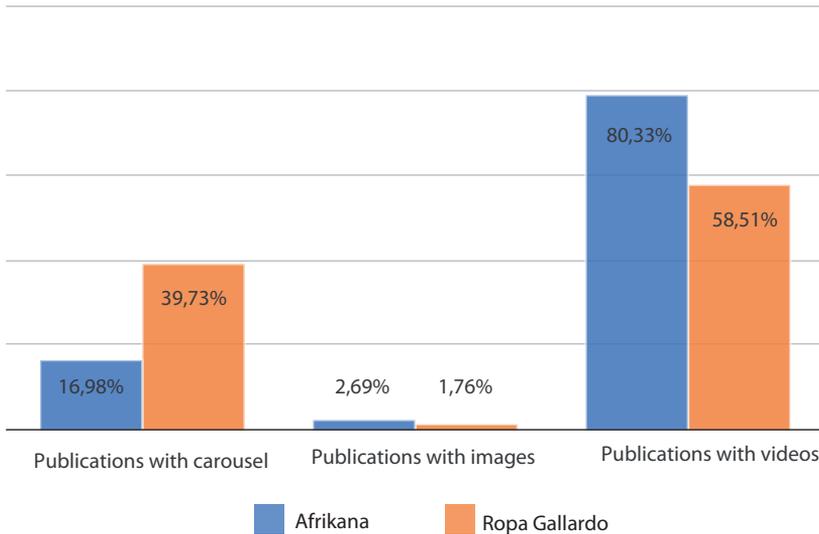
Monthly average publication formula

$$\text{Monthly average} = \frac{\text{Total of posts}}{\text{Number of months covered during the research period}}$$

Note. Own ó (2024) from Moore *et al.* (2021)

After applying the formula, the results reveal that the monthly average of publications is 20.13 for Afrikana and 82.75 for Ropa Gallardo. Regarding the type of content, there is a clear preference for video or reel publications, with 368 publications for Afrikana and 1162 for Ropa Gallardo, followed by carousel publications, with 82 and 789 publications, respectively. In contrast, static image publications have significantly less use, with only 13 publications in Afrikana and 35 in Ropa Gallardo.

Figure 2
Format trend in Gallardo and Afrikana clothing publications during 2023 and 2024

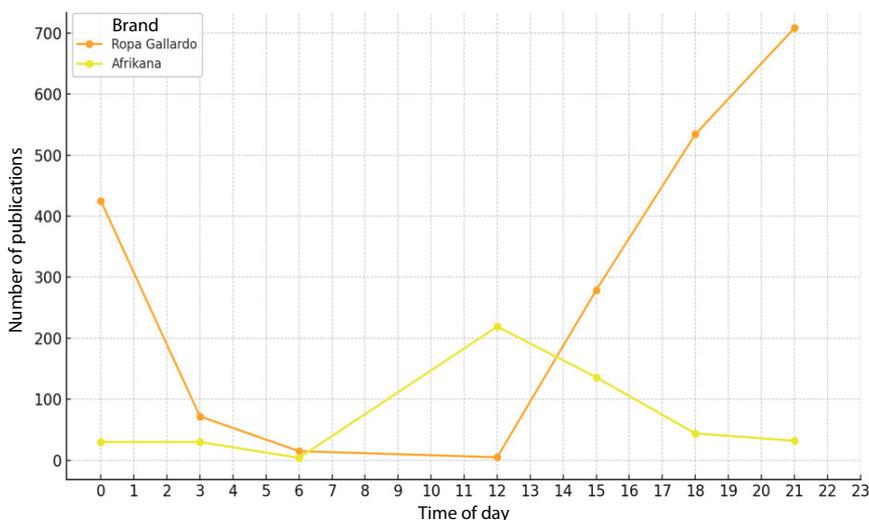


Note. Own ó (2024) from the data obtained in Fanpage Karma.

On the other hand, the line chart shows the distribution of publications by time of day for the brands Ropa Gallardo and Afrikana during the analysis period. It is observed that Ropa Gallardo concentrates a significantly greater number of publications at times such as 15:00 and 21:00 hours, while Afrikana maintains a more balanced distribution, with peaks around 12:00 and 15:00 hours. This could reveal that brands identify these lapses as periods of more activity by their followers.

Figure 3

*Trend of hourly publications of Ropa Gallardo
and Afrikana during 2023 and 2024*



Note. Own ó (2024) from the data obtained in Fanpage Karma.

To identify the predominant topics in the publications of the brands, an analysis of the 50 most recurrent hashtags in their publications was carried out. The results (see figure. 4) show that Afrikana mainly uses generic hashtags such as “#FyP” and “#FashionBlog”, which provide fashion tips and suggestions on the use of different garments. Likewise, hashtags such as: “#HowToUse”, “#OutfitInspiration”, “#StyleInspo” and “#InstaFashion” reflect a focus on the added value that the brand offers, by promoting various forms of style and use of its products. These elements indicate a strategy aimed at positioning the brand as a benchmark in trends and style.

Figure 4

Trend of hourly posts by Ropa Gallardo and Afrikana during 2023 and 2024

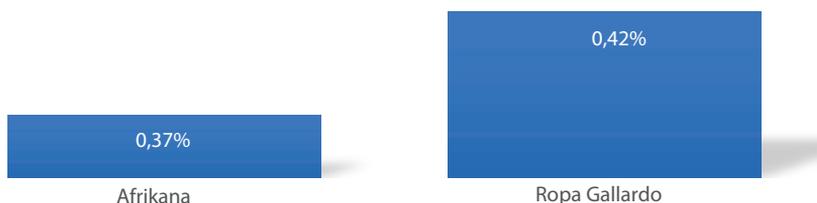
#comousar #Sale #style #conjuntos #Guayaquil #RopGallardo #New #OutfitInspiration
#fashion #NewIn #NewCollection #bffgoals #fashionstylist #Style #fashionblogger
#beachwear #FashionBlog #comocombinar #TallerGallardo #vestidos #stylish #Trendy
#Beach #tendencias2023 #gallardo #trendy #pants #Ootd #streetstyle #parati #StyleInspo #dress
#sets #Halloween #asesoriadeimagen #ecuador #fashionstyle #InstaFashion
#Fashion #ootd #inspofashion #fashionista #fyp #Ecuador #styling #Denim
#HechoEnEcuador #queusar #moda #modayestilo

Note. Own ó (2024) from the data obtained in Fanpage Karma.

For its part, Ropa Gallardo prioritizes the construction of brand identity through the repeated use of its name in hashtags, such as “#Gallardo”, and highlights its new collections, for example, “#NewCollection”. Additionally, it emphasizes geographical and origin elements, using hashtags such as “#Guayaquil” and “#HechoEnEcuador”, reinforcing its link with the local context and its cultural roots. These findings reveal an important part of the direction of the strategies of these brands.

To answer question 2, it was essential to analyze the engagement rate achieved by brands during the study period. According to Ballesteros Herencia (2018), engagement is an interactive and two-way process that occurs between a subject and a digital platform, in this case, Instagram. This process includes a cognitive and emotional state that manifests itself in specific behaviors of the follower towards the profile, and that are evidenced through: “likes”, comments and shares, which reflect different levels of involvement and intensity. To measure engagement, the sum of interactions is divided by the number of followers the account had at the time of posting. Then, the values obtained from all the publications are added. Finally, this sum is divided by the number of days of the analyzed period.

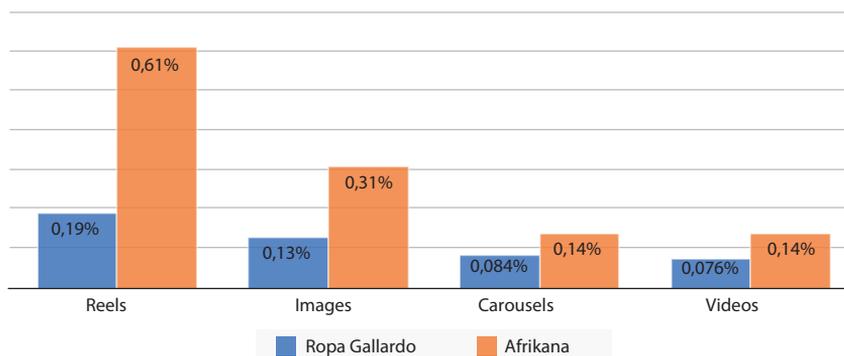
Figure 5
Engagement rate of Gallardo and Afrikana clothing publications during 2023 and 2024



Note. Own ó (2024) from the data obtained in Fanpage Karma.

An engagement rate of 0.37% (Afrikana) and 0.42% (Ropa Gallardo) indicates that, on average, less than 1% of the total audience (followers) interacts with the published content. Although this value could be considered low in absolute terms, it is essential to consider the particular nature of the accounts. These do not only depend on the interaction of their followers, but also generate participation through other sources, such as advertising campaigns, users interested in specific garments, or individuals attracted by specific content and various motivations.

Figure 6
Interaction rate by type of publication of Ropa Gallardo and Afrikana during 2023 and 2024



Note. Own ó (2024) from the data obtained in Fanpage Karma.

As shown in Figure 6, the results indicate that Afrikana has significantly higher interaction rates in all content formats compared to Ropa Gallardo, despite having a much lower number of followers. This finding suggests that Afrikana has a more engaged audience proportionally, which could be related to more accurate targeting, a more active community, or more relevant content for its target audience. In the case of Ropa Gallardo, the highest interaction occurs with reels (0.19%), followed by images (0.13%). Carousels (0.084%) and videos (0.076%) have considerably lower rates, indicating that these formats might not resonate as much with their audience. On the other hand, Afrikana stands out with Reels (0.61%) and images (0.31%), indicating a preference for visual and dynamic formats. Carousels and videos obtain identical rates (0.14%), which although lower are still higher than those of Ropa Gallardo in all cases.

In relation to mentions, labels and collaborations, it is important to note that in the case of Afrikana these practices are common. Most of the posts are made in collaboration with the account @VivianaPazmiñodesing (5858 followers), whose biography identifies her as the CEO of the brand. These actions give a more human image to the company, highlighting the human component behind it. On a recurring basis, this collaborator shows how to use and highlight the garments of the brand, aligning with the hashtags that Afrikana seeks to position on the platform. Additionally, Afrikana collaborates with various influencers, especially in the context of its sports line, where it establishes alliances with professionals in areas such as yoga, nutrition and lifestyle. Prominent profiles include @GabySuescum (20,100 followers), @GabyRecalde (54,100 followers) and @AndreasMakeUp (1.4 million followers), who contribute to the brand's positioning in specific market segments.

Gallardo Clothing, in contrast, uses mentions, labels and collaborations less frequently. However, it is important to note that the brand establishes alliances with other companies, promoting and marketing their products in their physical store. Some of these are: @CoolTherapy (30,300 followers), a store specializing in accessories; @Covesec_RopaDeportiva (28,000 followers), focused on sports apparel; @ColoryCool (16,100 followers), offering accessories linked to Apple devices, such as cases, wireless headphone cases and popsockets; and @BlankSpace.ec (7,284 followers), dedicated to skin care and makeup.

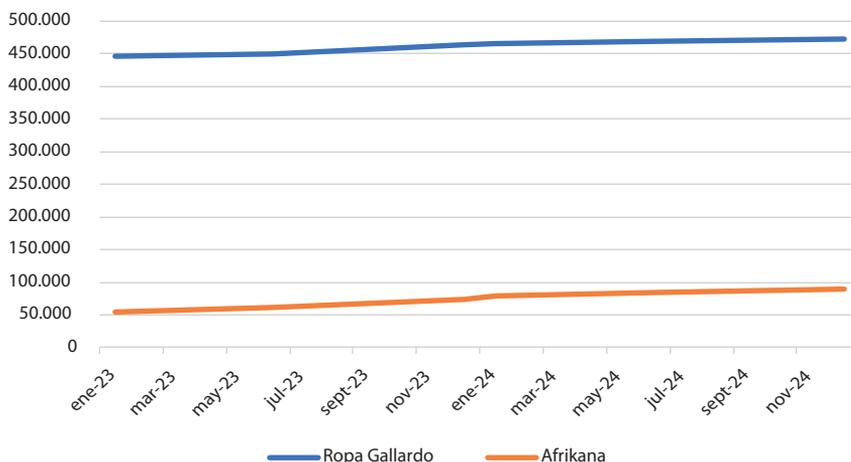
Regarding the collaboration with influencers, there is a limited participation, mostly linked to the store team. Some of these people identify directly with the brand, such as @MichelleGallardo (23,100 followers); @LilyGallardo (25,000 followers); In other cases, they include @AidaMatute (21,800

followers); @AllissonMatamoros (3,995 followers) and @NataliaZambrano (4,902 followers). It should be noted that one of the strategies they use is to call to action through *copies* that motivate the mention of more people, for example: “Your first @ owes you a Crochet dress!” In some cases they are about contests and in others they are simply about motivation of what they get a considerable response around interaction.

To answer question 3, it was necessary to know the growth data of the followers of both brands. The results show how these have grown over the past two years (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Growth of followers on Ropa Gallardo and Afrikana’s Instagram accounts



Note. Own ó (2024) from the data obtained in Fanpage Karma.

Between January 2023 and December 2024, Afrikana and Ropa Gallardo showed different growth trends in their Instagram followers. Afrikana, with a 67.6% increase in its fan base, shows significantly higher growth in relative terms, rising from 53,724 to 90,036 followers, reflecting effective strategies to capture new audiences in a probably more niche market. In contrast, Ropa Gallardo, despite its much larger initial base, experiences a more moderate growth of 5.6%, increasing from 447,015 to 472,053 followers, which could indicate a saturation in its audience or a focus on maintaining existing followers. The-

se differences highlight the importance of adapting strategies according to the stage of growth and the characteristics of the target audience of each brand.

To know the content generated by users, it was necessary to manually access Instagram accounts, taking into account that Fanpage Karma for privacy reasons does not access this type of information. Through a qualitative analysis sheet, it was verified in how many publications the Ropa Gallardo and Afrikana accounts were mentioned. The results show that in the first case there are 43 contents published with a label; while in the second case there are 26. In both accounts, the publications belong to collaborations of various types: photographic studios, influencers, brand collaborators, brand owners and in a smaller proportion followers who do not belong to other groups.

The same tool (observation tab) this time with the help of Fanpage Karma was used to know the number of comments of the publications. Both accounts have results far apart from each other, but with a high level of interaction considering the number of followers of each. Figure 8 below shows the two publications that have attained the highest number of comments during the study period.

Figure 8
Publications with the highest number of comments on Gallardo and Afrikana Clothing



As seen in the screenshots, the first post by Ropa Gallardo is a year-end competition, while the second, by Afrikana, is a post in which the CEO of the company shares a personal aspect of her work. Although they represent very different types of content, both publications manage to generate a high number of comments in proportion to the number of followers of each brand. This suggests that regardless of the nature of the content, both participatory dynamics, such as contests, and personal stories can capture the audience's attention and foster interaction. This phenomenon highlights the importance of understanding followers' preferences and using diversified strategies to maximize engagement.

To learn more about the comments generated by the Instagram accounts selected for this study, the top 200 brand posts were selected during the study period. The results revealed that between January 2023 and December 2024, while Ropa Gallardo records an average of 1084 comments per post, Afrikana reaches a much lower average of 40 comments per post, reflecting a noticeable difference in the ability of each brand to generate engagement.

Conclusions and discussion

This study has analyzed and contrasted the use of Instagram as a digital tool for the positioning of Ecuadorian fashion brands Ropa Gallardo and Afrikana, responding to the research questions raised. The comparison between these brands shows how differentiated strategies influence the perception and engagement of their audiences.

As for communication strategies, the contrast between the two brands shows the importance of adapting to the characteristics of their audiences. While Ropa Gallardo employs a high frequency approach in its publications, consolidating its constant presence, Afrikana opts for more curated content that appeals to quality over quantity. This suggests that there is no single strategy and that success depends on how these tactics align with the expectations of their followers. Afrikana, on the other hand, demonstrates a more refined use of its visual narrative, using personal stories and aspirational content to connect emotionally with its audience. This reinforces the idea that strategies based on storytelling and brand humanization are key to fostering meaningful engagement, especially in more niche communities.

Engagement analysis reveals that interactions depend not only on format or frequency, but also on context and emotional content. Afrikana stands out for its ability to maximize interactions in proportion to its fan base, demons-

trating that a focused and creative strategy can overcome the limitations of a smaller reach. In contrast, Ropa Gallardo, despite its greater volume of publications, could optimize the use of formats such as Reels or collaborations to capture new audiences.

It should be noted that collaborations play a crucial role in engagement. Afrikana leverages partnerships with niche influencers that resonate with its target audience, while Ropa Gallardo uses mentions and labels to reinforce its local brand identity. This contrast suggests that effective collaborations not only increase visibility, but also strengthen the perception of authenticity and relevance.

In terms of brand recognition, Afrikana is showing faster growth thanks to its ability to generate content that motivates participation and attracts new followers. This illustrates how strategies based on authenticity and cultural adaptation can be more effective in consolidating an emerging brand. For its part, Ropa Gallardo emphasizes the loyalty of its existing public, reinforcing its link with the local and cultural context. While this strategy ensures a stable base, it could limit its expansion potential into new markets. This finding highlights the importance of balancing strategies between audience retention and acquisition.

This research opens new possibilities to study digital marketing in the fashion sector. A key direction is to further analyze the impact of user-generated content (UGC) on the consolidation of digital communities and its influence on brand loyalty. Studies such as Kim and Lee (2017) highlight that the UGC fosters a sense of belonging and reinforces the perceived authenticity of brands, which could be replicated in emerging brands such as Afrikana. Also, exploring the effectiveness of transmedia narratives, which could offer new approaches to connecting with multidimensional audiences. As suggested in recent work (Jai *et al.*, 2022) transmedia stories can increase emotional engagement and consumer identification with the brand, crucial aspects to differentiate themselves in competitive markets. Finally, longitudinal investigations would be valuable to understand how changes in algorithms of platforms such as Instagram affect reach and engagement strategies. This would allow brands to anticipate trends and adapt their tactics to maximize their long-term impact.

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