

Influencers and reputation: Chiara Ferragni, Instagram and the Pandoro Gate scandal

*Influencers y reputación: Chiara Ferragni,
Instagram y el escándalo Pandoro Gate*

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Abstract

Chiara Ferragni is one of the most important fashion influencers in the world. A pioneer in the profession, with the creation of her blog The Blonde Salad, she has reached more than 29 million followers on her Instagram account. At the end of 2023, her image and reputation suffered a serious deterioration after the Pandoro gate scandal. This article analyses the evolution of its content creation routines before and after this crisis. The main objective is to analyze the evolution in the behavior of the influencer; her followers and the brands with which she collaborated. The results show a significant transformation in her digital behavior; characterized by a month of silence followed by a notable decrease in her publications. This trend continues after her separation and the agreement with her husband not to show the faces of their children. It is striking how the engagement of her Instagram account, despite the lack of content published by the influencer; increases. However, there has been a rise in critical and controversial comments. Despite the decrease in content, the activity of her community intensifies, suggesting that the interest of her followers is focused more on Ferragni's personal and professional history than on her controlled posts.

Keywords

Influencers, Instagram, influencer marketing, marketing, communication crisis, social media, Chiara Ferragni, fashion.

Resumen

Chiara Ferragni es una de las *influencers* de moda más importantes del mundo. Como pionera en la profesión, con la creación de su blog The Blonde Salad, ha llegado a alcanzar más de 29 millones de seguidores en su cuenta de Instagram. A finales de 2023 su imagen y su reputación sufrieron un grave deterioro tras el escándalo Pandoro Gate. Este artículo analiza la evolución de sus rutinas de creación de contenidos antes y después de esta crisis. El objetivo principal consiste en estudiar la evolución en el comportamiento de la influencer, sus seguidores y las marcas con las que colaboraba. En los resultados se aprecia una transformación significativa en su comportamiento digital, caracterizada por un mes de silencio seguido de una notable disminución en sus publicaciones. Esta tendencia continúa tras su separación y el acuerdo con su marido de no mostrar el rostro de sus hijos. Llama la atención cómo el *engagement* de su cuenta de Instagram, pese a la falta de contenidos publicados por la influencer, aumenta. No obstante, se observa un alza en comentarios críticos y polémicos. Pese a la disminución de contenidos, la actividad de su comunidad se intensifica, esto sugiere que el interés de los seguidores se centra más en la historia personal y profesional de Ferragni que en sus publicaciones controladas.

Palabras clave

Influencers, Instagram, marketing de influencers, marketing, crisis de comunicación, redes sociales, Chiara Ferragni, moda.

Introduction

The objective of this work is to investigate the problems and new challenges in fashion communication, specifically in relation to influencers. The fashion industry, especially with the emergence of social networks and the gradual popularization of Artificial Intelligence, has been experiencing a digital transformation for more than a decade that has led fashion to develop in unknown ways and without previous references. The current fashion scene is marked by instantaneity, virality, acceleration and a model of rapid consumption based on the imitation, above all, of the new communication leaders who, above the brands, are influencers who appeal more closely and intimately to a community created around them. One of the most powerful influencers is the Italian Chiara Ferragni, at least until December 2023, when it became public that an advertising campaign featuring her, including a charity action, was fake and therefore fraudulently profited. This study investigates how the crisis of fame and reputation has been managed, how it has been carried out in the following six months until the elaboration of this research in July 2024, and how the community of followers has responded.

At the same time, Ferragni's personal life has been radically altered. Her marriage to rapper and instagrammer Fedez has come to an end as a result of the scandal, and her profile, previously focused on her relationship with a partner and her two children, has changed. From the supposed closeness that made her followers feel like a family member or a close friend, she has gone on to not explicitly pronounce on the end of their relationship—in a statement or post, etc.—although it is known that although she takes it for granted, she has shared her sadness and desire to overcome it, and has spoken about it in other media. In addition, she has stopped showing her children, showing them only on their backs, allegedly due to the judicial conflict between the marriage. Collaborations with brands, on the other hand, have been extinguished and many contracts have been publicly terminated. The relationship with her community is not the same either: in addition to messages of support there are recriminations about the scandal, her personal behavior with Fedez and her children and her attitude on Instagram, as well as about her insincerity and greed, as well as criticism for the lack of interest in her new content.

The culture of cancelation and the complexity of the current brand and influencer landscape are topics that therefore stand out when approaching the figure of Ferragni from December 2023. Where is the acceptance and unders-

tanding of the possibility of getting it wrong—for a woman who has done so much for inclusion, the control of COVID-19 in Italy, the promotion of Italian culture and the de-stigmatization of mental health—and therefore redeem herself? Will Ferragni emerge stronger later, or will her profile decline and will no longer emerge? What does this example mean for the relationship between brands and influencers from now on? And for other influencers? How is a reputation crisis treated in the online environment? Can content evolve from a content creator? Do influencers have an expiration date?

The benefits or possibilities of influencers, as well as the dangers they can pose for brands are topics at the Academy and analyzed by authors such as Velasco Molpeceres (2018), San Miguel and Sádaba (2019), Sanz Marcos *et al.* (2019); Pérez Curiel and Velasco Molpeceres (2020) or Sanz Marcos *et al.* (2020). Everyone agrees that fashion brands seek to adapt to a digital environment in which they have little control and that, at the same time, this context has changed the traditional norms of fashion brand communication.

Influence marketing (San Miguel, 2020) and online advertising particularly on social networks, closely related to influencers, are the two most important elements for fashion firms today as they serve to manage communication, design and shape corporate identity, boost sales and even sell online directly. In addition, the digital world allows greater versatility, diversity and more targeted investments can be made for different specific audiences. Even if this means that, for example, important strategies in the past, such as fashion shows, have been overcome, at least in their traditional form. Nor is the digital environment unidirectional, unlike most traditional advertising, which causes abundant controversies, especially because brands have less capacity to direct from above the dynamics of fashion communication and because new issues arise that were not important before, such as equality and inclusion, diversity policies, sustainability, the political positioning of brands, etc., which were previously not relevant in the public debate. For this reason, the mediation of content creators is as thorny as it is necessary, at least nowadays, for brands that attend a landscape in which there is more and more regulation on online behavior and responsibility, but which also becomes increasingly complex and indefinite.

The case of Chiara Ferragni and her relationship with partners, sponsors and brands, as well as with her community, represents a matter of interest. Knowing the behavior and storytelling of the content creator after her reputation crisis—the Pandoro Gate—can provide valuable lessons for the fu-

ture of fashion brand communication and, in general, for the international influencer community.

Influencers, influence marketing and brand communication

It is necessary to understand that the new trends in communication and marketing in the fashion and luxury sector go through social networks and especially through Instagram (Espinosa Grau, 2020) and TikTok, as well as the use of influence marketing. This reality clashes with the traditional concepts of fashion and luxury as they must now overcome the concepts of exclusivity and bet on digital democratization (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012), although their products remain for the socioeconomic elites. In addition, they must do everything in an environment in which their audience, whether customer or not, is active: they are prosumers – producers and consumers on the network – who demand a retroactive dialog with issuers (Miranda-Galbe and Figuero Espadas, 2016). Thus, the use of influencers has become a very important practice in the marketing of fashion companies, as they allow to generate a community of followers with an important level of engagement.

Social networks, especially Instagram and TikTok, allow brands to have more visibility and escape from a serious and controlled discourse, flat and undynamic, associated with traditional media, that causes rejection in an interested public (stakeholders) in fashion but that relates naturally in the network (Sarmiento-Guede and Rodríguez-Terceño, 2020; Monserrat-Gauchi and Sabater-Quinto, 2017). This audience, in turn, generates its own lifestyle and brand-related content on a daily basis. Hence, this public, which also believes, is much more demanding than in the past, posing a major challenge for fashion brands as they have lost the dominance of communication and the absolute control of messages. Now, they have to enter an intimate sphere of followers who want to interact, identify and have fun on the network with their favorite brands although, on the other hand, surely they cannot acquire them. However, this paradoxical game contributes to create, curiously, an image of luxury and power for these brands as they renew their aspirational components. Why use influencers? Because they allow brands to play with their audience but without losing the aura by not using their official profiles (Benjamin, 2003).

Influencers have no stable relationship with the brand, they are passing through, so to speak, and although collaborating with influencers involves a transfer of power and even the question of whether it does not benefit them-

selves more than the brands (Sanz-Marcos *et al.*, 2020; Pérez-Curiel and Clavijo-Ferreira, 2017; Rocamora, 2016), especially in the face of a crisis such as that experienced at the end of 2023 by Ferragni. On the other hand, influencers are interchangeable and brands remain because they have a long-term communication policy. So, influencers are only beneficial: does Ferragni low popularity splash on Dior? (Velasco Molpeceres, 2021). They reaped the fruits when it was at its zenith, and now they can, if they wish, simply set it aside: it has nothing to do with the house. She is not their ambassador, nor has she produced content for them: she has only dressed her designs and her community has seen it. Then, its popularity allowed to reach the brand emotionally (González Romo and Plaza Romero, 2017) as influencers transmitted their ‘authenticity’ to their community of followers. If she chose Dior to marry, at her fairy tale wedding, would not she return to Dior desirable? Now that their marriage has broken down: does that link retroactively affect a brand like Dior? Their wedding generated in 2018, both internet traffic and the link of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, members of the English Royal Household (Alarcón and Segarra-Saavedra, 2020), which shows the power of a profile like Ferragni’s. But this relationship can end when necessary and, for Dior, it will mean nothing. Another thing is how Ferragni will manage its influence in a situation of contraction of interest towards it or even rejection, as the Pandoro Gate revealed in December 2023.

These issues are the subject of our analysis, as well as the storytelling that, after its triple crisis, Ferragni makes on her Instagram profile, the basis of her brand and business. The digital reputation of influencers is key because it is the basis of their relationship with the community that follows them, which generates high rates of interaction and engagement with respect to their content. This influence or connection is the element coveted by fashion brands for their communication and/or their marketing strategy (Castelló-Martínez, 2016; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017; Molpeceres, 2019). It is the phenomenon that has revolutionized the communication policy of the fashion sector, dominated by presentism and the ephemeral —such as stories that disappear, etc.— (Segarra-Saavedra and Hidalgo-Marí, 2018; Vinader-Segura *et al.*, 2019), as well as by the emission of a large volume of thought-out, but often inconsequential information. Fashion is instagrammable (Alarcón and Torres, 2020; Espinosa Grau, 2020; Sanz-Marcos *et al.*, 2019). Although there are differences in discourse between influencers and brands, it remains to be seen whether these different goals can be dangerous for brands or, on the contrary, only

bring benefits, given the large volume of information available that makes influencers easily dispensable.

Studies on influence, or on word of mouth in all its versions, are very important in communication and marketing studies (Barrientos-Báez *et al.*, 2022; Tiwari *et al.*, 2024). Above all, after World War II, authors such as Lazarsfeld and Katz (1955) already pointed out that interpersonal communication was twice as effective as radio ads, four times more than personal selling and seven times more than print ads. And in the business world, it has concretized through the promotion of referral and/or recommendation programs that take advantage of the social circle of the companies' clients to attract new audiences (Gershon *et al.*, 2020). In this way, customers become brand ambassadors (Barrientos-Báez *et al.*, 2021). This goes even deeper into the digital realm and explains what influencers offer brands. As noted by Schmitt *et al.* (2011), the existence of these communication strategies by brands means that the final company is the one that drives, manages, controls and monitors the recommendation process, which is stimulated and not spontaneous. But it seems more authentic, thus overcoming the skepticism (Plesh, 2003) of the clients, because, by following the recommendations —paid but that seem spontaneous or natural, emotional— of the influencers, one believes to be trusting a friend.

As Villanueva *et al.* (2008) say, traditional marketing causes mistrust because consumers perceive that the company seeks to influence their opinions, so that they protect themselves both in the physical and virtual environment (Rodrigo-Martín *et al.*, 2021). Influencers, although strictly not members of the social circle of each client, are present in their lives and interact with them (Sanmiguel, 2020; Barrientos-Báez *et al.*, 2021) almost as if they were. That is what brands are looking for. Especially for Generation Z (1994-2010) (Martín-Critikián *et al.*, 2022) which is digital native and connects better with its peers (influencers) than with authority figures, such as brands.

The Information Society is a new technological, economic and social system characterized by the use of ICT for the interconnection – convergent, instantaneous, multimedia and ubiquitous – of people's networks (Finquelievich, 2010). It requires, as for users or customers, that brands adapt to this new society that is postmodern (Druker, 1996; Szabo, 2005) and postindustrial (Bell, 2001) but capitalist, even if it is under the model of cognitive capitalism and cultural industries. For Jiménez (2018) there are four types of well-differentiated consumer generations: Baby Boomers, these are those born between 1945 and 1964; Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980;

Millennials, born between 1981 and 1994 and Generation Z, from 1995 to 2010. Each has preferred means of communication (and socialization). Television and print or traditional media, as well as Facebook, are favorite choices for people born before 1980 and, as of millennials, almost all information and activity is on social media. The average time spent on their devices by Z according to IAB data (2020) is 90 minutes per day on average, which is an increase of 20 minutes per day compared to the previous year. In the absence of authorized and reference broadcasters as in traditional media, the public and brands have turned to influencers (Fernández de Bordóns and Niño, 2021) who are mediators who bring them, or so they perceive, to a (virtual) but close (tangible) communication, almost as if it were traditional. And they pay their attention because they transmit transparency, trust and security (González-Carrión and Aguaded, 2020), for the brands they are interested.

According to Hatch (2012), in a study published by Harvard Business, there are several basic characteristics that influencers must gather to succeed: 1) reach: potential to do something viral; 2) share experiences with their followers who feel involved; 3) credibility: being transparent so that their public trusts them; 4) congregation: ability to mobilize users and 5) trust: ability to build familiarity with users. Thus, thanks to this, influencers could retain, through their strong connection with their followers, the consumers that brands want to attract (Zuckerman, 2019 and Martín Critikian *et al.*, 2022). And, therefore, achieve attention and reach, with a great follow-up: in engagement it is precisely where influencers contribute.

But if in 2020 COVID-19 multiplied digital commerce, there are also some paradoxes. According to data from the IAB (2020), influence tracking decreased compared to the previous year, although Instagram remains the social network in which influencers are followed the most. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink or discuss the usefulness of influencers and how long their importance in current marketing can last. In addition, several studies suggest that large influencers – more than 50,000 followers – generate less interaction than nanoinfluencers –less than 10,000 followers– or micro-influencers – between 10,000 and 50,000 followers (Martín Critikian *et al.*, 2022). This is a complex scenario because, according to a study carried out by IAB (2022), the use of social networks among users continues to grow: in the range between 12 and 70 years, they are used by 88% and, between 18 and 24 years by 93%. In addition, we must think about the changing of

this landscape and the great transformations that can happen in the face of the emergence of Artificial Intelligence.

Budgets for influencer marketing have increased rapidly in advertising (Schouten *et al.*, 2021; De Cicco *et al.*, 2021; Hofeditz *et al.*, 2022), but that does not mean that the future will be as it is now. Influencers like Chiara Ferragni have had a competitor emerge: AI influencers are increasingly being used as highly effective marketing tools (Farivar and Wang, 2022; Hofeditz *et al.*, 2022; Jiang *et al.*, 2024; Shamim *et al.*, 2024). One of their advantages is that they can overcome the limitations and risks of human influencers (Bu *et al.*, 2022; Stein *et al.*, 2022; Cascio Rizzo *et al.*, 2023), since they can be completely controlled, unlike real people, with their virtues and defects. Therefore, many researchers and professionals believe that virtual digital characters have significant commercial potential for the various brands that already collaborate with them (Zhou *et al.*, 2024; Alboqami, 2023; Sands *et al.*, 2022). And some studies have begun to compare the differences between virtual and real human influencers as well as follower reactions (Park *et al.*, 2021; Arsenyan and Mirowska, 2021; Hofeditz *et al.*, 2022; Stein *et al.*, 2022; Deng and Jiang, 2023; Liu and Lee, 2024).

This topic is very important because trust is the basis of success of influencers. Unlike traditional TV ads, social media influencers typically post commercial content that resembles and merges with non-commercial posts, causing people not to identify them as advertising (Evans *et al.*, 2017; De Cicco *et al.*, 2021). This, in turn, increases the likelihood that consumers will be influenced by advertising (Passebois Ducros *et al.*, 2023) as marketing is, to a large extent, the science of persuasion. It is stronger when it seems natural and not influenced by other interests (Dhanesh and Duthler, 2019; Chen *et al.*, 2020). The audience, moreover, is quite naive: research shows that customers tend to place great trust in the content shared on social networks (Shareef *et al.*, 2019), reaffirming the role of influencers but also explaining the problems that these profiles (and brands) can have if their rejection is generated by perceiving dishonesty. This is basically the problem Chiara Ferragni is facing today after the Pandoro Gate.

Until now, most communication crises related to fashion brands had been precisely because of the brands. And the reaction of users and influencers on social media had determined the management of the crisis, although, due to the long-term accumulated prestige, the scandals dissolved soon after, without affecting the brands. For example, in 2022, Balenciaga (Mena Gonçalves,

2024) had a problem due to an advertising campaign accused of promoting the abuse of minors, which was responded to on networks by various influencers asking for the cancelation of the brand, which eliminated advertising. This drastically changed the position of power that once had the brands, which seemed untouchable, although the controversies have not made Balenciaga stop being one of the most coveted brands. The same was true for Dior and the scandal over the anti-Semitic statements of its designer, John Galliano, who was fired and then hired by front-row brands like Maison Martin Margiela. But influencers are other profiles, with other capabilities, and they are seen as if they can survive a crisis. In this sense, the case of Chiara Ferragni is especially interesting, both because of her ability to set a precedent and because she presents a new case in the fashion industry: managing a crisis of emotional communication with the community, a pillar of her storytelling, of her engagement and, therefore, of her business potential for herself and other brands (Aritejo *et al.*, 2024; Shamim *et al.*, 2024).

Materials and method

The proposed method for this work, focused on a case study, is based on a series of previous investigations based on the comparative content analysis of quantitative and qualitative indicators (Bryman, 2016; Flick, 2004; Franklin *et al.*, 2015; Krippendorff, 2004; Silverman, 2016). Both processes constitute the scientific basis for testing the general hypothesis of the research. To do this, we analyzed the official Instagram profile of Chiara Ferragni (@chiara-ferragni). To define the chronological period of interest, we have revised the profile and set the start date of the study on June 15, 2023, six months before the Pandoro scandal broke until June 15, 2024, i.e., a calendar year. So, 453 Instagram posts have been analyzed for Chiara Ferragni's profile. These data allow us to delve into some questions of the objectives and research questions, in particular regarding content production strategies, the role of brands and advertisers and the management of a communication crisis. Then, on the concrete sample of the 453 posts, it has been deepened qualitatively. During the time period of the analysis, three distinct stages have been found (Table 1).

Table 1*Dates and number of publications during the three stages*

Stages	Dates	No. of publications
Stage 1 —E1—	June 15 to December 15, 2023	373
Stage 2 —E2—	January 14 to March 30, 2024	44
Stage 3 —E3—	April 16 to June 15, 2024	38

E1's time frame is the one before the Pandoro Gate scandal was published in different media. E2 refers to the stage in which the influencer returned to publish content, after a month without doing so due to the crisis. This stage ends when the news of Chiara Ferragni's separation from her husband comes to light. Finally, E3 starts the moment the influencer started uploading new posts after her divorce.

To carry out the study and achieve the proposed objectives, a content analysis has been carried out in which variables such as the number of daily publications, the number of followers, likes, and comments have been considered. In this way, engagement can be measured. These first measurements allow us to contextualize the status of the influencer's account, and to know the evolution that it has had over time before, during and after the different crises.

Likewise, other variables have been counted that focus on analyzing the relationship of Chiara Ferragni with the fashion firms she used to represent. Firstly, it has been differentiated between publications in which the influencer referred to her own clothing brand, as well as publications of other fashion firms.

Finally, the publications have been counted and analyzed according to the type of content that was promoted.

In this case, three different types have been found:

- Brand advertising: These are publications in which the influencer promotes clothing brands that have hired her directly. These publications are recognized by the hashtag #adv.
- Promotion of gifts received from clothing brands: In this case, the publications in which the influencer makes promotions of brands that have sent gifts are considered. These publications are recognized by the hashtag #supplied.

- **Mentions:** in some cases, the influencer thanks, through mentions —@— to different brands or people for their support in certain issues.

The objectives of this study are the following:

O1 To observe the evolution of the number of fashion publications by Chiara Ferragni.

O2 To analyze the engagement of Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account before and after the scandals.

O3 To determine the publications of her own brand and collaborations with other fashion firms.

O4. To describe the evolution of fashion content on Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account before and after her scandals.

To achieve these objectives, a series of research questions will be answered after obtaining the results:

Q1 Is there any change in the number of posts following the Pandoro Gate scandals or the influencer's divorce?

Q2 How has the engagement of Chiara Ferragni's Instagram profile been affected after the scandals?

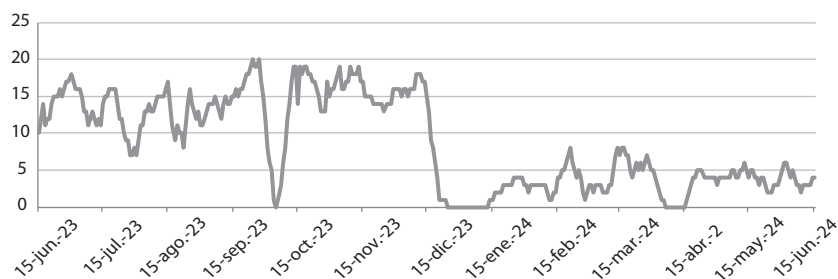
Q3 How have her relationships with fashion firms on social media been affected?

Results

After performing the analysis during the dates indicated above, 453 posts made by Chiara Ferragni on Instagram have been found. 357 were uploaded to this social network in stage A —E1— (between June 15 and December 15, 2023, when the Pandoro scandal was made public), 44 in stage B —E2— and 36 during stage C —E3—. This is logical, since E1 covers a period of six months, for the two and a half months of E2 and two months of E3. If the monthly publications of each stage are considered, during E1 the influencer posted on average 62.2 contents per month, 17.6 in E2 and 18 during E3. This shows how Chiara Ferragni markedly dropped the number of posts following the Pandoro Gate case (figure 1). After her separation from rapper Fedez —E3— she keeps the pace of publication that she had in E2, away from the volume of posts during the period before the Christmas candy scandal.

Figure 1

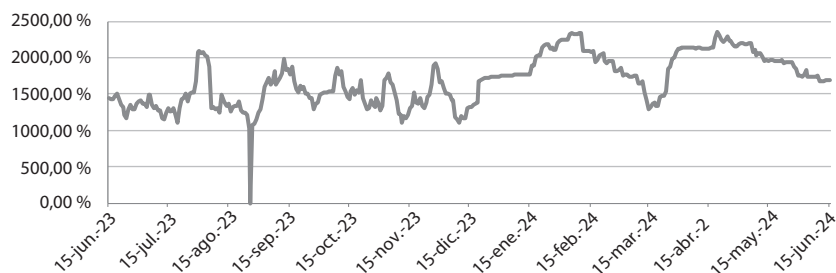
Evolution of weekly posts on Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account



It is important to mention that, as of December 15, 2023, there were more than 29 and a half million followers. After the scandal, and at the end of E2, she lost 573,904, this being a constant until the last day analyzed in this work, on June 15, 2024, where the influencer had 206,740 fewer followers compared to E2, falling from 29 million followers. But, despite the permanent decline in users and posts, her engagement increased for two periods of time (Figure 2) in recent months. These coincide with the start of E2 and E3. At the end of both periods there is a decrease in the engagement of the influencer's account, as the interest of her followers for the novelties of Ferragni's life was decreasing.

Figure 2

Evolution of engagement on Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account



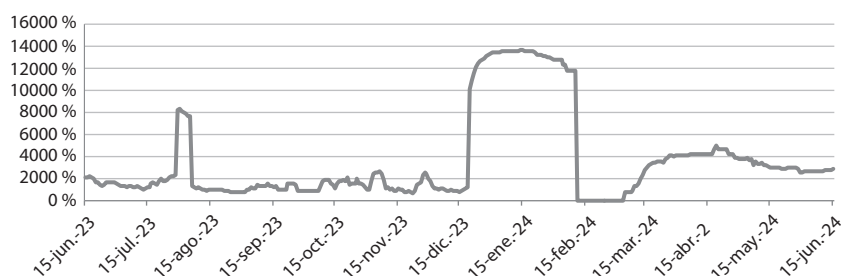
Following the explosion of the Pandoro Gate case, Ferragni stopped posting content on its networks for a month – from 15 December 2023 to 14

January 2024. However, as seen in figure 2, this did not mean a decrease in the level of engagement among her Instagram followers. During the period between E1 and E2, both comments and ‘likes’ increased considerably (Figures 3 and 4). The crisis caused by the Pandoro Gate aroused a lot of controversy among followers and detractors, thus generating a lot of movement on her Instagram profile.

The case of comments during this period is very striking, as the increase was noticeable. The opinions expressed by her followers were mostly negative, thus generating a bad image of the influencer and creating a major reputational crisis for her. However, this increased her ability to generate engagement, as the number of likes and comments increased, this measurement variable in social networks increased. However, in this case, it did not improve Ferragni’s brand image.

Figure 3

Evolution of average comments on Chiara Ferragni’s Instagram profile



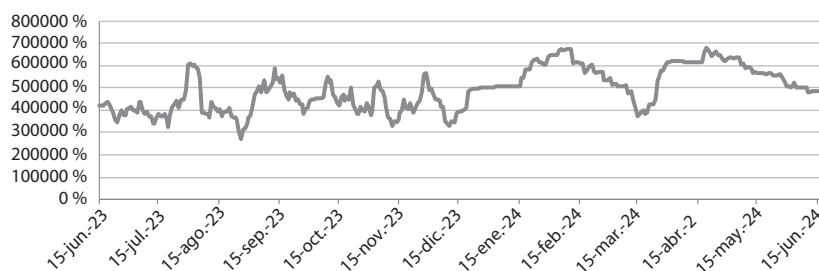
From January 14 to March 3, there was a decrease in the comments received on her profile, showing that the controversy stemming from the Pandoro Gate was losing interest for her followers or detractors. As of February 14 and as of March 3, the number of comments received dropped dramatically. Two issues stand out during these dates: the first is the clear decrease in the number of publications by the influencer, and second that the publications she made from January 14 to 21—only 4—were not commentable. As of January 23, when she uploaded the next post, these were very scarce compared to E1.

It should be noted that as of March 4, and after a controversial interview made on the program of “Che tempo che fa”, Canal Nove, comments increa-

sed again dizzyingly far exceeding the number of responses obtained during E1. In this way, and as seen in figure 2, she increased her engagement again. Similarly, her publication rate was much lower than that of E1 (figure 1). It also influences that it was at this time when her break with rapper Fedez was made public, which made her followers more active, despite the fact that from March 31 to April 15 Ferragni did not publish anything on networks. It happens, for the second time, that when she stopped uploading content on her Instagram profile, it favored her in terms of engagement. Her followers, despite the lack of content, were much more active.

Figure 4

Evolution of the average 'likes' on Chiara Ferragni's Instagram profile

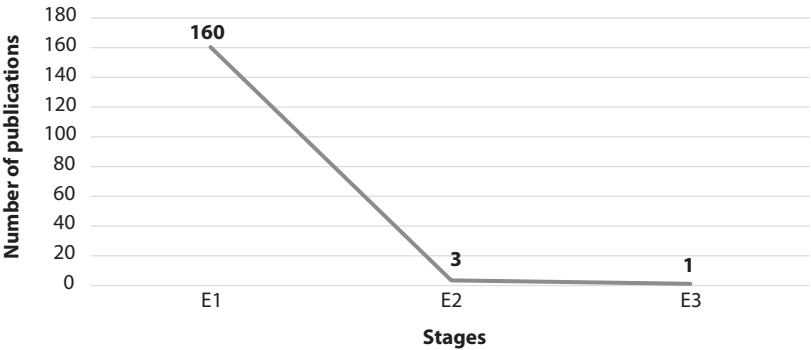


In the case of likes, it is seen how there is no decrease, beyond some periods with less activity that have been occurring in her profile since the first date under analysis. However, it is striking how between December 15, 2023 and January 14, 2024, when no posts were uploaded, the 'likes' were kept at a constant pace, similar to what had been happening in E1. During E2 and E3, the likes increased at the beginning, slowly decreasing. During the period between E2 and E3, from March 31 to April 15, the influencer did not post anything on her networks. As said, this corresponds to the moment when the break-up with her husband Fedez was made public. However, as with comments, likes are increasing as well as the engagement of the profile.

When it comes to Chiara Ferragni's relationship with fashion brands, there is a big change after what happened at the Pandoro Gate. During E1, 42.9% of her publications referred to fashion brands (160 posts), either through mentions, advertising or clothes given to the influencer — *supplied*—. During E2, the figure fell to 6.82% of posts uploaded by Ferragni (3 posts).

During E3, the trend continues downwards, with only one post referring to clothing brands, accounting for 2.86% of the total publications during that period.

Figure 5
Number of fashion publications during the three stages



This abrupt decline is due to the reputational and image crisis of Chiara Ferragni’s brand after the Pandoro Gate. Fashion houses decided to end their collaboration with the influencer to prevent the image crisis from reaching them. This fact, together with the increase in engagement of Ferragni’s Instagram account, indicates that the big brands do not only look at the numbers, but take special care with the story that is generated behind them. In this case, with a large number of detractors after the scandal, the fashion firms understood that the relationship that united them with Chiara Ferragni would not be advantageous or good for them.

Table 2
Number of publications by type of clothing represented

Brand Type	E1	E2	E3
Own brand	29	1	0
Other brands	131	2	1

It should also be noted that the influencer not only decreased the amount of content showing other fashion brands but also decreased the pace of con-

tent of her own brand. So much so that during E2 she only published content of this type, ceasing to do so in E3 (table 2).

As for the hashtags used to refer to the type of content made, three different ones have been found: 1) #adv, advertising, 2) #supplied and 3) mentions of accounts. As expected from Table 2, the amount of trendy content posted in the emergence of the candy scandal decreased considerably (Table 3).

Table 3

Number of publications by type of content

Content Type	E1	E2	E3
#adv	93	1	0
#supplied	17	0	0
@ Mention	50	2	1

Figure 1

After the scandal, Ferragni does not even indicate the brands that dress her in events as important as the Venice Biennale



Note. <https://bit.ly/3y5ooKU>

Figure 2

Prior to the scandal, brand collaborations were recurrent, even on normal days, with no events



Note. <https://bit.ly/3WruIo9>

As for advertising —#adv—, it has a total of 94 contents, finding 98.94% of these in E1 and 1.06% in E2. In this way, it can be seen how advertising disappears from Chiara Ferragni's Instagram posts during E3.

Something similar happens with the contents with the hashtag #supplied. 17 posts of this type have been found, all belonging to E1. Finally, 53 contents with specific mentions have been found —@—. 94.34% of publications belong to E1, 3.77% to E2 and 1.89% belong to E3.

This is due, as mentioned above, to the crisis caused by the Pandoro Gate, something that fashion firms did not want to get involved in. Similarly, during E1, the most recurring type of content was advertising, which accounted for 58.13% of the total in that time period. During E2 the most abundant type of content (2 contents) are the mentions, the same as in E3, where only a mention and no other type of content is observed.

Conclusions and discussion

After analyzing Ferragni's publications, and responding to the O1, we can conclude that there is a transformation in the influencer's content creation routines from the Pandoro scandal. After a month in silent, her publications are very scarce. After their separation and, in particular, after the agreement with her husband not to show the face of their children, their contents will vary even more and, perhaps because of that and the complexity of their personal lives, a decrease in publications is observed (P1). Regarding the O2, with which we intended to analyze the engagement of Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account before and after the scandals, we observed a paradox. Engagement goes up, but it turns into something negative, as the comments are against her. Controversies of all kinds (personal and professional) cause comments to increase and, with them, engagement (P2). In Ferragni's case, every time some information comes out it generates controversy, her account increases in terms of comments and likes, although she continues to lose followers. But engagement does not mean improvement in brand image: her followers leave and haters arrive. This may even increase the reputational crisis.

This is also evident in the fact that, despite the lack of content in two periods, users are much more active. In other words, her community acts freely, outside of Ferragni's influence, i.e., Ferragni's personal-professional history is more important than the influencer's own content and the community she has created. She has lost her influence, or seems to, because what interest followers is not so much the publication that she makes and controls, but the story behind it all. This, also in relation to the O1, makes us wonder if, then, it can be, therefore, a good strategy for content creators on Instagram to stop uploading content and take some time to 'rest'. Unless they closed their networks, it seems that it does not work because if the story that is in the background interests, it will not stop increasing engagement, although with opposite results to those that the influencer intends to achieve.

And, on the other hand, when the influencer tries to create a different story than the one she has exploded without her control—the Pandoro Gate and its separation—the community does not get hooked. They want more information about the economic scandal and her personal life, precisely what she is not talking about. Hence, users lose interest without a good story. Influencers must create stories that entertain, not empty content. So are the influencers who create a story around themselves the most successful? It seems

that it does, because fashion brands have sidelined Ferragni (P3, O3 and O4), which, in addition to ceasing to post, has greatly reduced the pace of her collaborations and even the advertising of her own brand, precisely the most damaged by the Pandoro Gate case. Another question is to what extent the business can be viable.

It remains to be known, in terms of studies of fashion influence, the role Ferragni may have in the future and whether she can become a micro-influencer for her community, with more engagement, than other older influencers. On the other hand, it is expected that at some point her personal and professional situation will become clearer and she will create content more regularly. As of July 2023, her number of followers continues to decline but, as noted in other studies, brands are not more interested in superinfluencers with millions of followers, but in those profiles with a community in which they truly influence. The role of haters in the profile of fashion influencers should also be studied in other works, such as social awareness, promotion of values and discourse about morals and/or ethics and ideals of different influencers. These people are increasingly being asked for a political position on the current situation, for example: on the Palestinian conflict. And fashion brands, like Vogue, are committed to political agendas like the Democratic Party's ahead of the 2024 US election.

The same has happened with national editions of Vogue, like the Ukrainian one, committed to the war effort against Russia. In the case of Ferragni, her work against COVID-19 was recognized and praised in the past, as well as her support for *made in Italy* and Italian culture. But, at least for now, that reputation is badly damaged. Although it remains to be known whether more transparency and more social commitment will be able to restore it or if, on the contrary, her strategy of 'low profile' and zero transparency will be more beneficial for her and, subsequently, especially after her divorce, it will resort to an arc of redemption in her storytelling and her narrative strategies.

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