Slow Fashion as a Communication Strategy of Fashion Brands on Instagram

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Abstract: The objective of this research is to study the reasons for the growing impact of sustainable slow fashion brands in the fashion industry and, in particular, how they manage their communication and which digital strategies they employ. We applied a mixed research methodology: a comparative content analysis of qualitative and quantitative indicators, as well as in-depth interviews with 10 professionals and experts in fashion and digital communication, with the aim of contrasting their opinions with the results of the study. The five sustainable fashion brands (YosoLOVEamor, LIFEGIST, ECOALF, Alohas, and ECOOLOGY) chosen are distinguished by the fact that they base their business projects on social and environmental responsibility, and their Instagram accounts were studied over a period. This paper demonstrates the social interest in and concern for sustainability, ethics, and corporate social responsibility in the fashion industry. Additionally, it is evident that slow fashion brands need to have a good online strategy, as it is the future of fashion. No greenwashing was found, but sustainable fashion is a controversial issue with no regulation and a short history, so it has to develop.

Keywords: slow fashion; sustainability; Instagram; influencers; greenwashing; fast fashion; fashion

1. Introduction

The objective of this research is to study the reasons for the growing impact of sustainable slow fashion brands in the fashion industry and, in particular, how they manage their communication. These brands must compete with multinational fast fashion companies (e.g., Inditex, H&M, Shein, Primark) in order to reach consumers. This paper aims to find out what their digital strategies are, how they configure their storytelling, what results and impact they generate with their communication on social networks, and the situation and possibilities of slow fashion in society [1,2].

Fast fashion is an industrial model that consists of a rapid, large-scale production of fashion items, characterized by their low cost and short sale time due to the rapid circulation of products in stores, which leads to an increase in consumption. In contrast, slow fashion represents a production model that is conscious of and responsible for the environment, based on social and environmental responsibility, the pursuit of quality in products, and a longer life cycle. Therefore, it has a high cost and slower production, resulting in a decrease in pollutants and an improvement in the environment [3]. In general, these are not large companies, but small initiatives, with limited profitability and resources. However, in social networks, especially on Instagram [4], the fashion industry attends to other variables, and not just the size of the companies, to make an impact.

In a context in which concern for the environment and climate change is becoming increasingly important, slow fashion and sustainable fashion are topics on the rise. Alongside the oil and chemical industries, the textile industry is currently one of the most harmful to the environment. Almost 200 countries signed the Paris Agreement in 2015, which aims to

implement the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and strengthen the resilience of countries to changing climatic conditions [5]. However, as we have pointed out, sustainability is not limited solely to a production model. The media and social networks play a fundamental role in changing mentalities and tastes. For this reason, we consider this paper, which combines the emergency situation and climate change with research on fashion, a field of research that is on the rise and is also linked to new technologies and the transformations of society and its tastes, to be of interest.

One of the problems with sustainable fashion and slow fashion, as well as communication in networks and media about sustainability, is the practice of greenwashing or social washing by companies. This term refers to the communication and marketing strategies carried out by companies to simulate sustainable actions that [6,7] are merely for marketing purposes. The point is that there is no legislation that establishes what constitutes an eco-brand, what constitutes slow fashion, what constitutes ethical fashion or what constitutes ecomoda, and what practices are required to use these labels.

It is true, however, that there are various sustainability criteria that must be met in order to affirm that the aim is to avoid or minimize the environmental, economic, and social impact produced by human action. One very important factor is fashion environmental certifications that guarantee that the products being purchased do not contravene environmental or human rights. These are private certifications to fill the current legislative gap and to avoid prejudice; the origin of clothing does not make something sustainable. Some of the criteria are:

1. Fair trade.
2. Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS): Textiles have at least 70% organic fiber.
3. Organic Exchange (OE): produced through a production chain that is separate from other types of fibers. Standard 2 (OE Blend) refers to products that have a minimum of 5% organic cotton.
4. OEKO-TEX: The STANDARD 100 certificate guarantees that textiles are free of 300 harmful substances, and in Europe, the Made in Green certificate indicates that companies have respected the environment and human rights and are free of harmful substances.
5. Naturtextil: inspects social and ecological responsibility. The BEST certificate (from IVN) is the highest.
6. Bluesign: values the production of resources, atmospheric emissions, consumer and worker safety, water emissions, and health.
7. EU Ecolabel: is applied to products and services with high environmental standards throughout their life cycle.
8. Global Recycled Standard (GRS): is an international standard that allows for the verification and communication of the percentage of recycled materials in products, as well as the social and environmental practices of their production.
9. Naturland: fair trade certification for farmers.

However, there are also other criteria. For example, cultural criteria are based on maintaining the cultural, textile, material, and immaterial heritage, betting on local industries, encouraging consumers to adopt more conscious behavior, cooperation and participation in collective projects for the community, as well as those related to professionalism or labeling and transparency with consumers, and social criteria such as respect for human rights, fair trade, and solidarity.

Previous studies have indicated that the communication of sustainable brands has a very significant influence on the ecological awareness of consumers and their behavior [8]. Therefore, it is necessary to include new digital opinion leaders [9] to reach users on a daily basis to create an ideal opportunity for the creation of new sustainable textile companies [10]. Trends are created from the acceptance of the consumer, to whom the product is sold [8].

It is necessary to be well versed in the Internet business and understand the problems that networks generate, such as the vampire effect of influencers [11–13]. Or, as pointed out by [14] about slow fashion on Instagram, the fact is that environmental and social issues

(such as feminism) are more prevalent in the communication of these accounts than fashion. Thus, the main discourse is ethical and moral, related to authenticity, not fashion. This points out [14] that minimalism and the presence of nature in the images are combined with sustainability. According to [15], slow fashion brands typically publish only a dozen posts per month, which usually focus on manufacturing processes, materials, and CSR (such as donations, effects on the environment, and talks). In this direction, another problem is that they do not seek to connect with the public in their speech, but rather to communicate about their projects. It is pointed out that their engagement is very low and that only 32.8% of the publications received comments. However—and this is important—there is a real commitment to the environment, and they do not engage in greenwashing practices. These problems and deficiencies necessitate the study of business sustainability communication to discover the reality and what can be done to stop the fashion industry from orbiting around fast fashion and its unsustainable practices, so that slow fashion brands know how to articulate their digital strategies to ensure viability.

The general objective of this paper is to determine the reasons why slow fashion is gaining more and more impact in the fashion market and to analyze the communication that these fashion brands carry out through the Instagram social network.

The research questions are:

Q1. Are influencers the primary resource for Spanish sustainable fashion brands to promote their products on social media?

Q2. What priority level do slow fashion brands give to the certification of ecological fashion and the use of sustainable materials?

Q3. Is the engagement rate of content related to sustainability higher for slow fashion brands?

2. Literature Review

Studies on the relationship between fashion and sustainability are a topic of growing interest for the academy; however, the contradiction between concern for the environment and its link to the fashion industry seems evident. The authors of [16] point out that there are great internal and external challenges to incorporating sustainability into the fashion design process. The authors of [17] also share a perception when investigating eight small US sustainable fashion companies. They point out that the problems of a sustainable fashion industry are numerous and varied, even affecting their own self-proclaimed sustainable fashion designers, who, like other producers, distributors, and customers, do not truly understand what sustainability means when applied to the fashion business. The authors of [18] also investigated the barriers to sustainability in the apparel and fashion luxury industry and pointed out that there are many, the fundamental ones being those related to 'Management, Government Support, and Infrastructure Barriers', although there are also 'Material Barriers', 'Finance Barriers', 'Supplier Barriers', 'Certificates and Customer Perceptions', and 'Sustainable Packaging and Human Resource Barriers'. However, alongside barriers, various studies also point to different opportunities and models of sustainability in the fashion industry [19,20].

For their part, ref. [21] are more optimistic and point out that, regarding sustainable design and the circular economy in fashion and textiles, sustainable fashion will be more important in the future due to social concerns outside of the reality of companies, as 95% of the fabrics can be produced from recycled materials. The authors of [22] point out that, in the Swedish children's clothing industry, designing for longevity and neutrality is important and that there are more strategies for sustainability than just the fabric; thus, they also have a positive future vision. The industry's interest in sustainability is also pointed out by [23], who investigate, as does this paper, the forms of sustainable fashion, sustainable fashion brands' strategies, consumer transparency, the driving forces and scopes, and how fashion brands and consumers are advancing towards sustainable fashion.

Apart from the industrial landscape, many researchers consider the role of consumers to be essential. The authors of [24] ask how much sustainable value customers perceive

and how much the evaluation of their sustainable performance influences their customer equity. They conclude that sustainability is very important because perceptions of value and quality are essential when fashion consumers evaluate a fashion company's sustainable performance. Satisfaction with sustainability brings greater customer equity to companies and brands, thus strengthening customer relationships. Many authors have pointed out multiple advantages of implementing sustainable sourcing in the fashion industry [25–27].

3. Materials and Methods

The objective of this paper is interdisciplinary, as it aims to analyze the work of sustainable fashion brands within the industry and the communication strategies that these firms use when publicizing their products, production processes, or materials used. Therefore, it has been decided to apply a mixed research methodology, which is increasingly used because it allows for a greater understanding of the phenomena studied [28], facilitates the approach to a problem from different perspectives, and generates and verifies theories of the same identification [29]. Investigations using multiple methods have been shown to have a greater impact than those using only one method [30]. The method used in this research is based on a series of previous studies that employed comparative content analysis of qualitative and quantitative indicators [31–35], as well as in-depth interviews [36,37] with professionals and experts in fashion and digital communication, with the aim of contrasting their opinions with the results of the study. Both processes comprise a scientific basis that will allow for the verification of the hypotheses and the evaluation of the objectives of the study.

Phase I: Content analysis

The first phase (P1) of this research compares the qualitative and quantitative indicators of the content produced by five sustainable fashion brands: YosoLOVEamor, LIFEGIST, ECOALF, Alohas, and ECOOLOGY. These firms have a common denominator in that they are all characterized by basing their business projects on social and environmental responsibility. Therefore, the content analysis will focus on the profiles of these brands on the Instagram social network, due to its relevance in topics related to fashion [38], as well as in the communication strategies used to publicize their products and their impact on the digital universe.

Based on the selection of the sample to be studied, various basic criteria are established that fashion brands must meet in order to be analyzed in this research. In this sense, firms must have sustainability certificates, use sustainable materials when making their garments, and use their social networks as communication tools when informing about the sustainability of their products. The fashion brands chosen for the content analysis are:

1. YosoLOVEamor: a Spanish brand that defines itself as label-less, sustainable, and made with organic cotton material. All their garments are made in Spain, respecting the environment, with information about the materials they are made of, and a GOTS certification. Additionally, the suppliers this brand works with have OEKO-TEX certification, ensuring that the fabric of the product is safe from chemicals.

2. LIFEGIST: a Spanish firm founded in 2013 with the intention of creating ecological and contemporary fashion. The materials used by this brand to make its garments include organic wool, elastane, organic cotton, hemp, bamboo, milk fiber, micro Modal®, silkmere, and cashmere. This brand's website includes a section dedicated to sustainability, descriptions of the materials used in their garments, and a detailed list of the certificates they possess, such as GOTS.

3. ECOALF: a brand founded in 2009 with a clear commitment to the environment, the planet, and people. This brand is highly recognized worldwide and stands out for its innovative projects linked to caring for the environment, such as Upcycling the Oceans, BECAUSE THERE IS NO PLANET B, or the #zeronet2030 movement. It should be noted that this firm has several sections on its website dedicated to sustainability, as well as information on CO_2 emissions or the water saved when making of the

garment, as well as the materials or certificates that the garment has. It is the first fashion brand in Spain to obtain the B Corp certificate, as well as many others. In addition, it uses sustainable products such as recycled nylon, recycled bottles, recycled cotton, 0-microplastic fabric, recycled polyester, recycled wool, post-consumer coffee grounds, and recycled tires to make their garments.

4. Alohas: a Spanish fashion and footwear firm founded in Hawaii in 2015, whose business model is based on purchasing on demand, avoiding overproduction, and promoting responsible purchasing. Sustainability and local production are two fundamental features of its identity. In fact, during a purchase, the customer can donate money to various environmental causes, such as the regeneration of native forests and renewable energy projects. All the suppliers the firm works with are Leather Working Group certified, and all products are made with sustainable skins, using low-impact dyeing and causing less pollution.

5. ECOOLOGY: a brand that was born in 2010 and is defined as fashion and ecology in the same garment. This company uses natural, ecological, and recycled fabrics such as organic cotton, bamboo, linen, or tencel. In addition, it has several certificates, such as B-COME, FAIR WEAR FOUNDATION, GOTS, and OEKO-TEX. On its website, this brand has a section dedicated to sustainability—a collection called Upcycling, which is created from textile waste to make limited-edition pieces. In some products, they also provide the details of the materials used.

Regarding the timeframe, the objective is to carry out a six-month comparative study (Table 1) (December 2021 to May 2022) of the various publications of these five brands on the Instagram social network in order to understand their strategies, how they shape their stories, and what results and impact they generate with their communication on social networks. The program chosen for data processing was IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 25. The reliability of the intercoders was calculated using Scott's Pi formula, reaching an error level of 0.99.

Table 1. Data sheet.

Brand Name	IG Count	Followers
YosoLOVEamor	@yosoloveamor	56,300
LIFEGIST	@lifegistfashion	1560
ECOALF	@ecoalf	22.1000
Alohas	@alohas	98.5000
ECOOLOGY	@ecoology	4161

Source: Own elaboration.

Standardized observation is used to recover the content published during the sample period, collecting the data manually and consulting one by one the publications that comprise the study sample, focusing on the previously detailed items in the quantitative-qualitative analysis coding sheet designed to measure and compare actions and levels of influence of the brands under study. Based on the selected variables, the number of followers, number of publications, frequency, theme of the posts, level of response, and hashtags used, among others, are studied. In this sense, the coding manual was applied initially to a random sample of 10% to confirm the adequacy of the different variables and responses. Table 2 shows the variables and methods that were used to analyze the intended brands:

Table 2. Variables and methods.

Brands and IG Count	Methods	Variables
YosoLOVEoamor (@yosoloveoamor) ECOOLOGY (@Ecoology) LIFEGIST (@lifegistfashion) Alohas (@alohas) ECOALF (@ecoalf)	Quantitative analysis	Number of followers Number of posts Type of influencer (macroinfluencer or microinfluencer) Frequency Metrics (comments and views) Type of post (photo, Reel or IGTV)
	Qualitative analysis	Topic of posts Most viewed video Theme Hashtags Level of engagement

Source: Own elaboration.

Phase 2: Interviews

Attending to the second phase (P2), a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews are carried out with various experts related to fashion, marketing, social networks, advertising campaigns, and sustainability. In this way, it will be possible to obtain a close, personal, and direct view of the opinions of these professionals, as well as their perspective on sustainable fashion, the communication strategies used within slow fashion, and corporate social responsibility. When selecting the professionals, two basic criteria are established: the first is that the profile of the interviewees is that of a professional in the fashion sector, and the second is that these personalities are involved in issues of corporate social responsibility (CSR) or sustainability. Once these criteria have been established and after contacting several profiles, the chosen experts are listed in Table 3:

Table 3. Names and positions of the interviewees.

	Name	Position
I1	Paloma del Soto	Creator of the sustainable brand An&Be
I2	Javier Luna	Fashion designer of the brand Javier Luna Mexico
I3	Eva Sánchez Amboage	Professor (Universidad de Coruña, Spain)
I4	Aitor Salinas Esquiroz	Fashion journalist
I5	Alfredo Álvarez Zaballos	Beauty Marketing Specialist
I6	Daniel Rabaneda	Fashion designer
I7	Ernesto Naranjo	Fashion designer
I8	David Alarcón Castejón	Content editor and head of advertising and specialized projects for METAL Magazine
I9	Concha Madero	Fashion entrepreneur and professor (Universidad de Sevilla, Spain)
I10	Eduardo Rodríguez	Fashion designer

Source: Own elaboration.

In this way, the analysis of the interviews is carried out using the theory founded by [39], who affirms that the theory must emerge from the discourse. After the interviews, the transcription of the audio and text is obtained as a primary document. Subsequently, these texts are coded with the aim of cataloging the themes that correspond to the answers of the interview [40].

To obtain a comprehensive and holistic response, the same interview, organized into four blocks, is applied to the 10 profiles:

1.　Sustainable fashion: introductory block with basic questions about sustainable fashion, the characteristics associated with a slow fashion brand, or the possibility of slow fashion as a temporary option, among others.

2. Sustainable fashion at a business level: this point delves into the possible problems of sustainable brands, the relationship of these firms with influencers, or the competition of these brands with large firms.
3. Slow fashion and communication: ask how these brands should communicate, the power of social networks, and the strategies of slow fashion firms.
4. Corporate social responsibility (CSR): the different processes of incorporating CSR into a fashion department are studied, as well as the customer–consumer assessment of CSR in a fashion brand.

4. Results

4.1. Phase 1: Content Analysis

The analysis of the 655 posts published over 6 months by the five sustainable fashion brands under study allows us to understand the communication strategies used by these firms, the stories they shared, and the impact generated on the Instagram social network. In addition, the participation of influencers in making their products known, as well as the visual elements used and the periodicity of the digital publications of these brands, is also explored. Considering the data provided by the sample, one of the most notable aspects is the difference between the volumes of monthly publications of some brands compared to the low number of posts of others (Figure 1). In this sense, some of the firms did not generate any content on Instagram in certain months, such as ECOOLOGY in January. On the contrary, the Alohas brand has a totally different social media strategy, publishing more than one daily post and being the brand with the most social media content, with a total of 213 posts.
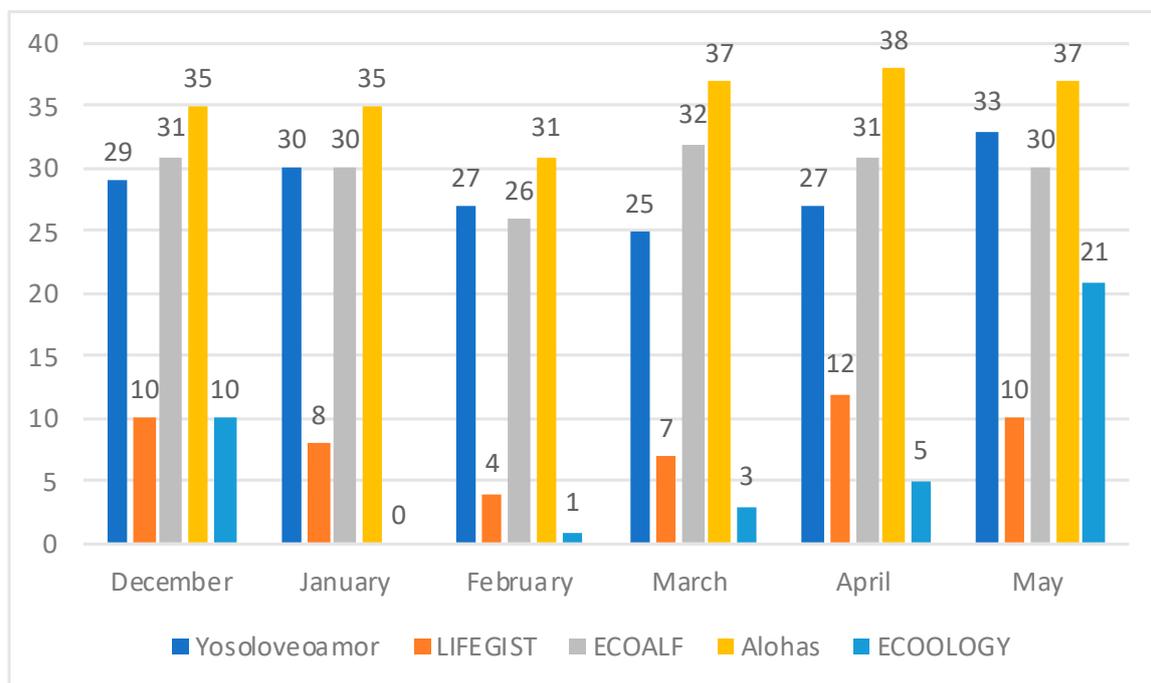

Figure 1. Monthly posts. Source: Own elaboration.

On the other hand, the brands ECOALF, with a total of 180 posts, and YosoLOVEamor, with 171 entries, resort to a more leisurely strategy, with an almost daily frequency in their Instagram posts. Compared to them, it is observed that the LIFEGIST brand produces little content, with 51 posts, and so does ECOOLOGY, which has only 40 posts. In relation to the latter, it should be noted that it presents an uneven periodicity, publishing 10 of them in December, a key month in the Christmas campaign, and 21 May, a time related to the first summer sales. In this line, taking into account the total number of publications per month, it can be seen that May is the month with the most posts, registering a total of 131,

coinciding with the spring/summer campaign. On the contrary, February is the month with the least content, which may be related to the fact that it is in that month when the sales end (advertised and promoted during January) and customers spend less money, waiting for the new collections oriented to spring and summer moments.

In short, it should be noted that the sustainable brand with the highest number of publications during the sample was Alohas, with 32.51%, followed by ECOALF (27.48%) and YosoLOVEamor (26.10%). At the opposite extreme are LIFEGIST (7.78%) and ECOOLOGY, with only 40 publications, equating to 6.10%. These data (Figure 2) show that the five fashion brands follow totally different strategies when it comes to their social media content. In this way, the data confirm that some of the brands are committed to the Instagram platform as a key means of promotion, distribution, and contact with their customers, while others do not end up decisively resorting to this social network.
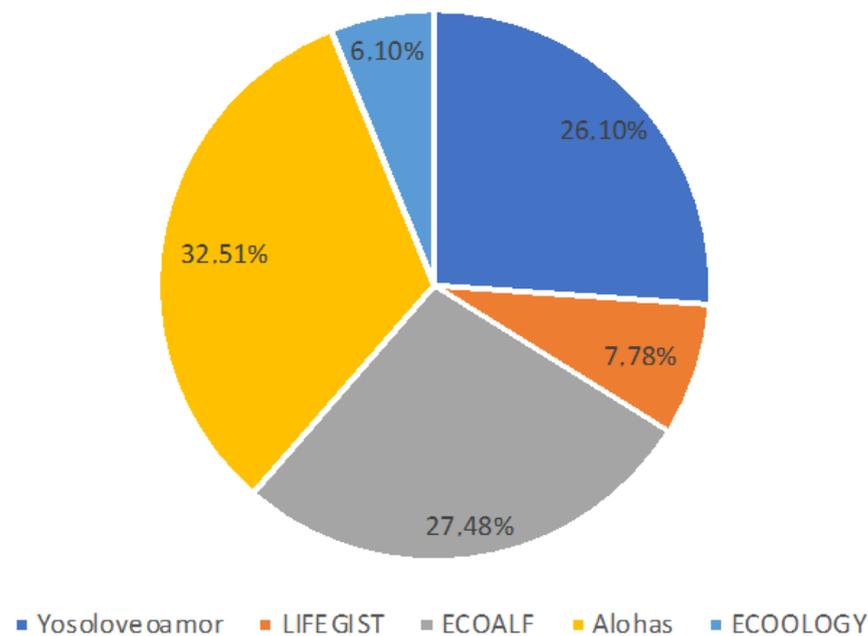

Figure 2. Total percentage of publications. Source: Own elaboration.

Linking these data with the number of followers of the brands, the figures suggest that the two brands with the highest number of followers, Alohas (985 K) and ECOOLOGY (221 K), follow completely different communication strategies. The first of these firms decides to offer its followers consistent and regular content over time, uploading more than one photo a day. In this sense, despite having a large, consolidated audience on this platform, the Alohas team does not hesitate to keep their followers informed, providing new content almost every day. With this strategy, it seeks to remind its customers of its products' characteristics, what offers exist, its business vision, and the materials they use, and they also delve into sustainability as a fundamental pillar of their work. On the contrary, ECOOLOGY resorts to a different strategy, since it has a loyal audience that likely invests in the brand on a regular basis, without the need for a communication strategy as incisive and consistent as the competition. In addition, it can also resort to other informative, commercial, or communication channels.

Going deeper into the characteristics that determine the online discourse of the selected sustainable fashion brands, it is worth knowing the audiovisual resources used by these firms to spread their products on Instagram. Thus, we must take into account that this social network allows you to upload both images and videos when creating new content. In this way, sustainable fashion brands (Figure 3) have a clear tendency to use photographs (69.32%), as opposed to videos (30.68%). This fact shows that the image is the visual element with the greatest weight within the social networks of these brands, a decision that may be related to the economic nature of this static visual resource. It must be borne in mind that

the vast majority of these firms are small companies, with very small teams, tight budgets, and oriented, for the most part, to the production and distribution of the garments they design; thus, the money allocated for communication strategies or the creation of content for social networks is very limited. In this sense, it is much cheaper to take a photo than a video because it requires more time and a larger production process. In fact, in various publications, it can be seen that designers often take photos or pose with their creations, which also helps reduce costs.
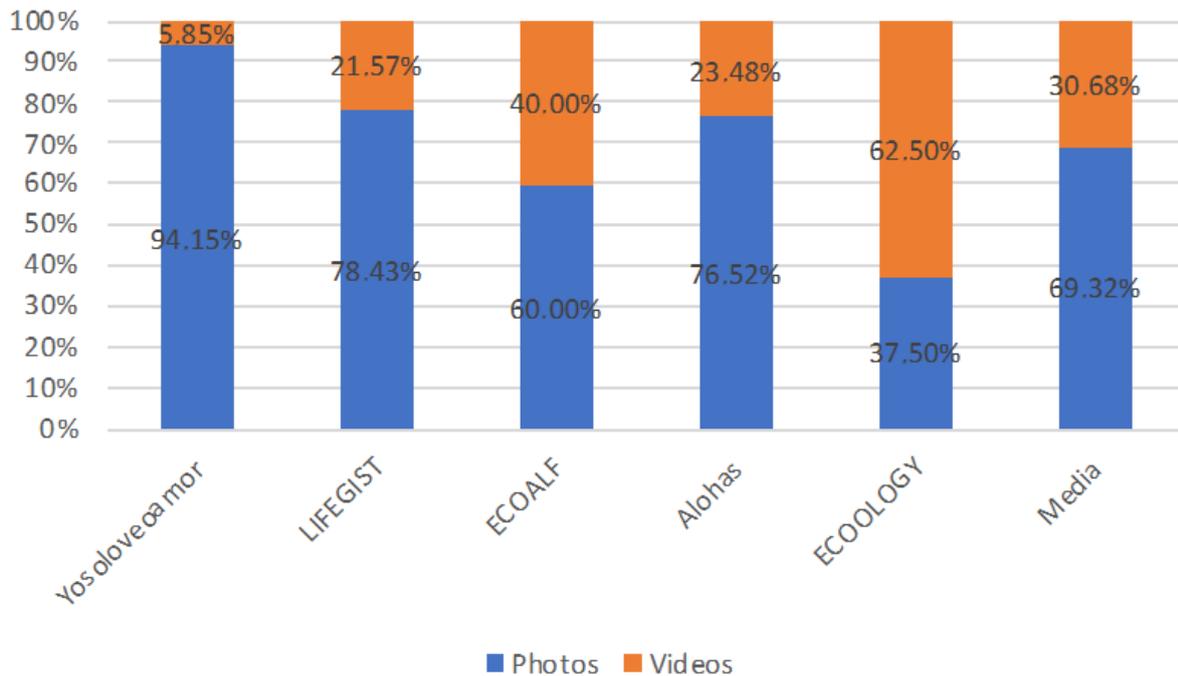
Figure 3. Use of audiovisual on Instagram. Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the volume of videos and photographs used by each brand, it should be noted that 94.14% of the Yosoloveoamor posts are photographs, with this firm being the one that makes the greatest commitment to this visual resource. In the opposite case, the ECOOLOGY brand bets the most on video (62.50%), making it their key resource when it comes to advertising content on this social network. The rest of the firms (see Graph 3), LIFEGIST and Alohas, follow a strategy similar to that of Yosoloveoamor, where the image is the fundamental element with which to make their products known on the platform, while ECOALF moves away from this strategy; they have almost achieved a balance between the two audiovisual resources analyzed.

Considering the videos uploaded by these firms, an important fact to take into account is the audience, and specifically the monitoring and use of these audiovisual materials (see Table 4). In this sense, the number of views achieved thanks to the 168 videos published by these sustainable clothing brands exceeds 3 million visits (3,177,447). Disaggregating the data for each of the firms under study, it should be noted that the sustainable firm Alohas is the one that achieves the most visits, as its 50 videos reach almost 2 million viewers (1,865,899). However, it should also be noted that the company ECOALF has achieved over a million views (1,065,284) with its 72 videos. Regarding the average viralization of different brands, it should be noted that Alohas has the greatest impact, with 37,317 video views. However, it should be noted that the average of all brands is reduced by more than half (18,913) due to the minimal impact achieved by the company LIFEGIST (85).

Table 4. Video post views.

	YosoLOVEoamor	LIFEGIST	ECOALF	Alohas	ECOOLOGY	Total
Videos	10	11	72	50	25	168
Views	197,420	938	1,065,284	1,865,899	47,906	3,177,447
Average views/video	19,742.00	85.27	14,795.61	37,317.98	1916.24	18,913.38

Source: Own elaboration.

Continuing with this audiovisual resource, it should be noted that the 168 videos published by these brands between December and May accumulated a total of 2578 comments. In this way, it can be affirmed that the ability to generate debate on the part of these sustainable firms is very low (15) for each video (see Table 5). However, relevant divergences were detected between the companies studied. Thus, the sustainable fashion firm Alohas is, once again, the one with the greatest impact, with 1047 comments on its 50 published videos and an average of nearly 21 responses. As regards views, Alohas outperforms the firm ECOALF despite the fact that it has a greater number of videos (72), but its impact is still less, achieving only 794 comments, which represents an average of 11. However, the strategy of the firm YosoLOVEoamor should be highlighted, since it publishes a small number of videos (10), but they are very effective in generating debate (665 comments), allowing it to have a very high average rate (66.5). Finally, the reduced impact of the videos of the ECOOLOGY (2.84 media comments) and LIFEGIST (0.09) brands must be highlighted.

Table 5. Post comments.

	YosoLOVEoamor	LIFEGIST	ECOALF	Alohas	ECOOLOGY	Total
Videos	10	11	72	50	25	168
Comments	665	1	794	1047	71	2578
Average comments/video	66.50	0.09	11.03	20.94	2.84	15.35
Photos	161	40	108	163	15	487
Comments	2494	11	1465	6932	39	10,941
Average comments/photos	15.49	0.28	13.56	42.53	2.60	22.47

Source: Own elaboration.

Taking into account the comments collected from the photographs published by the five fashion brands, a total of 10,941 comments were collected in the 487 entries that used this visual resource as a claim. In this sense, it should be noted that the ability to generate debate on the network is significantly higher when photographs are used (with an average of 22.47 comments per publication) compared to videos (15.35). Breaking down the data, the firm with the largest number of images uploaded to Instagram is Alohas, which also achieves the highest number of comments, with a total of almost 7000 (6932), giving it an average of 42.53 comments per photograph published. In second place, with smaller metrics, is YosoLOVEamor, with 161 photos and a total of 2494 comments, averaging 15.49. Opposite these are once again the firms LIFEGIST and ECOOLOGY, with a very small number of published photographs (40 and 15, respectively). In addition, the fact that they have a very small number of followers translates into a few comments achieved (11 and 39) and minimal average figures (0.28 and 2.6).

Regarding the topics addressed in each publication (Figure 4), three classification criteria were established: commercial, sustainability, and others. Commercial posts are directly oriented towards the sale of products or promotions; among the publications that

address sustainability are those that talk about the sustainable materials with which the garments have been made, the protocols used in the company, the importance of caring for the environment, or the benefits of resorting to non-polluting clothing manufacturing processes. Finally, the category of "others" has also been created, a space that includes motivating phrases, announcements of new campaigns, posts with only a photo without text, and current news that companies post in their publications, among other things. The data show a balance between commercial posts (48.30%) and sustainability (42.49%), demonstrating the importance of these two issues within the digital content of brands. Thus, they combine the sales of their products with awareness of the environment when betting on natural products and the use of sustainability protocols, among others. Finally, there is another type of content that does not address either of the two topics mentioned previously. These publications, totaling 51, correspond to 9.21% of the posts studied. In these cases, these types of posts tend to focus on the commemorations of certain festivities, providing reminders, sharing inspirational phrases, or posting questions to interact with their followers.
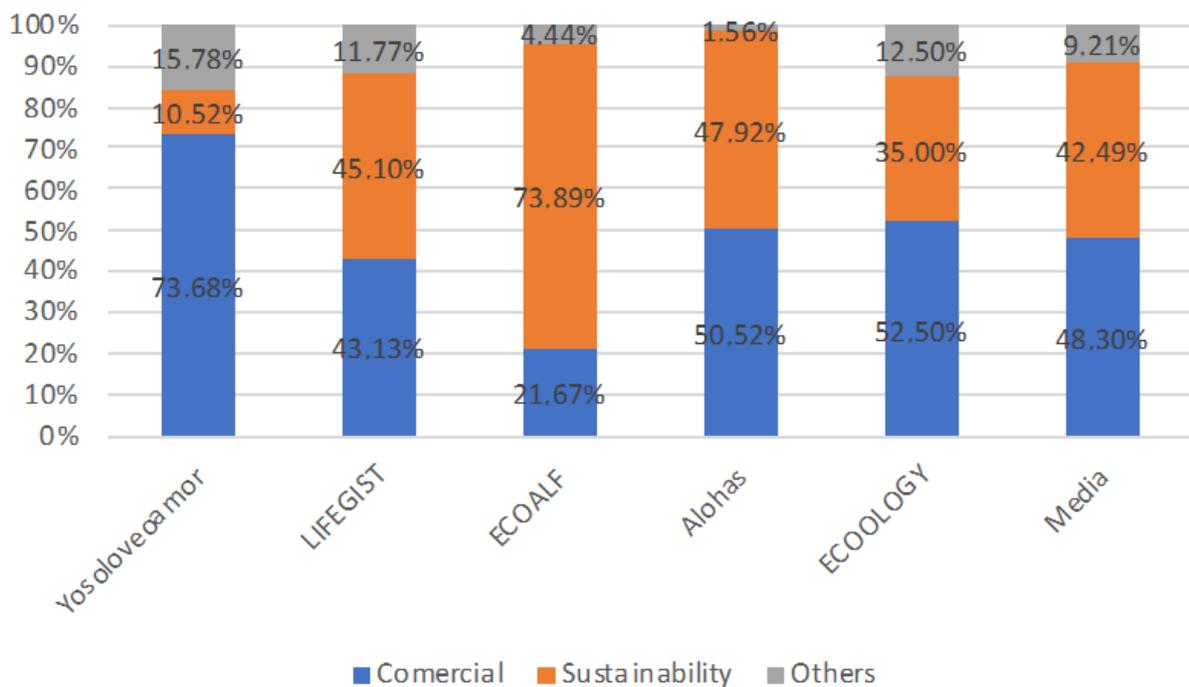
Figure 4. Topics addressed in the publications. Source: Own elaboration.

Thus, YosoLOVEamor (73.68%) is the brand that focuses the most on commercial content, followed by ECOOLOGY (52.50%) and Alohas (50.52%). Compared to these, ECOALF (21.67%) is the sustainable fashion company that publishes the least commercial content on Instagram. These metrics reflect different strategies once again, since not all brands use Instagram as a showcase to post photos of their products for viewers to purchase from their profiles. In fact, considering sustainability, a fundamental pillar of all these fashion companies, it is observed that ECOALF publishes the most posts in relation to this topic (73.89%), followed by Alohas (47.92%) and LIFEGIST (45.10%). On the contrary, the strikingly small number of entries that the YosoLOVEamor brand (10.52%) dedicates to raising awareness about sustainability, sustainable materials, or caring for the environment is striking. Finally, it should be noted that there is a type of secondary content, composed of all those publications that do not seek to raise awareness about sustainability or entice followers into purchasing a garment, and that it is more prevalent in the company YosoLOVEamor (15.78%), being residual in the rest.

Regarding the influencers used by these brands, the presence of the Boisset brothers Mikel and Alex, two young content creators with almost half a million followers between

them, should be highlighted. These influencers have worked with ECOALF, like Blanca Padilla (693 K) or Carlota Bruna (195 K). On the other hand, the firm Alohas bets on figures such as Belen Hostalet (831 K), a content creator and founder of the Manola brand, a luxury sustainable clothing firm oriented towards sports; Bárbara Inés (173 K) and Victoria Gaspeti (121 K). Finally, it should be noted that the firm YosoLOVEamor has appointed Verónica Sánchez to be responsible for the profile Oh!Mamiblue (481 K) and as founder of the YosoLOVEamor brand.

4.2. Phase 2: Interviews

All the interviewees in block 1 (Sustainable fashion: an introduction) agree that sustainable fashion is both a product and a way of thinking, and thus a way of living and consuming, as stated by I1. Although I5 states that, strictly speaking, the only sustainable fashion is that which comes from the reuse of already used garments, such as vintage, since it is the only way of not producing more and taking advantage of what has already been done. This perspective is shared by I6 and I7, who say that 100% sustainable fashion is impossible today due to the transport of materials and goods produced, as well as the production of unnecessary pieces no longer being ecological. I4 agrees with I1 that the main value associated with a slow fashion brand is quality, so that its products can last for years. I5 adds to the debate the question that this requires a higher price, which conditions the extension of brands, as price is the main value for consumers. I3 defines sustainable fashion as a new way of understanding the textile business, establishing that all companies that produce profitably and respect the environment, society, and culture are part of it. I4, I5, and I8 insist that a very important issue is respect for workers, although initially the focus is on materials. In addition, I7 points out that it is very important to produce on demand, directly and without intermediaries so that, if it is not possible for it to be sustainable fashion, at least they are sustainably produced garments.

Regarding block 2 on sustainable fashion at the business level and its relationship with the fast fashion model, almost everyone agrees (I3 or I4) that slow fashion is not an alternative to fast fashion and that both coexist because their target audiences are very different. Most people consider that, in fact, it is economically unfeasible due to the very high prices of the products (E6 and E7). Although I5 clarifies that secondhand clothing and the reduction of planned obsolescence will indeed be developing issues and that we are only at the beginning of a new sustainability trend. For I3, it remains to be seen whether sustainable fashion will gradually expand its space compared to fast fashion, although it is considered a trend that will likely continue to grow, as there is a growing interest in local production companies with environmental responsibility. I4 points out that it also remains to be seen to what extent the consumer cares about the environmental values that the brands claim to have and points out that, until now, green brands have been more of an advertising claim, not backed by real actions, so that the future of this type of fashion should be to visualize its actual impact. I5 suggests that options such as the Humana brand, a Spanish chain of secondhand clothing stores, which are not producers but spaces for the sale of old and used products, could be competitive and accessible to all people concerned about sustainability but who do not want or cannot afford slow fashion prices. However, precisely due to the high cost of these products, I5 suggests that sustainable fashion may disappear from the media spotlight in the short term due to its extremely high production costs. I6 states that the issues of transportation and waste generation are not taken into account enough, which hinders or makes sustainability impossible. I6 also points out (like I9) the great difficulties in creating an eco-brand, speaking of his own experience in purchasing fabrics, in production workshops, and with distribution partners, as a large volume of business is required.

I1 believes that sustainable fashion is causing a shift in the retail sector and that each movement should focus on following that path (for example, without using materials that are harmful to the environment or animals). I5 wonders if, for sustainable fashion to be truly possible, it is necessary (paradoxically) for the large fast fashion brands to incorporate

its philosophy to some extent, putting an end to both production and human resource practices. Thus, I6 gives the example of some premium and eco lines from Zara, Mango, or H&M, especially its COS line, although it points out that they are falsely labeled as eco because their environmental impact is enormous. In this sense, I4 agrees that it is necessary for all brands to understand the growing interest in sustainable fashion among consumers, not just the smaller ones that have already declared themselves slow. I7 says it might be possible to do something in between. However, the majority of those interviewed consider it to be very difficult to create respectful brands with a full production chain that are also profitable in such a way that they doubt their viability in the long term or on a large scale. In this regard, A4 states that one of the main problems is the need for a large initial investment to obtain an impact and be relevant. I2 also adds the need to influence design, as it is intended to sell fashion, trends, and entertainment. These types of brands cannot; nor can customers perceive them, as simply altruistic activities for the environment. This view is shared by I6, who says that there are too many very similar small brands. I2 insists that it is necessary for brands to think beyond sustainability, in creative aspects, and that they address the right public objective to achieve a good positioning of the brand, so that the sustainable part is part of the business and not its sole focus. All the interviewees on block 3 (communication) agree that it is very necessary to take care of the communicative part, as the perception of consumers is fundamental, especially when it comes to high-cost brands such as these (I3). In this sense, I5 insists that the consumption of these brands is primarily for a public with high purchasing power, so the discourse of both the brand and its communication and advertising should be directed towards them, even though it may seem that various groups can be reached on social networks. Thus, I5 considers that perhaps magazines are also an outstanding advertising space, although he thinks that for young people who are interested in sustainability through vintage, it can be reached with inexpensive online communication through social media.

Regarding this, the use of influencers in the communication of slow fashion brands is a controversial issue for the interviewees. Some of these sustainable brands have been born linked to influencers, but, for example, I5 says that brands are not relevant and that it would never associate sustainability and influencers. I7 agrees. For I1 and I3, the use of influencers can be an issue that increases the reach of a slow brand, but I1 considers that the main problem of these firms is the cost of the materials and, therefore, the price of the products, rather than their communication. A vision is shared by all those interviewed. I2 believes that this can be combatted by informing the community of followers about the manufacturing processes of the products, as the Dior brand does, for example. Headed by Maria Grazia Chiuri, they try to recover traditional craftsmanship. I4 adds that attention to process is something that the consumer values in Haute Couture and that it may be necessary to re-educate the client on the problems of the 21st century, which in this case are related to climate change. However, I5 and other interviewees emphasize that high costs make it very difficult for slow fashion to penetrate society and for them to become well-known brands.

I3 considers that good management of brand communication through social networks is essential and interesting due to the two-way communication it allows, brand loyalty, and the low cost it entails for the company. This issue of low communication costs in networks is pointed out as being very important for I6. Most interviewees point out that initiatives such as fashion films, which were very popular a few years ago, have been replaced by the quick format of an Instagram or Tik Tok post (I5, I7), so that fashion is also quick in its communication. So, a fast digital communication strategy is necessary, even if fashion is slow. However, some do consider that fashion films are interesting (I9). Everyone agrees that networks are essential for fashion brands.

Regarding CSR in fashion (Block 4), I2 states that this is very important in companies and adds that many companies are currently doing it, not out of a commitment to doing good, but because now everything can be known and it forces them to be more careful. Within different age ranges, young people under 30 tend to be more aware of the values of

a fashion brand and to talk more among themselves about the values of the firms. However, I6 states that the consumer worries and feels bad about buying fast fashion, but cannot afford an alternative. I3 thinks that fashion brands have many options to be responsible: the most common is to respect the environment, not pollute, and use sustainable materials. The local population can also be supported in production, such as the Malinalli brand or the designs of Monica Cordera. I6 emphasizes that, apart from production, due to the small size of slow fashion brands, they can be responsible for their workers, who form a kind of family. I7 insists that it considers CSR and respect for the environment to go hand in hand with the care of the workers. I1 believes that CSR is intrinsic to the essence of slow fashion, and that, in the face of the emergence of social networks, as anyone can post a bad practice by a company and thousands of people see it in a few minutes, brands tend to work more ethically. I5 states that consumers highly value CSR in brands, but that price is a factor that inhibits their consumption, an issue shared by other interviewees, such as I6, and I7 says that customers are often not properly informed.

Regarding the leading brands of slow fashion, the views of the experts show the difficulty in defining the concepts of sustainable fashion, slow fashion, and ecological or green fashion. E2 insists that slow fashion brands cannot simply be for advertising or to celebrate Earth Day, but must be linked to the creation of new materials, as Stella McCartney does, a brand that I9 also cites. At this point I3 coincides, and also I1, I9, and I10, indicating that ECOALF, the brand that produces recycled materials to clean the seas and the planet of waste, 'because there is no planet B', and manufactures with biodegradable fabrics is perhaps the leader in the sector. I4 points out another important issue: the need to think differently in this type of fashion industry. I4 states that, in general, they are brands without public recognition because they are very small, and that leadership or public recognition of multinationals is very difficult since, in general, they have productions made in a local context with very few pieces. For this reason, points out that perhaps only Palomo Spain, which produces in his town of Córdoba, has an impact, but this is due to his appearances on television and not so much to the productive dimension of his brand, in the same way that other designers who are involved with his local environment, such as the Basque Aitor Goiko or the Sevillian Ernesto Naranjo. I5 adds that knowing which brands are slow fashion or have sustainable practices is very difficult for consumers, and that their names are not known by the general public. I3, I6, and I10 say that perhaps Adolfo Domínguez, which has international projection, is a brand that is not completely slow fashion but is committed to expanding some of those ideals. I7 says that Loewe stands out for its messages in defense of craftsmanship, even if it is not slow fashion. I10 also indicates Recovo.

In short, it is observed that it is difficult for experts to unequivocally describe what is sustainable fashion and what is slow fashion (they are clear about the theory, but when naming brands, many of those mentioned are not truly sustainable), although they are concepts they believe will be important in the future for both small brands and fast fashion multinationals. On the other hand, everyone agrees that a digital advertising and information strategy on networks is necessary, which is an asset for these brands whose main problem is the cost of production and the difficulty in doing so while maintaining CSR. The issue of influencers is controversial, as most experts do not believe they are relevant to these brands. However, everyone agrees that it is necessary for slow fashion brands to be not only respectful of the environment but also of their workers, and also transparent with customers. They insist that it is necessary to educate consumers on sustainability (I10) and are concerned about greenwashing to ensure that sustainability is achieved.

5. Discussion

This paper aimed to investigate the growing impact of slow fashion brands, an issue that has been confirmed both by analyzing the Instagram posts of the selected brands and by interviewing experts. However, everyone points out that the viability of these brands is very difficult [16,17,41] in competition with low-cost fast fashion, and that is why the solution may be to introduce the discourse of sustainability into all fashion production little by

little [16,18–21]. In this sense, digital communication is confirmed as essential by allowing fashion brands to get closer to their consumers, and in the case of slow fashion brands, at a low cost also raising awareness of the environmental and CSR issue [1,2,4,9,14,15]. For now, as we have seen, brands do not have a common digital strategy, and there is a lot of room for improvement to achieve greater engagement [11–13,18,19,22,41].

On Q1 (Are influencers the primary resource for Spanish sustainable fashion brands to promote their products on social media?), we conclude that no, even though some brands have emerged this way, perhaps due to the risks these figures entail [4,11–13,41] due to the lack of control by the brands. On Q2 (What priority level do slow fashion brands give to the certification of ecological fashion and the use of sustainable materials?), we can conclude that it is high, probably because private certifications are the only real measure of what sustainability is. As in other studies, we can see a lack of education in sustainability [17,26] because the experts (phase 2) do not know properly what sustainability means. For example, the place of production does not matter, and the majority of experts point to it as being very important. Textiles are a key issue in sustainability [1,20–22,24,25,29], so the issue of certification of ecological fashion and the use of sustainable materials is logical. On Q3 (Is the engagement rate of content related to sustainability higher for slow fashion brands?), we can conclude that yes: the engagement rate of content related to sustainability is higher than the engagement rate of "fashion" content for slow fashion brands. However, brands need to improve their communication policies because there is no uniform model and a lack of continuity [3,11–13,15–17]. Moreover, because slow fashion brands or sustainable fashion brands are not non-profit organizations, they are fashion businesses and, as the interviewees pointed out, they cannot only offer 'sustainability' [2,16,17,22].

This paper demonstrates the social interest and concern for sustainability in fashion, ethics, and CSR in the industry [3,8,14–16,19–21,23,24]. It has also been proved that slow fashion brands need to have a good online strategy, since it is the future of fashion [1,2,6,8,18,20,23,24].

6. Conclusions

We believe that other papers can expand upon this study by incorporating more brands and delving into the chains of production, sale, and marketing of the brands to obtain internal data. We also believe that the field of 3D printing or self-production should be explored. Moreover, the study could be transnational, since there are already authors who have conducted similar studies in Sweden [5] and the United States [24], and it would be interesting to cross-reference these data and obtain a broader perspective. Another pending issue would be to investigate issues related to sustainability training, both for consumers [21] and brands [17], since studies [41] confirm deficiencies in sustainability training. We consider that this paper evidences the need for slow fashion brands to better understand their own business projects in order to be successful. Although some limitations of this paper are those derived from the use of Instagram, a social media network focused on the image, which prevents knowing the opinion of the users regarding slow fashion or fast fashion and which privileges the visual format. We consider it necessary to better investigate the level of engagement of brands with users and define strategies based on the interaction or response of the public. Some future lines of research, therefore, are to compare the strategies of slow fashion versus fast fashion and analyze the trend in other social media, investigate the legal framework on ethics and sustainability in fashion, expand the study to other international brands, and analyze the opinion of consumers on the advantages and disadvantages of slow fashion in the context of social networks.

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