

Consumerism and Surveillance in Fashion Media

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Abstract:

Operating in the background, algorithms play a pivotal role in determining visibility for social media users (Cotter, K., 2019). As such, these algorithms act as a regulatory mechanism that establish norms and expectations for user participation without users often being aware of their presence (Eslami et al., 2015; Rader et al., 2018).

How does this constant surveillance of 'Instagram Algorithm' administered by the app manipulates the minds of the consumers of the app and how the range of celebrities from one of the highest followed instagram celebrities in the world, Kim Kardashian, to a major fashion elite, Vogue magazine utilize this opportunity for commercial benefits to establish themselves as a Fashion Industry?

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Key themes used:-

1. Consumption and Surveillance Culture
2. Fashion as an Industry
3. Capitalism and Consumerism
4. The democratization of fashion through social media
5. Fashion and Politics

Limitations/Assumptions

Based on the research, I will be attempting to view this from a generalized perspective and acknowledge how different people consume Instagram differently. Please note that this also means the research would not consider this essay from the audience's viewpoint, but the creators point of view and from the perspective of Instagram administrators as well and audiences are just statistics for this essay as the audiences of this app are significantly large and come from different economic, geographical and personalized marketing perspectives. Comparative Analysis of particular instagram accounts is self done but also based on peer reviewed research.

Methodology

Despite improving brand strategy significantly, Instagram creators have noticed a significant portion of its content, approximately 70 percent, not consumed by users (Osman, 2017). This lack of visibility stems from the overwhelming amount of content available on the platform and the resulting saturation (Horst and Duboff, 2015). This stems unbeatable rivalry, where three main aspects can help improve the quality of the content posted. These qualities are:-Visceral Consumerism, Cultural Impact and Manipulation of the consumers mind. This paper compares using thematic analysis, the instagram accounts of mega instagram celebrity Kim Kardashian and the fashion epitome Vogue magazine considering the Aesthetic appeal of their overall instagram account, which is done by analyzing their individual instagram feeds, the cultural impact they have on their audience, and how does it affect their commercial success, which will be concluded by analyzing all these components considering *Instagram algorithm*, the prime and litigiously proven surveillance tool used by Instagram (Levinson-Waldman, R., 2017). and how it affects and manipulates the consumers brains and how every action of the consumer is surveyed throughout their interaction with the app.

Coding and Themes

To simplify analysis and comparisons, Note that some codings and themes were created to explain aspects and their consequences. Please refer to the appendix to know more about them.

Background

Consumption and Surveillance on platform Instagram

Instagram app is a platform for photo and video content that helps businesses reach consumers without the constraints of time and space.

In early 2016, Instagram announced that users' feeds would soon be "ordered to show the moments we believe you will care about the most" (Instagram, 2016) whereas in 2018, Instagram introduced a new operational framework known as the **Instagram algorithm**, which incorporates artificial intelligence by enhancing the operational efficiency of Instagram while claiming to prevent malpractices. (Agung, N.F.A. and Darma, G.S., 2019) This means the user feeds would be organized to display the most relevant content based on user preferences.

Manipulation of Democratization of Information through Social Media

Users have incorporated many strategies to signify their presence on Instagram and gain visibility which is called "gaming the system" (e.g. Brown, 2018; Gillespie, 2014; Marwick and Lewis, 2017). The phrase "gaming the system" denotes the actions of users who utilize their understanding of an algorithmic system in order to influence specific results. (Cotter, k., 2019) This suggests that engineers and platform owners, who are assumed to hold the power to predict the user interface behavior, did not predict the manipulation of it and are unaware of the circumstances and results suggesting that social media is still in its infancy, with the entire social media culture being completely an experiment, "Gaming" which was supposed to provide a foolproof blueprint for achieving specific outcomes, (Cotter, k., 2019) are not going according to the engineer's intended design and its usage, or rather manipulation has successfully deviated from those original intentions (Van der Nagel, 2018; Van Dijck, 2013).

Democratization of Fashion

Fashion revolves around *seasonal trends* that undergo significant changes every season, (Kusumasondjaja, S., 2020), driven by the ever-changing popular trends, experimentation, or need to be authentic. The mass market is constantly urged to seize these 'limited-time' opportunities in order to keep up with fashion. In an experiment carried out by Hu, Y., Manikonda, L. and Kambhampati, S., 2014, categorizing a sample of 200 photos from 1000 photos, they analyzed that the content posted by users and the number of followers do not have a direct relationship with the types of users characterized by their shared photos, they were attracted to the content by mere yet *proper* usage of user bios, hashtags, comments, and video content(reels). (Kusumasondjaja, S., 2020)

Dedicated fans have always held a keen interest in the private lives of celebrities, and social media provides a platform for these stars to leverage this fascination by revealing personal details in public forums. (Richards, H. (2015) This is usually not peer reviewed, personal experience based, and mostly ignorant. This can and has led to many spread outs of misinformation. Moreover, influencers, because they hold power over mobs, have the ability to seduce them towards hazardous and at times violent routes but this is usually not observed in the fashion spectrum.

Accounts

The official accounts of fashion elites Kim Kardashian and Vogue Magazine were used for this analysis. This is because they both cover the widest range of fashion elites possible, with Kim being one of the most famous personalities on Instagram and Vogue magazine being the most influential and important magazines in the fashion industry, with its opinions still being valid.

Comparative Analysis

Overall outlook

Kim Kardashian

@kimkardashian

Kim Kardashian boasts a total of 356 million followers around the Instagram platform.

Screen to images Proportion: Her feed follows a very predictable pattern of 9 posts per week, with her post following the algorithm of 4:2:2:1 in every 9 posts. In every 12 posts, 9 of them follow a theme, or are a response to an event, and other three can be considered as fillers to fill between the themes.

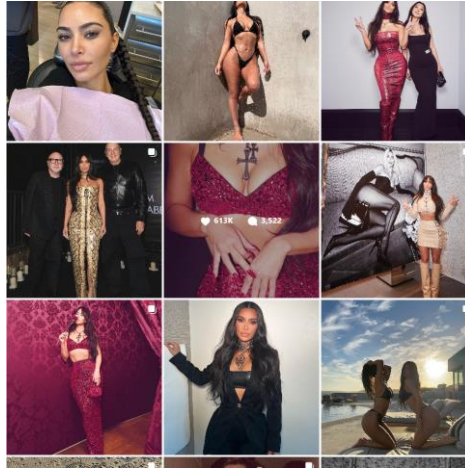
Thematic Approach: Her profile can be categorized into 4 main themes that are Brand endorsements, occasion based photographs, Personal photographs and political stance. The proportion of 4:2:2:1 is how her posts are divided, with the category of most number of posts, that is 4, sets the theme of the week, which can be from the ongoing main event like the Met-Gala, a new launch of her brand line, endorsement posts for her own fashion brands or endorsing other brands like Dolce & Gabbana.

2 of them are two occasion-based posts like a friend's birthday which are not to be confused with 2 personal posts that are usually her childhood posts or posts of her children. Occasion based posts show her present life and personal posts give an outlook towards her own personality.

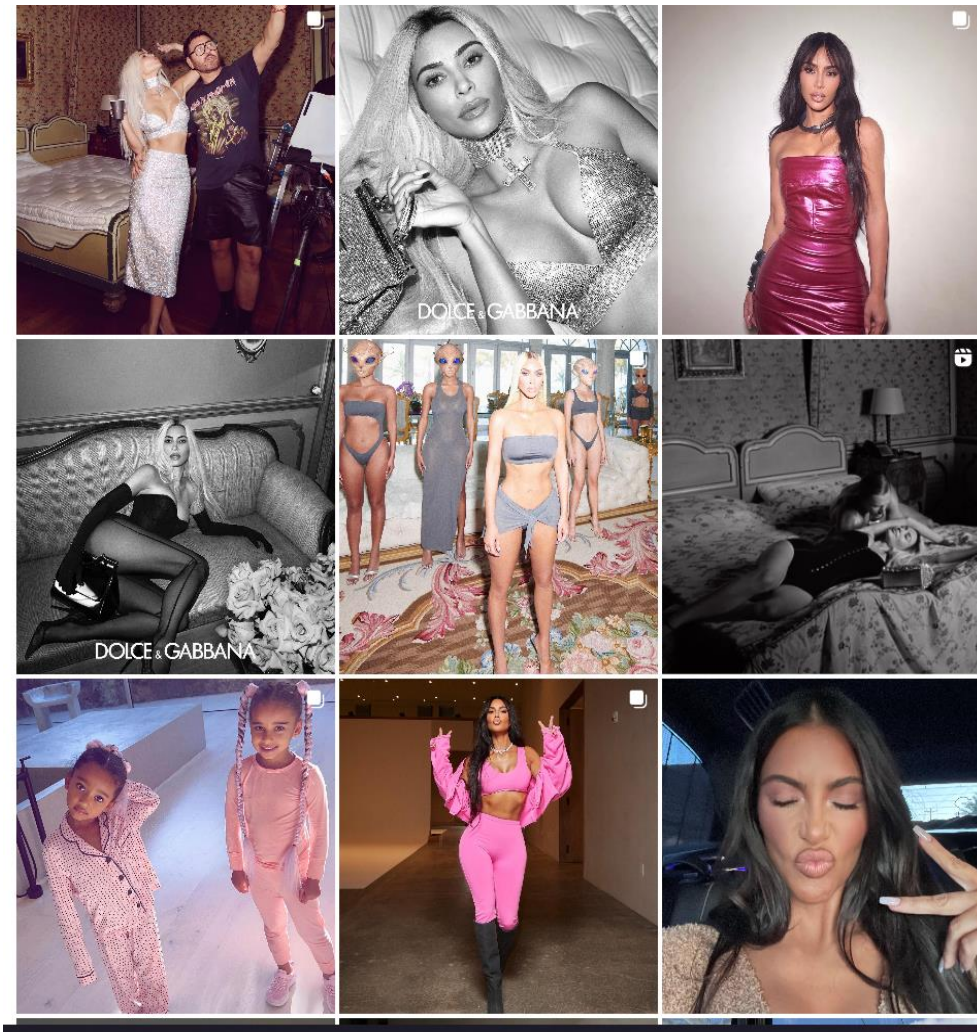
The remaining 1 other personal photo that usually is intended to break the theme or randomize it.

Kim and politics: Her political posts are usually uploaded on her story, which usually is either a commentary on women empowerment or on unjust criminal offenses, which can be considered as an endorsement for her law degree.

Her stories follow the same thematic expression but to a higher degree, with more posts posted per day on her stories. This is the pattern that her PR team is predicted to follow. (Information deduced from her official Instagram page).



As you can see above, 4 posts are from the event with Dolce & Gabbana, two personal outfit showcasing posts (Bottom-center, and rightmost picture in second row, 2 endorsement posts of Skims (Centre pic in top corner and right-most picture in bottom row and one selfie post to break the pattern, (Top left-most post.) Here are more examples.



Vogue magazine

@voguemagazine

Vogue magazine, One of the most prestigious fashion magazines around, has about 45 million followers around the Instagram platform.

Thematic approach: Vogue magazine is renowned for its influential presence in the fashion and lifestyle industry. Its Instagram post pattern is just like any other information journal. It's completely random with each post portraying the crème-de-la-crème of the celebrities, highest honored allocates, biggest events of the season and one can still rely on vogue magazine Instagram account for all the news of the entertainment forum and fashion. Vogue magazine's strategy is to go for the biggest happenings around the world and use controversial captions as the cherry on the top. They aim to create relevance with absolutely contrasting images.

Screen to images Proportion: The themes might be random, but the posting algorithm is very consistent. The proportional division of Vogue page is 5:3:2:2:1 with 5 images usually going with the most trending option of the season, 3 of personal interviews, conversations and events carried out by Vogue itself, like the 73 question segment, 2 images of the ongoing *fashion* event, as it is a fashion magazine afterall, 2 of international political events like Prince Charles coronation with a clever caption added to it, which can be seen as a strategy to remain relevant as scandalous opinions fly throughout instagram, and remaining 1 image is commentary on a celebrity, which is totally random. This shows high range of outworld influence like which company is paying Vogue to publicize them.

Visceral projection of the accounts

Kim's aesthetic style is what most influencers follow, heavily air-brushed pictures with great camera quality and enhancement level brightened. This has officially become the Instagram style of most of the users. It also has an ongoing color theme of shades of beige, bronze, white and pink with occasional particular colors that are based on her outfit and the occasion like the met gala. She tends to post high-quality photos that are carefully curated, displaying her personal style, fashion choices, and glamorous lifestyle. Her account showcases extraordinary editing techniques, creating a cohesive and visually impossible to achieve feed.

Vogue's Instagram account primarily focuses on sharing visually captivating content related to fashion, beauty, celebrity culture, and lifestyle trends. They often feature high-quality photographs, editorials, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and exclusive interviews with prominent figures in the fashion industry. They curate their feed with a sophisticated and polished look, often using vibrant colors, instagram-flattering compositions, and elegant typography. This cohesive visual identity helps to establish brand recognition and reinforces Vogue's position as a leading authority in the fashion industry.

Cultural Influence

In an age defined by brand cultures, the concept of fame hierarchy has become an influential and monetary factor. Influencers, in particular, set themselves apart from traditional media and celebrities by embodying an air of authenticity but it is the Fashion elites who not only tend to maintain distance and foster hierarchical relationships with their fans, but also set major fashion trends that are copied by influencers. (Abidin, 2015). (*Information deduced from research available in Appendix*)

This multi-layered hierarchical distribution has led to creating multi-faceted influence where the information is borrowed and passed to the lower hierarchy. So the biggest consumers of Kim Kardashian

and Vogue are not normal ordinary people, but multi-millionaire influencers and social media entrepreneurs that are followed by the rest. This lured a huge population of social media users into participating in the act of imitation when the elites keep controlling this huge part of the population by their actions and the followers completely lose their authenticity. Sometimes this imitation is not even ethical.

Capitalism in Fashion through social media considering Kim Kardashian

The combination of influencer credibility and brand credibility influences consumer's perceptions of promotional posts. (Susanna Lee & Eunice Kim (2020) and influencer promotions encourage consumers to critically evaluate the advertising message, especially when they have a hierarchy that is so deep within. Kim Kardashian adopts a strategy that capitalizes on the effectiveness of sex appeal advertising to capture the attention of countless viewers (Setiawan, A.R., 2020). By embodying a figure to aspire to, Kim Kardashian suggests that her stereotypical hourglass figure and sensuality can serve as a powerful marketing tool, enhancing the sale of the products she promotes through her captivating presence, alluring demeanor, and sexual allure (Poorani, 2012, p. 10). Notably, the immediate success of Kim's business ventures, as evidenced by the enthusiastic response from viewers on the very first day of product releases, further attests to the effectiveness of emphasizing her inner desires and sexual allure. (Setiawan, A.R., 2020.) These positive and fervent reactions from viewers bolster the rationale behind Kim Kardashian's ongoing need to meticulously control and monitor her seductive persona, encompassing deliberate wardrobe choices and enticing gestures. Consequently, **this normalization process inadvertently confines her body within a metaphorical prison system caged to a *panoptic gaze*, where constant surveillance and regulation persist.**

Fashion as an industry and involvement of politics considering Vogue

Consumers' reactions to luxe brand's on Instagram is influenced by the visual aesthetics employed. (Kusumasondjaja, S., 2020) Vogue perfectly aims to administer it. Luxury brands like Vogue were known for a more avante-garde, chic, extraordinary approach to fashion, which allowed them to give a glimpse of high society back in the 60s. But classical texts and approach get less noticed by algorithm, meaning the fame of Vogue was depleting so they started using the Instagram Flattering approach to get the fame needed, eventually losing its authenticity.

Vogue magazine is known for its political commentaries. But its distribution of information is significantly manipulated in order to suit the cultural restrictions of the country its published. (Alexandersson, E. and Matlak, R., 2017.) The presentation of content in different editions of Vogue, published in countries such as the UK, France, and Russia, exhibits distinct disparities. Notably, disparities arise in the interpretation of femininity and masculinity, as well as in the portrayal of gender and sexuality (Kopnina 2007). However, there has been a lack of extensive exploration into how various publishing countries present content to their readers. This remarks high adulteration and manipulation of information to gather engagement.

Conclusion

The study has determined how Instagram Algorithm has a panoptic gaze on all of its users and also access to their information that they use to manipulate the content consumers receive. Further, Kim Kardashian, THE fashion elite who has established herself as a major fashion industry, has utilized all necessary

algorithm requirements mentioned in the essay and by projecting herself as a sexual object for capitalistic results, has led to making the world believe that her hyper real life (Setiawan, A.R., 2020) is the true definition of extravaganza, whereas she has little to no commentary on true political stance despite being a law student. Vogue magazine uses Instagram algorithm to adulterate the information distribution on the political stance and because of the requirements of the new generation has changed its own avant-garde motif to fit and improve engagement.

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Appendix

Codings and Themes

1. **Screen to Images proportion** :- scroll, creating one 'output theme' that sets the tone of the essence of the account shown. This predicts patterns, understand the intention of the user and its effect on the consumer.



The image showcases the 12 block sets a theme that will be used for visceral comparison. And images comparison is done in this proportion.

1. Influencers, Micro-celebrities and Traditional celebrities, all will be termed under the word **users** unlike stated otherwise.
2. Celebrities are denoted by first name to control word count.
3. Term **Instagram flattering** is used to denote aesthetic managements like using a square grid and incorporating the usage of hashtags, attractive user bio and captions.

Theory

Algorithms play an important role in our daily lifestyle and routines as we depend on them to perform most of the tasks (Willson, 2017). Once an algorithm has categorized its user, and understood their behavioral patterns, desires and ways of consuming Instagram, this pattern recognition can be utilized to determine which information or products should be presented to that user.

In practice, when *engineers operationalize concepts* (pp. Cotter, k., 2019) and then arrange and rearrange all the content available on Instagram according to the users likes and dislikes, calling it "meaningful interactions" (Zuckerberg, 2018) into algorithms, they basically assume the users requirements for them, taking away the users rights for capitalizing their brand. This can impose specific values, meanings, and relationships onto the objects and celebrities with whom we interact (Willson, 2017), which are usually fed to the consumers by fashion influencers, ongoing trends and Large scale endorsements that are paid for by the companies to their desired celebrities . Consequently, as algorithms reason, synthesize, and act on our behalf, they generate social relationships (Kitchin and Dodge, 2011) and shape our social realities (Cheney Lipold, 2011) therefore, manipulating our future requirements.

History of Instagram

Her stories follow the same thematic expression but to a higher degree, with more posts posted per day on her stories.

Participation within the realm of social media offered a level playing field and equal opportunities to all users, like a fresh start, encouraging active Engagement. Different forms of user engagement can be observed in the realm of digital participation, ranging from the active distribution of content generated by others, known as user generated content (UGC), to the production of original content by the user, referred to as user created content (UCC). (Hinton 2013).

The rise of Instagram and its focus on interactive forms of engagement brought numerous noteworthy consequences for the examination of media and society on a wider scale, which weren't necessarily positive. Infancy of social media provided the normal consumers with a taste of EBP, Experimentation build Popularity, (term coined by author for the sake of this essay and will be used throughout the essay) amongst their peers broadening the range of their social admirers, which was just done to gain popularity among their peers or connect with long lost friends, but it can be marked in the history of social media as the beginning of cultivation of the most successful experimentation in the social media culture that had ever been seen in the fashion spectrum, giving birth to social media personalities turned millionaires.

Digital Influencers

Digital marketing strategies have improved advertising in the business industry by yielding results up to 78% of the overall impact. (Agung, N.F.A. and Darma, G.S., 2019) whereas a study conducted by Ansar Surya Pranaka in 2017, titled "The Influence of Instagram Social Media on Competitive Advantage." suggested that Instagram accounted for a 74% impact on competitive advantage.

Digital influencers are a type of micro-celebrity (Senft, 2008). Influencers have made it their business to understand the algorithms that govern visibility on social media as a means of growing their follower-base.

Influencer marketing revolves around on the idea that influencers can impact their followers' beliefs and practices so long as they can captivate and maintain their attention (Hearn, 2010; Hearn and Schoenhoff, 2015).

Instagram Algorithm

However, similar to other platform owners, Instagram provides limited information about the inner workings and architectural aspects of its algorithm. Typically operating in the background, algorithms play a pivotal role in determining visibility for social media users. As such, these algorithms act as regulatory mechanisms that establish norms and expectations for user participation without users often being aware of their presence (Eslami et al., 2015; Rader et al., 2018).

In particular, algorithmic ranking plays a crucial role in determining the visibility of individuals and content on social media platforms. By defining the criteria for visibility, algorithms function as disciplinary tools that prescribe the norms and guidelines for user engagement.

The influence of algorithms on user behavior has its limits. Influencers' understanding and interpretation of Instagram's algorithmic architecture and the broader concept of visibility in the platform are shaped by their own perspectives, extending beyond the rules dictated by the algorithms themselves.

To illustrate this point, I will discuss two prevalent interpretations among influencers regarding Instagram's algorithms and the visibility game. These interpretations reflect how influencers perceive their influence as being constructed either through genuine relationship building or through the simulation of such relationships. These perspectives arise from influencers' assimilation of information about Instagram's algorithms and their existing discussions within influencer communities about authenticity and entrepreneurship. Ultimately, these interpretations shape the strategies influencers employ to increase their visibility. By shifting the focus to the visibility game instead of individual narratives of "gaming the system," we highlight the interdependence between users, algorithms, and platform owners. This emphasizes that algorithms play a role in structuring user behavior but do not unilaterally determine it.

Similar to the notion of authenticity, contemporary brand culture promotes a prevailing logic of entrepreneurialism, wherein the idea that "everyone is entrepreneurial" is deeply ingrained (Banet-Weiser, 2012: 217). Social media platforms offer a means for individuals to receive feedback on their entrepreneurial endeavors through engagement metrics such as "likes," comments, and followers. These metrics also contribute to the level of visibility one can attain on these platforms (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Hearn, 2010).

Brand posts that employ expressive aesthetic images garner a higher number of likes and comments on Instagram in comparison to those featuring classical, unmanaged aesthetics. Similarly, brand video content receives more engagement in the form of likes and comments when compared to static content. There is a noticeable interaction between visual aesthetics and presentation mode in terms of increasing likes and comments and encouraging user-viewer engagement. Brand content that embraces instagram-flattering aesthetics and utilizes audio-visual modalities are known to generate greater responses particularly when presented in an audio-visual format. (Kusumasondjaja, S., 2020.) This shows the usage of the algorithm and how it is supposed to function.

Level of relatability

Kim Kardashian's Instagram account portrays extravagance, high end fashion and expensive cars. It unapologetically projects an hierarchical aura of the celebrity. Vogue publishes itself as a luxurious magazine for normal readers with more blended hierarchical boundaries.

Conclusion

Contrary to the above mentioned statement, the audience can also perceive the essays as a statement on how Kim Kardashian has improved the quality of social media by setting up trends to promote body positivity. She has also further set up strong goals and achieved it in the entrepreneurial space and proved to be an efficient mother and a modern successful woman utilizing social media to its fullest. Also Vogue magazine can be said to be adoptive of change and embracing freshness regardless the reason and is therefore broadening its spectrum of readers.