Micro-Influencers as Agents of Gendered Branding: A Study of Jewelry Marketing in Lebanon under SDG 5

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how female Lebanese micro-influencers are redefining jewelry marketing by shifting from celebrity endorsements to more accessible, community-driven campaigns on Instagram. Using the cases of Lynyer, Joanna Dahdah Fine Jewellery, and MBLSHD, the research highlights how women influencers contribute to sustainable branding practices by fostering authenticity, trust, and inclusive consumer engagement. Anchored in Emotional Branding, Parasocial Interaction, and Social Proof theories, the analysis emphasizes the gendered dimension of influence, showing how women leverage personal narratives and peer connections to humanize jewelry and integrate it into everyday life. Findings reveal that female micro-influencers not only democratize jewelry marketing but also align with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth), as they enable female entrepreneurship, reshape luxury consumption, and build long-term, trust-based relationships with consumers. This positions women not merely as endorsers but as cultural actors driving both market accessibility and social change.

Keywords: Female Micro-Influencers, Jewelry Marketing, Emotional Branding, Parasocial Interaction, Social Proof, Gender Equality (SDG 5), Sustainable Branding

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore how Lebanese jewelry brands collaborate with female micro-influencers on Instagram to shift consumer perceptions from aspirational luxury to accessible, everyday identity. By applying the theories of Emotional Branding, Parasocial Interaction, and Social Proof, the research investigates how women influencers humanize brands through storytelling, authenticity, and peer validation. Beyond marketing outcomes, the study emphasizes the gendered dimension of influence, highlighting how these practices align with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by amplifying women's roles in digital entrepreneurship and sustainable branding.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing strategies are increasingly shaped by cultural shifts, consumer expectations, and the global call for inclusivity. In recent years, the jewelry industry—traditionally associated with exclusivity and elite consumption—has undergone a transformation in how it communicates with audiences. Rather than relying on celebrity endorsements, which project aspiration and unattainability, many local Lebanese jewelry brands are turning toward micro-influencers, particularly women, whose presence on social media feels authentic, relatable, and grounded in everyday life. Female micro-influencers connect with audiences through personal storytelling and interactive engagement, allowing followers to see jewelry not as distant luxury, but as part of their own identities and lifestyles.

This shift is not only commercial but also social. Female micro-influencers are positioned as active agents of gendered branding, reshaping the symbolic value of jewelry and making it more accessible across demographic and psychographic categories. By humanizing brand identity and aligning products with values of authenticity, realism, and community, they contribute to a new form of sustainable consumer culture—one that aligns with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Lebanese brands such as Lynyer, Joanna Dahdah Fine Jewellery, and MBLSHD (Embellished) exemplify this transition by strategically collaborating with female micro-influencers to target younger audiences and cultivate trust-based, long-term brand loyalty.

This study examines how these collaborations operate within the theoretical frameworks of Emotional Branding, Parasocial Interaction, and Social Proof, while also emphasizing the gendered role of micro-influencers as cultural actors who democratize jewelry marketing in Lebanon.

Research Question

How do emotional branding, parasocial interaction, and social proof explain the success of female micro-influencer collaborations in jewelry marketing, and how do these collaborations advance inclusive branding practices aligned with gender equality and sustainable growth?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rise of micro-influencers has transformed branding strategies across industries, offering new ways to build trust and cultivate loyalty. In her Forbes article "Micro-Influencer Power: Building Brand Trust and Driving Conversions", Bryanne DeGoede (2023) demonstrates how influencers with modest followings—between 10,000 and 100,000—can exert significant impact on consumer purchasing behavior. Through consistent interaction, micro-influencers foster authentic connections that audiences perceive as trustworthy and relatable. This trust, often cemented through comments and personalized exchanges, encourages consumers to follow product recommendations and increases brand conversions. Importantly, DeGoede also stresses that these collaborations are cost-effective, allowing small businesses to engage multiple influencers within different market segments. From a gendered perspective, this dynamic is particularly relevant to women influencers, who often rely on relational communication styles to cultivate long-term audience bonds, positioning themselves as credible, relatable advisors. This approach aligns with SDG 5, as it amplifies women's voices in entrepreneurial ecosystems and validates their role as cultural intermediaries in consumer markets.

Complementing this, Robert Woo (2024), in "The Future of Jewelry in Retail: Authenticity Over Luxury", emphasizes a generational shift in preferences toward everyday jewelry over occasional luxury pieces. Campaigns such as Zales' "Love Real" illustrate how consumers value authenticity and personalization in branding. Woo further highlights the rising demand for sustainably sourced materials and transparent manufacturing processes—an expectation particularly strong among Gen Z. Jewelry brands adopting eco-friendly practices such as recycled materials and fair labor not only win market share but also secure long-term loyalty. When applied to female micro-influencers, this resonates deeply: their content often weaves narratives of ethical consumption and empowerment, bridging sustainability with personal storytelling. This integration connects jewelry branding with both SDG 5 (empowering women as industry voices) and SDG 8 (supporting sustainable, equitable economic practices).

The foundation for such consumer-brand relationships is found in Marc Gobé's (2001) seminal work, "Emotional Branding: The New Paradigm for Connecting Brands to People". Gobé argues that emotions, rather than functions such as price or quality, drive enduring brand loyalty. He conceptualizes branding as a relationship based on love, nostalgia, empathy, and sensory appeal. Jewelry, as an intimate and symbolic product, becomes especially suited to this paradigm. Female micro-influencers often harness emotional branding by integrating jewelry into their personal narratives—presenting it not merely as a product but as an extension of self-expression, cultural identity, and lifestyle. This personalization enables audiences, particularly women, to emotionally align with both the influencer and the brand, thereby humanizing the brand and reinforcing consumer loyalty.

The theory of parasocial interaction provides further insight into the appeal of micro-influencers. Originally articulated by Horton and Wohl (1956), parasocial interaction describes one-sided relationships where audiences perceive intimacy with media figures. On platforms like Instagram, this manifests as followers feeling as though they "know" influencers personally, despite the lack of true reciprocity. Female influencers, in particular, often cultivate these bonds through authenticity, vulnerability, and continuous digital presence. Their personas function as conversational partners, fostering trust that directly shapes consumer decisions. In this sense, parasocial interaction not only sustains brand visibility but also empowers women to shape aspirational yet attainable consumer identities.

Finally, Robert Cialdini's (1984) principle of social proof sheds light on the collective dynamics of consumer persuasion. When individuals are uncertain, they look to the behaviors of others as guidance, particularly through

visible engagement on social media. Likes, comments, and shares provide validation that reinforces consumer choices. Female micro-influencers amplify this mechanism by positioning themselves within communities of trust and relatability, where peer validation carries particular weight. While social proof can be subject to manipulation, women influencers often counteract skepticism by grounding their endorsements in lived experience and transparent communication. In doing so, they not only strengthen brand credibility but also contribute to the democratization of luxury markets, making jewelry accessible to broader audiences.

Taken together, these perspectives establish a theoretical foundation for understanding the role of female micro-influencers in jewelry marketing. Emotional branding, parasocial interaction, and social proof intersect with gendered modes of communication, sustainability imperatives, and inclusive consumer practices. This literature underscores how women's influence in digital branding extends beyond mere marketing tactics, positioning them as cultural agents advancing SDG-aligned forms of brand engagement.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on three interconnected theories—Emotional Branding, Parasocial Interaction, and Social Proof—to understand how local jewelry brands in Lebanon strategically collaborate with female micro-influencers on Instagram. Rather than relying on celebrity endorsements, these brands reframe jewelry from an aspirational luxury into an accessible part of everyday life. When examined through a gendered lens, these theories illuminate how women influencers act as cultural mediators, shaping both consumer behavior and broader perceptions of jewelry marketing.

Emotional Branding, as articulated by Gobé (2001), emphasizes the role of emotions, sensory appeal, and storytelling in building long-term consumer-brand relationships. For female micro-influencers, this goes beyond simply showcasing jewelry. Their personal narratives—intertwining jewelry with lifestyle, identity, and even empowerment—humanize brands and create emotional resonance. Small jewelry brands leverage these tactics by prioritizing authenticity and lived experiences over exclusivity, thus aligning their branding with the everyday realities of young female audiences.

Parasocial Interaction Theory, introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956), helps explain how followers form one-sided emotional bonds with influencers who feel like trusted companions. On Instagram, female micro-influencers nurture this illusion of intimacy by consistently sharing personal stories, engaging in two-way dialogue, and maintaining a visible presence. For consumers, this sense of closeness translates into solidarity and trust, which significantly influences purchasing behavior. This gendered dimension is important: women influencers often cultivate bonds through empathy, relatability, and everyday authenticity, creating a deeper form of engagement than celebrity figures typically achieve.

Social Proof, as defined by Cialdini (1984), refers to the psychological process where individuals look to others' behavior when making decisions under uncertainty. In the context of jewelry marketing, visible likes, comments, and shares signal authenticity and reliability. Female micro-influencers, who are embedded in communities of trust, amplify this effect by endorsing products in ways that feel organic and relatable to their demographic. Their recommendations serve as social authentication, persuading followers that the jewelry is both desirable and attainable.

Together, these theories provide a powerful framework for understanding the psychological shift in jewelry marketing. By blending emotional branding, parasocial interaction, and social proof, female micro-influencers are not only driving brand accessibility but also aligning with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by amplifying women's entrepreneurial voices and SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth) by promoting sustainable, community-driven growth.
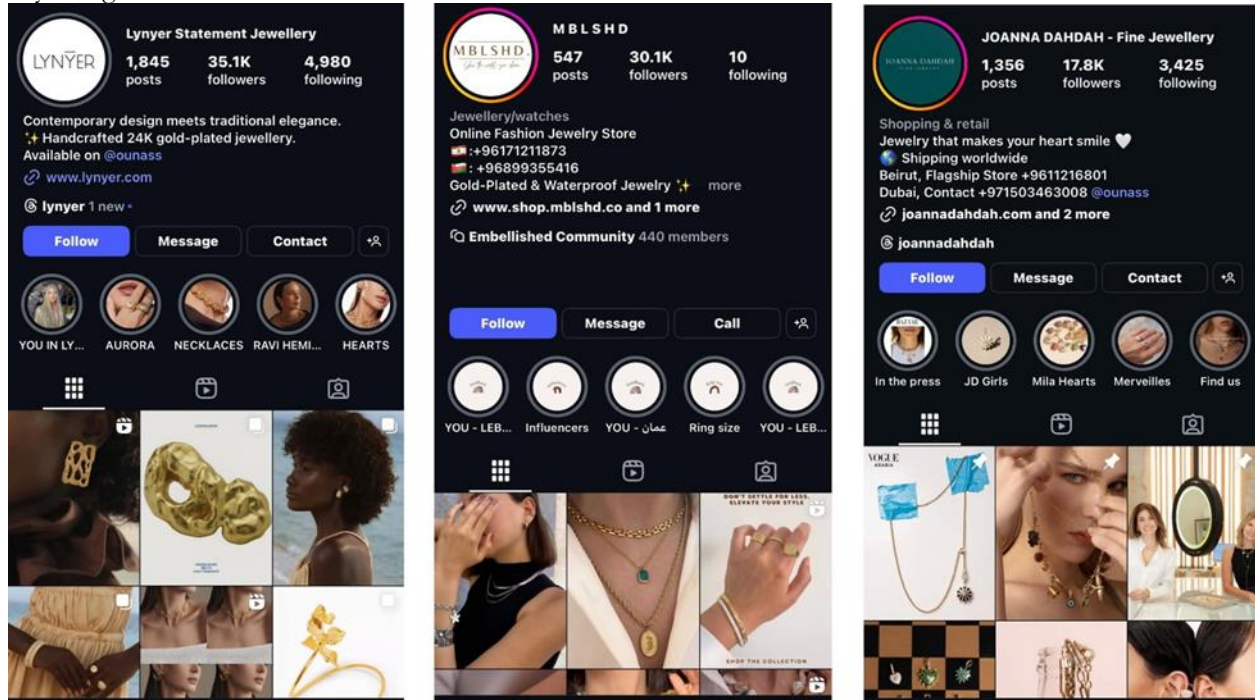
METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach to examine how Lebanese jewelry brands—Lynyer, Joanna Dahdah Fine Jewellery, and MBLSHD (Embellished)—leverage female micro-influencers on Instagram. Social media, particularly Instagram, serves as a cultural space where individuals actively seek inspiration, identity, and satisfaction through visual storytelling. By focusing on micro-influencers rather than celebrities, these brands reposition jewelry within the everyday lives of consumers, making it more accessible and relatable.

The analysis centers on Instagram posts, engagement metrics (views, likes, comments, shares), and the narrative strategies employed by influencers. These data points are interpreted through the lens of Emotional Branding, Parasocial Interaction Theory, and Social Proof, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how women influencers humanize brand identity and foster consumer trust. By framing the methodology around gendered practices of influence, this study situates jewelry marketing within a broader conversation about inclusivity, sustainable branding, and the advancement of gender equality in digital spaces.
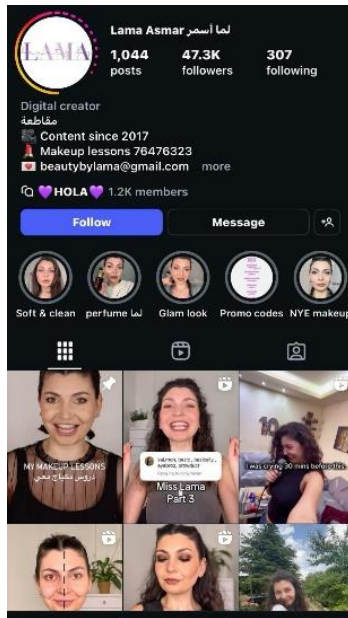
ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this case study is to examine how three local Lebanese jewelry brands—Lynyer, Joanna Dahdah Fine Jewellery, and MBLSHD (Embellished)—collaborate with female micro-influencers to reposition jewelry marketing. Instead of projecting aspiration and exclusivity, these brands use micro-influencer strategies to make jewelry feel wearable, attainable, and emotionally relevant. Each brand aligns with the theoretical pillars of emotional branding, parasocial interaction, and social proof, while simultaneously foregrounding gendered storytelling that humanizes their brand identities.

For Lynyer, emotional branding emerges as a central strategy. The brand consistently reposts collaborations with female micro-influencers, creating Instagram highlights where consumers can revisit and engage with content. For example, influencer @nirvana.abdul integrated Lynyer pieces into her cultural-inspired fashion reels while directly engaging followers through polls and comment replies. These small but powerful interactions build a sense of trust and relatability. By showcasing young women, brides, and mothers as their central figures, Lynyer positions jewelry as part of life's milestones and everyday joys. This reflects emotional branding through storytelling and aligns with SDG 5 by celebrating women's voices and perspectives in shaping brand narratives. Joanna Dahdah Fine Jewellery uses a slightly different approach, one that resonates strongly with parasocial interaction theory. By gifting jewelry to influencers such as @leasfeir, who celebrated Valentine's Day with a heartfelt caption— "Celebrating love today and everyday with @joannadahdah ❤️🌹"—the brand encourages consumers to see jewelry as a personal and emotional expression. The consistent use of female micro-influencers fosters intimacy and authenticity, as audiences feel part of the influencer's story. Joanna Dahdah's strategy exemplifies how parasocial bonds can elevate a brand's cultural relevance, transforming jewelry into a symbol of love, family, and identity rather than mere ornamentation. In doing so, the brand highlights female empowerment and inclusivity, connecting personal storytelling with broader community values.

MBLSHD (Embellished) represents a more direct use of social proof. By focusing on affordable, everyday gold-plated jewelry, the brand collaborates with micro-influencers like @tanyaaasif, whose posts receive high engagement within hours.

With over 1,000 views and active comment exchanges, Tanya's interaction validates the brand's credibility and quality. The visibility of this peer approval directly supports Cialdini's principle of social proof, as consumers are reassured by seeing others engage positively with the brand. Similarly, collaborations with influencers like Lama Asmar (47.3K followers) amplify the brand's reach, securing thousands of likes and reinforcing trust. MBLSHD demonstrates how social proof, grounded in women's voices and experiences, can democratize jewelry consumption and align with SDG 8 by supporting small-scale entrepreneurship and inclusive market participation.

Taken together, these findings reveal that micro-influencer strategies in Lebanese jewelry are not merely tactical choices but cultural practices that humanize brands, empower women, and redefine luxury. By weaving authenticity, storytelling, and social validation, these brands bridge the gap between aspiration and accessibility while contributing to socially sustainable forms of marketing.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights how local Lebanese jewelry brands leverage female micro-influencers to reshape consumer perceptions, moving from aspirational celebrity-driven branding to accessible, community-driven engagement. Through emotional branding, parasocial interaction, and social proof, influencers humanize jewelry and create lasting consumer-brand relationships built on trust and relatability.

Importantly, the analysis underscores that female micro-influencers are not only marketing tools but also cultural actors. By sharing personal stories, fostering digital intimacy, and mobilizing peer validation, they democratize jewelry marketing and amplify women's roles in shaping consumer culture. In doing so, these practices align with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by elevating women's entrepreneurial and creative voices, and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by supporting small businesses and sustainable brand growth.

The implications extend beyond small brands. If established luxury houses increasingly adopt micro-influencer strategies—as hinted by collaborations like Zoughaib & Co.'s with influencer Nathalie Nasrallah—the industry may witness a more inclusive future where women's voices lead cultural change. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that micro-influencers offer not just a marketing advantage but a pathway toward gendered empowerment, authenticity, and socially sustainable branding in Lebanon's jewelry industry.

Originality and Value

This study contributes originality by shifting the focus of jewelry marketing research from celebrity endorsement and generic influencer strategies to the gendered role of female micro-influencers in Lebanon. By integrating Emotional Branding, Parasocial Interaction, and Social Proof theories with the global framework of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), it demonstrates how women influencers are not only shaping consumer perceptions but also advancing inclusive entrepreneurship and sustainable branding practices. The study's value lies in positioning female voices as cultural actors who democratize luxury and redefine authenticity in the digital marketplace.

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