Gender stereotypes and social networks: consumption of influencer-generated content among pre-adolescents and adolescents

Estereotipos de género y redes sociales: consumo de contenido generado por influencers entre los preadolescentes y adolescentes

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Abstract:

Internalization of gender stereotypes begins as early as adolescence and preadolescence. Among all the factors involved in their adoption and assimilation, social networks and influencers currently stand out. Given that minors start consuming social network content at a very early age, influencers have become role models for them. Therefore, this research aims to examine the preferences and behaviors of minors on social networks regarding their favorite influencers and to detect to what extent they might reinforce pre-existing gender stereotypes. To this end, a survey (confidence level <95% and ±3.5% sampling error) has been carried out on 800 Spanish minors between 8 and 16 years of age and regular consumers of content generated by influencers. The results showed that boys and girls tend to follow influencers with different profiles, devote unequal amounts of time to this activity, and show preferences for different social networks and different types of content. These results lead to the conclusion that there is a generalized tendency to reproduce behaviors and preferences associated with traditional stereotypes about the male and female genders.

Keywords:

Gender; influencers; minors, social media; stereotypes.

Resumen:

La interiorización de los estereotipos de género comienza en una etapa tan temprana como la preadolescencia y la adolescencia. Las redes sociales y los influencers destacan entre todos los factores involucrados en su adopción y asimilación. Dado que los menores comienzan a consumir contenido en redes sociales muy pequeños, los influencers se han convertido en modelos de referencia para ellos. La presente investigación tiene por objetivo examinar las preferencias y comportamientos de los menores en redes sociales respecto a sus influencers favoritos y detectar hasta qué punto pueden reforzar los estereotipos de género preexistentes. Con este objetivo, se ha llevado a cabo un cuestionario (nivel de confianza <95% y error muestral +-3,5%) entre 800 menores españoles de 8 a 16 años, consumidores habituales de contenido creado por influencers. Los resultados de la encuesta muestran que los niños y adolescentes tienden a seguir influencers con diferentes perfiles, dedican una cantidad de tiempo desigual a esta actividad y muestran preferencias por diferentes redes sociales y tipos de contenidos. Estos resultaron conducen a la conclusión de que hay una tendencia generalizada a reproducir comportamientos y preferencias asociadas con los estereotipos tradicionales masculino y femenino.

Palabras clave:

Género, influencers, menores, redes sociales, estereotipos.

1. Introduction

Gender stereotypes not only describe typical differences between men and women but also prescribe what men and women should be and how they should behave in different life domains (Ellemers, 2018). Gender stereotypes have an impact on how men and women define themselves and are treated by others because they influence how people pay attention to, interpret, and recall information about themselves and other individuals. Therefore, by encouraging people to treat men and women differently, stereotypes help to create and maintain these distinctions (Solbes-Canales *et al.*, 2020).

Children develop stereotypes about gender and internalize the traditional gender roles that prevail in society from an early age (Jackson, 2007). Consequently, their academic achievement, their view of their own talents (regardless of their actual abilities), and their personal, vocational, and professional aspirations may all be significantly impacted by this internalization (Kollmayer *et al.*, 2018).

The interiorization of these stereotypes takes place through different factors, among which social interaction (Lieper & Friedman, 2007) and the media (Gallagher, 2013; Gauntlett, 2008; Ward & Grower, 2020) stand out. Today, the relationship of preadolescents, adolescents and young people with the media have been transformed by social networks that integrate characteristics of the media and social interaction at the same time (Rideout *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, these social networks constitute an important scenario where they begin to configure their identity, including their gender identity. It is in this context where the figure of the new influencers (content creators in social networks who are admired and considered as prescribers and referents by their followers) emerges as agents of special interest (Pérez-Torres, *et al.*, 2018).

Thus, even though the influencers' relationship with their younger followers has been studied mainly from the point of view of commercial impact (e.g., De Veirman *et al.*; 2019; Feijoo & Sádaba, 2021) or regarding their influence on different consumption habits (Falzone *et al.*, 2017; Smit *et al.*, 2020), recent research has begun to pay attention to how the relationship with their favorite influencers can be a relevant channel through which gender roles and stereotypes are perpetuated and transmitted (Arias -Rodriguez & Sánchez-Bello, 2022; Castillo-Abdul *et al.*, 2020). However, although it is relevant to study how the contents created by these new communicators might reproduce gender stereotypes, it is equally necessary to understand the way in which minors relate to and consume such content according to their gender and age.

Some previous research (e.g., García *et al.*, 2021; Serrate-González *et al.*, 2023) have examined the behavior of adolescents with respect to social networks in general but, to our knowledge, there hasn't been any research that focuses on their preferences with respect to content generated specifically by their favorite influencers. In addition, most research has examined the behavior of adolescents and young adults (Oberst *et al.*, 2016a), but those that have focused on earlier stages, such as pre-adolescence, are almost nonexistent. This aspect is particularly relevant since, as the most recent data indicate, the age of onset in the use of mobile devices and social networks in Spain has advanced even before nine years old (ONTSI, 2022). In this sense, the main objective of this research is to explore the habits and behaviors of preadolescents and adolescents regarding their favorite influencers to examine whether they show differences in expressing their preferences for different influencer profiles and content depending on their gender and age.

1.1. Gender identity, media and social networks

Gender stereotypes can be defined as beliefs about specific features, physical characteristics, role behaviors, and occupations that distinguish how men and women are (descriptive beliefs) or should be (prescriptive or proscriptive beliefs) (Leaper, 2015). For example, men are thought to exhibit more assertiveness and performance, whilst women are thought to exhibit greater communality and friendliness. In addition, men and women usually work in different professions and assume different caretaking roles (Ellemers, 2018).

Gender stereotypes, which are internalized from a very early stage of life (Leaper, 2015), can have socializing implications for children's development. For example, while toys "for girls" promote nurturing behavior, toys "for boys" emphasize the practice of spatial skills and mental rotation (Wong & VanderLaan, 2020). As a result, male stereotypes may prevent boys from playing with toys that encourage their nurturing traits and help them develop their sociocognitive skills, increasing the likelihood that they will experience emotional maladjustment in the future (Jones *et al.*, 2015). Likewise, girls tend to perceive themselves as less competent in science-related fields (OECD, 2020), which may lead them not to pursue careers in scientific and technical fields.

The messages that young children receive about the importance of activities and behaviors that are appropriate for each gender come from various socialization agents such as family members, peers and, in modern societies, the media (Ward & Grower, 2020). Specifically, the media continuously present a collection of images about men and women that, as previous literature shows, has an impact on the identities of younger viewers (Kumari & Joshi, 2015). Television (Zayer *et al.*; 2012), advertising (Eisend, 2019; Cárdaba *et al.*, 2022), and video games (Melzer, 2018) transmit stereotypes about how men and women seem to behave and how, especially, younger audiences accept referents and absorb them through the mechanisms of imitation and reinforcement, thus forging the foundations of their future identities (Leaper, 2015).

Currently, the shaping of gender self-concept cannot be fully understood without addressing the relationship of young people with new information technologies (Popa & Gavriliu, 2015) since they have become essential elements in their leisure activities and individualization and socialization practices (INJUVE, 2021).

Thus, although some studies (Faulkner *et al*, 2007) indicate that there is a persistent "gender gap" in terms of fewer women working in ICT, regarding the frequency of use of the internet and social networks, data indicate that among Spanish young people there is not properly speaking a "gender gap", something that occurs in other age groups (INE, 2021; Siddiq & Scherer, 2019; Cai *et al.*, 2017). In the case of all Spanish minors between 10 and 15 years of age, it can be said that the use of the internet and social networks is universalized as 98% of children use it on a regular basis (ONTSI, 2022).

However, men and women interact differently with these new technologies and their motivations tend to be different (Quazi *et al.*, 2022; Tifferet, 2020). For example, while men's use is mainly leisure oriented or has a pragmatic purpose, women tend to use them to connect and socialize, tending to express more emotions and reveal more personal information (Bond, 2009; Haferkamp, *et al.* 2012). Also, women tend to show more concern regarding safety than men (Tifferet, 2019) and adolescents tend to perceive different risks on the internet depending on their gender (Steinfeld, 2022).

Although these new technologies are transforming the way in which gender roles are represented, dealt with and transmitted, at the same time research suggests that they reproduce stereotypical practices and images (e.g., Gurrieri & Drenten, 2019). For example, Choi *et al.* (2018) found that in many cases, gender stereotypes were replicated by parents on Instagram posting pictures of their kids doing gender-typical things (girls were portrayed in fashion/creative/educational roles and boys were portrayed in athletic/playful roles) and dressed in gender-typical ways (the most common color of clothing for girls was pink and the most common color for boys was blue). In this same vein, previous research has revealed that male and female Instagram users' selfies not only reflect traditional gender stereotypes but are even more stereotypical than magazine adverts

(Döring *et al.*, 2016). In addition, women who incorporate and exaggerate gender displays in their selfies tend to receive more positive feedback from their followers (Butkowski *et al.*, 2020).

However, regarding adolescent behavior, Oberst *et al.*, (2016a) found that while adolescents are aware of conventional stereotypes, they perceive themselves in a less stereotypical and more sexually undifferentiated way, both in their self-perception and in the way they present themselves in a social network, than when they perform the same exercise with respect to an adult of the same gender. But the extensive visibility and exposure of these networks generate an environment of high public surveillance that often translates into young people, especially females, attempting to not deviate from gender norms and reproducing pre-established practices and roles (Bailey, *et al.*, 2013; Oberst *et al.*, 2016b).

1.2. Influencers and their socializing role in pre-adolescence and adolescence networks

As a consequence of the dual role of consumer and content generator that social network users can adopt, new actors have emerged who professionalize their actions and exert influence on other individuals, thus becoming referents, prescribers, and opinion leaders (Vrontis *et al.*, 2021).

One of the factors that help to explain the capacity of influence of these figures can be found in the asymmetrical bond that followers develop with respect to their influencers over time and that has received the term, *parasocial relationship* (Liebers & Schramm, 2019). Influencers share many aspects of their personal lives (friends, hobbies, activities, leisure, work, etc.) creating a sense of friendship between them and their followers. Moreover, as Lou (2022) points out, unlike traditional media, it is even possible to speak of a *trans-parasocial relationship* since these new channels do allow a two-way relationship when the influencer can have, when he/she so chooses, a personal and individualized interaction with their followers.

Given that at present the consumption of social networks begins in many cases in pre-adolescence, these minors (or *tweens*) are also exposed to social media influencers. Moreover, as they are in a phase of identity and personality formation, their position is even more vulnerable (Hoek *et al.*, 2020). The fact that many successful influencers are themselves young –and some underage– facilitates the emergence of admiration and identification on the part of their followers, thus becoming role models (Aran-Ramspott, *et al.*, 2018). For all these reasons, beyond their commercial and social impact, increased attention is beginning to focus on the role that influencers have in the development and construction of their followers' identities (Pérez-Torres *et al.*, 2018), including gender (Martínez & Olsson, 2019). However, more research is needed on how minors' networking behavior and the type of content and referents they follow influence their gender socialization process.

Thus, recent investigations have begun to explore whether top influencers may be reflecting gender stereotypes through their behaviour or conveying ideas that consciously or unconsciously perpetuate them. In this sense, different content analyses have revealed that many influencers still transmit stereotypical ideas about beauty, for example (Arias-Rodriguez & Sánchez-Bello, 2022). Similarly, Castillo-Abdul *et al.*, (2020), found that, among the top kid influencers, the content and the activities typically performed by male youtubers (such as gameplay) were significantly different from those performed by female youtubers (e.g., lifestyle and fashion).

However, while it is important to explore how these new communicators' contents may reinforce gender stereotypes, it is also important to understand how minors relate to and consume such content according to their gender and age. therefore, more

research is needed on how minors' networking behaviour and the type of content and referents they follow might influence their gender socialization process.

2. Objectives

The main objective of the present work is to examine the preferences and behaviors that adolescents and preadolescents have on social networks regarding their favorite influencers and the type of content they consume to identify possible relevant factors that may play a role in the process of socialization of their gender identities. In this way, the aim here is to determine whether new practices related to gender expression are carried out in the networks or whether, on the contrary, habits that perpetuate most widespread stereotypes about masculinity and femininity are reproduced.

Specifically, our research aims to answer the following questions:

1. Do tweens and teens show preferences for male or female influencers based on their own sex?

2. Are there differences, depending on the sex, among tweens and teens with respect to the time they spend following and consuming content created by their favorite influencers?

3. Are there differences, depending on the sex, among tweens and teens in the type of favorite influencer content they consume most frequently?

4. Are there differences, depending on the sex, among teens and tweens in terms of the type of social network in which they follow their favorite influencers most frequently?

5. Are there differences, depending on the sex, minors with respect to their desire to become influencers themselves?

6. Do these possible sex differences vary according to age (pre-adolescence vs. adolescence)?

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and procedure

To answer to the investigation questions and the achievement of the objectives, a survey was carried out, as a quantitative technique that allows the researchers to obtain information from a population sample through a standardized questionnaire (Corbetta, 2023). The design of this questionnaire had in account the categories of types of contents in social media previously used in some other research projects (Feijoo & Sádaba, 2021; García *et al.*, 2021).

To be exact, 800 minors aged 8 to 16 years (Mean age = 12.33, *SD* = 2.38) participated voluntarily in a survey (Corbetta, 2023). In exchange for a financial reward, they had to fill in an online self-administered questionnaire with the CAWI system (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing), prepared by a market research and surveys company. Questions were asked to get information (sex, age, autonomous community of residence) so that it can help to stablish socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. Quotas were set by sex and age: 200 boys aged 8 to 12 years, 200 girls aged 8 to 12 years, 200 boys aged 13 to 16 years, and 200

girls aged 13 to 16 years. The sampling error was ± 3.52% with a confidence level of 95.5%. The participants were selected from the 17 Spanish autonomous communities.

All participating minors had the consent of their parents and only those who had previously confirmed that they regularly followed influencers were selected. The survey was divided into two parts, one for parents/guardians and one for minors. Once the part for the parents was completed, they were instructed that it was their children who should answer the survey autonomously and independently, although they had permission to assist the minors in case, they had any questions.

3.2. Instruments and measures

Time spent consuming influencer content on social networks: To estimate the time that children spend consuming content generated by their favorite influencers, we asked both children and parents to independently reflect their own estimates. Specifically, parents reported the time they considered their son/daughter spent following influencers on weekends, on the one hand, and on school days, on the other. Response options included 1 (no time), 2 (0-30 minutes), 3 (30-60 minutes), 4 (60 min-2 hours), 5 (2-3 hours), 6 (3-4 hours), 7 (more than 4 hours). Each participant received a score reflecting their child's weekday ($M = 3.0$, $SD = 1.34$), weekend ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.37$) and total ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.23$) consumption time. Higher scores indicated higher consumption.

Similarly, we asked minors to make their own estimates for weekend and school days. We used the same response options as with parents and created a score reflecting their weekday ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.18$), weekend ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.34$), and total ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.15$) consumption time.

Favorite influencer: Participants identified their favorite influencer by writing their name, as well as the influencer's estimated age and gender.

Social network: Participants registered on the social network (or networks in the case of more than one) in which they most frequently followed content from their favorite influencer. The response options were: 1) YouTube; 2) Instagram; 3) TikTok; 4) Twitch; and 5) Other.

Content type: Participants recorded the types of content from their favorite influencer that they viewed most frequently. The response options were: 1) fashion and beauty tips; 2) travel restaurants, parties, and lifestyle; 3) explanations about toys, unboxing, and product testing; 4) dares and challenges; 5) jokes and humor; 6) online games and game play; 7) sports; 8) music and dancing; and 9) other.

Desire to be an influencer: Participants expressed their degree of agreement/disagreement with the statement "I would like to be an influencer" on a 7-point scale: 1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree".

4. Analysis and results

Consumption reported by parents: When parents were asked about the total consumption (weekend + daily) of their children, we found that those between 13 and 16 years of age spent more time ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.25$) than those between 8 and 12 years of age ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.18$) A parametric analysis of variance test (ANOVA) was performed to determine if there were

significant differences between the means. The result obtained was that $F(796) = 21.60$, $p < .001$. In turn, when analyzing possible differences according to their sex, the data reveal that boys spend more time ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 1.3$) than girls ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.16$) $F(796) = 3.82$, $p = .05$, although these differences diminish until they disappear in the older age group $p > .05$.

Weekend consumption: With respect to consumption on weekends and holidays, there is also greater consumption among older participants $F(796) = p < .001$, but in this case no significant differences are found between girls and boys $p = .34$.

Daily weekday consumption: When analyzing consumption time on weekdays and school days, the data provided by the parents show that, in addition to higher consumption by older participants $F(796) = 18.82$, $p < .001$, boys spend significantly more time ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .41$) than girls ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.27$) consuming content generated by their favorite influencers $F(796) = 6.94$ $p = .009$. However, the difference occurs especially among younger subjects (8 to 12) $p = .01$ while it tends to disappear with older ones (13 to 16) $p = .20$.

Consumption reported by minors: When the minors under study are asked about their total consumption (weekend + daily), the same two main effects are observed as with their parents' responses. First, the data show that older participants spend more time ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.19$) consuming content than younger ones ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.09$) $F(796) = 16.36$ $p < .001$. Second, marginally significant sex differences are also shown, with boys admitting to consuming content longer ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.2$) than girls ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.1$) $F(796) = 3.54$, $p = .06$.

Weekend consumption: As was the case with the estimate of parents, when participants reported their consumption time on weekends, the analyses showed that there were no differences according to sex $p = .27$. Likewise, there were differences by age with older participants (13 to 16 years old) showing higher consumption $F(796) = 14.08$ $p < .001$.

Daily consumption during the week: When analyzing the data provided by the minors with respect to school days, differences were again observed according to sex. Boys reported higher consumption ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.20$) than girls ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.15$) $F(796) = 5.79$ $p = .016$. Finally, when differences are analyzed according to age, these differences are mainly found among children aged 13 to 16 years, $p = .05$, but not among those aged 8 to 12 years, $p = .13$.

Favorite influencer: Even though some better-known influencers (i.e., Ibai, el Rubius, Auronpley) were named more frequently (12.9%, 12.8% and 5.1% respectively), the participants referred to a great variety and number of names (326) indicating a great diversity of profiles when identifying their favorite influencer.

Age of the influencer: Likewise, the age range of the influencers identified by the participants was very wide (from 6 to 60 years old), although the mean was 26.19 ($SD = 7.44$). In turn, the data showed that older participants (13 to 16) tended to follow older influencers as well ($M = 27.64$, $SD = 6.55$) compared to younger participants (8 to 12) ($M = 24.74$, $SD = 7.99$) $t(798) = -5.615$, $p < .001$.

Sex of the influencer: Although in general there is a greater number of male influencers (66.4%), the results showed that girls tended to a greater extent to choose a female as their preferred influencer (57.7%, compared to 42.2% who chose a boy), while boys tended to choose male influencers (91%) rather than female (9%). In the statistic test of chi-squared to show the relation among variables, it was obtained that $X^2(1) = 213.75$, $p < .001$. These preferences for influencers of the same sex were

maintained both in the segment of children aged 8 to 12 years $X^2(1) = 103.423$ $p < .001$ and in those aged 13 to 16 years $X^2(1) = 110.14$ $p < .001$.

Social network: As seen in Table 1, the most followed social network regardless of sex and age is YouTube (68.8%), followed by TikTok (39.9%) and Instagram (37.4%) practically on par, and lastly, Twitch (18.8%).

When we study which is the preferred network according to the sex of the participants, we observe that both YouTube ($X^2(1) = 16.996$, $p < .001$) and Twitch ($X^2(1) = 14.474$ $p < .001$) are primarily used by males, while Instagram is preferred by females ($X^2(1) = 3.338$, $p = .06$). TikTok, however, is the only network where the presence of both sexes is practically undifferentiated $X^2(1) = .881$, $p = .348$. Likewise, with respect to age (8-12 and 13-16), the data show that YouTube is abandoned as the user grows older while the following of the other networks, especially Twitch, increases in parallel with the age of the users.

On the other hand, when studying possible differences according to sex within each age bracket, the results show that children's preference for YouTube is found both in the 8-12 age bracket, $X^2(2) = 6.453$, $p = .011$, and in the 13-16 age bracket, $X^2(2) = 10.923$, $p = .001$. Regarding Instagram, however, the highest use by girls only occurs in the 13 to 16 age bracket $X^2(2) = 5.769$, $p = .016$ but not in the younger children (8 to 12) $X^2(2) = .13$, $p = .91$. As for Twitch, there is a greater use by boys between 8 and 12 years old, $X^2(2) = 3.676$, $p = .05$, and an even greater difference in the boy's older age bracket (13 to 16) $X^2(2) = 11.446$, $p = .001$. Finally, in the case of TikTok, no sex differences were found in either age bracket $p > .05$.

Table 1. Preferred social media

	Sex		Age		8 to 12 years		13 to 16 years	
	Boys	Girls	8-12	13-16	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
YouTube	75,5%**	62,0%	75,0%**	62,5%	80,5%*	69,5%	70,5%**	54,5%
Instagram	34,3%	40,5%†	26,8%	48,0%**	26,5%	27,0%	42,0%	54,0%*
TikTok	38,3%	41,5%	36,0%	43,8%*	32,0%	44,5%	40,0%	43,0%
Twitch	24,0%**	13,5%	13,3%	24,3%**	16,5%*	10,0%	31,5%**	17,0%

Note: † $p<.1$; *$p<.05$; **$p<.001$ Source: prepared by the author

Types of content: The most followed content regardless of gender and age, as can be seen in Table 2, are those where "jokes and humor" are the protagonists (46.8%) and those dealing with "online games and gameplay" (42.5%), followed by videos about "dares and challenges" (29.1%), "music and dancing" (27.4%) "fashion and beauty" (25.1%) and "travel, restaurants, parties and lifestyle" (21.3%). Finally, we found equal content on "toys, unboxing, and product testing" (18.3%) and "sports" (18.3%).

When analyzed for sex differences, the analyses revealed that "fashion and beauty" content $X^2(1) = 84.84$, $p < .001$, as well as "travel restaurants and lifestyle" $X^2(1) = 26.98$ $p < .001$ and "music and dance" $X^2(1) = 56.74$ $p < .001$ are followed significantly more by the female audience, while contents focused on "jokes and humor" $X^2(1) = 4.519$ $p = .034$ and especially "gameplay"

$X^2(1) = 66.476$ $p < .001$ and "sports" $X^2(1) = 34.318$ $p < .001$ were more followed by males. Finally, those based on "dares and challenges" and those focusing on "toys, unboxing, and product testing" were equally consumed by both, $p > .05$.

On the other hand, when we analyzed the possible differences in content consumption according to sex within each age group, the results revealed that girls' preferences for "fashion and beauty" content occurred both in the younger age group (8 to 12) $X^2(2) = 32.009$ $p < .001$ and in the older age group (13 to 16) $X^2(2) = 56.363$ $p < .001$. Similarly, the girls' preference for content dealing with "music and dance" was expressed both in the younger age group (8 to 12) $X^2(2) = 40.073$, $p < .001$ and in the older age group (13 to 16) $X^2(2) = 18.534$, $p < .001$. However, girls' preference for "travel, restaurants, parties and lifestyle" was present in the younger 13- to 16-year-old bracket $X^2(2) = 26.960$, $p < .001$ but such a difference was only marginal in the younger (8 to 12) bracket $X^2(2) = 3.563$, $p = .059$. In turn, the results showed a greater male preference for content about "online games and gameplay" both for younger subjects $X^2(2) = 31.818$, $p < .001$ and for older subjects $X^2(2) = 34.766$, $p < .001$. The same happened with respect to sports content; consumption was higher among boys regardless of whether they were in the younger age group $X^2(2) = 11.960$, $p = .001$ or the older age group $X^2(2) = 22.939$, $p < .001$. As for content focused on "jokes and humor", boys show marginally greater interest compared to girls in the oldest age bracket (13 to 16) $X^2(2) = 2.902$ $p = .08$, but there is no difference between boys and girls among the youngest age groups (8 to 12) $X^2(2) = 1.697$ $p = .19$. Finally, the analyses showed that the interest of both boys and girls was similar in all age groups with respect to content dealing with both "dares and challenges" and "toys, unboxing, and product testing" $p > .05$.

Table 2: Preferred Content Type

	Sex		Age		8 to 12 years		13 to 16 years	
	Boys	**Girls**	**8-12**	**13-16**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**
Fashion and beauty	11,0%	39,3%**	16,5%	33,8%**	6,0%	27,0%**	16,0%	51,5%**
Travel, restaurants, and lifestyle	13,8%	28,8% **	13,8%	28,8%**	10,5%	17,0%†	17,0%	40,5%**
Toys and unboxing	19,5%	17,0%	22,8%**	13,8%	23,0%	22,5%	16,0%	11,5%
Challenges and dares	30,5%	27,8%	27,5%	30,8%	26,0%	29,0%	35,0%	26,5%
Jokes and humor	50,5%*	43,0%	46,8%	46,8%	50,0%	43,5%	51,0%†	42,5%
Game play	56,8%**	28,3%	44,0%	41,0%	58,0%	30,0%**	55,5%**	26,5%
Sports	26,3%**	10,3%	14,0%	22,5%*	20,0%**	8,0%	32,5%**	12,5%
Music and dances	15,5%	39,3%**	28,3%	26,5%	14,0%	42,5%**	17,0%	36,0%**

Note: †$p<.1$; *$p<.05$; **$p<.001$ Source: prepared by the author

Desire to be an influencer: In this case, analyses showed that the aspiration to become an influencer was relatively high for participants overall (*M* = 5.15, *SD* = 1.66). Specifically, most of the minors surveyed (69.6%) expressed a high degree of agreement (scores = >5 on the 7-point Likert scale) and the desire to be an influencer was similar between boys and girls *F* (796) = .14 *p* = .73 independent of their age *F* (796) = .52 *p* = .47.

5. Conclusions

The general goal of this study was to examine the habits and behaviors of preadolescents and adolescents in relation to their preferred *influencers* to identify any potential differences depending on gender and age.

To this end, the present study examined the possible differences according to sex with respect to the time of consumption, the type of content consumed, the network used, and the profile of the favorite *influencer* by the group of minors under study. In addition, we wanted to know whether the possible differences according to sex could vary, according to age (pre-adolescence vs. adolescence).

Regarding the time spent consuming content generated by *influencers*, the first notable aspect is that there are hardly any differences between the estimates of their parents and those of the minors, increasing the reliability of the measure. As for possible differences based on sex, there is a greater dedication of time on the part of boys, especially on school days. It would be of great interest if future research could explore both the causes (e.g., less parental control) and the possible consequences of this increased dedication (e.g., less time devoted to studies).

It can also be concluded that the group of minors surveyed is significantly attracted to *influencers* of their same gender. This confirms the similarity-attraction principle detected in previous research where they also showed how minors tended to identify with their favorite youtubers in a manner congruent with their gender (Tolbert & Drogos, 2019). This parallelism is also observed, although to a lesser extent with respect to age, with older interviewees claiming to follow older *influencers*.

In addition, the data allows a characterization of the most-used social networks according to age and sex since the channel for following *influencers* varies when these two factors are considered. Specifically, in line with previous research (Serrate-Gonzalez, 2023), it can be affirmed that although there are social networks that are used by both sexes (TikTok) to follow their preferred *influencer*, there are others that are eminently masculine favored (Twitch, YouTube) or feminine (Instagram).

Regarding content, it is concluded that jokes and humor represent the most consumed type of content when gender is not considered, which confirms similar results from previous research (Aran-Ramspott, *et al.*, 2018). However, when analyzing the data by sex, it is detected that girls are more interested in fashion and beauty, travel, restaurants, and lifestyle (especially as they get older), as well as music and dance. Boys are more interested in gameplay, jokes and humor, as well as sports. The latter content grows with age in all cases, but the gender gap remains.

Regarding the profile of the favorite *influencer*, there are some common characteristics that allow us to speak of the "prototypical *influencer*" profile for each gender and age group. Thus, it is possible to point out that, for children aged 8 to 12 years, it is, on average, a 26-year-old male with a presence on YouTube who generates jokes/humor content or plays online games.

For girls from 8 to 12, the average profile is a 24-year-old female who generates jokes/humor or music and dance content on YouTube. If we look at the older age groups, we can see with respect to 13- to 16-year-olds, that the average profile of the typical *influencer* is a 29-year-old male youtuber with content focused on online games or jokes/humor. Finally, for the segment of girls aged 13 to 16, the average *influencer* is a 27-year-old female with a presence on Instagram or YouTube who mostly publishes fashion and beauty content. In addition, it can be concluded that, although boys follow more defined themes and networks, there is a greater variety among girls. Considering everything mentioned before, it can be concluded that both girls and boys are inclined towards the consumption of content traditionally related to their respective genders. This could suggest that their behavior on networks reinforces the reproduction of gender stereotypes from as young as 8 years of age and that, in addition, the differences observed according to sex increase with age.

However, the present research has the limited aim of describing the behavior of content consume created by *influencers,* so future research is needed to understand in-depth the causes of this behavior, since this choice of content could have very different origins (e.g., social pressure, shared interests with their group of friends, etc.). Likewise, longitudinal studies would be desirable to understand the direction of the trend (regression, stability, or increase). At the same time, the results obtained are the product of a cross-sectional study so it is limited to the observation of some variables at a certain time, so it would be desirable to carry out longitudinal studies to understand the direction of the trend (regression, stability, or increase).

Finally, we can affirm that within the members of the younger generation regardless of gender, there is a predominant desire to emulate their referents and become future *influencers*. This would serve to ratify, practically, and without any measure of doubt, that these new opinion leaders have become significant models and references for individuals of their ages.

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7. Specific contributions of each author

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Discussion and conclusions	Miguel Ángel Martín-Cárdaba and Patricia Lafuente-Pérez
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8. Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest contained in this article.

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