

## COMMUNICATION CHANNELS OF FASHION BRANDS IN 2026: MEDIA AND INFLUENCER MARKETING

The topic of the most relevant and in-demand communication channels for fashion brands in 2026 was explored during the business conference of the 37th International Fashion Exhibition Central Asia Fashion Spring 2026. Experts analyzed a range of effective communication channels, including traditional media, emerging formats, bloggers, and key opinion leaders. They also examined how to build brand awareness, establish reputation and trust, select the right channels, and measure the real impact of communications.

The session moderator, B2B event organizer, and head of business programs at the ProFashion media holding, Natalia Mironova, invited the speakers to share what they consider the key factor behind a successful advertising campaign. The commercial director of JKS Entertainment, Daulet Zimanov, believes that a brand and an influencer should support each other as equal partners: *«I recently heard another speaker say that it is not so important for a brand to work with influencers as it is for influencers to work with a brand. This is definitely not the position an advertiser or client should take. A brand and an influencer must help each other — that is the key to success. So, I'll start not even with advice, but with a simple idea: if you want your communication through influencers and bloggers to be effective, you need to treat the influencer the same way you treat your own brand. And then the influencer will do the same. »*

Businessman and fashion expert Sayatzhan Madiyev believes that the key determining factor is sales, as the market is currently highly competitive: *«Choosing a partner is not a problem — the main task is choosing the right one. You may ask whether it makes sense to work with just one. I would say this: human psychology is based on associative thinking, which means your influencer must perfectly match your brand — and there shouldn't be too many of them. The issue is that these are real people in a world where everyone has a camera. If you hire many influencers at once, say ten, one of them may make a mistake and damage the brand's reputation. Why takes such risks? I represent traditional business and classical marketing — you could say I'm old school. And I believe that marketing, including digital marketing, is part of the business. You cannot separate the product from marketing. Moreover, a good marketer or marketing team should be involved in product development. It is crucial to understand who you are going to sell to. There is a golden phrase: «If your product is for everyone, it is for no one». Of course, influencers can help generate initial sales, but you cannot rely on them 100% for results. What*



Businessman and fashion expert Sayatzhan Madiyev

*you need is a comprehensive marketing strategy that includes the 4Ps: product, price, place, and promotion. »*

Dalet Zimanov added that he agrees with the idea that you shouldn't put your entire budget on bloggers and make them your only bet: *«Bloggers are a marketing tool, but this tool needs to be used correctly. Different influencers are suitable for different tasks. We are now specializing not only in large influencers with high fees and, conditionally, over a million subscribers. We also have a special project with micro-influencers — it works very well on TikTok and Instagram, delivering strong reach. At the same time, the cost per placement is, of course, 10–20 times lower than with major bloggers. We work on a commercial basis, because as a business we are not interested in barter deals. However, we do not prevent barter integrations in any way: if bloggers are interested themselves, we connect them with brands, and they work directly with each other. The third communication channel that also shows good results is working with micro-influencers in the seeding format. We usually do 100–200–300 publications at once or spread them out every other day. And when choosing from these three tools — large bloggers, smaller bloggers, and mass text or visual seedings — we use different formats depending on the specific task. As for barter mailings, brands need to understand that they also have to be creative and visually appealing in the specific influencer's social networks. Let's take the example of the brand Gentle Monster, which has long been represented worldwide but continues to actively work with influencers. Moreover, they don't just send glasses that everyone already wants to buy — they come up with something new: they might send a scepter, unusual boxes, or bags of marmalade with glasses inside that are color-matched. In other words, they constantly create a wow-effect and work not only with big bloggers. Because of this, many people want to post about their product even for free. Firstly, it's prestigious, and secondly, it looks very impressive, «Instagram-worthy», and visually powerful. Therefore, if you're doing barter, it's important that the product looks like something the blogger themselves would want to show. If you simply send a sweater, hoodie, or T-shirt in a package, then out of ten mailings, at most one person will post something — and even that is not guaranteed. »*



Commercial Director of JKS Entertainment, Daulet Zimanov

Natalia Mironova recalled the case of the Kazakh Republic brand, when marketers simply sent hoodies with the word «Kazakhstan» to bloggers, who then published posts and filmed reels for free — ultimately generating significant promotion. Daulet Zimanov advised that in such cases it is important to consider the broader context: *«People living in Kazakhstan are generally very patriotic. Everything related to the country and the Kazakh language is actively supported. Kazakh Republic entered the*

*market at the right moment — it was a convergence of several factors. There were certain sentiments in society, and the brand launched its campaign at exactly the right time. Bloggers picked it up as a form of support for the country and the language. Even if it was part of a well-thought-out marketing strategy, the result was a strong effect — a major step forward both for the brand itself and for the promotion of the Kazakh language and national identity overall. »*

Influencer and founder of The Style, ex-Commercial Director of Vintage magazine, Alexandra Basova continued the topic of barter with influencers: *«I also worked as a marketer at Red Bull Kazakhstan, and to this day, Red Bull’s marketing remains one of the strongest strategic examples. Red Bull probably knows more about barter than any other brand. Working on barter can be very beneficial and cool, but the key here is giving emotions. Red Bull often collaborates with bloggers purely for product. Essentially, anyone can go and buy a can of Red Bull — it’s affordable. Yet even major influencers agree to work with them because the brand offers something much bigger — a unique experience. For example, we sent bloggers to Spain for major world finals, where they received incredible emotions. This is exactly what you need to keep in mind when working on barter: it should be about emotions and impressions. Even the unboxing of a box shouldn’t feel ordinary.»*



Influencer, founder of The Style, and ex-Commercial Director of Vintage magazine — Alexandra Basova

Creative Director of the brand RA&LLY, Sergey Surkov explained how the company structures its work with bloggers: *«As a brand owner, I want to say that it is very important to ground influencer integrations in real sales. Many brands face the issue of launching advertising campaigns with influencers but failing to bring them all the way to results — actual sales. We work both on a commercial basis and through barter. We use hyperlinked links to track the number of clicks and transitions. Before that, we analyze the blogger’s metrics, particularly the Engagement Rate (ER) — a metric that measures the level of audience involvement with the content. It’s also important whether the influencer visually fits the brand — as my colleagues have already mentioned. Next, we build work with the blogger in several formats. First comes the initial touchpoint: the blogger, for example, visits the boutique, gets to know the brand, and talks about it. Then comes the second stage — unboxing. And after that, he or she shows the item in real life, in actual use. In my opinion, one touchpoint today is not enough. Recently, RBC conducted a study on how many touchpoints are needed for a user to visit a brand’s account, subscribe, or make a purchase. The number is around thirty — which is actually a very large figure. Here’s how we handle it: through the blogger, we essentially receive a lead — the data and contact information of a potential customer. »*

The CRM manager then continues working with the lead by adding the person to the general retail CRM database. If it's simply a subscriber, we build communication with them, trying to understand why they became interested in the brand. If there is an intention to make a purchase, we track their journey through additional links. If the person completes a purchase, they enter the CRM system, where we can continue working with them: award bonuses, track geolocation, and, for example, send push notifications about the nearest boutique or about expiring bonuses. This is a very important point because previously we often faced situations where marketing campaigns were launched without any understanding of how they affected business results. I myself was the Creative Director at the brands Eleganza and Labbra, and we frequently encountered cases where different marketing directors would come in, launch activities, but there was no clear understanding of their effectiveness. The tool I described has been our number one instrument for the last two years, especially for Moscow. Today, in essence, only two key communication channels remain: contextual advertising (for example, Yandex.Direct) and working with influencers on social networks. Therefore, you cannot expect that a blogger makes one post and a person immediately buys something. In 90% of cases, this will not happen. At the same time, about 80% of our sales are generated through influencers. It is important to understand: there are influencers who do not drive direct sales but provide large reach. For a brand, especially one represented in federal retail chains, brand awareness is a critically important factor.



Creative Director of the brand RA&LLY, Sergey Surkov

Daulet Zimanov continued the topic: «In reality, these are excellent metrics and a truly correct approach, including the point about 30 touchpoints. However, if we talk specifically about working only with influencers, implementing this in practice is almost impossible. That's why touchpoints must be formed through a complex of channels: targeted advertising, micro-influencers, seedings, outdoor advertising — in short, it should be a wide range of tools that together create the necessary effect and contact with the audience. As for direct sales through bloggers, there is also our national feature here — including my personal one. Until I personally touch the product, I won't buy it. Online sales in our market don't work as effectively yet not because this tool is bad, but because people are used to checking, looking at, touching, and making sure that everything really meets their expectations. We had a case not with clothing, but with the sale of televisions. One blogger advertised a TV costing about 1.2 million tenge in a series of Stories. In the end, there was only one direct sale, and the client was dissatisfied. He said that it was not enough and that he needed at least two or three sales to recoup the integration. I asked him: «Did people come to your store after that?» He replied: «Yes, they did.» I clarified: «Did you ask them where they learned about your product — from the blogger or not?» He answered negatively. Then the

*question arises: how can you claim that the blogger didn't bring these people? An agency cannot always track such things accurately. In a sense, it's even easier for us to live this way, but at the same time we try to be honest with clients and partners: if there is dissatisfaction, we try to compensate, add extra placements, provide additional options, and so on. »*

*Sayatzhan Madiyev added his comment: «I recalled a joke that circulates among marketers. They say that every marketer knows that 50% of their budget works, but no one knows exactly which 50%. And there is some truth to that. Yes, there are metrics and analytics, and the advertiser always wants to understand what they are paying for. But the question is: what should be considered direct sales? If we view marketing as programming a person for a future purchase, it becomes clear that not everything happens instantly. For example, a television for a large sum is not an FMCG product, not something like a can of Red Bull. These are different product categories with completely different consumption logic. Such a product is not bought impulsively «for tomorrow», but it can be purchased in a week or two. This is where the concept of «being well-exposed» comes into play. When a brand is properly present across different platforms — offline and online — over time it leads to a purchase. However, it is almost impossible to determine exactly which influencer became the decisive factor. Still, you need to invest. It is clear that for small and medium-sized businesses, especially in retail, barter is often more advantageous. There is added value in the product: you produced clothing — it's easier for you to exchange. For example, you have jeans and a T-shirt, the blogger has an audience, and you make a mutually beneficial exchange. From a business perspective, this is truly profitable. But if you expect significant sales from a blogger, it is important to agree on the results in advance and understand his or her capabilities. Not everyone is interested only in barter, and you shouldn't always expect a big direct return. And here I return again to the idea that a blogger must perfectly match the brand. He or she should be its embodiment. The product must truly suit the influencer so that they can sincerely wear it and convey its meaning. There is no point in working with bloggers to whom this is not close — in that case, the result will be corresponding. »*

*Editor of «Gorod24» at WE Media Group, Dinara Azhgireyeva spoke about the changes that have taken place in the media sphere with the advent of the internet marketing era: «Changes are definitely felt, but we do not compete with influencers. On the contrary, we are friends with them, because we have one common goal — to help the client. We understand that publications in the media are about a long-term story: building a brand, shaping its image, and establishing authority. Influencers, on the other hand, are more often turned to when a quick flash is needed — emotions, trust, and a fast response. Speaking of barter, both brands and creators often approach us as well. One of our main projects is WeProject. As for publications in the media that work well today, I, for example, have a separate column where I interview representatives of various brands. I really like our Uzbek colleagues — they have many strong projects in textiles and the jewelry industry. When we introduce such brands to our audience through our platforms, it gives a good effect. We have a large audience not only in Kazakhstan but across all of Central Asia, and we are also entering the South Caucasus market. When a client comes to us, we select the format depending on their objectives. If sales are important, we build special projects and work over several months or even a year. If a one-time publication is needed, we offer ready-made material formats. This is on a commercial basis, but it can be more affordable depending on the format: text interviews, video interviews on YouTube, or short formats for TikTok. »*



Editor of «Gorod24» at WE Media Group, Dinara Azhgireyeva

Executive Director of Kazakhstan Fashion Week, journalist Botagoz Aldongarova thanked the WeProject for supporting the National Fashion Week KFW and the annual International Young Designers Contest New Generation. She then moved on to her presentation, which revealed how brands can spark interest among influencers: *«A brand must be creative and have its own DNA — this is exactly what we teach young designers. For example, Kazakh designer Adilya Botabayeva, who is currently studying at Parsons School of Design in New York — one of the world’s leading design schools, where it is extremely difficult to get accepted. She has worked with Adidas and Jimmy Choo and possesses serious professional experience. She is someone who creates products that attract the interest of influencers. Moreover, she has around 70 thousand followers, which is not that many compared to million-follower accounts, yet global influencers with million-strong audiences come to her. This is a perfect example of what a product should be and how a designer should work: never stop, constantly search for new ideas, and surprise*



Executive Director of Kazakhstan Fashion Week, journalist Botagoz Aldongarova

people. When designers know how to create such projects, it becomes clear what kind of commercial product they can produce. The task for contest participants is not just to sew clothes, but to create something innovative. For instance, a denim fur coat is one such case. Or the technique with which Alexandra Stolbushkina won the international contest «Admiralteyskaya Iгла» — sashiko, an ancient Japanese embroidery technique. Originally used for strengthening and repairing clothes, it has now become a separate technique and form of art. Another project that attracted a lot of attention was the four-meter dresses exhibited at the Kasteev State Museum of Arts. There were eight dresses created over the course of a year. When the designers first saw them in full size, many literally cried — the impression was so powerful. Each dress tells its own story. For example, one was made from fabrics collected from different countries, other features elements of national ornaments, images of nature, and symbolism. Our designers have enormous creative potential — they just need to be supported. »

Continuing the topic of modern media, Natalya Mironova asked Alexandra Basova what actually works in this sphere today and whether a modern brand can do without media at all, relying solely on partnerships with influencers. The speaker replied that media are essential: «In any case, the media provide a certain level of confidence and build trust in the brand. This is the foundation. Before moving on to working with bloggers, you need to secure publications in the media — people should already know something about the brand. Although sometimes it happens the other way around: bloggers first “pump up” the product, and then the media pick it up and analyze the trend. Trendsetters are bloggers who set the style and rhythm, and the media already orient themselves around them: they select top influencers with a bright style and, relying on them, form the agenda. In essence, these are two channels that are very closely interconnected, and for a good result, they must work together. »

Daulet Zimanov emphasized that every brand needs a strong marketer who knows how to work with all available tools: «When it comes to combining media and bloggers, our team at WeProject has been working together for a long time and has used various mechanics. For example, bloggers launch a trend: three or four influencers publish similar content, then the media write that a new trend has appeared, and micro-influencers pick it up. As a result, two channels work at once — both media and influencers. There is also a reverse scheme: first, a publication comes out in the media, and bloggers simply repost it, reacting with comments like «cool» or «interesting». This looks native and organic, but at the same time provides reach from both sides at once. Therefore, if you combine the tools correctly, the result will be truly strong. »



Experts at CAF Discussed Communication Channels for Fashion Brands in 2026

Sergey Surkov added that working with the media is an essential investment in the company’s image, status, and weight in society: «We do work with the media, but in my opinion, it is no longer an effective

channel for direct sales. If you ask today who buys fashion magazines, I think very few people would raise their hand. At the same time, the media have transformed significantly: only strong players with well-developed digital directions and active social networks have remained. It is important to keep an eye on this, because it contributes to the brand's image, its status, and its weight in society. It also affects SEO — how your website is indexed and appears in search results. When a client first types in the brand name and sees publications in reputable outlets, it increases trust and indirectly influences sales. The situation in Moscow has also changed: many media outlets have closed or reformatted, but new strong players have emerged. For example, The Blueprint is a high-quality media outlet that works effectively as both a B2B and B2C channel. They create special projects, landing pages, integrations with hyperlinks and promo codes, and this actually drives sales thanks to its strong influence on the audience. We also work through fashion directors and stylists. There are shoots, covers, and fashion editorials. And even today, there are still people who buy magazines: they see our product on a celebrity — and this gives us new contacts and collaborations. »

When asked how to find the right balance between commercial and image-building components when developing a strategy, Sergey Surkov replied: «I believe that approximately 30% should go to image-building activities, and 70% to what directly drives sales. After all, we are talking about business, and money must work. The cost of money is high right now; conditionally, you could simply put it on deposit and earn income. Therefore, any investment in marketing must pay off. You cannot endlessly invest in tools that do not provide a return. At the same time, image advertising is undoubtedly important. It strengthens the brand's position in the market and enables more favorable partnerships. When strong players already support you, you can negotiate differently and dictate terms. Right now, it is especially important not to fall out of the information field — to create that very «information noise», and not to sharply cut budgets, even despite the economic situation. We are observing an interesting period: for example, in Moscow there is a strong trend of brands creating their own events. This could be a presentation, a collaboration, or a closed event to which a large number of influencers are invited. In a short time, the brand receives enormous reach and increased awareness. Honestly, this is one of the most effective and relatively inexpensive tools, because if you try to achieve the same volume of publications through classic integrations, it would require enormous resources: negotiations, logistics, fittings, approvals. An event solves all these issues at once. People come because it is a social occasion — to communicate, spend time, and be part of the event. I'll also share one important point on how to convert events into sales. For example, we invite not only bloggers and celebrities, but also our top



Speakers of the CAF business conference (from left to right): Natalya Mironova, Sayatshan Madiev, Botagoz Aldongarova, Alexandra Basova, Sergey Surkov, Dinara Azhgireyeva, Daulet Zimanov

*clients. They receive additional value through the opportunity to communicate with influencers and stylists and get live recommendations. Imagine a stylist of the level of Alexander Rogov giving advice on how to put together an outfit right on the spot! This is no longer just an event, but a service and experience that enhances loyalty and, ultimately, influences sales. »*

Concluding the session, Daulet Zimanov urged fashion industry professionals to strive to give their clients a unique experience: *«Hosting events is undoubtedly an effective tool. However, there is a nuance: many events are gradually becoming formulaic. The same people, the same format — and audience interest inevitably declines. That is why it is now important not just to hold events, but to create a unique experience. Otherwise, even influencers begin to refuse cooperation simply because it has become uninteresting. »*

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