Conflicts and Challenges in Practices of Commercializing Humans
An Ethnographic Study of Influencer Marketing Work

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CONFLICTS AND CHALLENGES IN PRACTICES OF COMMERCIALIZING HUMANS

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF INFLUENCER MARKETING WORK

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CBS COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL
HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

Conflicts and Challenges in Practices of Commercializing Humans

An Ethnographic Study of Influencer Marketing Work

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My doctoral work is empirical and, without all the subjects and companies that allowed me access to their worlds and minds, this thesis would not have become a reality. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all of you—I would not have been able to do this work without you.

I write these acknowledgments from our summer house on Bornholm. From here, I can see the ocean, and my partner Nils is mowing the lawn. Our little daughter, Luna, is following his every footstep. Thank you for reminding me that a good researcher also needs to go outside and take a break. My sincerest appreciation goes to my family and friends for their unconditional support.

Preface

"From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art." Michel Foucault (1982)

Important research has already been conducted on influencer marketing (e.g., Audrezet et al., 2020; Brooks et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2019; Martínez-López et al., 2020; Wellman et al., 2020). However, I hope that, by revealing the "back-stage" of influencer marketing and focusing on the practice in its own right, this thesis offers ontological originality and leads to new understandings of our current digitalized society. I also hope that this thesis will open a new window on the understanding of influencer marketing as a phenomenon that leads to new conceptions of the contemporary time and provides scholars with new ways of studying the phenomenon in future research. This thesis combines marketing and management literature, and challenges existing silo thinking in academia that stands in strong contrast to the fluidity of our time. I hope that readers will be able to look beyond those silos and, instead, immerse themselves in the practice of influencer marketing. During the years in which I have been exploring influencer marketing, I have attempted to immerse myself in the practice by involving myself in the industry. This has strengthened my understanding of the practice and, in this sense, formed part of the empirical work of this research. However, it has also been a way to make sense of my research in the world. For example, I gave a talk for the Danish libraries in March 2022. Danish libraries and librarians are working to overcome the challenges of digitalization, which has implications for the professional role of librarians. In this transformation, they are, among other things, asked to offer more personal guidance to library patrons by using their private lives to facilitate commercialization of the libraries. I was invited to present an extreme example of such work and to illustrate how workers might be challenged by using their personal lives as a tool to achieve commercial outcomes. My aim in this doctoral work is to show a foundational exchange between schools and not take into consideration academic boundaries, but instead to illustrate purely explorative research on influencer marketing in contemporary time.

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Resume

Denne afhandling er et 'multi-sited' etnografisk studie af influencer marketing arbejde. I form af et empirisk studie af influencer marketing, undersøger denne afhandling bindeleddet mellem kommercialisering og personalisering som en enhed af aktiviteter på tværs af forskellige sites. Sites skal i denne afhandling forstås som, forskellige arenaer med deres egen historie og ontologiske individualisme. Således er influencer marketing undersøgt som en praktik i dens egen ret. For at empirisk undersøge denne praktik således, benyttes 'practice theory' som den forenende teori gennem hele afhandlingen. I de tre akademiske artikler, der danner grundlaget for denne afhandling, er 'practice theory' benyttet som en ontologiske linse til at forstå influencer marketing og som en epistemologiske linse til at foretage den empiriske undersøgelse af praktikken, influencer marketing.

Denne afhandling præsenterer tre videnskabelige artikler, disse refereres til som hhv. paper 1,2 og 3. De tre videnskabelige artikler udgør tre individuelle empiriske studier af influencer marketing. De tre 'papers' præsenterer tre forskellige teoretiske vinkler som holistisk muliggør en dybdegående forståelse af, hvordan udfordringer opstår i bindeleddet mellem kommercialisering og personalisering. I denne afhandling er kommercialisering og personalisering forstået som to forskellige logikker der hver især repræsenterer forskellige idealer og værdier, som fordrer handling og mening. Denne afhandling illustrerer hvorledes influencer marketing er praktiseret på tværs af sites der inkluderer begge logikker. Endvidere illustrerer afhandlingen hvorledes denne duo-logiske praktik indebærer udfordringer for influencers, som repræsenterer arbejderen og for praktikken selv, som konstituerer det faktiske arbejde. Således, viser denne afhandling hvorledes bindeleddet mellem kommercialisering og personalisering konstituerer en ny digital etik udøvet gennem selvregulering i digitalt kreativt arbejde (paper 1). Afhandlingen illustrerer hvorledes influencer marketing konstituerer en ny type arbejde hvor arbejderen er kontrolleret og monitoreret til at iscenesætte egne følelser (paper 2). Endeligt demonstrerer denne afhandling hvordan influencer marketing udøves som en processuel praktik der interagerer de to logikker. Endvidere, hvorledes dette udfordrer selve arbejdet for så at opstille mulige løsninger til disse udforinger (paper 3).

Denne afhandling berører forskellige akademiske siloer i form af dens diverse teoretiske ståsted. Denne afhandling beskæftiger sig således med teorier inden for marketing, sociologi,

forbrugerkultur, og management. Dette mangesidede perspektiv er en konsekvens af den ontologiske forståelse af, influencer marketing som en praktik der beskæftiger flere arenaer. Denne afhandling demonstrerer hvordan dette flerdimensionelle perspektiv muliggør en dybdegående forståelse af, influencer marketing arbejde i vores tid.

Denne afhandling slutter med en kommentar til hvordan traditionelle grænser udvaskes i vores digitale tid. Ved at benytte influencer marketing som et eksempel til at forstå individualiserede og personaliserede kommercielle praktikker i nye marketing taktikker, åbner denne afhandling for nye diskussioner af bindeleddet mellem kommercialisering og personalisering og hvorledes dette udfordrer os selv og vores samfund. Afhandlingen illustrerer hvordan flydende grænser i digitalt arbejde udforer nuværende ideer omkring moral og os selv, og hvorledes dette har indflydelse på arbejderen (paper 1 og 2). Mere præcist, bygger paper 1 på Foucaults etiske diskussioner, som omhandler hvad han kalder 'Care for Self' til at forstå hvordan arbejdere konstruerer etiske og moralske standarder for dem selv i individualiserede digitale arbejdsformer, så som influencer marketing. Paper 1 præsenterer praktikker i form af frihed og selv-misbrug som beskriver hvorledes nye digitale arbejdere, selvregulerer moralske standarder. Paper 2 benytter 'emotional labour', 'self-presentation' og 'governmentality' som teoretiske fundamenter til at illustrere, hvorledes influencers selviscenesætter deres følelser og på den måde bruger dem selv som kommercielle objekter. Endvidere, hvorledes disse arbejdere konstant ændrer deres grænser imellem privat og eksponering for at leve op til kommercielle mål. Paper 2 bidrager ved at navngive en ny type arbejder som vi kalder 'Personal Brand Emotional Labourer'. Denne type digital arbejder, arbejder som en iscenesætter af sit eget liv. Da denne afhandling udforsker bindeleddet mellem kommercialisering og personalisering undersøger paper 3, hvordan udfordringer opstår netop årsagsgrundet dette bindeled. Paper 3 adresserer ligeledes hvordan disse udfordringer kan løses. Paper 3 bidrager ved at forslå 'Bridging' som en aktivitet til at succesfuldt arbejde på tværs af de to logikker.

Denne afhandling inviterer fremtidig forskning til at videre undersøge bindeleddet mellem kommercialisering og personalisering, både i marketing, men også i form af vores egen selv-kommercialisering, når vi poser om os selv på sociale medier.

Denne afhandling er delt op i seks kapitler. Kapitel 1 præsenterer historien, inspirationen og udviklingen af min forskning om influencer marketing. Kapitel 2 introducerer afhandlingen. Dette kapitel introducerer ligeledes bindeleddet mellem kommercialisering og personalisering som et overordnet tema for de tre artikler. Endvidere, er det også i dette kapitel, at de

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metodologiske og analytiske overvejelser er præsenteret. Endeligt, beskrives baggrunden og konteksten for afhandlingen i kapitel 2. Kapitel 3,4 og 5 præsenterer de tre artikler. Kapitel 6 konkluderer afhandlingen og inviterer til fremtidig forskning og diskussion.

Abstract

This dissertation is a multi-sited ethnography of influencer marketing work. By empirically studying influencer marketing, this dissertation explores the nexus between commercialization and personalization as a bundle of activities across sites. Sites are understood as different arenas with a history and an ontological uniqueness. From this perspective, influencer marketing is explored as a practice in its own right, and to empirically study it as such, this dissertation uses practice theory as the enabling theory. Throughout the three papers that constitute this dissertation, practice theory is used as the ontological lens to understand influencer marketing and as an epistemological lens to empirically explore the practice.

This dissertation presents three journal articles referred to as papers 1,2, and 3, which all empirically and qualitatively explore influencer marketing work. The three journal articles present three different theoretical lenses that holistically enable readers to get an in-depth understanding of how challenges emerge in the nexus of commercialization and personalization within influencer marketing work. However, the three papers individually illustrate how challenges within the nexus of commercialization and personalization occur in three different ways. In this dissertation, commercialization and personalization are understood as two different logics that represent different ideals and values, which motivate actions and meaning. This dissertation illustrates how influencer marketing, as a practice across sites, draws on both logics. Moreover, this dissertation illustrates how this causes tensions for the social media influencer (SMI) who represents the worker, and for the practice itself who signifies the work. By doing so, this dissertation shows how the nexus constitutes new digital ethics of self-management in digital creative work (paper 1). It illustrates how influencer marketing constitutes a new type of digital work where the worker is framed, monitored, and governed to perform emotions (paper 2). Finally, this dissertation demonstrates how influencer marketing as a marketing practice that merges the two logics, how this challenges the work and suggests solutions to overcome challenges within the work (paper 3).

This dissertation moves across academic silos as it draws on theories of marketing, sociology, consumer culture theory, and management. This cross-silo perspective is a consequence of the ontological understanding of influencer marketing as a practice that moves across sites. This dissertation illustrates how this multi-dimensional perspective allows for an in-depth understanding of influencer marketing work in contemporary times.

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This dissertation concludes with a commentary on the fluidity of society and self in the digital age. By using influencer marketing as a case to understand individualized and personalized commercial practices in novel marketing tactics, this dissertation opens for debates on how the nexus of commercialization and personalization challenges ourselves and our society. It illustrates how the fluidity of boundaries in digitalized work challenges conceptions of morals and self, and how this affects the worker (papers 1,2). More specifically, paper 1 draws on Foucault's work on ethics, the so-called Care for Self, to understand how workers construct ethical and moral standards for themselves in individualized digitalized work, such as influencer marketing. It concludes by presenting practices of freedom and practices of self-abuse to understand novel digital workers' self-management of morality. Paper 2 draws on theories of emotional labor, self-presentation, and governmentality to illustrate how SMIs use themselves as commercial objects by performing emotions. Moreover, how these workers constantly reform boundaries between privacy and exposure to live up to commercial goals. This paper concludes by labeling a new type of worker, the Personal Brand Emotional Labourer who works as a performer of her of his own life in digitalized work. As this dissertation explores the nexus of commercialization and personalization, paper 3 presents how challenges emerge because of the nexus. Moreover, how these challenges can be resolved. Paper 3 concludes by introducing 'Bridging' as an activity to merge the two logics of commercialization and personalization.

This dissertation invites future research to further explore the nexus of commercialization and personalization, both in other marketing activities but also in our general self-branding activities when we post about our lives on social media.

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 presents the history, inspiration, and development of my research on influencer marketing. Chapter 2 Introduces the thesis. This chapter introduces the nexus of commercialization and personalization as an overacting theme for the three papers. Moreover, in this chapter, the methodological and analytical considerations for the three papers are presented. Finally, chapter 2 describes the background and context of the empirical work. Chapters, 3,4, and 5 present the three papers. Chapter 6 concludes on the overarching theme and opens for future research and academic discussions.

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Chapter 1 Thoughts

History, inspiration, and development

This PhD-by-publication is based on an internally funded three-year PhD research project entitled *Conflicts and Challenges in Practices of Commercializing Humans: An Ethnographic Study of Influencer Marketing Work*. Although this project formally started in 2018, my research on social media influencers (SMIs) and influencer marketing began long before that. To ensure readers understand the origin of this thesis, it is important to describe the journey I have taken while pursuing my PhD. I will therefore use the following paragraphs to describe how I came to my destination of becoming a PhD candidate in The Department of Marketing at Copenhagen Business School (CBS).

In 2014, I was a Master's student at CBS. In my spare time, I held a student work position in The Department of Marketing. At this time, influencers were called bloggers and, although most influencers were still "just" blogging, the activity was slowly being professionalized. In other words, this was when the era of influencer marketing began. Still, general knowledge, including my own, about bloggers and blogging was trivial. At this time my, now supervisors approached me to ask whether I was reading blogs. I was not, but their questions influenced me to start, and this marked the informal beginning of my research. Although, at the time, I did not realize that this would be the beginning of my PhD journey, today I understand that my unplanned interest in blogging was a necessary stage in my exploration of influencer marketing. As with most journeys, my research involved various turns, jumps, and stops over the years. Some of these were defining, some were only brief realizations, and some I like to call side turns. However, all were needed to arrive at my ultimate destination.

During the years of my research, the practice of influencer marketing evolved to become a million-dollar business (Business Insider, 2021) and, to some degree, my research underwent a similar radical transformation. I believe this method of exploring the practice has become the main value of this thesis. It has allowed me to grasp complexities and underlying processes that I would have not been able to understand had I not spent nearly eight years talking to

influencers, drinking coffee with agents, going to conferences in the industry, reading blogs, and much more.

In 2016, I decided to pursue a PhD and applied for a candidateship at the University of Hertfordshire in the UK. Although this was perhaps one of the side turns of my PhD journey (given my current position), it did allow me to immerse myself in literature—an immersion I would not have had time for, had I not spent that year in the UK. During my year at the University of Hertfordshire, I encountered important sociologists and philosophers who were previously unfamiliar to me. For example, Marx taught me that thoughts and the world are always connected by human activity, and that thinking is only one of the things humans do. Heidegger taught me that things always appear to us imbued with meaning. Wittgenstein taught me that the meaning of an act (or words) is established in the practical context in which it appears. Giddens taught me that, without speech, language would not exist. Finally, Bourdieu taught me about the systems, structures, and principles by which we form actions and acquire knowledge. It was in this year that I discovered that, in order to understand what influencer marketing was about, it was not enough to understand influencers' thoughts, I also needed to comprehend how their thinking and actions are given meaning by the systems that frame their work. In other words, although the University of Hertfordshire may have seemed to be a side turn, my experience there became essential to my research, as this was where I discovered practice theory (Schatzki, 1996), which allowed me to understand and study influencer marketing in a unique way.

After one year, I left the UK and submitted a new application for a PhD candidateship at the CBS. In my application, I began to define the researcher I would become. Aside from enabling me to understand the scope of my research, my period of reading and reflection was a turning point in my understanding of myself as a researcher. This reminds me that, while a PhD is primarily about defining a project, executing it, and contributing original research, it is also a process of understanding who you are as a researcher. Although my journey as a researcher has just begun, I hope that this PhD reflects who I have become as a young researcher. I hope that this is reflected in the way I write, in my presentations, and in the research papers that constitute my doctoral work.

In the four years I spent as a PhD candidate at the CBS, I was attempting to grasp the core of my research. Conducting explorative research is a tricky task, as one often gets lost in the enormous

variety of data, ideas, possibilities, reflections, and choices. In this thesis, I have tried to describe the aim of my research and have attempted to understand what it means in the world. I am aware that, at first sight, influencer marketing might not seem to be a practice that is changing society. Many people may wonder why it is important to talk about these young stars who enter such an occupation willingly. If these thoughts are shared by my readers, I hope that this thesis will encourage them to rethink their position. I believe that influencer marketing is, in many ways, changing culture and communication in modern Western society. The core aim of this PhD is not to explain how or why this is occurring, but rather to provide a new lens through which to examine questions of how digitalization affects us and the world we live in. Because this doctoral work is qualitative, I cannot and do not aim to make any generalizations; however, I hope that this thesis will encourage readers to reflect upon their own lives and the ways they interact with digitalization and social media.

This PhD project is by publication and so comprises three journal articles. In the following section, I present the three journal articles that constitute this thesis, which is the central product of my doctoral work.

The body of my PhD project

Since this thesis is based on three journal articles, some guidance is needed to enhance the reading experience and enable an understanding of the overall aim of my doctoral work. Pursuing a PhD-by-publication is an academic choice that allows young scholars to demonstrate their ability to publish their work. This is a vital and defining aspect of a researcher's role. Crafting these papers drives the PhD candidate's work and influences how the candidate conducts their research. Throughout this thesis, the journal articles are referred to as Papers 1–3:

Paper 1: Heeris Christensen, A.-B. (in progress). Practices of Freedom and Self-abuse in Influencer Marketing Work. (Planned to be submitted in *Journal of Business Ethics*).

Paper 2: Heeris Christensen, A.-B., Gyrd-Jones, R. and Beverland, M. Welcome to Hotel California: Social Media Influencers' Work as Emotional Laborers. (In review for *Organization Studies*). (Note: see Appendix 1 'Co-author statements to clarify roles).

Paper 3: Heeris Christensen, A.-B., Erz, A. and Von Wallpach, S. The "Back-End'" of Influencer Marketing Practice: Bridging between Communication and Personalization. *(re-strategizing after 3 rounds of review*ing, for *Journal of Advertising*). (Note: see Appendix 1 'Co-author statements to clarify roles)

Table 1.1 provides an overview of the three papers. In all three, practice theory (Schatzki, 2005) motivated the understanding of influencer marketing as a practice of collective action that forms sites (Barnes, 2005). The three papers hold three different theoretical lenses that directed each paper's concept: (i) care for self (Foucault, 1984); (ii) emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983), self-presentation (Goffman, 1990), and governmentality (Rose, 1990); and (iii) practice theory (Woermann & Rokka, 2015). Practice theory holistically motivated the methodological understanding across all three papers. To explore influencer marketing as a practice that moves across sites, the empirical work is based on one large multi-sited ethnographic study (Marcus, 1995). The differentiation in analytical design between all three papers, however, is affected by the explorative methodology.

Table 1.1 Overview of Papers 1-3

	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3
Enabling theory	Practice theory		
Conceptual theory	Care for self	Emotional labor, self-presentation, and governmentality	Practice theory
Methodology	Practice theory		
	Method		
Multi-sited ethnography	X		
Analytical design	Conceptual	Thematic	Conceptual
Etic coding	—	X	X
Emic coding	X	X	X

Research question

In this doctoral work, I investigate the intermediaries, tensions, conflicts, and challenges that occur when commercialization and personalization are merged in a nexus of activities in the practice of influencer marketing. Specifically, practice theory has been a helpful means to in-depth investigate and understand the intermingle of meaning between actors. An intermingle which has proven its importance as influencer marketing work is placed in the era of the new world of work where roles, space, and time are unsettled (de Vaujany et al., 2021), and part of what has been labeled as the liquid modernity (Bauman & Haugaard, 2008).

Practice theory understands humans as individuals, however, as humans who are always involved in doings (Echeverri & Skålen, 2011). This means that subjects are positions embedded in actions, which are governing and structuring particular practices. This position lets one ask not what something is, but what competencies are necessary to do what someone does (Dewik et al., 2016). Following this notion in the process of understanding the practice, this thesis is consistent in its wondering of what subjects do rather than investigating who those subjects are. Or in other words, it lets one to study influencer marketing work instead of influencer marketing. I believe that this is rather unique, to move beyond the phenomenon and wonder about how that phenomenon is done. Consequently, the ontological understanding of the world that constitutes the ground for the main research question is heavily affected by the understanding of the world as infinitely moving, as a world that only exists by the doings and sayings of subjects who are always doing something (Halkier & Jensen, 2011). Consequently, the ontological understanding of influencer marketing, as a practice in its own right, has heavily affected the epistemological exploration of how influencer marketing is done.

Practice theory has supplied an opportunity to conceptualize social interactions among multiple actors as the practice has always been the center of the analysis (Lombardo & Cabiddu, 2017). Whether I have studied ethics (paper 1), emotional performances (paper 2), or logics (paper 3) the center always has been the practice of influencer marketing work. It has been the main goal that by zooming in on subjects' doings, this thesis can explain why people do what they do concerning the world, and in this way, hopefully, this thesis says something about the world.

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Therefore, this thesis foremost, it is an exploration of influencer marketing work as a practice to *understand how the use of humans in commercial activities challenges the practice of influencer marketing and how the person who is essential to the practice is challenged by the commercialization that is driving the practice.* Consequently, for this dissertation, I asked:

How is the practice of influencer marketing practiced and how are SMIs used and using themselves as strategic objects in work practices?

I approach this question from three different angles that constitute three different theoretical perspectives, and address relevant developments in individualism, self-branding, and surveillance in the digital economy (see for example, Zuboff, 2019) from a new perspective. This perspective unpacks the work and the worker behind the screen and explore the challenges that emerge as the person become an object for commercialization.

I explored how influencer marketing is practiced, and how SMIs are used and are using themselves within this practice from three different perspectives, represented by the three papers that comprise the thesis.

In Paper 1, a concern for the ethical consequences of self-management in accordance with commercial ideals is addressed by drawing on Foucault's (1984) ethical project. With his ideas about "care for the self", Foucault argued ethos as subjective and ethics as an exercise on the self by the self. This is a paper about ethics, as it offers a new way of understanding ethics in practices of self-management in digital environments. This perspective specifically contributes to new debates about digital ethics (e.g., Ahsan, 2020; Argandoña, 2003; Place, 2021; Sarathy & Robertson, 2003) by discussing how SMIs work ethically toward remaking themselves as commercial objects. In doing so, this paper presents influencer marketing as a professional work practice and the SMI as a precarious worker in the digital creative industry. The exploration of influencer marketing as a practice between actors and sites illustrates how power relations emerge between actors and how these relations form a moral codex in which the workers (the SMIs) enact ethical guidelines in their everyday lives as self-management. In general, the aim of this paper is to motivate new theoretical discussions about how digital work creates new modes of precarity for the worker. Moreover, I hope that this paper impacts public policy discussions about digital ethicality and self-management within social media in general. For example, discussions about how we evaluate ourselves based on commercial metrics, such as likes on

Instagram. Also, how individuals may potentially prioritize these metrics and consequently deprioritize the wellbeing of the self.

Paper 2 contains an exploration of the work that constitutes SMIs' lives and how it challenges the worker, drawing on theories of emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983), presentation of the self (Goffman, 1990), and governmentality (Rose, 1990). In this way, influencer marketing is addressed as a new type of work that requires an emotional performance of the self. This paper illustrates how SMIs' work requires them to perform their lives and how the workers' emotions are monitored, governed, and framed to meet commercial goals. This challenge previous conceptions of emotional labor and self-presentation, as it shows how the lives of SMIs become intertwined with commercialization. Moreover, in this paper my co-authors and I address how workers enact governmentality and become lured into a commercial factory of emotions in order to increase authenticity. By focusing on the work practices across sites involved in influencer marketing, we contribute to theoretical discussions about new work and emotional labor. The paper illustrates how SMIs' lives become staged and how their emotional sincerity becomes intermingled with commercial agendas, as the self is transformed into a person-brand. Specifically, we introduce the SMI as a new type of worker—the "personal-brand emotional laborer"' who professionally work with her life as a performance of emotions.

Finally, in Paper 3, the examination of how tensions occur in the practice of influencer marketing was completed by using practice theory as a conceptual theory (Schatzki, 2000, 2002; Schatzki et al., 2001). Here, practice theory is used in a unique way to comprehend how challenges emerge between the sites of influencer marketing, with influencer marketing addressed as a professional practice in its own right, and arguing that this practice combines two logics that, at times, are competing. This is the logic of commercialization and personalization. In the paper, challenges and misalignments that occur as a consequence of these differing logics are carved out. My co-authors and I specifically use the work of Woermanm and Rokka (2015) to analyze practice elements and demonstrate how they are enacted differently in the same practice due to the two competing logics. Ultimately, we introduced "bridging" as an activity for overcoming challenges in the practice, so the two logics complement each other. In general, this paper contributes to the literature on marketing management in the new era of digital marketing (e.g., Audrezet et al., 2020; Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019; Shepherd, 2005). This is an era that relies much more on the individual and on multiple stakeholders than on one producer that communicates to consumers. By using the example of influencer

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marketing, this paper illustrates how to work successfully with multiple stakeholders of different logics, and in the intermediate space between commercialization and personalization.

Before letting the reader immerse themselves in the three papers, the following chapter introduces the background and context of the research and discusses theoretical and methodological considerations.

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Chapter 2 Considerations

Background and context

More than half of the world's population uses social media on a daily basis (Smartinsights, 2022). On social media, users check their friends' or followers' latest postings and perhaps also the news. When they browse their feeds, they are exposed to a variety of commercial content. Some postings are explicitly marked as advertisements and appear in accordance with the social media algorithm, while others are implicit or, as media agents call it, integrated content. In the mix of it all, SMIs' postings pop-up. Some of the SMIs' postings are explicit advertising and the creators explicitly mark them as "sponsored". Nonetheless, users tend to forget this, as their postings, whether they are paid for or not, look exactly like their friends' postings. In other words, agencies try to integrate advertisements into SMIs' private content so users cannot differentiate between paid, earned, and personal media. Whereas the paid and sponsored posts are clearly marked as advertisements, SMIs' non-paid (earned) postings may be perceived as sincere private content (personal media). However, SMIs operate as person-brands in all their activities, and everything they post is part of their effort to maintain their brand status. When users check in on their social media platforms, they must realize they are on a commercial channel and everything they see there is staged, managed, and governed.

Influencer marketing is a professional marketing practice that involves multiple stakeholders. I collected the data for my doctoral work from the professional influencer marketing industry in Copenhagen, Denmark. The departure of this multi-sited ethnographic study was a Copenhagen-based media agency, which I visited, on and off, between November 2018 and June 2019. Like a rhizome, my data collection took its cues from the media agency. Because media agencies orchestrate campaigns, they are linked to all other stakeholders. I collected data from firms who buy campaigns from a media agency. I interviewed and collected content data, in the form of e-mails, from firms. I got in touch with the firms via the media agency. I collected data from one of Denmark's largest influencer agencies, which manages more than 100 SMIs. Influencer agencies are employed by both media agencies and SMIs. Media agencies contact influencer agencies to match up influencers with firms (addressed as client brands (CBs) in relation to direct campaign work). But influencer agencies are also employed by SMIs who hire an influencer agency to connect them to commercial sponsorships and manage their brand.

Moreover, influencer agencies can also manage campaigns themselves. Finally, I collected data from Danish SMIs, some of whom I shadowed and interviewed, others I only had meetings with, and some I never met. In total, the focused multi-sited ethnographic study lasted from November 2018 until January 2021. For more information about the data-collection phase of this project, please see Appendix 2 (Data overview). Prior to the focused ethnographic study, I explored SMIs and their work, beginning in 2015. This formed part of my ethnographic study and exploration of influencer marketing, and therefore, the data I collected in this period were included in the analyses. This comprised both content data and interviews with three Danish SMIs.

In the following section, I attempt to draw a processual map of how I observed an influencer marketing campaign to normally develop. Hopefully, this will provide readers with a sufficient understanding of how the practice unfolds across sites.

Influencer marketing is campaign work that is normally bought by a firm in relation to a larger media campaign. In this sense, influencer marketing is only one piece of a larger media puzzle. Firms normally buy an influencer marketing campaign from a media agency, as media agencies also manage other parts of the firms' media campaign, such as television commercials or outdoor campaigns. The media agency strategizes and formulates what they call a brief. A brief is a contractual paper that binds the firm, the media and influencer agency, and the SMI, but it is also a strategic and conceptual paper that describes the aims of the campaign and how these aims should be fulfilled. The brief is always approved by the firm before the media agency sends it to the influencer agency. Moreover, the media agency organizes, implements, and evaluates the campaign. The influencer agency can, in many ways, be compared to a traditional model agency, with influencer agencies housing SMIs like model agencies house models, and they can also scout for new potential models—in this case, new SMIs. However, there are also differences. Influencer agencies manage the "back-end" of SMIs' social media profiles and help them manage their person-brands, which involves their private lives. They coordinate and organize campaigns for SMIs and calculate the price of SMIs' performances based on social media metrics. They also communicate with the other stakeholders on behalf of the SMIs. Finally, the SMIs create the content that we see online. However, SMIs never post any sponsored content without the approval of the other stakeholders. Normally, SMI postings are also directed by instructions in the brief. The above is a simplistic view of the various aspects of influencer marketing. However, it is important to understand that it is a practice that

encompasses a variety of stakeholders and a variety of processes, and not just the posts that users see when they go online.

Theoretical considerations

All researchers aim to produce original and relevant research. This is research that contributes to humanity's store of knowledge and brings attention to important issues, perhaps even solving problems that trouble humans' everyday lives. I would like to draw attention to an article by Dolbec, Fischer, and Canniford (2021), which provides suggestions on conducting original and important research. According to these authors, by using enabling theories, research can advance ongoing conversations both in research and in practice. They describe enabling theorizing as research that applies existing theories to data.

For this doctoral work, I used practice theory (Schatzki, 2002) as the enabling theory. Practice theory is a sociological theory that focuses on doings in order to understand social meanings (Schatzki, 1996). On one hand, practice theory is quite simple in focusing on doings. Practice theory views individuals as well as structures as part of doings, and posits that words and meanings emerge in organized doings enacted by actors. This logic stems from Wittgenstein, who, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, for example, argued that, "… the possibility of the movement stands in a unique relation to the movement itself; closer than that of a picture to its subject" (Wittgenstein, 2010, p. 85). Consequently, the structures of our society are related to organized doings. On the other hand, practice theory is highly complex. Doings, activities, and practices are complex terms, and trying to understand, for example, how a ski competition is practiced is a rather complex task (Woermann & Rokka, 2015). Undeniably, the levels of, for example, praxis, practices, and activities that aim to grasp layers of meaning in doings are complex in their own right (Reckwitz, 2002). Despite the complexity of practice theory, it can be used to make sense of underlying meanings of activities that move across actors (Barnes, 2005; Shove et al., 2012; Woermann, 2017). This is exactly how I attempted to use, and make sense of, practice theory in my doctoral work.

Practice theory determines the ontological understanding of influencer marketing as a practice in its own right, utilizing an understanding of meaning as emerging in the intermediaries between sayings and doings (Schatzki, 2005; Woermann, 2017). Moreover, no practitioner is favored over the other, which enables one to explore the practice as the focal point. Furthermore,

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practice theory has functioned as an epistemological lens for studying and exploring influencer marketing through multiple sites that constitute the practice (Nicolini, 2007). This unique way of using practice theory has allowed for an understanding of the power relations, tensions, exchanges, and consequences between actors who engage in the practice. Following Schatzki's (2001) understanding of practices, practices are shaped by the doings of the practice; therefore, studying practitioners' doings across sites is essential for understanding the practice itself (Schatzki, 1996).

What kind of practice is influencer marketing?

The site of social life is composed of nexuses of human practices and material arrangements (Schatzki, 2005). Influencer marketing is a practice with multiple sites in which practitioners inherently coexist; for example, firms and SMIs each represent a site. The sites of influencer marketing are defined by their own context, with sites producing a certain type of context. A context, in this sense, is a historical sphere of meanings and events that shape current meanings (Schatzki, 2005). Sites were defined by Schatzki as arenas or broader sets of phenomena forming part of something—a building, an institution, an event—that exists or occurs (Schatzki, 2005, pp. 467–468). In the case of influencer marketing, these arenas appear as intersections between the logic of commercialization and the logic of personalization. These two logics represent different ideals and motives that shape actions and meanings within influencer marketing. The literature on human branding addresses how the two logics of commercialization and personalization create tensions for the brand and the person, as they originate from different logics (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013). The logic of commercialization is based on values of economic achievement (Kjeldgaard et al., 2017), whereas the logic of personalization is based on bundles of activities where values of personal aims and beliefs drive actions (cf. Labrecque et al., 2011) (for more details, see Paper 3).

Influencer marketing includes a bundle of activities that constitute different sites, which affect how practitioners enact and understand the practice through overarching nets of activity between commercialization and personalization. Although commercialization and personalization generate tensions within a bundle of actions in influencer marketing (cf. Mäkinen, 2021), the context of each site steers and directs actions. These actions collectively affect the practice, and the practice, in turn, affects the sites (Barnes, 2005). Schatzki (2005) argued that materials are also a part of sites. In the case of influencer marketing, technology plays an important role, but materials are a part of sites and are used as tools to create meaning. In this sense, the meaning is

directed by the actions of the practitioners who enact a tool on a specific site. In my exploration of influencer marketing, I initially understood social media as a site. However, in the process of analysis, I realized that social media does not represent a historical context in which broader sets of actions coexist in the practice of influencer marketing. Rather, social media is used as a tool across sites and enables the sites to coexist.

In recent times, influencer marketing has evolved into a diverse practice comprising several sub-practices. Distinctions, such as micro-, macro-, and mega-influencer marketing, which are based on the number of followers (e.g., Britt et al., 2020), have developed as different tactics that potentially increase the perceived authenticity of the commercial content (Hudders et al., 2020). Although defining the different sub-practices was not an aim of this doctoral work, my exploration of them showed that the different sub-practices involve different sites and different importance of the sites. For this doctoral work, however, the focus is on what I like to call the core practice as a professional practice. This distinction is relevant because, for example, micro-influencer marketing does not ordinarily employ professional SMIs. Instead, micro-influencing is generally a hobby for its practitioners, and influencer marketing is not their main occupation (cf. Lee & Lin, 2011). The level of an SMI's professional engagement changes the activity in the sites, and thus a specific analysis of these sub-practices should be conducted. Unfortunately, this is beyond the scope of this work. In my exploration of influencer marketing, all levels of influencer marketing took place, but the sub-practices were not taken into consideration. Rather than defining influencer marketing based on the number of followers, I defined the practice by considering the level of professionalism involved in the work. This means that influencer marketing was the main occupation for all sites. Therefore, in this thesis, only SMIs for whom influencer marketing was their main profession were considered. The definition of influencer marketing also emphasizes that influencer marketing is a matter of a professional occupation form of work that is performed in collaboration with others.

In the core practice of influencer marketing, four main sites are usually present, in which a bundle of activities takes place. These sites are: (i) firms (CBs); (ii) media agencies; (iii) influencer agencies; and (iv) the influencers themselves. These sites are not individuals, but rather a set of actions that are both physically and mentally driven by the same meaning and broader idea of social life (Schatzki, 2005). In each of these sites, actions are composed and organized to steer influencer marketing in a direction of meaning that adheres to a specific kind of logic. Moreover, each site is equally important to the practice of influencer marketing. Firms

constitute a site that represents commercial logic. The agenda is to reach economic goals, and their socially defined meaning depends on how effective the business representing the specific brand is at achieving those goals. The context of the firm is defined by its economic growth. This ideal of growth inherently affects the actions and decisions made in the site. The media agency is inherently defined by its commercial logic. However, media agents also represent SMI agendas, and therefore their arena becomes a network of actions that represent both commercial and personal logics. The media agency, however, is paid by the firm, and thus the meaning of economic growth permeates the ideals of influencer marketing as a practice. However, this ideal must coexist with the logic of personalization, which is fundamental to the practice of influencer marketing (cf. Audrezet et al., 2020). Influencer agencies are also commercial sites. However, influencer agencies represent SMIs who constitute the logic of the person, which permeates the practice of influencer marketing—without the person, the practice cannot exist (cf. Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018). Influencer agencies thus become a practice of two logics and multiple sites, and the task of integrating the two across sites is central to the work influencer agents do. On one hand, they must personalize what is commercial, and on the other hand, they must commercialize what is personal. Finally, the SMI represents the logic of personalization. Because sites are not individuals, but rather networks of activities that include materials, technologies, and people (Barnes, 2005), the SMIs themselves are consequently detached from their personas. Accordingly, SMIs are understood as sites that represent logics of personalization, but who enact a network of (commercial) activities that allow their personas to become objects for the practice of influencer marketing. The logic of personalization represents the personal narrative, aims, and values of the person behind the brand (see paper 3). These parameters are what make influencer marketing sincere and relatable (e.g., Audrezet et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Reinikainen et al., 2020). Although commercial ideals are represented throughout the practice, neglecting the person is a strategic defeat for the practice itself (cf. Audrezet et al., 2020). Influencer marketing thus represents two logics and becomes an intermediary between two logics that must coexist. In this case, the activities are tied to two different arenas that scrutinize the activities that are part of those sites.

The nexus of commercialization and personalization in Papers 1–3

An exploration of influencer marketing as a new type of work that bears new ethical dilemmas (Paper 1), new dilemmas for the worker (Paper 2), and new strategic consequences (Paper 3) is important because the digital economy generates new types of creative work that are difficult to

place in traditional work schemas (e.g., Guarriello, 2019; Newlands, 2020; Salamon, 2020). When exploring influencer marketing, one realizes that it has a variety of similarities to existing work or activities, such as celebrity branding (Lunardo et al., 2015), human branding (Ki et al., 2020; Thomson, 2006), word-of-mouth advertizing (Boerman et al., 2017; Kozinets et al., 2010), fashion modeling (Rocamora, 2011), and entrepreneurship (Mardon et al., 2018). Influencer marketing draws on all the above, this fluidity of the work makes influencer marketing different from previous conceptions of work. This differentiation is born from an individualization of work that has flourished in the attention economy (Marwick, 2015). An economy which has made the average person a potential object for commercialization (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003) and has encouraged many people to treat themselves as a brand in various activities of self-branding (Gabriel, 2005; Hearn, 2008). In this sense, influencer marketing is an exemplar case of the personalization of marketing that is accelerated by social media, as well as the marketing of the self, which we all, to varying degrees, take part in when we post about ourselves on social media.

The nexus between commercialization and personalization has, to some degree, been investigated previously, both in relation to tactical strategies, where personalized initiatives decrease inauthentic brands' motives (Fournier & Avery, 2011), and in relation to how commercialization is a factor in human brands gaining legitimacy, and becoming and acting as brands (Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018; Thomson, 2006). This doctoral work aims to improving our understanding of the complexities in the nexus between the two, and providing some insight into how the two challenge and affect each other. By using three theoretical lenses, this intersection was explored from three different perspectives, enabling the reader to reflect upon influencer marketing and digital practices in a new and holistic way.

In Paper 1, self-management in new digital creative work forms was theoretically addressed (Duffy et al., 2021; Duffy & Wissinger, 2017; Gill & Pratt, 2008), with a discussion on how commercial motives are reflected in SMIs' ethical behavior toward the self. This illustrated a complexity of the nexus between commercialization and personalization by showing how care for the self (Foucault, 1984) becomes intertwined with care for commercial outcomes. By drawing on Foucault's later work on ethics, this paper reveals how power relations (Foucault, 1982) in commercial systems inform ethical care for the self, and illustrates how self-management in new types of individualized work (e.g., Salamon, 2020) influences practices of

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freedom and practices of self-abuse. Paper 1 shows how power relations are enacted as governmental practices, with workers enacting morals constituted by commercial actions on themselves. Therefore, this work reveals how the ethics of the individual become intertwined with commercial objects.

Where Paper 1 opens for future debates on new "digital" ethics between the personal and the commercial, Paper 2 use notions of emotional labor and self-presentation (e.g., Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Mardon et al., 2018) in order to deepen the analysis of how this type of work is different from others and how that affects the worker. Zooming in on the work, paper 2 reveals how the nexus between commercialization and personalization initiates a new type of work in which a person's emotions become an asset for commerce. Paper 2 contains an illustration of how the worker enacts commercial motives on the self so as to transform the self into a brand. It is in these work practices that the governmentality (Rose, 1990) of the worker's emotions comes into play. Moreover, this work examines how agents ingrain commercial thinking into workers' daily lives in order to transform emotions into commercial offerings. The nexus between commercialization and personalization is reflected in the worker's ability to create boundaries so that the personal can remain personal. Despite efforts to keep the two domains separate, the personal becomes intertwined with commercial activities, and the worker's life becomes a performance of commerce.

In Paper 3, the focus is on practice itself, illustrating how the two logics of commercialization and personalization challenge the nature of work. In this paper, influencer marketing is discussed as a marketing discipline in which the person is the focus (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019; Labrecque et al., 2011; Parmentier et al., 2013). Where Paper 1 presents an analysis of how the nexus of commercialization and personalization is formed in power relations across sites, and Paper 2's focus is internal to the worker, Paper 3 involves the use of practice theory as a conceptual lens (Woermann & Rokka, 2015), showing how and where the nexus cause challenges in the bundle of activities and sites that constitute the practice of influencer marketing. In this paper, we demonstrate how the logics of commercialization and personalization at times compete, producing tensions that challenge the practice itself. Consequently, this work illustrates why it is important to understand the intersection between the two logics in marketing management and how the two logics shape different enactments of the same practice.

In the following section, I discuss how this triangular approach supported an empirical analysis of the nexus between commercialization and personalization.

Methodological considerations

A rhizome develops from axillary buds and grows horizontally. The rhizome also retains the ability to generate new sprouts to grow upwards (Honan, 2007; Wider et al., 2018).

When exploring influencer marketing as a practice of sites and a bundle of activities from different sites, becoming like a rhizome, slowly developing in all directions, and creating a network of small events that constituted the whole, seemed unavoidable. This approach required the utilization of various methods that made sense concerning the site and the event. This doctoral work is an attempt to conduct a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995) by following the practice of influencer marketing, moving with it, and following its networks (Kjeldgaard et al., 2006), as well as making stops for immersion when something changed, impacted, or influenced the practice (Falzon, 2016). Such immersions potentially resulted in a new path or a dead end, despite which, all stops were necessary in order to understand the practice as a whole. Importantly, no site can be regarded individually. This work is not an ethnographic study of, for example, influencer agencies because influencer agencies are simply sites of the practice.

But why even start here, with the rhizome, why not take a more quantitative approach and for example measure how the involvement of emotions affects SMIs' wellbeing? To me at least, this is an interesting and relevant question, which I am yet to answer. Nonetheless, what seemed and still appears to me as the overarching question is, what is the nature of this form of work and why do conflicts appear to happen, as influencer marketing is practiced? Or in other words, in order to ask questions of generalizability, first one must understand the nature of what is being studied (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Consequently, to answer the question of the nature of this work, how this work is done, what is the heart of the work, and what are the main challenges, one must explore how the work is done. A grounded theorist would say that the attention should be on the discovery (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Specifically, for this investigation the attention to discovering the work of influencer marketing features a processual approach influenced by the idea that something is always being done, and that the world is always moving, so is influencer marketing. The ontological understanding of this thesis is that subjects

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are always doing things and that these doings constitute the meaning of what is being done (Schatzki, 1996). So, to return to the question of why starting with a rhizome, there appeared to be no other logical way. In other words, my ontological position to study influencer marketing is dynamic, perhaps even liquid, and understanding the practice appears only through the sites from where it is practiced. Rather than a question of what anchors practices (Barnes, 2005) this is a matter of what anchors sites.

Research is considered to be multi-sited when the researcher works on more than one site. The difference between the sites lies not necessarily in geography, but more importantly in how the sites are spatialized differently culturally, which means that meaning and action are different in such a way that it makes no sense to analyze them as one site (Falzon, 2016). The sites and the understanding of the sites thus become part of the exploration of influencer marketing as a practice. Though studying influencer marketing as a practice of multiple sites has led me to explore the intermingles between these sites, it obviously has also restricted the complete comprehension of the individual sites. Questions of how influencer agencies operate or how SMIs function as an organization, are relevant and interesting questions, however, as the multi-sited ethnography of this thesis centers the practice of influencer marketing work, those questions that relate to individual sites remain unanswered. In exploring influencer marketing work, the sites emerged processual as the rhizome grew and developed, always keeping in mind that practices of influencer marketing work are what glue the sites together. Consequently, evaluating single amounts of the data based on one site made no sense when I conducted the multi-sited analysis. Rather, the validity of the analysis must be understood and evaluated based on a gestalt view of the multiple sites.

Naturally, this approach has its limitations, at one point the researcher must stop, cut off the branch of the rhizome, and let it be (cf. Nicolini, 2011). The motivation for my exploration has been to understand intermediaries between relations and how conflicts emerge within these relations that constitute the doings of influencer marketing work. Though I recognize that there are places where I ideally could have let the rhizome grow, I believe that I have answered the research question and that hopefully after having read this thesis, the readers will more adequately be able to answer the question, what is the nature of influencer marketing work. The dynamic approach also affects how to understand the underlying meanings of what is being done, as a multi-sited study. This perspective has affected the choice of methods and a variety of methods has been used. As the rhizome changed and new sprouts made new turns, I sometimes

had to change my ways of doing things. To give an example, I started by conducting passive observations at a media agency, and my initial idea was to follow specific influencer marketing campaigns from here. However, I realized that doing passive observations did not allow me access to the detailed information about the work that I needed. Therefore, I started shadowing subjects. Several problems also emerged as I followed specific campaigns, the most important one was the ability to get access to meetings and report from there. Consequently, instead of merely taking a departure from the media agency, I physically located myself at different sites. The selection of sites happened as the rhizome grew, and as I came to understand the core of the work and how different actors would think and act upon doing the work. The changes in methods and approaches throughout the data collection also affected the possibility of using the different methods in-depth. Analyzing across different methods, for example, interviews, shadowing, and observation has its difficulties, nonetheless, this is how practices are, inherently incremental and exploratory, and neither linear nor rational (Makkonen, Olkkonen & Halinen, 2011), and so is the data of this thesis.

For all three papers, the data was collected and analyzed across multiple sites that constituted a variety of methods and data. In total, the data collection across sites resulted in 122 hours of observation, shadowing, and interviews, in addition to 120 minutes of analyzed television documentaries and more than 250 e-mails. Aside from this, for approximately five years, I collected newspaper articles, SMI content (40 online postings (Instagram and blog) were analyzed in detail), and trade magazines with varying relevance to my doctoral work. In addition to the data presented in the three papers, a considerable amount of additional data was collected (please see Appendix 2 [Overview of the data] to get an overview of the data). Although I would have ideally analyzed and presented all the data, administrative regulations (in regards to the Ph.D. hand-in procedure) and space constraints (for example, with regard to journal article guidelines) did not allow me to do so. Nonetheless, I read and collected all the data myself, which strengthened my understanding of the influencer marketing practice. When deciding what material to present, I was forced to consider relevance, significance, and practicality. Firstly, the data presented in the three papers were selected based on their relevance to the particular research question in the paper. For example, in Papers 1 and 2, I used data from 2015 because that provided better insights into the workers' understanding of themselves in the practice. Conversely, in Paper 3, I used the e-mail data intensively because that allowed a much better understanding of the challenges between the actors. Secondly, the significance of the data was

important. When working exploratively, the researcher cannot help but collect less-significant data, data that perhaps is holistically important for understanding the whole, but individually loses its importance with regard to a specific question. In each paper, the significance was evaluated taking the research question into consideration and the conceptual framework for the analysis. Finally, the specific journal guidelines constrained the length of the three papers, which limited the practical reasoning contained therein. For example, pictures of some content would show emotional performativity explicitly, however, both GDPR rules and journal guidelines affected the decision to not include such pictures.

Analytical approaches

At some point, any ethnographic researcher must leave the field and turn to understand the field notes, analyze them, and make meaning out of the results. Though I did eventually leave the field and immerse myself in the process of analysis, the process was again far from linear. As Woermann (2017) argues, the value of the mess within social theorizing lies not ontologically in the messiness but is continuously accomplished (p. 152). Understanding the sites and the selection of sites was partly done within the process of analyzing the data. If I think back, I never not analyzed data. Or in other words, the empirical investigation of influencer marketing work influenced the process of analysis. It almost became a processual investigation of the data itself, where I was trying to understand the core of the practice as I was moving back and forth between collecting and analyzing data. The body of the research slowly progressed rereading raw data and applying concepts, and when the conceptual lenses in Papers 1-3 were defined, I would start with a new iteration and analyze the data again. In the end, the gestalt presentation of Papers 1-3 is a suggestion of how I have endeavored to capture influencer marketing work, as a dynamic intermingles of activities by multiple stakeholders on different sites. Paper 1 focuses on micro-doings, as I like to call them, which is the self-management that SMIs do. Moreover, how these micro-doings affect macro-doings or constructs of our society, namely ethics. Paper 2 focuses on meso-doings which is the management of others' emotions that eventually affect micro-doings, the internalization of this management. Finally, Paper 3 that zooms out from the practice and views it in the context of logics, to eventually zoom in on the practice elements and conclude on the doings as they are played out.

In all three papers, the analytical approach was explorative, with several iterations between the theory and the data. In this sense, this doctoral work is purely qualitative and aims to show how qualitative research can advance our understanding of abstract and novel phenomena. In each paper, the analytical approach is described in detail. However, to holistically understand the similarities and differences in the analytical approaches, and to show how each approach increased the validity of this work, each approach is described below.

Paper 1

The analytical approach used for Paper 1 was derived from Foucault's (1982) conception of how to analyze power relations and his project on ethics (1984). Consequently, an emic coding procedure (Buckley et al., 2014) was followed, where the codes were directed by theory. The emic procedure of analysis maintains a focus on specifics and does not allow for comparison across dimensions. Moreover, it requires a pre-state analysis where the framework of analysis is well argued for (Buckley et al., 2014). Though an emic analytical approach is often used in the quantitative domain, this paper is the result of an extensive etic (universal and explorative) approach before it reached the state of being emic. This approach allowed me to address micro-doings and specifically look at how workers enact ethics as self-management. Though Foucault was not a practice theorist, his work has heavily impacted my understanding of influencer marketing work. His notions of governmentality and discussions of freedom (1977), where the liberated person risks being imprisoned by her own ideas of freedom, has in some respects become, if not essential for my understanding of influencer marketing work, then at least an influential fragment to my research. In the etic pre-state of the analysis and in my readings of Foucauldian literature, I became familiar with his rather radical change in his later writings about structure and subject. It seems like, Foucault had used his life on arguing for how structures of society restrained the self (for example both in The History of Sexuality (1976) and in Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1977)) but in the end, gave up and concluded, you can only free yourself by your own doings (Foucault, 1984). As a result, Foucault's focus on ethics, as doings by and on the self, enabled me to conduct an analysis of ethics as work practices. Though Foucault is not a practice theorist, his idea of ethics as doings is rather compliant with the ideas of practice theory (see for example, Barnes, 2005; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki et al., 2001; Shove et al., 2012).

Consequently and specifically, within the emic analysis firstly, power relations were carved out following Foucault's (1982, p. 792) five-step analysis of power relations. The codes used to analyze the SMI, system were consequently motivated by Foucault's five-step analysis, which enabled an analysis of power relations across sites. Secondly, practices of freedom and practices of self-abuse were analyzed by applying a combination of conceptual codes and codes motivated by the first phase of analysis. Figure 2.1 illustrates the analytical approach and the coding procedure.
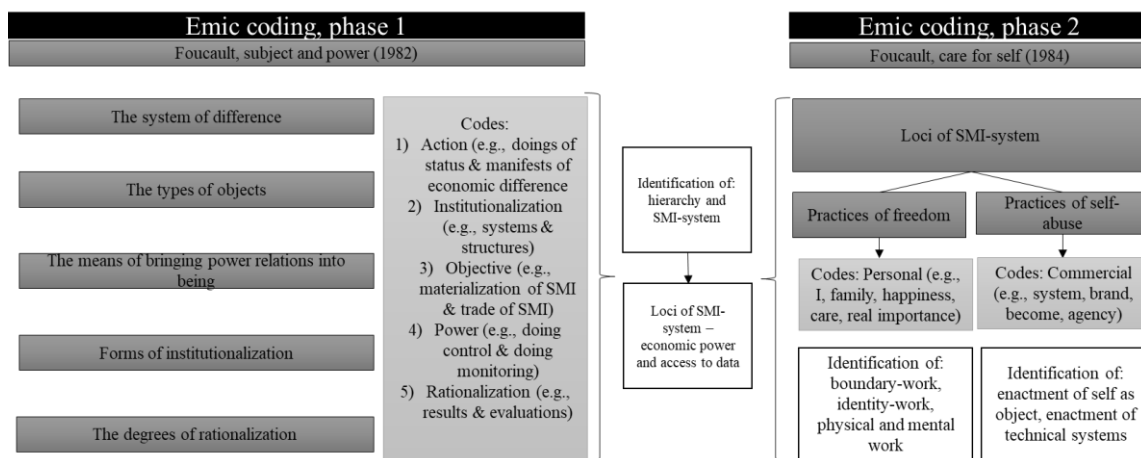
Figure 2.1 Analytical approach used in Paper 1

The analytical approach used in Paper 1 enabled me to specifically address the research question by exploring how power relations are formed in the practice, and how these power relations affect the enactment of the practice, as well as how the worker is affected by these power relations, and how that challenges the ethicality of the worker and our society. Consequently, this analytical approach sheds light on how the self manages the nexus between commercialization and personalization and how the intermingles between the two afects our current society.

Paper 2

The analytical approach employed for Paper 2 was truly explorative, following a thematic approach that allowed collective or shared meanings and experiences to be observed, and made sense of across multiple types of data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The thematic approach allowed for an identification of what was common across sites, and an understanding of how the sites

collectively constitute a new type of work. The thematic approach involves both logic and intuitive thinking and making judgments about meaning and importance (Allevesson & Sköldberg, 2017). These subjective terms must be agreed on based on the conceptual framework. To give an example, when studying emotional performances, all actions or sayings including articulations of for example fear, happiness, or anger are evaluated as important. Specifically for this analysis, the attention was on categorizing the management of emotions across sites. Therefore we thematized two open themes i) emotions that were managed, for example, an agent's direction of a SMIs' tone of voice, and ii) performed emotions, an SMI who was crying as part of a sponsored post. The themes were open in the sense that we did allow for all indicators within the data to be included. Therefore this approach was etic, as it was universal and without the direction of theory (Buckley et al., 2014). This approach works in alignment with the ideal of qualitative studies (Bryman & Burgess, 1994) and came as a natural development of how the data was collected. However, we slowly entered a more emic *mode*. I like to address this as a *mode*, as this is not a traditional emic approach that is restricted to one specific construct (Buckley et al., 2014), rather it is a *mode* in which we delimited ourselves to concentrate on previous themes that arose from the etic analysis. In other words, as the themes were localized and we immersed ourselves in readings of emotional labor, the thematic approach became almost an emic analysis of emotional performances. We addressed this as a thematic approach, as we realized that each category defined the other. In retrospect, this makes sense, as practices appear as a bundle of activities (Barnes, 2005)

Figure 2.2 illustrates how the coding procedure was defined by themes across the sites.

Thematic coding procedure

Themes Exploration

Etic coding of tension in-between internal and external management of emotional performances

→ Identification of: general work practices of emotional labour, themes of emotional performances and external versus internal control emerged

Themes Definition

Emic coding within themes, work-practices within management of emotional performance and identity struggle in emotional performances

→ Identification of: two internalisation processes, management and identity struggle

Themes Validation

Emic Coding within sub-themes to validate themes: coding within systemisation; quantification; stimulation; commercialisation; self-guidance; displays of personal pain; foregrounding the backstage; coping with emotional exploitation

→ Identification of: work-practices within internalisation processes
Management: systemisation; quantification; stimulation; commercialisation
Identity: self-guidance; displays of personal pain; foregrounding the backstage; coping with emotional exploitation

Figure 2.2 Analytical approach used in Paper 2

The three finalizing themes are all referring to each other. For example, within internal management (theme 1) work-practices of emotional performances happen in two processes (theme 2), and within these processes, doings, such as foregrounding the backstage, happen (theme 3). As a result, the final analysis allowed us to address how the meso-level, the management of others' feelings affect the micro-level, the management of one's feelings.

 The analytical approach used in Paper 2 was specifically explorative in analyzing the data, ensuring a deeper understanding of the work practices concerning the work and the worker. Assuring we answered the research question, in the analysis we were extremely precisions of always focusing on doings rather than on subjects, such as SMIs. The thematic approach was an advantage when trying to keep a distance from the subject, a rather refined and difficult balance, to be honest, especially concerning SMIs who both constitute a site and a subject. But the thematic approach ensured that the codes adhered to the theme rather than the subject herself. The coding was, for example, not a matter of making sense of SMIs' internalization itself but of making sense of how internalization happens as a work-practice within influencer marketing work. Following this principle, the analytical approach was following the conception of practice theory and centered on the practice, not the person.

Paper 3

Finally, the analytical approach employed in Paper 3 was explicitly directed by practice theory to function as an analytical tool to carve out practice elements (Woermann & Rokka, 2015). The analytical approach was divided into three phases where we slowly identified logics within the practice that affected the movement or flow of the practice elements. The first phase was rather explorative and followed an etic ideal of being universal and identifying similarities (Buckley et al., 2014) across sites and data types. I like to think of this analysis as we were zooming out on the practice and trying to understand how the practice of influencer marketing itself develops between sites. The first phase enabled the identification of themes across sites and allowed us to understand how the sites entail different logics. The second phase of the analysis was an emic approach, in which practice elements controlled the coding, and in the third phase themes and practice elements were merged. The level of detail in the analysis addresses the relations between actors and the enactments across the sites which shows why influencer marketing must be understood as a practice of different sites. Each doing across sites was categorized according to a practice element, which we ongoingly debated. The number of discussions we had about whether a social media account was a material object or an actor itself is uncountable. In the end, the argumentation was, that social media itself does not work with influencer marketing, however, it is a tool others use in their work. The conversations of how cultural understandings differentiate from logics are even more uncountable and in trying to understand the differences between the sites, we, for example, had uncountable conversations about small actions such as how agents would differently present a table to a firm and an SMI. Paper 3 hopefully illustrates this level of detail and answers to these uncountable questions. To simplify the analytical process, figure 2.3 illustrates how the data analysis progressed.

Practice Theory	
Data Analysis	Additional Data Processing

Phase 1

Data analysis

Tool: Digital mind maps
Coding: Themes relating to understanding dynamics of and fractions in the practice
Identification of: two competing understandings influencing the practice; some activity to balance these differing understandings ('bridging')

Phase 2

Data analysis

Tool: Nvivo 12 Pro
Coding: Practice elements; codes relating to two cultural understandings; presence of misalignments in the practice; bridging activities
Identification of: personalization and commercialization; temporary outcomes for the practice ('unresolved conflict', 'resolved conflict', 'maturing')

Describing accounts of two different understandings to locate patterns across research sites;
Describing accounts of conflict and maturing and related bridging activities across research sites to focus on the practice

Phase 3

Data analysis

Tool: Nvivo 12 Pro
Coding: Enactments of focus practice elements within each state of the practice; two different cultural understandings
Identification of: accounts of different types of bridging activities with reference to two understandings causing misalignments in enactments, with three different outcomes

Additional data processing

Enhancing previous descriptions by further describing, sorting, and categorizing accounts of maturing and conflict states and related bridging activities;
Identification of focus elements that cause and solve misalignments;
Distilling four core areas within which conflicts arise

Figure 2.3 *Analytical approach used in Paper 3*

Holistically, with the three analytical approaches I aim producing an understanding of the practice as a whole, and an in-depth understanding of how relations, enactments, and meanings are shaped across sites that constitute the practice of influencer marketing. Though there has been messiness, and this mess at some point has become an advantage or at least has been a necessity to understand the complexity of the nature of the work, I have in the three analytical approached made an attempt to make sense out of the mess. With the above, the previous sections, and chapter in mind, I hope that the readers feel enlightened and ready to immerse themselves into the reading of Papers 1-3.

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Chapter 3 Ethics

Practices of Freedom and Self-abuse in Influencer Marketing Work (Paper 1)

"Divisive content is the king of online media today, and [YouTube](#) heavily boosts anything that riles people up,". "It's one of the most toxic things: the point at which you're breaking down is the point at which the algorithm loves you the most."
(YouTuber Matt Lees, The Guardian*, Sept. 8th, 2018)*

Introduction

In the last decade, social media has changed how key structures in our society function (Rauf, 2021) and how work structures are formed (Gandini, 2016). More broadly, social media has challenged our perceptions of freedom and control (e.g., Cohen-Almagor, 2011; Hajli & Lin, 2016). During this transformation, creative work forms have proliferated, as social media offers endless opportunities for individuals to engage in different roles (Rundin & Colliander, 2021) and jobs (Fleming, 2005; Lee & Lin, 2011) at the same time. With this development, the possibility of always being online and promoting oneself has caused subjects to become the focus of intense commercial interest (Mcrobbie, 2010). Social media has digitalized the creative industry and, as a consequence, work structures have become more flexible and workers more vulnerable (Bridges, 2017; Duffy et al., 2021). Social media has fostered new types of creative jobs, such as influencer marketing (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017; Mäkinen, 2021). Moreover, its ability to drive commercial outputs via personal social media profiles has personalized the creative industry (Mäkinen, 2021; O'Meara, 2019). While social media offers opportunities to the individual, this also challenges us to rethink the regulation and protection of workers (cf. Duffy et al., 2021; Salamon, 2020). In this research, I used the example of influencer marketing to address the changing structures in work and society caused by social media challenging the ethical and moral conceptions between self-management (Mäkinen, 2021; Mcrobbie, 2010) and systematic power relations in digital creative work (A. K. Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2015; P. Kennedy, 2020).

The creative industry's freedom from institutional and organizational regulations creates work relations wherein workers must self-monitor and act as micro-managers of their own

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performances (Mcrobbie, 2010). However, critical voices have discussed how digital creative workers' freedom and self-management are in fact controlled and governed (Ahsan, 2020; Kennedy, 2020). Kennedy (2020) argued that the "free" imagery of creative digital work is highlighting a controlling predatory capitalism in which the worker is left to self-manage, unaided, through self-branding practices. Within the context of influencer marketing, the social media influencer is often portrayed as an empowered working consumer (McQuarrie et al., 2013) who lives a glamorous life (Business Insider, 2021). However, the literature suggests that SMIs work in established marketing systems (Martínez-López et al., 2020) with multiple stakeholders (Haenlein et al., 2020) to become brands (Ki et al., 2020). Although some SMIs have million-dollar budgets at their disposal (Business Insider, 2021), many live with short and insecure contracts, where self-management becomes a necessity in order to gain control and autonomy (Mäkinen, 2021).

Throughout the history of creative work, the academic literature has been concerned with creative workers' vulnerability (e.g., Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2021; Butler & Stoyanova Russell, 2018; Mangematin et al., 2014)—a vulnerability that accelerated digitalization has intensified (Mcrobbie, 2010). The literature on the creative industry has assessed workers as precarious, for example, because of their vulnerable contractual relations (Butler & Stoyanova Russell, 2018). Although these free structures are supplying workers with the space for creative thinking (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017) and meaningful work (Bridges, 2017), it has also been argued that they result in increased mental health issues, such as stress and depression (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2021; Duffy et al., 2021; Gill & Pratt, 2008; O'Meara, 2019). In the influencer marketing industry, there is an increasing number of SMIs who suffer from such conditions (e.g., Mäkinen, 2021; O'Meara, 2019; The New York Times, 2021).

The general literature on social media workers' wellbeing mostly concerns how the workers are affected by the structures of social media platforms (Hardman Taylor & Bazarova, 2021; Mäkinen, 2021). Although these studies have considered how social media affects workers' wellbeing, they have not focused on the ethical decisions and trade-offs social media generates for the worker in relation to self-management in creative digital work. This is despite researchers having argued that the digitalization of creative work has increased structures of self-management (Mäkinen, 2021; Mcrobbie, 2010) and the vulnerability of the worker because they are working in structural power relations that drive marketing tactics (Hearn, 2008). The literature regarding ethicality and morality has mostly focused on ethics as implemented

within the societal system (e.g., Ahsan, 2020; Chakrabarty & Erin Bass, 2013; Cohen-Almagor, 2011). For example, the argument in Ancient Greek philosophy is that ethical subjects enact moral constructs of how to live as a good citizen (Manninen, 2020). However, the structures of social media challenge this conception because social media leaves workers to manage their own moral constructs, for example, in relation to communication (Rauf, 2021) and authenticity (Wellman et al., 2020). In other words, moral guidelines for the working subject for ethical behavior have yet to be implemented for digital creative work, and therefore such protocols are most likely to be implemented by the workers themselves.

In this paper I argue that, in order to understand how ethics are implemented and moral constructs are enacted in new digital creative industries, such as influencer marketing, the subject must be central, and how ethics and moral constructs are enacted must be explored as practices of self-management.

In this paper, I draw on the later writings of Foucault and his project on ethics (Foucault, 1984), asking how the ethos of the self is defined in self-managing practices in digital creative work.

In his work, Foucault focused on the ethos of the subject. He argued that ethics is an exercise of self-conduct—which he referred to as "care for the self" —in which it is only by caring for oneself that the self can care for others. By drawing from Foucault, I unpack the complexity between controlling structures and free structures in which workers are left to self-manage. Interestingly, Foucault (1984) referred to ethos as an act against power, meaning that an ethical act is an act of freedom and that an unethical act is a passivity toward power, which I label as self-abuse. In this vein, a moral person is a person who acts to care for the self, rather than to care for systemic protocols, such as hidden market structures (Hearn, 2008; Kennedy, 2020; O'Meara, 2019).

I collected explorative data from firms, media agencies, influencer agencies, and SMIs from a five-year ethnographic study (Watson, 2011), which enabled me to obtain a deep understanding of how SMIs practice care for their selves. To understand how ethics are enacted as self-management and organized between multiple stakeholders (Belanche et al., 2021; Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018), I used a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995). This allowed me to explore how ethics are exercised through SMIs' work practices by the SMIs who works in what I call 'SMI-system' where power relations are enacted by multiple stakeholders, including firms, media agencies, influencer agencies, and SMIs. In order to understand how power relations are

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formed in these relations, I employed a variety of methods, including observation, shadowing, post-shadowing interviews, interviews, and content analysis of e-mail, online, and television documentary data. Following Foucault (1982), I see power as being enacted between subjects (Foucault, 1982) and being shaped in the space between what is uttered and what is enacted—the so-called "sayings and doings" of practices (Schatzki, 2005). For this reason, I focus on SMIs' work practices rather than on SMIs as subjects.

The findings show how ethics are self-managed in accordance with the SMI-system, which describes the actors who work with influencer marketing and their actions. In the SMI-system power relations follow loci of economic thinking. A hierarchy of power based on data access, money, and ideals of economic thinking drives workers' moral enactments. By unfolding how SMIs enact moral constructs through practices of freedom and practices of self-abuse, and determining how these moral constructs are intertwined with the SMI-system, this paper contributes to novel ethics research on precarious work in social media (Butler & Stoyanova Russell, 2018; Duffy et al., 2021; Rauf, 2021; Wellman et al., 2020), while arguing that ethics are shaped in self-management practices of freedom and self-abuse. In this paper, I suggest that the ethos of the self in SMI work is practiced as self-management through: (i) practices of freedom that are enacted as boundary work where SMIs attempt to undermine domination and protect their privacy, as identity work where SMIs attempt to co-exist to maintain their self, and as physical and mental exercise on their self; and (ii) as practices of self-abuse that are enacted through self-commercialization and self-organizing.

By applying Foucault's (1984) ethical work to the case of influencer marketing, an understanding evolved of how the ethos of creative workers is enacted through self-management intertwined with loci of economic thinking. This allows me to suggest a new type of precarity in digital creative work, attached to self-management, in which the moral self is constructed. Consequently, in this paper, I argue that, through governmental commercial system, the moral self becomes commercialized and, in so doing, behaves unethically toward the self. This paper contains an unfolding of current academic discussions between freedom and control (Ahsan, 2020; Argandoña, 2003; Cohen-Almagor, 2011; Place, 2021; Salamon, 2020), with the suggestion that ethics are self-managed through practices of freedom and practices of self-abuse. Finally, by suggesting an ethos of the self that is enacted through practices of freedom and self-abuse in social media work, this paper contributes to the novel literature on how new media

transforms traditional understandings of ethics (Argandoña, 2003; Cohan, 2001; Rauf, 2021; Wellman et al., 2020).

Theoretical background

New personalized creative work

Influencer marketing work is part of the new wave of media work in which creative work has been digitalized, individualized, and accelerated (Guarriello, 2019; Mcrobbie, 2010; Salamon, 2020; Veile et al., 2022). In this new type of work, self-branding practices have become a means of achieving fame and a way of establishing a lifestyle outside the traditional work structure (Hearn, 2008). Social media influencers are distinct from other digital creative workers, as the core of their business is to simply be themselves (Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018), and thus self-branding practices are central to their work (Audrezet et al., 2020). Being themselves and broadcasting their personas allows them to create strong friendship-like relations with their followers (Lou, 2021; Reinikainen et al., 2020). These relationships enable them to stay authentic despite their commercial offerings (Audrezet et al., 2020). On one hand, to "be yourself" sounds like an easy task, but on the other hand, being yourself is hard work, as it allows the SMI no opportunity to take a day off. In fact, SMIs are at risk of every aspect of their lives becoming a potential commercial offering (Hearn, 2008).

Historically, creative workers have eschewed firm regulations and contracts for the sake of autonomy (Bridges, 2017), self-realization (Salamon, 2020), and self-expression (Mcrobbie, 2010). Such considerations are reflected in how SMIs think about their own branded personas (Brooks et al., 2021; Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018; Ki et al., 2020) and how SMIs are viewed by their aspiring followers (Reinikainen et al., 2020). Although SMIs have gained capital (McQuarrie et al., 2013) and changed institutional structures (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), their mode of always being "on", as well as their extreme self-presentation, challenge previous conceptions of privacy (cf. Chua & Chang, 2016; Iqani & Schroeder, 2016) that shape moral conceptions in our society. These new moral constructs change our evaluation of the "good life" (Rauf, 2021; Wellman et al., 2020). Instead of measuring one's success by the quality of a task done, it has come to be evaluated based on how much attention that task attracts on social media (Marwick, 2015). Critical voices might argue that the value of a person depends on that person's

ability to self-brand (Hearn, 2008; Kennedy, 2020). This evolution of moral conceptions potentially drives notions of what is understood to be a good life, and it may, in consequence, challenge the ethical understanding of the extent to which a person's life should be commercialized.

The creative industry—and the gig economy in general—often involves fluid work and private boundaries (Fleming, 2005), and has been shown to challenge the wellbeing of workers (Kreiner et al., 2009). However, SMIs' work stretches the fluid boundaries to an extreme through their use of the self as immaterial labor (Gill & Pratt, 2008) where they commercialize their emotions (Hearn, 2008). In the commodification of their emotions, they work on themselves as brands (Ki et al., 2020). This type of work differs from more traditional conceptions of creative labor work, where the worker, for example, expresses the self through their music (Beech et al., 2016); for the SMI, creative work is a matter of expressing the authentic (Audrezet et al., 2020). In other words, for the musician, the act is a form of self-expression, whereas for the SMI, the act is a performance of the self. In their performance of their self, self-management for SMIs becomes a matter of managing themselves and their lives as commercial offerings (cf. Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018). Nonetheless, because SMIs work with themselves as brands, this potentially also challenges their moral conceptions of themselves as commercial objects (Hearn, 2008).

Along with the development of digital technologies and the rise of new media work, there has been an increase in ethical discussions and moral concerns for workers (e.g., Ahsan, 2020; Anwar & Graham, 2020; Friedman, 2014; Graham et al., 2017; Newlands, 2020). For example, Ahsan (2018) discussed how flexible work arrangements generate stress and other negative health outcomes, while Newlands (2020) explored how technology enables the surveillance of users' private lives. In a study on the gig economy in Africa, Anear and Graham (2020) addressed the complexity regarding flexibility and vulnerability that workers experience when working outside traditional contracts. However, in this transformation, new ethical compromises for the subject may also arise (cf. Rojek & Wilson, 1987; Sewell & Taskin, 2015). In a study about a female YouTuber, Guarriello (2019) discussed how flexibility and relationships with brands and followers affected the worker's wellbeing, and how the worker had to self-manage in accordance with the social media platform and sponsored deals to ensure her wellbeing. In general, there seems to have been a focus on how individuals in new media work are challenged; however, the literature seems to be centered around structural ethical questions in relation to privacy (e.g., Plaisance, 2013; Sarathy & Robertson, 2003) and control (e.g., Islam &

Greenwood, 2021; Place, 2021), tending to neglect ethical trade-offs and moral constructs for the subject, who finds themselves in the midst of it all.

Therefore, this study explores the ethos of the subject in digital creative work—the SMI, who works outside regulated ethical codes and is left to self-manage (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017). However, the SMI is placed in a system that motivates workers to commercialize themselves (Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018). In the following section, Foucault's (1980-1984) work on ethics is presented so as to provide a better understanding of the ethos of the self.

Foucault and the care for the self

Because Foucault's work developed and changed over his lifetime, it is important to take a stance when using a Foucauldian lens. The early Foucault (1961–1965) was interested in knowledge, and in *The History of Madness* (Foucault, 2013), he discussed societal structures and how knowledge is (discursively) produced within structures through his exploration of the meaning of madness. From 1966 to 1979, Foucault's work changed to an examination of power relations in the societal system. In particular, in his work *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977), Foucault described how power relations permeate structures and how one must work within these structures. However, in his later work, from 1980 until his death in 1984, he addressed ethics, wherein he centered the subject and argued that it is only the self that can practice ethics through practices of freedom (Bernauer & Keenan, 1987; Foucault, 1984; Heubel, 1989). I based my stance on this work because I aim to understand the ethos of the subject in SMI work practices.

Foucault named his last project "the care for self" (Foucault, 1984) and based his discussions on the ethics of virtue from ancient Greek philosophy, where care of the self-entailed being a good citizen. Philosophers such as Aristotle saw virtue ethics as being fundamentally linked to the role of the individual in society and the idea that it is only through the care of others that one can take care of the self. Foucault argued for the opposite, saying that it is only by caring for the self that one can care for others (Foucault, 1984). The care for the self is, in Foucauldian terms, an ethical act that requires the subject to be knowledgeable about the self, and therefore also about their role in relation to others and the rules and regulations of the societal order, so that the person can act morally toward the self and others (Foucault, 1984).

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In other words, ethics are an act in its own right, being work—"an exercise" for the self in relation to the "game of truth" (Foucault, 1984)—rather than innately part of the character of the individual. The game of truth is a system or regime of rules, norms, and regulations within which one conducts one's moral self (Foucault, 1984). In 1982, Foucault described subjects in relation to power or, specifically, how power is exercised by the subjects. In this work, Foucault used the biological term "locus" or the plural "loci" to describe how power is exercised in specific systems and structures (Foucault, 1982). In genealogy, loci describe certain biological abilities, but in Foucault's project on ethics, loci describe a certain exercise of power by the subject in relation to structures and systems (Foucault, 1982). In this paper, I use loci to understand the 'SMI-system'; that is, how multiple stakeholders exercise power within the system, and how morality is enacted through these power relations. This could be how agents motivate SMIs to use their private emotions in commercial campaigns.

Importantly, in relation to Foucault's games of truth, loci describe specific moral exercises by subjects or, more precisely, a subject's ability to act morally. For example, subjects can passively or explicitly enact the system, and thus their ability to act morally is non-existent. As another example, SMIs can suggest the commercialization of a private vacation to increase the sincerity of their brand. Foucault would have argued that, in this case, ethics are not salient: "… the mad subject can in fact be considered as the subject of a system coercion" (Foucault, 1984, p. 122). In other words, the subjects who do not exercise ethics are unethical toward themselves and, therefore, also toward others.

That subjects exercise care for their self in specific loci complicates Foucault's ideas on ethics because moral practices depend on the subject's ability to understand moral actions. As he said, "… to care for self is to fit one's self out with these truths. That is where ethics is linked to the game of truth" (p. 116). In influencer marketing, certain truths of the system might therefore affect how SMIs construct morality for themselves. Consequently, ethics are defined by practices of freedom within specific loci that define the subject's ability to act morally toward themselves. Foucault described practices of freedom as self-conduct or the exercise of ethos; an act of freedom, therefore, differs depending on the system the worker is obligated to. For SMIs, an act of freedom might be to stand against the commercial injunction from the agents, whereas an act of freedom for a researcher might be to limit their work hours and settle for a lower-ranking publication.

In contrast to practices of freedom, Foucault described the mad subject as the non-free subject—one driven by the "desires that enslave people" (Foucault, 1984, p. 119). In this case, the subject is driven by the system's desires rather than by their care for themselves. For example, an SMI's enactment of the emotional direction in a commercial campaign is an enactment of the system. Thus, desires are understood as motives or drivers for certain loci of a system. These desires can also be one's own desires as the self becomes intertwined with the system through governance. Enacting the desires of the system is consequently unethical toward the self and therefore also toward others. The unethical act is thus an act of the misuse or abuse of power, as Foucault explained, "In the abuse of power, one goes beyond what is legitimately the exercise of power and one imposes on [the] other one's whims, one's appetites, one desires". Following Foucault's thoughts, a good ruler or worker is one who exercises their own power on themselves without being a slave to the desires of the system. As Foucault claimed, if you truly know who you are, you cannot abuse power, but if you do not know who you are and enact another's desires on yourself, you are abusing yourself. In this sense, the unethical act toward the self becomes an act of self-abuse, and thus self-abuse is an unethical act. According to Foucault, self-abuse is a matter of enacting systemic power, which is defined by the desires of a system rather than care for a subject. Therefore, in this paper, self-abuse is defined as the abuse of self-conduct and self-regulation that form power relations and moral behavior toward the self and others.

To expand the understanding of the ethos of the self in the SMI-system, the ideas outlined above are explored empirically in the second half of this paper. The SMI-system is used to describe the power relations that shape multiple stakeholders' work practices in relation to influencer marketing. To understand SMIs' care for their selves through the practices of freedom, I first set out to empirically explore how SMIs enact freedom, and thus what they are being freed from. Therefore, to understand the ethos of the self as moral conduct on the self, one must first understand how power relations are enacted. Moreover, to understand how SMIs enact self-abuse and do not care for their self, one must understand what is limiting the care for the self.

Methodology

Because this study explores ethos as an exercise in self-management that occurs through practices of freedom and practices of self-abuse, the epistemology of this research follows the concept of practice theory (Schatzki et al., 2001). Practice theory centers on practices rather than

individuals (Schatzki, 2012; Woermann, 2017) by seeking an understanding of the social through practices that emphasize ethos as an exercise—something that one does—in line with Foucault's thoughts on ethics as an act. Consequently, in exploring the ethos of the self (Foucault, 1984) through the lens of practice theory, allows this study to determine how workers, through self-management, construct morals and ethical guidelines for themselves. Moreover, studying practices instead of people allows for data that cannot be captured by subjective narratives (Reckwitz, 2002). When studying self-abuse, it is important to keep in mind that the subject may not acknowledge or be consciously aware of their self-abuse. Therefore, studying the intermediaries between subjects' sayings and doings—which is the core of practice theory (Schatzki, 2005)—enables an understanding of practices of freedom and practices of self-abuse that cannot be captured by studying subjects' narratives.

Data collection

This explorative and ethnographic study began in 2015, when I was exploring SMIs' self-branding practices by conducting in-depth interviews with SMIs and a content analysis of SMIs' social media platforms. After reading the data and developing a theoretical understanding of SMIs and their use of themselves as brands, I conducted a focused multi-sited ethnographic study, beginning in November 2018 and ending in January 2020. Following the notion of practice theory, this data collection drew on the idea of multi-sited ethnography, following the doings of the practice rather than the subjects (Marcus, 1995). Consequently, this paper includes a variety of methods, and data from a variety of sites (Schatzki, 2005), which constitute the practice of influencer marketing. The sites included firms, media agencies, influencer agencies, and SMIs. The data includes passive and active observations (Gummesson, 1988) of media agents' work with SMIs, in-depth interviews (Belk et al., 2013) with firms, in-depth interviews with media agents, the shadowing (McDonald, 2005) of SMIs, influencer agents, and media agents, including post-shadowing interviews, the content analysis (Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018) of e-mail data between firms, influencer agents, media agents, SMIs, and other stakeholders, the content analysis of online data from social media platforms, and audio transcriptions of a television documentary. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the data collected from the subjects at different sites.

Table 3.1 Overview of data

Site	Data	Subject	Position
Firm 1	In-depth interview	Tenna	Head of Marketing
Firm 2		Donna & Sarah	Head of Marketing
Media agency 1	Observation	Danish Media Agency	N/A
	In-depth interview with media agents	Rob	Head
		Sophia	Creative Strategist
		Susi	Content Strategist
		Reba	Content Manager
		Jacob	Content Strategist
		Clara	Content Manager
	Shadowing + post-shadow interview	Sophia	Creative Strategist
	E-mail data	Firm 1, SMI Emmy, Media agency 1 & multiple sub-stakeholders	N/A
Media Agency 2	Informal Meeting	Nancy	Chief Content Officer
Influencer Agency	Shadowing + post-shadow interview with influencer agent	Nelly	Head of Influencer Marketing
Influencer Agency 2	Informal Meeting	Susan	Partner & Client Director
SMIs	Shadowing + post-shadow interview	Ann	SMI, 35 years
	In-depth Interview	Katelyn	SMI, 30 years
		Petra	SMI, 31 years
		Wendy	SMI, 33 years
	Television documentary	Katelyn	SMI, 30 years
		Dan	SMI, 36 years
		Tina	SMI, 29 years
		Jackie	SMI, 20 years
		Lucas	SMI, 23 years
	Online	Mia	SMI, 38 years
		Katelyn	SMI, 30 years
		Tina	SMI, 29 years
		Ann	SMI, 35 years
		Petra	SMI, 31 years
		Wendy	SMI, 33 years

Data analysis

After carefully reviewing the data, I conducted an emic coding procedure (Buckley et al., 2014) in a two-step analysis using NVivo12 Pro software.

Firstly, I followed Foucault's suggestion and analyzed the power relations (Foucault, 1982, p. 792) in the SMI-system. According to Foucault, the analysis of power relations calls into

question intermediaries between power and freedom. This enables us to understand how power and practices of freedom and self-abuse are enacted in the SMI-system. Foucault argued that five specific points must be established in order to correctly analyze power relations. In the following paragraphs, the five points are listed, and a clarification of the points is provided, including how they were used to analyze power relations in SMI work.

- *The system of difference* describes a hierarchy of relations that are manifested in law, status, economic differences, and differences in knowledge and ability. In SMI work, this relates to the relations between the firm, media agency, influencer agency, and SMI, and how power is defined between those actors. This analysis is used to define hierarchies and structures in the SMI-system.

- *The types of objectives* describe bodily and mental enactments of power, which are manifested in the enactment of power. This could be, for example, specific operations, a statuary authority, or the exercise of a function or a trade. In SMI work practices, this could be how SMIs are traded as content or media products. This analysis is used to broaden the understanding of how SMIs objectify themselves in accordance with the loci in the SMI-system.

- *The means of bringing power relations into being* describes the complex means of control defined by a specific system. It is manifested in how power is exercised, whether explicit or implicit, fixed or non-fixed, in processes and/or in systems of surveillance and through technological means that are brought into action. In SMI work practices, this could be how SMIs enact the influencer agency systems. This analysis is used to understand how SMIs enact technical commercial systems.

- *Forms of institutionalization* describe certain systems, structures, and specific loci. The forms of institutionalization are manifested in a mix of traditional dispositions; for example, legal structures, self-enactments of specific loci, or complex systems like the state. In general, forms of institutionalization address power relations that are endowed with multiple apparatuses or are in the form of a principle of regulation or, to a certain extent, represent the distribution of all power relations in a given social ensemble. In SMI work practices, this could be the influencer agency system that evaluates SMI performances in accordance with the loci in the SMI-system. This analysis is used to understand the system that defines the desires that drive SMI work.

- *The degrees of rationalization* describe elaborations in relation to the effectiveness of instruments. This is manifested in how people make sense of things and how results are measured. This could be how relations are elaborated, transformed, and organized. In SMI work practices, this could be how agents make sense of the value of SMIs' performances. This analysis is used to obtain and understanding of how the desires of the system are evaluated as moral within the loci of the SMI-system.

Secondly, following Foucault's five-step analysis, I coded in relation to practices of freedom and practices of self-abuse. In the following section, the parameters for coding the practices of freedom and of self-abuse are explained.

To analyze practices of freedom, I used Dey and Steyaert's (2014) classification, in which practices of freedom are enacted by actors who undermine dominant conceptions of the subjects' reality, practitioners who forge links with others that transcend hierarchical and instrumental models of co-existence, and practitioners who freely choose to identify themselves with a prescribed identity (Dey & Steyaert, 2014, p. 633). While Dey and Steyaert's first and second classes relate to detaching the self from the loci of a system, their third class allows freedom to be a matter of accepting the system in order to become an entrepreneur. Following Foucault (1984), understanding one's self within the loci of a system is an act of care, whereas obeying a system on the system's terms would be an instance of unethical care toward the self. Therefore, I challenge this category because the self should be protected from the governance of the system if the aim of the system is to prioritize its own goals over the wellbeing of the self. Moreover, where Dey and Steyaert focused on the aspiration of becoming an entrepreneur, this paper is concerned with the ethicality of the person as a whole. Consequently, I coded practices, such as freedom, as enactments where the subject cared for themselves by: (i) undermining the domination of conceptions that threatens the SMI's right to privacy; (ii) protecting their health; and (iii) creating co-existence with personal relationships.

In the analysis of practices of self-abuse, I followed Foucault's belief that it is in the enactment of others' desires that one allows for power to be abused over the self, "… the risk of dominating others and exercising over them a tyrannical power comes from the fact that one do not care for one's self and that one has become a slave to his desires" (Foucault, 1984, p. 119). Therefore, practices of self-abuse are analyzed as practices where the subject: (i) gives up their privacy for another's or their own desire; (ii) undermines their identity to live up to others'

identification of their subject; (iii) permits control and monitoring of their private space; and (iv) uses their relationships as a means to achieve another's or their own desires.

Findings

In the following section, the findings are presented by first revealing how moral constructs are enacted as self-management in the SMI-system. This illustrates the complex nature of the ethos of the self in SMIs' work practices, which, on one hand is defined by the SMI's autonomy and self-management, but on the other hand, is defined by a governmental system that is driven by economic loci. Secondly, the findings reveal how ethics are enacted through practices of freedom and practices of self-abuse. The findings indicate that the ethos of the self is heavily motived by the loci of the system, and that SMIs' practices of freedom and practices of self-abuse are intertwined.

Power relations in the SMI-system

Influencer marketing is enacted as a tactical media practice in which economic loci drive actions, systems, and rationalizations. As media agent Clara explains, "What we want is to integrate it [SMI campaigns] with media strategies, so when we do something on their [SMIs'] channels [SMIs' social media platforms], we get the rights to boost it [SMI content] through the client's [client brands (CB's)] media strategy" (interview, 2018).

As Clara's description stresses, SMIs are used in a tactical manner to solve commercial issues. The tactical use of SMIs is apparent in the way influencer agents monitor SMIs' lives. Influencer agents monitor, orchestrate, and evaluate influencers in an influencer backend system. In this system, all data on SMIs are listed and used as a means of connecting them to potential sponsorships, as well as to formulate a strategy for their brand. These data include both publically available and private data from their private calendars. Picture 13. illustrates this backend system.
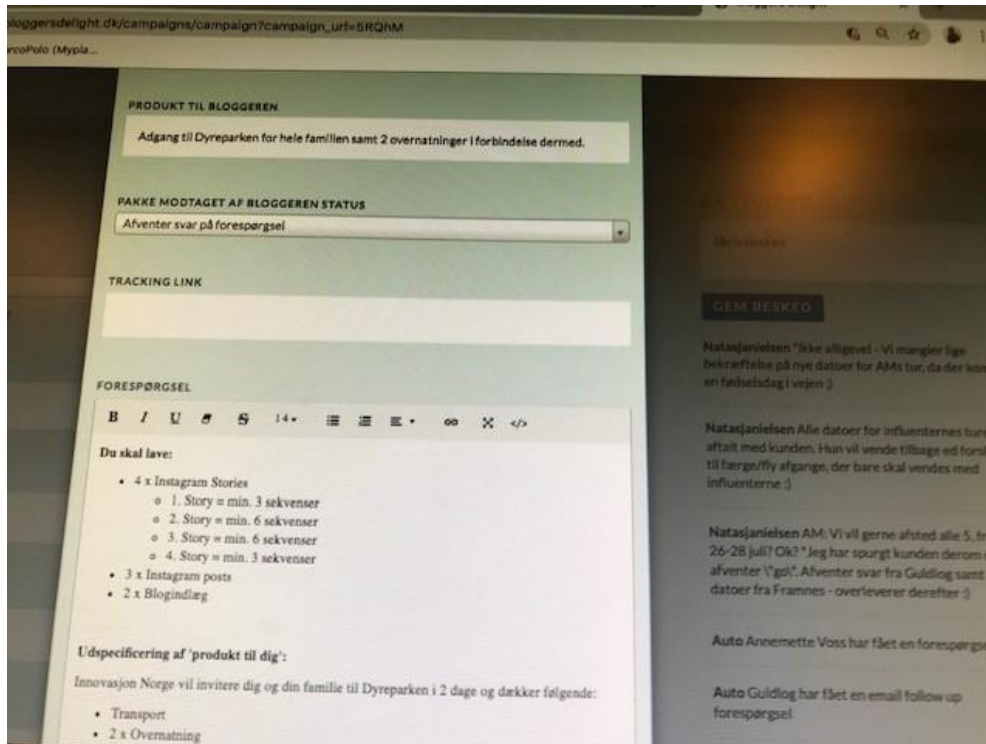
Picture 3.1 *Agency back-end system*
(Note: Picture taken when shadowing influencer agency)

The following section describes how, using Foucault's five-step analysis, power relations are enacted within the SMI system.

Firstly, to understand how power relations are exercised, the system of difference in the SMI-system must be understood. In the SMI-system, there is a hierarchy in loci of economic thinking, where power is defined by the entity that is paying for the campaign and the access to data. The hierarchy in the system is as follows.

1. Firms. As media agent Clara explains, "I believe that a campaign is successful when the client [CB] is satisfied and when we have reached the clients' [CBs'] wishes while staying inside budget" (interview, 2018).

2. Media agencies. These are paid by the CBs and have access to data that they analyze in order to make evaluation reports for CBs. According to media agent Sophia, "The influencer agent sends the data to the client [CB] who then sends it to us. It is a complicated process. My guess is that the influencer agencies have no idea that we are the ones analyzing the data and that we give the recommendation for implementation …" (interview, 2018).

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3. Influencer agencies. These receive a cut of the SMIs' earnings. However, influencer agencies have access to the SMIs' private data. Their relatively low rank in the hierarchy is apparent, for example, in their access to information about a campaign. For instance, when shadowing media agent Sophia, she mentions that she explicitly holds back information from the influencer agency in order to secure their place in the hierarchy. "The influencer agency gets a shorter deadline [i.e., the media agency holds back the information] to deliver the report … [because] They [influencer agencies] just don't know what they are doing, and I need to look it through" (Shadowing, 2019).

4. SMIs. These are viewed as content creators to be used. Media agent Reba explains "You can use them [SMIs] as content creators and then reuse the content on the CBs' channels" (interview, 2018).

Secondly, as Foucault explained, to understand the loci of the system, we must understand the types of objects that describe the means of power. One object in the SMI-system is money. Money represents the commercialization of SMIs and plays a powerful role in the SMI-system. The monetary payments that travel through the different sites of influencer marketing are used as an indirect enactment of power, with firms paying the media agency to organize the campaign and then the following sites calculating the SMI's payment. This payment is defined by an SMI's performance and calculated based on, for example, likes. According to influencer agent Nelly, she finds the influencers she is sending the request to, and she writes an amount in an equation model. Asked what she is doing, she explained, this is the system agents use to calculate what each influencer is paid. The calculation is based on, for example, engagement and likes. The influencer agency has a deal with each influencer on a percentage they cut from their payment, and the equation calculates exactly what goes to the influencers. So that Nelly, via the system, can write it in the request to the influencer" (notes shadowing, 2019).

While a single campaign does not determine other stakeholders' overall earnings, SMIs depend on these payments. This uneven eco-system of payment drives an underlying misuse of power where SMIs become economically dependent on the other sites of influencer marketing. As influencer Ann explains, this can cause tensions, "I think a lot of influencers are mad at them [influencer agencies]. They [SMIs] think that they [influencer agencies] want too much money for the work that they do. They [SMIs] think they [influencer agencies] take too big of a cut" (post-shadowing interview, 2019).

Thirdly, to understand the loci of the SMI-system, one must understand how power is enacted or, as Foucault formulated it, what the means of bringing power into being are. In the SMI-system power relations are enacted in accordance with loci of economic thinking. For example, agents bring power into being in the way they monitor SMIs' daily lives and integrate commercial motives into those. In general, this power is enacted through four work practices.

1. Practices of guarding: "Usually, it is quite important that these [influencer] agents make plans for the influencers … They are part of guarding the influencer and their brand. I mean, it is only a very few influencers who are acting on their own" (media agent Jacob, interview, 2018).

2. Practices of education: "We are educating the influencers. The whole trajectory of becoming a professional influencer is that they make a hobby into a way of living. And often they are also quite young. This means that they simply don't understand how it works … from a media perspective" (media agent Reba, interview, 2018).

3. Practices of content control: Hi Simon [photographer]. I talked to the client [CB] and they came back with some answers in relation to cut downs [remake of original influencer content]. See the comments below. 30 seconds movie versions are the best cutdowns from the main move, the story will remain (e-mail, 2019).

4. Practices of planning: Nelly has access to every influencer's calendar, which the agents also control. Nelly searches on the specific influencer and can see that the influencer is available on Monday, which she writes to the client (influencer agent Nelly, shadowing, 2019).

Fourthly, the degrees of rationalization that drive moral constructs are apparent in the way the SMI-system uses the person as a commercial object and how this is viewed as morally acceptable. The ethical guidelines thus reflect how this person's commercialization matches the firm's values. As Head of Marketing, Donna notes, "I mean, we are a large brand and it is very important that those we do business with are some that we are aligned with in relation to everything in our codes of conduct" (interview, 2019). This commercialized way of thinking impacts decisions and processes in the SMI-system. For example, how SMIs are implemented and evaluated equally to other media products to make influencer marketing comparable to other media strategies. Media head Rob explains how the media agency works with SMIs as they do with other media products, "From the perspective of media strategy, it is not really different … I

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mean, it is close to the same measurements we do, a lot of the same KPIs [key points of interest] and a lot of the same goals we have" (interview, 2018).

Moreover, the way SMIs become objectified within the system allows agents to integrate operations of trade and technical systems, where different apparatuses evaluate and organize SMIs, as well as making them fit into commercial structures. For example, when media agent Sophia and media agent Jay created a new SMI product that enables firms to order SMI content on demand, "[Jay] I love that we are using them [SMIs] as a product now. [Sophia] Yes, me too. I also told them [firms] that this is the first time that you are using content on demand… In fact, I think this is a great solution for clients [CBs] because they are so dependent on the content" (shadowing, 2019). That agents see this is as something "cool" is a indicator that it is considered to be morally acceptable.

The rationalization of SMIs as objects allows agents to evaluate them using media metrics. For example, when shadowing media agent Sophia, her colleague, Michelle, showed an evaluation table in which SMIs' performances are measured and evaluated. Michelle is evaluating an influencer's campaign performance. On the computer, Michelle shows an SMI's Instagram story and an Excel table with data from the SMI. The table also compares engagement rate and price, and the performance measures are quantitative metrics, [such] as follower likes, spend time, clicks … The way in which the price of the influencer is calculated is by number of posts, viewed Instagram stories, followers, and engagement rate (shadowing, 2019). The media table allows media agencies to compare SMIs to other media products and increase sales in accordance with loci in the SMI-system. In other words, here, an object is used to bring power into being, which fosters a realization of the person as a tradeable object equal to other media objects. Picture 3.2 illustrates the media table in which SMI performance is evaluated.
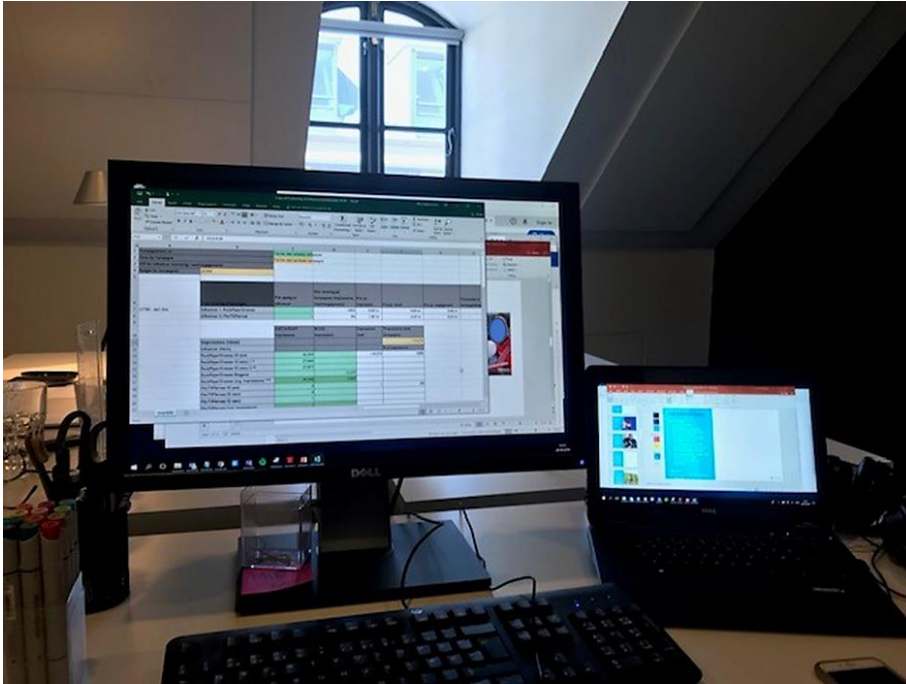
Picture 3.2 *Illustration of SMI evaluation table*
(Note: Picture taken when shadowing media agency)

Finally, the forms of institutionalization are represented by the governmental system on which the SMI-system is built. The above paragraphs describe how the SMI-system is entangled in power relations that are formed in the loci of economic thinking by the SMI system. Importantly, the findings show that the SMIs are controlled by a governmental system, which means that they are educated to enact the system upon themselves. As Foucault (1982) posited, power relations are complex. This is also salient within the SMI-system because SMIs do not view themselves as low in the hierarchy; in fact, it is quite the opposite. As Ann said when she was comparing her SMI job with other jobs, "Here, it is my opinion that matters" (shadowing, 2019). Nonetheless, in the implementation of the media strategy, the SMI is very rarely taking part. The belief in self-control is a way to control SMIs so that they are able to act sincerely for their followers, as media agent Sophia explains, "If they get too caught in the system, they get too commercialized and then can't deliver sincere campaigns" (post-shadowing interview, 2019).

Practices of freedom

Practices of freedom are enacted as self-managing practices of ethics where SMIs try to undermine domination and protect their selves from the SMI-system. Following the notion of Dey and Steyaert (2014), with minor modifications, this analysis shows that practices of freedom are enacted as self-management through boundary work, identity work, and physical and mental attention. The following accounts demonstrate how SMIs enact practices of freedom as care for their selves. However, the accounts also reveal the complexity of self-managed ethicality, and how practices of freedom are intertwined with practices of self-abuse, which are unethical acts.

Self-managing through boundary work

SMIs' use of their private lives is viewed as a condition of their work, as SMI Katelyn expresses, "The consequence of what I do is, of course, that I pay with part of my private life" (television documentary, 2020). However, on several occasions, SMIs have tried to establish boundaries to care for their selves and to limit the commercialization of their private selves— that is, undermining the domination of extreme exposure—which is driven by loci of the SMI-system that suffices to increase authenticity (Audrezet et al., 2020). For example, SMIs generally distinguish between the personal and private as a subjective moral factor for what is acceptable to publish online. Personal content, for example, could involve telling one's followers that you had a fight with your boyfriend, which would increase likes. However, to protect the self, the cause of the fight is kept private. Katelyn argues, "I differentiate between private and personal content. However, the boundary is not always the same as my boyfriend's" (interview, 2015). Although the SMIs set these boundaries to self-manage as an act of freedom, the findings show that boundaries are frequently broken and reformed. In this sense, self-managed ethics become a trade-off between the private and the commercial. The protection of the private is enacted as ongoing boundary work where SMIs attempt to care for their selves. However, they soon realize that what strengthens their commercial value is private content. Katelyn elaborates, "Before, I would write something quite personal about my boyfriend or family, and my followers loved it, but I experienced that my family would get hurt" (interview, 2015).

SMI Ann manages the complexity between personal and public by posting an Instagram story on her way to a café instead of posting while she was at the café with her friends. This was a way of letting her followers know what she is doing without involving her private peers. As she declares, "Life is not lived when going from one place to another, so that is a great time to be working" (post-shadowing interview, 2019). When Ann is on vacation, she manages this by asking her family whether she can take a photo, and then she quickly makes her commercial postings. While Ann undermines the domination of commercialization in parts of her life, she allows the domination in others. This trade-off becomes the practice of self-management, where the moral codex for her life as an SMI is made. However, these guidelines are constantly broken and reformed to fulfill commercial goals. As SMI Wendy explains, "If I wasn't an influencer, my private life would be different. Looking back, I would probably have chosen something else. But it takes up everything now, every single day, even Christmas eve … Today, I am a brand, but it is not something I think about, it has just happened" (interview, 2015).

Self-management through identity work

The complexity in practices of freedom and SMIs' use of themselves as objects is ubiquitous. In fact, SMIs often initiate their work as SMIs as an act of freedom. This is an example of the transcendence of SMI work, and where the act of freedom is attached to co-existence (Dey & Steyaert, 2014) as a self-made brand. For SMIs, the job provides them with autonomy and creative freedom, which offers them a rich life. Thus, the job in itself becomes care for the self. SMI Katelyn elaborated on this, "I started blogging out of boredom. In that time of my life, I did a lot of stuff that I couldn't control, both in relation to my job and in my personal life. In general, I missed something. I liked the idea about creating something that was my own and I loved writing" (interview, 2015).

When Katelyn began her career as an SMI, she was caring for herself by taking care of her creative freedom and doing something meaningful to her. However, the free structures became a challenge in terms of her protecting her privacy and her freedom to not be commercial. Her life and privacy became part of a brand, and thus she had to work for the system, and possibly she lost her feeling of co-existing with a non-commercial world. "My privacy is part of my brand. I don't know how much it is fluid" (interview, 2015).

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The ambiguity of protecting one's identity in self-management, between being a private person and being a brand, is also intimated in the following account, in which SMI Dan talks about his alter ego. Dan uses an alter ego to communicate sponsored messages to his followers. While this illustrates how he is using himself as an object for commercialization, it is also an act of freedom, as he is undermining the commercial domination of his inner self and protecting himself from being judged on his private persona. As Dan explains, "I would like [it] if there was [a] place where I would just fit in and where I would be super successful. I am trying to find that place. I mean, I am 35 years old and should not just be 'Jason' [alter ago] … but I don't know what I am. I don't like to be myself. If I am myself and I fuck up, people will judge me, but when I am using my alter egos, I am not the one being judged" (television documentary, 2020).

By using his alter ego, Dan is protecting himself from being judged by his followers. However, his alter ego also presents a challenge to determining who he really is. Later, I show, although Dan has built up alter egos to protect himself, he is practicing extreme self-abuse. In contrast to Dan, who distances himself as a practice of freedom, SMI Tina practices freedom by "giving it all" to her followers. Tina understands herself as an SMI who "breaks down taboos", and she has done this by being completely honest. For example, Tina has told her followers that she was sexually abused as a child. For Tina, this is a way of venting, and it has become a way to care for herself and create a feeling of co-existence. "After approximately a year working as an influencer, I felt a need to share my story about my trauma. My family would not hear about it, and I needed someone to share it with" (television documentary, 2020).

Tina uses her follower base almost as a therapeutic stage where she can vent and share her feelings. However, we will learn later that Tina suffers from anxiety because of her emotional involvement. The way she uses herself eliminates the boundaries between privacy and exposure and challenges ethical actions toward herself, as her care for herself becomes a means to harm herself.

Self-managing through physical and mental attention
Finally, practices of freedom can also be enacted as self-management, where workers exercise physical or mental care for the self as an ethical act. For example, SMI Lucas has limited his posts on YouTube because he feels mentally exhausted. Although Lucas' exhaustion might be a result of his presence on YouTube, his physical distancing from YouTube is an act of freedom,

protecting his wellbeing. According to SMI Lucas, "I am pretty worn out. At the moment, I just have a lot to think about. Right now, my YouTube channel is dormant. I have tuned out" (television documentary, 2020).

A focus on taking care of the self physically and mentally is also evident when SMIs try to create a life where SMI work practices play no or little role. For example, SMI Ann explains that she is happy that only two work acquaintances were invited to her birthday party, "Normally, I am quite social, and I might have 100 acquaintances I want to see, but I don't see them quite often. In a way, I was happy when I had my birthday for 15 friends of mine and only two of them were influencers. People from the industry, I don't see as my close friends. It is not that I don't like them, it is just that I don't want my job to take over my private life" (post-shadowing interview, 2019).

SMI Ann physically protects herself by not inviting work acquaintances to her birthday party, and she is happy that she managed to invite only two SMIs. In this vein, Ann is undermining the domination by commercial motives that would require her to have a commercially friendly birthday. While Lucas and Ann try to distance themselves by physically excluding their SMI work practices from their private lives, Tina exercises care for herself by working on herself, as she is seeing a therapist. The following account is part of a session with her therapist. Here, Tina is explaining how she has been feeling since her last session, "I feel OK, but in general, it is my job that fills up my life. I feel that I cannot relax in my job. I mean, even though I do believe in myself, I feel an enormous pressure from my surroundings … I feel like I have used so much of my life pretending to be someone else. I don't want to keep continue doing that, but then people start judging me … and then I feel my anxiety. I just feel that my body can't do this no more" (television documentary, 2020).

While Tina is working on herself and taking care of her mental health, her job and her honesty are what is harming her. Tina is practicing freedom, but she is trying to escape from herself. The act of seeing a therapist also ends up becoming an intertwined practice of both freedom and self-abuse—on one hand, it is an act of self-care, but on the other, because she is posting about her therapy on her social media profiles as a commercial activity, it can be viewed as an act of self-abuse.

Practices of self-abuse

Practices of self-abuse are unethical acts toward the self. They are enacted as self-management practices of self-commercialization in accordance with economic loci, and as self-management practices of self-organization in accordance with commercial technical systems. Practices of self-abuse are often intertwined with practices of freedom, as with SMI Tina's therapy sessions.

Self-management through self-commercialization

The enactment of the self as an object is driven by commercial desires about, for example, creating content that increases follower engagement rather than thinking about whether this would in fact increase one's anxiety. For example, influencer Ann suggested to her agent that she could include her private breakfast with her family in the commercial posting to increase her followers' engagement, "It is just because the angle they [CB] has … I have twisted a bit. I just know we will get much higher engagement on the content if I write something that is fun to read. So, you know. I have taken the perspective of what we talk about when we eat our breakfast at home" (shadowing, 2019). It was previously mentioned that Ann tried to exclude commercialization from her birthday; in this case, she did the opposite and accepted the domination of commercialization.

In the SMI-system, the worker internalizes the idea of themselves as a brand and their lives as a tool to achieve commercial desires rather than personal desires, as Ann does when she suggests using her family breakfast to achieve a positive commercial outcome. SMIs' use of their lives becomes an enactment of the SMI-system in which one's moral code is derived from a foundation of economic thinking, which means that the moral construct that SMIs enact for themselves becomes intertwined with commercial desires. In the case of Ann, what she articulated as important is the engagement, and also if it would compromise her private breakfast.

Because SMIs are enacting and using the system to become commercial objects, which enables them to be famous and live a flexible life, for them, these practices might not seem like self-abuse. However, following the Foucauldian understanding of self-abuse, which he describes as passivity toward the system in which the care for the self is under-prioritized, SMIs are exercising self-abuse and acting unethically toward their selves. In this sense, the SMIs enact the system's desires on the self, and rather than undermining commercial domination, they willingly accept it. Although SMIs do not necessarily articulate their work as self-abuse, it became clear

during the multi-sited ethnographic study that SMIs experience tensions and challenges in their lives as they enact commercial desires upon themselves. To give an example, the following accounts illustrate SMI Katelyn's inner ambiguity. First, Katelyn tried to elaborate on her awareness of her abuse, while saying that she wanted to continue engaging in it, as she talked about sponsored vacations, "My vacations have become working travels, but I don't feel that it is work, though I know it is … I think it is fun, but my boyfriend thinks that it [taking photos and posting online] is annoying if we are on vacation. It is difficult to balance this. I wouldn't say that you lose control, but I can get quite obsessive, and it is difficult to see yourself" (interview, 2015).

Although Katelyn claimed that her commercialized vacations did not feel like work, she described how the commercialization is creating tensions in her relationship, but she says she cannot help it. Following Foucault, Katelyn is behaving unethically toward herself because she is compromising her true self to meet the requirements of the SMI-system. Interestingly, Katelyn has realized that she and her relationships are being challenged by this, also articulating that this boundary is difficult to balance. Although Katelyn tries to set moral boundaries for herself, these have become difficult to manage. As a consequence, she is ending up compromising her own morality in favor of economic loci motivated by the SMI-system.

The following account is a particular demonstration of what Katelyn is trying to explain when saying that she can be obsessive. Katelyn's person brand is built upon a narrative of her trying to become a mother. The story of Katelyn and her husband's fertility treatments has created a brand narrative that has brought attention to her person and increased her authenticity. In reporting on this narrative, Katelyn made an Instagram story while she was in hospital. Unfortunately, her pregnancy went wrong, and Katelyn was forced to undergo an operation to remove the fetus. "I just woke up. They [the doctors] 'opened me up' yesterday and confirmed that I was pregnant outside my uterus in one of my fallopian tubes. So now they have removed it [the fetus]. I wouldn't wish this for anyone [crying]" (television documentary, 2020).

Katelyn's story of becoming pregnant plays an important part of her brand narrative. Managing her hospital experience is therefore vital for her brand authenticity. The Instagram story offers an authentic lens into Katelyn's personal battle, mirroring her private life to her followers. Following economic loci, this is morally acceptable, as it benefits Katelyn's brand. However, as the Instagram story also reveals, Katelyn is suffering and, clearly, her self-commercialization is challenging for her at this time. The boundary between privacy and exposure must be erased in

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order to adhere to economic loci in the enactment of self-commercialization. As Wellman et al. (2020) have suggested, the authenticity of her brand has become the prevailing moral guideline, rather than her personal wellbeing.

Another example of how enactments of commercialization can become self-abuse is that of SMI Dan. Dan suffers from an alcohol-abuse disorder, but he is trying to stop drinking and is attending Alcoholics Anonymous. While this is an act of care for the self, and thus an ethical act, Dan contradicts this as he enacts the desires of the SMI system and reverts to drinking in order to maintain his brand. "I am going on a ski trip with some other influencers … I don't really know about skiing, but we are supposed to go to parties for a whole week. OK, actually I am a bit nervous because it could be quite heavy in terms of drinking." During the trip, Dan became very drunk. "It is 01:30 and I have been drinking all day. Now I am really wasted. I had to go home before all the others. First day and I am throwing up" (television documentary, 2020).

Dan's brand image demands that he be fun and go out partying, and he is very successful—so successful that he has developed an alcohol-abuse disorder. Dan is trying to free himself from this by attending Alcoholics Anonymous, exercising care for himself. However, he is so entwined in the SMI-system that he ends up abusing himself to meet commercial demands. Although he is serving his personal brand, he is behaving unethically toward himself. Dan's example illustrates how, as morals become an act of self-management, it becomes difficult to manage this aspect, with the system loci favored over the care for the self. The consequence is that the person behaves unethically toward the self.

As an outsider, it is difficult to understand why SMIs do this; however, upholding the sincerity of their brand is paramount. As SMI Ann describes, "I would do anything to protect my brand, to protect my name. There is nothing more damaging that being insincere" (post-shadowing interview, 2019). In other words, SMIs are willing to compromise their wellbeing so as to be perceived as sincere and to establish a strong brand. The moral compass becomes the sincerity of one's brand rather than one's wellbeing. In other words, SMIs neglect care for themselves, while their moral compass is directed by the loci of economic thinking, which is controlled by the SMI-system.

Self-management through self-organization

In managing themselves as brands, SMIs integrate technical commercial systems in order to organize their commercialized selves and adhere to commercial protocols. These self-managing practices enable them to become objects of exchange for media agents, and thus are acts of desire from the system rather than desires from their selves. The systems are made by commercial stakeholders, in accordance with economic loci, and enacted by SMIs as everyday practices to organize their lives; for example, as they plan their day. When shadowing SMI Ann, she described how she was planning her day, Ann turns on her computer and goes into the booking system that connects her to the agency. This is where she gets all the information about the different campaigns she needs to do. She shows me all the current campaigns she is doing, there [are] about 20. See, she says, there is a lot for me to manage (shadowing, 2019).

Enacting technical commercial systems can also be included in the performance of self-branding, where SMIs' work strategically on themselves as a brand. For example, while shadowing influencer agent Nelly, a SMI reached out to Nelly for more commercialized jobs, an influencer has e-mailed Nelly. The influencer wants to know if there are any campaigns up-coming. Nelly explains that this often happens when it has been a slow period for the influencer. Nelly can see all the listed potential campaigns for the influencer in the system … Nelly sends off a list with 11 potential campaigns" (shadowing, 2019).

Finally, SMIs also enact commercial systems on their social media platforms in order to achieve commercial desires. For example, SMI Emmy integrated a branded content tool that allows a CB access to her content. In this case, the agent requires her to incorporate the system. "Hi Emmy, I just realized that you also need to have access to a branded content tool. You can get the access here [link]. It would be nice if you could do it today ☺" (e-mail data, 2018).

The commercial technical systems are permeating SMIs' lives. A power formation created by the system forms a governmental system to make SMIs compliant with commercial protocols. The following accounts come from shadowing influencer agent Nelly. The accounts demonstrate how SMIs are monitored, controlled, evaluated, and surveilled in the agency system. Although it is agents who monitor, control, evaluate, and surveil SMIs, the fact that SMIs allow this and enact the systems themselves shows that SMIs favor the system over care for themselves, and thus behave unethically toward their selves.

Notes from shadowing influencer agent Nelly: "The agency's backend system collects 100+

SMIs, all the SMIs' data is kept in the system. This includes their private calendar, metrics from their social media profile, and SMIs' aims and wants, as well as an evaluation of each SMI. The system connects SMIs to brands, and calculate[s] the price, which firms must pay for the SMIs' performances. The system controls and regulates SMIs as an everyday practice, enacted by agents whose work task is to make SMIs fit into commercial protocols" (shadowing, 2019).

Influencer agent Nelly explained, "The personal lens and the way to go about that is all about that I know the influencers whom I work with … Consequently, it is required that we daily are completely up to date with what is going on in their lives. For example, an influencer would just briefly mention she is planning a vacation, and then it is the salesman's [the agent's] job to figure out how to commercialize it, what potential commercial clients could be relevant, and then pitch the influencer about the client [CB]" (post-shadowing interview, 2019).

And, here, an SMI reports back via the system, "During a campaign, the influencers report back via the system, and it is through this system their work gets approved by the agents. Influencer agents might also send it to a media agency or a commercial client to get their approval … The influencer receives an approval to post the content online, when the client [CB] media agent and influencer agent agree … the content is good enough" (shadowing, 2019).

The use of the agency system demonstrates how SMIs accept themselves to be objects of exchange, as objects that are evaluated and sold in commercial organizing in loci of economic thinking. Self-management through the enactment of the technical system permeates SMIs' lives and compromises their everyday privacy. Consequently, the self-management through technical systems becomes self-abuse, as SMIs enact the system upon their selves, and become an object of the system that controls the SMIs by enacting governmental power structures on them. In other words, the self-abuse becomes entwined with their selves, as the enactment of the technical systems become everyday practices by which moral constructs are made. For example, Ann used the commercial brief made by her agent to direct her postings, "She returns to the brief and reads while she explains that the agency has written ideas for potential personal angles. I take these into consideration but don't copy them" (shadowing, 2019). In this sense, the commercial system has become essential to how Ann lives her life.

Although these systems might help the workers to manage their commercial selves, the system is commercial by nature, and consequently does not care for the person, but rather for the success of the CBs that pay for the campaigns. The system, therefore, also represents an ethical

risk to the SMI, as it can potentially create tensions in the private self. The system aims to make commercial content sincere by initiating the SMI to involve their private life, and thus for the SMI, the balance between commercialization and personalization becomes an impossible distinction to make, which ultimately impacts the moral constructs of the self.

The following final account illustrates how the moral constructs of the private self are a continuous struggle for SMIs. This account is from an interview with SMI Katelyn, five years after her first interview, in which she proclaimed that her life was difficult to balance. Katelyn recently had her first child, and she talks about her life as an SMI, her relationship with her followers, and her commercial partnerships: "My followers expect me to have a very dramatized life. Recently a follower wrote to me that she unsubscribed my blog because it was just too happy-go-lucky. What can I do, I am quite happy at the moment? I cannot just invent bad things to make my readers satisfied, even though many influencers do so. They [the followers] always want more, and I give so much already. It is difficult to balance my private life. Also, the clients ask for more, and I know the more privacy I give, the better my business is … I cannot continue doing this. It is constant work; I need to just have some time offline" (interview, 2020).

After five years, Katelyn still seemed to be trying to free herself from her self-abuse. However, she is still working as an SMI, still abusing herself, and is more successful than she has ever been.

Concluding discussion

By revealing the complexity of self-management in digital creative work as practices of freedom and practices of self-abuse, I posit that the ethos of the self is entwined in a governmental system of commercialization, and that the moral construct of the self becomes intertwined with loci of economic thinking. I have illustrated how ethics are enacted as self-management practices of: (i) boundary work; (ii) identity work; and (iii) physical and mental attention. However, these ethical acts are intertwined with the self-management of the person-brand that is enacted as practices of self-commercialization and self-organization in accordance with what I label, the SMI-system, which I have demonstrated is a system of economic thinking. These arguments emphasize the importance of understanding how digitalization has changed the ethical landscape, and how personalized creative workers, such as influencers, are faced with

ethical challenges of new magnitudes that rely on the individual. Partially inspired by Isaiah Berlin and his 1969 inaugural speech on liberty, this paper has shown that social media offers not only the freedom to be someone (cf. Brooks et al., 2021; Casaló et al., 2018; Duffy & Wissinger, 2017; Haenlein et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021), but, as I have demonstrated, also the freedom from, where the subject consciously asks themselves who governs them. I have stressed how this understanding of freedom from shapes how we evaluate ourselves and others, and what we believe to be morally acceptable.

This paper offers two main contributions. Firstly, to the literature on the creative industry, wherein creative workers' precarity and vulnerability have frequently been debated (Friedman, 2014; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Lewig & Dollard, 2003; Sewell & Taskin, 2015). Recent literature on creative work has included discussions on how structures of social media have increased the precarity of work-life for creative workers (Duffy et al., 2021; Mäkinen, 2021; McDonald et al., 2021). By illustrating how SMIs' work with ethics involves self-management of the practices of freedom and self-abuse, this work has revealed how SMIs attempt to create a healthy work life. As I discovered, this is a mirage because workers are intertwined with loci of economic thinking that drives the commercial system. In this paper, I go on to suggest that new media fosters a new type of precarity for workers that is not attached to contracts of flexible work environments (Duffy et al., 2021; Gill & Pratt, 2008), but rather to the self, and that ethical behavior toward the self (and others) risks being compromised in economic loci where workers must manage moral constructs themselves. This adds to the existing literature on the individualization of new media work (Hearn, 2008; Kennedy, 2020; Mcrobbie, 2010; Salamon, 2020) by arguing that ethical self-management occurs at a nexus between practices of freedom and self-abuse.

Secondly, this paper contributes to the new media-ethics literature (Rauf, 2021; Wellman et al., 2020) by employing Foucault's controversial ideas on ethics (Foucault, 1984). In applying this, I centered the discussion on social media ethics around the person, illustrating how underlying relations of commercial power (Hearn, 2008; Kennedy, 2020) define how creative workers fashion moral constructs and ethical guidelines for themselves. In this paper, I suggest that moral constructs are shaped at the nexus between practices of freedom and practices of self-abuse, and that these are intertwined with economic loci. This invites new discussions about the commercialization of the self (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016b; Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003), and how moral constructs for the self comes to be defined by commercial systems (cf. Hearn, 2008). In these systems, power relations emphasize autonomy by enacting commercialized

governmentality on the individual worker.

The marketing literature that is concerned with ethics in the digital age mostly positions ethics in relation to structures, systems, and behavior toward others (e.g., Argandoña, 2003; Islam & Greenwood, 2021; Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2015; Place, 2021; Plaisance, 2013). However, such studies also reveal that subjects are centered in their ethical discussions; for example, in relation to a subject's autonomy (Islam & Greenwood, 2021), equality (Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2015), and privacy (Plaisance, 2013). By placing the ethos at the heart of the person, I have illustrated how practices of self-management are enacted as a way of making moral constructs for the self. However, as the system is enacted as part of SMIs' understanding of themselves as commercial objects, boundaries and moral constructs are constantly challenged and reformed.

What I have described above has public policy implications for self-regulation in the age of social media. Questions such as: why do users look at their phones while eating dinner with their family, despite knowing that the meal would be more enjoyable if they engaged in conversation? or, why do many users continually delete and re-create their Facebook or Tinder profiles? The work of SMIs reveals the ambiguity that lies within all of us and is apparent from our self-conduct when using social media. The work of SMIs illustrates that subjects are constantly working in the nexus between the practices of freedom and self-abuse in order to maintain their moral self and how their moral self is influenced by the system in which they work. By understanding ethics as practices of self-conduct, this paper moves away from structural discussions about digital ethics and toward a discussion of the individual. In Foucault's project on ethics, he posited that domination is the end-state for the ethical subject. He used the example of the slave to argue for places without ethics, as such a state is a state of domination. The SMI-system is not a place of slavery; however, the fact that SMIs' practices of freedom often foster practices of self-abuse illustrate a system in which the free subject is so caught up in the desires of the system that they become enslaved to their self-abuse. As YouTuber Matt Lee said, "It's one of the most toxic things…".

Limitations and directions for future research

This research is not without its limitations. Firstly, while a variety of methods were used to validate the data, there is data inconsistencies, such as in relation to interview length. Moreover, the data shows that SMIs' relationships with their followers affect their wellbeing. However, data on the followers' interactions with SMIs is limited. In studying influencer marketing work practices, I focused on how influencer marketing is organized, implemented, and managed, which does not include the followers. Nonetheless, there is a realization that including follower– SMI interactions, and how these interactions affect SMIs' wellbeing, might have provided the study with more-nuanced findings.

Secondly, in this study, I did not differentiate between SMI categories; however, it is acknowledged that SMIs belonging to different categories might be affected by their work differently. For example, mom bloggers (Archer, 2019) and the involvement of their children may foster other important ethical discussions.

Finally, Foucault's notion of the care for the self has its limitations: (i) Foucault did not finish his thoughts on ethics, and therefore some of his ideas might not have been fully refined; (ii) the ethos of the self is a complex matter because the subject bears the ethical norm. This makes it impossible for the researcher not to take normative analytical stances, which are limited by the individual making the analysis.

This research invites further ethical discussions about SMI work practices, and digital wellbeing in general. Firstly, an ethical analysis of how the relationship between the follower and the SMI impacts the wellbeing of the SMI is relevant. Further studies should explore how new media workers establish boundaries in work, how identity work is processed, and how they care for their selves. The increasing use of the private self in professional life, and the increased prevalence of the always-online lifestyle, encourages users to consider how to manage their selves online. The SMI-system is an extreme example of the daily practices that facilitate this. Nonetheless, how the normal user establishes moral conduct is relevant, considering our digital social environment.

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Chapter 4 Emotions

Welcome to Hotel California: Social Media Influencers' Work as Emotional Laborers (Paper 2)

Welcome to Hotel California: Social media influencers' work as emotional laborers

"We are all just prisoners here of our own device"

Hotel California, The Eagles, 1976

Introduction

The Danish Social Media Influencer (SMI) Fie Laursen began her career with an Instagram post on her experiences of bullying at school. Subsequent media attention saw Laursen appear on national television where she again recounted her story of bullying. After this, her personal brand quickly took shape, and she became one of Denmark's most popular SMIs. As with many SMIs, Laursen adds value to sponsoring brands through her personal authenticity, characterized in this case by details about various mental illnesses, and her decision to invite her followers into her daily mental health struggles. On July 6th, 2019, Laursen displayed a video of her suicide attempt as a final letter to her followers. Fortunately, her followers located her through tagged posts and Laursen was saved. Subsequently, Larsen became more popular than ever, and, at the time of writing, continues to sell her personal brand and access to over 300,000 Instagram followers[1] to commercial partners.

Fie Laursen is an emblematic of a new type of work based upon the creation of communicative capital (Mumby, 2016) that is forged through individuals' personal life-stories as a type of emotional capital (Illouz, 2007). These life-stories are both projections and perceptions; a series of calls and responses between the SMI and their followers, in whom they mirror their commercialized life-stories, and which become internalized into the worker's identity through displays of empathy and support. These calls and exchanges reflect the logic of personal branding (Thomson, 2006) where emotions are systematized and displayed as readily as commoditized goods and where notions of emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) barely seem to scratch the surface in describing and explaining the complex internalization of control and

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[1] Retrieved 08.06.2020

impressions, and expressions of self. In this new form of work, workers' feelings are marketized, at once appearing as shimmering glass palaces to both those who gaze upon them (Gabriel, 2005) and to the SMI's encaged within them.

Although the literature differentiates between emotional labor as the external direction of other people's feelings (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; James, 1989; Nylander et al., 2011) and emotional work, where the worker freely engages in emotional displays (Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Bridgen, 2011), SMI's appear to challenge these categorizations, as their non-stop emotional self-presentations requires them to govern and systemize their own emotions to become person-brands (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019). In this paper, we draw from Gabriel's (2005) analogy of glass cages and palaces to illustrate the ambiguity between the notion of work as a cage, that confines the worker, and the "palace of glass", where outsiders look enviously in. In Gabriel's view, the worker is portrayed as a victim of the cage and the outsider as admiring the life of the performer from a distance. Our findings challenge this view. We find SMI's, as personal-brand emotional laborer (PBELs), are simultaneously placed in both a cage and the palace, where their identity is constituted in relation to projections of authenticity, and where their exploitation and suffering is central to their market value (McNay 2009) and their own feelings of emancipation.

This study focuses on the work-practices of SMIs as an exemplar case of emotional workers' governmentality. We ask how do SMI's internalize governing emotional control to create a sense of authenticity? To address this question we begin by asking, (1) how do SMIs work with their emotions and (2) how does this challenge previous conceptualizations of emotional labor work? Empirically, we address this question by studying SMI work-practices, which involve multiple actors who participate in governmental structures of commercial brand logics. We therefore go on to ask, how are emotions managed and regulated in social formations to make SMIs into marketable forms of communicative (brand) capital?

To answer these questions, we conducted a multi-sited ethnographic study of SMI work to explore how SMIs constantly manage the ambiguity of work where their emotions are commodities deployed to achieve authenticity. We use the concept of emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) to understand how SMIs' emotions are systemized. We complement this with governmentality (Burchel et al., 1991; Lemke, 2001), to explore the ambiguity between control and freedom that lies within the commodification of emotions. Extending on the previous literature about work (e.g., Fleming & Sturdy, 2011; Sewell & Taskin, 2015) and

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emotional labor (e.g., Bridgen, 2011; Ogbonna & Harris, 2004), we demonstrate that the worker *literally* becomes a brand as they internalize a person-brand logic of 'always being on' that underpins Gabriel's (2005) glass cage. This glass cage ensnares the SMI through constant demand by agents, sponsoring brands and audiences for greater levels of backstage exposure to maintain the authenticity central to the personal brand. Paradoxically, this also provides the perception of agency as SMIs believe they are expressing their true self and through the logic of branding, operating as a free and sovereign neoliberal actors. Thus, SMIs simultaneously enjoy the economic benefits and freedom resulting from self-authentication, while subjecting themselves to increasing levels of control over their emotions to finally maintain audience engagement and commercial viability.

This paper contributes to critical discussions of self-presentation on social media (Gabriel, 2005) and how digitalization of the self has changed how we perceive and work on and with ourselves (Hearn, 2008; Illouz, 2007). We add to existing literature of emotional labor (Bolton, 2009; Bolton & Boyd. 2003; Bridgen, 2011; James, 1989), which mostly address emotional labor in traditional organizational structures, by showing how digital work establishes new forms of emotional labor where the self becomes a resource for capitalistic motives (McNay, 2009). Finally, this paper adds to literature of how neoliberal work has blurred boundaries between privacy and work (Brown & Coupland, 2015; Comeau-Vallée & Langley, 2019) but, in the context of SMI's, washed them away. We end by identifying a new type of worker, which we label 'The Person-Brand Emotional Laborer' (PBEL). The PBEL normalizes their emotions as commodities and enact governmentality to become person-brands.

Theoretical framing

SMI as a new form of work
Influencer marketing is one of several novel digital economies where hobby and work boundaries are blurred and that allow individuals to decide when, where and how to work (Lee & Lin, 2011). In essence, influencer marketing is a set of practices relating to the distribution of roles, determination of processes and outcomes, such as negotiation of price and evaluation systems and perception of value. Typically, companies, who act as sponsoring brands, buy a SMI-driven media campaign via a media agency. The media agency then seeks an SMI from a

specialist influencer agency. The SMI is chosen based on their perceived fit with the campaign strategy and brand image of the sponsoring brand. An influencer agency then contacts the specific SMI and then attempts to convince them to fit their life to the campaign. Such contracts typically outline the numbers of posts, post timing and setting and attendant procedures. The price they receive from their work is calculated by their number of followers, the emotional capital (Illouz, 2007) they generate, and the symbolic associations gained by the sponsoring brand from engaging the SMI.

Such digital economies signify a movement in conventional work-practices (Gandini, 2015), which has changed from spatially and temporally defined organisational structures, to encompass all aspects of one's life (Brown & Coupland, 2015; Lee & Lin, 2011). SMIs are positioned in a liminal space between formal organisational and personal space, takes place outside formal organisations and is both a constitutive and generative set of practices lived out by SMIs and other actors.

SMI work includes constant self-presentation (Schau & Gilly, 2003) where SMIs display their life-biographies to become person-brands. They engage in the so-called "attention economy" where assigning value is related to the capacity of attracting "eyeballs" in a media-saturated, information-rich world (Marwick, 2015). SMIs and their work, are central in the attention economy and embrace the person as immaterial and emotional labour (Illouz, 2007), as they commercialise their lives through presenting their "real" selves for their followers to consume (cf. Gabriel, 2005). SMIs' self-presentation conforms to a branding logic where they seek to create communicative capital through cultivating their own image (cf. Mumby, 2016).

The branding of the self (Hearn, 2008) and using the self as a person-brand is played out (practiced) through a daily work-routine for individuals (Schau & Gilly, 2003). However, the commercial undercurrent becomes clear as SMIs navigate their person-brand in the context of the commercial brands that sponsor them: we witness a duality here of the commercial self (commoditized for, and in, a market of selves) and the real person navigating the space between the commercial and the personal. In other words, person branding gives rise to dialectic tension between the logic of the person and the brand (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019). For SMIs, distinguishing between what is instrumental and non-instrumental is an increasing challenge when everything has the potential to enhance the value of the self-brand (Huber & Brown, 2017). Consequently, in SMI work, like in Gabriel's glass cage, there is no front and backstage

since the SMIs live and become their own performance. Any distinction between image and identity dissolves reflecting a liquid boundary between work and non-work (Bauman, 1999).

Emotional labor and SMIs

Emotional labor is typically defined as the management of others' feelings for public display and as part of a service delivery (Hochschild, 1983; Ogbonna & Harris, 2004; Toerien & Kitzinger, 2007). When practicing emotional labor, workers adhere to specific "feeling rules", decided by the organization that outline emotional guidelines for the workers, which become a governing control of the emotional exchange (Hochschild, 2012). This view of emotions at work, which is both expected and delivered as part of a service, leaves the worker without agency and often in distress (Hochschild, 1983). Since Hochschild's research on service workers' emotional labor, there has been a growing focus on how emotional labor affects the work (see for example Mumby & Putnam, 1996) and the worker (see for example Bridgen, 2011). The emotional engagement of workers has been studied in a variety of organizational contexts, for example, prison officers (Nylander et al., 2011), public relations (Bridgen, 2011), and university lecturers (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004). These studies suggest that workers can freely engage their emotions as part of their work and indeed experience personal freedom by being allowed to engage in their work at this level.

Scholars (see for example Gandini, 2016; Lee & Lin, 2011) have studied how new forms of work, outside established organizations, might open new forms of emotional labor (Mardon et al., 2018). Emotional display, governed by the organization, has been found to coincide with workers' emotions, and provides an experience of authenticity for the worker (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003). The encouragement of 'just being oneself', as Fleming and Sturdy (2011) suggest, might affect workers differently, as the worker, might also find meaning in emotional labor, where work and non-work merge and have agency to enact and perform emotional display (Bolton, 2009). SMI's work projects authenticity through emotional displays, particularly through tragedies or breakdowns that involve "real private emotions" (cf. Rose and Wood, 2005); mutuality, intersubjectivity, and authenticity have become key elements in value production (Mumby, 2016). To achieve such authenticity and gain profits, sponsoring brands pay SMIs to perform authentically where, for example, the worker performs suffering through therapeutic narratives (Illouz, 2007).

The enforcement of emotions at work is often regarded as a front stage/backstage play (Goffman, 1990), where workers behind the scenes or "cockpit curtain" (Hochschild, 1983) show their real emotions but on front stage perform an emotional drama that might include surface acting or deep acting. Surface acting is when the body, not the soul, becomes the main tool for the emotion that is traded, whereas, deep acting works as a form of social engineering where the worker might actually end up feeling what is intended by the organizations (Hochschild, 1983). Emotional performance can function as a form of impression management that enforces the worker's identity at work (Morris & Feldman, 1997). This can give the worker a real sense of authenticity where emotional labor work is internalized. Deep acting and strong role identification have been found to amplify this sense of authenticity (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Goffman, 1990), as has emotional labor performances in tribal-like workplaces such as entrepreneurship communities (Mardon et al., 2018). For SMI's, emotional labor, particularly involving deep acting, becomes the means by which they continue to engage their audience, and is central to their commercial power.

Although heightened emotional labor is often associated with exogenous factors such as work intensity and variety (requiring emotional coping strategies) it is important to note how these emotional strategies become internalized. Fleming and Sturdy (2011)'s study of call center workers suggested how perceptions of autonomy and authenticity for workers can function as a normative control in where workers are encouraged to engage in emotional labor. Their study uncovers how workers micro-manage themselves, how this becomes an established organizational strategy, and thus how the self becomes subject to organizational control. In a similar fashion, SMIs point to a liminal workspace where the boundaries between private, commercial, and organizational space are blurred and where the individual worker's identity as a worker, entrepreneur, and private person is flux, fluid, and overlapping. Significantly, this also points to the rise of practices of internalized control in the neoliberal work landscape that combine identity and control.

Governmentality
SMIs' work as personal brands are analogous to entrepreneurial selves, where control and resistance become an on-going process between freedom and control (McNay, 2009). In other words, obligations and commitments traditionally governed by organizations become the

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responsibility of the SMI, who in exchange for agency, "gives up" their private life by embedding work-related practices such as planning and strategizing in day-to-day private affairs. In this sense, the "human" can be argued to be commoditized into a resource of human (McNay, 2009), immaterial (Mumby, 2016) or emotional (Illouz, 2007) capital to be exploited for entrepreneurial gain (Gilbert, 2013). This grey zone type of work, between self-employment and dependency, has previously been argued to form controlling structures of governmentality where individuals are governed in the milieu in which they live (Moisander et al., 2018).

Governmentality describes a form of complex power manifestation (Lemke, 2001) hidden from the obvious but enacted and normalized in self-regulating performances. It is, as Foucault (2008) describes, a neoliberal performed governance in which individuals mentally and physically enact self-governance that is directed by the powering state. In this way, it distinguishes itself from the normative control in micro-management structures, discussed by, for example, Fleming and Sturdy (2011). Governmentality works to enforce entrepreneurial selves who conform to governing structures, as they perform the art of governance and become their own regulator, working on themselves (Lemke, 2001).

Person-brand emotional work is characterized by constant self-display, where individuals pull deeply from their private sphere with highly charged, authentic emotional displays. These displays form the substance of their personal brand and market value as a SMI. As an entrepreneur, supervising their own emotional displays, they are placed in a dialectic between being a subject of the supervising personal brand system and the freedom associated with the entrepreneurial self (McNay, 2009). As Mumby (2016) suggests, over time, this personal brand logic becomes normalized for the individual and they become immune to self-criticism.

Research design and methodology

This research draws on practice theory (T. R. Schatzki et al., 2001; Woermann, 2017) as a method to understand the social as a field of embodied mentality-interwoven practices, eventually organized around shared practical understanding (Barnes, 2005). Accordingly, work-practices are understood as meaning making for actors as well as their surroundings (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). Actors and their context are thus analyzed via practices; considered as forms

of action (Barnes, 2005), meaning and knowledge (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012). To understand the dynamics of how influencers' work, with and on their selves and might be self-regulated in social formations, this study draws on Nicolini's (2010) notions of a multi-sited ethnography. This means that the study follows work-practices in situ in where meaning is reproduced in action (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011) across sites (T. R. Schatzki, 2005). Consequently, this study does not concentrate around actors but rather their actions (Marcus, 1995).

Data collection and analysis

To address the research questions a multi-sited ethnography of work practices was undertaken over 5 years. The first author collected data in the period of May 2015- February 2020 by using an explorative and iterative process (Thorpe & Holt, 2011) with three iterations, i) in-depth interviews of SMIs, ii) explorative interviews, observations, and shadowing and iii) secondary and archival data collection. In between the data-collection phases of theory building took place.

The data collection took place in Denmark and concentrated the professional and strategical use of influencer marketing. This means, that only SMIs who work with influencer marketing as their main occupation were used as subjects of interest.

In total, the data collection involves the following main sites: An influencer department in one of Denmark's largest dedicated SMI media-agencies, one of the largest influencer agencies in Denmark, two Danish located international firms who strategically work with influencer marketing, and finally, some of the biggest Danish SMIs. The sites involve a various of actors who all work professional with influencer marketing, and the sites contains a variety of data (see table 4.1). Therefore, the first author used a variety of methods to collect the different data. The first author used both action-based and ethnographic methods (Thorpe & Holt, 2007). Specifically, active participation was used in meetings and events to understand the ways in which SMI work-practices evolved in-between actors and across sites. Some meetings and daily work-life were passively observed to identify specific work patterns in the media agency. Shadowing (S. McDonald, 2005a) was employed as a micro-ethnographic technique, where the first author traced SMIs work-practices by following actors (media agents, influencer agents, and SMIs) in their place of work. Further, the first author conducted interviews by using an approach that combined ethnographic and active interviewing (Halkier & Jensen, 2011). Specifically, in-depth interviews were conducted with five SMIs to understand their daily work.

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Finally, archival, and secondary data were collected, including documents and emails about an influencer campaign from the media agency, and online content from SMIs and their followers between the period of 2018-2020. Lastly, a transcription of a

television documentary hosting four SMIs and their work-life was audiotaped and transcribed. The Danish produced television documentary is called 'Follow me' and was showed on national television, November 2019. The first author transcribed audio-recorded data verbatim and took manual notes about meetings or observations. Table 4.1 shows an overview of the sites, actors, and methods.

Table 4.1 Overview of data, informants & methods

Site	Data types	Amount	Informants
Media agency	Observation In-depth Interviews Shadowing Post-shadow interview Informal meetings E-mail data	32 hours 5 hours 13,5 hours 50 minutes 90 minutes 250+ emails	Rob, Head Sophia, Creative strategist Susi, Content strategist Reba, Content manager Jacob, Content strategist Clara, Content manager
Influencer agency	Shadowing Post-shadow interview	5,5 hours 35 minutes	Nelly, Head of influencer marketing
Organisations	In-depth Interview	96 minutes	Tenna, Head of marketing, commercial brand 1 Sara & Donna, Head of marketing & Marketing manager, commercial brand 2
SMIs	Shadowing Post-Shadow interview In-depth interview	9 hours 48 minutes 3 hours 3 hours	Ann, 35 years Katelyn, 30 years Petra, 31 years Wendy, 33 years

The data analysis was inductive in nature and followed an iterative process between analysis and theory building (Cunliffe, 2011). The first and second author analyzed the data in an iterative process of analyzing, comparing, and discussing to validate the findings. The different data were divided into smaller datasets, firstly by division of the data (e.g., SMI interviews and ethnographic notes were analyzed separately) and secondly between themes of external versus internal control. Using NVivo 12 Pro, the authors analyzed data by using a thematic approach

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). Though the analysis was explorative, the authors followed two different modes of exploration to identify work-practices. Firstly, an etic mode to find broad themes that describe SMIs' work-practices. In a second iteration, the authors coded within themes using an emic mode but still by means of NVivo 12 Pro to structure data. Thirdly, the authors coded for meaning within themes. Finally, the dataset was connected and analyzed holistically, by using NVivo 12 Pro as a structural tool. At this stage, the authors were specifically focused on SMIs' work-practices and the way in which the work practice affected their identity construction as person-brands.

Findings

In the following section we zoom in on a new type of worker, the Person-Brand Emotional Laborer (PBEL) to demonstrate how the worker enacts governmentality through a marketization of their selves. The PBEL must, to differentiate themselves from competitors such as traditional brands, work on and with their emotions, so that they can hold on to their followers who are attracted by their perceived authenticity. Though PBELs experience fame, free products, services, and financial rewards, their work causes external and personal tensions arising from the need to project an aura of emotional authenticity in the service of a commercial outcome (cf. Illouz, 2007). The findings show how these tensions are reconciled (temporarily) in processes of governing structures reflecting the logic of a personal brand where emotional displays reinforce a desired identity (Guignon, 2004).

PBELs generate authenticity by downplaying commercial motivations in favor of personal stories, including personal struggles and slices of daily life. As an example, we observe how this perceived authenticity among followers provides the SMI with commercial value for sponsoring brands who pay for their authentic performance to be attached to the sponsoring brands' commercial agenda. However, as with other attempts to project authenticity, the SMI's support for a brand must feel genuine or sincere, with brand-related posts appearing naturally and seamlessly in the daily life of the SMI and any endorsement seemingly coming from the heart, as SMI Katelyn describes:

"My blog is neither leisure nor business. I mean, in the end it is leisure made into business. It is difficult to see when it turned; I still think it is fun, but it is also a firm. It is an emotional thing

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you need to maintain but the framework must be more business-like. My blog has become my universe that nobody can take ownership of, so, I have to be business-like towards the people I work with" (interview, 2015).

We found that beyond the need to balance dual pressures from commercial motives and privacy to project a sense of authenticity, PBELs also use this logic as a coping mechanism. To reinforce the sense, they are both sincere with their followers, but also true to a 'real self' (Lehman, O'Connor, Kovács, and Newman 2019) while they are maintaining themselves as brands. However, this balance sometimes unravels, resulting in anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, being overwhelmed and giving in to temptation vis-à-vis demands from clients and agents.

External and Internal Management

SMIs' emotions are directed by agents in accordance with scripts. Here agents govern SMIs' biographies, emotional performances, and daily life, codifying and quantifying them to sustain their commercial value. For the agents, SMIs must deliver a performance that appears authentic, or as Media agent Susi describes, *"to sell something, which is trustworthy and sincere but actually isn't"* (interview, 2019). Emotions are here part of the service delivery on the terms of the brand and SMIs are those exposed to work-practices that demand they perform authentically in their personal postings. However, SMI agents' control happens as a governing act in the middle ground between freedom and control: an act that encourages SMIs to work on themselves as and marketize themselves as person brands. We observe this through work-practices of systemization (where emotions are controlled in commercial driven systems), quantification (where SMIs are measured according to commercial logics), prodding (where SMIs are gently prodded to use their real self in a commercial setting), and commercialization (where agents and SMIs themselves objectify their emotions in commercial offerings). Picture 4.1 'Strategic Planning of SMI Campaign' for example shows, how agents, in computer systems, plot and plan SMI behavior in accordance with commercial campaigns, which are embraced by SMIs:
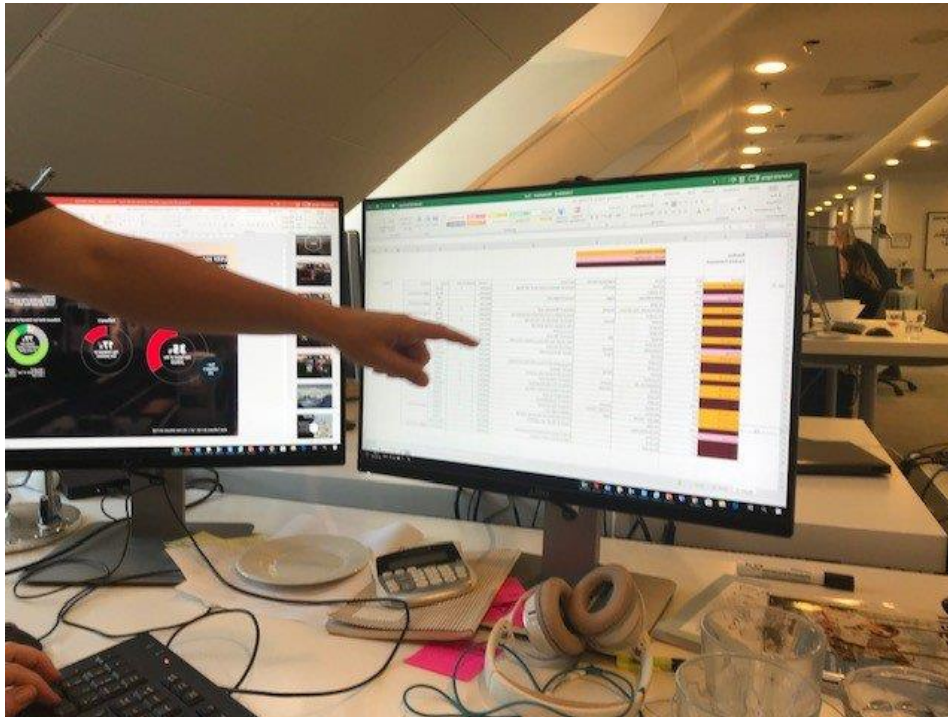
Picture 4.1 *Strategic planning of SMI campaign*
(Note: Picture taken at media agency. Two agents are planning a campaign for a beverage brand. The agents plan the postings and display for the SMI (how, when are where the SMI is going to display). The posting is to take place in the SMI's private home. The campaign goes for a whole year and must represent the four different seasons).

We observe how agents seek to systematize almost every aspect of an SMI's life. Personal biographies become central to the commercial value of the SMI since any aspect of an SMI's personal life represents potential both for a sponsoring brand and the SMI. Influencer agent Nelly describes the logic:

"The personal angle I suggest [in commercial briefs or contractual documents between client, agent and SMI that describes how the SMI must perform and integrate the client's brand into their personal story] is all about knowing everything there is to know about the influencers…this means that we need to be extremely up-to-date with their lives on a daily basis. Because sometimes they might mention that they are going on a vacation but don't know what they want. Then it is the agent's job to match that to potential travel clients and find out how it could be relevant to the influencer and try to pitch it to the influencer… So, it is about getting the influencer into a mind-set of how it can be used in their lives…and how it makes sense to them" (post-shadow interview, 2019).

The agent's job is to stage the day-to-day life of the SMI as potential brand opportunities. Access to this detail is regarded by the agent as essential to matching the SMI to commercial opportunities and then ensuring opportunities can be inserted into the SMI's day-to-day lived reality. Systemization also serves the needs of the SMIs' commercial self, as it opens opportunities for the SMI resulting in income and goods and services. An illustration of the duality between freedom and control in where the SMI internalizes their own marketization that insures the value of the SMI brand increases. During the shadowing of SMI Ann, we observed how commercial terms control her daily life and how she represents herself to followers:

(5/23/19) They [Ann and Ann's personal assistant, Bea] talk about what Ann should wear for the campaign photoshoot. They agree that her current outfit [sweatshirt and dress] doesn't work. It does not reflect the brand Ann is sponsored by. Bea suggests her blue shirt. Ann thinks that is a great idea and goes into her bedroom and changes.

(5/24/19) Ann receives an e-mail from the influencer agency who want to see the pictures before they approve Ann's postings. She chooses the pictures carefully, some for the blog and some for Instagram. When choosing the pictures, she explains that she ensures that they show the atmosphere and that it doesn't look like they are staged.

Ann's selection of photos show how she has internalized a personal brand logic, in which a desired identity drives a whole range of small day-to-day decisions involved in representing herself to various audiences. When shadowing SMI Ann, we also observed this logic in practice again in a phone call between Ann and her agent about leveraging eating breakfast with her family for a brand campaign. For example:

(5/23/19) [Ann] If I follow the calendar [given by the agency], I need to post an Instagram photo May 27 and then again, the 31st. I am just wondering whether, because it is launching May 27 on the blog shouldn't Instagram follow and post it all the 27th? … And, when they want me to eat breakfast with my family and post about it, should I then also make an Instagram story? … because I know that we will gain much more likes [from followers] if we depart from our daily morning conversations during breakfast.

To ensure SMIs conform their self to the brand, agents also systematically monitor their personal doings. However, instead of being overtly scripted by a firm (cf. Mumby & Putnam,

1992), SMIs are encouraged to produce sincere emotions for commercial ends. Agents therefore prompt the SMI to be themselves rather than direct their behavior via a closed script, a type of governing control that encourages the actor to work on themselves (Foucault, 2008). For example (shadowing, influencer agent, Nelly):

(5/15/19) Nelly opens the agency system. Nelly writes how the SMI should display a commercial in her biography; the campaign includes one Instagram post and two Instagram stories... Within the first story, the influencer should recommend the product to her followers and remember to stress what she personally thinks about the product. The following week the influencer should do her second story as a follow-up where she once again should stress those positive recommendations. Finally, Nelly writes that the customer of course wishes personal, trustworthy, and good content, and that the influencer should 'make it her own' (shadowing, 2019).

Nelly's control constitutes her governing role, whereby she monitors SMIs' lives and provides an open-ended script that allows for "a personal touch" while also ensuring SMIs to internalize a commercial logic. In this fashion the display by the SMI is scripted (Hochschild, 1983), and SMIs are taught to use their emotions to ensure their support for the sponsoring brand is seen as sincere, a key marker of authenticity.

The second practice, *quantification,* flows from the first. Quantification reflects the translation of biographies and emotions into a form of capital that potential sponsoring brands can understand. In an interview, media agent Clara explains, how the agency's policies ensure SMIs are quantified to position the use of SMIs as competitive media products (vis-à-vis other channels such as advertising):

"We begin to make more [measurements], I mean, I have a boss who used to work as a senior advisor in digital [media]. He really wants these estimates as if we would do the shopping at Politiken [Danish newspaper]. I mean, it is difficult [to do such measurements], but then you have something and then you can begin to talk about CPM [cost per impression] … and then we can begin to argue for the use of influencers" (interview, 2019).

The market value of SMIs is evaluated by their followers' beliefs about the SMI's sincerity, which is then further analyzed and quantified by the media agency. For example, SMIs' emotional displays and performances are quantified and codified in terms of brand-image

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associations (a key marketing measure of brand value) to enhance the value of SMI's to clients and to motivate SMI's behaviors, as Sophia describes when the first author shadowed her:

(5/1/19) "I have this table, with a lot of data, which I get from [brand name] with different prices. Then I can calculate that if I pay this for an influencer what do I then get in return. She [the client] suggested an influencer then I could calculate if it would pay off. So, by making this table we [the media agency] could evaluate the value of the influencer" (shadowing, 2019).

As Sophia describes, quantification enables her to commodify SMIs, which she can then promote to brands using the idea of return on investment. To strengthen their commercial selves SMIs must surrender their personal diaries and except exploitation so that media agents can enhance their commercial potential; then further assessment are made in terms of the quality of emotional performances with followers, which are then measured in terms of Instagram outcomes including likes, comments, and conversions (or sales of sponsors' products).

The third practice, *prodding* involves impression management practices to help the SMI perform authentically. Like Fleming and Sturdy's (2011) analysis of micro-management, influencer agents stimulate SMIs' use of real emotions through personal encouragement via regular personal interaction. During the shadowing, we observed how agents use personalized practices such as "catch-ups" or emotional signifiers such as heart emoji's (e.g., 😘) to ensure SMIs continue to feel 'real' and maintain the belief that they are performing what is real. Influencer agent Nelly describes her practices to increase or maintain SMIs' emotional engagement, which is mirrored in Ann's belief about her agent's sincerity:

[Nelly] "In reality, I prefer not to send text messages…but I have to be where the influencers are, and they prefer text messages [over e-mail]. And about us being very friendly, we also communicate with our close relations through emoji's, therefore we use the same language to the influencers. (…) If the influencer sends me a heart, I return it. It doesn't work if I send a professional 'kind regards', I have to give something of myself so that they feel safe" (post-shadow interview, 2019).

[Ann] "I can always call them [the agents] and say, this is not OK, can't you call him [the client] and tell him off. But then they [the agents] talk to me and say, but Ann, you said yes, yourself. I mean we talk about it…as humans…and it is not difficult because we know each other… they are very nice" (post-shadow interview, 2019).

Prodding helps SMIs to accept the commodification of their real self. These practices work as a governing tool to calm down SMIs when they are emotionally conflicted (as Ann describes). That Ann perceives agents as "someone she always can call" shows how she enacts governance and is empowered to feel authentic despite the commercial motives of agents to encourage SMIs to accept more client control and demands.

The final external work-practice is *commercializing*. SMIs exist in an economic system where the ultimate value is monetary and lies with the sponsoring brand. The challenge for the SMI is to maintain a sense of autonomy so that they can perform authentically to themselves and to their followers while also being an economic actor. In this tension between commerciality and authenticity, we observe ambiguous power structures; agents keep control to maintain SMIs' commercial potential as authentic emotional performers while encouraging the illusion of autonomy so SMIs feel true to their real self and keep performing authentically. Media agent Clara describes how commercial control is necessary for a successful SMI campaign:

"The client [sponsoring brand] places their money with us [media agent] and expects that we use them [the money] in their best interest, but they always want control over their marketing spend. So, we do this to keep the customer satisfaction and to get a successful campaign..." (interview, 2019).

The commercial rationale driving the campaign is always framed within the boundaries of the need for an authentic SMI performance. As a result, the agent must translate sponsoring brand motives to routines and guidelines that appeal to the SMI. Routines such as freedom of the written word establish an illusion of autonomy that enables SMIs to perform as themselves, which simultaneously ensures greater control over their performances, as influencer agent Nelly describes:

"…these are small formal guidelines and then the influencers need to incorporate it into their personal life. But we need to assure that these things are there because we use them [the SMIs] as strategic marketing tools… but I feel that the influencers get to put their personal touch on it…. We say to our clients that they can't go in and change in their post or language…" (post-shadow interview, 2019).

In presenting these four work-practices, we have focused on how the SMI is exposed to and adopts governing structures where agents seek to control SMI emotions and codify them into forms of commercial value that align to capitalistic priorities and systems. Superficially, this

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appears similar to the notion of emotional labor offered by Hochschild (1983) whereby the worker is performing to scripted emotional guidelines. However, we note one important caveat, which lies in the apparent intimacy of the relationship between the external agents and the worker. These work-practices are carefully played out to maintain the chimera of agency by the SMI and feed into as governing act where the SMI is exploited to work on themselves as brands and accept that their lives are managed for commercial gain.

In the next section, we follow how workers attempt to push-back on the governance of their selves, although we find that not only is this difficult to achieve, but that any personal failings are simply reframed as expressions of authentic pain and trauma, which provides fuel for the personal brand.

Finding the true self: internal struggles for identity

The logic underpinning the external controls eventually becomes internalized as governing structures by SMIs. However, as external control becomes internalized through self-controlling structures, authentic performances are changed from "putting on the right face" (Hochschild, 1983) to being part of SMI's identity work. As a result, SMI's attempt to push or fight back against these structures. Thus, emotional labor is also self-directed, aimed at both managing the tension between the real and branded self. This self-directed emotional labor involves four internal work-practices: boundary-management (where SMI establish self-made boundaries), display of personal pain (where SMIs uses their personal pain to maintain their personal brand), foregrounding the backstage (where SMIs enact discourses of commoditization of aspects of their private lives) and narratives of coping (where SMIs create narratives for themselves to overcome self-commodification). Whereas the external work-practices are prescribed according to a commercial logic, internal work-practices are more ambiguous; being often (although not exclusively) unconsciously and dynamically constructed as mental self-governing structures (McNay, 2009).

The first work-practice is *boundary-management.* SMIs' internalization of commercial branding logics requires them to open their daily lives to an online audience to maintain authenticity. However, this is managed against maintaining a personal sense of private self by pushing back through boundary management; SMIs try and develop self-guiding rules for how much personal

and commercial material they post. Balancing these dual selves (branded and real) becomes an internal management discipline for the worker who must manage her emotions in accordance with her sponsoring brands. The work-practice of self-guidance thus becomes a way to deal with challenges of how much of SMIs are willing to 'give up' (SMI, Katelyn, Documentary, 2019). For example, SMI Petra describes how she plans the amount of sponsored post her social media page can handle:

"If I write something private then the traffic [number of social media profile visitors] significantly increases, but I don't write them to get traffic, I write them because I want to. Nonetheless, I do think about that the blog not only contains sponsored post: it might send the wrong signal. If there are only sponsored posts, it quickly looks like I am only here for the money, but I am not", (interview, 2015).

Petra describes her conflict between commercial motives and her sense of a real self, and how this plays out in her online posting practices. However, the practice adopted, while enabling her to gain a level of comfort around the balance between paid posts and private emotions, also represents an internalization of a personal brand logic, in which calculations over what and how much private material to post are underpinned not by a self-logic but by the strictures covered above that represent a brand-driven system. Unlike traditional emotional workers such as airline cabin crew (Hochschild, 1983) or nurses (Lopez, 2006) who follow formal company guidelines, SMIs operate by what they believe are self-made guidelines. We witness an internal, emotional struggle where SMIs create guidelines to protect their privacy whilst, paradoxically, revealing themselves enough to create the desired level of authenticity for their followers. As these guidelines are intertwined with self-governing structures, this causes tensions for the SMI reflected in outcomes such as feeling inadequate, as we see with SMI Katelyn:

"I want to show pictures of my boyfriend on the blog, but I don't want to write if we had a fight. There is a limit, which sometimes can be difficult to find, but I never think I gave too much of myself, actually more the opposite. Sometimes I feel like I could have given more because a can feel that the followers want more" (interview, 2015).

SMIs' boundaries are constantly being challenged, by themselves and by their agents. The adopted boundary management practices do not ensure that that they do not cross these limits of

their own accord. For example, when SMI Tina shares her story of her abuse as a child, even though her family asked her not to do so (television documentary, 2019).

"I wanted to share my story about being molested by a family member as a child. And a lot of you have asked, whether I would like to share my story. Whether I wanted to share my knowledge and experience, and myself, I want to break down the taboo about incest. I went against my whole family to share this…" (television documentary, 2019).

The second internal work-practice, *display of emotional pain*. Emotional pain is expressed through the genre of a therapeutic narrative (Illouz, 2007) by displaying apparently real emotions to project the SMI's sincerity and enhances the connection with followers. Emotional authenticity becomes a counterbalance to the otherwise highly commercial displays of showing off sponsored projects and brands. For example, SMI Tina creates intimacy between her and her followers, by displaying her vacation meltdown. However, in working through her personal pain, Tina draws on the help of her mentor, who then suggests she should turn this into an ironic post that acts as an advertisement for her mentor's services:

"I had a smaller break down in the middle of our vacation. Right there, I was really happy that I could write to my mentor immediately … Mentorgo [anonymized name of sponsoring brand] have given me the possibility to write online to my psychotherapist when the shit burns down. #mentorgo" (television documentary, 2019).

While Tina displays a commercial for her mentor / brand sponsor, she commercializes her personal battle in such a way as to create an impression that enhances the authenticity of her feed. Drawing on the previous section on external management, this display of the real self (as opposed to repression) paradoxically further breaches any desired boundaries between private and public and represents the personal branding logic structures created by agents. A similar experience is described by SMI Tina, as she posts her discussions with her psychologist about how she feels trapped in a governing culture that exploits her emotions:

"I feel like I cannot relax… There is an enormous pressure from my surroundings. From all my followers in general. I feel like I constantly have to be perfect… I just feel like my body cannot do this…" (television documentary, 2019).

The outcome for Tina is anxiety and, though she is aware that her online performances intensify her anxiety, she continues to display how she copes with the emotional exploitation. This

reflexive work-practice becomes a way of dealing with the deficiency of her privacy and works a self-governing structure where the self, on the one hand, experiences exploitation, but, on the other, exploits her own personal pain to fulfil her desire to be a professional SMI and allow room for her sponsoring brand without her followers judging her to be inauthentic. Thus, while the practice of displaying emotional pain is sold to SMIs, to manage internal conflicts, it is actually a maneuver to strengthen their authenticity and therefore brand power.

Consequently, display of emotional pain causes further internal tensions as it becomes impossible to set down clear boundaries and SMIs feel compromised, leading to further online outbursts and a never-ending cycle of tension-expressions of pain-audience authenticity (and further demands for personalized content). This we observe later in one of Ann's social media postings where she bluntly burst out her emotional pain to her followers after a commercial event.

"I mostly feel like digging myself into a hole in the ground so no one can hear me crying. The anxiety won and it feels like the biggest defeat. Even though I promised myself that each time I go outside it is a success. But this does not feel like a success. Fuck this shit! I have no idea how I have become like this. Or I do have an idea, but you know…" (blog post, 2019).

Immediately after having presented at a commercial event, Ann made her online posting expressing feelings of defeat and anxiety. While Ann's display generates empathy, it also invites her followers into the processes of overcoming her personal battle and increases her emotional capital (Illouz, 2007). While the display works to cover up the inauthenticity of the commercial self, this pain is real for the SMIs, the SMI remains unaware that the very practice further entangles them in governing brand logics.

The third self-identity practice, we label *foregrounding the backstage*. As SMIs' work in the liminal space between no organizational commitments and structural control they are individually responsible for managing boundaries between work (public) and non-work (private) and integrate what we observe to be an internal work-practice of commercialized privacy. Since much of an SMI's work involves commercializing their daily life, they often benefit financially from foregrounding their private lives, through the provision of goods and services and financial payment. As such, SMI's accept they are in a position of privilege whereby they are paid essentially to live their lives and seemingly have fun (and narrate it as such); however, this results in a sense of always being 'on' and creates personal and interpersonal tensions.

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In total, we observed four main common private backstage realms that were foregrounded:

1. Vacations: "My vacations have become travels where I blog, but it doesn't feel like it is work even though I know it is" (SMI, Katelyn, interview, 2015).

2. Birthdays: "I really miss my friends and actually I didn't think I would work through a birthday party… but then [commercial brand] asked me for a collaboration. So, I invited my friends. Huge luxury birthday… But that meant that I had to be on air all the time, I had to have my phone on me all the time and take photos. In that sense I was not present in the way I would normally be" (SMI, Katelyn, television documentary, 2019).

3. Wedding: "I am shopping for my wedding dress, and I am really looking forward to it… I have my mother with me… and my three bridesmaids… I did a sponsorship with a bridal shop. The deal is that I must post some Instagram photos of me trying my wedding dresses. (…) Mitch [fiancée] saw the post and freaked out because he thought it was the actual dress. He was in grief." (SMI, Jackie, television documentary, 2019).

4. Childbirth: "I promised to do a review on what birth rehearsals actually helped me during my birth… But firstly, it has taken me a couple of months to get over the birth. Physically but most of all mentally. The separation was tough, and it is not before now, three months after, I can let go of the pain…" (SMI, Katelyn, blog post, 2019).

The examples provided above all share a sense of mixed emotions, whereby the benefits arising from foregrounding the backstage come tinged with a sense of regret, as well as further problems arising from breaching ritualistic norms (Jackie's partner's shock) and personal pain (arising from Katelyn's post-natal depression). These actions, in foregrounding the backstage, are attempts to benefit from the blurred boundaries between work and play that sit at the heart of SMI work, but the brand logic that structures SMI work also leads to a creeping commercialization of sacred realms, resulting in further distress and tension, which then triggers some of the other self-identity practices such as pain and trauma, as Ann explains:

"I look at my brand and ask what is it that I compromise now? Because I do, every time I make an advert, I compromise with who I am. It is always like that also when it is a really cool campaign…" she continues; "I have something where I must fit in myself. It is that merge, all the time (…) On the one hand there is something about some declaration of something, hard

core data, something I have to say and on the other hand it is my emotions, my opinion, my life, my every day…" (post-shadow interview, 2019).

Finally, in the last self-identity work-practice, we observe SMIs self-manage their emotional display by *narratives of coping*. Coping narratives work as way to maintain SMIs' feelings of personal authenticity as they express anxiety, feelings of being overwhelmed, and eventually give into the temptations of commercialization and fame by foregrounding private aspects of their lives. SMIs thus must find ways to accept their exploitation, as they get a "privileged life (…) and in return pay with their private life" (Katelyn, documentary, 2019). But more than this, they cope with this exploitation by internalizing it and arguing that is strengthens their personal brand. For example, in the documentary, SMI Dan, shares his problems with alcohol, and mentions he attends Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings. However, as he then explains: "sometimes my job is to be drunk and party" (documentary, 2019). He copes with this tension by arguing that his commercial self requires him to continue a personally addictive practice, and to support an industry he recognizes has caused him problems. In this sense, Dan is the most extreme example of "selling out", compromising his sense of self for commercial gain. Later in the documentary, Dan is booked to promote a festival by participating and report to his followers. Despite his acceptance, he planned not to drink. Nonetheless, he ends up drunk performing his person-brand. Prior to attending the party, he shared his concerns with his AA-sponsor:

"We talked about that I drink because I am afraid that I am not good enough…The alcohol makes me less shy, and it is really annoying that I have found that it works…" But at the festival he confesses "…I have to be honest I have been drinking…I am doing my job… and right now I can feel that I have to perform in about 10 minutes" (television documentary, 2019).

The exploitation of Dan's personal weakness, the authenticity of failure, becomes his brand's strength and an asset for his commercial sponsorships but reinforces a cycle he is trying to break. The way he copes with emotional exploitation is to rationalize it as part of his job role. Both the act of partying, and the display of his struggles with drinking enhance his personal brand in two ways: the drink helps the sponsor while the struggle with addiction drives connection with his audience. In a similar way to Tina (in sharing her private discussions with her psychologist about feelings of anxiety and entrapment), rather than experiencing a

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comfortable compartmentalization between front and backstage, Dan cannot fall back to a private backstage where he is "offline" and able to deal with his alcoholism. Instead, his story, as with Fie Laursen, makes him even more real, which leaves him in a self-created panopticon.

These four work-practices reflect internal struggles for maintain a sense of self whilst simultaneously exploiting themselves as marketized objects. They demonstrate how the ingrained and enacted governmental structures of personal branding dissolve boundaries between privacy and public, so that the tensions and struggles become a performative maneuver. Importantly, we illustrate the personal tensions that this extreme marketization of the self has, and how workers are programmed to exploit themselves. In their need and desire to build their own brand, to remain an attractive proposition in the market for sponsors and to please their followers they accept and enact their self-marketization.

Discussion

In studying SMI's work-practices we examine a new form emotional labor, personal branding, which normalizes the commodification of emotions in a race to realize a marketized self (e.g., McNay, 2009). This new type of emotional laborer must publicly display private, real emotions in a quest for personal brand authenticity. A worker who is placed in a novel digital economy where the ambiguity of the work not only lies within balancing work and non-work but also in the very identity construction of the worker herself. We introduce the SMI, as an example of the PBEL who strategizes her life-trajectory to become "someone" and in capitalistic forms sells her emotions to authenticate inherently inauthentic brands.

Commoditization of emotions relates to what previously has been addressed as communicative (Mumby, 2016) or emotional capitalism (Illouz, 2007). Here value is created beyond the workplace in everyday practices of communication, meaning, and identity management (Mumby, 2016). The PBEL shows that she finds (and indeed seeks) meaning in her work, but where she becomes an object of her own performance in which ongoing self-governing mental structures both restrain and enforce her. The worker is found to re-produce cultural meaning for

her followers in presenting her own authentically perceived messages by enacting systemic, capitalistic, and legitimized work-practices. The PBEL's self-presentation becomes a performance not only where the outsider glances in (Gabriel, 2005) but one in which the worker internalizes governmental structures to manage her emotions to achieve fame and glamour, and where outcomes, such as anxiety, inadequacy, and an invasion of private space, are the price. The ambiguity of the PBEL lies in the mental self-governing structures that serve their dual selves (branded vs real). The internal discourse attempts to aligns these two selves, however the logic of personal branding, means the PBEL must forever offer more and more expressions of emotions, pain, and private details to feed her followers, and remain real.

Emotions, for the PBEL, are always on display to perform authenticity for sponsoring brands, and for the self, to become a person-brand through communication, meaning, and identity (Mumby, 2016). Emotions no longer belong to oneself but become a strategic tool to achieve authenticity for all of us when we work on our self-branding performances on LinkedIn, Facebook, or so on. By drawing on Hochschild's (1983) notion of emotional labor, we find that what previously has been discussed as systemized emotional labor in organizations has changed in the context of the attention economy (Marwick, 2015). Here workers enact impression strategies of their lives to standout and end up always being at work using their life to gain attention from others (Gabriel, 2005) and the emotional script, previously guided by organizations (Morris & Feldman, 1997). The self-management of emotions becomes an everyday work-practice to publicly display one's private self to become "real" and engaged with by others, serving an ever-intensifying culture of emotional display (Illouz, 2007). Studying SMI's, we find an extreme of such work that hosts contradictions and layers as they work on the production of multiple selves in their self-presentation: the real self and the branded self. The dual selves become intertwined and impossible to differentiate and, in the end, identity becomes a constant authenticating narrative of the person-brand. Authenticity, for the PBEL becomes a double-edged sword, which is used by and on the worker as a script in their governmentality. PBELs' work differentiates from previous notions of emotional laborers', where the authentic self was found in breaks from work (Hochschild, 1983) or when the worker would break out of her scripted role to feel authentic (Bolton, 2009). Now, as the worker's self becomes a brand, she becomes locked into the discourse of self-realization, which depends on her ability to realize authenticity for the brands she represents including her own.

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SMIs demonstrate how exploitation takes form through normalization of emotions as marketable and marketizing commodities. The PBEL enacts governmentality performed by multiple stakeholders, including the worker herself, who passes what seems to be a self-created panopticon where she at all times strategizes her emotion. The dialectical disposition of the PBEL is in this study revealed in her work-practices on and with her emotions, as she constantly works between positive and negative consequences of the self-created panopticon. In her work-practices, distinction between her real and commercial self becomes meaningless. In contrast to governing structures through micro-management (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011), and emotional labor (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004) in traditional organizations, the PBELs' instructions and guidelines are intertwined with her life-trajectory and internalized, and notions of the workers' agency (Bolton & Boyd, 2003) becomes irrelevant, as their emotions become a commercial value proposition.

Illustrated through SMIs' work-practices we conclude that the PBEL works to reconcile tensions between marketization and privacy as a way to overcome a total marketization like the one described by (Picard et al., 2020). On the one hand, they depend on marketization and how they are managed to fit market protocols attached to commercial sponsoring brands and are enacted in order to enhance the value of the SMI's brand to clients (Hearn, 2008; McNay, 2009). However, on the other hand, the PBELs' are reliant on their sense of being real as well as their followers' perception of them as authentic. They depend on a private sacristy where their emotions are sincere, and where one must draw upon life outside professional structures to show whom one really is. Here deep acting, where workers draw on their real emotions as they perform (Hochschild, 1983), is not sufficient, as the real requires the audience to believe it stems from the sincerity of their selves. We observe how SMIs' essential 'being', as opposed to the existential 'doing' of a performance (cf. Guignon, 2004) and how they draw on various non-commercial role identities such as mother, sibling, lover, friend to reminds followers of their sincerity. The presentation of themselves as brands consequently blurs the boundaries between public and private emotions and realities, often triggering further authenticity tensions.

In conclusion, PBEL's such as SMI's experience a work *life* where they can never be "offline"; indeed, their very identity is dependent on being "always on" online. While they feel

empowered by the material benefits, they gain from being in the public eye, it also becomes their prison. PBELs do not have the luxury of smoking breaks, layovers etc. to provide them with the necessary release to keep going, to vent, and move on; to be their real selves (Hochschild, 1983). As a PBEL, the worker becomes entangled in their own person-brand where no part of the SMI's life is off limits for commercial exploitation. This involves being contained simultaneously within a glass palace and glass cage or as we like to express it: the PBEL is forever checked-in to the Eagles' *Hotel California* "such a lovely place where there is champagne on ice, but she is programmed to receive and can never leave."

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Chapter 5 Logics

The "Backend" of Influencer Marketing Practice: Bridging Between Commercialization and Personalization (Paper 3)

Introduction

Influencer marketing (IM) is becoming increasingly relevant to marketers, and firms have been estimated to spend up to $15 billion on IM campaigns by 2022 (Business Insider, 2021). At the heart of IM are so-called social media influencers (SMIs), who have built loyal fellowships through displays of personal experiences and opinions, often starting their careers as "ordinary" consumers (Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018a). However, marketers' new-found opportunities to promote their products through these SMIs might in fact harm what makes SMIs so attractive in the first place: their authenticity (Audrezet et al., 2020). Therefore, recent scholarly work has been particularly dedicated to investigating potential parameters of successful IM, such as message content, platform, influencer characteristics, or brand-influencer fit, and their impact on relevant consumer responses, such as brand engagement (Hughes et al., 2019), brand attitudes (Breves et al., 2019a), or purchase intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

While the growing body of research provides valuable insights, it has largely privileged investigations with a focus on single actors (e.g., SMIs, see Audrezet et al., 2020) or on consumer responses (e.g., Hughes et al., 2019), that is, the "front-end" of IM. In contrast, the "back-end" of IM, that is, its planning and implementation through collaborations between firms, media agencies, influencer agencies, and SMIs, has to date and to the authors' best knowledge received only very little empirical attention. However, the acceleration of the influencer marketing practice poses serious challenges to marketers in their management of the practice (Haenlein et al., 2020). Given the rise of digital co-creation processes (cf. Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016), marketing is changing from being a dual practice where practitioners distribute campaigns to consumers for them to consume to a much more fragmented process in which all actors potentially contribute to the campaign on multiple channels and platforms (Veile et al., 2022). Thus, the success of IM, and similar co-creational, processual marketing practices, for all involved may depend on how client brands, agencies, and SMIs work together (cf. Enke & Borchers, 2019).

Therefore, the goal of this research is to investigate IM as a practice that is performed by multiple practitioners in order to better understand tensions and conflicts that might occur between different practitioners, such as agents, client brands, and SMIs, when organizing and implementing the practice. More specifically, through an exploratory, multi-sited ethnographic study, we explore first, why conflicts occur, second, how practitioners approach conflicts, and third, which approaches may be viable and sustainable solutions. In doing so, we follow the premises of practice theory to study IM as practice, that is, an organized form of activity (T. R. Schatzki, 2002, 2005) that provides individuals with orientation in social contexts (Reckwitz, 2002). As a practice theory approach focuses an empirical investigation on the practice rather than on single practitioners, we embed IM in the field of digital marketing communications, which enables us to conceptualize practitioners' different "backgrounds", so prescriptive value and belief systems, as distinct logics (cf. Thornton et al., 2012). Particularly, we define the logic of personalization to co-exist and, at times, compete with the logic of commercialization, leading to misalignments between practice elements, which may erupt into conflicts. To overcome such conflicts, practitioners may engage in alignment work, so-called bridging, which may or may not lead to viable and sustainable solutions.

The contribution of this research is threefold. First, we contribute with a theorization of IM as an emerging practice that involves two at times competing logics and that the practice develops as it travels across sites in a bundle of activities enacted by actors who act upon values from the two different logics. This finding captures the processual nature of IM campaign planning and implementation, providing a terminology for future studies on IM and other processual and co-creational marketing practices.

Specifically, our empirical investigation uncovers IM as performed by multiple practitioners who enact five elements of the practice, including cultural understandings (i.e., ideas and values), teleoaffective structures (i.e., goals and affectivities), rules (including implicit and explicit rules), routines (i.e., bodily activities and related skills), and material set-ups (e.g., equipment and objects). We illustrate how these practice elements are enacted differently depending on the "background", that is, the logic, of the site. By focusing on collective performances, this research unearths important areas in the IM-practice, where conflict between practitioners often occurs, namely match, content, control, and evaluation, which can lead to serious challenges in the back-end planning and implementation of IM.

Second, we contribute with the identification of an important logic, the logic of personalization, to co-exist and, at times, compete with a second logic, the logic of commercialization. This dichotomy highlights the need for theory and practice to consider the SMI and their passion and intrinsic motivation as core to IM, and it emphasizes, similarly to the two-bodied theory of a human brand (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019), that SMIs and their – branded, commercialized – channels are distinct yet interdependent. In other words, while commercialization and personalization are both integral to the IM-practice, an overemphasis on turning an influencer into a profitable media channel and ignoring the person and her value to the practice may harm any practitioners' commercial goals.

Third, we contribute with an identification of possible causes of conflicts in the "back-end" of the IM-practice and carve out the activity of bridging, which is the alignment work in which practitioners engage to solve these conflicts that occur as a consequence to the different logics. Specifically, we identify conflicts to occur because of practitioners' differing enactments of cultural understandings and teleoaffective structures, so ideas, values, and goals that formed by the logic of the site. In contrast, it is the materials, rules, and routines that practitioners enact in ways so that they can bridge between, that is align, commercialization and personalization. As such, bridging constitutes an important vehicle for the IM-practice to continue 'going' and eventually mature into a practice where logics of commercialization and personalization are not privileged over another but integrated into enactments across practitioners.

Finally, our findings provide directions for future research and important managerial implications for marketers. Specifically, as we consider the complex nature of this digital co-creational and processual practice, our findings provide concrete tools for marketers, so they can successfully manage and eventually benefit from competing ideas, values, and goals of different stakeholders involved in the "back-end" of IM.

Theoretical Background

At the Heart of Influencer Marketing

With advancing platforms and the spread of blogging, individuals "grabbed the megaphone" to accumulate social and economic capital (McQuarrie et al., 2013). The rise of platforms such as Instagram has fueled the on-going professionalization of formerly "ordinary" consumers who have become branded professionals (Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018). SMIs can be considered opinion-leaders within a network (Erz et al., 2018). However, they are different from traditional

celebrities (e.g., actresses, singers, footballers, or TV personalities) who may be equally active on Instagram or other social media platforms but have accumulated their initial fame outside of these platforms (Haenlein et al., 2020). In this work, SMIs are content creators who have gained an engaged and relatively large fellowship (to varying degrees, dependent on their respective categorization as, e.g., micro- or macro-influencers) through broadcasting their personal, everyday lives, and experiences and opinions on social media (e.g., on b(v)logs, or Instagram). They may manage multiple roles vis-à-vis brands, including spokesperson, co-creator, or co-owner (Rundin & Colliander, 2021) and may post about selected or a range of topics, such as technology, fashion, nutrition, or fitness (De Veirman et al., 2017; Haenlein et al., 2020; Hudders, De Jans, et al., 2020).

Hence, IM can be defined as "the practice of compensating individuals for posting about a product or service on social media", paying "influencers with money or in kind, such as with free products, services, or experiences" (Campbell & Farrell, 2020, pp. 469; 470). IM has become integral to any marketing or communication strategy portfolio (Childers et al., 2019; Enke & Borchers, 2019). What differentiates IM from conventional marketing formats possibly the most is that, despite being compensated, SMIs optimally maintain control over the final message of sponsored content, albeit it not being organic word-of-mouth. As such, IM is considered a "hybrid approach combining aspects of paid and earned media" (Hughes et al., 2019, p. 79).

IM and its effects on consumer responses have experienced considerable scholarly attention in the past few years (Hudders et al., 2020). Authors have recently begun to examine the parameters of successful IM. For example, Hughes, Swaminathan, and Brooks (2019) investigate a range of factors and their interplay, which determine how influencers' messages are interpreted by consumers. Extant findings suggest the fit between SMI and firm to have an impact. For example, Belanche et al. (2021) and Martínez-López et al. (2020) find a positive impact of influencer-brand fit on the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. Recent literature even suggests that the relationship between influencer and follower can create an inspiring feeling towards sponsored posts ((Chloe) Ki et al., 2022). Furthermore, consumer-perceived brand control can affect consumers' trust negatively (Martínez-López et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2021).

Other research has focused more on the different practitioners of IM. For example, Erz and Heeris Christensen (2018) trace how consumer bloggers evolved into blogger brands, changing their relationship with brands from a means of self-expression into clients, sponsors, or collaborators. Analyzing influencer marketing campaign content against SMIs' own perceptions and experiences, Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard (2020, p. 558) find SMIs to engage in authenticity management strategies, as "SMIs' authenticity can be threatened by brands' encroachment into their content". Similarly, Haenlein et al. (2020) suggest that firms should avoid managing and briefing SMIs too closely. Investigating marketers' experiences and perceptions of IM, Childers, Lemon, and Hoy (2019, p. 267) find media agents to engage in a "delicate dance" with SMIs, a "balancing act of both controlling content and relinquishing that control".

In sum, extant research on IM has paid considerable attention to its effects on consumer responses, but less so to the back-end of IM. In addition, the rise of SMIs and their professionalization have birthed new actors, such as influencer agencies. Therefore, there remains a lack of empirical research on the processes of planning and implementing IM-campaigns involving multiple stakeholders at the back-end of IM, which might foster or hinder the success of the IM practice.

To address this gap, we conceptualize IM as an emerging digital marketing communications practice, using practice theory as conceptual lens. Practice theory's ability to capture the complexity of social life from the perspective of practitioners has made it particularly relevant for studying social phenomena in the context of organizations, including issues related to strategy (Whittington, 2006), branding (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018), marketing communication (Ots & Nyilasy, 2017), and innovation (Kohtamäki et al., 2020) or consumer research (Woermann & Rokka, 2015). As a meta-theoretical approach (Ots & Nyilasy, 2017), practice theory provides this study with a solid ontological and epistemological foundation, clear methodological recommendations, and a vocabulary to discuss IM as practice. In the following, we outline the theoretical premises of practice theory, while we apply it to the IM-practice in our analysis and findings.

Practice Theory as a Conceptual Lens to Study Influencer Marketing

Extant research on IM has largely privileged investigations focusing on single actors, such as SMIs (e.g., Audrezet et al., 2020), or on consumer responses to them (e.g., Hughes et al., 2019). However, the rise of SMIs and their professionalization have birthed new actors, such as influencer agencies who connect SMIs and client brands and have been re-defining skill sets and structures of existing organizations within the field of digital marketing communications, including firms and advertising or media agencies (Haenlein et al., 2020; Monllos, 2020). While Haenlein et al. (2020) provide managerial insight for marketers, there remains a lack of empirical research on the impact of the planning and implementation of IM in an eco-system of multiple practitioners on its success or failure. In order to address this gap, we conceptualize IM as an digital marketing practice, performed by multiple practitioners from multiple sites who enact a bundle of activities that constitute the practice in interaction. In the following, we outline the theoretical premises of practice theory, while we apply it to the concrete practice of IM in our findings.

Embracing a constructionist world view, practice theory assumes that social life is an ongoing production that emerges through people's recurrent but still changing actions (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). Practice theory assumes that action is situated and thus inseparable from the context in which it is performed (Bourdieu, 1990). Individual actors' ability to act is influenced by social structure, and social structure is shaped by individuals' agency (Giddens, 1979). Further, body and mind, cognition and action, and individual and institution are inseparable from each other (Reckwitz, 2002).

Practices are the building blocks of social life (Reckwitz, 2002; T. R. Schatzki, 2002). In its most generic sense, a practice denotes routinized behavior consisting of several interconnected elements (Reckwitz, 2002). Schatzki (1996, p. 133) introduces a conceptualization of practices as "spatiotemporal arrays of linked behaviors" that are "somehow structured alike". Practices can accordingly be perceived as behavioral patterns that provide individuals with orientation in social contexts (Reckwitz, 2002). Individuals – also referred to as practitioners – are "bodily and mental agents" that continuously fill these patterns with actions, thereby reproducing the practice (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 250).

In social spaces, a practice serves as nexus between different individuals' sayings and doings (T. R. Schatzki, 1996), laying the ground for a shared understanding of how to do things. In this

regard, it is important to note that practice theory focuses on the "implicit and intersubjective sociality of practices" (Löbler, 2011, p. 58). This implies that "mind/action is socially instituted and the body expressing it socially produced" (T. R. Schatzki, 1996, p. 88), and that practices constitute an implicit layer of symbolic structures, which coordinate explicit verbal and non-verbal (inter-)action (Reckwitz, 2002). Practice theory is thus in line with a constructionist world view, assuming that social life is an ongoing production emerging through people's recurrent but still changing actions and underlying practices (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011).

Practice theory is well acknowledged in marketing and consumer research contexts (Gannon & Prothero, 2016; Schau et al., 2009; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018; Warde, 2005; Woermann & Rokka, 2015). While specific conceptualizations of practice vary across this body of literature, scholars generally agree that the existence of practices as social building blocks "necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of [its] elements, [and] cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements" (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 250). Building on a recent conceptualization (Woermann & Rokka, 2015), this research assumes practice to consist of five elements:

First, *cultural understandings* encompass "discourses, cultural tropes, or value systems that play a role in the social organization of practices" (Woermann & Rokka, 2015, p. 1498). This element resonates with Schatzki's idea of *general understanding*, for example, about the nature, appropriateness or commonality of things (Schatzki, 2006), such as values of fairness, beliefs around manliness, or ideas of beauty in sports (Woermann & Rokka, 2015). These understandings are not practice-specific but reside on a higher level, constituting "ideal types invoked for judging the performance or experience of practitioners" (Woermann & Rokka, 2015, p. 1498).

Second, *teleoaffective structures* "encompass a range of ends, projects, actions, maybe emotions, and end-project-action combinations (teleological orderings) that are acceptable for or enjoined of participants to pursue and realize" (Schatzki, 2006, p. 1864). This element accounts for practitioners' goal-directedness, assuming that their doings are shaped by "implicit mental conditions such as ends and emotions" (Woermann & Rokka, 2015, p. 1496).

Third, *rules* encompass more explicit and formal regulations (T. R. Schatzki, 1996) as well as "rules of thumb, strategies, tactics, heuristics, recipes, instructions, or mundane sayings" (Woermann & Rokka, 2015, p. 1497) that implicitly organize practices.

Fourth, *bodily routines and skills* include all bodily doings, that is, physical routines and related embodied experiences that are crucial for performing a practice (Woermann & Rokka, 2015). Lastly, m*aterial set-ups* include all spatial and material elements used to perform the practice, including spaces, equipment, objects, etc. These elements are of particular relevance since their presence enables practitioners to perform the practice, while their absence constrains them (Woermann & Rokka, 2015).

Potential Conflicts Caused by Different Logics

Generally, practices are "organized bundles of entangled elements" (Woermann & Rokka, 2015, p. 1494), and therefore, all five elements are at work when a practice is performed. At times, when one element is misaligned or stands out, it might disturb the practice to some degree. For example, in the context of freestyle skiing, skiers might crash because of fears of crashing (Woermann & Rokka, 2015), causing a serious hindrance to the practice. In a similar vein, we propose that the IM-practice may experience conflicts, when practice elements are misaligned. However, in contrast to Woermann and Rokka (2015), we turn our attention to misalignments that may be caused by the multiplicity of practitioners and the potential plurality of "backgrounds" of sites that are formed by values and history of the site, which affect enactments of practitioners (Schatzki, 2005).

More specifically, to conceptualize the differences in practitioners' "backgrounds", we follow scholars who have used multiple sociological theories to address their research questions (P.-Y. Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; M. A. Parmentier & Fischer, 2020; e.g., Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), and introduce the term of logics, an element original to neo-institutional theory. Institutional logics are "socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce their lives and experiences" (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804), and they shape what social actors consider as appropriate or inappropriate behavior (von Richthofen & Fischer, 2019). Scholarly work generally distinguishes between societal and field or organizational logics, the former applying to large parts of societies, such as community, religion, or family, and the latter prevailing in more bounded, localized fields or organizations (Thornton et al., 2012), such as the field of

fashion (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), the beer market (Kjeldgaard et al., 2017) or the organization Airbnb (von Richthofen & Fischer, 2019).

Generally, extant work has demonstrated the plurality of logics in fields, and especially the permeability of fields for new logics promoted by a collective of new actors. For example, Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) showed that plus-size fashion bloggers introduced new logics from adjacent fields, such as the logic of human rights, to the field of fashion to mobilize change. In a similar vein, the Danish beer market experienced disruption, when micro-brewers introduced the logic of art to co-exist with the until then dominating logic of commerce (Kjeldgaard et al., 2017).

In a similar vein, the field of digital communications relevant to this context may comprise multiple logics, such as the logic of art (e.g., as visible in advertising creativity) and the logic of commerce, which, in its ideal form, "prescribes that enterprises should seek to maximize profits, while individuals should seek to maximize their self-interest" (Thornton et al., 2012; von Richthofen & Fischer, 2019, p. 195). The latter is specifically relevant to this research to explore tensions that may arise when practitioners such as firms and media agents who have clearly commercially driven goals work with SMIs. While SMIs may equally have commercial goals, practitioners' discourses (e.g., Monllos, 2020) and extant research show that SMIs may be even more concerned about their authenticity towards others and themselves. Many of them having roots as "ordinary" consumers who have shared personal opinions and tastes before SMIs became marketing terminology (Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018), they value "intrinsic motivations and [producing] social media content based on their love for the topic and their activity (e.g., creating and sharing content, discussing their interests with others)", where the production is not only a means to a financial end but the means in itself (Audrezet et al., 2020, p. 559). This notion of "something personal" or "being a person" with their own desires is not alien to the digital space in general, where self-broadcasting and personal branding (e.g., Labrecque et al., 2011) but also customization, personalization and "humanness" (e.g., when consumers expect companies to use a specific tone of voice, see Barcelos et al., 2018) take center-stage. Therefore, through the empirical investigation of the IM-practice, we explore and conceptualize another field-specific logic, particularly relevant to the context of IM, namely the logic of personalization. We further explore how this logic may stand in contrast to the logic of commercialization, causing misalignments in the enactments of practice elements, leading to conflicts in the IM-practice.

Methodology

This research aims to understand the dynamics of the IM-practice by studying it through the lens of practice theory. In line with practice theory's constructionist underpinning, this research adopts an action perspective to studying practices, suggesting that the activities practitioners engage in shape and promote practices (T. R. Schatzki, 2005). Accounting for the processual and situated nature of practices (T. R. Schatzki, 2002), this research sets out to explore the IM-practice by following its enactments across sites, that is, the context or relational scene in which the practice occurs. In doing so, we also acknowledge that practices and their sites are inextricably linked and co-emerge in a continuous process (Nicolini, 2011).

Research Context

We employed a multi-sited ethnographic approach (Nicolini, 2007), with all sites situated in Denmark. This choice is closely tied to the constructionist premise of practice theory, as it follows the movement and flow of the practice through sites rather than following the single practitioners who engage in the practice (cf. Marcus, 1995). As such, this approach enables the researcher to focus on how a practice is (re-)created and evolves in a continuous performative process.

As we followed the practice through a continuous iteration between data collection and analysis (Spiggle, 1994), we consecutively identified the sites where IM is performed, employing a purposive sampling strategy. Through desk research and the first author's network within the industry, we identified one of Denmark's largest media agencies, with a department dedicated exclusively to IM, as starting point. In total, we studied the practice at four sites, including firms, media agencies, influencer agencies, and SMIs. It should be noted that although our focus was on sites, practitioners are naturally part of these sites (Nicolini, 2011). Especially in the case of SMIs, this distinction may be blurred. To clarify, while SMIs can be regarded as single practitioners, in this research we treated them also as sites. Table 5.1 summarizes sites, their roles, and key informants affiliated with sites. All sites and informants are anonymized.

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Table 5.1 Overview of sites & key informants

Research site (abbreviation)	Short description	General role in IM	Informant (names anonymized)	Position at research site
Firm 1 (FR1)	Client of media agencies, furnishing industry, well-known for work with influencers		Sara	Head of Marketing
		Buy campaign from media agency; generally, less involved in activities to the practice; do not necessarily meet SMI in person	Donna	Marketing Manager
Firm 2 (FR2)	Client of media agencies, traveling industry, well-known for work with influencers		Tenna	Head of Marketing
Media agency 1 (MA1)	One of Denmark's largest media agencies; focus on its influencer marketing department		Rob	Head
			Sophia	Creative Strategist
		Conduct media planning and creative advertising work, partly replacing traditional advertising agencies; represent firm; mediate collaborations between firms, influencer agencies, and SMIs	Susi	Content Strategist
			Reba	Content Manager
			Jacob	Content Strategist
			Clara	Content Manager
Media agency 2 (MA1)	One of the largest media agencies in the Nordic countries		Nancy	Chief Content Officer

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

The first author collected data from November 2018 to January 2020 through a variety of data collection methods. We employed both action-based and ethnographic methods (Thorpe & Holt, 2007). Specifically, we used the method of active participation (Gummesson, 1988) in meetings and events to gain an in-depth understanding of the situated performance of the IM-practice (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018). Some meetings and daily work-life were passively observed in order to identify specific work patterns at the media agency (Watson, 2011). We employed shadowing (S. McDonald, 2005) as a micro-ethnographic technique, where the first author traced the practice by following key informants from three of the four sites (excluding firms). Further, interviews, most of them on site, helped contextualize what we had observed and comprehend the practice from the perspective of key informants, using an approach that combined ethnographic and active

interviewing (Halkier & Jensen, 2011).

While in-depth interviews, including exploratory and post-shadow interviews, with various practitioners were semi-structured and lasted between 42 and 93 minutes, ad-hoc interviews

during observations could take between three and 15 minutes and were conducted to clarify specific questions. Finally, archival and secondary data were collected. These included documents and emails about an influencer campaign from the media agency, and online content from SMIs, based on the criteria that the post should have a commercial intent and be posted within the period of data collection. The first author fully transcribed audio-recorded data and manual notes about meetings or observations. Table 5.2 provides an overview of the types and amount of data collected across research sites.

Table 5.2 Summary of data collection methods across research sites

Data Collection Methods	Amount of Data	Research Site(s) and/or Practitioners Involved
Informal meetings		Agents (media agents & influencer agents) and SMIs
Participatory observations	87 pages of computer written notes 240 minutes	Events and office practices within media agency
Passive observations		Media and influencer agencies, firms, and SMIs
Shadowing	64 pages of computer written notes 27.8 hours	SMI, media agency and influencer agency
In-depth interviews	157 pages of transcription 301 minutes	Firms, media, and influencer agency, SMIs
Secondary data (emails)	250+ emails	Firm, media- & influencer agents, SMIs & third parties
Archival content (online posts)	232 pages	Postings from SMIs' blogs and Instagram

Note. One page contained approximately 450 words on average, except for archival content pages, where we copied posted content and articles, including pictures, in their original form from the web.

With this research being exploratory in nature, we followed an iterative approach of data collection and analysis (Spiggle, 1994) to be able to follow enactments of practitioners as they unfold. The first and second authors coded the data separately, first through digital mind-mapping and then in NVivo 12 Pro. We used the core theoretical elements of practice theory – cultural understandings, teleoaffective structures, rules, routines, and material set-ups – as etic codes, while allowing emic codes to emerge from the data. Applying language and concepts from our scholarly field of interest in combination with coding that drew on the practitioners' language (cf. Belk et al., 2013) enabled us to unearth misalignments in the enactments of

elements according to differing understandings and identify conflicts and possible approaches to solutions. For example, "measurement/measuring", "control", "media channel/media tool", or "human/person" were recurring words across practitioners, denoting, for instance, which goals practitioners set (or did not set). Similarly, while we summarized practitioners' alignment activities under "bridging", an analog that we found fitting for alignment between two differing ideas, the words "match/matching" were vocabulary used by the practitioners themselves, which we, through further analysis, identified as one area of conflict and, on other occasions, as one specific type of bridging.

Throughout the analysis, we identified core concepts relevant to this research, which we refined through multiple phases of coding the entire data corpus that was available at the time of analysis. We identified the two logics, commercialization and personalization, by identifying different values and beliefs across the sites. Such values or beliefs would be articulated by actors' aims or wants or be focal to their way of working. For example, for the SMIs being true to themselves is crucial for their existence whereas meeting consumer needs is crucial for the client brands' perspective.

While we identified expressions and enactments of logics early on, it was through our applying of practice theory elements, that we could define these ideas more concisely as commercialization and personalization. Similarly, the notion of some sort of alignment work because of misalignments in how practitioners enacted the practice elements, or even severe conflicts became evident early in the process. Yet, it was only through the repeated data processing, including the sorting and continuous discussion of our codes, that we sharpened our understanding of distinct bridging activities. Lastly, through careful sorting and categorizing of codes and data, we were able to distill four core areas relevant to the IM practice in which conflicts particularly arise, including match, content, control, and evaluation. When no new insight emerged, theoretical saturation was deemed achieved.

To increase the understanding of layers of analysis the different layers are here briefly summarized. Firstly, logics are analyzed as superordinate to practice elements. As logics shape behavior, the two logics affect the enactments of the practice, i.e., the practice elements are analyzed as the second layer. Within the different enactments conflicts may occur, the identification of these conflicts is the third layer of the analysis. Finally, to overcome such conflicts actors must change their enactments of practice elements and perhaps also the

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organizing principles that shape the logics in where they are acting (Kjeldgaard et al., 2017). This activity we label bridging, and this represents the fourth and final layer of our analysis.

Findings

In the following, we demonstrate that IM is an emerging practice, which is performed by multiple practitioners, and which oscillates between two logics, the logic of commercialization and the logic of personalization. Similarly, to fields in which the presence of different logics can create tensions for actors (e.g., Kjeldgaard et al., 2017), we demonstrate that the plurality of logics leads to differences in enactments of practice elements, which in turn cause misalignments of various degrees between practice elements. Here, we illustrate the typical enactments of all five practice elements according to these two understandings (I, see Figure 4.1), which foreshadow the potential misalignments in practitioners' enactments (II). The second section defines bridging (III) and summarizes how three different bridging activities lead to three different temporary outcomes for the practice (IV). To present concrete accounts of such processes, the sub-sections that follow are structured along the temporary outcomes (IV). In addition to illustrating how the intertwined, yet at times competing, logics, commercialization and personalization, lead to misalignments in practitioners' enactments of practice elements, these accounts illustrate why and in which areas conflict occurs (II) and how practitioners concretely engage in bridging activities (III), which may lead to different outcomes (IV).
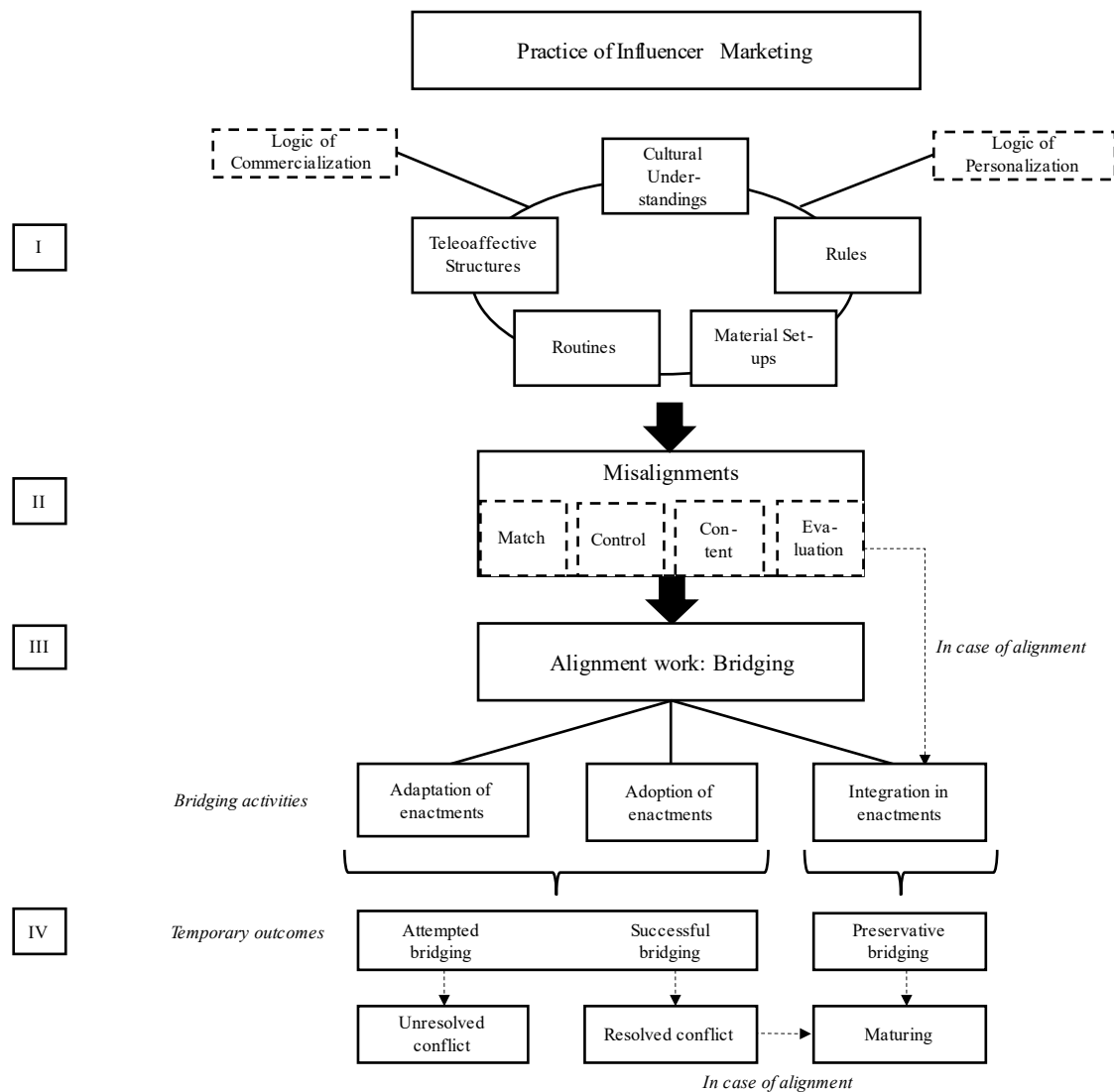
Figure 5.1 *Conceptual framework: The practice of influencer marketing between two logics*

Understanding of Commercialization and Personalization as Pervading the IM-Practice

Two logics, the logic of commercialization and the logic of personalization, impact the IM-practice. As each logic promotes different values and beliefs that prescribe behavior (Thornton et al., 2012), it was through the study of practitioners' enactments of its practice elements that we identified the two logics. It should be noted that while the definitions of the particular practice element cultural understanding and of logics may resemble, they are distinct concepts. Whereas cultural understandings relate to the nature of things and are more general ideas that

can apply to many practices (e.g., what is a beautiful ice-skating performance?), logics can be considered prescriptive for and may legitimize organizations' or individuals' doings within a specific field (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; cf. Thornton et al., 2012). As such, we conceptualize logics to be superordinate to the practice elements, as this conceptualization enables us to explore differences in enactments of one and the same practice, performed by multiple practitioners whose behavior may be determined by different logics.

While the logic of commercialization has been addressed in previous marketing research (e.g., Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), it is especially the logic of personalization that we define in this research. Personalization, in this context, is characterized by inward and outward acts to personalize and authenticate doings, including their communications (e.g., posting a review of a product in relation to one's own online narrative). These acts help build and maintain relationships with others and maintain and protect one's own ideas about who one was, is, or should be, whether as person or online person-brand. Importantly, while the logic of commercialization suggests value is of financial nature and objectively measurable, the logic of personalization places value within the individuals and their own, subjective evaluation of what fits their person (brand) and personal sense of integrity (cf. Audrezet et al., 2020).

Logics translate directly into behavior. While both logics may be reflected in enactments across practitioner sites, we find that the logic of commercialization shapes primarily enactments of media agents, influencer agents, and firms. In contrast, the logic of personalization can be primarily attributed to SMIs' enactments. In the following, we explicate the enactments of single practice elements by comparing the two logics along each of the five practice elements:

First, the *cultural understanding* enacted according to the logic of commercialization is primarily reflected in firms' and media agents' general ideas of SMIs, which they derive from known concepts of other, often paid, media channels. For example, media agent Rob explains: "From a media-strategic point of view, [IM] is not very different. […] in the way that many of the media tools we use […] are actually the same". This conception also entails an idea of IM being measurable in its efficiency and effectiveness, according to which it can be budgeted for as any other channel. This cultural understanding comprises a belief system of managerial control, efficiency, effectiveness, and measurability.

In contrast, the *cultural understanding* shaped by the logic of personalization is the idea that the SMI is an independent person (or, to emphasize, a human being), not a media channel, who can

only establish authenticity when she stays true to herself, and who should be treated as a human. Therefore, the SMI involved in any campaign and her person brand – and its maintenance and protection – are what primarily determine the practice and its success, not any external control unit or system. Authenticity, trust, and passion are part of this belief system. As SMI Ann expresses it is the alpha and omega that she personally believes in what she promotes: "… I would never promote something I don't believe in; it has to feel right" (Ann, SMI1).

Second, *teleoaffective structures* enacted according to the logic of commercialization comprise goals that are primarily associated with the successful completion of a campaign. We observe such teleoaffective structures predominantly at the media agencies or their clients. Especially the agents work tirelessly to fulfill the contract with their clients as effectively and efficiently as possible, and towards producing a measurable, successful outcome (e.g., reaching pre-set KPIs, such as engagement rates). As the practitioners' conduct is organized towards the end of running a successful influencer campaign, possibly integrated with other advertising formats (e.g., TV commercials), media agents may become euphoric about the benefits of IM (e.g., lower costs), but also be stressed about sticking to given deadlines. In other words, as media agent Clara articulates, a campaign is successful when:" the client [client brand] is satisfied and we have reached that while staying inside the budget" (Clara, MA1).

In contrast, being primarily characterized by the logic of personalization, SMIs' enactments are organized towards the end of not only presenting an authentic and trustworthy person brand but also creating something that is meaningful to them as individuals (cf. Audrezet et al., 2020). Not surprisingly, SMIs can be highly excited about but also deeply disappointed by firms' requests. For example, Katelyn allows her followers to have a look behind the scenes and writes about her and her peers' experiences as SMIs: "The deep partnerships where I become ambassador and can immerse myself into the company – that's what we go for. Where companies choose me for me and believe in us as a relationship. This is also why we often say no thanks to clients who only want to use 'my channels', although they actually don't care about me or what I can do" (Katelyn, SMI2).

Third, *rules* of the logic of commercialization dominate the practice as enacted primarily at media and influencer agencies when collaborating with each other or with firms. The agencies have a given budget within which they must stay and must adhere to clients' needs and demands, as made explicit in agreements. Says media agent Jacob: "We obey 100 % to the

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client's [client brand's] needs, as they have the money" (Jacob, MA1). Very often, deadlines and the request for control over content, time frame, money and other aspects of communication planning are equally made explicit between agency and client to organize the practice. For example, the importance of adhering to deadlines is often due to the need for orchestrating other advertising activities or specific economic goals set by the client or agency.

Rules of the logic of personalization, in contrast, are often not made as explicit, yet they equally organize the practice. Implicit rules direct particularly SMIs' enactments towards promoting and, at least equally importantly, protecting their authenticity. For example, SMI Ann addresses how the most damaging towards her brand is to be perceived unauthentic. We find that SMIs' enactments, such as publishing a post, are guided by the strategy to appear as authentic and/or transparent as possible (cf. Audrezet et al., 2020). For example, a tactic would be to only collaborate with firms, when the SMI would promote the product also under circumstances of no payment. To protect one's authenticity, an SMI may therefore tactically reject brand collaborations that do not fit the core of their person brand narrative. The implicit rules are also attached to the presentation of the SMIs private lives. This is expected by the followers as well as the agents, as influencer agent Nelly explains: "[…] we cannot use the influencers in collaborations with clients [client brands] if we do not know them [influencers] and know about their daily lives" (Nelly, IA1).

Fourth, being shaped by the logic of commercialization, practitioners primarily situated at media and influencer agencies enact the practice with *bodily routines and skills* typical to commercial settings. For example, agents possess skills of consulting, organizing, arguing, strategizing, and designing and evaluating creative solutions, and can respond to and orchestrate queries from different stakeholders, including their clients'. This shows in the following observation example of media agent Sophia: "Sophia returns to the complicated mail about a recommendation of influencers to a new client [client brand]. She starts writing. However, quite quickly she stops to explain: 'I mean this is difficult but what is important is that we secure that we have enough content, so we end up with a good result'" (Shadowing, MA1). What is important to Sophia is that she secure that the amount of content is enough to satisfy the firm's wants. Sophia obviously have accrued skills to do so, as she expresses the difficulty of making this happen. Driven primarily by the logic of personalization, SMIs possess *bodily routines and skills* that predominantly enable them to self-present authentically. We find SMIs to be persons who have an ability to openly approach and empathize with others, enabling them to build a far-reaching

personal network. They are creative (e.g., in writing or design), without necessarily having formal qualifications. Importantly, SMIs can continuously transform the different roles they may play in their private lives at different points in time into personal narratives to publicize. For example, SMI Katelyn has documented the birth of her first child with professionally taken photographs on her blog, and posts about her experiences as a new mother on Instagram. See picture 5.1 'SMI Instagram medley'

Picture 5.1 *SMI Instagram medley*
(Note: Retrieved online 20/12/200-1

Lastly, in the logic of commercialization, *material set-ups* comprise excel tables, money, calculation systems, evaluation reports, including KPIs, briefs, and contracts. We find these materials primarily at the media and influencer agencies. They help the agents calculate, evaluate, and set the price and value of an SMI based on comparable measures, such as likes, number of followers, or comments (see picture 5.2 'Influencer agency back-end system'). This way of making the work of an SMI tangible ensures that agencies can sell SMIs as advertising products or media channels to their clients.

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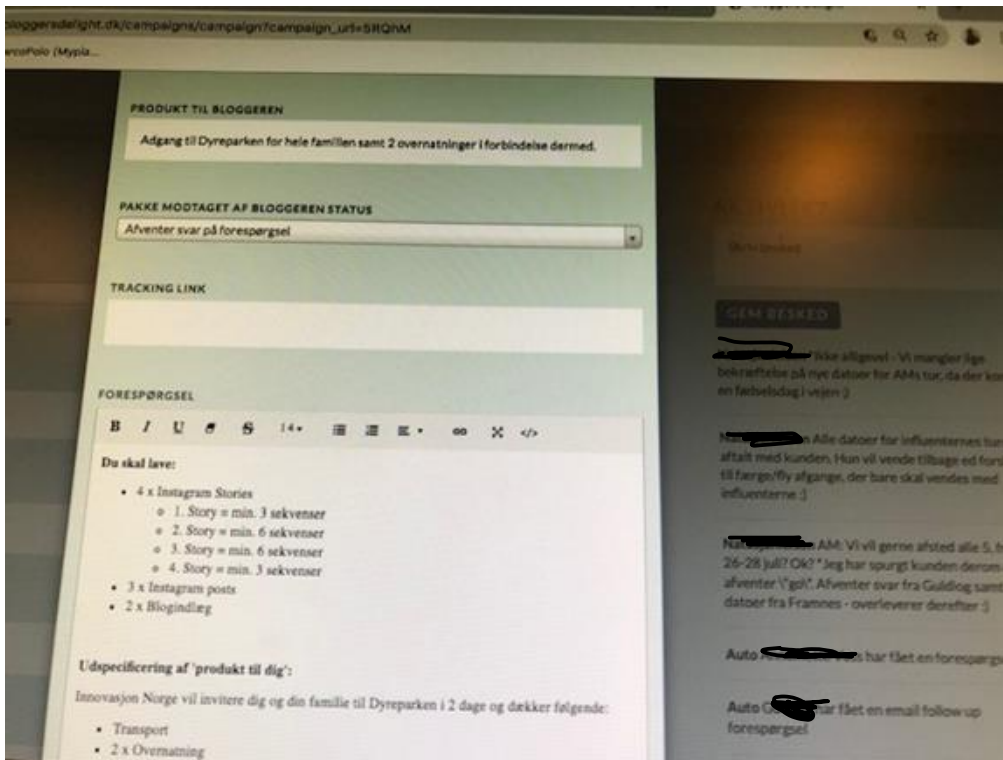
Picture 5.2 *Influencer agency back-end system*
(Note: Picture taken when shadowing IA1)

In contrast, *material set-ups* of the logic of personalization entail personal encounters, such as parties or dinners (e.g., when used as background to posts), emojis used in messages and posts, one's personal appearance and clothing, one's private home and everything attached to it, one's friends or acquaintances, and one's own social media channels. This material set-up primarily enables SMIs to display a "real" person (see also photo 1 'SMI Instagram medley').

Overcoming Misalignments in Practice Elements through the Activity of Bridging

Enactments of practitioners can be misaligned, which may lead to conflict. Practitioners may then engage in alignment work (cf. Woermann & Rokka, 2015), aiming at reconciling with another practitioner's logic that drive enactments. In general, we call this alignment work *bridging*, where we use the analog of a bridge that connects two unconnected pieces of land, here the two logics, commercialization and personalization.

In general, what happens in the activity of bridging is that actors personalize commercial ideas as well as they commercialize personalized ideas, to the extent that the two become intertwined. More specifically, we differentiate between three bridging activities. First, practitioners may adapt their enactments of one or multiple practice elements, so it fits the enactments of the respectively opposite logic. For example, an SMI may decide to adapt her post, a material set-up, so it reflects a firm's requirements. Second, practitioners may adopt a new practice element enactment. For example, to ensure the continued trust from her followers despite commercial collaborations, an SMI may enact a new type of post category, "behind-the-scenes", which enables her to be transparent about her commercial activities. Lastly, practitioners may integrate both logics in their enactments. For example, SMI and media agency may co-develop content for a campaign, which in turn enables them, staying within the analogy, to further secure the bridge for the future. Based on this differentiation between three bridging activities, we define bridging as alignment work, in which actors adapt enactments, adopt enactments, or integrate both logics of personalization and commercialization in enactments of practice elements to resolve conflicts that result from misalignments of practice element enactments.

Further, we find that once bridging takes place, it leads to temporary outcomes for the practice. First, practitioners may make an unsuccessful attempt at bridging through adapting or adopting their enactments of practice elements, leading to an unresolved conflict. Second, adaptation and adoption may equally be successful and lead to a temporary resolution of conflict. Lastly, when misalignments may not exist currently or conflicts have been resolved in the past, the practice can mature. Yet, bridging still takes place, namely in the form of preservative alignment work, where practitioners integrate the two logics in their enactments of practice elements.

In the following three sub-sections, we detail accounts of bridging as a response to conflicts resulting from misalignments in the practice, which we identify to occur in the areas of match, control, content, and evaluation.

Attempted bridging: When conflicts in the IM-practice remain unresolved
When misalignments in enactments of teleoaffective structures occur, practitioners consider the opposite side's goals as not conducive to how they have imagined the campaign or collaboration to succeed. This may lead to mostly negative feelings, such as betrayal, disappointment, or annoyance.

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In the following account, such misalignments erupt into a conflict between practitioners, who make an unsuccessful attempt at bridging. The Head of Marketing of firm 1, Sara, elaborates on a campaign gone wrong. The goal was to create brand awareness and reach a new target group, clearly a commercialization-oriented goal. They chose a particular SMI, "because we had to communicate to men, […] and because he had really many followers" (Sara, FR1). The SMI posted about the products as promised, but his review was not as favorable as expected, and as such not conducive to the firm's end of unlocking a new target group:

He did create some content about some problems of our products, and that's when I thought it might be entertaining, but at the same time, I thought why the hell he said 'yes' to this deal if that is what he wanted. (Sara, FR1)

The SMI instead posted what he thought about the products, typically signaling truthfulness and authenticity to his followers, reflecting personalization-oriented teleoaffective structures. Disappointed by this collaboration, Sara was not able to resolve the situation, and therefore tried to make the best of it. In an attempt at bridging, she adapted the material set-up, that is, the negatively valanced post the SMI created, as entertaining element within the campaign.

Further, we observe conflicts in the practice when the two logics directly collide at the level of cultural understandings. Interestingly, in the following two accounts, it is the firm representatives who seem to conceptualize the SMI as yet another paid media channel, while the media agents express appreciation of the value of IM lying in the SMI as an authentic person, their elaborations resembling ideas of personalization. However, in both accounts the media agents had to eventually bow to values of commercialization.

In the first of these accounts, the client had paid for SMIs to go to a festival to promote their product. The SMIs asked whether the firm would provide tickets for friends to bring along. Media agent Clara explained the problem to her colleague Sophia in the following phone call:

And [the client] doesn't provide a ticket with such a high value to a friend who is not part of the campaign and doesn't promote anything. […] a group [of girlfriends] who know each other, that's logical, or otherwise this will not appear authentic. […] the client needs to understand that [SMIs] are not robots, they are people, and we can't decide over people. (Observation, MA1)

During the phone call, it became clear that the client brand wanted to pay only for what they had booked. However, this idea of an SMI as paid media channel does not correspond with a logic of

personalization, where influencing is an endeavor concerning the person. Therefore, when the client still refused to pay for additional tickets, the SMIs declined further collaboration. In an attempt at bridging, the media agents adopted new routines. More specifically, they suggested to the client that they themselves would participate in the festival and create content for the firm to share. As such, the media agents imitated the SMIs' work.

Another account of misaligned enactments of cultural understandings demonstrates that the conceptualization of an SMI as paid media may also create conflicts between clients and their agents. During shadowing media agent Sophia, we learned that a firm required a fixed price per SMI for a given campaign. However, Sophia disagreed with such an approach:

The customer calculates a price per influencer, but I mean, that is not how you decide the value of influencer marketing, it is much more of a feeling. […] we can't do that, as each influencer is different. (Observation, MA1)

Sophia tried to resolve this conflict by enacting a new material-set up, namely PowerPoint-slides that elaborated more clearly on the value of IM representing values of personalization, and how to budget for it. However, even after several attempts at clarification with new sets of slides, the client remained unwilling to divert from known forms of budgeting. Therefore, Sophia had to adapt the material set-up, the calculation, to the clients' commercially-driven expectations.

In sum, these accounts demonstrate that even if practitioners attempt to bridge between logics of personalization and commercialization, a conflict in the practice may remain unresolved due to different values and beliefs. Solutions may simply not be conducive to the practice to benefit all involved, or they may be unsustainable (e.g., when media agents imitate SMIs). These accounts also highlight conflicts in three different areas particularly relevant to IM. Practitioners are at odds with each other about how to approach questions of content (What should/can be communicated in a sponsored post?), control (Who has the final say about activities?), and finally evaluation (What is the economic value of IM or the price of an SMI?). In the following section, we highlight accounts in which some of these questions were resolved successfully.

Successful bridging: When conflicts in the IM-practice are resolved
In the first of the accounts demonstrating successful bridging, firm 2 ran a campaign with the goal to create awareness and boost sales. Therefore, following the logic of commercialization, it

was most conducive to their campaign to advertise the price of their product, a material set-up. They therefore suggested to the media agency to produce a one-minute video with the SMI's and the brand's names, and the price of the offering. However, the media agency answered the following:

As agreed on earlier, we will not promote a price on any of [the SMI's] channels, nor on Facebook […], as this should feel more natural, and where we focus on the destination, the story, and her collaboration with you. It would not be in [the SMI's] natural spirit and tone if she started to talk about price. (E-Mails, MA1)

The media agent's reply demonstrates an understanding of the SMI as person whose aim for authenticity has priority. Importantly, the media agent assured the client in the same email "that [the firm] has a super-nice and elegant presence in [the SMI's] content both through the videos and the tags in the posts" (E-Mails, MA1). This re-assurance shows how the media agent realized that sticking to the SMI's original narrative might be beneficial for the firm in reaching their teleoaffective structures. However, in the same email conversation the client responded: "Ok, but I just have to be sure that when we spend a large part of the budget to boost that video – that we kind of get the sales message out" (E-Mails, MA1). At this point, the misalignment between enactments of teleoaffective structures – authenticity in the narrative on the one hand and boosting sales on the other – becomes clear and could potentially erupt into a conflict between practitioners. Through the email conversation that followed this excerpt and through an interview with firm 2's Head of Marketing, Tenna, we learned that the campaign went well after all. The firm engaged with the media agency in a conversation about how the inclusion of a sales message would harm the campaign. In addition, they also engaged with the SMI in person:

[…] I also hope, that with this, that we have met face-to-face, that we have talked together several times, we met [the SMI's] demands, because we really have done so. I have also asked some things from her, which she then did. It's been like that, give and take. We have respected each other, I feel. I have not looked down on her and thought, 'you are just an influencer'. I also feel like she has seen me, not because I am the boss, but she has listened [to me]. (Tenna, FR2)

This account demonstrates that adopting face-to-face-meetings into one's routines can be a pivotal bridging activity to better align teleoaffective structures.

In a similar vein, the following account shows how adopting such routine enactments can help solve misalignments in enactments of cultural understandings. More specifically, the following

account demonstrates a misalignment in how SMIs seem to conceptualize themselves still as independent from commercial constraints – although SMIs operate in a commercially driven market, in which they would like to equally reap the rewards. Media agent Susi elaborates on how the market of IM has changed. In her view, SMIs cannot simply expect firms anymore to collaborate without having any requests towards them. While SMIs might have to adjust their own understanding, Susi's explanation also demonstrates how firms continue to compare SMIs to other (paid) media channels, with consequences for budgeting and evaluation:

The clients make higher demands. They often say, 'well, we do not want to pay this price, it is way too high compared to the exposure we could get if we just did something different digitally or outdoor'. (Susi, MA1)

This misalignment has created conflicts to erupt in the past. To solve such conflicts, the media agency adopted a new routine, called "chemistry meeting. It really is quite low key, of course there might be an agenda with some things we need to clarify before we go ahead, but a lot of it is actually just to sit and chat and feel whether the chemistry is there – like a date" (Susi, MA1). The focus is on the client-SMI relationship and mutual responsibility. The goal is to help the client understand each SMI's individuality but at the same time reassure them of the value of IM and provide them with a feeling of control.

Just as chemistry meetings help in bridging cultural understandings, so can contracts, that is, material-set ups, in aligning enactments of teleoaffective structures. In the following account, we observe again how SMIs may feel somewhat independent from the goals a firm might have set for a campaign or collaboration. Interestingly, here misalignments occur primarily because some SMIs may pursue more commercially-driven goals, while clients and agents recognize the importance of SMIs following the logic of personalization. Media agent Sophia explicates:

[…] [the clients] are really sick [of feeling] 'today she promotes my brand, and tomorrow another, and the day after tomorrow she is with my competitor'. So, all this trust is destroyed, or [the SMIs] should at least make sure to not completely destroy the trust [between firms and SMIs]. (Sophia, MA1).

Naturally, companies need to position themselves against competitors, and therefore, exclusivity in partnerships, whether of communicative or other nature, may be pivotal to their campaign's success. However, SMIs may not feel particularly attached to a certain company or brand, but rather free to promote whatever fits their profile. Therefore, the media agency has adopted a new

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material set-up, a new type of contract for future SMI-company collaborations. This contract is longer and clarifies for both sides that "[w]e are a good match. We are invested in each other, […]" (Sophia, MA1). Indeed, such framing of a contract shows that not only the campaign message must be aligned, but that the feeling of a committed partnership is equally important for a collaboration to succeed.

Conflicts due to misaligned teleoaffective structures may also occur when firms request control over SMIs' content, which the SMI aims at keeping authentic and personal. Media agent Clara elaborates on a collaboration:

When [the SMI] sent back her blog post for approval […], the client had a clear idea about what the content should be, and [the SMI] just had to fill in stuff. (Clara, MA1)

This request for control over content threatened the success of the campaign:

[…] in the end, the influencer had to say, 'well, this is not me, I cannot vouch for this.' Then it is just about saying something that someone has paid for, and we are back to, 'what in fact is the value of influencer marketing?' Because then you clearly see it is advertising. (Clara, MA1)

Eventually, the client left more room for the SMI to personalize the content. However, Clara had to intervene and explain to the client the benefits of adapting their enactments of rules of approval to the SMI's rules of posting authentic content, bridging logics of personalization and commercialization successfully.

In sum, these accounts of successful bridging illustrate that when misalignments occur, there are several ways for practitioners to resolve a conflict by adapting or adopting enactments of practice elements. Again, we identify conflicts in the areas of content (e.g., should a price be communicated in a post?), evaluation (e.g., what is the price of an SMI?), and control (e.g., who has the final say in approving content?). Two of the accounts also highlight the importance of match (e.g., do SMI and client match, can they build a relationship?), which, in these instances, is tightly connected to the question of control and evaluation. Both chemistry meetings and special contracts contribute to the on-going matching process between firm and SMI, and therefore the matching presents itself as a specific type of bridging to address issues of control and evaluation. In turn, a wrong match might not only lower the chances of favorable consumer responses to IM (Belanche et al., 2021), but also the chances of successfully planning a campaign.

Preservative bridging: When the IM-practice starts to mature

Generally, once practitioners have successfully engaged in bridging activities, the practice can reach a state where practitioners participate in the practice in agreement (cf. Shove et al., 2012), enabling the practice to further mature. The following account demonstrates how the enactment of routines can integrate both logics of personalization and commercialization and prevent future misalignments:

It requires higher demands for us to find the right match. To make a good campaign that is trustworthy, and that we don't just find random influencers who we pay to say something good about a product […]. (Susi, MA1)

If media agents enact routines of finding natural matches between SMI and firm, teleoaffective structures are more likely to be aligned, and the practice is likely to benefit equally from personalization and commercialization. For example, a media agent, in collaboration with an influencer agency, might choose an SMI who has read a particular book already that the potential client would like to promote. A collaboration between client and SMI would then be considered a natural match, as the SMI promoting the book would be able to do so in a highly authentic way. Because there is no imminent misalignment to solve, this bridging is of preservative nature, where commercialization and personalization are integrated into enactments to contribute to the further maturing of the practice.

The notion of integration also comes to light in the following account. Firm 1 collaborated very closely with SMIs to develop the material set-up for the campaign:

Last year we collaborated with an influencer, she and another influencer created some hags [hashtags] with our brand and afterwards they did a competition on their channels. This year, we developed three hags where the influencer herself pitched the ideas, which we then can use on our channels. (Sara, FR1)

Developing such material set-ups together ensures that the involved practitioners can integrate commercialization and personalization into their enactments of teleoaffective structures. Sara could use the SMI's content on the firm's channels and integrate it with other campaign formats. The SMI, in turn, made sure that any content used in the campaign reflected her person brand authentically. Importantly, Sara shares the cultural understanding of the SMI being a person rather than a controllable media channel, and the following quote shows that she is aware that the only way forward may be reciprocal commitment:

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[…] it is important that it is trustworthy. What consequences it has for the brand, I don't know one-hundred percent, but influencers who think 'I will do this campaign only for the money', that does not pay off for us at all. (Sara, FR1)

The final account demonstrates that SMIs' enactments equally contribute to preserving the practice. SMI Ann collaborated with an environmental organization and used the organization's story to enrich her own person brand narrative. One of her blog entries reads:

I am on a mission. In extension to a campaign about reaching a range of environmental goals (read here), I decided to get as many of you – my loyal and of course environmentally conscious readers – on board […] We went as far as to let our three kids know that this year's Christmas gifts from Mike and myself will be second-hand […] You can get a lot for DKK 500 [approx. USD 82] when it is second-hand […]". (Ann, SMI1)

Here, Ann enacted routines of integrating a brand's narrative successfully into her own narrative, without the organization requiring this. This bridging activity contributes to maintaining alignment of teleoaffective structures, and as such to the sustainability of the practice.

In sum, preservative bridging through integration enables the practice to transcend the dichotomy of personalization and commercialization and further mature. The accounts also demonstrate the particular role that the continuous matching process as a particular type of bridging can have in the success of IM, preventing conflicts in areas of content, control, and evaluation.

Discussion

We set out to investigate IM as an emerging practice performed by multiple practitioners across sites, identifying conflicts that might occur between different practitioners, such as agents, firms, and SMIs, when planning and implementing IM-campaigns, and ways to overcome such conflicts. We found the IM-practice to oscillate between logics of personalization and commercialization (I, Figure 1), which cause misalignments in practitioners' practice element enactments (II), leading to conflicts across sites. Further, our analysis revealed a form of alignment work, bridging, enacted to overcome conflicts, where practitioners may adapt their practice element enactments, adopt new enactments, or integrate both logics in their enactments

(III). Lastly, we found these bridging activities to lead to different outcomes (IV). Practitioners may attempt to bridge through adaptation or adoption with no success, leaving a conflict unresolved. However, adapting or adopting enactments of practice elements can also be successful, leading to a resolution of conflict. Finally, when integrating both logics in their enactments of practice elements, we identify preservative bridging to help the practice mature. In the following, we discuss theoretical contributions and managerial implications of these findings and conclude with limitations of this work and avenues for future research.

Theoretical Contributions and Managerial Implications

First, to the authors' best knowledge, this is the first research to theorize and empirically investigate IM as practice. The terminology we develop based on practice theory considers the multiplicity of stakeholders and the co-creational, processual nature of planning and implementing influencer campaigns, which are exemplary for the increasing complexity of marketing in a digital world. By showing that influencer marketing is combining to logics we demonstrate the organized guidelines for the actors (Kjeldgaard et al., 2017) and how these, as the at times are competing, challenge the practice itself. The identification of the two logics, commercialization and personalization, expands current knowledge of the relations between firms, agencies, (Martínez-López, Anaya-Sánchez, Esteban-Millat, et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2021) and why conflicts may arise between actors (Breves et al., 2019).

In addition, by focusing on the collective performance by relevant practitioners, including agencies about whose roles extant research has been largely mute with only few exceptions (Childers et al., 2019), we unearth four types of conflicts that can emerge in the back-end of IM: match (Do SMI and clients match throughout the process?); content (What should or can be communicated in a sponsored post?); control (Who has or should have the final say?); and evaluation (What is the economic value of IM?). Here, our research contributes with an understanding of why and how practitioners may succeed or fail in making important decisions in these areas when planning and implementing IM-campaigns. More specifically, this research goes beyond extant findings of the benefits of SMI-brand fit (Belanche et al., 2021) in that it shows how a continuous and relation-focused matching process is important for the successful planning and implementation of IM. While previous research has found media agents to engage in a vetting process to select SMIs (Belanche et al., 2021), this research demonstrates that a

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matching process does not end with finding an SMI. Instead, the matching process may indeed be a continuous process during campaign development, where practitioners must build relationships with each other.

Furthermore, scholarly work has been investigating message content to affect consumers' responses ((Chloe) Ki et al., 2022). By carving out content as a critical factor for successful collaborations, we (i) show that conventional marketing thinking (e.g., everything that can be advertised in conventional channels can also be advertised through SMIs) may hinder campaigns to be successful, (ii) support scholarly discourse that SMIs may indeed be social media experts and skilled content creators (Campbell & Farrell, 2020), and (iii) provide further avenues for investigating different content strategies in IM.

In addition, we unpack an important topic of discourse in the practice community, namely control. While some scholars have argued that "[i]f clear guidelines are not in place, brands risk diluting their brand meanings or even diverging from corporate goals" (Campbell & Farrell, 2020, p. 477), others have warned that "excessive control necessarily reduces the creative freedom of influencers" (Haenlein et al., 2020, p. 15). To avoid the negative repercussions of control, our findings highlight the matching process as critical to a more relational approach.

The fourth challenge we unpack is that of evaluation, and everything associated with it, such as budgeting and measurements. Our findings suggest that a meaningful evaluation of how much to pay to SMIs in relation to outcomes of the campaign might also take the value of the SMI to the collaboration into account. For example, firms may consider the relative ease of collaborations and the additional input SMIs can generate (e.g., hashtags usable across campaign formats) when SMI and firm truly match and are invested in the partnership.

These findings provide marketers with concrete knowledge of the areas that bear potential conflicts, and concrete recommendations and tools for how to engage in a relation-oriented matching process during the planning and implementation of IM-campaigns. Importantly, while agencies are intermediaries between SMIs and firms and take on the lion share in the planning and implementation of IM, firms' media managers should not completely retract from the process. Thereby, instruments such as "chemistry meetings" that enable friendly conversations between firms and SMIs outside of monetary negotiations, or contracts that record the exclusivity of a committed partnership may be useful.

The second contribution lies in the identification of the logic of personalization, which determines, together with the logic of commercialization, practitioners' behavior in the field of digital communications. We show that although scholars and practitioners alike have acknowledged that IM can be considered a hybrid form between paid and earned media (Hughes et al., 2019), the notion that SMIs' maintenance of their intrinsic motivation and passion (Audrezet et al., 2020) is critical to the success of campaigns has not pervaded current communications thinking completely.

The conceptualization of the dichotomy of logics resonates with the conceptual differentiation between the person and the brand in human brands, which suggests, amongst others, that there is an "on-going interdependence between the person and the brand", and that human qualities of the person brand should be prioritized overturning the person into or treating her as a brand (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019, p. 613). In a similar vein, and as all practitioners of the practice, SMIs do not only behave according to one logic. Although we depicted the influence of logics dichotomously to ease illustration of the phenomenon, antagonistic ends can be at play simultaneously (cf. Woermann & Rokka, 2015), and we observed that SMIs capitalized on their fame, for example, by collaborating with competing firms. While this behavior may harm the brands that SMIs promote, it may equally harm their own person brands. However, by focusing on the practice that is influenced by multiple logics, blame for such behavior may not be found with the one or the other practitioner. Instead, such behavior may be considered a symptom of misbalance between the two logics, where the logic of commercialization dominates the logic of personalization, and neither side commits truly to the partnership, intentionally or unintentionally. Although committing to partnerships may still happen for different reasons (e.g., commercial exclusivity for firms vs. personal authenticity for SMIs), generally committing to it may avoid imposing objectifying concepts onto SMIs that may harm all involved.

From a practical perspective, while laws and regulations around the world require disclosure of sponsored posts on social media and have transformed the practice into a more overt form of marketing (Veile et al., 2022), our research shows that its power still lies in the person behind its content producers, SMIs. Therefore, advertisers and SMIs alike should be cautious about commercially exhausting this practice.

Third, we contribute with an identification of possible causes of conflicts in the IM-practice and carve out the activity of bridging, which is the alignment work in which practitioners engage to

solve these conflicts. Specifically, we identify conflicts to occur because of practitioners' differing enactments of cultural understandings and teleoaffective structures. In contrast, it is the materials, rules, and routines that practitioners enact in a way so that they can bridge between, that is align, commercialization and personalization. These elements inherent and essential to all collaborative practices may be easily overlooked when studying individual meaning-making only (cf. Ots & Nyilasy, 2017). Bridging constitutes an important vehicle for the practice to continue 'going' and eventually mature into a practice where ideas of commercialization and personalization are not privileged over another but integrated into enactments across practitioners. Thereby, bridging itself does not necessarily involve active collaboration to solve conflicts. Instead, our findings show that the adoption or adaptation of element enactments through single practitioners may alter the path of the practice itself towards resolution.

Critical to allowing the practice to mature beyond resolution of conflicts seems to be the matching process as a specific type of bridging, which does not stop at the point where an SMI is selected. Instead, our findings suggest this matching to be truly processual and relational in nature, requiring practitioners to incorporate competing logics of personalization and commercialization into their enactments and to build relationships with one another. As such, the matching process can support the bridging of interests and may lead to collaboration in its truest sense. Here, marketers may re-consider their evaluations of IM and single SMIs. While the number of shares, likes and comments of a single campaign may be useful measures of short-term effectiveness, additional value might particularly lie in long-term collaborations where influencers contribute ideas and content (e.g., hashtags for promotional purposes) and both parties' logics are taking into account so that the practice aligns.

Limitations and Future Research

This research is not without limitations. First, we chose the IM department of a media agency as starting point to follow the practice. Another starting point might have changed the path of data collection. Second, the SMIs we followed in this research were mature lifestyle influencers particularly popular in Denmark. Further, we did not differentiate between different SMI categories in the analysis, although we learned during data collection that procedures and strategies differ. Given that size of followership has been shown to affect consumers' perceptions of SMIs (De Veirman et al., 2017), future research might be interested in understanding potential conflicts and solutions when SMIs with different topic foci or from different categories are involved. Third, we did not take other logics, such as the logic of art,

into account, which may equally determine behavior in the field of digital communications. This may be interesting for future research insofar, as SMIs have become expert content creators who may compete with formally trained advertising experts. Fourth, while we contrasted the logics in the enactments of SMIs vs. agencies and firms, we would like to caution about stereotyping. Lastly, SMIs have already started using authenticity management strategies (e.g., of transparency by writing "behind-the-scenes" posts about patnerships, cf. Audrezet et al., 2020). It is not clear yet, however, whether and to what extent firms' use of similar strategies to provide more insight into their collaborations with SMIs – who are brands themselves – could help mitigate potential negative effects for this increasingly commercializing practice (such as informationals about advertising, cf. De Jans et al., 2018).

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Chapter 6 Perceptions

Conclusions

The work that went into the three papers and which constitute this thesis addresses key challenges and conflicts in the nexus between commercialization and personalization within the practice of influencer marketing. This thesis demonstrates an illustration of how commercialization of the self, challenges previous conceptions of privacy and traditional forms of marketing, and it is an exploration of how commercialization can change how individuals construct morals for their selves. The results of this thesis show that the SMI-work does not come without consequences and how these consequences affect the work and the workers. This thesis further illustrates how the nexus between commercialization and personalization challenges workers' emotional and ethical conceptions of the self as well as within traditional commercial procedures.

The findings shed lights on the subject area from three theoretically different angles. This approach enables the reader to gain a holistic, in-depth understanding of that subject area, influencer marketing. By drawing on Foucault (Burchel et al., 1991; Foucault, 1984) and theories of emotional and self-presentation (Goffman, 1990; Hochschild, 1983), this thesis unpacks the current dilemmas of self-branding and governmentality that are widely debated in the marketing literature and in society (Gabriel, 2005; Hearn, 2008; Zuboff, 2019).

This thesis differentiates from previous studies on SMIs (see for example, Belanche et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2019; Rundin & Colliander, 2021) in investigating the type of work that is required in order to commercialize oneself, the institution of the commercialization, and the challenges and possibilities that lie between the nexus of the two (personalization and commercialization) for both practitioners and workers. In doing so, the thesis contributes to literature on SMIs and influencer marketing by focusing on the back-end practice and on conflicts, which highlights the nuances of influencer marketing as a practice in its own right. As this thesis opens the door to the back-end of influencer marketing work-practices, it brings forth new conceptions of work and "update" theories of governmentality (Hafermalz, 2021). While others have focused on more systemic and behavioral governing, this demonstrates how governing structures can also be attached to emotional management. This thesis demonstrates

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how commercializing procedures is internalized by the self in the becoming of a brand, and that within this process conflicts appears between the branded self, which is heavily impacted by commercial agendas, and within the private self, which is heavily affected by the workers' private life. The thesis argues that as SMIs become their own governors, their emotions become vulnerable to capitalist procedures. In this vein, this thesis unfolds new dilemmas of emotional labor in the digital age (see for example, Gibson, 2016). Moreover, the thesis sheds lights on new dilemmas about autonomy and control in digital work (de Vaujany et al., 2021), as it focuses on the dichotomy between the two within the self. This thesis places complex conversations of the digital society in a relevant and practical context to explore nuances of our current society, for example, by illustrating how moral constructs are enacted as boundary-work in self-management practices. Finally, this thesis contributes to marketing ethics and public policy, as it addresses how ethics, in the new world of work (see for example, Ahsan, 2020; Cohan, 2001; Wellman et al., 2020), is self-managed. In detail, this thesis shows how SMI-work fosters work-practices where workers are ensnared in the idea of the self as a brand and therefore are increasingly working on their self as a person-brand. In this work, their ethical and moral codex become affected by commercial ideals which make the success of the brand. While the sponsoring brands are thriving on the workers vulnerability and willingness to display their emotions, this thesis shows how ethical behavior towards the self becomes challenged and immersed with commercial standards so the workers ends-up abusing their self.

In the context of digitalization and social media current scholars mostly concentrate on ethics from the perspective of structures, platforms, laws etc. These are all extremely important areas to discuss, however, what seems to be missing from the debates are discussions about the workers and the precarity of their work. This thesis is, hopefully, an opening to discussing the work and the worker who uses their private life as a sponsored property in new ways in digital arenas. In doing so, this thesis opens for novel academic discussions of ethicality of person branding in the digital age.

Reflections

Influencer marketing has shown to be a continuously expanding marketing field, growing at a speed that has seldom been seen. For example, in 2022, brands are expected to spend over $15 billion (el Qudsi, 2022) on influencer marketing. Influencer marketing has and is changing the

marketing discipline, even scholars within B2B marketing are starting to recognize influencer marketing as a promoting strategy (Bloomberg, 2022). This thesis is a small glimpse into an industry that is thriving and developing in the writings of this thesis. Though many previously have predicted that influencer marketing was just a phase, I believe that we can conclude by agreeing this is no longer the case. With that said, this does not mean that the practice does not develop into new forms, and since the time of my exploration, this has already happened. The influencer marketing practice is today even more professionalized and actors working within the practice are more focused on creating commercial settings that appear as ordinary people's postings. For example, since my explorative study micro-influencer marketing and content creation have had a significant rise (Forbes, 2022). Perhaps some work routines, of those I investigated, have changed, however, the core of the thesis remains its relevance. Influencer marketing work is eventually about finding the nexus between the logic of commercialization and personalization.

Influencer marketing is changing to become a tool through which commercial institutions can reach out to regular people and commercialize their private social media content. This is already a growing phenomenon on, for example, TikTok and Facebook. This so-called branded-content tactic (de Zordo, 2022) involves a process where firms buy people's private social media content and use the content in commercial campaigns. For years, brands have sought to associate themselves with celebrities and fame. But there seems to be a change, the type of work that influencer marketing entails includes working with people as products, and making the person think about themselves as such. As I write these reflections, I come to think about my initial research question, which was partly driven by the wondering of the industry. Initially, my question was, what is the value of influencer marketing? If I am not wrong, this is to date still being asked by most of the stakeholders who are involved in influencer marketing work and in academia. However, rather early in my investigation, I concluded that this was a rather composite if not too composite question. This question and its complexity, however, in fact truly stresses the precarity of the work that influencer marketing entails. What is really being asked here is how price on a human? What is the sponsored property of a human being itself? At least in the Western society, this question has in decades been agreed to be immoral, which is probably also why this question is still unanswered. Media agencies heavily work on developing algorithms that can calculate personal parameters and evaluate SMIs' performances. Moreover, the academic marketing discussion continually debate who to invest in, use, and profitably

thrive of these humans. In short, what *we* attempt to, is to price the human performance.

I clearly remember a conversation I had with two agents during my ethnographic study. The two agents talked about the uncomfortable meeting with SMIs when they were to discuss costs and payments with them. They explained that they felt uncomfortable because they were discussing the price of the human they sat in front of. Possibly, this is one of the reasons why firms and agencies still struggle to place SMIs in the same product category as the rest of their media products. SMIs are real people with real stories. Nonetheless, what this thesis illustrates is, that one must get used to changing moral conceptions, perhaps in a few years, we will know what each of us is worth? I am wondering how such a world would look like.

Although this thesis does not contain an analysis of Foucauldian work, his deliberations were unavoidable in my exploration of influencer marketing. Throughout this work, the work of influencer marketing can be viewed as a form of neo-liberal society, as was discussed by Foucault (see for example, Lemke, 2001). The governmental monitoring by agents and SMIs themselves illustrates how governmentality in the age of social media is not solely about behavior, as Foucault posited, but also about our private emotions. The brutality of Foucault's ideas on power relations, particularly in his work *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (Foucault, 1977), is reflected in the brutality of exposure on social media. Foucault began his discussion of power in *Discipline and Punish* by describing a public hanging as a demonstration of explicit governmental power. This is a violent example that illustrates how power is enacted in society. It is a form of power, he argued, that could be implicitly enacted in neo-liberal societies where individuals are trained to become their own governors. While SMIs and influencer marketing were unknown to Foucault, I cannot help but link his brutal analogy of governmental power to the SMI's exposure of their feelings, of sex, break-ups, mental illnesses, and much more. The ways SMIs work on themselves as commercial objects to achieve authenticity, exemplifies a new type of brutal exposure of the inner self. This brutality of exposure has infected the regular social media user. For example, on social media platforms, there is a growing trend of suicidal communities, where young people can become members if they are suicidal. In these groups, people share their suicide attempts (Friis & Frederiksen, 2021). Whereas this thesis presented only a brief comment on the brutality of exposure, this will hopefully encourage future researchers to investigate how this brutal exposure of the inner self impacts wellbeing in new creative work forms, and in social media usage in general.

This doctoral work has highlighted the fluidity of the self in the modern world. This fluidity entails a breakdown of various boundaries, such as those between work and leisure, exposure and privacy, and between the person and commerce. In this thesis, it is revealed how this fluidity challenges us, and how we continuously attempt to create boundaries and also how we fail in doing so. In her 1983 study on flight attendants' emotional labor performances, Hochschild found that, in order to maintain a healthy emotional life when performing emotional labor, three practices were important: (i), the act of physically checking in and checking out at the beginning and end of the day, which was shown to be central to the workers' ability to emotionally distance themselves from their work; (ii) wearing a uniform when at work, which has been shown to help personnel maintain a firm boundary between their work lives and their private lives; and (iii) having space to vent while at work, which allows personnel to maintain their emotional wellbeing. In our current world, and in SMI work in particular, these three tools seem to have changed or been removed; for example, the physical boundaries that once helped flight personnel to create emotional boundaries has been removed, and instead workers are compelled to constantly perform. Moreover, they are equipped with a digital device that offers a physical showground where they can and are motivated to constantly be on air. I make no assumptions about the ultimate consequences of this new paradigm; nonetheless, in this thesis, it is demonstrated that the practices of digitalized creative workers in influencer marketing may be able to provide insights into the nature of these changing structures.

Without doubt, the individualization of work also brings forth possibilities for the self and breaks down existing institutional hierarchies. I want to emphasize that this thesis is not per se critical towards influencer marketing. Influencer marketing creates opportunities both for business and individuals. However, as revealed in this thesis, this does not come without costs, and new power hierarchies can potentially arise unseen. This cost does not only belong to workers which is the focus of this thesis, however, also other sites are affected. For example, also for firms who must reform their communication strategy and willingly accept the loss of control, as they hand over partially control to SMIs. Influencer marketing in many aspects is placed in the time of fluidity where silos become intermingled, roles are unsettled, and strategies unstable. I am not saying that influencer marketing is *the* change of marketing, but it is part of *a* change that is fundamental for the discipline itself.

Addressing influencer marketing as a practice of sites, hopefully, shows how marketers in current time work in liquid conditions. The future of marketing is also exciting and interesting.

Specifically, I am thinking about how the new generation will come to address traditional advertisements, perhaps the era of huge commercial contracts that are communicated through somewhat unpersonal media channels is over?

Future directions

Through this work, future researchers are invited to investigate how to create a nexus of wellbeing for both the individual and the commercial institution in digital marketing forms and in digital work where the use of the person has become focal to the practice. Moreover, I hope that my doctoral work will inspire researchers to explore what this self-commercialization means to the worker and to the rest of society. I am also hopeful that my work will encourage fellow scholars to investigate how new areas for venting can be established to increase wellbeing in our digitalized society, where commercialization and personalization have become increasingly intertwined. Particularly, I am interested in these venting rooms and in establishing conditions within influencer marketing work that decrease the precarity for SMIs. Probably these rooms are already existing, worked out by the SMIs themselves and probably are changing and evolving the practice. However, knowledge about how these rooms is institutionalized, practiced, performed, and understood is still unexplored. I would imagine these rooms as fluid and unsettled, once again managed by the workers themselves who are slowly being increasingly ensnared in new commercial ideologies. I hope in the future to be exploring these rooms and to eventually discuss whether less vulnerable conditions for novel digital workers can be established.

The societal dimensions of SMI-work are many; for example, the fact that individuals evaluate people's looks, behavior, and success based on how many likes they have garnered on social media has a number of significant implications. This kind of evaluation not only intertwines with the moral codex in SMIs' self-management, but also affects how users enact the moral codex in society. The prioritization of digital life over analog life has become increasingly extreme. For example, a recent Danish television documentary that followed young women spending copious amounts of money on maintaining their Instagram-ready lifestyles showed one of these women choosing to eat porridge for every meal so she could afford designer clothes that would look good to her followers on the platform. These young people thrive on, and evaluate themselves based on, the attention they gain from social media. Rather than living a life in

which offline relationships are prioritized, the digitalized environment has become more important, and thus the moralities that exist on these platforms have also gained importance. This development calls into question the moral codex of the self and the individual's conception of themselves as free agents.

Finally, I would like to conclude this thesis by inviting the Danish government to think carefully about how digitalization is changing our professional work lives. I hope that this thesis provides some insight into the new dilemmas and risks that future workers will face on social media. As my work has shown, these workers must contend with an extremely individualized and personalized work form that erases traditional boundaries and requires new ethical guidelines and new ways of approaching labor.

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