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GETTING PAID TO TAKE CARE FOR THE ONES YOU LOVE: SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCING AS A MEANS FOR PAID SOCIAL REPRODUCTION LABOR

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Recent research has shown how digital platforms such as TaskRabbit, UrbanSitter, and Wolt commercialize, commodify, and transform social reproduction labor like cleaning, babysitting, and cooking (Huws, 2019; Van Doorn, 2023; Posada, 2021). Yet, with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Jorge et al., 2021; Duffy, 2017: 185-215; Casey and Littler 2022), how social media platforms and the activities of their professional users - influencers- intersect with the field of social reproduction has received scant academic attention.

In her germinal study of influencers titled (Not) Getting paid to do what you love, Duffy (2017: 195) notes that mothers experienced a sense of privilege and empowerment through their ability to juggle caregiving responsibilities and careers as influencers. Jorge et al. (2021) found that influencer mothers who share content about parenting justified leaving their salaried jobs due to their incongruence with caregiving responsibilities. Moreover, they frame their work as influencers in ways that reproduce the neoliberal ethos that promotes individual management of motherhood and career. Recently, Casey and Littler (2022) coined the term "spectacular housewifization" to describe the online work practices of British "cleanfluencer" as a combination of precarious forms of digital self-branding and gendered fetishization of domestic labor.

This study departs from examining intimacy as a tool for building bonds with audiences on social media (Baym, 2018) to actual intimate relationships. We use Viviana Zelizer's (2012) concept of relational work, which posits that people lead connected lives in which economy and intimacy intermingle and mutually constitute each other. The concept of relational work allows us to examine the intra-household relations, which Huws (2019:

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214) argues are "the cauldron in which changes in the scope and structure of capitalism are brewed, as well as the site in which its contradictions are played out."

Our study aims to examine the expansion of platform capitalism into the domestic sphere of social media influencers, taking into account the specific semi-peripheral socioeconomic context of Slovenia. We posit the following research question: RQ: *How do social media influencers in Slovenia manage work and household responsibilities?*

More than 50 semi-structured in-depth interviews with Slovenian social media influencers, their formal and informal business partners, and stakeholders (influencer agencies and brand companies) were conducted between September 2022 and February 2023. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Content analysis was done using NVivo.

The results show that social media influencing in the Balkans intersects with the social reproduction domain in two different ways, depending on whether influencers come from a household that is poor in money or time.

In households with time-poor backgrounds, influencing is a means to have flexible work hours, avoid rigid structures of 8-4 jobs, and thus find an optimal equilibrium between work and caregiving responsibilities. Influencers from time-poor households are primarily mothers of the Millennial generation who have caregiving responsibilities and call themselves "momagers" (a portmanteau of words mom and managers). They have given up their salaried jobs to build a business as influencers to improve their work-life balance. For them, influencing affords them time for social reproduction tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children. It is crucial to note that a time-poor group of influencers come from more privileged socioeconomic backgrounds: They all reported owning real estate and getting by "easily" on their income. For them, influencing is not limited to economic transactions but also offers them social integration, as they form friendships and share advice with followers and other influencers about raising children and other household responsibilities.

For influencers from money-poor households, influencing is a means to have one monetary expense less and obtain otherwise unaffordable products for household and personal care. In this group of influencers, there are also young mothers who come from less privileged backgrounds, and through influencing activities, they compensate for children's items like strollers and car seats. They have two jobs, with influencing being a side hustle. In this group, we found various forms of moonlighting activities: They take resources from conventional employers, such as cameras and tripods, or they use their lunch break to edit social media content or respond to messages from audiences and clients. For them, being an influencer is less a form of social integration than a way to survive in an economy where dual incomes are required but rising childcare prices and stagnant wages do not cover household expenses. This group may be money-poor, to begin with, but when they become influencers, they also become time-poor because creating content for brands means additional hours of work.

What unites these two groups is that they all create content "on the go" in their free time while taking care of the family, cooking dinner or cleaning the house (using the food, toys, and cleaning products they received for promotional purposes). Under the 8-8-8 rule

(work, leisure, sleep), only 8 hours of work in the organization were paid under traditional working conditions. With social media, leisure activities can also be monetized, often resulting in 2 x 8 hours of work, pay, and additional passive income. Influencing is peering into the cracks between work and leisure by creating a novel dimension of time, where free time is also working time. We conceptualize this blending of the intimate and the commercial as a new temporal dimension: monetized leisure. By leisure, we consider the time that remains at one's own discretion after doing paid work and provides opportunity for rest, self-realization and often a place into which intervene secondary activities like unpaid labor of housework and care work (Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2012).

Both groups earmark compensation from influencing for the same purpose: it builds a "household euro" for children or family travel. Nevertheless, one cannot speak of formalization of the informal economy, as is the case in Third World economies, since these transactions often take the form of the shadow economy - they are paid with products and vouchers, or they receive compensation through Paypal or a relative's or friend's company, allowing them to avoid taxation. Under the radar, rich and vibrant gift networks and resale activities are refracted through the household economy.

Our study shows that influencing activities on social media are less about getting paid to do what you love, as demonstrated by Duffy (2017) and more about getting paid to care for those you love. On the one hand, blending work and home domains in influencing activities can be understood as empowerment because it provides influencers with a kind of wage for housework and caring responsibilities. On the other hand, it is also double work for women. It exacerbates gender inequalities because female influencers reported monetizing caregiving tasks and never male influencers, who grounded their influencer activity with an entrepreneurial discourse.

The study offers insights into how Western platforms make landfall within the local economy, which is characterized by a pre-existing hustle culture in Slovenia. In this context, commercializing domestic and leisure activities is part of a more than century-old logic. It also contributes to the varieties of platform capitalism and to the de-westernization of platform and creator studies.

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