INDUSTRY TENSIONS: LABOR SUBJECTIVITIES AND SELF-REINVENTION IN PLATFORM WORK

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This panel aims to challenge the binary framing of worker resistance strategies found in recent internet studies research, by directing attention towards the intricate processes of self-reinvention and adaptation among platform workers, particularly influencers. The focus on worker resistance strategies (Bonini et al., 2023; Anwar & Graham, 2020) fails to consider the nuanced individual processes of adaptation associated with the kinds of transformation this panel puts forward. The digitalization of labor is reconfiguring the processes and products of various industries—from media and advertising to transport and retail (Delfanti, 2019; Turow et al., 2015; Woodcock & Graham, 2020). In this context, transformations related to the twin processes of digitalization and industrialization have introduced new mechanisms of power and subjugation, too. While internet studies researchers have drawn attention to many of the less auspicious aspects of control, including systems of surveillance, automation, and precarization; algorithmic systems, in particular, are key vectors in the organization and mediation of work (Ravenelle, 2019; Rosenblat, 2018; Wood et al., 2019). This panel delves into the labor subjectivities that emerge from processes of adaptation to platform work.

These papers discuss the mechanisms by which different actors within the influencer industry navigate constantly changing organizational environments, a crucial aspect of what it takes for them to thrive across industries and labor markets. This involves reinventing themselves in an ever-changing technological environment, coping with being subjects of permanent control and evaluation by customers and employers, and making sense of their activities in highly-commercial environments. Consequently, notions of labor and value remain in a continuous state of contestation and redefinition within the influencer industry. The papers span topics ranging from visibility and authenticity to the reinvention of work through platform engagements, as well as the role intermediaries play in the quantification and qualification of influencer activities.

The first paper considers changing discourses about labor and employment in the post-pandemic era—from #quietquitting to influencer-employees. By exploring social media expressions *of*, *for,* and *against* corporate employers, the authors offer a framework for understanding contemporary worker subjectivities. By doing so, they illuminate the tensions that arise when corporate brand directives (i.e., humanized brands) collide with individual promotional logics (branded humans) on social media.

The second examines the complex interplay between sustainability influencers' precarious and insecure labor conditions and the climate crisis. 'Green' influencers must negotiate reducing/refusing consumption and waste, practices that run directly counter to the social media values of self promotion via branded consumption. Rejecting normative income generating practices of self branding, and traditional notions of success, sustainability influencers struggle to monetise their labor without compromising their environmental principles (e.g. by working with brands with negative environmental impacts that have been accused of 'greenwashing'). These nuanced processes of individual adaptation require sustainability workers to craft their subjectivity over and against platform norms, causing intensified precarity to be endemic to this kind of work.

The third explores the cultural mediation fashion models perform at the margins of prescriptive ideals of beauty and race in social media culture. It details the pressure to self-brand to achieve influencer status, under the aegis of strict brand requirements exercised by model agencies. These pressures have forced older models to adapt and intensify their digital platform labor over and above the physical and personal self-branding labor that has always been a requisite to being signed as a model. While aging loudly and proudly, these model/influencers do so amidst limiting assumptions about how best to age as a person of color while trying to gain traction on social media. Respondents report that both the fashion and social media industries have promised far more inclusive acceptance of age and race than they currently afford. Consequently, their influencer work is often in tension with their agency's brand dictates, as well as running counter to social media influencing ideals.

The fourth paper explores the integral role of influencer marketing companies and their algorithmic tools in quantifying influencers' value in the Latin American context. These companies seek to render influencer returns measurable. This pursuit, however, comes at the cost of adopting a set of indicators, pricing structures, or monitoring methods that may remain opaque to content creators. Despite promises to enhance brand certainty, these agencies, rather than neutral intermediaries, actively shape influencer practices, often at the expense of creators. The study reveals how quantification dynamics perpetuate power imbalances, undermining the agency of platform workers in an opaque industry.

#EMPLOYABLE: WHEN HUMANIZED BRANDS AND BRANDED HUMANS COLLIDE

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Introduction

If mainstream media coverage is taken at face value, then the post-pandemic work era marks a radical new phase in labor politics: union support is soaring in Western countries (McCarthy, 2022), and workers across industries and levels are entering collective bargaining agreements (Logan, 2022). Contesting "always-on" professional demands, workers—especially the younger generation who joined the workforce since 2020—are pushing back against the steady incursion of the 9-to-5 into their personal lives. 2021 was dubbed the year of the "Great Resignation", with record numbers of employees quitting their jobs, meanwhile trends such as #BareMinimumMonday and #quietquitting encouraged workers to wrest back control over their schedules and labor power.

At the same time, corporate employers are striving to lure office-weary workers back to the workplace (Goldberg & Kode, 2023); while some companies are hiring slick designers to create "Instagrammable" officers, others offer dazzling in-office perks: dry-cleaning, lunch, even a concert with Lizzo (Wakabayashi et al., 2022). Others are honing their so-called "employer brand" in a bid to appeal to Gen Z, who purportedly care less about money than previous generations and more about working for "authentic" companies that share their values (Conley, 2022).

In case it's not abundantly clear, these emergent discourses and practices of contemporary work often involve social media platforms: Instagram, X, TikTok,

LinkedIn and YouTube, among others. In this paper, we contend that digitally mediated conversations about work can tell us much about broader flows of worker power, agency, and resistance in the contemporary landscape.

Methods

This paper presents a typology of trends at the interface of social media and the workplace. We began our research by identifying popular discourses related to work, labor, and employment from the last four years (2020-2024). Our corpus of data included news articles, popular media, and blog posts that spanned such topics as jobs, careers, work, labor, branding. We worked iteratively to compile more articles and examples until prominent themes emerged (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). From there, we developed a quadrant graph with employer power/employee agency on one-axis, and brand alignment on the other.

In order to glean deeper insight into the themes arising, we selected key case studies that exemplified each of the four quadrants. We subsequently compiled a secondary corpus for each case, which consisted of user-generated content on TikTok and Instagram; audience interactions; and press releases and communications from and about brands/companies.

We then analyzed these cases with an eye toward power flows on social media platforms as companies and employees grapple for control and agency.

Preliminary Findings

Through our typology, we identify a range of work practices and discourses about the nature of work as they are expressed through social media platforms: *The Company Influencer* (high corporate alignment/high employee agency)*, The Invisible Employee-Ambassador* (high corporate alignment/low employee agency)*, The Quiet Quitter* (low brand loyalty/low employee agency) and *The Anti-Work Crusader* (low employer loyalty/high employee agency). The individual cases that exemplify each category are highly variable—from cringey anthropomorphized brand Twitter and employee influencer schemes, to parodies of corporate culture and public videos of firings on TikTok. Yet, together, they help illuminate the shifting power dynamics between brands/companies and their employees at a moment when such negotiations are increasingly playing out on and through social media.

One key vector of the shift is the rise of digital branding and, more precisely, cultures of "influencer creep" (Bishop, 2023). Brands understand the value of harnessing employees in a platform-oriented marketing environment, and social media marketers and employee influencers are tasked with crafting relatable brand identities that will speak to Gen Z and Millennial audiences, who are often highly critical of overtly corporate messaging. Crucially, though, these initiatives rely upon

"real people"—oft-un(der)paid young people who are upheld as a savvy workforce (Jacobson et al, 2023; Duffy & Sawey, 2021). Over the past decade, companies and brands have increasingly leveraged social media in a bid to appear more authentic, more relatable, more *intimate* (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Marketing consultants laud efforts to humanize brands by capitalizing on the "aura," and anthropomorphic brands have been given new life across Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter/X.

At the same time as major brands cede control to their employees in their attempts to connect with a new generation of customers, the former fear losing a handle on their self-narratives, facing new risks from disgruntled (ex-)employees who may mobilize their own audiences against them. We see particularly high profile examples of this with social media-forward brands like BuzzFeed and Bon Appétit, both of which have benefitted from the immense popularity of their highly visible on-screen talent, and both of whom faced the consequences when said talent went independent and used their platforms to critique those companies.

Conclusion

In his much-hyped 1997 article *The Brand Called You*, business pundit Tom Peters roused those vying to get ahead in the brave new world of work to practice strategic self-branding. Though Peters' directive to become "the CEO of Me, Inc." was perhaps novel advice at a moment that predated LinkedIn and Twitter, self-marketization has since emerged as an organizing principle for social life under conditions of neoliberalism (Gershon, 2017). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that attention to the topic of self-branding abounds, seeing a great uptick with the rise of influencer cultures in the 2010s. Yet what is less well understood is how this culture of personal branding melds with its inverse: the humanization of brands. In this paper, we offer a conceptualization of these two concurrent movements at the interface of technology and work: the branding of humans, and the humanization of brands. Such a framework, we argue, has important implications for understanding the fraught terrain of employment, autonomy, surveillance, (in)visibility, resistance and rupture in the age of social media.

THE PARADOX OF COMMERCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES FOR SUSTAINABILITY INFLUENCERS: EXPLORING A POST-WORK APPROACH TO INFLUENCER LABOUR

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Scholarship on influencer labour has demonstrated that these hyper-precarious platform workers (Duffy et al., 2021; Glatt, 2022) are on the front lines of a

contemporary 'crisis of work' (Hoffmann & Frayne, 2023). This platform labour crisis can be understood not in isolation, but situated within the broader context of what has been described as the 'polycrisis' (Lawrence et al., 2024), a succession of major global social, economic, environmental, and political crises that are entangled with, and exacerbating of, one another. Specifically, the paper examines how influencers are positioned within the context of climate crisis and how this can intersect with and complicate their insecure labour conditions. The analysis draws on a digital ethnography of sustainability influencers, showing how their concerns for the environmental impact of consumption and waste come into conflict with normative income generation practices for influencers which involve monetising a self-brand into promotional arrangements.

The paper argues that commercial and promotional values of the influencer platform economy are ultimately irrevocable with environmental values. Sustainability influencers take on individual responsibility for navigating this 'sustainability paradox' (Frig & Jaakkola, 2023), using various practices of compromise, conciliation, strategic negotiation, defensive retreat, and refusal. The analysis develops the paper's theoretical argument: that ecological and feminist post-work and de-growth approaches to labour (Weeks, 2020; Hoffmann & Frayne, 2023) might fruitfully be brought to bear in influencer industry research as a way of imagining a way out of intersecting crises of both labour and climate. The paper concludes by looking to possibilities offered in the data that indicate alternatives to the commercial and promotional norms that pervade the contemporary influencer ecology.

Polycrisis: platform labour and climate

That platform workers are at the vanguard of the current labour crisis has been well established (Jarrett, 2022). This scholarship situates itself in literature examining the neoliberal shifts in cultural and creative sectors since the 1990s which devolved risk and responsibility from employer to employee (McRobbie, 2018). Influencer labour is characterised by intense levels of unpredictability and uncertainty, subject to shifts in markets, industries and platform affordances and algorithms (Duffy et al., 2021). Feminist researchers have demonstrated that this hyper-precarity exacerbates inequalities and engenders anxious forms of self-management (Bishop, 2018; Duffy et al., 2021; Glatt, 2022, Rauchberg, 2022).

Placing an understanding of platform labour in crisis within a broader 'polycrisis' context (Lawrence et al., 2024) has three main benefits. First, it allows for an exploration of the 'sustainability paradox' that emerges when the promotion normative to influencer labour clashes with increasingly popular sustainability values (Frig & Jaakkola, 2023). Second, it enables a feminist critique of how individual responsibilisation operates across multiple crises including that of economy, labour, pandemic, and environment, with women in particular taking on much of the burden of privatising and managing polycrisis conditions (Wilson and Yochim, 2018). And finally, it opens up the possibility of exploring solutions that might address

intersecting crises simultaneously, as explored in the discussion of post-work approaches below.

Methods

The paper draws on analysis of data gathered using a qualitative digital ethnography of a sub-set of sustainability influencers: those focused on 'zero waste' lifestyles aimed at reducing consumption and waste. Methods included an Instagram participatory ethnography of sustainability influencer Instagram accounts, participant observation of industry events, and semi-structured individual interviews with fifteen 'nano-influencers' based in the UK, Europe, and North America. The analysis highlights the specific complexities that arise from trying to work as an influencer while upholding sustainability principles that routinely come into conflict with taken for granted industry and platform norms of promotion, consumption, and accumulation.

Findings

All influencers must navigate a delicate, often unstable, balance of visibility and authenticity when monetising their personas to promote brands (Arriagada and Bishop, 2021). For sustainability influencers, however, considerations around commodifiable self-brand values are layered with, and routinely come into conflict with, *environmental* values. As one influencer explained in an interview: 'I feel like there's like two questions that I need to answer when I work with brands… number one, are they sustainable? And then number two, is it something that I would use and love?'. Analysis of the data shows that:

·   Before working with brands, sustainability influencers undertake extensive research about the environmental impact of the brand's materials, supply chains, production, workers, shipping, use, disposal, and more, often questioning the company directly and navigating obfuscating impression management communications in the form of 'greenwashing' (Jones, 2019)

·   Just as research on influencer labour has shown individual responsibilisation of precarious working conditions (Glatt, 2022), there was broad agreement among participants that it is ultimately influencers as individuals who are responsible for researching and understanding an extensive, complex, and often deliberately obtuse set of factors related to the environmental impact of brands and products. Interviews captured experiences of influencers feeling anxious and embarrassed and concerned about the risk of criticism from followers if and when they 'got it wrong'.

·   Some influencers seek to side-step this hard to manage level of individual expectation by promoting products that they knew had less than perfect eco credentials. To do this they draw on familiar discourses of authenticity (Arriagada

and Bishop, 2021), emphasising sustainability as an imperfect 'journey' and framing 'perfection' as inauthentic and unattainable.

Most influencers make very little or no financial income for their work, meaning their labour is 'aspirational' in its orientation to the possibility of monetising their self-brand in future (Duffy, 2017). Because of the factors outlined above, financial success was often described as an impossible and/or undesirable aspiration for sustainability influencers. Even for those who did wish to grow their account, it was acknowledged that doing so would be challenging not only due to the income precarity and individualised risk that all influencers face, but also the compromises to environmental values that creators felt would be unavoidable in order to monetise.

Discussion

The impossibility of straightforwardly aligning environmental and commercial values for sustainability influencers evidences the fundamental *unsustainability* of the influencer economy itself. In thinking through this polycrisis, we are presented with an opportunity to rethink social media cultures of promotional labour and consumption in ways that address the crisis of work and the climate crisis simultaneously (Vrasti, 2021). 'Post-work' approaches, drawing from eco-critical and feminist traditions, problematise the unsustainable centrality of labour in economic and social life, and imagine how dependence on paid work might be reduced, both materially and culturally (Gerold et al., 2023; Weeks, 2020). This approach acknowledges that contemporary systems of work are characterised by conditions of precarity, exploitation and inequality but argues that sustainable solutions cannot be found in calls for more and better jobs, which are highly energy intensive and environmentally harmful, but in a move away from work altogether (Vrasti, 2021; Hoffman and Paulsen, 2020).

In imagining how work might be reduced and re-organised in ways that are more sustainable, researchers suggest we look to traces of post-work organisation and politics in the present (Hoffman and Paulsen, 2020). In concluding the paper, I return to the data to touch on sustainability influencers' focus on practices that suggest alternatives to commercial and promotional norms, revealing possibilities for feminist communities of care (de Wilde and Parry, 2022) forged around the sharing of slow living practices and collective and creative patterns of re-purposing and re-using materials for daily living.

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"OWN YOUR AGE. OWN YOUR BEAUTY. OWN YOUR POWER" EXPLORING HOW MODELS OF COLOR NAVIGATE AGE AND RACE BOUNDARIES IN THE RELENTLESS YOUTHSCAPE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Introduction

Our study examines how mature models navigate the demands of platform labor within the confluence of race and aging. We noted the paucity of studies focused on race and aging under the pressure of fashion and beauty ideals in social media and the broader fashion industry. This addresses the gap in the literature, but more importantly, it offers a critical addition to broader conversation surrounding beauty, aging, race, and self-worth that have become culturally prominent in the last decade.

Models have long embodied brands by means of their aesthetic and glamour labor (Entwistle and Slater, 2012; AUTHOR, 2015). Within the rise of social media, models negotiate self-branding, while tightly controlled by the 'brand' of their agency. Similar to paper 1 in this panel studying the "tensions that exist when corporate brand directives (i.e., humanized brands) collide with individual promotional logics (branded humans) in digital/social media contexts," we are looking at the tension between the brand directives coming from the modeling agency, and the branded humans who have to construct 'individual promotional logics' amid a sea of assumptions regarding who and what they should be, due to their race and age, and their position as 'fashion models.' Mature models of color in particular face cultural attitudes of ageism (Kenalemang, 2022), and must work within a fashion culture that favors models who are thin and white (Biefeld, et al., 2020), while also working against racism in social media culture more broadly (Dodgson, 2020; Christin and Lu, 2023)

While there has been much lip service paid to the idea of inclusivity in the fashion world, industry practices are not living up to the hype (Reynders and Cyr, 2024). We pay particular attention to the cultural mediation models perform at the margins of beauty and race within a culture that promised far more inclusive acceptance of age and race than it has delivered (Banet-Weiser, 2021; Bishop, 2019). We also note how models self-brand within the paradox of the traditional fashion model image, premised on being inaccessible, with a reputation for being inauthentic, within a setting that demands legible authenticity (Arriagada and Bishop, 2021). Our study draws out, examines, and evaluates the social implications and personal costs of these cultural contradictions and damaging stereotypes at the root of their creation. This is where models of color in the 'age inclusive' market must ply their trade, both within the fashion system, and the broader context of influencer labor within the social media industries.

Methods

We conducted in-depth interviews with 8 established over-40 models of color. Interviews focused on the messages about aging, gender, race, and culture depicted in their self-branding versus the messages they receive from their agencies, and the broader culture. We used snowball sampling, calling on existing contacts both authors had in the modeling industry as well as recruiting via a social media call for participants. Interviews were open ended, starting with brief demographic and work history questions, and then moving on to explorations of respondents' experiences with attitudes about race, age, body ideals, and the work of embodying the desired 'look' for clients, to seek jobs, and in their influencer labor, to seek followers, legitimacy, and endorsements. Working from transcripts,we hand coded the responses to draw out patterns and produce a grounded theory analysis in which our analytic themes emerged from the data. These interviews were conducted in accordance with the IRB requirements at our university. Further analysis of the models' social media presence, both text and branded images, augmented the interview data.

Findings

Our respondents cited pressures emerging from the new terrain in which 'models' and 'influencers' are considered interchangeable. Several described how they had to 'retrofit' themselves to become more like 'influencers' than 'traditional models,' in order to stay relevant in their profession. Many respondents described the intensified demands of the digital labor required for building a following, along with the 'daily grind' of keeping their self-branded image current on social media.

Respondents also noted working to achieve these goals under the tight control of their physical and virtual presence by their agencies, within the demand to adhere to the agency's overall image and brand. For instance, our recruitment of a model on social media elicited a thorough interrogation by her agency regarding the nature of the study, where it would be published, what questions she would be asked, and if any images of her would be used.

Many of the models we talked to experienced influencers as competition. They perceived that influencers are sometimes rewarded for exposing stereotypes or presenting at the cutting edge of acceptable norms of presentation of beauty and desirable body types, while eschewing 'accepted' racial characteristics. In contrast, the over-40 models we spoke to were often held to a different and more conservative standard, within which they must still work to gain the online recognition and notoriety required to establish a social media presence.

Our respondents also described having to navigate prescriptive norms governing acceptable gendered and raced standards of beauty, and keenly felt the up close and personal nature of these pressures on body image and self-esteem in an environment that highly values youth. Much of their constructed personas revolved around pushing back against these standards. They employed hashtags such as #greyhairdontcare; #agingwithstyle; or #disruptallfashionrules; or the model in our title, whose 'about' section started with 'Own your age. Own your beauty. Own your power," an opening salvo that resonated with our respondents' stories of self-determination and battles for self-worth within an environment that devalues their look, and indeed who they are.

Conclusions

Amidst the hype of diversification in the modeling and social media industries, this study offers insights into how actors on the ground experience claims to inclusivity. We highlight cultural contradictions surrounding attitudes toward people of color and women of a certain age. Evidence points towards a kind of 'second shift' of respondents' platform labor, on top of the normal self-branding required to be a model in the first place. The added pressures to physically and emotionally embody the persona depicted in both their paid labor as models, as well as their projected image on social media, represent an intensification of the 'glamour labor' (AUTHOR 2015) in which models already engage as part of their regular work, exacerbated by their work to either diminish or embrace their race and age within different contextual demands on their self-presentation. While this pressure impacts age and race inclusive models in particular, it also explicates pressures influencers face more generally in social media culture. By examining our respondents' efforts to transform from models of color who work in fashion, to become influencers of color of a certain age, we elucidate the barriers presented by the youth infused, algorithmically limiting, space of social media to workers who do not readily meet these criteria.

(RE)INVENTING INFLUENCE: VALUATION AND JUSTIFICATION IN THE INFLUENCER MARKETING MARKET

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Introduction

The influencer industry, a multifaceted ecosystem involving brands, marketers, platforms, influencers, and agencies, relies on data-driven strategies for collaborations. Quantification through metrics and algorithms is crucial for influencer marketing agencies, establishing commercial connections by measuring indicators like followers and engagement (Bishop, 2021). This numeric validation transforms digital interactions into tradable commodities, shaping perceptions of success and popularity (Bucher, 2012; Gräve, 2019). The industry, projected to reach $21.1 billion in 2023, emphasizes the authentication of endeavors through data (Geyser, 2023).

This article delves into the quantification of influencers' work and justifications by marketing agencies, aiming to unravel complexities at the intersection of data, value creation, and commerce in the evolving influencer marketing landscape. A year-long ethnographic study focused on Chilean influencer marketing firms reveals the integration of algorithmic systems, extending beyond influencer selection to actively control their work throughout campaigns (Borchers, 2023).

Grounded in Boltanski and Thévenot's "orders of worth" framework (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006), the study explores how justifications reconcile the world of fame with the industrial world. Influencer marketing firms use digital quantification technologies to bridge these domains, creating calculable and sustainable campaigns. Despite industry volatility, agencies seek predictability through new algorithmic tools, potentially obscuring indicators from influencers. The study exposes how agencies influence expectations, pricing, and performance calculations, perpetuating power imbalances in an opaque industry controlled by platform companies and intermediaries (Rocamora, 2022).

The influencer marketing industry: a new form of compromise between the world of fame and the industrial world

The article investigates social quantification in influencer marketing agencies using a pragmatist approach through Boltanski and Thévenot's "orders of worth" framework. This framework encompasses six distinct orders—inspired, domestic, fame, civic, market, and industrial—each defining a common world with specific evidence, subjects, objects, qualifiers, and relations. Applying this framework to the influencer industry, the study explores the justifications aligned with the "world of fame" and its compromise with the "industrial world." The influencer marketing industry, seen as a unique compromise between fame and industry, employs data collection and machine learning to quantify and anticipate influencers' performance, creating dynamic and real-time metrics. The compromise relies on effective extraction and processing of social media data, making the measures of influence indistinguishable without algorithmic mediation. The study questions the strength of this compromise, considering whether efficiency criteria prevail over other considerations in influencer industry transactions (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Gerlitz & Lury, 2014; Hund, 2023).

The evolving roles of intermediaries in shaping influence valuation from media to influencer economies highlight the historical compromise between the industrial and fame worlds, exemplified by audience measurement instruments like people meters and polls (Gitlin, 1994; Napoli, 2003). In the digital age, social media platforms become active participants in the creation, distribution, and marketing of influencer content, serving as built-in people-meters commodifying social interactions. Influencer marketing companies, crucial intermediaries, utilize data to wield authority in this realm, influencing perceptions of success (Rocamora, 2022). While the Global South witnesses the rise of new intermediaries quantifying influencer work, this remains an unexplored terrain. The article aims to scrutinize these firms' validation, steering of influencer efforts, algorithmic tools, and justifications within the Latin American context (Bishop, 2021; Rocamora, 2022).

Methods

This article extends a 4-year research project on the Chilean influencer industry (Author, 2020; 2021; 2022). Conducting a 1-year ethnography, we mapped the market, interviewed experts, and analysed seven companies' websites and social media accounts. A comparative grid revealed diverse services, success stories, terms influencing mediation, and strategies for market leadership. Three agencies underwent an 8-month multi-case study involving in-depth interviews with executives. Cases revealed global ramifications as agencies utilized tools from Colombia and Brazil. Methodologically, we unpacked executives' qualifications, exploring metrics and algorithms' role in demarcation and justification within the industry, revealing how influence is defined and calculated in the influencer marketing landscape (Bishop, 2021; Christin & Petre, 2020).

Results

Making Social Media Influence Calculable Across Gut Feelings and Numbers

Despite positioning themselves as intermediaries between brands and influencers, a scrutiny of the websites of these companies reveals a predominant focus on addressing brands and marketers. For instance, a comprehensive analysis of a company's website demonstrates a clear orientation towards brands and their ability to exert control over campaigns and influencers: "Find the influencer closest to your brand. The influencer applies a campaign in which she/he feels identified with the brand. She/He makes you a creative proposal and puts a price on her/his work."

In response to the uncertainty about who truly wields influence and the success of influential marketing campaigns, influencer marketing companies deploy their technologies and services to move away from gut decisions and adopt a more strategic

approach. They endeavour to naturalise the notion that "influence" is something objective and measurable through a layer of data-driven planning and management processes. As an executive articulated, "Influencers are just another channel. Let's treat them like one. No gut feelings, just data."

Algorithmic mediations: the colonisation of the industrial world?

However, this escalating digital quantification of influence brings about transformations in various influencer practices. In the study cases, we observed the deployment of algorithms, accompanied by a set of assumptions and justifications, for four processes: 1) identifying ideal influencers for specific campaigns, 2) filtering the actual reach of influencers, 3) calculating the appropriate prices to be charged by influencers, and 4) predicting the return of campaigns for brands.

Algorithms aid in influencer selection, as seen in Chilean agencies partnering with platforms like Klear, quantifying influencers' impact beyond follower count (Author, 2020; 2021; 2022). Another algorithm trims inauthentic reach, addressing issues of engagement pod influence and follower deception (Grohmann et al., 2022; Rocamora, 2022). Algorithms also determine influencer pricing, offering standardized rates with negotiation flexibility (Bishop, 2021). Notably, predictive algorithms estimate campaign outcomes, aligning with the industrial world's pursuit of predictability (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). However, qualitative factors, industry expertise, and human judgment complement algorithmic evaluations, emphasizing the nuanced nature of influencer marketing (Bishop, 2021). The study reveals a delicate balance between efficiency-focused algorithms and qualitative considerations, mirroring the compromise between the industrial and fame worlds.

Conclusion

In the evolving landscape of influencer marketing, agencies serve as key intermediaries, employing metrics, algorithms, and platforms to make influence calculable on social media platforms (Gräve, 2019). Drawing from Boltanski and Thévenot's "orders of worth," influencer marketing companies reconcile the worlds of fame and industry to define and quantify influence, introducing novel calculations and metrics (Brooks et al., 2021; Colucci & Pedroni, 2022). Justification process enhances influencers' differentiation and value for brands, expanding beyond follower counts to include diverse algorithmic interventions. However, challenges arise as algorithmic efforts favor brands, potentially sidelining creators (Bishop, 2021). The compromise between fame and industry worlds unfolds across various processes, from specifying salaries to predicting influence returns, signaling a dominance of efficiency-based criteria conflicting with reputation-based justifications (Borchers, 2023). Despite a technological layer, influencer marketing agencies acknowledge the indispensability of qualitative and human aspects in campaign management, reflecting a nuanced understanding beyond data-driven decisions (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013).

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