ASSOCIATION FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

Influencers and the Shaping of Markets: Actors, Processes, and Sociotechnical Configurations

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This special session looks at the perpetually evolving market system around influencers as well as disruptions and changes in this market. Using data from consumers, practitioners, platforms, and mass media, the papers in this session show that influencer work, while shaping consumers, is a multi-actor market system in flux.

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Influencers and the Shaping of Markets: Actors, Processes, and Sociotechnical Configurations

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Paper #1: Influencers, Content Markets, and Institutional Work
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Paper #2: Becoming Famous: Influencer Marketing and the Cross-platform Acquisition of Celebrity Capital
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Paper #3: Family Influencers as Digital Family Entrepreneurship: Monetizing a Collective Human Brand
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Paper #4: Threading through a Field: Makeup Practice in the Age of Influencers
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SESSION OVERVIEW

Influencers and influencer marketing have been a pervasive area of academic and practitioner interest in the past decade. Past research has uncovered different aspects of influencers, such as how they emerge through capitalizing on taste displays (McQuarrie et al., 2013), which influencer-campaign characteristics are more effective with consumers (Hughes et al., 2019), what the effects of disclosing advertising intent in influencer based campaigns are (Eisend, 2020), and how their appearance and nascent professional activity (Abidin, 2016) disrupted and reshaped fields such as broadening the availability of products (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013). These processes allowed the emergence of new actors and dispersion of institutional work to ordinary consumers (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015), opening space to activism and embodied resistance towards fashion systems (Veresiu & Parmentier, 2021).

While influencers, albeit sometimes through different, unconventional and disdained forms (Abidin, 2016; Drenten et al., 2020; Smith and Fischer, 2021), generate value for themselves through assuming intermediary roles in marketing communication—social media manager, endorser, and connector of brands and audiences (Campbell & Farrell, 2020)—, new intermediaries and actors have also emerged (Stoldt et al., 2019) as well as a plethora of platforms with different affordances (Kozinets et al., 2021)

We continue this conversation with a special session that looks at this market system which is perpetually evolving. Our goal is not to discuss one particular dyad in the influencer marketing chain, such as influencer-consumers or influencers-brands. Instead, we focus on the emergence of new actors, processes and socio-technical configurations, and practices.

The first paper brings a market system perspective to the discussion on influencers. The authors investigate how influencers disrupted the field of advertising. Through interviews with influencers and influencer agents, the researchers show how new and emergent actors perform boundary work to stake claims to the profession of content creation.

The second paper looks at cross-platform celebrification and how this leverages audience portability through building celebrity capital. By showing how celebrification allows influencers to generate distributed content and how this content is created and evaluated through platform geographies, the authors underline the agility, fragility, and worth of platform content.

The third paper investigates family influencers as a form of digital family entrepreneurship. Highlighting how family influencers build brand biographies and relational narratives, this paper distinguishes family influencers from individuals and discusses the particular ways entrepreneur families build their brands and audience on platforms.

The final paper further elaborates on market work by showing how influencers affect market practices by introducing new materials, competences, and meanings through interaction among influencers themselves (and between influencers and brands), shaping both consumer and practitioner practices.

Taken together, these papers show how influencers' work is not just solely about creating and capitalizing a market but disrupting and shaping systems, including socio-technical systems in which content is created, affecting their audience, consumers, other actors, and practices. Using data from consumers, practitioners, platforms themselves, and mass media, the papers also show that influencer work, while shaping consumers, is a multi-actor market system.

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Influencers, Content Markets, and Institutional Work

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Content is king, as once declared by Bill Gates. Influencers as person brands (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019) have become essential assets for companies for content creation (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2020; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Müller & Christandl, 2019). Their expertise and visibility have disrupted different fields of consumption (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), generating a market that operates through monetizing, brokering, and optimizing content for consumer engagement and brand promotion.

In this paper, we theorize the emergence of influencers and discuss how the industry has shifted to operate around one important sociological object: content. We posit that this event has triggered different field-configuration processes of institutional boundary work (Langley et al., 2019; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010) in content creation, distribution, and monetization.

Our empirical work is built on a database triangulating data from different sources: 10 interviews with influencers, 10 interviews with intermediary agencies, 39 podcasts with professionals in the influencer industry (agents, brokers, and influencers themselves), and 2,104 articles in the specialized press (AdWeek and PR Week). We analyzed the data qualitatively and quantitatively to identify actors, processes, and market devices with careful attention to the tensions and dynamics between different market actors.

Our findings describe the disruption of logics in the field by the emergence of a new actor: the influencer. Influencers themselves struggle to legitimate their work and to manage the tensions of building their own brands versus promoting those of their clients' (also see Parmentier & Fischer, 2021) in creating content. On the side of brands and agencies who hire content creators, many uncertainties remain, such as costs, control of content, alignment with the brand's expectations, and desired outcomes, all of which create contractual problems (Childers et al., 2019). We show that these issues are addressed by different types of boundary work that simultaneously protect the interests of old actors while also reconfiguring the field and opening up spaces for new actors. We discuss the boundary work of both actors that existed before influencers (celebrities, models, opinion leaders, brands, agencies), as well as actors that emerged after the disruption (influencer agents, content farms, influencer platforms).

Competitive boundary work happens when actors engage in actions to protect the function of content creation that they have historically performed (Abbott, 2014) or negotiate their authority inside a field (Gieryn, 1983). As influencers claim the function of creating content for brands, and as different institutions (such as specialized media) recognize them as such, influencers, agencies, and actors previously tasked to create content claim stakes to the jurisdiction of content creation.

Collaborative boundary work consists of the alignment of actors to collaborate inside field boundaries (Cartel et al., 2019; Langley et al., 2019). The actors participating in collaborative boundary work are influencers themselves, agencies, and other intermediaries (Stoldt et al., 2019) that act as brokers between influencers and clients. These actors work together for different ends, which include convincing clients that content work is relevant and that it can bring a return of investment to the brand, assuring influencers that their work is recognizable and compensated, mediating affective labor in talent management, managing content that aligns with clients' interests, and, finally, making sure that the client achieves desirable metrics. Intermediaries act by translating the interests of brands (visibility or engagement) and of influencers themselves (creative and expressive freedom). In that sense, influencer agencies take the role of boundary actors, translating different logics and practices between the two worlds of clients and influencers who enter an exchange relationship around content.

Finally, the third type of boundary work, configurational boundary work, includes new actors (such as influencers and influencer agencies) that reconfigure field boundaries (Langley et al., 2019) to claim space in content work. Our data shows that these configurations emerge from boundary objects that allow new and old actors to work together. Media kits are an example of these objects allowing influencers to display and publicize their services for clients in a language that the clients are accustomed to. Other objects include metrics, which allow quantifying the results of content work for the clients and can be negotiated a priori a campaign. Through these configurations the functions of actors are negotiated, established and realigned.

In conclusion, our work contributes to the previously discussed disruption of fields (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015) and influencer work (Abidin, 2016). We take a market systems approach to look at the actors and dynamics that operate around a valuable object: content. We show that disruption and the emergence of a new actor have cascading effects in a field and result in the emergence of even more actors and continuous and complex boundary work. As the market logic shifts toward selling, brokering and monetizing content, the market also reorients itself around this object.

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Becoming Famous: Influencer Marketing and the Cross-platform Acquisition of Celebrity Capital

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Increasing attention has been given to executing influencer marketing (Campbell & Farrell, 2020), with a focus on understanding disclosure practices (e.g., Evans et al., 2018) and the impact of authenticity (e.g., Audrezet et al., 2020). Influencer marketing arose to prominence when the industry was dominated by only a few platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook. Yet, the modern social media landscape is saturated with both established and emerging platforms—Twitch, Clubhouse, and more—giving rise to new opportunities for social media influencers (SMIs) to seek visibility and attention. Meanwhile, some platforms (e.g., Vine, Musical.ly) have ceased to exist in their original forms. Influencers and marketing professionals must navigate influencer marketing across social media platforms in a complex digital landscape where social media platforms are both abundant and precarious. A starting point is understanding how influencers acquire celebrity capital in an evolving social media landscape. The purpose of this study is to explore how SMIs acquire celebrity capital in the modern social media landscape and the role of marketing professionals in this process. Specifically, we ask: how is celebrity capital acquired among social media influencers, and what role do marketing professionals play in the process? More broadly, how has an increasingly interconnected social media landscape shaped this process and does it matter?

Celebrity capital has been identified as a currency for fame (Driessens, 2013); it is "understood as accumulated media visibility through recurrent media representations (Driessens, 2013, p. 17) and exchanged within the field (Bourdieu, 1986) of marketing promotions. For example, celebrities exchange celebrity capital for endorsement deals (i.e. economic capital) and/or introductions to high-profile individuals (i.e. social capital; Carillat & Ilicic, 2019). Most SMIs exist in a stage of liminality: no longer a 'regular' non-commodified person; not yet a full-fledged celebrity. Similarly, the acquisition stage of the celebrity capital life cycle "refers to a celebrity's limited yet growing media visibility and recognizability" (p. 64). In celebrity and media studies, the acquisition of celebrity capital is known as celebrification (Driessens, 2013). Jerslev and Mortensen (2016) draw upon the 'celebrification process' defined by Rojek (2001) to suggest "celebrification encompasses the mediated interplays and negotiations between celebrities/ their management and various media platforms, media institutions and fans/followers (p. 251). Given influencers' unique position in the celebrity life cycle, Carrillat and Ilicic (2019) call on marketing scholars "to investigate the effectiveness of influencers as endorsers, identify potential stars to leverage, and examine the role of agents in managing and developing celebrity capital" (p. 64). Our study sits squarely in this domain seeking to better understand the influencer celebrification process in a saturated media landscape.

Based on close to 60 hours of in-depth interviews with 40 influencer marketing professionals (e.g., influencers, agents, brand executives), our findings point to the importance of cross-platform celebrification in acquiring celebrity capital among SMIs. We define cross-platform celebrification as the process by which social media influencers acquire celebrity capital within an interconnected social media ecosystem. We identify three types of practices in the cross-platform celebrification process: generative cross-platform celebrification practices; collaborative cross-platform celebrification practices; and evaluative cross-platform celebrification practices.

First, generative cross-platform celebrification practices authentically grow an influencer's celebrity capital across platforms. This represents the first stage in acquiring celebrity capital for SMIs. Influencers work tirelessly to build their following (i.e., fame labor) and develop niche content which can extend beyond a single platform (i.e., platform agnosticism). That is, influencers work to gain a following through content creation beyond a single platform. Influencers and marketing professionals recognize the precarity of social media platforms and thus stay agile, adapting as the social media landscape transforms. Our findings suggest influencers are not churned out of a system of stardom seeking their 'big break' from gatekeepers in the field; rather, they create their own fame through hard work and dedicated content creation. Marketing professionals act as talent scouts in this stage, seeking the 'next big thing' but recognizing that the acquisition of celebrity capital begins with the influencer.

Second, collaborative cross-platform celebrification practices synergistically expand an influencer's celebrity capital across platforms. This second stage in acquiring celebrity capital serves to deepen connections between influencers, fans, and marketing industry professionals. Influencers enrich relationships with their fans across multiple platforms (i.e., audience portability) and collectively conceive of new creative opportunities with marketing industry professionals and clients (i.e.., creative ideation). That is, influencers can transport their audience across platforms (e.g., podcast, television, social media) and across unique brand partnerships (e.g., collaborative and co-branded product lines). Marketing professionals

act as creative concierges in this stage, leveraging unexpected opportunities for the influencer to connect with fans and brands.

Third, evaluative cross-platform celebrification practices assess the value of an influencer's celebrity capital across platforms. This third stage in acquiring celebrity capital places valuation on the worth and potential of an influencer to deliver meaningful promotional value for a brand. Influencers are appraised based on their ability to gain online community buy-in for a brand partner (i.e., community-centric KPIs) and evaluated by the reach of their content across porous social media borders (i.e., content traversal). Traditional social media marketing metrics (e.g., views, engagement rates) focus on quantifying success in terms of individual platforms and individual tactics (e.g., click-throughs on an Instagram story). In contrast, our findings highlight the value of influencer audiences who propel their content through social media spaces. Marketing professionals act as impact analysts in this stage, assessing an influencers' relevance and potential for success, captured by less traditional (i.e., qualitative) measures of marketing effectiveness.

Within an ever-changing new media landscape, influencers and marketers must learn how to stay relevant and adapt across media platforms. The study contributes to the marketing literature by understanding how influencers, marketing professionals, and audiences (fandoms) coalesce to produce celebrity capital through cross-platform celebrification. We also demonstrate a holistic view of influencer marketing--beyond a single platform, and highlight how influencers' celebrity capital is inherently tied to the communities that follow them.

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Family Influencers as Digital Family Entrepreneurship: Monetizing a Collective Human Brand

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

A family goes to Costco; once they're there, one parent films the other as she explains why she chose the products which shape their family's consumption habits. Interestingly, this video, composed by the parents, is not solely meant for the eyes of family and friends; the parents are planning on posting the video on their family's public so-

cial media account. These parents created a social media account for themselves and their children to create collective content to be posted on this public account. This online content showcases the family members individually and collectively in their natural routine, special occasions, displaying talents, or making comedic scenarios. This is the life that family influencers lead via their online presence and curated content on social media.

This phenomenon has been discussed and coined by Abidin (2017), who explains that a family influencer exists via a social media account that represents an entire family rather than one individual. Family influencers are a new genre of microcelebrity "following in the celebrity trajectory of mommy bloggers, global micro-microcelebrities, and reality TV families" (ibid, p.1). Through this performance of microcelebrity, family influencers monetize their accounts in the same way that individual influencers do, through brand sponsorship as media entrepreneurs. Through qualitative findings, this study will recognize family influencers as a branded form of digital family entrepreneurship.

The topic of family entrepreneurship has been thoroughly explored by scholars (Beckhard & Dyer, 1983; Faccio & Lang, 2002; Feltham et al., 2005; Holderness, 2009; Kelly et al., 2000; Shanker and Astrachan, 1996). Researchers find that family businesses are built upon a family's engagement in entrepreneurial efforts (Chua et al., 2004). By capitalizing on today's digital realm, entrepreneurship has also taken place in online sites, namely, social media, to accrue social capital through interactions with others (Fischer & Reuber, 2014). This is particularly true for media entrepreneurs, who leverage social media to attract the attention of niche markets, a primary source of profit for businesses investing in mass media (Khajeheian, 2013). A social media influencer is a form of media entrepreneur who capitalizes on social media by transforming their account into an entrepreneurial venture (Abidin, 2018). Influencers monetize their digital presence by providing the service of brand ambassadorship or sponsorship. While individual influencers have been heavily explored by media and marketing scholars (Himelboim and Golan, 2019; Hughes et al., 2019; Martínez-López et al., 2020; Stoldt et al., 2019), the phenomenon of family influencers, a collective influencer, has not been investigated by marketing or entrepreneurship scholars.

This study addresses the gap in the literature by exploring (1) how influencer families establish and brand themselves as a family business via their social media accounts, (2) and how their branded collective identity mobilizes their content's monetization in the form of sponsorship engagements. By collectively employing various lenses that are novel to the field of family business, be it media, marketing, or branding literature, this study extends the extant literature on family entrepreneurial efforts by recognizing a new form of venture which takes place entirely online.

This study's method combines netnography (Kozinets, 2010), journaling, and interviews. The research focuses on couples who live together with their children, 10-18 years old, and manage a family-based social media account. The research focuses on accounts with 1 thousand to 1 million followers. Therefore, the sample will only consist of micro and macro-influencers, categorized as those with followers between 1k and 100k and 100k and 1m, respectively (Ismail, 2018). By doing so, the study disregards nano and mega-influencers, as the former target their brand sponsorship at their tight-knit communities making them an underdeveloped entrepreneurship venture, and the latter is identified as a type of influencer that usually stems from already established mainstream celebrity status (i.e., Beyonce), rather than through social media amplification (ibid).

The netnography and interviews shed light on how influencer families operate and brand themselves as a family business via so-

cial media accounts. They do so through the content they produce and share and the branded identity formed via their account to monetize through sponsorship engagements. This data is abductively analyzed through a branding literature lens that positions the family influencer account as a branded family business. Individual influencers are known to create an online identity in the form of a publicizable personality through self-commodification (Marwick, 2013). This self-commodification can be viewed as a strategy to construct a human brand (Thomson, 2006). Thomson (2006) defines a human brand as a specific operationalization of the brand concept, namely, a "well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communications efforts" (p. 1). This study acknowledges the concept of human brand and extends the literature by investigating the family influencer phenomenon as a form of collective human brand, namely, one which relies on a number of branded individuals as opposed to one. The research studies family influencer's human branding efforts by paying attention to how their brand is demonstrated as distinctive and visible through the depiction of brand biography and family members' market-relevant cues (Parmentier, 2011). The data on the agency, management, stakeholders, and business relationships of the family influencer account will guide the abductive analysis grounded in family business literature (Astrachan et al., 2002; Astrachan & Shanker, 2003) to parallel the family influencer to a family business. As a result, the study will find evidence to the claim that these online accounts are indeed a form of online family business operated via family business management and self-branding techniques that emerge through their content.

This research contributes to the literature on human brands, technologically mediated consumption habits, family entrepreneurship and gives new insights into how these three intersect. My research will also contribute managerially to existing and prospective family influencers, as well as companies that recruit them, by shedding light on what defines a strong family business and brand through social media account management tactics.

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Threading through a Field: Makeup Practice in the Age of Influencers

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

"Do you know Amanda Steele? She has **a social media following bigger than the population of Uruguay**. She is also too young to sit at a bar—or vote in the next election. **Sixteen-year-old Steele (a.k.a. MakeupbyMandy24)** is just one of a generation of beauty influencers who are documenting every topknot on Instagram and **dominating the lists of most-searched videos on YouTube** with their makeup tutorials. These new beauty gurus aren't just offering contouring tips. **They're changing the way we shop for, experiment with, and consume beauty…**" (Allure 2015, emphasis added)

Although applying makeup is an age-old practice, social media influencers only entered the market in the last two decades. Over that time, influencers have become ubiquitous in both the cosmetics arena and in other markets like food, travel and fashion: global spending on influencer marketing increased from $2 billion in 2017 to $8 billion in 2019 (Gerdeman, 2019) and may reach $15 billion by 2022 (Schomer, 2019). Scholars from multiple fields have begun to investigate characteristics of influencers as well as some of their impacts (e.g., Dolbec & Fischer 2015; Evans et al. 2017; Hughes et al., 2019; Kozinets et al., 2010; McQuarrie et al., 2013). Consumer researchers, for example, have addressed such questions as how influencers attract followers (McQuarrie et al., 2013), incite desires (Kozinets et al., 2017) and redistribute the institutional work performed in a field (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015). Marketing scholars have investigated the tactics influencers may use to maximize consumer attention and admiration for brands (e.g., Backaler 2018; Brown & Fiorella 2013; Brown & Hayes 2008; Evans et al. 2017; Hughes et al. 2019; Kapitan & Silvera, 2016; Levin, 2020). These studies collectively suggest that the influencers' impact on markets are many and varied. As yet, however, there is no comprehensive understanding of how influencers may collectively be impacting consumption practices in the contexts they frequent. This study aims to fill this gap by asking the question: **how does the influx of influencers into a field affect consumer practices therein?**

The paper employs a practice theory lens (e.g., Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2005) to conceptualize the emergence, persistence and disappearance of practices in a field. This lens posits that practices consist of three elements: materials, competences and meanings. Building on early work of Bourdieu (1990), practice theorists initially focused on ordinary experiences and the significance of materiality in practices in everyday life (e.g. Schatzki, 2002; Warde, 2005). This body of research collectively explained mechanisms of routinization and stability as well as change (e.g., Reckwitz , 2002; Shove & Pantzar, 2005; Shove et al. 2012). Consumer theorists followed this trend and employed practice theory to study such topics as choice (Allen, 2002), value creation (Schau et al., 2009), and the meanings of materials and their transformation (Türe & Ger, 2016). Consumer researchers also fruitfully studied the stabilization of misaligned or disrupted practice routines (Canniford & Shankar, 2013; Cardoso et al., 2020; Epp et al., 2014; Phipps & Ozanne, 2017; Seregina & Weijo, 2017; Thomas & Epp, 2016; Woerman & Rokka, 2015). Thus, practice theory studies have already shed considerable light on the routinization and disruption of practices, and it's a lens is well-suited to studying field-level changes (see Hui et al., 2018) of the type of interest here.

In the last decade, the cosmetics market has seen growing demand in North America; it is expected to expand even more in the near future as millennials and generation Z consumers attempt to master the latest makeup trends (Euromonitor International 2019a, 2019b). The number of influencers and followers has grown exponentially in the last decade in the cosmetics industry. Estimates suggest that by 2018 there had been over 349B total views of beauty content created by influencers on YouTube, with no signs of growth slowing in the near future (Pixability, 2018). Indeed, commentators suggest that the cosmetics industry has embraced influencer marketing more eagerly than any other (Gilliand, 2018). For instance, in 2015, Bethany Mota was the top beauty content creator on YouTube with 8.2M followers (Pixability, 2015); as of May 2020 she has 10M followers. The current top name in cosmetics on YouTube is Jeffree Star with 18.2M followers, while Huda Kattan leads cosmetics influencers on Instagram with 43.9M followers (May 2020). Taking all these contextual characteristics into account, it would appear that

the cosmetics market is an ideal one in which to examine how influencers may impact field level practices and individual consumers' performances.

To understand this context, we initially collected extensive archival data to understand the historical rise of influencers in the industry. The archival data was downloaded using Factiva to access US and Canadian newspapers, magazines and online blogs with the key words of "makeup" and "influencer". The dataset is a total 479 pages long (single spaced) without pictures. To gain more familiarity with the context, we also engaged in observational netnography by following 25 beauty influencers from North America on YouTube since March 2020. Lastly, the first author conducted 30 interviews in, 15 with consumers and 15 with professionals in the industry including: influencers; brand owners and managers; marketing, talent and influencer agency professionals; makeup artists; and a beauty magazine editor.

Our preliminary findings regarding practice level changes suggest that influencers affect market level practices by introducing new materials, competences, meanings to existing practices; these introductions, collectively, make practices more complex. The infusion of these new elements into practices is abetted by the networked circuits of interaction among influencers, and between influencers and brands. At the practitioner performance level, we find three patterns among consumers: non-reflexive adaptation; reflexive selection; and rejection of new elements of cosmetics practices. Overall, this research sheds new light on market systems dynamics by theorizing the role of influencers of practices, while extending the practice theoretic lens in more institutional directions.

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