Social media influencing as a business – it is all about curatorial logic

Abstract

The rise of social media influencers (SMIs) across sectors and interest categories is ubiquitous. This is particularly true for lifestyle blogging linking to increased materialism and impact on consumption of fashion products and leisure services. SMIs are mostly defined by academic literature as opinion leaders who are *"frequently able to influence others' attitudes or behaviors"* (Tuten and Solomon, 2014). However, SMIs, as opposed to celebrities, journalists and politicians, are ordinary people who have managed to cultivate a following base on a social media platform as a result of knowledge, skill or expertise, or simply passion for certain subjects of interest.

Not all SMIs but quite few today (numbers continue growing) are tuning passion for content creation and sharing into profit-making business. SMIs are therefore, entrepreneurial individuals who utlise social media to build a business. In branding literature SMIs are and have been studied as intermediary between audience and brands. However, to our knowledge no studies capture SMIs as business perspective. Hence, in this paper we aim to address this research gap by developing a substantive theory of curatorial logic. This working paper adopts a hybrid exploratory research methodology. Data analysis and discussion represent a work-in-progress phase of this study.

Introduction

The rise of social media influencers (SMIs) across sectors and interest categories is ubiquitous. This is particularly true for lifestyle blogging linking to increased materialism and impact on consumption of fashion products and leisure services. SMIs are mostly defined by academic literature as opinion leaders who are *"frequently able to influence others' attitudes or behaviors"* (Tuten and Solomon, 2014). However, SMIs, as opposed to celebrities, journalists and politicians, are ordinary people who have managed to cultivate a following base on a social media platform as a result of knowledge, skill or expertise, or simply passion for certain subjects of interest.

Not all SMIs but quite few today (numbers continue growing) are tuning passion for content creation and sharing into profit-making business. SMIs are therefore, entrepreneurial individuals who utlise social media to build a business (Fischer and Reuber, 2011). In branding literature SMIs are and have been studied as intermediary between audience and brands. However, to our knowledge no studies capture SMIs as business perspective. Hence, in the paper we aim to address this research gap. In particular we aim to develop a substantive theory of social media influencing as a business by integrating two theoretical perspectives within the marketing domain, effectual logic (entrepreneurial marketing) and communitarian orientation (relationship marketing).

Theoretical Background

Social media influencers

Social media is increasingly being utilised by entrepreneurial individuals, to build a business/brand (Fischer and Reuber, 2011). These individuals are using their own skills, knowledge and expertise to become social media influencers (SMIs). Veirman et al. (2017) defines SMIs as content creators who have established a solid base of followers through their social media activities. However, we would expand this definition and add that a SMI is also a person who is able to influence the attitudes and behaviours of their followers (Watts and Dodds, 2007). SMIs develop their passion or hobbies to deliver value to other users and from this gain recognition (e.g. by promoting workouts, own menus and recipes, fashion styles).

One way in which SMI differ from traditional brands and are consequently seen as more effective in engaging with consumers is that they enable insight into their personal and everyday lives. This not only develops a level of trust amongst SMI and their followers but also enables followers to see SMIs as 'real', hence, relatable people (Uzunoğlu and Kip, 2014; Abidinm 2016). These continued interactions and exposure to SMI everyday lives can generate parasocial relationships, where the follower can create a sense of intimacy and perceived friendship (Horton and Wohl, 1956). These parasocial relationships that SMIs curate is one of the key benefits brands gain from incorporating SMI in their marketing activities.

Marketers are more than ever seeing the authority SMIs have on other users within social media (Uzunoğlu and Kip, 2014; Veirman et al., 2017), and are therefore seeking to identify influencers and use them to market towards existing and potential consumers who will influence brand perception, generate interest and act as an intermediary between the brand and consumer. Whilst the phenomenon of social media influencing for marketing purposes is well researched, existing research has failed to look further into how SMIs are actually becoming a viable business ventures. As Duffy and Hund (2015) identify rarely are (fashion) bloggers just hobbyists they are entrepreneurs with business plans and revenue. The question

is what exactly is required to build a SMI business. If anyone with passion or knowledge for a subject could become an influencer with a significant following base and brand presence, why so few SMIs build a successful business. Hence we are interested to explore how SMIs are building a SMI businesses.

Effectual logic

In their 2010 studies Fischer and Reube highlighted how entrepreneurial individuals are utilising social media platforms to build a business or a brand, and how through adopting social media it may trigger effectual entrepreneurial thinking and action. Entrepreneurial marketing considers an effectuation as a process of "moulding and enhancing initiatives, formulating new goals and creating new opportunities rather than" discovering and exploiting (Wittbank et al., 2009).

The effectuation process contains three elements, (1) intra-subjective cognitions, (2) interactive behaviours, and (3) inter-subjective outcomes. Intra-subjective cognitions are about entrepreneur's, in our study SMI's, evaluation of available means and outcomes that can be achieved via available means. In a nutshell it is all about SMIs' skills, expertise and knowledge as well as financial resources and connections. Interactive behaviours are entrepreneur's, in our study SMI's, ways of forming social interactions as well actual interactions, its pace and sentiment. Finally, inter-subjective outcomes are the result of cognitions and interactions. One outcome is the creation of 'artefacts such as firms, markets and economies'; the other is that the entrepreneur acquires or is able to access additional tangible (e.g. funding) and/or intangible resources (e.g. reputation). For SMIs, initially they gain reputation as a result of their brand and business building process, and then they can seek financial rewards and investments. On a conceptual level, tt is prominent that effectual logic is embedded within the SMI as a business process. However, this proposition is yet to be explored empirically.

Communitarian orientation

According to Fischer and Reube (2010), it is critical for entrepreneurs to be embedded in communities that provide them with access to resources that they do not own. In the digital and social media context community orientation is an underpinning to SMIs' success not only in terms of leveraging resources but in terms its ultimate existence. Community, following base is an ultimate currency, competitive advantage that differentiates SMI as an ordinary hobby practices from SMI as a business practices. Adherence to community norms is an ultimate focus for SMI as a business (Duffy and Hund, 2015): relationship building, listening and authentic communication are particularly embedded within the SMIs customer relationship management processes.

Towards theory of curatorial logic

Previous sub-sections highlight one common process that SMI entrepreneurs ought to have – a process of curation. However, following an effectual logic literature, we can propose that it is these SMIs that have a curatorial logic succeed in building a SMI business. Curatorial logic involves content development, management and marketing = hence skills to develop creative ideas, develop creative materials and then ability to effectively manipulate and manage creative content. Curatorial logic involves relationships management (communitarian orientation and establishing communitarian relations). Finally curatorial logic includes authenticity and a reputational capital as a result of content skills and networking activities.

Methodology

This paper adopts a hybrid exploratory research methodology. Firstly, we conducted an observational in-depth netnographic analysis (Jozinets, 2015) of three SMIs' digital footprints. Secondly we interviewed twelve lifestyle SMIs who are part of the Bournemouth Bloggers community. Grounded theory was used to analysis qualitative data.

Findings

The netnographic data analysed consisted of 135 Instagram posts from three SMI accounts. Figure 1 below presents the main findings with Figure 2 showing the word frequency analysis. Images were the most popular content format (93.3% of all posts), and generated the highest levels of engagement (95.58%). Furthermore, most engagement was found in the form of likes as opposed to comments which contributed just 2.1% of total engagement. The word frequency analysis shows when followers do utilise comments, it is done to express gratitude "thanks", and admiration, "amazing", "love". Overall it shows followers react positively both to the content and to the SMI.

Data Analysis	SMI Instagram data findings	Implications for SMI
1. Descriptive Analysis	Images – made up 93.3% of all posts analysed across each SMI account.	The most popular form of content to post and engage with are images. Thus SMI's are best to post content in image formats.
	Videos – 6.7% of all posts analysed, receiving 4.3% of total likes and 8.9% of comments.	
	TTT (The Tiny Tank) – 86.7% of content were photos. Average number of likes per post 1352 and 29 comments per post.	
	Rhitrition – Average likes per post 506, and comments 42. 93.3% of posts were photos	
	CHM (Chloe Helen Miles) – Average number of likes per post 2077 and comments 24. 100% of post type were photos.	

2. Text Mining - Word Frequency Analysis	Across all SMI's the word frequency analysis shows reoccurring words of 'love' 'amazing' 'thank' demonstrating popular themes of gratitude and affection towards the SMI. Towards each SMI there has also been a reoccurring theme of acknowledgement towards their looks 'gorgeous' 'cute' 'looks' 'beautiful' demonstrating the positive reaction.	Followers use comments to express gratitude and positive opinions about content posted SMIs. Overall the sentiment is positive. There is a pattern in the ways followers react and interact with posts across three SMI profiles. Comments are mostly linked to the content but also are linked to the SMI's personality.
3. Network Analysis	Greater engagement was found with SMI images 95.58% as opposed to Videos 4.12%. Most followers engaged with SMI posts via likes, 97.9% of total engagement arise in the form of likes with comments only contributing 2.1% of engagement.	Social media content should be appealing to encourage engagement through likes and comments which will drive eWOM and entice more followers for an SMI.

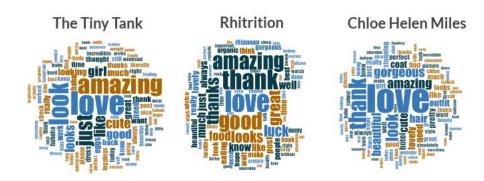*Figure 1: Results of SMI Instagram account three-step analysis*

Figure 2:SMI World cloud analysis

Findings suggest content type is driven by network behaviour of the followers, meaning sentiment of engagement as well as behavioural social media activities (i.e. likes and comments) is guiding SMI curation. This however, requires further verification from the SMI side.

<u>SMI Identify: Profiling Participants</u>

The sample of interviewees is diverse in terms of SMI identity with the majority specialising in much more popular areas of interest, i.e. SMI2 focuses on food. However, one participant - SMI4 - has established a niche focus – LGBT:

> *"I think the main message would be down the LGBT route of advice"* – SMI4.

Nevertheless the profile has commonalities in the sample: all SMIs are females and all incorporate Instagram as an SMI-ing channel. SMI4, however, primarily uses YouTube with Instagram being an additional content sharing and engaging platform. Alternatively for SMI3 YouTube is used to create content and share via main channels (I.e. blog):

> *"YouTube, I do have it but I don't share it to get more followers I only really use it to upload videos that I add to my blog but in the future I will hopefully start using my YouTube channel"* – SMI3.

All SMIs expressed interest in utilising other platforms for their SMI-ing, presumably to create more following. However, in doing so, SMIs risk the duplication of content as opposed to offering something unique for each channel. Thus, as SMI3 highlighted, it may be more effective to use one or two platform successfully.

For all SMIs interviewed, SMI-ing is an additional activity alongside their everyday identities such as personal trainer, student and full-time employment, with some such as SMI2, SMI3 and SMI4 having aspirations to turn their SMI-ing into a business activity:

> *"We both work full time jobs, it is a hobby that we would love one day to be a business"* – SMI4

In line with their SMI identity is their background which entails their reason for starting SMI-ing. What was interesting was SMI4 was cogitatively prompted by the evaluation of the "means available to them" (Fischer and Reuber 2011, p.8) in doing so they unknowingly followed the effectual logic process, beginning at the intra-subjective cognitions stage:

> *"There were so much exciting stuff going on right now that we kind of wanted to document, and we always seem to do things that others around us don't. People are always saying how do you get to do all these things and go to these events? and so we decided to document it"* – SMI4.

Therefore, the SMIs current life experiences and the things being said by others led them to consider SMI-ing as SMI4 knows things, or at least experiences things that are of interest to others. Below it will be clear that SMI identity is not a static phenomenon, it is dynamic.

Curation includes several elements explained below

<u>Content Development</u>

Curation is a complex process. Content development is an obvious element because it is essential to SMI-ing and is found in both the curation process and strategic orientation.

Interviews show what these individuals are doing is indeed work, shown through their meticulous efforts to not only curate content but the editorial and promotional work that goes alongside, yet is often unseen by followers (Duffy and Hund 2015):

> *"if it's just a half an hour video, you are likely to have an hours footage and it's likely to take me all day, to edit, add music...It is a time consuming but you have to have the commitment and be prepared to do that" – SMI4*

This signifies SMI-ing entails much more than the simple posting of content, there is a commitment to the curation process, which is demanding and time-consuming.

Curation of followership

A commonality across all SMIs was the desire to establish a greater followership. It is stated by SMI2 that whilst the initial process may start off quick, to gain substantial following after this initial surge requires commitment

> *"When you start from zero you get up to 500 followers quite easily then you do from 600-1000 because you're new to posting it picks up and people start following quickly".*

A fundamental element towards this curation entails engagement, and if there is a lack of interest or commitment towards interaction then it's suggested by SMIs this will impact on the number of followers gained.

> *"I do make sure I proactively engage and like and comment and reply to people and comment on peoples posts and ask questions. I try to be really interactive and get people to be interactive with me" – SMI1.*

However, there appears to be SNS rules experienced by SMIs in regards to the curation of followership.

> *"With YouTube you get people messaging you saying subscribe to my channel, I'm subscribed to you, there is definitely a follow on follow" – SMI4.*

Fischer and Reuber (2011, p.16) made a similar finding regarding community norms and state "there is a norm of reciprocity and it is considered impolite not to follow someone who is following you". They conclude that those who conform to the norms of the platform have a higher chance of progressing through the effectuation process. However, It would appear there are other mediating factors influencing an SMIs willingness to adhere.

> *"If your content isn't what I want to watch I'm not going to follow you, that's not the right reason" – SMI4.*

Therefore, an SMI will not adhere to SNS norms if the behaviour is not authentic. Whilst SMIs focus may be placed on curating followership this is not done at the expense of their values. This links to the intra-subjective evaluation of who am I? in the effectuation process.

In addition to the curation of followership, the netnographic analysis which looked at engagement from the perspective of followers, saw imagery to be the most engaged with and created content. Therefore, influencers appear to be posting what is desired by followers, what is most engaged with and liked. This idea that SMIs feed what followers want to see was further shown within interviews.

> *"I kind of notice a trend in posts where people are really engaging and asking more questions and so I'll go down that route of post content more often as it's something they are really interested in"* – SMI12.

> *"Recently we put up a poll on Instagram asking what our followers want to see, so we are gauging what they want and then work with that"* – SMI10.

It is apparent followers drive content, even at a micro-influencing level they have a large contribution to SMI-ing activities.

<u>Curation of skills and expertise</u>

Through SMI-ing SMIs learn about two major things: SMI topic and SMI implementation (content, media production skills), from interviews the researcher proposes there are external and internal means of doing both.

The external curation of skills and expertise entails utilising the skills or knowledge of others, either pre-existing or new connections. Participants were questioned regarding the skills necessary for SMI-ing as well as individuals they considered critical in their SMI-ing activities.

Respondents SMI1 and SMI3 both acknowledged times in which they gained advice from other SMIs

> *"One girl gave me advice on things to stop and start, she said I needed to be more active on my Insta-story and that I need to tag location, tag people, hashtag, otherwise without that it doesn't get seen. Before I didn't always tag or hashtag"* – SMI8.

Fischer and Reuber (2011, p.2) state "guided by the logic of effectuation, the entrepreneur…", in this study SMI, "…interacts with other people to gain feedback". It would appear part of the SMI process is the self-evaluation of what they know and thus is a cognitive assessment of their professional competencies.

SMI1 demonstrated an entrepreneurial acumen, deploying the skills of others through having a deeper understanding of their own capabilities. However, Capelleras and Greene (2008, p.320) state "venture creation is often associated with the nature of resources available to the entrepreneur". Thus, SMI1 may be in a more favourable position due to their resources available.

> *"I haven't really learnt how to build a website, I employed people to do that. Mainly because I know my skills and where I'm better at spending my time and I also think I would be wasting a lot of my time if I started doing that"* – SMI1

SMI1 demonstrated their process of effectuation. The intra-subjective cognitions of what they know? and who do they know? led to the interactive behaviour with people whom the SMI knew culminating in an inter-subjective outcome. In SMI1's case, a website.

SMIs placed little emphasis on the personal skills necessary mentioning loosely the need for "*having a good eye*" for detail – SMI3, instead there was an emphasis on expertise around SNS rules.

"If you want to have a business out of Instagram you need to know the many rules behind the scenes that normal users don't know about" – SMI3

It would appear there is a consistent requirement to curate the necessary skills and expertise to remain relevant,

"I think you need to follow with the times, Instagram and YouTube are always throwing algorithms that will cause challenges and change the format of the way you do things" – SMI4

Therefore, SMI-ing demonstrates a need for continual development, and across all SMIs there has been some attempt to gain the skills and expertise necessary to successfully carry out SMI-activities. This is similar to traditional businesses. Entrepreneurs are frequently participating in skill development workshops and training to enhance their tangible and intangible skills enabling them to become better entrepreneurs.

Curation of infrastructure

Interviews have shown a trend amongst SMIs, as they progress there is a curation of infrastructure to supplement their SMI-ing.

"We are also wanting to invest in more equipment to make better quality stuff to get more professional, so later on if it does progress we've got that professionalism as well. So now we've got our first camera for example".– SMI4

This curation of infrastructure as well as skills and expertise it seems comes at a cost. Whilst SMI4 has stated *"there are so many YouTube tutorials you can watch"*, there is still the initial investment in equipment as highlighted by SMI3, *"I did buy a good professional camera but then I realised how challenging it was to use"*. There is a presumption of social media being accessible due to its "relatively low cost" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.67), a tool that can be used for entrepreneurial activity. However, the challenge is in order to stand out from *"a saturated market place"* – *SMI2* entails financial investment in additional skills and infrastructure that supports expansion in terms of increased followership.

Although, SMI3 shows self-development through available means *"I did research online about how to start a blog"*, whilst diminishing the financial restriction it does present a time constraint. When managing a full-time job alongside SMI-ing as each of the participants does, this can create further difficulties.

"It is hard to juggle a full time job and all these platforms". - SMI4

Consequently, there appears to be a continual juggling of whether to invest more time or more money.

This process of curation within SMI-ing requires a persistent and at times invisible labour. It is something that needs to be scheduled around the SMIs full-time jobs and life. Interviewed SMIs accept at times it can feel like a full-time job in itself, due to the curation of posts, development of new skills and the promotion that goes alongside.

Gains

Gains in this study are in regards to both the positive and negative outcomes that result from SMI-ing.

Enjoyment

Each SMI made reference to enjoyment from their SMI activities. Wakefield and Wakefield (2016) suggest that it is passion for an activity that increases enjoyment.

> *"I've always had a passion for fashion and beauty" – SMI3*

However it goes beyond having an interest. Passion and thus enjoyment is suggested to push an individual to "participate in a self-defining activity that includes an investment of time and energy" (Wakefield and Wakefield 2016, p.143). SMIs investment in the curation of skills, expertise, infrastructure, and content move the individual forward to a point where the activity becomes part of their identity and are regarded as an SMI. Wakefield and Wakefield (2016, p.146) further state "social sharing may proliferate in response to experiencing a positive emotion", which may explain why these individuals begin and maintain their SMI-ing, "in order to prolong and enhance the positive affect" (Wakefield and Wakefield 2016, p.146).

SMI2 states, *"I think starting for yourself is a big thing",* and this appears to be an underlying theme towards being a successful SMI. Without this initial passion and enjoyment, an individual will find the curation process more challenging and will arguably be less successful as an SMI.

> *"it needs to be a passion of yours, taking photos here and there it's a lot easier and natural when its' something you are passionate about" – SMI1*

Earnings

Through SMI-ing activities each SMI experienced some form of earnings. *"I received a watch for free, which would otherwise be about two-hundred pounds" – SMI3.* This exchange of products in return for promotional activity on the SMI's page acts as a unmonitored transaction as part of an informal economy (Lobato et al 2011).

Despite interviews showing SMIs desire to convert their hobby into a business, which would entail creating earnings, there is an awareness of staying true to SMI identity. Hence only engaging in authentic brand collaborations (Bergkvist et al 2015).

> *"Someone could chuck me loads of money to write about something but if I don't particularly like the product or brand or what they are doing I wouldn't do something that is completely about the money" – SMI4*

SMI1, alongside receiving free-products, appears was the only one to gain monetarily from their SMI-ing.

> *"I get a lot of clients through there (Instagram) so without having that I wouldn't have the clients" – SMI1.*

It would seem when SMI activity is embedded with SMI profession greater gains are achieved.

Confidence and social media anxiety

Confidence is a positive outcome of SMI-ing, acting as a benefit to the SMI and a motive to continue. In some cases there is an effect on the SMIs focus related activities.

> *"It gave me confidence in my food, I thought OK I can cook something else and try all these new things, and it made me want to keep doing it"* - SMI2

Hence we can assume SMI activity acts as a self-managed and self-initiated developmental opportunity. In other cases there is a psychological impact on self-confidence that affects SMI's personality.

> *"It's definitely built both our confidence up and I feel a lot more ballsy…you just gain this confidence we didn't have before"* – SMI4

Furthermore, confidence stems from there being a "*more positive than negative*" (*SMI1*) reaction from followers regarding the SMI and their activities. This is in-line with the netnographic analysis findings, with the word cloud showing an overall positive sentiment toward SMI and SMI-activity.

In contrast to this, interviews showed whilst SMIs are empowered through their increased confidence they are vulnerable, facing social media fear and anxiety. This finding supports literature, which has found excessive social media use, correlates with "psychological well-being outcomes including depressive symptoms, general anxiety and physical appearance anxiety" (Sherlock and Wagstaff 2018, p.8).

Interviews revealed respondents at one stage felt social media anxiety in the form of fear of judgement (SMI1 and SMI4), or comparison (SMI2 and SMI3).

> *"You fear you're going to get judged and people will think you're self-centred taking a photo of yourself."* – SMI1.

> *"The first few videos or photos on Instagram, we weren't sure what to say, thought about how we looked, what if people didn't listen."* – SMI 4.

SMI1 is showing a fear of follower judgement where they will be perceived as too image conscious, focusing too much on their brand image as opposed to the community. SMI2 and SMI3 face social media anxiety through comparison.

> *"I do feel however, when I post something and it doesn't get many likes I do as much as I don't want to admit, sit and think what about it isn't as popular."* – SMI2.

> *"On Instagram I started comparing myself to others and wondering why my pictures weren't getting as many likes or why it didn't look a certain way."* – SMI3.

In line with literature, interviews show a relationship between social comparisons and anxiety (Labrague 2014; Lup et al 2015). The social comparison theory supports these interview findings, postulating that individuals engage in "upward comparisons" with whom they perceive to be "superior comparators" (Sherlock and Wagstaff 2018, p.2).

> *"I follow people myself who I aspire to be like so when people say to me they've seen me on Instagram and aspire to be like me…"* – SMI1.

Internal confidence and social media anxiety is arguably unique to SMI-ing in comparison to traditional businesses.

Strategic Orientation

Follower orientation

Findings show there is a strategic methodology to SMI-ing. Expanding followership and engagement is a continual theme throughout all interviews, where followers are almost perceived as SMI currency and their gateway to more gains. This is highlighted by SMI3 who states:

> *"There are some apps you can use as an influencer, so I want more followers so I can be a part of those apps".*

Consequently, SMIs appear to go through a cognitive thought process of how to curate followership, in line with the view of Fischer and Reuber (2011, p.12) who state it's "critical for entrepreneurs to be embedded in communities that provide them with access to resources that they do not own". This is an element of communitarian orientation mentioned previously (Section 2.3.2).

> *"I do try and grow my following I think it gives you a lot more credibility" – SMI1.*

SMI1 recognises the value in the development of communities and thus is interested in expanding.

Deeper engagement is a key construct of becoming an SMI. As opposed to strictly virtual relationships, meeting face to face is one way in which SMIs achieve a more personal relationship with followers. As Fischer and Reuber (2011) suggest, these meet-ups demonstrate a higher level of interest in community expansion and openness to engagement.

> *"We've met some of our best friends through Instagram... I'd love to meet more people if we can. There are some YouTube-ers up north who want to meet up in London so that would be good. There are lots of people we would love to meet and have a closer connection with". – SMI4.*

Furthermore, findings support literature in suggesting this deeper level of intimacy and friendship with followers' results from showing elements of their personal everyday lives (Solis 2016).

> *"We live our life we work full time and alongside that there are good and bad days" – SMI4*

Consequently, in line with literature, it would seem SMIs are able to establish a sense of intimacy, which is in contrast to traditional brands.

Content development

Intertwined with the theme of engagement is content development, all SMIs show some form of strategic thinking regarding the content they create, the preparation of posts and the strategic consideration of when to post, all with the aim of driving engagement. Respondents SMI2, SMI3 and SMI4 appear to implement some form of content strategy.

> *"During the weekend we usually have hours of photography and take as many photos as possible of lots of different outfits and different things. Then during the week I can use that on my Instagram or story" – SMI2*

Whilst SMI1 however, implements no content plan, there was an intention to do so; *"with Instagram I do want to start bulk doing pictures"*.

Arguably however, the flexibility of being a personal trainer alongside SMI-ing fitness provides SMI1 with fewer restrictions.

> *"I'm lucky that being a PT I'm in the gym all the time so I have more opportunities to take photos and record my workouts, I can do it in-between clients. My job and my Instagram help each other out so I have the ability to do more content". – SMI1*

For SMI1 the intertwined activities enabled content to be curated more organically, and be more responsive to follower interactions and interests.

SMI3 however, stated they *"can't really afford to just be on Instagram all day, I can only do somethings in the evening and morning"*. When comparing the results from the two it seems when SMI activity is well integrated/aligned with personal and other professional activities, SMIs are much more committed to being SMIs, creating content and engagement.

Furthermore, SMIs engage in an evaluative process with the content they develop. Whilst initially beginning without a clear direction, producing content sporadically, *"at the beginning I was a bit more all over the place" (SMI3)*. It becomes clear that through SMI-ing more logic evolves and SMIs begin to establish their identity and thus produce content in relation to their identity.

> *"I've worked out what I'm about and realised I didn't want to focus myself too much so now I'm life-and-style. I do want to incorporate more of traveling but traveling in style keeping it in keeping with my title" – SMI3*

Once engaged in SMI activities and through the observations of others individuals appear to establish themselves and create as mentioned an SMI identity. This identity in turn determines the content developed and almost a business focus.

Authenticity

Interviews show SMIs engage in a calculative cognitive evaluation when conducting SMI-ing activities. These evaluations relate to the ways in which SMIs can enhance their followership, solidify themselves as an SMI and thus establish a competitive advantage. Yet, when participants were asked questions regarding the skills necessary for SMI-ing, it was common across all SMIs that authenticity is an integral element.

> *"I think main things would be authenticity, reliability and personality." - SMI2*

Authenticity is seen as the foundation to the way SMI's operate, what they post, how they interact, and how they present themselves. However, It seems authenticity has a different light in the SMI context - it is based on self-reflection and fearing what followers would think and how they would react. However, participant responses indicate SMI's make a strategic assessment in regards to their SMI-ing and the benefits it will bring.

> *"I need to engage more I need to give more of me and then it will be more authentic" – SMI2*

It would seem the evaluation on how to be perceived as more authentic is in fact inauthentic. Therefore, the researcher questions, is authenticity truly authentic in the SMI context. Davis (2012, p.1969) research found a user who is inauthentic will "put forth an exorbitant amount of effort, thinks about how others will see her/him, and/or presents an over-idealised or even false image". All of which are behaviours the researcher saw across the interviews.

SMI3 on the other hand acknowledges this "over-idealised" image being portrayed, and states "*I'm never going to post a photo of me crying I'm going to post a photo of me at the beach with my friends having a good time*". It is clear therefore, in trying to maintain an authentic image SMIs omit elements of their life and thus contradict this. However, Davis (2012, p.1970) further argues an individual, SMI, who is "too cohesive" gives off the impression of extensive work on the part of the SMI.

SMI3 began with an initial theme of "*food quote food with the quote down the middle, however it got to a stage where I was just desperately looking, so I felt I was almost being fake and stopped*". Consequently, in line with Davis (2012, p.1970), this inconsistency going forward in post curation actually "combats perceptions of self-manipulated plasticity. Showing contradictions can…aid in the accomplishment of authenticity".

We see authenticity is just a mission statement for any SMI just like corporate social responsibility can be for a business. It is clear authenticity is twisted and used by each SMI to achieve own goals and objectives just like a business doing non-profit campaigns may use it for their own commercial advantage.

Ultimately this presentation of themselves and the management of relationships is with the aim of enhancing their SMI reputation. However, as stated by Gandini (2016, p.134) it is "not simply an explicit form of labour". SMI-ing goes beyond the posting of content seen by followers, there is, as shown through interviews, a more complex element entailing the curation of relationships, of skills, and a strategic cognitive thought process behind each SMI activity.

Conclusions: SMI Curatorial logic

Fitting with the aim of the study, the categories identified come together to build a substantive theory under the overriding principle of the idea of curation. We propose:

Proposition 1: SMIs (micro-influencers) possess, what is being coined in this study, curatorial logic. It is the possession of such logic that enables SMIs to turn their hobby or lifestyle into a business.

Proposition 2: Curatorial logic in the context of micro-influencing is a complex system of dynamic interconnections between SMI identity, curation, gains and strategic orientation.

Contribution

This study contributes to extant literature on SMIs by proposing a different perspective that treats SMIs as entrepreneurs and businesses. It is important to highlight that there are certain processes and cognitive behaviours successful SMI businesses that clearly differente them from these who do not fail in turning own lifestyle or hobby into business venture that attracts large digital following base. We propose that it is a curatorial logic that underpins a successful SMI business.

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