



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Business Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jbusres

Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Influencer marketing
Social media
Authenticity
Fashion

ABSTRACT

Social media influencers (SMIs) are increasingly being approached by brands to promote products, a practice commonly called influencer marketing. SMIs can take advantage of their influence to obtain personal rewards by entering into partnerships with brands. However, SMI followers value influencers' intrinsic motivations and noncommercial orientation. Thus, SMI–brand collaborations may result in tensions for SMIs' authenticity management. This research applies a qualitative approach based on SMI–brand partnership observations, SMI interviews, and a comparison of these data sources. Two authenticity management strategies emerged from the analysis: passionate and transparent authenticity. We articulate these strategies to propose a four-path framework that provides the first conceptualization of how SMIs can manage authenticity for themselves to resolve the tensions created by brand encroachment into their content. The results offer guidance for both SMIs and marketers on how to best partner with each other to build win–win relationships while protecting SMIs' authenticity.

1. Introduction

Social media has led online user-generated content to become a prevalent consumer practice. Social media allow users to develop and share content on a variety of topics, such as technology, beauty, fashion, politics, and health (Niederhoffer, Mooth, Wiesenfeld, & Gordon, 2007). Contributors post on various platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) to give their opinions (e.g., TripAdvisor, Amazon), inform their network (e.g., Twitter), share their expertise within a field (e.g., Wikipedia), or express their passions (e.g., personal blogs, Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook).

Over time, some contributors gain extended competencies in creating sophisticated content in the form of stories, videos, and visuals. Given the internet's scalability and speed of diffusion, these contributors may rapidly attract a mass audience and attain fame (Tan, 2017) through accumulation of cultural capital (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2013). For example, in the fashion industry, several fashionistas play a prominent role (Wissinger, 2015) in the fashion ecosystem, sit in the front rows at fashion shows and publicly wear branded designer clothes (Luvaas, 2017). One such fashionista is Chiara Ferragni, an Italian fashion influencer known for her blog “The Blonde Salad,” which has 8.2 million Instagram followers. As contributors gain

increasing numbers of engaged followers, they may develop into social media influencers¹ (Etter, Colleoni, Illia, Meggiorin, & D'Eugenio, 2018; Freberg, Grahamb, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011; Li & Du, 2017).

With actions that include expressing their opinions in product reviews, offering tips on product usage, and posting pictures or videos containing products or services (Bernitter, Verlegh, & Smit, 2016), SMIs “represent a new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media” (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 90). In the domain of fashion and lifestyle, in particular, aesthetic judgment and taste discrimination are assets that only a few individuals will master (McQuarrie et al., 2013). As such, influencers can complement traditional branding communication by serving as an embodied presentation of their personal tastes and clothing choices. Thus, SMIs are particularly attractive to brands, and marketers have started to develop a new communication practice, “influencer marketing,” to take advantage of SMIs' content (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017; Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016). Influencer marketing is defined as promoting brands through use of specific key individuals who exert influence over potential buyers (Brown & Hayes, 2008). US marketers familiar with influencer marketing consider this practice to be the second most effective promotional strategy (7.56 on a 10-point scale) compared to other media,

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¹ Hereafter referred to as SMIs.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008>

Received 10 November 2017; Received in revised form 6 July 2018; Accepted 7 July 2018

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such as magazine advertising (5.36) and celebrity endorsements (6.84).²

However, partnerships with brands do not come without risks for both parties. Initially, an SMIs' followers are attracted by the opportunity to access content that originates from other “ordinary” consumers, thought to be noncommercial in nature and, thus, more trustworthy than marketer-initiated communication (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). SMIs' messages are perceived as “one of the few forms of real, authentic communication” (Scott, 2015, p. 295), and collaborations with brands may call this authenticity into question. SMIs' intrinsic desires to create content about their personal passions might be sidetracked by commercial opportunities to promote brands or products they would not ordinarily be interested in. Thus, SMIs' authenticity can be threatened by brands' encroachment into their content.

Recent research has investigated how consumers perceive brand authenticity in various contexts (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008; Chronis & Hampton, 2008; Holt, 2002; Moulard, Raggio, & Folse, 2016) including the fashion domain (Choi, Ko, Kim, & Mattila, 2015), an important industry having sales of \$2.5 billion in 2017.³ This stream of research has mainly focused on the authenticity of traditional brands and has more recently expanded to the authenticity of personal or human brands (e.g., Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Moulard, Garrity, & Rice, 2015; Moulard, Rice, Garrity, & Mangus, 2014), including social media influencers. Techniques used by influencers to craft an authentic self-presentation, such as circulating selfies (Gannon & Prothero, 2016), posting original and creative content (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017; Marwick, 2013; Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Savignac, Parmentier, & Marcoux, 2012), shooting videos that operate with the code of dialog immediacy and live atmosphere (Suhr, 2014), or interacting directly with followers (Marwick, 2013) have been studied with a focus on techniques used to project an authentic self to an external party (e.g., followers, marketers, peer-influencers) and on personal branding strategies (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011). However, prior studies do not conceptualize how SMIs manage to craft authenticity for themselves. With the exponential development of influencer marketing, it is necessary to deepen the understanding of SMIs' authenticity management when influencers face tensions due to commercial opportunities. As such, this research aims to answer the following question: what strategies do SMIs use to maintain their personal authenticity when partnering with brands?

To answer this question and provide insight into SMIs' authenticity management, we specifically study the fashion and lifestyle domain, which features a proliferation of SMI–brand collaborations (Dasgupta & Kothari, 2018). Our literature review develops the notion that brands' encroachment into SMIs' content, also known as influencer marketing, is a form of product placement. The review also introduces the conceptual roots of authenticity and the challenges facing SMIs' authenticity due to brand encroachment. Then, the three-step qualitative methodology is described, including (1) an observation of SMI-brand collaborations, (2) a content analysis of the declared intentions in SMIs interviews about such collaborations, and (3) a comparison of these two data sources. Two authenticity strategies emerged: passionate and transparent. Based on these results, we propose a framework of authenticity management comprising four paths: absolute, fairytale, fake, and disembodied authenticity. These results offer guidance for both SMIs and marketers in the fashion and lifestyle domains regarding how to best partner with each other to build win-win relationships while protecting SMI authenticity.

2. Literature review

2.1. Brand encroachment into SMIs' content

One way brands can harness SMIs' content is to engage in influencer marketing, which involves SMIs incorporating brand messages within their posts in return for rewards (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016; Lu, Chang, & Chang, 2017). Prior research has investigated marketing techniques used by various influencers, who could all be considered endorsers or SMIs (Freberg et al., 2011), such as bloggers (Fu & Chen, 2012; Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Liljander, Gummerus, & Soderlund, 2015; Nekmat & Gower, 2012), vloggers (i.e., video bloggers) or YouTubers (Garcia-Rapp, 2017; Verhellen, Dens, & De Pelsmacker, 2013), Instagrammers (De Veirman et al., 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), and micro-celebrities (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016; Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017; Lee, 2016).

Also referred to by some practitioners as “sponsored” or “seeding campaigns” and “organic” or “native advertising,” influencer marketing represents a growing trend in promotional strategies with varying degrees of brand encroachment. In the case of minimal encroachment, marketers simply send free products with the hopes that SMIs will communicate some information about the product sampled (e.g., in an Instagram post). Maximum encroachment entails marketers offering payment in return for a post whose content has been fully determined contractually by the marketer. In the latter case, the brand may dictate specific requirements regarding the content (e.g., a minimum number of posts mentioning the products, a specific number of brand citations and pictures featuring the influencer with the brand, a redirection to the brand's online store, etc.).

We argue that influencer marketing can be considered a form of product placement because it involves purposely integrating brand messages into editorial media content (Russell & Belch, 2005; Schneider & Cornwell, 2005). Although product placement was originally developed in the context of traditional, often narrative, media such as books, movies, or TV shows, this practice has expanded recently into social media in the form of influencer marketing. We believe that product placement provides a framework for analysis, clearly articulated in past research.

Product placement has been found to improve brand memorization (Babin & Carder, 1996; d'Astous & Chartier, 2000; Law & Braun, 2000), enhance brand attitude and brand choice (Auty & Lewis, 2004; Russell, 2002), and increase purchase intentions (Gould, Gupta, & Grabner-Kräuter, 2000; Tessitore & Geuens, 2013). Practitioners rely on product placement because it allows the product to be presented in consumption usage situations and in entertaining environments into which the viewers can project themselves (Russell & Stern, 2006). Thus, consumers envision how to use products or services in real-life situations (e.g., drinking a particular soda while attending a cocktail party). In the context of social media, product placement may be particularly persuasive because followers tend to develop an impression of friendship with the influencers they admire, albeit often a one-sided “relationship,” due to the possibility of direct interactions (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011), also referred to as “parasocial interaction” (Lee & Watkins, 2016). As such, followers trust influencers and are willing to replicate their behaviors and adopt their choices of products.

Despite its effectiveness, product placement is sometimes criticized because the underlying promotional intent may be unclear to consumers (Boerman, Willemsen, & Van Der Aa, 2017). Furthermore, consumer advocates and public policy makers argue that “hiding” advertising in entertainment can sometimes be considered a deceptive communication practice (Cain, 2011). In the context of product placement within an SMI's content, ambiguity often exists concerning the extent to which the content is under the influencer's control or becomes, at least partially, suggested by brands (Liljander et al., 2015). As such, consumers may find it difficult to discriminate which messages are tied to influencer marketing and which are not (Bhatnagar, Aksoy, &

² “The 2017 state of the creator economy,” study from Izea, a consumer research company, is available on-line at <https://izea.com/resources/the-2017-state-of-the-creator-economy/> (retrieved on 11/05/2017).

³ “The State of Fashion 2018”, Business of Fashion and McKinsey, London 2017.

Malkoc, 2004).

To avoid such confusion, more stringent regulations have appeared. For instance, the US Federal Trade Commission updated its endorsement guidelines.⁴ Since August 2017, the guidelines have specified that a tweet, vlog, blog, or Instagram post for which the influencer has any connection or relationship with a company is considered a promotion and that such relationships should be disclosed. More specifically, the guidelines state that this type of content should display the hashtag “ad” in a prominent position (first three lines of the caption). In France, where most of the data were collected, authorities have also developed regulations to ensure that promotional content is disclosed as such.⁵

Tighter regulations on product placement disclosures have stimulated research examining its effects. At first glance, such regulations might not seem desirable from the marketer's perspective (Lewczak & Di Giovanni, 2010). A closer look, however, highlights that disclosure may also help the brand through increased awareness (Charry & Tessitore, 2016). Indeed, disclosing may not generate resistance if the product placement is perceived as appropriate (Wei, Fischer, & Main, 2008), that is to say if “the marketer's tactics seem to be moral or normatively acceptable” (Friestad & Wright, 1994, p. 10). However, almost no research has examined the impact of product placement disclosure on the media or content producers' authenticity management. Becker-Olsen (2003) suggests that although disclosure might not impair attitude toward the brand because companies are expected to make persuasive attempts (Campbell, 1995; Campbell & Kirmani, 2008), consumers may not expect media to participate in such promotional activities. This is all the more true in social media contexts, where followers expect influencers to express an unbiased, original, and trustable content (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010).

Followers, brands, and regulators pressurize SMIs to disclose information about product placement. Thus, influencer marketing creates challenges regarding how SMIs manage commercial and non-commercial influences and maintain authenticity for themselves.

2.2. SMI authenticity

Marketing research has recognized the importance of authenticity as an attribute. Consumers increasingly desire authenticity from their products and brands (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Authenticity improves message receptivity (Labrecque et al., 2011), enhances perceived quality (Moulard et al., 2016) and increases purchase intentions (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2014). In the context of content generation about beauty, lifestyle and fashion, authenticity has also been proven to be essential (e.g., Duffy, 2013; Gannon & Prothero, 2016; Garcia-Rapp, 2017; Marwick, 2013).

While notions of authenticity revolve around what is true, genuine, or real (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), marketing researchers recognize that the concept encompasses multiple meanings, and nuanced conceptualizations of these meanings have been offered (e.g., Napoli et al., 2014; Spiggle, Nguyen, & Caravella, 2012). Grayson and Martinec (2004) developed one of the most notable frameworks of authenticity in marketing and suggested two types of authenticity: indexical and iconic. Indexical authenticity refers to whether an object, such as a painting, is the “real thing” or a true “original,” with all other similar-looking objects being inauthentic copies. Iconic authenticity, on the other hand, refers to whether an object is perceived to be an accurate

representation of something else (Grayson & Martinec, 2004).

While Grayson and Martinec (2004) focus on inanimate objects' authenticity, another notion of authenticity applies to individuals' or marketers' motivations. According to self-determination theory, authenticity involves an individual's engagement in intrinsically motivated behaviors—those that emanate from a person's innate desires and passions. These behaviors involve the “active engagement with tasks that [one] finds interesting” (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In contrast, inauthenticity involves engagement in extrinsically motivated behaviors—those driven by external pressures such as reward or punishment (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and often determined by other individuals or groups. Because such behaviors are not driven by internal desires, extrinsically motivated behaviors may not be inherently satisfying and often involve “going through the motions.”

In the context of branding, this latter meaning of authenticity revolves around the extent to which consumers perceive that brands—both human brands (e.g., celebrities, artists) and products or services brands (Moulard et al., 2014; Moulard et al., 2015; Moulard et al., 2016)—are intrinsically motivated. Authentic brands are those whose marketers appear to be in business or engaged in their craft because it is enjoyable and provides hedonic value (e.g., Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Beverland et al., 2008). Inauthentic brands, on the other hand, are those whose marketers thought to be in business simply to increase profits and prestige via increased sales and market share (Moulard et al., 2014; Moulard et al., 2016). As such, inauthentic brands are perceived as “selling out” (see also Chronis & Hampton, 2008; Holt, 2002; Spiggle et al., 2012).

Research on brand authenticity mostly focuses on users' perceptions, and little work has centered on how producers (i.e., individuals or brands) manage their own authenticity. Beverland (2006) finds that wine producers attempt to showcase their authenticity and downplay their marketing orientation. Likewise, recent research on online content producers, such as influencers, has studied the techniques used to craft an authentic self-presentation (Duffy, 2013; Marwick, 2013; Savignac et al., 2012; Shifman, 2018) as part of a personal branding strategy. Nonetheless, research on producers does not delve into whether being authentic (i.e., being intrinsically rather than extrinsically motivated) is valued by these producers themselves.

Indeed, producers can be intrinsically motivated and value their work due to the enjoyment it offers (Hirschman, 1983). Self-oriented producers follow a production orientation, place more value on authenticity for themselves, and produce market offerings they enjoy, rather than market-oriented offerings that are financially successful. Given that many SMIs' primary activity revolves around self-expression, one can argue that SMIs may also value intrinsic motivations and produce social media content based on their love for the topic and their activity (e.g., creating and sharing content, discussing their interests with others). SMI production may be not only simply a means to an end (i.e., to please followers or marketers, to obtain financial compensation, etc.) but also the mean in itself. That is, SMIs value content production gratification, such as feelings of self-improvement, enjoyment, pleasure, and emotional management (Marwick, 2013; Sepp, Liljander, & Gummerus, 2011). A recent study by Terakeet,⁶ which explored influencers' motivations to publish, confirms that making money is only ranked fourth and that influencers are motivated more by using publishing as a creative outlet, as a way to connect with people, and as a means to journal their day-to-day life. Thus, SMIs authenticity would be highly important, not just as part of a personal branding technique, but

⁴ “The FTC's Endorsement Guides: What People Are Asking,” FTC website: <https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/ftcs-endorsement-guides-what-people-are-asking#productplacements> (retrieved from the Internet on 11/08/17).

⁵ Article L121-1-1 of the consumer code, Legifrance website, public service for the dissemination of law via the internet: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCodeArticle.do?idArticle=LEGIARTI000019293654&cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006069565> (retrieved from the Internet on 11/08/17).

⁶ “Win in Search with Effective (+ unpaid) Influencer Marketing Campaigns,” study from Terakeet, an influencer marketing company available on-line at the following address: <https://www.slideshare.net/MatthewRaven2/win-in-search-with-effective-unpaid-influencer-marketing-campaigns-80785239> (slides presented at the Influencer Marketing Days conference in New York on September 25th–26th 2017 and retrieved from the internet on 11/05/2017).

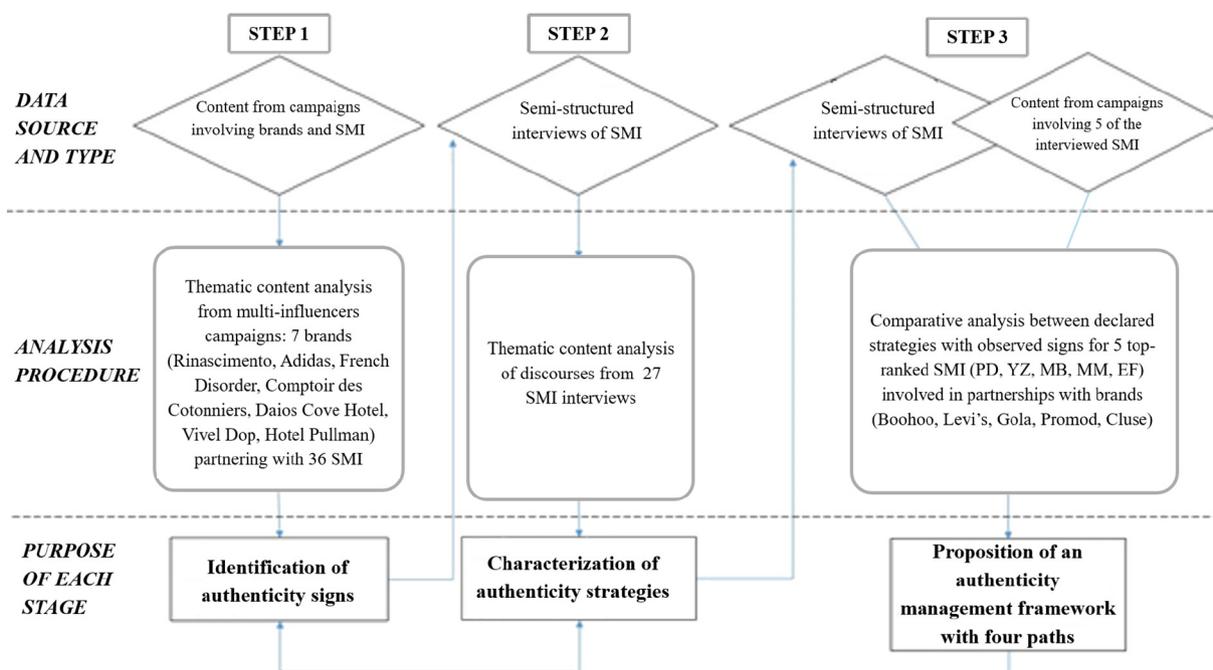


Fig. 1. Research design and analytical approach for study of SMIs' authenticity.

also for themselves.

Brand encroachment into an SMI's content might compromise this authenticity. SMIs might encounter a tension between creating content that satisfies their inner needs and creating content that satisfies the brands with which they partner. Using a qualitative approach, we aim at providing a clear framework of authenticity management, linking SMIs' produced content to the strategies they stated.

3. Methodology

This research uses a qualitative methodology, including non-participative observations of SMI–brand collaborations and semi-directive interviews with SMIs. We chose this method because the study of individual strategies and their implementation calls for an in-depth analysis of produced content, practices, and perspectives, which are better captured through a qualitative approach. We thus follow three steps to progressively identify authenticity signs (Step 1), characterize authenticity strategies (Step 2), and propose a framework of authenticity management (Step 3). Fig. 1 synthesizes the methodological approach. Our investigations focus on the context of fashion and lifestyle because it is one of the most successful and visible domains of digital production (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Marwick, 2013), resulting in large investments in influencer marketing (Kim & Ko, 2012).

3.1. Step 1: “On-stage” influencers' authenticity signs

Because it constitutes the more visible traces of authenticity production, we first observed signs of authenticity in the content produced by SMIs when they partner with brands.

To constitute our sample, we applied three criteria to select online marketing campaigns involving SMI–brand collaborations: (1) the campaign must be recent (launched between May 2015 and June 2016); (2) the campaign must involve a partner brand established in the fashion or lifestyle domains; and (3) the campaign must involve a brand that partnered with more than one influencer. We purposely chose multi-influencers campaigns (i.e., several influencers collaborate with the same partner brand for the same marketing campaign) for two reasons. First, each SMI–brand collaboration can then be probed separately and compared with the others. Second, when multiple

influencers are involved simultaneously with the same partner brand, their need to manage their authenticity is particularly prominent because the possibility exists that followers will compare one influencer's sponsored post with that of another influencer for the same campaign.

This selection process yielded a sample of seven marketing campaigns involving seven different partner brands in the fashion and lifestyle domains and 36 influencers. The profiles of the brands and the SMIs involved (anonymous names and number of followers) in these campaigns are detailed in Fig. 2.

Subsequently, in order to find posts produced for the selected seven marketing campaigns, we systematically searched for occurrences of the partner brands' names in the content of the 36 influencers on different platforms (i.e., Instagram, Facebook, Blogs, YouTube, Twitter, and Pinterest). This usually entailed 30 to 50 posts per campaign. Total downloaded texts from the 36 influencers amounted to more than 5000 words.

In order to convert the SMI-produced content related to signs of authenticity into meaningful units, a thematic content analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was first conducted using a framework originally developed in the context of celebrity authenticity, highlighting the role of intrinsic motivations in building an authentic self (Moulard et al., 2015).

To categorize the content using this framework, an independent, iterative approach was used, and the analysis switched between examining each SMI post in depth versus examining a cross-section of several posts from the same SMI together with comparing posts from several SMIs at once. After successive readings and discussions among researchers, it appeared that part of the content analyzed corresponded with intrinsic motivations. However, unexpected findings were also considered, which allowed new themes to be identified inductively in the data. Indeed, in addition to signs regarding whether SMIs are intrinsically passionate, other authenticity signs emerged. Researchers assigned a special code to these new components, which they subsequently analyzed for the naming process. Then, findings were compared to finally obtain a coherent coding structure of authenticity signs.

3.2. Step 2: “Behind-the-scenes” influencers' authenticity strategies

Because authenticity signs produced by SMIs may not completely

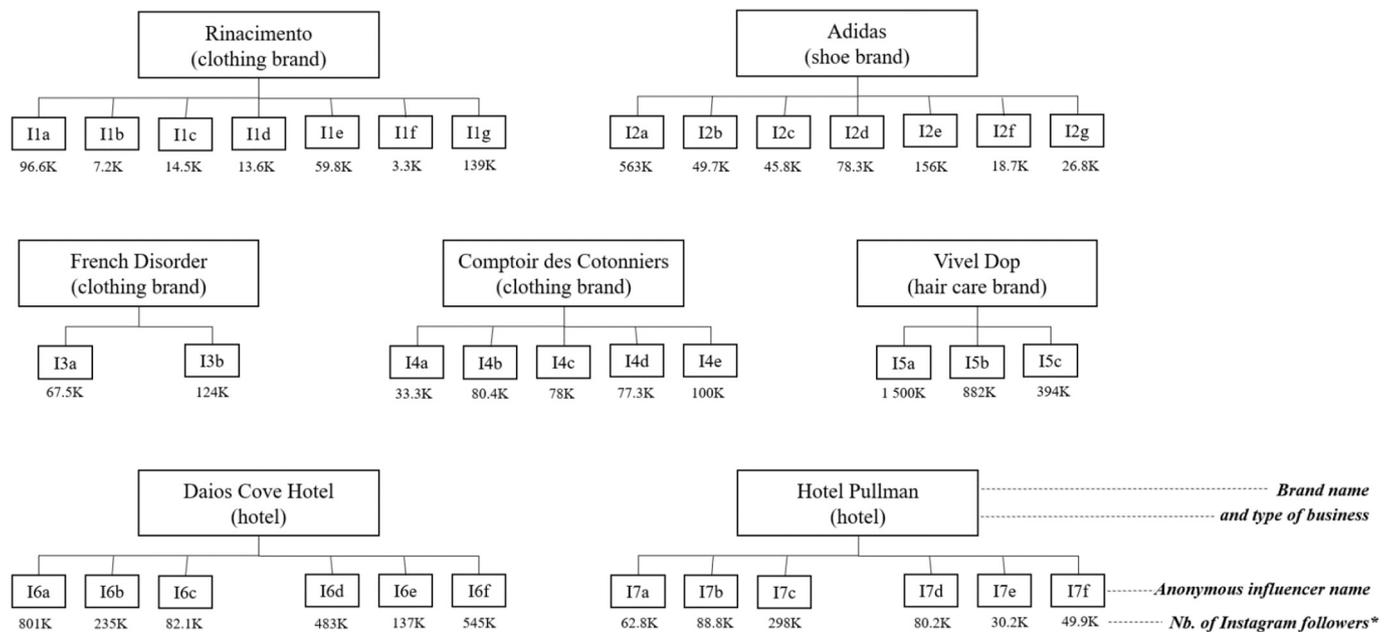


Fig. 2. Multi-influencers marketing campaigns selected for Step 1.

reflect their intentions, observational data were complemented with interviews of 27 influencers (Appendix A) in order to capture “behind-the-scenes” authenticity strategies.

Interviewees were selected using two main criteria: (1) the SMI's main area of interest must revolve around fashion, even though other subjects could be present (e.g., food, travel, lifestyle); and (2) the SMI must have previous personal experiences of partnering with brands. Among the SMIs who met these criteria, we ensured that the SMIs encompassed a range of audience sizes (from less than 1000 Instagram followers to more than 100,000) and experience (from those who started a few months ago to experienced influencers who started 4 to 5 years before the interview).

To subsequently recruit SMIs who corresponded to the above profile, we relied on either contacting acquaintances from authors' professional network (e.g., community or product managers who work with SMIs) or on directly emailing SMIs. About 100 requests for interviews were sent via email, which resulted in obtaining the first 15 participants. These first interviewees subsequently provided contact with other influencers, who the authors then contacted. After 27 interviews, authors did not interview more participants because point of saturation was reached, with additional informants providing no new information (McCracken, 1988).

During the discussions, participants were questioned about their perspective of being an influencer, their audience, and their relationships with brands. More specifically, we asked them to describe recent collaborations with brands. Respondents then focused on how they view brand encroachment in their content and reflected on their strategy to maintain their authenticity. The interviews were conducted face to face or by phone, lasting between 30 and 150 min, depending on amount of experience. The duration of the interviews depended on each SMI's depth and breadth of partnership experience with brands. More experienced SMIs could elaborate more on their strategy to maintain their authenticity than SMIs with limited experience. The resulting data collected through the interviews comprised around 100,000 words from transcripts of the interviewees' answers.

In order to interpret the transcripts, we used a constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The two main authenticity themes identified during Step 1 of the research were used to sort and classify SMIs' verbatim responses in terms of authenticity strategies. Continuously feeding back into these two authenticity themes, new

verbatim were constantly compared with previous ones to test, expand, and refine the themes and sub-themes. Consequently, researchers more comprehensively established the components of the themes and sub-themes. Two independent coders then coded quotes from interviews into the themes and sub-themes established by researchers. The rate of intercoder agreement reached 86.4%. Then, through multiple rounds of discussions, disagreements were resolved and a final interpretation of the interviews emerged.

3.3. Step 3: Comparison between goals and observations of authenticity strategies

This analytical step aimed to compare declared strategies with produced signs of authenticity and explore the potential discrepancies.

For Step 3, five top-ranked SMIs, i.e., those with a high number of Instagram followers, were selected from the 27 SMIs interviewed in Step 2. Their influence creates more opportunities for partnering with well-known brands, which in turn might cause the SMIs to face intense tensions and develop sophisticated strategies to maintain their authenticity. How these SMIs develop and implement strategies might be of particular interest to better understand authenticity management.

For each of the five selected SMIs, we then searched for one of their recent marketing campaigns in which they partnered with a fashion brand (list in Appendix B) and collected the online content they produced for the purpose of these marketing campaigns.

We analyzed jointly the declared strategy (from SMI interviews) and signs of authenticity (from SMI content produced online). In the light of strategies identified in Step 2, we checked the extent to which their claimed “behind the scene” intentions are manifested in the “on-stage” content produced. By doing so, we highlight challenges of brand encroachment into influencer's content and propose a framework of authenticity management.

4. Interpretive findings

The results follow the three-step methodology conducted. After identification of authenticity signs (Section 4.1.), we characterize authenticity strategies declared (Section 4.2). It is followed by a proposition of a framework of authenticity management (Section 4.3.) based on a comparison between the declared strategies and the authenticity

signs.

4.1. Identification of authenticity signs in SMIs' content

Authenticity was observable within SMIs' content through elements expressing creativity such as original pictures, text, and the occasional video. Content typically takes the form of a mini-story linking the influencer's life with the product or service promoted. In addition, messages generally encompass both factual information about the product or service and an emotional dimension about how the SMI relates to the brand and experience of producing the content. A further analysis of the content converged on several distinct signs of authenticity, as follows.

- Intrinsic satisfaction in producing and sharing posts. This type of content includes words and stylistic punctuation, such as exclamation marks, capital words, and even occasional emoticons. For instance, I6c mentions, "A magical shoot is finishing. [...] A team of girls at the top. It is thanks to you that I can go through such experiences, so THANK YOU!!!! And now, SO impatient to see the results; I am so excited to share this project with you!!!" (VivelDop). Also, I4e writes, "Party Time!! 🎉🎉 ready for partying this weekend! I have found the ideal outfit with @comptoirdescotonniers ♡ we did a great shooting between girls photographed by my @Lyloutte and I love the result, as usual 😊" (Comptoir des Cotonniers). Content includes demonstrations of excitement and pleasure. Satisfaction derived from creating or sharing content can be associated with intrinsic sources of motivation for the role of influencer.

- Emotions triggered by the product or service presented. The content's verbs and nouns specifically express positive emotions, personal appreciation, and enthusiasm for the brand's products and services. Participant I1f shares, "I am an ultra fan and I now wear it every day! I am truly thankful to Rinascimento—it is a very nice discovery. The dress is made out of a thick fabric, which creates a nice shape. The node in the back is a very feminine touch. I wanted thus to wear it in a very girly manner. I really think you will like the look" (Rinascimento). The content portrays how the influencer truly feels when using or wearing the brand and how she is intrinsically motivated to use and wear it.
- Fit between oneself and the product or service presented. The content incorporates elements related to personal tastes and interests. I4a explains, "You know me—sometimes I adopt a bohemian style and sometimes an urban one. When I picked the dress, I decided to put on the urban style [...]. It seems that this dress was designed for me, this is exactly what I look for when I want to dress well and be comfortable until the end of the night. When I want to party, this dress is the first thing that comes to mind. Associating easiness and style, I feel really good and so much myself! And feeling myself is essential for self-confidence" (Comptoir des Cotonniers). By explaining how the attire fits her personal preferences, the influencer expresses the match between the brand and her style, tastes, or personal interests. This congruence generates an intrinsic motivation to adopt the brand.

The content analysis also revealed other signs of authenticity that did not pertain to expressions of enthusiasm or personal enjoyment:

- Fact-based opinions about the product or service. The content provides precise objective information on the brand and its offerings. I2a details, "I wear the shoes while exercising and while walking around the city. When I have a long day ahead of me, I do not hesitate to choose these shoes. I've worn them for running, fitness room training, walking for a long time... the shoes have been perfect every single time. However, for running, these shoes remain really adapted for non-professional runners only" (Adidas). The content presents detail on how, when, and where the product was tested and the observed outcomes of the experience. Such objective accounts of performance and quality can be associated with sharing an honest, unbiased opinion.
- Disclosure of product placement contractual terms. The content

reveals information about the collaboration with the brand. I7b reports "A few days before my birthday, I received an email: I was offered to spend 24 hours at the Pullman Marseille to experience the Mermaid classes and the Yoga Paddle. I could not miss such an opportunity [...]. An enormous thank you to Accor for these 24 hours and this MAGIC birthday!" (Pullman Hotel). The influencer explains the partnership context by offering information regarding how the brand initiated contact and the offered rewards. Moreover, I1a discloses commercial ties at the bottom of her page for the Rinascimento campaign: "Leather jacket Vero Moda (partnership); Rinascimento dress (offered); Sarenza boots (partnership)."

Based on this first step of content analysis, we concluded that "on-stage" signs of authenticity revolve around expression of intrinsic motivations (satisfaction, emotions, and fit) as well as the expression of integrity (disclosure of partnership terms and fact-based information). As such, our analysis of "on-stage" SMI posts in the context of marketing campaigns can be tied to past research on self-presentation, which highlights the use of signs of authenticity (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006).

To understand intentions behind the produced content, we wanted to go "behind-the-scenes" and interview influencers regarding their authenticity strategies.

4.2. Characterization of SMIs' authenticity strategies

Behind authenticity signs observed in the online content, interviews allow for characterization of SMIs' strategies of authenticity. Precisely, strategies could be organized as those that pertain to passion and those that pertain to transparency.

4.2.1. Managing authenticity through passion

The first strategy revolves around expressing one's passions. It begins with a willingness to apply specific guidelines regarding the partnership process.

- Partnerships must guarantee mutual respect and balanced relationships. SMIs state their expectations regarding the terms of the marketing campaign. For example, BB requires that "what a brand offers me must be equitable, I must also have my fair share, a real win-win exchange. Depending on what is requested from me, I adjust my conditions." Moreover, the marketing approach must ensure a human and personalized relationship. MB explains, that she expects brands to show an interest in her blog: "When a brand contacts me, I first look at how the email begins. If the header begins with 'Hello,' 'Dear blogger,' 'Dear [blog name],' I do not even read the rest. I delete it immediately. My name is MB and if you follow my blog, you know it." SMIs highlight that human relationships are built through partnerships. Because influencers communicate with brand representatives (CMOs, brand managers, etc.) on a daily basis, they have established contract and communications norms and expect potential brand partners to respect them.
- Partnership must guarantee freedom of creative expression. To justify willingness to partner with a brand, CR declares, "I had free rein! I was able to do everything I wanted." Similarly, an overly-binding commitment is a reason to refuse a partnership. For example, NB stated, "I was asked for a 400-word article with 10 keywords including the name of the shop in the title and the inclusion of their banner ads on my blog for 15 days [...]. I, of course, refused." In an environment where influencers can compete for followers, part of the added value that influencers offer is their tailored and personal messages. Brands that are perceived as overly prescriptive may result in the SMI's rejection of the proposed partnership.

Selecting partnerships also supposes using criteria to choose partner brands.

- Brand and products must be appreciated, and choice of a partner brand could be either passive or active. When brands contact influencers for partnerships, many influencers apply selection criteria. For example, MM declared, *“I never contact brands! I do not work that way. I only work with people or brands that I like.”* However, some interviewees also reported that they sometimes initiate contact with brands they like. As EF explained, *“I regularly approach emerging designers and craftsmen directly. But only when I sincerely appreciate their work.”* In the end, influencers' brand choice results from ideas generated by SMIs as well as from partnership opportunities. For instance, AP describes her sources of inspiration in terms of both individual initiatives and suggestions from brands *“Sometimes I just call my boyfriend because I have no idea what to put on my evening post, and I ask him to check if we could visit a castle in the afternoon. And we are visiting a castle, ha ha! It also depends on the partnership proposals we receive. Yesterday, we were invited to a gastronomic restaurant, and I will surely post something about this experience. We receive a lot of partnership demands and select between opportunities.”* Careful partnership selection ensures intrinsic satisfaction with the activity.
- The partnered brand must fit with SMI's style, image, and editorial content. Participants shared several points regarding their vigilant daily management of partnerships. FC explains, *“I always pay attention that the campaign message is aligned with my editorial content. I will not talk about a brand which has nothing to do with me. I always ask myself: Would it interest me if I did not have a blog? Would I buy it?”* AP justifies rejecting partnerships in the following terms *“The brand Boohoo asked me to become its ambassador, and at first glance I was really excited to receive products throughout the year. But in the end, I refused because I thought that it would not fit me [...] it was not congruent with my image.”* PD also revealed challenges of including herself in pictures with certain brands *“I try to estimate if the collaboration would be natural and whether it would fit with my image, as well as if the shooting would not be too difficult.”* These statements reflect a desire to avoid doing things one would not do without commercial ties or promoting a brand that does not fit. SMIs also pay attention to their ability to imagine and produce creative content around the partnered product or service.

4.2.2. Managing authenticity through transparency

Interviews highlighted another strategy to manage authenticity when doing product placement: avoiding any risk of confusing followers.

- Following practices of partnership disclosure. Although each influencer has different rules, most participants claim to disclose information about the extent to which any content is fully or partially sponsored. For example, MC states, *“I never hide a collaboration. I provide straightforward answers if I am asked questions on a partnership. I think it is very important.”* Following stricter rules, MS explained *“I always add a label ‘sponsored’ at the end of my posts, meaning that if there is a collaboration with a brand, it is always stated. And I systematically thank the brand inside my post.”* Influencers seem to be pre-occupied with being perceived as too commercially oriented. For that reason, some SMIs tend to avoid participating in massive non-personalized partnerships, like BC states: *“It's a pity. A brand that organizes a press conference... It's obvious when you see always the same things [on different blogs]. Everybody knows then that it is sponsored.”*
- Providing objective product or service evaluations. SMIs also want to be able to disclose potential product failures. BB explains *“I try to be as transparent as possible to avoid my followers feeling cheated. If I notice a small defect with the product, I mention it.”* Objective product tests allow SMIs to occupy the role of trusted advisor. For example, CR states *“My community is generally happy to discover a product that has been tested and approved, which can sometimes inspire them for future purchases.”* Thus, SMIs provide fact-based evaluations because they perceive themselves as helpers who can test products before

others.

- Publishing true-to-life unedited content showing one's real appearance and mood. Although it might not be a general rule, a few SMIs argue that they do not edit their pictures. This is the case of NB, a plus-size influencer, *“Another important thing: in reality I am like on pictures. I never minimize my shape, retouch my skin, or anything else. I do not smooth the picture and do not edit anything!”* Moreover, CR reports how telling the truth about her hair resulted in positive feedback *“I wrote an article about my hair dying experience in which I explain how I lost my hair... it was not a cool moment. I hid for two weeks, covering my hair under caps, hats, hoods on Snapchat, and suddenly I posted an article about my new life with this short hair and how to live with it!”* AP criticizes edited, or not true-to-life, content when he says, *“We deliberately choose not to smile when we are not in mood, while others do it all the time.”* The goal is to offer a true picture of reality, which involves sincerely reporting physical appearance and mood without any photo editing.

From these data, we propose that when incorporating product placements within their content, SMIs rely on a strategy of either passionate and/or transparent authenticity. A passionate authenticity strategy corresponds to a set of means that an SMI develops in order to ensure an intrinsically satisfying creation process—a self-gratifying activity in accordance with his or her true self. A transparent authenticity strategy corresponds to a set of means that SMIs develop in order to provide a truthful and exhaustive representation of the partnership and personal opinions to respect their own sense of integrity. As such, our findings reveal that SMI authenticity management requires “behind-the-scenes” conscious efforts. Previous researches already pointed out potential obstacles to pursuing behaviors that produce or reveal an individual's true self (Arnould & Price, 2003). In the context of SMI activity, when external commercial temptations arise, an SMI may have to refuse immediate rewards from partnership activities to comply with self-imposed internal guidelines.

4.3. Proposition of a framework of authenticity management

The last methodological step aimed to compare SMIs' declared authenticity strategies with observed signs of authenticity. The analysis highlights that discrepancies could sometimes be found between SMIs' intentions and their produced content. Facing these difficulties, influencers appear to either combine the strategies (simultaneously or sequentially) or exclusively resort to one of the two options. Sometimes they do not engage in either of the two, resulting in a lack of authenticity. These results led to four paths of authenticity management, depending on how the influencer uses passion and transparency (Fig. 3).

4.3.1. Path of absolute authenticity management

Absolute authenticity management corresponds to a situation in which partnering with the brand provides the SMI with an opportunity to express intrinsic passion in a highly transparent way. EF is an example of an influencer who strives to adopt absolute authenticity management. In her interview, EF states *“Partnership is a tool to be professional, to show how two worlds [i.e. the influencer's world and the brand's world] can be mixed, to allow followers to discover brands or products, and for me to earn money. I try to be as honest as possible in my captions, my texts, and my comments, and I always try to add something personal to every picture I post.”* The interview portrays a willingness to accept partnerships if passion is preserved and transparency is ensured. EF's intentions are also demonstrated in content produced around partnerships *“OK nothing can be as useful as an elastic hair tie but this one is close, or should I say CLUSE, works like a watch, feels like a slender bracelet: right wrist, the ball is in your court. Content created in collaboration with CLUSE Watches.”* There is a consistency between intentions and content produced, showing both intrinsic pleasure and transparency. This approach seems to represent the “optimal”

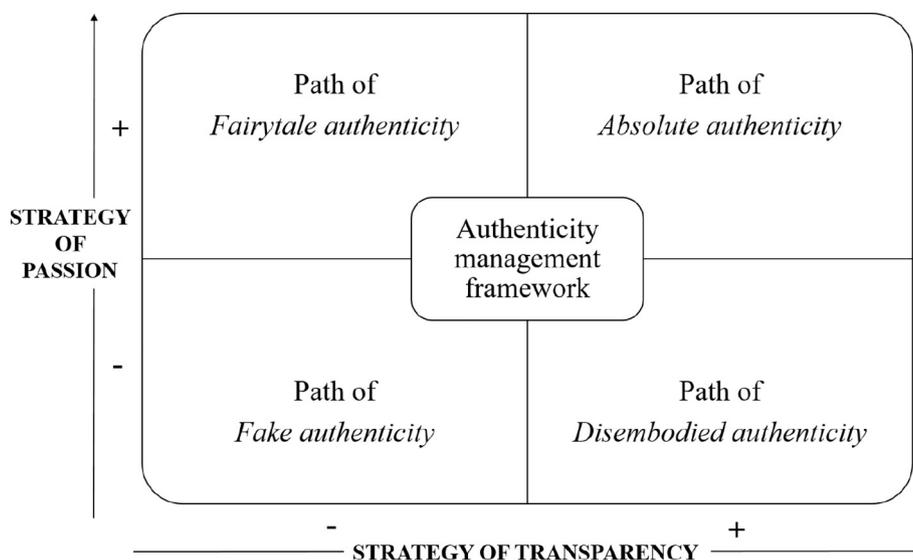


Fig. 3. Four paths in the authenticity management framework.

management of authenticity.

However, the content analysis highlighted that influencers sometimes use either passion or transparency. As a result, other paths emerged, which we detail below.

4.3.2. Path of fairytale authenticity management

Fairytale authenticity management corresponds to a situation in which SMIs preserve their passions but with limited transparency. In her interview, MB acknowledges that for partnerships in general, “products are offered and then I am paid according to the number of links and posts.” For the brand GOLA in particular, she was contacted “through an agency.” She then claims “Shoes are my passion, especially sneakers. I literally have dozens of them which I proudly show off. I never had issues with brands because I always do as I want, it is above all a passion!” However, MB does not have a specific disclosure policy. Regarding posts resulting from the partnership with GOLA, their content does not include any mention of a relationship with the brand: “For today’s look, this is typically what I wear during hot days, when I do not have much to do and I feel good. I have worn these shoes for most of the holidays and they are comfortable but also original.” She writes as if she was spontaneously inspired to talk about GOLA shoes that day, without specifying any influence from the brand.

In fairytale authenticity management, influencers are very enthusiastic about the product and brand and take pleasure in producing and sharing that content. However, the belief that passion compensates for lack of transparency about commercial orientation can be described as “naive” or “fairytale” authenticity. Furthermore, constant, consistent enthusiasm for every single brand mentioned could raise questions about whether SMIs can be always very excited about each partnership and whether they are exaggerating their passion.

4.3.3. Path of disembodied authenticity management

Disembodied authenticity management corresponds to a situation in which SMIs transparently disclose partnerships with brands, yet they do not express passion. For example, PD describes her collaborations in an opportunistic manner “Partnerships bring me a lot! Gifts, the opportunity to test new brands and products... and clothes that allow me to create variety and renewal of my blog content and get regular updates [...] I can get additional visibility.” Latter in the interview, she admitted her commercial orientation, “I did some collaborations that were not really for me.” Also, in her content during a collaboration with Boohoo, PD writes “As you may surely know, Paris Fashion Week is now on and all the Fashionistas are running to admire the most beautiful shows of the creative designers. The e-

shop from Boohoo has given me an interesting challenge: compose a complete outfit around ‘First row of the Fashion shows of PFW.’ To make things harder, the outfit had to include a dress and a piece of suede. I paired a Bordeaux dress and a nice pair of boots. So challenge met?” The description does not include emotions nor references pleasure or interest, thus adopting a distant and cold approach that abstains from imbuing the content with personal feelings.

Disembodied management can be associated with a commercial approach without passion. The risk of this approach is that influencers’ content may not be very creative and may not generate enthusiasm among followers.

4.3.4. Path of fake authenticity management

Fake authenticity management corresponds to a situation in which SMIs neither disclose their partnerships nor express any intrinsic passion. A few influencers could be considered as faking authenticity. In her interview, MM revealed, “I had to write an article, mention the brand and create a post for Instagram, [...] I have a professional relationship with brands through collaborations. After all, this is a job, and one has to earn a living [...]. Partnerships with brands allow me to present new trends.” By mentioning an obligation to comply with brand requirements to earn money, MM exhibits a lack of passion and an instrumental approach to the influencer activity. Moreover, in her content MM does not manifest either passion or transparency: “Hi girls! Today I greet you with a new outfit created for Valentine’s Day. Valentine’s Day—so much business for one date you will say? Certainly a good marketing thing without thinking of single people. [...] So Promod has collaborated with Hast. This association offers an idea for a good gift for Valentine’s Day. [...] It is a shirt made of jean fabric for him and for her. [...] after all, why not, it is different from chocolate, perfume, or other gifts. It is available in Promod stores and on their website for 49€95. This shirt has been especially designed for Valentine’s Day. It is a limited edition” (PromodxHast). MM explains that she does not like Valentine’s Day and questions its commercial dimension. Perhaps because she is not comfortable with the situation, she not only limits herself to a factual, non-passionate description of the product, but she also does not reveal the partnership.

In conclusion, although absolute authenticity management appears to offer the optimal solution for influencers, opportunistic approaches may emerge that lead to partnerships without passion and a lack of transparency. In such cases, authenticity management can be considered fake because both gratification and honesty are lacking.

5. Discussion

Our findings reveal two authenticity strategies deliberately used by SMIs to guide their brand partnerships: passionate authenticity and transparent authenticity. Passionate authenticity refers to the notion that authentic people or brands are those that are intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically motivated (Moulard et al., 2014, 2015, 2016). That is, they are driven by their inner desires and passions more so than by commercial goals. Although prior studies suggest that some producer types (i.e., ideologists and artists) reject commercial interests to follow inner desires, those researches do not link such notions to authenticity (Hirschman, 1983). We add to this body of prior research by studying how passionate authenticity is managed by influencers. Influencers are passionately authentic when they publish digital content that is enjoyable and intrinsically gratifying. Such activities are aligned with what Hirschman (1983) describes as marketing to one's self. SMIs manage passionate authenticity by selecting fashion and lifestyle brands that fit their style, respect their identity, and give them creative freedom. Overall, we can therefore define a passionate authenticity strategy as a means to ensure an intrinsically satisfying creation process.

Additionally, we find a second type of authenticity, which we label transparent authenticity. In the context of SMIs and product placements, transparent authenticity refers to providing fact-based information about the product or service at the center of the brand partnership. Transparent authenticity also entails disclosing information about the contractual terms of the partnership with the particular brand, as well as posting unedited content. Napoli et al. (2014) empirically identify sincerity as one component of brand authenticity but do not offer a definition of their sincerity concept. Additionally, Grayson and Martinec (2004)'s notion of indexical authenticity, which they describe as something that is not a copy or imitation, parallels transparent authenticity. We propose that in the context of influencer marketing for fashion and lifestyle brands, a transparent authenticity strategy refers to a set of means to provide a truthful and exhaustive representation of brand partnerships as well as personal opinions in order to respect the SMI's personal sense of integrity.

By highlighting the two strategies for authenticity management for oneself in the context of SMI–brand partnerships—passion and transparency—we complement past research. Indeed, we bridge two streams of research that have discussed authenticity. On the one hand, past research on self-projection and personal branding techniques established how individuals promote transparent authenticity through disclosure strategies in order to be seen as genuine by an audience (Schau & Gilly, 2003). On the other hand, past research relying on self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) conceptualized passionate authenticity as associated to intrinsic as opposed to extrinsic motivations (Moulard et al., 2014, 2015, 2016).

Building on a methodology comparing “on-stage” produced online content with “behind-the-scene” stated authenticity strategies via semi-directed interviews, we propose four paths that SMIs adopt in their day-to-day activity to manage authenticity for themselves. The paths move from absolute authenticity (passionate and transparent) to disembodied authenticity (only transparent) and fairytale authenticity (only passionate) and finally to fake authenticity (neither passionate nor transparent).

SMIs adopting absolute authenticity may result in their feeling better about engaging in this type of commercial activity. Indeed, psychology research finds that when individuals' behaviors align with their true selves, they experience greater self-esteem and life satisfaction (Goldman & Kernis, 2002) and decreased stress (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliouis, & Joseph, 2008). Moreover, being honest and avoiding misrepresentation has been shown to enhance subjective well-being (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). However, by adopting this path, SMIs must take care to refuse commercial opportunities when a brand does not fit their inner interests as well as when a brand is requesting non-

disclosure of sponsorship to mimic spontaneous endorsement. This consideration might be particularly important for SMIs who promote products that are subsequently purchased by their followers.

Other SMIs give preeminence to following their passions and showcasing their tastes. They believe that because they are not primarily driven by commercial opportunities, being occasionally sponsored is not an issue and assume that their intrinsic passion for their activity and for the brands they promote makes up for not disclosing commercial relationships. These SMIs pursue the fairytale path and derive satisfaction from inner self-gratification and enjoyment; they seem comfortable taking advantage of commercial opportunities as long as they are passionate about brands they promote and do not feel like marketers influence their opinions or behaviors. Marwick and Boyd (2011) recognize that an influencer will “interject her own personality and passions—like music—to retain an authentic voice” (p. 126). However, these authors consider this to be a strategy for building authenticity and thus do not discuss it as providing possible compensatory tools for a lack of disclosure.

Another identified path relies on transparency but lacks passion, resulting in a disembodied authenticity management. This management style might stem from SMIs being jaded due to the repetitive dimensions of their work or disillusion with a system in which commercial opportunities prevail over creativity. Some influencers lack emotions or interest for their sponsored activity or products but disclose all information transparently in a systematic manner. This finding may nuance past research on personal branding literature because it highlights that when individuals manage authenticity solely through transparency and without passion, they may risk losing interest in their activity.

In the most extreme case, influencers give prominence to external factors (e.g., peer pressure, financial reality, fame, and talent showcasing) over intrinsic motivations and transparency. Following this fake authenticity path may lead SMIs to relinquish some of their passion and integrity for the sake of getting more immediate rewards. This fake authenticity path creates signals of authenticity but removes the SMI's inner satisfaction. If only the artifice and labor are left when partnering with brands, SMI activity may not be sustainable in the long run. Indeed, managing an artificial and inauthentic self threatens the individual identity (Yang, Holden, & Carter, 2017).

These aforementioned findings lead to specific recommendations for both influencers and brands.

6. Managerial implications

In the context of SMI–brand partnerships, authenticity management raises unique challenges. Accordingly, we have developed specific guidelines for both SMIs and marketers to manage tensions created by brand encroachment into the SMI's personal sphere. Even if SMIs import some branding techniques for self-presentation purposes, individuals cannot ignore their moral obligation of integrity nor their inner desires (Yang & Brown, 2015). Influencers who follow neither passionate nor transparency rules may fail in the long run because such an overly commercial orientation may lack resonance with followers. For example, the American beauty influencer Michelle Phan explains in a video entitled, “Why I left”⁷ (more than 9 million YouTube views), that she stopped her influencer activity because of authenticity management issues, “*Who I was on camera and who I was in real life began to feel like strangers. [...] I spend all my life chasing after success, only to find myself running away from the very thing that matters, myself, my true self.*” In an activity that is rather new, unscripted, and just starting to become professionalized (Pedroni, 2015), it is important that SMIs implement

⁷ “Why I left”, video posted by the formal beauty influencer Michelle Phan on 06/01/2017: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=8&v=UuGpm01SPcA (retrieved on 11/08/2017).

rules of conduct to maintain intrinsic motivations and success.

For instance, influencers could state their criteria for managing their partnerships and stick to them as a necessary step. More particularly, to maintain self-gratification in an activity, collaborating with brands they are passionate about is crucial. Likewise, establishing partnership terms with brands that guarantee creative control should be a high priority. Ensuring inner satisfaction from the activity might lead to refusing partnerships when brands do not comply with the rules, even if they would offer short-term rewards.

Also, transparent authenticity should not be viewed as a risk but as an opportunity to maintain trustworthy relationships. As regulations become more demanding, there will be a stronger call for differentiating sponsored from non-sponsored content. One possibility to comply with expected transparency is to apply a disclosure policy systematically to all content and claim this explicitly in user profiles on various platforms. Rather than passively waiting for the new rules to be enforced, SMIs can then take control and initiate proactive disclosure rules, thus building a trustable profile.

Apart from influencer marketing, it is also essential that the SMI continues to produce content that follows his or her own inspirations by focusing on freely chosen topics and promoting things that the SMI personally believes in. Creating personal content, opening up to new brands, and sharing opinions openly may allow an SMI to engage in a self-discovery process. This practice results in opportunities to develop a unique taste in comparison with other influencers. In turn, taste leadership also creates distinction, which can be leveraged into cultural capital (McQuarrie et al., 2013).

Our findings also provide guidelines for marketers. When collaborating with influencers for marketing campaigns, marketers should be sure to provide scope to allow both authenticity strategies to emerge. For example, when initiating the primary contact, marketers should avoid anonymous mass emails. Further, marketers potentially can be helped by specialized agencies in customizing their communication. Indeed, a personalized message expressing a real interest in each SMI's universe can give the influencer the feeling that he/she is respected and will be treated as a real business partner rather than merely a promotional medium. This should encourage the SMI to be more confident that there is room for a co-production process to emerge. When marketers are attentive to SMIs' requests and expectations, they might also identify signals of lack of passion and thus avoid paying for purely opportunistic behaviors.

To preserve SMIs' passionate authenticity, brand managers should be attentive to reducing creative constraints. As partnership develops, brands can let influencers choose the products that suit their tastes and generate personalized communication around the selected items. Managers should accept the risk of giving free rein to the SMI, particularly because an environment perceived as controlling can erode intrinsic motivation (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989). In particular, for fashion brands, it seems all the more important to respect influencers' tastes because their followers expect them to express their own identity and lifestyle. It would appear false and dishonest to wear and showcase publicly apparel that does not fit their body or style.

Moreover, marketers can take advantage of strengthened disclosure regulations. Rules can help SMIs manage their transparent authenticity. By allowing influencers to give full information about the products, their opinions, and the partnerships, marketers can help foster enhanced trust between SMIs and their followers. Doing so will enable SMIs to provide informed, fact-based opinions.

7. Limitations and future research

This paper provides theoretical and managerial contributions, the

limitations of which provide a foundation for further research.

We did not investigate if influencers manage their authenticity through the four paths sequentially, thus ignoring potential temporal dynamics of authenticity management. With influencers progressively professionalizing their activities, our proposed framework could be used to analyze SMIs' career dynamics. Probably, SMIs start with genuine intrinsic passion applying absolute authenticity management; with the growing recognition, they might be tempted to accept partnerships with brands they are not passionate about and may move toward either disembodied or fairytale authenticity. Building on the tension between intrinsic passion and financial gains, it would be interesting to empirically test the extent to which evolving from the absolute to either disembodied or fairytale authenticity paths affects the well-being of the SMI. Moreover, it would be interesting to analyze the extent to which SMIs can develop a unique positioning through the choice of one particular authenticity management path, as well as determine how followers' discernment of such paths influences their perceptions of the SMI.

In addition, product placement in the context of influencer marketing differs from traditional product placement, and future research could analyze those differences. Within traditional product placement in movies, the commercial message is produced by the brand, the film director is responsible for the fictitious creative content, and the actor is just executing a script with limited input (Russell & Belch, 2005). However, in the case of influencer product placement, the situation is different because the SMI is considered as controlling, at least partially, the production of content supposedly representing real life. The practice may create confusion and expose SMIs to unique risks. Products placed and used by actors in movies are implicitly approved because they are embedded into a fictional narrative. However, those placed by influencers into their content and embedded into their daily life story seem explicitly approved by influencers as real consumption choices. Moreover, as influencers sometimes provide buying options (through affiliate links), one might question to what extent they are perceived as playing a seller's role. Product placement researchers might probe who would be blamed in case of product dissatisfaction in this specific context—the brand or the SMI.

Finally, although we tried to be systematic in the data collection, this context is highly rich in data because each influencer produces content for multiple platforms. Thus, we faced difficulties in ensuring data exhaustiveness. Nonetheless, replication could strengthen generalization of our findings. Furthermore, authenticity management is a concern for other types of human brands, such as politicians, top managers or academics, all of which providing avenues for future research.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank Axelle Lelièvre and Céline Thirault (M.S students of IESEG School of Management) for their assistance in gathering and recording data, as well as Hicham and Nicolas, the two independent coders for this research.

The authors also wish to acknowledge Barry Babin (Louisiana Tech University) and all the participants of the “Atelier-Manger Penser” from the Institut Supérieur de Gestion de Paris for their many valuable suggestions, which led to a significant improvement of the article.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Appendix A. Profile of the 27 SMIs interviewed in Step 2

Anonym name	Profile (gender, location, age, seniority) when available	Topics of interest	Nb. of Instagram followers ^a
AD	Woman living in Montréal	Fashion, beauty, culture	1451
MB ^b	Woman living in Paris. Seniority: 5 years	Fashion, beauty, lifestyle	108,000
YZ ^b	Two men living in Paris Both are 26 years old	Fashion, sport, lifestyle and culture	49,300
MM ^b	Woman living in a major French city Seniority: 4 years	Fashion, beauty, lifestyle	78,700
VF	Woman living in an average-size French city 28 years old Seniority: 5 years	Fashion, beauty, lifestyle	2621
MS	Woman living in a major French city Seniority: 6 years	Fashion	2481
CB	Woman living in a major French city Seniority: 4 years	Fashion, lifestyle	15,000
AL	Woman living in Montréal Seniority: 9 years	Fashion and beauty	12,600
AW	Woman living in a major French city Seniority: 6 years	Fashion and lifestyle	2029
CR	Woman living in Paris Seniority: 9 years	Fashion and lifestyle	6041
EF**	Woman living in Montréal Seniority: 8 years	Fashion, beauty, interior, bridal and art	104,000
NB	Woman living in French countryside Seniority: 7 years	Plus-size fashion, lifestyle, food	7834
FC	Woman living in a major French city Seniority: 5 years	Fashion, beauty and lifestyle	1546
AP	Couple living in a major French city Both are 24 years old Seniority: 2 years	Fashion, sport and lifestyle	20,100
CD	Woman living in Paris 22 years old Seniority: 4 years	Fashion and lifestyle	5641
MP	Woman living in a major French city Seniority: 1 year 26 years old	Beauty, cooking and interiors	8154
BB	Woman living in an average-size French city Seniority: 9 years	Plus-size fashion and beauty	13,500
PD**	Woman living in an average-size French city 26 years old Seniority: 7 years	Fashion, interiors and lifestyle	78,300
AC	Woman living in Paris 23 years old	Fashion, beauty and lifestyle	1382
MC	Woman living in Paris 26 years old	Fashion, beauty and lifestyle	76,500
DP	Woman living in a major French city Seniority: 5 years	Fashion, lifestyle and music	2142
BC	Woman living in Munich Seniority: 5 years	Fashion, beauty, lifestyle and cooking	610
HR	Woman living in Paris 28 years old Seniority: 2 years	Fashion, beauty, lifestyle	80,100
SC	Woman living in an average-size French city 24 years old Seniority: 5 years	Fashion and beauty	No Instagram account 2453 followers on YouTube
ED	Woman living in London 25 years old Seniority: 4 years	Fashion and lifestyle	597
SM	Woman living in a major French city 35 years old Seniority: 5 years	Fashion	6245

AE	Woman living in Paris 25 years old Seniority: 8 years	Beauty	1055
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^a Recorded in November 2017.

^b Influencers also included in Step 3

Appendix B. Top-ranked SMIs and campaigns analyzed in Step 3

Anonym influencer name	Nb. of Instagram followers ^a	Anonym campaign number	Type of business	Period
PD	78,300	Campaign 3–1	Online retailer	October 2015
EF	104,000	Campaign 3–2	Watch brand	August 2016
MM	78,700	Campaign 3–3	Clothing brand	February 2016
MB	108,00	Campaign 3–4	Shoe brand	March 2016
YZ	49,300	Campaign 3–5	Jeans brand	May 2016

^a Recorded in November 2017.

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