Exploring social media influencers' career construction : an inductive inquiry.

Auteur : Heine, Virginie
Promoteur(s) : Lisein, Olivier
Faculté : HEC-Ecole de gestion de l'Université de Liège
Diplôme : Master en sciences de gestion, à finalité spécialisée en management général (Horaire décalé)
Année académique : 2019-2020
URI/URL : http://hdl.handle.net/2268.2/10762

Exploring Social Media Influencers' Career Construction: An Inductive Inquiry

Promoteur :

Olivier LISEIN

Lecteurs :

Grégory JEMINE

Frédéric NAEDENOEN

Travail de fin d'études présenté par

Virginie HEINE

en vue de l'obtention du diplôme de

Master en sciences de gestion à finalité spécialisée

en management général

Année académique 2019/2020

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my master's thesis supervisor, Professor Olivier Lisein, who accepted to supervise this thesis, helped me define my research question, and steered me in the right direction whenever I needed it.

I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Grégory Jemine for his useful insights and advice, and for having taken time to read and comment my master's thesis. I am also grateful to Mr. Frédéric Naedenoen, who, as part of my committee members, has taken time to read my thesis.

I am deeply indebted to the social media influencers who accepted to take part in this study. The completion of this master's thesis would not have been possible without them.

Last, I would like to thank my long-standing friend, Jérôme Sulbout, who was there to encourage and advise me throughout the last two years. Thank you.

Virginie Heine

Abstract

The career of social media influencers has generated interest in the media over the last few years. Yet, very little attention has been paid to the career of those emergent actors in the research field. Our thesis aims to fill this gap in the scientific literature. Our research question is thus: how do influencers construct their career? Our aim is to understand how social media influencers construct their career, and to highlight the individual and contextual factors that influence their career construction. In order to answer our research question, we interview twelve social media influencers about their professional experiences, most particularly about their experience as social media influencers. We then conduct a narrative analysis. We identify various individual and contextual factors influencing social media influencers' career construction. We then analyse our results in the light of Briscoe & Hall's career profiles (2006) and of a combination of the career anchors models of Schein (1990), Bravo et al. (2017) and Marshall & Bonner (2003). We observe that influencers can be categorised in terms of career construction and identify three categories of influencers: the amateurs, the opportunists, and the entrepreneurs.

Keywords

Social media; Influencers; Instagram; Career

Résumé

Ces dernières années, la carrière des influenceurs sur les réseaux sociaux a généré de l'intérêt dans les media. Cependant, peu d'attention a été portée envers ces acteurs émergents dans le domaine de la recherche. Notre travail de fin d'étude a pour but de pallier cette lacune dans la littérature scientifique. Notre question de recherche est donc : comment les influenceurs construisent-ils leur carrière ? Notre but est de comprendre la manière dont les influenceurs construisent leur carrière, et de mettre en avant les facteurs individuels et contextuels qui influencent la construction de leur carrière. Pour répondre à notre question de recherche, nous interrogeons douze influenceurs à propos de leurs expériences professionnelles, plus particulièrement à propos de leur expérience en tant qu'influenceurs. Nous procédons ensuite à une analyse narrative. Nous identifions différents facteurs individuels et contextuels influençant la construction de la carrière des influenceurs. Nous analysons ensuite nos résultats à la lumière des profils de carrière de Briscoe & Hall (2006) et d'une combinaison des modèles d'ancres de carrière de Schein (1990), Bravo et al. (2017) et Marshall & Bonner (2003). Nous observons que les influenceurs peuvent être catégorisés en termes de construction de carrière et identifions trois catégories d'influenceurs : les amateurs, les opportunistes et les entrepreneurs.

Mots-clés

Réseaux sociaux ; Influenceurs ; Instagram ; Carrière

Short Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Over the last few years, there has been a growing interest in the media about a new emergent actor on the digital labour market: the social media influencer. Brands usually work with social media influencers to enhance their digital marketing strategies. In 2017, influencer marketing was worth $2 billion (Childers et al., 2019). According to an article in Forbes, influencer marketing was estimated to be a $8 billion industry in 2019, and is expected to rise to $15 billion by 2022 (El Qudsi, 2020). These figures highlight the increasing importance of social media influencers.

Furthermore, in many newspaper articles, authors try to explain what social media influencers are and what they do on social media platforms (Kirwan, 2018; Roose, 2019; Stephenson, 2020; Wakefield, 2019). In other newspaper articles, authors argue that becoming a social media influencer is a new career opportunity (McCormick, 2019; Suciu, 2020). As the career of influencers generates interest, there is also a growing number of books focusing on how to become a social media influencer (Bell, 2016; Daniels, 2020; Miller, 2020).

However, very little scientific research has been done on the career of social media influencers. Some researchers have focused on influencer marketing, especially on the perspective of brands that pay influencers to promote their products or services on social media platforms (Arora et al., 2019; Boerman, 2020; Childers et al., 2019; De Veirman et al., 2017, 2019; Kay et al., 2020; Li et al., 2011, 2012; Lin et al., 2018), while others have focused on the self-branding of social media influencers (Audrezet et al., 2018; Balaban & Mustățea, 2019; Cocker & Cronin, 2017; Freberg et al., 2011; Khamis et al., 2017). Little attention has been paid to the career construction of social media influencers. In our thesis, we aim to fill this gap in the scientific literature. Our research question is thus: how do influencers construct their career? Our aim is to understand how social media influencers construct their career, and to highlight the individual and contextual factors that influence their career construction.

In order to answer our research question, we first introduce social media influencers in a literature review. We then introduce the concept of career and the most prevailing career models in the research field. Following our literature review, we present our methodology. To answer our research question, we use an inductive, qualitative research approach. We interview twelve social media influencers about their professional experiences and about their experience as social media influencers to have new insights on their career construction. Our focus is particularly on influencers who are primarily active on Instagram.

Our interview guide is composed of open questions so that influencers can answer the questions in the form of narratives. Following the interviews, we conduct a narrative analysis, present our results, and analyse them. We identify individual and contextual factors influencing the career construction of social media influencers. We then analyse our results in the light of Briscoe & Hall's career profiles (2006) and of a combination of the career anchors models of Schein (1990), Bravo et al. (2017) and Marshall & Bonner (2003). We then observe three tendencies among the interviewees in terms of career construction. We further discuss our results by comparing our findings to the existing literature on social media influencers, and by comparing influencers' career to more traditional careers. Following our analysis and discussion, we present our recommendations for future research. We conclude our research by answering our research question and by presenting a global view of our work.

2. Literature review

In this section, we characterise social media influencers and describe their activity on social media platforms. Following our first approach to social media influencers, we introduce the concept of *career.* As this study is based on an inductive approach, we only present major career models (e.g. organisational careers, protean and boundaryless careers, and career anchors) to identify the different orientations a career can take, which will eventually help us understand the career construction of social media influencers.

2.1. Social media influencers

In this section, we focus on social media influencers. We define what social media influencers are and what they do on social media platforms. We also explain how some of them manage to earn money on social media platforms and characterise their relations with labour intermediaries.

2.1.1. Definition

Using social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitch, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube is now a very common practice. Social media platforms enable users to publish and share user-generated content about many topics, such as beauty, lifestyle, fitness, gaming, health, ecology, technology, or politics. In 2019, approximately 2.95 billion people were using social media platforms across the world (Clement, 2020). As Audrezet et al. (2018) note, some users have particularly developed their content over time, in the form of videos, stories and pictures, on different platforms. Due to the popularity of social media platforms and the speed of diffusion on internet, some users have attracted many followers and have reached some sort of fame (Audrezet et al., 2018). Marketers have perceived the potential of those famous users, and the latter are now part of the marketing strategy of many companies (Childers et al., 2019). As consumers spend more and more time on social media for entertainment and information, or to connect to other people, companies have had to adapt their marketing strategies to reach prospects and customers on social media platforms (Childers et al., 2019). In addition to creating their own pages on social media, brands often pay users who have a relatively large and engaged community on social media to promote their products or services. This strategy is known as *influencer marketing,* which can be defined as *"promoting brands through use of specific key individuals who exert influence over potential buyers"* (Audrezet et al., 2018, p. 557). Influencer marketing is not new, as people with influence such as celebrities and

journalists have had an important social impact and have advertised products or services for many years (Lin et al., 2018). However, the term *influencer* is now commonly used in a modern context, in which influencer marketing relies on *social media influencers.*

Although social media influencers are increasingly focused on in the marketing research (Arora et al., 2019; Boerman, 2020; Childers et al., 2019; De Veirman et al., 2017, 2019; Kay et al., 2020; Li et al., 2011, 2012; Lin et al., 2018), there is no consensus on the definition of the term. Drawing on diverse authors' attempts at defining the term *influencer,* social media influencers can be described as being *"online personalities with a large number of followers, across one or several social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, or personal blogs"* (Balaban & Mustățea, 2019, p. 33), who *"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), and who *"perform complex activities, being content creators and […] advertising creators, opinion leaders and entrepreneurs"* (Balaban & Mustățea, 2019, p. 34). There are many different social media platforms on which influencers can be active. Some famous platforms are Twitch, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and Pinterest, but other platforms exist, and each platform has its own characteristics. Some platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat and YouTube are video-oriented, while Instagram is mainly picture-oriented. Regardless of the platforms they use, influencers usually express their opinions on different topics, on products or on services, and share their opinions, ideas, and tips through posts, pictures, videos, or stories.

What differentiates influencers from celebrities is that, although celebrities also influence their fans and followers, social media influencers usually start from nothing and create their own personal brand through their profiles on social media platforms (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015). Unlike celebrities, influencers are *"believed to be accessible, believable, intimate and thus easy to relate to as they share the personal, usually publically inaccessible aspects of their life with their followers and interact with them in flesh"* (De Veirman et al., 2017, p. 801). Para-social interactions, which are *"described as the illusion of a face-to-face relationship with a media performer"* (De Veirman et al., 2017, p. 801), make followers feel closer to influencers and likely to be influenced by their opinions, which they perceive as trustworthy.

2.1.2. The search for authenticity

Authenticity is one of the most important characteristics of influencers, as authenticity *"involves an individual's engagement in intrinsically motivated behaviors—those that emanate*

from a person's innate desires and passions" (Audrezet et al., 2018, p. 559). Authenticity makes influencers look more trustworthy, which has an impact on how followers behave when they are confronted to influencers' content, especially when they are confronted to product placements, which can be defined as *"the purposeful incorporation of a brand into non-commercial settings"* (Williams et al., 2011, p. 2). Followers thus trust influencers and are likely to purchase products that influencers promote (Audrezet et al., 2018).

Consequently, marketers seek to collaborate with influencers, and to benefit from the relationship that influencers have with their communities (Khamis et al., 2017). Influencers' authenticity and relationship with their followers can thus be used for commercial messages and product placement (Hou, 2019). By capitalising on influencers' authenticity, marketers take advantage of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). As De Veirman et al. (2017) note, eWOM has a stronger impact on consumer purchase intentions than any other traditional marketing technique because consumers tend be more influenced by interpersonal sources than by advertisers. A message thus seems more authentic, trustworthy, and credible when it comes from another consumer. Moreover, as De Valck et al. (2009) claim, opinion leaders are perceived as having some expertise in their area, which makes them even more credible. Gerhards (2017) further points out that influencers on YouTube, also called YouTubers, are perceived as being credible particularly because of their amateur origin. Although they have some expertise, content creators are, at least in most cases, perceived as trustworthy consumers giving tips and reviews to their followers.

2.1.3. Earning money on social media

Collaborations between influencers and brands usually imply that influencers create sponsored content for brands on their own social media, for example, in the form of pictures, videos, stories, or that influencers take part in advertising campaigns, or go to events organised by brands (Boerman, 2020). Focusing on content creation, Audrezet et al. (2018) state that there are two types of 'brand encroachments'; in the case of minimal encroachment, marketers send free products to influencers and hope that influencers will communicate about the products for free, while in the case of maximum encroachment, marketers pay influencers to communicate about some products or services. In the latter case, the budget, the content to be posted or other specific requirements are contractually defined (Audrezet et al., 2018). In both cases of brand encroachment, many social media influencers choose to keep their authenticity by accepting collaborations with brands that respect their style, identity and creativity (Audrezet et al., 2018).

Brands usually do not, or at least not totally, control the content creation and leave it to social media influencers, as brands need to benefit from the authenticity of influencers (Audrezet et al., 2018). Although there is a risk that influencers do not respect the image of the brand, or speak negatively of a product, leaving the content creation to influencers improves the credibility of the message, which eventually influences the purchase behaviours of influencers' followers (Childers et al., 2019).

Other ways to make money on social media also exist. In the case of YouTube, videos can be monetised, which means that distributed ads are displayed on influencers' channels and videos, and that advertisers pay a certain amount of money to YouTube when an ad has been seen 1.000 times (Hou, 2019). This amount is then shared between YouTube and content creators (Hou, 2019). Video streaming platform Twitch also shares revenue with influencers. For example, streamers can *"offer 'subscriptions' to their viewers. Subscribers, viewers who purchase stream subscriptions, pay a monthly fee to Twitch, half of which goes to the streamer"* (Hamilton et al., 2014, p. 1316). By paying a fee, subscribers have access to new functionalities, such as skipping stream ads or using special emoticons in chat (Hamilton et al., 2014). Revenue-sharing between influencers and platforms is not possible on every platform. In the case of Instagram, influencers do not receive any money from ads displayed on the platform, and all profits are kept by Instagram (Carman, 2020). There are thus many ways to make money on social media, and those are relatively different from one social media platform to another.

2.1.4. Categorisation of influencers

Some researchers classify influencers according to their number of followers or number of likes/post and propose varying classifications. Kay et al. (2020) have analysed the classification of eight authors and have identified that six of them make a two-level distinction between macro- and micro-influencers, while only two of them use a three-level classification that differentiates between micro-influencers, macro-influencers and celebrities. Kay et al. (2020) use for their study a two-level classification and make a distinction between micro-influencers who attract 1.000 to 100.000 likes/post, and macro-influencers who attract 100.000 to 1.000.000 likes/post. De Veirman et al. (2019) further suggest that users with less than 1.000 followers can be labelled 'nano-influencers'. Yet, Boerman (2020) argues that there are only two types of influencers: micro-influencers, who have less than 10.000 followers, and meso-influencers, who have between 10.000 and 1.000.000 followers. Although the two-level classification seems

predominant in the scientific literature, there is no consensus on the labels of categories or on the range of followers each category covers.

According to Kay et al. (2020), micro-influencers, who have between 1.000 and 100.000 likes/post, have relatively small communities of followers but their followers are highly engaged in the influencer's content. Kay et al. (2020) argue that micro-influencers usually have higher engagement rates than influencers with bigger communities. Engagement rate is based on the engagement of the community of followers, and *"refers to the interaction between the influencer and the followers through the posts uploaded by the influencer. Forms of engagement include viewing, liking and commenting"* (Yew et al., 2018, p. 1). Engagement rate is thus a metrics, in percentage, that *"measures the quantity of responses and interactions that content on social media generates from users"* (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017, p. 1152). A high engagement rate indicates that the influencer generates commitment from their followers, which is advantageous for brands that want to reach prospects on social media platforms through influencers (Kay et al., 2020). Influencers with smaller communities are thus likely to be solicited for business partnerships with brands (Kay et al., 2020).

2.1.5. New labour intermediaries

As influencers are increasingly solicited by brands, new labour intermediaries are emerging, and some already existing intermediaries are adapting to this new business opportunity. Childers et al. (2019) argue that already existing ad agencies increasingly use influencer marketing, thus recruiting and managing influencers for brands that need their services. Other emerging agencies are specialised in influencer talent management. Instead of working for brands, they provide support directly to influencers (Childers et al., 2019). In the case of YouTube, multichannel networks are intermediaries that *"provide content creators with technological, financial, legal, talent developing, and marketing solutions",* and in return, they keep a certain percentage from the earnings of influencers (Hou, 2019, p. 541). Moreover, some emerging agencies are specialised in influencer marketing. Those influencer marketing agencies are similar to ad agencies, as they represent brands and have to find and manage influencers for their campaigns (Childers et al., 2019). In return, they keep a certain percentage from the influencers' incomes (Childers et al., 2019). As Stoldt et al. (2019) observe, intermediaries offer their services, which include recruiting influencers, negotiating payment, or preparing contracts, in order to facilitate the relationship between brands and influencers and to professionalise this relationship. The problem with intermediaries is that they decide which

influencers are best for brands and how their work is valued, thus often legitimising famous and established influencers and profiting from new and less experienced ones (Stoldt et al., 2019). The triangular relationship between intermediaries, brands and influencers thus professionalises the emerging business between influencers and brands, but also controls who benefits from this business.

To conclude, influencers are increasingly solicited by brands and other intermediaries, such as advertising agencies and talent management agencies, to take part in marketing campaigns. Although influencer marketing is increasingly focused on by researchers, there is no consensus on a unique definition of the term *influencer,* nor about a clear categorisation of influencers according to their number of followers, which suggests that the scientific literature about influencers is still at an early stage.

2.2. *The concept of* career

In this section, we introduce the concept of *career* and various career models that are useful to understand the different orientations a career can take; we introduce the organisational, boundaryless, and protean career concepts. We also present criticisms to boundaryless and protean career concepts, a contemporary reassessment of these two concepts, integrative frameworks, and career anchors.

2.2.1. Organisational careers

Career has been an important academic research topic from the 1950s onwards. It has been studied from many points of view, especially in the 1990s when several new career concepts emerged. Career was first defined as being a linear process made up of different stages (Levinson, 1978; Super, 1957). Arthur and Rousseau (1996) observed that, until the mid-1980s, careers were mainly *organisational,* meaning that individuals usually spent a lifelong career in the same firm, in which vertical coordination was the core of employment arrangements. Working to climb up the hierarchical ladder within one or two companies was a goal to be achieved. As Rousseau argues, for many people, long-term employment meant *"mutual obligations of loyalty"* between employers and employees, which explains why individuals tended to spend their whole career in the same company (1989, p. 124). In this context, promotions and salary increases were the reflection of one's career development (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

However, the end of the 20th century was marked by many social changes such as globalisation, technological advancements, an increasing workforce diversity, and the increasing use of non-standard work arrangements such as temporary work, outsourcing and part-time work (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Sullivan and Baruch (2009) argue that these changes have deeply modified traditional organisational structures, the relationship between employer and employees, as well as the work context, all of which have changed how individuals construct their career. Following the beginning of globalisation, many firms were relocated or restructured, which implied that workers had to find another job or to work somewhere else (Inkson & Baruch, 2008). Moreover, technological advances quickly brought the need to hire flexible people who could easily adapt to change (Inkson & Baruch, 2008). In this context, it became hard for workers to follow a traditional career path. Spending one's career in the same firm was becoming hardly possible. Besides these contextual changes, changes also happened within family structures. As there was an increasing number of *"dual-career couples, single working parents, and employees with eldercare responsibilities"* (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, p. 1543), many workers became unable to follow an organisational career path. Several workers had to disrupt the continuity of their career as they had other priorities, such as taking care of their children or elders. In this changing family and global context, the concept of career had to be reconceptualised, as many people could not stick to an organisational career path anymore.

2.2.2. Boundaryless careers

In 1989, Arthur et al. defined career as *"the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time"* (1989, p. 8). Not defined as a linear process anymore, career was rather introduced as dynamic and evolving. Sullivan and Baruch further developed the concept of career and defined it as *"an individual's work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organizations, that form a unique pattern over the individual's life span"* (2009, p. 1543). Again, career is not defined as a static and linear process, but as evolving over one's lifespan. This definition also highlights the fact that career is not only made up of work experiences within organisations, but also of 'other relevant experiences', which disrupts the concept of organisational career.

Both of these definitions resonate with Arthur and Rousseau's concept of the *boundaryless career,* which is fully developed in *The Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Economic Era,* published in 1996. In this book, Arthur and

Rousseau define boundaryless career *"as being opposite of organizational careers"* (1996, p. 6). Arthur and Rousseau further clarify the concept with six additional meanings:

(1) The boundaryless career is a career that *"moves across the boundaries of separate employers"*;

(2) the boundaryless career *"draws validation—and marketability—from outside the present employer"*;

(3) the boundaryless career is *"sustained by external networks or information"*;

(4) the *"fourth meaning occurs when traditional organizational career boundaries, notably those involving hierarchical reporting and advancement principles, are broken"*;

(5) the fifth meaning *"occurs when a person rejects existing career opportunities for personal or family reasons"*;

(6) the sixth meaning *"depends on the interpretation of the career actor, who may perceive a boundaryless future regardless of structural constraints."*

(1996, p. 6)

The boundaryless career is thus not about one's dedication to a single organisation, nor about stability and vertical coordination, it is rather about mobility, either physical or psychological. Physical mobility involves developing one's career in multiple work settings, such as change of jobs, countries, or companies during one's career (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Psychological mobility is harder to understand and to measure. Sullivan and Baruch define psychological mobility as *"the capacity to move as seen through the mind of the career actor"* (2006, p. 21). They give the following example to explain the concept of psychological mobility: Imagine a father who has always dreamt of being a manager but who now refuses a promotion to spend time with his children. He knows that accepting the promotion would involve spending less time with his children. His refusal means that the father cannot project himself in a new position, in which he would not be able to spend more time with his children. Although he is free to choose whether to accept the promotion or not, psychological boundarylessness prevents him from accepting physical mobility (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006).

Briscoe et al. further clarify the concept of psychological mobility by arguing that psychological mobility is a mindset, which consists in *"initiating and pursuing work-related relationships across organizational boundaries"* (2006, p. 31). People have a need to interact with others and to develop their network. This does not always imply physical mobility.

Workers can have a boundaryless mindset when they find it fulfilling to interact with people across organisational boundaries (Briscoe et al., 2006). As Segers et al. (2008) further suggest, being psychologically mobile also involves being driven by autonomy and interest. People driven by autonomy are more likely to cross restrictive boundaries in order to be able to organise their own work. Workers who want to be interested in the work they have to accomplish are also prone to crossing restrictive boundaries, as they do not want to perform tasks that they do not find interesting (Segers et al., 2008). The major issue with psychological mobility and the link between psychological and physical mobility is that they are difficult to precisely measure. Arthur and Sullivan (2006) thus suggest that a boundaryless career can be characterised by different levels of psychological and physical mobility (rather high or rather low). High and low scores on these two dimensions have led to the conception of four quadrants, which are represented in Figure 1.
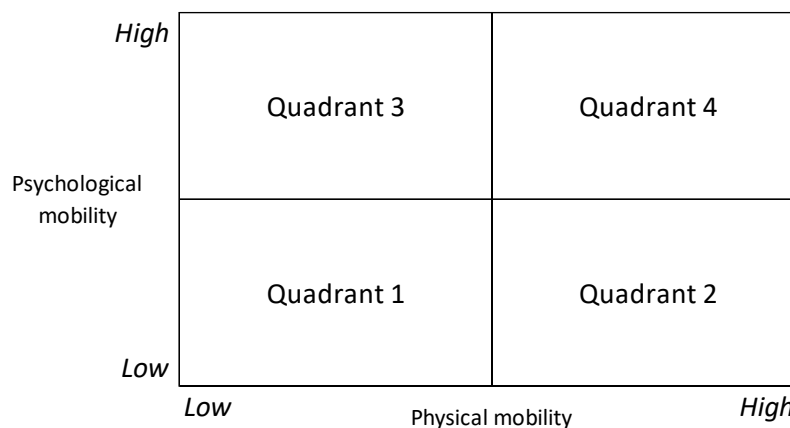
Figure 1 - Dimensions of boundaryless careers (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006, p. 22)

Quadrant 1 has low scores in both psychological and physical mobility, quadrant 4 has high scores in both of them, quadrant 2 represents individuals that have a high score in physical mobility and a low one in psychological mobility, and quadrant 3 is the opposite of quadrant 2 (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). According to this figure, *"having a boundaryless career is not an 'either or' proposition as suggested by some studies"* (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006, p. 23). A boundaryless career should be viewed as *"the degree of mobility exhibited by the career actor along both the physical and psychological continua"* (23). Consequently, the interdependence between psychological and physical mobility should be considered when studying boundaryless careers (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Psychological and physical mobility are linked and both of them influence whether individuals are prone to follow a boundaryless career path or not.

2.2.3. Protean careers

In parallel to Arthur and Rousseau's introduction of the boundaryless career concept, Hall (1996) identifies another career orientation: the protean career. In 1996, he published *The Career Is Dead—Long Live the Career,* in which he describes the protean careerist as being flexible and eager to learn and develop new skills. The book suggests that organisational careers have been replaced by a new model, protean careers. Hall describes this new form of career as *"determined by the individual, not the organization"* (1996, p. xvi). As Sullivan and Baruch (2009) further explain, with protean careers, individuals, not organisations, control and manage their own career. Unlike the boundaryless career, the protean career is not about physical mobility, but is rather a *"mindset about the career—more specifically an attitude toward the career that reflects freedom, self-direction, and making choices based on one's personal values"* (Briscoe & Hall, 2006, p. 6). The focus is thus on the individual's agency and ability to decide the direction their career should take. Briscoe and Hall (2006) further highlight two dimensions of the protean career. They define the protean career as *"a career in which the person is* (1) values-driven *in the sense that the person's internal values provide the guidance and measure of success for the individual's career; and* (2) self-directed *in personal career management—having the ability to be adaptive in terms of performance and learning demands"* (Briscoe & Hall, 2006, p. 8). Protean careerists are thus flexible and can use their skills and knowledge to fit changing work environments (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Flexibility, values, and self-directedness thus characterise a protean career.

2.2.4. Criticisms to boundaryless and protean career concepts

The concepts of boundaryless and protean careers have been criticised by researchers (Clarke, 2013; Inkson et al., 2012; Pringle & Mallon, 2003; Sullivan, 1999). Clarke (2013) argues that there is no empirical evidence proving that the organisational career has been made totally obsolete, and claims that organisational careers still exist in the 21st century. Clarke (2013) tackles preconceived ideas about organisational careers and argues that organisational careers can be challenging and that they can require mobility and flexibility. Organisational careers can also be jointly managed both by employers and employees, as employees can make their desires explicit and employers can consequently try to meet these expectations (Clarke, 2013). While there has been many generalisations and a tendency to depict organisational careers as being 'dead', Clarke (2013) states that organisational careers are complex and can still be attractive to workers. She thus questions the disappearance of the organisational career model from the

research field, although she does not reject the fact that boundaryless and protean careers prevail in the 21st century. Yet, Inkson et al. (2012) further point out that there is no empirical evidence proving that boundaryless careers are predominant.

Moreover, although the boundaryless career concept has brought new insights in the study of careers, some researchers criticise its vagueness. Although Arthur and Rousseau's canonical definition is an attempt at best describing the boundaryless career concept, it suggests that only organisational boundaries are transgressed. Yet, as Inkson et al. argue, a career can cross other types of boundaries, such as *"those delineating hierarchical status, employment status, community, country, social class and work/home"* or *"those delineating reference groups, vocational interests and comfort zones"* (2012, pp. 326–327). To this, Sullivan (2016) adds that the term *boundaryless* is not relevant because systems, including careers, are defined according to their boundaries. Inkson et al. (2012) support this argument by claiming that the concept of boundaryless career stands for boundary-crossing careers, rather than for careers without any boundaries.

Another criticism addressed to the boundaryless career concept is that it can only be applied to a limited part of the population. Gender, ethnicity, and social position have an impact on how individuals construct their career (Pringle & Mallon, 2003). The boundaryless career is a concept that can be mainly applied to western white men, thus neglecting the careers of ethnic minorities, blue-collars, and women (Pringle & Mallon, 2003). Career concepts tend to be based on an ideal type of workers and are thus appropriate only for some individuals in some specific contexts, and are thus not universal (Inkson et al., 2012; Pringle & Mallon, 2003).

2.2.1. Contemporary reassessment of the boundaryless and protean career concepts

Boundaryless and protean career concepts are predominant career concepts that are widely acknowledged (Baruch, 2014; Gubler et al., 2014; Rodrigues et al., 2016). Several researchers have tried, over the past few years, to further develop the two concepts. Rodrigues et al. (2016) focus on the creation of boundaries and on the motives that influence boundary-crossing. They argue that the way individuals construct boundaries is influenced by individual values, preferences and motivations, and by external constraints, such as cultural, economic and social constraints (Rodrigues et al., 2016). Through their qualitative study of the career of pharmacists in the UK, they go beyond the duality between boundaryless and bounded careers. Domains, which *"comprise sets of homogenous elements which are perceived to belong to a category"*, shape boundaries (Rodrigues et al., 2016, p. 672). Five domains and their associated boundaries

influence the career of pharmacists in the UK: occupation, non-work, organisation, sector and geography (Rodrigues et al., 2016). Rodrigues et al. also argue that people decide to cross boundaries or to remain within those boundaries according to their own values and motivations, which suggests that *"careers encompass both dimensions of boundarylessness and embeddedness"* (2016, p. 683). Holtschlag et al. (2020) also state that individual goals can determine whether a protean careerist will transgress interorganisational boundaries or not. Their study on the turnover intentions of protean career-oriented millennials demonstrates that millennials whose individual career goals can be achieved in one single organisation will not necessarily cross interorganisational boundaries (Holtschlag et al., 2020).

Moreover, Rodrigues et al. (2019) have investigated the factors that determine protean and boundaryless career orientations. They explain that social and family backgrounds influence career preferences. Having a large network is a major antecedent of the boundaryless orientation, while knowing influential people is an antecedent of the protean orientation (Rodrigues et al., 2019). In addition, they highlight the importance of self-perceived employability, which is also a major antecedent of the two orientations (Rodrigues et al., 2019). The individual's agency is thus not the only factor that determines one's orientation. Hirschi et al. (2017) have also focused on the antecedents of protean career orientation and have found out that protean career orientation is rather an enabler than a consequence of self-efficacy and vocational identity. Kaspi-Baruch (2016) has further focused on the link between personality and career orientation. She has used five personality dimensions: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Kaspi-Baruch, 2016). Her quantitative study suggests that *"extroverted and conscientious individuals [are] oriented towards learning and [exhibit] [protean career orientation] and [boundaryless career orientation]",* while *"neurotic individuals [are] oriented towards performance, preferring organizational stability"* (Kaspi-Baruch, 2016, p. 189). Open and agreeable individuals are *"oriented towards both learning and performance, which [are] associated with [protean career orientation] and [boundaryless career orientation] and seeking organizational stability"* (Kaspi-Baruch, 2016, p. 189). Personality, social and family backgrounds, individual values, preferences, goals, and external constraints thus influence individuals' career orientation.

Besides research on boundaryless, protean and organisational careers, new career concepts have emerged at the beginning of the 21st century, mainly hybrid careers and the kaleidoscope career model (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Hybrid careers are based on research findings, and kaleidoscope career research offers an alternative model to the popular

boundaryless and protean career concepts. In the next section, we will focus on integrative frameworks, which combine ideas from the protean and boundaryless career concepts.

2.2.2. Integrative frameworks

Integrative frameworks have emerged to clarify the relation between boundaryless and protean career orientations. Peiperl and Baruch (1997) created the *postcorporate career concept,* an integrative framework, in order to integrate ideas from both boundaryless and protean career concepts. They argue that postcorporate careerists manage their career themselves and transgress boundaries to fulfil their work desires (Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). Sullivan and Baruch add that *"postcorporate careerists tend to be those individuals who voluntarily or involuntarily leave large organizations to work in a variety of alternative employment arrangements, including working as independent contractors and temporary workers"* (2009, p. 1555). These workers are flexible, and their career is self-directed.

Similarly to Peiperl and Baruch, Briscoe and Hall (2006) combine ideas from the protean and boundaryless concepts. Drawing on the two dimensions used to define the protean career (i.e. values-driven and self-directed), they have found out that people can combine these two dimensions in four different ways. Consequently, they suggest that there are four career categories: dependent, rigid, reactive, and protean (transformational). These categories are represented in the higher part of Table 1. As Briscoe and Hall (2006) explain, dependent people are not values-driven and are unable to manage their career themselves. A reactive person is not values-driven but is self-directed in terms of career management. Reactive individuals are not sufficiently able to lead their career themselves because they are not driven by their values (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Individuals who are values-driven but not self-directed are also unable to manage their career as they are unable to adapt their knowledge and skills to changing environments. These persons have a 'rigid' career. Finally, people with a protean career are values-driven and self-directed, as they can define their career priorities and self-direct their career. They are able to adapt their performance, knowledge and skills throughout their career, they are thus 'transformational' (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). These four different combinations go against the usual dichotomy between organisational and boundaryless/protean careers and add a certain nuance to these concepts.

		Protean			
	Values-driven	No	Yes	No	Yes
	Self-directed in terms of career management	No	No	Yes	Yes
Boundarylessness		*Dependent*	*Rigid*	*Reactive*	*Protean (transformational)*
Physical mobility	Psychological mobility				
No	No	Medium	High	Low	Low
Yes	No	Medium	Low	Low	Low
No	Yes	Low	High	Medium	High
Yes	Yes	Low	Low	Medium	High

Table 1 - Likelihood of protean and boundaryless combinations (Briscoe & Hall, 2006, p. 9)

Briscoe and Hall then combine the four protean categories with boundaryless dimensions (i.e. psychological and physical mobility), which results in 16 different categories (see the lower part of Table 1). Each category *"represents a career profile that is high or low in four areas: values-driven and self-directed (both of these being equated with protean careers); and, psychological and physical mobility (both of these being equated with the boundaryless career)"* (Briscoe & Hall, 2006, p. 9). Briscoe and Hall (2006) have rated the 16 categories according to the likeliness of encountering them in practise (high, medium, or low likelihood). This rating (see Table 1) is subjective and based on their experience with their students, clients, and other acquaintances. In their study, Briscoe and Hall (2006) particularly focus on the eight categories that are high and medium and characterise those profiles in terms of personal challenge and career development challenge. The eight profiles and their characteristics are represented in Table 2. Some profiles are rather extreme: for example, 'lost or trapped' people score low on all dimensions, which suggests that these people have only limited options regarding their career development (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Another extreme concerns 'protean career architects', who manage their career themselves, are ready to cross psychological and physical boundaries and are likely to have a career that combines boundaryless and protean characteristics. Segers et al. (2008) further link these profiles to Arthur and Sullivan's quadrants model, which further helps characterise career profiles. Each profile is linked to a quadrant in Table 2.

Career profile	Protean			Boundaryless		
	Self-directed	Values-driven	Combination	Psychological mobility	Physical mobility	Combination
Lost/trapped	Low	Low	Dependent	Low	Low	Quadrant 1
Fortressed	Low	High	Rigid	Low	Low	Quadrant 1
Wanderer	Low	Low	Dependent	Low	High	Quadrant 2
Idealist	Low	High	Rigid	High	Low	Quadrant 3
Organization man/woman	High	Low	Reactive	High	Low	Quadrant 3
Solid citizen	High	High	Protean	High	Low	Quadrant 3
Hired gun/hired hand	High	Low	Reactive	High	High	Quadrant 4
Protean career architect	High	High	Protean	High	High	Quadrant 4

Table 2 - Career profiles (Segers et al., 2008, p. 213)

Segers et al. (2008) have empirically tested Briscoe and Hall's categorisation by analysing the data collected by the SHL Motivation Questionnaire[1], which has been completed by thirteen thousand six hundred and fifty-five individuals from Europe. They observe that women are more likely to lead non-traditional careers than men, as they are more likely to be psychologically mobile because they tend to distance themselves from traditional work roles. They are less driven by money and promotion, and more by their values. Women tend to be in the 'wanderer' and in the 'protean career architect' categories, while men, who are more driven by traditional measures of work success and physical mobility, are usually in the category 'hired gun/hired hand' (Segers et al., 2008). Segers et al. (2008) also explain that age influences the category in which people find themselves. Younger people tend to be more flexible and adapt more easily to changing environments than older workers. Younger workers are thus more likely to engage in physical mobility (Segers et al., 2008). Yet, they are less values-driven than older people, which suggests that *"people's motivation tends to change from a 'reactive' to a more 'rigid' career attitude with age"* (Segers et al., 2008, p. 225).

Moreover, Segers et al. (2008) state that people with higher education tend to be more physically and psychologically mobile and are usually driven by promotions, which makes them likely to be part of the 'hired gun/hired hand' category. Individuals with lower education tend to be in the 'fortressed' category, as they are values-driven, while people without university degree are usually in the 'trapped/lost' category, as they often are not values-driven.

---

[1] SHL Group Ltd. is *"an international provider of objectives assessments based in the UK who develops, implements, and sells products (e.g. aptitude test, personality tests, e.g. OPQ) and services that are grounded in scientific research to major corporations, public sector organizations and small- and medium-sized businesses"* (Segers et al., 2008, p. 217).

Seger et al. (2008) also observe that cultural factors influence the presence of career categories. For example, a higher proportion of the population in Belgium is in the 'wanderer' category, which is explained by the fact that Belgium has a central position in Europe and that there are three languages in the country. Belgian people are thus likely to cross physical boundaries during their career (Segers et al., 2008). Moreover, categories are related to sectors. The protean career architect is, for example, more likely to be present in *"health and social work, consulting, science and research, marketing, and the government sector",* while *"in the construction, manufacturing, transport and logistics and in the internet/new technologies industries people indicated to be more 'trapped/lost' in terms of their motivation"* (Segers et al., 2008, p. 227). Culture, age, gender, sector, and level of education thus have an impact on the motivation of individuals regarding their career and its development.

2.2.3. Career anchors

With the rise of protean and boundaryless careers, it becomes important for employers, and for workers, to understand career choices and to identify career drivers. Edgar Schein's career anchors provide a framework to identify those drivers. Schein first introduced the concept of career anchors in the 1970s but went on developing this concept over the years. Schein defines a career anchor as one's *"self-concept consisting of 1) self-perceived talents and abilities, 2) basic values, and, most important, 3) the evolved sense of motives and needs as they pertain to the career"* (1996, p. 80). A career anchor thus consists of one's abilities, values, and motives. As they reflect individual priorities, career anchors guide individuals' career. As Schein explains, career anchors function *"as a stabilizing force"* and *"can be thought of as the values and motives that the person will not give up if forced to make a choice"* (1996, p. 80). Schein (1990) argues that identifying one's career anchor takes time and comes with experience. Although different anchors can be fulfilled during one's career, only one anchor should be dominant throughout their whole career (Schein, 1990). According to Schein (1990), achieving congruence between one's anchor and job improves the chances to have positive outcomes, such as satisfaction and self-fulfilment.

Following his research in the mid-1970s, Schein first identified the following anchors: Autonomy/independence; Security/stability; Technical-functional competence; General managerial competence; and Entrepreneurial creativity (Schein, 1990). Schein's studies in the 1980s revealed three additional anchors: Service or dedication to a cause; Pure challenge; and Lifestyle (Schein, 1990). The eight anchors and their characteristics are represented in Table 3.

Career anchor	Characteristics of the individuals
Autonomy/ independence	⇨ Individuals who do not stand being forced to respect someone else's rules, working hours, dress code, procedures, etc. ⇨ They want to work according to their own way and pace ⇨ They find that organisations are restrictive ⇨ They cannot stand close supervision; they need an organisation that defines goals, but they want to choose the means of accomplishment of these goals
Security/ stability	⇨ Individuals who want to organise their career in a way that makes them feel safe, ⇨ Security and stability shape their career decisions ⇨ They are more concerned about the work context (stability, security) than about the content of their work (job enrichment) ⇨ They are willing to let their employer drive their career in exchange for job tenure, a good retirement plan, benefit programs, etc.
Technical-functional competence	⇨ Individuals who have talent and high motivation for a specific work, who find satisfaction in knowing they are expert in their activity and who commit themselves to a life of specialisation ⇨ They are concerned about the content of their work and need to be challenged ⇨ They want to be paid according to their skills level (importance of external equity)
General managerial competence	⇨ Individuals who want to climb up the hierarchical ladder and have high levels of responsibility ⇨ They know several functional areas and understand how their business works ⇨ They have analytical, interpersonal/intergroup, and emotional competences, and they have the competences that are required to be a general manager ⇨ They want to contribute to the success of their organisation ⇨ They need a challenging and varied job ⇨ They want to be highly paid (internal equity)
Entrepreneurial creativity	⇨ Individuals who have the need to create new businesses, to develop new products/services, or to take over and reshape existing organisations (ownership is their main goal) ⇨ For them, making money is a way to measure their success ⇨ They need to prove to others what they can do, and their motivation often comes from their families, in which there may be entrepreneurs ⇨ They do not stay long in traditional organisations. They sometimes keep a traditional job in order to have an income, while developing their business as a side activity ⇨ Freedom and power are important to them ⇨ They are continuously in the need of new challenges ⇨ The well-being of their business is their priority

Service or dedication to a cause	⇨ Individuals who want to improve the world in a certain way
	⇨ Their values, such as helping people and serving humanity, are fundamental when it comes to career decisions
	⇨ Money is not central to them; they prefer being recognised for their contributions
Pure challenge	⇨ Individuals who define success as overcoming many challenges
	⇨ They need ever-harder challenges; some need increasingly difficult challenges, while for others, the challenge is defined in competitive terms
Lifestyle	⇨ Individuals who want to find ways to integrate the needs of the individual, of their family, and of their career
	⇨ They need flexibility; they are willing to follow organisational rules if they suit their personal life

Table 3 - Career anchors and their characteristics – Summary of Schein's Career Anchors: Discovering your Real Values *(Schein, 1990)*

The concept of career anchor has had a major impact on the research field and has been used as framework for empirical research. For example, Da Silva et al. (2016) observe that the anchor of most people from Generation Y is the Lifestyle anchor, which suggests that this generation prefers flexible work arrangements that leave them time to focus on personal objectives.

Nevertheless, Schein's career anchor concept has also been criticised. The predominance of a single anchor in one's career is not widely accepted. Feldman and Bolino (1996) posit that having multiple complementary career anchors leads to high career outcomes, which suggests that having more than one single anchor is possible and can have a positive impact on one's career. This argument has also been supported by Martineau et al. (2005), who have empirically demonstrated that individuals can have multiple dominant anchors. In addition, although career anchors are usually stable over time, Rodrigues et. al (2013) posit that individuals' identity, social and family context, and work experiences influence their career anchor. They further argue that a person's dominant anchor can change at some point during their career and that *"aging and the enactment of important work and non-work roles influence people's career motives"* (Rodrigues et al., 2013, p. 149). Women, for example, change their career anchor when they have children.

Bravo et al. (2017) have also reconceptualized the career anchor framework to make it more relevant to contemporary boundaryless careers. To avoid any confusion with Schein's career anchors, they rather refer to *career orientations*, although the career orientation concept is similar to the career anchor concept. Bravo et al. define career orientation as *"the features of work that define one's career goals reflecting the individual's self-concept regarding his or her*

self-perceived values, interests, experiences, skills, and abilities" (2017, p. 503). Career orientations only differ from career anchors in terms of *"the multidimensional nature of the distinct orientations and the stability of orientations over time"* (Bravo et al., 2017, p. 506). As people with a boundaryless career do not work for the same organisation for a very long period of time anymore, their career cannot be based on one single career anchor (Bravo et al., 2017). A boundaryless career is rather guided by multiple anchors and these anchors might change over one's career (Bravo et al., 2017). Bravo et al. argue that *"individuals identify with certain career orientations early in their career based on their early work experiences, personal values, and perhaps parental values"* (2017, p. 506). Those orientations might remain important to individuals throughout their career, but some orientations might also become more or less central to one's career depending on major life and career changes, *"such as being fired from a job or having children"* (2017, p. 506). Bravo et al. also argue that only six orientations best represent contemporary careers: *"Entrepreneurial creativity, Security, Managerial, Lifestyle, Technical/functional, and Service to a cause"* (2017, p. 518). Autonomy and Pure challenge may be *"secondary orientations that become subsumed by one or more of the other six orientations"* (2017, p. 520). For example, some level of challenge is necessary for people who have a General managerial competence anchor, so Pure challenge may be a secondary anchor in their career.

Another issue with Schein's theory is the number of anchors. Marshall and Bonner's research (2003) on the relation between career anchors and age, culture and downsizing, has led to the hypothesis that there may exist nine anchors instead of eight. The authors observe that the Entrepreneurial creativity career anchor appears to be based on two elements, which suggests that Entrepreneurial and Creativity could be two separate anchors. This nine-anchor solution, instead of eight, has been empirically tested, and validated, in Israel by Danziger et al. (2008). For them, individuals who have the Entrepreneurial anchor are always searching for new ideas to start or improve their enterprise. Their main goal is to build their own business, which is more important to them than reaching a managerial position in a company that does not belong to them (Danziger et al., 2008). Individuals with the Creativity anchor are fulfilled when they are able to create something that is the result of their ideas and work, and feel successful when they create something on their own (Danziger et al., 2008). The split of the Entrepreneurial creativity anchor has also been validated by Costigan et al. (2018), their empirical research being based on U.S. and Turkish samples. Yet, as observed by Rodrigues et al. (2013), career orientations across the world, in different cultural and national contexts, are

unlikely to all fit pre-defined schemes of careers. Like the boundaryless career concept, career anchors are appropriate for some individuals in some specific contexts.

2.3. The career of social media influencers

Many researchers have focused their research on influencer marketing (Arora et al., 2019; Boerman, 2020; Childers et al., 2019; De Veirman et al., 2017, 2019; Kay et al., 2020; Li et al., 2011, 2012; Lin et al., 2018). Others have studied the construction of influencers' identity and the importance of authenticity (Audrezet et al., 2018; Balaban & Mustățea, 2019; Cocker & Cronin, 2017; Freberg et al., 2011; Khamis et al., 2017). Yet, very little attention has been paid to the career of influencers. Although some authors of newspaper articles and books have explored the career of social media influencers (Bell, 2016; Daniels, 2020; McCormick, 2019; Miller, 2020; Suciu, 2020), which implies that the career of influencers generates interest, there is almost no inquiry on this topic in the scientific literature. Some researchers acknowledge that successful influencers earn money and that they can turn their activity of content creators into a profession (Gerhards, 2017; Hou, 2019; Stoldt et al., 2019), but they hardly discuss their career and its construction.

The career construction of influencers is thus a rather vague process that has not been fully described in literature. As already mentioned, their income sources are varied and include, for example, content monetisation and collaborations with brands. Influencers also have the possibility to receive support from intermediaries, such as ad agencies, influencer marketing agencies and talent management agencies. These facts are a first attempt at describing the career of influencers, but they do not clearly explain how influencers construct their career.

To fill a gap in the scientific literature, we have decided to explore the career construction of social media influencers. Social media influencers are emergent actors who develop a new form of career on social media platforms, and we find that exploring their career construction would be enlightening. We have thus developed the following research question: how do influencers construct their career? Our aim is to understand how influencers construct their career, and to highlight the individual and contextual factors influencing their career construction.

3. Methodology

In this section, we present our research method, our sample and how we collected our data. We also present the method we used to analyse our data and present the limits and biases of our methodology.

3.1. Research method

As a means to better understand the career construction of social media influencers, we decided to use an inductive research approach. Inductive approaches are *"approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher"* (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). Inductive approach thus consists in using raw empirical data to develop new concepts and patterns. We used a qualitative approach and collected our data through several interviews that we conducted.

We conducted a narrative analysis to analyse our data. Narrative analysis is a methodology that consists in analysing individual life stories and experiences (Nasheeda et al., 2019). Through storytelling, individuals narrate their own experiences and the facts they find relevant to share with the interviewer (Nasheeda et al., 2019). Narratives are also a way for researchers to understand the emotions individuals feel towards their own experience (Smith, 2016). With narratives, researchers have a better view on the complexity of life experiences. As our aim is to understand how influencers construct their career, we asked the interviewees to talk about their life and professional experiences. Our interview guide was composed of open questions that prompted the interviewees to talk about their experiences in the form of narratives. We also asked additional questions when we felt that some points needed further clarifications from the interviewees.

3.2. Data collection

In order to better understand the career construction of influencers, we decided to interview several social media influencers, as they are the most likely to provide useful and relevant information about their career. We contacted about fifty influencers by using the private messaging system of Twitter and Instagram. We sent the same message to all influencers. The message was written in a rather familiar language. We chose this register because we did not want to appear too formal. Influencers are close to their community, so we felt that a familiar message would respect this closeness.

The influencers we contacted had been carefully selected according to their profile. We selected influencers with different fields of expertise (i.e. fashion, gaming, food, fitness, lifestyle, news, travel, photography) and with different community sizes (i.e. from 1.000 followers to 14.000.000 followers). The influencers we contacted were not all using the same platforms. For example, some were famous on Instagram, while others were famous on YouTube or TikTok. Many influencers did not answer our message, and only two of them replied that they had no time to participate in our study. Six influencers have positively answered and have accepted to participate. The rest of our sample has been completed through the snowball effect. Eventually, we ended up with twelve interviewees with various personal backgrounds and professional experiences (see Table 4).

Table 4 has been elaborated shortly after we conducted the interviews and thus reflects the interviewees' situation on 14 April 2020. Engagement rate on Instagram has been calculated as follows: (average number of comments + average number of likes) / number of followers. To have access to these variables, we used the engagement rate simulator created by the influencer marketing agency TANKE.[2] As mentioned in our literature review, influencers with a high engagement rate are advantageous for brands and are likely to be solicited for partnerships. Measuring the interviewees' engagement rate thus gives us insights on their likeliness to be solicited for partnerships with brands and PR agencies, regardless of their community size.

Regarding their professional status, the twelve interviewees are either self-employed, entrepreneurs, part-time employed and part-time self-employed, or full-time employed. Some influencers are self-employed and work full-time as influencers (e.g. Influencers 2 and 12), and some interviewees who are self-employed combine their activity as influencer with another activity, which involves that they are not full-time influencers. For example, Influencer 1 is part-time influencer and part-time illustrator, Influencer 4 is an influencer but also has an e-shop, and Influencer 10 is a journalist and an influencer. Influencers 7 and 8 are also self-employed. They create content for the social media profiles of different clients, usually brands, and are also influencers on social media platforms. Influencer 3 is an entrepreneur. She has a consultancy company and gives trainings about influencer marketing, but she is also an influencer, which is her side activity. Influencer 6 is also an entrepreneur, she offers her services as a community manager for different clients and has an e-shop, while also being an influencer on social media. Similarly, Influencer 11 is an entrepreneur. He sometimes works as a graphic

---

[2] See: TANKE, https://www.tanke.fr/ig/

designer and model but is mainly an influencer. Influencer 5 is employed and is part-time self-employed. Being on social media is a side activity for her. Influencer 9 is employed. She does not need to be part-time self-employed since she does not earn any money on social media.

We decided to categorise influencers according to their number of followers. As discussed in our literature review, researchers suggest various standards regarding the categorisation of influencers, and they usually use a two-level or three-level categorisation. We chose to use categories that have not been established by researchers, but by Mediakix, an American influencer marketing agency. According to Mediakix, there are several categories of influencers, which are based on the range of followers: nano-influencers (1k – 10k), micro-influencers (10k – 50k), mid-tier-influencers (50k – 500k), macro-influencers (500k – 1M), mega-influencers (1M – 5M), and celebrities (5M and more) ('What Is A Micro Influencer?', 2017). In this study, we use Mediakix's classification as each category represents a step in an influencer's career path and as it is a more precise classification than those presented by researchers. We posit that a two-level classification does not reflect enough diversity in terms of types of influencers. In a two-level classification, the range of followers covered by each category is too broad. For example, Boerman (2020) argues that micro-influencers have less than 10.000 followers, and that meso-influencers have between 10.000 and 1.000.000 followers. Yet, influencers who have 10.000 followers and influencers who have 1.000.000 followers may not have the same career opportunities, although they supposedly belong to the same category. Using a six-level classification thus brings more nuance and precision to the classification of influencers by number of followers.

The twelve interviews lasted between 29 minutes and 73 minutes. The interviews were conducted through video calls on Instagram, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and LifeSize, and through phone calls on Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. Online interviews were particularly useful to conduct these interviews since online interviews are less constraining for influencers than physical meetings. Moreover, several interviewees do not live in Belgium, so meeting them would have been difficult. Influencers are also familiar with social media platforms, so video and phone calls on social media platforms were a way to make them feel comfortable. Although we offered to conduct the interviews on Skype, influencers were reluctant to use this platform. They were more comfortable with Instagram, Facebook Messenger, or WhatsApp. Some influencers did not want to share their phone number with us, thereby preferring Instagram and Facebook Messenger for the interview. Others preferred using WhatsApp because they had never had video calls on Instagram, or simply because they

preferred phone calls to video calls. Interview channels were thus adapted according to the preferences of the interviewees. All interviews have been recorded and transcribed.

Our interview guide was composed of six open questions (see Appendix I). As already mentioned, those questions encouraged the interviewees to talk about their life and professional experiences in the form of narratives, and some questions were added when we felt some points needed further clarifications.

Anonym name	Profile				Interview		Main topics of interest	Category	Engagement rate on Instagram (%)	Number of followers on social media platforms							Other media	
	Gender	Age	Professional status	Location	Length	Channel				Instagram	Facebook	LinkedIn	Twitter	TikTok	YouTube	Pinterest	Blog	E-shop
Influencer 1	Woman	25	Full-time independent	Liege, BE	29'28"	Video call on Instagram	Drawing, fitness	Mid-tier-influencer	7.46	310 458	16 539	NA	174	NA	181 000	27	NA	Yes
Influencer 2	Woman	33	Full-time independent	Paris, FR	44'08"	Phone call on WhatsApp	Food, travel	Mid-tier-influencer	4.12	127 774	1 724	NA	1 398	4	NA	2 355	Yes	Yes
Influencer 3	Woman	31	Full-time independent	Brussels, BE	33'06"	Video call on WhatsApp	Food, travel, lifestyle	Micro-influencer	2.07	Main account: 13 427 Company account: 3 310 Travel guide: 2 135	2 500	+500	2 726	NA	NA	NA	Yes	NA
Influencer 4	Woman	23	Full-time independent	Liege, BE	40'21"	Video call on Instagram	Astrology	Mid-tier-influencer	7.29	Main account: 121 807 Lifestyle account: 6 296	Page: 761 Facebook group: 501 members	NA	NA	381	561	20	Yes	Yes
Influencer 5	Woman	25	Part-time independent, part-time employee	Charleroi, BE	42'45"	Phone call on WhatsApp	Food	Micro-influencer	4.13	13 419	2 188	NA	NA	13	NA	NA	Yes	NA
Influencer 6	Woman	38	Full-time independent	Brussels, BE	30'34"	Phone call on WhatsApp	Fashion	Mid-tier-influencer	1.95	Main account: 115 542 Travel account: 18 800	95 162	NA	1 659	3 602	NA	225	Yes	Yes
Influencer 7	Man	35	Full-time independent	Barcelona, ES Paris, FR	73'21"	Phone call on WhatsApp	Lifestyle, fashion, travel	Micro-influencer	2.85	43 436	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Influencer 8	Man	29	Full-time independent	Liege, BE	35'54"	Video call on Instagram	Food, lifestyle	Micro-influencer	5.56	12 607	528	NA	NA	312	212	NA	NA	NA
Influencer 9	Woman	27	Full-time employee	Liege, BE	37'31"	Video call on Messenger	Ecology	Nano-influencer	7.45	1 288	457	NA	NA	NA	17	NA	Yes	NA
Influencer 10	Woman	24	Full-time independent	Brussels, BE	54'23"	Phone call on Messenger	Food	Nano-influencer	3.98	6 519	1 811	NA	95	4	NA	16	Yes	NA
Influencer 11	Man	25	Full-time independent	Liege, BE Marbella, ES	36'19"	Phone call on WhatsApp	Fashion, lifestyle	Mid-tier-influencer	6.9	86 605	57	174	NA	NA	20	NA	Yes	NA
Influencer 12	Woman	25	Full-time independent	Liege, BE	61'41"	Video call on LifeSize	Food	Micro-influencer	3.87	18 001	745	NA	NA	279	540	405	Yes	NA

Table 4 - Interviewee profiles

3.3. Data analysis

There is no unique method to conduct a narrative analysis (Nasheeda et al., 2019). To conduct our narrative analysis, we did a thematic analysis, which is the most common technique used to analyse narratives (Sankaran, 2018). Similarly to Chudzikowski et al. (2020), we chose to identify patterns that are common to several interviewees, as well as recurrent themes in their narratives. Drawing on Fraser's guidelines for narrative analysis (2016), we proceeded as follows:

(1) We listened to the recorded narratives to have a global idea of the interviews.

(2) We transcribed the interviews to have an accurate record of them, and thus a more accurate analysis. The interviews were conducted in French and we translated the interview excerpts quoted in this study in English.

(3) We interpreted the transcripts individually. We identified various themes related to the career construction of influencers, identified every step of the career path of each influencer, and we identified the words used by influencers to describe the various steps of their career construction.

(4) We identified intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of stories. Intrapersonal aspects refer to the feelings of the interviewee, while interpersonal aspects involve other persons (Fraser, 2016). This step helped us determine the individual and contextual factors influencing the career path of the interviewees.

(5) We coded our data manually and used Excel. We associated every sentence of each interview to a code. Our list of codes has been developed throughout the coding of the interviews. This list includes the following codes: training, professional experiences, career on social media platforms, career reorientation, professional status, side activities, beginning on social media platforms, income sources, number of partnerships per month, strategies to have enough incomes, self-definition, sources of motivation, values, strategies to develop their career on social media platforms, administrative support, other sources of support, most used platforms, less used platforms, partnerships management, first partnership, type of content created for partnerships, relationship to PR agencies and brands, acceptation criteria for partnerships, unpaid partnerships, side projects, future projects for their social media accounts, and professional ambitions for the future.

(6) We sorted our codes and grouped them into broader categories that were recurrent in each transcript and that were related to the career construction of influencers. Our list of categories includes the following ones: professional background, current professional activities, experience on social media platforms, incomes, values, development strategies, sources of support, partnerships, side projects, professional ambitions, and self-definition.

(7) We looked for differences and similarities between the narratives of the interviewees, and particularly focused on the career construction of the interviewees and on individual and contextual factors influencing their career.

We then presented our results. After having presented our results, we identified individual and contextual factors influencing the career construction of influencers, and we analysed our data in the light of Briscoe & Hall's career profiles (2006) and of a combination of the career anchors models of Schein (1990), Bravo et al. (2017) and Marshall & Bonner (2003). We then proposed a categorisation of influencers in terms of career construction.

3.4. Limits and biases

The main limit of our methodology is our sample. The influencers we interviewed were all famous mainly for their Instagram account, although we also contacted influencers who were famous on Facebook, YouTube or TikTok. This lack of diversity is due to the snowball effect we used. The first influencers who accepted to participate in our study were famous on Instagram, and they then put us in contact with their friends, who were also famous on Instagram. Consequently, we cannot determine whether the career construction of influencers varies according to the platform they mainly use. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Instagram is the most popular social media for influencer marketing (Boerman, 2020), and that this platform provides many business opportunities for content creators. Focusing on Instagram influencers is thus an interesting case study in itself.

Moreover, we have only interviewed twelve influencers, all being French-speaking and most of them being in their twenties or thirties. This lack of diversity is also due to the snowball effect we used. Consequently, we cannot compare the career of the interviewees to the one of younger or older influencers, or to the one of influencers who do not use French in their content. The interviewees were also expert in a limited range of topics (i.e. food, lifestyle, fashion, fitness, astrology, ecology, and travel). Influencers who are expert in gaming, health or politics

are absent from our sample. This limit is due to a lack of feasibility, as it would be very difficult to cover all domains of expertise in a master's thesis, but also to the fact that finding influencers who are free and willing to participate in a study is a difficult task. As already mentioned, only few influencers answered our message.

In addition, many variables have to be considered when studying the career of influencers (e.g. community size, topics of interest, most-used platform, socio-demographic features of the influencer) and the different possible combinations of those variables lead to a large but unknown number of types of influencers. Identifying and interviewing all those types would be very difficult to achieve in the context of a master's thesis. Although we find similar and redundant features in the interviews, we think that further research could provide new elements that would help understand the career construction of influencers. For example, it would be interesting to interview influencers with more than 500.000 followers on Instagram, since those influencers are likely to have different business opportunities than nano-, micro- and mid-tier-influencers.

To conclude, our study cannot be generalised to all influencers and is rather exploratory, in the sense that we have tried to acquire new insights on a specific issue that has not been deeply researched yet. As we only interviewed French-speaking influencers who are mainly famous on Instagram and who are expert in a limited range of domains, our sample is not representative of all influencers, but it still provides enough data to first approach the career construction of influencers and the individual and contextual factors influencing it.

4. Empirical findings

In this section, we present our results and analyse them in the light of various career models we introduced in our literature review. Those models are Briscoe & Hall's career profiles (2006) and a combination of the career anchors models of Schein (1990), Bravo et al. (2017) and Marshall & Bonner (2003). We also identify individual and contextual factors influencing the career construction of influencers and categorise influencers in terms of career construction.

4.1. Results

This section consists in the presentation of our results. We first present how the interviewees define the term *influencer* to have a better understanding of what influencers are and do. We then highlight the motivations that have first led influencers to create social media profiles. Knowing their motivations will help us identify whether or not influencers had a specific agenda in terms of career construction when they first started their activity on social media platforms.

We then present the ways in which influencers articulate their professional life and their activity on social media platforms. We also identify the impacts these two aspects of their life have on each other in terms of career construction.

Furthermore, we present the development strategies implemented by influencers to develop their career on social media platforms. We then focus on how they earn money on social media platforms and on whether or not they implement strategies to make a living out of their activity as social media influencers.

We also introduce the support sources they benefit from and that are related to their career construction on social media platforms, which will enable us to identify interpersonal factors impacting influencers' career construction. The last part of this section will be focused on how influencers imagine their professional future, and on the impact of their influence on their career opportunities.

4.1.1. Controversy surrounding the term *influencer*

In this section, we focus on the way the twelve interviewees perceive their activity on social media platforms. We find that it would be interesting to ask influencers to give us their own definition of the term *influencer,* to tell us whether or not they relate to it, and to tell us how they define themselves in terms of professional activity on social media platforms.

Regarding the definition of the term *influencer,* we observe two tendencies emerging from the narratives of the interviewees. While some interviewees feel that *influencer* is a rather

pejorative term, other interviewees suggest that having some sort of influence on their followers can have a positive aspect. As Influencer 5 states, influencing people in terms of lifestyle or consumption habits can be positive, as influencers can lead people to disrupt their own habits and can make them discover new habits, products, or recipes.

> *Influencer 5: An influencer is someone that is going to influence people and their purchase behaviour, of course they are going to influence people regarding their purchase behaviour and their daily life. As a food influencer, I see that I influence people, they make recipes that they would not have made if they had not seen my picture. They remake my recipes at home, that's really great. I think that I consider myself as an influencer.*

Influencer 9 supports the idea that influencing people on social media can have a positive impact. Her definition of *influencer* does not imply having partnerships with brands or promoting products but is rather about sharing ideas with other people on social media.

> *Influencer 9: There are many people that are, for me, influencers, just like that, by sharing things on their private social media accounts, I think that now, with all those tools, an influencer is simply someone that as a certain view on things and that wants to share it. […] I like the term influencer; I think it is nice.*

The idea of sharing is central to the definition of most of the interviewees. The interviewees who find the term *influencer* pejorative prefer defining themselves as 'content creator', 'blogger', 'Instagrammer', or 'entrepreneur', but they still highlight the importance of sharing with their community. As Influencer 2 argues, 'sharing' is more relevant to describe what she does on social media than 'influencing', although she admits that she has some influence on her followers.

> *Influencer 2: I don't feel like I'm influencing, actually. […] Sometimes, we just want to talk about a product and it's not necessarily because of collaborations and all that stuff, it's really about sharing, […] but yes, it's about influencing at the same time, but I would say that it is more about sharing, I prefer the word 'sharing' than 'influencing'.*

Similarly, Influencer 6 does not like the term *influencer* and prefers defining herself as a 'blogger'. She admits that influencers influence consumers' behaviour and that the term makes sense for brands that want to work with influencers to sell their products. However, she feels that this word is pejorative and irrelevant to what she tries to achieve on social media.

> *Influencer 6: I don't really like this word, it makes me think of a sect, or guru, I don't know. […] For brands, 'influencer' is a media support that influences consumers' behaviour. In the individual sense, it's a really weird word. […] I rather consider myself as a blogger.*

Similarly, Influencer 10 defines herself as a 'blogger'. She also highlights the fact that sharing is central to her activity on social media, although she concedes that influencers can have a positive impact on their community as they can be a source of inspiration.

> *Influencer 10: It's true that the term influencer is not really appreciated today, […] there's a disturbing aspect in the sense that we don't want to influence people […]. I like the term 'we inspire people', we give them ideas, we share, we are a community.*

She feels that 'influencer' is a disturbing word and does not relate to this term. Influencer 7 also feels that 'influencer' is a pejorative term but cannot explain why.

> *Influencer 7: I think that the word has been ill-chosen… It's not a beautiful word, 'influencer', I mean… I don't know, it's not positive for me.*

Influencer 9 brings some insights on why 'influencer' is a rather pejorative term for some people. He argues that the main goal of influencers is to sell products, and he feels that this term does not apply to his own activity on social media.

> *Influencer 9: This word, it's not possible […]. I've never presented myself as being an influencer, never, never, never. Always as a content creator or an Instagrammer. […] I would say that reality show candidates are influencers, for me, an influencer is someone who, in front of their community, presents a product in order to sell it […]. It's a bit pejorative, but the word sounds pejorative to me.*

Influencers 3, 4, 10 and 11 highlight key features to describe an influencer in a more neutral way. Influencer 3 particularly suggests that being an influencer does not always involve having a large community on social media platforms.

> *Influencer 3: I would start by saying that an influencer, if we consider them from a large point of view, not only on social media platforms, is someone that has influence on people [...]. I think that today, it's a bit limited to social media platforms and if we limit them to that, we think about view numbers, followers, although for example, sometimes, we can reach people that are hyper targeted with someone that has influence, even though this person has 1.000 followers.*

She suggests that influencers with smaller communities might influence the specific target of certain brands. Influencer 4 also argues that some influencers have a rather small community on social media, but that they create a bond with their community, which is, according to her, one the most important characteristics of an influencer.

> *Influencer 4: For me, an influencer is a person who creates digital content and who can make a living out of it thanks to the collaborations they have with other brands. There are also people who don't make a living out of it, who have 1.000 or 1.500 followers, and who really create a bond with their community, I think that everything comes from that, it's really about creating a bond with the community.*

Influencers 10 and 11 rather link the term *influencer* to the content of influencers' work and the platform they use. Influencer 10 believes that *influencer* is a generic term used to describe people creating content on social media platforms.

> *Influencer 10: I think that 'influencer' has mainly become a generic term to designate people creating content on various platforms, either Instagram, Facebook, blog, YouTube, TikTok.*

Yet, Influencer 11 makes a distinction between people working on Instagram, on YouTube and on blogs. Social media influencer is thus, according to Influencer 11, a misused term that should only be used to name individuals creating content on Instagram.

In this section, we thus observe that there is no consensus among the interviewees on a definition of the term *influencer,* and some of them do not even perceive themselves as being influencers, but rather as being content creators, bloggers, or Instagrammers. They feel that their goal is to share content with their community, rather than to influence them. Yet, some influencers find that having some sort of influence on their community can have positive aspects, as they can inspire people to try new habits, products, and services.

4.1.2. Becoming an influencer

The interviewees have started creating content on social media for various reasons. Most influencers have started an Instagram account or a blog because they wanted to share about diverse topics with other individuals.

> *Influencer 2: I've created my Instagram account in 2012. It was first to help me in my food rebalancing. I told myself that posting photos of what I ate 'forced' me to eat well, and to share it with the persons that followed me, and so, we helped each other, it was about mutual assistance.*

> *Influencer 9: I've always wanted to have a blog and at some point, it associates several things for me, first it was because I had all those questions about transition, ecology, that animated me, I had many reflections, questions, things that I wanted to try, and I wanted to share and discuss about specific topics.*

Sharing is thus an important value and source of motivation for several influencers. Other influencers have started on social media platforms just like any other regular user, but some interpersonal factors, mainly gaining more followers or having positive feedbacks from people, have made them want to professionalise their activity a bit more.

> *Influencer 8: When I arrived in Liège, I knew no one, and I told myself that I was going to sign up to social media platforms to maybe have the chance to meet people etc., and on Instagram, I liked the concept that we could make photos and that there were exchanges that were made etc., and I really started like that, walking in Liège, making pictures of small places I found cute [...]. And slowly, some people started talking to me, and I created contacts, and friends, it started to work, so I gained followers.*

Influencer 8 has thus decided to create an Instagram profile to meet new people. He had no specific agenda in terms of career construction on social media platforms. Yet, gaining followers and connecting with other people encouraged him to continue creating content on social media platforms.

We thus observe that most of the interviewees have decided to create content on social media platforms mainly to share content they are interested in with other people. As they started creating content, people have started following them, and they gained visibility and success on social media platforms.

4.1.3. Articulation of professional life and activities on social media platforms

In order to develop their activity on social media platforms, some of the interviewees have made changes in their professional life. For example, Influencers 2, 8 and 4 have left their job in a traditional organisation to fully dedicate themselves to their social media.

> *Influencer 4: I wanted to work for a big company to [learn how it works] before starting my own business up. So, I worked for a branch of Proximus, but I hated it. All that I did before that was creative, linked to digital communication and all that stuff, all that was dead in this company, and I got really bored, so I quitted when I saw that I had a certain success on social networks, I started having brands that were interested in my content, and that were proposing paid partnerships.*

> *Influencer 2: Let's say that yes, at the crèche, children, it's all good and beautiful, but there is also a lack of staff, fatigue, bosses that are above us, you are imposed different things, and it's true that with the fact of being freelance, you don't have all that. This freedom is pleasant.*

> *Influencer 8: It was really frustrating [as a community manager at H&M] to come and not be allowed to, yes, be free to write what I wanted to, so yes, I really got fed up and I decided to quit.*

In the case of Influencers 2, 4 and 8, leaving their job to fully dedicate themselves to content creation was possible because they had enough partnerships with brands, and thus enough

incomes, to make a living out of their activity on social media platforms. Moreover, leaving their job was an opportunity for them to avoid the constraints imposed by an employer. Creative individuals such as Influencers 4 and 8 were not fulfilled in jobs that limited their creativity.

Other influencers, such as Influencers 11 and 12, have never had to work within an organisation, as they were still students when they started having enough paid partnerships to earn a living as influencers.

> *Influencer 12: I got my degree in 2019, in September, and at that moment, I had a huge collaboration […]. There started to have, not 10.000, but interesting collaborations and also regarding remuneration, it was becoming big […]. So I told myself 'I either become part-time self-employed and I try to find a job', knowing that it would curb what I did […], and at that moment, I told myself 'never mind, I go full-time self-employed and we will see if it works'.*

Like Influencers 4 and 8, Influencer 12 argues that having a 'regular' job would limit her creativity. As she had enough collaborations after her studies, she decided to fully dedicate herself to her blog and Instagram.

In contrast, some interviewees would not like to give up their job within an organisation or their other business activities to develop their activity on social media platforms, which is the case of Influencers 1, 3, 9, 10 and 5.

> *Influencer 5: I got a permanent contract after two years, so it's that security aspect that makes me stay at the hospital and I think about the long-term, actually. So yes, at the beginning, I worked full-time, I've been working part-time now [4 days a week] since October to have more time for the blog because it became difficult to manage. But I keep the job at the hospital, as I don't know what Instagram is going to be in 2, 3, 4, 5 years.*

> *Influencer 3: It's not that [I don't need collaborations] on the financial level, it's just that I decided not to gather my financial goals on that. My financial goal is that my company works well, does well.*

Although Influencer 5 has decided to modulate her work schedule to have more time to manage her blog and Instagram, she would not like to give up her job as it brings her a sense of security.

In the case of Influencer 3, being an influencer is just a side activity that she is unlikely to develop as she has other professional priorities, mainly the prosperity of her company.

In the case of certain interviewees, their success on social media platforms has impacted their professional life in the sense that they have gained more visibility for their other professional activities. For example, Influencer 1, who is an illustrator, has now more orders than when she was not successful on social media. Similarly, Influencer 4's e-shop is successful because of her success on Instagram.

Influencer 1: Nearly all the orders I have are from people that found me on social networks. Before that, I had drawing orders, but it was unstable. There were months when I could eventually pay all my bills with that, but the next month, not at all, so it was really not stable. But then, with the visibility I'm getting on social networks, I've never had any problem anymore, since that day.

Influencer 4: So, I launched my e-shop thanks to this, I have orders almost every day [...]. And here I am, I have many other projects that are being set up, little by little, thanks to this Instagram account.

Influencers 1 and 4's success on Instagram has thus accelerated the development of their other activities. Using Instagram is thus, for them, a way to respectively make their drawings and e-shop more visible, and thus to faster develop their career as illustrator and entrepreneur.

Some influencers fully dedicate themselves to their social media because they have the financial opportunity to do so and because they do not want to limit their creative potential in a 'regular' job. Yet, other influencers do not want to dedicate themselves too much to their activity on social media, as they have other professional priorities. We also observe that being successful on social media platforms can have a positive impact on other professional activities, such as increasing the visibility of a side business. In the case of Influencers 1 and 4, their success on Instagram has increased the visibility and success of their side activities and has thus helped them faster develop their career as illustrator and entrepreneur.

4.1.4. Career on social media platforms: development strategies

In this section, we highlight the different strategies that influencers implement to develop their activity on social media platforms. Although some influencers do not try to fully develop their

social media because they have other professional priorities, such as their job or business, most of the interviewees implement some strategies to develop their community. In terms of general strategies to develop their community, some influencers try to optimise their profiles to take advantage of social media algorithms, so that they may gain visibility on platforms.

> *Influencer 5: I've watched short videos on YouTube to understand the [Instagram] algorithm a bit, how to boost it or improve it, [...] for example, I heard that if you change the caption after you post the picture, it decreases the views [...], so it's true that I try, even if I make a spelling mistake in it, to change it the next day or two days after to be sure. I always try to post at more or less the same moment [...], and to respond relatively quickly to the first comments because supposedly, according to the algorithm, it would help to respond to comments.*

> *Influencer 4: It's old journalist and community manager habits, I subscribe to a lot of newsletters about Google SEO, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook algorithms etc [...]. For Instagram [...], I think [that my account took off] because I was very interested in the algorithm, I was very interested in the content that my subscribers wanted to see too.*

We thus observe here that understanding social media algorithms is important to several interviewees. Algorithms decide the content users see on their feed based on the posts they are usually most interested in. Yet, it is difficult to fully understand the functioning of algorithms, which is an issue for influencers who want to be visible on social media platforms. We also note that Influencer 4 adjusts her content to the content her followers want to see, which may help her take advantage of social media algorithms. Furthermore, to increase their visibility on social media, some influencers pay the platform to put their publications forward.

> *Influencer 12: I had a promotion not long ago, you pay Insta 30€ and they put you forward, and it works great.*

Paying Instagram to promote some publications is thus an efficient strategy to gain visibility. Unlike analysing algorithms, paying for sponsored posts has a direct impact on influencers' visibility.

Some influencers also try to create a bond with their community by being authentic and true, as authenticity might be the most important feature followers are looking for on social media platforms. In addition, followers are interested in influencers' personal life.

Influencer 8: To make it work, in any case, I try to be as fair as possible, I know that subscribers want to find people who are unique, who are really real, and I think that's what we have to rely on, so for example in my stories, [...] I'm really much more transparent, more real and more natural, and I'm sharing my life more while still trying to filter, there are still some things I don't want to show, and I think that's what we're looking for on social networks now, it's really authenticity and there's that voyeuristic side to it as well.

Influencers 1 and 8 note that followers tend to be curious about influencers' life. Being authentic and sharing some parts of one's life are thus factors that help develop one's community.

In terms of publications, most interviewees have specific weekly goals to achieve, but most of them are quite flexible. If they have no time or have no inspiration, they do not post. Regarding stories on Instagram, most influencers tend to be more active.

Influencer 1: Before, I used to try to post every day, but now I try to post at least every other day, but if I'm really lazy or uninspired, I'd rather not post anything than actually say nothing. [...] For the stories, I try to be as regular as possible.

Influencer 6: At least 3 stories per day and one publication per day. It's one photo a day, at the same moment because they're used to me posting at 6pm, not at noon. I also base myself on statistics, it's at 6pm that they are the most present, so I have no interest in posting at 3pm, for example.

Being constant in terms of publications and stories seems rather important for most influencers, even for those who do not particularly want to develop their Instagram.

Influencer 9: I don't put myself under pressure, so, I'm really trying to find, since the beginning of this year, I've been saying to myself, 'well, it would be really nice if I could find a balance of regularity', so that's what I'm trying to do. However, I don't put a

figure on that [...]. I think that, on social networks, it's really important to have a relatively regular contact.

Influencer 3: It's not my main activity but I feed and I'm on my social networks every day, [...] but I've never had a desire for it to become a profession.

We note that in terms of publications and stories, being present on Instagram is very important for influencers, either because they like frequently sharing with their followers, or because they want to maintain the bond that they have created with them.

Managing their online presence is also a relatively important element for influencers who want to develop their social media. Although some of the interviewees enjoy having a blog or a YouTube channel, most of them rather stick to Instagram, as creating content on Instagram seems less time consuming.

Influencer 1: I love YouTube, I really started it for fun, but then, for me, since it's the fun part, it's the last thing on my priority list of things to do.

Influencer 2: Well, with the work on the side, when I was in the crèche, because I've been a freelance since January, managing Insta, managing the work and managing the private life on the side, it requires a lot of organization, so, it's a lot of work, so I said to myself 'the blog, I'm leaving it aside, I'm doing Insta to the max and for the rest we'll see later'.

Some of the interviewees focus on Instagram, which is their priority, because of time constraints. By focusing on Instagram only, they increase their presence on this platform, instead of being only partly present on several platforms.

Most of the interviewees also force themselves to publish some content on platforms they do not appreciate to gain visibility for their Instagram. For example, most influencers do not like Facebook. They particularly do not like the behaviours of many Facebook users, but they still use the platform to share their Instagram content or because brands want a Facebook post.

Influencer 12: Facebook, I don't like it. In fact, I find that people on Facebook... [...] I find that the community on Facebook... I can't, I'm not interested, it's not the same

dynamic. [...] I feel like everyone's nice to me on Instagram, I'm not sure that on Facebook it would be the case, and I don't want to have people who get [upset] in life [upsetting me]. [...] Sometimes there are brands that ask you 'oh it would be cool to put a post on Facebook', ok no worries, but on Facebook I have, I think, 700 people following me so uh... So, it's really for grandparents.

Most of the interviewees thus rather use Instagram because they have a larger community on this platform and because their Instagram community brings them a more positive feedback than the one that they have on Facebook.

In addition, in order to develop their career on social media, most of the interviewees develop side projects. Projects can have various forms and usually arise from their activity as influencer. For example, Influencer 2, a food influencer, will publish a cookbook in 2020.

Influencer 2: I'm in the process of creating my first cookbook with a publisher who contacted me to work with them, so this is a crazy, sick thing.

Publishing a cookbook may increase Influencer 2's visibility, as the book will be sold in various shops. A cookbook is also a way to professionalise her activity out of Instagram, as she will produce a book that will be sold in 'real' shops. Influencer 4 has also many projects that have been made possible because of her success on Instagram; she has an e-shop, organises workshops, and develops products with partner brands.

Influencer 4: So, I launched my e-shop thanks to [my Instagram], I have orders almost every day [...]. I think I would have launched it even if I wasn't an influencer. It's just that having 'notoriety' on social networks helped me get a much faster customer base.

Influencer 4: I was able to create my own jewellery line. I discovered a jeweller in Namur who recently started as a self-employed as well and we met, since I live in Huy, it's not very far, and we did it together, I'm so happy. [...] I also approached two other girls who are also young self-employed, one with whom I made soaps and another with whom I'm going to make candles.

Influencer 4's various projects allow her to expand her activity as social media influencer out of Instagram. Although those activities arise from her success on Instagram, they are also a way

for her to diversify her tasks and to broaden her career experiences. Influencer 11 also has projects that arise from his influence on social media and that will enable him to develop his career. His main goal is to develop his own fashion brand.

> *Influencer 11: I'm in the process of creating my own clothing brand [...]. So what's more complicated is, there will be fewer pieces at the beginning but we're going to start little by little, so if it works well, I'll expand, I'll expand, I'll rely a lot on social networks, I'll promote with my own account, and that's it, we'll try to make it work. [...] Yeah actually, actually, why I'm creating my brand, it's a goal that I have, it's not even specifically to sell, for me it's a goal in my life, you know.*

As Influencers 4 and 11 state, they have an entrepreneurial desire. Similarly, Influencer 12 tries to develop workshops that are related to the content she posts on social media.

> *Influencer 12: It's really one of the first things I want to set up, it's world, vegetarian and vegan cuisine workshops. [...] Actually, I like the world of influence, I like having a blog, but in my life, I don't want to restrict myself to that because I want to have cooking workshops, I want to meet people, I don't want to be all the time... Alone.*

Influencer 12 thus wants to develop projects related to her activity as social media influencer in order to fulfil her social needs. As she explains, she likes working on social media, but she also wants to meet people. Organising workshops is thus a way for her to develop her career on and out of social media platforms, and to connect with other people.

To conclude, we observe that many influencers implement several strategies to develop their career and their social networks. The main strategies implemented to develop their social media are the optimisation of influencers' profiles to take advantage of social media algorithms, the urge to be authentic to please followers, and the urge to be present on social media, which is measured in terms of weekly posts and stories. In terms of career development, several influencers develop projects thanks to their influence on social media (e.g. workshops, books, fashion brands). Although those projects arise from their activity as social media influencer, they are not directly linked to Instagram or other social media platforms.

4.1.5. Incomes

In this section, we focus on the interviewees' income sources. As explained by most of the interviewees, the incomes they earn on social media come primarily from partnerships with brands or public relation agencies.

There is no consensus on the number of followers or engagement rate that influencers should have before having partnerships. Unpaid partnerships, which consist in receiving free products in exchange for some promotion on social media platforms, can be accessible to influencers with relatively few followers. For example, Influencers 5 and 8 had 3.000 followers when they were contacted for unpaid partnerships, while Influencer 11 had 10.000 when he was first contacted for such partnerships. Similarly, there is no consensus on the number of followers that influencers should have before receiving proposals for paid partnerships. For example, Influencers 1 and 11 had to reach 50.000 followers, while Influencer 7 had to reach only 12.000 followers.

> *Influencer 1: I really saw the day when I passed the 50.000, there are brands that have started to contact me, so it's a little bit the unspoken scale, it's a little bit the bar below which you're not necessarily paid, or small sums, and beyond the 50.000, you can hope to have a fixed sponsor, where there, it can be enough to start filling your fridge.*

> *Influencer 7: I scroll through my emails and then I see 'we'd like to work with you', it was Mamy Nova I think, and it doesn't sound like a dream at all, but it was my first paid collaboration, and then I go down, I go down, and then I see the fee […], I must have had like 12.000 followers, so nothing, I was 1.200€.*

Moreover, there is no consensus on the price of collaborations. As several interviewees argue, it is quite difficult, especially at the stage of the first collaboration, to define a price for their work and to negotiate with brands or public relation agencies.

> *Influencer 8: It's very complicated to position yourself regarding your rates because there are agencies that won't offer you anything, […] there are agencies that will offer you your rate... And how I positioned myself, the more we're going to offer you the same rate each time, the more you're going to think 'I'm worth it'.*

Influencer 12: There are agencies that sometimes, although they don't scam, they also try to negotiate, it's their job, it's normal.

We observe here that influencers have relatively few reference points when it comes to the financial part of their activity. As their incomes are not established by salary scales, they have to define themselves how much they want to earn and to negotiate their incomes with brands and PR agencies. As Influencers 2 and 12 argue, having partnerships with public relation agencies is more common than with brands, and they have to negotiate more with those agencies than with brands.

Influencer 12: A collaboration always involves an exchange of emails, and most often it's a PR agency that deals with the brand that contacts you, maybe sometimes they say there's no budget, maybe sometimes they don't say anything, [...] sometimes they tell you there's a budget, sometimes you can triple their budget and they'll say yes [...]. So, it's always a little bit complicated, and there are no rules.

Negotiating payment is thus very important for many influencers. As some of the interviewees are full-time influencers and need to make a living out of social media platforms, payment is one of the most important criteria when examining partnership proposals.

Influencer 11: So first of all, the product has to be relevant to me, it has to be relevant to my profile, I don't want to promote some [lame] things, you see. [...] I have to be credible. [...] I don't accept unpaid partnerships anymore, why, because, okay, it's nice to have the object, but how do I pay my bills with the object, I need someone to explain it to me. [...] So if I accept, it's for stories only, [...] it's less work.

Influencer 8: What people don't understand is that it's a job, I'm not going to go to my banker to buy an apartment and give him phones.

We observe in the quote of Influencer 11 that another criterion for accepting a collaboration is the relevance of the collaboration regarding the influencer's profile. Other interviewees argue that they want to promote products or services that make them credible and that they genuinely enjoy. Yet, Influencers 7 and 8 admit that they used to accept every proposal earlier in their

career on social media. Their change of attitude implies that authenticity is a very important value to them.

> *Influencer 7: Before 2020, I took everything or almost everything [...], I took a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot, because I wanted to make a lot of money. At any price [...]. And since 2020, I only accept collaborations I like, collaborations I want to do, collaborations especially with agencies I like, relationships are very important in my work as an influencer [...]. I have to like it and I must not be restricted in my creative process.*

> *Influencer 8: We get a lot of emails every day with great proposals, very often with remuneration that makes you want to say yes [...]. That's what I did, for a long time and since January, actually, something clicked [...]. The brands I worked with, there were lots of them that I fired because I told them that, eventually, they didn't suit me anymore, so it wasn't always well received, but at least, I'll tell you, I have really found myself again.*

As Influencers 7 and 8 explain, they used to accept all types of collaborations to earn money. Yet, they eventually decided to only accept collaborations that they wanted to do. Influencer 8 particularly values authenticity, while Influencer 7 values authenticity, creative freedom, and the relationships he has with PR agencies.

Several interviewees admit that, although they prefer paid collaborations, they are likely to accept unpaid collaborations with small brands as they want to make them benefit from their own visibility or because they are interested in their products/services.

> *Influencer 2: When it's a small brand that's starting up or it's a small company, or people who don't necessarily have the budget, and I like the product, I'm going to promote it, it's going to help them, if it can help them, or at least give them visibility.*

Several influencers thus try to support young brands, even though this involves no payment.

It should also be noted that the twelve interviewees are not all full-time influencers, and some of them thus have other income sources. Some influencers choose to have other forms of activity but could be full-time influencers, while other influencers do not have enough incomes from their activity on social media to become full-time influencers. Influencer 1 could be a full-time influencer but rather chooses not to be so because she does not want to do too many

collaborations, as she observes that doing too many collaborations negatively impacts the engagement of her followers and her visibility.

> *Influencer 1: Yes, my incomes as an influencer alone might be enough. I could even earn more if I actually accepted more collaborations. [...] I don't like to do too much because I notice that when I do too many ads, my views go down, and as a result, it lowers my value in terms of product placements and even for me, it's not necessarily pleasant. As my goal is to make my drawings, if I have less visibility, it works less.*

Since she uses her Instagram account to promote and sell her drawings, she wants to maintain the visibility she has gained and thus prefers to avoid having too many partnerships. Similarly, Influencers 9 and 5 do not want to have more collaborations, thus probably giving up the possibility of being full-time influencers, as they do not want to commercialise their Instagram.

> *Influencer 5: I don't want to use my Instagram account to advertise or really just to earn money, that's it, I don't want it to become like that, I prefer it to be a pleasure.*

> *Influencer 9: I've already done a couple of things, I get proposals from time to time, but actually, I realise that I don't like it at all, it doesn't correspond to the purpose for which I launched this platform [...]. It's just that I don't want to work on it with someone else's constraints, with deadlines, with visuals, etc., [...] I noticed that I didn't want to commercialise my time like that.*

Influencers 5 and 9 create content on Instagram and on their blog to enjoy themselves, and they do not want to jeopardise this enjoyment by accepting many collaborations and their constraints.

In addition, some influencers do not have many opportunities to collaborate with brands. As Influencer 4 explains, she has few partnerships because brands are not interested in her content.

> *Influencer 4: The problem with my account [...] is that it's a niche, so you need brands that are interested in astrology or that sell products in this sector, that are willing to pay me, except that it's often start-ups that get into this business, so they're in the same situation as me, they don't have a lot of money to spend.*

Influencer 4 has thus mainly unpaid partnerships with young start-ups, which implies that the incomes she has from her activity as influencer are low, which is also why she cannot earn a living out of this activity. To increase her incomes, Influencer 4 has developed an e-shop. As she explains, she has also developed a jewellery line in collaboration with a Belgian artisan and earns a commission on each sale made to one of her followers. Similarly, Influencer 1 does not want to have too many collaborations with brands. Therefore, in addition to selling her drawings, she is a YouTuber. Sharing content on a platform such as YouTube is also a way to increase monthly revenues, although it does not represent much money in her case. As Influencer 1 states, her YouTube videos are monetised, which means that she earns money from YouTube when the ads integrated before her videos are watched. In contrast, she states that she has no revenue from Instagram, since Instagram does not display as much ads as YouTube on the platform.

> *Influencer 1: My videos are monetized but it really doesn't represent much money. [...] Instagram doesn't do anything, I don't know anyone at Instagram, I don't have any contact with them at all. It's just a host.*

The cases of Influencers 1 and 4 thus demonstrate that promoting brands on Instagram is not the only way to earn a living on social media. They take advantage of their visibility to promote their YouTube channel, e-shop, or jewellery line. Similarly, Influencers 7 and 8 create content for the social media of various brands and Influencer 6 has a fashion e-shop.

For full-time influencers, having enough partnerships to earn a living is essential. Full-time influencers highlight the fact that their incomes are very unstable, as they have no fixed salary. Yet, this does not seem problematic to them, as they learn to manage their earnings.

> *Influencer 12: It's still a freelance job, so some months I'll get 4.000€, and the next month I'll get 500€.*

> *Influencer 11: Every month, I pay myself a very small salary and everything else, I leave it in my company, you see, that's how it works. So, my company is the most important thing for me [...], every month I have enough incomes, even when I have very low incomes, like 2.000€ a month, well then... I mean, it can happen, well then, I'm careful you see, but usually one month compensates for the other one.*

Influencers 11 and 12 thus compare their activity to any other activity of self-employed, as they involve unstable incomes. To avoid the instability of monthly incomes, some influencers have negotiated long-term partnerships or have a fixed sponsor that pays them a monthly salary.

> *Influencer 1: When I started to become famous, we were talking about finding me a fixed sponsor who was going to pay me a fixed income.*

> *Influencer 7: I have annual collaborations, I have annual collaborations with a large group [...], I've already been working with them for three years, or two years, I don't know, or two and a half years, in short, and honestly, we love each other, I love them, they love me, I know it won't stop tomorrow, I've just re-signed for 2020, and as a result, it allows me to balance out a month, I know that every month I have something that comes in.*

Long-term partnerships and fixed sponsors thus involve a sense of security regarding monthly incomes. Moreover, as previously mentioned, some influencers develop other activities that help them have sufficient monthly incomes.

To conclude this section, we observe that influencers can manage their incomes in different ways. While influencers are inequal when it comes to partnerships with brands, as there is no consensus on the price of collaborations or on the number of followers one should reach before having paid collaborations, influencers have to negotiate their incomes with brands or PR agencies. Moreover, we note that most of the interviewees do not accept unpaid partnerships anymore, as they consider that their work deserves to be rewarded. We also observe that there are three tendencies in terms of income management. Full-time influencers have unstable incomes and thus have to manage them. Having long-term partnerships or fixed sponsors is a way to make sure that they receive money each month. The second tendency concerns influencers who do not want too many collaborations. These influencers do not want to commercialise their time and content, and rather combine their activity on social media to another activity. The third tendency concerns the influencers who do not have enough partnerships to make a living because brands are not enough interested in their content or community. Those influencers also have to combine their activity on social media platforms to another activity, such as a 'regular' job, having an e-shop or proposing their services as community managers or content creators.

4.1.6. Support sources

Most of the interviewees benefit from various forms of support to help them develop their career as influencers. In terms of administrative support, most influencers have an accountant to help them manage the financial aspects of their activity, although some of them manage their accounts themselves because they have time and do not want/cannot afford to pay an accountant.

Influencer 11: I have a chartered accountant, actually. [...] It's a security, that way I'm sure I'm doing things right.

Influencer 2: I'm doing everything because I have time, and, on top of that, these people would have to be paid, and paying myself would be good enough.

In addition to having an accountant, some influencers benefit from other sorts of support to manage their business. For example, Influencer 1 works with a talent management agency that helps her find partnerships with brands, they process her emails, and they negotiate her contracts with partners.

Influencer 1: I was contacted pretty quickly by an agency [...]. And, actually, the agency mainly puts me in contact with brands. They already have the contacts. [...] And, actually, the most important thing is that they are the ones who manage the emails, because there are too many of them and it would take a lot of time of my day to sort them out, and on the other hand, they take a percentage. And so, as they take a percentage, they will try to negotiate all the contracts you have as best they can.

Talent management agencies thus support specific influencers in exchange for a percentage of their incomes.

Other influencers benefit from the support of entities that aim to help self-employed and entrepreneurs develop their career. Influencer 4 works with VentureLab, an eco-system that is part of the 'Pôle Académique Liège-Luxembourg', and that accompanies students and young graduates in the development of their enterprise.

Influencer 4: Well, I had a lot of help for the pricing [at VentureLab], as I was starting from a free content, I didn't know at all what prices to choose, the products I wanted to offer are not at all the products I offer today [...]. They really helped me to question myself, to meet my clients in real life, beyond the digital, I had to meet a lot of girls in real life, I had to do a lot of qualitative interviews etc. to propose a real product that corresponded to them.

VentureLab thus helps Influencer 4 develop her online business. Similarly, Influencer 8 benefits from the support of Smart, which helps self-employed individuals develop their career and mainly brings them administrative support. Influencer 1 also used to be helped by Smart before creating her own company.

Influencer 8: I use the Smart, actually, which manages of all my accounting, they get 6% on my fees and my contracts, and at least I'm at peace and I don't have to worry about taxes and they manage it on their side.

Working with talent management agencies or other support entities such as Smart is thus a way for influencers to delegate administrative work, and, in the case of VentureLab, to be coached in the development of their activities.

Yet, some influencers prefer managing their business themselves, mainly because they want to remain totally free in terms of partnerships and time management.

Influencer 6: I don't have an agent because that's 10% I could keep. I don't like it too much because agents will push you to collaborate because for them it's lucrative and I prefer to choose my collaborations.

Influencer 7: I've been offered to have an agent twice, once to be part of an agency, well, to have an agent within an agency, and once it was a free agent who offered me to work for him, or that he works for me, and no, I don't actually need it [...], I think it would bring me more collaborations, but it's not necessarily collaborations that I want to do and today, I'm free and I can do what I want to do, when I want to do it.

Working with an agent or with talent management agencies can relieve influencers of their administrative tasks, but this has a cost that not all influencers can afford.

Instead of relying on an agency or any other paid support, some interviewees prefer to be helped by their family and friends.

Influencer 2: I have a friend who's a web master for her work and so on, so she did the whole part of the site for me.

Influencer 4: I have 'friends' who help me by sharing my publications, by liking, by commenting, it's the basis on social networks [...]. If I do a shoot for the jewellery collection I've launched, it's friends who posed.

Influencer 12: I'd say that my father is self-employed and even if it's self-employed in the construction sector, it's still self-employed, so you see, he knows how the self-employed life works and that's very reassuring.

Family and friends thus bring various types of support, such as technical support in the creation of a blog, their advice on self-employment, and their daily support on social media in the forms of likes and shares.

The support of other influencers is also important for several interviewees. This support is particularly important for most of the interviewees when it comes to finding partnerships or sharing about incomes and experiences with brands.

Influencer 6: We have a group of female influencers, there are no Belgians actually, it's mostly French, American, Spanish girls and all that, and we exchange our contacts and all that. Just with this group alone, I don't lack collaborations.

Influencer 5: I don't remember how I established my current rates, it's a bit of word of mouth, talking to other influencers, I know I've already asked other influencers 'oh how much do you ask?', these are subjects we talk about from time to time. Sometimes, we also say 'oh that brand', it happens more when we talk about a collaboration between us, 'oh that brand, they offer me 100€ to do that, they're making fun of me', and from there, we talk a bit about prices and how much we ask and I think we more or less follow that.

Influencers thus have the opportunity to benefit from different forms of support, which can either be paid in the case of VentureLab, Smart, accountants, or talent management agencies, or totally free, which is the case for the support of family and friends, or for the support of other influencers.

Creating high quality content is an element that most of the interviewees consider very important to gain more visibility, credibility, and success on social media. Yet, creating high quality content is not innate. Although some influencers have a higher education background that has brought them tools to help them manage a career on social media (e.g. degree in marketing, communication, graphic design), or have followed trainings on entrepreneurship (e.g. at VentureLab), or have been introduced to photography by friends, all interviewees have learned to use social media by themselves, and by reading and watching tutorials on internet.

Influencer 3: I am self-taught, my boyfriend at that time, when I started my blog, was an amateur photographer so he sold me my first SLR camera and then he explained me a few things [...]. Afterwards, I learned by myself how to retouch the pictures, [...] like many things in life, it's the training that makes you better and do nice things.

Influencer 11: When you've never done any art and you start Instagram, well, some people find it harder, you know, [having studied visual and graphic communication] helped me on a visual level, on an artistic level and to have a more photographic mind. [...] I learned a lot by myself, now I'm very, very good at photography, editing, Lightroom pre-sets.

Influencer 10: I'm really lame when it comes to HTML and CSS, so when it comes to fiddling with the code [of my blog], I have to watch tutorials for I don't know how many hours.

The interviewees are thus self-taught when it comes to creating content on social media, although some of them have benefited from a higher education that has brought them tools to work online.

Influencers thus benefit from various forms of support that help them develop their career on social media platforms, such as paid administrative support (e.g. Smart, VentureLab, accountants, talent management agencies), or the free support of friends, family, and other influencers. Moreover, although some of the interviewees have a higher education background

that has brought them specific tools to manage their social media or to create quality content, they mostly had to learn by themselves how to manage a community and to create content. Most of the interviewees have thus resorted to the help of their friends, but also of various tutorials on internet.

4.1.7. Professional ambitions

The twelve interviewees have different projects for their professional future. Some influencers want to keep working on Instagram while it lasts and want to live in the present moment.

> *Influencer 1: I'm also trying to keep in mind that it could stop tomorrow in 10 minutes, if for some reason my Instagram is stricken or deleted or Instagram, the platform, closes, well, that part of my job no longer exists. So, I don't know, I'm enjoying it while it lasts.*

> *Influencer 2: I know I'm going to give it a year or two to see how it works, mostly. At the end of the year, I'll also see how it goes, I think we can quickly get an idea, so, yeah, at the end of the year, we'll see how it goes, then I think, one more year, and then we'll see after [...]. It's like, day to day and we'll see what happens.*

As Influencers 1 and 2 suggest, it is difficult to anticipate the future as an influencer on Instagram, as the future of Instagram itself is unpredictable. Some influencers clearly believe that Instagram will not last forever and try to figure out other projects for their future.

> *Influencer 3: I do everything that is consulting, because at some point, I thought that if I base everything on Insta and Insta ends up tomorrow, my company ends up with it. I want to think a little bit further than that. [...] So that's why I've tried to include social networks in my offers, but also consulting, which allows me to work on the product itself, and if tomorrow Insta doesn't exist, my work on the product, on the place, on the decoration, on the concept, on the recipes, well, it will always have value.*

> *Influencer 7: If tomorrow I'm no longer an Instagrammer and you don't want to hear about me anymore, and you don't want to collaborate with me anymore, well, don't worry, I'll become a salesman again or I'll do something else, and that's also why I*

started creating content, I work with the brand Volkswagen which makes me work a lot in terms of content creation.

Influencer 8 : Phew, yes well listen, clearly I know that Instagram, I won't be able to make a living out of it for much longer, that as I was telling you, it's really something ephemeral, so I'm taking advantage of everything I can get right now, because it's a great adventure, I'm having a great time. But I saw that I had the opportunity to get a job in the communication field thanks to Instagram, and so I hope, I wish, and in the future I will try to find a job there, by highlighting my Instagram experience.

As Influencers 3, 7 and 8 suggest, working on Instagram is temporary. These three influencers try to find ways to use the skills and experience they have accumulated on Instagram to imagine projects for their professional future. Influencer 3 is a consultant who could use all her skills and advice on other social media platforms than Instagram, Influencer 7 uses his skills in content creation to work for brands, and Influencer 8 believes that his experience on Instagram is likely to provide him with new job opportunities in the communication field. Like Influencer 8, some of the interviewees believe that their experience on social media can be valuable to some companies. For example, Influencers 1, 10, and 6 have found jobs as community manager or digital marketer for which they had no degree or certified qualifications, but their employers valued their experience on social media platforms.

Influencer 10: Because I actually have a blog, well actually, people came to me, because there was this job [as a digital marketer] but there were others too, there were others, I'd say, companies, that also contacted me to offer me jobs in community management just because I actually have a blog. [...] [T]he fact of having a blog, I think people associate it with the fact that we are self-taught.

Influencer 6: Most of my clients come to me because [my Instagram account] is my business card. [...] It would have been harder to become a community manager without my Instagram because I would have had to convince people, I would have had to say that I worked for such and such clients, whereas now, people think that if she has an Instagram like that, a blog like that, it's good, she manages the thing.

Similarly, Influencer 7 would like to work in the event industry and highlights his experience on social media to find a job.

> *Influencer 7: When you're an influencer, you participate in events, you participate in trips, you see how things are going, you're a self-entrepreneur so you have to manage your emails, you have to manage your clients, you have to manage agencies [...]. As a community manager, well yeah, that's what I do every day actually, being able to manage a community, being able to make a community grow, being able to create content, it's a bit like an Instagrammer's job description, yeah, so, it's not something I studied at school but it's something I did as a self-taught, so I think it helps.*

We thus observe that an experience as a social media influencer is valuable and can open new career opportunities to influencers (e.g. in the event industry, as community managers, or as digital marketers). The interviewees thus have different career projects, but most of them do not see Instagram as a long-term activity.

Working on social media platforms is thus perceived as a temporary activity by most of the interviewees. While some of them prefer to not question their professional future and want to enjoy their activity on Instagram while it lasts, other influencers have decided to make plans for their professional future. Some of them have developed side activities that offer them career opportunities out of Instagram (e.g. having a consultancy company, being a community manager for different clients, or creating content for the social media profiles of various brands). Other influencers believe that their experience on Instagram and other social media platforms is likely to be valuable to employers and thus do not fear their professional future, as they might find job opportunities in the event industry or communication field.

4.2. Analysis

The aim of our analysis is to establish ideal types of influencers in terms of career construction. To establish these ideal types, we analyse our data from different angles; we identify the contextual and individual factors impacting influencers' career construction, and we also determine the interviewees' career profiles and career anchors.

In the first part of our analysis, we focus on contextual and individual factors influencing the interviewees' career construction. We then analyse the career of influencers by using Briscoe and Hall's career profiles (2006) and a combination of the career anchors models of

Schein (1990), Bravo et al. (2017) and Marshall and Bonner (2003). These models, which were introduced in our literature review, help us understand how influencers construct and manage their career and help us define the individual motivations that influence the interviewees' career construction.

Following the first part of our analysis, we determine ideal types of influencers in terms of career construction. These ideal types give us insights on the possible ways followed by influencers to construct their career, as our ideal types are characterised by various individual and external factors influencing the career construction of influencers (e.g. their career anchor, career profile, income sources, professional ambitions, and support sources).

4.2.1. Factors influencing influencers' career construction

In terms of interpersonal factors influencing the career construction of influencers, we observe that gaining followers is a key element. Most of the interviewed influencers have started to share about their topic of interests on social media platforms without any specific agenda. Yet, they started gaining more and more followers, which made them interesting for brands and PR agencies and, as a result, enabled them to earn money from their activity on social media. Gaining or losing followers is relatively unpredictable and out of influencers' control, which suggests that the number of followers is an external factor determining the career construction of social media influencers.

Although having a large community may help in developing one's career on social media, we note that influencers with a rather small community but with a high engagement rate are also able to construct a career on social media platforms. As Kay et al. (2020) posit, micro-influencers[3] have business opportunities with brands, although they have relatively small communities. In our sample, most of the nano-, micro- and mid-tier-influencers, who have smaller communities, have paid partnership opportunities with brands and PR agencies. As we observe in Table 4, Influencer 11 has a high engagement rate (6.9%) and 86.605 followers, while Influencer 6 has a lower engagement rate (1.95%) but more followers (115.542). Influencer 11 has been living from his activity as an influencer for more than a year, while Influencer 6 does not make a living out of her activity on social media. The number of followers is thus not the only external factor impacting an influencer's career.

---

[3] Kay et al. (2020) define micro-influencers as influencers having 1.000 to 100.000 likes/post. We did not use Kay et al.'s categorisation, but both of us make a distinction between influencers with smaller communities and those with bigger communities.

In addition, partnerships with brands and PR agencies influence the career of influencers. Having well paid or loads of partnerships enables influencers to make a living out of social media, which influences their career construction. Some influencers, like Influencer 2, have quitted their job to dedicate themselves to their activity as social media influencers because they had enough incomes from partnerships to do so, and thus have had to opportunity to further develop their social media accounts. Yet, some influencers, like Influencers 4 and 9, have few or no partnerships with brands, either because they have few followers or because their content does not interest brands that could pay them (e.g. Influencer 4's topic of interest is astrology, which is a niche topic that does not interest most brands). Not having enough incomes out of partnerships with brands and PR agencies prevents influencers from making a living out of social media. They thus have to find alternative income sources, such as having a job in an organisation or developing their own business.

Influencers also benefit from different forms of support to help them develop and manage their career. The support of family and friends is very important for influencers on a daily basis, as their friends and family can help them with various aspects of their job (e.g. creating a blog, making photos). The help of other influencers also has an impact on the career construction of influencers. Sharing about the financial aspects of their activity and about partnerships with brands with other influencers can help influencers manage their partnerships and incomes. For several interviewees, talking about financial aspects with other influencers has helped them set standard prices for their work.

In addition, some influencers work with labour intermediaries (e.g. talent management agencies) that help them manage their emails, contracts, and partnerships. Working with such intermediaries helps influencers develop their network and enables them to have more partnerships that coincide with their professional goals. By delegating some time-consuming tasks such as processing emails, influencers have more free time and more time to manage their social media accounts. Besides, some influencers work with support entities (e.g. Smart, VentureLab) that help them develop their business and provide them with administrative support. For example, Influencer 4 works with VentureLab to develop her e-shop. The coaching she benefits from at VentureLab is a determinant factor in her career construction, especially regarding the development of her business, which is linked to her success on Instagram.

In terms of intrapersonal factors, we observe that the professional priorities and goals of each influencer play a major role in their career construction. Some influencers could make a living out of their activity on social media platforms but rather choose to develop their own business or to work within an organisation. For example, Influencer 1 wants to develop her

activity as an illustrator and Influencer 5 could not imagine working as a self-employed, as she deeply values the financial security she benefits from while working in a hospital.

Moreover, influencers' personality is an intrapersonal factor that influences their career construction. As already mentioned, followers value influencers that are authentic and true. In some cases, these personality traits influence the way influencers construct their career. For example, Influencers 7 and 8 were first not fully authentic and true, and rather were on social media platforms to do many collaborations and earn money. Yet, at some point, they decided to be more authentic and truer, as they know that these personality traits are what their followers want to see in the influencers they follow. Being true and authentic is thus part of the strategy of several influencers to develop their community and career on social media platforms.

To conclude, we observe that the career construction of influencers is influenced both by interpersonal and intrapersonal factors. In terms of interpersonal factors, the number of followers, the engagement rate, the number and remuneration of partnerships, and the types of support from which influencers benefit have an impact on their career construction. In terms of intrapersonal factors, the influencer's personality and professional goals are the most determinant factors.

4.2.2. The career of influencers: a theoretical approach

In this section, we use the career profiles developed by Briscoe and Hall (2006) and the career anchors models of Schein (1990), Bravo et al. (2017) and Marshall and Bonner (2003), which have been introduced in our literature review.

In terms of career profiles, our data allow us to distinguish between three types: wanderer, protean career architect and fortressed (see Table 5). As Briscoe and Hall (2006) explain, individuals in the wanderer category are boundaryless physically, but not psychologically, and are low in both of the protean dimensions. They are willing to take advantage of any career opportunity that comes along, and they do not restrict themselves from enjoying career opportunities because of organisational boundaries (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Yet, *"the limitation of such career actors comes in the sense that their psychological appreciation across boundaries is not as sophisticated as their ability to be physically mobile"* (Briscoe & Hall, 2006, p. 12). Wanderers are able to cross boundaries but are not actively trying to do so. They do not have a boundaryless mindset, as they cross boundaries only when opportunities come to them. As Briscoe and Hall further explain, *"because they are not truly self-directed in terms of values or career management, wanderers are essentially controlled by opportunities*

instead of directing them" (2006, p. 12). Wanderers' career is thus not self-directed, nor values-driven, but rather guided by opportunities.

Protean career architects are physically and psychologically mobile, they direct their career, and they are driven by their values (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). They are prone to transgress organisational boundaries as they have a boundaryless mindset. Protean career architects also have *"significantly higher levels of identity awareness, adaptability, career planning, proactive job search, and external networking behaviours compared to all"* (Övgü Çakmak-Otluoğlu, 2018, p. 133). Identity awareness refers to *"the ability to display accurate self-insight and to change one's self-concept as appropriate",* career planning refers to actively making plans for career developments and to have career goals, proactive job search refers to actively seeking new job opportunities, and thus to being psychologically and eventually physically mobile, and external networking behaviour refers to networking outside of the organisation in which one works (Övgü Çakmak-Otluoğlu, 2018, p. 130). Protean career architects thus have both a boundaryless and protean orientation.

Individuals in the fortressed category are values-driven. Yet, they do not direct their career and do not cross physical or psychological boundaries. They *"are only satisfied in conditions which match their values and which are stable"* (Briscoe & Hall, 2006, p. 12). Remaining in a stable work context is important to individuals in the fortressed category.

Anonym name	Boundaryless career		Protean career		Hybrid category (Briscoe & Hall, 2006)
	Physical mobility	*Psychological mobility*	*Self-directed*	*Values driven*	
Influencer 1	High	Low	Low	Low	Wanderer
Influencer 2	High	High	High	High	Protean career architect
Influencer 3	High	High	High	High	Protean career architect
Influencer 4	High	High	High	High	Protean career architect
Influencer 5	Low	Low	Low	High	Fortressed
Influencer 6	High	High	High	High	Protean career architect
Influencer 7	High	High	High	High	Protean career architect
Influencer 8	High	High	High	High	Protean career architect
Influencer 9	High	High	High	High	Protean career architect
Influencer 10	Low	Low	Low	High	Fortressed
Influencer 11	High	High	High	High	Protean career architect
Influencer 12	High	High	High	High	Protean career architect

Table 5 - Categorisation of influencers in terms of career orientation

The scores of each influencer on the different dimensions of the protean and boundaryless career models are presented in Table 5. In terms of career orientation, we observe that most of the interviewees have both a boundaryless and a protean orientation. Only Influencers 1, 5 and 10 are neither boundaryless- nor protean-oriented. Influencer 1's career

profile coincides with Briscoe and Hall's 'wanderer' category, as she is able to cross organisational boundaries, and as her career is not self-directed, but is rather controlled by opportunities. She first became a community manager, and then an influencer, because such opportunities came to her. She does not project herself in the future, as she wants to keep taking advantage of the present opportunity that is her activity on Instagram.

Influencers 5 and 10 are in Briscoe and Hall's 'fortressed' category. Both of them are values-driven, but have rather low scores in physical mobility, psychological mobility, and self-directness. They state that they are unlikely to give up their rather regular job to fully dedicate themselves to their activity as influencers. Influencer 5 does not imagine herself being a full-time influencer as she enjoys the financial stability that working in a hospital brings her. Similarly, Influencer 10 likes the financial security that her job as a journalist brings her, and she feels grateful for being a full-time journalist. Influencers 5 and 10 thus value financial/job security and are unlikely to cross boundaries that would disrupt their security.

All of the other interviewees are in the 'protean career architect' category. These influencers are psychologically and physically mobile, values-driven, and they direct their career. All these influencers are self-employed, except Influencer 9 who is employed in an organisation. These influencers are willing to transgress physical and psychological boundaries (e.g. some of them left their job to become full-time influencers), are values-driven (e.g. most of them have become influencers because they wanted to share about their passion and they only accept partnerships with brands that coincide with their values), and self-direct their career (e.g. some of them have started their business up, others have left their job to become influencers, and some also make plans for their professional future, such as creating their own fashion brand). Moreover, influencers who have various partnerships with brands usually work for several clients and offer several types of services, which, drawing on Hirschi (2018), is a contemporary form of physical boundarylessness. As Hirschi (2018) explains, careers increasingly consist of various tasks and projects that individuals complete for different firms, rather than of different jobs done for different organisations over their lifespan. Consequently, Hirschi (2018) argues that the boundaryless career concept has to be readapted.

We thus observe various tendencies in terms of career profile. Most of the interviewees who are full-time influencers or who combine their activity on social media with another activity as self-employed are in the protean career architect category. Those professional situations require psychological and physical mobility, especially in the case of influencers who left their job to become self-employed. Moreover, these types of influencers manage their career themselves and have to make plans for their professional future. As Instagram is, according to

several influencers, temporary, they need to find alternative activities for their professional future, and thus, to self-direct their career. Influencers who are working for an organisation in addition to working on social media platforms tend to have a fortressed career profile. The financial/job security they benefit from in their main professional activity is very important to them, and they would not want to give it up. Influencers in the wanderer category are also self-employed, but their main characteristic is that they take advantage of professional opportunities that come to them, instead of really controlling their career construction.

In terms of career anchors, we based our analysis on seven types of career anchor (see Table 6). Drawing on Marshall and Bonner (2003), we separated Schein's Entrepreneurial creativity anchor into two distinct anchors: Creativity and Entrepreneurial. Following the coding of our results, we noticed that some influencers are motivated by entrepreneurship, while others are motivated by creativity, which is why we decided to make a distinction between these two anchors. Indeed, when talking about their motivations, some influencers highlighted their will to start their own business up, while others told us that being able to create something that is the result of their ideas and work is one of their most important sources of motivation. As mentioned in our literature review, creative individuals are fulfilled when they create something that is the result of their ideas and work, and individuals with the entrepreneurial anchor have as main goal the creation and development of their own business (Marshall & Bonner, 2003). Moreover, drawing on Bravo et al. (2017), we decided to consider Schein's Autonomy and Pure challenge anchors as secondary anchors. We thus used the seven following anchors as theoretical framework for our analysis: Security/stability, Technical-functional competence, General managerial competence, Entrepreneurial, Creativity, Service or dedication to a cause and Lifestyle. Although having multiple career anchors is a possibility supported by Feldman and Bolino (1996) and by Martineau et al. (2005), we chose to identify only the main career anchor of each influencer. As most of the interviewees were relatively clear about their values, professional motives, and abilities, we felt that trying to identify more than one career anchor would have led us to overinterpret our data. In order to identify their main career anchors, we used the data we sorted out under the codes 'values' and 'sources of motivation'. Identifying the main sources of motivation and values of each influencer enabled us to determine their main career anchors. The career anchors of the interviewees are represented in Table 6, along with their career profiles.

Anonym name	Career anchor							Hybrid category
	Security/ stability	Technical-functional competence	General managerial competence	Entrepreneurial	Creativity	Service or dedication to a cause	Lifestyle	
Influencer 1							X	Wanderer
Influencer 2							X	Protean career architect
Influencer 3				X				Protean career architect
Influencer 4				X				Protean career architect
Influencer 5	X							Fortressed
Influencer 6				X				Protean career architect
Influencer 7					X			Protean career architect
Influencer 8					X			Protean career architect
Influencer 9							X	Protean career architect
Influencer 10	X							Fortressed
Influencer 11				X				Protean career architect
Influencer 12				X				Protean career architect

Table 6 - The interviewees' career anchors and their career profiles

We observe that most of the interviewees with a protean career architect profile have the Entrepreneurial or Creativity anchor. Influencers 3, 4, 6, 11 and 12's main goal is to develop their own business and they thus have the Entrepreneurial anchor. While Influencers 3, 4 and 6 have already developed their business (e.g. Influencer 3 has a consultancy company, Influencer 4 has an e-shop, and Influencer 6 has an e-shop and is a self-employed community manager), Influencers 11 and 12 are still developing it. Both of them are full-time influencers but would like to develop side projects (e.g. creating a fashion brand, organising cooking workshops). Influencers 7 and 8 have the Creativity anchor. As they explain, they do not want to limit their creative potential. When he worked as a community manager for H&M, Influencer 8 felt frustrated because he was not allowed to be creative. This lack of creativity made him quit his job. Similarly, Influencer 7 does not want to be limited in his creative process when it comes to partnerships with brands: *"I mustn't be restricted in my creative process. If I'm restricted, I don't do it"* (Influencer 7). Creativity is thus a major motivation for both of them.

Influencers 1, 2 and 9 have the Lifestyle anchor. Influencer 9 values her freedom to manage her time: *"Well, one of the things that really motivates me [...] is the freedom of my time and the freedom of the tasks I do, so if this blog could bring me that, that's great, but it shouldn't become a constraint, so you have to keep a good balance in that"* (Influencer 9). She needs flexibility in terms of time management and in terms of tasks. Balance is important to her, which is a characteristic of the Lifestyle anchor. Similarly, Influencers 1 and 2 have the Lifestyle anchor. Influencer 1 particularly likes being both an illustrator and an influencer because, as her activity on social media is not too time consuming, she still has time to draw for herself, not for clients: *"In fact, there are times when I'm tired of drawing for others [...], there are times when I like to say 'listen, I'm stopping the orders for two weeks', I draw only*

for myself then" (Influencer 1). Finding balance between drawing for herself and drawing for clients is thus important to her, so she would not like to be a full-time illustrator. Balance is also important to Influencer 2. She left her job at the crèche because she was too tired, needed a break, and quitted her job because she needed more balance in her life. She wanted more time for her blog and Instagram, as well as for her private life.

Moreover, Influencers 5 and 10, who are both in the fortressed category, have the Security/stability anchor. Influencer 5 explains that she needs job and financial stability in her life, which is why she does not want to become a full-time influencer. The Security/stability anchor thus coincides with her current situation. Influencer 10 also values security, as she would not quit her job as a journalist to try to develop her activity on social media platforms.

To conclude, we observe that there are three major tendencies regarding the career profiles and career anchors of the interviewees. Most of the interviewees who are full-time influencers or influencers with a side activity as self-employed are in the protean career architect category and have the Entrepreneurial or Creativity anchor. The interviewees who are in the fortressed category have the Security/stability anchor, as they seek financial/job security in their professional activities. Influencers in the wanderer category have a Lifestyle anchor, as they mostly seek balance in their life.

4.2.3. Categorisation of influencers in terms of career construction

Following our results, the main themes we identified in the narratives of each influencer, and the first part of our analysis, we observe that the interviewees can be categorised in terms of career construction. We established three categories of influencers: the amateurs, the opportunists, and the entrepreneurs. These categories are represented in Table 7 and are characterised by the career profile of the influencers, their main career anchor, their main professional activity, their main source of incomes, their professional ambitions, the number of partnerships they have with brands, the strategies they use to develop their social media profiles, the impact of their activity as social media influencers on their other professional activities, the trainings they received that are related to their activity as social media influencers, their values and the different sources of support they benefit from. The three categories represent ideal types, which implies that we have stressed characteristics that are common to most influencers in each category. Moreover, being part of one category does not mean having all the characteristics attributed to this category, but rather having most of them.

Characteristics	Amateur	Opportunist	Entrepreneur
Career profile	Fortressed	Wanderer	Protean career architect
Main career anchor	Security/stability	Lifestyle	Entrepreneurial
Main professional activity	Employee in an organisation	Influencer on social media	Entrepreneur
Main source of incomes	Job in an organisation	Partnerships with brands/PR agencies	Incomes from their business
Professional ambitions for the future	Continuing working both in an organisation and on social media platforms	Continuing their activity on social media platforms while it lasts	Developing their business
Partnerships with brands	They do not have many collaborations	They have collaborations with brands/PR agencies, and have long-term partnerships or fixed sponsors to secure their monthly incomes	They have collaborations with brands/PR agencies but these are not their main sources of incomes
Strategies to develop their social media	Poorly defined strategy: no publication planning, no sponsored post	Moderately defined strategy: publication planning, authenticity	Highly defined strategy: sponsored posts, focus on social media algorithms, publication planning, authenticity
Impact of the influencer's success on social media on other professional activities	Low impact: their main activity is not related to their activity on social media	High impact: side activities gain more visibility as they are promoted on their social media profiles	High impact: their business gains more visibility as it is promoted on their social media profiles

Table 7 - Categories of influencers in terms of career construction

The amateur category represents influencers who have a fortressed career profile and whose career anchor is the Stability/security anchor. Their main professional activity is the job they have in an organisation, and this job also represents their main source of incomes. Their activity as social media influencers is more like a hobby and represents relatively small extra incomes. Those influencers do not have many partnerships with brands, either because they are not interested in collaborating with many brands/PR agencies, or because brands/PR agencies are not interested in collaborating with them. In addition, those influencers do not have any specific strategy to develop their social media, but rather post content or stories when they feel like doing so. Regarding their professional ambitions, amateur influencers would like to continue working both in an organisation and on social media platforms. They do not want to give up their organisational activity, as it brings them a sense of financial and work security, although some of them have reduced their working time to have more free time to dedicate to their social media. Their activity on social media has little impact on their main professional activity, as these are not necessarily related.

The opportunist category concerns influencers who have a wanderer career profile and a Lifestyle career anchor. Their main professional activity is their activity as social media influencers because they had, at some point, the opportunity to become influencers as main

professional activity. Their incomes come from their partnerships with brands and PR agencies. In order to secure their monthly incomes, those influencers opt for long-term partnerships and fixed sponsors. In terms of professional ambitions, those influencers want to continue working on social media platforms while they can. They believe that their activity on social media platforms is temporary and want to make the most of this professional opportunity. They have a moderately defined strategy to develop their social media profiles, which usually includes a publication planning and the desire to be authentic to please their followers. Moreover, when opportunist influencers have side activities, these activities may benefit from a relatively high level of visibility, as influencers may promote these side activities on their social media profiles. For example, Influencer 1 is part-time illustrator. She shares her drawings on her Instagram profile, which makes them more visible and available to a large audience of followers.

The entrepreneur category concerns influencers who have a protean career architect profile and an Entrepreneurial career anchor. Although they have influence on social media platforms, they have also developed a form of business (e.g. e-shop, consultancy company) and the biggest part of their incomes comes from this business, although they may also have partnerships with brands and PR agencies. Developing their business is their main goal for their professional future. Regarding the development of their activity on social media platforms, they are highly strategic. They pay platforms for sponsored posts, as they want to gain more visibility, they try to understand social media algorithms to take advantage of them, they have a relatively structured publication planning, and they want to be unique and authentic to please their followers. Developing their social media profiles is also advantageous for their business, as their business may gain visibility thanks to their success on social media platforms.

We further note that, regardless of ideal types, there exist overarching characteristics that are common to most influencers. Most influencers are self-taught when it comes to managing their social media and to creating content; they have had no specific training related to their activity on social media platforms. Although some of them have been helped by their friends or family regarding certain aspects of their activity on social media platforms (e.g. in the creation of a blog), they have acquired most of their skills on their own. Besides, social media influencers can benefit from several sources of support when it comes to developing or managing their activity as social media influencers. Their main support sources are their family and friends, other influencers, and administrative support. Family and friends mainly help influencers in their daily life (e.g. they take photos for them, help them create their blog or explain them the basics of photography), other influencers mainly help them with the financial aspects of their activity (e.g. they discuss about their partnerships and incomes), and

administrative support mainly consists in working with an accountant, a talent management agency, or another support entity such as Smart or VentureLab. We also note that influencers share common values, which are authenticity and sharing.

5. Discussion

Following our analysis, we conclude that influencers can be categorised in terms of career construction. We identified three categories of influencers: the amateurs, the opportunists, and the entrepreneurs. Amateurs have a fortressed career profile and a Security/stability anchor, as they do not want to quit their job in a traditional organisation to work on social media platforms. They do not make plans to develop their career on social media, they do not implement any specific strategy, and they do not have/want many collaborations with brands. They would like to continue working both in an organisation and on social media, as creating content on social media platforms represents, for them, a hobby, or a way to earn extra incomes.

Opportunists have a wanderer career profile and a Lifestyle anchor. Their main activity is the one they have on social media platforms. At some point, they had the opportunity to make a living out of their collaborations with brands, so they decided to become full-time influencers. They have a moderately defined strategy to develop their career on social media (e.g. publication planning) and they try to secure their incomes by having long-term partnerships with brands and fixed sponsors. Some opportunists also develop side activities that gain more visibility thanks to the influencers' success on social media platforms.

The last type of influencers, the entrepreneurs, have a protean career architect profile and an Entrepreneurial anchor. Entrepreneurs have launched a business, usually following their relative success on social media platforms. Their main activity is their business, and their main source of incomes comes from their business, although they may also have collaborations with brands. They have a highly defined strategy to develop their career on social media (e.g. focus on algorithms, sponsored posts), but their main career goal is to develop their business, which gains visibility thanks to their success on social media.

The main factors influencing the career construction of social media influencers are individual and interpersonal. Individual factors include motivational factors, career anchors, professional goals, and personality. In terms of motivational factors, influencers' main source of motivation is the will to share their opinions and ideas with their community, which is the reason why most influencers have started creating content on social media platforms. Moreover, the career anchor of each influencer impacts their career construction. Some influencers have a Security/stability anchor and do not want to quit their job to dedicate themselves to their social media, as their job within an organisation brings them a sense of security. Other influencers have an Entrepreneurial anchor and try to create their own business. Career anchors thus influence how influencers construct their career. As Schein (1990) argues, career anchors guide

individuals' career. Similarly, as Holtschlag et al. (2020) state, professional goals determine the career construction of individuals. Some influencers do not want to quit their job within an organisation to develop their social media, as being full-time influencers is not their main professional goal. Their professional goals thus have an impact on how they construct their career. Regarding personality, we support Audrezet et al. (2018) when they argue that authenticity is the most important characteristic of influencers. Most of the interviewees value authenticity and know that their followers want to follow authentic people. Some influencers refuse certain partnerships because they do not coincide with their values, which has an impact on their career construction. For example, some influencers do not want to jeopardise the messages they want to share because of product placements, which eventually prevents them from earning money on social media platforms.

Interpersonal factors also influence the career construction of social media influencers. Those factors include gaining followers, having a high engagement rate, having partnerships with brands and PR agencies, benefiting from the support of family, friends, and other influencers, and benefiting from the support of talent management agencies, accountants, or other support entities. Regarding the number of followers and engagement rate, Kay et al. (2020) argue that micro-influencers usually have a higher engagement rate than macro-influencers, and that they are thus likely to be solicited for partnerships with brands. Following our analysis, we also observe that influencers with smaller communities (nano- and micro-influencers) have partnership opportunities with brands. Yet, we also notice that some influencers, even some who have a medium-sized community (mid-tier-influencers), have only few partnerships because brands are not interested in their content. Indeed, some influencers deal with niche topics in which brands are not interested. As a result, those influencers have to find alternatives to earn money (e.g. starting up a business). In addition, several forms of support impact the career construction of influencers. Family and friends may help influencers with various aspects of their activity (e.g. creating a blog, liking their publications, making photos). Influencers may also benefit from the help of other influencers regarding the financial aspects of their activity (e.g. setting standard prices) and partnerships.

Some influencers also benefit from paid support. As Childers et al. (2019) explain, ad and marketing agencies, as well as talent management agencies, provide direct support to influencers. We observe that many influencers work with PR agencies, and that some of them also work with talent management agencies. Talent management agencies help them manage their contracts, put them in contact with brands, and even process their mails. Besides, some

influencers work with other support entities that provide them with administrative support or coaching regarding entrepreneurship.

Following our analysis and the identification of factors influencing the career construction of social media influencers, we thus observe that the career construction of influencers differs from traditional career construction. Entrepreneur influencers are protean and boundaryless oriented. Unlike traditional workers who have a linear career and who work in only one organisation throughout their career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), entrepreneur influencers are not willing to spend their whole career within one organisation and rather want to manage their own business. Their career is boundaryless, as entrepreneur influencers tend to transgress interorganisational boundaries; some of them quitted their organisational job to start their business up, and as some of them work for several clients. As already mentioned in our analysis, working for several clients is a contemporary form of boundarylessness (Hirschi, 2018). Moreover, entrepreneur influencers have a boundaryless mindset, as they want to transgress organisational boundaries to be develop their own business. They have also a protean orientation, as they self-direct their career and are values-driven.

Opportunist and amateur influencers are not fully protean/boundaryless oriented. Opportunist influencers construct their career by taking advantage of opportunities, but as their career is controlled by opportunities, they are not self-directed in terms of career management or in terms of values. They thus do not have a protean orientation. Yet, opportunist influencers are able to transgress boundaries. Some influencers quitted their job because they had the opportunity to make a living out of social media platforms. However, they do not have a boundaryless mindset, as transgressing organisational boundaries is not, for them, a goal in itself. They thus only have the physical mobility dimension of the boundaryless career orientation. Although opportunist influencers are neither fully boundaryless nor protean oriented, they do not have a traditional career. They do not spend their whole career within one organisation and are not seeking traditional rewards such as promotions and salary increases. As opportunist influencers usually have a Lifestyle anchor, they are rather willing to find balance between professional and private life. Drawing on Sullivan and Arthur who argue that *"having a boundaryless career is not an 'either or' proposition"* (2006, p. 23), we argue that opportunist influencers are low in psychological mobility but high in physical mobility, and are thus partly boundaryless oriented.

Amateur influencers have a *hybrid career*. As Sullivan and Baruch (2009) explain, hybrid careers are characterised by elements of organisational and non-organisational careers. For example, people can combine the desire to self-manage their career and the willingness to

reach traditional rewards (such as promotions and salary increases), or they can transgress psychological boundaries while trying to climb up the hierarchical ladder (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). This concept implies that careers are not always either organisational or non-organisational, but that different dimensions of multiple career types can be combined throughout one's career. We observe that amateur influencers combine dimensions of the protean career and of the traditional career. Amateurs want to continue working within an organisation, as it brings them a sense of security and stability. Their activity of influencer is more like a hobby to them, and in some cases, this hobby brings them extra incomes. They keep their activity as social media influencers mainly because they are values-driven (i.e. they are motivated by sharing), which is a dimension of the protean career. They thus work within a relatively traditional context in an organisation and combine this traditional dimension of their career with their activity on social media platforms, which is more protean oriented, as this part of their career is driven by their values.

To conclude, influencers usually do not have a traditional career. Depending on their professional goals, personality, motivations, and career anchor, influencers are more or less oriented towards a boundaryless/protean career. While entrepreneur influencers are highly boundaryless and protean oriented, amateurs combine dimensions of both the traditional career orientation and the protean one, and opportunists are only partly boundaryless oriented.

6. Recommendations for future research

In terms of future research, we believe that it would be interesting to analyse the career of social media influencer in terms of sustainability. As Van der Heijden and De Vos explain, sustainable careers refer to *"sequences of career experiences reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, thereby crossing several social spaces, characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual"* (2015, p. 7). De Vos et al. (2018) distinguish three indicators characterising sustainable careers: health, happiness, and productivity. Moreover, when studying sustainable careers, three key dimensions should be considered: person, context, and time. De Vos et al. (2018) note that it is important to understand the 'person' dimension, which means understanding how the individual affects the sustainability of their career through their actions and their interpretations of their experiences (De Vos et al., 2018). The various 'contexts' in which the individual evolves also have an impact on the individual's career sustainability (De Vos et al., 2018). Regarding the 'time' dimension, De Vos et al. (2018) note that it is important to consider intrapersonal and contextual changes across the individual's lifespan. As social media influencers seem to have relatively unstable working conditions and an uncertain professional future, studying influencers' career according to these three dimensions could give us new insights on this emergent form of work.

In addition, using Pichault and McKeown's analytical matrix (2019) based on independent professionals' experienced situations regarding autonomy at work could bring us new insights on the supposed autonomy from which social media influencers benefit. This matrix could help us evaluate the level of autonomy influencers benefit from in terms of work status, work content and working conditions. Although influencers seem autonomous regarding these three dimensions, it would be interesting to question this supposed autonomy, especially when it comes to paid partnerships with brands. Measuring the autonomy brands allow influencers to have might challenge their supposed autonomy.

Another research recommendation would be the adaptation of Duggan et al.'s summary of working arrangements (2020), which is based on Cappelli and Keller's classification of economic work arrangements (2013). As influencers represent a new form of platform workers, they could embody a new category in Duggan et al.'s summary of work arrangements.

In our study, we identified three types of influencers. An interesting idea for future research related to our findings would be the exploration of career transitions and ideal type switching. For example, amateur influencers could become entrepreneurs or opportunists.

Exploring how influencers can change category would bring new insights on influencers' career construction.

Furthermore, the role and characteristics of intermediaries that work with social media influencers might be further studied. We observed that some influencers use talent management agencies to manage their administrative tasks, contracts, and mails, and to put them in contact with specific brands. Yet, we do not know the other types of services they provide, to whom they offer their services, or whether they have work contracts with influencers.

Moreover, a research could be focused on the role of the different actors involved in work relationships on social media platforms. Unlike Deliveroo or Uber, which put workers and clients in contact, social media platforms do not put brands or PR agencies in contact with influencers. They mainly host the content of influencers. Yet, without social media platforms, the work relationship between brands/PR agencies and influencers could not exist. We thus suggest that, in the case of social media influencers working for brands/PR agencies, there are four actors in the work relationship: the influencer, the brand/PR agency, the platform, and the follower. In this relationship, the influencer is the service provider, the brand/PR agency is the client, the platform is the host of the content/place of delivery, and the follower is the end-user. We should however note that in the case of platforms such as YouTube or Twitch, the platform can have a more active role in the work relationship, as they share some of their revenues with influencers (e.g. monetisation of videos, subscription fees). In addition, in some cases, such as in the case of influencers who benefit from the support of talent management agencies, there is a fifth actor (i.e. the talent management agency) who behaves as an intermediary between brands and influencers.

It would also be interesting to analyse how brands and PR agencies perceive their relationships with social media influencers. Knowing more about their influencer marketing strategy (e.g. how they select influencers for specific campaigns, how they manage their partnerships with influencers) and about the way they visualise the professional future of influencers may also help in clarifying the way influencers construct their career, and in identifying interpersonal factors influencing their career construction.

To conclude, further research on the career construction of social media influencers should avoid the limits we faced in terms of sample. Analysing the career construction of influencers mainly active on other platforms than Instagram, of influencers with more than 300.000 followers, with other socio-demographic features than those of the influencers of this study, or of influencers who have a domain of expertise that was not covered by our sample

would be very insightful and could bring more diversity to our results in terms of career construction.

7. Conclusion

The aim of our research was to fill a gap in the scientific literature by investigating the way social media influencers construct their career and by highlighting the individual and contextual factors impacting influencers' career construction. In order to achieve our goals, we used an inductive, qualitative research approach. Our interview guide was composed of open questions in order to make influencers talk about their career in the form of narratives. We collected our data through twelve interviews with social media influencers who have different professional backgrounds, domains of expertise, and community sizes. We also composed a literature review that has enabled us to analyse our data with some theoretical insights in mind.

Following the interviews, we conducted a narrative analysis. We used Briscoe and Hall's career profiles (2006) to categorise the interviewees in terms of career profile and we observed three tendencies. Full-time influencers or part-time influencers with a side activity as self-employed were in the protean career architect category. The interviewees who worked within an organisation and for which working on social media platforms was a side activity were in the fortressed category. The interviewees who became influencers because they had the opportunity to do so were in the wanderer category. We further observed that most of the influencers with a protean career architect profile had an Entrepreneurial or a Creativity anchor, influencers with a wanderer profile had a Lifestyle anchor, and influencers in the fortressed category had a Security/stability anchor.

Drawing on the first part of our analysis, we observed that the career construction of influencers was influenced by interpersonal and individual factors. In terms of interpersonal factors, the community size, the engagement rate, the number and remuneration of partnerships, and the types of support from which influencers benefit had an impact on their career construction. In terms of individual factors, the influencer's personality, motivations, and professional goals were also influencing factors. We further observed that influencers could be categorised in terms of career construction. We identified three categories of influencers: the amateurs, the opportunists, and the entrepreneurs.

We then discussed our results. We mainly noted that, depending mostly on individual factors, influencers can be more or less oriented towards a boundaryless/protean career. Some influencers, mainly the amateurs, even combine dimensions of the traditional career and dimensions of the protean one. We then provided recommendations for future research that may help in further understanding influencers' career construction and the factors influencing it.

8. Table of Appendices

9. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview guide

(1) Pourriez-vous vous présenter, en mentionnant votre âge et votre situation professionnelle actuelle ?

Could you please introduce yourself, and mention your age and current professional situation?

(2) Pourriez-vous me parler de votre parcours professionnel ?

Could you please tell me about your professional background?

(3) Pourriez-vous me parler en détail de votre parcours en tant qu'influenceur ?

Could you please tell me in more details about your background as an influencer?

(4) Vivez-vous de votre activité d'influenceur ? Si oui, comment faites-vous pour avoir assez de revenus ? Si non, pourquoi ?

Do you make a living out of your activity as an influencer? If yes, what do you implement to have enough incomes? If no, why?

(5) Mettez-vous des choses en place pour développer votre activité d'influenceur ? Si oui, lesquelles ?

Do you implement something to develop your activity as an influencer? If yes, what?

(6) Comment imaginez-vous votre futur professionnel ?

How do you imagine your professional future?

(7) Quelle est votre définition du terme *influenceur* ?

What is your definition of the term influencer?

10. List of Figures

11. List of Tables

12. References

Arora, A., Bansal, S., Kandpal, C., Aswani, R., & Dwivedi, Y. (2019). Measuring social media influencer index-insights from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *49*, 86–101. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.03.012

Arthur, M. B., Hall, D. T., & Lawrence, B. S. (1989). Generating New Directions in Career Theory: The Case for a Transdisciplinary Approach. In *Handbook of Career Theory* (pp. 7–25). Cambridge University Press.

Arthur, M. B., & Rousseau, D. M. (1996). *The Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Organizational Era*. Oxford University Press.

Audrezet, A., De Kerviler, G., & Guidry Moulard, J. (2018). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research*, 557–569. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008

Balaban, D., & Mustățea, M. (2019). Users' Perspective on the Credibility of Social Media Influencers in Romania and Germany. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations*, *21*(1), 31–46. https://doi.org/10.21018/rjcpr.2019.1.269

Baruch, Y. (2014). The development and validation of a measure for protean career orientation. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *25*(19), 2702–2723. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2014.896389

Bell, B. (2016). *Becoming an Instagram Influencer: How to Gain Mastery Over Instagram and Make Money Doing It*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Boerman, S. C. (2020). The effects of the standardized Instagram disclosure for micro- and meso-influencers. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *103*, 199–207. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.09.015

Bravo, J., Seibert, S. E., Kraimer, M. L., Wayne, S. J., & Liden, R. C. (2017). Measuring Career Orientations in the Era of the Boundaryless Career. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *25*(3), 502–525. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072715616107

Briscoe, J. P., & Hall, D. T. (2006). The Interplay of Boundaryless and Protean Careers: Combinations and Implications. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *69*(1), 4–18. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2005.09.002

Briscoe, J. P., Hall, D. T., & Frautschy DeMuth, R. L. (2006). Protean and Boundaryless Careers: An Empirical Exploration. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *69*(1), 30–47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2005.09.003

Calculez le taux d'engagement des Influenceurs sur Instagram. (n.d.). *tanke.fr*. Retrieved 14 April 2020, from https://www.tanke.fr/ig/

Cappelli, P., & Keller, J. R. (2013). Classifying work in the new economy. *The Academy of Management Review*, *38*(4), 575–596. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2011.0302

Carman, A. (2020, February 4). Instagram brought in $20 billion in ad revenue last year, more than a quarter of Facebook's earnings. *The Verge*. https://www.theverge.com/2020/2/4/21122956/instagram-ad-revenue-earnings-amount-facebook

Childers, C. C., Lemon, L. L., & Hoy, M. G. (2019). #Sponsored #Ad: Agency Perspective on Influencer Marketing Campaigns. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, *40*(3), 258–274. https://doi.org/10.1080/10641734.2018.1521113

Chudzikowski, K., Gustafsson, S., & Tams, S. (2020). Constructing alignment for sustainable careers: Insights from the career narratives of management consultants. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *117*(103312), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.05.009

Clarke, M. (2013). The Organizational Career: Not Dead but in Need of Redefinition. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *24*(4), 684–703. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2012.697475

Clement, J. (2020, April 1). Number of social media users worldwide 2010-2023. *Statista*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/

Cocker, H. L., & Cronin, J. (2017). Charismatic Authority and the YouTuber: Unpacking the New Cults of Personality. *Marketing Theory*, *17*(4), 455–472. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593117692022

Costigan, R., Gurbuz, S., & Sigri, U. (2018). Schein's Career Anchors: Testing Factorial Validity, Invariance Across Countries, and Relationship with Core Self-Evaluations. *Journal of Career Development*, *45*(3), 199–214. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845316676903

Da Silva, R. C., Trevisan, L. N., Veloso, E. F. R., & Dutra, J. S. (2016). Career anchors and values from different career management perspectives. *Revista Brasileira de Gestão de Negócios*, *18*(59), 145–162. http://dx.doi.org/10.7819/rbgn.v18i59.2260

Daniels, N. (2020). *How To Become An Influencer: The Step-By-Step Guide To Becoming An Influencer In Your Industry.* BookRix.

Danziger, N., Rachman-Moore, D., & Valency, R. (2008). The construct validity of Schein's career anchors orientation inventory. *Career Development International*, *13*, 7–19. https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430810849506

De Valck, K., Van Bruggen, G. H., & Wierenga, B. (2009). Virtual communities: A marketing perspective. *Decision Support Systems*, *47*(3), 185–203. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2009.02.008

De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, *36*(5), 798–828. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035

De Veirman, M., Hudders, L., & Nelson, M. R. (2019). What is influencer marketing and how does it target children? A review and direction for future research. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*, 1–16. http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02685

De Vos, A., Van der Heijden, B. I. J. M., & Akkermans, J. (2018). Sustainable careers: Towards a conceptual model. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *117*(103196), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.06.011

Duggan, J., Sherman, U., Carbery, R., & McDonnell, A. (2020). Algorithmic management and app-work in the gig economy: A research agenda for employment relations and HRM. *Human Resource Management Journal*, *30*(1), 114–132. https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12258

El Qudsi, I. (2020, February 6). Council Post: What to Expect for Influencer Marketing In 2020. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2020/02/06/what-to-expect-for-influencer-marketing-in-2020/

Feldman, D. C., & Bolino, M. C. (1996). Careers within careers: Reconceptualizing the nature of career anchors and their consequences. *Human Resource Management Review*, *6*(2), 89–112. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1053-4822(96)90014-5

Fraser, H. (2016). Doing Narrative Research: Analysing Personal Stories Line by Line. *Qualitative Social Work*, *3*(2), 179–201. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325004043383

Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public Relations Review*, *37*(1), 90–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.11.001

Gerhards, C. (2017). Product placement on YouTube: An explorative study on YouTube creators' experiences with advertisers: *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, *25*(3), 516–533. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856517736977

Gubler, M., Arnold, J., & Coombs, C. (2014). Reassessing the protean career concept: Empirical findings, conceptual components, and measurement. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *35*, S23–S40. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1908

Hall, D. T. (1996). *The Career is Dead-Long Live the Career: A Relational Approach to Careers*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Hamilton, W. A., Garretson, O., & Kerne, A. (2014). Streaming on twitch: Fostering participatory communities of play within live mixed media. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1315–1324. https://doi.org/10.1145/2556288.2557048

Hearn, A., & Schoenhoff, S. (2015). From Celebrity to Influencer: Tracing the Diffusion of Celebrity Value across the Data Stream. In *A Companion to Celebrity* (pp. 194–212). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118475089.ch11

Hirschi, A. (2018). The Fourth Industrial Revolution: Issues and Implications for Career Research and Practice. *The Career Development Quarterly*, *66*(3), 192–204. https://doi.org/10.1002/cdq.12142

Hirschi, A., Jaensch, V. K., & Herrmann, A. (2017). Protean career orientation, vocational identity, and self-efficacy: An empirical clarification of their relationship. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, *26*(2), 208–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2016.1242481

Holtschlag, C., Masuda, A. D., Reiche, B. S., & Morales, C. (2020). Why do millennials stay in their jobs? The roles of protean career orientation, goal progress and organizational career management. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *118*(103366), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.103366

Hou, M. (2019). Social Media Celebrity and the Institutionalization of YouTube. *Convergence*, *25*(3), 534–553. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856517750368

Inkson, K., & Baruch, Y. (2008). Organizational careers. In J. Barling, S. R. Clegg, & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Handbook of Organizational Behavior: Volume Two—Macro Approaches*. SAGE.

Inkson, K., Gunz, H., Ganesh, S., & Roper, J. (2012). Boundaryless Careers: Bringing Back Boundaries. *Organization Studies*, *33*(3), 323–340. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840611435600

Jaakonmäki, R., Müller, O., & Vom Brocke, J. (2017). The Impact of Content, Context, and Creator on User Engagement in Social Media Marketing. *Proceedings of the 50th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 1152–1160. https://doi.org/10.24251/HICSS.2017.136

Kaspi-Baruch, O. (2016). Motivational orientation as a mediator in the relationship between personality and protean and boundaryless careers. *European Management Journal*, *34*(2), 182–192. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2015.10.004

Kay, S., Mulcahy, R., & Parkinson, J. (2020). When less is more: The impact of macro and micro social media influencers' disclosure. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *36*(3–4), 248–278. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1718740

Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of Social Media Influencers. *Celebrity Studies*, *8*(2), 191–208. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2016.1218292

Kirwan, D. (2018, August 21). Council Post: Are Social Media Influencers Worth the Investment? *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2018/08/21/are-social-media-influencers-worth-the-investment/

Levinson, D. J. (1978). *The Seasons of a Man's Life*. Ballantine Books.

Li, Y.-M., Lai, C.-Y., & Chen, C.-W. (2011). Discovering influencers for marketing in the blogosphere. *Information Sciences*, *181*(23), 5143–5157. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ins.2011.07.023

Li, Y.-M., Lee, Y.-L., & Lien, N.-J. (2012). Online Social Advertising via Influential Endorsers. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, *16*(3), 119–154. https://doi.org/10.2753/JEC1086-4415160305

Lin, H.-C., Bruning, P. F., & Swarna, H. (2018). Using online opinion leaders to promote the hedonic and utilitarian value of products and services. *Business Horizons*, *61*(3), 431–442. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2018.01.010

Marshall, V., & Bonner, D. (2003). Career anchors and the effects of downsizing: Implications for generations and cultures at work. A preliminary investigation. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, *27*(6), 281–291. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090590310479910

Martineau, Y., Wils, T., & Tremblay, M. (2005). La multiplicité des ancres de carrière chez les ingénieurs québécois : Impacts sur les cheminements et le succès de carrière. *Relations Industrielles / Industrial Relations*, *60*(3), 455–482.

McCormick, M. (2019, October 13). How You Can Build a Career as an Influencer. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/meghanmccormick/2019/10/13/how-you-can-build-a-career-as-an-influencer/

Miller, C. (2020). *Earn from Social Media: How to be an Influencer, Grow Followers and Earn Millions from Social Media*. Independently Published.

Nasheeda, A., Abdullah, H. B., Krauss, S. E., & Ahmed, N. B. (2019). Transforming Transcripts into Stories: A Multimethod Approach to Narrative Analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *18*, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919856797

Övgü Çakmak-Otluoğlu, K. (2018). A cluster analysis of protean and boundaryless career orientations: Relationships with career competencies. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, *27*(3), 127–136. https://doi.org/10.1177/1038416217743024

Peiperl, M., & Baruch, Y. (1997). Back to Square Zero: The Post-Corporate Career. *Organizational Dynamics*, *25*(4), 7–22. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0090-2616(97)90033-4

Pichault, F., & McKeown, T. (2019). Autonomy at work in the gig economy: Analysing work status, work content and working conditions of independent professionals. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, *34*(1), 59–72. https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12132

Pringle, J., & Mallon, M. (2003). Challenges for the Boundaryless Career Odyssey. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *14*(5), 839–853. https://doi.org/10.1080/0958519032000080839

Rodrigues, R., Butler, C. L., & Guest, D. (2019). Antecedents of protean and boundaryless career orientations: The role of core self-evaluations, perceived employability and social capital. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *110*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.11.003

Rodrigues, R., Guest, D., & Budjanovcanin, A. (2013). From anchors to orientations: Towards a contemporary theory of career preferences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *83*(2), 142–152. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2013.04.002

Rodrigues, R., Guest, D., & Budjanovcanin, A. (2016). Bounded or boundaryless? An empirical investigation of career boundaries and boundary crossing. *Work, Employment and Society*, *30*(4), 669–686. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017015570726

Roose, K. (2019, July 16). Don't Scoff at Influencers. They're Taking Over the World. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/16/technology/vidcon-social-media-influencers.html

Rousseau, D. M. (1989). Psychological and Implied Contracts in Organizations. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, *2*(2), 121–139. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01384942

Sankaran, S. (2018). Megaproject management and leadership: A narrative analysis of life stories – past and present. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, *11*(1), 53–79. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-07-2017-0081

Schein, E. H. (1990). *Career anchors: Discovering your real values*. San Diego, California: Pfeiffer & Company.

Schein, E. H. (1996). Career Anchors Revisited: Implications for Career Development in the 21st Century. *The Academy of Management Executive (1993-2005)*, *10*(4), 80–88. https://doi.org/10.5465/AME.1996.3145321

Segers, J., Inceoglu, I., Vloeberghs, D., Bartram, D., & Henderickx, E. (2008). Protean and Boundaryless Careers: A Study on Potential Motivators. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *73*(2), 212–230. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2008.05.001

Smith, B. (2016). Narrative Analysis. In E. Lyons & A. Coyle (Eds.), *Analysing Qualitative Data in Psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 202–221). SAGE.

Stephenson, B. (2020, January 20). What Are Social Media Influencers and What Do They Do? *Lifewire*. https://www.lifewire.com/social-media-influencer-4685079

Stoldt, R., Mariah, W., Ekdale, B., & Tully, M. (2019). Professionalizing and Profiting: The Rise of Intermediaries in the Social Media Influencer Industry. *Social Media + Society*, *5*(1), 1–11. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2056305119832587

Suciu, P. (2020, February 14). Is Being A Social Media Influencer A Real Career? *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersuciu/2020/02/14/is-being-a-social-media-influencer-a-real-career/

Sullivan, S. E. (1999). The Changing Nature of Careers: A Review and Research Agenda: *Journal of Management*, *25*(3), 457–484. https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639902500308

Sullivan, S. E., & Arthur, M. B. (2006). The Evolution of the Boundaryless Career Concept: Examining Physical and Psychological Mobility. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *69*(1), 19–29. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2005.09.001

Sullivan, S. E., & Baruch, Y. (2009). Advances in Career Theory and Research: A Critical Review and Agenda for Future Exploration. *Journal of Management*, *35*(6), 1542–1571. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206309350082

Super, D. E. (1957). *The Psychology of Careers: An Introduction to Vocational Development*. Harper.

Thomas, D. R. (2006). A General Inductive Approach for Analyzing Qualitative Evaluation Data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *27*(2), 237–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748

Van der Heijden, B. I. J. M., & De Vos, A. (2015). Sustainable careers: Introductory chapter. In *Handbook of Research on Sustainable Careers* (pp. 1–19). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Wakefield, J. (2019, November 14). Social-media influencers' incomes soar. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50418807

What Is A Micro Influencer? Definition, Pros & Cons, Examples, & More. (2017, July 14). *Mediakix*. https://mediakix.com/blog/what-are-micro-influencers/

Williams, K., Hernandez, E., & Petrosky, A. (2011). Product placement effectiveness: Revisited and renewed. *Journal of Management and Marketing Research*, *7*(1), 1–24.

Yew, R. L. H., Suhaidi, S. B., Seewoochurn, P., & Sevamalai, V. K. (2018). Social Network Influencers' Engagement Rate Algorithm Using Instagram Data. *2018 Fourth International Conference on Advances in Computing, Communication Automation (ICACCA)*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1109/ICACCAF.2018.8776755

Table of Contents