

How Micro-influencers Position as Entrepreneurs on Instagram

A qualitative study on how micro-influencers in the beauty & fashion industry position themselves as entrepreneurs on Instagram

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid growth and popularity of social media, the number of people who identify as influencers has been on an upward trend. Influencers can be categorized as people who have large fan bases, and post content to engage their audiences. Micro-influencers are categorized as influencers who have a relatively lower follower count, but still have influence in a specific niche domain, or among certain interest groups. Micro-influencers are said to be able to more successfully engage with their audiences because they come off as more authentic than their influencer counterparts who have a higher reach, like macro-influencers. This new generation of entrepreneurial influencers uses social media to build their personal brands and engage with target audiences in their domains of influence. They have also been making waves in the beauty and fashion industry due to their ability to create rich content, and their capacity to connect with their audiences. This group reports higher engagement and dedication from followers, thereby increasingly becoming the preferred channel for brands to connect with audiences. The beauty/fashion industry has a strong presence on social media, and members of this group are particularly active on Instagram. This paper aims to study how micro-influencers position themselves as entrepreneurs through their accounts on Instagram. A total of 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with micro-influencers, and their responses were studied through thematic analysis. During the data collection and analysis phase, various themes related to the research questions emerged. The findings indicate that micro-influencers position as entrepreneurs on Instagram through creating close connections with their followers, and through successfully partnering with brands in their niche. They also alter perceptions through the type of content that is shared on Instagram, and the ways they utilize the opportunities and functions presented on the platform to position themselves as entrepreneurs.

KEYWORDS: *Social media influencers, micro-influencers, entrepreneurship, positioning on Instagram, beauty and fashion*

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1. Introduction

The wide availability of online social media created various entrepreneurial opportunities which spawned a new form of digital entrepreneur, the social media influencer (Guiñez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2021). Social media influencers (SMIs) and the content they create and post are difficult to avoid when navigating and exploring social media platforms. Social media influencers (SMIs) are perceived as opinion leaders in online communities. This work confirms that followers turn to influencers for information and advice, and view them as role models (Casaló et al., 2020). In turn, influencers utilize positioning tactics to craft an external image to attract and retain their audiences. Influencers implement personal brand positioning to highlight positive traits that are of value to their audiences, while at the same time differentiating themselves from others in the industry (Khedher, 2014). Moreover, authenticity seems to be a fundamental element when crafting external impressions. Indeed, these SMIs work to create an authentic individual brand through social networks, which businesses can utilize to reach customers (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015).

Micro-influencers, also known as micro-bloggers, are individuals with niche knowledge on a certain topic and have a reasonable number of followers on social media (Gan et al., 2019). They make up the largest group of influencers and have been gaining academic and practical attention, and for good reason. Even though micro-influencers have relatively fewer followers and reach than other types of influencers, they often have higher engagement rates in their domains of influence (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020). Hence, they are able to create a high impact as their followers are highly dedicated (Rakoczy et al., 2018). Audiences, in turn, tend to find micro-influencers more credible and relatable. They are not perceived as out-of-touch celebrities, rather they are seen as trustworthy individuals who have gained fame or popularity through social media (Kay et al., 2020).

Moreover, the beauty and fashion industry has been increasingly using micro-influencers for their ability to inspire trustworthiness and relatability in consumers (Britt et al., 2020). After all, brands and influencers who operate in beauty and fashion have a robust presence on social media, Instagram and YouTube being the most utilized platforms by influencers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The beauty industry has a strong presence on social media which continues to grow (Kay et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Additionally, the fashion industry has gained popularity on Instagram in the last few years and the most used platform by influencers in fashion is Instagram (Casaló et al., 2020). According to (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), it is vital for brands to search for and manage relationships with SMIs. Furthermore, investments in this sector, which also includes parenting and tourism, are

expected to reach between \$5 billion and \$10 billion by the end of this year (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) which makes it a prominent industry in which micro-influencers' positioning strategies are worth studying.

Influencer marketing is a type of marketing strategy where companies partner with social media influencers to advertise their products and services (Guíñez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2021). Additionally, in this paper, the beauty/fashion industry on Instagram is discussed because this sector heavily utilizes influencer marketing on the same platform (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). It would be interesting to focus on Instagram for a few reasons: it enables the creation of communities, engagement rates on the platform are typically higher than on other social networking platforms, and its ability to support visually pleasing content (Casaló et al., 2020). Additionally, the number of active users on Instagram has been on an upward trend and users on the platform are projected to increase in the near future (Statista, 2022). As of 2022, there are 1.28 billion active users on Instagram globally, more than those on YouTube and WhatsApp, coming in second to sister company Facebook (Statista, 2022).

According to Schumpeter, entrepreneurs are innovators who carry out entrepreneurial change in markets (Bahcecik et al., 2019). Furthermore, entrepreneurship impacts the needs of people, like wanting to be accepted and having status in society (Bahcecik et al., 2019). Entrepreneurship is also related to value judgements, and the larger cultural and traditional environment. Social media provides opportunities to reach clients and target groups, and enables communication, and relationship building in a manner that forms trust (Bahcecik et al., 2019). Social media influencers are perceived as digital entrepreneurs that provide various services to companies (Guíñez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2021). Furthermore, entrepreneurial behaviors are human behaviors that involve searching for and making use of entrepreneurial opportunities (Guíñez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2021). This paper discusses how influencers exploit these opportunities and position themselves on their Instagram accounts.

Social media influencers and their motivations have been studied academically for many years. Similarly, micro-influencers have been gaining ground by marking their place in the world of marketing and advertising (Rakoczy et al., 2018). However it was found that there is a gap in research with regard to studying the entrepreneurial motivations of micro-influencers as they navigate their way through opportunities previously unavailable to them through Instagram. Micro-influencers are using their relatively newfound popularity to establish their brands through social media (Sinha & Fung, 2021). They leverage their followers and turn them into buying customers by creating a brand is relatable and authentic

(Sinha & Fung, 2021). Furthermore, micro-influencers are launching their fashion lines on Instagram, which has become the main launching platform for several new influencer brands (Sinha & Fung, 2021). As a result, Instagram is supposedly perceived as a platform that *democratizes* fashion (Sinha & Fung, 2021). For these reasons, micro-influencers and their entrepreneurial motivations and intentions deserve to be explored further academically. Hence, this paper focuses on the positioning efforts that entrepreneurial micro-influencers undertake on Instagram and seeks to answer the research question: *How do beauty and fashion micro-influencers utilize Instagram to position themselves as entrepreneurs?*

1.1 Societal and Academic Relevance

This paper seeks to add to existing knowledge on micro-influencers, entrepreneurship, and brands in the fashion and beauty industry that are present on Instagram. There is a gap in the research about how micro-influencers position themselves as entrepreneurs on Instagram. This research aims to fill that knowledge gap and at the same time, contribute to the existing literature on relevant topics. This paper contributes insights into how micro-influencers advertise for brands, and their role in brand promotions (Rakoczy et al., 2018). Additionally, it adds to the existing knowledge on micro-influencers' ability to successfully connect with their audiences (Kay et al., 2020). Additionally, influencers' impact on purchasing behavior and follower attitudes are explored (Britt et al., 2020). Furthermore, this study contributes to the existing literature on entrepreneurship, specifically digital and media entrepreneurship. This is important as entrepreneurship has evolved given the rise of the internet and social networking sites (Guíñez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2021). Additionally, this explores entrepreneurial opportunities resulting from becoming a social media influencer (Guíñez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2021). In research from Leung et al. (2020), they state that influencers who focus on specific areas of interest manage their content to echo their positioning strategies. This paper further explores in what other ways micro-influencers position themselves. Additionally, Casaló et al. (2020) highlight that it might be beneficial to research antecedents and consequences of micro-influencers given their unique traits.

This research potentially benefits micro-influencers in their entrepreneurial journeys. Micro-influencers have recently been delving into the world of entrepreneurship (Rakoczy et al., 2018). The insights derived could potentially benefit influencers and micro-influencers in their efforts to collaborate with brands on Instagram. Besides brand collaborations, this research also potentially benefits micro-influencers who want to start their own

fashion/beauty lines on Instagram. This is important because influencer-created Instagram brands have witnessed great success on the platform and have been able to amass a dedicated following (Sinha & Fung, 2021). This research provides insight into how influencers use Instagram, a platform with the second-highest number of global active users (Statista, 2022), to manage perceptions by positioning themselves (Khedher, 2014).

Finally, this paper presents a possible different path to entrepreneurship via influencing (Guíñez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2021), and offers insights that could potentially help aspiring and conventional entrepreneurs. Indeed, entrepreneurs would benefit to learn about entrepreneurial opportunities that are available to them as influencers on social networking sites like Instagram (Guíñez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2021).

Therefore, the current research seeks to contribute to literature on micro-influencers in the beauty and fashion industry, entrepreneurship, and Instagram as a marketing tool. Additionally, this paper attempts to fill the knowledge gap of how micro-influencers in that industry position themselves on Instagram to come off as entrepreneurial to their audiences on the platform.

1.2 Thesis Structure

This paper consists of five chapters: Introduction, Theoretical Framework, Methods, Results, and Conclusion. In the following chapter, a theoretical framework is presented on the topics and definitions of entrepreneurship, definitions of the entrepreneur, social media influencers, beauty and fashion influencers, and positioning on Instagram as an entrepreneur. The academic literature presented in the theoretical framework sheds light on previous research on social media influencers and more specifically, micro-influencers. Additionally, this section highlights both media entrepreneurship and digital entrepreneurship as different forms of entrepreneurship that deserve acknowledgment and academic attention. The following chapter is about the Method in which this qualitative study was carried out using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and provides a detailed analysis of the data that was produced using thematic analysis. This chapter also includes sampling, data collection, operationalization, data analysis, a section on validity and reliability, and finally, ethical considerations are taken into account. The Results chapter highlights the findings that resulted from the analysis followed by the Conclusion chapter, where these findings are discussed. This chapter also includes this study's recognized limitations and highlights recommendations for future studies, followed by the list of references and appendices, which includes the interview guide and generated code trees.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the theoretical foundations of concepts focal to the research questions are explored. It covers theories on *entrepreneurship*, *entrepreneurs*, *digital entrepreneurship* and *media entrepreneurship*, *social media influencers*, *beauty and fashion influencers*, *positioning on Instagram*, and *the micro-influencer*. This chapter offers definitions and theories which will form the basis of data analysis, the outcome of which can be found in the Results chapter.

2.1 Entrepreneurship

The vital role that entrepreneurship plays in the economy was first studied by Richard Cantillon in 1755 (Brown & Thornton, 2011). In creating a vital theory of entrepreneurship with modern implications, Cantillon is said to be “*the original thinker on entrepreneurship*” (Murphy et al., 2006, as cited in Brown & Thornton, 2011, p. 102). He described entrepreneurship as prevalent in an economy and the theory of entrepreneurship as the instrument through which economic theory was built. The two implications that form Cantillon’s theory of entrepreneurship are uncertainty and risk, which are discussed in the next section. Cantillon’s conjecture falls under the *theory of risk*, placing the notion of *risk* as focal in the definition of entrepreneurship (Gedeon, 2010).

The definition of entrepreneurship, in some literature, has revolved around the concept of opportunities. For instance, in 1990, Stevenson and Jarillo defined entrepreneurship as the process by which people go after opportunities without consideration of the resources presently controlled (Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990). This definition falls under the behavioral school which stipulates that the formation of a new venture is key to the definition of entrepreneurship and not the personal traits of the entrepreneur. Similarly, Shane and Venkataraman (2000) agree that a definition of entrepreneurship that centers only on the individual has resulted in an incomplete definition of the phenomenon by researchers. They describe entrepreneurship as the ways in which people uncover, assess, and make use of *opportunities*.

However, Edwards-Schachter et al. (2015) offer a broader understanding of entrepreneurship as the ability to transform ideas into action, which encapsulates the notion of capturing opportunities as discussed by Shane and Venkataraman (2000). In their article about unraveling hidden interconnections between creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship, they offer a wider notion of entrepreneurship as additionally involving creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and the ability to plan and execute projects to fulfill goals

(Edwards-Schachter et al., 2015). Creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship (CIE) are the elements needed to promote the culture of entrepreneurship, according to Edwards-Schachter et al. (2015). These factors act as developmental catalysts in a socio-economic context and contribute to an understanding of entrepreneurship as a wide and dialogue-based approach (Edwards-Schachter et al., 2015). One that includes not only people, as future entrepreneurs, but involves the development of novel values, and the larger environment where these entrepreneurial affairs happen (Edwards-Schachter et al., 2015).

Further in this research, the definition of entrepreneurship put forth by Stevenson and Jarillo (1990) will be used as it centers on the notion of capturing opportunities. As will be made clear in a later section, this paper elaborates upon entrepreneurial opportunities that are available through social networking sites like Instagram. Therefore, it seemed fitting to use the definition offered by Stevenson and Jarillo (1990). Furthermore, it is interesting to consider the stark difference between what opportunities meant back in 1990, and how entrepreneurial opportunities are available in our digital world today.

2.2 The Entrepreneur

Cantillon's theory of entrepreneurship is the instrument through which economic theory was built, and the entrepreneur is central to the construction of economic theory. If there were no entrepreneurs, the theoretical construction would fall apart (Brown & Thornton, 2011). In Cantillon's work, the term entrepreneur was used to reference farmers, merchants, manufacturers, and retailers among others; *undertakers* of risk and uncertainty. Furthermore, Cantillon distinguishes between uncertainty and risk, highlighting the notion that entrepreneurs have to endure both (as cited in Brown & Thornton, 2011). He perceived uncertainty as similar to time passing, or simply not knowing. Risk, on the other hand, refers in his works to the prevailing threat of bankruptcy in an entrepreneur's endeavors (as cited in Brown & Thornton, 2011).

Therefore, the definition of an entrepreneur, according to Cantillon, is one who takes risks caused by changes in demand in the market (as cited in Brown & Thornton, 2011). Entrepreneurs buy inputs at a certain price to make and sell goods at a later stage, and at an unfixed price. Price and production are matched with demand, and this is done by the entrepreneur. The main characteristic of an entrepreneur, according to Cantillon, is surviving on an income that is not fixed or assured (as cited in Brown & Thornton, 2011). Decision-making based on judgment is linked to risk and uncertainty. Indeed, according to Casson (2003), the definition of an entrepreneur is one whose specialty is the ability to make

decisions based on their judgment about the allocation of limited resources. The perception of risk varies from one person to another, and an entrepreneur with confidence can see zero risk while others perceive substantial risk (Casson, 2003). The perception of lower risk is due to the information that the entrepreneur possesses.

A key strategy for entrepreneurial success is the ability to pioneer (Brush, 2008). Indeed, according to Brush (2008), entrepreneurs are pioneers by definition and being able to successfully pioneer, in essence, means to conquer difficulties. Some entrepreneurs deal with working in an unestablished industry, receive no support, have no mentors for guidance, and operate in an unstable environment. Nevertheless, their capability in acquiring new territories, traversing new domains, and creating innovative initiatives is based on a toolkit of skills that permitted these entrepreneurs to succeed in the first place (Brush, 2008). Indeed, Brush (2008) highlights these abilities and lists them as developing a vision, bootstrapping, and social skills. Visioning is having a long-term view of the future, and bootstrapping is the ability to manage finances creatively. Furthermore, according to Brush (2008), one does not necessarily need to be born with social skills, rather these skills, like others, can be learned and mastered through practice. Convincing and persuading others falls under social skills, and the ability to secure funds also relies upon the interpersonal skills of the entrepreneur (Brush, 2008).

2.3 Digital Entrepreneurship and Media Entrepreneurship

Digital entrepreneurship (DE) is a new form of augmented entrepreneurship that is specific to the digital world and the nature of digital media. According to Guíñez-Cabrera and Aqueveque (2021), digital entrepreneurship includes the impact of social media on entrepreneurial pursuits. Hull et al. (2007) define DE as a subset of entrepreneurship where the physical elements in a traditional company are digitized; these could be some physical elements or even all. On the other hand, Sahut et al. (2019) oppose the definition put forth by Hull et al. (2007) and offer a novel, more exhaustive definition of (DE) as the process of an entrepreneurial development of digital value via the use of “various socio-technical digital enablers to support effective acquisition, processing, distribution, and consumption of digital information” (p. 1162). Indeed, the analysis of DE cannot be boiled down to just the inclusion of conventional entrepreneurship, and information and communication technology (ICT). Rather, digital entrepreneurship is viewed as an augmented or cyber entrepreneurship that requires making novel conceptual frameworks to examine the intricacies of the DE ecosystem (Sahut et al., 2019). On the other hand, according to Achtenhagen (2017), digital

entrepreneurship is said to be categorized under mainstream entrepreneurship, and little effort has been expended on studying the role of certain factors of digital technologies in forming entrepreneurial actions.

In mainstream entrepreneurship research, there is a growing interest in better understanding digital and media entrepreneurship (Achtenhagen, 2017). Even though digital entrepreneurship has a great deal of overlap with media entrepreneurship (Achtenhagen, 2017), an exhaustive definition of media entrepreneurship is needed to explain the features of entrepreneurship in a dynamic and growing media sector (Khajeheian, 2017). Moreover, a definition of media entrepreneurship is suitable to present in this paper as the topic is related to influencers, a group that has a dominant presence on social media platforms. According to Khajeheian (2012), the definition of media entrepreneurship comprises people or small companies that utilize their, or others' resources to generate value by drawing out opportunities through providing products or services. These products and services incorporate innovation in "product/service characteristics, process, distribution channel or place, or different innovative usage, to media market, or any other market which media is its main channel of interaction" (Khajeheian, 2012, p. 128). In 2017, Khajeheian offered a more thorough definition of media entrepreneurship by additionally considering that the media entrepreneur could sell products, services, and information in the form of data, users including followers, or the media brand or channel itself (Khajeheian, 2017).

Novel technological advancements in the digital world have facilitated the creation of entrepreneurial media startups (Achtenhagen, 2017). Indeed, Achtenhagen (2017), who conducted research on the topic, states that current advancements in digital technology have made way for new forms of entrepreneurial startups that are causing disruption to the media market. These startups have been contesting the prior knowledge compiled thus far on media management. Additionally, Achtenhagen (2017) offers an assertion of the importance of the study of media entrepreneurship by stating that new media encourages unheard voices in the industry to offset the higher rates of concentration of media ownership that could challenge democracy.

2.4 Social Media Influencers

People determine norms by examining other users of their social networks who are similar to them (Casaló et al., 2020). According to Hernandez and Calarco (2021), members of a network replicate social behaviors that conform to the norm, and represent influence and control, to try and avoid being stigmatized. Social media influencers (SMIs) are, in essence,

opinion leaders. According to Casaló et al. (2020), opinion leaders portray themselves as influential participants of online groups that other members turn to for advice, and Instagram is the most used platform by these opinion leaders. Indeed, historically, the internet and relevant technologies created through it have expanded the role of these opinion leaders (Casaló et al., 2020). Indeed, opinion leadership has to do with the degree to which a person is seen to be a role model for other people, the level to which the information they have provided is deemed engaging, and their ability to persuade. Furthermore, interestingly, their findings report that the perceived originality and uniqueness of a post, rather than the number of posts or their quality, are the fundamental elements that allow a user to be perceived as an opinion leader, or an influencer.

Moreover, Freberg et al. (2011) base the definition of social media influencers (SMIs) on the ability to impact their followers' attitudes, or their ability to persuade audiences. More recently, Lee and Theokary (2021) describe SMIs as entrepreneurs who finance their own ventures and produce monetary value by fostering knowledge, expertise, and capabilities in their selected field of passion. Furthermore, passion can inspire credibility among influencers (Ouvrein et al., 2021). In fact, Ouvrein et al. (2021) use passion as a criterion to differentiate social media influencers from other types of endorsers. Additionally, Guíñez-Cabrera and Aqueveque (2021) categorize SMIs as digital entrepreneurs who leverage their following and provide various services to companies. Influencers can work for themselves by establishing their own brands, or by providing services to other businesses that are linked to their realm of influence (Guíñez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2021). Social media influencers generally work "to generate a form of 'celebrity' capital by cultivating as much attention as possible and crafting an authentic 'personal brand' via social networks, which can subsequently be used by companies and advertisers for consumer outreach" (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015, p. 194). However, influencers are distinguished from the classic notion of celebrities because of the way they get famous; the prior group attains fame by establishing a personal brand via social media posts (Kay et al., 2020).

Being an influencer offers diverse entrepreneurial prospects, according to Guíñez-Cabrera and Aqueveque (2021). These opportunities are created through the wide availability and use of online social media. Therefore, a new form of a digital entrepreneur was born: the social media influencer. Social media influencers are understood as digital entrepreneurs, therefore, removing the emphasis from their ability to simply influence their followers' viewpoints to broader entrepreneurial ambitions.

Social media influencers carefully craft and control their online personas by choosing what to share about their private and personal lives in an effort to appear authentic (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). This is discussed in detail in the positioning section later on in this chapter. Furthermore, SMIs also attempt to convey passion and openness by producing content that is original, incorporating product information with personal emotional narratives, and only presenting goods that are aligned with their online personas. Therefore, ironically, authenticity becomes an element that is carefully crafted, transforming the notion into a strategic way to present oneself (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). However, when influencers post about commercial products, they are perceived by their followers as less authentic; blaming the influencer for being a sell-out, and in it for the money instead of the community (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). Therefore, influencers work to effectively balance their followers' expectations with the expectations of the advertisers they partner with in an effort to come off as more authentic (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020).

Influencers utilize the tools and functionalities offered by Instagram to build social influence. In research by Arora et al. (2019), they found that the average likes acquired on Instagram have the highest effect in determining social influence, more than on Twitter and Facebook. Additionally, total engagement on Instagram is more effective than the same on Twitter and Facebook (Arora et al., 2019). Instagram is the platform that is utilized the most among SMIs who engage in influencer marketing activities (WFA, 2018, as cited in Guíñez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2021). This is also discussed further in the positioning section.

There is an increasing number of academic discussions around the topic of what makes up a large or acceptable follower/like count to be categorized as an SMI. However, practically, there are different categorizations of SMIs (Kay et al., 2020). While some researchers propose two levels of classification, others researchers suggest three (or more) levels of classification. Boerman (2020), who studied the impact of the standardized disclosure on Instagram for levels of influencers on the basis of the number of followers, states that intellectuals in the domain of influencer marketing characterize distinct levels of influencers; micro, meso, and macro-influencers. On the other hand, (Kay et al., 2020) discuss only two groups of influencers; macro-influencers and micro-influencers. Macro-influencers are influencers who have a big following, and micro-influencers have fewer followers, according to Kay et al. (2020).

Micro-influencers are social bloggers with knowledge of a particular topic and have a decent number of followers on social media (Gan et al., 2019). This group of influencers is composed of people who are not celebrities or do not possess celebrity status (Gan et al.,

2019). There are key differences between micro and macro-influencers besides follower count. First, micro-influencers tend to have relatively negligible celebrity status as compared to macro-influencers who tend to be more settled and possess an international celebrity-level status (Boerman, 2020). Second, micro-influencers are perceived to be more authentic and better connected with their audience, which leads to their posts being more persuasive, as compared to macro-influencers (Kay et al., 2020). Third, micro-influencers are perceived as people who exude closeness, friendliness, and naturalness, as compared to macro-influencers who have a more polished image, and less rapport with audiences (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020).

Furthermore, there are various unofficial, following-based classifications for micro-influencers. While some researchers identify micro-influencers as having less than 10,000 followers (Boerman, 2020), other researchers classify micro-influencers as having between 10,000 and 100,000 followers (Gan et al., 2019). For the purposes of this study, the latter classification is used. This is because, through observation over the course of this study, micro-influencers who are better integrated into the beauty and fashion industry mainly fall under that follower count, thus the insights derived as a result of using this classification have the potential to result in rich information on the industry. Additionally, this classification seemed suitable for influencers in both big and small geographical markets. However, it is also important to mention that these classifications are among other unofficial classifications that categorize influencers based on their follower count.

2.5 Beauty and Fashion Influencers

In the beauty and fashion industry, both brands and influencers have a robust social media presence. According to Britt et al. (2020), the industry has progressively utilized social media influencers as a less costly option that have a wide reach, as compared to paid advertising. Influencers in the industry tend to discuss issues relating to beauty and fashion brands, their personal style, beauty launches by fashion brands, and items accepted as press samples, to name a few (Britt et al., 2020). These influencers advocate a lifestyle of beauty and fashion and nurture relationships between the consumer and the brand while selling their own products and merchandise. Furthermore, there's an increasing pattern of beauty and fashion brands opting for micro-influencers rather than mega influencers for their trustworthiness and relatability with the general public (Britt et al., 2020). The followers of micro-influencers tend to relate to them on a larger scale and recognize a mutual connection with the niche influencer. Influencers in the beauty and fashion industry possess public

recognition and affect attitudes and purchasing decisions on a large scale (Britt et al., 2020). In addition, people tend to identify with SMIs more than with conventional celebrities and this is interesting to witness in the beauty and fashion industry. According to Feng et al. (2020), influencers as well are seen as trustworthy sources for information on products in a specific field of interest, such as beauty and fashion, and brands support the SMI based on their knowledge of the said field (Feng et al., 2020). A fundamental part of an influencer's success is that they create a reputation by dedicating themselves to a specific niche and their ability to create fun narratives, and this is just as true in the world of beauty and fashion (Feng et al., 2020).

2.6 Positioning on Instagram

In brand management, the positioning concept refers to "the way a company wants customers to perceive, think and feel about its brand versus competitive entries" (Janiszewska & Insch, 2012, p. 10). Personal branding is defined as the process of developing a one-of-a-kind personal identity, actively communicating this brand identity to target audiences, and studying its effect on personal elements like image and reputation, in an effort to achieve personal or professional goals (Khedher, 2014). Personal branding is undergone when people try to promote themselves in the market. It is an approach that differs from one individual to the other. Indeed, the fundamental premise of personal branding is that individuals can be thought of as brands, everyone possesses a personal brand regardless of age, position, and the business itself (Peters, 1997 as cited in Khedher, 2015). In other words, when personal branding is done right, anyone can be transformed into a brand in any industry (Khedher, 2015).

While personal branding is focused on self-promotion, brand positioning is one of the steps needed toward creating a personal brand. A brand needs to be positioned in the customer's mind (Khedher, 2014). Personal brand positioning is used to emphasize the *positive qualities* that are of value to a person's audiences, while simultaneously *distinguishing* themselves from others in the market (Khedher, 2014). Personal brand positioning involves active marketing communication initiatives of one's brand identity to a target demographic (Khedher, 2014). Positioning happens via presenting oneself through non-verbal cues like looks and mannerisms, verbal discourses (information about oneself), and social networking (Khedher, 2014).

Social networking can enhance the range of personal branding campaigns, and help grow the value of the personal brand (Peters, 2007, as cited in Khedher, 2014). Social media

influencers use Instagram to build and craft an external image to appeal to their target audiences (Khedher, 2014). Internet entrepreneurs use Instagram to reach their audiences (Bahcecik et al., 2019). Positioning on Instagram happens through the bio section, linking the Instagram account to other networks, using hashtags, and organizing Instagram campaigns (Bahcecik et al., 2019). Furthermore, according to new research from Leung et al. (2022), internet entrepreneurs utilize Instagram to ensure that the brand's identity and corporate culture align with the kind of images influencers share. Furthermore, while some companies provide briefs and guidelines for campaign goals, other firms allow influencers the freedom to create content as they like (Leung et al., 2022). From a brand's perspective, this content is meant to align with the influencer's personal positioning, so that it is appreciated by the influencer's followers (Leung et al., 2022).

3. Methods

In this chapter, the research design, sampling, and data collection of this qualitative study are discussed. The first section of this chapter discusses the research design where the choice of method is contended as appropriate for answering the research question at hand. The section after presents the sampling method, followed by the procedure of how participants were selected and the operationalization of the research question. Finally, the last section details the method used to analyze the data gathered from interviews, and thematic analysis, to identify themes and patterns in the responses.

3.1 Research Design

This study aims to explore the real-life experiences and attitudes of micro-influencers in positioning themselves as entrepreneurs on Instagram. Hence, the qualitative method was selected as it focuses on lived experiences and human behavior. Indeed, these elements are hard to quantify and therefore, the quantitative method is not fit for this study. The qualitative approach is utilized to comprehend an individual's beliefs, experiences, mindset, actions, and communication (Kalra et al., 2013) which makes it suitable for the purposes of this study that aims to explore micro-influencers' experiences on Instagram with regard to positioning. Indeed, the qualitative method centers on answering a research question using a humanistic approach. Furthermore, the qualitative process allows for the examination of a case in-depth and in detail (Patton, 1987). This approach was selected as it delivers an abundance of information about a relatively smaller group of people with rich insider knowledge (Patton, 1987). Micro-influencers have valuable insider knowledge on how to successfully generate and maintain engagement with their followers. Moreover, in qualitative studies, data gathering is not bound by pre-arranged categories of analysis, and that helps with the data's depth and intricacy (Patton, 1987) which is important to this study.

Since this paper aims to gather and assess deeper knowledge of participants' experiences, in-depth interviewing is used as the specific type of method. Additionally, semi-structured interview questions were utilized. In-depth interviews include one-on-one, face-to-face dialogue between an interviewer and a participant, and aim to construct intimacy through mutually sharing information (Johnson, 2001). The nature of this form of interview is based on uncovering detailed information on the participants' experiences, which is not accessible through a survey, for instance (Allmark et al., 2009). Even though both interviews and surveys are used to collect data, surveys restrain the depth of knowledge

that can be acquired (Codó, 2008). Indeed, the instructive way of asking questions, and close-ended responses that are derived from surveys make it difficult to explore additional information and details on participants' lived experiences (Codó, 2008). This is not the case with in-depth interviews, as probing questions and follow-up questions were asked to explore deeper insights, as discussed by Codó (2008).

A semi-structured interview format allowed for more flexibility and openness with regard to responses from interviewees (Longhurtst, 2016). It allows interviewees to discuss their experiences more openly (Longhurtst, 2016). The nature of semi-structured interview questions involves a pre-determined list of questions that elicit conversational and informal interactions that allowed for participants to be able to elaborate on their responses (Longhurtst, 2016). Therefore, semi-structured interviews are beneficial when exploring complicated behaviors, beliefs, and sentiments and for the purposes of gathering information on a wide range of experiences (Longhurtst, 2016), factors that are aligned with the purpose of this study. This is also the reasoning behind the use of open-ended questions, so interviewees could elaborate on their experiences and ideas in their own words. Furthermore, conducting semi-structured interviews enabled trust-building and establishing rapport with micro-influencers to gain insider knowledge (Longhurtst, 2016).

3.2 Sampling

The data was collected from a total of 10 micro-influencers over the age of 18. Micro-influencers with followers between 10,000 to 100,000 were approached. Participants were expected to have a presence on Instagram in the form of an active personal account or a professional account on the platform. Micro-influencers who post at least twice a week or post daily stories on Instagram were sampled. In this paper, this step was implemented to ensure that Instagram-active micro-influencers were approached. Additionally, the micro-influencers who were approached were involved in some way, or at some point in the beauty and fashion industry. In this paper, this was understood as either owning their own beauty and fashion lines or partnering with brands in a professional capacity to promote their beauty/fashion-related products and services. In this study, beauty/fashion micro-influencers were identified on Instagram by the content they post. The content posted on Instagram highlighted the micro-influencer's particular niche. This content includes posts on outfits, styling, accessorizing, makeup, skincare, and other topics and issues that fall under either fashion or beauty. The sample demographics are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Sample

Interviewee	Followers (April, 2022)	Social Media Focus	Location	Age	Gender
1	100,000	Fashion/travel/lifestyle	Qatar	49	Female
2	68,800	Fashion/jewelry/culture	UK	38	Female
3	100,000	Fashion/fitness/travel/lifestyle	Qatar	24	Female
4	12,200	Beauty/lifestyle	Malaysia	29	Female
5	63,400	Fashion/jewelry/study abroad	Italy	27	Female
6	74,500	Fashion/beauty/travel/lifestyle	Qatar	38	Female
7	92,900	Fashion/travel/lifestyle/study abroad	Canada	32	Female
8	21,000	Fashion/styling	Qatar	40	Female
9	11,800	Beauty/makeup	UAE	31	Female
10	10,200	Fashion/travel	Indonesia	28	Female

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique used to select participants based on the judgment of the researcher (Etikan, 2016). In this paper, purposive sampling was selected as a method to obtain initial leads, then snowball sampling was implemented to recruit additional participants. The influencer leads that were recruited are popular Instagram beauty/fashion influencers located in the Middle East. They were identified and approached on Instagram. Even though gender did not play a role in sampling, all participants were female. This form of sampling was utilized as it takes into consideration the overall quality of the data, rather than the number of respondents (Hennink et al., 2016). Additionally, in this study, data collection stopped at the saturation point, as discussed by (Parker et al., 2019). Indeed, in qualitative studies, sampling is usually complete when saturation has been achieved (Parker et al., 2019) and purposive sampling, as a method, provides insight into an adequate sample size through saturation (Hennink et al., 2016). It is the point at which data collection does not reveal any new information (Hennink et al., 2016). This means that saturation indicates whether more sampling needs to be done or not.

As a type of convenience sampling, purposive sampling is often used in conjunction with snowball sampling (Parker et al., 2019). In this paper, snowball sampling was used to access and approach additional participants. The process initially started with inviting a few leads, who matched the required criteria, to become participants in the study. The initial leads communicated the sampling criteria to additional participants. After double-checking their profiles, participants that actually fit the criteria were then approached. The willing

participants were then requested to recommend other potential candidates, who also fit the requirements, and so forth. Links were initially established through social networks, then snowball sampling took effect, resulting in a series of willing participants, as discussed by Parker et al. (2019).

In this study, sampling bias was minimized through implementing a theoretical framework as a foundational basis, as discussed by Sharma (2017). Sampling errors can be a result of either simple chance or bias (Sharma, 2017). Sampling bias is when some participants are favored over others for possessing specific traits (Mugo, 2002) and purposive sampling is known to be highly susceptible to researcher bias (Sharma, 2017). However, this judgment-based, subjective feature of purposive sampling is only a drawback when judgments are not carefully planned or considered (Sharma, 2017). The theoretical framework ensured that judgements were founded on understandable criteria in an effort to limit bias in this study, as discussed by Sharma (2017).

3.3 Data Collection

The interview duration per participant was between 45 mins to an hour. All interviews were conducted in the English language. The meetings took place face-to-face via Zoom. Video-conferencing tools that enabled remote communication were offered as all participants were located outside of the Netherlands. All interviews were audio-recorded, with the consent of participants before the interviews took place. Informed consent forms were provided to participants which provides information on the interview procedure and confidentiality, information some participants would appreciate receiving prior to the interview taking place. Both written and verbal consent to participate in the interview was requested prior to the interview taking place. An interview guide was used to list down the main questions to ask participants, which can be found in Appendix A. The interview guide was developed by defining concepts in the research question based on the theoretical framework presented in the previous section. The in-depth interviews began in a relatively slow manner, by exchanging pleasantries, describing the overall aim of the study, and starting off with simple questions before acquiring more detailed responses, as discussed by Johnson (2001). Semi-structured interviews feature open-ended questions, which allow for follow-up or probe questions to be asked. In this paper, probes were used to obtain more detailed answers from participants or to allow them a chance to elaborate on their initial answers, as discussed by Fox (2009). Furthermore, during interviews, a few notes were taken to highlight important information that was shared and worth revisiting at a later stage.

Additionally, specific time stamps were also noted down to refer to after the interviewing process. After an interview took place, the audio files were stored safely in a separate folder, and then the conversations were transcribed verbatim, resulting in 210 pages of transcripts.

3.4 Operationalization

The interview guide was created by extracting fundamental concepts and theories from the existing research discussed in Chapter 1. These concepts were then translated into the interview guide through operationalization, as can be seen in the table below. The interview guide started with big-picture, open-ended questions which allowed themes to emerge and then shifted to more specific questions in an effort to develop a connection with the respondents, as discussed by Jespersen et al. (2018). In this study, the topics used in creating the interview guide are entrepreneurship, social media influencers, the beauty and fashion industry, positioning on Instagram, and micro-influencers. The operationalization table can be found in table 2 below.

Concept	How it's understood	Sample Questions
Entrepreneurship	uncertainty and risk	- Have you experienced uncertainty as an entrepreneur? In what ways? Tell me about an instance where you overcame or avoided uncertainty.
	uncovering, assessing, and making use of opportunities	- In your experience as an entrepreneur, how do you identify opportunities in the market?
	practicing creativity and innovation	- What does creativity mean to you? How does creativity show up in your work?
Social Media Influencers	opinion leaders	- How do you use your social influence as an opinion leader? - Tell me about an experience in which you realized you had an influence?
	gain fame through social networking	- In your experience, what role does fame play in wanting to become an influencer?
	are turned to for advice and guidance	- In your experience, have followers turned to you for advice? What kind of advice?

	have the ability to impact their followers' attitudes, or their ability to persuade audiences	- Have you had an impact on your followers' attitudes or purchasing behavior? How so?
	can work for themselves, or provide services to other businesses	- Have you worked solely for yourself? How is that experience compared to partnering with brands? - Tell me about an experience working with a brand in your industry.
	attempt to craft an authentic personal brand via social networks	- In your line of work, what role does authenticity play? How does authenticity show up in your work?
Beauty/ Fashion Industry	influencers and brands in the industry have a strong social media presence	- How do you perceive the industry's presence on social media as compared to other industries?
	beauty and fashion brands opt for micro-influencers who are more trustworthy and relatable to the general public	- How has your experience been as an influencer in the beauty and fashion industry? - Have you witnessed any shifts or trends in the industry?
Positioning on Instagram	developing a one-of-a-kind personal identity, actively communicating this brand identity to target audiences	- What is important to you in creating an online persona?
	used to emphasize the <i>positive qualities</i> that are of value to a person's audiences, while simultaneously <i>distinguishing</i> themselves from others in the market	- How do you differentiate yourself from other influencers in the industry?
	involves active marketing communication initiatives of one's brand identity to a target demographic	- How do you think you are perceived by your followers? - How would you like to be perceived by your followers? What are the steps, in your opinion, to be perceived in that way?

	positioning happens through presenting oneself through non-verbal cues, verbal discourses, and social networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you use Instagram to be viewed as an entrepreneur? - Do you think you come off as entrepreneurial to your followers? In what ways?
	engagement rates on Instagram are higher than on other social networking platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In your experience, what role does Instagram play in your brand? - How has Instagram had an impact on your social influence if any?
The Micro-influencer	known to produce quality content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In your opinion, how does a micro-influencer's content differ from that of other influencer groups? - As a micro-influencer, what role does the quality of your content play?
	have a more specific and committed audience around a certain niche	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In your experience, have you perceived your account as more popular among a certain audience or demographic? Why do you think that is? - Have brands approached you due to your micro-influencer status? Tell me more.
	have the ability to more successfully connect with their followers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In your experience as a micro-influencer, have you successfully connected with your audience?
	perceived as trustworthy sources of information on topics in their domain of interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In your opinion, do your followers perceive you as a trustworthy source of information on topics in your domain of interest?

Table 2. Operationalization Table

3.5 Data Analysis

After the interviews were completed and correctly transcribed, data analysis became an ongoing process throughout the study. Data was organized and stored effectively to allow for the process of data analysis to go smoothly. Interviews were transcribed verbatim after the interview took place using Descript transcription software. The text was then cross-referenced with the audio file to ensure coherence. The process of analyzing the retrieved

data started with thoroughly reading the interview transcripts to uncover themes that came up from participants' responses (Guion et al., 2011). These themes were used to conduct thematic data analysis, an approach that highlights the overall patterns in transcripts and best encapsulates the intricacies of exploring meanings within text-based data (Guest et al., 2012). The thematic analysis approach was preferred to discourse analysis, which focuses less on what is said than *how* things are said when forming meaning, and how it impacts perceptions of reality (Sgier, 2012). Discourse analysis focuses on text and speech that is naturally occurring, it's a method of better understanding social situations and interactions (Gee, 2014), which is unsuitable for the purposes of this paper.

In this study, the thematic analysis guide by Braun and Clarke (2006) was utilized to develop codes, look for themes, refine and define concepts, name the themes derived from the transcripts, and finally report the findings. Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework consists of six phases of analysis. At this point, it is good to mention that the process of data analysis does not involve consecutively shifting from one step to the next, rather it involves moving backward and forward in between the phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Nevertheless, it is important to note that this is just one of the analytical frameworks that act as a guide for data analysis in qualitative research.

As discussed above, acquainting with the data was the first phase of analysis, as discussed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Reading was done in an active method to try to identify meanings and themes, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The second phase involved creating initial codes. This is when the systematic coding of different aspects of the data took place. Codes refer to the aspects of the data that could be of interest and signify a basic unit of unprocessed data that can be analyzed in a meaningful way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, open coding was implemented in both an inductive and deductive way. Inductive coding includes deriving codes from the data itself, i.e., from discussions with the interviewees, and deductive coding involves deriving codes from the theoretical framework (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Furthermore, the analysis was implemented with the use of the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.TI. At this stage, the data was coded by tagging quotes from responses from interviewees. Sometimes, the same response could be coded more than one time. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), in this study, coding was implemented for "as many potential themes/patterns as possible" (p. 19). This resulted in a sum total of 356 open codes. The third phase of analysis involved looking for patterns and classifying the initial codes into themes. This step involves viewing the data from a broader theme-level, instead of studying the data from the code level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this

stage in the analysis process, some patterns emerged on the various ways micro-influencers position themselves on Instagram. The themes that were raised were micro-influencers position through connecting with their followers, partnering with brands, creating rich content, and finally through the use of Instagram as a tool. These themes are presented and discussed in detail in the following chapter. The codes that did not fit under any relevant theme were placed under a residual theme. The fourth phase involved taking the themes developed in the prior phase, reviewing, and polishing them up. At this stage, the thematic map of data was created, which helped with conceptualizing the data patterns, and their connections to each other, as discussed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This phase included two levels of reviewing themes; at the level of the code and at the level of the complete data set. At the latter level, the validity of separate themes was contemplated with regard to the data set, as discussed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The fourth phase was implemented to ensure that the derived themes sufficiently express the data that was collected. This phase resulted in an initial rough list of 76 codes which were further narrowed down to a total of 22 axial codes. In this paper, the research question is structured around four themes that together answer the question. The coding tree containing the main themes and subsequent sub-themes is presented in Appendices B, C, D, and E. Phase five included refining every theme, and the story communicated by the analysis. In this phase, definitions and names were created for each theme. Finally, in phase six, the last stage of analysis, the report was created and can be found in the Results chapter below. This written report highlights the analyzed data in a simple way and persuades readers of the value and validity of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.6 Validity and reliability

The notion of validity and reliability are central to arguments on scientific rigor in research on the social sciences (McDougall, 2000). Validity is concerned with whether the methods used effectively measure the specific topics under discussion (McDougall, 2000). Reliability is achieved when another researcher studies the same topic in the given context and reaches the same outcome (McDougall, 2000). In this study, close attention was paid to ensure questions were clear and phrased appropriately to avoid issues related to reliability as the manner in which a question is stated can impact the results of the interview, and can potentially lead respondents to answer incorrectly, as discussed by McDougall (2000). Furthermore, concerns related to reliability and validity were addressed by keeping an accurate record of the interviews. Taking notes and audio-recording interviews were two

such ways of ensuring credibility in qualitative studies (McDougall, 2000). Furthermore, offering detailed accounts of participant experiences, and exhibiting clarity during the process of data analysis and data interpretation were two such strategies implemented in this study to ensure the credibility of the findings, as discussed by Noble and Smith (2015).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics guidelines were implemented in this study in the form of informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality with regard to participants' information. The informed consent form that was sent to participants includes important information and clauses on confidentiality and anonymity. Allmark et al. (2009) discuss the risk of interviewees agreeing to participate in research that is based on incomplete information, and then feeling obligated to proceed. In this study, this danger was minimized with the use of the informed consent form which also includes a section mentioning the purpose of the study, and insight into the types of questions participants can expect. Finally, issues related to privacy were addressed by paying close attention to whether participants or brands were identifiable in the written reports (Allmark et al., 2009). When found, names or identifying factors (Instagram handles, for instance) were removed from interview data, however, in doing so the overall quality and soundness of the report were not impacted.

4. Results

This chapter contains the results from the interview analysis conducted with the Instagram micro-influencers who operate in the beauty and fashion industry. The research question of how micro-influencers position is answered by four main themes. The themes that were identified were: micro-influencers position through connecting with their followers, partnering with brands, creating rich content, and the use of Instagram's functionalities as a tool. The results of the qualitative in-depth interviews are presented in this chapter and are structured around those four themes which together answer the research question. The coding tree containing the main themes and subsequent sub-themes is found in Appendices B, C, D, and E.

4.1 Positioning Through Connecting with Followers

It was found that micro-influencers position themselves as entrepreneurs through the specific ways they connect with their followers. The micro-influencers that were interviewed perceive their relationships with their followers to be special. Micro-influencers connect with their followers by building trust through sharing product information and advice, and by showcasing leadership. Under the first sub-theme, micro-influencers share advice on various issues including productivity and lifestyle, and information on products sold by brands in their niche. The second sub-theme elaborates on how micro-influencers display leadership qualities to build an entrepreneurial perception. These themes are explored further below. The code tree for this theme can be found in Appendix B.

4.1.1 Building trust through sharing advice and product information

It was discovered that the micro-influencers interviewed were well integrated into their thematic communities. A sub-theme that emerged was their ability to build and sustain long-lasting relationships with their followers by building trust and credibility and bonding through a common factor or common interests. The interviews have shown that trust is a big part of the equation. Trust is built through micro-influencers sharing advice and product information. This is in line with the discussion by Casaló et al. (2020), who claimed that influencers are key sources of advice for consumers. He discusses it as opinion seekers searching for information or advice from those who are considered opinion leaders. For instance, Interviewee 6 shared "Um, you know, many people ask me about fashion, beauty, skincare, makeup, places to go, places to travel, places to eat, according to their different

prices.” Reportedly, followers ask micro-influencers for advice related to their private lives as well. For example, Interviewee 1 stated:

Um, they, the other day I had someone asking for a personal advice that I was like a little bit... oops. I mean, that's, that's a bit too personal, but, uh, what would you do? And you try to, you try to accommodate in a way that you are comfortable with it and the person is not so disappointed.

In addition to asking for advice, micro-influencers reported people seeking product information about items related to their niche. For instance, one interviewee stated:

Um, so I try to connect with my audience through, um, Snapchat, and Instagram stories, um, to explain why typically for example, I would use, um, such products, um, and why I believe in, um, in, in products versus others because in the makeup world, and especially in the market, you have a lot of options (Interviewee 9).

This resonates with the discussion by Casaló et al. (2020) who stated that fashion opinion seekers seek information from opinion leaders to minimize the purchase risk, as they are perceived as being more knowledgeable about the topic. Some micro-influencers highlighted the significance of using their social influence to educate followers on the heritage, symbolism, and history of the items they promote in an effort to better connect with their audiences. One of the interviewees stated:

So for me, I like to show it as like, um, like, uh, not to influence you, but to inspire you to tell the story behind the trade who made it, how it's influenced in the aesthetic, the heritage behind it” (Interviewee 2).

Similarly, Interviewee 5 reported that she uses her platform to share information on the upkeep of the jewelry she designs and sells “that ah what I feel is different than I'm not only selling jewelry I am trying to educate them about the material more and to give them knowledge about it.” Additionally, Interviewee 1 stated with regard to her followers asking for information regarding a: “Certain thing that I post or a certain thing that I'm doing, if I am sharing a treatment or they asked me directly in the sense of, um, give me the details. Uh, so they trust.” Therefore, a sub-theme that emerged was that micro-influencers position themselves as entrepreneurs by building trust by sharing advice and product information with their followers on Instagram.

4.1.2 Showcasing Leadership and Independence

Under this sub-theme, micro-influencers position themselves by developing role model-like qualities, appearing motivated and passionate and being a specialist in their

domain of influence. These elements compose the sub-theme of how micro-influencers position through showcasing their leadership and independence. Through analysis, it was discovered that becoming a role model is accomplished through developing strength of character, and talent. When asked about how they think their followers perceive them, interviewees responded with features like being inspired, reliable, and strong – qualities associated with leaders. Leadership was showcased through being both an influencer and an entrepreneur in the beauty and fashion industry. For instance, when asked about how she differentiates herself from others in the industry, Interviewee 7 shared: “Being an influencer it helped me being an entrepreneur.” This is linked to the discussion by Guíñez-Cabrera and Aqueveque (2021) whose findings reported that becoming a social media influencer opens various enticing entrepreneurial opportunities. Furthermore, interviewees depicted leadership by referring to other gigs and titles:

I do so many things because I'm not only an influencer. I have my organization to support people. I am very involved, you know, charity events. I'm a community leader for Supreme committee and FIFA. I'm very involved with FIFA fan movement (Interviewee 6).

Additionally, Interviewee 3 talked about how she portrays herself as a sporty Muslim woman: “For example, um, putting a picture of me running with my hijab is me telling them, yes, you can do that. But at the same time, I am powerful, um, independent. I am great.” It seemed that being an independent woman was a recurring topic as Interviewee 7 also shared that she believes her followers perceive her the way she positions herself: “Umm a positive, strong, independent woman, even though she's married.” Additionally, when asked how she would like to be perceived, Interviewee 8 shared: “Yes. I would like to be seen, uh, independent, uh, positive, brave, a woman, inspiring others for changes and not to be afraid to do whatever they want.” Furthermore, appearing motivated and passionate were elements that showcased a micro-influencers leadership skill. For instance, Interviewee 2 stated: “Okay. Um, like I want to deliver them the passion, like the passion that I have in that product to be seen.” This is relevant to the discussion by Leung et al. (2022) who claim that displaying a passion for a specific niche helps build perceptions of authenticity. The element of authenticity is reported in the next section. Additionally, it is interesting to consider there that social media entrepreneurship is strongly linked to entrepreneurial passion (Ouvrein et al., 2021). According to Ouvrein et al. (2021), the social media influencer who acts on entrepreneurial passion will mostly also possess the knowledge and drive with regard to how

to strategically aim for influence. Therefore, showcasing their leadership skills is one of the ways micro-influencers position to come off as entrepreneurial on Instagram.

4.2 Positioning Through Partnering with Brands

This research focuses on the positioning efforts of micro-influencers on Instagram in the beauty and fashion world. The second theme that was discovered was how micro-influencers craft their outward impressions as entrepreneurs through their work with brands in the industry. This research shows that being influencers provided micro-influencers with professional and entrepreneurial opportunities. Micro-influencers reportedly get approached due to their niche focus, their potential to increase sales, and their targeted reach. In return, micro-influencers display these brand collaborations to alter the way they are perceived on Instagram. The code tree for this theme can be found in Appendix C.

4.2.1 Niche Collaborations

It was discovered that fashion and beauty micro-influencers partner with brands in their niches in their capacity as trusted community members. They are approached because they are knowledgeable on topics related to their domain and are able to create quality content for brands in the industry. For instance, when asked if brands approached her due to her influencer status, Interviewee 2 stated: “I don't think they see it as like micro-influencer. I think they see it that like, for the brands that I work with, it's truly something that I'm interested in and I have knowledge about.” This is relevant to the research findings by Kay et al., (2020) that indicate consumers report higher knowledge of products when dealing with micro-influencers. In their paper, they recommend that influencers focus on product knowledge, instead of product attractiveness. In terms of creating quality content for brands, Interviewee 1 stated:

I sent them some examples, depends what they want. If they want really good, good quality, I record professionally since I have all the equipments and I sing and also I edit and I, um, I like, I, uh, shoot the products.

The research also uncovered that micro-influencers are approached due to their relevance to the niche and are able to sustain long-lasting professional relationships with these brands. For instance, Interviewee 1 stated that in her experience, brands don't just focus on insights: “I don't think they just focus on statistics, but they also, uh, they also inquired about who is the person, how relevant or not is she and what is she doing? All of that.” Furthermore, in terms of building relationships with brands, Interviewee 2 stated: “I

think for me, it's maybe they work with me because it's not about just pushing a buck and trying to sell it.”

Moreover, it was discovered that brands provide micro-influencers with opportunities to grow and evolve in the world of beauty and fashion. Networking is one such opportunity that was identified. For instance, Interviewee 2 stated on networking:

It's because we all have this opportunity to network, to meet people, you know? So we've had people from Oscar de la Renta coming to Kuwait since like the fifties selling caftans. So, they have like this great understanding about our community and our culture.

This sub-theme of niche collaborations highlighted that these opportunities resulted in micro-influencers creating product-focused content but still retaining an element of authenticity and sincerity. This is relevant to Park et al.'s (2021) and Kay et al.'s (2020) findings that micro-influencers convey higher perceptions of authenticity about the brand they promote. Interviewee 8 states:

I was a vegetarian. I recently started eating fish. I'm a pescatarian now. How I'm going to promote meat, eating a burger or chicken or meat if I don't do it, but that's fake. Even if you pay me 10,000 riyals, I'm not going to buy a burger. Now, if it's a vegetarian burger, maybe.

This element of authenticity when promoting products was also discussed by Interviewee 9 when she stated: “So, I relate when you say authentic, um, in my mind, um, I think of honesty, um, and personally I wouldn't market a brand or a product that I don't believe in.”

Furthermore, it was reported influencers also take initiative and approach brands that they feel would match their online personas in hopes of collaborating with them. For instance, Interviewee 10 discussed her style of clothing as being influenced by the tomboy aesthetic and stated: “so I can get brands that are related to this because you know if you're an influencer, you get products and everything.”

Overall, most interviewees had positive experiences in working with brands. For instance, interviewee 3 shared her experience of collaborating with Adidas: “It's a beautiful experience. Um, I'm proud and it's an advantage, I think.” Additionally, Interview 5 stated “It's good. It's good. It's really good to see how other people handling their startups or their work.” However, some influencers faced more rules and restrictions during these collaborations, and others found the process of brand partnerships rather slow. Like Interviewee 1 put it:

I manage my schedule my time, my life in an independent way, whereas when you are attached to or working under someone or under a brand or in collaboration with the brand, you are at the same level. And you decide when you work under a brand, you have to follow the rules.

Furthermore, it was found that micro-influencers are well informed about trends and shifts in beauty/fashion. Interviewee 2 made a point about shifting trends in the industry by stating “You know, like even for fashion shows like, uh, you would have editors in the front row and then all of a sudden, it's just influencers.” Additionally, Interviewee 9 mentioned the pandemic’s impact on the industry by stating: “Um, so people think of beauty differently and it's more natural. It's more flawless. It's more, um, It's more elegant. So, I love, I love what's COVID did to the beauty industry.” Furthermore, two interviewees mentioned the rising trend of modesty clothing. For instance, Interviewee 7 responded to the question by stating:

The hijab fashion trends. Like if I don't know if you saw that, but lately everything is like uhh finally, the Muslim girl who's wearing hijab is finding herself in fashion and you know, lots of designs, lots of status, lots of fashionistas, colors.

Additionally, Interviewee 8 stated “One of the biggest trends is the middle east cover ups. It's, uh, the, the way that fashion is moving towards middle east, moved by the, uh, money.” Along the same lines, Interviewee 3 mentioned about brands and modesty wear:

Um, even if they don't support it at the end of the day, of course, uh, of this will bring them more profit and more love and support, then they would go for it. But, uh, this is something, um, I've seen it, uh, changing.

Besides modesty wear, other interviewees reported shifts in the industry with regard to sportswear, extreme plastic surgery, and sustainability to mention a few. Therefore, it seems that micro-influencers are positioning as entrepreneurs on Instagram through niche collaborations with brands in their relevant domain.

4.2.2 Impacting Purchasing Behavior and Follower Attitudes

Micro-influencers are utilized by brands due to their ability to form and sustain deeper relationships with their followers. The research uncovered that micro-influencers have an impact on their followers' purchasing behaviors, potentially having the ability to increase brand sales. For instance, with regard to influencing purchasing behavior, Interviewee 8 stated: “Well, people usually go and buy after I, uh, recommend something. That's what happens in terms of clothes.” This is related to discussions in research from Britt et al., (2020) which highlights that influencers in the beauty and fashion industry have public

recognition and can affect attitudes and purchasing decisions on a large scale. Additionally, Interviewee 7 stated:

When I post pictures or reels, especially Instagram, whatever I wear, they will ask me from where did you buy that? How did you match that? And they will literally go and buy it and sometimes take a picture and send it to me direct in direct message.

Additionally, Interviewee 9 mentioned trust as a reason people purchase what she recommends: “I was told that a lot of them trust me. So, if I, if I pick something, they would immediately go and buy it because they trust me.” This resonates with Park et al.’s (2021) findings which discuss purchase intentions for products promoted by micro-influencers. It is interesting to note that their findings resulted in micro-influencers having higher purchase intentions than macro-influencers.

Interviewees reported affecting purchasing behavior in several ways. These ways can be divided into two categories: direct product promotion and indirect product promotion. In the case of the former, intentional efforts are dispensed on having an impact on purchasing behavior. This is done by providing discounts for the brand, giveaways, and contests. For instance, Interviewee 5 put it: “so I tell them, okay if you want to get a discount, 5% I can, you can mention us in one of stories.” In addition, Interviewee 10 mentioned: “Um, it's a little giveaways that, um, I would choose like the five best pictures, you know, and, and I can share them on my stories so in that way.” These approaches have reportedly engaged their followers and altered their purchasing patterns. In the case of indirectly promoting, it was found that a micro-influencer would post about the products with the brands with no call to action, and are able to generate interest and engagement on where and how to buy the products being displayed on their social media. For instance, on her indirect promotional efforts, Interviewee 3 states:

People will see it, people will love it. So, it's how you're portraying it is important as well, because you can't force people. Even if you tell them this is for free go and buy it, people are still not going to do it (Interviewee 3).

Interviewees reportedly also had an impact on follower attitudes. This is relevant to research from Britt et al. (2020) which discusses the impact on follower attitudes in the beauty and fashion industry. For instance, Interviewee 4 discussed:

Like girls going out in social media, um, taking out their culture appearance. So, I think some people will come and talk. And after that, from the way that I talk to them, they they're going to change the whole way of talking. So, they they're going to be very friendly, very nice (Interviewee 4).

Similarly, Interviewee 3 stated: “Maybe I do it this in a discreet way of, for example, me wearing Adidas shoes right now. Um, and they know I'm a runner or then, oh, this might be the good running shoes, et cetera.” Therefore, it was found that micro-influencers position as entrepreneurs on Instagram by directly or indirectly impacting their followers’ purchasing behavior and attitudes.

4.3 Positioning Through Rich Content

The third way micro-influencers position themselves to appear as entrepreneurs is through creating and sharing rich content on Instagram. It was discovered that micro-influencers do this by creating content that is planned and consistent, and engaging and creative content. The code tree for this theme can be found in Appendix D.

4.3.1 Creating Planned, Consistent Content

Generating content that is well-thought-out and well-planned is a sub-theme that emerged throughout the interviewing process. For instance, Interviewee 4 stated: “Um, actually, if you are an influencer, you should focus a lot on your content.” Furthermore, Interviewee 9 shared her insight on why micro-influencers think of what they post: “I mean, I've seen micro-influencers, um, posts a lot and posts, um, stuff that are, um, you know, that they think of what they post because they've just started.” Additionally, Interviewee 10 commented on scheduled posts by stating:

Um, I think, for example, like, uh, when you give your time, like your, when you give your time to create content, I think that you should, you have like time to post, you know, exactly the right time to post in the, when the reach is... Uh, when everyone is - like when, when it will reach out to many people, it changes (Interviewee 10).

Furthermore, Interviewee discussed why she posts frequently and schedules her posts:

It took me weeks to understand that to be, to stand out or to be out there, um, I think you need to, um, post very actively. Um, so the number of posts for example, from one to three posts, um, you need to post at certain times. So, for example, not really during the night. Um, so yes, I did use Instagram a lot, um, to, to build my brand.

Additionally, Interviewee 8 discussed content consistency by stating:

I think that this is what I am as a difference from, uh, other influencers that I speak about clothes and I speak about clothes all the time. And if people go to my page, they know they will find the information about clothes.

She added that: “People trust me more because I speak about the same topic all the time. Big influencers promote absolutely everything.” This resonates with research from Feng et al., (2020) which states that influencers are seen as trustworthy sources of information on products in a given domain. Additionally, the content that micro-influencers create is reported to be impactful and focused given their niche nature. Interviewee 1 put it as:

Um, I think because of that niche market, uh, and again, because of, of, of the impact that, that you have with your niche market, in my case here in Qatar, um, you kind of focus more on... on the local culture on the traditions, or how am I going to post these thinking of all of that?

This is in relevant to research from Rakoczy et al., (2018) that discusses micro-influencers having a high impact despite their relatively small audience. It is interesting to note that their research attributes this impact to a dedicated audience. Therefore, it was discovered that micro-influencers stick to a content theme and plan posts on topics related to their niches on Instagram to be perceived as entrepreneurial.

4.3.2 Creating Engaging, Creative Content

The second sub-theme that was recognized was the role of creating insightful and engaging content towards building an entrepreneurial perception. Engaging content was discovered to be content that mixes fun and knowledge and engages audiences. “I watch the other people that they are successful and see how the they mix fun with knowledge” (Interviewee 5). Additionally, Interviewee 7 stated: “Um, if you mean like doing like some other trends, sometimes I do. Like, if there's any funny, like really nice trend, I can do that. But most of that videos I shares, uh, beneficial, informative videos.” Some interviewees focused more on the fun aspect: “You know, social media is also to have fun, to engage with followers. I don't, I don't like to be like getting so [coughs] sorry, stressed for doing this. I also like to have fun” (Interviewee 6).

It was discovered that the content micro-influencers post revolves around creatively displaying their personal interests, activities, and hobbies. Therefore, creativity seems to play a big role in the content they produce. Creativity seemed to be an important factor even when promoting products for brands. This is in line with research from Casaló et al. (2020), which stated that uniqueness and creativity are vital to becoming an influencer in the fashion industry. “The thing is that I also do it in a creative way. I cannot just promote in a very simple way. So, I always come up with an idea and that's how they reach out to me” (Interviewee 10). While Interviewee 10 described creativity as avoiding simplicity,

Interviewee 7 stated creativity means simplifying concepts: “For me, I try to make it short in like five words to make it easy. And like that's creativity. Like you, you take a big thing and make it simple for other people to understand it.”

Furthermore, it was reported that producing creative content included being care-free about bending some rules, as Interviewee 9 put it:

Um, so there's a lot of creativity in makeup, obviously, um, because it's art and, um, art is supposed to be creative. Um, but then when I also did makeup at Makeup Forever Academy, we were trying our best, um, to learn the theory, to apply the theory, but also have a creative side to us where we break the rules (Interviewee 9).

Creativity is relevant to research from Edwards-Schachter et al. (2015) that considers creativity one of the elements needed to promote the culture of entrepreneurship. Therefore, it was discovered that micro-influencers position themselves as entrepreneurial by releasing engaging and creative content and displaying it on their Instagram accounts.

4.4 Positioning Through Instagram as a tool

The final theme that emerged was how Instagram was used as a tool to position micro-influencers as entrepreneurs. It was discovered that Instagram was used because of its specific engagement features, and its ability to facilitate the creation of professional relationships with various brands in the beauty and fashion industry. The code tree for this theme can be found in Appendix E.

4.4.1 Engagement Features

A recurring sub-theme that emerged through the research was the use of Instagram's engagement features. Features like questions, polls, comments, stories, and saves and shares on a post are reportedly utilized to engage with audiences. For instance, Interviewee 1 elaborated on which features of Instagram helped her assess engagement rates on the platform: “The, um, shares on a post or, or saves on, uh, posts, likes of course comments, which mean people interacting with your brand.” This is linked to the discussion by Casaló et al. (2020) about Instagram being able to support visually pleasing, creative content through pictures, videos, stories, and other features. Additionally, when asked about how engagement rates on Instagram benefitted her personal brand, Interviewee 3 brought up a new feature on the platform called Reels. Reels is reported to have increased engagement for Interviewee 3 because it enabled her content to be accessible to people outside of her network and geographic region: “Um, thank God especially, especially after the reels. It's...

it's it is very, very, very big cause before it was only related to the region.” Furthermore, when discussing how she would use Instagram’s features to launch her new clothing line that was linked in her bio, Interviewee 10 commented:

I would definitely promote it on my page and use the features like the questions and, uh, yeah, like would do some stories and engagement on my stories and then to promote it, follow, um, include the link and everything.

While most interviewees seemed satisfied with the engagement rates on Instagram, Interviewee 5 shared that the platform is falling behind to a competitor. “Uh, it’s working so bad in Instagram right now, everyone's going into TikTok, Instagram is horrible, is horrible. Especially if you have a big account” (Interviewee 5). Instagram has reportedly also been adding many unnecessary features that are cluttering the platform.

Now I have five things. My feed, you have the Reels, you have videos. Then you have the guide, the guide, then pictures that someone tagged you, then you have the highlights that have a thousand highlights, and then there's so much on Instagram (Interviewee 6).

However, it seems that interviewees still use the engagement functions on Instagram to help build an entrepreneurial perception, even though a few interviewees admitted to Instagram’s drawbacks when compared to other social networking platforms. Some of the comparisons made are discussed in detail in the following section.

4.4.2 Platform for forming professional relationships

The second sub-theme that was identified was the use of Instagram to form professional relationships in an effort to encourage entrepreneurial perceptions. The platform is used as a tool for professional growth in terms of association with brands, and discoverability by clients, and includes an e-commerce space. When asked about the role Instagram plays in her personal brand, Interviewee 1 stated “Huge role, so Instagram is the number one tool. For my association with brands, it's not, I started on Facebook, but Instagram is the one that really took off.” Instagram was referred to as a marketing tool which is relevant to research from Guíñez-Cabrera and Aqueveque (2021) who stated that Instagram is used by influencers who engage in influencer marketing activities and marketers in general.

My Instagram, it's my main tool in work. And it's my main tool in, uh, connecting people and socializing and networking. It's my Instagram, it's means really a lot for

me. It's connecting me with so many people. I get so many jobs. All the job that I got, all the project, that was through Instagram for me, it's a marketing tool.

Additionally, Instagram is reported to be more serious when compared to TikTok and Snapchat, Interviewee 1 stated “But Instagram is totally different from Snapchat or, or TikTok. TikTok and Snapchat are considered more, um, playful. This Instagram is very business-oriented.” Reportedly, more business opportunities are reportedly acquired on Instagram than on other platforms. Additionally, brands reportedly search on Instagram for influencers to collaborate with.

But Instagram is the one that brands go to search you, so they don't go to Snapchat. It's different. It's a totally different thing. It was a boom. But again, it doesn't look as professional as Instagram because Instagram has the photos on the feeds and now has also the Reel (Interviewee 1).

Recently added features, like Reels, have reportedly helped with discoverability. The Reels function enables content to reach people outside of a person's social network. When asked about the role Instagram plays in her personal brand, Interviewee 9 responded with:

Yes, of course it has benefited. Um, I think that's where brands found me, um, earlier on. And that's where a lot of my clients as well for makeup, uh, found me, but then it also spread through word of mouth (Interviewee 9).

Furthermore, when asked how Instagram benefited her brand, Interviewee 10 mentioned: “Yeah. Um, Instagram have helped me with the Instagram shop, this, this new, this feature that they have.” Instagram is reported to be a platform that connects different services under one roof. “Um, because you know that whatever is in Instagram, it's like real somehow, and it's a connected, you can shop there, you can see pictures, um, uh, it's different than, you know, Facebook.” Some interviewees reported a sense of loyalty to Instagram due to the opportunities that the platform facilitated when building their brands. However, some interviewees responded that to successfully use Instagram, it is important to understand the features, like insights which can also inform on the best time to post. Insights have also been reported to be requested by brands when they're first starting out. For instance, Interviewee 10 stated: “Like Instagram, uh, slow and fast process, in my opinion, it depends on how much you can invest your time in that.” Brands reportedly ask for insights when a micro-influencer is just starting out and are relatively unknown in their niche:

Yes, I share my insights, but most of the brands, the brands that are in the middle east, that they know me, like, you know, you create, you create a relationship with their brands and audience when they know you're trustworthy (Interviewee 6).

Therefore, it seems that micro-influencers use Instagram's ability to facilitate the formation of professional relationships. Micro-influencers position themselves on Instagram by utilizing this feature to position themselves as entrepreneurial on Instagram.

5. Conclusion

This paper's aim was to explore how micro-influencers in beauty and fashion position themselves as entrepreneurs on Instagram. Micro-influencers position themselves in four ways: through connecting with their followers, partnering with brands in their niches, creating rich content, and through the use of various functions on Instagram.

The first way micro-influencers position on Instagram is through connecting with their followers on a deeper level. Micro-influencers focus on developing relationships with their audiences and promoting lifestyles that audiences appreciate. They tend to showcase leadership elements to help position them further as entrepreneurs to their followers. This is done by presenting themselves as specialists in their niche and as role models through their knowledge and product information. Furthermore, micro-influencers appear motivated and passionate about their niches and use those elements to help showcase their leadership skills. Domain-specific influencers like micro-influencers share products with their audiences in an enthusiastic and passionate way, according to Ouvrein et al. (2021). This study confirms that passion and deep interest in the niche was the driving force behind becoming an influencer and had less to do with wanting to attain fame. Additionally, Ouvrein et al. (2021) discussed influencers whose industry-specific passion encouraged their activities initially later experience how entrepreneurial motivations come into play. The authors describe entrepreneurial passion as using social media with the aim to maximize income and making a difference. In this study, it was found that micro-influencers, among other tactics, use passion and motivation to be perceived as leaders in their domain. This contributes to building connections with followers and appearing entrepreneurial on Instagram.

The second way micro-influencers position is through establishing partnerships with brands in their niches. Micro-influencers engage in niche collaborations with various brands in the beauty/fashion industry. This work confirms that brands are drawn to micro-influencers because they appear as trusted community leaders that are knowledgeable about their niche, and due to their relevance in the niche (Feng et al., 2020). In return, brands obtain quality content on products and services created by said influencers. In this paper, the findings suggest that micro-influencers gain a higher status in the beauty and fashion industry by partnering with relevant brands. Micro-influencers are also familiar with industry trends which seems to make them trusted sources of information in their respective niches. Therefore, the findings are consistent with Britt et al. (2020) who stated that the beauty and fashion industry utilizes micro-influencers for their ability to inspire trustworthiness and relatability in consumers. When partnering with brands, micro-

influencers have to adhere to more rules, and brand partnerships are slow to form when first starting out. However, the findings state that the high majority of micro-influencers reported worthwhile brand collaboration experiences that were mutually beneficial to the micro-influencer and the brand. Furthermore, micro-influencers are exposed to several growth opportunities as a result of partnering with brands in the beauty/fashion industry, one such opportunity is the chance to network with various stakeholders. Indeed, the opportunity to network with key players in their niche gives rise to job opportunities, brand collaborations, and higher exposure on Instagram. Furthermore, this paper confirms that micro-influencers try and impact purchasing behavior and follower attitudes in various ways. This is consistent with findings from Britt et al. (2020) who discuss how fashion and beauty brands make use of influencers to alter purchasing decisions. Micro-influencers promote brands in several ways on their Instagram accounts: by providing discounts, implementing social media contests, and conducting giveaways. As stated previously, trust is a big factor and forms the core reason behind why consumers are buying what is recommended and promoted by micro-influencers. This study confirms that influencers are approached by brands because of their ability to inspire trust in consumers (Britt et al., 2020; Feng et al., 2020). This research found that products are either explicitly or implicitly promoted. Explicit promotion includes direct and obvious promotion efforts, and implicit efforts include indirect promotional efforts, such as product placement in their posts. In other words, even if products are not explicitly promoted, consumers still show purchase intention because of the product's association with the micro-influencer. It would be interesting for future studies to focus on the impact on purchasing behavior given explicit and implicit product promotional efforts by micro-influencers.

The third way micro-influencers position is through creating rich content on Instagram. Micro-influencers create content that is planned and consistent in an attempt to be seen as entrepreneurial. To be more specific, micro-influencers position by creating content that is well-thought-out and focused on a specific theme. Even micro-influencers who do not stick to a theme, plan their content. Planning is done in several ways: by scheduling posts, posting regularly and at the right time, and ensuring the right message is being communicated in the right way. Additionally, the content micro-influencers create is deemed to be consistent and frequent. The findings suggest that micro-influencers plan consistent content in an effort to become specialists in their domain and ensure credibility. Therefore, audiences view micro-influencers as credible sources of information based on the nature of the content they share. This result is consistent with previous research that suggests micro-

influencers are perceived as credible and relatable as a result of their niche focus (Kay et al., 2020). The importance of knowing what to expect from a micro-influencer's content plays into the element of sincerity. Indeed, micro-influencers perceive influencers who post about everything appear as less authentic and are said to lack focus. At this stage, it is interesting to consider the discussion by van Driel and Dumitrica (2020) about micro-influencers balancing the tension between needing to appear authentic, and at the same time appealing to advertisers. In this paper, the findings suggest that micro-influencers design and plan content to try to be perceived as authentic by brands and their followers in their entrepreneurial positioning efforts.

Additionally, micro-influencers aim at creating rich content that is engaging, creative content in an effort to entertain and educate their audiences. This content is heavily based on visuals, playfulness, and the creative capacity to bend some rules. This study confirms that micro-influencers have a healthy amount of engagement. This is even more so apparent in posts regarding their personal lives, as compared to their usual type of content. Micro-influencers post content on their hobbies, activities, and personal and professional development journeys. This is done in an effort to appear carefree and spontaneous, to better engage with their audiences. This feeds into the argument by Kay et al., (2020) who suggest that micro-influencers are perceived as relatable by their audiences. Therefore, this study suggests that micro-influencers are perceived as approachable partly due to the content they post about their personal lives as well. This is related to previous literature that suggests that influencers carefully craft and control every aspect of their online persona by choosing what to share about their personal lives in an effort to appear more authentic (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). It is also clear that, to micro-influencers, generating insightful and entertaining content is a core aspect of how creativity manifests in their work. Indeed, creativity is also how they remain relevant in their circles and niches.

The fourth way micro-influencers position themselves is through using Instagram as a marketing tool. Instagram seems to be the platform that facilitates the right connections with brands and clients. Micro-influencers are requested for their insights and relevant data by brands when they first start out and are relatively unknown. Once the micro-influencer gets popular and is well-known in their niche, brands seem to no longer ask for their insights. Additionally, Instagram has engagement features that make it the right platform for micro-influencers. Micro-influencers use polls, questions, Reels, and stories to engage with relevant stakeholders on the social platform in their pursuit to craft online personas. However, in order to properly benefit from Instagram as a tool, it was made clear that one

must first properly understand how to use these features built into the platform. That is, success on the platform is reliant on the time invested in understanding the platform to be able to optimally utilize it. Furthermore, Instagram seems to be the chosen platform for forming professional relationships with brands and other businesses. Micro-influencers are approached directly on Instagram by brands, where micro-influencers already have a community that is forming or has formed around their niche. This result is consistent with Casaló et al. (2020) who suggest that Instagram enables the formation of communities. Accounts on Instagram also have the ability to highlight micro-influencers' achievements and successful partnerships in an effort to position themselves as entrepreneurial. Furthermore, Instagram is perceived as a high-quality social networking platform that micro-influencers can rely on. Even though other social networking platforms seem to be gaining ground, Instagram is still utilized for its ability to form personal brands. It is seen as a more formal, less fun app when compared to TikTok and Snapchat. As a platform, Instagram is used to assess a micro-influencer's value in the industry of beauty and fashion and micro-influencer seem to be leaning into this notion. Therefore, it seems that Instagram is an integral part of a micro-influencer's entrepreneurial positioning efforts. Some micro-influencers are reportedly dedicated to the platform due to the possibilities it introduces to their portfolio and career. Besides facilitating job and collaboration opportunities, Instagram brings people in the same niche together through networking. Networking happens by attending events, but more often it takes place virtually with other members of the beauty/fashion industry. This additionally supports the point made by Casaló et al. (2020) about Instagram's role in enabling the creation of communities. In the case of micro-influencers who are perceived as leaders of their niches, it makes sense why these micro-influencers are on Instagram and continue to be on Instagram. However, they seem to have their eye on the next social networking platform that can help them achieve their positioning goals.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

There exists a wealth of research on social media influencers and their entrepreneurial tendencies. Lee and Theokary (2021) describe social media influencers as entrepreneurs who fund their own ventures and generate monetary value. Additionally (Gutiérrez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2021) also investigated influencers from an entrepreneurial standpoint. This paper supports their findings that becoming an influencer opens entrepreneurial opportunities on social networks. However, entrepreneurial efforts by

specifically micro-influencers seem to be rather underexplored. Nevertheless, this paper supports findings from Britt et al. (2020) that discuss the purchasing behavior that influencers have on their followers in the beauty and fashion industry. However, the role of micro-influencers' and their roles as opinion leaders in their niches seems to have only recently started to be explored academically. This is supported by Casaló et al. (2020) who suggested future studies focus on analyzing micro-influencers' role in beauty/fashion as opinion leaders. Nevertheless, this study supports their claim that social media use is high in said industry, as both influencers and reportedly brands are active on Instagram and apparently are testing other social networks like Snapchat and more recently, TikTok. This study could potentially benefit micro-influencers as they attempt positioning strategies on Instagram. It provides insight into what other micro-influencers in the beauty/fashion industry are implementing on their profiles and what has worked for them. Additionally, this paper could also potentially benefit entrepreneurs. Becoming a social media influencer first seems to be a valid route to becoming an entrepreneur. This is due to entrepreneurial opportunities available on social media (Guiñez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2021) that aspiring entrepreneurs may not be aware of. This is also important because brands that were founded by influencers on Instagram seem to be gaining some success (Sinha & Fung, 2021). Finally, this paper also potentially offers insights to brands on the perks and potential drawbacks of utilizing micro-influencers. An advantage could be having access to an audience that is already created around what brands in the beauty/fashion industry try to sell. A potential drawback for brands could be giving more creative control and freedom to micro-influencers while they try to balance authenticity with product promotion (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020).

5.2 Limitations

Purposive sampling has been known to involve sampling bias as it relies on the judgment of the researcher involved. In this study, sampling bias was minimized through the use of a theoretical framework as a foundation to base insights, as discussed by Sharma (2017). Sharma (2017) discussed that to minimize sampling bias, judgements should be formed based on a set of clear criteria. Additionally, study participants were not asked to reflect on the interview process after the data analysis phase, as suggested by Noble and Smith (2015). This is done to ensure the derived themes sufficiently reflect the topic of the study as a way of ensuring validity, a concept known as respondent validation (Noble & Smith, 2015). In addition, this study was conducted on a limited sample consisting of

interviewees from several countries. Finally, coding was done by one researcher and therefore, the derived themes are purely based on one person's interpretation of the data. According to Castleberry and Nolen (2018), in order to increase the consistency of the coding phase, more than one coder should look through the data and code accordingly. This ensures that the coding process and resulting interpretations accurately describe the data gathered (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

5.3 Future Recommendations

The topic of micro-influencers and their entrepreneurial tendencies requires further research. This research covered the topic of micro-influencers in beauty and fashion, but it would be interesting to explore their roles and motivations in other industries such as health and fitness, or travel. Additionally, it would be intriguing to study potential key differences and similarities in how macro-influencers and micro-influencers position themselves on Instagram. This research discussed positioning on Instagram, however, it would be interesting to consider positioning efforts on other social networking platforms. It seems that micro-influencers have a presence on multiple social platforms, therefore, more studies can focus on Snapchat or TikTok, and how influencers craft their online personas and perceptions on those platforms. Furthermore, this paper covered the topic of positioning as entrepreneurs but it would be intriguing to study the other ways influencers position on social networking sites. For instance, a potential study could explore how would athletes or lifestyle influencers alter their perceptions on social networking sites.

Given a budget and more time to follow up on this research, the participants' positioning strategies would be reanalyzed on the platform after a period of time has passed. After the interview, some participants shared that they gained some sort of insight or idea to implement on their profiles. It would be interesting to observe if they end up implementing some ideas that may have occurred to them on some topics during the interview. Moreover, it would be interesting to compare responses to one another through a cultural lens. It would also be interesting to study how micro-influencers are using other social networks that are supposedly more fun and spontaneous than Instagram. Specifically, TikTok would be an interesting platform to study micro-influencers positioning efforts. In 2020, it was downloaded 315 million times around the world, an 58% increase from the quarter before (Li et al., 2021). Furthermore, in 2018 and 2019 it was the most downloaded mobile application, overtaking downloads of Facebook and Instagram (Li et al., 2021). Therefore,

given its potential and increase in popularity, TikTok, as a social media and video-creating platform, requires further research.

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Appendices

Appendix A Interview Guide

Ice-breaker / Factual Questions

- How old are you?
- Tell me about your educational background. What did you study?
- What type of content do you share on your Instagram account?
- How long have you been an influencer?
- Are you a full-time influencer?
- Do you own your own business? In what industry?

Experience in Being a (Micro) Influencer

- In your experience, have you perceived your account as more popular among a certain audience or demographic? Why do you think that is?
- Do you identify as a micro-influencer? Why? Why not?
- In your opinion, how does a micro-influencer's content differ from that of other influencer groups?
- As a micro-influencer, what role does the quality of your content play?
- In your experience, have you successfully connected with your audience?
- Have brands approached you due to your micro-influencer status? Tell me more.

Identifying as an Entrepreneur

- Do you identify as an entrepreneur? In what ways?
- What, in your opinion, are the main characteristics of an entrepreneur?
- Have you experienced uncertainty as an entrepreneur? In what ways? Tell me about an instance where you overcame or avoided uncertainty.
- In your experience as an entrepreneur, how do you identify opportunities in the market?
- Tell me about an instance where you took advantage of an opportunity.
- What does creativity mean to you? How does creativity show up in your work?
- What does innovation mean to you? How does innovation come through in your work?

- As an entrepreneur, have you had a hand in forming new values? What are they and how did you develop them?

The Social Media Influencer

- How do you use your social influence as an opinion leader?
- Tell me about an experience in which you realized you had an influence?
- In your experience, what role does fame play in wanting to become an influencer?
- In your experience, have followers turned to you for advice? What kind of advice?
- Throughout your experience, have you created engaging content? What value do you place on creating engaging content?
- Have you created or shared original and unique content? What value do you place on the same?
- In your experience, have you persuaded your followers to take a certain action?
- Have you had an impact on your followers' attitudes or purchasing behavior? How so?
- In your experience, have you worked with brands? Tell me about an experience working with a brand in your industry.
- Have you worked solely for yourself? How is that experience compared to partnering with brands?
- In your experience, has being an influencer offered you entrepreneurial prospects? What kind?
- In your line of work, what role does authenticity play? How does authenticity show up in your work?
- In your experience, what is important in content creation?
- How do you differentiate yourself from other influencers in the industry?
- What is important to you in creating an online persona?
- In your opinion, in what ways do your followers perceive you as a trustworthy source of information on topics in your domain of interest?

Beauty and Fashion

- How has your experience been as an influencer in the beauty and fashion industry? Have you witnessed any shifts or trends in the industry?
- As an influencer in the field, what do you discuss with colleagues in the industry? What topics are typically debated?

- How do you perceive the industry's presence on social media as compared to other industries?

Positioning on Instagram

- In your experience, what role does Instagram play in your brand? How has Instagram had an impact on your social influence, if any?
- In your experience, have the engagement rates on Instagram been beneficial to your brand? In what ways?
- How do you think you are perceived by your followers?
- How would you like to be perceived by your followers? What are the steps, in your opinion, to be perceived in that way?
- What qualities would you like your content to represent?
- What is the overall tone of your posts?
- Do you think you come off as entrepreneurial to your followers? In what ways?
- Do you want to be seen as an entrepreneur?
- What are the steps you take to achieve this perception?
- How do you use Instagram to be viewed as an entrepreneur?
- What role does the content you create play in wanting to be perceived as an entrepreneur?
- How do you differentiate yourself from other online entrepreneurs?

Appendix B Code Tree Positioning Through Connecting with Followers

Selective Code	Axial Codes	Sample Open Codes
Building trust through sharing information & advice	Building on common factors	Sharing common interests Sharing lifestyle
	Contributing to the community	For the benefit of others Sharing information on products Being committed Display on social media Planning & learning

	Being a specialist	Being an entrepreneur & an influencer
		Buying through recommendations
		Sincerity
Showcasing Leadership	Skillful Role Model	Want to be seen as a person with character strength
		Showing talent is important
	Motivated and passionate	Seen as inspired
		Seen as reliable
		Perception as put together

Appendix C Code Tree Positioning Through Partnering with Brands

Selective Code	Axial Codes	Sample Open Codes
Niche Collaborations	Brand partnerships	Collaboration with brands
	Collaboration for niche	Due to Knowledge
		New partnerships formed
		Relevance in the market
	Trusted community leaders	Depicting leadership
		Product-focus
		Sincerity gives them legitimacy
	Sustainable professional relationship	Beneficial to brand
		More rules
		Slow to grow
	Growth opps for micro-influencers	Market studies
		Networking with people
		Stepping out of comfort zone
	Current industry fads	Clothing styles
		New beauty standards

		Modesty wear
		Sustainability
		Extreme plastic surgery
Impacting Purchasing Behavior and Follower Attitudes	Potential to increase sales	Products promotion
		Asking where to buy
		Product discounts
		Giveaways
		People buy what is recommended

Appendix D Code Tree Positioning Through Rich Content

Selective Code	Axial Codes	Sample Open Codes
Creating planned, consistent content	Planned content	Scheduled posts
		Frequent posts
		Well-thought out
		Insightful content
		Niche content is impactful
	Consistency	Knowing what to expect
		Posts seem sincere
		Creates trust
		Focused content
		Sticking to a theme
Creating engaging, creative content	Engaging content	Fun-focus
		Fun and knowledge-focus
		Based on visuals
		Entertaining posts
		Playful
	Personal interests	Activities & hobbies
		Personal development
		Professional development
		Sharing culture
	Creative content	Element of being care-free

Content needs to stand out
 Breaking some rules
 Bringing something new to the table
 Visual-focus
 Symmetrical feed
 Insightful and informative
 Bright and clear
 Lined to innovation

Appendix E Code Tree Positioning Through Instagram as a Tool

Selective Code	Axial Codes	Sample Open Codes
Engagement Features	Functionalities Used	Comments
		Polls
		Stories
		Questions
		Reels
		Shopping feature
		Understanding features of Instagram
	Creates the right connections	Connection tool
		More visits to promoted places
		Facilitates more job opportunities
Forming professional relationships	Professional growth	Getting popular
		Business opportunities
		Significant association with brands
		Allows to build a personal brand

	Being discoverable by clients
	Loyalty to Instagram
	Main platform
	Having an ecommerce space
Professional platform	Brands search there
	Friendlier community
	High-end social media platform
	More trustworthy
	More formal, less fun
	Still no. 1 social media tool
Instagram builds self-brand and brings in new clients	Asserting worth in market
	Based on passion
	Knowing when to post
	Marketing tool
	Understanding the features