

The working context of digital influencers: dream or precariousness?

O contexto de trabalho dos influenciadores digitais: sonho ou precarização?

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Abstract

With the evolution of social networks and the increasing ease of access to the Internet, new actors in contemporary communication have emerged: the so-called digital influencers. Ideas of autonomy and precariousness seem to underlie this form of activity on social networks. The objective was to analyze the work context and elements of the daily routine of Instagram digital influencers. A qualitative and exploratory research was conducted through interviews with 10 digital influencers. For the development of this study, information was collected through a semi-structured script. The research suggests that there is a perception among influencers that the gains (achievements, remuneration, recognition and growth) outweigh the difficulties presented in the work context. Therefore, the research indicates that the elements of precariousness are arranged and presented, but are not consciously perceived by the interviewees. At the end of this research, it is concluded that there are elements of precariousness in the work context of digital influencers.

Keywords: precariousness, Instagram; influencer.

Resumo

Com a evolução das redes sociais e a crescente facilidade de acesso à Internet, surgiram novos atores da comunicação contemporânea, os chamados influenciadores digitais. As ideias de autonomia e precarização parecem subjazer a essa forma de atuação nas redes sociais. Objetivou-se analisar o contexto de trabalho e os elementos da rotina dos influenciadores digitais do Instagram. Realizou-se uma pesquisa qualitativa e exploratória, mediante entrevista com 10 influenciadores digitais. Para o desenvolvimento deste estudo, as informações foram colhidas através de um roteiro semiestruturado. A pesquisa sugere que há uma percepção dos influenciadores de que os ganhos (realizações, remuneração, reconhecimento e crescimento) superam as dificuldades apresentadas no contexto de trabalho. Desta forma, a pesquisa indica que os elementos de precarização estão dispostos e apresentados, mas não são conscientemente percebidos pelos entrevistados. Ao cabo desta pesquisa, conclui-se que há elementos de precarização no contexto de trabalho dos influenciadores digitais.

Palavras-chave: precarização; Instagram; influenciador.

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1 Introduction

Social media is widely used in marketing strategies, for which managers necessitate allocating an increasing number of resources on actions for these online platforms (Torres et al., 2019). With the evolution of social media and the growing ease of internet access, new actors of contemporary communication emerge, the so-called content creators or, according to the marketing industry, digital influencers (Moreira et al., 2021).

The role of the digital influencer appeared spontaneously, so much as the new relationship between these individuals and the brands. The results of Torres et al. (2019) research show that both brand attitudes and purchase intentions are influenced by the digital influencer's attractiveness (which includes both friendliness and familiarity). This new form of interaction has enabled a sense of connection with people, creating new challenges, since the activity involves different cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects.

In this new scenario, the importance of digital influencers is highlighted as important communication channels for conveying truly relevant and meaningful messages, being capable of genuinely influencing purchasing and consumption behaviour (Matos & Andreoli, 2022). This way, given a technology-dominated environment in which actions can virtually all be measured, it is made clear that a great number of followers does not necessarily result in an elevated engagement rate. Influencers seek new forms of gathering more visitors, reactions, and consequently, company sales. For that matter, influencers share their personal lives and interact directly with their following (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Digital influencers are deemed friendly, believable and intimate. In fact, interactions can create the idea of face-to-face relationships which leads to a great influence on customers when it comes to posts by digital influencers. However, exposure can bring space for bias, as is common in studies involving human feedback. The endless search for ways to generate higher engagement rates provoke high exposure situations (Torres et al., 2019).

The global changes currently underway are fostering a new paradigm in labor relations as an instance of precarious forms of work and employment which, in turn, have been realized through the proliferation of new contract forms and decrease in the availability of typical/permanent jobs (Araujo & Moraes, 2017). Therefore, new technological organizational standards and the new forms of work organization can lead to the degradation of living conditions, aggravated by the lack of social protection mechanisms and associated with deconstruction/reconstruction of identities built around work (Araujo & Moraes, 2017). In this regard, several types of work, such as that performed by digital influencers, are characterized by an alleged autonomy to decide when and how to work, in addition to not being limited to a specific workplace, with no fixed remuneration or schedule, which are characteristics different from those of traditional work (Rauber et al., 2022).

As a result, it is evident that the current idea of work along with various aspects of social relations were modified (Moreira et al., 2021). These changes resulting from the capitalist logic shed light on the forms of work precariousness at present day (Macedo et al., 2019). The romanticization of flexibility and fulfilled dreams leads to a work reinterpretation, causing situations in which it is common to normalize work precariousness, transferring risks and the unsafety of the organization to the employees. Then, there is speculation regarding the future of such agents as marketing strategy symbols (Silva et al., 2023). Based on this, and considering the importance and the scope of work performed by digital influencers, it is questioned: How are the working context and the routine elements of Instagram's digital influencers characterized?



The investigation is based on semistructured interviews carried out with digital influencers from different niches, the objective is to analyse the working situation and the elements of the digital influencers' routine on Instagram. The designated specific objectives are as follows: (1) To analyse elements of support in the daily lives of digital influencers on Instagram; (2) To analyse elements of exploitation and suffering in the day-to-day of Instagram influencers; (3) To point out the primary future perspectives of digital influencers.

The proposition of this work is to give influencers room in their own questions (labor context; physical, mental and emotional health) in a scientific study, as there is little demand in the academic context for this professional category. Understanding the relevance of the digital influencers' working scenario can bring contributions to professionals and improve the ways to which those connect with brands' audiences, as they are key channels for sharing companies and products (Pessanha & Soares, 2021). Theoretical and empirical contributions in the field of working relations in the Brazilian context are intended as well as providing insight on the reflection, analysis and planning of actions by lawmakers and institutions aiming to address concerns regarding the impacts of the growing trend toward more flexible labor relations.

2 Theoretical framework

In this section, the central themes grounding the present study conduction are approached, addressing social media and digital influencers alongside the topic of work precariousness.

2.1 Digital influencers and social media

In the landscape where using social media to establish marketing strategies is expanding, managers reserve an increasing number of resources on initiatives for online platforms (Torres et al., 2019). With this evolution, new actors in contemporary communication arise, the so-called digital influencers (Moreira et al., 2021). The role of the influencer emerged spontaneously as did the relationship between the brands and these individuals, seen by the public as a closer someone. Thus, anonymous people have frequently become digital influencers, expressing their opinions and sharing content in innovative and creative forms (Moreira et al., 2021).

For Karhawi (2016), digital influencers are not only a teenage fad, but new professional profiles which reshape dynamics in the communications industry, ranging from journalism to advertising. This way, they monetize not just the content they produce on their blogs and youtube channels, but themselves, in a dynamic similar to that of celebrities. Nowadays, the digital influencer goes beyond the relationships particular to the digital environment. Under another perspective, the inseparability between online and offline has defined new areas for these subjects to operate and exert influence.

Karhawi (2016) adds that the influencer not only commercializes banners on their blog or negotiate paid posts and videos speaking of partnerships, but monetize their own picture, accepting the Myself as a commodity.

According to Silva et al. (2023), the digital influencer's daily life, in addition to the materialist lifestyle and the pursuit of a "good life" - result of both financial receipts from business partners and products/services designated directly to influencers - encourage followers to seek out these brands, with the aim of (re)creating a similar lifestyle.

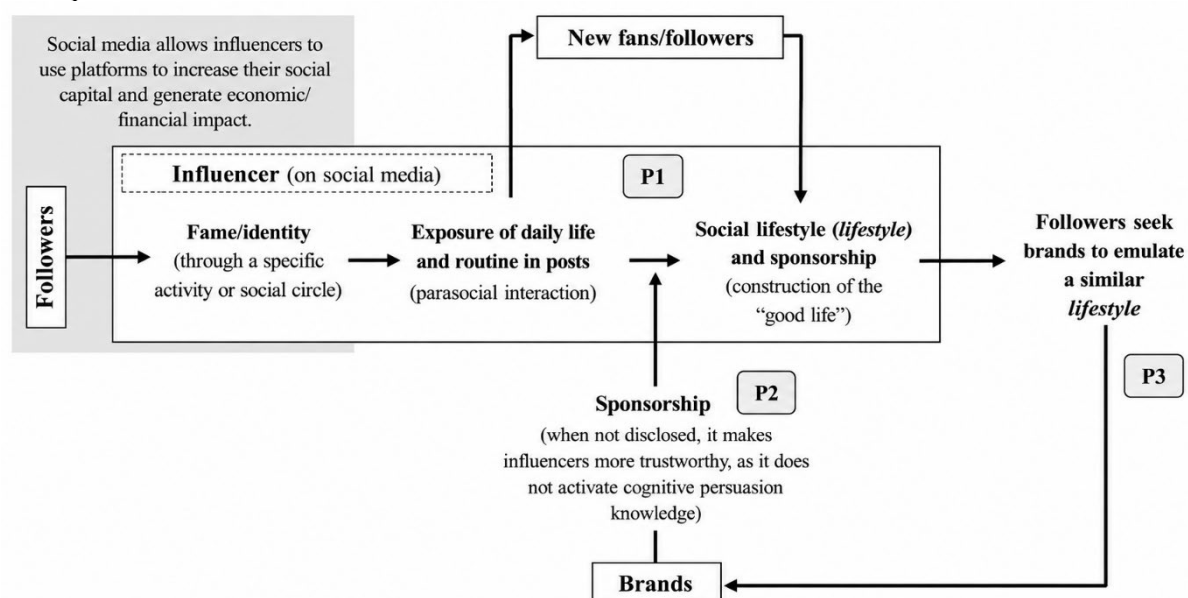
Torres et al. (2019) findings show that both brand attitudes and purchasing intentions are influenced by the attractiveness of the digital influencer (including friendliness and

familiarity). This new relationship form has enabled connection with people, creating new challenges, as the activity is related to various cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects. Thus, within a technology-dominated environment where virtually every action can be measurable, it is understood that a great number of followers does not necessarily implicate an elevated engagement rate. Therefore, influencers search for ways to gather more visitors, reactions, and, hence, sales. To reach this, they share their personal lives and interact directly with their following (Schau; Gilly, 2003). Digital influencers are considered accessible, believable and intimate. In fact, interactions can create an illusion of face-to-face relationships, which probably provokes a large influence on customers when facing their posting (Torres et al., 2019).

Silva et al. (2023) demonstrated visually, through Figure 1, communication efforts with using influencers on social media and its possible consequences. Such strategies, which involve the use of celebrities, everyday interactions and the promotion of non-commercial activities, are presented along with ads sponsored by companies.

Figure 1

Framework of communication efforts with the use of social media influencers and its possible consequences



Source: Elaborated by authors. Adapted from Silva et al. (2023, p. 308).

Matos and Andreoli (2022) highlight that using such importance and prestige of influencers in favor of companies' marketing communication might reflect a satisfaction sentiment by the public's experience, as they consume brands associated with and/or recommended by people they admire. On the other hand, it is also considered that, once the initial enthusiasm towards the niche of influencers is over, many brands come to not tackle the results they aspire by adopting those actions, having their results decreased in a dramatic way in some platforms (Moreira et al., 2021). Facts suggesting instability of the performance of the sector.

Karhawi (2016) points out that there is not a more preferable environment to working with influencers than on the internet. Insights and practices are consolidated and various.

Influencers use digital platforms, such as Instagram, to provide companies with valuable customer interactions. These platforms ease and boost the process of communication between brands and clients (Silva & Cordeiro, 2020).

Instagram was created by Kevin Systrom and by the Brazilian Mike Krieger in 2010. After a year of its launch, the network already had ten million users, even though it was only available for iPhones and iPads. In 2012, the app became available on all android phones and was acquired by Facebook (Silva & Cordeiro, 2020).

The social media movement has had several impacts on the Brazilian economy, prompting companies to invest in advertising on these platforms, primarily through digital influencers. The strength of social media across the globe allowed them to face digital influencing as a profession within a short time. Brazil also stands out in this matter, ranking first as the world champion in the number of digital influencers. These names are bridges to companies and brands (Veloso, 2023).

2.2 Work precariousness

With the event of making society digital and technological, it is possible to observe evident transformations in the workplace, causing new configurations and formats in work-related activities. Uber is the most emblematic example: workers riding their own vehicles, that is, working with their own tools, affording their social security costs and expenses on equipment and vehicle maintenance, while the “app” (truthfully, a global private company) does not have any labour responsibilities (Antunes, 2018).

Currently, working arrangements are being discussed, including “zero-hour,” “Uber-style,” “self-employed,” “intermittent,” and “flexible” contracts. This context causes the conversation about precariousness in this digital and flexible work environment (Antunes, 2018). Precarization is a phenomenon that cuts across the dynamic restructuring of work and employment, since it relates both to rising unemployment, the expansion of the labor reserve, and to the specific characteristics of job positions in the labor market, being marked by a contractual instability and a short-term nature. This way, the increase in the number of workers who find themselves in a precarious employment situation or in poor labor conditions leads to an increase in terms of workers deprived of their rights and subjected to unstable and unsatisfactory working conditions (Araujo & Morais, 2017).

Deriving from the capitalist logic, many forms of precarization burst with strength in today’s world (Macedo et al., 2019). The manifestation of work precarization occurs through a high number of unemployment, the existence of different forms of occupation, the loss of labor rights, the worsening conditions of employment to which workers are subjected, the issues concerning healthcare, illnesses, among such others, generating a boost of job unsafety and increase in vulnerability of the hardworking person (Tosta, 2008).

Druck (2011) refers to a six-dimension precarization model: vulnerability of the forms of integration and social inequality; increased workload and outsourcing; unsafety and health in the workplace; loss of individual and collective identities; weakening of the workers' organization; the erosion and undermining of labor rights. The model is considered a broad, contemporary approach to the Brazilian context. Figure 2 presents each constitutive element of precarization and its characteristics.

Figure 2

Work precarization typology



Type	Characteristics
Vulnerability of integration forms and social inequality	Labor market marked by a structural vulnerability and precarious forms of integration (contracts), without social protection, high unemployment rates and turnover. High level of inequality and discrimination in the workplace, especially when it comes to women, black and young people.
Increased workload and outsourcing	Imposition of unattainable goals, enormous increase in pace, work times and processes, long journeys, diversification and versatility in performing tasks. Grounded on fear-based management, in the discrimination created by outsourcing, which has been spread epidemically in the ways of power abuse, through moral harassment.
Workplace Unsafety and Health	Disrespect towards safety standards and healthcare in the workplace resulting from management models, in addition to inadequate conditions exposing employees to risk.
Loss of collective and individual identity.	Isolation and loss of root establishment, of bonding, of a perspective on collective identity, resulting from weakening of collective relationships, a breakdown in the bond of solidarity among workers. Scenario of unemployment and permanent threat of job loss.
Weakening of workers' organization	Heterogeneity and division of workers implicated in a dismantling of the labor union, by outsourcing and most of all, by difficulties in organization and by the forms of workers' struggle and representation.
Condemnation and Disregard of Labor Law	Deregulation of labor rights by the liberal principles in favor of flexibilization. Acknowledgment of inequality and economic inferiority of the employee in the capitalist society.

Source: Elaborated by authors. Adapted from Druck (2011).

Druck's (2011) classification of types of job insecurity has been widely used by several authors for carrying out empirical research. Authors make use of her findings to conduct the analysis of collected data and to investigate the presence and intensity of work precariousness in the Brazilian context regarding broad audiences and contexts. Quantitative research for measurement of labour precarization can use the Employment Precariousness Scale (EPRES). The EPRES is a multidimensional, Spanish scale developed to measure the degree of work precariousness. The questionnaire is composed of 22 items and six dimensions: timeliness (contract duration); wage (low or insufficient; possible economic deprivation); disempowerment (degree of negotiation of working conditions), vulnerability (helplessness in the face of authoritarian treatment), rights (to the place of work and to benefits of social security) and performance rights (powerlessness, on duty, to exert rights in the workplace).

In Brazil, the EPRES was the foundation for Araújo et al. (2018) to develop the Inventory of Work Precariousness (IPREL). The instrument has been analysed by judges and semantically. It has gone through a validation process, encompassing data collected amongst 287 workers from different professions, areas of expertise, and level of education. This scale is composed of two factors: 1) organizational support, with 29 items; 2) exploitation and suffering, with 21 items. These factors and the questions proposed in the scale served as the basis for the interview guide used in this study.

3 Methodology

Regarding the approach, qualitative research is carried out to understand in depth the phenomenon investigated through the digital influencers' perspective of their working context. As for the objectives, research is classified as exploratory once its goal is to help people become more familiar with the issue and gather initial information.



The subjects consist of a group of 10 (ten) influencers, chosen according to the following criteria: i) accessibility: finding influencers through referrals and through the snowball sampling method, who agree to participate in the survey; (ii) have at least 8,000 followers on Instagram. They were consulted on the phone or Instagram. During the first contact, the research briefing was made available aiming for them to understand how the participation would unfold as well as to elucidate the purpose of the study. The minimum number of 8000 followers on Instagram was demarcated to reach influencers in expanding or consolidated influencer marketing, regardless of the area of operation. Currently, as information sharing on social media increases, people can find one another anytime, independent of place and time - geographic barriers were removed (Moreira et al., 2021).

The decision to work with influencers performing on Instagram occurred due to the platform's success, as it is currently the leading social media platform. Instagram allows image- and video-sharing on a user's profile in addition to 24-hour photos and videos, called stories (Silva et al., 2013).

Data was collected by means of a semistructure script which investigated, among other questions, information relating to the process of "future perspectives", "support", and "exploitation and suffering". The script was based on Araújo et al.'s (2018) precariousness inventory model. Before starting the interview, the influencers responded to some questions concerning personal data and Instagram account information.

It is noted that a pre-test was administered with an influencer to verify coherence with the research elements, as well as the need for adjustments. After this phase, the order of some questions has been changed, but the need to remove any questions on the script was not identified. Therefore, this interviewee was included in the final data analysis of this study.

The research was conducted online, using the g-tool Google Meet, in June and July 2022. Interviews were scheduled by contact on Instagram and on the phone with digital influencers from different areas. Upon returning the contact, influencers received information on ways of interview conduction and time was set for it. It was required of participants permission of the recordings given in order to elaborate literal transcription and post hoc analysis. Data was processed qualitatively through content analysis. The software ATLAS.ti 7 was used for organization and categorization of the interviews.

4 Analysis and discussion of results

This section highlights study findings concerning digital influencers' working context and the precarious situations realized by them. Three analysis categories were defined based on the analysis of the interviews, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Analysis categories and recording units

Analysis categories	Recording units
Support	Acknowledgment
	Resources
	Compensation

	Development
	Place of work
Exploitation and suffering	Health
	Sentiments
	Freedom of speech
	Activity workload
	Exposure / Connection with audience
Future perspectives	Online presence
	Change

Source: Elaborated by authors.

It is highlighted that the category “Support” was utilized in the sense of investigating working conditions and management of productive processes aimed at ensuring thorough execution of working tasks and achievement of effective performance. The category “Exploitation and Suffering” analysed physical, psychological, legal conditions and labor practices that can undermine the life and the psychological integrity of the employee. The category “Future perspectives” was elaborated targeting to analyse whether digital influencers’ future perspective and decisions involved the desire of continuity or change. These conceptions help to understand the current context of social media presence.

To simplify the understanding of the results, subsections were presented in a way to address every specific objective. Besides, data on research subjects alongside primary information on motivation for the onset of digital influencers’ presence on Instagram are shown as follows.

4.1 Subjects’ profile

This section presents personal data and key information related to the work of digital influencers on Instagram. The questions were asked before initiating the interview, seeking to outline the subjects’ profile. This breakdown provides a better understanding of results in this research. Thus, it is possible to carry out adequate links to the items on the semistructured script. To protect participants’ anonymity, research subjects are identified as E1 through E10.

Figure 4

Profile of research participants

	Age	Sex	Main area of operation	Number of followers
E1	42	Female	Wedding planner/Events	9.864
E2	30	Male	Wedding planner/Events	104.000
E3	26	Female	Fashion	34.900
E4	31	Male	Cuisine	76.200

E5	29	Female	Influence on Instagram	311.000
E6	30	Female	Fashion	43.600
E7	18	Female	Fashion	15.200
E8	33	Female	Table set	73.300
E9	30	Female	Fashion	62.500
E10	32	Male	Cuisine	94.800

Source: Elaborated by authors.

As presented in Figure 4, research participants in this study have the following profile: they are between 18 and 42 years, predominantly in the 30-35 age group; the majority are female; and the following goes from 9.864 to 311.000. The most prominent area of activity was fashion. It is worth noting that even though influencers share content on a primary area, they approach a wide variety of topics on their Instagram profiles, as evidenced in the interviews.

4.2 Professional journey

This subsection evidences the main reasons for the start of the digital influencers' activity on Instagram. This survey is necessary for a superior understanding of these professionals' current working scenario. It is realized that the presence on social media platforms, such as Instagram, occurred naturally, where influencers opened their accounts for personal matters until they became more professional. The majority of interviewees created their accounts around 2011 and 2012, however, a more professional take only occurred around 2018. E5 explains their beginning in the following excerpt, corroborating Moreira *et al.* (2021) who affirm that oftentimes ordinary people can become digital influencers, sharing their opinions and content in an innovative, creative form:

At the beginning when I created an Instagram account in 2012 it was not a professional thing, people did not get money from that, it was not very professional, it was more of a personal thing, but somehow I produced fashion content, but it was more personal, I was not professionalized at that time, it was pretty personal (E5).

This way, it is understood that influencers begin to work inside the house, with limited resources, relying on little structural support, creating content with minimal knowledge until achieving notoriety on social media and winning contracts. With much dedication and work, over the years, the profile will grow and thrive. At some point, the profile is no longer a hobby but a professional activity.

Yet, reports indicate that, at the onset of Instagram, competition was minor and work was based on intuition. Nevertheless, with the platform's expressiveness today, professionals need to boost performance and pursue professional qualifications: "before it was too much in the intuition, before we would do what we thought was intuition, there were not people who had done that and worked out, there were not these rules that are today, were there? which you have to do this or that way" (E5). In other words, supporting the main authors' findings, as Silva *et al.* (2023), who highlight, in digital influence, the necessity of a creative strategy with an emotive side, differentiating and giving space to spontaneity which contributes positively to the brand's image.

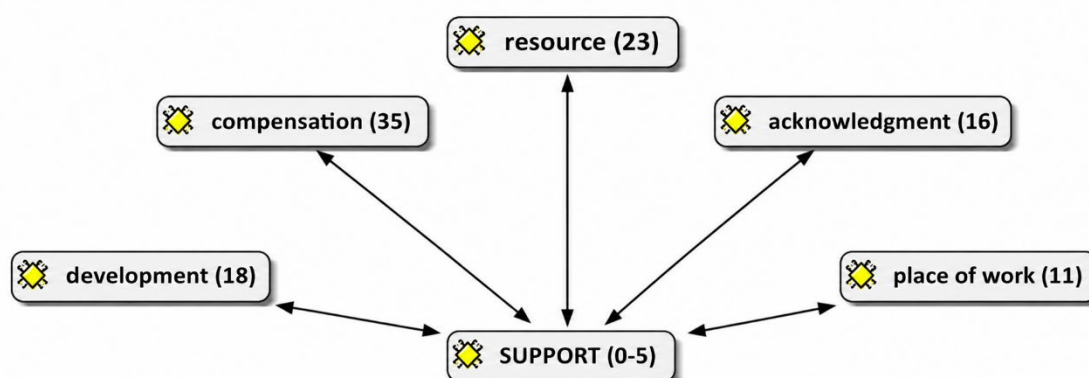
4.3 Support

In this subsection, primary elements identified in the dimension Support were analysed. In Figure 5, one can observe that the analytical category consolidates in the following

descending order: compensation (35); resource (23); development (18); acknowledgment (16); and place of work (11). Thus, the topic that came up most frequently in the statements was compensation.

Figure 5

Support category



Source: Elaborated by authors.

As for payment, every interviewee in this research pointed out that they are satisfied with financial return. The interviewed influencers affirmed they can be compensated by occasional posts or sponsorship agreements, known as “*publi*” (“ad” in English). Except for E1, the others deemed fair the compensation they receive for work currently.

However, based on reports, the starting pay is not much satisfactory during the activity onset, as research indicates a very difficult beginning on social media, as pointed by E4: “I am used to saying that especially the digital influencer works a lot for free until they really start to make money later”.

In addition to sponsors, there are other types of informal compensation observed in those reports. There are invitations to important events: “I have some opportunities to go to certain places, events, and meet certain people that I might not have had. Maybe I would pay to participate in certain events that I am now invited to” (E6).

In spite of the satisfaction with the amount received, the interviewees were inquired about how they perceive themselves in terms of financial security. Remarks indicate the necessity for financial control when facing instability, as exposed by E9: “Depending on *publi* (ad) is very dangerous, you can have it today, but we do not know what tomorrow holds” (E9).

Concerning the issue of workspace, most influencers said they get the most out of space in their homes, adjusting for their own necessities: “I set aside a tiny bedroom just for me, where I have lighting, space” (E7). The term “instagrammable” appeared in three reports, signaling that working as an influencer has evidently affected the privacy of their homes, since they are used as sites for content creation.

In terms of resources, it is noticed that some equipment is essential to working as an influencer. All the interviewees said that they at first used few resources (notably just the phone) and worked by themselves. The primary technological resource mentioned was the mobile phone, most of all, the iPhone. Five interviewees spoke about switching phones every year, when required by the need of modern devices (E1; E2; E4; E5; E10). In addition to the phone,

other pieces of equipment were mentioned, such as cell phone stand, cameras, led lighting, microphone, ring light, among others (E1; E3; E8; E10).

The interviewees were asked whether they had any professional or staff to assist with the activities. The vast majority said to be working without the assistance of other professionals, such as, an assistant, a make-up artist, a photographer, a videomaker, and the like (E1; E3; E4; E6; E7; E8; E9; E10). Four influencers informed that they had assistants destined to manage their schedules, handle administrative details and contracts (E3; E5; E7; E9). Two participants claimed having larger, structured staff (E2; E5). E4 considered they had already had structured staff, but today prefer hiring only on occasion.

Another aspect that brings satisfaction with the influencer career is recognition for their work. However, remarks on company recognition reveal another side, thus negative, which is the devaluation of the influencers' work. Several contracting parties do not pay the amount requested by the influencer and attempt to pay as little as possible for a promotion. There are strategies to deal with this situation, as E7 states: "we cannot lower the price. Because we would be self-devaluing. So, we talk, see which way is best for both parties, if we can make the deal, then good, but if we can't, leave it for next time". This aspect highlights Karhawi's (2016) claim of the negotiation of Me as a commodity.

Regarding professional and personal growth, one can realize there is a need for constant updates in several elements to continuously put into effect the digital influencer's work. The interviewees E1, E2, E3, E6 and E10 were emphatic about courses and training they had taken to stay up to date in their fields. Therefore, it is worth noting that despite influencers considering the compensation adequate, even in the face of starting condition hardships, it is clear that there is a necessity for investments on equipment, leading to constant swaps to more technological devices, and courses/training aimed at work improvement. It is highlighted that these investments are cost by the influencers.

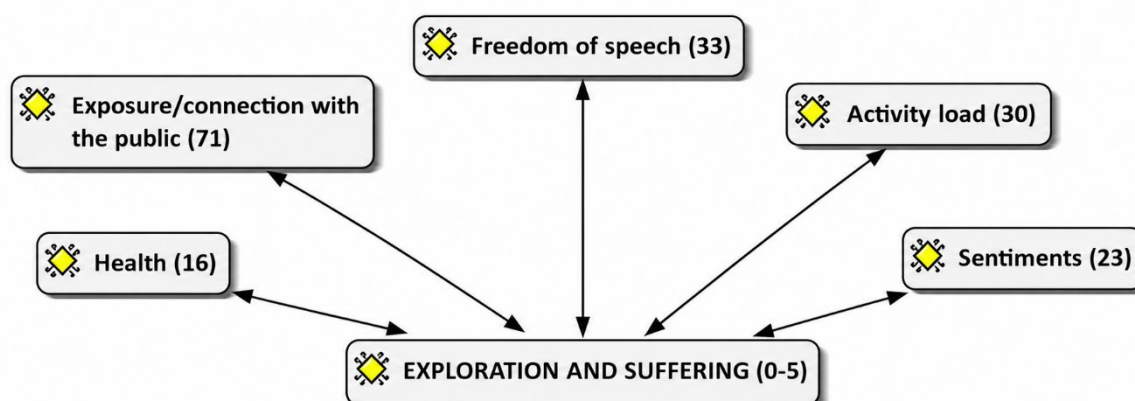
4.4 Exploitation and Suffering

In this subsection were analysed the main identified elements within the category Exploitation and Suffering. Five units of analysis were observed: Exposure/connection with the public (71); Freedom of speech (33); Activity load (30); Sentiments (23); Health (16).

Figure 6

Exploitation and Suffering category





Source: Elaborated by authors.

In relation to sentiments, overall, the interviewees expressed positive emotions concerning work: “I have a feeling of achievement, a sense of happiness, joy, an inexplicable thing, the feeling that I have when I do my job” (E6). However, some reported negative emotions (E3, E6, E7 and E8). For E7, there are moments of discouragement: “it comes a time when we see we work too hard on the internet, it comes a time when we get discouraged. Then there always comes an angel to guide you in the right direction” (E7).

The participants consider the pressure to conform to an aesthetic standard negative. The workload was another well-approached aspect during the interviews. To stay on the radar, most of the influencers feel pressure over constantly posting content and making a presence on the platform all the time, virtually 24 hours a day (E1, E5, E8, E9, E3). According to some remarks, the pressure of posting at weekends emerged. The high load of activities is not only a result of content posting. Several times the audience interacts and requires attention in real time, as they send messages and demand responses.

Besides producing content and addressing the public, influencers also inform that their activities are dynamic to meet the existing demands that ensure engagement. Thus, findings are aligned with the claims by Silva et al. (2023), indicating that influencers on social media - be it micro influencers or celebrity-influencers - are beyond the barrier of pure and simple product consumption, starting operations in politics or as cultural trailblazers, which can lead to new consequences.

One can notice that influencers always seek forms to attract more visitors, reactions and, consequently, company sales, developing a variety of activities to gather engagement and interaction. To meet this goal, they share about their personal lives and socialize directly with followers. This context of work intensification is characterized by long journeys on social media, once there is no limit between personal and professional life, which is one of the features of precariousness, according to Druck (2011).

Freedom of speech was another element arising in the context of digital influencers' work. In general terms, influencers (E3, E6, and E9) admitted that they opt to decline certain jobs with which they do not identify: “If I don't trust the brand, we turn it down. It has happened many times” (E9). Despite that fact, not all influencers decline jobs due to lack of identification with the product.

Research indicates that, in spite of what happens to them or what their problems are, influencers are always seeking to publish positive content, since people expect to find good

things online. Influencers avoid addressing controversies on their posts: “I am not a person who likes watching anyone talking about controversial topics, like politics, cursing one or another, I don’t like to watch anybody complaining. So because I don’t like seeing it, I also don’t like doing it” (E3).

Although being careful with sensitive topics, some influencers need, at times, to present content that can provoke some controversy. When this occurs, occasionally, the so-called haters emerge. They are people who send more aggressive and angry messages. It has been evidenced by other studies that the relentless search of forms to achieve a higher engagement rate results in high exposure situations (Torres et al., 2019).

One extensive point in the research concerns exposure and relationship with the audience, once most influencers expose their personal lives. Through the remarks, it has been identified that there is a curiosity from followers to learn the influencers’ routine. However, some interviewees (E1, E5, E8 and E10) stated that they select what they want to make public, calculating on a weighted basis and controlling exposure size, as described by E8: “We always choose what we will show. My husband pops up a lot, people love when he comes up, my cat, my family, the audience loves when my dad comes up. I end up exposing them, but not everything, I choose moments to post” (E8).

Regarding Health issues, this study points that the problems caused by the profession can be of psychic nature, which can generate physical consequences. All interviewees mentioned that stress is present to a greater extent as a result of their activities. “Anxiety, everything. You just need therapy so much” says E5 with disappointment. Problems provoked by stress can evolve and also affect physical health, some statements express. E10 assert that they are aware of the problems that can be caused to the extent of their field of activity (cuisine) and are careful with maintaining physical health.

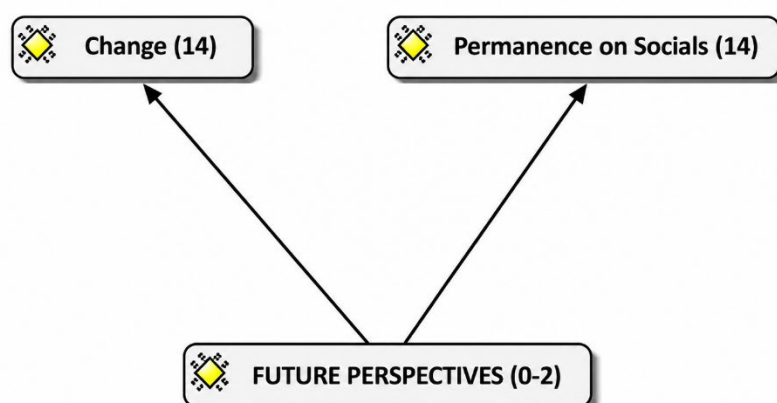
4.5 Future perspectives

In this subsection, the main elements identified under the “Future Prospects” dimension were examined: Permanence on Socials (14) and Change (14). Thus, a balance between change and continuity in networks is evident, as shown by the quantification of the reports.

Figure 7

Future perspectives





Source: Elaborated by authors.

There is a clear desire to maintain a presence on social media and gain more visibility in the media. E2 and E9 mentioned the possibility of appearing on a national television show to gain more fame, as they find it difficult to achieve greater levels of success through the usual channels on Instagram. Amid these grand ambitions, there is one isolated case of an influencer who does not aim for growth: “But regarding what I do on Instagram today, it’s not something I’ve invested in for growth; it has grown organically. I don’t plan what I’m going to do—this or that—today I just act on instinct; I don’t plan to grow and become the biggest” (E10).

Signs of change were also identified in the interviews. Some influencers acknowledge that the future of social media may be uncertain. As a result, influencers are trying to develop other professional skills for the future in light of this uncertainty.

As mentioned earlier in this article, influencers point out a trend which, after an initial period of enthusiasm for the field, the constant exposure of their images can lead to burnout. Finally, unanimously, as a natural progression of their work and in response to the need for diversification, influencers have highlighted the importance of building their own brand to secure a more stable source of income.

4.6 The Precarization of Digital Influencers' Work

This subsection presents a discussion of the research findings regarding the typology of job insecurity, as outlined by Druck (2011). With regard to the vulnerability of employment arrangements, some influencers point to job insecurity and intense competition, given the significant increase in the number of influencers. These are considered, according to Guimarães (2015), situations of labor exploitation, given a scenario where informality is conflated with flexibilization and deregulation - as also demonstrated in other occupations under the neoliberal model, such as Rio de Janeiro’s street Carnival, where street vendors work for breweries without any formal labor protections; or with volunteer programs for mega-events such as the Olympics, when thousands of people are mobilized.

Regarding job insecurity and occupational health, influencers’ complaints are related to excessive stress and anxiety, which can lead to physical health problems. The reports suggest fatigue, exhausting routines, insecurity regarding the future of work and compensation, and

concern about the transience of social media, as summarized in the results in Figure 8. Thus, the researchers identify several theoretical elements that can be framed within the typology of job precariousness.

Figure 8

Factors contributing to precariousness identified in the study

Type	Research findings
Vulnerability of forms of integration	Precarious contracts with no social protections. Job insecurity and intense competition. Uncertainty about the future of work, pay, and the transience of social networks.
Work intensification and outsourcing	A dramatic increase in the pace, timing, and processes of work, long working hours, and the need to perform a wide variety of tasks. Fatigue and exhausting routines. Although influencers are not in a subordinate relationship with Instagram, they are constantly pressured to post more and different types of content to keep their profile engaged on the platform. Furthermore, if they stop posting, they feel threatened by the risk that people will forget them and stop following them, jeopardizing their contracts with companies.
Workplace Unsafty and Health	Excessive stress can cause anxiety and may lead to physical health problems. Furthermore, the nature of the job itself can lead to serious health issues, given the pressure to maintain a certain body type or the need to eat specific food in order to provide culinary advice.
Loss of individual and collective identity	The constant threat of losing contracts. The constant pursuit of certain aesthetic standards—to the point of sacrificing their own identities. This is driven by pressure from followers and sponsors.
Weakening of the workers' organization	There are no labor unions or other forms of worker advocacy or representation. As this is a very new field, there is no support or protection from unions. There are no regulations whatsoever, leaving influencers completely vulnerable to exploitative business practices.
Condemnation and the Dismantling of Labor Law	The deregulation of workers' rights based on liberal principles in the name of labor market flexibility. Recognition of workers' economic inequality and inferiority in capitalist society.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Research suggests that influencers perceive the benefits (achievements, compensation, recognition, and growth) to surpass the difficulties encountered in their work environment. However, the research indicates that elements of precariousness are present and evident, but are not consciously perceived by the interviewees. Despite the benefits of being an influencer, this research concludes that there are elements of precariousness in the work context of digital influencers. The constant threat of losing contracts if they fail to demonstrate creativity and engagement, and the constant pursuit of certain aesthetic standards, are factors that contribute to excessive stress, generating anxiety and potentially leading to physical health issues.

5 Final remarks

The topic of the working conditions and precarious nature of labor relations among digital influencers is a new area of discussion that has received little attention in academic research. The guiding principle of this study is to analyze the working conditions and routine of Instagram digital influencers.

To identify the elements of the work context, we first examined key characteristics of the influencers' early careers, noting that their social media profiles initially served to share details of their personal lives or to provide a hobby-like outlet for discussing topics of interest. Over

time, the profile gained prominence and demanded more attention, becoming a source of income. As their profiles expanded, influencers began investing in resources to improve their work, such as professional photo and video production.

Next, the support characteristics related to the influencers' work were analyzed, namely: Compensation (35); Recognition (16); Resources (23); Development (18); Workplace (11). Regarding remuneration, it is noteworthy that, aside from one interviewee, the influencers consider themselves satisfied with the financial return. Thus, despite the deregulation of workers' rights - since the category has no guarantees - remuneration is generally considered fair in light of all the difficulties. Thus, a flexibility characterizes current employment, lacking any guarantee of regulation (Fleming, 2017).

As for the aspects related to exploitation and suffering, five factors emerged in the interviews: exposure/relationship with the public (71); freedom of expression (33); workload (30); emotions (23); and health (16). It is evident that a significant focus of the research was the issue of exposure and the relationship with the public, since the vast majority of influencers share their personal lives. Regarding feelings, in general, the interviewees express positive emotions, such as happiness, joy, and fulfillment with the work they do. Influencers take pride in having followers who use their tips. However, there were reports of negative emotions, with moments of discouragement from working so much online, especially given the difficulty of maintaining engagement on their profiles. This generates a huge volume of work, requiring them to constantly create content, even on weekends. Regarding occupational health, complaints are related to the stress caused by this workload. Over time, it becomes clear that influencers develop strategies to cope with stress and the volume of activity. However, there is always pressure to create content and be more active on their profiles.

As for the aspects related to future prospects, some influencers recognize that the future of social media can be uncertain and are considering launching new businesses or their own brands to ensure greater security. The research findings suggest that the gains (achievements, compensation, recognition, and growth) outweigh the difficulties presented in the work context. Elements of precariousness are present and evident, but are not consciously perceived by the interviewees. This study contributes to a better understanding of the work context of digital influencers, considering that a more balanced work relationship is essential for creating fairer life opportunities. Fairer working conditions have a positive impact on the economy as a whole and result in the attainment of practical independence (Fleming, 2017).

In terms of limitations, several aspects of this study warrant consideration. First, it is important to reflect on the influence of self-assessment bias among digital influencers, which may lead to a predominantly optimistic view of their own work experiences. Furthermore, it should be noted that the study is limited to the context in which it was conducted (in 2022, post-pandemic), since the work context of digital influencers may vary over time, as may their perceptions. Finally, it is considered that the criteria of accessibility and minimum number of followers resulted in a group of participants who operate in some very specific niches.

Given these limitations, several avenues for advancing research in this area can be suggested. Within the qualitative approach, longitudinal studies that track digital influencers over time (at different stages of development) may allow us to assess how the work context and the influencers' perceptions change at different points in time, including periods of significant change (such as the pandemic). Another approach would be to focus research on groups of influencers in specific niches, which could provide insight into the differences in perception and work experience among influencers in each niche.

To complement the qualitative research, a quantitative research effort—using a survey instrument designed based on the categories identified in this study and drawing on a



representative and more diverse sample of digital influencers (such as different niches, follower counts, and/or geographic regions of origin or influence)—could help yield more comprehensive results. Combined with quantitative research, the use of more objective data, such as performance metrics (engagement, reach, revenue), can provide a more comprehensive and evidence-based view of the elements of precariousness.

Finally, research that analyzes content produced by digital influencers (posts, stories, videos) to identify recurring themes related to work, challenges, and rewards can complement all other research proposals, providing a more holistic perspective.

Furthermore, it is considered essential to also examine the diverse roles of influencers, delving deeper into specific categories and elements of their work context, as well as conducting empirical research that explores the emerging themes of this study, such as influencers' insecurity and entrepreneurship in this context.

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