

Striving for Conspicuousness.

How Micro-Influencers Construct and Display Social Status on Instagram.

Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation

by Lucia Bainotti

List of contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
List of contents.....	5
Chapter 1. Literature Review	14
1. Introduction	14
2. The literature about social media influencers.....	15
2.1. Influencer: towards a definition	15
2.2. Self-branding, visibility, and authenticity	18
2.3. Building the platform-specific self-brand: influencer and Instagram.....	22
2.4. Entrepreneurialism and aspirational labour.....	24
2.5. The Internet of possibilities and the persistence of inequalities: towards an analysis of micro-influencers and status.....	27
3. Status	29
3.1. A definition of status	29
3.2. Status and the attention economy	33
4. Status and conspicuous consumption.....	36
4.1. Defining conspicuous consumption	36
4.2. Evolutions in status consumption: from conspicuous to inconspicuous consumption	39
4.3. Conspicuous consumption and Instagram	45
4.4. Rethinking Veblen and conspicuous consumption.....	48
5. Status and social class	49
5.1. Perspectives on social status and class	49
5.2. Perspectives on the contemporary Leisure Class	52

6. Conclusion.....	54
Chapter 2. Methodology	55
1. Introduction.....	55
2. The empirical study of status	56
2.1. Main aims and research questions.....	56
2.2. Research design.....	57
3. Studying status with digital data	60
3.1. Researching Instagram empirically: some reflections.....	60
3.2. Data collection.....	62
3.3. Data cleaning and sampling	63
3.4. Data analysis	67
4. Qualitative analysis of Instagram Stories	72
4.1. Instagram Stories and its specificities	72
4.2. Data collection	73
4.3. Data analysis	74
4.4. Ethical issues	76
5. Delving into micro-influencers' trajectories: qualitative interviews	77
5.1. Case selection.....	77
5.2. Interviews conduction	79
5.3. Interviews analysis	80
5.4. Fieldnotes and reflexivity.....	81
6. Conclusion.....	84
Chapter 3. Understanding conspicuousness. The interconnections between display, consumption, and production	85
1. Introduction.....	85
2. Theoretical framework. Disentangling the notion of conspicuousness	86
2.1. Conspicuousness as display	86
2.2. Conspicuousness as a circle of presumption.....	90
3. The performance of conspicuousness through Instagram representations	93
3.1. Aesthetics of display. Instagram aesthetics and the economy of display	93
3.2. Inconspicuousness as a status symbol, conspicuous authenticity as a practice	100
3.3. Conspicuousness as a wasteful and circular consumption	102
4. Conclusion	110
Chapter 4. Access-based conspicuousness and the construction of status	112
1. Introduction.....	112
2. Theoretical Framework. Access-based conspicuousness: the role of access in constructing status and shaping status hierarchies.....	113
2.1. The definition of access-based conspicuousness	113

2.2. The mediating role of access based-conspicuousness: access, self-branding, and reputational capital.....	116
3. Performing access-based conspicuousness and enacting social status.....	119
3.1. Seeking exclusivity, negotiating belongingness.....	119
3.2. Performing productive Leisure.....	123
4. The mediating role of access-based conspicuousness.....	128
4.1. Access as a lifestyle facilitator: between an amplificatory and a compensatory mechanism.....	128
4.2. Calibrating, downplaying, and negotiating status.....	133
5. Conclusion.....	137
Chapter 5. Conspicuousness as labour. Micro-influencers and the labour of intermediation....	138
1. Introduction.....	138
2. Theoretical framework. The labour of intermediation: a work without occupation.....	139
2.1. Micro-influencers and the labour of intermediation.....	139
2.2. Work, occupation and status in a post-employment society.....	143
3. The labour of intermediation between creativity and professionalism.....	145
3.1. Creativity, human capital, and the professional ethos.....	145
3.2. Professional ethos and neoliberal times: some contradictions.....	150
4. A constellation of occupations to get status.....	152
4.1. A typology of content creators.....	152
4.2. Micro-influencer, the slash-generation, and the acquisition of status in times of precarity.....	160
5. Conclusion.....	163
Conclusion.....	165
References.....	172
Appendix.....	190
Appendix 1. Digital data: data cleaning and sampling procedure.....	190
Appendix 2. Digital data: preliminary analysis.....	192
Appendix 3. Qualitative interviews: sample composition.....	196