

Barriers to become a fashion influencer

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## **Abstract**

It has been argued that the participatory Web has democratized markets such as fashion. Consumers have been theorized to be able to acquire a “megaphone” and become influencers. Such consumer influencers have been increasingly used for marketing purposes because of their persuasive power. Various studies have focused on the existence of these influencers, how to manage their influence and the impact of their influence. Despite claims of democratization, it is unlikely that all consumers can become influencers. Little research has examined the struggles everyday consumers face during their journey to become an influencer. Consequently, I intend to answer the following question through my study: What are the barriers to become a fashion influencer? Employing a qualitative approach and combining in-depth interviews of six wannabe-fashion influencers, a netnography and archival data, I find that in their quest to acquire a megaphone, wannabe-influencers face four main struggles. These struggles emerge as they are leaving their role as everyday consumers and starting to acquire some influence. I conceptualize this as being “stuck-in-between”. I find four ways consumers are stuck in-between these two roles: between different fields; between celebrity status and non-celebrity status; between amateur and professional; and between geographical periphery and center. I apply concepts from Bourdieu’s field theory to inform how being stuck in-between results in the incapacity of everyday consumers to accumulate enough capital to fully become an influencer. My study benefits existing research on field theory and influencers. It also has managerial implications, as the barriers faced by consumers lead to strategic recommendations for fashion marketers, brand managers, and designers to better develop their influencer marketing campaign, letting them work more efficiently with influencers, and producing better results.

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## **Introduction**

There's not much I can add here beyond how funny it is that we even still call them "bloggers," as so few of them even do that anymore. Rather than a celebration of any actual style, it seems to be all about turning up, looking ridiculous, posing, twitching in your seat as you check your social media feeds, fleeing, changing, repeating . . . It's all pretty embarrassing—even more so when you consider what else is going on in the world.

Vogue, Codinha 2016

For years, influencers have gained in popularity thanks to their capacity to reach a sizeable segment of audiences in a short period of time and at a lower cost compared to traditional ad campaigns (Phua, Jin, & Kim 2017). Additionally, influencers nowadays are located in various fields such as travel, foodie, gym, fashion etc. However, my study focuses mainly on fashion influencer since influencers have commonly been studied in the field of fashion (e.g., Duffy 2017; McQuarrie et al. 2013; Rocamora 2012). In addition, the "fame" acquired from fashion bloggers has been of discussion and argument for years due to the noticeable popularity of these fashion influencers in the fashion field. Specifically, it's very common to see brands and designers pay them to wear clothes in their own way and post on their Instagram, then followers give them compliments on their fashion style. It's evident that there has been a glowing optimism towards the career of a fashion influencer, hence, a growing number of wannabe-fashion influencers are motivated to follow this path.

But as Abidin (2016) 's study on Influencer Selfies points out, “aren’t these just young, rich women doing vain things online?”. This indicates that scholars may have neglected the “complicated production and articulation” of influencer’s work (Banet-Weiser 1999, p.4) as well as the reproduction of privilege inherent to cultural work (Bourdieu 1996). Accordingly, though this new type of effective spokespersons has been a focal research domain for public relations literature, studies mainly discuss their marketing benefits while only few briefly touches upon the struggles experienced by consumers.

Fashion influencers work hard to acquire a “megaphone”, the potential mass audience consumers now have access through the Web (McQuarrie et al. 2013). When starting out, they have to spend time and effort to constantly create and upload high-quality contents by styling, posing, taking, editing photos as well as keeping audiences engaged – all by themselves. Standing and posing outside for hours, taking hundreds of photos only to get a perfect one is part of the hard work which they have been doing to get into the game (Mccresh 2016; Chang 2017). Moreover, only few exalted ones who reach huge success can actually get paid to do the job, while the rest are un(der)-paid despite all their long working hours to showcase a high-quality photo to audiences (Duffy, 2017). Behind all the perfect photos and fancy lifestyle, there are struggles that these micro-celebrities experienced that have been neglected by existing research. Thus, the goal of my study is to challenge the idealistic affair about fashion influencers by answering the question: “What are the barriers to become an online fashion influencer?”

In the following sections, I first summarize the literature then introduce the theory and concepts which I will use to explicate my findings. After presenting a brief overview of the method, I elaborate on the findings of my research, identifying four struggles wannabe-influencers face when trying to acquire influence. Finally, I discuss the theoretical and managerial implications, as well as the limitations of my research.



## **Literature review**

### **The influence of social media on fashion**

The nature of fashion itself is to be known through social networks (Easley & Kleinberg 2010) since it is “necessarily public . . . a secret fashion is a contradiction in terms” (Reynolds, 1968 p. 44).

Consequently, fashion is an incredible social symbol which is used to form and communicate personal as well as group identities (Ahuvia 2005). People express themselves through consumption in various ways, and product and brands can be used by consumers to intentionally or unintentionally communicate messages to others (Kamineni 2005). Thus, as a symbolic form of communication (Katz & Sugiyama 2006), fashion noticeably exists on social networking sites. Additionally, the influence of social network sites, in general, has significantly increased over the last decade. Their primary use, at the current state, goes beyond just for personal contact. Nowadays, people participate in these sites for news consumption, self-expression as well as brand connections (Wolny & Mueller 2013; Masip, Guallar, Suau, Ruiz-Caballero & Peralta 2015). In other words, through social networking sites, consumers can both consume/share visual or textual contents from/with the general public as well as communicate with companies and brands. Two major dimensions are commonly involved in the fashion context that are strongly influenced by the usage of social networking sites: fashion consumers and fashion brands. Specifically, since social media users often share style-related information with their contacts, with the hopes of receiving feedback on their stylistic choices (Lin, Lu, & Wu 2012), the representation of the fashioned self has become more common on social networking sites and created a new channel to marketing one’s fashion preferences and engage with others and brands (Wolny & Mueller 2013). This phenomenon is pronounced to the point that social media can potentially ‘decide’ what you wear (Cartner-Morley, 2015), a phenomenon colloquially

referred to as “dressed by the Internet”. Moreover, social media is also an ideal tool for fashion branding. By utilizing social media, brands can manage their public perception which is one of many fundamental factors in fashion marketing (Recklies 2006). The feedback received by the brands through likes, comments and tags or hashtags from social media users on their brand posts let them further strategize their marketing efforts.

How people communicate about fashion has been re-shaped in every aspect through social media. Since Instagram, designers take into consideration how clothes look not only on camera but also on mobile phones. Moreover, nowadays, people in fashion need to translate magazine editorials, campaigns or lookbooks onto Instagram but in a unique way. The same thing would also apply to fashion brands, the definition of brand engagement has been emphasized on picture quality and on how many visual stories they would tell their fans through Instagram (Bryanboy & Evan 2016; Clasen 2015).

### **Fashion influencers**

Social media influencers (SMIs) are users who can shape audience attitudes through their preferred social media channels (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg 2011). They are conceptualized as ordinary consumers who gain a massive number of audiences on blogs and social media through posting visual and textual content documenting their personal lives and lifestyles (Abidin 2016). Due to their ability to attract large following, SMIs are assets for brand marketers. There have been many previous researches discussing the effectiveness of the use of such influencers to increase consumer’s positive brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Djafarova & Rushworth 2017; Jin & Phua 2014;

Kim, Sung, & Kang 2014; Lee & Watkins 2016).

The ability of everyday consumers to acquire a mass audience has been termed the “megaphone effect” (McQuarrie et al 2013). It is not restricted to one certain context. There have been various fields where SMIs have sizeable influence, such as food, interior design and home decoration (McQuarrie et al 2013). In the field of fashion, it would be common to term them as fashion influencers.

Fashion influencers post photos of themselves showcasing their style which influences their audiences (McQuarrie et al. 2013; Rocamora 2011). A great number of consumers reach out to them for aesthetic inspiration and exemplary taste (McQuarrie et al. 2013). Technically, these consumers are looking for fashion advice that they cannot get from professional and institutional sources such as famous celebrities from the fashion system (McCraken, 1986). Thus, their taste leadership has become more and more valuable to consumers. With their persuasive power, online fashion influencers have altered the fashion industry, becoming a new aspect to take into consideration in brands’ marketing, replacing and coexisting with traditional media (Dolbec & Fischer 2015).

Most fashion influencers are said to have started out as everyday ordinary consumers outside of the fashion system (Abidin 2016; McQuarrie et al 2013). Meaning that they might not have social connections or any qualification from the professional or institutional position in the field. (Turner, 2010; McQuarrie et al 2013). Based on this perspective, fashion influencers are simply regular people seeking fame through self-branding practices. Researchers have examined how such everyday

consumers change how they post on social networking sites as they acquire influence, from personal social media posts to public displays of taste, the key component for becoming a fashion influencer being the display of taste leadership (Khamis, Ang & Welling 2017; McQuarrie et al 2013). Moreover, McQuarrie et al (2013) suggests that taste as judgment power cannot be learned in school, but it can be accumulated through repeated practice and risk taking. In other words, the process to become an online fashion influencer mostly involves the practice of taste through public display and the positive reception of (fashion) risks taken by a wannabe-influencer from an audience. Since ordinary users can exercise taste, they can practice to become a fashion influencer.

Blogging is presented as something rather easy to do, thanks to the existence of various social networking sites (Gonzalez 2010). Khamis, Ang & Welling (2017) similarly suggest that it's easier for ordinary users to find online fame thanks to the existence of social networking sites. These platforms have empowered individuals to connect, share and exchange information, creating influences that have tremendously changed the way marketers execute influencing activities (Singh, 2005; Walmsley, 2010). Consequently, some might think that it would not be difficult to present yourself as a fashion influencer.

In the field of fashion, in general, there have been some studies conducted regarding fashion influencers. Mostly what has been identified are the practices as well as factors required to reach mass audiences (Abidin & Thompson 2012; McQuarrie et al 2013). Moreover, there are also some researches indicate several benefits that fashion influencers could offer such as advertising, PR strategies, endorsing, maintaining credibility with fans (Griffith 2011).

There also have been many studies focusing on social online influencers in general. To be more specific, in terms of identification method, articles explain both the characteristics and the audience perception attributes to define an online influencer (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg 2011). Moreover, what work social influencers mainly do and the benefit that they have brought to the table relevant to marketing strategies have also been analyzed through previous research (Abidin 2016).

But only Duffy (2017) briefly examines the difficulties that one could face to become an online fashion influencer by emphasizing on the fact that they are un(der) paid despite their hard work. Given that the field of social media influencers has started some time ago, it has become increasingly competitive and professional. Also, just only limited researches touched upon the difficulties of becoming online influencers more generally. Specifically, Khamis, Ang & Welling (2017) briefly mentioned some of the challenges to sustain consistency (i.e. vigilance, authenticity) and to build a sizable target audience in order to become an online micro-celebrity. No study has centrally examined the struggles and challenges wannabe-influencers face.

Thus, it would be beneficial to focus on the struggles during the transition process of becoming an influencer, especially in situations where consumers with varying level of privilege, skills, and knowledge are competing for attention.

## **Theory Introduction**

Bourdieu's field theory has been widely used to understand social reproduction and social competition by offering a clear understanding of social advantages through the concept of capital (Savage, Warde & Devine 2005). Consequently, the use of this theory is suitable for the study of how consumers position themselves and try to better their positioning in a competitive consumption field. More precisely, I examine the distribution of the various types and sub-types of capital possessed by consumers and how this influences their trajectory (e.g. Arsel & Thompson 2011; Coskuner-Balli & Thompson 2012).

Bourdieu classifies four generic types of capital – economic, cultural, social and symbolic – through which consumers position themselves. Economic, cultural and social capitals can be converted into symbolic capital, or reputation (Holt 1998). Since SMIs aim to acquire “celebrity” capital by accumulating followers and building an authentic reputation through social networking sites (Hearn & Schoenhoff 2016), and since the struggles they experience might relate to their lack of privilege, skills, knowledge, or social connections (respectively economic, cultural, and social capital), the use of this theory is suitable to inform and illuminate my analysis and my findings regarding barriers to become a fashion influencer.

### **Economic capital**

Economic capital is generally recognized as monetary value – a means to an end such as profit, interest, labor wage, etc. (Grenfell 2014). Economic capital “is immediately and

directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 242).

Furthermore, Bourdieu (1986) proposes that economic capital is the root of all other types of capital based on the economic viewpoint that every form of capital can be reducible to economic capital. Consequently, he touches upon the transformation of economic capital into other forms of capital, pointing out that this conversion requires labor. Plus, to understand this transformation, we need to take into consideration the logic of the certain efficacy of the other types of capital. To illustrate these statements, Pierre Bourdieu mentioned the exchange of a gift: the effort and time to personalize a gift could be perceived as a specific labor to transform the monetary value (economic capital) of the exchange into social capital. In the economic sense, this is considered simply a wastage, but in the logic of social exchange, it is a reasonable investment which results in profits in the long run, in either monetary or other forms.

### **Cultural capital**

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized state. Embodied cultural capital means implicit knowledges, skills and dispositions (Bourdieu 1986). The objectified state is identified only in the relationship with the embodied form in the sense that it can be objectified as cultural products (books, movies, instruments, etc.) which require individual to possess certain embodied cultural capital to appropriate and use. For example, in the present context, outfits are perceived as cultural products that need

embodied capital to appropriately mix and match to get more followings. The institutionalized cultural capital is considered as qualifications, official degrees and diplomas that confirm the embodied form (Holt, 1998). Thus, a key conceptualization of cultural capital from Bourdieu revolves around the embodied state. This form of cultural capital can be accumulated through the process of embodiment which requires practices of instillation and integration. This work of acquisition is more of self-improvement value and requires investment that costs time, thus, it's different from economic capital in the sense that it cannot be acquired instantly through purchase or exchange (unlike money, property, profit). For example, according to McQuarrie et al (2013), cultural capital is accumulated through risk-taking and displays of taste.

### **Field-specific capital and the meaning of taste judgment**

In later work, Bourdieu gradually shifts his focus from habitus to field and the conception of field-specific capital (Swartz 1997). Based on Bourdieu, the social world contains distinctive autonomous but homologous (similarly structured) fields such as politics, arts, education and business. Moreover, fields are the key place where individual compete for standing in the social hierarchy by acquiring status original to the field. Accordingly, cultural capital takes on a different type in each field which Bourdieu terms as “specific capital” or “[name of field] capital” (Holt 1998; Bourdieu 1998, 1999, 2008). As illustrated by Holt (1998), an example of field-specific capital could be cultural capital in the academic field can transform into the form of efficient research skills and high intellectual capacity.



Moreover, the author also suggested that cultural capital is enacted in aesthetic fields of consumption as taste and consumption practices. The definition of “taste” following Holt (1998) which is also consistent to Arsel & Thompson (2011) and Arsel & Bean (2013) would be perceived as “preference”, meaning that it is mainly treated as a tool to join a field, group or community in which they share the same taste. However, in the fashion field, following McQuarrie et al (2013), I employ a different meaning of taste which is taste as judgment power and aesthetic discrimination developed in Gronow (1997). Specifically, I take one of the forms of field-specific capital to be taste as judgment power, meaning one’s ability to differentiate between “the beautiful and graceful versus the labored and unappealing” (McQuarrie et al 2013, p.139). Consequently, in this sense, taste has levels, and actors can be ranked based on how good their taste is, depending on their capacity to tell the difference between fashionable outfits and simply acceptable clothing (McQuarrie et al 2013). Moreover, congruent with the nature of cultural capital, taste judgment can be improved through specific labor which could be termed as exercises of taste. Consequently, relevant to my present context, wannabe-fashion influencers are normal consumers starting with a certain level of taste judgment, who continue to acquire field-specific capital by exercising taste.

### **Social capital**

Social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 248). Hence, the level of social capital

depends on the number of connections that can be efficiently utilized in an individual's network.

The profits derived from one's network are the key of social capital. However, the possession of this network of connections is not naturally or socially given. It requires investment strategies to build and establish social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term such as transforming social connections in the neighborhood, at workplace into relationships that are indicating "durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship)" (Bourdieu 1986, p.249)

### **Symbolic capital**

Bourdieu (1989) presented symbolic capital as the recognition of economic and field-specific capital. However, in Bourdieu (1991), he isolates symbolic capital from economic and cultural capital and described it as a distinct form of capital that can be acquired by a person. In addition, Bourdieu (1993, p. 37) perceives the concept of symbolic capital as "being known and recognized and is more or less synonymous with: standing, good name, honour, fame, prestige and reputation". Swartz (2013) also suggests that symbolic capital should be perceived specifically as legitimate recognition, or "publicly recognized authority" (Swartz 2013, p. 84). Thus, symbolic capital could be generally understood as one's reputation and value as perceived by others.

Moreover, extending from his previous work, Bourdieu (1998) indicates that symbolic capital is any property under any types of capital (physical, economic, cultural or social) which is recognized and given value by social agents. Hence, symbolic capital is identified through the power of prestige and can contain economic, social or cultural capital. This type of capital can be accumulated in the same manner as economic capital due to its capacity of freely transforming from one type to another to acquire advantages under the form of wealth, power, allies and marriage partners (Bird & Smith 2005).

## **Methodology**

My research approach is qualitative and aims at understanding the struggles wannabe-influencers face along their journey to become a fashion influencer. My method for collecting data focused on conducting depth-interview with 6 fashion influencers-in-becoming who were using Instagram as their main site. I concentrate on Instagram as my research site since Instagram is now revolutionizing the fashion field (Manikonda, Kambhampati & Li 2015). Existing literature (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati 2014) indicates that Instagram alone has a huge share of posts related to fashion category. More, all fashion influencers have an Instagram account. Consequently, Instagram context would be highly relevant to my research purpose.

In addition to depth interviews, I also conducted a netnography and collected archival data. Specifically, for the netnography, I observed or screenshotted posts as well as Instagram stories of these wannabe-influencers who I conducted in-depth interview with, on a daily basis for five months between January to May. Regarding archival data collection, I collected this data from popular magazines such as the “The Guardian”, “Quartz”, “Elle”. I gathered articles from these sources on fashion influencers, as well as interviews with famous influencers or celebrities in the field of fashion regarding the matter of online influencing.

### **Interviews and participants profile**

I conducted in-depth interviews with a total of six participants (1 men and 5 women),

from February to May 2018. All participants are Millennials, five of them grew up in Vietnam, the other is Vietnamese born and raised in Canada and they all use their Instagram account for their fashion influencing activities. Three of them were recruited via my network of friends and the rest through snowballing after the first three interviewees were recruited. Five interviews were conducted in English with participants whose second language is English, the rest was conducted in Vietnamese and then translated into English by the author.

### **Interviewees description**

All participants are between the age of twenty years old and twenty-six years old and are university/college educated. Among them, only one has been trained professionally in fashion, the rest are all self-trained. Additionally, four of them study abroad in either Europe or North American then currently go back and settle in Vietnam. The other two don't study abroad and at this point still live in the country where they were born and raised; however, one is in Vietnam while other is in Canada. Besides fashion blogging, all participants have other jobs, specifically, five of them are full-time workers with one of them working part-time and one is a full-time student who has one part-time job. Table 1 below summarizes in more detail about my participants.

**Table 5: Participants information**

Code for citation	Age	Year started	Audience	Paid opportunities	Other opportunities
N	26	2012	43,200	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Modeling contract with several local brand clothing shops in Vietnam</li> <li>-Free gifted products from DA and some local brands in Vietnam</li> <li>-Owner/designer of T- designed bags store (after establishing Instagram blog)</li> <li>-Recruitment consultant at V</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Exclusive invite to collection preview from C</li> <li>-Her designed bag store T has been featured in several online magazines as the 1<sup>st</sup> trendy designed bags shop.</li> </ul>
J	25	2013	29000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Free gifted products from DA and some local brands in Vietnam</li> <li>-Modeling contract with N</li> <li>-Paid advertising</li> <li>-Sells clothing on separate Instagram account</li> <li>-Team leader of the merchandising department of FD company</li> </ul>	Featured in K, B magazine, V
CH	25	2012	23,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Former fashion stylist of K</li> <li>- Studio interned at GD</li> <li>- Free gifted products</li> <li>- Office work for VSV</li> </ul>	Featured in K, D magazine
C	25	2014	13,600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Paid advertising</li> <li>-Graphic designer at SV</li> <li>-Freelance Photographer at SY</li> </ul>	
IS	20	2015	13,300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-PR &amp; Event planning at BM</li> <li>-Free gifted products</li> </ul>	
P	22	2016	2628	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Free gifted products</li> <li>-Paid advertising</li> <li>-Owner at BB</li> </ul>	

## **Interview set up**

All interviews were conducted through video call in a quiet environment, allowing both the interviewer and the interviewees to discuss the research topic in a comfortable and friendly manner. The shortest interview is thirty-six minutes long and the longest lasts 1 hour 11 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded.

## **Topics addressed**

Each interview started with a question about the participant's personal background to know more about them, locate their field position and levels of generalized economic and cultural capitals, and make them feel more comfortable. After that, interviewees answered questions about their fashion knowledge to get more context regarding their answers. One main topic has been tackled throughout every interview is the difficulties they might face during the process of becoming an influencer. Basically, they have been asked about their previous and current struggles as well as their future plans as a wannabe-influencer.

## **Analysis of Data**

The analysis of the data was congruent with Belk, Fischer & Kozinets (2013). I started by contextualizing the research project by examining how the process to become a fashion influencer had been described in the media, and how this related to the lived experience of fashion influencers-in-becoming. This was done through the analysis of my archival

dataset. This allowed me to have a general contextual reading regarding the experience of wannabe-influencers, as well as how the field had changed over the last few years. I then coded my interviews from the ground up, creating codes as I was identifying new concepts and phenomena. As the idea of struggles became clearer, I decided on Bourdieu's field theory as my enabling lens to further make sense of my data. From this point on, I started to code based on this theoretical approach, focusing on dynamics pertaining to economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. I coded my dataset both from the bottom-up, creating codes from the ground up, and top-bottom, using the enabling lens of field theory to inform my analysis.



## Findings

### **Fashion, accelerated**

The social networking sites are now facilitating fashion blogging for youngsters. Referring to the term “fashion blogosphere”, Rocamora (2012) suggests that fashion time has accelerated significantly, everything in fashion gets transforms into posts and these fashion blog posts are rapidly taken over by new ones. This phenomenon is strongly related to the struggles of wannabe fashion influencers I present next.

In addition to fashion having accelerated, the field of fashion influencing is also becoming more crowded when compared to its earlier days. Wannabe-influencer P clearly states that it is a challenge for her to succeed due to the competitiveness in the field. By stating that the influencing job now is over saturated, she implies that there is so much fashion content posted that is now close to impossible to become an influencer. She elaborates that this field is expanding, and new platforms are emerging for influencers:

I think I mentioned before, that this has become over saturated. So many people are on the business, there are so many great people that have been doing it, that is making the game so much harder to enter because you have to compete with all of these people. At the same time, it's expanding. No one says Instagram is going to be it, up your game, spend it to another platform just like Facebook was the thing, now Instagram is the thing. There will always be newer platform and, of course, there will always be newcomer who becomes great... - Interview with P

In contrast to P, J started fashion blogging approximately 10 years ago and admits that it has been an advantage that has helped her to be better known than newcomers. She suggests that it was easy for her to be well-known since there was less fashion content posted when she joined, further strengthening the claim that the fashion blogosphere is getting more competitive:

It's easier when I did it because there were fewer people doing outfits photo back when I started than it is now. There are too many people now. Because I'm more well-known long time ago so I think it was easier for me. It's more difficult for the people now, I have to say – Interview with J.

Yet, interviewees who started some time ago, even though they benefited from less competition at first, still find it difficult to maintain and enhance their position as a fashion influencer due to the acceleration of fashion. CH highlights how her incapacity to catch up with the constant change in her audience's interest is conducive to her loss of followers. Indicating that the content which followers now pay attention to is different than before, she showcases her struggle to deal with the rapid change and replacement of content happening now:

I'm also trying to figure it out why I keep losing more followers, I don't know, but yeah like, people who using Instagram nowadays, they are a lot younger than me, so

the content they are interested about now is different, and I can't force myself into posting things that they like - Interview with CH.

Furthermore, the struggles of my interviewees are getting more pronounced due to the stress that it takes only a short break from the fashion blogosphere to be too far behind to catch up. Though it is hard for wannabe influencers to maintain their flow of content, they still have to find a way to post frequently, otherwise, they will be forgotten by their followers. As expressed by J, she emphasizes on the need to create enough content by suggesting that since there are many posts out there, one taking over another, it's easier for followers to lose interest in wannabe influencers. Thus, the constant replacement in the fashion blogosphere makes it easier for them to disappear from their audiences' feeds:

Once you have created some kind of flow with your content, you have to keep it going. If you don't create enough content and you don't post for a certain amount of time, you will lose your influence and people start losing interest because there are so many people creating contents out there - Interview with J.

Generally, it seems that the rapid replaceable nature of the fashion blogosphere poses as a great challenge for wannabe influencers. It prevents newcomers to be in the field and professionals to maintain and enhance their standing by making the game significantly competitive. Consequently, wannabe influencers need to utilize all their resources to compete with others to succeed as a fashion influencer.

Embarking on this journey of becoming a fashion influencer demands resources that everyday consumers often do not have. Competing with others to maintain and enhance their position further requires the constant improvement of the skills and knowledge related to the work of a fashion influencer. Both these aspects, the necessary resources to start, and the constant demand to improve on these resources, create additional struggles for wannabe influencers. I identify how this context leads wannabe-influencers to never quite fulfill their project, constantly being stuck in-between two worlds. I next elaborate on three ways wannabe-influencers are stuck.

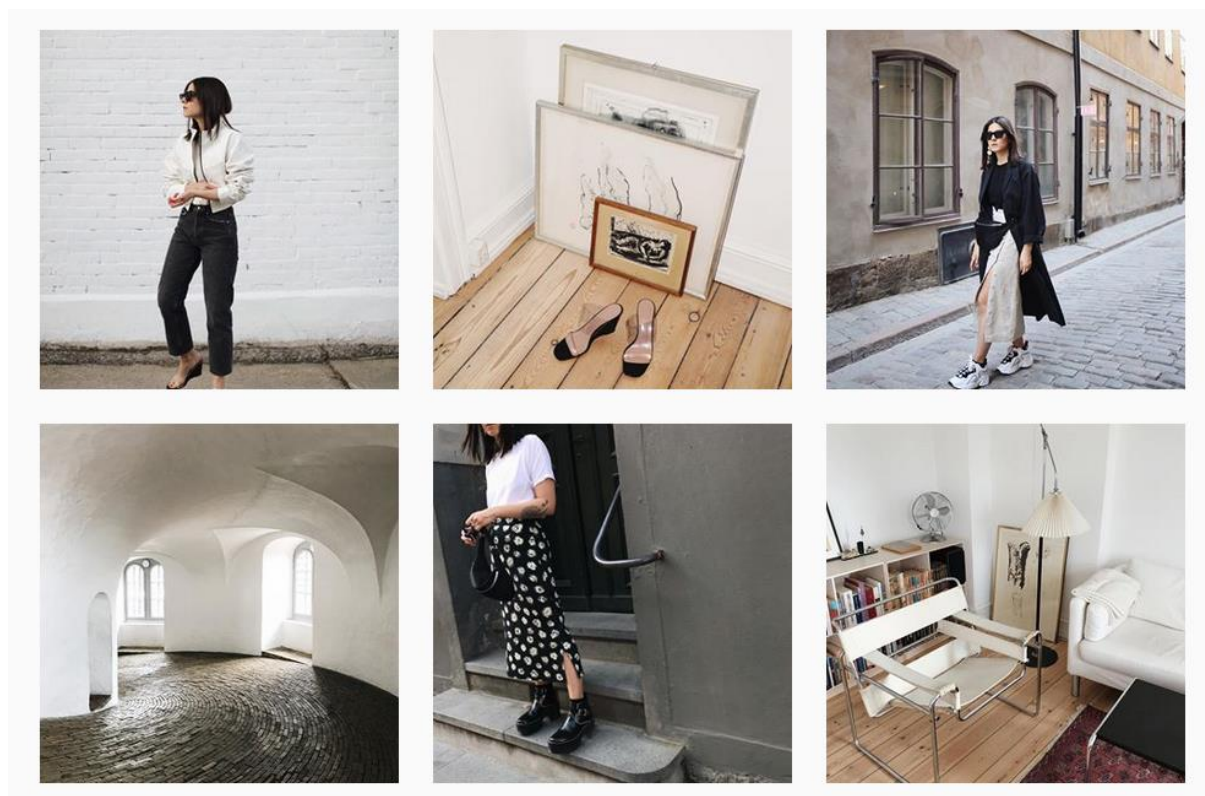
### **Stuck between fields**

When fashion stylist and influencer Erica Davies started featuring snaps of herself – in leather biker jackets or high-waisted white denim skirts – taken in her bedroom, with a brown and cream Scandi-style rug underfoot, the heart-eyed emojis came thick and fast from her 51,000 followers. Soon enough, the La Redoute rug had its own Instagram account, which more than 2,000 fellow human beings have seen fit to follow. The item has since sold out and been restocked many times over, and has been nicknamed “the Erica”. Fashion influencers, who take snaps out and about, but also at home, are fast becoming home decor influencers, too. (The Guardian, Bramley 2017)

As the case of Erica indicates, fashion influencers straddle fields such as home decoration and fashion. These adjoining fields also extend beyond home decoration to travel and cuisine. Fashion influencers might also be embedded in specific lifestyles, and for these consumers, adjoining fields could include, for example, coffee and cycling, or clubbing and beach

lifestyle. These fields provide the backdrop for pictures where influencers showcase their outfits. They also, as we can see in Figure 1 below, provide elements used by fashion influencers such as @thefashionmud to “fill” their Instagram wall. Common recommendations for Instagram influencers stipulate that they should be posting at least twice a day. Drawing from these different fields allows them to regularly post pictures and keep their followers engaged, and reduce the time and efforts necessary to create new looks to answer this constant demand for new content.

**Figure 1, @thefashionmud feed**



A consequence of this evolution of the work of influencers is the demand imposed on them to develop their skills and expertise in these multiple, adjoining fields. In order to find the backdrop for their picture that displays what is trendy at the moment in either fashionable travel destination, décor, or hip city location, or to be able to take pictures of landscapes, beaches, drinks, food plates, and the likes, fashion influencers need to develop their cultural capital in these fields. This allows them to identify appropriate backdrops and market elements, and understand certain nuances necessary to skillfully photograph them (and themselves) at these locations. This demands that they become involved in other fields besides fashion. Interviewee CH expresses these dynamics in the following quote:

I am lucky enough to study abroad, I mean studying abroad already gave me... for me like taking pictures abroad, like when I take pictures abroad, it's like there are more places that you can think of like you know that if you go somewhere, and you have a nice background, something that actually has content to post about. When I am in Vietnam, even the time when I was studying in the UK, and then back to Vietnam in summer, I found that there are fewer places to go to take pictures, to like even write something about, and I can travel quite a lot, so that's the advantage as well -

Interview with CH.

What CH perceives as luck in her capacity to have traveled and studied abroad is, in reality, the translation of her privileged social position, and the resulting economic and cultural capital associated with it. This conversely erects barriers for everyday consumers who are striving to acquire influence but do not dispose of such economic and cultural capital.

High cultural capital consumer with high economic capital are thus at an important advantage when compared to other consumers who do not dispose of these resources, as they can afford the high-end lifestyle that allows them to further their stock of cultural capital and develop their tastes, preferences and skills in various fields (field-dependent cultural capital) thanks to their recreational, shopping/dining activities. Consequently, the possession of this form of cultural capital in various fields could offer them more status value in a congruent field (Coskuner-Balli & Thompson 2012). Consistent with the case of CH, sharing about other aspects of her life would come organically to her. More importantly, she points out that, to increase her engagement with her audiences, she currently needs to expand her skills and expertise into other fields:

I think the line between “fashion influencer” and “lifestyle influencer” has always been blurred. Whoever you are, you have to eat, sleep, take care of yourself with some kind of products, and even if you aren’t an influencer, you tend to like sharing those things anyway. Personally, I do what I do because I love blogging, and I’ve been doing that since junior high. But now that I’m trying to stay connected to my followers, I have a push to do it more regularly instead of only blog when I feel like it. Blogging to me is like talking about anything and everything in your life, so that’s why I write about many different subjects and never set any rules for myself -

Interview with CH.

Adding to this, she elaborates that extending her expertise to other, connected fields is a necessity for fashion influencer in order for them to appear more authentic and growing their audience:

In my opinion, if you are a “fashion influencer”, providing other aspects of your life like what food you eat, what shower gel you use, what candle scents you like etc. somewhat makes you more human to your followers; you’re no longer just another character on the screen. This way they feel more connected to you, and you become more relatable. Naturally, the support or engagement you gain from that would increase as well [...] I think it is a need. If you solely post about fashion you’d be no different than a portfolio website. But it’s only a need to occasionally post something that is not fashion-related like I said to appear more “human” - Interview with CH.

However, it doesn’t mean that fashion influencers would want to switch to another field, or to be perceived as an expert in other fields. Participants state that as fashion influencers, they still have the need to create content consistently on one certain subject. Thus, for them, the intention would be to extend to other subjects while still sticking to the original field, which is the field of fashion. As expressed by CH’s statement:

Some bloggers they focus more on updating new trends or fashion news, or anything fashion related but more like news, some people focus on daily outfit, I mean like if you are more focused on something, you will have to have a niche market following



[...] have to find your niche, like is it about news, or outfits, or travelling, because I notice a lot of travel blogs they still call it fashion blogs - Interview with CH.

Hence, for an influencer to earn more status value to maintain in the fashion field, not only does he/she have to be perceived as expert at the field of fashion, but also need to be involved more in different fields, in other words, he/she has the need to acquire more “field-dependent cultural capital” in other fields as well. However, it’s not easy for these participants to position themselves in that ideal status. CH stated that it’s a challenge to acquire enough knowledge and skill to expand to another field. Especially, she implied that this quest is almost impossible, given the necessary resources that this would demand:

It’d be hard to share about something beyond your profession if you don’t have a substantial understanding of it. And it’d be harder when your original followers have no interest in it. [...] It all depends on how much time and energy you’re willing to invest in your blog or whatever social media platforms you use and how much you’re getting out of it. I guess it will be too much to handle if you don’t really like or love it but are just forcing it upon yourself to stay relevant - Interview with CH.

Based on my analysis, I now show how this leads normal, everyday consumers to be stuck between fields by identifying two tensions.

### **Tension 1: Accumulating cultural capital in multiple fields**

My argument above has been again reinforced by N while being asked about her plan in the future for her Instagram, she mentions that she wants to make herself more diverse, in the sense that she would like to travel more, or doing something more than just fashion:

First I want to make my image more flexible and diverse, in the sense that I want to travel more, to learn more, as I told you before that I want to create an image of myself more diverse, for example making a clip or sharing, not just normal picture but maybe GIF or something like that, or having something more interesting or travel to more places to share. Meaning that it's not just only about fashion but all other things, that's what I want to do in the future - Interview with N.

N also elaborates, to expand herself in other fields, she is currently facing two main challenges, which are all originated from her lack of cultural capital in travel field and technical field (create GIF): time and a teacher for her to acquire more cultural capital in these fields:

So for that plan, the first obstacle would be that I don't have time to do it by myself, and secondly since what I have done till now is simply my friends helping me with it. I don't have any professional behind my back and go with me to places. Because to make it beautiful, I need someone experts to consult and help me, but now I have to do it all by myself - Interview with N.

Her case would be different with what has been discussed above by Coskuner-Balli & Thompson (2013) where individuals with high general cultural capital enact certain practices to elevate the value of field-specific capital in a devalued field. My respondents are unable to deploy such value-adding practices. Even though N has some cultural capital in the fashion field, her leisure or recreational activities couldn't offer her enough field-dependent cultural capital in other fields, leading to her need of acquiring more to maintain a high status in the fashion field. However, since cultural capital in other fields couldn't be earned from her daily lifestyle activities, forcing her being in the situation that to gain more, she needs more time and connections to practice.

Additionally, this argument of Coskuner-Balli & Thompson (2012) would be more fit with J's situation. Since traveling is her hobby, she can clearly get more cultural capital in the travel field out of her lifestyle activities. Consequently, she has been utilized her high cultural capital in the travel field to attract more audiences for her position as fashion influencer:

It's crossed though because I travel a lot. People do follow me for my traveling as well. When I travel overseas, I also take active photos, so it's twofold. It's hitting two birds with one stone. Because if I don't do it, it's just a waste of content, because I do travel and then you have a lot to share by traveling while I take fashion photos. It's intertwined - Interview with J.

Despite her possession of high cultural capital for traveling, J still expresses that she is lacking travel cultural capital by stating that she needs to have a website, and she lacks knowledge and time to create one:

Because I travel a lot, so I also want to turn my social media platform into somewhere where I can share more about my traveling. But that would mean that I would have to have a website [...] but it's more time-consuming and you have to know how to use web design and things, and I'm not great at that. Mostly, because I haven't found the time to or Instagram is kind of okay at the moment but I do want to expand it to blogging at on a website, so I can... - Interview with J.

The lack of field-dependent cultural capital in congruent fields would clearly yield certain struggles for fashion influencer. The main reason that makes them find it difficult to acquire these capitals would be explained in detail below.

### **Tension 2: Affording multiple fields**

To earn more cultural capital in other fields while maintaining a high status in the original field, wannabe-influencers need economic capital to help them reach that point. It is evident that the lack of economic capital would be a challenge for influencers to expand themselves to another field. As highlighted by CH while being asked about what would be the disadvantages she has compared to other top influencers, she clearly refers to financial problem. As for her, she would want to have more money in order to expand herself in the travel and foodie field:

I mean, financial wise as well. For me, if I have more money, I would buy more clothes, have more outfits to post about [...] you have more outfits, you have more things to post about, you have more money, you can go out to eat or go to a lot more places, so yeah, that's what I think as well - Interview with CH.

J also admits that she wants to extend her Instagram to the travel field since she does have field-specific capital in traveling, and she is aware that it could help her to gain more audience. Consequently, it leads to her need for economic capital, as she states that she needs to work more to earn more money so that she can acquire more capital in that field:

[...] Of course, with anything, when you expand, you will need more fee, and I would have to work harder at my job to earn more money so I can travel more - Interview with J.

It's important to note that in the case of CH, she also indicates that she needs money also for more outfits to showcase her taste in fashion, which specifically related to her original field of fashion. This finding confirms McQuarrie et al (2013) that economic resources would enhance taste ventures in fashion, leading to an increase for the influencers' followers. More importantly, my findings would extend their findings in the sense that influencers might need to get more economic capital since the resource could also offer these fashion influencers opportunities to acquire more field-specific capital in other fields, not only in fashion, which attracts even more followers.

However, financially, it is already challenging enough for bloggers to develop themselves as a fashion influencer in the original field of fashion, as illustrated by C:

I think you have to update the photos and trends every day. It's pretty hard because I was not born into the rich family, I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth, so I only can buy stuff with the money I earned. It's not like I can buy Balenciaga or Gucci every day, like everybody, like all the famous influencers – Interview with C.

Thus, it is evident that it would be even harder for them to earn more economic resources to extend themselves to other fields in order to gain more audiences.

I thus find that the first axis of tension that emerges from the desire of everyday consumers to become influencers is organized around the need to develop their cultural capital in multiple fields. Yet, for most everyday consumers, this is often out of reach. Some do not dispose of the time necessary to involve themselves in adjoining fields, while others have financial limitations that restrict their capacity to access opportunities in such fields.

This critical examination of the conditions necessary for consumers to earn a “megaphone” (McQuarrie et al 2013) contrasts with existing work in marketing. In their highly-cited paper, McQuarrie et al (2013) overemphasized the power of cultural capital as taste judgment associated with the process of becoming a fashion influencer. Specifically, that accumulating a high degree of taste judgment in fashion is the key component to transform yourself into a

fashion influencer. They also suggested that when reaching a sizable number of followers, cultural capital would be able to be converted it into social and economic capital, aiding them to involve in the established fashion system to become a top influencer. In addition, this article considered cultural capital in fashion as taste leadership- taste that is commonly perceived positively and attracts a great number of audiences, and specifically implied that it could be earned through repetitive risk-taking practice. Moreover, McQuarrie et al 2013 also mentioned that bloggers who started out with a lack of social and economic capital could still develop taste judgment. As long as consumer took risks, it was possible for them to acquire a megaphone. In their model, everyone can be a fashion influencer.

However, my findings challenge this idea by proposing that to become a successful fashion influencer, besides having high cultural capital in the fashion field, wannabe-influencers need more: they need skills and expertise in multiple fields. And acquiring such skills and expertise is a costly endeavor, both in terms of time and money, that not all consumers are able to pursue. I next move to the next section and describe how wannabe-influencers are stuck between professional and amateur identities.

**Table 1: First finding summary**

Tension	Stuck between Fields
Summary	<p>This stagnation has been derived from the constant demand for new and high-quality content from followers. Since fashion influencer finds it difficult to post twice or three times a day, high-quality, fashion-related content, they have the need to extend to other fields to keep followers engaged without creating new looks constantly to meet the demand for new content. However, wannabe-influencers need to have certain understanding and knowledge about other fields, creating the tension of not accumulating enough cultural capital in different fields to be able to create tasteful pictures. The reason for that is mainly because wannabe-influencers do not have time or do not have enough money to have the opportunities to acquire cultural capital in multiple fields.</p>
Evidence	<p>“So for that plan, first obstacle would be that I don’t have time to do it by myself, and secondly since what I have done till now is simply my friends helping me with it. I don’t have any professional behind my back and go with me to places. Because to make it beautiful, I need someone experts to consult and help me, but now I have to do it all by myself” - Interview with N.</p> <p>“I mean, financial wise as well. For me, if I have more money, I would buy more clothes, have more outfits to post about [...] you have more outfits, you have more things to post about, you have more money, you can go out to eat or go to a lot more places, so yeah, that’s what I think as well” - Interview with CH.</p>
Type of capital used	<p>The lack of economic capital poses as a problem for wannabe-influencers for acquiring skills and knowledge from other fields besides fashion.</p> <p>The lack of cultural capital in multiple fields is the main reason leading to this stagnation.</p>



### **Stuck between professional versus amateur**

A lot of people who were successful had worked for years moonlighting as a blogger while maintaining their full-time jobs. They were essentially doing two jobs in order to make enough to subsist on. There was also a sense that they always had to be on. You can't just abandon your blog for a week, or you see a huge dip in your followers, which directly links to your advertising income. And so, there's this kind of, what is this doing to my personal life? But also, when is this going to pay off enough for me to leave my job? Or is it not? (Quartz, Kessler 2017)

Influencers have a hard time juggling between their job as an influencer and their full-time job (Duffy, 2017). Typical of creative workers (Lloyd 2004), fashion influencers need to hold at least two jobs at the same time so that they can maintain and improve themselves as a fashion influencer. Specifically, N emphasizes such a need by suggesting her desire to earn economic resources, which she cannot get from just being a wannabe-fashion influencer given her position within the fashion system. She expresses her hopes to be able to focus more on her career as a fashion influencer, nonetheless, it would be difficult for her since she needs economic resources to maintain and improve herself as a fashion influencer. Like other interviewees, the only way she found to sustain her career as a fashion influencer is to have a stable, paid job:

I hope I can work full-time as a fashion influencer, but, honestly, because since I move to Sai Gon, so in a way, I am financially independent, so if I want to nurture my passion for fashion as a fashion influencer like that, I need to have a stable job to nurture that passion - Interview with N.

Furthermore, in J's opinion, the stock of social and cultural capitals accumulated from her main job could be used to transform position as an influencer into a full-time career. Specifically, what she refers as "strong enough" would be a high stock of social and cultural capital, aiding her to reach an ideal position in the influencing career:

Because, number one, I do like my main job. Through my job, I get relationships and connections and learn a lot more than doing fashion influencing full-time. So, at the moment, I still want to learn through my full-time job at my company more till I feel like I'm strong enough to do something like a fashion blogger full-time - Interview with J.

However, it's also evident that though a full-time paid position might provide them enough amount of economic capital to stay in the game, it also consumes a great amount of time and effort, meaning that it's noticeably difficult for wannabe-influencers to invest their time and energy into creating contents to maintain the influencing career while working for another full-time job. This dilemma has been referred by J:

I don't spend enough time on it. I'm not that invested or that serious about doing it as other people are because I don't use it as a tool to earn money. I use it more as a platform where I express my style - Interview with J.

By considering her blog account a tool for personal expression (e.g. Schau & Gilly 2003) rather than a paid job, she clearly states that she couldn't be able to distribute her time and effort properly for her unpaid career as an influencer. Nevertheless, J also admits that she still has to invest efforts to keep her current field position as an influencer, otherwise she would lose her existing position due to the highly-competitive nature of fashion influencing:

Once you have created some kind of flow with your content, you have to keep it going. If you don't create enough content and you don't post for a certain amount of time, you will lose your influence and people start losing interest because there are so many people creating contents out there. Having people follow you is one thing but keeping them is another thing - Interview with J.

Struggling between two jobs, both consuming a high amount of time and effort, certainly creates a great confusion for fashion influencers. They remain unclear whether their work as a fashion influencer is a professional job or a hobby. Moreover, in J's case, that confusion can potentially also harm her career as a fashion influencer. She easily lets her emotion get into her way of maintaining her blog by deleting or not posting any content, risking her job as fashion influencer despite her investment in this position:

I have my own life. I'm very emotional so when, for example, there are times I was inactive for a long time, and of course I lose many followers. One time I was not happy and I deleted all my photos, I lost followers again - Interview with J.

C also experienced the same situation with J, he elaborates that he deleted all his photos, thinking about giving up his influencing position due to negative emotions:

It was a dark time for me because it was like everything was pretty bad. I got tired of almost everything. I thought to myself that, "I'm going to delete it. I'm just going to lose everything. I'm just going to let it be and just leave it like that and will never take it back" - Interview with C.

More importantly, it' is noticeable that even though participants are aware of these struggles, they cannot find a solution, literally acting as they are stuck in-between competing positions. As expressed by CH, though she would want to reach the ideal situation of having the best of both world, managing decently both of her jobs as an influencer and as a full-time fashion design student, she is not able to do that. Showing her regret that she couldn't prioritize her influencing career, she evidently showcases in the following quote how great challenge she faced, which was derived from this stagnation:

It was a bit disappointing, but I couldn't help it because if I keep focusing on my Instagram, I would probably fail my final year as well. So yeah like if there's something I wish I would be able to maintain like still post regularly and like creating

final collections nicely, then I guess I could do that. But now, I am trying to post photos regularly but hmm how to say, I still couldn't put it as my priority. Yeah, so it's a shame like I could utilize my Instagram more - Interview with CH.

Consequently, for everyday consumers to become a fashion influencer, not only do they need to complement their position by having another full-time job offering them enough stock of capitals to be influencing in the field, and have economic resources to sustain their operation, but they also need to be able to maintain and expand their position as a fashion influencer. As elaborated above, it is extremely hard for them to handle such a situation. According to my analysis, I would like to illustrate how this puts wannabe influencers into the situation of being stuck between job and hobby by listing two main tensions.

### **Tension 1: Becoming a professional influencer**

A professional influencer needs to stay relevant to be at the top, which translates into economic opportunity sufficient to be a full-time fashion influencer. To do so, wannabe influencers need to accumulate a certain stock of fashion-specific capital, as well as capitals related to their professional functions. As P indicated, to be somewhat of a successful influencer, normal everyday consumers need to stand out, they need to possess a high stock of cultural capital to differentiate themselves from others:

You have to really stand out because that's why they call you an influencer. There has to be something very special about you that you can influence so many people because the key is you have to influence a lot of people to be that influencer. [...] I

didn't have that unique thing, that I could bring. I haven't found it, because, you have to know what's unique about you or about your account or about what you're about to bring - Interview with P.

Additionally, what P perceives as “unique thing” that she does not have compared with famous influencers would be understood as her lack of cultural capital in the field of fashion. Further in our conversation, she elaborates on her lack of cultural capital in fashion:

You understand what's the difference, to be able to dress it, to style it. They have a good sense of fashion. They're quick with style. They know what's out there, they know how to mix them, they know how to make a better version of it. That's just how I see it - Interview with P.

Referring to “sense of fashion”, P implies that she does not possess the relatively high level of cultural capital that top influencers have. N, another interviewee, also supports this assertion in the following quote:

I think your creativity to style yourself, or to mix outfits, it would vary from person to person. Some people who are very creative... I don't know but sometimes when I see like top influencers wear stuff, they style it really beautifully, I did question myself why I can't think of it, why I can't be like them, can't choose outfit like that, so I think that is because they are more creative than me, kind of like that - Interview with N.

By questioning her own skills to display her taste compared with a famous influencer, she clearly showcases her lack of cultural capital in fashion, a contributing obstacle to achieve a top position as a fashion influencer.

Besides taste judgment, P also mentions her thorough knowledge of Instagram algorithm, an important professional tool for influencers. For her, understanding how Instagram works is one of the factors that differentiate her from everyday consumers:

For me, it used to work super well because I really understood how the algorithm work. I was actually like consulting others also. I was helping my friends out, and I interned another one of their culture fashion start-ups. I was managing theirs, and I think I did pretty well and all of that - Interview with P.

However, she also states that she has encountered problems with changes in the Instagram algorithm. When Instagram changed, she was not able to catch up. Hence, she lost her advantageous skill, which resulted in a decrease of likes from followers:

But once, algorithm changed, it's like I just keep going down and then I didn't have the patience to re-learn all the stuff that I knew and to come back. Because when you're so used to, "Oh, it's going up," and then at one point you're just like—[...] Honestly it was the beginning-- it was August, I officially started losing my game. It used to be 400-500 and then it dropped to 200-300, then it keeps dropping until it's

100 something, 200. When it starts going down, you lose interest in it, you put even less effort. Of course, when the situation gets worse and you put less effort, it's only going to get worse - Interview with P.

Her thorough knowledge of the Instagram algorithm, at first helped her achieve a higher status in the fashion field. It was a valuable skill for her pursuit of a career as a fashion influencer. However, once the algorithm changed, the value of this skill diminished and it could not be translated into a valuable asset anymore. In the language of Bourdieu, the conversion value of her cultural capital was drastically reduced. This incapacity of converting the skills and knowledge she had acquired related to Instagram led to a decrease in her standing. This demand on wannabe-influencer to also be on top of technological changes, in addition to the previous demands I presented, further complicates this ability to stay on top of such a competitive and rapidly changing field.

Adding to this, since brand/shop co-operation is the main source of income for influencers, N suggests that her lack of skill in working with brand/shop is problematic in some senses. Entertaining relationships with other commercial actors, such as retail shops often owned by other entrepreneurs who are facing similar difficulties, translates in the need of fashion influencers to be able to market somebody else's product. She indicates that an obstacle she is facing has to do with how to be able to correctly photograph a product in such a way to satisfy a brand/shop:



My challenge right now is how to use products from brands or shops in the best way, to create the most beautiful photo, to make the product which I want to promote or introduce to others, stand out and be more impressive... because not every time I posted photos about the products are good enough [...] my problem right now is how to use the product, to have a photo that looks best to post, and still satisfy the brands/shops - Interview with N.

In addition to requiring skills in understanding the Instagram algorithm, as well as being an apt marketer, N also touches upon another form of cultural capital contributing to her incapacity of becoming a famous influencer: bodily capital. While being asked about which advantages that top influencers have over her, she responses as follow:

With the top influencers who have hundred k followers, then first, the audiences pay attention to the faces, I mean the charisma [...] for those who have a lot of followers that I follow, their charisma is very impressive - Interview with N.

Although interviewees tend to see charisma and beauty as innate qualities, research shows that properly displaying and working on one's is an effortful task at which we can be more or less skilled. These skills and knowledge associated with this are termed bodily capital (e.g. Mears & Finley 2005; Mears 2014). Knowing how to showcase your physical appearance to be well-perceived by followers hence demands certain skills which are not easy to acquire. In the case of top influencer-Carmen Hamilton, managing your look to appear natural on the photos will pose as a challenge:

This is a hard one, as it's obviously natural to get a bit self-conscious when someone is pointing a camera at you, but the more you act like nobody's watching (that includes the camera), the more candid and flattering the photo will be. Take a deep breath, exhale and drop your shoulders down, think happy thoughts and smile! (Elle, Chang 2017)

The possession of bodily capital, the capacity to use own body to gain economic and symbolic rewards (Mears 2014), can help wannabe-influencers differentiating themselves from other wannabe fashion influencers. The difficulties of Carmen Hamilton in doing so indicates that accumulating such type of capital is a challenge. Famous influencer Elle Ferguson also indicates that to know how to perfectly portrait her selfies would take her a lot of time and efforts, which again emphasizes on how challenging it is to acquire bodily capital to illustrate the right look to followers:

I've learned after many failed attempts that lighting is everything! [...] You literally can go from looking 100 years old in bad lighting to Victoria's Secret model in good... So I always stand and turn and take 100 selfies until I find the right light. (Elle, Chang 2017)

My participant, C, also found it hard to find the best picture to illustrate the right look. By admitting that he has to pick one picture out of many, he implies that there have been many

failed attempts to have only one best picture to post on Instagram. Consequently, he indicates that it's difficult to possess the skill to present his best appearance:

Actually, they are selfies. I just leave them on the tables and on the chairs or everything, I can [...] Some of them were taken by my friends, but I got to choose 1 from 1,000 other photos. I had to pick the best one - Interview with C.

Besides skillfully utilizing one's physical appearance, having the knowledge about whether one has the right look would be equally important. In P's case, she admits that she finds it hard to be certain whether her look is good enough:

I still think the confidence was really it because you know when you're an influencer, people also contact you to model, to do fashion models or photography models and all that and I never felt good about myself. I was thinking, "I'm too short, I'm too skinny, I'm too flat." I'm too this, too that, or I'm like not pretty enough, and then you realize that everyone looks different, it's okay, and the thing is you have to think that you're attractive, and you have to believe that you dress well, you look good, you're 10 out 10 - Interview with P.

Being able to skillfully use and display one's body, and know how to present oneself in a way to command attention and admiration is a consequence of disposing of the high level of bodily capital (Mears 2014). The lack of confidence exhibited by P showcases that it took time, and probably efforts, to understand she had a look that some audiences would

appreciate. The difficulty of some wannabe-influencers in accumulating enough stock of bodily capital can lead to self-doubt and prevent them from using their look to enhance their position as a fashion influencer.

The link between confidence and bodily capital is not trivial. McQuarrie et al (2013) theorization of how consumers acquire a megaphone and become an influencer has risk-taking as its cornerstone. It is this taking of risks that allow consumers to push the boundary, convert their cultural capital into symbolic capital, and better their field positioning.

Consequently, being reluctant to use her bodily capital, P might not be able to take risk, thus, limiting herself to be perceived as a top fashion influencer. Knowing how to utilize one's look to convert it into a higher position as a fashion influencer is a fundamental factor to better one's field position. Suggesting that followers might not pay attention to the display of outfits if you can show a pretty face to followers, N emphasizes on the important role of bodily capital:

Now, if they look pretty, then they take pictures and dress well, then a lot of people will follow them. I don't know but most of the time, followers don't care about the outfits they style, in general, you only need to look attractive then a lot will pay attention, even when your outfits or the way you mix clothes is not that good. Maybe it's fine but well, if you look pretty enough, then you can become hot and a lot will know about you, then shops and brands will send you their products - Interview with N.

This last point by N suggests that bodily capital might be even more important than cultural capital specific to fashion: it does not matter what an influencer wears, as long as she looks the part. This little-acknowledged dynamic in academic literature obscured what is at play for consumers to acquire a megaphone and become an influencer.

Other than fashion-specific cultural capital, participants also mention their lack of social capital. Specifically, they don't have the right connections that could further their position as a fashion influencer. As stated by J, she doesn't intend to enhance her network with other influencers, instead, she uses her time to focus more on her main paid job:

I don't spend too much time going out making friends with other influencers, going to events and stuff lately because I have work. I distribute my time differently than other influencers - Interview with J.

At further part of the interview, she admits that she does not have enough social skills to enhance her stock of social capital, leading to her slow development as a fashion influencer:

Also, I'm not great at creating relationships that will further increase my influence so I grow at a very sustainable but not-- I don't gain followers that fast, as many other people - Interview with J.

N also experienced the same situation, she confesses that compared with top influencers, she doesn't have enough opportunity to expand her network, leading a lack of opportunities to work with big brands or join famous fashion show like them:

They have a great number of followers, so they can participate in many fashion events or brands, and then famous fashion brands would contact and work with them, for example, big brand, or famous fashion show, and then they will have more chance to network, to meet, they will meet, they will have opportunities to improve, to open their mind - Interview with N.

Connections with famous fashion brands or others in fashion show referred by N would be understood as a valuable stock of social capital possessed by top influencers that could aid her in transforming fashion influencing into a professional career. Hence, to her, being able to join and work with popular fashion/brands events is a privilege that she cannot have, and this hinders her acquisition of social capital.

Generally, it's evident that the lack of field-specific capital in the fashion field is an obstacle to becoming a professional fashion influencer. Consequently, it is not possible for my respondents to become such professionals. As supported by CH's statement below, their influencing power is not enough to make a living. Specifically, it is common for wannabe influencers to be contacted by small brands, but most of the time, this kind of clients does not remunerate them but rather provide free products or exchange services:

For micro bloggers, there are small brands would like to sponsor them as well [...] usually, it wouldn't be paid content but it would just be like sponsorship, like I have something I would like you to use, can we send it to you, and then you give reviews, and of course, they would expect a good review about their products, but they wouldn't pay or anything - Interview with CH.

In summary, wannabe--influencers have to invest themselves significantly to create content and acquire the resources to make it as an influencer. But their lack of earning potential as they strive to gain influence forces them to engage in paid labor somewhere else. Due to their lack of capitals, famous brands do not want to contact and collaborate with them. Small shops/brands appreciate their content enough to exchange the influence and visibility of these influencers for goods such as clothes. But this translates in their incapacity of influencers to acquire financial resources from their social media work, which would allow them to concentrate fully on the multiple demands that are necessary for them to better their reputation, influence, and symbolic standing, such as acquiring the cultural, bodily, and social capital necessary to gain influence. It is this tension, between their inability to sustain themselves through their work as an influencer, which forces them to get a paid position somewhere else, and their incapacity to devote enough time, efforts, and resources to become a better influencer that leads them to be stuck between being an amateur and a professional. Wannabe influencers would need to “work full-time” for an unpaid job, leading to the second tension:

**Tension 2: Afford to work full-time for an unpaid job**

Fashion is-- when you want to pursue fashion, you really have to have the money to experience it yourself. Be able to buy the expensive-- the luxury handbag - Interview with P.

As expressed by P, economic capital plays an important role in being a fashion influencer. Specifically, as a microcelebrity, they need to create high-quality contents to post on Instagram, meaning that they must invest money on outfits, places, cameras etc, as well as time and energy on photos. However, as discussed above, wannabe-influencer do not have enough influence to be provided with financial rewards to compensate for the time they invest in becoming an influencer. A few of them might have some sort of existing capitals to sustain themselves with this unpaid full-time job as influencers. Participant P illustrated this struggle with the quote below:

You need to work, you need to graduate, you need to get a decent job. Hobbies don't really exist much anymore. I just don't have the time for it. I get free clothes but it's not that-- Free clothes can't be changed for food and water, and all that. It's just that I need to work now - Interview with P.

As perceived by P, being a fashion influencer would be more or less a hobby, rather than a full-time job. The mention of “food and water” implies that her needs of economic capital cannot be satisfied by working an unpaid job as an influencer, leading to the fact that she has to find a paid full-time job.



In addition, J would also elaborate more on this struggle by explaining why she needs to have a stable job instead of working only as a fashion influencer. For her, working full-time as a fashion influencer would even cause trouble for her since she might need to book many jobs due to her needs of economic capital, potentially ruining her position as a fashion influencer. Specifically, it is not that she is not able to receive enough sponsorship from brands/shops to sustain her position economically, it is that she does not take all jobs offered because she has the need to keep her symbolic capital as a fashion influencer. Thus, aside from offering her a stable life, her full-time paid job would allow her to be more selective, thus, protecting her reputation as a fashion influencer, which would allow her to maintain and enhance her position in the fashion influencing career:

It's more stable having a full-time job and then having this on the side because, as you know, it's not stable. You don't always book jobs every day. It's not stable because you don't always -- because I'm very selective. I don't do everything. I don't work with all kinds of companies. I only promote products that I really like, I really believe in. Sometimes I don't go with things that are trendy in Vietnam, let's say, I'm more selective. By that, it means that I don't book as many jobs as other people. Which I'm fine because I don't really need to work with all grants that come to me because I want to keep an image, maintain my own quality of what I present to my followers. I only want to promote what I really believe in - Interview with J.

Most of wannabe influencers struggle to have enough economic capital to solely focus themselves on their career as a fashion influencer, and juggling with two jobs at the same time is a challenge that is not easy to manage for them.

This second tension is thus derived from the need of wannabe-influencers to earn high stock of cultural, social and economic capitals in order to become strong enough to be able to prioritize the fashion influencing career as a full-time career. However, this is often impossible to attain. Everyday consumers neither have a high stock of cultural capital nor symbolic capital in fashion field to be relevant enough to make an income from being a fashion influencer nor have the financial stability to focus only on that unpaid job.

These findings challenge McQuarrie et al. (2013). For them, acquiring a megaphone is the logical conclusion of everyday consumers successfully taking risks and being well-received by their audience. But by indicating that solely earning taste leadership will allow wannabe-influencers to acquire a megaphone, McQuarrie et al. (2013) did not consider all the other forms of cultural capital as well as social capital that are fundamental for everyday consumers to build their audience. Specifically, besides from high degree of taste judgment, the possession of knowledge about the Instagram algorithm, skills to work with brands/shops and valuable social connections would significantly contribute to a higher position in the influencing career. More importantly, possessing a high stock of bodily capital proves to be an important factor as well: being born with a body figure/shape that would fit with the common perception of beauty is not sufficient to gain influence. Instead, consumers need the skills and knowledge necessary to display their physical appearance in a way to be highly

favoured by followers. Moreover, it would contrast the statement of McQuarrie et al. 2013 that a body type that is commonly favored by audiences plays simply as a tool to showcase taste leadership.

Abidin (2016) proposes that selfie-taking skills are a competitive asset for Influencers. Since selfies act as a sellable object for advertising for influencers, they need to practice and master their "selfie-face" which includes specific facial expressions such as poses of eyebrows, eyelids, lips, shoulder etc as well as knowledge about eye makeup, lighting, and posture in order to earn more economic capital. I too emphasize on the importance of bodily capital, by showing how body presentation actually requires skills and efforts from fashion influencers. Abidin (2016) refers to selfies as tacit labor - a set of practices where an individual work to appear as being as effortless, which includes makeup, lighting, posturing etc. Consistently, my findings also show that to appear as “pretty” or “impressive”, fashion influencers actually need to master skills and knowledge. In addition to skills such as lighting, posing, I also find that knowledge to identify whether you have the right look plays an important role as well. I further suggest that this awareness also aids influencers to feel more confident to take risk, hence, leveraging their taste judgment.

**Table 2: Second finding summary**

Tension	Stuck between Professional versus Amateur
Summary	<p>This stagnation has been derived from the fact that wannabe - influencers are not relevant enough to acquire economic resources as top fashion influencers due to their lack of field-specific capital. Consequently, they need to accept that their influencing position is an un(der)paid job. In addition, fashion influencers in-becoming do not have enough economic capital to sustain themselves to follow solely an un(der)paid job, leading to their need to work full-time for a job that they can actually get paid. Since both occupations require time and effort, wannabe-influencers find it confusing to balance these two jobs.</p>
Evidence	<p>“You have to really stand out because that's why they call you influencer. There have to be something very special about you that you can influence so many people, because the key is you have to influence a lot of people to be that influencer. [...] I didn't have that unique thing, that I could bring. I haven't found it, because, you have to know what's unique about you or about your account or about what you're about to bring” - Interview with P.</p> <p>“I hope I can work full-time as fashion influencer, but, honestly, because since I move to Sai Gon, so in a way, I am financially independent, so if I want to nurture my passion with fashion as a fashion influencer like that, I need to have a stable job to nurture that passion.</p> <p>You need to work, you need to graduate, you need to get a decent job. Hobbies don't really exist much anymore. I just don't have the time for it. I get free clothes but it's not that-- Free clothes can't be changed for food and water, and all that. It's just that I need to work now” - Interview with P.</p>
Type of capital used	<p>The lack of field-specific capital poses as the main problem for wannabe-influencers to become a top influencer in order to earn economic resources as an influencer.</p> <p>The lack of economic capital to sustain themselves while being in an un(der) paid influencing position is also problematic for wannabe-influencers.</p>

### **Stuck between celebrity versus non-celebrity**

Because they have influence, fashion influencers can be considered a public figure on some levels. However, the line between a celebrity and an everyday consumer is quite blurry for these micro-celebrities. This is supported by CH, who clearly shows her confusion between her identity as a normal consumer and as an influencer:

Yeah, like trying to not let your online appearance or like having more followers or not affect you in real life. Yeah, that's one of the thing. And also for me, it's kind of weird but for my friends, for example, not really close friends, but old classmates from high school or something, when I am more, I don't know if I can say more relevant, but like when I have interviews on K etc, my friends would notice that I have more followers, and they would say you are famous or something. I mean, it's like joking around, but gradually, I can see that they kinda like distant themselves from me, it's just weird because I still post the same thing, I still act the same way, but hm I mean for my Facebook, for example, my photo would get more reactions from strangers, I mean followers, instead of people are actually on my friends list, but like now, I am not really in any news or having any interviews or anything now, a lot of friends, I mean I see a lot of them coming back, yeah, it's like I see more reactions from my actual friend than followers. It's yeah, it's weird, but nothing really like change about the thing I act or the thing I say stuff online. But I feel like my friends, would think that if I am more popular, I would not talk to them or something, I don't know - Interview with CH.

Being more popular, CH needs to deal with the change in her followings, where she lost participation from friends. However, by saying that she still posts the same thing, she shows her confusion towards how her gain in influence has affected how others interact with her. Additionally, though she states that there is nothing changed in the way she posts and acts online, her Instagram page does show a significant transition from private posts for her friends to public display of tastes as suggested by McQuarrie et al (2013). Specifically, her posts before she acquired a few thousand followers were mostly random stuff she owned and typical selfies with casual caption in Vietnamese, while after, the content more often changed into photos showcasing her outfits with less casual caption in English. Generally, though her transition is obvious through time, what CH perceives as “weird” clearly indicate that she is not aware of it. This emphasizes that wannabe-influencers are more conscious about maintaining their identity as a regular person to the point that they ignore their own transition into a micro-celebrity. Nonetheless, she also expresses her fear of losing her fame as a micro-celebrity since she considers her loss of audience the most difficult part of being a fashion influencer. When CH started losing her followers, she questioned herself and her relevance:

I mean the hardest part would be seeing you losing followers, I mean I know there are a lot of accounts stop following me, hoping that I would follow back, mostly they are like new brands, and like when they see when you do not follow back, they will unfollow you, and also there are people following you, I mean when there are new interview about me, I would see more people start following me, that would be when you feel like you are more relevant, and that when you lose followers, It means that it

has been sometimes you're not on a major new sites, I mean like you start thinking you are not relevant anymore - Interview with CH.

The association between her fear of losing followers and being relevant showcases her need to maintain her identification as a public figure. She thus needs to maintain two identities through her Instagram page: a personal and an influencer one. This is not an easy task to separate these two roles. From J's point of view, she clearly states that it' is difficult to balance these two identities as it is easy to be overwhelmed by the role of a public figure:

I think it's maintaining the content all the time and then not being caught up in it, because it's easy to be caught up in this whole thing. Of course, when you started creating content, you want people to like it, to have a positive response to it. You're not a celebrity yet but you're still some sort of public figure. At least to the 20,000 people that follow me, I am a public figure to them so I have to keep my image. You're not perfect all the time, people will say things about you that are not nice and then you have to be able to just keep it out of your system and not care about what they're saying - Interview with J.

As a celebrity, J indicates that she wants to receive positive feedback from her audiences, leading to her need to keep her image that is well-perceived by her followers. She balances her incapacity to do so by drawing from her role as a normal, everyday consumer. Curating one's life might be feasible as a celebrity who has access to resources, who can outsource part of this work, and who have immediate gains from the constant micro-management of

their image, but it is much harder for everyday consumers. Consequently, she needs to remind herself that she is an ordinary customer and should thus not be caught up in likes and people opinions. Nonetheless, since she perceives that it's "easy" to be obsessed with the position of a fashion influencer, it's challenging for her to balance these two roles.

Instagram is important to me, but it cannot compare to my knowledge, my school, my work and my friends and family. I used to just do Instagram and work so hard on it that I forgot school. I forgot the values of my family and my friends. I will be so concentrated on followers that I would forget the people who are actually with me in real life. I guess the value of a close one was a big lesson for me, and that it's okay to not do a lot. It's okay to take a break. It's good to chill. [laughs] It's good to take your time with things - Interview with IS.

Though there is no denying that IS needs both identities, she has to face the situation that her life as a normal, everyday consumer is negatively affected by judgments from people due to her role as a fashion influencer. As an ordinary consumer, she still wants to hang out with friends and go to parties. She wants to live as a normal twenty-something-year-old. However, since she is somewhat a public figure, others might treat her as such. Consequently, judgments from others force her to change her actions by not posting pictures on Instagram whenever she wants and paying more attention to purposes others approach her. Thus, creating a lot of frustrations for her:



Now, whenever I get to meet people outside of work, just friends, just in a party, people gonna share their pictures on Instagram right away but I have to wait for one or two months to post it because people actually judge me from Instagram. I don't want them to see me because of Instagram or want to use me because of my Instagram. I had people talk to me just because of my Instagram. This is hard but you always want to see the good in people but then when this happens, it just breaks your heart because you're like, "Wow, you really only care about followers," and it's not just about that - Interview with P.

My interviewees have different strategies to deal with this situation. For example, P mentions that it's nearly impossible for her to manage decently between these two roles. Specifically, as a public figure, she has to pay attention to her image both online and offline. However, since she perceives her offline identity as an everyday consumer, she obviously does not want to dress up to correspond to expectations of a fashion influencer on a daily basis. She thus refuses to change her habit to fit with her role as a public figure:

Sometimes if you're influencer, people are going to recognize you on the street and then they'll be like, "Oh, why does she look like shit?" and you're like, "Because I just jumped out of bed and I'm heading to school at 5:00 AM, 7:00 AM, or even 10:00 PM," - Interview with P.

Unlike P, N is more accepting towards her need to change her habits as an ordinary consumer for her influencing career. Consequently, she confesses that she has to show the consistency

in her look both online and offline by paying attention to her outfit whenever going outside. However, N still shows her struggle to “continue” doing this, hence, proving that it’s a challenge to get out of the stagnation between two identities:

Every time I go outside, I must pay attention to what I am wearing, because someone might recognize me so that they can see me looking consistent with my picture, so it would be a challenge for me, to continue doing that -Interview with N.

In summary, wannabe influencers struggle between the role of a celebrity and that of an anonymous consumer. Through my analysis, I would like to explain how this puts everyday consumers to be stuck between the two roles by identifying two tensions.

### **Tension 1: Maintaining symbolic capital**

Starting out at first as a normal, everyday consumer, wannabe-influencers consider themselves no superior to other everyday consumers. N admits that what she has been doing so far on her Instagram is the same as every normal person. While being asked about what skills are needed to be a fashion influencer, N admits that she is not sure how to answer this and suggests that her skills as a fashion influencer are simply doing things she likes. It seems that she is rejecting her expertise in the field to cast herself as an ordinary consumer. At the same time, by indicating that she did not intend to be popular, N shows that her position as a fashion influencer started out simply just a hobby and her actions are simply her realness

expressions towards what she loves. This could be her way to justify that from the first start till now, everything she posts in her influencing account is solely authentic:

Up until now, everything I have done totally based on the fact that I simply do what I like, for example, I am using Instagram then I honestly upload my pictures and then people know, then they follow me, then I get noticed, then brands come and ask me for sponsorship, that's it, I don't really have in mind at the very beginning to be famous so... - Interview with N.

Getting known by doing what they like offers these bloggers the justification of staying true to themselves. It is obvious to them that, to maintain their symbolic capital, they need to stay an authentic, normal person. This, though, is in contradiction to findings arguing that influencers need to change in order to gain more influence. Specifically, as suggested by McQuarrie et al (2013), once wannabe-influencers start to increase followers, they will change their previous behaviors of an everyday consumer, which creates no problem for them. My respondents, however, beg to differ by emphasizing on their needs to maintain their acts as a "regular people".

As expressed by C, he considers that his symbolic capital simply comes from the genuine interest of followers in what he is doing. Furthermore, he perceives his Instagram as his personal account, meaning that he can do whatever he wants. Consequently, he believes that his audiences come to him simply because of him as an ordinary consumer. Hence, when he lost his followers after he deleted every picture on his account, an un-managed, unplanned

action that is difficult to reconcile with that of professional influencers, he didn't take it too seriously:

This means people when looking at you and follow what you do. If people look at you and they don't like what you're doing, they will unfollow you. That doesn't affect me. It's not like when they unfollow me, I should be upset or something because I'm just doing me and I'm happy to do that. If they just unfollow me just because I deleted all my pictures, I would not be upset about that. Because it's my world and it's still my account that I can do whatever I want - Interview with C.

Consistent to C's case, J also shares the same mindset, while being asked what disadvantages she has compared with a top influencer, she's aware that she might have said things which are not appropriate online. However, she wouldn't mind because she considers herself as an everyday consumer. Thus, thinking of themselves as authentic, normal persons would justify their actions that might not be ideal for their role as a celebrity:

Also, I'm very outspoken, so sometimes I would say my opinion that would not be ideal to say online. For example, I don't like people who print t-shirts that are stolen photos online but a lot of popular people do that, so they don't like me, for example. I think it's my own space and I'm allowed to say whatever I want - Interview with J.

Positioning themselves as a normal consumer helps wannabe-influencers in justifying and legitimating some of their actions. Perhaps their perceived lack of success, in comparison to

other non-micro-influencer, leads them to reframe their actions in such a way to emphasize that they are not really trying to gain influence. It has happened organically. To support that statement, while being asked what is the achievement they are most proud of, CH refers to the fact that followers come to her naturally. What she perceives as “free giveaways, follow for follow or like for like” is the typical “unauthentic” ways which wannabe influencers use to build audiences. Thus, she seeks to distinguish herself from these archetype bloggers, specifically to demonstrate that her authentic behavior helps her to gain these followers:

The most achievement? I am not sure, I am kind of proud that I never try to force people to start following me, I mean like, it's not a lot per day, but there are still new people start following me each day, I mean, yeah I am kind of proud of that, I never give like free giveaways, or like follow me, and I will follow you back, or give me a like, I will like you back something like that - Interview with CH.

It's evident that wannabe-influencers have the desire to be perceived as a regular consumer so that they can justify their actions of staying true with themselves. Being in an exalted few positions restricts them from that need. Hence, their goal might not be to reach the star rank. Supporting that statement, in N's case, though she did have a chance before perhaps to be some sort of a celebrity, she turned down that offer since she doesn't want to be involved too much with the role of a public figure. Referring to her desire to be known in her community, she indicates that she has the need to be noticed only in a controllable number of audiences, which allows her to manage both identities:

I don't want to get into some sort of showbiz business kind of, so, before, I turned down the chance to get into stylist or something deeper in fashion that can turn myself into a famous, or a superstar kind of, I just want to be in, kind of like, known in my community, then follow and learn from each other - Interview with N.

However, to be approachable, they need to listen to and interact with their followers. This can cause trouble when some of their followers have hateful comments and attitudes. IS shares that she has encountered inappropriate requirements as well as hateful comments from her followers which was disturbing for her. The comments are not the main challenge she experiences. Her main challenges emerge from her orientation as an authentic individual reacting to these comments. As a result, she feels she has to take them into consideration instead of simply ignoring them. She expresses that she needs to listen and answer comments and questions from her followers, thus, forcing her to deal with negative attitudes from her audiences. Though her need to be authentic creates challenges as such, IS still needs to protect her symbolic capital by consistently maintaining her value when answering such comments:

It's going to be hard because sometimes having hate comments, you want to listen to them and be influenced and it hurts your mentality. It could disturb you. This can be hard, I guess, for some people [...] Getting a lot of weird followers that ask you for weird stuff [...] Some people might ask you weird things, to send them pictures or something that you don't want to show. Just being yourself and to keep your values on tact is going to help you [...] Like when people comment I answer in a nice and I'm

not mean. People, sometimes they are mean and they're like, "I know." It is just sick -  
Interview with IS.

Furthermore, the need to protect their symbolic capital gets more pronounced when wannabe-influencers have to deal with the pressure derived from their own followers regarding issues arising from sponsorship. Accordingly, as demonstrated by Kozinets et al (2010), these micro-celebrities are struggling how to equilibrate the essential commercial-communal tension and at the same time protect their ongoing image as an authentically relatable consumer. Moreover, extending beyond the tension of going commercial, my participants indicate that any dishonest behaviors which are not congruent with their narrative character of an authentic, regular consumer can also harm their reputation. Consequently, as expressed by IS, what she perceives as “going for the fame” or “intentions not good” from wannabe influencer would be understood as the factor that is opposite with their position of an everyday consumer, thus, will diminish their symbolic capital, which, then would lead to negative consequence:

If you are only going to do it for the fame, then it will never work because people will get to know you. They know that your intentions are not good and they will just hurt you more than anything - Interview with IS.

Adding to this, IS elaborates that it's easy for followers to spot out the unauthentic content by suggesting that if she produces fake reviews about products which she doesn't like, it would be noticeable by her followers:

Being authentic is staying true to yourself, posting what you love and posting what you believe in. Example, if someone sent me a product, like a company and I don't love it and then I post it on Instagram just because they told me that if I do that they are going to give me money. It's going to show. People might think that it won't show but it shows - Interview with IS.

Moreover, CH also supports IS's idea by suggesting that audiences could tell whether your content would be a fake one. Drawing from her own observation as an everyday consumer, she is certain that there's no way a blatantly fake post could be well-received by followers. Generally, both IS and CH imply that it's impossible to go for a fake review for the money purpose, requiring them to be very selective with taking sponsorship from brands/shops:

Your content should be, more honest. Is it a paid post, you should say that as well, because people aren't stupid and like when they see you, like if you talk about a product, and you say it's so good, the way you say it, people can differentiate between an honest review and like a paid review. It's something I notice that Vietnamese fashion influencers are not really sophisticated, like the way they say it, it's like blatantly, I could say, they didn't use the product at all but then they say it's so good for your skin, something like that, like for like one week, or for one month, they would review for likes products that are for the same thing and say that it's so good, I mean like people know - Interview with CH.



Furthermore, CH also adds that authenticity is demonstrated by being honest about whether you have been paid for that post. However, by contrasting between honest and paid review, it seems to her that a paid review is a fake one that could be perceived negatively by followers. Consistent with that, during the interview, CH also indicates that if she sees someone with paid posts, she will think of that person as superior, not like an everyday consumer. Her perception is supported by Kozinets et al (2010) that taking sponsorship will make audiences perceive wannabe-influencer more as a marketer who intends to persuade them to buy the products, thus, ruining their reputation as a normal consumer. Though my participants are quite careful and selective with the sponsorship from brands because of their need to maintain their symbolic capital, their followers still question their integrity. For J's case, while conducting a Q&A section on her Instagram with her followers, she has encountered questions and comments questioning her symbolic capital, in response to that, she has posted a caption to protect her reputation by explaining that she rarely takes sponsorship, and she is very selective with brands/shops she might collaborate with. Furthermore, in her caption, not only she wants to protect her reputation, but she also tries to normalize the fact that she will do sponsorship because of her need to go commercial for economic resources. Mentioning in detail all types of brands/shops that are commonly favored and giving an example of her- not taking sponsor from a brand copying FOREO, she wants to justify her act of sponsorship and at the same time still maintain her symbolic capital:

Followers: How could we believe you when you are not sponsored? / Ew people have a strong influence like you saying that you don't take sponsorship, who can believe that (: everyone lies to consumers!!!

J: About sponsorship- for a weird day having been received so many hates anonymously, don't know why.

I have the feeling that a lot of you guys have a negative point of view with sponsorship- I understand, because I know some accounts promote products with no principal, don't even know the brand but still take the sponsorship, so you guys can feel like your feed is full with advertisement [...] - I rarely take sponsorship because I only want to review products from credible brands, owner of start-up shop who is adorable, local brands which are passionate about their products, products that I respect not only the seller but also their hard works, branding, creativeness. Not every product I gonna tag or recommend, brands that appear frequently, 95% are not sponsored, simply I am their loyal consumer, I buy their outfits with my money [...] for example, there is one brand for facial cleansing brush copying FOREO would want to send their product to me, and I do not accept it because I hate stealing intellectual property- all the sponsorship that I take and all the content I create all reflect my principle.[...] Sponsored or not sponsored, so what? If the content is interesting and the product is good, I will share with no discrimination. For example, a big brand like Muji, they do not even pay attention to me, but I wear their products all the time. That's it! - Excerpt from J's Instagram.

It's evident that the pressure of whether doing sponsorship or not is a big issue for wannabe fashion influencers if they want to protect their reputation. Consequently, it's a challenge for them to protect their symbolic capital and at the same time take sponsorship from brands/shops. Going commercial would still be a need for fashion influencers, but it would

mean that they might lose their reputation as someone relatable and authentic. Thus, it could create a confusion for them since it's a challenge to have both.

Thus, for CH, being asked about her plan in the future, she showcases her indecision about going either commercial or authentic. By pointing out that the perception between personal and commercial will give different meanings to followers, she separates these two images, indicating that it's impossible to maintain her symbolic capital if being commercial:

Hm... I am trying to decide as well as to actively trying to develop my account into something more like an advertising tools for myself or my brand or keeping it as personal as possible, and have a different account, I mean like, of course, I will have a different account for my brand, but I just try to figure out that whether should I be more commercial about my account now. It's more about like, whether I should create a brand under the impression of commercial or under the impression of authentic and more like small, like a start-up, you know, it gives a different impression, that's what I am trying to choose between - Interview with CH.

Though it appears that choosing one over another might help CH to get out of the confusion between two roles, her struggle clearly indicates that it's impossible to prioritize one since doing sponsorship and protecting reputation are both important. Moreover, it's also important to note that there are several cases in which bloggers receive positive reactions from audiences when going commercial and still at the same time maintain their realness image as mentioned by Kozinets et al (2010). Perhaps, this tension between commercial-authentic

which is perceived as the opposite prevents them to practice strategies to be authentic in a communally appropriate way (Kozinets et al 2010). Thus, the need to maintain their authenticity creates struggles for these wannabe-influencers, putting them in the situation of being stuck between two identities.

## **Tension 2: Managing celebrity**

Not having enough taste leadership would pose as a great challenge for wannabe fashion influencers. As a public figure, they cannot avoid judgments and hurtful comments from followers; however, due to their lack of taste leadership, they are not able to manage this problem decently. As expressed by P, facing up with hurtful comments from followers would make her question her taste judgment. Consequently, her doubt might discourage her to take risk to practice and display her taste, leading to her incapacity to earn a higher level of taste leadership:

If people say, "Oh, this is ugly," then, of course, it gives you a lot of doubt and you start doubting if you're good enough for this. I guess that's something you should take into consideration... - Interview with P.

Consistent with P's case, while being asked what is the difficulty to be a fashion influencer, C refers to the part of being judged by audiences. He indicates that his negative thoughts about the fashion world are derived from the negative comments from his audiences.

Receiving unfavorable attitudes towards his display of taste from his followers decreases his capacity to practice taste, hence easily discourages him to invest more on his further display

of taste (McQuarrie et al 2013). Consequently, suggesting that staying persistent and practice more to gain taste leadership would be the solution, C perhaps implies that to be able to consistently follow that solution is a great challenge due to negative comments from followers:

This fashion world is so—I don't know. It's not horrible, but it's a mess. People might diss you just because they don't like your style, but it doesn't mean that you're wrong. You shouldn't stop, shouldn't stop about being yourself or to style what you want. You just need to improve that style. You just need to improve yourself -

Interview with C.

However, even when these micro-celebrities reach a certain high degree of taste judgment, it creates a lot of doubts. As in CH's situation, though consistently receiving favorable responses from audiences towards her taste judgment, she still admits that losing followers still makes her question her taste leadership:

I mean sometimes, it makes you think like did you do something wrong with your blog or Instagram or something like that - Interview with CH.

Adding to that, C indicates that wannabe-influencers can deal with these negative judgments only when they possess the level of taste leadership of the exalted few who reach the top rank:

That picture should at least look nice so people can like it. If you are already a famous person, it would not be matter anymore because famous people, they can just post a blank photo and they still can get 50,000 likes. Just for the beginners, they cannot follow that rules - Interview with C.

His statement about how famous people can take a blank photo and still can be well-perceived by audiences could mean that with superior taste leadership, celebrities do not need to question themselves when encountering bad attitude from followers as wannabe influencers do. Indicating that beginners cannot follow that rule, C clearly states that the lack of taste leadership would be a challenge for wannabe influencers to decently deal with negative attitudes from audiences.

Moreover, their lack of social capital, as well as symbolic capital, would also cause trouble for them as a micro-celebrity. Specifically, in J's case, she admits that her lack of social connections would limit her chance to get more audiences. To protect her integrity, J limits her stock of social capital by selectively engaging with others, even though she's aware that it could help her to socialize more broadly:

I don't just hang out with any people that are influencers because some people, some jobs and some communities of influencers I don't find very inspiring. That limits me because I don't get as much exposure as I could have, I feel like. But it's okay because I want to keep my integrity and I want to do what I believe in. I don't want to just do whatever it takes to grow new followers - Interview with J.

Consequently, when her content on Instagram has been taken without permission by an online magazine, her limited symbolic capital greatly reduced her capacity to address the issue. Even though she shared her concerns and the fact that she was plagiarized on her Instagram and Facebook accounts, in the hopes that this would lead to the protection of her content, no one from the magazine contacted her. She admits that her influencing power might not be enough to make a difference:

Thank you all. Thank you everyone for sharing this frustration with J. Honestly, J wrote to express my anger but J haven't seen any words from representative of K, maybe because J is only a random someone who has no big influence, so K acts, same with several other times they stole my picture and showed no respect to me- one girl whose pictures has been stolen complains? Still, hundred billion of people read my magazine. J don't want to post story or anything because I see that not enough people care about it, and I am really tired. Honestly, J would like to send a special thanks to everyone who is brave enough to speak out what you think about K- THE media powerhouse in Vietnam- one of the strongest media companies, they are too powerful, I have friends or acquaintances who have strong influence and also my friends as influencer, all don't want to fight with them because they don't want any bad impact on their job/career- I understand. And I aware that my influence is still limited, so I might say that, but cannot make any impact on K, and after this, I doubt that K would show more respect to content creators. I only hope that through this, you guys can be more aware of your content, they upload your pictures without permission is NOT A

FREE PR! My post about this is just nothing because I can see you guys comment that this is normal, and I am sad because it's a something disturbing but there is nothing we can do except accept it, to a lot of people. I want you guys to know that because of your content, they use it and post it, add an interesting title, then billions of people gonna read it, based on that, they can use it for advertising. So it's not Free pr, it means stealing your intellectual property, thank you, everyone, for sending me messages sharing the same feeling with J these days. \_\_\_ From J with moderate peace  
- Excerpt from J's Instagram.

According to J, this problem of dealing with the press is common for many influencers. Due to their limited symbolic capital, it is hard for them to earn the respect from the powerful media company and ensuring the protection of their content.

Hence, I would conclude that this third tension is derived from the need to maintain the reputation as authentic from fashion influencers as well as from their lack of cultural, social and symbolic capital to successfully manage the problems of a celebrity.

Existing work of McQuarrie et al. (2013) indicates that protecting their standing as an ordinary consumer in the eyes of their audiences plays an important role for fashion influencers if they want to hold on to their followers. However, contrasting with McQuarrie et al. (2013) findings that bloggers in their case have no problem of risking their authentic image from audiences by going commercial, I find that by taking sponsorship from brands/shops which is naturally not consistent with their image of authentically relatable,



influencers might damage their image as a normal, everyday consumer since their audiences are still conscious about it (e.g. Kozinets et al. 2010). However, our finding challenges Kozinets et al. (2010) findings because even if wannabe-influencers present their sponsored content in an honest, subtle way which is consistent to their character narrative, their followers are still questioning their integrity, thus, I would propose that this tension between commercial-authentic is more intense in my context than what has been found by Kozinets et al (2010).

Additionally, my findings also indicate that the situation of getting stuck between celebrity and anonymity is due to the lack of capitals to deal with problems of celebrity. I thus add more to the importance of taste leadership from McQuarrie et al (2013) in the sense that possessing a great degree of taste leadership can aid wannabe influencers to deal with problems coming from negative judgments of audiences. Furthermore, I also find that though micro-celebrities need to take risk to exercise and earn taste leadership as indicated by McQuarrie et al (2013), it is a challenge for them to do so since it creates a lot of self-doubt due to their incapacity to deal with hateful comments from followers.

**Table 3: Third finding summary**

Tension	Stuck between celebrity versus non-celebrity
Summary	<p>Wannabe-influencers have been perceived both as a public figure and as an everyday consumer by followers, putting them in a difficult situation of balancing these two identities. More importantly, since starting out at first as an everyday consumer, they have the need to be perceived as such, leading to the tension of maintaining their reputation as someone who is authentic and relatable to ordinary consumers. This need poses as a problem mainly due to their need to do sponsorship which creates a great tension between commercial versus authentic. Moreover, another tension from this stagnation would be the fact that fashion influencers in-becoming are also not powerful enough to deal with problems derived from being a celebrity.</p>
Evidence	<p>“I think it's maintaining the content all the time and then not being caught up in it, because it's easy to be caught up in this whole thing. Of course, when you started creating content, you want people to like it, to have positive response to it. You're not a celebrity yet but you're still some sort of public figure. At least to the 20,000 people that follow me, I am a public figure to them so I have to keep my image. You're not perfect all the time, people will say things about you that are not nice and then you have to be able to just keep it out of your system and not care about what they're saying” - Interview with J.</p> <p>“Being authentic is staying true to yourself, posting what you love and posting what you believe in. Example, if someone sent me a product, like a company and I don't love it and then I post it on Instagram just because they told me that if I do that they are going to give me money. It's going to show. People might think that it won't show but it shows” - Interview with IS.</p> <p>“If people say, "Oh, this is ugly," then, of course, it gives you a lot of doubt and you start doubting if you're good enough for this. I guess that's something you should take into consideration...” - Interview with P.</p>
Type of capital used	<p>The need to maintain symbolic capital poses as the main problem for wannabe-influencers</p> <p>The lack of social capital, field-specific capital (taste judgment) and symbolic capital leading to their incapacity to deal with celebrity's problems.</p>

### **Center versus Periphery**

Besides the three main stagnations which wannabe-influencers need to address mentioned above, place and locality also play an important part in the work of fashion influencers.

There is a significant difference between living in fashion centers, in cities such as New York and London, and peripheral fashion cities, such as in the case of the Vietnamese wannabe-influencers I interviewed. For wannabe-influencers, life in a fashion center offers more opportunity to be exposed to opportunities to build knowledge in fashion, as well as an environment that supports risk-taking. Both of these dynamics are central to the accumulation of cultural capital and the subsequent gain in influence.

At least in the perception of my respondents, living in a fashion center could motivate them to acquire more knowledge and better her taste judgment. By being approached every day, P indicates that living in a fashion center might help her to be more exposed with fashion, giving her more chances to practice her taste just by looking at people and receiving comments about her styles on the street. She emphasizes the importance of living in a fashion center by stating the desire to “see it every day”, which could be translated into the need to learn and practice their taste judgment. Though as McQuarrie et al (2013) suggested, bloggers can practice, thus acquire taste judgment by displaying taste through social networking sites, it seems that getting chances to do it offline would be somewhat important:

Of course, if you're born in New York, Paris or Milan, then that's so much better. London, because that's where the fashion is born there. You're being approached every day. People dress well on the street. Just compare between-- no offense Montreal and Toronto. It already makes so much difference. In Toronto, if you dress well, people notice. I did one photo shoot at Toronto and I was taking the picture at the square. What's the name of the square? You know the big square. So many people pass by and they asked me where did I buy my skirt. Where I got my outfit from, what I was doing if I'm in fashion and all of that. In Montreal, people don't really care much. The environment you live in, it creates a lot of-- just a person you are because then you care less about fashion. In a smaller city, you don't have all the big brands, also, so people don't-- they don't see that every day. I think the word see is the right word. That you have to see it every day, you have to live the life - Interview with P.

Referring to famous fashion schools and New York fashion week, P elaborates that by living in a fashion center, she would have more chances to have proper training in fashion and get involved more in the fashion events, thus, enhancing her cultural capital in fashion:

It's also like you go to New York, you go to London, you go to Paris for all the best fashion school. There's a reason for it and it's a big city so they have all opportunities for them. It's like New York fashion week - Interview with P.

Adding to this, when being asked which advantages they have over others, participants mostly refer to the fact that they started fashion blogging earlier when they were living in a center. Living in a fashion center facilitates their quest to become an influencer as it allows them to be exposed to trends earlier. Compared with others living in Vietnam, J shares that she gets exposed to Instagram trend earlier thanks to her study abroad in London back then. As for J, the fact that she used to live in London offers her the opportunity to start fashion influencing sooner, which is an advantage she has over other wannabe-influencers:

Mostly because when I was in London, I followed the influencers on Instagram that's how I found out about this whole community people were interested in fashion and beauty and sharing about, generally, beautiful things. That's where I started and I always stuck to it - Interview with J.

Besides facilitating the acquisition of knowledge in fashion for wannabe-influencers, living in fashion centers can also support their risk-taking activities through a context that is conducive to such actions. Living in a fashion center is ideal for wannabe-influencers since it can prevent them from being frequently exposed to negative reactions from others towards their risk-taking activities, thus, encouraging them to display and practice their taste judgment. Consequently, P expresses her struggle as a fashion influencer when moving back from Montreal to Hanoi. Since Montreal is still more central to fashion than Hanoi, it's a great challenge for P to take risk to develop her taste judgment while moving back to Vietnam due to the culture barrier:

It's also impossible because of the location. In Montreal, it was easier. People are more open-minded, they don't care how you dress, you can express yourself. Fashion is about it. Then, here, you have to wear a skirt, have to dress appropriately, have to look like a normal Asian with black hair, and have to look like you're feminine, like a good girl and all that. Definitely, it holds you back a lot. I also think that's also the reason why the fashion industry hasn't developed in Vietnam, because people's minds, the mentalities, once the mentalities not changed, then it's very hard -

Interview with P.

Since Northern Vietnam culture generates a lot of negative judgments towards something new, it prevents P to freely display her fashion style. Experiencing both places, namely Montreal and Hanoi as a fashion influencer, she indicates that it's easier in Montreal because living in Montreal allows her to take risk by freeing her from hateful attitudes from audiences. Consequently, she can have more opportunity to acquire taste leadership to develop her position as a fashion influencer.

Furthermore, she shows her concern with heavy judgments in Vietnam fashion week, she emphasizes that it would be a great struggle for fashion influencers to display their taste judgment in fashion if they live in Vietnam:

It's just like then in this fashion week, every year people always say the meanest thing about other people who go there. I'm like, "So what?" Even if they come

dressed as the shittiest thing, you have no right to judge them. People can do anything that they want to do because they don't hurt you, they didn't spend your money, they didn't do anything wrong [...] because no one wants to become the joke

- Interview with P.

P again emphasizes on her struggle of not being able to take risk due to hateful comments from Vietnamese. Indicating that “no one wants to become the joke”, she showcases her reluctant to take risk and display her taste judgment. However, to become a taste leader in the field, wannabe-influencers need to take risk in order to accumulate more cultural capital (McQuarrie et al 2013). Thus, living in the periphery might prevent them to reach a higher standing in the game since the only way that wannabe-influencers can reach a high stock of cultural capital is to display and practice their taste judgment publicly, meaning that they must involve in the risk-taking process. Evidently, living in a fashion center could encourage them to acquire more cultural capital, enhancing their position in the field.

Other than offering chances for bloggers to earn more stock of cultural capital, fashion centers serve as a factor to attract more audiences for these micro-celebrities. To be more specific, to CH, living in the location such as New York or London would offer more content for her to post:

I would say, I don't know it's way too shallow but they live abroad, and to me, that's already an advantage, as I said before, more content to post about, I mean like,

there's a lot more happening in New York, or in London compared to like Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City, that's one thing - Interview with CH.

Being asked what disadvantages she has compared with top influencers, she clearly indicates the location matters. Living in London for years before coming back to Ho Chi Minh, she states that locating in a fashion center provides more content to post about since living in London provides her with more photogenic backdrops to showcase her outfits as well as locations to fill her Instagram feed compared to Ho Chi Minh city. Lacking ideas and content to post is a problem that most wannabe-influencers have, thus, living in a center city can significantly help them to tackle this struggle.

Consistent with CH's case, J also admits that when she got back from London to Vietnam, it was a challenge for her since Vietnam could not offer backdrops for pictures such as London did. Referring that Vietnam is not as photogenic as London, J suggests that it's harder to create attractive content to post:

For example, when I moved back to Vietnam, it was difficult at first because Vietnam is not as photogenic as London - Interview with J.

Furthermore, IS clearly states that simply because London is more popular in general compared to Montreal, posting content from London would gain more audiences than in Montreal:



Yes, because London is more of a touristic place that people travel to. Say, "I'm going to travel to London. I want to see how London is like." Then you might just follow their Instagram. I guess for Montreal people it's like, "Oh. "Montreal is not as good. People just don't travel to Montreal. The fact that it is not known and the fact that it doesn't have as much attraction, it could be hard - Interview with IS.

Thus, for famous fashion city, it can attract more audiences who are not solely interested in fashion simply by its reputation. Indicating that a content created in London could attract more travelers to follow, IS shows that living in a center location could help them to gain audiences from other fields as well.

Consequently, fashion centers provide various benefits to wannabe fashion influencers compared with periphery ones. As McQuarrie et al (2013) emphasized on the fundamental role of the risk-taking process for the development of fashion bloggers, I find that supportive surroundings will be a significant factor to encourage influencers to take risk. Since living in fashion centers can offer influencers more ideal environment with less negative judgments, my finding proposes that living in such centers is a key factor for bloggers to participate in risk-taking.

Furthermore, living in a periphery location poses challenges for fashion influencers. First, there is a lack of manifestation of the latest style/trend, thus, making it difficult for

youngsters to be frequently involved with trendy global styles. I propose that living in the periphery could not offer influencers chances to immediately and spontaneously participate in the fashion field, thus, limits their exposure to gain more cultural capital. Moreover, living in a periphery city can also prevent wannabe-influencers to freely express themselves with trends and styles, hence, discouraging them to be more involved in a risk-taking process to earn a higher position in the game.

Consequently, I also challenge the term “decentered fashion” from Rocamora (2012) since decentered fashion would mean that fashion cities turn all into a node, where no specific cities overpower others; however, I find that fashion centers such as London, Paris, New York still showcase greater benefits for fashion influencers as compared with other periphery cities.

**Table 4: Fourth finding summary**

Tension	Stuck between center versus periphery
Summary	For wannabe-influencers, life in a central fashion location offers them opportunities to be exposed immediately with knowledge and trends in fashion as well as an environment that supports risk taking. Moreover, fashion cities would also serve as a factor to attract more audiences for micro-celebrities compared with peripheral location.
Evidence	<p>“Of course, if you're born in New York, Paris or Milan, then that's so much better. London, because that's where the fashion is born there. You're being approached everyday. People dress well on the street. The environment you live in, it creates a lot of-- just a person you are because, then you care less about fashion. In smaller city, you don't have all the big brands, also, so people don't-- they don't see that everyday. I think the word see is the right word. That you have to see it everyday, you have to live the life” - Interview with P.</p> <p>“It's also impossible because of the location. In Montreal, it was easier. People are more open minded, they don't care how you dress, you can express yourself. Fashion is about it. Then, here, you have to wear a skirt, have to dress appropriate, have to look like a normal Asian with black hair, and have to look like you're feminine, like a good girl and all that. Definitely, it holds you back a lot. I also think that's also the reason why the fashion industry hasn't developed in Vietnam, because people's minds, the mentalities, once the mentalities not changed, then it's very hard” - Interview with P.</p> <p>“Yes, because London is more of a touristic place that people travel to. Say, "I'm going to travel to London. I want to see how London is like." Then you might just follow their Instagram. I guess for Montreal people it's like, "Oh. "Montreal is not as good. People just don't travel to Montreal. The fact that it is not known and the fact that it doesn't have as much attraction, it could be hard” - Interview with IS</p>
Type of capital used	Living in fashion cities offer wannabe influencers with opportunities to acquire field-specific capital, which is important to become a top influencer.

## **Discussion**

It is evident that because of the potential persuasive power of everyday consumers, there have been many studies concerning various aspects of online influencers, namely their characteristics, acts as well as marketing benefits (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011; Abidin 2016). However, only a few studies touched upon the barriers that wannabe-influencers need to overcome to become truly influential. More importantly, given that fashion is now accelerated, making the field more competitive (Rocamora 2012), there have been no studies discussing the struggles that one could face to become an online fashion influencer. Consequently, by concentrating on these difficulties which wannabe fashion influencers encounter, my research contributes to the growing literature about online influencers. Specifically, my research has identified four struggles that in-becoming fashion influencers have a hard time to decently manage as followed:

Firstly, wannabe-influencers are stuck between fields due to the constant demand for new and high-quality contents from audiences. It's difficult for these micro-celebrities to daily showcase new styles with outfits, thus, they have the need to extend their posts to different fields so that they can meet the demand for interesting contents. Fashion influencers in-becoming suffer from the need to accumulate enough cultural capital in multiple fields since this desire is difficult to reach. Some do not have enough time to acquire cultural capital in adjoining fields, while others find it impossible to be involved in such fields due to their lack of economic capital.

Secondly, wannabe-fashion influencers find it difficult to manage their stagnation between their “real” job and their position as wannabe-influencers. It is obvious that to maintain and improve their fashion influencing career, fashion influencers in-becoming have to juggle at least two jobs, namely their full-time job and their influencing position. However, both jobs demand a great amount of time and effort, thus, it’s impossible for wannabe-influencers to manage decently both positions. To tackle this problem, they wish that they could prioritize their career as a fashion influencer; yet, it’s hard to attain due to their lack of cultural, social and economic capital. Basically, their second tension is derived from not being relevant enough to turn their influencing position into their full-time career.

Thirdly, it is a challenge for wannabe-influencers to manage both identities as a celebrity and as an anonymous. Possessing influencing power, they have been perceived as some sort of a public figure. However, because they first started as a normal, everyday consumer, they continue to be perceived as such by followers. This leads to fashion influencers in-becoming to manage and maintain their symbolic capital. This creates tension for them due to their need to take sponsorship since it could diminish their reputation as a regular, everyday consumer. Additionally, wannabe-influencers have to handle with problems derived from their position as a celebrity; however, they do not possess a high level of cultural, social and symbolic capital to decently manage these struggles accordingly, thus, generating more frustration for them.

Lastly, living in periphery cities poses as a struggle for wannabe-influencers. Compared with life in a fashion center, life in a periphery city cannot provide them with opportunities to acquire

knowledge in fashion by being exposed to the latest trends. More importantly, living in a periphery location prevents influencers in-becoming taking risks which is important to acquire taste judgment. Additionally, content related to fashion cities such as backdrops or new restaurants is considered more interesting by audiences, thus, attracting more followers for wannabe-influencers living in a center location. Hence, being located in a peripheral location restricts everyday consumers from both accumulating cultural capital and gaining more influence.

Generally, my findings successfully answered the research question through the concept of capital classified into four types- economic, cultural, social and symbolic by Pierre Bourdieu. He argues that the level of economic, cultural and social capital possessed can determine whether an individual successfully competes for symbolic capital (Holt 1998). Accordingly, my findings reveal that to successfully earn a high status as a fashion influencer, wannabe-influencers need to draw on a distinctively high stock of economic, cultural and social capital. Yet, it's a challenge for most everyday consumers since this need is often impossible to reach, creating barriers to become a fashion influencer. These barriers are reflecting those present in real life and questioning the claim that the participatory Web is democratizing fashion.

Consistent to the statement indicating the power of field-specific capital in relation to the acquirement of high standing in a certain field from Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992), several studies also suggest that the accumulation of field-specific capital can determine one's status in a certain subculture (McQuarrie et al 2013; Arsel & Thompson 2011; Thorton 1966; Kates 2002). My finding extends this statement by proposing the need for acquiring capital from

multiple fields from wannabe-influencers. It is evident that to compete and reach a high position in the game, not only do they need to possess a high stock of fashion-specific capital, but they also have to acquire cultural capital from different fields. For example, to be more of a successful fashion influencer, wannabe-influencers might need to have skills and knowledge in travel or cuisine to gain more audiences and influence. Moreover, my findings add that social and economic capital also play important roles in deciding one's status in the field. Thus, I propose that though field-specific capital is a fundamental factor for everyday consumers to compete and gain high standing, other forms of capital should also be taken into consideration.

Furthermore, my findings suggest that the specific form of symbolic capital for fashion influencer, of being authentic, generates struggles for these influencers in-becoming. Specifically, these difficulties are mainly derived from their act of taking sponsorship from brands/shops. Thus, this calls into question the findings of Kozinets et al (2010) and McQuarrie et al (2013) in the sense that both articles indicate that there is no problem emerging from audiences when bloggers go commercial on their blog. Though Kozinets et al (2010) did specify that followers might not respond negatively as long as the sponsorship is consistent with the narrative character of the influencers, I find that no matter if it is consistent or honest sponsorship, audiences still negatively react to commercial acts by influencers by questioning their authenticity. Consequently, the need to maintain symbolic capital poses as a great challenge for wannabe-influencers. This also greatly hinders their capacity to integrate themselves in the marketing of fashion, as well as hinders their ability to make money from being an influencer and dedicating more time towards this.

In terms of managerial contribution, nowadays, to optimize marketing messages for fashion brands, managers and marketers need to work well with fashion influencers since they are powerful promoter thanks to their ability to influence and persuade other everyday consumers into purchasing products. Consequently, by suggesting the struggles that wannabe-influencers need to overcome to become a fashion influencer, my findings could help marketers and managers thoroughly understand these micro-celebrities needs and facilitate their collaboration with them. Moreover, organizations could potentially support and develop influencers for marketing campaigns by addressing some of these challenges since they are now more aware of the barriers to transform a normal consumer into an influencer.

Furthermore, my findings complicate our understanding of the authenticity of influencers by emphasizing on the great tension between commercial and communal. Previous research either neglected or provided certain strategies to deal with negative responses from followers when influencers start to go commercial. My findings, however, suggest that this tension might be greater than what has been assumed, thus, and call attention to the need for marketers to work more with influencers to come up with proper marketing messages that will not damage micro-celebrities' reputation.

Although the use of netnographic and archival data allowed for a fuller theoretical development, a first limitation of this study is its sample size. Moreover, this study focuses solely on one social media platform: Instagram. This social networking site has been chosen because of its huge influence in the fashion world. However, the way by which consumers access fashion influencer can shift and evolve, thus, findings on a different social media should



be done for future research. Moreover, since there are influencers in different fields besides fashion, findings in different fields might be different and could be relevant to compare these fields when it comes to social media influencers in general.

Since the participants are dominantly from Vietnam or being affected by Vietnamese culture, it is important to note that my findings may not be representative of the whole domain of influencer. Hence, it is valuable to extend this research to wider settings, including other specific cultures. Future research can also conduct the comparison between center fashion country and periphery, for example, wannabe-influencers in New York and in Hanoi, the struggles from New York influencers in-becoming might be different compared with these in Hanoi.

Additionally, the use of Bourdieu theory does not focus on the differentiation between types of skills, such as the ones that might be required to gather influence and be a better marketer. These different skills are considered as part of the cultural capital of an influencer. I recognized that the skills to effectively market a product, and the skills to acquire influence are different, and future research might want to disentangle these different types of skills

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