การสร้าง Micro-influencer จากกรณีศึกษาของยูทูเบอร์ในประเทศไทย
The Making of Micro-influencer through a Case Study of Youtubers in Thailand

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บทคัดย่อ

ประเทศไทยขึ้นชื่อเรื่องการให้ความสนใจต่อคนดังเป็นอย่างมาก แต่ด้วยการเพิ่มขึ้นของโซเชียลมีเดีย ภูมิทัศน์ของสื่อจึงเปลี่ยนไป ในปัจจุบันผู้คนสามารถได้รับอิทธิพลจากบุคคลธรรมดาทั่วไปที่เรียกว่า Micro-influencer มากกว่าผู้มีชื่อเสียงแบบดั้งเดิม งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาการเปลี่ยนผ่านที่บุคคลธรรมดาสามารถกลายเป็น Micro-influencer ได้ในภูมิทัศน์สื่อที่เปลี่ยนแปลงไปของประเทศไทย จากการศึกษา 24 กรณีศึกษาของยูทูเบอร์ชาวไทยที่มีผู้ติดตาม 10,000 ถึง 100,000 คน ผู้วิจัยสำรวจว่า Micro-influencer เหล่านี้มีปฏิสัมพันธ์และมีอิทธิพลต่อผู้ติดตามของพวกเขาอย่างไร การศึกษานี้ใช้ทฤษฎีของต้นทุนทางวัฒนธรรมของ Bourdieu (1984) และพฤติกรรมผู้บริโภคของ Holt (1995) นักวิจัยได้สังเกตการณ์ช่องของยูทูเบอร์ และพฤติกรรมการบริโภคของทั้งตัวผู้มีอิทธิพลและผู้ติดตามผ่านระเบียบวิจัยที่เรียกว่า Netnography หรือ ชาติพันธุ์วรรณนาทางอินเทอร์เน็ต งานวิจัยได้ค้นพบปัจจัยด้านความเกี่ยวข้อง (Relevancy) กิจวัตร (Ritual) การแทนที่ไม่ได้ (Irreplaceability) และความสัมพันธ์ (Relatability) โดยนำเสนอมุมมองใหม่เกี่ยวกับผู้มีอิทธิพลที่นอกเหนือไปจากการใช้ความงามทางกายภาพและเน้นย้ำถึงความสำคัญของต้นทุนทางวัฒนธรรมสำหรับผู้มีอิทธิพลในการสร้างผลกระทบที่มีความหมายต่อชีวิตของผู้ติดตาม ท้ายที่สุดแล้ว การศึกษานี้มีเป้าหมายเพื่อให้ข้อมูลเชิงลึกสำหรับองค์กรสื่อในประเทศไทยให้เติบโตในยุคดิจิทัล

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Abstract

Thailand is recognized for its strong interest in celebrities, but with the rise of social media, the media landscape is changing. People are now more influenced by everyday individuals known as micro-influencers, rather than traditional celebrity endorsers. This research examines the transition of regular individuals into micro-influencers in Thailand's changing media landscape. By studying 24 case studies of Thai YouTubers with 10,000 to 100,000 followers, the researchers explore how these micro-influencers interact with and influence their followers. The study draws on Bourdieu's (1984) Theory of Cultural Capital and Holt's (1995) typology of consumer behaviors. Through netnography, the researchers observe the YouTubers' channels and the consumption practices of both the influencers

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and their followers. The study highlights the factors of Relevancy, Ritual, Irreplaceability, and Relatability, offering a modern perspective on micro-influencers that goes beyond physical beauty. It emphasizes the significance of cultural capital for influencers to have a meaningful impact on their followers' lives. Ultimately, the study aims to provide valuable insights for media organizations in Thailand to thrive in the digital era.

Keywords: Cultural Capital, Consumption Practices, Micro-Influencer

Introduction

With 52.25 million users, Thailand stands as one of Southeast Asia's foremost social media nations. Globally, it ranks eighth in the surge of social media usage, as platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and LINE rapidly reshape the media terrain (Datareportal, 2023; Digital Business Lap, 2022; Thai Examiner, 2019). This transformation can be attributed to the ascent of generating social media content as a marketing strategy, which involves the active dissemination of product insights and viewpoints (Cheung et al., 2022). Supported by Stewart and Pavlou (2002), consumers are no longer passive recipients of information but active contributors to content generation. Consequently, the use of traditional celebrities in marketing and communication strategies has evolved.

While celebrities have traditionally been effective in capturing public attention and building brand reputation, the advent of social media has given rise to new consumer behaviors, including increased content consumption, participation in discussions, and knowledge exchange among consumers (Berthon et al., 2007). This shift in consumer behavior has led to the emergence of "micro-influencers" (Nouri, 2018). Unlike traditional celebrities, micro-influencers can be anyone who has developed engaged followings and delivers relevant content.

Shao (2009) categorizes social media users into active users who create content and passive users who consume it. Active social media users can become micro-influencers by building engaged followings and delivering relevant content. Despite the recognition gained by micro-influencers, limited attention has been given to understanding how their consumption practices influence their followers. Therefore, understanding the process of creating micro-influencers is crucial for media companies to leverage the cost-effective, high-exposure potential of social media.

Given the widespread popularity of social media, it is imperative for media companies to establish a strong online presence within the platforms frequented by their potential customers. Notably, collaborating with micro-influencers allows these organizations to leverage the genuine following and authentic conversations these individuals generate, thereby adding significant value to the creative industry and fostering broad engagement.

Research Objectives

This study aims to explore the process through which regular social media users transform into micro-influencers and examine their methods of engaging with and influencing their followers. By uncovering these insights, media companies can develop communication strategies tailored to the digital era. The study encompasses two primary objectives: firstly, understanding how regular users attain the distinct status of a micro-influencer and utilize social media to exert influence over their followers; secondly, comprehending how media companies can leverage this approach to communicate with consumers for organizational benefit.

Literature Review
The concept of the micro-influencer

Scholars use the term 'micro-influencer' to refer to regular individuals who gain celebrity-like status through a strong social media presence and a large following (Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2013). Micro-influencers are recognized and admired by others due to their expertise in a specific field, such as blogging or vlogging (Kutthakaphan & Chokesamritpol,

2013; Marwick, 2013). They possess the power to influence the desires and needs of others. Influencers are categorized based on the social media platforms they use and the audience they reach, with micro, macro, and mega influencers being common categories (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019).

While the micro category typically includes influencers with fewer than 100,000 followers, the distinction of micro-influencers goes beyond follower count alone (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019; Tesseras, 2018). Nafees et al. (2021) characterize them as individuals skilled in specific areas, capable of sharing product knowledge with over 10,000 followers. As such, Micro-influencers differentiate themselves through their quality of interaction with their audience, emphasizing real-time commenting, responsiveness, accessibility, and familiarity (Tesseras, 2018; Nouri, 2018).

In Thailand, consumer preference is shifting towards non-traditional celebrities and online influencers. Micro-influencers have gained trust among Thai consumers (Potavanich, 2019; The Nation, 2015; de Mooji, 2014). These influencers are seen as more trustworthy and competent, fostering interactive relationships (The Nation, 2015). Schouten et al. (2020) affirm that consumers trust influencers more than traditional celebrities due to the potent persuasive impact of influencer-generated word-of-mouth compared to brand-generated sources. This connection is highlighted by Chapple & Cownie (2017) who identified trust and resemblance perceptions among followers, strongly linked to influencer credibility.

Micro-influencers display behaviors associated with perceiving themselves as celebrities, focusing on self-presentation and authenticity (Marwick, 2013). Their ability to showcase authenticity and physical appearance contributes to their influence, as consumers value these factors (Duffy, 2010). Micro-influencers aim to establish a sense of closeness, fostering strong relationships with their followers based on affection, common interests, or social commitment (Nouri, 2018; Berryman & Kavka, 2017). Building long-lasting interpersonal relationships is crucial for maintaining trust and admiration (Nouri, 2018).

By cultivating perceptions of closeness and authenticity, micro-influencers appeal to specific reference groups and influence consumer decision-making (Marwick, 2013; Schiffman et al., 2012). Their relatability as ordinary individuals with passions resonates more with consumers compared to traditional celebrities who rely on social status and wealth (Nouri, 2018). Media companies recognize the engagement on social media platforms and collaborate with micro-influencers to connect with their target audience, leveraging their dedicated fan bases and ability to drive discussions. Therefore, understanding the process of how regular individuals transform into micro-influencers and attain celebrification is valuable in this context (Marwick, 2013).

The role of celebrification

Celebrification, as described by Couldry (2004), refers to the process through which ordinary individuals without prior media presence attain celebrity status. The rise of social media has blurred the boundaries between private and public, enabling the democratization of celebrity (Senft, 2013; Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Exclusivity and inaccessibility, which were once crucial for celebrity status, are no longer necessary, as regular individuals can achieve and perform celebrity through social media platforms, directly connecting with a large audience. Thus, micro-celebrity encompasses both a cultural and communicative practice while also representing a continuation of traditional celebrity (Nouri, 2018).

The concept of celebrification is closely intertwined with the extraordinary-ordinary and private-public dichotomies, depending on the media used to support and cultivate celebrity. It involves the continuous public performance of the self, offering followers immediate and regular access to an individual's private everyday life (Nouri, 2018). Micro-influencers possess celebrity status without necessarily being labeled as celebrities, thereby enhancing the perception of accessibility and authenticity as they engage in performances of distinction (Potavanich, 2019).

Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital and taste sheds light on the performance of distinction. Taste influences individuals' desires and pleasures, shaping their consumption practices and enabling advertisers and merchandisers to shape consumer behavior (Holt, 1998). Micro-influencers can be viewed as objects of consumption, with their value determined by their audience's taste. Consumer decisions, such as subscribing, following, or interacting with micro-influencers, are influenced by taste, which is shaped by an individual's cultural capital (Holt, 1998; Bourdieu, 1984). Micro-influencers' taste and cultural capital play a crucial role in establishing their authenticity and status, with those possessing higher cultural capital achieving celebrity status (Valck, 2013). Their expertise in specific domains, such as beauty or fashion, positions them as micro-influencers. The cultural elite, characterized by high cultural capital, often rely on exclusionary practices rather than displays of wealth to maintain their social status (Trigg, 2001).

Taste and cultural capital are central to micro-influencers, shaping their status, lifestyle, and cultural competency, while also influencing the preferences and consumption patterns of their followers (Bourdieu, 1984). Followers tend to engage with micro-influencers who share similar cultural interests and regard individuals with higher cultural capital as influencers. To sustain their position within their field, micro-influencers with high cultural capital must continuously maintain a sense of connectedness and encourage user interaction through comments and conversations (Nouri, 2018).

In Thailand, ordinary individuals aspiring to become micro-influencers have had to enhance their cultural capital to establish themselves and influence others within their network. They leverage various social media platforms, such as YouTube, to showcase their personalities, incorporating taste and humor, which hold great value in Thai culture (Tiwsakul & Hackley, 2006; Wells, 2018). Traits like trustworthiness, sincerity, intelligence, outspokenness, relatability, and entertainment value are also crucial for Thai micro-influencers (Wells, 2018). While cultural interests presented on social media platforms attract a significant number of consumers, the development of a sense of closeness is essential (Yuwakosol and Chompukum, 2021). Micro-influencers strive to communicate informative content, showcasing high cultural capital while entertaining their followers, positioning themselves as potential friends and equals who can be trusted for opinions and recommendations.

Overall, the application of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in understanding micro-celebrities does not overlook its critical connotations. While Bourdieu framed cultural capital as a tool for maintaining inequalities, its use in this context reveals a nuanced perspective. Micro-celebrities, leveraging their acquired cultural assets rather than traditional economic capital, challenge conventional pathways to fame. Their engagement with niche audiences and personalized content disrupts homogeneous celebrity narratives. Thus, the application acknowledges Bourdieu's insights, yet adapts them to reveal how cultural capital can redefine celebrity dynamics, potentially offering a more inclusive platform and undermining traditional hierarchies. While cultural capital is a valuable concept, it falls short in distinguishing between various consumption practices that elucidate the diverse ways in which micro-influencers

Social Media Consumption Practices

The research emphasizes that micro-influencers need to immerse themselves in social media consumption practices to gain a deeper understanding of consumer culture. Consumption practices, as defined by Holt (1995), encompass specific acts and interactions related to consumption within the realm of social media. These practices can be categorized into passive interaction, contribution, and creation (Schivinski et al., 2016). Passive interaction involves consuming content without active participation, contribution involves engaging with others through likes, comments, and sharing, while creation involves initiating and publishing new content.

While there is an increasing number of studies on consumption practices in social media, there is still a need to explore the active and reactive relationships between micro-influencers and their followers. Understanding

the specific consumption practices that contribute to micro-influencer status and their influence over online communities is crucial. Holt's typology of consumption practices (1995) provides a systematic explanation of the different ways in which people consume, offering valuable insights for researchers to differentiate and analyze consumption practices based on structure and purpose. This framework allows for the examination of consumption practices in relation to their intended outcomes and the contextual conditions in which they occur, aligning with de Certeau's (1984) approach to understanding everyday practices

Purpose of Action

	Autotelic Actions	Instrumental Actions
Object Actions	**Consuming As Experience** • Accounting Practice • Evaluating Practice • Appreciating Practice	**Consuming As Intergrating** • Assimilating Practice • Producing Practice • Personalising Practice
Stucture of Actions		
Interpersonal of Actions	**Consuming As Play** • Communing Practice • Socialising Practice	**Consuming As Classifying** • Through objects Practice • Through actions Practice

Figure 1: Metaphors for consuming (Holt, 1995)

According to Figure 1, the framework outlines the structure and purpose of consumption, which can be applied to social media use. Object actions involve consumers' interaction with objects, while interpersonal actions refer to the process of making consumption objects central resources (Holt, 1995). Consumption purposes can be categorized as self-focused (autotelic) or instrumental, where consumers seek personal gratification or use consumption as a means to achieve other goals (Holt, 1995). This framework helps researchers understand how social media satisfies personal and social needs but requires further exploration (Bruhn et al., 2012; Schivinski et al., 2020).

Holt's (1995) framework allows researchers to gain insights into object and interpersonal actions in social media use for personal and social reasons. It helps examine the social dimensions of consumption, including how users utilize social media to impress others, demonstrate their status, and create connections (Holt, 1995).

Consuming as experience emphasizes the experiential aspect of consumption, including emotional and aesthetic reactions. Social media's hedonic dimension enables enjoyment and bonding among users (Bruhn et al., 2012; Schivinski et al., 2020). Consumers' subjective experiences improve as they acquire interpretative tools for sense-making, such as understanding objects (accounting), evaluating their value (assessing), and experiencing emotional responses (appreciating) (Holt, 1995).

Consuming as integration involves consumers acquiring and manipulating the meanings of products to integrate them into their identities. This practice highlights the symbolic significance of products and their connection to the self or other objects (Belk, 1988). Consumers shape their identities based on social media personalities they admire, engaging in assimilating, producing, and personalizing behaviors. Assimilating involves improving understanding and skills, while producing or participating in the production of consumption objects enhances one's image. Personalizing

entails making changes to align goods with personal meanings (Holt, 1995).

Consuming as classification focuses on how consumers use consumption items to classify themselves within groups and establish connections or differences with others. Cultural and individual meanings associated with consumption objects are expressed on social media, which serves as a platform for showcasing tastes and lifestyles (Champniss et al., 2015). Social media influencers' attractiveness can influence followers to adopt specific styles or lifestyles, leading to shared understandings and interactions with objects (Holt, 1995).

Consuming as play involves using consumption objects for communal and social activities to create and recreate connections (Holt, 1995). Communal experiences are shared and meaningful, while socializing activities serve as mutual entertainment (Holt, 1995). Trust embedded in play practices on social media platforms generates feelings of closeness on specific topics (Liu et al., 2015).

In conclusion, Holt's (1995) analysis of consumption practices provides insight into how micro-influencers and consumers co-create experiences, practices, and meanings in the realm of consumption. This understanding extends to social media consumption, offering a framework to explore the diverse ways in which social media users engage with objects and interact with others.

Research Framework

This study aims to understand the transformation process of regular YouTube users into micro-influencers and their interactions with followers. It expands the examination of consumption practices in social media by incorporating the theories of Bourdieu (1984) on cultural capital and Holt (1995) on consumption practices. The research framework explores the empirical aspects of consumption, focusing on the behaviors of micro-influencers and their followers in their everyday lives. This comprehensive approach offers insights beyond personal traits, providing a broader understanding of the influence of micro-influencers on their followers.

Research Methodology

Netnography, a qualitative research approach, involves studying online communities and interactions to understand behaviors and cultural dynamics (Kozinets, 1998). The methodology used in this study aims to triangulate narratives about YouTube micro-influencers' consumption practices through written, visual, and netnographic methods. Written narratives encompassed social media content that influenced informants' ideas, while visual narratives drew from photos and videos created by micro-influencers and their audiences. By combining these methods with participant observer netnography, positioned as a 'pure' observer, the researchers achieved a comprehensive understanding of micro-influencers' practices and influence. This approach preserves authenticity, reliability, and objectivity by avoiding direct engagement, mitigating potential bias, and ensuring an accurate depiction of channel dynamics and audience responses (Kozinets, 1998).

For participant selection, purposive sampling targeted Thai YouTubers with 1,000 to 100,000 followers across diverse content categories (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019). Inclusion criteria considered content type and audience engagement rates, while age restrictions and vulnerability formed exclusion criteria. This strategy enabled the exploration of varied Thai YouTubers, fostering a democratic approach and enhancing research validity by embracing a range of voices that reflect similarities, differences, and variations in research results. This qualitative study didn't rely on statistical principles for sample size determination; however, prior research recommended a minimum of 12 participants (Guest et al., 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013). Hence, 24 Thai YouTubers were recruited, ensuring a comprehensive exploration. Table 1, below, provides a participant summary with anonymized data for scholarly purposes.

Table 1 Participants' background and details

Case Study	Age	Gender	Channel's Main Content
1	33	Male	Running (Sports and Fitness)
2	37	Male	Body Builder (Sports and Fitness)
3	31	Female	Yoga and Exercise (Sports and Fitness)
4	28	Female	Fitness Routine (Sports and Fitness)
5	21	Female	Weight Control (Sports and Fitness)
6	30	Male	Soccer (Sports and Fitness)
7	25	Female	Japanese-based Travel and Lifestyle (Travel and lifestyle)
8	22	Female	Café Hopper (Travel and lifestyle)
9	27	Male	Travel and Photography (Travel and lifestyle)
10	29	Male	Movies Review (Travel and lifestyle)
11	20	Female	Craft and Art (Travel and lifestyle)
12	25	Male	Manga Review (Travel and lifestyle)
13	39	Male	Pageantry (Beauty and Fashion)
14	24	Male	Skincare Product Review (Beauty and Fashion)
15	27	Female	Makeup Tutorial (Beauty and Fashion)
16	19	Female	Clothes Stylings (Beauty and Fashion)
17	28	Male	Makeup Tutorial (Beauty and Fashion)
18	22	Female	Skincare Ingredient Review (Beauty and Fashion)
19	34	Female	Home Cooking (Food)
20	28	Female	Fine Dining Review (Food)
21	25	Male	Street Food Review (Food)
22	23	Male	Eating Challenge (Food)
23	27	Male	Isan Dish (Food)
24	26	Female	Professional Baker (Food)

Recruitment involved direct contact with the selected YouTubers, providing them with participant information sheets and consent forms. Zoom calls were conducted to obtain consent, and observations of YouTube channels and social media accounts were carried out for up to four months. Archival data, elicited data from subscriber interactions, and researcher fieldnotes were collected. Data collection methods varied depending on the complexity and convenience, including copying and pasting, screenshots, and software tools.

Finally, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected on consumer practices in the context of social media and micro-influencers. The guidelines developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed for conducting the thematic analysis. Overall, thematic analysis was employed to analyze the textual and visual narratives, resulting in the identification and categorization of themes that provided insights into micro-influencers' behaviors and practices.

Results

The study examines the social media consumption practices of micro-influencers by analyzing data collected from participants' social media accounts. The analysis offers insights into the transformation process of

regular social media users into micro-influencers and investigates how micro-influencers engage with and influence their followers. The conceptual framework, depicted in Figure 2, illustrates the main themes and common practices employed by micro-influencers.
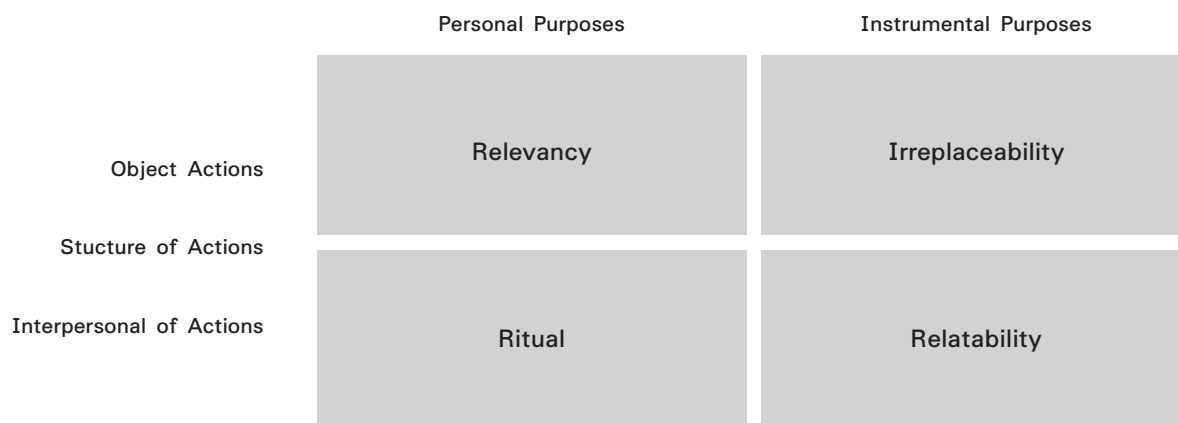
Purpose of Practices

	Personal Purposes	Instrumental Purposes
Object Actions	Relevancy	Irreplaceability
Stucture of Actions Interpersonal of Actions	Ritual	Relatability

Figure 2: Conceptual framework describing micro-influencers' social consumption practices

Structure and Purpose of Practice

The initial themes of the study highlight how micro-influencers utilize their self-generated content to engage with social media platforms and employ specific practices to initiate interactions with their followers. Participants focus on producing various types of content, such as videos, images, and posts, that align with the theme of their channels. They also utilize live videos, share personal stories and images on platforms like Facebook and Instagram, and actively respond to comments and feedback from their audience.

For example, Case 13, a micro-influencer specializing in pageantry, engages in consumption practices that allow him to connect with his followers. He creates YouTube videos where he discusses community posts, provides commentary on competitions, analyzes contestants' performances and outfits, and shares news updates. Additionally, he conducts live videos to interact with his audience, sharing personal photos and videos, and providing ongoing updates. These practices enable Case 13 to establish a strong connection with his followers, demonstrate his expertise in pageantry, and maintain an active and engaging online presence.

Furthermore, the study reveals the motivations behind micro-influencers' engagement in consumption practices. In Case 7, the micro-influencer's consumption practices serve both personal and instrumental purposes. Personally, her experiences in Japan fulfill her passion for travel and boost her self-esteem. She enjoys sharing these experiences with her followers through content creation, comments, and photos on social media platforms. Instrumentally, these experiences reinforce her micro-influencer status and allow her to showcase unique aspects of her persona. By leveraging her experiences in Japan, she solidifies her influence and maintains her online presence by generating new content related to her travels.

In conclusion, the study suggests that micro-influencers' social media consumption practices should be viewed as both personal and social. These practices encompass a wide range of activities and experiences that shape their status and facilitate interaction with their followers. By expanding on Holt (1995)'s perspective, the findings highlight the importance of considering all aspects of a micro-influencer's engagement with social media, including the creation of content and

everyday activities, in understanding their influence and relationship with their audience.

Metaphors for Micro-influencers' Social Media Consumption Practices

To comprehend the role of micro-influencers in social media consumption practices, four key themes or metaphors are proposed: relevancy, ritual, irreplaceability, and relatability. These themes categorize the practices according to their connections with consumers' overall actions, offering insights into the transformation of regular social media users into micro-influencers and their relationships with and influence over their followers.

Theme 1: Relevancy

Relevancy in micro-influencers' social media practices is closely tied to their ability to reference and interpret content that they find relevant to their specialized area, incorporating their own emotions and feelings, which emphasizes their self-relevance. Engaging in such content development tasks is presumed to influence their personal growth and attitude strength. This is evident in Case 1 and Case 20, where their dedication to content creation driven by passion, personal values, and lived experiences has had a profound impact on their self-esteem and identity.

Case 1, for example, demonstrates his commitment to extensive research and how it has contributed to his self-discovery and boosted his self-esteem. In his videos, he shares:

"Many people ask me how to overcome mental blocks to run longer and faster. Initially, I didn't have a definite answer. I just trained day by day. Eventually, I realized that I could overcome these mental blocks without even consciously thinking about it. But the more I have to find concrete answers to create content for you, the more I realize that I am more of a challenger than I had thought."

"This is my 100th video! Oh, I'm incredibly proud of how far I've come from being an ordinary runner to completing a marathon."

Similarly, Case 20 has honed her content creation skills, particularly in editing and enhancing artistic quality, which has contributed to her personal growth and increased self-esteem. She reflects:

"I am a chef who bakes cakes and creates videos!"

"I never anticipated that people would start asking me about video-making rather than baking. Nevertheless, I'm still happy, and it's enjoyable to hear those inquiries."

These micro-influencers assert their relevance by consistently sharing higher-quality content, indicating their transformation from ordinary users to micro-influencers and influencing their relationship with their followers. The findings reveal that followers perceive this transformation when they witness a significant improvement in the content's quality and the consistency of posting new and original material over time. This phenomenon can be attributed to the contrast effect, where followers compare earlier and latest videos or their own expectations with the outcomes they experience. Comments from multiple followers highlight this perception:

"The channel's quality has improved significantly. I still remember the very first episodes. You've come such a long way. Well done!"

"The more videos you post, the more incredible the content becomes."

"This is epic! It's a whole new level of makeup tutorial."

"I've been to that place before, but this surpasses my expectations. You've shown me a different perspective on this location."

According to the findings, micro-influencers must possess a deep understanding of their content and the content creation process to achieve relevancy. This understanding allows both the influencers and their followers to evaluate the value of content development, reinforcing the influencers' pride and their followers'

belief in their unique abilities. Establishing relevancy also requires an emotional response from both micro-influencers and their followers towards the created content and subsequent engagement. This emphasizes the hedonic nature of social media, where users react emotionally, such as experiencing fun and attachment. These practices enhance subjective experiences, as micro-influencers acquire knowledge for sense-making, and followers learn to compare content over time to assess progress. Notably, the presence of relevancy signifies a significant improvement in content quality. The ability of micro-influencers to address unexpected issues becomes a key differentiating factor between them and other social media personalities.

Theme 2: Ritual

Ritual in the context of micro-influencers' social media practices refers to the incorporation of hedonic elements and the interaction with other users. Micro-influencers utilize everyday social media practices to establish communication rituals, such as sharing content, commenting, and posting images or stories. These practices aim to create a sense of connection between micro-influencers and their followers, allowing them to maintain contact with their online community.

Case 8 exemplifies this ritual by updating her daily activities through pictures and videos on Instagram. Even mundane experiences become a means of fostering intimacy with her audience. The captions accompanying her posts may not be directly related to her area of expertise but focus on the ambiance of an image, her thoughts at the moment, and narratives of her ordinary daily life:

"The purpose of our life is to be happy."

"Spending quality time with my friends. The pandemic can't separate us!"

"Now... I'm getting crazy from WFH!"

Similarly, Case 24 utilizes his Facebook page to share news and random everyday content, including his thoughts and comments on political news, particularly if it is controversial. This ritual reinforces the relationship between Case 24 and his followers, allowing them to get to know him beyond his field of expertise. Here are some examples:

"This is interesting. Thanks for sharing!"

"Never knew that you're into politics! Keep on sharing your thoughts."

"This is hilarious. I love your sense of humor!"

These practices of Case 8 and Case 24 demonstrate the ritual activities commonly employed by micro-influencers on social media. Through repeated exposure to the everyday life of a micro-influencer, followers become more familiar with them, facilitating the development of relationships. The adoption of communication rituals through everyday social media activities enhances the hedonic experience, leading followers to eagerly engage with micro-influencers on a daily basis, eagerly anticipating updates, comments, and sharing of posts with the community.

The findings indicate that becoming a micro-influencer is not solely based on advanced skills or knowledge but on consistent daily exposure that cultivates deep engagement among followers. Through sharing everyday updates, micro-influencers provide insights into their personal narratives and perspectives, facilitating the formation and strengthening of connections. Ritual practices employed by micro-influencers convince followers of their trustworthiness and position them as friends worth staying connected to. Moreover, the appeal of micro-influencers extends beyond their physical appearance. It arises from the opportunity they provide followers to experience a new relationship in their everyday lives. Additionally, comments from followers reflect their enthusiasm and anticipation for updates:

"I'm just anticipating seeing you share this news! Your opinion never disappoints me."

"Are you busy at the moment? I think I've lost touch with you over the past couple of days."

"Thank you for posting this. I love seeing your lifestyle posts."

In summary, micro-influencers establish communication rituals through everyday social media practices, fostering deep engagement and connection with their followers. These rituals enhance the hedonic experience and trustworthiness of micro-influencers, leading to a sense of friendship and anticipation among followers.

Theme 3: Irreplaceability

Irreplaceability in the context of micro-influencers refers to their ability to showcase unique content that highlights their status and distinctiveness. This construct revolves around the idea that the skill-based content they create is exclusive to them and cannot be replicated by others, thus emphasizing its irreplaceable nature. Case 3 and Case 9 exemplify this by demonstrating their expertise in yoga and photography, respectively, which sets them apart from other individuals. Their dedication and perseverance in acquiring these skills further establish their irreplaceability.

Similarly, Case 12 and Case 19 exhibit their irreplaceability through their content, which reflects their exclusive knowledge and skill-based practices. Case 12's expertise in manga culture and ownership of a manga collection contribute to his special status, while Case 19 showcases her cooking skills in her enviable kitchen to convey her lifestyle and status.

As individuals strive to become micro-influencers, they invest their cultural capital resources to engage with and connect with these influencers. Micro-influencers prompt their followers to actively evaluate their displayed skills and knowledge, continuously expanding their expertise to improve their content. The value of a micro-influencer lies in their content and expertise, representing substantial cultural capital that must be consistently enriched to establish and maintain their status and influence. Followers' comments acknowledging the micro-influencers' superiority in specific life skills further emphasize the use of irreplaceability to highlight their credentials and influence.

"I promise, if you ever start selling your own skincare products, I'll definitely be the first in line to buy them!"

"Your analysis of last night's football game was spot on! I totally agree with everything you said."

"You're such an amazing storyteller! Your travel Vlogs are unlike anything I've seen on other channels."

"I wouldn't even dare to attempt what you do! You're truly one of a kind."

"Thanks to you, I keep ending up spending more money on movie tickets!"

The quotes provided reflect the recognition and admiration expressed by followers towards micro-influencers' unique abilities and content. These comments emphasize the impact of micro-influencers' irreplaceability on their followers and their influence within the community. Overall, irreplaceability is crucial for micro-influencers, connecting their content and expertise to their elevated status. They leverage exclusive skills and knowledge to solidify their position and connect with their audience. Continuous improvement allows them to engage effectively through valuable content. As such, becoming a micro-influencer requires time, dedication, and perseverance, with followers acknowledging achievements and superiority as devoted community members.

Theme 4: Relatability

Relatability pertains to how micro-influencers establish a connection with their audience by utilizing their actions. This connection is forged through communication on social media platforms, allowing micro-influencers to share experiences that resonate with their followers and engage in experiential practices that entertain them. Their relatability is achieved by showcasing their ordinariness. Videos serve as a means for them to exhibit authenticity, vulnerability, and engage in real-time conversations, encouraging their followers to comment, share, and generate discussions within their online community. These actions contribute to the relatability that leads

followers to desire friendship with the micro-influencer due to their perceived similarity.

For instance, Case 11 employs camera filters, sound effects, and zoom to create amusing video content, making her highly relatable. Case 21, on the other hand, employs self-deprecating jokes to exhibit relatability, showcasing a sense of humor and a slightly clumsy demeanor. The study findings indicate that participants, even those with large followings, aim to avoid appearing famous. They post images on social media that highlight their physical imperfections and initiate conversations that reinforce their ordinariness, conveying that they are just like their followers. In their own words:

"Like all of you, I always feel awkward speaking with the camera."

"Let me know your results after following my techniques. I would love to see your comments!"

"Sometimes I get sad as I'm single. Then I remember that Boy Pakorn is also single, I am happy. But I remember that he is rich, now I'm sad again."

"Which one should I buy between these bucket hats, Gucci or Prada?"

"Share this video if you love it! Or if you hate it, you really need to share this too!"

Audiences feel a genuine connection with micro-influencers who avoid using image strategies. The transition from an ordinary person to a micro-influencer and the establishment of a relationship with followers highlight the importance of relatable and sympathetic personalities. Those who portray themselves as relatable rather than displaying their authentic selves are more likely to become micro-influencers., as indicated by the following comments:

"Love to see you not wearing makeup, hair in a messy bun, and dressed in baggy sweatpants. It just looks like me!"

"I had the same feelings as you when I watched this movie."

"You remind me of one of my friends. She is very funny too."

Thai micro-influencers value relatability, but the pursuit of appearing relatable has ironically diminished true relatability. Followers perceive seemingly relatable lives through their own biases, considering micro-influencers' lifestyles as the only acceptable ones, rather than celebrating uniqueness and authenticity. Relatability suggests less stratification based on social, economic, and cultural status. Social media consumers are categorized based on their connection with relatable personalities, especially those who display honesty, embrace imperfections, and possess an element of daring.

Discussion

Applying a conceptual framework to the social consumption practices of micro-influencers enhances our understanding of how they establish their status and connect with followers, leading to a redefined conceptualization of micro-influencers. This aligns with Holt's (1995) typology of consumption practices, emphasizing the structure and purpose as fundamental elements.

The study participants actively engage in object actions, which involve creating and sharing self-generated content on social media platforms that align with their channel's theme. Additionally, they employ complementary actions such as using live videos, sharing personal stories and images, and actively interacting with comments and feedback from their followers. Accordingly, the present study highlights the significance of this mundane aspect within everyday experiences and emphasizes that micro-influencers' interpretations extend beyond the personal aspect, suggesting the presence of other objectives (de Certeau, 1984). Also, it align with previous research (Bruhn et al., 2012; Schivinski et al., 2020) that acknowledges the social and personal dimensions of social media consumption practices.This expands on Holt's perspective by proposing that consumption

practices encompass not only basic and interpersonal actions related to consumption objects but also involve all of the micro-influencer's experiences and activities, ultimately shaping their status.

Research findings indicate that regular social media users who transition into micro-influencers employ certain key practices that can be grouped into four main themes: relevancy, ritual, irreplaceability, and relatability. These themes shed light on the process through which contemporary micro-influencers gain and exert influence over their followers, moving away from the simplistic assumption that physical attractiveness alone is sufficient (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998). Table 2 presents a comprehensive summary and a comparison of the primary explanations that underlie both traditional and contemporary perspectives on how social media users evolve into micro-influencers.

Table 2 Traditional versus contemporary perspectives on how social media users evolve into micro-influencers

Major explanation	Traditional View	Contemporary View
Major Focus	**Physical Attractive**: Followers drawn by looks	**Irreplaceability**: Showcasing unique expertise/ skills
Attraction	**Personal Traits**: Relying on charisma and personality to attract followers	**Relevancy**: Relying on a relevant content to resonate with the followers
Bonding	**Aesthetic**: Superficial Bonds through visual appealing	**Ritual**: Fostering deeper bonds through a sense of friendship
Experiences	**Ideal**: Establish perfect image strategies as aspirational image	**Relatability**: Incorporating imperfections and real experiences

The concept of **irreplaceability**, in line with Bourdieu (1984) and Holt (1998), plays a crucial role in the transition from an ordinary social media user to a micro-influencer. This occurs when individuals successfully showcase their superior knowledge or skills, allowing followers to assess and evaluate them based on the cultural capital displayed in their posts (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998; Potavanich, 2019).

However, the study challenges prior research that attributed the relationship between micro-influencers and followers solely to personal characteristics (Tiwsakul & Hackley, 2006; Wells, 2018). Instead, the contrast effect plays a significant role, with followers perceiving someone as a micro-influencer when they observe an improvement in content quality. To maintain **relevancy**, micro-influencers need a deep understanding of their content and its creation process. This allows both influencers and followers to evaluate the value of content development, reinforcing the influencers' sense of pride and their followers' belief in their unique abilities (Bruhn et al., 2012; Schivinski et al., 2020).

Engaging in **ritual** practices allows micro-influencers to tell their followers that they are trustworthy, but also induces a feeling of real friendship, which is accompanied by the desire to stay in contact (Liu et al., 2015). The attractiveness of micro-influencers extends beyond physical appearance. It stems from the opportunity they offer followers to enjoy a new relationship in their everyday lives (Yuwakosol and Chompukum, 2021; Kapitan & Silvera, 2015).

Lastly, Micro-influencers who exhibit relatable and sympathetic traits are more likely to gain followers, particularly among Thai audiences (Tiwsakul & Hackley, 2006). The findings also add that, to foster a sense of intimacy, **relatability**, and authenticity, micro-influencers incorporate images of their own physical

imperfections into their content, avoiding image strategies. However, the strong pursuit of relatability has ironically diminished true relatability, as followers perceive micro-influencers' seemingly relatable lives as the only acceptable ones, neglecting the celebration of uniqueness (Wells, 2018).

Summary

This study highlights four crucial social media practices for micro-influencers: relevancy, ritual, irreplaceability, and relatability. Understanding these practices is vital for effective communication strategies. Media campaigns should provide expert knowledge and enhance cultural capital, fostering social connections. Relevancy is critical, with content quality improving throughout the campaign to leverage the contrast effect and positively influence consumer perceptions. Routine practices, such as incorporating sponsored content into consumers' daily lives, create meaningful connections and increase loyalty and purchase intent. Storytelling, particularly around sponsored content, enhances credibility and relatability, addressing concerns about sales-focused strategies. Media companies should integrate micro-influencer behaviors, emphasizing cultural capital, maintaining relevancy, leveraging routine practices, and employing relatability through storytelling. Implementing these strategies can enhance engagement, build sustainable fanbases, and establish meaningful connections in social media marketing.

Limitations and Recommendations

This exploratory research has limitations due to its qualitative nature, which may restrict a comprehensive explanation of the micro-influencer phenomenon compared to quantitative investigations. However, it uncovers novel consumption practices in social media that can be further explored in future research for more generalizable results. Future studies can expand the sample size, examine different market segments, and employ quantitative methods for broader insights. Incorporating qualitative approaches and focusing on specific dimensions of the constructs can provide more detailed and in-depth understanding. Research can also explore generational differences in social media consumption practices, test hypotheses regarding the transformation of ordinary users into micro-influencers, and apply the conceptual framework to different platforms like podcasts and TikTok. Further investigations will deepen our understanding of how consumers perceive micro-influencers in diverse contexts.

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