

MASTER THESIS

# The Job Demands-Resources model in the context of social media platforms: SMI's perspective

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## INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media platforms has completely changed the way people interact and communicate, make purchasing choices and share information. Social media platforms are Web 2.0 Internet-based applications which allow the expression of one's creativity and passion through sharing of user-generated content (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020) in the form of photos, podcasts, videos or posts. Those platforms increase people's abilities to create their own content and make it a pleasure to share them with others (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). Indeed, people are willing and love to spend long hours creating, editing and refining their content (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Sometimes, it could happen that the content of a person starts to be successful, pushing her/him to pay more attention to it and to invest in better equipment. This phenomenon led to the emergence of a new professionals' category: social media influencers (SMIs). SMIs represent "a new type of independent third party endorser" (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011) who has the ability to influence their followers' habits and attitudes through sharing daily life snippets and opinions about products or brands on social media. SMIs usually specialize in a specific domain, e.g. beauty, tourism, lifestyle, technology, fashion, finance (Szcurski, 2017), obtaining a high credibility in it (Arora, Bansal, Kandpal, Aswani, & Dwivedi, 2019). Working on social media, SMIs deal with at least three different actors: organizations, particularly advertisers, their followers, i.e. their audience, and the social media platform they work on. Their presence creates challenges for SMIs because all actors have different expectations towards influencers who necessarily need to meet them in order to achieve and maintain success on social media platforms (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020).

Nowadays, SMIs represent one of the most powerful forms of advertising. Indeed, more and more advertisers want them to promote their brand and products because they are able to reach out to the masses (Arora et al., 2019) but also to target niche audiences, even those who would not be reached by traditional forms of advertising (Glucksman, 2017). Thus, SMIs represent an intermediary between organizations and consumers, i.e. their audience (Enke & Borchers, 2019). This relationship between SMIs and organizations is a two-way street<sup>1</sup> because they help each other to reach more people, popularity and hence to grow. SMIs success is given by their ability to build and maintain trustful and authentic relationships with their followers. Therefore, it is fundamental for them to carefully manage their online presence in order to be perceived as authentic, transparent and reliable by their followers otherwise they would lose their trust and consequently lose appeal by brands. Indeed, what makes an SMI attractive to advertisers are her/his followers and the power of influence she/he has on them (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). As a consequence, SMIs need to find the right strategy to appear authentic to their audience, remaining at the same time appealing to advertisers. This can create a tension because when SMIs promote a brand or a product, giving their opinion about it, they can be perceived as less authentic by followers who could accuse them "of selling themselves out and of writing for the money rather than for the community" (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). Therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from:  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/deborahweinswig/2016/10/05/influencers-are-the-new-brands/?sh=567961277919>

one challenge SMIs face is to strike a balance between followers' expectations and those of the advertisers.

Given its crucial importance, SMIs invest a lot in audience management. They constantly study how to appear to their followers and assess the way they react, trying to understand followers' preferences and which posts are more effective. Nevertheless, the audience is usually so heterogeneous that it is difficult for influencers to determine the actual one, hence they rely on an imagined audience, i.e. the mental conceptualization of people with whom they are communicating (Litt, 2012). SMIs aim to build a true and intimate relationship with their followers and avoid elevating themselves to a higher status but rather emphasize their ordinariness, gaining in this way the audience's trust. Therefore, the careful development of an authentic online persona requires hard work and commitment from the influencer (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). A great debate exists about the criteria for evaluating SMIs effectiveness and power of influence on social media because for brands it becomes essential to understand it in order to identify the right influencers for them (Arora et al., 2019). Not only the number of followers has to be taken into account. Indeed, SMIs effectiveness is also assessed in terms of engagement rate, frequency of activity and prominence in the community (Gillin, 2008). Despite some technological tools to track influencers' relevance, e.g. times a post is shared, number of hits on a blog (Freberg et al., 2011), organizations still struggle to find effective metrics to evaluate them (Gillin, 2008).

Another powerful challenge SMIs deal with is the platform's algorithm. It constantly changes and threatens to make their content invisible, hence SMIs have to understand how to adapt to it. They often deal with it "by adopting best practices for content production and curation in their field" (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020).

Even if SMIs act as independent professionals and no one tells them what they should share, their content is somehow shaped by the presence of the actors because, to keep success, they necessarily need to deal with the challenges coming from their audience, advertisers and the platform they work on, such as find a balance between being perceived as authentic by followers and being appealing to advertisers or the threat of the algorithm. Those challenges can be seen through the lens of a fundamental theoretical framework about job characteristics, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). According to the JD-R model, challenges can be seen as job demands, e.g. the need of SMIs to be perceived as authentic, transparent and reliable by their followers and at the same time to be attractive to advertisers and promote their brands or products, or to adapt to platform's functionalities. These can be considered as job demands because they could require a high effort to be met and a SMI can be not able to manage them leading to a reduction of its health and energy (Demerouti, & Bakker, 2011). However, existing research has a very narrow view about job demands SMIs face on social media platforms. Indeed, the majority of studies on this topic mainly focus on the job demand of authenticity coming from the SMIs' followers, neglecting all the other possible job demands. Moreover, the JD-R model has always been applied in traditional work contexts with regular workers, thus being SMIs non-traditional workers as they do not have

an employment contract and work mainly on virtual spaces, it could be that the job demands usually identified by the theory cannot be applied to SMIs in the context of social media platforms. Therefore, what is lacking in the existing literature is research that applies the JD-R model in a non-regular work context as it could be the one of social media platforms. Furthermore, the current research on SMIs completely overlooks the opportunities they could seize on social media platforms that could help them to deal with different job demands, that is it lacks a clear understanding of which are the job resources SMIs can rely on. Indeed, job resources are aspects of the job that increase motivation and energy and help to cope with job demands reducing strain associated with the latter. Therefore, this study aims to fill those gaps by answering the following research questions: “*Which job demands and job resources do SMIs experience on social media platforms? How can they use job resources to cope with the different job demands?*”

Applying this theory to the context of social media platforms is relevant to examine if the job demands and job resources SMIs face are the same that regular workers face. This could bring new theoretical notions about the JD-R model as it was usually applied in traditional work contexts. Answering the research questions also provides a practical contribution because it allows us to have a systematic overview of all the job demands and job resources SMIs face on social media platforms, but even more importantly it helps SMIs to understand how they can balance these two types of job characteristics in order to reduce strain and increase motivation and energy. The purpose of this research is to examine how the JD-R model works in a non-traditional work context, to provide a clear categorization of job demands and job resources SMIs experience on social media platforms and how they can use the latter to cope with job demands with the aim of reducing strain and increasing motivation.

The study is structured as follows: first, theoretical concepts about social media platforms, SMIs and the JD-R model are illustrated in the theoretical foundation section, second how respondents are selected, data collected and analyzed is explained in the methodology. Then, findings are presented and discussed highlighting the implications for theory and practice. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

### **Social media platforms and SMIs**

The rise of social media platforms has completely revolutionized the way individuals communicate and disseminate information and the way organizations do marketing. These Web 2.0 Internet-based applications allow an easy, faster and more effective online connection among people (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020). Social media platforms are user-generated content spaces where people produce and share their content on a variety of topics (Audrezet, De Kerviler, & Moulard, 2018). Some users gain such popularity that they begin to have an influence on their followers and then to devote more and more time to the production of their content, going through a professionalization process (Hou, 2019). Indeed, they invest in better

equipment for the creation of more professional content (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). They turn from ordinary content creators to professionals, thanks to the opportunity for different forms of monetization (Hou, 2019). This new type of professionals is known as SMIs. What mostly characterizes them is their ability to attract people's attention and to reach fame "bypassing the gatekeeper role of media and entertainment industries" (Hou, 2019). Indeed, the advent of social media platforms allows amateurs to gain the status of celebrity in a do-it-yourself manner (Gamson, 2011) thanks to the access to celebrification techniques, e.g. self-branding and self-celebrification (Hou, 2019), social media platforms provides.

SMIs gain extended competencies in a selected domain, e.g. beauty, tourism, lifestyle, technology, fashion, finance (Szcurski, 2017), and have the power to shape their followers' attitudes and purchasing choices through sharing daily life snippets, personal experiences and opinions about products or brands on social media. Their power comes from their ability to establish an authentic and intimate relationship with their audience and to promote their ordinariness (Gamson, 2011). Beyond the area in which they are specialized, another SMIs' classification criterion could be the number of followers that provides an indication of SMIs' network size. Indeed, according to this criterion, Berne-Manero and Marzo-Navarro (2020) distinguish two kinds of SMIs: macro and micro. The former have between 100,000 and 1,000,000 followers, they are more professional and more expensive than the latter. While micro influencers have between 1,000 and 100,000 followers and are less costly.

Since they have the ability to influence their followers, i.e. potential organizations' consumers, and easily reach out to the masses (Arora et al., 2019), SMIs are considered as relevant intermediaries between organizations and their customers (Enke & Borchers, 2019). Indeed, today they represent the form of advertising most leveraged and required by organizations. Through SMIs, advertisers are able to spread their brand's message with the goal of building a positive relationship with consumers (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020) and thus sell their products and services. The promotion of brands and products by SMIs can take place in several ways, particularly with different degrees of direct involvement of advertisers: there is a low degree of involvement when the brand sends its products to SMIs for free, hoping that they will express an opinion about them. Instead, there is a high degree when advertisers pay SMIs for a post fully regulated by the contract which determines collaboration' conditions, e.g. number of posts dedicated to the brand, the type of caption or image to post (Audrezet et al., 2018). In addition to followers and advertisers, working on the social media platforms, SMIs deal with a third actor that is the platform itself.

### **SMIs' challenges**

The presence of three actors on social media platforms, each of them with different expectations towards SMIs, creates challenges for influencers who necessarily need to adapt to them in order to achieve and maintain success.

The main difficulty highlighted by existing literature SMIs face is the tension that arises between their collaborations with brands and the need to be perceived as authentic by followers

(Audrezet et al., 2018). The marketing strategy, implemented by advertisers, to create a strong and lasting relationship with consumers through SMIs' content, is mutually beneficial to both parties (Arora et al., 2019). Indeed, they help each other to reach more people, popularity and hence to grow. SMIs need to collaborate with organizations because they monetize their audience by incorporating advertising of brands and products into their posts (Enke & Borchers, 2019) as well as brands need SMIs to promote them in order to reach a higher visibility and engagement with consumers (Arora et al., 2019). However, the inclusion of commercial purposes into SMIs' content goes against the request for authenticity by followers. Indeed, what the audience value is the opportunity to access trustworthy opinions and true information that comes from other consumers, without commercial interests, instead of "marketer-initiated communication" (Audrezet et al., 2018), considered less reliable. Therefore, the reasons why followers trust and appreciate SMIs, e.g. their authenticity and transparency, could be threatened when SMIs include advertisements in their content (Audrezet et al., 2018). In the latter case, followers can see SMIs as less authentic and can accuse them of publishing only for money rather than for the community (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020), hence they have to be careful because "there is a fine line between separating being a 'sellout' and being 'real'" (García-Rapp, 2017). Since followers are what make SMIs appealing to advertisers (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020), it is crucial to gain their trust.

Given its importance, the topic of SMIs authenticity is extensively covered by existing literature. García-Rapp (2017) defines authenticity as "an essential construct" that legitimizes the privileged position of SMIs and allows the further strengthening of their online status. In another research, Audrezet et al. (2018) claim that authenticity is important not only for the audience but also for SMIs themselves. Indeed, they seek to create content that satisfies both their inner needs and those of the advertisers. Particularly, in the study they identify two authenticity strategies SMIs could use: passionate and transparent. The first means that people are authentic when they are intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically motivated, that is "they are driven by their inner desires and passions more so than by commercial goals" (Audrezet et al., 2018). Therefore, SMIs are passionately authentic when they promote brands or products that are in line with their identity and their style and are free to choose the way to do it. Instead, SMIs use a transparent authenticity strategy when they provide a "truthful and exhaustive representation" (Audrezet et al., 2018) of a brand, or of its products, openly disclosing their personal opinions and the terms of the collaboration agreement. These two strategies are not mutually exclusive. Depending on the extent to which they adopt each of them, the degree to which SMIs are intrinsically satisfied with what they post and the degree to which they are transparent toward followers varies. Therefore, SMIs need to carefully manage their online presence in order to be perceived as authentic by their followers and not lose their trust and appeal by brands.

With the aim of being successful on social media platforms, SMIs closely monitor their audience to see their reactions, figuring out their preferences and which are the most effective posts (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). However, this is not so easy because the audience is usually so heterogeneous that SMIs are not able to clearly define the actual one. Therefore, they rely on

an imagined audience, considered “as influential as the actual audience in determining behavior” (Litt, 2012). Indeed, people adapt their behavior based on who their audience is. This means that SMIs content and their online self-presentation is affected by the imagined audience they rely on (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). Given its power on SMIs behaviour, an accurate determination of the imagined audience is crucial, also because a misalignment between the actual and imagined one may lead to negative consequences for SMIs (Litt, 2012). Therefore, understanding what influences the construction of the imagined audience in order to create one as close as possible to the real one, constitutes another potential challenge for SMIs.

SMIs have to deal also with the functionalities and constraints social media platforms entail (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). Particularly, algorithms govern Web 2.0 applications determining what is visible and what is not (Bucher, 2012). Algorithms represent pre-programmed structures that are mutable and adaptable. They constantly threaten to make SMIs’ content invisible, thus is one of the main concerns for them who want to reach their target audience (Bucher, 2012). However, the key to avoiding the algorithm’s threat is a high level of engagement of the audience because the algorithm seems to prioritize content with high interaction levels (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020).

In conclusion, even if SMIs act as independent professionals and no one tells them what they should share, their content is somehow shaped by the presence of these three actors. Therefore, in order to keep success, SMIs need to understand what challenges they could face working on social media platforms and how to deal with them.

### **JD-R model in the context of social media platforms**

In the present section firstly a summary of the main concepts of the JD-R model is presented, then the research problem is highlighted.

To deepen the study of challenges SMIs face and to better understand the complex context in which they navigate, it could be useful to look at those challenges through the lens of a fundamental theoretical framework about job characteristics, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001). The underlying assumption of the JD-R model is that job characteristics, regardless of the occupation, can be classified in two general categories, i.e. job demands and job resources, and each of them is related to specific outcomes (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007).

Job demands refer to “those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007). Among the main job demands there are emotional and physical demands, i.e. the amount of emotional and physical efforts the job requires, and work overload, i.e. excessive quantity of work (Demerouti, & Bakker, 2011). They are not necessarily negatives, but they may become a stressor when they require high effort to be met and the worker is not able to adequately manage it (Demerouti, & Bakker, 2011). Indeed, they are initiators of a psychological process, named health impairment process, positively linked to the development of



job-related exhaustion and strain. This occurs when demanding jobs exhaust worker's resources and lead to a reduction of health and energy. When individuals face job demands, they react by activating themselves, investing more time and increasing physical and mental effort to achieve higher demands (Adil, & Baig, 2018), i.e. using performance-protection strategies (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007). The long-term effect of these strategies is the depletion of an individual's energy and the onset of a burnout condition (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007).

Existing research on SMIs perspective, completely overlooks the opportunities they could seize on social media platforms that could help them to deal with different job demands. However, as we know from the JD-R model, there is another category of job characteristics, that is job resources. These are "physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that are either/or: 1. functional in achieving work goals 2. reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs 3. stimulate personal growth, learning, and development" (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007). They are key players in another psychological process, i.e. motivational process, that is positively related to motivation and job engagement. Job resources play a role as intrinsic motivators because they help to meet primary human needs, e.g. autonomy, relatedness, and "foster employees' growth, learning and development" (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007). They also play an extrinsic motivational role because they allow workers to achieve job goals. The main job resources identified by the literature are supervisor or social support, i.e. instrumental and emotional support (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007); job autonomy, i.e. workers with certain levels of autonomy are more confident in managing their duties, they can choose which task to prioritize and how to allocate their available resources among them, thus they feel they have a bigger control on what they are doing and have a better ability to deal with an hostile environment (Adil, & Baig, 2018); feedback, i.e. constructive feedback about the quality of the work done fosters learning and helps workers to do their job more effectively (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007), thus increases their competence and motivation to achieve desired goals (Adil, & Baig, 2018).

Therefore, job demands are predictive of feelings of exhaustion and job strain, whereas job resources are predictive of motivation and job engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001). Another important effect in the JD-R model is the interaction between the two types of job characteristics, that is job resources act as a moderator between job demands and job strain (Demerouti, & Bakker, 2011). This means that there are some resources that may buffer the impact of job demands on strain and burnout conditions (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007).

There are other studies that have extended the JD-R model, making it more accurate. One is the study by Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2007) that introduces personal resources in the model. These are defined as "individuals' sense of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully" (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Particularly, they analyse the role that three personal resources, i.e. self-efficacy, organizational-based self-esteem, and optimism, play in predicting job strain and engagement. Self-efficacy is defined as individuals' belief in their capabilities to manage workplace experiences and to accomplish tasks successfully, while optimism is the tendency to believe that one will generally experience good

outcomes in life (Scheier, & Carver, 1985). They found out that personal resources do not moderate the relationship between job demands and exhaustion, but they act as mediators between job resources and work engagement. Indeed, the availability of job resources leads to the development of personal resources, making individuals feel more capable of controlling their work environment and hence more engaged (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Moreover, the activation of personal resources, deriving from the supply of job resources, also helps to prevent feelings of exhaustion.

Another study is the one by Van den Broeck, De Cuyper, De Witte and Vansteenkiste (2010) that introduces a distinction between two types of job demands, i.e. job hindrances and job challenges. The meaning of the former is close to the original concept of job demands, indeed they are considered “obstacles that drain employees’ energy” (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Individuals when facing job hindrances, e.g. emotional demands, i.e. the amount of emotional effort the job requires, job insecurity, i.e. general concern about the future existence of the job (Witte, 1999), interpersonal conflicts, i.e. negative interpersonal encounters characterized by hostility or aggression (Ilies, Johnson, Judge, & Keeney, 2011), feel lack of control and negative emotions. Moreover, they believe their efforts will not be sufficient to achieve their goals, thus they feel unsatisfied. Whereas, job challenges, e.g. workload, i.e. quantity of work, time pressure, i.e. fast work or insufficient time to finish it, cognitive demands, i.e. mental effort the job requires, not only reduce workers’ energy, but also stimulate them to put more effort in the job since they are considered “positive motivating forces” (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Indeed, in the latter case individuals feel a high probability of success in dealing with them and in reaching valuable outcomes, thus they are motivated to act and psychologically satisfied.

Nevertheless, the JD-R model has always been applied in traditional work contexts with regular workers, thus being SMIs non-traditional workers as they do not have an employment contract and work mainly on virtual spaces, it could be that the job demands usually identified by the theory cannot be applied to SMIs in the context of social media platforms. Therefore, what is lacking in the existing literature is research that applies the JD-R model in a non-regular work context as it could be the one of social media platforms. Furthermore, the current research on SMIs has a very narrow view about job demands SMIs face because the majority of studies mainly focus on the job demand of authenticity coming from the SMIs’ followers, neglecting all the other possible job demands and it completely overlooks the presence of job resources available to SMIs that can help them to cope with the different job demands reducing strain and burnout conditions associated with the latter. Therefore, the aim of this research is to examine how the JD-R model works in a non-traditional work context, to provide a clear categorization of job demands and job resources SMIs experience on social media platforms and how they can use the latter to cope with job demands with the aim of reducing strain and increasing motivation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to understand what job demands SMIs experience on social media platforms and which job resources they can use to deal with them, an interview-based study is conducted with various types of SMIs. SMIs interviewed are selected on the basis of two criteria: the area in which they are specialized and the size of their audience. According to these criteria SMIs can specialize in a specific domain, e.g. beauty, tourism, lifestyle, technology, fashion, finance (Szcurski, 2017), and can be macro or micro (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020). The former have between 100,000 and 1,000,000 followers, the latter have between 1,000 and 100,000 followers. Considering different types of SMIs allows us to have a more representative sample and to explore if and how job demands and job resources they deal with vary according to SMIs' classification. The social media platforms taken into account for this study are Instagram and YouTube as they are among the main platforms SMIs work on and because of the researcher's greater familiarity with these platforms than others. In the next paragraphs an in depth explanation of the SMIs involved and the way in which data were collected and analysed will be shown.

### **Data collection method**

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the interview research method is chosen. Indeed, interviews allow us to collect information about behaviours, experiences and opinions of respondents to explore a phenomenon (Rowley, 2012), in this case the JD-R model in the context of social media platforms. Particularly, semi-structured interviews are conducted. This type of interview allows us to ask questions that are to some degree predetermined based on the topic of interest, in this case based on the categorization made of job demands and job resources, but ensures flexibility in answers because the questions are open-ended. In this way, there is a room for discussion and respondents are not affected by binding questions (Longhurst, 2003).

Participants were recruited by searching Instagram and Youtube for potential interviewees and contacting them directly via email. As said before, the selection of participants was informed by two criteria. First, they must have at least 1,000 followers. Second, they were selected from different domains. In total, eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted in the period of time between May 2021 and June 2021, each lasted about thirty minutes. The interviewees were informed in advance of the purpose of the research and were given the choice of whether to be anonymized or not. The choice to give them the opportunity to show their name in the research was made as a strategy to attract more respondents giving them the chance to receive visibility. Three of them preferred to remain anonymous and will be indicated as SMI1, SMI2 and SMI3, while all the others will be indicated with their account's name. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, that limits social interaction, interviews were conducted online and the transcripts were subsequently sent to the interviewees to be controlled and approved in order to guarantee the trustworthiness of the data. Given the criteria of audience size, three interviewees can be regarded as macro SMIs, the other eight as micro ones. Moreover, after analyzing their accounts, the domains in which they are specialized are identified by the researcher and can be

classified as sustainable fashion, plants, lifestyle, yoga and wellness, instagram consultant, food, travel, fashion and beauty. More details about SMIs not anonymized can be found in *Table 1*.

SMI account	Social media platform	Audience size	Domain
fralow	Instagram	30,500	Beauty
	Youtube	116,000	
giulio_scarano85	Instagram	52,700	Travel and lifestyle
grace_theamazing	Instagram	41,700	Instagram consultant
irisskrami	Instagram	16,200	Sustainable fashion
itsbruna_	Instagram	70,300	Fashion and beauty
jessicaamendola	Instagram	102,000	Fashion, beauty and travel
naki.earth	Instagram	36,700	Sustainable lifestyle, yoga and wellness
	Youtube	54,400	
thebluebirdkitchen	Instagram	47,000	Food and sustainable lifestyle
	Youtube	20,600	

*Table 1: SMIs overview*

## Data analysis

After conducting and transcribing interviews, a preliminary code book with macro categories, categories and subcategories was developed based on theoretical concepts above described (Pearse, 2019). Particularly, two macro categories were defined: job demands and job resources. The former is divided into two categories, that are job hindrances and job challenges, as mentioned in the theoretical foundation section. Also the latter macro category is divided into two categories, that are job resources and personal resources. Each category includes several subcategories reported on the basis of the job demands and job resources identified in the literature. Then, based on this preliminary code book, transcripts were codified using the software program ATLAS.ti. After the first round of analysis, other subcategories were identified in the data and were added to the code book, using in this way an hybrid approach between deductive and inductive coding (Pearse, 2019). *Appendix A* provides an overview of the macro

categories, categories and subcategories, predefined and new, and their definitions and examples to make the coding procedure even clearer.

Transcripts were analysed by one coder only who, codifying the data, remained as close as possible to theoretical variables to ensure validity of identified categories. However, because the coder could have some biases, a colleague not involved in the research topic and the researcher's supervisor were asked to assess the code book and operationalization of theoretical concepts in order to improve intercoder reliability (Burla et al., 2008). Intercoder reliability improves the quality of the analysis and its credibility (Burla et al., 2008).

### **Operationalization of theoretical concepts**

In order to ensure high quality interviews and clarity of questions, an operationalization of theoretical concepts is needed. In this section a brief description of each identified category, i.e. job hindrances, job challenges, job resources, and personal resources, and subcategory is provided together with some questions' examples. It is worth to specify that the predefined subcategories below described are just some examples of job demands and job resources already known from the literature but they do not necessarily apply in the context of SMIs. Therefore, they represent a starting point to explore which job demands and job resources SMIs face on social media platforms and how they can balance them.

As highlighted in the theory section the macro category of job demands can be distinguished in job hindrances and job challenges. Job hindrances: Obstacles on the job that make individuals feel lack of control and believe their efforts will not be sufficient to overcome it. "Do you face some obstacles in your job as a SMI? If so, which ones? In what way do these obstacles bother you?"

Examples of job hindrances identified by the existing literature are:

- Emotional demand, i.e. the amount of emotional efforts the job requires. "Is your work as a SMI emotionally demanding? Do you face emotionally charged situations in your work? If so, which ones? What is so emotionally demanding about it?"
- Job insecurity, i.e. general concern about the future existence of the job. "Is there anything you worry about the future development of your job as a SMI? What do you worry about? And why?"
- Interpersonal conflicts, i.e. negative interpersonal encounters characterized by hostility or aggression. "Did you ever have negative experiences while interacting with followers, clients or any other individuals that you interact with in your work? If so, which ones? With whom? What was so challenging about it?"

Job challenges: Aspects of the job that require energy but also motivate workers to act for achieving valuable outcomes. "What do you like about your job as SMI?"

Examples of job challenges identified by the existing literature are:

- Workload, i.e. quantity of work. "Is there anything in your job as a SMI that overwhelmed you? To what extent do you believe you have to spend extraordinary levels of effort to succeed in your job? What is it that makes you so overloaded?"

- Time pressure, i.e. fast work or insufficient time to finish it. “Do you have deadlines on your work as a SMI? How do you manage it? Is that something you like or does it create problems for you? Why?”

Job resources together with personal resources create another macro category.

Job resources: Factors of the job that help workers in achieving work goals, in dealing with obstacles and foster their learning and development. “What are the factors of your job that help you to achieve your goals as a SMI? What factors help you in dealing with obstacles?” For the sake of clarity, these questions are asked after each of the previous ones about job demands.

Examples of job resources identified by the existing literature are:

- Supervisor or social support, i.e. instrumental and emotional support. “Is there someone that can help and support you with your job as a SMI? If so, who are they? What support do they offer you?”
- Job autonomy, i.e. take job decisions independently. “Can you decide yourselves how to perform your work? Do you have flexibility in the execution of your job? Does your work allow you to make a lot of decisions on your own? What can you decide on?”
- Feedback, i.e. constructive feedback about the quality of the work done. “Do you get enough feedback about the quality of your job as a SMI? From whom do you get the feedback and what feedback do they offer you?”

Personal resources: Individual’s perception of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully. “What skills and abilities do you need to have to be a successful SMI? Do you have those? How do you get those?”

## **FINDINGS**

In this section, results from data analysis are presented. First, which types of job demands SMIs involved in the research experience on social media platforms are shown. Particularly, a distinction between job hindrances and job challenges is made to better understand which of them are regarded simply as obstacles and which, instead, are not only seen as factors that require energy but also as motivating ones. Then, job resources used by SMIs to cope with job demands, in order to reduce strain and increase motivation, are presented making a distinction with the personal ones.

### **Job hindrances**

Despite the huge success and changes the advent of social media platforms brought in the world, and despite the fact that SMIs are considered one of the most powerful forms of advertising, today SMIs are not yet seen as professionals and their work is discredited as it is not considered "a real job" by some people. This causes many negative consequences for SMIs. They need to make extra efforts and to “fight” to ensure that they are seen as professionals and that their work is regarded as valuable and hence adequately rewarded. Indeed, some of them stated that they often receive requests for jobs not fairly rewarded or for free. In addition to requiring great

efforts and energy, this also causes many personal insecurities and doubts about their own abilities and opportunities. As two SMIs stated:

*“The biggest obstacle for me is the lack of recognition for my work, which means having to “fight” to be paid fairly. Many companies ask me for content in exchange for merchandise, that is free content not recognizing in this way the value of the content I create.” [naki.earth]*

*“The biggest obstacle is people’s distrust and their way of discrediting this work. [...] In many circumstances this caused me insecurity.. fear in throwing myself, to risk, to do my job without giving account to the judgment of others.” [jessicaamendola]*

SMIs have shown several concerns about the future of their work on social media platforms. Many SMIs are not sure that it can be a long-term job for them because of concerns about the uncertainty of the future development of social media platforms, such as changes in users' wishes on the same platform and the rise of new platforms with new dynamics.

*“I know it’s not a long-term job and so I’m working to try to build something that can exist even when this phase will be passed.” [thebluebirdkitchen]*

*“How long will social media live? Instagram in particular. This is definitely one of the questions I ask myself most often and that worries me the most. For this reason I continue to train myself in a more transversal way, acquiring skills that I used in social media marketing, but also outside.” [grace\_theamazing]*

Indeed many of them emphasized how quickly social media platforms evolve and change and the difficulty of predicting these future developments. As a consequence, SMIs should always be updated on new social media platforms developments, such as new outgoing social media, new trends, changes in followers’ wishes or the ones of the new generations and they need to be able to adapt to them in order not to fall behind and lose their audience. This involves a continuous updating, an increasing commitment to produce new and high quality content and the fear of not being able to meet the new targets.

*“The new platforms scare me, the idea of not being able or suitable to interact on other social media platforms, I admit that a little worries me.” [fralow]*

*“Social networks are a becoming, developing constantly and always in a different way. My main concern is for the new generations and the new social platforms with different dynamics to which we must adapt to.” [irisskrami]*

Another big issue SMIs face are interpersonal conflicts. They face negative situations both with companies and with their followers. It often happens that companies do not respect contracts, especially when only verbal and unwritten agreements are made, they disappear or they take months before paying the SMI for the work done. Other negative situations occur when companies excessively exploit the SMI's image or when they impose a certain type of content not in line with the style of the SMI. Unfortunately, SMIs often deal also with haters. They often receive negative comments characterized by malice and aggressiveness and are very exposed to continuous negative judgements and threats coming from their audience. This is very stressful for them and causes them many insecurities.

*“It happens that some companies do not respect the contract, disappear, make me wait months to pay me. It happens that people who follow me get angry because I don't answer quickly enough. Once it happened that a man of about 60 years wrote me a lot of messages, emails, threatening me to come and find me if I didn't answer him.” [naki.earth]*

*“It happened that brands did not respect contracts or did more than they should with my image” [fralow]*

One of them stated that he/she face negative situations also with his/her colleagues:

*“If we're talking about negative experiences with colleagues [...] very often there is no real desire to collaborate and grow, but only to excel and to be seen better than others.” [SMI3]*

Working as a SMI is very emotionally demanding. There are many factors that contribute to making this work stressful and emotionally demanding. As already mentioned, the continuous judgments, insults and negative comments coming from the audience are one of the primary sources of stress for SMIs. Other sources of stress are the constant comparison with others, the fear of not being interesting anymore and losing the followers' and companies' attention. This also generates a lot of uncertainty about future earnings, that represents another source of stress and concern. Another huge stressor is the speed of social media times that causes SMIs fear of falling behind and to never really get away from their work.

*“Feeling obligated to always cultivate a community, be interesting, fun or relevant every day generates a lot of anxiety. In addition to this, the tendency to always compare us with those who are better than us (in terms of numbers, aesthetics, wealth, etc.) brings a sense of frustration. Finally, negative comments and haters help create a climate where you are terrified of making a mistake for fear of the terrible consequences that could result, at the expense of creativity and experimentation.” [giulio\_scarano85]*



*“On social media times are different, there is always the risk of falling behind, this is a source of creativity but also of continuous research, in practice you have to be always up to date and if this is not well managed can cause you stress or may make you think you are no longer good enough at what you do.” [fralow]*

Given the rapid timing of social media platforms, sometimes deadlines also become an obstacle for SMIs. This happens when deadlines given by brands are excessively tight, thus neglecting the time needed for creative processes or to make the content suitable and credible. Moreover, being a job closely connected with private life, meeting deadlines can become complicated when a SMI faces low energy moments as he/she may not be creative and productive enough.

*“They (the deadlines) are necessary but often they (the brands) do not take into account the creative timing and sometimes the choice of the publication time, given the revisions and passages with customers and agencies, damage a coherent and effective storytelling.”  
[giulio\_scarano85]*

*“Being a job where creativity plays an important role, in periods of fatigue it is difficult to carry out several projects and things at the same time trying to respect the deadlines.”  
[thebluebirdkitchen]*

The large workload SMIs face on social media platforms makes them feeling overwhelmed. Indeed, being independent contractors, they need to manage a lot of different tasks, from the creation of content and the interaction with the community to the bureaucratic duties, such as the management of contracts with clients and the financial aspects, and this can become an obstacle for them.

*“Sometimes I feel overwhelmed. The creative part for a person who works on social media is crucial, if it fails because you are committed to handling more bureaucratic things it becomes difficult to make attractive content.” [fralow]*

*“It requires a lot of energy to be able to stay behind everything, on the one hand the creation of content that must always be qualitatively greater, on the other hand to keep active the interaction with the community that grows and becomes more demanding in terms of time in addition to the fact that you can never really detach.” [thebluebirdkitchen]*

It becomes particularly difficult to manage if you do not have collaborators. Indeed, as some of them pointed out, it is a very solitary job where often you do not have a confrontation with a collaborator and thus it is difficult to understand if you are doing well and going in the right direction.

*“Loneliness. It’s hard not to have someone to discuss with to see if you’re going in the right direction.” [grace\_theamazing]*

Another obstacle they face is the trade off between doing collaborations with brands and being perceived as authentic by the followers. Indeed, sometimes advertisements are seen as a bad thing by the audience, that makes SMIs perceived as less authentic. However, sponsorships are necessary for SMIs who need to find the right way to do them, remaining appealing both to their followers and brands. Their ability to do so also depends on their negotiation power that is influenced, among other things, by their number of followers. If they have low power, their possibility to select only collaboration in line with their values is lower, and vice versa.

*“The biggest obstacle for me is to try to be authentic. Not having a huge negotiating power, because of my limited numbers, to work I often have to compromise by making contracts with brands that do not always fully embody my values. The challenge is to try to make this commercial part of my content performing without compromising my image resulting inconsistent or superficial.” [giulio\_scarano85]*

*“People who follow me don’t always understand that accepting collaborations and then doing sponsored posts is what allows me to do what I do, which includes, among other things, even answer up to hundreds of messages a day coming from my community. Some see advertisements as a bad thing, and do not understand that all the free content I offer (recipes, videos etc.) take time and somehow I also have to pay rent.” [SMI1]*

Closely related to the type of social media platform used, is the obstacle of the algorithm. The algorithm decides what to make more or less visible and to whom, widely influencing in this way the work of SMIs who, to deal with it, can choose either to leave social media or remain at the “rules of the game”. This makes having the followers' attention even harder.

*“The obstacles depend on the platforms. The content is no longer displayed by all your audience. They don't even choose whether to see them or not. The platform decides if your video needs to be seen and who needs to see it. Unfortunately the only way to overcome them is to abandon social media platforms or stay at this game.” [SMI3]*

*“The main problem for those who work on social media, given the low attention span and the high number of content available, is being able to get the attention of followers. The algorithm is also evolving, affecting the visibility of content.” [irisskrami]*

## **Job challenges**

There are some obstacles that not only require energy but also motivate SMIs to act for achieving valuable outcomes.

In some cases the workload SMIs face motivates them to choose only sponsorships in line with their values and to better organize time and work being able to satisfy companies, followers but also to respect their values and their health by not overloading themselves with work. Therefore, it can be said that depending on the amount of workload it can be a job hindrance or a job challenge.

*“For me it is sustainable because I decide which collaborations to accept and which not, how to distribute them, and how much content to create.” [naki.earth]*

*“I decide everything most of the time, maybe I’m wrong to charge myself with too many things. I feel I have to do more and more. And to offer over 100% to companies that contact me, and that’s fine.” [jessicaamendola]*

From interviews what clearly emerges is that there are two types of deadlines SMIs need to meet. The first are deadlines SMIs impose themselves in order to adhere to their own schedule, the second are the ones imposed by the brand they collaborate with. The former are more flexible thus SMIs feel more comfortable to shift them in case of need, the latter, being imposed by external subjects, tend to be more respected. Many SMIs claim that both types of deadlines not only represent an obstacle but also motivate them because they push SMIs to better organize their time, to avoid procrastination, and to keep a sense of responsibility. Thus, also in this case deadlines represent both a job hindrance and a job challenge depending on their flexibility and on who imposes them.

*“I have deadlines that I set to myself for my content without collaborations because I want to publish with constancy and to have a routine, and deadlines for collaborations with companies. The first ones are more flexible, and those are the ones I feel comfortable moving in case of need. With companies I always make sure to set manageable deadlines so I can respect them. Personally I find them motivating, since I can safely move them and they motivate me to keep a good schedule.” [naki.earth]*

*“The main deadlines that I have are those of the weekly columns that constitute my editorial plan. Being programmed does not cause me particular stress but only a sense of responsibility.” [SMI2]*

An element that strongly characterizes SMIs work is the autonomy they have in carrying it out. When they have too much autonomy, it turns to be challenging because it involves making many decisions on their own and knowing how to manage the work properly without anyone providing them with guidelines. However, it represents one of the aspects that most motivate them. Indeed, what satisfies them the most is their freedom to experiment, the possibility to give space to their creativity and passions and to be heads of themselves. Nevertheless, it constitutes a challenge

even because autonomy is not given to SMIs but it needs to be gained. Actually, it requires time to be acquired as at the beginning the SMIs' negotiating power is low, thus they have to follow brands' rules if they want to collaborate with them. Over time their contractual power increases and consequently also their autonomy and freedom to choose who to collaborate with.

*“Over time I have acquired more and more (autonomy). With some courage I experimented and invented effective formats. Content speaks for you and when brands see that something works they feel more comfortable giving you more control over the production of content.”*  
[giulio\_scarano85]

*“What most motivates me is the possibility to carry out my work in autonomy and freedom and to work with my own passions.”* [SMI2]

What also motivates them is being able to create a community. Creating a community of people who value and support a SMI is not easy because it requires time, effort and energy as they have to answer a lot of messages, to be active and constantly interact with followers in order to gain their trust and attention. However, it is one of the most satisfying aspects of SMIs work as thanks to their community they receive affection, esteem and support, they feel they are considered as friends and they are able in this way to create ties with people that otherwise they could never have created.

*“[...] create a community and get to know people you would never have known otherwise.”*  
[irisskrami]

*“The most beautiful thing is certainly the creation of a strong community, constantly receiving affection and support.”* [SMI2]

What many of the respondents have indicated as the thing they like the most about their work is the possibility of creating value for their audience. Indeed, they are motivated to work on social media platforms and to share their content and values with the aim to be useful, to positively influence someone's life, to give advice, to inspire, to amuse, to show new points of view and to spread the values in which they believe and the causes they care about.

*“To be able to give a positive contribution to people who follow me by sharing content that I hope will be useful to someone. Also, I do it for a cause that I care about, the vegan world and sustainability.”* [SMI1]

*“The opportunity to make people curious about new points of view, and entertain those who devote their attention to me.”* [giulio\_scarano85]

## Job resources

In this section the factors that help SMIs to achieve their goals and to deal with obstacles reducing strain and increasing motivation and energy are illustrated.

As already said, working as a SMI is a very lonely job and this can cause several challenges for SMIs, thus one of the main resources they draw on to deal with those challenges is social support. Interviewees highlighted different types of social support deriving from different actors. Some of them stated that they receive support from their family or partners both practical help and emotional one. Practical help mainly in taking pictures or shooting video, emotional help because they support and motivate them especially in moments of difficulty and discomfort. Thus, this type of social support helps SMIs to deal with the job demands of loneliness, workload, emotional demand and interpersonal conflicts offering them both practical and emotional support.

*“Yes, my boyfriend. He helps me a lot in taking pictures. He also gives me emotional support as well as practical because he spurs me on. There are times when I would like to give up everything and in those moments he supports me and encourages me.” [itsbruna\_]*

*“My partner helps me a lot to find ideas and in taking photos for Instagram, then I modify them and publish them, but having someone who is willing to do it is a fortune!” [fralow]*

Another actor who often provides SMIs with support are the agencies. The agency provides SMIs with practical help. They usually protect them, manage the bureaucratic part of the work and the relationships with customers (the brands).

*“I never had problems with companies, the protection of a competent agency always protected me.” [giulio\_scarano85]*

*“I have an agent [...] who helps me a lot, she manages all my contacts with brands leaving me the most creative part to be able to express myself in the best possible way.” [fralow]*

Other respondents claim they have collaborators that are not part of an agency and that help them in organizing content and in managing the emails. Reducing the amount of tasks SMIs need to carry out personally and providing them with some suggestions about the work done, these types of social support are useful to cope with the job demands of workload, deadlines, loneliness and autonomy.

*“Most of the things I manage alone, then there are people who help me for the organization of the content, in managing the emails as well as for the realization of professional photographic material. Totally alone it would be impossible!” [jessicaamendola]*

*“Yes, I have permanent collaborators like virtual assistant, web designer, seo-specialist, advertiser, a couple of Copy and a person who deals with email marketing.” [grace\_theamazing]*

Sometimes SMIs turn to other professionals like therapists, to better manage stress and emotions, and lawyers or police in more extreme cases such as threats or contracts not respected by companies. These professionals support SMIs in case of interpersonal conflicts and emotional demand.

*“I’m considering proceeding with a lawyer.” [SM11]*

*“I tend to feel bad about every negative comment, but over time, I’m learning not to value that kind of stuff too much. Psychotherapy certainly helps me a lot.” [naki.earth]*

Some interviewees stated that they do not receive any help but that they recognise its importance and are indeed considering hiring some collaborators.

*“I think it’s necessary to have people around who believe in you and support you in what you do. Unfortunately, I miss this, which makes me easily lose my motivation and my route.” [SM11]*

*“I am considering getting help from another person who can give me support on many organizational and bureaucratic aspects so that I can devote myself more to the creation of content and the management of my community.” [thebluebirdkitchen]*

In conclusion, it can be said that the job resource of social support is useful for SMIs to cope with many different job demands. They rely on social support to deal with interpersonal conflicts, emotional demands, deadlines, workload, loneliness and autonomy.

Another useful resource to deal with the job demand of loneliness is the feedback SMIs receive. Feedback helps them to understand if what they do is useful and valuable for the community and brands, if they are going in the right direction and also motivates them to keep doing what they do. Feedback comes from the followers, clients they work with and closer people like friends and family. SMIs receive those mainly through email, private messages and comments. However, also looking at how many reactions a post/story/video receives represents an indicator of how much it has been appreciated. Feedback is also useful to cope with other job demands such as building a community and creating value for the audience because thanks to it SMIs can better understand the followers’ tastes and preferences and can adapt to them in order to create valuable content and retain the audience. Retaining people helps SMIs to increase their follower base, increasing in this way also their contractual power and thus their autonomy. Therefore, even if in an indirect way, feedback can also be seen as a precious resource to gain autonomy.

*“I constantly receive feedback from my followers through comments, personal messages, emails, and of course conversions in sales. From companies every time I work with someone.” [SMI2]*

*“Most of the feedback comes from my community. This is a very important aspect especially to understand what direction to give to the editorial plan.” [thebluebirdkitchen]*

If on the one hand the community constitutes a job challenge for SMIs, on the other hand it can also be considered a job resource. Indeed, in addition to providing feedback, the community can be a resource even because it motivates SMIs, gives them affection, esteem and support and sometimes defends them from haters’ attacks. Thus, the community is a resource that helps SMIs to deal with some interpersonal conflicts and with emotional demand. Having a community is what allows SMIs to be recognized as such and to work with brands. Therefore, having a great number of followers helps SMIs to gain autonomy, to be recognized as professionals and to have a more stable job, balancing the job demands of little recognition and job insecurity. Moreover, an active community should help them in dealing with the platform’s algorithm as it seems to prioritize content with high interaction levels. One of the interviewees believes that it is crucial to build a community, that is to make an individual feel part of something bigger.

*“One of the things that we rely on is to create a community. That is, to ensure that a person is not simply a single following X but is part of a group following X and that they are all united by an interest. For some account’s types this community element is crucial, but not always necessary.” [irisskrami]*

*“Often it is my community that protects me and responds to attacks.” [fralow]*

As already said, a strong characteristic of SMIs’ job is the high autonomy they have. All the interviewees declared to have complete autonomy in their work or that sometimes they just have to follow the guidelines provided by the brands they collaborate with. This autonomy constitutes not only a challenge but also a resource for SMIs. Indeed, having high autonomy allows SMIs to manage their time, to freely express their creativity and their passions, but above all to slow down or take breaks from work in times of difficulty and postpone them to a better time for them in order to not compromise the quality of their work. Thus, it is a crucial resource to deal with the job demands of workload and deadlines. Autonomy is so fundamental for them that they stated to refuse works in which they cannot have autonomy.

*“It is difficult to make launches, advertising or promo when you are in an wobbly emotional state, but in my opinion the beauty of this work is the ability to self-manage and postpone a given job to when you have more resources.” [grace\_theamazing]*

*“If I cannot have autonomy, I reject the job. Only I know what my audience likes.” [SMI3]*

Thanks to the autonomy they have, another resource they can make use of is taking detox days/weeks. Taking some detox times helps them to deal with many of the job demands highlighted before such as workload, emotional demands or interpersonal conflicts.

*“I just got out of a detox week because I felt overwhelmed.” [giulio\_scarano85]*

*“I generally take a day off social media once a week.” [SMI2]*

Finally, to cope with the insecurity that characterizes SMIs’ job, many of them make use of the “plan B” resource. This means that SMIs carry out other projects not strictly related to their work on social media platforms. Indeed, they try to form themselves in a more transversal way and to develop a plan B in the event that their work on social media does not provide sufficient earnings anymore.

*“The only way to address the problem (profit uncertainty) is to have other revenues unrelated to my content.” [SMI3]*

*“For this reason I continue to train myself in a more transversal way, acquiring skills that I used in social media marketing, but also outside.” [grace\_theamazing]*

### **Personal resources**

Another type of resources a SMI can use to deal with job demands are the personal resources, that is the perception of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully. When they are asked which are the skills and abilities they need to be a successful SMI many different personal resources have emerged.

One of the main personal characteristics they all should possess is authenticity. Many of the respondents believe that being sincere, spontaneous and consistent with their own ethics is fundamental and that these lead people to trust them more. What is important is to be authentic not only to others but also to themselves in order to satisfy their inner needs. It is worth noting that authenticity constitutes both a job demand and a job resource that helps SMIs in building a trustful community.

*“My strength is spontaneity.” [naki.earth]*

*“I think it’s important to be honest [...]. The compliment I get most often from people who know me personally is: “ You’re just the same as you are on social media ” ”. [fralow]*

Self-efficacy is another personal resource that could help SMIs to emerge and to grow. Being confident of their own abilities allows them to move forward despite criticism, to show people



who do not believe in them that they can actually make it and to make their voice heard on social media. It is a personal resource that could help SMIs in balancing many of the job demands they meet working on social media platforms, but particularly it can be useful to face interpersonal conflicts, emotionally demanding situations and to gain recognition.

*“My greatest resource: revenge. To make people understand that I could reach my goals, to make them understand that they were wrong [...]. This was my revenge. And about my insecurities, I got over them with the grit I needed.” [jessicaamendola]*

*“You have to be patient, especially at the beginning and have a good awareness and self-confidence. This last aspect I think is the one in which I sin most. I know that if I were less insecure and critical of myself, I could definitely grow faster and have a louder voice, which is what social media needs.” [thebluebirdkitchen]*

What cannot be lacking in SMIs' work is passion. They should have the passion to share their life every day, to give advice and to interact with the community, but also to be passionate about what they talk about and share. If they are passionate about what they do and share they will be perceived as more authentic and can create more valuable content, thus passion is fundamental to deal with the job demands of authenticity, community and creation of value.

*“I think the key thing is to have passion and love for what you choose to share.” [naki.earth]*

*“What is fundamental to do this [...] is passion. If I want to communicate something to people, I have to love sharing, talking, responding, interacting, and giving advice.” [jessicaamendola]*

To deal with interpersonal conflicts some of them declared to use dialogue. Indeed, as in offline situations, dialogue is one of the better means to solve conflicts both with companies and followers.

*“It happens that some companies do not respect the contract [...]. It happens that people who follow me get angry because I don't answer quickly enough [...]. In these cases I opened a dialogue, which in my opinion is very important.” [naki.earth]*

*“When it happens with companies, I try to make my case and explain why it would be better to take one direction instead of another. When that is not enough, I try to close the relationship as soon as possible.” [thebluebirdkitchen]*

Other SMIs claimed to use not only dialogue, but sometimes they also use to be detached. Indeed, in case of offensive comments or messages many of the respondents claimed to react by ignoring them. It is not always easy and doing this required years of experience to SMIs but

many times they feel this is the only way to move forward. Most of the time they do not know who writes these offensive messages or comments and the reason he/she did it, thus being detached is the best way to deal with them.

*“With time you learn to smile and to accept that someone might see you not for who you are, but you realize that is their problem, not yours.” [grace\_theamazing]*

*“When these episodes happen you never know who is on the other side and sometimes they are quite aggressive, in these cases I think you have to act coldly because you do not even know why he/she sent that message.” [irisskrami]*

To better manage the autonomy SMIs have working on social media platforms it is essential for them to be disciplined. Discipline, organization and constancy are important to well manage the time between the different tasks that need to be performed, e.g. content’ creation, editing, answer to messages and comments, to meet the deadlines, to ensure a constant publication of content in order to keep the interest of followers active and to carry on their projects. Therefore, it helps SMIs to cope with the job demands of autonomy, deadlines, workload, and community but also with the job demand of algorithm as it could favor those who publish content with constancy.

*“Punctuality and organization because there are deadlines you need to meet and you have to do everything with extreme precision.” [jessicaamendola]*

*“I am trying to set organizational boundaries by devoting more or less the same time every day to various aspects like spending a couple of hours every morning to reply to messages, afternoon to create content, etc.” [thebluebirdkitchen]*

In order to cope with job insecurity and with the speed of change that characterize social media platforms, SMIs need to be innovative and versatile. Those two personal resources allow SMIs to face the continuous changes that occur on social media, renewing themselves each time in order to adapt to them. Being innovative also helps SMIs to differentiate themselves from others creating valuable content and attracting in this way more followers.

*“You should have a lot of versatility to be able to keep an eye on and manage more things, often very different from each other, at the same time.” [thebluebirdkitchen]*

*“I think it is important to be innovative. Now there are many influencers, many with the same content, all homologated. So I think it is important to find a way to differentiate himself/herself, even if it’s not easy at all.” [itsbruna\_]*

Closely linked to innovation is creativity. Finding new ways to interact with the community and to make advertisements, creating new formats and finding new topics to talk about are aspects that definitely pay off.

*“I like to connect with people, to write and to shoot videos that make people laugh and surprise those who watch my content. Then I try to use these same qualities to make the advertising.”*  
[giulio\_scarano85]

*“It is important to be creative.” [SMI1]*

What is also important in this work as a SMI is to have technical skills. Indeed, given the variety of tasks that this work includes in addition to creativity, passion and authenticity it is also important to know how to shoot videos, to use editing programs and to have marketing and communication skills. All those technical skills can be learned with experience or with some courses.

*“Technical skills of video and photo editing, marketing and communication skills can be learned on the field. I still have a lot to learn but I am satisfied with where I am.”* [naki.earth]

*“All the marketing skills you need can be acquired over time or by doing courses.”* [SMI1]

There are many other personal resources pointed out by SMIs. One of them argues that self-irony is very effective against hater attacks, that curiosity plays an important role in adapting to new changes and that physical appearance could also play a role in SMI's success.

*“I try to develop personal skills through my curiosity that allow me to adapt to any change in technology.”* [giulio\_scarano85]

Other respondents listed several personal resources a SMI should have. Being independent contractors they should have strategic vision and entrepreneurial ability in order to manage their work in an effective, sustainable and lasting way. Unlike most regular jobs, SMIs to be successful should also have aesthetic sense, good taste and writing skills in order to attract more audience attention and make the viewing of content pleasant.

*“Writing skills, aesthetic sense, precision, care and programming skills. Strategic vision and entrepreneurial ability to be able to transform the traffic around social media in an effective workflow. Empathy, patience, generosity because many times it is necessary to put yourself in the background.”* [SMI2]

*“A lot of creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, good taste, culture to 360°, but above all you need to have something to say. I got them because I always wanted to communicate with others and I studied all my life to do it. I also have a thousand passions that help me to deepen the most disparate topics.” [SMI3]*

Table 2 offers an overview of all the job demands SMIs face on social media platforms identified in the findings and of the job resources they use to cope with each of them.

Job demands	Job resources
Little job recognition	Community; self-efficacy
Job insecurity	Community; plan B, innovation
Interpersonal conflicts	Social support; community; detox; self-efficacy; dialogue; be detached
Emotional demand	Social support; community; detox; self-efficacy
Time pressure	Social support; job autonomy; discipline
Workload	Social support; job autonomy; detox; discipline
Loneliness	Social support; feedback
Authenticity	Passion
Algorithm	Community; discipline
Job autonomy	Social support; feedback; community; discipline
Community	Feedback; authenticity; passion; discipline; innovation; creativity
Create value	Feedback; passion; innovation; creativity

*Table 2: balancing job demands and job resources in the context of social media platforms*

## **DISCUSSION**

The aim of conducting and analyzing interviews was to examine how the JD-R model works in a non-traditional work context, to explore what are the job demands and job resources SMIs experience on social media platforms and how they can use the latter to cope with job demands with the aim of reducing strain and increasing motivation. Many interesting findings emerged from the research that have implications both on a theoretical and a practical level.

In this section, first implications for theory and practice are discussed, then some limitations of the research are highlighted.

### **Implication for research**

As it is shown in the theoretical foundation section, the majority of studies on SMIs mainly focus on the job demand of authenticity, that is the tension that arises between SMIs collaborations with brands and the need to be perceived as authentic by followers (Audrezet et al., 2018), and completely overlooks the presence of job resources available to SMIs to deal with job demands. The findings of this research confirm the existence of authenticity as a job demand. Indeed, some interviewees claim that, in line with what is found in existing literature, sometimes advertisements are seen as a bad thing by the audience and that this makes them perceived as less authentic. However, unlike most of the studies on SMIs, this paper shed light on many other job demands and job resources SMIs deal with on social media platforms that have never been reported before. Therefore, on the one hand the application of the JD-R model to the context of social media platforms allows us to bring out many job demands and job resources that had not been identified before, but on the other hand the model needs to be expanded in order to have a complete picture of all of them. Indeed, in addition to the main job demands, e.g. workload, time pressure, job insecurity, and job resources, e.g. feedback, social support, and job autonomy, usually identified in traditional jobs and employees, using the JD-R model in this context we run into new demands and resources, meaning that the model needs to be extended in order to be able to study SMIs.

Studying SMIs with the lens of the JD-R model, new peculiar job demands and job resources SMIs deal with emerge. Those have not been identified before either by existing literature about SMIs or studies about the JD-R model in traditional job contexts. Despite the huge success of social media platforms and the fact that SMIs are considered one of the most powerful forms of advertising, today SMIs are not yet seen as professionals. This is due to the fact that being non-traditional workers, some people discredited them as they do not consider their job as a real one. The little recognition of their job causes them negative consequences both on a practical and emotional level. Traditional workers do not run into this job hindrance as they do not need to struggle and make extra efforts to be recognized as professionals and their work as valuable. Being independent contractors without coworkers and supervisors, makes loneliness particularly challenging for them. Indeed, they do not have a confrontation with a collaborator and for them it becomes difficult to understand if they are doing well and are going in the right

direction. Traditional employees experience less this job hindrance because they usually have coworkers or managers to discuss and take decisions with. As a consequence, the job resource of social support becomes particularly relevant for them. Family and partners especially take an important role because SMIs rely on them much more than traditional employees. They provide SMIs with both practical and emotional support. Practical help mainly in taking pictures or shooting video, emotional help because they support and motivate SMIs especially in moments of difficulty and discomfort.

SMIs can be considered also as service providers to companies. As we know from the literature, more and more advertisers want them to promote their brand and products because SMIs are able to reach out to the masses (Arora et al., 2019) but also to target niche audiences, even those who would not be reached by traditional forms of advertising (Glucksman, 2017). Therefore, as intermediaries between companies and the audience they make use of agencies that help them in dealing with all the bureaucratic issues, such as the management of contracts with clients and the financial aspects, and in managing the relationship with brands. Among the personal resources SMIs should have, particular importance assumes creativity and innovation. Indeed, as content creators that share daily life snippets and opinions, SMIs have to find always new ways to interact with the community and to make advertisements, they need to renewing themselves each time in order to adapt to the continuous changes that occur on social media platforms and to differentiate from other SMIs attracting in this way more followers.

One of the things that most characterize SMIs is the high autonomy they have in doing their job. What emerges from findings is that autonomy allows SMIs to manage their time, to freely express their creativity and their passions, but above all to slow down or take breaks from work in times of difficulty and postpone them to a better time for them in order to not compromise the quality of their work. Autonomy also allows them to take detox times according to their needs and to deal with many job demands, e.g. workload and interpersonal conflicts. However, autonomy also means they need to be disciplined. Indeed, discipline, organization and constancy are important to well manage the time between the different tasks that need to be performed, e.g. content' creation, editing, answer to messages and comments, to meet the deadlines, to ensure a constant publication of content.

Finally, what can also be deduced from findings is that SMIs' job is very precarious, characterized by a great job insecurity. This involves that many of them develop a plan b, that is carrying out projects not strictly related to their work on social media platforms and forming themselves in a more transversal way in the event that their work on social media does not provide sufficient earnings anymore. Traditional workers do not face this job demand because while they are working they do not need to constantly think of a secondary plan in case their first job should go wrong.

To sum up those theoretical implications, it can be said that this research shed light on new job demands and job resources SMIs face on social media platforms. These are new respects to those identified in both existing literature about SMIs and existing studies about JD-R model. Moreover, having identified these peculiar job demands and job resources that

characterize SMIs' job allows us to further conceptualize SMIs. Starting from the initial definition of SMI given in the introduction, that is "new type of independent third party endorser" (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011) who has the ability to influence their followers' habits and attitudes through sharing daily life snippets and opinions about products or brands on social media, it is possible to add that their job is quite precarious and a non-traditional one, and it is carried out with a high level of autonomy and without coworkers or supervisors. Moreover, SMIs can be considered content creators and service providers.

Another important theoretical implication of this research is that a job resource could also be a job demand, and vice versa. Two notable examples are autonomy and the community. Autonomy is identified by the literature as one of the main job resources as it allows workers to be more confident in managing their duties, to choose which task to prioritize and how to allocate their available resources among them, thus in general allows them to feel a bigger control on what they are doing (Adil, & Baig, 2018). This is confirmed by interviewees who claim that autonomy allows them to manage their time, to freely express their creativity and their passions, but also to slow down or take breaks from work in times of difficulty and postpone them to a better time for them in order to not compromise the quality of their work. Nevertheless, if on the one hand it is true that autonomy is a resource for SMI, on the other hand it could also turn into a demand. Indeed, when SMIs have too much autonomy, it can become challenging because it involves making many decisions on their own and knowing how to manage the work properly without anyone providing them with guidelines. This can require a lot of effort and could also be a stressor. As said before, autonomy can be a resource to manage the high workload of SMIs, but most of the time it is exactly the autonomy they have that pushes them to overload themselves with work. Therefore, they have the autonomy to take time off of work but also to put in more work. This is perfectly described by one of the interviewees who stated that he/she generally takes a day off social media once a week. Reflecting on this sentence we can say that on the one hand he/she has the freedom to give him/herself a day off but on the other hand this indicates that he/she has the freedom to work six days a week that could still be stressful. Another reason why autonomy constitutes a challenge is that it is not given to SMIs but it needs to be gained. Indeed, it requires time to be acquired as at the beginning the SMIs' negotiating power is low, thus they have to follow brands' rules if they want to collaborate with them. Over time their contractual power increases and consequently also their autonomy and freedom to choose who to collaborate with. This entails a new implication that is it could be more appropriate to consider autonomy as a personal resource rather than a job resource. Unlike a job resource that is provided to the worker, autonomy in this case must be earned from SMIs, hence it can be considered as a skill that they need to develop.

A second example to show that a job resource could also be a job demand is the community. The community is recognized from the literature as job resources because it is a type of social support. Indeed, the community provides SMIs with feedback that helps them to understand if what they do is useful and valuable, and if they are going in the right direction, motivates them, gives them affection, esteem and support and sometimes also defends them

from haters' attacks. Moreover, it is thanks to their followers that SMIs acquire autonomy and become attractive to brands. However, creating a community is also a challenge because it requires time, effort and energy as they have to answer a lot of messages, to be active and constantly interact with followers in order to gain their trust and attention. Therefore, what can be concluded is that a job demand and a job resource are not necessarily two different things but that often they are two sides of the same coin.

Just as a job resource could be a job demand, even a job challenge could also be a job hindrance. Two meaningful examples are workload and time pressure. Those two job demands are recognized by existing literature as job challenges, but what emerges from findings is that they can also be, in some cases, job hindrances. Starting from workload, it can be viewed as a job challenge because it motivates SMIs to choose only sponsorships in line with their values and to better organize time and work being able to satisfy companies and followers' wishes, but also to respect their values and their health by not overloading themselves with work. However, when the workload becomes excessive, SMIs start to feel overwhelmed and it turns into a job hindrance. Indeed, being independent contractors, they need to manage a lot of different tasks, from the creation of content and the interaction with the community to the bureaucratic duties and this can become an obstacle for them.

Considering deadlines, what emerges from interviews is that there are two types of deadlines SMIs need to meet. The first are deadlines SMIs impose themselves in order to adhere to their own schedule. These are more flexible hence SMIs feel comfortable to shift them in case of need. The second are the ones imposed by the brand they collaborate with and that, being imposed by external subjects, tend to be more respected. Those two types of deadlines can be considered job demands when they push SMIs to better organize their time, to avoid procrastination, and to keep a sense of responsibility. Nevertheless, they turn into job hindrances when, especially those imposed by brands, are excessively tight, thus neglecting the time needed for creative processes or to make the content suitable and credible.

### **Implications for practice**

This research has implications not only on a theoretical level but also on a practical one. The researcher with this study wanted to bring to light the job demands SMIs could experience and the job resources they could use to deal with them. One of the aims was to create awareness about obstacles and opportunities those who work on social media platforms can face, particularly create awareness for SMIs and the aspiring ones. Having highlighted all the job demands they could face might be useful for them to be able to recognize which are the factors that lead to a reduction of health and energy, and that in the long period could cause them stress and the onset of a burnout condition (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007). Particularly, what they need to pay more attention to is to be authentic. As we saw, authenticity means being sincere, spontaneous and consistent with their own ethics and it is fundamental to gain people's trust, but also to satisfy their inner needs. Gaining people's trust results in having constant support from the community, but also increasing their audience in order to gain more and more contractual



power and hence autonomy. Another thing they need to be aware of is that on social media they are very exposed to people's judgments and they can easily experience interpersonal conflicts both with companies and haters. Workload is usually another important stressor because if it is not sustainable and not well managed can cause in the long period the onset of a burnout condition. Finally, they should take into account the precarity of the job given by the uncertainty of the future development of social media platforms, such as changes in users' wishes on the same platform and the rise of new platforms with new dynamics.

This research created awareness also about job resources and personal resources SMIs need in order to achieve their goals, reduce job demands and stimulate personal growth, learning, and development (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007). Among the main job resources there are social support that as we saw in the findings section can be practical and emotional and can be derived from different actors, e.g. family, followers, professionals; the community that can offer feedback and allows SMIs to grow and acquire autonomy; having a plan b, that is carry out other projects not strictly related to the work on social media platforms and form themselves in a transversal way, is also very important to face job insecurity and ensure themselves other revenues; taking some detox times to reduce stress and makes the job more sustainable.

Personal resources also play an important role in successfully navigating social media platforms. Particularly, as already emphasized, being authentic is crucial for SMIs as well as being creative and innovative in order to always find new ways to entertain the audience and differentiate themselves from other SMIs. These characteristics are innate but recognizing the importance they have, SMIs know they should pay great attention to them and develop them as much as possible. What is also important for SMIs is to learn to manage interpersonal conflicts with dialogue or being detached when it is not possible to solve the situation just talking with the other person. These abilities can be improved with experience, especially being detached at the beginning is not easy at all because SMIs tend to respond to offenses or to want to understand the reason why a person sent a given message, but often the best thing they can do is to ignore those offensive messages without giving them too much importance.

### **Limitations and directions for future research**

As with any study, this research has its limitations. The first limitation arises with data collection because, due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, it was not possible to conduct face to face interviews thus the researcher made use of online tools. However, during online interviews there is a weaker connection and interaction between the researcher and interviewees who tend to be less concentrated and less willing to spend their time with respect to in-person interviews.

Second, all interviewees come from Italy, thus the results may not be generalizable to SMIs from other countries. Conducting interviews in other countries, especially non European ones, can be interesting to see if diverse job demands and job resources emerge, due for instance to different cultures and political or social pressures.

Third, social media platforms taken into consideration in this study are Instagram and Youtube. It is likely that the same results are not valid for other social media platforms that may

have different politics and dynamics. For instance, on TikTok the job demands content creators face can be completely different from those they face on Instagram as well as the personal resources needed may take on a different importance, e.g. different technical skills, less need of being authentic or more creativity. Therefore, it could be useful to further explore job demands and job resources in other social media platforms.

Finally, the results of this research may not be generalizable to other SMIs with a different audience's size. In this study there are no SMIs with more than 220,000 followers, hence it can be that the ones with 500,000 followers or more face different job demands or job resources. For instance, these SMIs might not face the job demand of autonomy because having a lot of followers means also having a huge contractual power, or could be less worried about the future of their job because they are more recognized and established. However, they could face new job demands, named for instance social pressures, because having a great following and a great influence they might feel a greater responsibility towards society.

In conclusion, it could be interesting for future research to fill these gaps to have a more complete categorization of all the job demands and job resources SMIs experience on different social media platforms.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Given the advent of social media platforms and SMIs that has completely changed the way people interact and communicate, make purchasing choices and share information, this research wanted to deepen the study of this new category of professionals. The aim was to examine how the JD-R model works in a non-traditional work context, to provide a clear categorization of job demands and job resources SMIs experience on social media platforms and how they can use the latter to cope with job demands with the aim of reducing strain and increasing motivation. Despite its limitations, the researcher believes that this study has provided important insights both about SMIs and the JD-R model. First of all, this research was able to shed light on new job demands and job resources SMIs face on social media platforms. These can be considered new respects to those identified in existing literature about SMIs, but also respect to those usually indicated in existing studies about the JD-R model. Actually, fourteen job demands, i.e. nine job hindrances and five job challenges, and sixteen job resources, i.e. six job resources and ten personal resources, were identified of which at least fifteen not reported in previous studies. The study had also successfully fulfilled the aim of indicating which job resources are more suitable to cope with each job demand allowing SMIs to understand how to reduce strain, avoid burnout conditions and increase motivation and energy. Moreover, having identified these novel job demands and job resources that characterize SMIs' job it was possible to further conceptualize SMIs as content creators, service providers, independent and non-traditional workers with high levels of autonomy and job insecurity, and without coworkers or supervisors. This study also provided great insights into the literature about the JD-R model because it showed that a job resource could also be a job demand, and vice versa, as well as a job challenge could also be a job hindrance. Above all it challenged the existing knowledge about SMIs' autonomy,

recognizing it not as a resource, as indicated by theory, but as a job challenge and a personal resource. In conclusion, with this exploratory study the researcher tried to create awareness about the job demands SMIs should pay more attention to and the job resources they should have in order to reduce strain and increase motivation and energy.

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## APPENDIX A

Macro categories	Categories	Subcategories	Definition	Example
Job Demands	Job hindrances	Little job recognition	SIMs are not seen as professionals and their work is discredited as it is not considered "a real job" by some people.	<i>"For some people this job is not yet considered such, unfortunately they still think it's just "wasting time on social media." " [fralow]</i>
		Emotional demand	The amount of emotional effort SIMs' job requires.	<i>"The stress is due to the uncertainty of income, but being an entrepreneur this is part of the game.[...]Other sources of stress are the continuous negative comments and judgements not required and not being able to detach from work." [SMI3]</i>
		Job insecurity	General concern about the future existence of their job.	<i>"Social media evolves so fast, we can't know where we'll be in ten years and how my work will evolve." [naki.earth]</i>
		Authenticity	Trade off between doing collaborations with brands and being perceived as authentic by followers.	<i>"The biggest obstacle for me is to try to be authentic. Not having a huge negotiating power, because of my limited numbers, to work I often have to compromise by making contracts with brands that do not always fully embody my values.." [giulio_scarano85]</i>
		Interpersonal conflicts	Negative interpersonal encounters characterized by hostility or aggression.	<i>"[...] with companies when they do not give creative freedom and they impose a certain type of visual language that does not correspond to my own style. In addition to some troll cases [...]" [thebluebirdkitchen]</i>
		Workload	Quantity of work that hinders SIMs.	<i>"I am constantly overwhelmed by my work, it is certainly a work that the more it progresses the more it becomes unsustainable, in terms of rhythms and requests." [SMI2]</i>

	Time pressure	When fast work or insufficient time to finish it is a source of stress.	<i>Being a job where creativity plays an important role, in periods of fatigue it is difficult to carry out several projects and things at the same time trying to respect the deadlines.” [thebluebirdkitchen]</i>
	Loneliness	It is a solitary job without confrontation that makes it difficult for a SMI to understand if he/she is doing well.	<i>“Unfortunately this is a very solitary job where it is not always easy to understand if you are doing “well” and what path to take.” [thebluebirdkitchen]</i>
	Algorithm	Platforms’ algorithm constantly changes and threatens to make SMIs’ content invisible.	<i>“The obstacles depend on the platforms. The content is no longer displayed by all your audience. They don't even choose whether to see them or not. The platform decides if your video needs to be seen and who needs to see it.” [SMI3]</i>
Job challenges	Create value	Creating value for their audience is what motivates SMIs to share content on social media platforms.	<i>“I like the contact with people and seeing their results. It’s nice to know that you’ve positively influenced someone’s life.” [grace_theamazing]</i>
	Job autonomy	Acquiring autonomy takes time. It is not easy for SMIs to decide everything on their own but it is also motivating.	<i>“The freedom with which I can express my creativity and the fact that I am in charge of myself.” [naki.earth]</i>
	Time pressure	When fast work or insufficient time to finish it is a source of motivation.	<i>“I have a schedule that I get from the clients I work with. Personally I find them motivating, because they give me structure and help me not to procrastinate.” [SMI1]</i>
	Workload	Quantity of work that motivates SMIs.	<i>“For me it is sustainable because I decide which collaborations to accept and which not, how to distribute them, and how much content to create.” [naki.earth]</i>



	Community	Creating a community requires time and experience but it also gives energy to SMIs.	<i>“Surely the community’s affection is what I find most satisfying, knowing that there are people who consider you a trusted friend.” [fralow]</i>
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Table 3: SMIs’ job demands overview

Job resources	Social support	Instrumental and emotional support coming from different actors.	<i>“My sister helps me in taking pictures.” [SM11]</i>
	Plan B	Having other projects not strictly related to social media.	<i>“At the moment I love what I do very much, but I’m still developing other projects to carry on.” [naki.earth]</i>
	Job autonomy	Freedom to express their own creativity and passions and to slow down from work when necessary.	<i>“When I live challenging periods I find it more difficult to create content and I’m lucky to be able to take breaks or slow down a bit.” [naki.earth]</i>
	Feedback	Constructive feedback about the quality of the work done.	<i>“Yes, from the community. If you do something of value you can also understand it by the number of reactions you receive to posts or stories.” [irisskrami]</i>
	Community	The community motivates SMIs and sometimes defends them from haters’ attacks.	<i>“Often it is my community that protects me and responds to attacks.” [fralow]</i>
	Detox	Taking some detox times from social media helps SMIs to deal with many job demands.	<i>“Other sources of stress are the continuous comments and unsolicited judgements, and not being able to get off work. [...] For that it is necessary to take a holiday.” [SM13]</i>

Job  
resources

Personal  
resources

Passion	Be passionate about sharing content on social media and about what they talk about.	<i>"I think the key thing is to have passion and love for what you choose to share." [naki.earth]</i>
Authenticity	Being sincere, spontaneous and consistent with their own ethics.	<i>"I try to be consistent with my ideas and ethics." [SM13]</i>
Technical skills	Being able to shoot videos, to use editing programs and having marketing and communication skills.	<i>"All the marketing skills you need can be acquired over time or by doing courses." [SM11]</i>
Dialogue	Using dialogue to solve conflicts with followers and companies.	<i>"In these cases I opened a dialogue, which in my opinion is very important." [naki.earth]</i>
Be detached	Ability to be cold and detached when receiving negative comments and judgements.	<i>"Sometimes I lose control, sometimes I ignore. There are no other solutions. You have to be strong and put up an armor, even if some comments will always hurt you." [jessicaamendola]</i>
Creativity	Ability to find new ways to interact with the community, to make advertisements, and to create new formats.	<i>"An element of creativity is always there." [irsisskrami]</i>
Discipline	Organization, constancy and discipline to well manage the time between the different tasks.	<i>"Patience and constancy. Unfortunately, many projects die in the bud, simply because people are not patient enough and consistent enough in what they do." [grace_theamazing]</i>
Innovation	Being innovative and versatile to better face the continuous changes that occur on social media.	<i>"[... ] renewal is necessary." [fralow]</i>

Self-efficacy	Individuals' belief in their capabilities to manage workplace experiences and to accomplish tasks successfully.	<i>“You have to be patient, especially at the beginning and have a good awareness and self-confidence. This last aspect I think is the one in which I sin most. I know that if I were less insecure and critical of myself, I could definitely grow faster and have a louder voice, which is what social media needs.” [thebluebirdkitchen]</i>
Others	Self-irony, curiosity, physical appearance, aesthetic sense, writing skills, entrepreneurial skills, culture 360°.	<i>“I have very few haters, but I think self-irony is a very effective shield.” [giulio_scarano85]</i>

Table 4: SMIs' job resources overview