Ella Mills and Deliciously Ella on Instagram:

The evolution of a successful entrepreneur and wellness brand.

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To Nicholas and Alcinous

"Pay attention. It's all about paying attention. Attention is vitality. It connects you with others. It makes you eager. Stay eager"

Susan Sontag (1933-2004)
Commencement Speech at Vassar University (Sontag, 2003)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates from a visual social media studies perspective the increasingly popular practices of a highly active online actor, the influential plant-based food advocate and successful entrepreneur Ella Mills. Its aim is to document and analyse some ways in which popular Instagram visual narratives have contributed to the formation of plant-based eating practices, wellness discourses and lifestyle choices in the UK. The analysis proceeds in two steps.

First, I use a combination of mixed methods to analyse 4,000 Instagram images from the Deliciously Ella account and their relevant captions from 17 January 2013 to 24 October 2018. The deliberate choice of a lengthy time frame involves a novel visual social media approach called "Comparative Instachronics", which offers a new way of dealing with a single Instagram account.

Second, I provide a deeper analysis of my visual sample by using several conceptual approaches such as a) authenticity, b) class, inequality and distinction, c) enrichment. Interpretation of the sample using these concepts allowed me to make an important discovery early enough in the research process: plant-based food, though integral to the nature of the Deliciously Ella business, is not the leading visual cue. On the contrary, food's significance is mediated by other important factors, such as Mills' personal health story and details of her family and personal life and those of people close to her. The central finding of this thesis is that the elements surrounding the visual imagery of plant-based food function as essential facilitators of the Deliciously Ella project and the brand's evolution across time.

By going beyond the visual material to analyse social media images as distinct items through lengthy periods of time, the thesis makes an original methodological contribution to visual social media studies.

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DECLARATION

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter is mainly focused on providing context for the reader to facilitate the analysis that follows in later chapters. It also places the thesis within existing research. After highlighting some of the trends of food consumption in the UK and the rise of plant-based eating, I provide a bird's-eye-view of Ella Mills's life and works since she launched her blog, Deliciously Ella, and explain why she matters in comparison to other food bloggers. I also sketch the context that allows one to make sense of her narrative. The chapter then moves on to set out in a clear way this thesis's aims, research questions, glossary of terms, contributions to knowledge and structure.

1.1   Background to this research

This PhD work is funded by the White Rose ESRC Network on 'Big Data and Food Safety', a research collaboration network with the UK's Food Standards Agency (hereafter, FSA). During my PhD scholarship application and while undertaking research within the wide area of food cultures, food consumption and social media – with a view to narrowing down the focus of a proposed project –, I came across a recent, and relatively unexplored, social media trend: the increasingly popular practices of a set of highly active online actors self-defined as 'wellness' bloggers and influencers. These actors, many of whom have popular blogs, social media profiles and food-related businesses, are widely called by the mainstream media, and some of them even refer this way to themselves, as 'wellness gurus', 'wellness warriors', 'plant ambassadors' or 'health coaches'. Their online activities focus on 'healthy' food preparation and consumption. This usually involves things such as the consumption of whole foods, organic and healthy food shopping, talk about the 'right' food ingredients and the proposal of 'healthy' recipes that, according to these social actors, nourish one's body and soul. Crucially for a project focused on social media images, they generate a wealth of pictures of their shopping, cooking preparations and outcomes and post them online to communicate with their audiences.

Wellness bloggers don't merely offer food recipes. They also produce discourses around themes often described as healthy lifestyle, cultivation of healthy vanity, nourishing beauty, and glowing everyday life. Moreover, some of them argue that the healthy foods and recipes they propose helped them overcome various medical conditions and changed their lives. Some of these claims are normative. They concern the kinds of foods that one ought to consume. They also aim at establishing that the actors making the claims are wellness authorities with a right to provide advice to others. In many cases, advice amounts to a practice of exhaustive self-surveillance regarding food preparation and consumption. It thus involves an overall lifestyle of self-care often dubbed a life of 'individual beauty inside and out', 'a healthy and happy world' or a 'detox life'. Hard scientific credentials rarely, if ever, back the authority claimed. Indeed, the actors' relation to science generally appears tentative. Few of them have university nutritional qualifications. Some prefer to take various online courses that, in their eyes, entitle them to act as 'wellness coaches' and health advocates.

The present thesis investigates these phenomena by analysing a specific example: that of Ella Mills, née Woodward, originator of the brand name 'Deliciously Ella'. Hereafter, a distinction will be made between Ella Mills, i.e. the person and social actor that launched the Deliciously Ella blog, created the Deliciously Ella Instagram account and later on created the successful Deliciously Ella brand, and the Deliciously Ella brand itself. To mark the distinction, I use the term 'Mills' to refer to the individual and 'Deliciously Ella' to refer to the brand and/or the Instagram account. The distinction is one that Mills makes herself in several places (Murray, 2019) and it should be understood critically and with a few caveats. First, Mills only gradually articulated it in a clear way. In the early days of her blog, and before the consolidation of the brand, one could arguably identify a kind of fusion between the person and the digital persona. Second, there are multiple interactions that take place between Mills and Deliciously Ella, since a significant aspect of the brand's success is to do precisely with Mills's biography and perceptions of authenticity, as analysed in detail later in the thesis. Thus, the distinction only becomes clearer as the Deliciously Ella project

gradually evolves and becomes, in the end, thoroughly professionalised. Indeed, this distinction was officially and clearly announced by Mills in April 2022 when she launched a separate personal Instagram profile. The Deliciously Ella Instagram account today is run by Mills's marketing team. As she explained in an Instagram announcement: "[it] is run collectively by a team of 50 people" (E. Mills, 2022g).

Mills appears particularly interesting for my research project for several reasons. First, she attracts a very large and wide audience, especially on Instagram, being one of the most followed wellness influencers in the UK. Second, she creates significant amounts of online content, amenable to different forms of analysis (visual, discursive, and text-based). Third, she largely operates outside official institutional and media channels as her career has been mainly propelled through her social media popularity.Fourth, Mills has created a thriving business, largely due to her successful blog and Instagram presence.

The main aim of this thesis is thus to investigate how the influential UK wellness blogger and entrepreneur Ella Mills has shaped and developed her narrative about plant-based food within the parameters of a visual social media environment. Most importantly, this involves capturing the dynamic of transformation from a simple 'blogger next door' to a multimillion-business owner. As I will discuss in more detail in the next section (1.2), tracking Mills's change through time as it was occurring led me to develop a novel methodological approach for Instagram that eventually became the centre of my analysis. Using Instagram images as the dominant data pool and utilising supporting material from Mills's publications and media interviews, the thesis explores notions of self-presentation, authenticity, distinction, and enrichment that emerge through her visual social media trajectory.

1.2 Placing the thesis within existing academic research

Social media are a relatively new topic of investigation for the social sciences, Web 2.0 having been launched only two decades ago. Still, interest in the topic has grown steadily and social media have become a compelling subject for top-quality research (Abidin & Brown, 2018; D. M. boyd & Ellison, 2007; Bruns & Burgess, 2011;

Burgess & Green, 2018; B. E. Duffy & Hund, 2015; B. E. Duffy & Schwartz, 2018; Kozinets, 2010, 2019; A. Marwick, 2014; A. E. Marwick & boyd, 2011; Miller & Sinanan, 2018; Sloan, Quan-Haase, Quan-Haase, et al., 2017; Snelson, 2016; Tufekci, 2008). Moreover, as visual imagery in various forms (images, videos, reels) has been developing as a dominant communication vehicle for social media users (Meeker, 2019) academic research has also been vigorous in this domain (Faulkner et al., 2017; Giannoulakis & Tsapatsoulis, 2016; Hand, 2018; Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Hochman & Manovich, 2013; Manovich, 2016; A. E. Marwick, 2015; Rathnayake & Ntalla, 2020; Zappavigna, 2016; Zappavigna & Ross, 2021). Being an integral part of everyday life, food's presence on social media and especially on Instagram was also included in detailed academic research (Coary & Poor, 2016; Feldman, 2021; Feldman et al., 2017; Guidry et al., 2015; Vassallo, Kelly, Zhang, Wang, Young, & Freeman, 2018; Walsh & Baker, 2020). Within this informationally rich environment, conducting research on Deliciously Ella posed a significant challenge. At the same time, focusing on Mills offered an opportunity to explore a visual social media trend that was not as rigorously represented, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 2.

The popularity of Mills and her Deliciously Ella brand, as well as her continuous changes through time, urged me to immerse myself into her world to better understand why this research could potentially form a topic of academic interest. I started reading her blog updates, followed her on Instagram, attended her talks, bought and read her books, listened to her podcasts, used both of her mobile apps, tried her food products and visited her delis in London several times. Additionally, I followed her advice at home and cooked her recipes. This immersion never ended. Although I have not adopted a plant based diet for myself, I still follow Mills quite closely on social media and read her books for my own research purposes. Moreover, because I had to pause my PhD research several times for personal reasons over the years, I had the unique opportunity to notice the ways in which the Deliciously Ella Instagram account morphed across time. Of course, across these transformations a certain kind of overarching unity was present. Mills's aim was and remains to promote plant based food and 'share delicious ways to feel better' (E. Mills, 2022a).

Finding ways of tracking all these changes throughout several years and over different offline and online platforms was a challenging research aim. To add to that, existing academic research does not approach food and wellness-related themes on Instagram longitudinally, but mostly in shorter chronological periods (Baker, 2022; Chetioui et al., 2022; DAgnillo, 2022; Drew et al., 2022; Gil-Quintana et al., 2021; Guidry et al., 2015; A. E. Marwick, 2015; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018; Vassallo, Kelly, Zhang, Wang, Young, Freeman, et al., 2018; Winzer et al., 2022). Hence, I decided to shift my attention towards Instagram as my dominant platform of interest, whilst using Mills's books and blog-later-website as supportive material to create a digital diary of Deliciously Ella. The diary reflected the period between January 2013 and October 2018. The result was the collection of 4,000 Instagram posts (images and text), as well as the study of seven books and a fully functional website. Once data collection ended, the next step consisted in finding ways of managing such a voluminous dataset. At that point, and as I was further immersing myself into the Deliciously Ella universe, her continuously evolving persona inspired me to start looking at her online and offline presence from a distance. This approach allowed me to come up with the idea of creating distinguishable data clusters across time. These clusters (which I call 'eras' and discuss in more detail in Chapter 3) reflected the actor's trajectory in chronological order. They helped me handle efficiently my large visual dataset. After careful consideration, I ended up with four eras. Each of them has distinct characteristics. Together, they correspond to Mills's progressive shifts across time. Approaching a single Instagram account through this novel lens helped me realise its academic significance. My research does not just analyse in detail a successful Instagram actor, but also introduces a methodological novelty consisting in observing and analysing visual social media data over a significantly longer period. The project thus became a study which revealed how the interrelated notions of authenticity, distinction and enrichment undergirded what became a global brand within the Instagram realm.

1.3 Contemporary food anxieties and the turn towards plant-based nutritional choices.

When I was starting this research in early 2016, the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Hereafter, DEFRA) and the Environment Secretary Liz Truss released findings from the National Food Survey (DEFRA, 2016), which had been running since 1940. Information about 150,000 households was included as part of DEFRA's commitment to open data. In this survey, initially launched by the wartime government, thousands of UK households report on their weekly food and drink purchases. The survey has charted major shifts in the nation's dietary habits over the last 70 years. Nowadays, consumers are keener on knowing where their food comes from, online shopping provides quick and easy access to quality food and the launch of the pop-up restaurant concept is helping them discover global cuisines and latest food trends (Gov.UK, 2016). The report highlighted five main factors influencing the kinds of foods the UK population consumes. These are: a) technological evolution; b) convenience with ready meals; c) shopping basket increased spending; d) a shift from the female consumer as mainly responsible for household food purchases and e) an increase in health consciousness. It is worth noting, in this last regard, that the consumption of white bread has dropped by 75% since 1974 and, as the 2016 report showed, it was replaced by brown and whole meal bread, the consumption of which has increased by 85% (Gov.UK, 2016).

Meanwhile, Ipsos Mori reported in May 2016 that there had been a significant increase in veganism, which amounted to over 350% over the last decade (The_Vegan_Society, 2016). According to the survey at least 542,000 people were following a vegan diet in the UK. Half of the vegetarians who were not vegan, i.e., around 521,000 people, said that they would like to change their diet by reducing the consumption of animal products. The trend was mostly driven by younger generations. 42% of all vegans were between ages 15 and 34, whereas those over 65 were only 14% (Marsh, 2016). Change was mainly led by social media active young people, eager to make more 'ethical' and 'compassionate' choices. Indeed, social media and the image sharing app Instagram had played a crucial role in the dissemination of veganism. According to the CEO of The Vegan Society, the fact that people can now

find a much greater variety of attractive vegan recipes than in the past, especially online and on social media, partly explains the trend. At the same time, consumers had become much more considerate about their health. Consumers are also influenced by many top vegan athletes who show that they can follow plant-based diets and still be competitive, fit and healthy (The_Vegan_Society, 2016). Accordingly, mentions of 'vegan' as a Google search term increased by 150% between 2011 and 2016 (Joyce, 2016).

Subsequent research by Ipsos Mori showed that trends around plant-based and vegan options have only been increasing. The UK is at the forefront of the global shift towards seeking alternatives to animal products (IpsosMori, 2019). Five out of ten Britons mentioned that they would eat plant-based alternatives to meat and the UK super markets and food businesses launched more vegan products in 2018 and 2019 than any other country (IpsosMori, 2019). National initiatives such as 'Veganuary' (a UK non-profit organization initiative created in 2014 to promote veganism and advocate vegan dietary choices for the month of January) and 'meat-free Monday' have gone mainstream. The Veganuary movement reached a record breaking milestone of more than 2 million global participants in 2022 (Wood, 2022). British international market research YouGov statistics concluded that in July 2022 2% of all UK adults were vegan, meaning that estimated vegans went from around 542,000 in 2016 to around 1,374,348 today (YouGov, 2022).

At the same time, the food landscape is marked by a combination of anxieties and deep inequalities. Major incidents and concerns such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate change crisis and the cost-of-living crisis with the concomitant food price inflation have significantly underscored the importance of both good quality food and people's unequal access to it. Latest reports from the FSA highlight some important areas of concern. First, access to nutritious and good quality food is a major priority, but also a concern, for the UK public. 76% of the people asked mentioned that they are very concerned about the cost of proper food choices. Second, though, increased food prices do not allow consumers to maintain health standards in their selections. 53% of consumers said that they cannot buy healthy food and 25% that the food they

can afford is heavily processed. Third, the pandemic restrictions prompted people to cook more at home. Still, people also indulged more often in takeaways, and sugary and processed snacks. Fourth, consumers with lower incomes reported that they eat fewer vegetables and fruit and more sugary soft drinks and snacks compared to the better off. The latter also feel more food secure (FSA, 2021).

UK Public's Interests, Needs and Concerns Around Food, a 2022 research project which surveyed more than 6,000 people and was conducted by market research company Bright Harbour for the FSA, concluded that food choices are mainly influenced by: a) cost; b) health anxieties; c) changing eating habits towards plant-based diets; d) environmental and ethical concerns (FSA, 2022d). Additionally, research from the Vegan Society in March 2022 showed that 23% of the consumers have been cutting down on animal products since the start of the pandemic (The_Vegan_Society, 2022b). Since June 2022 around a third of them are reducing or completely discarding consumption of animal products to address rising food costs and utility bills (The_Vegan_Society, 2022a).

It is becoming obvious that not only food matters ever more but, in fact, with UK food prices currently increasing at the fastest rate on record (Kollewe & Wearden, 2022), food has become one of consumers' most worrying quotidian concerns as well as a symptom of the unequal distribution of economic and cultural capital. It is thus only to be expected that many people will turn to online platforms that offer an abundance of information on plant-based food options, as well as advice on products, recipes, and new ways of shopping. In fact, social media constitute a key environment that facilitates an evolving society-wide conversation on plant-based food options (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2022) and enables food bloggers, influencers and other micro-celebrities to encourage people to transform their eating habits and practices (Twine, 2014).

1.4 Setting the scene: Deliciously Ella within the food blogger and influencer UK environment

As already stated in the first section, the thesis focuses on a particular example and offers a detailed analysis of a sample of images taken from the Deliciously Ella

Instagram account. This section provides context, placing Mills within the wider phenomenon of food blogging in the UK and offering information about her trajectory and its importance. By doing so, it also tentatively justifies choosing Mills as a research topic. The next two sections fill in some of the details, whilst also providing an overview of the latest evolution of one important theme in Mills's trajectory.

Food blogging has evolved considerably since the US-based pastry chef and cookbook author David Lebovitz launched the first food blog in 1999 (Rodney et al., 2017). In the UK, food blogging emerged in 2007. This was the year when food blogger and self-taught cook Julia Parsons founded the UK Food Bloggers Association (Parsons, 2009) and initiatives such as Food Bloggers Connect (J. Oliver, 2013) popped up. Across time, an ecosystem of food bloggers was created. It includes older players such as *Maison Cupcake*, *Eat Like a Girl* and *Tinned Tomatoes* but also newer health and wellness bloggers such as Joe Wicks, The Food Medic, Calgary Avansino, the Hemsley Sisters. Deliciously Ella forms an integral part of this newer generation.

Social media have been a major driver in the gradual emergence and rise of food blogging by offering a wide range of textual and visual tools that helped bloggers convey their messages more efficiently. The rising trend of Web 2.0, particularly via Instagram and You Tube, made possible a new kind of relation between online publics and food bloggers. Due to the powerful visual characteristics of these social media platforms, food bloggers, especially those focusing on wellness and clean eating, had the opportunity to produce and propose to a wide audience attractive and well-curated images and videos of super foods, plant-based recipes, and 'clean' products. These images and videos depicted a visual wellness world that promised the audience a longer and happier life. The rise of wellness bloggers in the UK (Freeman, 2015) is of particular interest for visual social media studies because, unlike celebrity cooks such as Nigella Lawson, Jamie Oliver, Gordon Ramsey or Nigel Slater, many, if not most, of its main representatives never had any presence in the traditional media. In most cases, their success depended on the bloggers' social media presence and strategies. It was these strategies that allowed them, if at all, to obtain elevated social media followership and recognition. Today, and to a large extent because of the success of

their social media strategies, several wellness bloggers have their own 'healthy food' business in addition to writing best-selling books, working closely with supermarket chains, and creating their own product lines. Apart from Mills, these include Livia Wollenberg, Calgary Avansino, Madeleine Shaw, Tess Ward, Jasmine and Melissa Hemsley and Natasha Corrett.

Mills thus partakes of the wider food-blogging phenomenon whilst also standing clearly out in several respects. First, she appears to be the most successful amongst the food bloggers in terms of followship and recognition by the public. According to the narrative that she herself has constructed and publicly disseminated, Mills was in 2011 a university student diagnosed with a rare medical condition, postural tachycardia syndrome (NHS, 2022a). This is an abnormal response by the autonomous nervous system to standing up. In her words, the illness kept her mostly at home 'feeling miserable and depressed' (L. Slater, 2015). After numerous visits at doctors and recourse to conventional medication, Mills decided to turn to natural remedies and alternative therapies for help: *"I could no longer rely on my doctors and I had to find a way to get my life back"* (Woodward, 2015: 8).

To heal herself, Mills stopped eating dairy, meat, sugar, gluten, and any refined or processed food. She embraced 'natural, plant-based foods' (Kooienga, 2015) and launched a blog called 'Deliciously Ella'. In it, she tracked her progress, narrated her reactions to the new lifestyle and shared her recipes with other people. Mills's decision to share online how she tackled her health condition by adopting a plant-based lifestyle marked the birth of the Deliciously Ella persona. After six months Mills's blog reached 100,000 hits. In another nine months, that number had further jumped to 900,000 (Grice, 2016). In 2014, and while enjoying wide social media popularity (200,000 Instagram followers in September 2014), Mills launched a recipe mobile application, which then costed £2.99. The application was a stunning success. It reached number five of the iTunes store for all categories of applications combined and was the number one application regarding the food and drinks category for the UK and the US (London, 2014). Riding the health and wellness trend of the time enhanced by the promotional tools and opportunities that Web 2.0 was offering, Mills soon became a social media micro-celebrity and a publishing super star. Her first book, 'Deliciously Ella', was

published in January 2015. According to the UK media it was the fastest selling debut cookbook ever, achieving number one position in the selling charts for six weeks (Lewis, 2015). During the early years of her success, Mills's blog received 6M hits per month (Lewis, 2015), her personal Instagram account reached 500,000 followers (Woodward, 2015b) and her first mobile app, which costed £3.99, exceeded 60,000 downloads in 2015 (L. Slater, 2015). To add to that, Mills and her later husband Matthew Mills opened three deli cafes in London (Seymour Place, Herne Hill and Weighhouse Street). She also launched 'Deliciously Ella Love Yourself Plan', a £35 digital guide with information, tips, and advice on eating, exercising, managing stress, and getting healthy. Additionally, Mills developed recipes with supermarket chains like Waitrose and Marks and Spencer, she became one of the Sunday Telegraph's food columnists and her recipes often appeared on the Sunday Times. Last, but not least, she organised numerous open public events, ranging from cooking classes, yoga and brunches to 'wellness parties' and 'wellbeing interventions' (Woodward, 2016b), with tickets costing between £35-£40 per person.

A decade later, Mills is a well-established cook, food writer and businesswoman. Her activities include:

a) the publication of seven cookbooks, six of them bestselling (E. Mills, 2022a);

b) a blog that is now a fully functional commercial website with an embedded e-shop;

c) ownership, together with her husband, of the restaurant 'Plants by DE' in Mayfair, London, after shutting down two delis in 2018 (Starkey, 2018);

d) a mobile app 'Feel Better', which costs £27 for an annual subscription and has 9.5K downloads per month (Crunchbase, 2022);

e) the Deliciously Ella company, which supplies seven different lines of food products across 7,000 stores in the UK (E. Mills, 2022a);

f) an Instagram account, which was originally Mills's personal account before becoming a business one, with 2.1M followers (E. Mills, 2022g);

g) a series of podcasts that have been examining the fads and the complications of the wellness industry, the growth of which she has clearly contributed to (Fox-Leonard, 2022);

h) the launch, announced on 14 October 2022 through a lengthy Instagram post, of a new sister brand called *Plants* by Deliciously Ella, exclusively stocked in Waitrose supermarkets. *Plants* kicked off with a range of three ready-made soups and two coconut yoghurts (priced at £3 and £3.5 per 500gr and 300gr pot respectively). The company announced that they have another 100 products of ready-made plant-based food in their portfolio, ready to launch in due course (E. Mills, 2022h).

The success of Mills's endeavour is an indicator of the popularity of the kinds of discourses that she articulates and could amply justify using her as an example to explain and analyse social-media-based explorations of plant-based lifestyles in the UK. Apart from that, however, the very evolution of an amateurish plant-based food blog created by a student, Mills, into an internationally recognised plant-based brand, Deliciously Ella, through heavy use of visual social media (Instagram) is a fascinating phenomenon and could warranty detailed study. This study is the business of the present thesis. In anticipation of the discussion and the results of the next chapters, the following two sections briefly provide more context regarding Mills, whilst also bringing her latest book (E. Mills, 2022e) into focus and using it to provide a glimpse into her discursive trajectory.

1.5 Deliciously Ella's publications

An important initial point of entry into Mills's plant-based world is through her best-selling publications, mentioned in the previous section. Since the early days of her blogging and mobile app success, when she *"was approached to write a cookbook"* (E. Mills, 2022a), Mills has been publishing her books at Yellow Kite Books, founded in 2014. The latter is an imprint of Hodder and Stoughton, one of the UK's leading publishers within the Hachette UK portfolio. All her publications adopt a similar aesthetic style. They largely focus on the evocative power of a range of beautifully curated photographed images of food. Regarding their textual content, the books broadly follow the line that Mills adopts in her blog. Accordingly, Mills's books articulate a discourse dedicated to natural and organic foods, positive feelings, and optimistic thoughts. These same themes were also present on Mills's social media channels. 'Goodness' and 'wellness' were thus terms that Mills repeated faithfully in her offline

and online activities. The aesthetic qualities of visual communication have been of particular importance. Mills has uninterruptedly produced visual content that appeared to undergo meticulous curation and aesthetic enhancement before being released online, even during her early amateurish days.

As I will discuss in much more detail in later chapters, Mills's personal life, her husband, her friends, her colleagues, her dog Austin and, later, her two daughters, have always been a part of her visual storytelling and brand building. The visual narrative projected was this: behold a young, beautiful, happy and healthy-looking (after her dietary change) white woman, with sparkling eyes, glowing skin and long shiny curls, who has successful relationships with people, spouse, friends and colleagues and has accumulated important achievements after endorsing wellness as a central component of her life. This visual narrative has frequently featured in the UK mainstream media through interviews and special celebrity-like photo shootings. However, Mills has also confessed in the past that, although she loves social media, she feels that there is continuous pressure to be *"sparkly and shiny all the time"* (Grice, 2016).

Image No 1.1: Mills for Observer Food Monthly in 2015

Source: (Fox, 2015)

In August 2022 Mills published her seventh book called *How to go plant-based. A definitive guide for you and your family*. At that time, I was writing up this thesis. Even though I had already completed my data collection and analysis, I decided to buy and read the book. It initially follows a familiar pattern, that will be explored in detail in the chapters that follow. The pattern consists in offering variations of plant-based recipes and advice on healthy eating and vegan dietary planning. However, there were also some significant and telling differences between this new book and her first best-selling book published in January 2015. The most important for the present research project concern Mills's approach to wellness and they are worth mentioning here separately. In the 2015 book Mills's personal health story, briefly introduced in the previous section, was a dominant element of her narrative. Moreover, Mills was consistently using the term 'clean eating', whilst being somewhat sceptical of the word 'vegan'. In her own words: *"I am not a huge fan of the word vegan anyway, as you can also be a very unhealthy vegan"* (Woodward, 2015a: 10). At the same time, in that first cookbook Mills expressly admitted to having relied on Google and some best-selling books from inspirational people as research resources, with the aim of engaging in a dramatic change of diet and tackling her health condition: *"It became clear that it was*

my responsibility to change my situation (…) So, I spent the next week researching holistic, natural approaches to healing, which is what led me to change my diet. After a lot of Googling I came across some incredibly inspirational people (…) So, overnight I started a wholefoods, plant-based diet and gave up all meat, dairy, sugar, gluten, anything processed and all chemicals and additives". (Woodward, 2015a: 8)

On the other hand, in her latest 2022 book Mills implied that the research process that led her to adopt a different lifestyle had been more academically rigorous than the one described in the 2015 book. In her words: *"I was going to give up or I was going to dig deeper than I thought I had the ability to do and find a solution. I chose the latter and began a period of research into what else could help me. This took me into the science of nutrition, looking at the latest research on how our lifestyles and our food choices impact our health".* (Mills, 2022b: 8). Furthermore, Mills's personal health story, which is central in the first book, is here limited to a small paragraph with no mention whatsoever of the terms 'clean eating'. Most importantly, the advice provided in the book no longer reflects the personal point of view of a lay person, as it did in 2015. Instead, the advice that the newest book provides is a kind of collective professional advice originating from a team of experts, ranging from NHS GPs to scientists, psychologists, dieticians, and academics.

As will be shown in subsequent chapters, this evolution is both interesting and revealing. It displays how careful Mills has been since her Deliciously Ella brand started becoming more successful and popular, and, hence, more mainstream. The latest change of course can largely be attributed to her reaction to a major public backlash against clean-eating, which occurred in 2017. Thus, to fully grasp the extent to which Mills's latest book, which categorically repudiates the notion of clean eating, represents the confirmation of a deep about-turn vis-à-vis her initial narrative, it is important to add some further context. Since her early days of success, Mills was often described by the mainstream media as the 'queen of clean' (Alibhai-Brown, 2017; Millington, 2016; O'Neill, 2016; Rogalska, 2016). At the time, this regal description could be justified by reference to several facts. As I have already stated in previous sections, Mills was well on her way towards becoming the most popular wellness

blogger in the UK. Indeed, she had managed to publish a best-seller book that surpassed Nigella Lawson's *How To Eat* and Jamie Oliver's *The Naked Chef* (Grice, 2016), she had developed her own brick and mortar business as well as her own product line in collaboration with the biggest super market chains in the UK. Interestingly, although Mills *today* still recognises that mainstream media have been calling her 'queen of clean', she does not agree with this title, nor does she use it herself (Britt, 2018; Fox-Leonard, 2022). However, this attitude does not cohere with the way she had used the category of clean eating to launch, justify and solidify her business from the very beginning of her blogging career. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4 of the present thesis, the repudiation of the clean eating notion does not square with what Mills's Instagram hashtag strategy had been for a considerably long amount of time.

To add to the above, repudiation of clean eating also clearly differentiates Mills from her peer – and competitor for social media popularity at the time– Natasha Corrett. The latter appears to enjoy media endorsement as the 'queen of green' and claims that she has been the genuine pioneer of clean eating in the UK (Godwin, 2016). Corrett is the creator of the foodie website 'Honestly Healthy' and author of three best-selling cookbooks based on the Alkaline diet, one of the recent breakout diets. Corrett claims that the diet may improve memory and help with headaches, weight loss, muscle pain or even heart disease or insomnia (Agar-Wilson, 2014; Hilpern, 2013). The diet is centred around the idea that certain types of food can alter the acidity or alkalinity (and, hence, the pH balance) of the body. Proponents of the diet claim that foods like meat, wheat, processed products and refined sugar make the body produce acid. They also suggest that consuming foods that make the body more alkaline, such as fruits, vegetables, and nuts, can help protect against several conditions. In contrast to such discourses and claims, scientists researching the diet have not yet reached a consensus on its merits. Existing scientific literature suggests that although the alkaline diet can be potentially beneficial with regard to certain types of diseases (Dawson-Hughes et al., 2008; Passey, 2017), it is not so with regard to others (T R Fenton & Fenton, 2016; Schwalfenberg, 2012). Moreover, as far as cancer treatment is concerned, there is no systematic study of the diet's impact (Fenton & Huang, 2016).

1.6 Aim, research questions and objectives

In this section, I set out my aim, research questions and objectives. In the next two sections, I discuss the contributions that the thesis makes and the structure of the thesis.

The overarching aim of this research is to describe, track, analyse and explain the Instagram trajectory of Deliciously Ella, one of the most followed Instagram accounts in the UK which promotes plant-based food consumption and wellness practices.

To achieve this aim, the following research questions were asked:

RQ1. What are the key features of the Deliciously Ella account on Instagram?

RQ2. How might we understand the Deliciously Ella Instagram trajectory as part of wider debates about distinction, authenticity, and creation of economic value?

RQ3. What can the study of the Deliciously Ella Instagram account contribute to the explanation and understanding of the wider social phenomena of healthy eating and wellness lifestyle practices, mediated by, and presented on, a visual social media platform?

To achieve the research goal of analysing the social media content generated by Mills and considering the research questions posed above, the thesis shall pursue the following more specific research objectives:

- 1- To observe, collect and analyse images from the Deliciously Ella Instagram account, with supporting data from Mills's blog/website and books.

- 2- To develop a framework that can successfully address the methodological challenges of dealing with large longitudinal data sets of Instagram posts

- 3- To theorise this visual and textual material through the lens of authenticity, distinction/class and enrichment

Additionally, this thesis provides evidence, information and data-based insights that could be further used by the FSA (a key collaborator of my PhD network) to better understand how discussions and depictions of healthy eating occur on one of the UK's most popular Instagram platform, thus contributing to the implementation of some of FSA's strategic goals, as set out in FSA's Strategic Plan 2015-2020 (FSA, 2015) and 2022-2027 (FSA, 2022b).

1.7 Thesis contributions

This is the first original analysis of the Instagram account Deliciously Ella belonging to Ella Mills, one of the UK's most prominent advocates of plant-based eating. Mills has used Instagram as her dominant communication platform. By engaging in deep analysis of that actor's behaviour, the thesis provides insights into the more general phenomenon of social-media enhanced plant-based eating and wellness practices in the UK. Additionally, this thesis combines aspects of science social media analysis and insights from social theory to provide a profound understanding of the Instagram presence of a particularly influential social actor as well as a detailed explanation of her online and offline behaviour regarding plan-based eating.

The original methodological contribution of this thesis is twofold. First, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first thesis that analyses a single Instagram account within a significantly lengthy timeframe (five years). Through an original approach dubbed 'Comparative Instachronics' this single account is viewed as an online diary continuously evolving across time. The approach allows the construction of a narrative of continuity by systematic juxtaposition of offline and online events pertaining to the social actor under study, thus helping understand, describe and explain these events.

Second, visual analysis of Instagram images is performed through a version of compositional interpretation (Rose, 2012) a method initially developed as a 'high art' approach to understand and evaluate imagery. The method is critically reworked to

apply to social media images, thus conveying new and original insights regarding the structure and features of the latter.

Findings from this thesis are apt to inform policy decisions, especially for stakeholders such as the FSA, whose main mission is to protect the interests of consumers as far as food is concerned. As the thesis charts successful techniques of communication of plant-based eating preferences through visual social media, it can be leveraged by the FSA to promote the latter's goals by adopting to new technologies, platforms and narratives, effectively responding to growing public concerns about healthy food as well as sustainable and affordable sources.

1.8 Thesis structure

Chapter 2 (Literature Review) examines the relevant literature that has been used in this thesis as a valuable tool for interpreting data and results. *Chapter 3 (Methodology and Methods)* discusses in detail the data collection process, the methods followed throughout to analyse that data, as well as the Deliciously Ella 'eras' that I used as a platform to cluster my analysis into different time periods. *Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7* present my findings and relevant discussion concerning Eras 1,2,3 and 4, the definition of which will be explained in detail in Chapter 3. *Chapter 8 (Eras 1-4: a summary),* provides an overview of all four eras and a comprehensive approach to my findings. Finally, *Chapter 9* provides a more systematic discussion of the results and findings of this thesis. It also sketches out three important areas for future work.

1.9 Glossary

In this section I define some important recurring terms that mainly derive from the online world, especially from social media environments.

Avo-toast: A recipe that became particularly popular via Instagram and consists of a mashed or sliced avocado, seasoned with lemon, salt and pepper and/or chili flakes, on top of a piece of sourdough or any other type of artisan bread.

Clean Eating: The process of consuming foods that are as close as possible to their natural state, unrefined and unprocessed. The term has gained popularity since 2012, especially because it was used by various 'wellness influencers' on Instagram. Such influencers advocated consuming wholesome, healthy, and nutritious foods as part of a 'cleaner' diet. The term has received heavy scrutiny over the years, this way of eating being neither scientifically backed up nor healthy since, in some cases, it requires the exclusion of whole food groups such as meat, fish, dairy and/or eggs.

Courgetti: Pieces of courgettes cut in long, thin strings with either a knife or a special kitchen utensil called a 'spiraliser'. Courgetti is a portmanteau word combining 'courgettes' and 'spaghetti', since the courgetti pieces resemble spaghetti strings. This is a popular ingredient among social media users who focus on wellness and use it as a grain-free substitute to traditional spaghetti or noodles.

Influencer: A highly active and popular individual on social media who can influence, through their continuous social media content posting, their audience's opinions about several social issues, purchasing intentions or adoption of new habits. Influencers collaborate with several brands in paid advertising partnerships for the promotion of products.

Instagrammable: A term referring to anything or anyone visually interesting enough to become suitable for photographing and posting on the popular social media platform Instagram. Instagrammable also refers to visual imagery that has been curated in such ways so it can blend harmoniously within the Instagram visual environment.

Micro-celebrity: A term coined by Theresa Senft (Theresa Senft, 2008) referring to those online actors who have not been widely popular for any reason, but they have developed high levels of followership on various digital and social media platforms especially after Web 2.0. These actors, who do not necessarily have to be artists or part of a wider celebrity community, share on their channels' intimate information about their personal lives, might offer visual material of their everyday routines, in real time

or not. They also view their followers as 'fans' and they engage into activities that resemble celebrity culture to maintain the attention of their audience.

Power Bowl: A nutritious meal in a bowl that combines wholesome ingredients that can be physically and mentally satisfying according to wellness influencers. The meal usually consists of plenty of vegetables, grains, pulses, (plant-based) proteins and a sauce made of various ingredients such as tahini, garlic, lemon, and olive oil.

Smoothie Bowl: A fruit and vegetable blended drink (smoothie), albeit served in a bowl. It can also contain various nuts and seeds, dried fruit and/or muesli and granola toppings. Smoothie Bowls are usually thick enough to eat with a spoon.

Spiraliser: A vegetable (and fruit) slicer used for cutting courgettes and carrots, among other vegetables, in the shape of spaghetti or noodles.

Wellness: A term that has become extremely popular within social media, especially after the Web 2.0 development. It is used to cover a wide range of topics and themes aiming at the individual's generic wellbeing status, from good physical and mental health to consumption of nutritional foods and drinks, a mindful lifestyle and emotional prosperity.

1.10   Author's positionality

At this point, it is also worth stating, in reflective terms, my own position vis-a-vis the topics of my research, i.e., first, Mills and her Deliciously Ella brand on Instagram and beyond and, second, the general themes of wellness entrepreneurship and healthy eating (Cousin, 2010; Dean et al., 2018). A short introduction into my specific background can go some way towards explaining this position, and the ways in which I could relate to Mills on various levels. It bears noting, at the outset, that I am a middle-class mother of two, and I have been interacting with and using social media, including Instagram, since their inception. My class position and my trajectory thus place me squarely into Mills's core audience. To add to the above, I also have a significant experience of cooking, being the person mainly occupied with preparing food for my

family for a long time. This experience was crucial when it came to understanding and assessing various characteristics of Mills's recipes against Mills's discourses on these recipes, such as how long they take to prepare, how 'easy' or 'hard' they were to follow and what kinds of results, including visual results, they procure. Details of insights into these specific aspects and how I used them to glean into Mills's practice can be found in Chapter 3.2.1: Elements of Autoethnography.

Apart from the above, I am also a relatively mature student, having undertaken a PhD thesis in my 40s. Prior to this, I had worked for more than twenty years in the advertisement and marketing sector in various European countries. In doing so, I handled accounts relating to many categories of products, including a range of so-called luxury ones. More specifically, I have been responsible for devising and executing the advertising strategy and the media planning and buying for numerous luxury-brand accounts belonging to the garment, beauty, and styling accessories categories, as well as to the luxury cars category. This professional background, which could also be dubbed 'professional positionality' (Leppard, 2022) was significant for the present thesis. It allowed me to acquire, first, knowledge of what luxury products are and, second, a keen sense of which customer segments they are addressed to. In short, my professional positionality put me in a position to be able to successfully spot issues to do with consumer behaviour, class distinction by means of conspicuous consumption and inequality. In later chapters I shall show specifically, and by reference to examples from my dataset, how this put me enabled me to identify various luxury products that Mills depicts, whilst also picking up on distinctively class elements of who exactly can buy and properly use these products, as a matter of both wealth and cultural capital. I also set out more specifically in Chapter 3 (Methodology and Methods) some limitations of my approach, which are partly to do with having taken the deliberate decision to leverage my professional positionality and to accordingly de-emphasize other possible lenses, which are less compatible with it.

With these preliminaries in place, I can now move on to my position vis-a-vis Mills, the Deliciously Ella brand, wellness blogging and healthy eating. Overall, I have strived to take a more explanatory than critical approach, emphasising, for example, how Mills

makes certain claims and whether these claims cohere, rather than evaluating these claims' correctness itself. This decision stemmed partly from a lack of competence in 'healthy eating'. Like many other people that belong, as I do, to the educated middle classes, I have a positive predisposition towards healthy eating understood as consumption of whole, non-processed, foods, cooked and prepared at home. On the other hand, despite some scepticism towards plant-based eating, especially regarding the controversial issue of protein intake and its quality, I do not have the credentials to scrutinise claims about its long-term effects on human organisms. Likewise, despite being sceptical of Mills's claims to the effect that she self-healed by changing her diet, I do not take a position thereon simply because I am not competent enough. Phenomena such as the rise of wellness blogging or the social prestige acquired by self-certified amateurs when it comes to what to eat and how to eat it as well as its critique by other social actors are thus in the present thesis more described and explained than criticised.

However, I did not adopt this line of relative neutrality when it came to issues such as distinction and the unequal distribution of economic, cultural and social capital (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). In this case, my approach towards plant-based eating and wellness as a class phenomenon has been much more critical. As I had sufficient competence in understanding and unveiling some of the mechanisms whereby specific categories of people, first, may become popular advocating plant-based eating and, second, may become attracted to such a lifestyle for numerous reasons, ranging from the availability of economic resources to the possession of cultural capital, I have decided to highlight these mechanisms. I did so, as becomes clear in the thesis, in various ways. These include documenting the cost of a comprehensive adoption of Mills's lifestyle using autoethnography and placing Mills in contemporary UK's culinary class space by deploying Bourdieusian categories. The analysis allows me to draw conclusions about who that lifestyle is, realistically, available to, as well as to partly explain how and why Mills could transition so smoothly from a famous blogger to a best-selling author and then a successful entrepreneur.

1.11 Conclusion

In this introductory chapter I did several things. First, I set out the topic on which I conducted my research, i.e., the study of social media to understand and explain contemporary food cultures, as well as explained and justified the choice of a specific example as a means to approach it, consisting in focusing on the Deliciously Ella Instagram account for a defined period. Second, I sketched out the context in which my research unfolds in three ways: a) regarding current academic work on the topics of social media and food studies, b) regarding the rise of online wellness influencers and c) regarding Mills herself. Third, I presented my research aims and objectives. Fourth, I provided a brief glossary of frequently used terms that can assist the reader in approaching the social space on which my research zooms in. Fifth, I offered a preliminary discussion of the main contributions of my thesis. Sixth, I clearly presented my own position vis-à-vis the subject of my research. The next chapter provides the first steppingstone in my research endeavour through a detailed review of relevant literature.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The literature review that follows was conducted with an eye to identifying and critically analysing a range of conceptual tools and theories that could help me achieve my research aims and objectives. As stated in the previous chapter, these are to do with providing a deep analysis of a particular actor (Mills) as a privileged point of entry into the ways in which visual social media have shaped social phenomena of healthy and plant-based eating as well as wellness discourses and lifestyles in the UK. Accordingly, I was led to select and review pertinent literature in a twofold manner. The first part of the literature review concerns works on self, social media, and food, which are directly pertinent to my topic. Additionally, as this thesis provides insights that can enable the FSA to further enhance their agenda, it also involves a brief literature review on the subject of public administration's use of social media to promote healthy eating. The second part concerns a set of core theoretical tools and approaches that seemed increasingly relevant for explanatory purposes, but their relevance was only revealed gradually and after engagement with my empirical material. I provide a brief characterisation of both parts below.

2.1 Introduction

Conducting the first part of this literature review was straightforward. The pertinence of this literature for my topic was obvious and did not require deep analysis of my dataset. Mills was an extremely popular actor that articulated wellness discourses, advocated plant-based and clean eating, and heavily relied on visual social media, first and foremost Instagram, to grow her followship and launch her business. It was thus natural to begin my literature review by critically investigating these themes, discussing approaches that would help place Mills into a wider societal, cultural, and technological context. The first part of this chapter therefore reviews literature pertaining to: a) self-presentation, micro-celebrity and influencer culture on social media; b) contemporary food anxieties and the rise of clean eating, wellness and food-as-medicine as potential responses to these anxieties, as well as a review of the

literature on Mills and Deliciously Ella and c) visual social media, especially Instagram, and the photographic representation of food.

Secondly, my deeper immersion into Mills's online and offline world, coupled with collection and detailed analysis of data, led me to a different, more selective, layer of literature. A more fine-grained analysis of the data suggested that Mills stood out in several ways compared to similar social media wellness influencers. First, Mills's commitment to plant-based food seemed to be authentic, and this authenticity was something that her audiences both recognised and validated. Second, analysis of a large sample of the images, supported by data to do with Mills's offline activities, strongly suggested that Mills was belonging to the upper classes and that this was a crucial explanatory variable of both her culinary choices and her success. This dimension also raised important critical issues of inequality regarding access to plant-based diets and lifestyles. Third, Mills may have begun as an amateur food blogger, but later rapidly evolved into a full-blown entrepreneur, creating economic value in a distinctive way. Accordingly, the latter sections of this chapter review literature pertain to: (a) debates on authenticity as a cultural resource and social-media authenticity; (b) distinction and social class as factors that can help explain the social distribution of aesthetic tastes and lifestyles and (c) processes of creation of economic value in late capitalism. Throughout, I will highlight the relationship of different materials with my research questions.

2.2 PART A: Self, food and social media
2.2.1 Self-presentation, microcelebrity and Influencer culture

Self-presentation

As already stated, a significant part of the theoretical lens underpinning the present thesis concerns a systematic examination of the self-presentation practices and tactics – chiefly, but not exclusively, visual – adopted by the Deliciously Ella account and Mills herself. The framework that I use builds on Erving Goffman's seminal work *The presentation of self in everyday life* (Goffman, 1990). Goffman provided a ground-breaking sociological examination of the ways in which social actors in ordinary

interactions express their identity by using a range of communicative techniques, both verbal and non-verbal, to convey versions of their self-images to their intended audiences. Goffman deployed a 'dramaturgical approach' (Goffman, 1990: 154), which rests on an understanding of the actor as a persona (used here in the sense of 'mask') performing a role before an audience. The central concept used is the metaphor of a stage, on which various performances take place. Goffman's core idea is that such an analysis does not only explain highly ritualized practices, which lend themselves naturally to an unpacking in terms of the stage metaphor, but also to mundane and ordinary interpersonal interactions. Goffman contends that such interactions, rather than being expressions of the individual's inner self, are instead shaped by impression-management that anticipates the responses of audiences within a given environment. They thus essentially involve taking up corresponding roles on the part of individuals.

Crucially, Goffman distinguishes between the front stage, where actors interact with others attempting to effectively present idealized versions of their selves, and the backstage, where actors can adopt behaviours which knowingly contradict the impressions fostered by front-stage performances (Goffman, 1990). He insists that it is not essential that actors understand that successful performances are aimed at impression-management. They may sincerely believe that they express their authentic selves even when taking up a certain role. Moreover, performances eminently practical: they mobilize a variety of skills and competences, whose particular content depends on the distinctive structure of each stage, as well as on the nature of the interaction with audiences, which can be, for example, strategic or cooperative (Goffman, 1972).

Of particular importance to Goffman's dramaturgical approach is the concept of face. Goffman uses it to refer to the projected idealized self-image that an actor attempts to foster when found in contexts of interpersonal interaction. Face is further linked to two sets of concepts. First, to the visible aspects of the individual. Second, to an idealized version of the individual's self, as defined by the social role in which the individual is found in each interaction. Face thus fuses attributes akin to the individual with the social aspect of the role occupied. As interactions take place between individuals that

are embodied and take place within contexts of space and time, they are not purely verbal. They also involve sophisticated bodily activities, which Goffman designates using the generic term face-work.

Goffman's seminal work has prompted a wealth of empirical study of ordinary interactions and to several important debates about the further refinement of his proposed theoretical framework. To take a particularly pertinent example, Schlenker has proposed to distinguish between self-presentation *lato sensu* and 'impression management' in the stricter sense of the term (Schlenker, 1980). Self-presentation in the general sense is aimed at causing thoughts about aspects of oneself in the minds of a given audience. Schlenker insists that impression management should be defined in stricter terms as an effort strategically aimed at regulating information about oneself, to influence the way one's self-image is perceived by others. More generally, uses of the framework of self-presentation to study aspects of strategic interaction have been particularly influential when it comes to examining attributes that lead to successful outcomes in different contexts (R. Hogan & Briggs, 1986). Related cognitive skills are dubbed 'social acuity' (Hogan & Briggs, 1986: 6) and refer to the ability of individuals to project a certain image of their selves that prompts others to cooperate, trust or love them, depending on the kind of relationship and interaction involved. Relatedly, impression-management can be also conceptualized and empirically studied in terms of power or control over others (Baumeister, 1986).

In social media studies, Goffman's self-presentation framework has been extensively used to frame, conceptualize, and empirically examine various phenomena. To take some particularly interesting examples, Hewitt and Forte (Hewitt & Forte, 2006) have used Goffman to explore issues of identity management on Facebook. Likewise, danah boyd (boyd, 2007) has deployed a 'goffmanian' framework to analyse the activity of teenagers on social network sites and Bullingham and Vasconcelos (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013) have turned to Goffman to probe identity and presentation of self in blogging and Second Life contexts. Goffman's dramaturgical theory and self-presentation tactics have been the focus of Merunková and Šlerka (Merunková & Šlerka, 2019) as well as of Grimmer and Theobalt (Grimmer & Theobalt, 2021) in their investigations about how people form social media identities online.

Visual analysis studies on Instagram also show the effectiveness of Goffman's theoretical tools in various contexts (Baker & Walsh, 2018; Bardhan, 2022; Fiers, 2020; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; L. R. Smith & Sanderson, 2015).

Social media such as Instagram and Facebook have institutionalized and mediatized self-presentation and identity-construction techniques. To use Instagram and socialize online, for example, users must construct mediated self-presentational items that take the form of images, photographs, check-ins, and videos. Instagram allows users to decide, build, edit or hide aspects of themselves, deciding strategically about the items and information that they shall make available to others. An interesting ongoing debate about the best way to conceptualize such self-presentation practices on social media is to do with whether they should be understood as 'performances' of an actor in the strict sense or, rather, as (in part disembodied and de-territorialised) online 'exhibitions' arranged by a virtual 'curator' (B. Hogan, 2010). Irrespective of the most convincing answer to this question, the present thesis accepts the premise that Instagram can be effectively understood as a 'stage' and that users can be perceived as 'actors' in the wide sense, which would also comprise virtual 'curators' as Hogan understands that term, adopting a range of self-presentation techniques. The ambition of the thesis is thus to analyse in depth Deliciously Ella's Instagram profile in order to empirically track these techniques and propose a useful typology thereof, with a special emphasis on work such as Hogan's, that links Goffman's framework to the specific research issues that arise in the (visual) social media context.

Micro-celebrity and Influencers

Goffman's self-presentation framework links in a natural way with the self-branding techniques summarized under the concept of micro-celebrity. The term was coined by Theresa Senft in a study of the practices of young girls broadcasting their lives online and presenting themselves as a type of brand package to their fans (Theresa Senft, 2008). Following Senft's work, the concept of micro-celebrity has been further popularized and investigated by various scholars and social media professionals, along with cognate concepts, such as 'social media influencers' and 'social media celebrities'. As suggested by Alice Marwick and dana boyd (A. E. Marwick & boyd, 2011) the rise of user-generated content aided by technological developments has led

to the adoption of various micro-celebrity techniques and attitudes on the part of users that view their online presence as a way to create, sustain, manage and potentially expand their perceived fan base. In a similar vein, Alison Hearn (Hearn, 2008) has also explored practices consisting in treating oneself as a branded product. According to Hearn users brand themselves and deploy narratives that are heavily dependent on the communicative codes, visual or otherwise, of the mainstream culture industry and on the imperative of creation of value.

A major study in the dynamics of social media micro-celebrity practices is Alice Marwick's *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age* (A. E. Marwick, 2013a). Marwick explored the relationship between fame, popularity, and identity in social media with a focus on San Francisco's tech community. She defined micro-celebrity as 'an emerging online practice that involves creating a persona, sharing personal information about oneself with others, performing intimate connections to create the illusion of friendship or closeness, acknowledging an audience and viewing them as fans, and using strategic reveal of information to increase or maintain this audience' (Marwick, 2013: 177). Micro-celebrity is not just a status that refers to (relative) popularity, but also a set of practices, which include specific techniques of self-presentation and branding. An actor can adopt micro-celebrity techniques and practices even if her audience is small (A. E. Marwick, 2013a). Interestingly, some of these practices involve the emulation of more standard aspects of celebrity culture, albeit without the help of professionals. In a similar vein, Senft's study (Theresa Senft, 2008) suggests that, when it comes to creating, sustaining and expanding a fan base, the absence of such professional expertise is counterbalanced by appeals to authenticity as a distinctive form of cultural capital. Thus, contrary to 'proper' celebrities with 'perfect hair, perfect friends and perfect lives', micro-celebrities are 'real' and 'authentic' (Senft, 2008:16). Nonetheless, appearing authentic before one's audience can be a formidable task, which requires a complex skillset. Attempts at fostering perceptions of authenticity can take many forms, such as disclosing personal secrets, interacting with fan bases without the mediation of third parties or using sexually promiscuous photos to seduce. Successfully navigating between the demands for authenticity and the imitation of standard celebrity practices can be a daunting undertaking, micro-celebrities often being open to the criticism that

they are hypocritical, narcissistic or self- promotional.

In her book *Internet Celebrity: Understanding Fame Online* (Abidin, 2018), Crystal Abidin argues that although everyone can have the opportunity to become a microcelebrity online, not everyone will be a successful one. She proposes six criteria of Internet celebrity: a) scale (sometimes Internet celebrities can surpass in popularity and followership even well-established traditional celebrities); b) platform (Internet celebrities can actively choose to move in and out traditional media and new media platforms to retain their popularity or grow their audience base); c) audience (Internet celebrities appeal to global audiences and not just niche groups anymore), d) nature (Internet celebrities used to be amateur hobbyists that then approached fame as a vocation); e) practice (Internet celebrities used to mainly depend in more intimate private conversations but then grew to use personal information to strengthen the dialogue with their followers) and f) impact (how the influence of Internet celebrities is monetized through business activities) (Abidin, 2018: 14-15).

An interesting aspect of social and digital media influencers has to do with their approach to authenticity when collaborating with brands and companies to promote various third-party products. Popular social media users and, earlier, bloggers who jumped into microcelebrity through their social profiles and/or blogs have heavily relied on displaying their 'true' and 'authentic' self to create their online fanbase, as digital media generally offer them the platform for a more 'authentic reality' (Maares et al., 2021). However, the more their celebrity status grows and the more they engage with brand collaborations, their initially authentic style loses its credibility (Maares et al., 2021). Authenticity thus becomes instrumental in maintaining an audience. As the content that social media influencers create becomes commercialised, authenticity becomes a supporting core narrative that helps influencers overcome charges of merely seeking profit (Banet-Weiser, 2012). This creates an interesting contradiction, which is also evident in the Deliciously Ella trajectory as I will show in later chapters. The contradiction involves expressing one's true and authentic self, while at the same time becoming a commodity (Pooley, 2010). Instrumentalizations of authenticity have been also described as 'calculated' (Pooley, 2010) or 'strategic' (Gaden & Dumitrica, 2015) authenticity. Influencers thus shape and form their online content and activities

in ways that allow them to move, and perhaps to justify moving, between the worlds of authenticity and commercialisation (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). Moreover, another appealing element of this careful and strategic calculated authenticity is its multifaceted management by many influencers who not only express a positive 'authentic' self, but even an imperfect, vulnerable, negative but, at the same time, productive self (Berryman & Kavka, 2018). This happens when audiences are encouraged by the influencers to have a look at their 'real' lives, behind the cameras, the photoshopped images and the social media filters. In this way, online claims of authenticity become a "performative ecology and parasocial strategy" (Abidin, 2018).

A further important question is to do with ways in which the influence of social media micro-celebrities can be identified or measured. Popularity does not necessarily imply influence even though the two terms are often linked by social media users and/or mainstream media or marketeers. Digital influence can be defined as the ability to 'cause effect, change behavior and drive measurable outcomes online' (Solis & Webber, 2012: 8). Popular social media users and bloggers are often considered to be 'influencers', since they have thousands of friends and followers and enjoy some measure of broad recognition from them. However, these subjective perceptions can now be tested on a more data-driven basis, which is particularly useful for the advertising and marketing sector that has been increasingly collaborating with various social media influencers to influence consumers' choices (Borchers, 2021). Various companies offer online tools that can help establish benchmark metrics for identifying influential users – as opposed to merely popular ones – on social media. Thus, services such as Klout, Peer Index, BrandWatch, BuzzSumo, Keyhole, Tupinfluence, Sprout Social and Google analytics offer tools that can measure levels of digital influence based on social media activity. Although these services primarily target advertising and marketing businesses to help determine brands' online Key Performance Index (KPI) evaluations, they can also be more widely used whenever it comes to measuring digital influence.

Some micro-celebrities do indeed attempt to take advantage of their social media popularity and cooperate with brands and companies to promote products and services to their fan base. But micro-celebrity users may also adopt attention-getting

techniques that are usually employed by consumer brands outside such cooperation, in order to increase their online popularity (A. E. Marwick, 2013b). Likewise, many micro-celebrities that do not cooperate with brands or companies could still decide to include their personal profile or personal Facebook pages in an 'evaluating influence' process as part of a larger drive towards adopting versions of the 'quantified self' (Ellison, 2013). Indeed, technology and new social media platforms allow some form of measurement of the online influence of individuals but also of various other activities of their lives, including aspects of their bodily functions, deportment, or feelings. Thus, many social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram provide like-buttons and similar counters, helping create a data-intensive infrastructure that has been characterized by scholars as a 'Like-Economy' (Gerlitz & Helmut, 2013) (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013). Marketing experts also use the term 'attention economy' to refer to the value a user can add on the basis of her capacity to attract 'eyeballs' in a media-focused world (Fairchild, 2007). Recent developments in advertising strategies have seen the attention 'currency' to influence media buying techniques from the traditional cost-per-thousand impressions (CPM) towards the notion of the 'attentive CPM' (aCPM). This is a new metric that highlights a certain value to the attention and engagement an advertising campaign will receive. More attention means more advertising effectiveness (Beuckels et al., 2021; Jefferson, 2022; WARC, 2020).

I have already alluded to the fact that Mills is a striking example of the social media user's rise from micro- to macro-celebrity status through a combined use of her blog, Instagram, and other social media channels, disrupting traditional media and challenging established patterns of power and influence. To add to this, Mills has successfully converted capital accumulated in the Like or Attention economy into various business activities that include brick and mortar business, the production of various food merchandises, the cooperation with national supermarket chains and a variety of best-selling books. Her case is thus particularly prone to analysis using the concept of micro-celebrity, especially as it transpires in the work of Alice Marwick and Theresa Senft.

2.2.2 Food bloggers in the UK, food anxieties and the rise of wellness.

Social media have significantly altered the way food is perceived, viewed and consumed. The traditional one-way food-related communication to the public has become increasingly interactive (Shan et al., 2015). This model has come under increasing criticism for a variety of reasons. These include the fact that it did not take into account public perceptions and habits regarding food consumption or scientific messages about food health and safety (Shan et al., 2015). With the rise of social media a wider pool of information became available to scientists, researchers, academics, and the industry in general. This enabled a better empirical understanding of patterns of food consumption as users were expressing their views about food in a variety of ways, from sharing recipes, recommending nutritional choices and reporting on diets they followed, to reviewing restaurants and food products. The literature on this subject is vast. Researchers and academics have worked on a wide range of food and social media related themes, unearthing new empirical insights by studying large datasets from social media platforms, such as Twitter (Mostafa, 2018; Pennell, 2016; Pilar et al., 2021; Vidal et al., 2015) and Instagram (Bragg et al., 2021; Cavazza et al., 2020; Feldman, 2021; Guidry et al., 2015; Vassallo, Kelly, Zhang, Wang, Young, & Freeman, 2018).

More specifically, posting about food on social media as well as food blogging came under increased scrutiny as a popular online (and social) platform capable of effectively influencing people's food choices. At the same time, though, due to their lack of scientific expertise creators of food blogs appeared incapable of providing nutritionally balanced recipes to their followers (E. P. Schneider et al., 2013). In an important study on food blogging, researchers highlighted the fact that the public should understand the nutritional drawbacks of its favourite food blogs. Nutritionists and dietitians should intervene to assist in making the recipes healthier and more nutritional (E. P. Schneider et al., 2013). Healthy eating and responsible food business on blogs and social media have also been explored by researchers who have been trying to study people's perceptions about health in relation to healthy eating blogs (Bissonnette-Maheux et al., 2018), bloggers' reactions to food companies' press releases on health and obesity issues (H. H. M. Lee et al., 2013) or younger adults'

perceptions of social media influence on their health attitudes and behaviours (Vaterlaus et al., 2015). Social class as a controlling factor of the distribution of food tastes in particular segments of the population is an important *leitmotiv* emerging from this literature. Researchers seek to understand how food blogs create and contest social distinctions (Zhao & Zeynep, 2011), how gastronomy blogs influence readers' desires towards particular taste choices (Wang, 2011), how to analyse the specific language on food on social media (Fried et al., 2014) and how low-income individuals can be recruited through social media to become nutritionally educated (Lohse, 2013).

The trend towards an increase in food blogging has been particularly present in the UK. In 2007, Julia Parsons, a self-taught cook, writer and food blogger founded the UK Food Bloggers Association, aiming at creating a network where the growing numbers of British food bloggers could connect with each other (Parsons, 2009). Julia's blog 'A slice of cherry pie', created in 2006, was one of the first food blogs in the UK. According to its creator, it focused more on a British, budget-conscious cuisine designed to feed a family. Between 2006 and 2010 Julia became one of the central figures of the UK food blogging sphere, featured in newspapers like the Times (Britten, 2010) and the Guardian (Parsons, 2009). She published a cookbook called *A slice of cherry pie* and partnered with other chefs and cooks for a limited-edition recipe book that the multinational beverage company Coca-Cola published as part of its wider advertising campaigns in collaboration with Harvey Nichols (Eleftheriou-Smith, 2010)

Parsons was only one among several other food bloggers at the time. 'You'll have had your tea', 'Pinch of Salt London', 'Ms Marmite Lover', 'The British Larder', 'The Graphic Foodie', 'Gastro Geek' and many more were amplifying a new online trend that challenged the establishment of traditional chefs, cooks, food specialists and reviewers and also altered the construction of food discourse (Zhao & Zeynep, 2011). The rise of the food blogging community prompted everyday people who just loved food and cooking – people without any specific culinary training or gastronomy knowledge background – to express their opinions about recipes, ingredients, restaurants, or grocery shopping. Moreover, food blogging became part of a wider development of new forms of writing about food (Briend, 2007), reflected a vivid foodie

culture (Johnston & Baumann, 2014) and was even viewed as a serious leisurely pursuit (A. M. Cox & Blake, 2011) that led various food bloggers into successful subsequent incorporation in the food industry (DeSolier, 2006).

Over the last years, however, major shifts in digital media have occurred. Blogs (including food blogs) have not been part of that change. The UK Food Bloggers Association closed its official website in April 2016. Food blogs were not what they used to be in 2007. Although the list of the UK Food Bloggers association counted around 5,600 members, a closer inspection reveals many inactive blogs. The explosion of social media transformed food blogging into something totally different, since food bloggers could now benefit from a range of social platforms with many textual and visual capacities to communicate their messages. This rapidly changing environment initially prompted food bloggers to move to YouTube and Instagram and later to TikTok, prioritizing an intense visual culture which focused on wellness and healthy eating, not only as a novel way of viewing and consuming food, but as a means towards a life-altering experience. The phenomenon of wellness bloggers (Freeman, 2015) spawned an army of social media celebrities of the food industry in the UK. Although they did not enjoy access to a mass audience through television shows and media endorsement like many of their famous peers (Jackson, 2015), including Nigella Lawson, Jamie Oliver, Gordon Ramsay or Nigel Slater, they managed to obtain high volumes of social media followership, launch new brick and mortar food business, cooperate with supermarket chains and write best sellers. Such is the case of wellness bloggers Ella Mills, Calgary Avansino, Jasmine and Melissa Hemsley, to name a few.

Wellness, although traced as a concept at least back to the 1650s (Zimmer, 2010), is a term that became particularly popular over the last sixty years in a variety of areas like social science, medicine, economics and the food industry. Oxford English Dictionary defines wellness as *'The state or condition of being well or in good health, in contrast to being ill; the absence of sickness; the state of (full or temporary) recovery from illness or injury.'* (Oxford_English_Dictionary, 2016). Beyond mere illness or injury, the modern approach to wellness reflects a more encompassing and active attitude towards health, perhaps inspired in part by the World Health Organization's

1948 constitution, which defined health as *'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'* (WHO, 1948).

The importance of current preoccupations with wellness is substantiated by reference to a variety of indications. Chief amongst those are the attitudes and strategies of the food industry, including extant tools of food marketing. Indeed, the food industry has increasingly used wellness to create market opportunities (McMahon et al., 2010). Food and beverage companies like The Coca-Cola Company or Unilever have been developing a wide range of products over the last decades to meet consumers' expectations towards healthier diets. They have also strategically worked on informing people about smarter food choices by launching educational initiatives about nutrition and general well-being, investing on scientific research and providing a more detailed product information table on their packaging (Calder et al., 2010; Short, 2005). As consumers tend to turn to healthier food choices, big food companies are rethinking their strategies. For example, the US manufacturer of the famous chocolate bar Mars has recently started informing consumers that it would be better to limit their weekly intake of its high calorie pesto product and other pasta sauces. Food giant Nestle has also started inviting customers to eat more salads and less of its frozen pizza products (Daneshkhu & Whipp, 2016). Nestle has also made major changes throughout its product range, removing artificial colours and high fructose corn syrup, usually connected with obesity increase. It is worth noting that food companies try to appeal to younger generations of consumers who increasingly select organic, fresher, and more natural products from smaller start-up companies. Top industry analysts contend that these consumers are the main driver of the increasing health-trend (Daneshkhu & Whipp, 2016). Overall, then, market research seems to strongly indicate an ongoing trend towards healthier eating.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of contemporary food anxieties when it comes to studying the rising trend of healthy eating. In his book *Anxious Appetites, Food and Consumer Culture* Peter Jackson explores in detail the nature, range and scope of food anxieties in contemporary western societies (Jackson, 2015). Among other things, Jackson investigates how anxieties are created, shared and spread

within various social fields and how they escalate, in cases of uncertainty, giving rise to tensions between experts and laypersons (Jackson, 2015) insists that it is important not to conceptualize food anxieties at an individual level: food carries an inherent social element that varies by class and gender, as well as by time and place.

Jackson suggests that the roots of such food anxieties are often to be found in the proliferating chasm between consumers and food producers. As urbanisation has moved consumers away from agricultural production, anxieties about the kind of food reaching the consumers' plate can augment. Such anxieties can also be traced to the challenges posed by expanding supply chains. They can even be found in the alleged lack of food-related knowledge on the part of consumers or be associated with possible institutional failures. According to Jackson, it is crucial to study how food anxieties influence other areas of social life and how consumers express such anxieties by making connections between events and situations that are not necessarily related to each other (Jackson, 2015).

Because food consumption is related to health, food anxiety cannot but intensify concerns about people's well-being. In this wider context, celebrity chefs (Jackson, 2015) played a significant role in mediating consumers' food anxieties by providing abundant advice over healthy food, diets and, more generally, well-being. Through their personal fame and success, celebrity chefs acquired cultural authority as food experts, telling consumers not only how to cook food but, most importantly, what kind of food to consume. The chef and cookbook writer Jamie Oliver is one of the most characteristic examples. Apart from being a famous chef, Oliver is also a food activist, harnessing his media presence to politically influence food-related issues. Oliver has been leading pro-healthy food campaigns for more than a decade, urging people to pay attention to their dietary habits and pressing the government to take more decisive action on the issue of healthier school meals (J. Oliver, 2011). In his 'Manifesto for School Dinners', Oliver claims that a good and solid food education teaches young people how to make informed choices about food consumption and dietary habits and invites people to gain back control of their health and happiness (J. Oliver, 2011). In 2015, Oliver led a campaign on sugar tax, urging the British government to introduce

a tax on sugary drinks to tackle childhood obesity and diet-related disease (UK_Parliament, 2015). After an intense media campaign, on 16 March 2016 then Chancellor George Osborne announced the introduction of a sugar tax on the makers of sugary soft drinks in order to fight childhood obesity (BBC, 2016). For Jamie Oliver the Chancellor's announcement was both a 'symbolic slap' (BBC, 2016) and a personal victory.

But the discussion about healthy eating can also be the manifestation of deeper societal trends and practices, especially when purported advice on what it consists in comes from actors who have no scientific background or medical training but are able to influence public opinion through their celebrity and fame. As such actors – whose only relation to food science and/or to the industry is that they simply consume food – are actively involved in influencing or even determining social trends and eating lifestyles, they generate a wealth of messages on nutritional advice, mingling scientific (or sometimes pseudo-scientific) facts with personal experiences and opinions and finding a welcoming place on social media.

In this respect, the example of self-professed foodie (Rousseau, 2015) 'health guru' (Pells, 2015) and 'cosmic wellness' (Conor, 2021) advocate Gwyneth Paltrow is striking. Apart from being a famous Oscar-winning actress, Paltrow is also the founder and owner of lifestyle website Goop, which makes suggestions on food, travel, fitness, health, art, self-discovery, mindfulness, and general well-being. Additionally, it promotes its own merchandise, which consists of clothes, superfoods, herbs, dust, crystals, and the recently launched Goop Glow, a power shot drink positioned within the expanding 'ingestibles' market in the US, a market which is projected to reach $200 by the end of 2022 (Conor, 2021). Goop was initially launched as weekly newsletter in 2008 from Gwyneth Paltrow's kitchen (Goop, 2022) and it was meant to be a place where the famous actress could find an answer to her own questions on fitness, health and the psyche (Lipsky-Karasz, 2018). Before launching Goop, Paltrow had already engaged with cookbook writing after experiencing a migraine and a panic attack which, as she describes, made her think she was nearly dying (Rousseau, 2015). She then took a series of medical tests indicating several food intolerances. Paltrow ultimately placed her trust on Dr. Junger's so-called 'elimination diet' (Junger,

2022), which ruled out dairy, shellfish, eggs, sugar, wheat, meat, corn, soy, eggplant, anything processed, coffee and alcohol (Rousseau, 2015), a practice familiar to Mills as well, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4. It is worth mentioning that, apart from being an expert on 'elimination' or 'detox' diet, Dr. Junger is also the author of *Clean: The Revolutionary Program to Restore the Body's Natural Ability to Heal Itself*, where he explains how he became aware of planet toxicity (Junger, 2022). In the same vein, Paltrow's cooking books and Goop dietary advice propose recipes that exclude the aforementioned food categories. Her second book, which was characterised by the UK media as in complete 'fear of food' (Freeman, 2013), offered ambiguous wellness advice, such as recommendations on 'vagina steaming', which prompted reactions by a number of medical professionals (Pells, 2015) (Pells, 2015). Despite the intense criticism over the years, Goop grew to become very successful in terms of product sales and popular with over 8 million subscribers. Around 35% of the website's traffic comes from its own newsletters (McKinnon, 2022). Launched as early as 2008, long before the rise of celebrity wellness influencers, Gwyneth Paltrow can be considered as a pathfinder and a trendsetter within the continuously growing wellness industry in the UK and US.

Actors who can create a successful social media profile to share their own experiences can thus sometimes bypass medical authority and scientific expertise, contributing to the phenomenon that Warren Belasco in his foreword to *Food words: essays in culinary culture* calls 'crisis of authority, trust and responsibility' (Jackson, 2013: x). Such actors can also play an active part in undermining the opportunities of consumers to relate with actual science and the latter's evidence-based methods. More generally, social media can influence consumers in making certain food choices as against others (Vaterlaus et al., 2015). Research has also suggested that, compared to non-interactive media, social media can especially influence young adult behaviour regarding food choices (McFerran et al., 2010).

The rise and development of Web 2.0 has thus created a fertile environment for all sorts of messages to bloom and influence an ever-greater number of social media users. To take the important example of marketing strategies, research indicates that extensive use of social media from brands and companies can influence shopping

behaviours (Ruane & Wallace, 2013). Moreover, as smartphones are becoming mainstream, their combination with both textual and visual social media enables consumers and companies to interact with each other in a simultaneous way, thus inspiring a novel value fusion approach (Lariviere et al., 2013).

In view of the above, it should perhaps not come as a surprise that wellness trends on social media have influenced shopping behaviours in a wide range of markets. Correspondingly, market trends can be indicators of evolving wellness social practices. A particularly relevant example, in this respect, is that of crockery. In a survey commissioned for Channel 4's programme 'What Britain Buys', trend forecasting and analytics company WGSN mentioned that bowl sales reached 40% while plate sales dropped at 8% (Haynes, 2016). Bowls became particularly popular kitchen artifacts among wellness bloggers and social media micro-celebrities, especially when they were launched as 'power bowls' or 'smoothie bowls' on Instagram, i.e., combinations of fruit and vegetables or protein, vegetables, whole grains and seeds, served in a large bowl as a main, healthy and nutritious meal. The example of crockery is an especially pertinent indicator of the wider wellness trend, mainly initiated by Mills (Haynes, 2016), who has often depicted 'smoothie bowls' throughout her Instagram imagery as I will show in later chapters. However, and despite the increasing presence of wellness practices in their relation to food consumption as a new phenomenon fuelled by social media, there has not yet been a great deal of research carried out on them (Grundén & Lagrosen, 2013) especially when it comes to food-related issues. Thus, the original contribution to knowledge of the present thesis stems, among other things, from the fact that it is the first one devoted exclusively to the systematic study of these phenomena.

As a conclusion, it would be worth summing up several key points. First, practices of healthy eating occur against a backdrop of food anxiety, shaping the interpretive lens and expectations of various actors. Second, the rise of celebrity chefs and other laypersons claiming authority to tell people what to eat and how to eat it outside mainstream epistemic channels can be understood as a symptom of enhanced reflexivity: traditional scientific authorities are continuously challenged by actors that possess different kinds of cultural and symbolic capital. Third, social media have

changed the fora of articulation of these challenges, making them cheaper, easier, and more decentralised. Fourth, social media can influence food consumption practices. Further investigation is required to explain these phenomena, especially when it comes to the relationship of social media and the proliferation of challenges to traditional authorities about food.

2.2.2.1 Existing Literature on Mills and Deliciously Ella.

The existing literature on Mills and the Deliciously Ella brand can be subdivided into two main categories: a) Work which is not exclusively focused on Mills and/or Deliciously Ella, including work which is is incomplete, b) Work which is partially or fully focused on Mills, and/or the Deliciously Ella brand.

The first category is not directly relevant to the present project for a number of reasons. These reasons comprise first, its incomplete nature, and, second, its subject matter, where only passing references are made to Mills and Deliciously Ella, as opposed to focused analysis. This is the case, for example, of work that cites Deliciously Ella but is focused on developing mobile applications from a computer science point of view (Kumar-Rao, 2023) or of work that is only half-complete (Weiss, 2014). It is also the case of ethnographic work that merely mentions Deliciously Ella in passing and then only as part of one of the interviews undertaken (Hanganu-Bresch, 2020: 315; Rosati, 2021: 113-114; Warde et al., 2020: 187), of analysis of consumer behaviour regarding plant-based eating by the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) that makes passing reference to social media celebrities such as Mills to explain the rise of veganism in the UK (AHDB, 2018), or of studies which mention Mills but focus on explaining the rise of foods such as turmeric (Paleker, 2023). Other examples include writings that, whilst striving to explain the broader phenomena of healthy eating, food blogging or wellness entrepreneurs, refer to Mills as belonging to that widely conceived explanandum, albeit without focusing specifically on her in a deep way (Evans et al., 2020; G. Gonzales, 2020; Goodman & Jaworska, 2020; Koch, 2017; Sikka, 2019, 2022; Wilkes, 2021; A. V. Wilson, 2019). Likewise, this is also the case of quantitative studies using methods such as corpus linguistics to chart the patterns of usage of selected terms in various kinds of online media, which also mention Mills only in passing (Cesiri, 2016, 2017).Finally, the category encompasses magazine

articles targeted at lay audiences that critique wellness bloggers in general and invoke Mills as one of the critiqued bloggers (Bhagat, 2017) or articles that mention Mills insofar as she is a best-selling author in analysis of market trends regarding sales of books (Tinvan, 2016).

The other category of articles and book chapters is much more relevant to my research project. It consists of works that are dedicated wholly or partly to Mills and the Deliciously Ella brand. Writings belonging this category comprise, first, an important article by O'Neill that is dedicated to Mills (O'Neill, 2020a), which should be read together with a companion article by the same author on the explanation of the pursuit of wellness as a more general project (O'Neill, 2020b). In this category also belongs a large part of chapter 3 of Hollows' book *Celebrity Chefs, Food Media and the Politics of Eating* (Hollows, 2022) as well as parts of chapter 3 of Gabrielle Gonzales's unpublished PhD dissertation *Life as a Work of Health: Women's Healthy Food Blogs as Self-Help* (G. G. Gonzales, 2021).

Having identified the above categories, the following points can be made in relation to the present thesis. Firstly, only one study focuses solely on visual social media, to wit Instagram (Worth, 2018), with most studies using a combination of social media analysis (where that includes blog content (Braun & Carruthers, 2020; Goodman & Jaworska, 2020), fieldwork and/or analysis of discourse found in books and/or interviews and/or media articles either by Mills or by other food bloggers and wellness entrepreneurs (O'Neill, 2020a; Sikka, 2022).

Second, methods typically vary, ranging from qualitative ones, such as critical discourse analysis (O'Neill, 2020a) to versions of corpus linguistics (Cesiri, 2016, 2017; Goodman & Jaworska, 2020). Still, unlike the present work, no study engages in visual social media analysis using a longitudinal approach across a significant amount of time. Thus, to confine myself to analysis of material identifiable online, either on blogs or on social media, Cesiri (Cesiri, 2016, 2017) focuses, among other things, on Mills's blogs, as do Braun and Carruthers (Braun & Carruthers, 2020) and Gonzales (G. Gonzales, 2020). Worth (Worth, 2018) focuses on Instagram, but only makes one

passing reference to Mills. Goodman and Jaworska (Goodman & Jaworska, 2020) concentrate on Twitter. The only work that aims at Instagram is Wilson's MSc thesis (A. V. Wilson, 2019), albeit with an emphasis on critical discourse analysis (not visual analysis) and with only a partial focus on Mills.

Third, regarding the results and the main takeaway points, the reviewed works aim at a problematisation and explanation of Mills's activity from a critical point of view. That comprises several dimensions, which include the conceptualisation of healthy or clean eating as a neoliberal form of management of the self under conditions of taking responsibility for one's health and concomitantly absolving the welfare state of such responsibility (Braun & Carruthers, 2020; G. G. Gonzales, 2021; Hollows, 2022; O'Neill, 2020a; Wilkes, 2021), debates about postfeminism and wellness entrepreneurship as a classed and racialised activity (O'Neill, 2020a), Foucauldian analyses of 'knowledge regimes' of non-expert 'health knowledge' (Sikka, 2022), or analysis of the contradictions of dominant discourses about health through critical focus on healthy eating (Evans et al., 2020).

Fourth, from the perspective of the theoretical frameworks and concepts on which these analyses rely, and despite lots of variation, a significant amount of emphasis is placed on critical approaches through the lens of neoliberalism and the social construction of race and gender (Braun & Carruthers, 2020; Hollows, 2022; O'Neill, 2020a; Wilkes, 2021). Authenticity is also mentioned and used as an interpretive lens (Hollows, 2022: 58) but not in a deeper way. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge there are currently no analyses on offer of either Mills's activities or the wider phenomena of healthy eating and wellness entrepreneurship that rely heavily on either Bourdieu's framework (with the exception of Koch's MSc dissertation, which zooms in on social capital) or Boltanski's pragmatic sociology.

The preceding review allows us to reach the following conclusion. The present thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge, with respect to current literature, along the following dimensions. First, regarding the object of analysis, this is the first study that: a) focuses solely on Mills's Instagram account, b) relies heavily on visual analysis

and c) uses a longitudinal methodological approach across time, which I have dubbed 'Comparative Instachronics' (explained in full in Chapter 3.3.2, Comparative Instachronics). Second, regarding the conceptual and theoretical framework of analysis, this thesis builds on previous critical work on Mills and the phenomena of healthy eating and wellness blogging and entrepreneurship to bring new insights using previously either underused (authenticity, and distinction/inequality – understood along Bourdieusian lines) and unused (enrichment – understood in the tradition of Boltanski's pragmatic sociology) approaches.

2.2.3 Social media, visual social media and food.

Social media are ubiquitous. Since the birth of Web 2.0, a term first coined in 2004 by Tim O'Reilly, (Manovich, 2009), social media have rapidly become a top online activity for users. With a world population of 7.91 billion, social media reached in January 2022 4.62 billion active users out of 4.95 billion active Internet users worldwide (Kemp, 2022). Facebook remains the most popular with 2.910 billion users, followed by You Tube (2.562 billion), What's App (2 billion), Instagram (1.478 billion), WeChat (1.263 billion), TikTok (1 billion), and Facebook Messenger (988 million) (Kemp, 2022). In the UK social media enjoy high levels of popularity. With a population of 68.35 million and 66.99 million active internet users, active social media users reach 57.6 million, a penetration level of 85.9% (Kemp, 2022). Facebook, You Tube, Instagram, TikTok and Facebook Messenger are the top five social platforms in terms of usage (Kemp, 2022) with Instagram having 31.75 million users, 56% of which are identified as female (Kemp, 2022).

In recent years, separate features like video and images have monopolized users' attention. There has been a noticeable shift towards visual online social media content. The rise of visual platforms like Instagram, Snapchat or TikTok leaves no room for doubt: images played and still play a significant role in user communication and interaction. Transformation from text to images came gradually. The long and wordy blogs of the early 2000s were followed by the textual Facebook status updates or 140-character tweets of the 2010s. Finally, after 2012 and Instagram's acquisition by Facebook, a dominant visual shift took place. According to Mary Meeker's Internet

trends report 2016 (the most recent data on image sharing at global scale), people share 3.2 billion images every day on Facebook-owned companies (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger) and Snapchat (Meeker, 2016) According to the same report, one of the most important differences in the ways that the millennial generation communicates compared to generation Z is the major shift from texts to images. In her later Internet Trends report 2019 Meeker mentions that image-based communication continues its ramping trajectory with the help of computer vision and artificial intelligence, as well as with image sharing tools evolution among several social media platforms (Meeker, 2019).

In October 2010 a new photo sharing application for the iPhone called 'Instagram' was launched. The application revolutionised image-sharing online, by giving users the opportunity to create a profile and instantly upload pictures they would take with their mobile phone, with the supporting option of a range of available digital photographic editing tools that embellished their visual artifacts. Mobile applications might be commonplace today nowadays, but in the unexploited mobile-app territory of the time Instagram made a dynamic entrance, with its co-founder Kevin Systrom talking back then about how the power of communicating through images would take off because of a fundamental shift in the enabling technology (Siegler, 2010). Today there are more than 1.4 billion Instagram active users worldwide (Kemp, 2022), sharing more than 1 billion images every day (Broz, 2022). Instagram evolved. The limited visual tools offered in 2010 have increased in number, with more sophisticated photo editing filters, a feature called 'stories' in 2016, make live content available for only 24 hours, longer duration videos (IGTV) in 2018 and video Reels in 2020. Additionally, during the Covid-19 lockdowns, Instagram introduced features assisting virtual connections with friends, family and colleagues due to social distancing (Leskin, 2020).

Although it has undergone significant changes over the last years, Instagram has remained relatively straightforward as a social media platform. Compared to Facebook's complicated features and its cluttered-with-advertising-and-video-games newsfeed, Instagram initially offered a clear and simple space for sharing images and later videos. In 2013, a Pew Internet study on Teens, Social Media and Privacy reported that, although Facebook remained a leading social media platform among

American teenagers, at the same time it was the most despised (Madden et al., 2013). The majority complained about the constantly negative social interactions on Facebook, about 'stressful drama', about users over-sharing their news and opinions and about the increasing adult presence in the platform (Madden et al., 2013). As Facebook's popularity with young American consumers was decreasing, Instagram was leading the road to Instafame (Marwick, 2015): the condition of acquiring a great number of followers within the platform. According to a recent Pew Research Center report on Teens, Social Media and Technology, visual-based platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and You Tube have significantly grown among younger and trend-setting audiences, while Facebook usage has dramatically fallen among the same audiences (Vogels et al., 2022).

Celebrity endorsement of the mobile app played a crucial role. Instagram most followed users form a wide list of Hollywood stars, pop icons, football players and television celebrities, like Taylor Swift, Beyonce, Lionel Messi, Christiano Ronaldo or Kim Kardashian. At the same time, this celebrity visual social media environment acts as a driving force for other users to gather thousands or even hundreds of thousands of followers, aiming perhaps at some form of micro-celebrity within the platform (A. E. Marwick, 2015). An illustrative example of micro-celebrity practice on Instagram is the evolution of the Tumblr blog 'Rich Kids on Instagram'. The blog started as a digital album that collected photos of young and extremely rich people showing off their wealth by driving Ferraris, shopping luxury clothes and accessories, cruising in luscious private yachts and drinking expensive champagne in parties. A particular photo can serve as an illustrative example. The photo shows a receipt from a Miami Beach Club where the bill has reached $35,951 and the gratuity is at 34%. The caption reads: 'Nice tip'. Comparing this amount of money with the average American family's annual income implies not only an extreme wealth but also a certain extent of obscenity (A. E. Marwick, 2015). In fact, Rich Kids on Instagram offer many variations of an obscene rich culture that can function as both a critique of income inequality and as its glorification. The popularity of this Instagram group has been so immense that recently Channel 4 kicked off a homonymous programme presenting the world of the young and super rich who share their lives online: E! Online. It also recently

announced a reality show called 'Rich Kids of Beverly Hills' depicting rich people with 'Instafame' and making direct references to Instagram.

In 2012, Instagram was purchased for $1 billion by Facebook (Cutler, 2012), a bold move initially received with scepticism, as Instagram only had 13 employees and no discernible revenue model (Arthur, 2012). Using Facebook's offices, Instagram has rolled out since 2012 many new features like photo-maps, filters, improved camera, web profiles and translations for a range of languages. In 2016 the visual social media platform launched 'Instagram Stories', an ephemeral photo and video feature resembling the social media platform 'Snapchat' and allowing users to upload their photo and video slideshows that last only for 24 hours before they disappear. As a social photography application designed for mobile phones, Instagram has always been based on visual communication, with users producing and using images to form meaning and interact with each other. Everyday life is thus remediated into a new context of social visibility (Vivienne & Burgess, 2013).

Apart from revolutionising online image sharing, Instagram has significantly influenced the way food is photographed. 'Foodstagramming' (Ginsberg, 2015) became a regularly used term to describe the action of photographing one's food and instantly uploading the image on Instagram, as part of an online community's social experience. Whilst food photography has been popular for a variety of reasons (Machin et al., 2021; Young, 2015) the distinctive features of Instagram significantly modify practices of producing and consuming a food-related visual storytelling. The social platform offers a unique environment for food-related content to thrive as foodie culture on social media has constantly been on the rise over the last years and hashtag 'food' reaches more than 490 million entries (Latest hashtag search on 10 December 2022). Practices of sharing food images on the platform have transformed professional cooking (Lee & Tao, 2021; Levin, 2019), have enhanced food trends like 'wellness' and 'clean eating' (Baker, 2022; Baker & Walsh, 2018; Freeman, 2015; Wu et al., 2022) and have turned home cooks who had never been professionally trained into Instagram micro-celebrities. The case of Michael Zee and his Instagram profile 'Symmetry breakfast', which reached in less than two years more than 630K followers

by posting beautifully curated photos of his everyday breakfast creations (Spector, 2016), provides an example.

Although there is rich literature on camera phone photography (Zappavigna, 2016), as well as vast interest in 'selfies' (Burns, 2015; Butkowski et al., 2020; Highfield & Leaver, 2016; A. E. Marwick, 2015; M. Thelwall et al., 2016) research on the social media visual imagery of wellness is still limited, leaving room for new and exciting visual research and analysis. This thesis aims, among other things, at exploring in detail Instagram imagery, to originally contribute to a slowly evolving academic literature, which at the time of writing is still in its infancy. Studies using visual media data vary from observing chatting through pictures (M. Thelwall et al., 2016) to monitoring visual social media analytics for public safety (Thom et al., 2016) and studying memes, gifs, emojis and selfies (Burns, 2015; Highfield & Leaver, 2016; A. E. Marwick, 2015; Rettberg, 2014; T Senft & Baym, 2015). Literature has been developing rapidly, especially since the turn to more visual content on social media. The visual is becoming ever more significant for the curation of online identities, inspiring a range of tools and services worth researching and analysing, such as Tinder and/or TikTok. Production and consumption of visual content has been a concern for researchers and scholars in terms of self-presentation, self-identity and/or authenticity among other issues and themes (G. David & Cambre, 2016; Duguay, 2016; Mason, 2016; Zeng et al., 2022). Images, moreover, carry great political power. This is especially the case when they are used as a dominant form of message dissemination in public protests, demonstrations and riots (Neumayer & Rossi, 2018; A. N. Novak & Khazraee, 2014), as a tool to record and demonstrate police brutality (Clark et al., 2017; G. David, 2010; C. J. Schneider, 2014) or as a platform for promoting political agendas (Van Zoonen et al., 2011).

To conclude this section, Instagram has at once modified and amplified extant practices of producing, sharing and consuming food-related visual content. Charting this wider social trend allows us to make sense of the spectacular rise in popularity of 'food bloggers' *qua* producers of visual content, chief amongst which figures, in the UK context, Deliciously Ella. Indeed, as we have already observed, Mills has

intensively used Instagram to deploy a range of aesthetic tactics to present her preferred version of 'healthy' and 'wellness' food preparation and consumption under a particular visual light, thus, as we have seen, rapidly acquiring the status of microcelebrity.

2.2.3.1 Public administration's use of social media

As already established, the evolution of Internet and Web 2.0 has brought significant changes to many social and political institutions, including public sector organisations. Together with other new technologies, Web 2.0 has prompted important modifications to the administration and provision of services to the public (Aher & Luoma-Aho, 2017). The public sector often borrows expertise and paradigms from the private sector when implementing such innovations (Aher & Luoma-Aho, 2017). However, this does not happen without complications and challenges. Due to the heavily bureaucratic nature of the public sector, which comes with more time-consuming procedures, and due to the public sector's commitment to the values of transparency and equality (Aher & Luoma-Aho, 2017), the adaptation of practices from the private sector, which is usually more flexible, adaptive and secretive, is not always a risk-free and smooth process. Still, despite challenging the established bureaucratic ethos, new technologies, including digital and social media, have been increasingly used by governments and the public sector around the world over the last decade (Khan et al., 2014; Lovari & Valentini, 2020; Mergel, 2012; Panagiotopoulos et al., 2013; Zheng & Zheng, 2014) to improve the quality of public services, and/or deeper public understanding and/or decision-making processes (Todisco et al., 2021) as well as to enhance the public sector's trustworthiness (Porumbescu, 2016).

Food related issues such as the use of GMOs, the status of agro-food systems, food safety, healthy eating habits, nutrition or animal welfare are controversial topics of discussion on social media that can potentially involve governmental bodies, consumers, private sector businesses and other actors (Mendoza-Herrera et al., 2020; Stevens et al., 2016). The abundance of information produced by high levels of social media activity can be used by a range of stakeholders in various circumstances, including food crises (Regan et al., 2016). It constitutes a new and challenging arena

for the governance and administration of food related concerns (Stevens et al., 2016). Indeed, the FSA has used a wide range of digital and social media tools and platforms to disseminate information and communicate with consumers about the complex issues of food safety and food hygiene, as well as food habit changes and new food trends. The FSA has its own main website, which provides a large range of consumer reports and advice, business and industry guidance, and highlights areas of science and research among others. Additionally, since 2003 the FSA has made available to the public via live webcast and a public Q&A all board meetings (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2013). It has also mobilized email and mobile alerts when product recalls or allergy warnings occur and investigated social bookmarks and visualisation platforms such as Pinterest and Thinglink or interactive calendars for the public (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2013). As far as social media is concerned, the FSA has profiles on Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram, apart from its official blog. The consumers have a wide information pool at their disposal to learn more about food safety and healthier food habits or get the latest news about possible allergies and changes of policy.

At the same time, social media has enhanced the FSA's own work, allowing it to meet consumers' needs. As the FSA's 2022-2027 strategy states, one of the agency's missions is to be able to reflect on growing consumer concerns about sustainable, affordable and healthy food (FSA, 2022b). Social media monitoring tools used by the agency (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2013) can bring consumer conversations about food into the FSA's direct attention, resulting in better understanding and engagement with audiences. In 2019 the FSA commissioned an open listening project based on 13.7 million social media conversations about food to understand what consumers' spontaneously talk about when it comes to food (FSA, 2019).

Empirical research on the use of social media by the public sector shows that social media can offer multiple opportunities to discuss with citizens, but also to interact with various stakeholders such as journalists, bloggers and social media influencers (Lovari & Valentini, 2020). Although adopting such practices can attract scrutiny to public sector organisations (Fuchs, 2013; Lovink, 2011; vanDijk, 2013), extant

literature shows that the consumers of the current digital age increasingly demand more interactive dialogue with the public sector, less use of bureaucratic jargon and less distanced communication (Lovari & Parisi, 2015; Lovari & Valentini, 2020).

Seen in this light, the present research, which is partially funded by the FSA, can offer an opportunity to the agency to better understand discussions about plant-based eating on social media and particularly on Instagram, as these are mediated through a very prominent and popular actor in the wellness & plant-based scene in the UK. The FSA Instagram profile is often updated with useful information about food safety. Still, a careful look shows that there is no Instagram-dedicated communication strategy, nor tailor-made material for this platform. As consumers rely more on social media to gather information of public interest (Lovari & Parisi, 2015), and as recent FSA data shows that online conversations about plant based food will be growing further subject to public health advice (FSA, 2019), there can be opportunities for a new communication strategy on social media, which I further discuss on Chapter 9.7, *Recommendations to Stakeholders.*

2.3 PART B: Core theoretical lenses

2.3.1 Authenticity

A significant theme that emerged through my deeper engagement with my dataset was authenticity. As we shall see in detail in the chapters that follow (especially chapter 4), one of Mills's most distinctive features was the fact that she appeared 'out of nowhere': she was merely an amateur blogger that had nothing to vouch for her other than the truthfulness of her subjective experience about the wellness qualities of the foods she was consuming. In short, Mills might not have been a wellness expert, a professional cook, or a foodie, but she was *authentic*. I was thus led to explore the meaning of authenticity in more detail, constructing a conceptual framework that could account for this aspect.

The literature on the topic of authenticity has grown steadily in recent years (Seto & Schlegel, 2018; Sims, 2009; Williams, 2006), including research focusing on social media (Caldeira et al., 2021; A. E. Marwick, 2013a, 2013b; A. E. Marwick & boyd,

2011; Theresa Senft, 2008). Many commentators suggest that authenticity has become a mainstream concern in late capitalist societies. Authenticity has been described by philosopher Charles Taylor as one of the major cultural and moral resources of modernity. The modern idea of authenticity builds on earlier, pre- or early modern, forms of individualism and expresses a commitment to a truer and deeper self, that pioneer romantic authors such as Herder understood as a completely 'original way of being human' (Taylor, 1991: 28). Since the 19th century, and under the influence of romantic currents of thought, art became a privileged mode of authentic expression. In particular, art was associated with the division between an 'original' artifact, which bears the stamp of unique human creativity, and a 'copy', which is just a valueless reproduction of the former. No one captured this distinction better than Walter Benjamin, who, in his seminal 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* claimed that the original is characterized by an unmistakable aura, which the copy lacks (Benjamin, 2008).

Despite its importance, art is hardly the only domain of authentic display. In fact, the ideal of authenticity as remaining true to oneself has spilled over to many other domains of social practice. Its conceptual core refers to a distinction between appearances that correspond to social conventions and a deeper, convention-free, human essence or self that lies within every human being (A. Gibson, 2009). The self is thus divided between a 'true' or 'authentic' inward self and a 'false' or 'inauthentic' outward self. When that split occur, the true self's commitments, decisions, or ideas are not expressed as outward actions. The ideal of authenticity thus requires a turn within and a readiness to listen to one's inner voice to realize a mode of existence beyond conventional social norms and expectations, assuring the dominance of the true (authentic) self over the false (inauthentic) one (A. Gibson, 2009). Accordingly, the idea of authenticity is closely connected to that of sincerity in the expression of the true inner self.

Whilst philosophical or historical accounts of authenticity are hermeneutic in the sense that they strive to articulate or unearth a conceptual core that rests implicit in social practices, social-scientific accounts of authenticity take a slightly different tack. On

social-scientific treatments of authenticity, the question shifts from what authenticity really is to how it is perceived, (re)produced and performed in different social contexts. Moreover, while authenticity is widely understood as a disposition to be true to ourselves and free from social conventions and norms, cultural theorists have been long arguing that managing to achieve or to display it, and being successfully recognized as authentic by others, is a complex social performance that depends on contextual elements and depends on various resources (A. E. Marwick, 2013b). Thus, in reviewing Andrew Potter's book *The Authenticity Hoax: How We Get Lost Finding Ourselves* (Potter, 2010), Andrew Gibson regards authenticity as a way of seeing and acting using a wide range of institutionalized practices and symbols. Such practices and symbols can help individuals create a unique personal style recognized by others as authentic (A. Gibson, 2009). The control and use of social resources to perform authenticity can often create tensions that have to be carefully managed. One of the most often cited examples are cases where actors indulge in consumption of goods with the ultimate goal of undergoing authentic experiences and forging a distinctive and 'true' identity (Featherstone, 1991) (Featherstone, 1991). Impression-management, moreover, requires recourse to Goffmanian techniques of self-presentation that can reliably convey appearances of authenticity to others (Vannini & Franzese, 2008). Successful performances of authenticity also require social capital and are influenced by its unequal distribution. At the same time, such performances can also be converted into social (and, more specifically cultural) capital in a self-reinforcing cycle: the more a social actor is perceived by others to perform authentically, the more she may acquire greater capacities for future authentic performances.

These general considerations are also important for the study of authentic performances by actors on social media. To begin with, research has been conducted in studying various self-presentation techniques. These include micro-celebrity, where authenticity involves laypersons spontaneously adopting branding and advertising practices (Theresa Senft, 2008). For people who struggle for attention, status and recognition, perceptions of authenticity by audiences can be particularly important. Scholars studying online environments argue that these perceptions can create a

space where individuals differentiate themselves not only from their peers, but also from performances occurring through other media forms (A. E. Marwick & boyd, 2011). Concerns about perceptions of authenticity significantly influence such performances. As social media actors are increasingly being perceived by others to be authentic, thus capturing people's attention *because* they are authentic, they can be said to accumulate a distinctive kind of 'authenticity capital', i.e., the capacity to be perceived as such even when they engage in performances and actions that are not ordinarily understood to express their true inner self.

Food is no different. Studying the production, accumulation, investment, and consumption of authenticity capital can be particularly important when it comes to approaching food on social media. As already highlighted above, performances of actors on social media are hardly simple or tension-free. Instead, they navigate between different requirements, especially under circumstances of mass consumption. It is thus crucial to understand not only how actors perform successfully, but also what specific kinds of social forms they use to so perform and whether and how they can sustain those forms. For example, being authentically a wellness fan may signify taking part into body cleansing activities, purchasing organic, gluten free, natural products, seeking special super foods, seeds and 'power bowls' or drinking wellness and goodness smoothies. These consumer practices, prosaic as they may be, can be perceived as authentic expressions of a true self if, for example, they are performed with mindfulness or reflexivity (A. E. Marwick, 2013b). Moreover, authenticity can mark distinctions between social actors, thus functioning as signals of social class or cultural capital. Thus, Prieur's and Savage's remarks in their paper 'Emerging Forms of Cultural Capital' (Prieur & Savage, 2013) on distinction as the socially approved result of a certain reflexive mode of consuming unoriginal objects can be readily transposed to food. On this analysis, what differentiates actors is not the kinds of foods they consume but the distinctive ways in which they consume it: these can consist in their mindset, their characteristic evaluative outlook, their discipline and spiritual orientation or anything else.

Similarly, it is important to stress the aesthetic dimension of perceptions of authenticity when it comes to food consumption, especially in connection with visual social media. Food cultures on social media have implicated new aesthetic forms, with users sharing their food experiences to express their self-identity (O'Hara et al., 2012). Photography becomes the main storytelling tool, and the digital aspect of image-sharing acts dominates the 'real' and the 'live' one – also called 'liveness' per P. Auslander's innovative work (Auslander, 2008). Authenticity thus becomes a carefully crafted appearance that is performed for and consumed in a digital platform, whether a food blog or a social network.

To further facilitate the analysis of Mills's practice, I construct here an empirical model of authenticity as follows. To begin with, from a formal and phenomenological point of view, authenticity involves: (a) the experience of a separation between a true ('inner') and a false ('outer') self or, more generally, of a true or 'genuine' item as opposed to a 'simulacrum' (a copy) and (b) an evaluative requirement that the true/authentic self should take charge or that the 'genuine' item be recognised, valued and chosen (as opposed to the simulacrum/copy). The specific reasons that the actor performing authentically puts forward to underpin the experience of authenticity and the requirement to be authentic or to choose the authentic item can vary widely and span several different domains. They range from the quasi-existential or spiritual (for example, as we shall see in the relevant chapter, Mills converted almost overnight to plant-based eating in a quasi-religious way) to standard micro-celebrity authenticity strategies (such as when Mills depicts on Instagram personal moments, or her family, friends, dog and so on) or more 'ethical' discourses and commitments.

I argue that the conceptual contours of the model of authenticity sketched above can capture relatively well several dimensions of authenticity that have been emphasised in social-scientific studies. I here provide several examples to make this claim plausible. To begin with, in social media and other social scientific studies authenticity, which is also designated, among other things, as 'authenticity labour' (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021), 'authenticity work' (Thurnell-Read, 2019) or 'the ideology of authenticity' (Burgess & Green, 2018) has been associated with: (a) the amateur

nature of production of online content (Burgess & Green, 2018); (b) 'ordinary performances' involving actors that openly acknowledge their lack of expertise; (c) sincerity, passion and 'doing what influencers love' (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021); (d) emotional performance on the part of actors or acting in accordance with one's values (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). On the model proposed here, these characteristics should not be confused with authenticity. They are to be understood either as marks facilitating the apprehension and eventual recognition of one's authenticity by others (e.g. amateur production of content, ordinary performances and emotional passion), as traits of character that can help reveal a true self but are not necessarily connected to its expression (e.g. sincerity) or simply as action-dispositions that have nothing to do specifically with authenticity (e.g. acting in accordance with one's values – these values might well not be authentic in the sense of being the expression of a true self). The main point to emphasise is that it is the abstract idea of authenticity as genuineness or expression of a truer self that guides these other practices, judgments, and dispositions. Hence, the model proposed can make sense of these conceptualisations of authenticity for social-scientific purposes in the following way: the conceptualisations are to be understood mainly as *means* of expression of a true self in social space or as frequently associated *connotations* of the concept of authenticity.

Besides, I place more emphasis on analysis of authenticity claims than on 'the real thing'. The proposed model involves the idea that intersubjectively or collectively shared representations of authenticity emerge when the claims made by certain actors are met with approval or endorsement by other actors, to whom these claims are addressed. This is sometimes expressed in the social scientific literature through the idea that authenticity is essentially a social achievement. However, this way of putting things can lend to confusion, because of two significantly different available interpretations. On a first, innocuous, reading, all that is claimed is that authenticity *assertions* or *practices* can only be understood and explained when placed in social context. This reading is trivially true but neutral with respect to the 'nature' of authenticity itself. It should not be confused with a further, stronger, claim that is sometimes made. This is the claim that authenticity *per se* is 'relational' or

'constructed' and *nothing else* (Maares et al., 2021). Whether this 'purely constructivist' account of authenticity should be accepted is debatable, and I shall not here take sides. I simply note that many actors, from their own perspectives, do not seem to accept the idea that authenticity is purely relational or constructed. Rather, they appear to share the exact opposite intuition, i.e., that authenticity is precisely the expression of that part of the human self that has not yet been 'distorted' or 'corrupted' by social conventions and practices. On that view, authenticity is 'really' *anti-social* and actors can reliably detect it, readily distinguishing the genuine from the fake. In what follows I shall thus bracket the issue of whether the 'true self' really exists. However, at various points in the analysis, I shall also try to indicate when my own subjective perception of Mills's online presence seems to corroborate the idea that her 'true self' is somehow expressed.

We can summarise the above discussion by returning to the thesis expressed by Marwick and boyd (A. E. Marwick & boyd, 2011): the fact that Mills has successfully managed to differentiate herself not only from her competition but also from traditional media, is a significant indication that authenticity in its digital mediated form played an important role. Indeed, food blogging and social media sharing develops through a complex procedure whereby a range of different practices such as cooking, photography, video, storytelling, and styling are combined. These create new social forms of authenticity performances, as well as different sets of authenticity expectations on the part of audiences. The socio-technological context plays a crucial role in the development of food cultures, creating new connections between the private and the public, redistributing influence and shaping new roles in food production and consumption (S. H. Lee et al., 2014). Authenticity is key in explaining challenges to more traditional distributions of epistemic authority. The term 'authenticity', as I use it here, thus refers to a fluid concept used by social actors to make claims about themselves, about others or about items and objects. The distinction that the concept of authenticity makes between the true and the false self is formal, i.e., it says nothing about the content of the true and false selves or objects. More specific contents will depend on how the formal schema is supplemented in contexts of use by actors. Contents vary depending on the circumstances in which authenticity claims are made

and other evaluative commitments of the actors making those claims. Similarly, the normativity of authenticity claims depends on the claims' content, on contextual factors and on the intentions of the actors themselves. What counts as the expression of the true self for one person will not necessarily be the same as what counts as a similarly truthful expression for another person. Successfully making such claims across contexts is thus a useful social skill. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, Mills has been particularly successful in this respect, convincing various audiences that her endorsement of plant-based eating corresponds to the expression of a true, deeper self.

2.3.2 Distinction and Inequality

One other important theme that clearly emerged from my deeper engagement with my dataset was the role and function of social class and the concomitant inequalities of access to healthy eating and plant-based diets. This theme is relevant in several ways. To begin with, some connections between class and food are very straightforward and required no special enquiry. As we shall see in more detail in later chapters, Mills is a passionate advocate for relatively expensive foods, and she does not appear to give much thought to the fact that this makes them unaffordable to a large segment of the UK population. Other connections, especially those to do with specific class signs that Mills emits in terms of, say, clothes she is wearing in photos or culinary tastes, were more complicated and called for deeper analysis. Accordingly, I was naturally led to Bourdieu's seminal work on the explanation of the unequal class distribution of tastes, where these include, importantly, culinary tastes.

In his ground-breaking book *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste* (Bourdieu, 1984) Pierre Bourdieu presented an explanatory framework based on the empirical research he conducted in France between 1963 and 1968 regarding lifestyle differentiation along class lines. Bourdieu constructed an analytical ethnography of French culture connecting classes understood in a triple way, i.e., at the intersection of economic, cultural, and social capital, with specific tastes. Chief amongst these were aesthetic tastes, which manifested themselves in cultural knowledge, and participation in cultural events. His theoretical framework is of particular significance

for the sociological study of food, since Bourdieu placed particular emphasis on the investigation of the food culture of French households. He argued that food consumption is a cultural practice that displays sophisticated performances pertaining to identity, gender, and social class. At the same time, food is a powerful matrix of social inequalities. Actors engage in practices of distinguishing between different categories of food in a symbolic system of classification, using schemas such as healthy/unhealthy, light/heavy or wellness/junk. The ways in which they do so are unequally distributed between classes of actors. Bourdieu convincingly argued that the classification schemas that actors use can be explained by reference to the position they occupy in social space, i.e., along identity, gender, and class lines. His analysis thus makes possible a powerful critique of extant patterns of food consumption.

To carry out his analysis, Bourdieu introduced a set of distinctive theoretical concepts: habitus, field, practice, and capital. Briefly put, habitus denotes a set of internalized action dispositions reflecting external social structures. It shapes the ways in which actors think and act within the world (Power, 1999). Field is a structured and relatively autonomous social space, subsuming different kinds of capital. Capital is a generic term, which refers to the resources available to agents in pursuit of their goals. The resources belong to four different kinds. Economic capital refers, roughly, to the possession of strictly economic (i.e., convertible into money) resources. Cultural capital refers, roughly, to the possession of forms of knowledge, educational credential, and other intellectual skills (for example, the possibility to make fine distinctions between the qualities of different kinds of food). For Bourdieu, cultural capital is not 'free-floating' in people's minds: rather, it is embodied, institutionalized, and thus objectified into specific action-dispositions. Social capital refers to the possibility of mobilizing social connections through networks to achieve one's objectives. Last, symbolic capital refers to one's social position in terms of prestige and recognition by others. Unlike more simple theories of class, which insist on one overarching criterion such as position in the relations of production, classes for Bourdieu are complex. This is so because individuals are typically differentiated unequally along all four identified dimensions of capital. This allows for interesting

classificatory possibilities such as, for example, the classification of someone as 'upper class' (or 'dominant' in Bourdieu's terminology) regarding cultural capital (possession of educational resources and, more generally, forms of knowledge) but 'lower class' (or 'dominated' in Bourdieu's terminology) regarding economic capital. For Bourdieu, the interplay between habitus, field and capital is expressed through the following equation: [(habitus) (capital) + field] = practice. This equation unpacks the notion of practice or strategy as the result of the interplay of social structures within a particular field and the individual's habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). It is precisely this kind of analytical framework that allowed Bourdieu to make important observations about the explanation of aesthetic and other tastes, correlating these with specific social classes, and with a special regard among other things to culinary tastes.

Still, it is crucial to distinguish between Bourdieu's abstract theoretical concepts, just outlined, and his concrete empirical results as presented in *Distinction*. Whilst the former can be productively used in a wide variety of different contexts and fields, the latter are tied to particular historical circumstances (France in the 1960s). Whether the *specific findings* that Bourdieu strived to explain (notoriously, for example, the propensity of the dominated classes lacking economic capital to consume fatty foods) still hold in the UK in 2023 is a matter of empirical investigation. The same consideration, moreover, applies to the question whether the dominant classes distinguish themselves from the dominated in terms of, say, a taste for refined French cuisine as opposed to convenience/junk food. As Prieur and Savage put it (Prieur & Savage, 2013: 258) and *pace* Bourdieu's particular empirical conclusions, *'the mode of relating to culture may now be more important in games of distinction than the precise choice of cultural objects in themselves'*. The overall fertility of Bourdieu's framework transpires, among other things, in the fact that researchers and scholars have used that framework to shed light on health inequalities, food safety and food cultures across a range of different countries and geographical and social spaces. For example, Diez-Garcia (Diez-Garcia, 1997) used habitus to query the food consumption field and to propose two different models of eating: a) eating occurring by pleasure and b) eating by nutritional rules. Another study by Carvalho and Luz (Carvalho & Luz, 2011) analysed two eating styles: 'natural' and 'fast-food'. The study

proceeded to an interpretative analysis of symbolic exchanges of elements created and reproduced in various eating practices. The researchers studied mixes of these two eating styles, such as fast-food restaurants that boasted 'natural' food offerings, to conclude that there is a new 'alimentary order' more receptive to diverse food styles and 'natural' foods. In a similar vein, Costa, Zepeda and Sirieix (Costa et al., 2014) proposed the idea that 'natural' and organic foods can be understood as symbols of status. These researchers interviewed shoppers who believed that the social value of eating was connected to the actual place where they bought their (organic) food. Status was also expressed by other preferences for 'green' and 'natural' food, which accompanied shoppers' concerns with food sustainability.

Still, divergences between Bourdieu's original analysis and the actual class distribution of culinary tastes in contemporary UK should not be exaggerated. The best recent sociological work that draws on Bourdieu's framework seems to significantly confirm Bourdieu's results from his 1960s work. Bourdieu's original explanation of the social determinants of food tastes correlated the patterning of food tastes with the placement of individuals on two main axes of capital possession (instead of four): economic capital and cultural capital. One of Bourdieu's most important findings was that those who possess more capital overall (both economic and cultural) opt for more refined and fine foods, whereas those relatively lacking both forms of capital opt for fatty and substantial in carbohydrates foods. Interestingly, moreover, capital composition can also make a difference. In particular, possession of predominantly cultural as opposed to economic capital meant that the individuals concerned opted for healthy-lean-exotic tastes (Atkinson & Deeming, 2015). Atkinson and Deeming make a convincing case, using data on contemporary food consumption, that, despite some important differences, food tastes in contemporary Britain still strongly correlate with class along roughly Bourdieusian lines. One important difference, though, is that the possession of significant amounts of cultural capital nowadays strongly correlates with patterns of plant-based eating, veganism and, more generally, the preference for 'whole' and 'good' foods (irrespective of whether they are exotic or not). Thus, freshness, 'wholeness' and health as preferred attributes of foods indicate, in contemporary UK,

the possession of higher amounts of cultural capital (Atkinson & Deeming, 2015). In short, healthy eating in at least some of its variants is marked by cultural inequalities.

Accordingly, the present thesis draws inspiration from Bourdieu's theoretical framework as set out in *Distinction* and further developed by contemporary scholars to approach and analyse Deliciously Ella's visual social media presence within the wider context of 'wellness'. From the point of view of such a framework, Mills is endowed with different forms of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital, that place her firmly within UK's younger generation of social elites. She is the daughter of the Labour politician (initially a Conservative MP between 1997-1999 and a Labour MP from 2001-2015, who has also served as an Under-Secretary of State for Creative Industries and Tourism, as well as a Secretary of State for Northern Island) Shaun Woodward and his wife Camilla Sainsbury, heiress of the Sainsbury family. Camilla Sainsbury is the granddaughter of Lord Alan Sainsbury, a leading and pioneering executive member of the supermarket company and later a Lord Temporal in the House of Lords; she is also the daughter of Sir Timothy Sainsbury, a Conservative MP between 1973-1994 who also served as Minster of State for Industry and Trade). Mills is married with Matthew Mills (whom she usually calls "Matt"), son of Baroness Tessa Jowell, an English Labour politician (MP from 1992-2015) who served, among other posts, as Secretary of State for Culture, Media, and Sport, from 2001 to 2007. As becomes evident from the above scant biographical details, not only does Mills's family firmly belong to the financially powerful elites, but is also a long-standing political family, having connections to higher echelons of political power and influence. Analysing these forms of capital and seeking correspondences to forms of visual self-presentation and aesthetic taste sheds important light on the wider social context surrounding Mills's production of visual social media imagery. It also allows the identification of patterns of deep inequality that sustain lifestyles such as plant-based eating and healthy eating and thus makes possible the articulation of a critique of those lifestyles from the standpoint of social justice.

2.3.3 Enrichment

As I have already mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter, an important aspect of Mills's evolution concerns the way in which what began as an amateur food blog, proposing quite simple plant-based recipes, rapidly gained traction and ultimately gave birth to a highly efficient and successful business. The business is international and generates economic value at a large scale. Interestingly, the amateur blog and the process of creation of value are intimately connected. As we shall see in detail in chapter 6, explaining Mills's entrepreneurial success requires explaining the fact that she can sell her products at premium prices. The more I was engaging with my empirical material, the more it was becoming clear to me that there was an important analogy that could be made with other premium products, such as those marketized by luxury brands. In both cases, products are sold at prices which do not merely reflect the strictly 'utilitarian' value of the former – in Mills's case, the food's nutritional value. This naturally led me to investigate literature on how certain kinds of brands succeed in marketizing and selling their products at seemingly high prices, using these explanations to understand premium food products such as Mills's. My readings led me to a relatively recent book by French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre entitled *Enrichment: A Critique of Commodities* (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2020). The book analyses practices of economic value creation in late capitalism, emphasising narratives used by actors to 'enrich' otherwise prosaic or ordinary products. The narratives accompanying the products allow these actors to sell them at relatively higher prices. Boltanski and Esquerre's framework seemed to fit particularly well with Mills's economic practices. In the remainder of this section, I shall critically discuss this framework because as it can help shed light on Mills 's entrepreneurial trajectory.

Boltanski and Esquerre's *Enrichment* uses the more general approach of so-called 'pragmatic sociology' that Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot began to develop in the 1990s (Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006) (the date refers to the English translation: the book was published in 1991 in French). Two points should be made from the outset. First, the point of departure of Boltanski and Esquerre is the restructuring of economic activities that occurred in recent decades in Western capitalist countries. Originating

in the 1970s crisis, the process has several important features: the rise of financialization, the relative de-industrialisation of the West coupled with the dislocation of production to non-Western sites (Boltanski & Esquierre, 2020: 62-63), and the exponential rise of inequalities of income and wealth (Piketty, 2014). As a result, goods and services are not necessarily produced industrially and on a mass scale and they are often aimed at actors that have significant amounts of disposable income and cultural capital. Boltanski and Esquerre call the practices that reflect these trends 'enrichment economy'. A basic premise on which their work is based is the idea that structural changes in types of capitalism correspond to different regimes or 'forms' of commodification of goods and services (Boltanski & Esquierre, 2020: 12-67).

Boltanski and Esquerre do not rely on objectivist theories of economic value. Instead, they place emphasis on the real practices and capacities of actors striving to sell goods and services. More specifically, Boltanski and Esquerre unpack economic forms in terms of the action patterns of persons engaged in processes of argumentative exchanges. The latter aim at either justifying or critiquing different forms of socially recognised associations between the value of items (where these comprise goods and services) and their prices (Boltanski & Esquierre, 2020: 71-101). One important point that Boltanski and Esquerre make is that the argumentative associations between these entities are contestable. Actors often dispute whether the prices of items accurately reflect their values. When critiques by potential buyers of specific patterns of association between values and prices take sufficient hold, the items' prices appear problematic. Importantly, this problematization is not an 'objective fact', but the result of the specific interactions between buyers and sellers. In Boltanski and Esquerre's framework the reflective capacities of social actors are thus crucial for the explanation of processes of commodification. On the one hand, articulating critiques of the value of a given commodity is always possible. On the other hand, the justification of prices must successfully answer these critiques, lest sellers lose the capacity to set prices at the intended levels.

Within this wider framework, Boltanski and Esquerre provide a typology of patterns of economic interaction that undergird different kinds of commodification practices

(Boltanski & Esquierre, 2020: 102-132). In their terminology, the typology reflects different 'pragmatics of value-setting', i.e., argumentative patterns that pick out different ways of justifying and/or critiquing attempts to connect the values of items with purported prices. Boltanski and Esquerre begin by first identifying the **'standard form'** of commodification, which corresponds to goods and services substitutable in principle substitutable and produced in mass ways (Boltanski & Esquierre, 2020:135-151). Second, and innovatively, they single out a novel **'collection form'**. This corresponds to the hard core of the post-industrial 'enrichment' economy, further analysed in their book (Boltanski & Esquierre, 2020: 164-220). Third, they identify a **'trend form'**, which is crucial in fashion economies, but not confined to them. This form is mainly linked to celebrity practices and/or social hierarchies that rely on a range of differentiating factors such as class, age, beauty or ethnic origin (Boltanski & Esquierre, 2020: 221-239). Fourth, Boltanski and Esquerre also pinpoint an **'asset form'**, which consists in acquiring items solely as a means of re-selling them later at a higher price. Under this form, people acquire items which function as depositories of monetary value and almost always expect that their liquidation must be an ongoing possibility (Boltanski & Esquierre, 2020: 240-252).

It bears underscoring that Boltanski and Esquerre's framework helpfully connects prices with the reflective capacities and practices of social actors. Far from reflecting any mechanisms of 'perfect' or 'imperfect' competition, prices emerge at the intersection of both non-verbal (unwillingness to buy) and verbal (explicit argumentation) practices of critique and justification, with actors exchanging arguments and forming narratives aimed at confirming or critiquing extant socially confirmed connections between values and prices. Discounting cases of dire need, buyers must be sufficiently convinced that the prices duly reflect the values of commodities. At the same time, it is open to them to challenge sellers and extant prices by using their own interpretive resources. Many of these practices of justification and critique of prices, moreover, are particularly visible in social media settings, whereby crowds of buyers and sellers interact in different kinds of ways and mobilise arguments to different kinds of effects. A prime example is provided by apps and websites such as Tripadvisor.com, which give both providers of hospitality services and buyers the

possibility to post online critiques and justifications of the prices as well as the quality of the services, leading to an overall ranking (Jeacle & Carter, 2011). Overall, Boltanski and Esquerre's framework rests on the important idea that the economic emerges at the intersection of complex social interactions that comprise an irreducibly argumentative and discursive element.

Now, with these preliminaries in place, it is possible to move on to the central notion of the 'enrichment economy'. The main thesis that Boltanski and Esquerre set out is that practices of enrichment define the contours of a new commodification form in which things (or, more generally, goods and services) acquire value by virtue of their association with a *narrative* that somehow makes these things stand out in the eyes of buyers. Where commodities produced under the 'standard form' are mainly bought to fulfil needs, other kinds of goods serve different, and more complex, functions. For example, Boltanski and Esquerre analyse in detail things that belong to collections, such as wines coming from a particular vineyard and where the collector aims to 'complete' the series by owning wines for all available dates. Goods such as these are rarely, if ever, randomly selected. In fact, Boltanski and Esquerre provide many empirical examples of collections identified and valorised through specific forms of narratives (such as the historical specificity of the vinery, the tradition of producing wine by using these specific grapes and so on). The narratives, moreover, are articulated by actors that have special access to economic, cultural, and symbolic resources and which can use distinctive techniques of commercialization, normally addressed at the richer strata of the population. 'Enrichment' thus takes on a double meaning. First, it refers to the increase of economic value of an item by virtue of the social effectivity of the narrative that surrounds it. Second, it refers to the actors that produce the narratives and sell the items, which seek new opportunities of gaining income and wealth. Enriched actors thus turn to the production of enriched and narratively enhanced goods and services, such as luxury and artisanal goods or objects that form vast collections (Boltanski & Esquierre, 2020: 172-179). Importantly, the things that partake of the enrichment economy must also be deemed to be authentic in some sense of the term: this is a condition of the non-substitutability of the enriched objects or services, which acquire value precisely because they *cannot*

be produced at a mass scale (Boltanski & Esquierre, 2020:191). It is this authenticity, confirmed through narratives, that, for example, connects things with some valuable past or tradition and prevents a relative decline of their price across time. Overall, then, enriched goods and services are deemed to be exceptional. In contrast to goods marketized under the 'standard form' of commodification, to wit, mass industrial production, they are 'transformed' through socially recognised narratives connecting the producers or buyers and the sellers. These narratives form a kind of *lingua franca* whose mastery normally requires at least the accumulation of sufficient amounts of cultural capital and makes the specimens that they are about 'special' and unique.

The most important example of enriched objects that Boltanski and Esquerre discuss consists in what they call the 'collection form'. In this form of valorisation, objects (say, to return to the examples used by Boltanski and Esquerre, a bottle of fine French red wine that was produced during a particular year and from a very specific vinery) acquire value not by virtue of their specific usefulness (say, because they can be consumed, as would have been the case under the standard form of valorisation) but because they are associated to a narrative (say, some kind of story extolling the history of that specific vinery) that can justify selling the item at a higher price. Since collections must be as complete as possible, however they are defined (say, by year, by vinery, by origin or by a combination of these features), the rarity of the specimens boosts their price. Moreover, the specimens are not bought to be consumed, but merely to be stored as parts of the collection (Boltanski & Esquierre, 2020:193-220). Without entering the finer details of Boltanski and Esquerre's exposition, we might say that the main distinctive characteristic that differentiates the collection form as a commodification project is the distinctive *valorisation of the past*. Thus, whereas standard industrial objects produced in a mass fashion gradually lose their economic value as they grow older, items that can be collected, and precisely *because* of their association with specific events mediated by narratives (Boltanski and Esquerre provide the example of the watch that De Gaulle was wearing when signing the Treaty of Paris), they can acquire more value as time passes.

From a more critical perspective, it is important to stress that the framework that Boltanski and Esquerre propose is not all-encompassing, nor are the boundaries between the various commodification forms identified watertight (Boltanski & Esquierre, 2020: 221). Whatever the current importance of collections as economic forms, enrichment as a narrative process sustaining economic interactions involving actors that valorise objects by transforming them beyond their 'mundane' (i.e., strictly utilitarian) features is not exhausted by the 'collection' and the 'trend' forms. It is a major gap of Boltanski and Esquerre's typology that the forms of enrichment considered do not appear to account for cases in which the transformation of items or objects into enriched specimens is produced through narratives that are not directed towards the past (as in the collection form) or sustained by differences in social status (as in the trend form). Indeed, there can be forms where the narrative justifying the price mobilises authenticity as a distinctive feature. This, as we shall see in chapter 6, is exactly one important narrative theme that Mills uses to sell her food at premium prices. And whilst it is also clear that, in Boltanski and Esquerre's terminology, Mills's commodification practices also partake of the trend form, this is not enough to fully account for Mills's economic project.

In fact, many of the formal features that Boltanski and Esquerre address in their book can be found in Mills's case. These include narratives of 'wellness' and 'goodness' undergirding the special value of the kinds of food that Mills champions. Similarly, these narratives require the use of high amounts of cultural capital to promote their authenticity. Moreover, the trend form is clearly at play: the food items that Mills marketizes rapidly lose their value as time passes and they gain value by virtue of their association with a social media celebrity, a wealthy white woman that has accumulated a significant amount of money and cultural capital. On the other hand, the association of wellness with the food depicted on Mills's Instagram profile is not at all geared towards the past: there is no sign of a culinary heritage or tradition, that is used in other similar contexts. On the contrary, 'wellness' functions as an ahistorical and unobservable property that, by its very presence, is supposed to utterly transform both the quality of food and the person consuming it. Moreover, the certification of the presence of this unobservable quality comes through Mills's declaration of

authenticity, based on her own first-personal narrative. As we shall see, this narrative mainly concerns the story of an illness that was successfully cured by consuming the right kinds of foods. It conveys a deeply personal qualitative experience which is, strictly speaking, impossible to certify other than through subjective and 'lived' means. Still, the narrative transforms the marketized food. This distinctive commodification form is certified and sustained through a community of 'believers' or, more simply put, by persons that claim to have had similar subjective experiences for whatever reason and which recognise that quality in each other. The upshot is that Boltanski and Esquerre's framework, in the context of this thesis, is accordingly enriched to account for Mills's case and for similar cases of wellness entrepreneurs.

The preceding discussion points to the following conclusions. First, enrichment economies are based on the valorisation of premium goods and services through narratives that transform the things sold and which make these things stand out vis-a-vis standard mass-produced objects in a socially confirmed way. Second, the narratives depend on their articulation as well as on their chances of success on the possession of high amounts of cultural capital on the part of both the buyer and the seller. Third, the narratives are not static: they evolve under specific social conditions of articulation of arguments aimed at critiquing and justifying the association of values and prices. Fourth, the 'trend' form, which is particularly helpful when it comes to interpreting Mills's entrepreneurial practice, should be supplemented by an 'authenticity' commodification form. The latter is sustained through the practice of confirming the presence of a transformative unobservable subjective quality that makes a thing stand out and where the recognition itself binds together persons as members of a community that treat each other as sharing that same subjective experience.

3. Conclusion

This chapter can be briefly summarised in the following way. First, I reviewed literature to do with presentation of the self, microcelebrity, food and social media studies, with a special emphasis on phenomena of wellness, clean eating, and food anxieties. Several themes emerge which comprise the rise of wellness bloggers, the link

between food anxieties and the emergence of the 'clean eating' trend, as well as the importance of online self-presentation practices with respect to the construction of microcelebrity on (visual) social media, where that includes celebrity based on one's visual relationship to food. These themes are pertinent in Mills's case, since she became an influencer and thereafter a successful entrepreneur in the foodsphere by primarily relying on Instagram. Second, I focused, more specifically, on social-scientific literature pertaining to the themes of authenticity, class/distinction and enrichment. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, these are particularly important when it comes to explaining Mills's online practices and her entrepreneurial success. Some of the reasons are already given in the preceding discussion but, briefly put, the theoretical lenses discussed have been chosen as they allow to account for Mills's distinctive trajectory as someone who based her fame on an authentic personal experience (a conversion to plant-based eating after an existential crisis), leveraging her class position and concomitant tastes to not just become a best-selling author but, ultimately, a successful businesswoman who sells premium products at high prices.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Overview

In this chapter, I present the theoretical foundation of my research approach, as well as reasoning underlying my decisions to use a certain number of methods to answer my research questions. I discuss the methodological lens of my analysis, how I made specific choices for this research and how I engaged with the dataset. Additionally, I introduce the tools and techniques adopted for best effect of my data collection and analysis. Essentially, I explain how I attempted to establish a carefully constructed balance between theory and practice, transforming the relation between methodology and methods to what Howell (Howell, 2013) describes as the two sides of the same coin. Rigorous practice is intimately connected to an accurate theoretical background, while clear and concise theory contribute to a thorough understanding of practical situations (Howell, 2013). After presenting my methodology and methods, I set out the approach I used to analyse a sizable dataset comprised of 4,000 Instagram posts and images. This approach, which I name 'Comparative Instachronics' (see section 3.4 below), produces several clusters of Instagram posts arranged in order of occurrence within the Instagram ecosystem. At the same time, it corresponds to respective life events that happened outside Instagram. These clusters, which I name 'eras' present distinct time-periods in Mills's life and provide a replicable methodological approach of interpreting a single account's (and the corresponding person's) digital trajectory on Instagram. Finally, as a preparation for the findings chapters that follow, I conclude this chapter by providing in some detail the reasons behind choosing the specific theoretical lens of distinction, authenticity and enrichment for my interpretation and discussion.

3.1 Theoretical Background

This section provides a detailed presentation of the approach adopted for this thesis, and in this respect differs from the literature review that preceded. The approach can be unpacked by reference to three methodological lenses which helped me clarify where my work is positioned.

3.1.1 Lens #1: Interpretive ethnography and immersion

First, I situate my work within interpretive social science broadly conceived, along lines long ago defined by Clifford Geertz (Geertz, 1973, 1983). The broad aims of such an approach are, first, to provide as accurate a description as can be realistically achieved of the actions and practices of specific chosen actors from the point of view of those actors themselves and, second, to reasonably trace out the wider meaning contexts, both material and symbolic, in which those actions and practices occur. It has been long established by seminal and influential works on hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1975) and analytical philosophy of language (Davidson, 1984; Quine, 1960) that the interpretation of purposive action involves resorting to a complete reconstruction of inter-locked webs of meanings to which actors implicitly refer. The reconstruction of the action's meaning by an observer can succeed if, and only if, these webs are further elucidated. Therefore, immersion in the actor's 'world of meaning' (where that world includes the context in which the action is taking place) is required in order for description of the action to be as successful as it can reasonably be, through a process of interpretive iteration well described by Davidson (Davidson, 1984). The interpreter begins with a set of tentative hypotheses about the meanings of the observed actions, both linguistic and non-linguistic, empirically verifies whether the hypotheses 'make sense' in context given what she takes for granted, spots mistakes of attribution of meaning if need be by dropping certain hypotheses about the beliefs attributed to the actor and the significance of the context and then repeats the process until a sufficiently satisfactory (given the evidence) description emerges.

There is no specific set of rules guaranteeing in advance that ascriptions of meaning will always come out correctly, nor any 'ideal' point of ascription of meaningfulness outside the process of interpretation. On the view adopted, interpretive practice has served its purpose when it has elucidated to a sufficient – but always essentially contestable – degree the web of meanings alluded to by the actors themselves, where this involves a considerable degree of attention to nuance as well as to the context of the action. Naturally, transparency regarding the exercise of interpretation also

necessitates iterative reflexivity. Since the attribution of meanings to the observed actions essentially involves a set of supporting hypotheses on the part of the interpreter, only some of which can be made explicit at any given time (Brandom, 1998), it is imperative, following good interpretive practice, first, to disclose as fully as can reasonably be the initial starting points of interpretation and, second, to show how these starting points evolved through the iterative process of interpretation. Interpretive practice is thus not fundamentally different from common-sense everyday attribution of meanings to actions, but merely an especially disciplined, systematic and highly reflective and explicit practice of such attributions.

3.1.2 Lens #2: An eclectic pragmatism

My second commitment follows from the assumption noted above that the description of purposive action is both essentially contested and contestable. Since there is no criterion outside interpretation to make sense of action, no amount of theorising about interpretive protocols, and, essentially, no mechanical application of methodological principles can ever guarantee a 'correct' or 'accurate' description, still less an 'objective' one. Therefore, I have taken the decision to engage in a kind of "eclectic pragmatism" regarding the methods used to approach my field. At each stage, and through an iterative interpretive process of trial and error, I have attempted to make sense of my field by using a variety of methods, to be described in detail further on. The choice of methods was pragmatic i.e., the methods were selected with an eye towards making progressive sense of my field. The more the process appeared to succeed, the more I focused on specific methods which seemed to be more useful than others, taking also into account specific resource constraints (such as time). Ultimately, the only way to assess whether I have successfully elucidated the actions of the actors under study involves not an abstract critique of the methods used on a priori methodological grounds, but, rather, a reading of the work in its context. In interpretive social science perhaps more than elsewhere, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Whilst this does not imply a lack of methodological rigor, and indeed all the methods used in the present thesis are explained and justified, it does mean that one should not try to impose on the topic under investigation more methodological rigor than the topic itself allows for

3.1.3 Lens #3: Methodological framework for a digital, social, and visual media world

Third, my last methodological lens which will be explored in detail further below, is to do with the peculiarities of the 'digital', the 'social' and the 'visual', which are at the heart of my thesis. In fact, working on a social media focused thesis involves what Kozinets (2010) has described as 'a point of no return' in the integration of the digital with the non-digital. The Internet and all computer-mediated communications, tensions and affordances can no longer be viewed by social scientists as esoteric occurrences. On the contrary, I strongly believe that operationalising principles for making sense of the purposive action of actors using digital devices or connecting on the Internet and using social media platforms, requires placing a special kind of attention on the technological, symbolic, and discursive context of action. I will explain and develop this context below, by reference to pertinent work on 'ethnography for the Internet' (Hine, 2015), 'digital ethnography' (Pink et al., 2015) and the literature on visual methodologies (Rose, 2012) as well as visuality on social media (Hand et al., 2017) as reflective resettlements for online visual digital environments. Here again, whilst the abstract principles of interpretation already alluded to do not fundamentally change, the specificity of the context suitably modifies these principles and requires a scrutiny of the methods used with an eye to make the best sense one can reasonably make of the topic under consideration.

The E3 Internet

This third methodological framework primarily draws inspiration from what Christine Hine describes as "The E3 Internet" in her 2015 book *Ethnography for the Internet* (Hine, 2015). It will be explained further below, in relation to my own research. Hine, who builds her arguments based on traditional ethnographic methodological approaches and theories, with particular references to Geertz (Geertz, 1983) among others, claims that an ethnography for the internet can offer a distinctive and particularly useful way of interpreting the information and experiences pertaining to the relation between people and technology. For Hine, the Internet ethnographer immerses herself in the selected setting of investigation and, just as any other, can also plunge into various online settings and produce different strategies of interpretation and understanding. In particular, she can also "be there", perhaps not

qua physical presence but with a proximity created through mediated interactions (Hine, 2015). Hine believes that ethnography needs to be able to adapt itself to the new methodological challenges posed by online environments, without in any way sacrificing the essential principles of the ethnographic approach. She argues for a multi-modal approach that is tailor-made *for* the Internet and not *of* the Internet. The adaptive ethnographic approach she proposes can be useful when it comes to moving between different platforms, channels and/or devices.

Within this framework Hine introduces three aspects of the online ethnographic experience which can help construct several strategies for interpretation and comprehension: the embedded experience in various contexts, devices and societies, the embodied experience, and everyday experience. Hine calls this framework "The E3 Internet", claiming it offers a vehicle for a systematic comprehension and analysis of online environments. This approach proved particularly helpful while I was initially observing Deliciously Ella, and when I was collecting Instagram data from her account. As Hine explains, the embedded internet idea implies that 'Internet' means different things to different people. Meaning emerges through specific settings, contexts, cultures, devices, and platforms. The embedded Internet introduces a multiplicity of practices and agent-technology unities, each with its own rules, values, behaviours, and characteristics. Mills, for example, uses a great range of digital platforms, such as her blog later-to-be-website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, as well as mobile apps and podcasts. As I was particularly interested in her Instagram activity, the embedded approach helped me ask more specific questions about: a) how this different (visual) online setting, that is mostly operated through a mobile device, was used; b) what kind of self-presentation tactics and practices tailor-made to the platform were mobilized in order for Mills to communicate with the world (and her target audience); c) what kind of special codes of communication (emoticons, hashtags, inspirational quotes, etc.) were activated, and/or d) in what way Mills's visual artifacts evolved, so as to come in line with the styles and forms of "Instagramism" (Manovich, 2017) and thus become integrated within the distinctive grammar of the Instagram world.

In addition to the embeddedness of the Internet, Hine also introduces the idea of the 'embodied' aspect, which particularly fascinated me while observing and analysing Mills. The idea of 'embodied Internet' does not separate the physical body from the online experience, nor does it distinguish between online and offline self. For Hine, "going online" is not an experience taking place in a distinct and separate 'world' but, rather, should be viewed as an extension of the embodied modes of living, communicating, and acting in the already-existing world. Importantly, even if the researcher becomes immersed in the online world, this does not necessarily imply an 'absence' from the physical world and vice versa. "The Internet user is an embodied user" (Hine, 2015: 43). Consequently, it is not enough to say that one is either online or offline: both modes represent complex ways of existing in the world and serve different purposes and needs, depending on circumstances. Indeed, while immersing in the world of Deliciously Ella, I tried not only to ponder on the abstract ideas produced by engaging with the Deliciously Ella dataset, but also on the material circumstances, as well as the emotions and senses shaping the experience of her online ecosystem. In fact, 'just' analysing the Instagram visual dataset, without fully understanding and actively engaging with the world of Deliciously Ella off the limited borders of 4,000 Instagram posts did not seem enough. Inspired from autoethnographic processes, I followed all Deliciously Ella social media platforms, subscribed to her website newsletter, downloaded her mobile apps, listened to her podcasts, visited her delis, tasted her own super-market products, cooked her recipes and shopped a variety of the so-called 'wellness' goods that she promoted. My intention was not to use this exhaustive list of Deliciously Ella-related artifacts as core material for my analysis; after all, my initial idea was to analyse and interpret a large visual Instagram dataset, which is what I eventually did. My intention, rather, was to produce knowledge by combining the thoughts deriving from my very own embodied experience as a follower of Deliciously Ella's online/offline properties and as a consumer of her products, with thoughts about the specificity of Mills's engagement with the Internet, and Instagram in particular.

The third Internet aspect that Hine discusses is the everyday. As the Internet becomes more embedded and embodied, it eventually changes from a distinct feature of the

everyday life to a mundane and unremarkable tool helping us undertake various activities. Nonetheless, even if Internet usage has become a mundane fact in one's everyday life, the Internet is not undeserving of critical attention by researchers. On the contrary, Hine argues, when something becomes an ordinary component of habitual routines, it might fail to be scrutinized or give rise to wonder. The real challenge for the researcher in this case is to manage to overcome this invisible naturalisation and delve into the details of what lies beneath it. Additionally, the researcher should strive to develop strategies and techniques that unravel tensions and meanings behind the mundane, the invisible and what has been taken for granted. In the case of Mills, the everyday aspect is notably obvious especially in the food images she uploads. As I will show in detail in my findings chapter, food dominates Deliciously Ella Instagram images. Because Mills supports a plant-based diet and excludes many food groups from her online visual suggestions, recipes and ingredients repeat themselves, making her Instagram feed sometimes monotonous and monothematic. However, a closer look reveals that not all food images are the same, not all food images are styled and photographed in the same manner, not all food images display the same colours; this becomes particularly obvious in a diachronic perspective. On closer inspection and reflection, what appears to be unsignificant and repetitive, becomes significant and unique.

Digital Ethnography

This thesis has also been influenced by the theoretical approach expressed by Pink et al. in their book *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (Pink et al., 2015), and especially by the five key principles outlined: multiplicity, non-digital-centric-ness, openness, reflexivity and unorthodox. Like Hine, Pink et al. take the view that technology and digital media are part of the everyday world disclosing itself in mundane phenomenal experience. They delve into the digital by deploying a non-digital-focused approach, placing it within the heart of interconnected elements of the everyday personal and social life. These elements can be sensory, digital, material, atmospheric. They represent the non-static world human actors live and act in. For Pink et al. the researcher who uses digital ethnographic practices also needs to adapt to a continuously changing environment. This environment challenges traditionally

defined concepts and produces novel and innovative methods. In this context, the authors introduce five principles that guide their approach and can be adapted to various research goals. I will attempt to introduce these principles in relation to my own thesis, in the paragraphs below.

Multiplicity refers to the numerous ways that a researcher can engage with the digital world and the distinctiveness that digital ethnography deploys in various circumstances. In other words, digital ethnography is unique to the research questions it seeks to answer and to the challenges it responds. At the same time, there is added emphasis to the state of existing infrastructures that support digital (and hence, social) media use. In the case of Deliciously Ella, for example, a unique challenge that I had to face while working on my dataset was the continuous API changes that prevented me from being able to access important information on her Instagram profile. Later in time and while still working on my dataset, I discovered that Mills had completely erased her blog and replaced it with a brand-new commercial website. As a result, I could not find valuable supporting information about specific periods. This resulted in me digging into Internet Archives, to legitimately retrieve the information that I was seeking. However, this also resulted in significant delays since it was a very time-consuming process.

Non-digital-centric-ness introduces the idea that although digital ethnography focuses on the online lives of actors under investigation, the digital aspect is only a part of their world, and it is necessary for the researcher to look beyond the digital to develop a deeper understanding. The idea is intimately connected to Hine's conception of the 'embodied Internet'. Digital media are inseparable from the materiality, emotions, relations, activities, and technologies through which they are experienced. The same principle can be transferred to Instagram: although Deliciously Ella's Instagram activity is mainly conducted online and through digital devices, relationships and actions cannot be exclusively digital. It is important thus to look beyond the digital, to understand how the digital functions. It is through examining challenges and relations to other areas that we can understand at a deeper level the role of social media in people's lives. In the case of Mills, this thesis has very much

benefited by the investigation of Deliciously Ella's publications (cookbooks mainly) as supporting data and, especially, by the closer look of her written personal acknowledgements serving as introductions to her books. These confessions, combined with a closer glimpse into her personal and professional actions as presented by the mainstream UK press and by her own blog posts, aided me to come to a clearer understanding of Mills and to better explain (part of) her actions on Instagram.

Openness is to do with the open boundaries that are required through the process of observing digital worlds. Using openness as a principle for digital ethnography means that the researcher is open to various influences and disciplines, such as computer science, engineering and/or art design, which are often required on the part of the digital researcher, as the study of the digital world necessitates the use of a specific set of skills. Because I faced numerous challenges with Instagram's API and since my academic background does not involve any computer science/programming training, I had to initially discuss with various colleagues from other disciplines how I would be able to respond to collect large volumes of Instagram data through a very limited API source. These discussions helped me formulate different questions that I had to answer before collecting my dataset and made me realise what Pink et al. call 'a collaborative process' (Pink et al., 2015: 30). In a fluid and continuously changing digital environment, it is through a collaborative and not a lonely process that a researcher can create knowledge.

Reflexivity traces back to the traditional notions of reflective processes that an ethnographic approach deploys through encounters with individuals and objects. This approach examines how the researcher shapes her production of knowledge through her relations with the field. However, the distinguishing characteristic in the case of a digital ethnographic approach is that the researcher theorises and encounters the world as "a digital-material-sensory environment" (Pink et al., 2015: 31). For Pink et al. reflexivity goes beyond the idea of merely scrutinizing personal bias. It encompasses a fuller and richer exploration of the subjectivity of the researcher as a creative way of coming to an adequate interpretation and explanation of the actions of

other actors or the tensions and affordances of certain environments. As already noted by reference to Davidson's and Quine's ideas about interpretation, making sense of the action of others always involves formulating hypotheses about the kinds of beliefs and desires that one can reasonable attribute to them based on one's own web of beliefs. Reflexivity thus entails at least being aware of one's starting point in the chain of belief-attributions, i.e., coming to think about the prior beliefs that one already brings in when engaging with a specific subject-matter.

In this vein, my thesis on Deliciously Ella has been especially aided and influenced by my long-standing professional career in digital advertising and marketing. In fact, before becoming engaged myself with academic research, I worked since 2000 in various European advertising agencies in the fields of digital media planning and consumer strategy. I collaborated with many international fast-moving-consumer-goods companies, as well as with luxury brands, to develop advertising techniques and marketing tactics that helped launched various products in several European markets. At the same time, as my expertise was mainly focused on digital and social media environments, I worked with social media influencers and delved into their self-presentation tactics, to introduce successful influencer marketing campaigns. Through a reflective process, I attempted to use my already existing knowledge and beliefs about popular advertising and marketing techniques and tactics as interpretational tools for Mills's Instagram activity. More particularly, I placed Mills's actions into a wider web of beliefs and meaning-giving practices with which I was already familiar, taking at the same time care to think at a deeper level about the possible interpretations of her practices, which may also depend (as indeed they did) on grasping the wider context of influencer marketing, advertising strategy and luxury branding.

Unorthodox, finally, discusses the focus that a digital ethnographic approach requires on alternative forms of communication, such as digital photography and video or, as my own research encountered, emoticons and hashtags. Indeed, Pink et al. claim that in digital environments visual artifacts such as images, do not merely play an illustrative role but, rather, they are different forms of implying feelings, activities, and relationships. It is thus important to make use of all these visual and digital tools to

elicit the multifaceted mix of activities, feelings, relationships that compose the research context. For example, as I will show in more detail in the chapters that follow, when Mills claimed in the online version of tabloid UK newspaper 'The Express' (Britt, 2018) that she had never used the term 'clean eating', it was through further investigation of the Instagram hashtags she was using at the time that I found that her claim was unsubstantiated.

Social Media and Visuality

In 2016 American venture capitalist and Wall Street securities analyst Mary Meeker stated in her well esteemed Internet Trends annual report that, in the digital era, the next evolutional rupture in communication between Millennials (born between 1980 until late '90s) and Generation Z (born between late '90s and the early 2010s) would consist in the 'textual versus visual' opposition (Meeker, 2016). Where Millennials used to talk with each other through short text forms, mainly mobile or desktop communication, Generation Z would use visuality in various forms (images, videos, vanishing stories, memes, or gifs), to develop communication, storytelling, messaging and sharing. For Meeker, visual communication offers an expansive landscape where sophistication and relevance meet to enable more complex and expressive social conversations. By that time, Instagram, as one of the most widespread representatives of visual Web 2.0 communication, had reached 400 million active users worldwide (Kemp, 2016) and soared to a staggering 1,221 million in 2021 (Kemp, 2021) suggesting a wide range of visual tools of interaction. At the same time, the international launch of Beijing-based video sharing app TikTok in 2017, which became a viral phenomenon and one of the fastest-growing apps worldwide (Tankovska, 2021b), expanded the visual social media market and reached a remarkable 689 million users (Kemp, 2021). Moreover, in 2019 more than 50% of Twitter impressions involved posts with images, videos and other forms of visual media (Molla, 2019). Meeker was right in her projection: visual imagery would gradually become an integral tool for communication, especially as technological developments such as better and faster wi-fi and highly sophisticated mobile phone cameras would incite more image taking and sharing.

From the point of view of the social sciences, it is important to reflect upon the structure, role, and function of visual social media as communication platforms. Instagram and/or TikTok are mobile based apps that fully function on smart mobile devices. These devices, especially smartphones, are not only used for making phone-calls; they are also hi-tech photo cameras, they offer high quality live streaming video services through wi-fi connections, they allow downloading information from the internet, reading books, watching films and TV series, taking, and sharing images and videos and – especially during the covid-19 era – they enhanced the acceleration of digital transformation. As Jenkins (Jenkins, 2004) put it by deploying the notion of 'media convergence', social actors find themselves in an unprecedented era of media saturation: media is everywhere and everyone is using all kinds of media to communicate with everyone else. The idea of media convergence implies a multifaceted system where digital technology and media supply more than mere 'tools' for social communication. In fact, the sheer quantity of information exchanged deeply transforms the social world itself (Jenkins, 2004). In this vein, Instagram as a social media platform is not *just* a digital space for sharing imagery, but, at the same time, a cultural and economic territory where audiences, markets, industries, consumers, and genres collide. Instagram is indeed an integral data source for this thesis. Although it mainly involves visual imagery, textual data also plays a significant role. It is the combination of the two – transforming both – that poses a complex challenge for the researcher, who is required to decode and interpret the abovementioned tensions and transitions.

Together with the visual eruption within the digital ecosystem, developments took place across social science research as well, one of the most prominent being the expansion of visual methods (Rose, 2014). A possible explanation for this change could be the mounting weight of visual imagery in the contemporary social and cultural world (Rose, 2014), as well as a dramatic surge of visual circulation within digital and social networks from 2013 and onwards (Faulkner et al., 2017), known to some as "social media's visual turn" (Gibbs et al., 2015). This encompasses the wide spread of the use of visual social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat (and later in time, TikTok), as well as the increase of image-sharing on less image-centric social

media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, or WhatsApp. However, the visual turn on the part of *users* has not yet been translated into a critical mass of distinctive practices of academic *researchers*, at least when compared to academic research on text-based social media communication (Faulkner et al., 2017). Indeed, the visual (and, as already noted above, the limitations applied by particular visual social media platforms' APIs) intensifies complexity and renders both analysis and interpretation more difficult: retrieving, collecting and archiving the visual material and later examining it in combination with its textual elements requires both a longer and deeper researcher involvement than analysis and interpretation of just short-form textual material (Twitter, for instance), where the latter may also be enhanced by using advanced computational tools (Highfield & Leaver, 2016). For this reason, more sophisticated and elaborated methodological approaches for visual analysis from traditional social science studies prove to be extremely advantageous. For my thesis, I chose a critical approach to visual culture as described by Gillian Rose in her seminal work *Visual Methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* (Rose, 2012).

As Rose explains, a critical approach requires: a) *to "take images seriously"* (Rose, 2012: 15), since images are never innocent: they carry their own effects independently from their context; b) *to "think about social conditions and effects of visual objects"* (Rose, 2012: 15), which leads to ponder upon the social repercussions of images and the ways of their circulation and c) to *"consider your own way of looking at images"* (Rose, 2012: 16), taking thus a reflective stance while looking at the images. Taking images seriously requires familiarity with a certain *grammaire* that provides a meticulous guide for discussing the appearance of the image. Rose calls such a *grammaire* 'compositional interpretation' and traces it back to the fundamental approaches to image analysis developed in art history, especially in relation to painting in the Western tradition's fine art (Rose, 2012). Compositional interpretation is based on an exhaustive analysis of images through instruments that scrutinise in essence their visual core. These instruments comprise, among other things, content, colour, spatial organization, geometrical perspective, angle, focus, point of view, zoom shot, light, expressive content. However, compositional interpretation, as a significant part

of a critical visual methodology, also carries important shortcomings. As Rose argues, it does not allow for reflexivity, nor does it consider the particularities of any interpretations. Moreover, it does not incite discussion of how the images were produced, used, and interpreted by various users. Compositional interpretation is not interested in the social practices of visual imagery: it is mainly focused on how images are, but not on what images mean. Consequently, it needs to be combined with other methodological approaches, to respond to the previously mentioned issues. For this thesis, I used Gillian Rose's critical approach as an inspiration for my visual analysis and interpretation and connected Deliciously Ella's Instagram visual imagery with the above-mentioned requirements. I looked carefully at her Instagram images, combining agency, social practices, effects of their viewings and reflexivity on the specificity of my own viewing and interpretations. At the same time, I used compositional interpretation as a method while taking images seriously, the process of which I will explain in more detail below in the section 'Methods and Tools Used'.

Echoing Rose's statement on the non-innocent nature of images (Rose, 2012), work by sociologist Martin Hand places the discussion about visuality more firmly within the complex environment of social media. Hand argues that visuality in social media entails three broad concepts that need further debate and methodological negotiation (Hand et al., 2017). First, the large (and continuously augmenting) volumes of visual social media data present numerous challenges for the researchers in terms of choices, scope, and scale. Second, the creation and the circulation of images on social media platforms via many different devices makes them incomparable to traditional print images. Third, the complex but also edited, inconsistent and agreeable nature of social media visual practices creates such challenges on ascertaining the context of interpretation, that the detail of such practices usually remains a mystery for researchers who mainly focus on the visual outcome. These concepts imply that tensions and challenges between visual imagery and social media platforms demand a meticulous methodological deliberation. Hand suggests (exactly as Rose suggests in her work) that even if images on social media are visual phenomena, they are never transparent: one cannot take them simply as naturalistic and translucent. On the contrary, images on social media are mediated and ambiguous. Hence, a critical

methodological reflection is necessary when delving into the depths of social media visual analysis.

At the core of this methodological approach of visual analysis lies the question concerning the establishment of meaning. As Hand argues, establishing meaning in visual culture studies cannot be viewed separately from the image itself, but may also be profitably approached only through a combination of various intertextual levels of other closely related images and the social practices they belong to. While working on my methodological framework I was particularly aided by this notion, especially since Instagram images are part of a wider digital ecosystem, with a particular grammar, codes, supporting texts as well as contexts that also give them meaning. As a characteristic example, when I was looking at Mills's visual post of 2014 showing a sliced avocado on toast, I was not just looking at an image of a healthy snack uploaded by a wellness advocate. That should have been an obvious choice for a blogger supporting 'healthier' food options. Around the same time, avocados and their relation to Instagram were receiving considerable media attention (Carney, 2016; Equihua, 2014; Hayword, 2019; Henderson, 2017; Orenstein, 2016), because they were resurfacing in the platform as a trendy and fashionable ingredient. In essence, I was not merely looking at an image, but also at an Instagram trending topic, which, at a specific point of time, had redefined avocados: through a combination of food styling, overhead shots and various filters, avocados had become an 'instagrammable' artefact, which, in turn, created a new culinary fixation, with cultural and economic significance for a whole generation: the millennials (Heller, 2017).

3.1.4 Summary of theoretical foundation.

Before I proceed to the next section and discuss the methods I used for my research, I would like to summarise the theoretical foundation of my research approach. **First,** I placed my work within a, broadly conceived, interpretive approach as described by Clifford Geertz, (Geertz, 1973, 1983) aiming to offer accurate descriptions of the actions and practices of specific actors, from their point of view. Additionally, I aimed at tracing both the material and symbolic context in which those actions happened. **Second,** I decided to develop a certain "eclectic pragmatism" (as I call it) which means

that I remained eclectic regarding the methods used to approach my field and focused on methods as tools delivering results in my attempt to make sense of the actions and events of my topic. **Third,** I handled the particularities of the combination of the 'digital', the 'social' and the 'visual', which reflect the kernel of this thesis, through three seminal works discussing ethnographers dealing with digital and visual environments. These approaches are a) Christine Hine's 'The E3 Internet' (Hine, 2015); b) Pink et al.'s approach of 'Digital Methodologies' (Pink et al., 2015) and c) Gillian Rose's critical approach to visual culture (Rose, 2012), as well as the methodological challenges on visuality and social media, as approached by Martin Hand (Hand et al., 2017).

3.2 Methods and Tools Used

In the section below I will discuss the methods and tools I used for my research and the synthesis I ended up applying to offer a deeper understanding and interpretation of Deliciously Ella's Instagram activity. I will introduce in some detail the following approaches: a) Elements of Autoethnography; b) Digital Methods and Netnography; c) Content Analysis; d) Code Frame; e) Compositional Interpretation; f) Mixed Methods.

As previously discussed, social media provides new ways of communication, socialisation, information exchange, public speaking and doing business, among others. The abundance of data produced within these online ecosystems is of particular interest not only to computer scientists and/or technology scholars but also to social scientists from various disciplines. Although this is still a growing field in terms of replicable tools for data mining, collection and analysis, I believe that the combination of established methods (such as content analysis) with recent analytical techniques for the online field (such as the digital methods paradigm) tremendously helps the researcher to give form and meaning to the, often, chaotic assemblage of social media data. It is also important, in my opinion, to state once more that although there are researchers who still study social media as a separate part of one's 'real' life, this thesis insists on an integrated approach. As previously stated, many scholars view social media as an integral part of the social world and do not distinguish between 'real' and 'virtual', or 'online' and 'offline' (Hine, 2015; Kozinets, 2006; Pink, 2013;

Rogers, 2013; Sloan & Quan-Haase, 2017). Social media do not function in some separate social space that we enter and exit at our own convenience, but are predominantly and simultaneously produced within the same historical, political, social and economic context as is our actual social world (Sloan & Quan-Haase, 2017). It is crucial, therefore, that the social science researcher work with social media data together with other forms of information (including newspaper articles, books, maps, demographics, and statistics, among others) in order to produce meaningful synapses and more complete interpretations.

3.2.1 Elements of autoethnography

Immersing myself into Deliciously Ella's world was a fascinating yet challenging procedure that would have been partial had I not been able to directly engage with Mills's food choices, recipes and cooking tools and techniques. From the first days of researching her blog and Instagram, I decided to test and taste Mills's recipes. Borrowing from Stanislavsky's approach, where actors try to embody their roles' emotions, psychological motivations, and backstories to accurately represent them and create believable performances (Cole, 2015), I chose to follow all Deliciously Ella accounts on social media, cook the recipes, try the wellness products, and keep notes during the process. Eventually, and after a significant initial immersion, I chose not to use autoethnography as a fundamental tool of my research,hence the title of this subsection, which talks of 'elements' of autoethnography. However, the notes I kept eased the process of analysis and allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of Mills. It also put me in a position to grasp at least the economic element of inequalities of access to plant-based 'healthy' eating. These are the reasons for which I briefly present some of my autoethnographic insights below.

As a qualitative method, autoethnography provides more complex and detailed information about specific individual experiences, instead of general knowledge about big groups of people (Adams, 2015). From the early years of the 'Dani auto-ethnography' (Heider, 1975) and Walter Goldschmidt's "self-ethnography" carrying personal investment and understanding, until recent autoethnographic works on social media (Are, 2021; Basabain et al., 2021; Mavroudis & Milne, 2016; Vik et al., 2022)

and attempts on "computational digital autoethnography" (Brown, 2019), this method has grown to become a significant and legitimate tool not only for social science but for a wide range of disciplines as well (Adams, 2015). Additionally, it raises the subject of objectivity in research, asking researchers to recognize that ethnographic research cannot be separate from one's self (Richardson & Adams-StPierre, 2008) while qualitative researchers can no longer shed light in the world of others without accounting for their own experiences, intentions and assumptions (Richardson & Adams-StPierre, 2008) and without taking responsibility by reflecting on their own subjective approaches (Boylorn et al., 2016).

Accordingly, I decided that for a period of two months at least, I would systematically try a range of Deliciously Ella recipes and, later, some of her products. These included smoothies, nut butters, pasta sauces, pan stirred vegetables, soups and, of course, zucchini. I personally follow the Mediterranean diet and I cook most of my family's meals at home. It was thus not too difficult for me to include more vegetables and fruits in my shopping list, nor to cook different recipes, at least for a while. However, after the first few weeks of following the Deliciously Ella Instagram account and blog and cooking the recipes, I realized that the whole procedure was anything but effortless, despite Mills's constant online reassurance that her recipes were simple, quick, and easy. In fact, it was not the complexity of the recipes that troubled me, but a long list of expensive ingredients that I had to buy and keep in quite abundant quantities, at least if I were to follow the Deliciously Ella blog daily. For example, so-called 'Sweet Potato Brownies', one of the most popular Deliciously Ella recipes (Woodward, 2015: 265) required sweet potatoes, buckwheat flour (or brown rice flour), maple syrup, medjool dates, ground almonds and raw cacao. The recipe was easy enough to execute, but, back in February 2015, buckwheat flour and/or brown rice flour was not as widely available in the UK supermarkets as it is today. Additionally, as most of the recipe's ingredients are quite costly, one should search in various places for different offers and options to avoid overpaying. In other words, this was a time-consuming and expensive process. In short, it became crystal clear from my own personal experience that Mills's lifestyle was not open to everyone but required significant investments along various dimensions and presupposed the possession of different forms of

capital. The data below show an example of the total cost of purchasing the appropriate ingredients for this recipe. I checked the updated product prices in five leading UK supermarkets (Waitrose, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Morrisons, ASDA) and I used a range of prices that were displayed on the shelves (updated for December 2022). Although I included all cost ranges (including organic and bio products as well), I specifically avoided using bio or organic goods in my own recipe tasting, to decrease the grocery costs.

600gr sweet potatoes: From £0.99 – £3.65 per kilo

14 Medjool dates (140gr): From £10.5 - £27.78 per kilo

80gr ground almonds: From £11.5 - £23 per kilo

100gr buckwheat flour or brown rice flour: From £3.80 – £8.5 per kilo

4 tablespoons raw cacao powder (60gr): From £8 - £32 per kilo

3 tablespoons maple syrup (45gr): From £11 - £24 per kilo

The total cost of this recipe is thus between £4.20-£10 for 10 brownies, which is considerably more expensive and time-consuming than purchasing a 10-pack of brownies from a supermarket. The nutritional quality of these different products may differ, and my personal experience has led me to conclude that the process of making the brownies involves an element of distinction and exclusivity. One needs, at the very least, various resources, such as money and time, to properly cook the foods. The class element becomes particularly obvious, moreover, when one considers wider consumer audiences, who continuously express major concerns about the cost of food in the UK (FSA, 2022a). In fact, according to recent reports (November 2022) by the FSA, these concerns have significantly increased during the period up to Christmas time 2022 compared with the same period last year: 81% of the consumers reported concerns about the food prices when last year this number was 62% (FSA, 2022c).

Another striking element of my personal interaction with Deliciously Ella's recipes was the sugar level found in alternative-to-refined-sugar propositions, such as medjool dates and/or maple syrup. Mills has consistently claimed at various occasions in the past, and especially in her first book 'Deliciously Ella', that she used to be a *"sugar*

monster" and *"a total addict"* (Woodward, 2015: 21). Accordingly, in this narrative it was purportedly the decision to completely remove refined sugar (among other things) from her diet that dramatically changed her health status and helped her heal from the illness that she was facing at the time:

"The decision to change my diet really was single-handedly the best thing I've ever done. It allowed me to take control of my illness and get my life back, which was so empowering." (Woodward, 2015: 27).

Refined sugar does not possess any nutritional value compared to medjool dates or even maple syrup, for example. However, sugar intake is still high. Roughly, maple syrup contains 61gr of sugar per 100gr of product and Medjool dates 68gr of sugar per 100gr of product (I have used the nutritional information of the maple syrup and medjool dates that I had bought at the time of writing these lines from one of the leading UK supermarkets, on the assumption that their values would be typical). Accordingly, portion intake needs to be controlled so as to avoid weight gain, diabetes, high blood pressure, tooth decay and/or chronic inflammation among other effects of excess sugar eating (HarvardHealthPublishing, 2022). But this contradicts Mills's lifestyle motto according to which she used to repeat, especially during the first years of her success, that her lifestyle is about *"counting goodness, not calories"* (Woodward, 2015: 31).

"I'm simply saying that there are amazing, natural alternatives which taste just as good – if not better – than the processed, sugar-laden desserts everyone is used to, and they'll make you feel so much better too." (Woodward, 2015: 31).

There is no doubt that a sweet alternative to refined sugar might provide some tangible benefits regarding a healthier nutrition. However, with such levels of sugar as the ones existing in maple syrup and/or medjool dates and irrespective of whether sugar is refined or not, even a rough calculation of calorie intake is necessary for those who want to look after their general health.

3.2.2 Digital Methods and netnography

Since the dominant environment of the actor under investigation for this thesis is the online (and more particularly, the social media) environment, focusing on wellness bloggers and influencers required a more tailor-made methodological approach, such as the one found in the Digital Methods paradigm (Rogers, 2013). Digital Methods place the medium (in this case, Instagram) in the centre of the researcher's attention, as a rich source of novel and innovative methodological approaches, to shed light on the social processes and relations of our contemporary world. The selected approach will work as part of the interpretative basis for examining the interaction between actors (Deliciously Ella) and digital devices (Instagram) as well as the process of the points of view, principles, actions, ideas and individualities involved in such environments (Caliandro & Gandini, 2017). Therefore, to paraphrase Christine Hine, who has delved into various methodological dilemmas occurring with regard to contemporary internet society (Hine, 2015), digital methods help develop an analysis *for* rather than *of* the digital world. In this vein, I have profited from Rogers's understanding of digital methods. According to Rogers, digital methods are not supposed to utilise the internet and various computational tools, to analyse and present research; they are supposed to mine the internet to find material that will be helpful in social science research. Most importantly, Rogers is not interested in online culture as a separate and 'atypical' kind of culture, born online, but, on the contrary, places emphasis on how one can use the online environment as a tool to study culture in general. Indeed, digital methods are aimed at people from various research disciplines wishing to use digital source material. (Thomas, 2016).

Along the same lines, "Netnography" (Kozinets, 2002) is a method inspired by researcher and academic Robert Kozinets in the late 1990s. Kozinets attempted to mobilise classical ethnographic methods as a tool for understanding virtual communities and networks in the fields of consumer behaviour and marketing. The method is classified as a qualitative research method and, compared to traditional ethnographic approaches, it is viewed as faster, less expensive, less obtrusive and more naturalistic (Ahuja & Alavi, 2018) and endowed with the ability to accurately

describe the lived reality of users (Kozinets, 2002). The key element of this approach is that, although it can involve active integration of the actors under investigation into the research (interviews, questionnaires, etc.), it also offers the option to passively observe and monitor actors, as well as gather information and material about them, in order to obtain a deeper comprehension of their online behaviour (Kozinets, 2018). In the pertinent literature netnography, although limited in various ways, is considered as an established approach for understanding actors' performances on social media through immersion in their online practices and actions (Del Vecchio et al., 2020). Even if the approach originated in business and marketing fields, with the proliferation of social network technologies growing research interest transformed it into a study of online social interactions (Loureiro et al., 2019); (Brem & Bilgram, 2015); (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018); (Moura & Aschemann-Witzel, 2021); (Dolan & Goodman, 2017); (Eaton & Pasquini, 2020); (Kozinets, 2019), heavily based on digitally mediated artifacts of communication (Kozinets, 2018). For Kozinets, netnography is predominantly a participant observation research method, relying on an online fieldwork where computational tools are necessary, in order to collect and analyse data as a means towards a better understanding of a cultural phenomenon (Loureiro et al., 2019).

In the case of Deliciously Ella, I have used a combination of both methods to better understand both the online environment of Instagram, but also her own distinctive presence within this ecosystem. Long before I started collecting my data, for example, I decided to 'follow' the Deliciously Ella account on Instagram (but also on her other digital and social media) and observe on a daily basis her activity, posts, use of various tools offered, and also her own reactions and responses to what, at the time, was her growing online community. I set up notifications on my mobile so that I could be alerted each time she would post content online. I then decided to do the same with a few other significant peers of hers, such as the Hemsley Sisters, Calgary Avansino, Madeleine Shaw, Anna Jones, Sarah Britton, Joe Wicks, the Food Medic and Gwyneth Paltrow's 'Goop'. In this way, I created an online 'wellness' social space, where I could initially closely observe self-presentation techniques, strategies and the tensions and meanings these produced.

3.2.3 Content analysis and code frame

Content Analysis as a method of interpreting textual or/and visual sources is one of the most popular and fast-growing techniques in various fields of research over the last 40 years (Neuendorf, 2017b). Described as one of the most significant research methods for the social sciences (Krippendorff, 2004), its objective is to decode in a methodical and organised way a vast amount of textual and other data into a succinct synopsis of key outcomes (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Although earlier descriptions of content analysis focused on the analysis of written texts, communicational developments shifted focus towards inclusion of a greater range of data. There are several approaches to content analysis, mainly described in literature as: a) basic content analysis; b) interpretive content analysis and c) qualitative content analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2015), or, depending on the field of research, a) conventional; b) directed and c) summative (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). All these approaches are fundamentally used to grasp and create meanings, each one serving different purposes depending on the researcher's aims and objectives when applying methods for collecting, coding, analysing and conceptualising content. Context plays a crucial and distinctive role in content analysis, since the researcher treats data as demonstrations of expressions produced to be decoded for their connotations and meanings (Krippendorff, 2004). With the creation and evolution of social media platforms, new sources of information appeared, offering numerous opportunities to social scientists for content analysis. More particularly, content analysis has been a prominent analytic approach among studies involving social media content (Snelson, 2016). However, these new opportunities did not come without their challenges, especially in terms of how data and its relation with the social world can be developed (Sloan, Quan-Haase, Quan-Haase, et al., 2017). Indeed, a noteworthy challenge for social media researchers is to combine traditional methodologies with social media practices and to apply these methods to totally different social environments (Hand et al., 2017). This is especially the case when data produced by social media platforms does not only concern text or visual forms but also includes newer types of information points such as emoticons, hashtags, ephemeral stories, gifs, and memes. It is in this explosive ascension of content that methods such as content analysis prove to be very

valuable for social scientists. For visual social media content, in particular, content analysis has been beneficial, especially when analysing data specifically created for and in extremely context-sensitive online spaces (d. boyd & Crawford, 2012).

For this thesis, a content analysis process was designed based on the content analysis flowchart depicted in Neuendorf's (Neuendorf, 2017a) Content Analysis Guidebook: First, I evaluated the kind of content I wanted to investigate and analyse and connected it to my research questions. Second, I defined the variables of the study through a lens of exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories. Third, I created a coding book with all variable measures explained in detail. Fourth, I developed a representative sample (which is explained in further detail in the relevant section later down). Finally, I decided on a separate coder I used to establish intercoder reliability (Freelon, 2010). Examples of the relevant intercoder reliability results can be found in the Appendices section at the end of this thesis. As my analysis is mostly interpretative, I did not use multivariate techniques of reporting, but I preferred to present one variable at a time. The section below explains in further, how I developed my code frame.

Code frame

The rich visual dataset of Deliciously Ella's collected Instagram posts has offered many opportunities for in-depth analysis. However, for the research to be more comprehensive, a typology of topics discussed as well as a code frame were needed. Coding is one of the most important components of content analysis, requiring a deep dive into data. It consists in categorising data in various segments with a code name and using these codes in order to have a more comprehensive later understanding of what is happening in the social situation under investigation (Charmaz, 2006). At the same time, coding presents several challenges for the researcher. The latter must develop a clear and concise code frame that can: a) answer the respective research questions modelled right from the start of the research and b) be later used or reproduced from other researchers. A main recurring issue derives from the data classification process by which texts, visuals or other material are reduced in fewer content categories (Weber, 2011). In particular, when the data for analysis are social

in nature, a coder needs to resort to their cultural and interpretational skills in order to ensure trustworthiness, reliability and objectivity and withstand recurrent examination (Krippendorff, 2004).

For the Deliciously Ella dataset, which is predominantly visual, I decided to use a combination of coding techniques and research methods to analyse and code visual material and their associated textual material (when applicable). These coding techniques include basic content analysis, quantitative content analysis and qualitative content analysis, with a special focus on compositional interpretation for visual analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2015); (Rose, 2012); (Pennington, 2019). Basic content analysis is the most popular form used in the social sciences, as well as interdisciplinary fields of research (Weber, 2011). Its deductive form leads the researcher to develop a necessary code frame based on already existing theories and experimental work, sometimes even prior to data collection. Indeed, the code frame in basic content analysis is usually descriptive and does not require particular interpretational skills. Quantitative content analysis aims to be as 'objective' as possible (Pennington, 2018 check reference) and mainly counts the presented and obvious content that is under investigation. The Deliciously Ella visual dataset, for instance, is inundated with images of food. At the same time, there are also images depicting people or animals. A first coding attempt, under quantitative analysis, would consist in measuring how many of these images depict food, people or animals, or any other relevant categories. Indeed, quantitative analysis can be used to investigate data that can be detected concretely (Banks, 2007).

On the other hand, qualitative content analysis tackles not only the obvious content, but predominantly the themes and the ideas implied within that content (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). Qualitative content analysis also entails familiarization with the dataset, or as described in (Maher et al., 2018) "immersion" in the data. Immersion helps the researcher to look at the whole dataset to build further knowledge of context and also to notice key areas of analysis. In this case, the purpose of coding is not mere description of what the data shows but primarily a deeper understanding of what is implied, what kinds of connections to the social world appear and how, to answer as best as possible specific research questions. Researchers in qualitative content

analysis play a central role, since they take context and cases seriously (Banks, 2007, check reference) to better understand the data under scrutiny. Moreover, qualitative research often relies on case studies and it is the density of the case study that acts as a compelling context for comprehending and interpreting the social object under study (Banks, 2007).

With both coding techniques and research questions in mind, I decided to design two distinct clusters for my code frame: a) Descriptive code frame and b) Qualitative code frame. The first one would categorise the dataset according to basic, intuitively appealing information, such as date of post, number of post, location shown, hashtags used and so forth. It would also perform frequency counts deriving from the coded data. The second one would take into consideration the activity of "memoing" (Benaquisto, 2008) and would use it in order to obtain a more profound understanding of the dataset. In this respect, I have been keeping notes since the first day that I decided to direct my attention to Mills, a practice that turned out to be particularly useful while collecting data and observing her Instagram timeline. Moreover, the second code frame would contemplate compositional interpretation elements (Rose, 2012) following the techniques for a more elaborated interpretation. At the same time, Mills herself, as she presents herself online, visually, or textually, in certain ways rather than others, would be my dominant guide in the code frame creation. By letting Mills lead me, I decided to put the main research actor in the centre of attention and make the context of this particular example a valuable partner in decoding, comprehension, and interpretation.

The table No 3.1 shows the analytical code frame from March 2021.

Table No.3.1: Deliciously Ella descriptive and qualitative code frame

DELICIOUSLY ELLA - DESCRIPTIVE CODE FRAME		
1	Post number	Indicates number of each post with chronological order
2	Sample post number	Indicates number of post reflecting the sample data list
3	Post link	indicates the unique URL of each Instagram post under investigation
4	Post date	Indicated the date each post was uploaded
5	Post dominant visual theme	Indicated what the image predominantly shows
6	Post caption theme	Indicates what theme the post's caption predominantly discusses
7	Post location	Indicates where, in which location, the image was taken
8	Number of hashtags used	Indicates how many hashtags were used in each post
9	Hashtags	Indicates what hashtags were used in each post
10	Number of emoticons used	Indicates how many emoticons were used in each post
11	Emoticons	Indicates which emoticons were used in each post
DELICIOUSLY ELLA - QUALITATIVE CODE FRAME - FOOD RELATED INFORMATION		
1	Kind of food/drink	Indicates what kind of food (fruit, vegetables, grains, pulses, etc) or drink (smoothies, juices, beverages, etc) is depicted and/or mentioned
2	Main ingredients	Indicates the dominant ingredients shown and/or mentioned
3	Camera angle	Indicates the camera angle used to photograph and serve food
4	Food description	Indicates what words are used to describe food
5	Special diets	Indicates whether special nutrition requirements are mentioned (gluten free, dairy free, fat free, raw, vegan, etc)
6	Wellness	Indicates whether 'wellness' is mentioned or shown (within the image, caption and/or hashtag)
7	Clean Eating	Indicates whether 'clean eating' is mentioned or shown (within the image, caption and/or hashtag)
8	Plant Based	Indicates whether 'plant based' is mentioned or shown (within the image, caption and/or hashtag)
DELICIOUSLY ELLA - QUALITATIVE CODE FRAME - ELLA RELATED INFORMATION		
1	People depicted	Indicates the person(s) depicted
2	Who is Mills with	Indicates whether Mills is alone or with other people and/or animals
3	Mills's self presentation	Indicates whether Mills's face or body is fully shown
4	Feelings expressed	Indicates whether Mills's feelings are obviously expressed (I'am so happy, etc)
5	Illness mentioned	Indicates whether Mills mentions her illness, or a story about her illness is shown/mentioned
6	Personal details mentioned	Indicates whether personal details of Mills's life are shown/mentioned
7	Luxury brands	Indicates whether Mills is seen wearing visibly luxury brands (Chanel, Gucci, etc)
8	Mills's styling	Indicates whether Mills appears 'natural' or with visible hair and make up styling

In order to be able to manage such volume of data, coding was implemented upon four separate Excel files, which served as my coding book (see table 3.2 in the next page). These files were broken down in four parts for an easier data handling and contained all the above codes and their respective content. Working on Excel also helped me later in time, especially with my quantitative analysis, as I was able to use its features to calculate data and/or percentages, as well as to create charts for visualisation. More detailed screenshots from my working Excel spreadsheets is included in the Appendix No 6.

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Table No.3.2: Deliciously Ella Excel Spreadsheet example for coding book

DESCRIPTIVE CODE FRAME										
RANK	SAMPLES POST NO	POST LINK	POST DATE	DOMINANT VISUAL THEME	POST CAPTION THEME	POST LOCATION	No OF HASHTAGS USED	HASHTAGS	No OF EMOTICONS USED	EMOTICONS
1	1	ww.instagram.com/p/U4iMe64ox-TJ/?taken-by=delicio	17-Jan-13	Food	Food description	Borough Market, London (implied)	2	#instafood #delicious	0	
2	2	ww.instagram.com/p/U8Mcl0TaRy/?taken-by=delicio	20-Jan-13	Quote	N/A	N/A	0		0	
3	14	ww.instagram.com/p/VlKRDoubx/?taken-by=delicio	14-Feb-13	Drink	Food description	N/A	0		0	
4	18	ww.instagram.com/p/V6cpu2oual/?taken-by=delicio	19-Feb-13	Food	Food description	N/A	0		0	
5	23	ww.instagram.com/p/WByJzlul/h/?taken-by=delicio	23-Feb-13	Food	Food description	N/A	0		2	Black heart, strawberry
6	26	ww.instagram.com/p/WE3pAZluaL/?taken-by=delicio	23-Feb-13	Food	Food description	N/A	0		0	
7	30	ww.instagram.com/p/WKOBYXou/X8/?taken-by=delicio	25-Feb-13	Food	Food description	N/A	0		1	Big Smiley Face
8	31	ww.instagram.com/p/WME8blsi/u/?taken-by=delicio	26-Feb-13	Food and Drink	Food description	N/A	0		1	Big Smiley Face
9	38	ww.instagram.com/p/WTw9rouV2/?taken-by=delicio	01-Mar-13	Food and Drink	Food description	N/A	0		1	Big Smiley Face
10	39	ww.instagram.com/p/WUPD-souZs?taken-by=delicio	01-Mar-13	Food	Food description	N/A	14	#vegan #raw #healthyfood #eatclean #foo	0	
11	41	ww.instagram.com/p/WWkm96ua/?taken-by=delicio	02/03/2013	Quote	N/A	N/A	0		1	Big Smiley Face
12	46	ww.instagram.com/p/WbeRtLou5e/?taken-by=delicio	04/03/2013	Food	Food description	N/A	13	#raw #vegansohig #vegan #instafood #foo	1	black heart
13	47	ww.instagram.com/p/Wb1LFRuUa/?taken-by=delicio	04/03/2013	Food	Food description	N/A	16	#vegan #cleaneating #healthyfoodshare #	0	
14	50	ww.instagram.com/p/Wego7Dou/Op/?taken-by=delicio	05/03/2013	Food	Food description	N/A	15	#vegan #raw #healthyfoodshare #nutrition	0	
15	52	ww.instagram.com/p/WKC1UbJ/t/?taken-by=delicio	05/03/2013	Food	Food description	N/A	16	#raw #vegan #cleaneating #healthyfoodsl	1	Smiley Face
16	54	ww.instagram.com/p/Whtbhki/u.TJ/?taken-by=delicio	06-Mar-13	Food	Food description	N/A	0		1	Smiley Face with Heart Eyes
17	57	ww.instagram.com/p/Ww4GBluXY/?taken-by=delicio	08/03/2013	Drink	Food description	N/A	20	#vegan #smoothie #raw #healthyfoodshar	0	
18	59	ww.instagram.com/p/Wce0T/KluRB/?taken-by=delicio	08/03/2013	Drink	Food description	N/A	17	#vegan #raw #smoothie #healthyfoodshar	0	
19	64	ww.instagram.com/p/WuRJRplu/Ye/?taken-by=delicio	11/03/2013	Food	Food description	N/A	18	raw #vegan #cleaneating #healthyfood #v	0	
20	67	ww.instagram.com/p/WynVIcluOu/?taken-by=delicio	13-Mar-13	Food and Drink	Food description	N/A	18	#raw #smoothie #vegan #healthyfood #cl	1	2 pink hearts

QUALITATIVE CODE FRAME - MILLS RELATED INFORMATION								
RANK	PEOPLE DEPICTED	WHO IS MILLS WITH	MILLS'S SELF PRESENTATION	FEELINGS EXPRESSED	ILLNESS MENTIONED	PERSONAL DETAIL MENTIONED	LUXURY BRANDS SHOWN	MILLS'S STYLING
1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
3	Mills	N/A	Half body shown	N/A	N/A	N/A	Van Cleef bracelet	N/A
4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
6	Mills and Matt Mills	Her husband	Full body shown / smiling	Yes - love, appreciation	N/A	N/A	probably Self-Portrait Lace Dress (350-750 euros)	N/A
7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Hair is down / Visible make up
8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
9	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
10	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
11	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
12	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
13	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
14	Ella	N/A	Portrait / smiling	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
15	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Hair is down
16	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
17	N/A	N/A	N/A	Happy	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
18	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
19	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
20	Mills and Food	N/A	Full body shown / smiling	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Hair is down / 'natural' make up

Continuously immersing myself in the dataset and following the Deliciously Ella Instagram account led to thoughts, ideas and connections that helped me to develop coding categories and organise and unravel data at a deeper level. My code frame has also evolved. It was edited numerous times whilst coding and analysing data. In fact, it remained subject to change, editing and fine-tuning, until the end of the thesis.

3.2.4 Compositional Interpretation

Establishing the meaning of visual media data is admittedly a very complex task (Hand et al., 2017), therefore, Gillian Rose's conception of the three sites (in her terminology) where images are created, proved to be a useful heuristic. These sites are: a) the site of production (entailing the technologies and socioeconomic conditions influencing the production); b) the site of the image itself (entailing meanings, composition and the possible effects the image has) and c) the site where the images are seen by various audiences (which gives rise to interpretations, as well as ways of circulation and display). Each of these sites contains three distinct traits (Rose calls them 'modalities') that contribute to the critical understanding of the images: a) technological; b) compositional and c) social. In the case of visual social media, interpretation requires a combination of all three modalities, since even a preliminary characterization of the data shows that visual analysis is insufficient. For example, when looking at an Instagram image a researcher must carefully take into consideration, among other things, the caption's text, the hashtags used, or the platform's guidelines for uploading visual content. Since these modalities commonly occur in all three sites, it follows that

the distinctions among sites might be more complex. Hence, the specific modalities on which a researcher focuses depend on the theoretical framework she has selected for the analysis (Hand et al., 2017). As far as the present thesis is concerned, I have decided to focus on the second modality, compositional interpretation, since I consider it a method that proved to be of considerable help for reasons that I will explain in what follows.

'Compositional Interpretation' is a term coined by Gillian Rose in her 2012 work 'Visual Methodologies' (Rose, 2012). Rose came up with this term to describe her critical approach to imagery, which is based on a reconstruction of aspects of art history. Rose centres her approach on what scholar and theorist Iris Rogoff calls "the good eye" (Rose, 2012: 33), i.e., a way of looking at visual imagery consisting in paying attention to the visual protocols of envisaging high Art. More specifically, Rose argues that, to perform compositional interpretation and thus demonstrate a 'good eye', it is required that one possess deep knowledge about painters and art movements, details about the various kinds of paintings they have produced across time and insights about their own inspiration and the kinds of visual imagery they were exposed to. With this background in art history, the researcher can then use her 'good eye' to evaluate the quality of the paintings. In essence, compositional interpretation looks at the images through the lens of what they are, rather than of what they do, or for which reasons they were produced and used. Indeed, compositional interpretation pays attention to the site of the image itself and focuses on its compositional modality. However, Rose also explains that this method has several significant downsides, especially because, by its single focus on the image itself, it leaves out analysis to do with the production of the image, the social practices that undergird it or the reflexive practices of social actors that give rise to various interpretations.

As compositional interpretation is a method already established in art history, albeit with a dominant focus on objects that art historians have conventionally reviewed, i.e., paintings, I decided to use it as a lens that could be applied for my data analysis. My focus of visual analysis, of course, is not art but Instagram images. The very idea of a 'good eye' seems tied to specific socio-temporal horizons, i.e., the training of one's

aesthetic sensibility through exposure to patterns of arranging images as 'distinct units' of reality, abstracted from their wider context. Indeed, the very idea of a painting involves the creation of a conventionally confined visual unity and aesthetic sensibility, as a mandatory pre-requisite of the 'good eye', evolves through exposure to visual patterns and comparison of similarities and differences between them, with certain 'canonical' images being seen as fixed points of reference.

The question then is whether the focus on the image itself that compositional interpretation invites could be extended to 'prosaic' images such as those produced on visual social media, which on any reasonable understanding are only very distant relatives of canonical paintings. It was my immersion into the Deliciously Ella visual social media world that convinced me of the fruitfulness of this approach and strengthened my belief that the idea of the 'good eye' can be applied to visual analysis in a wider and more open way. That said, the very idea of the 'good eye' in my case meant trying to see the produced images the way the actor producing them did, which involved understanding better who Mills was, as well as grasping her own inspiration and the kinds of visual imagery she herself was observing. Parameters that I kept revisiting included what kind of personal revelations she was making in her blog and in her books and how she was viewed by the UK mainstream press. The deep immersion into Mills's social and visual world from the very beginning of my thesis provided a valuable resource that assisted me with my data analysis and later interpretation of her visual trajectory. It was also what led me to take up Gillian Rose's approach, attempting to perform an extensive analysis of my visual dataset as to dissect the images produced by Deliciously Ella at a deeper level.

Taking an example from the dataset to display compositional interpretation (albeit with a more open-ended approach to the idea of the 'good eye' than Rose had in mind), I will build my analysis through a set of five points concerning the compositionality of the selected image below, using Rose's visual analysis methods' design:

Point 1: Content: What does the image show?

Point 2: Colour: How is colour used in the image? Lightness, darkness, hue, highlighting, saturation, value, emphasis on different aspects.

Point 3: Light: How is light used in the image? What types of lights can we see? Electric, candles, natural light, shadows? How does this affect colour? Does it create emphasis? How is perspective formed?

Point 4: Spatial organization: What is the spatial organization in the image? What is the direction of objects and the focus created to address spectators?

Point 5: Expressive content: What is the atmosphere/feeling of the image? Use of imagination and reflexivity to go beyond the purely descriptive approach.

Before I proceed with the compositional interpretation of the image below, I would like to provide some context first. Mills and her husband Matthew moved into a new house in June 2017, in the midst of a very busy period of their professional lives (E. Mills, 2017c). Their new home was located in West London, somewhere among the posh neighbourhoods of Kensington and Chelsea, *"just 20 minutes from the office",* where Mills walks to every day (The Home Page, 2018). Mills's new kitchen had been a noteworthy visual subject and she was often uploading on her social media accounts inspirational images of kitchen spaces when she was searching for colours, accessories, tiles, and various materials to decorate her own space. The image below is visually significant. It follows a set of widely used principles that result in an "Instagrammable" effect. 'Instagrammability' is a relatively new term denoting visually attractive objects posted on social media (such as Instagram), where visual imagery is of central focus (Arts et al., 2021; Caldeira et al., 2021; Rhee et al., 2022).

Image No 3.1: The new kitchen at Mills's home (Instagram post of 23-7-2017)

Compositional Interpretation

Point 1 Content: The image shows an interior space and, more specifically, a kitchen. It is clean and tidy and there are no signs of usage. The viewer can see a small part of the sink area, a part of the marble bench, some cupboards and some kitchen utensils and accessories. On the left-hand side towards the top of the image, there are various colourful pots with plants.

Point 2 Colour: Colours are bright pastels, a popular choice for Instagrammable interiors. Pink and white are dominant, although blue and green blend well together in a coordinated contrast.

Point 3 Light: The photo is well lit. It was presumably taken in broad day light, since the right-hand side of the image brings some sunlight from what appears to be a window. The bright colours of the kitchen make the image brighter and create a feeling of cleanliness, structure, and serenity.

Point 4 Spatial Organisation: Everything looks very well organised, tidied up and aligned. The photo was taken from a higher angle and includes as many elements as possible.

Point 5 Expressive Content: This is an image of a minimalistic space. It conveys a sense of understated luxury that is also present in many other of Mills's images on mainstream and social media. The image is carefully designed. It was almost certainly executed by a professional team. There is no sign of Mills, the owner of this kitchen. Still, one can clearly see some Deliciously Ella products in the centre of the image. Next to them is a distinctive kitchen accessory: the vintage-like Smeg four slice toaster in cream colour (it costs £199.95 as per the official UK site). Once again, luxury accessories and products are present, even though they are not the central focus of the image and are not flashy. They play a supportive role, insinuating that, although Their owner is wealthy, she does not boast about her possessions.

3.2.5. Mixed Methods

For over twenty years, mixed methods have been a continuously evolving approach to social research, especially within the field of interpretive social science (Given, 2008), where qualitative research through evidence-based practices have been increasingly accepted. Mixed methods imply that the researcher amasses and examines data, then incorporates findings and produces interpretations based on both qualitative and quantitative methods in the selected study. The mixed methods approach covers a large methods' spectrum: interviews, case studies, data analysis, interpretations, data calculations, descriptive statistics among others. This approach requires researchers equipped with skills that can cover both areas and suggests three ways of mixing the qualitative and quantitative data: a) by integrating them; b) by connecting them with each other, so one source of data (quantitative or qualitative) explains or builds the other and c) by embedding secondary sources of data into primary, larger sources, in order to provide supplementary information (Given, 2008).

During the last decade, evolution in social media research has been growing as a distinctive field of study (Ahuja & Alavi, 2018; boyd & Ellison, 2007; Manzoor, 2017; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Quan-Haase & Sloan, 2017; Sloan et al., 2017; Snelson, 2016; Thelwall, 2018) using mixed methods as one of the analytical tools of research (Cornelio & Roig, 2020; Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Sloan, Quan-Haase, & Murthy, 2017; Tazghini & Siedlecki, 2013). The rich and large volumes of data available within

social media platforms and the numerous ways, both quantitative and qualitative, of analysis and interpretation, have urged many researchers to use mixed methods approaches as a fertile mindset of engaging in context sensitive analytical and cultural explanations (Cornelio & Roig, 2020). In the case of Mills, I selected a mixed methods approach, or better I decided to adopt a notion of 'remix', as Markham (2013) calls it, which helped me to engage in a reflexive attention of practice and purpose. I thus assembled both quantitative and qualitative data and drew my interpretations based on the combination of the two, to be able to better understand and answer my research questions. Academic work suggests that especially a digital method design can profit from a combination of 'quanti-quali': after analysing and exploring the potential of the quantitative part, then the qualitative part can offer an opportunity for thick data analysis (Rogers, 2019; Vicari & Kirby, 2022).

For example, in my 4,000 images dataset, I counted the times that Deliciously Ella was depicted and discovered that, as time went by, Mills's face would appear more. As she was growing her personal brand, her Instagram timeline moved from food-mainly visuals to Mills-centric visuals. Still, this was not only a quantitative issue of just counting the number of images that Deliciously Ella appeared on; it was an equally qualitative one: as Mills became more famous, her face images became more curated, differently styled and enhanced with details for her personal life. It was through the combination of quantitative and qualitative elements that I managed to draw more informed conclusions about her self-presentation tactics.

3.2.6 Summary of methods used in this research.

In this section, I introduced the methods used for my data analysis and explained in more detail the ways these methods are connected to my research. This thesis has particularly benefited by Digital Methods and Netnography as data analysis tools for online environments; by Content Analysis as the dominant technique for the interpretation of a large (in volume) and rich (in information) dataset; by a Mixed Methods approach that combined both qualitative and quantitative techniques and, finally, by autoethnographic elements that aided my immersion in the dataset. In the next section, I will talk about a distinctive approach that I took while working on this

thesis. I decided to call it 'Comparative Instachronics' and I developed it in a bespoke way as a means of analysing my dataset. The approach is designed to be replicablefor Instagram research.

3.3 Deliciously Ella's Eras: The Comparative Instachronics approach

Although I started my research without intending to avail myself of any new methodological tools, I realized that, within the parameters of a relatively limited Instagram academic research, the specific way in which I worked with my dataset could perhaps be helpful for those dealing with Instagram data analysis and, hence, become a replicable approach. Thus, I started developing a technique that viewed Instagram's visual data through repeated observations of a single account across larger periods of time, in combination with other online and offline relevant information produced by the single account owner and the mainstream UK media. The aim was to track continuity and change across time regarding the account in question in a systematic way. I called this technique 'The Comparative Instachronics approach' ('CI') , a portmanteau term combining 'Instagram' and 'Chronos' (the Greek work for time), since it deals with Instagram data at a chronological level, as these data were posted in and across time. The 'comparative' element signifies the contrast as well as the association to off-Instagram environments, where these concern the actor's actions in other online or offline media, or her non-Instagrammed life in general.

The motivation for developing CI came from a gradual realisation of the limitations of current approaches to Instagram analysis. Accordingly, the distinctiveness of CI can be brought out via comparison to similar research endeavours in visual social media studies. In the relevant literature, visual research focused on Instagram is typically restricted along the dimension of time. Images are not analysed in a diachronic way and the goal is seldom or, indeed, never to trace out the visual evolution of an Instagram (and, more generally, social media) account across a significant amount of time. Instead, data samples are typically created as if there was no evolution of accounts across time, which amounts to simply ignoring the temporal dimension. The choice to restrict Instagram study at a certain point in time or, even when data are collected across time, to ignore the evolution of an account, could perhaps be

explained by reference to the usual scarcity of research resources. Simply put, a decision to track continuity and change across time means creation of much larger and more complicated datasets.

Apart from interdisciplinary attempts that can indeed investigate significantly larger datasets, usually with the additional help provided by an academic lab and/or by means of computational tools and/or machine learning approaches (Ging & Garvey, 2018; Hochman & Manovich, 2013; A. E. Marwick, 2015; Murthy et al., 2016; Reece & Danforth, 2017; Yu & Egger, 2021), most journal articles authored by single researchers that analyse Instagram images range between a sample of 50 – 1000 images (Feldman et al., 2017; Gibbs et al., 2015; Guidry et al., 2015; A. Slater et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018; Tiggemann & Zinoviev, 2019; Walsh & Baker, 2020). For example, the work of Michele Zappavigna (Zappavigna, 2016) explores Instagram images focusing around the theme of motherhood. The dataset of the research consists of 500 images under the hashtag #motherhood and another 416 images by a selected Instagram single user account who was posting images of her children and her motherhood experiences. Another example is the work of (Webb et al., 2019), where 300 Instagram images appearing online in July 2015 under the hashtags #curvyyoga and #curvyfit were analysed. Typically, the time frames are either short (for example, a month), or, when the time frame is somewhat longer, it rarely exceeds one year (Vassallo, Kelly, Zhang, Wang, Young, & Freeman, 2018). Another study of the hashtag #mentalhealth on Instagram, investigated 758 images uploaded on Instagram between 11 May 2019 and 2 July 2019 (N. Lee et al., 2020). Additionally, it's worth mentioning that in all the studies above the element of time, and its continuous relation to the evolution of the single Instagram account, does not play a central role. It might be considered in terms of seasonality perhaps and/or as a variant of frequency within a given time frame, however it does not act as a factor of change or evolution of the selected Instagram dataset in comparison to real life events of the single account user under investigation. Take for example the study of (Webb et al., 2017), which is a comparative content analysis of the hashtags #fatspiration and #healthateverysize on Instagram, consisting of 400 images posted during May and June 2015; the study of (Shaw et al., 2022) on wildlife images on Instagram

investigates 670 images between 1 January 2020 and 1 August 2021 (a time period, as the authors explain, that satisfactorily covers some important Australian milestones); the study of (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017) investigating the objectification of fitness through Instagram images under the hashtag #fitspiration: although the study is using a significantly large image dataset (944), the authors focus more on the nature and the text of images, rather than the evolutionary element of the dataset that might appear through time.

These approaches can then be juxtaposed with the research undertaken in the present thesis. This research used a 4,000 Instagram posts dataset for a time frame of five years and 10 months. The choice of dataset and time frame rendered possible a deep longitudinal study of the Deliciously Ella Instagram world, allowing me to describe and interpret how that world evolves across time under the impetus of various external pressures (e.g., the imperative to produce curated visual content on Instagram and the clean eating debacle). It is important to stress that the choice of a longer time frame is as crucial as the decision to study Mills's evolution across time from the point of view of the Comparative Instachronics approach. This can be shown by means of an example from my dataset. Thus, if I had decided to study Mills's evolution, say, between 2020 and 2022 by analysing a sample of, say, 500 images that were uploaded on the Deliciously Ella Instagram during that period, I would have missed out on the extraordinary transformation of visual content since the beginning of Mills's blog. Since all content uploaded after 2020 is heavily curated and focuses increasingly less on Mills, it would have been impossible to grasp insights about the ways in which Mills initially used her persona for purposes of brand-building or accumulated a significant amount of authenticity capital between 2013 and 2015. In short, the choice of the right time frame, for purposes of tracking continuity and change in social media across time, is key and it is conditioned by qualitative and interpretive factors.

In the remainder of this subsection, and before I delve into the specifics of CI, I will discuss the data collection under a particular prism reflecting the complex repercussions created by numerous API restrictions that Instagram gradually introduced since 2016. These restrictions affected social media analysis and research

in various ways, the most significant of which are the limitations regarding access of important Instagram data. I will then introduce CI and discuss in detail how I ended up with four distinct Deliciously Ella 'eras' that aided me in my data analysis and interpretation.

3.3.1 Data collection and API restrictions

Eleven years after the creation of Web 2.0 (T. O'Reilly, 2005), a wide range of diverse social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn, Snapchat) has offered numerous research opportunities to academics and scholars, fostering social media research. A quick search on online academic databases and libraries reveals large numbers of peer reviewed articles on the subject, across all disciplines, with Facebook and Twitter being the two most popular platforms: 364,107 peer-reviewed articles appear on the search box results when searching the word "Facebook" on the University of Sheffield's online library and another 332,632 peer-reviewed articles are to do with Twitter. YouTube and Instagram follow with 67,187 and 21,317 peer-reviewed articles respectively and finally, platforms such as LinkedIn (15, 707), Snapchat (4,502) and the newcomer TikTok (450) are among the subjects of academic investigation and analysis.

The search results mentioned above demonstrate that certain platforms are over-represented in research. This may be related to the longevity of each platform. Another reason, as the literature shows, can be the platforms' architecture (Highfield & Leaver, 2015) especially as far as their Application Programming Interface (API) accessibility is concerned. The convenience and user-friendliness that used to be offered by Twitter's API, for instance, has made the platform one of the most extensively studied (MacDowall & de Souza, 2018), since it was relatively simple to extract large amounts of various forms of data for analysis. On the other hand, Instagram, an image-sharing app which has grown to the point of being one of the most used social media platforms globally, with 1,2 billion users in 2021, as Statista – the globally acknowledged and well-established company of market statistics – indicates (Tankovska, 2021a) has received relatively limited academic attention. The reasons for this might be twofold. First, textual content has been leading social media research to this moment,

especially for large-scale 'big data' research, since there is an abundance of computational tools and programming languages aiding quicker data collection and analysis (MacDowall & de Souza, 2018). Additionally, texts in short and limited forms (such as texts used in Twitter) allow for easier and less time-consuming investigation compared to visual and audio-visual content available on visual social media such as Instagram and/or YouTube. Second, the already limited access to Instagram API, that used to allow a range of information to be available to researchers and programmers before June 2016, dramatically changed, making the extraction of Instagram data from individual posts or public user accounts very demanding and time-consuming.

More specifically, in June 2016 Instagram significantly restricted access to its API, to prevent it being used by developers, marketers, researchers and/or third-party applications. Changes continued for the following years until June 2020, when two APIs eventually became available: a) Instagram Graph API and b) Instagram Display API (Instagram, 2021b). This practically meant that it was impossible for a third-party requiring data from Instagram accounts other than its own to retrieve it from the API. At the moment of writing, there are still other ways of observing and retrieving Instagram profile data, for instance through third-party analytics companies with authorised access at a significant annual fee. However, the absence of quick, easy, and free access to the Instagram API led to a much more controlled environment. Apart from Instagram, the repercussions of the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018 pushed dominant social media players, such as Facebook and Twitter to put in place more restrictions to their API access (Bruns, 2019)

As the data collection for this thesis occurred between 2017 and 2019 and since there was no convenient way to access all the information needed (image, text, number of comments on post, number of likes on post, date of post) due to API limitations, I decided to manually collect all the data required for the period under investigation. A visual dataset of 4,000 Instagram posts (images and captions only, excluding Instagram videos or stories) was collected between November 2017 and March 2019 (starting from Post No 1 on 17 January 2013 and ending with post No 4,000 on 24 October 2018). Data were collected through screengrabs of Deliciously Ella's Instagram posts. These screengrabs were initially cut and then pasted in Powerpoint

files per hundreds and organised in various clusters of images, to make both the sampling procedure and subsequent analysis more manageable. The final master data archive ended up having 40 different power point files, each one containing 100 Instagram post screengrabs.

3.3.2 Comparative Instachronics

Instagram, like most other social media platforms, offers the opportunity to users to upload textual, visual, audio, and/or audio-visual content of their choice, which is then stored and archived on a chronologically arranged style in the users' personal profile page, in the order of their uploading. On the other hand, since March 2016, Instagram's feed – by 'feed' one refers to Instagram's digital 'space' where the user can watch and interact with the activity of other users/followers (Instagram, 2021a) – has not been using a chronological order, but rather an algorithmic rearrangement of content, based on the users' interests in particular topics, their relationships with other users and the timeliness of their posts (Lopez, 2016).

As far as the personal profile 'space' of the single account is concerned, the chronological order on Instagram has only a contingent connection to the chronological order outside Instagram. In fact, the platform offers to users the opportunity to act as curators of their own content by editing or deleting it, if they so wish. There is thus no necessary connection between "past" and "present" time inside and outside Instagram, at least no connection deriving from a linear temporal ordering of shared images and snapshots of everyday life when they happen. Indeed, images on Instagram are not only heavily curated and edited but also, sometimes, not shared immediately. Many users often decide to upload photos taken hours, days or months earlier, at a later moment in time (Hochman & Manovich, 2013). The potential gap between 'real' and 'online' time therefore makes it important to acknowledge that Instagram is not only *just* an online archive of visual images uploaded in chronological order, but it can also be both subject and product of subjective judgment, manipulation of time, corporate control, as well as power, surveillance and many more continuously changing dependencies (Robards & Lincoln, 2017).

At the same time, Instagram, in this sense no different from other digital and social media, has grown to be an integral part of everyday life, and not a separate entity supervenient on it. The idea that no such thing as a 'distinctive' digital or social media life (or both) exists has been gaining traction and popularity among scholars, many of them approaching such media as part of a 'digital intangible' (Pink et al., 2015) which integrates with the other contextual, sensory and material elements of the social world. The main line of argument is that various technological developments, as well as evolution of mobile communications and enhanced social media activity, have embedded a wide variety of digital elements and devices in our lives such that it is difficult to separate the elements from other items of the physical and social world and view them as a distinct form of experience (Hine, 2015). The flow of content among multiple platforms, the intercommunication between media and audiences and the encouragement of the latter to create, edit, share and exchange information by continuously bouncing from online to offline environments have merged digital, online and offline elements of the world, ultimately generating a notion of media convergence (Jenkins, 2004).

With that in mind, I closely observed the Deliciously Ella Instagram single account regularly upload visual content and readings about Mills's professional accomplishments in her blog, social media and the UK press. It became clear to me that the reality of the Instagram account was both reflecting and re/deconstructing parts of Mills's everyday reality and vice versa. There were no rigidly separated worlds that Deliciously Ella inhabited, to wit, a 'digital' and a 'real' one; in fact, there was just one single world, in which, among other things, Mills used multiple communication platforms to express herself and contact a gradually growing and visible audience. Deliciously Ella's Instagram profile was growing through a daily narration of her life-changing nutritional habits at first, through the depiction of her cooking attempts, through her search for the right ingredients and practices to sustain 'wellness and goodness' in her life and through some significant moments reflecting both personal and professional progress. Immersion in the material made clear that all this visual (and textual) information was not only just a glimpse of her life, but also an attempt to edit, reconstruct and produce narratives about it. Her visual presence on Instagram

was thus a significant part or aspect of her life and there was value in the analysis and interpretation of these digital traces over time on a large scale (Hochman & Manovich, 2013). By taking a step back and looking at the single account from a distance, all these reported, uploaded, and archived visual moments became key markers in a curated trajectory from blogger to celebrity.

Taking into account the 'scroll back' method developed to "bring to life" the digital trace (Robards & Lincoln, 2017) in combination with qualitative longitudinal approach techniques, I decided to go back to Mills's first post to observe her visual trajectory through a temporality lens that would make change through time *online* a fundamental focus of my investigative attention (Thomson & Holland, 2003). Drawing from Miller (2000) as cited by Thomson and Holland (2003), the ideal method of observing an actor's experience of change through time would consist in accurate longitudinal research, where the actor under investigation is followed across a long period comprising years or even decades. Such an approach was, of course, impossible in the context of my present research. However, the distinctive characteristic of social media platforms acting as (re/deconstructed) online diaries of one's life moments, mundane or significant, could perhaps offer an alternative tool of interpretation and analysis. Thus, whilst it was impossible for me to follow all Deliciously Ella's life events and activities, I used her Instagram profile as a basic source of information and together with other supporting data (books, blog/website, event calendar, media interviews), I meticulously created a visual chronicle covering almost five years of her Instagram activity. Starting from her Instagram post No 1 on 17 January 2013, until her Instagram post No 4,000, I pinpointed the most significant moments of her personal and professional life and tried to create separate clusters (I called them 'eras' and they are explained in more detail in the next section) that would help organise my data but also view her trajectory in evolutionary steps.

As already observed, I named this approach 'Comparative Instachronics' (herafter, CI), a portmanteau term merging both the words 'Instagram' and Greek word 'chronos', that means time. The comparative element refers to the supporting data I used to cross-check the Deliciously Ella's Instagram posts against off-Instagram life

events surrounding Mills and her brand and place them in the relevant chronological timeframe. This proved to be important, because it was only through this approach that I managed to capture an evolutional course of the Deliciously Ella's Instagram trajectory. Through CI I managed to gather valuable information about the way Mills would present herself, she would distinguish herself between her competition, she would market and promote her Deliciously Ella brand from the very beginning of her Instagram activity as a food blogger, until much later as a successful entrepreneur.

I hasten to add that there is no reason to believe that this approach is not replicable across other social media platforms, such as X (formerly known as Twitter) and Facebook. In fact, all that would be needed is the possibility of studying closely, through appropriate data collection, the evolution of a single X or Facebook account across time (whether that involves an individual person's account and/or a brand's and/or an organisation's and so on), which, as things currently stand, is possible on both of these platforms. This, of course, presupposes that access to data shall remain possible under the Terms of Service of these platforms and that all ethical conditions for data collection are met (including privacy and intellectual property ones). It also goes without saying that the name of the approach would have to be modified accordingly (Comparative Facebookchronics, for example), but its essence would remain. However, a major limitation of the approach concerns research resources. The approach is resource-intensive in that it requires not just a sampling of data across time, but a deeper immersion in the world of the actor studied, both online and offline, in order to make sense of that data, comparing continuity and change along several dimensions. This seems to be a major reason why something like CI is not followed more often by social media studies.

The section below attempts to describe a replicable guideline explaining all the steps I took to operationalise CI.

Comparative Instachronics Approach – A procedural guideline

- **Step 1:**

Using a chronologicl order, pinpoint the date of the first post in the dataset and the date of the last post in the dataset.

i.e., *17 January 2013 (Instagram Post No 1–) - 24 October 2018 (Instagram Post No 4000)*

- **Step 2:**

Carefully observe the images one by one. Then, create an extensive list of significant dates (milestones) for the single account as depicted in the Instagram posts. These milestones can be major events in the professional or personal life of the actor under investigation.

i.e., *First blog makeover, first collaboration with a partner, first professional shooting, reaching followers' milestones (10K, 20K, 100K, etc), wedding date, book launch date, etc*

- **Step 3:**

Highlight those milestones that relate to the research's aims and objectives.

i.e., Since I was particularly interested in Deliciously Ella's evolutionary trajectory from amateur blogger to writer, entrepreneur and well-known UK celebrity, the most important milestones for my research had to do with professional achievements and some major personal moments, such as her wedding to Matthew Mills.

- **Step 4:**

Compare and cross-check all these important milestones with other social media of the single account, as well as with other information sources, such as mainstream media articles and interviews, or books and blog posts discussing personal life and actions. In this way you establish the connection between offline and online activity.

i.e., *When Deliciously Ella announced her wedding on Instagram (24 April 2016) there was also online coverage by a range of UK mainstream media (Blott, 2016; Finnigan, 2016; Hello, 2016; Marie-Claire, 2016)*

- **Step 5:**

Place the images into separate clusters (eras) and clearly indicate a chronological start and an ending for each one of them. Eras represent different time periods and contain images that correspond to these particular periods so make sure that images share a common context, as well as fundamental characteristics among them.

i.e., *Era1 starts on the day of Deliciously Ella's very first Instagram post (17 January 2013) and ends on the day she announces the release of her first book (1 September 2014). I intentionally stopped Era1 on that milestone, since after the launch of a cookbook, she clearly transitioned from the amateurish blogger, to a more professional status. The proof of that lies upon the change one notices in the*

aesthetic qualities of the images. As soon as the images start showing a more professional look and feel, it is obvious that the 'era' has to change .

- **Step 6:**

Give a title to each era that corresponds to the era's contents and helps towards building a narrative for discussion.

i.e., Era 2 is called 'The Best Selling Author' because it is mainly characterised by Mills's first publication that becomes a best seller. A great deal of the Deliciously Ella Instagram posts talk about Mills's new book and that gives food for further analysis.

3.3.3 The emergence of Deliciously Ella Eras

3.3.3a Data sampling

As this thesis used a mixed methods approach and combined both quantitative and qualitative methods, analysing a dataset of 4,000 images (which are followed by text as well) presented various challenges regarding volume, as well as the complexity that visual imagery always carries. Computational tools prove to be very helpful in counting and sorting large volumes of data as far as quantitative analysis is concerned, but the analytical depth and the detail of variety of concepts and ideas a researcher aims at developing throughout qualitative content analysis mean that smaller samples are unavoidable (Emmel, 2013). Deciding sample size in qualitative research has been a point of a rather controversial discussion for researchers (Schreier, 2021). Some scholars argue that although large sample sizes in quantitative research are important for statistical generalization and validity, sample size in qualitative research is of minor concern, since information rich data, relevant to the scope of the research are of more significance (Patton, 2015). Personal and real-world restrictions and constraints involving the researcher need to be taken into account as well, when trying to estimate the volume of the artifacts available for investigation (Emmel, 2013).

For this thesis, time constraints and limited availability of resources required a realistic approach about the final dataset volume. Manual qualitative and quantitative analysis for such large datasets proved to be labour-intensive, tiresome and mentally draining, especially when content analysis of images cannot be conducted computationally due to: a) API restrictions (as previously mentioned); b) lack of elaborated tools and c) the

high cost of third party applications that might be able to analyse only a small part of the visual dataset. As previously discussed, attentive observation of all 4,000 images revealed a variety of distinctive 'eras' in chronological order, reflecting Deliciously Ella's trajectory to professional success and fame. This meant that images reflecting key moments or milestones of these eras had to be included in the final dataset since they could shed more light to the interpretation process. Accordingly, I decided to sample the total dataset in two distinctive phases:

First, I used a systematic sampling approach and select units at a fixed interval of 4. Systematic sampling is a probability sampling method and part of random sampling design. Its process requires a random starting point (or k) to be selected in advance (Harter, 2011). Once the starting point is selected (in this case, the starting point was the first Instagram post ever uploaded by Mills) the rest of the sample is unswerving. Nevertheless, the randomness concerns the selection of the starting point (Harter, 2011). For this thesis, since the total dataset was divided into four distinct eras, four starting points and another four end points were created, each one responding to the start and end of the respective eras. Using an online tool that generates random numbers from a list and starting from image No1 and ending at image No 4,000, the final dataset included 1,000 images.

The online tool was introduced to guarantee a certain level of randomness as possible in the sample selection. More particularly, I used the Research Randomizer website (randomize.org) to create my systematic sample. This is a free online tool, very common among researchers and post graduate students, that generates random numbers or assign participants to experimental conditions (Urbaniak, G.C.; Plous, 2013). The online environment offers a range of randomization tools in the form of websites, applications and/or computer software for research and other scholar tasks in a wide variety of academic fields (Silva et al., 2020) (Morice, 2012) (Saa & Stern, 2019) (Amaral et al., 2021). I used Research Randomizer four times, one per each era and four different excel tables were created, reflecting a stratified sample for each period. These tables, if required, are available in a separate excel document with supporting data.

Second, as Deliciously Ella's Instagram account is highly focused on images of food, it is important, to ensure accurate data analysis, to also analyse images which do not repeat themselves and are representative of the account's development over time. Hence, together with the stratified random sample covering all four eras, I analysed in a separate part of the thesis a variety of images that I found significant and could be tied to this research and literature as well. By using a purposeful sampling approach (Emmel, 2013) and select those 'information rich cases' (Emmel, 2013: 34) I presented representative examples from each, already predefined, Deliciously Ella era.

Throughout this process, reading about purposeful sampling and its strategies (Emmel, 2013) proved to be particularly helpful. The six common themes that accompany purposeful sampling strategies, as described by (Patton, 2002) in (Emmel, 2013) enhanced my own thoughts on how to view the data under investigation and helped me design a sampling strategy outline. These six strategies are worth mentioning briefly here:

a) Researchers critically view and judge the samples before, during and after sampling;

b) These judgments are related to what is known already about the phenomena under investigation;

c) Researchers strategically select a controlled number of cases in order to produce useful information;

d) Researchers seek to understand who their audiences are and thus they produce information and results that would be credible for these audiences;

e) All the decisions researchers make are limited by a number of constraints that need to be taken into consideration as soon as the first four themes are considered. For example, researchers would always like to sample more, but they are required to make decisions depending on time constraints, budget limitations but also their own capacity to analyse the full volume of the data they have selected;

f) There are some significant differences between qualitative and quantitative analysis that are illustrated in the practice of purposeful sampling.

3.3.3b Deliciously Ella "eras"

The abovementioned preliminary observation of the data through the Comparative Instachronics approach , as well as the sampling process, revealed some distinctive time periods (eras) depicting Deliciously Ella's professional and personal trajectory over time. Since social media serve, among other things, as a large digital archive where users can keep all or part of their posts for as long as they keep their accounts active, a longitudinal approach adapted for this particular environment, where the "past is apprehended from an evolving present" (Thomson & McLeod, 2015) was employed. This practically meant that the researcher took a step back from the 4,000 Instagram posts dataset and treated this big volume of data as moments in time that constituted a longitudinal narrative text. Keeping in mind the limitations that such an approach presents (for instance, social media users are able to delete, edit or recreate content), the dataset which was archived in chronological order from 17 January 2013 until 24 October 2018 (5 years and 10 months) served as an online diary of Mills's daily, routine moments, which include certain "critical moments" (Robards & Lincoln, 2017), such as taking up new professional tasks, writing a book, getting engaged, or launching new products. These were viewed as key indicators of Mills's personal and professional life. Although Mills herself has often mentioned in various interviews – in tabloid and mainstream press, but also in her blog and Instagram posts as well – that our reflection on social media is only a small part of our lives and whatever one sees in there is not necessarily a 'reality', a careful juxtaposition of her key life moments on Instagram and the same actual moments in 'reality' proves that the association of the two, online life and offline life, is more than real.

After careful consideration this observation ended up being scaled up to four eras. The criteria for the creation of each era mainly lied upon significant professional moments (I called them 'milestones') and changes in Mills's life. For example, Mills started as a wellness food blogger who wanted to keep a personal food diary with amateur photos online. However, after a few months, as her blog and social media gained traction, she started giving interviews, doing photo-shootings, launching a mobile app and appearing on mainstream media, online and offline. This was a moment of change

signifying that Mills moved to a new phase in her blogging life, from an amateur stage to a micro-celebrity one. Later in time, another significant moment is when she announced that she was publishing her first book: again, this was an important change of era, as the blogger eventually became a best-selling writer.

After having created an extensive list of milestones (see relevant tables in the following chapters 4,5,6 and 7), I pondered on the development of distinctive eras that would serve as organizational vehicles of making data analysis clearer and more manageable. I decided to focus on the major life events (personal or professional) and create the eras around them. Eventually, the most prominent events emerging in Mills's life within the dataset's time frame were: 1) The creation of her blog and the amateurish building of the Deliciously Ella brand name; 2) The publication of her first cookbook which became the fastest selling debut cookbook ever in the UK; 3) The launch of her first deli in London, as well as her super market food products; 4) Her denouncement of clean eating on BBC's Horizon show, which redefined her whole brand positioning (as I will explain in detail in the Findings section). After these weighty moments in her life, she went on with more product launches, terminating parts of her business, announcing pregnancies and a new mobile app, among others, but time constraints and limitations about the completion of this thesis would not allow for further investigation.

Eventually, four distinct eras emerged with a total of 4,000 Instagram posts:

ERA1: The Wellness Blogger, from 17 January 2013 until 1 September 2014. A total of 1,037 posts covering a) the first days of Deliciously Ella's blog and Instagram amateurish efforts and b) Deliciously Ella's rise into fame mainly through coverage by the UK mainstream media.

ERA2: The Best-Selling Author, from 2 September 2014 until 29 October 2015. A total of 1,011 posts presenting a) Deliciously Ella's publishing debut and following her book promotion overseas.

ERA3: The Entrepreneur, from 30 October 2015 until 18 January 2017. A total of 840 posts covering a) Deliciously Ella's efforts to launch a brick-and-mortar business in London and b) her supermarket products' launches.

ERA4: The Clean-Eating Denouncer from 19 January 2017 until 24 October 2018. A total of 1,112 posts following a) Deliciously Ella's new views and opinions on clean eating and b) Deliciously Ella's post-clean eating period, where she actively took the (self-proclaimed) role of the ambassador for plant-based eating in the UK. A role that she still serves up until the time of writing.

What is captivating (and as it will be explored later in the Findings chapters) is that these four eras are not only distinctive in terms of life moments, but predominantly each one of them entails very different elements as far as visual, textual, and sociological interpretation is concerned. Indeed, looking at the data through a longitudinal lens revealed not only the changes that Deliciously Ella went through as she and her business were evolving, but also the careful curation of a digital trajectory claimed to be authentic as time went by and followers increased.

3.4 Overview of theoretical lenses used for interpreting findings.

This overview will set out the specific steps that I took whilst first examining and then more carefully analysing my Deliciously Ella visual dataset. Before I continue with my analysis of findings and further discussion in the next chapter, I would like to explain in some detail how and why I chose the specific theoretical lens of distinction, authenticity, and enrichment to tackle it.

As already presented in the literature review chapter, the more general historical, cultural, and explanatory context in which Mills's actions take place can be understood to be composed of three distinct but interrelated clusters. On the one hand, the project that Mills embarks on, places food in the kernel of its existence and sits solidly within the wider 'food-space'. It can therefore be elucidated by means of the theoretical tools that a broadly conceived sociology of food consumption and food marketing provides. On the other hand, what makes the project distinctive stems from two further features.

First, from its inception, it relied heavily on the use of visual social media. Correspondingly, the present thesis provides a rich analysis of the visual aspect of the dataset, composed of 4,000 photos, using appropriate empirical and methodological tools. Second, the way Mills presented herself to the public might have well involved 'eating' as a culturally and socially charged activity, but this activity was itself understood in a unique way: through her personal health story, Mills mobilised the relatively vague and open-ended concepts of 'wellness', 'goodness', and 'healthy and natural eating'. She connected these concepts in various ways to food preparation and consumption, investing them with new meanings and cultural connotations. And since the project was also heavily relying on visual social media, Mills's explicitly stated goal from the beginning was to show convincingly, using appropriate and conventionally accepted pictorial forms as well as discourses accompanying these forms, that there was indeed some kind of relation between the depicted plant-based food and these open-ended concepts.

Like any other researcher, my initial theoretical predispositions were to an extent shaped by my first contact with the empirical material. This contact was coupled with a first attempt to immerse myself in the 'goodness, plant-based eating' social world, partly by deciding to adopt, for a certain time, Mills's nutritional lifestyle, as I have already discussed in section 3.2.1 of this chapter. What became increasingly evident from this initial study of the Deliciously Ella Instagram account was that Mills consistently made all different sorts of connections between food, 'health' and 'goodness', mainly by using comments and hashtags in her posts to this effect. Moreover, and apart from Mills's Instagram account, these concepts also dominated the wider discursive context within which the Instagram photos were placed; these comprised Mills's first books as well as her initial blog posts.

The connection that Mills established between plant-based food and health/goodness had an important recursive consequence on my deciphering of the photos themselves. The food depicted and talked about in Mills's blogs, books and social media accounts was not solely praised for its aesthetic, gustatory or other qualities. To be sure, the emphasis on these qualities was anything but absent. It was a crucial part of Mills's

discourse to attempt to convince her audience that a plant-based food consumption practice, which she persistently refrained from associating it with a strict diet full of restrictions (although she enforced so many of them) was just as tasty, enjoyable or in her own words 'yummy', as any other.

"The other thing that I want to stress is that the Deliciously Ella lifestyle is about counting goodness not calories. We're not focusing on dieting and deprivation here, which I know are things often associated with healthy eating. Instead I'm hoping that this book might help to change your mindset in the way that it did for me, so that we can all celebrate amazing food and feel incredible about ourselves at the same time. " (Woodward, 2015: 29)

However, it also became evident that food consumption, apart from its culinary properties, was also invested with a special existential and even quasi-spiritual role. It was conceptualised as a means towards a higher end, vaguely described as a 'healthy' state or a state of 'happiness'. That state involved a deeper transformation of the self via preparing, tasting, engaging with, and ultimately consuming food.

Indeed, one of the central narratives that Mills initially used, and which became immediately apparent from the initial perusal of the empirical material, part of which later became my dataset, was the trope of Mills's gradual *conversion* to plant-based eating. This conversion was presented as rooted in the needs of a deeper, more authentic, and more natural self. It was also sustained by a relatively strict discipline and a practice of consistent self-surveillance and self-monitoring: the reason Mills started her blog was initially to track her progress by recording and sharing her nutritional practices during her quest to overcome her illness (Woodward, 2015a). The foods prepared and consumed were thoroughly examined. At the same time, Mills engaged in various acts of self-confession. In her blog, she was forthcoming about deeply personal matters, such as the health condition that prompted her to adopt a plant-based food consumption practice in the first place. She was also increasingly honest about the various everyday challenges that the disciplining of the self involves when a full conversion to a plant-based food consumption practice is adopted (Woodward, 2015a) In short, this first perusal of the material strongly indicated that Mills was talking as much about 'eating' in a more relaxed, ordinary and casual way,

as she was about 'eating' in terms of a deeper existential practice that challenges and, ultimately, transforms the whole self.

This preliminary examination had several consequences regarding the theoretical tools and frameworks that I would later select to study Mills. My first take consisted in attempting to place her practice in social space. What became increasingly clear was that Mills was simultaneously occupying, fusing, and navigating different kinds of social space, with relatively distinct, but not necessarily contradictory, logics. The first social space was a more 'traditional' and well-trodden one, as far as social scientific research is concerned. It is the space of food preparation and consumption. The study of the social logic of food production, preparation and consumption begins from the idea that the universal biological need to sustain oneself underdetermines the specific social forms that acts of food production and consumption take (Albala, 2013; Murcott et al., 2013; Pilcher, 2012). These forms, among other things, result as complex interactions involving relations between culinary taste, class, and economic and symbolic capital. They are also marked by inequalities and differential distribution of economic, cultural and symbolic capacities regarding access to food. The choice of a 'bourdieusian' framework of distinction thus seemed to suggest itself (Bourdieu, 1984), as I explained in the previous chapter.

Second, the examination of the Instagram account, the book and the blogs also showed that Mills firmly occupied a relatively more recent social space, constituted by practices of 'wellness', 'goodness' and 'healthy eating/living' in late advanced capitalism (Cederstrom & Spicer, 2015; Davies, 2016). Simplifying, we might say that these are all forms of adopting secular and in many ways evaluatively non-committal techniques of care of the self, geared towards the goal of constantly refashioning, disciplining, examining, conceptualizing, and sustaining a 'healthy' and 'happy' self. As already stated, one important theme that makes Mills stand out in relation to other plant-based food bloggers and wellness entrepreneurs was the creation and circulation of a narrative grounded in the expression of an authentic and deeply personal reality, involving a 'higher', quasi-spiritual dimension. The interpretation of Mills's actions thus seemed naturally to call for a wider understanding of authenticity

in its contemporary forms, involving an enquiry into secular lifestyles that aim at a kind of existential reorientation.

Last, and equally importantly, Mills also adopted a third social space: that of creation of economic value. Therefore, food consumption and good/healthy eating were subsequently fused and, ultimately, leveraged with an eye towards producing added economic value or profit. As I will show later through the findings and discussion chapter, this happened in degrees, but the existence of this dimension was already clear when I first interacted with the data, since Mills had already published several very commercially successful books and had already given numerous interviews in the mainstream media. The culmination of this economic project consisted in the marketisation of the Deliciously Ella food products and the provision of culinary services through the delis that Mills opened in London. The theoretical framework proposed by Boltanski and Esquerre (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2020) on enrichment as a distinctive practice of creating value in advanced capitalism seemed, again, to naturally suggest itself, at least in a preliminary way.

Nonetheless, these tentative starting points were, at this stage of the analysis, mere suggestions. They had to be further corroborated by a deeper, more systematic, and unbiased analysis of a wider amount of empirical data collected using the appropriate methodology. This became possible only after I had constructed and analysed my dataset in full. To be sure, the coding categories were constructed with an eye towards capturing and systematising aspects of distinction/inequality, authenticity, and enrichment. There is indeed a sense in which my initial theoretical predispositions provided lenses through which I then proceeded to further analyse the data. In that respect at least, these lenses are reflected in the data, since they helped shape some of the coding categories. However, this does not make their choice arbitrary. To begin with, any type of empirical enquiry must inevitably take certain starting points for granted. Moreover, to control for the possibility that I was missing out on other, potentially important, dimensions of the data, I used many other coding categories. These helped supply different sorts of qualitative and quantitative information about the data.

In any event, the initial lenses proved to be particularly fruitful when the dataset was completed and analysed. Indeed, an inductive identification of different patterns of recurring themes from the whole dataset appeared to cohere well with my theoretical predilections summarised in the previous paragraphs. Furthermore, my confidence in the validity of my approach was also increasingly confirmed by my own attempts at immersion in the studied actor's phenomenological point of view, which was accompanied by wide readings in culinary sociology and food studies (Jackson, 2010, 2013; Johnston & Baumann, 2014; Murcott et al., 2013; Pilcher, 2012) of forms of authenticity in culinary lifestyles (Beer, 2008; Conroy, 2014; Kjær, 2019) and a certain kind of economic sociology focused on practices of creating economic value in late capitalism (Arvidsson & Colleoni, 2012; Boltanski & Esquerre, 2020; Büscher & Igoe, 2013). Distinction/inequality, authenticity and enrichment thus became at this stage of analysis of the data much more than just tentative working hypotheses: they became my main theoretical frameworks in my endeavour to describe, interpret and explain Mills's actions. In the following paragraphs, I briefly justify by way of introduction the use of these frameworks to analyse parts of the dataset with reference to examples.

3.4.1 Distinction/ Inequality

With respect to distinction and inequality, the dataset consistently provided numerous items lending themselves to an analysis in terms of the social distribution of culinary tastes among classes and strata of classes in the UK and, more generally, in advanced capitalist democracies. Apart from the foods chosen, which are robustly correlated with the medium upper classes (Beagan et al., 2016; Bourdieu, 1984; Jackson et al., 2013; Reigner, 2009), many personal items depicted in the photos (e.g. clothing, luxury goods, expensive kitchen appliances), coupled with the aesthetic qualities of the photos themselves, confirmed the idea that bourdieusian distinction indeed constitutes a most fruitful lens of analysis. Thus, class and its concomitant inequalities were a natural explanatory factor regarding Mills's practice. It was clear that the foods and goods depicted in the dataset, as shown in this thesis in detail, are objectively markers of wealth, and inaccessible as such to large segments of the UK population. Given current patterns of food consumption in the West between and among classes

(Beagan et al., 2016; Bourdieu, 1984; Jackson et al., 2013; Reigner, 2009) and once the food consumption advice given by Mills is interpreted against the background of extant levels of income and wealth inequality, it was evident that the plant-based food depicted by Mills is, in reality if not in intention, addressed to a very specific subset of economically and culturally privileged individuals. Roughly, the subset consists of the, perhaps arithmetically widening as a matter of both market power and diffusion of symbolic capital, upper-middle class and the wealthier dominant classes.

But bourdieusian distinction was also useful in a second and potentially deeper way. In particular, the question it helped me pose and try to answer was to do not with the markers of class, but with their *absence*. More specifically, the dataset is interesting in that one finds *both* a clear display of undisputed signs of class privilege which, as already stated, mainly took the form of depicting expensive food and luxury items in photos, *and an absence* of other markers of class, either explicit (such as discourses on inequality) or implicit/implied (such as class snobbery or, alternatively, information about where the capital for opening the delis and producing the marketed food came from). This second absence of class markers is justified on the basis that Mills's project is presented to her audience as non-snobbish and 'democratic' (Johnston & Baumann, 2014) i.e. as formally open to anyone, irrespective of class, gender or race. This intention does not in itself make the project any more class-neutral, and in this respect my thesis engages in critique of class-neutrality appearances: rather, it displaces the elements of class and lends them a different kind of form. As a matter of explanation, the absence of explicit class signals can be connected to empirical findings regarding forms of contemporary elite food consumption. In a way that is only seemingly paradoxical, the very absence of explicit class signals can be a signal of class distinction (Johnston & Baumann, 2014). In particular, as has been shown in the context of gourmet food consumption in the US (Johnston & Baumann, 2014), self-effacement of class through the repression of outright snobbery can itself be understood as a marker of class distinction under conditions of 'cultural omnivorousness'. Class distinction is not cashed out in terms of a homology between social classes and 'higher' or 'lower' (from a gustatory of aesthetic point of view) *kinds* of food (the classical example being French haute cuisine), but using a much more

complex set of differences, which can apply to *any kind* of food, such as its 'gourmet' or 'raw' and 'fresh' qualities. In this context, and as will be discussed later on, what sets Mills apart is that, as the dataset consistently shows, distinction in Mills's case is not mainly to do with the 'gourmet' or 'exotic' food (Johnston & Baumann, 2014) but, rather, with the fact that it is *healthy/good* food.

3.4.2 Authenticity

With regard to authenticity, and without entering into many details at this stage, it bears noting that the dataset is characterised by a number of qualities that may be understood to be markers of the authenticity of Mills's practice, such as the food's simplicity or some of the ingredients' 'exotic' qualities (Johnston & Baumann, 2014). However, the main element that sets the dataset apart as a whole is the fact that Mills accompanies her plant-based food consumption practice with a narrative that is simultaneously deeply personal and non-committal. In particular, on the one hand, as already stated, plant-based food and the discipline of preparing and consuming it are presented as means towards the construction of a healthy and happy self. Thus, far from being a 'mere' aesthetic experience, as it is in gourmet settings, the food's consumption acquires a quasi-spiritual quality and an existential dimension.

On the other hand, though, this quality is fully compatible with the absence of a deeper commitment with respect to controversial moral, 'ethical' or political values, such as animal rights. Mills makes clear from the beginning, with her blog and books, that she proposes plant-based eating as a self- rather than other-regarding practice. Certainly, the theme evolves; in her more recent books, Mills makes several vague but important commitments to values such as 'community' and the 'environment'. However, throughout the dataset, Mills consistently abstains from characterising plant-based eating 'vegan'. In this respect, she avoids the strong moral commitments associated with veganism. Accordingly, the kind of authenticity at play, as will be argued later in detail, is a 'thin', as opposed to a 'thick' authenticity. What is authentic is the expression of the deeper self's need for 'health' and 'happiness', which in no way, though, involves making 'strong evaluations' (Taylor, 1985) which may lead to occupying a controversial position in social and political space. This is one more sense

in which the authenticity of the project opens it to 'anyone', irrespective of controversial evaluative, religious, or other comprehensive conceptions of good life.

3.4.3 Enrichment

Last, but not least, the dataset clearly shows an important evolution of the Deliciously Ella project from what appears to be the practice, confessions, and choices of an 'amateur' towards a full-blown entrepreneurial attempt to create economic value, first through the books and later on through the marketisation of food products and the opening of delis. Boltanski and Esquerre's framework on 'enrichment' is particularly enlightening here. The creation of economic value brings together the themes of distinction and authenticity, since the authentic personal and existential narrative accompanying the practices of food production and consumption, along with the food's contribution to 'wellness' and 'goodness', are precisely the means used to justify the prices of the products that Mills sells. The interesting question is more to do with the kinds of tensions that have to be negotiated, since Mills herself comes to recognise that, the more 'professionalised' the project becomes (and she admits so openly (E. Mills, 2018a), the less 'authentic' it begins to feel. As we shall see later on, the main way in which Mills negotiates the tension between her 'more authentic and naive' past and the 'less authentic but professional' present is through the trope of purported *sincerity*. In both cases, though, the food is never sold solely because it is 'healthy' or 'good', i.e., because of its intrinsic qualities. The personal narrative that accompanies it is an integral part of its economic value.

3.5 Limitations of my research At this point, it is also essential to sketch out the limitations of my approach. Every decision to focus on the analysis of certain aspects of an extremely rich empirical material implies the downplaying of other aspects, which could have been explored in the former's place. Thus, the focus on distinction, authenticity/inequality and enrichment is partial at least in the sense that certain other dimensions that could be potentially explored have been left out. Thus, for example, the dataset could have been profitably analysed from a gender-centred perspective (Johnston & Baumann, 2014). The division of labour between Mills and her husband with regard to the Deliciously Ella brand with Mills handling the 'brand side of things –

everything you look, see, eat, feel and connect to and engage with', while Matthew Mills taking up the CEO role, since his skills lie 'in the business development and the finance and the operations – actually making it work' (Millington, 2016; E. Mills, 2018a; O'Neill, 2020a) is a clear enactment of socially constructed gendered roles. Moreover, since cooking remains to a significant extent a gendered activity, and hierarchies of status among chefs, bloggers and 'foodies' reflect gender hierarchies, it would be have been interesting to place more emphasis on these hierarchies and identities as ways of further explaining Mills's culinary visual trajectory. My decision to circumvent this kind of analysis is a function of three factors. **First,** as I explained in the previous section (3.6) elements of distinction/inequality, self-presentation and enrichment immediately emerged already from my first contact with empirical data. Additionally, the initial comparison of Mills with other popular food/wellness bloggers and influencers, which, unlike top chefs, are also women, prompted me to try to focus on the characteristics that appeared to make Mills's project distinct vis-à-vis these bloggers and influencers. Authenticity and enrichment for example, clearly distinguish Mills's project from these other women food/wellness bloggers. I thus thought it more illuminating to focus on these dimensions than on, say, gender hierarchies. And whilst the dimension of class/distinction is not distinctive in this way, I explain in detail in the Introduction the more specific reasons, pertaining to my positionality, which led me to place emphasis on it. To repeat, due to my past professional engagement with the marketing strategies of large brands, I was equipped with the capacity to discern subtle visual details as signs of class distinction and inequality. These details could easily be missed by other researchers that did not have my experience. I thus decided, on strategic grounds, that it was best to focus on the identification and interpretation of these markers of class privilege and distinction rather than on the gendered dimension of Mills's online practice. **Second,** although I am very interested in how gender shapes and forms this whole wellness ecosystem, I have no specific background in gender studies, other than a general reading interest. Hence, I decided to focus on what I know best and dig deeper into new but relevant knowledge and information, instead of focusing on a subject for which I had no academic or professional background. **Third,** every research is based on finite resources. Accordingly, the researcher must draw a (possibly arbitrary) line somewhere, delineating her topic to make that topic

more manageable. Still, these dimensions could constitute a topic for future work. This possibility will be discussed in the conclusion of this thesis.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

An investigation of Mills's Instagram account came with a number of legal and ethical challenges that had to be adequately addressed as part of the research design, and throughout the research process.

In 2020, after several years of gradual data collection restrictions for third-party actors and amidst the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Instagram permanently prevented access to its API, to expand users' privacy protection (McCrow-Young, 2021). This action had several implications for social researchers, among others, who saw significant limitations to their Instagram data collection options, as I have already mentioned in Chapter 3.3.1 (Data collection and API restrictions). As a result, I had to find a way of creating my dataset by surpassing these restrictions, bearing in mind the protections of users' data – in this case, public data of a brand and a popular and heavily media covered celebrity.

As I explained earlier in 3.3.1 (Data collection and API restrictions), I decided to collect images manually, a procedure that offered me the opportunity to familiarise with the dataset and assess the relevance of the posts' images and texts in relation to my research (Laestadius, 2017). A first and important set of questions concerned ethical considerations pertaining to: (a) manually collecting, storing and using Instagram images for my dataset and (b) reproducing some of these images, along with selected chunks of text and captions, in the body of my PhD thesis. The concerns that are raised are to do with: (a) privacy considerations, (b) GDPR compliance and (c) intellectual property issues (and, more specifically, copyright of the images collected). These aspects of data collection and analysis were addressed as follows.

First, regarding issues of privacy, one initial question that had to be answered concerned whether I could access, collect, store and use images posted by the Deliciously Ella account on Instagram without the account owner's consent. The

relevant standard in these cases has to do with the existence, or lack thereof, of a reasonable expectation of privacy on the part of the person posting the images. In the instant case there was no such expectation requiring asking for the account ownner's consent to store and use the account's images, a least for the categories of images that I discuss below, and which composed my dataset. This stems from the following reasons: First, the Deliciously Ella account was publicly and fully accessible to all users, including myself. Thus, there were no privacy settings used restricting access only to a subset of users (such as 'friends' or 'followers'). Moreover, the account was, and it still is, operated based on maximal exposure of content to a widely conceived public. Accordingly, there is no reason whatsoever to think that any of the visual content is intended to be private. Second, regarding the content itself, images either depict food or persons or both. Regarding the persons depicted, these are either Mills, i.e., a person that is widely known and has no reasonable expectation of privacy, or third parties (such as Mills's husband, Mills's children, Mills's husband's mother or the Mills' dog). Regarding these persons and items, a good case could be made that the same consideration of lack of a reasonable expectation of privacy applies. The crucial consideration is that Mills and other persons appearing on the Deliciously Ella account (including her two underage children, whose legal guardians decide to publicly expose on social media) have either deliberately exposed themselves to social and mainstream media coverage, or knowingly acquiesced to their images being uploaded on a hugely popular and publicly accessible Instagram account. Hence, these persons can be reasonably said to have implicitly consented to such exposure. Accordingly, the crucial element of publicity has been satisfied and no additional consent is needed to use the images for research purposes. As a result, the collection and study of the images themselves without express consent by the owner of the Deliciously Ella account posed no privacy issue. The ethical complexities regarding the special case of underage persons (Mills's children) will be dealt with separately below, but it should be repeated straight away that the images were publicly posted by the children's putative legal guardians, i.e., Ella Mills and/or Matthew Mills, under conditions where these guardians knew, for the reasons stated in the previous paragraph, that there was no reasonable expectation of privacy.

On the other hand, the comments made by third parties under the Deliciously Ella posts pose, at least *prima facie*, some privacy issues. This is so because a case could be made that the comments were not 'public' in the requisite sense. Accordingly, users making these comments could perhaps come to believe that they were acting in a private capacity or in a way that minimises their public exposure, which would result in the necessity to acquire their explicit consent to use them for research purposes. However, even if third parties do have these beliefs about privacy, which is a moot point for reasons stated below, this is not sufficient to render their posts private in the ethically requisite sense. The same criterion as before applies, i.e., the crucial question is whether these users could be said to have a reasonable expectation of privacy when posting comments on the social media wall of a person that has a public account followed by hundreds of thousands of people (or, later, by millions of users). A good case could be made that they do not. Still, as I have already observed people might have various beliefs about privacy, including erroneous ones, and hold that they 'had not realised' that their comments were public. Consequently, with respect to these comments made by third parties, I decided to err on the side of caution and removed all of them from the images when constructing my dataset, a practice that is also followed in other in recent literature (McCrow-Young, 2021).

Next, regarding storage and processing of images comprising my dataset, suffice it to say that I fully complied with all GDPR-stemming duties, as transpires clearly from my application to the University of Sheffield's Ethics Committee and its approval, which can be found in Appendix No 5 of this thesis. First, the images comprising my dataset were public. Second, academic research based on these images is a 'legitimate interest' within the meaning of article 6(1)(f) GDPR (EUR-LEX, 2016). Third, the images were used by paying due deference to the principle of proportionality. Fourth, no sensitive personal data were collected. Fifth, the images were safely stored in a password-protected computer managed by the University of Sheffield, which is the data controller, and inaccessible to third parties. Sixth, after completing my research I proceeded to destroy the dataset, thus once again complying with the duty to use personal data in a proportionate manner given the legitimate interest underlying data collection (i.e., scientific research).

Regarding intellectual property issues to do with the reproduction of images from my dataset within the body of my thesis, there are potential copyright concerns to consider. The first consideration to ponder is that the images collected from the Deliciously Ella account are probably copyrighted, since they arguably belong to the person that took them, or which owns them (in case they were taken by someone else). One might reasonably hypothesise that this person is Mills. Second, though, copyright is not an absolute rule. It does not under all circumstances imply that the downloaded images may not be *exceptionally* reproduced in the main body of the thesis. In particular, the well-established 'fair use' doctrine (Gov.UK, 2021), which is one of the most important such exceptions, unequivocally holds that copyright gives way to the legitimate interest of pursuing academic research, at least when some conditions are met. These comprise, first, the absence of pursuit of a financial goal and, second, the proportionate nature of the interference with copyright (Gov.UK, 2021). Both of those conditions were met in this case. To begin with, the thesis does not pursue a financial aim. To add to the above, only a relatively small number of images is reproduced in the main body of the thesis. As a result, there is no legal obstacle to the publication of the thesis on the University of Sheffield's website. On the other hand, the reluctance of various publishers to publish academic work without explicit permission from copyright holders could potentially pose an obstacle when it comes to the publication of papers stemming from the thesis, or of the thesis, from these publishers. Various strategies could be envisaged, when that time comes, to address these issues. These range from complete removal of the images, using instead textual description, to seeking explicit permission from Mills to use these images for academic purposes. The same considerations pertaining to 'fair use' apply, moreover, regarding reproduction of some images, along with relevant quotes, from Mills's books, and regarding quotes from Instagram posts.

The considerations adduced above are also at play when considering other sources of ethical norms. In particular, I had to specifically comply with the principles of research ethics upheld by the University of Sheffield (University of Sheffield, 2023) as well as with those upheld by the FSA, which co-funded my research (FSA, 2022e).

With a view to these norms, the pertinent considerations for the present thesis are as follows. First, regarding privacy concerns, it should be once again stressed that it is not the case that Mills can be reasonably be said to believe that her Instagram account, with hundreds of thousands (and now millions) of followers is in any way 'private'. Second, the data are not sensitive, and its collection and processing did not pose any risk of harm to the persons depicted in the images collected, processed, and reproduced. Third, when sensitive data was used, i.e., information pertaining to Mills's health condition, which was presumably healed (according to Mills) by the plant-based diet that Mills later turned to, this was to do with information that was already in the public domain, including Mills's blog and first book, as well as various mainstream media articles, and hence could be reasonably be said to be public. Fourth, whilst I did collect images depicting Mills's underage children, I did not reproduce these images within the body of the thesis, nor did anyone else have access to them. They were solely used for research purposes and no risk of harm was posed to the children depicted. The cogency of these considerations can be further corroborated by reference to the clearance that the research project got by the competent ethics committee of the Information School of the University of Sheffield, which allowed me to confidently pursue my research whilst legitimately believing that there was no ethical issue involved that remained unaddressed. As already mentioned, the document approving of my ethics application can be found in Appendix No 5 of the present thesis.

Last, but not least, sidestepping the Instagram API and manually collecting the images posed significant issues of management of resources (in terms of time) but no ethical issues per se. This is because, first, images from Instagram and other social media sites are publicly accessible. Second, manual collection of images as a way of dataset construction does not pose ethical issues which can be meaningfully differentiated from the more general ethical concerns of constructing the dataset irrespective of method (scraping, screenshotting and/or manually downloading) and publishing some of these images within the body of the thesis. At the same time, the fact that I could collect images from the Deliciously Ella account and use them to construct a dataset for academic research purposes also meant that I fully complied with Instagram's Terms of Use (Instagram, 2023). These clarify that a) there is no duty to refrain from

downloading other users' content (since there is only a duty to refrain from '[...] sell[ing], licens[ing] or purchas[ing] any account or data obtained from [Instagram] or [the] Service') and b) the main duties that account holders undertake by virtue of Instagram's Terms of Use are the same as their legal duties regarding respect of privacy and copyright, dealt above.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to explain in detail the theoretical and methodological foundation that infiltrates my research approach and in particular: a) the positioning of my work within the wider realms of interpretive social science as defined by Geertz; b) the definition of an eclectic pragmatism as a cherry-picking process of the methods used and c) a methodological framework particularly developed for a digital and online social media world. I also introduced the methods I used for my data analysis, which ranged among Digital Methods, Netnography, Content Analysis, Compositional Interpretation, Mixed Methods and some elements of Autoethnography for my own purposes of immersion into my research subject. I presented a methodological approach I developed while working on my dataset, called 'Comparative Instachronics' and defined a set of clusters ('eras') that were produced via this approach. Through these, I managed to view Deliciously Ella's Instagram single account as a chronologically organised online trajectory, enhanced by supporting information that was found in other online/offline sources. Considering limitations occurred through API restrictions, I explained in detail my data collection and my sampling procedure, before delving into the analytical presentation of the four distinctive Deliciously Ella eras. These eras, which were thematically organised through significant milestones in Mills's life, demonstrated her own online trail from amateur blogger to famous celebrity and entrepreneur. Furthermore, I provided an overview of the theoretical lenses I used for my findings' interpretation (which follows in the next chapter) and discussed them in relation to Deliciously Ella. Additionally, I presented the limitations of my research, especially in relation to the dimension of gender. Finally, I discussed the ethical considerations while undertaking this research.

CHAPTER 4
ERA1 – THE WELLNESS BLOGGER

Overview

In this chapter, and before I move on the presentation and discussion of my findings of ERA 1 (Deliciously Ella: The Wellness Blogger), I offer an outline of some milestone events that were pivotal to Ella's personal and professional life during ERA 1 (17 January 2013 to 31 August 2014). I then proceed with the presentation and discussion of findings related to the era, with particular focus on the theme of authenticity, which is dominant. I also use compositional interpretation to analyse a significant image for ERA1. Additionally, I discuss in detail hashtag usage and especially the #cleaneating hashtag. This sets the scene for a discussion in later chapters, as Mills revisits the term 'clean eating' after receiving strong criticism for using it.

4.1 ERA1: The Wellness Blogger: Findings and discussion

4.1.1 Milestone moments of ERA1

In this subsection I introduce the reader to several milestone events for the Deliciously Ella brand and Mills herself during ERA1. Mills launched her Instagram profile on 17 January 2013, after having already launched her blog in May 2012. She did so by using a very simple image depicting green olives. The caption read "beautiful olives" and it was followed by two hashtags: #instafood and #delicious. Instagram had introduced hashtags in January 2011 (Giannoulakis & Tsapatsoulis, 2016; Van Grove, 2011), just a few months after its launch. It might seem like a long time ago in internet terms today, but in 2013 hashtags were not just novel: they were one of the few limited that were available to users on the platform. Thus, their use was practically mandatory, especially regarding those users that aimed at creating the most widespread community of followers possible. More information about hashtags and the ways they enhanced Deliciously Ella's Instagram presence will be presented later in the sections below.

Image No 4.1: Deliciously Ella's first post on Instagram (17-1-2013)
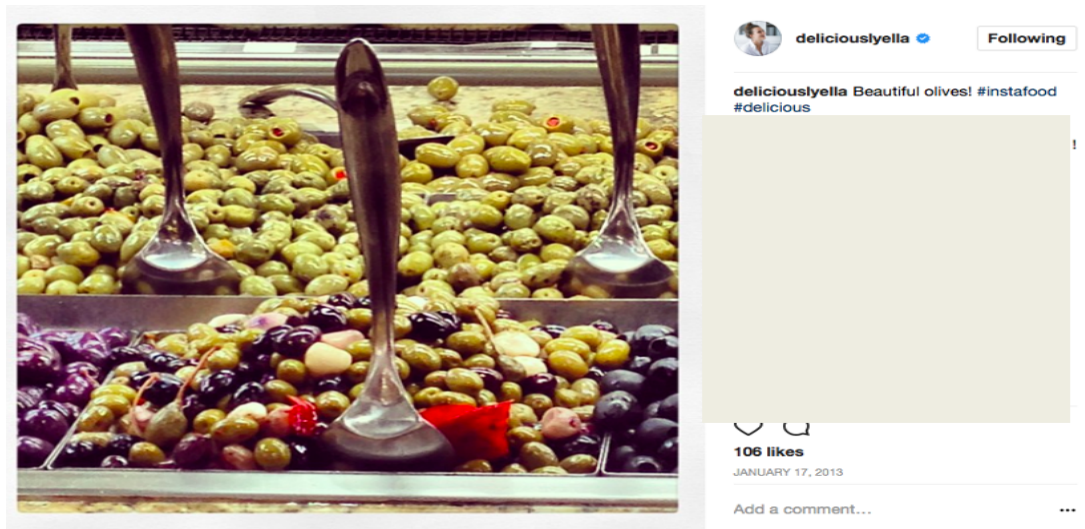
As already mentioned, ERA1 begins on the 17th of January 2013 and ends on the 31st of August 2014. Overall, it comprises 1,037 Instagram posts. 259 of them have been used as a sample for this thesis's analysis, i.e., 1 out of 4. The posts roughly correspond to the early days for both the Deliciously Ella brand on Instagram and Mills as a blogger. Despite this, however, these early Instagram posts already presage Mills's later trajectory towards a more successful professional life, comprising the creation of a company, and her recognition as a microcelebrity. I have assembled some of the most important milestones of that trajectory during ERA1 in the table below to provide a workable overview of Mills's trajectory before I discuss a selection of them in more detail.

Table No 4.1: Selection of Deliciously Ella ERA1 Instagram milestone moments

SELECTION OF ERA 1 INSTAGRAM MILESTONE MOMENTS	DATE
First Instagram post	17-Jan-13
First Blog makeover	30-May-13
First Mainstream media appearance	30-Aug-13
Reached 25.000 followers on Instagram	03-Sep-13
Filiming videos for the blog, with celebrity director	26-Sep-13
Announcement of Mills giving cooking classes	15-Oct-13
Announcing the planning of a new mobile app	22-Oct-13
First appearance on Sunday Time Style Magazine	19-Jan-14
First Public talk about Mills's health story	31-Jan-14
Deliciously Ella first Mobile App Launch	10-Feb-14
Mobile App reaching No1 on App Store - food and drink category	11-Feb-14
First appearance on Daily Mail online	21-Feb-14
First appearance on Telegraph Magazine	23-Feb-14
First announcement of Mills looking for an assistant	23-Feb-14
Reached 100.000 Instagram Followers	01-Apr-14
Dropping hints about writing her first cook-book	07-Apr-14
First Appearance on Glamour Magazine	09-Jul-14
First Mention in Vogue	14-Jul-14
Second Blog makeover	28-Jul-14
First US Magazine appearance (Self magazine)	27-Aug-14
Last post of ERA1	31-Aug-04

As the table above shows, the Deliciously Ella blog morphs into a more aesthetically professional look-and-feel via an official blog makeover just about a year after its initial launch. This speedy metamorphosis of the blog is significant. Initially, the Deliciously Ella blog was a self-created Word Press blog that began as an amateurish attempt on the part of a young student and was aimed at sharing that student's illness story and her efforts to heal herself through the consumption of plant-based food. Nevertheless, the blog rapidly transformed into a stylish website which contained curated images, significant amounts of text, and where new categories such as 'food philosophy' were added. Moreover, this new and aesthetically more pleasing site was also signed by means of the Deliciously Ella trademark. The visual comparison between the two versions of the blog, i.e., the initial one and the one after the first makeover, reveals some of the specific visual and aesthetic traits of this transition:

Image No 4.2: Deliciously Ella Word Press Blog Homepage – May 2012
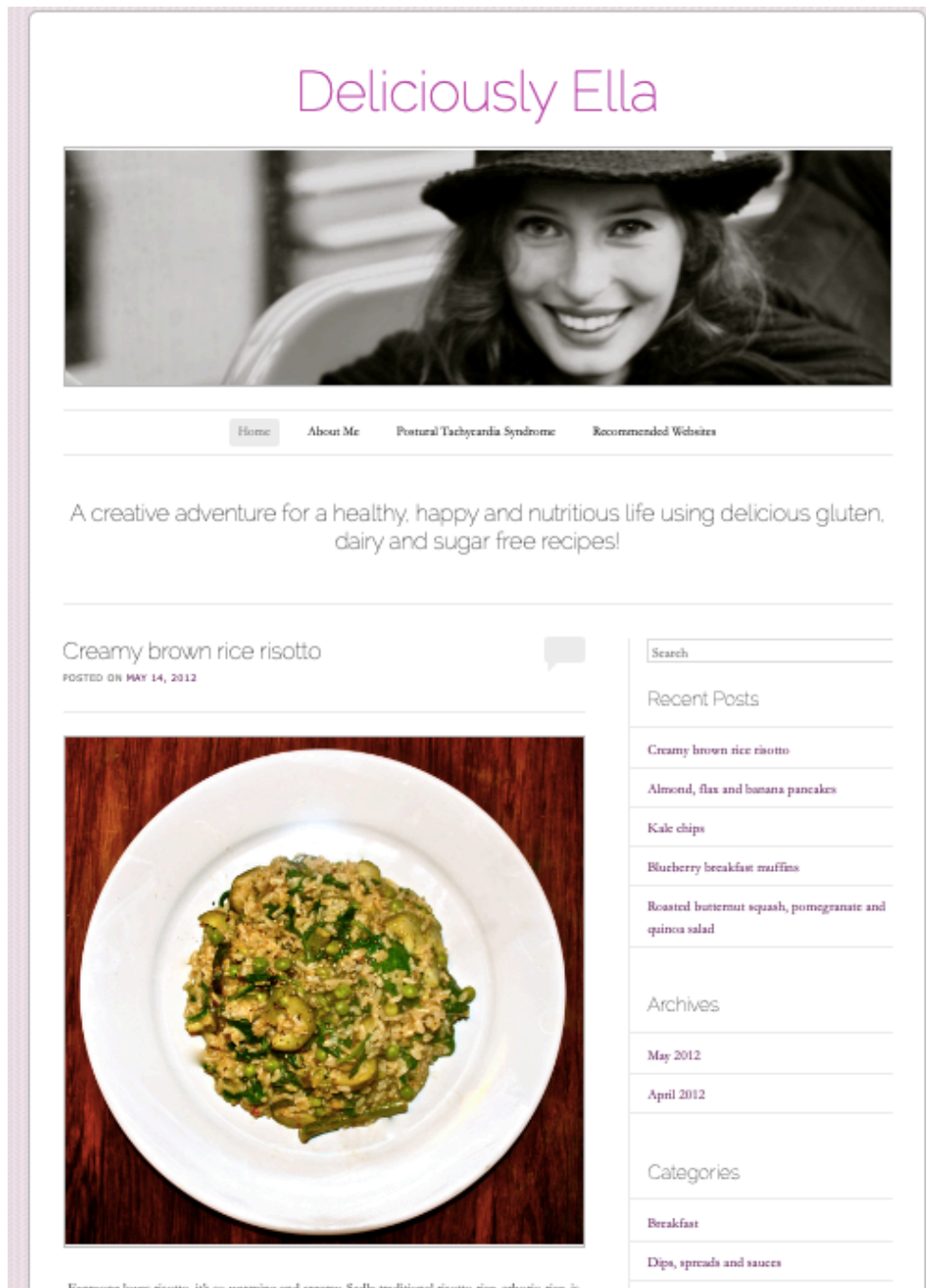
Source: internetarchive.org (DeliciouslyElla Website, 2012)

Image No 4.3: Deliciously Ella Blog Makeover – May 2013

Source: internetarchive.org (DeliciouslyElla Website, 2013)

The comparison reveals several interesting features. First, the 'amateurish' personal photos of the blog are replaced by professional food styled photos. A photo of Mills still exists in the newer version, but in this case the food takes central place. At the same time, a very specific font type is now used, which will also from now on also be found in Mills's books until new rebranding and redesigning attempts occur at a later stage. It constitutes a kind of signature that differentiates the revamped website from other similar content and provides it with a distinctive name. Third, social plugins are provided in the revamped blog, helping visitors to quickly connect with Mills's social media platforms. Fourth, vivid colours and specific tones are used to depict the plant-based food talked about, in line with more social media general trends about accepted norms of how food should be depicted. Fifth, these aesthetically more pleasing photos are also used in Mills's Instagram account of the time as well. Thus, on the 30th of May 2013, Mills posts an image of the blog makeover (followed by a list of hashtags in the second comment) asking her followers for feedback.

Image No 4.4: Deliciously Ella shows their blog makeover on Instagram (30-5-2013)
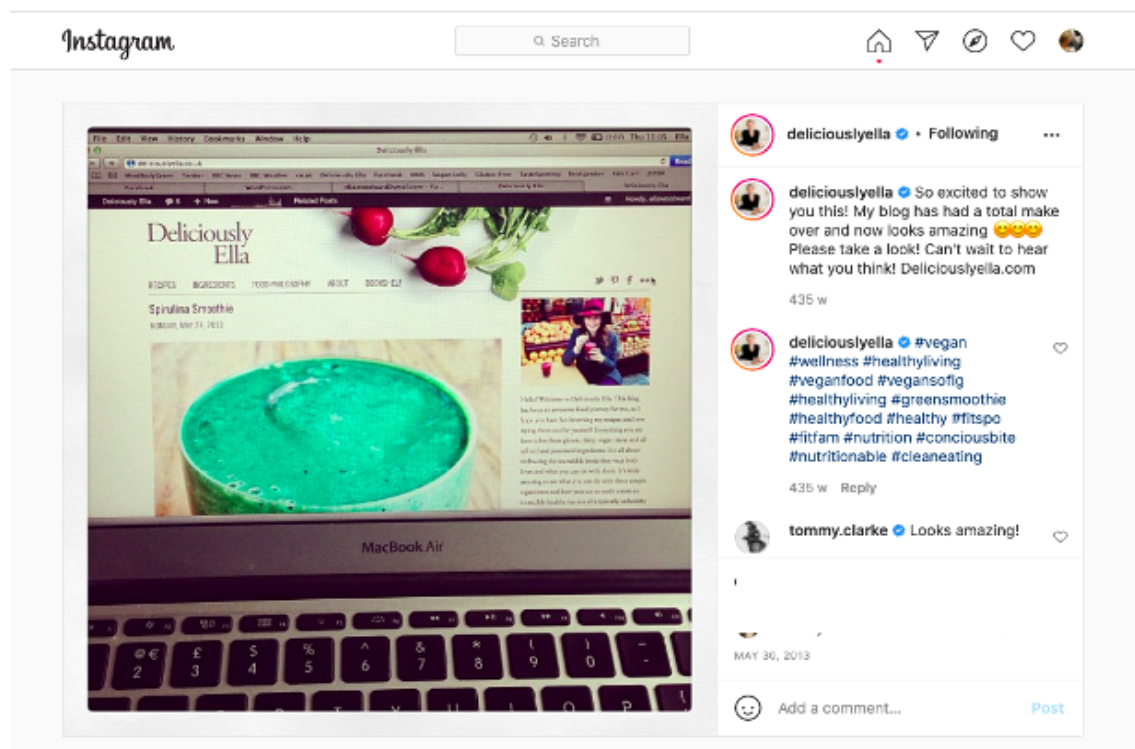
A noteworthy detail in this Instagram post is Tommy Clarke's comment just under Mills's caption, reading: *"Looks amazing!"*. Tommy Clarke, who has a certified Instagram account (this is what the blue tick next to his name reveals – the same blue tick also certifies the authenticity of the Deliciously Ella account) is a celebrity photographer based in the UK. Judging from the fact that, later in time, and more specifically in September 2013, Mills hired Tommy Clarke to shoot a range of professional videos for her blog, one could venture the hypothesis that Tommy Clarke's comment under Mills's Instagram post implies that he was professionally involved in the makeover of her blog. Irrespective of whether this kind of involvement indeed took place or not, though, the makeover itself at such an early stage of an amateur blog is a safe indication of the possession of a significant amount of economic, symbolic (and possibly also social) capital by Mills, as well as of skills and capacities needed to effectively use that capital.

Other milestone moments of ERA1 reveal Mills's steady and careful steps towards fame. These include mainstream media interviews, public talks about her own health story and cooking classes for her followers. A pivotal moment during these early days of success, however, has been the first Deliciously Ella mobile application, which was launched on 10 February 2014. Overwhelmed as she was from all her followers' requests about recipes and ingredients usage, Mills decided, in her own words, to launch a mobile app where she could organise and archive everything, thus making her recipes more user-friendly and accessible (London, 2014). Priced at £2.99, the application offered a range of plant-based recipes grouped by meal (breakfasts, drinks, mains, soups, salads, snacks, sweets) and quickly reached No1 on the Apple Store under food and drinks category. Mills herself mentioned at a later interview for Business Insider online that it was this mobile app that *"funded everything to start with"*, as it was *"this constant ticker that allowed everything to get started"* (Millington, 2016).

Entrepreneurship – let alone creating business out of a blog that advocates vegan and plant-based food practices back in 2012, where the plant-based trend was only in its early stages – involves risk and losses as a part of its very core (Bodde & St John,

2012). However, during these early stages of the Deliciously Ella blog, Mills's intentions of making money using her blog were never an issue of discussion, nor were they made obvious. On the contrary, Mills's narrative has been since the very beginning very consistent: the blog served as the online diary of a young 21-year-old student trying to overcome her illness while sharing her recipes with the world to disseminate positive messages about a healthier way of living. Undoubtedly, this appears to be a noble cause, not instrumentalised by the quest for monetization. Nevertheless, engaging in professional blog makeovers, filming promotional videos with a celebrity film-director, and launching a well-designed, user-friendly mobile application just about a year after starting one's blog, costs considerable amounts of money. The funds needed are not usually available to young bloggers who create content, no matter how popular, for their own pleasure and leisure. Entrepreneurial endeavours usually imply reduced and irregular earnings in the beginning, as well as sometimes being in dept to support one's effort or even going bankrupt (O'Neill, 2020a). As for blogging, critical factors for monetization involve advertising, inbound or affiliated marketing as well as sales, among others (Rizky & Pardamean, 2016). However, the first year of Mills's blogging activity, as well as the first months of her successful Instagram account did not seem to have involved any of the usual promotional and advertising tactics to commercialise the Deliciously Ella brand. Nevertheless, it involved: a) an abundance of inspirational and motivational quotes for success in life (discussed in more detail later in this section); b) a continuous storytelling of Mills's personal health story and her own quest to heal herself through a plant-based diet, which built up an 'authenticity capital' as I will discuss later in Chapter 6 and c) a consistent repetition of the same narrative that seemed to serve as a moral compass, a contemporary moral ideal (Hookway, 2015) in the Deliciously Ella brand building: do what you love, be authentic, *"stay true to yourself, engage with your followers and ignore the critics"* (London, 2015). What is also important is how success gets to be described as a casual result of Mills's effort. Thus, it was because Mills stayed true to her authentic self that her blog simply 'snowballed':

'When I first started blogging, I kept it a secret from my friends and then started to show a few people and it snowballed from there. I'd say my golden rule is stay true to your own self and voice. (…) Authenticity is huge, it's important to make people feel a part of the journey.' (London, 2015)

The experience of a young blogger (who became a millionaire entrepreneur in only a few years), however, is not a common one for most bloggers, especially women bloggers, who engage in "aspirational labour" in the digital culture industries, as Brooke Erin Duffy explains (B. E. Duffy, 2016). And although many successful bloggers draw on authenticity, community building and loving-what-they-do narratives, exactly as Mills has done throughout her amateur and professional blogging trajectory, these are merely symptomatic of a very gendered and class-subjective portrayal of work coined as 'aspirational labour' (B. E. Duffy, 2016). These aspirational labourers engage into creative activities that can promise an increased economic and social capital, but in the majority of cases they end up achieving nothing close to what Mills has achieved (O'Neill, 2020a). The reasons why Mills's success was not necessarily the result of what she claimed to be 'accidental' (O'Neill, 2020a; Vyas, 2017) will be discussed in later chapters in relation to notions of distinction and enrichment.

ERA1 ends on 31 August 2014, just before Mills officially announced her first cookbook publication. The last image of the era depicts a bowl of 'courgetti', i.e., a bowl of courgettes that have been cut into long and curly stripes. Preparing courgetti often happens with the help of a kitchen tool called a 'spiraliser' (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, 2021). Courgetti is a well-known plant-based dish which is normally created with the intention to emulate some of the properties of spaghetti, albeit without the gluten and the calories involved. Courgetti are usually served with some plant-based 'bolognaise' sauce, which, again, is an emulation of the classic Italian recipe of minced meat and tomato sauce. The sauce can be made with soya mince, mushrooms, lentils, aubergines, quinoa, and other plant-based materials that when cooked can resemble to mincemeat. Indeed, one of Deliciously Ella's most popular recipes is lentil bolognaise. This dish has featured many times in mainstream media and blogs (Cavendish, 2015) and Mills herself has presented in her own cookbooks (E. Mills, 2020; Woodward, 2015a). The emulation trope is quite common in vegan food preparation and consumption (Alcorta et al., 2021; Walsh & Baker, 2020) and it forms an integral part of a negotiation of a distinctive kind of tension similar to the strict consumption of plant-based food. On the one hand, the consumer submits

herself to a strict discipline for reasons extraneous to the consumption of food. These reasons might be moral, referring for example to the protection of animal rights, or, as in Mills's case, they may pertain to the transformation of the self or aim towards sustaining a healthy self. In both cases, some consumers deem important to relax the requirements of self-discipline. Emulation of otherwise 'forbidden' foods is a key means of such relaxation, and it is intimately connected with the distinctive character of the commitments involved, which are more fluid and flexible than, say, religious commands.

Image No 4.5: Deliciously Ella displays recipe of 'courgetti' pasta (Instagram post 31-8-2014)
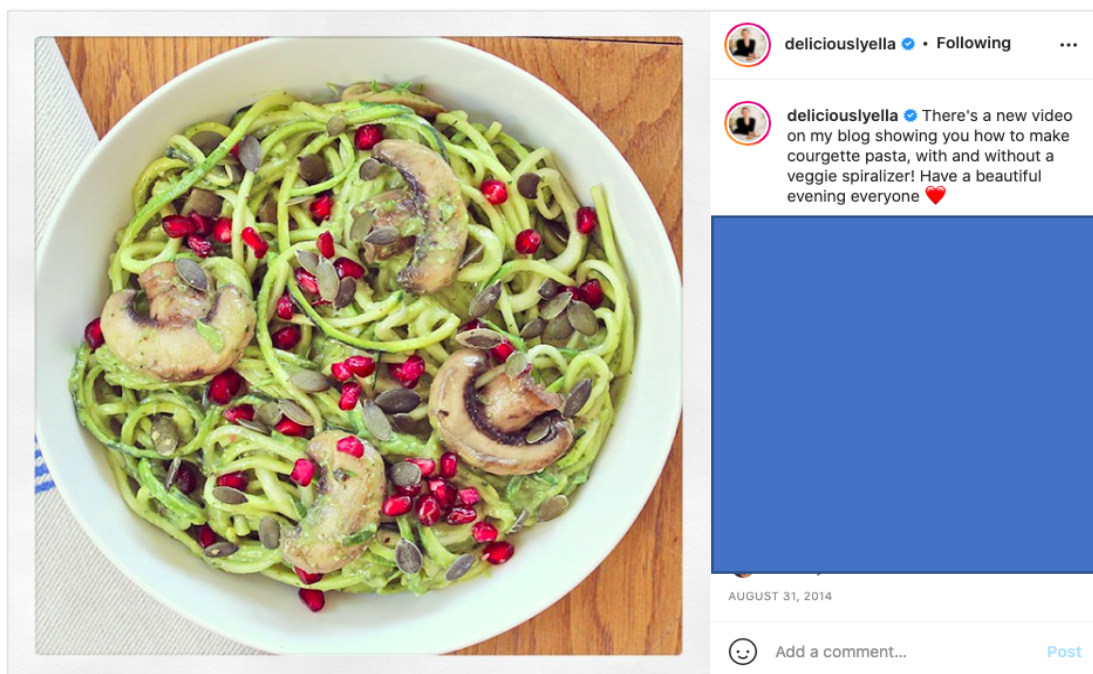
4.1.2 The image and the message: Building an authentic story.

Food, as perhaps it should be expected, plays a primary role in Deliciously Ella's Instagram posts throughout ERA1. Indeed, as shown in the table in the next page, the general category of food images combined with images of drinks as well as images of food and drinks together, cover 82.6% of the ERA1 visual dataset. Images of Mills and anyone/anything related to her (people, animals and/or activities) correspond to 11.6% of the total dataset. The remaining 5.8% of the visuals include inspirational quotes that Mills is particularly fond of, as I will explain below, images of nature and various landscapes. An interesting element of the table is that images of Mills alone do not exceed more than 4 out of 259 of the total ERA1 dataset. This finding is significant, and it should be interpreted in comparison with subsequent eras. In fact, as will become clear in the following chapters, the focus on the personality (and the image) of Ella Woodward (later, Mills) grows stronger as Mills invests in both her public persona as well as her Deliciously Ella brand.

Table No 4.2: ERA1 Deliciously Ella Instagram Image Themes

ERA1: INSTAGRAM IMAGE THEMES	NO OF INSTA IMAGES	%
FOOD AND/OR DRINK	214	82.6
MILLS	30	11.6
OTHER	15	5.8
TOTAL	259	100
IMAGE THEME BREAKDOWN **FOOD AND/OR DRINK**	**NO OF IMAGES**	**%**
Food	154	72.0
Drink	28	13.1
Food&Drink	32	15.0
TOTAL	214	100
IMAGE THEME BREAKDOWN **MILLS**	**NO OF IMAGES**	**%**
Mills alone	4	13.3
Mills and Animals	2	6.7
Mills and Coworkers	1	3.3
Mills and Food and/or Drink	17	56.7
Mills and Friends	2	6.7
Mills and Students	1	3.3
Mills, Food and/or Drink, Animals	1	3.3
Deliciously Ella Blog	1	3.3
Mills's Supper Club	1	3.3
TOTAL	30	100
IMAGE THEME BREAKDOWN **OTHER**	**NO OF IMAGES**	**%**
Flowers	5	33.3
Landscapes/Nature	5	33.3
Quote	4	26.7
Various Products	1	6.7
TOTAL	15	100

Looking deeper into the food and/or drink category reveals that Mills's recipes throughout ERA1 are mainly based on fruit and vegetables and are not very diverse. The table below shows the top ten kinds of foods and drinks (ranked by frequency) she presents in her Instagram posts, with 'smoothies' being number one in her preferences. Vegetable salads, juices, smoothie bowls and (usually raw) fruit follow, implying a low level of actual cooking involved. During ERA1 Mills's recipes are usually mixed vegetables and fruit, blended vegetables with fruit to make a smoothie, some occasional pasta/noodles/rice making, as well as some brownies or pancakes. After

all, Mills herself had mentioned several times in her blog and later in her first book that she had absolutely no idea about cooking:

"I was all ready to go with my healthy eating healing regime until it suddenly occurred to me that not only did I not know what to eat, but I also couldn't cook! I mean I could boil pasta and scramble a couple of eggs, but that was really about it." (Woodward, 2015a)

Table No 4.3: ERA1, Top 10 kinds of food/drink depicted on Deliciously Ella Instagram

Rank	ERA1: Kind of food/drink depicted (TOP 10)	No of instances	%
1	Smoothie	30	14.0
2	Vegetable salad	18	8.4
3	Juices	14	6.5
4	Smoothie bowl	14	6.5
5	Fruit	13	6.1
6	Variation of dishes and ingredients	12	5.6
7	Vegetables	11	5.1
8	Porridge	8	3.7
9	Avocado on toast	6	2.8
10	Brownies	6	2.8
	REMAINING CATEGORIES	*82*	*38.3*
	TOTAL	**214**	**100**

Indeed, throughout ERA1 Mills does not seem to focus on her cooking skills but mainly on promoting healthier nutritional choices. Making a smoothie does not require following sophisticated instructions, other than mixing some fruit together with water or plant-based milk. Still, it is an integral part of Mills's authentic experience and her self-healing journey. Mills is not apologetic for not being able to cook. On the contrary, simple recipes of raw fruit and vegetable combinations are what helped her maintain a continuous consumption of this 'healing food' (Woodward, 2015a: 8). Additionally, as she confesses at the Introduction of her first book *'I thought that if I kept a blog and promised myself that I would try three new recipes a week, then I would start really loving this new way of cooking, which is exactly what happened'* (Woodward, 2015a: 8).

Authenticity is an important element for blogs and social media, especially as they both reflect the voice of everyday ordinary people (A. Duffy, 2019; Logfren, 2016).

Food blogs (and their social media extensions later in time, mainly on Instagram) are one of the most popular platforms where these ordinary people can write about food, share recipes online, advocate practices of food shopping and styling, and thus challenge the idea that writing about food (or cooking) is exclusively a professional activity (Logfren, 2016). Of course, as mentioned in chapter 2, there have been numerous interpretations of what makes something or someone 'authentic' (Beverland, 2005), meanings of authenticity change over time (Postrel, 2004) and, even more, research indicates that consumers with different levels of cultural capital seek different signals to understand authenticity (Holt, 1998). Nevertheless, food blogs have contributed to an additional angle, framing authenticity connected to food as a way of contradicting the traditional production and marketing techniques of the food industry (Simunaniemi et al., 2013). In the case of Mills, authenticity became a way of contradicting traditional medical practices and scientific gravitas. The more Mills highlights the healthy attributes of those kinds of foods and drinks that helped her heal herself, without paying particular attention to her own unsophisticated culinary practices, the more authentic she appears to be.

As for the ingredients depicted in the Deliciously Ella Instagram account, once more the selection is mainly limited among those that can help quickly create a light salad or a snack assortment and at the same time offer a certain level of exoticism. Bananas, carrots, tomatoes, kale, chia seeds, spinach, almonds, and avocado figure among the top ten list as table No4 shows below. Visual imagery focuses on the simplicity of ingredients and their combinations, perhaps as a sign of 'pureness' and 'cleanliness' compared to calorie rich foods, or even fatty food choices that consumers are used to watch on many visual media (Walsh & Baker, 2020). But Mills, symbolically named by the same media as 'the daughter of Nigella' (Meltzer, 2016) or 'the new Nigella' (Creighton, 2015) – clearly compared to the famous television cook and best-selling food writer Nigella Lawson – has a radically different proposition to offer than her symbolic mother: simple, 'clean' ingredients that nourish one's body and take care of one's health. The proposition sounds authentic, as it derives from Mills's personal narrative. At the same time, it implies that Deliciously Ella is not another food blog that

offers just plant-based recipes, but a whole philosophy that distinguishes itself from the mainstream and deals with the higher practice of eating one's way to good health.

Table No 4.4: ERA1, Top 10 kinds of Ingredients depicted on Deliciously Ella Instagram

Rank	ERA1: Kind of ingredients depicted (TOP 10)	No of instances	%
1	Bananas	58	5.4
2	Almonds	51	4.8
3	Avocado	43	4.0
4	Spinach	35	3.3
5	Carrots	32	3.0
6	Nut Butter	31	2.9
7	Tomatoes	30	2.8
8	Chia Seeds	27	2.5
9	Pumpkin seeds	27	2.5
10	Kale	24	2.2
	REMAINING CATEGORIES	*711*	*66.5*
	TOTAL	**1069**	**100**

Take, for example, the Instagram post below, where is hard not to see the implied contrast that Mills conveys in the visual. Food is presented in a pure, raw, and unprocessed form which acts as a reminder to Mills's followers of what 'healthy' compared to 'unhealthy' looks like. Although Mills is not present in the image, and despite the fact that no explicit talk about clean eating is present (apart from using the #cleaneating hashtag some comments further down), it is the food itself that stands in as the symbolic illustration of clean (Walsh & Baker, 2020). Additionally, the selection of exotic (as well as expensive and not widely available) ingredients such as kale, coconut water, flax seed (and later maca and/or acai powder as I will discuss in the next chapter) or hemp act as a subtle marker of status and distinction (Johnston & Baumann, 2014). Of course, all these ingredients are known for their high nutritional value and contribution towards one's good health. However, their cost and scarcity make them inaccessible to wider consumer audiences that Mills is supposedly addressing.

Image No 4.6: Deliciously Ella displays smoothie's ingredients (Instagram post 27-5-2013)
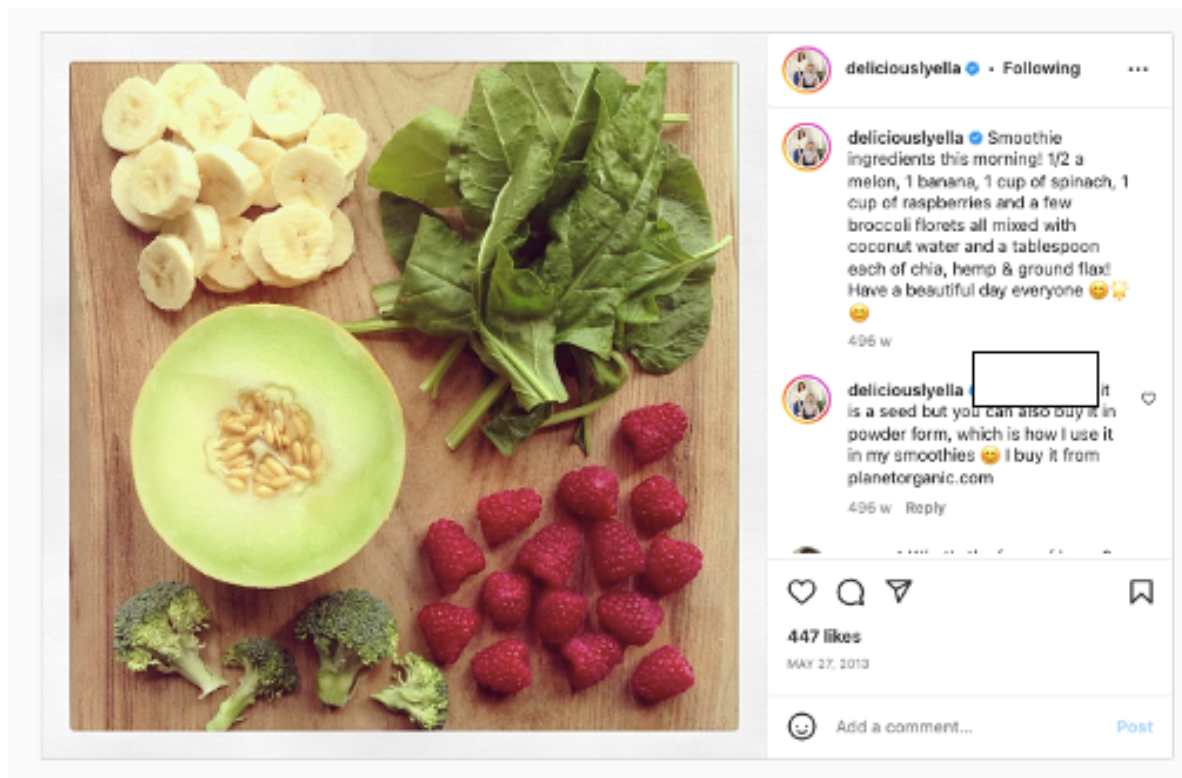
Another interesting point is Mills's answer to one of her followers who is apparently asking for some clarification. Not only she replies, but she also recommends Planet Organic, one of the most popular upmarket shops for organic food in the UK. Although I am not able to know Mills's marketing and advertising plan during that time (or any other time for that matter), my longstanding experience in advertising agencies would single out such a comment. This is a post uploaded in May 2013. By this time, Mills has already a very successful blog and mobile app, she has dropped hints in public about writing a new book and she has already gained traction and popularity. She is clearly on the way of becoming a brand while she earns money from all the promotional activities she is engaged with. Promoting Planet Organic to her followers could equally be a paid sponsorship of the shop to Mills's Instagram account, or it could be Mills's pure and authentic desire to share with her own community a useful tip.

Further down in the comments, Mills includes all the relevant hashtags, #cleaneating figuring among them:

Image No 4.7: Deliciously Ella using #cleaneating hashtags among others (27-5-2013)
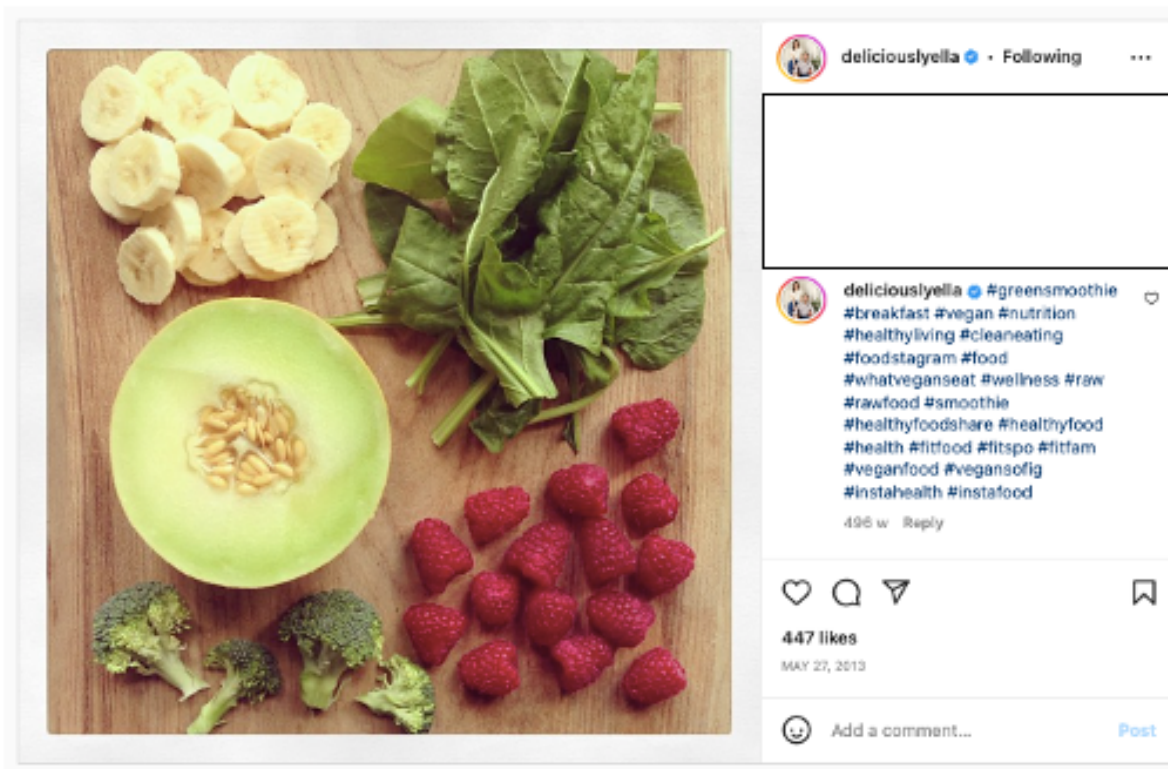
Despite the simplicity of recipes and ingredients' combinations, it is worth discussing at this point another angle of Mills's approach to these plain and unadorned meal suggestions. Throughout ERA1, Mills makes 39 lunch and 11 dinner suggestions. 21 of them (42%) are called 'rainbow' lunches or dinners. According to Mills, a 'rainbow' lunch is a lunch full of a variety of vibrantly coloured ingredients (ranging from vegetables and fruits to seeds and pulses). Sometimes these meals form an organised display on the plate, to vaguely resemble a rainbow, as the image in the next page shows:

Image No 4.8: Deliciously Ella's 'rainbow lunch' (Instagram post 16-5-2013)

The image depicts a simple vegetable salad lunch with some pumpkin seeds sprinkled on the top. However, in the Deliciously Ella world this is not just a random lunch, but a distinctively rainbow one. It is not only healthy, but it is also pretty and "perfect" as Mills exclaims. Most importantly, it oozes happiness (see another rainbow lunch image below).

Image No 4.9: Deliciously Ella's 'rainbow bowl' (Instagram post 1-10-2013)
Caption: *"Hello rainbow bowl. The happiest, most delicious lunch! (…)"*
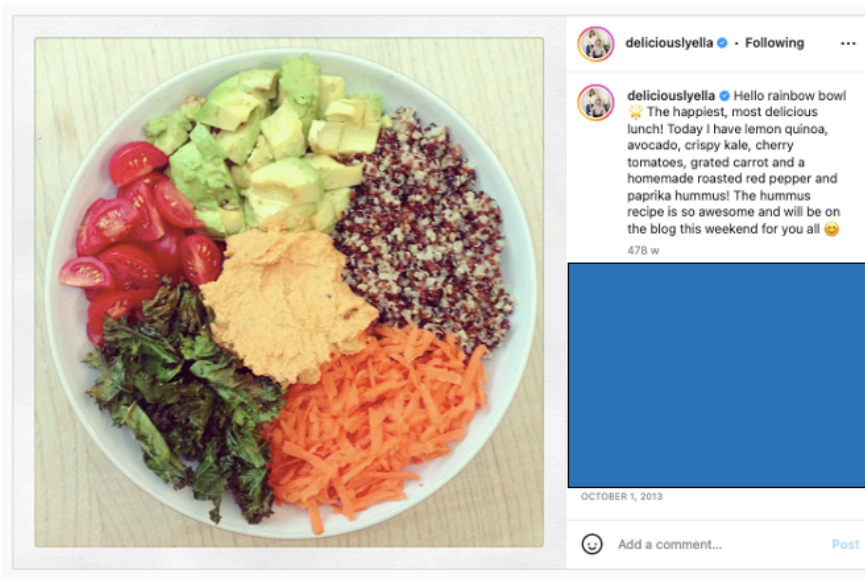
Importantly, the 'rainbow meal' notion, which connects to the idea of happiness through food, is one of the first means by which the happiness theme appears in Mills's social media discourse. The happiness theme manifests itself in a relatively timid way during ERA1. However, as I shall show in later chapters, the theme gradually gains traction and, from a certain point onwards, becomes one of the dominant themes. The rainbow meal idea can thus be interpreted as one of the theme's prominent birthplaces in Mills's social media universe.

4.1.3 The image and the message: Compositional Interpretation

I will now proceed with an image of Mills that is of particular interest, especially when compared to other images of Mills during later eras that I will discuss in the following chapters. Mills kicks off images of herself in a rather 'low key' manner. This allows us to make several particularly interesting observations during the early days of the Deliciously Ella Instagram account. The first time that users get a glimpse of Mills is on the 14th of February 2013, almost a month after the account's initial launch. Users only partially get to see Mills in this picture. In fact, her face is hidden behind a huge glass of green juice. In visual social media terms, this conveys a certain coyness for attention seeking.

Image No 4.10: Mlls 'appears' for the first time on her Instagram account (14-2-2013)

Compositional Interpretation

Point 1 Content: The image shows a very small part of Mills's face, hidden in a folded light blue scarf. She holds a plastic container cup with her right hand, and she purportedly sips green juice. The content of the cup is mentioned in the caption. Mills wears a dark brown sweater, but only a small part of it is visible.

Point 2 Colour: There are three dominant colours in this image: dark green, light blue and brown, plus the pink pale colour of Mills's hand. This is not a specifically colour-coordinated match. On the contrary, the photo projects a feeling of colour spontaneity.

Point 3 Light: The image is slightly dim. No attention has been paid to light.

Point 4 Spatial Organisation: Although the focus is on the green juice, one can hardly leave unnoticed the face hiding behind it. This photo was taken either from a lower camera angle or from Mills herself as a selfie with her left hand. In both cases, the centre of attention is the person hiding in the background.

Point 5 Expressive Content: The 'low key' way Mills presented herself to audiences could also be interpreted in the sense of the centrality of food and its 'healthy' and 'ethical' connotations to fashion her identity. The absence of curation implies spontaneity. As a result, Mills's Instagram account looks simple, down to earth, real, authentic. As I discuss in the next section of this chapter, authenticity is a crucial notion here. One of the central dilemmas that Mills had to navigate is how a committed amateur that seems to have made an existential/ethical choice to plant-based food later gravitates towards an agented presentation of her online self within a 'commercial context of branding and advertising' (Banet-Weiser, 2012: 66), gradually transforming her choice into a 'Deliciously Ella brand'. At least part of Mills's way of coping seems to have involved, as we shall see, a partial focus on herself as well as the abandonment of potentially divisive/controversial hashtags.

4.2 Hashtags, a crucial tool of ERA1

As already stated, Mills's first Instagram post (17.1.2013) contained a very simple caption ("Beautiful Olives"), followed by two hashtags: #instafood and #delicious (see image 4.1). Hashtags are a form of textual sign that aids users to categorise posts under specific topics and themes. They were originally introduced in 2007 by US blogger and technology consultant Chris Messina, who presented the idea of hashtags as a way of "improving contextualization, content filtering and exploratory serendipity within Twitter"(Bruns & Burgess, 2011). Hashtags are used to develop threads of online discourses around themes of interest (Zappavigna, 2011). They can vary from being very generic (e.g., #food) to very specific (e.g., #olives). At the same time, hashtags help those users who wish to easily identify what is being said or (in the case of Instagram) shown on a specific topic, allowing them to discover relevant posts in an easier and quicker way. Moreover, they facilitate discussions among users that are not necessarily following each other in several social media platforms (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). Instagram allows up to 30 hashtags on a post and up to 10 on a story. The limit is justified by reference to the idea that a more intense use of hashtags might annoy other users or encourage spam tactics (Newberry, 2020). Generally, hashtags make content more easily discoverable. As Instagram platform technology developed throughout the years, hashtag usage became more sophisticated in terms of classification, strategy tactics, trending topics and/or community building. The more prevalent a hashtag becomes, the more visible and popular the represented topic becomes. Moreover, the community created around specific hashtags not only acknowledges a shared interest among users but also facilitates symbolic signals of validation of content (Walsh & Baker, 2020).

Since hashtags are digital facilitators and classifiers of online conversations, they have also become essential tools of social science research on (or via) social media. By observing and analysing the use of hashtags, social scientists can explain social constructions online and try to understand the meaning of the various activities involved in hashtag use (Caliandro & Gandini, 2017). Furthermore, as users classify their own content using classifications already used by hashtag communities, the conversations deriving from them do not simply reflect a subjective categorization of

topics. Instead, hashtag use already implies a kind of negotiated constraint implying an important shift towards a more structured and organised commentary (Zappavigna, 2016). This, however, also depends on the specific nature of the social media. In the case of Instagram, for instance, the dominance of visual imagery implies that the opportunities for online conversations are more limited compared to, for example, Twitter. Nonetheless, it is interesting to observe that Instagram hashtags serve as digital albums of collective engagement and community participation (Rathnayake & Ntalla, 2020) as well as communally certified forms of self-presentation. A quick Instagram search of hashtags can provide one with a fairly accurate picture regarding the volume of possible online conversations under specific topics. For instance, #food results in 488 million posts, #wellness in 60.3 million posts and #cleaneating in 47.6 million posts shared among 1.478 billion Instagram users worldwide (Hootsuite and We Are Social, 2022) – all three hashtag searches were conducted on 10 November 2022.

In January 2013, when Mills launched her Instagram account and made her first post, users were significantly lower at 90 million worldwide (Statista, 2020). Since it is impossible to search for a specific hashtag back in time, one can only make assumptions about the potential user reach via the use of hashtags in 2013, appropriately corrected to account for to the number of Instagram users at the time. However, UK numbers were not publicly available for 2013. Accordingly, it is impossible to draw a conclusion about the magnitude of the user base Deliciously Ella was talking to, as well as of her own share within this base. During the first years of Instagram's existence, the company had always adopted a restrained approach about releasing the annual active users' numbers per country. All relevant information was limited to the total number of active users worldwide. It was only five years after Instagram was created, in July 2015, that official UK numbers were released. According to these numbers, there were 14 million active users in the country at the time. Moreover, it was the first time that Instagram ever presented the numbers of its user base in relation to a specific single geographic area (L. O'Reilly, 2015). The latest Instagram statistics report that, as of December 2020, there are 30.6 million Instagram

users in the UK, the largest Instagram base reported since 2018, which is a robust sign of the continuous appeal of the visual social media platform (Johnson, 2021).

The act of attributing certain Instagram images to a hashtag implies that the user wants to create 'relevance' (Rathnayake & Ntalla, 2020). Although subjectively defined, this relevance is an essential trait of social media imagery, irrespective of the fact that certain risks of misinterpreting information are involved (Rathnayake & Ntalla, 2020). When Deliciously Ella used the hashtags #instafood and #delicious in her first Instagram post, she deliberately wanted to associate the olives depicted in the Instagram post with those Instagram thematic clusters created by users who classify but also appreciate similar imagery. In this way, and since she was a newcomer to the platform, she was able to make her own post more visible to relevant audiences and thus help create a larger fanbase of followers. Her goal was to become more easily discoverable within the Instagram ecosystem and especially within food-related hashtag groups by using the available promotional tools that the platform could offer at the time.

Findings of ERA1 analysis reveal that Deliciously Ella used 78 different hashtags through a particular period of almost nine months, between 17 January 2013 and 1 September 2013 with Instagram post number 432/4,000 (in chronological order) being the last one where a hashtag was used. Looking at the sample data, generic use of hashtags throughout ERA1 is at 22% (57 posts used hashtags out of 259 within total sample), while their use throughout the above-mentioned period where Mills was using hashtags is at 63.3% (57 posts using hashtags out of 90 posts until she stopped using them completely). The clear pattern that emerges is that Mills strategically used hashtags intensively for a limited amount of time and, once a sufficient fanbase (by her own rights) had been created, she resorted to different strategies of curating and promoting her Instagram content. These strategies will be discussed in later chapters. The table below shows in more detail the different kind of hashtags used and the number of times they were repeated throughout the 57 different Instagram posts. The word 'group' next to each hashtag means a group of related variations that carry the same meaning. For example, hashtag #cleaneating is also related to hashtags

#cleaneats, or #eatclean, or #cleaneats, or #eatcleaneatclean. This used to be a common promotional practice while looking for popular hashtags on Instagram, to maximise visibility of one's own visuals.

Table No 4.5: Most Popular Hashtags Used on the Deliciously Ella Instagram account (ERA1)

MOST POPULAR HASHTAGS USED	TIMES REPEATED	%
#Vegan group	194	14.3
#Healthy group	194	14.3
#Insta group	167	12.3
#Cleaneating group	144	10.6
#Fitfam group	145	10.7
#Food group	94	6.9
#Nutrition group	81	6.0
#Raw group	73	5.4
#Consciousbite	37	2.7
#Wellness	29	2.1
REST	172	12.7
TOTAL	**1330**	**100**

What is also worth observing is that, after a while, Deliciously Ella hashtags were not included in the image caption, but in the comments that followed the caption. For instance, on 20 February 2013 she shared a post showing a roasted vegetable and pasta salad, however hashtags are only used in the second comment and are not part of the initial caption:

Image No 4.11: Deliciously Ella using hashtags on the first comment after caption (Instagram Post 20-2-2013)

Hiding or moving hashtags in separate comments emulates on the part of users a very popular marketing tactic that many brands use in order to avoid revealing in too evident a way that their main objective is to make themselves visible in various thematic groups on Instagram (Newberry, 2020). Hashtags as promotional digital devices have been incorporated into advertising strategy plans since Twitter initially introduced its Promoted Trends advertising service, offering brands the opportunity for higher campaign reach and engagement (Quin, 2015). Nevertheless, although for both users and brands an extensive number of hashtags is necessary for audience growth and continuous popularity, there are certain kinds of luxury, high-end brands and/or influential users that appear to deliberately abstain from using them. To take a particularly salient example, world leading luxury brand and haute couture house Chanel has a consistent policy of using few hashtags on Instagram (@chanelofficial). When it does, it solely refers to Chanel's own campaigns, events or collaborators. The same is the case with house Dior (@diorofficial), Hermes (@hermes) or French luxury jewellery conglomerate Cartier (@cartier) on their respective Instagram accounts. These luxury brands seem to follow a similar strategy, which involves minimum use of

hashtags and only when such use is relevant to the respective brand, i.e., when it makes a kind of self-reference.

A possible explanation of such strategic reluctance could be that the use of hashtags is widely perceived as a means towards making oneself visible and known within the social media ecosystem. As a result, using hashtags could be understood to imply that these brands are not 'always already' widely known and established, thus somehow undermining their own chosen branding strategies. Another type of explanation, not necessarily antagonistic to the first one, could mobilise concepts of taste. Thus, for some, hashtag use could be considered 'tasteless' and perhaps a sign of neediness for attention (Pulsar, 2015). As already stated in various parts of the present thesis, explanations of social phenomena through the invocation of social patterns of taste have been famously explored by the pioneering work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984). As Bourdieu puts it *"taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications [class structure] is expressed or betrayed"* (Bourdieu, 1984: xxix). For Bourdieu, specific choices of taste are a form of expression and endorsement of class positions. Thus, a further hypothesis along roughly bourdieusian lines could involve the idea that what all the above-mentioned luxury fashion brands – aiming at wealthy, affluent, upmarket, and discerning audience – share is a motivation to be perceived as self-assertive, *exclusive* and thus distinct from brands that engage in more popular hashtag practices. The more general point is that hashtag use (or non-use) can be one of the many ways in which an actor may try to place herself strategically with respect to the sometimes-contradictory requirements of popularity (sameness) and distinction (difference). Mills navigated the hashtag dilemma in a rather orthodox way, i.e., by intense initial use (albeit in separate comments) followed by a more relaxed subsequent use.

4.3 The role of the #cleaneating hashtag

One of the hashtags that appear more often throughout ERA1 was the #cleaneating hashtag, which in fact carried a controversial significance in Deliciously Ella's online

trajectory. In fact, the term 'clean eating' became the object of heavy media scrutiny in 2017. The term, as used by various persons identifying themselves as 'wellness' bloggers, appeared to imply (if not to explicitly state) that there was some kind of causal relationship between 'clean eating' (a purposefully vague term, open to several different and frequently divergent interpretations) and a 'healthy' state on the part of the person performing the 'clean eating'. Critical scrutiny focused on exactly these causal claims, as well as on the meaning of the term (McCartney, 2016; A. Smith, 2020; Walsh & Baker, 2020).

One of the consequences of the scrutiny was that popular bloggers and other users found themselves under pressure to publicly explain whether they were indeed making (or implying) causal claims about the purported health qualities of 'clean eating'. For her part, Mills denied in mainstream and popular media that she had ever used #cleaneating or that she had ever associated herself with it (Britt, 2018; Corner, 2018). In an interview on The Telegraph's Stella magazine in August 2018 she says: *"If you read our books you don't see clean eating in anything we've ever done"* (F. Ryan, 2018b). However, a careful look at her first book 'Deliciously Ella' reveals that the term is omnipresent, even though it is not heavily used. For example, on page 34 (Introductory chapter 'Getting Started') she mentions:

"These ingredients played a huge role in my healing processes and really helped me learn to love clean, natural food, so once you're using all of these you'll see amazing things happen too!" (Woodward, 2015a)

Much later, on page 264, under the section 'My favourite resources' she recommends her favourite – as she mentions – book *Clean* by Dr Alejandro Junger:

"Clean by Dr. Alejandro Junger – a fascinating book written by a doctor disillusioned by modern medicine, all about how we should treat our bodies with a clean diet and lifestyle for optimum health. Also easy to read and really interesting." (Woodward, 2015a).

Or in page 411, she makes another favourite book recommendation:

"The Blood Sugar Solution by Dr. Mark Hyman – less 'extreme' than the others and offers a very understandable, very straightforward insight into how to clean up your diet. If you're very new to healthy eating this is very helpful." (Woodward, 2015b)

For Mills, the use of the term 'clean eating' seems to heavily rely on semantic ambiguity. 'Clean eating' can be understood as an interesting and rather vague signifier of a generically assumed subsumption of consumers' concerns about the 'healthiness' of food. Perhaps even more so than 'healthy eating', clean eating is a vast umbrella category. It may pick out and unite an immense and heterogeneous variety of different views, opinions, and concerns about food. As expected, the category is differentially appropriated by scientists, researchers and lay persons. Over the recent years, demand for 'clean' food has grown exponentially, making clean eating a key consumer tendency, especially among young people (Allen et al., 2018). One of Nielsen's consumer reports for *The Grocer*, a UK food-industry leading online magazine, described how the growing popularity of concepts like clean eating and flexitarianism (a plant-based diet, mostly vegetarian but allowing occasional meat and other animal products in moderation) have shaped the nation's food and drink behaviours (Weinbren, 2018). After the launch of Web 2.0, clean eating has also grown in popularity among social media platforms where users, influencers and brands promote a 'healthier' life style, based on natural, unprocessed and wholesome ingredients (Allen et al., 2018). In the UK 'clean eating' has particularly been associated with a wider group of young women-entrepreneurs who are viewed as having introduced radical changes in the British food culture (O'Neill, 2020a). Mills is clearly the most recognizable among them and, as stated previously in the thesis, she has received vast media coverage over the years. The rest of the group consists of the Hemsley Sisters, Madeleine Shaw, Natasha Corrett and Amelia Freer, to mention the most popular. Although they do not necessarily support clean eating as a term (especially during the last few years), their dietary philosophy focuses on wholesome, 'real' and 'healthy' foods. Moreover, they usually renounce restrictive diets, even though the discourse they articulate excludes certain food groups from their everyday meals.

Apart from the book, a closer look at the Deliciously Ella blog (version of 2012) and especially at the 'About Me' section where the young blogger introduces her eating style philosophy, shows a particular focus on clean eating practices.

"My diet is based on the purest, most natural foods as I learn to appreciate nature's candy! (…) I hope you enjoy the recipes as much as I do: everyone is gluten, dairy, sugar & meat free with nothing unprocessed or chemical based" (Woodward, 2012a).

Later in 2013, when she has already launched her Instagram account, she writes in the 'Food Philosophy' section of her blog:

"I believe that the concept of healthy eating should embrace a diet of pure, unprocessed, unrefined plant-based foods. You can eat as much of these things as you like as your body absolutely loves them and can process them so easily" (Woodward, 2013b).

Increasing consumer concerns for the environment, but also for their own health resulted in an escalating attention towards the consumption of natural and organic food (Ansari & Talan, 2017; Larson, 2018; S. Smith & Paladino, 2010). Over time, alternative food movements were characterised by a growing reflexivity and adopted new ways of action, linking food producers, consumers and activists (Winson, 2010). The slow-food movement, the organic food movement, the locally produced food movement, to name just a few, reflected an agenda involving the revival of local –small and medium– producers, the offer of healthier and more nutritious food to less privileged society groups, and the establishment of a more natural food environment, with fewer chemical and artificial additives (Winson, 2010). For many scholars, these movements were also representing a reaction to governmental and corporate agendas in the global North, that were perceived to have led to the degradation of food production because of their emphasis on profit-making, to the expense of a healthy and nutritious diet for consumers (Winson, 2010). At the same time, 'clean eating' movements also reflect the need to provide new types of justification of the economic value of certain kinds of food, where the small scale of production, along with the specific techniques used, supposedly reflects the 'extra care' of the 'personality' of the producer, thus creating a commodity that blends that personality with the product and

serves as a justification for its (higher, as compared to the 'traditional industrial agriculture') price (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2020).

However, influencers, bloggers, authors, and other self-proclaimed representatives of clean and healthy eating seem to have utilised the growing power of various digital and social media platforms in order to connect with and at the same time exploit a legitimate consumer anxiety. In doing so, they adopted strategies consisting in riding the trend of wellness without the need to display 'objective', i.e., scientifically confirmed, credibility. Although they have often been featured by the mainstream media as 'healthy-eating gurus' or 'health-related experts' (Allen et al., 2018; Freeman, 2015) some of them do so without any medical or nutritional qualifications. Their main claim is the idea that the change of one's nutritional habits and the adoption of a pure and clean diet can play a (usually unspecified as to its details) causal role in maintaining a 'healthy' state (also generically defined) and even heal certain illnesses (Allen et al., 2018). Undeniably, this pattern is characteristic of Mills's central narrative from the moment she decided to launch her blog and, later, her social media accounts: the main underlying story was that healthy eating and plant-based food helped her (in a casual way) overcome her illness.

"(…) so I decided to try a natural approach, to learn to love and heal my body through food. This has been the most amazing success. Nature's medicine has finally resorted my energy, brought me back to my happy self and allowed me to take control of my illness. It really is healing me, hopefully forever (…) I'd never have believed I could have come this far simply through diet, it is simply unbelievable, it's been better than any drug" (Woodward, 2012a)

However, the causal claims are dubious. In fact, research shows that clean eating advocates, blogs and/or social media sites promote a nutritional way of life that is not necessarily in line with scientific and evidence-based advice for good health and balanced nutrition (Ambwani et al., 2020; Dickinson & Watson, 2018). Especially as far as vulnerable audiences are involved, this kind of advice might even turn out to be positively harmful, with people running the risk of potentially reinforcing certain eating disorders (Allen et al., 2018). A range of studies have shown that the dietary constraints that 'clean eating' requires in order to be 'properly' executed can cause

nutritional deficits in the human body (E. P. Schneider et al., 2013). Moreover, such constraints can lead to orthorexia, a pathological and obsessive preoccupation with pure and clean diets (Nevin & Vartanian, 2017; Stutts, 2020). The phenomenon thus attests to an interesting hiatus between scientific discourse and certain kinds of popular representations of the alleged 'healing' properties of food.

"To really thrive you should say goodbye to the following as they're all incredibly acidic and your body works best when it's alkaline, they're also really hard to digest which means they suck your energy and slow down your digestion: dairy, gluten, refined sugar, including all candy, fizzy drinks and almost all chocolate (…)

All other refined foods - white rice, white flour, white pasta etc, anything with chemicals, additives and flavourings, including natural flavourings as trust me these are anything but natural! Almost all supermarket products that are labelled as 'healthy,' such as dairy free butter, gluten free rolls and pizzas, soymilk and soy yoghurts, store brought almond milk etc – these items tend to be full of weird additives and chemicals that your body cannot digest, they're really not much better than the gluten/dairy alternatives. (Woodward, 2013b)*.*

The hiatus between popular (for certain audiences) and scientific representations of food can, under certain conditions, become a tension or even an open clash between these two kinds of discourses and perspectives. This is, in fact, what happened in the British public sphere. Indeed, the usefulness of the category of 'clean eating' was problematized following a BBC 2 Horizon documentary broadcast in January 2017 that articulated criticisms and doubts. The programme was called *Clean eating, the dirty truth* (Quinn, 2017). It called into question the validity of the discourses around 'clean eating' pertaining to a range of popular clean-eating actors, such as Deliciously Ella, Natasha Corrett and the Hemsley sisters. The programme was presented by Dr. Giles Yeo, a biochemist and principal research associate and group leader at Cambridge University's Metabolic Research Labs. Yeo critically examined clean eating by scrutinising the claims made by various wellness bloggers and healthy eating consultants, paying particular attention to their scientific basis. Thus, Yeo's challenge was articulated mainly based on the authority of scientific discourse.

Clearly, the kind of scientific critique addressed at 'clean eating' presented its proponents with a kind of strategic dilemma. Several possible options to tackle it

presented themselves. These included: a) denial; b) indifference or c) modification of core narratives by interested actors. That last strategy was adopted by Mills. Interestingly, she was the only UK wellness blogger that agreed to appear in the TV programme to discuss her eating philosophy, which, as already stated, places plant-based foods at its core. Adopting a stance that could be interpreted as a response to criticism through tweaks in her (previously articulated) core narrative, Mills distanced herself from clean eating, arguing that it implied its opposite, i.e., 'dirty', instead of 'clean', and describing how negative this semantic transformation had been. Moreover, she claimed that she had never used the term herself in the past. Nonetheless, she also said that, in her understanding, the term used to mean 'natural, unprocessed food' whereas now, it merely means a 'fad diet' that advocates a restrictive eating plan (Quinn, 2017). Mills's intentional distancing from the 'clean eating' trend was the follow-up to a blog post of hers made in May 2016, in which she argued that healthy eating did not mean a 'diet' and that she did not subscribe to the idea of clean eating (E. Mills, 2016). Nevertheless, she did not provide any explanations on why she talked so much about various food groups eliminations in her dietary schedule between 2012-2016. For example, gluten, among others, was excluded from her blog and book recipes and Mills herself claimed that she was better off it because that worked for her. No scientific evidence or explanation was ever given about why a nutritional approach that did not mean a 'diet' (as she later argued) was indeed so restrictive.

After the broadcast there was heavy media publicity and criticism on clean eating (Billen, 2017; Donnelly, 2017; Donovan, 2017; Freeman, 2017; Tandoh, 2017; B. Wilson, 2017). Mills, in an attempt to retroactively rewrite her own history and philosophy, reportedly deleted any clean eating related posts and wording from her blog (Donovan, 2017). To take just one particularly salient example, the Mail Online reported that in one blog post she had initially mentioned *"For me, one of the hardest things about adopting a totally clean, healthy diet was finding the right snacks to eat"*, which then was transformed into *"For me one of the hardest things about adopting changing the way I ate was finding the right snacks to eat".* (Donovan, 2017). In fact, it seems that the erasing procedure that had already started in 2017 after the media scrutiny Mills received continued until very recently. The Deliciously Ella blog has gone

through several changes and makeovers since its launch. Especially since 2018 it has gradually become more of a full-blown website than a blog, although it was still containing a blog section which included some of the older blog posts. Nevertheless, towards the ends of July 2019, this section was totally obliterated.

In empirical terms, this shift in the nature of the blog posed a challenge to this thesis, because I had not collected nor kept any of Mills's past blog posts. The reason was that these posts were not part of my main dataset: they only provided an accompanying context. Accordingly, I had decided to use them only in a complimentary way to my main data analysis. When I discovered that this blog material was not readily accessible anymore, I decided to turn to Wayback Machine and search for the deleted content. Wayback Machine is a digital archive created in 2001 by the Internet Archive, a non-profit American digital library (Arora et al., 2016). Wayback Machine is service of over 435 billion stored webpages (increasing every week) allowing users to search past versions of webpages since 1996. Although it has been heavily criticised for the lack of user friendly design and functionality among other issues, it is a very helpful and popular service among journalists, researchers, scholars and professionals (Hartelius, 2020).

Answering questions by journalists about these alterations, Mills observed that she initially used the term 'clean eating' to refer to natural and unprocessed foods. However, as the term was now used more widely, she wished to distance herself from it because she somehow felt that its meaning had essentially changed to reflect diet fads that she does not condone in any way. Moreover, Mills admitted that she had removed the word 'clean' from her blog posts, in order to ensure that she has no relation to what this word represents (Donovan, 2017). Additionally, on the same day that the Horizon documentary was about to broadcast, Mills made a morning appearance on BBC Radio 4 Today's Programme and talked to Mishal Husain about her own approach to 'clean eating'. Yeo featured in the programme as well, presenting his own views on 'clean eating' and arguing how dangerous the notion of 'food as medicine' can be for the public. During the radio programme Mills mentioned that she finds ironic the fact that she was viewed as the 'queen of clean' despite never having

described herself as 'clean'. She said that she was never a fan of the word because of its obvious implications. Although the presenter insisted on asking her questions about the advice that she had been giving to her fans to exclude large food groups from their dietary intake (for example, gluten or dairy as previously discussed in this section), Mills denied that she had ever advised people to adopt a gluten free diet for no medical reason. Indeed, even if some years have passed, in a very recent interview for The Telegraph, Mills repeats once more the claim that 'clean eating' was a term she never used: *"I wrote clearly in the first book: do what works for you, adopt it to suit your life. But that's nuanced, you have to read it to see it"*. (Fox-Leonard, 2022)*.* However, this claim does not really respond to what was written (or implied) in the first book as I presented just a few paragraphs above, especially when Mills a) clearly states what kinds of food groups she excluded for the diet that healed her and b) all the recipes she presents in the book are gluten free and plant-based.

On 31 January 2013 Mills made her third Instagram post, using for the first time the hashtag #cleaneating. The caption was merely descriptive, reading: "Nutty berry cheesecake for dinner tonight! #instafood #vegan #raw #cleaneating".

Image No 4.12: Deliciously Ella using #cleaneating hashtag (Instagram Post 31-1-2013)

As already mentioned, use of hashtags was mainly active during the first nine months since the Instagram account launch. Still, #cleaneating (and its variations) was the fourth most repeated hashtag during this time frame. Although any reference to clean eating has been totally wiped out from the Deliciously Ella blog, there are still many Instagram posts remaining with the hashtag #cleaneating during the early days of her Instagram activity. Additionally, the Deliciously Ella Instagram account retains posts from later that year (2013) showing that, although Mills had ceased using hashtags, she would still utilise the word 'clean' in various recipes. For example, the image below shows an Instagram post sharing a Deliciously Ella blog recipe where a loaf of (gluten free) bread is described as 'totally clean':

Image No 4.13: Deliciously Ella using the term 'clean' (Instagram Post 31-8-2013)
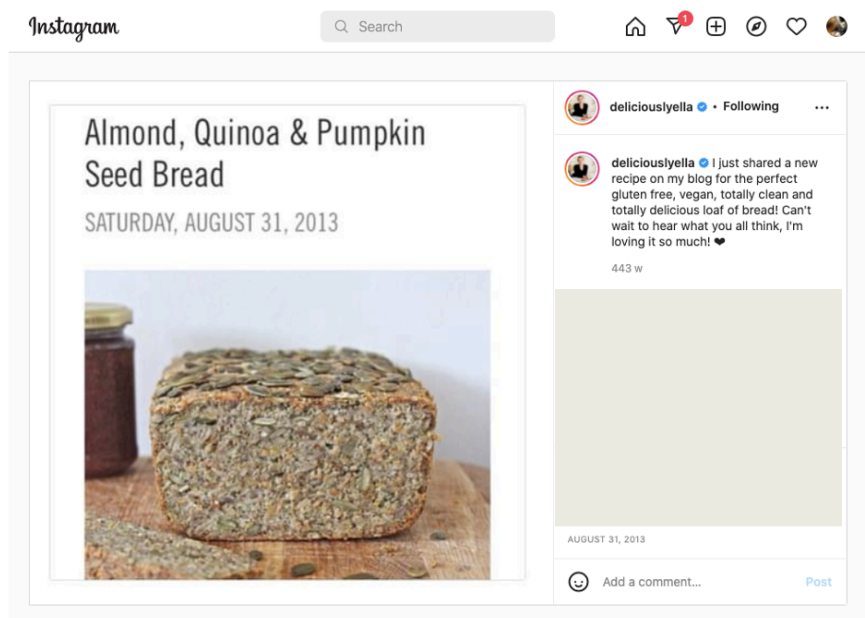
4.4 Conclusion of ERA1

In this chapter, I firstly presented some milestone events that set the scene for ERA1 and then moved on to discuss in more detail the findings of my data analysis. Results showed that:

- Food and drink visual imagery dominate ERA1.

- Ingredients used and recipes presented might not entail any sophistication, however they are celebrated mainly for their healthy and nutritional attributes, contributing thus to Mills's effort towards an authentic storytelling.

- Some exotic ingredients such as flax seeds, avocados, hemp and/or chia seeds subtly convey notions of status and distinction, despite Mills's narrative that aims at making 'everybody' feel better.

- 'Clean eating', a controversial term that came under heavy media criticism in 2017 is significantly applied mainly through hashtags, despite Mills's later claims that she has never used the term (Rumbelow, 2017).

- Phrases, such as 'rainbow lunch' used to describe meal suggestions and some popular wisdom through inspirational sayings and quotes, prepare the ground for a discourse that places happiness and positive thinking in the centre of Mills's philosophy, as I will show in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

ERA2: THE BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

Overview

In this chapter I will discuss the data and findings concerning ERA2. The chapter unfolds as follows. In the next section I present an overview of the era and set out its broad parameters. The period is marked by the transition from an amateurish visual style of an inexperienced food blogger towards a project that aspires to become much more professional and potentially lucrative. Crucially, Mills becomes a best-selling author during the period. From the point of view of the visual content produced, the most striking finding is to do with the fact that Mills's face becomes the centre of attention of her Instagram account. The visual narrative thus focuses much more on Mills as an individual than during ERA1. Moreover, several details about Mills's personal life are disclosed to the public. The following section provides a more detailed discussion of several interesting findings, such as an exploration of how the avocado became a key ingredient during this era. The penultimate section discusses another important finding: a turn towards an expression of 'positivity' using emojis, images of Mills smiling and other visual and textual devices. The discussion traces out the wider context in which these devices should be understood, using specific instances and examples from the dataset.

5.1 ERA2: The Best-Selling Author: Findings and Discussion

5.1.1 Milestone moments of ERA2

ERA 2 begins on 1 September 2014 with the revelation of Mills's first cookbook cover (see image below).

Image No 5.1: Mills's first book cover revealed (Instagram post 1-9-2014)

By virtue of her first cookbook launch, the Deliciously Ella brand enters a marketing and promotional phase. Milestone moments of this era include Mills's numerous mainstream media appearances through feature presentations, interviews, articles, and a new food column on the weekend Telegraph signed by her. Additionally, during this era Mills attempts to launch new products (in particular, t-shirts, bags, and a new website). On a more personal level, she is engaged to "ethical financier" - a description that originates in the mainstream media (Edwardes, 2016) and business partner Matthew Mills. The table below shows a selection of milestone moments for ERA2:

Table No 5.1: Selection of Deliciously Ella ERA2 Instagram milestone moments

SELECTION OF ERA 2 INSTAGRAM MILESTONE MOMENTS	DATE
First post of ERA2: Book No1 cover revealed	01-Sep-14
Won Blogger award at Red Magazine Awards	04-Sep-14
First Red Magazine appearance	05-Sep-14
First appearance on the Times newspaper - described as the new new-Nigella	12-Sep-14
Reached 200.000 Instagram followers	15-Sep-14
Launched campaign with Esprit	15-Sep-14
US edition of her first book	23-Sep-14
Launch of new food column on weekend Telegraph	24-Jan-15
Book No2 writing hint	18-Mar-15
Tshirt and Bags (Peace Love and Kale etc) Launched (Blog Post explaining)	11-May-15
Reached 400.000 Instagram followers	10-Apr-15
Getting a dog - Introduces Austin	13-Jul-15
Reached 500.000 Instagram followers	15-Jul-15
First hint of new deli (we are hiring store manager and chef)	18-Jul-15
Getting engaged	05-Aug-15
Announcement of new wellness website: Love Yourself	28-Sep-15
Launch of Love Yourself website	01-Oct-15
Winning Observer Food Monthly Award	16-Oct-15
Showing off printing of 2nd book	23-Oct-15
Last post of ERA2: Ella and Matt Mills announce that they are planning their wedding	26-Oct-15

To set the scene for the analysis of ERA2, I will focus on: a) Mills's food column in the Telegraph newspaper; b) Deliciously Ella's Instagram account increased followership; and c) Mills's plans for a brick-and-mortar business, at approximately the same time she announced her engagement to Matthew Mills.

5.1.2 The authentic self-healing story goes mainstream

Mills's first cookbook launch was followed by a range of media appearances (interviews, feature presentations and articles). Drawing from my previous professional experience in marketing and advertising, I can safely interpret this is a standard promotional tactic which occurs during new product launches. The appearances are usually designed and planned by the product's company (here, by the publishing house) or by public relations teams (here, by Mills and her work partners) or both. This marketing procedure involves the development of a strategic action plan aiming at introducing the new product to its prospective customers through advertising, branding and promotional activities (Rautela, 2021). It also requires the investment of a specific budget, the limits of which vary. The budget is spent on mainstream media and/or other offline/online activities to make the new product known in wider target-audiences. It would be safe to assume that when Mills uploaded an

Instagram post announcing her new collaboration with the Telegraph newspaper (see image below) and a separate interview in the weekend edition of the newspaper *"with a very big photo of me on the front"* (Woodward, 2015c), this was part of the promotional activity following the launch of her first cookbook.

Image No 5.2: Mills presents her new Telegraph food column (Instagram post 24-1-2015)

On the same day of the Instagram post above the Telegraph published both online and offline a long interview with Mills. The readers were informed, among other things, that Mills is the daughter of supermarket heiress Camilla Sainsbury, her father is Labour MP Shaun Woodward, she lives in a *"beautiful and airy West Brompton flat"* in London (Parker, 2015) and she used to be *a "notoriously fussy child who hated fruit and vegetables"* (Parker, 2015). However, when doctors failed to cure her illness, she *"took matters into her own hands"* (Parker, 2015) and healed herself through food. This is the same story that Mills had already told on her blog from the very beginning. Still, the Telegraph interview is the moment when Mills's authority as a wellness specialist begins to emerge through traditional and popular media channels. The message is simple. Where science fails to offer the right answers, Mills - who *"is now a picture of health, with glowing skin, a slim and toned body and a great appetite"* (Parker, 2015) – succeeds.

At this stage, Mills's authority is constructed in two interrelated ways: a) she is a white and beautiful female, as well as a member of the affluent and highly ranked (in terms of social and economic class) London families and b) a widely popular newspaper endorses her story via bold declarations such as: *"this food has cured her so completely that doctors are now using her as a case study to help other people with PoTS"* (Parker, 2015). Moreover, the newspaper distinguishes Mills from the trendy (but less serious, by implication) Gwyneth Paltrow style: "*Ella is no Gwyneth Paltrow, proclaiming that we must drink dandelion juice because it's today's detox fashion.*" (Parker, 2015)*.*

The dismissal of the term 'detox' above is interesting, in that it is rejected as 'just' fashionable, and therefore (impliedly) as not serious enough. However, Mills herself had used it several times throughout ERA1, especially when she would advocate for 'clean eating' diets and recipes (see previous Chapter, section 3.4). In fact, the Telegraph interview mentions that Mills's self-healing trajectory began with the book of an American cancer survivor named Kriss Carr, who had changed her diet to plant-based foods to fight her severe illness (Parker, 2015). This book has been pivotal in the construction of Mills's narrative identity (Woodward, 2015a) and – in Mills's words – she *"read it in a day"* (Parker, 2015). Karr had been constantly advocating 'detox' and 'cleansing' programmes and this was something that Mills took on and supported herself until the practices came under public criticism.

Detox has been variously described as a popular 'fad diet', connected to discourses making promises of weight loss and other supposed health advantages, albeit without scientific evidence to back up such claims (Jáuregui-Lobera, 2017; Tahreem et al., 2022). Many famous celebrities have supported different fad diets over the years, usually addressing people seeking quick solutions for losing weight. Proponents of Detox diets claim that these enable the elimination of toxins, resulting in weight loss and overall wellbeing. Although the Detox industry has been a particularly successful one, there is dearth of solid clinical evidence to support the diet (Klein & Kiat, 2015). In his 2009 book 'Bad Science', academic and science writer Ben Goldacre adopts an interesting approach to understand Detox practices (Goldacre, 2009). Detox

represents *"one of the most grandiose innovations of marketers, lifestyle gurus, and alternative therapists: the invention of a whole new physiological process."* (Goldacre, 2009: 31). Goldacre contends that, since detox has no precise scientific meaning, it could be better understood as a cultural and lifestyle product that blends pseudoscience, common sense and *"medicalised fantasy"* (Goldacre, 2009: 32). Indeed, even though it is very hard to identify credible scientific or medical publications promoting 'detox' (Jáuregui-Lobera, 2017), wellness bloggers and advocates of Detox such as Gwyneth Paltrow, the Hemsley Sisters, Natasha Corrett and Mills (until she changed course), to name just a few, comfortably deploy discourses about flushing the toxins, detoxifying and cleansing the body. Significantly, in a quick Google search, the phrase 'Deliciously Ella detox' displays 697,000 results, the phrase 'Hemsley and Hemsley detox' shows 593,000 results and the phrase 'Gwyneth Paltrow detox' displays 1,450,000 results.

Still, even though Mills had also been an advocate of detoxes, according to the Telegraph newspaper she had done so for serious reasons (her health) and not just to ride a fashionable diet wave (like her peers). One can only notice the powerful influence of mainstream media on image making. As Mills's personal story becomes widely known, mainstream media transform Mills from a prominent member of the affluent and rich London 'elite' to 'just a normal girl', with the newspaper justifying her actions as serious and even compassionate*: "She is just a normal girl who stumbled on a way to help herself recover from serious illness and wants to share her secrets."* (Parker, 2015)*.*

On the business front, in March 2015 Mills drops hints about writing a new book. In May 2015 she launches a small t-shirt and bag collection with the logos 'Peace Love and Kale', 'Peace Love and Avocados', 'Peace Love and Coconut' and 'Peace Love and Yoga', signifying her measured but firm entrance in the entrepreneurial world.

Image No 5.3: Mlls presents her new Deliciously Ella clothes and bags (Instagram post of 11-5-2015)

In July 2015 Mills insinuates that she is preparing a new brick and mortar deli store in London. Meanwhile, in October 2015 she announces the launch of a new wellness website named 'Love Yourself', where she promotes a 12-week wellness schedule at the cost of £35, including recipes, shopping lists, workout videos, meditation guides and advice on staying healthy.

Image No 5.4: Announcement of new website 'Love Yourself' on Instagram (1-10- 2015)
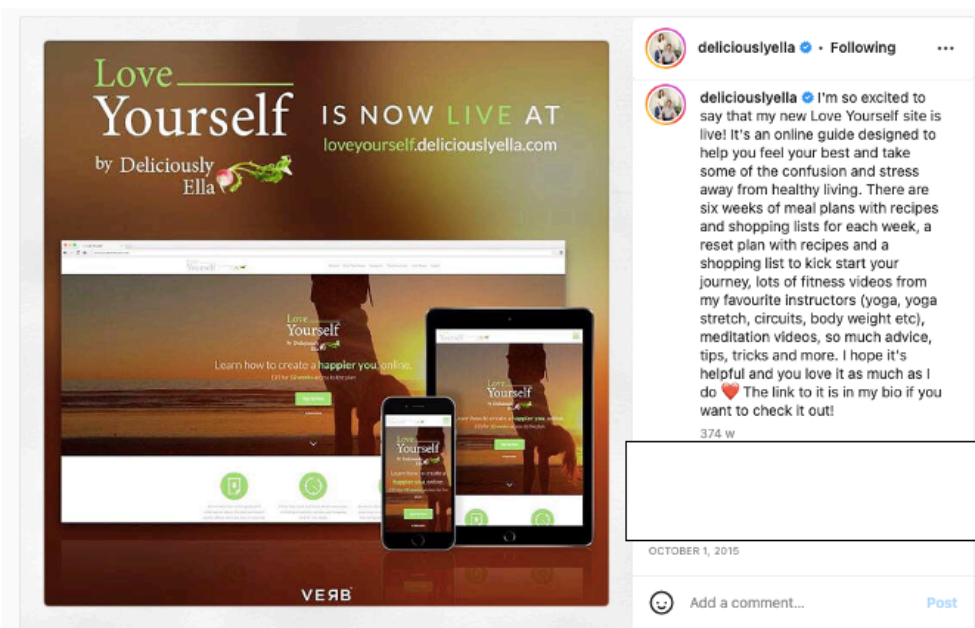
Finally, on 23 October 2015, Mills's second cookbook 'Everyday' goes to print, almost ten months after the launch of her first best-selling publication.

Image No 5.5: Announcement of a second cookbook (Instagram post 23-10-2015)

On the personal front, this is the phase when Mills meets her future husband, who also becomes her partner in the Deliciously Ella business. A milestone moment for their shared life is acquiring a dog named Austin (a cocker spaniel that in 2017 will have its own Instagram account until 2019 – see image below).

Image No 5.6: Mills's dog, Austin, Instagram Account (Mr Austin Mills)
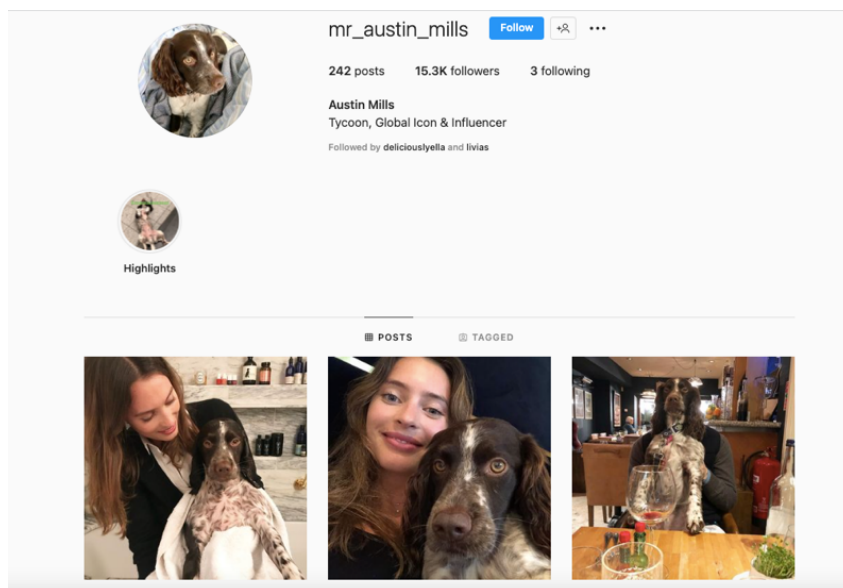
Eventually, in 5 August 2015, Mills announces from the private island of Mustique in the Caribbean, where her family used to keep its summer house (Churcher, 2008), her engagement to Matthew Mills (see image below).

Image No 5.7: Announcement of Mills's engagement (Instagram post 5-8-2015)
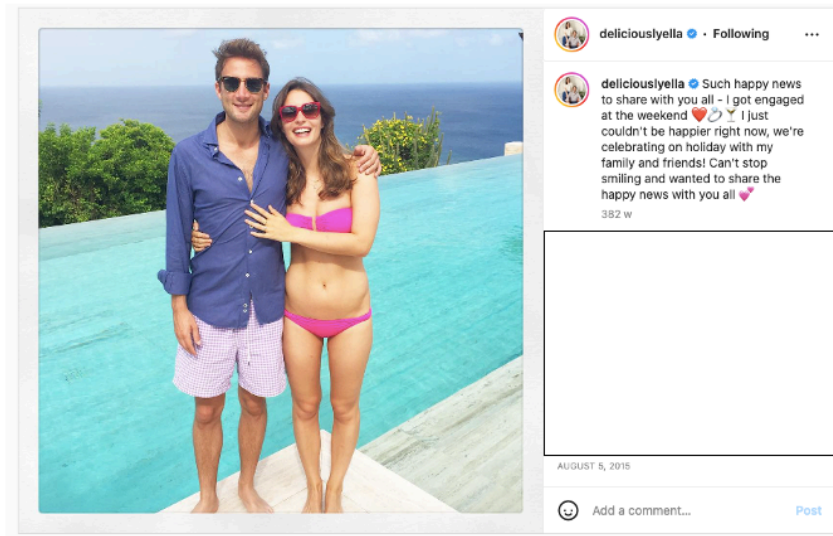
ERA2 ends on 29 October 2015 with the Mills couple announcing their wedding plans. Two months after their engagement announcement, the couple is photographed once again in the exotic beach of that same private island.

Image No 5.8: Announcement of the Mills wedding (Instagram post 29-10-2015)

In terms of content, this is the era when the Deliciously Ella brand grows stronger and gradually transitions from an amateurish blogger visual outlook towards a much more professional and visually sophisticated style, heavily curated by means of marketing, promotional and photo editing techniques. Food styling becomes increasingly dominant. Most importantly, the personal element becomes overriding content-wise. Thus, the account posts a significant number of Mills's images and Mills herself is much more forthcoming when it comes to disclosing details about her personal life. These personal details, far from focusing on her health issue, which characterized ERA1, are to do with her everyday life, as well as depictions of her friends and romantic relationships.

5.1.3   The image and the message: The microcelebrity effect

In the ERA1 chapter I presented data showing that the category 'Food and/or Drink' was dominant as far as image themes were concerned (these accounted for 82.6% of total images, whereas images of Mills covered only 11.6%). Throughout ERA1 one hardly notices what the woman behind the Deliciously Ella blog looks like. This trend is completely reversed in ERA2. Instagram images depicting Mills (either alone or accompanied by other people, animals and/or food) reach a notable 41.1%. The 'Food and/or Drink' category is still dominant, but with a roughly equivalent 46.2%. In other words, while images of food and/or drink get a 44% decrease from ERA1 to ERA2, Mills's images show an impressive 255% increase.

While researching a book on young women who were broadcasting their lives on the Internet, Theresa Senft coined the term 'microcelebrity' (Theresa Senft, 2008). There is an extended subsection in the Literature Review chapter on microcelebrity. Here, it is worth pinpointing some elements highlighting Mills's trajectory throughout ERA2. As Mills steps into fame, she increasingly uses microcelebrity tools to construct her image and position herself within the UK wellness market.

Table No 5.2: ERA2 Deliciously Ella Instagram Image Themes

ERA2: INSTAGRAM IMAGE THEMES	NO OF INSTA IMAGES	%
FOOD AND/OR DRINK	117	46.2
MILLS	104	41.1
OTHER	32	12.6
TOTAL	**253**	**100**

IMAGE THEME BREAKDOWN FOOD AND/OR DRINK	NO OF IMAGES	%
Food	89	76.1
Drink	17	14.5
Food&Drink	11	9.4
TOTAL	**117**	**100**

IMAGE THEME BREAKDOWN MILLS	NO OF IMAGES	%
Mills alone	30	28.8
Mills and Animals	3	2.9
Mills and Austin	5	4.8
Mills and boyfriend	1	1.0
Mills and Coworkers	3	2.9
Mills and D/E Books	3	2.9
Mills and D/E Products	4	3.8
Mills and Food/Drink	22	21.2
Mills and Friends	8	7.7
Mills and Gym and/or Yoga Instructor	3	2.9
Mills and her Mother and Sister	1	1.0
Mills and her Sister	1	1.0
Mills and Matt	1	1.0
Mills on Magazine Cover Page	1	1.0
Mills's home	2	1.9
Deliciously Ella Announcements	3	2.9
Deliciously Ella Book	5	4.8
Deliciously Ella Love Yourself Website	1	1.0
Deliciously Ella Mobile Application	2	1.9
Deliciously Ella Products (Merchandising)	2	1.9
Deliciously Ella Supper Club	2	1.9
Austin (Mills's dog)	1	1.0
TOTAL	**104**	**100**

IMAGE THEME BREAKDOWN OTHER	NO OF IMAGES	%
Animals	2	6.3
Beauty and Wellbeing Stores	1	3.1
Cityscapes	1	3.1
Flowers	4	12.5
Inspirational Quote	1	3.1
Interior Spaces	4	12.5
Landscapes/Nature	8	25.0
People and Nature	1	3.1
Restaurants	4	12.5
Various Branded Cosmeticss	3	9.4
Various Branded Edible Products	3	9.4
TOTAL	**32**	**100**

As the table above shows, during ERA2 the 'Mills' category involves 104 Instagram images. 30 of them depict Mills alone. 93 include Mills alone or not. Food (only) images are 89, drink (only) images are 17 and food and drink images are 11. It is thus evident that, during this phase, Mills uses herself as a communication vehicle – if ERA1 was about her health story where food played the dominant role, ERA2 is about her and the promotional tactics she uses to become widely known.

Early in ERA2, on 15 September 2014, Mills uploads two images taken from the advertising campaign for the clothing company ESPRIT, with which she had a (clearly sponsored, although not mentioned as such) collaboration. The first image has an advertising line on it, reading *"MEET OUR MUSES. See Ella's story and get her look at Esprit.com"*. This line connects Mills's (health) story with ESPRIT's audience to create more awareness of her message. Meanwhile, it is presumed that the clothing brand's customers would also like to know and perhaps be influenced by Mills's clothing style.

Image No 5.9: ESPRIT advertising campaign with Mills (Instagram Post 15-9-2014)
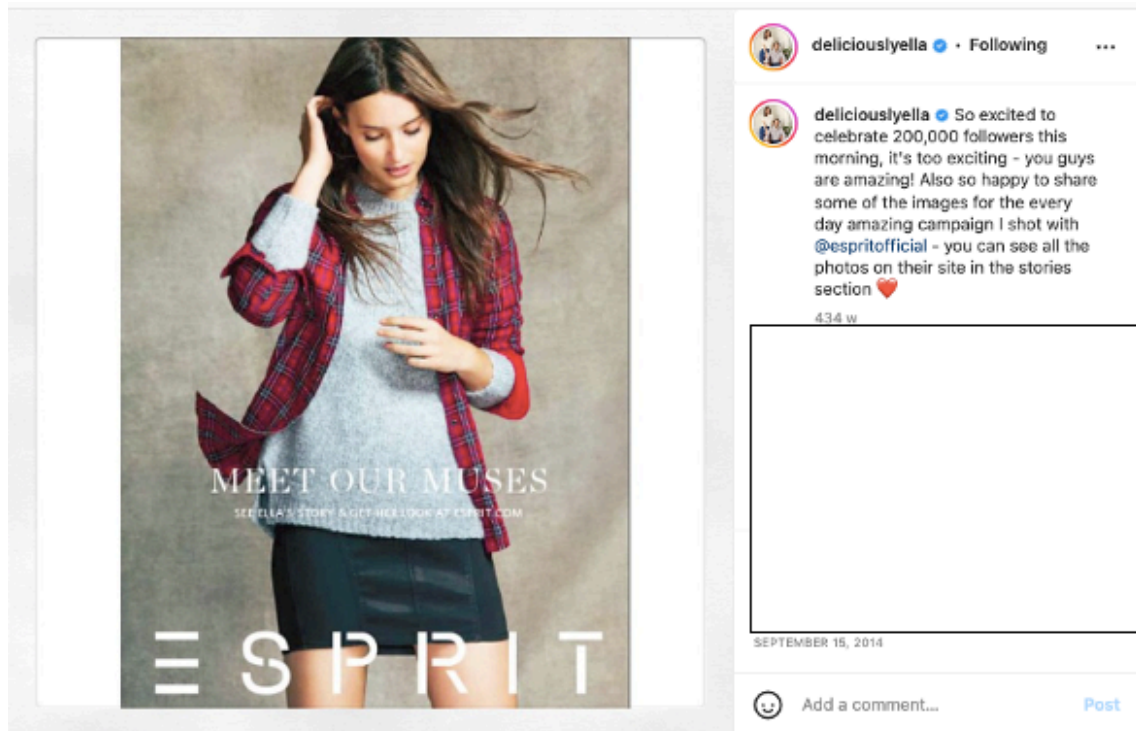
Image No 5.10: Portrait, from the ESPRIT advertising campaign with Mills (Instagram post 15-9-2014)
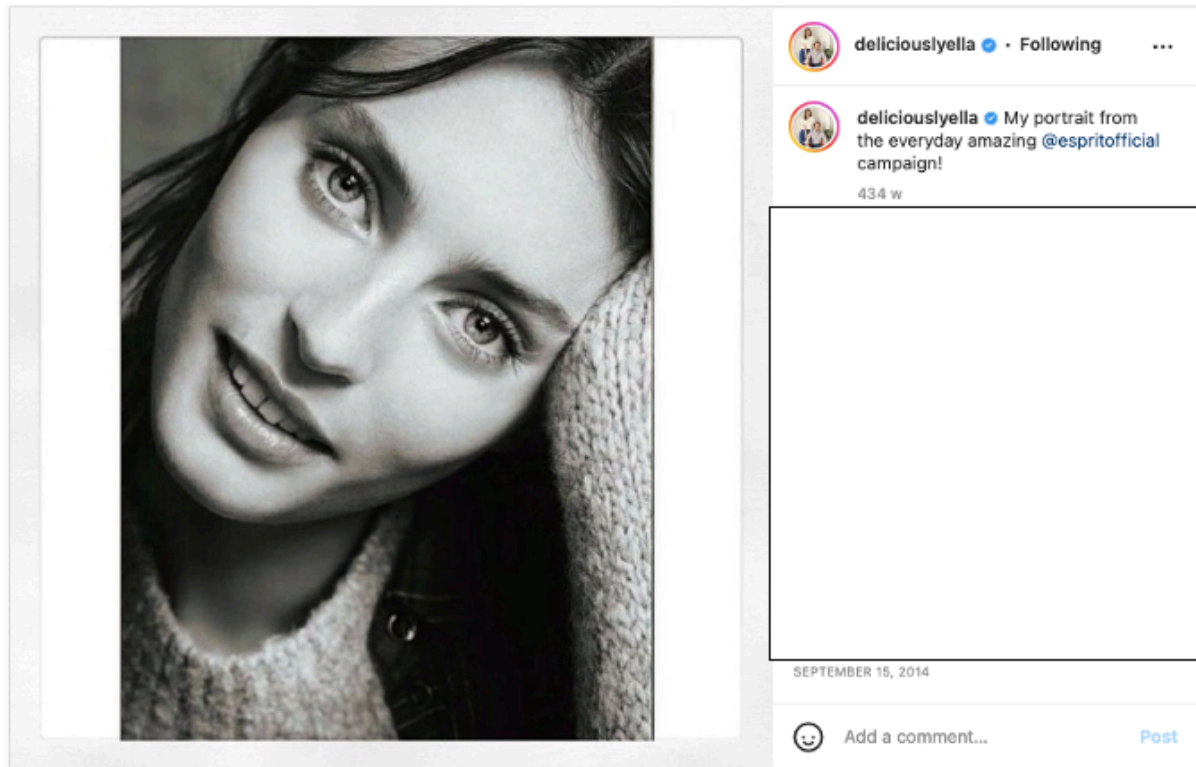
The post's caption announces that Mills's Instagram account has reached 200,000 followers and Mills thanks her audience for their support. At the same time, she prompts her followers to have a look at the ESPRIT campaign photos of her and informs them that if they want to see more photos, they can go to the ESPRIT company's website to do so. The connection between an advertising brand that links its products to a celebrity and a celebrity that advertises the brand to her audience is called 'celebrity endorsement' in marketing terms. Celebrity endorsement reflects an advertising technique that strives to persuade consumers to select a product through the influence of one (or more) of their favourite celebrities. There is a vast literature on the practice (Costanzo & Goodnight, 2008; Erdogan, 1999; Kamins et al., 1989; McCracken, 1989; Pradhan et al., 2016), which has been a very popular marketing strategy for many decades. Its origins lie in social psychology models and, more specifically, the 'source attractiveness' and the 'source credibility' ones. On these models, the effectiveness of the advertising message heavily relies on the level of familiarity, likeability, expertise and trustworthiness of the source (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; McGuire, 1976). Nevertheless, there is an

interesting twist in Mills's case. By early 2015 Mills was indeed a successful blogger. However, she was not a widely known celebrity. Drawing from my own professional expertise in advertising, but also from the academic literature on the subject (Byrne et al., 2003; Costanzo & Goodnight, 2008; P. L. Cox, 2004), I can hypothesise that brands usually prefer collaborations with famous personalities, despite the usually high economic cost of endorsement. This is because the more recognized and prominent the celebrity is, the more effective their influence towards consumers' preferences and product sales will be. In this case, Mills's book had just been published and her mainstream media presence was in its dawn. She was not yet established. Nevertheless, she belonged to a niche group of internet micro-celebrities who based their social media presence and activity on the wellness, vegan and plant-based sector in the UK, during a time of growth for the latter. Moreover, these are the same people who will later ride the trend of the Internet 'Influencers' (the term is covered in detail in chapter 2). Therefore, brands who decided to collaborate with them early enough might not have aimed at large volumes of audiences, but perhaps simply higher levels of affinity between their products and the (micro) celebrities they selected to represent them.

Another remarkable point with the endorsement of this campaign by Mills is the casual way she decides to tell her audience about it. Clearly, this is a paid collaboration. Although there is no data to support it, it is safe to assume that celebrity brand endorsements and/or product promotions are traditionally paid partnerships between brands and individuals. In other words, it is a business exchange. There is an interesting shift here in Mills's positioning. Thus far, her users/followers have witnessed an authentic story of hers, having perhaps recognized themselves in her health struggles. Maybe they have been persuaded by the sincerity of her good intentions when she initially shared plant-based recipes to "start really loving this new way of cooking" (Woodward, 2015a: 26). In ERA2, however, and immediately after the publication of her best-selling book, Mills moves from being the person behind the camera to becoming the focus of the account. When she prompts her followers to "see all the photos" of a particular advertising campaign where she features herself, this is not just a casual invitation authentically expressed, but a conscious and strategic

decision towards brand building. The techniques that were used to negotiate the tension between authenticity and commodification will be explored in later chapters. Here, I simply note that the tension becomes visible once one takes into account the various reassurances that Mills gave in media interviews and articles to the effect that she never had the intention to build a business at first – *"the blog was only ever meant to be for me, my mum and my friends!"* (E. Mills, 2017b), along with claims that during her early blog and Instagram years, when Deliciously Ella "was not a business", Mills would simply say "yes" to different (advertising/business) offers that she would stumble upon (Goldfingle, 2018). These must be compared to the fact that she accepted a business partnership with a retail company and used her Instagram account (and copy) as an advertising platform for that retail company.

5.1.4 The image and the message: Compositional Interpretation

This is the most important (and most often repeated) image of ERA 2. It shows the cover of Mills's first cookbook that became the best-selling debut cookbook in the UK. This image contrasts with the previous one in remarkable ways. Mills is very much visible in a rather impressive photo shooting. The visual context does not resemble at all the visual style of the early days of her blog and Instagram account.

Image No 5.11: Cover Page of Mills's first Cookbook called 'Deliciously Ella'. (Instagram post of 1-9-2014)

In fact, Mills is in the centre of the picture as the focus of attention. Moreover, this is a professional photo, staged and directed by a team of professionals (as mentioned on the copyright details of the 1ˢᵗ edition). To produce this image an art director, a photo shooting coordinator, a food stylist, a stylist, a make-up artist and finally renowned food photographer Clare Winfield (Woodward, 2015: 7) were needed.

Compositional Interpretation

P1 Content: The image shows Mills sitting on a highchair in what seems to be a studio kitchen. She looks happy and smiling, while she is holding a bowl of what appears to be 'courgetti'. She holds the bowl with her right hand, while she twirls a fork with courgetti with her left hand. Mills is surrounded by glassware, tableware, food, and flowers in a setting that is staged to look slightly unstructured. She is dressed casually, wearing a simple white top with red stripes and a pair of blue jeans. Her long hair seems to keep its natural form and it is not blown dry, which would signify perhaps a more gilded look. Although Mills does not seem to wear heavy make-up, the collaboration of a make-up artist to the photoshoot corroborates that she wears a lighter, more 'natural', make-up, appropriate for this kind of photo productions. Since this is the cover page of her first book, the title 'Deliciously Ella' on the top right-hand side needs no introduction. A short text a bit further down on the right-hand side of the image reads: "Awesome ingredients and incredible food that you and your body will love" followed by Mills's full birth name, Ella Woodward.

P2 Colour: Colours are generally bright, and they coordinate with Mills's dress colour code, which consists of shades of bright red, white and blue. There are some intense red elements around Mills. These comprise, for example, red tomatoes on the lower level of the image, a light red onion left of Mills's face, some red wildflowers on the right-hand side, and some red radishes on the lower right-hand side of the image. Shades of light blue also appear in the glassware. The rest of the colours are mainly pastel and wood shades, signifying a peaceful and quiet environment.

P3 Light: The image is very well lit, with a special lighting focus on Mills's smiling face, creating a porcelain effect. In fact, Mills has often been described by mainstream media as having 'English rose looks' (S. Mills, 2015a; F. Ryan, 2018a) because of her fair skin, blushed cheeks and dewy complexion. The lighting focus on her face echoes

such descriptions and prompts feelings of familiarity for distinctively UK audiences. Light is intense on the background of the image: all depicted elements are visibly distinguishable.

P4 Spatial Organisation: Mills is in the centre of attention as the writer of the book and the upcoming "wellness queen" (O'Neill, 2020a). The whole image is carefully coordinated. Mills is in the centre and everything around her is balanced and well aligned. The wooden shelves behind her, especially the top one, work as a leveller that gently limits her full body appearance into a proportionate setting. Her left hand and head are aligned with the top shelf above her. Food and kitchenware play an equal role within the image, creating a feeling of a maestro and her orchestra.

P5 Expressive Content: This image clearly had the potential to become iconic, as it in fact did. As taking it was part of a business strategy, every element depicted was carefully planned by an experienced production team. A closer look at some distinctive elements is vital for a better understanding of the expressive content of the image:

1- **Food Selection:** The dish selected was 'courgetti' which, as I have already shown, is a portmanteau word combining 'courgette' and 'spaghetti'. The dish used to be a very popular vegan dish at the time when the book was published. The dish consists of courgette stripes that have been spiralised by a special kitchen utensil (spiraliser) to simulate the spaghetti form. Courgetti is usually addressed at gluten-intolerant individuals as an alternative to spaghetti, although it has also been a trendy food choice among those following 'clean' and 'wellness' diets that also want to exclude gluten from their menus without necessarily being gluten-intolerant. The choice of food depicted is instrumental in grasping the target audience of this cookbook. These are not just vegans, but also people who want to follow healthier, more natural, and fresh green food choices.

2- **Styling:** As previously mentioned, Mills wears natural make-up, with special attention paid to her glowing skin and rose cheeks. This visual style coheres well with one of the book's, and Mills's, core narratives, i.e., the idea that the recipes are the result of her life-changing dietary choices that freed her from

the symptoms of a challenging illness. The book is the distillation of a self-obtained wisdom on food and life decisions, that altered her everyday reality and her looks (Woodward, 2015: 42, 57, 73, 172). The selection of clothes reflects a 'casual chic' look that combines the clean-cut timeless choice of jeans and a striped blouse. The twist is a carefully ripped part on Mills's right leg, perhaps an attempt to communicate effectively with a wider age range of customers. Her long hair is not deliberately blown dry but follows its natural flow. Accordingly, Mills does not pay great attention to a more 'preppy' style that is usually common for professional photo shootings. Moreover, discreet accessories such as thin bracelets, earrings, and pendants add an understated luxury to her fresh but well-prepared look. However, a tiny detail provides the occasion for further interpretation. In fact, Mills wears a thin bracelet in her right wrist that seems to be the iconic vintage Alhambra bracelet in yellow gold and onyx, marketed by world leading diamond and jewellery house Van Cleef and Arpels (see Image No 5.12 below). This bracelet costs £3,750 and even though it looks (and is) discrete, it has a very specific symbolic and economic value as a distinctive luxury good. Still, the overall expressive content of this subtly ostentatious image of Mills, although heavily mediated, comes out as effortless and authentic.

Image No 5.12: The Vintage Van Cleef and Arpels Alhambra bracelet (image taken from Selfridges.com website on 15-11-2021)
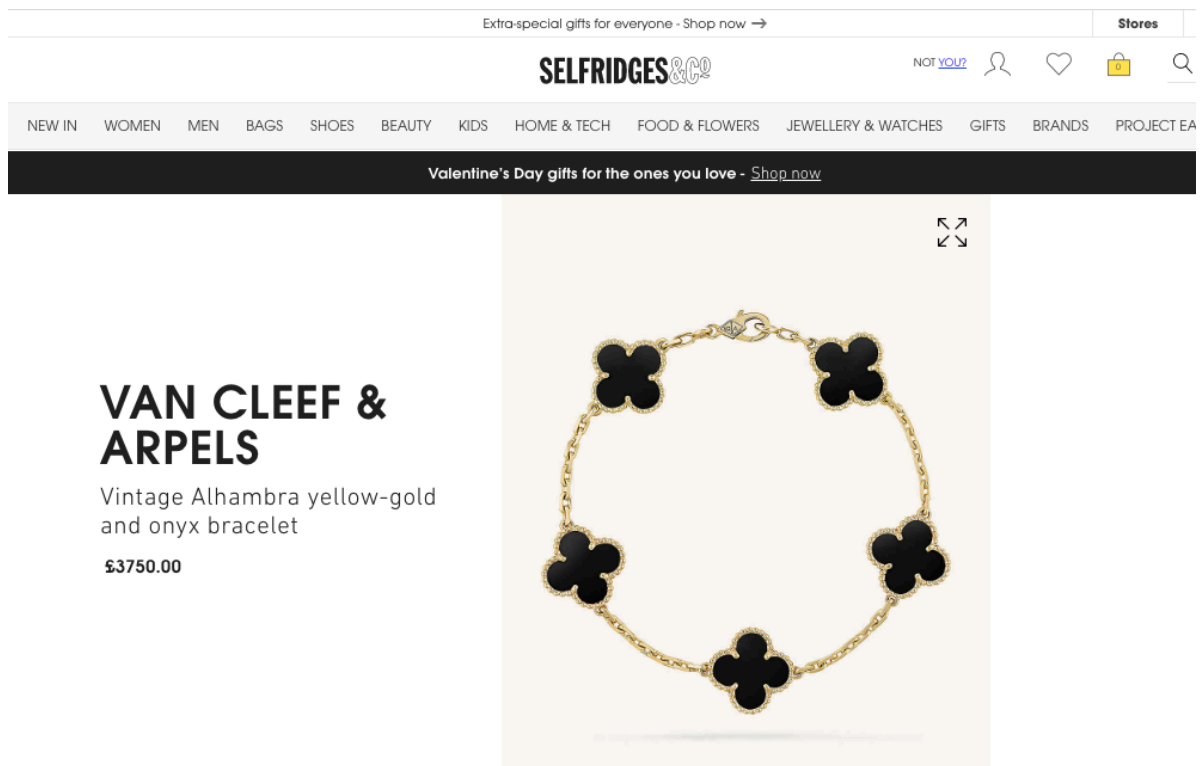
3- **Action:** This is another interesting element, especially for a cookbook. Mills holds a fork and twirls the courgetti. She is smiling and looking directly at the portion of food she has on her left hand. However, she does not eat it. Her body posture indicates that she keeps a distance from the food. Another point of interest is that a careful look at many images of Mills on both social media and mainstream media reveal that she is a right-handed person, eating writing, cutting, cooking and serving mainly using her right hand. However, in this image she holds the fork with her left hand, making her intentions about consuming the food unclear.

5.2 Avocado: an Instagram nomad-star is born

For the past decade, the mainstream media has intrinsically linked the popularity of avocado to the influence of social media and especially Instagram (Carney, 2016; Equihua, 2014; Freeman, 2015; Hayword, 2019; Heller, 2017; Orenstein, 2016). In fact, for many years avocados have been considered one of the 'top trending' foods

on several social media platforms (Sherwin, 2015; Waite, 2018). Its benefits on health have been intensively praised, especially in the global north over the last years (Durocher, 2022) and as it typically belongs within the organic produce, it is also ethically placed on the 'right side' of food consumption (Zappavigna & Ross, 2022). Nevertheless, the sudden rise of avocados' popularity (which consequently resulted in increased demand and farming) has received heavy criticism as well, since growing avocados is a very water intensive procedure resulting in an alarming environmental impact and a low level of sustainability (SustainableFoodTrust, 2020; WorldEconomicForum, 2020).

Concerning visual social media, the avocado-on-toast recipe (which is what its title describes, even though it often comes in variations: a slice of bread, usually sourdough, with some avocado on top) owes a great deal of its growing popularity since 2014 to Instagram and the rise of wellness and healthy eating bloggers (Orenstein, 2016; Sherwin, 2015) who used to promote it as a trendy but healthy brunch option. Meanwhile, a form of aestheticization through various visual approaches has made avocado highly 'Instagrammable' among young and active social media users who have been sharing millions of posts under the hashtag #avocado #avocadoontoast #avoontoast and many other variations on a daily basis (Zappavigna & Ross, 2022). Likewise, avocados were also endorsed by several celebrities that vouched for their 'wellness-making' features. Indeed, one of the most characteristic lines of the time was the one used by ex-Hollywood-actress-now-famous-wellness-guru Gwyneth Paltrow, whose website 'Goop' has been a pioneer with respect to the field of US wellness bloggers. For Paltrow avocado on toast is the "holy trinity of Veganise, avocado and salt that makes this like a favourite pair of jeans — so reliable and easy and always just what you want" (Orenstein, 2016). The frequency of avocado use by Mills during ERA2 can thus be safely placed within this rising trend, which tended to become dominant among wellness-minded people.

Table No 5.3: ERA2, Top 10 kinds of Food/Drink depicted on Deliciously Ella Instagram account.

Rank	ERA2: Kind of food/drink depicted (TOP 10)	No of instances	%
1	Juices	22	13.7
2	Smoothies	11	6.8
3	Porridge	10	6.2
4	Raw fresh vegetables	8	5.0
5	Roasted vegetables	7	4.3
6	Avocado on toast	6	3.7
7	Brownies	6	3.7
8	Raw fresh fruit	6	3.7
9	Soups	6	3.7
10	Courgetti	5	3.1
	REMAINING CATEGORIES	*74*	*46.0*
	TOTAL	**161**	**100**

Throughout ERA2, the Deliciously Ella account used 85 different ingredients in the recipes posted on Instagram. These recipes were either made by her and her team, or by others featured in her profile. Ingredients varied from ordinary and well-known vegetables such as tomatoes, cucumber, beetroot, cabbage and/or potatoes, but also from more exotic edibles, such as avocado, chia seeds, tahini paste and coconut. Avocado stands out among these ingredients and in the subsection that follows I shall proceed to trace out the context in which we might explain and interpret the frequency of its use.

Table No 5.4: ERA2, Top 10 kinds of Ingredients depicted on the Deliciously Ella Instagram account.

Rank	ERA2: Kind of ingredients depicted (TOP 10)	No of instances	%
1	Avocado	20	5.1
2	Kale	13	3.3
3	Beans	12	3.1
4	Chilli	11	2.8
5	Chocolate	10	2.5
6	Coconut	10	2.5
7	Oats	10	2.5
8	Spinach	9	2.3
9	Banana	9	2.3
10	Beetroot	9	2.3
	REMAINING CATEGORIES	*280*	*71.2*
	TOTAL	**393**	**100**

Avocados were the most frequently used among a long list of other plant-based ingredients throughout ERA2, followed by beetroots, limes, chili, and kale. With respect specifically to avocados, it will be useful to remind the reader that the era under consideration starts on September 2014. The use of avocados and, in particular, the consumption of avocado on toast – a dish very popular to Instagram users that rapidly became one of their favourites (Zappavigna & Ross, 2022) – reflects the distinctive momentum of popularity that this exotic ingredient had gained at that precise time. In this vein, avocado was an important bonding icon in semantic contexts such as wellness, veganism and clean eating (Zappavigna & Ross, 2022).

However, in all their simplicity, avocados have been much more than just an Instagram trend, especially for Mills, who is "totally addicted" to them and "can't go a day without eating at least one" as she proclaimed in her first cooking book (Woodward, 2015: 52). During these early days of her writing career, Mills used to believe in *"counting goodness, not calories"* (Woodward, 2015: 482) and although avocados are known to be a nutrient dense however high in calories fruit, Mills was set to dispel the myth that eating avocado would make you fat (Woodward, 2015: 31). After all, *"an avocado contains wonderful compounds that will nourish your body, give you glowing skin, and make you feel happy. It's also much easier to digest so it will give you amazing energy too."* (Woodward, 2015: 482).

Attributing miraculous properties to avocados (O'Neill, 2020a) does not only cohere with the well-known idea of "food as medicine" (Adelman & Haushofer, 2018; Chen, 2009; Jovandaric, 2021; LInskens & Jorde, 1997; Pieroni & Price, 2006) (which re-emerged with wellness bloggers and influencers on social media), but it also implies that the way to restore one's good health and happiness is effortless as long as one consumes the 'right' foods which can be easily found at any grocery store. It's just a matter of changing habits and shifting priorities. Issues such as money or time, let alone the cultural capital needed to appreciate what kind of foods and combinations can contribute to a healthier lifestyle, are never, or almost never mentioned. Yet, industry research from leading institutions and companies have been showing that consumers' concerns about the rising costs of living and their ability to access good

quality food at reasonable prices, grow year by year (FSA, 2022a; Mintel, 2022; Waitrose, 2022). Even back in 2015, when Mills published her first cookbook, FSA was reporting that in financially strained environments where people from lower socio-economic grades struggle to make a living, they sometimes feel pressured to make less healthy food choices to feed themselves and their families (FSA, 2016). Still, although Mills has often advocated her followers to eat their 'five a day' (E. Mills, 2017b) – a familiar directive to various UK governments for the last two decades, urging people to increase their fruit and vegetable daily intake (Gov.Uk, 2016a; NHS, 2022b) – she has barely scratched the surface of whether a significant percentage of the population has the means to access these five a day. On the contrary, she does not believe that healthy food has to be "expensive or inaccessible" (E. Mills, 2018a: 19). As she explains in her 2018 cookbook, "we've got to make broccoli, cauliflower and lentils a little more appealing!" (E. Mills, 2018a: 19). To achieve that, she proposes tackling two things. First, perceptions must be shifted; the way people think about fruit and vegetables must change, since healthy eating does not have to be "expensive, niche or inaccessible". Second, the way people cook fruit and vegetables must be also altered: *"we need to make fruit and vegetables as delicious as they can possible be"* (E. Mills, 2018a: 19).

5.3 The rise of the red heart emoji

'Emojis' (from the Japanese 'e', which connotes pictures and 'moji' which stands for characters) are graphic symbols used in social media to quickly express various ideas and notions without the use of text. Emojis emerged from mobile communication practices that required shorthand writing instead of longer texts (K. P. Novak et al., 2015). They were invented in 1999 by the Japanese Interface Designer Shigetaka Kurita (L. Stark & Crawford, 2015) and, in the beginning, they were indented for a Japanese user base. *Qua* internet artifacts, they followed up on 'emoticons' (short for 'emotion icon') that were shorthand pictorial symbols used to denote facial expressions of sentiments. The main difference between the two consists in the fact that emojis are pictographs, whereas emoticons are punctuation marks, to wit, letters and numbers that create a pictorial icon (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021b).

As already discussed in the chapter on the findings pertaining to ERA1, Mills has consistently and frequently used emojis since she launched her social media persona During ERA1 80% of Mills's Instagram posts used a variety of different emojis, ranging from a simple smiley face (😊) to a smiling face with heart-shaped eyes (😍), a happy smiling face with smiling eyes (😄), a glowing star emoji (🌟), or a pink, a green and a black heart 💗💚🖤. However, the distinctiveness of emoji use during ERA2 is not to do with a significant increase of decrease of emoji usage (emojis are used in 83% of the sampled posts, which shows only a very slight and statistically insignificant increase). Rather, the main interesting feature is a noteworthy turn towards a monothematic use of emojis. Thus, during ERA2 Mills opts for the uniform use of the red heart emoji: ❤️.

The table in the next page shows a comparative view of various emoji usage between ERA1 and ERA2:

Table No 5.5: ERA1 and ERA2 use of different emoji forms on the Deliciously Ella Instagram account.

ERA1 - Emojis Used	%	ERA2- Emojis Used	%
Smiley Face 😊	35.0	**Red Heart** ❤️	98.1
Smiley Face with Heart Eyes 😍	22.0	Sun ☀️	0.9
Smiley Face Big Smile 😄	11.0	Party Popper 🎉	0.9
Black Heart 🖤	7.0		
Black Sun	6.0		
Green Heart 💚	6.0		
Glowing Star 🌟	5.0		
Clapping Hands 👏	2.5		
Praying Hands 🙏	2.2		
Red Heart ❤️	0.8		
Smiley Face Savouring Delicious Food 😋	0.8		
Star ⭐	0.8		
Strawberry 🍓	0.8		
TOTAL	100		100

To account for this modification in Mills's online behaviour during ERA2, it is first important to trace out the wider context of emoji use in social media. At a first take,

the red heart emoji is used to express unambiguously a sentiment of 'love', 'happiness' or other positive feelings. Still, these are not the only possible uses of this or other emojis. Research on emoji use in social media has shown that emojis have been used not only as indicators of sentiments and feelings (K. P. Novak et al., 2015), but also as communication tools in online social movements (Alfano et al., 2021), as contextual indicants offering nuanced information about users' actions and geographic environment (Hauthal et al., 2021) or even as parts of a continuously developing visual dictionary of aggression among individuals involved in criminal activities (Danesi, 2021). Decoding this supplementary informational content in each case of emoji use requires attention to the context of use and the background presuppositions that are shared by the person using the emoji and the person interpreting its meaning.

That said, the main literal conventional meanings that the red heart emoji conveys are to do with positive emotions. Indeed this emoji is one of the most frequent positive emojis, together with smiley faces and/or party symbols (K. P. Novak et al., 2015). Thus, social media posts carrying such emojis usually express (or are understood to be expressing) a particular emotional state on the part of the users posting them, connected with a 'positive mood'. In Mills's case, the consistent use of the red heart emoji during ERA2 is accompanied by a textual and visual context that uniformly points towards meanings related to 'positivity' and 'happiness'. This comes out in a particularly clear way once we combine her use of the red heart emoji with other elements accompanying her posts. Thus, the data gathered clearly show that during ERA2 the heart emoji is systematically combined with: a) affirmative and optimistic adjectives describing food and/or life experiences; b) a continuous use of exclamation marks and c) glossy and happy images of Mills smiling, which are taken to reflect a vividly positive stance of Mills towards nutrition, work, everyday reality and life in general. The systematic message conveyed through these means is thus one of positivity, happiness, optimism and, more generally, joy.

5.4 The happiness imperative

Accordingly, optimism and positivity appear to be integral characteristics of Mills's self-presentation tactics during ERA2. Positive moods are not associated with specific

events or happenings in Mills's digitally reconstructed life. Instead, they express a constant existential orientation towards that life as a whole. Thus, red heart emojis and other indicators of positivity can crop up in a variety of different contexts. These may involve, for example, everyday consumption of plant-based food, the demonstration of a very simple recipe or the sharing of professional wisdom about success in life. As we shall see, there can be subtle differences between the associations made between positivity/happiness and the presented events or images. These differences suggest a basic typology between happiness/positivity as triggered by events (where the events visually presented are the explanations of the positivity/happiness) versus positivity/happiness as *itself* a trigger of other events (where the positivity/happiness is deemed to explain, say, professional success). Overall, Mills implies that the turn towards a plant-based food consumption practice can initiate a 'virtues cycle' of positivity: plant-based food can make one happy/positive and the 'happiness/positivity' can be then further leveraged to pursue other ends in life, such as professional or entrepreneurial success.

Here is a specific example of the first approach from ERA2. A mundane everyday event involving the consumption of a plant-based food item, such as a simple avocado on toast, is deemed enough to trigger Mills's happiness, positive mood and overall joy for life, conveyed through the red heart emoji, as shown in Image No 5.13:

Image No 5.13: Avocado on toast (Instagram Post 24-2-2015)
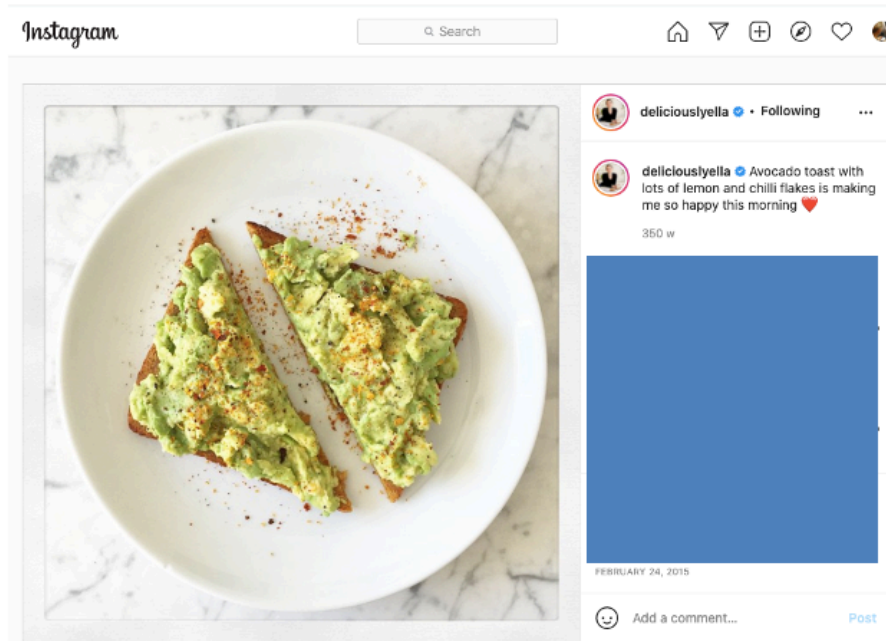
The important thing to note about Image No 5.13 is that the mundane is positively transformed through the consumption of the avocado toast. The food is presented as the (causal) trigger of the positivity, which is rendered textually (in the comment accompanying the image). The red heart emoji can itself be understood in an open-ended way, as either instantiating the positive mood, authenticating, or verifying that what is said in the comment is indeed true or otherwise adding emphasis to the comment. In any event, the main message conveyed is that the depicted food itself triggers the happiness, positivity, optimism, or joy. Would the absence of this specific depicted food imply the absence of the positive mood or feeling? The post itself is silent on this point but it could be at least hypothesized that an insinuation is made to the effect that this could potentially be the case. Be that as it may, the systematic use of the red heart emoji, text relating to positive moods and feelings and images of plant-based food is designed to forge reliable links between the food and the positive feelings. The clear message regularly conveyed is that the food depicted can reliably trigger positivity.

What about the other putative direction of causality that we find in ERA2, i.e., from positivity/happiness to further downstream desired consequences? This kind of scenario is essential to Mills's self-presentation strategies. It is to do with cases,

increasingly frequent within the ERA2 dataset and, more generally, within Mills's discourse, where it is the optimism/happiness themselves, perhaps (at least as Mills implies) reliably caused by the plant-based food, that can produce further desired results. The overall effect of the discourse and the posts is to represent a vicious cycle whereby plant-based food consumption, positivity and success establish themselves. A particular topic where this kind of approach becomes crystal is to do with Mills's attitudes and stances towards entrepreneurship. In entrepreneurial matters Mills presents herself as an "internal optimist" (E. Mills, 2017b) and suggests that her optimism and positivity are linked with her success. In articulating this kind of discourse, Mills also attempts to inspire young entrepreneurs to follow her advice to succeed themselves. Here is a characteristic sample of Mills's discourse in relation to optimism/positivity and the challenges of entrepreneurship:

"I think you have to be an eternal optimist to be a successful entrepreneur; you just have to have blind faith that you can make it work, even when it seems impossible" (BritishLibrary, 2017)

To properly explain this kind of narrative, we must first place it within the wider context of Internet-based or Internet-inspired entrepreneurial activity. It is clear that the emergence of the Internet as a general purpose technology (GPT) (Mack et al., 2017) was, from the beginning, also understood to give rise to new forms of entrepreneurial endeavours. This tendency became ever more pronounced after Web 2.0 entered the scene, when entrepreneurial activity became almost synonymous with social media platforms and applications (Turan & Kara, 2018). Web 2.0 created numerous opportunities for smaller businesses and individuals. They were now able to produce content more easily and cheaply, to enhance real-time interactions, to ameliorate customer targeting, and to accelerate procedures and services for their clients. Especially for women entrepreneurs, social media have proved to be a fruitful environment allowing more of them to thrive. This, moreover, despite the fact that women are still underrepresented in the technology sector, continuing mostly to be employed in social services and educational and health fields (Kamberidou, 2020).

Now, Mills's discourse as stated above articulates a personal narrative focused on her perspective or point of view regarding the challenges of Internet entrepreneurship. It zeroes in on the kinds of skills, virtues and internal moods that the entrepreneur must necessarily possess in order to succeed. These can be complex. In fact, many studies in entrepreneurship reveal that individuals involved in such activities face difficult challenges and working conditions, as well as high levels of anxiety due to business and financial uncertainty (Efrat et al., 2021). At the same time, entrepreneurial activity is reported to bring certain kinds of gratification, contentment and success to the individuals that engage in it. The impact of entrepreneurship on the entrepreneurs' well-being and quality of life is thus multifaceted (Shir et al., 2019).

Well-being is a multidimensional and essentially contested concept. It picks out features of a desirable life, which can further refer to several different factors, such as the quality of subjective experiences or the recognition of a given actor's social status. More recent psychological research has attempted to model well-being by defining it along two main dimensions, both of which have roots in the Western philosophical tradition in its classical and modern form: hedonic and eudemonic (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2001). Hedonic well-being signifies the happiness that is achieved through the successful pursuit of pleasure of mental and physical pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Eudemonic well-being, on the other hand, refers to a broader idea of self-realisation and carves out the conceptual space of a meaningful life according to values that the person itself endorses (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2001). The importance of well-being to entrepreneurial life has been the subject of recent scholarly research in psychology, with a particular focus on the correlation between well-being and happiness (Kahneman et al., 1999). Many scholars support the idea that entrepreneurial activity is distinguished from its non-entrepreneurial counterpart, in that solely the former offers opportunities to obtain several elements that can satisfy people's basic psychological needs and increase their levels of well-being and life satisfaction along a number of crucial dimensions (Shir et al., 2019). In short: entrepreneurial activity can provide its own distinctive forms of happiness and positivity.

This kind of pattern, however, is interestingly reversed in Mills's case. The commanding narrative here is that it is the positivity itself, as a certain kind of existential orientation towards the world and as a crucially important component of overall well-being, that can bear the fruits of successful entrepreneurial activity. Indeed, the focus on the dimension of positivity is strikingly emphasized since the very beginning of the launch of Mills's blog. The projection of happiness, positivity, and optimism, through a variety of visual and textual signs, have been integral parts of the Deliciously Ella blog and the birth of the Deliciously Ella brand (followed by social media profiles and later best-selling books, mobile apps, events and products). In fact, happiness in the world of Deliciously Ella is inextricably linked with almost every aspect of her personal and professional life, as well as with almost every undertaking, whether ordinary and mundane or serious and demanding. To take a particularly characteristic example, the homepage of her blog as retrieved in the version 16 May 2012 reads:

*A creative adventure for a healthy, **happy** and nutritious life using delicious gluten dairy and sugar free recipes!* (emphasis added – see Image No 5.14 below; the use of the exclamation mark in the sentence, which is, as already said, also systematically used in ERA2 posts to convey positivity is also of notice here).

Image No 5.14: Deliciously Ella blog homepage (As found in version of 16 May 2012 from WaybackMachine.com)

223
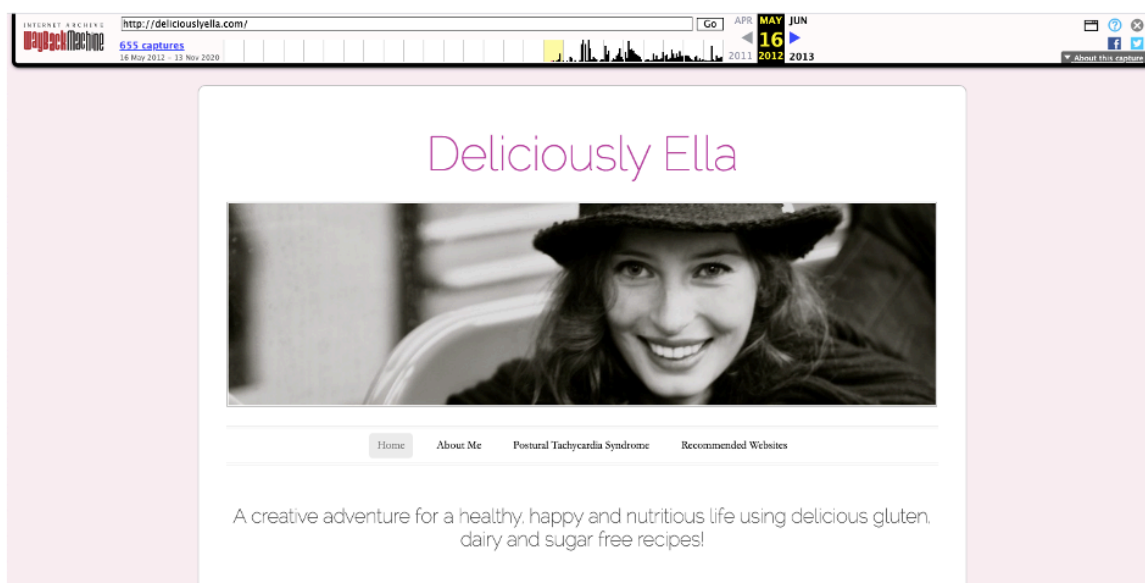
The blog is, moreover, accompanied by the picture of a smiling Mills, that exemplifies precisely the happiness that she is talking about.

Later, in July 2012, the 'About Me' section of the blog starts with a small introductory paragraph that reads:

Hello, welcome to my blog! I am a 21 year old Art History student and health food enthusiast from London. I adore cooking and experimenting in my kitchen, seeing other people enjoy deliciously nutritious food brings me so much **_happiness_**. (emphasis added).

Image No 5.15: Deliciously Ella blog 'About Me' section (As found in version 22 July 2012 from Waybackmachine.com)

To further illustrate this, in Mills's first book entitled *Deliciously Ella* (Woodward, 2015a) happiness is omnipresent. Happiness appears in many forms and disguises, which may involve the positive feelings that recipes and ingredients bring, the positive impact of everyday activities, or the deeper causal impact that the consumption of certain

kinds of food purportedly have on one's mood and psyche. For example, while talking about spirulina's benefits, Mills mentions the following: *"Spirulina is a freshwater algae, which is made up of around sixty to seventy per cent complete proteins. This means that it's incredibly energising and helps to keep your blood sugar balanced, which keeps your **happiness** balanced too! "* (emphasis added - Woodward, 2015: 395). In a similar vein, earlier in the chapter on 'Beans and Pulses' Mills makes the following claims: *"We need plant protein to sustain our energy levels all day, stop sugar cravings and fight off tiredness slumps, which in turn keeps our mood in a constant state of **happiness**"* (emphasis added - *Woodward, 2015: 197)*. Towards the book's closing 'Thank You' section, Mills comments: *"It's amazing knowing that Deliciously Ella has made a difference to your life and helped you on your own journeys to health and **happiness**."* (emphasis added - Woodward, 2015: 495). The claims made are thus specific. The plant-based food can trigger happiness and positivity. If we now combine this discourse with the narrative on optimism as a *sine qua non* quality of the successful entrepreneur we are in a position to grasp the wider assertion made, to wit, that the food consumption practice proposed can help provide at least some of the virtues that are needed for successful entrepreneurship, with Mills being a living embodiment of such a virtuous cycle.

5.5 Happiness: the social context

It is clear that happiness discourse can be further explained insofar as it draws on wider cultural resources available in late capitalism. In his book *The Happiness Industry* sociologist William Davies sets out the ways in which the concept of happiness, at least in some of its uses, has recently morphed from an intrinsic into an instrumental value and, more specifically, how it is regarded as a means towards maximizing workforce productivity and economic turnout (Davies, 2016). Key to such an instrumentalization of happiness has been the attempt to somehow quantify or otherwise precisely measure it, mainly by reducing happiness to a subjective psychological state such as moods or other feelings and attitudes. As s moods can be identified and quantified in relatively precise ways, happiness can become an object of intentional manipulation, leveraged to achieve further ends, rather than being an end-in-itself. Socio-technological advances were also crucial in this context. Thus, with

many recent technological developments able to measure one's mood – such as big data analytics, or functional MRI scanning – the exploitation of one's positive attitude has extremely evolved. This kind of technological sophistication thus focuses on the quantitative aspect of happiness and can help put in place commodification practices of the latter, happiness being reducible to a specific kind of pleasure that, alongside others, can be produced and sold by various methods, including the capitalist mode of production.

The commodification of happiness makes it an object sensitive to the workings of various kinds of social mechanisms. For example, commodification practices promote and sell desirable behaviours under the facade of 'well-being'. Happiness seminars, online workshops, wellness trackers (one, out of many, offered by the Deliciously Ella brand mobile application) help sustain a happiness industry ready to tackle several psychological issues, such as anxiety and stress, mental health issues and the problem of the relative increase in advanced capitalism working hours after the end of the 1970s. Davies defines the happiness industry as a neoliberal business that presumes that the individual should be held accountable for finding motivational resources and happiness or positivity, even if external factors tend to erode these. There are two crucial dimensions identified.

To begin with, on the supply side, happiness is projected as a commodity within one's grasp but also as the manipulative outcome of certain practices by big business. The main idea is that certain kinds of practices, many of which are commodified, can bring at least a certain kind of happiness, i.e., a happiness reducible to certain subjective mental states. Such practices are endorsed by big business elites who embrace this pursuit of happiness via celebrity motivational speeches, positivity conferences and mindfulness exercises. Davies's critique rests on the idea that the version of happiness offered is crudely reductionist, since an open-ended and subjective attitude is morphed into a manipulated, calculated and measurable one. The reductive transformation of happiness occurs through technologies like neuromarketing or recent social media platforms' developments, which track quantified forms of happiness through computational measures and algorithmic psychometrics. In this

respect, Davies specifically mentions the infamous Facebook 'emotional contagion' study of 2014 that manipulated users' profiles without their consent in order to alter their moods in their individual posts (Kleinsman & Buckley, 2015).

Irrespective of these criticisms addressed by Davies vis-à-vis the happiness industry, in advanced capitalist societies there is currently a growing supply of happiness commodities. This takes the form of goods, services or otherwise commodified disciplining practices that promise the achievement of certain positive subjective mental states or moods. Within this wider context of supply for happiness goods, Mills proposes a specific version of happiness commodity. The commodity supposedly triggering positive moods consists in a specific kind of food-consuming practice. The distinctiveness of Mills's commodification practice can be identified along several different dimensions throughout ERA2. First, as already shown, the food depicted is systematically associated with happiness using emojis and text. Second, and equally important, Mills herself authenticates the existence of the happiness/positivity claimed. That the happiness/positivity promised is genuine as opposed to spurious can be already inferred from Mills's living example. To this extent, the recentring of posts on Mills's person during ERA2 coheres particularly well with the claims made. But also, third, the era is also marked by the intensification of the commodification project, especially since during this period the blog is transformed into a proper professional entrepreneurial venture. Thus, happiness, authenticity and enrichment form a closed hermeneutical circle: that the food triggers happiness can be attested from the images of the food and Mills together with the emojis and the text. Moreover, the authenticity capital leveraged from the first era attests as to the genuine character of the happiness/positivity produced, as do the consequences of the positive attitude on Mills's business. This, last, helps sustain the enrichment project, i.e., the valorisation of the happiness good by virtue of its connection to a specific kind of deeply personal narrative. The elements of happiness, authenticity and enrichment thus converge. A more detailed discussion of Mills's

Still, these would not be enough in the absence of demand for happiness goods, on which Davies also throws light. Thus, Davies explains how 'post-fordist' processes of

restructuring work and life in late capitalism, together with an intensification of competition among individuals, have created a distinctive constellation of 'negative' psychological moods and needs. These comprise dire conditions of stress, anxiety, and depression. Ironically, Davies shows how the very same systems whose functioning created these moods now attempt to address the results of their own operations by producing commodified happiness solutions. The important point to note, in any event, is that the demand for these solutions takes an individualistic form. The psychological issues addressed as framed and understood precisely as individual, not collective, problems, to be addressed through individual action and responsibility. Finding happiness, positivity, good moods, and motivation are understood to be individual, not collective, goods and this creates the demand for precisely the kinds of commodities that Mills, among others, places in wide circulation.

One final point to underscore is that the demand for happiness goods is not confined to specific strata of the population. Because anxieties stemming from neoliberal social relations spread widely, attempts to refashion the self along 'positivity' lines are pervasive and all-encompassing. The imperative of positivity, as we have seen, permeates Mills's entrepreneurial discourse. Optimism is intrinsically linked to entrepreneurial success. But they also affect wage workers as well as others. In this vein, Harvard Medical School psychologist Susan David has argued that under current societal conditions happiness has become a widespread expectation. A specific social norm appears to have emerged, to the effect that in the working place, complicated and negative feelings have no place whatsoever: wage earners, company CEOs and managers must all be either content and joyful, or enduring (S. David & Congleton, 2013). However, David claims that this norm is in tension with certain basic characteristics of human biology. Her empirical data confirm that many people at higher managerial levels struggle with negative feelings and unwanted emotions, not necessarily because they have these emotions but because they feel trapped in them (S. David & Congleton, 2013). Whatever the specific mechanism, one of the most widely chosen remedies for navigating these tensions consists in selecting a range of widespread self-management positivity techniques. Hence a distinctive source of demand for positivity goods such as Mills's.

A "constant state of happiness" thus seems to be a recurring theme that marks Deliciously Ella's digital and non-digital presence. Mills expresses positivity by using a wide range of tools. These include emojis, exclamation marks and positive adjectives to describe food and/or the food experience. Throughout ERA2 the words used to describe food and/or food experience were exclusively positive and account for about 35% of the posts uploaded on Instagram, as the table below shows:

Table No 5.6: ERA2, words used by Mills to describe food/drink experience.
(The numbers refer to the times these words repeat themselves throughout ERA2)

Deliciously Ella ERA2 Words used to describe food/food experience	
delicious	23
awesome	14
heaven	12
so delicious	10
so yum	10
beautiful	10
beyond delicious	9
easy	9
favourite	9
obsession	8
so good	8
the best	8
warming	8
absolute heaven	3
amazing	3
beauties	2
best ever	2
easiest	2
energizing	2
exciting	1
goodness	1
happy	1
healthy	1
homemade	1
incredible	1
rainbow goodness	1
simple	1
too delicious	1
wonderful	1

On the visual side, happiness is depicted through images of smiling faces (mainly Mills's in ERA2), as well as images of sunny places and puppies. Again, there is an omnipresent feeling of contentment designed to convey a reassuring link between pursuing a life full of wellness and plant-based nutrition, with happiness as the ultimate achievement.

During ERA2 Mills is the central visual focus of 29% of the total Instagram posts, while in 92% of cases she has a big and bright smile as the example of Image Collection No1 reveals:

Image Collection No 5.1: Examples of Mills's portrait images on Instagram posts (ERA2)

5.6 Conclusion of ERA2

In this chapter, I presented and discussed findings pertaining to ERA2. Several conclusions can be drawn.

- First, this is the era when Mills begins the first process of transformation from a well-intended amateur food blogger towards a successful entrepreneur of wellness and happiness goods. Mills's popularity grows and the best-seller that she produces during that period marks a qualitative change. Her Instagram account acquires a different, more professional, visual style and there is a reorientation towards a much more frequent exposure of herself and her

personal life. Her health story becomes widely known with the support of the mainstream media and various sponsored partnerships with commercial brands and Mills herself becomes a media content creator through the launch of a food column on Sunday Telegraph.

- Second, happiness and positivity become dominant visual and textual narratives during this era. Indeed, the distinctive structure of Mills's narrative appears to be the following. The plant-based food consumption lifestyle proposed can trigger positivity/happiness because of the qualities of the food. This is attested by Mills herself, who becomes happy and sustains her happiness through that lifestyle. Mills, as can be shown from her images during the era, is authentically happy when she consumes the plant-based food that she prepares. Moreover, the experience of happiness is not mediated through specific techniques of the self, other than the simple imperative to prepare and eat the depicted food. There is no need for any deeper kind of attachment to a controversial or difficult daily discipline, such as meditation, and even less to a controversial set of demanding ethical values. Happiness thus comes easy and immediately.

- At the same time, the happiness that the plant-based lifestyle sustains and renders possible can be further leveraged to pursue other ends. These include, first and foremost, entrepreneurial success. More generally, they are to do with the adjustments or adaptations that impose themselves on individuals in a neoliberal era. This is because these adaptations are responses to market uncertainties and other anxieties that individuals live as constantly moving external constraints on their actions. To this extent, the lifestyle proposed by Mills fulfils several psychological needs: happiness provides the anchoring that aids entrepreneurial and professional success. Indeed, this is precisely Mills's own entrepreneurial narrative: her positive attitude, according to her, goes a long way towards explaining her resilience as an entrepreneur and, hence, can explain and justify her success.

- Fourth, Mills stays on top of the specific popularity trends that define the culinary field of plant-based eating in the UK. In particular, the rise of the avocado in her posts attests to her capacity to respond to these trends in the

appropriate way, i.e., by simply following them. When it comes to the *specific content* of the ingredients, Mills does not seem to aspire to be a trend-setter. There is no specific 'signature dish' proposed. Instead, the rise of the avocado in Mills's Instagram posts is a sign of her relative indifference towards specific ingredients. Her narrative is much more based on her individual qualities and the authenticity of her practice, irrespective of ingredients, than on an insistence on specifics, be they foods or values. However, in the next chapter I will discuss how Mills, despite the continuous repetition of ingredients and recipes, manages to create a 'signature' product for her first food market launch.

- Finally, happiness and positive mood are also shown through the use of emojis and in particular the red heart emoji that dominates the whole era.

CHAPTER 6

ERA3: THE ENTREPRENEUR

Overview

In this section I will discuss the data and findings concerning ERA3. This is the period when Mills's entrepreneurial project truly blossoms. The chapter unfolds as follows. In the next section I present an overview of the era and set out its broad parameters, through the selection and analysis of milestone moments. Since the effort to build a successful business is central to the period, the Instagram account focuses overwhelmingly on products, the most iconic of them being Mills's energy balls, and the deli restaurants that she opened in London. At the same time, Mills keeps publishing books that sell well and support her entrepreneurial effort. As regards the visual content posted online, one interesting finding is that the focus on Mills's person somewhat recedes, with products and food occupying more the centre of attention. In the following section I use the enrichment framework that I introduced and discussed in the literature review chapter to shed light on Mills's success. Briefly put, this success can be partly explained by the fact that the higher price of her premium food products is justified by reference to an undefined ingredient of 'goodness' that these products supposedly contain, a theme on which Mills has insisted since her first book. I thus provide an analysis of Mills's goodness narratives that contributed to the successful launch of her business.

6.1 ERA3: The Entrepreneur: Findings and discussion

In this section I shall present and discuss some key findings and milestone moments from ERA3. Beginning with milestone moments, the emphasis is on deli restaurants and new products, especially Mills's energy balls, without neglecting the publication of books and the planning of new ones. As we shall see in the findings, many posts are devoted to simply informing the public about supermarket chains and other commercial outlets in which the Deliciously Ella food products can be found.

6.1.1 Milestone moments of ERA3

According to the convention that was adopted in this thesis ERA3 begins on 30 October 2015 with the announcement of the lease signing for Mills's first deli restaurant in London (that she calls the Mae Deli). This can be seen in Image No 6.1 below. The era ends with an Instagram post that provides rich updates on Mills's life from both a professional and a personal perspective. In that post, Mills claims to be feverishly working on her new book (she says that she is "insanely busy" (see image No 6.2 in the next page), while moving houses with her husband Matthew.

Image No 6.1: Announcement of the lease signing for Mills's first deli restaurant in London (Instagram post 30-10-2015)

Image No 6.2: Announcement of a Mills new book and moving houses with husband Matthew (Instagram Post 18-12017)
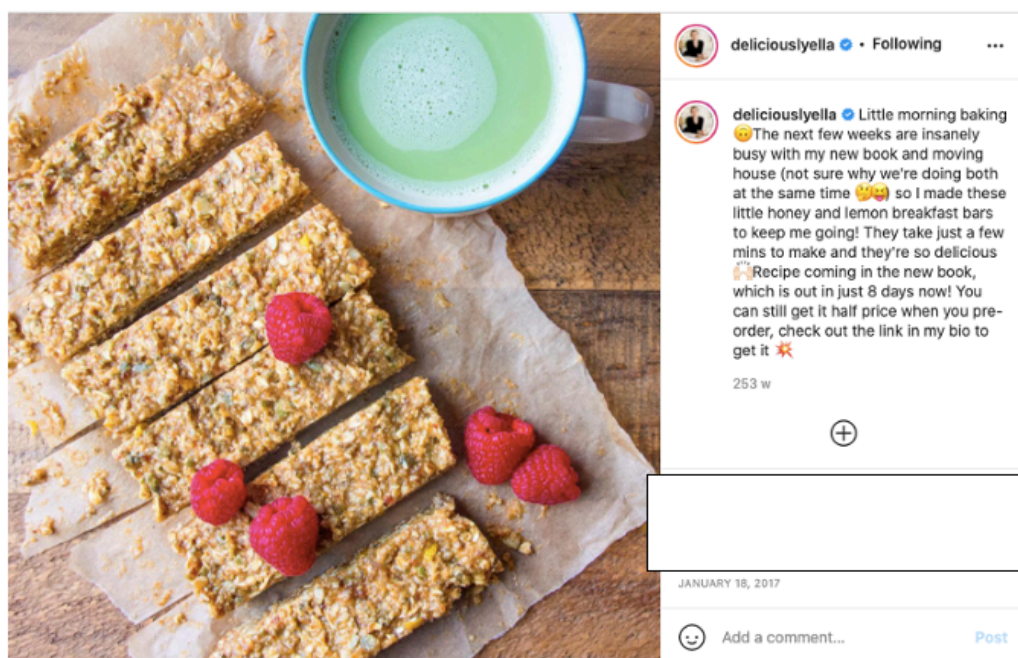
As transpires from her posts, this is indeed a very busy period for Mills regarding all aspects of her life. She announces her wedding plans, she works on the creation and launch of the Mae Deli, she marries Matthew Mills, she launches books No2 and No3 and starts working on book No4, she introduces a new food product in the UK food market, she opens a second deli restaurant in London, she finalizes numerous commercial deals with some of the UK's most prestigious and well-known brands and just before the end of ERA3, in January 17 2017, the Deliciously Ella Instagram account reaches 1 million followers. To place this number in perspective, it is important to mention that by March 2017 the UK had about 17.2 million Instagram followers (Kowalczyk, 2017). For a UK-based Instagram profile such as Deliciously Ella's, an account that was not yet internationally famous, 1 million followers is a particularly noteworthy achievement within the Instagram ecosystem of the time. Table No 6.1 below shows a fuller selection of the milestone moments for ERA3, the most important of which I just mentioned:

Table No 6.1: Selection of Deliciously Ella ERA3 Instagram Milestone moments

SELECTION OF ERA 3 INSTAGRAM MILESTONE MOMENTS	DATE
First post of ERA 3: Signing deal for Mae Deli (her first deli in London)	30-Oct-15
Announcing wedding plans	23-Nov-15
Book No1 sold over 250.000 copies in the UK	16-Dec-15
Official lauch of Mae Deli	05-Jan-16
Launch of book No2	21-Jan-16
First Instagram Video	21-Jan-16
Planning book No3	29-Mar-16
Getting married	24-Apr-16
Announcing book No3	24-May-16
Downing Street - Celebrating Entrepreneurs in Britain	16-Jun-16
British Referendum 2016 - Voting Yes (staying in Europe)	21-Jun-16
Announcement of first product (energy balls)	29-Jun-16
Announcing of skin care range with Neil's Yard	08-Jul-16
Announcing plans for book No4	27-Jul-16
First Deliciously Ella product (energy balls) is launched in the market	01-Aug-16
Official launch of Deliciously Ella beauty products with Neil's Yard	04-Aug-16
First product is launched at Whole Foods	08-Aug-16
Announcing plans for deli No2	17-Aug-16
First product is launched at Waitrose	29-Aug-16
Launch of book No3	22-Sep-16
Preparing Deli No2	15-Oct-16
First product is launched at Starbucks	17-Oct-16
Deli No2 opening	01-Nov-16
First copy of book No4	13-Nov-16
Mae Deli festive Pop Up store opening	14-Nov-16
Expanding business - hiring people	24-Nov-16
Book No2 is Amazon top 5 for 2016	09-Dec-16
One year anniversary of the Mae Deli	12-Dec-16
Book No3 is Amazon top 3	03-Jan-17
First product is launched at Sainsbury's	13-Jan-17
Reached 1.000.000 Instagram followers	17-Jan-17
Last post of ERA 3: New Deliciously Mlls book announcement and Mills moving houses with her husband	18-Jan-17

Mills's entrepreneurial debut was officially praised during a prestigious event celebrating entrepreneurs in Britain at No10 Downing Street, which took place on the 16th of June 2016. The event was organised by the Founders Forum, an influential community of global leaders, investors and stakeholders including Arianna Huffington, Prince William, the founder of the prominent fashion portal Net-A-Porter Natalie Massenet, then UK Prime Minister David Cameron, the British businessman Richard Branson, and the ex-CEO of Google Eric Schmid. The Forum has been supporting and creating networking opportunities over the last two decades for a range of young and newcomer entrepreneurs. Together with a group of prominent UK entrepreneurs Mills attended the event with her husband Matthew and talked about new business but also, importantly, about the British referendum then scheduled for 23 June 2016. This was the first and last time that Mills used her Instagram profile to express a

political opinion. She asserted that she would vote for the UK to remain in the European Union. As we will see in the next chapter on the clean eating debacle, adopting a highly controversial political position is uncharacteristic of Mills, who mainly adopts a neutral stance vis-à-vis contentious issues.

Image No 6.3: Ella and Matthew Mills at No10 Downing Street, Founders Forum (Instagram Post 16-6-2016)

Image No 6.4: Mills votes 'in' for the UK EU membership referendum (Instagram Post 21-6-2016)
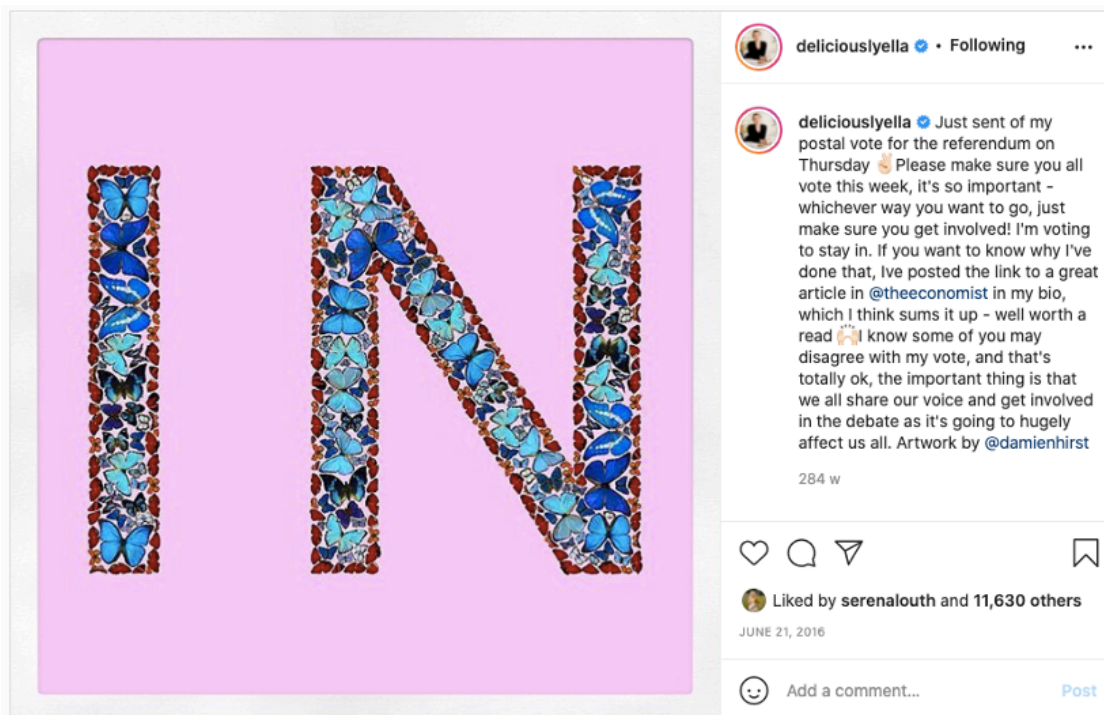
Mills's wedding to Matthew Mills was also a key moment for both her personal and professional life. Matthew, a "professional golfer turned ethical financier" (Edwardes, 2016) is the son of the late Baroness Tessa Jowell, former Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in the UK, and corporate lawyer David Mills, one of the "best connected lawyers in Britain with a network of influential friends and relations" (Popham, 2009). His brother John Mills has been one of the largest donors to the Labour Party (TheLabourParty, 2013). Matthew's sister, the well-known and awarded journalist Eleanor Mills, was the editorial director of The Sunday Times, employed by the newspaper for 22 years until quite recently (Mayhew, 2020).

As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 8, it is in many respects significant that the marriage took place in the private island of Mustique, where Mills's family used to own a summer house (M. David, 2011). As I have shown in previous chapters, the house had already featured several times in the Deliciously Ella Instagram account during ERA1 and ERA2, Mills travelling there often for holidays. However, Mills had always been particularly nonchalant and casual about it, as if visiting a seven-bedroom-nine-household-staff villa, butler included, was merely the average girl-next-door holiday place. In fact, in 2019, the Hummingbird villa, as it is called, was put on the market by Mills's parents for a striking £22 million pounds (Hind, 2019), being now available for weekly rentals of $75,000 (MustiqueCompany, 2023).

In their article "Justifying inherited wealth: between the 'bank of mum and dad' and the meritocratic idea" (Moor & Friedman, 2021), Liz Moor and Sam Friedman ponder on how people who receive significant economic family gifts or inheritances still manage to firmly believe in meritocracy. The authors' empirical research on first-time homeowners shows that the latter deliberately downplay their intergenerational privileges by justifying through their families' hard work, meritocratic struggles and achievements upward social mobility and a family tradition of cautionary measures when handling their finances (Moor & Friedman, 2021). In Mills's case there is an interesting analogy with this justification of wealth through meritocratic values. Mills systematically insists that it was her passion and determination in combination with her hard work, as I will discuss later in this section, that has brought her success. She

never talks openly about her family's or her own wealth, nor does she refer to her childhood days growing up in a 500-acre country estate in Oxford or explain how an amateur blogger could afford holidays in the Caribbean during the early days of a blog that was, in her own words, never meant to be read (Rumbelow, 2017). Likewise, she does not publicly discuss the details of a supposedly "low key" wedding in the private island of Mustique with guests arriving all the way from the UK (Blott, 2016). To be sure, her attitude is not one of actively hiding her immense family wealth, but rather one of strategic non-disclosure. It is simply not the kind of information that she shares online, despite sharing other personal information in enormous detail. A hypothesis that could explain this attitude could be an attempt to become relatable, forging a strong connection with her audience, which would be harder had she openly admitted that she is a member of a tiny elite. Indeed, research shows that similarity and closeness are among the most significant factors affecting strong relationship building between social media influencers and followers (Moulard & Garrity, 2013; Taillon et al., 2020). If Mills's persona was not seen as reflecting a down-to-earth hard-working individual, similar in many ways to her wider audience, how could she approach it and eventually become relatable and likeable?

Matthew became Mills's business partner almost immediately after they became romantically involved, later taking up the position of CEO of the company. In one of their first joined media interviews in early 2016 Matthew reveals that he first saw Mills on a Sunday newspaper supplement and thought she could be an ideal ambassador for his own business in South Africa. He emailed Mills's MP father, who was a long-standing friend with his MP mother, to initiate contact with Mills. The couple claims that they are "unconventional" since they decided to quickly move in together and talked about getting married "after a week" (Edwardes, 2016). Despite the unconventionality claim, in the interview Matthew reveals some rather conventional practices, such as asking for Mills's parents blessing before he proposed, as well as asking his mother's opinion about the engagement ring so that "she could check that it was definitely the one they should have" (Edwardes, 2016). After his mother's ring sign-off, Matthew describes that they went for tea and champagne at one of London's poshest and iconic restaurants, The Wolseley, where "mom cried" (Edwardes, 2016).

Since the beginning of their relationship, two recurring themes often appear in Ella's and Matthew Mills's narrative: a) their almost 24/7 working pattern and b) their 'low key' and simple lifestyle despite their elite family background. In her 2018 book entitled *The Plant Based Cookbook* Mills narrates in a detailed manner how hard both she and Matthew worked for the opening of their first deli in Marylebone, London. As they were still in the beginning of their deli business, Mills claims that they were very cautious with spending money, which resulted in them having to step in and do a little bit of everything, from business and menu planning to "cleaning the loos, doing the dishes and clearing tables" (Mills, 2018a: 42). A surprising moment of Mills's chronicle is when she explains that their budget was so limited that they could not even afford a LinkedIn premium subscription (which costs $59.99 or £48.47 per month), which compelled them to search within LinkedIn's free sections for candidate employees and then "hunt them down" on their personal Facebook and Instagram pages (E. Mills, 2018a: 43). Indeed, Mills has claimed in various media interviews over time that she and Matthew are "the most boring people on the planet" (Edwardes, 2016; YouMagazine, 2022) due to their busy working lifestyle. Additionally, she has mentioned several times that she is working 24/7. This is among other things because social media "makes it a 24 hour day" (Edwardes, 2016), since Mills feels "a real responsibility" to personally respond to her followers' emails and comments, although this has become very complicated as the brand evolved (Millington, 2017).

Working in an "always on society" (Nguyen, 2021) is coupled with an imperative for constant connectivity that was enhanced by the digital and, especially, the social media explosion of the last two decades (boyd, 2012; Turkle, 2008). As a young millennial Mills is digitally savvy. She is also a heavily active social media user who can go to great depths of content creation and curation to develop her own brand. However, it is the combination of this always-on mode of the digital world and the overall 'workaholic' approach that justifies entrepreneurial success, especially when one must take care of their own business, mainly through hard work (and passion, as I will later discuss in Chapter 6). Accordingly, Mills's financial assets, along with her and Matthew's family business network and connections, are usually downplayed in

favour of the values of hard work and dedication. Mills thus displays a particular nonchalance as a member of one of Britain's richest families who grew up in an Oxfordshire mansion, sold some years ago for £24 million, and being educated in expensive public schools (S. Mills, 2015b). Despite her elite status and enormous family fortune, Mills does not care about an opulent and lavish life; she only focuses on growing her business through her systematic efforts and planning, a true example of a contemporary meritocracy where the individual's overachievements are based on their skills, talents and merits rather than on family fortune, availability of various forms of capital and social background (C. H. Kim & Choi, 2017). Mills claims that she leads a simple life, relatable to many others: she lives with her husband Matthew and their daughters in London, just off Kensington Church Street, one of the city's most expensive areas (YouMagazine, 2022), and insists that her life is not luxurious, due to the constant call of work: *"It's really boring but we spent pretty much all our time at work"* (YouMagazine, 2022). Even weekends fall within the strict rules of hard labour: *"We have a Sunday night ritual of working for a few hours and clearing out the inbox or writing a blog post while watching X-Factor"* (Millington, 2016)*.*

Mills's views on merit and hard work contrast interestingly with those of Professor Jo Littler, who in her book *Against Meritocracy: Culture, power and myths of mobility* (Littler, 2018) provides a different perspective on current invocations of meritocracy. According to Littler, the idea of meritocracy, despite its deep historical roots, has become a tool whereby wealthy elites reproduce themselves. It also provides a significant ideological justification for the neoliberal culture in the Global North through the articulation of a discourse proclaiming that there are nowadays more than ever equal opportunities for everyone, as long as individuals outperform themselves, by trying enough and working hard (Littler, 2018). Various stakeholders in high positions of political and/or economic power provide constant reassurance that if individuals try hard enough (no matter how generic that sounds, since 'enough' can always be a subjective value depending on who is judging the effort) they can achieve their goals. Race, social class, and gender are not controlling factors for success. If one *really* wants to succeed, then they must believe in themselves, in their skills and talents and work hard. Mills is a perfect mouthpiece of such a view when she says that what is

needed is to "put yourself out there" (E. Mills, 2018a): *"I definitely believe that if you don't put yourself out there and challenge yourself to move out of your comfort zone every day, you will never get to where you want to be"* (E. Mills, 2018a: 26)

Perhaps the most important moment of ERA3 that also reflects the shift of the Deliciously Ella brand towards the UK food retail industry is when Mills announces the launch of her first food product into the UK grocery market: Deliciously Ella's Energy Balls. These are a gluten, dairy, and refined sugar-free snack in a colourful, luxurious and fully compostable packaging. The snack is based on one of the most popular recipes from the Deliciously Ella blog (Selwood, 2016). The visual focus on products such as energy balls clearly indicates that in ERA3 the Deliciously Ella Instagram account is centrally concerned with the successful marketisation of the brand's products, which take centre stage.

Image No 6.5: Ella and Matthew Mills launch their first Deliciously Ella product: energy balls (Instagram Post 1-8-2016)
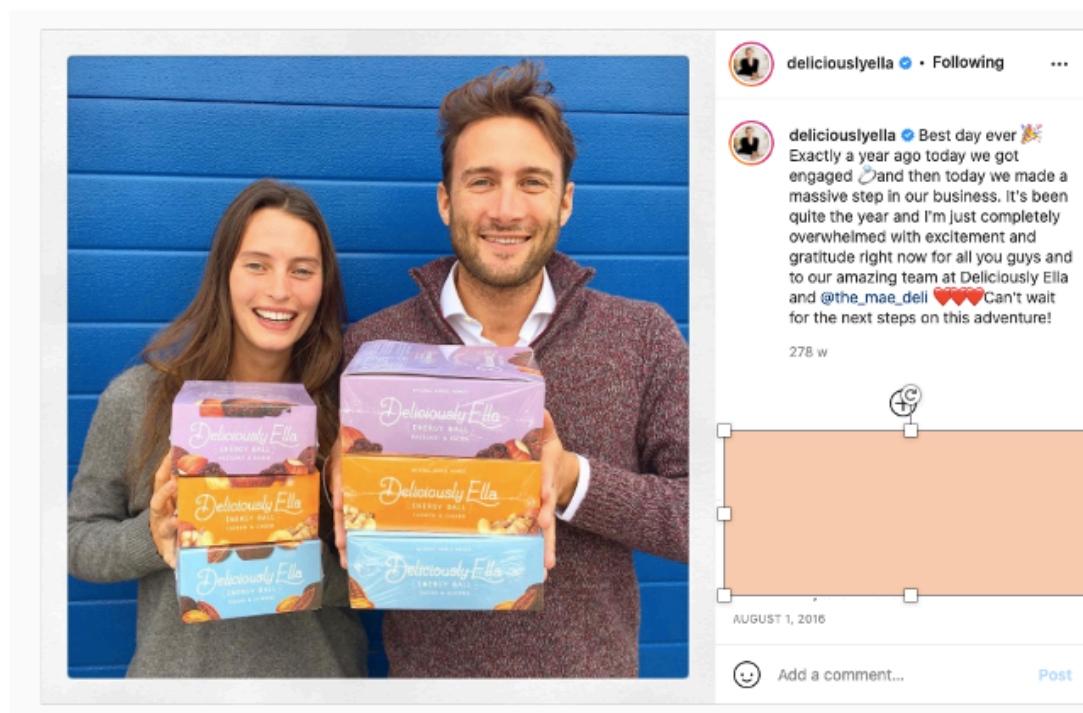
ERA3 ends with a very simple image of breakfast bars (the post was shown earlier in image No 6.2). Still, the simplicity of the depicted food contrasts with the caption of the post, which focuses on Mills's busy and demanding professional and personal life.

Using a classical marketing trope, Mills says that the recipe for the bars will be made available in her forthcoming book. The content of the post promises in no uncertain terms that more books, more products, more deli restaurants, and more events will follow. Overall, during ERA3 the commercialization and commodification project takes off in a striking way. Mills calls the trajectory that begins with amateur blogging and evolves into commercial fame and success the Deliciously Ella 'adventure'.

6.1.2 The image and the message: The entrepreneurial energy of the energy balls

ERA3 brings food back to the centre of attention, with 120 images (and relevant Instagram posts) depicting food out of the total sample of 210. One of the most important events of the period, as I have already shown in section 2.1, is the launch of Deliciously Ella energy balls. Accordingly, properly presenting this new product matters for commercial success. Understandably, images of food (and drinks) increase to 57.1%, while Mills's images (alone or accompanied) are reduced to 25.2% (see Table 6.2 in the next page). Energy balls (or energy bites as Mills initially called them during the early days of her blog and in her first book) are round-shaped small snacks made of nuts, seeds, medjool dates, spices, coconut oil and cacao powder, all mashed and blended in a sticky humid paste that is then shaped and frozen to stay firm. Because their ingredients were high in protein and nutritional value, Mills used to call them 'energy balls', claiming that they helped her boost her low energy levels while she was trying to overcome her health issues. She used many variations of ingredients combinations to make them, always stating how easy and quick they are to prepare. However, her most popular recipe has been the 'cacao and almond energy balls', which was the inspiration behind the launch of her first product (E. Mills, 2017a). Because of their simplicity, "just five simple ingredients" as Mills proclaims, an authentic story backing them up (Mills's health issues), their pioneering and innovative character as a snack packed with nutritious ingredients, and their premium character (as I will discuss in later sections), energy balls carry a certain 'elite authenticity' (Mapes, 2018) which has made them a signature product for Mills.

Table No 6.2: ERA3 Deliciously Ella Instagram Image Themes

ERA3: INSTAGRAM IMAGE THEMES	NO OF INSTA IMAGES	%
FOOD AND/OR DRINK	120	57.1
MILLS	53	25.2
OTHER	37	17.6
TOTAL	**210**	**100**
IMAGE THEME BREAKDOWN FOOD AND/OR DRINK	**NO OF IMAGES**	**%**
Food	104	86.7
Drink	10	8.3
Food&Drink	6	5.0
TOTAL	**120**	**100**
IMAGE THEME BREAKDOWN MILLS	**NO OF IMAGES**	**%**
Ella and Matthew Mills	8	15.1
Mills alone	5	9.4
Deliciously Ella Food Products	5	9.4
Austin	5	9.4
The Mae Deli	4	7.5
Mills and Austin	3	5.7
Mills and Food	3	5.7
Ella and Matthew Mills, Austin	3	5.7
Deliciously Ella Books	3	5.7
Mills and Animals	2	3.8
Mills and Deliciously Ella Books	2	3.8
Mills and Frieds	2	3.8
Mills and Deliciously Ella Food Products	1	1.9
Mills and Work Colleagues	1	1.9
Mills Friends and Food	1	1.9
Mills, Animals and Food	1	1.9
Ella and Matthew Mills and DE Products	1	1.9
Mills's Accessories	1	1.9
Deliciously Ella App	1	1.9
Matthew Mills alone	1	1.9
TOTAL ELLA WOOWARD MILLS	**53**	**100**
IMAGE THEME BREAKDOWN OTHER	**NO OF IMAGES**	**%**
Inspirational Quotes	13	35.1
Landscapes/Nature	9	24.3
Text Images	4	10.8
Flowers	3	8.1
Interiors	3	8.1
Cityscapes	2	5.4
Voting IN Europe	1	2.7
Objects (A book)	1	2.7
Various branded products	1	2.7
TOTAL OTHER	**37**	**100**

Mills announced the launch of her first product to her audience in an emotional Instagram video on June 29, 2016. Deliciously Ella's Instagram videos are not part of my visual dataset. Still, in this instance I made an exception, using this screengrab of the announcement video to mainly focus on the Instagram caption of the announcement itself. An enthusiastic Mills says that she is "SO" excited to be able to *"finally"* (emphasis added) share the news with her followers. Moreover, she claims

that it has been *"so hard not to tell you all about this"* (See Video Screengrab No 6.1 in the next page). By expressing feelings of restrain, and against her own will (as she implies), Mills enhances the personal bond that she had forged with her followers since the early days of her blogging activities, when she used to share details of her personal health issues. True to form, Mills does not want to keep such exciting news from her followers, but for some unexplained reason she must. Still, nobody should think that this decision was easy for her: on the contrary, it was extremely hard.

Video Screengrab No 6.1: Mills announces her energy ball launch plans to her audience (Instagram Video Post 29-6-2016)
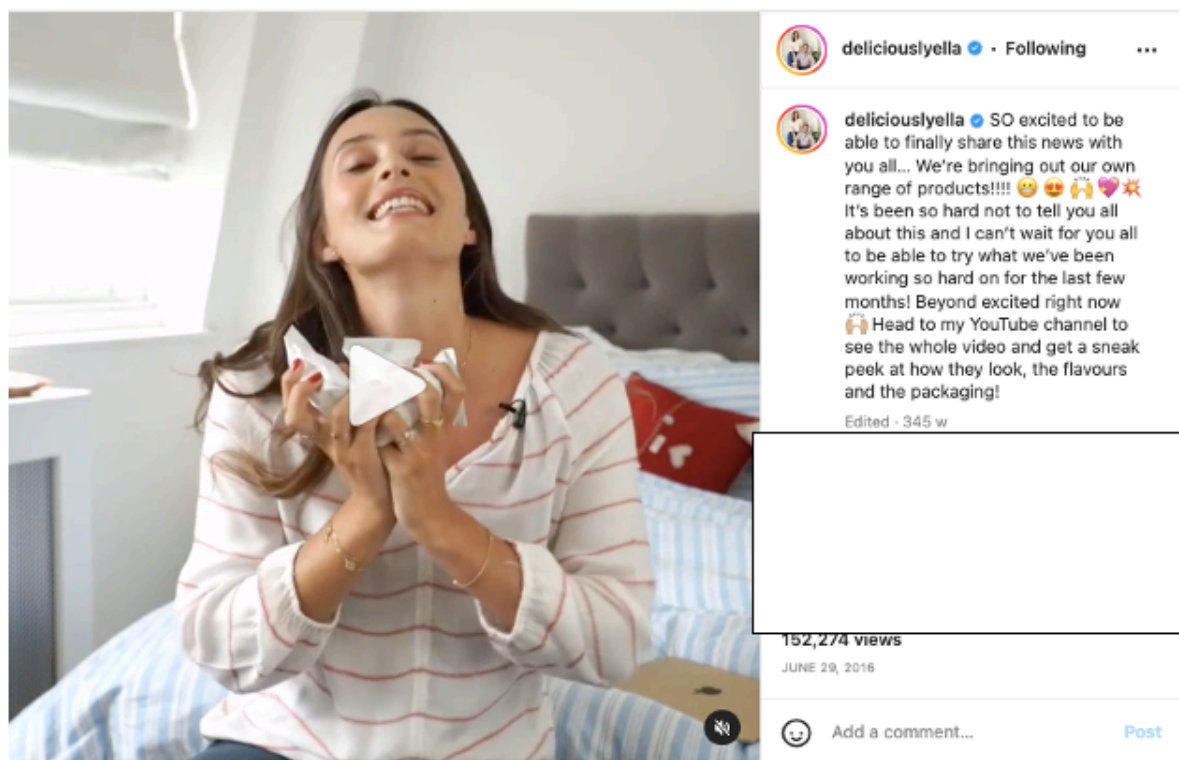
The selection of a more personal tone is not accidental here. Mills must "gain and maintain" (Page, 2012) her audience's attention. The fact that she has been trying to hide the big news from *"you all"* also implies a feeling of guilt. Non-disclosure is something she should not be doing, because the bond between Mills and her audience ("you all") is based on sharing everything. Indeed, the idea of a community of persons sharing things, with Mills serving as a mediator, has always been a leitmotiv in her books. From the very first book that Mills wrote, in which she shared all the

experiences of her personal health journey with her followers because she knew *"how daunting healthy food can be"*, wanting *"to make it easy"* for them (Woodward, 2015a: 9), to a very recent post on Instagram (19-1-2023) where she announced that Deliciously Ella products are now available in European super markets, attributing this huge success to the Deliciously Ella's followers community (E. Mills, 2023). This community is usually described as the principal reason of existence of Mills's business. On the other hand, Mills continuously downplays any kind of intentional and well-planned commercial goals (O'Neill, 2020a).

As Mills herself has claimed numerous times in various media interviews or in her books over time (Goodwin, 2016; E. Mills, 2017b, 2018a; Rumbelow, 2017), commercial success and profit has never been Mills's main driver for developing the Deliciously Ella brand. Indeed, Mills said that she had no idea about business: *"I will never forget talking to Matt when we first started working together. He was asking me relatively basic questions about my business and I just stared blankly back at him as if he was talking a foreign language"* (E. Mills, 2018a: 26). Apart from her personal health journey, it was mainly that *"collective feeling"* that drove Mills's ambitions to become *"part of the fast-growing movement celebrating plant-based living"* as *"it's the community that shapes and guides the way we think, what we work on and ultimately help us define our wider goals"* (E. Mills, 2018a).

Recent social media research shows that the development of so-called parasocial interactions between celebrities and consumers has fully migrated from mainstream/traditional media to social media. Accordingly, celebrities and micro-celebrities create, maintain and establish particularly close relationships with their followers (Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Cocker et al., 2021; Hoffner & Bond, 2022; M. Kim & Kim, 2020; Pradhan et al., 2016; Um, 2022). The environment where direct and real-time interaction between users can take place and where a social media user can start a dialogue with their favourite celebrity, irrespective of whether the celebrity's account is managed by a communication team, builds expectations of conversational engagement (Giles, 2017; Stever & Lawson, 2013). Additionally, social media offer an excellent platform where online communities can expand and grow stronger, very

often resulting in significant activist action, grassroots politics or movements for social change (Bruns et al., 2013; R. K. Gibson, 2015; Ince et al., 2017; Mattoni et al., 2020; Mundt et al., 2018; Storer & Rodriguez, 2020; Turley & Fisher, 2018; Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). However, this online community platform activity has not gone unnoticed from commercial brands and businesses who use social media for their own promotional purposes. These either mobilize celebrities to endorse and promote products and services to their own online communities, or engage on marketing techniques such as relationship marketing or sponsored content creation and co-branding synergies (Dessart et al., 2015; Jibril et al., 2019; Kaur et al., 2018; Wong, 2023). My own professional experience with numerous multinational brands especially on various social media platforms indicates that online engagement, as well as followers' loyalty and interaction through community building and maintenance, are among the most sought-after business goals for any brand that desires to become successful and profitable. Despite Mills's claims that the development of the Deliciously Ella brand and the growth of her entrepreneurial attempts have never been intentional or strategically planned, there is no doubt that a strong online community consisting of loyal followers and fans creates a solid ground for a prospective customer base. The fact that Mills never ceases to mention how important her online community is and what kind of fruitful contribution it has made to the Deliciously Ella project is laudable. At the same time, it is a significant marketing technique; even if the act of thanking the community expresses authentic feelings of gratefulness, it has also undoubtedly been an immense help to the profit-making of the company.

Returning to the energy balls theme, as expected, energy balls are on the top of the list below, which gives a quantitative overview of the kinds of food/drink that were depicted in the images comprising the ERA3 dataset.

Table No 6.3: ERA3, Top 10 kinds of Food/Drink depicted on the Deliciously Ella Instagram account.

Rank	ERA3: Kind of food/drink depicted (TOP 10)	No of instances	%
1	Energy balls	13	10.1
2	Cakes	9	7.0
3	Porridge	8	6.2
4	Pasta	7	5.4
5	Smoothie	6	4.7
6	Variety of dishes	6	4.7
7	Avocado on toast	4	3.1
8	Granola	4	3.1
9	Rice with vegetables	4	3.1
10	Vegetables and pulses salad	4	3.1
	REMAINING CATEGORIES	*64*	*49.6*
	TOTAL	**129**	**100.0**

Despite energy balls' frequency among ERA3's visuals, the fact that their ingredients are blended all together (hence, not individually visible) brings other kind of ingredients towards the top 10 list:

Table No 6.4: ERA2, Top 10 kinds of Ingredients depicted on the Deliciously Ella Instagram account.

Rank	ERA3: Kind of ingredients depicted (TOP 10)	No of instances	%
1	**spinach**	**14**	3.8
2	**sweet potatoes**	**13**	3.5
3	**avocado**	**12**	3.2
4	**beans**	**12**	3.2
5	**tomatoes**	**12**	3.2
6	**coconut**	**11**	2.9
7	**almond butter**	**8**	2.1
8	**chocolate**	**8**	2.1
9	**honey**	**8**	2.1
10	**oats**	**8**	2.1
	REMAINING CATEGORIES	*267*	*71.6*
	TOTAL	**373**	**100**

6.1.3 The image and the message: Compositional Interpretation

This is the first Instagram image indicating that Mills is now wed to Matthew Mills. As previously discussed, the wedding took place in the island of Mustique on 23 April 2016, at the Hummingbird villa owned by Mills's family, recently put on the market for £22 million (Hind, 2019). Al already explained previously, Mills has been often visiting

the island, sharing various photos from the tropical surroundings and peaceful settings since the early days of her Instagram profile.

This first wedding photo displayed on Mills's Instagram profile is important because it shares with a wide audience a very intimate moment of Mills's personal life. Mills has mentioned many times that she is a private person and an introvert (E. Mills, 2018c). In this vein, mainstream media coverage of the wedding reported at the time that the guest list was 'moderate' because the couple wanted a 'low key' wedding. In Mills's words *"we've invited ten friends and their partners each. We couldn't do more because we want to keep it small"* (Hello, 2016). Still, this private event was utilised as a tool for the Deliciously Ella brand's communication strategy, in line with Mills consistently using personal life images to amplify her brand's online content.

Image No 6.7: Mills's trainers displaying her husband's surname (Instagram post of 24-4-2016)

Compositional Interpretation

Point 1 Content: The image depicts a pair of fuchsia trainers (with a tiny zebra-like pattern detail) standing on a step of a marble staircase. The shoes belong to the newlywed Mills, who adopted her husband's family name. The left shoe displays the prefix 'Mrs.' and the right show the surname 'Mills'. Details of the trainers' brand are not visible.

Point 2 Colour: The photo seems to be taken with a mobile phone camera. The fuchsia of the trainers dominates the image without any additional colouring enhancements.

Point 3 Light: The photo feels as if it has been taken in broad day light. Perhaps this is because of the contrast between the intense fuchsia colour of the shoes and the light beige colour of the staircase they are standing on.

Point 4 Spatial organization: The focus of the image is solely on the shoes. The photo is taken from a straight-on angle: the photographer shot it at the same eye level with the centre of the object of the photo. Straight-on angles are used in photography to help viewers of the photo connect more quickly with the image's central theme (Kraft, 1987)

Point 5 Expressive Content: This image is not the classic wedding photo of the happy and smiling newlyweds. Still, the association with the wedding is straightforward while the caption implies a kind of achievement: "We did it". The shoes present Mills's new surname, Mrs. Mills as per her husband. There are various elements worth mentioning here, starting from the selection of Mrs. (a prefix commonly used to refer to any married woman) to the selection of taking one's spouse name (usually women use their husband's family name). The image conveys a 'relaxed' style, since the shoes selected are trainers, instead, for example, of a pair of high heels. Moreover, the pink colour of the trainers is widely – by the mainstream media and general public - associated with girls (Paoletti, 2012). Overall, the image conveys mainstream messages of femininity, whilst communicating a more relaxed approach to life. At the same time, it reminds of more traditional practices - that do not necessarily comply with the image of a modern young female entrepreneur - such as the adaptation of Mills's husband surname is.

6.2   Famous words: The Deliciously Ella popular wisdom

A compelling category of visuals in ERA3 is the 'Quotes' category. Posts containing inspirational texts, conveying a sense of positivity and advice on how to lead a happier and healthier life are among Mills's favourite kinds of posts. All eras contain such posts. The relevant texts (or 'quotes', as they are called in social media vernacular) are usually followed by a lengthy caption written by Mills. Compared to the other eras, ERA3 displays 14 such posts, whereas ERA1 displays 4, ERA2 only 1 and ERA4 7. ERA3 posts mainly focus on the power of positive thinking and the personal choice of happiness to reach personal and/or professional goals. The captions following the

posts usually contain information about Mills's personal thoughts about life as well as her own advice on reaching success.

Over the last years research on social media has shed more light on how the use of distinctively 'motivational' or 'inspirational' content on various social media channels is leveraged to promote social connections by articulating discourses of personal elevation, well-being, inner beauty and human prosperity (Dale et al., 2020). Although many scholars have investigated such content in relation to the movie industry (Rieger & Klimmt, 2019), inspirational and meaningful content is not only found in conventional media. Indeed, it can now be traced in online and social media, especially after the drastic changes that occurred in the media landscape over the last decade (Dale et al., 2017; M.B. Oliver et al., 2016). Extant research shows that many users turn to social media for the creation and/or consumption of eudemonic and 'uplifting' content. Such content, moreover, grows in popularity as it is disseminated to large volumes of audiences through the networks of social media users that have many online connections (friends) to share it with.

With respect to the content itself, entertainment theory scholars have distinguished between a 'hedonic' style of entertainment consumption and a 'eudemonic' one (Rieger & Klimmt, 2019). The first style is conceptually connected to pleasure and amusement. The second style is conceptually associated with various aspects of an eudemonic well-being, such as meaningfulness, inspiration, moral beauty and virtue (Rieger & Klimmt, 2019). Indeed, the idea of meaningfulness has been related to the concept of self-transcendence and, more particularly, to the idea of a personal elevation or even a deeper transformation of the self. Users are invited to explore their ability to behave in morally virtuous ways, to act kindly, to become better persons (along several different dimensions), or even to submit to self-sacrifice for a greater and nobler cause (Dale et al., 2020). The aim in every case is for users to abandon their mundane, everyday reality concerns and to focus on their relations with other people, by forming a community with shared interests in more important human causes (Rieger & Klimmt, 2019). In this vein, social media became a field in which people can create, share, and consume their "daily doses of inspiration" (as per

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various popular Facebook and Instagram Pages). These inspiration-doses usually take the form of memes, quotes, videos, among many other textual and/or visual elements of content (Vorderer et al., 2017). In the case of Deliciously Ella, the use of inspirational quotes is designed to prompt a practice of a 'positive' thinking about life and the 'choice' of happiness and success.

Image Collection No 6.1: Deliciously Ella Instagram Quotes during ERA3
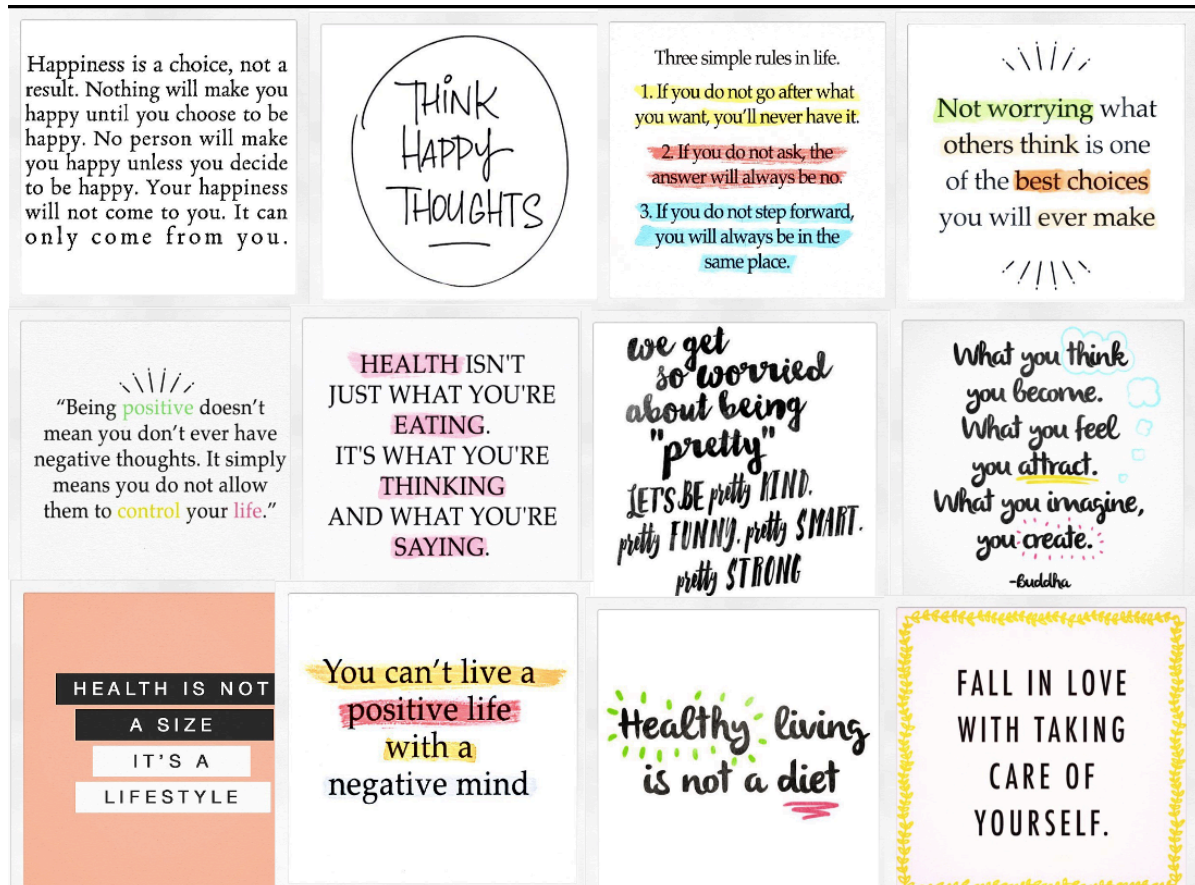
Inspirational content such as that depicted above appears quite frequently across all social media platforms, where positive affirmations, motivational short texts or speeches and/or touching personal stories and videos can be very popular (Dale et al., 2020). Such content often has a certain positive effect on users, with more than 50% of all American adults reporting having been motivated by content they saw on social media, with the percentage of younger adults being even higher at 67.3% (Raney et al., 2018). Academic research on the effects of inspirational (social) media content to users is growing. Recently, some scholars have focused more on what they call a 'self-transcendent media experience' (Mary Beth Oliver et al., 2018). This type

of experience is based, according to Oliver et al. (2018), on feelings of connectedness, shared humanity, moral virtue, courage and inner strength. Users recognise in themselves these moral sentiments and urge others to shift their focus from everyday routines and trivial issues to a deeper level of consciousness, comprising interconnectedness with other people, positive feelings of determination and hope and, thus, to higher causes in life.

Mills partakes of that wider trend. She has often expressed in interviews, social media posts or in her books that she views herself as a wheel of change in other people's lives, as regards healthy eating and the promotion of a plant-based lifestyle. She also takes pride in being widely recognised as such. Mills has said that she is "enormously humbled" to have been credited as the "trailblazer in the health revolution" (E. Mills, 2020). This statement, despite its vagueness, since she does not mention who credited her and which health revolution she refers to, clearly reflects Mills's intention to play a transformative part in the UK foodscape as well as in people's lives. Statements such as the one quoted above have been used consistently across time. Similar assertions were made in her first book in 2015, during the first years of success: *"It's amazing knowing that Deliciously Ella has made a difference to your life and helped you on your own journeys to health and happiness"* (Woodward, 2015a). Deliciously Ella blog posts from 2012 also reveal Mills's intention to position herself as an agent of positive change and interconnectedness with other people, as this extract from the 'About' page of her blog in July 2012 illustrates: *"Through my health adventure I've learnt more than I could possibly have imagined, and I want to share all of this incredible information with you. It's also my way of turning something seemingly negative into something really positive. If I can spread any happiness and health with anyone then this counts as a success!"* (Woodward, 2012b).

Moreover, Mills' discourse adds a further dimension to these happy and positive words: the idea that success in life is a personal choice. *"If you do not go after what you want, you will never have it"* she claims on her Instagram post of 15 April 2016 (see image below):

Image No 6.8: Inspirational Quote by Deliciously Ella (Instagram Post 15-4-2016)
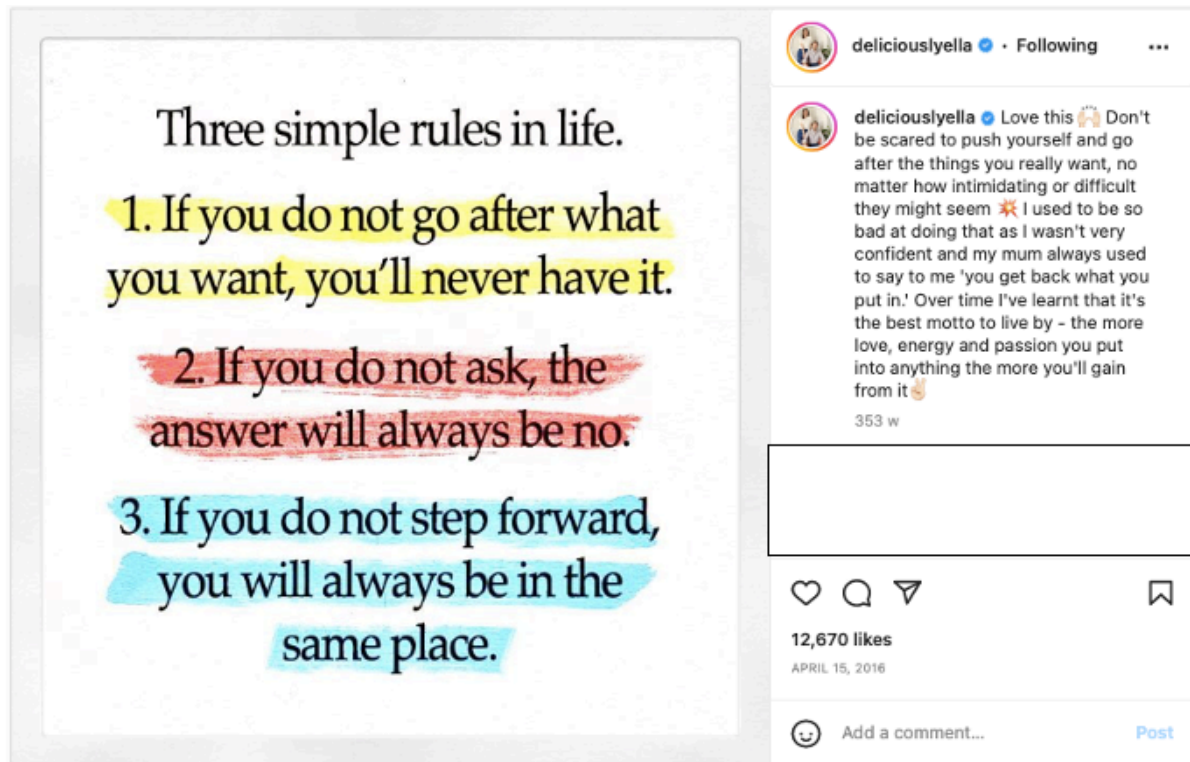
According to Mills, there are three 'simple' rules in life and one of them is to go after what you want, so that you can have it. Indeed, *"the more love, energy and passion you put into anything, the more you'll gain from it"*, as she declares in the caption of her Instagram post shown above. The word 'passion' is of particular significance here. It implies that Mills's success was mainly due to her being passionate about her work and obviously very dedicated to it. Passion about one's work is a recurring theme in Mills's books as well as in her Instagram posts until recently. In one of her latest Instagram posts for example (20 January 2023), where she talks about the availability of the Deliciously Ella brand in various European supermarkets, Mills once more insists that her great success can be mainly attributed to the "deep passion" she once decided to pursue:

"It's been the ultimate lesson in both believing in yourself and trusting others, while pursuing a deep passion, even when everyone thinks you're mad in the early days."

Image No 6.9: Mills discusses the success of the Deliciously Ella brand after her products become available to many European supermarkets (Instagram post 20-1-2023)

Indeed, this concept of being passionate about one's work is what Angela McRobbie places within the context of a (mainly) gendered and emerging 'creativity dispositif' that requires young individuals – predominantly female – to follow their dreams and work on projects about which they are passionate (McRobbie, 2018). In her earlier work, McRobbie explains how this passion for work, that is especially related to the enthusiastic nature of young individuals, has been exploited by governments to develop a positive attitude towards a (neoliberal) economic world, which heavily relies on self-entrepreneurial abilities, on expanding one's creative abilities and on working overtime to follow one's passion, while social security and welfare provisions, both major elements of the post-World War II social contract between capital and labour, are fading away (McRobbie, 2015). Under the banner of passion, individuals who operate within the areas of new culture industries, such as social media, are not only urged to *be* entrepreneurial, but also to *become* entrepreneurs (O'Neil, 2022).

Yet, as I have already discussed in chapter 4, entrepreneurial attempts do not always lead to success and they certainly require much more than passion to achieve appropriate results. Moreover, the decision to go after what one wants is not as 'simple' as Mills claims. In fact, academic research shows that in many cases the transition to a successful entrepreneurial trajectory takes a long time, during which individuals must either maintain their day jobs, receive financially support by their partners or make lifestyle sacrifices, among other things (O'Neil, 2022). Moreover, as I show in the next section on enrichment, successful commercialization of narratively enhanced goods and services requires possession of significant amounts of economic, cultural, and social capital. Thus, Mills 's inspirational discourse, as it purports to explain her success, is at the same time a simplification and a justification of a much more complex, demanding, and uncertain process. By reproducing familiar tropes, it inscribes itself in a shared dominant discourse, which attributes success and failure to individual capacities, aptitudes and mental dispositions and feelings.

6.3 Enrichment and goodness

Mills's entrepreneurial success has been the central theme of this chapter. One important question that can be posed at this point is how to make sense of it. As we have seen in chapter 2, a full explanation will have to seriously consider several important and interlocking factors. These include class/distinction, which accounts for the availability of economic and cultural capital and gender, which accounts for both the division of labour between the Mills couple and Ella Mills's success in a traditionally gendered activity such as cooking. Moreover, as I have explained in chapter 3, the gender dimension is not explored in the context of the present thesis. This section will tackle the issue from the perspective of Boltanski and Esquerre's enrichment framework on commodification practices in late capitalism. We should recall at this point that the entrepreneurial dimension was present from ERA 1. In fact, it was during this period that the popularity of Mills's blog was used to initially launch a Deliciously Ella app in February 2014. The entrepreneurial trajectory then accelerated considerably in ERA 2, when Mills's first cookbook was published and became a UK best-seller. ERA3 was simply the moment when this process gained considerable traction and was intensified in several respects. Thus, one central aspect of the

evolution across time of Mills's social media persona is that the originally amateurish food blog gradually transformed itself into a lucrative business, ultimately through the successful commodification of a range of food products and the opening of a deli restaurant in London in the end of 2015 in ERA 3. By the end of ERA 3, Mills has become a successful entrepreneur and has accomplished the project of generating income and profits from her overall social media presence.

Before proceeding to the analysis of some examples from the dataset that can be illuminated by using Boltanski and Esquerre's enrichment framework, it could be useful to recall some main points about this framework from chapters 2 and 3. The core idea behind the analysis of enrichment practices in late capitalism is that social actors can negotiate higher than usual prices for premium goods by accompanying these goods with structured narratives. The narratives are aimed at transforming (in the eyes of others) the nature of the goods in question. Thus, enriched goods can stand out and gain a comparative advantage vis-a-vis standard mass-produced goods. Boltanski and Esquerre place emphasis on several patterns of arguments that they call 'forms of commodification': the standard form, the collection form, and the trend form. In the literature review chapter, I argued that, while the general idea that Boltanski and Esquerre rely on, i.e., the fact that actors accompany goods with narratives to enrich the former and thus justify selling them at premium prices, the framework should be enriched to account for cases such as Mills's, which rely on the goods' 'goodness'. Commodification narratives themselves can be successful at varying degrees. Their articulation depends on the possession of high amounts of cultural capital on the part of both the buyer (who produces the narrative) and the seller (who confirms it). Last, the narrative specificity of the products that Mills produces and marketizes points to some unobservable quality (goodness/wellness) that these products possess. This quality makes her products stand out. Recognising the 'goodness' of the products binds together persons as members of a community that treat each other as sharing that same subjective experience.

6.4 Mills's premium products

I shall begin my analysis simply by substantiating the claim that Mills's products are indeed premium and, hence, that they are mainly addressed at actors who can, in Bourdieusian terms, be characterised as members of the dominant class (in the sense of possession of economic and/or cultural capital). Consider the prices of the prepared meals at the Mae Deli in London. These cost £7.5-12 for starters, £15.5-17 for main courses, £10.5-12 for desserts, as the menu at the Mae Deli in Mayfair London shows (E. Mills, 2022i). Similar considerations apply to other Deliciously Ella products based on a quick look, in May 2022, at the UK grocery market. I conducted a search on Tesco's website. Tesco was selected because of its super market share (which at the time placed it at No1 among UK food retailers - Blazquez, 2021). The search showed that the Deliciously Ella Granola figures among the most expensive granola products (£0.95 per 100gr / £3.80 per pack of 400gr) as Image No 6.7 shows below:

Image No 6.10: Tesco.co.uk online search for Deliciously Ella granola products, 15 January 2023
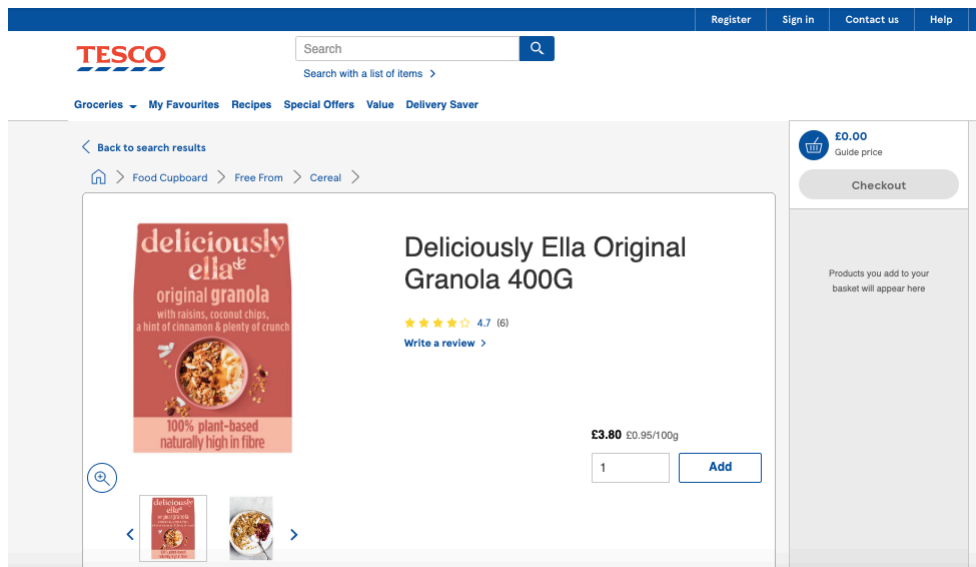
At the same time, the lowest prices in private labels such as Tesco Fruit and Nut granola can reach even £0.20 per 100gr or £2 per pack of 1 kg:

Image No 6.11: Tesco.co.uk online search for private label granola products, 15 January 2023
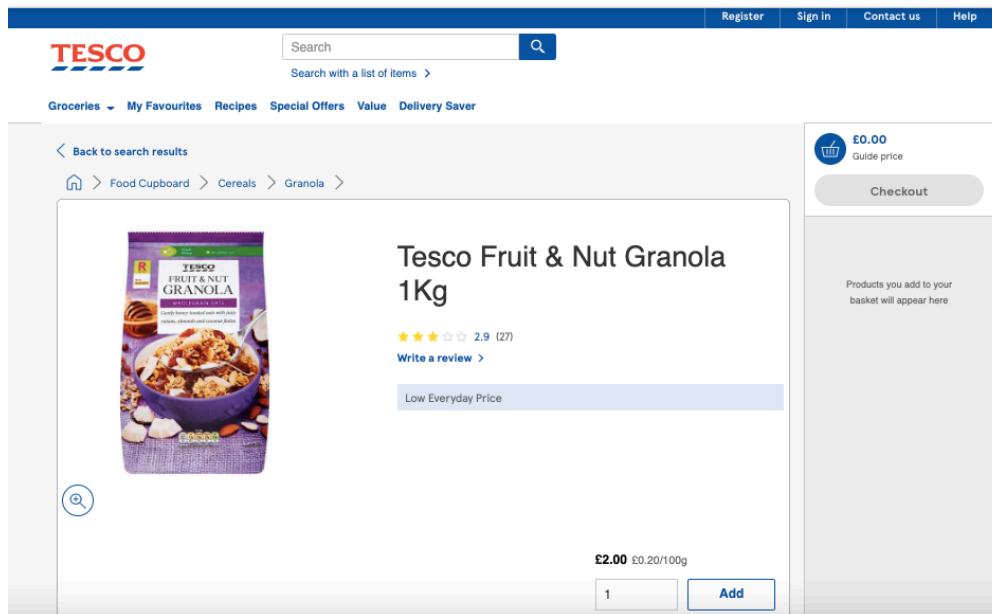
The Deliciously Ella granola example is hardly isolated. In fact, the pattern of pricing products highly generalises to all the other Deliciously Ella products, as can be shown from numerous other examples. Clearly, then, the products that Mills marketizes are premium in the specific sense that they are sold at higher prices than roughly comparable products. Such goods allow the seller to win higher profits than she would have under 'standard' (i.e., non-special) versions of the same kinds of food.

6.5   Mills's core narrative: The transformative property of goodness

The key to understanding the success of Mills's marketisation practices is to unpack the distinctive textual and visual narrative that accompanies these practices. At the very core of that narrative, since the early days of Mills's blog and her first book, is the quality of goodness. Moreover, the vague but constant references that Mills makes to the community that upholds this narrative and believes in the special value of her products (E. Mills, 2018a) seems to provide a further social confirmation of these narratives themselves. We thus have two different elements of narrative that come together. On the one hand, goodness of plant-based food stands out as a dominant theme. On the other hand, the Deliciously Ella community is rhetorically forged as a community of believers in the goodness theme. In what follows, I shall take up these two elements in turn.

Beginning with goodness, it is important to stress that relevant narratives appear since Mills's first book. In fact, the book contains a special section entitled 'A World of Goodness'. One could legitimately ask: what exactly is the goodness that is supposed to be contained in plant-based food? In the book, Mills does not provide a positive definition of characterisation. She simply implies things, and her overall view can only be loosely reconstructed based on remarks that Mills makes at other points. The implications allow the association of the idea of goodness with other ideas. Some of them are positive. Thus, plant-based food is deemed to be 'healing' (Woodward, 2015: 29), since it presumably was causally efficient in healing Mills from the health condition that she was suffering from. More generally, Mills associates plant-based food with health (Woodward, 2015: 29), even though she also makes clear that goodness does not reduce to healthy food. Other positive connotations include 'deliciousness' (Woodward, 2015: 30) and artisanal values such as 'making things from scratch' (Woodward, 2015: 39). On the other hand, some associations are negative. Thus, for example, Mills claims that the goodness of plant-based eating is not to be understood in terms of a form of diet or calories-counting ('the Deliciously Ella lifestyle is about counting goodness not calories' – Woodward, 2015: 31). Importantly, it is also emphatically *not* a commitment to an ethically demanding outlook such as veganism (Woodward, 2015: 30). Consequently, Mills explains that:

"I promise you that I absolutely haven't written this with the intention of converting you all to veganism. I'm not a huge fan of the word vegan anyway, as you can also be a very unhealthy vegan. Instead I'm all about whole, natural foods that nourish your body." (Woodward, 2015: 32)

At other points, Mills associates the goodness of plant-based food to the 'miracle' that led to the disappearance of the symptoms of her illness and to a feeling of 'glow inside out' (Woodward, 2015: 31). Goodness is a mysterious, non-observable, quality that plant-based food somehow possesses. The quality can make people healthy, but it is not itself reducible to health, nor is it possible to understand or measure goodness in quantitative terms. The reason why the trope of goodness is readily distinguished from

health, at least when one looks at the narrative from the point of view of argumentative constraints that can explain the arguments that actors use, should be clear. The concept of health, despite its relatively open-textured semantic attributes, can be intersubjectively tested. It is prone to analysis by scientific and medical experts, which, despite various disagreements due to the limitations of scientific studies on the effects of food, can arrive most of the time at a consensus as to what counts as healthy food and what does not. Thus, scientific experts are widely recognised epistemic authorities on whether plant-based food is healthy.

On the other hand, Mills plainly cannot claim expert credentials and in fact, as we have seen in the chapter on ERA1, she goes a long way in her books to explain that her conversion to plant-based eating was more of an existential reorientation amid an acute personal crisis than a choice well calculated in advance. Accordingly, Mills admits that she did not even know how to cook and had to learn everything from scratch, experimenting in various ways (Woodward, 2015: 30-33). Staking her discourse on health would have thus necessitated the collaboration with experts, something that Mills indeed did at a later stage in her trajectory (E. Mills, 2022e), but which could not have constituted a viable strategy from the get-go. Under these conditions, it is understandable that Mills instead chose to place emphasis on the unobservable and mysterious quality of goodness. Since goodness refers to personal subjective experiences, i.e., to the way that consuming plant-based food makes one feel, it cannot be immediately corroborated in an inter-subjective way. This is exactly, for example, the meaning of one of the tropes that Mills used in the excerpt from her first book quoted above, where she refers to the feeling of 'glow inside out'. Importantly, this kind of feeling, which is solely based on Mills's deeply personal experience, cannot be tested (or contested) in a straightforward way. One either feels that way or not and the presence of the subjective experience, which is accessible only from a first-personal viewpoint, is its own corroboration. The strategy that Mills adopts in her first book is thus to invite her readers and, more generally, her audience, to share in this experience. Moreover, as will be shown in much more detail in the chapter on ERAS1-4, the authenticity of her viewpoint also plays an important part in making her claim to having first-personally experienced goodness convincing.

Wellness, goodness, and happiness thus function as subjective tropes that are sustained by the aura of authenticity of the narrative itself. Still, this should not be understood to imply that goodness is the only quality of plant-based food that Mills insists upon. On the contrary, she also mobilises the more conventional trope of health and healthy food, which is also to be found numerous times in her first book (Woodward, 2015: 17, 25, 28, 44, 102, 155).

We are now able to grasp the main form of argument that Mills gives when it comes to justifying the premium prices at which she sells her various products. It is not just that these products are healthy. In addition to that, they also contain 'goodness', since they have been selected and prepared by someone whose personal experience attests to the presence of this quality. Hence, it is the goodness of the products that justifies their price. Narratives of goodness thus form the symbolic and cultural basis on which commodification practices are then developed. By the time Mills starts her own brand of food products, her first book was already a UK best-seller. Mills had thus secured that her audience, which was growing, was already comprising a significant amount of people that had made theirs the triple association between Mills's subjective experience, goodness, and the plant-based food that Mills was proposing. This association would then make possible, by the time the commodification project took off in ERA3, a distinctive form of marketisation: Mills's products (the kinds of food that she sells) and her services (provided at her delis) were not to be perceived as 'everyday' ones. These products and services are transformed through their association with the quality of goodness, with Mills's subjective authentic experience of it attesting to the quality's presence in the food. Plant-based food products that would otherwise be mundane are thus converted, through goodness narratives, into products possessing an unobservable quality that can only be experienced at a thoroughly subjective level. From the point of view of Boltanski and Esquerre's framework, this is thus a clear case of enrichment of these products. Some other, special, attribute supervenes on their plain qualities, which justifies the products' premium prices.

One more hypothesis could be proposed here. The use of goodness narratives since ERA 1 is fraught with a certain ambiguity. The discourse that Mills produces implies that all forms of plant-based food, especially the expensive fresh ingredients that she herself standardly uses, are bearers of goodness. However, the question then becomes one of asking why her followers and audience should buy Mills's own food as opposed to preparing their own from scratch, simply using her recipes. It goes without saying that there may be many reasons to make that choice, such as lack of time to properly prepare food or mere convenience. But there is also another way of interpreting the data, relying on the fact that Mills's person is brought to the foreground after ERA 2 when the commercialisation project really takes off. This suggests a strategy of close association of Mills's charismatic persona with the products she produces. Mills's approach corroborates this interpretation since she gradually made herself a central part of her social media account. Indeed, as I have shown, the account, from a certain point onwards, places almost equal emphasis on her as on the food itself. In a certain way, this leads to a kind of blending between her persona and the food. There is thus a sense in which the food becomes a central part of her existence and, to some extent, becomes indistinguishable from that existence.

By the same token, the need for a kind of intersubjective corroboration of the presence of the unobservable quality of goodness in the food sold could also explain the emphasis that is placed on the Deliciously Ella community (E. Mills, 2018a), which was showcased in previous sections. The tension to be navigated is that between a deeply personal experience, on which Mills's project rests, and its communicability to others, which is the only way in which any successful marketisation process can function. Accordingly, the experience must somehow be socially confirmed by other persons that also have similar experiences. The confirmation of the truthfulness of Mills's narrative thus requires a community of believers in the 'wellness' and 'goodness' of the sold food. In Mills's words: *"(…) we did it all without external investment, PR support or a marketing team – it was purely achieved through the direct connection with our readers. The support of that community means the world to us; we treasure it so much and taking care of it is always my number one priority."* (E. Mills, 2018a: 30). Moreover, Mills's marketisation project is also sensitive to various forms of critique.

The justification of the prices of her products is modified depending on changing circumstances. The prime example, in this respect, is provided by her reaction to the backlash against clean eating, discussed in detail in the next chapter. Mills's decision to distance herself from clean eating can be interpreted as an attempt to salvage the value of her products by pivoting between positive (wellness/goodness) and negative (clean eating) associations, once criticisms of clean eating took sufficient hold

6.6   Conclusion on ERA3

ERA3 was really the period when Mills's entrepreneurial project took off, leading to the gradual transformation of a best-selling and well-known wellness and plant-based social media guru into a national (and later international) brand. The chapter has focused on charting some important aspects of that transformation. Furthermore, it provided a framework for explaining Mills's entrepreneurial success. First, from a visual content perspective, the focus of the Deliciously Ella account during ERA3 is on food and, more specifically, on Mills's new products, with energy balls at the centre of attention. Still, the personal element is hardly absent, and it accompanies brand building. Second, the justification of the brand's success mobilises standard narratives of entrepreneurial practices in late capitalism. Mills uses tropes of hard work and themes of passion, together with inspirational quotes. These elements strongly imply that Mills merits her success. On the other hand, aspects which could potentially undercut this narrative, such as Mills's elite background, are systematically downplayed. Third, Mills enriches the products she marketizes by narratively endowing them with a special unobservable quality, goodness, the presence of which is corroborated by the inchoate community that Mills has forged with her followers. The narrative helps create a product that can be sold at premium prices and serves as a justification of that price. Overall, Mills's entrepreneurial practice is a characteristic example of the blending of discourses of justification of success together with the justification of premium prices under contemporary socio-economic and class conditions.

CHAPTER 7

ERA4: THE CLEAN EATING DENOUNCER

Overview

In this chapter I will present findings for the ERA4 dataset which comprises 278 images. My analysis begins with a summary of the context in which ERA4 unfolds. Charting it is important because the era is mainly characterised by the intense media scrutiny of the notion of clean eating. At the epicentre of this scrutiny is the broadcast by BBC2 of a Horizon documentary called "Clean Eating: The Dirty Truth" (Quinn, 2017). The documentary marks a turning point in Mills's discursive practices. Mills was one of the few wellness bloggers that was invited to talk. The question was whether she would stick to her preceding clean eating narrative. Her response was clear: she duly distanced herself from clean eating and denounced the term as 'fad' (Quinn, 2017). After a brief presentation of some top-line data of the era, I will critically discuss this distancing and I shall then proceed to analyse other important developments during ERA4. Finally, I will briefly present some key moments of Mills's professional life, along with a visual analysis of Instagram posts corresponding to these moments. These can be used as a chronological index for the reader, placing the findings and the discussion of ERA4 within a wider framework of unfolding events.

7.1 ERA4 – The Clean Eating Denouncer: Findings and Discussion

7.1.1 Milestone moments of ERA4

According to the convention this thesis adopts, ERA4 starts on the 19th of January 2017 and ends on the 24th of October 2018. The first Instagram post of the era marks a landmark moment, which I will discuss in detail in later sections of this chapter. In the post Mills denounced the term "clean eating". She also denied that she had relied heavily on it in the past.

Image No 7.1: Mills denouncing the 'clean-eating' term (Instagram Post 19-1-2017)
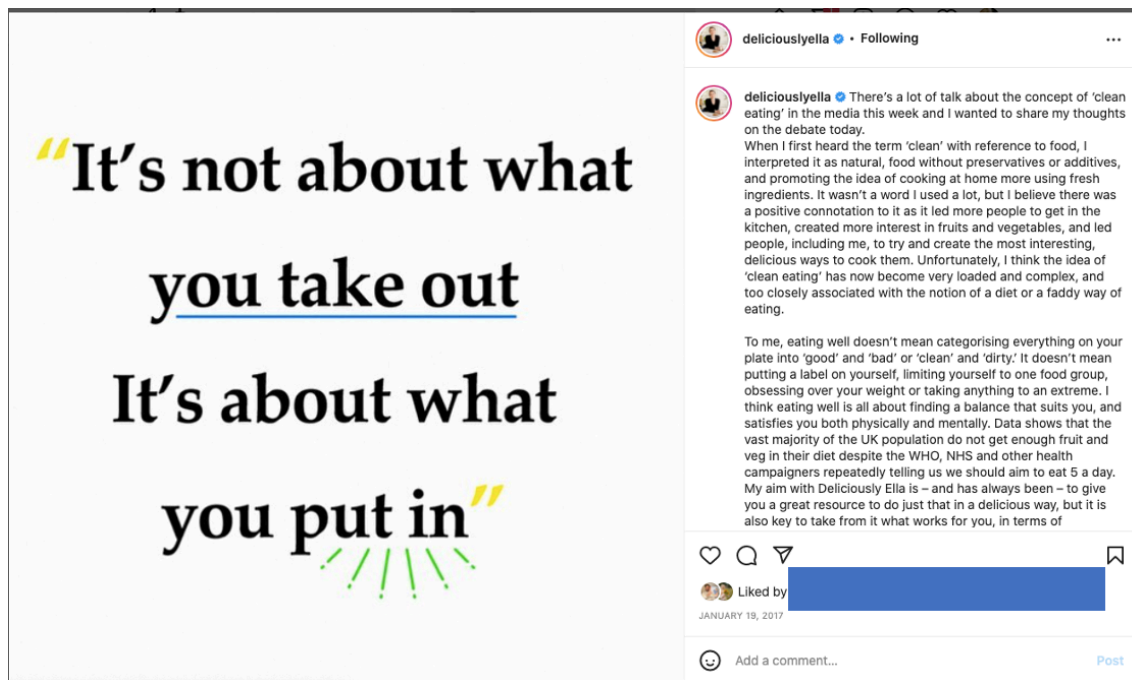
Apart from the clarification of her position on clean eating, ERA4 is also characterised by several other major events in Mills's professional life: 1) she launched a fourth new book; 2) she sold 2 million energy balls in the UK by July 2017; 3) she was awarded the 'Rising Star' award in Ernst and Young's entrepreneurs competition; 4) she launched two new products in the UK market (granola and oat bars); 5) she secured business deals with major UK super markets (Tesco's, Ocado, Waitrose, Whole Foods, Morrisons); 6) she announced a partnership with renown Italian clothing label Intimissimi and was photographed for the campaign by celebrity photograph Mario Testino; 7) she was forced to close down two of her delis (Seymour Place and Herne Hill) and she responded to media criticism regarding this decision and 8) she announced the release of her fifth book, which contained a detailed recount of her life and work trajectory so far, thus further recentring her narrative.

Table No 7.1: Selection of Deliciously Ella ERA4 Instagram milestone moments

SELECTION OF ERA 4 INSTAGRAM MILESTONE MOMENTS	DATE
First post of ERA4: Clean Eating backlash - revisiting the term	19-Jan-17
Book No4 launch	26-Jan-17
Announcement for Deli No3	07-Apr-17
Deli No3 opening	17-Apr-17
One year wedding anniversary	23-Apr-17
First product is launched at Boots UK	27-Jun-17
Rising Star award - Ernst&Young entrepreneurs	27-Jun-17
Sold 2.000.000 energy balls in the UK	07-Jul-17
Second product announcement - granola	17-Jul-17
Second product to launch at Waitrose, Ocado, Whole Foods	19-Jul-17
Cover page on Women's Health - bikini photo	04-Sep-17
Third product announcement at Tesco's - Oat bars	07-Sep-17
Announcing Intimissimi partnersip and Mario Testino	12-Sep-17
Third product official launch at Tesco's	15-Sep-17
Cover page on Women's Health - collectors' edition	16-Sep-17
Announcement of Mill's mother in law, Tessa Jewel's cancer - public	17-Sep-17
First and second product launch at Morrison's	15-Jan-18
Closing down business - Seymour Place (Mae Deli) and Herne Hill (Kitchen Counter)	06-Mar-18
Explaining about business closing down and media criticism	14-Mar-18
Book No5 announcement (personal story/brand story/recipes)	18-Mar-18
Five years anniversary of Deliciously Ella limited company	07-May-18
Book No5 cover revealed	08-May-18
Baroness Tessa Jewell (Mills's mother in law) dies	13-May-18
Last post of ERA 4: Started yoga training to become a yoga teacher	16-Jul-18

On the personal front, ERA4 is dominated by the announcement that Mills's mother-in-law, Baroness Tessa Jowell, was suffering from a brain tumour, which led to her death eight months later. On another personal note of different significance, the ERA ends with Mills's decision to take up special training to become a yoga teacher.

Image No 7.2: Mills decides to get training to become a yoga teacher (Instagram post 18-7-2018)

7.1.2 The image and the message: the clean eating backlash

Quick glance at some top-line data:

ERA4 comprises a sample of 278 Instagram images and subsequent posts. A quick look at them shows that 181 images are about food and/or drink (65.1%). 75 images focus on Mills (27%) and the rest 22 images (7.9%) contain various themes that Table No 7.2 presents below:

Table No 7.2: ERA4 Deliciously Ella Instagram Image Themes

ERA4: INSTAGRAM IMAGE THEMES	NO OF INSTA IMAGES	%
FOOD AND/OR DRINK	181	65.1
MILLS	75	27.0
OTHER	22	7.9
TOTAL	**278**	**100**

IMAGE THEME BREAKDOWN FOOD AND/OR DRINK	NO OF IMAGES	%
Food	167	92.3
Drink	8	4.4
Food&Drink	6	3.3
TOTAL	**181**	**100**

IMAGE THEME BREAKDOWN MILLS	NO OF IMAGES	%
Mills alone	24	32.0
Ella and Matthew Mills	16	21.3
Mills and food	5	6.7
Mills and (her) family	4	5.3
Mills and Austin	4	5.3
Ella ad Matthew Mills and food	3	4.0
Ella's Delis	3	4.0
Ella and Matthew Mills, Austin and food	2	2.7
Mills's cookbook (only)	2	2.7
Mills and her cookbook	1	1.3
Mills and other celebrities	1	1.3
Mills and colleagues	1	1.3
Mills and animals	1	1.3
Mills, friends and food	1	1.3
Ella and Matthew Mills and Austin	1	1.3
Deliciously Ella event promotion	1	1.3
Austin (Mills's dog)	5	6.7
TOTAL ELLA WOOWARD MILLS	**75**	**100**

IMAGE THEME BREAKDOWN OTHER	NO OF IMAGES	%
Landscapes and nature	7	31.8
Text with inspirational quotes	7	31.8
Intrerior spaces	5	22.7
Flower bouquets	2	9.1
Various branded cosmetics	1	4.5
TOTAL OTHER	**22**	**100**

The patterns of themes resemble those of ERA3. One fourth of the total sample visual dataset are images depicting Mills, the protagonist of the Deliciously Ella brand that has been playing a vital role in brand building since the launch of her blog. As previously discussed, scholarly research on marketing and management studies has shown that consumer attachment to celebrity brands is usually facilitated through personal narratives, that can create stronger bonds (Eng & Jarvis, 2020), which helps explain the selection of this theme. Indeed, as has been shown in this and previous chapters, the Deliciously Ella brand is a vivid actualization of a personal narrative, that has introduced consumers to the story of Mills's life and deeds and created a whole production line, and hence market value, through it.

In terms of various kinds of foods and ingredients depicted, once more there is no sophistication or complexity. In fact, one would expect that by this time, after 3 best-selling cookbooks, five years of food blogging, deli restaurant openings and successful food product launches in the UK market, Mills would have started elaborating a bit more on the sophistication of her recipes. This could have been so especially since part of her self-proclaimed mission has always been to transform simple things to something special by "adding a little magic to a carrot or a cucumber" (E. Mills, 2018a: 220). However, what the table No 7.2 shows below is that one of the most depicted foods of ERA4 is porridge. Mills has often mentioned in the past that breakfast is her favourite meal of the day, as it helps her body reach the best physical and emotional level (Woodward, 2016a). Once more, happiness enters the scene as Mills believes that eating a healthy and nourishing breakfast *"gives you the mental strength to look after your body for the rest of the day, as you will feel good about yourself (…) once you've made that decision at breakfast, you'll most likely be inspired to continue on a positive path all day (…) and just have a happier day all around"* (Woodward, 2016a). Even if porridge is not considered as a complex and refined food, Mills transforms it into a superpower dish that can boost her whole day at many different levels. At the same time, she advises her followers to do the same if they want, so they can as well wake up "feeling amazing every day" (Woodward, 2016a: 11). Make no mistake, Mills claims, this is not just *any* porridge, but a ticket to a happier, more fulfilled life.

Table No 7.3: ERA4, Top 10 kinds of Food/Drink depicted on the Deliciously Ella Instagram account.

Rank	ERA4: Kind of food/drink depicted (TOP 10)	No of instances	%
1	Variety of dishes	16	8.2
2	Porridge	11	5.6
3	Pasta	10	5.1
4	Vegetable salad	10	5.1
5	Deliciously Ella food products	9	4.6
6	Granola with toppings	8	4.1
7	Roasted vegetables	8	4.1
8	Brownies	5	2.6
9	Cookies	5	2.6
10	Hummus on toast	5	2.6
	REMAINING CATEGORIES	*109*	*55.6*
	TOTAL	**196**	**100.0**

As for the ingredients depicted, seven out of ten (almonds, chocolate, coconut, banana, peanut butter, coconut yoghurt and maple syrup) are among those used for

porridge toppings as Mills's porridge is always enhanced with numerous nutritional additions.

Table No 7.4: ERA4, Top 10 kinds of Ingredients depicted on the Deliciously Ella Instagram account.

Rank	ERA4: Kind of ingredients depicted (TOP 10)	No of instances	%
1	Sweet potatoes	27	7.2
2	Almonds	26	7.0
3	Avocado	24	6.4
4	Chocolate	18	4.8
5	Garlic	18	4.8
6	Coconut	17	4.6
7	Banana	16	4.3
8	Peanut Butter	15	4.0
9	Coconut Yoghurt	15	4.0
10	Maple Syrup	13	3.5
	REMAINING CATEGORIES	*446*	*119.6*
	TOTAL	**635**	**100**

Going back to image No 7.1 displaying the quote *"It's not about what you take out, it's about what you put in"* that Mills used to respond to the heavy media criticism that sparked after the BBC2 programme broadcast, I will now proceed in a more detailed analysis. This Instagram post of 19 January 2017 (its full caption can be found in Appendix No1, at the end of this thesis document) was published hours before the BBC2 programme broadcast and discussed Mills's new and revised approach. As already observed, there is a slight but interesting difference between Mills's appearance on the documentary and the discourse of the post. Whilst in the documentary Mills said that she had never used the term 'clean eating', in the post she admitted that she had. The post was relatively unusual in its length compared to other posts made by the Deliciously Ella account. This was an additional indication that Mills's reaction to the clean eating debacle was a major moment for the brand.

The denouncement calls for at least three observations. First, as a matter of fact, Mills's latter statement is demonstrably false. As I have shown in the ERA1 chapter, Mills often used the term "clean eating" as well as the hashtag #cleaneating in both offline and online contexts. Second, there is a slight but important difference between the landmark Instagram post and her appearance on the BBC 2 Horizon Documentary. Whereas the post says that clean eating '[…] *wasn't a word* [Mills] *used **a lot**'* (emphasis added), in the documentary Mills insists that she did not use it *at all.* (Quinn,

2017: 57:41). Third, in the documentary Mills mentioned that the term *"clean eating"* used to mean *"natural, unprocessed food".* However, she also added that these positive connotations were no longer dominant. Now, she claimed, the term denoted a *"fad diet"* that advocates a restrictive eating plan. In this respect at least, Mills remained consistent in that she has since the beginning understood the term "diet" in a negative way. As she had been using the term, clean eating was not to be understood as a restrictive diet at all (E. Mills, 2016). It is of course an interesting question what she means by 'restrictive diet' in this context. Indeed, Mills has openly advocated abandoning certain food groups (i.e., meat, fish, eggs, dairy, gluten, refined sugar, white rice, white flour, white pasta, anything with chemicals, additives and flavourings including natural flavourings and almost all super-market products labelled as *'healthy'* – Woodward, 2013a, 2015a) since her first years of blogging and her first book. Still, the first Instagram post of ERA4 was very carefully worded. Mills admitted that she had used the concept of clean eating and attempted to reframe the narrative, this time around healthy (not 'clean') eating.

As I have remarked in chapter 4, the scrutiny of clean eating by the BBC 2 Horizon documentary was instrumental in Mills's decision to distance herself from it. The programme called into question the validity claims (Habermas, 1987) made by popular clean-eating wellness bloggers and healthy "food-fluencers", such as Mills, Natasha Corrett and the Hemsley sisters. The main point of contention concerned the supposed causal features of different kinds of food. The programme thus adopted the scientific viewpoint. It was presented by Dr Giles Yeo, a biochemist and principal research associate and group leader at Cambridge University's Metabolic Research Labs. Yeo critically examined the claims made by various wellness bloggers and healthy eating consultants by paying particular attention to their scientific basis. Mills was the only UK wellness blogger that agreed to appear to discuss her plant-based eating philosophy. By way of distancing herself from clean eating, Mills argued that the term now implied 'dirty' instead of 'clean'.

Apart from Mills, Yeo also presented and scrutinised the outlook of the Hemsley sisters, who promote gluten-free and grain-free cooking, and Natasha Corrett, who supports an alkaline-diet style through her 'Honestly Healthy' brand. Moreover, Yeo

also investigated a range of alternative health 'experts', whose claims and practices inspired and motivated wellness bloggers. He pressed the point that the claims made were not based on scientific evidence. Accordingly, Yeo met with alkaline diet pioneer Dr Robert Young, who, at the time of the broadcast, was facing court charges for fraud and practicing medicine without a licence. Young had previously implied that his alkaline diet could help cancer patients. Interestingly, Young was a central source of inspiration for Natasha Corrett and the Hemsley sisters, all of whom later issued statements related to their connection with him (Blair, 2017). The programme also turned to the experiences of cancer patients who had adopted clean eating diets, and especially the alkaline diet, as possible cures. The idea that consumption of 'clean' food can cure diseases was submitted to strict scrutiny. The BBC programme was then taken up by media and initiated a cycle of criticism of clean eating (Donovan, 2017; Freeman, 2017; Grimes, 2017; Prendergast, 2017; Tandoh, 2017). In an attempt to rewrite her own narrative, Mills reportedly deleted all posts related to clean eating from her blog (Donovan, 2017). Answering to questions by journalists about these alterations, she repeated the position taken in the documentary. She also admitted having removed the word 'clean' from her blog posts, explaining that she wanted to ensure that she would not be related to what this term now represented (Donovan, 2017).

Prior to the broadcasting of the documentary, there had been sporadic criticism on the idea of clean eating from media (Hardman & Prendergast, 2015). Nutrition scientists had also investigated clean eating diet claims (Medlin, 2016). Still, the documentary was a watershed moment. Criticism of clean eating exploded in the mainstream media and correspondingly, numerous wellness bloggers found themselves on the defensive. (Billen, 2017; Blair, 2017; Donnelly, 2017; Donovan, 2017; Prendergast, 2017; Tandoh, 2017) as they were now being held responsible for promoting a dietary lifestyle unsupported by the best scientific evidence. Since Mills was by far the most popular wellness blogger, she occupied the centre of the scrutiny spotlight. Mills's pivot, which has defined her identity ever since (E. Mills, 2022e) was thus a significant moment. In section 7.3 later, I shall say more about this moment through close analysis of the key Instagram post of 17th of January 2017.

7.1.3 The image and the message: Compositional Interpretation

For the visual analysis below, I have selected another significant moment of scrutiny, which occurred fourteen months after the clean-eating backlash. I particularly chose this moment because I believe it shares some common characteristics with the clean-eating backlash described above. It demonstrates, once more, Mills's tendency to distance herself from a potentially complicated situation that puts her on the spotlight of public scrutiny. Therefore, it is interesting to see what kind of visuals she chooses to publicly discuss her decision to close down part of her brick and mortar business. In particular, when one attempts to make sense of the images that have been analysed through compositional interpretation below, one needs to keep in mind that Mills's decision was criticised by the mainstream media. The object of the criticism was different: in this instance, it was to do with Mills's ways of conducting her business (Dennys, 2018). Still, apart from the differences, there are also similarities in Mills's approach which suggest a common trope of response to pushback, mainly through the attempt to downplay the critique and restore a sense of consensus.

On the 6th of March 2018 Mills announced on Instagram that her company would close two out of three delis that she had invested in, Seymour Place and Herne Hill. In a sentimental post that did not mention the financial status of the Deliciously Ella café/restaurant business, Mills 'said goodbye' while recalling bittersweet memories from the days that she and her husband Matthew were working late shifts before the delis opened. The reason she gave for shutting down part of her business was her decision to focus her attention on one deli (Weighhouse Street in Mayfair, London), which allegedly offered the best customer experience to her clients (E. Mills, 2018b).

Image No 7.3: Mills announcement about shutting down two delis (Instagram post 6-3-2018)
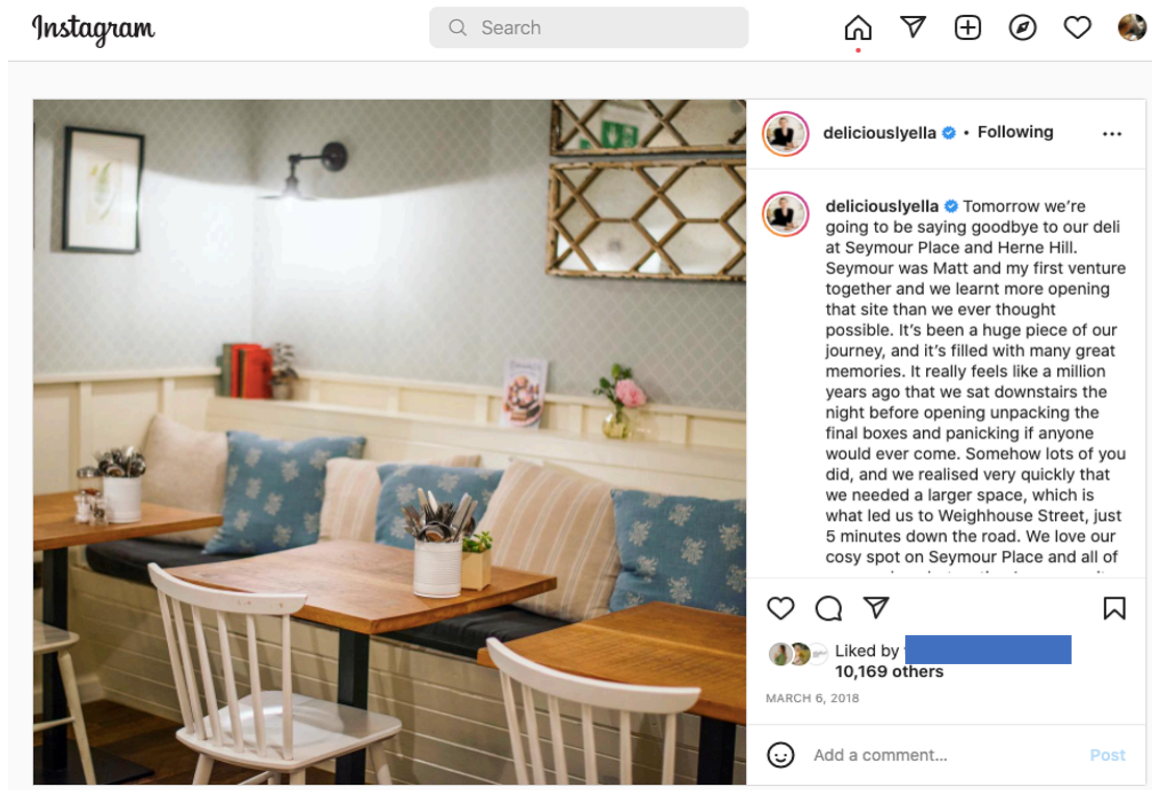
However, in a week's time growing media scrutiny revealed that Mills was forced to close her business after suffering significant financial losses (Starkey, 2018). Still, as per media reports of the time, debts from the closed business would be met by way of shareholder support (Dennys, 2018). After the revelations of the company's financial status, Mills posted another Instagram post, where she attempted to respond to criticism in what could be described as a slightly passive-aggressive style. Once again, she did not disclose financial details.

Image No 7.4: Mills responding to criticism about her shut down delis (Instagram post 14-3-2018)

I will analyse these images below, using Gillian Rose's compositional interpretation framework, but also my own enriched approach (see Chapter 3.4.4 Compositional Interpretation). My approach takes into consideration the distinctive nature of Instagram images and uses elements from captions to further shed light on them.

Image No 7.5: Comparison of images No 7.3 and No 7.4

6-3-2018   14-3-2018
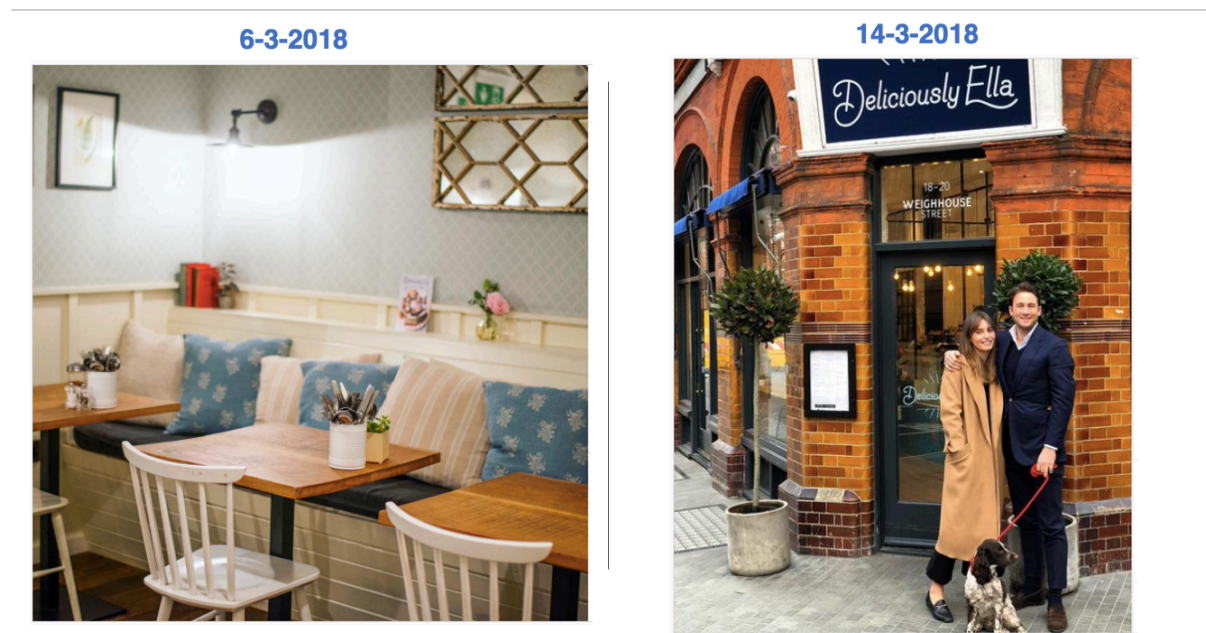
The first image illustrates the interior space of a café without people in it: this is the Seymour Place deli. The second one depicts the exterior space of a café: this is Weighouse Street deli, with two smiling people and a dog outside the premises. The contrast is striking. The first image visually represents the decision to close two businesses. The second represents the attempt to explain why such a decision, which affected both their employees' lives and the overall state of their business, was taken by the smiling people in it. The absence of the human element in the first image and the empty café tables that should, under normal conditions, be buzzing with people that chat, eat, and drink create an atmosphere of abandonment and perhaps generate a sentiment of sadness. In contrast, the happy, well-dressed couple in the second image with their lovely cocker spaniel induces a feeling of happiness and comradery despite the bad news.

Compositional Interpretation for Image No 7.3

(Closing Deliciously Mills's delis: Seymour Place and Herne Hill – Date: 6 March 2018)

P1 Content: This image shows a part of the Mae Deli interior, in particular a corner entailing three square tables and a long wooden bench where customers usually sit. The bench is full of pastel-coloured cushions; the tables contain a jar with cutlery and a smaller one that seems to be sugar canes and other sweeteners for drinks and/or beverages. However, there is no sign of customers eating and/or drinking when this picture was taken.

P2 Colour: The colour of this image is soft, light and follows the pastel shades of the furniture. Some pink enhances the strength of the colours as well.

P3 Light: This is an underground space of Mae Deli: hence, artificial light was needed to brighten it up. This creates a brighter effect in the first top half of the image and a darker effect in the other half further down.

P4 Spatial Organization: The setting is organised around the empty tables of the deli. Everything is in order, as if someone was waiting for people to sit down. Cushions are colour coordinated, and the frame of the image is divided into equal parts between the upper and lower part of the image. The baseboard on the wall creates the feeling of a barrier between these two parts.

P5 Expressive Content: This is a staged image of abandonment of a place that is supposed to be vibrant and full of people. However, depiction of abandonment is

unusual: for example, the image does not show an empty, dusty, and untidy space. This is an image that could equally serve for a café's opening, even though it was is used to show its closure. The take-away message is that of comfortableness and an implied optimism to the effect that perhaps the same setting will reappear at another geographic area.

Compositional Interpretation for Instagram image No 7.4

(Explaining the decision for closing Deliciously Ella's businesses – Date: 14 March 2018)

14-3-2018

P1 Content: This image shows Ella and Matthew Mills standing outside their deli business in Mayfair (Weighhouse Street deli), together with their dog Austin. Matthew Mills is holding Austin's leash with his left hand, and he is hugging his wife with his right arm. They are both laughing, and they seem happy. The main door of the deli behind them is closed; however, the lights inside are on, implying that the deli is open for business.

P2 Colour: The image is dominated by the shades of dark red and brown tiles in the exterior walls of the deli. Mills's light camel-coloured coat creates an interesting match. Matthew Mills is dressed mainly in dark blue colours that seem to match with the Deliciously Ella label above him.

P3 Light: This is a picture taken outside in natural light. It does not seem as if the photographer used artificial lighting boosters. The way that Ella and Matthew Mills are

dressed and the date this image was posted (March 2018) imply that it was a cold and somehow cloudy day in London, without particularly bright sunlight.

P4 Spatial Organization: The image is set in two levels. On the foreground Ella and Matthew Mills (and Austin) are standing in front of the deli. On the background the deli directs their position as well.

P5 Expressive Content: An image that conveys optimism after a difficult time for Ella and Matthew Mills. They are both happy and smiling. This contradicts the general sad feeling of the image's caption, which is about people losing their jobs as well as Mills's struggles with work stress and anxieties. Another interesting point regards the selection of clothes. These include a) Mills's camel-coloured winter coat; b) what seems to be Gucci black leather Jordaan loafers (£645 per pair, see Appendix for reference) and c) Matthew Mills's perfectly matched casual corporate look (white shirt – blue vest – blue blazer – blue trousers – brown shoes). These project a look of understated luxury of which I am going to discuss in the next chapter.

7.2 *"It is not about what you take out, it is about what you put in":* Mills responds to criticism

In this section I shall provide a deeper analysis of the abovementioned Instagram post of 19 January 2017. To do so, I shall use the framework that Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot set out in their book *On Justification: Economies of Worth* (Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006). In essence, Boltanski and Thévenot strive to analyse critical operations undertaken by actors that publicly justify or criticize actions and states of affairs. Despite its translation in 2006, the book has not been extensively discussed in the English-speaking world (but see Blokker & Brighenti, 2011; Stark, 2009; Susen, 2017; Turner, 2007). Accordingly, in what follows I shall begin with a critical outline of the book with a view to explaining how I shall use Boltanski's and Thévenot's framework in the present context. The following subsections then use the framework to describe, analyse and explain Mills's reaction to the clean-eating backlash. Briefly put, the argumentative strategy that Mills adopts consists in occupying the middle ground. In the discussion that follows I shall analyse the conditions and constraints under which this strategy was adopted.

7.2.1 On Justification: From the imperative to justify to the conditions of agreement

Boltanski and Thévenot begin by emphasising a specific social norm that they call 'the imperative to justify' (Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006: 23). It amounts to the requirement, under certain conditions, to provide reasons for one's evaluations of items. The main conditions in which the imperative is operative are to do with disputes about the appropriateness of actions or the evaluative properties of objects. These disputes cannot be resolved by force. Other ways of resolving them include arriving at some form of principled agreement. This often involves producing a distinctive kind of argumentation that aims at justifying choices in ways that can be accepted by others as proper and legitimate. *On Justification* has the ambition to provide a general sociological theory for this kind of phenomenon.

Accordingly, the central concept of the framework developed by Boltanski and Thévenot is that of justification. It designates attempts to provide grounds for beliefs or actions by giving reasons about their validity or appropriateness. Crucially, to suitably perform their justificatory function the reasons offered must not be considered as good solely by the individual that gives them. Justification is thus subject to a specific kind of generality constraint. Thus, the reasons provided must transcend individual circumstances by appeal to more generally accepted principles, maxims, or premises. The constraint is flexible and contextual, fluctuating with potential audiences. Still, we might say that the wider the target audience, the more neutral the reasons invoked must be, to suitably perform their function.

The generality constraint was indeed operative in Mills's Instagram post in question. This is clear in the way she unpacks how she initially understood clean eating. The reasons Mills gives are clearly geared towards reaching some form of agreement or consensus with a widely understood public. Mills's claim was that, for her, the concept meant *"natural food, without preservatives or additives"*, and *"promoting the idea of cooking at home more using fresh ingredients"* (the full text of Mills's Instagram post is available in the Appendices section, at the end of this thesis), no idiosyncratic meaning is invoked. Thus, unlike wellness gurus such as Gwyneth Paltrow (Conor,

2021), Mills does not invoke cleanliness to denote a purely subjective psychological mental state, nor does she refer to detoxification and purification rituals. These uses would be overtly controversial, jeopardising the success of her justificatory endeavour. In contrast, 'natural and fresh food' can be easily grasped due to its connection to the uncontroversial idea of healthy eating. Accordingly, Mills straightforwardly associates the concept of clean eating – at least in the way in which she said she had interpreted it up to that point – with the more defensible generic idea of a healthy nutritional lifestyle. She thus provides a more widely accepted justification about why she had used the term 'clean eating' in the past. Importantly, moreover, the justification provided does not need to further spell out why healthy eating itself is good. This is because healthy eating, in the context of the media dispute following the documentary, is simply not a controversial topic. Hence, the inter-subjective constraint of invoking a general and widely accepted principle is met. This, of course, does not mean that the concept of clean eating should be used. There might be other, weightier, reasons to refrain from doing so. Indeed, Mills herself gives such reasons when she admits that her uncontroversial interpretation of clean eating failed to become the conventionally accepted interpretation. Still, she is plainly not responsible for this development.

It should be already clear by this point that what I am after, following Boltanski and Thévenot, is not an abstract philosophical account of justification (on which see, for example, Forst, 2012), but a distinctively sociological one. Such an account can help make sense of practices of justification occurring under real social conditions. Briefly put, whilst both philosophical and sociological approaches to justification give pride of place to the concept of a reason, philosophical approaches such as Forst's strive to explain what reasons are and how they *ought* to be given, whereas sociological approaches such as Boltanski and Thévenot try to explain why certain actors give certain reasons *as a matter of fact*. Still, Boltanski and Thévenot accept some premises of philosophical approaches to justification as initial points of departure for a full-blown sociological conception. These are, first, the idea that actors are often (though not always) both rational and reasonable and second, that actors, by way of using arguments, tend to display rational coherence (Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006)

More specifically now, the sociological model of justification that Boltanski and Thévenot advance has the following characteristics. To begin with, social actors are understood to be reflective. They respond to social circumstances and situations by using, among other things, a repertoire of general normative concepts. These can generate and sustain agreement about the 'proper place' of persons and things whenever challenges, disagreements and disputes arise. Moreover, the repertoire of normative concepts that actors can mobilise is not infinite in its variety. Rather, under specific social conditions normative concepts tend to have a limited number of contents, that Boltanski and Thévenot call 'grammars' (Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006). The normative grammars that Boltanski and Thévenot identify pertain specifically to ideas about *justice or the common good*. This allows them to classify six 'polities', i.e., abstract normative models of appropriate relations between persons and things that sustain agreement about specific arrangements. These are, more specifically, the polity of inspiration, the domestic polity, the reputational polity, the civic polity, the industrial polity, and the market polity. Since I will argue shortly that the model of the polities is of limited usefulness when it comes to approaching the justifications that Mills provides, I shall not here provide a more detailed discussion of it.

Besides, reference to normative arguments does not occur in the abstract. Rather, it always takes place in specific social contexts that involve power differentials along several different dimensions. The contexts also involve the investment of practices of normative justification in specific material objects thus constituting 'worlds', i.e., socio-technical contexts in which certain reasons are considered good and taken for granted or, on the contrary, disputed, and criticised. Furthermore, justifications can be, and most often are, implicit. The need to invoke them explicitly arises only when social actors are challenged during disputes and disagreements about appropriate normative configurations. For the most part, social interactions take place against a background of agreement, which includes agreement about the normative principles that regulate their interactions, and which social actors implicitly accept. Thus, it is mainly when agreement breaks down that constructing a new consensus involves the exchange of arguments. But, since worlds are socio-technical contexts that comprise objects as well as actors, the exchange of arguments is accompanied by 'tests' that can implicate

those objects against a background of constraints specific to the context. Last, practices of justification in complex societies can become uncertain and, at times, incommensurable. This is because, in these societies, there exists a plurality of independently legitimate normative forms. Thus, for example, in the model of the six different normative worlds that Boltanski and Thévenot provide, each world comes with its own forms of ordered legitimacy. The construction of agreement involves navigating these different normative forms. Intra-world disputes are the most complex. This is so because they sometimes involve incommensurable claims. Intra-world disputes involve the evaluation of arrangements along at least two normative dimensions, whilst no meta-principles are available to provide a stable ordering. Classical examples include clashes between the market and the domestic worlds (where actors must determine the worth of persons on both economic and family-based criteria) and between the civic and the industrial worlds (where efficiency – the mark of the industrial world – can clash with the rights of citizens). The incommensurability of claims thus sometimes requires the resolution of disputes through *compromises*: actors fudge the substantive normative issues, i.e., fail to agree on principles, whilst still coordinating their courses of action by choosing low-level solutions.

7.2.2 The framework modified: from common good to ethics and scientific authority

In this subsection, I propose a modification of Boltanski and Thévenot's framework of polities/worlds to better account for Mills's justificatory discourse. As we have seen, this framework classifies in an abstract way arguments about the worth of persons and the appropriateness of arrangements when disputes around 'giving people their due' arise. The distinctive characteristic of these arguments is that they concern *normative relations between persons* or, in other words, questions of justice and the common good. Typically, the claims involved in these contexts are endowed with strong normativity: they aspire to guide the conduct of others in a mandatory, non-optional way. Claims about justice are typically not given in the form of advice. Rather, they deploy the stronger vocabulary of rights that must be protected, as well as of duties and obligations that must be heeded.

This, however, is precisely the vocabulary that is *not* used by Mills. The normative issues that Mills raises in her post of 17th of January 2017 are not to do with rights and duties. Instead, they concern activities to do with what moral philosophers sometimes call 'the good life' or 'what gives value and meaning to life' (Dworkin, 2002). The actions that Mills proposes are *self-regarding*: they concern the relation that individuals entertain with themselves. The arguments provided are thus geared towards articulating principles, concepts and maxims that can help individuals lead better culinary lives, rather than evaluating their worth in the context of their normative relationships with others. However, this is not to say that there is no norm of justice implicitly operating on the background. Such a norm indeed exists, and Mills subscribes to it when she writes that:

'[…] eating well doesn't mean categorising everything on your plate into 'good' and 'bad' or 'clean' and 'dirty.' It doesn't mean putting a label on yourself, limiting yourself to one food group, obsessing over your weight or taking anything to an extreme. I think eating well is all about finding a balance that suits you and satisfies you both physically and mentally […]'.

In this excerpt, Mills makes clear that she does not set out to strongly evaluate (Taylor, 1985) culinary lifestyles. In particular, she does not distinguish between higher and lower ways of eating or between persons that have higher worth because of how they eat, which would amount to making strong evaluations in Taylor's sense. On the contrary, all culinary practices providing individual satisfaction are deemed worthy, irrespective of whether some will find them 'good' or 'bad'. This provides one further reason why the model of polities/worlds that Boltanski and Thévenot set out is of limited applicability in this context. Mills does not attempt to rank the worth of lifestyles in a contested normative space. Instead, she takes the equal worth of lifestyles for granted and then strives to convince her audience that adopting a certain lifestyle will be good for them. Normative prescription thus takes the form of friendly advice, not of duty stemming from principles of justice.

There is one further reason why the polity/world model developed by Boltanski and Thévenot must be modified. Mills used her intervention in the BBC2 documentary and the Instagram post of the 19th of January 2017 to clarify her position vis-à-vis scientific authority. As we shall see in the next subsection, this clarification is based on the premise that she would henceforth accept science as a *hard* constraint, deferring to scientific authority about the causal properties of the foods and culinary practices she endorses. However, Boltanski and Thévenot have little to say about argumentative constraints that stem from the acceptance of scientific authority. Despite the fact that *On Justification* relied heavily on the conceptual apparatus developed in ground-breaking science studies of the 1980s (Latour, 1988), it did not focus on scientific disputes nor explored the interplay between science and wider normative questions. Still, these considerations do not indicate that Boltanski and Thévenot's framework, which mainly attempted to regenerate the classical project of a sociology of morality (Durkheim, 1997), cannot be used to explain Mills's justificatory commitments. On the contrary, the framework provides a rich network of concepts (capacities, disputes, tests, constraints) that will be used in the ensuing discussion.

7.2.3 The Clean-Eating Denouncer: Occupying the middle ground

We may now move on to the detailed analysis of the 17th of January 2017 Instagram post, in which Mills denounced clean eating. The first thing to note is that, unlike most of her other posts, this post does not depict an image, but a quote. The quote reads:

"It's not about what <u>you take out</u>
It's about what <u>you put in</u>"
(Emphasis underlined in the original)

This quote can be interpreted in several different ways but mainly seems to refer, in context, to Mills's positive and permissive approach regarding food. Approaches that 'take [foods] out' (of one's diet) are, by implication, overtly rigid. They 'forbid' certain kinds of foods. The quote thus implies that their normative commitments do not amount to *advice*, but to some form of *duty*. Such approaches are thus associated to a '[…] faddy way of eating'. As becomes clear from the post, normative rigidity is one

of the central critiques that Mills addresses to the idea of clean eating. Such rigidity contrasts sharply with her own position, which consists in 'putting in' the rights kinds of food. Mills's approach underpins a permissive, relaxed, and positive attitude. The quote thus makes implicit reference to the norm of relaxed liberal toleration. Mills merely gives advice; she does not issue commands. Instead, they may creatively adapt it to their own preferred lifestyles to make their culinary lives better along a (vaguely defined) evaluative dimension of eating well. Consequently, the quote sets the tone for the central normative messages that are contained in the post. We should recall at this point that the clean eating debacle was interpreted as a threat to Mills's project. This transpires both from the post itself and from Mills's overall online behaviour during the same period. Thus, the post begins with an open avowal of the importance of the clean eating debate: *"There's a lot of talk about the concept of 'clean eating' in the media this week and I wanted to share my thoughts on the debate today"*. Moreover, as I have already shown, it was during this period that Mills re-engineered her digital past. She did so by deleting posts, both on Instagram and on her blog, which contained references to clean eating (Donovan, 2017).

Within this wider context, the specific choice of argumentative strategy is constrained in important ways. Arguments and justifications were selected in ways which display narrative coherence given these constraints. Two significant types of constraints stand out. First, as I have already alluded, Mills decided to treat scientific authority as a hard argumentative constraint. This implies that, at a bare minimum, any discourse that she would from then on articulate regarding what 'eating well' means must *at least* be compatible with, for example, the kinds of claims that Yeo made in the BBC 2 Horizon documentary. It is important to emphasise that there was nothing necessary about this choice. Various actors, both within and outside the wellness blogosphere, query, question or outright reject the claims made by scientific authorities and present their own narratives about the causal properties of various objects. Indeed, it is precisely the rejection of scientific authority and the construction of a parallel 'pseudo-science' that was at the very heart of the BBC2 Horizon documentary. Still, the argumentative costs of overlooking or even attempting to debunk mainstream scientific claims can be exceedingly high. And in any event, Mills decided to forego these costs. The Instagram

post under discussion makes this choice abundantly clear when Mills says the following:

"*Data shows that the vast majority of the UK population do not get enough fruit and veg in their diet despite the WHO, NHS and other health campaigners repeatedly telling us we should aim to eat 5 a day.* **My aim with Deliciously Ella is** *–* **and has always been** *– to give you a great resource* **to do just that** *in a delicious way*" (emphasis added).

This post thus retrospectively creates the following narrative. Mills's aim *all along* was to help people comply with the best scientific advice as communicated through mainstream channels. Quite apart from the substantive truth or falsity of this claim, it commits Mills to treating scientific evidence as a hard constraint. This is, for example, what happens in one of her latest books (E. Mills, 2020) where Mills, after recounting the various wellness practices that she has engaged in throughout the years, mentions that there is substantial science behind many practices under the wellness domain. As our mental and physical health declines, Mills continues, it is important to make the relevant changes into our everyday habits and lives. This tendency, moreover, became even more pronounced in her latest book (E. Mills, 2022e). In that book, Mills intensively used the advice of a team of nutritional and medical experts that would *'[…] bring the knowledge and authority needed for the project'* (Mills, 2022: 13). Indeed, the whole book presents itself as thoroughly data- and evidence-based, answering questions such as *'what is a healthy diet?'* or *'is a plant-based diet safe for both me and my family, smaller children and teenagers included?'* in a supposedly scientifically sound way (Mills, 2022: 16). The significant decision to accept science as a hard constraint coheres well a common-sensical position that avoids perceived extremes. It also entails that Mills now disposes of a simple way to resolve potential disputes regarding the health impact of the foods she favours. As her latest book showcases, she just uses expert scientific advice. Experts can help resolve disputes in a characteristically authoritative manner and with low argumentative and reputational costs.

The second constraint is equally important. It is to do with the rejection of clean eating from the vantage point of a critique of strong evaluations. In the post, Mills simply refuses to distinguish between better and worse ways of eating, while still being committed to the idea of eating well. In fact, her central criticism of clean eating is that it amounted precisely to a position that *excludes* certain culinary practices as worse, inferior, and so on. In her own words:

"[…] eating well doesn't mean categorising everything on your plate into 'good' and 'bad' or 'clean' and 'dirty.' It doesn't mean putting a label on yourself, limiting yourself to one food group, obsessing over your weight or taking anything to an extreme".

This excerpt expresses the paradoxical idea of *the strong evaluation to condemn strong evaluations*. Mills thus clarifies that it is precisely the idea that there are better and worse, superior and inferior, ways of eating well that makes the idea of clean eating *itself an inferior position*. Her approach is characterized by seeming normative openness to anyone who does not subscribe to this point of view. Along with deference to scientific authority, this commitment also amounts to a hard argumentative constraint. Once this narrative move is made, it is not open to Mills, on grounds of coherence, to evaluatively rank food lifestyles. The only exception to this rule stems from the constraint of deferring to best scientific evidence. Still, this constraint leaves ample room for different lifestyles and combinations of food. At the same time, Mills mounts a critique of the idea of a 'diet' with its connotations of strong normativity (since a diet is, in some sense, non-optional). Similarly, the second constraint that Mills accepts has a significant impact on the normativity of her claims. The recipes and culinary practices that Mills favours are now presented as simply pieces of advice, 'everyday tools, resources and recipes to help us all feel a little healthier and happier' (E. Mills, 2020).

These remarks bring us to the core of Mills's thesis. The acceptance of mainstream scientific discourse and the decision to avoid strong evaluations underwrite Mills's firm commitment to respond to the clean eating debacle by *occupying the middle ground*. This is a strategy that we could characterise, in political terms, as a form of centrism.

The main normative principle endorsed is one of balanced positivity. Clean eating is criticised precisely because its mainstream interpretation gave rise to extreme, unbalanced and, in the end, intolerant views about how people should eat. Mills thus fabricates agreement by subscribing to the exact opposite principle, as the following excerpt shows:

'I think eating well is all about finding a **balance** *that suits you and satisfies you both physically and mentally.'* (emphasis added).

The core message that Mills projects here is one of balance, openness, and acceptance of a wide diversity of culinary choices. The goal is described in the most neutral possible terms: eating well while avoiding extremes, diets, and fads. The way that people can achieve this goal is thoroughly pragmatic. People should simply try out 'what works for them' on an individual basis. Mills's narrative is the exact opposite of a wellness guru. Downplaying any element of quasi-religious fervour, it belongs to a thoroughly secular universe. Mills simply says, after having consulted the scientific data, what has worked for her, albeit implying that her lifestyle can also speak to others who might find themselves in similar circumstances as her. As she puts it in her 2020 book 'I've learnt that there is no one clear definition of being healthy, and certainly no one right way to do it.' This leitmotiv coheres well with the choice, described in section 6, of systematically using on Instagram inspirational quotes that denote positivity, happiness and openness whilst abhorring closeness, condemnation and, more generally, strong commitment to a higher purpose.

7.3 Conclusion

This chapter focused on an analysis of data from ERA4. The period is important for two main reasons. First, Mills distanced herself from the clean eating trend or movement and adopted a specific argumentation strategy in doing so. Second, on the business front, this is the time when Mills took the decision to close two London-based delis, without always clearly explaining the reasons that drove those decisions. Both these two milestone moments involved heavy scrutiny from the UK media and they relate to each other as Mills uses very similar tactics in both cases. The chapter begins with a brief summary of the era, along with some top-line data. Additionally, I briefly

introduce a quote presented on Instagram by Mills (*"It's not about what you take out It's about what you put in"*). This quote plays a significant role throughout the Era and is analysed in more detail in later subsections of this chapter. Then, a compositional interpretation analysis of the Instagram images that the Deliciously Ella account used to explain the decision to close the two delis. I then move on to a deeper analysis of the clean eating debacle and Mills's response to it. Briefly put, I use Boltanski and Thévenot's *On Justification* framework, to explain the position that Mills took. The explanation consists in the fact that specific argumentative constraints (the acknowledgment of the authority of science and the absence of a strong commitment to veganism) led Mills to adopt a strategy that I call 'occupying the middle ground', i.e., making as few controversial commitments as possible.

CHAPTER 8
ERA 1-4: FINAL DISCUSSION

Overview

This chapter brings together and analyses material from all four Deliciously Ella eras. I begin by providing a deeper analysis of a selected sample of images covering all eras. These images are characteristic of the account's visual and aesthetic trajectory. I then move on to a discussion of visual imagery elements coupled with discursive material from the blog and Mills's books through the lens of distinction/inequality and authenticity. Finally, I also provide an overview of where Mills and the Deliciously Ella brand stand today. I do so in order to make clearer, via comparison, the subsequent evolution of both Mills and the brand, which further evinces how continuity and change occurred across time.

8.1 ERAS 1-4: A visual timeline

In this section I will critically analyse four significant images, one from each era. My aim is to present, by using specific visual evidence and mainly through compositional interpretation (on which see chapter 3), how images of a seminal recipe depicted by Mills evolved across time. Before delving into this analysis I will briefly present and discuss, in quantitative terms, the composition of my dataset in terms of image themes. This is important for the following reason. Although the Deliciously Ella Instagram account is food-centric, non-food-depicting images also play an influential role in the brand's story-telling methods. It is thus important to acquire a sense of how food-centric images compare to non-food-depicting ones.

To pursue this preliminary analysis, I grouped my Deliciously Ella Instagram dataset into three categories: (a) images that depict food and/or drink, (b) images that depict Mills and/or anyone/anything related to Mills and (c) other images. Thus, category (a) picks out all edible products featured in the posts (juices, smoothies, salads, main courses, fruit, nut butters, etc). Category (b) contains all images concerning Mills or anyone and/or anything related to her. Their content can vary. Category (b) images can be portraits of Mills alone, photos of Mills with her family and/or friends, pictures

of Mills's dog Austin, depictions of Mills's personal items or Mills's home. This first cut provides the results shown in chart No 1 below.

Chart No 8.1: Deliciously Ella Instagram's Account Image Themes ERAS 1-4
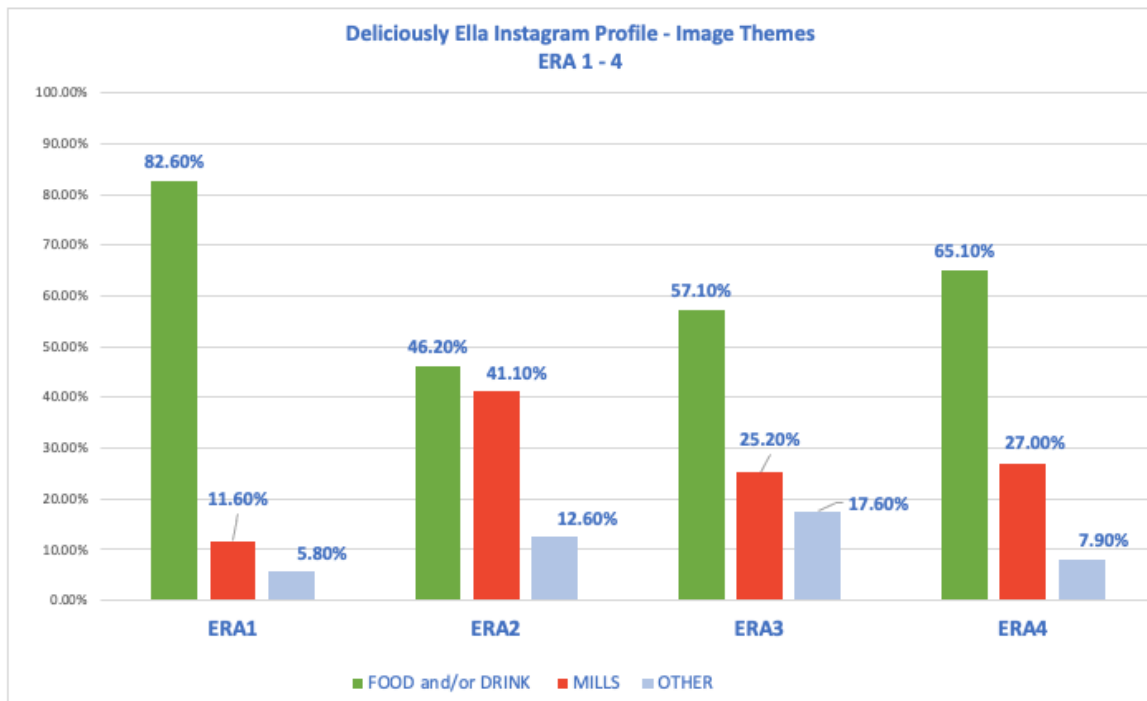
At least two initial inferences can be drawn from this simple quantitative comparison. First, images involving Mills play an integral part in the assortment. Her Instagram account throughout ERAS 1-4 was not purely dedicated to food. On the contrary, there was a secondary but robust focus on Mills and her personal life. However, and this is the second point, the focus on Mills was not quantitatively even across all eras. Images from ERA 1 are mainly focused on food and only secondarily on Mills. It is only after ERA 2 that Mills's images become dominant. This is an important finding; it indicates Mills's intention to borrow standard tactics from celebrity culture once she had created a sufficiently robust audience base. By resorting to heavy use of personal visual material and by revealing details about her personal and professional life, Mills brings her audiences closer by creating a bond of online intimacy. At the same time, she uses that bond to reinforce a feeling of belonging to the same community with the users that follow her. She therefore forges what is standardly called in the social media literature parasocial interaction (Eng & Jarvis, 2020; A. E. Marwick, 2015), i.e., a kind of

relationship experienced by an audience in mediated encounters with performers on mass media.

Consequently, although the main activity of the Deliciously Ella brand involves the promotion of plant-based food and drinks, other visual elements, and first and foremost elements to do with her personal and professional biography, play an equally important role. In the rest of this section, I will show how a select number of visual elements evolve across time to convey a sense of the gradual transformation of Mills's account. I shall focus on the following: Part A, a typical dish appearing throughout all eras (pancakes) and part B, a selection of images depicting Mills and/or personal objects and spaces related to her. As I have already explained in chapter 3 and practices throughout the previous chapters, the analysis of the images proceeds through compositional interpretation across five selected parameters (content, colour, light, spatial organisation, and expressive content). This analysis will help the reader acquire a deeper sense of how the initially amateurish food blog evolved into the social media counterpart of an internationally recognised brand.

8.1.1 Visual storytelling Eras 1-4: Pancakes.

ERA 1

I shall begin with the visual evolution of pancakes across all eras. The image shown below is one of the first images that Mills chooses to post online. It is both important and representative of ERA 1. The dominant visual characteristic of this first era is the virtual inexistence of food styling, which conveys an 'amateurish' visual look. In the second section of the chapter, I shall argue that the omnipresence of this look throughout the era was highly conducive to Mills's project being perceived as authentic.

Image No 8.1: Banana and blueberry pancakes (Instagram Post 31-3-2013)
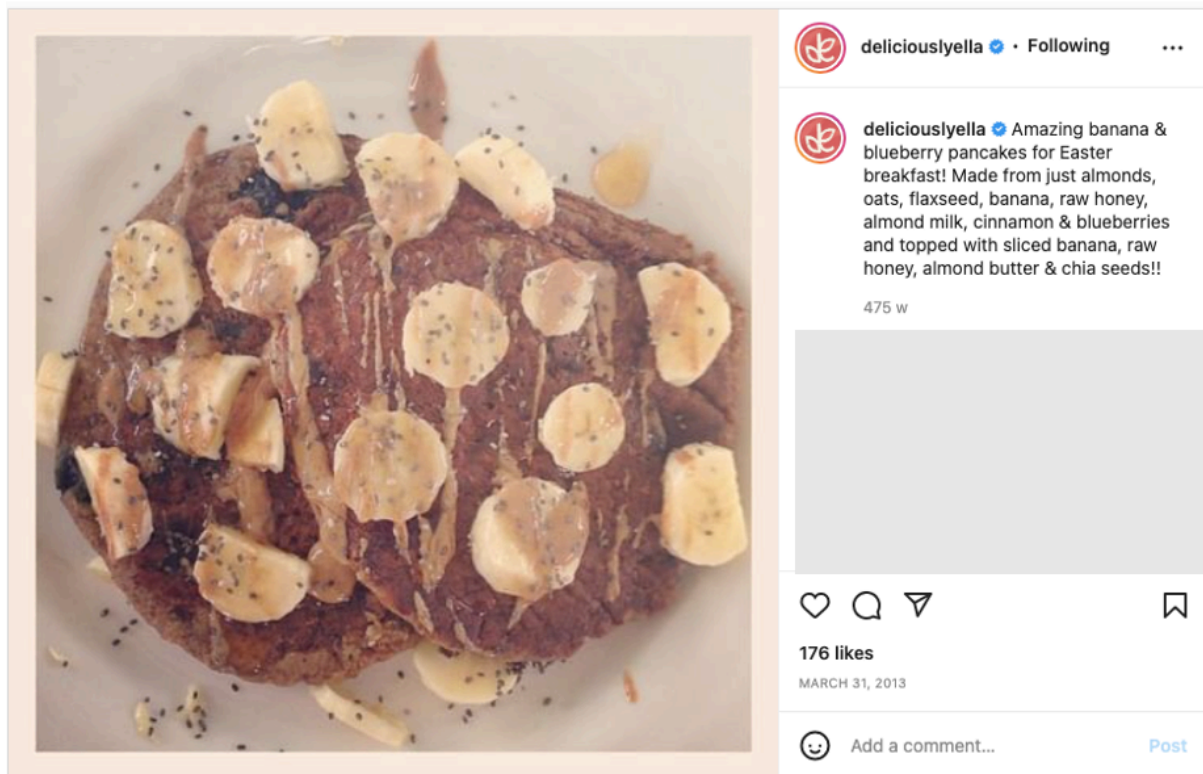
Compositional Interpretation

P1 Content: The image shows what appears to be a porcelain white plate, displaying pancakes topped with banana slices, chia seeds and blueberries, together with brown sauce.

P2 Colour: Colours are warm; shades of brown colour are dominant. The image looks dark. Moreover, it seems that an Instagram filter was applied, although this cannot be positively confirmed due to Instagram's API restrictions.

P3 Light: The image does not appear to be particularly luminous. No sign of electric light appears. The lack of light creates a darker feeling and affects colour. Perspective is formed through the selection of angle. The angle selected is the bird's eye view which creates the effect that the viewer stands over the plate and looks down at the food. This is a particularly popular photography higher angle on Instagram as it brings viewers closer to food (and thus makes the food more attractive) but also, as the food itself is inaccessible, consumption is achieved only by looking (Walsh & Baker, 2020).

P4 Spatial Organisation: Food is the sole focus of the image and because the selected angle uses an overhead position, food becomes dominant. Almost all the ingredients are clearly shown. However, they are combined in a rather mingled style.

P5 Expressive Content: Importantly, the image has a distinctively amateur feel. It does not display signs of professional editing. The absence of sophisticated visual curation corroborates the narrative that this is just the content created by a self-taught amateur food blogger. The latter records her daily experience by communicating her recipes to the world through snapshots, apparently using her mobile phone. Thus, the image contributes to the absence of mediation between the blogger and the audience and, hence, conveys an aura of authenticity. The visual style thus supports the idea that Mills converted to plant-based eating overnight and started making recipes from scratch (as further discussed in the second section).

ERA 2

Moving on to ERA 2, the same pancake recipe reappears, albeit in a different and clearly upgraded version:

Image No 8.2: Banana and blueberry pancakes (Instagram post 16-5-2015)
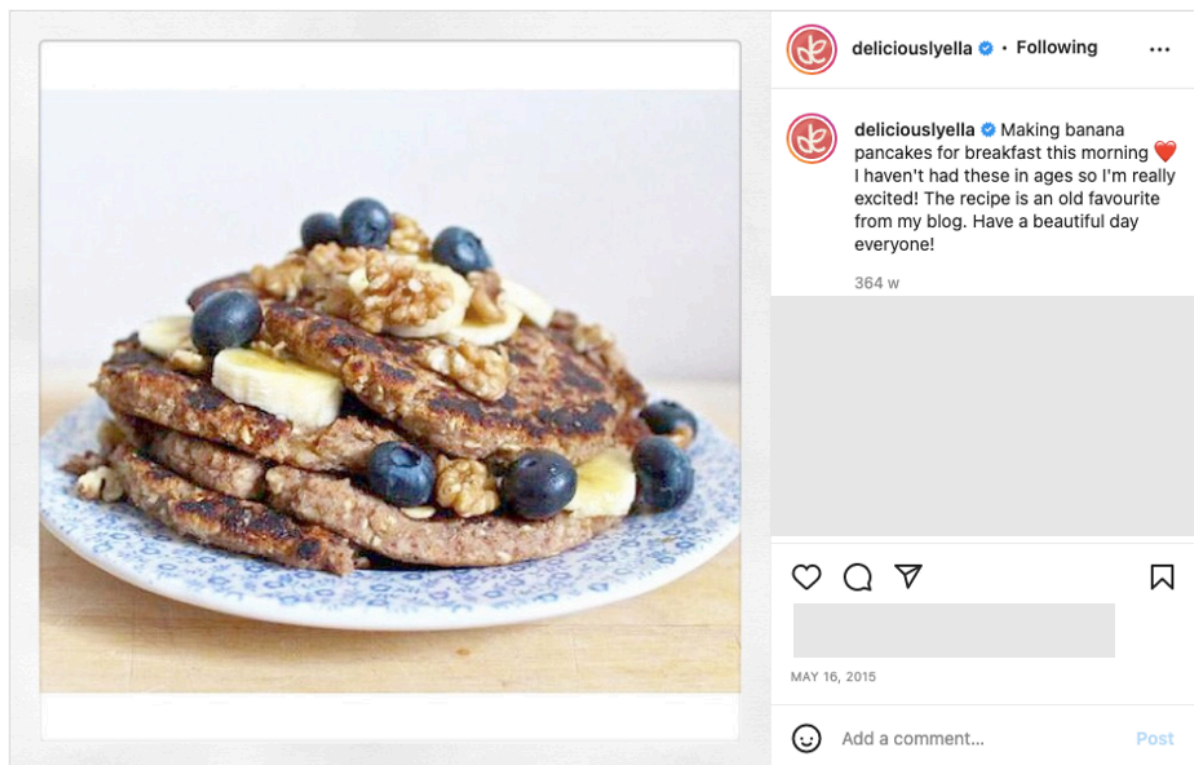
Compositional Interpretation

P1 Content: The image shows a plate of four pancakes topped with blueberries, banana slices and some walnuts. The pancakes are served on a light blue and white porcelain plate with a floral pattern. The plate is set on a wooden surface that could be a table or a kitchen bench. Wooden surfaces are very popular among food stylists and photographers. The element of wood offers a feeling of warmth and also highlights the objects standing on it (Bellingham et al., 2012; Campbell, 2012; Gissemann, 2016; Glyda, 2019). A characteristic example of how Mills uses such visual elements to upgrade the content she creates can be gleaned from the dialogue below. In it, Mills provides advice to Cambridge University academic Dr Giles Yeo on how to make Instagram images look nicer. The dialogue took place during her interview for the 2017 BBC2 Horizon documentary 'Clean Eating, the Dirty Truth' (Quinn, 2017), which has been extensively discussed In the previous chapter:

(Gilles Yeo to Ella Mills at 45:18'')

- GY: So, can I ask a favour?
- EM: Yes?
- GY: Can we, I know it's cheeky of me, can we take a picture and post it on Instagram? Can we do that?
- EM: Of course, but let's do it at the table because the wood is going to look better, it's a better surface
- GY: You are a professional!

P2 Colour: Colours are brighter here as compared to the equivalent ERA 1 image that we just analysed. Although there is no visual background, whoever took this picture paid much more attention to the objects' colours.

P3 Light: Light is significantly enhanced in this image as compared to the previous one. The introduction of the wooden element (table/bench) also provides a more luminous effect. Moreover, the blueberry toppings make the image brighter.

P4 Spatial Organisation: Food is the absolute focus of the image. However, this time a high angle position is used. High angles in food photography have much in common with the bird's eye view previously mentioned photography (Bellingham et al., 2012) and they are both used to focus attention on the main object of interest.

P5 Expressive Content: Interestingly, this is a photo of the same pancake recipe from ERA 1 presented above. Nonetheless, Mills made efforts to visually recreate the recipe with several adjustments. For example, the general effect is clearer. The actual food is fully visible to the viewer and one can distinguish between pancakes and toppings. The floral plate used is characteristic of the effort to create a more attractive visual style. Besides, the wooden element makes the image warmer. Although the pancakes themselves seem slightly burned (which is a visual minus), the result is more 'Instagrammable' than the previously analysed image.

ERA 3

The recipe looks slightly changed and the whole presentation is significantly refined, aiming perhaps at more discerning palates.

Image No 8.3: Pancakes with fruit compote (Instagram post of 23-10-2016)
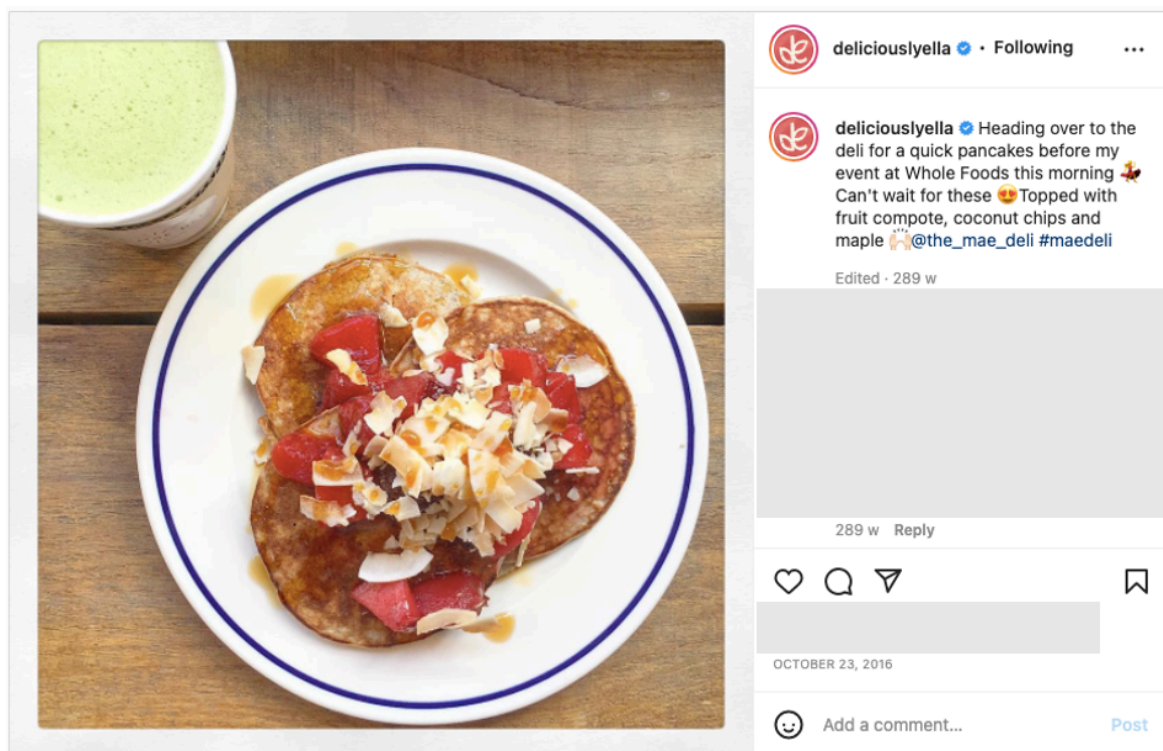
Compositional Interpretation

P1 Content: The image depicts a white porcelain plate with a blue decorative border. The plate contains three pancakes topped with colourful condiments that, according to the caption, are coconut chips, fruit compote and maple syrup. It also shows a cup that seems to contain either a hot and frothy beverage or a juice. As in the previously analysed image, both plate and cup stand on a wooden surface.

P2 Colour: Colours are particularly vivid in this image. The yellowish froth on the cup looks fresh, the plate is sparkling white, the blue decorative border is intensely blue, and the warm brown wood creates a feeling of familiarity.

P3 Light: The image is well lit and enhances the object's texture and colours. The plate looks immaculately clean and bright. The pancakes reflect their warm and deep caramel colour. The toppings, and especially the fruit compote, sparkle. Light thus creates a certain kind of mood, which is of outmost importance for food photography, creating a certain mood and enhancing attractiveness (Gissemann, 2016). The whole image is staged to perfection to create a mouth-watering effect to the viewer.

P4 Spatial Organisation: The image is structured in a very tidy way. All three pancakes are carefully placed on the white plate in parallel with the blue border. The plate itself is positioned almost in the middle of the wooden table's partition, giving the white cup some space to the left. The overhead angle gives a feeling of depth. Still, it is not certain if this perfectly presented plate prompts the desire to devour or to admire the food.

P5 Expressive Content: It should be obvious by this point that Deliciously Ella's Instagram images had gone far beyond the initially amateurish visual style of Era 1. There is a very conscious evolution towards professional food styling and photography, parallel to the growth of the brand. What might have started as a university student's side project quickly became a highly curated business project.

ERA 4

This last version of pancakes for ERA 4 reflects the professional transformation of the Deliciously Ella brand. The contrast with the first Instagram images of 2013 is even starker.

Image No 8.4: Pancakes with warm chocolate sauce (Instagram post of 25-8-2018)

Compositional Interpretation

P1 Content: The image shows a light-blue and grey porcelain plate placed on a light grey wooden table. The plate displays a stack of six pancakes topped with banana slices and melting chocolate sauce. On the top of the image a hand holding a small light green/grey jag pours the chocolate sauce on the pancakes. The background of the image, deliberately out of focus, shows what seems to be a wall.

P2 Colour: The pancakes are the focus of the image. Colours around them seem to follow a coordination between grey and light blue, creating a harmonious effect. The colours of the pancakes, banana slices and chocolate sauce are brighter and shinier than usual. Either a colour correction tool has been used, or the food was made with artificial ingredients enhanced with colours. The pancakes look crisp and very well shaped, the chocolate sauce looks shiny and smooth. Both look as if they were prepared by a professional chef.

P3 Light: This is a luminous image, but it is unclear whether it is lighted with natural or electric light. The use of light facilitates focus and promotes the food displayed.

Perspective is created by the contrast between the pancakes and the blurred background.

P4 Spatial Organisation: The pancakes dominate the image. Still, the perfectly centred line of the melting chocolate sauce plays an important supporting role, creating a scrumptious and attractive effect. The point of focus is on the foreground, as opposed to the blurred background. Because of this, the tableware is emphasised. It is a particular type of non-porous ceramic tableware made of stoneware clay. Stoneware, which is fired at high temperatures of 1,200°C, is usually thicker than porcelain or bone china (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021a).

P5 Expressive Content: This is a professional image of professionally prepared food taken by a professional photographer or by someone who understands very well the main principles of photography. The elements of the image resemble food magazines or chefs' marketing promotions. Since the caption refers to Deliciously Ella's 2018 cookbook, a possible explanation could be that this image was taken either for the print edition of that cookbook, or for a range of promotional images for Mills 's advertising campaign. Indeed, a cross-checking with her 2018 cookbook proves that the same image appears on page 46 (see below Image 8.5; this photo was taken with my mobile phone on the 18th of April 2021 and captures pages 45-46 of my own copy of Deliciously Ella's *The Cookbook*).

Image No 8.5: Deliciously Ella, The Cookbook, pages 45-46
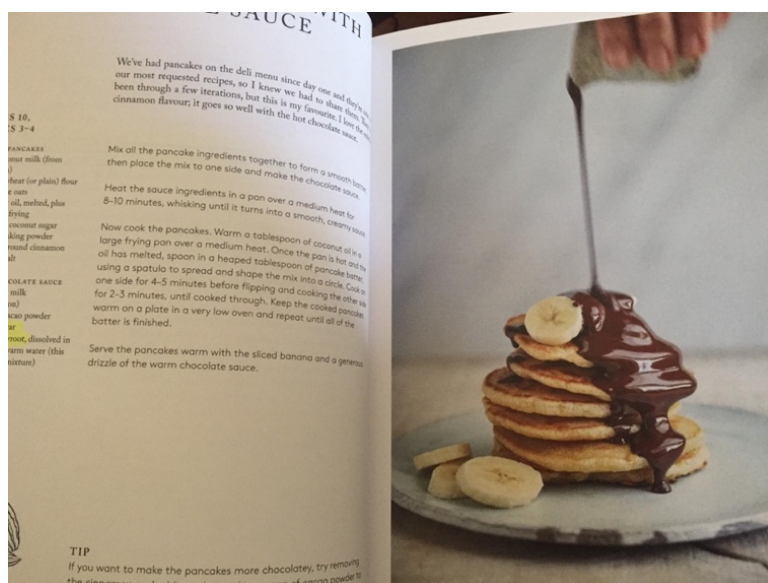
Image No 6 below shows all four images together, making it easier for the reader to witness visual style transformations that took place across Eras. The main finding was that the visual look of a recurring recipe (pancakes) evolves from an initially amateurish photo to a highly curated professional visual style across all dimensions (from the visual composition of the photo to the texture of the depicted food itself). In the next subsection I shall argue that a similar visual and stylistic evolution also took place regarding Mills 's pictures.

Image No 8.6: Deliciously Ella Instagram images: the visual evolution of pancakes from Era 1 to Era 4

8.2 Distinction, class, and inequality

As stated in the overview, in this section I shall provide a deeper analysis of my dataset encompassing all ERAS. The focus will largely be on material discussed in the previous section or closely adjacent such as, for example, Instagram images with similar visual content, and Mills 's books. The books provide an important point of entry into Mills 's core narratives. As already stated in chapters 2 and 3, the conceptual lens of analysis comprises distinction/class, authenticity, and enrichment. Enrichment was discussed extensively in chapter 6. Distinction/class and authenticity are addressed in detail in the subsections that follow.

I have mentioned in the literature review chapter that the interaction between class and culinary choices is a complex one. In that chapter, my main starting point was the idea, brilliantly articulated and defended by Bourdieu in his seminal work *Distinction*, that there exists a substantial correlation between class position and food choices. In particular, the patterning of food tastes correlates with the placement of individuals along two different axes: economic and cultural capital. One of Bourdieu's most significant findings for 1960s France was that those who possess more capital overall, i.e., both economic and cultural capital, opt for more refined and 'fine' foods. On the other hand, those relatively lacking in both forms of capital opt for less aesthetically refined fatty foods and for foods substantial in carbohydrates. Moreover, capital composition made a difference with respect to food choices. Thus, possessors of predominantly cultural as opposed to economic capital opted for 'healthy-lean-exotic tastes' (Atkinson & Deeming, 2015: 877), which set them apart from people that possess more economic than cultural capital.

Besides, as I have argued in the literature review chapter, there is good reason to think that food tastes in contemporary Britain still strongly correlate with class along roughly Bourdieusian lines. Class inequalities are thus particularly robust mechanisms when it comes to the distribution of food goods and not merely because of the unavailability of wealth vis-à-vis the worse off. In this subsection, I shall take this fact as my starting point. My aim is to use empirical data from ERAS 1-4 to: (a) place Mills within class space with reference to economic, social and cultural capital and (b) focus on the way

she treats economic inequality and class. Regarding (b), the inquiry into my dataset shows that Mills displays symbolic mastery of various health and well-being themes popular among the culturally (not necessarily economically) dominant classes. Moreover, the evolution of her Instagram account, which was charted in the first section of this chapter, shows a clear trajectory towards aesthetic refinement across several visual and symbolic dimensions.

8.2.2 Placing Mills in class space

Placing Mills in class space involves inquiring how much economic, social, and cultural capital she possesses. Beginning with economic capital which, for the purposes of this thesis, can be roughly defined in terms of wealth, money, and income, and in the absence of very specific data, I shall use proxies from the dataset to proceed to a rough estimation. It transpires quite clearly from my dataset that Mills can be safely placed (although not precisely), within what Bourdieu refers to as the economically dominant classes. These are the classes possessing a significant amount of wealth and/or money compared to others (the dominated). Even discounting Mills's specific biography and family connections, which are extremely important, just a few select examples from the visual dataset across ERAS 1-4 shall suffice to show that Mills consistently maintains an affluent lifestyle in an expensive and cosmopolitan city (London). Mills lives in a rich neighbourhood close to Hyde Park and works in a posh area of the city centre (Mayfair). Her lifestyle can thus be used as a proxy to estimate her economic class position.

To substantiate my conclusion to the effect that Mills can be firmly placed in the economically dominant classes, I provide in what follows some pertinent examples from my visual dataset. Many of these were presented in the previous section. They include the following:

a) the fact that, as I remarked in the interpretation of the image where Mills announces her marriage on Instagram in the previous section, Mills often spends her vacations with her husband (and before her wedding with her girlfriends as seen on Instagram

posts of the past) in the exclusive private Mustique Island in the Caribbean, which is owned by the super-rich;

(b) the fact that the places she often visits in London to either have lunch or dinner or hold well-being sessions are consistently 'posh' as Images No 8.12 and 8.13 below show;

Image No 8.7, Mills hosts a supper club in posh Paradise club in Kensal Green (Instagram post of 9-9-2014)
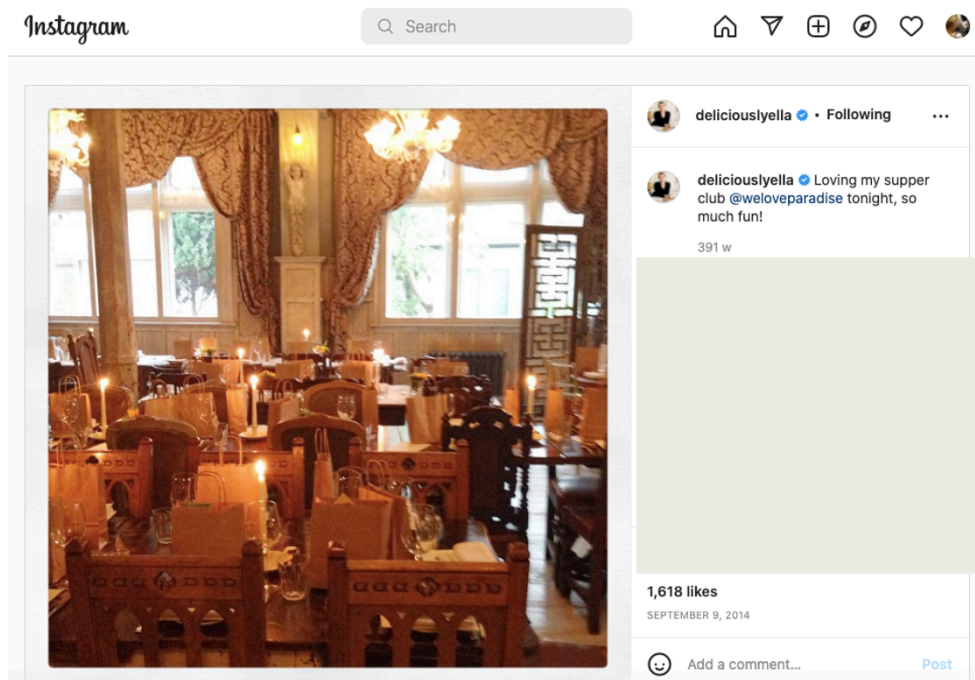
Image No 8.8, Mills has lunch at Daylesford Organic* (Instagram post 14-9-2014)
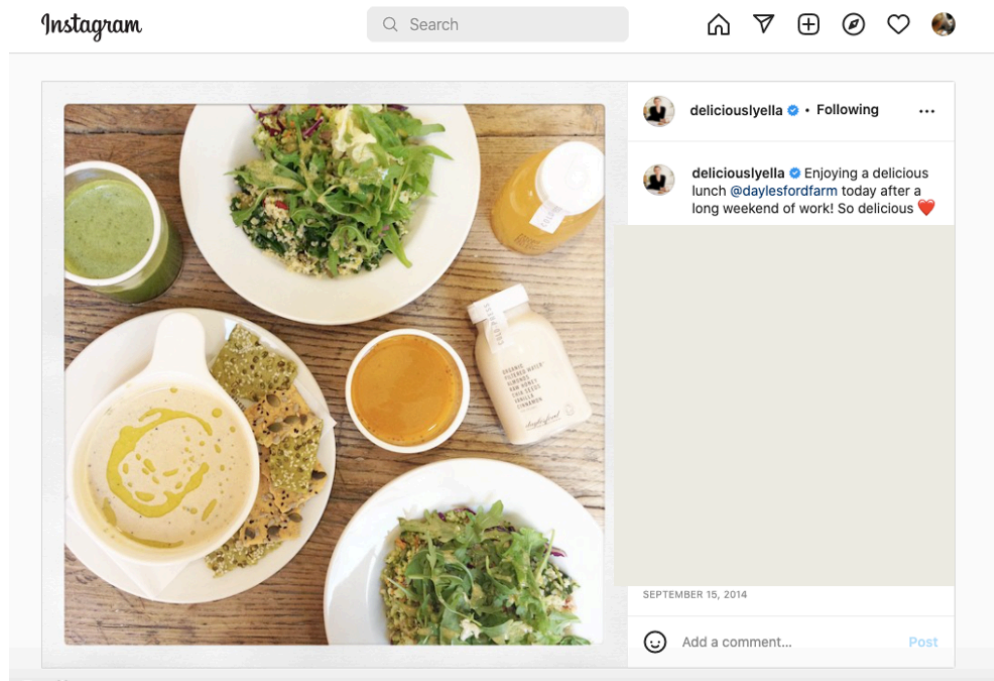
* This is one of the most famous 'wellness' cafés of London and Cotswalds, with lunch menus pricing from £14 – 18.5 for a main course

c) the fact that inferences about her overall lifestyle can be made from the images that she posts on Instagram. In these, she often wears luxury items, even though the brands might not be instantly recognisable by a wider audience. Still, they can be safely recognised by a stylistically discerning eye. Indeed, some of the images very often depict consistently expensive clothing items and jewellery. A characteristic example, to which I referred in the previous section, was the subtle yet expensive Van Cleef and Arpels bracelet that Mills was wearing on the cover of her first book. Another example is what seems to be the iconic Chanel espadrilles Mills is wearing during a trip in Rome with her husband Matthew Mills (see Image No 8.9 below):

Image No 8.9: Ella and Matthew Mills in Rome, Italy (Instagram post 26-8-2018)
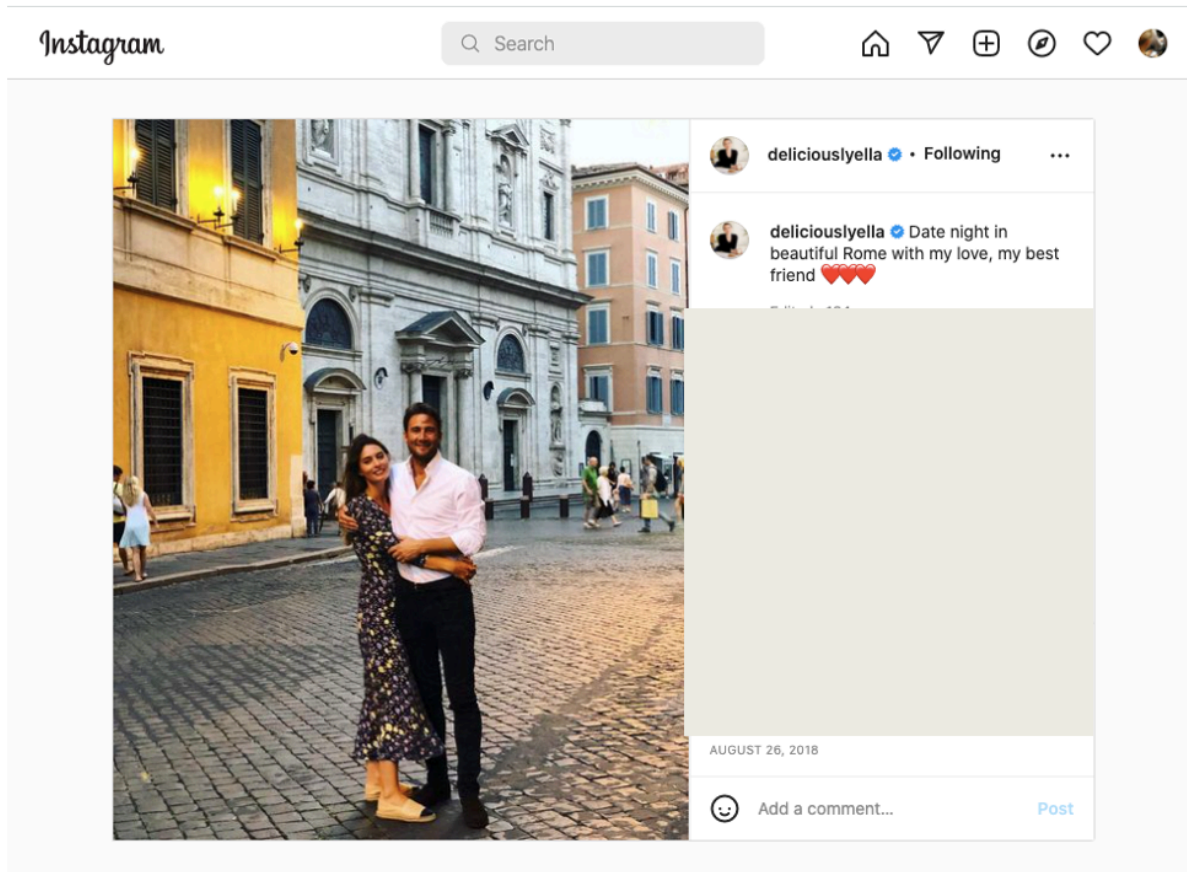
Importantly, this is not *just* a pair of shoes. Instead, it is a subtle class and cultural statement. The espadrilles might not look flashy or luxurious. Indeed, espadrilles are a relaxed type of shoe usually worn during summer holidays. However, the cost of these particular espadrilles begins from £650 and goes upward in various outlets (Gill, 2022). Accordingly, they convey a message of exclusivity that is characteristic of the Chanel brand. People wearing Chanel espadrilles belong to the privileged few that can afford them, along with a date night in Rome with their loved ones.

Image No 8.10, Official Chanel.com Website, Lambskin Espadrilles
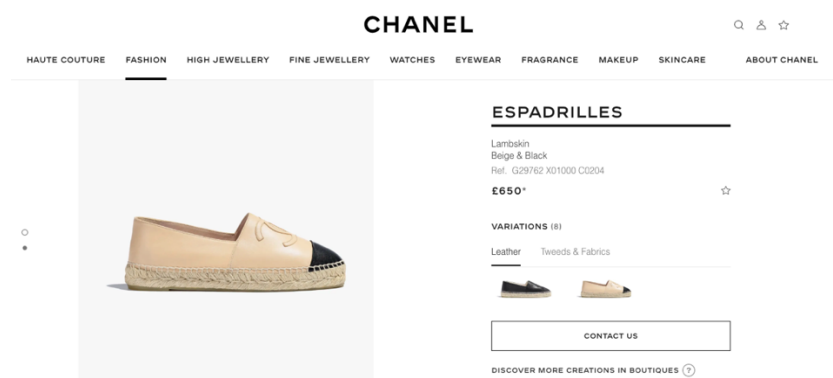
These examples, which are characteristic of a very expensive lifestyle, could be multiplied with many other visual indicators. Thus, whilst the inference to the effect that Mills belongs to the economically dominant classes based on this data is defeasible, it is the most natural and, I think, correct interpretation of that data.

That Mills belongs to the dominant classes, moreover, is corroborated by her possession of social and cultural capital. Social capital, roughly, refers to the importance of social connections and networks. These connections and networks can be mobilised to help actors realise their goals and projects. Differential possession of such capital thus implies a differential capacity of successful accomplishment of projects. Here are two characteristic images from the dataset that show Mills's place within the social capital space.

The first is a photo from ERA 1 (see Image No 8.11 below). Mills announces that she has made a video for one of her favourite recipes (double chocolate cheesecake brownies) with Tommy Clarke. Clarke is a famous English professional photographer and artist, whose work has featured in major titles of the international press (Clarke, 2022). His artwork can be priced up to £3,000 per picture (Riseart, 2022). Collaborating with Clarke during the early days of her blog to create a YouTube video is a clear indication that Mills has the capacity to successfully mobilise privileged social networks to pursue her ends. At the same time, one wonders about how a young student-amateur blogger could pay for the services of such a highly esteemed and expensive professional.

Image No 8.11: Mills announces her video collaboration with renowned photographer Tommy Clarke (Instagram post 24-10-2013)
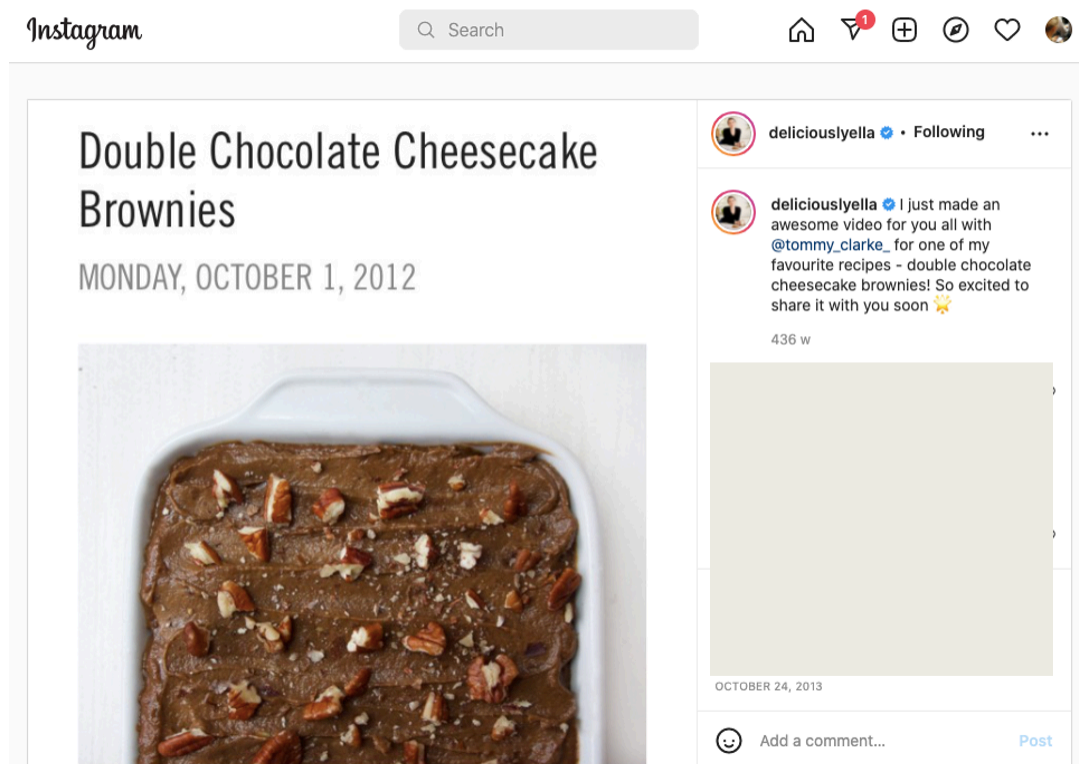
The second example involves the people that helped Mills initially register her company. According to an Instagram post dated 7 of May 2018, the registration of that company had taken place 'five years ago' (i.e., in May 2013) by Mills's brother (see Image No 17 below) who is a hedge-fund manager (Godwin, 2016). According to Mills, her brother's assistance was instrumental in transforming a blog run by an inexperienced 22-year-old into a successful business and internationally recognisable brand. In various Instagram posts and interviews in the mainstream press Mills has positioned herself as an accidental entrepreneur (O'Neill, 2020a), who never had any thoughts of a strategically calculated commercial ambition (O'Neill, 2020a). It is unclear whether Mills engaged in conversations with her brother as to the market potential of her blog. Still, we can infer that his expertise in how to set up a new and potentially lucrative businesses was important, opening a path for later economic success. Both examples thus attest to the significance of social connections when it comes to the successful launch of the Deliciously Ella company and brand.

Image No 8.12, Mills celebrates five years of the registered Deliciously Ella company (Instagram post of 7-5-2018)
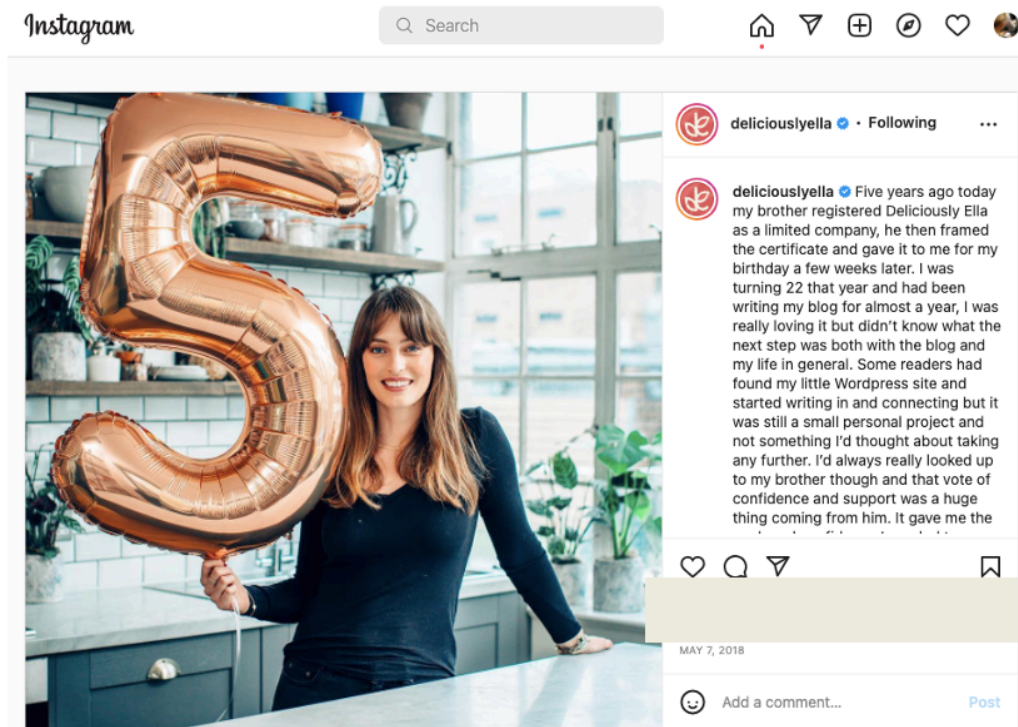
Last, it is also clear that Mills belongs to the dominant classes in terms of cultural capital. Here again, we dispose of numerous indicators that corroborate this interpretation. Such indicators include, to begin with, the specific foods that Mills focuses on. The foods are selected based on their distinctive features, i.e., freshness, 'wholeness' and health. Selection of foods with these attributes clearly correlates, in contemporary UK, with the possession of higher amounts of cultural capital (Atkinson & Deeming, 2015: 890). Moreover, Mills's specific techniques of self-presentation in visual space, which can be inferred from the aesthetic dimension of the Instagram images posted online, also attest to a refined taste. We might again here provide the example discussed in the previous section of the photo on the cover of her first book. The fact that Millsused sophisticated 'natural' make-up contrasts with the much heavier, and more ostentatious, make-up used by less privileged classes (Francombe-Webb & Silk, 2016). Likewise, as shown in the previous section, the evolution of the visual presentation of the food cooked clearly shows a trajectory towards aesthetic refinement. Even if this refinement emerged only gradually, it attests to the capacity to learn quickly and effectively implement techniques of refined visual presentation. Such

a capacity is also an indication of possession of cultural capital. Indeed, the rapid aesthetic upgrade of Mills's blog, website and Instagram demonstrate that Mills grasped immediately the importance of the link between aesthetic refinement and the long-term outlook of her growing business.

8.2.3 Natural privilege, discursive flexibility, and aesthetic refinement

Having established that Mills belongs to the dominant classes and that she combines the possession of economic, social, and cultural capital, the question that this subsection asks is what, if any, is her attitude and framing of class and inequality as part of her online persona. The general answer is that Mills tends to render class inequalities invisible by taking an attitude of naturalness towards her own class privilege and simply taking for granted that her lifestyle is formally open to all. The first thing to note is that the plant-based food that Mills selected to cook and depict across all eras is considerably more costly than other, equivalent in calories, kinds of food. Fresh and sophisticated plant-based food is less accessible to people with lower incomes in strictly economic terms. One may glean into how much the food Mills uses costs through a characteristic ERA1 example from the dataset. The gluten-free almond, quinoa, and pumpkin seed bread that Mills early on presents as 'totally clean and totally delicious' (Image No 8.13 below) costs magnitudes of order more than normal wheat-based bread. Mills's recipe includes 1.5 cup pumpkin seeds, 1 cup of buckwheat flour, 1 cup of almonds, 0.5 cup of sunflower seeds, 3 heaped tablespoons of psyllium husk powder, 2 tablespoons of chia seeds, and 2 tablespoons of dried mixed herbs (Woodward, 2013c). These ingredients are particularly costly as opposed to a simple flour, yeast, and warm water bread recipe. In fact, to verify the cost of the preparation of that bread (drawing on work I did whilst exploring an autoethnographic approach: see section 3.2.1) I personally decided to check the cost of this recipe. I bought the ingredients from Sainsbury's online, a mainstream and pricewise moderate supermarket. The total cost for one loaf breaks down as follows:

200gr Pumpkin Seeds: £2

130gr Buckwheat Flour: £0.44

130 gr Almonds (blanched): £2

70gr Sunflower seeds: £1

60gr Psyllium Husk: £1.8 (I did not find this one on Sainsbury's but on Amazon UK)

30gr Chia Seeds: £0.40

30 gr Mixed Herbs: £1.5

TOTAL COST: £9.14 for one loaf of bread

Image No 8.13, Almond, Quinoa & Pumpkin Seed Bread (Instagram post 31-8-2013)
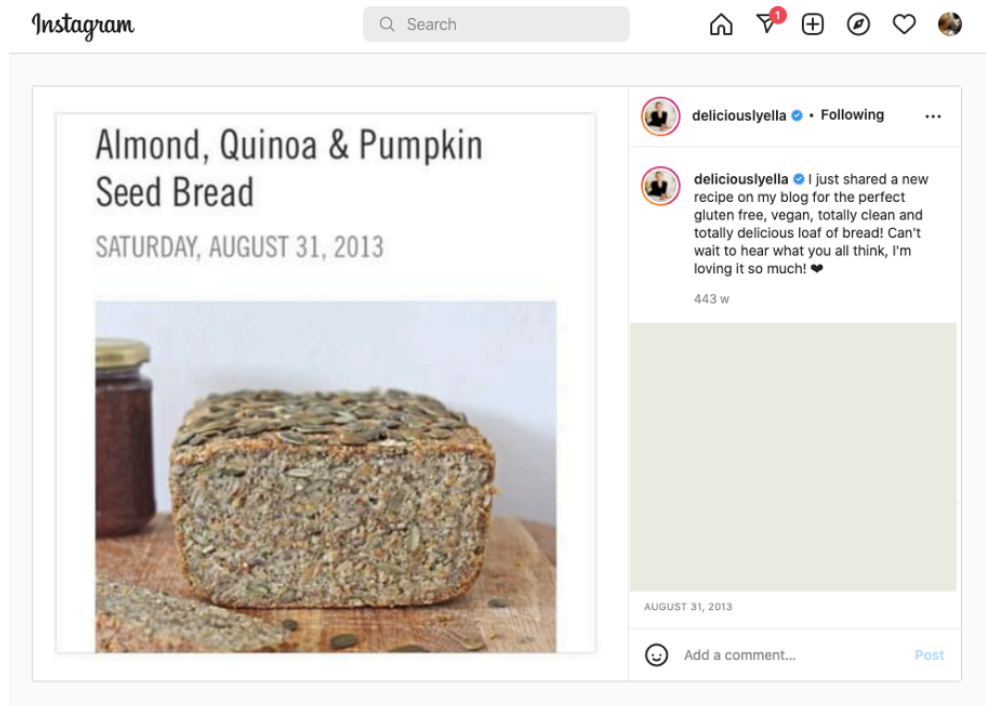
Additionally, and for the comparison to be fair, I also compared the cost to the price of a simple plain-flour bread recipe. The result is noticeable:

500gr Plain Wheat Flour: £0.4

1 sachet dried yeast: £0.15

TOTAL COST: £0.55 for one loaf of bread

To be sure, the gluten-free almond, quinoa, and pumpkin seed bread is one of many examples. The point is quite general: access to the foods preferred by Mills, especially as exclusive sources of everyday nutrition, presupposes the possession of a significant amount of economic and cultural capital. Thus, the lifestyle that Mills

favours, at least if one uses it as one's exclusive guide to culinary choices, is targeted at the relatively wealthy as well as the culturally dominant.

At this juncture, one interesting question is how Mills frames that lifestyle with respect to class and inequality. Three large themes, closely linked, emerge from the dataset. First, since the very beginning and throughout her accounts, Mills presents her culinary lifestyle as nominally open to all, irrespective of levels of income, wealth, and cultural capital. I shall call this the frame of *nominal democratic equality*. The lifestyle is deemed to be 'easy' and accessible to all. Here, for example, is how she puts the point in a characteristic excerpt from her first book, where she refers to her initial conversion to plant-based eating:

*"It took me about six months to really get the hang of cooking this way and every time I tried a new recipe, I couldn't believe how well it worked. There were two things that really stood out. Firstly, that it was all really easy. I mean seriously easy. **I couldn't believe that we weren't all enjoying the simplicity of this way of cooking**."* (emphasis added - Woodward, 2015: 28).

Still, it is clear, based on what we have said so far, that Mills's lifestyle is precisely *not an option* for large segments of the population that lack economic and cultural capital. The question then becomes how to navigate the tension between the promise of the lifestyle and the reality of the constraints that hinder individuals from adopting it. Given its economic cost, Mills's nominally democratic proposal can only appear convincing if attention is diverted from economic and cultural inequalities. Otherwise, it would become clear that the lifestyle is only partially accessible to the less wealthy and educated, if at all. Mills negotiates this tension in three ways. The first consists in simply not addressing the issue of poverty and, more generally, of class and inequality when it comes to consuming plant-based food. Thus, poverty, which could forbid people from switching to a wholly plant-based diet, if that was desirable, is rendered invisible by omission. More generally, no attention is paid to budgetary or educational constraints which could hinder even a substantial portion of the middle classes from adopting in a sustained and comprehensive manner Mills's culinary lifestyle.

Now, whilst it is not possible to infer from the dataset and the accompanying sources (chiefly Mills's books) that Mills's choice not to address class and inequality is deliberate, it can be interpreted, following a suggestion made by Johnston and Baumann in their book *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction* (Johnston & Baumann, 2014), as the manifestation of an attitude of naturalness towards economic and cultural privilege. On such an attitude, roughly, the possession of economic and cultural capital is simply taken for granted. Economic and cultural privileges are default vantage points from which to look at the social world. Consequently, the economic and cultural capacity to have access to healthy, fresh, sophisticated, and expensive plant-based food appears as natural: poverty and its cognates are absent from the horizon of visibility of the economically and culturally privileged actors.

Whilst the naturalness of economic and cultural privilege is an important theme, there is also a second, more sophisticated, way in which Mills navigates the tension sketched above. As we have already remarked in the previous subsection and, in more detail, in the literature review chapter, Mills's culinary lifestyle roughly corresponds in contemporary British social space to food preferences characteristic of those who own relatively higher amounts of cultural, as opposed to merely economic, capital. This makes it possible for her discourse and lifestyle to appear highly congenial to social actors that seek healthy, fresh, and sophisticated plant-based food even if these actors cannot necessarily always afford to pay for it or, alternatively, to pay for it as part of a comprehensive lifestyle. There is a central aspect part of Mills's discourse that can appeal directly to these people, helping to sustain her relationship with them. It consists in the fact that she adopts a 'flexitarian', as opposed to a 'strict vegan', discourse. Indeed, one of Mills's core messages is that people may be flexible in their plant-based eating practice, and no comprehensive commitment is needed to the specific kinds of food that she cooks and depicts. Here, for example, is how she puts this point in her first book:

*"I promise you that **I absolutely haven't written this with the intention of converting you all to veganism.** I'm not a huge fan of the word vegan anyway, as*

you can also be a very unhealthy vegan. Instead, I'm all about whole, natural foods that nourish your body. I'm really not here to point fingers though or encourage feelings of guilt, and I'm absolutely not expecting you to start eating entirely this way tomorrow. **Instead this book is meant to be flexible and adaptable** *[...]"* (emphasis added - Woodward, 2015: 30).

Mills's relaxed and flexible attitude towards plant-based eating is a staple throughout the eras. She keeps insisting that the adoption of her lifestyle does not need to be comprehensive. Instead, people can adopt it in a piecemeal and strategic way, depending on their capacities (including economic ones) and needs. This realistic discursive strategy is open to Mills because she does not attempt to vindicate an ethically demanding identity, such as that of a vegan, nor does she pledge allegiance to values such as preserving animal welfare. Since no such identity is at stake when it comes to plant-based eating, Mills's outlook leaves it open to people to experiment with her recipes and lifestyle on an intermittent, experimental, and flexible basis. I have already discussed in chapter 7 that this kind of approach allows Mills to occupy the middle ground in ideological disputes involving critiques addressed against wellness bloggers. Importantly, *it also has the effect of lowering the economic cost of adopting her lifestyle*. People can choose to resort to more expensive ingredients only to the extent that their personal budgets allow them to. Hence, Mills's lifestyle can appeal to people that choose it for cultural reasons, even if they cannot always afford it.

Third, Mills systematically downplays elements of class distinction and privilege whilst simultaneously exhibiting aesthetic and symbolic preferences that clearly correlate with huge amounts of cultural capital. This comes out in the most pronounced way in her own suggested interpretations of her brand's success as well as in her reactions to it. To begin with, this success is not in any way attributed to the possession of economic/social/cultural capital. Instead, it is either framed as a surprise even to her, or it is systematically attributed to 'hard work'. Examples of the first sort abound (Godwin, 2016; Goldfingle, 2018; E. Mills, 2017b; O'Neill, 2020a; Shah, 2017). Mills has declared that she has found the success of her own blog and brand 'crazy', especially because she had *"no helping hand"* from her family and their connections

(Haslett & Clarke-Hill, 2021). Thus, during ERA 1, and after giving one of her first interviews for mainstream media (Red Magazine in 2014), she says that *"[...] it is pretty crazy to see an interview [...] in their [magazine]"* (see Image No 8.14 below). The implication is clear: the interview is nothing to do with social capital and mobilisation of social networks. Rather, it is an effect of pure luck.

Image No 8.14, Red Magazine Interview (Instagram post 31-5-2014)
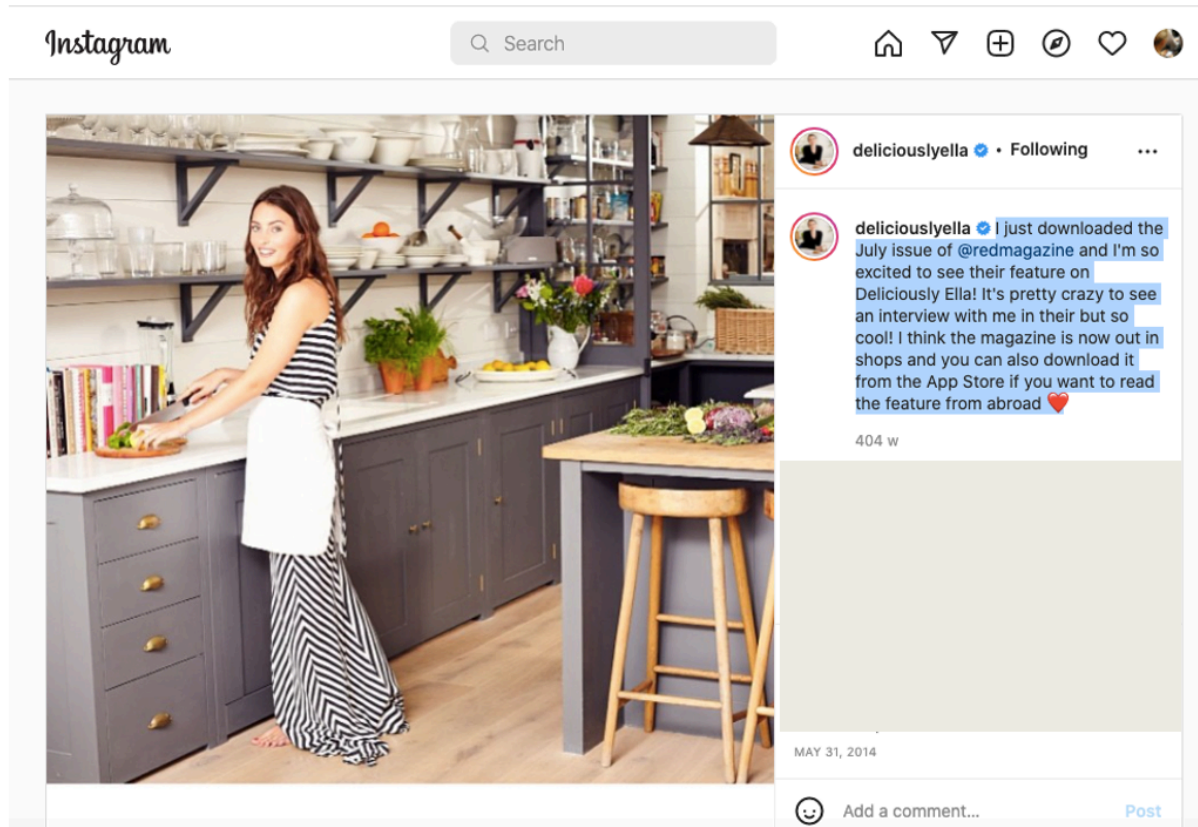
In a similar vein, and at a much later stage, during ERA 4 (date: 20/12/2017 – see Image No 8.15 below) the Instagram post announcing that her products can now be found in 5,500 stores across the UK downplays elements of class and instead attributes a large part of her success to her husband. It reads as follows: *"[...] I'm honestly totally flawed by it [...] I'm not a bold person by nature and would never have had the belief in what I started without Matt [...] I started with a little personal blog in my parents' kitchen and now we're here."*

Image No 8.15, Deliciously Ella's products can be found in 5.500 stores across the UK (Instagram post 20-12-2017)
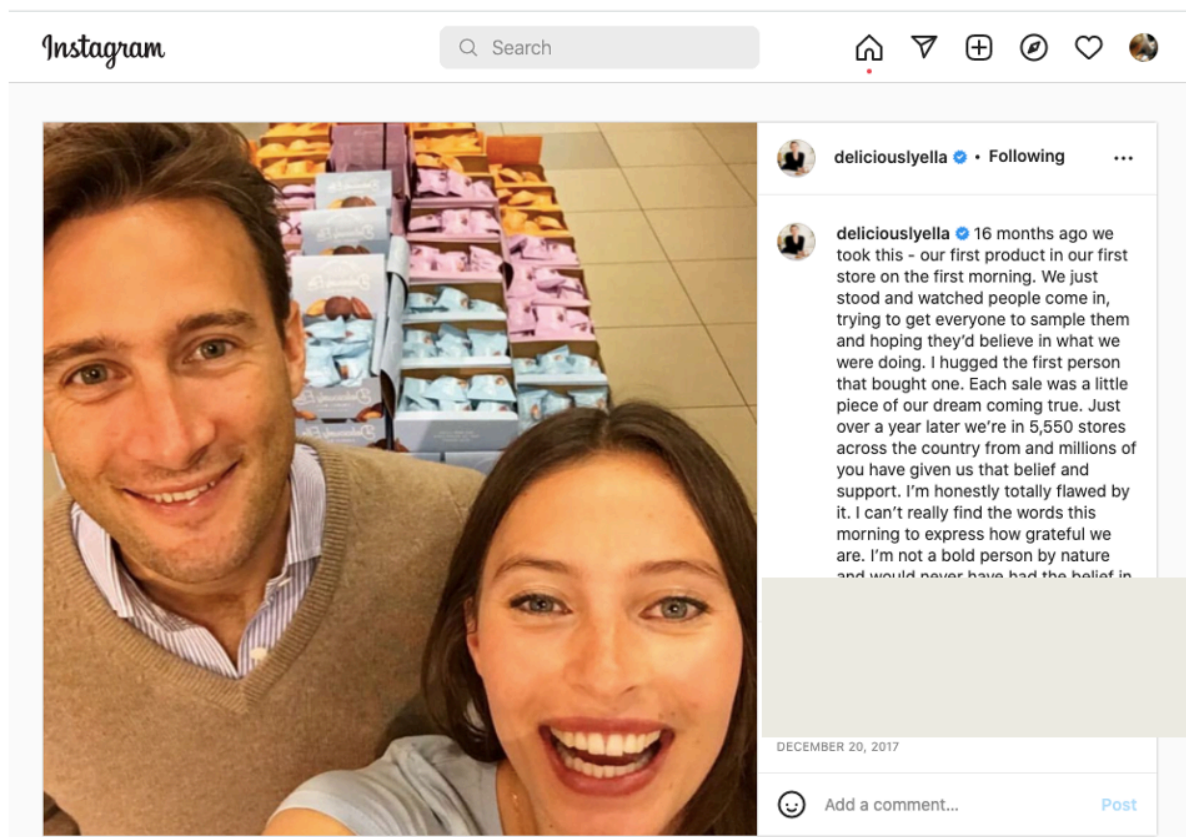
At the same time, the familiar trope of hard work is also used as a potential explanation of success. Overall, the absence of any reflection on inequality as potential explanation of success coheres well with the attitude of naturalness towards class privilege documented previously. In both cases, the significance of the possession of significant amounts of economic, social, and cultural capital is rendered invisible. Mills's discursive and visual world is one full with real inequalities whose existence is systematically either repressed (inequalities are rendered invisible) or justified through familiar neoliberal tropes of personal success through hard work.

8.3 Deliciously Ella: An authentic wellness advocate

The second theme that I shall be concerned with is authenticity. As I have shown in the literature review chapter authenticity is a particularly important concept for both the Deliciously Ella brand and Mills. Authenticity goes a long way towards distinguishing the practices of micro-celebrities that use social media from similar

projects disseminated through traditional media (Abidin & Brown, 2018; Jerslev, 2016; Khamis et al., 2017; A. E. Marwick, 2018; Raun, 2018). In this respect, one important contrast is to do with the projection of a true self as opposed to the more formal, professionalised, and curated practices of traditional media. Social media micro-celebrities are often deemed to be authentic in comparison to other social actors in that they do not 'feign'. Their surface image and their deeper identity often appear to coincide. This section will use the conceptual framework I constructed in the literature review chapter to explore authenticity themes in Mills's culinary trajectory.

8.3.1 Deliciously Ella and authenticity: A typology of narratives

To anticipate the ensuing discussion, the evolution of the theme of authenticity across eras can be summarised in the following rough way. During the first, amateurish, era, Mills accumulates what I shall call an initial 'authenticity capital'. By this expression I denote her capacity to be recognized by others (and, most importantly, by her intended audience) as being authentic rather than not. This can be understood to be a sub-species of cultural capital. Mills accumulates authenticity capital by constructing an existential narrative about how she overcame a significant personal health challenge through her switch to plant-based eating. The visual style and the blog's content support the narrative and attest as to its truthfulness. After the initial phase, the theme of authenticity is handled in more conventional terms: these involve visual and storytelling techniques that are also used by other micro-celebrities on social media. Accordingly, the subsection is divided into two parts. Regarding Mills's initial accumulation of authenticity capital, the first theme that emerges forcefully is an existential version of authenticity. The narrative to which this type of authenticity corresponds was first presented in Mills's blog. It was further elaborated in the section 'my story' of her first book (Woodward, 2015: 21). According to this narrative, Mills's turn to plant-based eating is a kind of existential reorientation that bears important structural resemblances to religious conversions. Mills's true self emerged after an episode of severe existential crisis due to illness and it was this episode that prompted the turn to a radically different kind of nutritional practice. The second part of this subsection traces out the presence and use of more conventional narrative themes. These have been well documented in the literature on authenticity in social media

studies. They include references to the amateurish nature of her culinary practice, the specific qualities, and visual modes of depiction of the prepared food, the material qualities of the ingredients and the procedures of cooking. Importantly, they also comprise various negotiations of potential tensions with the initial, 'charismatic' and existential authenticity phase.

8.3.2 Existential authenticity: Mills's conversion to plant-based eating

As we have seen in chapters 2 and 3, secular themes of existential authenticity traditionally focus on subjective experiences that indicate the presence of a latent true self that can only emerge after the experience of an acute personal or existential crisis. The prototype of such a model of authenticity is to be found in the Western religious tradition, with its experiences of conversion after a deep spiritual crisis and a moment of reckoning (Lane Fox, 2015). The crisis releases spiritual and existential energies that render the transformation of the subject possible. The transformation is preceded by a critical re-examination of the subject's past practice. A look at ERA 1's main themes clearly shows that the conversion model of authenticity fits particularly well Mills's initial turn to plant-based eating. Already in her blog and even more clearly in her first book the narrative that Mills articulates is that of an acute personal health crisis that was resolved by a comprehensive existential re-orientation. According to that narrative, Mills was for many years, and up to that crisis, a 'sugar monster' and 'a total addict' (Woodward, 2015: 21). Especially during her student years, she would feed herself in 'unhealthy ways', which would include '[…] a delicious mixture of Ben & Jerry's Cookie Dough ice cream, mountains of chocolate (preferably filled with gooey caramel) and lots of fizzy pick 'n' mix.' (Woodward, 2015: 21). The revelations about her past indulgences contrast particularly starkly with her overnight conversion to plant-based eating. Mills admits that 'it seems crazy that [her diet] has transformed so dramatically in such a relatively short amount of time' (Woodward, 2015: 22)

So, how did that transformation happen? The answer is that after Mills finished her second year of university, she was diagnosed with an illness called 'Postural tachycardia Syndrome' or POTS. This had *"[…] a devastating effect on [her] life".* Mills reports being unable to walk down the street, sleeping for sixteen hours a day, being

in chronic pain and suffering from many other symptoms. The different mixes of medicines that were prescribed to address her condition did not really help (Woodward, 2015a). At that point, Mills embarked on personal research on Google and *"after a lot of googling"* she came across Kris Carr, a woman that had changed her diet to manage her cancer. The book had a huge influence on Mills: *"[…] overnight [she] started a wholefood, plant-based diet and gave up all meat, dairy, sugar, gluten, anything processed and all chemicals and additives"* (Woodward, 2015: 25)

This initial conversion narrative, that focuses on an existential reorientation after a severe crisis, has been a staple of Mills ever since. From the point of view of subsequent eras (E. Mills, 2018a) the narrative corresponds, in Mills's own words, to 'phase one' of the Deliciously Ella journey. It stakes in a clear form a claim of existential authenticity using the model of conversion. The actor reveals intimate details about her personal struggles to a wider audience. The description of her subjective experience was one of severe illness, where her bonds with others and the external world seemed to melt into nothingness. Mills then explains how these struggles, after a rather random external trigger, to wit, the discovery by chance of Kris Carr's story and book, led to the emergence of her real self.

The conversion experience led to a congruence between her true self and her overall identity, i.e., revealed that the turn to plant-based eating as a response to that crisis was not just a mere secondary lifestyle choice. Importantly, though, the subject of the conversion component was to do with health, and not with the commitment to a moral value, such as preservation of the well-being of non-human animals, which is a major concern of veganism. In previous chapters we have seen that, with respect to that episode in her life, Mills also made a causal-scientific claim about the qualities of the foods: she claimed that the switch to plant-based food *caused* her recovery (Woodward, 2015: 25). Thus, a person that did not have the slightest idea about cooking and was devoid of skills in selecting plant-based food (Woodward, 2015a) suddenly converted into a new kind of lifestyle, drawing strength from a deeper kind of commitment. The narrative can thus be understood as the story of the birth of Deliciously Ella as a project expressing Mills's true self.

Importantly, this narrative is corroborated by the amateurish visual style that, as we saw in the previous section, dominates Mills's Instagram during ERA 1. The image of the aesthetically sloppy pancakes that were photographed without filters or food styling techniques in a non-curated way using an ordinary mobile phone coheres well with the idea that the person posting the content has only now learned, in a self-taught way, how to cook according to their new culinary commitments. An episode that attests to these commitments, and which differentiates Mills's turn to plant-based food from a mere food preference, is narrated again in her first book. When she took the decision to switch to plant-based eating, Mills did not really know how to cook or what to eat. Her initial tentative solution was to learn how to cook gradually, whilst eating the same dishes every day for the next three months. In her own words:

"Nonetheless I really wanted to try this new way of life, so for the next three months or so I literally ate the same thing every day. Breakfast was banana and blueberry porridge, with the fruit added in right at the beginning to ensure it fully disintegrated (…) Lunch was buckwheat toast with mashed avocado and roasted tomatoes: totally delicious but a little repetitive every day! And dinner was brown rice pasta with some form of veggie sauce" (Woodward, 2015: 25). The excerpt clearly marks out Mills's commitment. This was not to do with the choice of a specific food but, rather, with a new way of life, a reorientation that required specific culinary sacrifices.

In 2018, Mills took stock. She acknowledged that the initial conversion was just *"phase one"* of her project (E. Mills, 2018a). *"Phase two"* involved the creation of *"[…] a sense of community, a shared belief and ways to expand"* (E. Mills, 2018a). Here again, the parallels of the evolution of the narrative of authenticity with religious practices of conversion is striking. The idea of a charismatic person that, gifted with a mysterious health condition that is both a burden and an opportunity, begins to share her experiences online and thereby instigates a large following can be found in many other different contexts, ranging from the mystical and religious (the prototype being various religious sects) to the political. In her subsequent reflections on the first phase, Mills plays up the authenticity of the construction of the Deliciously Ella community by talking about the 'completely organic' and 'unexpected' evolution of what was a

personal diary initially written in her student kitchen to a best-selling phenomenon. Her popularity was a strong indication that 'somehow, the first book caught a moment'.

As with her reaction to the 'clean eating' backlash (see chapters 4 and 7) what is distinctive about the construction of Mills's community is the soft normativity of her approach. By soft normativity I mean the idea that Mills puts forward her ideas about what others ought to do as mere pieces of advice, that is, as things that it would be good to do, as opposed to categorical demands, i.e., as things that one *must* do no matter what. As she puts it in her 2020 book 'Quick and Easy' (Mills, 2020) the Deliciously Ella community is not about a categorical or over-riding requirement to consume plant-based food. Mills explains that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to being healthy and eating healthy food. Thus, her authentic first-personal experience is not presented as a categorical model for everyone. It is merely one possible way in which people might be inspired to adopt her preferred plant-based eating lifestyle (Mills, 2020).

8.3.3 Negotiating initial authenticity capital: The evolution of Mills's arrative

The previous subsection pointed to the conclusion that Mills's narrative during ERA 1, in tandem with the visual style of her blog, does indeed seem convincing from the point of view of authenticity. There is an interesting problem that occurs at this point. During her first amateur phase Mills accumulated a certain amount of authenticity capital, which resulted in the growth of followship of her Instagram account and drove the sales of her first book. The narrative basis of this accumulation was precisely the conversion story analysed previously. However, we have also seen that her project gradually became professionalised and dominated by visual themes and pertinent narratives that were highly curated. The project thus became open to the critique that the initial spontaneous phase was eventually subdued by an approach that is simultaneously more aesthetically sophisticated but dominated by the imperative to make profits through the marketisation of products. All these elements are problematic from the point of view of authenticity. Professionalisation entails a 'hardening' of online practices. These are now the exact opposite of spontaneous. Instead, they are rationally planned by experts based on specific norms of expected market

performance. Aesthetically curated practices can thus stifle the expression of the true self. Seeking profit, moreover, can entertain the suspicion that the actor is not engaging in her preferred lifestyle for deeper existential reasons but merely to sell something to others. Likewise, stating one's preference for specific brands can be understood as 'advertising', which, once again, involves engaging in an action not for the sake of it, but for other, extrinsic, reasons (such as gaining something from the advertised company). Authentic actors wishing to marketize parts of their experience thus face a kind of 'market dilemma': once aspects of their experience become marketized goods, their authenticity credentials decline. Addressing the dilemma involves finding ways of negotiating the tensions arising from the fact that authentic actors can be perceived to be driven by extraneous, market values. Mills has adopted a multiplicity of strategies to address some of these issues. Most of them are well documented in the literature on social media celebrity in its relation to the performance or staging of authenticity. I present some of those strategies through a discussion of selected images throughout ERAS 1-4 in what follows.

An initial form of the market dilemma concerned clarifying Mills's stance with relation to brands depicted on her Instagram account. In the following post, dated 5th of October 2013, she clarifies that her page is *'not an advertising page […] [she] is only showing these products because she loves them and not because the companies are asking her to […]'*:

Image No 8.16, Coyo Plant Based Yoghurts (Instagram post 5-10-2013)

The question is whether this disclaimer is sufficient to sustain her initial authenticity capital. At the very least, the strategy that Mills uses is consistent with her overall outlook. According to her narrative, the considerations that prompt her into action are not to do with extraneous reasons, such as being asked to advertise specific products by specific companies and be paid for that, but solely with the love for her chosen lifestyle. Mills here appeals to a well-trodden trope in the micro-celebrities literature. This is a trope of sincerity/passion and the project of 'doing what one does because one loves it' rather than for putatively irrelevant reasons (B. E. Duffy & Hund, 2015; B. E. Duffy & Wissinger, 2017; O'Neill, 2020a). Interestingly, though, Mills does not consistently make similar disclaimers for all her Instagram posts that could be understood to be potential advertisements. This can be seen, for example, in the following post, which comes later in time:

Image No 8.17: Imbibery London Samples (Instagram post 13-2-2014)
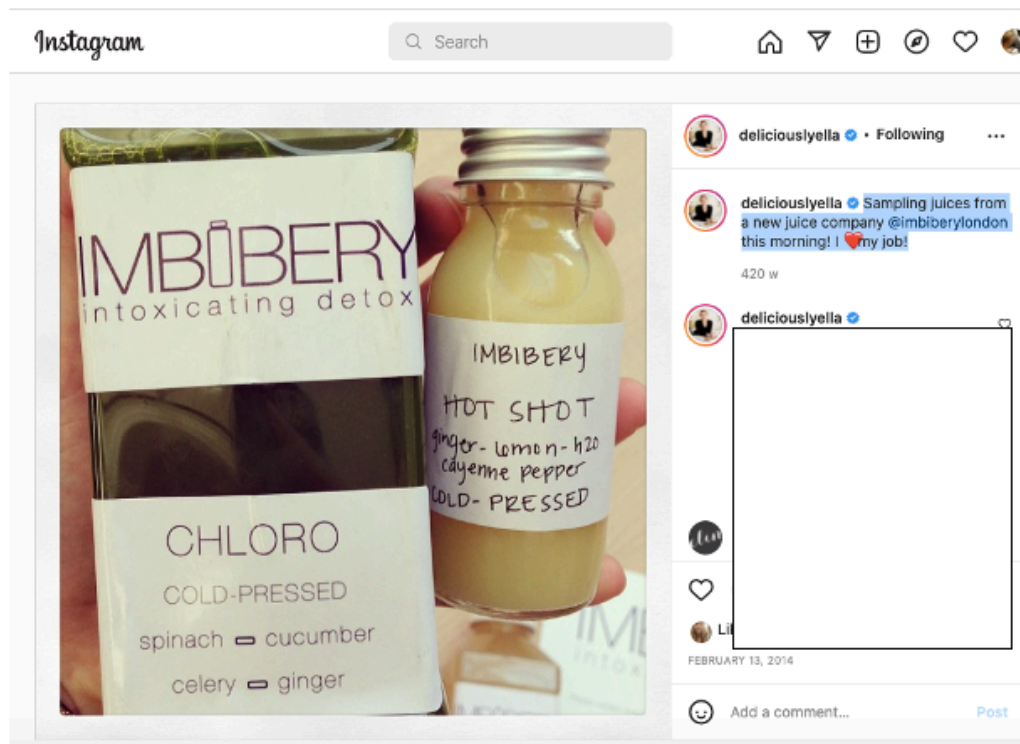
Since posts such as these blur the sincerity narrative, it is not always entirely clear if Mills is advertising products on her Instagram or not, which could be a potential source of erosion of her authenticity capital.

A second well-established micro-celebrity strategy for sustaining authenticity consists in disclosing personal moments with an increased frequency (Abidin, 2018; Abidin & Brown, 2018; Gaden & Dumitrica, 2015; A. E. Marwick, 2015; Pooley, 2010). As I have discussed in the previous section, Mills's Instagram account rapidly evolved, after ERA 1, in two main directions. First, the visual content became much more sophisticated and curated, and less 'amateurish'. Second, though, and perhaps to compensate for the professionalisation and commercialisation which can be perceived as less authentic, the account simultaneously becomes much more focused on Mills's personal moments (on this, see the quantitative details in the beginning of the first section of this chapter). Here I shall enquire this phenomenon with a greater degree of specificity, by analysing a few selected images. After ERA 1, the user can see much more often pictures of Mills's boyfriend (who later becomes her husband), of her dog

and of her friends, as well as pictures from vacations or even from more 'fragile' moments. Below, for example, is Mills announcing her engagement:

Image No 8.18, Ella and Matthew Mills announcing their engagement (Instagram post of 5-9-2015)

The setting of this picture, as well as its style, conform to standard micro-celebrity practices. Mills seems relaxed and happy, wearing her fuchsia bikini that highlights her lean and toned figure. Matthew Mills, with a similarly relaxed attire, is happily hugging his future wife. The happy couple is photographed in a semi-staged-semi-spontaneous style, in the holiday home (most probably the Woodward's mansion in Mystique Island, which I have already mentioned in the subsection on Mills's position in social class). They are spending their time with their families (as per Mills's caption). This is a more personal and intimate photo, not only because of the nature of the information it conveys, but also because of the couple's relaxed and half naked attire, implying a sense of intimacy and familiarity.

The same considerations, moreover, apply to similar examples from my visual dataset. Here, for example, are two more images of Mills's wedding and personal moments with her husband:

Image No 8.19: Mills's one year wedding anniversary (Instagram post 23-4-2017)

Image No 8.20: Mills and her husband on vacation (Instagram post 14-9-2017)

8.4 Mills and the Deliciously Ella brand today

I have previously mentioned in chapter 3 that this research analysed a dataset of 4,000 Instagram images from the Deliciously Ella account. The time frame of the analysis began in January 2013 and ended in October 2018. Still, even though my data collection formally ended in October 2018, I have been following the Deliciously Ella account on Instagram since. I did so mainly to stay up to date regarding the brand's evolution and at the same time to be able to reflect on these developments in relation to my own work.

To begin with, the Deliciously Ella blog, which has gone through many design changes over the years, does not exist anymore. It has been replaced by a fully functional website, which includes an online shopping section. Users can shop online a wide range of Deliciously Ella food products that can be also found in the UK's leading supermarkets and wellness stores. The product range varies and comprises, among other things, chips, cereal bars, granolas, chocolate bars, caramel cups, dipped nuts,

energy balls and frozen desserts. The variety of the products offered bring to focus Deliciously Ella's commercial success over the years. An interesting addition is the new brand logo. The full title 'Deliciously Ella' has been dropped. Instead, only the initials 'DE' have been kept. The new logo resembles to a small stick with two leaves, as the image below shows. The logo thus clearly indicates the restaurant's connection with plants and, by association, with plant-based food. But there is even more to this revamped brand identity. The Deliciously Ella brand no longer focuses solely on 'Mills'. To this extent, the name was simply dropped from the title. The initial 'DE' thus signifies that, although the brand continues to pay tribute to its founder, it has become relatively autonomous in the sense that it is no longer uniquely connected to a specific personal story. The celebrity Mills has now completely given way to a new company, which places plant-based food at the core of its commercial value.

Image No 8.21: Deliciously Ella Website screenshot of home page (taken on 13 July 2022)
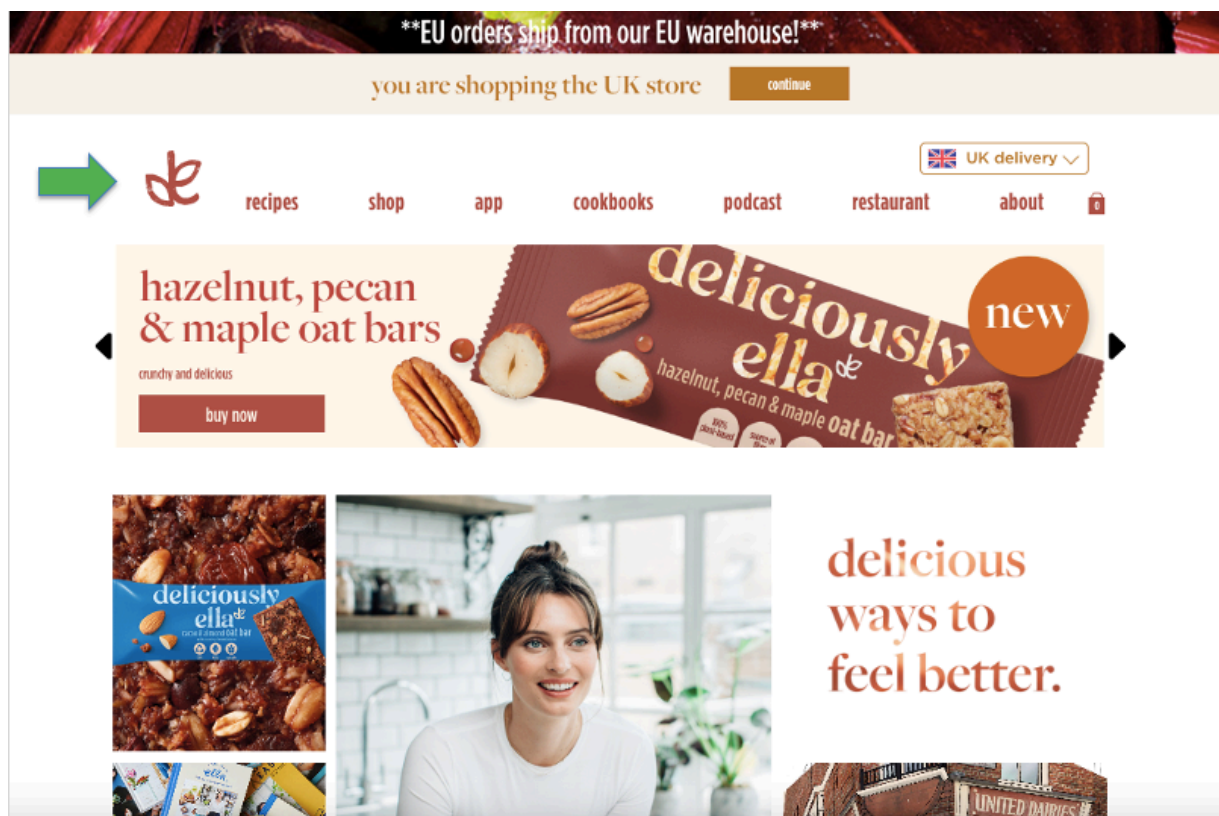
Moreover, since September 2018 Mills and her husband have been presenting a podcast focusing on the UK wellness market. The podcast features a range of interviews with scientists, doctors, dieticians, and researchers, and it has accumulated

over 10 million listens since its launch (E. Mills, 2022c). Moreover, the Deliciously Ella brand has expanded the Deliciously Ella app by offering three types of subscriptions. These range from 2.75 to 4.5 euros per month, featuring a *"holistic approach to health"* (E. Mills, 2022d). The mobile app is now called 'Feel Better by Deliciously Ella' and offers plant-based recipes, 'nutritionist approved' meal plans, movement classes, meditation classes, mindfulness and sleep tools and a 'wellness tracker' (E. Mills, 2022d).

Another recent significant step for the Deliciously Ella brand was the launch of the restaurant 'Plants by DE' in Mayfair (London). The restaurant occupies the same space where the Deliciously Ella deli was previously located. As previously mentioned, a few years ago, in 2018, Ella Mills and her husband Matthew, who is the CEO of the company, took the decision to close two of their three delis after reporting losses of almost £724,000 according to the mainstream media of the time (Dennys, 2018; Starkey, 2018). Later, in March 2020, and due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing restrictions, they decided to close their remaining deli in Weighouse Street in London until June 2021. After that point in time, they transformed the deli into a vegan restaurant and launched 'Plants by DE' (Axworthy, 2021).

Concerning Mills's cookbook writing career, and as I was writing the present section, on 12 July 2022 at 19:00 Deliciously Ella uploaded a promotional video of her brand-new cookbook on Instagram. The book was entitled 'How to go plant based' and the Instagram caption described it as 'a definitive guide with all the resources and expertise that you needed'. The video featured highlights of several chapters of the book, such as 'How to change your diet', 'What is a healthy diet', 'Why the future needs to look different' and 'Raising plant-based children' among others (E. Mills, 2022f). The video also mentioned that this new book has everything one needs to go plant-based or flexitarian. The use of this latter category is a noteworthy shift away from the strictly plant-based narrative so far. It also signals a slightly different strategy of audience targeting on the part of the Deliciously Ella brand and Mills. Indeed, Mills had been adamant since the early days of her blog that meat, poultry, fish and/or eggs were totally excluded from her diet. Flexitarians, as already discussed in my Literature

Review chapter are flexible vegetarians who can enjoy animal products in moderation (Dakin et al., 2021; Derbyshire, 2017; Erisman, 2018; Himics et al., 2022; Wozniak et al., 2020). The pivot towards flexitarianism is an interesting change that occurred gradually. It marks the transition from a niche blog discussing personal health issues and nutritional choices to overcome a specific illness in 2012, to a successful plant-based food brand addressing wider audiences through the mainstream routes of a more flexible approach to nutrition. Importantly, moreover, this latest book is the most deferential to scientific authority to date. Mills says that she selected teams of experts, depicted in the book, which contributed to almost every aspect of it, and first and foremost on the nutritional value of the foods comprising the proposed recipes (E. Mills, 2022e). Thus, 'How to Go Plant-Based' completes and deepens the turn taken after the clean eating debacle, placing Mills's project firmly within so-called evidence-based dietetic practices.

Last, but certainly not least, a significant move on the Deliciously Ella Instagram account occurred on March 20, 2022, when Mills decided to abandon it and create a new personal account under the name of @Ella.Mills_. The reason provided was that the Deliciously Ella brand had grown 'so far beyond' Mills herself. In fact, Mills admitted that she was not running the Deliciously Ella account which, instead, was run by a team of 50 people employed by her company. She explained that: *"It felt the right time to create a separate space for me as an individual".* She did so in April 2022 in a short Instagram post accompanied by a smiling image of herself next to her 3-year-old daughter Skye (E. Mills, 2022g).

This new personal page (followed by 102,967 people in February 2023) seems to be a space where Mills can upload images of her personal life, family, and friends as well as news about her company. On the other hand, the official Deliciously Ella brand Instagram page that reached 2.155 million followers in February 2022, appears to be now exclusively focused on the Deliciously Ella brand and company, and it maintains a more food-centric corporate style with only a few images of Mills's personal life.

This is a recent change which started in August 2021. This was only a few months before Mills and her husband announced that they bought out their investors from the Deliciously Ella company (as I mentioned in the previous section). The buy-out itself was presented as a seminal milestone for the couple, and it was described, explained, and justified in the lengthy Instagram post (the text of which can be found in the Appendices section, at the end of this document) presented in the next chapter (Image No 9.1). The main theme that runs through it is to do with the nexus between 'ethics and values', family ownership of the company and personal effort to connect the two. Mills explains that the main goal of the company is not financial (making profit or shareholder value) but *"[to] change the way we eat and live, and making health, wellbeing and plant-based eating commonpla*ce". The 'we' that she refers to in the context of accomplishing this goal is left completely vague and indeterminate: it could be anything, from people at large to the customers (and potential customers) of the brand to Instagram followers. Still, the main message is that the goal itself is existentially important: it purportedly flows from *"every fibre of [the Mills'] being".* As such, it trumps purely financial considerations. It is this higher goal that justified the decision not to sell the company (or large parts of it). At the same time, and during attempts to accomplish that goal, the division of labour between the entrepreneurial couple conforms to traditional gendered patterns. Even though the Mills are presented as equal partners of a family business, it is Mills's husband Matthew, who is also the CEO of the company, that is presented as the one responsible for coming up with the idea of buying back the business and who is also credited with the successful execution of this idea.

Overall, and regarding the triple authenticity-distinction-enrichment lens of the thesis, the first thing to note is that the most recent evolution of the brand marks a break with the theme of authenticity, which had already somewhat receded in the background after the clean eating debacle. Indeed, the comparison between Mills's first and latest book offers a striking glimpse of the veritable volte-face that occurred in between. One way to interrogate this transformation is by asking whether authenticity capital tends to depreciate across time. Thus prompting actors that initially had relied on it to launch their business to adopt more mainstream strategies along the way.

At the same time, while the marketisation of Mills 's products still falls within the enrichment economy broadly conceived, it is now less a function of sharing authentic experiences and more to do with narratives revolving around healthy eating and its wider (including ecological) benefits and family values. Last, but not least, distinction and class still play a pivotal role. Here are some characteristic examples with a focus on the cost of the lifestyle that Mills proposes. She discusses the benefits of probiotic supplements, in particular of the brand 'Symprove' (with which she has an advertising collaboration), one of the UK market's most expensive probiotic supplement that ranges from £50-£80 per month depending on whether one chooses a monthly subscription or not (Fargo, 2021; Magee, 2019). Moreover, although she chooses an understated luxury fashion style for her own interviews, the 'simple' clothes that she wears are quite expensive. For example, the top and skirt selected for the photo shooting below are on the £500+ range (YouMagazine, 2022); or, she endorses the Sweaty Betty activewear brand, a successful British retailer with jogging pants and/or leggings costing £90+ (SweatyBetty, 2022). Additionally, although the Deliciously Ella brand has grown tremendously over the years, no discussion is ever made about consumers' capacity to afford a plant-based nutrition or regularly buy expensive food products such as Mills 's. This remains the case despite the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the energy crisis, and the cost-of-living crisis. These events could have prompted Mills to use her influence and popularity to discuss such complex issues of concern to UK consumers. However, no such thing occurred: Mills clung to her careful and quiet strategy of distancing herself from complicated narratives. Concomitantly, she does not show off her wealth and never fully discloses her life as a member of London's affluent elite, whilst also remaining silent on thorny issues that could make her vulnerable to criticism and perhaps question her social class's role within contemporary UK.

8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I did three things. First, I charted the visual evolution of Mills's online trajectory by providing a deeper visual analysis of four selected images across all eras. More specifically, I tracked the visual properties of a landmark dish (pancakes) across time. The analysis demonstrated that the visual content of the initially amateurish food blog rapidly evolved into a curated, highly aestheticized visual style reminiscent of professional food websites.

I then moved on to discuss data from the vantage points of distinction/inequality and authenticity. My findings and interpretations can be summarised as follows. Mills belongs to the dominant British classes in terms of possession of economic, social, and cultural capital. Her lifestyle, nominally open to all, presupposes the possession of cultural and economic capital (and optimally, both), even though this fact remains unacknowledged. At the same time, Mills systematically downplays her class privilege, and her self-presentation on her Instagram account is particularly discreet. An important factor that can play a role in convincing potential audiences to turn to her lifestyle stems from Mills's narrative of existential authenticity, which provides a ring of truthfulness and sincerity to her plant-based culinary practice. Still, after the initial phase of accumulation of authenticity capital, Mills resorted to more conventional techniques, also used by other social media micro-celebrities, such as systematic exposure of her personal life, to boost perceptions of authenticity.

Finally, I provided a summary of where the Deliciously Ella brand stands today on several issues of particular interest to the present thesis. Several interesting points emerged. First, in line with the brands consensual centrist approach, references to veganism were all but dropped and concessions to flexitarianism, which allows for occasional consumption of meat or fish, were made. Along similar lines, there is now increased reliance on scientific discourse, which marks a significant break with the initial period's self-healing discourse. Second, an important development is the formal separation between Mills and the Deliciously Ella persona, marked by the opening of a separate, personal, Instagram account on the part of Mills. Third, this separation

entails playing down elements of authenticity. To put it in different terms, the conversion of the initial authenticity capital accumulated through Mills's charismatic persona into entrepreneurial dynamism is now complete. Fourth, elements of distinction/class and enrichment continue to play a central role.

CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION OF THESIS

Overview

I begin this final chapter by offering a summary of this thesis and its aims and objectives, as well as an outline of the findings discussed in Chapters 4,5,6 and 7. In the following section I discuss the approach I took and the challenges of interpreting a voluminous visual social media dataset using social scientific conceptual tools. I then return to the issue of my professional positionality and outline how that positionality influenced the analysis and interpretation of my findings, before I continue with a brief update of how the Deliciously Ella brand evolved up to the present date. The next section focuses on this thesis's contributions. Following that, I make several possible recommendations to stakeholders, such as the FSA and DEFRA. I also sketch out future ways in which it is possible to build upon my research.

9.1 Summary of thesis and research findings

This thesis studied in detail the increasingly popular practices of the highly active online actor Ella Mills (AKA 'Deliciously Ella' and denoted throughout the thesis as Mills when reference was made to the person, whereas 'Deliciously Ella' was used to refer to the Instagram account and/or the brand), a British food writer and entrepreneur, defined by the mainstream media as a 'wellness blogger' or a 'wellness influencer'. Mills is one of the most recognisable and popular wellness influencers in the UK (2,155 million Instagram followers on 1 February 2023). Her high social media followership and popularity makes her a significant representative of a large group of social media actors, generally defined as 'wellness influencers'. These include mainly young women food writers and/or entrepreneurs that have recently brought a noteworthy change into the British food scene (O'Neill, 2020a). Like Mills, wellness influencers have popular blogs and highly visible social media profiles, where they generate a wealth of visual content by posting online about their grocery shopping, their cooking preparations, their lifestyle choices, and their distinctive ways of viewing the world. This content is then used to communicate with their audiences, to promote their work and, whenever possible, to create a suitable environment for advertising

and marketing collaborations. Such practices help to sustain those actors' income, as well as the income generated by the UK's Health and Wellness market. The latter has been calculated as being worth £19.3 billion in 2020, whilst the global Wellness market was worth more than £3.95 trillion (WellnesCreativeCo, 2022).

The general aim of this research was to provide useful insights and explanations via a detailed analysis of the Instagram trajectory of Deliciously Ella: one of the most popular and most followed Instagram accounts in the UK promoting plant-based food consumption and wellness practices. A combination of mixed methods (qualitative, quantitative, content analysis, visual analysis, digital methods, netnography) was used to extensively analyse 4,000 Instagram images of the Deliciously Ella account, that were posted between 17 January 2013 and 24 October 2018. This lengthy time frame gave birth to a voluminous visual dataset, which presented significant challenges. Still, it also offered me the opportunity to develop a novel approach of analysing a single Instagram account, which I named 'Comparative Instachronics'. This approach considers the Instagram images posted as visual representations of events and/or thoughts happening at approximately the time of the posting. It also views each single Instagram account as an online diary. The account's visual entries correspond to the offline events happening in real time and involving the account owner, who is responsible for uploading online content.

To handle and work with the data in a more convenient way, the visual dataset was then separated into several image and Instagram posts groups, which I called 'eras'. Eras correspond to specific time periods in the life of the actor, mainly identified through major events. In the case of Deliciously Ella, for example, ERA1 (The Wellness Blogger) indicates the period when Mills used to be a newcomer wellness blogger. ERA2 (The Best-Selling Author) corresponds to the period when Mills had published her first best-selling book. ERA3 (The Entrepreneur) is to do with the period when Mills is making her entrepreneurial attempts. Finally, ERA4 (The Clean Eating Denouncer) is marked by the renouncement of 'clean eating', a controversial term that Mills used at the beginning of her blogging activity, when Mills re-invents herself as a

more conscious and evidence-based plant-based food influencer and businesswoman.

In this way, a dataset reflecting a time-based continuity was created. It offered opportunities for a deeper analysis of the online actor and her practices across time, as well as observations of change and/or evolution as time passes by. In fact, this thesis introduced an element of methodological innovation in social media studies, i.e., the Comparative Instachronics approach. The extent to which this approach is innovative can be brought out via comparison to similar research endeavours in social media studies. As I have shown in my Literature Review chapter, visual research focused on Instagram is typically restricted when it comes to taking into consideration the dimension of time (see Chapter 2, Literature Review). Nevertheless, the crucial variable concerns tracking change (and continuity) across time. To begin with, images are not typically analysed and coded in a diachronic way. Moreover, in all studies that I am familiar with, and which were mentioned in the Literature Review chapter, a certain sample of images from one or more Instagram accounts is analysed, but not with the aim of tracing the evolution of some entity (an actor, an account or anything else) across a significant amount of time. So even when the sample concerns a wide (more or less) period of time, images are typically analysed synchronically, as if they were taken at the same moment in time.

This choice to restrict Instagram study at a certain point in time could perhaps be explained by reference to the usual scarcity of research resources. Second, the object of research was a particular actor, i.e. Mills and one of the explicit aims was to track her evolution, and the evolution of the Deliciously Ella account, across time. This meant that I was actively seeking elements of both continuity and change when I was coding and analysing my dataset. This led me, third, to temporally order my research by decomposing the time frame into distinctive eras, which were identified as such precisely because they were marked by *transformative events*, i.e. by elements of change along various dimensions (for example, entrepreneurial practices, visual evolution of images of iconic foods, acceptance and then denial of clean eating and so forth). Thus, fourth, this approach allowed me to correlate the changes (and

invariances) that I tracked with developments and events outside the dataset itself, interpreting and explaining these changes across time under the impetus of various external pressures (for example, the visual evolution of iconic foods can be explained through the the imperative to produce curated visual content on Instagram as all users try to do or the about-face vis-a-vis clean eating can be explained by the public debacle and the general change of cultural mood concerning this trope and so forth). Overall, the choice of dataset and time frame, codified in the Comparative Instachronics approach, rendered possible a deep qualitative longitudinal study of the Deliciously Ella Instagram world, which stands out in comparison to similar - and typical - Instagram studies.

Additionally, the visual analysis conducted in the context of the present thesis was inspired by Gillian Rose's 'Compositional Interpretation' approach (Rose, 2012) and the idea of the deployment of the 'good eye' (Rose, 2012). Roughly put, this consists in approaching visual material holistically, while also taking seriously into account elements that go well beyond the image itself. Finally, through a set of questions that investigated, among other things: a) key characteristics of Mills's self-presentation techniques on Instagram; b) how Mills's Instagram images contribute to shaping a wider narrative about plant-based food choices; and c) how elements of authenticity, social class/inequlity and enrichment structure a new emerging economy through social media, this thesis shed light on Mills as an Instagram wellness influencer.

Findings of ERA1: The Wellness Blogger (Chapter 4)

- **First,** during the early days of Mills's trajectory, food (and/or drink) plays a major and central role in the Instagram visuals. Food images have not undergone any professional food styling and they are mainly characterised by a raw authenticity which is usually very common among amateur bloggers.
- **Second,** the recipes presented do not entail any sophistication, but they are mainly celebrated due to their nutritional attributes which, according to Mills, help maintaining one's good health. This is the era where Mills builds her own, authentic narrative by heavily relying on her own health story and her choice to 'eat her way' to health.

- **Third,** some selections of exotic ingredients (such as hemp, chia seeds, avocados and so on) subtly imply notions of status and distinction and prepare the scene for later eras where these notions become more intense, despite Mills's reassurances that her aim is to make plant-based food likeable and approachable to everybody.

- **Fourth,** the controversial term 'clean eating' (for which Mills and many other wellness influencers in 2017 were heavily scrutinised by the mainstream media) is often used through hashtags, despite Mills's later claims that she has never used it.

- **Fifth,** sharing inspirational quotes of positivity and introducing neologisms such as 'rainbow lunch' formulate a solid ground for Mills's life and work philosophy that places positive thinking and happiness in its centre.

Findings of ERA2: The Best-Selling Author (Chapter 5)

- **First,** images of food and/or drink do not have a dominant role anymore as images of Mills herself and elements of her personal (and professional) life emerge. Although this is still the Instagram account of a plant-based food influencer, microcelebrity culture prevails and therefore the followers have a chance to get to know better who the face behind the Deliciously Ella account is and what kind of life she is leading. Because Instagram allows followers to directly interct with the account owner, Mills gets to develop a quasi-personal relationship with her audience.

- **Second,** as her blog and business grow, her Instagram account obtains a more professional look-and-feel and the first food styling images as well as a more curated look-and-feel in her website and Instagram account appears.

- **Third,** Mills's recipes continue to be basic and often blunt in terms of ingredients used, technique applied and food styling. However, they are still praised for their nutritional benefits (as they were during ERA1) and for the happiness they can bring to those who consume them. Happiness and positive thinking are dominant themes for Mills in this era, connected not only to a healthier, plant-based eating style but also to entrepreneurial success.

- **Fourth,** avocados are among the mostly depicted and/or used ingredients of the era, as Mills seems to be aware of staying on top of the UK food trends of the time, to further establish her brand.

Findings of ERA3: The Entrepreneur (Chapter 6)

- **First,** food (and drink) images return to a more central place among other image theme categories, and they are enhanced further through the launch of Mills's first product in the UK market.

- **Second,** by sharing more personal details and thoughts, Mills creates feelings of proximity with her followers and creates a fruitful online hub of prospect customers and a strong feeling of online community.

- **Third**, as the Deliciously Ella brand grows, Mills takes the opportunity to unfold her personal views about life and success that are mainly focused on her passionate hard-working character without taking into consideration factors such as social class and status, family origins and networks, as well as personal finance.

- **Fourth,** Mills is using her personal health narrative, and in particular the concept of 'goodness' to enrich her new product and justify its premium price and market position.

- **Fifth,** elements of distinction, inequality and class emerge while Mills is preparing her wedding with Matthew Mills. Although the wedding preparations and venue imply that Ella and Matthew Mills are an upper class and financially affluent young couple, all these elements are significantly downplayed by Mills to create a more relatable connection with her audience.

Findings of ERA4: The Clean Eating Denouncer (Chapter 7):

- **First,** food (and drink) still retains the biggest part of the Instagram imagery (65.1%) while images of Mills or anyone/anything related to her reach a 27%. However, almost 1/3 of the images within the Ella Mills category are exclusively portraits of Mills signifying that she still conveys a notable gravitas for the brand.

- **Second,** food still does not appear to be sophisticated (most depicted food kind is porridge). The food images are now professional and highly curated but the

recipes remain simplistic. However, food is still attributed with superpowers that according to Mills can make someone's life happier.

- **Third,** Mills is obliged to respond to strong media criticism she is receiving. She decides to do so by making as few controversial commitments as possible, adopting a 'centrist' position in the foodscape and deferring to scientific authority.

- **Fourth,** elements of understated luxury are employed, especially when the couple must convey complex messages (closing down their business for example) implying that in moments of great difficulty social status is preferred for self-presentation tactics.

9.2 From empirical evidence to theory

This is a thesis in social media studies. This distinctive disciplinary context circumscribes my research. Indeed, my first and primary aim was to provide a profound analysis of the Deliciously Ella account on Instagram, and the associated dataset, by using methodological tools appropriate to the above-mentioned discipline. Thus, the empirical evidence amassed was properly analysed at various levels using a range of different methodological tools. All these tools were selected to provide an entry point into Deliciously Ella's rich empirical world. As explained in detail in chapter 3, the main methodological devices used to this effect were to do with visual and textual analysis of Instagram posts.

Still, in this thesis I also used several theoretical and conceptual tools to interpret and explain my empirical findings. These were mainly borrowed from sociology and social theory. However, it is important to note that the thesis is not theory-driven. In fact, I did not begin by adopting a priori one (or more) theoretical framework(s) and, after that adoption, move on to the interpretation of the empirical data collected based on this (these) framework(s). In fact, things evolved exactly the other way around. I engaged with social theory mainly *after* having collected and initially analysed my data. Moreover, my sole aim in engaging with social theory was that of assembling tools allowing me to provide a deeper and richer understanding of these provisional empirical findings. Accordingly, it was the findings themselves, together with sustained

reflection on how I could best interpret them, that led me to the particular social-theoretic tools that I decided to rely upon. In this respect, my main source of inspiration was the work of sociologists such as Bourdieu (on distinction, inequality and class), Boltanski (on enrichment) and various authors on authenticity. Consequently, whilst sociological theory in this thesis has not been used or developed to the extent to which it would have been in a purely sociological thesis, since this is a thesis in social media studies, I contend that the analysis I provide, traces out a new, original, and particularly informative approach regarding the phenomenon I study.

More specifically, as already outlined, in my thesis I placed emphasis on three social-theoretical tools: class/distinction, enrichment, and authenticity. The process whereby I was led to the selection of these conceptual devices was dialectical and iterative. By this I mean that it involved going back and forth between the empirical evidence that I gathered, together with the analysis of the evidence using visual and textual methodological tools, and the search for social-theoretical concepts that could help me make sense of my empirical material in explanatorily richer and enhanced ways. Thus, as I looked ever deeper in the Deliciously Ella dataset, I took several paths between evidence and sociological ideas.

In this vein, the initial step I took consisted in a deeper immersion in Mills's visual world and lifestyle. This first immersion occurred mainly through close observation and analysis of: a) Mills's online communication platforms (blog, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter); b) Mills's books, press coverage and interviews on the mainstream media; c) Mills's events in London; d) Mills's delis, which I personally visited and tasted the food served; and e) my own attempts at adopting Mills's plant-based wellness lifestyle (as discussed in Chapter 3.2.1, Elements of autoethnography). Accordingly, I was familiar enough with Mills's world to find myself in a position where I could identify certain themes and patterns that were both ubiquitous and recurring. At the same time, these themes and patterns which I identified directed in distinctive ways my readings and thinking. Simply put, I read and reflected on social theory with a view to understanding and interpreting better these themes and patterns. My main concern at that stage of my thesis was thus to select social-theoretical tools that could help me provide a

deeper interpretation of my material. A certain picture was already emerging, since it was clear that Mills was attempting to communicate with an audience mastering distinctive cultural and symbolic codes and techniques. For example, I wanted to make sense of the fact that Mills was creating connections with audiences by disclosing intimate details about her health and by using extremely subtle ways of promoting her products. As explained above, my own experience with Mills 's plant-based culinary lifestyle also made clear that there was an important class element involved in the adoption of that lifestyle.

As a next step, and just before I collected my 4,000 Instagram image dataset, I decided to perform a more extensive content analysis of Mills's discourse as could be found in her books and mainstream media interviews and press coverage. This discourse analysis was also helpful in other ways since I also used it to further query my visual material. At the same time, I further systematized my readings of social-theoretical texts to fit them to the themes that were, by that stage, clearly emerging from my empirical evidence. Discourse analysis unmistakeably indicated that my initial feeling was correct: Mills was utilising, in combination with the recipes that she was proposing to people, elements of her personal and social background (family, friends, connections, partners, places to visit, lifestyle practices etc) to tell a distinctive kind of story, which could be further interpreted and analysed by using appropriate social-theoretic conceptual tools. This is what led me to the particular social-theoretic concepts that I outline below.

The first group of recurring themes revolved around luxury, distinction, social class and inequality. For several different reasons pertaining to my biography, which I have previously explained in more detail in Chapter 1 and will discuss as well in the next section, I was well placed to identify, track and understand the emergence of these themes from an analysis of the visual material. It became clear that Mills was handling adeptly a complicated visual and symbolic grammar. On the one hand, this grammar was *implicitly* addressed to an audience that Bourdieu calls the "dominant classes" (Wacquant, 1993). Mills was emitting subtle visual signals that were unmistakably intended to reach a specifically *privileged* audience. On the other hand, she would

address a wider and more culturally and socially diverse audience. These symbolic and cultural themes, coupled with my own experience on luxury marketing together with the autoethnographic approach of reviewing, buying, and preparing plant-based foods I took, led me to Bourdieu's work on distinction as a potential conceptual framework. Reading Bourdieu convinced me that this choice was appropriate, for several reasons. First, Bourdieu offers a classical and rich analysis of the relevance of class in the context of cultural practices, enriching considerably more economically reductive accounts, such as Marxist ones. Second, Bourdieu focused specifically on food and provided a robust – and still relevant – explanation of the interaction between social class and food tastes. Third, Bourdieu's framework allows a critical analysis of class inequality as it is manifested in culinary and cultural choices made by individuals endowed with unequal amounts of capital. My decision was further corroborated after I completed my visual analysis of Mills's Instagram photos. That analysis showed that the gradual refinement of the aesthetic visual content produced by Mills across time, as well as the choice of the foods consumed, corresponded to the tastes of the economically and culturally dominant classes in contemporary UK. From a critical point of view, that meant that, despite claims of accessibility of plant-based lifestyles to 'everyone and easily', there remains a class wall of inequality separating plant-based eating from individuals that lack the economic and cultural capital to adopt it.

At the same time, I was struck by Mills's unique and deeply personal narrative. According to that narrative, Mills's turn to plant-based eating was much more than a simple lifestyle choice. In fact, it amounted to a quasi-religious 'awakening' to the possibilities of plant-based eating after a deep existential crisis caused by her health issues, as per her own confession. Her commitment to plant-based eating was thus not just an adoption of a trendy fad: it had a more profound, hidden, and powerful source. Mills's story thus would reflect an expression of a deeper and truer, more authentic, self. A comparison of Mills's original narrative with the rather different stories that other influential wellness and food bloggers circulate corroborated the importance of authenticity as a pervasive discursive theme in Mills's discourse. I thus incorporated social-theoretical tools from social media and sociological food studies that emphasize

authenticity and, in doing so, I also attempted to provide my own thicker understanding of the very concept itself.

Last, but not least, one more aspect that emerged was that authenticity was central not just in creating a huge network of devoted online followers committed to plant-based eating, but also in aiding Mills's transition from the initial project of an amateurish food blog to that of a successful global brand. Indeed, that brand came to a point where it was effectively marketing premium food products in the UK but also across the world. In short, Mills succeeded in leveraging the visual and textual content she produced to create and sustain economic, and not just symbolic or cultural, value. Now, it was also clear that the line of products that Mills marketed and the delis that she opened were premium. Accordingly, they were addressed at the relatively wealthy. Interestingly, moreover, Mills's authenticity and the crucial notion of 'goodness' supposedly contained in the food that she produced and marketized played a crucial role in this marketisation process. Indeed, I quickly understood that the narrative that Mills was systematically using to market the food that she was producing was a crucial ingredient or quality of the food itself. It was when I made this realisation that I decided to turn to Boltanski and Esquerre's *Enrichment*. Upon reading the book, I was convinced that my initial idea was plausible. The book allowed me to make better sense of the marketisation process that Mills used. As I explain in chapters 2 and 3, Boltanski and Esquerre focus on the ways in which, in contemporary capitalism, entrepreneurs such as Mills can successfully leverage narratives to transform the perceived qualities of their products, thus selling them at relatively higher (or even premium) prices. Boltanski and Esquerre's enrichment framework thus proved to be particularly useful in explaining Mills's success as a wellness entrepreneur.

9.3 Professional positionality and interpretation of the data.

At this point, I want to show more specifically how my positionality, already touched upon in the introduction, interacted with the choices I described in the previous section. To repeat, my longstanding professional experience in advertising agencies, and in particular the fact that I have handled a significant number of luxury-brand accounts, provided me with tools allowing a deeper interpretation of Mills's world. These tools

gave me access not just to the superficially compelling (and important) aspects of micro-celebrity and celebrity culture that Mills mobilises, but, furthermore, to a grasp of how some tiny details that are not necessarily noticed by wider audiences can play a strategic role in building and sustaining a specific narrative.

I will show this by using a particular example. My dataset analysis reveals that Mills's husband Matthew Mills does not typically dominate visual content produced by the Deliciously Ella Instagram account. On the contrary, the frequency of his visual appearances is significantly lower than Mills's. Supporting data from my 1,000 Instagram image posts sample dataset show that Matthew Mills's appearances are 39 out of 1,000, while Mills's are 230 out of 1,000. Qualitative analysis of Matthew MIlls's images also reveals further interesting details. Matthew MIlls is usually smiling and looking straight to the camera. He mostly adopts a smart-casual dress code, at least when he is not formally dressed for an evening event or a professional photo shooting. Accordingly, his visual appearance does not trigger fancy or flamboyant sentiments. I will use as an example the image in the next page, in which Mills and her husband Matthew Mills announced that they bought out their investors from the Deliciously Ella company. I have added a red arrow within that picture, that points to a signet ring that Mills wears on his left little finger:

Image No 9.1: Ella and Matthew Mills announce that they have bought out their investors from the Deliciously Ella company (Instagram post 31-8-2021)
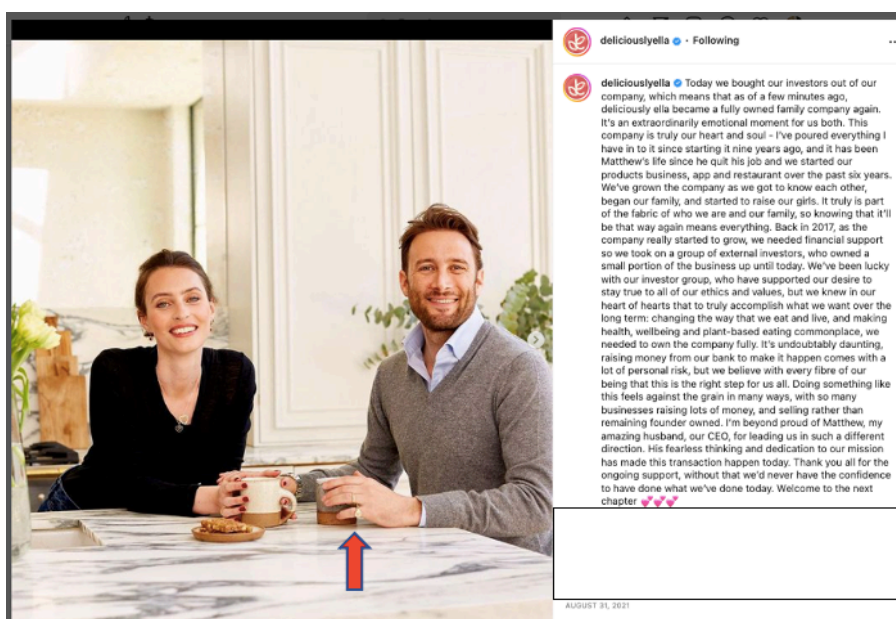
A careful look at other images in the Deliciously Ella Instagram account corroborates that Matthew Mills wears that small piece of jewellery systematically. Some further visual examples can be seen below.

Image No 9.2: Celebratory breakfast invitation for the Deliciously Ella audience (Instagram post of 24-9-2018)

Image No 9.3: Ella and Matthew Mills announce they are expecting their first baby (Instagram post 29-1-2019)

From the ancient days of King Minos of Crete (Nagy, 2020) to the numerous references in the Old Testament (Biblegetaway, 2022; Screws, 2015), the signet ring has been traditionally understood as a longstanding symbol of family heritage, class, status, and personal signature. During the Middle Ages it represented power and high lineage. To this day, signet rings are usually family objects of great value (both sentimental and/or financial) that pass from one generation to the other. Although Matthew Mills does not in any way emphasise his ring, nor has he ever disclosed any information about it, it is the very act of choosing to wear it – whilst being photographed for an image that will be publicly displayed – that makes the image interesting, while elements of distinction emerge.

Going back to image No 9.1, a more careful look at Matthew MIlls's dress code reveals that he has chosen a simple yet meticulously perfected look. He wears a light blue shirt and a grey sweater that appears to be made of wool or cashmere. These materials are usually quite expensive and, depending on the high fashion brand that sells them, they can range from £300 to more than £1000. One could argue that this very standard type of male sweater can be also found in fast fashion chain stores for no more than £14.99. However, this would be a mistaken inference in this instance, since I have already established that the Mills couple lead an affluent life that can afford, among other things, luxury – although simple, at first glance – clothing.

This nonchalant dress style, which is often also present in Mills's clothing and styling choices, in combination with the signet ring acts as a twofold communication vehicle between Matthew and his audience. On the one hand, viewers see a young, successful man, smiling next to his wife during a significant moment for their family-owned business. He is casually dressed, without any obvious cues of flamboyant and conspicuous luxury items around him that would unambiguously indicate that he belongs to a tiny and privileged economic and social elite. His casualness and relaxed appearance can be relatable to many. On the other hand, the signet ring leaves no room for doubt that all this simplicity acts as a silent camouflage of distinction by indistinction (Y. Lee, 2019). Hence, and despite initial appearances, Matthew is not really one of the 'hoi polloi' but one of the very few and privileged. Simplicity can be

used as a tool of enhancing the relatability of the Deliciously Ella brand with larger audiences; however, it can also be an – unrecognizable by the wider public – indicator of status addressed only to a very select group (Faiers, 2017).

The point of this subsection, though, is not so much to focus on Mills's husband as to explain, by using Matthew MIlls's example, that subtle elite visual cues can best be decoded by someone who understands and commands this complicated symbolic grammar. For biographical reasons I explained, I was well placed to do so. This goes a long way towards further justifying my choice to opt for an analysis that placed emphasis on luxury, distinction, inequality and class.

9.4 Realisation of research aim and objectives.

As stated in the Introduction the principal aim of this thesis was to describe, track, analyse and explain the Instagram trajectory of Deliciously Ella, one of the most popular and followed Instagram accounts in the UK which promotes plant-based food consumption and wellness practices.

The following research questions were asked:

RQ1. What are the key features of the Deliciously Ella account on Instagram?

RQ2. How might we understand the Deliciously Ella Instagram trajectory as part of wider debates about distinction, authenticity, and creation of economic value?

RQ3. What can the study of the Deliciously Ella Instagram account contribute to the explanation and understanding of the wider social phenomena of healthy eating and wellness lifestyle practices, mediated by, and presented on, a visual social media platform?

To achieve the goal of analysing the social media content generated by Deliciously Ella and considering the research questions posed above, the thesis pursued the following research objectives:

- 1- To observe, collect and analyse images from the Deliciously Ella Instagram account, with supporting data from Mills's blog/website and books.

- 2- To develop a framework that can successfully address the methodological challenges of dealing with large longitudinal data sets of Instagram posts

- 3- To theorise this visual and textual material through the lens of authenticity, distinction/class and enrichment

All of these research objectives were successfully realised in the present thesis. Research objective 1 consisted in analysis of 4,000 Instagram images collected between November 2017 and March 2019 using a wide range of methods, with supporting data from Mills's blog/website and all of her books, together with elements of autoethnography. Achieving research objective 1 helped answer research questions 1 and 3. Research objective 3 was pursued by constructing an appropriate conceptual and theoretical framework through comprehensive critical discussion of the relevant literature. The deployment of this framework to interpret, describe, analyse and explain my empirical data was of cardinal importance in helping to answer research questions 2 and 3. Research objective 2 was a preliminary to answering all research questions. I accomplished this objective by introducing the Comparative Instachronics approach, whilst also utilizing established methods of visual analysis such as Compositional Interpretation, and by taking advantage in the conduct of visual and interpretive analysis of my distinctive background and positionality, as explained in section 9.3 and in the Introduction. The specific original contributions to existing knowledge that this thesis makes, formulated in terms of accomplishment of research objectives, is provided in section 9.6.

9.5 Recommendations for further research

This thesis focused on the creator and articulator of online social media content (Mills) and tracked in detail her visual (and to some extent non-visual) narrative strategies across time, taking it for granted that these strategies were ultimately successful, at

least in terms of standard metrics (such as number of social media followers and likes or numbers of books sold). However, it was not part of this thesis to investigate the specific ways in which Mills 's audience actually (and not just potentially) behaves as a result of its online engagement with the 'Deliciously Ella community'. In a similar vein, questions of social class and inequality regarding the adoption of healthier culinary lifestyles (and, more specifically, plant-based eating) were posed from Mills 's perspective but only briefly (see the discussion on autoethnography in Chapter 3, Methodology) from the perspective of followers relatively deprived of economic and cultural capital. These two axes thus define different directions for future work:

- **To investigate the Deliciously Ella online audience and community**
  With respect to audiences of Mills and other wellness bloggers/influences several interesting questions could be posed, which include the following. First of all, what is the composition of the Deliciously Ella community along a number of dimensions, which include class, race and gender? Apart from following Mills's Instagram, do they also commit to a plant-based culinary lifestyle consistently and, if so, how and why? Do they also buy Mills 's products or other related plant-based products and, if so, how often? What are their thoughts about the sustainability of a plant-based nutrition financially and time wise?

- **To extend the research over the areas of class and inequality**
  How does the recent cost of living crisis impact on the adoption of plant-based nutrition? More generally, how does social class and inequality interact with (visual) social media when it comes to adopting or promoting plant-based culinary lifestyles?

- **To explore a new audience category in relation to plant-based nutrition on social media**
  To draw further from Deliciously Ella's plant-based recommendations for infants and young children in her latest book (E. Mills, 2022e) and examine how visual social media depict and communicate plant-based nutrition and wellness to such audience groups (and their parents).

9.6 Contribution to knowledge

The present thesis contributes originally to existing knowledge in several ways. These are as follows.

- **First,** with reference to research objective 1, this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge, the first one that focuses in depth on visual analysis of the Instagram account of one of the most influential actors in the UK food/wellness sphere using a quantitatively significant dataset. Concomitantly, deep analysis of this specific Instagram account (and actor) allowed me to draw unique and original insights regarding the evolution across time of the universe of visual and narrative meaning in which the current wellness sphere unfolds. The thesis reveals, among other things, the importance of framing plant-based eating in evaluatively uncontroversial ways (e.g., avoiding the term veganism) across time, as well as the pressure to increasingly comply with the aesthetic norms of production of sophisticated Instagrammable visual content.

- **Second,** with reference to research objective 2, the thesis also introduced an element of methodological innovation in social media studies, i.e., the Comparative Instachronics approach (CI). The extent to which CI is innovative has already been explained in Chapter 3.3, Deliciously Ella's Eras: The Comparative Instachronics approach. To summarize the discussion provided in that subsection, the novelty of CI can be brought out via comparison to similar research endeavours in social media studies. In the relevant literature (see Chapter 2, Literature Review) visual research focused on Instagram is systematically restricted along the dimension of time. Images are typically not analysed in a diachronic way and the goal is not to trace out the visual evolution of an Instagram account across a significant amount of time. Insofar as it is not restricted in these ways, CI and hence the thesis make an original contribution to existing literature.

- **Third,** with reference to research objective 3, the theorisation of the findings allowed me to frame several explanations of the success of Mills 's project. In this respect, the thesis insists on the explanation of Mills 's success by reference to several factors. These include, first, Mills 's display of existential authenticity when it came to her commitment to a plant-based lifestyle. Second, the projection of subtle signs of class distinction, both regarding food tastes and more generally related to visual aesthetics and symbolic mastery of themes. In all these cases, the possession of significant economic, cultural, and social capital is presupposed. Third, as also explained in the relevant chapter, Mills 's self-positioning in an ideologically flexible and 'centrist' position about her preferred lifestyle was also of enormous importance, especially when clean eating came under fire. Last, but not least, the factors highlighted above firmly place the entrepreneurial prong of Mills's project in the new enrichment economy. Mills succeeds in selling premium products because, among other things, because she has produced and still maintains a distinctive narrative that can justify those products' price.

9.7 Recommendations to stakeholders: the FSA

In this section I would like to offer specific recommendations to stakeholders, and in particular to the FSA that has co-funded this research, that could flow from the analysis and interpretation of the data that constitute the backbone of this thesis. In fact, many of the original insights that this thesis offers could be of significant interest to various public and perhaps also private stakeholders whose aims are related to food and public health. This thesis proposes specific takeaway points with respect to how and under which conditions publics can be influenced by (visual) social media to adopt healthier culinary lifestyles, thus aiding these stakeholders to better use social media in pursuit of their distinctive strategic objectives. The FSA's mandate covers, among other things, dietary health, sustainability and affordability and the lowering of dietary risks (FSA, 2022b). Both objectives are clearly related to the promotion and adoption of healthier culinary lifestyles, which include plant-based eating and consumption of fresh food. Similar objectives have been set out by the Department of Health and

Social Care (DHSC, 2021) and DEFRA (DEFRA, 2023) and are a central concern of the UK government.

Although the commercial use of social media influencers as a marketing tactic to influence public opinion is usually activated by big brands in the private sector (Hudders et al., 2021), the recent Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the use of these same marketing tactics on the part of the public sector. The latter ended up using various social media influencers in various countries, as well as popular celebrities, to discuss more openly with their own audiences issues to do with the pandemic, policies of quarantine and the vaccines (Gupta et al., 2022; Looi et al., 2023; Martin & Allen, 2023; Pöyry et al., 2022). A very characteristic case in Europe was that of the famous fashion blogger, entrepreneur and social media influencer Chiara Ferragni in Italy who, together with her husband Fedez – a popular rapper – collaborated with the Italian Government to disseminate messages about protective masks, as well as vaccinations (Reuters, 2020). Another example during the same period was the communication strategy of Finland's government that motivated various social influencers to talk about Covid-19 to their audiences and hence reach citizens outside traditional channels (Henley, 2020).

As circumstances change and the public sector seems readier to adopt practices that once sounded impossible to implement, I believe that the FSA has an opportunity to reflect on Mills's success and perhaps liaise with the Deliciously Ella account and/or even borrow some of the tactics Mills used on Instagram to build that account. Far from being a bolt in a clear sky, such a decision would follow up on similar recent projects by the FSA. Indeed, a recent search of the FSA's Instagram account shows that the agency has decided to partner with some popular social media accounts, including the following:

a) On 28 July 2023: @budgetingmumofficial, the Instagram account of Beth Turbett-Rogers, a mom of two who has been sharing money saving tips on social media and has developed a very popular Instagram (162,103 followers) and Tik Tok account

b) On 26 July 2023: @togethertoeat, by Emma Bridgeman, a family-food blogger who advocates families about eating meals together (7,342 followers on Instagram)

c) On 25 July 2023: @lifeofcharlouise, by Charlotte-Louise Harvey, a vlogger posting about recipes for her toddler, as well as lifestyle advice (47,736 Instagram followers)

d) On 28 April 2023: @eathappyfeelgood, by Christianna Aristidou Karaolis, a nutritionist talking about healthy and balanced food and recipes (and an editor for Cherubs magazine, aiming at parents in the UK) with 17,996 Instagram followers.

Although these partnerships appear rather limited, with only one Instagram post for each over the last 12 months and a special scheduling focus in July 2023, it proves that perhaps the FSA is now more inclined to collaborate with social media influencers to reach specific audiences online. In this vein, my research on Deliciously Ella on Instagram can prove to be helpful in various ways:

a) to properly inform the FSA on whether it can partner with Mills, who is an active advocate of plant-based food on Instagram and has a significant audience followership, thus allowing the FSA to reach a wider range of consumers;

b) to better understand how Mills, who heavily used her own persona as a communication vehicle, especially during the first years of the Deliciously Ella brand, built her Instagram account through time, whilst also evaluating which of these techniques could be adopted and used by the FSA;

c) to contemplate whether a radical shift in communication strategy would be beneficial for the FSA's mission and consider creating tailor-made content for social media that will be disseminated by familiar Instagram influencers, acting as the 'faces' of the FSA on social media. Who these could be is a question that could only be answered after more research, audience analysis, focus groups, SWOT analyses, identification of the agency's goals for social media in the future and, in general, a more specific preparation for a new strategic communication plan.

9.7.1 Using Mills as a strategic partner for the FSA on Instagram.

Social media are mainly characterised by an informal and more figurative language (Barklamb et al., 2020; Reyes et al., 2012), the use of which, as already noted, has nudged the communication strategy of various public sector organisation towards a simpler, less bureaucratic linguistic style (Lovari & Parisi, 2015). Despite persistent scepticism, social media is considered an opportunity for the transformation of the public sector at many levels (Khan et al., 2014). More to the point, and as already discussed, the FSA has been using various digital and social media platforms, albeit arguably not at a level of sophistication such that could accrue significant benefits regarding the enhancement of the relationship with the consumers, especially as far as Instagram is concerned. As the most popular social media platform in the UK (YouGov, 2023), Instagram offers a wide range of tools and opportunities for more direct and easier communication with the general public that the FSA could take advantage of, in a context marked by increasing expectations of responsiveness by the public sector (Todisco et al., 2021).

As already discussed in detail in the present thesis, perceptions of authenticity conveyed through personal narratives are crucial when it comes to approaching users online through (visual) social media. Accordingly, co-opting potential influencers that can articulate and sustain such narratives to promote healthier culinary lifestyles can be a particularly efficient strategy when devising online campaigns. A familiar and likeable person behind specific strategies might result in persuading people adopt healthier habits. In these respects, Mills would be a good candidate for a partnership with the FSA. Still, even if such a partnership could potentially engage especially younger audiences on social media, it does not come without its challenges. These are specially to do with how tactics that are considered mainstream marketing tactics for many private sector brands could be effectively used by a public organisation. Any partnership with Mills would require a carefully designed strategic communication plan, covering all major areas of the strategic process, such as mission and goals, legal issues, political and cultural implications, organisational issues, and budget constraints. But even before such a plan could be put into action, there are some preliminary considerations to be made:

a) Mills is an experienced Instagram influencer, a content creator, a best-selling writer, and a popular celebrity. This means that she already has her own strategic plan as far as her career pathway is concerned. Despite her family ties with politics, she has not expressed thus far the desire to become a politician. However, she has mentioned several times that she would like to be further involved in healthy eating through lobbying work similar to Jamie Oliver's (YouMagazine, 2022). As I have already discussed in previous chapters, Mills has been occupying the middle ground in terms of her discursive style, avoiding strong evaluations such as veganism about healthy eating (see Chapter 7.2.3) and claiming that her goal is to get people excited about vegetables (Parker, 2015), her "mission" being to make vegetables cool and "our community feel a little healthier and happier" (E. Mills, 2019). At the same time, there have been several examples, especially over the last couple of years, when Mills has voiced criticism of the UK government. This was the case when she scrutinised UK Health Secretary Sajid Javid for joking about not being particularly enthusiastic about healthy eating policies (E. Mills, 2022b). Equally, Mills has raised concerns about the "serious health crisis" that the UK faces and the "serious trouble" that the NHS is in because of lifestyle-related diseases such as diabetes type 2 (Murray, 2019). Slowly but steadily, it seems that Mills is preparing herself for a more public involvement, the form of which is still unknown, but might indicate an opportunity for the FSA.

b) Mills has been collaborating with a range of food and wellness brands over the years, from Neil's Yard cosmetics and Symprove supplements, to her partnerships with Waitrose and Hyundai. This means that, unlike other social media influencers, she has strong business and financial ties with the private sector, the values, and goals of which are not always in line with those of public administration. On the other hand, she has collaborated with a public organisation such as the NHS Arden and GEM Unit for the

2016/2017 "Stay Well" campaign (NHS, 2016), which sets a good precedent for the FSA.

c) Additionally, as Mills is a marketable social media influencer, she displays a high price list for paid advertising and sponsorships that might not comply with the - usually limited - marketing budgets of the public sector and arguably the FSA.

d) Production wise, a well-established brand such as Deliciously Ella usually makes its own marketing and advertising productions (whether they are outsourced or in-house). This means that the FSA will have to implement a separate strategic collaboration the Deliciously Ella production company, to ensure the desired production values and quality.

9.7.2 Looking deeper at Deliciously Ella on Instagram

The findings of my research can be used to understand better how a successful healthy food/wellness advocate has used Instagram, irrespective of whether that involves the use of an actor that could represent the 'face' of FSA on Instagram or not.

There is a long list of insights found in the Deliciously Ella trajectory on Instagram, and documented in my thesis, that could be used by the FSA. Some examples, among many others, are shown below:

a) Food plays a crucial role in the visual communication, but not the only role. A more personal element can capture the attention of audiences on (visual) social media and could also be used in relevant online campaigns.

b) The existence of a brand ambassador that directly engages and communicates with audiences facilitates the dissemination of information. This seems to be even more important for the FSA which, most of the time, has to communicate quite complicated and sophisticated information on food safety.

c) Careful attention should be paid to the online presentation of different class markers and their role in making social media content congenial to various audiences.

d) Messages of positivity and happiness are crucial for audience engagement. Tone of language is friendly, direct, and appealing.

e) Simple recipes that do not require significant investments in money and time are key and do not require higher levels of culinary sophistication.

f) "Instagrammable" visuals help message dissemination and captures the audience's attention.

g) Following social media trends can enhance audience engagement and create greater visibility of messages.

9.7.3 Tailor-made content and communication strategy for the FSA Instagram platform.

As the consumer-brand engagement is facilitated by social media platforms through a range of tools and services (Marques et al., 2019), a tailor-made social media strategy for private and/or public sector brands and organisations becomes even more essential. Different platforms attract different audience groups with different usage patterns. Accordingly, to establish successful delivery of their messages, brands and/or organisations need to take into account the distinct characteristics of each platform and its audiences (Gao & Feng, 2016).

At the moment, the FSA does not seem to have implemented a tailor-made Instagram strategy. The visuals (and part of the promotional copy) seem to share the same material among the main social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). I have not conducted any specific research on the FSA's social media marketing and/or communication strategy, nor have I evaluated its marketing plans so far. Still, I strongly believe that investing on Instagram would result in higher levels of engagement with the FSA's audience groups and perhaps lead a shift towards a more direct, responsive, and friendlier image. These, as already suggested, would be attributes that consumers require from public administration services online, as research consistently shows (Lovari & Parisi, 2015; Lovari & Valentini, 2020). As I have shown in my thesis, relatability is key. So is the sense of a community that shares common

values, along with anxieties and fears. Talking directly with consumers, answering questions, and considering the public's own concerns regarding healthy food can create a feeling of 'togetherness' and perhaps can make consumers more invested.

9.8 Epilogue

The years after the Covid-19 pandemic receded have placed western societies in a state of re-evaluation. As soon as lockdowns eased and the virus slowed down, governments and citizens tried to get back to normal again. However, they quickly realised that this new normality remained deeply unfamiliar. Health systems were tremendously affected, as was family and socioeconomic life, and life on the planet. Climate change, the energy crisis, the cost-of-living crisis, democratic failures, rising authoritarianism, technological developments threatening individual privacy and autonomy are only few of the issues that western societies are now facing. In this vein, the whole food sector (production, processing, distributing, retailing, consuming) was deeply affected (Wentworth, 2020). Many vulnerabilities of international food systems have been exposed, food markets still face uncertainty (Giha, 2021) and consumers are feeling alarmed and unable to sustain healthy and nutritious diets, mostly for financial reasons (FSA, 2023).

Moreover, as Mike Savage suggests in his latest work (Savage, 2021), inequality is resurfacing as a pivotal issue. Wealth, privilege, and other socioeconomic assets are amassing in the hands of the few; western societies now face conditions and threats that used to belong to the past, such as imperial elites and monopolies (Savage, 2021). On the food front, consumers are constantly bombarded with information about how important healthy, wholesome, and good quality fresh food is, or how they must take their health in their own hands (one of Mills 's favourite mottos). However, food prices are soaring and the dilemma 'heating or eating' is real (Champerlain, 2022). What used to be the visual social media trend of 'Wellness' now appears more politically and socially controversial. Fancy green smoothies with chia seeds, buckwheat flour pancakes and medjool dates cookies might look very Instagrammable and they can surely enhance a balanced nutrition. However, this kind of diet is patently unsustainable for most consumers. Those lucky enough to have inherited wealth or

be part of the western elites might be able to support and/or advocate it. Still, what happens to the many who can only attain it, if at all, through their Instagram feed? This question was constantly in my mind while I was writing this thesis, but consistently absent from Mills 's discourse. As already mentioned, answering it requires a deep dive into the Deliciously Ella's Instagram audience as part of a possible future work. It also means measuring up wellness against the contemporary stark realities of class, inequality, and hierarchy.

In his article "Fluid Enquiry, Complex Causality, Policy Processes: Making a Difference with Qualitative Longitudinal Research" (Neale, 2021) Bren Neale discusses longitudinal research as an effective vehicle of a flowing investigation. Mingling its real-time and real-world elements can lead to "follow reality in all its windings" (Neale, 2021: 654) and therefore to produce meaningful insights for professional and policy contexts. It is within this complex but dynamic environment of the qualitative longitudinal research that researchers can walk along with their participants and comprehend not only the measurements of change (what changes, when and/or how much) but the essence and deeper significance of change: how it is formed, conveyed, and performed. Making full sense of the Deliciously Ella brand on Instagram, and, concomitantly, gaining a deeper understanding of the dynamics of interaction between visual social media and plant-based eating and wellness thus, proved to be a complex and multifaceted project that required the mobilisation of several different skills and conceptual devices. The portrait painted is anything but simple. I can only hope, however, that it succeeds in conveying a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study.

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APPENDICES

1- Chapter 7, Section 7.1.2

- **Caption of Instagram post of 19-1-2017**

Ella denounces the term 'clean eating' and offers her own interpretation.

@deliciouslyella There's a lot of talk about the concept of 'clean eating' in the media this week and I wanted to share my thoughts on the debate today.

When I first heard the term 'clean' with reference to food, I interpreted it as natural, food without preservatives or additives, and promoting the idea of cooking at home more using fresh ingredients. It wasn't a word I used a lot, but I believe there was a positive connotation to it as it led more people to get in the kitchen, created more interest in fruits and vegetables, and led people, including me, to try and create the most interesting, delicious ways to cook them. Unfortunately, I think the idea of 'clean eating' has now become very loaded and complex, and too closely associated with the notion of a diet or a faddy way of eating.

To me, eating well doesn't mean categorising everything on your plate into 'good' and 'bad' or 'clean' and 'dirty.' It doesn't mean putting a label on yourself, limiting yourself to one food group, obsessing over your weight or taking anything to an extreme. I think eating well is all about finding a balance that suits you, and satisfies you both physically and mentally. Data shows that the vast majority of the UK population do not get enough fruit and veg in their diet despite the WHO, NHS and other health campaigners repeatedly telling us we should aim to eat 5 a day. My aim with Deliciously Ella is – and has always been – to give you a great resource to do just that in a delicious way, but it is also key to take from it what works for you, in terms of maintaining a balanced diet and a positive relationship with food. I love being veggie, I genuinely love chickpeas and hummus and I really do enjoy making granola, but that's just me, and you should feel free to be you – whatever that is. I'm talking in the BBC2 Horizon documentary tonight about this topic, sharing my

views on how complex the subject has become and where my interest in eating well came from. I haven't seen the documentary yet, but I know it shines light on some very controversial areas, so I thought it was important to share the above with you. Please let me know if you have any thoughts in the comments, it would be great.

2- Chapter 7, Section 7.1.3

- **Gucci Jordaan Leather Loafers**
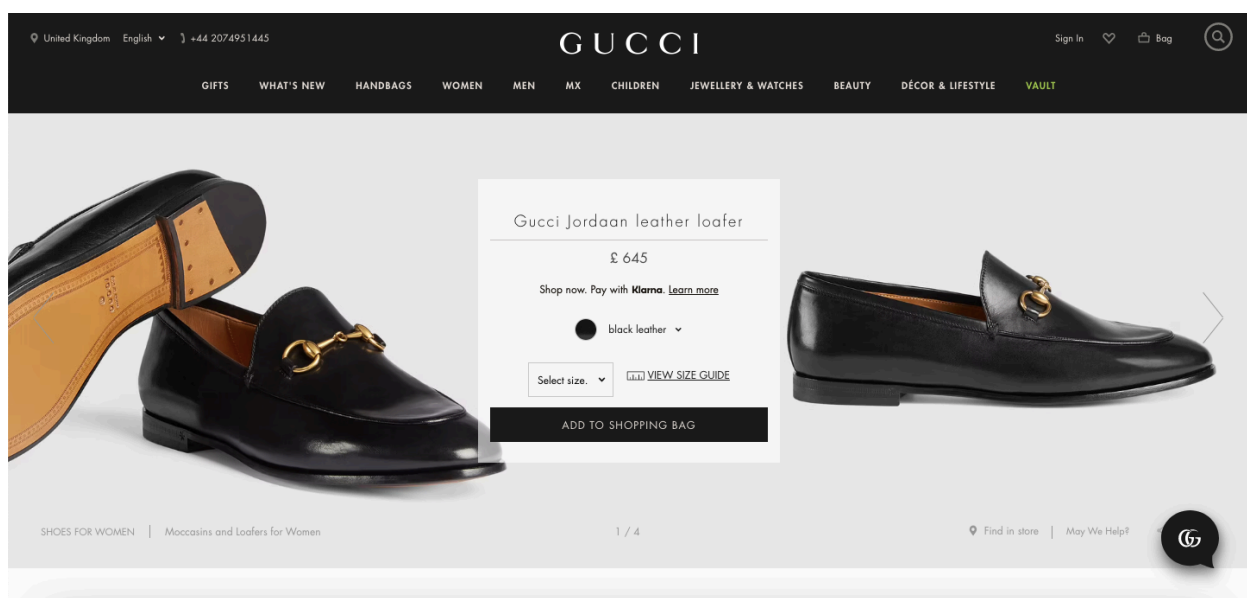
As seen at:

https://www.gucci.com/uk/en_gb/pr/women/shoes-for-women/moccasins-and-loafers-for-women/womens-gucci-jordaan-leather-loafer-p-404069BLM001000

3- **Chapter 9, Section 9.3**

- **Caption of Instagram post of 31-8-2021**

Ella and Matthew Mills announce that they have bought out their investors from the Deliciously Ella company

@deliciouslyella Today we bought our investors out of our company, which means that as of a few minutes ago, deliciously ella became a fully owned family company again. It's an extraordinarily emotional moment for us both. This company is truly our heart and soul - I've poured everything I have in to it since starting it nine years ago, and it has been Matthew's life since he quit his job and we started our products business, app and restaurant over the past six years. We've grown the company as we got to know each other, began our family, and started to raise our girls. It truly is part of the fabric of who we are and our family, so knowing that it'll be that way again means everything. Back in 2017, as the company really started to grow, we needed financial support so we took on a group of external investors, who owned a small portion of the business up until today. We've been lucky with our investor group, who have supported our desire to stay true to all of our ethics and values, but we knew in our heart of hearts that to truly accomplish what we want over the long term: changing the way that we eat and live, and making health, wellbeing and plant-based eating commonplace, we needed to own the company fully. It's undoubtably daunting, raising money from our bank to make it happen comes with a lot of personal risk, but we believe with every fibre of our being that this is the right step for us all. Doing something like this feels against the grain in many ways, with so many businesses raising lots of money, and selling rather than remaining founder owned. I'm beyond proud of Matthew, my amazing husband, our CEO, for leading us in such a different direction. His fearless thinking and dedication to our mission has made this transaction happen today. Thank you all for the ongoing support, without that we'd never have the confidence to have done what we've done today. Welcome to the next chapter 💕💕💕

4- Intercoder Reliability Calculation (examples from ERA1 and ERA2)

For consistency reasons and since my sample dataset consisted of more or less equivalent amounts of images posts per Era, I decided to give a 30% out of the total samples of Instagram image posts per category to a second coder for assessment.

Therefore:

For ERA1 Image Themes, I gave 75 image posts out of 259 of the sample dataset.
For ERA1 Kinds of foods/drinks, I gave 75 image posts out of 214 of the sample dataset.
For ERA1 Kinds of ingredients, I gave 75 image posts out of 214 of the sample dataset.

The results are shown in the screengrabs below:

Congratulations! Your file has passed a basic error-check and is probably OK. But please doublecheck it if the output below seems off.

ReCal 0.1 Alpha for 2 Coders
results for file "Intercoder Reliability ERA1 Image Themes.csv"

File size:	376 bytes
N columns:	2
N variables:	1
N coders per variable:	2

	Percent Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha (nominal)	N Agreements	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Variable 1 (cols 1 & 2)	94.7%	0.901	0.901	0.901	71	4	75	150

Export Results to CSV (what's this?)

Select another CSV file for reliability calculation below:

Choose file | No file chosen   Calculate Reliability

☐ Save results history (what's this?)

Disclaimer: This application is provided for educational purposes only. Its author assumes no responsibility for the accuracy of the results above. You are advised to verify all reliability figures with an independent authority (e.g. a calculator) before incorporating them into any publication or presentation. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding ReCal, please send them to deen at dfreelon dot org.

ReCal 0.1 Alpha for 2 Coders
results for file "Intercoder Reliability ERA1 Kinds of fooddrinks.csv"

File size:	376 bytes
N columns:	2
N variables:	1
N coders per variable:	2

	Percent Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha (nominal)	N Agreements	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Variable 1 (cols 1 & 2)	97.3%	0.951	0.951	0.951	73	2	75	150

Export Results to CSV (what's this?)

Select another CSV file for reliability calculation below:

Choose file No file chosen   Calculate Reliability

☐ Save results history (what's this?)

Disclaimer: This application is provided for educational purposes only. Its author assumes no responsibility for the accuracy of the results above. You are advised to verify all reliability figures with an independent authority (e.g. a calculator) before incorporating them into any publication or presentation. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding ReCal, please send them to deen at dfreelon dot org.

ReCal 0.1 Alpha for 2 Coders
results for file "Intercoder Reliability ERA1 Kinds of Ingredients.csv"

File size:	376 bytes
N columns:	2
N variables:	1
N coders per variable:	2

	Percent Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha (nominal)	N Agreements	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Variable 1 (cols 1 & 2)	98.7%	0.976	0.976	0.976	74	1	75	150

Export Results to CSV (what's this?)

Select another CSV file for reliability calculation below:

Choose file No file chosen   Calculate Reliability

☐ Save results history (what's this?)

Disclaimer: This application is provided for educational purposes only. Its author assumes no responsibility for the accuracy of the results above. You are advised to verify all reliability figures with an independent authority (e.g. a calculator) before incorporating them into any publication or presentation. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding ReCal, please send them to deen at dfreelon dot org.

For ERA2 Image Themes, I gave 75 image posts out of 253 of the sample dataset.

For ERA2 Kinds of foods/drinks, I gave 35 image posts out of 117 of the sample dataset.

For ERA2 Kinds of ingredients, I gave 35 image posts out of 117 of the sample dataset.

The results are shown in the screengrabs below:

Congratulations! Your file has passed a basic error-check and is probably OK. But please doublecheck it if the output below seems off.

ReCal 0.1 Alpha for 2 Coders
results for file "Intercoder Reliability ERA2 Image Themes.csv"

File size:	379 bytes
N columns:	2
N variables:	1
N coders per variable:	2

	Percent Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha (nominal)	N Agreements	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Variable 1 (cols 1 & 2)	98.7%	0.984	0.984	0.984	74	1	75	150

Export Results to CSV (what's this?)

Select another CSV file for reliability calculation below:

Choose file | No file chosen | Calculate Reliability

☐ Save results history (what's this?)

Disclaimer: This application is provided for educational purposes only. Its author assumes no responsibility for the accuracy of the results above. You are advised to verify all reliability figures with an independent authority (e.g. a calculator) before incorporating them into any publication or presentation. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding ReCal, please send them to deen at dfreelon dot org.

Congratulations! Your file has passed a basic error-check and is probably OK. But please doublecheck it if the output below seems off.

ReCal 0.1 Alpha for 2 Coders
results for file "Intercoder Reliability ERA2 Kinds of fooddrinkscsv.csv"

File size:	176 bytes
N columns:	2
N variables:	1
N coders per variable:	2

	Percent Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha (nominal)	N Agreements	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Variable 1 (cols 1 & 2)	94.3%	0.917	0.917	0.918	33	2	35	70

Export Results to CSV (what's this?)

Select another CSV file for reliability calculation below:

Choose file | No file chosen | Calculate Reliability

☐ Save results history (what's this?)

Disclaimer: This application is provided for educational purposes only. Its author assumes no responsibility for the accuracy of the results above. You are advised to verify all reliability figures with an independent authority (e.g. a calculator) before incorporating them into any publication or presentation. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding ReCal, please send them to deen at dfreelon dot org.

ReCal 0.1 Alpha for 2 Coders
results for file "Intercoder Reliability ERA2 Kinds of ingredients.csv"

File size:	176 bytes
N columns:	2
N variables:	1
N coders per variable:	2

	Percent Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha (nominal)	N Agreements	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Variable 1 (cols 1 & 2)	100%	1	1	1	35	0	35	70

Export Results to CSV (what's this?)

Select another CSV file for reliability calculation below:

Choose file | No file chosen   Calculate Reliability

☐ Save results history (what's this?)

5- <u>PhD Ethics Application Approval Letter</u>

The University Of Sheffield.

Downloaded: 25/07/2017
Approved: 25/07/2017

Alexandra Boutopoulou
Registration number: 150247023
Information School
Programme: Information Studies (PhD/Info Studs (SSc) FT)

Dear Alexandra

PROJECT TITLE: Using visual social media data to better understand food cultures: the case of wellness bloggers.
APPLICATION: Reference Number 015575

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 25/07/2017 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 015575 (dated 20/07/2017).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

Matt Jones
Ethics Administrator
Information School

6- Code Frame (Excerpts from Excel Working Sheet)

Example from ERA1 – Descriptive Code Frame

(20 first samples in chronological order)

Zoom in – Part A:

ERA 1				
THE WELLNESS BLOGGER	17 JAN 2013 - 1 SEP 2014			
TTL IMAGES	1037			
START	1			
END	1037			
SAMPLE	259			
DATE SAMPLE WAS TAKEN	25 AUG 2021			

RANK	SAMPLES POST NO	POST LINK	POST DATE	DOMINANT VISUAL THEME
1	1	/w.instagram.com/p/UkMk64ouTJ/?taken-by=delici	17-Jan-13	Food
2	2	ww.instagram.com/p/UtMcf7luRy/?taken-by=delici	20-Jan-13	Quote
3	14	w.instagram.com/p/VtKRIDoubx/?taken-by=delici	14-Feb-13	Drink
4	18	ww.instagram.com/p/V6opu2ouel/?taken-by=delici	19-Feb-13	Food
5	23	ww.instagram.com/p/WByjlzlufh/?taken-by=delicio	22-Feb-13	Food
6	26	/w.instagram.com/p/WE3pA2IuaL/?taken-by=delici	23-Feb-13	Food
7	30	w.instagram.com/p/WKD8YXouX8/?taken-by=delic	25-Feb-13	Food
8	31	/w.instagram.com/p/WMEBbbIuTu/?taken-by=delic	26-Feb-13	Food and Drink
9	38	ww.instagram.com/p/WTwllvouVZ/?taken-by=delici	01-Mar-13	Food and Drink
10	39	w.instagram.com/p/WUPD-souZz/?taken-by=delici	01-Mar-13	Food
11	41	/w.instagram.com/p/WWkmV6Iuai/?taken-by=delici	02/03/2013	Quote
12	46	w.instagram.com/p/WbxRhLouSe/?taken-by=delici	04/03/2013	Food
13	47	/w.instagram.com/p/Wb1LFRIuUe/?taken-by=delic	04/03/2013	Food
14	50	w.instagram.com/p/Wego7DouQb/?taken-by=delici	05/03/2013	Food
15	52	ww.instagram.com/p/WhC1ijIubY/?taken-by=delici	05/03/2013	Food
16	54	ww.instagram.com/p/WhtImkIuTU/?taken-by=delici	06-Mar-13	Food
17	57	ww.instagram.com/p/Wlv4G8IuXY/?taken-by=delic	08/03/2013	Drink
18	59	w.instagram.com/p/WoaOTKIuRB/?taken-by=delic	09/03/2013	Drink
19	64	w.instagram.com/p/WuRJRqIuYw/?taken-by=delic	11/03/2013	Food
20	67	ww.instagram.com/p/WynVlcIuQu/?taken-by=delici	13-Mar-13	Food and Drink

Zooming in – Part B:

DESCRIPTIVE CODE FRAME

POST CAPTION THEME	POST LOCATION	No OF HASHTAGS USED	HASHTAGS	No OF EMOTICONS USED	EMOTICONS
Food description	Borough Market, London (implied)	2	#instafood #delicious	0	
N/A	N/A	0		0	
Food description	N/A	0		0	
Food description	N/A	0		0	
Food description	N/A	0		2	Black heart, strawberry
Food description	N/A	0		0	
Food description	N/A	0		0	
Food description	N/A	0		1	Big Smiley Face
Food description	N/A	0		1	Big Smiley Face
Food description	N/A	14	#vegan #raw #healthyfood #eatclean #foo	0	
N/A	N/A	0		1	Big Smiley Face
Food description	N/A	13	#raw #vegansofig #vegan #instafood #foo	1	black heart
Food description	N/A	16	#vegan #cleaneating #healthyfoodshare	0	
Food description	N/A	15	#vegan #raw #healthyfoodshare #nutrition	0	
Food description	N/A	16	#raw #vegan #cleaneating #healthyfoods	1	Smiley Face
Food description	N/A	0		1	Smiley Face with Heart Eyes
Food description	N/A	20	#vegan #smoothie #raw #healthyfoodsha	0	
Food description	N/A	17	#vegan #raw #smoothie #healthyfoodsha	0	
Food description	N/A	18	raw #vegan #cleaneating #healthyfood #v	0	
Food description	N/A	18	#raw #smoothie #vegan #healthyfood #cl	1	2 pink hearts

Example from ERA1 – Qualitative Code Frame

(20 first samples in chronological order)

QUALITATIVE CODE FRAME - FOOD RELATED INFORMATION

KIND OF FOOD/DRINK	MAIN INGREDIENTS	CAMERA ANGLE	FOOD DESCRIPTION	SPECIAL DIETS	WELLNESS	CLEAN EATING	PLANT BASED
Fruit	oa, tomatoes, basil, avocado, broccoli, ca	Straight On	Beautiful	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	Straight On	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Smoothie	ale, orange, apple, spinach, ginger, lemo	Straight On	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cacao Brownies	und almonds, sweet potatoes, dates, cac	Overhead	moist, squishy, delicious	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Fruit	strawberries	Straight On	Yumm, better	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vegetables	mushrooms	Overhead	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vegetable Salad	nel, sweet potatoes, avocado, sunflower,	Overhead	rainbow, deliciousness, cripsy, sweet	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rice Cake and Smoothie	nger, carrot, spinach, banana, rice, almon	Overhead	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Smoothie bowl	mango, banana, chia, flax, almond	Overhead	homemade	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vegetable Salad	ves, zucchini slices, pumpkin seeds, che	Overhead	delicious	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vegetables	china rose radish sprouts	Overhead	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Quinoa with vegetables	potato, carrot, brussel sprouts, pumpkin s	Overhead	goodness	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
Salad	ck, carrots, quinoa, sunflower seeds, avoc	Overhead	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
Guacamole	um tomatoes, jalapeno, chilli, lime, buckw	Overhead	fresh, creamy, spicy, favourite, healthy, simple	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
Cacao Brownies	imonds, walnuts, dates, ripe banana, caca	Straight On	best, chocolatey, rich, gooey	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Smoothie	oats, banana, dates, spinach, cinnamon,	Straight On	incredible, awesomely	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
Juice	Beetroot, apple, ginger, carrot	Overhead	most beautiful, healthiest, most delicious	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
Energy Balls	coconut, cacao	Overhead	incredible	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
Smoothie bowl	rry, oat, flax, banana, goji berries, coconu	Overhead	pink, goodness, delicious	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A

Zoom in – PART A:

QUALITATIVE (

KIND OF FOOD/DRINK	MAIN INGREDIENTS	CAMERA ANGLE	FOOD DESCRIPTION	SPECIAL DIETS
Fruit	oa, tomatoes, basil, avocado, broccoli, ca	Straight On	Beautiful	N/A
N/A	N/A	Straight On	N/A	N/A
Smoothie	ale, orange, apple, spinach, ginger, lemo	Straight On	N/A	N/A
Cacao Brownies	und almonds, sweet potatoes, dates, cac	Overhead	moist, squishy, delicious	N/A
Fruit	strawberries	Straight On	Yumm, better	N/A
Vegetables	mushrooms	Overhead	N/A	N/A
Vegetable Salad	nel, sweet potatoes, avocado, sunflower,	Overhead	rainbow, deliciousness, cripsy, sweet	N/A
Rice Cake and Smoothie	nger, carrot, spinach, banana, rice, almor	Overhead	N/A	N/A
Smoothie bowl	mango, banana, chia, flax, almond	Overhead	homemade	N/A
Vegetable Salad	ves, zucchini slices, pumpkin seeds, cher	Overhead	delicious	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vegetables	china rose radish sprouts	Overhead	N/A	N/A
Quinoa with vegetables	potato, carrot, brussel sprouts, pumpkin s	Overhead	goodness	N/A
Salad	ck, carrots, quinoa, sunflower seeds, avoc	Overhead	N/A	N/A
Guacamole	um tomatoes, jalapeno, chilli, lime, buckw	Overhead	fresh, creamy, spicy, favourite, healthy, simple	N/A
Cacao Brownies	imonds, walnuts, dates, ripe banana, caca	Straight On	best, chocolatey, rich, gooey	N/A
Smoothie	oats, banana, dates, spinach, cinnamon,	Straight On	incredible, awesomely	N/A
Juice	Beetroot, apple, ginger, carrot	Overhead	most beautiful, healthiest, most delicious	N/A
Energy Balls	coconut, cacao	Overhead	incredible	N/A
Smoothie bowl	rry, oat, flax, banana, goji berries, coconu	Overhead	pink, goodness, delicious	N/A

Zoom in – PART B:

QUALITATIVE CODE FRAME - FOOD RELATED INFORMATION

SPECIAL DIETS	WELLNESS	CLEAN EATING	PLANT BASED
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A

Example from ERA3 – Qualitative Code Frame

(20 first samples in chronological order)

ERA 3			
THE ENTREPRENEUR	30 OCT 2015 - 18 JAN 2017		
TTL IMAGES	840		
START	2049		
END	2888		
SAMPLE	210		
DATE SAMPLE WAS TAKEN	26 AUG 2021		

QUALITATIVE CODE FRAME - MILLS RELATED INFORMATION

RANK	PEOPLE DEPICTED	WHO IS MILLS WITH	MILLS'S SELF PRESENTATION	FEELINGS EXPRESSED	ILLNESS MENTIONED	PERSONAL DETAIL MENTIONED	LUXURY BRANDS SHOWN	MILLS'S STYLING
1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
3	Mills	N/A	Half body shown	N/A	N/A	N/A	Van Cleef bracelet	N/A
4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
6	Mills and Matt Mills	Her husband	Full body shown / smiling	Yes - love, appreciation	N/A	N/A	probably Self-Portrait Lace Dress (350-750 euros)	N/A
7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Hair is down / Visible make up
8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
9	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
11	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
12	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
13	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
14	Ella	N/A	Portrait / smiling	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
15	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Hair is down
16	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
17	N/A	N/A	N/A	Happy	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
18	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
19	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
20	Mills and Food	N/A	Full body shown / smiling	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Hair is down / 'natural' make up

Zoom in – Part A:

ERA 3	
THE ENTREPRENEUR	30 OCT 2015 - 18 JAN 2017
TTL IMAGES	840
START	2049
END	2888
SAMPLE	210
DATE SAMPLE WAS TAKEN	26 AUG 2021

QUALITATIVE CODE FRAME - M

RANK	PEOPLE DEPICTED	WHO IS MILLS WITH	MILLS'S SELF PRESENTATION	FEELINGS EXPRESSED	ILLNESS MENTI
1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
3	Mills	N/A	Half body shown	N/A	N/A
4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
6	Mills and Matt Mills	Her husband	Full body shown / smiling	Yes - love, appreciation	N/A
7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
9	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
11	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
12	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
13	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
14	Ella	N/A	Portrait / smiling	N/A	N/A
15	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
16	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
17	N/A	N/A	N/A	Happy	N/A
18	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
19	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
20	Mills and Food	N/A	Full body shown / smiling	N/A	N/A

Zoom in – Part B:

CODE FRAME - MILLS RELATED INFORMATION

ILLNESS MENTIONED	PERSONAL DETAIL MENTIONED	LUXURY BRANDS SHOWN	MILLS'S STYLING
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	Van Cleef bracelet	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	probably Self-Portrait Lace Dress (350-750 euros)	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	Hair is down / Visible make up
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	Hair is down
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
			Hair is down / 'natural' make up