

Netnographic Insights into Digital Influence: Authenticity in Written Posts of Tourism Influencers on Instagram

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Abstract

This study examines how tourism influencers construct authenticity in their written Instagram posts, addressing a gap in research that has largely focused on visual content. Using a netnographic approach, we analyze 109 posts from influencers across micro, macro, and mega categories, identifying linguistic and narrative strategies that balance personal authenticity with commercial promotion. Findings reveal how influencers use personal stories, transparency about sponsorships, and emotional engagement to maintain credibility while promoting branded content. Key themes include the use of pronouns, informal language, storytelling, and values like freedom, escapism, and materialism. These insights enhance our understanding of the dynamics between authenticity and influencer marketing, offering practical guidance for brands and influencers in building trust-based engagement.

Keywords: Tourism influencers, authenticity in commercial content, influencer marketing, Instagram, netnography.

1. Introduction

In recent years, social media platforms have dramatically reshaped the landscape of tourism marketing, with Instagram emerging as a pivotal platform for influencing travel behavior. As brands progressively exploit social media influencer (SMI) collaborations, a principal challenge has emerged: how to reconcile authenticity with commercial imperatives, especially within a media landscape that is extensively commercialized and meticulously curated.

Authenticity, a pivotal component of the influencer-consumer nexus, has become increasingly paramount. The demand for transparency, particularly regarding the disclosure of paid promotions, has surfaced as a fundamental criterion in evaluating the credibility of influencer-generated content. A plethora of studies have investigated the correlation between authenticity and transparency, scrutinizing how SMIs

can sustain authentic connections with their audiences while adhering to contractual commitments to brands (Audrezet et al. 2020, Pöyry et al. 2021). This delicate balance between sponsorships and genuine self-representation constitutes a primary area of inquiry in influencer marketing research, leading to the first critical question of this study: *How do tourism influencers navigate the tension between maintaining authenticity and promoting commercial content through their written communication on social media?*

In addition to the authenticity dilemma, the influencer-follower relationship exhibits considerable variation contingent upon the magnitude and scope of an influencer's audience. The discourse surrounding micro versus macro or mega influencers has attracted heightened scrutiny in marketing scholarship. While macro influencers provide extensive visibility and broad outreach, they are frequently perceived as less relatable due to their celebrity-like presence and pronounced commercialization. Conversely, micro influencers, possessing smaller, more specialized audiences, are generally regarded as more genuine and accessible, resulting in elevated engagement rates and a more profound connection with their followers. This perceived trustworthiness and authenticity renders micro influencers particularly advantageous for niche and localized marketing initiatives (Boerman & van Reijmersdal 2020).

Despite these benefits, a trade-off persists between the extensive reach of macro influencers and the increased engagement offered by micro influencers. The second research question is: *Do micro influencers utilize features and tools on written posts that might be more authentic in comparison to macro or mega influencers?* Comprehending the equilibrium between these SMI categories is essential for optimizing influencer marketing strategies, as varying approaches may be necessitated based on the brand's objectives.

The study investigates these essential dynamics within the influencer marketing ecosystem, offering insights into the subtleties of authenticity, transparency, and influencer scale. By analyzing these critical

components through a comprehensive netnographic examination of Instagram tourism influencers, the study enhances the understanding of how SMI reconcile their commercial and personal identities. In pursuing this aim, it scrutinizes the written communications of SMI and provides practical ramifications for emerging ones striving to navigate the increasingly intricate and competitive realm of digital influence.

The originality of this research lies in addressing the underexplored realm of written communication in influencer posts. By investigating the linguistic and narrative features that accompany visual content, this study offers a deeper understanding of how SMI craft and maintain authenticity, providing new insights into the interplay between written language and influencer marketing strategies. This focus on written content is especially crucial given that language has the ability to reveal sincerity, personal reflections, and unfiltered emotional expression, all of which are key to authentic engagement with followers.

2. Background

2.1. Tourism influencers on Instagram

Tourism influencers on Instagram play a multifaceted role in shaping travel behaviors and destination perceptions. They significantly impact tourists' decision-making patterns by leveraging their follower bases and the platform's visual capabilities to promote destinations through engaging photos and videos (Nadalipour et al. 2023). Influencer posts are known to activate emotions and shape users' opinions about tourist destinations, highlighting the significant impact of social media content on destination image (Smith et al., 2020). This emotional effect is crucial as it can significantly influence potential tourists' travel decisions and their overall perception of a destination. Past research indicated that Instagram influencers play a pivotal role in constructing and projecting the image of tourist destinations. Their posts often blend personal experiences with visual and textual storytelling, creating compelling narratives that resonate with their followers. These narratives can evoke strong emotional responses and trust (Lou & Yuan 2019), which are instrumental in shaping perceptions and attitudes towards destinations.

Research delves into the dimensions affecting influencer popularity (De Veirman et al. 2017), and content (Guerreiro et al. 2019), revealing that factors such as perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and similarity to the audience significantly impact SMI's credibility (Janssen et al. 2021). These variables, in turn, affect followers' intentions to visit the destinations endorsed by the influencers (Jones et al. 2021). Influencers' credibility, often determined by their

attractiveness, similarity to followers, and expertise, fosters trust and parasocial interactions, which in turn shape followers' travel intentions (Hernández-Méndez & Baute-Díaz 2024).

2.2. Types of tourism influencers

Various scholarly investigations have employed an array of classifications to delineate the categories of influencers. For instance, Kay et al. (2020) identified two principal categories of influencers: macro and micro influencers, whereas Park et al. (2021) examined the efficacy of mega and micro influencers. Campbell & Farrell (2020) formulated a typology that encompassed mega influencers (over one million followers), macro influencers (100,000 – 1m followers), and micro influencers (10,000 – 100,000 followers).

The communication medium employed has a significant effect on the resultant outcomes (Gräve and Bartsch 2021). The follower count of SMI impacts other users' perceptions of popularity, credibility, and likability (De Veirman et al. 2017). Boerman & van Reijmersdal (2020) found negligible differences between micro and macro-influencers, prompting the inquiry as to whether the size of the influencer network should be the sole criterion in selecting an appropriate influencer for brand promotion. Campbell & Farrell (2020) observed that the influence of mega influencers – traditional celebrities (film stars, athletes, musicians, and television personalities) – has received less scrutiny compared to macro influencers, suggesting a presumption of no substantial differences between the two. Borges-Tiago et al. (2023) present empirical support indicating that mega and macro influencers may wield differing degrees of influence. Consequently, marketing professionals ought to meticulously assess the distinctions between mega and macro influencers, as they may represent traditional celebrities yielding entirely divergent results in endorsements. A lesser influencer is advantageous regarding brand credibility, engagement, and involvement, whereas a larger influencer can have a direct impact on brand equity.

2.3. Influencer authenticity and written posts

Personal authenticity encompasses a reflective emotional experience characterized by sincerity, truthfulness, and originality, as noted by Vannini & Franzese (2008). From an existential viewpoint, it denotes an individual's perceived alignment with their identity, while in psychology, it refers to the genuine expression of internal experiences, including thoughts and emotions, ultimately allowing individuals to act in accordance with their authentic selves (Kahn 1992, Steiner & Reisinger 2006). SMI increasingly diverge

from their authentic personas due to external pressures (Schallehn et al. 2014), primarily from persistent impression management fostered by comparison and the allure of fame, which significantly undermines their personal authenticity.

Zniva et al. (2023) postulate that the construct of influencer authenticity will emerge as pivotal elements for the efficacy of influencer marketing in the future. While the field of marketing research possesses a substantial comprehension of the credibility paradigm (Lindh & Lisichkova 2017, Sokolova & Kefi 2020), a thorough discourse on the essence, limitations, and significance of authenticity – particularly in the realm of influencer marketing – remains notably scant. This dearth of literature is unexpected, given that the marketing corpus has acknowledged the criticality of authenticity across various market contexts.

Audrezet et al. (2020) distinguish between passionate and transparent authenticity, indicating that authentic influencers provide factual insights about brands and their products. They argue that ‘transparent authenticity’ involves influencers disclosing contractual details of brand partnerships while sharing unedited content, with authentic influencers finding satisfaction in personal growth and positive experiences. Consumers perceive influencers’ evaluations as genuine endorsements, contingent upon honest reviews that reflect intrinsic motivations, which align with the concept of ‘passionate authenticity’ that emphasizes inner aspirations over commercial interests (Moulard et al., 2015; Moulard et al., 2016). Lee and Eastin (2021) characterize the authenticity of social media influencers as the degree to which consumers perceive these influencers to be benevolent, engage in intrinsically motivated brand endorsements, share personal information about themselves, exhibit natural talent in their respective fields, and differentiate themselves from other influencers. Moreover, influencers can inspire their audiences through interaction with their profiles. These opinion leaders, characterized by aspirational traits, encourage followers to act upon their inspiration, such as making purchases based on recommendations (Abidin 2015, Casalo et al. 2018).

Lee & Theokary (2021) explore into how renowned social media influencers exploit linguistic style and emotional resonance to engage their audience. Their discoveries indicate that influencers who adeptly use emotional language and infectious enthusiasm in their posts are more adept at captivating and retaining the attention of their followers. This insight is particularly pertinent for tourism influencers, who can leverage emotional resonance to construct a more immersive and gripping narrative surrounding travel experiences. Munaro et al. (2024) delve into the linguistic styles of influencers on YouTube, offering insights into how

varied communication strategies influence digital consumer engagement. Their research reveals that inclusive language and emotional expression significantly enhance engagement.

Influencer authenticity appears as a construct that encompasses a consumer’s assessment of the extent to which a social media content creator authentically conveys information pertinent to purchasing that reflects their true perspective towards the products or brands being presented and discussed. Against this background, previous studies have investigated consumers’ perception of SMIs authenticity, but have not delved into the construction of authenticity by focusing on the influencer posts and what they convey. To the best of our knowledge, there is no comprehensive study that examines the written communication of influencers as a critical tool in depicting authenticity. Most research to date has centered on visual artifacts (e.g., photographs, videos) or consumer perspectives, leaving a significant gap in understanding how written language – through values, emotions, and narratives – contributes to the portrayal of authenticity.

3. Method

The netnographic method is ideal for exploring the written communication styles of tourism influencers on Instagram due to its ability to capture and analyze rich, naturally occurring data in social media environments. This method captures real-time, authentic interactions, revealing patterns in communication styles that might be overlooked in traditional research methods. Combining netnography with a mixed method approach enriches the understanding of influencer authenticity, since mixed methods integrate quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights, offering a holistic view of how travel influencers construct it using written language.

Netnography, a qualitative research methodology developed by Kozinets (2006, 2019), is an adaptation of ethnography tailored for computer-mediated communications. Its primary objective is to comprehend online cultures and behaviors. The methodology proves to be highly beneficial in interpreting the digital footprints individuals leave across various media formats such as pictures, videos, text, and audio, on diverse online platforms. Netnography involves observing subjects in their natural settings using non-intrusive methods such as participant observation, casual dialogue, in-depth interviews, and document examination. A key aspect is viewing the community from an external perspective to understand its culture and customs, requiring researchers to be open and adaptable without fixed hypotheses due to the unpredictable nature of research outcomes.

4. Findings

4.1. Linguistic features

4.1.1. Pronouns. The use of pronouns plays a significant role in how influencers position themselves within their narratives. The pronouns used across the posts include “I”, “we”, “you”, “my”, and “our”, among others, which are indicative of the influencers’ approaches to storytelling and self-presentation. Strikingly, these were micro and mega influencers in the sample who actively used pronouns.

The most frequent pronouns being “I” and “my” suggest that tourism influencers often position themselves as the central characters in their narratives. For example, in posts such as “*To be honest, I love taking time and reflecting this time of year*” (micro influencer) and “*I’ve been dreaming about this trip for such a long time*” (mega influencer), the influencers clearly emphasize their personal experiences, emotions, and perspectives. This self-centric storytelling approach helps followers to connect personally with the influencers, as they share their journey in a very individualistic and relatable manner.

In many instances, influencers also use “we” and “our”, which indicates a shared experience, often with a partner, friends, or their audience. For example, in posts like “*Mason & are also super excited*” and “*we made it & I couldn't be more grateful*” (both mega influencer), the influencers create a sense of community and togetherness. This approach not only highlights their relationships but also invites followers to feel included in the experiences being shared. By doing so, influencers effectively build a communal bond with their audience, making the followers feel like part of their journey.

Pronouns such as “you” and “your” are used to directly engage the audience, encouraging interaction and participation. For example, in the post “*Would you fly with me if I was your captain?*”, the mega influencer directly addresses the audience, creating a conversational tone that invites responses and fosters engagement. This use of direct address is a common strategy to increase interaction and make the audience feel directly involved in the content. The overall narrative centers around the influencer’s personal connection to other events or people, maintaining their position as the central figure in the story.

4.1.2. Informal language and emoji use. The analysis of the posts from tourism influencers underscores the consistent use of informal language. This informal communication style is central to how influencers build rapport with their audience and enhance engagement. Several key trends emerge that characterize the informal

language used by both micro and mega influencers on Instagram.

Hashtags and social media vernacular are the first feature. The posts, particularly those from micro influencers, are laden with hashtags like “#artofvisuals”, “#discoverearth”, and “#earthfocus”. These hashtags not only categorize the content for visibility on the platform but also represent a form of digital slang that aligns with the social media community’s norms. The repetitive nature of hashtags, often used in bulk, reflects a strategic yet informal approach to audience targeting.

Contractions such as “I’ve”, “can’t”, and “we’re” appear frequently, contributing to a conversational tone. For example, “*I’ve had my @everfun_official hydration pack for a few months now and it has been the perfect addition to my adventures*” and “*you just can’t go wrong!*” This use of contractions makes the content feel more intimate and accessible, mimicking spoken language. Many expressions are informal and contribute to the friendly, down-to-earth persona that influencers often cultivate.

Emojis are used liberally across posts to convey emotion and add a playful element to the text. They function as non-verbal cues that enhance the expressiveness of the messages. For example, posts like “*Go where your soul feels most alive 🚗🌳*” (micro influencer) and “*Underneath the palm trees 🌴 you can leave your worries 😊*” (mega influencer) use emojis to emphasize a sense of adventure and relaxation. This visual language is integral to the informal style and aligns with the aesthetic focus of Instagram.

Many posts directly address the audience with questions or calls to action, such as “*I - 4... which pic is your fav? 😊 Mine must be #4 🌟*” and “*Which Coachella Hair&Makeup Look was your fav this year? 🦋🌟🌸*” (mega influencer). This strategy invites followers to participate in a dialogue, fostering a sense of community and interaction. The casual language (“lil” for little or “fav” for favorite or “🌟”) is a deliberate attempt to maintain an informal and approachable tone.

The language is simple, direct, and often focused on capturing a moment or feeling, making it easy for followers to connect with the content. In some cases, influencers create their own vernacular that resonates with their personal brand or community. For instance, “*cotton candy skies and dreamy horizons*” and “*my little home on wheels 🚗🏠🌳*” are personalized expressions that reflect the influencer’s unique style and ethos. This personalization of language further enhances the informal, personable feel of the posts, which remains even when promoting products, making the advertisement feel more like a recommendation from a friend rather than a traditional commercial.

4.1.3. Storytelling. The writing style of tourism influencers on Instagram is largely characterized by brevity and a focus on imagery rather than extensive storytelling. Most posts serve as captions to accompany visually striking photographs, with the primary purpose of enhancing the visual content rather than engaging in detailed narrative storytelling. This approach is reflective of Instagram's platform dynamics, where visual appeal often takes precedence over text.

Only 8 posts could be classified as true stories. These instances of storytelling were exclusively from a mega influencer. However, even these stories were succinct, structured more as personal reflections or brief anecdotes rather than elaborate narratives. The content within these rare storytelling posts often revolved around the influencer's personal experiences during travel or significant events. These narratives were enriched by the influencer's expressions of excitement and gratitude, capturing the highs of travel and life experiences. Challenges were also acknowledged, such as nearly having to cancel a trip to Zanzibar and the disappointment of Coachella being too crowded and not worth the expense.

Despite the brevity, this influencer skillfully used their writing to foster engagement and emotional connectivity with their audience. They often invited followers to feedback what images and/or outfits of the influencer they liked most (“*which outfit was your fav?*”), thus creating a dialogue and building a community around their posts. Moreover, they demonstrated empathy and support, as seen in posts where the influencer sent love and positive energy to followers who might be facing challenges related to motherhood or difficult relationships.

When storytelling transpired, it was distinguished by several notable techniques. First, the influencer frequently engaged in introspective analysis of personal emotions and experiences, offering an authentic insight into their existence. This methodology contributed to the humanization of the influencer, enhancing their relatability to the audience. Second, in storytelling posts, visual components were paramount. The images accompanying the narrative were not merely supplementary but essential, enriching the storytelling by establishing a visual framework for the textual content. Third, influencers often integrated engagement stimuli within their narratives, encouraging followers to participate by sharing their own experiences or preferred images. This strategy not only heightened interaction but also strengthened the communal dimension of their influence. Finally, the deployment of emotionally resonant language, including expressions of affection, gratitude, or discontent, facilitated the establishment of an emotional bond with the audience. This stylistic

choice proved particularly effective in cultivating a devoted following, as it connected on a personal level with readers.

The rarity of storytelling among the influencers suggests that while they recognize the power of narrative, they tend to prioritize the platform's visual nature. The decision to engage in storytelling might be influenced by the nature of the content—only significant, memorable events or emotions seem to warrant a departure from the usual caption-style writing.

4.2. What do the written texts convey?

4.2.1. Values. Tourism influencers on Instagram often embody and project a set of values through their posts that align with broader cultural trends. These values revealed in the analysis include materialism, consumerism, hedonism, rejection or acceptance of conventional norms, as well as escapism and freedom (see Figure 2).

Influencers at both the macro and mega levels prominently incorporate themes of materialism and consumerism within their content, particularly through the endorsement of luxury brands and opulent experiences. For example, imagery depicting high-fashion labels such as Nadine Merabi or extravagant locales underscores the significance of material wealth in constructing an aspirational lifestyle. This alignment with consumerist ideals positions these influencers as purveyors of desirable, luxury-oriented existences.

Values	Micro Influencer	Macro Influencer	Mega Influencer
Rejecting Materialism	2,6%		
Materialistic Affection		8,3%	
Existential Liberation	2,6%		
Hedonistic Indulgence		8,3%	30,4%
Consumerism		31,3%	
Independence and Autonomy			4,3%
Rejection of Conventional Norms	10,5%	2,1%	8,7%
Shared Cultural Experiences		6,3%	
Self-Expression	2,6%	22,9%	8,7%
Multigenerational Bonding			13,0%
Escapism and Freedom	26,3%	16,7%	34,8%
# N = Dokumente	38 (34,9%)	48 (44,0%)	23 (21,1%)

Figure 2. Values conveyed; own representation.

The quest for pleasure and self-gratification emerges as a pivotal motif among various influencer categories, particularly among macro and mega influencers. Content that highlights lavish experiences, such as witnessing a sunset in Dubai or embracing the euphoria of Coachella, accentuates a hedonistic worldview. This focus on pleasure and self-indulgence aligns seamlessly with the aspirational narratives that influencers advocate, motivating followers to pursue analogous fulfilling experiences. For instance, a macro influencer post on “*sundowner with a view*” in Dubai

encapsulates the essence of hedonism, where the simple pleasure of enjoying a sunset with a stunning view is shared as a luxurious and indulgent experience. This hedonistic approach often aligns with the aspirational content shared by influencers, where followers are encouraged to seek out similar pleasurable experiences, reinforcing the influencer's role as a curator of desirable lifestyles.

Micro influencers frequently eschew traditional lifestyles in favor of more unconventional, liberty-focused choices. For instance, content that celebrates a nomadic “vanlife” (“*little home on wheels* 🚐🌿”) illustrates a departure from societal conventions. This repudiation of orthodox paths bolsters the perceived authenticity of influencers, who are viewed as proponents of liberated and alternative modes of existence. Such rejection of norms often enhances the influencers’ authenticity, as they are seen as pioneers of new, liberated ways of living who encourage others to break free from societal conventions.

Influencers regularly employ travel and adventure as a mechanism for escapism, depicting exotic locales as an avenue to transcend everyday pressures. By portraying exotic destinations and adventurous lifestyles, influencers tap into the escapist desires of their audience, offering their content as a gateway to an idealized, carefree existence.

Freedom constitutes a universally esteemed principle among tourism influencers, closely linked to the capacity to travel, explore, and live autonomously. Posts encouraging followers to “*Go where your soul feels most alive* 🚐🌿” (micro influencer) or reporting being “*back at the beautiful & iconic @bevhillshotel*” (mega influencer), thus showcasing the exhilaration of events like Coachella, reflect a profound yearning for independence and exploration. This focus on freedom is integral to the influencers’ identities and resonates with followers aspiring to similar lifestyles.

Across all influencer categories, hedonism, escapism, and freedom are consistently highlighted in the data, with these values serving as essential elements of the lifestyles they advocate. These themes resonate with followers who yearn for pleasure, adventure, and independence. Micro influencers typically place greater emphasis on rejecting conventional norms and endorsing freedom through relatable, genuine content. Conversely, macro and mega influencers are more inclined to spotlight materialism, consumerism, and hedonistic pleasures, often aligning with luxury brands and experiences. While the content of micro influencers tends to be more grounded and relatable, that of mega influencers frequently revolves around aspirational luxury and existential liberation. Mega influencers integrate opulence, indulgence, and escapism with themes of existential freedom and self-representation.

Although they frequently project a pronounced sense of privilege, they uphold authenticity by periodically challenging societal norms and embracing autonomy. Lastly, macro influencers strike a balance between consumerism and self-representation while intermittently referencing existential concepts. They tend to adopt a more commercial approach, partnering with brands yet striving to preserve a semblance of authenticity through individual expression and cultural engagements.

The authenticity of influencers is closely tied to how they embody and convey these values. Influencers who genuinely live the lifestyles they promote – whether it be through their travels, consumer choices, or personal philosophies – might be perceived as more authentic. For example, influencers who consistently promote materialistic values but do so through personal experiences, and transparent collaborations can be seen as credible and genuine. Their followers might trust them because they align their content with their lived experiences. The celebration of hedonism and freedom, particularly when it is presented through personal stories and honest reflections, adds to an influencer’s authenticity.

4.2.2. Emotions. The Instagram posts convey a range of emotions and experiences, including happiness, gratitude, excitement, and nostalgia. The authors share their love for travel, nature, and spending time with loved ones. They reflect on past and/or ongoing trips, expressing appreciation for the stunning landscapes and warm-hearted people they encountered. The authors discuss their experiences at different events, and highlight the appreciation for simple pleasures, such as cozy sweaters, mountain sunrises, and quality time with family and friends. The emotions expressed through their posts not only enhance the narrative, but also engage their audience on a personal level.

Positivity constitutes a crucial affective state articulated by macro and mega influencers, augmenting their allure to followers in pursuit of inspiration. Nonetheless, an overabundance of positivity may risk being perceived as disingenuous. In contrast, micro influencers exhibit a diminished level of positivity, which may bolster their authenticity by revealing a more extensive emotional spectrum. Macro and mega influencers frequently articulate a yearning for happiness, particularly through the anticipation of forthcoming events, resonating with followers who share similar aspirations. Micro influencers express this sentiment less often, potentially fostering a more equitable and genuine representation. Macro and mega influencers typically demonstrate empathy and engage in discussions regarding the surmounting of challenges, such as managing adverse travel circumstances, which

cultivates authenticity and relatability. Conversely, micro influencers are less inclined to address these topics, thereby preserving a more refined image.

Macro and mega influencers regularly communicate enthusiasm regarding imminent events to captivate their audience. In contrast, micro influencers exhibit excitement more temperately, contributing to an authentic and grounded identity. Travel and exploration in terms of wanderlust are integral to the authenticity of all influencer categories, particularly micro and mega influencers. Macro influencers incorporate travel within a broader array of content, rather than concentrating on it exclusively. Mega influencers frequently employ nostalgia to forge emotional connections, while micro and macro influencers engage with this sentiment to a lesser degree to bolster authenticity. Mega and macro influencers commonly articulate gratitude, thereby reinforcing their humility and authenticity. Micro influencers seldom emphasize this emotion.

All influencer categories convey emotions associated with travel, enthusiasm, and freedom, which are fundamental to their functions as tourism influencers. What is more striking are the differences between the influencers under study. While mega influencers predominantly emphasize privilege, materialism, and hedonism, potentially compromising authenticity, micro influencers prioritize more balanced, relatable content, thereby enhancing their perceived authenticity. Lastly, macro influencers present a hybrid approach, integrating travel and emotional engagement without allowing these elements to dominate, thereby maintaining a diversified yet relatable brand.

4.3. Balancing authenticity and promotion

Balancing authenticity and promotion is a crucial challenge for tourism influencers on Instagram, especially when personal narratives intersect with commercial content. Authenticity is closely tied to influencers' ability to convincingly represent the lifestyles they promote. When influencers manage to blend their personal stories with promotional content seamlessly, they might be perceived as more genuine. Overly commercialized posts without personal context can detract from the influencer's credibility.

The netnographic analysis zoomed in to the three types of tourism influencers and identified the key elements related to their authenticity. The additional analysis of two posts, by a micro and a mega influencers, discusses them below.

Sunrises like this remind me of why I love calling Canada home! 🌻🌻

It's such a treat to be able to experience and see the glow on the mountains and the moon still in sight with the

best company! Of course, staying hydrated is key and luckily, I have my @everfun_official hydration pack with me everywhere I go. Lightweight, space for my camera/snacks/gear and hands-free hydration anytime.

Use code Cassidy or follow this link for a discount!



*<https://bit.ly/3sbj2qo>
#everfun (a d)*

The first post by a micro influencer exemplifies the intricate dynamic between authenticity and promotional content among a micro influencer. The post begins with a sincere reflection on Canada's natural beauty, conveying an authentic appreciation for the outdoors. Personal experiences, such as enjoying a sunrise with companions, foster a relatable connection to the locale. However, it transitions to the promotion of a hydration pack, explicitly naming the brand and highlighting product features, including a discount code. This shift, while incorporating casual language, may disrupt the perceived authenticity of the narrative and risks alienating some followers. Ultimately, the success of this balance hinges on the influencer's rapport with their audience, the frequency of similar posts, and the genuine alignment of promoted products with their established lifestyle.

Off to Zanzibar 🌴 I cannot wait to spend some time in paradise I and then to go on a safari in Kenya 🇰🇪🦒 I've been dreaming about this trip for such a long time and I almost thought we would need to cancel it 😞 Those who follow my stories know why 🐘 But we made it & I couldn't be more grateful 🙏

Mason & are also super excited to fly with our fav airline @turkishairlines again ❤️ They always surprise us with the best service, food & route network & Did you know that only in Germany DE they fly from 16 different airports via Istanbul TR to nearly anywhere in Asia, Africa, Middle East etc. (and thus also to Zanzibar & Nairobi) 🇰🇪🇹🇷

Swipe right to see who is our captain 🧑 on today's flight 😊

In the second post, a mega influencer exhibits genuine enthusiasm for an impending journey to Zanzibar and Kenya, sharing a personal anecdote about nearly canceling the trip, with references to their Instagram stories for context. The post expresses gratitude and a longstanding aspiration for this particular voyage, enhanced by the mention of traveling with a companion. Promotional elements include explicit acknowledgement and recommendation of Turkish Airlines, highlighting notable attributes such as service quality, cuisine, and extensive route network. Comprehensive details regarding the airline's operations in Germany are also provided, and followers are

encouraged to swipe for additional content, likely featuring the airline. The influencer seamlessly integrates the airline into their travel narrative, presenting it as a preferred option rather than a forced promotion. While the post maintains an authentic, casual tone, the absence of clear disclosure about its promotional essence may raise concerns regarding transparency, complicating the balance between authenticity and promotion.

In the analysis of these posts, distinct strategies for balancing authenticity and promotional efforts are evident. The Zanzibar post integrates promotional material more fluidly within a personal narrative, yet it lacks a degree of transparency. The Canadian sunrise post, conversely, displays greater transparency regarding its promotional intent, but encounters difficulties in sustaining a coherent authentic voice throughout its content. Both posts exemplify the persistent challenge faced by tourism influencers in upholding authenticity while meeting promotional responsibilities. The most efficacious strategy is likely characterized by a synthesis of explicit disclosure, seamless incorporation of promotional elements, and a steadfast commitment to delivering value to followers through both personal experiences and pragmatic information.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This netnographic analysis provided a nuanced understanding of how tourism influencers navigate the challenges of maintaining authenticity while fulfilling promotional roles on Instagram. The study zoomed into the 109 written posts of micro, macro and mega influencers, which resulted in a rich set of 134 codes, offering a comprehensive view of key elements constructing authenticity in written influencer content, and elucidated a complex interplay between authenticity and promotion in tourism influencer content. This complexity indicates that authenticity in social media marketing is not a monolithic concept, but rather a multifaceted construct that can be achieved through various means. The diversity of codes likely reflects the different strategies employed by influencers to balance personal branding, audience expectations, and commercial obligations. This balance appears to be crucial in maintaining perceived authenticity while effectively promoting products or destinations.

The results underscore several pivotal strategies that emerging influencers may adopt to bolster their credibility and preserve audience trust. Primarily, the integration of personal narratives with promotional material is essential. Audiences appreciate influencers who convey sincere reflections on their lives while fluidly incorporating brand partnerships. Moreover,

emotional authenticity – exhibiting a broad range of emotions, including both trials and triumphs – facilitates stronger connections with followers.

For novice influencers, embracing a conversational style through the use of informal language and emojis can cultivate a more approachable and relatable digital persona. The inclusion of personal reflections or anecdotes, even amidst predominantly visual content, enriches posts and enhances the overall authenticity of the narrative. Demonstrating a genuine spectrum of emotions, spanning from happiness to hardship, further solidifies the sense of authenticity, rendering influencers more relatable to their audience.

Ultimately, remaining faithful to one's principles and maintaining transparency regarding partnerships or promotions are essential for sustaining credibility. Influencers who effectively balance authenticity and marketing are those who synchronize their personal brand with the products they advocate, ensuring that the integration appears organic rather than contrived.

Values such as materialism, consumerism, hedonism, freedom, and escapism are frequently articulated by tourism influencers. The degree to which these values are interwoven into personal narratives significantly influences the perceived authenticity of the influencer. Transparency concerning sponsored content and consistency in expressing personal values are critical in shaping followers' perceptions of an influencer's credibility. A clear concordance between an influencer's espoused values and their personal life enhances this credibility.

Emerging influencers can gain significantly from the incorporation of both personal and collective language in their posts, thereby nurturing a sense of connection and community with their audience. Embracing informal diction and utilizing emojis can facilitate the maintenance of a conversational tone that resonates profoundly with Instagram's relaxed, visually-centric platform. Integrating brief, personal anecdotes or reflections, even when the primary emphasis is on visuals, enriches content and amplifies its authenticity. Furthermore, manifesting a range of emotions, encompassing both affirmative experiences and adversities, can aid in constructing a more authentic and relatable persona. It is imperative for influencers to ensure that the values they endorse are congruent with their personal narrative and are conveyed with clarity. This congruence is vital for reinforcing authenticity within their online persona.

While the study provides valuable insights, it is limited to three influencers and one social media platform. Future research could expand on these findings by incorporating a larger sample of influencers across multiple platforms. Additionally, foregrounding gender and/or cultural differences, can provide a more

comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of different authenticity strategies.

6. References

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