

## **Instagram used as a tool by influencers to perform an “authentic” persona among users.**

### **Abstract:**

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the different perspectives where Instagram influencers perform an “authentic” persona towards their own community. The argument is that influencers engage actively in the settlement and consolidation of their authentic persona among their followers on Instagram. This paper, therefore, argues that brands and influencers work together to build up marketing strategies and this gives a chance to the influencers to be truthful to their community while promoting a product. Influencers tend to work with brands who advocate for a good cause in order to enhance their authentic persona. The paper also elaborates on the effect of including followers in the daily lives of the influencers. This allows both parties to engage together and to develop a genuine relationship with each other. Another aspect that has been investigated in the paper is that influencers take part in online advocacy such as body positivity and #Nofilter movement to showcase their authentic persona.

**Keywords:** #Authenticpersona, #Instagraminfluencers, #Bodypositivity, #Nofilter, #Authenticity

Social media is omnipresent in our daily lives and allows individuals to share all kinds of information, building up online networks and communities. Instagram is an example of a social media platform and it is described as mainly being a platform for photo sharing (Humphrey, 2016). However, with time, Instagram took another direction and some changes occurred, as mentioned by Driel and Dumitrica (2020), “The rise of Web 2.0, characterized by ‘the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement’” (p. 67). Taking this into context, it is evaluated that with time, Instagram became more than just sharing of photos, it became a tool used by influencers, marketers and other institutions to promote different purposes. Influencers are defined as opinion leaders, who have their specific communities and they usually create their own content online. For example, they can be a travel influencer where they share

contents about travelling. Nevertheless, besides projecting unrealistic beauty standards or lifestyle, influencers perform their own type of self-presentation which result as being an “authentic persona”. According to Reade (2020), “Authenticity, then, has become understood not as an inherent quality, but rather part of a ‘performative ecology’. On social media, the performative nature of authenticity may be reflected in choices users make to appear ‘real’ to others” (p.537). The main focus of this paper is to show the influencers engaging actively in the settlement and consolidation of their authentic persona on Instagram. This paper will explore the different aspects where an influencer performs an authentic persona. First of all, being an “authentic” influencer is a strategy for marketing purposes, secondly, by exposing their daily lives and real self, influencers can build up an online community through active engagement and finally they perform their authentic persona by taking part in online advocacy.

### **Influencers are promoting brands and products while maintaining an authentic persona**

Influencers work together with brands and other institutions to come up with marketing strategies and they are able to consolidate their authentic persona while promoting the products. To be more credible amongst their community, influencers make sure that the authenticity which will be projected will help themselves and the brand to make an impact among the followers. In other words, the more real the influencer seems to be, there are more chances for the consumers to develop a strong relationship with them (Reade, 2020). Instagram influencers act as stakeholders more specifically as the secondary stakeholders and they have an effect on the primary stakeholders which are the consumers (Enke & Borchers,2019). Authenticity can take different directions, it can be one exposing their real names, addressing or even sharing every detail of their daily life online. One common type of influencers who expose their “authentic” persona, would be beauty influencers. As mentioned by Driel and Dumitrica (2020), “beauty bloggers use selfies that ‘record the transition from a bare face – a “no make-up selfie” to a partial or ‘full face’ of make-up” (p.69). By using Instagram as a tool, there is a whole construction of online self-representation. But as mentioned by Goffman (1959), “when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially

accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behaviour as a whole” (p.125). By analysing this statement, it is deduced that influencers are going against these, they are actually consolidating their performance by going against the values of society. Beauty influencers are now showing their bare face before promoting brands. Influencers have to calculate their strategy well when they are exposing their “authentic” persona to the public because if they write directly about a commercial product, their community can easily distinguish this action as not being authentic and may lose interest. To avoid this, Driel and Dumitrica (2020) state, “by creating original content, mixing information about a product (e.g., product placement disclosure) with emotional stories of their own relationship to it, and featuring only products that are a good fit with their online persona” (p.69).

### **Influencers are working with brands that advocate for authenticity**

However, some brands come up with authentic purposes and destroy the unrealistic beauty standards hence allowing influencers to perform their “authentic” self via their community. There are several brands such as ModCloth, Asos, Aerie, Nike who advocates for the real self. These brands project authenticity, where authenticity is related to being genuine, truthful and original (Pöyry et al., 2019). Since the brands themselves are presented as being authentic, it will be easier for influencers to settle their “authentic” persona and this will contribute as being “real” to the public. This will provide the influencer with another opportunity to grow up their third space present on Instagram. Different influencers took part in promoting the different brands mentioned above. First of all, the influencer and plus-size model, Zack Miko is breaking all the unrealistic beauty standards and is advocating for body positivity for plus size men. One of his campaigns comprises being featured on the Iconic swim show, bringing awareness to his public, he is also performing his “authentic” persona online and is promoting the Iconic swimwear to his public. This example shows how there is a fading barrier between his offline and online identity. He is using the plus-size movement to consolidate his persona. Another example of an authentic brand is Levi’s. Levi’s is known to promote authenticity to its consumers. With the help of various influencers around the world, Levi’s has been able to raise awareness pertaining to body positivity. Huma Qureshi is breaking all the stereotypes by promoting Levi’s and

by performing her authentic persona on Instagram. She talks about body shapes and skin colours and relates these statements to her own story while recommending the brand to her public.

### **Influencers are exposing their daily lives to settle their authentic persona**

Influencers consolidate and settle their “authentic” persona by exposing their daily lives on Instagram. Like other media outlets, Instagram plays an essential role in showcasing what is the ideal body and it eventually influences the perception of individuals concerning body images (Knobloch-Westerwick & Romero, 2010). It has been noticed that both female and male have a lack of satisfaction due to comparison between body ideals (Knobloch-Westerwick & Romero, 2010). Nowadays, besides magazines or adverts, influencers play a crucial role in shaping the “ideal body”. By exposing their “raw” body on Instagram, influencers can perform their authentic self in a direct manner or in an artistic manner. As stated by Reade (2020), “trying to ‘fancy up’ posts were tied to notions of inauthenticity and fakeness, while leaving posts ‘as they are’ marked an authentic image of the self” (p.541). This can be resumed by exposing their bodies without any filters, using Instagram stories as mini vlogging videos and having a genuine talk about social topics and arising issues in society (Reade, 2020). Being an authentic influencer will have a direct and positive impact on their community, by posting unedited pictures including cellulite, stretch marks and blemishes bring more authenticity to the person as a whole. An example to illustrate an “authentic” persona exposing flaws would be the Instagram influencer and model Ashley Graham. Her Instagram page mostly displays a natural and raw body and her real self. In February, she posted a photo with stretch marks on her belly with the caption “same me. Few new”, this picture got around 1.5 million likes. She got a lot of positive comments and this shows that she could get the attention of her public and she succeeded in maintaining her online “authentic” persona. Another example to illustrate the raw body is the Instagram account of the artist Petra Collins. She performed her “authentic” persona by artistically exposing bodies, back in 2013 (Olszanowski, 2014). Olszanowski (2014) also states that “In a self-imaging practice, the artist is the object and the subject at the same time—a threat to the social order of image production and consumption” (p.84). While analysing the article, it is deduced that through her pictures, she wants to show

women empowerment and feminism and by including the “real” body, she was more credible among her followers. Olszanowski (2014) says “Each of these women maintains a feminist self-imaging artistic practice constituting a complicated skill set that employs certain technical and aesthetic tactics to include the body, often in nude” (p.85). Besides describing being “raw” as exposing bodies and imperfection, it can also be described as being emotionally genuine towards the public. When influencers include bits of their personal lives by including their family and friends, their followers tend to see them as being an ordinary person and hence this provides the influencer as being more authentic (Reade,2020). This also develops a sense of closeness between them and develop a “real” bond. Furthermore, when influencers talk about arising issues such as mental health and health in general or voicing out their experiences about struggles they are facing in their daily lives, this develops their authentic persona because they are bringing awareness and they are encouraging their followers to talk about their own issues and this is, in turn, help them to get through different issues (Reade,2020).

### **Online advocacy contributes to consolidate the genuine persona of the influencer**

Instagram influencers usually take part in online advocacy and this helps to consolidate their authentic persona because they advocate for good causes. Since influencers have their way of tackling different social issues, most of them usually take part in online movements. Throughout the years, body image is going beyond the initial image and is expanding to the construction of a body-positive image (Cohen et al., 2019). To build up and perform their “authentic” persona, the body positivity movement is one of the most popular among the influencers. According to Cohen et al (2019), ““Body positivity” is a growing social media trend that seeks to challenge dominant societal appearance ideals and promote acceptance and appreciation of all bodies and appearances” (p.47). By analysing this, the influencer reflects a positive self-representation. According to Lee-Won et al. (2014), “Positive self-presentation could also be viewed as behavioural manifestation of self-enhance behavioural motivation to enhance the positivity of self-views and public self-images to maintain a sense of self-worth and “maximize social approval and minimize social disapproval” (p.414). With the drastic increase of body positive content on Instagram, different influencers are taking a stand to make a difference by performing their

“authentic” persona. Body positive movement as mentioned by Cohen et al. (2019) “aims to challenge the aforementioned narrow appearance ideals and instead represent a diverse array of bodies of different shapes, sizes, colours, features, and abilities, with the presumed aim of fostering body acceptance and appreciation” (p.1548). For example, Taylor Giavasis, a body-positive influencer has set up an Instagram page allowing men and women to express themselves through photos, videos and captions in relation to the body positivity movement. The Instagram page named “thenakediaries” was set up in 2015, it now comprises 250,000 followers, with 1591 posts where both men and women shared their imperfections, flaws and stories. Instagram is a powerful tool to allow the influencer to perform their “authentic” persona and by using hashtags a wider range of people can be reached. Hashtags such as #bodypositivity, #Bopo, #bodypositive are written in the posts posted by influencers with powerful captions as stated by Cohen et al. (2019), “it’s possible to love your belly rolls, it’s possible to have a favourite spot of cellulite” (p.1548). The kind of photos posted by influencers to raise awareness is the before and after showcasing the “real” self (Cohen et al, 2019). Moreover, the concept of #Nofilter can be determined as a hybridisation from Eastern Buddhist principles and the western world such as Instagram. Bueton and Wallis (2019) mention “Eastern Buddhist principles of aesthetics reveal a minimalist beauty that appreciates *shizen*, natural difference; *kanso*, simplicity; and *shibui*, understatement” (p.391). Each principle stated results in the movement of #Nofilter are used by influencers to perform their “authentic” persona. “Wabi-sabi” is simply defined as the beauty one acquires while ageing and that all imperfections make that person unique (Bueton & Wallis, 2019). This results in bringing more authenticity to the influencer hence making him or her more credible towards the public.

In conclusion, Instagram acts as an essential tool in our daily lives and as well as in influencers’ lives. Influencers are engaging actively to settle and consolidate their authentic persona towards their followers. There are different aspects which have been discussed throughout the paper. Influencers are working together with marketers and brands by maintaining their authentic self. They are doing so by creating original content, by relating emotions and feelings to the products and they are also pairing with brands that advocate for authenticity. Using Instagram influencers as a marketing strategy can be beneficial for

the brand or institution and the influencer. Additionally, influencers perform their authentic persona by including their followers in their daily lives by doing Instagram stories, exposing their imperfections and talking about social issues by bringing more awareness pertaining to different topics. Finally, online advocacy contributes to consolidate the authentic persona of the influencer. Different online movements such as body positivity and #Nofilter are being advocated by influencers hence contributing to a positive self-presentation amongst their community.

Reference list:

- Buetow, S., & Wallis, K. (2019). The Beauty in Perfect Imperfection. *J Med Humanit* 40, 389–394. <https://doi-org.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/10.1007/s10912-017-9500-2>
- Cohen, R., Fardouly, J., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2019). #BoPo on Instagram: An experimental investigation of the effects of viewing body positive content on young women’s mood and body image. *New Media & Society*, 21(7), 1546–1564. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819826530>
- Cohen, R., Irwin, L., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2019). #bodypositivity: A content analysis of body positive accounts on Instagram. *Body Image*, 29, 47-57. <https://doi-org.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/10.1016/j.bodyim.2019.02.007>
- Driel, V.L., & Dumitrica, D. (2020). Selling brands while staying “Authentic”: The professionalization of Instagram influencers. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 27(1), 66–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856520902136>
- Enke, N., & Borchers, N.S. (2019). Social Media Influencers in Strategic Communication: A Conceptual Framework for Strategic Social Media Influencer Communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13(4), 261-277. DOI: 10.1080/1553118X.2019.1620234

- Goffman, E. (1959). The presentation of self in everyday life. In D. M. Newman & J. O'Brien, *Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life Readings* (#7ed., pp.120-162. Pine forge press.  
[https://books.google.mu/books?hl=en&lr=&id=TIIAzT5uT-IC&oi=fnd&pg=PA120&dq=the+presentation+of+self+in+everyday+life&ots=IuEhfhJko7&sig=BwYF2uSeq-QNS6jHQUMcVwtl\\_88&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q=the%20presentation%20of%20self%20in%20everyday%20life&f=false](https://books.google.mu/books?hl=en&lr=&id=TIIAzT5uT-IC&oi=fnd&pg=PA120&dq=the+presentation+of+self+in+everyday+life&ots=IuEhfhJko7&sig=BwYF2uSeq-QNS6jHQUMcVwtl_88&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=the%20presentation%20of%20self%20in%20everyday%20life&f=false)
- Humphrey, B. (2016). Instagram. *The School Librarian*, 64(4), 211.  
<https://link.library.curtin.edu.au/gw?url=https://www-proquest-com.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/scholarly-journals/instagram/docview/1860947754/se-2?accountid=10382>
- Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Romero, P., J. (2010). Body Ideals in the Media: Perceived Attainability and Social Comparison Choices. *Media Psychology*, 14(1), 27-48. DOI: 10.1080/15213269.2010.547833
- Lee-Won, R. J., Shim, M., Joo, K. Y., & Park, G. S. (2014). Who puts the best “face” forward on Facebook?: Positive self-presentation in online social networking and the role of self-consciousness, actual-to-total Friends ratio, and culture. *Computers in human behaviour*, 39, 413-423.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.08.007>
- Olszanowski, M. (2014). Feminist Self-Imaging and Instagram: Tactics of Circumventing Sensorship. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 21(2), 83- 95.  
 DOI: 10.1080/15551393.2014.928154
- Pöyry, E., Pelkonen, M., Naumanen, E., & Laaksonen, S. (2019). A Call for Authenticity: Audience Responses to Social Media Influencer Endorsements in

Strategic Communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13(4), 336- 351. DOI: 10.1080/1553118X.2019.1609965

Reade, J. (2021). Keeping it raw on the ‘gram: Authenticity, relatability and digital intimacy in fitness cultures on Instagram. *New Media & Society*, 23(3), 535–553. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819891699>