Calibrated authenticity – Multimodal Analysis of Authenticity Construction in the Instagram Feed of @noelledowning

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This thesis examines the multimodal construction of authenticity in the Instagram feed content of lifestyle social media influencers. The value of authenticity and 'realness' has been made apparent in previous examinations of social media influencers where the portrayal of 'calibrated amateurism', through establishing relatability, and authenticity have been identified as key components of content creation for social media influencers on Instagram (Abidin 2018). The need for authenticity is juxtaposed against an Instagram platform vernacular of conventional styles of content creation that are focused on highly curated and aesthetically pleasing representations. The vocational needs of the social media influencers in creating commercially laden advertorials further complicate the multimodal construction of authenticity. These realities of social media influencer content creation combine with the semiotic technology affordances of the Instagram platform to create an interesting environment in which different methods of constructing and communicating authenticity can be examined.

The study examines this environment through a focus on the Instagram account of a New York - based lifestyle influencer Noelle Downing (@noelledowning). A textual analysis of the visual and written content in the Instagram feed posts was employed on a corpus of 275 posts and 369 photos connected to the posts. The theoretical framework of the thesis is built on the theory of representation of visual social actors by Theo van Leeuwen and on the theory of mediated authenticity by Gunn Enli. The theory of mediated authenticity was expanded successfully in this thesis through the category of engagement to further its applicability to social media content. The ideational, interpersonal, and textual discursive metafunctions devised by M.A.K. Halliday further guided the examination of authenticity construction in the synthesis of written and visual content.

The results of the study indicate that authenticity is constructed through relatively uniform visual representations that communicate relatability, focus on creating an interpersonal connection with the followers, and through representing predictable and conventional lifestyle influencer topics and styles, whereas captions are used to provide a more detailed look into the private life, thoughts, and feelings of the influencer. Through a multimodal and multidisciplinary approach to social media content creation, the study establishes the lifestyle social media influencer authenticity construction as a form of calibrated authenticity where the mundane, relatable, and personal are invoked to balance the apparent commercialism of advertorial content. Influencers are found striving to establish an equitable relationship between themselves and their followers to ensure authenticity and relatability.

Keywords: Authenticity, Social media, Influencer, Instagram, Multimodal analysis,

Textual analysis, Social Actor Theory, Mediated Authenticity

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SMI – Social Media Influencer

1. Introduction

The lifestyle social media influencer is a vocation born out of the development of social media networking sites in the 2010s, particularly with the rise in popularity of Instagram. The possibility of documenting one's life from its most minute to grandiose details for potentially millions and even billions of others to see has made possible the emergence of this new brand of internet celebrities. These influencers do not necessarily rely on specific skills for their fame or appeal but rather engage with their audiences to create relationships with them that can be leveraged to accumulate social and financial success. This creation of a connection has been found to rely on relatability and authenticity as the primary tools with which relationships are managed and the self-brand of the influencer made appealing. (Abidin 2018: 71). Relatability is this context can be understood as the establishment of a connection between the influencer and the followers where the followers view the influencer as alike to them in a substantial way and as portraying a lifestyle that they can emulate. Authenticity concerns the influencer exhibiting in their content their inner motivations and desires while portraying their lives as they are 'really' lived.

The process of self-branding and authentication takes place in an environment that is characterized by heavy competition for user attention and a vernacular where intense curation of one's communication is considered key for success. Furthermore, the vocational success of a social media influencer is reliant on engaging in commercial partnerships with companies that must be made consistent with their own self-brand and even more importantly: authentic. In such an environment that is rife with competition, commercialism, and curation there are many pressures placed on authentic expression. Nonetheless, appearing authentic and relatable remains the key to success. The specific nature of how this authenticity is constructed has however remained opaque.

This thesis builds on a strong foundation of studies on social media influencers since the beginning of the 2010s. Influencers are a well-researched topic at this point but despite the evident importance of authenticity and relatability for their craft, the actual influencer content has sparsely been studied in terms of how it constructs authenticity. Thus, through the study of a typical lifestyle influencer in the anglophonic and western world, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of how authenticity is constructed through multimodal content creation channels such as the Instagram feed.

There is a need to understand how authenticity is employed by the lifestyle social media influencers in their content creation. This thesis sets out to analyze the actual produced content of a lifestyle social media influencer to better understand how authenticity can be constructed in lifestyle influencer content.

Through an examination of the lifestyle social media influencer Noelle Downing (@noelledowning) and her Instagram feed content this thesis examines how she constructs authenticity with the multimodal content creation format of the Instagram feed. The focus of this study is primarily to examine **how authenticity is constructed in the Instagram feed of @noelledowning.** The analysis is based on a multimodal approach to the Instagram feed and its properties to study both the visual representations of Noelle Downing and the written captions in the Instagram feed posts. The multimodal focus of the thesis guides the format of the research questions which are presented below:

1) How are different methods of visual representation of social actors and mediated authenticity used in constructing authenticity and relatability?

2) How is authenticity constructed multimodally through ideational, interpersonal, and textual methods of communication in the Instagram feed posts of @noelledowning?

The first research question focuses on authenticity and relatability construction through the specific theoretical frameworks to cover both the visual and written content in the Instagram feed posts. The second question expands to cover the whole multimodal ensemble in terms of authenticity construction and how multimodal elements of meaning making construct authenticity together. These questions will be analyzed from a multimodal approach and an understanding of language as a social semantic phenomenon. The theory of social actors by Theo van Leeuwen (2008) and its adapted version will be used to examine the visual representations of Noelle Downing and other people in the Instagram feed posts as visual social actors. The theory of mediated authenticity by Gunn Enli (2016) will be adapted for analysis primarily concerning the written captions in the Instagram feed posts. The methods of analysis in this thesis are primarily based on a qualitative textual analysis.

The next chapter will provide an overview of multimodal analysis and its connection with social semiotics as the underlying approach to the Instagram feed content. A brief overview of semiotic technology and its relevance for this thesis is also presented.

Chapter 3 examines Instagram and its properties, and presents the semiotic meaning making capabilities of the Instagram feed. Chapter 4 provides the theoretical framework and understanding of social media influencers in terms of constructing relatability, authenticity, and how these interact with the advertorial content. Noelle Downing as a lifestyle social media influencer is also presented in the chapter. Chapter 5 presents the relevant theoretical frameworks in terms of authenticity and the theory of mediated authenticity and how they connect with influencers. Chapter 6 presents the theoretical framework for visual social actors and for the examination of the visual representations in the Instagram feed content. Chapter 7 introduces the material and methods of the study. Chapter 8 presents the results and discussion in relation to the research questions. Finally, chapter 9 concludes the thesis by re-examining the major findings and considering the contributions of the thesis while suggesting new avenues for further research.

2. Multimodal analysis and social semiotics

This section will introduce multimodal analysis and briefly outline its theoretical underpinnings. Specific attention is paid to social semiotic multimodality which acts as a basis for the multimodal analysis in this thesis. Deriving from social semiotic multimodality, the field of semiotic technology is also presented as it pertains to understanding social semiotic multimodality on social media platforms.

2.1. Multimodality

Multimodality as an approach is focused on the social interpretation of language and provides an extension on the meaning of communication to accommodate for "--- social interpretation of language and its meanings to the whole range of representational and communicational modes or semiotic resources for making meaning that are employed in a culture – such as image, writing, gesture, gaze, speech, posture". (Jewitt 2009a: 1). A mode is a meaning making tool that is contextually bound to its users who have a shared cultural sense of a resource set which can be used for realizing meaning (Jewitt 2009b: 21-22). The concept of mode and semiotic resource will be examined in more detail later.

Jewitt (2009b: 14) presents four interrelated theoretical assumptions that guide the understanding of multimodality. Firstly, language is formed as a component of a multimodal ensemble where representations and communication are constructed through drawing from a multiplicity of modes which all have equal meaning making potential (Jewitt 2009b: 14). Thus, multimodal analysis does not view features outside spoken or written communication such as gesture or image as somehow purely complementary or optional in understanding meanings conveyed through language (Jewitt 2009b: 14).

Secondly, the modes employed in a multimodal ensemble realize different communicative functions (Jewitt 2009b: 15). Modes are constituted through their cultural, historical, and social usage and as such all communicative acts are realized through social interactions which are context dependent (Jewitt 2009b: 15). These properties of multimodal texts highlight the need for understanding how the social context affects the use of modes in each text such as the usage of visual and textual modes on Instagram Feed posts in this study.

Thirdly, the meaning making process of multimodality is realized through people's adaptation of modes and in an environment where contact between different modes creates meaning in a communicative event (Jewitt 2009b: 15). For example, in this study the construction of authenticity in Instagram Feed posts is analysed through various modes available for selection in producing visual imagery and writing. The interaction between these modes is necessary to understand the construction of authenticity and to highlight their individual and combined contributions.

Lastly, multimodality is built on the idea that the semiotic resources or modes and the meanings produced from them are social and as such various norms and rules shape their use in the sign-making process (Jewitt 2009b: 15). The sign-makers perform the selection, adaptation and reproduction of meanings which reflect their goals and interests in the social context (Jewitt 2009b: 16). This assumption highlights the significance of the social context and the role of the sign-maker in producing meanings. These assumptions are next complemented by an understanding of mode itself.

2.2. Mode

The previous subsection on multimodality gave some mainly indirect perspectives to the concept of mode and semiotic resource, namely their situatedness in terms of social and cultural contexts and how they can be used and altered by people in communication. The understanding of modes as socially and culturally constructed resources for meaning making in communication makes it possible to understand a wide variety of phenomena as applicable to be described and used as modes for analysis (Kress 2009). Kress (2009: 54) provides examples of phenomena in representation and communication that cover many areas of human meaning making such as *image*, *writing*, *music*, *speech*, and *gesture* while also adding other elements of human construction that carry meaning in a certain environment such as *clothing*, *food*, or *furniture* which could also be considered modes. Further questions about the status of modes also concern the hierarchy between different modes and how sub-modes of other modes are presented (Stöckl 2004: 11-12). Even further complications also ensue from the fact that the same mode can be present in different media which creates new variants of the mode (Stöckl 2004: 11). These examples already highlight the open-endedness of the concept of mode and the question of what features separate a mode from something that is not a mode.

In social semiotic theory of multimodality, the separation can come in the form of social and formal requirements which guide our understanding of a mode. The social requirement posits mode as something that is recognized in a community as a mode and demonstrated in the community's practices of representation (Kress 2009: 59). Discernable regularity and consistency in the use of a mode and shared assumptions of its meaning making potentials are necessary (Kress 2009: 59). According to Kress (2009: 59): "In a social semiotic theory any communicational resource has to fulfil three functions: to be able to represent 'what goes on' in the world – states, actions, events: the *ideational function*; to be able to represent the social relations of those engaged in communication: *the interpersonal function*; and to represent both these as message-entities – texts – coherent internally and with their environment: the *textual function*". These three functions are based on the theoretical work of Michael Halliday (1978) who devised them as meta-functions operating through grammar and different elements of language. The idea of mode being intertwined with grammar, and as such being governed through a set of common rules, is also present in the exploration of the nature of mode by Stöckl (2004: 11). Stöckl (2004: 25) also sees the meta-functions proposed by Halliday as an element applicable to all modes in use.

The understanding of mode as socially constructed is a widely accepted between multimodal approaches even if the actual usage of mode as a unit of analysis may differ (Jewitt 2009b: 22). Endeavours to build grammars of different modes have been attempted on human communication on areas such as art (O'Toole 1994) and image (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). The notion of the feasibility of trying to build a grammar governing the production of modes other than language in its spoken or written form has encountered some criticism where the viability of imposing the grammar of spoken and written language on modes that are very different from them is questioned (Machin 2009: 188-190). The understanding of different modes realizing different meanings in interaction is an important part of what kind of meanings a specific mode can express.

The concept of modal affordance comes to play in examining what different modes are capable of in communication. According to Kress (2009: 54-57), the modal affordances explain what different meanings different modes can be used to express based on their connection to materiality of the mode, the cultural context, and the social requirements that guide communication. These affordances of modes do not always materialize the

same way across cultures or social situations and the materiality that allows different expressions of a mode (e.g. pitch, rhythm, stress, accents etc. for speech) is not necessarily fully utilized in communication situations (Kress 2009: 56).

Simultaneously, as the different modes realize different functions, the interaction between modes is of paramount importance in analyzing multimodal ensembles and thus examining intersemiotic relationships becomes salient (Jewitt 2009b: 25). Stöckl (2004: 25-27) suggests that the modes of writing and image share various similarities and the explanation of how both modes construct meaning and realize the Hallidayan meta-functions in a multimodal ensemble must be conducted in detail to understand the meaning of the ensemble in question. The linkages between writing and image in terms of their history and the development of human beings from childhood to adulthood are also made apparent through the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 16-23). Additionally, Martinec and Salway (2005) have devised a framework based on the systemic functional semiotics of Halliday to elaborate how image and written text interact through the logico-semantic relations of *elaboration, extension,* and *enhancement*. In their framework, *elaboration* refers to a clause restating or clarifying information of another clause, *extension* refers to addition of information from clause to another, and *enhancement* refers to a clause supplying information about relations of a clause to another that explain how, why, when or where (Martinec and Salway 2005: 349-351). These interactions between modes as well as other properties of modes will next be highlighted in terms of the social semiotic approach to multimodality.

2.3. Social semiotic multimodality

The properties of a mode according to social semiotic multimodality were already briefly examined in the previous section through which the impact of Halliday's work on social semiotic multimodality was mentioned. The theories of social semiotics and systemic functional grammar as advanced by Halliday have been a major influence on social semiotic multimodality (Jewitt 2009c: 29). Particularly the meta-functions proposed first by Halliday (1978) in *Language as a Social Semiotic* are important building blocks for the approach as mentioned in the previous subsection. Halliday sees language as a form of meaning potential and a human semiotic with a goal to understand human communication as it plays a role in the social life of people (Halliday 1978: 51). Halliday and Matthiessen (1999 [2006]: 3-4) later explain their position in utilising the meta-functions as one interested in understanding language as a systemic

grammar where the different categories are based on meaning which has a semantic and lexicogrammatical base.

2.4. Kress and van Leeuwen's adaptation

Through the social semiotic understanding of language there is then a possibility of understanding how different modes operate through the different meta-functions. Due to the focus on image in addition to written language, the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) on *Reading Images* is of particular value to the analysis of images. The approach of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) is utilized in this study through the theory of Visual Social Actors developed by van Leeuwen (2008) which will be presented in its own section. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 41-44) employ the Hallidayan meta-functions to describe how the ideational, interpersonal, and textual resources realize meaning in visual modes and how they could be turned into a grammar of visual communication. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 3) describe this visual grammar as "--- a quite general grammar of contemporary visual design in 'Western' cultures, an account of the explicit and implicit knowledge and practices around a resource, consisting of the elements and rules underlying a culture-specific form of visual communication".

In their analysis of images Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 6-8) start from the basic semiotic concept of *sign* with a focus on the 'interest' of the sign-maker in the sign-making process. The interest of the sign-maker is conditioned by available semiotic resources which are further conditioned both by the social context and the individual themselves (Kress 1993: 172-173) (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 7). The sign-maker makes the choices that are the most appropriate for a given situation and then binds the relatively independent signifier (the form) with the signified (the meaning) in to a newly made sign (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 8). The understanding of signs and sign-making by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) already highlight the nature of the semiotic resource in social semiotic multimodality. Van Leeuwen provides a poignant definition of the semiotic resource in his own work:

> Semiotic resources are the actions, materials and artifacts we use for communicative purposes, whether produced physiologically – for example, with our vocal apparatus, the muscles we use to make facial expressions and gestures – or technologically – for example, with pen and ink, or computer hardware and software – together with the ways in which these resources can be organized. Semiotic resources have a meaning potential, based on their past uses, and a set of affordances based on their possible uses, and these will be actualized in concrete social context where their use is subject to some form of semiotic regime.

> (Van Leeuwen2005: 285)

The definition covers the actual process of meaning making through the available means and what could be done with them to produce meaning while also illustrating the social context, rules, and norms that influence the composition of the interaction. Through mapping the available methods for meaning making, social semiotic multimodal analysis can also account for the development of different semiotic resources or modes to understand how 'reality' is represented and thus offer a way to imagine 'reality' differently and even redesign it (Jewitt 2009b: 23). Such a possibility underlines the emphasis on the sign-maker and their meaning-making process in social contexts as the most salient analytical focus of social semiotic multimodality (Jewitt 2009c: 31).

The approach developed by Kress and van Leeuwen opened new pathways for the study of multimodality and different modes with more emphasis placed on the context of communication and the person behind the makeup of the sign in producing meaning. (Jewitt 2009c: 29). The impact of a social semiotic understanding of multimodality is also a matter of expanding the purview of linguistics by incorporating the theories and ideas of interactional socio-linguists such as Erving Goffman or Stuart Hall (Jewitt 2009c: 29-30). One example of such development is also this thesis which draws on Goffman's work. Additionally, wholly non-linguistic disciplines such as film theory, art history, iconography, and musicology have been used to better understand non-linguistic modes (Jewitt 2009c: 30). Underlying theoretical ideas have also been drawn from sociology and visual communication on perception and cognition (Jewitt 2009c: 30). Through a multidisciplinary foundation rooted in linguistics and analysis of language as a social phenomenon, social semiotic multimodal analysis then focuses on the use of semiotic resources for meaning making.

The emphasis on the sign-maker and their social context includes the technological dimensions of the social media platforms in social media influencer content creation. The field of semiotic technology deals with the implications of technology for semiotically oriented communication and it will be briefly introduced next.

2.5. Semiotic technology

Semiotic technology is an approach that expands the examination of multimodal texts and their social contexts in digital media to include the effect that the technology used in the communication has on meaning-making and the choices made by people on e.g., social media platforms (Poulsen and Kvåle 2018: 700). The motivation for expanding the analysis to include the used technology and their composition is due to texts often

appearing "---inseparable from technological features for design, production, distribution and consumption" (Poulsen and Kvåle 2018: 700). As an example, Poulsen and Kvåle (2018: 700) provide the Instagram feed post which necessitates the taking and uploading of the image and then choosing or not choosing to use e.g., filters and hashtags which affect the meaning made in the post. The users continuously choose and negotiate with different resources offered by the social medium to successfully realize their communication needs (Poulsen and Kvåle 2018: 700). This process of choosing and negotiation is naturally not restricted to just the resources that a single format (e.g., the Instagram Feed post) of content creation provides but also to the choice between which format to use for what kind of content and how meaning can be realized differently by using different resources provided.

The critical account of computer and mobile software as semiotic technology by Djonov and van Leeuwen (2017: 570) seeks to destabilize the previous notion of software as a neutral tool which in the case of social semiotics is used as a tool for realizing communication and producing meaning. Instead, the software and its technological dimensions are governed by the developers who may or may not respond to changes in the social contexts where the users employ the resources offered by the software (Djonov and van Leeuwen 2017: 571). As such, a software is a closed "semiotic regime" where the different conventions and resources provided by the developers are governed by the rules made by the same developers while being imposed by the design of the software (Djonov and van Leeuwen 2017: 571). The users of a software or e.g., a social media platform can experiment with the given resources and rules but the ultimate governing power over the content and how it is produced on the platform is wielded by the developers.

The next section explores Instagram as a social media platform with specific attention directed to the semiotic technology affordances and content creation methods that are available on the platform.

3. Instagram as a social media platform

This section will provide an overview of Instagram as a social media platform. The focus is on the construction of the platform and subsequently on what affordances guide the content production process for influencers and micro-celebrities. The understanding of different content creation options makes the salient features of the Instagram Feed content apparent while also providing context in terms of alternate ways of creating content. The book *Instagram: Visual Social Media Cultures* by Tama Leaver, Tim Highfield, and Crystal Abidin (Leaver *et. al.* 2020) was employed in covering the developments of the content creation methods due to its recency and comprehensiveness. Supplementary information is provided through information provided on the official Instagram blog and help centre.

3.1 Instagram as an app and a platform

Instagram is a mobile application and a social media platform owned by Facebook that where users can share photos and videos with or without captions, and to contact and communicate with people they know personally as well as celebrities and total strangers. The early iterations of the app since its release in 2010 were based on the instantaneousness of the photography with the added ability of filters to enhance photos that had to be taken on the spot, which could then be commented on and liked by other users after the upload (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 10). These basic features are still present on Instagram and they have been supplemented by the introduction of new forms of content creation. Instagram's popularity has increased tremendously since 2010 with the monthly userbase expanding steadily to over one billion monthly active users by 2018 (Statista 2020). Over time the app has become a platform which expands the understanding of what Instagram features such as: the actual app itself; different series of programs and algorithms; a massive database including all the content produced (both visual and textual), and the different kinds of personal data about the users (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 8). The actual composition of a platform depends on a multitude of factors but the most pertinent for this study is what Gillespie identifies in his analysis of YouTube as a platform: the empowerment of the individual to produce user-generated content (Gillespie 2010: 352). The content creation methods for this user-generated content are at the heart of this thesis as well and the available alternatives on Instagram will be considered next.

3.2. Instagram content creation methods

Users can create a variety of photographic, video, audio, and written content on Instagram through the different functions of the platform. Though mainly a mobile application, the platform is also available on desktop computers with a caveat that producing content on desktop was not made available which the developers explained by wanting to keep Instagram about: "---producing photos on the go, in the real world, in realtime (sic)" (Systrom 2013). The most notable types of content are the Instagram Feed posts, Instagram Story posts, IG-TV content, and Instagram Reels video content. The formats for content creation above are listed in their chronological order of introduction.

All these content creation methods are governed by the Instagram algorithm which suggests content to users through a mix of three core categories governing what a user will see on Instagram (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 18). Until 2016 the timeline was chronological and thus displayed new Instagram feed posts to the user in the order that they had been published (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 18). Instagram developers explain the timeline's function through three core categories: *interest, recency,* and *relationship* (Instagram Help Center 2021a). According to the first category, Instagram attempts to display content that the user has shown a preference for in the past (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 18). The second category retains the chronological component whereas the third category is particularly interesting for this study. *Relationship* guides the algorithm through how close the users are to each other which is realized by comments, likes, and mutual tagging in content (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 18).

The next section presents the content creation methods of the Instagram Story, IG-TV, and Reels will before a more comprehensive look into the Instagram Feed posts.

3.2.1. Instagram stories

Instagram introduced the Instagram stories in 2016 to compete with rising popularity of Snapchat (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 27). The defining feature of Snapchat is the ephemeral nature of its content (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 26). The content on the platform is temporally limited by requiring it to be created at or close to the moment of publication and by being deleted after 10 seconds (or less) since consummation by the receiver (Bayer *et. al.* 2016: 958). Additionally, Snapchat includes the My Story function which allows the user to create a series of snaps (pictures or videos) in their desired order which are

viewable for 24 hours (Snapchat Support 2021). The ephemerality of Snapchat and its usage functions often leads users to post content that focuses on the more mundane properties of their daily lives with their close trusted connections (Bayer *et. al.* 2016: 970). The ephemeral nature also helped in the formation of new connections or enhancing existing ones (Vaterlaus *et .al.* 2016: 600). Instagram Stories made it more feasible to share exactly what Snapchat had become known for: the smaller, more mundane parts of the daily lives of the users in both picture and video form (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 28).

3.2.2 IG-TV and Reels

IG-TV was launched both as a stand-alone app and an integration into the existing Instagram app in 2018 (Systrom 2018). The app enables production of up to one-hour long videos that can be viewed directly from the profile of the creator (Systrom 2018). Reels is the newest addition to Instagram content creation bringing along short video clips of 15 seconds which can either be made in the Instagram application or recorded in advance (Instagram Blog 2020). These video clips can be found in the Instagram user Feeds and in the Explore section where users can find new content creators to follow (Instagram Blog 2020). Reels is derivative of how content creation is made on the social media platform TikTok where the content is primarily 15-second long video clips (Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz 2020: 463). TikTok is particularly popular among pre-adolescent and adolescent users with a user base of over 500 million 2020 (Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz 2020: 464). It seems quite logical that the introduction of Reels is an attempt to provide content creation tools for those familiar with TikTok and the possibility for the audiences to consume such content. Reels and IG-TV represent the newest major additions to the way content is produced on Instagram. The very first of these content creation methods, the Instagram feed, will be explored in more detail in the next section.

3.3 The construction of an Instagram feed post

The unpacking of the construction of an Instagram feed post helps to better understand what technical affordances the format has for content creation on the platform that enable the users to perform different actions (Norman 2002). The analysis of the feed post in this section allows for a mechanical understanding of the different possibilities that users can employ in interaction with each other. Figure 3.1. provides an example of an Instagram feed post from the data and it has been modified to better illustrate

features that are available for Instagram users to interact with on the platform. The features have been grouped in to five different sections by their location and functionalities on the content page. The desktop format is primarily used here and further on in this thesis because it more consistently allows for full expression of the captions and other content in a single picture.

Figure 3.1. An example of a desktop Instagram feed post from the data which has been modified for emphasis (@noelledowning 27.1.2019)
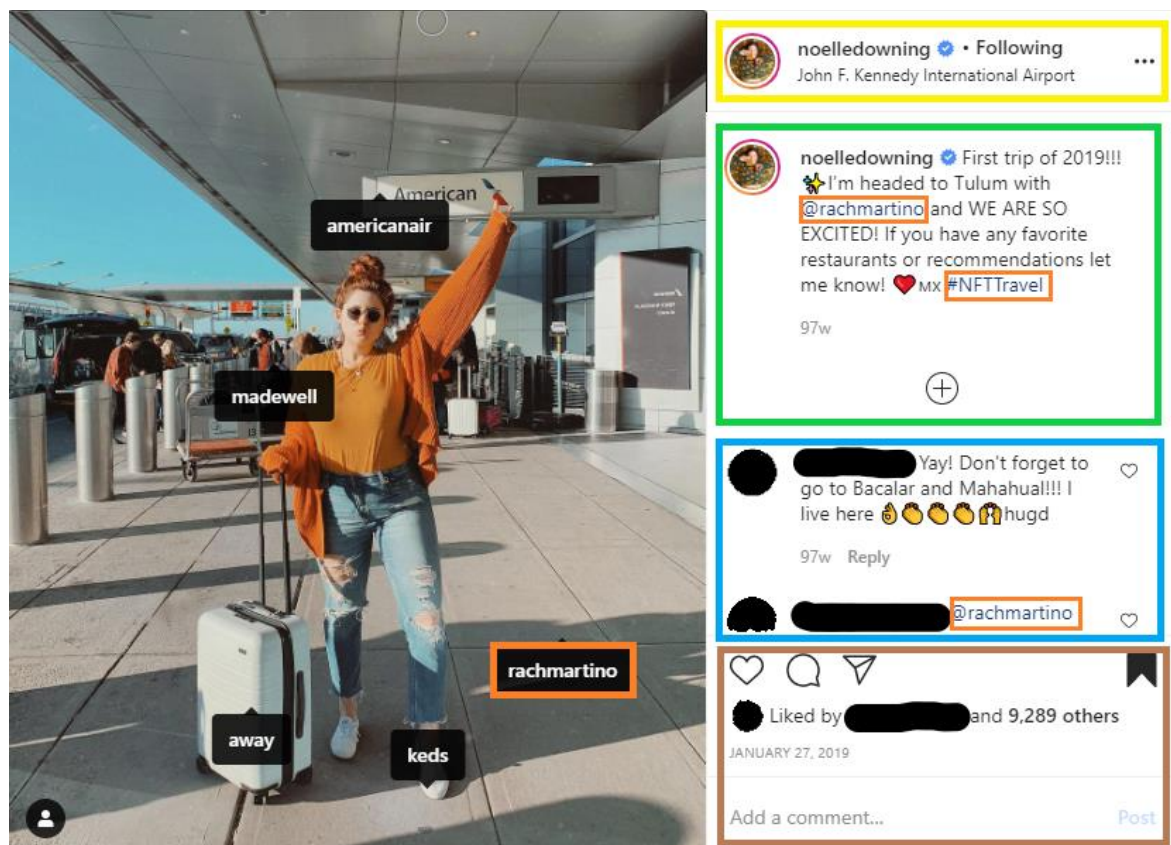
The first group of features emphasised in orange colour on Figure 3.1. concern tagging, mentions, and hashtags. The hashtag feature, seen here in the form of '**#NFTTravel'**, functions as a kind of a hyperlink with a string of characters tied to a hash (#) and thus forming an interactive feature (Erz *et. al. 2018*: 50). The usage types of hashtags vary but they generally help with searching, categorizing, and tracking content on social media platforms (Erz *et. al. 2018*: 50). Furthermore, hashtags have the possibility of guiding the topic of the text for the reader so they can place the content in context (Erz *et. al. 2018*: 50). According to Zappavigna (2018: 41) hashtags can carry a topic-marking feature and they also have an interpersonal function that allows e.g., evaluative metacommentary of presenting attitudes and alignments. Importantly, hashtags also

facilitate broadcasting since using a popular hashtag makes the content viewable through that hashtag and thus increases the likelihood of being noticed by people interested in the topic in contrast to posts without hashtags (Page 2012: 184).

Closely related to hashtags in Instagram posts are account or image tags and mentions which can be placed on the picture itself as exemplified in Figure 1 with the account tag '**rachmartino**' and into the caption with the mention feature exemplified by **@rachmartino.** Using either of these features also notifies the tagged account and acts as a link to the tagged account that other viewers can utilise (Instagram Help Center 2021b). Social tags and mentions are then in essence like hashtags due to their hyperlink functions but are more directly interpersonal since they are a direct link to a different Instagram account whether commercial or non-commercial. Social tags and mentions in addition to hashtags can be used for many purposes but a distinctly status seeking, and self-branding focused use has been identified (Fiers 2020). According to Fiers (2020: 9), all these elements can be utilised by Instagram users to "---ensure that their followers associate them with expensive brands, exclusive locations, such as travel destinations or high-status restaurants, and a significant social network". Additionally, this process of status seeking and self-promotion through tagging requires a careful curation of content and often includes strategies to obscure the process due to concerns over appearing inauthentic (Fiers 2020: 9).

The second group of features emphasised in yellow colour on Figure 1 concern a few small but important features of the Instagram platform. The geographical or location tag is present in this section which functions quite similarly to the other tagging options. The location tag lets the user specify where they are in the world which helps in communicating physical location to the users in addition to the image and caption. Location tags are not creatable by users and must be chosen from a selection (Instagram Help Center 2021c). Other features found in this group are the profile picture and username of the user and an indication of whether the user is following the profile in question. The three dots in the right side enable sharing the post in various ways as well as flagging for inappropriate content. The profile picture also functions as a link to the user's Instagram stories content. The most notable feature in this group in addition to the location tag is the verified tag which is exemplified by the check mark (✓) symbol on a blue circle. The verified tag signifies that Instagram certifies the account to be an authentic profile of a public figure, celebrity, or global brand (Instagram Help Center

2021d). Specific criteria for the verified badge are tied to the account being authentic, unique, complete, and notable (Instagram Help Center 2021d). Essentially, the verified tag acts as a signifier of authenticity for the viewer that the account belongs to the person or brand they are representing.

The third group of features emphasised in green colour in Figure 1 concern the space for captions. Additionally, the features of profile picture, name, and the verified tag are again displayed here. The captions space hosts at most 2200 characters (Jackson 2020). Additionally, the caption space also shows the elapsed time since the feed post was published. The captions are basically a freeform way of expression that may or may not relate directly to the posted image or video. The users can edit or delete captions after posting them (Instagram Help Center 2020c).

The fourth group of features emphasised in blue colour in Figure 1 concern the space for comments. In this section user comments are viewable, and the users can also reply to other user's comments or 'like' them via clicking the heart symbol. The elapsed time since the comments have been made is available in a similar fashion as for the captions. The profile picture and username of the commentators are present but have been redacted from this version. The comment section is the clearest feature allowing interpersonal communication between the content creator and content consumer while also facilitating communication between the audience members.

The fifth group of features emphasised in brown colour in Figure 1 concern the functionalities for giving 'likes', adding comments, saving content, and sharing content to other users. Clicking the heart icon gives a 'like' to the picture. Clicking the speech bubble or writing a comment to the 'Add a comment…' section lets the user comment on the post. Clicking the paper plane lets the user share the post to other Instagram users. Finally, clicking the bookmark icon on the right side lets the user save the post into their own bookmark collection that allows easy future access to the post.

Additionally, it is necessary to note that users can also post multiple photos or videos to a single post in a 'carousel' style picture where the photos can then be viewed in a slideshow-like manner. This feature enables the user to e.g., construct a narrative with multiple photos without having to make each of them an individual feed post thus enabling more intense curation of the number of separate feed posts. The next section

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will provide insight into the factors underlying social media influencer communication through these content creation methods.

4. Social Media Influencers

This section will cover the genre of internet celebrity known as a social media influencer (SMI). Firstly, the defining qualities of SMI's will be discussed. Secondly, these basics of SMI qualities will be expanded to include an understanding of the affordances of the SMI content production particularly in terms of conventional genres and styles guided by the social media platforms that host the SMI's. In discussing the content of SMI's the concepts of para-social relations and back-stage access will introduced. Thirdly, the importance and influence of SMI content will be made apparent both in terms of their economic impact and value as well as cultural relevance. Finally, the subject of this study @noelledowning will be presented as a representative of the social media influencer genre.

4.1. The defining qualities of social media influencers and their place in the celebrity genre

The social media influencer is a unique type of celebrity particular to the twenty-first century (Giles 2018: 156). The term influencer came into wide circulation in the mid-2010s with its antecedents reaching somewhat further back in time (Giles 2018: 156; Abidin 2018: 58). The emergence of the social media influencer can be seen as a morphing of the micro-celebrity into a more commercialized and professional entity which constitutes a new form of internet celebrity (Khamis *et. al.* 2017: 202). Micro-celebrities are a form of celebrity "---best understood as a new style of online performance that involves people 'amping up' their popularity over the Web using technologies like video, blogs and social networking sites" (Senft 2008: 25). Senft (2008: 25-26) delineates micro-celebrity from that of e.g. film or television star celebrity on the grounds that the audience wants to uncover the mystery of the film or television star and see how they really are whereas in terms of the micro-celebrity the question is about the audience itself and how successfully the micro-celebrity connects with them. Giles (2018: 156) makes the case for the influencer often appearing like earlier forms of celebrity while reminding that particularly the development of new forms of social media conducive of new types of individual fame have made influencers possible.

Giles (2018: 156) suggests that Instagram is the most important medium in the emergence of the influencer. Leaver *et.al.* (2020: 102) echo Giles' sentiment by identifying that there was a rare combination of sufficient interest in Instagram

concurrently between would be SMI's, followers, and potential business clients for the SMI's to produce a demand for sponsored content.

The defining qualities of the SMI vary somewhat in previous research, but a very general starting point can be made by channeling Abidin's conception of SMI's as internet celebrities who are: "--- vocational, sustained, and highly branded social media stars" (Abidin 2018: 58). Additionally, they can accumulate a sizable following through their content production process that is focused particularly on personalized content and engagement with the followers while acting as information conduits and amplifiers (Abidin 2018: 58). Achieving the necessary status requires a conscious process of self-branding to produce representations of the self that are understood as authentic by the audience (Hearn and Schoenhoff 2015: 194).

The idea behind self-branding is that just like products, people can and in many cases should be branded to produce unique selling points that can be exploited (Khamis et. al. 2017: 191). Branding operates through building an affective connection through authenticity and sincerity (Banet-Weiser 2012: 37). The authenticity and sincerity of SMI's is often founded on a perceived ordinariness that makes identification with the SMI easier and helps with downplaying aspects of paid promotion (Giles 2018: 155). Self-branding by the SMI's can and often must be leveraged for commercial and/or cultural capital gains (Khamis *et. al.* 2017: 191). The social media influencer emerges as a branded product that is carefully constructed not only by the SMI themselves and the audience but also through various social media analytics and evaluations of commercial value (Hearn and Schoenhoff 2015: 194). This process happens on the social media platforms where the SMI pursue their craft and construct themselves in an environment where they often find success and focus on a single platform but then expand to other platforms to diversify their assets while maintaining a central platform or two for their content (Pedroni 2016: 109; Abidin 2018: 71). The proliferation of SMI's across the multitude of content platforms among a multitude of different topics on the internet then exemplifies the fact that differentiating oneself will be highly beneficial in an environment rife with competition. This process of content saturation on the internet has led to the situation where distinctiveness and visibility is key to being noticed (Khamis et. al. 2017: 191). This state of an attention economy is very prevalent in an environment such as Instagram where clicks and views equal success (Marwick 2015: 157). The next section will examine what social media influencer content is like on

Instagram and how the SMI's approach differentiation within the affordances of Instagram.

4.2. Social media influencer content on Instagram – conventions, genres, and styles

Social media influencers primarily produce content that is somehow connected to themselves or their interests. Abidin (2015) presents SMI content as narratives in textual and visual form about the personal lives and lifestyle of themselves while also stressing the aspect of monetisation of the content through integration of advertorial content into their content creation process. Abidin (2015) identifies advertorials in SMI content as: "---highly personalized, opinion-laden promotions of products/services that Influencers appear to personally experience and endorse for a fee". Central to the content creation process is presenting one's life as it has been lived (Abidin 2015). The Instagram feed is an example of such content. Some content creation formats such as Instagram Stories and IG-TV also allow the creation of streaming content which can be consumed in real-time. Pre-recorded video content on Instagram Stories, IG-TV, and Reels falls somewhere in between in terms of immediacy. The SMI content on all these formats contains elements of building follower engagement, intimacy, and the SMI's authenticity which are largely created in conjunction with each other. The concepts of para-social relations and front region and back region access are important in understanding how engagement, intimacy, and authenticity connect with audiences and will be introduced as well. The salience of these factors in content creation will be examined next.

4.2.1. Para-social relations

The idea of para-social relations was first conceived by Horton and Wohl (1956) through their examination of how television viewers interact with the programming. Para-social relations emerge from audience perception of intimacy when experiencing indirect interaction with people they do not know personally (Sthern et. al. 2019: 1941). This indirect interaction has previously been subjected to some infamy as a secondary substitute for direct social interaction (Turner 2004: 92-93). Similarly, some critics have even described para-social relations as dangerous and harmful to audiences since they are based on a scripted and constructed interaction made to seem natural and innocuous (Rojek 2012: 125-126). The significance of para-social interaction has however been recognized particularly in connection to celebrities (Turner 2004: 93-94). The

importance of the phenomenon of para-social relations has increased in societies where family and community connections have dwindled (Turner 2004: 94). Despite the criticism or perhaps because of it, Rojek (2012: 124) claims that we are living in an age of para-social relations which has only been further normalized particularly by the visual means of digital media.

Social media platforms are overall in many capacities ideal for these para-social interactions since a platform such as Instagram offers the opportunity to follow the everyday life of influencers (Boerman 2020: 201). The para-social relationships can then be strengthened on a regular basis which allows the fostering of intimacy between the influencer and follower (Boerman 2020: 201). The power of intimacy can be even further enhanced by incorporating reciprocal communication into the interpersonal relation between the SMI and the audience. The reciprocal possibilities for communication between the influencer and followers necessitate a more nuanced understanding than para-social relations can provide.

4.2.2. Perceived interconnectedness

Other situations of more direct contact require a more developed understanding of the situation which has been attempted by Abidin (2015) in the form of *perceived interconnectedness.* The two-way relationship present in perceived interconnectedness leads to a situation where interactivity in communicating intimacies is co-constructed by the SMI's and their followers (Abidin 2015). The reciprocal nature of the communication better fits with the affordances of social media platform communication which through the possibility of bi-directional communication is based on a higher degree of interactivity between users than para-social relations presume. Matt Hills (2016: 478-479) suggests that understanding both para-social relations and the reciprocal nature of follower celebrity relations is necessary for successfully navigating the social media platform relationships. According to Hills (2016: 479), the communication is *multisocial,* and the para-social natures will remain in some capacity when people still maintain a symbolic gap between celebrities and followers. The range of communication whether pertaining to para-social relations, perceived interconnectedness or multisocial communication will be conducted by the SMI and ordinary social media platform users by utilising both their front and back regions (Abidin 2015; Davis 2014: 505-506; Marwick and boyd 2011: 143-144). The importance of both regions in SMI content creation will be examined next.

4.2.3 Regions in social media influencer context

The concepts of the regions and regional behaviour were first theorized by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Everyday Life* (Goffman 1959 [1990]). Goffman defines a region "---as any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers of perception" (Goffman 1959 [1990]: 109). These regions are called the front region and back-region which both operate differently and require different types of performances. Goffman's book is related to the symbolic interactionalist approach found in sociology where human identities and the self are constructed through constant interactions with other humans by utilising talk and communication (Marwick and boyd 2011: 144). Consequently, individuals in communication work together in upholding preferred self-images of themselves and the other participants (Marwick and boyd 2011: 144). The cooperation between participants relies on successful performances which according to Goffman (1959 [1990]: 26) are: "--- all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants". In terms of SMI's this cooperation will happen between the SMI and the followers who are then the audience. Since SMI profiles are usually public, the whole user base of the platform is in some form also part of the audience or if taken even further the whole userbase of the internet who have access to the platform. SMI performances are then directed to multiple different audiences at the same time especially if multiple social media platforms are used which will likely have at least somewhat divergent audiences. The content is created as a public persona for an imagined audience that cannot readily be seen (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 103). This phenomenon leads to what Marwick and boyd (2011: 145) call 'context collapse', where multiple different audiences usually considered separate exist simultaneously in the same context. The situation leads to a heightened need for management of performances and consistent construction of the self (Marwick and boyd 2011: 145).

4.2.4. Front region access

The performances are key for front region management where the front region is labelled as a place the performance of an individual occurs regularly and in fixed capacity for the audience (Goffman 1959 [1990]: 32). The front is characterized by the usage of *setting, appearance,* and *manner* (Goffman 1959 [1990] 32-34). The *setting* contains physical features present at the place of performance such as the furniture or the layout of the place (Goffman 1959 [1990]: 32). The *appearance* of the performer contains the visual stimuli that tell of the performer's social status(es) (Goffman 1959

[1990]: 34). The *manner* refers to how the performer conveys their intention of interactional role or attitude in the upcoming interaction which could be realized for example as friendly, aggressive, or disinterested (Goffman 1959 [1990]: 35). Often performers will consciously attempt to conceal and suppress activities, facts, or motives that are not compatible with the performance's standards (Goffman 1959 [1990]: 56). The deliverance of a relatable performance is in the performer's best interest and thus the performer typically wants to segregate audiences to better host their routinised performance in a way that is perceived by the audience as unique and spontaneous (Goffman 1959 [1990]: 56-58). Through these qualities the front often becomes institutionalised and a collective representation of what it is supposed to stand for is formed (Goffman 1959 [1990]: 37).

Drawing parallels to SMI content, the institutionalised front region captures the general aspects of lifestyle SMI content production which relies on the SMI's presenting their lives to the audience often through conventionalised forms of representation. A different way of phrasing this would be to use the idea of a *platform vernacular* which according to Gibbs *et. al.* (2015: 257) is constituted by the "--- unique combination of styles, grammars, and logics" for each social media platform. Further the vernacular is also constructed through user interaction and their communicative conventions (Gibbs *et. al.* (2015: 257). The idea of the platform vernacular ties into what Leaver *et. al* (2020) trace in their attempt to delineate the general aesthetic(s) of Instagram. For the Instagram Feed, the aesthetic has typically been one of highly curated, consciously constructed representations of the life of the social media influencer where aesthetically pleasing or otherwise interesting content is displayed (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 59). Following the general aesthetic of SMI content can only bring the SMI so far in competition with other SMI's for the attention of the audience's limited time and interest, and thus the back region emerges as a tool for differentiation.

4.2.5. Back-region or backstage access

The back-region or backstage (henceforth used term) is an area where the performance or more precisely the impression that the performance makes on the audience in the front region is consciously contradicted (Goffman 1959 [1990]: 114). The backstage is easily understood through an analogy to an actual stage of a theater: it is the place where adjustments to the performance can be made in a region where there is an expectation of no access by the eventual witnesses of the performance (Goffman 1959 [1990]: 115-

116). Thus, the performers can drop their front region behaviour, relax, and act out of character (Goffman 1959 [1990]: 115). The backstage is typically located in a place where it is divided from the place where the performance is presented to facilitate the qualities necessary for relaxation and concealment (Goffman 1959 [1990]: 115). Such a physical locality of a backstage may be difficult to determine for social media influencers which begs the question: What does the backstage contain on Instagram and how do SMI's use it?

Since lifestyle SMI content is already typically a comprehensive coverage of their lives, the question of the backstage becomes a question of how intimacy is communicated to the followers. Abidin (2015) examines four ways of building intimacy through her study of Singaporean SMI's: *commercial, interactive, reciprocal,* and *disclosive*. In the *commercial* context the intimacy acts as a mediator in making commercial content such as advertorials relatable for the followers (Abidin 2015). The *interactive* dimension of intimacy refers to actual physical formal or informal meetups between SMI's and followers where the primary challenge is in performing in congruence with the digital representation of the self (Abidin 2015). The *reciprocal* intimacy covers situations of interaction between SMI's and followers through e.g., Instagram comments where appreciation, agreement, and acknowledgement can be given reciprocally (Abidin 2015). Additionally, a situation where the SMI solicits advice or opinions from the followers and then acts upon them can fit this category of intimacy. Perhaps the most significant in building an intimate connection between the SMI and the follower is *disclosive* intimacy. The documentation of the trivial and the mundane in the daily lives of SMI's is a key feature of lifestyle SMI content creation (Abidin 2015). Such content runs parallel to the glamourous and extraordinary as well as the advertorial which are likely not as relatable for the average follower (Abidin 2015). The usage of "behind-the-scenes" type of coverage of such situations as well as the daily lives of the SMI's is a typical form of producing disclosure of intimacy (Abidin 2015).

The SMI's can also use the backstage to highlight the construction of the content creation process in which a disclosure of what the audience usually does not see gives them a glimpse in to the nonetheless edited but supposedly more real version of the SMI. Making visible the content creation process comes close to what Abidin (2017: 1) calls 'calibrated amateurism' where a conscious decision is made to present raw amateur footage as opposed to curated content in constructing contrived authenticity.

According to Abidin (2018: 71) the general focus of SMI content has recently been increasingly taken to this more amateurish direction where "The aesthetic of calibrated amateurism has a leveling effect because Influencers appear less constructed, less filtered, more spontaneous, and more real, thus fostering feelings of relatability and authenticity.". Hurley's (2019) research on Arab Gulf influencers and Reade's (2021) research on fitness influencers seem to provide further evidence and follower desire towards the direction presented by Abidin. Supporting such developments has also likely been the enormous success of Instagram Stories which focus on the more mundane and everyday moments of the SMI lifestyle. Adoption of backstage access and intimacy highlight the relational work conducted by SMI's which is also important in making advertorial content relatable and authentic. The intricacies of commercially oriented SMI content and authenticity concerns related to such content will be examined next.

4.3. The lifestyle influencer advertorial – the commercial reality of social media influencer content

The lifestyle influencer advertorial is a SMI performance of content that features product placement and/or is sponsored by an external party. These collaborations between brands and influencers typically involve either direct monetary compensation or sponsored products that are given in exchange for created content. The details and style of the content are agreed upon in collaboration between the brands and the influencers with varying levels of brand influence on the content creation process (Audrezet *et. al.* 2018: 2). The collaborative process is called influencer marketing and it is characterized by the collaboration between the SMI and a brand or company (Boerman 2020: 199). These advertorials can promote products and service of various industries. According to a study conducted on German micro- and macro-influencers: "The accessories, fitness, beauty and clothing industries are among the most widely marketed influencer types. "(Alassani & Göretz 2019: 259). The study also found that: "Surprisingly, banks, telecommunications companies, technology companies and tourism companies also use influencer marketing to advertise their products and services." (Alassani & Göretz 2019: 259).

The influencers can simultaneously act as brand ambassadors for the brands they partner with and produce advertorial style content which features the influencer with the product integrated into the visual and textual content through various means such as

mentions in captions or the tagging function on Instagram (Boerman 2020: 199). This content can seamlessly be integrated into the unsponsored content of the influencer which also highlights its status as often a more covert form of advertising which the audience may not even recognize as commercial (Boerman 2020: 199). Additionally, the possibility of seamless integration may also weaken audience perception of what is and what is not sponsored content while also placing the status of the ownership and creator of the content ambiguous (Audrezet *et. al.* 2018: 2). Advertorial content is governed by various regulations imposed by national jurisdiction or national governmental organisations such as the Federal Trade Commission in the USA. These FTC regulations provide guidelines on how influencers must disclose sponsored content in a clear and conspicuous manner (FTC 2013: 6).

Influencer marketing and the effect of disclosures has also been extensively studied. Apparent findings include disclosure of collaborative or sponsored content being effective in increasing advertorial content recognition among audiences in comparison to a situation of no disclosure (Boerman 2020: 205) (Evans *et. al.* 2017: 145). However, Evans *et. al* (2017: 145) did find differences in terms of advertorial recognition by the term used in conjunction with a hashtag to indicate sponsorship. Since disclosures are meant to highlight the advertorial nature of the content they are attached to, these results are not very surprising but do highlight that the possibility of transparency for influencers in producing advertorials can be strengthened with the disclosure methods at hand which can also help with managing authenticity.

Attitudes from SMI followers towards advertorial content have been of interest in research as well since they help in determining the effectiveness of brand and influencer collaborations. Jin and Muqaddam (2018: 576-577) found that when comparing traditional celebrities and social media celebrities conducting brand collaborations, trustworthiness levels of social media celebrities were higher which was found to be explainable in part due to the increased social interaction the audiences have with social media celebrities in contrast to traditional celebrities on Instagram. Veirman *et. al.* (2016: 813) found that follower numbers affect consumer attitudes towards the influencers in terms of likeability while a perception of the popularity of the influencer did not necessarily correlate with perception of actual influence over the consumer.

4.4. Noelle Downing (@noelledowning) as a social media influencer

This subsection will explore Noelle Downing's presence as a social media influencer in some detail to both contextualize the research subject of this thesis and to also highlight how she fits into the genre of lifestyle social media influencers. According to the hyperlinks available on Downing's blog, Noelle's Favorite Things, she currently has public social media accounts or pages on Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube, and naturally Instagram (Noelle's Favorite Things 2021). A brief glance at these accounts reveals that the blog, the Instagram page, and the Pinterest page are updated the most frequently with daily or nearly daily updates as opposed to the other platforms where updates are infrequent or seem to have stopped at some point in time. The archives on Noelle's Favorite Things indicate that the inaugural post on the blog was made on June 11th, 2013 (Noelle's Favorite Things 2013). Downing has started out as a blogger while expanding to Instagram as her second main social media platform for content creation. Her presence on Instagram will be considered next.

Figure 4.1 A screen capture of the profile page of @noelledowning on desktop with added emphasis (the shared followers of the author of the thesis have been redacted)
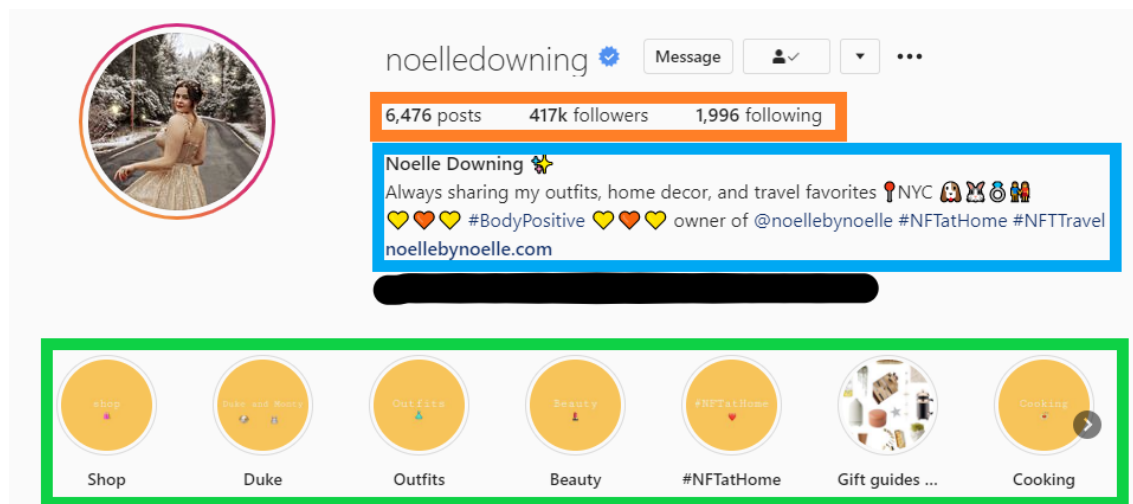
Noelle Downing's Instagram profile information is displayed in Figure 4.1. The profile shows a few typical features of Instagram SMI qualities. Firstly, the area highlighted in orange shows a high follower to following ratio with over 417000 accounts that follow Downing's profile as opposed to just 1996 accounts that Downing's account follows. Such high follower to following ratios are typical among social media influencers on

Instagram where they usually follow friends, family, other notable SMI's, and possibly some elite followers (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 103).

Secondly, the area highlighted in blue shares information about what kind of content Downing publishes, and other information that may be of interest to followers or people who stumble upon the page. Typical areas of interest for SMI's are present such as outfits, home décor, travelling, and pets. The emojis of a diamond ring and the male and female persons holding hands likely indicate her marital status. The 3rd line in the blue area is interesting particularly due to the existence of the #BodyPositivity hashtag which is even emphasised by a string of heart emojis on both sides. Body positivity can be categorized as a movement that focuses on accepting one's bodily appearance and challenging normalized representations of thin and toned bodies (Sastre 2014: 929). As such the movement is "(P)ositioned against mainstream media images of idealized female bodies" while also stressing inclusivity of different bodies and the representation of bodies of all shapes and sizes (Sastre 2014: 930).

Body positivity in Instagram and influencer content has been studied in several recent studies which indicate an emergent community of body positive content creators (Cohen *et. al* 2019; Lazuka *et. al* 2020; Tiggemann *et. al.* 2020). Downing's self-identification through the hashtag thus implies an involvement on the subject and will likely influence the bodily representations in her content. In terms of hashtags, the two others listed (#NFTatHome and #NFTTravel) imply that they are used by Downing to mark her content into suitable thematic units which is a common usage for hashtags and particularly for SMI's. The last notable tidbit of information in the blue area concerns Downing's clothing brand Noelle by Noelle which was launched in 2019 (@noelledowning 27.6.2019). Fittingly, the announcement of the brand was made in an Instagram Feed post (@noelledowning 27.6.2019). The expansion of Downing's vocation to launching a clothing line of her own echoes the work of other SMI's who have been able to leverage their fame to conduct business ventures (Abidin 2018: 60).

Thirdly, the area emphasised in green contains the repository of Instagram Stories highlights that have been attached to the profile and have thus gone from ephemeral to archival. These seven Stories highlights already give a clear indication of the commercial nature of the SMI in that they include highlights such as Shop, Outfits, Beauty, and Gift guides. The Stories highlights illustrate the nature of the lifestyle content at display where the SMI can give their expert advice on subjects that the

followers pursue. The followers can use these highlights in addition to other advertorial content to locate purchasing information or use them as aspirational lifestyle referents for their own lives (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 104).

5. Authenticity

This section explores the nature of authenticity and how it impacts the content creation process of the social media influencer both in terms of their connection with the audience and the different commercial entities they collaborate with. The section begins with the exploration of different understandings of authenticity followed by a focus on performative authenticity and mediated authenticity as the primary theories used in this thesis to explain authenticity in relation to SMI content creation. Authenticity is also considered in connection to a variety of commercial concerns such as self-branding, product placement, and sponsorship.

5.1. The contested concept of authenticity

The understanding of authenticity as it pertains to various human phenomena is conditioned by cultural contexts that guide the human experience and as such the concept can be applied to many different facets both in terms of objects and persons (Assmann 2012: 34). The many realisations of authenticity have been studied by a variety of different disciplines using various typologies of which particular focus in this subsection will be on the sociological and psychological dimensions. A consensus among research on authenticity finds the usage of the concept for "---capturing dimensions of truth or verification---" when examining different objects or experiences and as such being concerned with something being true, genuine, or real (Newman 2019: 9). The first point of departure for studying authenticity further in this thesis will be on delineating the concept from the similar concept of *sincerity*.

Trilling (1972: 5-6) finds in his account of both sincerity and authenticity, the former to be composed of the avoidance of being false or with pretence in favour of being true to oneself. According to Trilling (1972: 12-13), sincerity was first applied to items to denote their qualities and subsequently to account also for people first in terms of metaphorical accounts of being pure, whole, or consistent in terms of virtuousness, with the later application concerning the absence of pretence. Trilling emphasizes that the concept of authenticity has eventually superseded sincerity for similar purposes (12). Authenticity, for Trilling (1972: 11), expands on the concept of sincerity by "---suggesting a more strenuous moral experience than 'sincerity' does, a more exigent conception of the self and of what being true to it consists in, a wider reference to the universe and man's place in it, and a less acceptant and genial view of the social circumstances of life". Essentially, authenticity is less concerned with moral

implications of being true to oneself like sincerity is, and instead simply focuses on appearing true to oneself as it manifests towards others.

Trilling's distinction between sincerity and authenticity also brings into view the wider variety of phenomena in which authenticity has found application in currently. Assmann (2012: 34-35) distinguishes the application of authenticity to the quality of object and person in terms of e.g. various written documents, events, art, establishment and institutions, human intentions, and people. From these examples, it is evident that authenticity can concern both the authenticity of material matters or objects, and people. Examining the authenticity of objects or people is most often conducted through two distinct approaches to authenticity: objectivism (also materialism or realism) and constructivism (Vannini & Williams 2009: 2-3; Gerven *et. al.* 2019: 372; Reisinger and Steiner 2006: 66; Wang 1999: 352).

5.1.1 Authenticity through objectivism

Objectivism views authenticity as something that is inherent to the object's constitution: something real that is discoverable in the object itself (Gerven *et. al.* 2019: 372). In some situations, an objective definition of authenticity and the authentication of an object can be made in objectivist terms e.g., in terms of the historical authenticity of different kinds of documents which are either verified as authentic or not (Lehman *et. al.* 2019a: 20). However, accepting authenticity as an inherent quality leaves us with a quality that cannot be negotiated, achieved, taken away, or appropriated: either something is authentic, or it is not (Vannini & Williams 2009: 2). If the inherence of authenticity in the objectivist approach to authenticity is to be accepted, issues arise in terms of how context affects authenticity (Gerven *et. al.* 2019: 372-373). Context has been found to affect the authenticity of objects for example in a museum setting in terms of the location of the object (Gerven *et. al.* 2019: 373). In such cases the perception of authenticity becomes the main issue rather than the inherent authenticity of the object which places uncertainty on the feasibility of finding an authentic core of an object. This has even led to a suggestion for abandoning objective authenticity altogether, particularly in the context of tourism studies where issues of authenticity have been widely researched (Reisenberg and Steiner 2006: 80-81). In order to account for the complexity that context brings to the examination of authenticity a different perspective has developed: constructivism.

5.1.2. Authenticity through constructivism

Constructivist understandings of authenticity rely on a subjective as opposed to objective approach of authenticity as social construction (Lehman *et. al.* 2019a: 20). The open-endedness of the socially constructed constructivist approach is both a strength and a weakness since the description of authenticity as relational or the result of multi-stakeholder negotiations may work neatly in theory but fail to manifest sufficiently in application (Gerven *et. al.* 2019: 374). Additionally, the constructivist approach to authenticity as variably independent of material concerns is not always concomitant with the reality in some settings (Gerven *et. al.* 2019: 374).

In their account of constructivist authenticity Lehman *et. al* (2019a: 21) distinguish between two different versions of socially interpreted authenticity: *moral authenticity* and *type authenticity*. According to *moral authenticity,* acting in accordance with one's personal values and not being purely driven by external motivations is the criteria for attribution to this type (Lehman *et. al.* 2019a: 21). This type derives from research into social psychology and existential philosophy which posits the individual and their desire to be authentic as a driving force in human life and self-actualisation (Lehman *et. al.* 2019a: 21). The focus is then on values and how to act consistently with them to be authentic. The other version, *type authenticity,* is based on social categories which individuals and organizations can claim to accommodate (Lehman *et. al.* 2019a: 21). The authenticity is then based on the perceived fit of the person or organization with the social category which also must be ascertained by some standard of classification against which claims of authenticity can be ascertained (Lehman *et. al.* 2019a: 21). Both forms of authenticity can co-exist, be independently present or not be present at all (Lehman *et. al.* 2019a: 22).

A related typology of authenticity is provided by Kovács (2019: 35) based on a literature review of 452 authenticity-related articles by Lehman *et. al.* 2019b. Kovács (2019: 35-36) presents the categories of *consistency, conformity,* and *connection.* These categories are built on the ideas from *moral authenticity* and *type authenticity.* *Consistency* refers to the idea of the accordance of a person's internal values with their external output of values producing authenticity through this consistency of the self in inner and outer operations (Kovács 2019: 35). *Conformity* includes the idea of something being authentic when it closely fits to cognitive or social categorizations (Kovács 2019: 35). The fit between the person and the category is based on typicality

leading to authenticity because prototypical instances are closer to the essence of a particular category (Kovács 2019: 36). Uniqueness is found in opposition of this view as one marker of authenticity through its connection to staying true to the inner self (Kovács 2019: 36). *Connection* refers to a spatiotemporal link between the object or person and an origin or source as a guarantor of authenticity (Kovács 2019: 36). These categories stress individuals, the process of self-expression and participant perception in interactions where authenticity is constituted.

Vannini & Williams (2009: 3) posit socially constructed authenticity similarly to both *moral authenticity* and *type authenticity* in terms of an ideal to strive towards in the construction of the self or group. Authenticity is realized as an objectification of a process of representation where culturally and locationally specific values and ideals are made explicit, natural, and valuable (Vannini & Williams 2009: 3). Ultimately authenticity dressed in these terms should be understood as permutable and subject to change in different cultures and communities and as such the ways of socially constructing authenticity will also be under flux (Vannini & Williams 2009: 3). This thesis adopts the starting point of socially constructed authenticity presented by Vannini & Williams and others by building on it through the introduction of authenticity conceptions pertaining specifically to the relational aspects between people, and to the construction of authenticity through mediation. These forms of authentication take place in a performative process where: "---authenticity is a claim that is made by or for someone, thing, or performance and either accepted or rejected by relevant others" (Peterson 2005: 1086).

5.2. Performative authenticity and its connection with para-social relations

Performative authenticity is based on finding relatability between the creator and the audience. The relational labor employed by the creator is a process in which they attempt to strategically form connections with their audiences through managing intimacy in the form of emotions and their resonance (Shtern *et. al.* 2019: 1951). These displays of emotion in content creation and the process of relational labor are often necessary for SMI's to be able to successfully connect with their audiences and build lasting relationships that can also be used for financial gain (Abidin 2015). The relational qualities in the content are present to encourage the formation of para-social relations (Shtern *et. al.* 2019: 1941). The incorporation of relational qualities is part of a

constant process of re-negotiation of authenticity with the audience which is necessary to continue producing content that is desirable by followers (Shtern *et. al.* 2019: 1952). Shtern *et. al.* (2019: 1952) present the achievement of content that feels "authentic" as requisite for SMI's to efficiently do their work and as such highlights the socially constructed nature of the performed authenticity which is dependent on follower perceptions of authenticity rather than any objectively inherent authenticity present. The socially constructed performance of authenticity is further governed by the mediated nature of the content and the theory of mediated authenticity as the primary explanatory tool for understanding both traditional and social media authenticity will be presented next.

5.3 Mediated authenticity

This subsection explores the concept of mediated authenticity as theorized by Gunn Enli (2015) in her book *Mediated Authenticity.* Mediated authenticity is concerned with the representations of reality constructed through processes of mediation and the place of authenticity as a tool when producing content for media audiences (Enli 2015: 1). These mediated constructions of reality are typically recognized as such by audiences whose perception of mediated authenticity is manipulated through *authenticity illusions* (Enli 2015: 1). The *authenticity illusions* can "---range from minor adjustments such as lighting and sound effects to drastic post-production editing and photoshopping" (Enli 2015: 1). According to Enli (2015: 2), the understanding of the authenticity illusions as intentional constructions is dependent on an *authenticity contract*. The *authenticity contract* is a negotiation between the producers and the audience based on genre conventions of the medium as well as other established practices and expectations (Enli 2015: 2). The *authenticity contract* can be damaged or broken by either parties and will then require re-negotiation (Enli 2015: 2). When faced with a more severe challenge to the contract an *authenticity scandal* of possible deception is formed whereas more minor challenges will present an *authenticity puzzle* of possible ambiguity in terms of what is real or fake (Enli 2015: 2). The successful negotiation of authenticity requires three key aspects of mediated authenticity to be examined: trustworthiness, originality, spontaneity (Enli 2015: 3). These aspects will be explored next.

5.3.1. Mediated authenticity as trustworthiness, originality, and spontaneity

The authenticity of media as *trustworthiness* highlights the role of the media as source of knowledge about the world (Enli 2015: 3). The media acts as a significant mediator

of support for the individual in how to conduct their lives in a complex society (Enli 2015: 3). A normative duty of the media in this process is to provide trustworthy, balanced, and neutral information for the audiences to utilize in their daily lives (Enli 2015: 3). Amidst the norms and ideals that should guide the media, the end product is still a fabrication which takes the form of a story that is an amalgamation of the real and the imaginary (Enli 2015: 5-6). Successful negotiation requires carefully constructing narratives that have a high enough level of the facts in relation to the mediated representation (Enli 2015: 6). The construction of narratives happens through the presentation of the daily lives of SMI's.

The authenticity of media as *originality* relies on the evaluation of the mediated representations as "original", "genuine", or "real" which usually carries positive connotations for audiences (Enli 2015: 6). The worth of authenticity in terms of originality is cast in opposition to mass-produced items or mass-media representations (Enli 2015: 7). Additionally, in a post-modern condition of hyperreality where the real and the fictional cannot be reliably separated from each other the value or originality is elevated higher (Enli 2015: 8). In such circumstances the negotiated nature of authenticity becomes even more evident since there is no certain way to distinguish what is authentic and what is not.

The authenticity of media as *spontaneity* is a contradictory quality since the pre-planned nature of media content production by necessity makes actual spontaneity a rare commodity reserved for situations where something completely unexpected happens (Enli 2015: 10). The possibility of scripting media content as spontaneous is however a rather widespread method, but the result is a performance concomitant with the needs of the format and script (Enli 2015: 10). Enli (2015: 10) notes that real improvised performances can even often seem less spontaneous than scripted performances meant to be spontaneous. According to Enli (2015: 11), the pressures of self-fulfillment and self-realization, and an idea of being true to oneself are at the core of the modern understanding of authenticity which spontaneity also exhibits. The idea of the spontaneous as authentic takes an interesting turn with influencer content since the medium of Instagram enables immediacy of production as well as consumption. Technically one could simply take a photo and in a few touches of the screen publish it to the world. Instead, the content is carefully pre-planned to often denote some form of spontaneity and immediacy such as through calibrated amateurism (Abidin 2018: 71).

5.3.2. The theory of mediated authenticity

Enli forms a tentative theory of mediated authenticity through the presented concepts of *authenticity illusions, authenticity contract, authenticity puzzles,* and *authenticity scandals* as well as the aspects of *trustworthiness, originality,* and *spontaneity* while drawing from examples of radio, television, blogs, and news outlet content. This theory of mediated authenticity is mainly concerned with traditional media outlet content production. The range of the theory can be reasonably expanded to the research subject of this thesis who simply adopts the role of the content creator herself. The components of the theory of mediated authenticity are based on seven characteristics emerging from Enli's research:

Table 5.1. Characteristics of categories of mediated authenticity

Predictability	Consistent usage of genre features and conventions establish trustworthiness based on previous experiences of the audience.
Spontaneity	Rehearsed, directed, and pre-planned performances that seem spontaneous while being personal, engaged, and emotionally driven as opposed to being calculated and strategic.
Immediacy	The producer and the audience are connected through a shared immediacy of the present moment which establishes togetherness through shared authenticity construction.
Confessions	Confessions and disclosure of personal secrets and details which the audience find believable and can connect with their own personal experiences.
Ordinariness	Appearing mundane or ordinary is experienced as more authentic in opposition to appearing in a glamorous fashion.
Ambivalence	Ambivalence or hesitance in revealing "truths" about oneself is more authentic than being upfront about being authentic.

Imperfection	Authentic performance benefits from a certain degree of imperfection to produce a contrast that highlights the authenticity illusion through minor mistakes or flaws.

The applicability of this theory for lifestyle social media influencer content seems quite apparent. The category of *predictability* covers the SMI producing content that is typical for the lifestyle influencer genre which is realized as the representation of their lives in detail. *Spontaneity* can be produced with pre-meditated content planning and strategic content publishing choices which can further be enhanced through *immediacy* as a quality that the SMI can introduce to the content through the instantaneous nature of the content creation format. The categories of *confession* and *ordinariness* are present in SMI content through their focus on the everyday, mundane events of their lives where personal connection is built through presenting content the followers can relate to and through it acquire the SMI's opinions, feelings, and personal details while simultaneously at times accessing the backstage of the SMI's lifestyle. The categories of *ambivalence* and *imperfection* are part of the impression management of the social media influencer where the backstage access is employed to contrast glamorous content to better maintain relatability. All these seven categories are thus applicable for the analysis of the authenticity performed by the social media influencer. However, the affordances of the SMI content creation highlight the need for an additional category of analysis. The SMI is highly reliant on engagement with the followers in the form of likes and comments that increase visibility on Instagram and thus subsequently help gaining more followers which can then be leveraged into new commercial opportunities. Due to this affordance, the need for engagement with the followers through the content becomes apparent, and the followers will likely expect the SMI to express their interest in the follower's opinions and feelings. Thus, one part of an authentic presence for an SMI is predicated on communicating interest in their followers. The proposed category, called *engagement* is outlined below:

Table 5.2. The definition of the added category of engagement

Engagement	Authentic performance benefits from the social media influencer explicitly acknowledging and addressing their audience in their content

It is imperative to realize however that the performance e.g. in the SMI content creation process may not necessarily reflect an authentic version of the content creator (Sthern *et. al.* 2019: 1952). It is even possible that the goal of the content creator is to produce authenticity through inauthenticity as in a situation of careful curation of photos meant to 'capture the moment' (Faletua 2018: 726). The focus is on appearing authentic and not necessarily on being authentic (Faletua 2018: 722). The most important factor in determining the success of the performative authenticity process is found in achieving the feeling of authenticity that the audience can accept (Sthern *et. al*. 2019: 1952). Previous research has suggested that successfully negotiating authenticity and presenting an acceptable authentic image to audience generates positive emotional attachment towards celebrities (Kowalczyk and Pounders 2016: 353). This emotional attachment made possible by para-social interactions can be explained through attachment theory which suggest that durable human connections are based on close bonds of various emotions such as love, passion, and delight (Kowalczyk and Pounders 2016: 349). According to Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016:353) research results, both these lasting bonds and authenticity can have an impact in fostering purchase decisions and word of mouth information flow. Additionally, emotional attachment from audiences towards celebrities also strengthens the impact authenticity can have on audiences. The impact of authenticity is also intimately tied to the advertorial content which is considered next.

5.4. Authenticity management in advertorial content

Authenticity in the context of SMI's will always have financial implications since for many influencers presenting an authentic self and creating content is also their livelihood. The commodification of the self and self-branding conducted by influencers connects with the advertorial content where balancing between sponsored editorial content and other forms of advertising with "regular" content will be necessary.

Crafting a consistent self-branded image is not easy to achieve and even more difficult to sustain which highlights the issue that the idea of a person subjected to branding has to overcome (Khamis et. al. 2017: 192). Deviations from a consistent image will likely hurt the performed authenticity of the micro-celebrity as well since the relationship with the audience has to be negotiated again. A change in the consistent brand can be what the content creator wants to achieve and thus fulfill the authenticity needs and desires for themselves which in turn can appear inauthentic to the audience since it is incongruent with the previously negotiated authenticity (Faleatua 2018: 726-727). Such a situation is quite paradoxical but also highlights the audience negotiated nature of authenticity and the necessity for careful self-brand management.

Since managing authenticity can be viewed as one of the vital tasks of a social media influencer and sponsored content and collaboration are a major source of revenue for influencers there arises a need to manage the performed authenticity conveyed to audiences in advertorials. Audrezet *et. al.* (2018) have devised a framework for understanding authenticity management through an analysis of French influencers and their participation in brand collaborations. Influencers managed authenticity through passion and transparency (Audrezet *et. al.* 2018: 6-7). Management of authenticity through passion was important for influencers in ensuring that their commercial partnerships fit their style, image, and editorial concerns and that the relationships between partners were balanced and respectful (Audrezet *et. al.* 2018: 6-7). Management of authenticity through transparency was focused on providing content that is as 'real' as possible (Audrezet *et. al.* 2018: 7). Diligence in disclosing partnerships to followers was the primary method to achieve 'realness' while posting of un-edited content was sometimes used (Audrezet *et. al.* 2018: 7). Generally, management through passion functions to ensure that sponsored content is self-gratifying to make for the influencer themselves while management through transparency serves to preserve the integrity of the influencer (Audrezet *et. al.* 2018: 7).

6. Visual representation of social actors

This section serves as an introduction to the theory of social actors by Theo van Leeuwen with specific concern towards visual actors and representations. The theory will guide the examination of visual content in Downing's Instagram feed posts. The theory of social actors is supplemented by earlier research from van Leeuwen in collaboration with Gunther Kress. With its basis on understanding social practise like anthropologists and sociologists, van Leeuwen posits his linguistic approach as stemming from understanding representations of the world as representations of the social practise of the participants (van Leeuwen 2008: 4-5). van Leeuwen (2008: 5) maintains the idea of the plurality of discourse which translates to multiple ways of representing the same social practise. As socially regulated means of performing different things, these social practises are regulated by various aspects such as prescription, traditions, experts or charismatic influencers, and technological constraints (van Leeuwen 2008: 6-7). One clear example of social practise that must influence the discourse of social media influencers would be the technological constraints and affordances of the Instagram platform.

In addition to understanding social actors and discourse through social practice, the process of recontextualization is key to van Leeuwen's (2008: 12) theory. Recontextualization can be applied to both non-linguistic and linguistic sequences and combinations of them but the recontextualizing social practice must be a linguistic sequence often understood as a genre (van Leeuwen 2008: 12). Recontextualization makes explicit the practices of the recontextualized activity of which the participants may often be aware but unable to precisely communicate (van Leeuwen 2008: 12-13). According to the idea of recontextualization a social media influencer may not necessarily be aware of all the internalized processes in their content creation but when asked about the process would then use their experience and knowledge of other discourses on the social practice of content creation to answer. The aim of this thesis in making explicit the visual and textual means used in the content creation process can then recontextualize how authenticity is produced.

This recontextualizing will be achieved through what van Leeuwen (2008: 137) calls the visual representation of social actors. The key questions presented by van Leeuwen (2008: 137) concerning images are: "How are people depicted?" and "How are the depicted people related to the viewer?". These two questions are present simultaneously

and thus need to be considered when analyzing visual actors (van Leeuwen 2008: 141-142). Both the depiction of SMI's and the relation of the depicted SMI's to the viewers are vital to understanding the performed authenticity. The depiction of the SMI mainly concerns how authenticity is constructed in the content creation process. The relation of the depicted SMI to the viewer is then mainly concerned with the formation of the para-social relations and how they can be used to foster authenticity. The tools van Leeuwen provides for answering these two questions will provide responses to the question of how authenticity is realized visually in SMI content. Following van Leeuwen's order of the questions the tools provided for analyzing how people are depicted will be presented first.

6.1. How are people depicted?

There are five different choices presented by van Leeuwen (2008: 141-148) to make in depicting people in images. These choices concern the *exclusion, roles,* and *categorization* of depicted people as well as the choices on depicting people *generically* or *specifically*, and as *individuals* or as *groups* (van Leeuwen 2008: 141-148).

The choice of *exclusion* concerns the depiction of social actors in their natural environments where they work, live, and generally conduct their lives (van Leeuwen 2008: 142). When exclusion is chosen, these social actors are not included in representations of situations that would include them (van Leeuwen 2008: 142). They are essentially not acknowledged as valid social actors in such a situation. This category is not pertinent to the analysis at hand in a major capacity since the focus of lifestyle-influencer content is on the lives of the influencers themselves and as such it is natural that the focus of depiction is on them and the people in their lives.

The choice of *roles* concerns the different actions that social actors are or are not involved in depictions (van Leeuwen 2008: 142). This also concerns whether the social actor is the agent who performs the action or the patient to whom the action is performed on (van Leeuwen 2008: 142). The importance of this choice in SMI content is particularly on showing the everyday routine of their lives in terms of what they do on a day-to-day basis. Documenting their lives for the audience is the primary form that encompasses the lifestyle influencer content. Choosing to depict content as active participation in an activity at play in opposition to a more passive depiction that is primarily based on posing for the camera makes the performed action explicit whereas a passive depiction will likely emphasize the performer of the action. These choices can

influence how consumers of the content will identify with the action and the depicted social actor.

The choice of visual *categorization* encompasses both cultural and biological categorizations of social actors (van Leeuwen 2008: 145). The cultural categorizations are formed from signifiers of standard attributes which may include properties such as a certain way of dressing or doing one's hair (van Leeuwen 2008: 145). The features connect to a sociocultural reality through connotation in a process that binds negative or positive connotations to different features in social actors. Being cultural, these features are ultimately changeable by the depicted social actors (van Leeuwen 2008: 146). Biological categorizations function largely the same way, but they are based on depicting standardized exaggerated physical features in producing negative or positive connotations that connect to the sociocultural reality of the social actors and the consumers of the content (van Leeuwen 2008: 146). In contrast to cultural categorizations, the features included in biological categorizations are portrayed as not being changeable (van Leeuwen 2008: 146). The biological categorization is of interest for this study in terms of how closely the SMI's let the audience discern their bodily features which in turn can affect how close the audience can get to an authentic representation of the person in terms of their body.

The choice of *generic or specific* depiction is a choice of representing a social actor as a specific individual or as part of a generic group of a certain kind (van Leeuwen 2008: 143). This choice would at first seem obvious in terms of SMI representations: the content represents the influencer if they are depicted. However, in some situations depicting oneself as generic or stereotypical may prove useful for connecting with the audience and in fostering likeness between the influencer and their audience. These situations may be difficult to decipher since the specific and generic often blend within each other (van Leeuwen 2008: 143).

The choice of depicting a social actor *individually or as part of a group* enables the inference of different interpretations based on group membership (van Leeuwen 2008: 144). The representations of lifestyle SMI's are often focused on the influencer as an individual: the account is after all tied to a single existing person. However, a depiction of a lifestyle would be incomplete without incorporating other people that are part of the person's life. The interest is on who are significant enough to be included in the

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influencer's content and whether group depictions have significant similarities or dissimilarities in contrast to the individual depictions.

6.2. How are people depicted in relation to the viewer?

Van Leeuwen (2008: 138-141) examines the depiction of people relative to the viewer through: "the social distance between depicted people and the viewer, the social relation between depicted people and the viewer, and the social interaction between depicted people and the viewer." These dimensions illuminate *the social distance, the social relation, and the social interaction* between the depicted people and the viewer (van Leeuwen 2008: 138). These symbolic dimensions between the represented and the viewers will be considered in more detail below.

The dimension of *social distance* functions in image much like distance in real life: it tells us how far away we are from the represented person or people (van Leeuwen 2008: 138). The distance communicates the closeness of our interpersonal relationships both literally and figuratively (van Leeuwen 2008: 138). Social distance is symbolic in pictures and realized by different distances which lead to different interpretations (van Leeuwen 2008: 138). A "long shot" will depict a person as further away and as a stranger to the viewer whereas a "close-up" will bring a person to be associated with the viewer (van Leeuwen 2008: 138). This spectrum of distance is a continuum which can lead to different interpretations by the viewer of the relationships with the represented person or people. Social media influencers can utilize this tool to control how close the followers are brought to the influencer.

The dimension of *social relation* covers the vertical and horizontal angles from which the person is seen (van Leeuwen 2008: 139). The vertical angles create a social relation of power between the depicted people and the viewer (van Leeuwen 2008: 139). Looking down on someone exerts symbolic power over the person whereas looking up at someone gives the symbolic power to the depicted person (van Leeuwen 2008: 139). Additionally, equality is then represented at eye-level angle (van Leeuwen 2008: 139). The horizontal angles create a social relation of involvement or detachment between the depicted people and the viewer (van Leeuwen 2008: 139). The depiction of the person can place them in front of the viewer, sideways or at some other place on the continuum but still facing the viewer (van Leeuwen 2008: 139). The most extreme form of detachment would be facing away from the viewer but even such situations must be contextually determined. Social media influencers can use the vertical angles to indicate

equality with their followers and welcome them to their world but also to signal their power and differential status in relation to their followers or fans. The usage of the horizontal angle is then another way of making the followers welcomed to the life of the influencer but also a tool to make the influencer someone to be examined from different angles. Using different horizontal angles also allows one to showcase clothing and the body in a multitude of ways.

The dimension of *social interaction* concerns whether the depicted people are looking at the viewer or not (van Leeuwen 2008: 141). Looking at the viewer is an imposition towards the viewer that the depicted person should be examined whereas not looking at the viewer places the depicted person as an object for the viewer's scrutiny (van Leeuwen 2008: 139-141). The demand from the depicted person towards the viewer makes the interaction more personal but what the depicted person wants can only be further discerned by also looking at gestures, facial expressions, and angles (van Leeuwen 2008: 141). Instigating a demand towards the viewer will by necessity foster a more personal connection between a SMI and their followers which can then be made more specific by the addition of facial expressions and gestures. Surrendering oneself to the scrutiny of the viewer may also be a useful strategy for showcasing different aspects of the self or the surrounding environment, or even a different person in the picture.

7. Material, methods, and research ethics

This section introduces the research material and methods of this thesis while also considering research ethical questions relevant to the thesis. The section begins with an outline of the research data, its collection, limitations, exclusions, and examination of the choices made in terms of the data. The research ethical questions concerning the thesis will be examined after the presentation of the data. Presentation of the methods applied to the data for the study of authenticity in accordance with the research questions will close off the section.

7.1. Research material

The material for this research consists of the Instagram Feed posts of @noelledowning. This thesis examines the construction of authenticity and relatability in SMI content creation through the intricate study of the Instagram feed content of @noelledowning. The choice of @noelledowning for this study was made based on the researcher's previous familiarity with the content, which made it possible to identify the account as an accurate example of a lifestyle influencer. A sample of Instagram feed posts was analysed for this thesis which covers the years 2017-2020. The sampling was conducted to include for each respective year the whole month of posts from both January and June. The aim was to avoid months with major holiday seasons so they would distort the content less, and to cover clothing representations from seasonally distinct time periods. The historical perspective was chosen due to the possibility of examining change in the representations which are of interest for examining authenticity through consistency. A longer historical perspective allows examination of possible changing trends in lifestyle influencer content and their implications for authenticity. Additionally, the focus on full months of content better enables the examination of advertorial campaigns that span a longer period, as well as examining how different feed posts connect to produce meaning. The choice of including only two different months per year also enables the historical perspective to cover a longer period since the limits of the thesis and focus on qualitative methods would make a more robust sample too time intensive to handle.

The focus in this thesis on how the representations of Noelle Downing herself are used to construct authenticity delineate the exclusions made in terms of the Instagram Feed posts. Only posts and photos that included Noelle Downing herself were included in the analysis. The exclusion was made to ensure that all examined posts and photos include a

visual representation of Noelle Downing herself and are thus better comparable to each other. However, it must be noted that the construction of authenticity will by necessity also be done through posts that do not include a visual representation of Downing. Overall, all photos that included Downing were also part of the analysis and thus multiple photos per post were analysed when applicable. Photos that clearly represented other people in addition to Downing were also analysed for the representations of all the other participants as well. The captions of the Instagram feed posts were analysed for all applicable posts. Video content was not included as part of this thesis since the full methodological framework cannot be applied to video material.

Overall, the timeframe from which the data is collected includes 299 Instagram Feed posts. In total, 24 posts were excluded from analysis due to not containing a representation of Downing in the visual content. The material consists of 429 photos in total of which 60 were excluded due to not containing a representation of Downing. In terms of group representations, 35 posts with 54 different photos include two or more represented persons. Thus, 275 Instagram feed posts, and 369 photos connected to them were analysed in total. The data was collected directly from @noelledowning Instagram profile page by manually accessing the relevant timeframes. The data was collated into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis and annotation. The posts were screen captured but the analysis and annotation were ultimately conducted through direct access to the Instagram feed since it provides the most convenient and up to date access to the content. The data was analysed and annotated first in December of 2020 and then later in January of 2021 without referring to the previous annotation. Any discrepancies between the annotations were reviewed before analysis.

The choice of the Instagram feed for analysis will only give insight into a single aspect of the content creation of @noelledowning. In terms of authenticity, the other tools to produce content (e.g. Instagram Stories) are relevant and important in building the entire representation of the account and person. Since the focus of this thesis is on how authenticity is constructed in content creation, it is possible to analyse only one facet of content creation and examine how authenticity is realized in the Instagram feed without incorporating other facets. The Instagram feed as data was partially chosen for this thesis due to it allowing for a historical perspective, which is nearly impossible to examine through the ephemeral Instagram Stories. Additionally, the Instagram feed as the "front page" of an account provides the initial overview of an account to a visitor

and is also the content that is seen when scrolling one's Instagram feed. Despite the emergence of various new tools for content creation on Instagram, it thus still holds an important status. The limitation of the focus on Instagram Feed will be considered in the interpretation of the results concerning the effects of semiotic technology on content creation.

A brief note on the negotiated aspect of authenticity is also relevant. This thesis focuses on the construction of authenticity by the content creator and how they embed meaning into their content. As established earlier, the construction of authenticity in the context of social media will be negotiated between the creator and their followers or audience. Instead of also accounting for how the followers view the authenticity of the representations, in this thesis it is presumed that the influencer is aware of an audience to negotiate with and as such it will affect their choices in content creation. The perspective of the audience will be utilised through previous studies that have focused on audience perceptions of influencer content which somewhat mitigates this limitation.

7.2. Ethical considerations of the research design

There are a few ethical considerations to make in terms of this research. The focus of the research is on a person who, while in the public domain, cannot be considered a traditional celebrity. However, Noelle Downing is a digital content creator, blogger, and social media influencer by vocation. Thus, the thesis examines a public persona and Instagram account as opposed to a predominantly private account. The account is publicly accessible and currently has over four hundred thousand followers. Downing's content and life is thus available to a large amount of people and the content analysed in this thesis is viewable by practically anyone who has access to Instagram. These factors make studying the content feasible and recognise the fact that she may exert an amount of influence over a major number of people. However, the lifestyle influencer content is by default also personal while it is public. As such, issues of privacy are necessary to consider.

The content was not originally intended to be researched or examined in such detail as present in this study which raises privacy concerns. The topic of authenticity can also be very personal in the sense that it is also intrinsically tied to self-identity. The author is aware of possible privacy concerns in studying a person's represented life in the detail that this thesis covers. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to descriptively analyse how authenticity is represented on lifestyle influencer content through @noelledowning

as a specific exemplary of the vocation. Thus, the focus is not on critiquing or otherwise passing judgement on Downing's representations.

Noelle Downing was contacted to ask for permission for studying her content and to utilise some of her posts in the making of this thesis. The inquiry by e-mail received no reaction. Downing is after all a figure in the public domain so the decision to continue with the research was made. Simultaneously the non-reaction is acknowledged in this thesis in the sense that the usage of Downing's content as examples will be limited to situations where it is necessary for research design, clarity, and avoiding misrepresentations of Downing or other persons represented. The editing of research material was also conducted to ensure maximum clarity of the representations such as in situations where a post containing multiple representations was addressed. Additionally, the decision was made to not include representations of other people who are not also influencers to better protect their privacy. Furthermore, since user comments are not under scrutiny in this study, they were redacted from the illustration material to avoid unnecessary presentation of user profiles.

7.3. The mediated authenticity framework and its application through textual analysis

The analysis of mediated authenticity in the data is conducted in this thesis through textual analysis. The focus is on the written captions but when necessary, elements of the visual communication will be subjected to textual analysis. Textual analysis is a qualitative method that can be used to analyze written, spoken, and visual communication in detail and in ways influenced by and reflective of larger social structures (Hawkins 2017). Through textual analysis it is possible to generate knowledge about the meanings employed in language in its context and to formulate patterns that emerge from the use of forms of communication in the data (Hawkins 2017). Since the focus of this thesis is in describing how authenticity is constructed in social media influencer content, textual analysis as a method helps to understand the socially situated nature of authenticity construction.

The choice of textual analysis as a method is further supported by the freeform nature of the captions. Lifestyle influencer content is typically personal and there are as many ways to produce influencer content as there are influencers. The preliminary examination of the material guided the choice of method in revealing the highly variable

nature of the captions ranging from single sentences to multi-paragraph narratives. Thus, a distinct benefit of the textual analysis method also lies in its ability to analyze ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings without being constrained by a focus on a particular linguistic feature. Textual analysis as a method can capture the complexity of the content creation process and properly contextualize the factors that affect the construction of authenticity as it is outlined in the mediated authenticity framework. An example of the textual analysis on the data of this thesis is presented in Table 7.1 using the seven original categories of the mediated authenticity framework and the added category of *engagement* presented in table 7.2.

Table 7.1. Example of textual analysis

Caption	Applicable categories
I always get asked "What's in your bag?!" and today I've teamed up with @mycarmex to share how I'm reviving my bag! ❤️🎇I tend to be a "let's just throw it all in, in case I need anything" type, much like Hermione ⚡, but I've changed my ways! Having my bag organized makes me feel revived and refreshed, and ready to take on the day! What's something funny you always have in your bag?! #ReviveTheRealYou #sponsored @noelledowning 26.1.2019	Predictability: A reference to past identity construction as a fan of Harry Potter by mentioning Hermione and incorporating the lightning emoji that links to Harry Potter's physical characteristics. Immediacy: Temporally linking the content with 'today I've teamed up with…'. Confessions: Sharing of details about how Downing used to organize things in her bag and how she does it now. Ordinariness: Grounding of advertorial content with a Harry Potter popular culture reference to invoke relatability and authenticity through ordinariness. Engagement: Indirect reference to past questions by followers ('I always get asked…') and a direct question to the followers ('What's something funny you always have in your bag?!').

Table 7.2. Categories of mediated authenticity examined in the thesis

Predictability	Consistent usage of genre features and conventions establish trustworthiness based on previous experiences of the audience.
Spontaneity	Rehearsed, directed, and pre-planned performances that seem spontaneous while being personal, engaged, and emotionally driven as opposed to being calculated and strategic.
Immediacy	The producer and the audience are connected through a shared immediacy of the present moment which establishes togetherness through shared authenticity construction.
Confessions	Confessions and disclosure of personal secrets and details which the audience find believable and can connect with their own personal experiences.
Ordinariness	Appearing mundane or ordinary is experienced as more authentic in opposition to appearing in a glamorous fashion.
Ambivalence	Ambivalence or hesitance in revealing "truths" about oneself is more authentic than being upfront about being authentic.
Imperfection	Authentic performance benefits from a certain degree of imperfection to produce a contrast that highlights the authenticity illusion through minor mistakes or flaws.

Engagement	Authentic performance benefits from the social media influencer explicitly acknowledging and addressing their audience in their content

7.4. Variables and values for analyzing visual content through the theory of Visual Social Actors

The variables and values presented in this section were chosen based on research by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) and van Leeuwen (2008), on previous research on authenticity and influencers, as well as on preliminary examination of the data. These variables are used to examine the representations of people in the visual content on @noelledowning Instagram feed. The most important goal in choosing the variables and values is to be able to examine the research questions in appropriate detail and capacity. The variables pertaining to number of social actors, direction of gaze, facial expression, social distance, horizontal angle, vertical angle, and activity were adopted from van Leeuwen's (2008) research. The categories of exposure of skin, location background, number of tags, and sponsorship disclosure were included based on the preliminary examination of the data. The different variables and their values are presented in table 7.3.

Table 7.3. Variables and values

Variables	Values
1. Number of social actors	Zero, One, More than one
2. Direction of gaze	Demand, Offer
3. Facial expression	Smiling/ laughing, serious, playful, other, not discernible
4. Social distance	Intimate, Close personal, Far personal, Close social, Far social, Public, First person view
5. Exposure of skin	Unrevealing, Slightly revealing, Revealing, Very revealing, Not discernible
6. Horizontal angle	Involvement, Sideways, Detachment
7. Vertical angle	High angle, Eye-level, Low angle
8. Activity	Representing performing an activity, Representing performing a pose
9. Location background	Private location, Public location, Other
10. Number of tags	Numeric value starting from zero
11. Sponsorship disclosure	Zero (no disclosure), One (disclosure)

The variables and values are now explained in more detail to make their content as transparent as possible. The first variable is related to the *number of social actors* (Variable 1) in the representations. The variable was coded for values zero, one, and more than one. This category enables to see how prevalent representations of the influencers themselves are, and how prevalent are the incorporation of other social actors.

The next two variables are concerned with the portrayal of the face in the representations and the processes of interaction. *Direction of gaze* (2) tells whether the represented social actor looks at the viewer and thus makes a demand for viewer attention or does not look at the viewer and thus offers themselves to be gazed upon by the viewer. The variable of *facial expression* (3) is realized by the values smiling / laughing, serious, playful, other, and not discernible. Instances where the social actor is smiling or laughing were coded as smiling /laughing, while the absence of such expressions and adoption of a neutral serious expression was coded as serious. The

coding of the value <u>playful</u> is realized when the social actor makes expressions that can be considered silly such as grinning, twisting one's face, pursing one's lips, and other exaggerated expressions used in communication with the viewer. The value of <u>other</u> covers situations where the expression does not fit the previous values whereas the value of <u>not discernible</u> is realized when the facial expression is not visibly discernible from the representation. The variables related to gaze allow the representation of the influencer as evoking the attention of the viewer and connecting with the viewer personally through addressing them directly in the representation or letting them observe the details of the influencer freely, without imposition. The representation of facial expression enables the influencers to represent emotions which can be discerned by the viewer. Both variables at play here can help in representing the personal connection between the influencer and the viewer thus building on their relationship as well as displaying emotions of various kinds for the viewer to examine and identify with and help in determining the authenticity of the influencers' expression.

The next variable of *social distance* (4) governs how close or far social actors appear in relation to the viewer. Starting from the value nearest to the viewer: <u>intimate</u> distance covers representations of the face or head only. The next value of <u>close personal</u> distance adds the shoulders in addition to the head. Following along the spectrum, the value of <u>far personal</u> distance adds the features of the body above the waistline. Next, at a <u>close social</u> distance the whole figure of the person is represented, whereas at <u>far social</u> distance the whole figure has some space around it, or the surroundings are visible. Finally, at a <u>public</u> distance the torsos of multiple people can be seen. The representation of distance in relation to the viewer allows the influencer to control how closely or accurately the viewer can perceive their bodily qualities and apparel. The influencer can then use different distances to reveal or disguise certain elements of themselves thus affecting how their physical self and its manifestations are represented to the viewer.

The variable of *exposure of skin* (5) is used to examine how much skin the clothes of the social actor reveal. The value of <u>unrevealing</u> was chosen when the represented person's skin is primarily covered by clothing. The value of <u>slightly revealing</u> stands for one of four body parts: back, chest, thigh(s) or stomach being exposed, whereas the value of <u>revealing</u> covers situations where multiple such body parts are exposed. The value of <u>very revealing</u> is then coded for representations where the social actor is in swimwear or

lingerie. Finally, in situations where the clothing of the social actor was not visible, the value of <u>not discernible</u> is chosen.

The two variables concerning *horizontal* (5) and *vertical angles* (6) allow representations of social relation towards the viewer. For the *horizontal angle,* the value of <u>involvement</u> indicates directionality of the front side of the body towards the viewer, the value of <u>sideways</u> indicates a partial directionality of the front side of the body towards the viewer, and the value of <u>detachment</u> indicates the directionality of the back side of the body towards the viewer. These values can be used to realize varying levels of involvement with the viewer and the possibility of the viewer observing the represented social actor from different angles. The utilization of a consistent variety of the horizontal angles would likely lead to a maximally authentic perception both over a longer timeframe and in a single post featuring multiple pictures. The possibility of presenting social relation through *vertical angles* enables the representation of power in images with the <u>high-angle</u> from above, the <u>low-angle</u> from below and the <u>eye-level</u> angle. The *vertical angle* can be used to position the influencer as having power over the viewer (low-angle), the viewer having the power over the influencer (high-angle), or both being of equal status (eye-level). The relation of the influencer to the viewer in terms of power status acts as one form of communicating the interpersonal dimension and relationship that the influencer and viewer have. These two variables both make possible the examining of in-between cases which were determined to the closest applicable value.

The variable of *activity* (7) covers how the represented actors are involved with their surrounding world. The value of <u>representing</u> <u>performing an activity</u> covers situations where the social actor is an active agent in a discernible activity realized through usage of different objects and bodily movements that imply motion and usage. The value of <u>representing performing a pose</u> covers situations where the social actor is a passive agent not discernible involved in using objects to perform an activity. Bodily movements may still be used for performing a pose.

The variable of *location background* (8) makes visible the background of the social actor in the representations. The values of <u>private, public</u> and <u>other</u> include: <u>private</u> spaces such as the influencer's own home or other people's homes and various other private establishments that have restricted access, <u>public</u> spaces such as commercial establishments, parks, public events, and various other public places, <u>other</u> spaces that

do not neatly fall into either category. The representation of private places can make accessing the inner domestic life of the influencers easier which gives a glimpse into the supposedly less curated and more real "backstage" of the influencer's day to day life. Simultaneously a variety of public places the influencer visits gives a full and more complete view of the lifestyle of the influencer. The background is a consistent factor in how the influencers present their life and is thus important in understanding their content creation process.

The next two variables of *number of tags* and *sponsorship disclosure* both largely concern the intricacies of sponsored content and are important in understanding the strategies of authenticity management in sponsored content creation. The value of the variable *number of tags* can take any numeric value starting from zero. The variable *sponsorship disclosure* is covered either by a value of <u>zero (no disclosure)</u> or one <u>(disclosure).</u> The usage of tags needs further specification in qualitative terms for a deeper understanding of how they are used. Similarly, understanding the various ways that sponsored content is represented in the content will also require further qualitative specification since examining disclosure only highlights advertorials that are explicitly marked as such.

7.5. The research questions

The analysis of visual and written content in the Instagram feed posts of @noelledowning will be conducted to answer the following research questions:

1) How are different methods of visual representation of social actors and mediated authenticity used in constructing authenticity and relatability?

2) How is authenticity constructed multimodally through ideational, interpersonal, and textual methods of communication in the Instagram feed posts of @noelledowning?

8. Results and discussion

The results of the analysis of the Instagram Feed posts will be presented in this section alongside a discussion of the results and how they connect with previous research. The results of the analysis of visual representations of Noelle Downing and possible other people as social actors will be presented first. The analysis of the representations in terms of mediated authenticity will be presented second. A discussion on how authenticity is constructed through the synthesis of these elements into a multimodal ensemble will follow the presentation of the results. Semiotic technology affordances and advertorial content affecting authenticity construction will also be considered in the discussion. Samples from the data will be used to illustrate findings when applicable and necessary.

8.1. Construction of authenticity through representations of visual social actors in the Instagram Feed of @noelledowning

The analysis of the categories of representations will be conducted through examining similar representation categories in conjunction with each other when useful. The overall number of representations will first be presented alongside the number of group representations. The representation categories will be presented in the order of *social distance, horizontal angle* and *vertical angle, direction of gaze* and *facial expression, exposure of skin,* and *location background,* and *activity.* The *social tags* will be presented last.

The data has 369 representations that include Noelle Downing. The number includes representations of Noelle Downing from photos that also include people other than Downing. Overall, there were 114 representations (i.e., number of people represented) that included two or more people and all of them also include a representation of Noelle Downing. Insight from these group representations will also be used.

8.1.1. Social distance

Table 8.1. Representations of social distance

Social distance	Intimate	Close personal	Far personal	Close social	Far social	Public	First person	Total
June 2020	0	6	16	22	11	1	1	**57**
January 2020	0	5	14	24	11	3	0	**57**
June 2019	0	6	10	11	8	0	0	**35**
January 2019	0	9	14	5	4	4	0	**36**
June 2018	0	2	14	19	3	1	0	**39**
January 2018	0	7	8	30	2	0	1	**48**
June 2017	0	7	11	25	1	0	2	**46**
January 2017	0	8	17	15	6	0	5	**51**
Total amount	**0**	**50**	**104**	**151**	**46**	**9**	**9**	**369**
As percentage of total number	0.00 %	13.55 %	28.18 %	40.92 %	12.47 %	2.44 %	2.44 %	100.00 %

The results for representations of social distance are presented in table 8.1. Two values contain most of the representations in this category: *far personal* (28.18%) and *close social* (40.92%). The result is understandable when considering the focus lifestyle influencers have on representing clothes and outfits for followers. Particularly the value of *close social* is typically useful for documenting an outfit since it allows for a full depiction of the person while the distance remains close enough to discern details of clothing. The value of *far personal* is used to represent a closer look on the influencer that still allows for specific outfit pieces to be showcased. Considering these two categories as a base value for social distance in the representations, the general distance taken towards followers is one of at least close sociability, thus inviting the followers as someone akin to a friend in conversation and extending a considerable degree of intimate contact towards them.

The other values provide a few key insights into social distance. The next most common values are the ones closest to the highest values' *close personal* (13.55%) and *far social* (12.47%). The representations of *close personal* were used to highlight facial features and expressions, and for example the effects of makeup, hairdressing, or cosmetics products. Though selfies were very rare in the material, any picture taken in such a style falls under this value. The lack of selfies and the lack of any representations in the value of *intimate* is not necessarily too surprising since it has been found that selfies only account for 0.7% of the photos posted on Instagram (Caliandro and Graham 2020: 1).

From the opposite end of the spectrum, the value of *far social* was typically used when the surroundings of the people were also acutely relevant such as when photographing at different venues or public places. Such public places were also the focus of the few representations in the value of *public* (2.44%) where the focus is also on people not necessarily intended to be in the photo.

The value of *first person* is interesting in terms of content creation due to its focus on providing what Downing sees herself. The method of representation makes for a rather distinct type of photograph and it was used for example for depicting Downing in a bath, having brunch, and watching a drive-in movie. The adoption of the point of view of Downing allows for a further authenticity in providing a way for the followers to see what she sees. The adoption of this style of representation does not allow for representing outfits of the influencers themselves and is thus not suitable for many content creations needs prevalent in lifestyle influencer content.

Overall, the representations of social distance construct authenticity through interpersonal construction of relatability by positioning Downing socially close to the follower and providing a way for the follower to observe Downing and her life from a variety of distances.

8.1.2. Horizontal angle and Vertical angle

Table 8.2. Representations of horizontal angle

Horizontal angle	Involvement	Sideways	Detachment	Total
June 2020	24	27	6	57
January 2020	28	23	6	57
June 2019	24	10	1	35
January 2019	25	5	6	36
June 2018	33	6	0	39
January 2018	43	4	1	48
June 2017	40	3	3	46
January 2017	45	6	0	51
Total amount	262	84	23	369
As percentage of total amount	71.00 %	22.76 %	6.23 %	100.00 %

Table 8.2. presents the results of how horizontal angle is represented. Horizontal angle representations show a definite majority in the value of *involvement* (71%) which indicates that representations of Downing are typically of her body facing forward. Thus, the front of her body is most visible to followers whereas the other horizontal angles are far less prevalent with *sideways* comprising 22.76% and *detachment* comprising 6.23% of the total. The general predominance of involvement for influencer content suggests a focus on photographing the front of the person and their face. The person is thus more immediately recognizable and able to communicate with their face for a more intimate representation. The typical sideways representation also includes the face readily recognizable. In some posts multiple horizontal angles were used for representation in different photos which enables e.g., showcasing an outfit from a variety of angles. This is also apparent in the increased proportion of *sideways* and *detachment* representations in date from both January and June 2020. The prevalent representation of involvement constructs authenticity interpersonally through the front facing focus of Downing that allows for recognizability of the content and marks it the property of the creator.

Table 8.3. Representations of vertical angle

Vertical angle	High angle	Eye-level	Low angle	Total
June 2020	5	45	7	57
January 2020	5	51	1	57
June 2019	0	28	7	35
January 2019	1	28	7	36
June 2018	3	28	8	39
January 2018	5	32	11	48
June 2017	7	22	17	46
January 2017	7	30	14	51
Total amount	33	264	72	369
As percentage of total amount	8.94 %	71.54 %	19.51 %	100.00 %

The presentation of vertical angle in table 8.3. provides insight into how power relations between Downing and the followers are constructed. The most common representation of power relation is *eye-level* (71.54%), followed by *low angle* (19.51%), and *high angle* (8.94%). The prominent use of eye-level in representing power relations allows for Downing to establish equality with the followers, emphasizing that they are socially

on the same level as friends or acquaintances. The importance of the prominence of eye-level representations for interpersonal construction of authenticity lies in strengthening the impression of an equal and intimate connection between the influencer and the follower which is important in remaining relatable. The other angles are far less prominent in the data with low angle representations that emphasize the power of Downing over the followers typically employed in documenting outfits and high angle representations of Downing often involving Downing in bed or relaxing.

8.1.3. Direction of gaze and Facial expression

Table 8.4. Representations of direction of gaze

Direction of gaze	Demand	Offer	Total
June 2020	40	17	57
January 2020	34	23	57
June 2019	28	7	35
January 2019	20	16	36
June 2018	22	17	39
January 2018	25	23	48
June 2017	27	19	46
January 2017	22	29	51
Total amount	218	151	369
As percentage of total amount	59.08 %	40.92 %	100.00 %

The representations of direction of gaze are presented in table 8.4. The results show that representations of Downing are somewhat more frequently based on *demand* (59.08%) as opposed to *offer* (40.92%). In posts with multiple representations there was often variance between demand and offer within a single post. Frischen *et. al.* (2007: 697) document previous studies on direction of gaze which suggest that humans may have a predisposition to detecting the gaze of others and "---that direct gaze both captures attention and delays disengagement of attention from the face stimulus". The predisposition makes direct gaze a powerful tool that influencers can use for attracting attention of followers and other Instagram users. Since attention is necessary for success in the lifestyle influencer ecosystem, demand representations also help in more successfully promoting the influencer. The somewhat higher number of demand representations also helps in establishing an interpersonal relation with the followers through promoting a focused attention towards the influencer.

The offer representations allow for a different view of Downing since they free the followers to observe other details of the representations without the imposition of the gaze. Interestingly, the group representations, particularly with Downing's husband often include a demand representation of Downing with an offer representation of her husband. Thus, the attention again remains on the influencer themselves. Both directions of gaze are well represented in the data and as such offer a construction of authenticity both through interpersonal communication and attention being bestowed to the followers by Downing as well as through directing the attention of the followers to the photo in full.

Table 8.5. Representations of facial expression

Facial expression	Smiling / laughing	Serious	Playful	Other	Not discernible	Total
June 2020	30	16	0	3	8	**57**
January 2020	21	15	6	0	15	**57**
June 2019	15	16	1	0	3	**35**
January 2019	9	12	6	0	9	**36**
June 2018	26	3	3	4	3	**39**
January 2018	37	1	5	0	5	**48**
June 2017	30	7	3	0	6	**46**
January 2017	35	5	3	0	8	**51**
Total amount	**203**	**75**	**27**	**7**	**57**	**369**
As percentage of total amount	55.01 %	20.33 %	7.32 %	1.90 %	15.45 %	100.00 %

The representations of facial expression are presented in table 8.5. The value of *smiling/laughing* was the most common representation of facial expression in the data with over a half of the representations containing the value. The predominant representation of facial expression as smiling/laughing acts to communicate positive emotions typically linked to smiling or laughing (Ekman 1993: 387). Downing thus routinely employs intimacy and positive emotions towards the followers as a tool of relatability and authenticity. A similar function is realized by the value of *playful* which while not very common in the representations (7.32%), also emphasized positive emotion signaling. An example is seen in the inclusion of obviously humorous visual content in figure 8.1., where Downing is balancing books with a cat on top of her and evidently fails to do so.

Figure 8.1. An illustration of a playful representation through humorous content (@noelledowning 22.1.2018)

The value of *serious,* was the second most common with an occurrence of 20.33% in the representations. This value was found particularly in connection with representations that had glamorous clothing or distinctively recognizable poses for the camera as demonstrated in Figure 8.2, with the close personal distance shot where Downing looks at the camera over the shoulder and the caption denotes how Downing is 'all dressed up'.

Figure 8.2. An illustration of a serious representation through a close personal distance shot (@noelledowning 8.1.2020)

Additionally, there were a sizable number of representations where the facial expression is not discernible which was evident in certain group representations such as those including intimate interaction between Downing and her husband and naturally also in representations where the horizontal angle of detachment is represented. In terms of the different timeframes in the data, there is some increase in the total number and the proportion of serious representations in relation to the other representations. This makes the general disposition towards smiling/laughing representations somewhat less prevalent in representations from 2019-2020. This reflects a more complete range of emotions at display which also contributes to authenticity by providing a more complete access to the emotions of Downing.

8.1.4. Exposure of skin

Table 8.6. Representation of exposure of skin

Exposure of skin	Unrevealing	Slightly revealing	Revealing	Very revealing	Not discernible	Total
June 2020	12	23	15	6	1	57
January 2020	34	15	2	4	2	57
June 2019	12	14	4	5	0	35
January 2019	16	10	0	5	5	36
June 2018	20	12	0	6	1	39
January 2018	39	6	2	0	1	48
June 2017	24	19	2	1	0	46
January 2017	39	7	1	0	4	51
Total amount	**196**	**106**	**26**	**27**	**14**	**369**
As percentage of total amount	**53.12 %**	**28.73 %**	**7.05 %**	**7.32 %**	**3.79 %**	**100.00 %**

The representations for the value of *exposure of skin* are presented in table 8.6. Two values encompass over 80% of the representations in this category with *unrevealing* at 53.12% and *slightly revealing* at 28.73%. The high percentages for both categories indicate that most of the representations expose either a minor amount of skin or not at all. Interestingly there is not much variance in terms of the seasonal changes for exposure of skin. Representations in June months include more representations for *slightly revealing* in comparison to January months which can likely be attributed to seasonal weather differences in New York City that allow for less clothing to be worn. Since the representations generally include only minor amounts of skin or not at all, the cases where skin is shown are particularly interesting for analysis. The major proportion of the value of *revealing* in the representations is covered by a few different posts with multiple representations in June 2020. The value of *very revealing* shows a clear emergence of representations in lingerie or swimwear since June 2018 whereas before that there was only a single representation with this value. Coincidentally, this corresponds with an increase in terms of body positivity themed content on Downing's Instagram Feed and such themes are found particularly in connection with the value of very revealing. This linkage will be explored in more detail in relation to the categories of mediated authenticity and when discussing multimodal ensembles.

Faleatua (2017: 726-727) has documented situations where an unprecedented level of exposure of skin in influencer content can influence follower perception of the influencer and make them appear inauthentic. Such a situation would be possible in

terms of Downing's representations as well. The representations of revealing and very revealing are however tied to actual situations and locales where the usage of lingerie or swimwear is typically done or connected to advertorials that necessitate the wearing of such clothing. Additionally, body positivity is employed in such representations to guide the interpretation of them. Overall, the construction of authenticity through exposure of skin relies on consistency in representing oneself in accordance with a chosen level of exposure that does not deviate from what the audience has come to expect or contextualizing a deviance from the consistency with e.g., advertorial needs or body positivity signalling.

8.1.5. Location background

Table 8.7. Representations of location background

Location background	Private	Public	Other	Total
June 2020	45	12	0	57
January 2020	24	33	0	57
June 2019	18	16	1	35
January 2019	11	25	0	36
June 2018	9	30	0	39
January 2018	11	37	0	48
June 2017	6	38	2	46
January 2017	11	37	3	51
Total amount	**135**	**228**	**6**	369
As percentage of total amount	**36.59 %**	**61.79 %**	**1.63 %**	**100.00 %**

The division between different location backgrounds in the content is presented in table 8.7. The location background representations highlight a higher number of depictions of the *public* life of Downing (61.79%) as opposed to the *private* life of Downing at home (36.59%). The value of public encompasses a very wide variety of different locales ranging from photos taken at the street to cafes, restaurants, events and event venues, travel locations, and various other establishments. The public life of Downing thus gives a comprehensive look into the front region that Downing operates on in her daily life which is comprised of locations and activities quite typical for lifestyle influencers.

Some representations in public also pertain more to a back region access style e.g., representations of Downing on a flight in Figure 8.3., where she is engaged in the private activity of reading or the fairly regular content of Downing sharing intimate moments with her husband. The value of private mainly includes photos taken at the

home of Downing and her spouse with a few representations depicting other private places such as other people's homes. These representations enable utilizing the back region by revealing the various aspects of private life such as cooking, dining, choosing outfits, relaxing at home, spending time with loved ones, and sharing intimate moments at home.

Figure 8.3. An illustration of backstage access in public (@noelledowning 15.1.2017)
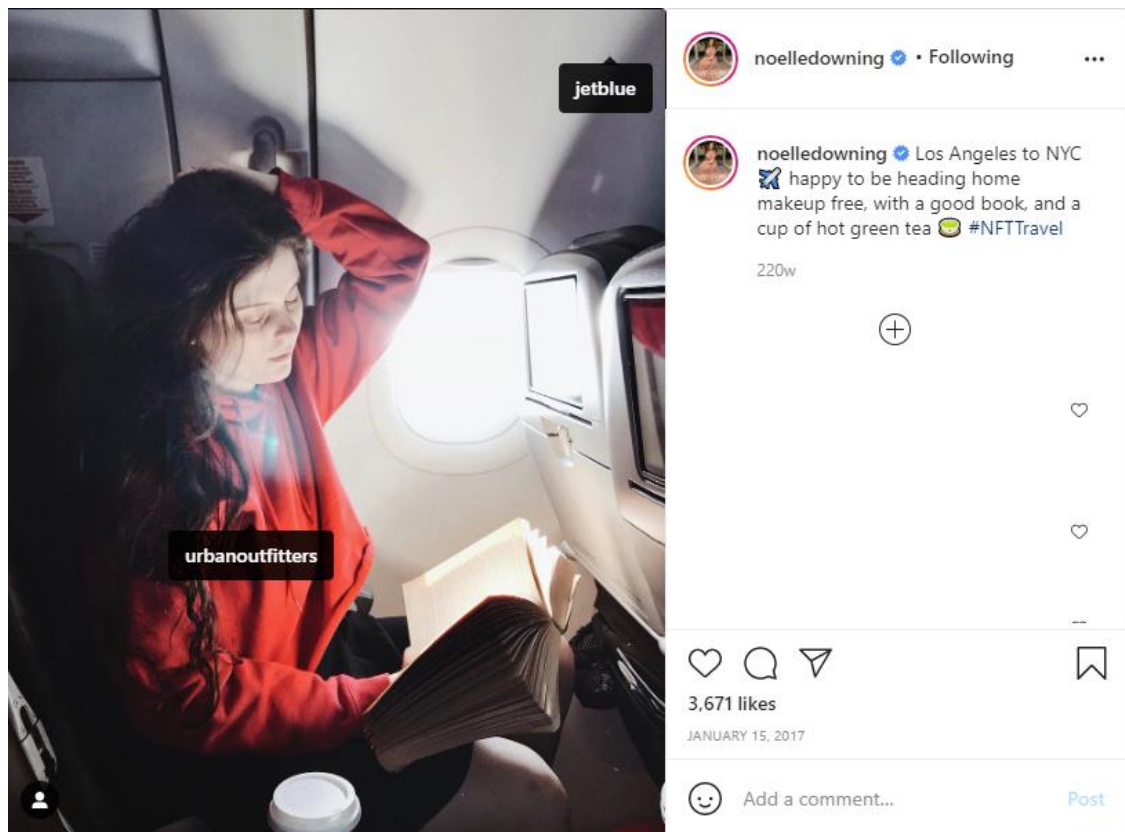
The higher proportion of public location representations indicate a generally higher focus on the front region in the representations which is then complemented by back region access provided particularly by the private location representations. The front region access enables Downing to situate herself firmly in the lifestyle influencer genre through producing representations that conform to the general curated aesthetic of the Instagram feed and the representation of the influencer's life as it has been lived (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 59; Abidin 2015). The back region access then enables the representation of disclosive intimacy through presenting the mundane and the typically unavailable private life of Downing even if in a necessarily curated and edited form (Abidin 2015).

In conjunction with the proposed further employment of calibrated amateurism and increased use of back region access by influencers in recent years, Downing's

representations have also included proportionally increased numbers of private location background representations since June 2019 (Abidin 2018: 71). However, it should be noted that the month of June 2020 happened amidst the COVID- 19 pandemic which has affected the ability to lead the typical influencer lifestyle and thus the pandemic at least partially contributes to the far higher proportion of private location backgrounds than the average. The front and the back region together construct authenticity by providing followers access to both typical lifestyle influencer content of the front region and the more intimate and personal content specific to Downing found in the back region and realized also using calibrated amateurism to make the representations relatable and authentic (Abidin 2018: 71). Interestingly, Downing herself also comments on her fondness of both staying at home and leading an active life outside of home in her content as visible Figure 8.4.

Figure 8.4. An illustration of Downing at home with a caption about staying home and travelling (@noelledowning 11.1.2018)

8.1.6. Activity

Table 8.8. Representations of activity

Activity	Activity representation	Pose representation	Total
June 2020	7	50	57
January 2020	13	44	57
June 2019	8	27	35
January 2019	11	25	36
June 2018	19	20	39
January 2018	21	27	48
June 2017	7	39	46
January 2017	16	35	51
Total amount	102	267	369
As percentage of total amount	27.64 %	72.36 %	100.00 %

The representations of activity divided to *activity representation* or *pose representation* are presented in table 8.8. The representations of poses (72.36%) are more common than representations of activity (27.64%) in the data. The situation is likely explainable by the clothing and outfit focus of a lot of the representations both in regular and advertorial content which guides the content creation towards clothing showcases that benefit from posing to effectively showcase the qualities of the clothing. Activity representations often display activities like cooking, eating, drinking etc. that is implied by the motions of the represented person as visible in Figure 8.5. Some representations fall somewhere in-between the categories since it can be difficult to determine whether e.g., holding a cup of coffee or tea is part of the pose or part of an activity. Such situations highlight how influencers can still employ different objects to make poses seem more natural and connected to what is happening in the photo overall. Thus, some representations of both activity and pose can be interpreted as attempts to naturalize clothing showcases to make them about something more than just the clothes i.e., holding a donut, drink, a pet etc. in conjunction with clothing content that features prevalent social tagging and captions that highlight the clothes.

Understanding the overall effect of activity and pose representations for authenticity also requires some consideration for the technical tools for content creation. Since the Instagram Feed only allows for still photos and up to 60 seconds long video content, there are some clear constraints to document activity. Still photos can only ever capture a moment in time and to represent an activity in full would require the publishing of multiple representations or photos of the same activity. Multiple representations in a single post were occasionally utilised to document multiple facets of an event for example in documenting a whole weekend in the content. Such content included both activity and poses to balance the overall representation of the post which was also used in the other photos from the post presented in Figure 8.5. Overall, the activity and pose representations point towards a clear dominance of pose representations in the data which would imply a detrimental effect towards authenticity. However, the poses are typically linked to showcasing outfits and clothing with an added attempt at naturalizing the content by employing different contexts through handheld objects and the context or location where Downing is situated thus attempting to make poses less constructed and more authentic.

Figure 8.5. Illustration of activity in a series of photos in a single post (@noelledowning   23.6.2019)

8.1.7 Image tags

Table 8.9. Distribution of image tags

Image tags	Amount	As percentage of total amount
June 2020	21	2.49 %
January 2020	33	3.91 %
June 2019	51	6.04 %
January 2019	68	8.06 %
June 2018	63	7.46 %
January 2018	220	26.07 %
June 2017	138	16.35 %
January 2017	250	29.62 %
Total amount	844	100.00 %

The numbers of image tags used in the photos and their distribution in different months is presented in table 8.9. The usage of image tagging shows a very distinct trend towards far less tagging since June 2018 in the data with an even further decline towards June 2020. Conversely, the first three timeframes of January 2017, June 2017, and January 2018 show high percentages (29.62%, 16.35%, 26.07%, respectively) of tagging in terms of all tags and typically photos from this era included tagging of various clothing brands and other accounts in a single photo. The prevalent tagging is consistent with what Floor (2020: 6) identifies as displaying of capital and status in Instagram user's tagging conventions. The declining trend in tagging is indicative of a change in tagging conventions where far fewer brands are tagged in general. Interestingly, advertorials consistently only include a tag of the advertised brand or product and possible other people in the photo regardless of timeframe. The declining usage of tagging is an indication of a lower amount of commercial linkage in Downing's account in terms of the Instagram Feed.

Since commercial implication in content can negatively affect follower perception of authenticity due to not serving purely the influencers interests, the decrease in tagging helps with achieving authenticity in representations (van Driel and Dumitrica 2021: 69). The focus is then less on what Noelle is specifically wearing and instead simply showcasing her life as it is even if the clothing is still visible. However, the lack of tagging can also be a strategy to generate engagement since not tagging the clothes also leads to less information to followers about the clothes Downing is wearing. The followers then need to specifically ask about the clothes in comments for the

information which facilitates engagement. Other Instagram platform related concerns need to be considered when examining tagging. Instagram has introduced a function where Instagram Stories can include direct links for shopping and thus may perform the function of showcasing clothing to shop better towards followers than image tags. Downing has also used a platform called liketoknow.it that allows her to link different clothing to followers for easier shopping experiences which may also have partly replaced the need for social tags.

The representations of visual social actors in Downing's content suggest a construction of authenticity that is largely reliant on representing oneself as available for interpersonal connection between Downing and her followers. This interpersonal connection is generally built through representations geared towards maintaining a close social distance, facing the front of the body towards the followers, positioning oneself as equal to the followers, demanding the attention from the follower while also offering them a chance to observe, maintaining a facial expression that generates positive emotions, and wearing modest clothing or contextualizing the wearing of revealing clothing appropriately. The representation of interpersonal relation and intimacy towards the followers is conducted through the congruence of front and back region access where the front region represents the general and expected lifestyle influencer content while the back region represents the more intimate and specific lifestyle influencer content of Downing. Additional implications for authenticity are realized through application of image tags, which were used more commonly in the data from January 2017 to January 2018 with a sharp decrease in image tags in the following timeframes. Due to their commercial nature, a decline in the usage of tags can be considered a marker for higher authenticity in Downing's Instagram Feed content in the timeframes from June 2018 onwards.

The analysis of visual social actors focused primarily on the representations of Downing and how interpersonal meaning and relations towards followers are conducted through them. The next section will focus primarily on the captions in the Instagram Feed of @noelledowning and further contextualize the construction of authenticity through ideational, interpersonal, and textual means.

8.2. Construction of mediated authenticity in the captions and visual content of Instagram Feed posts of @noelledowning

The analysis of the construction of mediated authenticity through the captions and visual content in the Instagram Feed of @noelledowning will be presented in this section. The analysis will highlight distinct patterns of authenticity construction in the data in the seven different categories proposed in the mediated authenticity theory and the added category of *engagement*. Possible outlier data will also be considered when relevant. The analysis will be complemented with quotes and reproductions of the Instagram Feed posts to further illustrate authenticity construction. The categories will be presented in the order of *predictability, spontaneity, immediacy, confessions, ordinariness, ambivalence, imperfection,* and *engagement*.

8.2.1 Predictability

The category of predictability is realized in the captions and visual content through repeated displays of typical lifestyle influencer content. A very consistent feature of the photos and captions is the focus on clothing and outfits. Showcasing of outfits can be done both explicitly and implicitly. Implicit showcasing of outfits is achieved through photos that do not place emphasis on the clothing through captions or image tags which further guide the interpretation and direct it towards the outfit and specific pieces of clothing.

Explicit showcasing of clothing and outfits is more reliant on both image tags linking to the accounts of specific brands of the outfits, and captions directing attention to either full outfits or pieces of clothing. A caption may comment on a whole outfit in connection with the other visual content e.g., "Sweat suit matching the sunset kind of Saturday night 🦋" (@noelledowning 14.6.2020), "Snapped this after brunch with my cutie friends ❤️ was feelin myself in this casual comfy look ❤️" (@noelledowning 5.1.2020), or specifically on the outfit e.g., "Looking like an 80's mom and I'm here for it 💁🏻‍♀️" (@noelledowning 17.1.2019). In the first two captions, Downing links the outfits thematically to what is happening in the picture or what has happened earlier in the day. Interestingly, the second caption presented also reveals a minor detail about the content creation process by elaborating on when the picture was taken. Consistent with the results of image tag distribution presented earlier, the first three months analyzed

contain more examples of the usage of image tags in explicating outfit details as seen in Figure 8.6.

Figure 8.6. Illustration exemplifying usage of numerous image tags (@noelledowning 18.1.2018)

Posts that promote clothing typically employ the explicit showcasing of pieces of clothing through only using the image tag of the promoted brand and mentioning the brand and product in the caption. The captions provide the opinionated and highly personal accounts of experiences with the promoted clothing or products in the vein that Abidin (2015) identified advertorials. Brand and advertorial campaign related hashtags are used particularly for the textual function of hashtags in organizing the post as part of a brand campaign. An example of this practice and the style of captions employed in advertorials is presented in Figure 8.7. There are two different styles of content in close connection with clothing and outfits content and advertorials: fitness and body positivity content.

Figure 8.7. Illustration exemplifying advertorial campaign hashtag usage (@noelledowning 22.1.2019)

The fitness content typically focuses on ideational explication of workout routines and thoughts about working out and how it improves Downing's mental and physical condition. Somewhat surprisingly, this fitness content is often found in the form of an advertorial in the earlier timeframes (2017 and 2018) whereas later timeframes (2019 and 2020) are not as advertorial. This change is presented in Figure 8.8. and Figure 8.9. where the first image is an explicit advertorial that nonetheless discusses fitness, Downing's active lifestyle and her pride in her body and its capabilities, whereas in the second photo Downing makes a mundane remark about her workout clothes in a somewhat cheeky tone realized through the emoji.

Figure 8.8. Illustration of advertorial fitness content (@noelledowning 15.1.2018)

Figure 8.9. Illustration of non-advertorial fitness content (@noelledowning 26.6.2020)

Body positivity content is not necessarily part of lifestyle influencer content by default but its distinct position in Downing's content merits inclusion in terms of authenticity construction through predictability. Additionally, the earlier established self-identification in her profile biography signals followers that such content is to be expected. In terms of clothing and exposure of skin, the body positivity content often contains a representation of Downing in lingerie or swimwear. In terms of captions, Downing documents her history with her body image and acceptance of her own body while also reaching out to her followers through interpersonal means. Such interpersonal content takes the form of addressing the follower and directing affirmation, encouragement, and acceptance of their own bodies. Some of Downing's body positivity content particularly in 2019 and 2020 also employs a style of captions that references known internet memes or other colloquial forms of internet language use e.g., "Felt cute might delete later 🦋 #bodypositive" (@noelledowning 2.6.2019) and "80's Barbie called... and she has curves. 🍑 #curvy #bodypositive" (@noelledowning 29.1.2020).

The content in the Instagram Feed of @noelledowning is primarily focused on displaying Downing herself but there are friends, family, and pets who consistently appear in the posts and photos. These representations also construct the authenticity through predictability by appearing consistently as indicators of people who Downing chooses to represent also to her followers. Downing's husband, dog, cat, and bunny, and a few friends of Downing who are also social media influencers appear consistently in the content. The representations of Downing and her husband often document them being intimate with each other or highlight an activity they are doing together. This kind of content can be reinforced with a caption that highlights Downing's love towards her husband e.g., "I love you 🧡" (@noelledowning 10.6.2020) and "My favorite thing about Saturday is you ❤️" (@noelledowning 12.1.2019). The inclusion of the pets is particularly notable in terms of Downing and her husband's dog Duke, who is present in several posts with both only Downing and Downing and her husband. The data of this study covers the first post where Duke appears and subsequently Duke's presence is a consistent factor and often accompanied by explicit mention or information about Duke in the caption e.g., "So in love with this handsome puppers 🐶 he's been trying to give me as many kisses as possible all morning and it's just making my heart melt ❤️ #adoptdontshop #NFTatHome" (@noelledowning 12.6.2017). The friends and

influencer colleagues of Downing are somewhat regularly accompanying Downing particularly in connection to advertorials, contests or giveaways and travelling content. These can be part of the multi-influencer campaigns that Leaver *et. al.* (2020: 116) present in their analysis of advertorial influencer content.

The joint content creation with Downing's friends and colleagues also segues to the next form of typical lifestyle influencer content: travel. The data set includes multiple different cases of content creation that document Downing's travelling experiences which usually happen with her friends or husband. The onus of predictability is not on the locations of travel themselves necessarily being predictable but rather in the production of travelling content in an influencer typical form. Such content relies on a travelogue kind of style popularised by travel blogs where insight about the destination is given through an average person who has personal experience of the destination (Duffy 2019: 572). Downing constructs these travelling experiences as narratives that take place over several Instagram posts and photos during the trip, thus enabling the documentation of the journey relatively close to real-time.

Often these narratives begin with a post documenting the trip starting by announcing the destination accompanied by a photo with travel bags at an airport. The end point is often similar and depicts Downing's return to New York City. These travelling experiences are also sometimes revisited in the form of a retrospective where Downing might reminisce about the trip in a longing fashion e.g., "Dreaming of the morning in Tokyo ✈ and not just because the time difference made me a morning person, which I usually am not! 😖 But because my Tokyo vlog just went live over on my YouTube channel! Hit the link in my bio to watch the full video 🎥🎥🎥" (@noelledowning 18.1.2018). The caption also captures the documentation aspect of travel content through the announcement of a YouTube video blog being released. Advertorials can be weaved into the travel content as well and such practice is employed by Downing in multiple instances. Even the sponsorship of the whole trip or parts of it is implied by some of Downing's content. Duffy (2019: 572) surmises on the paradox of such travel blogging which relies on amateur opinion supposedly not influenced by commerciality and thus more authentic. Downing attempts to mitigate the commerciality by making the travel content in a format that is established and predictable to construct authenticity.

Ultimately, travel content is far less common than the bread and butter of lifestyle influencer content: documentation of both the mundane and exceptional day-to-day life. The everyday life of Downing gains the most coverage in the content through her life at home and around New York City. The content at home is often focused on showcasing daily routines such as getting dressed and presenting the outfit of the day, cooking, eating, watching television, reading a book, listening to music, working or just plain relaxing. The content around New York is then focused mostly on Downing (sometimes with her husband or friends) attending different events, visiting cafes and restaurants, documenting outfits at different places both iconic and mundane, and generally depicting Downing's life in transit.

The construction of authenticity through predictability hinges on the balance of mundane and exceptional in the end by making them appealing through access to the front and back regions of the influencer's life where the front region is the actual activity or location of the influencer and the back region is realized through further specification by the influencer particularly through captions. Examples of this distinction are available in Figure 8.10. which realizes the front through its visual content of Downing shopping at a farmer's market in NYC while the caption provides the back region personal details from her life and past that expands beyond the visual content. Another example in Figure 8.11. from the privacy of Downing's home realizes the physical back region very efficiently by representing Downing's weekend with her pets in a bedroom photo (5.1.2019).

Figure 8.10. Illustration of front and back region distinction in visual and written content (@noelledowning 7.6.2018), edited to include the whole caption

Figure 8.11. Illustration of the physical back region (@noelledowning 5.1.2019)

8.2.2. Spontaneity

The construction of authenticity through spontaneity is largely dependent on visual representations and their arrangement into posts. Authenticity through spontaneity in the Instagram Feed of @noelledowning is constructed of pre-arranged elements made to seem spontaneous. This construction is achieved through selfie style photography, representations of on-going activity or implications of previous activity through objects, arrangements of objects for photography, and certain distinct poses.

Selfie-style photography is mostly prevalent in the 2017 and 2018 representations. The importance of the selfie for spontaneity construction lies in its function of highlighting the photographer in addition to the person being photographed since they are the same person (Jurgenson 2019). The inclusion of the photographer extends the point of view to the back region of the influencer which can be shared through selfies (Jurgenson 2019). The selfie can be used to allow followers access to the influencer as they see themselves (Jurgenson 2019). However, deletion of unsuccessful shots and choosing and editing of images to publish are invisible forms of spontaneity construction (Jurgenson 2019; Zappavigna 2015: 273). Essentially, through publishing selfies Downing captures

instantaneous and spontaneous moments that are nonetheless constructed through curation by editing and deleting photos.

The representations of activity and previous actions in the photos construct spontaneity through implying either an action that is taking place when the photo has been taken or has happened earlier. This representation can be achieved through photographing Downing in the process of eating, drinking, choosing clothes, getting dressed, applying make-up or cosmetics, or simply going about her business in the streets of NYC. These representations typically contain an element of ongoing action as seen in Figure 8.12. where Downing is posing for the camera but also holding the latte drink in her hand as if she was mid drinking. Such photos are also prominent in advertorials as seen in Figure 8.13. where Downing is testing a pair of jeans during a bike ride which is documented mid-action.

Figure 8.12. Illustration of ongoing action realized through a drink in hand (@noelledowning 21.1.2019)
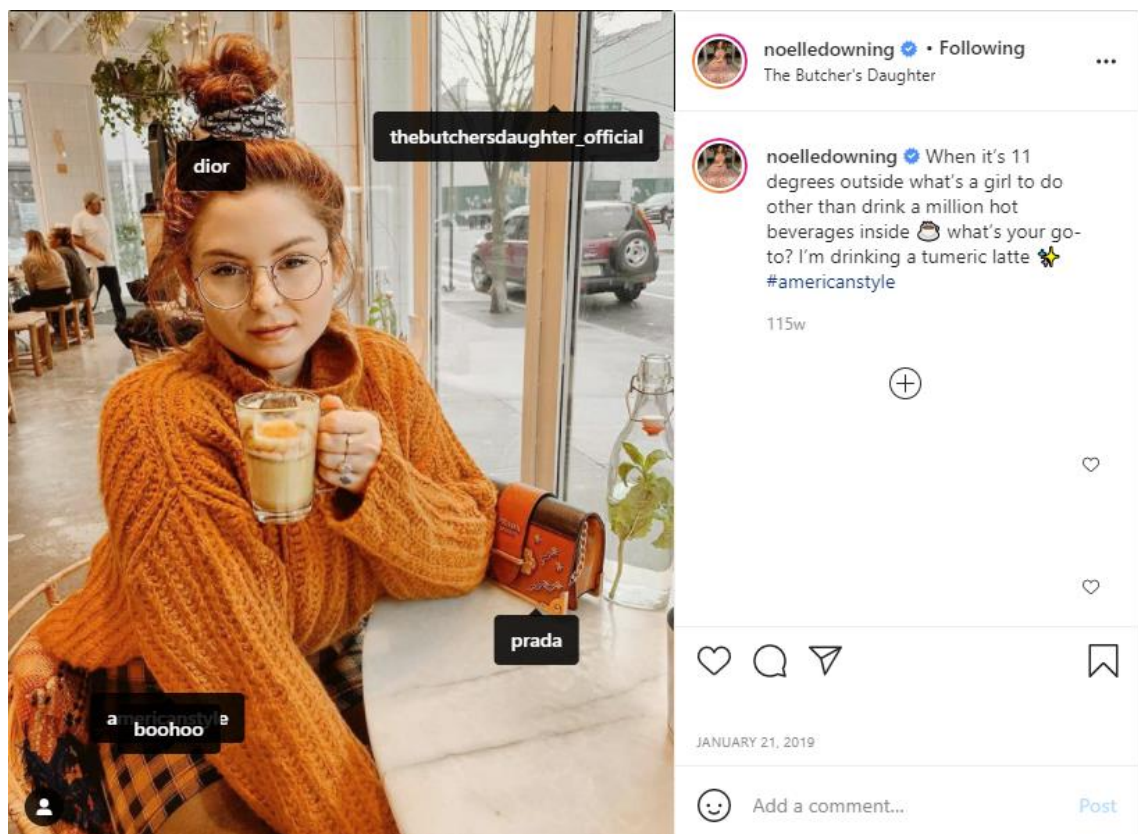
Figure 8.13. Illustration of ongoing action in an advertorial (@noelledowning 25.6.2018)

Another way of constructing spontaneity within the confines of the Instagram Feed is possible through appropriating a common trope of organizing food, drinks, or other objects together to form curated ensembles that when photographed mask the effort spent in making them (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 72). This practice is presented in Figure 8.14. where the blueberry muffins mentioned in the caption and Downing's body are arranged for the photo. The arrangement of the body also connects with the way of indicating spontaneity through different poses that indicate activity. A prominent example of this can be seen in Figure 8.15. where Downing is toasting a drink with a person (likely her husband) who is otherwise outside of the photo. The post and the photo then document a spontaneous but constructed snapshot of relaxation at Downing's home.

Figure 8.14. Illustration of constructed spontaneity (@noelledowning 1.1.2017)

Figure 8.15. Illustration of spontaneity construction through activity (@noelledowning 8.1.2019)

8.2.3. Immediacy

The construction of authenticity through immediacy relies on Downing explicitly connecting the visual and written content together temporally to contextualize the interpretation of the representations and to authenticate what Downing has posted is indeed temporally relevant in her daily lifestyle. Instagram by nature can facilitate the sharing of content in real time but the curated, and aesthetically pleasing platform vernacular of the Instagram Feed discourages such content creation and directs more immediate and spontaneous content towards different content creation methods such as Instagram Stories (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 59). Indicating the temporal link then emerges as a strategy to construct immediacy on the Instagram Feed.

The most explicit form of immediacy construction centres on linguistic marking of content through using expressions of time e.g., now, today, yesterday, this weekend, this morning or mentioning specific days of the week. The linguistic marking is often used in conjunction with cross-promotional activity guiding the follower to more content on Downing's blog, Instagram stories, or YouTube channel. An amalgamation of both practices is present in the following caption: "Just my lil fluffy baby ❤️ Incase you missed it, I have a q+a up on my YouTube channel all with questions you guys asked me! Hit the link in my bio to have a look 💫 and happy Friday! #americanstyle #asseenonme" (@noelledowning 26.1.2018). The usage of cross-promotion can even be used to imbue immediacy to a picture that was taken earlier as illustrated in the following caption: "Paris lookbook is now live on my YouTube channel! Plus all the details on this disco ball skirt 💫 link in bio! #NFTTravel #americanstyle" (@noelledowning 3.6.2018). Here the posting of a picture from the trip to Paris is made relevant through the new lookbook (sic) to construct the immediacy.

The construction of immediacy can also be done through narratives of multiple posts or photos in addition to single posts. The already mentioned travelogues construct the immediacy through representing Downing's travel experience on a day-to-day basis. Additionally, narratives spanning multiple photos can also highlight immediacy by allowing the followers to experience the events unfolding. Examples include a narrative of Downing balancing books and her cat on her head (@noelledowning 22.6.2018), a haircare tutorial that documents the process in detail (@noelledowning 26.1.2019), a

two-photo narrative contrasting New Year's Eve with New Year's Day (@noelledowning 1.1.2019), and a narrative that documents a whole weekend (@noelledowning 13.1.2020).

8.2.4. Confessions

Authenticity construction through *confessions* employ both the front and the back region of influencer. The sharing of personal details, both minor and major, for followers to relate to enables Downing to construct authenticity through confessional content. Such content takes multiple ideational and interpersonal forms through the captions where Downing operates on the front region by sharing mundane details and on the back region by sharing highly personal details of her past and of her relationships with her husband and friends. The highly personal details also concentrate on Downing's perceptions of her body through body positivity centred content, her dreams and goals, and private life at home. The mundane details focus particularly on documenting fondness of clothes, pop-culture phenomena, food and drinks, and hobbies and activities.

The construction of authenticity through the mundane varies somewhat regarding the specific details Downing shares with her followers. Clothing related content often relies on Downing explicating a piece of clothing as something that particularly appeals to her or is her "favourite". These confessionals may or may not be in connection with an advertorial e.g., "When you find a worthy strapless bra honestly you just gotta snap a pic with her �" (@noelledowning 12.6.2020) or "New favorite outfit ❤️ and of course it's by the cutest @modcloth and apart of their amazing Pride collection ❤️ #ModclothSquad #sponsored" (@noelledowning 24.6.2020). In the first caption Downing explicates on her recent find of a useful strapless bra as notable for sharing whereas the second caption follows a typical form of clothing content advertorials where Downing calls a piece of clothing or an outfit a favourite of hers. However, Downing uses the designation of favourites often which raises a question of the believability and authenticity of such appraisals.

Another mundane detail which constructs authenticity is the sharing of identification with pop-culture phenomena by Downing. The most distinct of these is the Harry Potter- fandom where fans are often called "potterheads" (Peyron 2018). Downing posts content where she is dressed in appropriate costume and includes #potterhead as a

method of further self-identification with the fandom as seen in Figure 8.16. Such self-identification is also important in authenticating oneself as a true fan even if in the Harry Potter fandom, the standard for a "potterhead" is not stable (Peyron 2018). Considering the enormous success of the book and film series, identifying oneself with the fandom acts as a detail for fellow fans to build relatability on, which constructs Downing's authenticity towards them.

Figure 8.16. Illustration of confession through Harry Potter- themed content (@noelledowning 9.6.2018)

The sharing of personal details of the back region operates through multiple forms of content creation. A distinct form of a confessional is the "random things about me" approach where Downing grants access to the back region through sharing personal details both past and present. This form of content is very effective in constructing authenticity through distinct ideational, interpersonal, and textual means. An illustrative example is presented in Figure 8.17. where Downing links the ideational content of grocery shopping at a farmer's market in NYC to the interpersonal connection provided by the sharing of details such as being a vegetarian and documenting her past in NYC into a textual construction of a list format in the caption.

Figure 8.17. Illustration of confessions authenticity construction through ideational, interpersonal, and textual means (@noelledowning 7.6.2018), edited to include the whole caption

Another strand of confessional content creation emerges from the body positivity focus of Downing's posts. These posts often include retrospective captions looking into Downing's past insecurities with her body and how she has overcome them. They may also be accompanied by distinctively revealing outfits highlighting the focus on the body in the visual content. The textual construction can take the form of a narrative, but other options are also available. Interpersonally, Downing also addresses the audience through her show of acceptance, affirmation and encouragement towards the bodies of her followers as evident in short captions e.g., "Curvy and cute 💗 being soft is okay 💗 #bodypositivity" (@noelledowning 4.1.2020) and "Love yourself 💗 take that trip 💗 wear that swimsuit 💗 be fearless 💗 feel those negative voices just fall to the side when you do 💗 #bodypositive #selflove" (@noelledowning 30.6.2019). These captions also highlight the use of the heart emoji as an intensifier and conveyor of emotion and a way to textually emphasize ideational content through demarcating written text. Particularly the use of emojis as ways to enhance and convey emotion are typical among influencers (Ge and Gretzen 2018: 1284).

The use of back region access through confessionals in Downing's representations is further enhanced in the group representations with her husband. These representations often centre on Downing confessing her love and appreciation for her husband in various ways. In terms of textual organization, such captions can take the form of brief declarative statements e.g., "I love you 🧡" (@noelledowning 10.6.2020) and "My

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favorite thing about Saturday is you ❤️" (@noelledowning 12.1.2019) which emphasize the intimate emotions of Downing for the followers to experience. These captions are in both posts supported by the visual content in terms of the back-region access by providing an offer representation of both Downing and her husband which is further enhanced through the high-angle representations of Downing and her husband in sharing an intimate moment in bed in the June 2020 photos. More expansive options for Downing to represent intimacy between her and her husband in the captions are also present in the data. The most distinct examples include a post that simultaneously provides the followers with personal details of Downing's father while connecting the topic towards her husband as a father in the future and a father to their pets in the present (@noelledowning 17.6.2019). Notably, Downing again employs the demarcation of written text through emphasis with heart emojis. A different example, and an atypical form of caption is employed when Downing utilizes a poem from a well-known "Instagram- poet" Rupi Kaur to channel her feelings towards her husband (@noelledowning 9.1.2017). The very distinct form of textual construction realizes a similar goal as the brief captions presented earlier.

The private back-region access is further evident in Downing's sharing of her hopes, dreams, goals, and plans particularly present in posts made close to the start of a new year. In sharing such details, Downing produces content that followers can find relatable in terms of their own aspirations in life which coincides with a major trend in influencer content creation where curation of content often directs towards an ideal construction of the life as lived that followers could aspire towards (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 104). However, consistently with her adoption of body positivity, Downing also underscores the aspirational content with qualifiers that direct the interpretation. Figure 8.18. and Figure 8.19. exemplify efforts by Downing to construct aspirational content which considers the fact that hopes, dreams, and goals are recognized as exciting and valuable tools for improving one's life while also emphasizing that loving oneself as you are remains important. In the post from 2019, the hashtags #bodypositivity and #selflove also act as textual organizers of the meaning construction further guiding the interpretation of the caption.

Figure 8.18. Illustration of aspirational body positivity content (@noelledowning 2.1.2019)

Figure 8.19. Illustration of aspirational body positivity content (@noelledowning 2.1.2020)

The authenticity construction through confessions operates through the sharing of both the front and the back region of Downing with an emphasis on providing access to the

private life of the influencer typically inaccessible to other people. This conforms with Abidin's (2015) ideas of perceived interconnectedness particularly through disclosive intimacy towards followers to increase relatability and authenticity.

8.2.5. Ordinariness

The category of *ordinariness*, much like confessions, focuses on using both the front and the back region. Ordinariness is presented in the data as representations that consciously contrast the glamorous and curated nature of the Instagram Feed with representations that attempt to achieve relatability through ordinariness. There are multiple ways of achieving ordinariness per se, but the focus in this category is on distinct representations or series of representations that explicitly contrast glamorous representations with representations of ordinariness. Such contrasting can be achieved through textual organization within a single post or between multiple different posts, ideational linkage of different types of representations, and through interpersonal communication by directly interacting with followers and establishing reciprocity.

The textual organization of content to emphasize ordinariness can be realized efficiently through the incorporation of multiple representations in a single post. A very distinct example of this method is visible in Figure 8.20. where Downing shares two different representations of herself with the caption: "December 31st vs January 1st 🤣❤️🙇" (@noelledowning 1.1.2019). The first representation depicts Downing in a glittery dress and a headband that spells "2019" while wearing distinct makeup thus contributing to a glamorous and polished overall representation which is starkly contrasted with the representation in the second photo where Downing is laying down on a sofa with no discernible make-up on and in an ordinary flannel shirt. The representations thus play on an idea of documenting both the glamorous night out celebrating New Year's Eve and giving back region access to the morning after which is distinctly more ordinary and thus balances the glamorous representation. These two representations also connect with a different post made in the same day (@noelledowning 1.1.2019) where Downing also documents the glamorous of her New Year's Eve at Times Square thus also establishing a narrative of continuity through separate Instagram posts.

Figure 8.20. Illustration of ordinariness authenticity construction (@noelledowning 1.1.2019), edited to include both visual representations
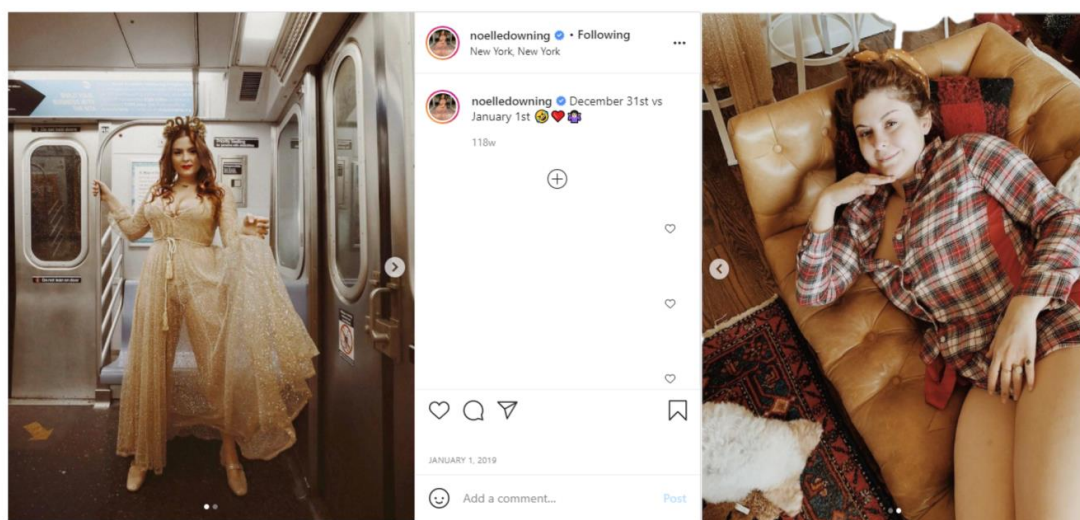
The contrasting in terms of textual organization can also be realized within a single post where some ideational elements convey glamour which is then contrasted by other such elements. Such situations can arise for example in relation to Downing's travelling content and how it is constructed to downplay the idea of travel as a glamorous activity. A distinct example of this can for example be seen in Downing's trip to China which according to her post was also sponsored (@noelledowning 19.6.2017). The contrast is achieved e.g., in the following caption "Seeing things around the world I never thought I'd see 💗 being a girl from a small town in Louisiana, it feels unreal to get these experiences // @visitchina #VisitChina #NFTTravel" (@noelledowning 22.6.2017). The caption contrasts the experience of glamorous travel with the ordinariness of Downing's past and how she still cannot believe that someone like her gets to have experiences like this. Simultaneously, Downing is also sharing funny and mundane moments from the trip in addition to the spectacular which also further enhances the contrast of glamorous and ordinary. Similar contrasting can be found in later travelogues as well e.g., on representations of Downing's trip with her friend to Costa Rica in January of 2020 (@noelledowning 26.1.2020 and @noelledowning 27.1.2020).

The trip to China is an emblematic experience of interpersonal contrasting of glamour and ordinariness as well. Downing routinely exclaims her joy in being able to share her travel experiences with her followers which constructs commonality and relatability towards her followers and downplays the inherent glamorous aspect of a sponsored trip

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to a faraway country as visible in the following caption: "We took a flight this morning into Lanzhou and drove to Yongzhou Country and it is so beautiful! 🚌The whole ride was filled with stunning mountains I can't wait to share more of on here for you guys CN while I was having this photo taken, about 25 locals were also taking photos of me 🤣 it was hilarious and I'll try to share more on my stories tomorrow! The 12 hour time difference from NYC really has be exhausted today so off to bed I go 😵 @visitchina #visitChina #NFTTravel" (@noelledowning 19.6.2017).

The contrast of ordinariness and glamour is a large facet of the ideationally body positivity themed content. Body positivity is foundationally related to ordinariness in the sense that it celebrates the representation and appreciation of all kinds of bodies. However, as Downing's representations exhibit, it can also be used to downplay aspects of glamour. Such usage is most prevalent in content that is both travel and body positivity related such as Downing's trips to Mexico or Iceland. Examples from these trips are included in Figure 8.21. and Figure 8.22. Both images include a visual representation of Downing in swimwear on the beach (Mexico) and at the Blue Lagoon (Iceland). The captions of the images depict both Downing's own thoughts on body positivity in relation to her own body while also interpersonally communicating towards the followers the importance of acceptance of one's own body. The usage of body positivity then downplays the glamour aspects of travel and increases the relatability and subsequently the authenticity of these representations through textual, ideational, and interpersonal meaning constructions.

Figure 8.21. Illustration of body positivity ordinariness construction (@noelledowning 29.1.2020)

Figure 8.22. Illustration of body positivity ordinariness construction (@noelledowning 19.6.)

Closely in connection with the body is clothing, which also features in contrasting glamour and ordinariness. Downing does not comment regularly on financial costs of her clothing or accessories, but she does sometimes attempt to downplay a luxury item present in her representations with captions e.g., "Went a little bit Gucci at the Gucci store 😅🤣 But I got some pieces I really love and can't wait to show you guys! I shared a pair of the loafers I got on my IG stories if you want to peek! 😊 Wearing my favorite pair of jeans and a cozy @asos_us sweater today" (@noelledowning 31.1.2017) and "Can you tell I like Tokyo? 🌈 JP Also never thought I'd buy a fanny pack but here I am splurging on a Prada one 🤐 Life is funny like that. Never say never! #NFTTravel" (@noelledowning 1.1.2018). In the first caption, Downing implies through a humorous opening sentence ("Went a little Gucci at the Gucci store 😅🤣") and the accompanying emojis that her shopping spree may have been a little impulsive and even out of character but justifies this behaviour by explaining that she bought items she values dearly ("But I got some pieces I really love and can't wait to show you guys!") and also that she wishes to showcase them to her followers thus increasing the relatability of the post by making it a shared experience. Further contrasting of the glamorous is done through specifically highlighting a cheap clothing brand (Asos) and her favourite jeans. Such contrasting of glamour and ordinariness through mixing and matching of more expensive and cheaper clothing is a strategy for maintaining relatability for lifestyle bloggers and influencers (Duffy 2017: 109-110).

The second caption by Downing presents much the same idea through the idea of purchasing a fanny pack, which are often very affordable, as something not suited for her but nevertheless ending up buying one from a luxury brand. Downing acknowledges the nature of her spending as extravagant and out of character with the word 'splurge' and through the emoji with the closed zipper as a mouth that situates this splurge as something not to be shouted from the rooftops, thus further emphasizing that such action is not the norm for her. Through these meaning constructions Downing downplays the purchase of a luxury items to maintain relatability and subsequently authenticity despite the display of items that may not be attainable for many followers. Duffy's (2017: 109-110) interviews with bloggers and influencers have pointed towards maintaining such balance as an important part of authenticity management.

The method of appealing to ordinariness is closely related to Abidin's (2018: 71) concept of calibrated amateurism in the sense that the representations are nonetheless curated but there is a distinct attempt at downplaying the glamorous and curated nature of the representations.

8.2.6. Ambivalence

There was a distinct lack of captions that demonstrated ambivalence in the data. This may reflect the very consciously constructed nature of the Instagram Feed, where displaying overt hesitance towards revealing truths about oneself may ultimately come across as more fake than authentic. Downing occasionally refers to past insecurities particularly in connection to body image and her bodily features but such captions do not demonstrate a discernible hesitance over revealing the past insecurities in the present. There is a single example of a caption that demonstrates ambivalence: "Almost missed our stop trying to get that cool subway pic 🤪🤪 but we made it! Continuing this thick thigh journey by sharing another photo I at first glance felt insecure about my thighs in.. but it's me! So here ya go world! 📱" (@noelledowning 25.1.2018). The key to displaying ambivalence in this caption lies in the commentary on the hesitance in sharing the photo due to current insecurity over the bodily representation. Downing documents her overcoming of such insecurities in multiple bodypositivity focused posts (all containing at least #bodypositivity as an identifier) dealing with past insecurities (@noelledowning 22.1.2018, @noelledowning 19.6.2018, @noelledowning 24.6.2018, @noelledowning 21.6.2019). Such content is close to ambivalence expression but ultimately falls out of this category due to not demonstrating discernible hesitation towards the posts in the present moment.

8.2.7. Imperfection

The construction of authenticity through imperfection is uncommon in the data. The lack of representations of imperfection being used to contrast the curated nature of the Instagram Feed is somewhat surprising since the employment of imperfection would help in accessing the "supposedly more real" back region of the influencer. The methods for employing imperfection in Downing's content mostly focus on body positivity themed content that explicitly deals with her own bodily imperfections and as such the imperfection representations connect with the previous category of ambivalence. An example of Downing documenting her own imperfections and insecurities focusing on her thighs is found in the following caption: "I used to be so

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insecure about my thick thighs but having thick thighs means you can hold more puppies on your lap, so I've learned to accept it 😛Seriously though I've got everything on these thighs- stretch marks, cellulite, and scars but I've had these babies for a loooong time so I may as well start loving them now ❤️ #nftathome #selflove #americanstyle" (@noelledowning 22.1.2018). The caption deals with Downing's imperfections through explicitly mentioning different bodily features that are framed as imperfections ("stretch marks, cellulite, and scars"). There is however a distinct message that Downing has overcame these insecurities and imperfections through the usage of the past tense ("I used to be so insecure") and present tense call to action for herself ("I may as well start loving them now"). A similar approach is presented in Figure 8.23 where Downing connects her bodily imperfections and their acceptance into an advertorial for a cosmetics product, where she again mentions her having learned to love various features of her body such as stretch marks, stomach, chest, and thighs. Simultaneously, Downing uses textual meaning making tools to demarcate the content that is part of the advertorial by situating the small marker "#ad" after the introduction of body image themed content.

Figure 8.23. Illustration of body positivity in authenticating advertorial content (@noelledowning 13.6.2019), edited to include the whole caption

A different way of constructing authenticity through imperfection is used in Downing's content by presenting photos that deviate from the typically curated nature of the Instagram Feed. Such visual content can also be marked as an imperfect shot or a

"blooper" through a caption as presented in Figure 8.24. The post contains two different photos where the first conforms to a typical curated Instagram aesthetic conforming to what the caption refers to as 'Instagram' whereas the second photo conforms to the 'reality' part of the dichotomy presented in the caption. Thus, the first photo realizes the typical Instagram Feed content while the second contrasts it by providing back region access through an imperfect shot. Simultaneously, Downing also comments on the nature of Instagram content creation and its inherent constructed nature. The 'Instagram vs reality' posts are rather common in connection with body positivity themed content where the focus is on highlighting the lack of editing or retouching (Lazuka *et. al.* 2020: 90).

Figure 8.24. Illustration of ordinariness authenticity construction through Instagram vs. reality content (@noelledowning 27.6.2018), edited to include both representations

8.2.8. Engagement

Authenticity construction through *engagement* is a ubiquitous feature in Downing's Instagram Feed posts. There are multiple ways in which Downing takes into consideration her followers by directly or indirectly making their presence acknowledged in the captions. Such methods include but are not limited to: direct or rhetoric questions, sharing advice or affirmation, soliciting advice or affirmation from followers, directing followers to other platforms through cross-promotion, exclaiming excitement over sharing something with her followers, referring to past interactions with followers, and providing information on future posts. Additionally, certain types of posts also feature engagement especially often such as contests and advertorial content.

The most distinct and direct form of engagement towards the followers is Downing's use of direct and rhetoric questions which invite a response from the followers. The use of the questions is in showing that Downing values her followers' opinions, thus enforcing relations between her and the followers to help in constructing authenticity. Simultaneously, since increasing visibility on Instagram is boosted by likes and comments, these questions also help Downing in reaching audiences on Instagram. Thus, there is also a somewhat covert self-interested aspect to the questions which may also be taken to detract from authenticity. Downing's use of direct questions is shown in the following examples: "Where you can find me this weekend: spending quality time at home with my boys 🐶🐰❤️ are y'all up to anything other than cuddling your pets?! 🤣 #NFTatHome" (@noelledowning 5.1.2019) and "3 looks I styled wearing some new pieces I got in ✨ mixed with some oldie but goodies! Which ones your favorite look 1,2, or 3?! #americanstyle" (@noelledowning 15.1.2020). Both captions display Downing asking a direct question: in the first caption about the weekend plans of her followers and in the second caption about their favourite outfit in post with a three-photo set. Downing typically connects the questions with the overall theme of the post. An example of a rhetorical question in the data set is present in the following caption: "Guess what will be live tomorrow on my YouTube channel?! A mini glasses lookbook! 👓 You guys asked for it so much and I finally made one! I can't wait to share it 👜 Leave me a comment below to let me know what other sorts of things you want to see me share on my blog and YouTube channel!" (@noelledowning 5.6.2017). The preceding caption is opened by a question that is answered by Downing herself and thus serves as a rhetoric device to engage the followers with the text. Additionally, the caption also contains elements of other engagement methods such as responding to follower demand and exclaiming happiness over sharing to followers, direct solicitation of follower comments, and cross-promotion of other social media platforms.

Addressing the followers can also happen by giving advice or words of affirmation. The advice is often derived from Downing's own experiences with or without an advertorial linkage and the affirmation is often linked to body positivity themed content. Giving of advice is particularly common in connection with advertorials since they are essentially recommendations of products and services by the influencer. Simultaneously, Downing connects her own experiences and the usefulness of the product for her specific needs and expands to give advice about products and their use to the followers. This process is

visible in Figure 8.25. where Downing exclaims how well the advertised swimwear suits her body and the multiple options of colours. Downing also recommends the swimwear particularly to people with similar body types. Other forms of engagement are also incorporated such as using capital letters and an exclamation mark for emphasis when first addressing the reader and directing them to shop on the brand's Instagram page. These forms of engagement very much conform with the use of intimacy for commercial purposes as identified by Abidin (2015) in her research.

Figure 8.25. Illustration of engagement in advertorial content (@noelledowning 17.6.2017)

The giving of affirmation is also a show of intimacy towards the followers. An interesting example emerges again connected with swimwear and is also more covertly commercial. In the caption of Figure 8.26. Downing showers the followers with affirmation in the form of imperatives in which she encourages the addressees to live life without fear or judgment from others. This message is coupled with the hashtags #bodypositivity and #selflove which Downing frequently uses to textually categorize

and her content and show alignment interpersonally with the body positivity "movement" in a manner consistent with the findings of Zappavigna (2018: 41) in terms of hashtag usage on social media. Downing uses intimacy again to make commercial content relatable even though this time the focus is on her own brand Noelle by Noelle.

Figure 8.26. Illustration of affirmation in body positivity content (@noelledowning 30.6.2019)

The giving of advice and affirmation is not a one-way street for Downing for there is a distinct reciprocal element involved. Downing routinely asks for follower advice or opinions and appears to also solicit follower affirmation. An example of a simple caption with Downing asking for follower opinions is present in the following: "What's your fav drink to keep you warm?! Mines an almond chai latte 🎇🥤☕ My favvvv ever" (@noelledowning 10.1.2018). The soliciting of advice may also concern for example travel tips which enables the followers to share their expertise or knowledge with Downing e.g., "First trip of 2019!!! 🎇I'm headed to Tulum with @rachmartino and WE ARE SO EXCITED! If you have any favorite restaurants or recommendations

let me know! ❤️MX #NFTTravel" (@noelledowning 27.1.2019). The message is further emphasized with the exclamation mark and heart emoji. Questions and solicitation of advice or opinions is also part and parcel of advertorial posts as seen in the following caption: "💍💍💍Shopping for a second wedding dress at @davidsbridal and I NEED YOUR HELP! Which one is your favorite!? 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5? I'm obsessed with all of them and especially love the gold one! Absolutely blown away by the ranges and prices they have at #DavidsBridal it's insane! Shop my favorite's here or on my blog: http://liketk.it/2Cnd9 #liketkit @liketoknow.it" (@noelledowning 7.6.2019). In this caption, Downing emphasizes her need for follower advice with a call for help emphasized by the capital letters and exclamation mark. This approach directs attention to the follower advice while also showcasing the products in a way that is weaved into the content. Downing's upcoming wedding is also used as a tie-in for the content to naturalize it further in a practice documented by Leaver *et. al.* (2020: 120-121).

Downing often directs her followers to her different social media platforms particularly in the data from 2017 and 2018. This cross-promotional activity can be performed to utilize the synergies from the different platforms in directing followers to content they may not necessarily notice otherwise. The 2017 and 2018 timeframes mainly include directing of followers from Instagram to Downing's blog or YouTube channel, or from the Feed post to Downing's Instagram Stories for additional content. This approach implies that during these timeframes the blog was still an integral part of Downing's content creation and the recent addition of Instagram Stories was something that Downing specifically directed followers towards. The later timeframes of 2019 and 2020 scarcely include any mentions of the blog or directions to check Instagram Stories. The function of these directives may be purely self-serving for Downing in the sense that gaining more traffic for her platforms is beneficial for her career as a lifestyle influencer. This may undermine Downing's authenticity due to motivation outside of the self being visible at least to audiences aware of the logic.

However, Downing mitigates this by emphasizing that she enjoys sharing this content with the followers which then connects with motivation from the inner self to enhance authenticity. An example of this type of directing of cross-promotional traffic is present in the following caption: "Guess what will be live tomorrow on my YouTube channel?! A mini glasses lookbook! 🤓 You guys asked for it so much and I finally made one! I

can't wait to share it 🚕 Leave me a comment below to let me know what other sorts of things you want to see me share on my blog and YouTube channel!" (@noelledowning 5.6.2017). In the caption, Downing exclaims her enjoyment in making the glasses look book and her impatience and excitement over getting to share it with her followers which both imply her inner motivation for providing this content and thus detract from the cross-promotional outer motivation to gain more traffic to her YouTube profile. This claiming of inner motivation connects with the ideas from Lehman *et. al.* (2019a: 21) and Kovács (2019: 35) of inner motivation being more authentic and of the need for balancing inner and outer motivations to achieve consistency in construction of authenticity.

Downing shares her enthusiasm over presenting her life to her followers in multiple other instances as well. This method of displaying inner self motivation and desire to provide something that the followers would enjoy is visible in the following caption: "I'm so excited to share with y'all... that WE ARE MOVING!!!! 🙀 🙀 🙀 we will still be in Greenpoint so in Brooklyn right by where we live now but moving into a gorgeous space that I couldn't be more excited about! More importantly lots of outdoor space that Duke will LOVE! Woo!! #NFTatHome" (@noelledowning 4.6.2019). In the caption, Downing emphasizes both her excitement about moving to a new apartment while introducing the subject by emphasizing how excited she is to share this detail with her followers thus highlighting the pleasure she gains from the actual sharing of what is happening in her life. The displays of enthusiasm over sharing with followers is also used in connection with advertorials as seen in the following caption: "After a 14 hour makeup free flight I made it to Beijing! 🛫 I'm so excited to explore China and share everything with you guys! Thanks so much for having me @visitchina CN the flight over was pretty wonderful! I watched Beaty & the Beast & Table 19 and slept for like 8 hours 😴 #NFTTravel #VisitChina" (@noelledowning 19.6.2017). This post marks the beginning of Downing's travels in China which span a series of posts in the travelogue style. The caption indicates the sponsorship (Thanks so much for having me @visitchina CN) while Downing simultaneously frames the trip also as an exciting opportunity to share her travels and China with her followers. Invoking inner motivation and pleasure from the sharing can thus also be used to make advertorial content more authentic.

A further method for indicating that Downing engages with and takes into consideration her followers in the content creation process is the acknowledgement and addressal of past follower question or requests. Through this method Downing can show that she wants to build intimacy with her followers also through reciprocity much in the vein that Abidin (2015) has identified earlier. The building of reciprocity can be observed in how Downing responds to follower questions and provides new content based on past follower requests as seen in the following two captions, respectively: "Post hike acai smoothie 🧡 also I get asked about my favorite workout clothing a lot and @beyondyoga is my ultimate favorite! Especially their #katespadeny collection! They have the best high waisted yoga pants you could ever buy! #NFTTRAVEL" (@noelledowning 10.1.2017), and "Guess what will be live tomorrow on my YouTube channel?! A mini glasses lookbook! 👓 You guys asked for it so much and I finally made one! I can't wait to share it 🚕 Leave me a comment below to let me know what other sorts of things you want to see me share on my blog and YouTube channel!" (@noelledowning 5.6.2017). In the first caption Downing mentions past questions about her favourite workout clothing as an added impetus for posting which indicates reciprocity by answering follower questions. The second caption indicates how Downing also takes ideas for her content from requests that her followers make. Fulfilling those requests then allows for reciprocity to be utilized in building relationships with the followers.

A salient use for engagement emerges in connection with contests and advertorials where the focus is on instructing the followers in how to enter the contest or in exclaiming the benefits of advertised products and services to the followers. Contests could be taken to be yet another form of building intimacy through reciprocity since Downing is giving a chance for followers to win something for themselves. In advertorials Downing often uses questions that are directed towards the followers and related to the advertised product or service as seen in the following caption: Who else just loves zoning out in their room to a great track!? 🎧 Music just relaxes me like nothing else and @Mastercard believes in the power of people and the connections we can all make together! That is why they have collaborated with up and coming global musicians to bring its sonic identity into the next decade! Check out Mastercard's first-ever single, "Merry Go Round," by up-and-coming artist Nadine Randle on your favorite music streaming services! #mastercardambassador" (@noelledowning

25.1.2020). The caption begins with Downing addressing the followers with a question which is related to the ideational content of the advertorial where the credit card company Mastercard's new music related campaign is presented. The question establishes a relation between Downing and the followers through likeness to Downing's love of listening to music in solitary company.

Overall, engagement is a very salient and multi-faceted method for constructing authenticity through managing relations towards followers. Many of the ways in which Downing uses engagement rely on expressing inner motivation in maintaining relations towards the followers which can be used to obfuscate external motivations that engagement also facilitates such as soliciting comments for increased visibility on Instagram. Additionally, engagement is an integral part of contests and advertorial content where the building of intimacy through relational work can be used to naturalize the advertorials and make them more authentic.

This section further expanded on how Downing constructs authenticity by primarily analysing written language in her Instagram Feed content. Having now established methods of authenticity construction both through visual social actor representations and through mediated authenticity construction primarily in the written captions, the next section will consider these features in synthesis and analyse authenticity construction in the multimodal ensemble.

8.3. The synthesis: authenticity construction in the multimodal ensemble of Instagram Feed posts

The analysis of the construction of authenticity in the multimodal ensemble in this section will be conducted through linking together the different features of visual social actor representations and mediated authenticity constructions in terms of their intersemiotic relationships which govern how the modes construct meaning together (Jewitt 2009a: 17). Additionally, factors related to the semiotic technology affordances of Instagram will be considered when analysing Downing's posts and their construction in the Instagram Feed. The analysis will be constructed through presenting specific posts that exemplify how authenticity is constructed through multiple means of visual social actor and mediated authenticity construction working in concordance. The analysis is guided by the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions as they were previously presented through Kress (2009: 59): "In a social semiotic theory any

communicational resource has to fulfil three functions: to be able to represent 'what goes on' in the world – states, actions, events: the *ideational function*; to be able to represent the social relations of those engaged in communication: *the interpersonal function*; and to represent both these as message-entities – texts – coherent internally and with their environment: the *textual function*".

8.3.1. The linking of ideational content

The construction of authenticity through predictability is efficiently conducted in the Instagram Feed by linking of the ideational content. Downing almost universally establishes the ideational links between image and caption in the first sentence or clause of the caption. Examples of these ideational links are presented in Figure 8.27., Figure 8.28., and Figure 8.29. These images showcase somewhat different levels of linkage. Figure 8.27. mainly connects the most salient features of the photo with the caption by connecting Downing's outfit and the bike she is handling with her exclaiming the outfit and bike ride as her favourite things of the day. Figure 8.28. in contrast connects the visual representation of Downing in her closet with elaboration on the content creation process in addition to the connection with the closet thus providing additional information. Finally, Figure 8.29. (7.6.2018) connects the visual of Downing's visit to the farmer's market with Downing's exclamation of how she finds farmer's markets one of the best things about living in New York City. This connection is subsequently expanded to a long-form caption that presents swathes of information about Downing's personal life but nonetheless retains the original connection to the ideational content by focusing especially on NYC- related topics.

Figure 8.27. Illustration of ideational linkage (@noelledowning 13.6.2020)

Figure 8.28. Illustration of ideational linkage (@noelledowning 26.1.2018)

Figure 8.29. Illustration of ideational linkage (@noelledowning 7.6.2018), edited to show the whole caption

The ideational linkages of the captions with the visual contents of the posts are almost universally textually situated in the very first sentence or clause of the caption. Thus, Downing makes sure that the ideational linkage is made from the very beginning and acts to guide the interpretation of the visual content for the followers. This approach leaves room for further specification or deviation from the visual content with various means of authenticity construction. An example of such linkage can be found in Figure 8.30. (8.6.2018) where the first sentence of the caption ("NYC ✈ Cali!") designates Downing's departure to California via airplane as evident of the picture taken with the luggage at the airport. Then, Downing shifts the topic to a personal story about her father passing away using engagement ("I have a story for you guys") authenticity construction and then providing a confessional authenticity construction through the personal story. This caption is further enhanced with the immediacy of the situation linking the personal past of Downing to who she met on the flight in the present. In the last two sentences of the caption, Downing employs authenticity through spontaneity by marking the encounter with the fashion designer as a spontaneous situation where she simply enjoyed the moment, and then through ordinariness by exclaiming how she refrained from documenting this potentially glamorous situation with a selfie. This example showcases the common form of authenticity construction that is initially facilitated by the visual content but is then consciously expanded with multiple different methods of authenticity construction. Much like in this post, the move from the front region of the influencer to the back region is often made possible through the

consciously added ideational content framed through various authenticity constructions functioning in unison.

Figure 8.30. Illustration of ideational linkage in travel content (@noelledowning 8.6.2018)

The ideational linkages between the photos and the captions follow along the lines of the image-text relations in terms of elaboration, expansion, and enhancement as proposed by Martinec and Salway (2005). The ideational linkages act as the background for authenticity constructions through predictability since they allow for Downing to present her life as lived in detail as per social media influencer content conventions. Further authenticity construction through interpersonal relations will be explored next.

8.3.2. The linking of interpersonal content

The combination of interpersonal visual methods and written language methods as constructors of authenticity are used in a multitude of ways throughout Downing's posts. As established earlier, Downing's visual representation regularly relies on making herself available and connecting with her followers through facing them at a close social distance or nearer, being frontally positioned towards followers, demanding

their attention be fixed upon her, and smiling to facilitate generally positive disposition. These features regularly combine with interpersonal methods of authenticity construction such as confessions and engagement as presented in image 8.31. The visual representation in the image consists of a close social distance, a frontally facing position towards the audience, a demand representation with the added help of the camera providing a visual element of interest, and a smile discernible behind the camera. The caption provides context for the picture with the car and the camera Downing is holding through explaining past activities while simultaneously announcing Downing's new car as forms of confessional content. The engagement with followers is realized through Downing's solicitation of personal questions from followers.

Figure 8.31. Illustration of typical interpersonal content and linkage (@noelledowning 23.1.2018)

The content that visually deviates from the general formula as outlined above is also interesting for analysis. More socially distant representations often also incorporate offer representations and are used especially for highlighting travel locations that Downing is visiting as presented in Figure 8.32. Such posts often then also employ

confessions that reveal Downing's thoughts on specific locations and events during a vacation. Through these both the front region accessible places are visible as well as the back region access to Downing's thoughts and opinions. Similarly, offer representations and specific poses can also be used to highlight certain parts of the visual content which is then also made central in the caption such as in Figure 8.33. where the focus is on Downing's body and particularly her thighs. Through the pose with the book covering her face, the photo turns to an offer representation where the caption also instructs the reader on the thighs being central to the content. Downing establishes her past insecurities with the thighs through a confessional authenticity construction which is further amplified through an imperfection construction recalling physical defects that Downing finds about her thighs. However, ultimately the caption establishes a theme of self-acceptance and selflove that is also indicated with the incorporation of #selflove which further guides the interpretation through the textual organisation function of the hashtag.

Figure 8.32. Illustration of socially distant travel content (@noelledowning 21.1.2019), edited to include whole caption

Figure 8.33. Illustration of offer representation used for focusing attention (@noelledowning 22.1.2018)

Interestingly, the photos included in the visual representation category of close social that can bring the follower the closest to Downing in terms of her facial features – selfies, were often used for advertorial content. This was particularly prevalent in the posts from 2017 which included four different advertorials (@noelledowning 22.1.2017, 25.1.2017, 28.1.2017, and 16.7.2017) that connected a selfie of Downing's face with advertorial content for makeup and haircare brands. The advertised products in these posts guide both visual and written content creation. The post from 22.1.2017 presented in Figure 8.34. exemplifies how the visual and written content cooperate in the advertorial through Downing's offer representation that allows the follower to discern her eyeshadow that is mentioned in the caption. Downing constructs authenticity through the immediacy of the photo by linking it temporally and through sharing her own experience in using the product via confessional authenticity construction. A very typical, and overt selfie advertorial is incorporated in the post from 16.6.2017 presented in image 8.35, where Downing uses a pose where she holds the advertised product in the hand that is not taking the picture (Abidin 2016: 7). However, here the caption

expands on the visuals by announcing a meet and greet event with a fellow influencer. This also enables the construction of authenticity particularly through engagement where Downing exclaims her enthusiasm for the event and about the possibility of meeting and getting to know her followers. The use of a very close social distance coupled with the advertorial needs makes selfies a premier showcase of how advertorial content can be authenticated through interpersonal methods.

Figure 8.34. Illustration of visual and written content cooperation in advertorial (@noelledowning 21.1.2017)

Figure 8.35. Illustration of a selfie advertorial (@noelledowning 16.6.2017)

Downing also links interpersonal content between visual and written forms by utilizing engagement through specific poses and then connecting the pose with the written caption. This method of authenticity construction is visible in Figure 8.36., where the pose implies the sharing of the Pocky with the viewer while the caption reinstates the same idea by exclaiming "I'm always willing to share my @Pockyusa with you guys!" (@noelledowning 5.6.2018). The post also employs a confession construction through providing Downing's thoughts about the product in typical editorial fashion. A similar connection between pose and caption is utilized in other posts as well, where it can also serve to construct authenticity in connection with advertorial content.

Figure 8.36. Illustration of interpersonal linkage through pose (@noelledowning 5.6.2018)

The multimodal ensembles present in body positivity themed content exhibit a few prevalent patterns of authenticity creation. Unsurprisingly, Downing's posts with body positivity themes are visually focused on showcasing her body. The focus is particularly visible in terms of exposure of skin, where more revealing representations are often linked to body positivity either through the written caption's overall semantic content or explicitly marked through the hashtag #bodypositive. This practice is presented in Figure 8.37. where Downing voices her current thoughts on different bodies (utilizing immediacy and confessions) and uses engagement with the followers as further authenticity construction. These more revealing representations are often contextualized by Downing in the captions to guide the interpretation. Examples from Figure 8.38. and Figure 8.39. illustrate how very revealing pictures are connected into the body positivity thematic which acts as an authenticity construction through ordinariness. The otherwise possible sexual implications of the poses and levels of exposure of skin in Downing's representations in both images are contextualized by the captions in Figure 8.38. as

overcoming past insecurities and embracing life at its fullest, and in Figure 8.39. as simply being something Downing never thought she could do and is now embracing. Both images construct authenticity through ambivalence and imperfection through documenting the past difficulty for Downing in posting this kind of content while also mentioning the bodily imperfections she used to be concerned about. Overall, connecting more revealing content with the body positivity theme helps to contextualize the deviation from the general level of exposure of skin and helps to avoid issues of consistency that may hurt the authentic image of the influencer (Faleatua 2017: 726-727).

Figure 8.37. Illustration of interpersonal linkage in body positivity content (@noelledowning   29.1.2019)

Figure 8.38. Illustration of authenticity construction through ordinariness in very revealing content (@noelledowning 28.6.2019)

Due to the rising prevalence of body positivity marked content in the data since June 2018, often through hashtags #bodypositive, #selflove, and sometimes through #curvy, there are other functions that body positivity can perform as a constructor of authenticity through ordinariness. One avenue for such construction emerges in contextualizing glamorous content such as travelogues as visible in image 8.40. where Downing and her friend's sponsored holiday trip is documented via a quite typical, engagement laden body positivity post. A different approach but nonetheless fulfilling a similar goal of glamour contrasting with ordinariness is presented in Figure 8.40. where Downing is showcasing her very extensive shoe collection. Interestingly, the caption implies an almost afterthought approach to the incorporation of body positivity through its textually situated position by the captions' end and by beginning the clause with the adverb 'also'. Simultaneously, Downing highlights the prominence of her backside in the images with a colloquial semantic use of the peach emoji (Emojipedia) which is then connected to body positivity with the appropriate hashtag. This inclusion of body positivity alongside the use of engagement and confessions authenticity constructions downplays the apparent glamorousness of the shoe collection.

Figure 8.39. Illustration of authenticity construction through ordinariness in very revealing content (@noelledowning 28.1.2020)

Figure 8.40. Illustration of ordinariness construction (@noelledowning 7.1.2020)

The showcasing of Downing's shoe collection is an example of back region access connected to body positivity. The access to the back region of Downing in connection with the theme also emerges through written content and through Downing's provision of thoughts on bodily issues and different bodies towards the followers. These types of captions often construct a narrative around selflove and acceptance which is then most strongly tied to body image through authenticity construction as confessions. Visually, they may retain certain important qualities such as the strategic exposure of skin as seen in Figure 8.41. where Downing connects her thoughts in written form with a far personal distance representation in underwear.

Figure 8.41. Illustration of body positivity narrative (@noelledowning 2.1.2019), edited to include whole caption

The method of injecting personal stories into captions is a key part of the authenticity construction both through establishing back region access and providing contextualization for Downing's posts. The authenticity construction through confessions in the personal narratives also allows Downing to link ideational visual content in the posts with her past, present, and future in the captions. An example of such practice is visible in the following caption "Last night Danny took me to the ballet to see Romeo and Juliette and it was such an amazing night 💗 my mom was a ballet teacher and it just made me think of how much she'd of enjoyed it 🎇 in other news there is a new Asos try on haul up on my YouTube channel! Link is in my bio 🥴 #asseenonme #nyc #americanstyle" (@noelledowning 12.6.2018). The ideational

content of the visit to the ballet documented in both the visual of the post and in the caption allows Downing to establish a link to her past by mentioning her mother's past as a ballet teacher. This caption also exhibits a sudden topic shift towards self-promotional and advertorial content with Downing making her followers aware of a new clothing showcase of a specific brand.

8.3.3. The linking of content through textual means

The usage of textual features afforded by the semiotic technology means of the Instagram Feed are also important in understanding how Downing's visual representations, captions, and the qualities of the platform together allow specific ways of meaning construction. The linkages made between and within posts through textual means are particularly salient in constructing multi-photo or multi-post narratives such as the travelogues and documentations of specific events. Additional functionalities are provided by hashtags and image tags as ways of both organizing and communicating information and thus affecting meaning. This section will exemplify these methods in practice.

The 'carousel' function of the Instagram Feed enables Downing to post multiple photos in a single post which allows expansion of ideational content and the incorporation of various interpersonal elements into a single post. Perhaps, most importantly through creation of multi-photo posts, arises the possibility of visualizing a narrative construction. Some examples of such narrative constructions include a post about a weekend with friends at home (@noelledowning 13.1.2020), a documentation of a weekend with friends in a hot tub (@noelledowning 23.6.2019), multiple instances of showcasing different representations in connection with a single outfit or theme particularly in June 2020 (@noelledowning 22.6.2020, @noelledowning 26.6.2020, @noelledowning 30.6.2020). The posting of multiple pictures allows Downing to present her life as lived in a more complete way. The post from 13.1.2020 is a prime example of the visual narrative constructing a more complete understanding of the ideational content in conjunction with the caption. Whereas the caption only exclaims Downing's delight with the past weekend and employs ordinariness through highlighting having dinner and playing board games as all one really needs, the visuals provide a more complete picture of the weekend's events both glamorous and ordinary.

Multi-photo posts construct their narratives in a single post and a similar function is realized in multi-post narratives but simply spread over multiple posts. These posts may

share a tight temporal linkage (e.g., posted on consecutive days) or they may also be more temporally spread out. The most typical examples of these narratives are the already mentioned travelogues which weave in multiple forms of ideational and interpersonal meaning constructions that are then textually linked. A prime example includes the China travel narrative from June 2017 which includes a variety of visual imagery and instances of ordinariness displays to balance the glamour of travel. The various posts between 17.6.2017 and 27.6.2017 document the different stages of travel all the way from finishing errands to get ready for the trip to the arrival back at NYC. During this time multiple instances of confessionals about the various aspects of the trip are provided as well as relatively immediate and occasionally spontaneous access to Downing's thoughts and activities. More temporarily dispersed narratives are also used where for example Downing documents her time at the Governor's Ball festival in NYC in three separate posts (@noelledowning 2.6.2017, @noelledowning 3.6.2017, @noelledowning 6.6.2017). The last post acts as a call back to the content seen in the other two posts which allows Downing to reminisce with the followers through a predictability construction by repeating content ideationally linked to previous content. Such posts are not uncommon in relation to travelogues either.

The hashtags, and image tags are important for textual organization of content in addition to their interpersonal and ideational properties. Since hashtags allow Downing to categorize her content, they also help in constructing predictability for followers by providing a repository where to search for similar content (Erz *et. al. 2018*: 50). Hashtags such as #NFTTravel and #NFTatHome categorize travel posts and posts situated at Downing's home. They are quite prevalent in the content and connect with her focus outlined in her profile bio presented earlier. Otherwise, Downing typically uses hashtags in advertorial contexts and in the body positivity themed content where hashtags #bodypositive, #selflove, and #curvy are prominent. The advertorial and body positivity connected hashtags help with the broadcasting function of the hashtags by connecting with brand campaigns or by utilizing the popularity of the body positivity content, in addition to acting as identity constructors for Downing (Page 2012: 184). Hashtags take an important function in authenticity construction by providing a way to signal body positivity themed ordinariness constructions and by helping access content that constructs authenticity through predictability. Additionally, they help in indicating advertorial content both through small markers such as #sponsored or #ad as well as affiliate hashtags such as #ModClothSquad which both fulfil FTC guidelines for

disclosure. Such practice may help in managing authenticity concerns through increased advertorial content recognition tied to disclosures which alleviate concerns of covert advertising (Boerman 2020: 205) (Evans *et. al.* 2017: 145). The practice of disclosure to indicate transparency of advertorials also connects with the strategies proposed by Audrezet *et.al.* (2018) for SMI authenticity management.

Chart 8.1. Distribution of the usage of image tags
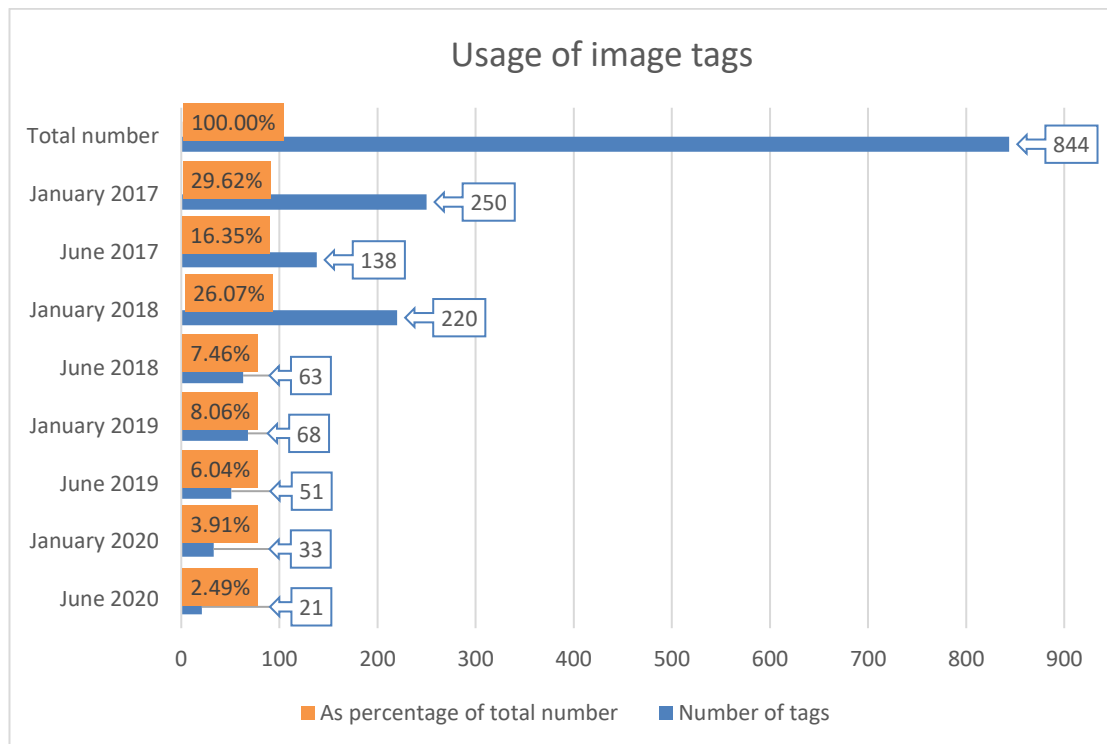
The usage of image tags was previously discussed in connection with the representations of Downing as a visual social actor. Downing's frequency in the usage of the tags is again presented in Chart 8.1. The major decline in frequency of image tag usage also impacts how information was organized with the image tags. In terms of authenticity, some key considerations can be made. The datapoints with significantly larger amounts of tagging (January 2017- January 2018) typically employ tagging of different parts of outfits or documenting many apartment details in the photos. Textual organization in such cases typically situates the tag near the tagged item. Some tags such as @ootdsubmit, @ootdmagazine, and @americanstyle document apps or tools used for content creation and share no immediate connection with the visual content. Through the prevalent use of image tags Downing organizes the interpretation of the visual content through commercial brands that while only visible when activated by the user, nonetheless, indicate a higher degree of commercial linkage. This method of

tagging does not connect with overt advertorial content (disclosed advertorial status) and as such raises authenticity concerns that are not necessarily alleviated through the captions via mediated authenticity methods.

The major decline in tagging also comes with a change in tagging conventions. From June 2018 onwards, Downing uses image tags more sparingly and often to denote specific pieces of clothing or specific details around her apartment instead of attempting to include a wealth of tags. This shift in convention means that tags are more overtly connected with advertorial content since advertorials typically only include the tag connected to the brand and thus textually organize attention to the brand and product in the visual. Some remnants of the previous style of tagging also remain. The even further decline in tagging also sees the emergence of posts with no image tags at all. Such posts are prevalent in January 2020 and especially in June 2020. This trend towards decline in tags is important for textual organization since it eliminates the highlighting of specific products or brands from the visual content which brings greater focus to Downing herself. Such a trend is consistent with systemic shifts towards further interest in relatability of influencers to followers and less interest in aspirational content that followers can emulate based on the commercial success of the influencer (Abidin 2021: 83-84).

8.5. Constructing the authentic through the relatable

This section will answer the research questions of the thesis pertaining to how authenticity and relatability is constructed in the Instagram feed of @noelledowning. The methods of authenticity construction through ideational, interpersonal, and textual means are also presented. This subsection sums up the major findings previously presented and attempts to provide a holistic understanding of authenticity construction through the visual representations and the written content of @noelledowning.

The construction of authenticity in Noelle Downing's Instagram Feed content relies on making linkages between ideational, interpersonal, and textual features of meaning making to construct narratives both within and between posts. Downing typically establishes her content within the common themes of lifestyle social media influencer content: spending time at home, travel, daily experiences around NYC, social and culture events, and various mundane everyday life experiences. These ideational themes form the basis of predictability in the front region of Downing on which the authenticity relies upon. The foundation is expanded through linking the ideational visual content

with captions that repeat, evaluate, and elaborate on the visual, expand with new themes, and thus provide access to the back region of Downing. The expansion takes place by confessions providing details on Downing's thoughts, likes, dislikes, and feelings to the followers about the ideational content, with which they can empathize and interact.

Downing establishes the relevance of her daily experiences by constructing authenticity through immediacy of the content with the explicit use of linguistic marking with expressions of time e.g., now, today, yesterday, this weekend, this morning or mentioning specific days of the week. Such practice is necessary, despite the instantaneous possibility of content creation afforded by Instagram, to ensure that the highly curated photos accurately represent Downing's daily activities. Immediacy is also used to justify the direction of followers to Downing's other social media channels which is in practice also essential for her to gain more traction and visibility and subsequent success in her profession. The highly curated nature of the Instagram Feed does not denounce the possibility of authenticity creation through spontaneity but rather makes a curated spontaneity of the still photo the chosen method by incorporating poses that imply ongoing activity.

The interpersonal communication of the ideational content through visual means is reliant on representing oneself as available to followers. The connection through representations is geared towards maintaining a close social distance, facing the front of the body towards the followers, positioning oneself as equal to the followers, demanding the attention from the follower while also offering them a chance to observe, maintaining a facial expression that generates positive emotions, and wearing modest clothing or contextualizing the wearing of revealing clothing appropriately. The representation of interpersonal relation and intimacy towards the followers is conducted through the congruence of front and back region access where the front region represents the general and expected lifestyle influencer content while the back region represents the more intimate and specific lifestyle influencer content of Downing.

The interpersonal visuals are integrated with captions that construct authenticity through engagement as a multi-faceted method that is used for managing relations with followers. Many of the ways in which Downing uses engagement rely on expressing inner motivation in maintaining relations towards the followers which can be used to obfuscate external motivations that engagement also facilitates such as soliciting

comments for increased visibility on Instagram. These methods of giving and soliciting advice and affirmation, asking questions both rhetoric and direct, and answering to follower queries are key in constructing authenticity through interpersonal means.

The authentic construction based on being relatable and intimate through interpersonal communication, while conforming to expected themes of presenting the daily and mundane elements of Downing's life, is in jeopardy when more glamorous ideational content is presented. Thus, the use of ordinariness as an authenticity construction acts as the balance to the glamorous or otherwise deviant content to contextualize it properly. Downing downplays luxurious and conspicuous consumption with appeals to ordinariness while constructing travelogues that include both the glamorous and the mundane parts of travel. A similar function is used by Downing to authenticate through ordinariness and connect with her followers through the creation of body positivity themed content.

All the ideational and interpersonal methods of authenticity construction ultimately operate in the semiotic technology affordance of the Instagram Feed where Downing can utilize the formats available in creating narratives that construct meaning and allow for variable means of authenticity construction both within and between posts. Thus, a more complete and perhaps also a more authentic picture of Downing is available for follower consumption. Further textual elements in the form of hashtags and image tags are used for meaning construction both in terms of textual organization of visual and written content and interpersonal communication through Downing broadcasting her identification with e.g., body positive values.

All these methods of authenticity construction ultimately co-exist in an environment rife with commercially motivated advertorials where the need for methods of authentication is omnipresent. Downing relies on naturalizing advertorials as part of her content through copious use of confessionals, immediacy, predictability, and engagement with her followers while preferring the most common visual representations fitted to advertorial needs. The advertorial content essentially largely resembles the non-sponsored content and vice versa. Thus, the most major differentiating factor becomes about transparency and how overtly perceptible the commerciality is in Downing's representations. Weaving in personal narratives providing thoughts, feelings, and details makes it possible for Downing to naturalize the advertorials while explicitly stating sponsorship fulfils the need for transparency (Audrezet *et.al.* 2018: 7-8).

Ultimately, Downing constructs authenticity through a varied access to the front and the back region of her life. The access is granted through predictable ideational visual content that connects with the captions providing the access to the back region through interpersonal methods of narrative storytelling and details however minor or major shared with transparency and made relevant in the moment of posting. Downing constructs relatability to be fashioned into authenticity through engagement with the followers while visual representations communicate her availability to followers. When relatability is in danger due to the occasionally glamorous lifestyle compromising it, constructions of ordinariness to mitigate the glamour are employed, and often used through body positivity to contextualize out of place actions. Textual organization of the construction of authenticity points towards the visual representations forming a foundation upon which deeper access into Downing's life can be shared with followers through written captions. The construction of authenticity takes place in a commercial reality where these authenticating measures are used to make the commercial and inauthentic more palatable, or even natural, to followers. The carefully curated platform vernacular of the Instagram feed relies on what Abidin (2018: 71) identified as 'calibrated amateurism' used to construct relatable representations of the mundane life. In the Instagram feed of @noelledowning the representation of the mundane points towards a calibrated authenticity where relatability realized through making oneself visually available to the followers and providing them with confessions, relatable representations of ordinariness, and explicitly engaging with the followers in the predictable content formats are the primary methods to accumulate the currency of authenticity construction.

9. Conclusion

This thesis examined the construction of authenticity for lifestyle social media influencers through a examining the Instagram Feed of @noelledowning. Lifestyle influencers present their daily lives for followers to consume and engage within an environment where visibility and attention are a scarce resource. Projecting an authentic and relatable representation of the self is essential for success in the Instagram ecosystem and is part of building a consistent self-brand. Meanwhile, the commercial reality of the platform and of the vocation of the lifestyle influencer places major pressures on projecting a consistent image. The multimodal construction of this authenticity as it is communicated to and co-constructed with followers was examined in this study in terms of ideational, interpersonal, and textual dimensions. 275 Instagram feed posts, and 370 photos connected to them were analysed in total for their visual representations and written captions while considering the semiotic technological affordances of the Instagram platform. The focus of the study was on providing a deep understanding of the ways in which authenticity can be constructed through a mainly qualitative analysis of the Instagram Feed posts.

The theoretical framework of the thesis relied upon a multimodal approach to the material of the Instagram Feed while employing two distinct frameworks that mainly focused on the visual or the written content. The theory of the visual representation of social actors by Theo van Leeuwen was utilized to provide an understanding of how Downing positions herself in relation to the followers to construct a relationship with them in the visual content. This understanding was then connected with a theory of mediated authenticity by Gunn Enli. The theory of mediated authenticity was repurposed for examining social media content by expansion with the category of engagement which enabled the analysis of eight different categories of authenticity construction. These theories were supplemented with Erving Goffman's theorization of the front and back region activity as a performance and through Crystal Abidin's subsequent adoption of Goffman's concepts in examining social media influencers. The understanding of the advertorial content of the social media influencers was then further supplemented through studies in influencer marketing. Thus, the overall theoretical framework combined the multimodal approach to the visual and written content of @noelledowning with a strong emphasis on media studies, while drawing further supplementary insight from interactional psychology and influencer marketing studies.

The results indicate that Downing constructs authenticity through a varied access to the front or the back region of her life. The access is granted through predictable ideational visual content that is consciously crafted to seem spontaneous while connecting with the captions providing the access to the back region. The captions then operate through interpersonal methods of narrative storytelling and confessional details however minor or major shared with transparency and made relevant in the moment of posting by indicating temporal linkage with the subject. Downing constructs relatability to be fashioned into authenticity through engagement with the followers by explicitly addressing them in the captions while visual representations communicate her availability to followers. The visual representations communicate the availability by maintaining a close social distance with the followers, facing the front of the body towards the followers, positioning oneself as equal to the followers, demanding the attention from the followers while also offering them a chance to observe, maintaining a facial expression that generates positive emotions, and wearing modest clothing or contextualizing the wearing of revealing clothing appropriately.

When relatability and authenticity is compromised due to the occasionally glamorous lifestyle, constructions of ordinariness to mitigate the glamour are employed, and often used through body positivity to contextualize deviant representations. Textual organization of the construction of authenticity points towards the visual representations forming an ideational and interpersonal foundation upon which deeper access into Downing's life can be shared with followers through authenticating methods in the captions. The construction of authenticity takes place in a commercial reality where these authenticating measures are used to make the commercial and inauthentic more palatable, or even natural, to followers. Essentially, what Abidin (2018: 71) found to be a shift towards 'calibrated amateurism' is largely realized as 'calibrated authenticity' – the curated nature of the Instagram Feed persists but the stories told, and the self-brand constructed are authenticated by emphasizing relatability and engagement, the mundane and the accessible, and the highly personal. Whether the content is overtly commercially motivated or not, these features persist and together construct the authenticity of the social media influencer.

The general findings of this study were consistent with past research on social media influencer content and provided new insights into how authenticity is constructed in practice on the Instagram feed. The focus on a single lifestyle influencer and the highly

qualitative approach to influencer content creation somewhat limits the generalizability of the results but also enabled this study to understand authenticity construction in its full capacity over a longer period to account for consistency in authenticity constructions. The study was able to provide additional understanding into the construction of relatability and authenticity together in a multimodal ensemble to construct the authentic self-brand of a social media influencer dependent on the complex interplay of visual and written content. Interestingly, this thesis suggests that for the construction of authenticity, the written content of the Instagram feed rises to prominence on a content creation platform where visual content holds a primary position. In terms of theoretical contributions, this thesis successfully adopted Gunn Enli's theory of mediated authenticity and expanded it through the category of *engagement* to better equip the theory for analysis of social media micro-celebrity and influencer content creation, while again highlighting the importance of reciprocity between users in understanding social media communicative interactions.

The practical applications of the research findings can be utilised to better understand how social media influencers and commercial partners collaborating with them for advertorial content can evaluate and construct authenticity in the curated and polished platform vernacular of the Instagram feed. Understanding the highly valuable currency of authenticity and its creation on social media platforms helps in creating content where the authentic voice of the author can be presented in its intended capacity. Further research on authenticity in terms of social media influencers on Instagram would benefit from examining the various content creation tools available and how the construction of authenticity coincides and deviates from that of the Instagram feed. Other interesting avenues for further research could also include cross-platform examination of authenticity construction between different social media platforms by the same influencers. Examining influencers in more specific content creation topics such as various hobbyists could reveal new forms of authenticity constructions catering to different authenticity concerns. The major strand of body positivity content used for authentication in the data of this study also points towards interesting further research avenues for examining authenticity in relation to body image representations.

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Finnish summary

Tutkielmani käsittelee sosiaalisen median elämäntapavaikuttajien (*social media lifestyle influencer*) sisällöntuotantoa autenttisuuden (*authenticity)* ja samaistuttavuuden (*relatability*) näkökulmista. Tutkimuksessa selvitetään, miten sosiaalisen median vaikuttajat rakentavat autenttisuutta ja samaistuttavuutta Instagram-syötteen sisällöissä. Instagram-syötteeseen tuotettua sisältöä tarkastellaan multimodaalisena kokonaisuutena, jossa kuvallinen sekä kirjoitettu sisältö luovat yhdessä autenttisuutta ja samaistuttavuutta, joita sosiaalisen median vaikuttajat hyödyntävät menestyäkseen työssään. Tarkentavana tutkimuskysymyksenä tarkastellaan, miten autenttisuutta ja samaistuttavuutta luodaan multimodaalisesti ideationaalisten (*ideational*), ihmistenvälisten (*interpersonal*), ja tekstuaalisten (*textual*) kommunikatiivisten keinojen kautta. Tutkimusaiheen ja tarkasteltavien ilmiöiden valinnan kautta tutkimuksen kielitieteellinen lähestymistapa täydentyy mediatutkimuksen, psykologian, ja vaikuttajamarkkinoinnin tutkimusten avulla.

Sosiaalisen median elämäntapavaikuttajat toimivat sisällöntuottajina erilaisissa sosiaalisen median kanavissa, joissa heidän sisältönsä koostuu pääasiassa heidän oman elämänsä tapahtumien kuvaamisesta seuraajillensa ja muille mahdollisille yleisöille (Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 104). Työssään he tuottavat henkilökohtaiseksi rakennettua viihteellistä sisältöä, jonka tavoitteena on myös välittää ja vahvistaa informatiivisia viestejä (Abidin 2018: 58). Tuottamalla sisältöä, joka toimii mielipidekirjoituksen kaltaisina välineinä kaupallisiin tarkoituksiin, vaikuttajat pystyvät rahoittamaan elämäntyyliään (Abidin 2015). Vaikuttajat luottavat sisältönsä rakentamisessa vahvoihin henkilöbrändeihin, joiden avulla he voivat rakentaa autenttisuutta ja siten erottautua kilpailullisessa sisällöntuotannon ympäristössä (Banet-Weiser 2012: 37). Lisäksi vaikuttajien sisällön autenttisuuden kannalta kysymykset samaistuttavuudesta ja yleisön osallistamisesta (*engagement*) luomalla intiimiä sisältöä ovat ensiarvoisen tärkeitä (Abidin 2015, Shtern *et. al.* 2019: 1952).

Sisällöntuotannossa vaikuttajat hyödyntävät parasosiaalisia suhteita samaistuttavuuden luonnissa. Parasosiaaliset suhteet syntyvät siitä, että yleisö kokee läheisyyttä (*intimacy*) kokiessaan epäsuoraa vuorovaikutusta ihmisten kanssa, joita he eivät tunne henkilökohtaisesti (Sthern et. al. 2019: 1941). Vaikuttajat hyödyntävät parasosiaalisia suhteita luodessaan sisältöä etu- ja taka- alueilla (*front* and *back region*), jotka mahdollistavat erilaiset sisällönluonnin konventiot (Goffman 1959 [1990]).

Instagramissa vaikuttajat luovat etualueellaan ennustettavaa, yleisön odottamaa, esteettistä, ja tarkasti kontrolloitua sisältöä (Goffman 1959 [1990]: 32, Leaver *et. al.* 2020: 59). Taka-alueella puolestaan syntyy intiimi, vähemmän tiukasti kontrolloitu, spontaanimpi, ja oletettavasti myös sitä kautta autenttisempi sisältö, jota vaikuttajat voivat tuottaa laskelmoidun amatöörimäisyyden (*calibrated* amateurism) avulla (Goffman 1959 [1990]: 115-116, Abidin 2017: 1). Laskelmoidun amatööriyden kautta vaikuttajien sisältö välittyy vähemmän tietoisesti rakennettuna, spontaanimpana, ja aidompana, jolloin heidän on helpompi luoda samaistuttavuutta ja autenttisuutta (Abidin 2017: 1). Autenttisuus ymmärretään tässä tutkielmassa konstruktiivisena performatiivisena toimintana, jossa pyritään autentikoimaan erilaisia asioita tai ihmisiä sekä heidän toimintaansa tavalla, jossa autenttisuus neuvotellaan yhdessä kohteita tarkastelevien ihmisten kanssa. Sosiaalisen median vaikuttajien tapauksessa autenttisuus siis rakentuu suhteessa heidän yleisöönsä. Samaistuttavuus puolestaan käsittää ajatuksen mahdollisuudesta nähdä vaikuttajan elämä ja itse vaikuttaja seuraajan kannalta samankaltaisena ja samanarvoisena henkilönä riippumatta asian todellisuudesta.

Vaikuttajien sisällöntuotantoa tutkimus tarkastelee Instagram-syötteessä multimodaalisena ilmiönä, jossa kielellinen ilmaisu on vahvasti sidoksissa siihen ympäristöön, jossa kielellä tuotetaan merkityksiä. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaankin multimodaalista sisällöntuotantoa kuvallisen ja kirjallisen sisällön kokonaisuutena, jossa otetaan huomioon myös Instagramin teknologisten ominaisuuksien vaikutus kielellisten merkitysten luontiin. Erityisesti multimodaalisen sisällön tarkastelun pohjana toimivat M.A.K. Hallidayn (1978) kehittämät metafunktiot, joiden kautta kielellisten merkitysten luontia tarkastellaan ideationaalisten (*ideational*), ihmistenvälisten (*interpersonal*), ja tekstuaalisten (*textual*) keinojen kautta. Ideationaaliset keinot kertovat mitä maailmassa on tai mitä maailmassa tapahtuu, ihmistenvälisillä keinoilla ilmennetään ihmisten välisten suhteiden merkityksiä, ja tekstuaalisilla keinoilla luodaan viesteistä johdonmukaisia niiden tekstin sisäisten ominaisuuksien sekä ulkoisen maailman kanssa (Kress 2009: 59).

Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan autenttisuutta ja samaistuttavuutta multimodaalisesti erityisesti kahden teoriakehikon kautta, joista molemmat keskittyvät pääasiallisesti joko kuvallisen tai kirjallisen ilmaisun tarkasteluun. Kuvallista sisältöä tarkastellaan pääasiallisesti Theo van Leeuwenin visuaalisten sosiaalisten toimijoiden teorian kautta. Van Leuwenin (2008: 4–5) teoriassa sosiaalisen toimijan tuottamat merkitykset

ymmärretään osana hänen osallistumistaan sosiaaliseen toimintaan, jonka puitteissa luodaan representaatioita maailmasta. Van Leeuwen tarkastelee merkitysten luontia kahdesta ulottuvuudesta: kuinka ihmisiä on kuvattu ja kuinka ihmisiä on kuvattu suhteessa katsojaan? Ensimmäisen ulottuvuuden puitteissa merkitykselliseksi tutkimuksen puitteissa nousevat erilaiset aktiviteettien ja roolien representaatiot, keholliset representaatiot, sekä yksilöiden ja ryhmien representaatiot. Toisen ulottuvuuden puitteissa tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan vaikuttajasisällölle erityisen merkityksellisiä sosiaalisten suhteiden luomisen keinoja eli *sosiaalista välimatkaa, sosiaalista yhteyttä,* ja *sosiaalista vuorovaikutusta.*

Sosiaalisella välimatkalla voidaan ilmentää etäisyyksiä kuvissa tavalla, joka mukailee etäisyyksiä fyysisessä maailmassa. Välimatkalla voidaankin ilmentää tuttuutta ja läheistä suhdetta tai vaikutelmaa vieraasta ja etäisestä henkilöstä. Sosiaalista yhteyttä kuvataan horisontaalisesti ja vertikaalisesti eri kuvakulmista. Horisontaalinen kuvakulma mahdollistaa kohteiden kuvaamisen joko edestä, sivusta tai takaapäin. Vaikuttajien sisällössä näin voidaan symboloida osallisuutta vaikuttajan elämään ja kohtaamista hänen kanssaan kuvaamalla edestäpäin, ja toisaalta vastaavasti katsojan jättämistä kuvan ulkopuolelle, mutta toisaalta myös mahdollisuutta tarkastella ympäristöä kuvaamalla vaikuttaja takaapäin. Vertikaaliset kuvakulmat symboloivat valta-asemaa, jossa kuvaamalla henkilöitä suoraan katseen tasolta saavutetaan tasa-arvoinen asema. Ylhäältäpäin kuvattaessa saavutetaan tila, jossa katsoja tarkastelee valta-asemasta alaspäin. Alhaaltapäin kuvattaessa puolestaan kuvattu henkilö on valta-asemassa, josta katsoja häntä tarkastelee. Sosiaalista vuorovaikutusta tarkasteltaessa keskitytään henkilön kasvoihin, jotka voivat joko vaatia tai olla vaatimatta katsojan reaktiota eli käytännössä katsovat suoraan kameraan tai eivät. Vaikuttajat voivat käyttää näitä representaation keinoja luomaan yhteyttä seuraajiin vaatien heidän katsettaan tai toisaalta antaa mahdollisuuden tarkastella vapaasti ympäristöä olemalla vaatimatta huomiota. Van Leeuwenin teorian sisältämiä keinoja täydennettiin vielä kasvojen ilmeiden representaatioiden tarkastelulla, vaatteiden paljastavuuden tarkastelulla, kuvien taustalla olevien sijaintien tarkastelulla, kuvatunnisteiden tarkastelulla, ja sponsoroinnin julkituonnin tarkastelulla, joiden avulla pystyttiin täydentämään visuaalisen autenttisuuden ja samaistuttavuuden luomisen keinojen analysointia.

Kirjoitetun sisällön tarkastelussa hyödynnettiin Gunn Enlin (2016) kehittämää mediavälitteisen autenttisuuden teoriaa. Teoria pohjautuu ajatuksille autenttisuuden

rakentumisesta tuottajan ja yleisön suhteen kautta, jossa autenttisuuden tuottaminen on alisteinen mediasisältöjen luomisen logiikalle. Mediasisältöjen kuluttajien halu ja tarpeet autenttista sisältöä kohtaan ohjaa sisällöntuottajien toimintaa ja autenttisuus rakentuukin tuottajan ja kuluttajan välisen neuvottelun varaan. Enlin teorian ja sitä tukevien esimerkkien pohjalta johdetut seitsemän mediavälitteisen autenttisuuden ominaispiirrettä tai kategoriaa toimivat kirjoitetun sisällön autenttisuuden tarkastelun pohjana. Osa kategorioista ilmeni sisällössä vahvasti myös kuvallisen sisällön kautta. Enlin seitsemän kategoriaa ovat *ennustettavuus, spontaanius, välittömyys, tunnustukset, tavanomaisuus, ambivalenssi* ja *epätäydellisyys*. Tutkimusmateriaalin ja taustakirjallisuuden pohjalta mediavälitteisen autenttisuuden kategorioita oli tarpeellista täydentää yleisön aktivoimisen (*engagement)* kategorialla. Kategoriat on esitelty tutkimuksen taulukossa 7.2.

Tutkimuksessa käytettyjä teorioita sovellettiin aineistoon tekstuaalisen analyysin metodin kautta, joka mahdollistaa tutkimuksen kohteena olevan sosiaalisen median elämäntapa -vaikuttaja Noelle Downing sisällön tarkastelun liitettynä sisällön laajemman sosiaalisen ympäristön tarkasteluun. Tekstuaalisen analyysin kautta pystytään tutkielman puitteissa tarkastelemaan sisällöntuotantoa keskittymättä tiukasti tiettyihin kirjallisen kielen osiin, jolloin on mahdollista havaita hyvin vapaasti toistuvia taipumuksia autenttisuuden rakentamisessa. Noelle Downing (@noelledowning) ja hänen tuottamansa sisältö valikoitui tutkimuskohteeksi kirjoittajan omaan aiempaan tietämykseen kohteesta, sisällön ennakkotarkasteluun sekä vaikuttajiin liittyvään teoreettiseen tutkimukseen pohjautuen. Tyypillisten vaikuttajiin liittyvien ominaisuuksien lisäksi Downingin sisällössä näkyi merkittävästi kehopositiivisuus, joka huomioitiin analyysissä. Tutkimuksessa analysoitiin yhteensä 275 Instagram-syötteen julkaisua, jotka sisälsivät 369 kuvaa. Tutkimusmateriaalista rajattiin pois kuvat, jotka eivät sisältäneet visuaalista representaatiota Downingista.

Tutkimusaineistoa kerättiin julkaisuista aikaväliltä 2017–2020. Analyysiin valikoitiin kaikki julkaisut jokaisen vuoden tammikuusta ja kesäkuusta. Rajauksen tavoitteena oli mahdollisimman hyvin välttää juhlapyhien ennakkotarkastelussa havaittu vaikutus sisältöihin. Ajallisen perspektiivin laajuus valikoitui, jotta tutkimuksessa voidaan tarkastella vaikuttajasisällön muutosta ja autenttisuuden kehitystä myös tasaisuuden näkökulmasta. Tutkimusaineisto analysoitiin ja luokiteltiin joulukuussa 2020 ja uudelleen tammikuussa 2021 ilman viittausta aiempiin luokitteluihin. Eroavaisuudet

luokitteluissa tarkastettiin vielä uudestaan erikseen ennen tulosten kirjoittamista. Tutkimusaineisto otettiin talteen kuvakaappauksilla, mutta tutkimusprosessin aikana materiaalin käsittely todettiin kuitenkin käytännöllisemmäksi suoraan Instagram-syötteen kautta. Tutkimusaineiston analyysissä ja luokittelussa hyödynnettiin Microsoft Excel-ohjelmaa.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että Downing rakentaa autenttisuutta vaihdellen seuraajiensa mahdollisuutta tarkastella hänen elämänsä etu- ja taka-aluetta. Seuraajat pystyvät tarkastelemaan Downingin elämää ennakoitavissa olevan ideationaalisen visuaalisen sisällön kautta, joka on tietoisesti muotoiltu näyttämään spontaanisti tuotetulta ja yhdistyessään kuvateksteihin tarjoaa pääsyn taka-alueelle. Kuvatekstit toimivat siten ihmistenvälisten kerronnallisten menetelmien ja pienten tai suurten tunnustuksellisten elämän yksityiskohtien avulla, joita jaetaan avoimesti ja joista tehdään merkityksellisiä sisällöntuotannon hetkellä osoittamalla sisällön tuotantoajan yhteys itse sisällön aiheeseen. Downing rakentaa samaistuttavuutta, joka muotoutuu autenttisuudeksi yleisön aktivoinnin kautta. Downing puhuttelee seuraajiaan suoraan ja epäsuoraan kuvateksteissä, ja visuaaliset representaatiot puolestaan viestivät hänen lähestyttävyyttään seuraajille. Visuaaliset representaatiot viestivät lähestyttävyydestä luomalla läheistä sosiaalista etäisyyttä seuraajiin, suuntaamalla vartalon etupuolen seuraajia kohti, asettumalla tasavertaiseksi seuraajien kanssa, vaatimalla seuraajien huomiota ja tarjoamalla heille samalla mahdollisuuden tarkkailla vaikuttajaa, ylläpitämällä positiivisia tunteita herättäviä ilmeitä ja pukeutumalla vaatimattomasti tai kontekstualisoimalla paljastavan vaatetuksen seuraajien kannalta hyväksyttävällä tavalla.

Samaistuttavuuden ja autenttisuuden ylläpitämiseksi Instagram-syötteen sisällössä on ajoittain tarpeellista käyttää tavanomaisuutta rakentavia representaatiota, joita hyödynnetään erityisesti kehopositiivisuuden kautta kontekstualisoimaan tyypillisestä sisällöstä poikkeavia representaatioita. Autenttisuuden rakentamisen tekstuaalinen organisointi viittaa siihen, että visuaaliset representaatiot muodostavat ideationaalisen ja ihmistenvälisen sisällön perustan, jonka pohjalta Downing pystyy esittelemään elämäänsä yksityiskohtaisemmin kuvateksteissä. Autenttisuuden luominen tapahtuu kaupallisessa toimintaympäristössä, jossa autenttisuudella pyritään tekemään kaupallisesta ja ulkoapäin motivoituneesta sisällöstä hyväksyttävämpää seuraajille. Crystal Abidinin (2018: 71) havaitsema vaikuttajasisältöjen siirtymä kohti

"laskelmoitua amatöörimäisyyttä", toteutuu tutkielman aineistossa pääasiassa "laskelmoituna autenttisuutena". Instagram-syötteen ennustettavissa oleva, odotettavissa oleva, tarkasti kontrolloitu ja esteettinen sisällöntuotannollinen viitekehys säilyy, mutta vaikuttajien kertomat tarinat ja heidän rakentamansa henkilöbrändit autentikoidaan korostamalla samaistuttavuutta ja yleisön huomioonottamista. Tuotettu sisältö on arkista, helposti lähestyttävää ja erittäin henkilökohtaista. Riippumatta tuotetun sisällön kaupallisista motivaattoreista, autentikointiin käytettävät sisällöntuotannolliset ominaispiirteet ovat läsnä ja yhdessä rakentavat sosiaalisen median vaikuttajan autenttisuutta.

Tutkielman tulokset ovat yhdenmukaisia aiempien sosiaalisen median vaikuttajien sisältöä koskevien tutkimusten kanssa ja tarjoavat uusia näkökulmia autenttisuuden luomiseen käytännössä elämäntapavaikuttajien Instagram-syötteissä. Tutkimuksen laadullinen lähestymistapa vaikuttajasisällön luomiseen rajoittaa jossain määrin tulosten yleistettävyyttä, mutta mahdollistaa autenttisuuden rakentumisen ymmärtämisen täydessä laajuudessaan pidemmän ajanjakson aikana ja sisällöntuotannon johdonmukaisuuden merkityksen tarkastelun autenttisuuden rakentamisessa. Tutkimus onnistui lisäämään ymmärrystä samaistuttavuuden ja autenttisuuden rakentumisesta multimodaalisissa kokonaisuuksissa. Sosiaalisen median elämäntapavaikuttajien autenttinen henkilöbrändi voidaan tutkimuksen kautta nähdä syntyvän visuaalisen ja kirjallisen sisällön monimutkaisessa vuorovaikutuksessa. Yksi tutkielman kiinnostavimmista tuloksista on havainto autenttisuuden luomisesta, jossa Instagram-syötteen kirjallinen sisältö nousee tärkeään asemaan sisällöntuotantoalustalla, jossa visuaalinen sisältö on ensisijaisessa asemassa. Tutkimuksessa hyödynnettiin onnistuneesti Gunn Enlin teoriaa mediavälitteisestä autenttisuudesta. Teoriaa laajennettiin yleisön osallistamisen kategorian avulla, täten mahdollistaen teorian entistä paremman selitysvoiman sosiaalisen median vaikuttajien sisällöntuotannon analysoimisessa. Onnistunut lisäys teoriaan korostaa entisestään käyttäjienvälisen vastavuoroisuuden merkitystä sosiaalisen median viestinnällisen vuorovaikutuksen ymmärtämisessä.

Tutkimustuloksia voidaan hyödyntää käytännössä sosiaalisen median vaikuttajien ja heidän kanssaan mainossisältöä varten yhteistyötä tekevien kaupallisten kumppanien yhteistöiden koordinoinnissa. Vaikuttajat voivat tutkimuksen avulla arvioida tapojaan luoda autenttisuutta ja yhteistyötahot voivat saavuttaa paremman ymmärryksen

autenttisuuden luomisesta kaupallisiin tarkoituksiin Instagram-syötteen viestinnällisessä kontekstissa. Autenttisuuden arvokkuuden ja luomisen ymmärtäminen sosiaalisen median alustoilla auttaa vaikuttajia luomaan sisältöä, jossa tekijän autenttinen ääni voidaan esittää tarkoituksenmukaisella tavalla. Tulevat tutkimukset autenttisuudesta sosiaalisen median vaikuttajien osalta Instagramissa voisivat keskittyä erilaisten saatavilla olevien sisällöntuotantovälineiden ja autenttisuuden luomisen välisiin yhteneväisyyksiin ja poikkeavuuksiin Instagram-syötteen suhteen. Tulevien tutkimusten kautta olisi myös mahdollista toteuttaa sosiaalisen medioiden alustojen rajat ylittäviä tutkimuksia autenttisuuden rakentumisesta eri sosiaalisen median alustojen välillä samojen vaikuttajien tuottamana. Vaikuttajien tutkiminen tarkemmin rajattujen sisältöjen puitteissa kuten erilaisten harrastuksiin keskittyvien tilien yhteydessä voi myös paljastaa uusia autenttisuuden tuottamisen muotoja, jotka palvelevat erilaisia autenttisuuden tuottamisen tarpeita. Tämän tutkielman aineistossa autenttisuuden luomiseen käytetyn kehopositiivisen sisällön merkityksellinen osuus viittaa myös mahdollisiin uusin mielenkiintoisiin jatkotutkimusaiheisiin, joiden avulla voidaan tutkia autenttisuuden luontia suhteessa kehonkuvan representaatioihin.