

Communicating Mental Health on Instagram: How lifestyle influencers are shaping the current discourse

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Mental health has been a sensitive topic for centuries, only now becoming gradually destigmatized, with social media being a contributor to it through normalizing health communication (Koteyko & Atanasova, 2018). The topic of mental wellbeing has even penetrated the narratives of Instagram influencers who used to present a flawless self-image, since the new trend for authenticity requires sharing struggles, including psychological ones (Foos, 2021).

In this talk we intend to understand how the sensitive topic of mental health is embedded into a blogger's narrative and which discursive strategies Insta-influencers use to make mental health narrative align with their online persona.

Narrative studies of the mental health struggles representation among Instagram bloggers are relatively scarce (Feuston & Piper, 2019). Meanwhile, looking into the mechanisms used by influencers to communicate sensitive topics may help better understand what shapes nowadays mental health discourse.

This research builds upon previous health discourse studies of Instagram (Melander, 2019) and is informed by the "small stories" framework (Georgakopoulou, 2007), multimodal approach (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001) and discourse-centred online ethnography (Androutsopoulos, 2008).

For the study, we manually selected 5 lifestyle Insta-blogs with more than 100 000 subscribers. The initial multimodal content-analysis was conducted to characterize every Influencer's online persona. At the next stage, all the posts related to mental health were picked and analyzed as "small stories" with the focus on the linguistic means of embedding the mental health topic into the blogger's narrative.

The data analysis showed that Insta-bloggers attend to such concepts as lifestyle expertise, commodification, and authenticity to reconcile the topic of mental health with the success

narrative dominating their discourse. The combination of the above- mentioned strategies presents a unique balance in every case depending on the blogger's online self-image. By sharing sensitive issues from the position of confidence and authority, bloggers contribute to normalizing the communication of mental health struggles.

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