Original Scientific Paper https://doi.org/10.24867/GRID-2026-p64

Personal vs. Promotional Influencer Content on Instagram and TikTok: Engagement and Disclosure Practices

ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing combines personal communication with commercial content, making audience engagement and promotional disclosure important aspects of influencer–brand communication. This study examines engagement with personal and promotional influencer content on Instagram and TikTok, as well as differences in the use of official platform disclosure labels. The analysis included 795 publicly available Reel/video posts from 20 local and regional influencers active on both platforms. Engagement rates were compared across content types and platforms, while promotional posts were additionally analysed according to disclosure practices. No significant overall effect of content type, platform, or their interaction was found. Personal content showed higher engagement than promotional content on Instagram, while no significant difference was observed on TikTok. The use of official platform disclosure labels differed significantly between the two platforms, with higher use on TikTok. The findings indicate that engagement patterns are not determined by platform or promotional content alone and that disclosure practices may vary across platform environments.

Rastko Milošević
Selena Nikolić
Savka Adamović
Ivana Tomić

University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Technical Sciences, Department of Graphic Engineering and Design, Novi Sad, Serbia

KEY WORDS
Influencer marketing, Instagram, TikTok, engagement rate, promotional content, disclosure transparency

1. Introduction

Social media influencers have become important intermediaries between brands and consumers because they combine content creation, audience interaction, and commercial communication within the same social media presence. Unlike conventional advertising, influencer marketing embeds brand-related messages into the ongoing communication between creators and their followers, drawing on relationships characterized by trust, perceived authenticity, similarity, and psychological attachment (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Ki et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021).

Audience engagement represents an important indicator of how users actively respond to social media content. However, engagement with influencer content may depend on numerous factors, including the characteristics of the influencer, audience size, content strategy, commercial nature of the post, and the platform on which the content is published (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Consequently, evaluating influencer marketing effectiveness requires considering both the distinction between personal and promotional communication and the platform-specific context in which these messages appear.

Previous research has examined influencer marketing from multiple perspectives, including influencer characteristics, audience engagement, authenticity, and influencer–brand collaboration dynamics (Tafesse & Wood, 2021; Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Milošević et al., 2022; Milošević et al., 2024).

2. Theoretical backgrounds and hypotheses

2.1. Personal and promotional influencer content

A distinctive feature of influencer marketing is the coexistence of personal and commercial content within the same social media profile. Personal content is generally unrelated to direct brand or product promotion, whereas promotional content results from a commercial relationship between an influencer and a brand. Because both types of posts appear as part of the influencer's continuous communication with followers, commercial messages enter an already established influencer–audience relationship.

Commercial collaborations may challenge perceptions of influencer authenticity, as followers often value intrinsic motivation and non-commercial orientation (Audrezet et al., 2020). At the same time, characteristics such as informational value, influencer trustworthiness, attractiveness, and perceived similarity can strengthen trust in branded content (Lou & Yuan, 2019). However, promotional content should not automatically be expected to generate lower audience engagement. Gross and von Wangenheim (2022), in an analysis of 64,438 Instagram posts, found that sponsored posts could generate higher engagement than non-sponsored posts, depending on influencer and message characteristics. These findings suggest that the relationship between promotional content and audience engagement is not straightforward, and that the commercial nature of a post alone does not provide a sufficient basis for predicting the direction of audience response.

Engagement is additionally associated with broader characteristics of influencer strategy. Tafesse and Wood (2021) found that follower count and content volume were negatively associated with follower engagement on Instagram, whereas followee count was positively associated with engagement, and these relationships varied according to influencers' domains of interest. Taken together, previous findings suggest that engagement is shaped by multiple interrelated factors rather than simply by whether a post is promotional.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Engagement rate differs between personal and promotional influencer content.

H1a: Engagement rate differs between personal and promotional content on Instagram.

H1b: Engagement rate differs between personal and promotional content on TikTok.

2.2. Platform-specific engagement

Instagram and TikTok both represent visually oriented platforms widely used by influencers, but their content ecosystems and patterns of use differ. Platform characteristics can shape how users encounter, consume, and respond to influencer content. Research on TikTok, for example, has shown that platform-specific characteristics of influencer communication are relevant to follower responses. Barta et al. (2023) found that originality and perceived opinion leadership contributed to influencer effectiveness on TikTok and that humor enhanced message effectiveness through followers' hedonic experience.

These findings, together with evidence that influencer engagement depends on content and profile characteristics (Tafesse & Wood, 2021), indicate that engagement patterns observed on one social media platform cannot necessarily be assumed to apply identically to another. Previous findings therefore provide no clear expectation regarding engagement differences between Instagram and TikTok or whether personal and promotional content perform differently across the two platforms. Based on this, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H2: Engagement rate differs between Instagram and TikTok.

H3: The effect of content type on engagement rate depends on the platform.

2.3. Promotional disclosure

Because influencer advertising is integrated into content that may visually and stylistically resemble non-commercial posts, users may not always immediately recognize the commercial relationship behind a message. Disclosure mechanisms therefore represent an important component of transparency in influencer marketing.

Standardized platform disclosure labels provide a particularly explicit way of signalling commercial relationships. Boerman (2020) experimentally demonstrated that Instagram's standardized "Paid partnership with [brand]" disclosure increased recognition of influencer content as advertising. The disclosure also indirectly increased brand recall and intention to engage with the post through advertising recognition, while no negative effect on parasocial interaction with the influencer was observed.

Commercial relationships may also be communicated through hashtags, textual descriptions, brand tags, collaboration functions, coupon codes, and other indicators. However, these mechanisms differ in their standardization and visibility. Moreover, Instagram and TikTok differ in their technical affordances, content formats, and communication conventions, which provides a

basis for examining whether creators use platform-native disclosure mechanisms equally frequently across the two environments. The present study therefore focuses specifically on the official platform disclosure label as a standardized and directly comparable indicator, rather than treating it as equivalent to the broader concept of overall promotional transparency.

Accordingly, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H4: The rate of official platform disclosure-label use for promotional content differs between Instagram and TikTok.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and content selection

The study included 20 local and regional social media influencers (17 women and 3 men), primarily active within the Serbian and broader regional social media environment, who were active on both Instagram and TikTok. For descriptive purposes, accounts were classified separately on each platform as nano (<10,000 followers), micro (10,000–99,999), macro (100,000–999,999), or mega influencers (≥1,000,000). The Instagram sample included 4 nano, 5 micro, 9 macro, and 2 mega accounts, while the TikTok sample included 3 nano, 4 micro, 10 macro, and 3 mega accounts.

Only Reel/video posts published within the 12 months preceding data collection, conducted in May 2026, were eligible. Posts were classified as personal or promotional, and up to 10 eligible posts per influencer, platform, and content type were randomly selected. Giveaway and pinned posts were excluded because of their potentially atypical engagement and visibility. For both platforms, the engagement rate (ER) for each post was calculated as:

$$Engagement\ rate = \frac{\text{Likes} + \text{Comments} + \text{Shares}}{\text{Number of followers}} \times 100\% \quad (1)$$

For inferential analyses, post-level ER values were averaged within each influencer for the four platform × content-type conditions (Instagram–personal, Instagram–promotional, TikTok–personal, and TikTok–promotional), with the influencer retained as the unit of analysis.

Promotional posts were also coded by disclosure method (official platform disclosure, Instagram Collaboration, tag in the post description, hashtag, coupon code, QR code, and no recorded disclosure), while the official platform disclosure label was used as the directly comparable indicator for the inferential comparison between Instagram and TikTok.

3.2. Statistical Analysis

Data were prepared and summarized in Microsoft Excel, while inferential analyses were conducted in jamovi 2.7 (The jamovi project, 2025), following standard statistical procedures described by Navarro and Foxcroft (2025). The analyses were performed within the R-based statistical environment, with relevant procedures supported by the afex and emmeans packages (R Core Team, 2025; Singmann, 2024; Lenth, 2025).

Raw engagement rates were summarized using means, medians, standard deviations, minima, and maxima. Because the distributions were positively skewed and included several extreme values, engagement rates were transformed using ln(ER + 1) for inferential analysis.

A 2 × 2 repeated-measures ANOVA was used to examine the effects of platform (Instagram vs. TikTok), content type (personal vs. promotional), and their interaction. Additional within-platform comparisons were performed using paired-samples tests, with Wilcoxon signed-rank tests used where appropriate. The difference in official disclosure-label use between platforms was also tested using a paired Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive engagement patterns

As previously mentioned in 3.2. Statistical Analysis, a substantial variability was observed in the raw engagement rates data. Across all four conditions, means exceeded medians, indicating positively skewed distributions and the influence of several high-engagement observations (Table 1).

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of raw engagement rates by platform and content type

Condition	M (%)	Md (%)	SD	Min	Max
Instagram – Personal	10.66	5.16	14.50	0.82	64.50
Instagram – Promotional	11.45	3.82	23.10	0.55	99.50
TikTok – Personal	11.49	4.38	18.20	1.57	75.90
TikTok – Promotional	8.25	3.89	13.60	1.03	61.70

The largest discrepancy between the mean and median occurred for promotional Instagram content, where the mean engagement rate was 11.45% but the median was only 3.82%. Log transformation reduced the impact

of extreme values and produced more balanced distributions. On the transformed scale, mean engagement rates were 2.01 (SD = 0.89) for personal Instagram content, 1.76 (SD = 1.07) for promotional Instagram content, 1.99 (SD = 0.93) for personal TikTok content, and 1.76 (SD = 0.84) for promotional TikTok content.

4.2. Effects of platform and content type

The repeated-measures ANOVA results (Table 2) showed that the main effect of content type did not reach the conventional threshold for statistical significance, $F(1, 19) = 3.90$, $p = .063$, $\eta^2p = .170$. Personal content nevertheless showed a descriptively higher transformed engagement rate than promotional content across the two platforms.

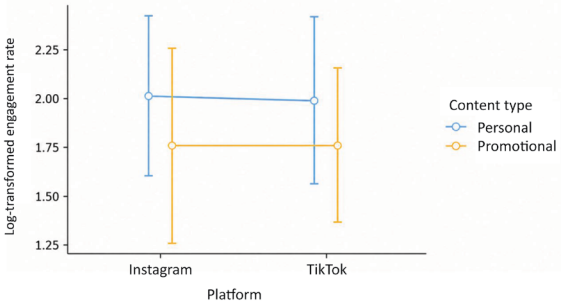
There was no significant main effect of platform, $F(1, 19) = 0.01$, $p = .934$, $\eta^2p < .001$. Overall engagement rates were therefore highly similar between Instagram and TikTok.

The platform × content-type interaction was also not significant, $F(1, 19) = 0.02$, $p = .902$, $\eta^2p = .001$. Thus, there was no statistical evidence that the relationship between personal and promotional content differed systematically between Instagram and TikTok.

Table 2
Repeated-measures ANOVA results for log-transformed engagement rates

Effect	F(1,19)	p	η^2p
Content type	3.90	.063	.170
Platform	0.01	.934	<.001
Platform × Content type	0.02	.902	.001

The corresponding estimated marginal means and 95% confidence intervals are shown in Figure 1. Accordingly, the hypotheses predicting an overall difference between personal and promotional content (H1), a difference between Instagram and TikTok (H2), and a platform-dependent effect of content type (H3) were not supported.



» **Figure 1:** *Estimated marginal means of log-transformed engagement rates by platform and content type, with 95% confidence intervals*

4.3. Within-Platform Comparisons

Additional analyses examined personal and promotional content separately within each platform (Table 3). On Instagram, personal content showed significantly higher engagement rate than promotional content, W = 169, **p = .015**, $r_{rb} = .610$, supporting H1a. On TikTok, the difference between personal and promotional content was not statistically significant, $t(19) = 1.63$, $p = .120$, $d = .364$; therefore, H1b was not supported. However, the significant Instagram comparison and non-significant TikTok comparison do not themselves indicate a platform-dependent content-type effect, as the platform × content-type interaction was found to be not significant.

Table 3
Within-platform comparisons of personal and promotional content engagement rates

Platform	Test	Statistic	p	Effect size
Instagram	Wilcoxon	W = 169	.015	$r_{rb} = .610$
TikTok	Paired t-test	t(19) = 1.63	.120	d = .364

**Note. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used for Instagram due to non-normal paired differences, whereas the paired-samples t-test was used for TikTok.*

4.4. Disclosure of Promotional Content

A total of 199 Instagram and 196 TikTok promotional posts were included in the disclosure of promotional content analysis. The most common disclosure method on both platforms was a tag in the post description, accounting for 55.28% of promotional Instagram posts and 59.69% of promotional TikTok posts. The distribution of disclosure methods across the two platforms is presented in Table 4.

On Instagram, the Collaboration feature was observed in 34.17% of promotional posts, whereas the official platform disclosure label was not recorded in any analyzed promotional post. On TikTok, the official platform label

Table 4
Distribution of promotional disclosure methods on Instagram and TikTok

Disclosure method	Instagram n (%)	TikTok n (%)
Official platform label	0 (0.00)	27 (13.78)
Collaboration	68 (34.17)	N/A
Tag in description	110 (55.28)	117 (59.69)
Hashtag	16 (8.04)	34 (17.35)
Coupon code	3 (1.51)	5 (2.55)
QR code	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
No recorded disclosure	2 (1.01)	13 (6.63)

was present in 27 posts (13.78%). Hashtags were used in 8.04% of Instagram and 17.35% of TikTok promotional posts. Posts with no recorded disclosure represented 1.01% of Instagram and 6.63% of TikTok promotional content. At the influencer level, the mean official disclosure-label rate was 0.00% on Instagram (Md = 0.00%) and 13.50% on TikTok (Md = 5.00%). The Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated a statistically significant platform difference, W = 0, **p = .005**, r_{rb} = −1.00. Ten influencers had identical disclosure rates on both platforms (0%), while all remaining ten influencers showed higher official disclosure-label use on TikTok. Thus, H4 was supported. It is also notable that promotional posts without any disclosure were more than six times as common on TikTok (6.63%) as on Instagram (1.01%), indicating platform differences in disclosure practices beyond the use of official platform labels.

5. Conclusions

The results indicate that audience engagement cannot be attributed simply to content type or platform. No statistically significant overall effects of content type or platform, or their interaction, were found. Personal content nevertheless showed statistically significant higher engagement rate than promotional content on Instagram, whereas no statistically significant difference was observed on TikTok. This supports previous research suggesting that influencer engagement is shaped by multiple factors rather than by promotional content alone (Tafesse & Wood, 2021; Gross & von Wangenheim, 2022).

A clearer platform difference emerged in promotional disclosure, where official platform disclosure labels were significantly more frequently used on TikTok, while tags in post descriptions were the most common disclosure method on both platforms. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of considering both content characteristics and platform-specific disclosure practices when planning influencer collaborations.

The findings should be interpreted in light of the relatively small, non-probability sample of 20 local and regional influencers and the observational design of the study. Other factors that may influence engagement, such as account size, content niche, and posting characteristics, were not controlled. Future research could examine these relationships using larger and more diverse samples.

6. Acknowledgment

This research has been supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation (Contract No. 451-03-34/2026-03/200156) and the Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad through project “Scientific and Artistic Research Work of Researchers in Teaching and Associate Positions at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad 2026” (No. 01-3609/1).

7. References

Audrezet, A., de Kerviler, G. and Moulard, J.G. (2020) 'Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation', *Journal of Business Research*, 117, pp. 557–569. DOI: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008

Barta, S., Belanche, D., Fernández, A. and Flavián, M. (2023) 'Influencer marketing on TikTok: The effectiveness of humor and followers' hedonic experience', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 70, 103149. DOI: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.103149

Boerman, S.C. (2020) 'The effects of the standardized Instagram disclosure for micro- and meso-influencers', *Computers in Human Behavior*, 103, pp. 199–207. DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2019.09.015

Campbell, C. and Farrell, J.R. (2020) 'More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing', *Business Horizons*, 63(4), pp. 469–479. DOI: 10.1016/j.bushor.2020.03.003

Gross, J. and von Wangenheim, F. (2022) 'Influencer marketing on Instagram: Empirical research on social media engagement with sponsored posts', *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 22(3), pp. 289–310. DOI: 10.1080/15252019.2022.2123724

Ki, C.W.C., Cuevas, L.M., Chong, S.M. and Lim, H. (2020) 'Influencer marketing: Social media influencers as human brands attaching to followers and yielding positive marketing results by fulfilling needs', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 55, 102133. DOI: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102133

Kim, D.Y. and Kim, H.Y. (2021) 'Trust me, trust me not: A nuanced view of influencer marketing on social media', *Journal of Business Research*, 134, pp. 223–232. DOI: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.05.024

Lenth, R.V. (2025) emmeans: Estimated Marginal Means, aka Least-Squares Means. R package. Available from: https://cran.r-project.org/package=emmeans.

Lou, C. and Yuan, S. (2019) 'Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media', *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 19(1), pp. 58–73. DOI: 10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501

Milošević, R., Komlenić, A., Kašiković, N., Banjanin, B. and Menzildžić, D. (2022) 'Instagram influencers' responsiveness to a small business collaboration outreach'. In: Vladić (ed.) Proceedings - *The Eleventh International Symposium GRID 2022, 3–5 November 2022, Novi Sad, Serbia*. Novi Sad: University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Technical Sciences, Department of Graphic Engineering and Design, pp. 237–243.

Milošević, R., Adamović, S., Komlenić, A., Menzildžić, D., Dimovski, V. and Vasilić, P. (2024) 'The impact of reciprocity on Instagram pet influencer posting response times'. In: Pál (ed.) Proceedings - *The Twelfth International Symposium GRID 2024, 14–16 November 2024, Novi Sad, Serbia*. Novi Sad: University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Technical Sciences, Department of Graphic Engineering and Design, pp. 317–322.

Navarro, D.J. and Foxcroft, D.R. (2025) *Learning Statistics with jamovi: A Tutorial for Beginners in Statistical Analysis*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers. DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0333

R Core Team (2025) R: *A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing*, Version 4.5. Vienna: R Foundation for Statistical Computing. Available from: https://www.r-project.org.

Singmann, H. (2024) *afex: Analysis of Factorial Experiments. R package*. Available from: https://cran.r-project.org/package=afex.

Tafesse, W. and Wood, B.P. (2021) 'Followers' engagement with Instagram influencers: The role of influencers' content and engagement strategy', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58, 102303. DOI: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102303

The jamovi project (2025) *jamovi*, Version 2.7 [Computer software]. Available from: https://www.jamovi.org.



© 2026 Authors. Published by the University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Technical Sciences, Department of Graphic Engineering and Design. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license 4.0 Serbia (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en).