

Interpersonal Metafunction Analysis of Influencers' Life Journey Video: A Systemic Functional Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the interpersonal meanings constructed in Malaysian influencers' life-journey videos through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Centring on the Interpersonal Metafunction, this research examined mood, modality and appraisal to express stance, evaluate experiences and negotiate relationships with the audience. The study adopted a qualitative discourse-analytic design where four publicly accessible life-journey videos of four Malaysian influencers were purposely selected. The analysis focused on identifying mood types (declarative, interrogative or imperative), modality (expressions of certainty, obligation or inclination) and appraisal resources (attitude, engagement or graduation) to explore how influencers construct interpersonal meanings. The findings of this research highlighted the domination of declarative clauses in all four videos, enabling influencers to present their experiences as personal testimony and to establish authority through lived experience rather than direct instruction. Modality expressions vary across the influencers, from uncertainty and experimentation, constructing future commitment and social responsibility, expressing aspiration, while another expresses little modality while emphasising audience support. Appraisal analyses revealed that success is commonly balanced by failure, struggle, gratitude, humility and contribution to others. By applying SFL to digital discourse, this study contributes to the understanding of contemporary digital discourse communication by demonstrating how Mood, Modality and Appraisal operate together in personal success narratives.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, digital discourse, influencers, interpersonal metafunction, social media

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media influencers have become increasingly important in society. Social media has created opportunities for ordinary individuals to build their own audience and become influential figures through the content that they share online. Hall (2015), Agrawal (2016) and Varsamis (2018) describe social media influencers as individuals or "micro-endorsers" who have a large number of subscribers or followers on one or more social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and TikTok. Over time, being a social media influencer is no longer seen merely as a hobby or a form of entertainment, but has developed into a recognised career. Influencers are involved in various activities, including brand advertisements, networking events, social campaigns and other forms of promotional and professional work. This shows that their influence has extended beyond social media and into different areas of society.

Due to their large number of followers and their ability to influence audiences, social media influencers have attracted considerable attention from researchers. Much of the existing research focuses on influencer marketing, particularly on how influencers affect audience engagement, brand awareness and purchase intention. Studies have shown that marketing through social media influencers can be effective in reaching and

persuading digital consumers (Martínez-López et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2021; Joshi et al., 2023). Abidin (2016) also points out that social media popularity has increasingly become something that can be used for commercial purposes. Therefore, many studies have examined factors such as the number of followers, audience engagement, credibility, authenticity and the relationship between influencers and their followers. These studies are important in helping us understand the impact of influencers on consumer behaviour. However, they mainly focus on the effects of influencers on their audiences rather than the language and communication strategies used by influencers to build these relationships.

Apart from promoting products and brands, influencers also share many aspects of their personal lives with their audiences. One type of content that has become increasingly common is the sharing of personal experiences and life stories. In these videos, influencers talk about their struggles, challenges, failures and achievements. Some may share how they started with very little before becoming successful, while others may talk about the difficulties they faced in their personal or professional lives. These life journey videos allow audiences to know the influencers beyond the products or services that they promote. At the same time, the videos also allow influencers to present themselves in particular ways. For example, they may position themselves as hardworking individuals, successful entrepreneurs, survivors of difficult experiences or ordinary people who have gone through struggles similar to those experienced by their audiences. Therefore, it is important to look at not only what influencers say in these videos, but also how they use language to present themselves and communicate with their audiences.

One useful approach to examine this is through Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the interpersonal metafunction. The interpersonal metafunction is concerned with how language is used to establish and maintain relationships between speakers and their audiences. It also looks at how speakers express their opinions, attitudes and positions through language. In this study, the interpersonal meanings in influencers' life journey videos are examined through Mood, Modality and Appraisal. Mood can show how influencers interact with their audiences through different types of clauses, while Modality can reveal the degree of certainty, possibility, obligation or commitment expressed in their narratives. Appraisal, on the other hand, provides a framework for examining how influencers express their feelings and attitudes, evaluate people and events, and position their audiences to view their experiences in particular ways. By looking at these three linguistic resources, it is possible to gain a better understanding of how influencers use language to create connections with their audiences while sharing their personal experiences.

Although there has been a growing number of studies on social media influencers, there is still limited research that focuses specifically on the language used in influencers' personal narratives, particularly from the perspective of interpersonal meaning. Existing studies have largely examined areas such as influencer marketing, consumer engagement, self-presentation, identity and authenticity. While these studies have provided useful insights into how influencers communicate and influence their audiences, less attention has been given to how specific linguistic resources are used to construct relationships and negotiate meanings with audiences in life journey narratives. More specifically, studies that examine Mood, Modality and Appraisal together in analysing influencers' life journey videos remain limited. Therefore, this study examines how selected social media influencers use interpersonal linguistic resources in narrating their life journeys. Through the analysis of Mood, Modality and Appraisal, this study aims to provide a better understanding of how influencers use language not only to share their experiences, but also to present themselves, express their attitudes and build relationships with their audiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media influencers have become an important part of social media communication. They do not only use social media to promote products or services, but also to share their personal lives and experiences with their followers. Kay, Mulcahy and Parkinson (2020) explain that social media influencers participate in self-

presentation by creating an online image through the sharing of their everyday personal lives. Through this process, they are able to develop an identity that attracts followers and helps them establish themselves as influencers in the digital world. Abidin (2016) also explains that influencers use their everyday experiences and personal narratives as part of their online visibility. These personal narratives are important because they allow influencers to present themselves in ways that can be accepted and recognised by their audiences. At the same time, the identity that they construct online can also become part of their commercial identity.

The way influencers present themselves is closely related to the idea of authenticity. Audiences generally expect influencers to be genuine, relatable and honest, even though the content that they produce may be carefully planned. Abidin (2017) refers to this as “calibrated amateurism”, where influencers create content that gives the impression of being spontaneous and natural. They may share their daily activities, personal problems, family experiences or achievements to make their online presence appear more personal. Therefore, sharing personal information does not necessarily mean that influencers are simply revealing their private lives. It can also be part of how they construct their identity and maintain their relationship with their followers. This is particularly relevant to life journey videos because influencers often share experiences that are more personal, such as their struggles, failures, challenges and achievements.

Apart from identity construction, previous studies have also examined the relationship between influencers and their audiences. One of the important concepts in this area is parasocial interaction. Sokolova and Kefi (2020), for example, found that influencer credibility and parasocial interaction can influence followers' attitudes and purchase intentions. This indicates that followers may develop a sense of relationship with influencers even though the interaction takes place mainly through social media. Vrontis et al. (2021) also found that authenticity, credibility, engagement and parasocial relationships are among the important areas discussed in social media influencer research. Joshi et al. (2025), through their review of influencer marketing research, similarly identified parasocial relationships, authenticity, engagement and influence as important themes in the field.

These findings show that the relationship between influencers and followers is not only about the number of followers or the products being promoted. The personal connection that influencers create with their audiences is also important. Influencers therefore need to make their content relevant and relatable to their followers. One way of doing this is by sharing personal experiences and stories. When influencers talk about their struggles, difficulties and achievements, audiences are given an opportunity to know them beyond their professional or commercial activities. In this sense, life journey videos can be seen as one of the ways influencers develop a closer connection with their audiences.

While many studies have examined influencers from the marketing and consumer behaviour perspectives, there is also increasing interest in the language used by influencers. Jamil, Afzal and Zubair (2025), for example, examined language, power and identity in influencer culture. Their study shows that language plays an important role in how influencers construct their identity, establish authority and engage emotionally with their followers. Personal storytelling and emotional expression are among the strategies used to create a stronger connection with audiences. This is relevant to the present study because influencers' life journey videos are also based on personal storytelling. However, the focus of Jamil et al. is mainly on language, power and identity, while the present study is more concerned with how interpersonal meanings are constructed through linguistic choices.

Sosiana (2026) also examined influencer language, but from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis. The study focused on how influencers use language to construct digital public opinion. Among the linguistic strategies identified were evaluative language, modality, inclusive pronouns and personal narratives. The study shows that influencers can use language to position themselves and influence how audiences understand particular issues. However, the type of content examined in the study is different from the present study. Sosiana focuses on public opinion and the relationship between language, ideology and power, whereas the

present study focuses on influencers' personal life journey narratives. This difference is important because when influencers talk about their own experiences, they are not only expressing an opinion about an issue. They are also talking about themselves, evaluating their own experiences and presenting a particular version of their own identity.

Systemic Functional Linguistics provides a suitable framework for examining these linguistic choices. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) explain that language performs three main metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. The interpersonal metafunction is concerned with how speakers interact with others, express their attitudes and establish relationships through language. This is particularly relevant to social media because influencers communicate with audiences who may not be physically present but are still part of the interaction. Zappavigna (2018) explains that social media provides a space where users can create connections with others through language, evaluation and shared attitudes. Although the interaction is mediated by technology, users still use language to create a sense of connection and affiliation with their audiences.

For the present study, Mood and Modality are important because they provide insights into how influencers interact with their audiences. Mood can show how influencers give information, ask questions or make statements, while Modality can show their level of certainty, possibility, obligation or commitment (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). These linguistic choices can be important in life journey narratives. For example, when influencers give advice based on their own experiences, they may use modal expressions to show how strongly they believe in what they are saying. Similarly, the use of questions or statements may create different types of interaction with their audiences.

The Appraisal framework developed by Martin and White (2005) provides another useful way of examining interpersonal meaning. Appraisal focuses on how speakers express attitudes, make evaluations and position themselves in relation to other people and ideas. This is particularly useful when analysing life journey videos because influencers often evaluate their past experiences, people around them and their own achievements. They may express positive or negative feelings towards particular experiences, describe people in favourable or unfavourable ways, or strengthen their evaluation of certain events. Through these choices, they are not simply telling their stories. They are also showing audiences how they want those experiences to be understood.

The use of SFL to examine social media and influencer discourse is still developing. Some studies have applied SFL to influencer videos, particularly videos related to product promotion and persuasion. These studies show that linguistic resources can be used to present information, engage audiences and make promotional messages more persuasive. However, product endorsement videos and life journey videos serve different purposes. In product-related videos, influencers are mainly concerned with introducing or recommending a product. In life journey videos, the influencer becomes the main subject of the story. The focus is usually on their own experiences, including the difficulties they have faced and the achievements they have made. Therefore, the linguistic resources used in these two types of videos may also serve different interpersonal purposes.

Rosette-Crake (2025) provides another useful example of using an SFL-informed approach to examine social media video discourse. The study focuses on social media oratory and shows how speakers use linguistic and other semiotic resources when communicating with audiences through social media videos. Although the study does not specifically examine influencers' life journey videos, it shows that social media videos can be studied as forms of interaction where speakers construct relationships with their audiences. This is relevant to the present study because influencers also address their audiences directly through their videos. However, the present study focuses more specifically on the linguistic resources used when influencers narrate their own personal experiences.

Based on the studies discussed above, research on social media influencers has mainly focused on influencer marketing, consumer behaviour, self-presentation, authenticity, identity and audience engagement. More recent studies have started to examine influencer discourse from linguistic perspectives, particularly in relation to

identity, power and public opinion. These studies provide useful insights into the ways influencers use language to influence and communicate with their audiences. However, there is still limited research on the language used when influencers share their own life journeys.

Life journey videos are different from promotional or public-opinion content because the influencers are usually talking about their own experiences. They may share their struggles, failures, challenges and achievements and, at the same time, explain how they have responded to these experiences. In doing so, they also express their feelings, evaluate people and events and position themselves in particular ways. Therefore, the language used in these videos can provide useful insights into how influencers construct relationships with their audiences. However, limited attention has been given to how Mood, Modality and Appraisal work together in these narratives. Therefore, the present study examines selected social media influencers' life journey videos from the perspective of the interpersonal metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistics. The study focuses on Mood, Modality and Appraisal to understand how influencers use language to tell their stories, express their attitudes, present themselves and build connections with their audiences.

METHODOLOGY

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

This study is grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a theory of language developed primarily by M. A. K. Halliday and further elaborated by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). At its core, SFL views language not simply as a collection of grammatical rules or structures, but as a resource for making meaning. Language is functional because people use it to do things: to represent their experiences, interact with others, express attitudes and positions, and organise their ideas into meaningful messages. In this sense, language cannot be fully understood in isolation from the social context in which it is produced and interpreted.

One of the central principles of SFL is that language users constantly make choices. When speakers or writers put their thoughts into words, they select from a range of available lexical and grammatical resources to construct meanings in particular ways (Taverniers, 2004). These choices are not random. The words, grammatical structures, and patterns of expression that individuals use are influenced by the context, their purposes, and the meanings they intend to convey. Different choices, therefore, may result in different representations of experience and different relationships between the speaker or writer and their audience.

From an SFL perspective, the organisation of language reflects its role in social life. As Halliday (1990) argues, linguistic choices are closely connected to the social circumstances in which language is used. In other words, grammatical structures do not merely exist as formal features of language; they also contribute to the construction of meaning within a particular context. The way a message is structured can therefore reveal how a speaker or writer understands an experience, positions themselves in relation to others, and works towards particular social purposes.

To explain these different meaning-making functions, Halliday identifies three broad metafunctions of language. The ideational metafunction is concerned with how language represents experiences, events, and the world around us. The interpersonal metafunction focuses on how language is used to establish and negotiate social relationships, express attitudes, and position oneself in relation to others. Finally, the textual metafunction concerns how linguistic resources are organised to create coherent and meaningful messages.

This study focuses specifically on the Interpersonal Metafunction, as the life-journey videos examined are fundamentally interpersonal in nature, involving influencers' presentation of themselves and their relationships with their audiences. The interpersonal metafunction enables speakers to express attitudes, opinions, certainty, obligation and personal involvement while positioning themselves in relation to others. In the context of social media discourse, these linguistic choices are particularly relevant as influencers simultaneously construct

personal identities, present their experiences and establish relationships with their followers.

Within the interpersonal metafunction, Mood provides a means of examining how speakers structure interactions through choices such as declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives. Declaratives are typically used to provide information or make statements, interrogatives to seek information, and imperatives to issue commands or requests. In this study, mood choices are examined to determine how Malaysian influencers frame their life experiences and position themselves in relation to their audiences.

The study also examines modality, which concerns the speaker's degree of commitment, certainty, obligation or inclination towards a proposition or proposal. Modal expressions such as can, will, must, should, want to and their equivalents in Bahasa Malaysia allow speakers to indicate varying degrees of certainty, willingness and commitment. In influencer discourse, such resources may reveal how influencers position themselves towards their experiences, achievements, aspirations and plans.

In addition to Mood and Modality, this study draws on the Appraisal framework developed within the SFL context, particularly the work of Martin and White (2005). Appraisal provides a systematic framework for examining how speakers express evaluation and position themselves and others through language. The framework consists of three interconnected systems: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation. Attitude concerns the expression of feelings, judgements and evaluations of people, behaviour and things; Engagement concerns the ways speakers position their propositions in relation to other voices and viewpoints; and Graduation concerns the scaling or intensification of meanings.

The integration of Mood, Modality and Appraisal allows this study to examine interpersonal meaning from complementary perspectives. Mood provides insight into how influencers structure their interactions with audiences, while modality reveals their positioning and degree of commitment towards propositions, experiences and future actions. Appraisal, meanwhile, enables the analysis of how influencers express emotion, evaluate experiences and achievements, acknowledge or position alternative viewpoints, and intensify or soften their evaluations. Together, these resources provide a framework for examining how interpersonal meanings are constructed in Malaysian influencers' life-journey videos.

Accordingly, the theoretical framework adopted in this study conceptualises interpersonal meaning as being realised through the interaction of Mood, Modality and Appraisal, which collectively contribute to the construction of stance, evaluation and audience engagement. This framework is particularly appropriate for the analysis of influencer discourse, where the presentation of personal experiences is closely intertwined with the construction of identity and relationships with audiences.

Data Collection

This study analyses four video narratives produced by prominent Malaysian social media influencers, each chronicling their trajectory towards public success. These creators were purposefully selected based on the high audience reach, as reflected in their number of followers, as well as their notable recognitions through awards and industry collaborations. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to select data that can provide rich and in-depth insights rather than to achieve statistical representativeness (Patton, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). Additionally, while there are plenty of social media influencers in Malaysia, the current study intentionally narrows down to a smaller sample of the population, which will allow for a thorough analysis of the language used. Instead of attempting to study a large amount of data, the goal of the study is to give a preliminary insight into how interpersonal meanings are formed using language by social media influencers. The results thus can be seen as the basis for future research.

Table 1 outlines their follower counts across two key social media platforms and awards received, along with their demographic details and the analytical codes assigned to each influencer.

Table 1 Demographic details

Influencer Username	Influence Coding	Gender	Niche	No of followers	Notable Awards Received
s*****6	Influencer A (IA)	Male	Video effects	1.1 M (Instagram) 3.2 M (TikTok)	Winner Ultimate VFX Challenge 2023 Anugerah Gempak Hall of Fame 2022
k*****g	Influencer B (IB)	Male	Recipes and cooking	4.5 M (Instagram) 6.9 M (TikTok)	Creator of the Year (TikTok Awards 2023) Anugerah Maulidur Rasul Peringkat Kebangsaan 2025
p*** **g	Influencer C (IC)	Male	Food review and brand advertisements	1 M (Instagram) 5 M (TikTok)	TikTok Shop Creator of the Year 2024
q****	Influencer D (ID)	Female	Teaching and brand advertisements	1.1 M (Instagram) 2.6 M (TikTok)	TikTok Korea Award 2023

For this study, one video from each influencer was chosen. The videos were posted between September 2022 and December 2025, in conjunction with major life events such as birthdays and New Year celebrations. The videos, ranging from 38 seconds to 5 minutes, centre around the influencers' rise from humble beginnings to success. As they are all from Malaysia, a multicultural country with Bahasa Malaysia as the first or national language and English widely used as a second language, it is expected that the languages used in the videos are predominantly English and Bahasa Malaysia. The occurrences of code-switching and code-mixing are therefore visible. One of the videos by one of the influencers, however, was delivered fully in English.

Since the chosen videos featured both English and Bahasa Malaysia, including occurrences of code switching and code mixing, both languages were included in the analysis. The selection of language in every utterance was seen as an integral part of the discourse instead of being a reason for exclusion of that data, as reported in Zulkifli and Idris (2025). In cases where there were examples of Bahasa Malaysia terms or code mixing, the meaning of those terms was translated into English for the ease of analysis and reporting of results. The linguistic choices of the influencers were presented through retention of the wording in the data excerpts.

Table 2 below shows the details of the videos and the number of 'likes across different social media platforms.

Table 2 Details of the chosen videos

Influencer Coding	Posting Date	Duration	Total Number of Likes Across Platforms	Language Used
Influencer A (IA)	31 December 2025	0.38 min	8676 (Instagram) 5050 (TikTok)	English and Bahasa Malaysia
Influencer B	25 September	5.00 min	461k (Instagram)	English and Bahasa

(IB)	2022		574.3k (TikTok)	Malaysia
Influencer C (IC)	27 July 2024	2.55 min	198k (Instagram) 52k (TikTok)	English and Bahasa Malaysia
Influencer D (ID)	21 July 2024	1.24 min	128.6k (TikTok)	English

These videos were later transcribed using the Google Doc Voice Typing tool and validated by an anonymous transcriber and a reviewer. The transcription was qualitatively analysed based on the Mood, Modality and Appraisal analysis.

Research Questions

Ultimately, this research aims to answer the following research questions:

What are the mood, modality and appraisal choices employed by the Malaysian influencers in their life-journey videos?

How do these interpersonal choices construct the influencers' stance, evaluation and engagement?

This study purposefully emphasises qualitative transparency and not frequency counts. While the latter can be beneficial in pointing out patterns, they often risk oversimplifying the meaning-making in discourse. Instead, the analysis has been based on clear coding, inter-coder reliability and reflexivity of the coding process in order to maintain credibility. Transcripts have been carefully checked, coding has been negotiated until consensus has been reached and the inter-coder reliability has been further improved through discussion. By focusing on methodological clarity and interpretive depth, the study demonstrates how Mood, Modality and Appraisal interact to shape interpersonal meaning in life-journey narratives, without reducing the analysis to mere counts of linguistic features.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study was designed to answer two primary research questions: (1) What mood, modality and appraisal choices are employed by the Malaysian influencers in their life-journey videos; and (2) How do these interpersonal choices construct the influencers' stance, evaluation and engagement with their audience. The following table summarises the findings on mood choices from the videos:

Table 3 Dominant Mood Choice

Influencer	Dominant Mood Choice
Influencer A (IA)	Declarative
Influencer B (IB)	Declarative
Influencer C (IC)	Declarative
Influencer D (ID)	Declarative

Mood Choices

Declarative clauses overwhelmingly dominate the four videos. This is unsurprising, as the influencers are essentially telling stories about their lives. However, the prevalence of declarative Mood does more than simply allow them to recount past events. It positions their stories as personal testimony and establishes a form of

authority grounded in lived experience. Rather than explicitly instructing their audiences on how to become successful, the influencers present what happened to them and allow the experiences themselves to carry the message. For instance, Influencer IB structures much of his narrative around chronological declarations such as the following:

“Pada umur 20, aku dah tahun kedua di ...”,

“Pada umur 21, aku kumpul duit and then...”,

“Pada umur 22, aku graduate.”

This repeated pattern creates a sense of progression, as if the audience is being taken through the evidence behind his present success. His achievements are therefore not simply announced; they are narratively accounted for.

The same declarative structure, however, serves different interpersonal purposes across the videos. In Influencer IB's case, it helps construct success as something that has been accumulated over time through education, experimentation, failure and persistence. Influencer IC similarly begins with declaratives about his background, evidently as follows:

“[Saya] berasal dari keluarga sederhana”

“Bapa [saya] jual kuali dekat pasar pagi.”

These clauses establish a humble starting point before the narrative moves towards big figures in highlighting his success, such as the following:

“...video kami sudah reach 100 juta orang setiap bulan.”

“Dalam tempoh masa 2 tahun, [saya] sudah ada 5 juta followers.”

“Hari ini, [saya] boleh buat RM400,000 dalam satu live.”

The contrast between modest beginnings and extraordinary outcomes makes his success appear more significant, but it also helps to legitimise it. By first establishing where he came from, the subsequent display of success becomes less likely to be interpreted as simple self-praise.

Interestingly, Influencer IA departs from this achievement-oriented pattern. His declaratives are less concerned with establishing what he has accomplished and more concerned with assigning value to his relationship with his followers. The following statements shift attention away from the influencer himself and towards the audience.

“Setiap sokongan korang sangat bermakna”

“Perjalanan ini bermakna kerana korang semua”

In this sense, the declarative Mood does not merely communicate information. It redistributes ownership of the journey. The success being celebrated is presented as something collectively made possible rather than individually achieved.

Influencer ID adopts yet another approach. Her declarations repeatedly foreground personal feelings and values. Such as the following statements:

“I started as a teacher.”

“I'm very passionate about what I do.”

“I love teaching.”

For her, declarative clauses function as a form of self-disclosure, allowing her to construct authenticity through the consistent presentation of her personal identity.

The limited use of imperatives across the four videos is also notable. Despite their roles as influencers, they rarely tell their followers directly what to do. Apart from instances such as “jangan putus asa” (Influencer IC), influence is generally achieved through narration rather than instruction. The underlying message is not simply an instruction of what they tell people to do, but rather a sharing platform of what they have experienced and what it has taught them. This makes the interpersonal relationship less hierarchical. The influencers construct influence through experiential authority, inviting audiences to draw inspiration from their journeys rather than explicitly positioning themselves as people who have the right to command.

Modality Choices

The use of Modality across the four videos is more uneven and perhaps more revealing than the dominant declarative Mood. As presented in Table 2, the influencers employed different modality choices in their videos.

Table 4 Dominant Modality

Influencer	Dominant Modality
Influencer A (IA)	Low/ implicit
Influencer B (IB)	High inclination and commitment
Influencer C (IC)	Obligation and inclination
Influencer D (ID)	High inclination (low use of modality)

While the other linguistic patterns may initially suggest that these influencers are confidently narrating a clear path towards success, their modal choices reveal varying degrees of uncertainty, desire and commitment. This is particularly evident in Influencer IB's narrative. The following expressions reveal that his journey was not narrated as a carefully planned route towards inevitable success:

“Aku rasa macam nak try buat side income”,

“Aku ingatkan berjaya, rupanya tak.”

“Aku ingatkan dengan kejayaan yang ada ni boleh ubah hidup keluarga aku.”

Instead, the narrative is marked by experimentation and uncertainty. The use of ‘nak try’, ‘rasa macam’ and ‘boleh’ positions many of his decisions as possibilities rather than certainties. This is significant because it complicates the conventional success narrative. Looking at Influencer IB now, it would be easy to assume that his current achievements were the result of a clear vision and a carefully executed plan. However, his modal choices tell a different story. He repeatedly represents himself as trying, deciding, hoping and sometimes being wrong. Even the transition from engineering to content creation is not presented as a grand masterplan. Instead, he says:

“Aku rasa baik aku buat video masak je.”

The casualness of this expression is important. It constructs the decision as something tentative and almost experimental. His eventual success therefore becomes more authentic because the narrative acknowledges uncertainty rather than retrospectively presenting every decision as obviously correct.

Modality in Influencer ID's video is more strongly associated with aspiration and purpose. Her statements project her identity towards the future, such as the following:

“My dream is to use this platform to reach even more children in need and to inspire more people,”

“My goal was just to share as much uplifting and fun and happy content.”

Unlike Influencer IB, whose modality frequently emerges around trying and deciding, Influencer ID's modal orientation centres on what she hopes to do with the platform she has gained. The viral video is therefore not constructed as the final achievement but as a means through which future possibilities can be realised.

“I'm able to accomplish them because of you guys”

The above sentence is an example where she highlights her success as a collective achievement, not an individual success. Her capacity to achieve her goals is explicitly linked to audience support. This is another way in which the narrative softens individual success by distributing agency across the influencer-audience relationship.

Influencer IC's modality, on the other hand, becomes increasingly connected to responsibility. His statement below follows his observation that children approach him and say that they want to become like him:

“Saya tahu tugas saya sangat-sangat penting dan saya akan teruskan.”

The sequence is important: visibility produces imitation, and imitation produces responsibility. His future commitment is therefore not presented merely as personal ambition. It is framed as something that he now has a duty to uphold because others are watching him. In this sense, the modality of ‘akan teruskan’ carries more than future orientation. It signals commitment to a role that has become socially significant.

Influencer IA, in contrast, makes relatively little use of explicit modality. His short narrative is largely situated in the present and the past, focusing on what his followers have already done for him rather than what he intends to do next. This absence is meaningful. While the other influencers project future aspirations, commitments or ambitions, Influencer IA's discourse remains focused on acknowledgement. His identity is constructed less around what he will do next and more around what the audience's support has made possible. Thus, Modality differentiates the influencers quite clearly. Influencer IA foregrounds relational gratitudes rather than future-oriented promises, Influencer IB negotiates possibility and uncertainty, Influencer IC expresses commitment and responsibility, while Influencer ID projects aspiration.

Appraisal

Table 5 below summarises the Appraisal choices found in the four videos:

Table 5 Appraisal Choices

Influencer	Attitude Pattern	Engagement Pattern	Graduation Pattern
Influencer A (IA)	Affect / Appreciation	Mostly monoglossic, audience address	Lexical strong intensification, repetition

Influencer B (IB)	Affect + Judgement+ Appreciation	Personal + assertions + expectations/ contrasts, audience address	Strong quantification and intensification
Influencer C (IC)	Judgement + Appreciation + Affect	Explicit incorporation of others' doubts/ rejections	Strong numerical scaling
Influencer D (ID)	Affect + Judgement	Acknowledges negative internet discourse but positions herself positively	Repetition and intensifiers

Influencer IA's narrative is relatively brief compared with the other three videos, yet it is strongly interpersonal and emotionally oriented. The Appraisal analysis indicates that Attitude, particularly Affect and Appreciation, is the dominant resource through which Influencer IA constructs his relationship with his audience. His repeated expressions of gratitude explicitly encode positive Affect towards his followers such as the following:

“Terima kasih kepada yang sentiasa ada,”

“Terima kasih kerana tidak pernah jemu,”

“Terima kasih kerana terus percaya,”.

At the same time, the followers and their support are positively evaluated through Appreciation, as seen below:

“Setiap sokongan korang sangat bermakna”

“Perjalanan ini bermakna kerana korang semua.”

“Korang semualah sebab saya terus berkarya”

These expressions position the audience not merely as recipients of his content but as an important source of meaning in his personal and professional journey. These statements strengthen this relational positioning by attributing his continued creative work directly to his followers. Thus, Influencer IA constructs his identity not primarily through claims of individual achievement, but through an identity of gratitude, humility and dependence on audience support.

The Engagement resources in Influencer IA's narrative are relatively limited, as there is little explicit acknowledgement of alternative voices or viewpoints. Most of his propositions are presented as direct and relatively uncontested assertions. In Appraisal terms, this predominantly monoglossic presentation gives his statements a sense of personal certainty and sincerity. Nevertheless, his repeated use of the informal pronoun “korang” creates a strong sense of interpersonal proximity with his audience. Although direct audience address is not itself an Engagement category, it contributes to the dialogic character of the discourse by positioning followers as an intimate community rather than a distant audience. The Graduation system further reinforces this close relationship through several intensifying expressions. Words and phrases such as “sentiasa,” “tidak pernah,” “setiap,” “terus,” and “every single support” increase the force of his appreciation. Rather than presenting audience support as occasional or limited, these expressions construe it as continuous, comprehensive and enduring. Overall, Influencer IA's Appraisal choices construct a grateful and relational creator identity, in which his continued creative journey is represented as inseparable from the loyalty and encouragement of his followers.

Influencer IB's life-journey narrative demonstrates a considerably wider range of Appraisal resources, reflecting the complexity of his story, which moves through achievement, failure, loss, perseverance and

eventual success. Within the Attitude system, Affect, Judgement and Appreciation work together to construct a resilient and accomplished identity. Positive Affect is expressed through terms such as “excited” and “sangat bersyukur,” while negative emotional experiences are also acknowledged, particularly when he explains that increasing popularity resulted in “privacy tu makin kurang hari demi hari.” His account of his father’s death introduces a significant emotional shift when his expectation that his success would improve his family’s life is disrupted by the statement, “Tapi umur dia tak panjang.” Importantly, however, the narrative does not remain centred on loss. Instead, the experience is incorporated into a broader story of perseverance. Judgement is particularly evident in expressions such as “langkah berani” and “tak give up on my dreams,” which construct him as courageous, determined and persistent. His repeated references to failure below initially introduce negative evaluations:

“Jual happy meal, gagal.”

“Jual baju, gagal.

“Jual resume template pun gagal.”

However, these failures are subsequently reframed as stages within his eventual success. Consequently, failure is not used to construct an incompetent identity but rather becomes evidence of resilience and persistence. Appreciation is also used extensively to evaluate his educational achievements, professional experience and entrepreneurial journey, including his “Cum Laude Honors,” “anugerah dekan,” and “ATNT innovation award.” His retrospective statement that he is “sangat bersyukur dengan pengalaman yang ada dan rezeki yang ada pada hari ini” is particularly significant because it positively evaluates not only his achievements but the entire collection of experiences, including the difficult ones.

In terms of Engagement, Influencer IB predominantly presents his life story through direct personal assertions, creating a largely monoglossic narrative. The repeated chronological structure presents his account as a coherent personal history such as below:

“Pada umur 20,...”

“Pada umur 21...”

“Pada umur 23...”

“Pada umur 24...”

However, the narrative occasionally introduces alternative expectations or propositions that are subsequently contradicted. For example, the following establishes an anticipated successful outcome before immediately challenging it with the actual failure.

“Aku ingatkan berjaya, rupanya tak”

“Aku ingatkan dengan kejayaan yang ada ni boleh ubah hidup keluarga aku.”

These contrasting propositions create a dialogic dimension within the narrative, allowing Influencer IB to represent his journey as unpredictable rather than as a straightforward path to success. Direct references to “korang” and “you guys” also position the audience as participants in this journey. The Graduation system is particularly prominent, with both intensification and quantification used to dramatise the scale of his transformation. Numerical references to “setengah juta followers,” “1 mil,” “2 mil” and “3 mil followers” provide measurable indicators of increasing influence, while expressions such as “sangat bersyukur,” “semua

saving aku hilang” and “penuh dengan cabaran” amplify the emotional and material magnitude of his experiences. The cumulative effect of these resources is the construction of a resilient, hardworking and successful entrepreneur whose achievements are presented as the outcome of perseverance, adversity, personal sacrifice and audience support.

Influencer IC's narrative contains a strong combination of Judgement, Appreciation and Affect, particularly in the construction of perseverance, entrepreneurial success and social responsibility. Judgement is evident from the beginning of the narrative through his positive evaluation of his father as someone who worked hard to support the family: “[Saya] pun sangat bangga bapa saya kerja keras untuk membesarkan kami.” His own childhood aspiration to become a businessman is subsequently connected to his entrepreneurial journey. Negative Judgement is introduced through references such as the following:

“Bila start, banyak bantahan...”

“...banyak yang kawan pun tak percaya idea ini.”

“Kebanyakan video adalah banyak rejection daripada orang”

However, these negative evaluations are immediately countered by the positive Judgement encoded in “kami pun tak putus asa” and his explicit message, “jangan putus asa.” Thus, rejection and doubt are not presented as evidence of failure but instead, they become resources for constructing a positive identity based on determination and perseverance. Appreciation is also prominent in his evaluation of achievements. His references to “100 juta orang setiap bulan,” “5 juta followers” and his nomination for the TikTokShop Creator award contribute to a positive evaluation of his professional achievements. Affect is expressed through “sangat bangga,” “sangat bersyukur” and repeated expressions of gratitude towards his followers and TikTok. The narrative therefore presents success as something that generates not only personal pride but also an obligation to give back to the community.

Influencer IC's Engagement resources are particularly significant because he explicitly incorporates the perspectives and responses of other people into his narrative. His video follows a pattern of doubt → persistence → achievement, with alternative voices functioning to strengthen rather than weaken his self-positioning. Direct references to followers similarly establish a strong interpersonal relationship with the audience, particularly in “Terima kasih semua yang sokong saya” and “followers yang sokong [saya] since day one.” Graduation is one of the most striking features of Influencer IC's narrative, particularly through the extensive use of numerical quantification. The progression below dramatically scales the extent of his commercial transformation and provides concrete measures of success:

“... satu live RM3000”

“RM400,000 dalam satu live”

“100 juta orang setiap bulan”

“5 juta followers...”

Lexical intensification is also evident in expressions such as “sangat canggih,” “sangat bersyukur” and “sangat-sangat penting.” These resources collectively amplify the significance of his achievements and responsibilities. Overall, Influencer IC's Appraisal choices construct a persistent, successful and socially responsible entrepreneurial identity, where commercial success is presented as meaningful because it enables him to support others and fulfil a broader social purpose.

Influencer ID's narrative is characterised by a strong emphasis on Affect, with emotional evaluation forming an important part of how she constructs both her professional and personal identity. Expressions such as below explicitly encode positive Affect:

"I'm very passionate about what I do."

"I love kids."

"I love teaching."

"I love making content."

"I love sharing with you guys"

Appreciation is also used to evaluate the role of social media and her viral video, particularly in expressions such as "positive content," "uplifting," "fun" and "happy content." The viral video is therefore not constructed simply as a source of popularity. Its value lies in enabling her to share her classroom experiences, mental health classes and other issues about which she is passionate. Judgement is evident in the construction of her professional and moral identity as a teacher who wishes to "reach even more children in need and to inspire more people." Through this representation, she positions herself as caring, socially responsible and committed to making a positive difference. Her success is consequently evaluated not only in terms of visibility but also in terms of its potential social impact.

The Engagement system is particularly interesting because Influencer ID explicitly acknowledges an alternative and negative perspective on social media when she states, "The internet can be a very scary place." This introduces a broader negative evaluation of the online environment, against which she positions her own communicative purpose in "My goal was just to share as much uplifting and fun and happy content." The contrast constructs her as an actor who consciously attempts to provide an alternative to the potentially harmful aspects of the internet. Much of the remainder of the narrative is monoglossic, with her personal experiences and beliefs presented directly and confidently. At the same time, the repeated references to "you guys" position followers as active participants in her success. Statements such as "I'm able to accomplish them because of you guys" and "you guys have been encouraging me a lot" explicitly attribute her ability to pursue her ambitions to audience support.

Graduation further intensifies this positive representation through expressions such as "super viral," "very passionate," "very very big dreams," "even more children," and "thank you thank you so much." The repetition of "very" and "thank you" increases the force of her emotional evaluations, while "super viral" intensifies the scale of the video's success. Overall, Influencer ID's Appraisal choices construct a passionate, caring and socially purposeful teacher-creator identity, in which social media success is legitimised through its capacity to inspire, educate and support others rather than through popularity alone.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the Mood, Modality and Appraisal choices suggest that these life-journey videos are doing something more complex than simply documenting how the influencers became successful. They are carefully constructing legitimate versions of success. The influencers do not simply say that they are successful and expect the audience to accept the claim. Their success has to be explained, justified and, in some cases, morally softened.

Influencer IB's success is legitimised through failure and persistence. The repeated negative evaluations of unsuccessful attempts allow his eventual achievements to be interpreted as earned rather than accidental.

Influencer ID legitimises her visibility through purpose; the platform matters because it allows her to continue teaching, helping and inspiring. Influencer IC legitimises commercial success through humility and social responsibility, repeatedly connecting his achievements to his modest background and his desire to give back. Influencer IA, meanwhile, legitimises his journey by presenting it as inseparable from the support of his followers.

Perhaps, then, the most important finding is not simply that these influencers use positive language, express gratitude or demonstrate resilience. More critically, their interpersonal choices reveal an underlying tension in influencer self-presentation. They need to talk about themselves and display evidence of success, but they also need to remain relatable, grateful and authentic. Mood allows them to establish authority through personal testimony rather than direct instruction. Modality reveals different orientations towards uncertainty, aspiration and responsibility. Appraisal allows them to celebrate achievement while simultaneously balancing it against failure, struggle, gratitude and contribution to others.

This study highlights the importance of understanding contemporary digital discourse, particularly in examining how social media influencers connect with and engage their audiences. The way influencers narrate their experiences plays an important role in this process, allowing them to make themselves and their stories relatable and relevant to their followers. Through their narratives, influencers do more than simply tell audiences who they are or share their experiences. They also construct particular versions of themselves and their journeys, presenting their success as something that is deserved, meaningful, and socially legitimate. In doing so, their narratives become a space where identity, success, and authenticity are continuously constructed and negotiated. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of research on discourse analysis by offering further insight into how meaning and identity are constructed within the increasingly influential landscape of contemporary digital communication.

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