

# I Really Know You: How Influencers Can Increase Audience Engagement by Referencing Their Close Social Ties

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Acknowledgements:

n/a

Cite as:

Chung Jaeyeon, Kalra Ajay, Ding Yu (2023), I Really Know You: How Influencers Can Increase Audience Engagement by Referencing Their Close Social Ties.

*Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy, 52nd, (112561)*

Paper from the 52nd Annual EMAC Conference, Odense/Denmark, May 23-26, 2023



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## **Abstract**

Despite firms' continued interest in using influencers to reach their target consumers, academic and practical insights are limited on what levers an influencer can use to enhance audience engagement using their posts. We demonstrate that posting stories with or about people whom they share close ties with—such as family, friends, and romantic partners—can be one effective lever. We analyze texts and photographs of 55,631 posts of 763 influencers on Instagram, and after controlling for several variables, we find robust support that consumers “like” posts that reference close social ties. We supplement the Instagram data with an experimental approach and confirm the relationship between close ties and consumer engagement. Managerially, we also show that sponsored posts tend to be perceived negatively compared to non-sponsored posts, yet, embedding social ties on the sponsored posts can mitigate the negative response.

**Subject Areas:** *Advertising, Consumer Behaviour*

**Track:** Digital Marketing & Social Media