



# The mindful marketplace: ideological repackaging in influencer marketing<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Amid the broader cultural rise of contemplative traditions, social media influencers, particularly those promoting mindfulness, blend commercial self-promotion with the ideological commitments of this philosophy. This study examines how they navigate authenticity and commerciality by repackaging mindfulness into marketable products. Using a qualitative analysis of 16 mindfulness influencers on Instagram, we identify two strategies, discourse and practice, that enable them to maintain authenticity while commercializing a belief system. Our findings challenge the assumption that authenticity and commerciality are inherently oppositional. This study demonstrates how these dynamics can coexist, while raising ethical concerns around authenticity inflation, informal expertise, and the monetization of belief systems.

## 1. Introduction

The mindfulness market has transformed an ancient Buddhist tradition, rooted in contemplative practices centered on awareness, compassion, and equanimity (Bahl et al., 2016; Mick, 2017), into a commercialized space featuring books, apps, and courses (Centre for Mindfulness Studies, 2024). This shift has extended into the digital sphere through the #mindfulness movement (Kraus, 2019), where social media influencers promote practices such as meditation, yoga, and mindful living. Mindfulness influencers promote present-moment awareness, non-judgment, and inner balance (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Brown & Ryan, 2003), while drawing on ideologies—defined as systems of beliefs and values that guide behavior and attitudes (Arnesson, 2023)—as aspirational frameworks. Unlike activist (Thomas & Fowler, 2023) or sustainability (Pittman & Abell, 2021; Jacobson & Harrison, 2022; Kaivonen et al., 2024) influencers who advocate for tangible change, mindfulness influencers focus on internal contemplation. This makes for a compelling motivation to study, as they “platform” (Drenten et al., 2023) traditionally introspective ideologies as products, illustrating how self-transformation is repackaged into profit-making within digital markets (Aboelenien et al., 2023).

Mindfulness, as traditionally practiced, involves internal reflection

to cultivate balance, calm, and objectivity (Brown & Ryan, 2003). It is historically solitary and quiet, resisting self-branding (Mick, 2017), materiality (Errmann et al., 2021), and attention-seeking (Walsh, 2016). However, on social media, mindfulness must conform to platform visibility and commercial viability (Drenten et al., 2023; Goode et al., 2023). This shift, which we term ideological repackaging, renders mindfulness into a market-ready ideology by shifting its focus from inner contemplation to public-facing digital work. This adaptation highlights how mindfulness influencers navigate the tension between its introspective origins and the attention economy’s demands, offering insight into how social media influencers propagate ideologies through digital spaces (Brooks et al., 2021; Ooi et al., 2023). Mindfulness influencers must reconcile authentic internal work with the commercialization of their labor.

Authenticity is essential for building trust, requiring influencers to project sincerity while managing monetization (Goode et al., 2023; Liao & Chen, 2024). This tension is sharper for mindfulness influencers, who promote internal reflection and non-materialism within a system that demands “authenticity work” for visibility (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Duffy, 2017; Chen et al., 2023). Although mindfulness may appear inherently virtuous (Small & Lew, 2021), commercialization risks shifting its focus from philosophy to profit (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Choi & Berger,

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2009). The rise of non-expert authorities also raises concerns about diluting perceived authenticity (Martin & Smith, 2008; Vasconcelos et al., 2021). Mindfulness influencers exemplify how commercial pressures reshape authenticity (Audrezet et al., 2020) and transform philosophies into commodifiable belief systems. While prior work often treats authenticity and commerciality in tension (Chen et al., 2023; Hofstetter & Gollnhofer, 2024; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Marwick, 2013), mindfulness influencers highlight how ideological labor may bridge these demands. Addressing this gap advances understanding of how markets absorb and reconfigure belief systems, raising broader ethical questions for influencer culture. This leads us to ask: (1) How do mindfulness influencers repackage contemplative practices into commodifiable belief systems to maintain both authenticity and commercial viability? (2) What strategies and tactics enable this ideological repackaging in digital spaces?

This study employed a qualitative interpretive approach, using hermeneutic analysis to examine how mindfulness influencers navigate authenticity and commerciality in promoting an ideological product (Thompson, 1997). We purposively sampled 16 mindfulness influencers from established influencer marketing platforms and analyzed 3,424 Instagram posts collected between September 2021 and June 2024. Through a four-stage iterative process (Thompson, 1997), we identified two strategies and six tactics that influencers use to maintain authenticity while commercializing their belief systems.

Our contribution reframes authenticity and commerciality as complementary, showing how mindfulness influencers integrate commerciality as a natural extension of their self-brand (Audrezet et al., 2020; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Duffy & Hund, 2019). Unlike other influencers who align sponsorships with their brand to maintain credibility (Abidin, 2018; Arriagada & Bishop, 2021), mindfulness influencers present their offerings (e.g., courses, retreats, products) as authentic expressions of their philosophy rather than external partnerships requiring negotiation. Their digital labor commodifies internal transformation rather than advocacy (Pittman & Abell, 2021; Thomas & Fowler, 2023), requiring continuous performance of aspirational self-improvement to sustain commercial success (Schouten et al., 2021; Wellman, 2024). This raises concerns around authenticity inflation, informal spiritual expertise, and the monetization of non-materialist philosophies. Finally, we examine how ideological repackaging enables influencers to commercialize belief systems while preserving perceived authenticity, offering insights applicable to other ideological influencers (Drenten et al., 2023; Kapoor et al., 2023; Thomas & Fowler, 2023; Wellman, 2024).

## 2. Conceptual background

Authenticity is central to how mindfulness influencers commercialize their ideological labor. We review tensions between authenticity and commerciality, examine how mindfulness is repackaged as an ideology, and then operationalize mindfulness influencers within a broader typology of ideological influencers.

### 2.1. Authenticity and commerciality in mindfulness influencing

Perceived authenticity is essential in influencer marketing, as it fosters trust and credibility with audiences. Authenticity is broadly defined as the perception of genuineness and alignment with one's true self (Audrezet et al., 2020), while commerciality involves the commodification of the self (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). Influencers must navigate both roles as product promoters and facilitators of authentic sociality, developing "influencer imaginaries" to reconcile these tensions (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021).

This balancing act creates two key pressures: the expectation to share one's "real self," particularly with smaller or intimate audiences (Kang & Wei, 2020), and the need to "perform" in ways that sustain monetization and visibility (Abidin, 2018; Haenlein et al., 2020). These pressures can lead to content standardization (Van Driel & Dumitrica, 2021) and, at

times, a crisis of authenticity (Audrezet et al., 2020). To manage this, influencers engage in strategic digital labor, such as creating private or secondary accounts like "Finstagrams" (i.e., fake Instagram accounts) for more candid self-expression, separate from the demands of commercialized influencer culture (Goode et al., 2023). Rather than being "fake," these accounts can serve as more "real" portrayals of influencers' lives, offering a diversion from commercial pressures while preserving perceived authenticity (Reade, 2021; Goode et al., 2023).

Despite having control over their self-presentation, authenticity remains precarious when measured against commerciality. Since commerciality is inherently tied to monetization and attention-seeking, influencers must balance self-expression with platform algorithms and brand expectations (Salisbury & Pooley, 2017; Duffy & Hund, 2019). This tension manifests in two ways: some influencers attempt to resist the attention economy by emphasizing more personal or "authentic" content (Goode et al., 2023), while others align their perceived authenticity with platform logics to maximize engagement (Drenten et al., 2023).

Marwick (2013) conceptualizes authenticity as performative, with influencers curating content to appear genuine, while Duffy and Hund (2019) describe the "authenticity bind," where they must balance relatability with aspirational idealization, especially in sponsored content. This tension is pronounced among health and wellness influencers, who cultivate authenticity through contradictory practices that form an "influencer pedagogy," indirectly educating followers via relatable yet aspirational interactions (Hendry et al., 2022). As influencers institutionalize digital labor, they negotiate relationships with audiences, advertisers, and platforms to maintain trust amid commercialization (Van Driel & Dumitrica, 2021). Such negotiations shape their evolving role as intermediaries in the platform economy (Drenten et al., 2023; Goode et al., 2023). Within this context, mindfulness influencers face a distinctive ideological and commercial paradox: unlike influencers who overtly self-promote (Abidin, 2016), they advocate internal contemplation while navigating the visibility-driven demands of social media (Brooks et al., 2021; Ooi et al., 2023), making them a compelling case for studying authenticity in commercialized influencer work.

Existing research suggests that authenticity is often measured by how closely an influencer's digital persona reflects their offline self (Schultze, 2014), but mindfulness complicates this dynamic. As an ideology, mindfulness is inherently tied to self-enhancement and inner transformation rather than external performance. Mindfulness influencers may embody a distinct form of authenticity, one that is internalized before being outwardly projected. In this sense, mindfulness functions as an "uncalculated" core self, where outward actions naturally reflect inner beliefs (Mick, 2017). Their commercial work, whether promoting courses, retreats, or digital content, may be perceived as an extension of their ideological commitments rather than a departure from them.

Mindfulness influencers can be compared to influencers who use alternative strategies to manage authenticity, such as Finstagram (Goode et al., 2023) or ideological influencers who platform deeply held values (Drenten et al., 2023). For mindfulness influencers, authenticity may be more fluid, as their brand is rooted in practices of inner reflection and self-work. Abidin's (2018) concept of "porous authenticity," where influencers blur the lines between offline and online selves, may be especially relevant to mindfulness influencers, who present their digital personas as direct extensions of their work.

Mindfulness influencers may be uniquely positioned to integrate authenticity and commerciality in ways that feel less performative to audiences. Unlike celebrity influencers, who are often seen as highly curated (De Veirman et al., 2017), mindfulness influencers build credibility by appearing both ordinary and enlightened. Their relatability (Schouten et al., 2021) is constructed through self-disclosure, where their "rawness" (Reade, 2021) and amateur-quality aesthetics (Abidin, 2017) create intimacy with followers. Though commercial, their digital work may feel more authentic because it appears as self-work. Little is known about how an internal tradition shapes how influencers navigate authenticity and commerciality. Existing studies often frame

commercial pressures as a threat to authenticity (Hofstetter & Gollnhofer, 2024; Brooks et al., 2021), particularly as influencers shift from intrinsic content creation to monetized opportunities that may compromise sincerity. This tension directs attention to how mindfulness is repackaged as an ideology.

## 2.2. Mindfulness influencers: ideology as product

Ideology encompasses the mental frameworks, values, and beliefs that shape worldviews and influence social structures (Eckhardt et al., 2018). It is expressed through both social representations and marketplace actions (Schmitt et al., 2022), making it central to influencer culture. Research shows that influencers promote ideologies by aligning with ethical stances to gain legitimacy (Aboelenien et al., 2023), acting as ideological intermediaries who cultivate aspirational belief frameworks (Arnesson, 2023), and using platforming techniques to integrate ideologies into everyday practices (Drenten et al., 2023). Influencers can also mobilize social interests among followers (Rothut et al., 2024).

While research explores how influencers promote ideologies, less attention has been given to how these ideologies are repackaged into marketable products. Social media influencers do not merely share beliefs; they transform them into consumable, commercialized forms that align with platform logics and consumer culture (Arnesson, 2023). We define this process as ideological repackaging: the transformation of mindfulness from a quiet, introspective, and non-materialistic tradition into an outward-facing market-ready ideology, where influencers commodify it into aspirational lifestyles and narratives. Unlike ideological promotion, ideological repackaging requires influencers to materialize an immaterial philosophy (Walsh, 2016), translating contemplative practices into digital and commercial forms of labor that sustain influencer economies.

Historically, mindfulness was an ethical and contemplative practice rather than a consumer good (Rosenberg, 2004). It emphasized non-attachment, self-reflection, and detachment from materialism (Brown & Ryan, 2003). However, as mindfulness entered Western consumer markets, it became a tool for self-optimization and personal well-being (Bahl et al., 2016; Sheth et al., 2011). This shift led to its commodification through books, courses, wellness retreats, and workplace mindfulness programs (Centre for Mindfulness Studies, 2024), reframing it as a solution for stress, productivity, and self-improvement rather than an existential or ethical practice. While influencers in other domains are often seen as idols of consumption, mindfulness influencers position themselves as agents of conscious reflection and self-transcendence (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

These influencers extend the commercial trajectory of mindfulness but uniquely operate within the attention economy, requiring them to adapt mindfulness into content that is both consumable and algorithmically visible. Unlike traditional wellness brands or self-help authors, influencers rely on engagement-driven digital content rather than static products to sustain their platform presence. This necessitates the visual and narrative materiality of mindfulness, transforming it into three key commercial forms.

First, mindfulness is repackaged as an aspirational lifestyle, tied to wellness aesthetics, minimalist living, and curated self-care routines. Second, it is commercialized through personalized services and digital products such as courses, guided meditations, and coaching. Third, mindfulness influencers craft narratives using origin stories and personal struggles to appear relatable and aspirational. This process embeds philosophical foundations in their messages (Stanley et al., 2018), positioning influencers as symbolic and literal messengers who shape meaning for followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Repackaging mindfulness raises societal and ethical concerns. Mindfulness promotes detachment from materialism, yet its commercialization requires strategic visibility. While mindfulness influencers often present their work as purpose-driven and socially beneficial (Small & Lew, 2021), reliance on monetization can shift priorities toward profitability over philosophical depth (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Choi &

Berger, 2009). Further, the rise of non-expert influencers raises concerns about dilution and misrepresentation, as algorithmic visibility does not guarantee expertise (Martin & Smith, 2008; Vasconcelos et al., 2021). Examining ideological repackaging provides insight into the role of influencers in shaping belief systems, commerciality with credibility (Vasconcelos et al., 2021), and transforming philosophies into market-ready cultural commodities (Aboelenien et al., 2023). Accordingly, the next section operationalizes mindfulness influencers within a broader typology of ideological influencers.

## 2.3. Operationalizing mindfulness influencers

Mindfulness influencers are a distinct type. We present a typology (see Table 1), outlining distinctions of ideological influencers across description, motivations, authenticity crafting, and the navigation of authenticity and commerciality.

While the table provides a structured comparison, the overlaps between ideological influencer categories necessitate a more dynamic approach. Accordingly, we integrate a radar chart (see Fig. 1), which compares influencer types across four key attributes: content focus, ideology promotion, authenticity crafting, and commerciality navigation. Each attribute is measured on a 1–5 scale, but the anchors vary by attribute. For content focus, 1 represents outward collective change (e.g., activist influencers) and 5 represents inward self-transformation (e.g., mindfulness influencers). For ideology promotion, 1 indicates minimal or implicit ideological content and 5 indicates highly explicit, central, and consistent ideological messaging. For authenticity crafting, 1 means limited emphasis on signaling authenticity, while 5 means authenticity is a continual, strategically foregrounded practice. For commerciality navigation, 1 denotes limited or resisted commercial engagement (e.g., avoidance of sponsorships), whereas 5 denotes extensive, integrated commercial activity (e.g., frequent monetization through courses, products, or sponsorships).

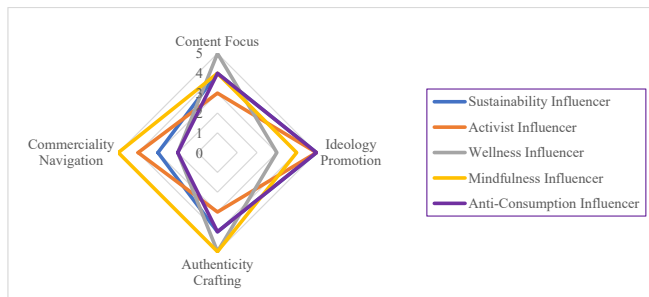
This comparison shows how influencer types balance ideological commitment and market engagement. Activist and anti-consumption influencers score high on ideology promotion and authenticity crafting but face greater friction in commerciality due to risks of opportunism or hypocrisy. Wellness and sustainability influencers score more evenly, reflecting smoother integration into commercial ecosystems. Mindfulness influencers, while also balanced, are distinct for their inward-facing focus and strong ideological grounding, requiring them to commercialize internal transformation without undermining authenticity.

Sustainability influencers promote environmentally conscious lifestyles, using digital platforms to advocate for systemic change. Their work often involves partnerships with eco-friendly brands, leveraging authenticity through personal sustainability commitments while balancing the risk of greenwashing (Pittman & Abell, 2021). Activist influencers, on the other hand, engage in sociopolitical advocacy, using hashtags, viral campaigns, and community mobilization to push for justice-oriented causes (Thomas & Fowler, 2023). Within this category, we distinguish between different activist types, such as race and gender justice advocates, body positivity influencers, and political activists. Their authenticity is tied to consistency and credibility within activist communities, but they risk being perceived as performative if their activism appears opportunistic.

Wellness influencers focus on holistic health, promoting emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. While they may share some content with mindfulness influencers, such as yoga and meditation, their overarching goal is typically health or aesthetic self-optimization rather than mindfulness as a practice of non-attachment and acceptance (Wellman, 2024). Anti-consumption influencers, in contrast, critique consumerist culture and advocate for minimalism. They leverage counter-narratives like “anti-hauls” to promote mindful consumption (Wood, 2021), but unlike mindfulness influencers, their ideology centers on social change rather than inner awareness. While anti-consumption influencers often promote environmentally conscious behaviors, we position them as a

**Table 1**  
Influencer typology.

Influencer Type	Description	Ideological Framing and Motivations	Authenticity Crafting	Navigating Authenticity and Commerciality	References
Sustainability Influencer	<p>Content creators advocating for sustainable lifestyles, eco-consciousness, and environmentally friendly practices.</p> <p><b>Sub-types:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Greenfluencers</i>: Promote eco-conscious lifestyles.</li> <li>• <i>Sustainable Fashion Influencers</i>: Focus on sustainable fashion.</li> <li>• <i>Climate Influencers</i>: Advocate for climate awareness.</li> <li>• <i>Thrifting Influencers</i>: Promote thrifted fashion for sustainability.</li> </ul>	<p>Use storytelling, data-backed evidence, and partnerships with sustainable brands to inspire eco-conscious behavior.</p> <p>Inspire pro-environmental behavior and cultural change.</p>	<p>Build trust through transparency (e.g., personal eco-practices) and community engagement.</p>	<p>Risk accusations of greenwashing when collaborating with brands perceived as insincere about sustainability.</p>	<p><a href="#">Pittman &amp; Abell, 2021</a>; <a href="#">Jacobson &amp; Harrison, 2022</a>; <a href="#">Kaivonen et al., 2024</a>.</p>
Activist Influencer	<p>Influencers advocating for sociopolitical causes, such as LGBTQIA + rights, race and gender inclusivity, or zero-waste lifestyles.</p> <p><b>Sub-types:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>LGBTQIA + Rights Activists</i>: Race and gender inclusivity.</li> <li>• <i>Zero-waste Activist</i>: Circular economy promoters.</li> <li>• <i>Political Activists</i>: Advocate for political beliefs or political causes.</li> </ul>	<p>Amplify causes using hashtags, viral campaigns, and collaborations with advocacy organizations.</p> <p>Drive awareness and action for sociopolitical and systemic change.</p>	<p>Authenticity tied to consistent activism and alignment with the promoted cause.</p>	<p>Risk being perceived as performative if activism appears opportunistic or inconsistent, especially when monetizing cause-based content/partnerships that may conflict with activist values.</p>	<p><a href="#">Thomas &amp; Fowler, 2023</a>; <a href="#">Drenten et al., 2023</a>.</p>
Wellness Influencer	<p>Content creators share advice and promote holistic health approaches, encompassing emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.</p> <p><b>Sub-type:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Spiritual Wellness Influencer</i>: Focus on spiritual relationships with deities or others.</li> </ul>	<p>Promote lifestyle ideology through aspirational content, such as curated routines and wellness programs.</p> <p>Motivate followers to achieve self-improvement and holistic well-being.</p>	<p>Often blend relatability with aspiration to connect emotionally with followers.</p>	<p>Lose credibility if over-promoting questionable wellness products or monetizing in ways that exploit followers' vulnerabilities.</p>	<p><a href="#">Baker, 2022</a>; <a href="#">Wellman, 2024</a>.</p>
Anti-Consumption Influencer	<p>Influencers discouraging excessive consumption, critiquing consumerism, and promoting minimalism.</p> <p><b>Sub-types:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Minimalism Advocates</i>: Support lifestyles with minimal objects or distractions.</li> <li>• <i>Anti-Haul Influencers</i>: Critique consumerist culture.</li> </ul>	<p>Leverage counter-narratives to consumerism (e.g., anti-hauls, 'not buying' campaigns) to inspire followers.</p> <p>Encourage minimalism, environmental conservation, and sustainable consumption.</p>	<p>Modeling minimalist lifestyles and critiquing consumerist norms through resistance strategies.</p>	<p>May appear hypocritical if perceived as profiting from anti-consumption ideologies or engaging in commercial endorsements.</p>	<p><a href="#">Wood, 2021</a>; <a href="#">García-de-Frutos and Estrella-Ramón, 2021</a></p>
Mindfulness Influencer	<p>Influencers promoting mindfulness tradition, emphasizing present-moment awareness, compassion, and acceptance.</p> <p><b>Sub-types:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Meditation Guides</i>: Focus on meditation practice guidance and techniques.</li> <li>• <i>Yoga Influencers</i>: Focus on the breath, yoga as a mindfulness technique, and inner observation.</li> <li>• <i>Mindfulness Coaches</i>: Personal coaching on mindfulness philosophy, techniques, and lifestyles.</li> <li>• <i>Contemplative Practitioners</i>: Overall contemplative techniques and philosophy, such as Buddhism or other contemplation philosophies.</li> </ul>	<p>Advocate mindfulness as a way of life using contemplative content, guided practices, and discussions on mental clarity.</p> <p>Advocate for inner peace, mental clarity, and emotional equanimity.</p>	<p>Relational authenticity achieved through personal narratives and consistent alignment with mindfulness philosophy.</p>	<p>Face tension when monetizing mindfulness while promoting non-materialism, risking dilution of the ideology and audience trust.</p>	<p>N/A</p>



**Fig. 1.** Influencer Typology and Attributes \* *The scale anchors differ by attribute: (1) Content focus: 1 = outward collective change, 5 = inward self-transformation; (2) Ideology promotion: 1 = minimal or implicit ideology, 5 = ideology is central and explicit; (3) Authenticity crafting: 1 = low emphasis on authenticity, 5 = authenticity is continually foregrounded; (4) Commerciality navigation: 1 = limited or resisted commercial engagement, 5 = extensive and integrated commercial engagement.*

distinct category rather than a sub-type of sustainability influencers. This is because their core ideological orientation centers not on promoting systemic environmental solutions or eco-friendly products, but on rejecting consumerism altogether, through minimalism, anti-haul content, or critiques of capitalist consumption norms. In contrast, sustainability influencers often engage with market solutions (e.g., green brands, sustainable fashion) and emphasize conscious consumption rather than non-consumption. By separating these types, we recognize their differing ideological roots, commercial strategies, and approaches to authenticity and marketplace engagement.

Mindfulness influencers uniquely monetize a philosophy that resists materialism. Unlike sustainability or activist influencers who promote external change through brand partnerships, they must embody and perform inner transformation to maintain legitimacy. This dual demand, to live and sell mindfulness, sharpens the tension between authenticity and commerciality. Though they share themes with other ideological influencers, their focus on internal transformation and relational authenticity sets them apart.

Given these distinctions, our study examines how mindfulness influencers repackage contemplative practices into commodifiable belief systems. This raises questions about the strategies that enable this process in digital spaces. To address them, we used a qualitative interpretive approach to analyze mindfulness influencers' content on Instagram. The next section outlines our methodology, including sampling, data collection, and analysis.

### 3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach, using hermeneutic analysis to examine how mindfulness influencers navigate authenticity and commerciality in promoting an ideological product. Hermeneutics enables contextualized interpretation of meaning-making in textual and visual content (Thompson, 1997). While prior studies applied hermeneutics to consumer culture (Thompson, 1997), recent social media research (e.g., Drenten et al., 2023; Kozinets, 2020) highlights the need to examine how influencers shape ideological narratives in platformized environments. Building on these insights, we analyze the digital labor of mindfulness influencers, focusing on strategies for crafting authenticity while engaging in commercial activity.

#### 3.1. Data collection

We employed a purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 2002) to identify mindfulness influencers who actively engage with mindfulness discourse on Instagram. Our initial sample included 40 influencers identified through industry reports, curated lists from influencer marketing platforms (e.g., Influencer Marketing Hub, HyprBrands), and

recommendations from Instagram's algorithm. To refine the sample, we systematically examined their content to ensure they met the following criteria: (1) regularly posting mindfulness-related content, (2) integrating mindfulness into a broader ideological and commercial narrative; that is, consistently framing mindfulness not as a standalone activity but as part of a broader belief system linked to a monetizable brand identity (e.g., spiritual coaching, self-optimization discourse, wellness entrepreneurship), and (3) engaging in promotional activities related to mindfulness (e.g., courses, brand sponsorships, digital content).

The final sample included 16 influencers across diverse mindfulness subtypes (e.g., meditation guides, yoga influencers, contemplative practitioners; see Table 2). This number reflected data saturation (Kozinets, 2020) and ensured coverage of varied approaches to mindfulness commercialization.

We manually extracted one year's worth of Instagram posts (Rose, 2016) from each influencer. The dataset includes 3,424 Instagram posts, capturing both textual (captions, hashtags) and visual (images, videos) content. This helped track shifts in branding, authenticity claims, and commercial partnerships over time. To comply with the official Association of Internet Research (AoIR) ethical guidelines (Markham & Buchanan, 2012) and in line with previous internet ethical research practices for research conducted on social media influencers (e.g., Leban et al., 2021; Kozinets, 2020), we altered usernames and summarized post captions rather than reproducing them verbatim. Summarization was used to retain the substantive meaning of posts while reducing the risk of traceability through direct quotation, thereby balancing ethical responsibility with the need for analytic transparency.

#### 3.2. Data analysis

Our analysis followed a four-stage hermeneutic approach

**Table 2**  
Sample of influencers and Instagram posts.

Social media influencer	Type of mindfulness influencer	Date established	Number of followers	Number of posts selected
@zenmindguide	Meditation guide	2011	277 K	189
@calmwisdomcoach	Meditation guide	2012	72.4 K	212
@meditationmuse	Meditation guide	2009	51.3 K	200
@innerpeacepath	Meditation guide	2014	101 K	230
@yogi_and_dog	Yoga influencer	2012	1.2 M	248
@bohemiannomads	Yoga influencer	2014	407 K	211
@mindfulglamour	Yoga influencer	2013	1.5 M	185
@islandyogi	Yoga influencer	2011	2 M	278
@mindfulmentor	Mindfulness coach	2014	294 K	197
@mindfuljourneycoach	Mindfulness coach	2016	160 K	210
@tranquilityseeker	Mindfulness coach	2018	12.8 K	226
@serenitysage	Mindfulness coach	2009	165 K	214
@reflectiveyogi	Contemplative practitioner	2018	20.9 K	199
@soulcarementor	Contemplative practitioner	2015	52.4 K	237
@contemplativevoice	Contemplative practitioner	2016	2.9 M	180
@integrativemindcoach	Contemplative practitioner	2017	8.5 M	208

\*Usernames have been assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity.

(Thompson, 1997), adapted to qualitative social media research methodologies (Drenten et al., 2023; Kozinets, 2020). First, we conducted an intra-textual analysis, using NVivo 12 for open coding to examine individual influencer posts. This phase focused on identifying how influencers construct authenticity and engage in commercial activities, particularly through narratives of self-transformation, promotional strategies, and audience engagement techniques. By analyzing textual (captions, hashtags) and visual (images, videos) elements, we explored how mindfulness influencers perform and market their ideological commitments.

Second, we conducted an inter-textual analysis, comparing themes across influencers to identify broader patterns in digital labor. This phase revealed recurring tactics used to align mindfulness with aspirational branding, leverage personal struggles for relatability, and integrate mindfulness into commercial ecosystems such as online courses, coaching, and apps. These comparisons allowed us to capture both commonalities and divergences in how mindfulness influencers navigate the authenticity-commerciality tension.

Third, as themes emerged, we refined our codebook iteratively, integrating existing literature on influencer authenticity, platformization, and ideological labor (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Drenten et al., 2023; Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). This process enabled us to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and empirical data, ensuring that our interpretations were grounded in both prior research and the lived practices of influencers. The coding process was conducted independently by researchers, with regular discussions to ensure consistency and theoretical alignment.

Finally, through an abductive approach (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), we synthesized our findings into a conceptual framework outlining the strategies and tactics mindfulness influencers use to balance authenticity and commerciality. This last phase involved mapping how influencers engage in ideological repackaging, transforming mindfulness from an introspective practice into a marketable digital identity. The analysis process was repeated until theoretical saturation was reached (Spiggle, 1994), ensuring that the identified themes provided a comprehensive understanding of mindfulness influencers' digital labor.

#### 4. Findings

Mindfulness influencers engage in ideological repackaging through two interconnected strategies: discourse and practice. Discourse reinterprets mindfulness and Buddhist philosophies as extensions of the self, with influencers acting as intermediaries who align personal identity with audience expectations. This strategy relies on authenticity and is enacted through three tactics: appeals, modernizing philosophy, and the hero's journey. Practice reinterprets mindfulness as actionable, enabling commodification through personalization, materiality, and physicality. Unlike discourse, which legitimizes authenticity, practice facilitates commerciality, often through the same offerings that also enhance authenticity. This is cyclical: influencers construct authentic narratives rooted in the self, operationalize them through commodified practices that materialize ideology, and reinforce their authority by integrating authenticity and marketability within their brand.

Fig. 2 illustrates this relationship, showing how discourse and practice operate as mutually reinforcing strategies. Many activities that build perceived authenticity (e.g., podcasts, books, retreats) are simultaneously monetized, emphasizing that authenticity and commerciality are intertwined rather than oppositional.

Table 3 defines each strategy and tactic with illustrative examples. By combining the figure and table, we capture both the overarching framework (Fig. 2) and the specific mechanisms (Table 3) through which mindfulness is repackaged into marketable forms.

##### 4.1. Discourse: repackaging mindfulness as a marketable philosophy

Mindfulness influencers function as ideological intermediaries

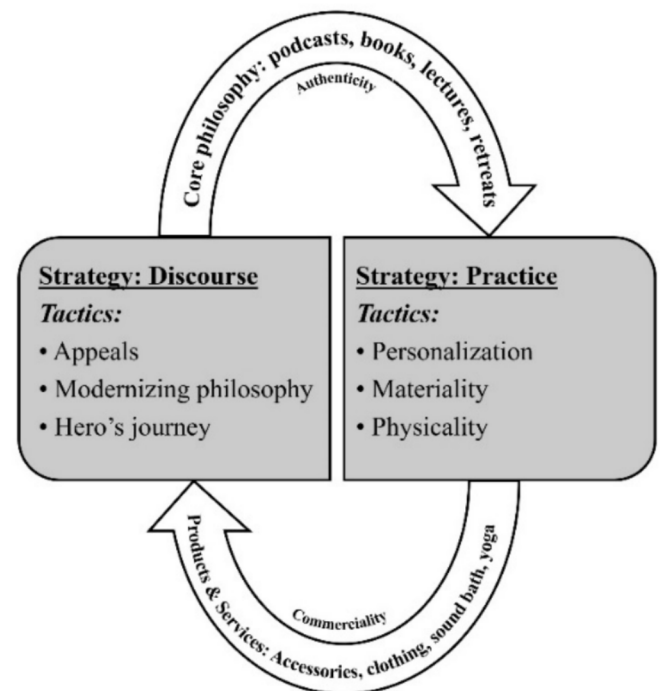


Fig. 2. Repackaging Strategies and Tactics of Mindfulness Influencers.

(Arnesson, 2023), repackaging ancient philosophies into self-oriented belief systems that align with their personal identities while meeting the demands of digital audiences. Like influencer imaginaries (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021), mindfulness influencers not only market themselves as authentic practitioners but also construct aspirational ideologies that shape how followers engage with mindfulness. While wellness influencers also emphasize personal self-improvement, they often foreground physical outcomes (Baker, 2022), whereas mindfulness influencers center psychological, emotional, and spiritual transformation as their narrative. In doing so, they also use contemplative language to align with contemporary agendas of “self-care,” where mindfulness becomes a tool for individual optimization.

This strategy differentiates mindfulness influencers from other ideological influences, such as sustainability or activist influencers, whose messages primarily center on external social change (Pittman & Abell, 2021; Thomas & Fowler, 2023). Sustainability influencers, for instance, frame authenticity through visible activism and systemic change, urging followers to adopt ethical consumption habits or engage in collective action (Pittman & Abell, 2021). Similarly, activist influencers build legitimacy through their direct participation in sociopolitical causes (Thomas & Fowler, 2023). In contrast, mindfulness influencers commercialize internal transformation, positioning the self as both the product and the site of ideological labor. Their influence derives not from calls for systemic change but from curating personal transformation narratives that encourage followers to see mindfulness as a consumable journey—one that requires continual investment in courses, digital tools, and guided practices. This strategic discourse is enacted through three key tactics: appeals, modernizing philosophy, and the hero's journey. Each tactic reinforces perceived authenticity by ensuring alignment between an influencer's self-brand and mindfulness philosophy.

##### 4.1.1. Appeals: emotional resonance

One of the core tactics in discourse-driven authenticity is the strategic use of emotional appeals to shape identity. Mindfulness influencers curate emotional transparency, using personal experiences to craft narratives that feel intimate and relatable while maintaining

**Table 3**  
Strategies and tactics for repackaging mindfulness.

Strategy	Tactic	Example
<i>Discourse</i> Strategic reinterpretation of mindfulness into self-narratives that signal alignment between personal identity and ideological values, enabling perceived authenticity.	<i>Appeals</i>	@mindfulmentor share visible struggles laden with sweat and tears; @integrativemindcoach employ fear-based messaging for overcoming trauma, stress, and anxiety; @bohemiannomads, @mindfulglamour, and @tranquilityseeker use fantasy-infused aesthetics to show emotional transformation.
	<i>Modernizing Philosophy</i>	@serenitysage use Buddhist principles, like dharma (teachings of the Buddha) and Metta (loving-kindness); @zenmindguide reframes Buddhist teachings into content about manifestation, goal-setting, and hustle culture.
	Reinterprets Buddhist and contemplative traditions to align either with foundational principles of mindfulness or with modern narratives of self-optimization.	
<i>Practice</i> Strategic performance and embodiment of mindfulness through actions and offerings that transform ideology into commodifiable experiences and products, enabling commerciality.	<i>Hero's Journey</i>	@calmwisdomcoach and @soulcarementor narrate personal struggles, self-discovery, and 'life's journey'; @meditationmuse and @innerpeacepath curate journey from personal seeker to spiritual guide; @bohemiannomads and @reflectiveyogi engage with raw, confessional-style storytelling, such as reflective long-form captions or before-and-after self-perception shifts.
	<i>Personalization</i>	@contemplativevoice promote their books as unique selling points for self-help; @innerpeacepath provide specific guidance on mindfulness practices, such as exploring the Yamas and Niyamas.
	<i>Materiality</i>	@mindfulglamour integrates essential oils, crystals, and handcrafted wellness tools into their daily routines; @meditationmuse position branded sound bowls and incense kits as essential enhancements to meditation practices.
	<i>Physicality</i>	@meditationmuse consistently appears in posts wearing a hat and long shawl; @innerpeacepath cultivates a hermit-like persona with long white hair, a beard, and a dark t-shirt.

aspirational appeal. Engaging in performative authenticity, mindfulness influencers deliberately construct vulnerability as a trust-building mechanism rather than an intrinsic quality (Marwick, 2013; Duffy & Hund, 2019). For instance, @mindfulmentor frequently shares visuals of visible struggle with sweat and tears, noting they are “struggling” alongside their audience. By sharing emotional struggles, often through long-form Instagram captions, podcast storytelling, or books, mindfulness influencers blur the line between personal disclosure and curated branding, reinforcing their perceived sincerity while making mindfulness feel accessible to audiences (Errmann, 2024).

Influencers like @integrativemindcoach employ fear-based messaging to position mindfulness as an essential tool for overcoming trauma, stress, and anxiety. They cite scientific studies on adverse experiences and their long-term effects on health, which may heighten followers’ anxieties while presenting mindfulness as the necessary antidote. For instance, Fig. 3 shows how trauma and health risk are discussed, offering healing through free mindfulness workbooks, delivered via DM to followers who engage with the post by commenting. However, this fear appeal is carefully balanced with compassion-driven messaging, offering reassurance, such as guided meditations, digital journals, and community support. This back-and-forth between fear and hope is central to maintain perceived authenticity; by embodying both reliable suffering and enlightened guidance, they strengthen parasocial bonds and enhance audience trust (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

A blend of personal vulnerability with aspirational appeals exists, making mindfulness not just a practice but a lifestyle investment. The presentation of authenticity through emotional storytelling mirrors broader trends in influencer culture, where curated transparency fosters deeper audience engagement while simultaneously serving as a commercial tool (Duffy & Hund, 2019). Parasocial intimacy enables audiences to view influencers as both mentors and fellow participants in the mindfulness journey, reinforcing their credibility (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Beyond verbal appeals, some mindfulness influencers, such as @bohemiannomads, @mindfulglamour, and @tranquilityseeker, use fantasy-infused aesthetics and mystical symbolism to position mindfulness as a transformative discourse. Fig. 4 illustrates the symbolic power of sunrise and sunset as moments of connection during yoga practice, while promoting new video content through framing sunrise and sunset as meaningful rituals. The content features dreamlike landscapes, ethereal lighting, and surreal imagery, evoking aestheticized emotional transcendence that transforms mindfulness philosophy into an aspirational state of being (Borges-Rey, 2015; Kretz & de Valck, 2010). While seemingly paradoxical, blending philosophical beliefs with visually polished escapism, these influencers capitalize on the symbolic power of emotional authenticity, turning mindfulness into a labor of self-transformation that is aesthetically desirable.

#### 4.1.2. Modernizing philosophy: new belief systems

This role extends beyond traditional wellness influencers by redefining mindfulness itself to fit within consumer-driven self-optimization cultures. Through philosophical adaptation, influencers reshape mindfulness to align with contemporary consumer values, ensuring their teachings remain accessible, culturally relevant, and commercially viable. This process of modernization reflects the broader secularization and marketization of mindfulness, wherein spiritual traditions are translated into individualistic, productivity-focused belief systems (Rosenberg, 2004).

This reinterpretation of mindfulness reveals a tension between traditional Buddhist teachings and contemporary adaptations. Influencers such as @mindfulmentor and @serenitysage root their discourse in Buddhist principles, drawing on dharma (teachings of the Buddha) and Metta (loving-kindness) to reinforce mindfulness as a deeply ethical, introspective tradition (Mick, 2017). For instance, @mindfulmentor frequently references formative learning experiences, such as “studying with the Dalai Lama” or reflecting on early mindfulness training to “de-establish the identities I had about myself,” signaling authority through



**integrativemindcoach** The influencer shares that childhood trauma has long-term physiological effects, including increased inflammation, altered brain development, and heightened risk of autoimmune conditions, particularly in women. Referencing research on ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) scores, the post emphasizes the link between early stress and adult health outcomes. The caption ends with a message of hope, encouraging followers to heal by regulating their nervous system and offering a free C-PTSD workbook via direct message to those who comment “COMPLEX.”

Fig. 3. @integrativemindcoach Instagram Post.

experiential wisdom and continuity with foundational teachings. Similarly, @serenitysage draws on personal spiritual transformation narratives, often posting reflections on Buddhist ethics to emphasize compassion, humility, and presence as core tenets of their practice. Their emphasis on continuity, positioning mindfulness as a historically rich and ethical practice, establishes credibility and strengthens their perceived authority.

In contrast, influencers such as @zenmindguide modernize



**bohemiannomads** The influencer reflects on the spiritual and sensory connection between yoga practice and the sun, inviting followers to share memorable locations where they’ve practiced. The post promotes two new yoga videos—a morning and a sunset flow—and encourages followers to incorporate them into their daily routines, with links provided in the bio.

Fig. 4. @bohemiannomads Instagram Post.

mindfulness by merging it with neoliberal individualism, reframing meditation and presence as tools for personal success, self-optimization, and manifestation. For example, @zenmindguide documents their attendance at a “manifestation retreat in Bali” and shares motivational speaking clips where they describe “charting out new identities” through visualizing success. This positions mindfulness less as a contemplative practice and more as a means of self-actualization within goal-oriented, market-friendly frameworks.

These differing approaches shape influencers’ discourse, where some emphasize mindfulness as a contemplative tradition, while others promote it as an empowerment tool aligned with self-agency, market-driven success, and productivity-oriented lifestyles, reflecting a broader neoliberal reframing of mindfulness. The secularization of mindfulness plays a critical role in ideological repackaging, allowing influencers to connect their self-concept with audience expectations.

As mindfulness becomes detached from its Buddhist roots, influencers integrate contemporary self-help principles, reinforcing mindfulness as both a spiritual and practical tool for navigating modern life (Rosenberg, 2004). This authenticity-building strategy allows influencers to frame their commercial offerings, such as meditation courses, books, and podcasts, as natural extensions of their lived philosophy, rather than as detached, market-driven products. Fig. 5 illustrates how followers might participate in a shared culture of intention-setting and self-development, fostering community interaction through accountability. Further, @serenitysage markets a podcast series described as a “daily companion for mindful awakening,” blurring the line between service and story. This further legitimizes their commercial enterprises, as followers perceive these products and services as valuable tools for self-transformation rather than profit-driven commodities.

However, the modernization of mindfulness also introduces ideological divides within the influencer space. Some influencers remain closely aligned with Buddhist ethics (Mick, 2017), whereas others expand mindfulness into digital activism, integrating social justice, environmentalism, and identity politics into their branding (Schmitt et al., 2022). For example, @yogi\_and\_dog’s (Fig. 6) collaboration with



**serenitysage** The influencer invites followers to share their upcoming reading or practice plans for the week, using an open-ended question to encourage engagement.

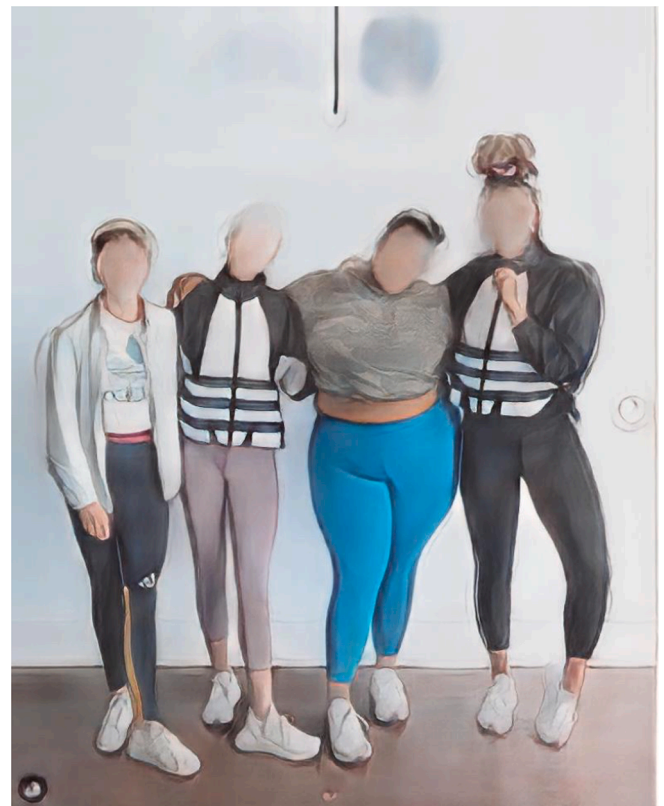
Fig. 5. @serenitysage Instagram Post.

Adidas frames mindfulness as a social movement, aligning with broader values of inclusivity, community well-being, and political consciousness (Feng et al., 2021). The post shares a personal backstory to form humor, nostalgia, and emotional sincerity to promote a fellow influencer's book and a ticketed online event. This strategic alignment broadens mindfulness' cultural reach, making it not just a personal practice but a socially embedded, activist-oriented discourse that enhances its marketability in digitally mediated spaces.

Influencers promote adventure, slow living, and lifestyles embedded with various belief systems, reinforcing mindfulness as a consumable journey toward self-betterment. Aligning new belief systems, such as manifestation, ancestral wisdom, or feminine energy, legitimizes authority as influential online leaders (Aboelenien et al., 2023; Schouten et al., 2021), transforming ideological work into authoritative, monetizable content (Drenten et al., 2023). Fig. 7 highlights the promotion of a forthcoming book and frames pre-ordering as an act of loyal support. By thanking early readers and signaling the emotional significance of their backing, the post cultivates intimacy.

#### 4.1.3. Hero's journey: the 'path'

A final discourse tactic used by mindfulness influencers is the hero's journey, in which mindfulness influencers craft stories of personal enlightenment, struggle, and redemption to structure their self-branding as an ongoing transformation process. These narratives serve as authenticity markers, positioning influencers as living proof of mindfulness' transformative power. Unlike traditional wellness influencers, who emphasize external transformations such as fitness goals or aesthetic enhancements, mindfulness influencers curate an internal transformation journey, turning their past hardships into ideological credentials rather than obstacles to overcome. Building on Abidin's (2018) concept of "porous authenticity," mindfulness influencers such as @calmwisdomcoach and @soulcarementor, narrate personal struggles, self-discovery, and their own mindfulness path, making their ideological messages indistinguishable from their lived experiences. The

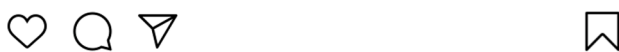


**yogi\_and\_dog** The influencer reflects on a brief pause from virtual events to care for a family member, before announcing her return via a paid Zoom event promoting a fellow influencer's new book. The post combines personal storytelling with a public show of support, encouraging followers to attend and purchase the book, while signaling friendship, gratitude, and shared community values.

Fig. 6. @yogi\_and\_dog Instagram Post.

hero's journey not only provides relatability but also serves as a visual authenticity strategy, in which aesthetic curation of 'life's path' and 'experiences' vis-a-vis ideological evolution (Drenten et al., 2023; Heeris Christensen et al., 2024).

Mindfulness influencers do not just narrate transformation; they perform it. @meditationmuse and @innerpeacepath curate a journey that traces their evolution from personal seeker to spiritual guide. In this process, their digital persona transitions through distinct visual phases, signaling different stages of ideological authority. The struggling self is often represented in early content featuring darker, grainier, or unfiltered images, symbolizing past distress, burnout, or emotional disconnection. Captions highlight uncertainty, personal crises, or past failures, framing mindfulness as the turning point for self-redemption. Others like @bohemiannomads and @reflectiveyogi engage with raw, confessional-style storytelling, such as reflective long-form captions or before-and-after self-perception shifts, reinforces relatability and emotional investment (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The transformational phase introduces a shift in visuals toward lighter, ethereal tones, incorporating nature, minimalism, and serene backdrops to represent inner peace. The influencer begins adopting recognizable mindfulness aesthetics, such as flowing garments, meditation poses, and soft lighting. Posts start featuring wisdom-infused reflections, subtly repositioning the influencer



**mindfuljourneycoach** The influencer announces the upcoming release of their debut book and encourages followers to pre-order it via a link in their profile. They express appreciation for early supporters, emphasizing how meaningful their encouragement is as a first-time author.

Fig. 7. @mindfuljourneycoach Instagram Post.

as someone who now understands the process of transformation.

The expert phase marks the influencer's arrival as a self-realized guide. Influencers adopt a signature "guru" aesthetic, reinforcing expertise through self-presentation. Posts become more professionally curated, often including quotes, book excerpts, or polished brand collaborations that align them with recognized institutions or opinion leaders. Fig. 8 shows a formative memory from the influencers first retreat and narrates their transformation from rigid self-judgment to acceptance and emotional resilience. The anecdote not only humanizes authority but reinforces core mindfulness values, non-attachment, patience, and the impermanence of emotional states, as applicable not just to meditation, but to life itself. Their presence shifts from introspective seeker to authoritative mentor, marking their arrival as a



**serenitysage** The influencer shares a personal story from her early meditation practice to illustrate the development of wisdom and emotional perspective over time. By contrasting her initial frustration with a more experienced practitioner's casual acceptance of difficulty, she conveys a message about embracing change and learning to let go through sustained practice.

Fig. 8. @serenitysage Instagram Post.

performative expert (Drenten et al., 2023; Heeris Christensen et al., 2024). Influencers curated self-presentation allows them to materialize authority, reinforcing the notion that personal transformation legitimizes their commercial success. Audrezet et al. (2020) extend this logic by emphasizing how influencers align past hardships with commercial credibility, positioning their product offerings as natural extensions of their journey rather than opportunistic monetization (Reade, 2021).

For example, @calmwisdomcoach, a mindfulness influencer and founder of a subscription-based meditation app, frequently references their past as a struggling corporate professional before dedicating their life to mindfulness. Their Instagram feed visually shifts from dark, indoor, high-stress corporate imagery to bright, outdoor, nature-infused scenes, aligning with the visual markers of spiritual clarity. This carefully curated transformation not only reinforces the credibility of his teachings but also justifies the commercialization of his coaching programs, as his current self is positioned as living proof of the effectiveness of his method. Similarly, @innerpeacepath frequently references a past life of anxiety and chronic stress. This narrative is reinforced visually, with earlier content reflecting stress and confusion, while newer images depict calm, illuminated spaces, nature retreats, and ritualistic meditation poses. By visually staging aesthetic coherence, these influencers materialize the idea that mindfulness is not just a practice, but a lived experience curated with visible outcomes (Drenten et al., 2023).

The hero's journey also operates within storytelling frameworks, where influencers capitalize on transformation tropes to increase engagement and product legitimacy. Pilgrimage narratives by @mindfuljourneycoach emphasize stories of traveling to India, Bali, or Peru for spiritual awakening, reinforcing the idea of wisdom gained through

movement. Sobriety or detox arcs via @contemplativevoice frame quitting alcohol, caffeine, or social media as part of their self-discovery journey, encouraging followers to undergo similar challenges. Seasonal renewal themes use moments such as New Year's resolutions, solstice rituals, or birthday reflections as turning points for transformation. These narrative devices cultivate a sense of inevitability, where the influencer's transformation seems destined, reinforcing why their products and teachings are "meant" to be shared with followers.

Ultimately, the hero's journey functions as both a narrative and aesthetic transformation strategy, where mindfulness influencers stage authenticity through visual storytelling and self-presentation. By performing the transition from personal crisis to enlightened guide, they construct a credible self-brand, where expertise is legitimized through curated identity shifts. Mindfulness influencers do not just sell meditation courses or coaching programs; they sell themselves as proof that transformation is possible, ensuring that their brand remains personally compelling.

#### 4.2. Practice: commercializing mindfulness through embodied and materialized action

While discourse provides a foundation for authenticity by aligning mindfulness influencers with ideological values, practice operationalizes mindfulness as a set of commodifiable actions, routines, and rituals. This practice strategy enables influencers to materialize and embody mindfulness, transforming it from an abstract philosophy into tangible products, services, and lifestyle performances. Unlike wellness influencers, who focus on external transformation (Baker, 2022), mindfulness influencers center their commercial efforts on internal transformation, making personal identity and lived experience the core sites of ideological labor. This strategy unfolds through three tactics: personalization, materiality, and physicality, each of which facilitates the monetization of mindfulness while reinforcing an influencer's credibility.

##### 4.2.1. Personalization: one-stop-shop

Personalization enables influencers to tailor mindfulness content and services to individual needs, framing mindfulness as an accessible, flexible, and user-driven experience. Rather than adhering to structured spiritual traditions, influencers position mindfulness as a customizable self-improvement tool, aligning with broader trends in platformized wellness (Duffy & Hund, 2019; Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). This tactic expands commercial opportunities by allowing influencers to present mindfulness as an adaptable lifestyle that accommodates diverse consumer preferences, highlighting how influencers tailor mindfulness content to fit diverse consumer preferences, making it commercially adaptable.

Several influencers extended personalization through premium-tier services, offering one-on-one consultations and subscription-based programs. For example, @mindfuljourneycoach advertised paid video sessions tailored to follower concerns around stress management, while @serenitysage promoted tiered memberships that provided exclusive guided practices and direct feedback. These offerings highlight how personalization enables not only ideological tailoring but also the creation of scalable revenue streams central to influencer sustainability.

One of the key ways mindfulness influencers personalize their offerings is by bundling multiple practices into holistic self-improvement programs. For example, influencers like @contemplativevoice promote their books as unique selling points to establish legitimacy and authority in mindfulness. By sharing quotes and excerpts, they offer tailored advice on mindful living, reinforcing their credibility. Similarly, influencers like @innerpeacepath provide specific guidance on mindfulness practices, such as exploring the Yamas and Niyamas from Patanjali's Eight Limbs of Yoga (Fig. 9). The influencer uses the yogic principle of Ishvara Pranidhana to encourage followers to let go of control and embrace presence. Drawing on Eastern spiritual frameworks, the post blends self-help and devotional language to promote introspection.

Engagement is encouraged through reflective questions and an invitation to share personal experiences in the comments. These personalized teachings engage followers in reflective practices and encourage active participation through live prompts and questions.

Influencers often respond to followers' comments with personalized reflections, clarifications, or encouragements that make the advice feel tailored to the individual. For instance, in response to the question "Do I trust that there is a divine plan for my life?", a follower commented: "This is something I really struggle with—I want to believe but my anxiety gets in the way." The influencer replied: "You're not alone. It can help to surrender one small thing at a time—build trust slowly. That's part of the practice." These exchanges illustrate how tailored advice emerges through public comment threads, reinforcing the influencer's role as a responsive and spiritually attuned guide. Thus, 'tailored' does not mean individualized private coaching alone, but includes selective, emotionally resonant responses that strengthen parasocial intimacy.

By packaging mindfulness as an all-in-one solution, influencers foster engagement across multiple touchpoints and sustain monetization.



**innerpeacepath** The influencer introduces a weekly series on the Yamas and Niyamas, foundational ethical principles from Patanjali's Eight Limbs of Yoga. This post focuses on Ishvara Pranidhana, or surrender—to God or to the present moment—and encourages followers to reflect on questions related to trust, control, and divine presence. The post invites engagement through introspection and prompts followers to share their thoughts in the comments.

Fig. 9. @innerpeacepath Instagram Post.

Personalization includes live Q&As, tailored prompts, and one-on-one coaching, which strengthen parasocial ties and generate revenue through memberships and consultations (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Like other influencers, they build premium-tiered models through subscriptions and coaching. Framing mindfulness as individualized and adaptable extends their reach and legitimizes premium offerings, reinforcing its viability as an on-demand service.

#### 4.2.2. Materiality: making the intangible tangible

A second key tactic in the practice strategy is materiality, which involves embedding mindfulness into physical products that serve as both commodities and symbolic representations of mindfulness ideology. Unlike fitness influencers, who commercialize tangible health outcomes, mindfulness influencers must translate an internal, contemplative philosophy into outwardly visible and marketable objects. They achieve this by creating and endorsing mindfulness-branded products, such as guided journals, aromatherapy kits, mala beads, and meditation cushions. These products function as material anchors, allowing followers to experience mindfulness as a tactile and aestheticized practice.

For instance, influencers like @mindfulglamour emphasize the ritualistic consumption of mindfulness, encouraging followers to integrate essential oils, crystals, and handcrafted wellness tools into their daily routines. This reflects the growing trend of commodified spirituality, where engagement with mindfulness is increasingly mediated through curated consumer goods (Poell, 2020).

Additionally, influencers like @meditationmuse position branded sound bowls and incense kits as essential enhancements to meditation practices (Fig. 10), reinforcing the idea that mindfulness benefits from external, purchasable aids. Framing the upcoming product drop as both artistic and spiritual, the influencer builds excitement around new singing bowl mallets through a behind-the-scenes glimpse of a collaborative shoot. The casual tone, combined with hashtags like #soundbath, appeals to a niche wellness audience while softly commercializing the upcoming launch. Poell (2020) references the symbolic function of material goods in reinforcing ideological authenticity, while Abidin (2018) supports how influencers use visually curated objects (e.g., sound bowls, mala beads) as both commercial offerings and engagement-driven content.

Materiality also plays a key role in digital visibility. In an attention-driven economy, mindfulness influencers rely on visually engaging, shareable content to sustain audience engagement (Abidin, 2018). Branded mindfulness tools not only serve as sellable products but also as content production assets, allowing influencers to generate aesthetically curated posts that align with their ideological brand. However, this commercialization strategy introduces ideological tensions, particularly regarding the contradiction between mindfulness' minimalist ideals and its increasingly product-driven marketization. Some influencers navigate this by reframing mindfulness purchases as investments in self-development rather than as consumerist indulgences. For example, @serenitysage justifies her ethically sourced meditation beads as tools that enhance spiritual practice, rather than as luxury accessories. Thus, influencers may rationalize product sales by framing purchases as "investments in self-development." This messaging preserves authenticity while rationalizing mindfulness-based consumption, enabling influencers to maintain ideological legitimacy while monetizing their brand.

#### 4.2.3. Physicality: The body as temple

The final tactic in the practice strategy is physicality, where influencers use their own bodies as representations of mindfulness ideology. Unlike fitness influencers, who emphasize visible physical transformation, mindfulness influencers cultivate an embodied sense of inner peace and wisdom as an aspirational brand identity. Their physicality operates at multiple levels, from aesthetic branding and performative bodily presence to experiential commercial offerings such as retreats and workshops.

One key aspect of physicality is the stylization of bodily presence,



**meditationmuse** The influencer previews an upcoming product launch—new singing bowl mallets—describing them as both aesthetically beautiful and acoustically impressive. The post highlights collaboration with other practitioners and hints at a forthcoming release, generating anticipation among followers.

Fig. 10. @meditationmuse Instagram Post.

where influencers adopt distinctive visual markers that signify contemplative authority. For instance, @meditationmuse consistently appears in posts wearing a hat and long shawl, creating a signature look. Likewise, @innerpeacepath cultivates a hermit-like persona with long white hair, a beard, and a dark t-shirt. These curated visuals serve as commercial assets that reinforce their spiritual credibility.

Beyond aesthetics, physicality extends into bodily rituals that reinforce mindfulness as an experiential and immersive practice. Influencers leverage breathwork, slow movement sequences, and mindful eating rituals as key components of their brand, framing these embodied techniques as essential to personal transformation. This emphasis on bodily engagement enables influencers to sell high-touch commercial offerings, such as retreats, in-person coaching, and immersive workshops. Unlike discourse-driven monetization, which often relies on content subscriptions or digital products, physicality facilitates experiential commerce, where followers invest in exclusive, real-world interactions with influencers (Drenten et al., 2023).

Monetization also occurs through experiential formats that rely on embodied presence. For instance, @innerpeacepath regularly promotes

in-person retreats framed as opportunities for immersion in mindfulness practices, while @bohemiannomads offers ticketed workshops combining yoga, meditation, and lifestyle coaching. These examples illustrate how physicality supports high-value commercial offerings, where the influencer's embodied authority justifies premium pricing and fosters exclusivity.

By embodying mindfulness as a lived practice, influencers not only enhance their commercial credibility but also elevate their perceived expertise. This helps distinguish mindfulness influencers from relatable, amateur influencers (Abidin, 2017) and instead positions them as spiritual authorities whose wisdom justifies premium commercial offerings. The strategic use of physicality, therefore, ensures that authenticity remains performative and marketable, reinforcing the influencer's legitimacy.

Overall, through personalization, materiality, and physicality, mindfulness influencers transform their ideological brand into a commercially viable enterprise. Personalization allows them to expand accessibility, tailoring mindfulness to diverse consumer preferences and monetizing through coaching, memberships, and adaptable content strategies. Materiality grounds mindfulness in consumer culture, legitimizing branded products and material consumption while making mindfulness a shareable, visible lifestyle. Physicality further solidifies influencer credibility, leveraging bodily aesthetics and experiential engagements to drive high-value commercial interactions.

Unlike wellness influencers, who sell external transformation and results, mindfulness influencers market the promise of internal evolution, offering tools and practices rather than outcome-driven change. This distinction allows mindfulness influencers to preserve the illusion of authenticity, even as they fully embrace monetization and platformization (Drenten et al., 2023; Heeris Christensen et al., 2024). In sum, strategic practice bridges the gap between ideological conviction and commercial strategy, ensuring that mindfulness influencers remain financially sustainable while maintaining their role as authentic ideological guides.

## 5. General discussion

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

First, this study contributes to the literature on social media influencers, authenticity, and the commercialization of ideological products by offering new insights into the tension between authenticity and commerciality. Mindfulness influencers navigate this dynamic by primarily positioning their self-brand as the product itself, for example through coaching, courses, or retreats, while often limiting or selectively engaging in external sponsorships. When they do engage in brand collaborations, they tend to carefully align such partnerships with their values and practices to preserve perceived authenticity and spiritual integrity. This aligns with recent findings that influencers employ diverse and evolving strategies to capture value, ranging from brand sponsorship to entrepreneurship and professional service provision (Dolbec & Smith, 2025; Rundin & Colliander, 2021). Our study complements this literature by showing how mindfulness influencers, as ideological actors, tailor these strategies to navigate commerciality in a field where overt monetization may compromise trust and legitimacy (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Duffy & Hund, 2019).

Unlike sustainability or activist influencers, whose authenticity is tied to visible advocacy (Pittman & Abell, 2021; Thomas & Fowler, 2023), mindfulness influencers commodify internal transformation through continuous ideological labor. Their commercial activities, such as selling courses, retreats, and digital products, are framed as natural expressions of their ideological commitments, rather than as sponsorships or opportunistic monetization efforts. This diverges with prior work that highlights how influencers must align sponsored content with their personal brand to maintain credibility (e.g., Abidin, 2018; Arrigada & Bishop, 2021). Mindfulness influencers demonstrate a different

logic, wherein their self-brand is the product, and thus, their commercial endeavors are positioned as authentic manifestations of their philosophy rather than as external partnerships that require careful negotiation.

Second, this study extends research on influencer authenticity and ideological labor by highlighting the distinct commercial and digital work of mindfulness influencers. Unlike sustainability or activist influencers, whose content focuses on external action (Pittman & Abell, 2021; Thomas & Fowler, 2023), mindfulness influencers commodify internal transformation. Their digital labor involves materializing an immaterial ideology through symbolism, aesthetic branding, and performative self-work. While previous research has examined how influencers promote aspirational lifestyles (Schouten et al., 2021; Wellman, 2024), we show that mindfulness influencers do not simply sell a lifestyle, they sell an ideology that must be continuously performed and embodied to sustain commercial viability. This study, therefore, contributes to the literature by demonstrating how influencers reconcile commerciality and authenticity not through strategic alignment but through a repackaged form of ideological labor.

Third, this research provides insights into the ethical and societal considerations of marketing ideological products. Unlike traditional consumer goods, which can be evaluated based on tangible quality or performance, ideological products such as mindfulness courses or coaching programs are rooted in personal and societal values. This aligns with recent work on influencer ethics and informal expertise (e.g., Duffy & Hund, 2019; Heeris Christensen et al., 2024), as well as broader concerns around the commodification of belief systems in consumer culture (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Eckhardt et al., 2018).

Our findings highlight several ethical concerns when influencers commercialize belief systems. First, authenticity inflation may occur as influencers continually perform vulnerability and transformation (e.g., appeals, hero's journey). This cycle can pressure influencers to dramatize personal growth, creating unrealistic expectations and reducing trust among followers. Second, informal expertise risks emerging when influencers without formal training gain authority by modernizing traditions or offering personalized coaching. This can misrepresent established practices and disadvantage consumers who assume expertise where none exists. Third, monetization blurs ideology and commerce when practices framed as authentic self-work are simultaneously sold as products or digital content. This risks diluting the underlying philosophy and turning values into marketable commodities. These dilemmas extend beyond mindfulness influencers and may also apply to wellness, sustainability, or religious influencers, where authenticity is judged not only by content but by perceived moral and ideological consistency.

Finally, we introduce ideological repackaging as a conceptual tool that extends beyond mindfulness influencers. Similar mechanisms may operate in other contexts built on intangible belief systems, such as sustainability influencers commodifying environmental consciousness (Kaivonen et al., 2024) or political influencers marketing 'personal' enlightenment (Rothut et al., 2024). By showing how mindfulness influencers integrate authenticity and commerciality, this study advances understanding of ideological labor, influencer authenticity, and the ethics of digital self-branding. Our findings illustrate how influencers navigate both the attention economy and the moral economy, where credibility depends on commercial adaptation.

### 5.2. Managerial implications

Our research provides several practical insights. First, agencies that manage mindfulness influencers should focus on fostering a commitment to authenticity and ethics among influencers. Coaching programs designed to guide influencers in developing ethical content strategies can enhance their moral responsibility towards their audience (Small & Lew, 2021). Our study highlights several ethical dilemmas that mindfulness influencers face, including balancing authenticity with monetization, presenting informal expertise as authority, and commodifying belief systems that may provoke or alienate segments of their audience.

Managers should address these concerns by creating clear ethical guidelines that emphasize: (1) transparency around monetization (e.g., labeling paid partnerships), (2) appropriate disclosure of qualifications, and (3) respectful representation of belief and value systems. These guidelines can help influencers navigate the complexities of maintaining authenticity while engaging in commercial activities, ensuring their content resonates with followers while upholding ethical standards.

Second, brands should consider leveraging mindfulness influencers as agents of positive social and societal change (Mick et al., 2012). Companies that promote sustainable or mindful consumption products and services (Sheth et al., 2011) or advocate for “conscientious consumption” (Kingston, 2021) should partner with influencers who are genuinely committed to these values. However, because many mindfulness influencers focus on creating their own offerings rather than promoting external brands, collaborations must be reimagined. For instance, brands can support influencer-led initiatives, such as co-developing products that align with mindfulness values (e.g., journals, wellness kits), sponsoring retreats or events, or providing ethical infrastructure (e.g., eco-friendly packaging, local supply chains). These partnership models allow brands to maintain influencer authenticity while aligning with value-based marketing.

Furthermore, brands and agencies should understand the strategic importance of ideological branding. Our findings reveal that mindfulness influencers often repackage their philosophical commitments into marketable formats, such as books, workshops, and retreats. Rather than traditional advertising partnerships, brands can support these influencers by developing content strategies that authentically extend the influencer’s message. For example, promoting products as tools that enhance mindfulness practice, rather than distract from it, can help frame commercial activities as contributing to community wellbeing rather than detracting from ideological integrity.

Finally, agencies should encourage mindfulness influencers to adopt community-centric commercial strategies. By framing their monetization efforts as supporting broader social goals, such as promoting mental health, funding local projects, or supporting underrepresented artisans, influencers can position themselves as authentic and socially responsible. This approach helps align profit-making with collective benefit, maintaining credibility and trust among followers. Brands can reinforce this by offering value-aligned support that amplifies, not co-opts, the influencer’s message.

### 5.3. Limitations and future research

Despite the strengths of our study, we acknowledge certain limitations. We only collected secondary data observed from Instagram profiles. Although this type of data is widely used in internet research, future studies could benefit in integrating in-depth interviews in further understanding the different tactics that these social media influencers engage. It would also be valuable to examine how other actors, such as management agencies and brands, shape influencers’ ethical decision-making.

Our findings highlight ethical challenges, authenticity inflation, informal expertise, and monetization of belief systems, that are especially salient for ideological influencers. Future research should examine how these challenges appear in other domains (e.g., sustainability, spirituality, health) and the boundary conditions under which audiences question influencer credibility. For instance, studying how followers reconcile ideological and commercial content could extend work on source credibility and parasocial relationships (Abidin, 2016).

Further, our research invites investigation into the institutional dynamics that shape influencer behavior. While we focused on influencers themselves, future studies could examine the role of algorithmic recommendation systems or platform affordances in either constraining or enabling ideological branding. This line of inquiry would enrich understandings of how market and platform logics interact with ideological positioning (Arnesson, 2023; Arriagada & Bishop, 2021).

Finally, scholars could examine how ideological influencers adapt their content strategies in response to audience backlash or platform shifts. As our findings show, influencers walk a fine line between maintaining ethical credibility and monetizing their identity. Understanding how they respond to critiques or crises (e.g., accusations of inauthenticity, spiritual bypassing) could offer valuable insights into the evolving norms of ethical influencer culture.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Amy Errmann:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.  
**Marina Leban:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

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### Data availability

Please contact the corresponding author.

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