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When influencer marketing meets online discourses of healthcare professionals: the case of dietitian influencers on Instagram

ICA Regional Conference - Food and Communication

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Source : #Food - Instagram - May, 07 2024

INTRODUCTION

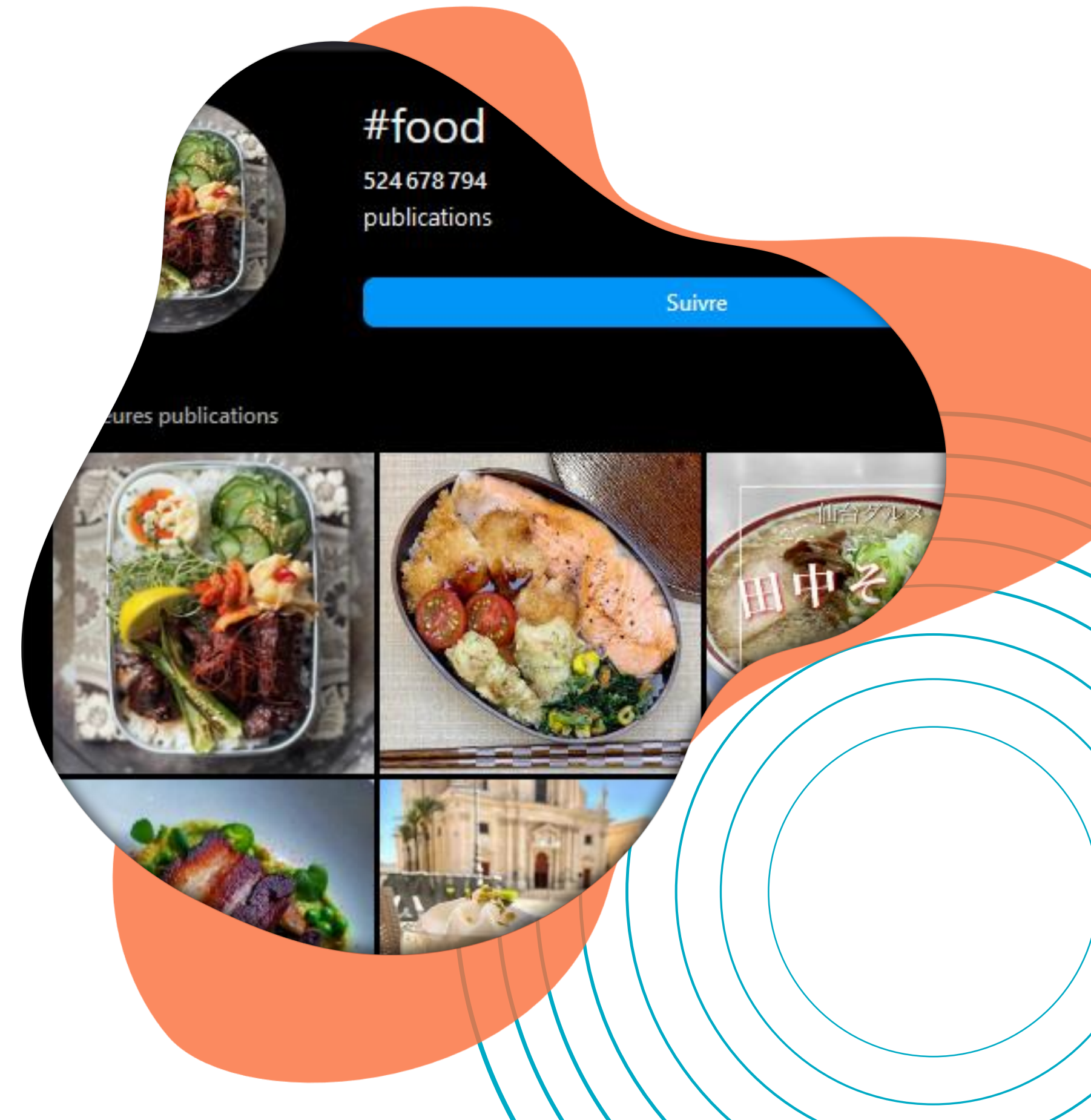
Context

Significant presence of food-related content on Social Networks Sites (SNSs) -> considerations related to health, pleasure, and sustainability.

Emergence of influencers, particularly health professionals like dietitians, who gather followers around their dietary recommendations.

They leverage SNSs to democratize health information and engage in self-presentation tactics (Goffman, 1973) to maintain their audience's attention (Citton, 2014).

-> How does influencer's activity coexist with the nutrition professional's discourse?



INTRODUCTION

Context

Influencers on platforms like Instagram attract users, but they aren't paid for content production -> they rely on partnerships with brands as a form of rewarding.

Applications shape competition among influencers by incentivizing content production to maintain user engagement.

Dietitian influencers face tensions between :

- meeting follower expectations and platform algorithms,
- aligning their discourse with brand partnerships,
- and the desire to disseminate nutritional information.

-> Interest in the communicational and commercial issues of dietary discourses conveyed by dietetic influencers.

BUILD YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

There are so many ways to express yourself on Instagram

Table 1 – The eight accounts analyzed in this research.

Influencers*	Number of followers on Instagram (October 2023)
Alix	218 000
Laurine	162 000
Alice	162 000
Benjamin	151 000
Elodie	93 600
Camille	67 000
Justine	63 800
Aurélie	63 600

*user names have been anonymized for ethical reasons

INTRODUCTION

Field and methodology

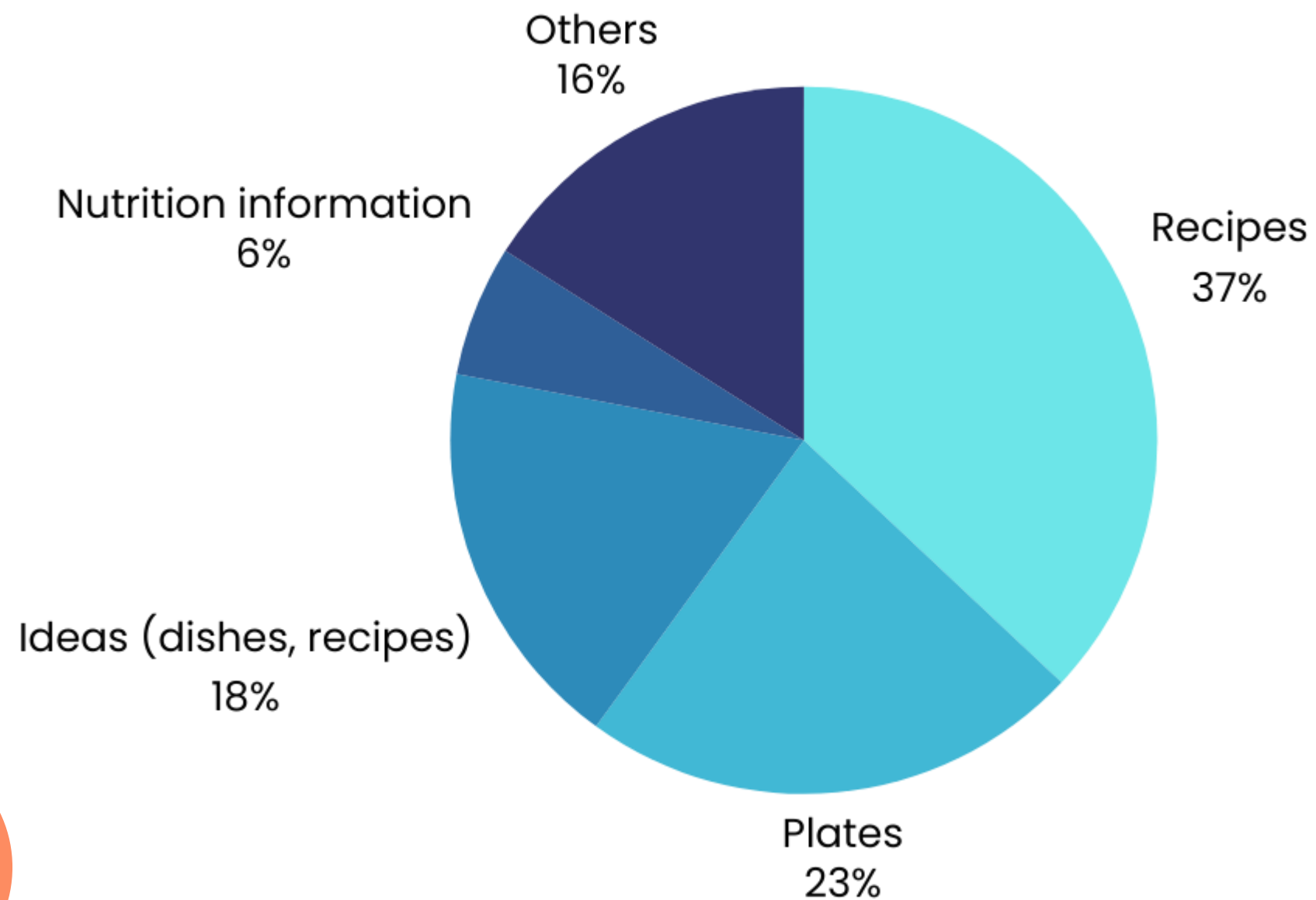
Daily manual data collection on 8 Instagram accounts of dietitian influencers (Table 1) from September to October 2023.

The corpus is made up of 372 productions (carousels, reels and stories). This collection was carried out according to an analysis grid that considers:

- Strategies for sharing personal and professional life,
- Staging of food and lifestyle,
- Product placement strategies.

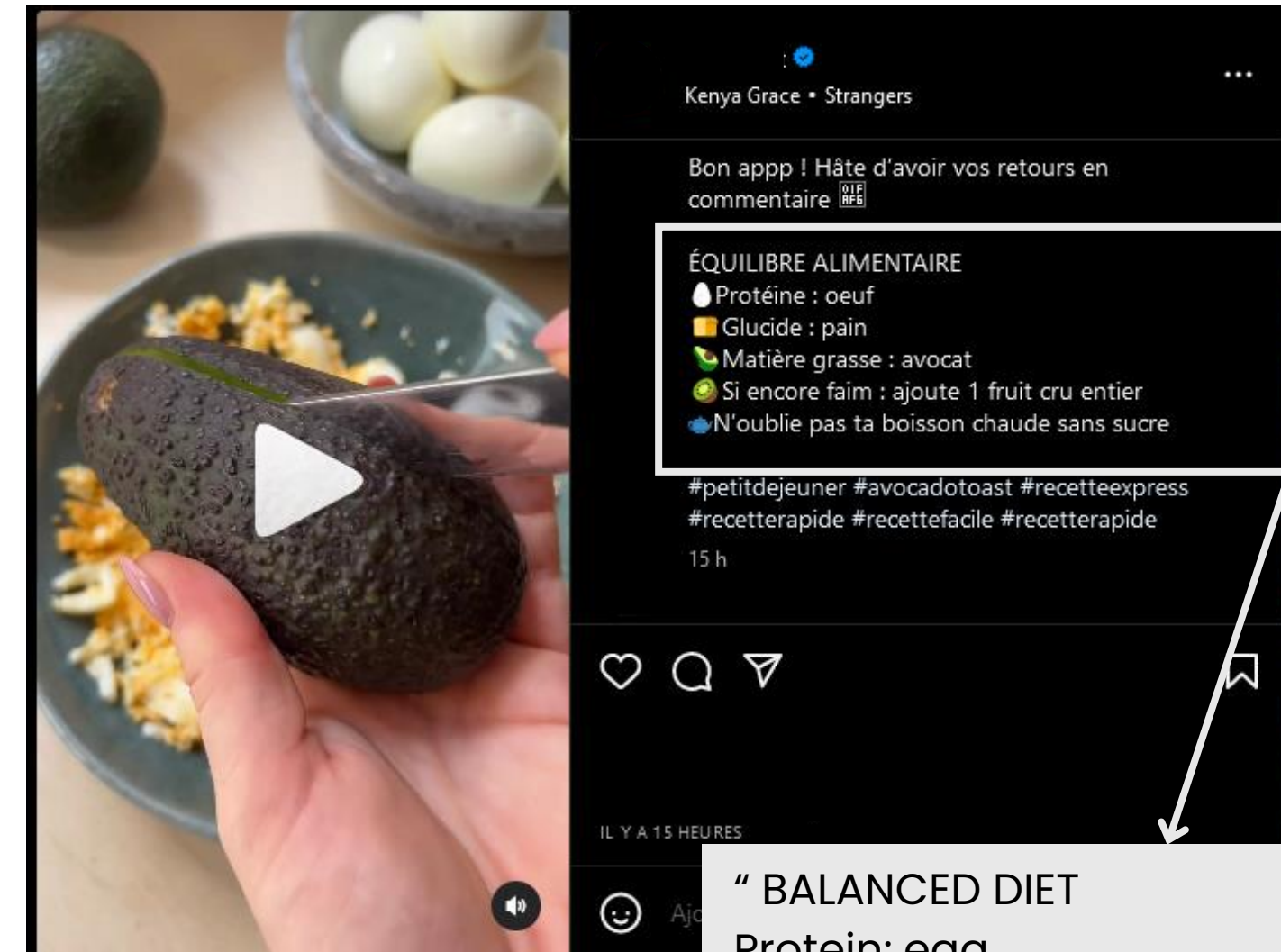
1. FOOD CONTENT OF DIETITIAN INFLUENCERS

Graphic 1 – Formats used for food publications



Nutrition

The nutritional composition of the ingredients in the recipe



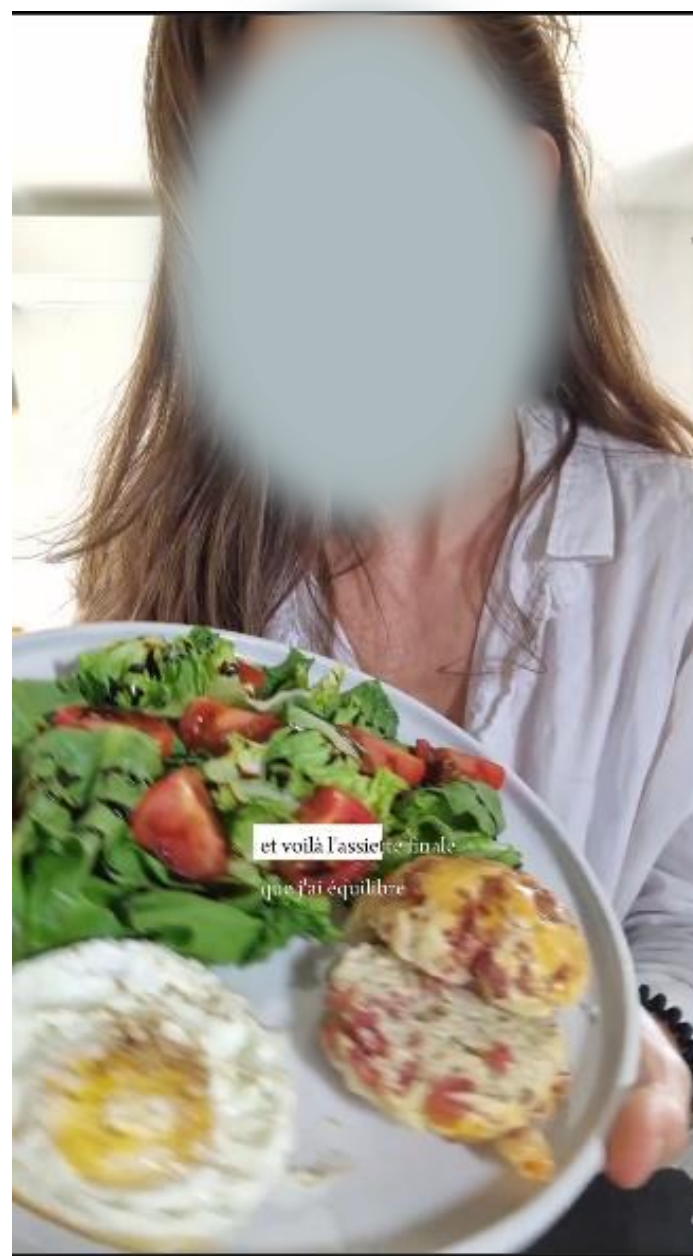
Source : Alix – published on 10/01/23

“ BALANCED DIET
 Protein: egg
 Carbohydrate: bread
 Fat: avocado
 If still hungry : add a whole raw fruit
 Don't forget your sugar-free hot drink ”

1. FOOD CONTENT OF DIETITIAN INFLUENCERS

Nutrition

The segmentation of plates according to macronutrients



Source : Alice – published on
09/22/23



Source : Justine – published on
09/28/23

Food hierarchy based on nutritional intake (sugar)



Source : Justine – published on
26/09/23

1. FOOD CONTENT OF DIETITIAN INFLUENCERS

Nutrition

Dietitian influencers participation in the nutritionalization of society (Poulain, 2009).

The national nutrition and health program in France identifies nutrition as a key to fight obesity and diabetes in particular.

-> The communication strategy of the program is part of a process of mass dissemination of nutritional knowledge through the media (Romeyer, 2015).



Source : <https://sante.gouv.fr/>

1. FOOD CONTENT OF DIETITIAN INFLUENCERS

Nutrition adapted to instagram

Healthy and foodporn markers



Burger Bowl

Source : Elodie - published on 19/10/23



No added sugar brownie bowlcake

Source : Alice - published on 10/02/23



Legume pancakes

Source : Laurine - published on 10/02/23

Trending recipe types on Instagram (Anglo-Saxon influence)



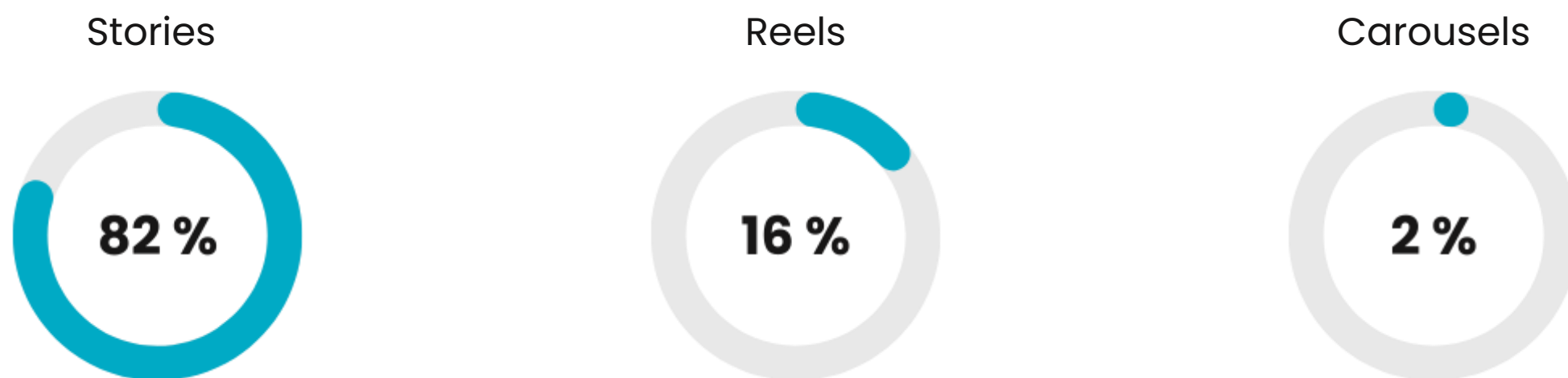
Pumpkin spiced latte

Source : Elodie - published on 10/09/23

1. FOOD CONTENT OF DIETITIAN INFLUENCERS

Nutrition adapted to instagram

Graphic 2 - Percentage of publications in the corpus according to the devices used



Instagram campaign to encourage the use of video devices (e.g. Reels lasting less than 30 seconds) -> competing with TikTok on the attention market.

=> The question of compliance with production standards (to be visible in particular) and the influence of these standards on the discourse.



Log in

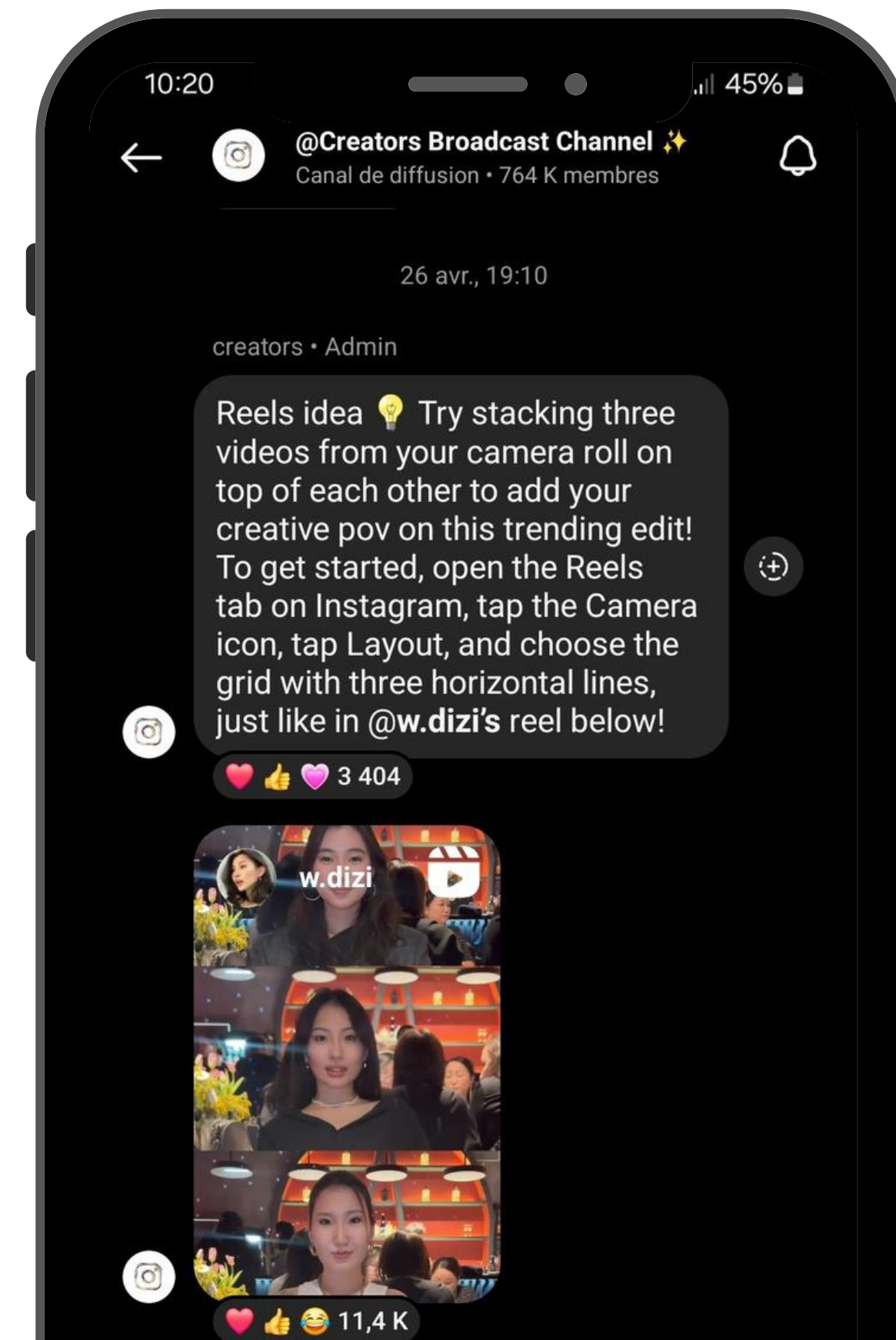


INSTAGRAM STORIES

Share your everyday moments

Source : creators.instagram.com 05/07/24

Source : @creators broadcast channel
04/26/23

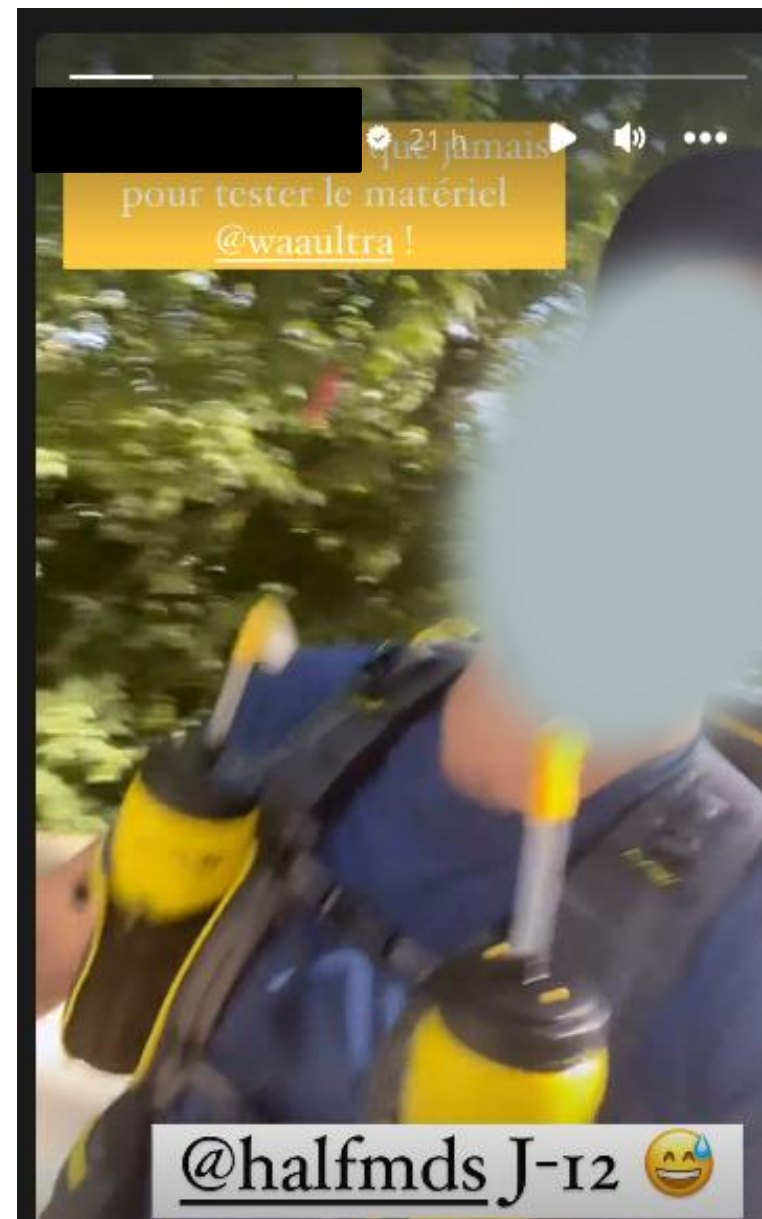


1. FOOD CONTENT OF DIETITIAN INFLUENCERS

Nutrition adapted to instagram



Source : Justine –published on 10/19/23



Source : Benjamin – published on 10/03/23

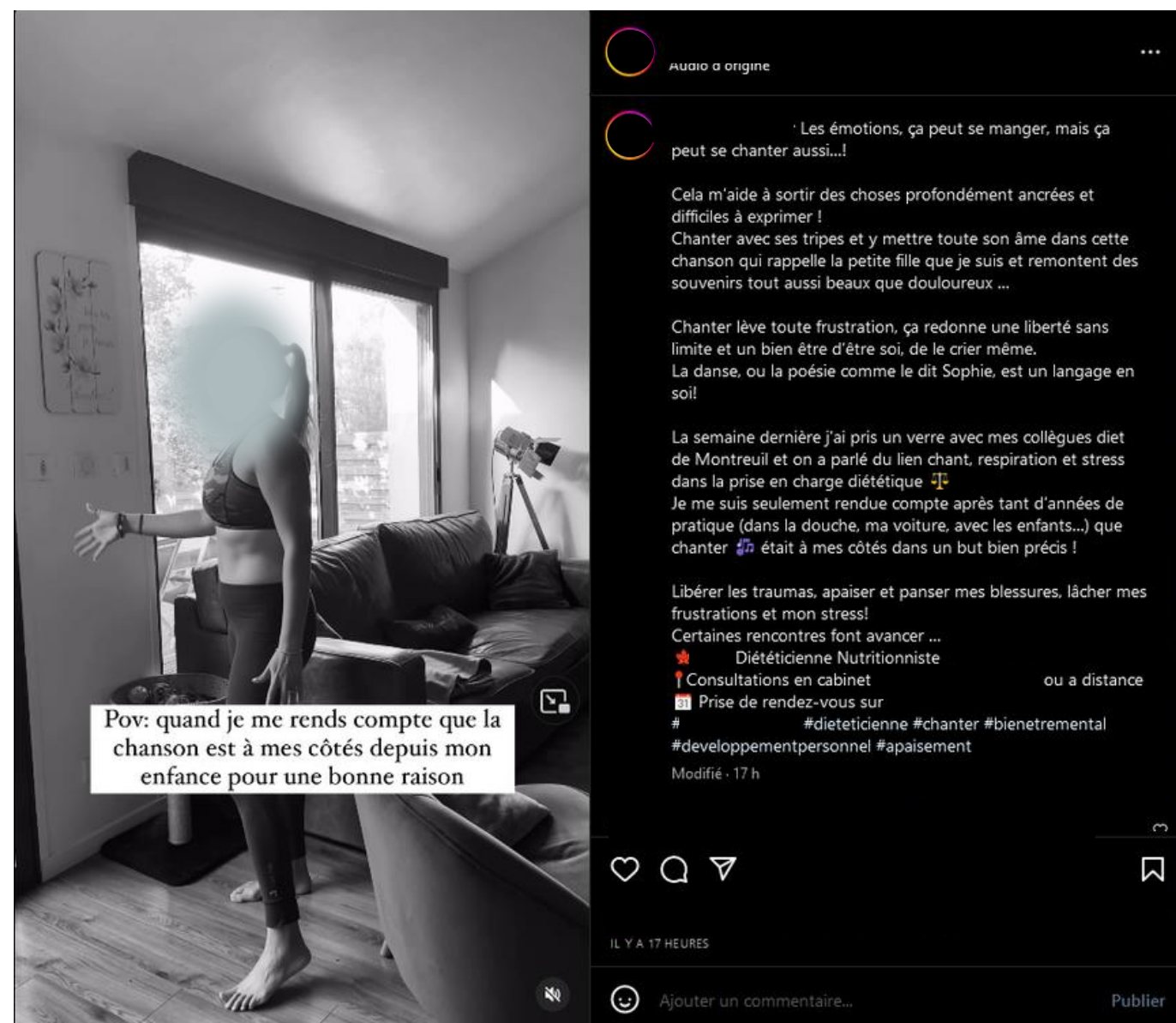
Food discourse is not limited to the meal or its preparation -> promotion of a lifestyle that involves the practice of sports.

-> 33% publications of the corpus are related to the promotion of physical activity = running and weight training.

-> Representative of the "healthy" lifestyle promoted by the fitness content on the SNSs (David, 2021). This lifestyle is subordinated to objectives such as maintaining one's health or body performance (David, 2021).

1. FOOD CONTENT OF DIETITIAN INFLUENCERS

Nutrition adapted to instagram



Watering down of the nutritional discourse with other themes like well-being and mental health.

-> An extension of the field of expertise of dietitians.

-> The promotion of intuitive eating or consciousness eating = based on a logic of empowerment. The aim is to regain control over unconscious or emotional bodily processes through the monitoring of hunger signals or sensations during the act of eating.

-> These discourses appears to be a form of "biomorality" (Zupancic, 2008).

Diet and physical activity can be instrumentalized in the name of well-being in a strictly individual way. This imperative of well-being generates a whole dialectic between the good bio-citizens and the bad bio-citizens that should be saved (Rail, 2016).

Source : Camille - published on 10/16/23

2. ONLINE AUTHORITY AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY

Dietitian's authority

Instagram represents a way to showcase the profession of dietitian.

14% (51 publications out of 372) correspond to the sharing of to-do lists, certain tasks and even testimonials from their patients.

The number of dietitians increases every year in France, from 7,000 in 2012 to more than 16,000 in 2023 -> consultations are not supported by social security = subscribers can represent a pool of potential patients.

The posture of the professional is part of both health communication and the register of influence marketing (Staii, 2022)

Article R4127-13 of the French Public Health Code states:

"When the doctor participates in a public information action of an educational, scientific or health nature, whatever the means of dissemination [...] He does not aim to profit from his intervention in the context of his professional activity, nor to benefit from it organizations within which he practices or to which he lends his assistance".

French Association of Dietitian Nutritionists, 2018:

"The dietitian nutritionist undertakes to behave loyally towards his colleagues and to respect the free choice exercised by the person or partners in their choice of professional. He undertakes not to practice his profession as a business and refrains from any advertising process."

Sharing a patient testimonial



Source : Justine – tetique published on 10/16/23

Source : Aurélie –published on 09/26/23



Partnership with the Hari&co brand
(transformed legume-based products)
Source : Laurine - published on 10/04/23

2. ONLINE AUTHORITY AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY

Influencer's authority

This authority is built notably through brand partnerships.

Partnerships represent :

- a form of recognition by brands of the quality of the content produced by the influencer,
- a gain in legitimacy that helps to reinforce his reputation, the number of subscribers,
- and, thanks to his "partnership", the ability to "help and advise" his followers (Godefroy, 2021).

Influencers are capable of creating a reputational authority online (notoriety) -> many brands lack this authority, which is sold to them as a lever of authenticity (Alloing, 2022).

2. ONLINE AUTHORITY AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY

Influencer's authority

This reputational authority is the result of affective and emotional work (Alloing, 2022).

-> Knowledge of the audience (Quizz, Q&As, etc.).

-> Provoke a reaction enables content to be circulated, made visible and even viral + create proximity and attachment.

It invites to explore the link between extending the field of expertise and emotional work to maintain a link with the public -> the construction of expertise through the staging of requests (e. g. Q&As).



Source : Justine – published on
10/03/23



Source : Alice – published on
09/25/23

Source : Justine - published on
10/19/23



"It's better to do the diet files in bed"

Faire les dossiers diet
dans le lit c'est mieux 🙄

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Dietitian influencers show concrete applications of a nutritional discourse, while at the same time lightening the hygienist character of nutrition.

Adapting the discourse to Instagram, through:

- aesthetics (healthy and foodporn),
- use of devices,
- staging the daily lives (embodiment of nutritional discourse).

The themes of weight loss and dieting are not clearly verbalized, but are scattered throughout the representations.

The coexistence of the posture of health professional and influencer which seems to be based mainly on the demonstration of authority = appears to be proof of their legitimacy -> ethical stakes of this online activity.

-> Critical reflection on the role of social media in promoting health and well-being

-> The degree to which the lifestyle promoted by dietitian influencers can be reproduced in real life



**Thank you for
your attention**

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