'Thanks Sis! I Am Praying for Your Work Permit!': The Role of the YouTube Vlogger's Performance Authenticity in the Game with the Migrant Job-Seekers' Needs

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Recently, online searching has become as important as more traditional methods of getting a job abroad. International labour migration is now influenced by new key actors – migrant micro-influencers who share international job opportunities and are increasingly trusted over established authorities. While media scholars analyse influencers' self-presentation, their role in international labour migration remains underexplored. Migrant YouTube vloggers blend formal and informal brokerage and intermediary practices through 'performance authenticity' (Taylor 2022), achieved by a 'mediated' presence and intimacy, as well as the strategic 'game with the expectations and needs' of job-seeking viewers. It allows them to shift between formal and informal intermediation and brokerage, depending on the context and audience's preferences. Through authenticity, migrant micro-influencers build trust and adapt their content to audience expectations in an online spectacle. This trust requires strategically blurring vloggers' dual formal and informal roles. Using a visual and thematic content analysis of a Filipina vlogger's YouTube channel, the study examines how migrant micro-influencers impact labour brokerage and intermediation. They do so by adapting to audience expectations and leveraging informal media conventions to enhance their credibility as brokers.

Keywords: Filipino international labour migration, brokerage, YouTube vlogger, performance authenticity, mediated intimacy, formality and informality

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Introduction

Like I always say: being a factory worker is just a stepping stone to better opportunities (…). Here, on my channel, I aim to inspire people, especially those who dream of going to Poland or Europe generally. I share with you my journey from the time I organised my documents for visa processing and then came here and became a factory worker (…).

This fragment consists of a statement posted by a Filipina YouTube vlogger, whom I refer to as Tina. Tina is a popular Filipina micro-influencer who advises people who would like to take up employment in Poland. Before she moved to Poland to work in a factory, she had worked in the Middle East. Her YouTube channel quickly gained recognition (with almost 19,000 followers), with videos surpassing 100,000 views. After a few months in Poland, during one of her livestreams, Tina revealed that she had changed her factory job and is now working as an employee of the recruitment agency, as a marketing manager. Surprisingly, she recommended herself as a broker for job-seekers interested in Poland.

The Internet has enabled unprecedented access to people and information through platforms like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube; this is the focus of my article. The literature on micro-celebrities and micro-influencers in digital ethnography is rapidly expanding (Cabalquinto and Soriano 2020; Hjorth, Horst, Galloway and Bell 2017; Jayadeva 2023; Ma 2022; Marwick 2015, 2019; Soriano and Gaw 2021; Tolson 2010; Wallis and Cui 2017; Zhang and Zhao 2020). The aforementioned scholars discuss how different influencers present themselves while they engage with observers (e.g., micro-communities) and managing publishing policies.

Micro-celebrities, as defined by Marwick (2019: 162), employ self-presentation strategies to establish credibility and authenticity. Authenticity, crucial for audiences, is crafted and performed by users and creators operating in the online space. Taylor (2022) argues that social media redefines authenticity as a visual tool, aiming to present content as real – a strategy commonly used by vloggers. Marwick (2019) notes that authenticity is also influenced by algorithms, while Jayadeva (2023) underlines the potential influencers' profit motives, such as advertising collaborations on YouTube. Authenticity is crucial for intermediaries, regardless of whether in real life or on YouTube, who are trusted for support and guidance (Tolson 2010). While scholars explore how influencers present themselves and engage with communities, the latters' role in international labour migration and job placement remains underexplored. This article suggests that vloggers emerge as significant new actors within the existing migration infrastructure (Wanicka 2024; Xiang and Lindquist 2014) using 'performance authenticity' (Taylor 2022) that both aligns with and extends the concept of traditional brokerage.

How can a vlogger's credibility in an informal job intermediating on YouTube be built through mediated and 'performance' authenticity? What role does the audience and its needs play in this online spectacle (Goffman 1956)? How can formal brokerage experience influence migrant-vloggers' activity on YouTube? What micro-influencer experiences enhance the credibility of labour brokers in reality? Understanding these aspects can draw researchers' attention to the influence that performative authenticity based on formal and informal role-blurring has on labour intermediation and brokerage in the online and offline spheres.

Tina strategically balances formal and informal roles, engaging viewers seeking jobs in Poland. In her videos, she presents herself as relatable and focused on the viewers' problems thanks to a planned performative strategy which both results from and influences her observers. This article examines the vloggers' 'game with the needs' of viewers through 'performed authenticity', shifting between formal and informal brokerage depending on the context.

The paper begins with a discussion on YouTube as a mediated space and the significance of presence and intimacy in building a vlogger's performance authenticity. I then look at online job-seeking and placement, discussing the concepts of mediation/brokerage in labour-migration studies within the context of shifting boundaries between formal and informal, in the activities of contemporary informal brokers. Afterwards, I present what the migration of Filipinos to Poland looks like according to the official data and literature, pointing out its non-traditionality and describing the research design used in the study. Finally, the results of the content analysis are presented. They refer to Tina's mediated and performance authenticity, which she uses in building credibility by balancing her role as a vlogger with her role as a real broker. The article concludes with a discussion.

YouTube as a site of mediation

Goodchild and Ferarri (2021: 107) call platforms 'intermediaries', since they enable the process of creating networks and the performance based on this matchmaking of people and services. Another valuable advantage of platforms is that they enable the acceleration of communication between the largest and the most distant audiences. Online platforms can also act as mediators due to their performativity, which constitutes a form of 'communicative technology' by translating the meanings (Goodchild and Ferrari 2021: 106). YouTube has become a space for many different actors who operate there for different purposes. One group consists of individual creators who take on the role of influencers (Abidin 2015; Tolson 2010) or micro-influencers (Marwick 2019) who create their content in a rather informal way, trying to reach diverse types of user. In research on micro-influencers, scholars often differentiate them from influencers based on the follower count. Marwick (2019) defines micro-influencers as individuals with up to 30,000 followers, whereas Zhang and Zhao (2020) view them as ordinary internet users with 1,000 to 100,000 followers and less significant than celebrities. This article adopts Zhang and Zhao's definition.

The number of studies on new micro versions of online celebrities and influencers – such as micro-celebrities (Marwick 2015, 2019), micro-communities (Strangelove 2010: 53–55) and micro-influencers (Soriano and Gaw 2021; Wallis and Cui 2017), including migrant vloggers (Cabalquinto and Soriano 2020; Jayadeva 2023; Lee and Abidin 2022; Ma 2022; Zhang and Zhao 2020) – in digital ethnography is growing rapidly. There are several examples of mediation between creators and users, which take place both in the exchange of comments (Schultes, Dorner and Lehner 2013: 663) and also in livestreams or videos recorded in response to others' statements or views published on YouTube (Hirzalla, Van Zoonen and Müller 2017). Furthermore, YouTube has provided a space for celebrities (Taylor 2022) such as musicians, athletes or actors (Hjorth *et al.* 2017) who formally define themselves and who often share their thoughts on the platform, with some content related to their lives and above all to their work shown 'behind the scenes'. Finally, YouTube as a platform has enabled formal actors, such as companies like recruitment agencies that act as intermediaries between job-seekers and employers (Wang, Hu, Wen and Lu 2024) but also non-governmental organisations or trade unions (Jansson and Uba 2019), to share their knowledge and experience, to network or publicise and agitate on political and social issues. Although the convention of social media itself tends to be more unofficial, how individual actors operate and formally define their practices on YouTube helps to state them as formal (e.g., politicians) or informal (most often micro-influencers). The line between such distinctions is blurred and often subjective (Soriano and Gaw 2021). Furthermore, this boundary changes over time as the number of followers increases, paid promotional partnerships are established and informal users become more formal.

The ordinary users who only observe the actions of others and do not create on their own – such as the person looking for work abroad, on whom I particularly focus in this article – are also important participants in this mediated community. They significantly shape how micro-influencers present themselves on YouTube and often determine the sustainability of their channels.

YouTube as a space for 'mediated presence' and 'mediated intimacy'

YouTube has become a platform that gives its users a sense not only of presence but also of intimacy. Villi (2015) speaks about 'mediated presence' in social media, exemplified by vloggers who create a 'sense of presence', since their videos show real-time changes in emotions (even if strategically performed), surpassing text and image-based media. Shtern, Hill and Chan (2019) highlight this shift, emphasising the emotional impact and situational connection with the audience in a given moment. Madianou (2016: 183–184), who observes the transnational communication of Filipino migrants in the UK, created the term 'ambient co-presence', which she defines as an 'increased awareness of the everyday lives and activities of significant others through the background presence of ubiquitous media environments'. 'Ambient co-presence' fosters an 'ambient community' (Madianou 2016), while social networks' visibility on platforms like Facebook (Ellison and Boyd 2013) or YouTube enables conversational interactions through vlogs. Tolson (2010: 279), who examines YouTube vlogs in detail, considers them to be like no other tool, 'conversational' and 'distinctively' a form of mediated communication.

One of the basic building blocks of co-presence is a sense of intimacy between people; an intimacy, often sustained by video, which includes the immediacy of the message, weaving in an element of 'fresh talk' or acting in any film being recorded – which is, for example, a bedroom or even a toilet. 'The effect is to construct co-presence and invite interaction, although of course none of this is live' (Tolson 2010: 280). Cefai and Couldry (2019) refer to the concept of 'mediated intimacy', which they understand as the cultural context that makes mediated contact intimate, even without establishing an intimate relationship before. In the case of vloggers, it is done by maintaining a sense of 'co-presence' between those separated by miles. How information technologies can support long-distance intimacy was also described by Rooney (2013), who examined the ways and tools used to create a sense of mediated intimacy (e.g., through touch-signalling devices). Hjorth and Lim (2012: 478) argue that mobile media personalise public and private spaces, blurring and redefining online and offline boundaries through various forms of mobility and intimacy. The mediation of interpersonal relations and the way in which they are maintained through the creation of a sense of intimacy would not be possible without a certain performativity of creators in their relationships with their audiences, for whom authenticity is particularly important. Raun (2018) even believed that associations with the word 'micro-celebrity' refer to and signal accessibility, availability, presence, connectedness and – above all – authenticity, which is examined in detail in the article.

'Performance authenticity' on YouTube as a base of the 'game'

In the past, scholars discussed the extent to which media figures such as actors or talk-show hosts (Tolson 2010) are authentic and the extent to which they are a kind of 'construction' and 'performance'. Although the boundary is extremely thin and practically invisible, the desire for authenticity among viewers has existed for decades. This demand requires people like Tina to actively construct and present themselves as authentic.

The audience, which was previously responsible for directly assessing the creators' authenticity, has been deprived of it in a way, as part of the emergence of the Internet and the transfer of celebrities to the online sphere. The intrusion of the Internet into the relationship between audiences and individuals has thus been transformed and mediated by the construction of authenticity (Marshall 1997). Goffman (1956: 13) speaks about the face, claiming that we have been using the term 'performance' to refer to all the activity of an individual that occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers. People do not exist in a vacuum and create their presentation through the presence of others, who act as audiences in whose eyes they reflect and through whom they define themselves.

Wesch (2009: 22), building on Goffman (1956), suggests that face work is a collaborative process where every action and word influences how we present ourselves. Our identity is shaped by context, including location, companions and activities.

Through performativity, micro-influencers try to sustain authenticity in online spaces, thereby enabling them to cater to diverse audiences in various contexts. Taylor (2022: 26) called this phenomenon 'performance authenticity', which would be answered by a visual presentation of authenticity like 'realism'. Although Goffman emphasised that individuals perform social roles, the notion of 'performance authenticity' (Taylor 2022) helps to explain how influencers like Tina construct authenticity as part of their role. Rather than contradicting Goffman, it extends his view – authenticity becomes performative and shaped in interaction with audiences online.

Performance authenticity, in turn, is the basis for the 'game with the job-seekers needs', which I examine in this article to show how it affects the vlogger's blurring of the boundaries between what is formal and informal. Soriano and Gaw (2021: 783) refer to the not fully visible role of modern political brokers on YouTube by saying: 'We see this as unable to capture the complexity, nuance and "grayness" of the nature of political engagement by these actors on YouTube'. Hjorth and Lim (2012) as well as Patterson (2018) argued that media creation requires vloggers to constantly blur and reconstruct the boundaries between public and private space and thus often between their formal and informal roles. What interests me the most is the balancing act itself which is required of the vlogger and the blurring of formal and informal roles. Role-blurring is related to the need to move between different dimensions and contexts that indicate the person's creating online ambiguity. Tina's example illustrates this balancing well.

Online job-seeking and job placement

Online job-seeking and placement have become key methods for migrants and actors in the migration infrastructure, including informal brokers, formal recruitment agencies and employers (Xiang and Lindquist 2014). Platforms such as Instagram (Ayaydin 2020), Facebook (Cheng and Vicera 2022; De Guzman and Garcia 2017; Jayadeva 2019) and TikTok (Cabalquinto 2024; Chee 2023) have transformed into spaces for sharing information about working and living abroad.

Social media have broadened access to employment opportunities (for both enabled migrants and non-migrants) on an unprecedented scale, thanks to unlimited contact with potential employers and intermediaries (Ayaydin 2020; Fudge and Hobden 2018; Jayadeva 2023; Moriarty, Wickham, Krings, Salamonska and Bobek 2012; Wang *et al.* 2024), making it easier to verify hard-to-find information (Dekker, Engbersen, Klaver and Vonk 2018; Soriano and Gaw 2021). It is crucial for migrants, who often rely on content from intermediaries (Moriarty *et al.* 2012), such as videos or photos of accommodation,

workspaces or contracts. Recently, video technology has made job information more accessible for marginalised groups, providing salary ranges or task descriptions (Wang *et al.* 2024).

Online job-seeking for migrants has expanded through social media, enabling the sharing of job-related information and providing easier access to verification (Ayaydin 2020; Jayadeva 2019; Soriano and Gaw 2021). Overall, social media also enables employers and intermediaries to target migrant workers and present job opportunities, portraying migrant lives and sustain transnational networks (King and Wood 2013; Moriarty *et al.* 2012; Wang *et al.* 2024).

Brokerage in international labour migration

The Internet has profoundly impacted on international labour migration by enabling faster job-searching. The development of international labour migration has influenced the operation of the infrastructure that determines mobility nowadays. With the liberalisation of migration services (Xiang and Lindquist 2014), both formal and informal intermediaries are playing an increasingly important role in migrant navigation, often thanks to technology (Chen, Liu and Yeoh 2023). Thus, despite the growing number of studies on international labour migration, Oso, Kaczmarczyk and Salamońska (2022: 127) indicate that still-neglected areas of research should concern the impact of technology on structural changes and its consequences for mobility. Intermediaries maintain the migration system, managed by the governments of the sending countries, while facilitating mass international migration and perpetuating its commercial nature.

The Philippines have sent workers to Europe since the 19th century, driven by globalisation, poverty, unemployment (Lindquist 1993) and unstable political conditions. Since the 1970s, the Philippine government has been systematically developing regulations for labour migration; a significant step was the establishment of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) in 1974, which supervised recruitment processes (Guevarra 2009). The Philippine government not only controlled the migration process but also actively supported the development of recruitment agencies that helped citizens to find jobs abroad. Labour migration became central to economic growth through remittances (Parreñas 2015). In 2021, former President Rodrigo Duterte restructured the POEA into the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) to improve migration management, controlling migrant movements as COVID-19 reduced remittances (Opiniano and Ang 2023). Despite the challenges, Filipino labour migration remains a key part of the country's economy and one of the most important sources of national income.

In the case of migration to Poland, recruitment agencies have become very active, imitating the trend of acquiring the workers from all over the world (Lindquist 1993; Xiang and Lindquist 2014). They are the leading actors in the framework of migration to new immigration destinations (Chen *et al.* 2023) that Poland has become for Filipinos. This is also visible in the case of economic migrants from other countries in Poland, as highlighted in Kindler and Szulecka's (2022) study on the repercussions of liberalised state policies. The opening of the 'windows' (Xiang and Lindquist 2014: 129) has led to a lack of real control over the actual market, as well as difficulties in obtaining verified information about work (increasingly published in shorthand online). In response, informal labour-migration brokers have become providers of such information.

Migration researchers have been concerned with the issue of informal brokers within international job placement for a long time (Baas 2020; Chen *et al.* 2023; Kern and Müller-Böker 2015; Lindquist 2012, 2025; Rodman and Counts 1983; Shrestha and Yeoh 2018). They are often presumed to be bridge-builders (Haxby 2021; Rodman and Counts 1983; Soriano and Gaw 2021) who enable and increase

employment opportunities abroad (Chee, Yeoh and Vu 2012). Another view of labour brokers identifies them more as hustlers (James 2011: 319) who exploit gullible migrants for their purposes (Kyle and Koslowski 2001; Nyberg Sørensen 2013) and reproduce and exacerbate social inequalities (Faist 2014; Fernandez 2013). Labour brokers, despite the different outlooks and assessments of the ethics of their behaviour, have become the most important actors in the migration infrastructure, with their ability to jump between its different dimensions.

Between formality and informality in brokerage

The literature on formality and informality in studies on intermediation and brokerage in the migration context is considerable (Kern and Müller-Böker 2015; Koster and Van Leynseele 2018; Lindquist 2015). Formality operates under formalised rules and obligations (e.g., established by the state), while informality does not require such arrangements. Nevertheless, Lindquist (2012: 75) claims that:

> *By moving attention from state actors and private agencies to informal brokers, distinctions between 'state' and 'market' as well as 'formal' and 'informal' become increasingly difficult to sustain. In fact, as an elementary-school teacher* [who Lindquist perceives as an informal broker in his article] *(...) he is actually a low-level bureaucrat and state official himself.*

Taking informal brokers as a starting point thus allows us to move beyond these dichotomies'. Building on Lindquist's (2012) critique regarding the possibility to clearly distinguish between formality and informality in intermediation, one has to agree that these terms should be treated as theoretical constructs rather than actual different definitions. Lindquist (2012: 85) argues that formal and informal intermediaries are hard to differentiate since neither operates under clearly defined contracts and both collaborate with multiple agencies or employers. The boundary between formal and informal intermediation blurs as traditional state-regulated brokerage intertwines with modern informal strategies, both employing shared tactics despite operating within different legal and regulatory frameworks.

Baas (2020) highlights the key role of society and the state in defining formal or informal practices depending on the context and situation of migrants. Fudge and Hobden (2018) examine how informal intermediaries have influenced both the improvement and the deterioration of conditions for migrant domestic workers during the formalisation of their employment. Formality and informality in international labour brokerage are, therefore, not rigid opposites but, rather, dynamically interpenetrating spheres.

The vlogger as a non-typical labour broker

The international job search relies on online mediation, shaping the formal or informal roles of intermediaries. While terms such intermediary, mediator and broker are sometimes used interchangeably, their meanings differ. An intermediary usually connects 2 parties, for example a recruitment agency and migrants, a mediator resolves conflicts and interpret interests (Goodchild and Ferrari 2021), while a broker is defined by negotiating transactions for a benefit, often monetary or symbolic (Lindquist 2012; Xiang and Lindquist 2014). Brokerage is particularly crucial when access to information is limited (Soriano and Gaw 2021).

Lindquist (2012: 74) highlights various brokers, such as migrants, smugglers or low-state bureaucrats who possess social recognition, communication skills, networks and experience abroad. He also considers activists, musician brokers or military translators as brokers (Lindquist 2025). This article considers vloggers as hybrid figures who are operating between informal intermediaries and brokers. While they may not directly receive commissions, their influence often generates non-material gains such as social recognition, visibility and platform growth. In this sense, they fit within the broader understanding of brokerage, as outlined by Xiang and Lindquist (2014), where brokerages include prestige or reputational capital as key gains. Their ability to connect aspiring migrants with migration-related knowledge – often perceived as more trustworthy than formal agencies – positions them as key actors in the contemporary digital migration infrastructure.

Vloggers today resemble brokers, especially as their activities become more influential online (Janta and Ladkin 2013; Moriarty *et al.* 2012). They provide informal advice on living and working abroad, which is often more credible than that of recruitment agencies. Between 2018 and 2022, the number of Filipino vloggers in Poland increased. Most published materials are in Tagalog (Schachter and Reid 2018). Shtern *et al.* (2019: 1946) write about the conscious use of Tagalog by YouTube creators considering the preferences of most recipients, claiming that influencers who decided to speak English were also focused on reaching audiences outside Asia. Vloggers are perceived as informal brokers despite the risk of 'information insecurity' and confusion when relying on online migration helpers (Wall, Campbell and Janbek 2017). Vloggers like Tina also act as informal brokers, influencing the verifiability of information for aspiring migrant viewers (Dekker *et al.* 2018).

This article uses 'broker' and 'intermediary' notions (Lindquist 2025) since the situation I am focusing on concerns a person who performs the role of a labour broker in her real life and, albeit less explicitly, an intermediary role on her YouTube channel. Vloggers represent new, informal intermediaries who can act as brokers online, operating under unclear mediation conditions, as there is no formal information on how these processes occur, leaving the actual mediation opaque to viewers. The article explores how Tina strategically blurs her roles to meet viewers' job-seeker needs.

Poland as a non-traditional destination for Filipinos

Historically, the most common migration destinations for Filipinos have been the United States (Espiritu 2002), the Middle East (Lindquist 1993) and Canada (Pratt 1999). In Europe, they primarily migrate to the United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium and Spain (Hacbang and Jusay 2007). However, recently, Central and Eastern Europe, in particular Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, have attracted Filipino workers. Traditionally, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Europe have been employed as domestic workers, *au pairs*, nurses, seafarers or oil-rig workers (Hacbang and Jusay 2007). In recent years, however, many have also found employment in Central and Eastern Europe's processing sector (Wanicka and Patzer 2024).

Poland became a popular destination for OFWs quite recently. The factors that promoted Poland as the so-called New Immigration Destination (NID) (Chen *et al.* 2023) were the historically low presence of foreign-born social networks and the low activity of integration supporting migrant institutions (Górny and Kaczmarczyk 2018). Despite bilateral Filipino–Czech agreements[1] regulating the acquisition of OFWs or opening a DMW satellite agency abroad – a Migrant Workers' Office [MWO] in Hungary in October 2024[2] – it is Poland which has issued the most stay permits for migrants in the European Union in recent years[3] (MFLSP – Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy – 2024). In 2024, Filipinos were the largest group[4] compared to other migrants whose stay in Poland was regulated by possession of this

document (MFLSP n.d.). Many Filipinos are attracted to Poland due to the easier possibility of extending their stay and work compared to Taiwan (Ituriaga 2024: 56) or the Middle East.

I refer to Filipino labour migration to Poland not as the main object of analysis but as a contextual background that helps us to understand the activities and role of Filipino vloggers within the emerging digital dimension of contemporary migration infrastructure. Despite the efforts of the Philippine DMW to strictly regulate direct Filipino departures, Filipinos primarily arrive in Poland via Middle Eastern countries or countries such as Taiwan, Singapore or Hongkong (Wanicka and Patzer 2024). Filipinos in Poland are employed in sectors such as manufacturing, transport, administrative services, finance, food industry and agriculture (De Guzman and Garcia 2017). Additional key data about OFWs in Poland come from the Social Security Institution (SSI). In 2023, the most up-to-date data show that Filipinos found employment in *administrative and support activities, manufacturing, transport and storage* (SSI 2024). In Poland, Filipinos, therefore, take up occupations that are not typical for OFWs all over the world (such as domestic work or nursing). Contrary to global trends and highly feminised Filipino migration, there were more Filipino male migrants (6,155 men and 4,575 women) in Poland and their average age (35–39 years) was higher than for other migrant groups, such as Nepalese or Indians (SSI 2024). The flexibility of the labour market, the demand for production workers regardless of gender and age and Poland's Schengen membership (Wanicka and Patzer 2024) play key roles in attracting OFWs to the country.

The Filipino community in Poland is at an early stage of formation but has been growing rapidly, with increasing Filipino institutions like religious or sports communities (e.g., Pinoy Warsaw Basketball League) and businesses like restaurants. Social media, like Facebook, are widely used by Filipinos in Poland to connect and share information. The activity of Filipino migrants in Poland is also visible on YouTube channels, where migrants seek both information and emotional support.

Research design

I analyse the Filipina migrant YouTube vlog run by Tina, who provides employment advice in Poland. Unlike other Filipino vloggers who avoid formal recruiters, she collaborates with a recruitment agency and shares content mostly in English, making her case atypical. Her dual role as a vlogger and a labour broker attracts an audience seeking both lifestyle content and job opportunities. Thus, Tina's channel was selected because it provides a lens through which to explore how migrants may balance the roles of vlogger and labour broker and how authenticity is performed in the context of international labour migration. Her channel was selected due to the high engagement with videos focusing on life and work in Poland, which distinguished her from other Filipino vloggers. Aware of the limitations of a single case study, I use Tina's case to offer in-depth insights into digital brokerage and role-blurring in migration. While several Filipino vloggers publish similar migration-related content across platforms, her high visibility, bilingual content and offline recruitment role make her a particularly valuable example. Although the findings are not representative of all Filipino vloggers, they provide valuable understanding of how authenticity and credibility are performed and negotiated in international labour-migration contexts.

Tina's channel, created in 2020, contains around 100 videos (lasting no more than 30 minutes) covering work – including various institution visits – and travel. In the paper I analyse vloggers' performativity and role-blurring using video content (including livestreams[5]) and viewer comments. YouTube was chosen based on findings from conducting the PhD project titled 'Poland's Inclusion to the Global Network of Job Placement: The Case of Overseas Filipino Workers' which highlighted its growing

role in providing visually verifiable information on life and work in Poland and making it ideal for analysing performativity.

The analysis centred on the visual and narrative content of YouTube videos (Burges and Green 2018; Flick 2009; Lange 2019), examining how Tina creates authenticity through her roles as both a vlogger and a labour broker. The study examines how she constructs authenticity through shifting roles (Goffman 1956), seamlessly transitioning from lifestyle content to job-related advice, making her unique as both a micro-influencer and a broker. I focused on content in English as it was the primary language used by Tina and it helped me to understand her approach, due to my limited knowledge of the Filipino language. Some videos in Taglish[6] were also analysed, especially during live streams, as they were more accessible to me and a wider audience (Cabalquinto and Soriano 2020).

I examined Tina's non-verbal content, such as camera positioning, recording locations and her behaviour in the video, noting emotional expressions like laughter or tiredness. The analysis also looked at marketing strategies, such as subscription reminders and the use of music, as well as the changing presentation styles of her videos, from simple narratives to dynamic video tours (Wang *et al.* 2024). Camera positioning and the choice of recording locations were varied – from everyday spaces (bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, work's locker room or the supermarket) to professional backgrounds (with stylish furniture or flowers behind). I paid attention to how the vlogger performs and builds a co-presence and intimacy with the audience, balancing the role of a friend and an expert helping migrants to find a job in Poland.

Comments were put into the *YouTube Data Tools programme*[7], which served only as a tool to organise the comments into a structured Excel table, while I conducted the actual coding manually. Using a grounded theory approach, I inductively identified the main categories in the comments, based on the recurring themes and topics which they addressed. A thematic content analysis (Franzosi 2004) of 2,000 comments (from a total of 4,296) identified key topics discussed in the videos and comments, such as *recruitment agencies*, *visas*, *work permits*, *daily life costs* and *job tips*, as well as viewer requests for Tina's *assistance* or those suggesting the *formation of a community*.[8]

YouTube as a research subject raises ethical concerns, particularly regarding participant consent. Jayadeva (2019: 2243) noted that, despite obtaining admin consent, not all Facebook users were aware of her research position due to frequent member turnover. Since it is difficult to obtain consent from every YouTube user and creator, I follow the researchers who view YouTube analysis as public discourse analysis (Dołowy-Rybińska 2016), with users giving conscious consent by posting videos and comments online (Cabalquinto and Soriano 2020: 902; Morrow, Hawkins and Kern 2015: 536–537; Patterson 2018: 762). Additionally, I did not participate in comment discussions or influence any interactions (Jayadeva 2019) and all analysed videos were publicly posted on YouTube (not via PayPal or special codes), so informed consent was not obtained.

To protect anonymity, I gave each vlogger a pseudonym, slightly altered some comments and anonymised sensitive data. As the number of videos, comments and observers on the analysed channel changed daily, this makes the vlogger's identification difficult. Tina is atypical but she is not the only Filipina micro-influencer in Poland – sharing content in English, having a broader migration background and discussing topics like salaries and recruitment stages. Such Filipino vlogs are in the public domain and are available on YouTube.

Although I do not implement traditional discourse analysis, I use a broader view of discourse that includes both language and visuals shaping meaning in context (Rose 2016; Wodak and Meyer 2009). My approach examines how vlog content and audience comments together create narratives of credibility. Direct quotes support only key interpretative insights, aligning with discourse-based

methods. I ensured that any quotes used were anonymised and de-identified to the greatest extent possible, following the principles outlined in *Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0* (Association of Internet Researchers 2020: 11). To minimise any risk of tracing them back to individual users, usernames were removed, identifiable details were altered and references to unique or traceable information were avoided.

The vlogger's role-blurring

It happens that intermediaries have previously achieved migration success (Lindquist 2012, 2015). Tina, who acts as a vlogger and a labour broker, is primarily a migrant. Her narrative is based on experiences gained both abroad and in her country of origin, bringing together these 2 interpenetrating perspectives (Zhang and Zhao 2020). Her online narratives are shaped by her overseas life and this affects her performance. She can, thus, compare her previous and current situations (including that of employment) while focusing primarily on reaching a wider multinational[9] community. Blurring the roles describes Tina's involvement in the informal intermediary activity on her own YouTube channel and her formal work for the recruitment agency as a labour broker. For illustration, I use 2 examples of an exchange of comments between Tina and her followers. In the first, Tina was asked to recommend a recruitment agency, which she often mentions on her channel, referring to her experience of working in Poland:

> Follower: *Please, tell me about* [agency name]. *How does it work?*

> Tina: *I work there and this is my personal vlog so, unfortunately, I can't mix my work and personal life. Thanks for respecting my decision.*

A few comments later, asked in a more flattering way virtually the same thing, Tina replies

> Follower: *Thanks, m'am[10] Tina for sharing your experience. You are so humble the way you advice others to work and apply in Poland po[11] (...). May I ask po m'am, to what agency did you apply? (...) I am planning to work in Poland po, as a stepping stone. Thanks a lot, po. I hope you have free time to answer my inquiry. God blessed po and take care* 🙏 🤍*.*

> Tina: *Thanks, sis, for the kind words, yes, my agency is* [agency name] *and since I'm officially working with them, you can send me a direct message on my FB page or personal account – TINA* [surname] *for a faster response. Thanks!*

What I perceive as Tina's 'game with the job-seekers' needs' is the fact that, on YouTube, most of the time she presents herself as just a migrant who shares her experience (primarily to inspire and help others); however, she only talks about her real relationship with the recruitment agency when it suits her and when she sees a purpose in it.

This blurring of roles is key to the analysis, which aims to explore how vloggers subvert the formality–informality distinction by playing with viewers' (mainly migrant job-seekers') expectations. On the internet, Tina is a formal vlogger, but she also plays an informal labour broker. In real life, however, she is a formal labour broker, sometimes defining herself through her YouTube experience and presenting herself as an informal vlogger.

This is done mostly by her balancing between formality and informality. Tina does not hide her role in blurring the arrangements that stand behind her. This is her game, which features leaps between formal and informal, in which performance, ambiguity and stretching are the essence of what happens.

Building performance authenticity: Playing with viewers' expectations

> *Hello! In this video, I am going to show you the positive things about being a factory worker (…). In my previous video, I shared with you the throwback or the disadvantages of being a factory worker. The reason why I did that was to set proper expectations with you… Then, I get feedback, that I am not talking about reality (…). I realised that I need to share the throwbacks and advantages of being a factory worker too. Well… as a matter of fact, being positive is realistic as well and is not just about negativity. Now I will share with you the perks of being a factory worker to show you both sides of the coin (…). After you see both sides it's up to you now to contemplate and analyse whether you are ready to go for your dream… to work as a factory worker here.*

In this video segment, Tina highlights the advantages of working in a factory, drawing from her own experience. She contrasts it with office work, noting the absence of prolonged mental stress and the flexibility it offers. In the previous video, Tina showed her work conditions accurately from the inside and also mentioned the cons – such as the need to carry boxes frequently – and pointing out that factory work does not suit everyone, which confirms her experience as an authentic person who does not try to distort reality. Ma (2022) suggests that creators like Tina must constantly adapt to the audience's expectations and to the many possible generalised others who are always present in non-face-to-face contact. She just does it through the lens of the camera. This adoption is one of the ways of building a sense of co-presence. This is evident in Tina's presentation style in which, by changing and adapting to its recipients, she confirms the assumption that her authenticity is negotiated (Wesch 2009) concerning the roles assumed on YouTube (Shtern *et al.* 2019). Tina, like other micro-influencers, gives off an air of closeness and familiarity, suggesting her naturality and often imperfection. Her emotional disclosure is crucial here in creating a sense of credibility. She calls her viewers *kabayan*,[12] which also refers to close friends and relatives. While speaking, she uses lively gestures – pointing at the virtual recipients, yawning and smiling. Therefore, she seems to be more personal and this is also noticed by the viewer:

> Follower: *Your body language and affect blends here are natural and realistic, though I could see that you are tired when you made this one but that is okay. What matters is that you are true to yourself and to everyone. God bless you, Tina!*

> Tina: *Thank you. God bless you more!*

We see here confirmation of Taylor's (2022: 102) statement that 'influencers are only as authentic as their audience believes them to be'. The choice of such a strategy is described by Marwick (2015), who studied different ways of approaching an audience and distinguished them depending on the platform chosen by the creator (e.g., through sloppiness and familiarity on YouTube and professionalism on Tumblr). Shtern *et al.* (2019) emphasise Filipino creators' complex content navigation between audience demands. Tina's strategy of self-presentation is focused on building trust, which is appreciated by her followers:

Follower: *You just make my day sis, I love u,*[13] *you are such an honest person.*

Tina: *Thank you so much for the feedback. It inspires me more. God bless.*

Additionally, Tina often refers to her belief in God's agency (explaining that, thanks to it, she managed to find a job in Poland). She often ends her videos and comments with 'God bless', reflecting Filipinos' belief in divine help, which enhances her authenticity and popularity, fostering a sense of closeness online (Tolson 2010). Jayadeva (2023: 4) argues that independent advisers' value as intermediaries is shown by the fact that they share the same cultural and local understanding as their audience, which may explain their gaining wider sympathy.

Tina also uses self-creation, in which she responds to self-criticism more ironically and sarcastically, which makes her become 'closer' to ordinary people (Tolson 2010: 281) who observe her:

Follower: *Referring to your video. It's called an hourly wage, not a salary.*

Tina: *Yes, correct. Thx*[14] *for reminding me. I have known about this since high school, but I'm just a human who also forgets and gets preoccupied with factory work. Lol*[15]

Following Goffman's (1956) statements about performance as a basis for 'working on face', Tina wants people to perceive her in a certain way. Even though she knows that she lacks complete knowledge on every topic, she wants her audience to see her as an authority – something she gradually begins to believe herself, occasionally referring to herself as an informal expert. In this context, sarcasm can be seen as creating tension between authenticity and the conscious construction of reality. Looking at the 2 examples above, one can see that Tina also balances the language she uses, which becomes more or less formal (Tolson 2010) depending on the context and her perception of the recipient's words.

Comments expressing gratitude indicate a community centred around Tina's channel. She also informs them when the next video is coming out or how she is feeling. Jayadeva (2023: 12) described similar strategies of constant dialogue between influencers and observers to sustain the narrative of 'one big family'. During the livestream, Tina allows direct contact (with or without the camera on), which enables her followers to talk in real-time and ask about details that interest them in connection with the work in Poland. Such a real consultation (Wang *et al.* 2024) also affects the sense of mediated presence on YouTube.

All of the aforementioned factors create Tina as a person who is approachable by her followers and could be perceived as a planned strategy. An especially noted and appreciated response to the needs of commenters is her publishing her content in English.[16]

Follower: *I am glad you speak English in most of your videos.* 🫰 🤪

Tina: *Thanks; I have to since Filipinos can understand English and my target audience is multinational.* 😊

Since Tina succeeded, how she portrays her life in Poland evokes admiration and awe:

Follower: *Hi! Tina welcome to Poland :) I'm happy to hear your story. I wish I can interview u. I'm a small YouTuber :) I salute*[17] *all production workers in Poland. (…) U are an inspiration. Keep doing great. God bless! :)*

Tina: *Hi sis! Thank you for the warm welcome and of course, you can* [interview me]. *I really feel humbled to be given that opportunity. Please send me a message on my FB Account:* [TINA] *so we can discuss more.*

The non-sharing of negative experiences and obtaining 'positive' reactions from the audience (Wallis and Cui 2017) can be just a different performative strategy used by YouTubers (Marwick 2015) which somewhat explains Tina's brief response:

Follower: *This looks like very hard work. Do you get paid for overtime when you're working a 12-hour shift? Does your employer cover the cost of accommodation and commuting to work? Good luck making a life for yourself in Poland!*

Tina: *Hi. Yeah, we are paid for doing overtime… but, since last month, we are back to normal 9-hour shifts, so it's not that tiresome anymore. Yes, accommodation and transportation are provided by the company. Thanks.*

Concealing negative experiences in the media may be a result of prevailing beliefs about 'heroism' and 'sacrifice' (Guevarra 2009). The departure of migrants from the Philippines often involves the need to support a family permanently. The obligation to send remittances, which families left behind in the origin country expect, leads migrants to hide any difficult experiences which could be worrying, provoke family conflict or testify to their failure abroad (Asis 2006; Gotehus 2023; Madianou 2017).

On the other hand, Tina uses her personal experience which also builds her authentic perception. The topics she undertakes to speak on range from living costs to employment conditions in Poland, addressing viewers' inquiries about salaries, overtime and employer services; Tina deals with them by providing knowledge in a condensed form. She sensitises followers to potential migration challenges and advises them to carry out thorough research before engaging with recruitment agencies, cautioning them against hasty decisions that could result in indebtedness as well as being trapped in other precarious situations. Furthermore, Tina clarifies terms like gross and net profit, often misrepresented by recruitment agencies. As an informal intermediary with first-hand experience, she is more effective (Chen *et al.* 2023).

On her YouTube channel, Tina also provides information in a 'softer' and more understandable way than formal intermediaries. Again, we can see Tina 'playing' with the expectations of her viewers. She knows how the informal communication and accessible language on her YouTube channel help to distance her from typical formal brokers through whose prism she does not want to be perceived as an informal vlogger. In the current situation of uncertainty and related changes in the labour market, there is a visible tendency to look for new helpers outside one's close kinship networks (Dalgas 2016; Jayadeva 2019). Unlike formal agencies, which often leave migrants feeling uncertain, Tina offers an additional source of security. Her approachability as a native Filipina (De Guzman and Garcia 2017; Lindquist 2012) makes her a trusted figure, which is often bestowed upon her without deeper verification. Del Rosario's (2007: 236–237) study shows that informal OFW networks in new destinations are the most reliable source of trust, offering clear information without hidden agendas,

unlike formal institutions. Informal networks, like Tina's, are seen as more reliable due to their accessibility and transparency, with no perceived ulterior motives. Through 'mediated presence' (Villi 2015) on YouTube, Tina adapts to her audience's needs, effectively engaging them with performative practices to enhance her authenticity.

Hjorth and Lim (2012: 480) claim that:

Mobile media can be considered as part of shifts in conceptualising and practicing intimacy as no longer a 'private' activity but a pivotal component of public sphere performativity (...). Intimacies here not only refer to the kinds of intimacies that exist between lovers, family members, or close friends (though these can and do play a role). Intimacies can also exist at a social or cultural level.

Such public creation of privacy between the vlogger and the audience is evident in the case study. Both geographical and social distances shrink when Tina refers to her own experiences, which allow her to naturally burst with joy and evoke a positive feeling (Lindquist 2015: 171). Contemporary media practices mediate intimacy by referring to behaviours such as recording materials and communicating with audiences from, for example, individuals' homes. Message personalisation performs intimacy and blurs the boundaries between the offline (home) and the online (YouTube) world (Tolson 2010). Content recording from home, with flatmates suddenly appearing in the background, gives viewers an additional feeling 'of being in conversation with a friend in the intimate setting of their home' (Jayadeva 2023: 11). Abidin (2015) believes that internet creators prioritise intimacy over authenticity, using performative practices. Tina's live gestures foster closeness and care in order to build her 'authentic' image. She uses an intimate tone to make the audience feel that they are on the same level or as if they are already close friends. Rooney (2013: 885) claims that engaging in intimate interactions largely involves joking, storytelling or making plans together because it allows for an ongoing awareness of each other. Tina seems to be aware of this approach.

Tolson (2010) argues that an attractive way of communicating by adopting ordinary talk forms contributes to build authenticity. This is another reason why Tina tries to fill the gap (existing within geographical boundaries and felt by the camera) between herself and her followers, which Taylor (2022) points to as a potential way of presentation through performative authenticity, possibly thanks to the feeling of special intimacy. Her 'ordinariness' shows in how much she shares about herself (Tolson 2010), from job changes to consulate visits and cooperation with the authorities. It supports Raun (2018: 104), who argues that audiences expect micro-celebrities to be 'transparent, open and authentic', which includes disclosing intimate information.

Mediated intimacy (Cefai and Couldry 2019) is also approached primarily through the camera setups and 'backstages' (Raun 2018: 107), locations in which Tina records her videos. The places include her bed, her kitchen and even her bathroom; the way she invites viewers into her life, showing them what she has in the fridge, the colour of the towel in her bathroom or how she changes into her work clothes in the factory locker room is how her intimacy with viewers contributes to her authenticity.

Vlogger balancing between an informal and a formal role

Tina is constantly both formal and informal depending on her chosen strategy and the choice of a particular 'face' (Gofmann 1956). In referring to her blurring the roles earlier, I wanted to demonstrate that her balancing is planned and used by her whenever it suits her. The example below shows that Tina does

not respond to comments that might cast her role as a formal labour broker in real life in a negative light. She responds only to those she wants to, ignoring the first one:

> Follower: *Pls*[18] *don't pay any money to Tina's* [recruitment agency name]*, they are fraudulent/scammers, they will take money from 1,000 applicants and make visas for 10. They will intentionally defraud the remaining to make more profits. I'm a victim and I won't let anyone watching this be a victim like me (...) don't mind the agents they are paid based on commission, that's why they will sweet talk you into making a payment and losing your hard-earned money like I did, pls be warned.*

> Follower: *Ms Tina, can I really start the process? Is it possible to get a visa?*

> Tina: *Kindly contact him. He's a good friend and colleague and can definitely assist you. https://www.facebook.com/* [broker's friend name]*.*

Analysis has shown that Tina gradually removes the comments that do not align with her narrative on the vlog. However, she receives so many of them that she cannot always keep up.

Tina not only provides her contact details but also offers personal contact with agency colleagues. By doing this, she can distance herself from any accusations of negative practices done by the agency that employs her, as in the example below:

> Follower: *Very informative (...). Madam please, I need some advice from you; planning to move to Poland too... Here is my email:* [email address]*.*

> Tina: *Thank u for the feedback; if you have questions, you can ask here, brother. But please note that I am not a legal advisor nor an agent, so i highly recommend that you contact one. You can search for* [broker's friend name] *fb pages (...). For sure they can help.*

Publicly publishing contacts to other brokers working with Tina in the same agency alludes to Ellison and Boyd's (2013) conclusions about the expansion and publicisation of social contacts in the informal online space, which in Tina's case may help her in formal broker work.

My analysis shows that by 'game' and informal intermediary popularity, Tina's authenticity may be put above the credibility of formal brokers – for example, when she refers to the amount of the typical placement fee in the video and gets a comment:

> Follower: *Thank you, Tina, for sharing your all experience. It's mean maximum cost is 10,000 dirhams but my agent's demand is around 20,000 dirhams – my God, they are cheating me.*

Jayadeva (2023: 12) claims that, in the YouTuber's case, those who were already known to aspiring student-migrants and their families, even if they offered something less prestigious than other available options, could be considered more credible and convincing precisely because of their popularity as experts in the online space. Thanks to the Internet and vlogging, ordinary people are becoming experts (Tolson 2010: 284) – they are perceived as such on their YouTube channels by the audience.

Tina's navigation between the formal and the informal is also manifested in the framework in which she presents herself as an independent and altruistic expert who, however, has gained 'secret knowledge' by changing her factory job to work in a recruitment agency. For aspiring migrants (her viewers), it can seem

that she is, informally, able to help to deal with employment without going through a long chain of formal brokers. While the fees for informal recruiters' services are increasingly disproportionate to the earnings of migrants (Xiang and Lindquist 2014: 123), informal brokers continue to play a special role in the mediation of migration in East and Southeast Asia (Lindquist, Xiang and Yeoh 2012). For Tina's recipients, the YouTube channel becomes a valuable guide which is, above all, free (Goodchild and Ferrari 2021):

> Follower: *Life is a journey, and place to learn. In a way of learning cost us money, time and efforts. Great to know all of these things you have given to all of us free!*

By engaging with viewers, Tina benefits as a formal broker. By getting informal questions from her followers, she gains knowledge that may come in handy in her formal job at a recruitment agency. Jayadeva (2023: 8) claims that sharing experiences for free is appreciated and could eventually lead to financial recognition in the future. By playing with the viewers' expectations and bypassing formal and informal roles, Tina builds her social capital through a 'sense of community' (Raun 2018), enthusiasm and support, which potentially monetises her presence in the form of a solid base of contacts (Shtern *et al.* 2019). As a vlogger, Tina's formal advice masks commercial gains through the 'game with authenticity'. She blends her roles as an informal adviser and a formal broker. She asks for a formal reference if a viewer of her channel is hired by the agency where Tina works in reality:

> Follower: *Ms Tina, can I really start the process? Is it possible to get a visa?*

> Tina: *Try to connect to* [broker name] *of* [agency name] *on fb page. Tell her i referred you.*

The strategy of referencing to expand the social network of intermediaries is also described by Chee *et al.* (2012). Although it is not clear whether she earns money from running her channel, she is also guided by non-financial benefits, such as an increase in popularity and a source of emotional support or prestige (Lee and Abidin 2022; Xiang and Lindquist 2014).

Koster and Van Laynseele (2018) emphasise the role of social capital in expanding brokers' market reach. Contact with Tina provides migrants with international opportunities (Chen *et al.* 2023; Jayadeva 2019). She can reach even more job-seekers and it is difficult to control her as a formal recruitment agency representative, whose work duties are defined by a specific employment contract which can be terminated in case of a violation or exceeding authority. Engaging individual informal vloggers to work in formal recruitment agencies seems to be a strategy for hidden commercial goals, since producing a micro-influencer also requires collaboration between various hidden actors outside the formal sphere (Dumont 2017).

Another visible manifestation in Tinas's videos, in addition to her everyday impeccable appearance, demonstrates her ordinary lifestyle (e.g., frequent trips around Poland or living in a well-furnished apartment provided by the agency), which most of her viewers are probably unable to afford. Taylor (2022: 102) argued that audiences see micro-influencers' success as earned through resourcefulness, viewing them as more authentic despite their hidden circumstances. Nevertheless, such a 'creation' of reality is very attractive to Tina's audience and is visible in their comments:

> Follower: *Very nice accommodation, better than a regular Polish apartment, honestly. And surprisingly, so many Filipinos are working in Poland nowadays. Won't be surprised to hear Tagalog in buses and malls* 😊.

> Tina: *Thanks and, yes, it is indeed.*

Here, another aspect of Tina's role-blurring is evident. Her video once featured an apartment provided by the agency but she later changed the video title to reflect the potential price increase or the apartment no longer being available. The accommodation now offered could be different or worse but the previous video still shapes viewers' – mainly migrant job-seekers' – expectations. Such a shift indicates that Tina stays informed about current conditions; with her informal knowledge from formal work, she is blending her informal YouTube insights.

Tina's balancing act is necessary primarily because her audience demands it. Depending on the needs and preferences, the vlogger is more or less formal. He or she can present as a vlogger or a labour broker, depending on the context of communication with the audience and the intended purpose of performing.

Discussion

The article explores how a vlogger blurs formal and informal roles by playing with the expectations and needs via 'performance authenticity', achieved thanks to the mediated presence and intimacy.

Tina builds authenticity by strategically positioning herself in front of or behind the camera to emphasise presence. Close-up shots create a 'face-to-face' effect (Tolson 2010), while filming in personal spaces like her home or workplace fosters relatability. 'Mediated presence' (Villi 2015) but especially 'intimacy' (Abidin 2015) also results from the fact that Tina records in places associated with privacy – in bed, cloakroom and even the bathroom, inviting the audience to her personal, intimate world (Raun 2018).

Furthermore, Tina gains a presence and intimacy through props that she uses to visualise her story. Work uniforms, lunch boxes or rice-cookers familiar to Filipino migrants signal, especially for compatriots, authenticity and suggest that she is 'one of us'. Moreover, her props play an educational role, as when she showcases budget-friendly Polish products in the supermarket to help newcomers to navigate life abroad. The occasional appearance of her co-workers in the background enhances the sense of realism.

Non-verbal communication also strengthens a vlogger's authenticity. Expressive gestures, laughter and eye-rolling make him or her appear natural and relatable. Through Goffman's (1956) 'work on face', Tina makes her exhaustion visible, enhancing her perceived naturalness and deepening intimacy with viewers, with whom she appears to share emotions (Abidin 2015).

Tina's strategic choice of YouTube and verbal narrative adjustment reflect Marwick's (2015) views on building an image through platform familiarity. By balancing formal and informal language, humour and cultural references, she connects to her audience. Calling viewers '*kabayan*' and incorporating religious phrases strengthens this bond, particularly with Filipino viewers (Jayadeva 2023). Being the only Filipino micro-influencer in Poland who uses mostly English also enhances Tina's accessibility. Regular interaction (Rooney 2013), sharing details about life (Wange *et al*. 2024) and responding quickly to comments all foster trust and a sense of community (Wanicka 2024). Her dialogues with recipients resemble everyday conversations (Tolson 2010), which strengthens the impression of authenticity and direct contact.

The article explores how vloggers' credibility in informal job-intermediating on YouTube is built through mediated and performance authenticity fostering presence, intimacy and trust (Goodchild and Ferarri 2021; Raun 2018). By sharing personal job-seeking experiences and insights into the Polish labour market (Jayadeva 2023), Tina positions herself as an 'ordinary expert' (Tolson 2010). Her transparency in discussing job changes and experiences as a labour broker further strengthens her image. YouTube enables Tina to share knowledge through various means – personal stories, live

conversations and comment responses. Her positivity-driven approach aligns with Filipino cultural norms of resilience, avoiding displays of weakness (Guevarra 2009; Wallis and Cui 2017). All the aforementioned factors enhance her credibility both on- (Jayadeva 2023) and offline (Lindquist 2012). By involving her audience in content decisions, she fosters inclusivity and responsiveness (Wanicka 2024) and, in so doing, she becomes a trusted figure, providing guidance (Dalgas 2016) while reinforcing her role in informal job intermediation on YouTube.

Audience perception plays a crucial role in shaping Tina's credibility. Online authenticity is fragile and subject to scrutiny according to Taylor (2022), who argues that judging authenticity maintains social control, as is evident in Tina's efforts to satisfy the audience's informational needs. YouTube vlogs, relying on directness, amateurism and interaction (Tolson 2010), require continuous adaptation. Tina manages her 'working on face' (Goffman 1956) by adjusting informality, approachability and engagement based on audience demand (Marwick 2015; Shtern *et al.* 2019). Viewers actively evaluate her credibility, shaping her strategies and reinforcing her authenticity.

This article also examines how Tina's formal brokerage experience influences her vlogging. Her industry expertise enhances her reach as viewers trust her real-world experience. Unlike formal intermediaries, she balances professionalism with informality, making her more accessible. By publicly sharing her migration journey and brokerage connections (Chee *et al.* 2012; Ellison and Boyd 2013), she strengthens her credibility.

Even if she does not currently monetise her YouTube presence, she could leverage it for future brokerage work. Her online engagement fosters a trusted community (Shtern *et al.* 2019) and enhances her credibility in real-world job placement. As a well-known figure, she understands migrants' needs, using her recognition to strengthen her role as a formal labour broker (Jayadeva 2023).

This article analyses how Tina plays a 'game' with audience expectations by balancing formal and informal roles. Her success in both vlogging and brokerage relies on performed authenticity. Her informal intermediary's or formal broker's face depends on the analysed context. She selectively acknowledges her formal role when beneficial while avoiding discussions that might undermine her credibility. She presents herself as an altruistic helper yet does not clarify why she refers job-seekers to formal brokers. Her role-shifting is particularly evident in how she alternates between personal experiences and formal knowledge. For instance, when updating videos about agency accommodations, she carefully blends informal storytelling with authoritative insights. This balancing act reflects the interplay of online and offline knowledge-sharing, reinforcing her credibility as both a vlogger and a broker. However, positioning herself as an informal expert while referencing formal labour agency knowledge allows her to offer practical job-seeking, bypassing traditional intermediaries (Goodchild and Ferrari 2021; Xiang and Lindquist 2014). Here, her formal and informal role-blurring is particularly visible and results from the game played with the expectations of viewers – migrant job-seekers.

Lindquist (2012) highlights the fluidity between formal and informal roles in labour migration, where brokers shift based on context and potential benefits. This study shows how micro-influencers, like Tina, act as both informal intermediaries and formal brokers, reshaping traditional brokerage roles (Lindquist 2025). Lindquist (2012: 86) notes that successful brokers are often ordinary figures – teachers, low-level bureaucrats – trusted across communities. Following up on his characteristics, the case described in this article provides an illustrative study with some differences. Tina fits this model but operates in an online setting. Her ability to connect with diverse audiences, organise community meetings and interpret regulations enhances her reliability. Despite the lack of clarity about her formal role, Tina's guidance enhances her effectiveness as both an informal and a formal broker.

Chen *et al.* (2023) argue that online intermediaries play a crucial role in migration, particularly in regions with limited networks, like Poland. Dekker *et al.* (2018) note that those exploring new migration destinations often rely on the media, highlighting vloggers' role in job placement. Future uncertainty drives migrants to seek new, non-kinship networks (Dalgas 2016), with vloggers providing hidden contacts and lowering migration costs, even when collaborating with recruitment agencies.

This article illustrates how vloggers who also act as labour brokers use authenticity as a strategy to mediate employment, skilfully playing with the viewer's expectations and the job-seekers needs. It is possible by the blurring of the formal and informal roles, thanks to mediated presence and intimacy. Tina's case exemplifies how the reconceptualisation of authenticity influences informal intermediation, making her role a significant subject for migration researchers.

Notes

1. On 14 March 2024, the Philippines and the Czech Republic signed a bilateral agreement to increase the annual limit for Filipino migrant workers to 10,300, focusing on sectors such as manufacturing, IT and healthcare (see Gita-Carlos 2024).
2. See GMA News (2024).
3. In 2023, Poland issued 642,800 permits for foreigners to stay, the highest number in the European Union according to Eurostat data (Poland Insight 2024).
4. The Polish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy issued 37,988 work permits for Filipinos in 2024 (MFLSP n.d.).
5. Livestreaming is the real-time broadcast of video content over the Internet.
6. Using Tagalog and the English language in one sentence (see Collins Dictionary n.d.).
7. Previously, YouTube was not an easy platform to study and analyse due to the necessity of manual data collection and narrowing down the sample size. Nowadays, computer programmes enable a full analysis of online data, for example: the *YouTube Data Tool* that enables the extraction of data from videos, channels and search queries. *YouTube Data Tools* also allows for in-depth analysis of a large number of comments, which is why it is so useful (Quan-Haase and Sloan 2017: 658–659).
8. I also coded requests for Tina's support in finding employment, as well as expressions of gratitude. Irrelevant comments, such as matrimonial inquires, technical questions or advertisements, were excluded from the analysis.
9. I adopt the 'multinational' concept (Paul and Yeoh 2021), which describes diverse migration patterns across multiple destinations, including temporary stays, aligning well with the Philippine overseas migration context explored in this paper.
10. Popular Filipino respectful ways to call women, used in professional or polite conversations.
11. In Tagalog, this phrase means an expression of respect to an interlocutor.
12. 'Compatriot' in Tagalog.
13. Abbreviation of the word 'you'.
14. Popular abbreviation of the word 'thanks' in online casual conversation.
15. The phrase stands for 'laugh out loud' and is often used to express amusement in response to something funny, particularly in online communication.
16. Different language strategy involving the use of migrants' native languages by migrant vloggers on YouTube to gain their community's approval was described by Zhang and Zhao (2020: 556–557).

17. In the above example, commenters used the Latin word 'salute' to greet others.
18. Abbreviation of the word 'please'.

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