

**How do followers authenticate SMIs who promote destinations organically?  
Using Large Language Model for comparisons of domestic and international audiences**

**Abstract**

This study investigates how online users from culturally different audiences authenticate social media influencers (SMIs) and their creative products which promote destination culture, traditions, and heritage. Guided by the authenticity and SMI literature, we examined such authentication aspects as otherizing, traditionalizing, nostalgia, and self-discovery using Large Language Model (LLM) and prompt engineering methodologies. We obtained strong evidence that authentication through otherizing and self-discovery is more prevalent among international followers while traditionalizing and nostalgia are used more by domestic viewers. The context of the study was Chinese influencer Li Ziqi and her videos that depict domestic, day-to-day life in rural areas of the Sichuan province of China. The videos indirectly and organically promote tourism by contributing to more developed perceptions of China's destinations and the country's brand through building positive associations, which potentially can be leveraged by the DMOs in their marketing efforts.

**BIO**

**Svetlana Stepchenkova**, Ph.D., received her doctorate in Hospitality and Tourism Management from Purdue University and currently is a Professor in the Dept. of Tourism, Hospitality & Event Management at the University of Florida. Her research centers on marketing communications, branding, and positive image building. She studies tourist behavior and the effectiveness of destination promotion efforts, specifically in situations of strained bilateral relations between nations. Svetlana has published more than 65 peer-reviewed articles and presented her research at conferences and universities internationally. She participated in several sponsored research projects with the aims of rebranding an attraction, developing a new tourist product, and studying local communities' perceptions of tourism benefits. Her service to the profession includes being an editorial board member for *Journal of Travel Research*, *Tourism Management*, *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, *Tourism Management Perspectives*, *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, and an open-source journal *Hospitality and Tourism*.

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