

Positive and Negative Impacts of Influencer Marketing on Companies and Society

Szilárd Malatyinszki^{1*}, Gréta Odett Bécsi², Szonja Jenei^{3*}

¹ *Habil, Ph.D, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1624-4902>. Associate Professor, Dean in Kodolányi János University, Faculty of Economics, adress: 25 Rákóczi utca, Székesfehérvár, HU-8000, HUNGARY, e-mail: malatyinszki.szilard@kodolanyi.hu
Associate Professor, in János Neumann University Faculty of Economics Department of Management and Business Law, 10 Izsáki út, Kecskemét HU-BA-6000, HUNGARY, e-mail: malatyinszki.szilard@nje.hu
Doctoral Supervisor, John von Neumann University Doctoral School of Management and Business Administration, 10 Izsáki út, Kecskemét HU-BA-6000, HUNGARY, e-mail: malatyinszki.szilard@nje.hu*
² *Kodolányi János University, Faculty of Economics, 8000, Székesfehérvár, Hungary*
³ *Assistant Professor, Széchenyi István University, Kautz Gyula Faculty of Economics, 9026, Győr, Hungary, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6865-1219>, jenei.szonja@sze.hu*

*Corresponding Author: jenei.szonja@sze.hu

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ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing has become a prominent player in the marketing world in recent years, as opinion leaders help companies reach their target audiences effectively. With the rise of digital marketing, influencers have a huge influence on consumers, creating opportunities for companies to interact with their audience and respond to market changes. The aim of influencer marketing is for companies to promote their products and services through influencers, connecting directly with consumers. Authentic content builds brand loyalty and consumer trust, and increases brand visibility and reach. However, there are also dangers: some influencers can mislead audiences by painting a false image or simply by greenwashing by falsely claiming to be environmentally friendly. It is important that companies choose their interactions with influencers carefully, as the behaviour of opinion leaders can directly affect brand credibility. A potential scandal could damage the image of the company, so choosing the right profile is key. Focus on the activity rate rather than the number of followers, as followers can be easily bought, which can distort the true reach. The impact of influencer marketing can vary for different age groups and genders, so companies need to carefully consider the aspects they take into account when running their campaigns. Ultimately, influencer marketing has a complex impact on both society and companies, so it is essential to be aware of both the positive and negative aspects.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

Thanks to huge technological advances over the past decades, the emergence of social media platforms has broadened people's horizons and unfortunately we have reached the point where we spend most of our everyday lives online. Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of Generation Z follow influencers, which is why companies are increasingly seeing it as key to fully exploit influencer marketing. At the same time, the inclusion of influencers in marketing strategies has made digital marketing one of the most influential and fastest growing areas. The new opportunities and tools have started to completely change traditional marketing paradigms, and as a result, influencers have already started to take over the power of branding and product promotion. In my thesis, I will therefore examine the impact of this

on consumer society and businesses. The emergence of influencer marketing poses quite a challenge for companies, but if they manage to overcome the obstacles they face, they can be sure of increasing sales at a higher rate.

Problem Statement, Hypotheses

Over the past few years, the word 'influencer' has become part of everyday vocabulary, yet few people know its exact meaning or recognise its impact on everyday life. There are also many benefits of the rise of social media, such as the ability to connect with anyone without geographical barriers, or the ease of working for a multinational company from home, anywhere in the world. However, there are also many downsides to the emergence of social media. I think that the excessive 'power' of opinion leaders is one of the biggest drawbacks of the rise of social media. In my thesis, I will explore what the expectations of the different actors are, what the general opinions are about influencer marketing and substantiate why I think the emergence of influencers is a rather negative factor. As this topic has become fully integrated into the daily bloodstream, due to the fact that we spend a significant part of our days on these platforms, I will provide a comprehensive insight into this world. First, I think it is important to clarify what social media is.

"Social media is a place where people talk and share information with each other through a two-way platform." (Ross, 2011)

These are platforms based on content sharing and expression. They make it easy for consumers to connect, have conversations, share and view videos, pictures and files. Thanks to the dominance of social media among digital platforms, communication tools have emerged "that allow companies to be present in the consumer community space (both online and offline!) and build brands through the content and conversations generated by consumers." (Horváth-Bauer, 2016a).

The Aim of the Research

In my thesis, I will first of all introduce the social media platforms with the most users, I would like to clarify who exactly are the influencers and what power they have. Among other things, I will highlight the fact that nowadays social media advertising is a significant part of companies' marketing communication and therefore I will emphasize the importance of the opportunities it opens up for consumers and companies. I will also give an insight into the development of marketing communication, what preceded influencer marketing and what advertising opportunities a company has and what it should look out for to avoid falling victim to deception. Furthermore, I will look at the evolution of influencer marketing and how the content of opinion leaders affects the purchasing decisions of the consumer segment and the different companies that use influencers to promote their products and services. I will also look at how a company chooses an influencer and what makes them suitable for their advertising. To the extent possible, I will explore the workings and structure of the influencer's business, the tasks involved, and how to influence consumers' decisions when they decide to use a product or service advertised because of an influencer or not to try it.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

As a primary quantitative research method, I created a questionnaire that I used to collect responses from people of different genders and ages on different social media platforms. In addition to this research method, I also conducted primary and secondary research to get the most accurate overall picture available. I will base the primary research on various interviews and the secondary research will be conducted using books, literature sources and the internet.

Results and Debate

The Social Media Platforms with the Most Users¹

Founded in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Chris Hughes and Dustin Moskovitz. It was first created for Harvard University as an internal social network, but in September 2006 it became public and anyone could sign up. Today, it has grown to become the largest social media platform with around 2.41 billion users. On this platform, you can create a personal profile, share pictures, videos, links with people you know, join groups and easily connect with people around the world. However, Facebook is losing its popularity among young people and is now much more used by older generations. However, thanks to an innovation, Facebook ads can now be used to target an ad campaign directly to the right audience and reach real consumers

Instagram

Founded in October 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, it has been a huge success, with over 100 million users by 2013. It now has nearly 1 billion users, making it the third most popular social media platform. This app allows you to share photos and short videos. Its popularity stems from its simplicity, as it is easy to use and very simple to build a large following. In 2012, Facebook acquired Instagram, after which it was introduced the possibility to post ads through Facebook Ads. Today, it is one of the most popular platforms for influencers, where they can manage several promotional campaigns in parallel.

TikTok

It was first launched in September 2016 as Musically, and was rebranded and renamed TikTok in 2018. The launch of this app has radically changed the dynamics of the digital space, opening up a wealth of new opportunities for businesses, content producers and users alike. The essence of the app is that only short, video content is uploaded, which lasts between 15-60 seconds, and then the video is automatically replayed. This makes it, unfortunately, the most addictive interface, because as we watch short videos and quickly keep spinning before the content restarts once more, it can be stuck in front of the phone screen for long hours. As it is an attractive platform for a digitally engaged target group, companies can easily attract consumers as it is a highly interactive platform where they can build a closer relationship with their followers and gain brand loyalty. It also has a number of advertising campaigns, which helps smaller businesses as information spreads quickly on the platform, making it an excellent platform for brand awareness and traffic generation.

YouTube

Founded in February 2005 by Steve Chen, Chad Hurley and Jawed Karim, it was acquired by Google for HUF 318 billion a year later and has been operated as a subsidiary of Google ever since. With over 400 hours of content being uploaded every minute around the world and just over a trillion hours of people watching videos, it has grown to become the world's second largest search engine after Google. Any user can upload videos, music and movies to this content sharing platform. On YouTube, you can constantly encounter 1-2 ads before each piece of content you launch, which in many cases you can now easily move on from, which is good because it improves the user experience and encourages companies to create more relevant and creative content.

It is important to emphasize that in order for a company to be successful on its own on the various social media platforms, it is necessary to constantly publish interesting, attention-grabbing and interactive posts alongside the individual advertising campaigns, because if we find a product on an influencer's profile that is appealing, but the company in question either has no profile or very few, uninteresting posts, the company, the product and the influencer who recommended them will appear unreliable.

Influence, Influence

The word influencer comes from the English word influence, which means to persuade, to influence. From this, influencer is further formed to mean to persuade, to influence. This term accurately encompasses this activity, as influencers have the power to influence the purchasing decisions of their followers and their opinions about a particular product or service. One reason for this is that they are often seen as role models. Such people have been around for a long time and have been able to influence consumers' buying habits to a large extent. The only difference between influencers and influencers is that they do this via the internet. They are people who have built up a large following on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube. In the best cases, opinion leaders have earned the trust and attention of their followers by imparting their knowledge in a particular field of expertise through different content and by attracting followers interested in these fields.

Nowadays, unfortunately, it can be said that anyone can become an influencer, because the opportunity, the platform is there for everyone. Furthermore, there are already many training courses and courses on how to become an influencer. It is no coincidence that it has become a new profession. This is backed up by a 2020 New Zealand study² where children aged 7-13 were asked to draw a picture of their future job. Of the 7241 images received, 340 drew a picture of themselves in a social media-related job. In addition, 54% of children aged 13-38 in the US and 30% of children in the UK want to become a Youtuber or some kind of social media influencer. Presumably, this attitude has developed because most new opinion leaders are not employed and have no fixed hours, which may appeal to younger people. Nevertheless, in order to remain credible, they need to post almost every hour of the day about how they spend their time, and the companies they work with need them to constantly produce creative content, which requires some photo or video production skills. So, personally, although I don't think that it could be a good direction for future generations, I would definitely not say that being an influencer is easy, or that if someone can take advantage of it, they can even make a positive difference in the future.

Types of Influencers

Even though not all opinion leaders are the same, we usually divide them into four or four groups according to two classifications. One of these categories is based on the type of content produced by the influencer and the other is based on the number of followers.

By Type:

Low-Impact Influencers

They are the ones who are completely ordinary users and produce some kind of mostly funny, entertaining content that has been picked up by an app's algorithm and delivered to hundreds of thousands of people. In this case, the users are much more distrustful and therefore less likely to buy the products they are promoting. This group grew mainly during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, when everyone was at home and started producing content mainly for TikTok. Because on this app, a video reaches a lot of people very quickly. Thanks to the fact that the so-called micro-influencers have a smaller following, they can cultivate a much closer relationship with their viewers and thus influence them better. However, they rarely take advantage of this, as fewer people follow their content, so they are also careful about the trust they place in them.

Experts

They deserve attention for their high standing and their wide and varied experience. Most often, the confidence here comes from the person's profession. Therefore, they can easily gain the loyalty of their followers, as they are perceived as credible.

Bloggers and Vloggers

There has long been a close relationship between influencer marketing and blogging. This is because if a popular blogger writes a positive review of a brand's product or service, it is likely that many of his or her followers will feel the urge to try it. A vlog, which is essentially exactly the same as a blog but in video form, is considered by many to be more effective, as it is perceived to be more personal, more direct and, in today's fast-paced world, much easier to think of as something else to do while simply listening to the video.

Celebrities

It has long been an open secret that the products or services that star athletes, singers, actors and actresses use or name for certain collaborations are more popular and sell better. This is also due to the fact that because they have already proven themselves to the public, they are perceived as more credible. Fortunately, nowadays, fewer and fewer celebrities are putting their name forward (even smaller influencers will take almost any invitation) for a product they don't use. Those that do, usually charge a price for a post with an ad that completely excludes small and medium sized businesses from being a potential partner:

Nano-Influencers:

Between 1000-10.000 followers, mostly faces of local communities. They can be mayors.

Micro-Influencer:

10,001-100,000 followers, experts in an area where there is demand but no supply. For example, home exercise video sharers.

Macro-Influencer:

100.001- 1.000.000 followers. This includes vloggers, youtubers and tick-tockers. They have become famous because of their online activity.

Mega- influencer:

1.000.001-10.000.000+ followers. This group includes world famous athletes, musicians, actors, entrepreneurs. Although this category is not typical in Hungary, Barbara Palvin, for example, has firmly established herself in this group with 20.4 million Instagram followers.

What is the Role of Influencers?

From the point of view of companies, the basic aim is to buy a product or pay for a service through opinion leaders. In order to achieve this, they need to produce creative videos, posts and detailed descriptions that convince their followers that the product advertised is the right one, thus encouraging consumers to buy.

The Influencer Marketing

In order to reach a target audience that is receptive, it is easiest for a business to work with different opinion leaders. Because consumers trust the experience of the influencer they follow. This makes it easy to reach people of all ages. However, it is very important to underline that you need to choose your celebrity well. The first step is to determine what type of credible person fits the image of the company. Then it is important to check how many followers and what quality of content the person has, and what type of posts the person has made have reached the most people. Once you've found the right person, it's also important to consider what time of day it's best for the influencer to post the ad. In addition, seasonality should also be taken into account. It is well known that the advertising market is much less active in the early months of the year and in the summer, in line with the general consumer spending pattern. However, the market is highly seasonal in the run-up to Christmas, for example, when demand is very buoyant, so it is worthwhile to time your campaign to coincide with these periods. In such cases, it may be necessary to constantly monitor competitors' activities in this direction, as this can help to avoid competitor activity interfering with our own campaign, and can be a great help if our advertising is a response to a competitor's activity (Horváth-Bauer, 2013).

The Development and History of Influencer Marketing

In the history of the emergence of social media, we can distinguish two periods after the advent of the internet. The first is web 1.0, which lasted from about 1990 to 2000, and web 2.0, which started in 2000. The Web 1.0 period is characterised by the emergence of the online world, the provision of information and, in a word, the beginning of digitalisation. E-commerce grew and more and more people chose this field as a profession. In contrast, in the Web 2.0 era, images, videos and content are quickly shared (Eszes, 2012a). The new media trend is gradually highlighting the role of digital corporate identity and network changes. With the advent of digitalisation, websites have played a key role in the life of the company. Already in the era of web 1.0, companies created their content through complex designs (Horváth-Bauer, 2016b). The production of user-friendly content through online media has started. In the early 2000s, we had access to blogs and social media, such as Myspace, created in 2003, which allowed us to share text, images and videos online. One of the most popular platforms in our country was IWIW, founded by Zsolt Várady in 2002, but unfortunately it is no longer a functioning platform. Another was the social networking site MyVIP, which became the most popular platform for young people at the time (Eszes, 2012b). It can be said that today's Generation Y grew up on these social media platforms, as I did. Social media marketing (SMM) is the use of social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc.) that allow businesses to connect with the public, build brand awareness, increase sales and online traffic. This includes posting relevant content, listening to and interacting with consumers, and promoting advertisements. So on social media, companies share their content to reach the widest possible audience, generating traffic. But today's situation is much more than that. Today, companies are using these platforms for multiple purposes. By monitoring comments, they can understand what their target audience thinks of them. They can also track their audience and activate them, providing targeted media advertising with measurable results. With the advent of social media, the internet has become an even bigger area of the web, allowing people to connect with each other quickly and easily. They can share pictures, videos, files or many other daily activities almost instantly. There are no geographical boundaries, so information is accessible from anywhere in the world. The PR goal of social media should be to find news editors and news outlets, but it should also create opportunities for ordinary people to find relevant information. Most social media, Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn, allow users to follow companies (Horváth-Bauer, 2016c).

Media consumption is a new way of spending leisure time and a form of entertainment. So-called multitasking means that consumers use TV, mobile phones and the internet at the same time. Consumers can access a variety of media content via their smartphones, tablets or laptops. Thanks to the possibilities offered by the internet and social media platforms, consumers can easily express their opinions and experiences. In addition, social media provide an opportunity for consumers to exchange information. The provision of information and content also increases consumer trust in companies (Horváth-Bauer, 2016d).

The Development and Purpose of Online Marketing Communication

The topic of online marketing communication falls within the framework of online marketing (or digital marketing in the broader sense). According to one of the most commonly referred to scientific marketing models, the entire marketing campaign is divided into four main parts, the so-called marketing mix. The elements of the marketing mix are the so-called "4Ps":

- Product
- Price
- Place
- Promotion

When we talk about network marketing, we need to know the difference between "digital" and "online". This is because online marketing can be considered a subset of digital marketing. Digital marketing is a branch of marketing science that studies the impact of digital technology on the marketing mix and describes a new and more advanced set of marketing tools that use digital technology. On the other hand, online marketing focuses on the marketing tools developed in online media. The term online marketing is more fashionable and well known to the general public, while the term digital marketing is more scientific, and the two words are often used synonymously in common parlance, but I find it important to mention that online marketing is a much larger category, with the Internet as a prerequisite, while digital marketing does not necessarily require Internet access. (Kiss, 2016) The aim of online marketing communication is to deliver advertising information to the right place and to create the most appropriate persuasive environment and context through communication tools, thus facilitating sales between buyers and sellers. Internet (online) advertising differs from traditional advertising in that it can create a genuine communication between the customer and the advertisement. If the consumer wants to know more about a product, he can obtain information in various ways and even purchase the selected product immediately. Most online marketing tools offer excellent "targeting" options for advertisers, so you can tailor your ads to the tastes and interests of every visitor. Although positioning can be achieved through traditional advertising platforms, this chapter reveals that these do not come close to matching the possibilities offered by the Internet in this respect. The history of online advertising is relatively short, from the launch of the online advertising service Prodigy, through the so-called spam war, to the development of social media. Prodigy started mapping online advertising long before Internet advertising doubled. The company relied almost entirely on advertising as early as 1990. Prodigy was the only experiment in this regard. At the time, other online retailers were still very reluctant to place ads on their sites. CompuServe was launched in 1979, but it was not until 1995 that the first sponsor was agreed. Similarly, AOL only got serious about advertising in the spring of 1995. While Prodigy advertised only to its own subscribers, others were interested in the wider advertising opportunities offered by Internet applications. After the success of the altavista.com search engine, Google appeared and soon became successful not only as a search engine but also as an advertising platform. Google's contextual advertising system has fundamentally changed online marketing communications by providing more relevant and personalised advertising in a more cost-effective way than previous solutions. Another milestone is the emergence of social media (networking), where previously there were mostly anonymous users who provided a wealth of personal information about themselves and shared it on social networks. Based on this, Facebook started to develop an advertising system through its own social network, a system that provided more accurate positioning than the solution provided by Google, but still needed to be able to display paid ads that users would find useful. The rapid development of internet technology and the popularity of smart phones and tablets has opened up new opportunities for online marketing communication (Avornicului, Gubán, Seer, & Szócs, 2019).

Today, significant and often interconnected social forces have created new patterns of behaviour, challenges and opportunities. These include:

- **Consumer Information** - They can gather accurate details about almost anything from anywhere in the world in so many languages on the internet. There are hundreds of thousands of consumer reviews on some products and services, which can strongly influence consumer choice.
- **Consumer Purchasing Power** - Nowadays, it is possible to compare product features and prices in seconds and order products from anywhere in the world, saving significant amounts of money. Furthermore, there are many promotions that allow you to easily combine your purchases with others to get a bigger volume discount. Groups are already being organised on various social media platforms to monitor such promotions and look for people who would like to join for a better price.
- **Consumer Participation** - they can have an increasingly powerful influence on society's opinion. Recognising this, companies are encouraging them to get involved in sales to increase their sense of connection and responsibility. "Consumers see their favourite companies as workshops that put together the offers they want." (Kotler Philip, 2012)
- **Consumer Resistance** - Many people feel that there is less and less difference between products and therefore less brand loyalty. As a result, they are more focused on price and quality. A survey by a polling firm has measured record levels of consumer resistance to marketing. The majority of respondents have a negative opinion of advertising and avoid products that they feel are over-marketed.

Types of Cooperation

In this chapter, I would like to look at the types of agreements that can be made between companies and influencers. These are:

Mention Post or Video

In this case, the focus of the post is not the ad. In this case, the advertised item or service is only mentioned as an indication, along with a general post and a short text.

Dedicated Post or Video

This is when advertising takes centre stage. The focus of the photo or image is only on the product, such as the Xixo advertisements that are everywhere these days.

Advertisement

This content, which features a celebrity with the device they want to promote on the official site of the product, can be found in various campaigns first and then later on on the influencer's site.

Shout Out

Essentially, influencers with fewer followers promote less popular products.

The Research and its Results

The Benefits of Influencer Marketing

By gaining such power over their followers, by gaining their trust, by sharing their lives and spending their everyday lives in the public eye, influencers can/should inspire people to take positive action, to represent real values, and contribute to the positive change in the digital space and social media that is so badly needed. I think that the power of influence is properly harnessed by influencers who campaign for a good cause and stay true to it. I think this includes opinion leaders who raise awareness of the importance of sustainability. As is well known, the economy is growing in direct proportion to the ever-increasing consumer demand, but the basis of economic growth is non-renewable resources. In order to preserve natural resources and the environment for future generations, it is essential to reduce our ecological footprint, and influencers can help us do this. There are many Hungarian influencers who support various environmental campaigns and encourage their followers to go to a park to collect rubbish together, for example. Due to the fact that followers want to get closer to the celebrity, there are many applicants for such events. In addition, more and more celebrities have started to promote sustainable products, thus shaping sustainable consumption and conscious buying habits. Examples include organic food, recyclable or recycled products. Fortunately, influencers who promote such products actually use them, so they can set an example for their followers and raise awareness about the importance of zero waste, for example. One of the biggest trends today is the promotion of electric cars, which help to reduce carbon emissions and, because they are charged with green energy such as solar panels, they can raise awareness of their use, thus helping to reduce our ecological footprint. Greta Thunberg, a 20-year-old Swedish climate activist who became famous a few years ago, was also awarded a prize in Portugal in 2020 for her "ability to mobilise the young generation to fight climate change and her perseverance in the fight to change the current situation." (Jorge Sampaio, former President of the Portuguese Republic). It is a reflection of the depravity of our world that the various news portals do not even in this case emphasise the positive impact of such an activist and the need to follow her example, but publish articles about the amount of money Greta Thunberg received with this award, thus creating a negative impression on the readers of the news portals. In summary, influencer marketing is a very powerful tool for promoting sustainability, as influencers can use their large followings and credibility to quickly and effectively promote sustainability messages and promote social change, among other things. In addition, a huge advantage of such online advertising is that in the event that an incorrect post has been published, it can be easily corrected in a few moments on that post, unlike an advertising campaign that is not on social media and has been preceded by lengthy planning and very heavy investments, and correcting the error can cost additional heavy investments, energy and possibly loss of credibility. In addition to this, one of the advantages of influencer marketing is that influencers usually come ready with a number of skills that marketers are looking for. Influencer marketing is not a new trend, it is a highly competitive industry, nevertheless it is a very saturated market and as I mentioned earlier many people want to get into it and the opportunity is there for everyone. To get to the top people need to have the same skills that an entrepreneur is looking for to increase sales.

- Industry authority
- Access to the target audience
- Technological competence
- Marketing experience
- Initiative and ambition

Influencers usually have many of these qualities, precisely because they need them to be successful in their business.

The Disadvantages of Influencer Marketing

The benefits of influencer marketing are very impressive, but there are some challenges to overcome. None of these challenges are insurmountable, but they do show that a clear focus is needed to run a successful influencer marketing campaign. Influencer marketing allows people's trust in influencers to be abused and exploited. We see large scale examples of this with things like greenwashing. When companies with questionable green credibility try to align themselves with green initiatives and influencers, it is often seen as a cynical move to exploit the consumer. On a smaller scale, it is necessary to make sure that the brand is aligned with the ideals of the influencer and its target audience. If it is clear that there is a misalignment, the credibility of the relationship with the influencer is immediately called into question, which is why it is so important to choose the right influencer. When you work with an influencer, you relinquish control over your brand. There is no way around this unless you make rules. Branding is one of the most powerful tools businesses have, and it's something they work extremely hard at. One slip-up by a prominent influencer can have a huge impact on brand image. It can also be a big risk, as people are unpredictable. You can spend a lot of money aligning your brand with someone who has an immaculately clean image, but you don't know what they will do tomorrow. One of the reasons influencer marketing works is that people transfer some of their feelings for the influencer to the product they are promoting. For example, what happens if an influencer commits a high-profile crime? The chances are probably small, but brands have suffered these things. Just think of Johnny Depp's high-profile court case and the hardships he has put the brands he promotes in.

What to Look Out for when Choosing Influencers?

The most searched topics on social media are beauty, food and drink, health and sport. If you want to advertise a product that falls into one of these categories, you are almost guaranteed to be unsuccessful. The first thing to look for is the right target audience. If you choose a content producer with a large following of Generation Z, it is not advisable to promote a luxury brand, as most young people are still in education or new to the labour market and therefore lack the financial stability to buy a luxury product. The number of followers does not mean that a celebrity is successful, as unfortunately anyone can buy tens of thousands of so-called "fake" followers with a few clicks. More relevant information is the activity rate. This shows the percentage of followers of a given influencer who are actually interested in the content on that page. So it is very important to do a thorough research on the opinion leader you are considering before you engage with them. Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who pretend to be influencers just to get a free product, so they can give your brand a bad name in no time. You also need to take into account that you need to find someone who fits your company profile and that this is mutual with the celebrity. For example, it's not a good idea to approach an opinion leader with a sports product who only produces beauty content. Because if you make this mistake, your followers will not consider the promotional post as credible and will not be willing to buy the product. Other dangers of influencer marketing on social media platforms is that while a television or radio media advertisement is done in a controlled environment, an influencer, especially an aspiring influencer, can say what they want to hear about a product in exchange for profit.

What happens when an influencer loses popularity?

There have been many cases where an opinion leader's private life has been exposed in the light of something that has been very divisive to his or her following, losing a lot of followers and losing credibility. Of course, companies now have to consider whether it is still worthwhile to continue to work together. If an influencer loses popularity, they are no longer a valuable advertising medium for companies, so their value decreases and their expected rates drop. While it may be worthwhile for some companies to work with such influencers because of the lower rates, they are taking a big risk and more often than not, the number of requests for their services will decrease. In the event of a celebrity being caught up in a scandal, the image of the brands they promote can also be damaged, which is not a good investment for companies.

The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Businesses

With the proliferation of social media platforms and the rise of content creators, influencers have become key players in shaping consumer behaviour. Understanding the profound impact of influencer marketing on businesses is key. The next section examines the influence and importance of influencer marketing for businesses. It will show how engaging with influencers can impact brand visibility, engagement and overall growth, among other things. The most significant impact of influencer marketing is its ability to bridge the gap between brands and their audiences through authentic content. Unlike traditional advertising methods, engaging with influencers allows businesses to connect with their consumers in a more organic and personalised way. By partnering with influencers whose values align with their brand, businesses can effectively build a sense of credibility and trust with their target audience.

Another significant impact of influencer marketing on business is the exponential increase in brand visibility and reach that brands can achieve with the right content. With engaged followers and engaging content, influencers can amplify brand awareness far beyond the reach of traditional marketing strategies. Through strategic partnerships and well-developed campaigns, businesses can leverage the power of influencers' huge followings to drive brand awareness and brand loyalty.

Camp to reach a wider audience, increasing their brand visibility and creating a greater online presence. Influencer marketing serves as a catalyst to foster deeper engagement and interaction with target audiences. By seamlessly integrating authentic influencer-generated content into marketing campaigns, businesses can create a compelling narrative that truly resonates with their customers. This is important because the art of storytelling, skilfully applied by influencers, has the potential to evoke a deep emotional connection and generate genuine interest in consumers. This in turn not only increases consumer engagement, but also builds a dedicated community of loyal fans around the brand, solidifying the brand's presence and influence in the marketplace. Strategic use of influencer marketing can increase brand credibility and help businesses build a stronger brand image. By working with influencers who embody the values and ethos of the brand, businesses can effectively build a sense of credibility and belonging around their products or services. Partnering with reputable and trusted influencers can strengthen brand reputation, build consumer trust and create positive brand perceptions among target audiences. Influencer marketing also plays a key role in driving innovation. By embracing the dynamic and constantly evolving nature of influencer-based content, businesses can tailor their marketing strategies to stay relevant and meet changing consumer preferences. By continuously engaging with influencers and staying in tune with emerging trends, businesses can remain agile and innovative, improve their SEO presence and gain a competitive advantage in the market. Finally, influencer marketing's most fundamental impact on business is that it acts as a powerful engine for sustainable growth and success. By leveraging the authentic relationships influencers have already established with their followers, businesses can leverage these trusted networks to build lasting relationships that go beyond one-off transactions. This organic and relatable approach to marketing helps build a loyal customer base, ensuring consistent revenue streams and long-term brand sustainability. In addition, by fostering genuine and lasting relationships and staying abreast of emerging IM trends, businesses can ensure that their products or services remain in line with consumer demands, ultimately increasing their competitiveness and securing their position in the market. This adaptability, combined with a loyal customer base, lays the foundations for sustained success and growth for brands in a wide range of industries.

The Impact of Influencers on Society

The Positive Impact of Influencers on Young People

Some social media influencers focus on creating a safe and empowering space for their followers. This can be a great support for those who struggle with isolation, mental health issues and other personal challenges. Here are some of the positive effects influencers have on young people. When teens and tweens can't find the right support from friends and peers, an influencer may be able to fill in the gaps. This may be the case for children with unusual interests, mental illness or health conditions. An influencer with similar circumstances can connect teens and tweens with a wider online community of people like them. Some influencers build their brand solely on spreading positivity. For preteens and teens who want to feel better, turning to such influencers can achieve that. Whether an influencer is making funny videos, sharing funny memes or simply posting words of encouragement, their digital space can bring a smile to a child's face.

The Negative Impact of Influencers on Young People

With good comes bad. Social media influencers can have a negative impact on the way teenagers and young adults think about themselves and their lives they think. Here are some of the negative effects of influencers on young people. It's no secret that social media influencers can bring in a lot of money and often live a lavish life, or give the impression that they do. Designer clothes, brand new cars, nice houses and frequent exotic holidays are not realistic for most American families. But if your child fills his newsfeed with influencers who seem to have it all, he may start to believe that this lifestyle is the standard. In such a case, children need to be reminded that influencers are paid to promote products and portray a certain image. It's their job, so their lives may look luxurious on the internet, but that doesn't mean that this portrayal is accurate. Most social media influencers are women. These women are usually considered conventionally attractive, meaning that their appearance matches what society considers "beautiful". For preschoolers and teens who don't fit this mold or struggle with their body image, looking at influencer after influencer can be harmful. As one in three teenage girls already have a negative body image because of social media, such content only makes matters worse. When a social media influencer eats, wears clothes, shops or does something, their followers want to do the same. This phenomenon can be explained by the bandwagon effect. According to Very Well Mind: "The bandwagon effect refers to the tendency for people to

adopt a certain behaviour, style or attitude simply because everyone else is doing it". No one wants to be the odd one out. The marketing tactics of influencers can lead children to think that in order to be cool and accepted by others, they have to do what influencers do. Since social media influencers make their money from marketing, there is no way to know how much research they have done into their corporate partnerships. The foods they promote may be unhealthy, the drinks may be alcoholic, and other products may be inappropriate - or simply unnecessary - for children.

Analysis of the Questionnaire

In my questionnaire, I wanted to firstly separate the responses by gender and age, as there can be significant differences in the effects of influencer marketing depending on people's gender and age. The results also support the variability in reach between genders and different generations. I then gained insights into which social media platforms are most used by which age groups, which content is most frequently viewed on these platforms, and how often influencers are recommended for purchase. This provides evidence of the influence of influencer marketing on consumer decisions, provided that consumers perceive the product being promoted as credible and trustworthy.

My research has helped me to understand the target audience in a more transparent and easy to understand way, as the results can be used to demonstrate which generations and genders are sensitive or more sensitive to the products promoted by influencers and how they choose an opinion leader to join their followers. Based on this primary question, I gained a deeper insight into consumer choices.

As a primary quantitative research method, I created a questionnaire that I shared on various social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. In my opinion, this was the most effective way to reach people of different genders and ages. In addition to this research method, I also conducted primary and secondary research to get the most accurate overall picture available. For the primary research, I would draw on various interviews and existing research, such as the 2017 Hootsuite and We Are Social surveys. For the secondary research, I would draw on books, literature and the internet.

Of those who completed the questionnaire, 25% were male and 75% female. From the responses received, it can be seen that women prefer Pinterest and Instagram, while men prefer to spend their time on TikTok.

Although the age of the respondents varied widely, most of them were in the 25-35 age group. The questionnaire supported the assumption that older people, in this case those aged 50+, use social media platforms less (usually 1-2 hours per day) and follow influencers less. In contrast, the responses to my questionnaire suggest that younger generations generally spend 3-4 hours a day on these platforms and are more aware of celebrity life. There was one respondent who spends 6+ hours in the online space. So on average, we can see that people spend around 2.4 hours on different social media platforms, regardless of age. This result is supported by the Global

Web Index16 data from April 2023 shows that, on average, social media users worldwide spend 2 hours 24 minutes per day on each platform.

The vast majority of respondents believe that influencers often portray an idealised image of themselves and their lifestyle, yet few said they do not follow influencers at all.

The questionnaire also revealed that more than half of respondents have never bought a product recommended by an influencer, hence 50% of respondents stressed that paid promotion posts should always include this.

One of the main reasons for this is that they do not believe in the credibility of influencers, which is why many question the effectiveness of the product. However, according to a survey by Morning Consult, 88% of Generation Z learn about products they buy through various social media platforms and of these, 56% buy what they find in a post. Furthermore, when someone follows a celebrity, it's not because they want to be exposed to all kinds of advertising. 12.5% of respondents follow influencers because they produce entertaining content, 20.8% because of common interests and content, and 33.3% of respondents join a follower group because of the credibility and authenticity of the profile.

We are Social Survey

The total population of the world in 2017 was 7.476 billion people, of which almost 4 billion use the internet and 2.8 billion of them are active users of various social media platforms. Almost 5 billion people use mobile phones and 2.5 billion of them are active users. Facebook achieved the bulk of its user growth in 2016, when 363 million active accounts were created each month worldwide, growing 24% year-on-year.

This research shows that more than one billion people use Facebook alone on a daily basis, meaning that more than half of all active user accounts use this social media platform on a daily basis. The company's other prevalent platforms Instagram, Messenger and WhatsApp are also showing strong growth and while there is certainly a lot of user overlap between the platforms, Facebook alone has over 4.37 billion users. So it just goes to show that

social media has infected our everyday lives and is taking our world in a direction that I don't think there is any way that it can be diverted.

DISCUSSION

Influencer marketing plays a key role in companies' marketing strategies. With the emergence of social media platforms and influencers, it has fundamentally reshaped traditional marketing paradigms, and a presence in the digital space has now become essential for companies to reach consumers. Despite the many positive effects of influencerism that could be harnessed to create a more accepting and livable world, I believe that the future and self-image of younger generations is currently being very badly damaged by the perfect life that opinion leaders portray, which is not really available to anyone, and which sets unattainable expectations in people, creating a constant state of dissatisfaction. So, although the sky is the limit for companies through influencer marketing, I think it is more harmful to consumers than helpful. Like our whole world, social media is in a constant state of change. New platforms and new trends are constantly emerging in the digital space, which both companies and influencers will presumably have to adapt to, as it is difficult to predict the direction in which social media will evolve. The average age of opinion leaders is also getting lower, mainly thanks to TikTok, so the question arises as to whether younger generations will be able to effectively represent brand messages or perhaps lose credibility. Generation Z are often less experienced and less aware of promotional ethics, which means that interest in the products being promoted may also decline. This can also lead to companies having to find new ways of advertising their products or services. Influencers who have so far become successful in this new profession and have made significant revenues are likely to start their own businesses or invest in other companies. In this case, since they already have the clout they need thanks to their brand recognition, they may not need new influencers. In summary, there are two paths for the future of influencer marketing, one, as it is a rather precarious 'profession', there may be a basis for the assumption that in order to retain their power, current influencers will need to diversify their sources of income to create a more secure future for themselves. For the moment, however, as long as they produce sufficiently creative and varied content and maintain their credibility, they are sufficiently secure in this market that there will always be consumers who will buy on their recommendation. From a business point of view, influencer marketing is a relatively simple and efficient mechanism due to the fact that it can quickly get a product to a large number of people within a pre-selected target group. However, it is important to stress that influencer marketing is not sufficient on its own, but should always be combined with other marketing communication tools. Thanks to the growing role of content producers, campaigns are no longer created by large advertising agencies, but by many content producers, even smaller ones, partly for reasons of credibility and partly for cost-effectiveness. Companies are spending staggering amounts of money on people producing posts and promoting their products and services. The other possibility for the future of influencer marketing is that as content producers continue to grow in popularity and their role in the marketing profession, they will continue to play an important role in companies' marketing strategies in the future. Increasingly, influencers and content creators are playing a prominent role in authenticity and authenticity, and this is an important factor in attracting and retaining consumers. Influencer marketing has become an important part of online marketing communications, and with the continued evolution of social media and digital communications, it will continue to play a major role in helping companies and brands reach and persuade their target audiences.

CONCLUSION

Influencer marketing has conquered the world of marketing in recent decades, making it essential for companies to include opinion leaders in their marketing strategy to promote a product or service. As digital marketing has grown into a rapidly evolving field, influencers already have a huge power over consumers. Both influencer marketing and online marketing communications play a vital role in helping companies reach consumers as smoothly as possible. In fact, online marketing communication is already playing a vital role in reaching online audiences and allowing companies to build interactive relationships with their target audience. In addition, online marketing communication helps companies to monitor the views of their audience and react to current market changes. The aim of influencer marketing is therefore to enable companies to promote their products through influencers and thus reach their target audience directly. There are therefore many dangers in this area, since there are many profiles that mislead consumers, since a celebrity's followers often follow him blindly, without questioning the real value of the products and services being promoted. Moreover, for younger generations, it presents a picture of life that does not exist in reality and which easily deceives them. However, influencer marketing also has some significant positive effects. Because influencers are able to build a relationship between

companies and consumers through authentic content, thereby increasing brand credibility and trust. Brand visibility and reach also increases exponentially through influencer-mediated content. In addition, influencer marketing can foster brand loyalty among consumers, helping to drive sustainable growth and long-term success while retaining target audiences. Fortunately, today there are more and more influencers on various platforms who are only and exclusively engaging in collaborations that can make our world a better place. Examples include ads that campaign for more sustainable living. I think it is important to point out, however, that unfortunately there are many influencers on social media who use greenwashing techniques, i.e. they can falsely present themselves as environmental heroes without actually adopting sustainable practices in order to gain more followers and more profit. In addition, the risks of collaborations in brand building must be taken into account, as the brand may completely lose control over the content of the opinion leader. So if an influencer is involved in some kind of scandal it will have a negative impact on the brand's credibility. So it's important to choose the right profile and monitor which page reaches the audience that is relevant to you. To do this, it is recommended to consider the activity rate rather than the number of followers. We know of many cases where a few clicks have bought hundreds of thousands of followers. Finally, the analysis of the questionnaire was necessary to confirm the impact of influencer marketing on different age groups and genders, and what are the aspects that a company should pay attention to if it wants to advertise on a social media platform. In essence, therefore, influencer marketing has complex effects on society and companies alike, and it is important to be aware of the positive and negative aspects that both young people and companies may face when influencers are involved.

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