

Influencer Marketing: A New Paradigm in Brand Communication

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Abstract - In this chapter, the author examines how influencer marketing has developed, operated and cultural implications of influencer marketing as a disruptive trend in the digital space. It outlines the way in which marketing has historically developed, beginning with the early word of mouth and celebrity endorsing techniques to the development of techniques built around digital and social media. Emerging social platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter (X), LinkedIn, and Twitch have changed the complexion of communications by letting influencers establish credibility, parasocial connections, and joining niche communities. The chapter classes all influencers basing on their numbers of followers as micro, macro, and mega influencers depending on the type of the niche or what platform (s) they might be on and how they contribute to influencing consumer behavior and brand trust. Also, it looks at the commercialization and professionalization of influencer marketing by use of agencies, marketplaces and regulatory frameworks, as well as issues of authenticity and transparency. Finally, the influencer marketing concept is introduced as an amalgamated work model that combines the effectiveness of a word-of-mouth, with the leverage of digital technology, making influencers the primary figure in the modern brand-consumer interaction processes.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Social Media Platforms, Consumer Trust and Authenticity, Digital Advertising Evolution

I: Introduction

Influencer marketing has been such a revolutionary aspect in the wider arena of digital marketing that it has sweeping changes in the manner of communication used by brands towards consumers. Whereas in the past the modern influencer could only be an established celebrity, the contemporary world of influence has opened the door to a vast variety of content makers and creators-from semi-famous niche accounts with a small following to globally prominent figures that have millions of followers. This travel is not just a change in marketing instruments but a significant change in consumer attitude, online culture, and brand planning.

In its basis, influencer marketing relies on such foundations as trust and perceived sincerity. In contrast to the traditional ads, which depend on a convincing language and visual drama, the influencer content looks more natural and dialogic. Consumers are now more controllable by people they find relatable or inspiring, unlike giant corporations. This change indicates a trend in general more towards peer-recommended authority and less towards institutionalized authority. With the explosion of digital platforms and the fragmentation of audiences, the role of the influencer has shifted to content aggregators that simplify to a scale that is consumable by an audience, and individualize at the same time.

The growth of influencer marketing cannot be discussed without the advent of social media technologies. Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter (currently X), and LinkedIn have not only provided platforms to millions of users, but have

also provided platforms that quickly spread content across geographies and demographics. This has led to a digital democratization where micro-influencers, those with smaller but extremely engaged followings, can exert strong powers when it comes to shopping-related decisions, especially in niche markets. The entry of these new marketing agents into the advertising value chain has threatened the traditional media that once enjoyed power due to the costliness and high impact of advertising options offered by the new agents.

II: Marketing and Endorsement of Influencer Marketing

To understand how marketing evolved around the concept of an influencer and its role today, it is necessary to examine the history of the discipline. The marketing has had several changes, and this has occurred through advancements in technology, the behavior of consumers, and the media. Since the dawn of commerce with the barter and town criers and the shift to the digital era of programmatic advertising and algorithmic targeting, the mass medium of promotion and persuasion has always been changing in response to the new dynamics of communication and trade patterns. Marketing used to be basic and straightforward in ancient times. In a pre-industrial community, word-of-mouth used to be the key means of advertising goods and services. Community people trusted local businessmen and their relationships as a primary source of credibility and promotion in business. The printing press also became available in the 15th century, which allowed advertisements to scale. The advent of the handbill, flyers, and printed posters helped these businesses

to reach wider audiences as the previously personal communication between people transformed into a mass one.

The period of advertising had its golden years that were deeply rooted in the emergence of radio and television in the 20th century. The mass media turned out to be the main channel to promote the brand, and big agencies appeared to dominate the marketing techniques, creating persuasive appeals addressed to a broad and generalized audience. One of the main characteristics of this era was one-way communication because the brands dictated the message, and the consumers were recipients. The use of celebrity endorsement became typical as an aspect of trying to gain credibility, as well as admiration for merchandise using the popularity and image of those who are renowned.

But there were constraints to this classic model. The late 20th century saw the entry of the internet, which started changing the balance of power. On digital channels, consumers were provided with a two-way communication platform where they could not only communicate with the brands but also express their views and voices. A more data-oriented, precise way of promotion used in search engine marketing, email campaigns, and banner ads emerged. However, even these types of online advertising started to face opposition when consumers became affected by the phenomenon of banner blindness and began using ad-blocking technology. That is when, in the context of a lack of trust in corporate messages and the growth of consumer agency, influencer marketing started to develop. The shift in the mass media into the social media created a new level of opinion leaders- people who were not exactly celebrity material in the old sense, but had gathered a dedicated following through their content, knowledge and even lifestyle. Such influencers started closing the credibility gap caused by traditional advertising to deliver a sense of authenticity, relatability, and personal interaction with the audience.

Therefore, the history of marketing development, whether it is the word of mouth recommendation, mass media, and subsequently, the online shift to digital media, has led to the creation of the above hybrid model of influencer marketing. It mates the relationships of trust of word-of-mouth of yesteryear and the reach and scalability of digital technology. The following section will explore the fact that social media has transformed into a vehicle of such change, as it allows influencers to occupy the center stage in the contemporary marketing landscape.

III: Social Media vis-à-vis Influencer Marketing

The rise of social media can be regarded as one of the key points in the annals of communication and marketing. Social media platforms gave the responsibility of content creation to users instead of companies and media houses; they changed the status quo in the dissemination of information and equalized online power. It was this structural shift that

formed the initial premise in which influencer marketing could thrive.

Later on, in the early 2000s, user-generated content entered the mainstream with the emergence of such platforms as Friendster (2002), MySpace (2003), Facebook (2004), and YouTube (2005). The platforms were originally built as social networking technologies to facilitate communication with friends and family, but they soon transformed into content ecosystems where individuals shared opinions, showcased their talents, and formed communities based on common interests. Notably, the communities were no longer geographically restricted. Additionally, there were no more age or background restrictions. They were fluid, transnational, and self-collected.

This has been further fastened by the exponential rise in the use of smartphones and mobile internet. Through Instagram (2010), Snapchat (2011), and Tick-Talk (2016), people got access to the visual content of instant consumption and creation, which was an immersive and communicative experience. They focused more on short-form content, visual storytelling, and algorithm-curated feeds, which made them very favorable environments to grow an influencer-style. Social media did not just alter the actors to influence public opinion but also the manner of influence. The traditional celebrities did not remain the only individuals who were to be emulated after. People living in different circumstances, fashion bloggers, fitness, gamers, makeup artists, travellers, and even pet owners could amass huge followings through frequent, genuine, and interesting content. Many consumers preferred them to the conventional advertising mediums because they appeared to be relatable and transparent.

Notably, social media resulted in the ability to measure and analyze data to measure the engagement in real-time. The number of likes, comments, shares, views, and followership growth was now a measurable/quantifiable data point on influence. It slowly dawned on brands that they could work with these emerging digital voices to connect with particular demographics in a more effective and expensive way as compared to television or newspaper advertising. Another approach that has become available, not only to be visible but also to gain trust, product knowledge, and customer loyalty, is influencer marketing.

The form of social media itself has adapted to become an architect of such ecosystems of influencer marketing. The functions of branded-content tools, live shopping, affiliate links, stories, reels, and creator marketplaces enabled influencers and brands to establish caveats on the partnerships in the app. YouTube has rolled out the concept of monetization with ads and sponsorships, and TikTok has pioneered creator funds and product integration options to allow commerce led by influencers. The emergence of social media provided an excellent environment in which influencers would think of being versatile communicators who act as a combination of a content creator, product

reviewer, and brand ambassador. This spawned a new kind of marketing, as will be discussed in the next section that was heavily anchored in community building, niche targeting, and the emotional appeal or connection of peer-like relationships.

IV: Influencer Marketing: Concept and Evolution

The usage of public figures to promote the goods is not innovative. Much earlier than the digital era, brands utilized the popularity of movie stars, athletic performers, and musicians to fuel the interest of consumers. The rise of influencer marketing, though, in the modern form that does not involve classic celebrity endorsement, started to emerge in the early part of the 2010s, mostly due to the intersection of social media, the democratization of content, and the turning point in consumer psychology.

Authentic peer-to-peer persuasion is the hallmark of modern influencer marketing. This is quite the opposite of celebrity influencers who usually market their products in highly formulated, scripted advertising platforms. In contrast, this is something common with digital influencers, who tend to market products by use of personal stories, lifestyle videos, interaction opportunities, and so on. The format gives an impression of personal endorsement as opposed to commercial promotion. Consequently, the chances of followers considering the endorsements offered by influencers as genuine and credible will increase and, as a result, generate more engagement and conversion rates.

The collaboration of beauty gurus on a YouTube channel with cosmetic brands might be considered one of the oldest and most frequently mentioned examples of the success of the influencer marketing approach. Such e-personalities as Michelle Phan started becoming popular, sharing their makeup tutorials, reviews of products, and skincare routines, including their favorite brands. Such videos attracted millions of views, and viewers demonstrated more credence in peer-generated videos than in brand-controlled narratives. Companies saw an opportunity in this and started to hire the creators to show products through review or even buy a sponsored video and ineffectively embedded their marketing messages.

With the practice, various types of influencers came into the picture that had different reach and influence. Types of influencers included macro (100K+ followers), micro (10K-100K), and nano (less than 10K) that profiled about various brand objectives. The micro and nano-influencers provided a higher rate of engagement and niche audience alignment than the macro-influencers, whose platform provided wide reach and visibility. Brands started to use diversified approaches to influencer marketing, frequently having a variety of influencer types in order to achieve the highest reach, as well as authenticity.

Another milestone was the appearance of the influencer agencies and markets. Once influencer marketing has matured, it has started to resemble traditional media buying. Agencies were formed to ensure that the agencies linked brands to influencers, negotiate contracts, monitor performance indicators, and deliver brand consistency. Marketplaces such as Influenced, AspireIQ, and Upfluence made this industry more formal, where strategic campaign planning, budgeting, and cost-revenue ratio calculations are possible. Influencer marketing is not restricted to beauty, fashion, or lifestyle segments anymore. Different industries, such as health and wellness, fitness, education, food, gaming, travel, and finance, have been deploying the approach of the usage of influencers to reach specific customer categories. As an example, fitness coaches on Instagram sell supplements and gym attire, whereas travel bloggers work with travel boards and airlines to promote their destinations.

Early influencer marketing also had its share of skeptics in spite of the growth burst it experienced commercially. Some concerns paid promotions lacked authenticity, there was no state regulation, and dubious activities could take place. To counter this, government authorities like the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the United States issued guidelines that created requirements of transparency that required the necessary influencers to disclose the sponsored material by making it clearly noticeable through tags like hashtag ad or hashtag sponsored.

The creation of influencer marketing is, consequently, a paradigm shift not only concerning the communication means, but also the dynamic between brands and consumers. It brought about a new age of marketing whereby marketing was more interactive, personality-oriented oriented and community-based. The next section will examine how there are different categories of influencers who influence this changing environment, and specifically, the way they are perceived by consumers.

V: Influencer in Influencer Marketing: Concept and Types

There is no single idea of influencer marketing with only a specific type of people who can be classified according to the number of their followers, the niche of their content, the platform they choose to use, and the activity of their followers. It is imperative that brands know the various types of influencers so as to create a strategic partnership or affiliation with any given influencer aligned to a particular goal, i.e., brand awareness, niche engagement, or direct sales conversion. Classification of influencers is largely done by their number of followers, as one of the most popular classifications. On the one hand, reach is a valuable indicator; on the other hand, the quality of engagement and the depth of it can prove to be what matters with regard to influencer effectiveness.

- Nano-influencers (10K – 1K followers)

The nano-influencers will tend to have an audience that is small in size but very influential, mostly among the close-knit community. Their messages sound closer and genuine, which can also be valued at high rates of trust and conversion. They suit local campaigns, hyper-local, and grassroots promotions.

- Micro-influencers (10K 100K followers)

Micro-influencers are on point in terms of both reach and engagement. They tend to mention certain niches like vegan food, sustainable fashion, or pet care, and those who follow them read them as experts and reliable sources of information. Brands also tend to use micro-influencers since they are cheaper and help to reach specific audiences.

- Macro-influencers (100K1M followers)

Such influencers also provide higher reach and exposure; therefore, it is appropriate to target mid-size brands with them. The engagement might be a bit lower than through the use of smaller influencers, but their smoother content and professional partnership opportunities turn them into an enticing option when it comes to product launching and holding events.

- Mega-influencers(1M+)

They are mega-influencers, who are popular celebrities or other high-profile people who attract mass attention on the platforms. They apply especially to global campaigns and the positioning of brands. Nevertheless, their impact may be shallow in scope and not as profound as they can be, and expenses are quite high.

In addition to the metrics of followers, another tier of differentiators among influencers is the thematic base of their posts. This is an important classification where brands need to match themselves with a particular sector or the values of the industry.

- Lifestyle Influencers:

These influencers make posts related to daily life, style, health, and tourism. Their wide content attractiveness enables them to fit into various industries.

- Influencers of Beauty and Fashion:

Social media stars such as those on Instagram and YouTube dominate these platforms, offering makeup routines, skin care processes, and even fashion styling, thereby affecting buying choices considerably on both cosmetics and garments.

- Fit And Health Influencers:

These influencers are usually active on Instagram and TikTok focusing on exercise, diet, mental health, and wellness. They tend to collaborate with content marketing

with supplement brands and active wear brands, and also with health apps.

Gaming influencers who stream, conduct product reviews, and construct their fanbase are popular on streaming sites such as Twitch and YouTube and are now being used by the marketing companies of major firms in order to promote their products. They also assist in product launch, brand collaborations, and event promotions.

- Tech Influencers:

Such creators of the content are focused on gadgets, software reviews, and unboxings. They are very useful in informing prospective consumers and enhancing the credibility of products.

- Thought Leadership Influencers/Educational:

You can find them on such platforms as LinkedIn, YouTube, or Substack, and they provide information about business, science, career growth, and money. B2B marketing and knowledge-based campaigns are useful to them.

The influencers can also be segmented according to those who use the platform dominantly. The most popular platform with respect to influencer marketing is Instagram, though TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter (X), and even podcasts have also become effective platforms based on the nature of the audience and the target audience.

Platform	Best For	Common Influencer Types
Instagram	Visual content, short reels, and stories	Fashion, lifestyle, fitness
YouTube	Long-form video content, tutorials, vlogs	Tech reviewers, beauty creators, educators, gamers
TikTok	Viral short-form, high engagement content	Gen Z-focused influencers, entertainers
Twitter (X)	Real-time updates, opinion sharing	Political commentators, tech experts, journalists
LinkedIn	Professional content, B2B marketing	Career coaches, industry analysts, consultants
Twitch	Live streaming, gaming interactions	Gamers, eSports professionals

There are specific functions of each type of influencer which is involved in the marketing funnel. Although nano and micro-influencers assist in the establishment of loyalty and trust towards the brand, macro and mega influencers are able to increase brand awareness. In the same manner, niche-based influencers motivate conversions within a niche, while lifestyle influencers are focused on mass appeal. We could examine the tendency of these influencers to use specific social media platforms in constructing the brands and addressing audiences, which stimulates the overall ecosystem of influencer marketing.

VI: Influencer Marketing Platforms: Forms and Application

The fast growth and change of influencer marketing are closely related to the creation and spread of social media networks. Through these platforms, not only has the design and sharing of content become possible, but it has also changed the way communication, branding of oneself as an individual, and consumer interaction work together. All the platforms have their own characteristics and audience demographics and contribute to the influencer marketing sphere quite differently, altering the experience of communication between influencers and their audiences, as well as the way the brands implement campaigns.

VI (I): Instagram: Aspirational branding and visual storytelling

Instagram has turned into the booster of influencer marketing, especially in the spheres of lifestyle, fashion, travel, and wellness. Instagram was released in 2010, having exploited the increasingly cultural focus on the art of visual communication. The functionality of utilizing visuals, photos, and videos as the most important parameters lets us state that the platform is perfectly suited to demonstrate products, experiences, and individual ways of life.

In the course of time, Instagram added a number of new capabilities to influencers and marketers, including Stories, Reels, IGTV, and shopping tags. By using these instruments, influencers present endless flows of curated content that mix dreamy images with personal stories. The algorithm of the platform promotes material by engagement, not by time, which means that the further a person sees it, the more relevant and interactive it is. Affiliate links, sponsored posts, and brand collaborations are the norm and allow influencers to earn money from their following and brands to reach a particular segment of the market within a trusted space. Instagram breeds parasocial relationships in which the followers are among the people who establish a unidirectional emotive attachment to the influencers. This sense of closeness makes the brand gain more trust and can also result in increased conversion rates as opposed to conventional advertising.

VI (II): YouTube: long-form and expertise leverage

YouTube, which debuted in 2005, is the main source of long-form video content. It favours deep narration, product review, tutorials, learning materials, and entertainment. YouTube compensates for consistency, the quality, and value of production, where other sorts of platforms exist in their brevity as a significant factor. YouTube has given influencers the reputation of being professionals in domains such as technology, finance to health, and education. The business model of YouTube, ad revenues, brand sponsorships, affiliate links, and memberships, however, has allowed a lot of influencers to make content creation a full-

time profession. Searchability of the platform through Google means that content can stay discoverable longer than ephemeral trends or formats such as Instagram stories or their video equivalent on TikTok. Significantly, YouTube enables influencers and their audiences to relate much better. By means of comment sections, live chats, and community posts, influencers can develop engagement and cultivate credibility. To brands, YouTube stars are an effective avenue to perform product demonstrations, unboxings, and comparative reviews that play a hot role in influencing consumers in their purchase decisions.

VI (III): TikTok: Trend Culture and User Participation of the Youth

TikTok has disrupted the content delivery system and is based on short-form videos and an algorithm. Initially released in 2018, TikTok is special because it enables content to become viral, even when its creator does not have a large number of followers. It's For You Page (FYP) is optimized on the basis of user behavior so that rising influencers achieve visibility more quickly than before. TikTok is more spontaneous, light-hearted, and embraces the trend compared to websites such as Instagram that focus on curated imagery. Some of the content formats that reign the platform include dance challenges, lip-sync videos, duets, and DIY hacks. TikTok influencers are not just entertainers to Gen Z users; they also serve as curators of culture and influence or dictate music trends, language, fashion, and consumer choices. When brands team with TikTok influencers, they are likely to go after techniques that are soft-selling. In place of direct product placements, the products are then slotted perfunctorily into the trending challenges or skits so that they become natural and conversational. Besides, TikTok has rolled out the Creator Marketplace feature, Live Shopping, and in-application shopfronts, which further increase its share in influencer-led selling.

VI (IV): Twitter (X): Immediate Persuasion

There is Twitter, now rebranded as X that has a different but equally vital role in the culture of influencers. It is first and foremost a text-oriented site where power is gauged through thought leadership, views, and timely commentary as opposed to imagery or lifestyle. Investors of Twitter normally appear within the fields of politics and technology, academia, finance, and media. Well, in contrast to Instagram or TikTok, Twitter is an online agora, and discourse in the persona can take place in real time. Influencers develop through sharing, engaging in discussion, and thread listing with extensive analysis. The use of hashtags and trending topics allows information to spread rather quickly, and Twitter can be considered as one of the most important platforms to influence the opinion of the masses and to highlight newly developed narratives. Twitter influencers can be useful when used by brands to market to other businesses, as advocates, in crisis communication, and

reputation management. Their brief yet effective strategy of communication would suit thought-based messages as opposed to advertising the products or services.

VI (V): LinkedIn: Influence and Authority by sectors

It would be impossible to overestimate LinkedIn as the most relevant tool for professional networking and B2B influence. It started as a digital storehouse of resumes, but now serves as a content-sharing platform with thought leaders, entrepreneurs, recruiters, and business movers and shakers imparting professional knowledge, career paths, and industry perspective. Unlike other sites where content focus is largely on entertainment, LinkedIn lays emphasis on expertise and legitimacy. Influencers in this case, commonly known as LinkedIn Creators, also use their work experience to give advice regarding leadership, innovation, HR practices, business ethics, and organizational growth. In the case of businesses, working with LinkedIn influencers is an effective strategy in talent branding, lead generation, and visibility of executives. Their tweets, usually these are expansive text postings, articles, or even video snippets, help in facilitating quality conversations and rich interactions amongst peers in the industry.

VI (VI): Twitch: Live Involvement and Engagement

Twitch, which has been mainly used in the field of gaming, is a streaming-based platform that inspires a real-time and personal interaction between influencers and viewers. Live commentary, playing, Q&A with fans, and fan involvement are the basis of strong communities that streamers create. Communication with viewers, in the form of chat during a stream, develops real-time feedback and discussion, which forms a very immersive experience when viewing a stream. Although Twitch started in the gaming industry, the stream has been diversified to accommodate music, art, fitness, and Just Chatting content. Broadcasters on Twitch are likely to get monetary assistance in the form of subscriptions, donations, and sponsorships, and this makes it a career opportunity for a majority of content creators. Twitch provides special promotional options in case a brand wants to focus on a niche community or acquire high engagement. Some of the forms in which collaborations with influencers will take place on this platform include in-game product placement, live unboxings, and sponsored tournaments, to name a few.

The contribution of every platform to the development of the influencer marketing culture is distinctive. Instagram is built around visual quality and lifestyle choice, YouTube provides access to depth and authority, TikTok lives on trends and virality, Twitter makes it easy to discuss and be a thought leader, LinkedIn centers around expertise, proof of credibility, and Twitch is all about live, interactive experiences. The cross-platform integration is a popular

strategy that makes an effective influencer program: the format of the delivered content should reflect the advantages of the platform and the behavior of the target audience.

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