

INFLUENCER MARKETING – RESEARCHING CONSUMER INTEREST IN TOPICS DISCUSSED BY INFLUENCERS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Urszula Chra chol Barczyk  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6583-3236>

Faculty of Economics, Finance and Management

University of Szczecin, Poland

e-mail: urszula.chrachol-barczyk@usz.edu.pl

Abstract: Growing competition and changing consumer behavior force companies to look for new ways to reach customers. The Polish market is a place of growing consumer interest in content created by influencers. The aim of the article is to isolate the topics discussed by influencers that attract the consumer's attention on social media. The article presents the results of own research conducted using the CAWI method in January 2022 on a representative nationwide random-quota sample of $N = 776$ adult inhabitants of Poland.

Keywords: social media, influencer marketing, communication

JEL classification: M31, I23

INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing is one of the popular forms of promoting brands and products in social media. In recent years, many influencer agencies have emerged on the market. There are also numerous divisions of influencers, most often grouped according to the number of people who follow them in social media.

Companies are increasingly collaborating with influencers. Based on the "Influencer Market in Poland – 2023" report, which was attended by a group of over 100 advertisers active in the field of influencer marketing (primarily marketers, but also representatives of advertising agencies, media houses, digital agencies, e-commerce platforms, startups, PR agencies, etc.), as many as 66% of respondents establish cooperation with influencers directly, looking for partners on Google or Social Media, and 33% search for them on their own, with

<https://doi.org/10.22630/MIBE.2023.24.3.16>

the help of appropriate thematic groups (usually on Facebook). On the other hand, 44.3% of respondents do it on their own, but with the help of platforms (such as Reachablogger.pl), while 43.3% start working with influencers they know personally. Far fewer respondents declared that they would use a specialized advertising agency or media house for this purpose (19.6% and 3.1%, respectively). When it comes to the goals of activities with influencers, the surveyed advertisers most often indicated product/brand awareness – as much as 81.9%, followed by sales goals – 58.5%. The third place was taken by "traffic" (acquiring traffic for a website or store) -38.3%. [Report "Influencer Market in Poland – 2023"]

According to the numbers provided by StockApps.com, Influencer marketing saw spectacular growth between 2017 and 2021. The annual growth rate ranged from 34.6% to 46% over four years. However, the growth rate slowed to 20.4 percent in 2022. And the growth rate may decline until at least 2027. The annual growth rate in 2027 is projected to be only 10%. In 2022, a total of \$27.5 billion was to be spent on influencer marketing, while in 2027 the spending is expected to increase to \$51 billion. [StockApps Report 2022]

Influencer marketing is also already a well-known marketing activity among young consumers. As shown by the results of the "World of the Young 6" survey, as many as 87% of young Poles know an influencer even by hearsay. 81% follow such a character on social media. [Influencer influence on the young. IQS Survey 2022]

The presented data from the reports show the great importance of influencer marketing in the marketing activities of companies. However, it should be borne in mind that in order to get good results from this activity, you need to choose the right influencer for your audience and company profile.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the subject still lacks a single common definition and conceptualization of Influencer marketing.

The use of the image of the people by companies dates back to 1760, when Queen Sophie Charlotte gave permission to brand the tea set with the name Queen's Ware at the request of Josiah Wedgwood, the owner of a company producing ceramics and porcelain. [Gogłozka 2023]

With the development of technology, traditional advertising on television, praise has been replaced by advertisements on the Internet. Thus, famous people whose images were used in television or newspaper advertisements were displaced and partially replaced by famous people appearing on the Internet. Communication has also changed from one-way to two-way communication.

The emergence of web 3.0, the development of social media, but also the change in consumer behavior have made influencer marketing begin to develop dynamically.

An influencer is a person who has gathered a specific audience on their social media channels and shares their opinions and thoughts on specific products, having a real impact on the purchase decision of their followers. [Jaska et al. 2019] Most often, a distinction is made between influencers who are known for their profession (actors, singers, athletes) and people who have made their mark and gathered an audience online, based on showing their interests, passions, views, and life. An influencer is sometimes referred to in the literature as a digital influencer.

The most common criteria for classifying influencers include [Miller 2018; Kuchta 2016; Biegun 2019; Wyrwicz 2019]:

- Quantitative reach criterion (mega-influencer, macro-influencer, micro-influencer, nano-influencer),
- Brand relations (advocates, referrers, supporters),
- Value for fans (social butterfly, thought leader, early adopter, celebrity, expert, everyday user, sharer),
- Topics (lifestyle, industry expert, internet celebrities),
- Preferred content format (product placement, sponsorship of content and events, social media posts, contests, quoting influencers, unique content on the blog, joint project of several influencers),
- Communication platform,
- Motivation (idol, expert, activist, lifestyler, artist).

With the growing popularity of influencers in the literature, the concept of influencer marketing has developed.

Influencer marketing is the search for popular and influential people in a given field and working with them to promote a brand or product, using a community organized around this persona. [Wilusz 2017] Influencer marketing is a type of advertising where businesses work with well-known people on social media to advertise their goods or services. [Mishra et al. 2023]

Influencer marketing is one of the marketing tools that uses popular people in social media to achieve predetermined sales or marketing goals.

Influencers gain the trust of consumers compared to other online sources. Consumers try their best to avoid ads by using ad blockers. In such a scenario, influencer marketing is considered to be non-intrusive and more engaging than traditional online advertisements such as pop-ups, banners, etc. In the digital space, influencers on online platforms have become credible and trusted sources. [Chopra et al. 2021]

Influencer marketing can take its form in blog posts, videos or pictures on the influencer's social media channels, which means content cooperation, and it can be content for the company's marketing campaign with influencer's name or picture, which means providing content. It can also be operating as a brand ambassador, competitions for the end-users, cooperation in different social media channels, for example on the company's Instagram, Snapchat or Twitter, or involving consumers in product development and testing. Influencer marketing can also be events, trips and workshops, widgets and display advertising [Biaudet 2017].

Online influencer marketing is a strategy in which a firm selects and incentivizes online influencers to engage their followers on social media in an attempt to leverage these influencers' unique resources to promote the firm's offerings, with the ultimate goal of enhancing firm performance [Leung et al. 2022].

DATA AND METHODS

The research problem adopted for the study is whether the topics discussed on social media by influencers are of interest to their followers. The research problem adopted for the study is whether the topics discussed on social media by influencers are of interest to their followers. The study was conducted in January 2022 using the CAWI method on a representative nationwide, random-quota sample of $N = 776$ adult residents of Poland aged 15 to 60, where the total amounts were selected according to the representation in the population of Poles for the variables sex, age, size place of residence. In other words, the sample was divided into 50 strata resulting from the intersection of categories within variables 2 (gender), 5 (age), 5 (size of town) and the respondents were randomized for each of them. For the purposes of the study, a database was procured and utilized in accordance with the above guidelines.

The study used one of the most popular methods - an online survey, which guarantees reaching a representative sample in a short time. This method also has limitations - only people who use mobile devices can participate in the study. The research tool was an original questionnaire prepared. The omnibus survey consisted of open-ended, semi-open-ended, and closed-ended questions, with the majority of questions employing a Likert scale.

The answers to all questions were described using aggregate statistics, which include: mean (M), standard deviation (Sd), median (Me) and modal (Md). In addition, for variables measured on quantitative scales, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test was performed to check whether the distribution of results deviates from the normal one. In order to increase the accuracy of the analysis of quantitative data, the occurrence of the level of statistical significance of the relationship between the variables was examined.

RESULTS

Survey participants were asked about their interest in particular topics that influencers discuss on social media. The answers are summarised in Table 1. The most interesting respondents are influencers (41.1%), followed by travel (40.5%). The respondents indicated that they are least interested in the private life of influencers (22.9%) and fooling around and joking around by influencers (12.2%).

Table 1. Respondents' interest in topics discussed by influencers in social media

Subject:	Interest				
	I'm not interested at all	Negligible	Average	I'm interested in	I'm very interested
private life of an influencer	22.9%	23.8%	29.1%	18.4%	5.7%
travel	4.0%	10.4%	26.5%	40.5%	18.6%
cooking	5.9%	12.8%	28.6%	38.7%	14.0%
clothing	7.3%	14.8%	28.6%	37.2%	12.0%
expertise in various fields	4.4%	10.1%	27.4%	41.1%	17.0%
nice shots	6.1%	15.9%	31.2%	36.1%	10.8%
music	5.7%	14.2%	28.2%	38.8%	13.1%
fooling around/joking	12.2%	21.3%	33.1%	24.1%	9.3%
comments on various events	6.8%	15.6%	36.9%	31.7%	9.0%
product reviews & recommendations	4.6%	13.7%	30.4%	38.1%	13.1%

Source: own research, n=776

Table 2 presents the answers to the question of the influencer's interest in the private life broken down by age group. To see if there are differences between age groups in relation to influencers' interest in private life, the statistical significance between the variables was examined.

Table 2. Respondents' interest in the influencer's private life and their age

Private life of an influencer:	n	Age (years)	
		Average	Standard deviation
I'm not interested at all	178	41.25	9.92
Negligible interest	185	40.32	9.43
Medium interest	226	40.88	9.83
I'm interested in	143	38.37	9.50
I'm very interested	44	36.57	9.66
Total	776	40.12	9.75
Statistical significance:		$r_s = -0.110274$, $p = 0.002096$	

Source: own research, n=776

The result of Spearman's correlation coefficient indicates the existence of a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) relationship between the variables. As the respondents aged, their interest in the influencer's private life decreased. The value of the coefficient indicated that this correlation had a statistically weak impact.

Also in the case of the influencer fooling around/joking, the result of the Spearman correlation coefficient indicates the presence of a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) relationship between the variables ($r_s = -0.102376$, $p = 0.004307$).

On the other hand, in the case of travel, cooking, clothing, expertise in various fields, nice photos, music, comments on various events, reviews and product recommendations, the result of the Spearman correlation coefficient did not prove the existence of a statistically significant ($p > 0.05$) relationship between the variables.

Table 3 presents the answers to the question about the respondents' interest in the private life of influencers broken down by gender. To check whether there are differences between the gender of the respondents and the interest in the private lives of influencers, a series of chi 2 tests were conducted.

Table 3. Respondents' interest in the influencer's private life and their gender

Private life of an influencer:		Sex		Total
		Women	Men	
I'm not interested at all	n	80	98	178
	%	18.3%	28.8%	22.9%
Negligible interest	n	112	73	185
	%	25.7%	21.5%	23.8%
Medium interest	n	123	103	226
	%	28.2%	30.3%	29.1%
I'm interested in	n	94	49	143
	%	21.6%	14.4%	18.4%
I'm very interested	n	27	17	44
	%	6.2%	5.0%	5.7%
Total	n	436	340	776
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Statistical significance:	$\chi^2 = 16.6234$. df = 4. p = 0.002287			

Source: own research, n=776

The result of the chi-square test proved the existence of a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) relationship between the variables. Men showed less interest in the influencer's private life than women.

Other topics taken up in social media by influencers in relation to the gender of the respondents were also examined. The result of the chi-square test proved the existence of a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) relationship between the variables:

- Women showed greater interest in the topic of travel discussed by influencers than men ($\chi^2 = 23.4802$, df = 4, p = 0.000102),
- Women showed more interest in cooking topics raised by influencers than men ($\chi^2 = 41.0590$, df = 4, p = 0.000000),
- Women showed more interest in the topic of clothing raised by influencers than men ($\chi^2 = 44.9346$, df = 4, p = 0.000000),
- Women showed more interest in the subject of pretty photos raised by influencers than men ($\chi^2 = 22.9037$, df = 4, p = 0.000132),
- Women showed greater interest in the topic of product reviews and recommendations raised by influencers than men ($\chi^2 = 17.9363$, df = 4,

$p = 0.001270$).

On the other hand, the result of the chi-square test did not prove the existence of a statistically significant ($p > 0.05$) relationship between the variables in relation to the following topics: expertise in various fields, music topics, fooling around/joking, comments on various events.

Table 4 presents the answers to the question of the influencer's interest in the private life in relation to the place of residence. To see if there were differences between the place of residence and the interest in the private life of influencers, the statistical significance between the variables was examined.

Table 4. Respondents' interest in the subject of clothing raised by influencers and their place of residence

Clothing:		Size of the town				Total:
		village	city up to 100 thousand inhabitants	city of 100-500 thousand inhabitants.	city with more than 500,000 inhabitants	
I'm not interested at all	n	18	18	12	9	57
	%	6.7%	6.6%	8.5%	9.6%	7.3%
Negligible interest	n	38	41	19	17	115
	%	14.1%	15.1%	13.4%	18.1%	14.8%
Medium interest	n	70	79	49	24	222
	%	26.0%	29.2%	34.5%	25.5%	28.6%
I'm interested in	n	101	107	47	34	289
	%	37.5%	39.5%	33.1%	36.2%	37.2%
I'm very interested	n	42	26	15	10	93
	%	15.6%	9.6%	10.6%	10.6%	12.0%
Total	n	269	271	142	94	776
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Statistical significance:		$r_s = -0,071801, p = 0.045555$				

Source: own research, $n=776$

The result of Spearman's correlation coefficient proved the existence of a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) relationship between the variables. Along with the increase in the size of the place of residence, the respondents' interest in the subject of clothing raised by influencers decreased. This correlation had a statistically negligible impact.

When examining the statistical significance between the topics discussed by the inspectors and the place of residence of the respondents, the result of the Spearman correlation coefficient did not prove the existence of a statistically significant ($p > 0.05$) relationship between any of the other variables.

CONCLUSIONS

The emergence of influencers on the market has caused major changes in consumer behavior and the choice of marketing tools used by companies.

Due to the emergence of agencies on the market specializing in the selection of an influencer for a product/service/company, platforms dedicated only to this issue, and even profiles of vlogging classes in high schools, it is safe to say that this issue will continue to grow.

The most interesting results of the presented research are those showing that the respondents are least interested in the private lives of influencers. Influencers, on the other hand, very often show viewing statistics in various social media and they clearly indicate the greatest interest in the subject of their private lives. The influencers themselves lament the fact that this topic is more important than sharing their expertise in particular fields.

It would be interesting to know the reasons why people in social media are interested in the private lives of influencers? Is it due to the "ideally" presented life, the desire to compare or equal, escape from one's own problems, jealousy? It would be equally interesting to know the reasons why people declare that they are not interested in it, and in fact the results shown by influencers are completely different.

Chopra, Avhad, and Jaju [2021] conducted research based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Social Learning Theory authored by Bandura and Walters (1963). The study aimed to identify key factors in influencer marketing that influence consumer behavior. The study revealed that both attitude toward influencers and perceived behavior control that allows increase in domain knowledge had a favorable impact on consumer behavior while the influence of peers had no effect. Further additional constructs namely personal relevance, inspiration, and trust had a positive impact on behavior while perceived risk did not have any effect. Product influencer fitment was an important criterion for consumers, as they followed the specific type of influencers for different product categories. Depending on the posts shared by influencers, consumers are impacted at four levels: increase in brand awareness, subject matter expertise, brand preference, and preference. Successful influencer marketing involves identifying the right type of influencer who will offer curated advice, stories, and suggestions to create engagement with the audience.

The presented research results refer to a specific period and should be repeated, developed and improved in the future in order to learn about the needs,

attitudes and preferences as well as changes in the perception of interest in the topics raised by Influencers.

The result of the study can be used by marketers as a basis for improving their influencer marketing strategies by generating insights that would help them better reach their millennial cohort by understanding their expectations, barriers, and the type of influencer they prefer in different categories.

REFERENCES

- Biaudet S. (2017) Influencer Marketing as a Marketing Tool: The Process of Creating an Influencer Marketing Campaign on Instagram. Yrkeshögskolan Arcada.
- Biegun K. Involvement of Micro-Influencers and Celebrity Reach – 5 Types of Influencers. <https://medialnaperspektywa.pl/zaangazowanie-mikro-influencers-a-reach-celebrities-5-types-of-influencers/> [access: 30.10.2023].
- Chopra A., Avhad V., Jaju A. S. (2021) Influencer Marketing: An Exploratory Study to Identify Antecedents of Consumer Behavior of Millennial. *Business Perspectives and Research*, 9(1), 77-91.
- Gogłóza W. (2023) Pionierzy marketingu - Josiah Wedgwood <https://allhands.agency/blog/pionierzy-marketingu-josiah-wedgwood> [access: 30.10.2023].
- <https://socialpress.pl/2016/12/typy-influencerow-czyli-jak-dzielimy-liderow-opinii> [access: 30.10.2023].
- Influencer Influence on the Young. IQS Survey 2022, <https://marketingprzykawie.pl/espresso/influencerski-wplyw-na-mlodych-badanie-iqs/> [accessed: 30.10.2023].
- Jaska E., Werenowska A., Gomola B. (2019) The Use of Influencer Marketing in Creating a Brand Image. *Scientific Journals of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences. European Policies, Finance and Marketing*, 21(70), 56-67.
- Kuchta M. (2016) Types of Influencers, or How Do We Divide Opinion Leaders?.
- Leung F. F., Gu F. F., Palmatier R. W. (2022) Online Influencer Marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 1-26.
- Miller G. (2018) Typology of Influencers. *Marketing in Practice*, 3, 52-55.
- Mishra S., Ashfaq R. (2023) Influencer Impact: Examining the Effect of Influencers on Consumer Behavior and Purchase. *Traditional Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences*, 1(01), 55-72.
- Report Influencer Market in Poland – 2023. <https://www.iab.org.pl/aktualnosci/patronat-raport-rynek-influencerow-w-polsce-20233/> [access: 30.10.2023].
- Report StockApps (2022) <https://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/artykul/marki-wydadza-w-tym-roku-27-5-mln-dolarow-na-influencer-marketing> [access: 30.10.2023].
- Wilusz R. (2017) Influencer Marketing Powerful Beyond Measure. [in:] H. Hall (ed.) *Marketing (r)Evolution. New Techniques, Ideas, Solutions*, p. 250.
- Wyrwisz J. (2019) Influencer Marketing in Brand Marketing Communication. *Innovation and Digitization of the Economy*, p.79.