

INFLUENCER MARKETING AND ITS IMPACT ON CONSUMER LIFESTYLES

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ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing is a form of marketing communication, using influencers to target consumers. It helps companies build their brand and loyalty based on consumers' trust in someone they know and admire. Given this fact the purpose of this study is to define the theoretical basis of the impact of influencer marketing on consumer lifestyles. This includes an analysis of the perception of influencer marketing by consumers in relation to consumer lifestyles by means of a questionnaire survey focused on Slovak consumers aged 15 and above. The research sample comprises 410 respondents. Based on the results of the questionnaire survey and the verification of statistical hypotheses, it is clear that influencer marketing has a significant impact on Slovak consumer lifestyles (especially on consumers younger than 35). Finally, the effects of influencer marketing on consumer lifestyles are highlighted, and proposals are put forward for its efficient implementation within companies.

KEY WORDS

Influencer marketing, consumer lifestyles, brand, product.

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Introduction

Nowadays, there are a number of different ways to attract potential customers. Social networks are currently among the most popular communication tools; in connection with them, we may increasingly encounter the term 'influencer marketing' (Moravcikova et al., 2019).

The power of influencer marketing lies in the fact that people trust a specific person with influence, a so-called influencer, more than they trust a brand. An influencer can create interest in the product in an unobtrusive way, which at first glance does not appear to be direct advertising. At the same time, he or she can provide a credible review of the product, whether positive or negative. This usually includes information on the price, availability and

the possibility of ordering the product online (Vrtana and Krizanova, 2018; Bucko et al., 2017; Štefko et al., 2015). An influencer, as a person with his or her own channel, is able to communicate with his or her audience, which actively consumes content produced by that influencer. The main goal of every influencer is to affect the thinking and buying behaviour of his or her followers, which can lead to affecting their hierarchy of values and thus their lifestyles. The reason is that, for the customer, it is much easier to obtain information in this form, as he or she perceives the content in a natural way, i.e. as "friendly" advice from a person who is sympathetic to him or her and is familiar with the issue.

Nowadays, the number of brands that have decided to increase the visibility of their products or promote them through influencers is constantly growing (Moravcikova and Krizanova, 2017). This way, they can reach and attract a large number of consumers very quickly. This is mainly due to the fact that consumer confidence in the traditional tools of brand promotion has generally declined, especially with regard to advertising.

The purpose of this study is to define the theoretical basis of the impact of influencer marketing on consumer lifestyles from the viewpoint of domestic (Slovak) and foreign authors. This includes an analysis of the perception of influencer marketing by consumers in practice. The secondary data for the analysis were obtained from annual company financial reports, statistical tables and professional publications. In order to determine the perception of influencer marketing in relation to consumer lifestyles, a questionnaire survey was conducted. Statistical hypotheses are set to achieve the aim of the article. Based on the results of the questionnaire survey and the verification of statistical hypotheses, we determine the impact of influencer marketing on consumer lifestyles.

1. Literature review

It is estimated that up to 4.2 billion people worldwide use the Internet. Of these, on average, one in five people has a social media account and spends about two hours a day on it. This is the reason why companies have decided to promote their brands online. However, due to the oversaturated online market, so-called banner blindness, which consists of knowingly or subconsciously ignoring advertising banners on websites, is a significant phenomenon. A survey by Google shows that if a webpage does not load within three seconds, users leave it. Therefore, it was nec-

essary to find a new way to interest consumers. As a result, content produced by authentic personalities – influencers – was created (Kramarova, 2019).

The issue of influencer marketing has been researched and analysed by many authors. Influencer marketing consists of convincing consumers of the quality of a product or service by means of a personality chosen mostly on the basis of expertise, popularity or reputation: a so-called influencer. Rouse (2016) defines an influencer as an individual whose actions and opinions carry more weight with their colleagues, social networks and the general public than is the case with most other individuals. Influencers include journalists, subject experts, celebrities and other individuals with large followings. They typically have established online presences through multiple channels and large followings on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and are widely considered authorities among their follower base. In IT contexts, influencers are often early adopters who are looked to for guidance. It is therefore possible to argue that social media influencers represent a new type of independent, third-party endorsers who shape the attitudes of an audience through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media channels (Freberg, 2011). Through social networks like Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook, social media influencers create content promoting certain brands with the goal of obtaining more followers and brand recognition. According to Freberg (2011), the success of influencers is vitally important to brands. Therefore, technology has been developed to identify and track influencers' relevance to a brand or company. This technology tracks the number of hits on a blog, the number of times a blog is shared, likes and comments, and followers. All of these points are pivotal aspects of an influencer's success.

Based on the definition of an influencer, one can agree with the statement that influencer marketing is a form of internet marketing which focuses primarily on individuals who have some potential to influence the behaviour of a large target group (Bokunewicz and Shulman, 2017). According to Vrana and Vranova (2017), influencer marketing helps companies build brands and trust based on people trusting someone who they know and admire. Similarly, Gallegos (2016) defines influencer marketing as a type of marketing tool that uses popular personalities with a large number of followers on social networks to promote their brand, product or service. Thus, instead of building their own network, brands hire influencers, who already have a network of fans, to share information about the brand or product with society as a whole. Iwashita (2019) defines influencer marketing as one of the marketing methods by which information about products and services is spread through influencers with social impact, leading to increased awareness and interest on the market. He points out a relatively new type of influencer – the YouTuber. In his opinion, video is one of the strongest forms of media for advertising. As a result, the video advertising market is gradually growing year by year. Plenty of enterprises wish to use video advertising, and the demand for video content produced by influencers will increase as a result.

Sammis et al. (2015) explain this type of marketing as a science based on captivating the audience by engaging people who are influential in the online world, where they share selected brands as sponsored content with their followers. Influencer marketing mainly benefits from the fact that people no longer respond to 'classic' advertisements, and when deciding to buy products, they lean towards the recommendations of friends or family. Therefore,

it is important that influencers approach their fans in a friendly way and create a pleasant environment using their profile. In a similar way, Capova (2017) describes influencer marketing as a digital version of WOM (word-of-mouth), i.e. a form of disseminating information about the quality of a particular brand or product among individuals. The identification of the influencer with the product is then considered guiding, ideally as being credible and more effective than advertising on traditional media. In an attempt to better examine the impact of influencer marketing, Jin et al., (2019) focus on testing the effects of two types of celebrities (Instagram celebrity vs traditional celebrity) in terms of source trustworthiness, brand attitude, envy and social presence. The results of their survey indicate that consumers exposed to Instagram celebrities' brand posts perceive the source to be more trustworthy, show a more positive attitude toward the endorsed brand, feel a stronger social presence and feel more envious of the source than those consumers exposed to traditional celebrity brand posts. From the perspective of marketing planning, the findings speak to the power of influencer marketing as an effective branding strategy. However, according to several authors, influencer marketing is no longer merely a tool for marketing communication and an intermediary of the brand marketing of well-known brands. Ladrova (2017) claims that nowadays they are directly involved in brokering sales and thus function as distributors to a certain degree. She focused on how small businesses can use this trend to improve their ability to compete on the market.

It is obvious from the above that influencer marketing has many benefits. On the one hand, it addresses smaller groups of people, but on the other hand, it is much more targeted. It effectively strengthens the brand name and encourages the purchase

of the promoted product. At the beginning of any collaboration with an influencer, it is necessary to consider whether the product is suitable for this type of promotion and whether the particular influencer is able to reach the right target group. Another important aspect when concluding cooperation is the precise definition of its result. The most important issue is the credibility of the influencer and the authenticity of its appearance. If an influencer does not act authentically, he can evoke a negative response from the audience and thus harm not only himself, but also the promoted brand (Ogilvy and Mather, 2017). On the other hand, there are disadvantages of influencer marketing, which lie mainly in the problem of finding the right influencer. The problem of a low level of representation of the target group in the audience can also arise. Many companies are also concerned about the low level of control over the content and quality of the output when considering cooperation with influencers. These are the main reasons why companies should responsibly consider cooperation with influencers.

Effective cooperation with influencers has to be long-term. If an influencer regularly promotes the products of one brand, he or she will establish a certain relationship with it and thus increase the authenticity of the content being shared. Long-term cooperation is usually limited to a few influencers, who later become brand ambassadors. On the other hand, short-term collaborations involve a number of different influencers, which in turn cover a wide range of target groups.

Over time, various forms of influencers focused on specific areas, such as beauty, fashion, fitness, health, etc., have begun to emerge on social networks. Influencers have thus become role models for many of their followers, who have changed their habits and lifestyle under the influence of

these personalities. For companies, this fact represents a significant challenge when it comes to targeting their campaigns even more accurately.

One should state that several authors have dealt with the impact of influencer marketing on consumer lifestyles. Glucksmann (2017) points out that social media influencers are on the rise, becoming one of the biggest marketing and public relations trends, especially those who promote lifestyle brands. Lifestyle influencers focus on working with companies whose products average consumers use in their everyday lives. Thus, influencer marketing has successfully changed the way that brands interact with consumers, especially in regard to lifestyle. According to Trivedi (2018), who also deals with the fashion and lifestyle industry as one of the sectors which most frequently uses influencer marketing strategy, fashion marketers are facing the conundrum of employing a fashion expert or an attractive celebrity as an influencer. His research found that attractive celebrity influencers induced a greater impact on consumer lifestyles, especially Millennials, in contrast to expert influencers. The reason behind this is that influencers who have a large impact on consumer lifestyles focus on their everyday life, and update information about their daily activities several times a day for their followers. As these are influencers who share exclusive aspects of their life with their followers, in turn, their followers are more likely to be more emotionally attached to them (Abidin, 2015, 2017).

It is worth adding that many future influencers and brands initially avoided influencer marketing (Pophal, 2016). The main reason was the assumption that when viewers found out that an influencer has received a financial or other reward for promoting the brand, they would feel manipulated. However, as time has shown,

the opposite is true. Waller (2016) and Rogers (2016) found that most consumers do not notice the label of cooperation, and if so, it does not affect their opinion in any way. This is mainly due to the trust in the influencer and the associated choice of the brand to support. Thus, we can claim that influencer marketing on social media belongs amongst the most powerful marketing communication tools (De Veirman et al., 2017; Reicher, 2018). Consumers are oversaturated with traditional advertising; they need something different (Kramarova, 2019). Due to the fact that most people (not only in Slovakia) are users of social networks, this presents a space in which to reach consumers in the online environment (Kadekova and Holiencinova, 2018). As mentioned earlier, for the customer, it is much easier to obtain information as “friendly” advice from an influencer, i.e. a person who is viewed favourably, because he or she perceives the content as natural. In this way, an influencer may affect the thinking and buying behaviour of his or her followers, which can lead to affecting their hierarchy of values and thus their lifestyles (Ivancsone Horvath and Printz-Marko, 2018).

The most commonly used social networks in the case of influencer marketing include Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. However, collaboration is also possible with personalities on LinkedIn or with bloggers. When choosing the right platform, it is important to find out how many users the influencer has, and the link with the target group. Currently, there are more than one billion active users on Instagram, and brand engagement rate is 10 times higher on Instagram than on other social networks. It is also an excellent way of reaching young audiences, because 71% of users are younger than 35. Up to 60% of registered users log in to their account every day, most of whom are 18-29 years

old. An average user spends about 53 minutes of his or her online time on Instagram. Thanks to Instagram, 83% of users have discovered a new product or service which they subsequently purchased, and more than 30% of users have shopped on Instagram via a mobile device. More than 200 million Instagram users visit at least one business account per day (Sykurova, 2019). On Instagram, there are up to 500,000 active influencers.

Facebook is used by 2.6 billion active users worldwide, from which 1.73 billion people on average log into Facebook daily and are considered daily active users. A huge, growing number of Facebook users are active and consistent in their visits to the site, making them a promising audience for the marketing efforts of the brand. Therefore, Facebook is the third-most visited website, outranked by only Google and YouTube (Noyes, 2020). According to Pew Research, a 2019 study showed that among U.S. adults who use Facebook, 74% visit the site at least once a day (Gramlich, 2019). People under the age of 35 spend over four hours a day on their mobiles versus less than 1.5 hours per day in front of the TV. The share of adult Facebook users who visit the site at least once a day is higher than the corresponding share of Instagram (63%) and Snapchat users (61%). Nearly 75 percent of high-income earners use Facebook, which once again makes Facebook a fantastic platform to use in influencer marketing. Regarding stories, 300 million users use Facebook Stories daily compared to 500 million who use Instagram Stories (Noyes, 2020).

YouTube is the second-most used search engine in the world (after Google) with more than 1.9 billion active users. On average, 80% users are aged 18-49, who mainly use mobile browsing and with an average time per opening of more than 40 minutes. 60% of users prefer online video

to live TV. The total number of active users per day is more than 30 million, including 1 million YouTube TV paying subscribers. The number of videos watched per day is up to 5 billion. On YouTube, there are 50 million users who create content, and more than 400 hours of video content are uploaded every minute (Jurickova, 2019). Thus, this platform is suitable for distributing interesting and high-quality video content. Interaction is greater if there is a known influencer in the video.

Based on an analysis of the literature, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis H1: More than 50% of consumers follow an influencer on social networks.

Hypothesis H2: More than 50% of consumers who follow an influencer are younger than 35 years old.

Hypothesis H3: More than 50% of consumers follow an influencer focused on lifestyle.

2. Methods

The paper is aimed at influencer marketing and its impact on consumer lifestyles. This includes an analysis of the perception of influencer marketing by consumers in practice. Based on the analysis, the results of the questionnaire survey and the verification of statistical hypotheses, the effects of influencer marketing on consumer lifestyles are highlighted, and proposals are put forward for its efficient implementation within companies.

The secondary data for the analysis were obtained from annual company financial reports, statistical tables, scientific research and professional publications. In order to determine the perception of influencer marketing in relation to consumer lifestyles, a questionnaire survey was conducted, the aim of which was to analyse the perception of influencer marketing in relation to

consumer lifestyles. The sample size was determined using the Sample Size Calculator that forms part of Creative Research Systems' survey software and which is provided as a public service. The calculator determines how many respondents need to be interviewed in order to obtain results that reflect the target population as precisely as possible. This is necessary in order to avoid any distortion in the information obtained as a result of the survey. The process requires a base file to work from, which in this case consisted of population data for the Slovak Republic, and in particular data on those aged 15 and above. The confidence interval was set at 5%, with a confidence level of 95%. This means that, for the questionnaire survey, a 5% margin of error is assumed. The sample size calculated by the calculator was determined to be 384 respondents. In total, 410 respondents participated in the questionnaire survey which was conducted during January - March 2020. The selection of the respondents in the sample set took place at random and was based on the number of Slovak inhabitants aged 15 and above. The quantitative assessment method was applied to the processing of the information obtained from the questionnaire survey. The data were processed empirically in the form of percentages, with additional written comments and comparisons.

General scientific methods were applied to the processing of the data, such as data collection, excerption, description, comparative analysis, deduction, induction, analysis and synthesis, as well as mathematical methods to evaluate the data collected from the results of the questionnaire survey and statistical hypothesis testing.

Statistical hypothesis testing is one of the most important statistical inference procedures. The role of statistical inference is to decide whether we accept or reject certain hypotheses regarding the basic set on the

basis of information from the choices available. In verifying the correctness or otherwise, we proceeded in accordance with the methodology of statistical hypothesis testing (Rimarcik, 2007).

To verify the statistical hypotheses, we used the method for testing a single proportion. Hypothesis testing for a single proportion includes the following steps:

1. Formulation of the null hypothesis:

$$H_0: \pi = \pi_0$$

2. Formulation of the alternative hypothesis:

$$H_1: \pi > \pi_0$$

3. Determining the level of significance:

$$\alpha = 0.05$$

4. Calculation of the sample proportion:

$$p = \frac{m}{n}$$

where m is the number of respondents which indicate the particular option and n is the total number of respondents.

5. Satisfaction of the condition

$$n * \pi * (1 - \pi_0) > 5$$

Application of the test criteria:

$$T = \frac{p - \pi_0}{\sqrt{\frac{\pi_0 * (1 - \pi_0)}{n}}}$$

6. Critical field of the test:

Use the tables of the normalised normal distribution to find the critical value for the right-tailed test $Z_{2\alpha}$

$$T > Z_{2\alpha}$$

7. Decision on the test result:

If the inequality does not apply, do not reject the hypothesis H_0 .

If the inequality applies, reject hypothesis H_0 , i.e. accept the alternative hypothesis H_1 .

3. Results

As mentioned earlier, in order to analyse the perception of influencer marketing in relation to consumer lifestyles, a questionnaire survey was conducted among Slovak consumers. Of the 410 respondents in the sample set, 217 (53%) were female and 193 (47%) were male. The respondents were subsequently divided into categories according to age. This delivered the following breakdown of the sample set:

- aged 15-25 – 112 respondents (27.3%);
- aged 26-35 – 123 respondents (30%);
- aged 36-45 – 89 respondents (21.7%);
- aged 46-55 – 54 respondents (13.2%);
- aged 56 and above – 32 respondents (7.8%).

The results of the questionnaire survey show that 74% of respondents know the terms 'influencer' and 'influencer marketing' respectively, the majority of those being younger than 35 (89%). The majority of respondents are users of social networks (92%); they have an account on Facebook (87% of respondents aged 25 and above), Instagram (91% of respondents younger than 25 and 83% of respondents aged 26-35), YouTube (49% of respondents of all categories), and LinkedIn (23% of respondents aged 35 and above).

65% of respondents state that they follow some influencers on social networks, mainly respondents younger than 35 (68%), 44% of respondents aged 36-45 and only 9% of respondents older than 45. Of this group, 3% of respondents follow only one influencer, 42% of respondents follow between two and five influencers, and 55% respondents follow more than five influencers. The largest viewership of influencers is recorded on Instagram (89%), followed by YouTube (45%), and Facebook (42%).

Regardless of the age of respondents, the main reason why they follow influencers is interesting and attractive content

(94%), a source of inspiration (82%), sympathy (66%), relaxation and fun (51%), travel experiences (46%), product reviews (42%) and motivation (39%). Regarding the content of influencers' posts, 82% of respondents consider fashion to be an attractive topic, while 67% of respondents list beauty & make up (perhaps unsurprisingly, 89% of whom are female), and 55% of respondents marked the fitness and lifestyle category as attractive. Slightly less interesting, but still somewhat attractive, are topics related to travel (38%) and food preparation (31%). Respondents consider economics & business to be the least attractive topics (5%).

When examining the impact of influencers on respondents, the most common responses by respondents were that they buy products recommended by an influencer (56%), use services recommended by an influencer (42%), change their lifestyles (35%), choose a travel destination (29%)

and prepare food according to the advice of an influencer (25%). When it comes to purchasing a product based on the influencer's recommendation, respondents younger than 55 prefer cosmetics (approximately 35%), clothes (approximately 30%), and fitness accessories (approximately 25%). Respondents older than 55 mainly buy CDs.

When examining whether influencers affected the lifestyles of respondents in any way, 38% said yes, to a large extent; 15% to a limited extent; and the rest of the respondents were not affected by influencers. Of the positive answers, 62% of respondents changed their lifestyle and health care habits, and 51% changed their eating habits.

Subsequently, we used the data from the questionnaire survey to test the statistical hypotheses. The results of the verification of statistical hypotheses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Verification of the statistical hypotheses

Calculation of the sample proportion: $p = \frac{m}{n}$	Satisfaction of the condition $n * \pi_0 * (1 - \pi_0) > 5$	Test criteria	Critical field	Inequality	Acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis
Hypothesis H1: H ₀ : 50% of consumers follow an influencer on social networks. H ₁ : More than 50% of consumers follow an influencer on social networks.					
p = 0.65	102.5 > 5	6.0745	1.6449	6.0745 > 1.6449	H ₀ rejected
Hypothesis H2: H ₀ : 50% of consumers who follow an influencer are younger than 35 years old. H ₁ : More than 50% of consumers who follow an influencer are younger than 35 years old.					
p = 0.89	102.5 > 5	7.2894	1.6449	7.2894 > 1.6449	H ₀ rejected
Hypothesis H3: H ₀ : 50% of consumers follow an influencer focused on lifestyle. H ₁ : More than 50% of consumers follow an influencer focused on lifestyle.					
p = 0.55	102.5 > 5	2.0248	1.6449	2.0248 > 1.6449	H ₀ rejected

Source: Own elaboration.

As is clear from Table 1, the inequality applies in all cases, so we reject the hy-

potheses H₀ and accept the alternative hypotheses H₁.

4. Discussion

Based on the analysis, the survey results and the verification of statistical hypotheses, it is obvious that consumers (especially those younger than 35) follow at least one influencer on social networks. More than half of them follow an influencer focused on lifestyle issues such as health care, fitness and so on, and this fact has a significant impact on their habits and lifestyle.

The efficient application of influencer marketing includes several rules. First of all, it relates to the *appropriate choice of influencer*. In other words, when choosing the influencer, it is important to set a budget for mutual cooperation. Another criterion is the target group. One option is a cheaper novice influencer with fewer followers, or alternatively a familiar face who has experience with this form of advertising and many more followers. However, it is important to focus on their previous results, their charisma, as well as their ability to reach potential customers. The second key point is *selecting the right platform*. As is clear from the questionnaire survey results, the best platform for influencer marketing is the social network Instagram (especially for respondents younger than 35), followed by YouTube and Facebook. However, it is important to adapt the choice of the right platform to the target group. The *length of cooperation* is the third rule. The initial cooperation with an influencer should be one-off cooperation, even if the company has selected him or her carefully. If a company is satisfied with an influencer, it may then suggest long-term cooperation that has a positive impact on consumers and offers a number of benefits to the companies over one-off cooperation. Fourth, *manage the cooperation* – this includes good communication in advance; do not leave the influencer completely free; do not force

the influencer into something he does not want to do; do not be afraid to direct the influencer; let the influencer say something negative as well. Fifth, *campaign timing* – it is necessary to inform the influencer of the right timing of the campaign. Finally, *evaluating the success of the campaign* – after the end of the campaign, the company must evaluate the results, i.e. analyse the return on investment, measure website traffic and also the level of brand awareness. This will determine whether the campaign has had the desired effect and whether it is worth investing in further promotion. In order to measure results, it is possible to use Google Analytics, shortened links, brand awareness and so on.

Conclusions

The effective application of influencer marketing represents a number of benefits, such as building a company's image and goodwill, increasing brand value, the dissemination of quality content to consumers, positive feedback from customers and increasing the number of customers. However, the question is how the phenomenon of influencer marketing will develop further. The major problem in spreading this marketing trend is the oversaturation of social networks through cooperation, which often leads to a reduction in the trustworthiness and authenticity of the contributions of some influencers, especially macro influencers. In contrast, so-called micro influencers (who have less than 10,000 followers) do not collaborate so often and are often closer to their "narrower" audience. For this reason, their credibility is higher. Thus, one possibility as regards further cooperation is that it will not last long. As technologies continue to evolve and change, so do the platforms used by influencers. Because they depend on their functioning, this development can hurt them. On the other hand, the most important value

which enables influencers to thrive is not the platform on the social network, but more precisely their relationship with the audience as well as the growing trust they have built and maintained. At present, influencer marketing is still developing and is on the rise. If influencers can maintain their authenticity and the trust of fans, it is possible that they will remain popular for a long time.

It is obvious that the issue of the impact of influencer marketing on consumer lifestyles has the potential for deeper research in the future – both qualitatively and quantitatively. To obtain statistical relevance, it would be appropriate to investigate the findings of qualitative research quantitatively. A further qualitative investigation would be appropriate for expanding knowledge and comparing the impact of micro-influencers and macro-influencers on consumer buying behaviour.

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