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Article

The Big Four of Influencer Marketing - A Typology of Influencers

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Influencer Marketing



The Big Four of Influencer Marketing

A Typology of Influencers

Selecting the right type of influencers for an influencer campaign is a challenging task. This article introduces a typology for influencers presenting four distinct types: Snoopers, Informers, Entertainers, and Infotainers. Temporal dynamics and influencer type transitions based on social presence and domain breadth are shown to provide a guideline for companies to successfully scout influencers.

Jana Gross, Florian von Wangenheim

The proliferation of digital social media platforms, such as YouTube or Instagram, has given rise to a new phenomenon in marketing: Influencers. While there is no general definition in the extant literature, the term of influencer refers to an individual or a group of individuals who built their own audience through social media platforms. Technically speaking, in times of social media everybody can be an influencer. Furthermore, influencers are individuals who can influence others. Examples of influencers are YouTubers such as Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg (Kjellberg, 2018) or Eva Gutowski (Gutowski, 2018). Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg's worldwide most subscribed YouTube channel, PewDiePie, and Eva Gutowski's channel, MyLifeAsEva, provide a wide range of entertaining videos.

Influencer marketing focuses on using social media influencers as a communication channel in the marketing mix. Companies communicate through these influencers to a larger and targeted audience. Marketing with influencers on digital platforms has become a frequently discussed topic over the past years (Insights, 2017). In fact, 63% of the companies in the United States increased their influencer marketing budget in 2017 (Bloglovin', 2017). However, despite the growing public attention of influencers, influencer marketing is still in its infancy in both research and practice. So far, most research has focused on other well-established concepts of social influence such as celebrity endorsement or market mavens (Erdogan, 1999; Feick & Price, 1987). Moreover, companies are still cautious when it comes to influencer marketing for several reasons. The challenge many companies face is that they do not truly understand how to approach influencers, although they recognize the need to be active in influencer marketing. At the same time, there is a limited understanding of what types of influenc-

ers exist and which one will be effective in which situations and for what purpose.

Because of the dramatic growth and diversity of influencers, one core challenge is to identify and select the right type of influencers for a given campaign. Influencers differ in content, social presence, actionability, and reach. Additionally, influencers within the same vertical distinguish themselves through personality, domain or topic. For example, vertical refers to the broader area influencer's content is belonging to (e.g. sports) and domain is a particular subvertical within the focal vertical (e.g. angling). However, a clear and consistent identification of influencer types is fundamental for a successful influencer campaign. The present article offers a systematic understanding and a recipe for companies to select different types of influencers.

There is a considerable amount of literature on social influence of key individuals such as celebrities or opinion leaders (Katz, 1957; Ohanian, 1990). Influencer marketing became mainstream only recently (AdWeek, 2016). Hence very little is known about influencers. One main difference between influencers and other key players is that the border between content creation and consumption vanishes. In contrast to celebrities or opinion leaders, influencers create content for their audience and consume the traffic generated by their content. They highly appreciate audience comments and take audience feedback very seriously, thereby being influenced by their audience. For example, Sarah and Dominic Harrison (Harrison, 2018) returned a baby carrying bag after the audience warned them about posture issues with that carrying bag. Another difference is that influencers exert high influence on specific topics or domains on social media and are not necessarily global celebrities (Williams, 2016, pp. 158–160) or opinion leaders. Another difference is that influencers exert high

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Management Summary

This article identifies four different types of influencers: Snoopers, Informers, Entertainers, and Infotainers. Influencer types can further be distinguished by domain breadth, defined as the extent to which the influencer creates content in multiple domains, and social presence, defined as the intensity of audience contact fostered by the influencer. Influencer types might evolve over time based on audience feedback.

influence on specific topics or domains on social media and are not necessarily global celebrities (Williams, 2016, pp. 158–160) or opinion leaders.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 1 presents four distinct types of influencers. The second section further identifies two key factors determining these four types. Moreover, Section 2 explains the temporal dynamics and influencer type transitions. In the last section, conclusions are drawn of which influencers companies should best select for their influencer campaigns.

1. Four Types of Influencers

An exploratory study design was implemented because of the scarcity of research on influencer marketing. To group and distinguish influencers, in-depth interviews were used. Interviews are particularly fruitful in this context because they reveal insights into how influencers differ in activities, motivation, content, and audience. Moreover, interviews are insightful when deepening the understanding of interviewee's perceptions and behavior (Belk, Fischer, & Kozinets, 2012, pp. 33–56). The interviews were based on four parts to identify main types of influencers and to generate the corresponding identification factors. The first part focused on motivations behind creating content on a particular platform. The second part

aimed to understand the current activities of the influencer. The third section explored how and why content evolved over time. The last part mainly captured the position and importance of the audience in the eyes of the influencer.

Personal interviews were conducted in 2017 with fifteen German-speaking influencers. Interview partners were people who build their own audience from the ground on social media. Additionally, interview partners were selected by doing social media for living, aiming for doing social media for living, and doing social media as a hobby. Interview partners included influencers differing in content, activities, platform, and age. The interviews' length lasted about two hours each and were audiotaped. Interviews have been fully anonymized to keep interviewees' identity private. The advantage of an-

Snoopers are discoverers of social media platforms. Motives for creating content on social media are self-expression, sharing, and experiencing with others.

onymizing identity is that interviewees tend to express more openly their opinions (Belk et al., 2012). All interviews were held in German and have been translated into English. Based on in-depth analyses of the interviews, four distinct types of influencers could be identified: Snoopers, Informers, Entertainers, and Infotainers.

Snoopers



Snoopers are discoverers of social media platforms. They are motivated by pure amusement and fun from making and sharing content. Creating content is their hobby or passion, which they like to share with a like-minded audience. Motives for creating content on social media are self-expression, sharing and experiencing with others, or building and managing a social network of friends and contacts (Heinonen, 2011).

“I followed many people and then I felt that I would like to try it myself.”

“Originally, it was an additional hobby. [...] We did it out of fun. [...] We started because we were up for it.”

“My motivation or the reason was the uplift of [platform], which originated. [...] I just kept going as a hobby.”

They are curious to explore new tools such as cameras, cutting tools, lights and experience how different content is perceived by their audience. In addition, Snoopers explore content through knowledge-sharing, emotion-sharing, or entertainment-sharing. Snoopers often share deep private insights with their audience. For instance, what keeps them engaged or what keeps them busy in their everyday life, thereby being inspirational, personal and encouraging.

“For me, my channel is a representation of my life and what interests me at the moment. [...] I try to do things that I like to do and that I like to watch.”

The motivation of amusement, creativity, and self-expression allows Snoopers to expand their social circles. They foster frequent and intense contact with their audience. Close contact includes answering individual comments or having a one-to-one conversation with members.

“I have contact with my [audience] on all my channels. [...] I am trying to always answer the comments.”

A typical example of such influencers is Irene with her channel *The Green Spirit* creating diverse content following her philosophy of enjoying life (Irene, 2018). Another one is Nadine with her channel, *naddinontour*, who creates and shares content around her life (Nadine, 2018).

Informers



Informers aim to share their knowledge, thereby filling important domain gaps on social media. As opposed to Snoopers, Informers' motives are to provide informational, educational, and supportive content that is searched for. They contribute through their high degree of competence, expertise, and domain knowledge (e.g. drawing, baking, medicine). Their audience seek advice and help when handling domain-specific issues. Informers satisfy their audience's needs, curiosity, and interests with their content.

“There was no one dealing with [domain] topics and spontaneously [...] made and uploaded my first video.”

“I started [domain] on [platform]. [...] I really want to do something good somehow.”

They actively support intensive and frequent contact with their audience.

Informers aim to share their knowledge, thereby filling important domain gaps on social media. Their audience seek advice and help when handling domain-specific issues.

Answers to comments are often pieces of advice and suggestions how to deal with domain-related issues.

“I really do bother to read every comment and to answer it.”

“I have always exchanged, always written back. Partly very detailed. [...] I try to give an advice or a tip [...] I am very present, really answering everything, very diligent and fast.”

Informers care to be perceived as a trustworthy and credible source of information. They are aware of their responsibility and appreciate audience feedback regarding content quality. Interviewees stated that high quality content is carefully investigated, prepared, and finalized. Informers demand a great deal of themselves, also aiming to constantly improve themselves.

“It has got around. [...] People now believe and trust me.”

“Credibility is always important to me. [...] I definitely want to have the predicate “safe source.”

Informers include influencers such as channel *Der Biograph*, who tells people's life story to inspire and motivate the audience for their own lives (Biograph, 2018). Another example is channel *Matheretter* providing simple and short e-learning videos in mathematics (Matheretter, 2018).

Entertainers



Entertainers provide amusement, enjoyment, and relaxation to their audience by creating entertaining content. Entertaining content spans from music, drama, acting, horror or comedies. Content varies with influencer creativity, innovativeness, visions, and narrative storytelling. Opposed to Informers, Entertainers are giving their audience a good time and

Lessons Learned

1. If companies are not yet considering influencer marketing in their marketing mix, it is time to do so.
2. In most cases, it makes sense to distinguish influencers based on a content factor and a social factor, and the last chapter gives a guidance on when to focus on each factor.
3. Companies should consider influencers with narrow domain breadth (i.e. high level of influencer expertise) when their influencer campaign aims to target an audience in a credible and compelling manner.
4. If closeness and approachableness are core targets of the influencer campaign, companies should collaborate with influencers high in social presence (i.e. frequent and close contact between influencer and audience).

often attach a personal touch, connection, and insight to their content.

“I also want to put a smile in people’s face or make someone laugh. [...] I am very creative. [...] There are no limits.”

Entertainers are often influencer-entrepreneurs who have teams in the background supporting them in content creation and maintenance (e.g. cutting, filming, managing social media). Even though Entertainers might have a team supporting them with audience management, they are perceived as one entity and the audience relates mostly to the one in front of the camera. Thus, audience contact is less frequent and close. The contact

Entertainers provide amusement, enjoyment, and relaxation to their audience by creating entertaining content.

happens on an aggregate level through Q&A videos, live-stream videos, meet & greet, or asking for feedback in the content.

“The stupid thing is, you do not want to be rude, but you cannot answer everyone. [...] I do my best, I try to do as much as possible.”

“I once did some kind of audience meeting.”

Influencer of that type is for example Bianca Heinicke. Her channel *Bibis-BeautyPalace* offers beauty, lifestyle,

and comedy content attached with a personal and private insights (Heinicke, 2018). Another example is Marcel Eric from *MontanaBlack*, he creates gaming and lifestyle content linked with private connections to his life (Eris, 2018).

Infotainers



Infotainers are a hybrid version of both Informers and Entertainers. Infotainers are well-read experts in their domain. However, domain-related topics are secondary in the sense that content includes a higher proportion of entertaining elements. Entertaining topics include personalized and emotionalized elements, such as video blogging (i.e. vlogs). Yet, entertainment remains always connected to their focal domain. Infotainers create purely informational content, entertaining content, and content including both elements. The proportion of domain-related topics to more entertainment-related topics depends on each single influencer.

Domain-related and entertainment-related content attracts a diverse audience: some relate more to the influencer as an expert in his or her domain, others relate more on the personal level. Thus, similar to Entertainers, contact with the audience is less frequent and is often happening on a more aggregate level (e.g. meet & greet, live-stream, Q&A).

“You are getting bigger and it is then also the question what do you do with that. Certainly, good are events. [...] You have to be present and you have to meet your fans as well. [...] Do Q&A.”

An example of Infotainers is Mai Thi Nguyen-Kim who has a PhD in chemistry. Her channel *The Secret Life Of*

Scientists creates informational and entertaining content about a life as a scientist (Nguyen-Kim, 2018). Another Infotainer is Sophia Thiel who specialized her content around body-

Infotainers are a hybrid version of both Informers and Entertainers. They create purely informational content, entertaining content, and content including both elements.

building and dieting. Her channel *SophiaThiel* additionally offers entertaining content of bodybuilding lifestyle and personal insight into her workout (Thiel, 2018).

Table 1 summarizes the four types of influencers based on motivation, goal of content, and audience contact. Snoopers’ motivation is the exploration of both social media platforms and creating and sharing content. They give people private insights into their lives and enjoy close and frequent contact with their audience. Informers are motivated by sharing their knowledge and expertise. They aim to provide high-quality information and foster individual and frequent contact with their audience. Entertainers are inspired by giving people a good time. In contrast to Informers, content is mainly entertaining often combined with a personal touch. They engage on an aggregate and moderate level with their audience. Lastly, Infotainers are driv-

en by both sharing their knowledge and giving people enjoyment. Content is a combination of information and entertainment within a focal domain. Similar to Entertainers, they exchange on an aggregate and moderate level with their audience.

2. The Influencer Scheme

Building on the typology discussed above, two factors identify and distinguish the four presented types of influencers. First, domain breadth presents the scope of content created by influencers. The second factor, social presence, indicates how present influencers are within their audience. These factors were supported in the interviews. As an example, influencers stated:

“If you want to stand out there, you probably have to do that [via social presence].”

“Content is king. Content has to convince so that people watch.”

“You can shine with knowledge. [...] You have to have knowledge, the viewer can tell.”

Domain breadth is defined as the extent to which the influencer creates content in multiple domains. Entertainment levels are low when audience is looking for educational and factual information (Heinonen, 2011), thus domain expertise or specialty is more relevant for narrowly defined content. Domain depth outweighs domain breadth when judging the value of information (Weiss, Lurie, & MacInnis, 2008). Yet, narrowly defined domain breadth with high domain knowledge and expertise requires a certain knowledge from both influencers and audience.

Social presence refers to the influencer’s willingness to connect and exchange with members in his or her audience. Social media platforms differ in their degree of social presence they support (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Drawing upon this idea, influencers differ in contact intensity with their audience members. Furthermore, social presence is linked to conversations and relationships, two important characteristics of social media (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).





This then suggests that social presence and domain breadth are key indi-

cators for influencer type identification. Within this scheme, influencers decide on the extent of breadth in a focal domain and on the closeness of contact with their audience. Interestingly, the interviews revealed that social presence and domain breadth influence reach, another widely spread term when talking about influencers. We define reach as the number of members in the audience (i.e. number of subscribers). Reach is a relevant metric for social media performance objectives such as brand engagement (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010), but social media encourages to capture and continue attention through engagement instead of focusing solely on reach (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). Hence, reach is considered as an outcome of influencers’ chosen levels in social presence and domain breadth.

“The [entertainment] attracts more people than the [domain], that requires some background knowledge. [...] which gave me less subscribers, namely the [domain].”

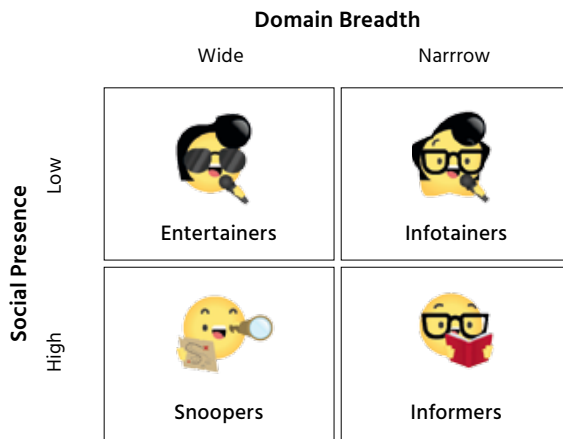
“Half of my clicks comes from my subscribers. This means that this care, to

Table 1: Summary Typology

Type	Motivation	Goal of Content	Audience Contact
 Snoopers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovering social media platforms • Creating and sharing content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal insights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual & frequent
 Informers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing knowledge and expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information & education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual & frequent
 Entertainers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving people a good time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entertainment • Personal insights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregate & moderate
 Infotainers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing knowledge and expertise • Giving people a good time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information & education • Entertainment within focal domain • (Personal insights) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregate & moderate

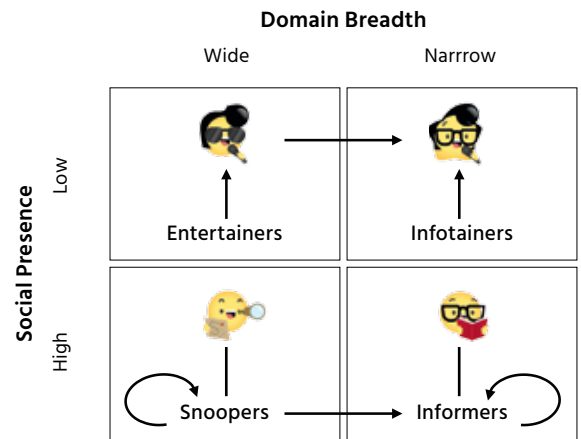
Source: Gross/von Wangenheim, 2018.

Table 2: The Influencer Scheme



Source: Gross/von Wangenheim, 2018.

Table 3: Influencer Type Transition



Source: Gross/von Wangenheim, 2018.

write comments, etc., seems to be worthwhile. [...], [audience] sees “ah, (s)he reads that, (s)he took the trouble to answer.” I think that’s rewarded.”

“You have to have a certain reach. [...] You’re more likely to follow one with many K-subscriptions. [...] The higher the number of subscriptions, the more credible you are and people will make faster a subscription.”

Table 2 presents the influencer scheme based on the two presented identification factors. Each box in Table 2 presents the type of influencers and the corresponding levels of domain breadth and social presence. With respect to domain breadth, influencers such as Informers and Infotainers can be assigned as narrow, because they require domain-specific knowledge and hence focus on creating content in their domain expertise. On the wide level are Snoopers and Entertainers, which create content in multiple domains by being entertaining or presenting current activities. Regarding social

presence, Informers score higher than Infotainers, as the former socially closer connect with the audience by answering single comments or cultivating back and forth contact with audience members. Finally, Snoopers enjoy a higher level of social presence than Entertainers because the latter fosters audience contact on an aggregate level. For instance, summarizing several comments and questions into a Q&A video. The next section discusses the temporal dynamics and transition of influencer types.

Temporal Dynamics and Influencer Type Transition

Every influencer starts as either a Snooper or an Informer. Both Snoopers and Informers later evolve themselves further based on audience feedback and reaction. Most of the interviewees reported that audience comments are highly valued and the comments significantly helped them to improve and transition themselves. The transition happens either consciously or uncon-

sciously. But, most of the influencers stated that they were unaware of how this initial hobby-based experiment would develop.

“I did not expect the stuff to shoot through the ceiling like that.”

“I did not think about distribution at the time. So, it was completely clear to me, I get 10 or 15 clicks on it [...] and the theme is through.”

“The comments are the most important thing. [...] It’s the only feedback that we get. [...] We have changed extremely [...] and that is through the comments.”

Content evolves into two directions: (1) information or (2) entertainment. The former offers additional learning benefits through domain knowledge and expertise (e.g. angling, physics, sewing). Another form of factual information is sharing experiences of particular life stories (e.g. coming out, disease). The main purpose is to pro-

vide transparency and to offer online support communities for people in similar situations. Entertaining content serves the purpose of amusement, relaxation, or escape often attached with a personal touch. The content includes broader general human interest topics such as “gossip” or “pranks.”

“It’s almost like an online support group with people, many people write to me personally and then I answer and then the back and forth contact comes up.”

“Maybe there are other people who have [disease] too and who think it’s great when someone talks about it on the internet. Maybe someone has experienced a story like me, I’ll just tell it.”

Table 3 shows the possible temporal transition of influencer types throughout time. Assuming influencers start as Snoopers, they can transition further into Informers, Entertainers or remain Snoopers. Informers and Entertainers can then further transition into Infotainers. Interviews revealed that Snoopers transition not directly into Infotainers because they first focus on either informational or entertaining content. Infotaining content is, in a second step, the response of both audience feedback and influencer’s own desires to create such content. In a similar spirit, Informers can further transition into Infotainers or remain Informers.

Once influencers are of type Infotainers, they have no interest in transitioning into another type because they enjoy the freedom to create both content based on their domain knowledge and content aiming to giving the audience a good time within their domain. Infotainers offer the additional value the audience searches for through their expertise. At the same

time, entertaining content addresses a different audience than informational content. As a result, audience is more diverse. However, these four types are not mutually exclusive. Influencers might or might not jump back and forth in types over time. Taken together, influencers’ transition depends on their ultimate goals.

3. Advice for Companies Selecting Influencers

Influencer marketing is a highly dynamic, fast moving and growing channel. When examining the trend of influencers, it becomes clear that new influencers emerge every day. It is therefore important for companies to have a guideline that can be applied when scouting influencers. So, this article is a recipe for proper influencer type selection for a successful influencer campaign. Given that influencers distinguish themselves through a content factor and a social factor, advice is split into two parts: domain breadth and social presence.

Main Propositions

1. A successful influencer campaign needs a clearly defined goal, message to be delivered and relevant insights regarding the target audience.
2. Companies will face both social- and content-related challenges when scouting influencers.
3. Instead of focusing solely on reach, marketers should distinguish influencers by domain breadth and social presence.

Domain Breadth

A narrowly defined domain contains influencers with high domain knowledge. These influencer experts enjoy trustworthiness and credibility with their audience. Domain knowledge requires more background information from both influencer and audience and is particularly important when audience is seeking for advice. Higher levels of domain depth affect information to be judged more valuable than higher levels of domain breadth (Weiss et al., 2008). The advantage of a broader domain is that it potentially influences reach. Reach creates impressive amount of awareness and electronic word-of-mouth, which was found to have a significant impact on company performance (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Companies should consider influencers with narrow domain breadth when their influencer campaign aims to target an audience in a credible and compelling manner. Influencers with a broader domain should be considered when creating awareness is one goal of the influencer campaign.

Social Presence


Influencers high in social presence foster a close and approachable relationship with their audience. Social media platforms differ in the degree of social presence (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), so do influencers. The higher the social presence, the more influential the conversations (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Moreover, speed of response, frequency of dialogue, and the amount of information provided play an important role when judging the value of an information in online discussions (Weiss et al., 2008). If closeness and approachableness are core targets of the influencer campaign,

companies should collaborate with influencers high in social presence.

In sum, it is recommended that companies should first define the target audience to be reached. Secondly, on the basis of this, they should define the goals of their influencer campaign and the message to be communicated. Based on the goals, target audience, and message of the influencer campaign, companies should then decide whether to put a focus onto domain breadth or onto social presence, dependent on which helps to better

achieve the stated goals. Once the focus is defined, companies should identify which of the four influencer types best matches. Lastly, companies should start looking for influencers within the identified type.

Although Snoopers, Informers, Entertainers, and Infotainers are all part of influencers, that typology might not be conclusive. Due to the high degree of dynamics on social media, new influencers appear every day and thus, the presented typology might be extended by various subtypes. This study was a

first step towards a deeper understanding of selecting influencer types for successful influencer campaigns. Future work should empirically test the presented identification factors and further define influencer characteristics of each type. This work is a starting point for properly scouting influencers. Returning to companies' cautiousness when it comes to influencer marketing stated in the beginning, companies should keep in mind what Theodore Roosevelt once said: "It is hard to fail, but it is worse never to have tried to succeed." 

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