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Influencer Marketing



Mass Reach or Mass Impact?

A Taxonomy on Influencer Cooperations

Hardly any other phenomenon has dominated the marketing world in the past few months as Influencer Marketing. Specifically designing the cooperations with influencers is crucial for companies to exploit the full potential. This article presents a taxonomy of the four main archetypes of influencer cooperations, develops a classification with specific features and contributes a guide on how to start and run influencer marketing.

Jasmin Farouq, M.Sc., Prof. Dr. Marcus Schögel

What makes a successful marketing campaign and how can you generate a huge return on investment? Many marketing managers are currently answering this question with a buzzword: influencers. Influencer marketing is certainly top-of-mind for marketers, but it continues to be one of the most puzzling pieces on the path to purchase. No doubt – hardly any other phenomenon has dominated the marketing world in the past few months (Nielsen 2015). In a relatively short period of time, influencer marketing – a form of marketing which identifies individuals that have influence over potential buyers and orients marketing activities around them – has seen a rapid evolution and increased deployment among brands, primarily via social media channels such as Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. Marketers have noticed the impressive sway that digital influencers have over their followers, and brands are capitalizing on the growing opportunity for product endorsements to reach key market segments, especially the important millennial demographic. The content creation of the influencers allows brand-relevant content to be passed on authentically to the followers. Current studies show that influencers can contribute with their posts also for more than the increase of the brand awareness and the improvement of the image (Jaakonmäki, Müller & vom Brocke 2017). Already 60 percent of young adults can trace purchases to influencer recommendations (Nielsen 2015) – and influencers are aware of their impact and relevance for their audience. These digital celebrities, who have grown up in the digital media, act as small media powerhouses and professionally market their reach and their perceived advertising space. Companies that have already understood the potential, rely on the new communication channels for future growth and thus on influencers in content generation (Woods, 2016). Digital companies like Daniel Wellington even manage their complete communication content creation exclusively with images of digital influencers.

Understanding the Phenomenon of Influencers

Digital influencers are an integral part of corporate relations and as such influence a vast range of marketing communication (Jaakonmäki, Müller & vom Brocke 2017). Consequently, different aspects of integrating and cooperating with non-marketing generated content creators have been studied in various research contexts. In order to ensure a consistent understanding, a definition of digital influencers is necessary.

Influencer marketing has been around for decades, whether it be Nike sponsoring athletes, Proctor and Gamble using dentists to sell products or Tupperware product parties hosted by regular people. However now, independent online broadcasters – those who claim they use a product as part of their everyday life and create their own content, are becoming extremely popular with viewers. These influencers are different from the traditional celebrity influencer or influencers promoted by networks, as they create their own content such as product tutorial videos or “hauls”, buying a lot of products before comparing and contrasting them for viewers (Woods, 2016). “The social media stars are among the first generation of prominent influencers who gained notoriety without access to the classic media and today have their own reach in the millions” (Kilian, 2017, p.64). Among other things, they have a more authentic and credible effect on the target groups than the classic celebrities who promote products. Moreover, they are closer to the target group (Paperlein, 2016, Djafarova & Rushworth 2016).

The term influencer has been utilized in a variety of different ways (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007; Droge, Stanko, & Pollitte, 2010; Feick, & Price, 1987; Katz, & Lazarsfeld, 2006; Richins, & Root-Shaffer, 1988; Roshwalb, Katz, & Lazarsfeld, 1956). To evaluate previous research approaches with various influencer concepts and position the present article, a clear definition is needed. The suggested classification scheme helps to pin down influencers for research in marketing communication. Essentially, the following four aspects

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are crucial for the presented understanding of influencers in digital marketing: Relevance for audience's behavior (digital self-presentation by consumers), significant social capital (consumption of influencer content by followers), regular content production (blending of user generated content and firm generated content) and willingness to monetize.

Relevance for possessions reflect individual identity when they demonstrate a person's accomplishments, skills,

Digital creators are part of a “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2006), which has the potential to break the established mass media production structures.

tastes, or unique creative efforts (McCracken, 1988; Schultz, Kleine, & Kernan, 1989). The influencer becomes relevant for its audience's behavior with the quality of alignment and connection he/she shares with its followers around a brand or topic. Audience's behavior: Influencers create personal online pages and are engaging in what Arnould and Price (2000, p. 140) call “authenticating acts”, or “self-referential behaviors actors feel reveal the true' self” and frequently multiple true selves. Individual identity is the self as distinguished from others and unique. Significant social capital: Unlike conventional users, influencers have built up a community as an audience on any given social channel. Within that community, the engaged reach is the size of audience within this following that will actually engage with the posts (Interviews 2017).

The phenomenon of influencer differentiates itself from other influencer constructs with the ongoing professionalization and willingness to monetize influencers. The quality of an influencers' bonding with its followers, and the resulting ability to drive a desired behavior or action from the target audience is closely connected to the ability to monetize the content (Interviews 2017).

To sum up, the term “influencer” as used in this article will be understood as a (individual) content creator with significant social capital that influences its followers through word-of-mouth communication (on- or offline) based on its regular produced influencer content and with a willingness to monetize its reach.

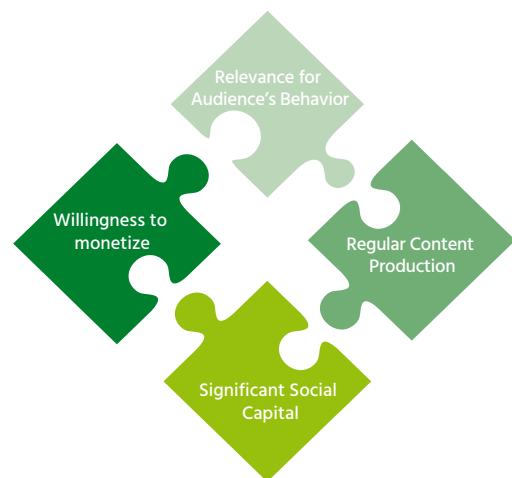
The Multi-faceted State of Research on Influencers #

The topic of influencer marketing is multi-faceted and roughly groups into different scientific streams.

The Opinion Leaders concept was developed by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1944) and integrated in the two-level flow model. In its core, it says that people are not directly influenced by the mass media, but by interpersonal communication of people from the immediate environment. These people have a greater impact on their environment than others and have a higher media consumption. That means that messages first reach the so-called opinion leaders and then from these to the less active persons. This model was then further developed into a multi-step flow model (Renckstorf, 1970). This means that people who are not very interested are also reached by the mass media during important events.

In the field of Cultural Studies, activities from content creators on social platforms are considered as a phenomenon of growing up. Ethnographic investigations focus on individual teen-groups, which are increasingly differentiated by digitization (Majounu & Vogelsang, 2015; Hugger, 2014). Social communicative motives such as self-portrayal and networking in the peer group, self-disclosure and identity management as well as experiencing self-efficacy (Hugger, 2014) are at the center of this.

Figure 1: Elements of Digital Influencers



Source: Farouq/Schögel, 2018.

Digital creators are part of a “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2006), which has the potential to break the established mass media production structures. This is due to low hurdles for artistic expressions and civic engagement, a high importance of harming and sharing content with others, informal mentoring of experienced members of beginners, belief in the significance of one’s contributions and an experience of social connectivity (Jenkins et al., 2009).

Finally, Uses and Gratification research shows the concrete benefits that individual online video producers expect from their activities. Regardless of the specific platform or normative or life-sector-related perspectives, nine motif groups can be differentiated from online influencers on video platforms (Stoeckl, Rohrmeier & Hess, 2007): Economic incentives, depiction of one’s own life, joy/entertainment, pastimes, information sharing, contact with others/community feeling, attention, self-realization and self-assurance.

Why Focusing on Cooperating with Influencers?

While influencer marketing is moving to a strategic priority for startups and billion-dollar brands alike, many brands struggle to find consistently profitable results from influencer marketing. Developing a deeper understanding of cooperation opportunities and how to manage them is key. The potential of influencer marketing can only be sustainably exploited if the cooperation between companies and influencers is specifically designed and picked according to the marketing and campaign objectives. However, there have been few scientific studies at focus on cooperation arrangements among influencers and companies.

Methodology

The aim of this article is to reveal how companies can work with digital influencers and what forms of cooperation exist, especially on the social media platform Instagram. The growth of influencer marketing in the digital world may have started with bloggers and vloggers, but as the market has matured, Instagram has emerged as the platform of choice. As the fastest growing social media platform, Instagram and its 700 million global users have fueled the rise of an influencer marketing industry that is expected to exceed \$2 billion by 2019 (e-Marketer 2016). For this purpose, a content analysis of 70 influencers from the categories Fashion, Beauty, Fitness, Entertainment, Home, Travel and Gaming from the Forbes Top Influencer list is carried out. For a period of three months,

all types of product placements, sponsorings, promotions, events as well as brand-extension cooperations and other designs of cooperations displayed on Instagram are analyzed. These findings are complemented by 20 qualitative interviews with experts from agencies, influencers and companies.

Taxonomy on the Archetypes of Influencer Cooperations

As influencer cooperations exhibit different extents to what influencers aim to achieve with the cooperation and to what objectives corporate partners have in mind when collaborating with influencers, we base our typology on a continuum of purpose. We argue that categorizing influencer cooperations along a continuum of purpose yields four archetypes: (i) the Initiator Cooperation to create brand awareness and offer inspiration, (ii) the Promoter Cooperation to advocate and advertise products and services, (iii) the Ambassador Cooperation for which the influencer shares the companies values and to connect the cooperation partner with the influencer’s audience and communicate deeper product information and a personal review, and (iv) the Partner Cooperation to let the audience experience the influencer and expand the cooperation partner’s brand with the influencer’s personal

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brand. To identify the differences between the types, however, we seek to regard each archetype individually.

The primary focus of the Initiator Cooperation is to inspire the audience and gain brand awareness within the community of the influencer. With regards to the consumer, the cooperation aims to offer interesting content for the influencer’s channel and some brand and product inspiration. However, for customers the cooperation arrangement is barely visible and the collaboration not transparent. Corpo-

rate partners mainly benefit from brand awareness as well as possible likes and comments, yet with a short-term perspective. The expert interview partners (2018) suggest that the risk for corporate partners is fairly low, although corporate partners merely have an influence on the exact execution. The experts interviewed have stressed that this type is most suitable for a first start with influencers: “With new influencers, we often get asked to provide products or we offer them the product ourselves – for us, it is a good first test how the product fits to the influencer, how they incorporate it and if we enjoy cooperating” (Expert Interview 2017).

A Promoter Cooperation aims to present the influencer’s audience product inspiration and advocate and advertise the company. All expert interviews attested that since mostly no financial transactions are made, no sponsoring labeling is obligatory and thus transparency for followers is fairly low. “If not part of a bigger engagement, we simply offer the products as gifts and see how it goes” (Expert Interview 2017). On the corporate side, with the mass of featured products and services on the influencer’s channel and posts, the earnings perspective is very short term and aim at possible additional clicks, campaign hashtags, likes and the ability to refer to blogger content. Corporate cooperation partners feel that they face only little risk, since no strong connection to the influencer exists and backlashes and setbacks from influencers hardly affect them as well as acquisition costs (e.g. press samples) are comparatively low (Expert Interview 2018). However, on a management perspective, corporate cooperation partners can only integrate the influencer

content limited in their marketing activities. “We offer lots of influencers discount codes for their audience, and consider that more as a mass initiative than a real cooperation. With so many creators, we don’t have much control on how the posts are made” (Expert Interview 2017). According to the expert interviews (2017, 2018), corporate partners mostly rely on comments, and corporate hashtags to measure the success of such content.

By winning the influencer as a brand representative, an Ambassador Cooperation enables the corporate cooperation partner to strongly connect the influencer with itself and the influencer’s audience. Rather than inspiration, this type of cooperation is done to convey deeper product information and get a personal review and perspective of the influencer



Figure 2: Example of Daniel Wellington Discount Campaign with Influencers.

Exhibit A: Specific Designs of Influencer Cooperations

Giveaway / Competitions

An influencer includes a competition or awards a giveaway, a so-called (advertising) gift to its subscribers. From a business perspective, this can generate attention and increase its fan base. The result is often a high engagement rate (Dahan, 2015; West; 2016). Influencers can post a link to the competition, they can ask their fan community to follow the company, comment on a specific post, mark their own friends or the

fan community upload their own images related to the contest provide them with specific hashtags. From the point of view of the influencer, this one can express his appreciation and gratitude to his subscribers. Especially since his fan community is an important prerequisite for his practice as an influencer (Interviews 2018).

PR Samples / Gifting

The company will send products to the influencer free of charge.

From a corporate perspective, this may involve a risk as there is no obligation on the influencer to report on these products or integrate them into their posts. But it can be conducive to building a relationship with the influencer. However, if an influencer likes a product and would like to work with the company in the future, it may well be that he or she talks about the product or company in his fan community (Handley, 2014, Loren, 2016, Tsai, 2017).

(Expert Interview 2017). Corporate partners benefit from a stronger connection to the influencer's personal brand. For consumers, sponsorships are marked with specific hashtags that are used in the post description or based on the used platform, even in the title of the content post. Thus, transparency is considered medium to high. From a company perspective, the Ambassador Cooperation offers inclusive brand ambassadors, attention and potential sales as income source. Due to the high sponsoring costs, profitability is considered mid-term. Corporate cooperation partners feel that they face medium risk. Ambassador Cooperations are very well integrated in the ongoing marketing campaigns and are highly orchestrated throughout all channels: "We make sure this kind of sponsorships are consistent with our broader marketing efforts – we must." (Expert Interview 2017). Depending on the influencer, the creative controllability is considered as medium to high. As to measurable KPIs, the experts agreed on clicks, likes, as well as sales.

A Partner Cooperation is considered as the strongest type of cooperation between influencers and their cooperation partners. This type of cooperation lets the influencer's audience experience the influencer and its creativity through a brand collaboration and expands the cooperation partner's brand with the influencer's personal brand. Customers can show their support for the influencer and benefit through trusted products. Since the Partner Cooperations are highly promoted on both the influencer's and the corporate cooperation partner's sides, transparency for



Figure 3:
Example of Partner-Cooperation between Chiara Ferragni and Intimissimi.

customers is quite high. From the company's perspective, the income source is besides overall brand awareness and recognition, engagement and sales. Profitability for this type of cooperation is considered as long-term. However, the expansion of the brand with the influencer's brand holds

Exhibit B: Specific Designs of Influencer Cooperations

Sponsored (Blog) Post

The influencer creates content that advertises a product, company, brand or service. This is indicated by e.g. *#ad*, *#sponsoring*, *#sp*, that is advertising.

Promotion / Discount Code

The influencer motivates his subscribers to buy a specific product or at a company. The buyer must specify an individualized code from the

influencer when buying so that they can enjoy the special offer (discount, combination offers, free gift when buying). The company's goal is to boost sales in this way. The discount code benefits both parties – the influencer receives a certain percentage per product sold as agreed and the consumer often receives the product at a lower price or similar benefit (Loren, 2016; West, 2016).

Influencer Takeover

In the influencer takeover, the influencer takes over the company's digital platform for a certain period of time, which can range from a few hours to a week. During this time, the influencer creates exclusive content that revolves around the company. The fan community of the influencer should be lured to the side of the company and at best be turned into a fan (Kitzmann, 2016; West, o.D.).

a lot of risk (Expert Interviews 2017, 2018). Possible personal criticism of the influencer automatically affects the collaboration and the corporate partner. Since the Partner Cooperation is considered a long-term cooperation, integration in the company’s marketing activities is very much given and controllability on both the influencer and corporate sides is high: “We use the content produced by the influencer beyond the social channels – we incorporate them in traditional media campaigns as well as display in store, e-mail – as much as possible” (Expert Interview 2018).

On a time perspective, two generic empirical types surfaced from the dynamic and integrative interpretation of the cooperation examples. Long-term partnerships emerged where cooperations were assigned specific, explicitly or im-

PLICITLY stated purposes. A valid indicator for a cooperations partners’ aspiration to commit in a long-term partnership is the existence of explicitly defined goals within such cooperations. The majority of expert interview partners also emphasize the intimate and trust-building atmosphere when aiming these type of cooperations.

Short-term partnerships accounted for cooperations in the remaining parts of the grid – wither with a respectively low stated focus on relation & experience, restricted interaction potential, or both. Most of the respective cooperations aimed at reaching larger audiences in rather undifferentiated way. The central idea behind such short-term partnerships is two-fold. First, they could support other social instruments and thus equip potential customers with interesting content, such

Table 1: Taxonomy of Influencer Cooperations

Type		Initiator Cooperations	Promoter Cooperations	Ambassador Cooperations	Partner Cooperation
Exemplary Cooperatin Design		Product Placement	Discount Codes	Product Ambassadorship	Co-Created Products
Customer Perspective	Primary Focus	Inspiration and Brand Awareness	Brand – & Sales Orientation	Sales Orientation, Engagement	Experience & Sales Orientation
	Objective	Offer interesting content and product inspiration	Gain new consumer segments by promoting products	Connect with influencer, give deeper product insights and reviews	Enable experiencing influencer and getting closer to them
	Tonality	Inspiring and conveying lifestyle	Promoting and advertising products	Assessable reviews and information	Trusted products and showing support for influencer
	Transparency	Low	Low/Medium	Medium/High	High
Company Perspective	Income Source	Brand Awareness, clicks, likes	Brand Awareness, clicks, hashtags, likes, sales	Media attention, brand ambassador, sales, engagement	Engagement, sales
	Earnings Perspective	Short-term profitability (low acquisition costs)	Short-term profitability (low acquisition costs)	Mid-term profitability (high sponsoring costs)	Long-term profitability (building up engagement)
	Risk	Low	Low	Medium	High
Management	Controllability	Low	Low	Medium/High	High
	KPIs	Comments, likes	Branded Hashtags, Sales	Clicks, Likes, Sales	Sales, Engagement
	Integration	Low – Medium	Low – Medium	High	High
Existence		Short-term (re-occurring)		Mid-term	Long-term
Examples		Zoella x Lush	Tyler Oakley x Audible	PewDiePie x Razor	Chiara Ferragni x Intimissimi

Source: Farouq/Schögel, 2018.

as location placements or promotions. Second, short-term partnerships emerge when influencers address constructs in the front end of the funnel such as brand awareness.

Hence, the majority of influencers and corporate partners engaged in cooperations that “open the door” and show customers “that there is something new” (Expert Interviews 2018).

How to Start and Run an Influencer Cooperation

Marketing and communication managers should consider a few points upon designing an influencer cooperation.

In order to perform well, according to the above delineations, influencer cooperations need to be strategically well aligned with the firm’s marketing strategy and its purpose on the cooperation. To this end, this study outlines the influencer cooperation framework that guides marketing managers through the process of creating influencer cooperations.

Building on the qualitative interviews, this framework assists marketing and communication managers to embrace influencer cooperations by highlighting the hierarchical steps necessary to build a coherent influencer cooperations. Therefore, the first step is to determine the goals connected to the influencer cooperation and decide on the impact the cooperation should have (step 1). Based on the goal definition, the influencer cooperation type can be deduced, and a concrete type of cooperation specified, designed and executed (step 2). Monitoring the cooperation and listening to how the audience responds and reacts (step 3) is essential for gaining and keeping the momentum. Engaging, taking actions and if necessary adjusting and enriching the cooperation is then crucial to build trust with the established awareness (step 4). Finally, to keep track of how the influencer cooperation translates into tangibles, all efforts need to be measured (steps 5). These five steps can lay the foundation for future subscription providers to partake in the growth of this disruptive form of retailing.

The potential of influencer marketing strongly depends on the cooperation design

We have identified four archetypes of influencer cooperations. Each one satisfies a different purpose for the cooperation. The Initiator Cooperation is predestined for a simple, short-term executable, loosely bound collaboration between corporate partners and influencers that help the corporate partner getting to know with the influencer and serves the influencer’s purpose to share interesting content with (product-related) inspirational posts. It is mainly designed to gain awareness and is ideal for a short-term campaign objectives

Exhibit C: Specific Designs of Influencer Cooperations

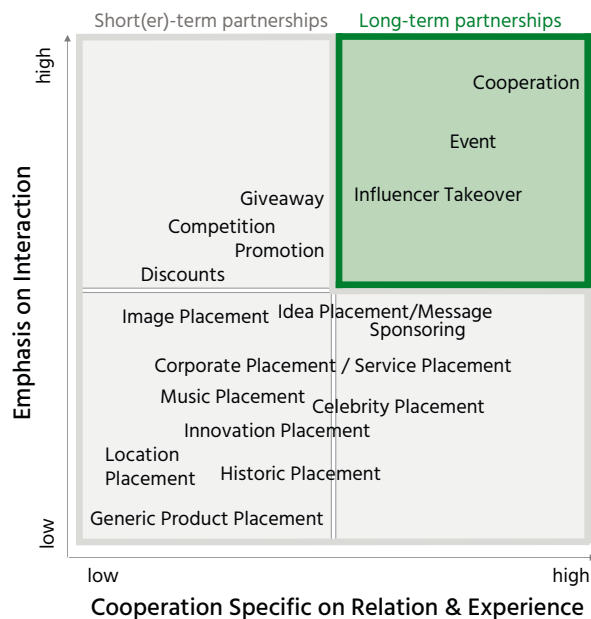
Collaboration

In collaborations, influencers are actively involved with their personal brand. The collaboration is usually designed for a longer term. They can play an Ambassador role and are the face of a brand (West, 2016). Also, they can be actively involved in the creation process or in the enterprise, e.g. is a collection or specific products developed together (West, 2016).

Event

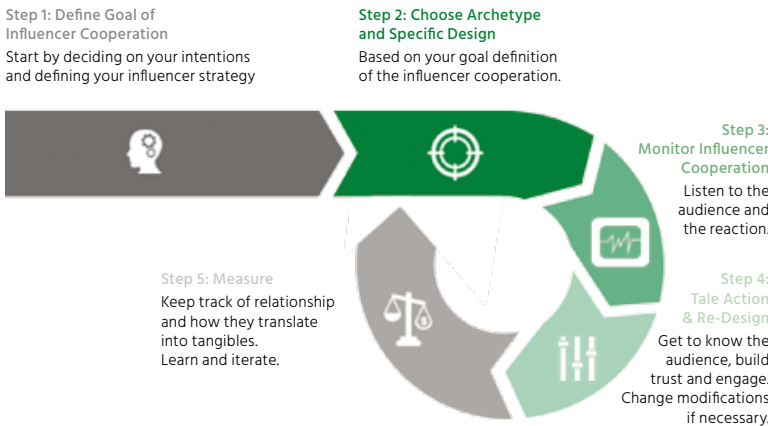
Influencers can also be used to increase the awareness of a specific event (Wick, o.D.). They can help to ensure that the promoted event gets a significant status and that it should not be missed. Influencers are particularly interesting if a specific target group is to be addressed (Krost, 2017). The influencer can announce the event while reporting and when it’s over, review it again.

Figure 4: Empirical Designs of Cooperations




Source: Farouq/Schögel, 2018.

Figure 5: Influencer Cooperation Implementation Framework



Source: Farouq/Schögel, 2018.

and represents a short-term earnings perspective. The Promoter Cooperation aims at pushing communication to new segments and advertise the products through the influencer. The Ambassador Cooperation succeeds for the purpose of conveying deeper product information and assessable reviews through the influencer who is strongly associated with the company. Corporate partner take a higher risk in connecting with the influencer's personal brand, but are very well integrateable in ongoing marketing activities and funneled into more tangible KPIs. The Partner Cooperation is appointed when the purpose of the cooperation is to join the influencer's personal brand and the company. By getting closer to the influencer and letting the audience experience and further connect with the influencer through a collaborated product or initiative, this archetype represents the strongest cooperation of a corporate partner with an influencer and very much caters the needs of the influencer's audience. Besides overall awareness, corporate partners mainly profit in engagement and sales. The earnings perspective is considered long-term, however the investment and risk is quite high. 

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