

# Social media influencer- A Lifestyle or a profession of the XXIst century?

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## Abstract

Internet has become the most consumed medium by millennials who are the young generation of consumers (according to Brand Builder). The owners of the most popular (followed, liked) channels on the social media tend to have an impact on their audience (which consists mostly of millennials). The impact is so strong that business brands, which have the same target groups, start the cooperation with social media opinion leaders to promote their products.

Social media opinion leaders are called (digital) influencers. They have strong relationship with their audience and are able to shape customer behaviour significantly with the help of communication on their social media channels (Brown, Hays: *Influencer Marketing: Who really influences your customers?*). Influencers live certain lifestyles or have some achievements that make them popular on social media platforms. On the other hand, they work as brand advocates and create content that they distribute on their channels to promote brands. Influencers seem to do cooperative job of digital marketers and publishers.

The main purpose of this paper is to discuss whether digital influencer is just a certain lifestyle or has become a new XXI century profession? International study on influencer marketing from IndaHash will be helpful to take a deeper look in this topic. The paper is also the basis for my further PhD research on influencer marketing and study on social influence in the Internet.

*Keywords: millennials, influencer, social media, digital marketing, brand advocacy*

## 1. Introduction

The problem of influence had been discussed in the fields of marketing and communication since a very long time (Katz and Lazarsfeldt

1955, Godin 2000). Theories of influence have perceived society as group that can be guided by a limited amount of individuals, who can spread information and are „influential” i.e. opinion leaders (Katz and Lazarsfeldt 1955, Rogers 1962, Gladwell 2000). There are two processes, distinguished in 1903 by Trade, that make people popularize ideas: imitation and influence.

There are two types of how one can analyze relational networks in social web: influencer marketing and recommender systems. Influencer marketing is based on minority of users, influentials, who seemingly can influence public opinion. Katz and Lazarsfeldt in 1955 used two-step communication flow model:

- a) „targeting these influentials in the network;
- b) achieving a large-scale chain-reaction of influence led by word-of-mouth, when there is a very small marketing cost” (Cha et al. 2010).

Opinion leaders’ (influentials) main objective is to connect strategically and position a message in a social network, intermediate between mass-media and the rest of the society (Watts and Dodds 2007, p. 441). First time term „influencer” in this form was introduced by Ahoren (2005) when describing the cooperation of Yahoo: „Yahoo has long been identifying and paying influencers to share their opinions in online social network.”

But being an influencer who uses social media means also living certain lifestyle, social status. More and more people treat it as a profession. Some influencers make a living out of their social media skills, others treat it as an extra job and a passion.

## 2. Social media influencer- what makes it XXI century profession

Marketing professionals have endorsed celebrities to raise brand awareness and increase sales, but with the rising importance of social media popular channels, more companies see brand influencer collaborations as more effective way of grabbing the customers' attention.

A survey conducted in the United States on 14,000 consumers by ZD Net showed that 30% of consumers are willing to buy a product recommended by an influencer than a celebrity. The study also proved that 70% of millennials (consumers aged 18 to 34) preferred "peer" endorsements (e.g. friends, family members, or influencers) over recommendations from traditional celebrities.

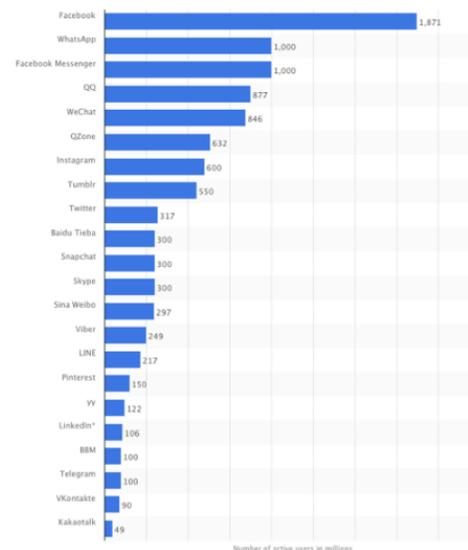
Another advantage of influencers is the fact that they are relatable. They can build strong and long-lasting relationships with the customers. And that is what young audience needs. The most millennials grew up in the digital age. They are more receptive and trust of recommendations from digital (social media) influencers. A recent study described by Tech Insider found that 73% of teen and young adults feel a true connection with a YouTuber (to compare: only 45% said the same about a celebrity- TV or a movie star).

Influencer marketing as a tool gives impressive business effects. Statistics coming from Burst Media study shows that average return on investment (ROI) is \$6.85 for every \$1 spent on influencer marketing. The returns are even higher for consumer packaged good (CPG) foods and retailers, who saw returns of \$11.33 and \$10.48, respectively.

What is more, social network sites' active users number is constantly growing and exceeding number of 2 billion in 2016, and is very quickly approaching the mark of 3 billion. Assuming that every user spends several hours on social media

every day, it turns out that those who are the biggest influencers on social media get the attention of millions of hours. The bigger audience, the more powerful influence. Figure 1 shows the most popular social network sites worldwide. Eight of them have more than half billion users with Facebook being the biggest one.

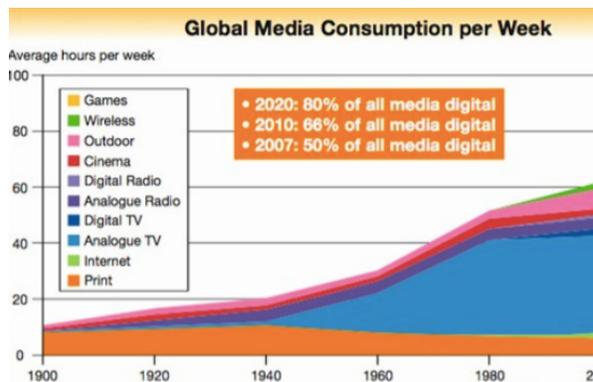
**Figure 1.** Social network sites worldwide ranked by the number of active users (in million, as of January 2017).



**Source:** <http://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>

Nowadays, people consume less and less traditional analogue media in order to consume more and more digital formats. Estimation by BrandBuilder indicates that in the year 2020, 80% of all media will be digital (figure 2 presents the trend). Taking into account that the number of social media users is also growing quickly and influencer marketing is an effective business tool, the role of digital influencer will continue to be more profitable and we surely can say it has already become an important XXI century profession.

**Figure 2.** Global media Consumption per Week in time



Source: <https://thebrandbuilder.wordpress.com/2012/03/12/strategy-reminder-shifts-in-global-media-consumption/>

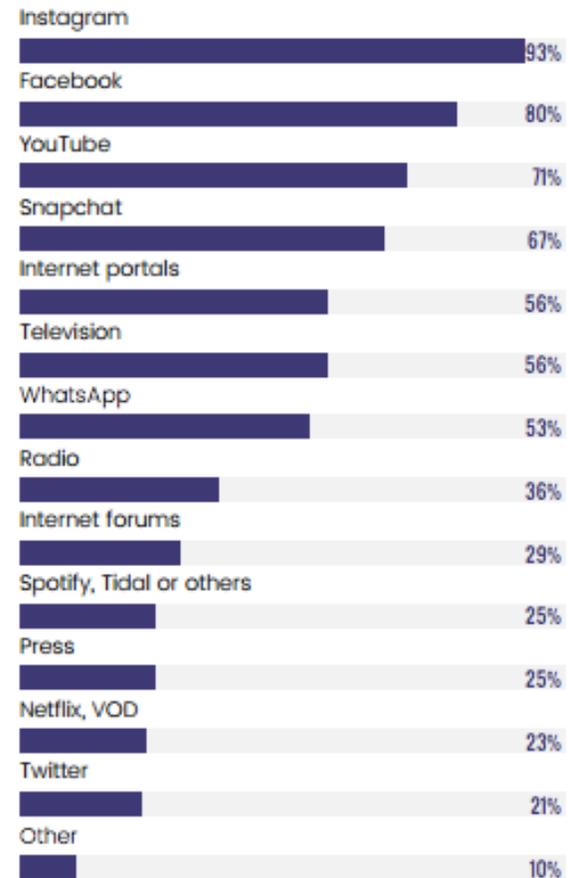
### 3. Profile and lifestyle of social media influencer

To become an influencer, first of all one must have the passion and be able to share it in an entertaining way via social media platforms. The passion of the influencer should be represented in the lifestyle and the accomplishments or skills. Most of the influencers treat their work really seriously. They practise to be professional, spend hours creating the best content that would engage with their audiences. Influencers' friends and other social media users have the biggest impact on them. Digital influencers live in social media world and buy products they see there. In order to better understand the way influencers live and who they are, a international study in 2017 via indaHash (Polish CRM platform for influencers and brands) was conducted. 2 285 active global influencers took part in it. The study gave useful insights into the work, lifestyle and profile of digital influencers.

64% of social media opinion leaders stated they treat their work as a profession. They have vision of what type of content to create, what skills they need to work on. They also prefer to follow real people (82% of the answers) instead of consuming traditional media. And 41% of them watch little or no TV. Over 60% of them visit Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat on

daily basis. This only shows that consumption of traditional media may keep declining. 77% of influencers also think that they are competitive with traditional media. Figure 3 shows how influencers use media (also for their work).

Figure 3. Types of media used by influencers on daily basis.

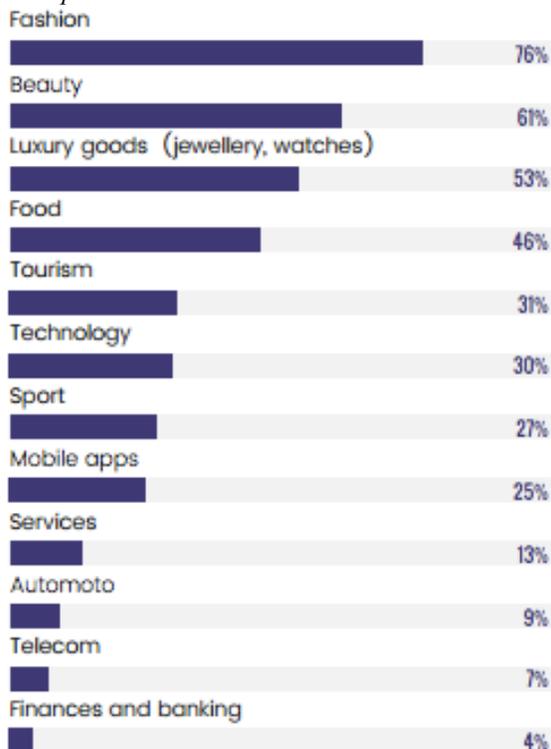


Source: indaHash Labs, *WOMEN ARE THE NEW MEDIA*

68% of social media influencers are woman. 60% live in the capital or one of the largest cities in their countries. On average, they have almost 20 000 followers, are 21 years old. 62% of them are students. Almost half of all influencers declared that they post content at least once per day. 60% spend a lot of time on preparing a post before publishing. The most important factor for influencers while considering cooperation with brands is the brand's image. 58% stated, they must like the brand to cooperate with it (even for free). For 50% of influencers, the main reason to

work with the brand would be: money and the fact that they need to want to recommend the brand to their followers (the brand image must fit to the influencers' target groups). 53% of them prefer to collaborate with influencers through a special application (whereas 40% would like to work directly with the brand). Influencers also have their favourite types of cooperation with the brands. Their favourite types of brand campaigns are: product placements (either video or photo), reviews or product tests, creative task. What is very important, 88% of influencers think that their followers react at least good for the advertising content. Social media influencers have their favourite industries to cooperate with: fashion, beauty, luxury goods, food or tourism.

**Figure 4.** The industries influencers would like the most cooperate with.

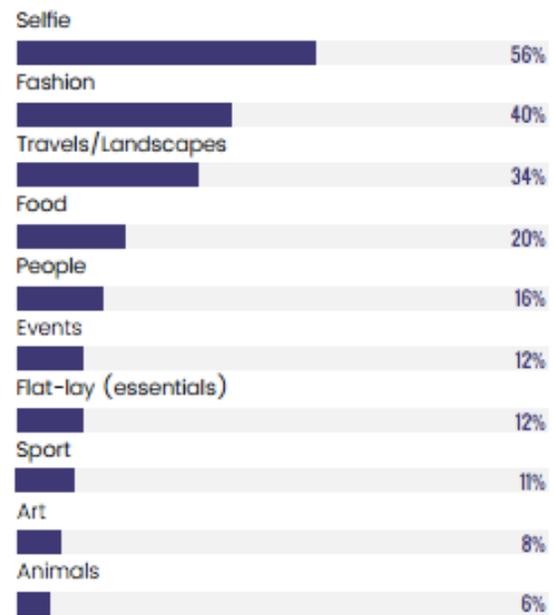


Sources: *indaHash Labs, WOMEN ARE THE NEW MEDIA*

And for the brands, when they want to choose the right influencer for the cooperation, they need to know that popularity (numer of followers) does not equal engagement (fans- so the campaign

effect). The top 25% of most engaging (the numer of interactions) social media influencers had the audiences of 4000- 5500 followers. The majority of the influencers think that they are also influential offline, among friends. But they can also be influenced by other social media users, friends or business partners. The most of popular types of content that influencers post: selfies, fashion, travel, food or other people (figure 5 shows the categories).

**Figure 5.** Types of posts published most often by influencers



Source: *indaHash Labs, WOMEN ARE THE NEW MEDIA*

Photos are the most popular type of content used by social media influencers. Maybe because this is the most engaging type of content. Most of the posts include also signs # called hashtags. They allow to track the posts and identify or just search for content. The most popular hashtags among influencers are connected with love, fashion or travel. Influencers post mostly in the late afternoon (5-8 p.m.) or in the afternoon (1-5 p.m.).

## 4. Conclusions

Internet gave millennials freedom of media choice. People can have their own medium where they are able to socially express ideas and share their lives. Social media is the space on the Internet that everybody consumes and will consume more and more. Digital influencers are those whose voice on social media is the loudest and is the most influential. They live in times of digital media. They read websites instead of newspapers. They watch online video instead of TV. They follow real people on social media instead of celebrities in the media. They take advantage of the new technologies. The same as their followers who feel the real relationship with the influencers. Fans follow them consciously and interact with the content influencers create. Changing media consumption landscape makes business brands adapt to new market conditions. Brand owners want to collaborate with influencers as the collaborations seem to bring business effects. The study conducted by indaHash on influencers shows that they put much effort into collaboration with brands. Influencers treat their work as a profession and get money for it. At the same time, they live in their own way and are individuals who can shape behaviors of millions. Social media influencer is not only a lifestyle but also a new XXI century profession.

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