ARTICLE

Do digital influencers successfully contribute to reducing the gap between customers and companies?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to analyze the role of digital influencers in the construction of relationships between companies and consumers. A qualitative methodology was used, whereby seven Portuguese service providers were interviewed. The results obtained demonstrate that companies' hire digital influencers to publicize their products, create notoriety, build a trustworthy image, and increase sales. It was also found that the most used platform for digital strategies is Instagram, due to its ease of communication and number of active users. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that the traceability of sales related to digital influencers is quantifiable through tools such as Google Analytics, discount coupons, number of site visits generated, and also the increment of followers on digital promotions days. This research contributes to scientific knowledge as it validates the theoretical constructs developed on the role of digital influencers in the establishment of relationships between brands and consumers and confronts them with the business reality. Finally, some suggestions for future line of investigation are presented.

KEYWORDS

Digital Influencers, Digital Marketing, E-commerce, Social Networks, Digital Strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

With the evolution of social networks and the growing ease of accessing the internet, opportunities to create contact links between brands and their consumers have become increasingly more plentiful, more direct, and simpler. Nevertheless, this new globalizing digital wave also brought new challenges, since the possibility for the consumer to search and find similar products with different advantages in the most diverse brands without geographical limitations, also increased (Malik, Naeem, & Munawar, 2012; Sette & Brito, 2020).

In classic marketing strategies, brands have always ventured to identity elements, leading to the brand's personality reinforcement, as such, creating an immediate distinction on the products or services in the same category which are viewed by an equivalent audience. Once created, the relationship between the brand and its customers, is long-lasting and hardly permeable to noise, since the communication between the sender and the receiver has a single conduit (Bello-Orgaz et al., 2020; Chen, Chen, & Huang, 2012).

Through the advent of social networks, the culture of digital sharing emerged, as well as the tools to identify people and brands, the content distributed through algorithms are all innovations that allowed consumers to interact with each other. Reviews, comments, and suggestions based on other people's purchases have changed the way customers choose products and services (Torres, Augusto, & Matos, 2019; Yan, Hyllegard, & Blaesi, 2012).

The full potential of social networks brought substantial features that have stimulated the proliferation of user-generated content. The evolution of the content produced by the public, took off from amateur entertainment to increasingly elaborate productions to convey a message (Chen et al., 2012; Coleman, de Chernatony, & Christodoulides, 2011).

Since the expression "user-generated content" emerged around 2005 and has continued to the present date, thousands of ordinary people have started to compete on equal terms, for space, and even business with big brands and traditional companies. Many of these people built their own image through the content made available to their followers, thus making themselves known in digital media. These recent opinion leaders, and celebrities from different fields (actors, models, artists) have a loyal audience in their online media, and also have, to a certain extent, the ability to influence their audiences` purchasing decisions (Netzer, Feldman, Goldenberg, & Fresko, 2012; Stoldt, Wellman, Ekdale, & Tully, 2019; Wijaya, 2013).

The role of the digital influencer was born almost spontaneously, as was as the new relationship of these people with brands. In the same manner, a digital influencer is seen by the public as someone closer to them. This new form of relationship with celebrities brought the audience closer, a type of identification that "television celebrities" do not have. The opinion of a digital influencer for his audience is seen as an indication, not as an advertisement (Chen et al., 2012; Coleman et al., 2011; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

Digital marketing actions do not always follow the strategies mentioned in the literature, on the contrary, they further use intuition, being reactive, and susceptible to experiences. Nonetheless, working with a broader knowledge on how to reach audiences effectively and acheive marketing objectives, will always be an advantage for any organization. In an environment where technology makes practically all actions measurable, and when it has been proven that a large number of followers does not necessarily mean a high rate of interaction, it is essential to understand which influencers generate more or less visitors, reactions, and sales (Peng, 2016; Riha, Stros, & Rihova, 2018).

Influence marketing is currently a large part of the strategies outlined by companies. However, there is little information about the factors that drive successful online brand engagement (Hughes, Swaminathan, & Brooks, 2019). Measuring the impact of social media communication is essential and relevant for companies. That said, the marketing of social media influencers, in what is traditionally called influencer marketing, makes this effort even more complicated to measure as there are more and more platforms (Martínez-López, Anaya-Sánchez, Fernández Giordano, & Lopez-Lopez, 2020). Being so, and taking into account the studies by Peng (2016) and Ramalho, Silva, and Silva (2020) the following research question was formulated: How do digital influencers contribute to building a relationship between brands and consumers? Once the initial enthusiasm for the influencers' niche passed, many brands ended up failing to get the results they aspired to with such actions, some even declining in a dramatic way. Our research is based on semi-structured interviews given to Portuguese service providers, with the objective to verify which tools effectively measure the return on investment from digital influencers as well as knowing what drives companies to decide on digital influencers. With such an approach, companies can analyze the return on investment from digital influencers through digital tools such as Google Analytics in a more objective and detailed manner. Additionally, it is possible to compare the ratio between the investment made and the actual return that digital influencers gave to the company. The results of this research will help companies to invest in digital influencers in a more elucidated manner. It will also guide companies to compare the ratio between the investment made with the actual return that digital influencers brought to their company and brand.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The digital revolution has changed the manner in which consumers approach the communication strategies implemented by companies. Digital media has become an essential tool to compete in most of the current markets. Companies invest in their proximity to customers, thus contributing to the effectiveness of the loyalty process. The objective of organizations, through the use of digital channels, has become more strategic and aggregated, as customers started to play an active role in creating value and brand reputation (Enke & Borchers, 2019). As a result, customer loyalty became a central element of relationship management (Bakhtieva, 2017; Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017).

Through the evolution of digital channels and the amount of information available in the media, digital marketing has intervened in order to increase the value of goods and services available to consumers. The greater the value is recognized for a product, the greater is its value to the consumer. Being so, a consumer will seek the benefit of a product through its value. Digital marketing has a similar function - increase the value of products (Fawzy, Sharuddin, Rajagderan, & Zulkifly, 2018; Kapitan & Silvera, 2016; Malik et al., 2012).

The popularity of digital media in recent years is mainly attributed to the possibility of doing business online. With the fast evolution of global e-commerce, companies are looking to gain competitive advantages through their interactions with customers (Buechel & Berger, 2018). The growth on technology penetration combined with the evolution of virtual purchases boosted the e-commerce ecosystem, revolutionizing the global economy as it allowed physical stores to expand their communication channels and distribute at lower costs (Wijaya, 2013; Yan et al., 2012).

Electronic commerce, also known as e-commerce, is a recent and continuously evolving trend, whereas the purchase and sale of products or services is accomplished through electronic systems such as internet and/or other computer networks, allowing consumers to do their purchases within a vast, privileged, and highly secure offer (Fawzy et al., 2018; Malik et al., 2012).

The Internet became an intangible entry into any strategy to reach customers. Nowadays, customers have access to a company's website anywhere in the world and companies can reach their customers wherever its location. E-commerce opened new horizons to reach global services and has shortened the gap between companies and consumers (Borggren, Moberg, & Finnveden, 2011; Malik et al., 2012).

Due to the effect of technological advances, society has evolved to a new model of life characterized by the widespread acceptance of digital media. With the emergence of social networks, some of its users became content producers and began to interact with other users to promote products and lifestyles (Magno & Cassia, 2018). In the same manner, influence marketing, also known as word-of-mouth marketing, became an asset in the expansion process of electronic commerce. Such a digital marketing strategy has, as main objective, the cooperation with digital content producers, known as digital influencers, consequently creating a bridge between the brand and the influenced public. Nowadays, with the advent of information sharing, individuals are able to meet, regardless the time or location. With the interactivity intensification, geographical distances have been eliminated, allowing companies to reach their consumers anywhere in the world. (Galeotti & Goyal, 2009; Savell, Gilmore, & Fooks, 2014; Yan et al., 2012).

With regards to digital marketing, influence marketing became an effective tool (Huynh et al., 2019). In an increasingly connected and interconnected society, the role of influencers is essential to companies, as they bring brands closer to consumers. An approach and connection at this level hardly happens between people and brands (Jimenez-Castillo & Sanchez-Fernandez, 2019). Thus, brands need influencers to reach their public and at the same time, influencers need brands to make their business profitable since the role of digitally influencing consumers already became an ability (Fawzy et al., 2018; Fierro, Cardona Arbelaez, & Gavilanez, 2017).

Considering this, when companies hire digital influencers their intention is that these individuals produce digital contents where detailed information on the brand's products is made available. The purpose of this content creation is to grasp the attention of consumers and change their opinions and behaviors, then providing a follow-up service. Furthermore, the pursuit of establishing a relationship of trust will cause a positive effect on image and brand awareness (Coleman et al., 2011; Morris, 2009).

Presently, companies have been associating with influencers to reach certain niches of the population. Since these individuals create interesting content and function as a tool to attract and retain customers, they end up building a close relationship with their followers on the various social networks in which they operate, helping companies in their forms of communication (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016; Wijaya, 2013).

Brand marketing managers already direct part of their marketing and communication budget towards strategies with digital influencers. This fact is justified by consumers' rejection to traditional communication. The acceptance of messages transmitted by content producers due to the existing relationships, leads companies to readapt their communication strategies (Jimenez-Castillo & Sanchez-Fernandez, 2019; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

3. METHODOLOGY

The present research uses an exploratory qualitative methodology. Thus, it is important to select the appropriate participants. Interview questions should be written in a clear and precise manner, avoiding duplication, and be sufficient in order to explore the theme under analysis. Data confidentiality should also be ensured (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005).

Being so, qualitative methodology is the most suitable for the present research as it allows the phenomena to be studied in its natural settings and throughout the information people transmit. Qualitative studies hold a key importance to the statements of the social actors involved, speeches and the meanings they convey. In this sense, it is important to verify the practical experiences with identical problems or explore similar examples which may stimulate analysis understanding (Denzin, Lincoln, & Giardina, 2006). Furthermore, the qualitative approach allows a better understanding of the interviewees' opinions and, successively allows the researcher to carry out more assertive data analysis.

The present research was prepared in accordance to the suggestion by Crouch and McKenzie (2006). First, a pre-analysis was carried out on the theme and theoretical framework, methodology was defined as well as how to collect the data. Then, a descriptive analysis was carried out to organize and describe the collected data. Finally, an inferential interpretation was performed, starting with the theoretical framework and the empirical results obtained. In such way, the authors tried to answer to the research question previously formulated and also check if there were any contradictions on the portrayal and respective conclusions.

The script for the semi-structured interviews used in the present research is composed by 12 open questions, adapted from a study by Peng (2016). Taking into account the objective of this research, questions were developed to confirm whether influencers really contributed to the construction of a relationship between companies and customers. The interview is divided into 2 groups of questions. The first group is focused on the companies' objectives in digital communication strategies, the channels they use, their budgets, and their results. The second group aims to identify which are the factors that companies consider more relevant when partnering with influencers and the metrics used for results analysis. A questionnaire based on this script was sent by e-mail to 13 service providers in the northern region of Portugal in order to check if the companies fit the research and if they had relevant information for the analysis. In this sense, the criteria of investigation location is associated with the ability to compare companies providing services in the same region, with similar turnover and using digital influencers as a way to create relationships with customers. 7 validated responses were received between November 2019 and January 2021, these responses were replied to by the CEO. Subsequent to the response validation, a meeting was scheduled, through an online meeting platform, in this case via Zoom, with each of the companies asked to clarify the responses obtained. The meetings lasted an average of 75 minutes and served as a means to know whether the company's digital strategies, and the contribution of digital influencers in the process of approach between the company and its customers. The results obtained were further expanded through sessions via Zoom, which allowed to deepen the obtained replies.

Finally, after collecting the information from the interviews, the obtained answers were transcribed and coded into Microsoft Excel Office 365. One of the results from the data collected is presented in Table 1 where it is possible to identify the profile of the surveyed companies.

Table 1

Profile of the surveyed companies

Company	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Size	Micro Company	Micro Company	Micro Company	Micro Company	Micro Company	Micro Company	Micro Company
Sector	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary
Employees	2	7	3	2	3	3	8
Sales turnover 2019	65 000€	150 000€	80 000€	75 000€	70 000€	60 000€	160 000€
Interview date	22/11/2019	25/11/2019	26/11/2019	27/01/2021	25/01/2021	27/01/2020	28/01/2021

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS DISCUSSION

In order to synthesize the results with the main ideas obtained from the interviews, a summary table was constructed (see Table 2 in the Appendix). Primarily, the characteristics of the surveyed groups are presented: gender and professional position. The results obtained allowed to answer to the research question previously formulated: How do digital influencers contribute to building the relationship between brands and consumers?

Question 2 asked companies about the purpose of investing in digital communication strategies. From the results obtained, it is possible to observe that companies A and F seek greater interaction with customers and increased sales. The remaining companies seek to publicize their products, create awareness, and strengthen the brand in consumers' mind. Despite the various objectives collected throughout this question, it is essential to mention that the digital medium is a place where the greatest forms of communication are established. Information is easily disseminated, on a global scale, and capable of modifying behaviors and relationships (Okada & Souza, 2011).

Since the objectives of digital communication strategies are different, it is important to analyze which digital channels are used by companies in their communication strategies. According to Santos and Kunz (2014) and Schwemmer and Ziewiecki (2018), digital platforms are a fundamental support for marketing strategies, as they function as a tool to attract, retain, and maintain customers. Furthermore, there are relationship channels that include digital platforms, such as websites, blogs and social networks, with which the customer is able to purchase or obtain information about a product. Question number 3 focused on the digital media adopted by companies in their digital communication strategies. According to the results obtained, Instagram and Facebook are the most active digital media in digital strategies, mainly due to the number of active users (Cotter, 2019; Silva, Farias, Grigg, & Barbosa, 2020). These social networks have grown around 20% a year, thus, giving an advantage to companies that use this media as online communication tools (Silva et al., 2020). Through a Business Account option, companies can sponsor their publications in order to reach more users, and be able evaluate the results (Lo, Chiong, & Cornforth, 2016; Magno & Cassia, 2018). With the above results, it is possible to mention that the first part of the theme of this study is completed.

On question 4, companies were asked on the investment made in activities related to digital influencers and their allocation in the budget for digital marketing. According to the data collected from the 7 service providers, it is possible to conclude that companies C, D and F allocate between 50% and 60% of their digital marketing budget for activities related to influencers. However, due to internal policies, in company A there is no budget for influencers, on the other hand, in

company F, the budget is made monthly according to the products launch. Although the results prove different perceptions and approaches, a digital influencer is an asset for a company, as they produce consistent content, seeking to maintain relationships, prestige, and influencing recognition (Karhawi, 2017). From another perspective, it is important that companies strictly define the budget for marketing strategies aimed at digital media, more specifically influencers. After defining the budget, it is pertinent that companies understand that the investment made may be an opportunity to reach potential consumers and a way to retain existing ones. The choice of the right digital influencers, the detailed definition of the intended objectives and the of strategies, are some of the necessary steps for the success of digital strategies related to influencers (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016; Torres et al., 2019).

In question number 5, companies quantified the direct or indirect origin of sales related to influencers in percentages. Companies A and F are companies that heavily depend on the work of influencers, 40% of the actual results are related to the effect of influencers . According to the CEO of company A, "(…) about 40% of our sales are clearly identified as being related to influencers (due to the discount code) but I would say that maybe 60% are indirectly related to these (sales without using discount code)". Following this trend, in companies D and E the sales related to influencers are between 20% and 25%. Companies need to be desired by consumers, and, to achieve this, they need to create a bridge with all the actual digital media, so that consumers create an interest and need for a shared communication, subsequently acquiring the product or service offered (Dalmonte, 2015; Tronstad & Unterschultz, 2005). Taking advantage of the fact that consumers are increasingly connected to the internet, the results obtained through digital strategies from influencers prove that this investment has a positive return, if well-defined and applied. Undoubtedly, a well-designed digital plan and a proper connection with a digital media allows companies to have more possibilities to achieve a specific audience and have the opportunity to interact with them. In this regard, influencers are a key aspect of digital strategies (Ataide, Brandao, Pinto da Cunha, & Loureiro, 2018; Peng, 2016).

As for question number 6, companies indicated the essential factors when choosing their influencers. With the influence of social networks as the most used means of communication, the main characteristics pointed out by the surveyed companies when selecting their influencers are: the number of followers on their social networks, the lifestyle of the individual influencer, and the quality of content produced. The choice of the ideal influencer should be based on the ideals of the company, therefore, it is essential that the influenced public review themselves in the characteristics of the promoted product or service reflected. Otherwise, communication will not be effective and may be considered aggressive to the consumer. In other words, the effectiveness of digital strategies based on influencers depends on the correct choice of the influencer to promote a certain product or service. Being so, the timing to select the ideal influencer is extremely important. They should be aimed at the target audience intended by the organization and be capable to transmit credibility and maintain a close and reliable relationship (Dalmonte, 2015; Strategic Direction, 2013).

When looking to the effectiveness of the work developed by the producers of digital content, questions 7 and 8 revealed some antagonism. On one hand, companies disclosed examples of successful strategies, while, on the other hand, they exposed situations where the developed digital strategies were not well applied by content producers. According to company B, in question 7, there was a well applied strategy where digital influencers were essential to promote a products launch related to Mother's Day. Following this taught both company D and G to bet on giveaways through social networks. The success of digital strategies based on influencers

depends on the flexibility of companies in their relationship with the influencers they hire. Although the digital strategy is defined by the company, an opportunity should be given to the content producer to create his or her own content aimed at their followers. Sometimes, when the strategy defined by the company is too restrictive, the influencer ends up without enough margin of communication and is not able to reach his audience. If not flexible and adaptable to the selected content producer, the success of the strategy may be compromised (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Matthews, 2019).

Question 8 is essentially focused on failed digital strategies. Company A considered that the reason for failure of one of its digital strategies was: "Not choosing influencers well, is the only factor that leads an experiment to be unsuccessful. It is necessary to analyze the target audience of the influencer very well ". In the same manner, companies C, D, E, F and G considered that the main factor that leads to the failure of a planned strategy is the erroneous choice of the content producer, this is observable when there is no prior analysis to the influencer' profile, and evaluation of the target audience to check if it is the adequate, according to the new product launch. The right choice of the content producer depends on several factors such as extent, interaction, clicks on publications, number of followers and even country and gender. A very common mistake by brands when selecting their influencers is choosing a content producer without checking the gender of their followers. If a brand wants to advertise a female product with a female content producer whose followers are mostly male, then, this digital strategy is not aimed at the intended target audience. In such way, the effectiveness of the digital strategy will be compromised (Breves, Liebers, Abt, & Kunze, 2019; Magno & Cassia, 2018; Torres et al., 2019).

Taking into account the replies collected, digital marketing strategies applied to influencers are not always effective and aligned with the previously defined objectives. Influential marketing actions are generally carried out on social platforms such as Twitter, Facebook or Instagram (Arora, Bansal, Kandpal, Aswani, & Dwivedi, 2019; Martínez-López et al., 2020).

Question 9 disclosed which metrics and results analyzing tools are capable to establishing the return on investment in digital strategies. According to the replies collected, the most used analysis tool was Google Analytics. This free piece of software generates traffic statistics on the internet, being able to identify the geographic location of the visitor, the operating system used and search tools, amongst other aspects. Thus, through the dissemination of a java script code, included on the analyzed website's homepage, data captured from visitors are transmitted to Google, consequently, allowing companies to analyze the obtained data and check if the results meet the objectives portrayed in their digital strategies. This software also allows the configuration of goals such as measuring the number of conversions, monitoring the path that the consumer takes to the sale or conversion page, seasonality, amongst other information of visits made by consumers (Pinochet, Pachelli, & Rocha, 2018; Solis-Martinez, Pascual Espada, Gonzalez Crespo, Pelayo G-Bustelo, & Cueva Lovelle, 2020).

The collected results are focused on the quantification of the return on investment in digital influencers. When replying to question 10, company A considers that "The most reliable way of quantifying the return on investment in influencers is through the use of discount codes by customers". In addition to company A, companies D, E and F also use discount codes to quantify the return on sales related to influencers. The use of discount codes is a tool with a high potential of attracting consumers and for quantifying the return on investment made by companies as it stimulates the purchase, keeps customers loyal, and causes consumers the feeling of exclusivity at the moment the purchase is made. A promotional code that reduces the final amount that

the customer has to pay is a strong incentive to consumption (Gilfoil & Jobs, 2012; Sette & Brito, 2020).

Question 11 examines the reliability and usefulness of the tools for analyzing results related to influencers. In this regard, companies A, B, D, E, F and G consider that the results traceability tools are useful and reliable as they identify the direct or indirect source of sales related to digital influencers. Still in this question, company C emphasizes that "… it is essential to measure and understand the results to define the next step of the digital strategy…". In this sense, the adoption of results analysis tools by companies is considered a key factor in measuring the effectiveness of digital strategies. The need to achieve the desired results gives traceability tools an important role in performance communication (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016; Wijaya, 2013).

Finally, in question 12, companies were asked about possible improvements in the current results analysis tools. According to the results obtained, companies A, C and F argue that the current tools are very comprehensive, but, nonetheless they should be more targeted to digital influencers. Companies B, D, E and G already mentioned that the current tools are useful in data analysis, however, they point out the need of specific tools to analyze each social network, since the influencers are distributed over several social networks. According to Santos and Kunz (2014) and Schwemmer and Ziewiecki (2018) although the results analysis tools help companies to measure the effectiveness of digital strategies, it is important that the tools transmit the reach and visibility that the investment in influencers produces and if it meets the previously defined digital strategy.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays, companies have to work furthermore with digital media. On the other hand, consumers interact even more in social networks, expressing their opinions and experiences about brands and products. In this context, we have often seen anonymous people becoming digital influencers where they express their opinions. As a rule, digital influencers produce and share content in innovative and creative ways, gaining loyal audiences, therefore establishing a relation of trust. This faithful and loyal audience can reach thousands of people, depending on the influencer (Sette & Brito, 2020). This research was initiated with the research question: How do digital influencers contribute to building a relationship between brands and consumers?

The results obtained from the interviews, with the seven service provider companies located in the north of Portugal, lead us to conclude that the motives for companies to adopt digital strategies based on influencers are essentially the construction / enhancement of the brand, the dissemination of products / services, to create awareness, and to increase sales. It should also be noted that the digital channels most used in digital communication strategies are Instagram and Facebook due essentially to the number of active users and the ease of communication on the part of influencers. Adjusting the research objective to the results obtained, it is possible to verify that digital influencers appear as a communication tool between brands and consumers. In this phase, it is necessary to reflect and respond to the main themes underlined by this research: How do digital influencers contribute to building a relationship between brands and consumers? As digital influencers are opinion leaders with enhanced capacity to influence society, companies increasingly choose to invest in this type of communication as a way to get closer to their customers by creating partnerships with content producers on other social networks. Being so, it is correct to say that the way influencers share experiences and opinions regarding new products and services is a factor of added value for brands and beneficial for credibility on the part of customers (Torres et al., 2019).

With this research, companies are able to anticipate why they should use digital influencers, as well as how to measure the returns of the investment made. This way, companies can make investments in a more informed way, thus reducing investment risks. When hiring digital influencers, companies can, for example, introduce tools such as Google Analytics and promotional codes in their models for evaluating digital influencers. Consequently, it is possible to compare the investment made with the return that digital influencers bring to the company. On the other hand, this research clarifies the existing literature on the subject under analysis, as well as leaving some suggestions for future lines of investigation or new knowledge can emerge.

The limitations of the present research are related to the minor sample size, only companies based in the north of Portugal were analyzed. In this sense, the results cannot be generalized. Respondents may not be aware of some technical terms covered in the interview which may have limited the collection of more robust responses.

As for future lines of investigation and due to the geographic limitation of the research, it is necessary to carry out studies in other geographical contexts. Quantitative studies should also be carried out to complement the results of the present investigation. We also suggest researchers to investigate the following questions: Is there any relationship between market segments and the adoption of influencers? Does the return on digital influencers increase company sales? Are digital influencers compensated depending on the results? In terms of value, how much does an influencer-based digital strategy cost? Should companies use digital influencers or not? If so, what are the criteria that companies should take into account when selecting digital influencers? Can digital influencers change a company's brand value?

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APPENDIX

Table 2

Summary of interviews

	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D	Company E	Company F	Company G
1)Name and position in the company	Founder and CEO	Marketing & brand activation manager	Founder and CEO	Founder and CEO	Co-founder	Founder and CEO	Finantial Director and CEO
2) What are your company's goals within digital communication strategies?	Engagement and sales	Brand building, product launch and promotion	Promote the product and create notoriety.	Product disclosure and sales increase	Build a strong brand image, increase our visibility and promote / promote our products	Reach the target audience and increase sales	Increase brand expression and notoriety, captivate a younger audience and continue to communicate with the brand's current audience.
3) Which digital channels are used in digital communication strategies?	Instagram	Brand platforms (Website, CRM), Various platforms according to each project (Google, Gmail, Remarketing)	Instagram, Facebook e Youtube	Instagram and Facebook	Instagram	Instagram and Facebook	Facebook, Instagram, sms, newsletter and website
4) What percentage of the total digital marketing budget is intended for influencers?	The budget is made monthly and is related to the products and the shipping of the products. We never pay influencers	It is not within the digital investment and I depend on the challenges that we are having throughout the year	60%	50%	It is not planned in our investment. We have the initiative to launch the products and later a study is done around the influencers	The budget is made monthly and is related to the number of hits and consequent sales, but we never pay influencers.	50% of the digital marketing budget

Table 2
Cont.

	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D	Company E	Company F	Company G
5) Of the results obtained through digital strategies, what percentage has its origin in the influencers?	About 40% of our sales come from influencers (due to the discount code) and 60% are indirectly related to them (sales without discount code)	For brand building about 15% for conversion about 5%	Sales have no identified origin	20%	25%.	40%	We were unable to directly control the results obtained. We were able to measure the notoriety gained by the brand when working with influencers
6) What are the factors that your company takes into account when hiring influencers?	The choice of influencers is divided into 2 different types: those who have a substantial engagement and will bring us sales or those who may not have much engagement, but we want them to produce content	Type of profile and type of content generated, data in addition to followers (average impressions, reach, engagement) when it is not the first time that we work with the profile, we take into account the results of previous initiatives	Number of followers and geographic location	Reach the type of audience we want, more targeted to age groups and lifestyle	The influencer's lifestyle, how he communicates with his followers, the appearance of his social network, and lastly and most importantly "what he can bring the brand"	The choice of the influencer is related to the number of followers and the target audience that we want to reach	Type of audience, charisma and way of working
7) Are there examples of successful strategies in your company's experience with digital influencers?	On Valentine's Day we sent our digital influencers the new creamy glitter with 2 cards: One has a caricature of them and in another card, we had a kind of rules about the influencing taste / personality in question	Licensing t-shirts launch, Mother's Day and Father's Day, Women's Day	Couples influencers in the week of Valentine's Day	Giveaways through social networks	Women's Day, being that the product that was being communicated were bodies and the influencer made a communication directed to the dinners and gatherings that normally exist on that day	Partnership with a beach bar where we offer some of our services. The experience was a success and most of the winners are currently our customers	Partnership with a television program presenter

Table 2
Cont.

	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D	Company E	Company F	Company G
8) Are there examples of unsuccessful strategies in your company's experience with digital influencers?	Not choosing influencers well is the only factor that makes an experiment not successful. It is necessary to analyze the target audience of an influencer very well	Do not exist	Attempted promotion through male influencers	Yes. The choice of the influencer has to be considered. At the beginning of the brand, the choice of digital influencers was not properly analyzed, and the results were not as intended	Wrong choice of the influencer. It is necessary to analyze your target audience and see if the type of communication is identified with the brand communication. If not, the results will not come	A bad choice of the influencer is what can lead to unsuccessful experiences, hence the importance of carefully analyzing the public following the influencer	Influencers of small expression that do not yet have a well-defined working method
9) What are the digital marketing metrics and the results analysis tools used by your company?	We have a table with the details of each influencer, amongst other information when we made a publication, how many sales were made that day, how many views, etc.	Analytics, data from their RSS platforms and data provided by partners (agencies and / or their influencers). In addition, there is a manual research that has to be done to evaluate some qualitative points.	Sales volume and website visitors. Google Analytics	Visitors to the site regarding sales reach through it. Balance of sales in physical stores by area / district	Google Analytics, through our website and our digital platforms	We have a table with the details of the influencer, that is, how many posts you made in a week, how many views those same posts had and how many sales you managed to generate	Metrics made available on Facebook and Instagram, analysis of comments to publications
10) How does your company quantify the return on investment in influencers?	The most reliable way is through the use of discount codes by customers, otherwise it is extremely difficult to measure since we do not ask for statistics and it is all organic.	Valorization of the generated content (what value would we have to invest to reach that result), number of visits generated to the site, number of views to the site and growth of followers in the days of actions	Does not quantify	Website visits and discount codes	Through visits to the website and discount codes	The most reliable way is through the promotional codes used by customers	The way we do the metric is measured by the notoriety that influencers transmit to the brand. An analysis of the demand generated when the product is released is made

Table 2
Cont.

	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D	Company E	Company F	Company G
11) In your opinion, what is the utility and reliability of results analysis tools to measure the return obtained through influencers?	It depends on how the company chooses to deal with influencers, in our case how the only credible way is to use a discount code, the rest that we managed to obtain as an increase in followers, an increase in views on the site, is very subjective	Very useful and important. Working with influencers has a part that will always have to be test and intuition, but it is essential to measure and perceive results in order to define the next step of the strategy and on whom we should bet for the future	–	Digital tools are useful and reliable. They help us to analyze results and make decisions, taking into account the feedback of influencers	Quite useful and important. Investment in influencers is one of the strategies of the brands, and it is necessary to understand whether we are betting on the best strategy or not. Since it is an expensive bet that has to generate profit	In our particular case, our analysis tool even goes through promotional codes, as it helps us to track the origin of the sale	I find the results analysis tools reliable and useful for companies
12) What should be improved in the current tools in order to make the traceability of results from influencers more effective?	Maybe go deeper with more data in the tables that we have about the specific influencers	It will not be so much to improve on the current tools, but rather to be able to obtain more tools and often some that help to minimize the research and manual work that still has to be done and that is difficult to measure (especially on Instagram)	There must be a specific tool or, if there is, it should be better known	I think the current tools are very useful and help brands in making decisions. However, there should be more specific tools for each social network	There should be a tool solely aimed at Instagram. A tool that brought together all the influencers (relevant in terms of content) and that through the knowledge of the brands managed to make the ideal match. Therefore, the brand would not have all the manual research work for the perfect influencer	Perhaps some tool aimed at investing in influencers, so that when choosing to invest in an influencer it is something positive and productive both for the company and for the influencer himself	It depends on the means of communication that each influencer works on and the objectives that the company has with the partnerships made. I think the current tools are useful for companies

Source: Author.