

# Influencer as Content Creators – An International Survey on Motivations, Types of Content, and Business Models

## Abstract

Today, consumers use diverse social media in a multitude of modes. Although differing across nations and age groups, such social media usage has become a global mass phenomenon. By combining personal stories with advertising content, social media users become “influencers” in the sense of marketing (Brown & Fiorella, 2013; Martínez-López et al. 2020). In this way, they act similarly to incumbent media players using awareness on their content for advertising purposes. Such influencers may differ strongly regarding their audience and their level of professionalism or prominence, respectively. Thereby, the content ranges from personal experiences in everyday life to elaborations of rather specific interests or competencies as diverse as do-it-yourself issues, food, travel, fashion, or gaming. The most successful social media influencers also stand for a new kind of celebrity (O’Reilly, 2015; Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019), often role models for their fans as well as testimonials for brands, much like traditional stars (Tan, 2017).

Among the first scholarly papers on influencers were rather functional elaborations on integrating them into marketing. Today, this perspective is complemented by a more encompassing one on the effects of influencer content, particularly on the younger generations (Reinikainen et al. 2020). Also, on a macro level, the collective effects of billions of users as content producers are studied (Bruns, 2008), being extensively marketed by specialized agencies and “multichannel networks” (PWC, 2014). This constitutes a “transmedia industry” (Mann, 2015), which impacts the film and TV business (Cunningham et al. 2016) as well as other traditional media players, which is not necessarily to the latter’s disadvantage (Kellogg, 2015). Such an economic perspective on influencers’ (potential) contributions to media industries or on the dynamics of stardom, in particular (Gaenssle & Budzinski, 2020), has only recently been addressed from a media management perspective by investigating influencers as innovative content creators and media entrepreneurs (Achtenhagen, 2008).

In our proposed contribution to WMEMC, we shall present first results from an international survey among about 50,000 influencers from the US, UK, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and Poland ranging across a wide range of quantitative followership. The data is based on a major international content marketing agency’s network and allows to cross-culturally compare findings on influencers’ motivations, on types of content, as well as on modes of operation and revenue models corresponding also to different levels of professionalism.

Our findings underline that social media influencers are entrepreneurs enticing large audiences with diverse content reflected by substantial time spent for its production, its orchestration across several platforms, and increasingly complex business models. However, the link of individual content creation with advertising activities rather comes alongside professionalization and is not the primordial driver. In this respect, influencers are no different from other content experts in creative industries who also seek to monetize the awareness they generate. Their motivations are diverse and unevenly distributed across countries with different media systems, gender of the influencer, and topics covered, but based on a general set of overall driving factors reproduced in international comparison.

**Keywords:** Influencer, marketing, content, motivation entrepreneurship, business models, innovation