

Interaction Quality of Content Creators with their Followers – A Comparative Content Analysis of Micro Youtubers and Social Media Superstars

Abstract

Over the past years, more and more brands and organizations started to work together with content creators (influencers) to promote new products or support other organizational goals. In fact, "(...) social networks are gaining a tremendous influence on consumers, companies, business, and politics and have been catapulted to the number one leading medium in recent years" (Lembke & Soyez, 2012, p. 5). Hereby, current research shows that users want authentic communication and attach great importance to the quality of social media content (ANONYM). Additionally, we know that commenting on content can have a significant influence on its impact (ANONYM). Thus, the quality of interactions seems to be an important metric. However, a lot of media managers and planners still focus on traditional metrics like reach or engagement and often neglect content or interaction quality when collaborating with influencers. Since commenting is a central activity in the realm of social media, research about the effects of social media comments on content perception gains in importance. In this study, we investigate the interaction quality of YouTubers with their subscribers in the comment section within a quasi-experimental design and quantitative content analysis as a method for data collection. The study was conducted within the "Beauty & Fashion" category. For the analysis, 2 x 5 beauty and fashion YouTubers were randomly selected from an overall population of Micro Youtubers (between 10.000 and 50.000 subscribers) and Social Media Superstars (500.000 subscribers or more). Next, we randomly selected one video from each calendar week for each of the selected youtubers as well as ten comments for each video with the help of the "Random YouTuber Picker". Thus, we came up with a representative sample of n= 4175 comments that have finally been analyzed in our content analysis.

Various chi-square tests of independence were performed to examine the relation between the content creator's category (micro youtuber vs. social media superstar) and the interaction quality with their followers (measured on 21 different comment-related variables e.g. heart emoji, thumb signal, positive or negative comment, etc.). Results show, that Micro Youtubers have a higher interaction quality with their followers than Social Media Superstars (SMS). We also find, that the relative overall amount of comments is higher for Micro YouTubers, and that negative comments occur almost exclusively for SMS. These results are discussed in the light of current insights about decreasing engagement rates when follower numbers are growing (data from a leading influencer agency) and non-linear relations between content creation frequency and audience attention (Budzinski & Gaenssle, 2020). Obviously, interaction quality as a metric must not be neglected in the context of media planning and collaborations and the interaction effects between different content creator categories (number of followers), content creator activities (e.g. frequency of content creation) and follower activities (e.g. commenting on content) should be explored more deeply.

Keywords: media management, interaction quality, media planning, organizational innovation, social media