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Influencers in Digital Marketing: The Impact of Instagram

Influencers in Brand Communication

Cara Ghaphery

Abstract

With the more prolific rise of influencers on social media platforms, companies are taking advantage of the influencer marketing strategy to advertise their products. Influencer marketing, defined generally, is a form of social media marketing with the integration of product placement by people with large social followings. As a result of the rise of influencer marketing, and the popularity of social media use, the use of influencer marketing is beneficial when considering brand communication and company revenue. This article analyzes three Instagram influencers through the examination of common themes and marketing language. Additionally, the ethical and legal implications, visual appeal, and return on investments are discussed. This study will also explore companies who advertise through influencers on Instagram and their generated growth from their social media marketing to best calculate the financial benefits of using influencer marketing. This research is beneficial in order to best understand the benefits of using influencers to market a company's product and the impact of social media marketing on the company's revenue.

Keywords: influencers, brand communication, micro-celebrity, self-branding, social media, marketing

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Introduction

As of 2020, Instagram has surpassed the 1 billion global user mark according to Insider Intelligence (Enberg, 2020). With the rise of users come the influential impact of what is known to be called, *social media influencers*. Social media influencers, according to researchers Khamis and Marwick, are individuals who have accomplished and established a unique identity and who have collected a substantial number of followers due to the establishment of personal self-presentation strategies on social media (Khamis et al., 2016; Marwick, 2013). These social media influencers gain a sense of trust and credibility with their followers which gives influencers power over purchasing decisions. As the use of social media outlets has become more prominent in today's popular culture, this has led to a new form of connectivity for companies to market products known as influencer marketing.

Companies and corporations have elevated their marketing strategies by integrating the use of social media influencer marketing. According to Woods, "With social media growing in influence and advertising agencies allocating more of their media budgets to social, the advertising industry is in search of effective strategies to get the most return on investment when it comes to social" (Woods, 2016). This tactic can be seen from popular home delivery service companies such as *Care Of*, *Thrive Market*, and *Home Chef* for which they have used marketing strategies that include the use of famous influencers over the use of celebrity endorsements to advertise products. This is due to the well-defined target markets influencers curate through their platforms. Through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and more, influencers are able to represent companies through branded content on personal social media accounts to endorse brands and the products they use.

Due to the rise of social media influencer marketing, companies are able to reach new target audiences and change the way of brand communication to their customers. This study examined the use of social media influencer marketing and how such marketing has become

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an essential marketing strategy for business growth and revenue as well as the possible ethical and legal implications that may occur.

Literature Review

Influencer marketing is a marketing strategy that has been on the rise since 2017 (Glucksman, 2017). With the market constantly evolving and ever-changing trends emerging, it can be difficult for companies to stay ahead of the curve. Influencer marketing effects to business growth have not been researched enough in scholarly articles. According to a marketing study conducted by Steven Woods, “two-thirds (67%) [of] marketers reported using influencers for content promotion and more than half (59%) reported using influencer marketing tactics for product launches and content creation” (Woods, 2016). The literature review identifies social media influencers, the impact of influencer brand communication and the possible ethical implications, the visual connection through digital rhetoric that Instagram portrays, as well as the impact of influencers on company’s return on investment. In order to best understand social media influencers in relation to brand communication and revenue growth, the research includes scholarly publications as well as academic curriculum text.

Who Are Social Media Influencers?

Social media influencers (SMIs) represent a new type of independent third-party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media. Through various social media platforms, influencers are able to connect with audiences and create their own brand recognition. Companies have since realized the impact that influencers have, and due to the persuasive power of social media influencers, tracking technologies have been created in order to identify and track influencers’ success and relevancy in relation to a brand or organization (Freberg et al, 2010). The average social media influencer gains their fame through the social network Instagram. This term has since been coined as being Instafamous which researcher Boerman defines as, “an Instagram

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influencer as any popular Instagram character with a high number of followers, who has a high taste in fashion and lifestyle, which enables them to monetize their appearance”

(Boerman, 2020). When conducting a study on sponsored posts and influencers, Woods interviewed several participants who worked for advertising agencies in New York City for which they work directly with influencers. When speaking on how the emergence of influencers started on Instagram, this was a response Woods received,

“(Working with influencers) was the main avenue before you could have Instagram sponsored posts. This was the way brands did it to promote themselves on Instagram, because you can only promote to your followers and not to other people before you could pay to do so. What people did was they worked with influencers who had like hundreds of thousands of followers on Instagram to then seed in their content. We did it with Instagram” (Woods Interview, 2016)

Through influencer’s personal image, relatability, and credibility, they are able to impact their audiences’ purchasing decisions by using word-of-mouth marketing. A study conducted by researchers Kiss and Bichler states, “The distribution of the WOM [word-of-mouth] message varies with the degree of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the consumers. One of the few empirical analyses of this effect shows that customer satisfaction has a positive impact on word-of-mouth, which in turn has a positive impact on sales and market share” (Bichler & Kiss, 2008). Since influencers hold this power, it is critical to identify their power in purchasing decisions as well as the ethical implication and legal implications.

Brand Communication and Ethical Implications

Through these popular social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, these individuals are able to *self-brand* themselves in a way that appeals to a certain audience, being their follower count. This in turn leaves the influencers to have creative freedoms on the content they are posting which may lead to issues if not branded correctly with the brand being sponsored. While in past marketing strategies it has been historically difficult to brand a person, Instagram has allowed for users to challenge this

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theory by branding themselves in any light they chose. This has since allowed changed the way marketers view the new influencer marketing brand communication.

Self-branding, as stated by researcher Khamis, “involves individuals developing a distinctive public image for commercial gain and/or cultural capital” (Khamis et al, 2016). This ability that influencer’s have to self-brand makes it attractive for companies to use their followers as target markets in order to represent a certain brand communication. This form of brand communication has been more appealing to marketers due to the instant, trusting connection the audience can have with a *micro-celebrity* over the traditional celebrity. A micro-celebrity is an influencer who can be characterized as one who has accumulated less than 10,000 followers on their social media platform (Boerman, 2020). This defined audience makes the appeal to marketers due to the smaller, well-defined target audience that has been created over the large following of the traditional celebrity in traditional marketing strategies. According to the results of a recent research study conducted on the analysis of social networking websites, “Social networking sites will become the primary arena for highly targeted marketing and advertising. Social networking sites present an unmatched opportunity to build brand” (Jothi et al, 2011). This is especially enticing for companies who are looking for an influencer and median between their intended audience and the organization who they believe share the same values and fit within the company’s branding.

With the use of influencers, comes possible ethical implications and legal actions between the company, SMI, and the audience. An example of these guides in action would be with the use of “#ad” or “#sponsored” in influencer’s social media posts to indicate the partnership with a company and the personality. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has put guides in place specifically for influencers when advertising endorsements from companies. According to a study on the FTC and influencers by William and Mary scholars,

“To protect consumers from deceptive advertising practices, the FTC requires clear and conspicuous disclosure of an endorsement when there is a material relationship

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between the influencer and the brand that a consumer might not reasonably expect. Without clear and conspicuous disclosures of these material relationships, consumers struggle to determine the nature of the relationship between the influencer and the brand promoted in any given post and to accurately evaluate how much weight to give the influencer's endorsement” (Bladow, 2018).

If the company does not disclose the partnership between the organization and the influencer, the FTC will administer a \$250,000 fine (Rodriguez, 2015). Even with these guidelines put in place as well as client contracts with the influencer, the company can still face ethical implications and legal issues once handing over creative control to the influencers signed.

Ethical implications may arise when influencers have creative freedoms on their personal social media platforms. For example, if an influencer does not believe in or even use the product, they are endorsing but continues to speak of the brand in a positive light while receiving payment from the brand (Woods, 2016). According to a study conducted by researchers on social media influencer marketing, “Since social media marketing relies on interactivity and social comparisons, seeing the brand’s products worn by characters consumers can easily identify with increases brand affinity and the urge to fulfill the needs created by social comparison” (Jin et al, 2019). Due to this, brands need to consider if the influencer is the correct fit for their company based on the influencer’s self-branding and audience demographic.

The Visual Connection

The Instagram social media platform allows for users to post not only self-branding content, but content that is visually appealing. This is something to consider when thinking about the effects of social media digital rhetoric and its impacts on purchasing behavior as well as user engagement. According to London researchers,

“...image-based features of Instagram visual content affect the digital user’s perception of such content and consequently his/her level of engagement with the image. Results show that direct gaze and high product salience have a positive influence on digital visual engagement. The image gaze can stimulate the view into

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action. This result corroborates an early assumption that faces in a photo on Instagram significantly influence digital engagement of digital publics as human faces can be considered as “one of the most powerful resources in visual imagery” (Valentini et al, 2018).

Within this research it is important to note that the majority of Instagram users are women between the ages of 18 and 30. According to a study conducted on the impact of Instagram influencers on young female users’ purchasing decision, results showed that micro-celebrities who are bloggers, or Instafamous, are to be more influential to young females¹ due to their visual portrait of relevancy that the influencer portrays on their Instagram account (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Studies have also found that the reason for engagement and visual appeal is due to the presence of faces no matter the age of gender. According to researchers at George Tech, “...the existence of a face in a photo significantly affects its social engagement. This effect is substantial, increasing the chances of receiving likes by 38% and comments by 32%” (Bakhshi, 2014). The relatable visual and digital rhetoric that the influencer portrays on their personal Instagram accounts ultimately attracts their audience and increases the influencers engagement levels. The use of digital rhetoric is important to understand when considering what attracts an organization’s target audience and how an influencer is depicting their own personal image when looking at a potential partnership.

Influencer Return on Investment

As influencer marketing continues to grow and become part of a company’s marketing strategy, it is important to understand the return on investment in order to comprehend the benefits of implementing influencer marketing over traditional marketing tactics. A research study conducted on the ROI of influencer marketing by researcher Kirkpatrick found, “...influencer marketing has the ability to trigger 11 times more return on

¹ The researcher understands the demographics of the influencers chosen within this study, those of whom are women young, white females. This is something to consider for later research in consideration of demographics in visual culture.

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investment than other forms of traditional marketing” (Kirkpatrick, 2016). During another study conducted on Twitter users, researchers also found “40% of respondents said they have purchased an item online after seeing it used by an influencer on Instagram, Twitter, Vine, or YouTube” (Swant, 2016). These social media influencers can lead to successful social media marketing campaigns that researchers have studied. According to MIT Sloan researchers, “Previous researchers have found that influencers on social media exhibit high levels of engagement in three aspects: (1) message spread (the number of times a message is forwarded, with or without modification, by the receivers); (2) influence (the number of times the message is forwarded by recipients to their friends); and (3) social impact (the number of comments and replies received for each message)” (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012). Because of the implementation of social media influencers within the social media campaign companies returns on investment have increased.

RQ1: What marketing strategies do influencers employ?

RQ2: What should marketers understand about influencers?

H1: A result of the rise of influencer marketing and the popularity of social media use, the use of influencer marketing is beneficial when considering brand communication and revenue.

Method

To answer the two research questions and hypothesis proposed, the researcher conducted a content analysis of three Instagram influencers that they personally follow who have done sponsorships with any of the following companies: *Care Of*, *Thrive Market*, or *Home Chef*. The companies chosen by the researcher have used influencer marketing and have implemented the strategy into their company marketing. The content analysis includes coding common themes and forms of language used from the artifacts based on the individual social media influencers’ personal Instagram accounts.

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The first step of this study was to conduct a content analysis. A content analysis as defined by authors Daniel Riffe, Stephen Lacy, and Frederick G. Fico is,

“Quantitative content analysis is the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption” (Fico et al, 2005).

Content analysis was chosen by the researcher in order to understand common themes and language used when these influencers post and what makes them relatable and creditable to their audience. For the content analysis, the researcher chose to focus on influencers Shawn Johnson (former USA Olympian Medalist), Sara Hopkins (Vine personality), and Gretchen Geraghty (YouTuber). These influencers were chosen based on the level of branded content posted each week as well as a substantial follower count ranging from 194,000 to 2.1 million on their personal Instagram accounts.

In order to properly analyse the artifacts presented on the influencers’ social media accounts, the researcher conducted a coding sheet in order to identify the common visuals, layouts, and language seen during the content analysis. The researcher looked for words that boasted the company, discount codes, and words pertaining to personal use of the product. The researcher also used an inductive coding approach to find emerging themes unaccounted for previously during past research.

- **Boasting of company:** The influencer speaks on company values or practices.
- **Discount codes:** The influencer has a discount code to give followers money off her purchase.
- **Personal use of product:** The influencer speaks on how the product has benefited them or how long they have been using the product themselves.

Social media influencers use their self-branding and relatability to form a sense of credibility with their followers that is desired by companies. Each of these influencers have

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curated their own individual online personalities that shows an appealing marketing strategy for popular lifestyle companies. This study focuses on the common themes and language used that helps companies in their own marketing strategies in order to create revenue.

About Care Of, Thrive Market, & Home Chef

Care Of is a vitamin and supplement delivery service that sends personalized packs of daily vitamins after taking a personalized quiz indicating your health goals, lifestyle, and values. *Care Of*, or C/O, was founded in 2016 by founders Akash Shah and Craig Elbert in New York City. The company has since flourished in sales and has recently signed a deal with to feature supplements in Target stores around the country. The organization goes by the motto of, “Everyone has a different path to personal health, and we’re here to help you find yours. We believe in the power of technology, science, and human empathy to make the journey simpler. Let us help take care of you” (Care Of, 2016). The company’s branding and overall values and mission have resonated with customers and influencers alike. *Care Of* has created a social media brand for themselves on Instagram with a total of over 238,000 followers and multiple tags from people around the world including social media influencers.

Thrive Market was created by Gunnar Lovelace, Kate Mulling, Sasha Siddhartha, and Nick Green, as an easier way to put healthy food on the table for families. The organization stated and goes by, “Everyone should have access to healthy products, reliable information, and affordable prices” (Thrive Market, 2021). The company has provided many families with healthy and sustainable products including categories such as food, wine, beauty, pets, babies and kids, and supplements. The organization has since been able to raise money for other charities, non-profits, and families in need. According to the *Thrive Market* website the company has accumulated the following analytics, “475,000+ members have donated at checkout since 2015, 392,000 healthy meals provided since 2018, \$3,600,000 raised toward food equality since 2015, and \$375,000 donated to natural disaster relief efforts since 2017”

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(Thrive Market, 2021). Showcasing healthy recipes, their charity work, and values through their Instagram posts, *Thrive Market* has gained a following of over 734,000 followers.

CEO, Pat Vihtelic created what is now known as *Home Chef*, a weekly meal delivery service that supplies customers with weekly fresh and portioned out ingredients to achieve a chef recipe from the comfort of your home. According to the *Home Chef* website, “...simplicity is our mantra. From online to doorstep...to your kitchen table, we make planning and preparing a home-cooked meal simple, intuitive and inspirational every step of the way” (Home Chef, 2021). Customers can choose the meals based on their needs and preferences as well as their dietary restrictions. One is then able to customize the features of the dish by upgrading, swapping or even doubling the protein portion on the recipes chosen. The recipes including the fresh ingredients to make them are then sent to the customer’s door to cook for themselves and their families. The organization has grown since the start in 2013 and according to the company, “Last year, we delivered over 10 million meals and expanded our delivery to cover more than 97% of the U.S. population” (Home Chef, 2021). Customers have also shown the love for the meal delivery company on the *Home Chef* Instagram with a total of over 212,000 followers. The posts on their social media consist of food pictures of the recipes customers can purchase and make from the comfort of their homes.

Findings

This study found that the use of influencer marketing within company marketing strategies provides audience reach and high engagement levels, but the return on investment must include the organizations traditional marketing strategy and initial investments to understand the potential for growth.

Instagram Influencer Marketing

This research found that influencers, big or small in follower count, are able to connect with their followers on a personal level by the use of their personal social media

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platforms. Influencers, like Johnson, Hopkins, and Geraghty, use Instagram as a way to easily connect with their audiences in order to show their day-to-day activities and lifestyle. This then gives their followers a sense of reliability and personal connection in order to trust the influencer to impact their purchasing decisions. The ability for influencers to have a say in their audience's purchasing power then leads to company's interest in partnerships that benefit both the influencer and the brand.

In order to understand the language and themes used by influencers in order to gain a sense of trust, relatability, and credibility, the researcher analysed current Instagram stories and posts by Johnson, Hopkins, and Geraghty. Between the three social media accounts and their individual content, each influencer used words from the standpoint of helping the audience in some way. For example, using the word you interchangeably with their own personal thoughts on the company and products offered. This then gives the followers a connection that the service or product will benefit them while also making a connection with the influencer. The content analyses conducted helped to further answer RQ1 and RQ2, what marketing strategies do influencers employ, and what should marketers understand about influencers? The method also helped to evaluate the researcher's hypothesis, that as a result of the rise of influencer marketing and the popularity of social media use, the use of influencer marketing is beneficial when considering brand communication and revenue.

Content Analysis: Shawn Johnson

Shawn Johnson is a 29-year-old white female who is married to former, white NFL player Andrew East. Together the two have one daughter, Drew, and another one on the way. Former Olympic medal winning gymnast for team USA, Shawn Johnson has used her Instagram to connect with over 2.1 million followers. Johnson advertises herself in her Instagram biography as, "Wife. Mom. Olympian. NYT Bestselling Author. #family #parenting" (Shawn Johnson Instagram, 2021). Giving an insight into what her Instagram

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posts and lifestyle are all about. Shawn's Instagram posts usually consist of her personal life including pictures of her family, important events in her life, as well as sponsorships and endorsements of brands she works with, as seen in P1. Along with her husband Andrew East, the couple has shown their journey through having their first child and are currently allowing followers to join them for their second pregnancy as well. Johnson utilizes her Instagram daily using Instagram stories to update her followers and engage with them, usually including a sponsored swipe up link with a promotional code.

Shawn has partnered with *Care Of*, *Thrive Market*, and *Home Chef* and includes her lifestyle within every post or story. When conducting Shawn's content analysis, the researcher found the connection to her busy everyday lifestyle and how the companies benefit herself and her family. As seen in Table 1, Johnson boasts the individual brands by using phrases such as, "the best", "I use this everyday", and "we have been ordering their meals for over a year now" (Johnson, 2021). Johnson also shows the packaging, box, or products within each Instagram story that includes a swipe up link at the bottom of the Instagram story for followers and viewers to go directly to the website to order using her code. This then gives the audience a quick and easy way to make a purchasing decision right away or to visit the company website for more information.

Shawn Johnson's content on her personal Instagram account has made it easier for followers to make a connection with her because of the way she shows her own personal life through her posts as seen in P1. This has also made it easier for companies to look at her personal brand and see if it matches with their own for potential partnerships in the future.

Content Analysis: Sara Hopkins

Sara Hopkins is a 30-year-old white female who is married to former, white male Vine personality Robby Ayala. Together they have a son, Aidan, and two dogs, Chico and Lily. Sara Hopkins is a former Vine personality who has accumulated a following on

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Instagram of over 215,000 followers. Her biography on her Instagram reads, “Recently made a person, ATL” (Sara Hopkins Instagram, 2021). Similar to Shawn Johnson, Sara also shows her everyday lifestyle through her Instagram story posts and stories, as seen in P2. She features her husband, Robby Ayala, and her child on her page as well as her two dogs. Sara’s Instagram feed focuses a lot on her family with a few sponsored posts, but not too many. Her content also includes personal comedic posts of short skits that she has created for her followers.

Sara is a partner with *Care Of* and *Home Chef* and includes her family as well as herself in the promotions created. During Hopkins content analysis, as seen in Table 2, she spoke a lot about how she was excited to work with the companies including phrases such as, “Every time I see someone doing a sponsored post by them, I want to work with them” and “I love them” (Hopkins, 2021). Sara shows her excitement for each product and brand values as seen in Table 2 for each of her sponsored ads. This also includes involving other members of her family such as her mother and even a subtle nod towards making her own mother an influencer as well.

Along with the posts and Instagram stories, Sara saves many of her stories and puts them into highlights that followers and others visiting her Instagram can view. One of the highlights she has created is completely dedicated to her partnership with *Care Of*. This is also a great way for future brands to see the content that she is able to create and what she is able to do for the company sponsorship within their partnership.

Content Analysis: Gretchen Geraghty

Gretchen Geraghty is a 24-year-old white female. She is a YouTube personality with an Instagram following of over 194,000 followers on her personal Instagram account. Her personality is showcased in her Instagram biography which reads, “Host of Happy Hour Podcast, Puppy mama” (Gretchen Geraghty Instagram, 2021). Gretchen posts a lot about her

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lifestyle and has posted more content related to sponsorships than influencers Shawn Johnson and Sara Hopkins. Although her posts do consist of herself, boyfriend, travels, and her dog, Gretchen also includes sponsored content within her posts that can be seen in the background or forefront of the image, see P3.

Gretchen is a partner with *Care Of* and *Thrive Market* which she personally does on her own and references herself within her promotions. When conducting Gretchen's content analysis, as seen in Table 3, she refers to the audience more by using the word you more often. For example, some phrases she stated were, "very important as the seasons change to take care of your immune health" and "Vitamins are the easiest way to support your health" (Geraghty, 2021). Geraghty connects with her audience by showing how the product or service will benefit them which in turn creates a sense of trust and credibility when making a purchase decision.

Aside from her posts, further research revealed she also conducts paid promotions on her YouTube channel which furthers her audience connectivity. Her paid promotions also include the partners featured on her Instagram including *Care Of* and *Thrive Market* where she gives further in-depth advertisements within her video content. This can also be of interest to potential companies when looking for a potential partnership with the influencer because of another audience connectivity aside from her Instagram following.

Influencer Marketing Impact

Influencer marketing, as seen in the researcher's study, is an implementation that is worth considering for brands to connect with a new audience and demographic. To answer RQ1 and RQ2, as seen in the researcher's study, influencers have created a connection with their followers through creating a sense of reliability through showing their lifestyle and day-to-day activities. Due to this, the influencer is able to connect with brands and show their personal audience a brand's product or service through boasting the partnered company,

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using the featured product or service, and having personal discount codes for incentive of a purchasing decision for followers.

Marketers should understand the values and image that the potential partnership or influencer portrays and the possibilities of ethical and legal implications that may arise. Understanding influencer guidelines, contracts, and other legal actions is important for a company to know in order to advertise in the correct manner when using influencer marketing to benefit the company and the influencer alike. As shown in this study, creative control is given to influencers once guidelines and postings begin on the social media influencer's personal page. This is something to consider when giving an outside influence control and to feel secure about a partnership ahead of time if so.

The content analysis conducted by the researcher shows the positive impacts of brand promotion in influencer marketing through word-of-mouth marketing. As stated previously, word-of-mouth marketing is one of the most powerful forms of marketing when coming from someone that is trusted, reliable, and credible. When making this connection with followers, influencers' positive word-of-mouth marketing and discount code incentives can lead to an easier purchasing decision made by the viewers of the post of social media platform story. This is something for marketers to take into account when considering including an influencer in their marketing tactics in order to spread the word about their product or service to receive sales in return.

Discussion

The current study enhances the understanding of social media influencers and their ability to create a platform to use self-branding, marketing tactics, and audience connectivity to their advantage. The findings in this study support the two research questions proposed by the researcher, what marketing strategies do influencers employ? And what should marketers understand about influencers? As seen by the findings within this study, influencers create

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content and use a certain language that connects with their audience on a personal level in order to gain a sense of reliability, credibility, and trust in their product recommendations. This in turn leads to an influential impact on audiences' purchasing decisions which marketers should best understand to employ in their own company marketing strategies.

Based on the key findings within this research, this analysis supports the hypothesis that a result of the rise of influencer marketing and the popularity of social media use, the use of influencer marketing is beneficial when considering brand communication and revenue. By using content analysis and relevant frameworks, the study brings awareness to the potential positive impacts influencer marketing can have for a brand in order to connect with a well-defined target audience. This study may be further analysed when considering the use of an influencer vs other traditional marketing tactics within a company's marketing strategy.

Due to the lack of public data on specific company revenue for the companies selected for this research, *Care Of*, *Thrive Market*, and *Home Chef*, the quantifiable data that influencer marketing has brought to each company cannot be supported. Further studies should take into account the product or service the organization is attempting to advertise and recognize the best possible marketing tactics for their individual company and sales goals.

Conclusion

With the increase of social media users every day, social media influencers have emerged to create a new way to advocate brand communication for companies' marketing strategies. By studying the themes, marketing language used, and use of digital rhetoric by Instagram influencers, the research shows the significance of micro-celebrity word-of-mouth marketing and identifies the strong correlation between audience purchasing decisions and increase of brand revenue. Common themes or languages that occur may include the use of brand promotion, connectivity to product use implemented within the influencer's day-to-day lifestyle, and the promotion of discount codes attached with a swipe up link to help speed up

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the audiences' purchasing decision. This suggests that companies should consider the role of influencer marketing within their marketing strategies when looking to promote a product or service to a direct target-audience that an influencer may provide based on their demographic.

Future research into social media influencers and other micro-celebrities in brand communication should focus on the different platforms that are being created and the ways in which these influencers are connecting with their individualized audiences to promote their personal self-branding. Additionally, while this study focused on Instagram influencers and the means of brand communication of products, data analysis is required to gain more insight into the impacts on revenue for an individual company-to investigate, for example, whether using influencer marketing is beneficial to implement within a company's marketing strategy for a product or service.

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Table 1*Shawn Johnson: Influencer Coding Sheet*

Influencer: Shawn Johnson Instagram: @shawjohnson Number of Followers: 2.1M Date: 04/13/2021 Coder: Cara Ghaphery	Care Of Partner? Yes	Thrive Market Partner? Yes	Home Chef Partner? Yes
Boasting Company	-“I use this everyday” -“Take care of yourself, take your vitamins, these are the vitamins that I have been taking” -“Awesome, go online and fill out a short quiz on what you need” -“It’s the best for self-love”	-“The best snacks for us and Drew” -“Best food ever” -“Love Thrive, can shop online and filter based on dietary restrictions” “Shop by your diet and preferences” -“Awesome selection and delivers right to your door” -Pointing to certain products and stating how great it is and can’t live without” -“Have to have snacks stocked at all times and they have the best”	-“Busy schedule” -“Can go 12 hours and not realize you haven’t eaten all day” -“First discovered Home Chef during the busiest time in our life” -“Home Chef makes it easy for us to cook at home, and feel good about what we’re eating – a win-win!” -“We have been ordering their meals for over a year now”
Discount Code	“Swipe up and use code EAST for 50% off your first order”	“Swipe up for 25% off your first order and a free gift!”	“Swipe up and use code SHAWN90”
Use of Product	-Shows packaging and how it comes in the box -Boomerang video of taking pill package out of the box	-Unboxing package -Shows website and what they rebuy -Tells how they eat/prepare certain foods -Shows items in pantry	- Showing herself and husband making a meal - Unboxing package and what food they received
Other	Has an Instagram highlight of all of her partners titled “Face Products” that include all of the Instagram story paid promotions including #ad #(brand endorsement). Has done past YouTube video and blog posts for Home Chef. Has another sponsor Athletic Greens		

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Table 2*Sara Hopkins: Influencer Coding Sheet*

Influencer: Sara Hopkins Instagram: @sayhop Number of Followers: 215K Date: 04/13/2021 Coder: Cara Ghaphery	Care Of Partner? Yes	Thrive Market Partner? No	Home Chef Partner? Yes
Boasting Company	-“I’ve wanted these vitamin packs for so long” -“Every time I see someone doing a sponsored post by them, I want to work with them” -“I’m glad I took this quiz because I did not know I needed B complex” -Excited about new pill package and a certain pill -Compostable packaging -“How cute” -“I got my mom on it!”		Her and her mother making it “I love them” “I’m going to make her [referring to her mother] an influencer today!” Has her mother speaking like a TV host “Welcome to cooking with SayHop, brought to you by Home Chef” Saying it together with her mom “Swipe up and get \$90 off”
Discount Code	SAYHOP for 50% off your first order		SARAHOPKINS90 (swipe up link added to story)
Use of Product	-Shows herself taking the short, personalized quiz -Shows unboxing and states how clean the packaging is -Easy to grab everyday -Shows “Today’s quote” on packaging -Shows taking all of the different daily pills		Showing a recipe, they are cooking together
Other	Has an Instagram story highlight just for Care Of partnership and all of the compiled Instagram stories of the different ads starting from 42 weeks ago.		

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Table 3*Gretchen Geraghty: Influencer Coding Sheet*

Influencer: Gretchen Geraghty Instagram: @gretchengeraphty Number of Followers: 194K Date: 04/13/2021 Coder: Cara Ghaphery	Care Of Partner? Yes	Thrive Market Partner? Yes	Home Chef Partner? No
Boasting Company	-“One of the easiest things you can do for your health” -“Makes it easier to get into a routine [using the individual daily packets]” -“Very important as the seasons change to take care of your immune health” -“Taking care of my immune system, energy levels are some of my personal goals” -“Totally recommend and you can get 50% off with my code!” -“Vitamins are the easiest way to support your health”	-“My Thrive Market box just came in the mail” -“I’m always on their website poking around trying to look for stuff because it’s just so convenient and specifically at this moment in life working from home, life at home, and a dealing with a new puppy” -“So convenient to get all of my groceries and snacks” -“If you didn’t know Thrive Market is by far my most favourite healthy living market, healthy living in general.” -“ It’s more than wholesome food, organic snacks they also have clean beauty, clean home products”	
Discount Code	“For 50% off your first Care/of order, enter GG50 at check out”	“Go to Thrivemarket.com/Gretchen to try Thrive Market risk-free for 30 days and choose a free gift up to \$22 value!”	
Use of Product	Shows herself taking the personalized quiz Shows the vitamins she takes everyday and what they are for	Unboxes new box and shows what she got in it Showing each product and how she prepares the snacks	
Other	Has Instagram highlight of all of her discount codes and recommendations for her followers. Also does paid promotions for all of her companies on her YouTube channel for longer advertisements.		

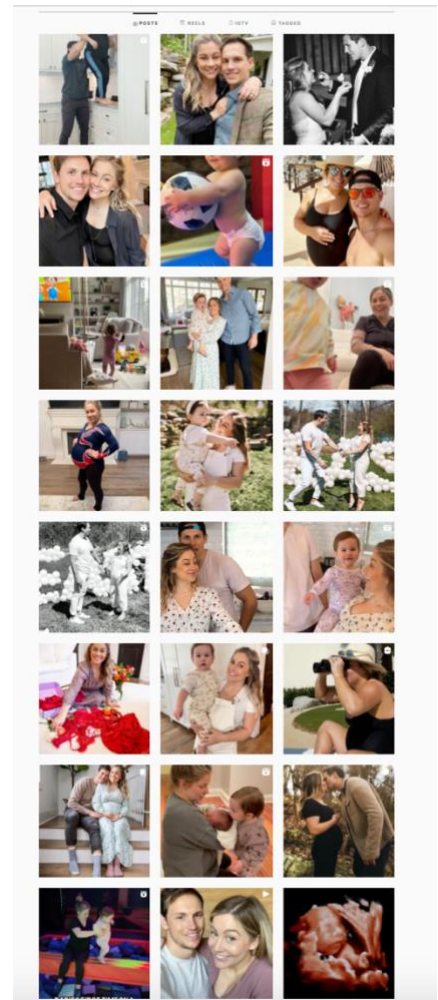
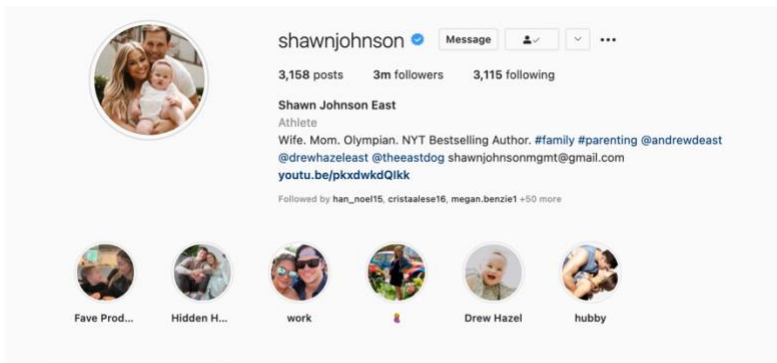
P1:

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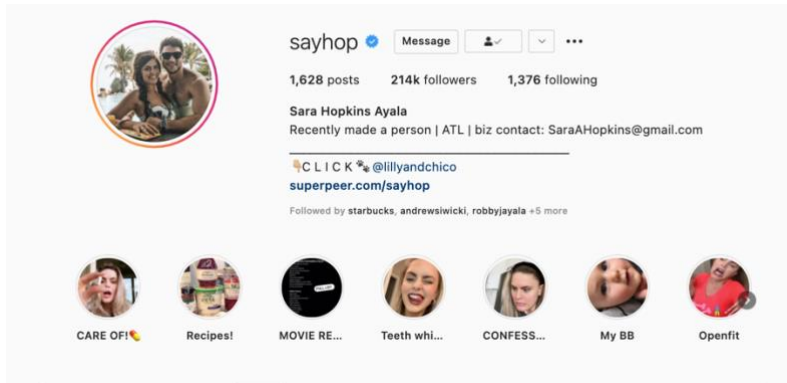
Shawn Johnson Instagram Profile



P2:

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Sara Hopkins Instagram Profile



sayhop Message Profile More

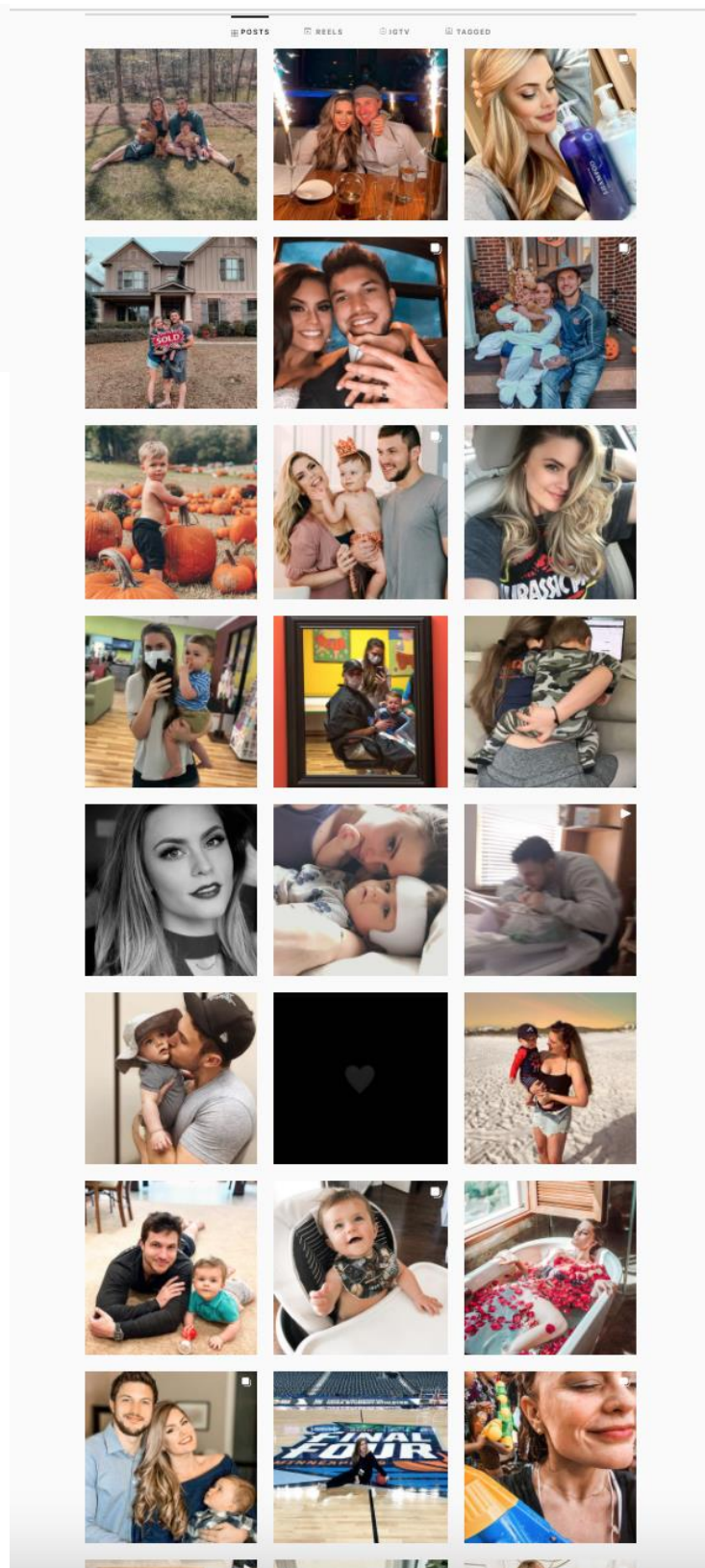
1,628 posts 214k followers 1,376 following

Sara Hopkins Ayala
Recently made a person | ATL | biz contact: SaraAHopkins@gmail.com

CLICK @lillyandchico
superpeer.com/sayhop

Followed by starbucks, andrewsiwicki, robbyjayala +5 more

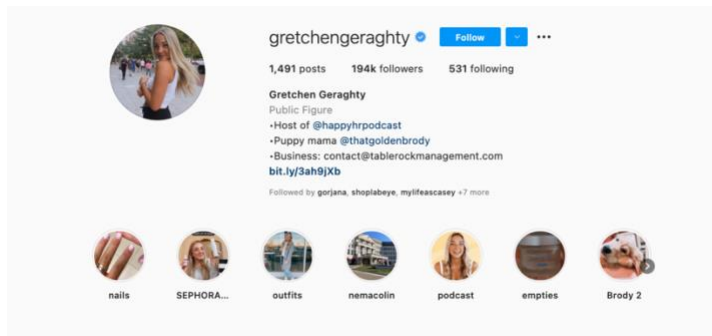
CARE OF! Recipes! MOVIE RE... Teeth whi... CONFESS... My BB Openfit



P3:

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Gretchen Geraghty Instagram Profile



gretchengeraghty Follow ...

1,491 posts 194k followers 531 following

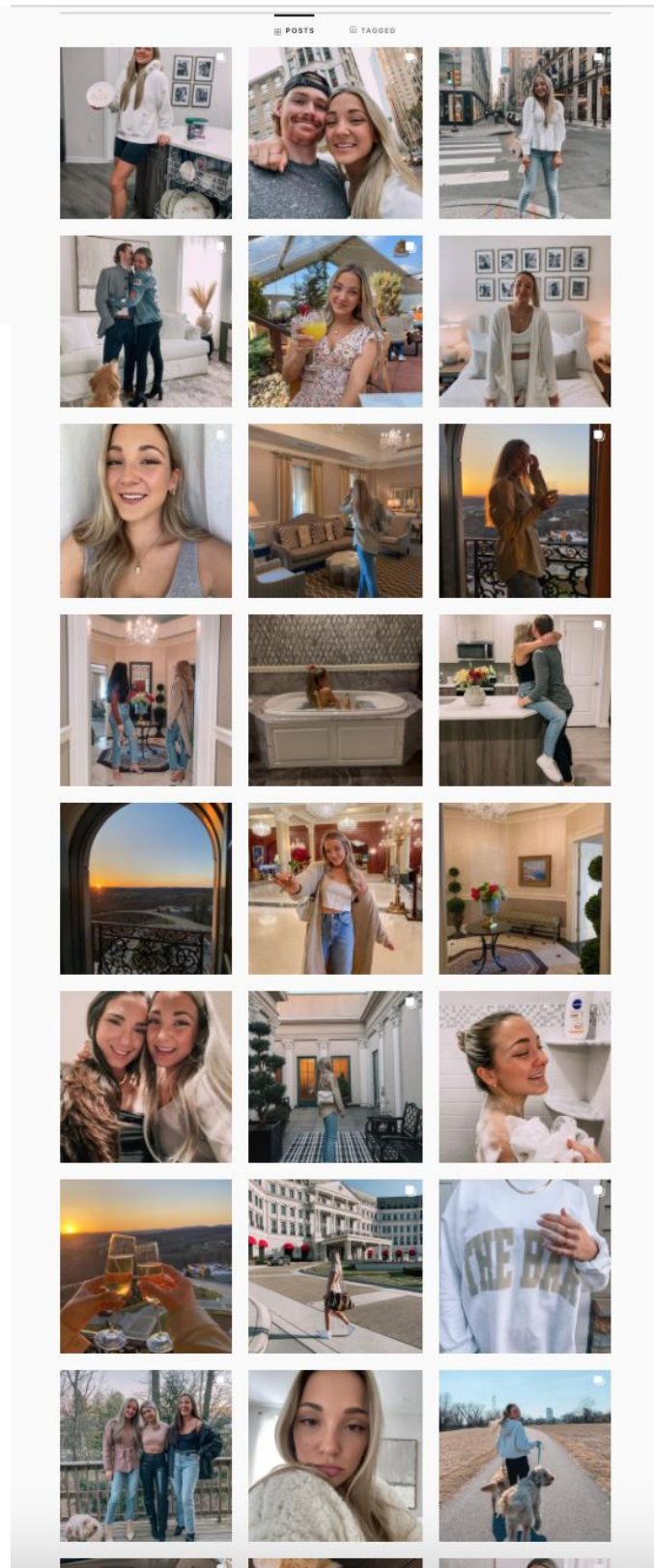
Gretchen Geraghty
Public Figure

- Host of @happyhrpodcast
- Puppy mama @thatgoldenbrody
- Business: contact@tablerockmanagement.com

bit.ly/3ah9jXb

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