



THE INFLUENCER AS A NEW PROFESSION IN THE LABOUR MARKET IN STUDENTS' POINT OF VIEW

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Abstract. Individuals, when making purchase decisions (among others), often rely on the opinions of third parties, including influencers. Their presence is not a new phenomenon; however, this profession has been re-explored in academia and has recently become subject to legal regulation. The aim of this article is to present the utilisation of social media and social networking sites by the information society, as well as to characterise the profession of influencer and influencer marketing, and to discuss the results of research conducted for academic purposes, which were utilised in the author's master's thesis.

INFLUENCER JAKO NOWY ZAWÓD NA RYNKU PRACY W OPINIACH STUDENTÓW

Słowa kluczowe: Internet, społeczeństwo informacyjne, social media, portale społecznościowe, influencer, influencer marketing

Streszczenie. Jednostki, podejmując decyzje zakupowe (i nie tylko), często posiłkują się opinią osób trzecich, w tym influencerów. Ich obecność nie jest nowym zjawiskiem, jednak od niedawna zawód ten jest ponownie eksplorowany w nauce, a także regulowany prawnie. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie wykorzystania social mediów i portali społecznościowych przez społeczeństwo informacyjne, a także charakterystyka zawodu influencera i influencer marketingu oraz omówienie wyników badań przeprowadzonych w celach naukowych, wykorzystanych w pracy magisterskiej autorki.

Introduction

The internet revolution, ongoing since the creation of the ARPANET network in 1969, has had a tremendous impact on our reality (Pudełko, 2017, p. 33). Thanks to access to the Internet, we have the ability to perform many activities remotely, without leaving home, and we also benefit from an unlimited amount of information. Today's society, known as the *information society* or *society 4.0*, can create, collect, and share this information (Stopczyńska, 2021, pp. 24, 25). Moreover, the increase in the bandwidth of internet connections has made the digitalization of machines and services commonplace – which affects the labour market and contributes to the emergence of the so-called “fourth industrial revolution” (Gajdzik, Grabowska, 2018, p. 223) and the characterization of contemporary society as informational (Nowak, 2008, p. 36).

One of the proofs of the changes surrounding us is the transfer of many areas of life to the Internet, as well as the possibility of real-time communication through emails, messengers, or social networking sites. Currently, organizations use them to promote their products and services, which is relatively inexpensive compared to traditional advertising forms. Thanks to social networking sites, they have the opportunity to make contact with potential customers (Stopczyńska, 2021, p. 113). Given that Internet users are more likely to be influenced by the opinions of other users (Bartosik-Purgat, 2016, p. 14), a new branch of marketing has emerged, namely *influencer marketing*. It is a type of marketing in which influencers convey marketing messages to their audience through social media services. In this way, they influence their viewers and encourage them to purchase products or use the services of a given company (Karcz, Wasilewski, 2021, p. 4). Over time, being an influencer has become a profitable profession due to the popularity of using their images as brand ambassadors (Babicz, 2023). The purpose of this article is to discuss issues related to the profession of an influencer – from the information society, social media to influencer marketing. Subsequently, some research results carried out for the sake of the author's master's thesis will be presented.

Information society – definition

According to Tomasz Goban-Klas, an information society is a type of society where people not only possess advanced information processing abilities, but also the processing of this information itself contributes to the generation of national income and provides a source of livelihood for the majority of society (Goban-Klas, Sienkiewicz, 1999, p. 53). Janusz Gnitecki describes it as a technical civilization, whose priority is knowledge and information. Furthermore, adaptation to new technologies is not difficult for it, as individuals easily create creative mechanisms for creating, collecting, and transmitting information, which becomes one of the states of human consciousness. They also strive to improve humans to the extent that they can meet the requirements of modern civilization. The author emphasizes that these concepts are significant factors in civilizational changes (Gnitecki, 2005, p. 83). Kinga Stopczyńska aptly notes that the current representative of the information society is a person who actively participates in social life but places increasing emphasis on activities conducted in the online space, especially on social networking sites. Thanks to them, it is easy to make contact with people with similar interests and participate in discussions on various social, cultural, or political matters (Stopczyńska, 2021, p. 41).

Use of social media and networking sites in the labour market

One of the aspects characterising the information society is the entry into a new stage of Internet development – Web 2.0, which focuses on content delivery and information exchange through tools created for this purpose, referred to as *social media* (Bartosik-Purgat, 2016, p. 12). Magdalena Grębosz, Dagna Siuda, and Grzegorz Szymański define social media as internet portals that facilitate interaction between users through websites or applications. Thanks to social media, an Internet user can create their own profile on a chosen platform and select a group of recipients with whom they intend to share their content, as well as view content from other people (Grębosz, Siuda, Szymański, 2016, p. 16). It is worth adding that the process of content creation in social media differs from that in traditional media, as in the case of online social media the user becomes both the broadcaster and the recipient of content (Dzik, 2017, p. 120). There are many reasons why people use social media. These include: the desire to establish and maintain relationships with other people; the need to make new

acquaintances; pressure from the environment that already uses social media; observing others and the need to belong to a social group (Miotk, 2017, p. 25). As Paul Levinson notes, “all new media have a social character, [...] their primary purpose is connecting people, building relationships” (Levinson, 2010, p. 18).

Anna Szwajlik and Kamila Słupińska point out that currently social media are used not only for interactions between people. They play a key role in building relationships between companies and their customers. It is through social networking sites that companies can easily and quickly reach their customers, and customers, in turn, can easily contact companies and express their opinions about products and services (Szwajlik, Słupińska, 2017, p. 367). Moreover, thanks to social media, employers have the opportunity to inform potential employees about available job positions and the requirements for candidates for a given position. Employees, in turn, can express their opinions about workplaces and establish contacts with other employees for networking purposes (Bartosik-Purgat, 2016, p. 131).

Paweł Frankowski and Arvind Juneja define social networking sites as “a type of online communities grouped in a specific internet service, whose users satisfy their need for contact with other people through the exchange of information, experiences, and interests. They typically serve to increase the sense of belonging to a specific social group. Their characteristic feature is extensive interaction between users” (Frankowski, Juneja, 2016, p. 16). Two types of platforms are distinguished among social media: internet messengers and social networking services. Both types are characterised by high interactivity and mobility, enabling users to establish contacts, browse, comment on, and share content of interest to them. However, they differ in the way they are used and the functions they perform. Social networking sites are divided into sites transmitting visual content, sites focused on communication and maintaining interpersonal relationships, and virtual social worlds (Bartosik-Purgat, 2016, p. 16, 19). They allow, among other things, the creation of personal profiles, building user lists, sending private messages to other service users, creating and joining interest groups, and creating and sharing content (Frankowski, Juneja, 2016, p. 16).

The pandemic and associated socio-economic changes have accelerated the digitalisation process. Algorithms of social networking sites enable customer segmentation and also tailor company offers to them. Search engines are increasingly accurately selecting page rankings – according to users’ needs, and the growing popularity of online shopping facilitates the collection of data on purchasing preferences (Mruk, 2022, p. 12). In response to these changes, new

methods and channels of brand communication with potential customers have also emerged. Marketing content has become more personalised and is mainly available online. This means that brand ambassadors and customer service representatives are more accessible to their followers (Stopczyńska, 2021, p. 127). The effectiveness of companies' marketing activities on social networking sites is mainly determined by the reach of published content, audience engagement in interaction with the brand, and the frequency of posting (Grębosz, Siuda, Szymański, 2016, p. 58). Nonetheless, the opinion of another person about services or products remains important. Brands have started to use marketing in which influencers play a key role for this purpose.

Influencers and influencer marketing

Before the advent of social media, influential individuals included celebrities, politicians, athletes, and actors, known primarily from traditional media. Companies recognized the potential of these individuals and began to use their image in marketing activities, creating so-called brand ambassadors. However, customers expect opinions from their own surroundings before deciding to use a company's offer. With the development of social media, more and more people began to reject declarations from famous personalities in favour of content created by bloggers and influencers. In a report by the research agency IQS on the role of influencers in Poland, it was noted that 96% of Polish residents follow at least one influencer profile or channel (Marketing przy kawie, 2021). It can be said that today, influencers are seen as more than just influential people. Their activity on the Internet is treated as work consisting of promoting and expressing opinions about products or services, for which they are remunerated (Kuczamer-Kłopotowska, Piekarska, 2018, pp. 164-165).

The classification of professions and specialities assigns the profession of an influencer (other names: brand promoter, trendsetter) to the group of professions related to public relations, advertising, marketing, and sales (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, 2018, pp. 3, 15). Renata Ochoa-Dąderska and Agnieszka Chęcińska-Kopiec define an influencer as a person who influences the decisions or opinions of others and has lasting relationships with a wide audience that strongly identifies with them. They usually deal with lifestyle, fashion, travel, or marketing topics, and they are distinguished by passion, knowledge, and familiarity with the subject. Their work involves building trust among potential customers, who consider their advertising messages more

authentic, and their opinions true (Ochoa-Dąderska, Chęcińska, 2018, pp. 100-101). As Justyna Fabijańczyk and Agata Cupriak point out, influencers have a greater impact on people than celebrities. They are able to effectively attract the attention of recipients, arouse their interest and desires, and most importantly motivate them to action. In times when we are dealing with an endless amount of data and quickly lose attention, the ability to advertise something in a way that is interesting to the recipient is an extremely valuable skill (Fabijańczyk, Cupriak, 2016, pp. 16, 30). As Dobrosława Mruk-Tomczak emphasizes, “it is the trust in the influencer that determines whether the person who follows them perceives the recommendations as true, based on facts, and impartial. The mere act of following an influencer is an independent choice of the consumer, hence the level of trust in them is higher compared to a celebrity promoting a specific product” (Mruk-Tomczak, 2022, p. 274). Due to their activities in the media, influencers are divided into:

- a) idols, who have loyal fans;
- b) experts, specialising in the fields they cover in their content;
- c) lifestylers, who know trends and cover a variety of topics;
- d) activists, who create direct messages and encourage change;
- e) artists, who create visually pleasing content (Górecka-Butora, Strykowski, Biegun, 2019, pp. 29-46).

The briefly described profession of an influencer is closely related to the term *influencer marketing*. This is a form of marketing in which the influencer plays a key role, communicating with their followers through digital platforms and conveying specific advertising messages, influencing consumers’ opinions about a brand, product, or service (Karcz, Wasilewski, 2021, p. 4). Annually, the number of companies using influencer marketing and perceiving it as an effective tool for communicating with customers is increasing, as opinion leaders have a significant impact on their followers’ purchasing decisions, influencing the choice of a specific product (Fabijańczyk, Cupriak, 2016, p. 17). Additionally, influencers strive to create a natural emotional bond with their followers. Thanks to this approach, potential customers treat the influencer as a friend, believing in their objectivity and knowledge about a specific product (Fabijańczyk, Cupriak, 2016, pp. 14-73). Moreover, opinion leaders often combine messages on social media, adapting them to all the services on which they have an account (Stopczyńska, 2021, p. 136). The collaboration of opinion leaders with companies should be based primarily on mutual trust, as organizations do not have full control over the influencer and are unable to constantly monitor the content they publish

on social networking sites (Górecka-Butora, Strykowski, Biegun, 2019, p. 26). The profession of an influencer is dynamically developing, but unfortunately, it is not always taken seriously. The reasons for this situation are diverse and include, among others, “buying” followers, advertising non-existent things (scam), promoting pathological behaviours that negatively impact the reputation of creators and the community that follows them, and engaging in public quarrels, commonly referred to as *dramas* (Czubkowska, Wątor, 2023).

In 2022, for the first time in Poland, the phenomenon of influencer marketing was included in the academic discourse. The Faculty of Journalism, Information, and Book Studies at the University of Warsaw organized a scientific conference titled *Transparent Influencer Marketing – A New Era of Functioning?*. During this event, among other things, legal issues related to influencer marketing were discussed, and the importance of education for both influencers and Internet users was emphasized (Kałucka, 2022, p. 1204). It is also important to investigate how the profession of an influencer is perceived by representatives of different age groups, which is why the author’s research focused on the profession of an influencer in the labour market in the opinions of students. Some of the research results will be presented in the further part of the article.

Research results

The main goal of the research used in the master’s thesis was to understand students’ opinions about the profession of an influencer and to analyse factors that may differentiate these opinions. The research also aimed to answer the question of what students’ opinions are about the profession of an influencer. The research tool used was a survey questionnaire. The research was conducted among 85 students using a form on the Google Forms platform, and the link to the questionnaire was shared on a group gathering students of Kazimierz Wielki University on the social networking site Facebook. Below, the most important parts of the research will be presented. The first aspect addressed in the research was the profession of an influencer in the opinions of the surveyed students, where their task was to indicate whether the activities of an influencer can be defined as a profession.

Table 1. Students' opinions on defining influencer activities as a profession ($N = 85$)

No.	Answers	Total	
		Number of respondents	%
1.	Yes	26	30.6
2.	Hard to tell	50	58.8
3.	No	9	10.6
4.	Total	85	100.0

Source: Own research.

Analysing the data from the above table, it can be noticed that 58.8% of the students participating in the study have difficulty determining whether the tasks performed by an influencer can be called a profession. A positive response was indicated by 30.6% of respondents, while 10.6% believed that the tasks of an influencer cannot be considered a profession.

Next, the respondents were asked to justify why they believe that the tasks performed by an opinion leader can or cannot be defined as a profession. Respondents who considered the influencer to be a profession pointed out that such a person receives remuneration for promoting products and has the opportunity for development through cooperation with companies. However, for those who did not consider the activities of an influencer as a profession, it was rather an additional job, a hobby, or a temporary way of life. As one respondent indicates: “[...] *they earn money for it, but actually they don't do anything extraordinary, they are paid for showing normal, human things, I don't see anything more valuable in it that would give any basis to call it a profession. A colleague can record a shopping haul for me and it may interest me, but the fact that a person I don't know shows on some platform that a brand sent her products and she shows them to us, is for me a completely irrelevant matter, and even irritating, because it shows in what unreal reality she lives, where everything she does is untrue. Because who among us, ordinary people gets something for free? And besides, how do I know if the things she shows, because she got them for free, are really as good as she recommends? Therefore, such a person cannot be assigned the role of a guru in recommending actual products or services, so for me, as a recipient, it's just uninteresting and useless content*”. From the statement, it is clear that the respondent does not consider being an opinion leader as a profession, as he does not see any innovation or creativity in it. In his opinion, even a friend can perform the same actions as influencers, such as showing their purchases. Additionally, the respondent

expresses doubts about the quality of the products presented by influencers, whether they are really good, or whether they are promoted due to cooperation or receiving them for free.

In contrast to the above statement, the opinion of another respondent who agrees with the assertion that the activities of influencers can be considered a profession is cited: *They have their duties, they perform given assignments, which they devote their time and commitment to, just like any other job.* In this case, the respondent emphasizes that being an influencer requires a significant amount of time and engagement in their activities.

Next, the respondents were asked to determine the characteristics of an influencer. The responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' opinions on the characteristics an influencer should possess ($N = 85$)

No.	Feature	Total	
		Number of respondents	%
1.	Influential person	43	50.6
2.	Trustworthy person	14	16.5
3.	Brand ambassador	40	47.1
4.	Person with a large number of followers	65	76.5
5.	Controversial figure	14	16.5
6.	Family-friendly individual, creating content tailored to platform algorithms	12	14.1
7.	Person without character, merely executing advertisers' commissions	15	17.6
8.	Individual living in luxury	7	8.2
9.	"Walking advertisement"	27	31.8
10.	Person "knowledgeable in their field", expert in their domain	15	17.6
11.	Other	3	3.5

Source: Own research.

From the above data, it emerges that respondents most often perceive influencers as people with a large number of followers (76.5%), having an influence on others (50.6%), and being brand ambassadors (47.1%). A significantly smaller percentage of respondents characterize opinion leaders as people living in luxury. Other responses were also highlighted: *a person strongly associated with*

advertising, a self-confident person, focused on themselves first and foremost, and a non-toxic person (3.2%).

The next issue was to identify the competencies that an opinion leader should possess (Table 3).

Table 3. Students' opinions on the competencies an influencer should possess ($N = 85$)

No.	Type of competencies	Total	
		Number of respondents	%
1.	Proficiency in graphic design/video editing software	24	28.2
2.	Work planning	13	15.3
3.	Time management	17	20.0
4.	Collaboration	19	22.4
5.	Problem-solving	4	4.7
6.	Interpersonal communication	31	36.5
7.	Reading and writing comprehension	14	16.5
8.	Assessment of product legality	18	21.2
9.	Accuracy in providing information	32	37.6
10.	Monitoring current trends	21	24.7
11.	Creativity	40	47.1
12.	Entrepreneurship	13	15.3
13.	Influencing	9	10.6

Source: Own research.

Based on the data contained in the table, it can be noticed that the most desired competencies in influencers are: creativity (47.1%), reliability in providing information (37.6%), and interpersonal communication (36.5%). The smallest percentage of respondents indicated competencies such as work planning (15.3%), entrepreneurship (15.3%), influencing (10.6%), and problem-solving (4.7%). In addition to competencies, respondents were also asked about the education that an influencer should possess. The largest number of respondents (as many as 81.2%) emphasized that education *does not play a role*. The least frequently indicated answers concerned completed courses in management (1.2%) and having a technician's title in advertising organization (1.2%).

Subsequently, respondents' answers to questions concerning, among other things, whether they have ever thought about working as an influencer and whether they perceive this activity as a "dream job" were presented. From

the conducted research, it appears that over 60% of respondents have not considered working as an influencer, and over 37.6% indicated that they would be interested in this profession. For those who chose the answer *yes* ($N = 32$), additional questions were asked about whether working as an influencer would be their only source of income and whether they consider it a “dream job” – 59.4% of respondents considered that working as an influencer would be an additional source of income for them, and 25% of respondents considered that it could be their main way of earning money. Moreover, 68.8% of respondents disagree that working as an influencer would be their “dream job”. They point to the consequences associated with the lack of privacy and exposure to hate related to this profession. The results regarding the motivations that would guide the respondents to take up this profession were also discussed (Table 4).

Table 4. Students’ opinions on types of motivation for pursuing a career as an influencer ($N = 32$)

No.	Type of motivation	Total	
		Number of respondents	%
1.	Flexible working hours	17	53.1
2.	Desire to be well-known	7	21.9
3.	High earnings	21	65.6
4.	Promoting personal interests	4	12.5
5.	Merging the pursuit of passions with the opportunity to earn	11	34.4
6.	Finding like-minded individuals online	2	6.3
7.	Other	2	6.3

Source: Own research.

From the conducted analysis, it emerges that the main motivations of the respondents to take up work as an influencer are high earnings (65.6%) and flexible working hours (53.1%). Significantly less often, respondents indicated motivations such as finding people with similar interests on the Internet (6.3%), the desire to be their own boss, and curiosity associated with the experience (6.3%).

Another topic discussed in the research was the respondents’ opinions on the marketing activities of influencers. In the survey, respondents were asked about the credibility of advertising content published by influencers and whether they seek additional opinions about the advertised products.

The research results show that the majority of respondents (82.4%) can distinguish advertising posts from other content published by influencers. Special designations of posts as advertisements and a focus on a specific product or brand help them in this. Furthermore, respondents are often aware of the brands with which opinion leaders collaborate. To confirm this, a statement from one of the respondents will be quoted: *They usually publish ready-made content prepared by the brand they are currently collaborating with. These contents often in an infantile way, in all positives, present the product that the influencer is tasked to “sell”. Such advertising more resembles pointing out the sale of that specific product and brand than the proposal itself for the audience to simply become interested in the type of product at all. And when a discount code appears – there’s no doubt it’s an advertisement.* As for the credibility of influencers’ advertising campaigns among students, 60% of students consider them to be partly credible, while for 38.8% they are not credible at all. Additionally, over 60% of respondents who consider influencers’ advertising content to be fully or partly credible look for additional opinions about the advertised products. They most often look for opinions on forums and groups (45.5%), and least often among friends (10.4%). Respondents were also asked about factors determining the credibility of sponsored content (Table 5).

Table 5. Students’ opinions on factors affecting the credibility of content published by influencers ($N = 85$)

No.	Factor	Total	
		Number of respondents	%
1.	Matching the influencer to the advertised product	55	64.7
2.	The number of followers on the influencer’s account	9	10.5
3.	The manner in which the product is advertised	50	58.8
4.	The type of collaboration with the brand	24	28.2
5.	The number of collaborations the influencer undertakes	31	36.5
6.	Posting easily visible information	24	28.2

Source: Own research.

Based on the data presented in the above table, it can be noticed that the most frequently indicated factors determining the credibility of sponsored content are the selection of the influencer for the advertised product (64.7%) and the way

the product is advertised (58.8%). On the other hand, the least significant factor is the number of followers of the influencer's account (10.5%). There is justification for this result, according to observations by Sylwia Kuczamer-Kłopotowska and Kinga Piekarska, which suggest that audiences following less popular influencers often establish a more personal relationship with them and are more open to the content they publish (Kuczamer-Kłopotowska, Piekarska, 2018, p. 164).

Finally, the respondents' answers regarding educational content published by influencers and creators' behaviours that may negatively affect how they are perceived by the respondents will be discussed. Additionally, respondents' answers to the question of what they would like to change in the way the environment perceives influencers will be presented (Table 6).

Table 6. Students' opinions on influencer behaviours that negatively impact the assessment of this profession ($N = 85$)

No.	Behaviour	Total	
		Number of respondents	%
1.	Unpleasant situations between influencers	7	8.2
2.	Purchasing followers	17	20.0
3.	Advertising so-called scams	42	49.4
4.	The increasing number of so-called patoinfluencers	19	22.4
5.	Total	85	100.0

Source: Own research.

Based on the presented table, it can be noticed that the most frequently indicated behaviour of influencers that negatively affects the perception of this profession is advertising so-called scams (49.4%). On the other hand, the least frequently indicated by respondents were unpleasant situations between influencers (8.2%) as behaviour negatively affecting the evaluation of influencers' work. When asked what they would like to change in the perception of influencers by the environment, respondents wished it to be different from the one that considers them a pathology and that positive opinion leaders were promoted. Additionally, respondents emphasized that the work of an influencer guarantees a high level of income, as evidenced by the following statement: *"The stereotypical belief that online work is just 'playing on the Internet'. But influencers, who base their brand on online activities, also spend many hours a day interacting with their audience, preparing posts, contacts in advertising collaborations, etc. After*

all, this is how they earn, and to earn, they have to put in at least minimal effort". Moreover, some respondents noted that influencers are poorly perceived in society, which was reflected in their statements: *"I wish children didn't trust them so much; They should do something more useful, inspiring, not some nonsense. Maybe then people would respect them for their knowledge and skills"*.

Conclusions

This article aimed to discuss the topic of the author's master's thesis, which concerns the role of influencers in the labour market according to student opinions. Based on the conducted research, it can be observed that those who consider the work of an influencer as a profession mainly perceive it as collaboration with companies and advertising products in exchange for remuneration. However, this occupation requires a lot of time and effort. Creators must demonstrate creativity to stand out among other social media users. Meanwhile, respondents who do not regard the activities of influencers as a profession tend to see it more as a temporary way of life or an additional, seasonal job. According to the research, the most desirable competencies for those working as influencers are creativity, interpersonal communication skills, and reliability in conveying information. It is also worth noting that the surveyed students agree, regardless of differentiating factors, that specialised education is not necessary to work as an influencer. In their statements, students emphasise that they would like to see a reduction in the presence of so-called "patoinfluencers", i.e., influencers who lack valuable content and do not play a positive role as authorities. Nevertheless, respondents more often criticise the advertising of scams than the presence of toxic creators. In the opinion of the respondents, promoting scams negatively impacts the perception of the influencer profession.

It is important to add that the results and opinions of the respondents represent only preliminary observations in the area of influencer marketing and issues related to the influencer profession. These topics are still relatively new, and we observe the continuous emergence of innovative trends concerning collaborations between companies and opinion leaders. These studies can be treated as a starting point for further analyses in this field, as activity in social media has become an integral part of the information society.

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