

RUNNING HEAD: Influencer Logic

**Influencer Logic:  
How Influencer Relations Works**

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## Foreword

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the inspiration behind this research. As a media communications specialist with over a decade of working in marketing and communications departments for major Canadian broadcasters, I was confronted with the challenge facing all traditional media over the past decade – declining audiences, lack of new audiences, and changing audience behavior. “Appointment television” is no more. New modes of media distribution such as; streaming services Netflix, You-Tube, Apple TV and social media networks such as; Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram meant the media industry is in the biggest battle of its history. These new modes allowed consumers the power to choose what, when, where, and how they consume their content. People have become their own programmers.

However, season-after-season, the objective remained the same: “retain and gain new, youthful audiences.” Year-after-year the way we attempted to do that remained stagnant: pitch media reviewers, internal cross-promotion, produce promos, banner ads, radio ads, host screening events, buy out of home advertising, and social media boosted posts. These were the tools provided to us and they were targeted at an aging/shrinking demographic or they were not effective uses of new media. No surprise we continued to see carnage to linear TV numbers.

I wondered why are we not doing more to reach audiences through influencer marketing? There seemed to be walls around this idea. Explanations included: that is the social media team or “community managers” job; we hired an agency to do it and soon after cancelled the contract; since they are a form of media outreach, public relations will handle it; and finally we created an “audience engagement department” who focused on spending their ample budget on paid social boosting, and viewed working with content creators as having them create content for our platforms in what they called “the creator network.”

After reflecting on these experiences, I thought, this cannot be an isolated problem! There is a knowledge gap around influencer marketing that warrants demystifying. This author’s hypothesis was that there is not a critical mass of communication labour who have “influencer logic” and what this author seeks to define what are the competencies required by communications professionals to work with influencers effectively.

As a profession we need to acknowledge that there is confusion surrounding influencer marketing and influencer relations in order to move forward. Influencer logic is thinking about influencer relations holistically not just tactically. It is not just a checked box on a creative brief there is nuance to it and there is strategy. The objective of this author is to help communications professionals harness the power of social media influencers with a few simple rules of engagement.

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## Abstract

This study identified a gap within the ecology of roles within communication and added “influencer relations” to the nomenclature. The aim was to test if influencer relations fit within the communication department logic as previously identified by Grabher (2002) who established the terms “business logic”, “scientific logic”, and “artistic logic” and “technical logic” as identified by Takemura. The overwhelming answer was that while influencer relations borrows from these roles, *it is itself a separate and distinct role requiring “influencer logic”*. In addition, the study looked at the skills, aptitudes, and competencies that make this liaison between the company and influencers exceptional at the job, identifying three areas of influencer logic: having a collaborative/diplomatic attitude, possessing exceptional communication skills, and being deeply digitally literate.

Specific aptitudes included: openness, collaboration, diplomacy, professional communication, organization/time management, relationship builder, having been an influencer, social media expert, and being on top of what is next in the social/influencer space.

The results of this study suggest as well that influencer relations is most at home under the PR umbrella. This shift from marketing-led to being a function of PR practice represents a blue-ocean shift. As earned media becomes more of a scarce resource, and because influencers sit at the intersection of earned and paid media and are trusted by their audiences more than traditional paid media, their power has grown to approach that of earned – and they may even hold *more* power, depending on the target market.

In addition, this study suggests that the influencer relations role holds greater value and has longer term ROI when the function is led by the brand. If a full-scale functional area of in-house influencer relations is not possible, the next best thing is to have someone lead the efforts internally and hire an AOR that has a specialization in the area to help with execution. This study found that fully outsourcing influencer relations is not ideal according to *any* of the stakeholders (brand, influencers or communicators), especially by the influencer group who really prefer a tight relationship and a seat at the brand’s creative table.

In the aim of creating a best-practice model for influencer relations, this study proposes a 12-phase critical path for effective influencer campaigns. The 12 phases are: (1) Influencer Program, (2) Influencer Roster, (3) Influencer Outreach, (4) Influencer Proposal, (5) Proposal Approval, (6) Statement of Work, (7) Content Creation, (8) Content Approval, (9) Posting Content, (10) Content Interaction, (11) Post Reporting, and (12) Payment.

**Keywords:** *Influencer(s), Influencer Marketing, Influencer Relations, Word of Mouth Marketing, eWOM, Organic eWOM, Paid eWOM, PESO Model, Digital Word of Mouth Marketing, eWOMM, Attention Economy, Digital Reputation Economy, Online Communities, Virtual Communities, Online Advertising, Online Advertising Avoidance, Online Advertising Measurement, Relationship Marketing, Peer-to-Peer Marketing, Ecology of Advertising Roles, Anchor Content, Filler Content, Content Creator(s), Microcelebrities, Click Thru Rate, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Business Logic, Science Logic, Artistic Logic, Technical Logic, Influencer Logic, 12 Phases of Effective Influencer Relations, Collaborative Diplomatic Attitude, Exceptional Communication Skills, Deeply Digitally Literate, JIM Disclosure Approval Continuum*

## Introduction

Eyeballs have been the currency of traditional media to marketers. Today, those eyeballs are spending more time on social networking sites (SNS) than ever before. As Backaler (2018) articulates what this means for traditional media, “The days of ‘interruption marketing’ through disruptive ads are ending – people want to learn from trusted peers, not faceless companies” (p.18). These trusted peers are digital word-of-mouth marketers (eWOMM) who speak to virtual communities of consumption. As Kozinets (1999) defines it, “a specific subgroup of virtual communities that explicitly center upon consumption-related interests” (p.254).

In academic circles these eWOMM’s have been called: social media elite (Edelman, 2016), Pro-Ams (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004), Amafessionals’ (Penn, 2009) and producers’ (Bruns, 2008) but in the real world they are most commonly referred to as influencers or content creators. Whatever you want to call them there is no doubt that interest in influencer marketing is top of mind for many. In 2016 to 2017 there was a 325 percent increase in searches for the term ‘influencer marketing’ (Connick, 2018, p. 9).

Influencer marketing is the newest tool in the communicators tool kit, however, there exists a gap when it comes academic literature on influencer relations. This platform for advertisers is so fresh that in the academic space there are little more than definitions. To date, notable areas of study and prevailing authors include (but are not limited to); SNS Advertising Effectiveness: (Bauer, Barnes, Reichardt, and Neuman, 2005), (Robinson, Wysocka, and Hand, 2007), (Suk, 2007), (Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel, 2009), (Bond, Ferraro, Luxton, and Sands, 2010) and (Bang and Lee, 2016); SNS and Influencers: (Senft, 2008), (Hearn, 2010), (Turner, 2010), (Bueno, 2016), (Gandini, 2016), (Abidin, 2013, 2014, and 2017), (Backaler,

2018), (Chen, 2018), (Connick, 2018) and (Schwemmer and Ziewiekcki, 2018); Virtual Communities and Relationship Marketing: (Kennan, Chang, and Whinston, 2000), (Ridings, Gefen and Arinze 2002), (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007), (Spaulding, 2010), (Johns, 2016), and (Bashir, Wen, Kim, and Morris, 2018); and eWOMM (Kozinets et. al., 2010), (Takemura, 2012), and (Luna Nevarez and Torres, 2015). The academic research in this area is developing in lock step with practice and there are still many questions to be answered.

To date, much has been made of who influencers are and how they hold great power with consumers to influence their buying behaviours. This researcher has, however, found no literature in the area about effectiveness of influencer relations by communications professionals. This study will endeavor to be equal parts labour theory, communications theory, and business theory. From the perspective of labour theory, the jumping off point is a 2002 study that looked at the British advertising industry divisions of labour. Gernot Grabher (2002) established the terms “business logic” to describe the role of account managers, “scientific logic” to describe the role of account planner, and “artistic logic” to describe the creative department. Known as project ecology, Grabher used this terminology to explain how tasks are organized within an advertising or marketing department (p. 248). When digital advertising became the new normal Takemura (2012) did a similar study looking at how the digital revolution affected the lived reality of those working in advertising in Sweden. Takemura added the term “technical logic” to describe digital competencies required in today’s agency environment (p.43). With influencer marketing gaining mainstream recognition and brands of all sizes literally buying in, this researcher believes there is a need for an additional update to the nomenclature in the form of “influencer logic” or the competencies required by communications professional to work with influencers effectively. This study seeks to propose a set of rules of engagement known

influencer logic including: what functional area of communication practice should manage it, if it should be and internal or external function, what the ideal workflow looks like , and what skills are required in the role of influencer relations.

## **Literature Review**

### **Influencer Marketing**

Influence is not a new idea in marketing. In fact, influence is the central objective of marketing and public relations. In 1936, Dale Carnegie wrote the book: *How to win friends and influence people*. O'Reilly (2017) stated; “the book was essentially a user manual to human relations and Carnegie's teachings in many ways are as true today as they were back in 1936. In Carnegie's day you influenced one-to-one, and in person. Today, one person can influence millions and they can achieve that influence without ever meeting in person” (2017, p.1).

With SNS we have a whole new medium with power to both spread and gather information all with the swipe or tap of a finger. “The continuing fragmentation of media and information overload has led customers to become less and less interested in companies’ brand and messages delivered through traditional media” (Singh, Veron-Jackson, and Cullinane. 2008, p.281). These virtual communities on SNSs and lowered barriers to entry have given rise to influence going back to the day of Carnegie but instead of one-to-one the message is one-to-many. As Marshall McLuhan said “the medium is the message”(1964), he also coined the term “global village” (1962). In the case of influencer marketing that medium is SNSs, and the global village is on smartphones that bring daily customized marketing messages to the masses.

Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined SNSs as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other

users with whom they share a connection, (3) and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p.2).

The SNS timeline of the top five most popular sites (at the time of this writing) in order of founding is: Facebook (est. 2004), YouTube (est. 2005), Twitter (est. 2006), Instagram (est. 2010), and Snapchat (est. 2011). SNSs are the public newswire where we can all tell our own stories without gatekeepers or editors. As SNSs gained in popularity, The Arthur Page Society (2007) noted the change of information flow saying; “If the first phase of the web was about democratization of information consumption, the next phase - what some call web 2.0 - is about the democratization of information production” (p.12).

Edelman (2016) dubbed digital mediums’ meteoric rise an ‘inversion of influence’ in how we consume information and ideas. In the old model, elites (traditional media) had access to more information and their interests were perceived to reflect the mass population (p.21). Today, Backaler (2018) expressed the idea that our social ‘feeds’ influencing our day-to-day life decisions as normal saying; “The only thing ‘new’ about influence is the speed at which it now permeates everything we do. Thanks to the fluidity of the social sphere in which we all live, work, and play” (p.7). Hearn (2010) described this promotional culture of self-branding or influencer marketing saying; “No longer concerned with simply fixing a logo to a product, branding practices increasingly attempt to establish virtual contexts for consumption; experiences, spaces, relationships are all branded” (p.426).

## **Influencers**

Influencers are defined as; “individuals with the capability of affecting the opinions or actions of others” (Boone, Kurtz, Mackenzie, & Snow, 2016, p.112). Celebrities were the

original “influencers” (Backaler, 2018 p.31). Their influence, however, was heavily dependent on the approval of industry gatekeepers due to content being expensive to produce, and requiring specialized knowledge and expertise (Backaler, 2018. p.31). Today’s influencers are celebrities made in the social media landscape and are content creators in their own right.

These influencers are part of what has been coined the “attention economy” (Bueno, 2016), or “digital reputation economy” (Gandini, 2016, Hearn 2010). This is essentially living an online, self-branded representation of the self in which as Hearn (2010) said is “a form of affective, immaterial labour that is purposefully undertaken by individuals to garner attention, reputation, and potentially, profit” (p.427).

In this digital reputation economy or attention economy the online celebrity engages in deliberate content creation for their audience. Abidin (2017) talks about two types of content creation: “anchor” and “filler” content. Filler content is what she called “calibrated amateurism” wherein everyday routines of domestic life are shared with their audience without profit as the primary driver (p.1). Abidin (2014) argued that influencers use filler content for “captured attention by turning usually private events into a public performance” (p.2). This is likened to “backstaging” or the disclosure of private, unseen, secret or personal lives (Abidin, 2013 as cited in Abidin 2017, p.7). This type of content is posted frequently (in most cases daily) and gives the audience a sense of spontaneity and continuity (Abidin 2017, p.7-8). Abidin lists six main styles of filler content: developmental milestones (ex. firsts), family occasions (eg. holidays, birthdays etc.), errands (daily minutia), confessions (airing private matters publicly), reactions (ex. surprises, reactions to global tragedy, acknowledging news cycle) and logistics (ex. Ask Me Anything (AMA), Question and Answer (Q&As) and showing Behind-the-Scenes (BTS) (Abidin 2017, p.4).



In contrast, anchor content shares the following characteristics: higher production quality, is scheduled for optimal audience reaction, and is content crafted for profit (Abidin 2017, p. 8).

Influencers monetize their social clout by producing anchor content in four main ways: traffic referral commission, product placement, product giveaways, and product collaboration. In the case of product reviews, an influencer talks about product followed by inserting referral (affiliate) links into the corresponding video description boxes. The content creator gets a commission from attributable purchases for those who use the referral links leading to external shops (Wu 2016, p.59). A second method of monetization is product placement or seeding. In this method, product use is embedded into the content in a non-commercialized situation. Product placement is defined this action as “the purposeful incorporation of a brand into an entertainment vehicle” (Russell and Belch, 2005, p. 74). Wu (2016) notes product placement is common for YouTube influencers who are sent free products to be featured in videos (p.59). Third, when companies partner with influencers on partner giveaways to their following, influencers are compensated for doing the giveaway to their audience with the brand’s main interest being awareness of the product (Schwemmer and Ziewiekcki, 2018, p.5). Finally, an influencer might collaborate with the brand on a line of products that fit with their vertical. In this case they may be involved in launching the line, and be compensated based on how it sells (Schwemmer and Ziewiekcki, 2018, p.5).

### **Influencer Relations**

Within marketing and publicity departments, the role or responsibility of managing the relationships with this group is known as influencer relations. It is defined as; “The liaison

between a company and those considered to be influencers within the social media community” (Boone, Kurtz, Mackenzie, & Snow, 2016, p.112).

At the time of writing there are no formal studies looking at the aptitudes for those performing the role of influencer relations. However, Windels and Stuhlfaut (2018) looked at the agency’s expanding roles in a new digital media landscape. What they found were 14 new roles that have developed due to digital advertising methods. They suggest the implications of digital for both integrated and pure play digital agencies means “There is need for purposeful reflection about the creative process and how to inform and nurture it through the proper mix of personnel” (p.16). They do not suggest influencer relations as a new role in itself, however, roles such as “digital strategist”, “community manager”, “social strategist”, “content strategist”, “project manager”, and “client engagement manager” may touch on working with paid content creators as part of their job function (Windels et. al., 2018, p. 8). Influencer relations in communications practice is in its infancy and effective influencer relations is an untouched area of academic research. Takemura (2012) noted this gap saying “there is still a knowledge gap from professionals coming from the traditional side and the digital side (p. 38).

### **Digital Word-of-Mouth Marketing (eWOMM)**

Arndt (1967) defined word of mouth as “a consumer-dominated channel of marketing communication where the sender is independent of the market. It is therefore perceived to be more reliable, credible, and trustworthy by consumers compared to firm-initiated communications” (As cited in Brown, Broderick, and Lee, 2007, p. 4). With the rise of the internet and SNSs, we are now in the era of what Kozinets et. al. (2010) coined the Networked Coproduction Model where “Marketers have become interested in directly managing WOMM

activity through targeted one-to-one seeding and communication programs, with the Internet allowing unprecedented new levels of management and measurement of these campaigns” (p.72). The key change from previous models known as Organic Interconsumer Influence Model and Linear Marketing Influence Model is that the relationship between marketers has shifted from being transactional to relationship based (Kozinets et. al., 2010, p.73). In this model, influencers serve the following three functions to marketers: communicating the marketing message, staking his or her reputation and trust relationships on the marketing message, and converting the marketing message—through language, substance, or tone—to conform to the norms and expectations the community has developed. (Kozinets et. al. , 2010, p.83).

eWOMM has become an important supplement to traditional marketing communications and has a significant impact on consumer’s judgments, attitude formations, and decision making (Luna Nevarez and Torres, 2015, p.5) Terranova (2000) used the term “free labor” to describe how companies exploited users eWOMM in digital spaces (As cited in Takemura, 2012, p. 36). Takemura (2012) noted brands are turning consumers into “brand publicists” who are encouraged to share and spread news and information on their social media (p. 33).

There are psychological motivations and benefits for consumers who engage in eWOMM. Brown, Broderick, and Lee (2007) found the strength of relationship ties and mirroring of individuals interests (homophily) in eWOMM matter. Namely a closer match between individual’s interests, and a stronger tie make the messages received more personal thus more effective likely due to an increased feeling of trust or credibility in the message (p.14). Riegner (2007) showed that consumers find emotional and practical benefits in participating in eWOMM and recognize that these “electronic conversations” have a great influence over the

products and brands they consider for purchase (as cited in Luna-Nevarez and Torres, 2015, p.5). Simply put “the consumer is always on” (Takemura, 2012, p.35).

### **Types of Influencers**

A common way to group influencers is based on the size of their following. Connick (2018) suggested three groups exists: Micro-Influencers are those with up to 25, 000 followers. Mid-Level Influencers are those with 25,001 – 100,000 followers, and finally Macro-Influencers with more than 100,000 followers (p.5).

Using a different approach, Backaler (2018), groups influencers into three categories based on how their influence is conferred. Celebrity Influencers: those possessing broad-based fame often formerly amassed through traditional media platforms; Category Influencers: those who have a general interest, expertise, or enthusiasm on a topic and may be considered an authority in the area; and Micro Influencers: those who many not have a significant following or even an online presence but has an interest in a specific topic, brand or product category without authority in the area. They may, however, hold influence over their immediate circle i.e. friends, family, colleagues etc. (p. 36-38).

Senft (2008) and Turner (2010) fashioned the term ‘Microcelebrities’ to describe the category of online celebrities who are famous only to a niche audience (as cited in; Abidin, 2017, p. 2). This appears to be likened to what Backaler (2018) calls category influencers (p.37).

### **Online Communities**

Communities have evolved from being tangible organizations to intangible groups with the advent of online communities. Hallahan (2004), defined community as “the integration of

people and the organizations they create into a functional collectivity that strives towards common and compatible goals” (as cited in Valentini, Kruckeberg, & Stark, 2012, p.874). Online community as defined by Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze (2002) as; “groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way over the internet through a common location” (as cited in Johns, 2016, p. 114). Johns (2016) declared, “social media, including online communities, has altered the nature of communication between marketers and customers (p.121).”

Kennan, Chang, and Whinston (2000), found virtual communities are divided into four main types: transaction-oriented, interest-oriented, relationship-oriented, and fantasy-oriented (p.422). Examples of these four types for illustration purposes are; online stores (transaction-oriented), blogs (interest-oriented), social networking sites (relationship-oriented), and online-gaming (fantasy-oriented). Spaulding (2010) built on this, looking to provide principles for practice for brands looking to operate or create online communities. Five guiding principles resulted; 1) participation requires an attitude of contribution; 2) The primary activity should not be advertising; 3) sponsoring a community requires resources; 4) Be willing to experiment; 5) Match business and community needs (p. 46).

Hearn (2010) stated that the goal of online marketing is to foster a community of brand advocates from already existing consumers essentially deploying them to do the work of brand enhancement for free (p.432). Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) found “communication on SNSs is based on users’ preexisting social relations, usually comprised of known others... and that people use SNSs to maintain or reinforce their preexisting relationships rather than look for new relationships with strangers” (Bang and Lee, 2016, p. 3).

Bashir, Wen, Kim, and Morris (2018) looked at three variables driving relationship building on SNSs: appeal (perceived entertainment value, aesthetic value), engagement (perceived belongingness) and empowerment (perceived mutuality). The study looked specifically at brand's activities in these areas on the visual centric platform of Instagram. Their finding revealed that "brand fans derive intrinsic enjoyment and pleasure from interacting with brands on Instagram, especially through a variety of brand activities around visual-based brand content that are visually appealing and aesthetically attractive (p. 187). Further, they showed that SNS marketing that builds two-way relationships can result in positive long-term consumer brand relationships (Bashir et. al, 2018, p.187). Bond et Al. (2010) found that "the objective (of SNS marketing) must be to create a dialogue with consumers, rather than purely using media as a promotional vehicle to drive return on investment (ROI)" (p.5).

### **Relationship Building with Influencers**

Influencers build relationships not just with their audiences but also with brands. Smith (2010) proposed that it is important for communications professionals looking to build relationships with an online community leader to identify what stage of community building the influencer finds themselves at with their own community. Smith identified three phases of the evolution of bloggers (forerunner to influencers): introduction, community membership, and autonomy (2010, p.176). In the first phase, which Smith (2010) refers to as introduction, bloggers begin with a personal purpose and use the internet as an outlet to explore that topic or genre. In the second phase, community membership, they gain a following and with that their motivation moves from personal purpose to being useful to their community. Finally, in the autonomy phase, the blogger feels intensified ownership over content creation (p.176).

A recent report on influencer relations found “62% of brands compensate influencers as brand ambassadors or partners rather than one-time contractors” (Connick, 2018, p.10).

Therefore, there is loyalty found in building something together and sticking with the influencer as they move through their community building phases. Takemura (2012) echoed the findings that in digital marketing, long-term relationships are a must, saying “the digital approach facilitates a much more interactive approach between the brand and consumers” (p. 34).

### **Connecting with Influencers**

When it comes to finding, vetting, and working with influencers, an agency is a popular choice. A 2017 survey of marketers found 87% employ an influencer-specific company to carry out influencer campaigns (Connick, 2018, p.10). Agencies working in this area are growing rapidly. In 2016, 335 new influencer marketing platforms and agencies opened. In 2017, 420 new influencer related platforms and agencies opened (Connick, 2018, p.9).

Connick (2018) likened agencies and influencer platforms to serving as “matchmaker” between brands and influencers (p.10). The difference between an influencer agency and an influencer platform is that an agency, in addition to finding a match between brands and influencers, will also carry out the contract negotiation and creative work on behalf of the brand (Connick, 2018, p.10). A platform serves as a “database” that brands can search but engaging with the content creator and creative work would still fall to either the in-house brand manager or the agency engaged on behalf of the brand.

Another avenue is setting up an in-house influencer relations department. A recent survey reports that “29% of companies say their marketing team is the primary manager of the

company's influencer campaigns, followed by 21% who say that their social media and community management team manage influencers" (Connick, 2018, p.10).

### **Engagement and Campaign Measurement**

With regards to campaign measurement and success, it is useful to understand the key performance indicators (KPIs) that have been identified to measure SNS advertising. Backaler (2018) identified the three Rs of influencer marketing: reach, resonance and relevance. Reach is defined as: "The total size of an influencer's audience across all social platforms measured by followers, subscribers, traffic etc." (p.44). Resonance is defined as: "Engagement between influencer's audience and the content they produce measured by shares, likes, views, comments, retweets etc." (p.44). Relevance is defined as: "Content-topic match ensuring that the content produced by the influencer is aligned with the consistent set of topics that is of interest to the influencer's community. From a brand's perspective, relevance also relates to how closely an influencer's community matches up to the brand's target audience" (p.44).

Another common KPI is click-through rate (CTR) for online advertising which is widely regarded as an approximate indicator of online ad effectiveness on SNSs (Bang and Lee, 2016, p. 2). Other common measures include "behaviors such as liking a page, joining a group, adding an application, or following a company. These eWOM behaviors reflect positive attitudes of consumers toward social network advertisements." (Luna-Nevarez and Torres, 2015, p. 8). Hearn (2010) highlights that Amber Nusland, VP of Social Strategy for web analytics tool Radian6, used the term "share of voice" or "share of conversation" as a qualitative metric used to determine if a brand is having 'the right conversation with the right people' (p. 432). Web analytic tools are social listening tools that take consumers' social behaviours and converts them



into a ranking, score, or story. They help marketers study customer opinion in real-time and can be helpful in measuring effectiveness and campaign course correction.

When it comes to the size of following for influencers, bigger is not always better. In a recent study, those with fewer than 1,000 Instagram followers, known as micro influencers, have a like rate of 8% while influencers with more than 10 million followers, macro-influencers, have a like rate of 1.6% (Connick, 2018. p.8). This statistic suggest that marketers need to understand what their objectives are in selecting the appropriate level of influencer as a macro or celebrity influencer may allow for greater exposure, however, a smaller micro, mid, or category influencer may bring greater engagement.

Bang and Lee (2016) looked at likelihood of ad avoidance for traditional ads on SNSs. Using variables of ad location and ad path, they found the “level attention to SNS ads is ordered as follows: inside/indirect ad, inside/direct ad, outside/indirect ad, outside/direct ad” (p.11). This study showed that location – inside the user’s feed and indirect (by a brand ambassador or trusted-peer recommendation) garnered the most attention. This finding supports the use of influencers of all sizes and types by brands for reach consumers.

Suk (2007), found that incentive advertising may create positive attitudes towards online innovation (as cited in Luna-Nevarez and Torres, 2015, p. 3). Khrishnamurthy (2002) found incentives were helpful in improving recognition of and attitude towards a brand (as cited in Luna-Nevarez and Torres, 2015, p.8). Robinson, Wysocka, and Hand (2007) identified that four design elements of effective banner ads with the measure of increased CTRs. They are larger in size, have a long message, an absence of promotion incentives, and a presence of relevant information (in this study’s case, Casino Gaming) (p. 537).

Further, Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel (2009), share the uses and gratification theory (U&G) that is used to explain why people engage with media. They found that consumer engagement increased when users find they are having a utilitarian experience with a website (p.323). In U&G theory there are four reasons a user engages with a specific media: information, personal identity, social interaction, and entertainment. The user experience is described as ‘intrinsic enjoyment’ (Calder et. Al, 2009. P. 323). They found two factors were important overall for engagement with online ads: personal and social-interactive (Calder et. al., 2009, p.329).

Bauer, Barnes, Reichardt, and Neuman (2005) identified information value as a main driver of mobile advertising acceptance (as cited in Luna-Nevarez and Torres, 2015, p.7). Bond, Ferraro, Luxton, and Sands (2010) conducted a focus group study about the consumer’s perceptions, attitudes, and preferences for engagement with social media advertising and a key finding was that “brands must have a clear value proposition for consumers, given the sheer volume of messages and media noise encountered every day” in the information offered (p.5). These findings together point to the idea that for online advertising to be successful, including sponsored influencer posts, they need to offer consumers incentives and be a valued source of information that makes their lives easier.

Success of influencer marketing tends to increase with those who are millennials and younger. In a recent study examining college students’ use of Instagram, Chen (2018) found that “Young consumers were more likely to trust and accept marketing information from their friends. Participants are especially likely to pay more attention when their friends act as spokespersons for a product or company” (p.7). Chen (2018) also found that these young consumers “paid more attention to image-centric or pure product ads, and enjoyed a sense of

privilege by receiving exclusive information from companies” (p.7). Therefore, there is a sense of belonging or being part in crowd that contributes to the success of seeded influencer marketing messages via influencers on SNS.

### **Research Problem**

A comprehensive literature review in the area of influencer marketing and influencer relations has revealed a gap in regards to necessary competencies and best practices for communications professionals in working effectively with influencers on branded campaigns. This research project analyzed interview data from influencers and influencer-management professionals to examine the roles, relationships, and challenges experienced by influencers and communicators, in order to develop a set of recommendations for functional best practices for influencer relations management.

### **Research Questions**

#### **RQ1: Role of Influencer Relations**

How might the addition of “influencer logic” to the current ecology of roles set out by Grahber (2002) of “business logic”, “science logic”, and “artistic logic” and Takemura (2012) of “technological logic” augment the ability of communicators to work effectively with influencers? And where does the role fit?

#### **RQ2: Relationship Responsibilities**

In the influencer-communicator relationship, is there a division of responsibility for workflow and deliverables with regards to sponsored content?

**RQ3: Influencer Relations Best Practices**

Is there a set of best practices (skills, aptitudes, competencies) that represents an ideal for communicators to work effectively with influencers? If so, what are these practices?

**Methodology**

This mixed-methods study used two main sources of evidence: in-depth participant interviews and analysis of social media posts (both qualitative media analysis for context and social media engagement rates, a quantitative metric). These represent interviews and documents, two sources of evidence of a possible six types cited by Yin (2014) in case study research design (p. 106). RQ1 uses statistical generalization to develop theory while RQ2 and RQ3 use methods of analytic generalization. Yin said:

Theory development does not only facilitate the data collection phase of the ensuing case study. The appropriately developed theory also is the level at which the generalization of the case study results will occur. This role of theory has been characterized throughout this book as "analytic generalization" and has been contrasted with another way of generalizing results, known as "statistical generalization (2002, p. 30).

First, the qualitative data set includes N=5 case studies of pre-existing relationships between influencers and communication professionals. The recruitment of cases was done by picking a representative sample of influencer and communication professionals and then asking each member of the sample to recommend a person who they believe to be “exceptional at influencer relations” or “exceptional at working with influencer relations specialists.” This is known as a snowball sample method of participant recruitment (Krueger and Casey, 2015, p. 84).

An initial representative sample of participants was created from recommendations from an open call for participants put out on the primary researcher’s social media channels on

January 2, 2019. Formal recruitment started on January 11, 2019 via e-mail or via social media direct message. The interview window was February 12 – March 30, 2019. Interviews took place in-person, via FaceTime, or phone over the phone at the participant's convenience and for the participant's comfort. The sample all agreed to be identified, meaning their real names, titles, personal backgrounds and experiences will be outlined and used to illustrate salient themes in the findings.

This method of cross-case analysis is referred to by Yin (2014) as “multiple-case design” and is “considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust (p. 57).” The multiple case studies have been examined using cross-case analysis in order to identify themes (Eisenhardt 1989, as cited in Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, and Casey, 2015).

Yin, 2002, said:

When using a multiple-case design, a further question you will encounter has to do with the number of cases deemed necessary or sufficient for your study. However, because a sampling logic should not be used, the typical criteria regarding sample size also are irrelevant. Instead, you should think of this decision as a reflection of the number of case replication (p. 50).

In this case after 5 pairs of interviewees there was substantial case replication, and a sense that the sample had reached a saturation point in which clear patterns emerged.

Second, a content analysis of five #ad-disclosed influencer campaigns, one by each of the five influencers in the sample, was completed to discover whether the themes mentioned in the interviews were in evidence in the social media campaigns created by the influencer participant group. This was done using open source accessible data (likes, shares, comments), according to the research design principles of netnography. Netnography is a research method coined by Kozinets (2010) as an adaptation of ethnography for the internet space, where data is collected through online interactions. Netnography can take three forms: “(a) data the researcher directly

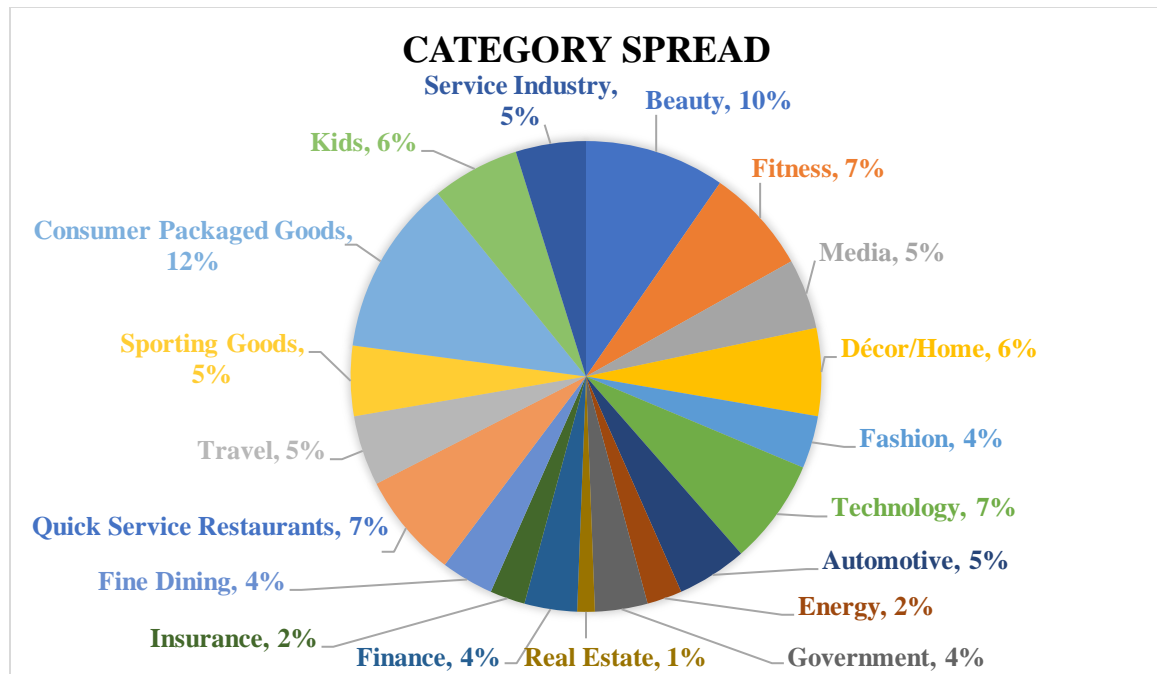
collects, (b) data generated through the capture and recording of online community events and interactions; and (c) data the researcher sketches as field notes” (as cited in Bower, 2010, p. 6). Further to this, Kozinets specifies that “analysis and interpretation involves classification, coding analysis and contextualization of communicative acts” (as cited in Bower, 2010, p. 7).

For content analysis, one campaign per influencer was chosen. Data on likes, shares, and comments was collected via the influencer’s public social media profile with their knowledge. Images and screenshots were captured for exhibits, and stories shared about campaigns from interviews with participants were recorded to help bring context where appropriate. Engagement rate (ER) was calculated by using the following formula:  $(\text{total likes} + \text{total comments} + \text{total shares}) / \text{total followers}$ .

### **Sample**

Using methods of participant recruitment described above, a total sample of N=10 was obtained. Influencers totaled n=5 and communicators totaled n=5. This resulted in N=5 case studies representing a variety of relationships between influencers and communicators. The sample was 100% Canadian, 10% male (n=1) and 90% female (n=9).

The sample has worked in a variety of areas of paid content creation. Each participant was given a list of categories and was asked to check “all that apply” for areas they have done work in. The chart below illustrates the category spread of both samples. This is also useful to illustrate the brand categories who are most active in the influencer space as of the time of this study: Consumer Packaged Goods with 12% (n=10); Beauty with 10% (n=8); and a three-way tie for third between Technology; Fitness; Quick Service Restaurants all with 7% (n=6).



### Influencer Sample Salient Features

For the purposes of this study, “Influencers” are those who are paid to produce content about brands, products, or services in a range of their own social spaces, from blogs to SNS. Payment can be in the form of “product for post” (organic e-WOM) or “post for payment” (paid e-WOM).


























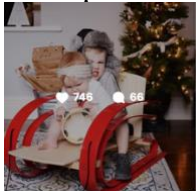
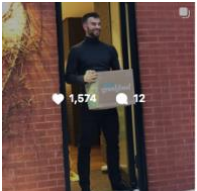
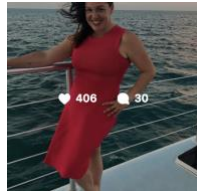
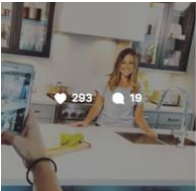

This study is comprised of 100% Canadian influencers. Cities of residence for the influencer sample included: Montreal (n=1); Vancouver (n=1); Toronto (n=2); Manitoulin Island (n=1). The influencers ranged in “type” of influencer from micro (n=3), to mid (n=1), to celebrity (n=1). The gender split was 80% female (n=4); 20% male (n=1).

Type of influencer was based on two scales. First scale is Connick (2018): micro 0-25,000; mid 25,001 – 100, 000; and macro 100, 000+. Second influencer types were proposed by Backaler (2018): celebrity (fame amassed by traditional media); category (expertise in a topic with authority); micro (expertise in an area without authority).

The numbers indicated in this study, including engagement rate calculations, are correct as of March 18, 2019. Engagement rate was calculated using the best performing Instagram photo-post by the influencer for the campaign selected for content analysis. To keep a level playing field, content analysis was limited by what data was publicly accessible on social platforms, thus allowing for replicability of this study.

## Influencer Sample

**Chart 1: Influencer Sample Comparison**

<b>Kate Wallace</b> @emmettsabcs Est. 2016 	<b>Eric Radford</b> @EricRadford85 Est. 2017 	<b>Jill Amery</b> @urbanmommies Est. 2008 	<b>Amber MacArthur</b> @ambermac Est. 2006 	<b>Christine McNaughton</b> @lifeonmanitoulin Est. 2006 
 10.6K  800  118  1.3K	 52.6K  12K  0  26.4K	 16.9k  9.2k  0  19.9K	 30.2K  345.4K  1.2K  115.9K	 4.8K  4.3K  48  19.2K
Campaign: Rudolphe Sled 	Campaign: Good Food 	Campaign: Beaches Resorts 	Campaign: Grohe 	Campaign: Telus/SickKids 
ER= 0.08	ER= .03	ER= .02	ER= .01	ER= .07
Type: Micro Category	Type: Mid Celebrity	Type: Micro Category	Type: Macro Celebrity	Type: Micro Micro

## About Kate Wallace



Kate Wallace is the founder of @emmettsabcs and [www.emmettsabcs.com](http://www.emmettsabcs.com). Wallace is a micro-influencer; her largest following is on Instagram with 10.6K followers. She has created paid campaigns for the following categories: beauty, fitness, technology, quick service restaurants, consumer packaged goods, and kids' goods.

She has worked as influencer since August 2016 when she founded EmmettsABC's when her first child, Emmett, was 6 months old as a way to build a resource site for friends around purchasing decisions for their children. Wallace said for her it combined several passions: "I like writing, I like communicating with people, and creating sort of that idea of a community."

Wallace talked about the evolution from something she did for close circle to being more about her life and family. Wallace said "in the beginning was very product focused... like what do we use? We were in the trenches, baby mode, first time mom living that life. And then it sort of became more about life." She views the blog and social media as part-time:

I think it's great that what we do resonates with people. I don't want it to be a full time thing, I am still home with my kids, that's my full-time thing. I want to put that out there as certainly there are people who make it a full-time business and that's awesome. But that is not our core intent right now.

Prior to founding EmmettsABC's Wallace worked in a marketing focused role. She said; "I worked on the brand side and I worked across the generating demand side of different consumer packaged goods." This gives Wallace some interesting insights into the conversations that might take place in the marketing boardroom of a brand around influencers.

Wallace was nominated as an influencer participant to the study by Aly Tsourounis, principal at Hank PR. The campaign selected for content analysis was a holiday gift Instagram campaign for Rudolphe sleds.

**Exhibit 1: @emmettsabcs/HankPR/Rudolphe 3000**

Fig. 1A IG Post

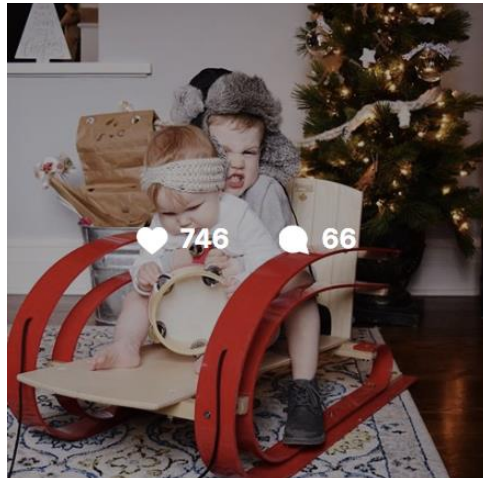


Fig. 1B IG Caption



Fig. 1C IG Stories 1



Fig. 1D IG Stories 2



Fig. 1E IG Stories 3



Campaign Date: December 3, 2019 (Instagram Post & Stories)

**About Eric Radford**

Eric Radford, @EricRadford85 is a former Canadian World and Olympic medalist in pairs figure skating. After retiring from competitive skating he transitioned into influencer work as a complimentary revenue stream to skating and as a way to tell his personal story. In addition to excellence in figure skating, he is musician and composer, he is proud to represent the LGTBQ community, and in March 2019 he was elected to the International Skating Union (ISU) athletes commission.

Radford talked about how when he started thinking about monetizing his following saying: “I started in the Spring of 2017. I wanted to maximize my opportunity going in the 2018 Pyeong Chang Games. In 2014 Games I didn’t have social media.” Since 2017, he has done sponsored content work in the following categories: beauty, fitness, real estate, sporting goods, consumer packaged goods, and service industry.

Radford is classified as a mid/celebrity influencer with his largest following of 52.6K on Instagram. He is a celebrity influencer as his following springs from his athletic performances which were primarily consumed on traditional media. Radford talked about the advantage of having a profile that is not solely rooted in the social space saying “for someone like me you can just google me and read my bio and then someone who just became an influencer how much do you know about them?”

His sponsored content work is done through his agency of record: Shine PR Influencers. He nominated the co-founder of Shine PR, Emily Ward to this study. Radford describes why he uses an agent to vet his opportunities saying; “I want everything to go to my agency. In terms of keeping a birds eye view of my brand, my previous engagements, and my direction. I feel my

agent is going to have a better view of it.” The campaign selected for content analysis is the food delivery service: Good Food.

## Exhibit 2: @EricRadford85/ShinePR/Good Food

Fig. 2A: IG Post – Jan. 15, 2019

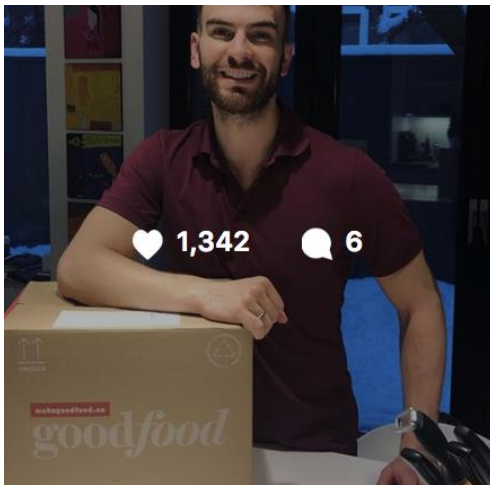


Fig. 2B: IG Copy Post 1 – Jan. 15, 2019



Fig. 2C: IG Profile Custom Link



Fig. 2D: IG Second Photo – March 15, 2019

Fig. 2E: IG Copy Post 2 – March 15, 2019




**ericradford85** • Following  
 Montreal, Quebec

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ericradford85 I LOVE being able to spend my down time at home which is why I love that @goodfoodca delivers everything I need right to my doorstep. No need to trudge through the snow with grocery bags! Not to mention the variety of recipes are always delicious and Luis and I can enjoy a homemade meal together. Feeling hungry? Visit the link in my bio and use the promo code ERIC50 to get 50% off your first box"

#ad #goodfood #goodfoodca  
 #makegoodfood #food #foodie  
 #fooddelivery #healthy #healthyeating  
 #montreal

## About Jill Amery

Jill Amery is the Publisher/CEO of [www.urbanmommies.com](http://www.urbanmommies.com) and @urbanmommies. She has been operating in the branded content area since 2008. As an early entrant to the eWOMM marketplace, Amery talked about building trust with brands, saying, “I would never in writing or on TV bash another brand or name a name in a negative way. I think that over the years has made me more appealing to marketers because they know they can trust me not to do something that doesn't feel right.”

Before getting into the online infomediary industry Amery was an actor, singer, and dancer. Today, she often appears on traditional media as a parenting expert. As a result, her influencer category is micro/celebrity. Amery’s largest following is on Twitter with 19.9K. She created paid content in a variety of segments including; beauty, home décor, technology, automotive, finance, quick service restaurants, travel, sporting goods, consumer packaged goods, and kids’s goods.

Amery’s aim with Urban Mommies was to be a safe place for parents;

One of the reasons why I was interested in doing this is that my first son had colic for 18 months and if I went anywhere on the internet it was basically like people were yelling at

me and blaming me for everything and I thought I wish there was some real research, real opinions, and non-judgmental resources.

Amery spoke about witnessing the shift from blogger to influencer saying; “Within the blog itself I was monetizing with banner ads and in text links. But then that the bottom fell out of that market completely I guess around 2011 and then started monetizing in different ways. And it was actually 2011 where I officially I think became an influencer.”

Communications professional Jen Maier nominated Amery to the sample. They have worked on many campaigns together over the years. The campaign selected for content analysis by Amery was her brand ambassadorship with Beaches Resorts #BeachesMoms.

### **Exhibit 3: Jill Amery/Beaches Resorts**

Amery is a brand ambassador for Beaches Resorts. In October of 2018 she attended their influencer conference held at the Beaches resort in Turks and Caicos. In this always on-campaign she posted 17 times. About her experience and created several Instagram stories.

Fig. 3A #BeachesMoms Instagram



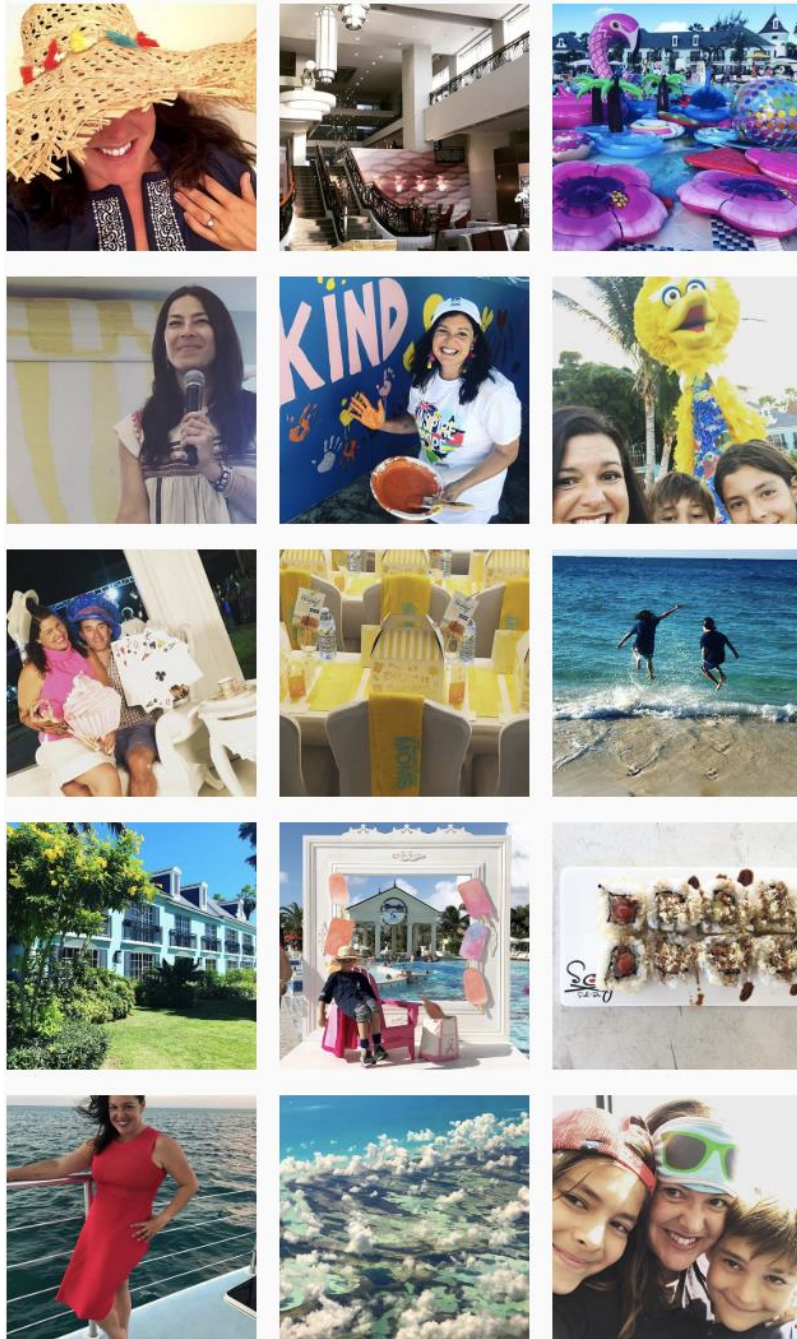


Fig. 3B: Instagram Profile (Beaches Resorts highlights)



Fig. 3C Most liked post while at Beaches Turks &amp; Caicos

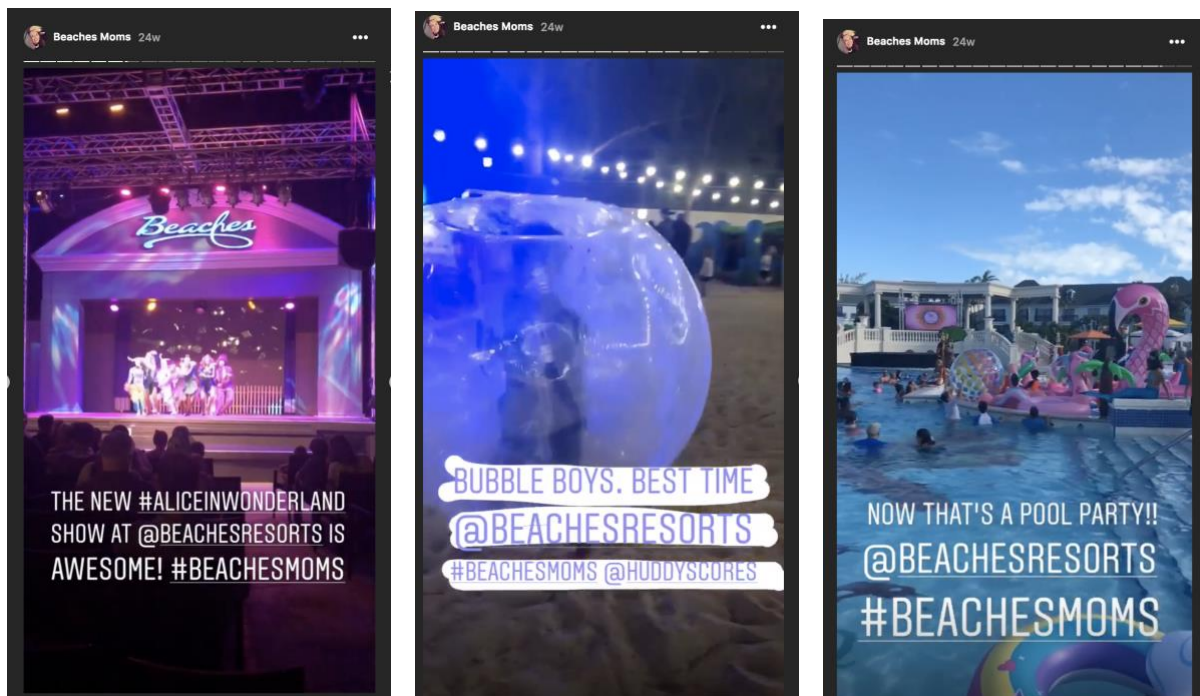




Fig. 3D: Second most liked post (1 month post trip)



Fig. 3E Instagram Story Examples



**About Amber MacArthur (Amber Mac)**

Amber Mac is the president of AmberMac Media. She is a macro/celebrity influencer with her largest following on Facebook with 345.4K in following. MacArthur is the author of two books: *Power Friending* (2010) and *Outsmarting Your Kids Online* (2016), she is a keynote speaker, consultant on social media strategy, and notably has been in-front of the camera and behind microphone on various tech related programs including; WebNation (CP24), AppCentral (BNN), and she currently hosts two podcast *The Feed* (SiriusXM) and *The AI Effect* (sponsored by Accenture), and is a regular contributor about Technology for *The Marilyn Denis Show* (CTV).

An early adopter in the influencer space, in 2006, MacArthur left her full-time job as a technology reporter, to start her own media company she said; “we started focusing on creating branded content or digital. It was back in about 2007 that really was my first entry point to the world of influencer marketing.” When asked how it has changed MacArthur said;

What I've seen then in the past 10 or so years is that what's happening more and more with influencer marketing is that there is a bigger push as far as creating original content for a specific platform. What's really evolved is that the brands know more about what they want versus just experimenting with a “throwing spaghetti at the wall” type strategy.

As big as her following is, MacArthur works without an agent, and crafts every pitch with a non-negotiable seat at the table. She is guided by fit when selecting which brands she works with. MacArthur stressed this approach saying: “You have to choose partnerships that you will look back on in your career and say I'm really proud of the work that I did with them.” Her influencer work to date is in the following select categories; beauty, media, home décor, technology, automotive, finance, and consumer packaged goods. The campaign selected for content analysis is her work with home décor brand Grohe as a brand ambassador for Canada.

#### Exhibit 4: @AmberMac/Grohe (Brand Ambassador)

Grohe hired Amber Mac as their Canadian brand ambassador kicking off the partnership June 1, 2018 with a Facebook Live from New York city at Grohe's headquarters. The partnership to date has involved a 4-part web series called "Moments of Truth", in-person demos at the Interior Design Show (IDS), 4 Instagram posts, and a featured product appearance on the Marilyn Denis Show. @GroheCanada has saved IG stories highlights under "Amber Mac" on their IG channel, showing two-way engagement between brand and influencer.

Fig 4A: Traditional Media Integration (Marilyn Denis Show)



Fig 4B: Original Online Content

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Boe2WDul0jt/>

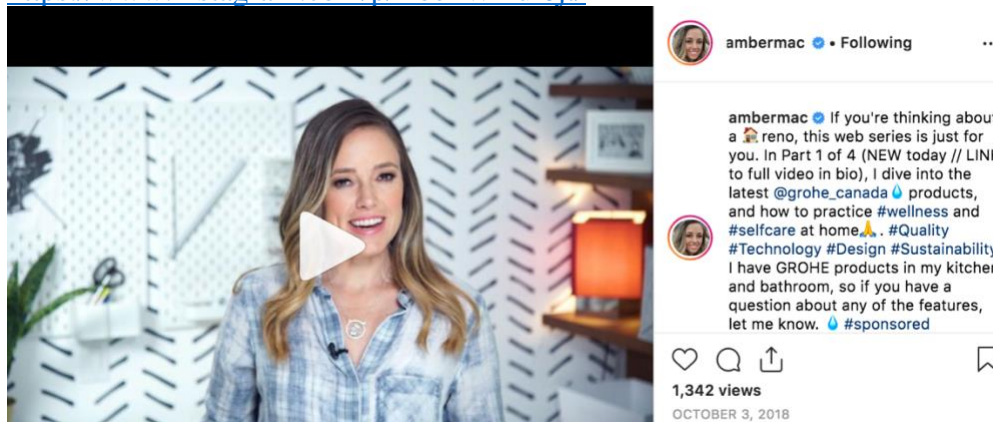
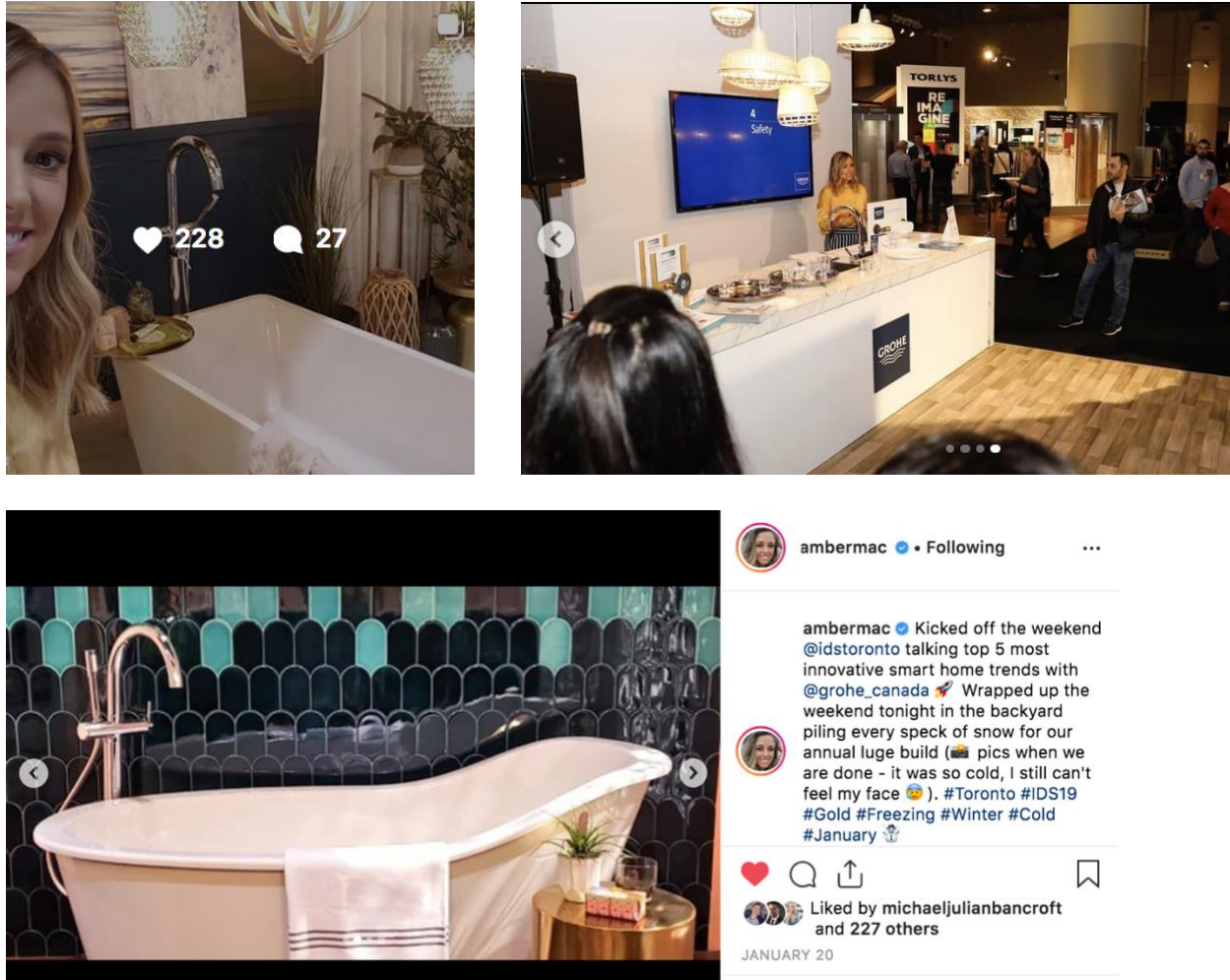


Fig. 4C: Launch of Ep. 2 of Web Series IG Post (November 20, 2018)



Fig. 4D: (In-Person Demo) @ IDS 2019





**Fig 4E: Partner Interaction Examples**

4Ea: Featured “highlights” in Instagram stories



#### 4Eb: Post About Mac's Demo At IDS 2019



#### About Christine McNaughton

Christine McNaughton is the owner of [www.lifeonmanitoulin.com](http://www.lifeonmanitoulin.com) @lifeonmanitoulin originally a blog founded in 2006 to keep her friends, family, and former students connected after her move from Toronto to Manitoulin Island. It has since become a digital community about as McNaughton says; “farm, family, and fun.” McNaughton’s largest following is on Twitter with 19.2K. She has done client work for almost every area except real estate. On the side she also telecommutes as a digital strategist/community manager for H2O Digital Marketing, a boutique marketing agency based in Toronto.

After over a decade of experience in the influencer world, McNaughton says the secret to her longevity working in sponsored content is; “to be honest with myself, truthful in my writing, and to do justice for the campaign I am working on. Basically, to be my authentic self. I would never sacrifice that for any amount of money a company could throw at me.”

She stressed the importance between knowing the difference between “brand monogamy” and “brand loyalty”. For her at this stage in her community development she prefers long-term monogamous relationships with her brands. She said; “for example with Telus. I have worked with them for years now and it started off because I have been a Telus customer longer than I have been married. I would never Tweet about another carrier.”

Communication participant Michelle Mullins recommended McNaughton to the campaign. McNaughton selected her campaign with Telus and SickKids. She talked about her experience working with this Telus led campaign saying; “They have their own specialists for influencer relations. They’ve done their research and they know what campaigns will fit perfectly. I had a high-risk pregnancy and she (her daughter who is referred to affectionately as “little one”) was born three months early and she was at SickKids. So this is really near and dear to my heart.”

## Exhibit 5: Telus/Sick Kids Campaign/ Life on Manitoulin

McNaughton is a #TeamTelus brand ambassador. In March 2019, she partnered with Telus to promote their cause marketing initiative to help raise funds for SickKids Hospital. The call to action included \$25 given for each new smart phone activation in Ontario and \$25 for each download of digital children's book "Bunny Goes to Hospital."

Fig 5A Blog Post "TELUS SickKids ~ How You Can Help" (March 7, 2019)

<https://lifeonmanitoulin.com/2019/03/telus-sickkids-how-you-can-help.html>

Fig. 5B IG Description/Highlights

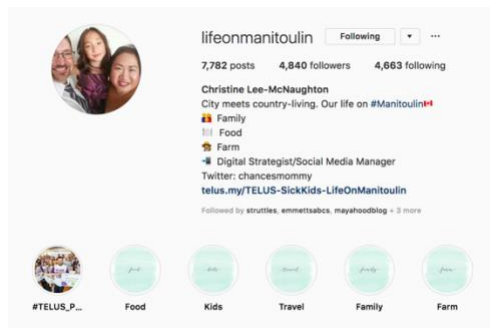


Fig. 5C IG Video Post



Fig. 5D IG Stories 3 Screens Featuring "Little One"

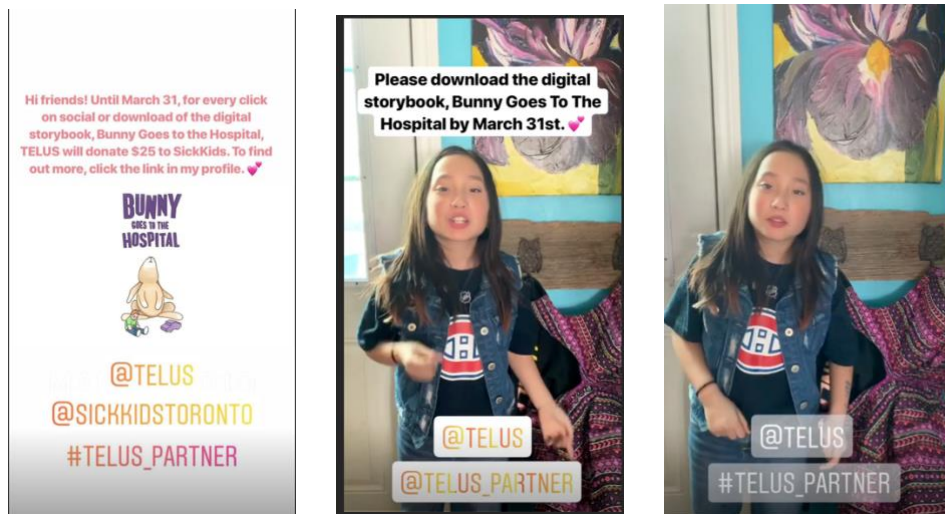




Fig. 5E: Twitter Announcement



Fig. 5 F: Twitter Video Post



Fig. 5G Facebook Blog Post

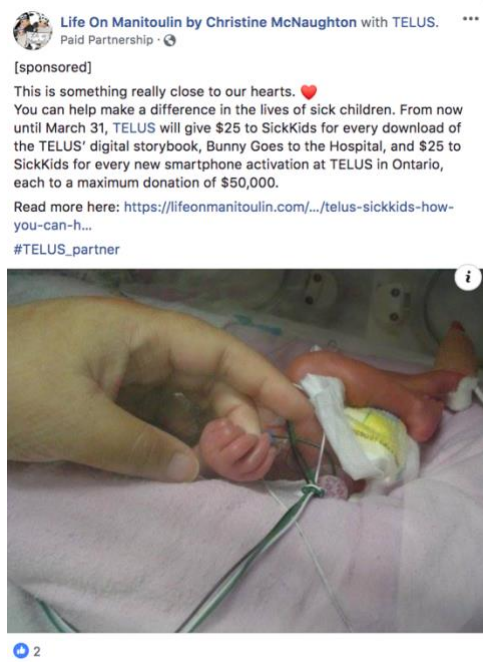


Fig. 5H Facebook Video



### **Communication Sample Salient Features**

For the purposes of this study, the “communicator sample” all worked in some capacity with influencers in their current job to execute paid campaigns. As previously defined, payment included product or payment for post. In addition, the definition of business size was determined based on the following scale: micro (1 – 10 employees), small (less than 11 - 50 employees), medium (51 – 249 employees), and large (250 + employees).





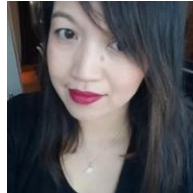
This group represent a variety of positions including talent manger/publicist (n=1), influencer agent (n=1), digital marketing specialist external (n=1), digital marketing specialist internal (n=1) and public relations specialist (n=1). All work at a senior or management level.

This study is comprised of communication professionals who are 100% (n=5) Canadian, live in Toronto, and are female. The business or agency size by number of employees was: micro (1-10) n=2; small (11-50) n=1; medium (51-249) n=1; Large (250+) n=1.

It is important to disclose that Muriel Rosilio has acted as an agent for influencers under the banner of Farago Media but is currently focused full-time on monetizing content for WattPad. She agreed to be interviewed about her experience working as an agent for influencers. Amber MacArthur does not use an agent or agency as she is her own media agency. Although not connected by a formal relationship, both participants represented an important voice in their respective spaces (agent and macro/celebrity influencer) and have been paired for the purposes of rounding out the sample.

## Communicator Sample

**Chart 2: Communicator Sample Comparison**

<b>Aly Tsourounis</b>	<b>Emily Ward</b>	<b>Jen Maier</b>	<b>Muriel Rosilio</b>	<b>Michelle Mullins</b>
				
<i>Principal, Hank PR (Kate Wallace)</i>	<i>Co-Founder, Shine PR/Shine Influencers (Eric Radford)</i>	<i>VP of Social and Influencer Marketing, Evolve Media (Jill Amery)</i>	<i>President, Farago Media Inc. (See disclosure notes)</i>	<i>Digital Marketing Manager, Henkle Canada (Christine McNaughton)</i>
Influencers: 15- 20 Brands: 4	Influencers: 60 Brands: 100's	Influencers: 1000's Brands: 100's	Influencers: 8 Brands: 30	Influencers: 10- 20 Brands: 3
PR Agency (Micro)	Talent/PR Agency (Small)	Digital Marketing Specialist (External) (Medium)	Agent (Micro)	Digital Marketing Specialist (Internal) (Large)

### **About Aly Tsourounis**

Aly Tsourounis is the Principal at Hank PR, a micro size PR Agency. She has been running her own business since 2016. Tsourounis says: “Right now, for every proposal I put forward for PR it encompasses influencers. Now I would say I am 60/40. Meaning 60 percent of the clients’ budget is going to influencer, 40 percent to more traditional media.”

Before going out on her own, Tsourounis advised on and carried out influencer campaigns at Environics Communications starting in 2008. Tsourounis talked about the shift from then until now, saying: “when I started working in PR. I could get guests on BT (Breakfast Television), I could get product on. You have to pay extra now. So much of what we do is “pay-for-play”. Everyone is an influencer.”

Her current client load working with influencers includes 4 brands and between 15-20 influencers in various on-going programs. Tsourounis range of client work includes: fitness, home décor, fashion, consumer packaged goods and kid’s goods.

Tsourounis worked on the Rudolphe sled Christmas campaign with Wallace where she seeded the product. She talks about the importance of having a mix of organic and paid posts in eWOM to hit metrics and to keep things real. She said of the campaign;

There is also something very authentic about the organic which is what I did with Kate for the Rudolphe sled. I just sent her the sled. There was no expectation to post. Knowing where there is a good enough product that you don’t need to put a ton of money behind it all the time. The organic and paid have to work together in terms of influencers.

Regardless of organic or paid influencer work, for Tsourounis, key to a healthy influencer/communicator relationship is that the influencer is genuine about their desire to

represent the product or brand; “I say that to all my influencers before we start... I am looking for authentic content, but first let’s make sure it is a fit.”

### **About Emily Ward**

Emily Ward is the co-founder of Shine Influencers (Shine PR), a small influencer talent agency, with offices in Toronto, LA, and Montreal. Founded in 2015, originally as a pure play PR Agency, they quickly found the earned media landscape was rapidly shrinking. Ward said:

By way of the fact that advertisers were removing dollars from print and broadcast advertising those media bodies when PR people would come with a pitch for earned media they would say – sounds great. Let me take you over to the advertorial team or the sponsored content team. You couldn’t really get earned media in those spaces at the same rate it became much more difficult. Over the past 5 years it has become almost impossible.

They looked to Australia for inspiration, where talent representation for influencers had become a common business model, and decided to do a spin off called Shine Influencers. Ward said; “knowone was really doing a talent management agency where were representing people who were firstly known for the fact that they have a social following in Canada. So we decided to do that and we launched Shine Influencers.” The parallel drawn is that they are similar to casting for actors. They have a roster of 60 exclusive influencer talent who they look to cast in three ways: brands/agencies approach influencer, brands agencies approach Shine PR to cast a campaign, and Shine PR approaches brands who are a fit with influencers persona. They have completed 1000’s of programs to date. Having completed so many influencer programs they have done work in every category type.

Ward says that working as an influencer talent manager attracts a certain type of person:

We are managing people’s business. In a lot of cases, in this mid-micro range, this is

people's jobs. This is 100% their income, and they are trusting us to grow that for them. It's a high degree of trust. Talent managers have to truly believe in the talent they are representing."

Ward highlighted a major challenge of working in such an evolving space being a lack of professionalism saying she hopes to "bring together a bunch of the influencer/talent relations media agencies so that we can come up with a code of ethics we all adhere to."

### **About Jennifer Maier**

Jennifer Maier is currently the Vice President of Social Media and Influencer Marketing for North America at Evolve Media, a medium size content company. They also have moved into the influencer space through an influencer matching platform. Maier explains;

We have access to influencers using a proprietary tool. It gives us access to search for influencers on any platform. We don't have exclusive, or preferred list. I have relationships with influencers due to my history in the space. Really I work with anybody who has a presence on social media.

The history Maier is referring to is that she founded [www.urbanmoms.ca](http://www.urbanmoms.ca) in 2005, which she ran until 2014. Maier was one of Canada's original "mommy bloggers." With a marketing, content, and strategy background she concurrently grew an influencer consulting business where she advised clients (agencies) and brands on social amplification, content development and consumer engagement strategy. Moving from content creator to commissioning content was a natural step, and with Evolve Media, Maier's skill set is a perfect fit. She said:

The whole reason I was hired to do influencer relations was because of my relationships within the influencers space. I was an influencer, I've been doing this a super long time, and I have contacts. I know how to speak the language, I know how to price things I know how to work with an influencer. Just like any creative person there's ownership and a sense of pride around the content you create, I get that."

Maier has serviced every industry from an influencer campaign perspective aside from insurance and real-estate. In the current landscape today, Maier had this to say about the state of

influencer relations: “I feel like we're at a point now where we have the opportunity for it to be much more strategic. And brands are open to it and people just aren't doing it very well.” Maier says to do it well it has to be strategic: “one thing that I deal with kind of on a day-to-day basis on the influencer side and on the brand side is that influencer marketing, social marketing should be strategic; it should be talked about at the early part of your planning cycle.”

### **About Muriel Rosilio**

Muriel Rosilio is an Agency and founder of Farrago Media Inc. and is the Director of Business Development for Wattpad. Rosilio said; “my entire career has revolved around monetizing content for creators. Today I can say it is either traditional producers, influencer online, or in the case of WattPad now writers are the creators.” She started working with influencers in 2012 when she took on an agent role for You-Tubers Mitch and Greg of ASAP Science which at the time was “a pivot away from traditional media distribution and a new challenge – how do you make money on a platform that is free to everybody?”

Rosilio talked about the differentiation of the role of agent and manager saying;

The agent role, which to me is more a very business-oriented role, is where you try to generate income for creators in order for them to continue to do what they do best which is create content and pursue their passion if you will. And then there is the role of a manager which is much more geared to trying to plan out the next five years for them considering every option that comes along in the big picture scheme of things. How do you build the brand? And of course how do you manage them personally as people you're working with.

As an agent, Rosilio represented 8 influencers. She has worked with over 30 brands, large and small on deals in the beauty, fitness, media, technology, government, fine dining, quick service, travel, consumer packaged goods, and service industry.

As an agent, she is always seeking alignment with the brand and creator. Her goal is that the brand to avoid in-authentic content saying; “there are lots of cases where brands want to be very hands on and tell you what to do. And those relationships never work. You have to trust that the creator knows how to message.” Further she said, creators’ followers should be given more credit; “online audiences understand that influencers have to make a living and they have work with brands.” Rosilio has an interesting vantage point to witness co-creation between brands and influencers saying; “I’m acting as a middle person. You know you have to give and take.”

### **About Michelle Mullins**

Michelle Mullins is the digital marketing manager for Henkle Canada’s detergent brands: Purex, Persil Pro Clean and Sunlight. Internally she runs an influencer program for these three brands and works with 10-20 influencers over the course of a year. Mullins, like Maier, is a crossover - influencer turned influencer marketing specialist. In 2008, she started a blog called [www.lipstickrules.com](http://www.lipstickrules.com) and in 2011 she won an award presented by Proctor and Gamble for Best Beauty Blog in Canada. Mullins talked about what being an influencer was like in early 2000’s;

I was partnering with Maybelline Canada. We did videos at Fashion Week. But at the time it wasn't as sophisticated as it is now where people are doing sponsored posts and there wasn't this paid media kind of component to it was very much like I give you product. You decide to write about it, or not. There was never any kind of contract and if there was a contract they were very few and far between.

While running her blog, Mullins also worked at a PR agency. Eventually she decided to use her learnings as a blogger/influencer to change her career path to being solely dedicated to digital and social media marketing. She has brought influencer relations into her work regardless of brand, and in some cases has made a business case for its inclusion into the marketing mix. She has always done this work inside on the brand team working with quick service restaurant Tim Hortons and consumer packaged good brands Purina prior to her current role at Henkle.



Mullins talks about the field of influencer relations and how it is currently evolving; “it's (influencer relations) definitely becoming more a kind of business relationships between influencers and brands. As a result of that with you are starting to see more guidelines being put in place.” Further she stressed the need for education in the field saying; “From an internal and even an agency standpoint we need constant education for those who are not as familiar with this space. So we always have to back it up with reason and stats.” Mullins nominated influencer Christine McNaughton to the study.

## Findings

### The Role of Influencer Relations

#### **Influencer relations is its own function.**

Participants were given a background on the current four-part ecology of communications and marketing roles of “business logic”, “science logic”, “artistic logic” (Grabher 2002) and “technological logic” (Takemura 2012) and asked: where does influencer relations fit within this schema? Or does it fit at all?

70% (n=7) responded that *all* these roles are in some way encompassed in the role of influencer relations. 20% (n=2) pointed to *two or more* roles as being essential to effective influencer relations: Ward suggested a combination of science and business logics and Wallace identified technical and business logics. Maier said that influencer relations would be most similar to the role of a brand manager residing in business logic.

The majority of the sample, *both* communicators 60% (n=3) and influencers 80% (n=4), thought that the role of influencer relations is its own type of logic, which borrows from the current ecology of roles but does not fit neatly into one job role or another. The extent to which the opinions concur is remarkable. On the communicator side, Tsourounis said: “I really think influencer relations is its own thing. I think it includes different elements of the current ecology but it’s different.” Mullins said: “I feel like influencer relations, as it stands today, is a bit of a combination.” Rosilio said: “Influencer Relations sounds like it fits in all of them.”

From the influencer sample, Amery said: “I really believe, as an influencer, in order to be effective at influencer relations you have to embody each one of those things to a certain degree” McNaughton said: “I feel they are all really intertwined. The specialists I work with for the campaigns they have their own job. They focus on the influencer and all the things related.” And Radford simply responded saying; “I think that it combines all of them in a way.”

There is also an interesting area of unanimous agreement between influencers and communicators: regardless of their positions on the specifics of influencer relations positioning, *all* participants (N=10) noted that business logic is an essential part of the role. Maier, who said the role of influencer relations is most similar to brand management, highlighted that relationship management is a core component of the job but identifies an important difference: the business being managed is a person with whom there is a key interpersonal relationship. “I would say the difference is that a lot of content producers, influencers are not "a business" they are not equipped to operate in the same way within that relationship that traditionally it was. That the relationship, the one-on-one that you have with that influencer, can make or break a campaign.”

The results of this question show that the role of influencer relations is in itself “a logic” worth identifying separately. It is an emerging role within communications which warrants a specific addition to the ecology of marketing and communication roles nomenclature with the term “influencer logic”.

### **Influencer relations and the PR tipping point.**

Is “influencer marketing”, a common term for influencer relations, a misnomer? When participants were asked which department is better at handling influencer relations - public relations or marketing? - the edge went to public relations with 50% (n=5) of the total respondents saying they felt it should be a role primarily managed by those with a public relations skill set. The remaining 50% were split with 30% (n=3) saying both or either and 20% (n=2) preferring the marketing department to take the lead on influencer relations.

To this question, the communicator sample and the influencer sample returned very different answers. The communicator sample is evenly split between public relations professionals and marketing professionals: two of the marketers and two of the PR professionals, perhaps unsurprisingly, answered along “party lines” and elected for their own specialties to take the lead on influencer relations. The swing vote for communicators was influencer agent Rosilio who said: “It just didn't matter, I dealt with all of them. I worked with digital agencies, social media agencies, PR departments, marketing departments, and media buying agencies. So much depends on the client, the campaign, and who they were hiring to do the job.” This demonstrates that the jury is still out, even within the field of communications, about who owns the role of influencer relations; it also demonstrates that marketing and PR professionals who

deal with influencers are often territorial about their specialities, and believe their own expertise to be best suited to influencer logic.

However, looking at the influencer sample responses, a clearer answer emerges: 60% (n=3) saying they prefer to work with public relations, 20% (n=1) said the job was best handled by either PR or marketing (Radford), and 20% (n=1) who said the job is better handled by marketing (Amery).

So why do we call it influencer marketing? MacArthur said that, in her view, there has been a shift of influencer outreach moving from marketing-led to public relations-led:

I have found for the majority of the influencer marketing campaigns that I do I have been dealing with the PR team either at the brands themselves or the agency that they hire on now. It's just kind of been a gradual shift because originally, I think what I would see is that the marketing departments would reach out to me but now it's almost entirely PR... I think in about 2017 there was a bit of a tipping point at least in my perspective.

A tabulation of reasons given by interviewees on both sides for preferring one area of practice over the other revealed three top functional reasons for this public relations tipping point, they were: (1) PR's innate understanding that influencers will not allow full control of their content and messaging (n=8); (2) A shift to "pay-for-play" and a shrinking pool of journalists in traditional media makes getting earned media more challenging for PR professionals. Influencers have become the new earned media (n=4); (3) PR has a greater understanding of long-term relationship management (n=3).

In contrast, the top three functional reasons for why marketing should lead influencer relations included; (1) bigger budgets/paid media (n=6); (2) an understanding of overall marketing strategy (n=3); (3) more adept at social media algorithms (n=1)

Lending her voice to why public relations is better to handle influencer relations, influencer, McNaughton said: “I felt that public relations within a company would have handled influencer relations better than the marketing department... There were times where marketing didn’t “get” some of the intricacies of a campaign that the public relations department probably would.” On the PR agency communicator side, Ward articulates what those “intricacies” are, saying;

We often times are advocating for our talent against the brand, being like: it is not advertising. You are guaranteeing the space, but the voice, the opinion: that is theirs. You don’t own that. And that is more PR minded. When I think of marketing, I think of full control. They work with a creative team, they have full approval of that ad, and they have full control of where that ad is going to go because they buy it. It’s not that – it’s somewhere in between.”

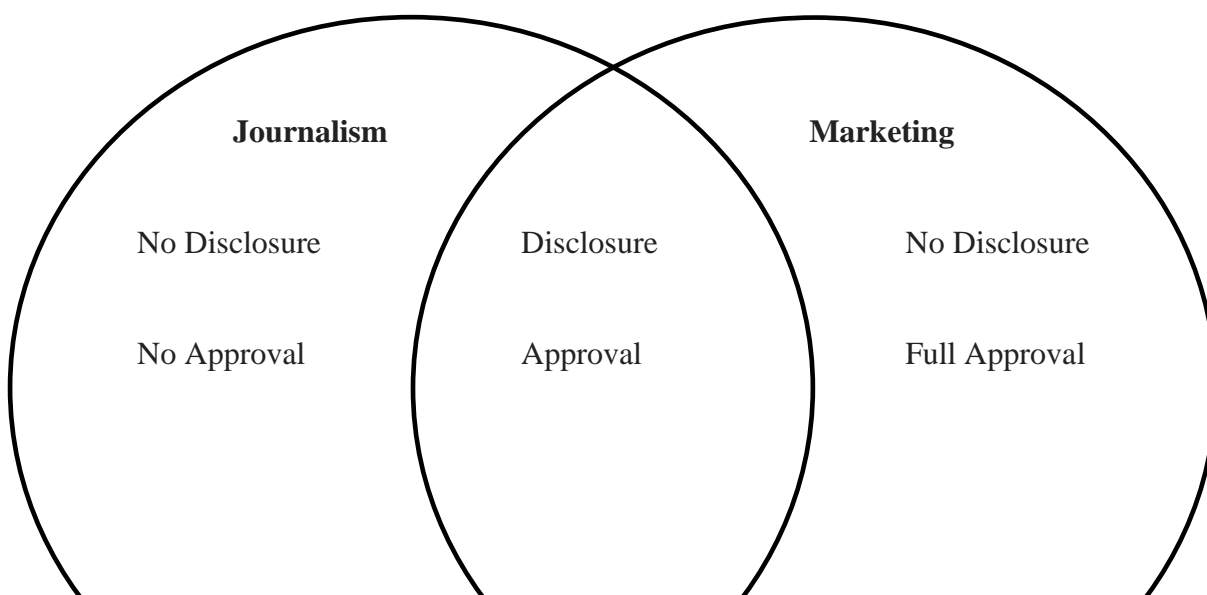
The somewhere in between that Ward references is a space between journalism and marketing that social media influencers have come to occupy as a new medium. Dietrich (2014) used the PESO model: paid, earned, shared and owned to show the overlap of various media types. In the PESO model, influencers are between paid and earned media. Public relations intuitively understands the give and take between professionals who represent the intersection between earned and paid: journalists, influencers, and marketers (JIM). Further, they possess unique skills such as relationship management, narrative story-telling, talent management, and social listening, which are essential skills for effective influencer logic.

To help explain this finding Exhibit 7: The JIM Disclosure Approval Continuum is a visual model of why public relations is best positioned to manage the role of influencer relations, which sits at the intersection of “earned” and “paid”. It is not just the source of payment but also the legal and ethical necessity of disclosure of “paid partnerships”, using hashtags like #ad and #sponsored and other disclosure language, that is a key differentiator of influencers; generally,

however, not all of their content is sponsored, and effective influencers generate trust from their audiences specifically because they claim that even sponsored posts are genuine and heartfelt.

Influencer participant Amery puts it this way: “disclosure is what separates journalists from influencers.” Journalists have journalistic independence and a code of professional ethics that prohibits them from engaging in conduct that would constitute a conflict of interest, which would include taking payment from the subjects of their journalism; in principle, this allows them the freedom to engage in journalism that is assumed by their audiences to be fair, balanced and without bias. On the other hand, influencer content is not pure advertising, which is one reason why influencers may prefer to work with PR. As Ward’s statement above highlights, in marketing departments there is generally a high degree of control and necessity for full approval of all expressions of the brand. Further, advertising is generally in the domain of marketing, and is a lower-trust activity than influencer content because it is clearly paid; there is no requirement for disclosure because the disclosure is inherent.

**Exhibit 7: The JIM Disclosure Approval Continuum**



**Public Relations****Public Relations****Influencers**

In brief, the realm of journalism requires that journalistic independence is observed. They do not need to disclose payment as they should accept any. They also do not require approval to share their findings, they are guided by the public interest and fact. In the influencer realm, influencers practice “brand journalism” which is disclosed to their audience and approved of by the brand. Finally, marketers do not disclose sources of information, but they control the message through full approval. Public Relations therefore becomes a bridge (brand to influencers) and a buffer (journalists to brand).

**Influencer relations... It is not something you can hand off.**

The final inquiry about the role of influencer relations was if the job should sit internally with the brand or externally with an agency. Should brands build the capabilities to run full influencer programs in house, or should they use an agency to manage it on their behalf?

70% (n=7) think that influencer relations as a role should be a speciality within a brands communication team, while 30% felt that using an agency to manage influencer relations was the better way. By isolating the influencers’ responses, however, we see a strong preference emerge: from their perspective, 80% (n=4) prefer to work with brands who have internal influencer

relations teams to those who employ an agency. Wallace highlighted briefing and feedback as reasons why the job sitting with an internal person is better:

Honestly, I think the way it works best is when the relationship to the brand is really tight... It is not just something you can hand-off. There are a couple reasons it doesn't work that way. One is that they (agencies) are not versed in 'what is the intent', they aren't looping back in and providing the feedback loop to the influencers as well. Also, then they're tends to be a very superficial treatment of it... I think if you don't have that tight relationship with that agency you are much better bringing in a specialist and having them manage it.

McNaughton talked about a favourite partner who has brought the function into their team. For her, similar to Wallace, having a direct relationship makes things run smoothly, saying; "one brand in particular that I work with has a specialist within their communications department that deals with influencer relations. This is by far my favourite brand to work with because everything is seamless."

Amery reasoned brands who have influencer relations as internal specialty tend to foster long-term brand loyal relationships with influencers and benefit financially, saying:

I think brands should think about it as an internal specialty. And I've worked with a number of brands to do house their influencer relations internally. And I find that I have much longer relationships with those brands and a lot of the time they don't even have to pay me... the majority of experience I've had with in-house influencer relations means that they're getting a lot more bang for their buck.

In talking to both groups about the difference between internal and external influencer relations a trend emerged that showed two common workflows. Exhibit 8 demonstrates internal vs. external influencer relations workflow. Fig. 8A is the ideal workflow, when a brand has internal influencer relations. Fig. 8B represents the non-ideal workflow, when a brand outsources influencer relations to an agency.



For 8A and B see \* and \*\* as they represent the common practice by influencers at the mid/macro level employ an agent to vet opportunities, manage contracts, and monitor conflicts of interest. The agent would deal with the brand or, if hired, agency or sub-contracted influencer agency or platform on these items. Rosilio, who works as an agent, talked about her role in the workflow:

as an agent my biggest role was always to vet what the opportunity was against the influencer's brand I'm representing. Every one of these channels or people are what I consider brands in-and-of themselves. They've spent a lot of time creating their own personal brands and they have a lot at stake.”

This dovetails with Maier's assertion that although an influencer is a person, they also represent a business, and that the relationship is both an interpersonal one and a B2B one.

Exhibit 8B, \*\*\* shows the seldom-discussed but often-practiced trend by some agencies to sub-contract influencer relations to a specialist agency or influencer platform. Maier, a communicator and former influencer who worked as a sub-contracted specialist for a number of years and discusses the knowledge gap she experienced from agencies who take on influencer relations capacities:

I would say my biggest frustration as an influencer and also servicing agencies as their in-house influencer person was they would *say* this was an internal service and then they would outsource it due to their lack of understanding of the importance and the value of what the influencer brings to the table. They were much more driven to support a client's need to control things then they were the creative freedom of an influencer.

Ward, who runs an influencer talent agency, confirmed this practice, saying: “Right now, 70% of our business comes through PR agencies. So brands are actually diluting their budgets because they are paying PR agencies who are then coming to talent managers to do this.” Ward, however, champions the idea of having an Agency of Record (AOR) for influencer relations, saying; “I see it as being another category that brands would have an AOR for influencer

relations; as they would have an AOR for a digital firm; an AOR for a direct marketing firm.”

She went on to discuss three tiers of service: strategists (i.e. what type of content makes sense for the brand’s narrative), execution (i.e. finding, hiring, briefing influencers), and data mining (i.e. looking at results to see if program is working). Mullins, who manages influencer strategy for Henkel, noted that she sees a need for an agency as Ward has outlined, as there is a human resource shortfall:

I think it's important for an organization to have somebody on staff that understands the space because it just it gives you insights as to what works what doesn't work. But I think execution and helping with a strategy and outreach of the day-to-day management... I think it is important to have external help.

#### Exhibit 8: Influencer Relations Internal vs. External Workflow

Fig. 8A

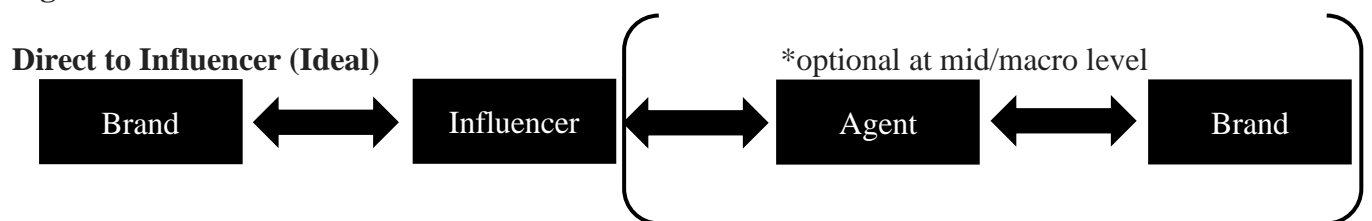
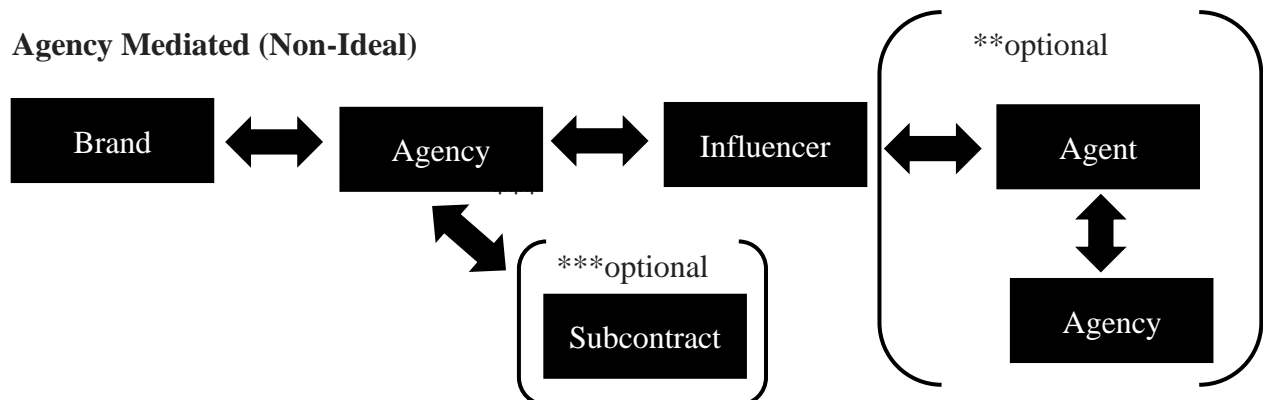


Fig. 8B



**Influencer relations... Who does what?**

The next area of inquiry looked to find a holistic overview of the influencer-communicator relationship and determine who is currently responsible for what. Participants were asked what their typical deal-to-delivery looks like from their vantage point. They were also asked to outline the respective responsibilities of the influencer and the partner. The findings of this section have been stitched together, like a quilt, featuring an analysis of their individual responses that revealed a current workflow pattern made up of 12 distinct phases. These 12 phases are outlined in the order of operations in Exhibit 9 with supporting evidence from interview answers.

The hope is this may be useful as a critical path that should be understood on both sides in order for any sponsored content program to run effectively. Understanding the full process is an important step towards realizing an effective influencer logic.

#### **Exhibit 9: 12 Phases of Effective Influencer Relations**

<b>What is the phase called?</b>	<b>Who is involved?</b>	<b>What happens?</b>
Phase 1: Influencer Program	Brand, Agency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Program objectives, timelines, and budget</li> <li>2. Create influencer brief</li> <li>3. Meet with agency to brief</li> </ol>
Phase 2: Influencer Roster	Brand, Agency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research possible influencers</li> <li>2. Create roster for approval</li> <li>3. Brand approves roster</li> </ol>
Phase 3: Influencer Outreach	Brand, Agency, Influencer, Agent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agency or brand pitch influencers by e-mail</li> <li>2. Influencers/agents look for alignment</li> <li>3. Influencers respond: either express interest or decline</li> <li>4. Request the influencer brief or further details/phone call</li> </ol>

Phase 4: Influencer Proposal	Influencer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Influencer puts forward menu of items for project</li> <li>2. High-level ideation/vision</li> <li>3. Proposal addresses budget</li> </ol>
Phase 5: Proposal Approval	Brand	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brand approves the high-level concepts from influencer</li> <li>2. Agreement on number of posts, channels, platforms, timeline, budget</li> </ol>
Phase 6: Statement of Work	Brand, Agency, Influencer, Agent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Proposal becomes basis for statement of work</li> <li>2. Legal contract facilitated by the brand or agency</li> <li>3. Negotiation of rates</li> <li>4. Negotiation of further terms i.e. confidentiality, NDA's, category exclusivity etc.</li> </ol>
Phase 7: Content Creation	Influencer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Product trial/product education period</li> <li>2. Shoot Photo/Video</li> <li>3. Caption/Script</li> <li>4. Edit</li> </ol>
Phase 8: Content Approval	Brand, Agency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Visual approvals</li> <li>2. Editorial approval</li> <li>3. Feedback or approval</li> </ol>
Phase 9: Posting Content	Influencer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Schedule content</li> <li>2. Post content</li> <li>3. Send links and screen shots to brand or agency</li> </ol>
Phase 10: Content Interaction	Brand, Influencer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Influencer monitors and interacts with audience</li> <li>2. Brand social media interacts with content</li> <li>3. Boost content</li> </ol>
Phase 11: Post Reporting	Influencer, Brand	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Influencer provides report</li> <li>2. Brand provides influencer with feedback on performance</li> </ol>

Phase 12: Payment	Influencer, Brand, Agency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Influencer sends invoice</li> <li>2. Brand or agency pays influencer</li> </ol>
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### Phase 1: Influencer Program

**“I would love to get to a place where every brand sends a brief.” – Kate Wallace**

The first phase of any influencer campaign starts with either the agency of record or the brand identifying an influencer program as part of the strategic communication plan. In this phase three key actions take place, set in motion by the brand or AOR. They are: setting program objectives, creating a strategic influencer program brief, and if initiated by the brand briefing the agency.

Mullins, the Digital Marketing Manager for Henkel, talked about how she starts her process. “First we decide: is it a campaign-based program? or is it always on? Then what happens is once we decide, what’s our budget? Then I’ll work with the agency to figure out what that program could look like.” Ward talked about the process of fielding a request for an influencer program from a brand: “If the job comes in directly from the brand, we ask them a ton of questions about who they are going after. The more information we have about their target consumer the better we can do our job. Then budget, framework, timeline.”

The importance of the brief, for both the potential agency/AOR and influencer, cannot be underestimated. The brief is the framework that Ward is referring to, and sets out guidelines and expectations. The success of an influencer campaign is based on the objectives and vision being clearly articulated by the brand at this phase. As influencer and former communications professional Wallace said:

I would love to get to a place where every brand sends a brief. That's my preference - to see one. There are lots of the brands I work with ongoing, who do that. I would say the ideal brand partner provides a strategic brief on where they are going, the direction of the campaign, as well samples of partner work they have done in the past that they have loved. If you have an idea in your mind what great execution looks like then please tell me. If I can, I will recreate that in my voice.

## **Phase 2: Influencer Roster**

**“We go through a bit of an investigation process.” – Emily Ward**

The second phase is creating an influencer roster. This phase includes three key actions: research of influencers who may be a good fit for the objectives and vision of the brief, creating a program roster for approval, and gaining brand approval on the roster for outreach.

Influencer agent Rosilio talks about the importance of brands doing their research on influencers at this stage, to ensure product-influencer fit: “There were so many brands that didn't even know the influencers...They didn't understand the real integrity of the channel or the content.” Influencer Wallace agrees brands need to do their research saying: “I have the biggest possible available portfolio. Just go to my site...If someone reaches out to me I go cyber-stalk the brand and I hope they do the same.” Influencer research can be quite a time-consuming process, but it pays off because you need to have the right people. Ward said: “It really does come down to having the right person, having communication with that person, that person being able to communicate effectively to their following-ship.”

The sample addressed using human vs. AI tools in selecting the roster. Tsourounis said: “I've used Klear, an influencer marketing platform. It can be a good first step, but I always do my own check. You can't rely on it totally to find your influencer group.” Likewise, talent agent Ward talks about the importance of the human factor, saying:

We go through a bit of an investigation process: the same way you might try and find the right journalist in a publication, we try to find the right talent. I do not believe that that can be done as well with just a database program that is only looking at the numbers. There is a whole layer of this business you can't rely on an algorithm to determine for you.

As Ward mentions that different influencer search platforms use different metrics to make content creator suggestions. It can be problematic as it can be surface level. It might be based on total following, average engagement, or average reach. These measures can be misleading. For example, the bigger your following typically the lower the influencers engagement rate. The influencer sample of this research follows that established rule (see Chart 1, p. 23). And influencers with higher reach tend to have larger followings.

Research activities mentioned by the sample included: following the influencer for a period of time to get a sense of their voice/content, going through their feeds for category conflicts, looking for signs of fake users or evidence of buying users, and looking at their metrics like engagement and reach. Tsourounis says: "I make sure I do the background research to see: do they have a conflict? Are they authentic? And do they have solid engagement? As a PR person, I think part of the service I am offering is the ability to create the campaign and select the influencers."

Creating a roster is like creating a wish list: you might not get to work with every influencer in the end. The next step is to get approval from the brand on which influencers they'd like to pursue. Maier talks about her strategy for this, saying: "I'll put a bunch of them forward, probably twice as many as are requested in the proposal, and the client will select whoever they want." In the same way a PR professional adds value through existing relationships with media, and influencer relations professional adds value through their own existing relationships.

Tsourounis starts from her own preferred list, saying: "I will put together a list of suggested

influencers. I kind of have a roster, I like and work with often. Depending on the client's needs I will suggest new people." Mullins on the brand side talks about receiving and approving the list: "The agency provides recommendations on our approach and some select names of influencers to potentially work with and then we vet those and decide this is who we want to go after."

### **Phase 3: Influencer Outreach**

**"My biggest goal is to be sincere." – Eric Radford**

The third phase is influencer outreach, which involves four main actions: the pitch to influencers by e-mail, influencer/agent evaluation for alignment, influencers respond and either express interest or decline, and interested influencers request the brief or further details by e-mail or phone.

MacArthur, an influencer, talks about her approach to this phase: "they contact me by e-mail, they know they potentially want to do work together. Then we book a 1/2-hour call, and then they tell me a little bit more about their goals." Maier, from a communicators perspective, confirms this process saying once an influencer campaign is signed off on by the brand or AOR she said: "I would reach out to a group of influencers beforehand and just say this is high level. It's a beauty brand or it's a hair brand or whatever...I'm just pitching it at this point. Would this be something that you'd be interested in? And usually they'll say what is required?" This appeared to be a very typical working process as the influencers look to get more information on the program being proposed.

It is important at this phase to note influencers and agents are looking for alignment or fit. Wallace says; "I normally ask why they are interested in us, if they haven't said that. I want to



know why they feel it is a fit with their brand.” Radford talks about needing to have a genuine affinity for the product: “My biggest goal is to be sincere...I need to believe in the products, like them, and use them (see Fig. 2D & 2E, p. 27).” Ward, Radford’s talent agent, talks about her golden rule: “The influencer first and foremost has to have some ethics... if it is a product or service they are not interested in, that they don’t do the campaign.” This is necessary for the influencer to maintain their audience’s trust.

#### **Phase 4: Influencer Proposal**

**“I’ll pitch them a kind of a ‘menu’ of items.” – Amber MacArthur**

The fourth phase is the influencer proposal, where the influencer takes the information gleaned from the pitch, brief, and phone call and puts together a custom proposal for the brand. A proposal includes three main parts: a menu of suggested execution items, high-level ideation/vision, and suggested budget. MacArthur talks about her typical proposal saying; “I’ll pitch them what a long-term relationship will look like, kind of a menu of items. Usually we going through it together and pick what they think is going to make the most sense for their audience (see Exhibit 4, p. 33-35).” Amery takes a similar approach: “I always try to push for a more integrated campaign because I’m not it’s just one platform.” The proposals can be widely variable; no two are exactly alike.

#### **Phase 5: Proposal Approval**

**Influencers know our audiences. – Jill Amery**

In the fifth phase, the client or agency refines or approves the influencer's proposal. In this phase the brand will approve high-level concepts from the influencer, or may make changes or suggest revisions. There will be agreement on number of posts, channels, platforms, timeline, and rates. This becomes the jumping off point for the contract or statement of work. Wallace talks about the proposal approval from an influencer perspective, saying:

They normally give me more information on that. I then go do some thinking about What that looks like for us. Timing, deliverables, rates, frequency, how it fits with our content schedule all that stuff. At that point we start nailing down contract stuff.

Amery stressed the need for the influencer to be part of the planning process and be given a seat at the creative table for this phase. "Influencers know our audience. So every campaign has to be different and tailored to an audience, which is a lot more work upfront for the brand or the PR firm." Amery is referring to the fact that each influencer will approach the creative differently. Influencer marketing is not a one-size-fits-all tactic, and is not the same as advertising, in which the brand controls the creative process; many influencers, in fact, negotiate to retain final control over the creative for their campaigns. Rosilio talked about content approval as being a hands-off process, saying: "With influencer marketing the brand has to trust what the creators doing. The creator will find the best way to get the message across. It cannot be scripted. You cannot ask for the company name to be repeated ten times. You can't have that much of a say and you have to be somewhat hands-off."

## **Phase 6: Statement of Work**

**We are very buttoned up when it comes to the legality of it. – Jen Maier**

Phase 6 is the statement of work. In this phase, the proposal becomes the basis for the legal contract, which is normally facilitated by the brand or agency commissioning the influencer, and may be between the influencer and the agency or between the influencer and the brand, with agency as intermediary. The final rate and negotiation of further terms, such as confidentiality and category exclusivity, take place at this phase. Of the contract process, influencer Amery says: “It always comes from the brand to me; if there's something in there that is, [say], a non-compete period that's too long or whatever, I'll go back and try to change that. But typically we've negotiated the parameters beforehand.”

MacArthur talked about the importance of being careful and having a second set of eyes review the final contract:

one of the things that I've learned early on is to take the time and have a professional go through all of your contracts because I feel as though that has protected me a lot through this process. I feel honestly so many people who built these great followings are really taken advantage of sometimes and don't really take the time to think about the business side of things.

Maier says that a contract protects everyone involved: “we have a legal document that's been vetted by a lawyer. Yeah, I'm dealing with some large budgets here. So we are very buttoned up when it comes to the legality of it.” Because every influencer-brand relationship can have its own nuisances, Rosilio stressed the importance of having a contract in place: “Every agency, every brand is different and has different expectations and requirements. It's always really clear that we have some form of contract or statement of work. It should be really clear what is expected of the influencer before anything gets created”.

## **Phase 7: Content Creation**

**“I want to do a good job and I want it to look good.” – Eric Radford**

Phase 7, content creation, is when the creative juices really start to flow. In this phase there should sufficient time to do a product trial and/or have an education period planned with the influencer where they can have an authentic experience with the product. Tsourounis talked about the commissioning partners responsibility in this phase being to ensure the influencer has what they need: “our responsibility is to ensure the influencer gets the key messages. Providing product is another big one. Finally, ensuring solid distribution and details on that.”

Next, the influencer prepares the creative: they shoot photos, video, write captions or script, and they might do some editing of images or video depending on what has been agreed on in the contract phase. Influencer Amery identifies that her number one responsibility as an influencer is production of “the highest quality writing, photography, and video that you can produce given the budget (see Exhibit 3, p. 30-31).” Radford echoed this, saying: “My responsibility is putting together a good quality photo, I want to do a good job and I want it to look good (see Exhibit 2, p. 27).”

Influencers stressed the importance of not rushing the process and being respectful that they have a variety of demands on any given day. Wallace said: “It feels like sometimes it’s a push out, it’s a big hurry to get the content out. Oh man, I need to get out to these 5 influencers, and I just need this content to happen. Sometimes you are in a time crunch and you just need it to happen, but be open to having a dialogue.” MacArthur referred to respecting that the influencer has a lot going on: “You know, I think the most important thing in terms of the expectations from the people that I end up working with is just that there are reasonable in terms of understanding that I do a lot of different things.”

Amery offered her explanation to why she feels influencer often get brought in under tight timelines saying;

Traditionally, influencers are viewed as the bottom of the totem pole. This is where brands go wrong is that they view us as a way to check the social media box. It just can't happen last minute like that. A media buy can't what happened last minute and I don't think effective influencer campaigns can happen last minute either.

Interestingly, timelines standards were not something that came up from the communicator sample as it seems they vary widely. The key takeaway for communicators here is that authentic content needs time. Communicators should build in time for trial and education when pitching an influencer program of any duration.

## **Phase 8: Content Approval**

### **It's their content still. – Michelle Mullins**

After the content has been created most influencers will send it for approval to the brand or agency. There are two types of approval: visual approvals and editorial approvals. When giving feedback to influencers, the influencer interviewees unanimously said, brands and agencies should not be too heavy-handed as creators have their own unique voices and know how to message to/with their audience. This is a marked difference from most brands' relationships with work-for-hire freelance creatives like copywriters and graphic designers.

Mullins expressed that the brand involvement at this stage should be limited: "It's their content still. But you know, from a brand perspective it is more about the messaging and visually perfect placement." Mullins went on to describe what that looks like: "We want to make sure elements of the messaging is carried through and any product placement is clear, not blurry."

Mullins is an exemplar for the brand side. She shows an understanding of openness to how the creator wants to get the message across to their audience. On the brand side she is doing a quality check of the content vs. editorial choices by the creator. For an example of allowing the creator to tell their personal story, in their own voice (or in this case her daughter's) see the Telus/Sick Kids Campaign by McNaughton. (see Exhibit 5, p. 38-39).

Wallace and the entire influencer participant sample shared stressful real-life moments about reviews gone bad, saying:

I certainly have had situations where I have 3, 4 revisions requested and at that point I say let's take a pause there and figure out a new approach. I don't want to use your time this way. I find it is usually with companies who are doing it for the first time and they are not comfortable letting go of the narrative.

The bigger the following the higher the stakes. The influencer with the largest following in this study, MacArthur, says that for her, reviews are about getting it right the first time:

There is always a review process involved in everything that I end up doing. There may be sort of loose guidelines around things like Instagram stories but generally speaking I would always get their approval... I understand that both the brand and myself would want to be especially diligent in making sure that there's not a slip up.

## **Phase 9: Posting Content**

**“Timing and calendar are important.” – Amber MacArthur**

Phase 9 is when the influencer content goes live. Three major events take place: scheduling the content, posting the content, and sending links and screen shots to the agency or brand. Scheduling the content is negotiated based on direction from brand or agency and other content obligations by the influencer; sometimes, for larger projects with other dependencies, it is included in the contract. MacArthur talks about the importance of having a content calendar:

“For people like me, obviously, timing and calendar are important because I don't want to have too much sponsored content in my feed at the same time.”

Once the plan for when the post will be flighted is agreed to, it is the influencer's responsibility to ensure it is posted on specified date/time as agreed. Radford said: “The other responsibility is schedule. If they want it on a certain date it's my responsibility to make sure it's on time.” Wallace echoes this: “If someone gives me a timeline, I need to make sure I can adhere to that.”

Communicator Tsourounis expects deadlines to be adhered to by the influencers she works with: “depending on the influencer, some are really good, I would say a lot of them are overwhelmed and disorganized. Promptness is a big one. If they miss a deadline, that annoys me.” Missing the publishing deadline backs up phase 10-12: content interaction, post reporting, and payment.

After the content goes live, the influencers are responsible for either alerting or sending screen shots and links as soon as possible to the commissioning partner. Maier says: “It would be up to me or my people to track that everything went live to take screenshots of it or links... send it to the client, make sure everything's cool there, make sure we're hitting whatever targets we have in place.” This should take place shortly after posting with close monitoring by the brand and influencer for the first 24 hours.

## **Phase 10: Content Interaction**

**“Share all of our posts on their networks.” – Christine McNaughton**

Phase 10 takes place in the first 24 hours after content is posted. In this phase the influencer monitors and interacts with audience comments, the brand should interact and ideally share content on their channels, and influencers or brand - depending on the objective of the campaign, and depending on the stipulations of the contract - might pay to use the post as a social media advertisement.

Qualitative evidence suggests, the first line of defence for the brand is the influencer. If there are questions, they can and should respond on behalf of the brand. It would be helpful to have a FAQ included in the brief to make this process seamless for the influencer, or the brand contact needs to be on-call to answer questions, or a private chat or group to inform influencers about company news and messaging. Amery talks about dealing with a social media storm either connected to something that is in the news about the brand or the post itself, and how important having an attentive influencer relations person is in this situation: “by the time the communication lags happen there's a new storm to weather and I'm left hanging out on a limb not having been able to appropriately respond.” In contrast, Amery shared her positive experience in which Beaches Resorts who benefited from having a direct link to their influencers. Amery said;

I'm a brand ambassador for Beaches Resorts and Sandals Resorts. We have a private Facebook group where we can communicate different ideas and things. And recently beaches announced that it was shutting down its Turks and Caicos location for a couple different periods in time. And this came out in the news but immediately... Beaches was able to communicate with all of us who were part of that group. The reasoning, the situation, the future plans, and all of a sudden 60 or 70 of us were able to share with our communities. The real messaging.

There is not conclusive evidence as part of this study what the best practices are, only a suggested way to help influencers lend their voices either proactively or reactively.



The second line of defense is the brand. The brand should not ignore the content created by the influencer; rather, they should interact with the content by giving it a share, like, or comment. McNaughton talked about this as being a responsibility brands sometimes forget about, saying: “They almost always... share all of our posts on their networks. But there have been some brands who haven’t done that and to me that doesn’t make sense.” Rosilio encourages this practice of brands engaging or sharing the creators’ content: “They should take every opportunity... They have different ways in which they can use the content that is created. It is all negotiated ahead of time. It’s an asset and they can use that asset wherever they want as negotiated.”

The second way optional content interaction takes place is to turn the content into paid social, or enact “boosting”. Of this, Tsourounis says: “One thing we are doing now is we’re boosting posts so the client is putting paid behind the Instagram post. I coordinate that with the influencer, once the post goes live.” Maier, a former influencer herself, was also positive about this practice: “I want to see that. I think that is good. I think they have to own that. What we are going to be doing now is make it a kind of a contract component.” MacArthur, also agreed that boosting is becoming more commonplace, and pre-planned: “I have found most of the time I know before we even post anything if there is going to be a boost involved...So usually that happens out of the gate, not necessarily after the fact. Usually it's planned (see Fig. 4E, p. 36).” Boosting is something that should be included in phase 6: statement of work. It is sensible for influencers to prefer boosting, and to prefer that the brand or agency pays for it. Boosting a post represents an investment that the brand is making in the influencer’s brand equity, as well as the brand’s own.

## Phase 11: Post Reporting

### **“Be clear on what metrics you want monitored.” – Kate Wallace**

After the campaign or at regular intervals the influencer provides the brand or agency with reporting with metrics, screen grabs, feedback, and recommendations on future campaigns. These metrics and KPIs should be decided upon before the campaign goes live, so that they can be monitored throughout and then measured and analyzed.

Mullins identifies key metrics that are important to her: “Reach is very important to Henkel. Engagement rate is also something we track. Qualitative metrics would be things like sentiment of the commentary.” Wallace stresses the importance of determining metrics beforehand, as in PR’s classic RACE formula: “Be clear on what metrics you want monitored. Sometimes I will find at the last minute or weeks later they will come back and say, ‘we would really like to know XYZ.’ I am like, I would really love to give that to you but I have already written your report and I have moved on.”

A common gap identified by influencers was feedback on influencer performance, which brands often do not provide. Radford would appreciate more follow-up from the brand: “I am interested in that... I am like – well, how did it go? I haven’t heard anything.” McNaughton confirms that there is often silence from the brand on results. “Normally, they will say thank-you for the report but then there is no feedback. Nothing substantial.” Influencer agent Ward talks about the challenges with attribution to influencer campaigns, which she identifies as the biggest reason return reporting is scant: “Successful brand launches are not because you have chosen one

person, it is because you have chosen the successful mix of factors, and influencers are just one factor in that mix today.”

## **Phase 12: Payment**

**“I like to pay as soon as I can.” – Aly Tsourounis**

The final stage is to get everyone #paid for their #ad. The influencer invoices the brand or agency. Depending on who is leading the relationship, the brand or agency pays the influencer. In the contract payment schedules should be outlined. Often influencers are requesting 50% upfront, although there is not a standard. It depends on the brand, influencer, and agent. This is still an area where best practices are developing. Tsourounis suggests closing the loop with “prompt payment because you want to keep the relationship flowing. I like to pay as soon as I can.”

## **Influencer Logic: Skills, Aptitudes and Competencies for Influencer Relations**

The third and final area inquiry of this study looked at what skills, aptitudes, and competencies the ideal influencer relations specialist requires to be effective. Three areas of expertise emerged from this set of research questions: having a collaborative/diplomatic attitude (100% or n=10), possessing exceptional communication skills (90% or n=9), and being deeply digitally literate, or what some interviewees called a “digital native” (80% or n=8).

### **Influencer Logic #1: Having a collaborative/diplomatic attitude**

A skill set highly desired by the entire sample, both influencers and communicators, was having a collaborative and diplomatic attitude. This was defined thematically by elements such as being open to different creative visions, being collaborative or co-creative with the influencers and/or the communicators, and being someone who “did not take sides” but instead was conciliatory and able to work with and between stakeholders who had differences of opinion.

### **Openness**

Being *open* was an aptitude strongly desired by the influencer sample. McNaughton suggested: “I would say have an open mind. Be able to see things from different points of view.” Definitions of openness ranged from viewpoints to voice; influencer agent Rosilio said that “the greatest people to work with are those that were really knowledgeable about the influencer they are going to work with. They love them and have followed them for years. So, you felt really confident that that person would be supporting their view and their tone.”

Openness, to the interviewees, also referred to an acceptance that the iterative creative process of the campaign might generate a different final form than the brief, vision, or spirit under which the campaign was originally undertaken. Ward said it is crucial to “be flexible in how your goal gets achieved. Be open also to how the creators might want to speak to their audience differently than the company might.” Communicator Mullins said she often receives pushback from the more traditional marketing function, who ask: “Does it feel like us?” Mullins responds with the following: “I say to them, well it's not us talking. That's the whole point. Right? Someone else is talking for you and they have a dedicated audience that believes them.

### **Collaboration**

*Collaboration* or co-creation was another aptitude, desired especially by influencers but mentioned also by communicators. Amery claims that influencer relations needs “somebody that can recognize the value of creativity and really help you hone your ideas.” This person should ideally to be an advocate and should recognize and embrace the value of what influencers bring to the process. Maier understands this intrinsically, as she was an influencer and now works in the marketing world: “I think being able to advocate on behalf of not just an influencer, but the idea of influencer content and the value of that, is huge because otherwise you're just going to get stomped all over by a brand that wants to control everything.”

Collaboration’s value extends to from creative process to execution, and is important on the brand side as well as the influencer and communicator side. MacArthur identified a desire for the brand to collaborate with the influencer on content sharing and engagement: “I find it frustrating if I put effort into content and maybe the brand hasn't even retweeted or shared it, right? If this is a partnership I think there's a responsibility on both sides (see Fig. 4E, p. 36).”

### **Diplomacy**

Interviewees identified the need for diplomacy, not just in sensitive situations but overall. Rosilio, who naturally acts as an intermediary between brands and influencers, said: “You need to really understand everybody's best interest. And from both sides of the table, not just the brand side.” That desire to find balance was echoed by Maier: “A willingness to see both sides and work with the brand and the influencer to find something that meets in the middle.”

## **Influencer Logic #2: Exceptional communication skills**

The second part of influencer logic is *exceptional communication skills*. Three core competencies that emerged were: professionalism in communication with influencers, being a relationship builder by nature, and excellent organizational skills, particularly time or schedule management.

### **Professional Communication**

Both influencers and communicators were clear on the need for clear, concise communication. Tsourounis said: “Like anything in communication you have to have solid writing because if your key messages are confusing then you are screwed... then your influencers are going to be confused.” Radford talks about his talent agent (Ward’s) exceptional communication: “If Emily copies me she always communicates very professionally. Strong but not over powered.”

### **Relationship Builder**

Another part of communication is being able to build a rapport with others. Mullins described this as “someone who knows how to build a relationship. Relationships are still very important because that's how you... negotiate and work through a lot of different components of any kind of partnership.” Rosilio emphasised the need today to think about long-term relationships: “I think good influencer marketers today recognized that they need to build a relationship in a collaboration with just a few influencers that really hit the mark, but over a longer term as opposed to a one-off.” In the campaigns selected by the influencers, (80% or n=4) are long-term relationships, known as brand-ambassador style campaigns.

### **Organization/Time Management**

Organization and time management were often associated with exceptional communication by both influencers and communicators. Influencer Wallace said: “Just be organized, clear, efficient and you will save yourself so much hassle in the long-run. Provide as much framework as you can upfront.”

A second theme was timeliness in communication with influencers. Amery said: “They need to be communicative. Whether it's what's in the news related to the brand, or what they want from the campaign, or what's not working in the campaign so we can course correct.” Communicator Tsourounis said: “I think the biggest things are clear concise communication and strong organization skills. Influencers are not going to follow-up with you. You need to follow-up with them.” The influencer relations specialist serves as the orchestra-conductor of the influencer program, and as Tsourounis noted, the influencers may need prompting. Influencer management is not a set-it-and-forget-it tactic, you need on-going dialogue, check-in's, and updates with the influencer program group.

### **Influencer Logic #3: Deep digital literacy**

The third pillar of influencer logic is to be immersed in the social media world personally and professionally: someone who possess *deep digital literacy*. This was underlined in three ways: the best influencer relations specialists were influencers themselves, they are expert level users on all SNSs, and they keep up on the latest trends or changes in the industry.

### **They Were Influencers**

An interesting, but unsurprising, finding of this study was that many influencers move into influencer relations roles, much as former models often become scouts. A more surprising finding was that this movement also goes the other way, with influencer relations specialists sometimes becoming influencers themselves. Among the cases in this study there were two influencers who crossed over to communications (Mullins and Maier) and two communicators who left their practice to become influencers (McNaughton and Wallace). Mullins said: “I think you have to be someone who is kind of tapped in to the influencer space.” McNaughton said this person has to “Understand different media. They need to have had experience with it personally. Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and You-Tube and how it all works.”

### **Social Media Expert**

The influencer interviewees in particular stressed that the person in an influencer relations role needs a high degree of social media literacy. MacArthur said: “I think being ‘socially native’ is essential. You know a real interest and curiosity about the social space. A good handle on analytics and understanding why something's working really well.” Amery, who views her following as fairly balanced on the major SNSs, said: “somebody in an influencer relations role needs to know the inside and out of different social media platforms. They do not just need to know how to use them.” McNaughton said: “I expect that they should be one step ahead of me. I shouldn’t have to be the one saying, you know, Instagram would work well for this. They need to really know and understand the channels.”

### **On Top of What’s Next**



In a space that is so young, and also changing so rapidly, anyone in influencer relations needs to be thinking about where it is headed. Amery identified social media algorithms as a major area of focus for influencer relations professionals: “Someone in an influencer relations role needs to keep on top of the algorithm changes because messages won't get shared enough or effectively if they've structured things in a different way than the algorithm is going to favor.” Radford discussed social listening: “They need a great awareness of the social world. How people interact with each other, what people want, and trends.” Ward, a bit of a communication chameleon herself with her evolution from founding a pure play publicity agency transitioning into running an influencer talent agency said: “An influencer relations professional needs to be someone who has allowed themselves to change with how the whole marketing mix has. They need to not be rigid and rooted in how things work. Because it is going to change again.”

### **Discussion**

The results of this study are a snapshot of where the relationship between influencers and communicators, as of 2019. A big theme that emerged was that this area has evolved rapidly in the last decade. We know the SNS timeline of the top five most popular sites, in order of founding, is: Facebook (est. 2004), YouTube (est. 2005), Twitter (est. 2006), Instagram (est. 2010), and Snapchat (est. 2011). These SNSs democratized the sharing of information from peer-to-peer within social and professional networks, and created unique opportunities for eWOM. Specifically since 2017, the scale and professionalism required of influencer campaigns has exploded. This has been driven by environmental factors such as a shrinking traditional media sector, pay-for-play specifically in lifestyle media, and at the same time a shift in audience behavior with audiences spending more time on SNSs.

This researcher believes that the results of this study demonstrate a need to address influencer programs as strategically as a media buy or a press release. This is not a fad; it is a long-term shift in brand-media relations, and many of the influencer participants specifically talked about brands who are investing in influencers for the long-term and have brought in-house a dedicated person or team to help manage it. These brands are laying groundwork that, this study suggests, will pay off as the environmental pressures mentioned above continue to fragment traditional means of full-control marketing tactics.

To illustrate how quickly this area is shifting: a 2017 survey of marketers found that 87% employ an influencer-specific company to carry out influencer campaigns, and just 29% manage the influencer relations function in-house (Connick, 2018, p.10). This study found that although outsourcing may be normative, both communicators and influencers were strongly in favour of an in-house model. There are major benefits to investing in the function internally: the ability to build long-term relationships, the brands benefiting from the creators' ideas, and avoidance of the budget dilution that comes with hiring an agency.

The basic definition of influencer relations – “the liaison between a company and those considered to be influencers within the social media community” (Boone, Kurtz, Mackenzie, & Snow, 2016, p.112) – is fairly well-established at this point. The question as to how to manage this liaison *well*, however, is hardly settled, and this study has taken a deeper dive into investigating precisely this question. By synthesizing existing research and case-based investigation around the functional area within communication which influencer relations should occupy (public relations), what workflow internal vs. external is ideal (internal), and what the job of influencer relations entails (12 phases of influencer relations), this study aims to bring forth a

set of effective best practices to inform the practice of influencer relations professionals and those around them.

### Conclusions

This study identified a gap within the ecology of roles within communication and added “influencer relations” to the nomenclature. The aim was to test if influencer relations fit within the communication department logic as previously identified by Grabher (2002) who established the terms “business logic”, “scientific logic”, and “artistic logic” (p. 248), and “technical logic” as identified by Takemura (2012, p.43). The overwhelming answer was that while influencer relations borrows from these roles, *it is itself a separate and distinct role requiring “influencer logic”*. In addition, the study looked at the skills, aptitudes, and competencies that make this liaison between the company and influencers exceptional at the job, identifying three areas of influencer logic: having a collaborative/diplomatic attitude, possessing exceptional communication skills, and being deeply digitally literate.

Specific aptitudes included: openness, collaboration, diplomacy, professional communication, organization/time management, relationship builder, having been an influencer, social media expert, and being on top of what is next in the social/influencer space.

The results of this study suggest as well that influencer relations is most at home under the PR umbrella. This shift from marketing-led to being a function of PR practice represents a blue-ocean shift. As earned media becomes more of a scarce resource, and because influencers sit at the intersection of earned and paid media and are trusted by their audiences more than traditional paid media, their power has grown to approach that of earned – and they may even hold *more* power, depending on the target market.

In addition, this study suggests that the influencer relations role holds greater value and has longer term ROI when the function is led by the brand. If a full-scale functional area of in-house influencer relations is not possible, the next best thing is to have someone lead the efforts internally and hire an AOR that has a specialization in the area to help with execution. This study found that fully outsourcing influencer relations is not ideal according to *any* of the stakeholders (brand, influencers or communicators), especially by the influencer group who really prefer a tight relationship and a seat at the brand's creative table.

In the aim of creating a best-practice model for influencer relations, this study proposes a 12-phase critical path for effective influencer campaigns. The 12 phases are: (1) Influencer Program, (2) Influencer Roster, (3) Influencer Outreach, (4) Influencer Proposal, (5) Proposal Approval, (6) Statement of Work, (7) Content Creation, (8) Content Approval, (9) Posting Content, (10) Content Interaction, (11) Post Reporting, and (12) Payment.

### **Limitations**

Influencer research as it relates to communication practice still has many opportunities for future research. The following are some suggested areas, but are not an exhaustive list: metrics, commenting practices, influencer feedback, ethics, rural vs. urban influencers, and influencer best practices.

First, while this study touched on metrics, asking what metrics are tracked, the results were not conclusive, in particular because some metrics are often unavailable to one or more of the parties involved; the only thing agreed upon by all parties in this study is that current measures leave much to be desired and that the measures currently available do not tell the whole

story. Ideal metrics and KPIs for influencer campaigns are worthy of further study and exploration.

Second, several influencer participants and communication professionals suggested that influencers should treat their brand ambassador-ship as a quasi-customer service function, responding to comments on behalf of the brand, and that brands should also share and comment on the content. It would be interesting to do a full content analysis to find and evaluate quantitative evidence of benefit or value in this practice.

Third, an area of research might be ideal ways in which communicators can share results of the campaigns and feedback on influencers' work. While not a current best practice, there seemed to be a desire from influencers to know more about their results. There is opportunity for theory-building, as currently feedback is a one-way communication. Why or how could it become more two way, a la Grunig?

A fourth area worth exploring is the ethics of influencers and those who work with them. This study consistently found that there is a desire to create a code of ethics for influencers. Most talked about having the ethical guideline to decline working for a brand that is not a fit, regardless of lost compensation. This would be a substantial future study, and one that the sample seemed to want to dive into.

Fifth, the sample of influencers was split between  $n=4$  urban and  $n=1$  rural participant. An interesting future study might look into whether there is a difference when working with rural and urban influencers, in terms of content, audience and other factors.

Finally, this study looked to put into context best practices as they relate to the communicator-influencer relationship. However, due to the relatively brief period of time in which influencer relations has been a field of practice, best practices are still emerging and

shifting. Revisiting the question of what best practices look like in a few years would be interesting follow-up research.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

This research had no funding and participants were not remunerated in this voluntary study. The primary researcher is a working communications practitioner; however, the researcher does not currently work in the specialty of influencer relations. The control group of influencers was sourced through network suggestions; however, no participants had current or past financial dealings with the primary researcher.

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### Online Connections

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