

Characteristics of Influencer Relations: A Literature Review

Theresia Lavietha Vivrie Lolita

Faculty of Communication, Universitas Multimedia Nusantara
Jl. Boulevard, Gading Serpong, Tangerang, Banten, 15111 Indonesia
theresia.lolita@umn.ac.id

Abstract

Ensuring a collaboration in influencer relations remains authentic, organic, and transparent remains a tricky compensating act and can be challenging for many companies and influencers to keep up though influencer relations have existed for a long time. This research aims at providing an exhaustive summary of the literature relevant to the characteristics of influencer relations. This study conducted a narrative literature review on influencer relationships which have features: 1) The communication aim is primarily at the opinion market and directly influencing the formation of opinions; 2) The goals usually are image and reputation enhancement, information and knowledge transfer; 3) Credibility and transparency of communication are crucial for achieving the goal; 4) Evaluation using image and reputation indicators, interactions, and sentiment analysis. This study suggests that strategic approaches focus on influencer relationships that spotlight authenticity to bring organizations accomplishment in influencer partnership. The research recommends the stages of corporate public relations to maintain authentic influencer relationships in adapting to the ever-changing communication landscape

Keywords: influencer relations; public relations influencer; literature review

Abstrak

Memastikan kolaborasi yang terjadi dalam hubungan influencer yang autentik, organik, dan transparan antara perusahaan dengan influencer masih menjadi tantangan dan sesuatu yang kompleks yang harus dihadapi pelakunya meskipun hubungan perusahaan dengan influencer ini bukan sesuatu yang baru. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengetahui karakteristik dari hubungan influencer, mengingat pendekatan ini awalnya menonjolkan otentisitas. Penelitian ini melakukan kajian literatur mengenai hubungan influencer, yang karakteristiknya adalah antara lain: 1) Sasaran komunikasi terutama pada pasar opini dan secara langsung mempengaruhi pembentukan opini; 2) Tujuannya pada umumnya adalah peningkatan citra dan reputasi, transfer informasi dan pengetahuan; 3) Kredibilitas dan transparansi komunikasi sangat penting untuk mencapai tujuan; 4) Evaluasi menggunakan indikator citra dan reputasi, interaksi, dan analisis sentimen. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan strategis yang berfokus pada hubungan influencer yang autentik dapat membawa kesuksesan organisasi dalam kemitraan dengan influencer dalam jangka panjang. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan implementasi humas perusahaan dalam menjaga hubungan influencer yang tetap autentik sambil beradaptasi dengan lanskap komunikasi yang selalu berubah.

Kata kunci: hubungan influencer; influencer humas; kajian literatur

Introduction

Companies' consideration of integrating influencer programs into their communication efforts has increased significantly. Conventional public relations (P.R.) utilizes news media outlets (newspapers, television, and radio), and the marketing works (television, radio, and print) are no longer adequate to attain audiences. These conventional approaches can successfully increase awareness but do not inevitably establish a connection between the organization and stakeholders like influencer relations fulfill

at present. The falling circulation and reach of the traditional media are the influence and status of media relations that appear worth supplementing through new channels (Lommatzsch, 2018). Organizations must construct an online identity to develop extensive-term relationships with the public (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012).

Relationship and audience segmentation strategies are at the heart of modern-day P.R. efforts. With emerging trends and new audiences coming to the forefront, P.R. practitioners should be aware of the growing changes, expectations,

and approaches to consider when formulating these new ventures (Freberg, 2020). Since PR has always been core to working with influencers, companies identify and strive for relationships with influencers, like media relations, and involve them in particular campaigns. Still, it is preferable to attempt a long-term relationship with them (Inoue, 2018), for it can bring better results than one-off promotions or cooperation.

P.R. looked for well-known journalists as influencers, and every day the public watched academics appearing on news programs as specialists on politics, business, and social issues (Inoue, 2018). P.R. is distinguished for finding a third person to communicate the organization's message to the target audience. It makes the practice of influencer relations position most at home under the P.R. umbrella since it has the best deployment to manage influencer relations (Gallagher, 2021). The essential thing in deciding opinion leaders is to identify who the internet users of the targeted organization are, the same as determining who the organization's target audience is. The selection process must evaluate the opinion leader's suitability and easily influence the audience (Pramesthi, 2021). Companies look for an influencer who is not only organization-fit but also has the same interests and is praised by its target audience. It is critically important to do a thorough background check on each influencer by reading articles they have written and stories about them (Alampi, 2019). The company avoids the negative impact of influencer relations when the public tends to judge an effect negatively by looking at their personality and track record on social media from the positive and negative sides. An influencer who has recently advertised or was an opinion leader for a competitor is unlikely to be hired by other clients in the same industry.

P.R. practitioners need to invest in building quality relationships with influencers because they have the capacity of communication experts and relevant organizational stakeholders to fulfill specific functions for the organization and

initiatives (Girsang, 2020). Influencer relations have become a new priority for P.R. practitioners, including P.R. agencies that handle the reputation of brands. Eventually, PR and influencers worked synergistically since the communication area charged into the latest media. Influencers are influential because they have built an audience that has formed into a community. At the same time, the organization can unlock its potential value by investing in earning trust and sustaining connections.

Organizations need help finding new ways since they can not straightforwardly apply the established communication management concepts in managing their influencer activities. Borchers and Enke (2021) mentioned that there are at least two characteristics of influencer communication: many influencers strive to monetize their status as micro-celebrities, and influencers combine functions that different actors have fulfilled previously, such as creative agencies, advertising media, journalistic media, testimonial givers, and opinion leaders.

According to Enke & Borchers (2019), influencers are third-party actors who have created many connections with an organization with a particular value to impact the stakeholders with content creation, dissemination, interaction, and personal manifestation. They manage the intended use of communication that addresses or includes their activities. Those activities are strategically substantive to P.R. objectives, legitimizing the organizations' practices and ensuring maneuvering room. In the social media age, Wang et al. (2021) believed that influencers are easier to adapt to their society, more competent, and more knowledgeable in maintaining existing norms in social media. Furthermore, they can draw new audiences and help the organization build relationships with them.

Online outreach to influencers is now necessary for online P.R. by detecting companies or individuals with a solid online audience and then using these connections to have power over

their audience, as influencer relations have a novel significance. The company may research the target influencers' activity and where they hang out on social media. Gallagher (2021) stated that this research can be time-consuming, but it pays off by ensuring product-fit influencers. Influencers allow an organization to get their followers and conceivably reach the connectivity of those followers. Sharing content from an influencer with their friends and family will increase the number and variety yet greatly expand effectiveness. Social media-based influencers allow greater precision in targeting particular audiences and two-way communication between influencers and their followers. Influencer relations have increasingly become an essential tool for P.R. because the Internet enables them to explore information when they need it more selectively and from almost endless references. Influencer relations continuously become a crucial tool for P.R. because people are day-long overwhelmed by advertisements (Inoue, 2018). However, Wasesa and Macnamara (2013) believe both conventional and social media have different advantages. The target audience they reach is diverse.

Knowing that terms are usually only sometimes universally defined when developing a new form of communication is crucial. The words "influencer relations" and "influencer marketing" currently hide significantly different expectations regarding the results and procedural implementation. There are also entirely different ideas within the P.R. departments and agencies about what "influencer relations" means, what is possible to achieve, how to implement it, and the distinction between "influencer marketing." Lommatzsch (2018) specified that the simple rule of thumb is that in "influencer marketing," the influencer is rewarded for cooperation. In contrast, in "influencer relations," there is no monetary reward that influencer relations practice can validate.

Based on Enke & Borchers (2019), there

are no consistent separations, rationalities, or definitions of influencer relations and marketing concepts. However, there should be a differentiation between paid and earned influencer relations. When engagements are the relations metric, paid engagements are commonly short-term, one-off campaign collaborations or promotions between brands and influencers, being a transactional relationship, approaching influencers as a media platform, and paying for one-off promotion posts. Meanwhile, Lommatzsch (2018) mentioned that influencer relations become the process of a long-term approach to relationship building with influencers, not short-term product placement with no monetary compensation involved.

Companies should aim to turn influencers in their industry into advocates by building long-term relationships with them organically rather than simply paying them. Kristal and Toth (2022) believed that by adopting a sustainable long-term perspective and prioritizing continued collaboration over one-time work, the company experienced several effects on the effectiveness of its influencer campaigns. Notably, an increase in authenticity as influencers promote over months, giving a more genuine and credible impression, then influencers turn into advocates.

The long-term influencer relations nurture organic relationships in the B2B space or are part of an always-on B2C engagement approach. In the B2C space, the influencer is paid upon activation when the right opportunity presents itself. In influencer relations, influencers are seen as organization partners and fans, not as advertising billboards. Referring to Lommatzsch (2018), when the organization works with social media influencers in the digital strategic communication area, it allows for the influencer's image transfer effect. The organization aims to appeal to their emotions and forge a real connection with them over time, hoping it will pay lasting dividends.

Influencer relations is less of marketing and more of a communications exercise. Gallagher (2021) found that marketing often

did not comprehend some of the intricacies of a campaign, while the public relations department probably would. The company should consider networking with the idea of engaging influencers, having positive interactions with them daily, and becoming part of the industry conversation. The extent of the fundamentals of blogger outreach, taking the organization's outreach and relationship-handling efforts to the personal point.

Kristal & Toth (2022) mentioned that the increasing number of influencers across various platforms and various influencer types has made it progressively difficult for advertisers to find the optimal influencer for their campaigns. Besides, the organization can only build relationships with some thought leaders, considering it is resource and time prohibitive. Organizations instead devote maximum effort to targeting only the most influential in the audience space. Since an organization has limited resources to develop relationships with journalists, editors, analysts, and thought leaders, it does make sense to target influencers by identifying the most influential of these groups and targeting only those with the most clout. P.R. practitioners should prioritize individuals in each influencer category according to market focus, exposure, and influence in developing a remediation plan for relationship building with the influencer community, whether with internal staff or consulting firms' help.

Developing relationships with influencers and thought leaders requires a structured and inclusive approach to establish a friendly relationship with them over time though its primary goal is different. The primary goal is to understand how they view the industry and discover what factors they feel are the most important in evaluating products in the industry. Influencers can become essential to an organization's market intelligence-gathering mechanism. Since they judge products based on what they think is necessary, it would behoove the organization to make sure. Once the organization

prioritizes, it should focus on the top 10 or 15 most important and influential influencers. The target number of influencers the organization appointed depends on the budget and the available resources.

According to Lommatzsch (2018), the following are the characteristics of a long-term oriented influencer relations program: 1) The communication aim is primarily the opinion market and directly influences the formation of opinions; 2) The goals usually are image and reputation enhancement, information and knowledge transfer; 3) Credibility and transparency of communication are crucial for achieving the goal; 4) Evaluation using image and reputation indicators, interactions, and sentiment analysis. Meanwhile, the characteristics of influencer marketing are following: 1) The communication aim is primarily at the sales market; 2) Objectives are usually: direct sales increase, reach and attention to product messages, and brand building; 3) Credibility and transparency of communication are relatively unimportant as long as achieve goals; 4) Evaluation using sales and reach figures, interactions, conversions (see Table 1).

There is a noticeable lack of research into organizations' relationships with influencers. Academic research has focused exclusively on sponsored posts and the pay-to-play part of influencer marketing (Agitashera et al., 2020). No studies have explored the organic part of influencer communications that emphasizes building credible long-term relationships with influencers to promote organization advocacy. Due to the existing literature on the definition of influencer relations being scarce, this study aims to discover how influencer relations differ from well-known influencer marketing and focuses on influencer relations characteristics. The results of this study can be used as a reference to find the attributes of influencer relations that show how distinctive it is and to find ways to implement them in practice.

Table 1. Overview of Communication in Influencer Marketing and Influencer Relations

No	Attribute	Influencer Marketing	Influencer Relations
1.	Aim	Primarily aimed at the sales market	In the opinion market and directly influencing the formation of opinions
2.	Goal	Mainly direct increase in sales, reach and attention to product messages, brand building	Mostly image and reputation enhancement, information and knowledge transfer
3.	Credibility & Transparency	Are relatively irrelevant as long as goals are achieved	Particularly important for achieving goals
4.	Evaluation	Using sales and reach figures, interactions, conversions	Image and reputation indicators, interactions, and sentiment analysis

Source: Lommatzsch (2018)

Research Methods

The study used a narrative qualitative research method (Pautasso, 2013) to review the literature. According to Bandara et al. (2015), a literature review examines recent or current literature, covering subjects at various levels of completeness and comprehensiveness, including research findings. It aims to explore more deeply related to influencer relations to find how distinctive influencer relations are by their characteristics.

This study used qualitative and secondary data collection techniques with documentation related to influencer relations from sources examined 26 journal articles, four books, and other publications related to influencer relations from 2012 to 2022.

The approach in this study was to commence a literature review with specified themes and sub-themes sought to be extracted from a research context and then synthesize evidence of what has been said in the past (Bandara et al., 2015). After defining the scope, goal, and research field upfront to help the review, as this review is deductive, this study read and analyzed research papers while looking for evidence of the predetermined themes. The data analysis technique in this study includes three stages: organizing, synthesizing, and reporting findings.

In the first stage, namely organizing, this

study collected and reviewed the literature and then used it as relevant to the problems studied. At this stage was to search for ideas, objectives, and conclusions from some literature, starting by reading abstracts, introductions, methods, and discussions and classifying literature based on the categories by influencer relations characteristics. In keyword research, the first step is to determine and use 'influencer relations,' 'public relations influencer,' and 'characteristics of influencer relations' to initiate a search keywords entry to Google Scholar. Xiao and Watson (2019) mentioned that Google Scholar is a compelling open-access database that archives journal articles. Torraco (2016) specified this literature review adopts the conceptual structure organized around the main concepts of the review topic: influencer relations characteristics as determined by Lommatzsch (2018). The main topics provided a framework around which organized the review of theory and research literature on work design around sub-headings for each influence relations character. In collecting the literature, the research adopted the conceptual structure of influencer relations. The research review of the article studies each characteristic as determined by Lommatzsch, consisting of the communication aim in influencer relations (n = 9), the goal of influencer relations (n = 6), the credibility and transparency cruciality (n = 8), indicators in

influencer relations evaluation or measurement (n = 3).

In the second stage, following the definition of Torraco (2016), which mentioned that synthesis is a creative process that integrates existing ideas with new ideas to develop new perspectives on the topic, this study unites the results of the organization of literature into a summary to become a unified whole by looking for interrelationships between literature. Bandara et al. (2015) believed that a comprehensive research synthesis enables attentive readers to find out what is known and does not know, what works well and what does not, and is the most critical key to a crucial literature review. After conducting an in-depth analysis and revealing research findings, the third stage is to report results in the literature review.

Results of Research and Discussion

Communication Aim in Influencer Relations

Due to social media and influencers, the target groups' opinion-forming and information-gathering have grown in the last ten years. P.R. looks for new ways and means of gaining attention and relevance for their communicative messages from their target groups in pursuit of goals such as attracting attention to product messages, image building, or knowledge transfer (Lommatzsch, 2018).

Influencer detection has been widely studied due to its significant role in shaping and formatting the opinions of others but also in disseminating, controlling, and accelerating information over the last decade (Bamakan et al., 2019). P.R. should win perceptions in the public's mind through a battle of opinions. Just like a battlefield, the winners are the ones who control the information map of the opposing party (Wasesa & Macnamara, 2013: 86). Influencers, as public opinion makers, can express their opinions with an extensive reach by acting as collaborative partners to support P.R. aims and independent critics or integrate commercial

content into organic narratives (Borchers & Enke, 2021). A company can detect the observers and experts who share views with a company by browsing opinions expressed on social or mass media, which indirectly represent the company's interests, then ask them to be its unofficial spokesperson on an emerging topic.

Influencer relations programs build awareness by encouraging referrals from respected authorities in their communities. An organization can not control what these people say but can bring them into the loop, which almost always improves relationships. P.R. practitioners to neutralize can provide information to build the same perception as the company, or at least they know the background of the company's vision in viewing a problem (Wasesa & Macnamara, 2013). By conferring insider status on these influential people, an organization allows them to raise their level and visibility in their communities. Although the company should treat influencers the same as media contacts, the nature of the engagement is more along the lines of grassroots community relations than press relations. They may not know an "exclusive" from an "embargo," but influencers are more likely than reporters to be experts in the product or category and have deep technical knowledge. They are also more likely to be collegial than competitive. While reporters tend to be driven by scoops, influencers are motivated by understanding. They are more inclined to share so that everyone understands an issue better. According to Silalahi (2021), the level of engagement of an influencer's grassroots community is typically high, and they consider the influencer a key opinion leader. Additionally, referring to Asan (2022), the power of a grassroots influencer lies in a follower's attachment to an influencer because of the similarities with their followers. They typically come as ordinary consumers who lack professional experience and do not hold institutional positions.

Another communication aim of influencer relations takes another drive, such as managing

fake news, being responsive and transparent, inspiring advocacy, integrating media relations with social media strategies, and building goodwill (Ewing & Lambert, 2019). One of the aspects of online P.R. is to minimize negative mentions of the organizations. P.R. can monitor and influence conversations in blogs and social networks through online reputation management through influencer outreach. For an example of this aim in social networks, take Twitter. An organization may transform influencer relations activities into Twitter by considering the implementation, instruments, and employing approaches. Increasing communication on Twitter makes some of the most critical discussions about the media agenda. Elmada et al. (2022) mentioned that screening prominent influencers in social media also counts as a prevention strategy in online reputation management. Organizations may have other techniques such as delivering value, organizing social media, doing the proper behavior on social media, prevention by simulation, and prevention by screening social media using tools.

Regarding media influencers, further evidence of Twitter's superiority is the level to which the media have embraced it. Often, an organization may not approach influencer relations with Twitter integration but use it as a channel to communicate with its colleagues. In that case, the organization risks being outpaced or even going out of crucial conversations. Concerning variability, companies leverage influencer communications across multiple social media content formats across platforms, such as text in blogs, images on Instagram, videos on YouTube, and others, such as live streams. Nowadays, there are new influencers with the rise of social media: bloggers, Instagrammers, YouTubers, and other social media platform users (Archer & Harrigan, 2016), including media owners or individuals with a large online following on social networks.

Influencers have unique voices and know how to communicate their vision and views to or

with their audience to help voice the company's interests. Gallagher (2021) suggests that a company should show an understanding and openness on how the influencer wants to get the message across to their audience and not be too heavy-handed to the influencer. In influencer detection, it is not uncommon to find influencers with high credibility yet who do not have good writing skills. P.R. practitioners can help write down their ideas in the form of articles, either through interviews or rewriting existing articles of interest, and then assist in their publication in the mass media (Wasesa & Macnamara, 2013). The company also should be prepared to marshal its internal domain experts to respond to influencers' challenging questions, or when there are questions, they can and should respond on behalf of the company. Considering the first line of defense for the company is the influencer, having a F.A.Q. The brief section makes the process seamless for the influencer or company contact to be on-call to answer questions or a private chat or group to inform influencers about company news and messaging (Gallagher, 2021).

The tactics and tools involved in influencer relations have remained unchanged for years to support the respective goals through approaches. The tactics, which consist of maintaining a database of influencer profiles, with details of each individual's preferences and characteristics and the organization's interaction history, have varying degrees of success. The influencer outreach involves three actions: email pitch and correspondence to influencers, influencer/agent evaluation for alignment, then influencers' response (Gallagher, 2021). Media lists of email and telephone contact details, either self-generated through research or purchased, also facilitate telephone conversations and face-to-face briefings. Influencer relations are not direct mail 2.0, so with this in mind, P.R. practitioners should tailor the relations strategy by customizing the approach based on the individual. Corporate PR may maintain regular contact with influencers

as public opinion makers, such as academics and practitioners, then provide data to support their cognitive activities. Influencer relations should also be the control point for the organization's outreach to influencers, ensuring that influencers receive rational messages and not be annoyed by inappropriate requests.

The Goal of Influencer Relations

Influencer relations are decisive for all elements of Public Relations (Inoue, 2018), yet its program goal-setting requires one or two key business objectives to target. Goal-setting is the most crucial part of programming influencer relations to achieve P.R. goals. Gallagher (2021) explained that a company should focus, define, and articulate one relationship's vision and goals. Ensuring the relationship delivers the best results in a successful influencer campaign is essential. Three key actions take place in the goal-setting phase: objectives, budget, and brief that later benefit influencers detection to fit the business's respective goals and purpose. Inoue (2018) believed that the primary P.R. activities govern influencer detection and outreach and then working closely with diverse online influencers or Key Opinion Leaders (K.O.L.s) who can get to and influence stakeholders. Thus, as Kristal and Toth (2022) stated, the company should define the target audience depending on the campaign objective since it is essential for an influencer's followers to represent the target audience PR wants to reach.

In the traditional Public Relations perspective, P.R. is about reputation: the result of what the organization does, what it says, and what others say about it. P.R. is the discipline that looks after reputation to earn understanding, support, and influence opinion and behavior. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its public: its target audience, including potential customers and stakeholders. Organizations leverage influencers

as a communication tool to provide information to stakeholders considering the need to strengthen an image and earn a positive reputation among stakeholders. Borchers & Enke (2021) argued that P.R. outsources traditional Public Relations functions to influencers.

Influencers are the people who have the power to create electronic word of mouth (eWOM) by developing or influencing particular images they express and relate to an organization. This outcome affecting people is significant in today's internet age (Saini et al., 2021). Elmada et al. (2022) mentioned that eWOM is positive or negative statements made by customers about a brand or company through various electronic media, including social media, that need attention since it affects the organization's reputation.

Influencer relations desire authentic and high-quality content corresponding, increasing awareness and aspiring to enhance an image as an outcome (Gräve, 2019). Publicizing an organization with a particular influencer helps form an image, gradually taking over from the selected influence (Stankova & Kuchta, 2020). Influencers who can lay a foundation for their identity by having their image and profile, such as ecologically, fashion or others, may enhance the corporate image. Influencers enhance the image by powerfully displaying a positive image for stakeholders and may act as a go-between factor for companies and consumers to convey the information adequately (Hariyanti & Wirapraja, 2018) to support one of P.R.'s goals to create understanding through power of information or knowledge (Wasesa & Macnamara, 2013).

When the influencer relation goal is building reputation, Pang et al. (2016) believe organizations can harness influencers by building and cultivating excellent and strong relationships with influencers. The influencer can reach audiences unreached by journalists by promoting and portraying the organization favorably in the marketplace, so they can share the bond and highlight a positive reputation.

Wasesa & Macnamara (2013) stated that P.R.'s goal in an image-building program as public education is to make the public understand the message conveyed. The people would not just know but also have an awareness of the message, a positive attitude of acceptance, and behavior that supports the message, yet expect them to change the behavior.

In the battleground for occupying the public's mind and ensuring precise positioning of an image in front of the stakeholders on specific issues (H, 2013), P.R.'s task is to conduct a battle of opinions that requires creating strong opinions to affect the views that come from the public mind. P.R. must convince a third party to help convince the first party to have the same perception management wants. The prime way to do this is to get influencers to trust the organizations and build meaningful partnerships with relevant influencers, given that stakeholders trust their peers, friends, and chosen influencers. Influencers are easier to adapt to their society, more competent, and more knowledgeable to maintain existing norms. They can reach and persuade their followers, even for crisis management and reputation management (Inoue, 2018). Wasesa & Macnamara (2013) mentioned that how far P.R. optimizes implementing the guerrilla strategy with influencer relations to help management manage its corporate image depends on the vulnerability of the image crisis hitting the company. The more sensitive a company is to the blows of situations, the higher the need to use guerrilla P.R.

P.R. legitimizes organizations' objectives and actions. It also seeks to establish ties with political and social stakeholders (citizens, regulative bodies, or N.G.O.s) (Enke & Borchers, 2019). Government relations and lobbying in P.R. often use influencers with specific knowledge and reputation in their field who drive awareness and actions such as support of a political candidate, legislation, causes, and acceptance of new ideas to the company (Inoue, 2018). When influencer

relations aim to transfer information about organization values and other messages, the company makes sure that the influencer knows what it is trying to accomplish with the campaign and how it will measure success. Organizations also could ask if they might have creative ideas to help reach the respective P.R. goals.

Credibility and Transparency Cruciality

An issue can become a big problem because the information carriers on the topic have various information requirements with high news value, including credibility and credible sources (Wasesa & Macnamara, 2013). Thus, involving influencers seems tempting to support the P.R. goal, as reasonable, authentic senders, influencers can communicate company messages and offers to their followers in an eye-catching way (Lommatzsch, 2018). While some of the long-standing best practices are consistent in this new age of social and digital media, P.R. practitioners should integrate additional elements into the current approaches (Freberg, 2020).

Credibility is the quality of being trusted and believed in by an influencer. Any organization can talk about what they offer but can only show its value through a credible influencer. Wasesa & Macnamara (2013) determined that influencers as third-party endorsers for information transfer are a form of P.R. guerrilla activity in distributing information to build public confidence by using the credibility of a third party. Due to their competence and close connection to their followers' enthusiasm, several studies show that organizations realize influencers as more credible than celebs, which results in their opinions having a more meaningful effect on their followers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Stubb et al., 2019).

Building good relations with them is necessary since the key to influencer relations is the company's credibility dependence on third parties. How long the relationship will last depends on its sincerity in being friends and the

level of intensity with which the organization shares views on specific issues. Relationships with third parties are not in a superior-subordinate form where one dominates the other, nor is it in the context of material trade-offs where one gives materiality to the other. The power of influencers as third-party endorsers lies in their willingness and passion for defending the organization. The more willing they are, the more persistent their desire to support the organization's voice will be. On the other hand, Wasesa & Macnamara (2013). Besides, Jaitly & Gautam (2021) reported that influencers help the brand build a direct relationship with a niche group of consumers, drive them to be loyal to the brand, and become the natural voice of the brands that consumers can trust and talk to.

The partnership in influencer relations helps build trust and credibility for the organization. P.R. practitioners can evaluate an influencer's credibility by assessing why this person is authorized or believed by their audience and the reason to believe in the knowledge or information they will transfer to the audience. The ability of influencers to maintain norms should be one of the logical consequences of the form of service or role model given or shown to the community. Source credibility here is of the influencer also with organization credibility. When stakeholders see that the organization has a good relationship with someone they respect, they trust it. P.R. is about establishing a sustainable, loyal relationship with customers where they see the organization as trustworthy, credible, and engaging. Influencer relations are a must when an organization wants to tell its stories authentic and believable.

The digital form of communication creates new possibilities for transparency and evaluation of the influencer communication process, especially concerning the reach and the response to the messages (Lommatzsch, 2018). openness and authenticity are more valuable than ever, such as in the relationship audiences want with organizations and the type of content

and experiences they are craving (Freberg, 2020). Through various tools and techniques, an organization can communicate in a transparent and data-backed manner to build enhanced trust among its stakeholders, including influencers. P.R. needs to get expelled from any bias in providing information. Raw content viewed as genuine will foster a more robust connection for the audiences and create stronger affinity. In other words, the audience and the organization will have a stronger emotional connection and preference. The times for paid spokespersons sharing information without any context are over. Influencers are audience members who help tell the story through their perspectives, bringing more diverse and proposed creative approaches to the organization. When negotiating a campaign with influencers, clearly lay out the terms and expectations, and always be professional and respectful in communications. It is good to use a contract for this.

The currency of influencer relations programs is information, not money. The relationship with third parties gathers the views of each party to get new ideas for a better solution, whereas the third parties may ask organizations to support their programs. By constantly supporting updated information and sorting more segmented information, a company will help interactions with third parties become more dynamic (Wasesa & Macnamara, 2013).

Pang et al. (2016) stated that from a corporate perspective, journalists and influencers share the commonality of influencing public perception through their respective media roles. Organizations can harness influencers because they can reach audiences unreached by journalists to promote and portray the organization favorably in the marketplace. Jaitly & Gautam (2021) also mentioned that influencers could influence customers' perceptions and attitudes since the influencers are more capable of communicating with a niche segment.

Influencer relations is one of the indirect

media activities in P.R. because it does not directly deal with mass media, while mass media relate to direct media activities. Both indirect and direct media activities aim to develop an image or shape public perception. P.R. practitioners may also combine direct and indirect media activities. For example, influencers can use mass media to convey or deliver the message directly to the public. When it turns out that a qualified third party still needs to have credibility, P.R. practitioners should first build the credibility of the third party (Wasesa & Macnamara, 2013).

Indicators in Influencer Relations' Evaluation

The influencer relations approach is geared toward the long term. Many of them have long-winded goals, such as increasing awareness of a policy or program, improving the image of a company or organization, and building awareness or reputations. Those long-term goals may need to be clarified or even off-track, making it a vague challenge to measure and evaluate. Unlike influencer marketing campaigns, influencer relations only sometimes involve agreeing on set timelines and specific promotional campaigns, so the results are not as easily trackable and measurable. Gräve (2019) mentioned that a company measuring the resulting campaigns' outcomes represents one of the main challenges in influencer relations, besides selecting the influencers to collaborate with. P.R. practitioners should have a benchmark such as awareness and the company's current image. P.R. practitioners should have a model such as the level of appearance awareness and the company's current incarnation. Otherwise, they can measure nothing about how far influencer relations contribute to the organization if the objectives do not follow the conditions of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely (S.M.A.R.T) objectives (Wasesa & Macnamara, 2013).

Organizations should learn, iterate, and keep track of the relationship they are building and how they translate into actual events such

as visits, introductions, mentions, and leads. Many communication experts try to avoid the challenge of using metrics as key performance indicators (KPIs) and other measurement systems in the evaluation and say they have nothing to do with P.R. P.R. should use KPIs effectively and sustainably and benefit from a method implemented in business units. Creating data on systems that the entire organization uses could improve P.R. and make it more understandable (Wasesa & Macnamara, 2013).

P.R. often deals with perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes toward a situation, an issue, or a probability. Current measurement research in P.R. attempts to create measures to evaluate P.R. effectiveness as an outcome associated with relationship, reputation, trust, confidence, and credibility. Understanding what people think and why they think about something requires that you tap into their attitudes about that "thing" or object. The only way is to measure attitudes and create measurement scales. The credibility of proof of work results and contribution to the goals set to management, shareholders, and stakeholders certainly needs the support of sustainable objective methods.

To monitor the influencer program, P.R. practitioners should quantitatively or qualitatively evaluate the measurement result. The target is no longer just published in which mass media and in what amount, but must also be in the form of a perception analysis built on news in the mass media or other P.R. activities. P.R. can directly trace the perception analysis by obtaining direct data, so it is not by simple assumptions (Wasesa & Macnamara, 2013).

According to Borchers & Enke (2021), some scholars mentioned criteria to evaluate the influencers' performance. Impressions (i.e., reach) and engagement (i.e., comments, likes, and shares) are identified as relevant evaluation criteria. Other studies support the finding that engagement and reach are key performance indicators and add brand awareness, sales, and

traffic as further KPIs.

P.R. practitioners must select critical criteria to get a methodology that produces indicators that management can easily understand and deem important. P.R. and corporate communications can use customized surveys to evaluate the effectiveness of various P.R. activities, including influencer relations, with several tools to obtain data, for instance, metrics for KPIs or balanced scorecards in evaluation, namely feedback mechanisms, media content analysis, interviews, surveys, and others (Wasesa & Macnamara, 2013).

P.R. practitioners need to know what the target audience's perceptions are like, what the target audience already knows, how much awareness has emerged, and what media the audience's sources of information (H, 2013). One of the ways to measure image through perception and how consumers feel about it is through a survey. To provide a solid basis for strategic planning and calculating outcomes and outcomes, a company can use surveys before or after at specific intervals (or both) (Wasesa & Macnamara, 2013). Organizations use many surveys to keep their image under surveillance, but it is the most common organization perception survey. The positive reputational indicators obtained through survey responses also help to understand how the customers, prospects, employees, and other stakeholders perceive the organization in their minds. The survey paints a picture of the organization's mental real estate and how the company considers it against its competitor.

According to Wasesa & Macnamara (2013), most companies take three to five KPIs. Gräve (2019) includes in KPI the number of interactions (i.e., the sum of all likes and comments), interaction rate (i.e., the number of followers divided by the sum of all tastes and words), and a sentiment index (i.e., positive minus the negative critiques). Ultimately, Freberg (2020) believed that metrics and research would

be crucial in evaluating influencer relationship management's current return on investment (R.O.I.). By determining the R.O.I. of influencer relations efforts, the organization would tie back to its original goals when it started the program. A long-term oriented influencer relations program designed to improve corporate reputation will have different criteria to measure R.O.I. than a one-off influencer campaign to launch a new product.

Gräve (2019) surveyed 76 professionals among social media professionals (brand managers, public relations managers, and employees of advertising agencies). The survey showed that they evaluate influencer relations campaigns based on the critical yet easily quantifiable and readily available fundamental datasets and metrics, namely, reach and interaction rate. The interaction rate shows how many interactions the content triggers with unique impressions. Factors influencing the interaction rate include users' comments, shares, likes, and saved content.

Even so, the research also showed that a high number of interactions, like comments, do not reveal the sentiment or the content of the exchanges. The professionals trust sentiment analysis more to assess the range of the campaign's performance (Gräve, 2019). Sentiment analysis is the computational study of a text's opinions, sentiments, and emotions (Colace et al., 2014). Puschmann and Powell (2018) believe that sentiment analysis provides a method to govern quantifiable, which is particularly helpful for extensive data sets in social media contexts. The technique is not only for evaluations but can also be used to identify influencers for the selection process.

Gräve (2019) suggests that professionals emphasize sentiment measures drawn from comments. By pointing that out, they can evaluate influencer relations activities rather than looking at simple heuristics like reach or interaction rate. However, it is also suggested not to entirely

overrule the reach measurement and consider (potential) reach and interaction rate too when choosing influencers before the collaborations.

Conclusion

Influencer relations primarily support respective P.R. goals, such as sending messages and overcoming barriers or delivering to the opinion battleground through an educational process. Organizations also expect to change the perception and behavior of the target audience according to the organization's views. It is advisable to avoid making influencer relations aims that come from a communication pattern that needs to be clarified, does not have a strong basis, and the effect of communication is not measurable. P.R. practitioners should be sensible about the third parties with credibility because the more credible influencers usually have a genuine affinity for the product and do not see material issues or replacement money as the number one matter. Instead, they are more concerned with the developing opinion than what and who is the target for forming the idea, then the expected final result. Before evaluating an influencer relations program, a SMART-adequate and measurable objective is an absolute requirement.

Many departments are experimenting with influencer communication and bringing their sometimes wholly different objectives, implementation processes, and evaluation methods into the terms "influencer relations" and "influencer marketing." Due to the other goals and approaches, there is no 'right' and no 'wrong' when defining and implementing the topic of influencer communication. Under certain circumstances, identifying online influencers, setting up intensive relationship management, and creating joint content with the influencers can be time-consuming. Still, it is the only way to achieve communicative goals with the target groups. So there are many ways of working with influencers, depending on the industry, influencer type, target group, and strategic communication

objective. So herein lies the importance of understanding the characteristics of influencer relations since the value of an organization's influencer relationships grows over time. Influencer relationship is about maintaining strong relationships with the influencers, which is a long game and requires a hands-on approach. No PR practitioner is calling an end to influencer relations as one of P.R.'s elements, so much influencer relations interest will keep going in the communication space for the foreseeable future.

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