

The power of the end-users for B2B influencer marketing

A practical case study in the tools and hardware industry

Master Thesis

Submitted in Fulfilment of the Degree

Master of Arts in Business, MA

University of Applied Sciences Vorarlberg
International Marketing & Sales

Submitted to
Prof. (FH) Fleerackers Tom

Handed in by
Malkoc Elvir, BSc

Dornbirn, 26. July 2020

Dedication

To my family

Abstract

The power of end-users for B2B influencer marketing

Influencer Marketing has been discussed by various marketing experts for years and is already a fixed component of the marketing strategy in many companies. These are mainly companies from the B2C sector. Recently, more and more companies are asking themselves about possible areas of application within the B2B structure. This phenomenon is influenced by the increase in digitalization and the ever-higher hurdles in reaching target groups using traditional marketing tools.

The topic of this master's thesis was the result of professional and personal development. Various modules attended during the study inspired a deeper interest in the subject. Furthermore, the topic was always a point of discussion in the professional environment, resulting in the realisation that there is currently very little knowledge in B2B companies regarding Influencer Marketing.

The aim of the research was to discover how to systematically find end users for the use of Influencer Marketing in B2B companies in the tool and hardware industry. Furthermore, the success factors for a long-term cooperation between influencers and companies from this industry will be identified and presented.

Research questions were created in order to realise the above-mentioned objectives. Therefore, the primary research question and three sub-research questions were created for both the theoretical and empirical part of the work. To answer these questions, eight experts from B2B companies in the tool and hardware industry were interviewed. The evaluation was based on the qualitative content analysis according to Mayring.

From the research results, a possible selection procedure could be identified, which would enable companies to systematically select influencers for marketing purposes. Furthermore, success criteria for a long-term cooperation between influencers and companies were also identified.

Kurzreferat

Die Macht der Endanwender im B2B Influencer Marketing

Influencer Marketing wird seit Jahren von verschiedenen Marketingexperten diskutiert und ist in vielen Unternehmen bereits fester Bestandteil der Marketingstrategie. Dies sind vor allem Firmen aus dem B2C-Bereich. In letzter Zeit stellen sich deshalb immer mehr Marketer die Frage nach möglichen Einsatzbereichen in verschiedenen B2B-Unternehmen. Dieses Phänomen wird nicht zuletzt durch die zunehmende Digitalisierung und immer höhere Hürden bei der Ansprache von Zielgruppen mit klassischen Marketinginstrumenten verursacht.

Das Thema der Masterarbeit war das Ergebnis einer beruflichen und privaten Entwicklung. Verschiedene Lehreinheiten, die während des Studiums besucht wurden, bildeten die Grundlage für ein erhöhtes Interesse an der Thematik Influencer Marketing. Zudem war das Thema immer auch Gegenstand von Diskussionen im beruflichen Umfeld. Es stellte sich jedoch heraus, dass in B2B-Unternehmen derzeit kaum Wissen über Influencer Marketing vorhanden ist.

Ziel der Untersuchung war es, herauszufinden, wie man systematisch Endnutzer für den Einsatz von Influencer Marketing in B2B-Unternehmen der Werkzeug- und Eisenwarenindustrie finden kann. Weiterhin sollte dargestellt werden, was die Erfolgsfaktoren für eine langfristige Zusammenarbeit zwischen Influencer und Unternehmen aus dieser Branche sind.

Es wurden Forschungsfragen erstellt, um die oben genannten Ziele herauszufinden. Daher wurden für den theoretischen und empirischen Teil der Arbeit eine Hauptforschungsfrage und drei Unterforschungsfragen definiert. Zur Beantwortung dieser Fragen wurden acht Experten aus B2B-Unternehmen der Werkzeug- und Eisenwarenindustrie befragt. Die Auswertung basierte auf der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse nach Mayring.

Aus den Forschungsergebnissen konnte ein mögliches Auswahlverfahren dargestellt werden, das es den Marketingmanagern ermöglicht, Influencer für Marketingzwecke systematisch auszuwählen. Darüber hinaus konnten auch Erfolgskriterien für eine langfristige Zusammenarbeit zwischen Influencern und Unternehmen beschrieben werden.

Table of Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| List of Figures | VIII |
| List of Abbreviations and Symbols | IX |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Problem description | 1 |
| 1.2 Research objectives and research question | 2 |
| 1.3 Research approach | 3 |
| 1.4 Structure of the research paper | 3 |
| 2. Definition Online Marketing and the link to Influencer Marketing | 5 |
| 2.1 Definition Social Media Marketing | 7 |
| 2.2 Definition Content Marketing | 8 |
| 2.3 Definition Referral Marketing | 9 |
| 3. Definition Influencer Marketing | 10 |
| 3.1 Definition Influencer | 11 |
| 3.2 Influencer types | 11 |
| 3.3 The power of Social Media Listening | 13 |
| 3.4 Word-of-mouth and Influencer Marketing | 14 |
| 3.5 Influencers in B2B versus B2C markets | 16 |
| 4. Finding a suitable influencer | 17 |
| 4.1 Six steps Influencer Marketing Strategy | 18 |
| 4.2 Definition of objectives and goals | 19 |
| 4.3 Target group & Target group user analysis | 20 |
| 4.4 Social media channel selection | 21 |
| 4.5 Influencer search and identification | 23 |
| 4.5.1 Social Media and Search Engines | 24 |
| 4.5.2 Influencer Marketing Databases and Platforms | 25 |
| 4.5.3 Influencer Marketing Agencies | 26 |
| 4.6 Influencer evaluation and selection criteria | 27 |
| 4.6.1 Quantitative criteria | 28 |
| 4.6.2 Qualitative criteria | 29 |
| 4.7 Influencer selection | 31 |
| 4.8 International challenges and opportunities | 33 |
| 5. Theoretical answers to the sub-research question | 34 |
| 6. Empirical research | 38 |
| 6.1 Methodology | 38 |

| | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 6.2 | Qualitative research | 38 |
| 6.3 | Sampling | 39 |
| 6.4 | Expert interview | 39 |
| 6.4.1 | Development of the guideline interview | 40 |
| 6.4.2 | Selection and description of interview partners | 42 |
| 6.4.3 | Contact to the experts and the subsequent interview | 43 |
| 6.5 | The quality criteria | 44 |
| 6.6 | Qualitative content analysis | 45 |
| 7. | Results of the empirical research | 50 |
| 7.1 | Status quo influencer marketing | 50 |
| 7.1.1 | Influencer image | 50 |
| 7.1.2 | Experience Influencer Marketing | 50 |
| 7.1.3 | Strategic positioning influencer marketing | 51 |
| 7.1.4 | Purpose of Influencer marketing | 52 |
| 7.2 | Implementing influencer marketing | 52 |
| 7.2.1 | Hurdles, Blockers and Questions | 52 |
| 7.2.2 | Objectives, Goals and KPIs | 53 |
| 7.2.3 | Target group and influencer persona | 54 |
| 7.3 | Influencer search, evaluation and selection | 54 |
| 7.3.1 | Social media networks | 55 |
| 7.3.2 | Search for influencers | 56 |
| 7.3.3 | Contact the influencer | 58 |
| 7.3.4 | Evaluation of the influencer | 58 |
| 7.3.5 | Selection of the influencer | 60 |
| 7.3.6 | International usage of influencers | 61 |
| 7.3.7 | Customer journey | 61 |
| 7.4 | Success factors for cooperation | 62 |
| 7.4.1 | Behaviour | 62 |
| 7.4.2 | Agreement and briefing | 63 |
| 7.4.3 | Importance of content approval | 65 |
| 7.4.4 | Support and Training | 65 |
| 7.5 | Success factors for the relationship | 66 |
| 7.5.1 | Continuous contact and involvement | 66 |
| 7.5.2 | Feedback | 66 |
| 7.6 | Success factors for influencer campaigns | 67 |
| 7.6.1 | Successful content | 67 |
| 7.6.2 | Timing | 68 |
| 7.6.3 | KPIs | 68 |
| 7.6.4 | Opportunities and threads of influencer marketing | 69 |
| 7.7 | Further expert view on Influencer Marketing | 70 |
| 7.7.1 | Influencer marketing among competitors | 70 |
| 7.7.2 | Influencer compensation | 71 |
| 7.7.3 | Future outlook of experts | 71 |
| 8. | Answers to the empirical sub-research question | 72 |
| 9. | Conclusion | 74 |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| 9.1 | Answer to the main research question | 74 |
| 9.2 | Discussion, limits and outlook | 76 |
| References | | 78 |
| Appendix | | 86 |
| Statement of Affirmation | | 94 |

List of Figures

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| FIGURE 1: TYPES OF ONLINE MARKETING BASED ON ADAMS | 6 |
| FIGURE 2: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIFFERENT ONLINE MARKETING TYPES BASED ON NIRSCHL AND STEINBERG..... | 7 |
| FIGURE 3: INFLUENCER CLASSIFICATION BASED ON NGUYEN AND CAMPBELL & FARRELL | 13 |
| FIGURE 4: TWO-STEP-FLOW MODEL FROM LAZARSFELD BASED ON NIRSCHL AND STEINBERG..... | 15 |
| FIGURE 5: SIX STEPS OF THE INFLUENCER MARKETING STRATEGY BASED ON NGUYEN | 18 |
| FIGURE 6: DECISION SUPPORT INFLUENCER MARKETING BASED ON NIRSCHL AND STEINBERG | 21 |
| FIGURE 7: SOCIAL MEDIA SELECTION MATRIX RELEVANT TO TARGET AUDIENCE BASED ON NIRSCHL AND STEINBERG..... | 22 |
| FIGURE 8: MOST EFFECTIVE FORMATS FOR INFLUENCERS ACCORDING MEDIAKIX..... | 23 |
| FIGURE 9: SELECTION CRITERIA FOR INFLUENCERS BASED ON HELD | 27 |
| FIGURE 10: ENGAGEMENT RATE BENCHMARKS BASED ON CREATORIQ | 29 |
| FIGURE 11: ASSESSMENT CRITERIA BASED ON HELD..... | 32 |
| FIGURE 12: INFLUENCER SELECTION MATRIX RELEVANT TO TARGET AUDIENCE BASED ON NIRSCHL AND STEINBERG..... | 33 |
| FIGURE 13: SYSTEMATIC INFLUENCER SELECTION PROCESS BASED ON NGUYEN; NIRSCHL, STEINBERG | 35 |
| FIGURE 14: SCREENING CRITERIA FOR INFLUENCERS BASED ON HELD | 37 |
| FIGURE 15: EXPERTS OVERVIEW INTERVIEW TOOLS AND HARDWARE INDUSTRY | 42 |
| FIGURE 16: QUALITATIVE SUMMARY BASED ON MAYRING | 46 |
| FIGURE 17: PROCESS MODEL FOR INDUCTIVE CATEGORY FORMATION BASED ON MAYRING | 48 |
| FIGURE 18: CATEGORY FORMATION | 48 |
| FIGURE 19: INFLUENCER SELECTION SCORING MODEL..... | 60 |
| FIGURE 20: SEVEN STEP INFLUENCER SELECTION PROCESS | 76 |

List of Abbreviations and Symbols

| | |
|------|-----------------------------------|
| API | Application Programming Interface |
| Ads | Advertisements |
| B2B | Business to Business |
| B2C | Business to Consumer |
| cf. | Compare (lat. Conferatur) |
| e.g. | For example (lat. Exempli gratia) |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicator |
| ROI | Return on Investment |
| SEA | Search Engine Advertisement |
| SEM | Search Engine Marketing |
| SEO | Search Engine Optimisation |
| USP | Unique Selling Proposition |
| WoM | Word of mouth |
| Web | World Wide Web |

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem description

Marketing communication channels have changed a lot during the last few years. The possibilities for online marketing presented marketers and agencies around the world with totally new methods to reach customers in various markets all over the world. Researchers from the University of St. Gallen forecast the end of traditional media. Print media and digital media, such as TV or radio, could soon become less relevant as people around the globe switch to subscription-based media providers. Until now, these media outlets have been able to shine, thanks to their high reach, especially in the consumer sector. However, they are currently losing their share of the market. Reaching customers through paid advertising will become challenging, as many subscribers expect advertising-free content from the providers. Therefore, alternatives will be sought in which potential customers can be reached at various, precise customer touchpoints. Especially brands that want to position themselves globally and remain competitive on the market can now use innovative approaches and the Internet to set themselves apart from their competitors. Therefore, it is possible today to convey additional value to customers by utilising information and communication technologies and, thus, stand out from the competition. This value can be induced in company self-generated content, or even in contributions which are generated and published by the end-users directly. The latter approach provides the basis for so-called Earned Media and offers companies completely new opportunities to be noticed on the Internet. Influencer marketing, utilising the user's participation on different networks, is thus enjoying an increase in demand and is now a very popular form of communication in social media.¹

The social media marketing report from 2018 shows that 39% of worldwide marketers use influencer marketing as a tool for their business.² While in the past it was mostly B2C companies that turned to this type of communication, an increasing interest can also be observed among B2B companies. More than that, it is also proving to be an important consideration for these type of business.³ Especially the younger population groups, such as millennials, show a high tendency to buy products that were previously recommended by influencers.⁴ An article from McKinsey and Company states that in 2020 about 50% of the overall workforce will be millennials. Most of them are connected and present in social media. Thus, pre-purchasing and product evaluations are also made in online channels. Positive relationships and awareness on social media are therefore essential for future business in any type of industry.⁵

In the DACH region by itself, the estimated expenditure for influencer marketing is about 990 million Euros in 2020, so this is an investment that should be well considered. Accordingly, choosing the right partners is of highest importance.⁶

¹ cf. 'BMT-Report.pdf' n. y., p. 23; cf. Wirtz 2011, p. 63–64.

² cf. 'Influencer Marketing - Nutzung weltweit 2018' n. y.

³ cf. '11 Things You Must Know About B2B Influencer Marketing' n. y.

⁴ cf. 'Influencer - Einfluss auf Kaufentscheidung nach Altersgruppen in Deutschland 2018' n. y.

⁵ cf. 'How to influence your new BFF: the Millennial procurement officer | McKinsey' n. y.

⁶ cf. 'Influencer Marketing - Marktvolumen in der DACH-Region 2020' n. y.

A closer look into the tools and hardware industry shows that influencer marketing has arrived in this industry as well. Various Influencers are active on social media platforms and work together with established manufacturers in the B2B environment. One example is the German power tool manufacturer Bosch. The manufacturer of drills, saws and other trade relevant products uses social media influencers in different channels for the promotion of tools and other hardware. A second example is the brand Stabila. Another German tools manufacturer, which embraces different influencers on social media in helping to promote their levels and measuring solutions to construction professionals. However, for companies, the selection and evaluation process in forming collaborations with influencers represents a challenge. About 61% of marketers claim to have difficulties in finding appropriate influencers for their marketing campaigns. Finally, there seem to be some questions to all interested marketers in finding the right partners and building a proper marketing strategy.⁷

1.2 Research objectives and research question

After the introduction to the topic and the problem description above, this research thesis will explore how influencers can be successfully discovered, evaluated and selected for the usage of marketing campaigns in B2B companies. The hardware and tool industries are the particular focus points of this thesis. In order to achieve the objectives, findings from the literature will be collected and compared with the current state of knowledge in the industry. This knowledge shall be evaluated empirically by expert interviews in the industry. Consequently, all insights and results will be used to recommend actions for B2B marketers in order to optimise the selection process of influencers. In addition, the empirical research will also be used to identify success factors for successful cooperation with influencers. Finally, in addition to recommendations for marketers in industry, this research will also present the limitations as well as the outlook for future fields of research.

Once the research objectives have been stated, a primary research question is required for this research paper. This question is as follows:

In the context of the tool and hardware industry, how can B2B companies successfully identify powerful end-users for gaining influence on social media?

In order to answer the main research question in detail, theoretical and empirical sub-research questions are formed. The theoretical sub-research questions required are following:

What process could be useful for a B2B company in the tool and hardware industry to aid in the systematic selection of suitable influencers?

Which parameters could be useful in the selection of the right influencers and how can one define the profile of the influencer in B2B?

⁷ cf. 'How Bosch Worked with 57 Influencers to Promote New Products [Case Study]' 2019; cf. 'Magdalena auf Instagram: „Gemeinsam mehr Frauen fürs Handwerk begeistern...“' n. y.; cf. 'Influencer Marketing Survey Results: 2019 Industry Benchmarks' n. y.

Additionally, the required empirical sub-research question is as follows:

What are the success factors for an effective, long-term cooperation in B2B companies?

1.3 Research approach

A good approach to performing exploratory research and to analyse a real-world phenomenon is to collect data within the context of a qualitative interview.⁸ Therefore, the data for the research work will be collected empirically by means of semi-structured expert interviews. This type of expert interview is especially suitable for determining qualitative data; it is particularly recommended for case study investigations, in order to understand related phenomena. The approach of semi-structured interviews furthermore allows to conduct insights and understand occurrences. These types of interviews are usually conducted face-to-face and are recorded or written down, not to be lost. Due to modern technologies and the current restrictions on freedom of movement, in this work, real-time electronic interviews were conducted via Internet conference.⁹

Before executing the expert interviews, a pre-test or pilot test of the interview is conducted. Pre-formulations and questions are to be checked in advance, so that no complications or misunderstandings arise later during the actual expert interviews. Furthermore, the interviewer can check if the questions are clear and effective. In the event of errors or misunderstandings, corrections can still be incorporated into the guide. This facilitates the later execution and recording of the expert interviews.¹⁰

To make use of the gained data during the expert interviews, it needs to be analysed and understood.¹¹ Therefore, it is recommended to transcribe the recorded qualitative data into readable text shortly after the interviews.¹² Afterwards, each individual interview is evaluated using the Mayring qualitative content analysis. This is to provide background information on the topic in order to answer the research question.¹³

1.4 Structure of the research paper

This research paper is intended to provide marketing experts, specialists and managers, influencers, scientists and interested students with a comprehensive and structured insight into the topic of influencer marketing. Furthermore, the thesis should provide a procedure for the selection of influencers for B2B companies.

This research work is divided into several chapters. Accordingly, in the first chapter, the problem definition and objectives are first introduced to the reader. Then the research question and methodology are explained in more detail.

⁸ cf. Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2009, p. 126-127,323-324.

⁹ cf. Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2009, p. 320–350.

¹⁰ cf. Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2009, p. 394.

¹¹ cf. Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2009, p. 480.

¹² cf. Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2009, p. 485; cf. Mayring 2010, p. 53.

¹³ cf. Mayring 2010, p. 56–57.

The second chapter forms the basis for the research into success factors in the search for suitable influencers in online communication, for companies in the tool and hardware industry. It also offers an introduction to the topic of influencer marketing.

The third chapter defines influencer marketing and identifies its credibility in the market. It also explains the necessary components of influencer marketing, such as the description and classification of influencers. Furthermore, the term influencer marketing is compared with the term word of mouth. Afterwards, in the final part, the distinction of influencers between B2C and B2B is presented.

In the fourth chapter, a possible selection process for influencers will be discussed. With the help of existing literature, the systematic selection of influencers will be explained.

In the fifth chapter, the theoretical sub-research questions are answered.

The sixth chapter discusses and presents the empirical survey of this research work. This chapter is followed by the presentation and evaluation of the empirical results in chapter seven. Building on this, the eighth chapter answers the empirical sub-research question. In the ninth chapter, the conclusion is made by answering the main research question. Besides, a concluding discussion of the results takes place. The possible limits and an outlook on the topic are also outlined in the conclusion.

A detailed bibliography follows the numbered chapters. The references are arranged alphabetically, according to the surnames of the authors. Finally, the appendix includes the interview guidelines used and the category scheme.

2. Definition Online Marketing and the link to Influencer Marketing

This chapter forms the basis for research into success factors in the search for suitable influencers in online communication, for companies in the tool and hardware industry. Additionally, this chapter offers an introduction to the topic of influencer marketing. To better understand the interrelationships, functional principles and functional mechanisms, the term online marketing is first defined, and its specific manifestations and disciplines in the context of influencer marketing are classified and delimited in detail.

Online marketing is a newer form of direct marketing. It is about addressing customers without detours, in as short a time as possible, on the Internet. According to Kotler and Armstrong, companies use the web to bring their products and services to the target group. Furthermore, it is intended to establish and maintain relationships with the target group.¹⁴ In the business context, online marketing is divided into two main categories, which differ according to the target group. On the one hand, there is the Business to Consumer (B2C) online marketing. Its goal is to sell products and services to end-users. On the other hand, there is the Business to Business (B2B) online marketing. Its goal is to address decision-makers, buyers or users in companies to use one companies solutions, goods and services in order to create further added value.¹⁵

Today online marketing has a wide bandwidth of different fields. Adams describes a total of 10 different types of online marketing like shown in Figure 1.¹⁶ However, before a purchase transaction is made, the modern-day customers will often look for information online and will phase probably some of the online marketing types. So-called digital opinion leaders and influencers, who are well versed in a topic or even seen by the followers as experts, make use of this. This effect can be used by companies in return to profit from the positive opinions and thus attract new customers.¹⁷ However, it should be noted that about 70% of participants in online interactions are only readers or consumers. Furthermore, 20% of participants react to various contributions, and only 10% generate real content. Companies must first discover this small but efficient group of people in order to use them as multipliers in their campaigns.¹⁸

¹⁴ cf. Kotler; Armstrong 2010, p. 519,528-532.

¹⁵ cf. Kotler; Armstrong 2010, p. 529–530.

¹⁶ cf. Adams n. y.

¹⁷ cf. Kreutzer 2014, p. 2–6; cf. Kotler; Armstrong 2010, p. 532–540.

¹⁸ cf. Kreutzer 2019, p. 9–10.



Figure 1: Types of online marketing based on Adams¹⁹

Source: Adams

While online marketing can be seen as a unit in various fields of application, according to Nirschl and Steinberg, there might be some overlaps as shown in Figure 2. The authors see individual connections, especially in the areas of social media marketing, content marketing and referral marketing interacting with influencer marketing. Therefore, the upcoming paragraphs explain the connections and relations to deliver some clarification before entering into the details of influencer marketing.²⁰

¹⁹ cf. Adams n. y.

²⁰ cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 7–10.

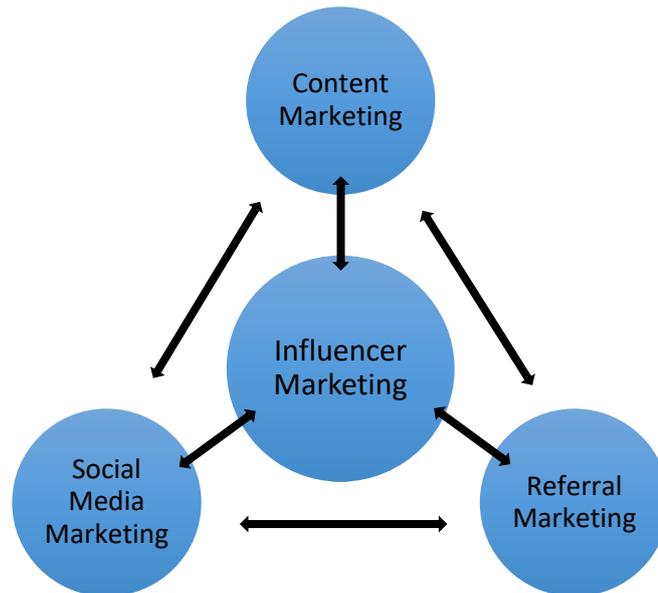


Figure 2: Relationship between different online marketing types based on Nirschl and Steinberg²¹
 Source: Nirschl, Steinberg

2.1 Definition Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is about the corporate use of online social media to exchange messages and information between internet users.²² Tuten and Solomon even express the objective of social media marketing as a creation, communication, delivery and exchange of valuable offerings to customers and stakeholders.²³ Social media platforms are Internet-based digital networks. These include applications that enable users to generate and publish content that they can share with various people and groups online. Content could be pictures, videos, text or any other type of digital information. Social media can be classified into six application areas. These are online social networks, online blogs or micro-blogs, online forums, online content communities, media sharing platforms and virtual worlds.²⁴ Besides the communication, social media can also be used for collaboration and thus for the participation between brands and users. Furthermore, it is also used to get the information from the users and transfer the customers voice inside the company. Getting this type of information can be essential in improving products and services but also in recognising customer needs and wants. Social Media Communication is thus a bidirectional approach. Social media marketing is a tool which allows a many-to-many communication.²⁵ Today, social media marketing is used to utilise all the different applications and to communicate a company offering to a wide audience. Besides the transfer of company

²¹ cf. Adams n. y.

²² cf. Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2015, p. 149.

²³ cf. Tuten; Solomon 2017, p. 17–18.

²⁴ cf. Gabriel; Röhrs 2017, p. 13–16; cf. Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2015, p. 149.

²⁵ cf. Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2015, p. 149–152; cf. Kreutzer 2014, p. 338–339; cf. Grabs; Bannour 2013, p. 41–44.

information and content, social media is also used to get in contact with relevant target groups and influencers. This approach can increase a company's reputation but also the overall reach of target customers.²⁶

2.2 Definition Content Marketing

During the last years, content marketing has become increasingly important in various marketing departments and eventually became a viral sensation. As the name suggests, this is the creation of valuable, relevant content for a target group. In addition to the term content marketing, more recent marketing literature also mentions the terms 'seeding' and 'inbound marketing'.²⁷ These can be various digital contributions in the form of a photo, video, audio or even written texts. The unique feature of content marketing is the relevance of the contributions for the users. Accordingly, companies and brands must publish contributions that arouse real interest among the target groups. It is, therefore, a strategic marketing tool which takes care of the creation and distribution of valuable contributions. Content marketing is a type of pull marketing, which should encourage customers to show further interest in the company or product. Customers are supposed to respond with a desire to read further into the matter and to search for additional details and information about a company.²⁸

Seth Godin calls this type of marketing permission marketing. The recipient of the content allows interacting with the message of the sender. He describes this form of marketing as anticipated, personal and above all: relevant. He states that content is relevant for the customers and stimulates their interest. In comparison, he describes traditional one-way marketing as interruption marketing with all its push strategies.²⁹ Classic marketing, also called outbound marketing, is, therefore, something completely different from content marketing. Furthermore, content is essential to be found by search engines as a company and be listed at the top of the search results list.³⁰

Besides the improvement of search engine visibility, content marketing can be used to achieve greater reach and bring new potential customers to a company's website. Furthermore, content marketing should strengthen trust and loyalty in a company, as well as bind influencers to a company and convert single users to more multi-users and brand ambassadors.³¹

In terms of content marketing, influencers are used as distributors and multipliers of the generated content to the target groups, in the dedicated markets by sharing in the social media channels.³² Furthermore, influencers and brand fans can be used as content creators to generate their own user-generated content. This can be also shared by various corporate or non-corporate channels to achieve further marketing objectives with more power. All in

²⁶ cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 8.

²⁷ cf. Lammenett 2017, p. 271.

²⁸ cf. Kreutzer 2019, p. 6,16; cf. Tuten; Solomon 2017, p. 214.

²⁹ cf. Marketing n. y.; cf. Backaler 2018, p. 7–9; cf. Kreutzer 2019, p. 73–74.

³⁰ cf. Lammenett 2017, p. 272–274.

³¹ cf. Lammenett 2017, p. 273–274.

³² cf. Kreutzer 2019, p. 6,157-158.

all, it can be assumed that there is a huge intersection set between influencers and content marketing.³³

2.3 Definition Referral Marketing

Regarding social media and content marketing, the long-known concept of referral marketing is experiencing full popularity these days. Marketers call the concept also Word-of-Mouth Marketing and it can be used by companies to push sales.³⁴ In principle, referral marketing is the use of existing customers for the acquisition of new customers through recommendations. A company offers a financial reward system and compensation for the successful recommendation of a new customer. While, in the past, recommendations were usually made analogously or personally by word of mouth, today there is the possibility to make these recommendations electronically or online. In practice, the recommendations are, therefore, now also called E-Referrals. However, the principle of Referral Marketing works quite simply. A customer recommends a product or service to a friend or relative and receives a reward from the company if the recommendation is successful. However, today the recommendation can also come from an influencer or another peer.³⁵

Referral marketing with recommendations from influencers, friends and relatives has become very popular nowadays. Furthermore, Nielsen states such recommendations are the most trustful type of advertisement in the world. In 2013, their global survey showed that 84% of the participants trust most recommendations from known people, which is an increase of 6% compared to the survey from 2007.³⁶

Online referral marketing is especially crucial in the B2B sector. Products and services in these industries are even costly or need more advice than in any other sector. Today, buying decision-makers are increasingly found on social media. According to a study by LinkedIn, 67% of B2B decision-makers use social media as their preferred channel of influence at the beginning of the customer journey. Furthermore, influencers can increase the trust base to a brand and let buyers decide quicker and with less price sensitivity. With the right content, they can influence from an early stage of corporate buying projects. Furthermore, social media channels can also be used to convert satisfied customers into new future referrals if their opinion is displayed at the right place.³⁷

³³ cf. 'Content marketing vs. influencer marketing' 2019.

³⁴ cf. Leigh 2018; cf. Grabs; Bannour 2013, p. 31.

³⁵ cf. Ahrens; Coyle; Strahilevitz 2013, p. 1035–1036; cf. Leigh 2018.

³⁶ cf. 'Under the Influence: Consumer Trust In Advertising' n. y.

³⁷ cf. 'Rethink-The-B2B-Buyers-Journey-v03.08.pdf' n. y., p. 17–19; cf. Grabs; Bannour 2013, p. 46–47; cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 9–10.

3. Definition Influencer Marketing

This chapter defines influencer marketing. It also explains the necessary components of influencer marketing, such as the description and classification of influencers. Afterwards the term social media listening is explained. Furthermore, the term influencer marketing is compared with the term word of mouth. In the final part, the distinction of influencers between B2C and B2B is presented.

Influencer marketing is the strategic use of influencers to increase the value of an advertising message via social media and thus influence the behaviour of potential customers in the customer journey. Influencer marketing is about planning, controlling and monitoring suitable opinion leaders to reach their audience for the benefit of the company's success. An Influencer is a person who is highly regarded and widely networked in online social networks. An influencer can also be an expert in their field. In this respect, the decisive factor for an influencer is not only the reach and size of the network but also the ability to influence other people in their decisions. Influencer marketing is primarily about the generation of a long-term relationship between a brand and influencers. Rather, the goal should be to establish a strong bond between the brand and the opinion leaders.³⁸

Influencer marketing is an essential part of the marketing mix today, as the high degree of influence during the customer journey influences the purchasing decision of customers. Furthermore, Influencer Marketing is a part of the overall marketing social media strategy.³⁹ The used social media applications and networks are just the tool for the communication of the message, which might change from time to time. Thus, it does not only depend on which social media network brands will use to address their products to the potential customers, but more, it is essential to have an overall objective to make it successful.⁴⁰

For a company influencer marketing is the use of various influencers to deliver messages on a personal level. In this respect, products and services are offered to influencers at a reasonable price to get a real opinion on the offering. Finally, under the heading of influencer marketing, the influencers share their impressions and opinions with their network of followers. This type of marketing is also called buzz marketing.⁴¹

Influencer marketing today takes place in two fields: paid media and earned media. If companies pay an influencer, e.g. to create content, then it is paid media. The contribution is thus more strongly classified as an advertising action, and the credibility is somewhat lower. In contrast, this behaviour is reversed in the case of earned media. Influencers report on this, wholly detached from a product or a brand experience due to a previously delivered product or service. In the case of earned media, the content is thus rarely classified as an advertising message and credibility is significantly higher than to any paid media content.⁴²

The use of influencers is no substitute for the use of non-personal communication channels such as print or online media. It is far more a link between the channels and the customers of a company. Influencers should therefore communicate the direct benefits of a product or

³⁸ cf. Kost; Seeger 2020, p. 53–54; cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 11–12.

³⁹ cf. 'intelligence-report-social-platforms-and-influencers.pdf' n. y., p. 7; cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 11–12.

⁴⁰ cf. Grabs; Bannour 2013, p. 73.

⁴¹ cf. Kotler; Armstrong 2010, p. 437.

⁴² cf. Owsianski 2018, p. 256.

service on a personal level to those customers who have only limited contact with the media. Influencers can be seen as translators from non-personal product messages to personal messages for certain target groups.⁴³

3.1 Definition Influencer

In literature, the term influencer has various synonyms. For example, Kotler and Armstrong equate the term opinion leader with the term influencer. More precisely, they refer to these types of people as people who exert a social influence within a group. This influence occurs because their followers see them as leaders based on specialised knowledge, personality, skills and other characteristics.⁴⁴ Their followers mostly seek their opinion because of specific knowledge or capability in a topic or product. This status allows companies to transport their message to the communication network and the followers of the influencer.⁴⁵

The authors Falzl and Freese describe so-called influencers as creative individual persons who regularly produce content and present it to the public. Furthermore, these individuals are willing to work with companies or brands and to influence the behaviour of their followers by means of the mentioned content.⁴⁶

On the other hand, Bakshy et al. define influencers as persons who have the ability to spread information or impressions. These influencers also have the ability to influence the perception of the information transmitted and thus control the behaviour of other people in their environment.⁴⁷

In the context of the corporate procurement process, the term influencer is usually attributed to a person who influences the purchasing decision. Accordingly, in this context, an influencer is seen more as a person who knows how to define specifications but also provides further relevant information for the evaluation of alternatives.⁴⁸ Therefore an influencer can also be a person from the management board, an engineer or simply another person from a corporate buying centre.⁴⁹ In connection with the B2B sector, terms such as multiplier, key opinion leader, digital opinion leader, brand ambassador and expert are also used for the influencers. It rarely happens that the terms evangelist or opinion leader are used.⁵⁰

3.2 Influencer types

Mega-Influencers:

⁴³ cf. Kotler; Armstrong 2010, p. 437–438.

⁴⁴ cf. Kotler; Armstrong 2010, p. 165–167.

⁴⁵ cf. Kotler; Armstrong 2010, p. 437.

⁴⁶ cf. '«Influencer Marketing»' 2017; cf. 'Forschungsreihe 04/2017' n. y., p. 2.

⁴⁷ cf. Bakshy et al. 2011, p. 66.

⁴⁸ cf. Kotler; Armstrong 2010, p. 198.

⁴⁹ cf. 'What's the difference between influencer marketing and word of mouth marketing?' 2018.

⁵⁰ cf. von Lewinski 2018, p. 88.

These are people with a large number of followers in social media. An unwritten rule says that mega-influencers must have more than one million followers on a network site. Most of them are very well-known faces and famous people. They are therefore only suitable as influencers for companies and brands that want to reach a broad audience. Individual contributions of such influencers are worth millions, and this, usually, only for a single post. Even if the remuneration should be right, they decide personally for whom they want to work or not.⁵¹

Macro-Influencers:

Macro Influencers are one level behind the Mega Influencers and have a following between 100.000 and one million followers. They are already better suited for the business goals of influencer marketing and are also willing to work for various companies. Because of their enormous popularity, they are particularly suitable for increasing brand awareness among the general public. Further, the selection is likely to be much higher in the market, as there are many of them available. Worth mentioning, is that there are also some fraudsters out in the market. Many of these influencers have bought their followers and have not worked hard to obtain them.⁵²

Micro-Influencers:

Micro-influencers have a following of about 10.000 to 100.000 people on a social media network. These are people who do not make up a specific celebrity. However, they have specialised knowledge in a niche, and this is important for B2B. Therefore, they usually have followers from this dedicated niche, which they have worked hard to acquire. Although this type of influencer has significantly fewer followers than the two previous types, they differ significantly in the relationship to their followers. The good thing about Micro-influencers is that many of them are not solely driven by money. Often products are sufficient as compensation for brand advertising. However, there are professional teams who insist on payment. The use of micro-influencers is continuously increasing in business marketing because they manage to reach specific niches.⁵³

Nano-Influencers:

The Nano-influencers are the group of influencers with the fewest followers. The number rarely exceeds 1.000 people usually but some of them can even reach to a follower count of up to 10.000. Nevertheless, they are very relevant to various industries. They possess the superior trust of their followers and can, therefore, strongly influence opinions. Especially with highly specialised products, their opinions can be decisive for the purchase

⁵¹ cf. Lammers 2018, p. 111–112; cf. 'What is an Influencer? - Social Media Influencers Defined [Updated 2020]' 2017.

⁵² cf. Lammers 2018, p. 111–112; cf. 'What is an Influencer? - Social Media Influencers Defined [Updated 2020]' 2017; cf. 'The State of Influencer Marketing 2020: Benchmark Report' 2020, p. 12.

⁵³ cf. Campbell; Farrell 2020, p. 4; cf. Lammers 2018, p. 111–112; cf. 'What is an Influencer? - Social Media Influencers Defined [Updated 2020]' 2017; cf. 'The State of Influencer Marketing 2020: Benchmark Report' 2020, p. 12.

of products. They are seen by their followers as absolute experts and can thus motivate the thinking of whole niches. If marketers intend to work with Nano-influencers, they should be aware that it often takes hundreds of them to achieve a relevant reach.⁵⁴

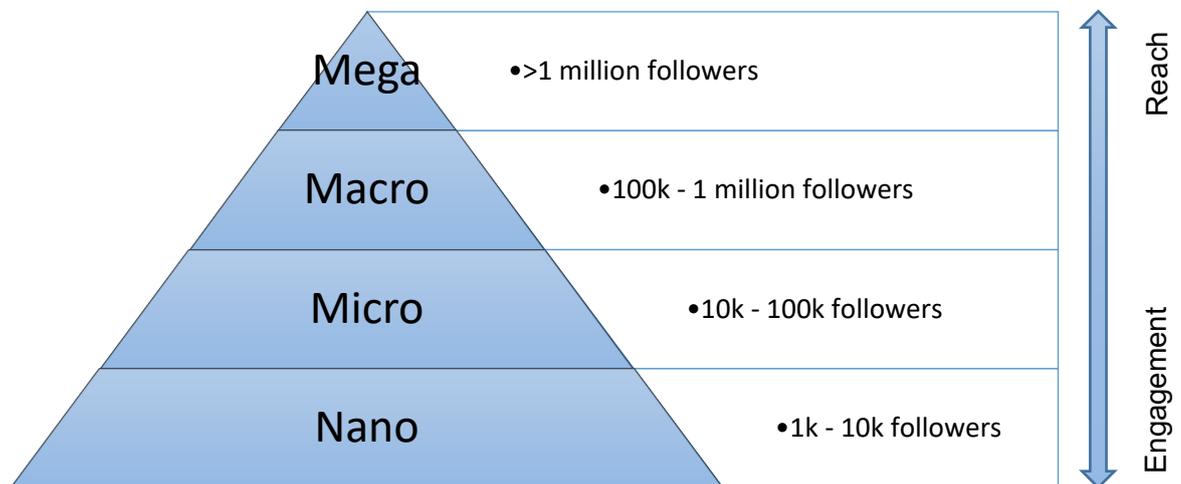


Figure 3: Influencer classification based on Nguyen and Campbell & Farrell⁵⁵

Source: Nguyen; Campbell, Farrell

A look into specific literature reveals here that experts do not entirely agree on the classification of influencers. Therefore, there are different numbers of followers for the individual classes depending on what they explain. To make it easier to understand, the latest results of the Benchmark Report 2020 by Influencer Marketing Hub were taken into account as a reference in the example above.⁵⁶

3.3 The power of Social Media Listening

Companies that want to know exactly what is being mentioned online about their brand should think about some systematic monitoring or listening.⁵⁷

Consequently, Solomon and Tuten recommend social media listening for systematic monitoring. Several tools and providers can support companies in this respect. This makes it possible to discover and analyse comments or other contributions in real-time. Popular providers for Listening-Platforms and Brand Monitoring Tools are, for example, Brand24, YouScan, Agora Pulse, Buzzsumo, Brandwatch, Tweetdeck, BackType, TwitterSearch, Hootsuite, Topsy or the services of Google-Alerts or -Trends. These and many more

⁵⁴ cf. 'What is an Influencer? - Social Media Influencers Defined [Updated 2020]' 2017; cf. 'The State of Influencer Marketing 2020: Benchmark Report' 2020, p. 12.

⁵⁵ cf. Nguyen 2018, p. 151; cf. 'The State of Influencer Marketing 2020: Benchmark Report' 2020, p. 12; cf. Campbell; Farrell 2020, p. 3.

⁵⁶ cf. Kobilke 2019, p. 225–226; cf. Lammers 2018, p. 111–112.

⁵⁷ cf. Kreutzer 2019, p. 5–6.

providers make it very easy to listen to the opinions of customers. Furthermore, these tools allow data management, data analysis or content distribution. Especially with brands that appeal to a broad target audience and where thousands of comments are made daily about a company, this is probably the only rational way to listen to brands' customers. This kind of systematic monitoring of social media not only serves to minimise risk but can also add value to a brand. For departments such as product management, for example, new product ideas can be created, or suggestions for improvement can be taken from existing products. When this kind of data is stored and analysed, companies can even gain additional benefits like finding pain points or discovering new leads.⁵⁸

Accordingly, true brand fans and ambassadors can also be discovered by marketers using social listening. This can happen when a customer speaks positively about a brand with regularity. If an internet user, with a suitable target group of followers, always appears in a favourable context with a company, then an influencer can also be discovered very easily by using such tools.⁵⁹

3.4 Word-of-mouth and Influencer Marketing

As early as 1967 Arndt defined word-of-mouth as oral communication between two individuals, concerning a brand, a product or a service. It is a form of communication with which companies can easily reach new customers by being recommended by existing customers. In the past, word-of-mouth marketing was mostly done offline in person or by phone. Today, various online tools allow such a recommendation very easy. These new online recommendations are, therefore, also called e-referrals in the literature. The recommendations can be made online via emails, instant messages, blogs or social media and are usually initiated by individuals or companies. This new possibility of sharing statements has much more potential to go viral because of the different online social networks and applications. In this regard, latest literature uses also the term electronic word-of-mouth.⁶⁰

Looking at the point of view of best-selling author Backaler, word of mouth and influencer marketing are very similar. Both concepts aim to influence other people and motivate them to take a desired action. While in the past, mostly only very famous people could spread their opinion in public media, things look a bit different nowadays. Now, through the established online social media, lesser-known faces have the opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences with other people.⁶¹ Nevertheless, in reality, there seems to be some differences between the two concepts. Basically, both approaches are about people being influenced by other people. However, the concept of word-of-mouth is about people acting freely and free of charge by sharing certain contents in their contributions with their

⁵⁸ cf. Tuten; Solomon 2017, p. 329–333; cf. 'Brandwatch Consumer Research' n. y.; cf. 'This So-Called Digital Life: Re-Evaluating the Value of Social Media' 2013; cf. 'What is Social Listening, Why it Matters, and 10 Tools to Make it Easier' 2020.

⁵⁹ cf. Tuten; Solomon 2017, p. 329–330.

⁶⁰ cf. Ahrens; Coyle; Strahilevitz 2013, p. 1035; cf. Petrescu 2014, p. 4–6.

⁶¹ cf. Backaler 2018, p. 16–17.

peers. There is therefore no obligation and no remuneration for the distribution of a content, opinion, attitude or experience regarding a brand or a product.⁶²

In contrast, influencer marketing is very much a paid activity. Although the compensation for the distribution of content and information does not necessarily have to be monetary, an influencer expects compensation based on special appreciation, experience, exclusivity, or access to products. Although a clear difference between the two concepts could be shown, a grey area still needs to be mentioned. This small grey area is the overlap of the word of mouth and influencer marketing. This situation can be found, for example, when paid influencers share a contribution with their audience. Subsequently, certain people may be convinced of the content and find it valuable to share with others in their communities. In this way, one would have gained another unpaid advertisement for one's product or company, which could then be assigned to the field of word of mouth.⁶³

Concerning word-of-mouth and influencer marketing, the two-step-flow model following Lazarsfeld should also be mentioned here. It explains how the transmission of advertising messages which utilise an Influencer takes place, as shown in Figure 4. Influencers act as filter units that selectively extract messages from media and pass them on to their followers. Marketers can use this knowledge to develop a targeted approach to influencers and thus achieve an optimal distribution of their advertising message. The upgrade of the communication mix by the use of Influencer and word-of-mouth can influence and guide customers' buying decisions very efficiently.⁶⁴

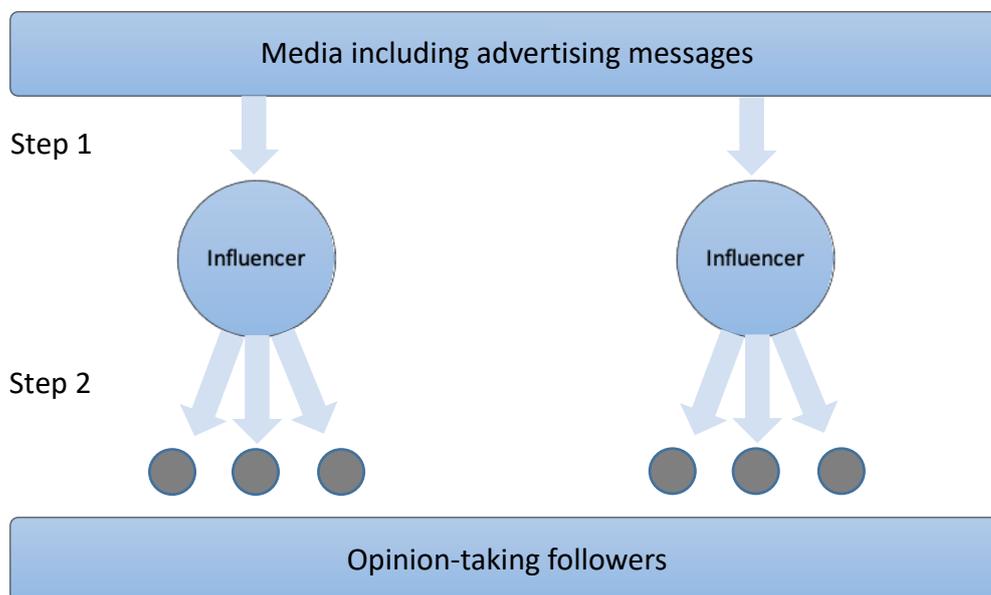


Figure 4: Two-step-flow model from Lazarsfeld based on Nirschl and Steinberg⁶⁵

Source: Nirschl, Steinberg

⁶² cf. Petrescu 2014, p. 5; cf. 'What's the difference between influencer marketing and word of mouth marketing?' 2018.

⁶³ cf. 'What's the difference between influencer marketing and word of mouth marketing?' 2018.

⁶⁴ cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 28–30.

⁶⁵ cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 29.

3.5 Influencers in B2B versus B2C markets

In the B2B the products and solutions are much more complex than any simple consumer good. Therefore, industry and niche experts can be good opportunities to serve as influencers. The integration of influencers can thus be a perfect add-on for the entire corporate marketing mix.⁶⁶

According to literature, the term influencer relations is also used in B2B, as the term influencer marketing was initially wrongly associated only with consumer goods marketing. In B2B, cooperation with influencers is not based on short-term successes, but long-term partnerships. Communication in this sector is thus primarily aimed at the opinion market. In B2B, an increase in sales is only indirectly the goal; it is more a matter of image enhancement, reputation, knowledge transfer and information dissemination. While credibility and transparency are somewhat neglected in B2C, they play a vital role in B2B. Therefore, quality control in this area is carried out utilising sentiment analyses, interactions and image indicators.⁶⁷

Long-term decision-making processes in the buying centre, challenging topics, controversial attitudes and different people who need to be involved in communication speak for influencers. Although according to literature, B2B companies only make rational procurements, they too are only human and have emotions. Therefore, increasingly B2C and B2B communication is becoming blurred from this understanding. No matter whether it is B2B or B2C, it is ultimately always the people who decide and it is vital to influence them at the right time through influencers.⁶⁸

Compared to B2C, influencers in the B2B sector do not work exclusively with one brand. Since they are experts and want to be perceived as such by their followers, they would have to know their way around the market and evaluate various brands in the field. Marketers must be aware of this fact. Otherwise, there can be no trust in the influencer. Furthermore, it is also unusual to pay influencers in the B2B area, because that would only harm their objectivity. They are usually fully employed and finance their livelihood by their employment. This fact makes it all the more vital for them to have non-monetary compensation available. Incentives can be ensured by attending essential press conferences, events, trade fairs or public meetings together, as it enhances the reputation of the influencer in the community. This approach will also increase the number of followers in future.⁶⁹

Even if the influencers in B2B are often called testimonials, opinion leaders or multipliers, it is crucial to find the right and suitable influencers for a company. However, in B2B, quality matters because if influencers convince one single decision-maker, from a big potential customer, the job is almost done. A direct sale via the influencer is rather unusual here compared to B2C. However, this may change in the future in various industries. Nevertheless, sales figures will increase through the effective use of influencers, as they have a significant influence on decision making in B2B.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ cf. von Lewinski 2018, p. 87.

⁶⁷ cf. Jahnke 2018, p. 6; cf. Backaler 2018, p. 73; cf. Lommatzsch 2018, p. 25.

⁶⁸ cf. von Lewinski 2018, p. 87.

⁶⁹ cf. Backaler 2018, p. 78–81.

⁷⁰ cf. von Lewinski 2018, p. 88–91; cf. Backaler 2018, p. 73–75; cf. Kotler; Keller 2012, p. 551.

4. Finding a suitable influencer

After the previous chapters have explained the basics of influencer marketing, the following chapter deals with the selection process of influencers. With the help of existing literature, the systematic selection of influencers will be discussed. For this reason, concepts will be presented out of the literature which enable the systematic selection of suitable influencers for B2B companies in the tool and hardware industry. Furthermore, parameters will be discussed, which should be helpful for the selection of the influencer and can be useful for the definition of an influencer profile.

According to an Influencer Marketing survey by Mediakix in 2019, 80% of the marketers surveyed consider Influencer Marketing to be effective. In return, 61% of participants confirm that they have difficulties in finding the right influencers. Especially the identification of false followers is a headache for marketing departments on some platforms.⁷¹

In the B2B sector, the famous advertising type influencers known from consumer goods communication can be neglected. For this purpose, partners are needed who can act for a company in the long-term and are therefore able to fulfil the marketing objectives. Above all, these are employees when it comes to the attractiveness of their own company. Much more important, however, concerning this research work, are the customers, business partners and users of the products and services.⁷²

Nowadays, many companies utilise social media marketing and in particular influencer marketing because it is trending or because their competitors do it. Therefore, companies have to develop a strategy to avoid disappointment. Before companies rush around the tactical components and tools of Influencer Marketing, they should first think about their strategic goals.⁷³

Especially when it comes to a brand in a niche, for this purpose, experts are usually recommended who are well versed in the niche and who are also recognised by the followers. Especially the millennials and digital natives do not expect to have celebrity personalities, but rather smaller and local opinion leaders. Those people have a slightly smaller reach but a higher interaction rate with their fans. In order to generate more reach, B2B companies should choose several small influencers, probably micro-influencers, with a high level of engagement with their followers and thus more able to achieve a practical added value. Adams thus confirms that the selection of influencers from a brand's niche are essential. Furthermore, they should represent the target audience.⁷⁴

On this occasion, the social media influencer marketing strategy, according to Nguyen, is considered in this thesis. It should help to describe the necessary steps for an appropriate influencer selection and cooperation strategy.

⁷¹ cf. 'Influencer Marketing Survey Results: 2019 Industry Benchmarks' n. y.

⁷² cf. Pleil; Helferich; Grupe 2018, p. 61,67.

⁷³ cf. Lammenett 2017, p. 365.

⁷⁴ cf. Leuman n. y.; cf. Adams n. y.

4.1 Six steps Influencer Marketing Strategy

At this point, the six-step model according to Nguyen will be presented. It is one of the few strategy processes that explicitly refers to the influencer marketing level. Since influencer marketing is known to be a part of social media marketing, marketers could also choose other methods. The other known strategy methods described in the literature could alternatively be used here to build successful influencer marketing in a company. Further strategies could be the seven-step model according to Lammenett, the POST method, according to Li and Bernoff, the ZEMM-MIT model according to Stuber, or the ten-step model according to Hilker. The alternative concepts of the authors mentioned above are all described in very general terms and sometimes very vaguely. There is not a perfect model for the Influencer Marketing Strategy. An exception could be the six-step model shown in Figure 5, according to Nguyen.⁷⁵

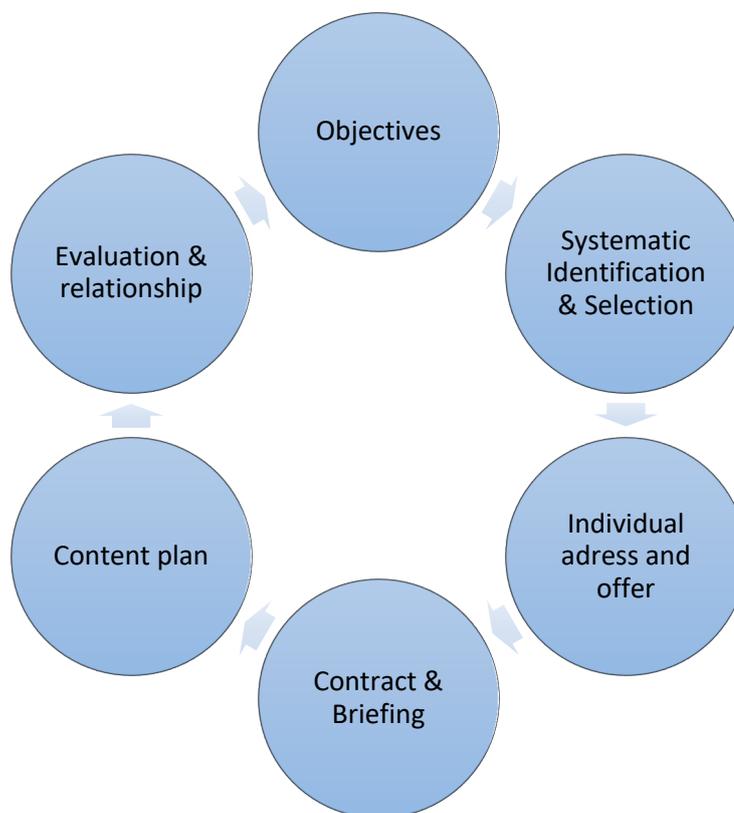


Figure 5: Six steps of the Influencer marketing strategy based on Nguyen⁷⁶

Source: Nguyen

As stated, this thesis deals with the selection of suitable influencers for companies. Therefore, in the following chapters, some possibilities for the tactical implementation of the first two points according to Nguyen, will be mentioned. The first chapter is devoted to the objectives in the following.

⁷⁵ cf. Lammenett 2017, p. 365–369; cf. Decker 2019, p. 71–84; cf. Nguyen 2018, p. 152.

⁷⁶ cf. Nguyen 2018, p. 152.

4.2 Definition of objectives and goals

Marketers should set objectives which should be achieved with the cooperation with influencers. Possible objectives can be, for example, the increase of awareness or visibility of a brand or product. Additionally, goals such as the spreading of messages or participate in various events are possible. In any case, the goals should be in line with the SMART method, i.e. they should be specific, measurable, accepted, realistic and timed.⁷⁷

As stated previously in this thesis, Influencer Marketing is a part of the overall marketing social media strategy.⁷⁸ Therefore, marketers should turn to the strategy development process of social media marketing. Hence, Lammenett describes the first step of a strategy in this area as the concrete definition of goals.⁷⁹ According to Rabach, the destination determines the route. The goals must be set before marketers can even talk about possible channels. Likewise, marketers should refrain from any trends at this early stage and focus exclusively on specific goals.⁸⁰ At the beginning of Influencer Marketing, Krüger also emphasises the importance of strategic considerations. Accordingly, it is essential to define which goals a company wants to achieve through influencer marketing and which target groups are to be reached.⁸¹

Lammenett names six possible goals in this regard:⁸²

- *Personnel*: The acquisition of new personnel or strengthening of employee markets.
- *Image*: To build image and reputation, to form a dialogue with the target group.
- *Product development*: To perform product-development based market research, to receive customer feedback or to integrate the customer in the development process.
- *Process*: Process optimisation, transfer of knowledge and workflow improvement.
- *Sales*: Increase sales numbers and revenue, to reach out to new target groups, support customers, strengthen customer loyalty and to spread incentives.
- *Awareness*: Use third parties to transmit company messages, to spread viral messages and links, to backlink customers to corporate channels.⁸³

In B2B Influencer Marketing, the most common goals, according to Pleil et al. are the direct communication of products, solutions and services. Furthermore, image and reputation are also very important common goals in this regard.⁸⁴

In any case, all goals should be derived according to the SMART principle. The more precise the definition at this point, the easier it is to measure success in the end. Therefore, the creation of specific KPIs should be established at the beginning.⁸⁵

⁷⁷ cf. Nguyen 2018, p. 152–159.

⁷⁸ cf. 'intelligence-report-social-platforms-and-influencers.pdf' n. y., p. 7; cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 11–12.

⁷⁹ cf. Lammenett 2017, p. 366.

⁸⁰ cf. Rabach 2018, p. 174.

⁸¹ cf. Krüger 2018, p. 218.

⁸² cf. Lammenett 2017, p. 367.

⁸³ cf. Lammenett 2017, p. 367.

⁸⁴ cf. Pleil; Helferich; Grupe 2018, p. 67.

⁸⁵ cf. Lammenett 2017, p. 367.

According to Karkalis, not defining clear goals in the beginning is one of the number one mistakes in influencer marketing.⁸⁶

4.3 Target group & Target group user analysis

In phase two, the target groups that the company wants to reach via social media should first be determined.⁸⁷ The clear target audience is essential in this case. Thus the target audience can be existing users, corporate decision makers or any other corporate member of the buying centre.⁸⁸ It should be clear at this point that only customers that use the channels can realistically be reached online via social media channels.⁸⁹

For companies and marketers, it is all the more essential to select and engage influencers by the target group. Today, individual influencers have their followers. Therefore, they communicate individually to specific groups. For a successful target group-oriented content strategy, marketers need to know their intentions and communication goals. The responsible professionals must thus determine their target audience in advance, as they do for other communication campaigns and marketing initiatives. A recommended way to do this is to carry out a target audience analysis. Therefore, the target audience to be addressed must be precisely defined. This definition can be done using characteristics such as socio-demographic, geographic and psychographic data. Besides this, media usage behaviour must be analysed to reach potential customers through the right social media channels.⁹⁰

The user analysis indicates which target groups can be reached with which social media. At this point, it should be mentioned that only users who can be reached digitally and who have already had experience with online marketing are suited for influencer marketing, as shown below in Figure 6.⁹¹

⁸⁶ cf. Verkaufen 2018.

⁸⁷ cf. Decker 2019, p. 65.

⁸⁸ cf. Kotler; Armstrong 2010, p. 433.

⁸⁹ cf. Owsianski 2018, p. 253.

⁹⁰ cf. Owsianski 2018, p. 257; cf. Kotler; Armstrong 2010, p. 216–222.

⁹¹ cf. Decker 2019, p. 65–66; cf. Owsianski 2018, p. 253; Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 41–42.

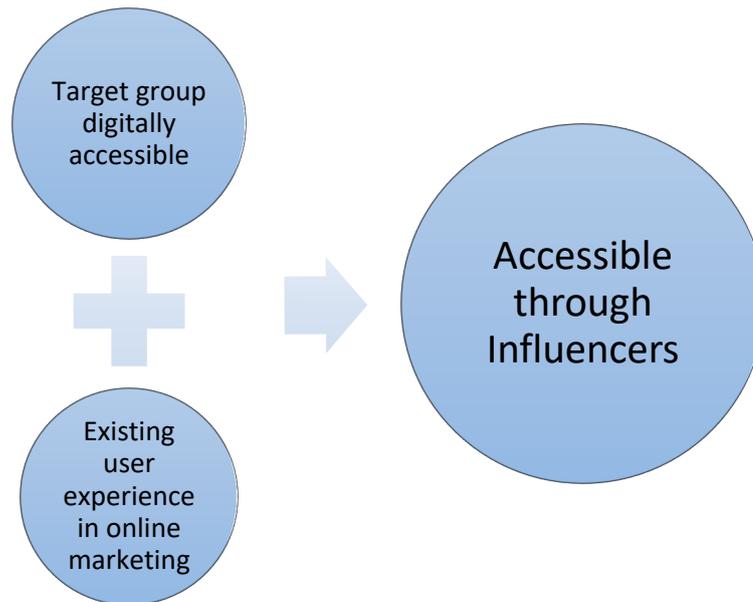


Figure 6: Decision support influencer marketing based on Nirschl and Steinberg⁹²

Source: Nirschl, Steinberg

In order to avoid the need to manage every possible online channel, companies should also be aware of the channels on which the majority of their target group is primarily located. The user behaviour can vary according to country and region. Accordingly, it should be carefully examined in which networks the target groups are active. An analysis of the demographics and user interests of the respective platforms is therefore essential before the point of channel selection. Channels that are not operated by the company can play a decisive role in this process.⁹³

Today, marketers can obtain extensive information about current and potential target groups on the web. This possibility provides them with information about where relevant groups are and what interests them, but also what is on their minds and what problems they are experiencing. One way to do this is through social media listening.⁹⁴ The concept of social media listening offers systematic monitoring for companies to gain insides about what exactly is being mentioned online about their brand or products. More information regarding social media listening is mentioned in chapter 3.3.⁹⁵

4.4 Social media channel selection

The social media environment today offers a high number of different networks and channels. However, only specific channels are suitable for collaboration with influencers. On the one hand, the interests of the participants in a social media network can differ from the importance of the companies. On the other hand, the desired target groups do not

⁹² cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 42.

⁹³ cf. Decker 2019, p. 65–66; cf. Owsianski 2018, p. 253; Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 41–42.

⁹⁴ cf. Owsianski 2018, p. 258.

⁹⁵ cf. Kreutzer 2019, p. 5–6.

circulate on the platforms at all. Another point may also be the technological progress of a social media provider. Therefore, algorithms and features may influence whether a social medium is even suitable for influencer marketing. An essential component for the implementation and measurement of influencer marketing campaigns today is an API interface that allows external applications to access data. With the help of these interfaces, marketers and service providers can access user data that they can use to measure their success or evaluate potential candidates. In this regard, marketers should only consider online social media channels that are already prominently used by the defined target group.⁹⁶

Here, Nirschl and Steinberg name the various criteria which must be defined priorly, to determine the social media channels relevant for the target group. The criteria can help later to check the channels. The customer profile with all the personal data of the target group serves this purpose for the first criteria. Besides this, a clear definition of the influencer marketing strategy goals to be achieved, provides a point of reference for the review. The various social media are also examined concerning success factors such as reach, relevance, reputation and resonance. These factors are to be evaluated individually and specifically for each channel by the marketers. An example of a social media selection matrix is shown below in Figure 7. The matrix shows the evaluation of the different channels using a scoring model. Thus, the creation of a ranking can identify the social media channels relevant to the target group. By awarding points, one to ten, the suitability of the channels is assessed based on the previously defined criteria. Here, one stands for "not suitable" and ten for "very suitable". A weighting of the factors can also allow for individual company adjustments.⁹⁷

| | Customer Profile | Goal 1 | Goal 2 | Reach | Relevance | Reputation | Resonance | Sum |
|-----------|------------------|--------|--------|-------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| Blog | 8 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 9 | 19 | 7 | 62 |
| Instagram | 5 | 8 | 5 | 10 | 10 | 6 | 8 | 52 |
| YouTube | 10 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 52 |
| Facebook | 9 | 8 | 5 | 10 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 51 |

Figure 7: Social Media selection matrix relevant to target audience based on Nirschl and Steinberg⁹⁸

Source: Nirschl, Steinberg

According to the author Held, today, the social networks Facebook, Instagram and YouTube are probably the most prominent channels for influencer marketing. The authors Nirschl and Steinberg also mention blogs, Instagram and YouTube as the channels in which influencers cavort and which are considered significant by users. A study by the IAB Spain from 2019 also confirms this fact, whereby Facebook was placed first among influencer channels, followed by Instagram and YouTube.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ cf. Owsianski 2018, p. 253; cf. Held 2018, p. 68.

⁹⁷ cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 41–42.

⁹⁸ cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 42.

⁹⁹ cf. Held 2018, p. 68–69; cf. 'Spain: influencer popularity by social network 2019' n. y.; cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 19.

A recent survey by Mediakix, a specialised influencer marketing agency, shows that Instagram is seen as the most effective social media for influencers in the market (Figure 8). Especially with its formats like Instagram Posts and Stories, the channel manages to grab people. Behind them are formats ranked from other social media such as videos on YouTube, videos on Instagram and blog posts.¹⁰⁰

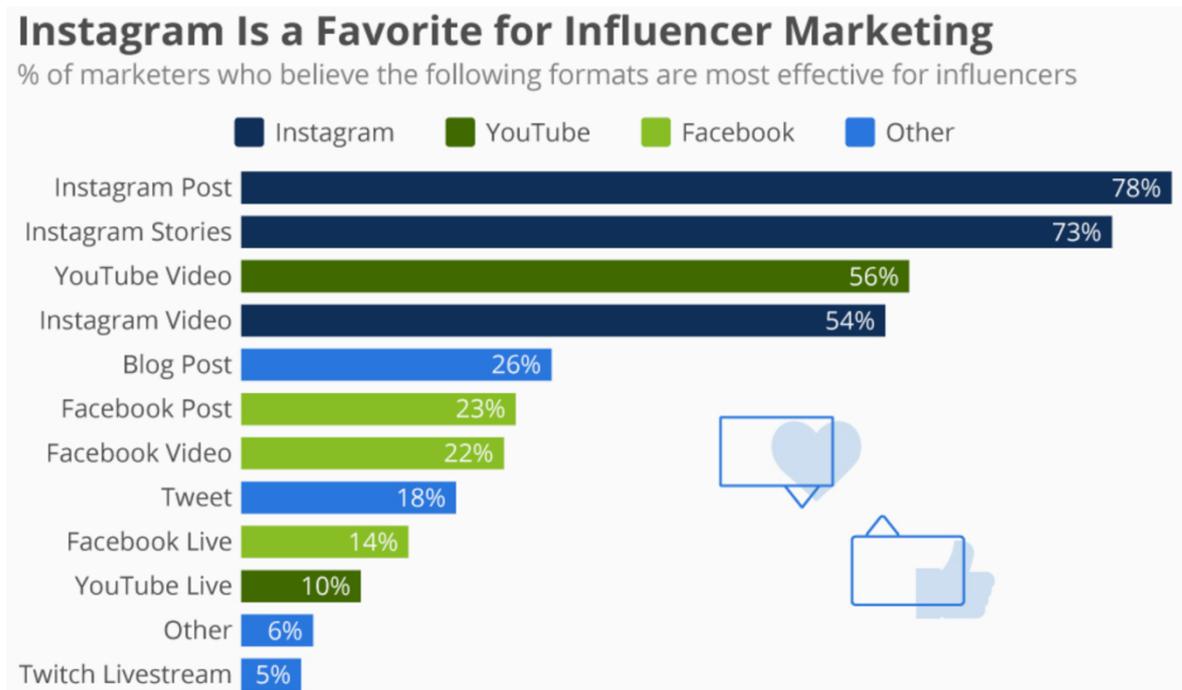


Figure 8: Most effective formats for influencers according Mediakix¹⁰¹

Source: Statista

To achieve the most significant benefit, integration with influencers in all the social media channels mentioned above would probably be useful.¹⁰² However, the coordination, relationship management and operational processing pose a massive challenge for marketers. In terms of channel selection, there is perhaps no one perfect channel that fits all marketing objectives. It always depends on which individual goals a company wants to achieve. Which channels potential customers use, is also a decisive factor.

4.5 Influencer search and identification

In this chapter, one possibility for the search and identification of possible influencer candidates is presented. This step is vital since the identification of the right accelerators is an essential step towards achieving marketing goals.¹⁰³

The identification of suitable influencers in the B2B environment is challenging. It takes research to find the right influencers. In particular, the cooperation with micro-influencers

¹⁰⁰ cf. 'Infographic: Instagram Is a Favorite for Influencer Marketing' n. y.

¹⁰¹ 'Infographic: Instagram Is a Favorite for Influencer Marketing' n. y.

¹⁰² cf. Held 2018, p. 77–78.

¹⁰³ cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 201.

promises some positive aspects for the collaboration with companies in this B2B field. The group of micro-influencers is mainly characterised by a higher engagement rate, which means that followers have a stronger bond to their opinion leaders and thus achieve higher interaction rates. Micro-influencers often even know their followers personally. Therefore, recommendations in these circles almost seem like personal recommendations. Credibility and authenticity are consequently particularly pronounced.¹⁰⁴

Those who want to invest a little more time and resources can search for influencers offline as well as online. Accordingly, Lewinski recommends an environmental analysis for the B2B sector. Marketers can ask existing or potential customers about preferred channels and which influencers they follow. Trade fairs and industry events are also ideal for marketers to come into contact with potential influencers. Employees or company partners can also be helpful in the search for suitable influencers. They usually know the company and the brand very well and can even make recommendations for influencers. Furthermore, a survey in a dedicated market can also provide further insights.¹⁰⁵

According to Hellenkemper, there are two different online approaches to finding a suitable influencer for a company. The first possibility is the open search via social media and various search engines like Google or Bing. The second possibility is to search in influencer databases or on influencer marketing platforms.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, in this context, there are at least two other possibilities of searching for influencers. This opportunity has not been mentioned in the literature yet. Thus, marketers can also request help from influencer marketing agencies to search for suitable influencers. Today, the agencies have gained quite some knowledge and experience in influencer marketing. Additionally, marketers can also make use of marketing research such as the social listening and monitoring as mentioned in chapter 3.3. When searching for keywords and channels, these listening tools can also uncover already acting or potential candidates.¹⁰⁷

4.5.1 Social Media and Search Engines

Social media influencer networks such as YouTube, Instagram or Facebook can be seen today as a way to search and identify suitable influencers for a company. For example, marketers use the previously mentioned hashtag "#" in combination with a keyword that corresponds to their choices. Thus, it is possible to identify contributions to a specific topic. This function also helps to identify the channels of influencers. However, there are also innumerable providers of applications, which make it possible to search on one or the other social media network by keyword. Tools like "ninjaoutreach.com" or "snapfluence.com" are two examples, which allow searching for influencers in various social networks. Furthermore, there is also the possibility to examine channels of existing cooperating influencers of a brand. Often followers can be found who are either influencers in the

¹⁰⁴ cf. '(44) The Biggest Problem With Influencer Marketing — Jay Baer - YouTube' n. y.; cf. Kirchmeier 2018, p. 306–307; cf. Nirschli; Steinberg 2018, p. 14–15; cf. Leuman n. y.

¹⁰⁵ cf. von Lewinski 2018, p. 92.

¹⁰⁶ cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 216.

¹⁰⁷ cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 218–220; cf. 'Influencer Database: What It Is and How It Compares To Alternatives' 2018; cf. Tuten; Solomon 2017, p. 27.

industry themselves or address similar target groups. The same applies to the influencers who work for the competitors. These also have followers who might target the defined target audience. Thus, it is possible to also consider them for potential cooperation. Moreover, it may not be a problem for one or the other marketer to even work with an existing or terminated competitor influencer candidate.¹⁰⁸

Similar to social media networks, marketers can also use the free functions of search engines. By entering suitable keywords which are relevant for reaching the target audience, content but also influencers can be discovered. The algorithm of the search engine strongly influences the results. Thus, a channel that is relevant for the search engine can still be useless for the company. Also, the detection of Instagram influencers is seldom possible with this method.¹⁰⁹

On the other hand, search engines like Google offer an excellent possibility for finding a suitable influencer through the link to YouTube. Keyword matching results from YouTube are now automatically displayed in Google's result window. The videos and channels can thus be activated directly in the results window which can lead to a possible influencer channel and candidate.¹¹⁰

In various industries, it is possible to find influencers also in other media. Therefore, a thorough analysis of the broader media landscape also provides an insight into the world of influencers. Thus, it is also possible to discover potential influencers which send high impulses to the target audience or create media interest.¹¹¹

4.5.2 Influencer Marketing Databases and Platforms

The already mentioned second option of searching and identifying possible influencers offers the analysis of so-called influencer marketing databases and influencer marketing platforms. Known from B2C, due to their approach and algorithms, they could also be applicable and exciting for the discovery of B2B influencers.¹¹²

An influencer marketing database is an electronic software-based file directory of various influencers. These databases are usually created by influencer platforms and agencies and register any influencers from multiple areas. The electronic directories contain essential information about the influencers but also about their used social media channels. Furthermore, such databases also contain information about followers. These are often psychographic and geographical indicators, such as gender, age, country of origin, interactivity and much more. Especially today, companies can find many micro-influencers in such databases, because they often do not have managers, as is the case with celebrity or mega influencers.¹¹³ Some companies today already maintain their segment-specific

¹⁰⁸ cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 216–217; cf. '(44) Instagram Influencer Marketing: Your Step By Step Guide - YouTube' n. y.

¹⁰⁹ cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 216–217; cf. 'Influencer Database: What It Is and How It Compares To Alternatives' 2018.

¹¹⁰ cf. Held 2018, p. 74; cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 23.

¹¹¹ cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 217.

¹¹² cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 217–218; cf. Kirchmeier 2018, p. 307.

¹¹³ cf. 'Die Influencer Datenbank - Eine Schatzkiste für erfolgreiches Influencer Marketing' n. y.; cf. 'Influencer Database: What It Is and How It Compares To Alternatives' 2018; cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 218.

databases of influencers, which they have gained through their research or past collaboration.¹¹⁴

Companies have the possibility offered to search for suitable influencers in such a database with setting the right filter. Thus, they can reach the intended target audience effectively. However, the quality of the available candidates also depends on the quality of the database. There is no guarantee that the perfect influencer for a niche is present in the file. In this regard, Mediakix names popular databases like Social Blade, Captiv8, Traackr, Revfluence, CreatorIQ, Julius and Hypr. There are also many other providers. It is the case that some platforms have specific country focuses. For example, other platforms like Reachbird, Buzzbird or Reachhero are very well known, but currently only concentrate on use in German-speaking countries.¹¹⁵

Platforms are a kind of marketplace for influencer marketing where marketers and influencers meet. It can also happen that platforms act like search engines using artificial intelligence and smart algorithms and search for suitable influencers on various social media channels. This possibility also enables companies to discover possible influencer candidates via keywords or brand related topics.¹¹⁶

4.5.3 Influencer Marketing Agencies

Companies that are not sure or are hesitant to gain experience with influencer marketing databases or platforms themselves can quickly contact an influencer marketing agency. These agencies have developed specialised knowledge in influencer marketing and know what might fit into various niches. Agencies can thus be helpful in influencer marketing, as they can in other marketing tasks.¹¹⁷

Influencer marketing agencies act as a kind of intermediary between interested companies and available influencers in the market. They can help to search and find the right influencers for a company. Furthermore, they can also support companies during the campaign by controlling and supervising the influencers. These kind of agencies help companies during the whole influencer marketing process. Especially for companies that do not have enough resources or do not trust themselves to do the entire influencer marketing process, specialised influencer marketing agencies can help. At this point, however, it should be said that not every influencer agency is suitable for every interested company. Also, in this area, it is essential to have the right partners on board for the desired target groups.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ cf. Enke; Borchers 2018, p. 219.

¹¹⁵ cf. '11 Plattformen für erfolgreiches Influencer Marketing' 2018; cf. 'Influencer Database: What It Is and How It Compares To Alternatives' 2018; cf. 'Die Influencer Datenbank - Eine Schatzkiste für erfolgreiches Influencer Marketing' n. y.

¹¹⁶ cf. Enke; Borchers 2018, p. 191; cf. 'Influencer Database: What It Is and How It Compares To Alternatives' 2018.

¹¹⁷ cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 209; cf. 'Influencer Database: What It Is and How It Compares To Alternatives' 2018.

¹¹⁸ cf. 'Top Influencer Marketing Agencies For 2020 | Influencer Agency Resource' 2019.

4.6 Influencer evaluation and selection criteria

After having explained in the previous chapter where companies can look out for influencers, the following section will explain possibilities for the evaluation of influencers. In the best case, marketers have a list of criteria to help them select suitable candidates for a marketing objective. According to Held, there are both qualitative and quantitative criteria to consider when evaluating influencers for the final selection as shown in Figure 9.¹¹⁹

According to Enke and Borchers, the criteria always depends on the goals. Accordingly, it is not mandatory to consider all criteria, because some criteria can gain or lose relevance depending on the objectives. However, before assessing the individual indicators, marketers should first check exclusion criteria, if necessary. Depending on the company, marketers can exclude a potential influencer from further evaluation because of too many brand collaborations or collaborations with competitors.¹²⁰

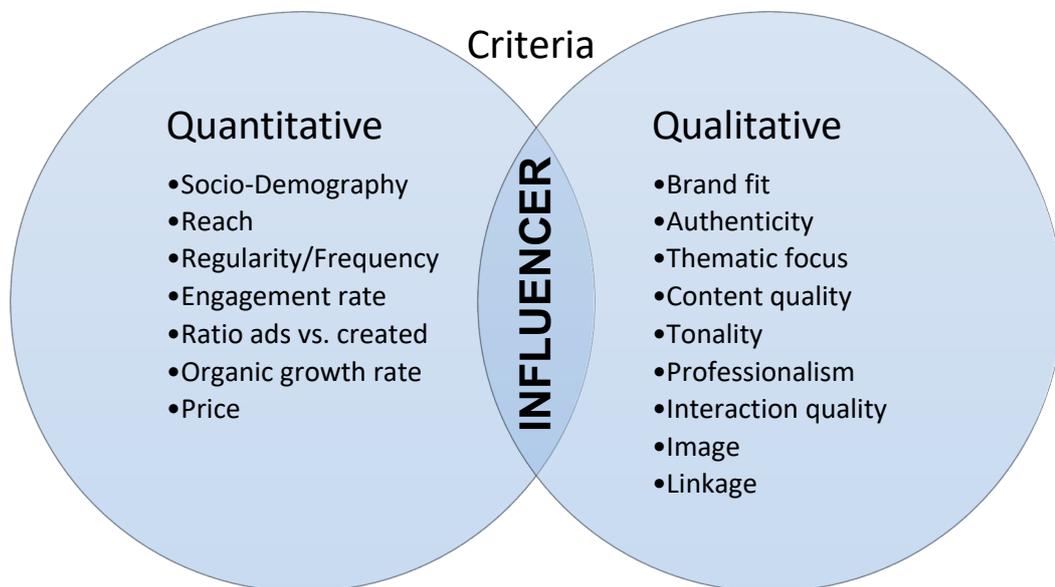


Figure 9: Selection criteria for influencers based on Held¹²¹

Source: Held

As Figure 9 above shows, the reach is not the only criterion in the evaluation of influencers. There are still plenty of influencers on the market who buy followers. Although these followers theoretically bring higher reach figures, they do not add value to the companies, as they rarely correspond to the target audience. Marketers must examine the above qualitative and quantitative data of a potential influencer candidate or applicant as thoroughly as possible in order to avoid issues.¹²²

¹¹⁹ cf. Held 2018, p. 79.

¹²⁰ cf. Enke; Borchers 2018, p. 189–190.

¹²¹ cf. Held 2018, p. 79.

¹²² cf. Held 2018, p. 78–79.

4.6.1 Quantitative criteria

In the following, some of the criteria are defined in order to provide a deeper understanding:

Socio-Demography:

Marketers should check the socio-demographic data of the Influencer but also the data of their followers to identify if they will reach their target audience. In this respect, the geographical activity locations, age, gender, interests and social status should be determined and compared with the desired goals. In an Audience Check a company should check if the followers of an influencer are congruent with the existing customers or with the customers which the company wants to reach in its objectives.¹²³

Reach:

Reach is about how many potential customers an influencer can reach with its content. Professional influencers can provide these key figure since most social media applications also provide analytical data for professional accounts. There is also the possibility to access such data via Influencer Marketing Platforms and Marketplaces. Similar to social media networks, most of them also have integrated analytics and can determine these key figures.¹²⁴

Regularity:

Marketers should check the frequency und regularity of an influencer's posts. Regular posts will increase visibility of the influencer content but will also allow for further growth rates on the influencer channels and probably also on the brands channels.¹²⁵

Engagement rate:

The engagement rate is about the interaction of the target group with the content of the influencer. The interaction is usually measured through comments, likes, shares and impressions. The ratio of the number of likes to the number of followers can provide information about the activity of the target group.¹²⁶

The Influencer Marketing Hub and CreatorIQ have developed an engagement rate benchmark for the most crucial Influencer social media networks based on an analysis of 224,000 posts, which is available in their 2020 benchmark report:¹²⁷

¹²³ cf. 'Influencer Marketing Statistics in 2019 (Trends + Key Takeaways)' 2019; cf. Krüger 2018, p. 220; cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 209–211.

¹²⁴ cf. Krüger 2018, p. 220; cf. Campbell; Farrell 2020, p. 5; cf. IZEA 2018; cf. Pleil; Helferich; Grupe 2018, p. 66.

¹²⁵ cf. 'Sussing out Growth – How to Interpret Follower Growth Rates' 2017.

¹²⁶ cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 211–212; '(44) Instagram Influencer Marketing: Your Step By Step Guide - YouTube' n. y.; cf. 'How To Find Instagram Influencers To Explode Your Sales - Influencer Marketing 2019' n. y.; cf. 'How I Find Influencers That Make Me 12k A Week (WITH EXAMPLES) - Shopify Dropshipping' n. y.

¹²⁷ cf. 'Influencer_Marketing_Benchmark_Report_2020.pdf' n. y., p. 12.

| | Nano-influencer | Micro-Influencer | Macro-Influencer | Mega-Influencer |
|-----------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Instagram | 4.4% | 2.4% | 1.8% | 0.7% |
| YouTube | 6.7% | 6.2% | 5.0% | 4.0% |
| Facebook | 0.42% | 0.13% | 0.03% | 0.01% |

Figure 10: Engagement rate benchmarks based on CreatorIQ¹²⁸

Source: Influencer Marketing Hub

Ratio:

Marketers should also check the ratio between paid advertisement posts and organic influencer generated content posts. The comparison of the organically generated postings to the paid postings can provide information about whether an influencer channel is already outwitted. An Influencer with too much paid content can lose authenticity with their followers.¹²⁹

Organic growth rate:

Marketers should check how many followers an influencer earned during the last period and how many followers an influencer lost. Growth rates are essential for the success of an influencer. Companies that manage to establish long-term cooperation at an early stage can, therefore, grow with the influencer and do not have to worry about partnership later.. A reasonable growth rate is around +5%, even better would be a rate of over +7.5%. However, a +2.5% growth rate is a minimum requirement for influencers to avoid disappointments during the campaigns.¹³⁰

Price:

In connection with the evaluation of possible Influencer candidates, it is advisable to analyse the media value per post in advance. This value provides information about the value of the influencer content contributions. With Instagram, for example, it is calculated automatically. It tells a marketer how much money would have to be paid for a paid advertisement on the medium to achieve the same effect. In short, it is a kind of thousand contact price. The media value per post tells marketers how valuable an influencer channel is and gives them a benchmark for the attractiveness of a collaboration. Marketers who manage to attract influencers with high media values can achieve higher success for their campaigns.¹³¹

4.6.2 Qualitative criteria

In addition to all the quantitative criteria mentioned above, in B2B marketing, it is all the more important to consider the qualitative measures when evaluating an influencer. The next paragraphs will explain some of them in the following.

¹²⁸ cf. 'Influencer_Marketing_Benchmark_Report_2020.pdf' n. y., p. 12.

¹²⁹ cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 214.

¹³⁰ cf. 'Sussing out Growth – How to Interpret Follower Growth Rates' 2017; cf. Krüger 2018, p. 220; cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 212,221.

¹³¹ cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 214.

Brand fit:

Probably the most crucial criterion in selecting a suitable influencer is the brand fit. Just like a corporate brand, the influencer is perceived as a brand by the market and its followers. For fruitful cooperation, the two images should fit together as well as possible. Only a well-fitting brand/influencer partnership makes it possible to reach the followers authentically. Accordingly, influencers with a high brand fit and a good credibility are essential for a long-term cooperation, especially in the B2B area. Marketers should therefore consider the positioning of their own brand in advance, but also the positioning of the influencer. This makes it easier to decide whether the influencer fits the brand or not.¹³²

Authenticity:

Influencers in the B2B segment should be objective and convey their content truthfully. B2B audiences are usually already well informed and aware of what is essential in their industry. Influencers also have to address suggestions for improvement or even express criticism. Accordingly, it makes little sense if influencers in the B2B area only work with one brand. Consequently, an influencer cannot authentically represent a brand that does not suit them. It would be even worse to take an influencer that does not even fit into the company's subject area. Moreover, the over-supply of existing collaborations can also cloud the authenticity. Marketers should also consider the ratio of paid postings versus organic posting in this regard. Therefore, marketers should take a close look at the influencer channel, check the rate of active collaborations and look for authentic material.¹³³

Thematic focus:

The relevance of the topic, especially in the B2B segment, is significant when selecting opinion leaders. Marketers can classify influencers according to their focus topics. Accordingly, there are firmly, theme-focused, specialised influencers who have often built up a thematically focused audience. On the other hand, there are also influencers with a broad thematic focus and a correspondingly heterogeneous community. The thematic focus and expertise of an influencer are among the central selection criteria for evaluating a potential influencer, especially in B2B.¹³⁴

Content quality and tonality:

As in all marketing messages, the quality of the contributions must fit. No follower or potential customer wants to look at blurred pictures or shaky videos. The same applies to the tonality in the postings. The tone of the influencer should at least match the tone of the brand.¹³⁵

Professionalism:

Another essential qualitative criterion is the professionalism of influencers. In terms of professionalism, it specifically refers to the journalistic ability of an influencer. Accordingly, Marketers should take factors such as accessibility, the autonomy of the influencer, the

¹³² cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 204–205.

¹³³ cf. Backaler 2018, p. 76–77; cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 205; cf. von Lewinski 2018, p. 91.

¹³⁴ cf. Enke; Borchers 2018, p. 188.

¹³⁵ cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 205–206; cf. 'A 12-Point Checklist for Vetting Influencers' 2018.

topicality of the content and thematic breadth of topics into account. Influencers are also preferable if they maintain a regular blog with detailed reports about their activity.¹³⁶

Interaction quality:

An essential aspect in the evaluation of potential influencers is engagement quality. This criterion is about the quality of the interactions between influencers and their followers. On the one hand, the exchange of information can give the posting a higher value, as questions and comments from followers will be answered. On the other hand, marketers can determine whether the questions are coming from a real target group or if they're just stupid questions generated by a bot. Furthermore, it is possible to identify whether the influencer communicates with their followers at all or whether the influencer does not respond to follower comments. Influencers with a higher interaction level have a better relationship with their community.¹³⁷

Image:

Every social media user and thus influencer has a social identity on the web. It does not matter if a person posts content on their private social media channel or on their professional channel. The surrounding environment provides the possibility to see someone's comments, likes, and content on various channels. All the information, available across different channels, is perceived by individuals or corporations and recognised as the influencer's social identity. Thus, a positive social identity perception from different groups can have a positive effect in terms of consumer buying behaviour. Marketers nowadays should check an influencer's social identity to evaluate if it makes sense to collaborate with a specific influencer. For companies and marketers, it is very important to check the influencer comments, posts, likes, visits or impressions on different media at various social media touchpoints.¹³⁸

Linkage:

Many influencers have now made a name for themselves within the influencer scene and have excellent networks with other influencers. Accordingly, they mention each other in their postings and thus achieve an even wider reach through the many friend channels and weak ties. A high-quality influencer who surrounds themselves with other high-quality influencers from the same segment can thereby increase their market value. When evaluating an influencer candidate, marketers should, therefore, also take a look at the channel's connections.¹³⁹

4.7 Influencer selection

According to Nirschl and Steinberg, marketers can combine a list of criteria together with a decision matrix to help them select suitable candidates for a marketing objective. Here, Nirschl and Steinberg name the previously mentioned criteria which must be defined to determine the suitable influencers, relevant for the target group. The criteria can help to

¹³⁶ cf. Hoffjann; Haidukiewicz 2018, p. 131–132.

¹³⁷ cf. Held 2018, p. 76.

¹³⁸ cf. Tuten; Solomon 2017, p. 44–48; cf. Khajeheian 2016, p. 467–473.

¹³⁹ cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 206–209.

check the influencers individually. Further, a clear definition of the Influencer Marketing Strategy Goals can help to provide a point of reference for the review. In addition to the various selection criteria, marketers should make the selection based on social media channels relevant to the target group. Thus, the previously identified networks act as a further decision criterion, whereby the result of the in 4.4 preceding matrix influences the influencer selection. Furthermore, marketing departments should consider general criteria such as the language or age of the influencers. Besides, they can make evaluations of individual influencers based on the measurement of online influence.¹⁴⁰ In this regard, marketers can examine various influencer candidates concerning qualitative and quantitative criteria. The most relevant assessment criteria, mentioned in section 4.6 for the evaluation based on Held, are:¹⁴¹

| Quantitative criteria | Qualitative criteria |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Socio-Demography | Brand fit |
| Reach | Authenticity |
| Regularity / Frequency | Thematic focus |
| Engagement rate | Content quality |
| Ratio Ads vs. Organic created posts | Tonality |
| Organic growth rate | Professionalism |
| Price | Interaction quality |
| | Image |
| | Linkage |

Figure 11: Assessment criteria based on Held¹⁴²

Source: Held

The criteria given are a recommendation and do not necessarily all need to be used to evaluate an influencer. Therefore, marketers should select criteria that are appropriate to the marketing objective and then assess the individual influencers. If an influencer is active on several influencer marketing networks, they should evaluate each channel separately. An example of an influencer selection matrix is shown below in Figure 12. The pattern shows the evaluation of the different influencers using a scoring model. Thus, the creation of a ranking can identify the best suitable influencers relevant to the target group. By awarding points (one to ten) the suitability of the influencer is assessed based on the previously defined criteria. Hereby, one stands for "not suitable" and ten for "very suitable". A weighting of the factors can also allow for individual company adjustments.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 41–44.

¹⁴¹ cf. Held 2018, p. 79.

¹⁴² cf. Held 2018, p. 79.

¹⁴³ cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 41–44.

| | Country | Age | Reach | Frequency | Engagement rate | Content quality | Brand fit | Sum |
|-------------|---------|-----|-------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Influencer1 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 62 |
| Influencer2 | 7 | 8 | 5 | 10 | 10 | 6 | 8 | 54 |
| Influencer3 | 10 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 52 |
| Influencer4 | 9 | 8 | 5 | 10 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 51 |

Figure 12: Influencer selection matrix relevant to target audience based on Nirschl and Steinberg¹⁴⁴

Source: Nirschl, Steinberg

4.8 International challenges and opportunities

When searching for influencers for specific countries, marketing departments should note that primarily internationally known influencers write their picture descriptions and record their videos in English. Situations whereby a company requires an influencer for a product launch, who addresses a target group in a different language can be challenging. In such a case, it can make sense to use an influencer with the language skills of the original target group. Depending on the niche, marketers cannot necessarily assume that everyone explicitly understands the English language. This fact should be particularly taken into account for products in need of particular explanation in B2B. Here, the "one-fit-all" method might not lead to the desired goal. Nevertheless, the English language also offers advantages. Accordingly, it is possible to reach a broader homogenous target audience through an international language. Influencers who are strong local and international can thus operate channels in their local language while also offering content for international supporters in English. The same applies to other languages and language regions that are in use across borders.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 44.

¹⁴⁵ cf. Hellenkemper 2018, p. 218; cf. Jahnke 2018, p. 153.

5. Theoretical answers to the sub-research question

With the help of extensive literature research, the previous chapter looked for possibilities of a systematic selection of influencers in B2B. After presenting the theoretical options of finding a suitable influencer for a company, the author will answer the theoretical sub-research question in this chapter.

The author could not find any publications in the scientific literature that deals exclusively with influencer marketing or influencer relationships in B2B. Accordingly, there was no book available which explicitly dealt with influencer marketing in the tools and hardware industry. The only contributions of various authors on the subject of influencer marketing and influencer relationship concerning business-to-business was available in two edited volumes. Accordingly, the following two publications are worth mentioning. On the one hand, the writer considered the book "Influencer Relations"¹⁴⁶ by Schach und Lommatzsch and on the other hand, the book "Influencer Marketing"¹⁴⁷ by Jahnke. Additionally, the book "Introduction into Influencer Marketing"¹⁴⁸ published by Nirschl and Steinberg also provided essential input. However, the author found general literature on the topics of social media marketing and online marketing from recent years much more readily.

After a thorough literature search, there seemed to be a difference in the operational implementation of Influencer Marketing in B2C and B2B. Accordingly, B2B requires different influencers and approaches adapted to the business model, though there is some evidence that the strategic approach of the two areas seem to be very similar. Correspondingly, some authors who see the overlap of communication in B2C and B2B as inseparable also testify to this. Further, Backaler even confirms that B2B marketers can learn a lot from B2C in practice. For this reason, the procedures and input described in chapter 4 are taken as theoretical guidelines to answer the following questions below. The academic findings will later be compared with the results of empirical research and serve as a possible guideline for future B2B influencer marketing campaigns in the tools and hardware industry.¹⁴⁹

What process could be useful for a B2B company in the tool and hardware industry to aid in the systematic selection of suitable influencers?

The literature reports minimal information about possible selection steps in the search for suitable influencers, especially concerning the B2B sector. Nevertheless, by analysing the contributions of the authors Nguyen, Nirschl and Steinberg¹⁵⁰, a possible selection process for influencers could be constructed. The following figure shows the created 6-step process:

¹⁴⁶ Schach; Lommatzsch 2018.

¹⁴⁷ Jahnke et al. 2018.

¹⁴⁸ Nirschl; Steinberg 2018.

¹⁴⁹ Backaler 2018, p. 72–73; cf. von Lewinski 2018, p. 87.

¹⁵⁰ cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 41; cf. Nguyen 2018, p. 152.

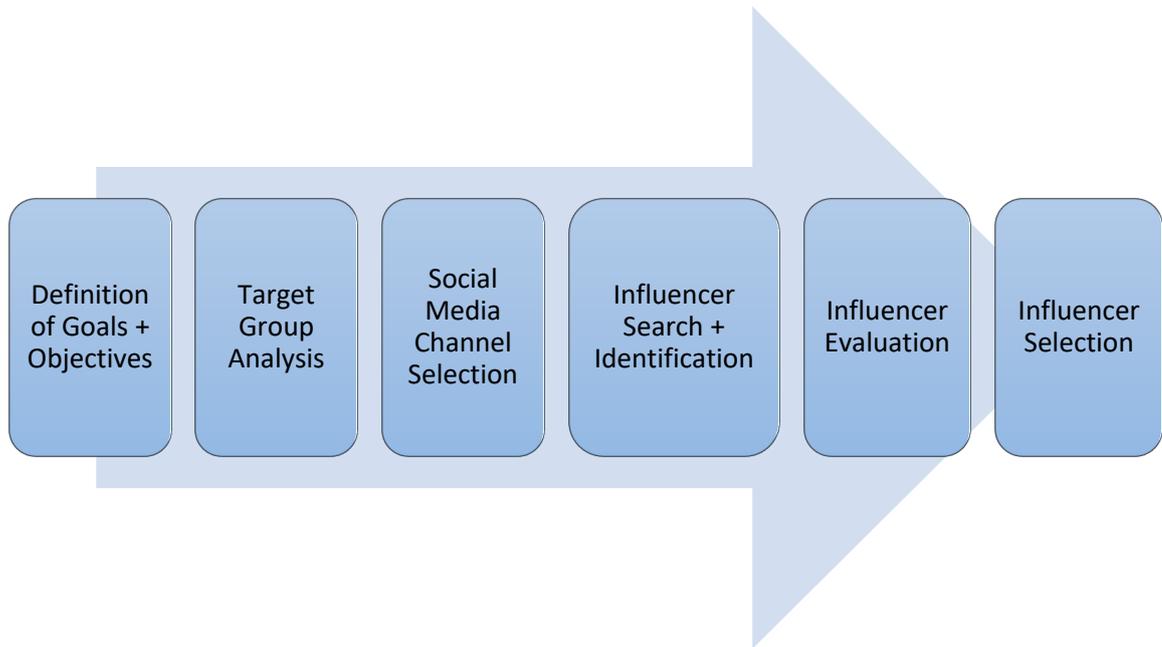


Figure 13: Systematic Influencer Selection Process based on Nguyen; Nirschl, Steinberg¹⁵¹

Source: Own Illustration

Step 1: Definition of Goals and Objectives

Marketers should set objectives which should be achieved through the collaboration with influencers. Possible objectives can be, for example, the increase of awareness or visibility of a brand or product. Additionally, goals such as the spreading of messages or participate in various events are possible. In any case, the goals should be in line with the SMART method, i.e. they should be specific, measurable, accepted, realistic and timed. Further details can be found in chapter 4.2.

Step 2: Target Group Analysis

In the second step, the target group to be addressed should be defined and analysed. This approach requires a clear definition of the target person using socio-demographic, geographical and psychographic criteria. In the next step, an evaluation should be performed, to identify whether the defined profiles can be reached online and whether people with existing experience in social media marketing exist. Furthermore, the target person's activities on the market should be checked, and thus active social media channels should be explored. More details can be found in chapter 4.3.

Step 3: Social Media Channel Selection

In this step, the appropriate social media networks should be determined, which are suitable for reaching the target audience. These can vary depending on the country and region.

¹⁵¹ cf. Nirschl; Steinberg 2018, p. 41; cf. Nguyen 2018, p. 152.

Concerning the objectives and target audience, the right networks should be selected using various selection criteria. More details can be found in chapter 4.4.

Step 4: Influencer Search and Identification

The fourth step is to search and identify possible influencers. Marketers can take different routes, which can be both online and offline. On the one hand, experienced agencies and influencer marketing platforms are available where companies can outsource the search task. On the other hand, there is the possibility to do manual research as a marketer. In this respect, search engines or social media can be used directly. It does not always have to be complicated. Accordingly, influencers can also be identified in a company’s existing customer base or at events and trade fairs. Further details can be found in chapter 4.5.

Step 5: Influencer Evaluation

For the evaluation of possible influencer candidates, various qualitative and quantitative criteria are available in this step, which should help to select the suitable influencer. The criteria are defined by marketers, taking the set objectives into account. However, before an influencer is evaluated, it should be checked whether the possible influencer fits into the defined target group. More details to be found in chapter 4.6

Step 6: Influencer Selection

For the final selection of an influencer, the candidates are evaluated according to previously defined criteria. Therefore, for each influencer, points are first assigned for evaluation. The candidates are then presented in a decision matrix based on the criteria. Finally, a potential candidate is selected based on the ranking. For more details, see Chapter 4.7.

Which parameters could be useful in the selection of the right influencers and how can one define the profile of the influencer in B2B?

According to the extensive literature research, suitable influencers can be described via a profile using qualitative and quantitative criteria. The selection of criteria always depends on the objectives of the respective company. Accordingly, Enke and Borchers¹⁵² write that not all criteria need to be considered. Therefore, some criteria can be deleted or neglected due to their relevance. Below are some criteria that can be taken into account when screening influencers:

| Quantitative | Qualitative |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Socio-demography | Brand fit |
| Reach/Followers | Authenticity |
| Frequency | Thematic focus |
| Engagement rate | Content quality |
| Posting Ratio Ads vs. Created Content | Tonality |
| Organic growth rate | Professionalism |
| Price | Interaction quality |
| | Image |
| | Linkage |

¹⁵² cf. Enke; Borchers 2018, p. 189–190.

Figure 14: Screening criteria for influencers based on Held¹⁵³

Source: Own Illustration

Suitable parameters to describe the profile for the influencer could be characteristics such as socio-demographic, geographic and psychographic data. Thus, some examples may be found in the following:¹⁵⁴

- Age
- Occupation
- Gender
- Country
- Region
- Personality
- Values
- Attitudes
- Interests

In addition to the criteria mentioned above, other parameters corresponding to the target group can also be set to determine an influencer persona. The choice and quantity of parameters are thus left to the discretion of the marketer.

¹⁵³ cf. Held 2018, p. 79.

¹⁵⁴ cf. Owsianski 2018, p. 257; cf. Kotler; Armstrong 2010, p. 216–222.

6. Empirical research

After answering the theoretical sub-research questions, this chapter presents the empirical part of the research work. The research design is explained, and the selected methods are presented. Subsequently, the survey method, the sample selection and the evaluation method are outlined in more detail.

6.1 Methodology

The literature describes qualitative and quantitative methods in empirical research projects, in business administration and management. Qualitative methods focus on the collection and analysis of non-numerical data, whereas quantitative methods aim at numerical results. The researcher chooses the technique depending on the research question and its objectives. Therefore, the process should be selected in such a way that the research question can be answered. Ultimately, the literature confirms that qualitative research is suitable for explaining relationships between variables and processes.¹⁵⁵

6.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative research will continue the tradition of American field research of the Chicago School. In this approach, an approximation to everyday situations takes place. Social reality is analysed with the help of observations and open interviews.¹⁵⁶

Qualitative research is the survey of not standardised data and their analyses with specific, not statistical procedures. However, standardised data can be used for qualitative research too. Not standardized data for qualitative research can be collected through a qualitative research method. Methods used in this regard can be monitoring, analyses of the documents or qualitative expert interviews.¹⁵⁷

Qualitative research is characterised by communication, understanding, subject and living environment. The essential principles of qualitative research therefore include openness, research as communication, process character of research and subject, reflexivity of subject and analysis, explication and flexibility.¹⁵⁸

With the help of qualitative research, real situations of social life can be simulated and constructed. Therefore, communication processes are used to get closer to the truth. In this way, qualitative research is intended to create a new theory from empirical studies.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ cf. Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2009, p. 151–155; cf. Baur; Blasius 2014, p. 41; cf. Flick 2017, p. 41–42.

¹⁵⁶ cf. Mayring 2002, p. 10.

¹⁵⁷ cf. Bohnsack 2014, p. 13ff.; cf. Flick 2017, p. 12ff.

¹⁵⁸ cf. Helfferich 2011, p. 21ff.

¹⁵⁹ cf. Mayer 2009, p. 23ff.

In this master's thesis, the approach of qualitative research was pursued to retrieve the current knowledge and experience of B2B companies in the tool and hardware industry. In this way, we tried to create a guideline on how to find suitable end-users for the social media influence, for B2B companies in the tool and hardware industry. Thereby, the researcher attempted to develop a sound process for use in the selection of suitable influencers. Furthermore, we also tried to identify success factors for a long-term and successful partnership in the mentioned industry.

In order to be able to name the success factors in the search for suitable influencers, suitable methods from empirical social research must be selected. Qualitative expert interviews prove to be particularly suitable for identifying success factors.¹⁶⁰

Expert interviews are mainly used to record facts, attitudes or intentions. The method of qualitative expert interviews allows not only to gather a great deal of information about the offences committed in the search for suitable influencers but also to provide insights into structural relationships and processes of change in action systems. Therefore, this method appears to be particularly suitable for the present research.¹⁶¹

6.3 Sampling

The selection of samples in qualitative research focuses on the relevance of the subjects studied. The representativeness of the content is thus examined. Therefore, the aspect of individuality plays a central role. Thus, there is a difference to quantitative research, which focuses on statistical representativeness with the help of standardised questionnaires. However, qualitative research also aims at generalisation. Especially in expert interviews, researchers try to gain insights that go beyond the case under investigation. Accordingly, special care must be taken when selecting experts to achieve generalisation. The experts must be selected in such a way that the results are transferable to other cases and can therefore also be implemented in practice. In connection with random sampling, a distinction is therefore made between two variants. The first type is the preliminary determination. Here, the sample is determined before the examination concerning specific characteristics. The second type is a theoretical sampling. Here the sample is continuously expanded and supplemented based on the state of knowledge. Finally, the experts must be selected by the researcher in such a way that the research questions can be answered in any case utilising their questioning. Therefore, it is necessary to find suitable persons who can provide information and advice on the chosen research subject.¹⁶²

6.4 Expert interview

The guided interview is suitable for collecting spoken data in qualitative research. In the process, knowledge and experience in a subject area are gained using narration. Therefore, the interview consists of a set of open-ended questions, to which the interviewee can answer openly. The questions are asked to provide the discussions with a structure.

¹⁶⁰ cf. Mayer 2009, p. 37ff.

¹⁶¹ cf. Bogner; Littig; Menz 2014, p. 17ff.

¹⁶² cf. Bogner; Littig; Menz 2014, p. 34–37; cf. Gläser; Laudel 2010, p. 97–98; cf. Mayer 2009, p. 39ff.

Besides, the guidelines increase the comparability of data between individual participants. The guidelines do not necessarily have to be worked through in sequence during the interview, but rather serve to ensure that essential aspects are not forgotten during the interview. Furthermore, the interviewer must decide when specific questions have to be asked in detail. The guidelines can also help to focus on excessive interview partners on the essential aspects of off-topic discussions. In a guided interview, the interviewer should use the guide sensitively and avoid unwanted interruptions, as this could restrict the interviewees in their answers. A guideline interview is also applied when dealing with experts. Here, the expert interview is a unique form of the guideline interview, which help the interviewee to ask about expertise in a specific field of action. The expert interview thus aims to collect a defined section of the reality of a group representative. In expert interviews, the guideline serves to guide the respondents specifically to the topic area. Furthermore, the guide also helps to convince the experts of the interviewer's existing knowledge of the topic. Experts are persons who have specialised expertise in a specific and limited field. Therefore, the retrievable knowledge of the expert is well-founded and based on reliable assertions. Under no circumstances would the provided answers be a matter of guessing. Experts are persons who have privileged information about procedures or dedicated people. Furthermore, experts have responsibility for the design, implementation or control of a problem solution.¹⁶³

An expert interview is a non-standardised survey in which suitable experts are interviewed on a specific topic. The conversation between the researcher and the respondent can take place in direct exchange in person at a face-to-face meeting, by telephone or electronically via the Internet. In explorative research, semi-structured expert interviews can serve to analyse behaviour and generate insights into a topic.¹⁶⁴

6.4.1 Development of the guideline interview

Guided interviews have the advantage that they are openly designed and thus allow the views of the subject under investigation to be better expressed. Accordingly, four criteria for conducting interviews are mentioned in the literature:¹⁶⁵

- Non-influence of the respondent
- The specificity of view and definition of the situation from the respondent's point of view
- Detection of a wide range of meanings of the stimulus
- The depth and personal frame of reference of the respondents

Interviews with experts will be conducted using a guideline. The guideline contains open questions, which should serve to question the expert in detail about a topic and not deviate from the subject. These questions are oriented on the problem and the objects of investigation. The guide should also not be too long, as there is a risk of generating too much data and therefore, a high time expenditure. The literature also recommends testing

¹⁶³ cf. Mayer 2009, p. 37–38.

¹⁶⁴ cf. Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2009, p. 320–322.

¹⁶⁵ cf. Flick 2017, p. 195ff.

the guideline in a pre-test using a trial interview. It is essential to check the comprehensibility and complexity of the questions.¹⁶⁶

For this thesis, a qualitative guideline for the research topic was developed. The guide was addressed to the marketing experts from the eight selected companies that are involved in influencer marketing. To develop the question format, an intensive document analysis of the research topic was conducted in advance. The guideline was originally written in English. Due to language preferences of the interviewees, the guideline was thus translated analogously into German and reproduced in the interviews.

All questions in the interview guide were asked as open questions. For example, one question was: "How does the systematic selection process for influencers look like for your brand?". As a consequence, no influence on the experts' statements should be exerted and the experts should be guided in their subjective direction by the formulation of the questions. A result of asking open ended questions is that a large number of possible answers can be reached.¹⁶⁷

The topics to be researched were examined in advance and compared with the available literature. This procedure serves to support the achievement of a clear and precise research result. The guide has been divided into three sections in this work. The introduction includes a short presentation of the research work by the researcher, the aim and intention of the questions created. It also gives an introduction to the interviewee and the activity. The central part of the guide contains various topic-related questions that cover both descriptive and normative statements. The answer format chosen is mainly open-ended questions that can be evaluated qualitatively. The thematic blocks are based on the research subject, which was discussed utilising literature research. The questions from the six different thematic blocks are intended to capture success factors on different levels of influencer marketing in B2B companies in the tool and hardware industry. Consequently, the following thematic blocks were established:¹⁶⁸

- Influencer marketing knowledge
- Starting with influencer marketing
- Influencer Search-Evaluation-Selection
- Success factors for the cooperation with influencers
- Success factors for the relationship with influencers
- Success factors for influencer campaigns

The interview guide concludes with a final question, which at the end allows the experts to express personal suggestions, hints or additions on the topic of influencer marketing. This section is followed by a conclusion and farewell statement.

The interview guide, in both English and German, can be found in the appendix of this master's thesis.

¹⁶⁶ cf. Mayer 2009, p. 43ff.

¹⁶⁷ cf. Bogner; Littig; Menz 2014, p. 59ff.

¹⁶⁸ cf. Bogner; Littig; Menz 2014, p. 59ff.

6.4.2 Selection and description of interview partners

For this research, experts were selected during the sampling process via a preliminary determination. Theoretical sampling could simply not be considered due to time constraints. In the period from 01 April to 08 May 2020, 17 experts were selected and asked to participate in the empirical study by e-mail or telephone. The response resulted in ten experts who agreed to participate in an interview. Although ten experts were initially shortlisted, two experts could not be interviewed within the given time frame due to the current situation, caused by Covid19. Therefore, a total of eight persons with expert knowledge of the tool and hardware industry were interviewed for the final survey. Except for one expert, all have been employed in the tool and hardware industry for several years. The one exception was previously employed in the industry and is therefore related to it. The selection of this person was slightly based on the above-average knowledge in the field of influencer marketing. In addition to their relation to the tool and hardware industry, all experts have a link to marketing and all of them have been working for several years as marketing managers or marketing directors in their respective companies. All experts have explicit knowledge and experience in the field of influencer marketing. This experience ranges from two to nine years of professional work. The experts were identified through extensive online research as well as through personal contacts in the discussed industry. The social media networks LinkedIn and Instagram were very useful in contacting the experts. The focus was explicitly on companies that had already established partnerships with influencers. In this way, the search for suitable experts was accelerated, and the connection to the subject was guaranteed. All experts proved to be very friendly and willing to share their knowledge and experience in the field of influencer marketing in the tool and hardware industry.

| Company Expert | Interview date | Company | Current position | Industry |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Expert 1: | 13.05.2020 | Bosch | Marketing Manager | Tools |
| Expert 2: | 13.05.2020 | Wera | Head of Marketing | Tools |
| Expert 3: | 19.05.2020 | Scheppach | Head of Marketing | Tools |
| Expert 4: | 18.05.2020 | Pica Marker | Marketing Manager | Tools |
| Expert 5: | 20.05.2020 | Reachbird | Management | Agency |
| Expert 6: | 26.05.2020 | Metabo | Marketing Manager | Tools |
| Expert 7: | 14.05.2020 | Blum | PR Manager | Fittings |
| Expert 8: | 13.05.2020 | Leica Geosystems | Marketing Manager | Tools |

Figure 15: Experts overview interview Tools and Hardware industry

Source: Own Illustration

A detailed list of the experts interviewed can be also found in the Appendix.

6.4.3 Contact to the experts and the subsequent interview

Access to the experts was formally provided by e-mail and telephone. The introduction included a short presentation of the topic, the formulation of the objectives of the master's thesis and the request for an interview appointment. Besides this, the experts were sent a participant information sheet and an outline in advance to give them an understanding of the research work. The interview partners were assured of an anonymous evaluation in advance. Therefore, they were able to confirm the use of the data and information as well as to allow recording in advance through consent form. The duration of the interview was between 40-70 minutes. In order not to interrupt or influence the flow of speech, care was taken to choose quiet and noiseless rooms. If questions were not answered thoroughly, the information content was increased through targeted questioning.¹⁶⁹

As mentioned in the literature, expert interviews can be conducted in different ways. In this master's thesis, two concepts (the telephone interview and the electronic interview) were pursued. Due to travel restrictions and the sometimes vast distances between the expert and the researcher, the interviews were conducted almost exclusively by Microsoft teams, virtually. As an exception, one expert had to be interviewed by telephone, since the program, as mentioned above, was not allowed on company computers. Due to language preferences, six interviews were conducted in German and the other two in English.¹⁷⁰

The interviews were conducted and recorded following the recommended instructions by the literature below. Since the interviews were mostly conducted via the Microsoft team's web conference, the conversations could be recorded in outstanding quality. After a short opening discussion, the researcher introduced the interview and pointed out the formalities. The interviews were conducted without significant disturbances or problems.

When conducting the interviews, the following guidelines and instructions were also recommended and considered:¹⁷¹

- Reference to anonymity and data protection
- Do not introduce distortions by means of deviating questions or statements during the interview
- Questions needs to be free of ambiguity
- Implementation under as similar conditions to one another as possible.
- Voluntary participation in the survey with the option of aborting the interview
- Passing on of data only by consent¹⁷²

All expert interviews were conducted personally by the researcher with the support of the interview guide. In the course of the interviews, the researcher was thus able to clear up any ambiguities and open questions from the participants using specific items. Therefore, the reliability of this master's thesis could be guaranteed. The expert interview was also confirmed by the interviewed persons as the optimal data collection method for this topic.

¹⁶⁹ cf. Mayer 2009, p. 100ff.

¹⁷⁰ cf. Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2009, p. 348ff.

¹⁷¹ Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2009, p. 188ff; cf. Mayer 2009, p. 44ff.,98ff.

¹⁷² Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2009, p. 188ff; cf. Mayer 2009, p. 44ff.,98ff.

All interviews were recorded with the consent of the respondents. After recording, the conversations were edited through literal transcription. For this purpose, the spoken language between the researcher and the expert was written down. The speech was taken literally, according to the literary transcription technique. To protect the data of the experts, the transcribed documents were anonymised. Therefore, individual words and names in the transcript were made anonymous so that no conclusions can be drawn later on about the identity of the persons interviewed. The texts produced thus form the basis for detailed qualitative content analysis.¹⁷³

6.5 The quality criteria

In research, quality criteria serve to verify research methods. They are used to verify the validity and reliability of research findings. It should be noted that it would be wrong to apply quality criteria of quantitative research to qualitative research.¹⁷⁴

It must be possible to assess the results of qualitative research using quality criteria. The quality of the research results can thus be measured using developed standards. These standards must be in line with the procedure and objective of the data analysis. There are six generally valid quality criteria of qualitative research provided by the literature. The four applied quality criteria in this research are presented below.¹⁷⁵

Process documentation:

The individual steps of the research process must be documented in detail, including a detailed description of the procedure. In particular, it contains the explication of the preliminary understanding, a compilation of the analytical instruments, the implementation and the evaluation of the data collection.¹⁷⁶

Argumentative interpretation protection:

The interpretations require an argumentative justification. It is essential that the prior understanding of the own information should be adequate, which enables a meaningful theory-based analysis. The arguments must be conclusive in themselves.¹⁷⁷

Rule guided:

Despite openness towards the object of research, qualitative research requires a systematic approach. Here, the material is put into a meaningful order after consideration of the rules of procedure.¹⁷⁸

Proximity to the object:

¹⁷³ cf. Mayring 2002, p. 89–91; cf. Mayer 2009, p. 46.

¹⁷⁴ cf. Mayer 2009, p. 55–57.

¹⁷⁵ cf. Mayring 2002, p. 140ff.

¹⁷⁶ cf. Mayring 2002, p. 144–145.

¹⁷⁷ cf. Mayring 2002, p. 145.

¹⁷⁸ cf. Mayring 2002, p. 145–146.

A decisive quality criterion is proximity to the everyday world of the researched subject. The researcher and the investigated person pursue a common interest, which results in closeness to the topic. The researcher enters the natural world of the researched person on site.¹⁷⁹

In addition to the four mentioned quality criteria which are considered in this paper, there are two more mentioned below. The two outstanding criteria are communicative validation and triangulation.

Communicative validation:

The communicative validation includes the verification of the validity of the results by the researched person by presenting the analysis results again to the investigated person and discussing them in a dialogue.¹⁸⁰

Triangulation:

Triangulation has the goal of linking different data sources, interpretations, theoretical approaches or methods and thereby finding different solutions. Triangulation can be based on the combination of qualitative methods or a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods.¹⁸¹

However, these two last mentioned criteria have not been applied in this research work, because on the one hand, it would go beyond the time frame and on the other hand, there is hardly any data available on the research topic in the field.

6.6 Qualitative content analysis

In this part of the master's thesis, the process of performing content analysis is described. Further, the instruments for the elaboration of the content analysis are shown and described in detail.

Mayring describes several ways of analysing qualitative research. The evaluation method used in this thesis is qualitative content analysis.¹⁸²

The qualitative content analysis offers a possibility to analyse existing material in a strictly methodical and controlled way. The material (in this case transcripts), is broken down into units that are processed sequentially. In the centre, there is a category system that is developed based on the existing material. Thus, the category system offers the possibility of determining those relevant aspects to be filtered out of the material.¹⁸³

In qualitative content analysis, the evaluation consists of the interpretation of the obtained data. Mayring defines three basic forms of the technique for this purpose.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ cf. Mayring 2002, p. 146.

¹⁸⁰ cf. Mayring 2002, p. 147.

¹⁸¹ cf. Mayring 2002, p. 147–148.

¹⁸² cf. Mayring 2002, p. 103ff.

¹⁸³ cf. Mayring 2002, p. 114.

¹⁸⁴ cf. Mayring 2010, p. 65ff.

- Summary: After the compression of the data, the essential information must still be available.
- Explication: Supplement ambiguous text passages with additional information that demonstrates for better understanding.
- Structuring: Extract defined aspects from the data and evaluates the data according to specific criteria.¹⁸⁵

Due to the circumstances of this master's thesis, the methodology of the summary was chosen by the researcher. With the help of this technique, the whole of the data is considered. Furthermore, a result is generated that still reflects the essentials despite reducing the data.¹⁸⁶

The complete spoken interview was transcribed, and in this case, the reduction leaves only the essential content. The vital information necessary to answer the research questions is preserved using this method. The reduction of the data was carried out using the four interpretation rules according to Mayring.¹⁸⁷

For a better understanding, the described procedure for summarising will be illustrated and then described in the next section. For this purpose, the following Figure 16 helps to visualise the process:

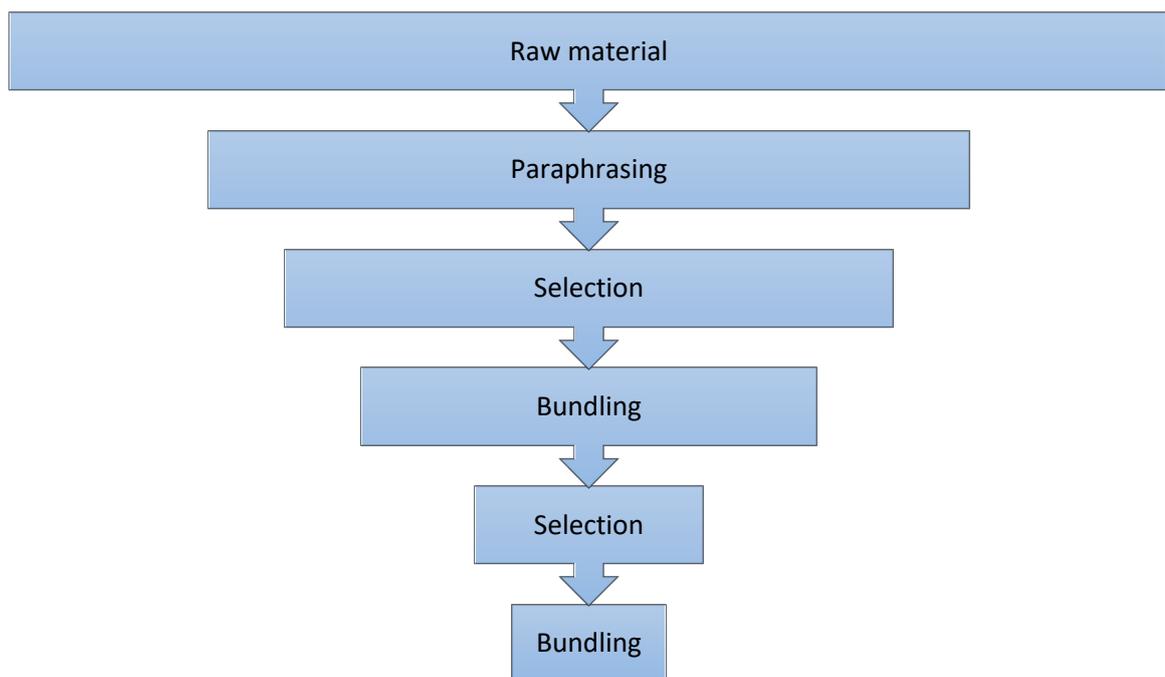


Figure 16: Qualitative summary based on Mayring¹⁸⁸

Source: Mayring

Mayring divides the individual process steps into four phases when combining them. These phases are described as follows:

¹⁸⁵ cf. Mayring 2010, p. 65ff.

¹⁸⁶ cf. Mayring 2010, p. 66.

¹⁸⁷ cf. Mayring 2010, p. 70ff.

¹⁸⁸ cf. Mayring 2015, p. 85.

1. Phase – Paraphrasing:

In this step, all raw material without substantial content was deleted from the transcription. The remaining significant content is put into a standardised short form. Content relevant statements are presented in a tabular form.¹⁸⁹

2. Phase – Generalisation:

The assertions and statements have been generalised to the specified level of abstraction. The old objects were implied in the newly formulated objectives. In ambiguous situations, theoretical presumptions were assumed. Mayring describes that the generalisation is made step by step, and thus the summary becomes more and more abstract. The generalisation for this master's thesis was made in one process step.¹⁹⁰

3. Phase – Reduction:

The paraphrases without meaning are deleted, and the paraphrases with similar content are merged. According to Mayring, the reduction phase must also be carried out several times. For this master's thesis, the reduction was carried out in one process step.¹⁹¹

4. Phase – Interpretation:

The complex of topic-related categories is the result of the content analysis with links to text excerpts from the interview. According to Mayring, it is possible to interpret the entire system of categories in terms of the semantics of the questions.¹⁹²

According to Mayring, defining categories is a crucial step in content analysis. Accordingly, categories can be defined either deductively or inductively. In the deductive approach, categories are developed using theoretical considerations of the preliminary investigations.

In the inductive approach, categories are derived directly from the material in a generalisation process. In this process, no reference is made to previously formulated theoretical concepts. With the inductive approach, the material is analysed very naturalistically without any distortions by the researcher. The literature also refers to this procedure as open coding. Within qualitative content analysis, this category formation process can be described more systematically by using the same logic, the same reductive methods that are used in the summary content analysis above.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ cf. Mayring 2010, p. 70ff.

¹⁹⁰ cf. Mayring 2010, p. 70ff.

¹⁹¹ cf. Mayring 2010, p. 70ff.

¹⁹² cf. Mayring 2010, p. 85.

¹⁹³ cf. Mayring 2010, p. 83–84.

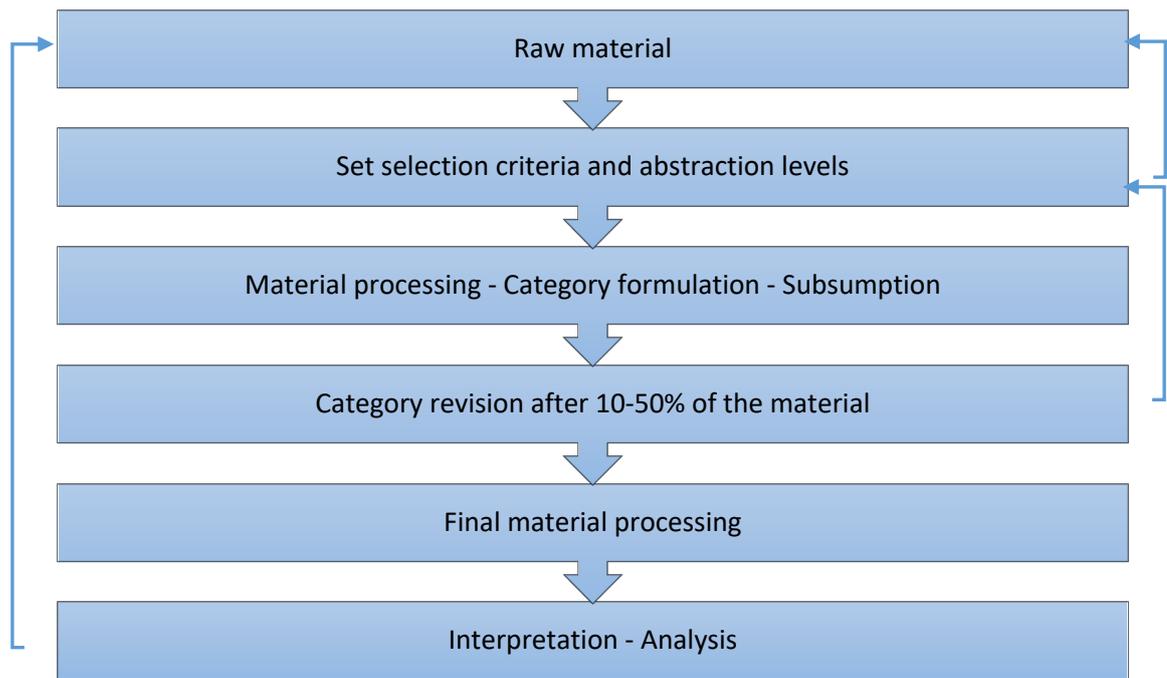


Figure 17: Process model for inductive category formation based on Mayring¹⁹⁴

Source: Mayring

The analysis of this research work was carried out with the help of a computer. The software MAXQDA was used for this purpose, which was specially developed for the evaluation of qualitative data and text. This tool offers various support in the categorisation, reduction and analysis of the data. Therefore, the process of inductive category formation was utilised in this work. According to the guidelines, an inductive category system with different codes and sub-codes was developed. The categories used are shown in the following Figure 18.

| Main category | Number of sub-categories |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| C1 Status quo influencer marketing | 4 |
| C2 Implementing influencer marketing | 3 |
| C3 Influencer Search, Evaluation, Selection | 7 |
| C4 Success factors for cooperation | 4 |
| C5 Success factors for relationship | 2 |
| C6 Success factors for influencer campaigns | 4 |
| C7 Further expert view on influencer marketing | 3 |

Figure 18: Category formation

Source: Own illustration

The transcribed conversations were processed, and essential passages were marked with the codes of the respective category. In the process, the categories or the coding guide

¹⁹⁴ cf. Mayring 2015, p. 86.

were iteratively supplemented and changed during preparation. The next step was the extraction of the marked passages of the expert interviews. At this point, the categories and the coding guideline were also adjusted. In the course of this work, paraphrasing was avoided, and a summary was created immediately.

The analysis of the results from the expert interviews is therefore presented in the next chapter.

7. Results of the empirical research

In this chapter, the answers and the results of the expert interviews are presented and evaluated. The results of the empirical survey should provide insights into how companies from the tools and hardware industry can find, evaluate and select suitable influencers. Furthermore, the results offer companies an insight into how influencers can be used efficiently, and which processes are used in influencer marketing. Success criteria for collaboration, relationship management and influencer campaigns are also described. Accordingly, opportunities and challenges are discussed, and industry prospects for the future of influencer marketing are given. This section of the research work contributes to answering the main research question.

A total of six main categories have been defined for content analysis, each containing subcategories. Details of the category list can be found in the Appendix. The structure and the order of the categories were inductively created based on the empirically generated research questions.

7.1 Status quo influencer marketing

In this section, the prevailing views of influencers and companies are presented. Besides, the understanding of roles and functions under the term influencer is examined. The prevailing views form the starting point for further definitions of the success factors of collaboration with influencers and the implementation of influencer marketing campaigns in B2B companies. The knowledge of the role and function of influencers is a fundamental prerequisite to answer the main research question in chapter eight and to derive recommendations for successful handling of influencers.

7.1.1 Influencer image

The majority of business experts describe an influencer as a person with excellent knowledge and expertise in a subject area. Furthermore, this person has a specific reach in the market, which allows to reach other people within a target group with their opinions and thereby influence them. Influencers present products and services to their followers in uniquely created and prepared content. The influencers then share the content via social media. In doing so, they act in a very authentic way and through their unique relationship of trust with their audience, influence opinions in the market. In contrast to classical corporate communication, they present an independent opinion of the end-user.¹⁹⁵

7.1.2 Experience Influencer Marketing

According to experts, Influencer Marketing seems to be the new form of marketing within the tool and hardware industry. In most companies, influencer marketing has been strategically used over the last two to three years. One expert even stated that she has

¹⁹⁵ cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 11; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 9; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 9; cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 11.

been utilising influencers in the industry for over six years. While Influencer Marketing in B2C has been successful for several years, this form of marketing seems to be gaining momentum in the tool and hardware industry. While international companies have already developed their concepts and gained initial experience, the smaller and locally operating companies seem to have difficulties. In the case of international companies, lessons from one region can be shared and adapted for other countries to achieve success faster.¹⁹⁶

Generally stated, all interviewed experts were delighted and enthusiastic about influencer marketing in the tools and hardware industry. All expressed the opinion that influencer marketing is a functioning technique to reach out to the target groups.

The next two paragraphs show explicitly mentioned positive and negative arguments.

Positive:¹⁹⁷

- Authentic content
- Professional influencers available
- Increase of corporate followers due to influencers
- Active contact and exchange with customers from target audience

Negative:¹⁹⁸

- Unreliable influencers that need to be constantly reminded
- Hard to brief influencers and explain the KPIs
- No full-time influencers available
- Agencies don't have much experience in the trades

7.1.3 Strategic positioning influencer marketing

Influencer marketing is, according to the experts, a part of social media marketing, and thus a part of the overall marketing strategy. Influencer marketing is, in comparison to one-way corporate communication, a means to promote dialogue and interaction between users and companies. It is possible to influence the brand image and to get in contact with the user in a more personal way. Therefore, marketers see influencer marketing as an excellent link between companies and end-users from the target audience. Furthermore, some companies use influencers for press releases or actively for new product introductions. This allows to get into direct contact with the target groups. Especially for new products, opinions of influencers offer a level of security for interested customers, because there are no product reviews and experiences in the market yet.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 15; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 105.

¹⁹⁷ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 17; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 25; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 33; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 17; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 43.

¹⁹⁸ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 15; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 11; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 15.

¹⁹⁹ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 17–19; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 13; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 11–15; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 13–15; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 13–15; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 20–21; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 26–27.

7.1.4 Purpose of Influencer marketing

According to experts, influencer marketing is used for various purposes. One essential purpose is to increase the brand awareness and product awareness. Thus, it allows to reach new customers. Particular reference is made to younger target groups, which also have a specific affinity to social media. One customer even explicitly states that influencer marketing can be used to increase the attractiveness of the company for new employees. Another vital purpose is to strengthen the brand's image and brand's level of associated trust.²⁰⁰

Furthermore, an essential purpose of influencer marketing is to provide companies with authentic content which can be shared by the companies with the target groups, but which does not look like classic advertising. Based on all these purposes, it is, of course, indirectly of interest to generate new sales, which increases the turnover and create new growth for the companies. One expert even mentioned the possibility of using Influencer content to improve the visibility in search engines and thus enable the ranking of brands in the top hit lists.²⁰¹

7.2 Implementing influencer marketing

This section explains to the reader what is necessary for the implementation of Influencer Marketing in a company and which requirements should apply. In particular, the author shows possible pitfalls or questions that may arise.

7.2.1 Hurdles, Blockers and Questions

Before a marketer implements Influencer Marketing in a company, specific basic requirements should be met. Accordingly, it is of utmost importance that all persons involved are informed and that the management also understands what influencer marketing is all about. Not all employees will immediately understand what its value when they first hear about influencer marketing. While younger people usually understand the term and the possible applications of influencer marketing, older colleagues or other departments may not understand the term. Frequently occurring questions can, therefore, be directed towards ROI or increased sales. Here, a clear understanding must be conveyed that growth in sales figures and turnover can only be achieved indirectly through influencer marketing and that other goals are more important. Influencer marketing is a supplement to operational marketing and has goals such as increasing awareness, brand image, brand confidence, loyalty and more. In the industry, there are currently hardly any companies that can use an influencer to make direct sales. However, this is always related to the organisation and infrastructure of the companies. Especially in the tool and hardware industry, manufacturers

²⁰⁰ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 21; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 21; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 23; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 21; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 25; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 25.

²⁰¹ cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 29,39.

sell indirectly via trading partners or distributors. It is challenging to monitor sales figures directly and achieve direct sales.²⁰²

Influencer marketing is a culture of its own, for which a company must be prepared. Marketers must understand that it is rarely perfect content, as no media experts or agencies act on behalf of the company. Accordingly, it is rarely possible to have the generated content changed or adapted. Similarly, influencer marketing does not behave like paid advertising, which companies can buy for a specific period and which then provides them with leads. Furthermore, there are no standardised orders where companies can choose from countless influencers. Especially in the B2B sector, influencers must be used on a long-term basis, and they must offer relevance to their followers. This approach is the only way to achieve a specific reach among the target groups.²⁰³

To introduce Influencer Marketing in a company, marketers should come up with some arguments. This helps to develop a concept and define goals precisely. In this way, marketers can make Influencer Marketing appealing to the management. Accordingly, one can find existing benchmarks on the market or bring external experts into the company for a workshop with all involved parties. Decision-makers need to understand that it is about letting third parties talk about the products and positioning the independent opinion of the end-user in the market. In the early stages, a test phase with micro-influencers can also be helpful. This concept was mentioned by several experts, citing that it provided a first feeling for this kind of marketing.²⁰⁴

7.2.2 Objectives, Goals and KPIs

According to the experts interviewed, once the prerequisites have been examined, and a company has decided to use influencer marketing, the next step should be to set goals and define performance indicators. The experts agree on this because, without set goals, no statement can be made about the success of influencer campaigns. Thus, an argumentation is also missing as to the justification of its existence in the future. In addition to the consideration and definition of the goals, measurable performance indicators should be defined, which make it possible to measure the results. Also, a strategy and individual quantifiable objectives should be considered, identifying how the mentioned objectives can be achieved. Common goals in the industry are to increase brand awareness and visibility in the market, especially among relevant social media users. Furthermore, goals such as branding or loyalty are also possibilities. Companies that have their corporate online shops can also set targets, such as increasing the number of visits to the shop or product pages.²⁰⁵

Suitable KPIs in the industry are, for example, reach, views per post, engagement, clicks on webpage or product page and increasing followers on the corporate social media pages.²⁰⁶

²⁰² cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 33.

²⁰³ cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 27.

²⁰⁴ cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 36–37; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 27; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 32–33.

²⁰⁵ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 35; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 27; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 31; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 25; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 39.

²⁰⁶ cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 39; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 39; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 21.

Moreover, companies should consider what message they want to convey to their target group through influencer marketing and in what style.²⁰⁷

Something that should also be defined at the beginning but is often forgotten, is the budget. Even if companies do not pay fees to influencers, internal resources and product sponsorship should be included.²⁰⁸

7.2.3 Target group and influencer persona

In the next step, it is recommended that a company define the target audience it wants to reach with influencers. This definition includes various socio-demographic, geographical and psychographic factors. In detail, these can be factors such as language, country, behavioural patterns, occupational group, gender, age, household income, among other criteria.²⁰⁹

The definition of the occupational group seems to be one of the essential factors in determining the target group at this point. Accordingly, the experts in this respect describe experienced workers from the trades, such as carpenters, furniture makers, roofers, floorers, tilers, or other occupational groups from the construction sector.²¹⁰

Accordingly, it is a good idea to define the influencer based on a clearly defined influencer persona in the initial stages. Especially if a company decides to cooperate with an influencer marketing agency, the precise definition of an influencer persona based on the criteria mentioned above is a mandatory requirement for a successful start. The definition of an influencer persona also saves marketers and agencies a lot of time, as not every real influencer on the market can be considered.²¹¹

In the description of the influencer persona, the size of the possible influencers should also be determined. Smaller influencers, in the micro and nano range, are more sustainable and more credible than the big influencers. Besides the fact that large influencers are hardly present in this industry, followers know that they mostly live from influencing. Therefore, the followers consider their opinion as bought. The smaller influencers are assumed to have purchased the tools themselves out of conviction, and thus they are seen more credible.²¹²

7.3 Influencer search, evaluation and selection

This section deals specifically with the systematic process of influencer search, evaluation and selection in the tool and hardware industry. Possibilities for the search and discovery of suitable influencers will be discussed. Furthermore, common evaluation methods for the selection of influencers and their social media channels will be described. Additionally, possibilities for appropriate contact will also be presented.

²⁰⁷ cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 35.

²⁰⁸ cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 47.

²⁰⁹ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 35; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 43; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 35; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 19; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 84.

²¹⁰ cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 25,64,65; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 49; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 83.

²¹¹ cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 33; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 47.

²¹² cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 29,84.

7.3.1 Social media networks

Before a marketer starts looking for an influencer, the social media network should first be determined. Accordingly, the platform with the best possible and most significant overlap with the desired target group should be chosen. Only in this way is an efficient use of influencers likely, as companies would otherwise only be present in small niches. Concerning the influencer channels, the experts are all in agreement; They all cite Instagram as the ultimate network for influencers in this industry nowadays. Closely followed in second place by YouTube and then by Facebook. Occasionally the possibility of using TikTok was mentioned by three experts, whereby it was mainly suitable for targeting a very young audience or end-users from the Asian region. On the other hand, the social network of LinkedIn seems to be less suitable for influencer marketing for the mentioned tool and hardware industry. According to the experience of two experts, there are hardly any craftsmen and end-users from the said industry on LinkedIn.²¹³

Although the three networks mentioned were preferred in the tool and hardware industry, marketers should independently check whether a social medium is suitable for addressing the desired target group. Depending on the country, there may be differences in user behaviours between the networks. Accordingly, one expert even states that Instagram, for example, is not at all popular with the target groups from the trades in the two countries she directly handles. Instead, the craftsmen in these countries focus on Facebook.²¹⁴

In order not to be left in the dark and to avoid targeting inefficient networks, market research is the right way of doing this. This technique can help to discover regional preferences of the target group for social media and thus determine a suitable network for the Influencer search. A digital landscape analysis, which is also relevant for social media marketing, can provide an insight into usage in certain countries.²¹⁵

Another way to test a social media network for its applicability for influencer marketing in a company is to conduct various studies and statistics. Often there are detailed reports and key figures on the Internet about the user groups, their preferences and interests on multiple networks.²¹⁶

Another easy way to check whether desired target customers use a network is to utilise the search function offered in many social media networks. Instagram, for example, can also detect some possible interactions via the "#" hashtag, plus a keyword like a brand name or target group. Companies that want to search a network professionally for possible mentions of the brand or products can also use so-called social media listening platforms. Such a listening tool recognises on various media, whether a brand or its products are discussed and mentioned. Thus, it can be determined if the network offers a possibility for the search for influencers.²¹⁷

²¹³ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 17,25; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 15; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 19; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 19–21; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 17–19; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 21,47; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 23; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 31.

²¹⁴ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 28–29.

²¹⁵ cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 21; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 57.

²¹⁶ cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 37,45; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 69.

²¹⁷ cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 57.

7.3.2 Search for influencers

According to the majority of experts, the search for influencers is one of the most challenging tasks because there are limited influencers on the market. Especially since the tool and hardware industry is a niche market and the wanted influencers are mostly from the target group of craftsmen and skilled workers, from the construction sector. Accordingly, it is advisable to look for the people who have a lot of experience in the specific industry, a good audience and the will to create content. There are many ways to search for influencers. The following list shows all the possibilities mentioned by the experts interviewed:

Paid ads:

One way to discover influencers is the use of paid advertising or competitions on social media, which leads target groups to a landing page. Accordingly, marketers can motivate prospective end-users to register and get details about the job and social media behaviour. By entering the company and profile data, the individual profiles on the social media can later be checked and evaluated. At the end of a campaign, companies receive a list of registered, interested parties who may be suitable as potential candidates for influencer marketing. However, marketers need to be sensitive when requesting personal data so that they do not lose potential candidates at the time of registration and so that they can keep the costs of the advertisements low.²¹⁸

Agencies, Influencer Platforms and Databases:

Another way to discover influencers is to use influencer agencies and their influencer platforms. They usually have established databases of different influencers. Although this technique is trendy in the B2C area, it is only of limited use in the B2B sector. The quality and specialisation of the agency are crucial as well as the intelligence of their algorithms. According to several experts, currently, there are hardly any agencies that are specialised in the tool or trade segment. Therefore, the majority of experts in their companies rely on manual research in the search for suitable influencers.²¹⁹

Search engines, blogs and forums:

Search engines can also offer a suitable possibility to search for influencers. Accordingly, keywords or relevant topic areas can be used to search for possible influencers. It can happen that marketers even land directly on the blogs of various influencers during the search. Similarly, search engines can be used to explore relevant forums that are home to several experts who are likely to be enthusiastic about influencer marketing. A little creativity is undoubtedly required in the search.²²⁰

Social media and social listening:

Various social media platforms have already integrated search functions and can also offer a suitable way to search for influencers. Accordingly, keywords matching the target group or relevant technical terms can be used to search for possible influencers. Furthermore, as already mentioned, social media profiles of direct and indirect competitors can also be

²¹⁸ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 37–39.

²¹⁹ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 40–43; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 11; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 41.

²²⁰ cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 29; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 29.

examined. It is also possible to explore social media profiles of other manufacturers who address the same target group to discover potential candidates. Most importantly, marketers should check their own social media channels first, as there may already be a potential influencer in the existing list of followers. Concerning social media, the aforementioned social media listening platforms can also help to search for possible candidates. These tools can be used to determine the appropriate networks and to search for influencers systematically.²²¹

Business directories and existing customers:

Another possibility in the research for possible influencers is the investigation of trade directories. Marketers can divide a country into different segments and then search in registers relevant to the target group. In a further step, these companies can then be actively researched on various social media. Tradespeople and construction companies, for example, may already have their profiles on social media and it may be possible to find one or the other end-user for influencer marketing in their posts. Furthermore, it is a good idea to consider the directories of existing customers and check their presence on social networks. Especially for companies that operate an indirect sales channel, the assessment of distributors and dealers is useful. It can happen that they already have connections to influencers.²²²

Trade fairs and conferences:

Trade shows and conferences also provide an opportunity for marketers to discover potential influencer candidates. As experts, they can give individual presentations or be actively involved at other manufacturers' booths.²²³

Internal experts:

Last but not least, the chance to look for possible influencers in the company's ranks should also be mentioned. Product experts, as well as industry experts, in this case product managers and CEOs, can also offer the potential for influencer marketing. Through their expertise and involvement in other communication channels, they already have a certain charisma on the market that companies can utilise for influencer marketing. Especially for companies in specialised niches, these people can be of particular importance.²²⁴

Speculative application:

In addition to the active search for possible influencer candidates, according to the experts, it also happens again and again that influencers approach manufacturers independently and send speculative applications. Applications can be sent directly via social media accounts or directly to the companies' e-mail addresses. Marketers can actively counteract this behaviour and make it easier for influencers to contact them by publishing their Influencer application page on the homepage. A few experts also mention that, in the

²²¹ cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 37; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 37; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 43; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 60–61; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 104.

²²² cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 29; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 47,63,65.

²²³ cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 45.

²²⁴ cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 115.

meantime, influencers also visit manufacturers directly at trade fairs and apply as possible influencers.²²⁵

7.3.3 Contact the influencer

After companies have discovered potential influencer candidates through their search, marketers should contact the influencers. To do this, they should gather additional information that may not be directly visible on the influencer profile, but that will make it easier to evaluate the influencer candidates later.

For this purpose, it is recommended to address the candidates personally. The influencers can be contacted via telephone, e-mail or directly via their profiles on social media. Ideally, an influencer will already indicate the preferred contact choice on his profile. In the B2B area, it is recommended to contact the influencers directly so that they know with whom they are dealing. Furthermore, there are no detours and filters in the exchange of ideas and information. Alternatively, influencers can also be contacted through agencies, if marketers shy away from personal contact. In the initial contact, the first step is to assess whether the targeted candidate is at all interested in cooperation and to introduce the company. The first point of contact is also about clarifying his intentions on social media. Accordingly, possible company projects should be examined and whether the influencer is a professional, experienced, skilled worker or a hobby craftsman from the DIY sector. Therefore, the answers should also fit the initially defined target group. Furthermore, such an initial interview can also be used to determine other essential information that can help in the evaluation of the influencer. For this purpose, decisive criteria can be tested at the same time, such as the reactivity and reaction time of the influencer. No answers or very late answers are already the first warning signs for a partnership. Possible data and criteria for assessment are mentioned in the next chapter.²²⁶

7.3.4 Evaluation of the influencer

To evaluate influencers, marketers should consider a variety of qualitative and quantitative criteria. Influencers can provide this information in so-called media kits. Thus, marketers can also access the data by using various technical tools and influencer platforms on the market. Individual criteria can also be discovered directly on the social media profile of the candidate. However, the experience of most experts shows that media kits with analytical data are usually only mastered by very professional or more significant influencers, bigger than 30000 followers. In this case, they are also made available to marketers and can be very helpful in the evaluation of influencer candidates.²²⁷

²²⁵ cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 11; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 35; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 31,37; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 43.

²²⁶ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 49,50; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 63; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 25,35; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 39; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 47,83; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 49; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 53,63; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 71.

²²⁷ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 53,57; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 42–43; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 49–50.

However, it is much more critical for marketers to assess the qualitative criteria themselves accurately. Especially in the B2B sector, the majority of experts agree that quality is the top priority and must, therefore, be right in any case.²²⁸

Therefore, marketers should check the following qualitative criteria in these regards:²²⁹

- Language, Locations, Geographical region and market
- Occupation and job experience
- Addressing target groups (trade professionals, DIY)
- Tonality and choice of words in posts and comments (Insults, Political views)
- Personality (quality requirements, facial expressions, gestures, appearance, values)
- Authenticity (Charisma)
- Content quality (product presentation, usage, applications, matching the target audience)
- Media production quality (pictures, videos, stories, voice)
- Codes (links, hashtags, mentions)
- Brand fit (matching with desired target group and brand image)
- Follower quality (target group, personas, decision makers, bots)
- Comments and replies (Sentiment)
- Community (age, professions, gender, match with target audience)
- Previous partnerships and cooperation (Manufacturers, Competitors)

The decisive criterion in this context is that the influencer addresses the target groups in the skilled trades with its contents. About 80% of the posts should be relevant for the target groups and not be strictly focused on the personal life of the influencer, i.e.: holiday time or family photos.²³⁰

In addition to the qualitative criteria, there are also some quantitative criteria, that can be taken into account. These criteria are usually standard in the assessment of B2C candidates:²³¹

- Engagement rate (number of likes + comments + shares in relation to followers)
- Followers/subscriptions
- Reach (number of people reached in the defined target group)
- Interactions
- Views/Impressions/Click rates
- Dwell time on videos
- Frequency of posts
- Growth rates of the channel
- Number of additional channels

²²⁸ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 61; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 35; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 39; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 59; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 39.

²²⁹ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 51,57-61; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 11,33,35-37,42-43; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 41,45,49; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 42-49,53; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 39,55; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 41,45,53,59,61; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 13,33,39,45,69,85; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 51,55,57.

²³⁰ cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 53.

²³¹ cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 31,35,39,41; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 35,43,47; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 37,41,49; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 55; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 67; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 33,69; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 58-60,78,82.

According to the feedback, the top three criteria Engagement rate, Followers and Reach are the most important when considering quantitative factors.

For influencers with business profiles, the transmission of most quantitative data should not be a problem. Social media channels usually have their analytics that calculate all of the metrics. Nevertheless, marketers should not rely entirely on this data, as it can also be falsified in some negative cases.²³²

Various benchmarks from scientific studies guide the performance of individual factors. Besides this, there are also social media analyses by multiple agencies on the quantitative factors mentioned, which are also available on the Internet.²³³

7.3.5 Selection of the influencer

When it comes to the final selection of suitable influencers, the experts surveyed are not in complete agreement. While some marketers ultimately determine their influencers based on the number of followers, reach and engagement rate, other experts decide purely on qualitative criteria.

According to two experts, there is also the possibility to nominate the most suitable influencer candidate via a scoring model. Influencers can be ranked using the discussed measures and then selected through a score or ABC analysis. For this purpose, some quantitative and qualitative criteria should be considered. Afterwards, criteria are awarded points from one to six, depending on their performance. In this scale, the six is allocated to the best grade and the one to the worst grade. The usual criteria used are reach, engagement rate, post frequency and brand fit. An example can be found in the figure below:²³⁴

| | Reach | Engagement rate | Post frequency | Brand fit | Sum |
|-------------|-------|-----------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Influencer1 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 18 |
| Influencer2 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 16 |
| Influencer3 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 14 |
| Influencer4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 10 |

Figure 19: Influencer selection scoring model

Source: Own illustration

In the final selection of the influencers, despite the evaluated criteria, it is also essential to always keep in mind the defined target group and the goal of the influencer campaign.

²³² cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 41.

²³³ cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 58–59.

²³⁴ cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 47,50-51; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 63,69.

Finally, worth mentioning is an important note about the selection; If the influencer has been classified as an ideal candidate, marketers should also check its availability for the marketing campaign period. Otherwise, there could be surprises.²³⁵

7.3.6 International usage of influencers

The applicability of an influencer for international campaigns always depends on the influencer itself and their followers. If the influencer has established a reach that extends beyond national borders, then they could also be used internationally. The countries addressed can be easily researched using analytics, and each influencers should know this for themselves. Especially more significant influencers often have an international audience. Influencers can be used internationally, as long as the spoken and written language in the contributions corresponds to the language of a foreign country. In this respect, it is possible to use German-speaking influencers in Germany, Austria and parts of Switzerland, if we only consider the language. The same applies to English-speaking influencers in the Anglo-American area and common law. However, there are limitations, especially in the tool and hardware industry, due to construction standards and manufacturing specialities. Architecture and construction methods also play an enormous role in marketing. While there are countries that process mainly with wood, there are other countries that work a lot with concrete or bricks. Furthermore, an influencer should also fit the regional culture and local conditions. It is recommended to use regional influencers who know the circumstances and address relevant topics and challenges. Companies that want to start with influencer marketing in a foreign country should take the same steps of analysis, evaluation and selection into account as in the domestic market. Only with a detailed analysis of target groups, social media networks, and influencers is successful influencer marketing in foreign countries possible. International companies are therefore best advised to have this type of analysis and evaluation carried out by their subsidiaries in the country branches.²³⁶

7.3.7 Customer journey

According to experts, influencers can be used beneficially throughout the entire customer journey. However, the use of influencers depends heavily on the organisation and the sales structure of the manufacturers. According to experts, influencers are mainly used in the awareness, consideration and retention phases since most companies sell their products indirectly through distributors and dealers. Companies with an affiliate program and an online shop can use influencers throughout the entire customer journey and measure their success. Accordingly, they can lead interested customers directly to the shop via an especially shared link after they have been noticed and influenced, thus expedite the buying decision. Customers who see the same products in use with one of their influencers after purchase in the retention phase automatically feel confirmed in their purchase. This condition results in an even higher loyalty to the brand. It also ensures further discussions and new recommendations on social media channels. Which acts like an amplifier for new

²³⁵ cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 77.

²³⁶ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 71; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 53; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 19,53-55; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 57,59; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 65–67; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 71–73; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 81,83; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 88.

customers in the network of the influencers and motivates them to influence additional participants.²³⁷

7.4 Success factors for cooperation

In this section, possible success factors for a long-term cooperation between influencers and companies in the tool and hardware industry will be presented. To this end, the specific behavioural patterns and reasonable precautions to be taken by the companies will be discussed. Furthermore, the topics of support and training will also be covered in the next section.

7.4.1 Behaviour

Influencers in the tool and hardware industry are usually not full-time influencers, denoting that they also have a regular job. Therefore, they often need reminders to remember to complete the agreements and deliver the discussed content. Even if marketers are structured and send reminders, it cannot be taken for granted that the promised content will be delivered on time. For marketers not to have to deal with such tedious reminder emails, it is advisable to use Influencer platforms that automate management and monitor Influencer continuously. Companies can manage the support of the Influencer platform themselves or hand it over to the responsible agency; They take over the entire functions of monitoring, supervising and reminding the assigned influencers.²³⁸

For a successful collaboration, there are several criteria that marketers should consider when working together with Influencers. According to the experts, most of the success factors mentioned in connection with influencers are:²³⁹

- Influencers respond quickly to emails or phone calls
- Influencers answer the calls of companies and agencies
- Influencers deliver the content in the desired time and quality as agreed
- Influencers do not postpone deadlines
- The handling and the tonality in the videos are appropriate and within the general framework
- Influencers accurately use the tools and observe safety instructions
- Influencers appear natural and authentic in videos, and it is evident that a professional is working with the tool
- An influencer does not give bad ratings in the videos
- Influencers do not express inappropriate remarks or political views
- Right influencers seek close contact and ongoing relationships with companies

²³⁷ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 21; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 21; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 23; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 25; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 23; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 27,29,31; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 27; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 41.

²³⁸ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 15; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 63.

²³⁹ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 73; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 57; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 45,57; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 63; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 17,79,85; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 76,78,90.

- Right influencers are convinced of the products, services and achievements of a company
- Right influencers are also users and operators of the products
- Influencers accept feedback and are also willing to reproduce or improve poor content
- Perfect influencers are also willing to provide additional output
- Influencers maintain an open and honest exchange with marketers
- Influencers harmonise with company and brand
- Influencers also label sponsored partnerships as such

7.4.2 Agreement and briefing

When working with influencers, it is advisable to keep certain agreements so that expectations are met and no surprises follow. The experts have different opinions about the handling of agreements in collaborations. While larger international companies rely on written agreements and briefings, smaller companies allow influencers more freedom and they do not sign any written documents. Freedom in the work of the influencer is very important because usually they know the best ways to reach their followers ways and are experts in how to interact with the target group. Nevertheless, a framework agreement could help to give some guidance and to protect against several common mistakes.²⁴⁰

According to the experts, the following points should be noted in a proper agreement.²⁴¹

- The naming of the company objectives and campaign goals.
- Clear communication of the KPIs, so that influencers understand what the marketing campaign is aimed at and can measure its success.
- Definition of deliverables in return for equipment sponsorship.
- Definition of compensation payments and expenses.
- Communication and clarification of safety regulations.
- The declaration of assignment if companies want to publish the content on their corporate channels and media.
- The approval process to avoid legal consequences such as security regulations, music rights, etc.
- Mention of a competition clause, for a definite or indefinite period and potential sanctions for the influencer, if necessary.
- Definition of the delivery address for the provided goods.

²⁴⁰ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 51; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 55; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 66–67; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 74–75; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 9–81; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 33; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 47.

²⁴¹ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 15,51,79; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 59; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 65,106-109; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 69; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 47,90.

Once the agreement has been signed, and both parties agreed to work together, it is advisable to communicate a clear briefing to the influencer. The briefing may include:²⁴²

- The naming of the key messages for delivery to the target group. Communication of keywords and #hashtags that need be included in the content.
- Clear product briefing including product benefits and USPs to be focused on by the influencer.
- Presentation of product videos for training.
- Schedule and content plan, especially crucial for new product launches and to avoid duplicate content.
- The naming of possible desired projects or applications.
- Optional provision of product and application training, if necessary.

Also useful, especially for smaller influencers, can be a guide, as well as tips and tricks for creating professional videos using a smartphone.²⁴³

In addition to the briefing of the influencer, a code of conduct is recommended. To avoid making it too formal, a list of Do's and Don'ts is suitable. Here, the Do's should define what is to be done. In contrast, Don'ts should explain what should not be done.

Possible Do's:²⁴⁴

- Create content as authentically as possible.
- Legal labelling obligation for advertising on social media.
- Postings on the best accessibility of the followers.
- Constructive criticism.
- Putting the product in focus.
- Only deliver one message per mail, not several if possible.
- Link to the client at postings.

Possible Don'ts:²⁴⁵

- Comparison with products in other price ranges or application classes.
- Resell of the equipment and tools.
- Plagiarising content from other influencers or people.
- Mentioning of undesired hashtags or mentions like DIY, if you want to reach the target group of professional craftsmen and companies.
- Using Background music without copyrights.
- Throwing or deliberate destruction of tools and goods, unless explicitly requested.
- Glorification of violence, racism, sexism or other inappropriate topics that could harm the company.
- Insulting the brand or the products.
- Illustration and presentation together with competitors' products.

²⁴² cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 15,75; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 11; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 41,57,59,83; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 74–79; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 79–81; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 92–93; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 71,74.

²⁴³ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 79.

²⁴⁴ cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 67; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 74–79; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 53; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 95; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 95–96.

²⁴⁵ cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 67; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 74–79; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 53; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 84–85; cf. 2020, p. 95; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 95–96.

Companies that do not make any written agreements with the Influencers justify this decision based on the authenticity factors. Accordingly, they suspect that too many requirements will affect the performance and credibility of the influencers. Nevertheless, because of the possible legal consequences by themselves, companies should protect their business and at least write down the most necessary information in a written agreement and have it signed by the influencer.²⁴⁶

7.4.3 Importance of content approval

According to the experts, whether a strict approval process is essential depends directly on the tools and hardware. According to one expert, today, about 30% of the generated contributions have to be rejected. This is because the influencers do not comply with the safety regulations or even misuse the equipment. Therefore, it is recommended to set up an approval process for products whereby misuse can be harmful or even fatal, at least for moving images. The purpose of an approval process is to inform the influencer about technical errors, but not to influence his creation. The latter could reduce the influencer's motivation and creativity and affect their authenticity. This approach may cause some bureaucracy, and not every influencer may agree with it. Influencers who refuse to go through the approval process should probably not be applied in the first place, as it may involve risks.²⁴⁷

7.4.4 Support and Training

Especially with larger machines and devices, it should be taken into account that influencers may need some help and must also be trained by experts. This support is also in the interest of the company to avoid mistakes or misunderstandings. Therefore, a company that offers complex or large machines and tools should also communicate a contact person to the influencer for questions and support. For this purpose, a central interface is useful so that the influencer is not confused, and his request is resolved as quickly as possible. For all other companies, it is advisable to have product training from the product trainer or product manager to name the most important advantages compared to competitors. This approach also promotes communication and loyalty to the company and thus additionally motivates the influencers in their work. Figures, data, facts about the product and a specific topic which the influencer can publish, are also helpful during the introduction. Such exclusive insights offer exceptional support and can lead to a fascinating discussion among followers in the network.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 55; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 41.

²⁴⁷ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 15,80-81; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 61-63; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 80-83; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 71-73; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 89; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 99; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 98.

²⁴⁸ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 84-85; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 61-63; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 63-67; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 69-73; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 76-77,81; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 79,83; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 19,87,101; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 92-93.

7.5 Success factors for the relationship

In this section, possible success factors for the relationship between influencers and companies in the tool and hardware industry will be presented. To this end, the specific importance of continuous contact and an open feedback culture will be discussed in the next section.

7.5.1 Continuous contact and involvement

According to experts, a successful relationship requires extensive relationship management and the involvement of influencers. This includes continuous contact between brand and influencers. This contact can take place spontaneously and relatively uncomplicated by phone, email or short messages. Furthermore, there are also opportunities to meet and get to know the existing partnerships by means of Influencer-Days. Such events are very suitable for example at the company location. Factory tours can also be offered to give influencers a better insight into the company and thus bind them to the company. Such events also provide an opportunity to create new content directly on-site, which the influencers can later share with their community. According to some experts, influencers are already actively planned for trade shows and corporate events. This approach brings new visitors to the booth and also offers original content for posts. Marketers can also develop a special relationship with influencers by sending out products to partners before market release. This also promotes ties and is highly appreciated by influencers. Furthermore, it makes sense to write studies together with influencers or invite them to press conferences and market launches. Relevant influencers can also be incorporated into professional company videos or product videos. Although contact with the influencer is important, marketers should not overdo it. The influencers do not want to be bothered every day. It is essential in the relationship that trust, openness and honesty are the main focus.²⁴⁹

7.5.2 Feedback

One of the success factors for a successful relationship between influencer and company is the constant contact and feedback. No matter whether the connection is made through an agency or personally by the marketer. Feedback on content is appreciated by the influencers and also promotes further development. In return, the input from the influencer to the marketer is also very crucial in tracking KPIs and identifying potential opportunities or challenges within the campaign. Companies that work with agencies and platforms even get continuous reports about the success of the campaign and the analytical data. Unfortunately, marketers cannot expect such professional documents from small influencers. Another critical factor for a successful relationship with influencers is an uncomplicated feedback culture. Constructive conversations between influencers and marketers should therefore always be conducted openly. During the discussions, potential for improvement should be identified and feedback on the product should be obtained. The

²⁴⁹ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 87–89; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 69; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 85,87; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 81,83,87; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 13,79,87,101; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 53,89,107; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 47,100,102.

latter can flow directly into the company to optimise products and services. Comments on influencer content in the channels are seen as valuable feedback and are also very much appreciated by the creators. In this regard, the resharing of influencer content by the marketers with the corporate community is appreciated by influencers and gives them good credit for their work. A detailed feedback discussion should be held at the end of the campaign at the latest to discuss its success. In a detailed conversation, metrics should also be discussed. Significant and semi-professional influencers usually deliver metrics on their own. Small ones rather not, because as already mentioned, they are overstrained with them. However, every influencer with a business account should at least be able to provide statistics from the social media channels. These metrics should then be discussed together with the KPIs. Furthermore, fluctuations in the desirability of content can also be addressed. Companies should also develop new ideas for follow-up campaigns with the influencers.²⁵⁰

7.6 Success factors for influencer campaigns

In this section, possible success factors for influencer campaigns in the tool and hardware industry will be presented. To this end, the specific importance of content and timing will be discussed in the next section. It also describes how companies can use metrics to measure the success of influencer campaigns. Finally, this section also reports on opportunities and threats in influencer marketing, which are also relevant to this topic.

7.6.1 Successful content

For an Influencer campaign to be successful, it needs good and successful content. According to the majority of the experts interviewed, content on video is the most suitable in this industry. The video format is therefore, in addition to an on-site demonstration, the best way to showcase the products virtually. In the videos, the products can be shown to their advantage and this makes the products lively. Likewise, videos can be used to achieve greater coverage, as they are also entertaining and attract more attention. Accordingly, after the videos, pictures or visualised content with numbers, data and facts are always very welcome. However, the format alone is not enough for a successful campaign. The content is usually successful if it appears to be authentic and comes from a competent professional who is also skilful in front of the camera. The influencers must therefore have really worked with the tool for a certain amount of time so that they know what they are talking about. Otherwise the opinion could look purchased. Therefore, every post should focus on the target group application and on the product.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 87-89,92-95; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 66-67; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 71-73; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 85,89; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 91; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 61,79,91; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 109-111; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 90,100.

²⁵¹ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 97,101; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 57; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 63,95,97; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 81,101; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 97-99; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 49,51,79,131; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 25,116.

7.6.2 Timing

Besides excellent and encouraging content, timing is also crucial for a successful campaign. Especially with new products, influencers can represent a significant added value as a second opinion on the Internet, even though a product is only just being launched on the market. Therefore, Influencers can enhance the advertising impact of corporate communications through their contributions. Moreover, it makes sense to limit the number of postings during a time sequence. For this purpose, it helps to define the contributions in a schedule and then distribute them in a controlled manner to various followers. This way, the product stays longer in the discussion, and there is not only a short peak in message transmission. It makes sense to coordinate Influencer contributions with other means of communication of the entire marketing mix. At this point at the latest, it is evident whether individual influencers are suitable for a long-term partnership. Contributions that are not delivered at time can be very disappointing and can, therefore, influence the entire communication. Thus, unreliable influencers are less suitable for influencer campaigns.²⁵²

7.6.3 KPIs

According to the experts, the best way for a company to measure the success of a campaign is through set key figures, which can be defined in the form of KPIs. The top priority is that the company can only measure KPIs that were defined and set at the beginning of the Influencer campaign. Therefore, the measurement of success always depends on the marketing objectives and the defined KPIs. As mentioned in the chapter Objectives, Goals and KPIs, suitable KPIs should be set at the beginning of the campaign. Otherwise, it will be challenging to monitor the success of a campaign.²⁵³

Various qualitative and quantitative KPIs can be used to measure success. Qualitative KPIs are mostly subjective and can be evaluated differently by people. Therefore, marketers should also define some quantitative KPIs so that marketers have something measurable to monitor success and thus remain objective.²⁵⁴

Regarding influencer marketing, the most critical quantitative KPIs are the metrics of:²⁵⁵

- Reach and
- Engagement rate (including impressions, comments, shares)

Depending on the objectives, other quantitative KPIs can be used, such as the following:²⁵⁶

- Channel Growth Rates
- Click numbers on landing pages or company pages
- Views/Impressions

²⁵² cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 41,79; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 77; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 57; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 85,117.

²⁵³ cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 93; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 95,97; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 117; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 110.

²⁵⁴ cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 95,97.

²⁵⁵ cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 69; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 91,93; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 97.

²⁵⁶ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 99; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 69,75; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 91,93; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 97; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 67,79,93; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 57; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 43,110,112.

- Number of interactions
- Number of comments
- Number of mentions or links to the company profile
- Follower numbers on company profiles
- Leads (for companies with established referral)
- Sales (for companies with established affiliate system or shop)
- Cost per engagement
- cost per view
- Quantity of content produced

Furthermore, some qualitative indicators are suitable for monitoring success. The qualitative KPIs can therefore be:²⁵⁷

- The sentiment of comments and interactions.
- Quality of the content produced.
- Brand fit.
- Speech and tonality.
- Target groups reached.
- Countries and regions reached.
- Feedback from the followers.
- Brand Awareness

A suitable way to measure brand awareness is to carry out a market survey before and after the campaign with the desired target group to measure the success of the improvement in brand awareness at the target audience.²⁵⁸

7.6.4 Opportunities and threads of influencer marketing

According to the experts interviewed, some outstanding opportunities and threats were also mentioned concerning influencer marketing. Accordingly, a look at possible opportunities follows first.²⁵⁹

- Reach younger audiences
- Receive direct feedback from end-users
- Improve brand image
- Direct communication of the core messages to the target groups
- Outstanding price-performance ratio, as influencer marketing is a combination of content production and content distribution
- Influencers can be even more involved in trade show appearances, press conferences, or classic corporate communications

²⁵⁷ cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 69,71; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 75; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 97; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 114.

²⁵⁸ cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 99.

²⁵⁹ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 103,105; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 57,77; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 79; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 99,101; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 103; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 101; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 49,133; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 118.

- Influencers shorten purchase decision of the prospective buyer
- Communication at 'eye level'

However, in addition to the opportunities described, Influencer Marketing might also be somewhat risky, according to the experts. Possible threats can be identified in the following.²⁶⁰

- Influencers can switch to a competitor relatively quickly and easily
- There is a danger that influencers will be manipulated by competitors
- In influencer marketing trust is crucial, and marketers cannot control everything.
- There is always a risk in the marketplace that uncontrolled influencers will emerge
- More and more influencers are tied to contracts, which impact availability
- There is the danger of shifting the entire corporate communication to Influencers.
- Companies that do not engage in influencer marketing or recognise their opportunities late, risk missing target groups and losing low-cost reach.

7.7 Further expert view on Influencer Marketing

In the following paragraphs, further exciting insights gained from the interviews will be discussed. Accordingly, the first part of the article deals with the competitive situation in the field of influencer marketing. The second point follows opinions on influencer compensation. In the third point, the future outlook in the field of influencer marketing will be presented.

7.7.1 Influencer marketing among competitors

Many experts feel an increased emergence of Influencer Marketing in larger companies, which also pursue the topic of Influencer Marketing strategically. The smaller competitors, however, still only rarely engage in use of influencer marketing. At the moment, there is not yet a great deal of competitive pressure from influencers in the tool and hardware industry. In most companies, it has not yet been established that their own influencers work together with their competitors. If they did, the majority of marketers would try to stop them. In case of doubt, the influencers ask the partner beforehand whether further cooperation is okay. The request is evaluated internally by the companies. Afterwards found to be good or even rejected in case of doubt. However, the application of influencer marketing differs between companies. Not all brands work towards the same objectives. While some companies use influencers very objectively for product tests, other companies want to proceed strategically and reach the end-users emotionally. Further, other companies already offer direct links to shop pages and try to generate immediate sales.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 103,105; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 57,77; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 79; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 99,101; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 103; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 101; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 49,133; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 118.

²⁶¹ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 107,110-111; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 79; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 81–83; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 102–107; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 41,107; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 105; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 45,135,137; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 23,120.

7.7.2 Influencer compensation

The experts are clearly in agreement today regarding the payment of influencers. Companies generally only provide necessary tools and hardware to the influencers. Accordingly, in B2B Influencer Marketing, usually no money is paid for the services of the influencers. An exception is made for the big influencers, who typically do professional influencer marketing and have to ensure the survival of their company and crew. In return, however, companies also receive much more professional content. According to an expert, payment is only found in about 10% of cases, since most marketers in this industry work exclusively with small influencers from the micro and nano range. One of the essential aspects is that the ratio of range and payment is right.²⁶²

7.7.3 Future outlook of experts

A look by the experts into the future reveals the following points:²⁶³

- Fake reviews and self-proclaimed experts will increase the need for professional trade influencers
- Agencies could play a more critical role in future
- The battle for suitable influencers will come which could increase prices as well
- In B2B companies will become more open to influencer marketing
- Influencer marketing will become more professional and integrated in the entire customer journey
- More data analysis to come and increased marketing budget expectations
- Influencers will become more strategic tasks as market research
- Trends from B2C will spread to B2B
- Influencer Marketing will probably be the only way to address young people
- Besides micro-influencers in B2B, the nano-influencers will also become more critical

²⁶² cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 119–123; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 33; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 25,29; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 63; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 121,124-125.

²⁶³ cf. Expert 1 A.H. 2020, p. 113; cf. Expert 2 D.D. 2020, p. 83,85,89; cf. Expert 3 A.P. 2020, p. 85; cf. Expert 4 D.D. 2020, p. 113; cf. Expert 5 P.M. 2020, p. 105,109,111; cf. Expert 6 A.T. 2020, p. 107; cf. Expert 7 J.U. 2020, p. 139,143-147; cf. Expert 8 Z.U. 2020, p. 15,122,124.

8. Answers to the empirical sub-research question

Based on the exploration of expert knowledge, the empirical sub-research question in this section of the research work is answered.

What are the success factors for an effective, long-term cooperation in B2B companies?

For a long-term partnership between companies and influencers, several prerequisites are needed. Therefore, various factors must be taken into account. First of all, the behaviour of influencers is an essential factor that determines whether an influencer is suitable for a long-term partnership. Accordingly, the following criteria have been researched, which speak for long-term cooperation:

- Influencers respond quickly to emails or phone calls
- Influencers answer the calls of companies and agencies
- Influencers deliver the content in the desired time and quality as agreed
- Influencers do not postpone deadlines
- The handling and the tonality in the videos are appropriate and within the general framework
- Influencers accurately use the tools and observe safety instructions
- Influencers appear natural and authentic in videos, and it is evident that a professional is working with the tool
- An influencer does not give bad ratings in the videos
- Influencers do not express inappropriate remarks or political views
- Suitable influencers seek close contact and ongoing relationships with companies
- Suitable influencers are convinced of the products, services and achievements of a company
- Suitable influencers are also users and operators of the products
- Influencers accept feedback and are also willing to reproduce or improve poor content
- Perfect influencers are also willing to provide additional output
- Influencers maintain an open and honest exchange with marketers
- Influencers harmonise with company and brand
- Influencers also label sponsored partnerships as such

Although some of the above criteria are self-evident, it is advisable to write them down in an agreement and sign them mutually. Accordingly, a written agreement is also the second very important success factor for a long-term cooperation. The agreement should therefore contain the following points:

- The naming of the company objectives and campaign goals.
- Clear communication of the KPIs, so that influencers understand what the marketing campaign is aimed at and can measure its success.
- Definition of deliverables in return for equipment sponsorship.
- Definition of compensation payments and expenses.
- Communication and clarification of safety regulations

- The declaration of assignment if companies want to publish the content on their corporate channels and media.
- The approval process to avoid legal consequences such as security regulations, music rights, etc.
- Mention of a competition clause, for a definite or indefinite period and potential sanctions for the influencer, if necessary.
- Definition of the delivery address for the provided goods

As a third success factor for long-term cooperation, it is therefore essential to provide the influencer with a decent briefing. Thus, this briefing should contain the following elements:

- The naming of the key messages for delivery to the target group. Communication of keywords and #hashtags that need be included in the content.
- Clear product briefing including product benefits and USPs to be focused on by the influencer.
- Presentation of product videos for training.
- Schedule and content plan, especially crucial for new product launches and to avoid duplicate content.
- The naming of possible desired projects or applications.
- Optional provision of product and application training, if necessary.

In fourth place comes the application of an approval process as another success factor for the long-term cooperation between the company and Influencer. This process is used to check the content for technical correctness and not to hinder the Influencer's creativity. Additionally, an approval process is intended to protect the company from accidentally getting into possible legal difficulties.

Last but not least, training and support from the companies are also considered a success factor for long-term cooperation. The aim here is to provide the best possible support for the influencer in the event of questions and concerns. It also makes it easier for influencers to achieve the goals of the Influencer Campaign by having the company at their side. Accordingly, the influencer should always have a contact person at the company to whom they can turn.

9. Conclusion

9.1 Answer to the main research question

In this chapter the theoretical and empirical research findings are brought together so that the following main research question can be answered:

In the context of the tool and hardware industry, how can B2B companies successfully identify powerful end-users for gaining influence on social media?

Although none of the experts explicitly mentioned a systematic selection process in the selection of suitable influencers for the tool and hardware industry, the selected interview questions and the expertise of the experts made it possible to reproduce individual steps. These particular steps can thus be described in a sequential seven-step process. The details of the analysis are, therefore given in the chapter "Results of the empirical research".

According to the research results, it makes sense to select suitable end-users for influencer marketing in the tool and hardware industry using a seven-step process model:

Step 1: Definition of Goals, Objectives and KPIs

First, a clear definition of the objectives that a company wants to achieve by using these influencers is determined. When defining the overall marketing goals, marketers consider which strategy can be used to achieve the set goals. Accordingly, key performance indicators are determined at the same time, so that the use of influencers can be measured and statements about the success of the efforts can be made at the end of an influencer marketing campaign. Most companies in the tool and hardware industry still use Influencer Marketing today to increase brand awareness and brand image. Accordingly, KPIs are defined at this point, which allows the measurement of any success.

Step 2: Definition of target group and Influencer Persona

In the second step, the focus is entirely on the target group. Accordingly, the target groups are determined here, which are to be reached utilising Influencer Marketing. In the tool and hardware industry, the target groups are mostly from the occupational groups of craftsmen and construction workers. For this purpose, marketers define the target group using various socio-demographic, geographical and psychographic criteria. This definition is particularly important, as it also serves to describe an influencer persona and is then used as a guide in the search for an influencer. Influencers in the tool and hardware industry are usually characterised by a strong relation to the professional field. Accordingly, they are mostly end-users of these tools and hardware. Thus, people are sought out who fit into the defined target segment.

Step 3: Determine Social Media Network

The third step is to determine the appropriate social media network. For this purpose, marketers decide to select one or more networks in which the target audience is also active. This activity can vary from country to country. That's why marketers use market surveys and market studies to check in advance what social media preferences the target groups have.

Step 4: Influencer search and discovery

The fourth step is the operational search for possible candidates. For this purpose, the experts name several possibilities. According to this, marketers can use paid advertising to reach interested parties who actively apply for a position by registering. A second possibility is to use an agency and existing influencer platforms and databases to search for candidates. A third possibility is to search the internet. Marketers use technical keywords and subject areas to search for blogs or forums where potential influencers can be found. A fourth way to search for influencers is to search directly in the social media channels. This approach is also done by using keywords or performed systematically via social media listening platforms. A fourth way to search for influencers is to search in business directories. Companies that are discovered can also reveal possible influencer candidates via a subsequent search on the social media channel. Further, lists of existing customers can also bring potential influencers to light. Trade fairs and conferences offer a fifth possibility for searching for candidates. The probability of encountering a possible influencer is quite high in the medium term. In sixth place, marketers can also search for influencers internally. Product experts can often also be used for influencer marketing. Last but not least, some experts report that influencers are now approaching companies of their own accord and thus offer themselves as potential candidates.

Step 5: Influencer Contact

The fifth step is to contact the potential Influencer candidates. For this purpose, marketers make contact with the desired persons to discuss the mutual interest in cooperation. Furthermore, additional information regarding a collaboration is researched, which is not visible on the social media profiles of the persons. Through personal contact, the responsiveness and interests of the person are also explored.

Step 6: Influencer Evaluation

In the sixth step, the discovered influencer candidates are evaluated by the marketer. For this purpose, various qualitative and quantitative criteria are used to help identify the best possible influencer. In the tool and hardware industry, the qualitative criteria have a special weighting. The companies usually work with small influencers, whereby the evaluation through quantitative criteria is rather difficult. Therefore, these criteria get a lower weighting. The assessment is, of course, always carried out concerning the target group and the objectives.

Step 7: Influencer Selection

In the seventh and last step, the appropriate influencer is finally selected. The selection is made using the most important qualitative and quantitative criteria determined by the marketer. For this purpose, the candidates are also ranked by awarding points. Finally, the candidate with the highest score can be selected.

The individual steps of the researched systematic selection process for influencers in the tool and hardware industry are graphically visualised below:

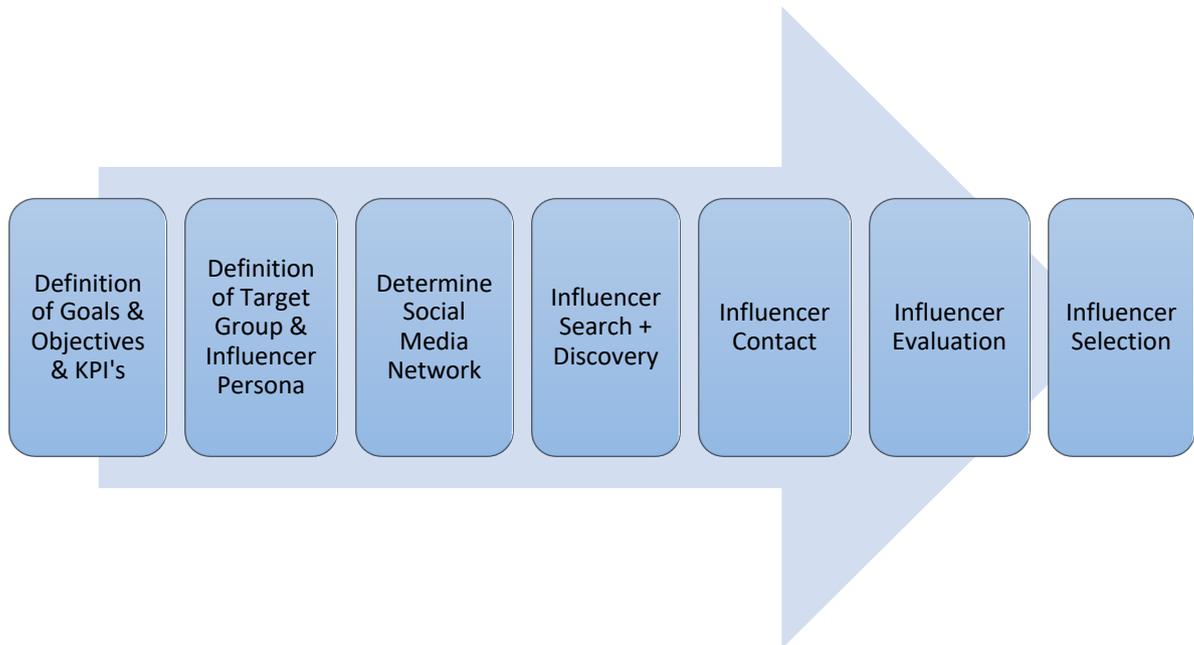


Figure 20: Seven step influencer selection process

Source: Own Illustration

Further details on the steps described can also be found in the empirical evaluation in the chapters 7.2 - 7.3.5.

9.2 Discussion, limits and outlook

Finally, in the context of a methodological reflection for the present study, it can be stated that the questions in the interview guide have proven to be correct. During the interviews, all questions were answered in detail. The goal of the expert interviews, to find a way to find suitable end-users for influencer marketing in the tool and hardware industry through the different statements of the experts, could be achieved. For the present study, it proved to be valuable to interview experts from companies that already have experience in influencer marketing. Nevertheless, the current research method also shows its limitations. The reliability of this work is only partially valid. Only eight experts were interviewed, who expressed their expertise. Although no marketing experts without experience in Influencer Marketing were interviewed, their opinions on the topic and the selection processes would undoubtedly have been interesting to detect some more blockers and hurdles in the search for suitable influencers. Additionally, international company experts had been interviewed, but only within Europe. For absolute reliability, it would have been useful to talk to experts from other countries and regions. Also missing in this research is the insight and expertise of the influencers or end-users themselves. To further research the success factors in the search for suitable influencers, additional group discussions in which both marketing experts and influencers participate, should be conducted. These group discussions promote

interaction and exchange on both sides. This way, possible discrepancies or general assumptions about the selection process could be better compared and explored in a direct discussion. In addition to the qualitative expert interviews, the group discussion method offers the possibility to investigate dynamic group processes that influence the selection process and the success factors for a collaboration. According to this, contradictory opinions and emotional backgrounds regarding the selection process can be better recorded in the group discussion procedure.²⁶⁴

From the results of the expert interviews and the scientific preparation, it can be concluded that influencer marketing is currently indispensable in the tool and hardware industry and is a strategic part of the marketing mix. Current developments indicate that influencers will be used more extensively in the future and that both the companies and influencers will increasingly try to establish long-term relationships. This situation requires increased investment in the area of relationship work, which creates a need for new job profiles in influencer marketing for companies. There is an excellent potential for specialised agencies in the B2B or tool industry to gain a foothold here and to support the companies in the future, due to the fact that the market will probably continue to develop and the battle to identify the right influencers is only beginning. There are already signs that influencer marketing in this industry will have to specialise and concentrate on its niche market, in order to deliver added value in the future. Accordingly, agencies are expected to play a more critical role in the future in the collaboration between companies and influencers.

The use of influencer platforms to search for influencers is only partially successful today. Although platforms use algorithms and databases and thus promise influencers a superior range, success in using influencer platforms is strongly dependent on their access to influencers in the target segment of the tools and hardware industry. As a result, marketers today often rely on their manual research when searching for influencers and maintain their company databases, where they continuously collect and evaluate influencers for use in their campaigns. As previously explained to the agencies, this situation also offers potential for the specialisation of platforms in the niche. Therefore, influencer platforms could make a significant contribution to the search and evaluation of influencers for the industry.

²⁶⁴ cf. Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2009, p. 347ff.

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Appendix

| Company Expert | Company | Current position | Experience Influencer Marketing | Experience Tools and Hardware Industry |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Expert 1: A.H. | Bosch | Marketing Manager | Managing Influencer Marketing Campaigns since 6 years | Working for power tools division since 6 years |
| Expert 2: D.D. | Wera | Head of Marketing | More than 30 Years marketing experience | Active manager in hand tools Division since many years |
| Expert 3: A.P. | Scheppach | Head of Marketing | More than 3 years; 1.5 years strategic | Active manager in power tools division since many years |
| Expert 4: D.D. | Pica Marker | Marketing Manager | Active Influencer Marketing responsible | Active manager for marking tools |
| Expert 5: P.M. | Reachbird | Managing Director | Founder of Influencer Platform | Worked previously in the industry |
| Expert 6: A.T. | Metabo | Marketing Manager | More than 2 years | Working for power tools division since 9 years |
| Expert 7: J.U. | Blum | PR Manager | More than 9 years | Working for fittings division since 3 years |
| Expert 8: Z.S. | Leica Geosystems | Marketing Manager | More than 2 years | Working for measuring tools division since 2 years |

Experts overview Tools and Hardware

Source: Own Illustration

Interview Guideline English:

Semi-structured expert interview guide B2B influencer marketing in the tool and hardware industry

Target: Ask 6-10 experts from various companies in the B2B sector with reference and experience in the given industry

The following questions should help to establish success factors for the selection and evaluation of influencers in the hardware and tools industry. Furthermore, success factors for long-term cooperation should be determined in this interview. Please try to answer all present questions by presenting the actual status and your experience regarding the topic. All answers are appreciated, and there is no right or wrong answer in this survey.

Introduction:

- Introducing myself.
Afterwards, give a short introduction to the research topic and objectives of the interview.
Presenting the methodology and asking for permission of recording. Prove for anonymization of the interview and confidential handling.
Ask for open questions before starting the interview.
- Please provide a short introduction of you as an interview expert (incl. company, actual role in the organization and experience in marketing)

Influencer marketing knowledge:

1. What means influencer to you in a few sentences?
2. What was your experience till today with influencer marketing so far?
 - Positive and negative insides?
 - When have you started with influencer marketing?
3. How important is influencer marketing for your organization?
4. Is influencer marketing part of your marketing strategy?
Please explain why or why not!
5. Which social media networks for influencers do you know? Which one do you use and Why do you use them in your campaigns?
6. What is the main objective in the usage of influencer marketing in your organization?
(Awareness, Leads, Sales, Support, Referral, etc.) Purpose of usage?

Starting with influencer marketing:

7. What has been the main challenges to start influencer marketing in your company?
Which hurdles had to be overcome in the beginning?
Which questions were in the room at the beginning?
What kind of blockers have you come across?

Influencer search-evaluation-selection:

8. What should be clear in advance or What requirements should be met before starting the real search for a suitable influencer candidate?
(e.g. Objectives, Target group, Geographic region, Demographics, ...)
9. How does the systematic influencer selection process look like for your brand?
Where do you search for influencers (Social Networks, Events, Research, Recommendations, Agencies)?
How do you know what the right social media influencer network for your brand is?
Is there some evaluation process?
How do you get in contact with the influencers (Direct/Indirect, Online/Offline)? Who reaches out to them?
What do you expect from them before a cooperation agreement (Media kit, Analytics data, Follower Demographics, etc.)?

How do you ensure that the correct target group is addressed by the Influencer?
10. What kind of analysis and evaluation do you do during the search on a potential influencer candidate?
(Social audit, partners, portfolio, audience, content quality, engagement rate...)
Any tools or scoring system you use to rank them?
11. Did you make a profile of your ideal influencer? What was important in profiling the influencer? What kind of criteria do you use to assess the influencer to nominate the most qualified partner for a campaign?
(Reach, Followers, Content-Type, Demographics, Engagement, Frequency)
Qualitative criteria?

Quantitative criteria?

Competences in methodology?
Is there such a thing as a rank or ranking? Which one do you select finally?
12. For which part of the customer journey do you use the influencers? What needs to be considered if using them in other parts of the journey?
13. Is it possible to use the same influencers global? If yes, what analysis needs to be done before? What about entering new channels/networks in foreign countries?

Success factors for the cooperation with influencers:

14. What does cooperation during a campaign look like, and what are the success factors for a long-term collaboration?

Which kind of briefing/framework do you provide? Is there any Schedule or Content plan? Any consent examples provided?

Is there any training provided before?

Is there any DO and DON'T DO list provided to the influencer? Or the code of conduct?

Do you provide any support to the influencers? If yes, how does it look like?

Success factors for the relationship with influencers:

15. How do you maintain the relationship with the influencer?

Is there any feedback provided for the generated content? Or is there a specific approval process for every piece of content?

Do you interact with each other? And if yes, how often?

Which expectation do you have after finishing the campaign?

(Report/Feedback regarding the Views, Engagements, Shares, etc.)

Success factors for influencer campaigns:

16. How to define a successful influencer campaign between an influencer and a brand in your industry?

How do you measure a successful influencer campaign which KPIs or metrics do you use?

What kind of content has the most success in your industry and why?

17. Which opportunities do you see in influencer marketing in your company?

18. Which threats do you see in influencer marketing in your company?

19. How does your competition do regarding influencer marketing?

Do they use influencers as well? And if yes, do they use the same influencers?

Where do you see the difference in the influencer usage of your competitors?

20. What do you think about the future of influencer marketing?

(Increase/Decrease, News, Trends, Challenges, Opportunities)

Conclusion and farewell

Interview Guideline German:

Semi-strukturierter Leitfaden für Experteninterviews zum B2B-Influencer Marketing in der Werkzeug- und Eisenwarenindustrie

Ziel: Befragung von 6-10 Experten aus verschiedenen Unternehmen im B2B-Sektor mit Referenzen und Erfahrungen in der jeweiligen Branche

Die folgenden Fragen sollen helfen, Erfolgsfaktoren für die Auswahl und Bewertung von Einflussfaktoren in der Hardware- und Werkzeugindustrie zu ermitteln. Darüber hinaus sollten in diesem Interview Erfolgsfaktoren für eine langfristige Zusammenarbeit ermittelt werden.

Bitte versuchen Sie, alle vorliegenden Fragen zu beantworten, indem Sie den aktuellen Stand und Ihre Erfahrungen zum Thema darstellen. Alle Antworten sind willkommen und es gibt keine richtige oder falsche Antwort in dieser Umfrage.

Einleitung:

- Vorstellung.

Danach kurze Einführung in das Forschungsthema und die Ziele des Interviews.

Vorstellung der Methodik und Bitte um Erlaubnis zur Aufzeichnung. Nachweis der Anonymisierung des Interviews und der vertraulichen Behandlung.

Beantworten Sie vor Beginn des Interviews offene Fragen.

- Bitte stellen Sie sich als Interview-Experte kurz vor (inkl. Firma, aktuelle Rolle in der Organisation und Erfahrung im Marketing).

Influencer-Marketingwissen:

1. Was bedeutet Influencer für Sie in wenigen Sätzen?

2. Welche Erfahrungen haben Sie bis heute mit Influencer Marketing gemacht?

- Positive und negative Details?

- Wann haben Sie mit Influencer Marketing begonnen?

3. Wie wichtig ist das Influencer Marketing für Ihre Organisation?

4. Ist das Influencer-Marketing Teil Ihrer Marketingstrategie?

Bitte erklären Sie, warum oder warum nicht!

5. Welche sozialen Medien Netzwerke für Influencer kennen Sie? Welche setzen Sie ein und warum verwenden Sie diese in Ihren Kampagnen?

6. Was ist das Hauptziel beim Einsatz von Influencer-Marketing in Ihrer Organisation?

(Bekanntheit, Leads, Verkauf, Unterstützung, Empfehlung usw.) Zweck der Nutzung?

Beginnend mit Influencer-Marketing:

7. Was waren die hauptsächlichen Herausforderungen bei der Einführung von Influencer Marketing in Ihrem Unternehmen?

Welche Hürden waren am Anfang zu überwinden?

Welche Fragen standen am Anfang im Raum?

Auf welche Art von Hindernissen/Blockierern sind Sie gestoßen?

Influencer - Suche - Bewertung - Auswahl:

8. Was sollte im Vorfeld klar sein bzw. welche Voraussetzungen sollten erfüllt sein, bevor man mit der eigentlichen Suche nach einem geeigneten Influencer-Kandidaten beginnt?

(z.B. Zielsetzungen, Zielgruppe, geographische Region, Demographie, ...)

9. Wie sieht der systematische Auswahlprozess der Influencer für Ihre Marke aus?

Wo suchen Sie nach Influencern (Soziale Netzwerke, Veranstaltungen, Forschung, Empfehlungen, Agenturen)?

Woher wissen Sie, welches das richtige soziale Medien Influencer-Netzwerk für Ihre Marke ist? Gibt es einen Evaluierungsprozess?

Wie kommen Sie mit den Influencern in Kontakt (direkt/indirekt, Online/Offline)? Wer kontaktiert sie?

Was erwarten Sie von ihnen als Vorleistung vor einer Kooperationsvereinbarung (Media Kit, Analytics-Daten, Follower Demographie, etc.)?

Wie stellen Sie sicher, dass die richtige Zielgruppe vom Influencer angesprochen wird?

10. Welche Art von Analyse und Bewertung nehmen Sie während der Suche nach einem potenziellen Influencer Kandidaten vor?

(Sozialaudit, Partner, Portfolio, Publikum, inhaltliche Qualität, Engagement Quote...)

Benutzen Sie irgendwelche Werkzeuge oder Bewertungssysteme, um sie zu bewerten?

11. Haben Sie ein Profil Ihres idealen Influencers erstellt? Was war bei der Erstellung des Profils des Influencers wichtig? Welche Kriterien verwenden Sie zur Bewertung des Influencers, um den qualifiziertesten Partner für eine Kampagne zu benennen?

(Reichweite, Anhänger, Inhaltstyp, Demografie, Engagement, Häufigkeit)

Qualitative Kriterien?

Quantitative Kriterien?

Methodische

Kompetenzen?

Gibt es so etwas wie eine Rangreihe bzw. Ranking? Welchen wählen Sie schlussendlich aus?

12. Für welchen Teil der Kundenreise/Customer Journey setzen Sie die Influencer ein? Was ist zu beachten, wenn Sie sie in anderen Abschnitten der Reise einsetzen wollen?

13. Ist es möglich, die gleichen Influencer weltweit/global einzusetzen? Wenn ja, welche Analyse muss vorher durchgeführt werden? Wie sieht es mit der Erschließung neuer Kanäle/Netzwerke im Ausland aus?

Erfolgsfaktoren für die Zusammenarbeit mit Influencern:

14. Wie sieht die Zusammenarbeit während einer Kampagne aus und was sind die Erfolgsfaktoren für eine langfristige Kooperation?

Welche Art von Briefing/Rahmen bieten Sie an? Gibt es einen Zeit- oder Inhaltsplan? Werden Einverständnisbeispiele gegeben?

Wird vorher ein Training angeboten?

Gibt es eine DO- und DON'T-DO-Liste, die dem Influencer zur Verfügung gestellt wird? Oder einen Verhaltenskodex?

Unterstützen Sie die Influencer in irgendeiner Weise? Wenn ja, wie sieht diese aus?

Erfolgsfaktoren für die Beziehung zu den Influencern:

15. Wie pflegen Sie die Beziehung zu den Influencern?

Gibt es ein Feedback zu den generierten Inhalten? Oder gibt es einen spezifischen Genehmigungsprozess für jeden Inhalt?

Interagieren Sie miteinander? Und wenn ja, wie oft?

Welche Erwartungen haben Sie nach Abschluss der Kampagne?

(Bericht/Feedback zu den Ansichten, Engagements, Anteilen usw.)

Erfolgsfaktoren für Influencer-Kampagnen:

16. Wie definiert man eine erfolgreiche Influencer-Kampagne zwischen einem Influencer und einer Marke in Ihrer Branche?

Wie messen Sie eine erfolgreiche Influencer-Kampagne, welche KPIs oder Metriken verwenden Sie?

Welche Art von Inhalten hat in Ihrer Branche den größten Erfolg und warum?

17. Welche Chancen sehen Sie im Influencer-Marketing in Ihrem Unternehmen?

18. Welche Bedrohungen sehen Sie durch Influencer-Marketing in Ihrem Unternehmen?

19. Wie steht Ihre Konkurrenz zum Thema Influencer-Marketing?

Setzen sie ebenfalls Influencer ein? Und wenn ja, setzen sie die gleichen Influencer ein? Wo sehen Sie den Unterschied im Einsatz von Influencern bei Ihren Mitbewerbern?

20. Was denken Sie über die Zukunft von Influencer-Marketing?

(Zu-/Abnahme, Neuigkeiten, Trends, Herausforderungen, Chancen)

Abschluss und Verabschiedung

Statement of Affirmation

I hereby declare that all parts of this thesis were exclusively prepared by me, without using resources other than those stated above. The thoughts taken directly or indirectly from external sources are appropriately annotated. This thesis or parts of it were not previously submitted to any other academic institution and have not yet been published.

Dornbirn, 26. July 2020

Malkoc Elvir