

Influencer Relations: Its Place in the World of Public Relations Today

Campbell Ferrick

Syracuse University

PRL 424: PR Management and Leadership

Professor D'Angelo

April 23, 2023

When thinking of a topic for this paper, I wanted to choose one that had shown major change over the last decade. As many of us know, the rise of social media has had a huge effect

on the public relations industry, and an even greater effect on how consumers interact with and behave toward brands, and all public-facing public relations clientele. For this reason, I wanted to research influencer relations and figure out why this facet of public relations has been so quick to grow over the past 10 years. So what are influencer relations? To someone not in the public relations industry this word might be unknown. Influencer relations, although sometimes similar, is different from influencer marketing, which is likely the dynamic that many people would first think of when defining influencer relations. By definition, “influencer relations is [the] building and maintaining [of] relationships with key individuals who can influence others' opinions, behaviors, and purchase decisions” (Brito, 2020). Influencer relations is the act of creating, and nurturing, a relationship between a client, for example, a brand, and influential social media users, deemed as influencers because of their ability to influence their followers, which are often large in number. To be an influencer is to be someone on social media who has a following that will take their advice, recommendations, and opinions seriously and often integrate these things into their own life. Noticeably this predicts a very impactful, highly engaged public when a brand joins a partnership with said influencers. Therefore, it has become increasingly important for public relations practitioners to be able to converse within the social media space and recognize who is getting listened to, who is getting positive attention, and who will be the most likely to put a spotlight on the practitioner's client. In a society that is now so dependent on the world of social media, the need for influencer relations has grown enormously.

So what does the structure of influencer relations look like? There are many different approaches, and most agencies or public relations practitioners' processes will be different, but in my research, I found a 12-phase step-by-step on how to perform effective influencer relations

which I thought did a great job of explaining how to best engage with influencers and their publics as a public relations practitioner. These are the 12 phases courtesy of Shannon Gallagher:

- **Phase 1: Influencer Program:** Here a team must decide on three key actions: “ objectives, budget, and brief” (Gallagher, 2020, #48). This is where an agency will determine what the goals of a campaign are, what they can afford to offer to influencers for partnerships, and have a clear conversation with the influencers involved about what’s expected out of them/how they can best match the campaign’s visions and objectives. These first steps are crucial.
- **Phase 2: Influencer Roster:** During this phase, an agency will conduct research on influencers, create a roster for approval, and confirm brand approval on the said roster. This organization allows influencer relations to run smoothly.
- **Phase 3: Influencer Outreach:** “Phase three is influencer outreach, which involves three actions: email pitch to influencers, influencer/agent evaluation for alignment, and influencers' response” (Gallagher, 2020, #50). This is where a brand will confirm that an influencer is on board with their message, and will also ideally possess the capability to be sincere in their postings/ads.
- **Phase 4: Influencer Proposal:** Proposals involve multiple pitches done by the influencer to the partnered brand of what their hopefully long-term relationship could look like and multiple examples of branded posts. “A proposal includes three parts: a menu of suggested execution items, high-level vision, and quote” (Gallagher, 2020, #50).
- **Phase 5: Proposal Approval:** “In this phase, the brand will approve high-level concepts from the influencer, make changes, or suggest revisions... There will be agreement on the number of posts, channels, platforms, timeline, and rates” (Gallagher, 2020, #51). During

this, a brand must be able to trust the influencer and recognize that they can properly get the brand's wanted message across.

- **Phase 6:** Statement of Work: Phase 6 is the contract process. This is where “the proposal becomes the basis for the legal contract, which is normally facilitated by the brand or agency commissioning the influencer” (Gallagher, 2020, #51). It is important that both the brand and influencer review and take part in this process as it provides security for both sides.
- **Phase 7:** Content Creation: Generally self-explanatory, this is where the influencer prepares for the creative side and pays attention to the content they're making for the brand, as to ensure it gets the wanted message across.
- **Phase 8:** Content Approval: This is where an influencer will send the created content for approval to the brand or agency, seeking either visual or editorial approvals. If an influencer is successful in the creation of the brand's desired content then it will be approved. If not, then additional edits will be sent back and revisions will be made.
- **Phase 9:** Posting Content: Often brands or agencies will give influencers a timeline or a schedule of when to post or desired posting times. With their approved and posted content “influencers are responsible for either alerting or sending screenshots and links as soon as possible to the commissioning partner [the brand]...This should take place shortly after posting with close monitoring by the brand and influencer for the first 24 hours” (Gallagher, 2020, #54).
- **Phase 10:** Content Interaction: “In the first 24 hours after content is posted the influencer monitors and interacts with audience comments, the brand should interact and ideally share content on their channels, and influencers or brand - depending on the objective of

the campaign, and depending on the stipulations of the contract - might pay to use the post as a social media advertisement” (Gallagher, 2020, #55).

- **Phase 11:** Post Reporting: During this phase, an influencer must come to the brand or agency with reports on post metrics screenshots. Which includes any feedback they’ve received on engagement rates and possible recommendations on how to have more perfected campaigns in the future.
- **Phase 12:** Payment: Finally phase 12, is when influencers will be paid by the brand or agency for their ads/posts. If an influencer’s content engagement was successful, this partnership will likely continue.

These 12 phases reflect the process of forming and building influencer relationships, nurturing the partnership, understanding what type of content will best match influencers’ demographics/followers, brainstorming, creating, and editing this content, so it presents both your client and the influencer in the decided upon and intended light so that it can be perceived properly by consumers and the influencer's followers, receive or surpass the projected engagement (clicks, likes, follows, sends, shares, comments, etc.), and finally nurture the relationship between the client and influencer through a payment for the content, described more figuratively, as saying thank you. I feel as though these steps best define how influencer relations work, and illustrate why influencers can work effectively and collaboratively with companies, brands, conglomerates, and all public relations clients within a world so dominated by social media and its influence.

In her journal on the subject, Gallagher explained that today’s influencers are “celebrities made in the social media landscape and our content creators in their own right... These influencers are part of what has been coined the attention economy or digital reputation

economy” (Gallagher, 2020, #38). So why is this definition key in defining the importance of influencer relations in the field of public relations? To start, I think that the term attention economy is an effective title for this phenomenon, and provides some reasoning as to why influencer relations has found itself positioned in a point of power and influence in the public relations industry. Without this population of influence, certain public relations clientele would be relying on standard practice public relations to garner attention, which is not to say these practices don’t work, but with the existence of influencers, and with the ability to form relationships with them, through gifting, partnerships, or contracts, public relations practitioners have been able to break into a whole new network of clients, and even larger, younger, more diverse publics. Influencer relations exist to be worked on by public relations practitioners as those with a skill set built for public relations are trained to create genuine connections, and relationships with these influencers, which allows for further growth for both a client and an influencer as well. Influencer relations might sound as though it’s very one-sided, but in reality, it is often a mutually beneficial relationship for both a PR client and the influencer they are forming this relationship with. This is because when many people look to influencers, they do take into account what kinds of brands they’re partnering with, what opinions they’re supporting through these partnerships, and how reputable their status may be by observing what clients these influencers are bringing into their digital space. No influencer wants to be portrayed in a negative light as that often encourages cancel culture and their reputation will usually take a hit. So influencers need to choose who they partner with very carefully, and through a PR department these relationships can be facilitated on a more professional and reputable level. It is also true that consumers when looking for who to follow, are going to take into account what other people think of them, meaning what their following demographics look like, or how much of their

media coverage outside of their profile is positive and encouraging growth. This is why it is increasingly important for public relations practitioners to be the ones who are forming and managing these relationships with influencers, as they are capable of making sure these partnerships or brand deals are properly portrayed and encourage positive engagement. According to an influencer sample response, 60% say they would prefer to work with public relations professionals over marketing teams when it comes to these partnerships with agencies' clientele (Gallagher, 2020, #42). This reports a perspective from the influencers themselves where they can identify that influencer relations are best handled by public relations practitioners, as explained by an influencer, Christine McNaughton, "I felt that public relations within a company would have handled influencer relations better than the marketing department... there were times where marketing didn't "get" some of the intricacies of a campaign that the public relations department probably would" (Gallagher, 2020, #43). If I haven't already gotten it across, I want to now; influencer relations is important to the field of public relations because it describes a relationship between public relations practitioners, their clients, and today's generation of "celebrities." Nurturing a relationship between businesses and their chosen influencers is needed to create long-term, effective campaigns that will reach a brand's desired publics, and then some 200,000 others that are tuned into the social media space but not yet the brand. Influencer relations offers longevity to the current business-to-consumer dynamic.

When discussing influencer relations there are a lot of key management considerations that must be taken into account. One very important consideration involves the watching of important trends in both consumer engagement levels and visual trends, in terms of content. Because influencer relations have to take the value of influencer marketing into account, here are

some key insights the practitioner should be aware of: as of 2022 global influencer marketing value is worth \$16.4 billion, with the leading platform for influencer marketing being Instagram, with an influencer market size of \$15.2 billion (Dencheva, 2023). This is a trend that practitioners should be aware of as they enter influencer relations, as it emphasizes just how important and valuable social media influencers are to the expansion of the worldwide market, essentially showing how worth it is for brands to engage in influencer relations. As there is so much growth in the credibility and the public's interactions with social media, practitioners must be able to identify the potential impact influencer relations would have on the organization they're supporting. This is why partnering with a credible and trustworthy influencer is needed because it will reflect positively on an agency and/or its client if they are involved with an influential and genuine content creator. It's also important that an agency and our brand be aware of the current visual and digital trends on social media so that their partnerships and ads are well received by social media users, and not seen as outdated or out-of-touch with what type of content is of the moment and/or trending. I have experienced this whilst participating in influencer relations, as I would make sure that the influencers I was forming partnerships with fit the aesthetic and vibe of the brand that I was working for. By doing so we were able to reach our target demographic as the influencers' followers positively received their postings and would redirect themselves to our brand page after content involving us was posted. It is important that an agency work on its research base analysis of the campaign, and should want to involve influencers in it. This will ensure that practitioners are intentionally choosing whom they partner with and know what kind of content they want to post, as they desire the ability to implement their intended messaging, and must do so through current on-trend content that will pair well with their intended promotional brand messages.

When it comes to best practices in influencer relations I found that my research highlighted the importance of a campaign having a custom outreach that matched with both the brand's and influencer's publics, the need for an agency and/or brand to pay attention to the social media space they were looking to get their message across on, and the need for an agency and/or brand to identify their campaign goals in order to best deliver their brand messaging. Of course, there are a lot of other best practices that I came across, but I found these three to be the most prominent in all of the successful influencer relational campaigns I reviewed. A prime example of an effectively done influencer campaign is Nike's continuous partnership with both well-known and influential athletes. Nike as a brand has been doing this campaign for quite some time, and yet it is always well received because the brand can keep up with the times, and cater to its demographics. "Today, both social media stars and athletes are influencers, and both can be extremely valuable marketing tools for brands" and Nike's campaigns prove this (Garrett & Forbes Business Council, 2021). Nike has perfected its ability to target its wanted audience with the needed best practice of custom outreach, as its campaigns often will go as follows: athlete partners with Nike and content/media will be posted → follower who is likely involved in sport sees followed athlete posting about or being featured in an ad for Nike → follower takes note that their favorite athlete supports and uses Nike products, and will then go and buy Nike gear and may even follow Nike's platform account → cycle continues. Another campaign that highlighted the importance of promoting on the right media platforms as a best practice is Dyson's campaign with pet parent influencers. "Pet influencers have a lot of pull on social media" so being aware of this, Dyson was able to push product awareness through a marketing campaign on Instagram with pet influencer partnerships where they allowed the influencers to have a lot of creative control, which evidently paid off (TREND, 2020). With the additional

intention of boosting its Instagram engagement Dyson was able to accomplish its campaign goals with results of 1 million views, 115,000 likes, and a 10% engagement rate, resulting in a very successful campaign overall (TREND, 2020). Finally, the beauty brand Glossier stands as a prime example of a brand being able to effectively deliver their intended brand messaging through influencer partnerships. Glossier was able to turn their “followers into advocates” leveraging their voices to spread their messages through the social media space (Schaffer, 2023). Glossier wanted to communicate that using Glossier was a lifestyle, something a person took joy in using everyday. Glossier was able to find its footing with a very specific demographic and was able to utilize this by essentially turning this demographic (which consisted of fans) into micro-influencers through the use of Glossier hashtags. The brand was also able to expand “on this engagement by connecting the more highly involved Instagramers in city-specific focus groups and making sure they [were] rewarded for their involvement in the brand’s growth” which formed partnerships with already established influencers who organically liked the Glossier brand (Schaffer, 2023). These three examples stand as ideal circumstances and results within the world of influencer relations.

As influencer marketing is projected to reach a five billion-plus industry in the United States in the coming years, influencer relations is now an essential part of public relations work. I predict that we will see many more successful brand and influencer collaborations in the following years, and I’m curious to see both how the media space changes and how public relations practitioners handle this change in terms of updated best practices, and changed key considerations of influencer relations. Public relations is all about connection and communication and through my research I have found that influencer relations, if done properly

can lead to many genuine connections between a brand and its wanted publics in today's social climate.

References

- Brito, M. (2020, July 6). *Influencer Relations: The New Relationship Marketing Model*. Michael Brito. Retrieved April 30, 2023, from <https://www.britopian.com/influencer-marketing/influencer-relations/>
- Dencheva, V. (2023, January 19). *Influencer marketing worldwide - statistics & facts*. Statista. Retrieved April 30, 2023, from <https://www.statista.com/topics/2496/influence-marketing/#editorsPicks>
- Gallagher, S. (2020). Influencer logic: How influencer relations works. *Journal of Professional Communication*, 6(2), 37-61. <https://mulpress.mcmaster.ca/jpc/article/view/4514>
- Garrett, C., & Forbes Business Council. (2021, November 21). *Home*. Forbes. Retrieved April 30, 2023, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/11/18/why-athletes-make-great-influencers/?sh=3703dc07b132>
- Schaffer, N. (2023, March 28). *Influencer Marketing Examples: 16 Compelling Case Studies*. Neal Schaffer. Retrieved April 30, 2023, from <https://nealschaffer.com/influencer-marketing-case-studies/>
- The Fashion Law. (n.d.). *From Fans to Nano Influencers, a Look at the Evolution of Influencer Marketing*. The Fashion Law. Retrieved April 30, 2023, from <https://www.thefashionlaw.com/fans-and-micro-micro-influencers-the-answer-to-growing/>
- TREND. (2020). *8 Insane (But True) Influencer Marketing Case Studies*. Trend.io. Retrieved April 30, 2023, from <https://www.trend.io/blog/influencer-marketing-case-studies>