



Instagram influencer's responsiveness to a small business outreach

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Introduction



Using influencers as a part of marketing strategy is not a novelty. However, the emergence of various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tik Tok, has increased the use of influencers in marketing, and also democratized their use immensely (McMullan, Laurell, & Pitt, 2022). Advertising in online environments is exceptionally competitive, so social media influencer marketing was formulated as a more refined advertising method than traditional ones, offering less overt, more subtle and authentic advertising (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

As the influencer's positive response to a brand's outreach is one of the first and most important steps in influencer marketing and a subsequent successful influencer-brand collaboration, this study aimed to explore Instagram influencer responsiveness to small business outreach. The analysis shows how different Instagram influencer size categories responded to the outreach of the selected brand, as well as which Instagram influencer size category is more inclined to accept an unpaid collaboration proposal (a free product in exchange for an Instagram wall post). As a result, we were able to make several practical recommendations that aim to improve an Instagram influencer outreach marketing strategy in the case of a small business of a similar size.

Methods



To determine the responsiveness of Instagram influencers to a brand's outreach, we chose a small business and the unknown brand Petification (IG:@petification) which operates in the pet industry niche, i.e. they make custom pet-themed digital and printed art. A single feed post campaign was carried out where the goals were to raise awareness of new products and the brand itself, as well as to increase considerations and conversions. Selected influencers for outreach had a follower count between 14K and 1.9M, and engagement rates from 0.55% to 69.54%. Usually, smaller accounts get more engagement (Oberlo, 2022). We also followed a common practice to interact and engage (follow and like) with chosen influencers before reaching out to them in order to increase the chances that they would positively respond to the brand's inquiry (Farmiloe, 2022; Ellis, 2017). The data of Instagram influencer profiles was obtained using Phlanx (phlanx.com) and HypeAuditor (hypeauditor.com) online platforms for social media analytics. This data included follower count, post number, average number of likes, average number of comments, and engagement rate. Our assumptions that smaller influencers with lower follower counts will be more eager to collaborate and, therefore, more responsive to Petification's outreach match the information provided in the literature. In this respect, we formulated a hypothesis H1 that states:

H1: A significantly higher number of influencers with a lower follower count will positively respond to a small business' outreach and consequently collaborate with it, compared to the influencers with a higher follower count.

Results



116 Instagram influencers of different follower counts and engagement rates were selected and eventually offered a collaboration proposal. The influencers were contacted in the span of approximately eight months, between July 2021 and March 2022.

Influencer response rate to the selected brand's outreach and collaboration proposal was 20.69% (24 influencers), whereas 14.66% (17 influencers) accepted and fulfilled the agreed upon collaboration terms (a free product/pet portrait in exchange for an Instagram feed post). A certain number of contacted influencers, 6.03% (7 profiles), responded to the brand's direct message but either refused the offer, wanted to change the offer significantly, or had accepted it but eventually failed to respond to the brand's follow-up inquiries that were necessary for proceeding with the collaboration process. One of the main parameters when selecting appropriate influencers was focused on their high engagement rates instead of relying solely on follower count. However, the relatively high mean values of the follower count parameter for both contacted influencers and those that collaborated with the brand show that reach, which depends on follower count, was also considered for influencer selection. The most effective outreach, with an almost 40% success rate, was achieved in the micro-influencer subcategory that has between 10K and 50K followers (9.48% of the total number of contacted influencers). There is a clear declining trend in outreach success rate and, therefore, the number of collaborations, with the rise of influencer follower count. The number of positive influencer responses to the Petification brand collaboration proposal significantly drops with the increase of influencer size, which supports the H1 hypothesis.

Table 1 Basic Instagram account metrics of 1. Petification brand, 2. contacted influencers and 3. influencers that collaborated

Instagram account metrics	Follower count	Posts number	The average number of likes	The average number of comments	Engagement rate [%]
1. Petification Instagram account	10,600	279	907	37	8.91
2. Mean contacted	199,655	1,044	10,812	201.6	8.30
3. Mean collaborated	99,100	908	6,727	112.4	11.90

Table 2 Mean engagement rates of different Instagram influencer sizes categories (Oberlo, 2022)

Number of Followers	1K – 5K	5K – 20K	20K – 100K	100K – 1M	>1M
Mean engagement rate [%]	4.84	1.70	1.22	1.06	1.23

Table 3 Distributions of 1. contacted influencers and 2. those who collaborated regarding their follower count category, and 3. outreach success rate within follower count category

Influencer category (follower count)	Nano	Micro		Macro		Mega	
	<10K	10K-50K	50K-100K	100K-250K	250K-500K	500K-1M	>1M
1. Influencers contacted [%]	0	24.14	23.28	31.90	10.34	7.76	2.59
2. Influencers collaborated [%]	0	9.48	0	4.31	0.86	0	0
3. Outreach success rate [%]	0	39.29	0	13.51	8.33	0	0

Conclusion



As the selected firm for this study was a small business and still unknown brand with limited advertising resources, nano-influencers and mega-influencers were out of the focus of its influencer marketing strategy. The reason was that, most likely, it would not have been able to meet the common mega-influencer collaboration demands. On the other hand, too many nano-influencers would have had to be collaborated with (and therefore given many more free products) for the intended reach. Therefore, the optimal influencer size and the main focus of this brand's influencer marketing strategy were micro and macro-influencers.

The positive response rate of influencers to Petification's collaboration proposal was 14.66% (17 out of 116 influencers). However, similar outreach efforts toward different influencer size categories produced different outreach response outcomes. The most effective outreach response was achieved in the micro-influencer category, which have between 10K and 50K followers (almost a 40% success rate). With the increase of influencer follower count, the positive response rate of contacted influencers significantly dropped, which supports the set hypothesis H1. Therefore, the main focus of a brand of this size in terms of influencer marketing should be pointed toward micro-influencers with between 10K and 50K followers. However, the results showed that a brand's outreach to macro-influencers offering an unpaid collaboration could have some success regarding the number of agreed collaborations. This shows that influencers choose brand collaborations not only based on the physical value that the brand offers, but instead on other factors and the influencer's perception of a particular brand. Due to the much bigger follower count of macro-influencers compared to micro-influencers, they have a more significant reach which, from the perspective of a brand, can compensate for the small number of positive outreach responses it receives. Thus, the influencer outreach strategy of a small business should not be exclusively pointed toward micro-influencers with relatively limited reach, but also toward the macro-influencer category (100K-500K followers).

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