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Influencer Selection in a Data-Driven Age: Analysis of the Impact of Data on Influencer Marketing Decisions

The case of the communication agency SA365

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Católica Porto Business School

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Abstract

This study explored the influence of data on influencer selection strategies within digital marketing campaigns, with a focus on the role of community managers. A case study approach was employed at the Portuguese communications agency SA365. Semi-structured interviews with community managers and relevant staff, along with participant observation and document analysis, provided insights into the decision-making process. Findings revealed that while data undeniably plays a pivotal role, a reliance on metrics alone is insufficient. Key performance indicators (KPIs) such as reach, engagement rate, and CPM (Cost Per Mille) were used to create an initial shortlist, followed by a qualitative assessment of factors including content style, authenticity, and brand alignment. Results highlight the need for a nuanced, holistic approach integrating both data and qualitative insights to ensure optimal influencer partnerships and campaign success.

Key-words: influencer marketing; community manager; communications agency; internship; case study; data-driven marketing.

Resumo

Este estudo explorou a influência dos dados nas estratégias de seleção de influenciadores em campanhas de marketing digital, com foco no papel dos gestores de comunidades. Foi utilizada uma abordagem de estudo de caso na agência de comunicação portuguesa SA365. Entrevistas semiestruturadas com gestores de comunidades e outro *staff* relevante, juntamente com observação participante e análise de documentos, forneceram informações sobre o processo de tomada de decisões. Os resultados revelaram que, embora os dados desempenhem inegavelmente um papel fundamental, a confiança apenas nas métricas é insuficiente. Foram utilizados indicadores-chave de desempenho (KPI) como o alcance, a taxa de *engagement* e o CPM (*Cost Per Mille*) para criar uma lista inicial, seguida de uma avaliação qualitativa de fatores como o estilo do conteúdo, a autenticidade e o alinhamento com a marca. Os resultados destacam a necessidade de uma abordagem holística e diferenciada que integre dados e percepções qualitativas para garantir parcerias ideais com influenciadores e o sucesso da campanha.

Palavras-chave: influencer marketing; gestor de comunidades; agência de comunicação; estágio; estudo de caso; marketing baseado em dados.

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Introduction

Social media's global reach exceeded 4.62 billion users in early 2022 (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022), and this widespread use has fundamentally shifted consumer interactions (Baboo et al., 2022). Within these interactions, influential social media users play a significant role (Bui, 2022). Consequently, social media influencers have become a prominent feature across various industries (Hugh et al., 2022), making them an integral part of brands' consumer targeting strategies.

Influencer marketing strategically uses individuals with large social media followings to influence the attitudes and behaviours of their followers. The influencer marketing industry, projected to reach \$24 billion by 2024, is experiencing a data-driven transformation (Geysler, 2024), and there is an increase on the industry's reliance on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and analytics to drive influencer selection.

This study investigates the community manager's importance on influencer selection strategies within communication agencies and how a mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) is used in that scenario. It aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do different types of data influence the selection and choice of influencers in digital marketing campaigns?

Addressing this first research question, the objective is to comprehend the influence of various data categories, including demographical data, psychographics, engagement metrics, and more, on the decision-making process regarding the selection of influencers in digital marketing campaigns.

This investigation seeks not only to discern how different types of data shape the strategies adopted by communications firms when collaborating with influencers but also to illuminate how these data-driven tactics influence the overall effectiveness and outcomes of influencer marketing efforts. Consequently, this research extends its purview to delve into the broader implications of data-driven influencer selection, exploring the impact it has on the tactics employed by communications agencies in their digital marketing collaborations with influencers.

RQ2: How does a data-driven influencer selection influence the effectiveness and outcomes of influencer marketing campaigns?

With this research question, the aim is to determine the degree to which influencer-driven marketing initiatives succeed and have an impact. To give readers a thorough grasp of how data, influencer choices, and campaign results interact in the context of digital marketing, this section of the article establishes the foundation for our later study.

This research seeks to address a potential gap in the academic literature by examining the interplay between data and qualitative factors in real-world influencer marketing decision-making. While existing research highlights the importance of both data-driven analysis and qualitative considerations, there's less focus on how these elements are balanced within a practical agency setting. An internship at the communication agency SA365, lasting four months and involving collaboration with the community management and other departments, exposed this gap. The scarcity of information on the community manager's role within a communication agency, along with a desire to build knowledge about this aspect of marketing, motivated the proposed research questions. This study aims to contribute significant insights into the field of

influencer marketing, providing valuable guidance for marketers seeking to understand this complex dynamic and ensure that data analysis is always interpreted within the broader context of qualitative factors.

A case study approach was deemed the most suitable research strategy for answering the research questions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather SA365 employees' perceptions of the community manager's role and relevance within the influencer selection process.

This study was structured into several chapters. The following chapter delves into the literature, examining influencer marketing's evolution, modern strategies, and selection dynamics. It emphasizes data-driven approaches, metric-based selection, and the critical role of non-data factors. The next chapter outlines the research methodology, including objectives, research questions, the chosen case study approach, and data collection/analysis techniques. Then, the next chapter presents the SA365 communications agency case study, investigating the role of community managers in influencer selection. It analyses their use of data, monitoring and metrics, and highlights the importance of a holistic evaluation that balances data with qualitative insights. Documents, interviews, and participant observation inform this analysis. Finally, the discussion and conclusion synthesize findings, address contributions and limitations, and suggest avenues for future research.

Chapter 1

Influencer Marketing Evolution, Modern Strategies and Data-Driven Selection Dynamics

1. Evolution of Influencer Marketing

Nowadays, social media empowers consumers with information and choice (Agnihotri, 2020) (Vieira et al., 2019), changing how they interact with brands. Due to growing distrust in traditional advertising, marketers are transitioning to influencer marketing to build authentic connections (Aw & Agnihotri, 2023). As posited by a Brown & Hayes (2008) study, influencer marketing uses individuals to influence consumer choices. Influencers build consumer trust more readily than other online sources, making their marketing less intrusive than traditional online ads (Chopra et al., 2021).

Early digital influencers, known as “bloggers”, shaped online content and social engagement (Rettberg, 2014). Their blogs allowed for a wider spread of information through social interaction, breaking down traditional dissemination barriers (McConnell et al., 2006). Now, the explosion of video platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube has transformed the media landscape, giving rise to “vloggers”. These video influencers share their lives and perspectives, influencing consumption decisions, especially among younger audiences. Vloggers integrate brands into their content and offer followers explicit product recommendation (Chen et al., 2023; De Jans et al. (2018).

Influencers' reach and trust make them strategic tools for brands, especially when targeting consumers who avoid traditional ads (Chopra et al., 2021). By building large niche audiences and becoming experts in specific areas,

influencers attract significant brand partnerships (Leung, Gu, & Palmatier, 2022). Influencers leverage skills and a relatable persona to create content and engage with followers on platforms (Jin et al., 2019) like Instagram, TikTok or YouTube. Direct interaction through comments and live chats further strengthens this connection (Sands et al., 2022). Brands hire influencers because of their significant influence on their followers to promote their products through influencer marketing in exchange for a fee. Consequently, many firms are leveraging influencer marketing to drive customer engagement and purchase behaviour (Barari, 2023).

1.1. The impact of the evolution of Influencer Marketing in the industry

Influencer marketing is a powerful modern marketing tool, but its roots lie in traditional advertising tactics that leveraged influential figures to persuade consumers. Social media has vastly expanded the reach and potential of this strategy, transforming how brands connect with their audience (Aspire.io, 2020). Influencer marketing's rapid growth demands a sophisticated approach from brands. Finding influencers who align with brand image and target audience is crucial, alongside tailored communication and relationship management (Agostino et al., 2019;Ouvrein et al., 2021).

Influencer marketing offers brands numerous benefits. By partnering with influencers who have established large, engaged followings, brands can significantly increase brand awareness and reach new audiences. Additionally, influencers are often seen as trusted figures within their niche, allowing brands to build credibility and authority by association. This leads to higher engagement with their target audience, ultimately generating leads and sales through targeted campaigns. Finally, influencer marketing offers trackable

metrics, allowing brands to measure campaign success and optimize their strategies (Brown & Fiorella, 2013).

Nowadays, there is a growing necessity to comprehend influencer marketing's effectiveness. It is of vital importance understanding the key mechanisms influencing influencer marketing effectiveness, as it can empower brands and influencers to optimize their campaigns, yielding better results and fostering more effective and collaborative partnerships that positively impact the industry (Hugh et al., 2022).

2. Strategies in Modern Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is overtaking celebrity endorsements as a modern marketing strategy. Like celebrities, influencers promote branded content (Waltenrath et al., 2022), but their niche communities and personalized connections with audiences make them more relatable and effective endorsers (Aw & Chuah, 2021). Influencer marketing poses intricate challenges for brand marketers. These challenges encompass the intricate process of identifying and selecting suitable collaboration partners (Carter, 2016) and grappling with the complexities of measuring campaign outcomes. The social media landscape adds to the complexity by being dynamic, fast-paced, and dispersed across various platforms.

Due to the sheer number of influencers on social media, marketers struggle to find those who match their brand's target audience and have the desired reach. This complexity, especially in multi-influencer campaigns, makes it difficult to both select and evaluate influencers. As a result, marketers often rely on metrics to measure the potential and actual impact of influencer marketing communications (Gräve, 2019).

2.1. Influencer Selection Dynamics

2.1.1. Data-Driven Influencer Marketing

Studies indicate that the suggestions put forth by influencers can notably shape the purchasing choices of their followers, underscoring the importance of managing consumer engagement. Influencers not only create content but also motivate their audience to enhance their engagement across various platforms. Social media marketing success hinges on finding influential figures who can transform potential customers into loyal buyers through authentic content that resonates with their audience (Venciute et al., 2023). However, declining trust in influencers underscores the cruciality for brands to partner with credible, relatable figures who genuinely align with their target customer's values and hold the power to influence purchasing decisions (Mscience, 2019). This underscores why data should be central to an influencer selection process.

The evolution of technology and the introduction of novel platforms with interactive features have significantly reshaped the landscape of the Internet. This transformation has shifted individual users beyond passive content consumers, positioning them as active participants and creators within the online realm (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013). Social media networks serve as conduits for diverse forms of content interaction, encompassing activities such as subscribing, (dis)liking, sharing, and commenting. These key metrics serve as benchmarks for measuring this engagement. Advertising firms depend critically on these metrics to refine their selection process and identify the most suitable influencers (Leung, Gu, Li, et al., 2022).

These user engagements generate a plethora of data and metrics, collectively constituting valuable information. A substantial portion of this information is openly accessible on social media platforms. Depending on the specific platform, various metrics, such as the number of followers on Instagram, likes

and comments on Facebook, or views of a post on YouTube, are perceptible to the public. While certain metrics, like the count of subscribers, bear intrinsic significance, others hold more abstract meanings, exemplified by actions such as clicking a Like button (Sumner et al., 2018).

Previously, brands might have relied on intuition or an influencer's follower count alone when making selections. However, the abundance of data now available empowers brands to go far beyond simple surface-level indicators. Metrics like engagement rates, audience demographics, and even the sentiment of comments can be analysed to ensure the most impactful partnerships. Social media provides a wealth of metrics that go beyond traditional measures, offering a nuanced view of audience engagement and influencer impact. This data-driven approach allows businesses to pinpoint influencers whose followers closely align with their ideal customer profile, so that campaigns can be better targeted, leading to greater resonance and potential conversions. Likes and comments offer readily visible engagement metrics - likes contribute to reach and signal interest, potentially driving traffic back to the influencer's original post, and comments provide both quantitative and qualitative insights. Comment volume and reply rates indicate post popularity, and benchmarks against the influencer's usual posts or similar influencers add context. Additionally, sentiment analysis delves into the nature of comments, revealing attitudes toward the content. Detailed comments hold more value than simple emojis or icons. While performance metrics like lead conversion and ROI ultimately matter, these require access to back-end data. However, tracking brand attitude changes over time among followers provides valuable insights into a campaign's long-term impact (Bakker, 2018).

Wies et al. (2023) found an inverted U-shaped relationship between influencer follower count and sponsored content engagement. This relationship is moderated by content customization and brand familiarity, while being

influenced by factors like audience demographics and content style. With increasing influencer marketing budgets and a growing pool of influencers, finding the optimal fit ("Goldilocks" influencers) becomes complex (Wies et al., 2023). Given influencer marketing's importance, a systematic approach to influencer selection is crucial (Jha & Ray, 2023).

2.1.1.1. Metrics-Based Approach to Influencer Selection and its Effectiveness

In influencer marketing, the core concept involves identifying and targeting influential users, encouraging them to endorse a brand or specific products through their social media activities. Like other word-of-mouth marketing strategies, a key challenge lies in pinpointing a suitable opinion leader or influencer (Araujo et al., 2017). While a higher number of followers can amplify the reach of the (commercial) message and harness the potency of word-of-mouth at scale, today, follower count is often employed as a primary metric for identifying influencers on social media. Given that a substantial number of followers and likes often translate into a broad dissemination of the (commercial) message, these metrics remain pivotal for brands, influencer agencies, and platforms in the quest to pinpoint suitable influencers for their campaigns. However, this reliance on follower and like counts also opens the door to unscrupulous practices, with influencers resorting to purchasing fake followers and likes—via bots and clickfarms—to artificially boost their perceived influencer status. This dual-edged phenomenon may lead to unsatisfactory outcomes for brands as their influencer marketing campaigns fall short of objectives. Moreover, if the public discovers that their favourite influencer has engaged in such practices, it may erode trust, labelling the

influencer as fraudulent and prompting negative reactions, including unfollowing (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Various studies have explored methods for measuring online opinion leadership and identifying opinion leaders. Notably, assessing audience size or the number of followers is frequently emphasized as the initial step in identifying opinion leaders. For instance, Zhang & Dong (2008) developed a roadmap for identifying online opinion leaders in virtual communities, with the first step being the identification of active users with a large following. A substantial number of followers can enhance the exertion of opinion leadership, facilitating the rapid and widespread dissemination of ideas, thereby strengthening interpersonal influence. However, the extent to which consumers process this information and utilize it to evaluate influencers on social media, particularly in terms of opinion leadership, remains uncertain (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Hence, this study aims to investigate the actual significance of different types of metrics in shaping attitudes. Leveraging my experience from an internship in a communication agency's community management department, where extensive work with influencers and metrics occurred, the research seeks to discern the real-world impact of these metrics, assessing whether their importance aligns with common perceptions. Furthermore, the study endeavours to uncover non-quantitative factors that play a role in attitude formation, exploring influences on attitudes towards both the influencer and the brands they promote.

2.1.2. Non-Data Factors in Influencer Selection

It is crucial to emphasize that selecting the right influencers for a campaign should consider factors beyond just data. Despite the increasing demand for

data-driven methods in determining the landscape of Influencer Marketing, a review of prior studies on social influencers (Abhishek & Srivastava, 2021; Leung, Gu, Li, et al., 2022) in this area reveals a scarcity in addressing the challenge of accurately estimating an influencer's influence or reach. Influencers may only wield influence within specific niches, and investing solely in macro-influencers may not fully optimize marketing budgets (Borges-Tiago et al., 2023).

For instance, Fang & Wang (2022) applied natural language processing and content-based metrics to identify effective influencers, enabling marketers to predict optimal choices. Similarly, Gräve (2019) challenged the adequacy of common quantitative success metrics, advocating for the inclusion of content-based metrics and sentiment analysis to comprehensively evaluate influencer performance.

Chapter 2

Research Methodology

1. Objectives and Starting Points

This chapter aims to present the questions that served as the starting point for the research, as well as the method used to answer them - the case study - and the data collection and analysis techniques used. It revisits the study's core objectives and the fundamental questions driving the research. The objective is to understand how various types of data influence influencer selection decisions within digital marketing campaigns. Therefore, two central research questions guide this investigation: firstly, how do factors like demographics, psychographics, and engagement metrics shape influencer selection choices, and, secondly, how does this data-driven approach to influencer selection impact the overall effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns.

1.1. Research Approach: The Case Study

This research uses qualitative methods and purposive sampling to provide a detailed description of a phenomenon and build a deeper understanding of it (Carminati, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Levitt et al., 2018). Unlike quantitative research, the goal is not to quantify, but to explore diverse perspectives and interpretations (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000).

To grasp the impact of data on influencer selection and its implications for the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, the study delves into the role of the community manager in a communications agency. Additionally, it seeks insights from employees at the SA365 communications agency and employs

direct observation within an organizational context. Given the need for in-depth exploration, a qualitative case study approach was deemed essential. This paper uses this case study approach, which is well-suited for addressing "how" and "why" research questions, particularly when there is no need for control over behavioural aspects, and the emphasis is on understanding current events (Yin et al., 2018). However, Ary et al. (2019) also wrote that "case studies can answer descriptive questions (what happened), and the underlying question in case studies is what are the characteristics of this particular entity, phenomenon, person, or setting?" A case study is not just a data collection technique, but a research strategy for in-depth study of a phenomenon within its context (Yin et al., 2018; Priya, 2021). Researchers use multiple data sources to gain a rich understanding of complex issues in their real-world settings. Case studies are a well-established research method, particularly in the social sciences (Crowe et al., 2011).

2.1.1. Data collection methods and analysis

This research utilized participative observation, document analysis, and interviews as data collection methods. Participative observation occurred during the curricular internship at the communications agency SA365, spanning from September 2023 to January 2024, specifically within the Community Management department. Qualitative interviews help researchers understand behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, and values (Oakley, 1998). Structured interviews, often used in surveys, have a set of questions for gathering this information. They also include in-depth open-ended questions for detailed responses (Bryman, 2016; Jamshed, 2014), and are employed to gather participants' career narratives with the objective of achieving data saturation (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Utilizing research methods like participant observation and semi-structured interviewing allows the researcher to maintain

an open-minded approach towards understanding the subject, enabling the emergence of concepts and theories directly from the gathered data (Bryman, 2016).

To acquire genuine perspectives on the opinions of SA365 communication agency employees regarding the role of the community manager and the relevance of data-driven influencer selection, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two interview protocols targeting two distinct groups: SA365's community managers and other employees extensively engaged with the community management department and influencer data analysis. These interview scripts comprised clear, neutral open-ended questions and are available in Appendices 1 and 2, respectively.

Ultimately, six interviews were conducted, comprising two with Community Managers, one from the Business Intelligence team, one with experience in both the Community Management and Business Intelligence teams, one from the Media, Business Intelligence, and Planning department, and one serving as an Account Manager (Table 1).

	Gender	Age	Role/Function	Education	Involvement in Influencer Marketing
Interviewee A	Female	25	Community Manager	Bachelor's Degree	On the front line of recommending influencers and analysing their performance on a campaign.
Interviewee B	Male	27	Strategy Director	Post-graduate course	Develops and executes influencer marketing strategies for optimal brand alignment and goal achievement.
Interviewee C	Female	26	Community Manager	Master's Degree	On the front line of recommending influencers and analysing their performance on a campaign.
Interviewee D	Female	27	Account Manager	Master's Degree	Acts as the primary contact for the client, managing expectations and ensuring alignment between campaign goals and influencer selection.
Interviewee E	Female	31	Business Analyst	Post-Graduate Course	Compiles and interprets metrics.
Interviewee F	Female	26	Community Manager/Business Analyst	Bachelor's Degree	Compiles and interprets metrics, having had previous experience in the CM role.

Table 1 - Sample characterisation.

The duration of each interview ranged from 25 to 60 minutes. The participants, aged between 25 and 31 years old, primarily consisted of females (n=5). Every participant had higher education qualifications: master's degrees (n=2), post-graduate courses (n=2), and bachelor's degrees (n=2). Their educational backgrounds spanned across Journalism, Marketing, Communication, Management, Advertising, and Data Analysis. In terms of professional background, three interviewees had prior experience working at an agency and had already engaged with influencers.

Chapter 3

The Case Study: SA365's Approach to Influencer Selection.

1. Agency characterization

Present in Brazil and Portugal, SA365 is a communications agency belonging to the E.Life group, a global consultancy specialising in market intelligence (Table 2). Positioning itself as experts in innovation and marketing strategies, SA365 is responsible for the communication strategy of nationally and globally recognised brands such as Continente, Uber, Kia, Worten, Prio, Hertz, among others. Dedicated to the fusion of innovation and creative strategies, it carries out activities relating to digital communication, consultancy, brand monitoring, community and influencer management, platform development, advertising, audiovisual production, and media buying and optimisation (SA365, 2023).

Under the motto "Hard strategy, creative solutions", SA365 assumes the position of a creative business partner for its clients. Its working method is to base creative communication strategies on data and intelligence in the agency's various areas of activity. Its vision is to transform the advertising market by establishing creative partnerships that are genuinely focused on clients' business objectives. To this end, SA365's mission is to promote a better relationship between brands and people based on data, creativity and innovation (SA365, 2023).

Legal name	CLVR365 AGÊNCIA DE COMUNICAÇÃO, LDA.
Type of organisation	Private subsidiary (80%) of E.LIFE MONITOR, LDA.
Legal structure	Limited company
VAT Number	515094994
Date of establishment	27/09/2018
Share capital	5.000 EUR
Headquarters	Rua da Restauração, 83 3º 4050-503 Porto Portugal
Activity description	Advertising services, including consultancy, design and production of material.
Number of Employees <i>(in 2022)</i>	36
Operational Income <i>(in 2022)</i>	2.736.283 EUR
Turnover <i>(in 2022)</i>	2.718.129 EUR

Table 2 - Legal characterisation of communication agency SA365.

Source: SABI (2023). Own elaboration.

SA365 employs a functional organizational structure characterized by decentralized work distribution through dedicated departments for various organizational functions (Figure 1). This framework emphasizes a division of responsibilities based on specific functions within the company. The structure

enables efficient management and specialization within each department, fostering a focused approach to tasks and responsibilities.

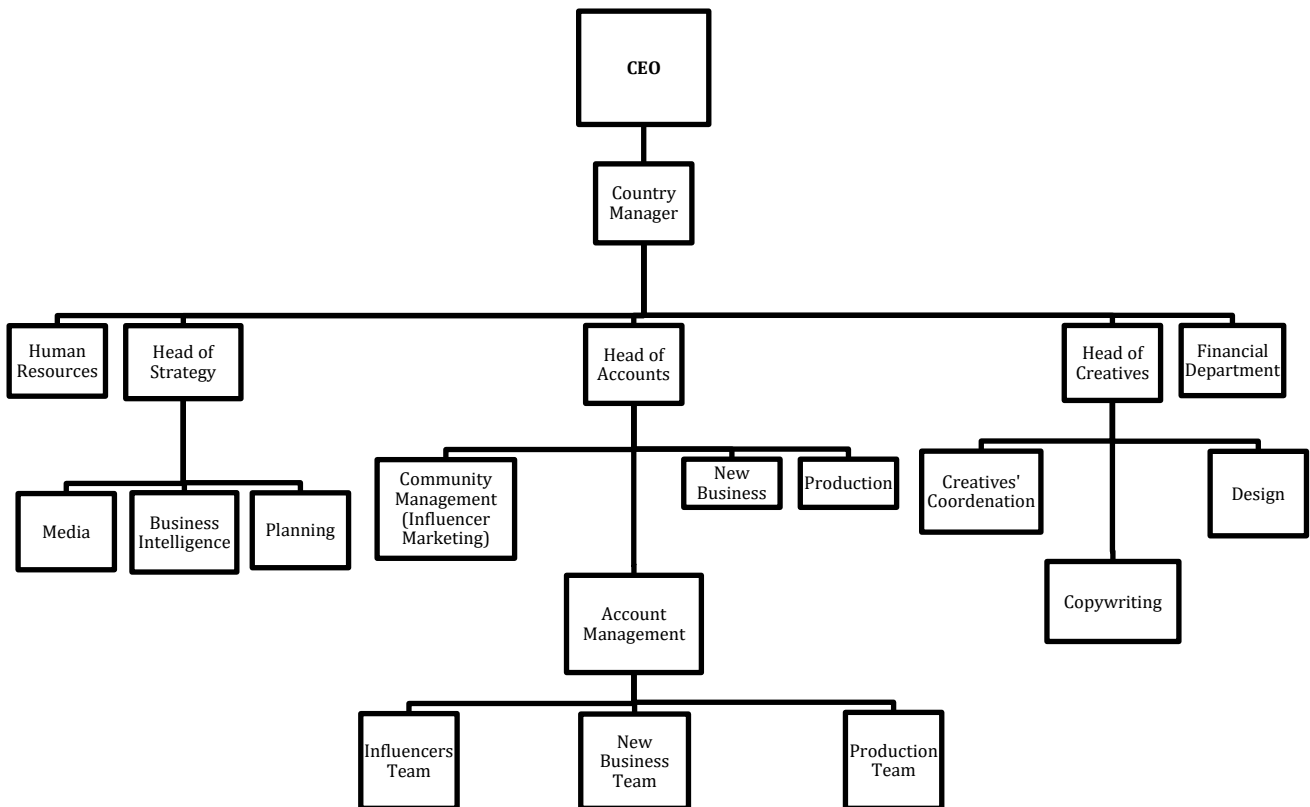


Figure 1 - SA365's organisational chart.
Source: SA365. Own elaboration.

2. The Community Manager Department: its role on influencer marketing campaigns

Throughout the internship, it was possible to see that the Community Manager (CM) role plays a crucial frontline role in selecting influencers based on both metrics and qualitative criteria. This section will delve into a comprehensive analysis of SA365's Community Management department.

The department is responsible for providing the best experience for the public by maintaining the relationship between influencers and/or agencies and the brand (which has a direct impact on its reputation). To do this, it is necessary to assume a tone of voice, interact on social networks, analyse perceptions and behaviours to know how and when to act in different types of scenarios.

KEY ROLES:
Monitoring and Social Listening
Relationship and Customer Service 3.0 (responding)
Influencers (mapping and strategy)
Crisis Management
Brand perception studies, trends, journeys, and behaviours

Table 3 - Community Manager's Key Roles.
Source: Own elaboration.

The role of the community manager extends beyond mere monitoring, response, and metric analysis (Table 3). A qualitative perspective is crucial for comprehending the perceptions and behaviours of both brands and users within the digital realm. Using these insights, the team collaborates with the Business Intelligence, Planning, and Creation departments to analyse information and steer the overall strategy. Consequently, seamless integration among these areas is imperative for achieving optimal results.

Influencers encompass a diverse range of personalities who actively generate content across various social networks, and cultivate devoted followings, fostering a sense of trust among their audience for the narratives they share. They are categorized based on their follower count, spanning Nano (up to 10.000), Micro (up to 50.000), Mid (up to 500.000), Macro (up to 1.000.000), and

Mega (exceeding 1.000.000). Regarding influencer selection for specific campaigns, a Community Manager assumes a pivotal role. The process involves a combination of manual efforts and the utilization of specialized tools. It becomes imperative to align the influencer profile with the client's objectives and ensure compatibility with the brand.

The advantages for brands engaging with influencers are multifaceted. They include the persuasive power of testimonials, the establishment of trust and credibility, humanization of the brand, fostering closer dialogues with the audience, achieving a broader and/or more targeted reach of users, heightened visibility, and the cultivation of brand loyalty, among other benefits. Thus, the Community Manager's adeptness in navigating this intricate landscape contributes significantly to the success of influencer-driven campaigns.

2.1. The meaning of data for Community Managers: monitoring and metrics' analysis

In this role, responsibilities encompass the collection of metrics derived from influencers' posts, whether gathered manually or extracted through platforms like Primetag¹ or Buzzmonitor². The tasks also include the thorough analysis of interactions, comments, and feedback associated with the content, culminating in the creation of a comprehensive report for the final evaluation of the campaign (Figure 2).

¹ Primetag is a software tool for brands and agencies to measure and optimize their influencer campaigns, focusing on influencer marketing analytics.

² Buzzmonitor is a social media listening tool that lets one track mentions of a brand or industry online.



Figure 2 - Working method for tracking and analysing metrics.

2.1.1. Data-driven influencer selection

Portugal's influencer marketing landscape has evolved dramatically. What started with simple product placement and a focus on follower counts has become more sophisticated, with brands recognizing the potential for deeper engagement and impact. Increased competition drives innovation, meaning brands do not just participate in influencer marketing – they strive for excellence. This translates to strategic, data-driven decision-making to fully unlock the power of influencer partnerships.

Choosing the right influencer starts with analysing metrics like impressions and reach, as they reveal the potential exposure and visibility of a campaign. The importance of each metric depends on the objectives – prioritizing impressions and reach for sheer exposure or focus on engagement rate if you want to spark conversations and create a positive brand perception. Aligning influencers with clear objectives ensures a strategic approach, maximizing the potential success of the campaign. Data is not just for selection – it also enables performance tracking against KPIs, allowing the brand to make informed decisions about an influencer's ability to drive the desired outcomes. Table 4 details the key metrics for influencer selection, emphasizing those deemed most important during the internship.

Cost per Mille (CPM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ad expense for reaching 1000 people.
Impressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The total number of times content is displayed, indicating potential audience exposure.
Reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The total number of unique individuals who see content, measuring the extent of audience outreach.
Engagement Rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure of audience interaction, indicating influencer impact.
Ad Saturation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency of influencer promotions.
Demographical Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on influencer's audience, aiding targeted and relevant campaigns.
Audience Resonance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When people strongly connect with content because they feel understood or deeply related to it.
Brand Affinity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the brands with which an influencer's followers interact the most, providing a sense of the preferences and interests of the influencer's audience.
Audience Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trustworthiness of influencer's followers, crucial for campaign authenticity.
Audience Overlap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which the same individuals or users are present in multiple target audience segments.

Table 4 - Key metrics when choosing an influencer.
Source: Own elaboration.

The initial stages of analysing an influencer involve requesting specific data points such as impressions, reach, and the cost for the content required. This information enables the Community Manager to calculate the estimated CPM and project the expected number of impressions and reach for the campaign. It

is crucial for the client to have a sense of what to anticipate from the influencer. These initial data points act as benchmarks and KPIs, allowing the client to gauge whether the influencer surpasses or falls below their average metrics later. Additionally, they help assess whether the influencer's rates align with the client's campaign budget, determining if they are costly or affordable, and helping the decision-making process.

The cost per thousand impressions (CPM)³ adds a financial dimension, allowing a cost-effective evaluation of the campaign's reach. It measures the cost incurred for a thousand impressions, providing advertisers with insights into the efficiency of their investment. A lower CPM suggests that the campaign is reaching a larger audience for the same budget, indicating better value. This metric is particularly crucial in optimising advertising budgets and maximising the campaign's overall effectiveness.

Primetag provides accessible graphics offering a market value overview in Portugal. This serves as a benchmark, establishing a maximum threshold for influencer costs (Table 5). For instance, consider an influencer with approximately 67K followers falling within the 50-100K category, where the average CPM for such influencers is 32€, in 2022 - if the calculated CPM for this influencer is 43€, surpassing the market average, it signals a relatively higher cost. This variance may prompt reconsideration, as it suggests that opting for this influencer could exceed the typical expense, influencing the decision not to proceed with their collaboration.

³ To calculate CPM, one must divide the total cost of the advertising campaign by the number of impressions and then multiply the result by 1000 to get the cost per thousand impressions.

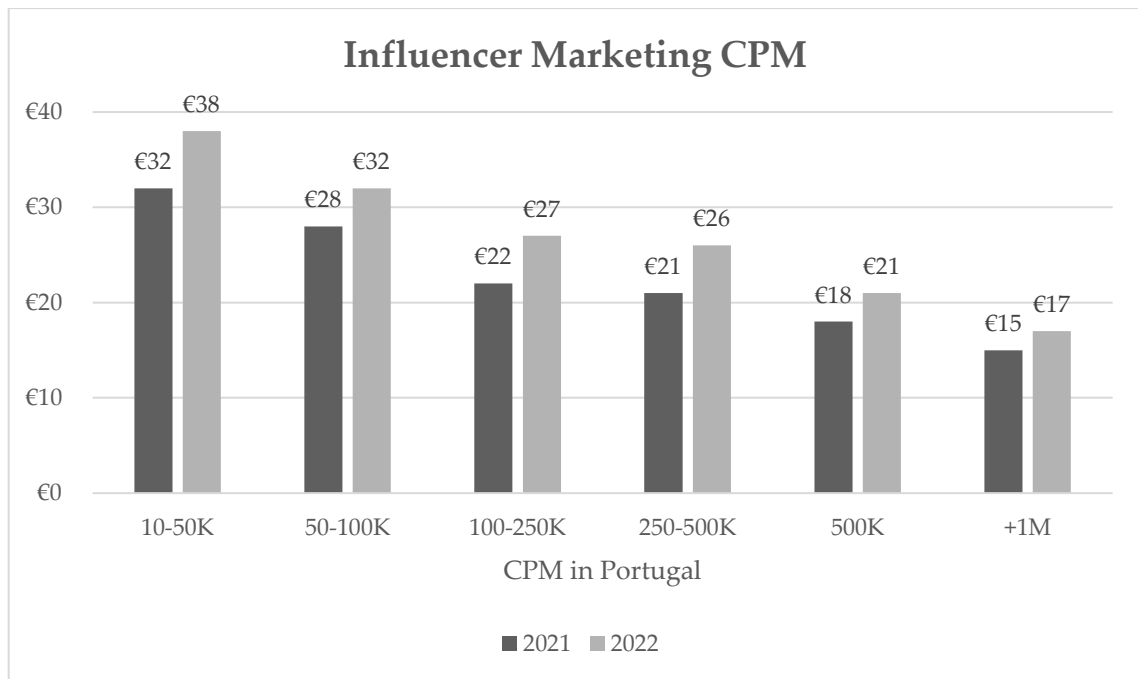


Table 5 - Influencers' CPM market value from 2021 and 2022, in Portugal.
Source: Primetag (2022).

To calculate the CPM, essential metrics include the influencer's impressions count and their campaign fee. These figures serve as the basis for estimating impressions and the CPM, pivotal in evaluating campaign efficacy. Additionally, understanding the influencer's current reach is crucial for estimating the overall reach and accurately assessing the anticipated impact and resonance of the campaign.

Another highly significant metric to consider is the influencer's engagement rate. This metric measures the level of interaction and connection between the influencer and their audience. A high engagement rate indicates that the influencer's content resonates well with their followers, fostering meaningful interactions such as likes, comments, shares, and clicks. It reflects the effectiveness of the influencer's ability to engage and retain their audience's attention, which is essential for the success of any influencer marketing campaign. Typically, an influencer is deemed acceptable if they maintain a minimum engagement rate of 2.00%.

CPM and engagement rate stand out as pivotal metrics when evaluating an influencer's suitability for a campaign. However, assessing these metrics devoid of context fails to grasp the broader picture. That is why it is imperative to request updated metrics directly from the influencer. Relying solely on past data might obscure the current scenario; influencers might cherry-pick content with superior results, masking less favourable outcomes. Such discrepancies could strain the influencer-brand relationship if the campaign's actual performance falls short of expectations based on inflated metrics. Therefore, transparency is key. It is crucial for influencers to maintain honesty and integrity by presenting accurate metrics, ensuring a trustworthy partnership with the brand, as evidenced by one of the interviewed community managers.

"Usually, the first metrics we delve into are the engagement rate and CPM. When we assess an influencer's profile, we examine their budget and statistics. Typically, we request data from the last 15 days to ensure it is as up to date as possible, emphasizing the importance of authenticity in these numbers. Some individuals would only pick their best-performing content and exclude others when presenting statistics. [...] It is more beneficial to provide a comprehensive view of performance, even if it means acknowledging areas where improvement may be needed. Failing to do so not only hinders accurate reporting but also strains ongoing relationships. [...] CPM holds significant weight in our evaluations. At the close of each year, Primetag furnishes us with a comprehensive document outlining market values based on the preceding year. This serves as a valuable benchmark for gauging CPM performance. With these references, we can determine if an influencer's CPM aligns with market standards for their profile size, allowing us to assess its adequacy or disparity."
(Interviewee A)

A careful understanding of ad saturation is beneficial for both influencers and marketers. Ad saturation describes the degree to which an influencer's content is interspersed with advertisements. When promotional content becomes overwhelming, it can negatively impact the influencer's relationship with their audience, potentially eroding their credibility. For marketers, evaluating an influencer's ad saturation is crucial. A brand associating itself with an influencer who constantly promotes numerous products risks being seen as inauthentic by the influencer's audience. This can be calculated by analysing the ratio of an influencer's sponsored content compared to their overall content output over a specific period (typically 365 days). For instance, if an influencer posts about paid promotions 25% of the time (total sponsored posts in the last year / total posts in the last year * 100), it might be a cause for concern for potential brand partners.

Here is where influencer type becomes a key factor. Industry benchmarks, like Primetag for example (Figure 3), exist for ad saturation, varying depending on the influencer's category (micro, macro, mega influencer, etc.). If an influencer has a 25% ad saturation rate and the benchmark for their influencer category is around 18%, this suggests they have more advertised content than the average influencer in their tier. In this case, a marketer might choose to partner with an influencer whose ad saturation aligns more closely with industry standards to optimize the effectiveness of their campaign.

	All	Tourism	Fashion	Tech	Beauty	Food & Bev.	Auto	Retail	Sports
10K+	16,41%	14,01%	14,03%	15,76%	21,30%	11,08%	2,22%	14,80%	17,86%
50-100K	15,64%	14,56%	15,70%	11,20%	16,38%	14,40%	13,45%	11,36%	10,43%
100-250K	17,55%	28,17%	20,40%	7,39%	27,49%	17,66%	11,11%	14,50%	16,57%
250-500K	19,86%	6,47%	21,78%	5,02%	29,07%	6,32%	14,32%	25,86%	17,36%
500K+	23,66%	5,96%	27,60%	12,28%	28,23%	6,35%	3,87%	27,43%	19,81%

Figure 3 - Ad saturation breakdown per industry and number of Instagram followers. Source: Primetag (2021).

Audience demographics are crucial for ensuring targeted and relevant content creation. An influencer focused on a young, urban, fitness-oriented audience will likely have followers aged 18-25 in metropolitan areas with strong health and lifestyle interests. Brands can use this demographic data to align their products or services. For example, a fitness apparel brand would find this influencer's audience highly receptive to a campaign promoting activewear for young, health-conscious urbanites.

Other important metric worth mentioning is the audience resonance, which is the degree of connection or engagement that a message, piece of content, or campaign creates with a particular audience, and it serves as a gauge of how well communication is working to elicit a response or reaction from that audience. Brand affinity holds significance in aligning influencer values with the brand's identity, fostering genuine audience connections. Yet, it is not

always accurately captured, especially when influencers discuss brands without tagging them. Thus, Community Managers need expertise and market experience to interpret metrics alongside contextual understanding, acknowledging technology's limitations in capturing nuanced data.

Primetag also helps identify bot followers (through audience credibility), which refers to fake social media accounts created to artificially inflate an influencer's follower count and engagement metrics. A high number of bot followers damages an influencer's credibility because it suggests their audience size and influence are inauthentic. Additionally, Primetag also provides the option to request an audience overlap which denotes the point of crossover or similarity between various audience segments. It happens when several target audiences have comparable traits, passions, or demographics. This tool aids in deciding between reach or frequency strategies. For maximum exposure, one should select influencers with minimal follower overlap, and for repeated messaging, target influencers with significant overlap. Primetag also calculates the overall unique reach potential and the impact of each individual influencer on the campaign performance.

One must recognize that campaign success depends on aligning metrics with overarching goals. When looking at metrics from a campaign (Table 6), these should be considered within the campaign's context to ensure the chosen influencer resonates with the brand and drives desired results. Understanding the 'why' behind metrics like engagement rate and CPM helps one gauge audience interaction and overall campaign effectiveness.

Month	Nr. of Influencers	Total Impressions	Total Reach	CPM	Estimated CPM	CPM Market Value Comparison	Nr. of Content Created	Content Differential	Engagement Rate
January	15	326528	313764	5,82€	3,75€	-84,33%	106	29	5,42%
February	16	321262	303623	6,23€	4,13€	-83,26%	91	12	8,45%
March	17	414579	379805	5,07€	4,80€	-86,40%	87	-4	11,01%
April	17	750666	676488	2,80€	4,13€	-92,49%	88	5	7,74%
May	17	343099	321069	6,12€	5,19€	-83,57%	122	29	5,19%

Table 6 - Illustration of a reporting dashboard presenting the influencer's performance to date, either throughout the campaign or at its conclusion. Source: Adapted from the data studio document.

This approach ensures that the metrics are not just numbers on a screen but meaningful indicators of the campaign's effectiveness and impact. This is why the role of data emerges as fundamental. Ensuring clear communication and managing client expectations rely heavily on providing realistic estimates of campaign outcomes grounded in thorough data analysis, as mentioned by an interview with the account manager. Data serves as the linchpin in guiding clients through the decision-making process, enabling informed choices between various marketing avenues, including influencer campaigns.

"We have two critical aspects regarding data: firstly, managing client expectations, which is crucial in my role, especially when they request actions involving influencers or content creators. [...] We need to analyse with the client the expected results from these actions and profiles. This analysis significantly influences their decision to pursue an influencer campaign. It is crucial that our data is realistic and positive to avoid disappointing the client. We aim for genuine data that enhances our

chances of success in the campaign and helps us manage client expectations effectively. This initial phase is where data plays a significant role in my responsibilities.” (Interviewee D)

Influencer campaigns offer cost-effective brand humanization compared to traditional channels. To maintain client relationships, delivering results that meet or exceed expectations is essential. Data-driven insights are crucial for shaping future campaigns and building trust. Therefore, data is the foundation for effective influencer marketing, facilitating complex decision-making and client success. Marketers must constantly monitor data to assess influencer marketing performance and make necessary adjustments. This proactive approach allows for early problem identification and ensures campaigns remain goal oriented. Prioritize effectiveness over absolute accuracy, as real-time data analysis promotes strategic optimization for maximum Return on Investment (ROI), as mentioned by the account manager. Adaptability is essential in data-driven influencer marketing. Insights might necessitate shifts in campaign strategy, while continuous data analysis fosters collaboration and the flexibility to explore alternative approaches for better results.

“The second significant aspect involves evaluating the outcomes of the campaign. We assess how influencers conveyed messages, whether they met qualitative expectations, and adhered to briefing guidelines. This evaluation encompasses both qualitative and quantitative results, such as CPM and impressions, which influence the brand’s decision to continue collaborating with specific influencers. While other factors like audience relevance and niche targeting are considered, clients primarily focus on the cost-effectiveness of influencer campaigns compared to paid media. Influencer campaigns offer a humanized brand association that paid media struggles to achieve. Therefore, it’s vital for the actual results to align with or surpass the

initial estimates, as this determines whether brands maintain relationships with influencers and invest in future campaigns. As a result, data plays a crucial role in my role, especially in defending reports to clients and addressing discrepancies between expected and actual outcomes.” (Interviewee D)

This highlights how data significantly influences the choice of influencers in marketing efforts. Firstly, data helps predict campaign outcomes, ensuring they meet client expectations and campaign objectives, and plays a crucial role in deciding whether influencer collaborations are more effective than other marketing methods. After the campaign, analysing data helps assess the performance of influencers and determine whether to continue working with them.

Data-driven influencer marketing supports strategic decisions, strengthens client relationships, and enhances campaign success. Continuous monitoring allows for real-time adjustments, maximizing target audience resonance. Comparing campaign engagement against an influencer's baseline reveals audience preferences and thematic strengths. This informs content curation for greater impact, ultimately driving deeper audience connections and meaningful brand interactions, as evidenced by the community manager interview.

“Consider a scenario where a profile has an impressive CPM and ticks all the qualitative boxes, yet its engagement falls slightly short. Sometimes, engagement metrics can be relative, prompting the need for ongoing monitoring to assess whether engagement is raising or not. Consequently, when generating reports, we closely examine the campaign’s engagement in comparison to the profile’s, gauging alignment which can vary significantly. This approach delves into audience resonance, providing insights into engagement within specific themes or niches. When scouting for content, I often narrow down the search to

focus on these areas, recognizing that certain profiles may excel within particular themes or niches. (Interviewee A)

Furthermore, parametrized links and related tracking systems are essential for assessing how well an influencer converts prospects into paying consumers. Marketers can track the user journey from the influencer's content to the point of sale or conversion by using these links, which are frequently embedded with unique IDs. Through a close examination of conversion rates, sales attributable to certain influencers, and consumer actions following engagement, marketers can discern the effectiveness of influencers in generating conversions. Based on real ROI and customer acquisition KPIs, such data gives marketers concrete proof of an influencer's capacity to sway purchase decisions, enabling them to optimise budget allocation and improve collaboration methods.

The process of choosing influencers for marketing initiatives has undergone a radical change thanks to technological breakthroughs and analytical tools. Social media and digital platform proliferation have given businesses access to a wealth of information about audience engagement, influencer performance, and industry trends. With the use of these technical tools, marketers may effectively and efficiently analyse large amounts of data. Companies may find influencers whose audience matches their target market and campaign goals by using sentiment analysis, demographic profiling, and engagement data. Furthermore, by enabling real-time monitoring of influencer activity, these solutions guarantee that campaigns continue to be influential and relevant, as discussed in the interview with a data analyst.

“Technology is essential for navigating through data. We rely on various tools, but the rapid pace of technological advancements means we always need to stay updated. [...] Despite the magic of technology, it's important to remember that humans, like

data analysts, are behind the scenes, guiding the process. Without technology, we would be stuck with paper records. However, understanding and interpreting data is not as simple as pressing a button. It requires thought and analysis to determine what information is relevant. In sectors like advertising and marketing, there's often a misconception about the role of data—it is not just about technology, but about human understanding. The field is growing rapidly, but it is challenging to keep pace with certifications and constant changes. Ultimately, technology is a tool that needs human input to be effective, and in such a fast-paced environment, adaptability is crucial.” (Interviewee E)

Technology is vital for managing large datasets, but human interpretation remains essential. Despite common misconceptions, meaningful analysis requires human insight alongside technical tools. Humans bring empathy, context, and judgment to the process, determining which data matters, how to analyse it, and how to present findings for optimal decision-making. This powerful combination of human insight and technological capability drives effective data analysis.

2.1.2. Holistic evaluation of influencers

While data is essential in influencer selection, it cannot capture qualitative factors like content style, audience fit, and authenticity, as discussed in the interview with a community manager. Table 7 outlines some of these crucial qualitative criteria most observed during the internship and how community managers assess them.

Qualitative Factors (Content Category)	Assessment Methods
Authenticity	Examining if product appreciation is sincere; identifying forced promotions.
Brand Alignment	Evaluating if influencer's values match the brand's; checking for conflicting associations.
Content Style	Analysing content for elements like humour, seriousness, aesthetics, and modesty.
Originality	Assessing if ideas are fresh and compelling.
Storytelling Ability	Analysing ability to craft narratives that evoke emotion and engagement.
Context and Timing	Evaluating understanding of cultural nuances and ability to align campaigns with trends/events.
Audience Resonance	Observing engagement levels across different topics to identify areas the audience connects with most strongly.
Overall Reputation	Reviewing the influencer's history and track record for potential controversies or problematic associations.

Table 7 - Key qualitative criteria for effective influencer selection decisions.

While metrics are important, human intuition is essential in influencer marketing. It plays a critical role in determining whether an influencer's values align with the brand and if they authentically connect with their audience. Originality and sincerity are qualities that build trust and drive campaign success – these cannot fully be captured by numbers, as revealed in the interview with a community manager. For instance, high engagement rates will not guarantee positive outcomes if the influencer's style clashes with the brand's image.

Genuine product appreciation is paramount, as audiences are quick to identify forced promotions. When an influencer's enthusiasm feels natural, their endorsement carries more weight. Additionally, the power of storytelling can't be underestimated; a compelling narrative crafted by an influencer evokes emotions and inspires action in a way that technology alone cannot. Lastly, a human understanding of timing and context ensures maximum impact; a well-timed campaign that aligns with current trends or events has the potential to resonate far more deeply.

“By taking a more qualitative approach, we can understand the unique qualities of each influencer profile—whether they are humorous, serious, aesthetically pleasing, or modest. This qualitative understanding is something that numbers alone cannot capture. But, when selecting influencers, it is crucial to align their characteristics with the brand’s goals. While a profile might seem perfect qualitatively, if it does not perform well numerically, with, say, a 0.10% engagement rate and a 90€ CPM, it is not feasible to activate it. Such poor metrics would fail to justify the investment. Therefore, it is essential for the data to complement the qualitative aspects, ensuring that both sides support and validate each other effectively.” (Interviewee A)

A comprehensive report that covers both sides, quantitative and qualitative, helps ensure that the influencer chosen aligns well with the brand and delivers a satisfactory return on investment. Based on the interviews, it became evident that a quantitative analysis serves as the initial stage, narrowing down potential influencers based on specific numerical criteria like reach and engagement. Subsequently, the qualitative assessment becomes pivotal. Evaluating factors such as content quality, communication style, and alignment with brand values emerges as crucial elements. When reviewing an influencer's profile, it is essential to go beyond numerical metrics and consider the broader context and the calibre of content they generate, as highlighted by the strategy director.

“The initial phase involves a quantitative approach, simplifying the process to identify a narrower set of options. So, let us say we have these characteristics in place: now, out of these 20 options we are considering, we move on to the second phase. While this stage could also be quantitative, integrating a qualitative aspect from the start proves beneficial. This human element involves reviewing the influencer’s profile, observing the content they share, and examining their associations. Sometimes, these associations may not be with brands directly, but with other profiles or movements that are relevant to our consideration. There is a multitude of possibilities, making this qualitative aspect immensely valuable.”

(Interviewee B)

While a single metric may provide initial insights into an influencer, positive at first glance, the reality can differ significantly. Every number requires context and rationale behind it; this is where the qualitative aspect becomes indispensable. For instance, the engagement rate may appear high, but it can be deceiving. This could be attributed to controversy surrounding the

influencer, resulting in a surge of comments and shares, albeit for unfavourable reasons. The human touch is crucial here because distinguishing relevant comments on an influencer's post becomes increasingly challenging. With people feeling more at ease commenting online, it is harder than ever to sift through and select pertinent comments for the campaign solely relying on data. Consider an influencer endorsing a skincare product with 1000 comments on a post. Initially, it seems like a commendable engagement rate (quantitative perspective). However, upon closer inspection, 300 of these comments may revolve around the influencer's outfit or inquiries about upcoming events, which are unrelated to the skincare brand. Despite their irrelevance to the skincare product, these 300 comments still contribute quantitatively to the post's engagement metrics – which is misleading, as explained by the strategy director in his interview.

“When assessing the results, it is crucial not just to measure the level of engagement but also its nature. Was the engagement positive, negative, or neutral? What was the overall sentiment? Sometimes, we might see a post with 100 comments and consider it excellent, it is a good engagement rate, especially if it is usually just ten. However, if 90 out of those 100 comments are negative, it is a concerning indicator that demands attention. Therefore, we delve into qualitative analysis to gauge sentiment, which is the primary focus. Additionally, we employ various other analytical methods to ascertain whether the engagement was positive or negative.” (Interviewee B)

It is crucial to recognize that despite conducting a thorough analysis of an influencer and comparing their metrics with market standards and benchmarks, there is no guarantee of campaign success. Even if an influencer appears to have all the necessary ingredients on paper, the campaign could still

falter. Marketing is not an exact science. Therefore, despite the community manager's diligence in the pre-selection phase of influencer campaign planning, outcomes can still be unpredictable, as highlighted in the interview with a community manager.

"There is not a single metric that offers a comprehensive individual-level assessment. Instead, various metrics—including demographic data, audience resonance, engagement, and ad saturation—are analysed. Consequently, I prefer a holistic evaluation of each profile, despite its exhaustive nature, as it instils greater confidence in profile activation. This comprehensive approach enables a better understanding of expectations and potential outcomes. However, it is important to acknowledge that algorithms may not always reflect reality accurately; unexpected deviations may occur due to factors such as audience readiness or external influences. Thus, marketing remains an inherently imprecise science, influenced by a multitude of internal and external variables." (Interviewee A)

This emphasizes the indispensability of industry expertise in managing the uncertainties inherent in influencer marketing. Providing comprehensive reports is essential to furnishing brands with clear insights into campaign performance, enabling them to understand why certain aspects worked better or worse and why specific strategies yielded varying results. Practical experience from the Community Managers in influencer selection and management offers valuable insights into the intricate processes, challenges, and considerations involved. It underscores the unpredictability of Marketing, where even influencers with exceptional metrics and creativity may not guarantee success for the campaign. This unpredictability accentuates the

importance of striking a balance between quantitative metrics and qualitative considerations.

“We test things out and try to predict outcomes, but it is not always spot-on. Sometimes it goes beyond our expectations, and sometimes, well, it falls short. We go over the variables we can see and analyse on our end, but beyond that, it is a bit of trial and error. That is why having detailed and organized reports is crucial. Brands need to understand what happened - why did things turn out the way they did? Was there more content than usual? Less? Understanding what works and what does not, helps us move forward.” (Interviewee C)

Understanding the campaign's context is pivotal, as it informs how the influencer's content aligns with the brand's objectives and resonates with the target audience. Factors such as the campaign's theme, timing, and intended messaging must be carefully considered to ensure cohesion and effectiveness. While metrics like CPM and engagement rates provide quantitative insights, their interpretation can be nuanced. An influencer's perceived value may not solely hinge on these metrics, especially if they lack an understanding of prevailing market standards. In such cases, apparent discrepancies between metrics and actual value may arise, necessitating a deeper examination of qualitative aspects such as content quality, brand alignment, and audience resonance. Considering the broader context of the campaign, analysing various metrics, and evaluating qualitative factors, allows for a more informed decision that maximizes the impact and effectiveness of influencer collaborations, as manifested by a community manager in the interview.

“Consider this scenario: an influencer with a 30% engagement rate. Is that sufficient for activation? Well, it is not that easy. The decision hinges on various factors such as the campaign’s context and objectives. We need to delve deeper: Why does this influencer boast a 30% engagement rate? Is it due to controversy? Is the influencer aligned with a cause that might not resonate with the brand? Simply looking at the CPM, or any single metric for that matter, is not enough. Without understanding the rationale behind the numbers, it is impossible to determine if, for instance, a €2 CPM is ideal for the campaign. [...] Sure, the CPM might be low, but let us say the engagement is also low - it might still be acceptable. Sometimes, the CPM reflects impressions, reach, video views, and how they relate to the budget. Consider this: the influencer might not be affiliated with any agency, so they might not be aware of market rates. They might quote a very low price, but if their reputation, history, and content are not up to par, it’s not the best fit. So, even if the CPM is low, we need to consider everything else. It is all about looking at the big picture and conducting a comprehensive analysis.” (Interviewee A)

While both dimensions offer valuable insights into an influencer's potential impact, the emphasis on quantitative data often takes precedence in decision-making processes due to its tangible and measurable nature. Quantitative metrics serve as the backbone of influencer evaluation, offering a clear indication of an influencer's reach, engagement levels, and audience demographics. The qualitative dimension of influencer selection adds depth and nuance to the evaluation process. Additionally, analysing metrics sometimes allows for a qualitative understanding of an influencer's perception, as evidenced by the strategy director.

“There are metrics present that are primarily quantitative, yet they offer insights with a qualitative dimension. Take, for instance, the concept of audience resonance. While we may know an influencer’s engagement rate is 10%, we observe variations—such as higher engagement when discussing gaming or certain topics. This signifies a positive resonance between the influencer’s content and their audience, indicating relevance and relatability. However, it is imperative to verify this resonance. This leads us to profile and search analysis and involves exploring an influencer’s digital footprint beyond their channels, a practice that is often overlooked in influencer marketing strategies.” (Interviewee B)

Despite the inherent value of qualitative factors, the prevailing trend in influencer marketing often sees quantitative metrics wielding greater influence in decision-making processes. This trend can be attributed to several factors, including the pressure to demonstrate measurable returns on investment (ROI), the proliferation of data-driven analytics tools, and the emphasis on scalability and efficiency in marketing strategies. In an era defined by data-driven decision-making, brands are increasingly reliant on quantitative metrics to justify their marketing investments and optimize campaign performance. However, it is essential to recognize that the overreliance on quantitative metrics can sometimes overshadow the qualitative nuances that define effective influencer partnerships. While quantitative data provides valuable benchmarks for performance evaluation and strategic planning, it is equally important to consider the qualitative aspects that contribute to long-term brand affinity and consumer loyalty. Striking a balance between quantitative metrics and qualitative factors enables brands to cultivate meaningful relationships with influencers and audiences alike, fostering authentic connections that transcend

transactional exchanges, as mentioned by a former community manager and data analyst.

“We always aim to strike a balance. It is not just about selling an influencer with impressive metrics but zero relevance to our brand or lacking a creative touch. Conversely, being overly creative without delivering the results the brand expects is not ideal either. So, we try to find a middle ground. Metrics tend to carry more weight in the equation. Clients often lean towards safer, more predictable content—like straightforward product placement—if they believe it yields better results compared to a highly creative, unconventional approach. However, the reality is that metrics matter more than creativity to most clients. We do have a few influencers who manage to blend both worlds. Take Madalena Abecassis, for instance. She boasts a massive following yet strives to inject creativity into her content, avoiding mere product placement in favour of crafting narratives. [...] In the end, while both metrics and creativity hold importance, clients almost always prioritize metrics.”
(Interviewee F)

Today's consumers can quickly spot forced promotions. Genuine product affinity translates to more resonant endorsements and increased campaign effectiveness. An influencer's storytelling ability is another powerful qualitative factor, as compelling narratives captivate audiences and inspire action, connecting with them in a way technology cannot replicate. Finally, timing and context are essential. A well-timed campaign aligned with current trends or events has greater impact, and this understanding requires human judgment of cultural and societal nuances, as recalled by the data analyst.

“In an ideal scenario, clients should prioritize data analysis alongside qualitative insights, maintaining a delicate balance between the two. It is insufficient to rely

solely on data or qualitative analysis independently; they must complement each other. Additionally, the client's decisions heavily influence the outcome. I have encountered situations where clients, driven by personal connections or preferences, pursued collaborations with influencers without considering their suitability. For instance, one client insisted on working with an influencer without conducting due diligence—a disaster check, as we call it—resulting in a PR crisis due to the influencer's problematic history. Despite the warning signs, the client proceeded, already heavily invested in the collaboration. This underscores the importance of informed decision-making based on thorough analysis rather than mere intuition.”

(Interviewee E)

Brands must prioritize a thorough evaluation process to ensure that their influencer partnerships yield meaningful results and align with their overall marketing objectives. Relying solely on intuition or popularity when selecting influencers can be detrimental to a brand's marketing efforts. A comprehensive evaluation that considers both quantitative metrics and qualitative factors is essential for forging successful and impactful influencer partnerships.

Discussion

This study offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of influencer selection within a communications agency. The evolution of influencer marketing, from its roots in blogging to modern video-centric platforms, has transformed how brands engage with consumers. As the industry matures, a sophisticated approach prioritizing both data-driven analysis and qualitative assessment is essential for effective influencer marketing campaigns.

Metrics such as reach, engagement rates, and audience demographics serve as critical tools for initial influencer assessment and alignment with campaign goals. However, this case study highlights that brands must move beyond surface-level metrics to ensure meaningful impact. Authenticity, brand-influencer fit, and the ability to connect with the target audience on a deeper level are all qualitative factors that weigh heavily on campaign success. This aligns with existing literature that underscores the need to balance quantitative and qualitative approaches for optimal outcomes.

Furthermore, the importance of influencer credibility is undeniable. Declining trust in influencers reinforces the need for brands to partner with individuals who genuinely embody the brand's values and hold the power to truly sway purchasing decisions. A keen understanding of audience sentiment and comment analysis, as evidenced in this study, provides brands with nuanced insights, enabling better prediction of campaign resonance.

This case study raises pertinent questions for continued research and exploration:

- The Impact of Authenticity: Can the measurement of authenticity and content quality be systematized for integration into data-driven selection

tools? Does a strong correlation exist between perceived influencer authenticity and positive shifts in brand attitude?

- The Power of Niche Influencers: To what extent do micro/nano influencers, despite smaller followings, sometimes achieve greater engagement and impact within specific niche audiences, potentially offering better ROI for certain brands?
- Longitudinal Analysis: How does a brand's ongoing relationship with influencers shape brand attitudes over time? Does consistency in collaboration enhance trust and credibility?

All in all, communications agencies can enhance influencer selection and campaign outcomes by integrating data-driven insights with a nuanced understanding of influencer impact.

Conclusion

This case study reveals the intricate interplay between quantitative and qualitative factors in influencer selection for marketing campaigns. Data undoubtedly serves as the backbone of the decision-making process. Metrics like reach, engagement rate, CPM, and audience demographics provide a foundation for comparison, allowing Community Managers to identify potential influencers who align with the campaign's objectives. However, an overreliance on data risks overlooking the importance of authenticity, brand fit, and the ability of the influencer to connect with their audience on a deeper, human level.

This study demonstrates the essential role Community Managers play as mediators, balancing data-driven metrics with an intuitive understanding of audience preferences and market trends. Through a holistic evaluation process, Community Managers ensure the influencer's style, and values resonate with the brand's message and target audience. The study highlights the limitations of relying solely on data, even with sophisticated analytics tools. While metrics offer benchmarks and insights, they cannot fully capture the qualitative aspects that drive genuine connection and lasting brand affinity.

Ultimately, successful influencer marketing campaigns depend on a harmonious blend of quantitative and qualitative analysis. Data informs strategic decisions while human judgment ensures the influencer's creative expression and storytelling ability resonate with the target audience, fostering authentic and memorable brand experiences.

During the preparation of this work the author used ChatGPT and Google Gemini in order to improve the overall writing quality of the work while ensuring clarity and accuracy, and to help synthesize insights and experiences from the internship, ensuring a well-formulated and comprehensive presentation. After using these tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Interview script for SA365's Community Managers

- Name
- Age
- Gender
- Educational background
- Job title
- Years of experience in this position:
 - How long have you been working at SA365? What is your background within the organisation?
 - Have you previously worked in a communications agency? If so, what was your role?
 - If so, were your duties like those you currently perform at SA365?
- Can you describe your role or intervention as community manager in the influencer selection strategies created for the agency's clients? Are these roles fixed or adaptive? Can they vary depending on the client/strategy?
- What tools or platforms do you use most to carry out your work?
- How has your team's experience in the Community Management department influenced the selection of influencers and the use of metrics?
- What are the main metrics considered when choosing the right influencers for a campaign?
 - What criteria are used to define them?

- Are these metrics reviewed periodically?
- What is the value of these metrics for the development of work in the organisation/department?
- How important is the number of followers of an influencer in the decision-making process?
- How do you ensure that the influencers selected are suitable for the brand and the campaign?
- Are there any non-quantitative factors that are considered when selecting influencers?
- Have there been any instances where the data/metrics suggested one thing, but the actual result was different?
- Have you ever faced a situation where the data or metrics suggested that the influencer would be an ideal choice for a campaign, but the client opted for a different approach? If so, what other factors did the client consider in that decision?
- Can you share examples of influencer campaigns that have been successful in terms of engagement, impressions, and reach? Why were they so successful?
- How does data analysis contribute to guaranteeing the authenticity of the influencers chosen and how is this considered in selection strategies?
- Do you think current influencer performance metrics accurately reflect the true impact influencers have on audience attitudes and behaviours?
- What are the key insights you've gained from analysing influencer performance metrics in previous campaigns?
- How does your team balance data analysis with intuition and experience when selecting influencers for a campaign?
- Which influencer performance metrics do you think are most underestimated or underutilised by brands today?

- What are the main lessons you've learnt from trial and error when working with influencer performance metrics?
- What are the most effective strategies for identifying and selecting suitable influencers for a specific campaign or brand?
- How do you measure the success of an influencer marketing campaign and which metrics are most important for evaluating the final performance of influencers?
- Have you had cases where influencers don't deliver the desired results or negative publicity overall?
 - If so, how do you deal with potential risks or challenges associated with influencer marketing, such as negative publicity or influencers who don't deliver the desired results?
- How does the agency deal with the issue of fake followers and interactions when analysing influencer data? Are there specific strategies to avoid inauthentic influencers?
- Which trends or innovations in influencer marketing do you believe will become more prominent in the future?

Appendix 2 - Interview script for SA365's Non-Community Managers

- Name
- Age
- Gender
- Educational background
- Job title
- How long have you worked at SA365? What is your background within the organisation?
- Have you previously worked in a communications agency? If so, did the community manager role exist?
- Do you have day-to-day contact with the Community Manager department to carry out your work? If so, in what way?
- How is influencer data and metrics used and/or relevant to your role in specific projects?
- In your experience, what types of data are considered most relevant when selecting influencers for marketing campaigns?
- How is data about the influencers' target audience considered in the selection? How does this information influence the paid media strategy or any other department?
- In your opinion, to what extent are quantitative metrics, such as number of followers, decisive compared to more qualitative metrics when evaluating influencer performance?
- What role does data play in adapting influencer strategies over time? How is data used to optimise ongoing campaigns?

- Do you believe that analysing data in the choice and then performance of influencers can have a direct impact on sales results or conversions? Can you provide examples of this correlation?
- How does the department you work in collaborate with Community Management or other sectors that are directly involved in selecting influencers based on data?
- In your opinion, how have technological advances and analytical tools influenced the agency's approach to choosing influencers?