

'Mommy bloggers' study reveals factors that drive success in social influencer marketing

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Christian Hughes, assistant professor of marketing in Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business. Credit: University of Notre Dame

Influencer marketing is extremely widespread, yet ineffective. Eighty-six percent of companies use it as part of their social media strategy, but effectiveness remains low. For an influencer on Facebook, the average engagement rate per post is 0.37 percent; on Twitter, it is even lower at 0.05 percent.

New research from the University of Notre Dame provides a framework of strategies to help managers yield larger returns on [engagement](#).

"Driving Brand Engagement Through Online Social Influencers: An Empirical Investigation of Sponsored Blogging Campaigns" is forthcoming in the *Journal of Marketing* from lead author Christian Hughes, assistant professor of marketing in Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business.

Hughes, along with her co-authors Vanitha Swaminathan of the University of Pittsburgh and Gillian Brooks from the University of Oxford, collected a data set of 57 sponsored blogging campaigns run by companies including AT&T, Walmart, Procter & Gamble, Chick-fil-A, Listerine, OshKosh B'Gosh, Chef Boyardee and Walmart, between 2012 and 2016. The data came from The Motherhood, a social media influencer marketing agency focused on "mommy bloggers," and involved 600 blogs and 1,800 posts. The researchers followed up the data analysis with an experiment to replicate their findings.

They noticed multiple factors affected success in generating online engagement (posting comments, liking a brand), depending on the type of platform, blog post content and the goals of the campaign—whether trying to generate awareness for a brand or prompt consumer purchase.

"On Facebook, attention-grabbing, creative content is more effective when the campaign goal is to win the purchase versus simply raise awareness," Hughes says. "And interestingly, including giveaways increases engagement on blogs, but the opposite happens on Facebook."

In addition, the research finds that posting on a weekend rather than a weekday results in higher engagement on Facebook, but not on blogs, and the type of content influencers are posting also impacts engagement depending on the platform and goals.

They also focused on the expertise of the blogger, which they determined matters on blogs, but not in

higher-distraction environments such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter.

"The biography of a high-expertise blogger may read something like 'professional marketing and content creator, brand ambassador, social media influencer, freelancer, etc.," Hughes says. "While a low-expertise blogger bio might boast 'loves family, travel, bad jokes and good coffee.' Though both are sponsored bloggers, they portray themselves very differently, and our research shows for a campaign trying to raise awareness on the blog platform, a high-expertise blogger can generate greater engagement."

The findings highlight the critical interplay of platform type, campaign intent, source, campaign incentives and content in driving engagement.

"Running a successful influencer marketing campaign is about more than picking an influencer with the most followers and posting across platforms," Hughes says. It involves designing a cohesive strategy, selecting influencers and encouraging content that is going to have the biggest impact for the company's specific campaign goals."

Hughes teaches social media marketing at Notre Dame and researches in the areas of digital and social media, with a focus on influencer marketing and social influence. She formerly worked as a marketing research analyst for Management Science Associates Inc. and consulted for companies such as Avon, Danone, Georgia-Pacific and R.J. Reynolds.

Provided by University of Notre Dame

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