



Online persuasive communication

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M. Bakker & Xenia. McGee

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Evolution of social media and the internet has changed the way we live; social media is everywhere and unavoidable.

This phenomenon has extended its reach into almost every aspect of modern life: individuals use social media for connecting and sharing personal information with others (Henderson & Bowley, 2010), businesses use social media to boost their customer engagement, generate sales (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011) and for social media branding (Yan, 2011), and celebrities use social media to stay in touch with their fan base and – celebrities are their own brand too since they promote their brand and products (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012).

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations defines social media as: *“Social media is the term commonly given to Internet and mobile-based channels and tools that allow users to interact with each other and share opinions and content. As the name implies, social media involves the building of communities or networks and encouraging participation and engagement”* (CIPR, 2013).

This definition emphasizes that different social media platforms need to be used to encourage prospects and customers to interact. It also hints at the challenges of encouraging engagement.

One of the most prominent social media platforms today is Instagram. Instagram has over 1 billion registered users (Statista, 2018). This platform was founded in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger (Instagram, 2019). Instagram allows users

to take and share photos and videos with their mobile devices, in combination with a caption (Neher, 2013). Even though Instagram can be addictive and therefore has negative influence on the health of the youth's (Patel, 2017), it is also the app that has increased its popularity faster than any other social media platform (Klie, 2015).

The key factor behind the popularity of Instagram is the feature which allows users to add a new feel to the post through the combination of the visual communication with the textual. In essence, users are able to share fragments of their everyday life in the form of an image in combination with a custom caption to tell more about the story or message behind the photo or video (Eler, 2012; Walter & Gioglio, 2014).

One could compare this with a book; readers will look at the photo on the cover and then read the caption to understand the context behind it.

According to Pixlee (n.d.), a branding agency, Instagrammers¹ who regularly share posts and generate large followings of enthusiastic engaged people, while establishing credibility on a specific industry are called social media influencers. An article on Influencer Marketing Hub (2019) mentions that social media influencers build reputation overtime based on their knowledge and expertise on the topic.

These influencers are therefore able to persuade and encourage their followers to purchase or interact with the products they promote, by virtue of their authenticity. When that level of following

1 Instagrammer - A user of the photo-sharing and social networking service Instagram.

has reached, it is essential for the influencer to communicate strategically with their followers in order to reach, persuade and/or capture their attention (Pono, 2016).

It is key to communicate strategically, since influencers with large number of followers can benefit from their followers by generating income per post when they engage into partnerships with businesses. In simple terms this means that any popular influencer with a large audience, has potential customers for a company that sells products in that specific category.

The way this system works is that the more followers you have, the higher the earnings per post can potentially be. For example, TV Star Kylie Jenner (@kyliejenner) with 138 million followers can earn around €800K per post (Mackay, 2018),

fitness model Jen Selter (@jenselter) with 12.8 million followers can earn around €50K per post (Bellom, 2016) and travel & lifestyle blogger Christina Galbato (@christinagalbato) with 221K followers has shared that she charges €2.2K per post (Carbone, 2019).

Clearly, Instagram has made a huge impact on our life as it affects our brains because it has the attractive power to keep us on the screen for hours at a time. In addition, Instagram also changes how people choose their next (travel)adventure, which car they buy or clothes they wear.

The travel category in particular is experiencing a rapid growth on social media, (MediaKix, 2018) this trend is also noticeable in the increase of travel related posts on Instagram: currently there

are over 416 million posts with the hashtag² #travel on Instagram (Instagram, 2019). A survey conducted by The GO Group, LLC (2018) showed a substantial increase in traveling in 2018.

While in 2016 only 21% of participants were planning to travel, this number had risen to 33% in 2018. This could have many reasons, one being the lower airfares (Mutzabaugh, 2018). However, this is not the main reason contributing to the rise of travelers.

So, what has? The United Nations guesses that 20% (World Tourism Organization, 2018) of all international travelers are millennials. With the millennials spending more time on social media than any other generation and are more likely to

² Hashtag – a word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#), used on social media websites and applications to identify messages on a specific topic.

search inspiration online by relying on inspirational influencers. What millennials also love to do is traveling because they are more interested in spending their money on experiences rather than big purchases according to a book by Airbnb (2016).

This makes them the most profitable generation for the travel industry. Hence more reason for businesses to partner with social media influencers in the travel industry for promoting their products and services because these influencers remain considerably more relatable to the travels than e.g. famous celebrities.

The draw of this relatability gives influencers a hold over Millennials, affecting their travel decisions (MediaKix, 2018) and shaping their wanderlust. In short, travel influencer marketing is

the reason Millennials take more vacations, and Millennials are the reason these tactics work so well.

In a book from Facebook IQ (2018), was found that 67% of travel enthusiasts on Instagram use the platform to look for inspiration for new places to travel to and 62% used Instagram to build excitement for new trips. Instagrammer and adventurer Gunnar Freyr (@icelandic_explorer) has noticed that since his start on Instagram in 2014 up until 2018, posts with #iceland have grown exponentially from 300k to 9 million (Do, 2018).

Because of the vast amount of money that is involved in the travel industry, Influencers can no longer randomly communicate with their followers and hope that they will somehow take

action. This has become a legitimate business which requires strategic communication.

One way for the travel influencers to communicate with their followers to i.e. persuade, influence and inspire, is through the use of the speech act theory. This theory is based on the work of John Austin (1962). However during the years the theory has been developed by John Searle – his student – who then emphasized a psychological interpretation based on beliefs, intentions and such (1965, 1976, 1985). Searle describes the speech act as: “a speech situation involving a speaker, a hearer and an utterance by the speaker where the speaker will have performed some acts, which includes informing, irritating or boring his hearers”.

By using (persuasive) speech acts in posts, travel influencers on Instagram are able to engage with, persuade, influence and inspire their followers' beliefs, actions and desires (Taillard, 2001).

1.1 Aim of the book

Aim of this book is to discover the persuasive communication strategies travel influencers on Instagram use in their posts, specifically focused on the use of the different speech acts and persuasive communication in branded posts in order to persuade their followers into engagement.

For this book, the content of four travel influencers on Instagram will be analyzed. Book focuses on influencers with a large following; specifically those, who have a community with a minimum of 500k followers. For comparison, out of the 195 countries in the world, 27 countries have a lower population (World of Meters, 2019). This gives us an idea of the major impact these influencers have on their environment.