

Dynamics And Strategies Of Influencers In Maintaining Career Success In Saturated Industries

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Abstract

In a highly competitive digital era, the influencer industry experiences a fairly high level of saturation. This study aims to analyze and examine the strategies used by influencers in maintaining career success in the midst of increasing competition in the increasingly competitive social media industry. With the increasing internet access and use of social media in Indonesia, the influencer phenomenon has become an important force in marketing and communication. The study identifies two main focuses: first, how influencers face competition in the saturated industry, and second, the strategies implemented to maintain credibility and relevance. Through a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods, data was obtained through in-depth interviews with a number of influencers from various niche categories, such as beauty, culinary, and entertainment. This study explores how influencers shape their identities and create authentic and creative content to build inflant trust with audiences. The results show that authenticity, consistency, and meaningful, ongoing interaction are key to long-term success. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of communication theory as well as practical insights for professionals in the field of marketing and brand management. This research also provides a framework to understand the dynamics of the influencer industry and its relevance in the context of digital marketing that continues to evolve. These findings were analyzed using the theoretical approaches of Strategic Differentiation (Porter) and Identity Communication (Hecht).

Keywords: Influencers, Social Media, Authenticity, Marketing Strategy, Credibility

INTRODUCTION

This research discusses the development of new media, especially social media, which began in the 1990s with the emergence of the internet as an interactive platform. Social media has changed the way people communicate and interact, accelerate the growth of the digital economy, and give rise to the phenomenon of influencers. Influencers on social media play the role of opinion leaders who influence consumer behavior through authentic and interactive content. The growth of internet users in Indonesia will reach 273.52 million in 2023, with a penetration rate of 79.5%. This shows that people are increasingly connected to digital technology, especially social media. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are becoming popular, encouraging companies to leverage influencers in their marketing strategies. Influencers can be categorized into mega, macro, micro, and nano, each with a different reach and influence.

New media, or known as New Media, began to emerge in 1990 through the publication of the book "The Second Media Age," which describes the transformation of communication due to interactive technology and the internet. New media combines interpersonal and mass communication, allowing individuals around the

world to connect and share information easily. Along with the development of digital technology, the benefits of the internet are getting wider, especially in marketing activities that are now very important. This can be seen from the increasing use of digital marketing, advertising activities, product exchanges, as well as the growth of smartphone ownership and internet access.

Media convergence, defined as the merger of the media, telecommunications, and computer industries, has changed the way people interact with social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn. In Indonesia, the growth of internet access, especially through mobile devices, is driving a surge in the use of social media. Platforms like Facebook and TikTok have become very popular, while Twitter serves as a conduit for public conversation. Video content is constantly evolving, with YouTube and TikTok becoming the top choices among younger generations.

However, challenges such as privacy, fake news, and online bullying have also emerged along with this growth. In January 2023, the number of internet users in Indonesia reached around 273.52 million, with an internet penetration rate of 79.5%. This increase reflects the increasing connection of society with digital technology. Social media is now a hub of activity, especially among the younger generation, and offers a great opportunity for companies to increase brand awareness and sales. With a total of 185 million active internet users, social media shows a significant impact on the lives of the Indonesian people and its contribution to the country's economic growth.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the dynamics and strategies used by influencers to survive in a competitive industry. This study explores how influencers build identity, maintain credibility, and relevance, and respond to the challenges of high competition.

The benefits of this research are divided into two: theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to understanding the dynamics of the social media industry and the development of communication theory. Practically, the results of this study provide insights for professionals in brand management and marketing to understand the relationship between authenticity, relevance, and influencer career success.

With an in-depth analysis of influencer strategies and dynamics, this study provides new insights into how they operate in an increasingly saturated environment, so it can help guide effective and relevant marketing practices in the digital age.

RESEARCH METHODS

The approach used in this study is a phenomenological approach that allows researchers to understand the subjective experiences and perceptions of influencers about authenticity and relevance in their careers. The data collection method involves selecting influencers with different niche categories and specialties, representing different industry sectors.

Types of descriptive and interpretive research. Descriptive research can help detail the characteristics, behaviors, and strategies that influencers use to maintain credibility and relevance. This may include a detailed analysis of the content published, the promotional tactics used, and interactions with followers and brands. On the other hand, this type of interpretive research allows researchers to interpret the meaning behind an influencer's actions and experiences. This includes an in-depth analysis of how influencers interpret authenticity and relevance in the context of their careers, and how they perceive success in this competitive industry. Overall, this approach, researchers gained an in-depth understanding of the complex dynamics, credibility, relevance, and career success among influencers in highly competitive industries. Therefore, this study provides valuable insights for practitioners and researchers who are interested in the phenomenon of influencer marketing and career dynamics in the digital era.

This cross-sectional sample allows for insight into practices across industries. The data was analyzed to identify recurring themes and strategies that influencers used to navigate and adapt to industry challenges, utilizing coding and thematic analysis to categorize strategies based on career stage and platform usage.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of data from the results of this study shows several implications by using the identification of themes, niche, categories and repetitive strategies used by influencers to show that there is navigation which then becomes a material and also a tool for influencers in defending themselves and their careers in the social media industry. By knowing that influencers have varying career ages in a saturated market, a model of strategy flows used by influencers is found. Established and long-established influencers in this case are influencers who have been in the social media world since before the term influencer in their careers, leveraging the visibility and partnerships of brands they have worked with to maintain relevance, while new influencers rely on niche engagement and micro-targeting to build a career foundation. Burnout often leads to shorter career lifespans for those who have been unable to diversify content or innovate massively in recent years due to the emergence of new influencers offering more engaging content and creativity. In this study, 6 influencer informants divided into 3 niches were used to identify various strategies used

Table 1. Informan Influencer category niche

Influencer	Social Media	Followers	Niche
➤ egita Yusran	@ regita yusran	254 thousand	Lifestyle, Fashion
➤ ully Ariat Jaya	@ as a roll set		
➤ nshar Tube	@Kendari.Food	152 thousand	Comedy
➤ en's Ovil	@Ovil Son	92,1 thousand	Food vlog, culinary
➤ amid	@ayapurnamasari	50,3K	Comedy
➤ here is a full circle of sari		54,7K	
		148 thousand	Food vlog, culinary
			Beauty, Lifestyle

Source: Instagram account influencer

Of all the influencer accounts that have become informants in this study, it is built with a fairly long process, not only the time but also the consistency of the influencers in managing and developing the social media accounts they have as well as the image built in the environment of the influencers, where the influencers who are informants in this study have been in their careers for more than 5 to 14 years.

In an increasingly saturated digital content industry landscape, influencers face ongoing challenges to maintain visibility and relevance in the eyes of audiences. Fierce competition, changes in platform algorithms, and rapid shifting trends make the existence of influencers highly dependent on their ability to develop adaptive and planned strategies. Based on the results of the interviews, it can be seen that the strategies used are not uniform, but are influenced by the background, niche, and characteristics of each audience. Influencers generally rely on a combination of consistency in content production, maintaining interaction with followers, and creating strong personal branding. Some also emphasize the importance of flexibility in responding to trends without losing self-authenticity. These strategies are an important part of the effort to maintain their existence in the midst of competition that comes not only from other creators, but also from public expectations and algorithmic performance pressures from the digital platforms used. In this study, researchers found five strategies that are the conclusion of all the efforts that influencers use to maintain their existence from the beginning deciding to have a career in the competitive and saturated social media industry.

a. Content selection in personal branding and influencer consistency

Content selection in influencer personal branding is crucial to attract the right audience. Content relevant to their niche should provide added value, be it information, entertainment, or inspiration. Authenticity is also key; Content should reflect the personality and values of the influencer to feel authentic. Thus, followers can feel a deeper connection. Consistency also plays an important role in building a strong image. Using the same visual style and tone of voice in each post helps create an easily recognizable identity. Additionally, maintaining a regular posting frequency and conveying a clear message will let the audience know what to expect. By combining proper content selection and consistency, influencers can build continued trust and loyalty from their audience.

b. Following Algorithms to Maintain Audience Engagement

Influencers who are quick to adapt to platform trends (e.g., viral challenges, popular hashtags, or emerging content formats such as short-form videos) report higher engagement. Trend adoption often requires careful balance, ensuring relevance without relying too heavily on at-a-glance modes. Genuine Community Engagement and Authentic Interaction with followers builds a stronger and more loyal community. Influencers use interactive features such as live sessions, Q&A posts, and polls to engage audiences personally, fostering a sense of community. These interactions increase audience retention, as followers feel more connected and valued by influencers.

c. Displaying Emotional Authenticity as a Characteristic of Personal Branding and Differentiation

One of the most prominent strategies of informants is their courage to display emotions openly, including when they are tired, sad, or stressed. Ayu, for example, honestly said that she doesn't pretend to be happy when she's upset. In his statement

"If it's upset, yes, I'll post it too. Not pretending to be happy."

Meanwhile, Rully emphasized that the content must be

"Have a sense of creating and presenting new content, not just follow the trend."

This strategy statement is in line with Personal Branding Theory, because displaying the emotional side of oneself is part of the process of forming an authentic and human image. Influencers don't just build a perfect external image, but show the complexity of their relatable selves. At the same time, it is also a differentiation strategy, as most influencers instead form a sterile image of vulnerability.

d. Building a Consistent Image Based on a Specific Theme or Style

Consistency in content style is a powerful strategy in shaping personal branding. Rully, for example, refused to move into political content despite pressure or opportunity, wanting to stay consistent on the comedy path. Hamid also stated that if one video or theme is liked by the public, he will develop the theme continuously. This consistency is at the core of Personal Branding Theory, which is to form a strong and stable public perception of who we are. In the context of Differentiation Theory, consistency is also a strategic differentiator. When many influencers try all kinds of content for engagement, influencers who have a distinctive style tend to be easier to recognize and remember by the public. Furthermore, this strategy allows audiences to build a clear emotional attachment and expectations to the influencer's persona. In the framework of brand identity, consistency creates coherent narrative elements both in visuals, communication tone, and values conveyed. This is especially important in the midst of a flood of uniform and competitive digital content, where authenticity and uniqueness are key to attention. Rully and Hamid show that maintaining one style does not mean stagnation, but rather becomes the foundation for innovating in a directional way in the corridor of identity that the audience has recognized. In other words, consistency is not a limitation of creativity, but becomes a strategic foundation that directs the development of content without obscuring the self-image that has been formed.

e. Reject Endorsements That Do Not Match Your Own Values and Audiences

In the midst of the many commercial cooperation opportunities, influencers are often faced with ethical dilemmas when accepting endorsement offers. Although brand cooperation is one of the main sources of revenue, some informants show a selective attitude towards the type of product or service they are promoting. Rejection of endorsements that are not in line with the personal values and character of the audience is a form of effort to maintain the authenticity and integrity of their personal branding. This attitude reflects an awareness of the importance of identity consistency, as well as responsibility for the public trust that has been built. Regita stated that he did not accept all endorsement offers. He will refuse if the product does not match his personal values or the character of his followers. Likewise with Ayu who admitted that she tried the product she was going to promote first. Rully even firmly stated that he refused endorsements from brands related to cigarettes, gambling, or politics because the majority of his audience was young people. This becomes one of the strong strategies in an influencer, This strategy shows that personal branding is not only about image, but also about integrity and moral credibility. In the perspective of Personal Branding Theory, this decision strengthens one's identity as a responsible figure. While in Differentiation Theory, this decision creates a unique position that is difficult to replicate because not all influencers are brave or able to refuse financially profitable offers.

CONCLUSION

Based on all the presentation and analysis of the data in the previous explanation, which was obtained from various sources by the researcher, this study can be concluded that, this study shows that the strategies used by influencers to maintain their existence in a saturated industry are very diverse, depending on the career stage and niche of the category they determine and are engaged in. Established influencers tend to leverage brand visibility and partnerships to stay relevant, while new influencers rely more on custom engagement and micro-targeting to build a foundation. Content saturation can shorten the career life for those who are unable to diversify or innovate. Furthermore, choosing the right content and consistency in personal branding is the main key to attracting and retaining audiences. Successful influencers are those who are quick to adapt to platform trends and leverage authentic interactions to build a loyal community. Additionally, maintaining a balance between sponsored and organic content is essential. Influencers who prioritize original/creative content often see higher engagement rates. Overall, the study highlights the importance of adaptability, authenticity, and consistency as determining factors for influencer success in a competitive marketplace.

Identity Negotiation in Maintaining Authenticity and Relevance. Influencers experience dynamics in maintaining a balance between personal identity, audience expectations, and the demands of digital platforms. Some informants mentioned that while they wanted to experiment creatively, they also considered the expectations of followers who were used to a certain style. It reflects the process of negotiating identities both personally and relationally where they must remain relevant without losing identity. This strategy is closely related to identity theories such as *Communication Theory of Identity* (CTI), which explains how identity is formed from the interaction of various layers (personal, enacted, relational, and communal)

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