



THE **i** FACTOR

Influencer marketing over-simplifies by dividing consumers into the influencers and the influenced, argues *Sarah MacDonald*. Drawing on data from a global telecoms study, she describes here some of the nuances that exist among influentials.

Shining the spotlight on super influencers

Are super influencers different from other cellphone users in the market? One of the main things that sets them apart is their age – they are significantly younger (16 – 21 years) than everyone else in the sample and almost two-thirds of them are younger than 30. This makes them different in other ways as well. For instance, many of them are single and still at school or university, so they don't contribute to the household income.

Perhaps due in part to their youthfulness, super influencers tend to be more carefree.

They strongly agree with statements that show a predisposition towards being more fun-loving, thrill-seeking and risk-taking than others in the market. They enjoy new experiences and are attracted to brands that help them to have fun. When it comes to their sociability and connectedness, super influencers are all that they're expected to be. They like to be in touch and keep up to date with what's happening around them. They are more social than average and are more likely to strongly agree that it's extremely important to be accessible to share in friends' special moments and to connect with people who have common interests and values.



One of the key characteristics of super influencers in the telecommunications market is that they absolutely love technology. They are significantly more likely to agree strongly that it's very important to have the latest technology. They tend to be more techno-savvy than others in their use of cellphone features and they show a disposition towards being early adopters.

When it comes to describing their relationship with their cellphones, they are far more likely to choose the option "I like to try out new technology and therefore want to have a cellphone that is among the latest launched phones in the marketplace, with new and advanced features" over any other.

When it comes to their reported market behavior, super influencers are different in other ways too. They are aware of more brands than others (both cellphone handset and social networking brands). They use more cellphone accessories than average and show a greater interest in purchasing more. They are more likely to strongly agree that they actively seek to change their handset from time to time and are also willing to pay more for technology. They are very involved in the product category and more likely to see their cellphones as an extension of themselves and a symbol of who they aspire to be.

Despite their awareness of more brands, super influencers aren't using different handset brands to others in the market. They are also not more attached to their brand of cellphone than others. Ninety-two percent of them are devoted to the brand of cellphone they use most often and 84% are single-minded in their choice of cellphone brand. However, when it comes to choosing their next cellphone, the model of the phone is slightly more important than the brand.

Expanding the circle of influence

From the above discussion, it's clear that super influencers really are quite different from others in the telecommunications market. What's interesting is that if we compare all influencers to all non-influencers, the differences between the two groups are even more pronounced. In fact, those who consider themselves to be influencers at all are significantly different from non-influencers across most measures in the dataset.

In addition to many of the things which are true for the super influencers (such as their technophilia), influencers are more likely to be

male. They also tend to be more concerned with getting the best possible phone, as opposed to the best possible price. They are even significantly more willing to participate in future research than non-influencers!

These findings illustrate exactly why the influencers hypothesis is so compelling. If those people whom we turn to for advice on products and services are so fundamentally different from everyone else, then it appeals to our common sense that we will be able to separate them from everyone else in one way or another.

Speaking and seeking

Now let's consider the other side of the equation: the difference between those who said that they would speak to friends and colleagues to help them decide on which brand of cellphone to buy next (open to influence) versus those who did not (not open to influence). Interestingly, when we compare these two groups, very few meaningful differences emerge.

They are not very different from each other in terms of demographics, psychographics, brand awareness, level of product knowledge, reported usage behavior, interest in the category and sociability. What this means, in effect, is that it's very difficult to distinguish between those who are open to influence and those who are not.

The one measure that really differentiates them is the sources of information they plan to consult when deciding which cellphone to buy next. Those who are open to influence are significantly more likely to speak with the store sales person (in addition to their friends and colleagues), while those who are not open to influence are significantly more likely to make a decision based on previous experience, check which brands or models are being promoted and consult online sources.

Despite no significant differences in measures of their sociability, those who are open to influence seem to prefer talking to others about their brand choice, while those who are not open to influence do not. One possible reason for this is that those who are open to influence are more likely to agree with the statements "my life just keeps getting busier and busier" and "I rarely seem to have time to do the things that are really important to me in my life".

This suggests that these people are more time poor than those who are not open to



influence. A possible hypothesis is that consumers who have limited time are more likely to make use of shortcuts or heuristics. Instead of sourcing and looking through all the product information themselves, they talk to other people to find out what they know. In the case where a consumer is already clued-up on the product category, this may just serve to confirm what they already know or to provide assurance that they haven't missed anything prior to making a purchase decision.

The influence matrix

By cross-tabulating the influencer and non-influencer groups with those who are open to influence, an interesting picture emerges.

Influence matrix		Level of influence	
		Influencers (n=198)	Non-influencers (n=201)
Openness to influence	Open to influence	55%	52%
	Not open to influence	45%	48%

Essentially, the telecommunications market can be divided into four roughly equal groups:

1. Influencers who are open to influence (others come to them for advice on which products to buy and they plan on speaking to others when deciding on which brand of handset to buy).
2. Influencers who are not open to influence (others come to them for advice on which products to buy and they don't plan on speaking to others when deciding on which brand of handset to buy).
3. Non-influencers who are open to influence (others don't usually come to them for advice on which products to buy and they plan on speaking to others when deciding on which brand of handset to buy).
4. Non-influencers who are not open to influence (others don't usually come to them for advice on which products to buy and they don't plan on speaking to others when deciding on which brand of handset to buy).

This has some noteworthy ramifications for the practice of influencer marketing. ■

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Influentials or Accidentals? Investigating Interpersonal Influence in the Telecommunications Market

Atticus Abstract



Sell of the century

The Future of Selling
Brian Fetherstonhaugh with Mish Fletcher, Nikolaj Birjukov, Phil Buehler and Jennifer Blum
OgilvyOne Worldwide, New York; Ogilvy & Mather, New York

Inspired by David Ogilvy's aphorism "we sell or else", Ogilvy embarked on a mission to uncover

the secrets of great selling. It involved a contest – the World's Greatest Salesperson – a consultation with 1,000 sales people worldwide and 30 experts, and the end result is described as "a 21st century selling guide".

Prominent among the agency's findings is that the game has changed irreversibly, especially since the advent of the internet and social media. The AIDA Sales Funnel, invented in 1898 by Elias St Elmo Lewis to explain how sellers could propel customers towards a sale, no longer reflects reality since consumers now create their own

multi-faceted journeys towards purchase. Salespeople are no longer in control and their role is to identify where the customer is in that journey, and to help them.

In a digital world, the search terms a consumer uses, the blogs they read and the shopping baskets they fill all provide a digital footprint that has replaced the clues of body language a salesperson once had to read. The new skillset required by salespeople involves creating content as digital bait, deploying social media and partnering with marketing. The guide concludes with a 30-day plan. David Ogilvy would surely have approved. ■

