



Business Process Services

White Paper

Social Media Influence: Looking Beyond Activities and Followers

About the Author

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Abstract

Social media influencers are crucial for most businesses and B2C marketing today. They talk about your brand in the virtual space and influence other social media users. Naturally, identifying and understanding social media influencers is important to business organizations. Most business entities today allocate a 'social budget' for monitoring social media to identify influencers among their customer base. Influencers share their opinions on products and associated usage experiences through tweets, blogs, or Instagram, and other users accept these opinions and use them to make decisions. The visibility of influencers makes social media a great marketing medium to reach a larger target audience. Consumers usually trust the opinion of someone they know, and this is the most prominent characteristic of key influencers. To effectively engage customers and enhance sales, companies need to tap the potential of social media influencers.

This paper showcases a methodology for identifying social media influencers by quantifying the degree of influence of an individual. It explains how this approach can be used to identify influencers on Twitter, and how it can be adapted to other platforms.

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Introduction

Social media has emerged as an important platform for customer engagement. Increasingly, businesses are using social networks to gauge consumer response, and obtain product reviews and feedback. A large number of smartphone users are known to shop using their mobile devices, and most consumers today rely on product reviews on blogs and e-commerce sites, as well as recommendations and opinions on social media. Buying behavior is increasingly getting affected by peers, and word of mouth is gaining importance as an effective marketing tool. 'Social influencers' are now a major force in sales, marketing, and brand building efforts.

Influencers are entities that can impact the purchase decisions of others (such as family, friends, acquaintances, and peers) because of their (real or perceived) knowledge, authority, or position. When influencers use social media to express opinions or offer advice that affects buying decisions, they are termed 'social influencers'.

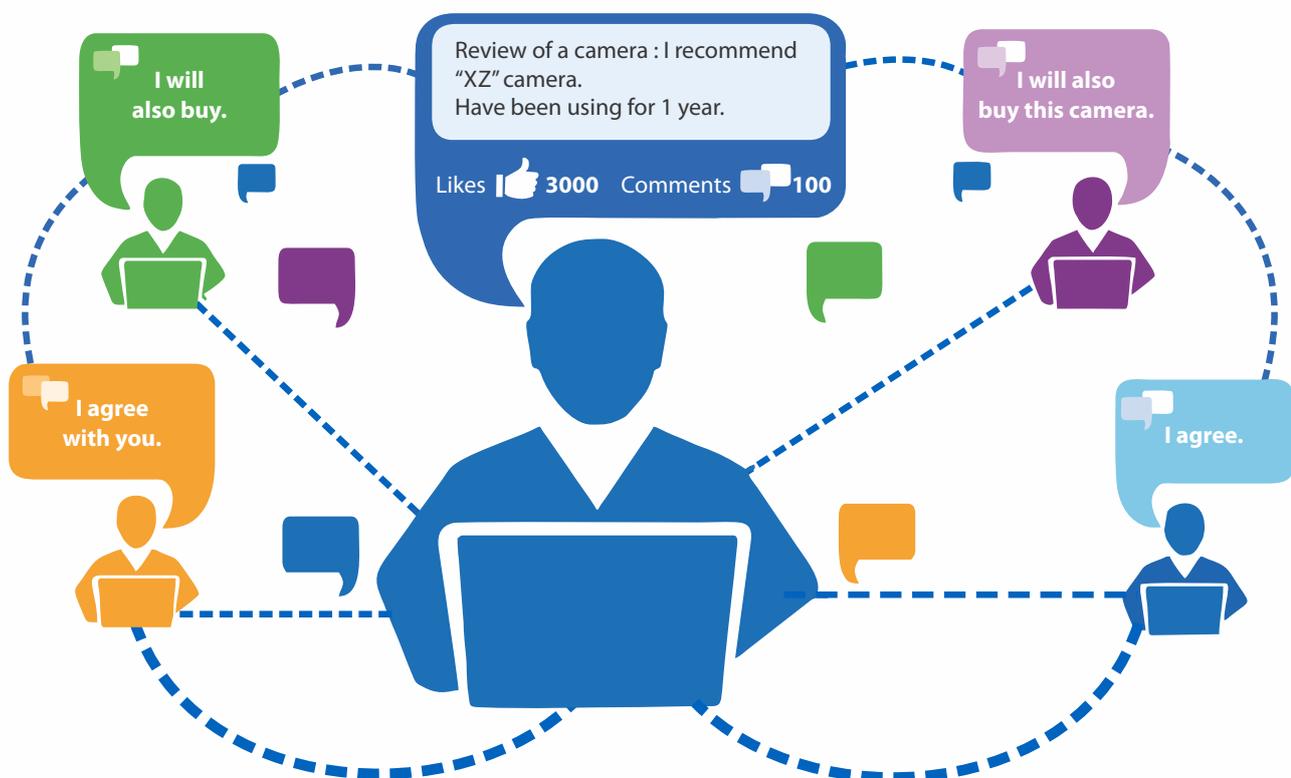


Figure 1- An illustration of how social media influence works

We believe that marketers should actively identify, seek, and build relationships with influencers to amplify the brand's message. Note that by 'building relationships' we do not imply bribing or otherwise directly incentivizing influencers, but suggest understanding them and their sphere of influence in order to improve your products, services, customer engagement, brand value, and revenues.

Marketers need to adopt a systematic approach to ensure efficacy while identifying social influencers. In the next section, we present a methodology to derive an 'influencer score' that helps quantify the degree of influence of an individual on a platform. We do so using an illustration of identifying influencers on Twitter. However, the methodology can be applied to identify social influencers across different platforms. It can also be used to derive an aggregated score across all the platforms to identify social influencers with a wider reach.

The methodology we propose differs from others available in the market. For instance, unlike other methodologies, our methodology will enable you to weed out fake or dummy accounts on social media based on an analysis of originality, sentiment, and consistency. Thus, the results are based on actual users and accounts. Secondly, this methodology also considers qualitative aspects such as originality, sentiments, and activity generation, as opposed to others, which only take quantitative aspects like the number of followers or number of tweets as a measure.

Identifying a social influencer on Twitter

On Twitter, an individual can perform various activities: post a tweet, re-tweet, mention another user, share a link, and so on. These actions define whether the individual is an influencer (put simply, one who tweets) or someone who gets influenced (one who follows).

Every activity or word written by an individual can impact the decisions of his or her circle of friends, acquaintances, and peers. This is more so in the case of someone who has a strong social presence and significant 'social authority'. To calculate the influence of an individual, we aimed to measure his or her impact on the purchasing decisions of other users on Twitter. This data was collected over a period and then used to derive an influencer score. The proposed methodology is depicted in Figure 2.

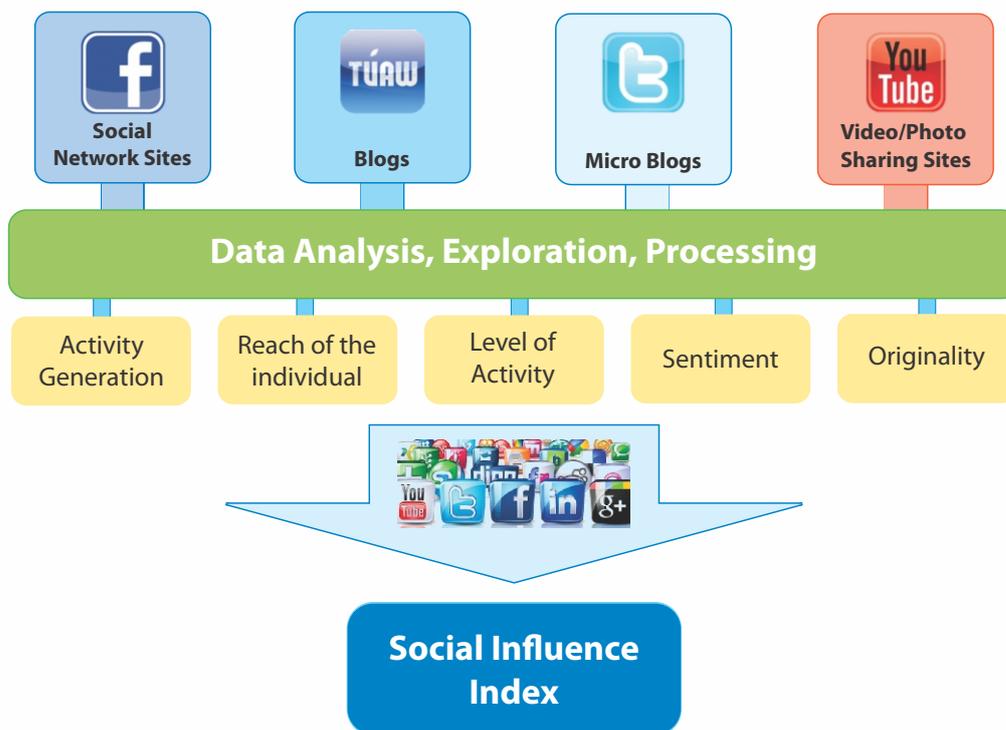


Figure 2 - Identifying influencers using overall social influence index

In this framework, structured fields like 'Activity Generation', 'Reach of the Individual', 'Level of Activity', 'Sentiment', and 'Originality' are extracted from the social media platforms. These platforms are further combined to create a Social Influence Index. This methodology is described in detail in the next section.

Our methodology to generate an influencer score

The degree of influence of an individual can be measured with the help of metrics like the amount of activity that was generated by a tweet. The criteria for evaluating a social influencer are:

Activity Generation: Can the person generate activities on the social media? For instance, when they tweet, do other users in their networks respond? The magnitude of influence of such individuals on Twitter can be measured in terms of the number of retweets, responses, and favorites.

Reach of the Individual: The greater the number of followers of an individual, the more the popularity and reach.

Level of Activity: Our proposed methodology is depicted in Figure 2. Influence of a person is also determined by the level of activity, which can be measured by these two parameters: and then used to derive an influencer score.

- **Volume:** The total number of tweets posted by the individual in one week. Since Twitter is a dynamic medium, a week seems to be a suitable time horizon. As users create accounts at different times, the cumulative number of tweets in their account lifetime is not indicative. In order to assess the level of activity the person indulges in, the average number of tweets each week is a better indicator.
- **Consistency:** Consistency in activity over time is indicated by whether the number of tweets, retweets, or favorites by the user decreased, increased, or remained steady. Consistency and volume are combined to obtain the measure of 'Level of Activity'.

Sentiment: The average rate of positive sentiment and the average rate of negative sentiment can be estimated through sentiment analysis. Sentiment analysis involves applying text analytics, natural language processing techniques, and computational linguistics to gain a comprehensive understanding of social media sentiments. It leverages machine learning techniques to filter the significant or the most valuable tweets and key trends from mere background noise, and also gauge the emotional aspects of the texts and the attitude of the authors.

Originality: Originality of the content can be assessed using the following criteria:

- **URLs:** The number of original URLs can help determine the originality of the content posted by a user. Let's assume our Twitter user is called 'T' and has posted a URL on her social media page. If somebody in T's network has already posted the same URL, then T's content is not considered original. The circulation or the online popularity of the URL is also used to measure the influence of T in her network.
- **Hashtags:** Similarly, the originality and popularity of the hashtags created by the user also determine the overall originality of the user's content on a social network.

These parameters and metrics can be obtained from other platforms like Facebook, as well as micro blogs and blogs. Therefore, this method can be adopted across platforms. The final influence score is a non-linear function of all the above parameters.

Social Media Score = f (Activity Generation, Reach of the Individual, Level of Activities, Sentiments, Originality)

Further, if we are looking at more than one platform, the overall Social Influence Index can help measure the impact of an individual across different platforms. It is a function of the scores that are obtained across platforms. For example, if we consider Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, the Social Influence Index is obtained as follows:

Social Influence Index = f (Social Media Score for Twitter, Social Media Score for Facebook, Social Media Score for YouTube)

Individuals can be ranked and segmented based on both their Social Media Scores for specific platforms, and their Social Influence Indices. These segments can then be targeted for marketing activities.

There have been cases of people creating fake profiles on social media in a bid to gain prominence in the social space. Individuals can falsify the number of posts, friends, and followers but it is difficult to fake behavior. Because of this, the approach suggested above can help identify genuine social media influencers.

Conclusion

Studies show that more consumers worldwide trust peer recommendations as compared to those that trust regular advertisements. The peers in question are the 'influencers' who impact the way their friends, families, and acquaintances think and act with regard to a brand or product or an organization. The impact of influencers on a company's brand and sales is so strong that marketing teams are developing influencer-relationship marketing strategies to understand, attract, and retain influencers. The methodology detailed in this paper can be used to identify social influencers not only on Twitter, but also on other social media platforms.

Influencers support organizations' marketing efforts by providing comments and feedback to help design new products, improve existing products, and align them with consumer preferences. They also help increase marketing ROI by bringing in new customers through referrals.

The time is right to get influencers on your side. Our systematic approach helps you take the first step, and identify the influencers for your business. Then you can target specific messaging towards them, provide detailed information about the product, and track their reviews or comments that help spread positive word of mouth about your product or brand.

About TCS Business Process Services Unit

Enterprises seek to drive business growth and agility through innovation in an increasingly regulated, competitive, and global market. TCS helps clients achieve these goals by managing and executing their business operations effectively and efficiently.

TCS Business Process Services (BPS) include core industry-specific processes, analytics and insights, and enterprise services such as finance and accounting, HR, and supply chain management. TCS creates value through its FORE™ simplification and transformation methodology, backed by its deep domain expertise, extensive technology experience, and TRAPEZE™ governance enablers and solutions. TCS complements its experience and expertise with innovative delivery models such as using robotic automation and providing Business Processes as a Service (BPaaS).

TCS' BPS unit has been positioned in the leaders' quadrant for various service lines by many leading analyst firms. With over four decades of global experience and a delivery footprint spanning six continents, TCS is one of the largest BPS providers today.

Contact

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