

## **INFLUENCER MARKETING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

In the recent years social media have played the role – for most brands – of an environment of a specific dialogue between a company and consumers. The number of active social media users is constantly rising, which is confirmed by data published by the agency We Are Social, and by the Hootsuite platform [Hootsuite, 2020]. In January 2020, the number of active social media users reached the level of 3.8 billion, which represents a 9% increase as compared with the previous year. The increasing role of the Internet, new technologies as well as social media in brand communication has resulted in developing new forms of promotion. One of them is influencer marketing. This concept is based on the use of the impact of an influencer on a group of recipients in his/her social channels for the purpose of promoting specific goods or services [Sobura, 2020, p. 136].

The unexpected COVID-19 outbreak caused much uncertainty in marketing, leading to considerable changes in companies' market communication. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a number of restrictions imposed by governments of many countries, having a huge impact on brand-consumer communication. Under these unprecedented circumstances, regularly operating business outlets were closed overnight, enforcing the use of online brand promotion activities. Marketers all over the world reviewed the currently adopted marketing strategies and, consequently, modified the sets of tools for building brand awareness.

According to the results of research published by Indahash [Indahash, 2020, p. 4] in May 2020, after the pandemic outbreak the consumption of social media worldwide rose by 89%, and 69% of influencers observed increased activities of their recipients [3]. Unfortunately, the spread of the virus had a simultaneous negative impact on influencer marketing. The research conducted by Indahash [Indahash, 2020, p. 14] showed that 32% of influencers, particularly those who relied their content on activities in the open air, observed a decrease in the number of campaigns on which they work in their cooperation with brands. In the face of this new and difficult situation for the entire world, in which consumption no longer played a key role, brands and influencers faced the challenge of providing content adjusted to the current needs of their recipients – the content that could help them survive the difficult period.

In the times of social distancing a number of brands decided to undertake influencer marketing activities based on building communities and engaging their recipients. For example, Gucci used its profile on Instagram, using it as a platform on which selected influencers shared fragments of their private lives with recipients, or communicated music events which could not be organized in a usual manner due to epidemiological conditions [Launchmetrics, 2020, p. 22].

Some creators are referred to as influencers, and it is well justified. A perfect example of an effective use of impact is an Italian blogger Chiara Ferragni, who, together with her husband, apart from dedicating financial means to fight the pandemic in Italy, raised funds for strengthening the intensive care unit of the San Raffaele Hospital in Milan [GoFundMe, 2020]. Taking advantage of her recognizability and appealing to a group of Instagram observers (currently 21 million users), she managed to raise nearly 4.5 million euros. This manifestation of social responsibility is perfectly expressed by Chiara Ferragni's statement: "From a huge voice comes a huge responsibility" [Ferragni, 2020].

### References

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