



THE LONDON SCHOOL
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POLITICAL SCIENCE

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Journalism at LSE



Can Journalists be Influencers? How to engage hard-to-reach audiences on social media.

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Introduction

Social media 'influencers' have a growing significance in our mediated lives. 'Influencers' can have huge followings that are loyal, devoted and attentive. Generally, people follow the kind of 'influencers' who reflect and reinforce their own values and beliefs. Social media is animated by emotions and 'influencers' have the ability to make you feel like you belong.

Traditional news and current affairs content, generally, does not make you feel connected or impart a sense of belonging in the same direct, personal way. For much of the news media this would be seen as potentially compromising the impartiality and professionalism of journalism.

But is it possible for journalists and news organisations to learn lessons from 'influencers' about how to engage with the public, without losing their independence and authority? And in what ways could they gain credibility with 'hard to reach' audiences by adopting strategies inspired by 'influencers'?

This paper explores the opportunities of what 'influencer' style journalism could bring to your newsroom. It also defines what is a 'journno-influencer', how to recognise them and what kind of challenges we face in journalism when working like 'influencers'.

Salla-Rosa Leinonen, June 2022

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This paper was produced as part of the Polis Newsroom Fellowship scheme supported by Yle. Polis is the international journalism think-tank at the London School of Economics. This project was overseen by Polis director, Professor Charlie Beckett. The views in this paper reflect those of the author and are not necessarily those of Yle, Polis or the LSE.



Influencers and their power platforms

Why should we be interested in social media influencers as journalists?

When the coronavirus pandemic started, governments in Finland¹ and the UK² collaborated with social media influencers to spread information about Covid, vaccinations and how to protect yourself and other people around you. Influencers were considered to be so important in reaching diverse audiences that they were asked to play this critical role. Clearly, traditional media wasn't reaching or influencing enough people despite the saturation coverage.

Though influencers have been in our lives since blogging and Youtube started to be popular in the early 2000s, this public health role for them was a landmark that highlights social media influencers' power in our networked societies. Governments aren't the only ones who are leaning towards influencers. Many companies want to benefit from influencers and their audiences, especially for marketing. But do we fully appreciate and understand the value of influencers?

Generally people would connect influencers to marketing, branded content and endorsements, especially in the lifestyle and beauty industries. That's the most researched area of influencers, because of their dominant marketing force in those sectors. These connections make us think very narrowly about a phenomenon that has affected our lives more broadly.

The Reuters Digital News Report 2021 found out that 40 percent of young people aged 18-24 say social media is their main source for news. Traditional news outlets and journalists gain attention and lead conversations on Facebook and Twitter, but they struggle on TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram.³ Celebrities, influencers and even ordinary people attract the most attention to news on TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram. According to the report, TikTok has a reach of 24% in under 35's and 7% of them are using the platform for news.⁴ So where does this attraction come from?

¹ politico.eu/article/finland-taps-influencers-as-critical-actors-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/

² bbc.com/news/business-53968222

³ journalism.co.uk/news/influencers-lead-news-debates-in-youth-focussed-social-networks-leaving-journalists-in-the-shade/s2/a839460/

⁴ reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021/dnr-executive-summary



Some want to benefit from influencers, some are scared

There is an increasing role for influencers beyond the narrow perception of them as 'lifestyle bloggers'. Recent research shows how influencers are exploring political content, for example. It found that the societal or political content and lifestyle content is usually published concurrently. The latter helps bring attention to the former.⁵

One of the most famous influencers in the UK, Zoella, is a great example of mixing lifestyle and political content. Zoella has created content on Youtube from 2009 and used other social platforms such as Instagram. Zoella has had a big impact on awareness of mental health problems in the UK, talking about her anxiety and panic attacks. She became the first digital ambassador for the UK mental health charity Mind in 2014.⁶ She has shown how influencers can talk about societal and political issues through their personal experiences.

If influencers are dealing in topics that journalism also covers, how should news organisations react? Is the way influencers deal with topics such as mental health more powerful than journalism on that topic? Traditional media companies want to benefit from influencers through collaborations and stories, but they are seen as a threat as well.

Youtubers and influencers built their following through years of content creation and interaction with their fans. The personal connection that influencers have with their followers makes them appealing for organisations struggling to maintain and gain new audiences. Youtubers, for example, bring an established audience with them, and that makes them interesting to print and broadcast media.⁷

But at the same time hugely popular influencers like Youtubers can threaten the existence of more 'established media' with their self-made celebrity status. In response, traditional media representatives have felt the need to define what is a 'proper' media professional and highlight the amateur status of Youtubers.⁸

It's all about competing for who gets the audience's attention. In the next section there will be more analysis of the ways influencers get their audiences connected through 'credibility' and 'authenticity'.

5 Suuronen, A., Reinikainen, H., Borchers, N. S. & Strandberg, K. (2021). When Social Media Influencers go Political: An Exploratory Analysis on the Emergence of Political Topics Among Finnish Influencers, Javnost - The Public. DOI: 10.1080/13183222.2021.1983367

6 mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/zoella-becomes-first-digital-ambassador-for-mind/

7 Deller, R., & Murphy, K. (2020). 'Zoella hasn't really written a book, she's written a cheque': Mainstream media representations of YouTube celebrities. European Journal of Cultural Studies, 23(1), 112-132.

8 Ibid.



What makes an influencer credible and how it's connected to journalism

There's a lot of information available on how influencers are effective marketers through the credibility they have gained. For example, people who have long term relationships with influencers are more likely to buy things that are sponsored, or to purchase recommended products. The personal credibility of the influencer positively affects their behaviour.⁹

This can be compared to journalism. People who feel connected to certain journalists will be more likely to consume the content they create. This has been clear in TV news, when people would wait to see the evening news presented by their favourite host. But how could we deepen the relationship using the same persuasive cues that influencers (and TV presenters for certain audiences) use in their content in social media journalism?

One key to gain credibility is through shared values that are communicated through influencers' content. Overtly shared values are one of the most important things when young people decide to regularly follow an influencer.¹⁰

Influencers appear more 'real' in beauty or lifestyle related content because traditional advertising models are usually seen as the 'perfect and distant', but influencers speak directly to their followers and offer valuable information to their daily lives.¹¹

Influencers that show expertise in the theme covered and build trustworthiness over time can get people to pay attention and even buy recommended products. Younger audiences especially seek further information after being told about something by their favourite influencer.¹²

Shared values, likeability, time, feeling of being directly spoken to, sharing valuable information and expertise are factors that get followers to seek more information. These aren't impossible things to embed in journalistic content. Like Julia Munslow (The Wall Street Journal) writes for NiemanLab Predictions for Journalism 2022: "Even if a 15-second video doesn't cover every detail of a story, it can be a gateway to reading that 2,000-word article."¹³

9 Sokolova, K. & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, Elsevier, vol. 53(C).

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 niemanlab.org/2021/12/gen-z-demands-personality-from-journalists/



Authenticity as a way of building trust – Should journalists be as ‘authentic’ as influencers?

Usually we think of journalism from the point of view of how to make good journalism, but when we think of journalism from the point of view of the audience, we face more questions. What kind of content do different audiences really want or need and how could we develop our ways of storytelling to meet the ‘hard to reach’ audience needs? How should we deliver the important news in ways that are engaging and easy to use? And what factors make news more approachable to audiences?

The need for authenticity to create trust is dominant in all research related to social media influencers, bloggers, Instagrammers, and Youtubers. In journalism trust is also highly valued and considered to be a key towards building relationships with audiences. So are journalists so different from influencers?

In a study that defined differences and similarities between journalists and content creators from the perspective of the audience, it was clear that normative traditional values were still dominant in defining what is ‘real journalism’. So a mix of different media produced by influencers such as selfies or ‘diary of the day’ wasn’t seen as connected to journalism or what journalists would do. It was seen as typical influencer style content not relevant to journalism. However, a lot of expectations towards journalists and creators were the same: *authenticity and transparency, genuine engagement and a promise of quality content that is well paced and consistent*.¹⁴

Authenticity can be defined by how influencers show their everyday life and personal imperfections. In sponsored content they should reveal the reasons behind the collaborations and negative aspects of the product itself to seem more trustworthy.¹⁵ The daily life connection that an influencer can bring to news can be considered more meaningful or valuable for followers.¹⁶

Perceived authenticity can be defined by exploring if someone is being true to themselves and is their behaviour internally or externally motivated. That means they should be able to differentiate themselves from others and show their uniqueness, originality, and consistency.¹⁷

A recent case example of mixed values interfering with the influencer-follower relationship comes from Sweden. Swedish influencers collaborating with the United Arab Emirates (Visit Dubai) were widely criticised to endorse dictatorship when promoting the country by travelling there. People saw a clear inconsistency between the influencers personal values and their vacations in Dubai, and influencers weren’t seen to be telling the ‘true story’ of the country.¹⁸

These controversies raised questions about influencer accountability. This also highlights the fluid borders between their personal and public life. But most importantly, this shows the very intimate relationship between influencers and their followers, when followers show ‘friend-like’ emotional reactions to things influencers do.¹⁹

Journalists can learn from the ways influencers build authenticity. Journalists have put a lot of time and attention into creating their stories and the results of that are embedded in the content published. When we think of a ‘good journalist’, you might like them for certain reasons, for example the quality of their stories, background checking, or format. A critical and questioning point of view is at the core of journalism too.

To be authentic these editorial values need to be shown in the published content. There might be a need to show influencer-type of ownership in journalism as well. The Trust Project, a project seeking to increase public confidence in journalism, has created a series of trust indicators for journalism: is it clear who made this, what is it, why is it made, where has the information come from, is it diversely and ethically sourced and can I interact and give feedback that matters?²⁰

More transparency in the news process could help to achieve more authenticity, especially when it’s clearly communicated to the audience. Influencers are often defined as too commercial and too connected to the brands they endorse, but competition for attention is increasing in journalism, even in Public Service Media. This might help ‘sell’ their work.

The danger is that the more overtly commercial both influencers and journalists become, the less audiences feel connected to them. The audience is hoping for quite similar things from content creators (influencers) and journalists:

authenticity, transparency, engagement, and quality content.²¹ Audience expectations and needs can be quite overwhelming and contradictory, but recent research on audience demands can help us navigate what is expected.

14 Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2022). A question of perspective: Exploring audiences’ views of journalistic boundaries. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), 705–723. DOI: 10.1177/1461444820963795

15 Ibid.

16 Swart, J., Peters, C., & Broersma, M. (2017). Repositioning news and public connection in everyday life: a user-oriented perspective on inclusiveness, engagement, relevance, and constructiveness. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(6), 902–918. DOI: 10.1177/0163443716679034

17 Luoma-aho, V., Pirttimäki, T., Maity, D., Munnukka, J., & Reinikainen, H. (2019). Primed Authenticity: How Priming Impacts Authenticity Perception of Social Media Influencers. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13(4), 352–365. DOI: 10.1080/1553118X.2019.1617716

18 Arnesson, J. (2022). ‘Endorsing a dictatorship and getting paid for it’: Discursive struggles over intimacy and authenticity in the politicisation of influencer collaborations. *New Media & Society*. DOI: 10.1177/14614448211064302

19 Ibid.

20 thetrustproject.org/#indicators

21 Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2022). A question of perspective: Exploring audiences’ views of journalistic boundaries. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), 705–723. DOI: 10.1177/1461444820963795



“Considering audiences’ perspectives allows us to potentially broaden the boundaries of journalism’s field beyond those discursively constructed, protected and negotiated by journalistic actors.”²²

To understand what followers demand from ‘influencers’ and how they are trying to fulfil their needs, the following lists define 14 points on both sides. It’s clear that all of these ‘demands’ are not always fulfilled, but they describe the challenge for ‘influencers’ as they seek to build their following.

So if you are a journalist, you might ask yourself which of these qualities might apply to your work, or journalism in general, and how might you demonstrate that to the audience? What are the differences between your work and influencers’ work?

14 things that followers expect from Influencers

Influencer...

- 1 Speaks directly to me^{23, 24}
- 2 Feels authentic^{25, 26, 27, 28}
- 3 Communicates shared values and shares personal revelations of private life (Feeling of authenticity through self disclosure)^{29, 30}
- 4 Is invested, emotionally connected and cares about content that is shared³¹
- 5 Is credible³²
- 6 Is interactive, engaging and present to seem more approachable and ‘real’^{33, 34}

22 Ibid.

23 Tolson, A. (2010). A new authenticity? Communicative practices on YouTube. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 7(4), 277-289.

24 Magrizos, S., Lamprinakos, G., Fang, Y. & Drossos, D. (2021). Taking It a Step Further: When do Followers Adopt Influencers’ Own Brands?. *Review of Marketing Science*. 19. 10.1515/roms-2021-0003.

25 Ibid.

26 Audrezet, A., Kerviler, G., & Moulard, J. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond passion. *Journal of Business Research*, Elsevier, vol. 117(C), 557–569.

27 Whitmer, J. M. (2021). “Between a Regular Person and a Brand”: Managing the Contradictions of the Authentic Self-Brand. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 62:1, 143-160. DOI:10.1080/00380253.2020.1724058

28 Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2022). A question of perspective: Exploring audiences’ views of journalistic boundaries. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), 705–723. DOI: 10.1177/1461444820963795

29 Ibid.

30 Sokolova, K. & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Elsevier, vol. 53(C).

31 Whitmer, J. M. (2021). “Between a Regular Person and a Brand”: Managing the Contradictions of the Authentic Self-Brand. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 62:1, 143-160. DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2020.1724058

32 Sokolova, K. & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Elsevier, vol. 53(C).

33 Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2022). A question of perspective: Exploring audiences’ views of journalistic boundaries. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), 705–723. DOI: 10.1177/1461444820963795

34 Whitmer, J. M. (2021). “Between a Regular Person and a Brand”: Managing the Contradictions of the Authentic Self-Brand. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 62:1, 143-160. DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2020.1724058

- 7 Is personally relatable and similar to me^{35, 36}
- 8 Is effortless, spontaneous and their content doesn’t seem ‘too planned’ or ‘premeditated’^{37, 38}
- 9 Feels like a friend³⁹
- 10 Maintains a consistent quality and pace in published content^{40, 41}
- 11 Shares (personally) relevant information^{42, 43}
- 12 Shows expertise in the subject covered⁴⁴
- 13 Shares how they get their information and shares negative aspects of sponsored content transparently^{45, 46}
- 14 Isn’t too commercial (too much advertising is disconnecting) and has a good balance between sponsored and organic content^{47, 48}

35 Ibid.

36 Sokolova, K. & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Elsevier, vol. 53(C).

37 Davis, J. (2012). Accomplishing Authenticity in a Labor-Exposing Space. *Computers in Human Behavior* 28, 1966–1973. DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2012.05.017

38 Whitmer, J. M. (2021). “Between a Regular Person and a Brand”: Managing the Contradictions of the Authentic Self-Brand. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 62:1, 143-160. DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2020.1724058

39 Sokolova, K. & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Elsevier, vol. 53(C).

40 Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2022). A question of perspective: Exploring audiences’ views of journalistic boundaries. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), 705–723. DOI: 10.1177/1461444820963795

41 Whitmer, J. M. (2021). “Between a Regular Person and a Brand”: Managing the Contradictions of the Authentic Self-Brand. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 62:1, 143-160. DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2020.1724058

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43 Magrizos, S., Lamprinakos, G., Fang, Y. & Drossos, D. (2021). Taking It a Step Further: When do Followers Adopt Influencers’ Own Brands?. *Review of Marketing Science*. 19. 10.1515/roms-2021-0003.

44 Ibid.

45 Audrezet, A., Kerviler, G., & Moulard, J. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond passion. *Journal of Business Research*, Elsevier, vol. 117(C), 557–569.

46 Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2022). A question of perspective: Exploring audiences’ views of journalistic boundaries. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), 705–723. DOI: 10.1177/1461444820963795

47 Ibid.

48 Whitmer, J. M. (2021). “Between a Regular Person and a Brand”: Managing the Contradictions of the Authentic Self-Brand. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 62:1, 143-160. DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2020.1724058



14 things that influencers do to meet those desires

- 1 Well-planned publishing schedule to balance sponsored and organic content^{49, 50}
- 2 Try to maintain their 'creative freedom' in collaborations to seem more 'authentic'⁵¹
- 3 Creating a connection through interaction with followers to seem more 'real'^{52, 53, 54}
- 4 Choosing topics that are 'relatable' and trying to act 'relatable'⁵⁵
- 5 Be prepared to receive negative feedback if a collaboration is perceived 'inauthentic'⁵⁶
- 6 Deciding what personal information is shared publicly to create a sense of 'authenticity' and 'realness'⁵⁷
- 7 Teams behind the influencers are not disclosed, so everything seems to be coming from the influencer⁵⁸
- 8 Disclosing perceived expertise on the topic and/or their work the influencer has put into certain things 'personally ' to create an authentic and invested feeling⁵⁹
- 9 Even though the influencer has put a lot of effort into something, how it's presented to followers should feel 'unplanned' to feel more 'real'^{60, 61}
- 10 Disclose negative aspects and criticise products or services that are sponsored^{62, 63}

49 Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2022). A question of perspective: Exploring audiences' views of journalistic boundaries. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), 705–723. DOI: 10.1177/1461444820963795

50 Whitmer, J. M. (2021). "Between a Regular Person and a Brand": Managing the Contradictions of the Authentic Self-Brand. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 62:1, 143-160. DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2020.1724058

51 Audrezet, A., Kerviler, G., & Moulard, J. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond passion. *Journal of Business Research*, Elsevier, vol. 117(C), 557–569.

52 Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2022). A question of perspective: Exploring audiences' views of journalistic boundaries. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), 705–723. DOI: 10.1177/1461444820963795

53 Tolson, A. (2010). A new authenticity? Communicative practices on YouTube. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 7(4), 277-289.

54 Whitmer, J. M. (2021). "Between a Regular Person and a Brand": Managing the Contradictions of the Authentic Self-Brand. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 62:1, 143-160. DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2020.1724058

55 Ibid.

56 Luoma-aho, V., Pirttimäki, T., Maity, D., Munnukka, J., & Reinikainen, H. (2019). Primed Authenticity: How Priming Impacts Authenticity Perception of Social Media Influencers. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13(4), 352–365. DOI: 10.1080/1553118X.2019.1617716

57 Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2022). A question of perspective: Exploring audiences' views of journalistic boundaries. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), 705–723. DOI: 10.1177/1461444820963795

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59 Sokolova, K. & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Elsevier, vol. 53(C).

60 Whitmer, J. M. (2021). "Between a Regular Person and a Brand": Managing the Contradictions of the Authentic Self-Brand. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 62:1, 143-160. DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2020.1724058

61 Davis, J. (2012). Accomplishing Authenticity in a Labor-Exposing Space. *Computers in Human Behavior* 28, 1966–1973. DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2012.05.017

62 Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2022). A question of perspective: Exploring audiences' views of journalistic boundaries. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), 705–723. DOI: 10.1177/1461444820963795

63 Audrezet, A., Kerviler, G., & Moulard, J. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond passion. *Journal of Business Research*, Elsevier, vol. 117(C), 557–569.

- 11 Trying to seem less commercial than they really are to be more 'real'⁶⁴

- 12 Trying to stay on brand pursuing a certain promised lifestyle to keep followers happy⁶⁵
66

- 13 Trying not to be too repetitive⁶⁷

- 14 Trying to stand out from other competitors in the influencer scene without losing the interest of advertisers (not being too niche)⁶⁸

64 Whitmer, J. M. (2021). "Between a Regular Person and a Brand": Managing the Contradictions of the Authentic Self-Brand. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 62:1, 143-160. DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2020.1724058

65 Ibid.

66 Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2022). A question of perspective: Exploring audiences' views of journalistic boundaries. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), 705–723. DOI: 10.1177/1461444820963795

67 Ibid.

68 Whitmer, J. M. (2021). "Between a Regular Person and a Brand": Managing the Contradictions of the Authentic Self-Brand. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 62:1, 143-160. DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2020.1724058

Defining different types of social media content creators

What makes journalists different from influencers in the end?

Journalists like to consider themselves as a professional breed apart from other media - but how profound is the difference?: "Though we like to consider ourselves distinct by dint of our craft's supposedly elevated calling, journalists are really just creators by a different name."⁶⁹

As **Olivia Le Poidevin (BBC)** noted in an interview for this paper, up to now there has been a clear division between 'content' and 'news', in many media organisations, as if they were two separate worlds. From the audience point of view, they are not separate, they are the same.⁷⁰

Journalists are definitely content creators as well, but it's too vague a term. We need to define social media content creators and social media journalists and the so-called journo-influencers in more detail.

From the audience's point of view, what makes journalists different from other kinds of content creators? Are we so stuck in traditional values of what is a 'real journalist' that we haven't recognized the connecting points with other kinds of content creators?

For this paper, I have categorised social media content creators in the following way including suggestions of real individual UK examples:

Social Media Influencer

Examples: Zoella, Dr Alex George, Jack Harries, Immy Lucas, Jim Chapman, Alfie Dea, Lucy Earl, Hannah Witton

Social Media Activist

Examples: Paris Lees, Chidera Eggerue, Hussain Manawer, Jada Sezer, Blair Imani

Journo-influencer, Freelancer

Examples: Owen Jones, Kassy Cho

Journo-influencer, Private Media

Examples: Sophia Smith Galer, Vice, Max Foster, CNN, Mojo Abidi, Channel 4, Clodagh Griffin, The News Movement

Journo-influencer, Public Service Media

Examples: Emma Bentley, BBC, Monika Plaha, BBC, Tom Brada, BBC, Georgia Coan, BBC

Traditional journalist, Private Media

Traditional journalist, Public Media

These definitions are not water-tight but this graph defines similarities and differences between influencers, social media activists and journo-influencers. These are the main categories for my definition:

1. How do employment relationships and income differ?
2. What are the aims of content creation?
3. Who has rules and guidelines to follow and who doesn't?
4. How well content creation is planned?
5. Who benefits from content creation?

⁶⁹ Nieman Journalism Lab: The rise of the journalist-influencer Stenberg, Mark . Weblog post. Newstex Trade & Industry Blogs , Chatham: Newstex. Dec 10, 2020.

<https://www.niemanlab.org/2020/12/the-rise-of-the-journalist-influencer/>

⁷⁰ Olivia Le Poidevin (BBC), Interview with the author 2021

Key: • yes • no • + • yes and no

CONTENT CREATOR	Social media influencer	Social media activist	Journo-influencer 'freelancer'	Journo-influencer 'private media'	Journo-influencer 'public service'	Traditional journalist 'private media'	Traditional journalist 'public media'
EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP AND INCOME							
Does free collabs, shoutouts ect. with associations, trusts etc.	•	•	•	• + •	•	• + •	•
Does paid collabs with associations, trusts etc.	•	•	•	•	•	• + •	•
Does paid commercial collabs	•	•	•	• + •	•	• + •	•
Earning their living only trough social media	•	• + •	•	•	•	•	•
Has a permanent full time employer	•	• + •	•	•	•	•	•
Is a freelancer	• + •	• + •	•	•	•	•	•
Is an entrepreneur	• + •	• + •	• + •	•	•	•	•
Has a manager, producer etc.	• + •	• + •	• + •	•	•	•	•
CONTENT CREATION AIMS TO							
Drive traffic to a site or a platform	•	•	•	•	•	• + •	• + •
Drive traffic to a site that has ads	•	•	•	•	• + •	• + •	•
Help sell a product or a service (app, vod service etc.)	•	•	•	•	•	• + •	• + •
Help sell a commercial product	•	•	•	•	•	• + •	•
Create and grow a following on social media	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Create and grow their conspicuousness	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Be transparent on who is involved in content creation	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •
RULES, LAWS AND GUIDELINES TO FOLLOW							
Editorial guidelines and standards	•	•	• + •	•	•	•	•
Journalism etchics and standards	•	•	• + •	•	•	•	•
Influencer marketing guidelines (if available)	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •	•	•	•
Copyright laws and regulations	• + •	• + •	• + •	•	•	•	•
Content publishing laws	• + •	• + •	• + •	•	•	•	•
Rules and regulations of social media platforms	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
CONTENT CREATION HAS							
Main themes or a main subject	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Special knowledge, know-how, expertise	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Well thought tone of voice	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
A certain visual style / graphics	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
A publishing plan	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Constant flow of published content	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Audience engagement	•	•	•	•	•	• + •	• + •
A team helping in content creation	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •
Power to affect how people act and think	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
WHO BENEFITS FROM THE CONTENT CREATED							
The audience	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •
Advertisers	• + •	• + •	• + •	• + •	•	• + •	•
Company that the person is working for	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
The person themselves (journalist, influencer etc.)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•



How do employment relationships and income differ?

As we can see from the graph, journalists and different kinds of content creators are closer to each other than we might think. The biggest differences comparing influencers and 'journno-influencers' are in employment relationship and income, laws and regulations.

Social media influencers and activists can both create sponsored content and collaborate with both commercial brands, trusts or associations. Although it's more likely that activists would be doing less commercial work and more likely to do social media work for free. That means that their income could be coming from another career.

'Journno-influencers' income is very much connected to their employment type. So if a 'journno-influencer' is employed full time in a public service media company, they wouldn't be doing commercial work. Freelance 'journno-influencers' might be commercially collaborating and earning some of their income from sponsorships on their platforms. Full time private media 'journno-influencers' would do commercial collabs or advertisements if it's connected to their employer or the employer allows them to do so.

Full time employed 'journno-influencers' in private and public media both have some kind of executive in charge of their work and set goals. Social media influencers, activists and freelance 'journno-influencers' are usually their own bosses, but they can have a representative, manager or a producer working with them on their channels.

In many cases employment relationships and contracts are confidential, so it isn't always easy to find out if a journalist is for example a full time employee or a freelancer.

What are the aims of content creation?

We can see similarities between all content creators in the graph in the 'aims of the content creation' section. All creators including 'journno-influencers' are trying to drive traffic to a site or a platform. Only public service journalists wouldn't drive traffic to a site that has ads as a primary motive. But if a public service journalist or 'journno-influencer' publishes content on social platforms, the content is shown on a platform among advertisements. So even public service media is not 'free' from advertising (and in many countries public service media is at least partly privately funded).

Everyone wants to get attention and that is why all kinds of content creators compete in the same attention economy. All kinds of content creators want to create awareness and target their audience.

Social media influencers, activists and all types of content creators might have a team who they work with who help in the content creation. As we have learned, one of the aims is to 'be authentic' for the audience. That can mean that content creators do not disclose these teams behind the social media personas. This is clearly a transparency issue, but some creators might not choose to fully disclose to their followers in an effort to feel more personal and approachable.

Who has rules and guidelines to follow and who doesn't?

Some of the biggest differences between content creators shown in the graph are what kind of rules, laws and editorial guidelines they have to follow. Social media platforms all have their own terms of use that they have autonomously created. These have to be followed by all content creators, but those rules aren't always favourable to everyone.

Journalistic media companies follow their own editorial and ethical guidelines. Those have to be adapted to all platforms used for publishing and sometimes social media platform guidelines are in tension with the company's own rules. For example a social media platform can block or shadow ban journalistic content that meets editorial guidelines but is against the terms of use of a social media platform. This content can be democratically important, but includes, for example, visual material that infringes rules of social media companies.

Also, copyright laws restrict established media companies from using copyrighted material online without permission or payment. Copyright laws concern everyone, but are not always followed by people surfing and posting around the internet. Not even when they earn some or all of their living through social media.

Since most social media influencers and activists aren't directly regulated, there is a possibility of hidden agendas or advertisement. Many countries have tried to regulate at least social media advertising, and these regulations concern influencers as well. But it's difficult to enforce them.

How well is content creation planned?

The most similarities that all content creators in the graph have is in the content creation planning. All creators have a theme or a main subject that is covered. To survive on social platforms, it pays to answer audience needs with specific kinds of content.

Usually the person or a team creating content has special know-how or expertise and a distinctive tone of voice. Publishing plans are made by influencers, activists and journalists. Plans are followed by a constant flow of published content and engagement. All the creators have a team or work by themselves to that strategy.

Who benefits from content creation?

All creators benefit somehow from the content they are creating. And, of course, the platforms benefit from the content published on them. If the content is commercial, advertisers benefit from the content created about them or the ads run between the content.



The essence of a 'journno-influencer'

How does a "journno-influencer" and an "influential journalist" differ?

There has been a lot of discussion in the research interviews for this paper about what is the difference between a 'journno-influencer' and an 'influential journalist'. There are similarities between the two, but also some key differences.

Nowadays social media personalities build connections with audiences that were previously built earlier via traditional broadcast or print media. Social media has become a way to make yourself famous without the need to work in the 'legacy media'. These are 'journno-influencers'.

An 'influential journalist' is a journalist who has gained their awareness or fame through more traditional modes of journalism. A person who has worked as a journalist on a newspaper, radio or TV channel, but who also uses social media to build their personal following. The biggest difference can be found in how the content is created.

An 'influential journalist' isn't publishing journalistic content on social platforms 'natively'. The content would rarely be available on social platforms only. Usually pieces from more 'traditional news' (articles, radio clips, TV inserts) can be distributed on social platforms, but the social platform isn't the only or first platform for the content creation. So social media is used more for sharing something they have done elsewhere to create awareness of that work.

Another big difference is that an 'influential journalist' might not be presenting the story themselves. There might be a brand or a team promoting their content for them. 'Journno-influencers' content is tied to their persona, so they would mainly be presenting the journalistic content with their own unique style via their social media profiles.

An 'influential journalist' who has written an article would post that article on social media to drive traffic to a site. But there isn't any original social media content created from the article that would suit the social platform's format. So it's basically distributing the same content created elsewhere. A good example of this would be a Twitter thread based on an article published on their news organisation's website.

A 'journno-influencer' might be working as a journalist writing or creating similar content, but what makes them unique is that they create content from those same subjects on

social media following formats and ways of telling stories on those platforms. Or they might only do unique pieces of news on social platforms. A 'journno-influencer' usually follows a format that is common on social media platforms to blend in with other content created. Examples might include a YouTube video, TikTok video, Instagram Stories or Reels.

An 'influential journalist' might be using social media to create awareness and gain a following by creating content that is something else than news. But they are, in effect, marketing their work. This is something a 'journno-influencer' might do as well concurrently with unique social media news creation.

Defining different archetypes of 'journno-influencers':

1. Journalists who work like influencers

A person who has studied journalism and maybe has worked or works as a journalist in legacy media, but is building their career through social media and has their own social channels used for journalistic/factual content creation. This person can be employed by a news organisation full time or as a freelancer, but is known for their accomplishments in social media journalism and their persona. They work and create social media news content as their full time job or social media content creation is a significant part of it. They project their personality and are familiar with different kinds of social media platforms. They publish their journalistic content social media first/only on social media.

2. Influencers who 'present' journalistic content

A person who has been employed by a news or media organisation to create social media news content for a specific target audience. Usually an influencer is known for certain themes or topics covered on their own social media accounts or they have a unique following, tone of voice or a performing style that the employing company wants to use for news content creation and publishing. Influencer who presents journalistic content has the support of the news organisation behind and works with a team of journalists and producers. The team is delivering the journalistic content, but the influencer is presenting it.

So we now have a working definition, let's consider some of the key issues about the way that 'influencer' attributes might impact journalism.

How 'journno-influencers' connect to 'hard to reach' audiences

Most UK tabloids use social platforms actively. For example the Daily Mail and The Sun use Snapchat, TikTok, Youtube, and Instagram. Everyday these companies are present in people's lives, making themselves relevant, on those platforms where younger audiences spend their time. That is how influencers build trust with their followers.

Tabloids use social platforms mainly for entertainment news focused content. But have we thought enough about how we could use that kind of power to benefit 'quality' journalistic content?

Gaining credibility in fragmented 'hard to reach' audiences

Most media companies need growth and new audiences for their content but are stuck in the same production formats and broadcasting. Niche target groups that aren't following major news outlets or interested in journalism either might get interested if content formats differed from traditional broadcasting and dull link distribution on social media. As Shirish Kulkarni has pointed out, it's not the audience's fault if journalists don't reach them:

"We know that audiences for news media have been falling across much of the world and we've consistently failed to reach many communities – not because they are "hard to reach" but because they're badly served, under-represented or misrepresented."⁷¹

In the search of new audiences gaining trust and credibility in highly saturated platforms is very hard. So how could a relatable 'journno-influencer' help?

A 'journno-influencer', has a specific target audience that they are reaching out to. Usually a 'journno-influencer' knows the target group thoroughly or even represents that target group archetype themselves. They are personalities that have a unique tone of voice and style of presentation. The attraction of a 'journno-influencer' is usually connected to their personality, tone of voice, content format, storytelling style and shown expertise.

Content creation isn't a one way street. A 'journno-influencer' builds trust with their followers through interaction, trying to listen and fulfil their needs and wishes. Followers

⁷¹ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2022/01/31/new-forms-of-storytelling-for-a-more-equitable-and-trustworthy-journalism/>

built a connection with the 'journno-influencer' and feel that they have a say in the content creation. There is, at least, an open line of communication and a feeling of being listened to. Content format is known and relatable and the person speaks in a familiar style directly to you. 'Journno-influencers' stay on top of things and react in the rhythm of social media when something big happens.

'Journno-influencer' storytelling formats are created through following trends, needs and gaps in the market and using a lot of imagination. If a 'journno-influencer' wants to be successful on social media platforms, they have to learn, try out and create to find the right mixes on how to combine news and current affairs to for example TikTok format.

Max Foster (CNN)⁷² and **Sophia Smith Galer (ex BBC, now Vice)⁷³** started their famous TikTok accounts by trying out and experimenting with what would work. Max Foster told me he started experimenting on TikTok because his children were using it. This must be the case for many, that social media trends follow them through younger generations. Sophia Smith Galer started experimenting with TikTok in her free time when working as a journalist at the BBC.

One reason behind starting a TikTok account for Smith Galer was to develop professionally as a video journalist. We are also seeing a new pivot to short-form video, thanks to the growth of TikTok⁷⁴, so many journalists are at least getting to know the platform. Quickly after experimenting with TikTok, Smith Galer realised she could use it as a news gathering tool as well. Engagement through news gathering keeps the lines open for communication and makes the journalist approachable and real.

What makes the content of Sophia Smith Galer and Max Foster unique, is that they are using the platform for original news content creation. Both of them are clearly defined as journalists on the platform, but the content format is usually experimental and follows trends and challenges on the platform.

As Smith Galer says, she quickly saw that it was helping her journalism. It was giving her a bigger audience and she was getting stories out of it.

Foster and Smith Galer say they have gained more awareness in new audiences that weren't spending time exploring their content on traditional media platforms. Especially young people would recognise them more from TikTok, when most of them wouldn't know who they were without the TikTok presence.

⁷² Max Foster (CNN), Interview with the author 2021

⁷³ Sophia Smith Galer (Vice), Interview with the author 2021

⁷⁴ <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/journalism-media-and-technology-trends-and-predictions-2022>



Who benefits from the content creation of 'journno-influencers'

David Knowles (Telegraph)⁷⁵ raised a question about who benefits from the work 'journno-influencers' do on social media platforms. Is it that 'journno-influencers' are just getting a bigger following for themselves, or is social media work bringing more audience to their company's 'owned' platforms as well?

The audience is one of the winners of 'journno-influencer' style social media content creation, if the platforms used for news publishing are those platforms that are familiar to them and in frequent use. The audience is getting information that is reliable, useful and presented in a format that is familiar through a persona they like.

A 'journno-influencer' might be making a name for themselves when they are succeeding on social platforms, similarly as TV presenters when they appear on broadcast TV. The biggest difference is that TV channels are considered to be 'owned' channels and social channels are usually considered to be 'third-party' platforms. But, how 'journno-influencers' employer could benefit from the gained fame should be thought through. There are many ways, and one is of course to make sure that the organisation's brand is present in the content created.

Could a 'journno-influencer' help to get more paying subscribers, traffic to a website? Some platforms are better at driving traffic to another platform than others. But over time people get connected to familiar personas, and through that they could help bring more audience to paid platforms as well. The main point is that the content has to have value in people's life to be able to gain paying subscribers.

If the content isn't serving a purpose for subscribers or followers, why would they pay more for that or move to another platform? If an interesting persona is working for a company or brand that is visible in the content presented, this could encourage them to think that the brand might have more relevant things for them overall.

⁷⁵ David Knowles (Telegraph), Interview with the author 2021



Ethical issues we face when working like influencers as journalists

Regulation: a threat or an opportunity for 'journno-influencers'?

In the UK and around the world there has been a growing discussion around the risks of social media, especially for young people. There's a move to regulate social media platforms and influencers at a governmental level.

Tighter regulations could result in social media becoming a more approachable and safer place for journalists. But it could as well make journalistic work even harder on social platforms. A lot of work needs to be done to find the right nuances that suit social media and different platforms.

Some regulations are available for social media professionals on responsible advertisement and commercial collaborations^{76, 77}, but otherwise social media work is mostly regulated by terms of use by global social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and Google. That itself can be threatening to the independence of journalistic media, when a platform has its own rules that can be in contradiction with editorial guidelines.

Recently Denmark gave an example of social media regulation with a new law that forbids influencers to advertise 'improper things' for under aged followers. The law bans the advertisement of body modifications such as plastic surgeries, dental whitening, weight loss products and shockingly, sugar dating. These things cannot be promoted on accounts that have under age followers⁷⁸

The trend to regulate the 'influencer economy' like in Denmark is growing and the reasons behind it are clear. When younger audiences use social media, there are various problems they may face; hate speech, cyberbullying, self-harm, disinformation, conspiracy theories and so on.

⁷⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-media-endorsements-guide-for-influencers/social-media-endorsements-being-transparent-with-your-followers>

⁷⁷ <https://www.asa.org.uk/advice-online/recognising-ads-social-media.html>

⁷⁸ <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/penge/nu-er-det-slut-med-influencer-reklamer-til-unge-skoenhedsoperationer-og-sugardating>



In the UK, the Online Safety Bill proponents claim it will make the UK the safest place in the world online, while they'll be defending freedom of speech. This Safety Bill could 'set the tone for social media regulation around the world'.⁷⁹

The Bill would have exemptions for news publishers to maintain their journalistic independence on social media platforms so that news content publishers content wouldn't be restricted with moderation or removing content without a clear criminal offence. The Online Safety Bill also tries to secure 'citizen journalists', such as bloggers because of their 'democratic importance'. But this might mean that they would just have an easier complaints procedure if the content is 'in the public interest'.⁸⁰

Journalists should not wait for regulation to take effect. There are potential downsides to any attempt to regulate online speech and journalists are rightly wary of efforts to control what people say online. Instead, they should try to find ways to stay relevant in the social media world. Worries about harmful content online proves the point that the more trustworthy Ofcom-regulated public service media companies should be present and are very needed on social media platforms.

Media literacy: how do people recognise what is journalism and what isn't?

When online and social media platforms are full of harmful content, the need for better media literacy is vital. The Edelman Trust Barometer 2021 found out that fewer than 1 in 4 people have 'good information hygiene'.⁸¹ This means that there is a lot of work to be done to improve media literacy on an educational level. But shouldn't social media journalism include media literacy as well?

There are great examples of content that cover media literacy and are social media savvy informative formats. One example would be a TikTok trend that asks you to tell something unique by starting it with the phrase 'I'll start'. That has been used by all kinds of TikTokers, for example Sophia Smith-Galer has used it to make people aware of journalism ethics and the right of reply.⁸² This would be a classic example of how you can make almost any trend fit your purposes in news creation if you use your imagination.

Transparency included in the storytelling format can be a way to increase media literacy, when people understand and are shown the whole process of news gathering or at least

the most important parts of it. One example of this could be a TikTok video from Sophia Smith-Galer where she is talking about spiking incidents in the UK.⁸³ This video shows a simple way to increase transparency when information sources are stated clearly. But who's job is it to teach media literacy? It's a hard task for newsrooms already struggling with audience engagement.

How to be personal, objective and impartial as a 'journo-influencer'

How can a 'journo-influencer' stay impartial or objective and act in a personal way at the same time? All things personal can be planned and decided beforehand to be clear what a journalist wants to disclose of themselves publicly. What makes a difference is the feeling of being personal even if a 'journo-influencer' doesn't disclose a lot of information about themselves.

The feeling of being personal can be achieved through simple acts such as interaction or self disclosure. A 'journo-influencer' can create a feeling of 'that person is talking to me' by reacting to things that are relevant to followers. This can be something as simple as a jouno-influencer choosing the questions in a Q&A session on Instagram.

If a 'journo-influencer' is transparent about their work, employer, editorial guidelines and ethics in a relevant way, they can easily adapt their newsroom rules and regulations to social platforms – by using creativity. That makes 'journo-influencers' stand out and differentiate themselves from others who aren't following the same Ofcom regulations, for example.

Impartiality and the BBC – No emojis, likes, social media personal brands or opinions

During the autumn of 2021 former BBC executives expressed fears that younger journalists don't understand what impartiality means. They said that social media is often a place to campaign: too loud, casual and argumentative. BBC journalistic staff shouldn't be lured into subjectivity on social media.⁸⁴

To reinforce this, BBC has published a 10 point plan to push fair and unbiased content including measures like new internal investigation policies, editorial policy team will be strengthened, impartiality training will be for all levels and transparency will be improved internally and externally.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/oct/13/techscape-uk-online-safety-bill-could-set-tone-for-social-media-regulation-worldwide-facebook-google>

⁸⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/dec/15/uk-parliament-pushes-back-on-the-online-safety-bill>

⁸¹ <https://www.edelman.co.uk/sites/g/files/aatuss301/files/2021-02/2021%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20-%20UK%20Media%20Deck.pdf>

⁸² <https://www.tiktok.com/@sophiasmithgaler/video/7056808884576587013?>

⁸³ https://www.tiktok.com/@sophiasmithgaler/video/7021171469682052357?_t=8RtVPBu5HGg&_r=1

⁸⁴ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/bbc-roger-mosey-journalism-tv-news-director-b971970.html>

⁸⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/2021/bbc-outlines-push-for-fair-accurate-and-unbiased-content>

Social media guidelines for BBC employees are strict even on how your use of emoji or liking some post can affect your impartiality or make you seem biased. Employees are told to remember that their personal brand on social media is always secondary to your responsibility to the BBC.⁸⁶

Likes, shares and emojis are the core of social media, so for public broadcasting in the UK 'journno-influencers' life is made particularly hard. That's maybe why BBC doesn't have many examples of journalism that would be created through personalities using BBC owned social media platforms publishing social media first.

Emma Bentley would be one of the first ones creating social media first influencer style content while working as a camerawoman for the BBC News. The material published on her TikTok account⁸⁷ shows behind the scenes material from the BBC News and some original news videos as well. We learn about what it's like to work in a newsroom from her point of view and valuable information on how news is made.

Talent such as Emma Bentley are the kind of people who have the ideas and personality to create 'journno-influencer' content, and that should be embraced more. When strict social media policies appear, the value of social media savvy people increases. The next chapter will be talking more about how to recognise, recruit and keep this kind of talent in house.

⁸⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidance/individual-use-of-social-media/>

⁸⁷ <https://www.tiktok.com/@justemmawithacamera>

How to recognise and recruit 'journno-influencers', and what happens when they decide to leave?

When hiring a 'journno-influencer', think first, do we have that person already? A typical 'journno-influencer' is genuinely interested in social media and willing to experiment with different forms of content creation. The person doesn't have to be a social media native, but they have to be eager to learn and try out things, like Max Foster has done with TikTok for CNN.

A 'journno-influencer' has expertise or interest in journalism and maybe some other talent as well. They are creative and persistent, because being a 'journno-influencer' needs a lot of work and commitment. But how to find potential 'journno-influencers'? There might be a bigger structural problem.

When young journalists plan their future and search for jobs, career paths are still quite traditional because of the current newsrooms and how they work. There aren't enough journalists that would be 'journno-influencer' role models, at least not yet in the UK. So journalism students and young professionals are still dreaming of legacy media jobs in journalism, such as TV presenters. Many young journalism students are very keen to work in social media journalism, but the formats and jobs aren't there yet that would reflect their own social media usage and followings.

For media organisations on a tight budget there is a strategic dilemma about investing in new platforms where 'influencer journalism' might flourish, as the BBC's Olivia Le Poidevin (Assistant Editor, BBC News Arabic) explains:

"The problem is that most organisations don't have the agility, we never get there fast enough, and when we get there the next thing has come along but we already have put all our financing into this. You have to make sure you have a diverse portfolio and your other platforms are strong. Not just relying on one personality that might just leave the organisation when you just lose a huge audience."⁸⁸

People have always changed jobs and moved on with their careers, so this isn't really a new phenomenon that media companies struggle after they lose one of their TV

⁸⁸ Olivia Le Poidevin (BBC), Interview with the author 2021

hosts for example. For public service media companies this is a familiar issue, but by developing this talent they are fulfilling their wider role of building up journalistic capacity for the market as a whole. So 'journno-influencer' platforms on social media are just a new way of bringing audiences together, but the reality is that they aren't eternal and neither are broadcast TV shows connected to a persona.

One of the threats could be that 'journno-influencers' want to start their own platforms, not that they would be moving to another company. This is a reflection of the way that the news market is changing with more opportunities for personal platforms such as Substack newsletters or crowdfunded YouTube channels. It seems there will be increasing movement between different kinds of media roles and more flexible careers.

So companies may need to think more about how they can keep their 'journno-influencers' happy within the company. Are there enough opportunities when a 'journno-influencer' wants to grow? Are there people who understand the nature of trial and error on social media platforms? Are there enough people who understand and value what they are doing and how important it is? Are there people who keep in mind the harsh reality of social media and public work where 'journno-influencers' are under pressure from all kinds of online communication?

Could something good come from more competition? More relevant news content on social channels for unserved audiences? Maybe, but at least these 'journno-influencers' have had enough recognition to get new opportunities.

Are news organisations ready to grow 'journno-influencers'?

Conclusion and key takeaways: What to consider in your newsroom about 'journno-influencers'

Influencer economy can easily be discarded as a way to make yourself famous for selfish reasons. Of course there are negative phenomenons in social media in general, but we as journalists should take it more seriously that influencers are opinion leaders in 'hard to reach' audiences. Younger audiences are thought to become similar media users that 'baby boomers' or 'millenials' are at this point, and most media professionals continue like that would be true.

There is a need to critically consider what digital platforms journalistic media should use, who owns it and what are you signing into when using them. Still we should not overlook critical young audiences and their ever changing media usage. We should offer them possibilities to engage in trustworthy news content on platforms that are familiar to them and validate their various ways of consuming news and media content.

As this paper has addressed, there are ways to adjust content creation, try out and develop new formats for news as well without losing our special know-how, skills and integrity of journalism. Relationships form and grow over time, and we have to hurry if we want to form meaningful news and factual related social media relationships for younger audiences.

A study that explored 'celebrified' columnists affirms how journalism intertwines with 'microcelebrities' and 'social media influencers'. The study argues that the democratic function of 'celebrified' of columnists, like Owen Jones, lies in how they can facilitate meaningful conversation, or are they just increasing the market share of news outlets and themselves as brands.⁸⁹

This is a core question of 'journno-influencers' as well. Are news organisations able to drive meaningful conversations through them? Distribute information that serves a purpose in people's lives and offer unbiased fact checked point of views? What kind of democracy are we looking at later if journalistic media is absent from relevant platforms for younger, hard to reach audiences? Journalists will always have to have the agility to evolve, even when the 'influencer' phenomenon is long gone.

⁸⁹ Usher, Bethany. (2021). The celebrified columnist and opinion spectacle: Journalism's changing place in networked public spheres. *Journalism : Theory, Practice, and Criticism.*, 22(11), 2836-2854.

Key takeaways: What to consider when thinking about creating influencer style journalistic content?

- Is there a specific target group you could reach better with ‘journno-influencer’ style content?
- Who could be your ‘journno-influencer’? Do we already have that person?
- How could your ‘journno-influencer’ show their personality in the content created? Do they have a special skill or know-how that could be used?
- What kind of exceptional value could you give to followers through a ‘journno-influencer’? How to be a part of their daily lives?
- What would be the right platform for that? And does your newsroom have enough experience of the platform or will to learn?
- Are you prepared to be persistent, flexible and creative? There might be a need to try out different formats before you find your own style and audience.
- Are you willing to develop your concepts hand in hand with content creation, especially when the social media platform evolves?
- Do you have relevant goals on what you want to achieve and also an ending point to your project if needed?
- What kind of concept or theme could compete or stand out with other content on the chosen social media platform?
- Are you able to keep up with a consistent and reactive publishing schedule?
- Is your brand present in the content created by your ‘journno-influencer’: Are your followers aware where ‘journno-influencer’ works? And how is it communicated?
- In what ways a ‘journno-influencer’ would you be able to bring followers from social media to your own platform (if it’s in your interest)?
- How are you able to follow your editorial and ethical guidelines when creating ‘journno-influencer’ content on social platforms?
- And how will the social media platforms guidelines affect your content creation?
- How do you show your values and ethical guidelines in the content created?
- How do you show journalistic work transparently in the content created?
- Are followers able to participate in the content creation? Do their opinions matter?
- And how to create different kinds of opportunities for the ‘journno-influencer’ when they grow and develop?

Acknowledgments

Thanks to all the people who helped with this project and in particular the following who agreed to extended research interviews:

Sophia Smith Galer, Senior News Reporter, Vice World News (before BBC)

Max Foster, Anchor and Correspondent, CNN

Olivia Le Poidevin, Assistant Editor, BBC News Arabic

Davin Knowles, Head of Social Media, The Telegraph

Gabriela Torres, Head of Social Media, BBC World Service

Alex Murray, Producer/Project Manager, BBC

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Design: LSE Design Unit (info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/communications-division/design-unit)

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