

THE USE OF EDUCATIONAL INFLUENCERS FOR COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES IN THE TERTIARY EDUCATION SECTOR IN AUSTRIA

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Abstract

This study examines reputation building in the Austrian higher education sector with the help of social media influencers. The following research questions are asked: Who are Austria's leading influencers in the tertiary education sector? Are educational influencers specifically used in university communication in Austria? The aim of this study is to find out whether influencers are already integrated into the communication activities of universities and which channels are used.

First, reputation factors that are relevant for students, were discussed. These can be divided into three groups: Relevant stakeholder groups, prestige and distinctiveness. According to our research design the study does not focus on paid or owned media. Instead, communicators that can be assigned to the area of "Earned Media"- in detail to the Earned Social Media - will be investigated and analyzed. These communicators can be called influencers. Various categories of influencers are discussed on the basis of current literature. On the one hand, there are influential opinion leaders who, with their detailed specialist knowledge, are regarded as so-called experts for their followers. They are not primarily characterized by a large reach. On the other hand, there are the strong multipliers, who have a large community of diverse people. This study focuses on the experts. The experts in the tertiary education sector are called "educational influencers". In order to identify the experts, a quantitative analysis was carried out, which looks at the social media sites of 36 Austrian universities. The online tool "Fanpage-Karma" was used to implement social media monitoring. The user-generated content on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube was evaluated, too. On the basis of this study, the environment of Austrian universities and universities of applied sciences in the social networks can be traced. A total of 137 profiles were compared according to various criteria: Fans, number of posts, number of likes, total number of reactions/ comments/ shares, growth (absolute), commitment and post-interaction. When evaluating the key figures, the size and number of students at the institutes must also be taken into consideration. On this basis, a trend analysis was carried out with 43 profiles, each with over 15,000 followers. As a result of the trend analysis, the educational influencers Elke Höfler and Markus Scholz were identified. Furthermore, with the help of a qualitative effort that was independent of the quantitative research design, the scientific channel "letsdogabout.science" was also classified as an educational influencer. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the social media platforms of Austrian universities shows that external social networks have played a minor role in their communication mix to date. Further research should deal with strong multipliers with large communities in social networks and their influence on the reputation building of Austrian universities.

Keywords: Educational Influencer, Tertiary Education Sector

1 REPUTATION IN THE TERTIARY INSTITUTION

Already 20 years ago, Frank (1999) predicted that the education sector was heading for a The-Winner-Takes-It-All market. He illustrates the consequences as follows: American universities advertise for the stakeholder group of teachers with the help of material incentives and for the stakeholder group of students with cost-intensive infrastructure measures. But there are other measures than investments in infrastructure, which a university can use to position itself promisingly. These include intangible resources such as reputation. For this reason, this study will deal with the topic of reputation building of universities in the social media.

Reputation develops in direct personal contact with an organisation, but also through images, experiences, impressions of other actors, interpersonal communication and mass media (Peters & Liehr-Gobbers, 2015). Eisenegger defines reputation as follows:

"Reputation is the public reputation a person, organization or institution enjoys for its specific contribution to the achievement of collectively shared goals and values. Positive reputation arises when actors permanently fulfil the expectations of important reference groups and when information is able to diffuse expectation conformity into processes of public communication" (Eisenegger, 2015, p. 450).

Despite the fact that image and reputation are often used in the same way, the two terms differ. In comparison to image, reputation has a "higher and more far-reaching claim as well as a higher commitment" (Rademacher, 2006, p. 48). A key feature of reputation is the possibility of ranking, i.e. there is a university with the best reputation, followed by the second-best university and so on (Eisenegger, 2015). This is not only a distinguishing feature in comparison to the image, but also influences the reputation of a company itself. In other words, a published good reputation rating contributes positively to an even better reputation (Barnett & Leih, 2016). It is therefore advisable to use an active communication strategy to influence the agile construct of reputation (Schneckenleitner, 2019).

Such a strategy can focus on the reputation factors for students. These are according to Wilkins and Huisman (2013):

Relevant stakeholder groups: My teachers recommended the university / My parents would be proud if I went to this university / Students in my school think a lot of this university / My friends would be impressed if I went to this university / The university primarily gets good media coverage

Prestige: The University is one of the top universities in its country / The University is highly ranked / Companies want to recruit graduates of this university

Distinctness: The University appeals to a particular type of person / the campus has a distinctive, unique atmosphere

2 INFLUENCER

Social media in particular are characterised by the participation and interaction of individuals. In addition to their own communication channels (Owned Media) and paid channels (Paid Media), social media channels also contain mentions of a brand or a company by users (Earned Media) (Katz, 2016). Influencers can support Earned Social Media messages. Three categories of influencers are distinguished (Lammenet, 2019):

Consumer Advocates: Customers of a brand or a company who report positively about a product or a company.

Employee Advocates: Employees of a company who publicly represent the company due to their high level of identification.

Social Advocates: Identify themselves with the social commitment of a company, but do not have to be customers.

Employee advocates are also referred to as corporate influencers. According to the Trend Report 2019 by news aktuell, 49 percent of German companies already rely on corporate influencers (Stier-Thompson & Stadthoewer, 2019).

Schüller (2014) defines two types of digital influencers that differentiate themselves from each other in terms of recommendations made, reach and weighting of their messages. On the one hand, there are the influential opinion leaders, who with their detailed specialist knowledge are regarded as so-called experts for their followers. Although they do not reach the broad masses, they influence them effectively and profoundly.

As a result, they exert a particularly efficient influence in market niches. These include, in particular, bloggers who have often built up their own significant media presence as experts. In addition to experts, there are multipliers with strong relationships who possess a larger community from diverse circles of people and communicate a wide range of information, product and brand recommendations. Strong multipliers often act as product testers for companies and agencies (Schüller, 2014). This paper focuses on the experts who, according to Lammenett, can be assigned to both the Consumer Advocates Group and the Employee Advocates Group.

The selection of an influencer depends on the communication goals of a company, the target group and the strategic approach in the field of influencer marketing (Fries, 2019). This can be further divided into two approaches, the strategic approach and the operational approach. In the first approach, influencers are embedded in the marketing mix holistically and on a long-term basis. This integration influences further communication measures of a company, such as public relations, social media as well as online campaigns. In the operational approach, short-term measures that achieve a temporary high level of attention and reach are essential. Depending on the concept, other factors may be considered to be effective for an influencer. These are broken down into qualitative and quantitative success criteria. Qualitative factors describe the image and positioning of the influencer and how it is perceived in its environment. On the other hand, quantitative criteria enable interactions of influencers to be measured and compared (Hellenkemper, 2018)

Table 1: Qualitative success factors (Source: Own description referring to Hellenkemper, 2018)

Qualitative success factors for influencers	
Term	Description
Brand Fit	the image of the company and the influencer should interlock to create an optimal brand fit / an authentic and credible presentation is made possible and a positive effect is achieved
Authenticity	Brand fit and authenticity of an influencer correlate strongly / the influencer must be able to identify with the company in order to present it authentically / It is important that the style of the influencer is maintained and that paid postings do not dominate.
Content-Quality	the influencer content should match that of the company, fit well into the existing content and have a similar linguistic style / the content of the influencer can then be transferred to the company's own channels / The company positions itself in the influencer's environment and its image is adopted / Whether professional high-quality or emotionally charged content is required depends strongly on the company and the target group.
Advertising impact of the content	the contents of the influencer are examined on the basis of their advertising effect / Investigate how the company is integrated into the influencer's content / Here the question of the obvious or subtle representation of the company arises.
Engaged Influencers	Influencers, which are known in the scene and network with other high-quality influencers, increase their market value.

Table 2: Quantitative success factors (Source: Own description referring to Hellenkemper, 2018)

Quantitative success factors for influencers	
Term	Description
Range (Fans)	the range alone says little about the success, for this further analyses are still needed / a high number of followers is essential for campaigns that want to achieve high performance and attention / It should be noted that followers are active and perceive the channel of the influencer directly /

	Influencers with a few dedicated followers who share the content and pass it on sometimes achieve greater success.
Target Group Overlapping	the target group of the influencer should be the same as the target group the company wants to address
Target group analysis (number of likes, total number/reactions/shares, post-interaction, engagement)	The analysis determines the effective range and quality of the influencer as well as the availability of the followers / to investigate whether followers interact with the content, whether they follow many other channels, and whether they exhibit human behaviour / It becomes apparent whether active and committed followers or purchased followers or machine bots are being reached / the analysis makes it possible to evaluate the influence of the campaign in advance
Like-Follower-Ratio (number of Likes in relation to the number of fans)	the metric is combined with other metrics to obtain more accurate results / the like-follower ratio (number of likes in relation to the number of followers) shows the activity of the target group and the generated attention of the influencer in advance / a high like-follower ratio and a large number of comments per post, indicate followers who are susceptible to the influencer's content and who have a real interest in it
Follower growth (absolute)	the steady growth of followers is crucial, especially in long-term cooperations / new followers are necessary, even with a high reach, because they discover the contents of the influencer in a new way, are usually very interested in the contents and are not yet saturated with content / a solid growth rate shows that the influencer has relevance and is able to generate sustained and growing interest in its content
Earned Media Value	This figure includes any unpaid communication activities (likes, comments, links, recommendations and reviews) that takes place around this channel / If the influencer is regularly linked by other channels, its Earned Media Value increases / On Instagram, the Earned Media Value of a channel is measured, for example, by the number of links.

Considering cooperations with influencers in the education sector, the criteria of authenticity, brand fit and content quality are particularly important, since the image and published content of the influencer are directly linked to the university. This is crucial: The terms image and reputation are always closely associated with the term trust. Communication acts as a link between these terms (Schneckenleitner, 2019).

3 OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A quantitative analysis of the social media channels of 36 Austrian universities is used to identify influencers in the education sector. In addition, a qualitative analysis will filter out further influencers who do not stand out from the data set. The following research questions arise:

How can educational influencers have a positive effect on the reputation of an institution?

Who are Austria's leading influencers in the field of education?

Are educational influencers specifically used in university communication in Austria?

The aim of the work is to find out whether influencers are already integrated into the communication activities of universities and which channels are used. In addition, factors for successful influencer marketing in the field of education should be classified.

4 SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

4.1 The Process Model

Based on the process model of the Bundesverband für Digitale Wirtschaft, the following influencer analysis was divided into the following four phases: analysis design, data collection, data preparation and results analysis (Bundesverband Digitale Wirtschaft, 2017).

4.2 The Analysis Design

On the basis of social media monitoring using the online tool "Fanpage - Karma", quantitative and qualitative data from social media platforms of public universities in Austria are collected, analysed and compared. In the process, persons of public interest who have a digital connection to Austrian universities and possibly act as influencers are filtered out. Subsequently, the different platforms of these persons will be examined using qualitative and quantitative screening to determine whether and to what extent they act as opinion leaders in the education sector.

4.2.1 Social-Media-Monitoring

Social media monitoring is derived as a specialization from web monitoring, in which data is collected and analyzed in the entire Web 2.0 system. This not only involves a breakdown of content created by users, but also a comprehensive overview of the platforms on which the company appears on the Internet and the context in which it does so. Social media monitoring specializes in the determination, observation and analysis of user-generated content of brands and products on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs and forums. (Decker, 2019)

4.2.2 Online Tool „Fanpage Karma“

Every day, masses of information and data are created on social media platforms. In order to analyze this incredible amount systematically and effectively, automated tools are needed to collect and evaluate relevant topics, contributions and sources in social networks. (Decker, 2019) The online tool "Fanpage Karma" was selected to evaluate the performance and posting strategies of various social media channels and profiles without limit and to compare them on the basis of key figures. Automatic reports with up-to-date data make it possible to monitor developments on social networks. ("Fanpage Karma", no year)

4.3 Data Collection

For the analysis, 36 universities in Austria were recorded and compared on the basis of their profiles on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube ("Hochschule & Universitäten", no year). Universities and universities of applied sciences that are not present on any social network were not included in the study. A total of 137 profiles of Austrian universities were identified and compared using the following criteria: Fans, number of posts, number of likes, total number of reactions/comments/shares, growth (absolute), commitment and post-interaction. This results in a first overview of the social media landscape of Austrian academies. When evaluating the key figures, the size and number of students at the institutes must also be taken into consideration. For example, the Facebook profile of the University of Vienna has the most fans with 88,000, but it is considered that the University of Vienna has about 88,000 students, this result is put into perspective ("Hochschule & Universitäten", no year). The post-interaction of 0.057% of the Facebook profile mentioned above also shows that although many people have marked the page with "Like", little or no communicative activity takes place.

4.4 Data Processing

4.4.1 Quantitative Analysis of Social Platforms of Universities

Only universities with at least one platform with more than 15,000 fans were examined further in the data processing. This results in 11 universities and a total of 43 profiles for the analysis. On the basis of the data obtained, a trend analysis is carried out using the "Fanpage Karma" tool in order to find out who is being talked about on university platforms and to whom there is a digital connection, which is evaluated on the basis of links. This shows that both Elke Höfler and Markus Scholz are increasingly mentioned in articles.

4.4.2 Qualitative Analysis of Social Platforms of Universities

In the qualitative analysis, data is broken down according to subject areas in order to find out whether other persons in higher education communication act as influencers in the education sector outside the quantitatively investigated platforms. The websites of the academies to be investigated were researched in order to discover individual platforms and blogs that have or are establishing an influence in the field of education. The results are unstructured and require a comprehensive interpretation of the data. Here, the analysis is limited to the scientific channel "letsdogabout.science" by Helmut Jungwirth, which represents a cross-platform brand and draws attention to current research topics at the University of Graz.

5 FINDINGS

The results of the data processing are examined and evaluated in a further social media monitoring on the

basis of the defined key figures. It can be seen that a rather small number of users (under 3000) follow the platforms of the named persons and brands. Elke Höfler lies with rounded 2,800 followers on Twitter ahead of Markus Scholz, who is followed by 1,100 people. "letsdogabout.science" has far fewer than 1,000 followers on all platforms, but they are highly active, especially on Instagram, as the number of likes (around 1,200) and post-interaction (6.6%) show. However, social media monitoring only considers profiles on social networks and ignores blogs or websites. In addition, the individuals and their platforms are examined in more detail. All three persons are corporate influencers who are more experts than multipliers.

5.1 Elke Höfler

Elke Höfler is a lecturer at the Institute of Romance Languages and Literature at the University of Graz and at the University of Innsbruck and gives lectures on media-didactic topics. Her research focuses on media didactics, media-supported subject didactics, language teaching research, fiction research, social media, open educational resources and MOOCs. Elke Höfler communicates medially mainly on her own blogs and Twitter, but also as a guest author ("Universität Graz", no year).

According to Höfler the motivation for blogging is not based on influencing others in their opinions or decisions, but on sharing thoughts about education, describing methods and providing materials on the platforms. (Höfler, 2019)

Table 3: Channels of Elke Höfler (Source: Own description)

Titels	Plattform/Activity	Link
Digitalanalog	Blog/Author	https://digitalanalog.at
Elkes Sprachenkiste	Blog/Author	https://elkessprachenkiste.at/
Elke Höfler (@lacknere)	Twitter/Author	https://twitter.com/lacknere
Bildungspunks	Blog/Guest Author	https://bildungspunks.de/tools/

5.2 Dr. Markus Scholz

Dr. Markus Scholz is Head of the Center for Corporate Governance and Business Ethics, Co-Head of the Research Cluster for SMEs and Family Businesses and Endowed Professor for Corporate Governance and Business Ethics at the Vienna University of Applied Sciences. He also teaches corporate governance, business ethics, strategy and philosophy of science at several national and international universities. Scholz is also active in the private sector as a consultant on ecological, social and governance issues. ("CSR News", no year) Markus Scholz is mainly active on Twitter, his LinkedIn profile does not contain any relevant articles or activities.

On the Twitter profile of Markus Scholz, articles are published which mostly contain different topics on the Center for Corporate Governance and Business Ethics. The University of Applied Sciences Vienna of the WKW is also linked.

Table 1: Channels of Markus Scholz (Source: Own description)

Titel	Plattform/Activity	Link
Markus Scholz (@CCGBE)	Twitter/Author	https://twitter.com/ccgbe

5.3 Letsdogabout.Science

The channel "letsdogabout.science" is managed by Prof. Dr. Helmut Jungwirth. He is Professor of Science Communication and Managing Director of the Center for Society, Knowledge and Communication at the University of Graz. He is also scientific director of the "Mitmachlabore Graz" and the university course "Kommunikationskolleg". The goal of "letsdogabout.science" is to meet the constantly growing interest in science with videos and expert interviews on current research topics of the University of Graz, which are published on different social networks. ("Letsdogabout.science", no year)

Table 5: Channels of letsdogabout.science (Source: Own description)

Titel	Plattform/Activ.	Link
Wissenschaftskommunikation	Website/Author	https://homepage.uni-graz.at/de/helmut.jungwirth/
letsdogabout.science	Instagram/Author	https://www.instagram.com/letsdogabout.science/
Helmut Jungwirth (@letsdogabout.science)	Facebook/Author	https://www.facebook.com/letsdogabout.science/
letsdogabout.science-Universität Graz	YouTube/Author	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCs5eXYXPPinqlwKfRbqk8gw/about

The brand "letsdogabout.science" has only recently been active on social networks. The Facebook platform was created in April 2018, the profiles on Instagram and YouTube in September 2019. This could explain the (still) low number of followers. Long-term monitoring of the platforms would be necessary to explain the development of the profiles on the basis of key figures.

6 RESUME AND OUTLOOK

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the social media platforms of Austrian universities show that social networks have played a minor role in their communication mix to date. The quantitative design was used to identify the influencers Elke Höfler and Markus Scholz. The qualitative analysis was also able to find the channel "letsdogabout.science". Ultimately, the use of educational influencers without mature social media profiles at universities makes limited sense, as they are sometimes intended to direct the target group precisely to these pages. The study identified three people who have a digital connection with universities and who focus on education on digital platforms. All three influencers discussed in detail are professionally active at a university of applied sciences or university (i.e. corporate influencers) and are more experts than multipliers. A targeted implementation of influencers by universities and universities of applied sciences in Austria could not be proven.

Individuals participate to an ever greater extent in social dialogue. In the course of this, influencers gain in importance. In higher education, however, this has so far only been practiced to a (very) limited extent. There is currently no evidence of large-scale use of influencers in higher education.

Further research could deal with influencers in tertiary education sector, which Schüller (cf. Chap. 2) can assign to the multipliers. The focus here could be on the students themselves and their community building. The focus is on the distinctiveness of the university, less prestige or competence. Perhaps future students are less interested in the knowledge conveyed or the rank of the university in a reputation ranking, but rather in the experience and leisure opportunities in the university region? Perhaps students are more credible as digital advocates for universities than blogging professors or marketing staff? These are approaches that still need to be investigated.

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