

**INFLUENCER MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS:  
THE NEW DYNAMICS OF BUILDING A BRAND IMAGE IN THE  
DIGITAL AGE**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study provides a comprehensive look at influencer marketing, public relations and the dynamics of communication in the digital age. The study explains the definition, importance, benefits and challenges of influencer marketing. It also details the evolution of public relations in the digital age, and its integration with brand communication and influencer marketing. It emphasizes that digital marketing can reach a wide audience, increase engagement and achieve measurable results as well as the importance of integrating public relations with digital media and online platforms. The concept of an influencer and the role of influencer marketing in creating brand image was explained in detail, and it was noted that the credibility of influencers and their impact on followers is important in creating a positive brand image. The benefits and challenges of influencer marketing were also discussed. Benefits included the ability to gain the trust of followers, build brand loyalty and reach the target audience effectively. Challenges included factors such as content quality, perception of sponsorship and managing long-term relationships. In addition, the study focused on how brand communications should be approached from a holistic perspective and how public relations professionals can interact with influencer marketing. It also identifies strategic objectives, influencer selection and content quality that should be considered when integrating PR and influencer marketing. It is also stated that social media platforms provide effective communication through collaboration with influencers as they can be used as brand ambassadors in public relations campaigns. It was stated that public relations professionals play an active role in navigating the digital environment, building relationships with influencers and using influencers to enhance brand image.

Keywords: influencer, influencer marketing, public relations, brand image

## **1. Introduction**

The constantly evolving nature of the digital era has forced companies to reassess their approaches to marketing and communication. The internet and social media have created new pathways for brands to reach their target audience more efficiently and cement their brand image. Influencer marketing and public relations are vital in adapting to the digital demands and encircling brand triumph. Traditional forms of media and communication have given way to digital platforms that provide brands with enhanced capabilities to engage with their target audiences. Central to this shift are two primary components: influencer marketing and public relations. Influencer marketing has emerged as a critical strategy for brands to communicate and persuade their audiences in the digital era. Public relations plays a significant function in shaping brand image and reputation. The integration of public relations and influencer marketing in the digital age results in a strong synergy for building brand image. The integration of public relations and influencer marketing in the digital age results in a strong synergy for building brand image.

## **2. Influencer Marketing And Public Relations in The Digital Age**

It is essential to provide clear and concise definitions of the basic concepts used in this study. Digital marketing, as a concept included here, refers to the various marketing activities carried out through the Internet, mobile, and interactive platforms. These activities aim to promote a brand and business using methods and practices that differ from traditional media while simultaneously supporting marketing efforts. According to Alan, Kabadayı, and Erişke (2018, p.494), digital marketing is defined as such. Digital marketing is a form of marketing that promotes, markets, and sells products, brands, and services through the use of modern technologies and digital platforms. Digital marketing enables reaching a larger audience, increasing engagement, and achieving measurable outcomes compared to conventional marketing methods.

Digital public relations entails the utilization of internet platforms to inform stakeholders about a company's services, activities, and to propagate information. Gifford (2010, p. 63) highlights that it incorporates traditional public relations strategies and tactics with digital media and online platforms. Besides, digital public relations refers to the integration of traditional public relations strategies and tactics with digital media and online platforms. This approach aims to facilitate interaction between a brand or organization and its target audience through digital channels, enhance communication, and cultivate a positive image.

The concept of influencers, individuals who have established themselves as opinion leaders through the content they create on social media platforms, holds the power to sway the masses, steer purchasing decisions, and boast a large following (Bor & Erten, 2019, p. 16). They are characterized as such. They typically specialize in a particular subject or have a sizable fan base, creating and sharing digital content on platforms like social media. This is because their followers display significant interest in their viewpoints, recommendations, and materials.

Influencer marketing refers to when influential opinion leaders, whether they are celebrities or non-celebrities with a large following on social media platforms, utilize their posts to promote positive attitudes and reactions in their followers (who are consumers) towards the brand's interests. (Martinez-Lopez, Anaya-Sanchez, Giordano, & Lopez-Lopez, 2020, p. 1) This

marketing technique, known as Influencer Marketing, aims to encourage the endorsement of products to a wider audience. In a general sense, influencer marketing is a brand marketing strategy that employs social media influencers to target their desired audiences.

In the present era of digital interaction, influencer marketing represents a viable strategy for brands to cultivate their own image and connect with a broad audience. This approach entails partnering with influencers capable of drawing the interest of a particular target demographic, thereby enhancing the transmission of the brand's intended message. (Gedik, 2020). Influencers with substantial followings on social media possess the capability of organically creating a viral marketing effect through sharing their own product experiences. Therefore, they have emerged as significant resources for brands seeking to proficiently engage their consumers and fortify their brand identity. (Mert, 2018a). Furthermore, they have been acknowledged as indispensable advertising and marketing assets in the digital realm. (Çağdaş, 2022). Public relations plays a critical role in shaping and upholding a brand's image. It involves managing communication between an organization and its stakeholders, including the media, customers, and the general public. The emergence of the digital age has brought substantial changes to the dynamics of public relations (Mert, 2018b). The increased prevalence of social media and online platforms grants brands novel chances to connect with their target audiences and safeguard their reputations (Ceyhan, 2021). Developing a sturdy brand personality and reputation proves crucial for effective brand management, where public relations assumes a vital role in constructing and preserving both. In the digital era, influencer marketing and public relations have emerged as pivotal factors accountable for establishing brand image. By implementing these components in their marketing and communication strategies, brands can successfully establish and uphold a robust brand image in today's digital era.

### **3. The Role of Influencers in Building Brand Image**

In today's digital age, developing a thriving brand image is vital to business expansion. Due to the rising impact of influencers in marketing, brands have revised their strategies to focus on digital marketing and keep pace with rapidly evolving trends in the realm. This is because influencers have a significant impact on building brand image and can significantly affect how consumers view a brand (Keçeci & Karaca, 2022; Eysel & Beliz, 2020). Influencers have become instrumental in shaping brand image and influencing consumer behavior, thanks to their ability to engage with their followers on a personal level and their authenticity.

Brands partner with influencers to effectively reach their target audiences and broadcast their messages to a broad audience. Social media platforms, in particular, provide a powerful tool for brands to accomplish this objective (Mert, 2018a). The dynamic nature of social media, along with the extensive followings of influencers, presents numerous opportunities for brands to promote themselves and communicate their values. Influencers serve not only as content creators, but also as spokespeople and representatives for brands, fostering a reliable connection between consumers and the brand. Brand collaborations on social media platforms allow companies to form personal and meaningful connections with their target audience and reach a wider demographic. Consequently, impressive brand collaborations have become a crucial component of modern marketing strategies.

As brand image-building dynamics constantly evolve in the digital era, influencer marketing and public relations remain essential factors in shaping brand perception and creating a robust brand image.

### *3.1. Benefits of Influencer Marketing In Building Brand Image*

In the digital age, influencer marketing has gained immense popularity because of its numerous benefits in shaping brand image. One key advantage is its capability to create fruitful partnerships between brands and influencers, forming a deep connection with consumers and a favorable brand image (Keçeci & Karaca, 2022). Such partnerships not only improve brand visibility, but also expand brand outreach by reaching fresh audiences and promoting brand awareness (Aslan, 2023). As influencers play an increasingly significant role in marketing, brands have begun to prioritize their digital marketing strategies and swiftly adapt to the evolving situation (Eyel & Beliz, 2020). By utilizing the influence and reach of influencers, brands can competently shape their brand image and perception in the digital sphere.

Additionally, influencer marketing provides a trust factor to the brand. When an influencer promotes a product or service, followers view it as a recommendation from a trusted source, thus endorsing the brand builds trust and credibility (Uğurlu Akbaş, 2019). In today's digital age, where advertising overwhelms consumers, influencer marketing provides an authentic and relatable approach to brand promotion.

Influencer marketing enables brands to leverage social media's potential to cultivate brand loyalty undistorted by subjective evaluations. On social media platforms, brands can engage their target audience, creating communities around their offerings. By collaborating with influencers wielding a robust social media presence, brands can augment their followers' allegiance and interaction, fortifying brand image (cycle-marketing.com, 2023). Brands that do not adjust to new formations and trends driven by influencers face the possibility of being left behind by young consumers (Eyel & Beliz, 2020). Influencer marketing provides a fresh approach to building a brand image in the digital age, with the potential for increased visibility, awareness, credibility, and brand loyalty.

### *3.2. Challenges of Influencer Marketing in Building Brand Image*

In addition to its benefits for building brand image, influencer marketing can pose challenges. Ensuring active participation by the target audience is one such challenge. While influencers can reach a wider audience, it is critical that the target audience actively engage with the brand's message (Gedik, 2020). Careful selection of influencers with a genuine connection to the target audience and the ability to effectively communicate the brand's values and proposition is crucial in influencer marketing (Kunt & Hassan, 2021). Additionally, the choice and utilization of communication platforms in digital marketing play a significant role in reaching and engaging relevant target audiences (Ceyhan, 2021).

However, one challenge of influencer marketing is the need for authenticity and credibility. In the realm of influencer marketing, there are occurrences where influencers are viewed as insincere or unreliable, resulting in detrimental effects on the brand's reputation. It is pivotal for the brand to conduct a thorough assessment of potential influencers for adherence to the brand's principles and possession of an authentic rapport with their followers. (Keçeci &

Karaca, 2022). This helps establish the necessary credibility to develop and uphold a positive brand image in today's digital age (Hamşioğlu & Nalcı, 2021).

Finding suitable influencers who align with a brand's image and values is a crucial challenge in influencer marketing. To ensure a strong brand fit, brands should consider the influencer's content type, audience demographics, and brand story (miniplanet.com.tr, 2023). This is because collaborating with influencers who have a natural connection to the brand fosters a seamless brand experience and helps to promote a positive brand image (suspendplus.com, 2023). Influencer selection is a crucial element for effective influencer marketing.

In light of these explanations, we can identify additional challenges for influencer marketing in establishing brand image.

*Content quality and consistency:* The quality and consistency of influencer-generated content significantly impact the brand's image. Consequently, the content should align with the brand's values and target audience to ensure maximum effectiveness.

*Sponsorship perception:* It is crucial for influencers to maintain sincerity and openness when endorsing sponsored content. Followers tend to steer clear of overtly promotional messages and content.

*Managing long-term relationships:* Managing the alignment of an influencer's values with a brand and maintaining the continuity of the collaboration poses a challenge in long-term partnerships.

*Follower fraud:* Unethical practices, such as influencers purchasing fake followers or engagement, can hinder the attainment of authentic engagement and loyalty.

*Changing trends and dynamics:* Trends in social media and influencer marketing are an ever-changing landscape, necessitating brands to continuously develop up-to-date and effective strategies.

*Crisis awareness:* Crisis situations encountered by influencers or brands have the potential to swiftly proliferate on social media and significantly impact their image. Thus, managing the crisis necessitates efficient communication and crisis management tactics.

*Target audience diversity:* Brands should manage audience diversity when working with multiple influencers because different influencers may appeal to different audiences.

*Compensation and budget management:* Influencer collaborations may require a specific budget, and brands need to be careful about how they compensate influencers and manage their budgets.

Influencer marketing has become a crucial means of enhancing brand image and forging strong relationships with target audiences. However, success hinges on thorough evaluation of influencer selection, content quality, long-term relationship management, budget, and compensation. In addition, aligning the values and goals of influencers and brands is essential for effective brand image-building. All these challenges necessitate strategic thinking and planning for brands seeking to maximize the potential of influencer marketing.

#### **4. Evolution of Public Relations in The Digital Age and Integration of Influencer Marketing**

The evolution of public relations in the digital age refers to a period in which communication and interaction processes have significantly transformed and grown with the rapid spread of communication technologies and digital platforms. The goal of this evolution is to exceed conventional public relations methods and adapt to the rapidly changing nature of the contemporary world.

While print, television, radio, and face-to-face communication were once the primary focus of traditional public relations practice, the emergence of the digital age has drastically altered communication. Digital platforms, social media networks, online news sites, blogs, podcasts, video, and instant communication tools now enable organizations and brands to engage with their audiences in a more immediate, interactive, and personalized manner.

The impact of the digital age on public relations goes beyond communication channel diversification. It now allows brands and organizations to directly and personally connect with their audiences, resulting in more effective communication management. Practicing public relations in the digital age also involves utilizing data analytics to achieve better results. Tracking, analyzing, and measuring online interactions and feedback helps brands gain a better understanding of the impact of their campaigns and shape future strategies. However, this evolution has also brought about increased competition and fast-changing dynamics, making continuous learning and adaptation essential for PR professionals.

In the digital age, brands' endeavors to establish and sustain their brand image have gained significant importance. Consequently, the incorporation of influencer marketing and public relations has become increasingly critical. Social media platforms, in particular, have emerged as a tool for brands to utilize Influencers to attain their public relations goals (Keçeci & Karaca, 2022). In today's world, influencers' social media presence makes them important players in brand communication who serve as brand ambassadors in public relations campaigns (Boran, 2023). Integrating influencers and public relations enables brands to reach and connect with their target audiences through authentic and relatable content (Peltekoğlu & Askeroğlu, 2019).

Effective building of brand image and reputation depends on solid public relations strategies and marketing techniques that impact consumer attitudes and behavior (Karapinar, 2018). In the digital marketing age, brands now have the ability to engage with consumers on a more personal level, which can generate a sense of community and bolster brand loyalty (Köse & Yeygel Çakır, 2019). Additionally, digital storytelling can serve as a communication tool to foster this interaction. Digital storytelling has become a potent content creation instrument in social media marketing, empowering brands to engage their target audience through captivating narratives (Büyükçelikok, 2018). This permits brands to convey their values, mission, and selling proposition to their audience, hence promoting a more robust brand-consumer relationship (Şahbaz, 2018).

In today's competitive scenario, it is essential to adopt a holistic perspective when approaching brand communication. Public relations is crucial in shaping brand image and maintaining a positive reputation. Meanwhile, social media platforms emerge as tools for interacting with

and building relationships with target audiences. Consequently, social media channels also play an effective role in building brand loyalty. Brands must adapt their communication strategies to the digital age, ensuring that their content resonates with their target audiences and aligns with their values. To create a cohesive brand message, it is essential to comprehend the digital landscape and effectively utilize influencers and public relations (Keçeci & Karaca, 2022). By integrating influencer marketing and public relations, brands can establish a robust brand identity that captivates their target market and fuels business accomplishments.

The digital age has redefined the role of public relations experts. In the wake of social media's ascent and digital communication platforms, public relations has transcended conventional media relations to encompass online reputation management and developing connections with opinion leaders. Now, PR professionals are tasked with navigating digital ecosystems, fostering relationships with influencers, and leveraging them to augment brand image (Boran, 2023). The integration of influencer marketing and public relations is crucial in developing a comprehensive and effective brand communication strategy in the digital era (Ceyhan, 2021). As such, public relations professionals should continuously adjust to the evolving dynamics of influencer marketing and utilize these strategies to establish brand credibility and uphold a favorable brand image (Peltekoğlu & Askeroğlu, 2019).

Integrating public relations with influencer marketing involves using public relations strategies and influencer marketing methods in harmony to reach a brand's target audience more efficiently and establish a positive brand image. Brands aim to leverage the power of influencers, support their public relations efforts, and expand their audience. To achieve this integration, brands should consider the following points:

**Alignment of strategic objectives:** Brands ought to merge their public relations and influencer marketing strategies in order to establish shared objectives. These goals may encompass boosting brand recognition, promoting novel products or services, supporting a particular campaign, or cultivating a favorable brand reputation.

*Take a public relations approach to influencer selection:* When choosing influencers, it is crucial to take a public relations viewpoint. It is important to evaluate any potential influencers in light of the brand's values, mission, and target audience.

*Story and content integration:* To ensure the content aligns with the brand's identity, it is recommended that companies integrate their PR and influencer marketing approaches in content development. Briefing the influencers on the brand's narrative and messaging is a necessary step in the process.

*Monitoring and evaluation:* Brands can integrate public relations and influencer marketing metrics to oversee and assess the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns. This approach aids in gauging the campaign's impact and the progression of the brand's image.

*Joint events and projects:* Brands can enhance their influence by merging public relations events with influencer marketing initiatives. For instance, they could plan launch events or social responsibility projects that unite influencers and brand delegates.

*Consistent communication:* Brands must align the content and messages produced through influencer marketing with their public relations strategy to ensure consistency and a coherent brand image. By doing so, brands' communications will appear more cohesive and complete.

*Managing influencer relationships:* Influencer relationship management is a task that can be undertaken by public relations teams. Effective influencer marketing is achieved by establishing communication, coordination, and collaboration with influencers.

Integrating public relations into influencer marketing aims to communicate the brand's values, goals, and messages to the target audience in a more intimate and credible manner by combining them with the influencer's content. This strategy expands the brand's reach while providing the audience with an opportunity to form an emotional connection. In doing so, the brand achieves a wider audience and greater credibility. This integration enables brands to reach out to influencers' followers on social media platforms, raising brand awareness and fostering stronger engagement with the intended audience.

## **5. Conclusion**

The rapid evolution of technology and communication tools in the digital age has necessitated the evolution of marketing and public relations, enabling brands to reconstruct their communication strategies. Public relations has transitioned from being confined to traditional media to digital platforms, fostering more immediate, interactive, and personalized engagements between brands and their target audiences. This development extends beyond channel diversification and involves utilizing data analytics to better communicate brand values and objectives.

This evolution has not only spawned the idea of influencer marketing but also elevated its significance. Thanks to social media, influencers with substantial followings have allowed for more organic interaction between brands and their target audiences. As brand ambassadors, influencers can effectively communicate a brand's values and messages to their followers, aiding companies in enhancing their brand image. However, there are several challenges associated with influencer marketing. Particularly, appropriate influencers must be chosen, content quality must be ensured, and successful collaborations must be established. Moreover, issues like the prevalence of fake followers necessitate consideration. Consequently, influencer marketing approaches ought to be carefully devised and executed.

In this regard, integrating public relations with influencer marketing is crucial for achieving a holistic approach to brand image building. This integration entails more than just selecting influencers, as it involves aligning strategic goals. Thus, brands need to set common objectives by combining public relations and influencer marketing strategies to guarantee effective communication. Working with influencers should create brand content that aligns with the brand's values and identity, while maintaining consistency in brand communication. It is crucial to monitor and evaluate the integration to enhance strategies and measure their impact. Modern PR professionals are tasked with managing brand image and communication across traditional media, digital platforms, and with influencers. Developing new skills is necessary to reach a wider audience and create a strong brand image.



Digital marketing, public relations, and influencer marketing strategies enhance brand effectiveness, build strong relationships with target audiences, and create a firm image. Implementing these dynamics helps brands gain a competitive advantage in a rapidly changing digital environment. The convergence of public relations and influencer marketing enables brands to formulate a thorough communication strategy and establish a successful brand identity. Consequently, companies can attain their communication and brand image goals by capitalizing on these dynamics seamlessly.

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