

# PERCEPTION OF THE PROFILE 'CONTENT CREATOR' IN THE TRIAD OF CROATIAN MARKETING PRACTITIONERS

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## Autori/Authors:

**DIANA PLANTIĆ TADIĆ**  
PhD, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR  
Sveučilište Vern'  
Palmotićeveva 82/1, Zagreb, Croatia  
E-mail: diana.plantic-tadic@vern.hr  
ORCID: 0009-0005-9382-1768

**DINO MARIĆ**  
DIRECTOR  
Marketinška agencija Studio A  
Draškovićeveva ulica 33, Zagreb  
E-mail: dino.maric@yahoo.com

**MARIO FRACULJ**  
PhD, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR  
Sveučilište Algebra Bernays  
Gradišćanska 24, Zagreb, Croatia  
E-mail: mario.fraculj@algebra.hr  
ORCID: 0000-0001-9875-5708

## ABSTRACT

Digital marketing strategies that involve engagement with content creators are becoming an increasingly significant element of marketing practice. Given the increasingly prominent presence of content creators in the media landscape and the growing need for their engagement, ensuring and applying relevant insights about sought-after profiles has become a business necessity. Considering the lack of such insights, a study was conducted with the purpose of better understanding how three different types of marketers perceive the profile of content creators. The main objective of this study is to analyze the perception of a "content creator" profile to develop skills for their assessment, selection, and engagement in marketing campaigns. The data were collected through the interviews with thirty marketing practitioners, with ten from each of three categories: marketing clients/advertisers, professionals in marketing agencies, and content creators. The results of this research might serve as valuable guidelines for marketing professionals to make better-informed decisions, as well as a good starting point for further research on the influence of content creators on today's digital marketing strategies. Based on the analysis of research results, recommendations have been formed for the application of new knowledge about the competitive profile of content creators, in order to help marketing agencies and clients optimize their business strategies and achieve more successful collaboration with content creators.

**KEY WORDS:** marketing communications, digital marketing, social networks, content creator, influencer marketing

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of widespread internet use, digital marketing is becoming a key tool for success in the modern business world (Krajnović et al., 2019). The general introduction of digital technologies has entirely changed the concept of doing business worldwide, as Kingsnorth (2019) stated that digitalization had ultimately led to digital transformation, which reached far beyond technology, in terms of business changes, consumer behavior and preferences, legal changes, and much more. Furthermore, the rising trend of digital technologies has thus completely altered marketing practices, urging modern companies to adopt digital strategies to remain competitive and satisfy the evolving requirements of their customers.

Pihir et al. (2019) highlight the positive effects of digital transformation of marketing on company operations, such as directing the focus of companies more and more toward the end user of media content, and proactiveness of companies, focused on ensuring close relationships with today's demanding customers. To be noted that today's media content users differ from old and passive ones, whose relationship is illustrated in the Table 1.

**Table 1.** Relationship between old and new users of media content

OLD USERS	NEW USERS
Passive	Active
Predictable	Unpredictable
Local, national	Global
Static – tied to a single medium	Dynamic – users of more media; easily switch from one medium to another
Loyal – to a certain medium or program	Disloyal – with a wide choice and choose what they like
Undemanding – scarcity of content	Demanding – expecting a lot of quality content
Isolated individuals	Socially networked
Quiet and media-invisible	Loud and media-exposed
Obedient	Disobedient
Paying a service	Demanding a service for free
Unorganized or difficult to organize, hard to motivate to engage with a particular issue	Organized, easily organized by social media usage and engaged with relevant issues
Patient – waiting for information	Impatient – looking for information immediately at the moment it happens
Less technically savvy	Understand and use technology better
Content users	Content users and creators

Source: Zgrabljic Rotar (2020, p. 65)

As can be seen from Table 1, the key difference between "old" and "new" users is generally in the level of their activity or engagement, as well as their character traits. According to the insights obtained from the Table 1, it is clear that digital content, as well as the profile of content creators, should be adapted to the new profile of content users, who themselves become content creators in today's paradigm of digital marketing. Vasković et al. (2012, as cited in Brakus, 2015, p. 1099) define digital marketing as "the marketing of electronic media that adapts to the new era and uses modern technological achievements in communication and direct engagement with users in a creative way in order to achieve set goals". Moreover, companies create a marketing policy based on messages and comments received from their online customers (Rrustemi & Jusufi, 2021), which present the foundations for interactive marketing. Kotler et al. (2014) define interactive marketing as activities and programs conducted via the Internet with the purpose of encouraging customers to purchase products, raising awareness or improving image. Interactive marketing emerged as a result of a shift in understanding consumers, where consumers become partners, and business becomes an interactive relationship (Vlašić et al., 2007).

Namely, in the context of interactive connections with consumers, social networks have become increasingly popular over the last decade. This is evidenced by the data that, even a few years ago, half of the world's population was actively using social networks (Chaffey, 2019, as cited in Mesarić & Gregurec, 2021). Consequently, social media marketing (hereinafter SMM) has emerged as an inevitable digital approach and an unavoidable tool for companies to retain existing, as well as to reach new potential customers. In essence, "social media" has been defined as "tools for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques (such as web-based, mobile technologies) to turn communication into interactive dialogue" (Coulson, 2013, p. 1) The implementation of SMM provides numerous benefits to companies, such as boosting brand awareness and building customer loyalty through customized interactions, providing with stronger relationship with consumers (Ebrahim, 2020; Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2022). In other words, the authors point out that SMM creates meaningful connections with consumers through content sharing on social media platforms.

Therefore, SMM might be defined as a process of creating content tailored to the context of each individual social media platform in order to connect with a wider audience, strengthen a brand, increase sales, and drive web traffic (Tuten, 2020). Tuten emphasizes that the number of social media users is increasing on a daily basis, and consequently, their influence is also growing. The author also states that the general acceptance of the concept 'social media' was prevalent by the introduction of social networking platforms which apparently have an ever-growing influence on consumer perception and

behaviour. In addition, integrating social media platforms into various marketing strategies has become a today's must for all modern companies which, accordingly, concentrate their marketing efforts on social media platforms.

First and foremost, a growing amount of evidence suggests that SMM has evolved into a powerful tool that may enable marketers to communicate more effectively with their consumers (Tuten, 2020; Kim & Lee, 2021; Huang & Chen, 2021; Sohaib et al., 2022). Numerous research investigations have been exploring the correlation between SMM and consumers' behavior. For instance, in the research, carried out by Sohaib et al. (2022), a comprehensive investigation was carried out to assess the impact that SMM activities have on the participation and behavior of customers. The findings of the study conducted by Tomašek and Gregurec (2022) lead to the same conclusion remarks emphasizing that social media can influence consumer behavior to a greater extent because social networks are precisely the places where large numbers of people gather and where communication takes place among friends, acquaintances, and other users who have a notable impact on purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, recent years have seen an increasing number of academic papers investigating the interplay between SMM and the way customers perceive brands. The research that was carried out by Kim and Lee (2021) provided significant results, proving that the usage of SMM could improve the perception of brand quality by increasing consumer engagement. Moreover, the authors concluded that SMM had a substantial effect on many different elements of customer behavior and perception. Another empirical investigation was carried out by Huang and Chen (2021), demonstrating that internet and social media content had a large impact on consumers' perceptions of brand quality. The aforementioned studies provide valuable insights on the relationships between SMM and the components which contribute to the success of brands. In general, the studies highlight the intricate qualities of SMM as well as its substantial effect on brand-related factors and customer behavior. It has been established that SMM is effective in increasing brand recognition, building consumer loyalty, and cultivating brand affinities.

Regarding the importance of SMM and the content on social media platforms, it is necessary to emphasize that social media has become an important channel and source of income for content creators (Khobzi et al., 2025) who play a significant role for digital marketing communication of today's companies. Given the number of followers that influencers have on their profiles across various social media platforms, it is difficult to ignore their position and significance in marketing communication between brands and the target market (Biloš et al., 2021). In other words, social media platforms rely on the content produced by content creators, and content creators rely on social media platforms to promote or disseminate their content, grow their audience base, and generate revenue. Content creators have also become important drivers of brand equity, contributing considerably to the marketing success of the companies with whom they collaborate (McMullan, 2023). That collaboration implies the creation of interesting content and the engagement of influential individuals to promote companies' products (Meno et al., 2025). Social media platforms have introduced different incentive mechanisms to reward content creators for their contribution, and for their ability to attract and retain audience (Wu et al., 2025). However, Vassey et al. (2025) draw attention to the need for strengthening regulation for content creators' activities on social media platforms, particularly on platforms popular among youth.

Namely, content creators are often perceived as social media influencers, i.e. as those who change how people think about a brand by posting photos, videos, and other updates on social media (Manzoor et al., 2023), as they are synonymous with influencers. As opinion leaders, influencers play a crucial role in communicating and interacting with large audiences, acting as intermediaries between brands and the public (Ooi et al., 2023). By channeling their ideas, thoughts, and even emotions of the public, influencers can help companies develop their communication and performance in the turbulent digital landscape (Reinikainen & Erkkilä, 2025). These relationships serve as catalysts for strengthening the companies' brand equity, awareness, and customer loyalty, all of which benefit from increased customer engagement.

Building on social media marketing, influencer marketing is rapidly becoming a crucial digital marketing tool (Li et al., 2024), representing 10 % of the budget dedicated to social media campaigns in 2021 (Harst & Angelopoulos, 2024). Influencer marketing involves recruiting and compensating influencers, i.e. content creators for promoting their products (Kim & Kim, 2021) and enhance sales performance (Leung et al., 2022; Cao et al., 2021). Therefore, marketers continue to face the challenge of selecting effective influencers for their social media campaigns (Sporn-Wang et al., 2025). In general, Leung et al. (2022) claim that, in principle, the effectiveness of the digital marketing strategy is influenced by the characteristics of the content creators and the content features. Saima and Khan (2020) also point out that companies should select influencers with appropriate attributes to attain the effectiveness of SMM. The findings of the research conducted by Sbonsou and Siriex (2021) showed that the credibility of the influencer source had a substantial impact on the responses of the followers and, eventually, in an increase in brand equity. Another recent study confirmed that the purchase intention of customers is directly affected by a content creator's trustworthiness and credibility (Yuxuan, 2025). In addition, the results of the empirical study conducted by Yang et al. (2021), revealed significant findings on the effect of the content creators' authenticity and credibility on customer loyalty and purchase intention when using the Instagram platform. For instance, around 60 % of consumers rely on social media influencers while purchasing a product (Forbes, 2022).

In relation to influencers' attributes, Leung et al. (2022) identify three easily observable attributes, i.e. influencer activity and originality, as well as a follower size which enhance influencer marketing effectiveness. The findings show that companies, having adopted a balanced approach along the abovementioned dimensions, have more chance to attain greater effectiveness.

Consequently, it is evident that there is an increasing need for the engagement of content creators in today's digital marketing communication, given their growing influence in the media and marketing space. Unfortunately, the role of social media platforms in the creator economy remains understudied (Bleier et al., 2024). The growing demand for content creators has been recognized not only in the global, but also in the Croatian digital communication environment which lacks in familiarity with and application of new knowledge about the competitive profile of content creators in Croatia. Therefore, this paper aims to address these gaps by analyzing the perception of the content creators' profile from the perspective of three different types of Croatian marketers. The purpose of the conducted qualitative research was to provide a deeper insight and understanding of how different types of marketers perceive the profile of content creators, and how this perception shapes their decisions regarding collaboration and engagement of content creators in the dimension of SMM.

Eventually, the need arises to obtain answers to two fundamental research questions, which are formulated as follows:

RQ1: How do different marketers perceive the competitive profile of content creators in the Croatian digital media space?

RQ2: What are the Croatian marketers' preferences in selection and engagement of content creators?

To solve the posed research questions, this study contributes a new piece of information to the existing knowledge concerned by conducting an in-depth investigation which is methodologically elaborated further in the paper.

Namely, the paper consists of five chapters, starting with Introduction and Methodology, followed by Research results, Discussion of research results and, finally, the last chapter Conclusion with the answers given to the research questions.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

In order to collect relevant data to answer the research questions posed in this paper, the research was conducted in two phases. The first phase was desk research and the second refers to the empirical research conducted between November 2023 and February 2024<sup>1</sup>.

The theoretical framework was based on the analysis of secondary data sources, including domestic and international marketing literature, scientific papers, statistical reports, and relevant online sources. The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the respondents' attitudes, preferences, and experiences, with a focus on three key groups: marketing agencies, clients, and the content creators themselves. The data were collected through a semi-structured interview with the 30 participants who were chosen through purposive sampling because these individuals demonstrated direct experience in content creating on social media. Qualitative research guidelines and previous studies suggest that thematic saturation in qualitative research often occurs at about 30 interviews when participants share similar characteristics that relate to the study (Daher, 2023). The respondents were evenly distributed across three categories of marketers:

- **Marketing agencies** – Respondents were selected from agencies of various sizes, with the criteria that the agency has a digital department and that the respondents are involved in strategy and management of digital campaigns, social media, and performance marketing.
- **Clients** – Research participants came from industries such as healthcare, luxury goods, fashion, and fast-moving consumer goods. All had experience in managing digital campaigns and content on social media.
- **Content creators** - The selected influencers had different thematic focuses, varying years of presence on social media, and different sizes of follower bases. Their profiles also included previous careers in other industries.

Each respondent answered 16 questions from a prepared guide, which were structured into three thematic sections:

- data on the profiles of professionals, budget allocation, preferences for collaboration with content creators, research, tactics, and the scope of collaborations on an annual basis,
- perception of the quality and quantity of content and challenges in different stages of the business process,
- the current situation in the content creator scene and predictions of future developments.

<sup>1</sup> The research was partially conducted for the purpose of writing the co-author's master thesis.

The interviews lasted approximately one hour per participant. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis of latent content, which enabled the identification of key patterns in the respondents' answers. The analysis process included:

- transcription of the interviews to ensure accuracy,
- coding of responses according to defined themes (e.g., content quality, collaboration challenges, etc.),
- grouping the codes into broader categories that reflect the perception of content creator profiles.

This systematic approach enabled transparent interpretation of the data, identification of trends, and the formulation of recommendations for practice.

### 3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Based on the interviews conducted with the three different groups of respondents, the results were analyzed according to these three categories of marketing professionals, as presented in the following text.

#### 3.1. Marketing agencies

Agency representatives emphasize that digital strategy and budget decisions are determined by clients, and that some of them still prioritize traditional advertising. Budget allocation for digital activities typically includes about half of the annual promotional budget, although precise tracking is often challenging due to different campaign structures and collaboration with multiple agencies.

When asked about their willingness to collaborate with content creators, representatives of marketing agencies are divided in their views. On one hand, some of them come from agencies that specialize specifically in connecting clients with content creators, while other respondents also emphasize that they consider this form of collaboration to be very beneficial, especially when it comes to creating added value, expanding the community, and strengthening brand recognition. Therefore, these respondents, regardless of client demands, advocate for collaboration with content creators - most often influencers - and proactively suggest their involvement to clients. On the other hand, some agencies state that their clients are not inclined toward this type of collaboration, which is why they avoid making such suggestions, and even when collaboration does occur, it is mostly limited to occasional posts with modest budgets and infrequent activations. Despite differences in approach, all interviewees emphasize that the engagement of content creators primarily depends on the specific objectives of the client's campaign.

When selecting content creators, agencies and clients prioritize profile analysis, cost-effectiveness, and subjective impressions, relying largely on previous collaboration experience. Micro-influencers are often preferred because of their targeted reach and authenticity. Authenticity, inventiveness, and congruence with brand values are important desirable attributes. When creators show true loyalty or turn down unsuitable collaborations, agencies and clients value this as a sign of professionalism and brand fit. The final determining factor in the selection process is budget compatibility.

#### 3.2. Marketing clients

According to data obtained from the conducted research, most marketing clients allocate approximately 50 % of their total marketing budget to digital channels. When breaking down the allocation within the digital budget in more detail, respondents highlight that the largest share of funds is dedicated to advertising via Google, followed by investments in social media promotion. Collaborations with content creators are also included within this budget, with an average of 10 to 15 % of the digital segment being allocated to such partnerships.

In general, most clients recognize the strategic importance of integrating content creators into the digital segment of promotion, especially in cases where collaborations have been successful and have delivered clear results. Some representatives of marketing clients state that, without including this form of collaboration, it would not be possible to reach the desired target audience, despite the use of other digital marketing tools.

In the context of identifying and evaluating the potential and cost-effectiveness of collaborating with content creators, marketing clients, like marketing agencies, most often rely on three main criteria:

*Profile analysis* – This involves a detailed examination of the type of content a particular creator publishes, the level of interaction with their audience through comments and responses, as well as the history of previous collaborations, especially with competing brands. It is crucial that the potential partner's profile aligns as closely as possible with the brand's identity and values. Although the number of followers is often taken into consideration, its significance varies

depending on the characteristics of the campaign and the established KPIs. Some clients engage several different content creators precisely to cover various campaign objectives. Special attention is given to the engagement rate, i.e. the ratio of likes, comments, shares, and saves to the total number of followers, in order to minimize the risk of collaborating with profiles that have purchased or inactive followers. Additionally, clients require access to social media analytics data already in the early stages of negotiations.

*Cost-effectiveness of collaboration* – This includes assessing the justification for investment in relation to the price of the product being promoted, as well as comparing the offers of other content creators. Follower engagement and conversions are often tracked using personalized codes. Respondents also highlight the importance of professional responsibility as a factor in evaluating cost-effectiveness; that is, if the content creator fully adheres to the agreed terms and deadlines, there is a greater likelihood of future engagement, even in cases where the results do not fully meet expectations. Additional value is seen in the possibility of reusing the created content for other promotional purposes within the client's communication channels.

*Subjective assessment* – Although less frequently formalized, this criterion includes personal preferences and affinities toward a particular content creator, as well as recommendations from industry colleagues. This dimension often plays a key role in the final decision on collaboration, especially when candidates have similar quantitative indicators.

Finally, respondents emphasize that the quality of communication is ultimately crucial. If a creator demonstrates a low level of literacy in writing or verbal expression-whether towards the client or their own audience-or fails to understand a clearly defined brief, the collaboration is called into question. Despite this, most respondents express a high level of satisfaction with collaborations involving content creators, as well as an intention to increase engagement with content creators in the upcoming period, particularly highlighting the importance of continuity, that is, continuing successful partnerships from the previous year.

According to marketing clients, the key characteristics that content creators need to possess to be considered for collaboration include authenticity, consistency in content, creativity, and a balanced ratio between sponsored and organic posts. In addition to content relevance, respondents also emphasize the importance of the aesthetic quality of posts and expect content creators to be aware of their professional role in representing the brand, including adherence to agreed deadlines and transparent, prompt, and accurate communication. Additional criteria considered by respondents relate to the market position of the content creator, their level of recognition, as well as the thematic alignment of their content with the brand's values and communication goals. Relevance and the potential for natural integration within the campaign are considered crucial for achieving an effective and credible partnership.

Missed deadlines, inconsistent content, and a lack of professional responsibility are among the issues that clients mention. They state that in order to expedite the creator selection process, a centralized database is required. Clients observe that, despite the growth of the domestic content creator scene, qualitative aspects are not keeping pace with quantitative growth, indicating the need for more market standardization and professionalization.

### 3.3. Content creators

From the perspective of content creators, collaboration with brands and marketing agencies is generally perceived as positive, but their acceptance of such partnerships is conditioned by a range of factors that go beyond purely financial interests. Although most content creators express openness to marketing collaborations, they emphasize that their willingness to collaborate is closely linked to the ability to preserve their own creativity and personal values. In other words, they do not accept every collaboration offer; instead, they prefer projects they genuinely believe in and with which they can personally identify. However, they point out that authenticity is the most important criterion. All respondents highlight that it is extremely important to them that the product they promote aligns with their personal beliefs and lifestyle-that is, it is something they already use or could easily integrate into their daily lives. Authenticity not only involves real experience with the product, but also the ability to present it honestly to their audience, without imposed formats or artificially constructed messages.

In addition to alignment with their personal interests, content creators also mention the importance of creative freedom as a prerequisite for successful collaboration. In situations where they have a clear vision from the outset of how they want to conceptualize and present the content, and when they feel an internal motivation to engage with the topic, they tend to believe that such collaborations have significantly greater potential for a positive outcome. According to them, content created out of personal enthusiasm and creative impulse is more likely to be well received by the audience, precisely because of the recognizable authentic tone of communication.

According to content creators, effective partnerships require audience trust, professionalism, subject-matter expertise, and high-quality content. Despite being aware of these priorities, they note that clients and agencies often place greater emphasis on quantitative metrics than on narrative quality or creativity. Maintaining creative control is a significant

challenge; creators stress the importance of autonomy in ensuring authentic content, pointing out that strict deadlines and strict briefs can reduce the possibility of producing high-quality content.

When it comes to the platforms considered most important for content monetization, all interviewees highlight Instagram as currently the most profitable social network. Regardless of format or distribution channel, content creators are convinced that authenticity will remain the key factor in maintaining audience interest. They believe that users will always be interested in content perceived as genuine, relevant, and aligned with the creator's personal values, regardless of the technical platform on which the content is published.

Based on the results of the interviews presented, a tabular overview was created to provide a structured and transparent comparison of the perception of desirable characteristics of content creators from the perspective of the three key types of participants within the marketing process (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Perception of the content creator profile from the perspective of three types of Croatian marketers (comparative analysis)

	Marketing agencies	Marketing clients	Content creators
<b>willingness to engage</b>	willingness to engage is dictated by the client's campaign objectives	in the majority of cases, inclined to engage content creators	in most cases, inclined toward collaborations; they must believe in the partnerships
<b>Importance of content creators for marketing strategies</b>	extremely important, even when they do not have clients who are inclined to engage content creators	extremely important; otherwise, it would be difficult to reach their audience	extremely important; they themselves are also influenced by other content creators
<b>Research, actions, and tactics in the decision-making process</b>	previous experience, analyses, trend forecasting, technical support, human factor, budget	profile analysis, cost-effectiveness, subjective factor, communication style, budget, level of interest	authenticity, creative vision, genuine motivation for the topic
<b>Comparison of the engagement level</b>	different responses, depending on the profile of the campaigns and clients	increased level of engagement in the previous year	increased level of engagement in the previous year
<b>Level of satisfaction with collaborations</b>	high level of satisfaction with authentic and genuinely motivated collaborations	high level of satisfaction with authentic and genuinely motivated collaborations	high level of satisfaction
<b>Key selection criteria</b>	authenticity, consistency, creativity, a good balance of organic and sponsored content, selective collaborations, aesthetics, professionalism	respect, professionalism, acceptance of content creators, content relevance	audience engagement and trust, content quality, professionalism, niche affiliation, credibility
<b>Analysis of sponsored content</b>	quality comes first; their experience shows that quantity always follows quality	slight preference for quality; authentic and creative content is important	too much focus on statistics, less on creativity and quality
<b>Collaboration challenges</b>	failure to meet deadlines, not responding to emails	non-delivery, delays, inconsistency with the brief, not responding to emails	low level of trust, relinquishing creativity and content creation

Source: Authors' research

According to the Table 2, the research findings have the potential to give significant insights for the marketing agencies, as well as the advertisers when it comes to cooperation with creator contents. These actionable insights might help with decision-making processes, allowing companies to make good choices when selecting content creators, but also for designing more successful social media marketing strategies in the future.

#### 4. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

Digital marketing strategies that involve collaboration with content creators are increasingly establishing themselves as an essential part of the modern business landscape. Such strategies directly contribute to brand success in reaching

clearly defined target audiences and in achieving and often exceeding set communication and sales objectives. Successful implementation of this marketing model relies on a detailed and methodical identification of relevant content creators whose profile, value system, and communication style align with the specific demographic, psychographic, and consumer structure of the desired market. By partnering with content creators who resonate with their audience, brands can build trust, expand their reach, and ensure that their messaging is both authentic and effective. This approach not only enhances brand awareness but also fosters stronger engagement and loyalty among consumers, making it a powerful tool in today's digital marketing environment.

A key prerequisite for the effectiveness of such campaigns is the careful selection of a content creator who is granted a certain level of creative freedom in creating and distributing sponsored content. This approach results in a synergistic effect, where the brand message is naturally integrated into the creator's everyday communication with their audience. The outcome is an authentic, relevant, and highly engaging campaign that not only meets client expectations but, in many cases, exceeds them.

Empirical experiences of numerous companies that have been actively collaborating with content creators for many years confirm the effectiveness of such strategies. Based on positive results, an increasing number of companies are deciding to allocate larger budgets for activities related to influencer marketing, which further stimulates the growth and professionalization of the digital advertising market. This opens new opportunities for collaboration, innovation, and creative development in the field of content marketing. Partnerships with content creators not only lead to increased brand visibility but also enable the development of deeper, longer-term relationships with target users. Such relationships are based on authentic communication and perceived credibility, which significantly increases consumers' emotional connection to the brand.

For this reason, a growing number of organizations are investing in the development of strategies that include carefully selected influencers, considering not only their reach but also the quality of relationships they maintain with their audience. Recent research (Benevento et al., 2025) also confirms that content creators play a very important role in forming brand perception and expanding social media following. According to the findings of the study, when selecting content creators, companies should evaluate their network positioning and the frequency of their interactions to determine how often those influencers engage with their followers (such as comments, shares, and other forms of interaction). Consequently, such interactions enable deeper connections with content creators and substantially increase followers' loyalty.

An analysis of recent scientific and professional literature clearly confirms the growing importance of digital campaigns based on social media, with content creators playing a key role in shaping brand perception and driving consumer behavior (Benevento et al., 2025; Huang & Chen, 2021). Their ability to influence the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of audiences positions them as strategically important actors within the broader digital marketing landscape.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Content creator marketing is a relatively new marketing strategy in the current times and is being accepted by more and more companies to positively shape the customers' and prospects' perception towards their brands.

The findings of this study, shown in the Table 2, transparently give the answer to the initially posed research question RQ1: *How do different marketers perceive the competitive profile of content creators in the Croatian digital media space?* Namely, such a profile should consist of creativity, authenticity and a good image, as well as professionalism in content creators' work. In addition, the research results. The findings indicate that marketers in Croatia are aware of the strategic importance of content creators in digital marketing communication. Their role is not limited to increasing brand visibility; it also includes fostering a deeper connection with consumers through authentic and relevant communication. Positive experiences from advertisers who have been collaborating with content creators for many years confirm the value of this form of marketing. Encouraged by past successes, many advertisers plan to increase their budgets for such activities, further stimulating the development of the digital advertising market.

When choosing and working with content creators (RQ2), Croatian marketers place a high value on professionalism, authenticity, and alignment with brand values. Both agencies and clients put a strong emphasis on a thorough examination of the creator's profile, paying particular attention to the quality of the content, audience engagement, and prior experience working together. Decisions are also influenced by subjective perceptions and cost-effectiveness; micro-influencers are frequently chosen for their capacity to provide genuine, targeted engagement. Since authenticity is seen as essential to successful collaborations, content creators themselves emphasize the importance of creative freedom and sincere alignment with promoted products. Building enduring, trust-based relationships with content creators who

can deliver quantifiable outcomes and genuine brand representation is evident across all groups. These findings directly address research question RQ2 (*What are the Croatian marketers' preferences in selection and engagement of content creators?*) by emphasizing that Croatian marketers look for content creators who blend professionalism, creativity, and credibility, and aim for partnerships that promote both brand growth and genuine audience connection.

The results obtained provide concrete guidelines for optimizing collaboration between marketing agencies, clients, and content creators. Clients are advised to clearly define their expectations through precise briefs and to ensure creative freedom for content creators so that the content remains authentic and relevant. Additionally, clients should further invest in the analysis of influencer profiles to ensure that their values align with the brand's identity.

Agencies should further educate clients about the importance of content quality and encourage more transparent communication between all parties involved. This would help reduce potential challenges such as delays or inconsistencies with briefs. Ultimately, content creators should invest in professionalism, consistency, and authenticity to build trust with both followers and partners. It is especially important that they choose collaborations that align with their personal values.

Although the qualitative methodology enabled an in-depth insight into the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of the respondents, it also entails certain limitations regarding the generalization of the results. Namely, although 30 respondents present a relatively significant number for qualitative research, it may be insufficient to represent the three stakeholder groups in the Croatian market. There is also an element of subjectivity, both in the collected data—since respondents interpret business reality through the lens of their own social and cultural context—and among researchers themselves during the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. Another limitation is the exclusive focus on the Croatian market, which means that the results cannot be fully generalized to a broader regional or global context. The research also revealed a lack of diversity among Croatian content creators, which may limit opportunities for specific market niches.

It is recommended that future research include quantitative approaches to increase the reliability and applicability of the results, providing insights relevant to different industries and demographic groups. Expanding the research to neighboring markets would allow for a comparison of the specificities of the Croatian market with those of other countries in the region and for the identification of shared challenges and opportunities. It is also recommended to investigate the long-term effects of collaborations between brands and influencers on brand perception and sales outcomes. Special focus could be placed on the dynamics of interactions between content creators and their followers, as well as on the impact of their specific characteristics on the success of campaigns.

In conclusion, the results can serve as a foundation for developing better communication models between content creators and their followers, who are at the heart of every modern digital strategy. Understanding the dynamics of these relationships is crucial for the development of long-term and sustainable campaigns that do not rely solely on short-term marketing objectives but instead contribute to creating value for both parties involved.

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## PERCEPCIJA PROFILA „KREATOR SADRŽAJA“ U TRIJADI HRVATSKIH MARKETINŠKIH PRAKTIČARA

### SAŽETAK

Digitalne marketinške strategije koje uključuju angažman kreatora sadržaja postaju sve značajnijim elementom marketinške prakse. S obzirom na sve izraženiju prisutnost kreatora sadržaja u medijskom prostoru i rastuću potrebu za njihovim angažmanom, osiguranje i primjena relevantnih spoznaja o traženim profilima nameće se kao poslovna nužnost. Uzimajući u obzir nedostatak navedenih spoznaja provedeno je istraživanje sa svrhom boljeg razumijevanja kako tri različite kategorije marketera percipiraju profil kreatora sadržaja. Glavni cilj ovog istraživanja je provesti analizu percepcije profila kreatora kako bi se razvile vještine njihove procjene, odabira i angažmana u marketinškim kampanjama. Podaci su prikupljeni pomoću dubinskih intervjua s trideset marketinških stručnjaka i praktičara, po deset u svakoj od triju kategorija: marketinški klijenti/oglašivači, profesionalci u marketinškim agencijama i kreatori sadržaja. Rezultati ovog istraživanja mogu poslužiti kao korisne smjernice marketinškim stručnjacima u svrhu donošenja kvalitetnijih odluka, kao i dobro polazište za daljnja istraživanja o utjecaju kreatora sadržaja na digitalne marketinške strategije današnjice. Na temelju analize rezultata istraživanja oblikovane su preporuke za primjenu novih spoznaja o konkurentnom profilu kreatora sadržaja kako bi se pomoglo marketinškim agencijama i klijentima u optimizaciji poslovnih strategija u cilju postizanja uspješnije suradnje s kreatorima sadržaja.

**KLJUČNE RIJEČI:** marketinške komunikacije, digitalni marketing, društvene mreže, kreator sadržaja, influencer marketing