

Understanding influence from the influencer's perspective: examining leadership, attributes and dedication in social media influencers

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores a previously marginal aspect of research on social media influencers: their self-perception regarding the factors influencing their performance. In a context where the influence of these digital agents is intensifying, shaping opinions, consumption patterns and cultural trends, previous literature has mainly focused on the consumer's perspective. To address this gap, this study aims to evaluate how knowledge-oriented leadership, opinion leadership (OL), content attributes, personal characteristics and dedication to social platforms are perceived as triggers of effectiveness in networks

Design/methodology/approach – This study uses a qualitative comparative approach using fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) on a sample of 20 influencers promoting products or services, with a follower base exceeding 20,000 users. In addition, this paper includes a case study analyzing these three influencers.

Findings – The results suggest that attributes related to content quality and effective OL are perceived as more decisive in social performance than personal characteristics and dedication. These findings enrich the understanding of the process of building and maintaining digital influence.

Originality/value – It has been evidenced that knowledge-oriented leadership and personal characteristics, such as physical and social attractiveness, also play significant roles in the effectiveness of influencers on social networks.

Keywords Opinion leadership, Dedication, Attributes, Influencers, Knowledge-oriented leadership

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Social media platforms are central spaces for building friendships and relationships through shared content. They allow users to exchange ideas and visual materials in an interactive environment. In this article, the term “social media” encompasses any interactive media technology that facilitates the exchange of ideas, information and various forms of expression across digital platforms (Tan *et al.*, 2024). However, it's essential to recognize that popularity within these platforms varies widely. Individuals who achieve significant popularity – commonly referred to as “influencers” – typically focus on specific areas such as



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fashion, cosmetics or lifestyle and create content that aligns with their expertise (Nosrati *et al.*, 2023).

The momentum behind influencer marketing is primed for a substantial uptick in popularity within marketing strategies. Findings from a comprehensive survey of 1,300 marketing professionals reveal that an impressive 74% of companies are gearing up to invest in influencers over the next year (Dwidienawati *et al.*, 2020). Beyond these statistics, recent reports by Hayes (2022) underscore the power of influencer endorsements on consumer behavior, indicating that a significant 71% of consumers are swayed towards making a purchase when products are promoted on social media. Moreover, a staggering 92% of consumers place their trust in influencer marketing reviews over those directly from brands themselves (Bokunewicz and Shulman, 2017). These influencers serve not only as conduits for brand promotion but also as opinion leaders and repositories of specialized knowledge. Delving deeper into the psychological mechanisms at play, Sweet and Adhikari (2020) shed light on the concept of social influence, elucidating how individuals' behaviors, opinions and beliefs undergo metamorphosis under the influence of their network connections. This phenomenon often results in individuals aligning more closely with the views and preferences of their social circles, including those of influential figures within their online communities.

Recent studies emphasize the enduring relevance of influencer marketing as a vital component of digital marketing strategies. This is particularly evident in the increasing prominence of nano and micro-influencers, who, despite their smaller followings, achieve higher engagement levels due to their perceived authenticity and closer connections with their audiences (Vogue-Business, 2024). Moreover, brands are progressively acknowledging the necessity of fostering transparency in their collaborations with influencers, a practice aimed at preserving consumer trust and promoting ethical standards in advertising campaigns (Okonkwo and Namkoisse, 2023). Parallel to these developments, there is a noticeable cultural shift toward responsible consumption, reflecting more conscientious and ethical attitudes toward digital advertising practices (Cabeza-Ramírez *et al.*, 2022). In addition, the emergence of corporate and virtual influencers further illustrates the evolution of this marketing approach, as it aligns with consumer expectations and explores innovative modes of interaction within digital ecosystems (Conti *et al.*, 2022; Puccia *et al.*, 2025). Together, these trends underscore the dynamic and increasingly sophisticated nature of influencer marketing in contemporary digital landscapes.

As highlighted by Kanaveedu and Kalapurackal (2022), the fundamental theories most frequently applied in influencer marketing have been three: source credibility model, persuasion knowledge model and social interaction theory. These frameworks have shaped the understanding of the characteristics of influencers and serve as a support for understanding from their perspective the different ways of exercising opinion leadership (OL) and influencing purchasing decisions. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to identify the combination of conditions and factors that contribute to high performance on social media (PSM) for influencers, from their perspective, using a qualitative comparative analysis with fuzzy sets (fsQCA). In addition, this document includes a case study analyzing these three influencers. One critical aspect of this research is to analyze the influencer from their own perspective rather than from the viewpoint of the consumer or follower. Ultimately, simple yet effective recommendations are expected to be provided for future influencers contemplating entering social media, as well as for the companies hiring them, as it provides guidance on what they should be like to achieve some success. To achieve this goal, the structure of this document includes: a literature review, methodology, analysis results, discussion and conclusions, presented in the corresponding sections.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical framework

Social media users engage with platforms to explore others' lives, seek enjoyment and fulfil social needs (Houghton *et al.*, 2020), while influencers' success hinges on cultural capital and strong personal branding (Ki *et al.*, 2020). Recent research examines how celebrities and traditional influencers shape purchase decisions (Arora *et al.*, 2019; Bakirtas and Celik, 2024), whereas other work explores trust in AI influencers (Alboqami, 2023) and the shift to virtual influencers (Shao, 2024), and the impact of celebrity advertising on consumer behavior (Al-Heali, 2021) each focusing on specific factors like expertise, reliability, attractiveness or credibility. Influencer marketing operates as a persuasion process, where source characteristics (credibility, attractiveness, similarity and power) affect message receptivity (Erdogan, 1999; Farivar *et al.*, 2022; Kang and Herr, 2006). In the knowledge-based economy, SMEs – including solo or small-team influencers – must leverage external knowledge to enhance competitiveness and optimize social media performance (Fidel *et al.*, 2018; Wu *et al.*, 2022). This study, therefore, tests five key conditions – knowledge-oriented leadership, OL, content attributes (CAs), personal attributes (PAs) and dedication to social media to determine their distinct roles in driving influencer success.

2.2 Knowledge-oriented leadership

Research has shown that leadership is a crucial determinant influencing organizational performance, both directly and indirectly (Rehman and Iqbal, 2020). Knowledge-oriented leadership (K-OL) exemplifies a blend of transformational and transactional leadership styles (Donate and Sánchez de Pablo, 2015). This leadership approach aims to foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, thereby significantly impacting organizational success and adaptability in a knowledge-driven economy (Naqshbandi and Jasimuddin, 2018). In this regard, K-OL involves behaviors focused on constructing, promoting and sharing knowledge. It enhances learning experiences, facilitates external knowledge acquisition, improves communication, motivation and coordination skills, boosts moral and fosters a cohesive and supportive team environment (Donate *et al.*, 2022). Influencers could play the role of knowledge leaders (K-OL) in their domains by using their platforms to share valuable information, facilitate access to external resources, encourage participation and foster collaboration among followers, focusing on education and enrichment rather than mere product promotion:

P1. A knowledge-oriented leadership style affects influencers' performance.

2.3 Opinion leadership

OL is characterized by personal involvement, familiarity and knowledge about a product, as well as uniqueness in the public sphere (Chan and Misra, 1990). Opinion leaders exhibit particular traits when influencing the decisions and behaviors of others (Chai *et al.*, 2023). The ability of an opinion leader to exert influence is based on two essential qualifications: specific knowledge about topics or products and the intention to communicate with others (Kim *et al.*, 2015).

Regarding influence on social media, OL can affect performance by influencing the perceptions, decisions and behaviors of the audience (Song *et al.*, 2017). In digital environments, opinion leaders can gain followers, generate conversations and catalyze the adoption of ideas or products. However, effectiveness on social media will depend on the authenticity, relevance and consistency of their messages, as well as their ability to adapt to

changing platform dynamics and audience expectations (Balaban and Szabolcs, 2022). When influencers are seen as opinion leaders, their recommendations are more likely to be followed, significantly influencing consumer behavior and shaping public perceptions (Ki and Kim, 2019). Influencers who maintain authenticity, relevance and consistency in their messages may have a more solid performance. Consequently, the proposition is proposed:

P2. An opinion leadership style influences performance on social media.

2.4 Content attributes

User-generated content – photos, videos, stories, animations and memes – is the core means by which influencers stay relevant and build credibility as opinion leaders through regular posts and follower interaction (Casaló et al., 2020; Childers et al., 2019; Lou and Yuan, 2019). In an environment of information overload on platforms like Instagram, TikTok and YouTube (Roetzel, 2019), truly unique, interactive, informative and visually appealing content drives engagement, boosts brand interaction and makes influencer marketing more effective and lasting (Ki et al., 2020; Tafesse, 2015). Consequently, the proposition is proposed:

P3. Content characteristics can play a crucial role in influencers' performance on social media.

2.5 Personal attributes

Research in social media has highlighted the relevance of attractiveness in influencers (Farivar et al., 2022). Physical attractiveness refers to the appeal of the influencer's appearance, while social attractiveness relates to the likability generated by their behavior (Sakib et al., 2020). Over time, it has been observed that media personalities with physical and social attractiveness receive greater attention and engagement from the audience, thus generating stronger connections (Bond, 2018). In influencer marketing research, conducted through large-scale online surveys, particular emphasis has been placed on relationship-based engagement, suggesting the positive impacts that influencers' physical and social attractiveness can have on such relationships (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). There is a natural tendency among individuals to prefer affiliating and socially interacting with attractive individuals, as this contributes to and enriches their own identity (Steger and Kashdan, 2009). Consequently, the proposition is proposed:

P4. Personal characteristics can play a crucial role in influencers' performance on social media.

2.6 Dedication

Social media influencers need to invest dedication, time and effort into developing their authentic personal brand, similar to how successful brands meticulously craft their identity (Gómez, 2019). For example, a fitness influencer might consistently share workout routines, meal plans and motivational content to build a reputation for expertise and inspiration in their niche. This ensures that the unique selling proposition and narrative resonate effectively with the intended audience (Khamis et al., 2017). Some influencers demonstrate a strong commitment to capturing attention in digital realms: they create engaging video tutorials, curate visually appealing Instagram posts, write informative blog articles, actively respond to

viewer comments, collaborate with other influencers on podcasts and meticulously plan social media campaigns to maintain audience engagement (Brooks *et al.*, 2021). The dedicated effort in attention management becomes an essential practice to establish oneself as an influencer.

As celebrities become more well-known, they often find ways to sustain their perceived authenticity. This authenticity is particularly appealing to brands and agencies when they collaborate on advertising campaigns with influencers. It signifies that influencers can maintain a genuine connection with their audience, enhancing the effectiveness of marketing efforts and bolstering brand credibility (Childers *et al.*, 2019). Exclusive professional dedication to social media and high investment in improvements indicate a serious commitment, which could benefit performance. Daily dedication and increased income in the last year suggest consistent and successful activity on social networks. Consequently, the proposition is proposed:

P5. The dedication of the influencer represents an essential element in influencers' performance on social media.

Therefore, our research is based on the analysis of five conditions and their impact on social network performance (see Figure 1).

3. Methodology

In this section, we introduce the approach used in this study to scrutinize and assess the suggested research framework. Building on the discourse above, we conducted an empirical

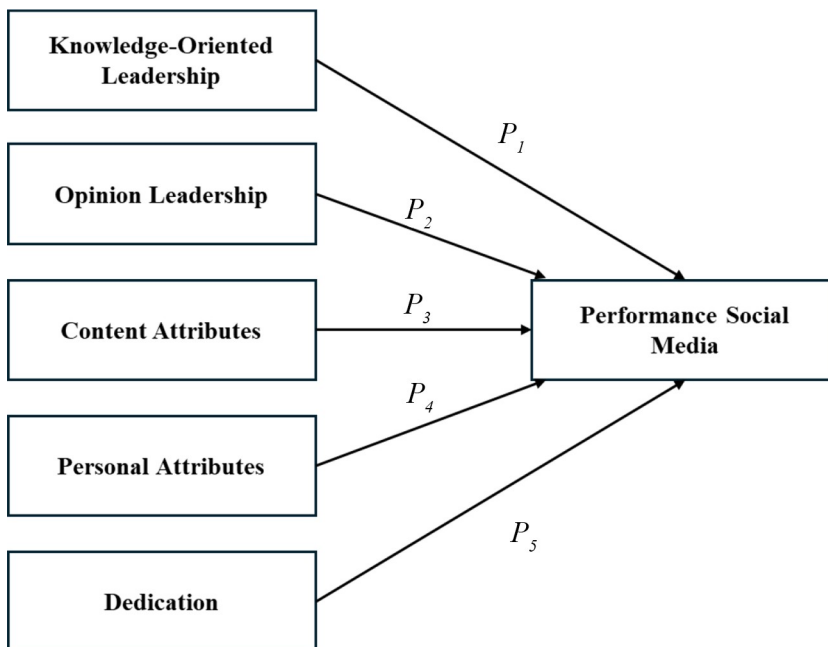


Figure 1. Research model
Source(s): Authors' own work

investigation through a survey to explore how these attributes enable influencers to improve their effectiveness (performance) in social media (see [Appendix](#)). Using a fsQCA, we delved into how combined circumstances culminate in a particular outcome ([Ragin, 2018](#)). This analysis, based on fsQCA, has recently been applied in the field of influencer marketing (see e.g. [Bakirtas and Celik, 2024](#); [Shao, 2024](#); [Alboqami, 2023](#)). As a complementary methodological approach, we carried out a case study analysis ([Yin, 2018](#)) focusing on three influencers and the variables detailed in [Figure 1](#). The case study method was chosen because it enables an in-depth analysis of subjects in their real-world context, providing a nuanced understanding of complex phenomena. This approach proved particularly suitable for the objectives of this research, as it enabled the identification of distinct strategies and behavioral patterns used by each influencer to engage their audiences effectively and optimize their performance.

3.1 Survey administration, sample and data collection

This research adopts a descriptive-exploratory design consistent with the main objective of the study. Currently, social networking platforms do not offer full access to public centralized databases of content creators (due to their privacy policies and commercial restrictions). Consequently, the application of probability sampling methods was ruled out ([Le and Aydin, 2023](#)). Based on this, [Cartwright et al. \(2022\)](#) was followed and theoretical purposive sampling was used ([Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007](#)). A random selection of 100 potential participants was directly contacted through social networks (Twitter, Instagram and TikTok) in February 2024. A total of 26 responded, followed by two restrictive criteria aligned with the objective (followers/promotional experience). The measurement instrument was designed based on the literature review (see previous section), for its correct application, a pilot test was conducted with a manager of a marketing company, a researcher with experience in influencer research and an influencer. Based on the results, the order of the questions was regulated and inconsistencies were corrected.

Our survey comprised 20 Spanish influencers actively promoting products or services on social media. We specifically targeted influencers with over 20,000 followers on their primary social network. To ensure response validity, the questionnaire began by confirming whether influencers engaged in promoting any products or services on their platforms (see [Table 1](#)). Only those who affirmed this were included in our sample. Data collection took place in 2024 via a validated survey reviewed by a panel of experts including professors, influencers and marketing professionals. The study's sample may be affected by self-selection bias, as successful or confident influencers were likely more willing to participate, excluding lower-performing ones. Focusing on influencers with over 20,000 followers also omits valuable insights from micro-influencers and convenience bias from selecting participants based on proximity or relationships may limit the representativeness and generalizability of the findings.

4. Research findings

4.1 Reliability analysis

The influencers were chosen based on practical considerations such as proximity, thematic relevance or existing relationships. To validate the measurement model, the data set underwent confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using IBM SPSS. The results of the CFA confirmed the original five-factor structure. Those loadings with absolute values greater than 0.4 were considered relevant, indicating a substantial relationship between the variable and the latent factor. The conceptual model consists of five latent variables and one outcome variable, PSM.

Table 1. Descriptive data of the survey respondents

Variable	N	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	7	35
Female	13	65
<i>Education level</i>		
Secondary education	1	5
High school	1	5
Vocational training	2	10
Bachelor's degree, master's degree, graduate degree	12	60
Master's degree	4	20
<i>Age</i>		
18–24	5	25
25–34	12	60
35–44	2	10
45–54	1	5
<i>Most used social media Facebook</i>		
Facebook	1	5
TikTok	4	20
Instagram	15	75
<i>Experience in social media</i>		
1–3 years	10	30
3–5 years	5	50
+ 5 years	4	20
<i>City</i>		
Marbella	1	5
Toledo	1	5
Guadalajara	1	5
Ciudad real	1	5
Madrid	5	25
Córdoba	7	35
Sevilla	3	15
Santa Cruz de Tenerife	1	5
<i>Main topics mentioned by influencers*</i>		
Food and beverages	6	16
Clothing and accessories	5	13
Art and culture	4	11
Psychology	4	11
Leisure	3	8.10
Stores and shops	3	8.10
Cosmetics and beauty	3	8.10
Education/training	3	8.10
Entrepreneurship	3	8.10
Travel and tourism	3	8.10

Note(s): *Some of the influencers chose multiple topics

Source(s): Authors' own work

All Cronbach's alpha values are above 0.7, indicating adequate internal consistency (see Table 2). Composite reliability (ρ_a and ρ_c) (≥ 0.7): composite reliability evaluates the quality of the factor loadings for each construct. ρ_a and ρ_c for all constructs exceed the minimum threshold of 0.7, indicating that the latent variables are well-represented. Finally, average variance extracted (AVE) measures the proportion of variance explained by a construct compared to the error. An $AVE \geq 0.5$ indicates good convergent validity. All constructs meet this criterion, demonstrating that the variance explained by the items is greater than the variance attributable to error.

4.2 Qualitative comparative analysis of fuzzy sets

The fsQCA (Ragin, 1998) methodology was used to identify causal configurations that explain PSM. We used the Fuzzy-Set/Qualitative Comparative Analysis 4.0 software (Ragin and Sean, 2022). This approach allows the analysis of combinations of conditions leading to a specific outcome, overcoming the limitations of traditional linear methods (de Diego Ruiz et al., 2023; Farooq Sahibzada et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2017). The five conditions analyzed were K-OL, OL, CAs, PAs and dedication (D). These conditions were selected based on previous studies highlighting their relevance to influencer performance.

4.2.1 Data calibration. Data collected through questionnaires was transformed into fuzzy values (ranging from 0 to 1) using the direct calibration method (Mattke et al., 2022). Specific anchors were established to determine membership levels: 0.95 for full membership, 0.05 for nonmembership and 0.50 as the crossover point. These scores, typically ranging from 1 to 7, are then converted into fuzzy sets, with values above 4 indicating full membership, 4 as the crossover point and values below 4 as nonfull membership, based on the methodology suggested by Ordanini et al. (2014).

4.2.1.1 Necessary conditions analysis, consistency and coverage. In the second step of the analysis, a necessity analysis is conducted to determine which conditions are essential for a specific outcome (Mattke et al., 2022) (see Table 3). Consistency measures the extent to which a configuration consistently leads to the outcome. A threshold of 0.75 was used to ensure that the selected configurations had a sufficiently strong relationship with performance. Coverage indicates the percentage of cases that follow a specific configuration. Unique coverage was used to identify configurations that exclusively contribute to the outcome, excluding redundant ones with a unique coverage value of zero. The consistency and coverage thresholds were based on recommendations from the literature (Schneider and Wagemann, 2010) to ensure the reliability and robustness of the results. Consistency ≥ 0.75

Table 2. Analysis of construct reliability with convergent validity

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (ρ_a)	Composite reliability (ρ_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Content attributes	0.811	0.734	0.725	0.503
Personal attributes	0.842	0.744	0.741	0.519
Dedication	0.763	0.729	0.727	0.582
Knowledge-oriented leadership	0.728	0.738	0.725	0.671
Opinion leadership	0.736	0.741	0.725	0.570
Performance on social media (PSM)	0.709	0.712	0.774	0.663

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 3. Necessary conditions analysis

Constructs	Consistency	Coverage
Knowledge-oriented leadership (K-OL)	0.760000 (0.320000)	0.863636 (0.444444)
Opinion leadership (OL)	0.920000 (0.160000)	0.851852 (0.307692)
Content attributes (CA)	0.840000 (0.240000)	0.840000 (0.400000)
Personal attributes (PA)	0.600000 (0.480000)	0.882353 (0.521739)
Dedication (D)	0.400000 (0.680000)	0.833333 (0.607143)

Note(s): Values for the negation of the condition are shown in parentheses. It meets the consistency standard of 0.75 for generally necessary conditions

Source(s): Authors' own work

ensures the configurations are sufficient to produce the outcome, while coverage ≥ 0.40 ensures their empirical relevance.

The analysis examines whether a particular condition consistently appears in all instances where the outcome is present, or whether its absence is noted in all instances where the outcome is absent (Nikou *et al.*, 2022). Table 3 shows that OL consistently exceeds the 0.90 threshold, suggesting it significantly impacts the outcome (Fiss, 2007; Ragin, 2006). However, other conditions did not meet the threshold, suggesting they do not play a necessary role in influencing the outcome.

4.2.1.2 Truth table construction. In the third phase of our analysis, we perform a sufficiency analysis to pinpoint all configurations that effectively result in a specific outcome (Nikou *et al.*, 2022). Initially, the truth table (Fiss, 2011; Ragin, 2006, 2008) presents various potential configurations that could potentially induce the desired outcome. The truth table was generated to enumerate all possible combinations of conditions. Each configuration was evaluated to determine its ability to explain the desired outcome. Parsimonious, intermediate and complex solutions were generated using the Quine-McCluskey algorithm (Pappas and Woodside, 2021). The intermediate solution was selected as it

Table 4. Intermediate solutions for performance on social media

Constructs	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11
K-OL	●		●		○		●	●	●	○	○
OL		●					○	●	●	●	●
CA	●		●		○		●	○	●	●	○
PA	●	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
D	○	●	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	●
Raw coverage	0.44	0.32	0.32	0.52	0.36	0.36	0.64	0.72	0.60	0.80	0.40
Unique coverage	0.44	0.32	0.32	0.52	0.36	0.36	0.64	0.72	0.60	0.80	0.40
Consistency	0.846	0.888	0.800	0.866	0.900	0.818	0.842	0.857	0.833	0.833	0.833
Total solution coverage	0.44	0.32	0.32	0.52	0.36	0.36	0.64	0.72	0.60	0.80	0.40
Total solution consistency	0.846	0.888	0.800	0.866	0.900	0.818	0.842	0.857	0.833	0.833	0.833

Note(s): * The black circles represent the presence of a condition, the white circles signify its absence and blank spaces denote that the condition is irrelevant. K-OL = knowledge-oriented leadership; OL = opinion leadership; CA = content attributes; PA = personal attributes; D = dedication

Source(s): Authors' own work

balances simplicity and detail, facilitating interpretation without losing essential elements.

4.2.1.3 Evaluation. The fsQCA results, based on the causal configuration of five conditions (see Table 4), reveal 11 solutions (S1 to S11) aimed at analyzing performance (Ragin and Fiss, 2008). These conditions include K-OL, OL, CAs, PAs and dedication. In the representation, the black circles represent the presence of a condition (●), the white circles signify its absence (○) and blank spaces denote that the condition is irrelevant without affecting the outcome (Ragin and Fiss, 2008).

The final configurations were evaluated based on their consistency and coverage to ensure they were both statistically sound and practically relevant. Configurations with high values in both indicators (e.g. S10, with 83.3% consistency and 80% coverage) stood out as the most explanatory. All solutions have high consistency ≥ 0.8 , indicating that each individual configuration is sufficient to achieve the desired operational performance (Ragin, 2006).

4.3 Case studies

The selection of the following three influencers – La Cocina de Poblete, Teresa Guitar and Comerte Córdoba – is particularly suitable for a qualitative analysis due to their distinctive profiles and the unique value they bring to their respective fields. Each represents a specific niche – culinary arts, music and gastronomy – enriched with strong cultural, artistic or community-driven elements. These qualities make them ideal subjects for exploring how different variables influence their impact and engagement strategies (Table 5).

First, La Cocina de Poblete, a chef blending traditional recipes with humor, excels on YouTube (26 K subscribers), Instagram (68 K followers) and TikTok (124 K followers). Focused on classic Manchegan dishes, he has appeared on shows and is a key advocate for regional culinary heritage. Teresa Guitar, a flamenco guitarist (in Instagram 221 K followers), merges traditional flamenco with other genres. After offering online classes, she now performs internationally, collaborating with artists like DJ Martin Garrix, pioneering the fusion of flamenco and contemporary styles. Finally, Comerte Córdoba (in Instagram 28 K followers), a gastronomic initiative in Córdoba, Spain, celebrates local cuisine. Its March 2024 edition featured 16 food stalls, 5 beverage stands and performances at Castillo de la Albaida, promoting gastronomy and community collaboration. Next, we will study qualitatively these influencers in the variables analyzed.

5. Discussion of results

Table 6 presents intermediate solutions (S1 to S11) for performance on social networks, evaluating the presence or absence of specific conditions and providing metrics related to coverage and consistency. These conditions are considered essential elements for explaining performance on social networks in the context analyzed. To better analyze the results obtained from the Quine-McCluskey test, we have synthesized them into the following table:

The analysis of these cases underscores that influencer success is not determined by a single factor but by the interplay of multiple elements. Each influencer uses these dimensions in a distinct manner, shaped by their specific context and audience characteristics. Common factors such as authenticity, content innovation and strong professional commitment emerge as pivotal contributors to their effectiveness. In the following section, we will assess the acceptance or rejection of the initial propositions, informed by the findings derived from fsQCA and the insights gathered from the case studies (Table 7). Emphasis will be placed on identifying the most consistent and broadly applicable conditions while considering the contextual factors that influence these outcomes.

Table 5. Influencers case study

Variable	La cocina de poblete	Teresa guitar	Comerte Córdoba
Knowledge-oriented leadership (K-OL)	Promotes cultural knowledge through traditional recipes. Encourages interaction with followers by sharing culinary experiences	Positioned as a leader in blending flamenco with other styles, inspiring musical innovation	Promotes gastronomic collaboration and openness to new culinary trends
Opinion leadership (OL)	A role model in preserving traditional Manchegan cuisine	Influences perceptions of flamenco boundaries, setting new musical trends	A source of information and a reference point for Cordoban gastronomy
Content attributes (CA)	Authentic, entertaining and high-quality content that connects with followers	Innovative and high-quality performances that captivate diverse audiences	Informative and unique multimedia content that enriches the experience of its followers
Personal attributes (PA)	An authentic and approachable personality, standing out for his presence in traditional cooking settings	Prestige as a flamenco guitarist and international artist enhances her reliability and social appeal	Recognized for organizing high-impact culinary events within the local community
Dedication (D)	Highly dedicated to content creation, investing time and resources to deliver authenticity	Transitioning to international concerts reflects strong professional commitment	Significant investment of time and resources in planning and organizing gastronomic events
Performance on social media (PSM)	Notable growth in followers and interaction metrics (likes, comments)	Social media amplifies her international reach, increasing likes and shares	Strategic use of social media to promote events and boost attendance and online interaction

Source(s): Authors' own work

6. Conclusions

This study has uncovered key factors that significantly impact influencer performance on social networks. By focusing on conditions such as K-OL, OL, CAs, PAs and dedication on social networks, crucial patterns and relationships have been identified. Different combinations of conditions explain social media performance, with OL and CA as key factors. Coverage and consistency metrics reinforce the effectiveness of specific solutions like S10, S8 and S7.

The findings emphasize the critical role of OL and content quality in influencer success, highlighting authenticity, relevance, uniqueness and aesthetic appeal as essential elements for effective influence. Companies can leverage this information to select influencers who possess these characteristics, thereby increasing the likelihood of success in their marketing campaigns. Furthermore, K-OL and personal traits, such as physical and social attractiveness, also play a significant role in influencer effectiveness. Companies and agencies can provide training to develop these skills. Ultimately, the use of the fsQCA methodology has proven valuable in assessing the complexity of these combined factors, offering a deeper understanding of their interaction and effect on influencer performance.

Table 6. Summary and discussion of the quantitative study

Aspect evaluated	Description/summary
Most outstanding solution	S10: Coverage of 80%, consistency of 83.3%. It is the most effective in explaining performance
Frequent conditions	– Opinion leadership (OL) and content attributes (CA) appear in several solutions, demonstrating their importance – Dedication (D) and knowledge-oriented leadership (K-OL) are also relevant in some configurations
Solutions highlighted by condition	– <i>OL</i> : Present in S2, S8, S9, S10 and S11; aligned with Farivar et al. (2022) , who observed that influencers actively engaging their audience in their posts, stories or live streams tended to demonstrate higher relevance – <i>Personal Attributes (PA)</i> : Present in S1, S4 and S5; aligned with Bawack et al. (2021) , which suggests that the presence of personality traits such as friendliness, conscientiousness and intellect, along with trust and prior experience, contributes to high customer experience performance – <i>Content Attributes (CA)</i> : Relevant in S7, S9 and S10; aligned with Cheung et al. (2022) , who emphasize the crucial role of crafting creative content with well-designed layouts and advanced technological features to stimulate consumers' psychological responses
Top solutions by metrics	1. S10: Coverage 80%, consistency 83.3% 2. S8: Coverage 72%, consistency 85.7% 3. S7: Coverage 64%, consistency 84.2% 4. S9: Coverage 60%, consistency 83.3% 5. S4: Coverage 52%, consistency 86.6%

Source(s): Authors' own work

6.1 Theoretical and practical implications

The theoretical implications of this study enhance our understanding of influencer PSM by incorporating various influential factors and validating methodologies like fsQCA to address this complexity. The identification of intermediate solutions offers a more detailed perspective on causal relationships in this context. This study offers significant insights into how brands and marketing professionals can effectively harness the potential of influencers. By identifying the factors that drive influencers' success on social media, companies can optimize their marketing strategies and build more impactful collaborations.

For instance, in the food industry, an olive oil brand might partner with La Cocina de Pobleto to sponsor a series of TikToks featuring traditional recipes. Such a collaboration would not only enhance brand visibility but also highlight its association with regional quality and cultural heritage. In the music and technology sector, a company specializing in music production software could sponsor Teresa Guitar's international tours or develop co-branded content. This initiative would showcase how its technology supports the fusion of flamenco and electronic music, positioning the brand as a key innovator in the music industry. Similarly, in the promotion of gastronomic tourism, a regional tourism office could team up with Comerte Córdoba to organize a festival celebrating local cuisine and cultural heritage. This event would attract tourists, stimulate local businesses and spotlight the region's culinary diversity. These examples demonstrate how brands can capitalize on the expertise and authenticity of influencers to create impactful campaigns that deliver value for all stakeholders involved.

Table 7. Summary of the acceptance of propositions

Propositions	Decision	Justification
P1: K-OL and PSM	Partially accept	Although K-OL appears in successful configurations (S1, S4 and S7) and cases like La Cocina de Poblete demonstrate its effectiveness in fostering cultural learning, its impact is not universal. It is not a necessary condition in all successful configurations and its effectiveness depends on the context (e.g. educational or cultural content)
P2: Opinion leadership (OL) and PSM	Accept	OL is the most consistent and frequent factor in fsQCA, standing out in key solutions like S10 (80% coverage). Cases such as Teresa Guitar and Comerte Córdoba show how opinion leadership expands reach, builds trust and increases engagement
P3: Content Attributes (CA) and PSM	Accept	CA is a recurrent condition in highly effective configurations (S7, S9 and S10). Cases like Comerte Córdoba highlight how unique and visually appealing content improves interaction and impact
P4: Personal Attributes (PA) and PSM	Partially accept	Although PA appears in some configurations (S4 and S5) and contributes to improving audience connection, its impact is less consistent compared to OL or CA. The analyzed cases, such as Teresa Guitar, highlights its relevance in specific contexts, but it is not a determining factor in all high-performance configurations
P5: Dedication (D) and PSM	Accept	Dedication is a complementary factor present in configurations like S6 and S8. Cases like La Cocina de Poblete demonstrate that constant effort drives growth. However, its impact is lower in terms of consistency in fsQCA and by itself, it does not guarantee success if other key factors like OL or CA are absent

Source(s): Authors' own work

Social media influencers shape not only consumer behavior but also public discourse and information quality. Their credibility and message quality boost adherence to health guidelines – evident during COVID-19 (Gupta *et al.*, 2022) and their reach can set political agendas and influence policy debates (Iuliia *et al.*, 2021). In youth mental health, rigorously sourced influencer content enhances health literacy and peer support (Adeane, 2024), yet there's a danger of promoting unrealistic ideals that harm self-esteem and well-being (Engel *et al.*, 2024). To harness their positive societal role while mitigating risks, collaboration among researchers, brands and health agencies is essential for crafting ethical, evidence-based guidelines.

6.2 Limitations and future research

The study's limitations may include some subjectivity in the process of selecting intermediate solutions following the application of the Quine-McCluskey algorithm. In addition, the data is based on surveys targeting influencers with over 20,000 followers, which could limit the generalization of the results. The evaluation of the adequacy of fsQCA configurations is based on measures such as consistency and coverage, which may not fully

capture the complexity of causal relationships in the environment of influencers on social media.

This study may have self-selection bias, as more successful influencers likely participated, potentially excluding those with lower performance. In addition, focusing on influencers with over 20,000 followers excludes micro-influencers and convenience bias may arise from selecting participants based on proximity or prior relationships. These limitations could affect the representativeness and generalizability of the findings.

As for future research, other factors not considered in this study could be explored, such as posting frequency and interaction with followers. Furthermore, investigating how specific marketing strategies can impact the success of influencers on social media would be interesting. Different methodological approaches for data analysis in this field could also be examined, such as the use of data mining techniques or social network analysis.

Future research could explore how content frequency affects engagement across niches, the impact of emotional connections and parasocial relationships on consumer behavior and whether influencers with specialized knowledge generate more trust. In addition, examining the long-term effects of influencer marketing on brand loyalty, comparing virtual vs human influencers in terms of trust and engagement and studying cross-platform performance could provide deeper insights into influencer marketing dynamics.

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Table A1. Items used in this study

Construct and adaptation of	Items (7-point Likert scale, totally disagree 1 – totally agree 7)
Knowledge-Oriented leadership (Donate and Sánchez de Pablo (2015))	<p>K-OL_1. The adopted management style has fostered an environment that encourages responsible behavior, teamwork and the sharing of knowledge</p> <p>K-OL_2. The account primarily focuses on promoting openness to new ideas, tolerance for mistakes and effective mediation</p> <p>K-OL_3. The account is noted for encouraging experiential learning and allowing for mistakes within reasonable limits</p> <p>K-OL_4. The influencer acts as a knowledge advisor, offering valuable content</p> <p>K-OL_5. The management approach used by the influencer supports the acquisition of external knowledge and enhances communication among followers</p> <p>K-OL_6. Influencers reward followers who share and apply their knowledge (content)</p>
Opinion leadership (Casaló et al., 2020) and (Thakur et al., 2016)	<p>OL_1. This social media account serves as a role model for others</p> <p>OL_2. This social media account is one step ahead of the others</p> <p>OL_3. This social media account offers interesting photos (or content) that suggest new ideas on a specific topic (fashion, gastronomy, entertainment... etc.)</p> <p>OL_4. This social media account influences people’s opinions on a specific topic (fashion, gastronomy, entertainment..., etc.)</p> <p>OL_5. This social media account is used by people as a source of information</p>
Content attributes (Farivar et al., 2022)	<p>CA_1. My content is fun/entertaining</p> <p>CA_2. My content is unique</p> <p>CA_3. My content is original</p> <p>CA_4. My content is informative</p> <p>CA_5. My content is of high quality</p>
Personal attributes (Farivar et al., 2022) and (Lee and Watkins, 2016)	<p>PA_1. My physical attractiveness</p> <p>PA_2. Reliability of information and content</p> <p>PA_3. Social appeal</p> <p>PA_4. My experience as an influencer</p> <p>PA_5. Personal presence (at events, contests, programs...)</p> <p>PA_6. My prestige as an influencer</p>
Dedication (Narver et al., 2004) y (Dwidienawati et al., 2020)	<p>D_1. My professional dedication is solely to social media</p> <p>D_2. To me, being an influencer is entertainment and not a job</p> <p>D_3. I dedicate a large part of my day to working on my content</p> <p>D_4. I allocate a large part of my income to improving my networks (e.g. buying better video cameras, computers and image)</p> <p>D_5. My income in the last year has increased thanks to social media</p>
Performance on social media (PSM) (Wies et al., 2023)	<p>PSM_1. Likes: The number of likes from my followers has increased in the last year</p> <p>PSM_2. Comments: The number of comments from my followers has increased in the last year</p> <p>PSM_3. Mentions: The number of times users were tagged by other users in comments on one of my posts has increased in the last year</p>

(continued)

Table A1. Continued

Construct and adaptation of	Items (7-point Likert scale, totally disagree 1 – totally agree 7)
	PSM_4. Stories: The number of times users clicked on a link embedded in a story to be directed to my website has increased in the last year
	PSM_5. Followers: My number of followers has increased in the last year

Source(s): Authors' own work

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