# The sway of influencer marketing: evidence from a restaurant group

## Abstract

Influencer marketing has become a powerful channel for brand promotion and market expansion in the hospitality industry. However, those responsible for implementing influencer marketing campaigns are susceptible to the "myth of viewability" and rely on the Cost Per View (CPV) evaluation metric, rather than the more appropriate Cost Per Action (CPA). The current research explores the aforementioned myth from a hospitality management perspective by identifying the types of image (or photo) which attract more audience commentary or liking. A qualitative research approach is adopted involving two experiments with influencer pairs across the restaurant context in Taipei, Taiwan. We selected influencers Q and S as our manipulated group. In sharing images on their social media platform, it was found that they make greater use of personal than of food related images. The opposite was the case for the controlled group - influencers X and A – who shared more food than personal images. The researchers tracked viewer responses and then actions towards influencer postings to determine a) which influencer approach draws more views and b) the costs that are attributable to views and/or actions. They drew upon the findings to formulate an Owner-Influencer Matrix, a strategic planning tool and framework that helps owners and influencers to optimize influencer marketing. It is concluded that interactions between influencers and business owners should be beneficial to both parties. This empirical study may provide business owners and social media influencers with insights about communicating the respective brand values of their counterparts and designing sponsorship collaborations with a capacity to generate the desired

**Key words**: influencer; marketing; restaurant; CPA; CPV; social media.

# 1. Introduction

Spending on digital advertising in the USA amounted to $129.34 billion in 2019, accounting for 54.2% of media advertising budgets and exceeding the equivalent spending on traditional advertising for the first time (*eMarketer* 2019). Indicative of the steep growth, it has been predicted that digital advertising will make up 66.8% of total media spending by 2023. Social media has emerged as one of the main digital marketing channels and influencer marketing has been a rising star within this category. It has been estimated that the business of influencer marketing will grow to $15 billion by 2022, compared with the 2019 figure of $8 billion (*Business Insider*, 2020). However, as a phenomenon in its early development, influencer marketing currently lacks substantive theoretical and empirical research. Schulze, Schöler, and Skiera (2014), Aswani, Kar, Ilavarasan, and Dwivedi (2018), and Shareef, Mukerji, Dwivedi, Rana, and Islam (2019) provided three sources of evidence about social media marketing, namely a) search engine marketing (SEM), b) Facebook viral marketing campaigns, and c) conceptualized advertising value and consumer attitudes towards advertisements. Li, Lai, and Chen (2011) also identifed word-of-mouth marketing as the most powerful tool for restaurant owners. Though the study revealed recognition of the size of blogger friendship networks by online-readers, Li et al. (2011) did not identify their content preferences. The lack of insght has led practitioners to rely on trial and error - focussing on the "myth of viewability" with digital marketers focusing their influencer campaigns exclusively on the CPV (cost per view) evaluation metric instead of CPA (cost per action). This myth merits systematic scholarly evaluation. The current study bases its conclusions on experimentation and explores the attitudes of owners and of types of influencer.

Most previous influencer marketing studies have emphasized how the phenomenon is perceived by customers (ie receivers). Fewer scholars have considered the topic from a management perspective (Harrigan, Daly, Coussement, Lee, Soutar, & Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Kiss, & Bichler, 2008; Liu, Jiang, Lin, Ding, Duan, & Xu, 2015; Ray Chaudhury, Nafees, & Perera, 2020), and considerations have been rarer still in hospitality (Guerreiro, Viegas, & Guerreiro, 2019; Oliveira, Araujo, & Tam, 2020; Tham, Mair, & Croy, 2020; Yılmaz, Sezerel, & Uzuner, 2020). Noting the deficient hospitality literature on influencer marketing, the current study explores the needs of transmitters (influencers and owners) to assist them in satisfying their respective target audiences. The insights can bridge the current gap between receivers and transmitters in marketing campaigns.

The current exploratory study provides a more scientific evaluation of the influencer marketing myth in hospitality from a management and operational perspective. A qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews is adopted,

supplemented by experiments on two restaurants in Taipei with two pairs of influencers. The posting tracks are monitored to determine which approach generates more views and to estimate the costs associated with views and follow up action. The researchers also document the number of customers and expenses incurred during the customized promotional campaign. The interview content is coded manually to analyze the resulting data. The research purpose is as follows:

To determine the merits of adopting a CPA or CPV approach that helps hospitality stakeholders generally and restaurant owners and managers in particular and supplements the hospitality literature on influencer marketing.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Influencers

An influencer is a marketing "rising star" whose popularity has been fueled by social media. The term influencer generally refers to an individual or third party who has accumulated a certain audience size through social media platforms and who has a direct impact on customer purchasing decisions (Boerman, 2020; Brown & Hayes, 2008; Chatzigeorgiou, 2017; Galeotti, & Goyal, 2009). Influencers are recognized as opinion leaders and are viewed by their customers as being trustworthy, knowledgeable, and authentic (Biaudet, 2017; Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011; Wen & Deng, 2020). The three levels of influence depend on follower numbers: mega, macro and micro. Mega-influencers have more than a million followers and are typically celebrities and/or social stars. At the other end of the spectrum, the moderate popularity of micro-influencers (fewer than 100,000 followers) depends exclusively on the content that they have produced (The Influencer Marketing Hub, 2019). Somewhere in the middle, the term macro-influencer refers to professional bloggers or famous journalists (Brown & Fiorella, 2013; Gottbrecht, 2016; Magno & Cassia, 2018). Deploying micro-influencers is becoming more popular than celebrity endorsements, due to their cost-effectiveness and authentic follower engagements.

Gross & Wagenheim (2018) proposed a classification of four influencer groups, based on the breadth of their domain and social presence: snoopers, informers, entertainers, and infotainers. Domain breadth refers to the scope of the content that they disseminate, while social presence describes how influencers connect and communicate with their audience. The considerations noted above give influencers a clear motivation to contact their audience and a pathway to do so. They attach value to the experiences of their audience and to their reviews. The influencer typology has implications for practice since it can guide organizations seeking to select influencers in alignment with particular stated goals. Despite the broad categorizations, influencer typologies are not fixed in time since this form of marketing is dynamic and will change according to the business and career development goals of the influencers.

## 2.2 Influencer Marketing

The rise of digital media has transformed influencer marketing into a leading strategic marketing option. However, in the absence of any comprehensive literature on the subject, there is no commonly agreed academic definition. Broadly speaking, it has been regarded as a type of social media marketing that pushes brand communications to a larger consumer market (Singh et al. 2012, Tap Influence, 2017). The most popular influencer marketers - named after their preferred channel - are Instagram bloggers (Tomoson, 2016). The substantial impact of influencer marketing derives from its capacity to shape brand equity and to generate higher returns on investment (ROI) for the organization, than traditional advertising (Tap Influence, 2017; Godey et al., 2016). The industrial report (The Influencer Marketing Hub, 2019, p.13) illustrated that companies implementing a successful influencer marketing campaign acquire $18 in earned media value for every dollar spent.

Brown & Fiorella (2013) have predicted that companies will pay increasing attention to the results and outcomes when evaluating influencer marketing. They noted that the essential metrics involve tracking measurement for both the influencer and the company (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). The company perspective involves analyzing the investment, cost of manpower resources and product, awareness, reactions, and actions. Awareness includes the number of blog posts, regular updates and brand and product mentions. Actions and reactions apply to an increase in online and offline traffic, such as the number of new followers, clicks, likes, customer reviews, the times discount codes were used, and purchase intentions and behaviors (Biaudet, 2017; Johansen & Guldvik, 2017). In summary, the usual vital measurement factors are ROI, CPA, CPV and cost per engagement (CPE, dollars spent per "like"). Factors that should be considered from the influencer perspective include reach (number of followers visiting the influencer's platform), audience perceptions, sentiment, traffic effects and purchasing path.

Influencer marketing builds on the enduring popularity of social media and has emerged as a commonplace business model for online marketing. As has been grown, it has confronted challenges such as diminishing trust and adequate supervision. Noting the reliance of consumers on trusting word-of-mouth (WOM), Magnini (2011) exemplified three methods that service companies use to disguise commercially-based promotional messages as genuine WOM. These include posting sposored WOM on blogs, using brand pushers and paying for endorsement by celebrities. There have been longstanding disputes about the ethics of disguising word-of-mouth in the marketing literature. Irrespective of the service company or the influencer, a crisis of trust will occur when inauthentic products or services are sold. The implications merit further thinking about the supervision of marketing services amongst government departments.

## 2.3 Influencer Marketing in the Restaurant Sector

Influencer marketing campaigns are booming in the restaurant sector because they offer a prospectively cost-effective and quick way of attracting customers. Restaurant owners actively seek to elevate the "wow factor" by cooperating with food bloggers and reviewers. These micro-influencers offer the prospect of creating valuable online content in the form of blog posts, photos, videos, comments and live broadcasts related to restaurants or food on their social platforms. In an increasingly competitive market, they can help restaurants with their target marketing, boost online exposure and brand awareness and increase sales. Some practitioners have noted a need for restaurant influencer marketing to be practical (align with industry realities), and that equal importance should be attached to ROI, quality of products sold and attractive presence of created content. Scholars have suggested that restaurant marketing managers should be tracking the conversion arising from high viewability rates (Patel, 2018).

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1 Research Design and Research Sites

The focus of this qualitative research is on two restaurants from the same group in Taipei, Taiwan, each of which offers a highly reputed dining experience. The first is a mid to high priced Japanese restaurant, Toutouan, Taipei. The other is a high-end Spanish restaurant, Molino de Urdaniz, Taipei that holds two Michelin stars (at the time of writing). The food styles differ - the Japanese restaurant offers traditional kaiseki cuisine, whereas the Spanish restaurant features modern molecular gastronomy. The Japanese restaurant focuses on customers aged 30 to 65 and the Spanish restaurant targets customers aged 35 to 55. Given the relatively high cover charges which apply, both concentrate on customers with substantial annual incomes. The two restaurants have different attributes and target audiences and were the first outlets within the group to deploy an influencer strategy for marketing and advertising. Previously, the primary marketing channels for the two restaurants were newspapers, magazine advertisements, television broadcasts, radio stations, and internet marketing (Facebook Page only). The marketing channel coverage was essentially limited to traditional marketing (Todor, 2016). The restaurant owners wanted to secure new online platforms and channels for promotion and opted to try an influencer marketing approach, making the two outlets suitable candidates for the current experimental research.

The respective group directors of sales and marketing were interested in targeting the 25 to 35 age range and wished to acquire more insights into this cohort that has a higher engagement with social media than the older customers who have been the focus of previous marketing and patronage. As was ascertained during interviews, the restaurant practitioners thought that deploying an influencer marketing channel might induce such younger customers to spend more, when better informed about the

atmosphere, ambience, and gourmet food of their high-end establishments. However, the experiment also considered relatively older prospective diners for purposes of comparison. The restaurant owners provided the researchers with access to both outlets to conduct an experimental study. In the spirit of transparency and accuracy, they consented to reveal the revenue-related information which would allow the researchers to calculate cost per view (CPV) and cost per action (CPA).

*3.2 Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis*

Purposive sampling was adopted for the conduct of this experimental study, and the researchers identified appropriate interviewees based upon the extent of their experience (Trochim, 2006). To acquire deeper insights into the topic of interest, seven semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted during the period 25$^{th}$ to 27$^{th}$ March, 2020. The respondents were restaurant owners, directors of sales and marketing and four influencers. Respondents provided prior consent, and the required research ethical standards were met. The survey instrument was divided into three parts though leaving some room for flexibility with the interview questions (see Appendices A and B): 1. interviewee profiles; 2. perceptions and opinions towards influencer marketing and 3. suggestions. Each interview lasted for 30 minutes to an hour. The second part sought to identify influencer understanding of restaurant needs, with both parties asked whether they would focus on CPA and/or CPV. The apparent focus of some influencers on CPV is because they priortise the number of likes or comments on their postings. Since restaurants prefer CPA to CPV, the results can potentially help decision makers to identify the types of influencer whom they should hire. All interviews were conducted in Chinese language medium and were tape-recorded. The verbatim transcripts were translated into English to allow for the conduct of manual coding and language content analysis. The researchers also conducted back translation from English to Chinese and a triangulation approach for the analysis of interview content (Thurmond, 2001) with a view to determining validity. The relatively small number of respondents lent itself to manual data coding and the results were assembled around keywords which drew upon both the literature and the researchers' experience.

To assure validity, a key driver in formulating our interview questions was to determine any gap between influencers and restaurants and see the potential for reduction. Most influencers evidently attach greater importantance to the number of views than to the number of restaurant divers whereas the opposite applies to restaurant practitioners. In confronting this challenge, we ask influencers about their use of social media platforms to approach their audience and their expected result. Meanwhile, we interviewed the restaurant side with a view to identify undertaking a cross-sdectional comparison with the answers provided by influencer, thereby facilitating the formation of our matrix.

In designing our interview questions we also engaged a triangulation strategy. To do

this we asked our informants from different angles to provide an assurance of validity, regardless of whether they were from the controlled or from the manipulated group. We also undertook respondent validation by observing whether our informants were responding authentically. Despite our modest sample size we observed that the answers were largely consistent.

### 3.3 Research Process

The first step involved identifying two pairs of influencers who would be featured in a promotion for each of the two outlets, namely influencers S & A for the Japanese restaurant and influencers Q & X for the Spanish restaurant (Appendix C). The selection of the influencer pairs was based on a) their similar "going rate" (applicable fee structure), b) platform (Instagram), c) target market (category or niche) and d) reach. Influencer S is currently a Food and Tourism TV show host for TVB Hong Kong, has approximately 12,000 Facebook followers, earning her the title of micro-influencer. Influencer A is an actress and print model with ten years of experience. She meets the criteria as a micro-influencer with an estimated 7,600 Facebook followers, and more than two million followers on Weblog. Influencers S & A have some level of celebrity and are more or less considered to be television artists and/or entertainers. Their followers include both males and females, though both have a predominance of female fans.

The equivalent group for the Spanish restaurant consists of influencers Q & X. They have similar numbers of Instagram followers. Influencer Q has been a print model for eleven years and is considered a macro-influencer with more than 300,000 Instagram fans ranging between 25 and 35 years old. Influencer X is also a print model with 6 years of industry experience. She has 228,000 Instagram fans in the age range 20 to 40. The two influencers have a majority of male fans; the style adopted by influencers Q & X could be described as "dream girls", with their followers being primarily interested in photographs posted by attractive women. The two have previously cooperated with different restaurants through their digital channel to undertake discount promotions.

The restaurant practitioners and researchers agreed to allocate Influencers S & A to the Japanese restaurant in order to target the 35 to 65 age group. The two have similar numbers of Facebook followers, are familiar with filming and are comfortable interacting with their followers. By contrast, influencers Q & X have generally younger followers, aged from 25 to 35. The practitioners hoped to target this newer and younger audience and to persuade them to embrace a new culinary style. The influencers were invited to adopt their own personal style of posting. When posting on their digital channels, influencers S & Q concentrate more on personal lifestyles and selfies, while influencers A & X focus more on the food and on the restaurant. The experimental guidelines required that all influencers should mention the offer of a special discount

for followers who visited the restaurants during the fortnight promotion period. To ensure credible internal validity for this exploratory research based on the timing and contexts (W. M. Trochim, 2006), the visits for influencers S & A to the Japanese restaurant and for influencers Q & X to the Spanish restaurant were scheduled on the same day and coinciding with the same meal period. The two restaurants were asked to record the number of guests per day and the cost of hiring each influencer, based on their charge out rate. For example, influencers Q and X charged NTD 15,000 per advertisement on their Instagram pages. Influencers S and A charged NTD 10,000 per advertisement on their Facebook pages. It was anticipated that the results would show CPA (cost per action) and CPV (cost per view) respectively. We assumed that if an influencer attracts fifty customers to the applicable restaurant, the CPA of Influencers Q and X would be NTD 15,000/50 (NTD 300) and the CPA of Influencers S and A would be NTD 10,000/50 (NTD 200). However, since customer spending will vary considerably, the ROI is combined to examine the promotional campaign results for the restaurant owners.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Information about the Interviewees

Table 1 illustrates that the fan base of the four influencers occupies a certain niche market. Influencers Q and X are print models, focusing on the fashion domain; X is also what is described colloquially as a "dream girl". Influencer S is a TV tourism and food host. Influencer A has been an actress and has roles in internet dramas and short films. Their motivations and pathways to contacting followers through the creation of targeted content are clear. They adopt well-known social media channels, such as Facebook, Instagram, and online streaming.

Table 2 presents the respective influencer categories. Based on the influencer typologies of snoopers, informers, entertainers, and infotainers (Gross & Wangenheim, 2018) and on the content analysis, influencers Q and X generally fall into the "snooper" category. They create and share content on social media about their daily lives, emotions, entertainment and share private insights with their audience. Influencer S belongs to the "informer" category. She usually shares her knowledge and expertise of food and tourism with her followers. She is delivering trustworthy content to win credibility amongst her followers. On the other hand, Influencer A is an entertainer who focuses primarily on providing her audience with enjoyable content (Fall, 2019).

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Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here
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*4.2 Expected Results of Influencer Marketing*

Brown & Fiorella (2013) suggested that organizations can benefit from examining the results of influencer marketing. Noting that there is no persuasive model to convince readers to track the outcomes of influencer marketing, the current empirical investigation encompasses a variety of perspectives and has generated some interesting and unexpected findings. As is evidenced in Table 2, influencers Q and X may be categorized as snoopers. For influencers Q and X, CPV is viewed as being more important than CPA. However, they were also happy to have a win-win situation (see Table 3).

> *Of course, I make some profit. If the restaurant also makes a profit too, that is even better. I really care about the number of fans. In our business, we need to people to see us. The more fans I have, the more companies come to me, and that means more business projects and money. (Influencer Q)*

Influencer Q views the sole priority for snoopers as being to increase the number of fans and to gain exposure. Though they would like a win-win situation with the relevant restaurant, this is not their priority. Influencer X mentioned that:

> *I would say exposure [is my priority]. You always need to have new work that have recognition. You need to make progress and create new topics to make more people aware of you. I am a product and I need to market myself. (Influencer X)*

Based on the interviewing, it may be assumed that snoopers think of themselves rather than the business owners. They believe that the number of fans on the page strongly influences their business. This is different from Influencers S and A, who attach more importance to CPA and to achieving a "win-win" situation.

> *I think the revenue is what determines the success of an influencer. I think that is very important and I don't really care about my exposure. Exposure can vanish like a bubble, pop! Feedback is way more important in my mind. (Influencer S)*

Influencer S who likes to share knowledge and expertise with her fans has been categorized as an informer. Unlike entertainers, she has the practice of sharing film video with her audience.

*I think video is a good approach if we have an agreed compensation ...*
*A short video around one or two minutes long. I think if I sent the video*
*to my fans, they probably would find it interesting and watch the full*
*video. (Influencer A)*

In terms of interesting findings, it was anticipated that most influencers would prioritize CPV because of its capacity to impact on their career and business. However, influencer A also mentioned that:

*The number of comments is the most important factor. Giving out*
*feedback means you are interested. If you watched the video for one*
*second it also counts as a view, but it means nothing. CPA is for sure more*
*important. I think money matters the most. But when you recommend an*
*item to your audience, you must be responsible to your audience and fans.*
*(Influencer A)*

Influencers S and A attach more importance to longer-term business. They indicated that many of their friends are micro-influencers. They recognize a need to care about the shared content if they are to secure business contracts.

*That is how you maintain a long-term business. A lot of my friends are*
*influencers. They get sponsored projects because it is the self-media era*
*now and anyone can be an influencer. Some influencers who only have*
*a few thousand fans may get more sponsored projects than those who*
*have more followers; this is because the big influencers take the business*
*seriously. They are engaged in editing contents and photos personally.*
*Some other influencers focus too much on themselves. They are less*
*concerned about the products they are promoting. As a result, it is hard*
*for them to get a sponsored project. (Influencer A)*

From the perspective of their longer-term self-development, influencers tended to regard CPV as more important than CPA, regardless of whether or not they placed themselves in the shoes of the restaurant owners. All influencers expressed an unwillingness to publish excessively commercial advertisements on their social media platforms. They expressed the view that aggressive advertising would have a negative impact. The content in Table 3 identifies the number of "likes" from each post on the influencers' social media platforms. The number of likes received in response to the

posting about visiting the restaurant was relatively low, compared with the number of prior and later posts. It was observed that Influencer S had higher views because she wore more alluring clothing than Influencer A on the day she visited the restaurant and she took more selfies than images of food. This may illustrate that many followers care less about the food quality when viewing an influencer's social media platform. As was predicted, the restaurant management team viewed CPA as the most important element when seeking to hire an influencer as an element of their marketing strategy. As is evidenced in Table 4, Director C and Owner W agreed that CPA is their main goal when deploying influencer marketing. They have not tried this marketing approach previously, and would like an additional channel for exposure to different age groups.

> *The final goal is still for consumers to take action. But since you do not know how many viewers will take action; all you can do at this moment is to seize as much exposure as possible. (Director C)*

> *CPA is more important. What is exposure? In my opinion, if the exposure can not be transferred to revenue, then there is limited exposure. As I said, I survey my customers everyday so I know if my promotions are working. I have advertised using newspapers, bloggers, and magazine promotions since mid December, with 4- 5 blog articles per week, 1.2- 1.5 newspapers ads daily. When we ask the customers where do they see our advertising, based on their feedback, we know if we are on the right track. Counting views on social media is not as precise as my survey. I want to transfer all exposure to money. (Owner W)*

The results confirmed the prevalence of the influencer marketing myth - many restaurant managers evidently consider CPV more than CPA in influencer marketing. The managers were very practical in their approach to influencer marketing with a clear view of what can be achieved.

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Company strategy and direction is evidently a lesser concern for Snoopers. During the interviews, they indicated a stronger focus on CPV than on CPA (see Table 5). They made little mention of customer perceptions in the influencer marketing context. Only Influencer Q observed that the number of restaurant customers could increase if they

promoted through influencer marketing channels offering free food and/or beverage or discounts. This differs from the views expressed by Influencer S – she was concerned about the quality of food and how it is presented on social media.

> *My first concern is about how the food tastes, and then if the photo is beautiful. In regard to if the food is tasty, I will check recommendations of gourmets who I respect in the industry. I care most about how the food tastes. I do not mind eating street food if the food is tasty. But if I went to a high-end restaurant and its food was worse than random street food, I would be angry. (Influencer S)*

Influencer S also identified food as the primary element when consumers are choosing a restaurant through a social media channel. Second is visualization, such as a photo or video shared on a social media platform. Ambience is listed third. However, a different perspective was provided by an entertainer. Influencer A indicated that impressive photos on social media platforms are the most important factors when selecting a restaurant for dining. These may present food, décor, and/or ambience. Nevertheless, if she is going to help a restaurant with an advertisement, she cites decor, then food, and quality photographs as the most important factors.

> *Because I think it demonstrates a professional attitude. If an owner tries to decorate tastefully to attract passers-by, the food should not be too bad. (Influencer A)*

Influencers A and S suggested that restaurants should be places of topical interest (have "topicality") before implementing an influencer marketing strategy. In particular, influencer S noted that:

> *When we are filming a TV show, we decide whether to visit a restaurant depending on if it has topicality. If they do, we can package it into a topic such as an Instagrammer restaurant. Even street food has to have a topicality. It must be street food "plus" to be a good restaurant. (Influencer S)*

When compared with influencers, restaurant managers evidently consider CPA to be the most important metric in the influencer component of their marketing strategy (see Table 4). Owner W and Director C closely monitored the incremental revenue arising from each marketing channel. They indicated that marketing budgets are exceptionally low in this industry, with many restaurant owners unwilling to invest in

influencer marketing. They identified a precise target audience and brand positioning for their two high-end restaurants.

> *Some influencers are fine for our industry. But we have to find the right candidates. Moreover, we have to find the right proposal. I think they must be professional in every industry, including hotel, tourism, and especially food of course. They need to be able to share informative and convincing information to all age groups. (Director C)*

> *I think it is the combination of three things. First, if she is a good match with our business; this is a branding and position issue. Second, how much will it cost me. Third, how much exposure do I get and how much incremental revenue do I get. It is the combination of these three things that matters. (Owner W)*

This is consistent with the views expressed by influencers S and A. Influencer S mentioned that restaurant managers should study the target group of each influencer before implementing an influencer marketing strategy. Influencer A also indicated that the strategies developed by restaurant managers would fail if they were inconsistent with the established brand positioning and image.

> *They did not position themselves correctly. For example, they might choose an influencer who is popular, but the influencer's audience group does not match the restaurant's target customer group. (Influencer A)*

The preceding results imply that snoopers may not be the right choice for high-end restaurants, because such influencers are more self-centered. Alternately, entertainers and informers tend to adopt a longer-term perspective towards their online presence and branding. In particular, informers possess the right skills and knowledge to fulfill the hiring requirements for influencer marketing by high-end restaurants. Director C specified that a preferred influencer should bring a detailed knowledge of the hospitality industry.

> *We are a Michelin restaurant. So everything is related to the branding. Because we are not only a luxury hotel, we also crossover with some prime distilleries around the world. So as an international luxury brand, I must be both classic and elegant; these two critical elements are also my restrictions. My limitation is I need my endorsers to have the same*

*image. The endorser must be one who fits the international luxury environment. (Owner W)*

As is evidenced in Table 5, Director C and Owner W noted brand positioning and image as the most important criteria when executing an influencer marketing strategy.

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Insert Tables 4 and 5 about here

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### 4.3. Owner-Influencer Matrix

The primary study experiment involved identifying whether more views would be generated about influencers' lifestyles and selfies, or food and restaurant images. Interestingly it was found that personal lifestyles and selfies generated more views in the case of both groups. We then interviewed four influencers and restaurant owners understand their respective needs and considered whether restaurant owners care more about quality or quantity. We equated the situation between influencers and owners to game theory and summarized possible scenarios to create our proposed owner-influencer matrix. With a view to facilitating its application, the design of the matrix is straightforward. It closely resembles the Boston Consulting Group share matrix which was created to help corporations analyze their business units and product lines. The proposed matrix analyzes the current situation and positioning and seeks the "best of both worlds". It can help companies to allocate resources to the right influencers, leading to endorsements that fit the brand and may provide an analytical tool in online marketing, brand marketing, product/service management, strategic management, and portfolio analysis.

Based upon the preceding findings, it is evident that influencers and restaurant practitioners have different needs and goals. As is predicated in game theory, both sides attach highest priority to their own interests, articulated through mathematical models of strategic interaction amongst rational decision-makers (Roger B., 1991). The desire for insights into the different perspectives prompted the researchers to conduct in-depth interviews with restaurant owners and the two pairs of influencers, thereby understanding the positions, expectations, needs, and leverage of the two parties. The ultimate research goal was to coordinate and maximize the interests of both sides, and to deliver a cooperative rather than a zero-sum game. The intention was not solely to assess the respective merits of CPV and CPA, but to explore optimal approaches for each side. The preceding results indicate that influencers are most concerned with the number of views of their posts; a higher number of views generates more followers, allows them to charge a higher price per post, and produces more exposure. Influencers

need to produce eye-catching posts if they are to keep building their reputations and brand recognition and equity. Following this approach, it is assumed that there is a fixed cost per post, with influencers seeking to generate the highest number of views for their own benefit. As a result, the cost per view (CPV) decreases when the cost of each post is fixed and views increase. For instance, if a business owner spends $100 to hire an influencer for one advertorial post and the number of views increases from 100 to 1,000, CPV will decrease from $1 to $0.1. On this basis the current researchers suggest that influencers should pursue a higher number of views, thereby lowering CPV.

The priority for business owners on the other hand, is the number of diners resulting from an influencer marketing campaign. A higher number of visits leads to higher revenues, return on investment (ROI), and exposure to target markets. Thus, from the business owner perspective, the cost per action (CPA) decreases when the cost is fixed and the number of visits of customer increases. For instance, if a business owner spends $100 to hire an influencer for one advertorial post and the number of customers taking action increases from 1 to 10, the CPA decreases from $100 to $10. The current researchers suggest that owners should pursue a higher number of customer visits, resulting in lower CPA.

The preceding findings have prompted the researchers to create the Owner-Influencer Matrix, a strategic planning tool and framework that can help owners and influencers to maximize the outcomes of influencer marketing. The matrix presents the quantity of customer visits as the vertical axis and the quantity of post views as the horizontal axis. It postulates that the cost per action (CPA) decreases, when other factors are equal and if the cost of hiring an influencer is fixed, along with an increasing quantity of customer visits on the vertical axis. This is consistent with the ultimate goal for business owners. Along with an increasing volume of post views on the horizontal axis, the cost per view (CPV) would decline. This is optimal for the influencers. With a view to presenting an easily understood model, Figure 1 proposes four possible scenarios: a "Best of Both Worlds" scenario, which is most desired by all, and three sub-optimal scenarios, namely "Perfect Storm", "Prisoner's Dilemma of Owners", "Prisoner's Dilemma of Influencers".

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*4.3.1 Scenario One - Perfect Storm*

In the worst scenario - "perfect storm" - the number of views and of visiting customers is relatively low. From the business owner perspective, customers and revenues are insufficient to cover the cost of hiring the influencer, resulting in high cost per action (CPA) and an overpriced influencer. This unsatisfactory outcome may

discourage businesses from future cooperation with similar influencer types, or worse still, prompting them to abandon the whole influencer marketing strategy and switching to alternative promotion channels. From the influencer perspective, the low number of views shows that this advertorial cannot evoke the attention of followers, resulting in high cost per view (CPV) and undermining their personal brand value. The unsatisfactory result may prompt influencers to reconsider the criteria for selecting sponsors with a view to protecting their future personal influence and credit. In summary, the "perfect storm" scenario may be viewed as a no-win situation. The business owners have low or negative returns on investment for influencer marketing, while influencers see a decrease in interest from their followers. In this scenario, both sides are encouraged to reevaluate their future strategies.

### 4.3.2 Scenario Two - Prisoner's Dilemma of Owners

The "prisoner's dilemma" is a paradox in game theory decision analysis in which two rational parties do not cooperate to create an optimal overall outcome, but pursue their own self-interest and protect themselves at the expense of other participants. In this scenario, business owners act in their self-interest and do not produce optimal overall outcomes, thereby reducing the benefits for influencers. In these circumstances, the business owners only care about customer visitation, return on investment (ROI), high exposure for their business to the target markets, and lower CPA. Meanwhile, they ignore the negative results for influencers. Although the influencers earn their sponsor fees, in this scenario they undermine their fan page traffic, number of post views and future development, resulting in high CPV. In conclusion, business owners take advantage of influencers enjoying fruitful outcomes from this marketing campaign for themselves, while the influencer earns the endorsement fee but loses traffic and brand value. Though companies may benefit in the short term, their longer term notoriety may impede their capacity to recruit new influencers who are willing to cooperate.

### 4.3.3 Three - Prisoner's Dilemma of Influencers

Contrary to the previously outlined "prisoner's dilemma of owners", the influencers take advantage of the owners in this scenario. Influencers pursue only their own interests, namely number of views and traffic on their fan page. However, they forget to encourage their fans to become customers of the sponsor's business. As a result, the CPV is quite high, even though the CPA is low. This means that businesses do not enjoy the outcome of high traffic on the influencer's post. In this situation, influencers promote themselves and present their daily life, instead of endorsing a specific business as agreed. If the preceding experiment is used as an example, influencers only show that their attractive bodies and faces attract many more likes on

their social media pages. However, the fans failed to notice the restaurant where they were dining, not to mention the dishes. In this situation, influencers strengthen their fan base and appeal to high visitor numbers to their post, though neglect the needs of the sponsor. The business owner might experience high exposure on influencer pages, but are unable to convert such traffic into visiting customers. The influencers may lose credibility with business owners over the longer term.

*4.3.4 Scenario Four - The Best of Both Worlds*

This scenario generates the ideal result and is a win-win situation in influencer marketing. The approach fulfils the needs of both influencers and business owners. The high quantity of visiting customers and of views generate low CPA and CPV. The business owner appreciates rising revenue, return on investment (ROI), and exposure to the target markets, while influencers build up personal brand image, generate more followers, can charge a higher price per post in future endorsements, and have higher exposure.

# 5. Contributions & Implications

The findings from this Taiwan-based study offer a potential enrichment of prior research on influencer marketing, particularly in the restaurant context. The study and associated matrix offers guidance for restaurant owners on how to approach influencers and to launch influencer marketing campaigns. The researchers have drawn upon the results of the experiment and have concluded with a restaurant owner-influencer marketing mechanism theoretical model. This model can help practitioners understand the essence of restaurant influencer marketing, and provides a meaningful theoretical basis for influencer marketing practice. The authors have identified crucial factors in influencer marketing from the perspectives of both influencers and restaurant owners. The study will lead to a better understanding of the requirements and needs of both sides. The proposed owner-influencer matrix examines the position of CPA, CPV, reputation and investment. The study results extend the basic theory of influencer marketing and have explored the relationship between CPA and CPV. Based on the quadrant analysis, it has been shown that a win-win situation is only achieved when the interests of both sides are considered (for example, by expanding the fan base of influencers and helping restaurant owners capitalize on the campaign in terms of organizational reputation, branding and/or revenue). It is thus vital for stakeholders to find a balance between implementation costs and the social and economic benefits of influencer marketing by building a trustful relationship and a coordination mechanism.

In this study, the authors compared the performance of restaurant online marketing with specific reference to local influencer blogs on major social media platforms. It was found that the shared blog tweets focus on different thematic content. Some showed the daily lives of influencers, highlighting attractive appearance; some focused on photogenic food displays: and others combined food and the influencer. The findings underline the importance for blog marketing strategymaking of influencer generated content and its distribution. As described by van Eldik *et. al.* (2019), influencers provide their followers with a sense of approachability and authenticity by placing themselves in everyday environments. In the current case, their blog tweets have evidenced Taipei's diverse food culture. Moreover, influencers generate parasocial interactions by communicating with their followers in the blog comments area. The creation of blog content is evidently vital for successful influencer marketing, especially when it attracts customer attention and approval and prompts follow-up purchasing. This is consistent with van Eldik, *et. al.'*s (2019) conclusions.

Those marketing restaurants and food service companies and social media influencers (SMIs) adhere to different value propositions. However, when they are in partnership, SMIs should seek seamless product placement in their blogs, potentially challenging their personal authenticity. The current study has offered practical guidance for both restaurant marketers and SMIs about matching demand (needs) and supply (capabilities). The findings offer a potential urging for SMIs to prioiritise a balancing of their own interests and of service companies, menwhile retaining their authenticity. Similar suggestions have been made in previous studies (eg Audrezet, et. al., 2018; Li, et. al. 2011). The restaurants should identify proper SMIs or potentially influential bloggers who align with their product positioning, respect them and allow flexibility when creating content. SMIs should manage the issue of authenticity by demonstrating passion and transparency based on their intrisinc motivations, and provide objective product or service evaluations. The study results seek to advance a positive media ecology.

Deploying influencer marketing is likely to be a prospective strategy for all brands operating in the contemporary social media era. The current study can inform the development of more effective influencer marketing campaigns, particularly on the part of restaurant practitioners, thereby yielding new customers and improving business performance. As the interview results have shown, many restaurants in Taiwan and elsewhere have insufficient budgets or experience to deploy influencer marketing activities. Adopting a leadership position in influencer marketing may allow them to

acquire more opportunities than less proactive restaurants and restaurant chains. The biggest challenge for restaurant practitioners is selecting an appropriate influencer that matches the restaurant's marketing goals and evaluating the effect of influencer marketing. The preceding results provide practical insights and suggestions.

The preceding findings indicate that a marketing plan should consider three key dimensions when selecting influencers. Firstly, the restaurant should set clear marketing objectives and a reasonable budget. Secondly, the restaurant should be appropriately positioned, including clarifying the target audience, product positioning and determining the effective types of influencer, and observing the adhesion of the target audience and the influencer in the marketing process, such as tracking numbers. It is suggested that restaurants should avoid focusing exclusively on follower numbers when recruiting influencers. In practice, a large number of followers may exacerbate the challenge of identifying an appropriate target audience, especially as most restaurants are small and medium sized enterprises. The most meritorious influencers will be those aligned with the corporate image and goals. If the chosen influencer is a key opinion leader (KOL) in the applicable vertical field, their expertise and opinions will be more persuasive and resonant with the target audience. The final dimension that restaurant practitioners should consider when designing their marketing plan is to explore the reasons behind the observation data, form a module through scientific calculation and measure the coincidence ratio of followers and product audiences (Nox Influencer & Baijing, 2018).

Though several important measurable indicators (i.e. CPA, CPV and ROI) are essential in the process of tracking performance there is no universally recognized module to track and evaluate the performance of influencer marketing. If an increasing number of restaurant customers have been referred by the influencer, it is meaningful for restaurant marketing professionals to develop remarketing strategies by creating affiliate programs with the appropriate influencer (Patel, 2018). However, it is notable that only customers who have proceeded to take action are contributing to the return on investment.

The researchers suggest that restaurant practitioners can improve marketing effectiveness by diversifying their strategies and combining influencer marketing and content creation. Berger proposed the 6 STEPPS of viral marketing - social currency, triggers, emotion, public, practical value and story (Thai, 2017). As a qualification, it is noted that restaurant popularity cannot rely exclusively on social media influencers; food and service remain the core restaurant products. To complement high-quality food and excellent service, marketing professionals should create contagious content for their products through innovative social marketing. For example, compelling stories about the restaurant may build brand awareness. Shared information should have

practical value and engage high-arousal emotions, such as humor, excitement and amusement, which will provide a stimulus to act and post on social media. Finally, marketers should explore "triggers", which might touch and/or involve customers or potential customers emotionally, encouraging them to experience unique restaurant offerings.

## 6. Limitations & Future Research

Several limitations of the current investigation research are noted which may help the activities of future researchers in extending the findings. First, the sampling was confined to middle and high-end restaurants in a single location - Taipei. The results for varying levels of restaurant outside Taipei might be different. Second, the selection of social media platform was confined to larger, better known platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram. It might have been useful to include other platforms and a wider group of influencers to extend the scope of the analysis. Third, the study participants were limited to influencers and restaurant practitioners. To produce a complete picture of influencer marketing, it would have been useful to consider customer intentions, experiences and behaviours. To this end, future researchers may deploy quantitative research methods to collect big data and to verify results. Fourth, the study was conducted in the restaurant industry context. More studies should be conducted in the other industries to gain a deeper understanding of the distinction between hospitality and other industries and contexts. Fifth, though we developed and proposed an influencer matrix, it should be tested in other industry settings. Finally, this research was conducted during the COVID-19 outbreak, when restaurant operations and customer behaviours were markedly different from in previous years, inevitably affecting the generation of experimental data. The dark side should be acknowledged. Influencer marketing has been subject to abuse, driven by the rapid development and loose regulation of digital media. Furthermore, there has been an undermining of professional ethics though the activities of commercial media and crowdsourcing platforms that sit behind the influencers. Restaurant owners may be distressed when fake (and possibly negative) comments are published in the pursuit of a quick profit. Future researchers may take account of the darker side of influencer marketing by considering industry standards and the application of professional ethics.

## 7. Conclusions

Influencers and business owners are not in a zero-sum game relationship and their interactions should bring mutual benefits to both parties. However, human nature tends towards the paradox of the "prisoner's dilemma" for influencer marketing. Business owners and influencers should communicate and cooperate with each other in the

decision-making process by campaigning to reach the optimal point at the top-right corner of the Owner-Influencer Matrix. Practitioners and influencers should each engage in sponsorship content and brand communication by providing a normative reason that justifies the existence and dissemination of the post to reach the lowest possible CPA and CPV, while increasing the credibility of sources and messages.

The current empirical study may provide business owners and social media influencers with insights about communicating the brand values of both sides and designing proper sponsorship collaborations to reach the desired consumer responses. It will also generate further scholarly interest in influencer marketing in hospitality.

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## Table 1: Interviewee Profiles

| Name | Current position | No. of followers / target customers | Gender | Work experience | Activity style / Marketing channel |
|------|------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| **Influencers** | | | | | |
| Q | Print model | 750,000 on FB+IG (300,000+ IG) 25-35 years old; male in the majority | F | 11 years | Live broadcast on FB; share her life on blog / IG, interactive with fans, respond to reviews, chat. |
| X | Show girl + Print model | 228,000 on IG, 130,000 (Fan page) 20-40 years old; 96% are male | F | 6 years | Expo, racing, magazine, posts on FB, IG, live broadcast on 17 online streaming. Sexy style, highlight herself; share her life, dynamic updates on blog, fans meeting. |
| S | Host of food/tourism (TVB HK) | 12,000 (Fan page) Female fans on FB; male fans on IG, writer, 30-40 years old | F | 3 years | FB, IG; filming food show on TV, recommend restaurant food, ranking. Seldom live broadcast / interactive with fans, answer questions related to the food/tourism topic |
| A | Actress / Print model | 900+ on IG; 7600+ on FB; 2,000,000+ on weblog; 900,000+ on 17 streaming 18-35 years old, female 70% | F | 10 years | Short film, internet drama. |
| **Practitioners** | | | | | |
| C | Director of Marketing - Michelin star restaurant (Molino/ Toutouan) | middle & elder age group, rich, more private | F | 5 years in marketing | FB /IG; magazines, newspapers, food bloggers, gourmets, electronic media (easy table) |
| W | Owner of Michelin star restaurant + hotel owner | 30-65 years, mostly female | M | 26 years in F&B | 4+1 (newspaper, magazine, TV, radio + internet; celebrity, foodies, blogger; FB /IG/ Blog |

**Table 2. Influencer Categories**

| Category | Snoopers | Informers | Entertainers |
|:--------:|:--------:|:---------:|:------------:|
| Q | * | | |
| X | * | | |
| S | | * | |
| A | | | * |

**Table 3. Number of Views on Social Media**

| Result | Average number before experiments (5 posts) | The day in Restaurant | Average number after experiments (5 posts) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Influencer Q | 3,140 | 2,721 | 4,998 | |
| Influencer X | 5,610 | 2,089 | 5,074 | |
| Influencer S | 408 | 422 | 277 | |
| Influencer A | 171 | 161 | 225 | |

**Table 4. Expected Results of Influencer Marketing**

| Results | CPA | CPV | Win-Win |
|---|---|---|---|
| Influencer Q | | * | * |
| Influencer X | | * | * |
| Influencer S | * | | * |
| Influencer A | * | | * |
| Director C | * | | |
| Owner W | * | | |

Note: CPA=Cost per action; CPV=Cost per view

## Table 5. Open Codes in Interviews

| Strategy Direction in Organization | Q | X | S | A | C | W |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brand positioning and image | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 11 |
| Topicality | 0 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Marketing budget | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 10 |
| Boosting revenue | 1 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 9 | 8 |
| Target audience | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 10 |
| Cooperate with multi-channel | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 7 |
| Promotion Event | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| **Perception of Customers in Influencer Marketing** | **Q** | **X** | **S** | **A** | **C** | **W** |
| Visualization on social media | 0 | 2 | 8 | 11 | 4 | 5 |
| Importance of food quality | 1 | 1 | 10 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Ambience | 1 | 0 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 1 |
| Price of food | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Free treat or discount | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

Note: The number indicated the frequency of the topic by interviewee
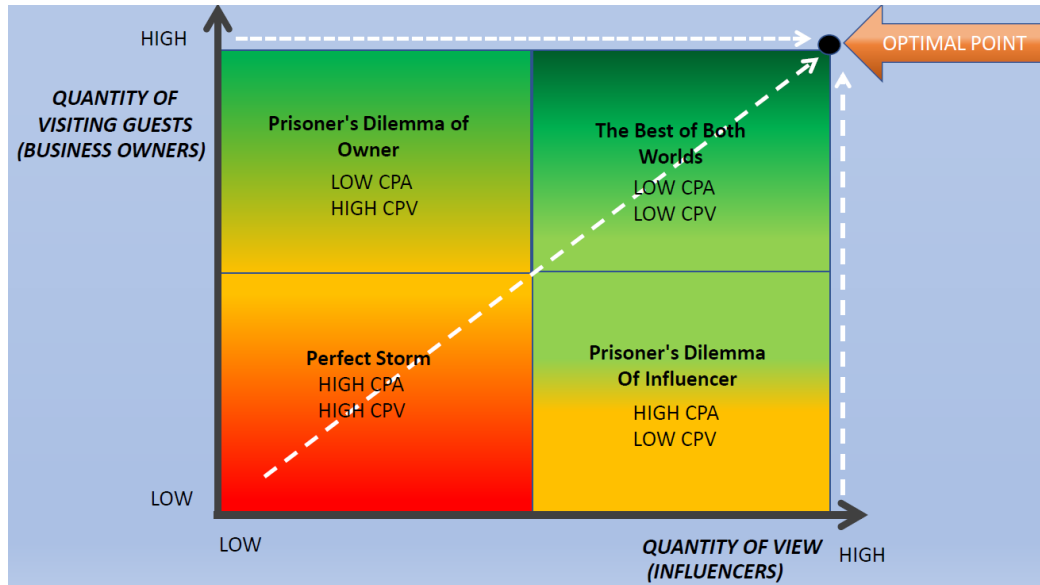
**Figure 1 Owner-Influencer Matrix**

# Appendix A. -Interview Questions-Influencer

**Part I. Interviewee Profile**
1. Could you please tell me something about yourself?   Name, position and job responsibility?
2. How many years have you worked in the influencer marketing industry?
3. How many followers does your blog have this year? Could you please describe your fan group?
4. What kind of influencer marketing do you focus on?
5. Which category of influencer do you think you belong to?
6. What social media platform do you often use?

**Part II. Perceptions and Opinions of Influencer Marketing**
1. What influencer marketing methods do you usually use to connect with consumers? Could you please share them with us?
2. According to your professional knowledge and experience, what forms of influencer marketing are more effective for restaurants?
3. What are the important metrics of influence used to measure the success or effectiveness of an influencer marketing campaign?
4. What is the most highly desired outcome of your influencer marketing? What factors are most important for you? Why?

**Part III. Suggestions**
1. What do you think are the main challenges of influencer marketing?
2. What suggestions would you give regarding restaurant influencer marketing?

# Appendix B. -Interview Questions - Restaurant Owners & Directors of Sales and Marketing

## Part I. Interviewee Profile

1. Can you please describe the career path that led to your current position?
2. What kind of marketing methods do you currently use in your restaurant?
3. What social media platforms do you regularly use to market your restaurant?
4. In your current restaurant, have you ever used influencer marketing? Do you know their strategies?

## Part II. Perceptions and Opinions of Influencer Marketing

1. What do you think of the role of influencer marketing and the power of social media in business today?
2. What are your expectations when you hire influencers? Are they generally able to fulfill your marketing needs?
3. What are the main points that you look for when deciding to hire an influencer?
4. What are the desired outcomes of influencer marketing for your company? What factors are the most important for you? Why?
5. What are the important metrics of influence used to measure the success or effectiveness of an influencer marketing campaign?
6. Can you explain how you take into consideration Cost Per Action (CPA) and Cost Per View (CPV)when using influencer marketing?

## Part III. Suggestions

1. What should other restaurants be aware of when hiring an influencer?
2. What do you think are the main challenges of influencer marketing in the restaurant industry?

# Appendix C. Influencers' Postings on Social Media Platforms

Appendix C refers to the total number of followers for each influencer and the number of "likes" per day after visiting the restaurant on influencers' social media platform.
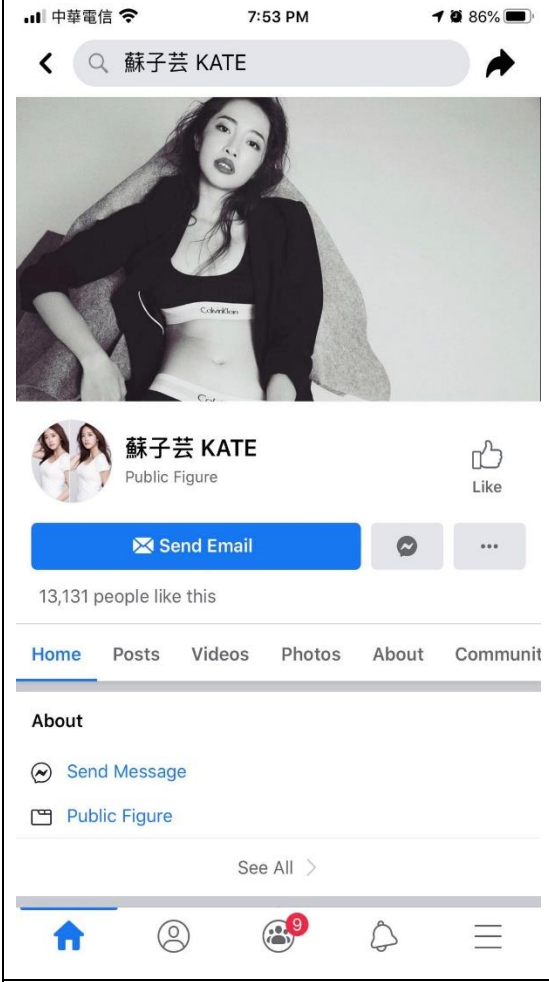
*Influencer X*



| Influencer X has 231K followers on her social media platform | Influencer X had 2,089 likes on her visiting restaurant post. |
| --- | --- |

| Influencer Q has 313K followers on her social media platform. | Influencer Q had 2,721 likes on her visiting restaurant post. |
|---|---|

*Influencer S*



| Influencer S has 13,131 followers on her social media platform. | Influencer S had 422 likes on her visiting restaurant post. |

| Influencer A has 7,584 followers on her social media platform. | Influencer A had 161 likes for her visiting restaurant posts. |