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## **Viral Marketing**

A study on influencers' behaviour through their pronoun use on Twitter

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# Viral marketing: A study on influencers' behaviour through their pronoun use on Twitter

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## ABSTRACT

Viral marketing has been defined as the task of triggering word-of-mouth (WoM) and in order for it to acquire traction it is crucial to identify and understand the behaviour of influencers i.e. well-connected individuals. A computerised text analysis software was used to map influencers' pronoun use on Twitter, as pronouns are inherently social and reflect behaviour. When compared to a sample of 11.4 million tweets of common Twitter users it was found that influencers use first-person pronouns "we" more frequently and "I" to a lesser degree. Accordingly, influencers on Twitter are high status individuals and in relation, average Twitter users are low status individuals. This study argues that the approval seeking of low status individuals is acknowledged via pronounclusivity forms used by influencers, and that influence is a process co-created by their dualistic behaviour. Furthermore, influencers' use of second and third-person pronouns was significantly lower. Seeing as Twitter is a micro-blogging platform where users write about themselves, the findings suggest that higher use of second and third-person pronouns are not correlated with influence on Twitter since the speaker is excluded from the context and thus detract the attention of their followers.

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## 1. Introduction

Interpersonal communication such as word-of-mouth (WoM) has been highlighted by researchers and practitioners alike for years (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Conversations of involvement with products and services are often passed on to family, friends and further spread through social networks (Allsop et al., 2007). Research by Cruz and Fill (2008), Smith et al. (2005) and Trusov et al. (2009) argues that, WoM has the ability to cut through surrounding marketing noise and carries a greater influential power than other traditional media e.g. print ads and personal selling.

Moreover, the growth of Internet and social media has transformed such interpersonal communications and moved it to an electronic setting (Vilpponen et al., 2006; Dellarocas, 2003). For instance, social media has become the most common internet-based activity and has fundamentally changed how we express ourselves, interact with others, share and consume new information (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Consequently, both Li and Du (2011) and Litvin et al. (2008) argued that WoM in an electronic setting is even more important and impactful than traditional WoM due to its innate spreading mechanism and accessibility.

Correspondingly, Hinz et al., (2011) claim that organisations seek to incorporate powerful WoM and electronic word-of-mouth (eWoM) into their marketing activities by prioritizing below-the-line activities such as direct mail and promotions, rather than above-the-line marketing, such as mass media. This ambition to generate and enable

consumers to share and increase exposure to marketing activities is what has been labelled as viral marketing (Dobele et al., 2005). The idea is that, like a virus, a message about a brand, goods or services is seeded to a target group who then pass the information along to other potential stakeholders, resulting in a "viral" or exponential spread (Dobele et al., 2005; Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2005). According to Hinz et al. (2011), seeding messages to well-connected individuals is symbiotic with success in viral marketing since they are more likely to participate and have a higher reach than normal individuals. Utilising a proper seeding strategy can be up to eight times more fruitful than other diffusion strategies (Hinz et al., 2011). Thus, these individuals are identified as primary WoM providers and have been labelled in various ways, e.g. influencers (Vilpponen et al., 2006), efluentials (Cruz & Fill, 2008), viral mavens (Phelps et al., 2004) or simply, opinion leaders (Burt, 2000).

However, the effective execution of seeding to well-targeted influencers is complex as intended viral communications rarely obtain the traction needed to be considered successful (Watts et al., 2007). As a result, researchers acknowledge viral marketing as an art rather than practical, or manageable, marketing tool (Diorio, 2001; Lindgreen et al., 2013). In addition, De Bruyn and Lilien (2004) explain that it is difficult to understand why and how viral marketing works.

To summarize, it stands to reason that viral marketing is a relatively new topic and our knowledge still remains limited (Lindgreen et al., 2013; Vilpponen et al., 2006). Therefore, it can be

argued that viral marketing has considerable gaps where potential for further research exists. For instance, Cruz and Fill (2008) gained considerable insights from practitioners that highlighted the importance of understanding; the profile of people that spread viral messages, their behaviour and the reasons why they chose to spread in certain ways. As the creation of viral networks ultimately hinges on these infected influencers, researchers find it crucial to understand their behaviour and how to identify this first group to pass a message to (Helm, 2000). Modern technological innovations as the Internet and social media have undoubtedly contributed to interpersonal communication, however a similar shift may have transformed influencers' behaviours in electronic settings such as websites, blogs and on social media (Hinz et al., 2011). Hence, Vilpponen et al. (2006) states it is important to explore how an electronic setting affects WoM behaviour.

The aim of this article is to contribute to the field of viral marketing by capturing influencers' behaviour on social media. More specifically, this paper intends to perform qualitative text analysis on influencers' written communication. The value of the chosen subject is based on the fact that there is a growing amount of literature and an increasing interest in understanding the behaviours that drive viral marketing. Hence, by examining influencers' eWoM behaviour, this article strives to heed the call from preceding works (Vilpponen et al., 2006) and findings that state the importance of understanding such behaviour (Cruz & Fill, 2008). In other words, by conducting this study, an attempt is being made to fill the before mentioned research gap as well as provide additional understanding and further clarification of viral marketing as a whole.

## 2. Literature review

The research field of viral marketing is strongly tied to the spate of research on traditional WoM, a field which has been thoroughly dissected, followed by the ambitious strives of practitioners to incorporate it in their marketing activities. In prior and related works, it is clear that research has shifted to the understanding of WoM and its effects taking place in an electronic setting. Preceding research has contributed to the understanding of the underlying processes and behaviour in eWoM by examining online feedback mechanisms (Dellarocas, 2003), responses and motivation to pass along email (Phelps et al. 2004), and the effects of electronic referrals on different stages of a viral marketing recipients' decision making process (De Bruyn &

Lilien, 2008). Furthermore, research on eWoM's effects were studied by measuring online conversations of television shows (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004) and the correlation and impact between online book reviews and their sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).

Knight (1999) described eWoM as a "digitalised sneeze" that geometrically increased in power and doubled with subsequent interactions. Consequently, the phenomenon has often been explained with a virus analogy i.e. marketing information is seeded to a given set of people who become infected and through their personal social networks the "virus" exponentially spreads further (Dobele et al., 2005; Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2005). Hence, the activity of instigating WoM or eWoM has become generally known as viral marketing. Empowered by personal interactions such marketing becomes tinged with credibility, its main benefit and strength, however this credibility goes hand in hand with the lack of message control (Fattah, 2000).

However, some variables have emerged as significant factors for the success of viral marketing activities. Dobele et al. (2007) identified two main themes when analysing viral message recipients. Firstly, respondents felt "something" was triggered and that the viral message was able to "capture their imagination". Secondly, the most viral campaigns were cleverly targeted i.e. they were sent to influencers, that would generally respond more favourably and consequently forward the message further. Correspondingly, Phelps et al. (2004) proposed that viral activities must successfully target and capture a handful of exceptional influencers but also that environmental circumstances should encourage the "virus" to be spread. Hence, it is clear that prior findings stress that "seeding" the message to a specific target group of influencers is arguably as important as the communicated message (Dobele et al., 2005; Dobele et al., 2007).

Influence over peers has been established in previous studies revolving around social and communication networks, opinion leadership, source credibility, uses and gratifications, and diffusion of innovations (Phelps et al., 2004). Likewise, the importance of influencers has continuously been highlighted within the field of viral marketing (Cruz & Fill, 2008). According to Helm (2000) and Cakim (2006), influencers are identified as key in the making of viral messages. This group of people are normally known as the first and foremost adopters of a message, who then subsequently participate in interpersonal

communication spreading the adopted message further in their social networks, influencing others (Dobele et al., 2005), a description more commonly attributed to “opinion leaders”. Cakim (2006) additionally states that influencers are characterised as especially active users in a wide range of online vehicles when exerting their influence. Li and Du (2011), address the issue of opinion leader identification by producing a framework based on content acquired from participating individuals rather than examining the whole produced network of relations. But more importantly, Li and Du (2011) stress the importance of identifying opinion leaders as valuable tools for marketers to assess and take appropriate action based on their opinions taking form online.

Generally, when trying to persuade others to adopt certain messages we typically rely on the power of language (Ng & Bradac, 1993). Thus, verbal communication is one of the most prominent influence strategies. Previous literature illustrated that influence, often involved the fundamentals of power and dominance. Though, this was not always true, especially in settings without face-to-face cues. Therefore, language is an important way to uncover influence, especially in online environments (Cassell et al., 2006). Based on the fact that behaviour is defined as the way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially towards others (Oxford dictionary, 2006), it is clear that eWoM behaviour must be a product of how one expresses oneself in an electronic setting. Previous studies based on eWoM behaviour often examine how recipients adopt and process persuasive messages (Berkowitz, 2000; Petty et al., 2001) rather than having a focus on the actual message itself or its construction. Correspondingly, few studies have been conducted where an examination focusing on words are used to measure social hierarchies in groups and between people (Kacewicz et al., 2013). The reason behind the absence of interest for such studies may have been a lack of sufficient and adequate methods.

However, Kacewicz et al. (2013) state that the recent advances in computerised text analysis have provided new methods for linking language and word use to social roles and relationships. For instance, by analysing the more common function words such as pronouns, articles and conjunctions, it is possible to capture emotional states, personality and even properties of social relationships (Chung & Pennebaker, 2007). In particular, the function word category of greater interest is the pronoun. In comparison to other words, pronouns are more social as they refer to human beings and act as a shared reference

between the partakers of the conversation (Chung & Pennebaker, 2007). First-person singular pronouns (I, me), act as an indicator for “self” whereas first-person plural, second and third-person pronouns (we/us, you, he/she/they) emphasise an “others”-focus (Zimmermann et al., 2013; Pennebaker, 2011). For instance, an individual who is self-doubting and self-conscious is more likely to pay attention to their own thoughts or behaviour and therefore have a tendency to use more first-person singular pronouns.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that low status individuals are more concerned with what high status individuals think of them, whereas high status individuals are less self-conscious and more socially attuned towards others (Snodgrass et al., 1998). Hence, Blader & Chen (2012) state that the likelihood for high status individuals to be more collectively oriented and externally focused might lead them to use more first-person plural pronouns. Moreover, in an online setting, such as Internet message boards, it is suggested that low-status individuals tend to use first-person singular pronouns more often than second-person pronouns in comparison with higher status members (Dino et al., 2008). A study that investigated the communication on a cockpit crew found that the pilots, that are of a higher rank used first-person plural pronouns to a greater extent than first officers and flight engineers (Sexton & Helmreich, 2000). Similarly, Cassell et al. (2006) found that individuals in an online discussion forum have a higher likelihood of being elected leaders when using more first-person plural pronouns.

Correspondingly, prior research points out that pronouns may therefore be an adequate measure for rank within social hierarchies (Sexton & Helmreich, 2000), and thus an appropriate way to discern influence in an electronic setting. By examining function words that dictate an individual's language style and that are psychologically revealing, it is possible to understand the social and psychological processes affecting behaviour (Pennebaker, 2011). As this paper intends to study the behaviour of influencers in a social media setting, the practicality of analysing behaviour is highly dependent on the chosen social medium. Because Twitter has taken an facilitating role as one of the platforms where people can express and influence one another, this study will utilise Twitter and influencers' tweets as the platform for analysis.

### 3. Method

In order to analyse influencers' behaviour there is a need to, (1) successfully identify influencers for examination, (2) perform an analysis of their tweets and (3) compare the results to the common Twitter user for increased understanding of the results.

In order to identify influencers on Twitter, three variables for measuring influence were considered i.e. indegree, retweets and mentions. According to Cha et al. (2010) indegree is a figure that signifies the amount of followers every user has, retweets refers to the amount of times that a certain user's content gets reposted and lastly, mentions refer to the amount of times that the user's username gets mentioned in other peoples' posts. Moreover, Cha et al. (2010) established that indegree is not necessarily a measure of influence, rather a prerequisite in order to measure retweets and mentions. Conversely, retweets and mentions are appropriate indicators of influence, as retweets signify how valuable content posted by a user is and mentions designate what value a certain username carries.

As indegree is a prerequisite for the other measures of influence, information was extracted from a Twitter census dataset collected by *The Infochimps*, a big data solutions provider. The distributed data which was used for this report was updated until April 2011 and it utilised a more sophisticated measure of indegree than counting the number of followers. The so called, Trstrank dataset, measured Twitter users' reputation, importance and influence based on their relative importance among the entire Twitter network i.e. how many people give attention to a certain user, weighted by how many people, in turn, give attention to them. The top 1000 Twitter accounts with the highest ranks of indegree based on the before mentioned algorithm were successfully extracted.

Furthermore, with the understanding that retweets and mentions are much stronger measures of influence, retweets were ultimately chosen as the primary measure. Retweets are essentially, the highest level of interaction and engagement of the written statements of influencers and thus, for the purposes of this study far more powerful than mentions. A potential risk of relying on data provided by Infochimps stems from the data being obsolete. However, the list of potential influencers were cross-matched with their current retweet rankings and several criteria were set for including them in the sample; eliminating any risks related to secondary data. The criteria were, (1) users had to be in the top 2% based on retweet rank of all Twitter users, (2) they had to have at least 300 capturable tweets, ensuring a significant amount of

words for text analysis, (3) had to tweet in English and (4) had to have a "verified" account by Twitter indicating the account's validity. In the end, the top Twitter accounts based on these four criteria were defined as influencers until a satisfactory of 100 users were reached. Subsequently, their available tweets were captured.

The sample of influencers and their captured tweets were then individually analysed for pronoun use. The texts were analysed using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker et al., 2007). LIWC is a computerised text analysis program that computes the percentage of various language categories (e.g., function words and articles) relative to the percentage of total words within a text. Prior research has utilised this text analysis tool to examine the pronouns use in social interactions between cockpit crew (Sexton & Helmreich, 2000), individuals with different military ranks (Kacewicz et al., 2013) and individuals within an online community (Cassel et al., 2006). Despite the fact that LIWC can be a helpful tool for text analysis it has several limitations. First and foremost, it has a lack of understanding semantics and cannot tell the precise meaning of analysed words. Secondly, it analyses at a single word level i.e. it does not take into account phrases or entire sentences. However, since this study has an exclusive focus on pronouns, it is not affected by these limitations and is therefore an adequate method of analysis.

In order to sufficiently analyse the data results of influencers through their tweets, there was a necessity to compare the results to how common users express themselves on Twitter. Consequently, a dataset captured by researchers from Stanford University (Yang & Leskovec, 2011) that included approximately 18 million Tweets captured during June, 2009 was acquired and utilised. As the use of pronouns should not have changed significantly over a period of five years on Twitter, the potential issues of comparing these asynchronous samples could be dismissed. In regards to the statistical power of this sample, the entire dataset was captured by researchers which had been granted an elevated access to Twitter, meaning that the data reflected about 20-30% of all tweets produced in real-time. Therefore, the sample of common Twitter users is statistically powerful where inference to the entire population is possible and issues of non-normality as well as potential outliers do not affect the sample in a significant manner.

In order to successfully import all of these tweets into LIWC, the data was cleaned from foreign

languages and retweets as they produced several duplicates of the original tweet. Ultimately, the amount of tweets were reduced from approx. 18 million to 11.4 million. By importing the entire dataset into LIWC, an output based on all 11.4 million tweets which presented mean values reflecting the mean percentages of all words used by Twitter users was acquired. As follows, a baseline mean of how common users behave and express themselves on Twitter was obtained as a comparison for the sample of influencers.

In the final stages of the method SPSS was used to compare and examine if there was a statistical and significant difference in the use of pronouns between the two samples, influencers and common Twitter users. The applied method was therefore a 1-tailed, one sample t-test. When conducting such a comparison one can safely use a sample without considerations towards skewness or outliers if  $N \geq 40$  (Moore & McCabe, 2006). This rule is based on the central limit theorem, which says that when a sample size reaches large numbers, the sample mean follows a normal distribution even when its population is non-normal. Thus, with a 1-tailed one sample t-test, it was possible to determine whether there was sufficient evidence to conclude that the mean value of the population from which the influencer sample was taken, was statistically lower or higher than the specified value, which was based on the mean of the large sample on common Twitter users. In other words, with this method it was tested if influencers use specific pronouns to a higher or lesser degree than common Twitter users

#### 4. Empirical findings

Conducting a one sample t-test to compare the mean values of the six chosen pronoun categories, with 99 degrees of freedom, shows that all the measured pronoun categories are different between the two samples with a statistical significance using a 95% confidence interval. Furthermore, when analysing the ensemble of all personal pronouns, the result illustrates that influencers generally use personal pronouns substantially less than common Twitter users,  $t(99) = -10.162$ ,  $p = 0.00$ .

Moreover, the usage of first-person singular (I, me) pronouns is significantly lower for the influencers than the test value given by the mean from the sample of common Twitter users,  $t(99) = -9.902$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . In addition, the mean for first-person plural (we, us) pronouns among influencers was significantly higher from the given test value,  $t(99) = 4.955$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . Meaning that influencers used less "I" and more "we" than the average Twitter user.

The results for the last three categories of personal pronouns were; second-person (you, your) pronouns  $t(99) = -3.266$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , third-person singular (she, he, her) pronouns  $t(99) = -4.001$ ,  $p = 0.00$  and lastly, third-person plural (they, them) pronouns  $t(99) = -6.562$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . Hence, these three categories of personal pronouns were all used at a lesser degree by the influencers than the control sample of common Twitter users.

Other notable findings are the ratios between different pronoun categories and comparisons between the samples and those ratios. For instance, between the two samples, personal pronouns were used 22.7% less frequently by influencers on average ( $5.83/7.54 = 0.773$ ). In addition, when analysing the first-person singular pronoun (I, me) it became apparent that influencers use these pronouns 35% less than common Twitter users ( $2.84/4.36 = 0.65$ ) and respectively first-person plural pronouns (we, us) are used, on average, 41% more often ( $0.79/0.56 = 1.41$ ). Therefore, first-person pronouns in particular, whether singular or plural, are used at substantially different rates by influencers than common Twitter users, even though influencers use personal pronouns to a much lesser extent. For example, the ratios for first-person singular pronouns in relation to the total amount of personal pronouns used by influencers is 49% ( $2.84/5.84 = 0.487$ ) whereas the same ratio is 58% for common users ( $4.36/7.54 = 0.578$ ). However, for the first-person plural pronouns the ratio was 13.5% ( $0.79/5.83 = 0.135$ ) for influencers, almost doubled the amount for common users, which had a ratio of 7.5% ( $0.56/7.54 = 0.075$ ).

Table 1	Examples	Influencers	Common	MD	SD	CI	P value
<b>Personal pronouns</b>	I, we, she	5.83	7.54	-1.71	1.82	5.4675 – 6.1897	0.00
<b>First-person singular</b>	I, me	2.84	4.36	-1.52	1.54	2.5306 – 3.1414	0.00
<b>First-person plural</b>	we, us	0.79	0.56	0.23	0.45	0.6951 – 0.8755	0.00
<b>Second-person</b>	you, your	1.46	1.69	-0.23	0.71	1.3186 – 1.5994	0.001

<b>Third-person singular</b>	she, he, her	0.49	0.61	-0.12	0.30	0.4309 – 0.5497	0.00
<b>Third-person plural</b>	they, them	0.26	0.33	-0.07	0.11	0.2374 – 0.2804	0.00

Reviewing the findings presented above, it becomes apparent that individuals which were defined as influencers in this study, are also individuals that have attained higher social status. This reflection is based on the parallels drawn from

Considering the effects of first-person pronouns, coupled with the abovementioned behavioural characteristics of high versus low status individuals, the concept of clusivity becomes increasingly interesting. Clusivity refers to the

*MD: mean difference, SD: standard deviation, CI: confidence interval*

All mean values reflect mean percentages of all words used by both samples e.g. the average influencer uses first-person singular pronouns at a rate of 4.3% of all their words. P-values were based on a one sample t-test comparison between the means of influencers and the sample of the common population, with 99 degrees of freedom, 1-tailed test.

prior research (Blader & Chen, 2012; Dino et al., 2008; Sexton & Helmreich, 2000; Cassell et al., 2006; Kacewicz et al., 2013) that specifically connected high status individuals to lesser use of first-person singular pronouns and higher use of first-person plural pronouns. Contrastingly, an average Twitter user is therefore, in relation to an influencer, a lower status individual which reversely focuses more on their self by using more first-person singular pronouns and less first-person plural pronouns.

The findings in this study provide support for the attention seeking nature of low status individuals. Namely, their wish to attract the approval and consideration of others for recognition and acknowledgement (Snodgrass et al., 1998), a behaviour that can be identified by the frequent use of first-person singular pronouns (Dino et al., 2008). In contrast, individuals with upper social status i.e. influencers, display entirely different attributes. For example, the infrequent use of first-person singular pronouns builds on Blader and Chen's (2012) notion that influencers are in fact less self-focused, opposing the general assumption that high status individuals are self-centred, self-loving and narcissistic. This notion is reinforced further when examining high status individuals and their use of first-person plural pronouns. A higher use of pronouns such as "we, us", which was also found in this study, illustrate a more collectivistic behaviour where attention is focused on others (Kacewicz et al., 2013). Conversely, as the average Twitter user does not use "we, us", to the same extent as their counterparts, one can state that they focus less of their attention towards others. Accordingly, the common Twitter users' self-attention is solidified further with their infrequent use of first-person plural pronouns as seen in the results. This dissimilarity of behaviour for the two sample groups is evident when examining the ratios between first-person singular and plural pronouns used by both groups.

categorisation of first-person plural pronoun "we" in two different blocks, i.e. an inclusive and an exclusive form. Pennebaker (2011) stresses the fact that inclusive "we" is a pronoun which low status individuals seek to be a part of, as well as, an initiator of a connection between partakers of a dialogue. Hence, this study argues that the approval seeking nature of low status individuals is given recognition when individuals of higher status use the more including pronouns "we, us". Hence, individuals could attain status by catering to the demand and behaviour of low status individuals, sequentially, granting or increasing their influential power. Expressly, influence is co-created and empowered by the dualistic but divergent behaviour of individuals situated at opposing ends of social hierarchy. In contrast, an excluding "we" erects a barrier between the parties involved in the dialogue. Pennebaker (2011) further claims as individuals accrue more social power and influence, there is a tendency to use the more distancing and excluding form of "we". On a micro-blogging platform such as Twitter this implies that the frequent use of "we" by individuals, regardless of the clusivity form, is a reflection of status and influence. Drawn from this discussion, one can deduce that accruing influence is a process where the introduction and growth of influential power is based on the low use of "I" in combination with the frequent use of an inclusive "we". However, as influence reaches a level of maturity, a shift to the exclusive "we" helps reinforce and solidify the influential power held by the individual.

Zimmermann et al. (2013) and Pennebaker (2011) state that second and third-person pronouns are indicators of social engagement. Moreover, individuals using these pronouns maintain a larger emphasis on others and consequently, based on previous discussion, would hold a higher rank. Remarkably, this pattern did not reoccur in this study, instead a contrasting effect was unveiled. It was found that second-person pronouns (you, your), third-person singular pronouns (she, he, her)

and third-person plural pronouns (they, them) were being used significantly less by influencers than common Twitter users.

Exploring this finding, a significant dissimilarity is identified between first-person pronouns and second and third-person pronouns i.e. first-person pronouns always include the speaker in the setting; regardless of clusivity form. In contrast, second and third-person pronouns continuously exclude the speaker from the context. Seeing as Twitter is a micro-blogging platform and that followers have certain types of expectations on followees, it might be counterproductive to frequently use pronouns that directs focus from oneself onto others. Therefore, the findings of this study imply that on Twitter, lower use of second and third-person pronouns is significantly correlated with influence.

## **5. Discussion & Conclusion**

The benefit of using linguistics as a foundation for research helps to bridge two different fields that consequently lead to a creative methodological approach when researching influence and eWoM behaviour. The purpose of this paper was to study the eWoM behaviour of influencers on Twitter by examining their use of function words and consequently gain an understanding for the drivers of viral marketing. More explicitly, this study examined the application of personal pronouns of influencers i.e. first-person singular (I, me), plural (we, us), second-person (you, your), third-person singular (she, he, her) and plural (they, them). The extensive research in this paper found that influencers on Twitter use the first-person pronouns “we” to a higher degree, whereas “I” is used to a lesser degree. Furthermore, it was discovered that influencers’ use of second and third-person pronouns were significantly lower compared with average users on Twitter. Analysing these results with support from previous research suggested that influencers on Twitter are high status individuals that enforce their social hierarchy rank by focusing attention on others rather than on themselves. However, this focus was solely based on influencers’ higher use of first-person plural pronouns rather than on all other-oriented pronouns such as second and third-person pronouns. Seeing as Twitter is a micro-blogging platform where users write about themselves, the findings provide evidence that lower use of second and third-person pronouns is correlated with influence on Twitter since using these pronouns would exclude the influencer from the context and thus detract the attention of their followers.

With the purpose of this study in mind, the conducted research and findings, ultimately contribute to the understanding of the phenomena of viral marketing. For example, by taking into account previous findings about the relation between social status, joint with the notion that individuals who accrue higher levels of status have a tendency to shift clusivity-form, this paper suggests that influence is not an absolute state, but rather a process. But more importantly, this paper has identified that one of the drivers which contribute to the success of viral marketing lies in the way influencers behave and express themselves. Namely, the prior understanding that influencers are crucial for viral marketing has received an explanation through the presented findings.

Coupled with the idea that influence is a process, the way influencers conduct themselves on Twitter towards others gives them the necessary social status, influential power and reach for becoming primary WoM providers, spreading marketing messages efficiently.

The importance of understanding the construction of influence is amplified when face-to-face cues are eliminated from the equation, since in offline settings non-verbal cues are equally important as verbal communication, yet in an electronic setting such as Twitter, expression is solely transmitted through words. Therefore, it is implied in this study that focusing on linguistic patterns such as pronoun use, an efficient method for identifying influencers emerges. Hence, this method is one valuable tool that marketers need in order to strategise and take appropriate actions in their viral marketing endeavours based on influencers’ behaviour on social media.

In addition, by understanding the construction of influence, companies with a presence on Twitter could potentially mimic influencer behaviour and generate follower engagement through higher influence. However, in order to exploit this understanding and attain influence on Twitter, it is essential to take in consideration how influence is developed. For instance, increased use of “we”, without consideration towards clusivity form could exclude followers and potentially affect follower engagement negatively. However, the conclusions made regarding the effects of clusivity are drawn from preceding work conducted in settings different from Twitter. Consequently, there lies potential for further research extracted from this discussion. For example, a complement to this study would be to focus on the effects clusivity has on a blogging



platform such as Twitter which is constructed on the idea of sharing your own experiences rather than others. Furthermore, as this study contributes to the literature by identifying and examining influencers on Twitter through a focus on words, it provides ample evidence suggesting that the chosen methodology is appropriate for similar purposes. For example, further research that incorporates a word focus can be conducted on different social media platforms such as Facebook or Reddit, which include more dialogue characteristics, in order to map behaviours but also the interactions between sender and recipients to gain new insights.

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