Project Last Mile

INFLUENCER MARKETING FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

A how-to guide for applying the private sector model of 'influencer marketing' to public health

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OVERVIEW

Many successful consumer brands such as Coca-Cola, Nike, and Microsoft have used influencers to market their products. They have been doing so for years, which has led to influencer marketing becoming a critical tool in companies' marketing wheelhouses.

Influencer engagement through community leaders or social media influencers is also commonly used in public health to promote health service uptake and behavior change. It may come to be recognized as a more sustained approach to behavior change in that it helps to reinforce social norms around health service uptake.

To date, while influencer marketing has been leveraged to support public health outcomes in certain settings, there are further learnings that can be leveraged from the private sector to strengthen the impact of these efforts within the public health sector. Though commercial businesses and brands nowadays typically use influencers on digital channels such as social media, this guide takes a broader view of the term 'influencer' and includes examples from faith-based leaders, radio DJs, as well as influencers on social media.

This guide explains when, why, and how best to use a private sector approach to influencer marketing more broadly, in the public health sector.
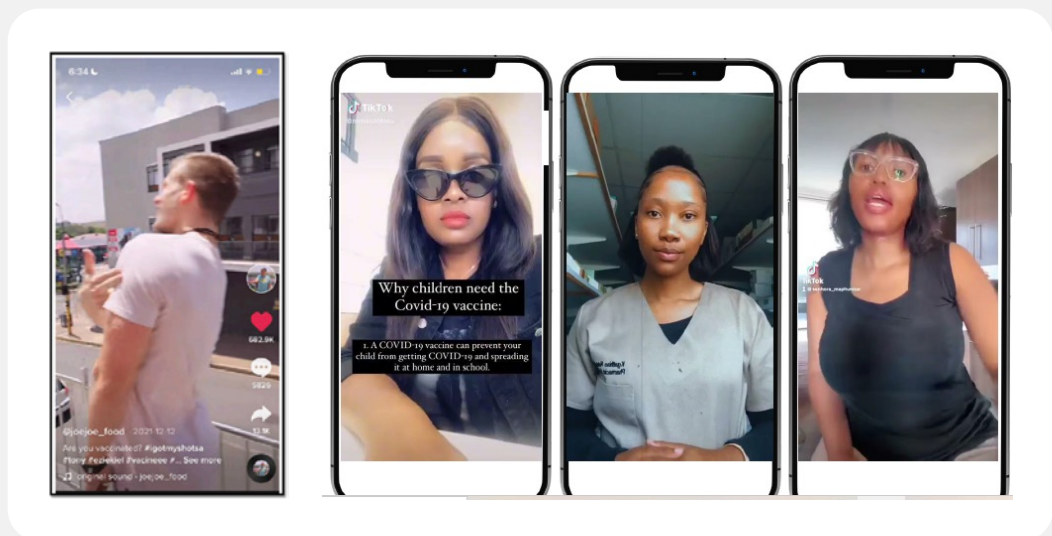

Image of TikTok influencer and micro influencers engaged via the Aifluence platforms.

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PRIVATE SECTOR INFLUENCER MARKETING

Companies view influencer marketing as a strategy to enable them to reach new customers at every stage of the decision-making process, from when they first become aware of the brand to when they are considering making a purchase.

Influencers hold a key power that is fundamental to any strong brand: trust. Studies have shown that consumers are losing trust in the brands that they do business with[1].

Influencers, especially celebrities, who have a large follower base, are often engaged to grow brand awareness and build trust. In addition, influencer marketing can be highly flexible and customizable. Its dynamic nature allows it to stretch out through the entirety of the marketing funnel, giving influencer marketing a key advantage over many other marketing avenues[2][3]. (Influencity, 2023; FastCompany, 2023)

Brands work with influencers to create content tailored to their target audiences. They use various formats (such as sponsored posts, product reviews, and guest posting) to reach specific demographics and build meaningful connections with potential customers. It also helps brands create new and fresh content, keeping their brand relevant and moving with the times.

Companies use influencers within their marketing in various ways, so there is no one-size-fits-all approach. However, there are principles of private sector influencer marketing that can be applied to public health. These are listed on page 5.
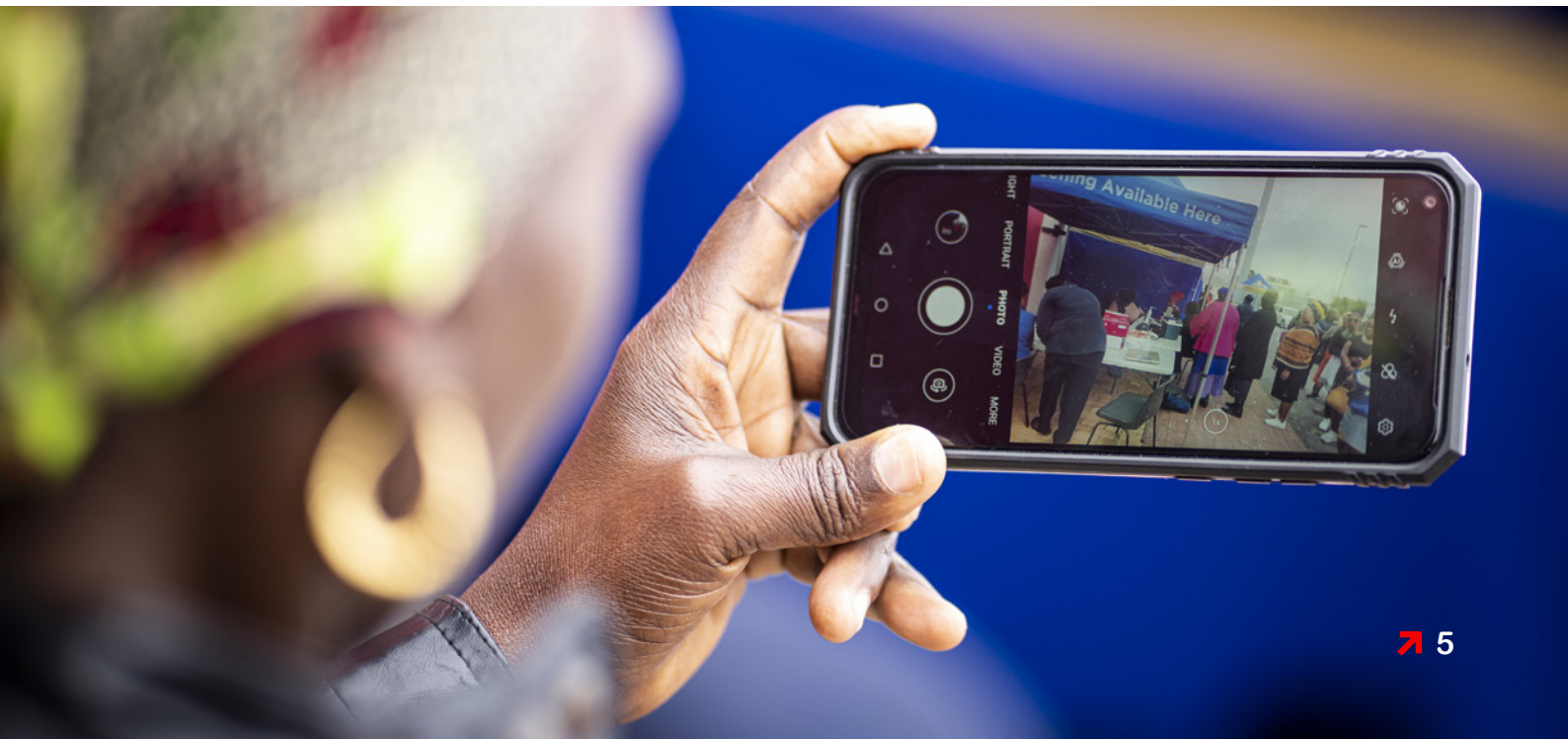
Private sector influencer marketing principles that can be applied to public health

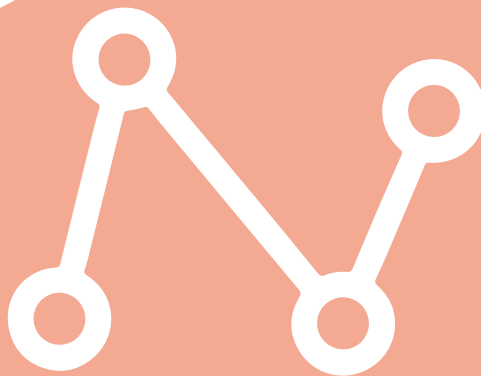## 1. Strategy development

- Audience identification and goal setting
- Strategic alignment and planning
- Collecting and analyzing consumer insights

2. Execution

- Influencer or messenger engagement models
- Creating the message
- Selecting the media approach
- Deploying data-driven and segmented tactics

3. Measurement

- Evaluation based on behavioral theory
- Understanding your metrics

WHEN TO USE PRIVATE SECTOR INFLUENCER MARKETING PRINCIPLES IN PUBLIC HEALTH

Traditionally in the public health sector, community leaders would be engaged in a health issue to ensure support and endorsement of social mobilization activities that healthcare workers or volunteers would conduct. Over time, community leaders, such as religious leaders or tribal leaders, would be engaged to advocate for certain health services or behaviors themselves.

With the proliferation of social media, an ordinary community member who is adept on social media and has a relatively large following, can also be used to endorse a health behavior or treatment. And what COVID-19 taught us is that influencers can be used for both health system strengthening and as part of a pandemic response. The next graph applies in both scenarios.

For any health service or intervention (be it for a sustained program like HIV or during a pandemic), there will always be early adopters to health services or products. But as time progresses, it is necessary to reach people who are more unwilling or resistant to a health service, as well as those who have increased accessibility challenges. At a certain point on the effort curve, communication on traditional media becomes ineffective in reaching new audiences.

As influencers work on the basis of trust and the concept of 'word of mouth', influencers tend to be an effective channel to reach those more unwilling or resistant to a new service or product.

In addition, as they are typically embedded within the community (both physically and often emotionally), influencers can help sustain behavior change on health issues with longer time horizons.

In summary, influencer marketing can be used to:

- Engage people who are harder to reach both physically and psychologically (for example, those who are hesitant or unwilling).
- Reach people further up the 'health uptake effort curve'.
- Sustain longer-term behavior change around health.

There are, of course, potential risks when engaging influencers. These need to be analyzed and weighed up before embarking on an influencer marketing campaign.
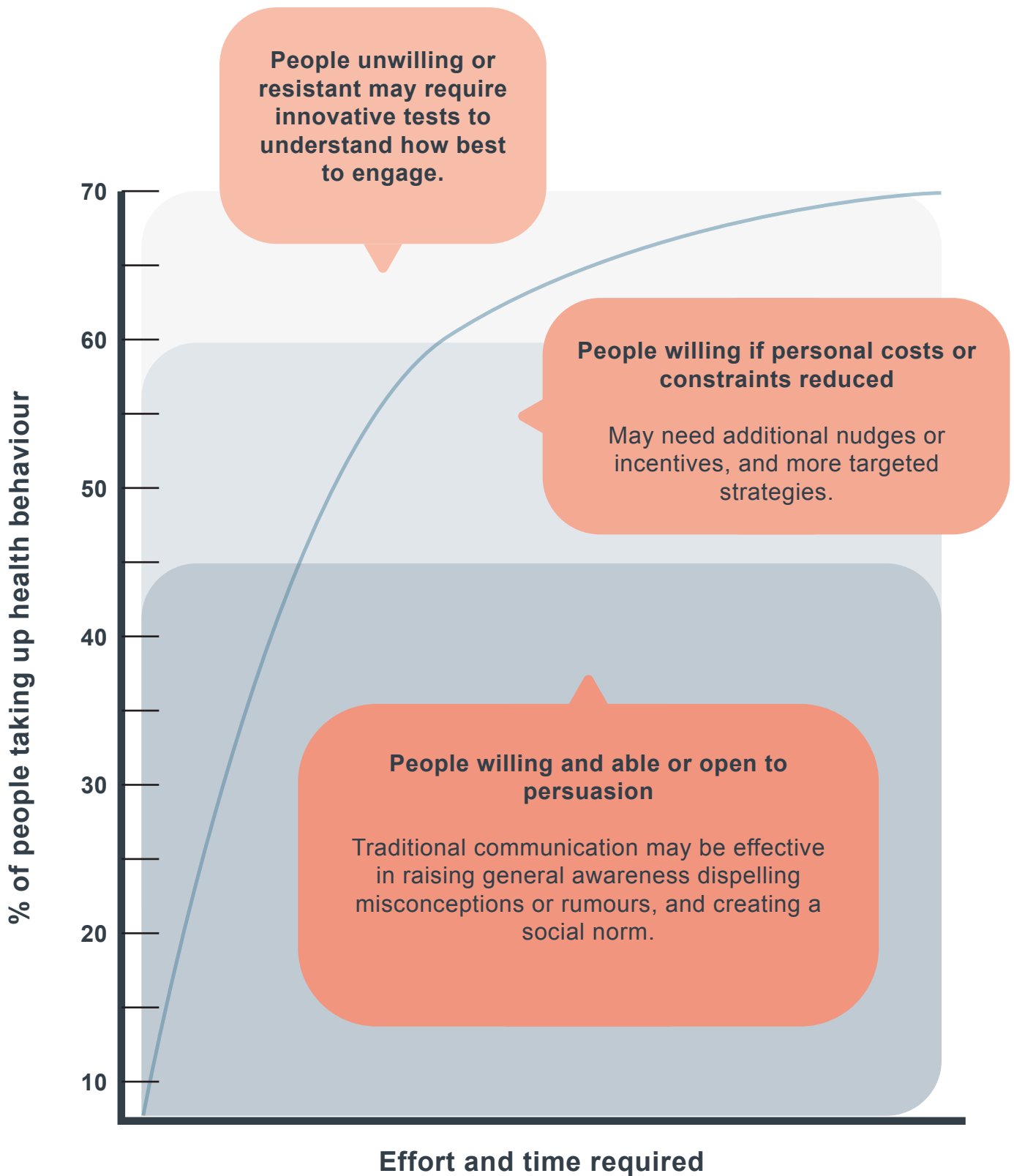
Health uptake effort curve

Figure 1: Health uptake effort curve (derived from the vaccine uptake curve)

UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

The choice of and alignment to influencers is one of the higher risk options private sector marketers have. The same applies to the public health space. So it goes without saying that a section of this guide must be dedicated to understanding the risks involved and how to mitigate them.

There are countless examples of brands having suffered reputational damage because of something their influencer said or did. There are parts of influencer inclusion that are outside of the brand's control or which are simply unforeseeable. Though these risks can never be eliminated they can be managed by:

- Implementing robust due diligence in the selection and screening of your influencers. Look at their track record – do they align to your principles, have you engaged with them previously?
- Closely monitoring your influencers' communication throughout the campaign. Here your agency should be able to track this for you and ideally monitor it on a daily basis (on social media this is possible).
- Have contracts in place with clear guidelines on what is and what is not acceptable. Ideally, talk your influencer through these guidelines rather than just expecting them to read through them ahead of time.
- Campaign/program owners are advised to get closely involved in influencer management, rather than just leaving it to the agency to do. There are gains to be made by keeping in regular touch with influencers, reinforcing allegiance and alliance.

Another risk you may face is that your influencer may not want to be associated with any of the partners you are working with, be it governmental or non-governmental. Your influencer may not want to be directly associated with the entities that are part of your program, so you need to be upfront at the start of your engagements about the objective of your campaign and who the influencers will need to engage or be associated with during the campaign.

You may also want to refer to the paid, earned, shared, and owned (PESO)[4] of media and decide if creating your own neutral website or social media handles would work better, or if a non-branded campaign would be more beneficial. (See page 15 for more details of the PESO model.)

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WHY USE PRIVATE SECTOR INFLUENCER MARKETING PRINCIPLES?

The concept of influencer marketing is not new. The private sector has been employing this approach for nearly a century. One of the earliest types of influencer marketing dates back to the 1930s when Coca-Cola used the fictional figure of Santa Claus in its advertising campaigns. This creative use of Santa Claus as a jolly, gift-giving character during the holiday season helped to associate the joy of Christmas with Coca-Cola, and it became a landmark example of leveraging influencers to encourage consumer purchases[5][6].

Over the years, the private sector has evolved its approach and accumulated a wealth of experience and expertise in influencer marketing strategies. Brands have honed their approaches, refined their tactics, and continuously optimized the process to reach new customers and build brand loyalty. The private sector's long history of influencer marketing provides valuable insights into what works and what doesn't, offering a rich pool of best practice examples for other sectors to draw from.

In addition to this extensive experience, the private sector's emphasis on optimizing efficiencies and applying agility or speed to market enhances the effectiveness of influencer marketing efforts. Businesses are highly motivated to deliver results quickly and efficiently to stay ahead in competitive markets. This focus on efficiency and agility translates into well-structured influencer marketing campaigns that are data-driven, targeted, and continuously measured for success.

The principles applied by the private sector, regardless of the influencer they use, relates back to connecting the message, to the right medium (channel) and the right messenger. The principles in this guide can be applied to a range of influencers, not just social media influencers. Influencers can be defined not just by their sphere of influence, but also their role in society and the channels they use.
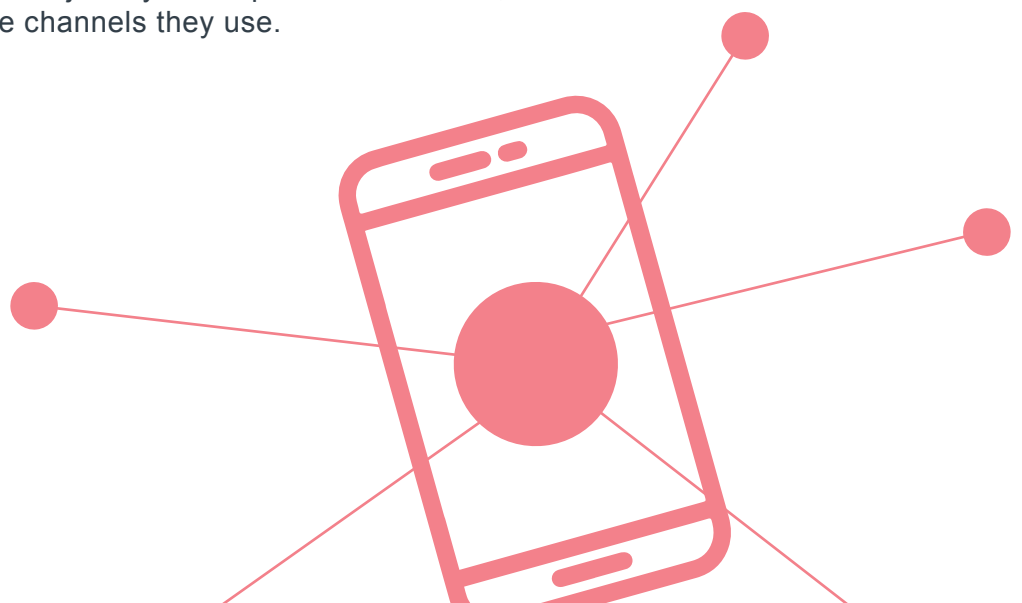
Tiers of influencers[6]
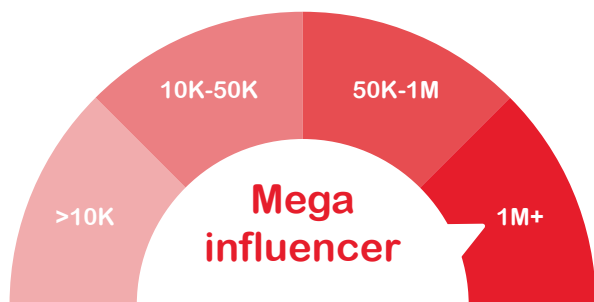
Audience reach: 1M+

Who are they: celebrities, athletes, social media stars

Campaign objectives: Brand awareness

Mega influencer
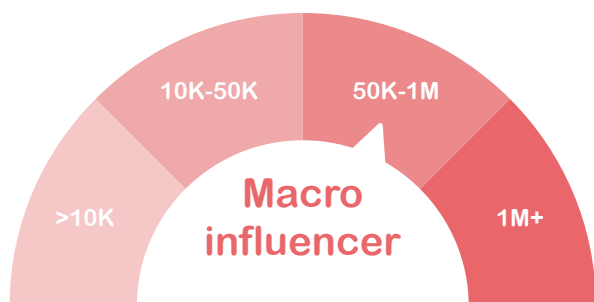
Audience reach: 50K - 1M

Who are they: Mini celebrities, recognised within a community

Campaign objectives: Brand awareness, User generated content

Macro influencer
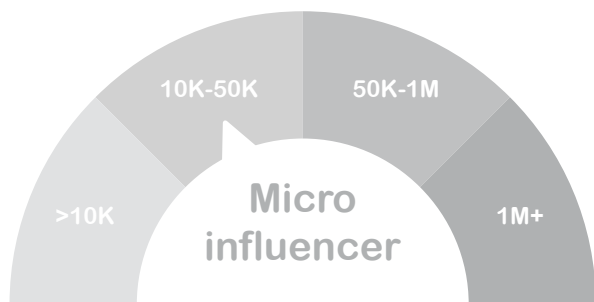
Audience reach: 10K - 50K

Who are they: Experts in their respective niche.

Campaign objectives: Brand awareness, User generated content, Engagement, Conversions

Micro influencer
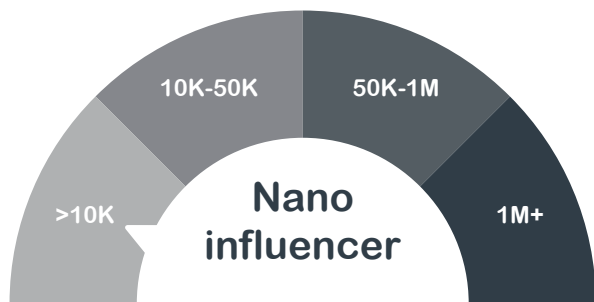
Audience reach: Less than 10K

Who are they: Brand advocates who already engage with your brand.

Campaign objectives: User generated content, Engagement, Conversions

Nano influencer

Figure 2: Tiers of influencers[6]

PRIVATE SECTOR CASE STUDY: ICELAND FOODS[7]

Iceland Foods may sound like a Nordic company, but it's actually based in the UK. And this frozen food brand had a problem: its customer approval ratings had plunged to an abysmal 10%.

In the past, Iceland used big-name celebrities to promote its products, but these campaigns weren't going well. It needed real influencer marketing return on investment, fast. Iceland realized the reason celebrity campaigns weren't working was that they didn't show real people. Iceland pivoted its campaigns to target everyday people, like mommy influencers. Since customers are more likely to trust a micro influencer over a celebrity, this proved to be a clever choice on Iceland's part.

The strategy: Iceland brainstormed a year-long strategy where it partnered with regular-Joe food influencers to get some 'oh so good' user-generated content. On top of that, it implemented social listening and paid ads to really get the message out there. The goal of the campaign was to deepen customers' bonds with Iceland products, with the ultimate goal of selling more frozen food.

The results: Iceland had to make frozen food appealing, which was no small feat. But during its partnership with 50 micro influencers, Iceland hit the jackpot. By showcasing a diverse range of everyday people using its products, Iceland saw:

- A 55% retention rate on Facebook videos (and a 59% rate on YouTube).
- Its approval rating increased from 10% to a whopping 70%.

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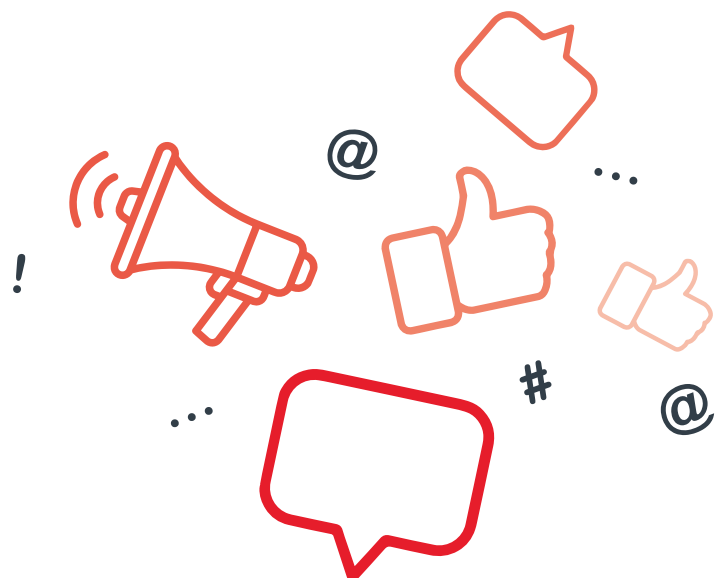
WHAT ARE THE PRIVATE SECTOR INFLUENCER MARKETING PRINCIPLES?

The principles of private sector influencer marketing that can be applied to public health are mapped to the best practice of formulating a strategic communications strategy, which are categorized into three areas: strategy development; execution; and measurement.

1. Strategy development

Strategy development is the first phase of creating an influencer marketing campaign. Key steps during this phase are strategic alignment and goal setting, audience identification, systematic planning, and collecting consumer insights.

1.1. Audience identification and goal setting

The very first step is to identify who you are trying to reach. Using data to identify your audience group most in need of your intervention is key. The data will help you to fine-tune the location of your campaign and any nuanced demographics within your audience to ensure you are reaching the group most in need. For example, you may find it helpful to narrow your audience from just males aged 18–24, based on a gap in healthcare uptake, when you identify that it's actually unemployed males between 18–24 in a certain province that you need to target.

Once you have identified your audience, research plays a critical role in confirming if influencers are an effective platform to engage your target audience. For example, two of the case studies used in this guide were informed by a nationally representative study in South Africa between 2021 and 2022, which showed that for many people who were still unvaccinated, their most trusted sources of information about the vaccine were first healthcare workers, followed by friends and family, rather than celebrities or employers[8].

Once you have determined your audience group and which influencers are most trusted by this group, the next step is to clearly articulate your campaign goals and ensure that all stakeholders are aligned. This includes stating the rationale behind setting the goals based on the available evidence.

1.2. Strategic alignment and planning

Even though engaging influencers may come across to consumers as a very organic process, there are well thought through plans and project management processes to execute a campaign. The same must be done when engaging with community influencers and executing a social behavior change campaign.

The campaign goals should be a primary reference point and a way to keep all activities – including the development of campaign tactics, channels, and messaging – and stakeholders on track throughout the campaign. Creating strategic alignment requires identifying the 'value add' for your influencers to engage.

Additionally, the planning process itself should help you to identify organizations or agencies that can vet your influencers and maintain engagement with them. Working with agencies that do this on a day-to-day basis is key as they have the processes and systems to engage influencers and manage risks.

1.3. Collecting and analyzing consumer insights

By starting with your audience and understanding their enablers and barriers to a particular health intervention, you can start to map out what tactics could be prioritized and understand how to engage the community influencer to help the key audience overcome their hesitancies. This understanding requires research and a deep understanding of the user journey of your audiences. Insights can be based on literature reviews, previous case studies, pre-campaign engagements and focus groups with your audience, as well as surveys and polls.

It is helpful to also select a social behavior change theory to underpin your campaign (this connects to your measurement and evaluation as well). For example, for vaccine hesitancy, you could consider the three Cs of convenience, complacency, and confidence[9], or for health seeking behavior you could apply the Fogg Behavior Model[10]. These social behavior theories help to ensure you are analyzing the enablers and barriers across this spectrum of behavior change.

2. Execution

This phase is about bringing the strategy into action and requires certain elements to be completed, which include choosing your influencer or messenger engagement model, identifying how you will co-create the message with your influencer, selecting your media approach and ensuring your tactics are deployed via a segmented approach.
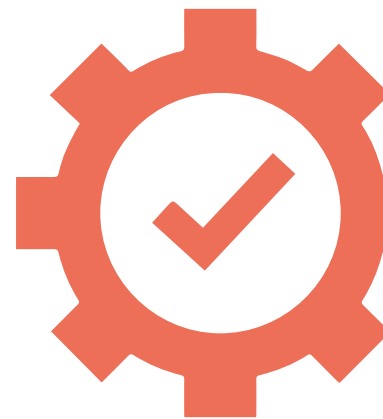
2.1. Influencer or messenger engagement models

The engagement process will vary depending on your influencer, be it a faith-based leader, TikTok influencer, or micro social media influencer. Ensure you use an influencer that is trusted among your audience group and a credible messenger of health topics. Working with agencies or civil society groups with past experience and relationships with your influencers is key to establishing rapport and a good working relationship.

It is important to provide support and educate influencers to generate original, authentic content, and ensure you have broader community ground support to enable the influencers to do what they need to do.

Finally, keep in mind that incentives do help to build a value add for the influencer, but incentives can be creative and done in a way that reduces the transactional nature of the engagement.

2.2. Creating the message

In terms of campaign messaging, it is critical to ensure influencers understand the campaign objectives and are fully behind the 'call to action'. Educating and supporting the influencer throughout the campaign is best practice, along with co-creating the message with them to ensure it is in their own authentic voice, always making sure that the source material you share with your influencer is from a credible source. Consider allowing your influencer to take a phased approach to storytelling and tap into your audience insights to develop creative angles and tonality for the message.

2.3. Selecting the media approach

It is key that your influencer marketing strategy doesn't just rely on your influencer's network. Using a mix of channels helps to ensure that your influencer marketing strategy is embedded into a broader marketing ecosystem, which helps with greater amplification. It is also important to understand what platforms will be used – will you be creating your own new handles and websites, or using government sites?

Taking into account who has authoritative voices on health issues and if your influencers are happy to be associated with those voices can help in determining whose platform you use. The PESO model[4] below is a helpful tool for determining how many of your media platforms fall under each section. Bear in mind that interpersonal communication such as community mobilization or in-clinic discussions with a healthcare worker should also be considered within your communication mix. These interpersonal channels do not fall under the traditional media PESO model.

Paid, Earned, Shared, Owned (PESO) model

Owned

Content you create & share on your owned channels

- Blog posts
- Videos
- Webinars
- White papers
- Case studies

Paid

Content you pay to have placed

- Guest posts
- Influencer marketing
- Social ads
- Press releases

OWNED PAID

SHARED EARNED

Shared

Content created by community & shared

- Social media
- Consumer reviews
- User-generated content
- Quotes
- Comments

Earned

Content created by external source, without payment

- Trade media placements
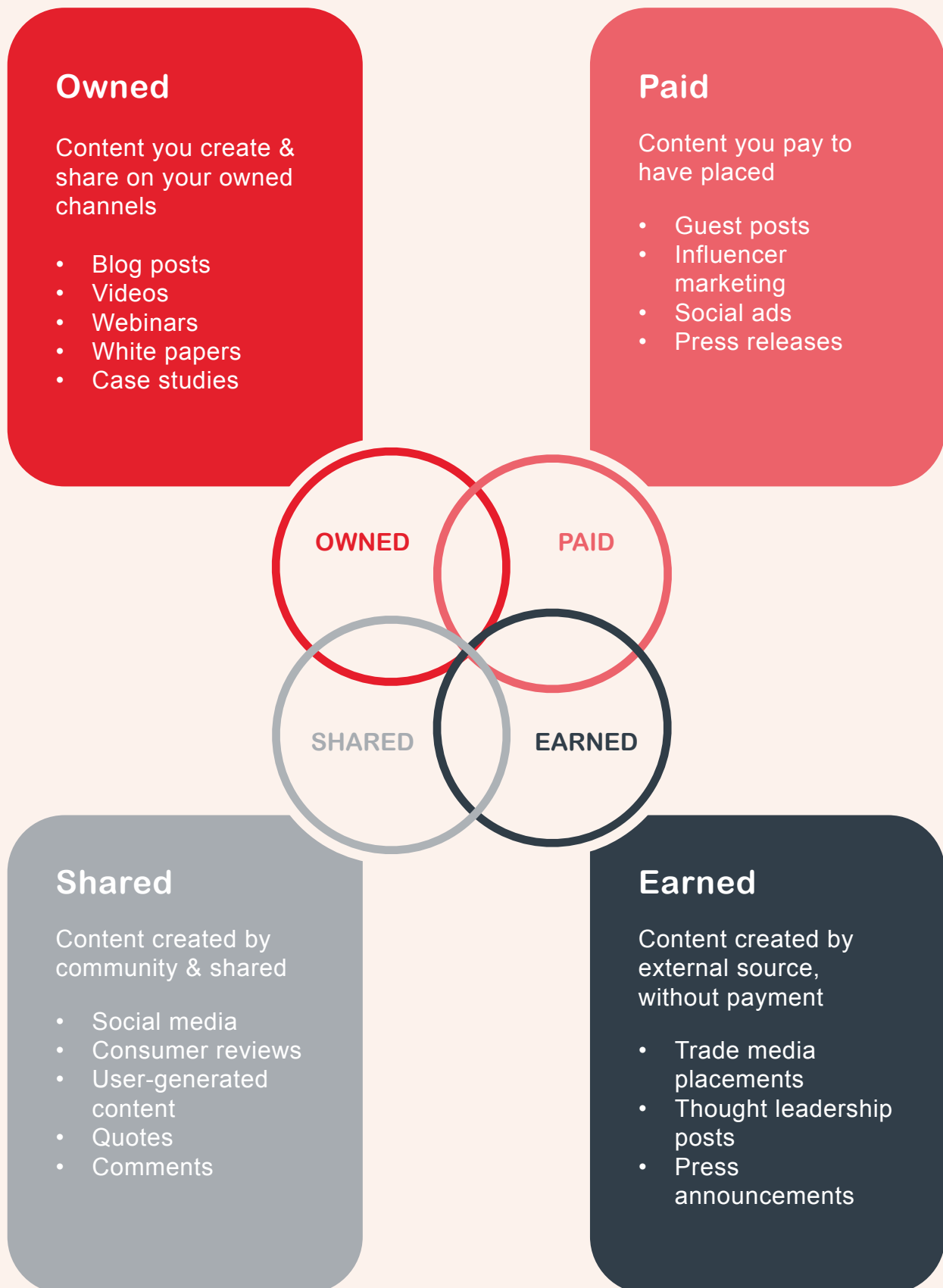- Thought leadership posts
- Press announcements

Figure 3: Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned (PESO) model

2.4.   Deploying data-driven and segmented tactics

Messengers and channels should be matched not only to where the target audience is but also to the campaign tactics and messaging. Not all tactics and messages work on all channels. Not all audiences are on all platforms. The choice of platform should take this into account and it is important to ensure that you use channels and platforms where your influencers are already engaging and where they have an established audience.

Insights and data help to segment your target audience into even more refined groups and help to identify and/or prioritize your activities and the area of need. By doing this, you can develop more customized tactics to reach and influence your audiences.

3.   Measurement

A key element of measurement is learning about what worked and what didn't, as this allows for continual improvements throughout the campaign. In essence, just as the private sector prioritizes adaptability to stay competitive, public health campaigns should value agility to ensure that their messaging reaches the right people in the most effective way. This requires a thorough understanding of both the target audience's preferences and the influencer's expertise, resulting in a more impactful and resonant delivery of crucial health messages. By embracing the private sector's agility, public health initiatives can enhance their reach, engagement, and overall success.

3.1.   Evaluation based on your chosen behavioral theory

Behind every good social behavior change campaign is a robust measurement framework. The same applies to successful brand influencer marketing campaigns.

Your measurement framework must be driven by the campaign objectives, but should also be underpinned by the social behavioral change theory that supports your campaign, such as the Fogg Behavior Model[10], the Health Belief Model[11], Theory of Planned Behavior[12] or Social Learning Theory[13]. By selecting your behavioral change theory, you can ensure you measure and understand changes in people's perceptions and intentions or their readiness for change.

3.2.   Understanding your metrics

Chose the appropriate metrics and data sources that help to support your behavior change theory. It is best practice to include metrics and data from more than one methodology or data source, such as media tracking and population and brand awareness studies.

Bear in mind that collecting data can form part of the communication tactics in your campaign. For example, polls on social media can be a piece of content the influencer uses to engage their followers, and deploying A/B testing during the campaign can provide good feedback on what's working while you are implementing the campaign. Additionally, testing the performance of different channels and messages throughout the campaign allows you to optimize the strategy.

UNDERSTANDING A/B TESTING

A/B testing, also known as split testing or bucket testing, is a widely used experimental method in the field of digital marketing, web development, and user experience optimization. This method allows researchers and marketers to assess the impact of changes to a website, mobile app, or marketing campaign by comparing two or more variants (A and B) and measuring their performance against a predefined set of key performance indicators (KPIs).

Methodology:

1. **Formulating hypotheses:** The first step in A/B testing involves formulating clear and testable hypotheses. These hypotheses articulate the expected impact of a specific change (e.g., a website layout modification or email subject line alteration) on user behavior or conversion rates.
2. **Random assignment:** Participants or users are randomly assigned to one of the test groups (A or B). This randomization helps ensure that any observed differences in outcomes can be attributed to the changes being tested rather than preexisting biases.
3. **Implementing variants:** Variants (A and B) are created to represent the different versions of the element being tested. Variant A, often referred to as the control group, represents the current or existing version, while Variant B represents the experimental change.
4. **Data collection:** User interactions and conversions are tracked and recorded for both variants during a predefined period. Common metrics include click-through rates, conversion rates, bounce rates, and revenue generated.
5. **Statistical analysis:** Statistical methods are applied to the collected data to determine whether the observed differences in user behavior or KPIs are statistically significant.
6. **Drawing conclusions:** Based on the statistical analysis, researchers can draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the changes tested. If Variant B outperforms Variant A in a statistically significant manner, it may indicate that the change should be implemented.
7. **Implementation and monitoring:** Successful changes identified through A/B testing are typically implemented in the live environment, and ongoing monitoring is conducted to ensure sustained improvements[14].

Social Media	Celebrity	Religious/Faith
1	2	3

Still Image Ranking & Click through rate

| CTR 1,53% | CTR 1,41% | CTR 1,24% |

Ranking based on reach:

Click through rate:

| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Within CTR Performance benchmark for Health:
0,97% - 1,9%

Community	Medical	Ordinary Citizen
4	5	6

Still Image Ranking & Click through rate

| CTR 0,86% | CTR 1,02% | CTR 0.96% |

Ranking based on reach:

Click through rate:

| | ✓ | |

**Within CTR Performance benchmark for Health:**
0,97% - 1,9%

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HOW TO USE PRIVATE SECTOR INFLUENCER MARKETING PRINCIPLES

The guidance points for this how-to guide were developed from four different campaigns run during the COVID-19 pandemic:

CASE STUDY:
(Western Cape, South Africa)

Engaging **faith-based leaders** to encourage their congregation of 50+ to take the COVID-19 vaccine and attend regular health screenings.
(See page 36)
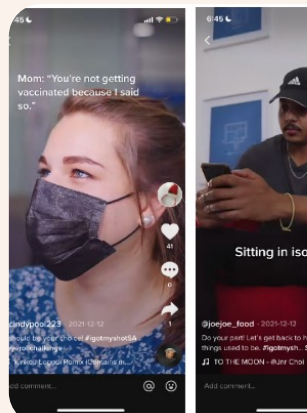
CASE STUDY:
(National, South Africa)

Engaging **TikTok influencers and radio DJs** to bring the topic of COVID-19 vaccines back into conversation amongst the youth
(See page 38)

CASE STUDY:
(Gauteng and Durban, South Africa)

Working with **micro and nano social media influencers** to improve attitudes around COVID-19 vaccines
(See page 40)

CASE STUDY:
(National, Eswatini)

Leveraging a range of **social media influencers and national celebrities** to encourage people to vaccinate against COVID-19
(See page 42)

The guidance points are structured around key private sector marketing principles, which are categorised under (i) Strategy development; (ii) Execution; and (iii) Measurement.

1. STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

1.1. Audience identification and goal setting

Why is goal setting important?

Why is identifying the target audience necessary and how do you do it?

Identifying your target audience allows you to identify the best influencers to use.

Research and data must underpin your strategy, and it starts with confirming your target audience. Ideally, your audience group should be well defined – instead of wanting to reach young girls, you should first understand within that cohort, which types of young girls need to be prioritized, which of them are lagging behind in the behavior change you want to see.

It is also helpful to consider both primary AND secondary audiences. Your secondary audiences are those you still would like to reach but which are not as important as your primary audience – by reaching your primary audiences you should be able to make more of an impact in your behavior change objective.

Having identified your primary and secondary audiences, and knowing 'why' you want to target them (backed by data and research), it is then imperative to understand who the trusted messengers for this audience group are. This will help you identify the best influencers to use for your campaign – should influencers be relevant for them.

Knowing your audience helps to identify agencies that can help you vet influencers and maintain engagement with them.

Once your target audience and type of influencer are identified, engaging with a media agency or civil society group specializing in managing or knowing your influencers is important. These organizations and agencies play a critical role in vetting your influencers. It is necessary to ensure that your influencers are fully aligned with your campaign objectives, have the right 'follower' profile to reach the target audience, and have credibility among their followers regarding the subject matter.

The vetting process to ensure you have identified the right individuals as influencers for your campaign can either make or break your initiative.

These organizations can also assist with executing your campaign. They are often locally based and have deep knowledge of your influencers and target audience. Building trusted relationships with influencers, as well as the platforms to manage the influencers and track the impacts of the campaign, is a resource-intensive process that cannot be executed on a per-campaign basis. Hence, engaging agencies or groups to assist is often cited as best practice.

Articulating the campaign goal and objectives allows you to match your influencer type to your objectives.

Articulating the campaign goal and objectives is critical when selecting the type of influencer, even before you think of your target audience groups. If your objective is to optimize reach and awareness, macro or mega influencers are more effective than nano influencers. Micro and nano influencers are often more effective if your objective is engagement and sentiment change. However, using micro and nano influencers for personal engagement is more effective if the goal is specific and localized, especially where showcasing social norms are critical.

Though the diagram below is through the lens of social media followers, the same principle can be applied to community or religious influencers. Understanding their 'follower' base and how they engage with their audiences is critical in selecting your type of influencer.

Influencer hierarchy[15]

MEGA ———————— +1M

MACRO ———————— 50K - 1M

MICRO ———————— 10K - 50K

NANO ———————— >10K
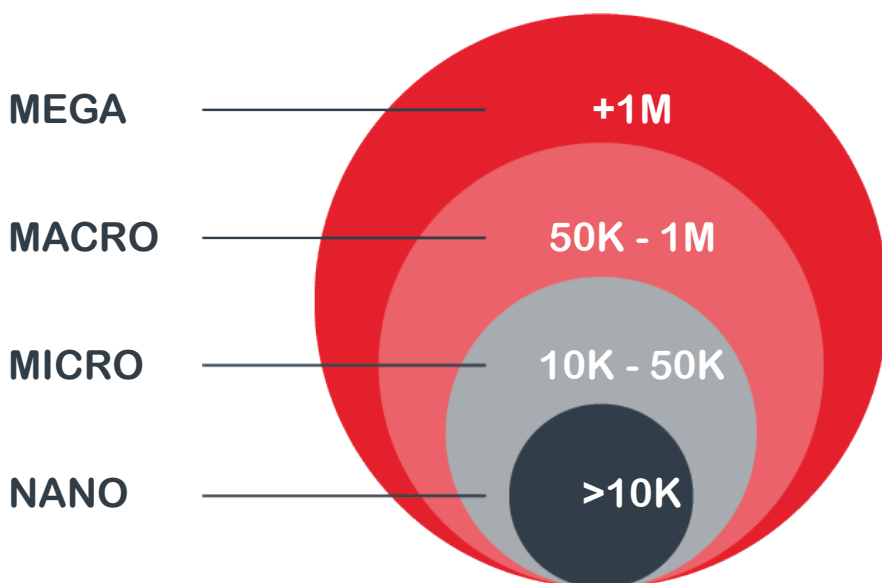
1.2. Strategic alignment and planning

How do you create strategic alignment?

How does systematic planning help in my influencer engagement?

Creating strategic alignment requires identifying the 'value add' for your influencers to engage, and it can take some time (remember to factor this in!).

A helpful starting point is understanding why your influencers may want to participate in your campaign. Is it because they will receive financial support for participating or because you will put media spend behind the content they produce on social, thereby increasing their follower base? Is it because they know their community (or congregation) has been concerned about a particular health issue, and being involved in your campaign will help them provide better advice and support to their community?

Particularly with community influencers, emphasizing the long-term relationship and gain helps to achieve co-ownership of the campaign goals and the results. Acknowledging and reinforcing that they are trusted leaders in their community and best placed to lead meaningful change in health and wellness goes a long way to building trust and alignment between your campaign and the influencer.

Understanding how engagement in the campaign can bring value to the influencer can be done through key informant interviews, literature reviews, and broader insight-gathering techniques.

However, it is not just the influencer you need to align with. Alignment with broader stakeholders, such as implementing partners or community gatekeepers, might be needed to execute the campaign. Being clear on the outcome the campaign sets to achieve and why that is beneficial to the broader stakeholder base is key to strategic alignment.

Finally, strategic alignment is not a one-off. It must be done throughout the campaign as the context may change or the situation within which the campaign is being executed may change. Continual engagement with stakeholders and your influencers also allows you to address any concerns they may have.

Planning is key to identifying and mitigating risks.

A successful consumer brand influencer marketing campaign is underpinned by a well thought through project management plan, from objective setting to concept development, influencer engagement, tactics, and measurement.

The process of planning also helps to identify any potential risks during your influencer engagement. Risks are easier to mitigate if they are identified.

1.3. Collecting and analyzing consumer insights

Why are consumer insights necessary?

What are the best approaches to collecting and analyzing insights?

Leveraging consumer insights and data helps to create interventions along the user journey.

Being clear on who the target audience is helps to refine the research and insights that are needed. Insights help you to understand what motivates your audience and makes them tick.
Additionally, identifying their full user journey as it relates to your program objectives is important as engagement with consumers or patients isn't static or in specific locations. Knowing what the various touchpoints are and could be, and understanding what challenges or frustrates people about accessing services or enabling the behavior change, are key to creating effective and holistic interventions.

Extrapolating relevant social behavior change models to your campaign design.

Reviewing various social behavior change models can help to define your theory of change, which in turn can help to translate community insights into actual tactics and behavior change activities that your influencer can promote. Social behavior change models include the Fogg Behavior Model[10], the Social Cognitive Theory[16], the Health Belief Model[11], the Social Ecological Model[17], and the Transtheoretical Model[18] and stages of change.

When translating insights and evidence into tactics, it is important to consider not just the confidence barriers your target audience group may have in terms of a particular health service but also convenience (or physical barriers) and complacency barriers – especially when attempting to overcome vaccine hesitancy. It may be that the main barrier to your target group is physical access. So, integrating outreaches of that particular health service and bringing it closer to your target group may need to be considered an integral part of your campaign.

Using data to identify and/or prioritize your activities and the area of need.

Analyzing health data can help identify the audience group which may need the most support from your campaign, or help with prioritizing geographical areas where you will execute the campaign with your influencers. Being able to validate the activities for your influencer to promote gives your influencer a clear justification for their involvement

and something they can stand behind.

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2. Execution
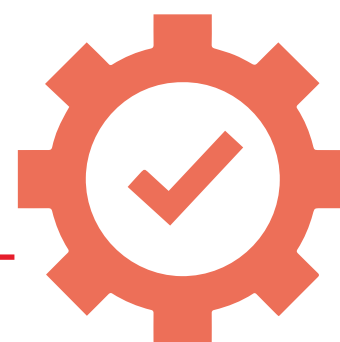
2.1. Influencer or messenger engagement models

What is the best way to engage community influencers?

Providing support and educate influencers to generate original, authentic content.

Educating influencers is necessary to ensure they feel confident regarding the subject matter and are comfortable and credible in discussions with their followers. A dialogue with influencers, allowing for an open-ended conversation, is more effective than sharing only written material.

Providing support to influencers tailored to the channel they are native to leads to greater engagement with the campaign than when influencers re-post or regurgitate existing content. The content must be guided by the campaign's key objectives, messages, and facts, but the influencers must recreate the message in their voice. Otherwise, they risk being seen as a mouthpiece for the campaign rather than independently communicating with their followers.

Ensuring you have ground support.

Ground support from community members who understand the perspectives of the community, your influencers, the local language, and other local dynamics is a crucial bridge. This ground support could be a media agency, a community organization, or selected health workers.

Incentives help to build a value-add for the influencer, but can be done creatively and in a way that reduces the transactional nature of the engagement.

In more recent decades, the use of celebrities and macro social media influencers has created a perception that influencer marketing requires big budgets and complicated contracts. It has fed into the idea that influencer marketing is very transactional and fickle; "If I pay you x amount, you'll do this for me..."

However, with community influencers and even macro social media influencers this does not need to be the case. And in fact, allocating a big endorsement fee to your influencer can cause more damage to your campaign in terms of credibility and engagement.

The case studies below provide real-life examples of how different influencers were motivated and engaged with different types of incentives.

Incentives for social media influencers

The use of social media influencers and celebrities in influencer marketing strategies by big brands has led to the perception that big budgets are needed and that social media influencers will do anything for you for a price. This does not have to be the case. Even macro social influencers (those with a very large follower base) do not require a huge endorsement fee or complicated contract when supporting an issue close to their heart.

In the case of the TikTok influencers, they were not paid an endorsement fee or for their work. Rather, their expenses were covered (such as travel to the workshop and data costs) and a certain number of their videos were boosted using media spend on TikTok. A set amount had been allocated as part of the media budget, and the influencers' top performing videos were then boosted with these funds. This helped to increase the influencers' profile and followership.

The radio DJs were also not paid a specific fee. Their time and engagement were covered in the media spend with the radio station, which confirmed a certain amount of airtime would be allocated to the COVID-19 campaign on their stations, along with a certain number of radio spots and ads.

Because the DJs were passionate about the topic, they gave additional airtime to the campaign during their conversations with listeners, resulting in great value add for the media investment made. This additional time given also stemmed from the fact that the media agency had a great relationship with the radio station and DJs. There was a lot of trust and belief in the campaign.

With regards to micro and nano influencers, the incentive is slightly different. Many of these influencers (especially in Africa) do not have full-time jobs and are often part of the gig economy. It can be difficult to find these influencers, which is why organizations such as AIfluence (a local African agency using artificial intelligence to identify micro and nano social media influencers) exist.

Their platform allows these influencers to sign up and take part in various campaigns for a fee. It is a form of micro-jobbing and therefore remuneration is often expected. Additionally, the offer to boost their posts in order to increase their followership may only work if the micro/nano influencer is focusing solely on making a career out of social influencing. Many are not and just do it on the side for additional income.
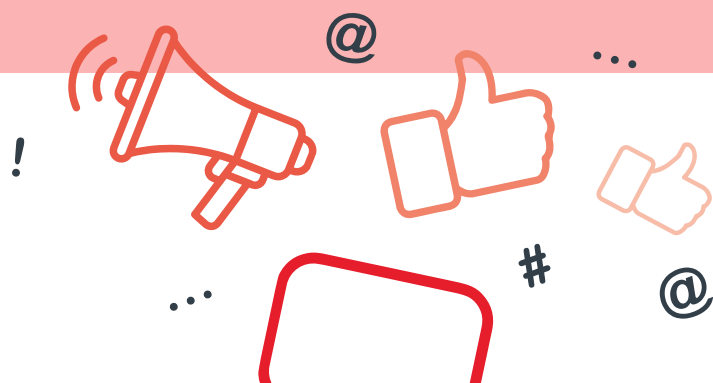
Incentives for faith-based leaders

During the faith-based organization (FBO) campaign, many discussions around incentives and giveaways were held. In partnership with the funder, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness, the pastors and supporting agencies, incentives were layered as such:

- Each individual attending the wellness day received a Bible cover as a thank you for attending, as well as a basic food pack containing various in-season fruits like apples, bananas and oranges, as well as bottled water or a low-sugar health drink.
- The community change ambassadors, who were mostly community health workers, were given a small stipend for completing predetermined goals. This enabled clarity on what the change ambassadors were meant to do, but also motivated them to reach certain participation targets ahead of the wellness days.
- The FBO received R9,000 (USD500) in the form of a development levy if 100 or more people from their congregation and community attended the wellness day. The levy went to supporting critical building and infrastructure needs for the church. All of the participating churches reached their target and received the levy.

In interviews and surveys post campaign, it was found that the wellness day giveaways (Bible covers and food) were found to be one of the reasons motivating people to attend the event, but it wasn't the main factor encouraging people to go. Likewise, the development levy to the churches was very appreciated and helped to create an initial motivation for pastors to join the campaign. However, the pastors felt that a trusting relationship and clear joint focus on servicing their communities were the overriding factors of success.

Through further analysis, the most important factor in the campaign's success was compensation for the change ambassador (the community health workers). Their work to engage the FBO leaders and their congregations throughout the campaign, as well as being the main intersection between the Department of Health and the community, was prioritized because they were clear on what they had to do and what compensation they would get for it. These change ambassadors created an enabling environment for the FBO leaders to do what they had to do.

2.2. Creating the message

Why is co-creation important?

How do you help them create messages for your campaign?

Researching the type of message that would be most effective to reach your audience.

Before working with your influencer, it is helpful to understand that your message is not just about a call to action or an idea. It includes the tone, framing, and creative execution that goes with your message. All of these elements are important in communications, and different audiences respond differently to different tones (such as instructional versus aspirational) or even different colors and images (such as bold versus pastel colors). Testing out how your core message should be framed and couched with your audience via message testing and focus groups is a helpful starting point when engaging your influencer as well.

Adapting your message to the channel.

It is important to understand that the same message cannot be copy and pasted onto multiple platforms. It needs to be adapted to best suit each channel. For example, the detailed content that a pastor can share during one of their sermons cannot be replicated on a social media post. The key message can be the same, but the length, tone, creative and delivery will need to be adapted. This is also the case on social media. There are numerous platforms on social media now: Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and LinkedIn, to name a few.

All of these were developed for different reasons – some are more visual, others more learning based, while others focus on videos. Audiences expect to see 'native' content on the mediums they get information from – not a copy and paste of the same poster on X (Twitter), Instagram and Facebook. Ensure you work with your influencer to adapt their messages and content to the channel.

Co-creating content.

Like co-creating tactics and approaches, the same can be done with messaging. For example, the TikTok influencers in the case study were given a full-day workshop to understand the campaign's objectives and key messages and then be creative with the concepts they would use in their videos. They fed off each other's creativity and this time together allowed for questions and concerns to be addressed by the program managers.

Similarly, the faith-based leader campaign included facilitated workshops with the pastors to generate inspiring, uplifting, and locally relevant language in the campaign messaging. It also allowed the pastors to truly believe in what they were preaching as they felt a sense of ownership over the messaging.

The most effective campaigns when looking at engagement were those that allowed time for co-creation. Allowing for moments of co-creation with your influencers ensures that the messages and how they are communicated are authentic.

Allow your influencers to suggest the best way for them to engage, for example with comments on a post or when conducting a sermon.

Creating a phased approach to storytelling.

From the case studies and in private sector influencer marketing, there is often a phased approach for influencers to tell their stories.

Allow the influencer to first share their story. For example, starting with their hesitations, then why they changed their mind and decided to vaccinate, and lastly, encouraging others to do so. This phased approach is not often done in public health influencer marketing.

Allowing for the phased approach facilitates more natural storytelling. It also taps into the key principles of effective narrative storytelling – an exposition, a climax, and a resolution. However, for this to be done, it is important that the storyline is planned and the 'ask' of the target audience group is clearly and consistently articulated.
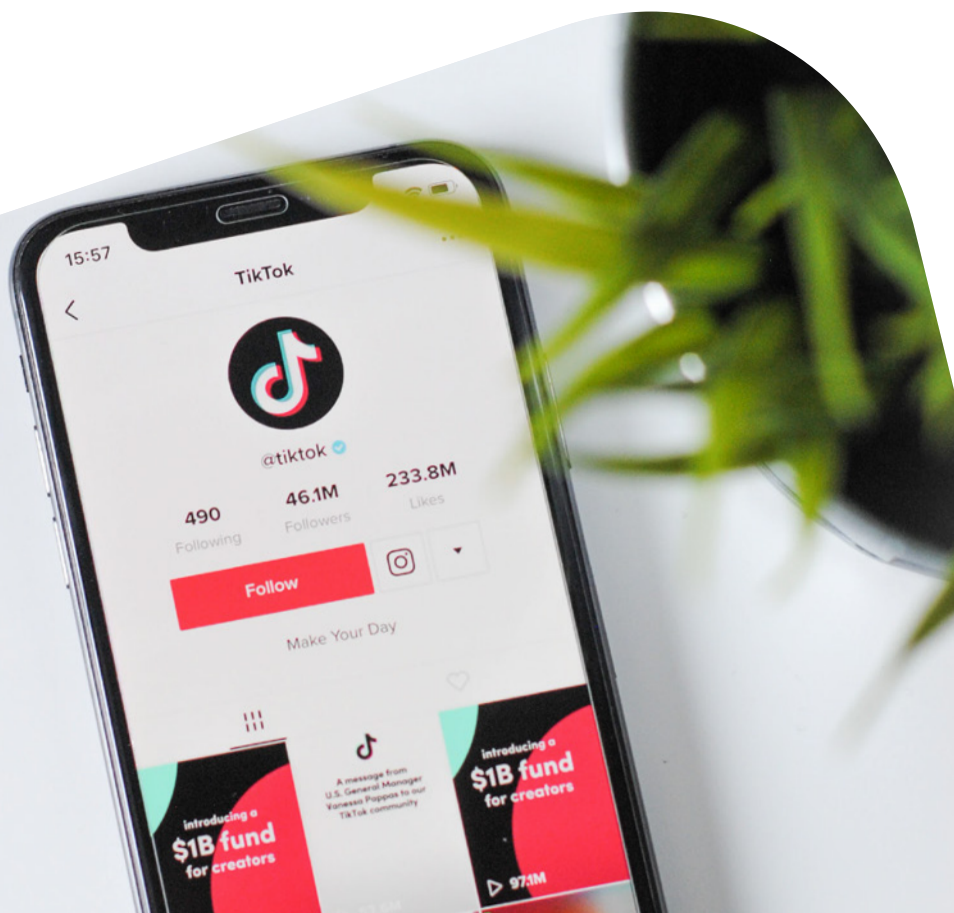
Tapping into audience insights and ensure credibility of your source material.

Tapping into consumer/audience insights and other data sources helps to determine the messages most needed and those most likely to resonate. There will often be a common thread within segmented audiences of their main concerns or hesitations, or what types of content piqued their interest most.

Checking that the material and key messaging you share with influencers is from an authoritative source is critical for delivering a campaign that avoids negative backlash. The key is to ensure that the influencers feel they can trust and stand by the facts they have to communicate.

It is also important to understand if your target audience trusts the authoritative sources – some individuals have a low level of trust in official health ministry communications, for example. It is key to refer back to your insights studies and understanding of the attitudes the target audience has towards trusted sources of information.

2.3. Selecting the media approach

Can't I just rely on the influencers' network?

Why is it important to understand different media and platforms?

Embedding your influencer marketing strategy in a broader marketing ecosystem.

Your audience group may be quite narrowly defined, for example, girls aged 12 to 17 in a particular sub-district. However, within that group, you may have some very cynical girls, others constantly on social media, and others prioritizing family, religion, or school.

It's crucial to consider the native platforms of the influencers themselves. For instance, a faith-based leader's strong presence within their community bolsters their influence. But using an unfamiliar platform like TikTok risks appearing insincere or ineffective. This misalignment not only disconnects from the audience but also undermines the trust that the influencer has painstakingly built.

What is important to note about private sector influencer marketing is

that it is embedded within a broader marketing ecosystem so that the messages used by the influencer and call to action can be reinforced by a wider set of channels that tap into different likes or preferences of your audience group.

Using the PESO model to select the most appropriate platforms.

Just relying on the influencers' own network limits the impact of your campaign. It is therefore important to understand what different platforms can and should be used for. Will you be creating your own new handles and websites, or using government sites?

These are important questions to raise with your influencers and partners. Taking into account who has authoritative voices on health issues and if your influencers are happy to be associated with those voices can help in determining whose platform you use. As mentioned above, the PESO model is a helpful tool for determining how many of your platforms fall under each section. Ideally, your campaign should comprise of a mix of all four platforms, if possible.

2.4. Deploying data-driven and segmented tactics

What is segmentation?

Why is having a mix of channels important?

Reaching the right person with the right message, on the right platform at the right time.

Segmentation is a process through which your target audience is split into groups based on their preferences, attitudes, and physical situations. Consumer insights are then used to understand which channels these people usually get their messages from, what their trusted sources of information are, which messengers they trust, and when they are most receptive.

Just as the private sector constantly adjusts its marketing strategies to match evolving consumer preferences, public health campaigns should flexibly tailor their approaches to suit the preferred channels of their target audiences. Not all individuals access information through the same mediums, and a one-size-fits-all approach rarely yields optimal results. By employing an agile mindset, public health initiatives can identify which platforms are most relevant to their audiences and can nimbly adjust their tactics to cater to those preferences. All these elements need to be considered in order to reach a particular person with the right message, on the right platform at the right time.

Considering potential unintended consequences.

It is also important to understand the potential unintended consequences of your campaign, such as negative backlash that erupts very quickly and goes viral on social media, particularly topics that have become controversial or polarized, like the COVID-19 vaccine. A wider set of channels and broader marketing strategy allows the other marketing tactics to 'take the heat' off the influencer while the backlash subsides.

Including a mix of channels and testing their performance throughout the campaign, allows you to optimize the best performing channel.

Much like the private sector employs data to personalize marketing content and target specific consumer segments, public health initiatives can optimize their messaging for diverse audience groups. Data-driven marketing enhances personalization and precision. Public health campaigns can leverage these principles to create messages that resonate deeply with each refined audience segment. By utilizing insights to tailor interventions for specific characteristics and preferences, you elevate the relevance and impact of your messaging.

This alignment with data-driven private sector practices enhances the efficacy of your tactics and opens avenues for iterative improvements. By consistently analyzing results and refining strategies based on real-time data, public health campaigns can mirror the private sector's agility in responding to changing dynamics. In essence, the integration of data-driven approaches equips public health initiatives to navigate complexities, engage effectively, and deliver impactful health messages.

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3. Measurement

3.1. Evaluation based on behavioral theory

How do you evaluate success?

Ensuring your campaign includes a robust measurement framework that is underpinned by a behavior change theory.

Behind every good social behavior change campaign is a robust measurement framework. The same applies to successful brand influencer marketing campaigns.

Your measurement framework must be driven by the campaign objectives, but it should also be underpinned by the social behavioral change theory that supports your campaign, such as the Fogg Behavior Model[10], the Health Belief Model[11], Theory of Planned Behavior, or Social Learning Theory. By selecting your behavioral change theory, you can ensure you measure and understand changes in people's perceptions, or intentions or their readiness for change.

3.2. Understanding your metrics

What are the best metrics to use?

Choosing the metrics and data sources that support your behavior change theory and campaign objectives.

It is best practice to include metrics and data from more than one methodology or data source. Typical measurement approaches for campaigns are:

- Media monitoring to understand reach and engagement. Ideally this should be disaggregated by channel, influencer, and message type so that you can understand how different aspects of the campaign perform in relation to each other. Typically, creative/media agencies should do this tracking for you.
- Tracking the knowledge, attitudes, practices and behaviors (as they relate to your campaign objectives) through surveys and polls of the target population. These are often longitudinal so that you can observe change over time, link findings with key milestones in the campaign, and link findings with external/confounding factors and events.
- Qualitative studies, such as interviews and focus groups, with influencers and the target audience to understand their response to the campaign and gather lessons for future campaigns.

Collecting data can form part of your content and assist with continual improvements.

Collecting data can form part of the communication tactics in your campaign. For example, polls on social media can be a piece of content the influencer uses to engage their followers, and deploying A/B testing during the campaign can provide good feedback on what's working while you are implementing the campaign. Additionally, testing the performance of different channels and messages throughout the campaign allows you to optimize the strategy.

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Case studies
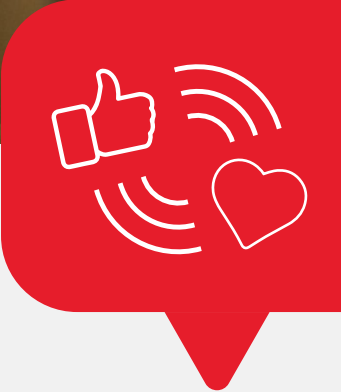
Engaging faith-based leaders to encourage their congregants aged 50+ to get the COVID-19 vaccine

With funding from the United States Agency for International Development, Project Last Mile and the South African provincial Western Cape Government Health (WCGHW) recognized the need for targeted interventions to address low COVID-19 vaccine uptake.

Despite older people having higher vaccination rates overall, in certain geographic areas, the vaccination rate among older people was closer to the national average. Project Last Mile and WCGHW selected two of these areas, Khayelitsha and Mitchell's Plain in the Western Cape, as focal communities for a pilot campaign. By early April 2022, the vaccination rates in these areas had slowed, with the 50+ age group having a vaccination rate of only 50%.

Project Last Mile and WCGHW identified six faith-based organizations (FBOs) and their leaders to engage with. The aim was to work with these pastors to encourage at least 100 members of their congregations and communities to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and receive health checks during the wellness days that were being organized.

Project Last Mile developed a toolkit of recommended resources and messaging to support the FBOs in engaging their congregations on various health topics including COVID-19. The toolkit contained communication and activation ideas to inspire the congregations and communities to embrace wellness and healthy living. The campaign was rolled out over the course of five weeks.

Each FBO that reached the target of 100 COVID-19 vaccinations received R9,000 (~USD 450) as a development levy to invest into the infrastructure of their church. By working closely with the pastors to educate them and co-create the messaging they would share with their congregation, pastors were able to educate and mobilize their congregations and communities.

The results included:

906
COVID-19 vaccinations administered during the pilot period, **exceeding the target by 51%.**

56%
conversion rate of wellness day attendees to COVID-19 vaccine uptake.

2,472
wellness screenings conducted for attendees, including HIV or TB screening.

Average vaccination rates during the campaign period were **110% higher than the average** performance in the pilot catchment areas before the campaign.

85% **of congregant members** indicated that the sermons shifted their thinking around COVID-19 vaccinations and their wellness, suggesting **religious leaders were effective messengers** to motivate perception shifts on COVID-19 vaccinations.
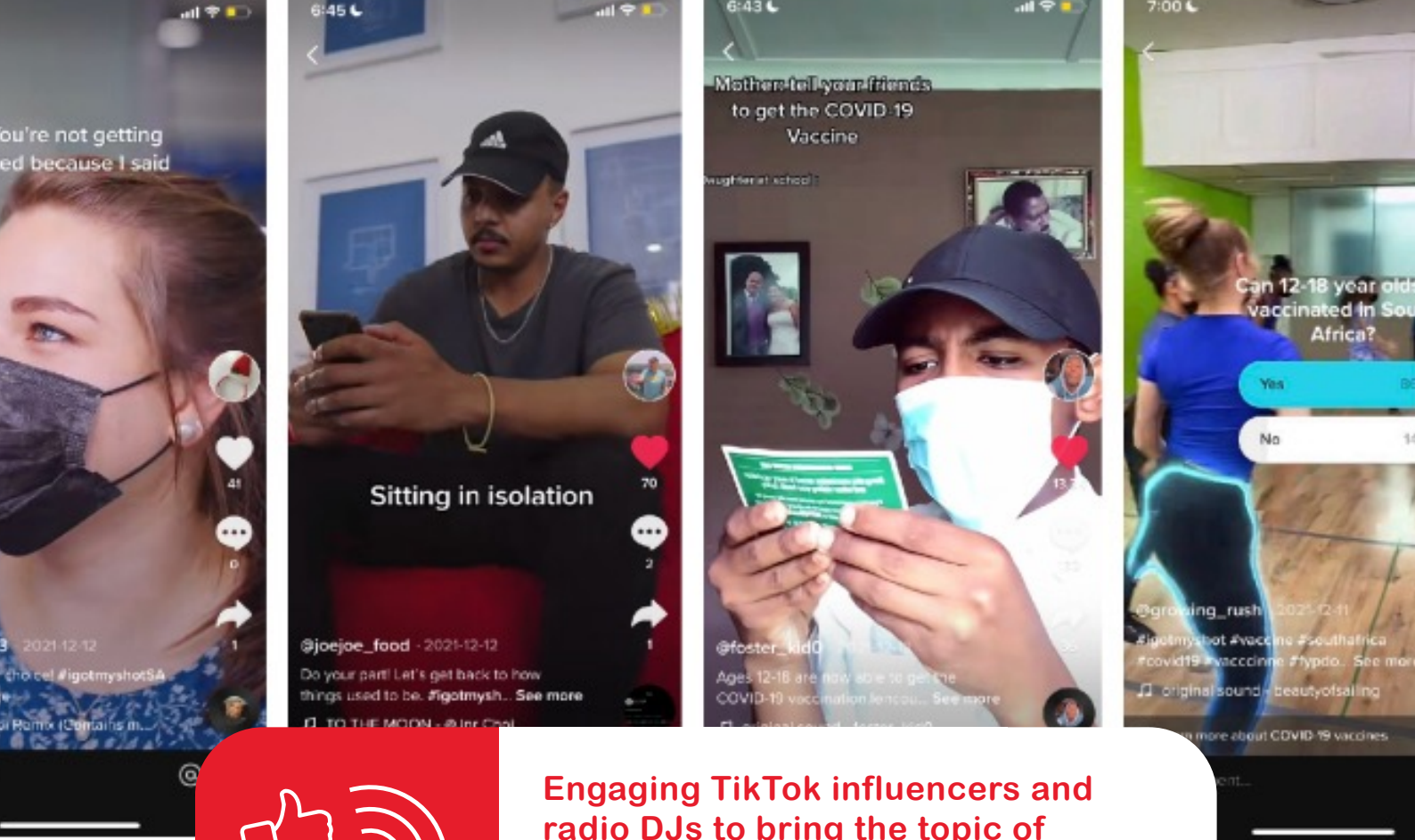
Engaging TikTok influencers and radio DJs to bring the topic of COVID-19 vaccines back into conversation amongst the youth

Project Last Mile collaborated with South Africa's National Department of Health (NDoH) to bring the topic of COVID-19 vaccines back into the conversation amongst youth (18–34) at a time when the national state of disaster had been lifted, complacency was high and pervasive vaccine myths still persisted.

Working with an influencer marketing media agency, three radio DJs and 14 TikTok influencers were identified and vetted to be part of the campaign. The objective was to use these influencers to increase authentic and positive conversations about COVID-19 vaccines, address confidence issues in the vaccine, and test the hypothesis that highlighting social norms around vaccinations can increase vaccine uptake.

The radio and TikTok influencers were provided with key messaging and facts aligned to NDoH's COVID-19 vaccine messaging. The media agency had one-on-one calls with the radio DJs (which included a doctor with his own channel) and their stations to talk them through the campaign and brainstorm what content they could produce that would resonate with their listeners. The content was then aired during the DJs' shows, with the DJs encouraging listeners to call in and share their experiences about COVID-19 and vaccinations. Social media posts were also created with the radio social media team and posted on the radio's social media handles.

For the TikTok influencers, the media agency organized a full-day workshop in Cape Town with the influencers to educate them about the topic and the objectives of the campaign. The workshop then included the influencers brainstorming with each other about what videos they could produce. They used props and other creative materials to get inspiration. The key components of the videos were approved but then the influencers were allowed to create the videos on their own and in their own voice. The campaign also included TikTok Lives with some of the influencers who were parents, as well as polls throughout the campaign to gauge people's attitudes towards vaccines.

From April to June 2022, the campaign **reached over**

12 million

people, with TikTok alone accumulating

10 million

views.

On TikTok, there were

171,375

engagements, where

98% were 'likes,' 1%

were 'shares,' and 1% were 'comments,' with the **majority of comments being positive.**

A key learning was to allow selected influencers to create content for the different channels they were native to, in their voice – the radio DJs produced different types of content compared to the TikTok influencers. But all the content was centered around the same evidence-based message that would resonate.

Important: Some social media platforms restrict health-related campaigns due to misinformation. For our TikTok COVID-19 vaccine campaign, we needed official letters from our donor and local government to prove legitimacy.

Working with micro and nano social media influencers to improve attitudes around COVID-19 vaccines amongst youth and parents

From February 2023, 12–17 year olds were able to get vaccinated against COVID-19 in South Africa. This was also at time when complacency was high both for this age group and youth more generally, as well as for parents who needed to provide consent for vaccination.

Feedback from previous campaigns indicated that young people wanted to engage, ask questions, and share their concerns rather than being spoken to. Studies also showed that friends and family played a significant role as influencers, and social media was an important information channel for young people.

In order to try and increase the volume of COVID-19 conversations and overcome hesitancy among 12¬–17 year olds, 18–24 year olds, and their parents, Project Last Mile collaborated with the NDoH in South Africa and AIfluence, an influencer marketing platform that identifies micro and nano influencers using AI (artificial intelligence and algorithms).

The campaign was run in two metro areas of South Africa, Durban and Johannesburg, where there was a significant presence of micro and nano influencers. A pre and post campaign survey was also deployed via the influencers to understand people's attitudes toward vaccines before and after the campaign. The survey was also deployed in Cape Town via influencers to that metro as a control.

Through the AIfluence platform, a total of 160 micro and nano influencers were identified, vetted and onboarded onto the campaign. They were mostly students between 18 and 24, or parents of 12–17 year olds. The majority were women. The influencers were provided with an onboarding pack with messages and campaign objectives. Some influencers directly shared the approved messaging with their followers, while others created their own content using the key messages that resonated most effectively with their audience.

Total reach across X (Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok:

3 million

people over eight weeks

Engagements recorded with audiences:

54,385

Overall **engagement rate:**

1.8%

X (Twitter)

identified as the **most effective platform** for influencer interactions

Survey results indicated a **21% increase in positive sentiment** and a **40% decrease in negative sentiment** around COVID-19 vaccines post-campaign.

X (Twitter) was the most effective platform for influencers to share and have engagements with their followers. The surveys that were run showed that there was a 21% uplift in positive sentiment and a 40% decrease in negative sentiment around COVID-19 vaccines after the campaign.

While social media platforms help to drive engagement and reach, some platforms create restrictions on what back-end data you can receive, such as TikTok. Understand what data you have access to before starting the campaign.

Additionally, tracking actual behavior change is difficult, but monitoring sentiment and engagement on social media is more manageable. However, due to diverse measurement methods and metrics across platforms, aggregating impact becomes challenging and hinders comparability.

Leveraging a range of social media influencers and national celebrities to encourage people to vaccinate against COVID-19

At the start of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Eswatini, there was limited social media messaging targeting younger populations to counter misinformation online. As the supply of the vaccines increased in Eswatini, so did the myths about their safety and efficacy. As these myths were predominantly being spread on social media, it drove significant vaccine hesitancy amongst young adults and adults.

While the Ministry of Health's (MoH) "Do it All" Campaign worked to dispel myths on other platforms, there was a significant opportunity to tackle the myths head on social media platforms. Project Last Mile worked with the MoH in Eswatini to create a digital campaign using both Facebook and Instagram focused on:

- Building awareness on the importance of taking the COVID-19 vaccine on social media.
- Educating on the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccine, which included myth busting on social media.
- Driving traffic to the registration page for COVID-19 vaccines on the MoH's website.

As the pandemic evolved, Project Last Mile leveraged the dynamic social media space and adjusted the communication to use a variety of messages, messengers, message formats and media insights to drive awareness, education, and engagement.

The campaign followed two distinct phases. The first phase was from December 2021 to July 2022 and included myth busting, clear call to action to vaccinate via the MoH registration website, disseminating frequently asked questions (FAQs), using videos to address confidence issues, and using religious and medical influencers to respond and answer to FAQs.

This approach then evolved in August 2022 until Q2 of 2023 to using a range of influencers to encourage citizens to keep vaccinating, use A/B testing methodologies to test the efficacy of different influencers, shift the narrative of COVID-19 vaccination being part of overall healthcare and other health priorities and using digital media to support private sector activations.

By engaging in a range of A/B tests, Project Last Mile was able to establish what type of messengers (e.g., influencers) and what type of messages were the most effective to drive click-through rates to the MoH's website to register for the vaccine. Subsequently, the team optimized these influencers and their posts using digital spend.

18-month
campaign duration

Reached over
500,000
social media users

Achieved **100% coverage** of Eswatini's social media user population

Generated **increased click-throughs** to the Ministry of Health's vaccine registration portal

The campaign's learning phase revealed the significance of employing diverse influencers at various pandemic stages. Different influencer categories impact distinct audiences, emphasizing the ineffectiveness of relying solely on one type (e.g., only celebrities) for a national campaign. Surprisingly, comedians proved most effective in driving engagement and click-throughs. While other influencers achieved high reach, they didn't generate as many click-throughs, suggesting the target audience prefers lighter, comedic, and engaging content.

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CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION TO PUBLIC HEALTH

Currently, using influencers to promote health or an intervention uptake is an underutilized modality in public health. Influencer marketing in public health helps to recognize that the role of the messenger is as important as the message itself. It also helps to ensure health communication remains relevant and resonates with your target audience. Other benefits include being able to:

- Strengthen relationships.
- Create credible messages and facilitate the authenticity of the message.
- Integrate two-way communications into campaigns, opening up spaces for people to engage with trusted messengers on certain topics. (This is different from traditional communication platforms such as TV or radio PSAs which are one-way or unidirectional.)

The key to leveraging influencer marketing in public health, however, is to identify and manage potential risks, which we hope this guide helps with. By using the building blocks explained in this guide, and including risk mitigation plans in your campaign, influencers have the ability to appeal to and communicate with hard-to-reach target populations: right person, right message, right platform, right time.

For many community-based influencers, however, it is important to invest in long-term relationships and influential community groups that can be called upon to advocate and support your broader objectives. Influencers are diverse; and if engaged systematically, they can keep healthcare communications interesting, engaging, relevant and ultimately, more impactful.
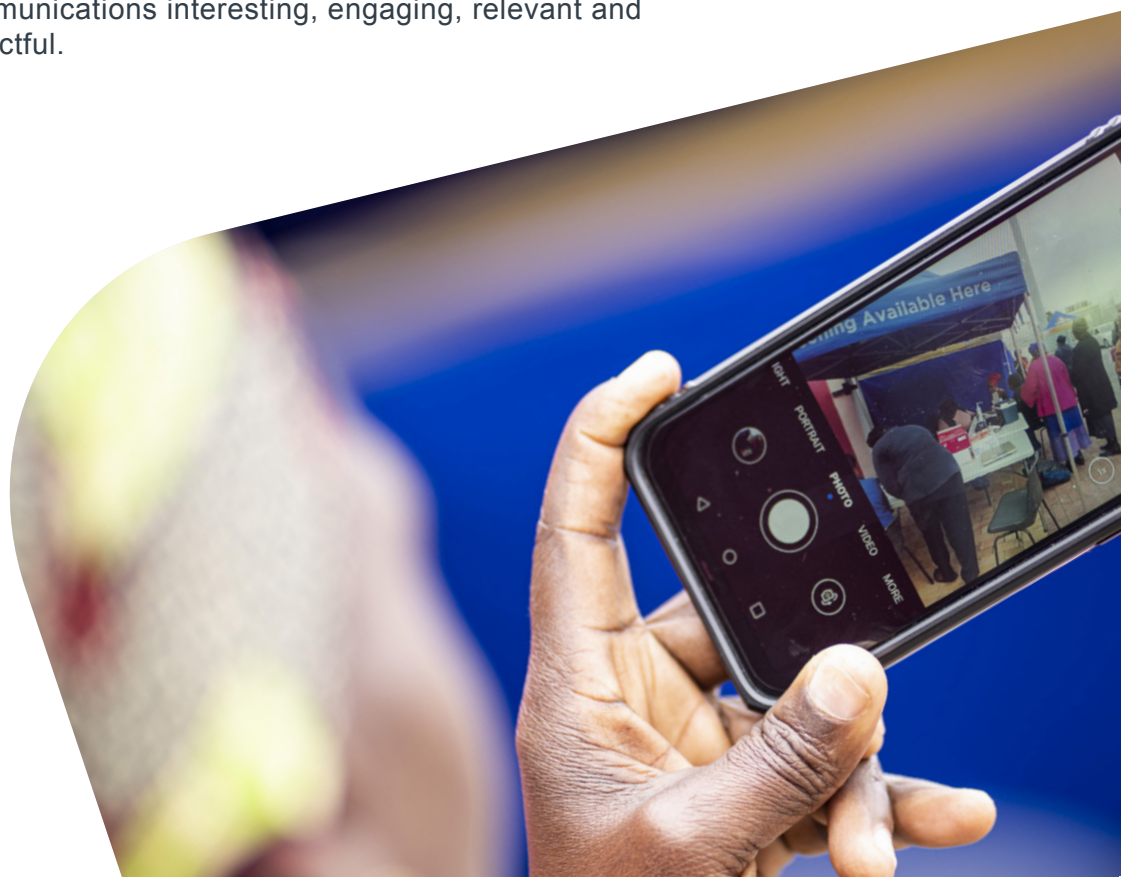
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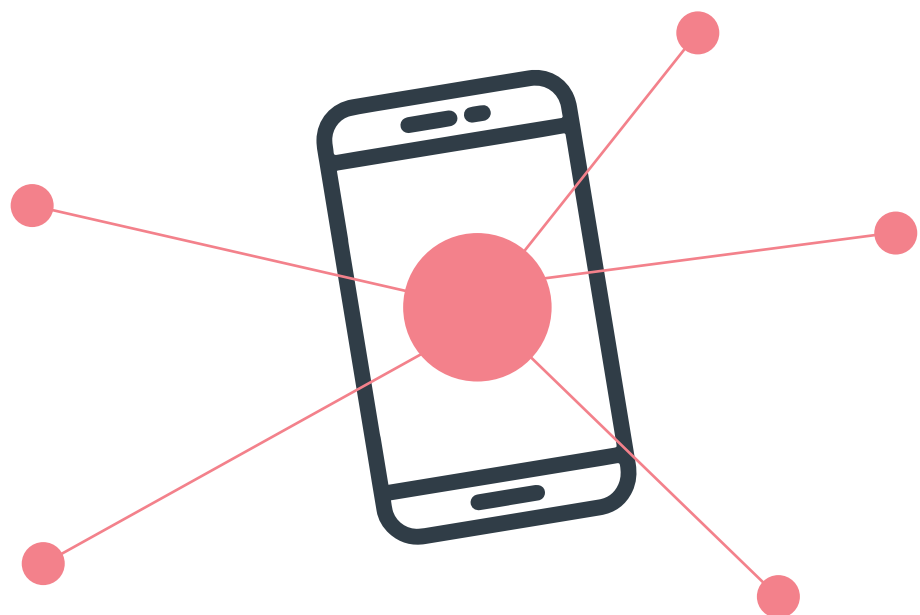
For more information:

For more information or advice on influencer marketing, contact Camilla Osborne at camilla@projectlastmile.com.

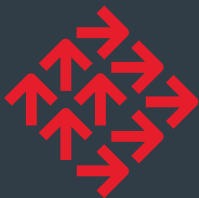*For general information about our work contact info@projectlastmile.com or go to projectlastmile.com.*

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Project
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Project Last Mile works closely with ministries of health and donor partners to apply the Coca-Cola System's best practices in route-to-market and marketing to improve access to, availability and uptake of life-saving medicines and health services down to the last mile in Africa.

For more information see **www.projectlastmile.com**