

DAGMARA TARKA, EMILIA ZAKRZEWSKA, *Ciemna strona influencer marketingu*, Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2024, pp. 134, ISBN: 978-83-972806-0-1.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18290/rns2025.0011>

*Ciemna strona influencer marketingu* [The dark side of influencer marketing] is an analysis of one of the key areas of modern social media marketing—influencer marketing. The authors—psychologist Dagmara Tarka and Dr. Emilia Zakrzewska, a social sciences scholar—attempt to unveil the mechanisms of this industry along with its hidden social, psychological, and ethical costs.

The book takes an interdisciplinary approach, combining research from the fields of social communication, marketing, and media psychology. Zakrzewska and Tarka are researchers and experts in public relations and influencer marketing, and their practical experience is reflected in the book's content. A particularly noteworthy aspect is that the authors were involved in the development of the recommendations of the President of the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection (Urząd Ochrony Konkurencji i Konsumentów – UOKiK) regarding the labeling of advertisements in social media, which further strengthens the value of their research.

The publication consists of a series of interviews conducted with influencers representing various market segments—ranging from lifestyle, beauty, and fashion to education and psychology. The interviewees reveal the behind-the-scenes realities of their work, particularly the challenges related to social pressure, Internet addiction, hate speech, and ethical dilemmas in commercial collaborations.

The authors adopt a qualitative approach, using the in-depth interview (IDI) method as a foundation for presenting the issue. This allows them to capture the nuances of influencers' work in the context of both the opportunities and challenges they face. The book encourages the reader to draw individual conclusions and reflect on the hidden realities of online creators. This methodological choice enables the presentation of influencer marketing from the perspective of its practitioners.

The publication raises several crucial issues related to influencer marketing. Readers gain insight into the challenges of being an online creator and the realities

behind the seemingly perfect social media image. The authors guide the audience through the multifaceted world of influencer marketing, revealing both its bright and dark sides.

One of the book's key themes is the path influencers must take to achieve success, and the specific demands imposed on them by the industry and the digital space. While the work of an influencer is often perceived as glamorous and easy, in reality, it requires immense self-discipline, constant engagement, creativity, and readiness to work around the clock. Online creators face numerous difficulties, such as financial instability at the beginning of their careers, uncertainty about their professional future, the necessity of building an audience from scratch, and the ability to adapt to rapidly changing trends and platform algorithms. Success in this industry is not merely a result of talent and passion but also of systematic effort and strategic personal brand management.

One of the most frequently discussed aspects in the publication is the impact of social media activities on influencers' mental health. While influencers are often seen as enjoying professional freedom and high earnings, they face immense psychological pressure. Being an influencer means constant online presence, the need to produce engaging content quickly, and continuous exposure to criticism and public scrutiny. Many professionals in this field struggle with stress, burnout, loneliness, and social media addiction. The pressure to create new content, maintain audience engagement, and compete with algorithms often leads to chronic exhaustion and mental health issues.

The book also explores the boundaries of authenticity in social media. It exposes the false image of a "perfect life," which often dominates influencer content. Posts on Instagram and TikTok are typically carefully curated moments designed to create a specific narrative. This idealized portrayal of everyday life can result in unrealistic audience expectations and frustration caused by comparisons to unattainable standards.

In the context of authenticity, the issue of ethics in influencer marketing is also addressed, particularly regarding commercial collaborations. The authors highlight the role of regulations in this area, especially following the 2022 introduction of UOKiK's recommendations on ad labeling. The interviews confirm that these regulations have increased transparency, although some influencers still attempt to conceal the advertising nature of their content.

One of the book's standout topics is the growing role of influencers representing the silver generation (50+). A particularly noteworthy example is Beata Borucka, known as "Mądra Babcia" [Wise Grandma], who successfully challenges stereotypes about older women in social media. Her work focuses on

demonstrating that mature influencers not only actively participate in the digital world but also build strong communities, redefining societal perceptions of their generation.

The interview puts emphasis on the fact that more and more women over 50 are engaging with social media, using it as a platform to share knowledge and experiences, as well as promote positive role models. Borucka plays a crucial role in this process, inspiring her audience to lead an active and conscious lifestyle. Her mission is not only to combat ageism but also to promote self-fulfillment, confidence, and openness to new technologies among older women.

The book makes a valuable contribution to the debate on influencer marketing, presenting the industry's mechanisms in an accessible yet well-documented manner. A key strength of the publication is the diversity of interviewees—both in terms of age and professional experience—which allows for a multifaceted view of influencer marketing as a cultural, social, and economic phenomenon.

However, despite its many strengths, the publication also has some limitations. One of its main shortcomings is the lack of a broader theoretical context. Although the interviews provide valuable empirical data, they lack deeper analysis and a connection to existing research in media sociology, digital economy, or communication theory. As a result, the interpretation of findings relies primarily on readers' individual reflections, drawn from the interviewees' statements. Additionally, it is difficult at times to distinguish subjective experiences from broader market mechanisms. Incorporating references to previous studies, as well as summarizing and comparing findings with scientific theories, could significantly enhance the book and make it a more useful resource for researchers and students exploring influencer marketing.

Another challenge is the varied nature of the interviews—some have a distinctly professional tone, while others are more personal. While this approach increases the authenticity of the narrative and provides a deeper understanding of the emotional aspects of influencer work, it also introduces stylistic and methodological inconsistencies. Moreover, the relatively short interviews are both an advantage and a drawback. On the one hand, their conciseness makes the book accessible and prevents the reader from feeling overwhelmed; on the other hand, in some cases, it may leave readers wanting more depth, particularly regarding more complex issues. Longer, more in-depth analyses could provide a fuller picture of the phenomenon under investigation.

Overall, *Ciemna strona influencer marketingu* is a valuable position for those researching or working in social media and digital marketing. Its strength lies

primarily in presenting influencers' voices and reflecting on the challenges associated with the profession. The book provides insight into the industry's backstage realities, while also encouraging a critical analysis of its impact on both creators and audiences. It can serve as an important study material in such academic fields as social communication, public relations, journalism, and marketing. Moreover, it may be used as a starting point for further research on the consequences of influencer marketing and the effects of digital culture on individuals' social and psychological well-being.

Despite certain theoretical shortcomings, the publication contributes significantly to the debate on the ethics of influencer marketing and the mediation of everyday life. Its engaging narrative style allows the recipient to feel like a participant in a dynamic discussion, which makes the reading experience both insightful and enjoyable.

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