

CONTENT WITH CONSCIENCE

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CONCLUSIONS

Influencers are an important phenomenon in today's media landscape. They are a source of information, inspiration and entertainment for many. Children and young people in particular are watching less and less traditional media and are increasingly consuming news and information through social media. They look up to influencers as role models. Because the audience feels close to these influencers, they often believe in the authenticity and reliability of their message as well. Influencers have a significant impact on society, public opinion and the personal views of their audience.

AT THE HEART OF THE EVENT WERE TWO QUESTIONS: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF INFLUENCERS AND ONLINE CONTENT CREATORS IN THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE AND HOW CAN THIS GROUP BE SUPPORTED IN THIS ROLE? BOTH EXPERTS AND INFLUENCERS FROM DIFFERENT EU MEMBER STATES SPOKE ON THIS TOPIC AND SHARED THEIR EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS.



In preparation for this event, the Presidency conducted a survey of 100 influencers across 26 EU member states. This survey showed that although influencers rate their knowledge of the legislation they are subjected to as high, they score lower on true/false questions that measure this knowledge objectively. While they also indicate that they are good at dealing with topics such as disinformation, mental wellbeing, cyberbullying and online hate speech, they are also willing to educate themselves further on these topics. Influencers would also like to be more involved in policies that affect them.

The event revealed the **5 KEY PRINCIPLES** that are essential for influencers:

- › **TRANSPARENCY:** influencers should be transparent about the content they post and whether it is sponsored or not.
- › **AUTHENTICITY:** influencers share their personal lives with their audience and in doing so build an authenticity-based relationship.
- › **MINDFULNESS:** influencers should be mindful of the impact they have on their audience.
- › **ACCOUNTABILITY:** influencers are responsible for their content.
- › **SUPPORT:** influencers need to be supported in all these principles.

The need for more support for influencers to develop the right skills to deal with all aspects of their activities was a constant in the event. Influencers are often entrepreneurs who are building a business. They should understand relevant legal obligations and their rights. They should also know how to react to followers struggling with mental health, deal with online hate speech, cyberbullying and disinformation. Several actors can take up a role in supporting influencers on these topics: policymakers,

influencer agencies, the platforms influencers post on, the brands influencers work with.... There should be more collaboration between these actors and influencers should be more actively involved in policy dialogue.

The discussions in the conference feed into the draft Council conclusions on the support for influencers as online content creators. At the moment, influencers are still viewed mainly from an economic and commercial point of view even though their influence on our society, and specifically on young people, goes much further. By putting this topic on the European agenda, the Belgian presidency aims to draw attention to the impact of influencers and would like to initiate first steps in supporting them in this role.

Influencers must be aware of their impact and should have the necessary media literacy skills to deal with it. They must have a sense of responsibility towards their audience and understand the potential impact that sharing mis- and disinformation, online hate speech, cyberbullying and other harmful content may have on their audience. Furthermore, they should know how to react suitably when confronted with these issues. The European level can help to support influencers to develop and strengthen these skills. The council conclusions will be on the agenda of the Culture and Audiovisual Council on 14 May 2024.



THE ROLE OF INFLUENCERS IN THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Influencers are important actors in the digital media landscape who are closer to their audience than traditional media. They are often passionate entrepreneurs but also opinion leaders. Influencers feel a lot of pressure to not only connect with their followers through an authenticity-based relationship and meet the expectations of their audience, but also to comply with many legal obligations. Even though they are becoming more professional, influencers often still have difficulties finding correct information due to a lack of the right support.

BREAK OUT: SHOULD INFLUENCERS FOLLOW AN ETHICAL CODE?

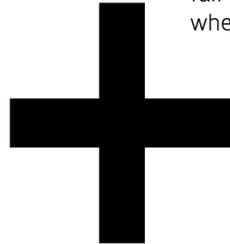
A lot of influencers are aware of their responsibility and would be open to some sort of ethical code. Developing a self-regulatory initiative is a good way forward. There need to be principles, tools, education and institutions to support a code. The code needs to consider where the responsibility of an influencer starts and where it ends. There are still a lot of discussions to be held on who could be responsible for such a code and what should be in it.

BREAK OUT: INFLUENCERS AND DISINFORMATION

The panel on influencers and disinformation emphasized the importance of media literacy education, collaboration between influencers and traditional media, and the need for platforms to take responsibility in addressing disinformation. Suggestions for policy interventions included supporting influencers with resources and guidance and promoting ethical codes of conduct. Despite challenges such as the voluntary nature of ethical codes and the blurred lines of responsibility, the panel underscored the significance of collective efforts in combating disinformation and promoting responsible online behaviour.

BREAK OUT: ONLINE HATE SPEECH & CYBERBULLYING

Aggressive online behaviour is too often considered to be normal. Influencers can have a role-model function in this: they can speak up about online hate speech they encounter, report and showcase the impact. However, they can't do this alone; all relevant actors (legislators, law enforcement, followers, teachers, parents and children) need to take online hate speech seriously and know how to react to it. It's important to make sure relevant information on this topic (e.g. where they can find support) reaches the influencers. Platforms currently fall short in their responsibilities of support for influencers when it comes to online hate speech and cyberbullying.



BREAK OUT: ADVERTISING AND RESPONSIBLE INFLUENCING

The panel on advertising and responsible influencing covered various aspects, including current legislation, ethical considerations, and the role of platforms in ensuring transparency. There is growing awareness among influencers of their legal requirements. However, influencers still express challenges in understanding and complying with these complex regulations. Research also shows there are still low rates of compliance especially in affiliate marketing. There was a consensus among the panel on the need for clearer guidelines and training for influencers, with the Influencer Legal Hub as a good example. The panel also emphasized the importance of collective efforts towards self-regulation, training, and enforcement to promote responsible advertising practices in the influencer industry.

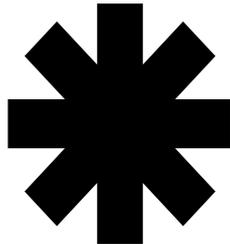


BREAK OUT: ETHICS OF KIDFLUENCERS, MOM/DADFLUENCERS, SHARENTING

The panel on ethics of kidfluencers, mom/dadfluencers and sharenting stressed the need to raise awareness about children's rights: their right of privacy, their right to be forgotten and acting in their best interest. Kidfluencers and sharenting are new and continuously evolving trends, so it is important to keep track of the short and long term consequences and evolutions. The panel asks all relevant and involved stakeholders to get together and discuss on what to do to support this topic.

THE ROLE OF PLATFORMS IN SUPPORT FOR INFLUENCERS AND ONLINE CONTENT CREATORS

Platforms want to connect people, therefore security is important to give all users (creators and audience) a positive experience. This needs to be ensured through algorithms, terms and conditions, legislation and the enforcement thereof. Influencers need more accessible support when it comes to this legislation and terms and conditions. There should be a focus not only on media literacy but also on AI literacy, especially in regards to the opacity of platform algorithms.



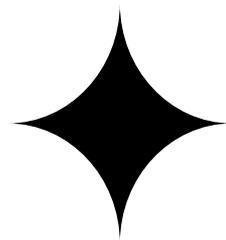
BREAK OUT: MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS OF INFLUENCERS

There still is a taboo on mental health in general and especially when you pursue a career as an influencer. Influencers can lose credibility if they admit they don't know how to help followers with dark thought, or they are struggling themselves. Influencers could connect with each other in order to find a community to tackle mental health issues. The panel members would find it useful to look at influencers in the sphere of 'creative workers'. In that way the current strategies for creative industries can be transposed to influencers.

INTERNATIONAL EVOLUTIONS IN SUPPORT FOR INFLUENCERS AND ONLINE CONTENT CREATORS

The European Commission gave an overview of the evolutions of legislation until now. The Commission remarks that member states sometimes have different approaches towards influencers and will consider whether an EU initiative is needed.

UNESCO highlighted the need for education and empowering influencers. UNESCO is working on promoting exchanges between journalists and the influencer community.



SHOWCASES

SUPPORTING INFLUENCERS

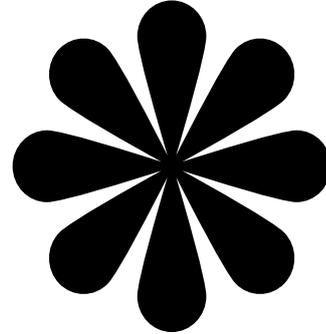
Three examples were showcased:

1.

THE "INFLUENCERFAQ"

The "influencerFAQ" is a practical guide with tips and tricks for online content creators initiated by the Flemish minister of media. These tips and tricks help influencers with practical issues like regulation for marketing and taxes, at the same time making them aware of their impact and the responsibility they have to demonstrate towards their followers.

Website: <https://www.deinfluencerfaq.be> (NL) or [pdf-version](#) (ENG)



2.

THE "SCHOOL OF RESPONSIBLE INFLUENCING"

The "School of Responsible influencing (Škola odgovornog influensanja)" organised by the safer internet centre in Croatia is a digital platform through which registered participants have the opportunity to listen to six educational modules on the topic of internet safety, followed by a knowledge test consisting of 5-10 questions related to the completed module. After the participants have completed all six modules and successfully solved the tests, they will receive a Certificate of Responsible Influence.

Website: <https://influensajodgovorno.hr> (HR)

3.

THE EUROPEAN INFLUENCERS ACADEMY

The European Influencers Academy organised by NHL Stenden focusses on responsible influencing through events, masterclasses and workshops, in which influencers engage in meaningful dialogue with other influencers, students, local businesses and government representatives.

Website: <https://europeaninfluencers-academy.com> (ENG)