

Ecological Products and the role of Influencers and Greenfluencers in their Promotion

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Abstract: Ecological themes are becoming a new phenomenon of the 21st century. More and more people are aware of social responsibility and the impact of their behavior on the environment. The aim of this paper is to analyze green energy in the offer of electricity providers. The analysis deals with the involvement of influencers and greenfluencers in the campaigns of electricity providers. It is the influencers and greenfluencers that can reach the right target group that has an ecological mindset. The question is whether the involvement of influencers and greenfluencers in green energy campaigns is effective. The aim of the paper is to find out how effective are green energy campaigns in Slovakia on the basis of an analysis. To do that, the paper used the social media measurement and reporting tool Zoomsphere.

Keywords: ecological electricity, ecological products, facebook, greenfluencers, influencers, influence of greenfluencers, instagram

1. The power of influencers on social networks

Nowadays, it is increasingly difficult to promote broader social issues affecting many people other than through social media. Instagram is one of the most widespread social platforms not only in the world but also in Slovakia. On Instagram, people have a well-thought-out communication strategy and are digital literate. To keep up-to-date and get a daily dose of news, Instagram users follow influencers who provide them with content that is relevant to them. Influencers and their involvement in digital campaigns is a matter of course today, and what is more, even the world outside Instagram is learning to perceive influencers as a relevant source of information.

Companies aware of their social responsibility in terms of environmental impact wishing to communicate their environmental message to their customers often turn to influencers, in particular greenfluencers, to establish a long-term collaboration to mutual satisfaction.

There are several initiatives on Instagram today that are not indifferent to life and environmental issues. In Slovakia, these include the Platforma udržateľnosti, activists Michal Sabo and Natália Pažická, Sandra Sviteková from Dejepis Inak and, for example, the popular Slovak snowboarder and mother Baša Številová.

According to Piatrov (2019), social sites are the 21st century phenomenon. „They have formed the possibilities of creating content, spreading it, getting information practically at the moment of its creations, but they also transformed themselves into fully functional communication channels.”

Users are spending more and more time on social networks, and developers are constantly coming up with innovations (Záuškova, 2019).

1.1 Influencers and ecological topics

The essence of every influencer's work is to establish two-way communication with their audience (followers) and then keep it up (make it targeted and personalized). This is something that companies find difficult doing on social networks (Aujeský, 2019). After all, no one wants to chat with a large company, because it is clear that it is a member of a social media team who replies. With influencers, however, fans/ followers communicate with a real person whom they feel they know and look up to. Brands can use this very personal communication channel (influencer) to their advantage and get their message through to people who would normally be immune to the classic form of advertising.

However, ecology and the environment are hotly debated topics not only in Slovakia, but also all over the world. The environmental issues should reach as many people as possible. These should be communicated in a language of masses - activities of influencers on Instagram. Using influencers, brands can thus establish themselves as socially responsible players who care about the future of everyone on the planet (influencers

would be seen as such, too). The environmental issues and sustainable behavior are hot trends of today and many brands follow suit not only in their communication strategy but also in their actions (Young, 2018).

Graphic design also plays an important role in communication. It is obvious that influencers must use graphically interesting elements that will be interesting for the observer. *“Graphics design finds its implementation in a wide range of social life spheres. It constitutes the basis of printed media, as are books, daily prints, magazines. It also finds itself in advertisements and marketing, where it helps businesses to build up their identity, save money, increase the value of the products, services, or even the value of the business entity, organization, or institution itself (Jurišová 2020).”*

It is important that businesses constantly innovate their products. Without innovation, companies would not advance. Organic products are also innovations in the company. A sign of innovation is a new added value to a product or service, the introduction of new technology, organizational change, or corporate culture (Kusá, 2017).

Záuškova (2017) states that the aim of green marketing is to develop and promote products that seek to minimize negative environmental impacts and increase their quality.

1.1. Green marketing trend

Green marketing is already a relatively widespread technical term and is a set of several practices that aim to increase the value of a brand, goods or service related to environmental aspects and social responsibility. Topics such as zero waste, upcycling and recycling of used things are becoming an important part of the lives of companies and people. Today, companies are trying to pack goods in recycled paper, they warn in the body of the e-mail that attachments are not unnecessarily printed on paper, and cloud stores such as Dropbox are gaining popularity precisely because of their carbon footprint by forwarding large files not in the e-mail body but via a direct line download from the web. A current initiative in Slovakia is, for example, the backup of PET bottles and cans.

The trend of sustainability has gradually spread among the world's influencers among local opinion leaders, and by applying green themes, they will gain a competitive advantage and, in particular, easier social acceptance. These topics are important for our work and in the article we will try to clarify their importance in combination with a large brand of electricity supplier in western Slovakia - ZSE Energia a.s.

2. Aim and methodology

The aim of the paper is to find out how effective are green energy campaigns in Slovakia on the basis of an analysis. To do that, the paper used the social media measurement and reporting tool Zoomsphere. The tool allows for the analysis of the following:

- increase in the number of followers,
- average number of interactions,
- interactions by days,
- interactions by hours,
- hashtag use,
- post success report
- success of celebrities in the campaign on Instagram.

Data was analyzed from January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021.

3. Green energy communication strategy in a digital environment

The term "green energy" is gaining prominence not only in Slovakia but also across Europe. Green energy means electricity that is produced from renewable sources. Green energy is also provided by electricity suppliers in Slovakia. There are three large electricity suppliers in Slovakia, namely ZSE Energia a.s., SSE a.s. and Východoslovenská energetika a.s. ZSE defines green energy as energy that is produced from 100% renewable sources. However, ZSE is not able to deliver this energy to the customers, even though they pay for it.

All three companies promote green energy on their websites. The Internet is a place where clients look for eco-friendly products. Companies should promote and raise awareness of their green products so that information

reaches widest audience possible. The paper analyzes communication tools of the three energy suppliers focusing only on green energy communication strategy. The results of the survey are outlined in the table below.

Table 1: Promotion of green energy

Company	Information on the website	Facebook	Instagram	Youtube	Working with greenfluencers	Working with influencers
ZSE Energia a.s.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
SSE a.s.	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Východoslovenská energetika a.s.	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

The table shows that ZSE Energia a.s. uses all the tools outlined above to communicate its green energy strategy. SSE a.s., uses two out of five, and Východoslovenská energetika a.s. does not use any of the above tools to promote its green energy strategy (even though it informs about its eco-efforts on its website). ZSE Energia a.s. is the only company of the three to share the number of customers using green energy. At the beginning of 2022, 85,000 households used the company's green energy (Slovenské domácnosti majú..., 2021). Other companies did not share this information. We can only assume that it is through active communication of ZSE Energia a.s. the number of customers using this energy is increasing. The next part of the paper analyses ZSE Energia a.s.'s communication regarding its green products.

3.1 The role of influencers and greenfluencers in the green energy communication strategy of ZSE Energia a.s.

ZSE Energia a.s. implements green energy communication strategy on several online platforms. It could be said that they have become a leader in raising awareness of green energy in Slovakia. The following section focuses on the analysis of online tools used in the green energy communication strategy.

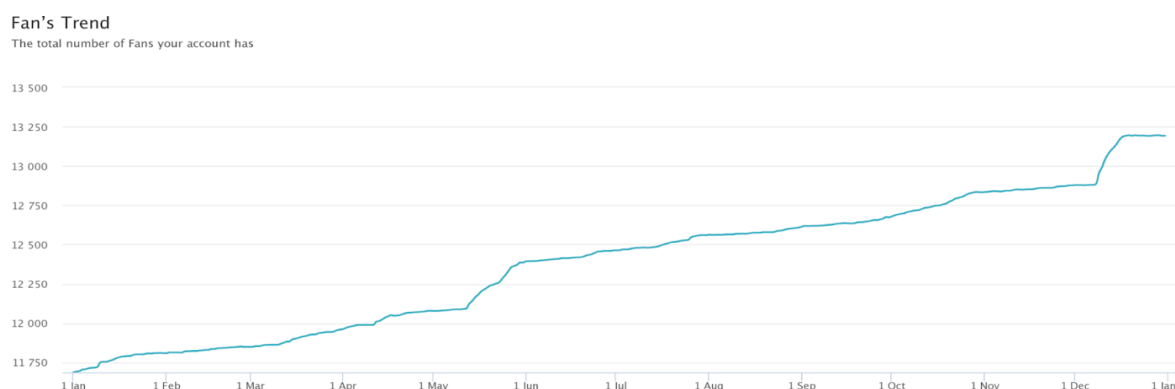


Figure 1: The increase in the number of followers of the ZSE's Facebook page from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021

Source: Zoomsphere, 2/2022

ZSE Energia a.s. recorded an increase in the number of fans on the social network Facebook in one year as it gained 1,510 fans in 2021, which represents an increase of 13% compared to the base. This year, ZSE has been promoting green energy more actively. The figure below shows how people reacted to its green products. In 2021, ZSE added a total of 117 posts, which, inter alia, also addressed green energy. The most popular posts related to competitions. Of the ten most popular posts, three posts focused on social media competition.

ZSE Energia a.s. uses Instagram as the main communication channel for the promotion of green energy. This profile was created in March 2021, and mainly focuses on and promotes green energy. Some posts are promoted on the profile by well-known influencers and greenfluencers. The profile has a total of 531 followers (as of February 20, 2022).

Top Hashtags
Your most used Instagram tags

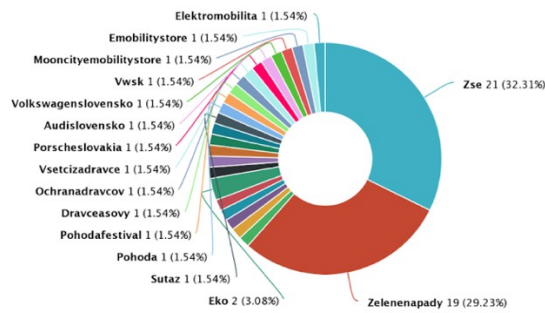


Figure 2: Most used instagram tags

Source: Zoomsphere, 2/2022

The figure shows that the second most used tag is "zelenenapady (green ideas)", which refer to organic products or green energy. By doing so, ZSE Energia a.s. wants to draw the attention of the fans to the values of the company.

Most Engaging Hashtags by Interactions
The tags that are generating the most interactions in your account

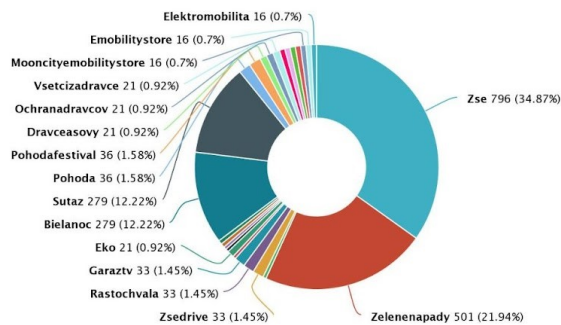


Figure 3: The Tags that are generating the most interactions on Instagram account

Source: Zoomsphere, 2/2022

The second figure shows the interaction of the tags. The "ZSE" tag generated the largest interaction, followed by the tag "zelenenapady (green ideas)". This shows that environmental topics really work on Instagram and make up a significant proportion of profile interactions. ZSE Energia a.s. cooperates with influencers and greenfluencers in the promotion of green energy and green ideas. The paper further analyzes whether involvement of influencers and greenfluencers makes a difference and how these influencers and greenfluencers interact with the profile of ZSE Energia a. s.

Table 2: Aim and reach infectors

Name	No. of followers	Topics	Influencer/greenfluencer
Natália Pažická	45,6 K	sustainable fashion climate	Greenfluencer
Baša Številová	35,3 K	sport motherhood	Influencer
Michal Sabo	54,4 K	climate green policy	Greenfluencer

Name	No. of followers	Topics	Influencer/greenfluencer
Platforma Udržateľnosti	12,5 K	sustainable fashion SWAP	Greenfluencer
Sandra of Dejepis Inak	59,1 K	history EKO history	Influencer

Source: Zoomsphere, 2/2022

ZSE Energia a.s. advertises its activities in the field of ecology, green topics and green energy on the social network Instagram @zse_sk. To promote these these topics, ZSE addressed five influencers and greenfluencers known for promoting green ideas, green topics and green energy.

Table 3: Performance of individual posts on the Instagram account zse_sk

Name	No. of posts	Number of likes under posts	The highest number of unique likes
Natália Pažická	6	577	173
Baša Številová	5	452	208
Michal Sabo	2	162	95
Platforma Udržateľnosti	5	1,601	550
Sandra of Dejepis Inak	3	1,695	990
SPOLU	21	4,487	-

Source: Zoomsphere, 2/2022

The table above shows that posts with influencers and greenfluencers are popular on Instagram. Since these people are active on Instagram, their involvement in the campaign was a step in the right direction. Influencers and greenfluencers also promoted green energy topics on their own profiles using @zse_sk.

Table 4: Engagement of individual posts on the profiles of influencers and greenfluencers using zse_sk

Name	No. of posts	Number of likes under posts	The highest number of unique likes
Natália Pažická	1	1,170	1,170
Baša Številová	0	0	0
Michal Sabo	3	2,633	1,020
Platforma Udržateľnosti	1	161	161
Sandra of Dejepis Inak	0	0	0
In total	5	4,166	-

Source: Zoomsphere, 2/2022

From the table above it follows that as part of the collaboration, influencers and greenfluencers are required to add a post with a @zse_sk tag on their Instagram profiles. These posts were highly popular. The posts targeted environmental topics and green energy.

3.2 Unified visual style of communication

The website where ZSE promotes its green energy activities is www.zse.sk/zelena-elektrina. At this link, the user will find all the necessary information and details of the service, prices and available sources of green energy and can also place an order or request to be contacted by the seller. The visual goes hand-in-hand with the eco-topic - shades of green with hand-drawn icons explaining the service. The same visual style was chosen for Instagram and Facebook posts, where this visual style is even more noticeable than on the web.

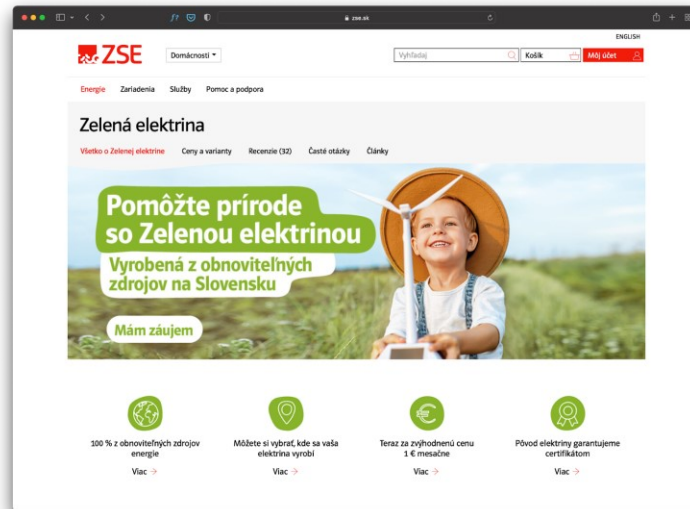


Figure 4: Web ZSE green energy

Source: www.zse.sk/zelena-elektrina

The Instagram account therefore matches the visual of the main page. The links are of a bright green color, they are distinctive and always use a photo of the influencer for greater credibility.

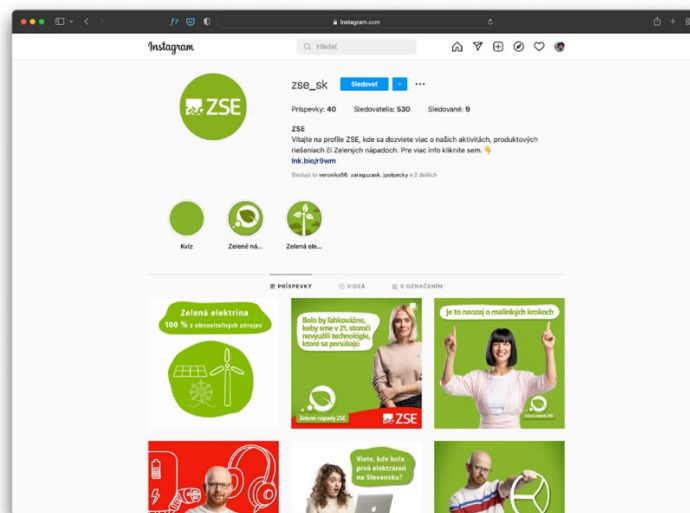


Figure 5: Instagram account ZSE green energy

Source https://www.instagram.com/zse_sk/

The individual posts have a uniform design – this guarantees good visibility on the profiles of influencers involved. However, influencers usually share this content only in their Instagram stories which disappear from the feed and profile after 24 hours. This content is not stored in the main feed or specific albums.

The website <https://www.setri.sk> has the same visual as ZSE's website. This portal acts as a hub for all video and audio content that is created for and around the initiative and also provides an overview of all actors involved. It also features podcasts which can be played via Spotify, Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts, and video interviews embedded from the YouTube channel Skupina ZSE with 1.85 thousand subscribers (data as of 28 February 2022).



Figure 6: Topics addressed by influencers and fan reactions to the content

Source https://www.instagram.com/zse_sk/

Credibility of communication is key for every influencer. If influencers, and especially greenfluencers, are clear about their opinions and live by them, too, they become ambassadors of topics and issues and thus gain the favor of people outside the digital environment of social networks (Klementis, 2019).

Credibility also lies in the selection of topics. Each influencer addresses specific topics in their content. A great example is Baša Številová. For some time, she has been updating her fans about the construction of her house in Banský Studenec. This construction is, of course, in absolute compliance with the valid territorial and environmental requirements and standards of the municipality, which can often be difficult to meet. Baša has been addressing this topic for more than two years, people are drawn in to "experience this story for themselves" even though house building is a very personal issue. However, in ZSE, Baša has gained an important partner and a major player in the field of green energy. Thanks to Baša, ZSE assumed a position of a strong player. Without Baša, this position would be unachievable for ZSE. Baša Številová's fans root strongly for this collaboration, they continue to support the project and it seems they have no problem accepting this form of cooperation.



Figure 7: Project of a family house by Baša Številova in Banský Studenec

Source <https://www.instagram.com/p/COSQ2SWHU-k/>

4. Conclusion

The big and important issues have always needed big and important personalities to back them up. These issues today include, inter alia, environment and related problems. The personalities capable of addressing these issues and bringing them to common people are Internet personalities, in particular influencers and greenfluencers. Thanks to the collaboration of large brands such as ZSE with people successful on social networks such as Michal Sabo, Natália Pažická, Sandra Sviteková or Baša Številová it is easy to find really effective solutions to environmental problems. The positive reaction of fans in the form of likes and comments shows that this form of communication pays off today and represents a new and effective element in the green marketing communication strategy.

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