

# From KOLs to KOIs: How to identify and engage the new healthcare influencers

**Paul Reed** Director **Basil Fielding** Associate Director

**Pharma has always looked to healthcare's Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) to understand likely doctor behaviour, attitudes and treatment paradigms. Now, a new breed of physicians, Key Online Influencers (KOIs), are establishing a loyal following in the digital space of the global medical community. Pharmaceutical marketers looking to launch and position their brand optimally need to join the conversation.**

HCPs use a wide variety of digital channels to connect with the medical community so that they can support each other and learn about new treatments. According to WHPRMS, while 87% of doctors use social media for personal reasons, 67% of those doctors use social media for professional use to explore medical information. Within social media, it is possible to identify a cohort of qualified and practicing physicians who have the ability to communicate and influence an extensive online HCP and patient community. We refer to these HCP social media influencers as KOIs.

As new digital channels appeared, HCPs who wanted to benefit the medical and patient community began to use them to share information, to debate and discuss healthcare issues. Online influencers using social media has dramatically increased in recent years and it has now become popular standard practice. As a consequence, KOIs have built up a large, highly engaged and supportive following. Communication using these methods is two-way, giving KOIs perhaps a greater opportunity to engage and influence. Research Partnership has conducted a range of studies and found numerous KOIs with huge potential reach.

## Example KOI profile

 **35.6K**  **336K**  **79.2K**  **134K**

**Total audience: 584.8K**

**Original content: 64%** **Shared content: 36%**

We can drill down further to see how much potential reach each KOI has. Using this example, if we look at their average tweets per day on a particular topic plus engagement, they have a potential reach of 20.8 million people on this one platform alone. Pharma marketers need to recognise this powerful new breed of influencers. If they are able to identify the correct KOIs, they have an opportunity to develop and nurture mutually beneficial relationships which benefit the KOIs, pharma brands and commercial goals.

## How to map and identify key online influencers

Pharma companies usually have a clear idea about how KOLs can support product and brand developments, and have established methods of developing necessary KOL engagements. But what about KOIs? As you can see from our example above, they exhibit quite different profiles. Here's how they compare:

	Key opinion leaders (KOLs)	Key online influencers (KOIs)
<b>Platform</b>	Medical journals, Conferences, Advisory boards	Multiple digital channels
<b>Core network</b>	Colleagues/HCPs	Broad online following
<b>Volume of reach</b>	Generally more targeted	High – large following
<b>Topics of interest</b>	Scientific discussion	Varying range of topics
<b>Sphere of influence</b>	Experience, Medical journals	Online, Public healthcare content
<b>How to identify</b>	HCP perceptions, Desk research	Social media analysis



At Research Partnership, we have developed an effective approach for investigating, analysing and profiling KOIs in the healthcare space to determine how influential their digital footprint is across social media, websites, blogs, forums, journals, online seminars and other digital channels. Our tried-and-tested approach, Influencer ID, identifies KOIs to reveal important metrics, such as their audience, influence, frequency, line of focus, interaction, and engagement.

A KOI's changing influence over time can be tracked and monitored. It is important to note, some KOLs are expanding their online presence and becoming ever more 'digitally minded', so can also be identified as KOIs. This fact adds weight to the argument that pharma needs to keep up with the movement in order to engage with the most influential individuals in a particular therapy area or space.

## Developing a KOI strategy

Once research has identified relevant KOIs and they have been profiled, pharma companies can begin to develop a strategy for engagement. What that strategy looks like depends on specific marketing objectives set, and whether the pharma company can develop the correct relationship with identified influencers. This process can't be rushed. The relationship must be mutually beneficial to both parties and slowly nurtured. There are a number of ways to do this. For example, pharma could begin by inviting them to be a speaker at a conference. The KOI could then share data and key messages before, during and after the event (as well as generate social media buzz and discussion).

Pharma can also invite a relevant KOI to lead a clinical trial, which can generate awareness of data among their online following. If the KOI often writes articles or blogs then the pharma company can provide them with exclusive information or support the development of original content, which can be shared with their audience.

Objectives can range from creating awareness around an access or patient support programme, generating brand awareness, or tapping into their knowledge of the challenges in healthcare by inviting them to participate in an ad-board. The success of these activities can be tracked over time, using social media analysis and KOI mapping.

## KOI research experience

As a business, we have started to see significant interest in KOI mapping research across a range of therapy areas. Our tried-and-tested approach means we have been able to provide pharma companies with essential recommendations on how best to involve KOIs in their development plans.

## To find out more please contact:

**Paul Reed**

paul.reed@researchpartnership.com