

Fashion brands, influencers and followers – who are really influencing us? An analysis of social media influencers in the fashion marketing

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Abstract

As the age of the digital well and truly submerses modern culture under the influence of the online, we find ourselves in a global community that is entirely reluctant to put down our digital devices. The world has become a place where social media serves as our digital blueprint of identity, which we willingly add and update with every new experience or life change. Interconnectivity has become the cornerstone of the decade as technology surges culture into a world with every terabyte of data and information at our fingertips. The digital age has brought about a movement of ‘Connectivism’ that can be explained as a learning theory “driven by the understanding that decisions are based on rapidly altering foundations” as “new information is continually being acquired” (Siemens, 2005). The digital age has brought about a world full of information with the greatest challenge found in sorting the relevant from irrelevant. This shift into a new way of learning and dealing with high volumes of stimuli, dramatically changes the way in which we communicate and function daily online.

What came from this digital revolution was the age of the influencer, with social media serving to catapult individuals onto an international platform to establish loyal fanbases and cult followings that lead to these ‘social media-stars’ reaching celebrity-like status, such as the rise of YouTuber Liza Koshy who has amassed a following on Instagram and YouTube well over a million. But how can we define an influencer? Influencer marketing expert Brittany Hennessy defines an influencer as an individual who utilizes word of mouth marketing - who has a strong online presence on their digital platforms- otherwise known as ‘social currency’ (Hennessy, 2018), thus allowing them to become extremely influential to their global audience. This in turn identifies influencer marketing as a profitable source of marketing for brands, in terms of reach and return on investment.

The purpose of this research is to delve into a discourse of Influencer Marketing from a three- dimensional perspective - *the influencer, the follower and the brand*. The key question being the exploration of who is really being influenced - ultimately uncovering where the power of social media marketing really lies within the fashion text. Who is pulling the strings and influencing our buying habits on platforms such as Instagram? The ever-shifting paradigm of power online will be a centre point of discussion in this topic. Demographics and social groups, digital environments and future challenges such as new technology will all be explored to predict the longevity of influencer marketing in a rapidly developing world. Definitions and models of influence marketing will be based on Kotler’s model ‘Marketing 4.0’ (Kotler, 2017) and Easey’s Fashion Social Media framework (Easey, 2009) through key audience theorists in relation to the study of media such as the Two Step Flow Model by Katz et al (2005).

Keywords: Fashion Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Fashion Social Media, Digital Marketing, Social Media

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