

10**Modern Day Marketing: From Likes to Likeability****Dr. Parul Chopra^{1*} & Dr. Divya Sharma²**¹Assistant Professor, Aditi Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi, Delhi.²Assistant Professor, Bharti College, University of Delhi, New Delhi.

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Abstract

The dynamic function of social media influencers in modern digital marketing and societal trends is examined in this chapter. It offers a fair analysis of influencer culture's benefits and drawbacks. Positively, influencers give brands a powerful platform for focused interaction, build customer trust through perceived authenticity, and speed up the spread of information. On the other hand, the chapter draws attention to possible negative aspects, such as the encouragement of unrealistic lifestyles, vulnerability to false information, moral dilemmas surrounding sponsored content, and the effect on followers' mental health. By examining these elements, the chapter hopes to give readers a sophisticated grasp of how social media influencers affect public opinion, consumer behavior, and larger social dynamics. This will benefit users, scholars, and marketers alike.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Consumerism, Marketing, Lifestyle Imitation.

Introduction

In present times the world has become extremely fast paced with rapid use of technology and artificial intelligence tools. Today the economies are moving with such a great momentum that *what was a decade ago, has become yesterday's piece of work and the future is just an hour away*. It can be aptly stated that the world is being driven by digitalization and consumerism, driving its life force from the fact that everything under the sky be it a man, material or an emotion has become a product meant for consumption. The maddening competition both at home and global has led to emergence of a culture where everyone wants to reach and capture everyone. The rising consumerism and competition is spreading its wings through the social media to reach wherever a possible consumer may be. Since the last decade marketers

now are using the social media tools to their maximum advantage to explore and create newer markets. The latest addition to the same is a social media influencer – a concept that has risen from mere thought sharing on social media platforms to selling whatever is capable of being sold. A social media influencer refers to a person or an entity with digital presence who is able to influence the audience who visit their channels or accounts, to become their follower. The rise of platforms like YouTube, Instagram, facebook, snapchat and the like has seen phenomenal increase in their visitors and content creators who are popularly known as social media influencers.

As per data released from a report by Brand Vision Insights it was revealed that the decade ending 2025 has witnessed a giant leap in social media platform audience from 2.1 bn to 5.3. bn worldwide. Breaking down the data further it implied that more than 60% of the world's population is active on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and the likes. On an average an individual spends a little more than 2 hours every day using the social media, a number which explains the interest of business owners in it as an effective channel of reaching out to market. Coming to the social media influencers who are able to influence their followers or audience's lifestyle decisions, habits, opinions and trends, the decade has also witnessed simultaneous growth in their numbers. Various digital platforms like tiktok created an empty space where someone could gain wide media visibility in a relatively short time when compared to other traditional means of gaining popularity. This was coupled with enhanced incomes generated by these platforms that varied directly with the number of views, likes, comments and followers. According to the same report the number of social media influencers had increased almost 20 folds in the same decade. This has led to the brands using the influencers to reach out to customers for brand building rather than being solely dependent on previously existing print and television media. Multiple incomes generated through follower dependent platform payments with sponsorship from brands has captivated attention of many, who have started to take content creation as an occupation and not a mere channel to voice their opinions. The culture of social media influencing is not limited to a particular age or region, but has spread across all urban and rural areas and across children, youth, the middle aged and elderly. With the internet penetrating every nook and corner of our country, it is equally common to see a tiktok influencer from a remote village as from an elite cosmopolitan city; as is equally common to see influencers as young as a few months old showcasing life hustles of a toddler, to life and vitality lessons from a ninety year old. Unsurprisingly there are videos dedicated to dogs and cats and trees each catering to a different genre of audience. The intense traffic of online audience and their immense adulation has transformed the face of social media influencers to become the modern day celebrities, each with a huge and more importantly loyal fan base. The followers invariably imitating the

habits, lifestyle, opinions, language, lingo, trends, fashion, passion, routine, diet and entire regime of the ideal influencers they worship.

The economic and political brands have understood the role these influencers play in transforming the attitude and mind set of an individual and are hence reaching out to them massively for brand building. Many organizations like the “Fashion Nova”, “Daniel Wellington” etc. preferred to use a vast network of influencers to successfully launch their products instead of traditional advertisement based campaigns. Others are launching their products both through the traditional and social media sources as can be exemplified from a protein product range “Super You” owned by a famous Bollywood star Ranveer Singh, the launch of which was done through social influencers also to increase product acceptability by the loyal media audience. We have very many such examples like the subtle branding of “Oziva” by famous influencer Bharti Singh on her channel “LOL” or the appreciation for use of “Amul” butter by food vlogger “Dil se Foodie”. Capitalizing on their stardom, many content creators have launched their own brands like, “Whats only needed” a protein supplement by Food Pharmar in India, to “Fenty Beauty” by Rihanna abroad. According to latest data compiled in 2026, the influencer owned brands are witnessing audience to customer conversion rates to as high as 8% -12% as against the average which nearly about 2% on other ecommerce platforms like amazon, flipkart etc. The rise of social media influencers has been a win – win situation for all those involved; with brands churning out increased revenues, influencers gaining popularity and income, the customer getting awareness and access to many products leading to high satisfaction, and media platforms like Youtube, Instagram earning massive subscription and sponsorship-based revenues. People like me are benefitted as we trust the product apparently used by influencers we follow. More than 50% of the Indian consumers now rely on social media influencers for making their product purchase decisions, as is evident from my own case that I started to successfully modify my dietary lifestyle based on advise advocated by influencers “Rujuta Diwekar” and “ Dr. Pal” both of whom I follow and trust. Many people like me follow the same, explaining the momentous escalation in sales revenue of those publicized through social media creators. This is the reason that from large manufacturers to local hawkers/ carts operating on a small scale are collaborating with the content creators.

This has boosted our economy as many budding entrepreneurs are seeking a colab with influencers to market position their startups like “Zivame”, “Germin8”, “Sadaa Designs”, “True Brown” and many more. It is going a long way in making true our country’s vision of “*Atmanirbhar Bharat*” with simultaneous gain in visibility nationally and internationally at relatively lower advertisement costs... This is likely to make a significant contribution to increased real G.D.P. of our country which is ultimately reflected in raised standard of living of people. The other side if the same

coin is exhibited by reduced cost of marketing as compared to traditional promotional sources like celebrity endorsements and television & print commercials. Brands like Kanha Gaushala Desi Cow Ghee, Aadivaasi hair oil, Mama Earth cosmetics etc. have collaborated with micro influencers who have a small yet impactful and loyal follower base to establish themselves at reduced marketing cost, in which gets transitioned to higher profits. Content creation operates in such a wide universe, giving people an opportunity to express their views, use their skills and knowledge to earn gainful employment. This has generated enormous amount of employment opportunities where people from all walks of life can work and earn as per their disposition of time and availability. There is no dearth of opportunity to scale up earnings in content creation as can be witnessed from the fact that many people have actually left their jobs to take up full time content creation. To name a few Emma Chamberlain, The Korean Vegan, Nikkie de Jager left their regular 9-5 jobs to convert their lukewarm passion to financially lucrative careers aspiring others to follow the same. The benefits of social media revolution extend to much beyond finance, as it has led to establishment of ancient traditional practices and vernacular growth thrusting the vision of all inclusive growth and national integration. It is a delight to listen to and follow names like Gaur Gopal Das, Sadhguru, Wandering Kanya, and many more sharing and promoting ancient Vedic wisdom, ayurveda, ancient science backed spirituality, and our cultural history to the modern gen –Z and millennials. Influencers like Masoom Minawala, Chef Kunal Kapoor, Malini Agrawal are playing a strong role in boosting regional and rural economies as they highlight traditional products and practices that have been sustaining us since centuries. The social media influencers are being effectively used to form and transform public opinion on plethora of topics ranging from health, fitness, career, finance, luxury consumption to narcotics consumption, philosophy and politics. Information gets disseminated at a great speed to a wide audience which can be used constructively for social causes, public issues, educational and ecological initiatives.

However, as a grey side to it, the creator culture is also condemned for creation of a consumerist society where the followers blindly imitate the lifestyle, attitude, opinions and consumption choices of their leads. The young followers like gen –alpha children and the gen –Z, are at an impressionable age and copy the practices and products preached by those they follow blindly. The internet is galore with examples where children have stopped focusing on academics just because their influencer was able to make a mark in life inspite of a weak academic background. Challenges like the “Kylie Jenner Challenge” which required challengers to have a bottle or jar placed under their lips, create vacuum so as to obtain a temporary plump in their lips mimicking the influencer, caused serious damage and facial disfigurement in many cases. It is a common fact experienced by every

alternate household, where children especially the *teens* pressurize their parents to buy them things their influencers consume, even if it is of no use to them. It is actually distressful to see many of our teenage girls dress and wear makeup as their grown up favorite influencer, and teen boys aim to look and act like alpha males, losing their innocence and individuality. The bandwagon effect is not just limited to trend following but is all the more alarming since our youth has started to see social media influencing as a way to earn and gain quick riches and popularity. Just because an influencer shares his rags to riches story due to influencing, the gullible youth influenced by a flashy lifestyle is heavily distracted and detracted from his main goal. If unable to reach desired outcome, frustration and anger sets in adding fuel to the fire. The desperate attempts for quick likes have lead people to show case themselves and intimate parts of their life in public view. In her video, Dr. Sudha Reddy openly expressed concerns about parents adopting *sharenting* where they post their children online for monetized fame, and urges the government to take steps to curb this practice to save the innocent, as a child who is being digitally sold is not even aware of the fact that they have been made content creation machines by their own protectors for quick fixes. Though the words sound harsh, but influencers like “The Flying Beast” have sided by Reddy, and debated about relevance of using children as an online consumable content. The chase of flamboyance in life is not limited to just youth, but across all generations as we can see people from all walks of life following and creating content which is appalling. Just a few years ago, an influencer got viral overnight with her “kaccha badaam” dance style which too many seemed distasteful. But, the flattering likes made her a super star, grew her earnings in seven figures, and more than that the internet was full of dance reels on the same by children, families, the elderly generation and even some professionals like teachers & doctors. The content creation like this surely has converted the vulgarity of yesterday to a trend of today. The influencers are also monetizing their popularity to as much extent as possible by recommending even sub - standard products as what they consume. It is surprising to see a few big influencers endorsing competing product brands on their channels, and it is all the more surprising to see that their followers who are well mature, not being able to make rational purchase decisions. It is saddening to see people with no knowledge of fitness, advocating diets and exercises on their channels and are very popular. Random untrained influencers offering psychological advices are playing with human minds on the pretext of emotion management. Thousands of naive followers have suffered due to such social media quacks but they go unreported or have no proof of what and who they followed.

We all are aware of the infamous “*Blackout Challenge*” on TikTok where children copied the challenge of holding one’s breath which severely restricted oxygen supply to their brains. This lead to a wave of disturbance among parents in

the U.S. and Italy who opined that these channels exposed their children to harmful and dangerous content. It not just a simple case of a child imitating their lead, but as reported by Indian Express many channels create addictive and dangerous content which when driven by the A.I. algorithms cause massive damage. It can be illustrated by another online gaming challenge “Blue Whale Challenge” publicized by an influencer led to many children across the globe to indulge in a series of self harm tactics, taken each day over a spread of 50 days, which lead to death of a 14year old boy in Mumbai as he jumped from his building due to it, and many more. Thus, if not monitored appropriately, social media can become a really dark zone.

Thus, social media influencers with effective, efficient and ethical assimilation can act as a great tool to uplift the marketer, manufacturer, consumer, prospective consumers, aspirational entrepreneurs, employment seekers, side hustle earners, the economy and the nation. Through their original and innovative content, the creators have helped to increase visibility and acceptability of existing and new products, ideas, opinions, trends thereby providing impetus to the national growth. However, in light of the numerous disadvantages, it is imperative now that stringent laws be made and followed on what and how the content is created. We need stricter and wiser monitoring and counseling of the youth that they are able to differentiate the authentic from the unscrupulous ones. Parents also need to limit their doom scrolling time serving as a model to curb screen time of their children. By spending quality time with each and engaging in open discussions, families and friends can support and advice each other to ensure that there is positive influence of the media influencers.

The truth of the matter is that the journey of an influencer which starts in pursuit of gaining “likes” has now risen to their “likeability” as a creator, developer, employment generator and most importantly an influencer – who is able to lead the masses, the followers without actually leading justifying the title. The *era of likes* has just begun, and is a long way to go in creating the content culture.

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