

The Influence of the Influencer

by

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## **Introduction**

In a capitalist system such as the one in the United States, marketing or advertising a product in order to entice people to purchase it plays an integral role in influencing consumer behavior and improving the likelihood of a customer buying a product. Marketing is defined as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (American Marketing Association). Therefore, the purpose behind marketing is essentially to identify who might benefit from or derive value from a product that is being sold and then to make that benefit and value known to those people so that they will want to invest money or other resources (social capital, time) on said product.

In the past marketing was predominantly done in the form of television advertisements, on the radio, billboard advertisements, celebrity endorsements and more. However, with advancements in digital communications technology leading to the rise of the internet and, especially, the invention of social media, a new marketing tactic has become a dominant force in marketing promotion and sales, the social media influencer. Social media influencing is a fairly recent phenomenon, but it has changed the landscape of marketing messaging and distribution, in part because social media influencers possess a level of authenticity and trustworthiness in the eyes of the consumer that is unmatched by any marketing techniques of the past.

In this paper I want to explore what defines the “influence” of the social media influencer and identity factors and assets that underlie the power possessed by influencer to persuade the consumer, focusing on those who are active on the platforms, Instagram, Youtube, and TikTok.

I am going to take a look at the ways in which marketing has been done in the past to lead the industry to where it is today before delving into the effect of social media influencers on both the consumer and the organizations that employ them by drawing on what I have learned during my studies in arts management with research in addition to that. Along with that, the advantages and disadvantages that a brand may face should they choose to utilize a social media influencer marketing strategy will be analyzed, including how cancel culture plays a role, the return on investments (ROI), potential to increase brand awareness and widen the consumer base, or the possibility of associating the brand with a controversial person. In addition to this, I will outline the distinction between a celebrity that has influence because of their fame outside of on-line marketing and a person that gained fame through their work as an influencer, some examples of these being people such as Bella Hadid, and the Kardashian family who are celebrities with influence and then Emma Chamberlain, and James Charles who are solely influencers. People trust greatly in social media influencers, and I am interested to know why this marketing tactic is so easily trusted by so many and hopefully help organizations understand both the benefits and potential risks that come with influencer marketing.

### **History**

The first major signs of marketing as an industry came about during the Industrial Revolution which began in the 18th Century (Hardy, et al.). While the idea of marketing or presenting a product or service to a potential customer or target audience existed prior to the Industrial Revolution, the rise of industry and mass production is what catapulted marketing into the full-blown business that it is today. With the Industrial Revolution came vast technological advancements that allowed for the mass production of goods and services, making the purchase

of those goods and services very simple for consumers which consequently resulted in an oversaturated, highly competitive market (Hardy, et al.). This is because goods were much more readily available and much easier to make because of industrialization fueled by capitalism resulting in a crowded, competitive market saturated with products making it easily accessible for people but where there was little to no distinction between competing brands. With this environment in context, it makes sense that marketing as a professional practice and industry would stand to face a major increase in relevance at this point in time. If mass production due to the Industrial Revolution allowed for the market to be oversaturated with products or services that were all very similar to each other, it was imperative that a brand or business entity set their product apart from the others, which is where marketing planning and strategy was needed. The overflow of products on the market caused an exceptional increase in competition in the market thus, the ability to set a given commodity of a brand apart from the others similar to it, again, was and still is what makes or breaks the success of a given commodity. In short, for the first time ever, products genuinely needed to be marketed. Marketing strategy needed to identify and communicate the specific benefits of diverse products to consumers who had unprecedented access to a wide array of options. It became obvious during this time that people now needed to be convinced to want and to buy a product.

advertising emerged from the need for the notification and promotion of goods and services to masses increasingly able to buy them. To clarify, advertising is to draw attention to a good or service and ideally encourage people to buy the product or service being advertised, therefore advertising is a strategy that falls under the umbrella term of marketing. Prior to the popularity of the internet and more specifically social media, advertising had been distributed

through printed and broadcast media including newspaper and magazine ads, billboards, as well as radio and television listings and commercials. However, all of that changed with the start of The Digital Age which started with the internet in the 1980's and progressed from there (Agrawal). When people think of marketing their minds usually automatically think of advertising, and when people think of advertising their minds usually jump straight to the techniques just stated, billboards, commercials etc. While these techniques are still utilized by brands, the beginning of the shift to social media influencer marketing as an advertising method can be seen as a direct result of the Digital Age.

### **Evolution of Influence in Marketing**

The concept of using influence to get customers to buy products is definitely not a new one and can even be seen as a method used in Ancient Rome when gladiators were recorded as endorsing products and, a more well-known early instance being in the 18th Century with King George III (Suciu). In the instance of King George, a tea set was made for the King and the maker then advertised the product as being royally approved which made more people want his product, making this a very early documentation of influencer-type marketing. This is comparatively similar to what the world knows now as celebrity endorsements, which arguably was the beginning of the possibility of influencing as a career path. Celebrity endorsements generally mean that, a brand pays a famous person to speak highly of their product which would hopefully result in the fans of that individual buying the product. In an instance like the one having to do with King George III, it resulted in more people wanting it because of his use of the product, thus came the realization that if a person with power or influence over a large number of

people says that they approve of a commodity, more people will buy it. This technique of endorsement inevitably started to send the marketing industry more towards the direction of what we know today as celebrity endorsements such as Taylor Swift for Diet Coke, Jennifer Aniston for Aveeno, Derek Jeter for Subway and many more. So, celebrity endorsement marketing helped to pave the way to what the world now knows as social media influencer marketing.

Advancements in digital communications through the 2000's and 2010's led to a massive rise in social media outlets. Major platforms used today include in influencer marketing include YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok,

YouTube was founded in February 2005 by former employees of the company, Paypal who wanted to create a video sharing website for the average person (Hosch). Initially after the opening of the website, it was seeing traffic of somewhere around 30,000 visitors daily which quickly turned into over 2 million views daily which rapidly became more than 25 million and by November of 2006 YouTube was purchased by Google Inc. for \$1.65 billion (Hosch). After Google's purchase of YouTube, the platform continued to grow and eventually turned into the first major platform to be utilized for influencer marketing.

Moving on to a more recent addition to the social media sphere, Instagram was founded very recently in October 2010. The app was launched by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, former Stanford University students and acquired 25,000 users on its first day (Blystone). By December of 2010 Instagram had a million users and by February the company was worth an estimated \$25 million (Blystone). Following its rapid increase, which is partially credited to the release of the iPhone 4 because of its higher quality camera just a couple of months prior to Instagram's launch, Facebook's founder, Mark Zuckerberg purchased Instagram for \$1 billion in



April of 2012 (Blystone). Therefore, given the app's release basically perfectly coincided with the iPhone 4 release, this was the perfect photo sharing app for people to share their lives with their new and improved iPhone 4 camera in the same way they could on YouTube just through photos instead of videos.

the most recent addition to social media and influencer marketing is TikTok. This platform has been quickly rising as a preferred social media but is still currently developing as a platform for influencer marketing. TikTok is a Chinese app which was launched in 2016 by the company ByteDance and was introduced to IOS and Android users in the United States in 2017 after merging with the formerly popular Chinese app, Musical.ly (D'Souza). TikTok is different from Instagram and YouTube because it marries the concepts of both apps together. It provides video content like YouTube but rather than being long-form content that requires more than just a casual viewing, it is generally known for short-form content usually being between 15 seconds and 3 minutes per video. This allows for it to be more casually viewed such as an app like Instagram, people do not need to dedicate a large amount of time in order to consume the content which is arguably YouTube's biggest downfall. When TikTok was launched, ByteDance was a startup company and by 2020 it became the highest valued startup in the world, with TikTok having a value of \$50 billion and ByteDance as a whole being worth \$140 billion (D'Souza).

### **Social Media Influence and Influencers**

The development of apps like the ones mentioned above allowed for people to be able to post whatever they wanted for anyone to see which sounds ideal from a marketer's viewpoint. the rise of popularity in YouTube in the 2010's coincides with the emergence and increase and

influence of social-media video-based content creators like Emma Chamberlain, Bethany Mota, Shane Dawson, Jenna Marbles, David Dobrik and more. All of these individuals at one point were average individuals who simply started posting on YouTube and with time, they gained a massive following of millions of people each. This is interesting because they each gained fame and the reason for that is somewhat unknown.

Usually one becomes famous for having a specific talent like acting, singing, etc., which results in people being impressed by them and wanting to follow them, but these people attained fame simply because people seemingly enjoyed watching them in their day to day lives and listening to what they had to say. Generally when it comes to social media influencers there is no specific artistic or physical talent that resulted in their fame as the case may be with a model, actor, singer, or athlete. Business owners and others looking to reach younger customers and others who were spending more time cumulatively on digital apps than television took notice of these new celebrities who appeared to possess both enormous reach and inspire deep engagement with their audiences.. YouTube allows convenient access to an enormous range of entertaining content for little to no apparent cost. Today it is understood as one of the leading search engines on the internet (HubSpot). It only makes sense that marketers would want to take advantage of that opportunity to get people aware of their product. So, the concept of sponsored content on social media platforms came to fruition. Businesses started reaching out to creators, sending them a product, and paying them to talk about the product in one of their videos, hopefully resulting in the followers of that creator buying the product and becoming aware of the brand that was spoken about. So, rather than paying a celebrity to talk about a product in a commercial brands started to pay influencers to talk about a product on their own social media pages. Also,

with the emergence of content creators with large followings came the ability to monetize YouTube content, which then transformed social media into an employment opportunity; subsequently resulting in the birth of the social media influencer.

### **What is a Social Media Influencer?**

In social media marketing, the term influencer is being used in likeness with the definition that describes an individual with a large amount of followers who uses their opinion to influence the opinion of others through social media posts having to do with brands and products (Martinez-Lopez, Francisco J., et al.). The difference to be highlighted is that a famous person such as a musician, television personality, model, athlete etc. has influence but is not an influencer by profession, whereas somebody who is an influencer has influence because they have a degree of relatability that a celebrity does not.

Circling back to celebrity endorsements, these are just one possible advertising tactic within the scope of influencer marketing strategies employed across social media platforms. Social media completely changed the possibilities for what it meant to be an influencer because people no longer needed the prerequisite fame from non-marketing fields to have an impactful opinion over a large number of people. Celebrities have influence which can be used to persuade people, but a celebrity does not solely influence people as a career. Bringing this idea to current day, brands are still using celebrities for the influence that they possess but there is also now the existence of an influencer, someone whose job is entirely to persuade people to buy goods or services through social media posts which is what modern social media influencer marketing truly is at its core.

For example, someone like Bella Hadid has influence but that is because she is a famous supermodel. The Kardashian family has influence but only because they are famous reality television stars.

In contrast, influencers have the ability to become famous, but the difference is that they become famous for being influential or standing as individuals and not for a particular talent, skill or achievement outside of their ability to influence. A person like Emma Chamberlain who has millions of followers became famous because of the YouTube channel she started in 2017 at age 16 largely devoted to posting videos of herself simply going about her day as an average person. Emma Chamberlain's audience is none other than Generation Z, the generation that are considered “digital natives” who came of age as the digital age came to full fruition. So, based on this it's no wonder that she has such popularity amongst people in that age group. This is because in the 2010's video sharing known as vlogging, which is recording what you do in a day and posting it for people to watch, almost became the new form of reality television for Generation Z. Emma Chamberlain along with several other YouTube personalities became household names with the same following and influence of the Kardashians or other reality stars. People waited for weekly videos from their favorite creators just as someone would wait for a weekly episode of their favorite show. Creators like Emma Chamberlain had innate influence through their content that people enjoyed watching, they had no prior fame before working in social media, making people like Emma Chamberlain the perfect example of what a social media influencer is.

While Chamberlain is among the first celebrity influencers, those employed by this growing industry are generally categorized and compensated according to the amount of

followers. The categories of influencer based on follower count are, nano-influencer (1k-10k followers), micro-influencer (10k-100k followers), macro-influencer (100k-1M followers), and mega-influencer (1M+ followers) (Santora). The remainder of this paper will focus on influencers that have achieved a mega-influencer status to enable the most relevant comparison between traditional celebrities and celebrity influencers as well as deepening an understanding of how digital influencers are able to gain celebrity status often exclusively with no prior visibility or fame for achievements/work outside being an influencer

### **How Marketing Influencing Works**

Contrary to what many people may think, follower count is not the complete driving factor in what makes a brand want to work with a specific influencer. A large reason to choose to work with a certain influencer is what that person posts about, who their follower base is, and whether or not that person aligns with a brand's voice and identity. To put it more simply, hypothetically, an influencer in the beauty and cosmetic industry would not be a good fit to post about a product having to do with something like fitness for instance, or an influencer that is hypothetically outspoken about veganism and animal rights would not be a good fit to promote products that are animal tested or contain animal ingredients. This is because those influencers would not align with what those brands stand for or align with the products that they produce. If a fitness brand were to send products to a beauty influencer to advertise it would probably be unwise because that specific influencer most likely does not post content that is compatible with advertising for a fitness brand, it would be more beneficial to send the products to an influencer

that posts gym and fitness content. The follower base would also likely be confused about why a beauty influencer is posting about fitness products. So, while someone who is interested in makeup may also be interested in something like fitness, that customer is not necessarily looking to a beauty influencer to sell them that product. Essentially the same goes for an influencer who is outwardly vegan and posts vegan content, it would make absolutely no sense for a brand that tests on animals to send their products to someone who feels strongly about animal rights, it could probably be assumed that the majority of people who follow that influencer also have strong feelings about veganism and animal rights and therefore would not be interested in a product that was tested on animals. Thus, influencers kind of give brands a road map to where their desired target market is because the influencer has made their page a hub for people interested in the specific market or category that they post about (American Marketing Association).

In addition another way in which influencer marketing is done is through agencies. Influencers can be represented by agencies that will help them find work that is suitable for both the influencer and the brand seeking someone to represent them. Now, with that said, not just anyone can be represented by an influencer agency. The main deciding factor in whether or not a person qualifies to be represented by an influencer agency is their follower count, the desired number is somewhere around 50 thousand followers. According to the Influencer Marketing Hub, influencer agencies come in three different ways, the most recent type being specialist agencies that are dedicated to overseeing collaborations for influencers. Aside from the specialist-type agency there are also talent agencies which have evolved and started to take on influencers, and lastly there are ones that start as influencer marketing agencies and see to the

necessities of both the influencer and the brand (Geysler). For example, Emma Chamberlain is represented by United Talent Agency. This agency is predominantly for actors, musicians and and they have now started to represent influencers due to the growing popularity of influencer marketing, hence why Emma Chamberlain is able to be represented by them as she currently has 16.2 million followers on Instagram and 12 million subscribers on YouTube. Additional examples of agencies are NeoReach which is dedicated to representing influencers, Viral Nation which is both a talent agency and an influencer agency, and Colossal Influence which is also solely an influencer marketing agency, just to name a few (Geysler). The reason that talent agencies are molding to take on influencers as clients, and that some agencies are dedicated exclusively to influencers is because content creation and influencing has become vastly popular in recent years and only continues to grow. These agencies are taking advantage of the current climate of marketing and social media and using it to keep themselves relevant and/or put themselves on the map depending on if the agency already existed prior to the influencer marketing boom. An agency such as United Talent Agency would be one that is keeping themselves relevant and keeping up with the times in order to gain the most clients possible, they existed prior to the rise of influencers, and was originally a talent agency for actors, musicians etc. when it was founded in 1991. Moving forward, starting in 2006 they were the first to start representing digital artists (“UTA Acquires Leading Influencer Firm Digital Brand Architects (DBA)”). Now they have tacked on influencers to their client rosters because, frankly, it would be unwise not to based on the significance of influencers in today's world. On the other hand, an agency such as Colossal Influence, which was founded much more recently in 2016 by Kristian Sturt, branded itself as an exclusively influencer based agency. So they came about with the rise

of influencer marketing and used the still-growing popularity of influencers to their advantage in that it put their agency on the map. Agencies like this one saw the market for influencers skyrocketing in recent years and decided that someone should represent them and be able to find them brand deals, agencies like Colossal Influence are solely dedicated to influencers so they are able to really learn and commit themselves to the ins and outs of influencer marketing.

Something else that is important to outline is the term, return on investments, also known as ROI. A return on investment is the comparison of the cost of an investment to the profit that the investment yields, so it essentially tells a person or entity whether or not their investment was worthwhile in the long run. In the case of influencer marketing, the investor would be a brand or business and the investment would be the influencer. Based on that, a brand would invest their money in an influencer promoting their product and then the return on investments would be determined by how much more the product sold after the posts made by the influencer. If the profit compared to the investment is higher, that would be a good or high ROI and mean that the investment was profitable and worth it for the investor,. If the profit is lower than the investment then that would be a low or bad ROI meaning that the investment was not worth it. In this case, once a given influencer campaign has ended the brand would likely calculate the initial cost of their investment in comparison to any sales that the product being promoted generated during the time of the campaign in order to determine their ROI. Going off of this, ROI in social media marketing has proven to be a challenging statistic to directly quantify; however, there have been recent developments in techniques to track the results of social media marketing campaigns which involve outsourcing to what are called social media marketing attribution tools (American Marketing Association). In the past up until the 2010's there was not really a clear cut way to



prove that product sales were directly linked to a social media marketing campaign, this is because there were no options available to track customer activity beyond direct product sales. Nowadays social media sites and outside websites have developed and are able to offer more insightful statistics on customer activity that can help investors track and prove their returns on investments (American Marketing Association). For instance, Instagram has developed an option to make your page a business profile, which was an added feature in June 2016. This allows brands to directly see the exact amount of people that view their page, the amount of people that they have reached through social media by month, and which posts and products are being viewed the most. Instagram also offers features like boosting posts which basically makes the app's algorithm put a business' or influencer's content on more people's social media feed making it more visible to more people in order to increase brand awareness. In addition, Instagram also gives the account user an exact number of how many accounts have engaged with their posts versus how many accounts the page has reached.

What is the difference between reach and engagement when it comes to social media marketing? Starting with reach, there are several components that go into determining someone's reach on social media, which are, reach rate, followers, growth rate, impressions, mentions, and share of voice. Reach rate is determined by dividing the amount of people that see a post by the number of followers that page has, which illustrates how many people in general the post is reaching in comparison to the amount of followers. Followers are defined simply as the number of people that follow or subscribe to the social media page, growth rate determines how quickly a page gains followers within a specific period of time, and impressions outline the number of times a post is seen per person. Mentions show how many times a brand is talked about or

mentioned on social media, and share of voice is used to determine how much of the target market's online discourse is about the brand in comparison to its competitors. All of these components together help companies and organizations to reach a conclusion on how many people are simply seeing and hearing about their brand. Moving onto engagement, the components that go into determining this are, engagement rate, likes and reactions, comments, shares, saves, and clicks. The engagement rate can be defined as the number of general interactions with a given post and this is determined by tracking the previously stated components of likes, shares, reactions, clicks etc. All in all, reach indicates how many people see a post and then engagement tracks the post one step further by then indicating how many people interact with the post which consequently shows general interest in a given post. High reach equals high brand awareness, high engagement equals high interest in a brand or product, increasing the likelihood of a high ROI.

### **Case Studies in Influencer Marketing**

Social media influencer marketing campaigns are everywhere nowadays, with that said, a successful campaign to highlight is the collaboration of the popular clothing brand, Pacsun with Emma Chamberlain. Pacsun partnered with Emma Chamberlain for a spring collection campaign which launched in the Spring of 2021 and encouraged people to use the hashtag #inmypac which catered to Generation Z by highlighting the importance of mental health awareness especially during the COVID-19 pandemic which had a multitude of adverse effects on people's mental health ("Pacsun Partners With Style And Beauty Icon Emma Chamberlain For 2021 Spring Brand Campaign").

This campaign saw success for multiple reasons, the first being their choice in the influencer with whom the brand collaborated. Emma Chamberlain was an ideal choice as the spokesperson because she not only has a substantial following but fits in seamlessly with the brand. She is also known as a fashion influencer which already helps to make her a good fit and on top of that she is part of Generation Z which is the Pacsun's target audience. Chamberlain's significant following of around 16 million on Instagram and 12 million on YouTube is made up overwhelmingly of Generation Z as well. In addition to those factors, the leading factor in the success of this campaign is that the focus was mental health and self-reflection. Emma Chamberlain has been known to speak candidly on her social media outlets about her personal struggles with her mental health, meaning that she can closely relate to the message of this campaign. The fact that the purpose of the campaign is a topic that hits so close to home for her gives it a degree of authenticity that another influencer may not have been able to bring to the table, and after all the biggest things that followers tend to look for in an influencer is trustworthiness and authenticity.

Another instance in which a social media influencer campaign was successful was in the Dunkin' Donuts and Charli D'Amelio partnership. Charli D'Amelio is a mega influencer on TikTok where she currently has 150.2 million followers and is the second most followed person on the app. Dunkin' Donuts started their collaboration with her because she would regularly post TikTok videos with her Dunkin' Donuts drink and frequently talk about how much she loved the brand. From there, she started in the partnership by posting TikTok ads where she would talk about her drink and post holding drinks from Dunkin' Donuts. This in itself was successful but where the real success comes in is when Dunkin' took it a step further and created an entirely

new menu item after her which is called The Charli. Following the release of the new specialty drink, Dunkin' created the #CharlixDunkinContest campaign which gave social media users the chance to win a hangout with Charli D'Amelio and it quickly went viral. To get an idea of how successful The Charli launch proved to be for Dunkin' Donuts, the brand saw an increase in mobile app downloads of 57% on the first day alone and additionally saw cold brew coffee sales go up by 45% within the first 2 days ("10 Best Influencer Marketing Campaigns in 2021"). The success of this campaign can be attributed to both Charli D'Amelio's follower count and again, her level of authenticity. At the time of the campaign she was the most followed person on TikTok so people were simply just more likely to hear about the partnership because such a mass amount of people followed her and, it is more likely that people would use the campaign hashtag to be able to meet her. Along with that, Charli D'Amelio actually is a known fan of Dunkin' Donuts so when her huge following found out that she helped create a drink with the brand they were more likely to trust that it would be a quality product and would be more likely to want to buy it.

### **Cancel Culture's Role**

When a brand chooses to take on an influencer to collaborate with, they give up a certain degree of control, meaning that even though contracts and agreements can be written up and signed there is still the element of the unknown because at the end of the day sometimes people make careless mistakes. Sometimes social media influencer campaigns do not go according to plan and end up failing. A huge driving factor in why a social media influencer campaign may fail is cancel culture. Essentially, cancel culture is when someone says or does something

problematic on a large scale such as social media platforms which results in the general public excommunicating them and effectively shunning them, also known as being canceled. The interesting thing about cancel culture is that it seems to put more power into the hands of the consumer rather than the brand because consumers can decide that they did not agree with what someone said and completely reject an influencer in a way that has never really been seen before. Cancel culture has allowed for consumers to completely erase someone from public conversation.

The rise and fall of TikTok beauty influencer, Mikayla Nogueira provides a recent instructive example of cancel culture in failed influencer marketing. With 14.6 million followers on TikTok, Mikayla is one of the most popular beauty influencers on the app. She is known for her makeup reviews and she gained her following because she has a sort of welcoming and relatable demeanor that makes her feel more approachable and trustworthy than others on social media who seem perfect in every way and intimidating. On January 24th, 2023 Mikayla Nogueira posted a TikTok video labeled as a paid partnership with the makeup brand L'Oreal, in which she tests out and reviews a newly launched L'Oreal mascara. Soon after this video was posted, a major social media uproar occurred because she appears to be wearing a set of fake eyelashes but says in the video that it is just the mascara. This was a huge issue because the main reason that influencers have influence is because they are seen as trustworthy, and this incident seemed like she was lying to her followers just to get them to buy a product, and while it was never fully confirmed if she was lying, people were convinced. This resulted in loss of followers on Mikayla's part, and also made L'Oreal as a brand look bad because companies cannot use fake eyelashes in a mascara advertisement without disclosing that fake eyelashes are being used

as that would be misleading the customer and misrepresenting the product (Newman). So, as a result of this single video, L'Oreal has been explicitly made to look like a company that will lie in order to make more money, and Mikayla Nogueira made herself look like an influencer who lies to her followers just to make more money from a brand deal which completely ruined the trust that she had with many of her followers. This could also be an example of when people thought cancel culture seemed a little bit harsh. Social media users definitely did not like or agree with the fact that Mikayla possibly lied to her followers but at the same time a lot of people felt like she simply made a mistake and she didn't hurt anyone, but regardless the lie she allegedly told made people question her credibility and while she arguably may have not deserved to be canceled, she violated the trust that she had with her followers.

One more popular example of when a social media influencer was canceled was in the case of James Charles who is also a beauty influencer. James Charles was popular on YouTube at the time and he had collaborated with the brand Morphe to create an eyeshadow palette named The James Charles Palette. At first the palette was a big success, his millions of followers were constantly selling the product out and Morphe could barely keep up with the demand that his product had created. But, in April of 2021 Morphe announced on social media that they would be officially cutting ties with James Charles (Lorenz & Safronova). This was because earlier the same year a minor accused 21 year old James Charles of persistently attempting to engage in sexual activities with them. Despite denying that any of it was true, this was not his first controversy and many other children also came forward saying that they had similar experiences with him (Lorenz & Safronova). This information spread like wildfire on the internet and it was not long until James Charles was canceled and his eyeshadow was off the shelves. He had many

other controversies up to this point including things like racism and lying to followers that had caused distaste amongst his followers and this controversy seems to be what sent him over the edge. Following this sexual coercion scandal James Charles lost around 3 million YouTube subscribers (Kesslen). Any brand that he had been working with ended their relationship with him and he lost a large amount of followers because no one wanted to be associated with an alleged child predator. While currently James Charles has been able to restore a large following, his degree of influence is nowhere near what it used to be following this information getting out and he has not had a major brand deal since. Due to his problematic behavior he was canceled and his career never truly recovered or at least got back to where it used to be.

Lastly, another influencer who has lost major influence due to being canceled is David Dobrik who is a popular YouTube vlogger with currently 18 million subscribers. In June 2020 David illegally drove an excavator while his friend Jeff Wittek was swinging on it from a rope for a video. Dobrik's reckless operation of the vehicle resulted in Jeff being thrown into the excavator causing severe head trauma and a near death. Following this incident and the release of the video Jeff Wittek began speaking out against David and exposing the shady things that he has done for videos in the past which is what began the process of his cancellation. It did not take long for David to begin being associated with several illegal things, the biggest accusation being an association with a rape. In 2018 David posted a video in which his friend Dom was with two girls, one of which came out later saying that she had been severely intoxicated that night and raped by Dom (Wong). At the time David was at a high point in his career, having brand deals with Chipotle, DoorDash, HelloFresh, General Mills, SeatGeek and more, all of which dropped him after this accusation (Wong). After this news came out even more people started coming

forward exposing David's friend group for problematic things that they've done and even other members of the friend group started to publicly criticize David saying that he would do anything for a video and even went as far as to call him a sociopath. The things that he has done like the incident with Jeff Wittek combined with the accusations following his closest friends resulted in a cancellation of David, people started to believe that he did not have any remorse for things that had been done and brands obviously would not want to be associated with someone like that and so his career began to crumble. Similarly to James Charles, David Dobrik still has a massive amount of followers, but again, his career is nowhere near what it used to be and his name has essentially been erased from mainstream social media conversation.

This goes to show that someone could be canceled at any time. David Dobrik's reckless behavior got him cancelled and then things that he did in 2018 came back to bite him years later. Mikayla Nogueira was canceled for something as small as a fake eyelash, and James Charles was exposed for something as intense as being an alleged child predator. Being canceled can happen for a multitude of reasons and those reasons can range from something as small as a fake eyelash to things as big as racism and sexual misconduct. From a marketing standpoint cancel culture is something that needs to be taken into consideration.

From the standpoint of the brand or company the risk of cancellation is a risk that they need to be willing to take if they want to participate in influencer marketing and there needs to be some sort of preparation and anticipation of the possibility for something to go wrong. Partnerships may need to be ended and products may need to be taken off of shelves which would likely end up in the brand taking a loss on the investment that they made into a given influencer which begs the question, is it worth it? In order to decrease the likeliness of a



controversy brands should investigate the social media platforms of influencers as far back as they can. Even if an influencer made a mistake when they were young and posted something that they shouldn't have, followers will not care and will still dig it up eventually, and a brand will not want their name tied to that person if something does come up. Posting anything on social media and the internet are forever, once something is posted it can rarely be taken back and followers do not care if an influencer made a careless mistake, the moment that they find something problematic from an influencer their trust in them is completely ruined, it turns them into a completely different person in the eyes of the followers. Brands generally have a crisis communications team that is meant to handle controversies so, get ahead of the curve and have the team do some investigating on the social media pages of influencers and maybe avoid a possible controversy all together. Partnering with an influencer has the potential for huge success but also has the potential to crash and burn and if the influencer looks bad then the brand that is associated with them also looks bad.

### **Putting it Together/Conclusion**

the development and growing popularity of the internet in recent decades has generated and sustained the social media influencer, an occupation and strategy which is gaining increasing use and value in the marketing industry. Influencer marketing is still changing and people are still learning new things about it everyday. In a way, the Digital Age, the birth of the internet and the rise of social media has a lot of similarities to the way that the marketing industry originally took shape during the Industrial Revolution when widespread marketing first began. During the Industrial Revolution the marketing industry came out of a need to differentiate products

between brands in an oversaturated market, following the start of the Digital Age the same type of thing happened because with the invention of online shopping. Society had products even more readily available to them with basically just the click of a button, people started spending so much time online and on social media so there needed to be a new technique in order to market to people while they scrolled on Instagram and TikTok or while they watched a YouTube video. With that said, the internet is also like a digital footprint and anything someone has posted or done in the past can be found and used against them later which is why influencer marketing can be a risky situation for brands because, just like products had become even more readily available, so did information about people. All in all, history repeats itself and essentially we are seeing what happened during the Industrial Revolution happen again except this time digitally.

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