

A Deeper Look at Influencers Online

Adriana Chavez

California Baptist University

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
A Deeper Look at Influencers Online	4
What is Public Relations?	5
Ethics – What is Good or Bad?	7
The Rise of the Influencer	9
Case Studies	13
Fyre Festival Disaster	14
Business Vs. Blogger	18
Blogging the Right Way	21
Further Research.....	26
Conclusion	27
References	29

Abstract

Influencers have become a new group of creators that brands and practitioners can work with to promote their products. With the group developing rapidly, some influencers and practitioners did not know how to handle the ethical lines regarding payment and unlawful disclosures. This creates issues where influencers can post without letting their audience know that they were paid and can lead to deception. By looking at examples of this, influencers and practitioners can learn how to build solid communications that is built on honesty and no other ulterior motives.

Keywords: Influencers, Bloggers, Brand Partnerships

A Deeper Look at Influencers Online

The 1980's saw the rise of the supermodel. If they were wearing it or using it, people went out and bought it immediately. These models were iconic and what they represented was immediately seen as the cool thing. Their faces became recognizable and their name attached to a brand gave it more value. As time went on, singers and other celebrities became the main endorsers. People wanted to look just like their favorite artist. It got to the point where a famous spokesperson could sell a product better than a powerful message. Popular people have always helped brands gain recognition. If people can connect their favorite face to a particular brand, then they will go out and buy it. But with the expansion of social media in the last few years, a new group of people have taken the reigns to tell people what they should buy.

Influencers live up to their name and are a group of people that share their lives and reviews with their audiences, which helps them to decide what is the new cool thing. They are not singers or celebrities but instead are regular people who sit behind a camera or screen telling you what to buy or why not. People are interested in seeing people just like them give their genuine reaction to a product and how it is used in everyday life. Influencers represent the voice people listen to now and this is changing the landscape for public relations since an important aspect of public relations involves connecting consumers with brands and providing valued opinions. Due to the increased popularity of influencers, many brands have begun to collaborate with influencers to try to get their products seen. It helps product placement seem more real and relatable to customers when a person just like them on a big platform has something to say about an item. However, most of these influencers are people who just thought it would be fun to share their thoughts on the internet and did not think it would transpire into something bigger. Many do not have managers, understanding federal trade commission rules, or just general

understanding on how collaborations work which can make things tricky. Some influencers will just do it because they see money signs but do not understand the implications their thoughts can have on those who believe it as truth. But there are others who know that their voice has value and want to use it for good. It leads to questions about ethics and where lines are drawn for influencers compared to celebrities. At the same time, there is still many businesses that do not believe influencers are the right way to showcase their products. Influencers as a group have snowballed much faster than practitioners could have caught on. There is also a wide spectrum of influencers, which makes it difficult to weed out the ones who truly care and impose solid rules. The rise of influencers creates new obstacles and opportunities within public relations, but it is important to look at what kind of impact it makes in the industry.

What is Public Relations?

Public relations can seem to some like a relatively new industry. But it has been around for decades and encompasses more than just getting people to like a certain brand or planning an event. It is always growing and molding to what is needed, which means it can be difficult to define. Men like Edward Bernays, who created powerful meanings with symbols and set a foundation for public relations, have published books to try to outline what it is and how it is done (Tye, 2002). Public relations is very complex and can have different definitions and perspectives. It also looks differently when thinking about it internationally because there are different uses to it and other parts of the world have their own customs compared to the West. This means that there is no one way to describe it and can mean a lot of things. This can be a good thing since people can use it to how they see fit, but also means it cannot be put into a category. It does not mean it is wrong but just that public relations is much bigger than the box we put it in. With social media coming into play, it added a whole new element for practitioners

to use and continues to evolve public relations. There are endless ways to tell a story, so it is important to see how public relations first started and what it has become. But as it is evolving, it creates a theory that will be followed because it contains all other types of communication within it (Watson & Noble, 2014). Public relations will continue to grow as technology and trends shift. In some ways, the theory, research, and practices of public relations all come down to power and control (Hansen-Horn & Neff, 2008). Organizations will always try to be the ones on top and will create campaigns and symbols that people can immediately connect with. Public relations looks to have influence among people. That is a core mission of any project practitioners - to be able to control the narrative over other organizations. Public relations exists to help these organizations get power to position themselves in society. We see it more now as social media becomes more prominent. The number of followers determines how relevant a brand is and whether they get engagement on their content. Even more so, everyone wants to be the first to create something that will go viral. Through some studies, practitioners narrowed down public relations to four words: strategy, managerial, tactical, and responsive (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). There is a method to the madness and even through social campaigns, there strategy and tactics have to be used to be successful. Public relations is not just what it does like planning events and people who have seen the message but rather the core of what it is trying to achieve in a grand scale. But in a world that is getting increasingly smaller because of social media, public relations needs to be looked at from an international perspective. A tweet posted by someone in the United States can be seen in seconds by someone in Japan. This makes the definition of public relations much broader. It is important to define it since businesses are going globally and trying to reach audiences around the world. Businesses might face challenges like understanding cultural practices, legal issues with local and national governments, to raising awareness in countries

with many different languages and media systems (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). For example, in Asia they see public relations just as sales and marketing, while in Latin America it is mainly seen as event planning and in the United States it is often seen as a strategic management function (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). Due to different customs and perceptions within cultures, public relations molds to become what is needed. The definitions differ, which means practitioners globally need to research thoroughly to see how to put out a message everyone can receive. Western perspectives can seem predominant because it is easy to assume that it is the norm, but it is not always the case. Public relations is so broad that makes it hard to define it but analyzing what different cultures and practitioners describe it as will help to pinpoint its general idea.

Public relations will continue to shift as trends start and end. The internet had a big role to play in that and leaves the definition open ended. The possibilities of what it can be make it exciting and something practitioners should always be ready to learn. At the end of the day, public relations deals with people and communication. Whether it is strategizing or creating a catchy campaign, public relations is all around and people may not be aware of it.

Ethics – What is Good or Bad?

From a young age we are taught what is good and bad. How do we define what is good and what is bad? The world has shifted into where people accept their own truth as the definite truth but that makes things trickier. People live by what they believe is their truth but that does not translate for others. But at the same time, social media has made it harder to see what the truth is. People will attack others ruthlessly and will defend their actions by saying it is their opinion. Good and bad is getting trickier to determine. Ethics needs to be applied to everyday life, but especially when conducting business. Public relations focuses a lot on influence and trying to

communicate ideas with people. There is a stronger demand to remain ethical because we are dealing with persuasion and what people will be lead to believe. Practitioners and the ones they are working with need to be more aware about what they are saying or promoting because audiences will believe that as truth. Since there are different ideas of what is right and wrong, it is important to analyze all ethical theories to determine what standard we hold things to.

Navigating through what people believe is hard. Practitioners who are creating campaigns need to do extra research to make sure what they create is not crossing any boundaries with different groups of people. Ethical relativism, for example, says there is no standard of right and wrong, even in principle (MacKinnon, 2011). This makes it a free for all for people to just assume what they think is the correct way despite of others. One can try to justify their own actions completely dismissing others because there is nothing to hold their ideas to. Without at least a general vision of right or wrong, it can be very dangerous and will eventually lead to instability. Looking at it through a public relations lens, Edward Bernays would do elaborate things, like create campaigns to get women to smoke by telling them it would help their physique (Tye, 2002). One can argue that he did not have the information we do now about the harmful effects of smoking, however, there is no way to deny that he was only trying to sell a product and did not have actual evidence for his claims. Without a standard of right and wrong, he could have argued that he was just trying to do his job and it was up to people to decide what to believe.

On the other side of the spectrum there is social relativism “holds that ethical values vary from society to society and that the basis for moral judgements lies in these social or cultural views” (MacKinnon, 2011, p.15). Different places and people have their own ideas of right and wrong that are passed on from past generations. For example, the idea of freedom is heavily rooted in the beliefs of people in the United States. In some Latin American cultures, women

regardless of their age should not move out of their parents' home until they are married. Social relativism differs from ethical relativism because it does acknowledge that there are standards that people follow, it just depends on the group. This is important to know when working internationally. Just because in one country it is seen as okay, it does not mean that it will be that way in another. When people in the West want to create a campaign that will be global, the ideas that they put out need to make sure it does not cross any lines and causes harm to another culture. Practitioners need to act in the best interest of the people they want to connect with.

People can find rules limiting but they really do keep things from spiraling into chaos. When groups of people find a common ground to be on the same page, it will help them act reasonably. The PRSA Code of Ethics, for example, details how practitioners should act in honesty, loyalty, and fairness, among other things ("Code of Ethics," n.d.). The code of ethics details basic qualities that helps practitioners act for the greater good of the people they are trying to reach. It is not a bad thing and at the end will leave people with a clean conscious. It can be easy to assume that the things we do are done ethically, but it is important to constantly get reminded and research ethical standards. Ethics helps us to act in morally correct ways. In a world where the line is continuing to get blurrier, there needs to be a standard we hold our actions to. Public relations heavily relies on communication with people so it is crucial to be ethical, so people do not get deceived. Following the general understanding of what is right and wrong will help create the best work.

The Rise of the Influencer

Ten years ago, making money by telling your opinions to strangers on the internet may have been extremely strange. Now, it has become a career for many. It is definitely not the traditional career route, yet it has become one. Businesses and audiences now have to embrace

that people on the internet have a bigger voice. We have people on the internet who are known as influencers. These are people with blogs, YouTube channels, or simply large followings on Instagram. Just like singers or actors, it is not one many can get to, but it is possible. Influencers do things like vlog their everyday life, post pretty pictures, and share what their favorite things are. They showcase a curated life that many people want to live. Brands have always used popular people to get people to try out their products but a lot of the times they were celebrities already in the public eye. These influencers are a different ballgame, but they have a strong voice online, which is why brands want to use them.

One of the reasons influencers have grown is because influencers and consumers tend to share the same views and interests on products, which then creates an online community where influencers become experts (Johnstone & Lindh, 2018). There is something about seeing someone you can connect with who has a platform that makes people trust them more. The more number of followers, the more people tend to listen to them. Influencers are a culture all their own. Many listen to their opinions because it seems like word-of-mouth since these are regular people whose sole purpose is reviewing or showcasing items (M & K, 2017). It is almost like an online friend telling you what to try. People can become skeptical when celebrities endorse products because they do not feel like it is genuine. Selena Gomez is an example of this phenomenon. She has endorsed brands like Coca-Cola, Coach, Puma, Adidas, and Pantene to name a few. But people have brought up the question of whether she genuinely has used these products because the more partnerships she has it makes it harder to believe (Naslund, 2018). This is why brands have begun to use influencers. They might not have a household name like Kim Kardashian but they have an audience. There are influencers for every age group and on different platforms. Mom bloggers make good money and have women that follow their blogs

and then teens and young adults follow their favorite influencers mostly on YouTube and Instagram (Del Rowe, 2018). Since there are influencers across any demographic, businesses can find an influencer that has the audience they want to connect with. Influencers create content that they know their audience will consume and social media helps to connect them so it develops a deeper relationship.

Although influencers have grown and many have now begun to break out and gain notoriety, there is still some flaws that practitioners and influencers need to iron out. It all comes down to money and privilege. Influencers' main purpose is to review items and share honest thoughts with their viewers or readers. That is their main job and that is where things get tricky. Singers and actors do not have to do endorsements because they can always do another album or movie because that is their job. But for influencers, majority of their income comes from brand partnerships and monetization. This has resorted into all kinds of issues that practitioners need to be aware of that stem out of the rapid growth of this group of people. For example, YouTubers have become heavy users of clickbait, where they title their videos something outrageous to pique people's curiosity but then the video has nothing to do with it, just go get views on their content (López-Sánchez, Herrero, Arrieta, & Corchado, 2017). Right now, there is no rules against that but many viewers know that it is deceiving.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has started to crackdown on influencers who do not properly disclose when they have partnered with a brand because not disclosing is deceitful to audiences (Mudge, & Shaheen, 2017). On blogs, bloggers need to have a disclosure on top of their post when it is sponsored or contains affiliate links. This is because they will make money when a reader clicks on a link. The FTC warns against this. There have been bloggers who ask people to click their links, which is against the law, and urge them to use disclosures since they

are earning income and there is a possibility that the user will get tracked (Mendez, 2018). It is possible that some bloggers do not know that they have to do this. Which is why practitioners need to fill in the gap and help educate them on the right processes. On the flip side, brands should not ask influencers to not disclose a partnership. The brand Lord & Taylor was sued by the FTC because they gave out clothing and shopping sprees yet told influencers not to disclose the partnership to seem more organic (“Lord & Taylor Settles FTC Charges It Deceived Consumers Through Paid Article in an Online Fashion Magazine and Paid Instagram Posts by 50 Fashion Influencers,” 2016). This caused the FTC to step in because it was deception and viewed it as Lord & Taylor buying positive influence, while people believed it to be true. The FTC is trying to catch up on all the situations that can happen between influencers and businesses but since it is so new there is no way to know until it actually happens.

Then there are some that believe that their followings themselves have power so brands should want to work with them for the exposure they can get (Zhang, Moe, & Schweidel, 2017). A quick Google search of “influencers and exposure” show several articles about how brands can use influencers to get the maximum social media exposure. Influencers can promise and sell their personal brand claiming that their audience will see their brand. But practitioners and brands alike need to keep in mind ROI. Return on investment (ROI) is a marketing measure of financial effectiveness concerned with returns on capital for a business (Watson & Noble, 2014). It is a tool that lets them know if their investments will yield successful results. Influencers treat their followers like a bargaining chip and can feel like they deserve partnerships because of their following. This is just another gray area that needs to be figured out. For brands, it is hard to accept an influencer deal with just going off their follower count and nothing else. For influencers, they also need to realize that brands need tangible proof that their followers will

respond well to posts. Dealing with influencers requires a completely different approach that practitioners will need to learn to navigate.

Influencers are a whole group of people that grew faster than anyone knew what to do with them. This means there is a lot of gray area between practitioners and influencers and how campaigns should be handled. It also brings the question of how much can we trust influencers' opinions if they continue to get paid endorsements. Opinions and reviews matter greatly to a business so there needs to be a line influencers must follow so they do not blindly support a brand just because they are getting paid to. It is a slippery slope where they do have a lot of followers so it benefits brands but at the same time, if they are only partnering just for the money or perks they can receive, it backfires. The only way to know what fires need to be put out are by looking at the ways brand and influencers have handled partnerships already. A few examples of have already played out publicly and analyzing them will help practitioners to see how campaigns should be handled with influencers but also make sure influencers understand the impact of their words and responsibility when they sign on to do a campaign.

Case Studies

Although influencers have seemed to come into the scene within the last few years, there are already countless examples to analyze regarding their relations with businesses. There is no way to determine what drives an influencer to support a brand or want to work with a specific business, since many of them are their own boss. A lot of their income revolves around brand partnerships and the amount of views they get, it can drive many of them to do things that may not be right. Looking at past examples will help practitioners navigate through the murky waters and determine how to best work with influencers and minimize any unethical practices.

Fyre Festival Disaster

Music festivals have become the must thing to do every summer. Tickets for Coachella now sell out before the lineup is even announced. It is no longer just about the music but about the fashion, prestige, and Instagram likes. This means that a lot of new festivals have begun to popup promising to be the next greatest destination. It is not just about the bands but how much luxury can be shown that will make people feel upset that they are missing out. That is what Fyre Festival tried to do. Created by entrepreneur Billy McFarland and rapper Ja Rule, Fyre Festival was a luxurious festival in the Bahamas that promised celebrities and high-end cabanas for festival goers with musicians like Blink 182 and Major Lazer (Sisario & Coscarelli, 2017). No one knows exactly, but at one point everything fell apart and the festival was a disaster. Festival goers flew from Miami to the Bahamas and came to find empty fields with items still in cardboard boxes and tents where they were given slices of plain bread with cheese, instead of the promised gourmet meals (Ohlheiser, 2017). Musicians also began to pull out days before the festival because some had not gotten paid and others cited unsafe conditions, which should have been a red flag (Sisario & Coscarelli, 2017). There were also no real pictures looking at how the accommodations would look but instead the website featured drawings of how the glammed-up tent would look like (Conrad, 2018). Fyre Festival was doomed before it even took place. The festival fell apart and was made bigger because of people posting their experiences on social media and it going viral. There were a lot of factors that made this event a disaster but an issue that was not expected was that influencers promoting the festival were part of the blame.

Every event needs to promote somehow, especially when it is a brand-new event that wants to make itself the next big thing. Fyre Festival got the most popular people on social media and recruited them to sell their event. In their leaked pitch deck, Fyre Festival was described as a

rich experience with the quest to connect a diverse set of influencers for two weekends on a private Exuma island (Bilton, 2017). The pitch deck dubbed them “fyre starters” and had several pages with influencers and their Instagram following numbers, which ranged from celebrity influencers like Bella Hadid to bloggers. The goal was to make it seem that these influencers were part of this dream getaway and that people will have the same experiences. Influencers were to post Instagram posts showcasing them on an exotic island having fun and it included regular bloggers to the biggest celebrity, Kendall Jenner (Levin, 2017). Fyre Festival paid for the top influencers like Jenner and her model friends to spend time at the island and filmed them to use for the promotional videos that would be used across social media (Levin, 2017). Content featured Jenner and other Instagram models on beaches, riding the waves, and just overall luxury on the island that people would be able to enjoy. From the get go, many observed that many influencers who posted photos or videos did not disclose properly their partnership with Fyre Festival, which made it worse when they started to delete their posts once they realized the festival was a bust (Barker, 2017). There is a lot to unpack in this situation. Influencers not disclosing properly is wrong and can be punishable, yet they did it anyway to make Fyre Festival seem like this is part of their dream lifestyles. Many of these influencers posted stylized photos of a dream vacation and were complicit to promising people the best experience of their lives. Jenner who was already part of an advertisement gone wrong with Pepsi, should have known better than to partner up with a festival that had risks from the start. It was deception from the start.

It is hard to determine why these influencers decided to sign on to help promote Fyre Festival but it goes to show that what they put their name on matters. These influencers promoted something they have never experienced and their content was the ideal vacation but it

was not the actual way the festival would run. It was also noted that the locations and resort that where Jenner and her friends showcased were not where people arrived to (Conrad, 2018). They were selling people on an experience that would not even be part of Fyre Festival. One side it could be argued that there is no way to create visual content from something that has not happened yet, however, these influencers ran with something that was not what they were putting their name on. How does one say something will be life changing if they have not lived it yet? Did any of the influencers ask anyone involved for any more information about the event or did they just partake, took their earnings, and moved on to the next thing? By putting their name on something without being certain, they violated people's trust but also put their own credibility in jeopardy. Promoting something that you do not believe in hurts everyone involved and creates an unnecessary mess.

There were a lot of implications that actually made influencers liable to be sued. Besides the fact that they did not properly disclose, influencers were paid large amounts but did not guaranteed a return on investment. When a company invest on someone to help promote their brand, they should expect results with that. Jenner was paid \$250,000, while lesser known influencers got \$20,000 to post but their posts did not garner interest and by the time the festival rolled around, only 8,000 tickets were sold, which was only 25% of the tickets they had available (Barker, 2017). Festival ticket prices ranged from \$1,000 to \$300,000 for basic tickets to exclusive packages (Conrad, 2018). Just because these influencers had high follower counts, it does not mean that their audiences were the ones that could afford to splurge on a music festival.

Fyre Festival was so focused on trying to get influencers to show the perfect vacation and only saw their follower counts but did not take into account if their audiences were actually the right one. The neglect of the promoters and the influencers to be honest affected the island of the

Bahamas. Officials in the Bahamas were hoping that tourism would increase thanks to the “insta-boost” (Kaufman, 2017). But it did the opposite and left the island in terrible conditions. Eventually the influencers involved were caught in a lawsuit citing misrepresentations, fraud, false promises and lack of proper disclosure (Flanagan, 2017). The lawsuit named the creators of the festival and listed all the influencers that represented it for over \$100 million dollars (Roberts, 2017). The people who were posting probably did not expect these kinds of repercussions for putting their name on this festival. But they did not follow legal and ethical rules and the punishment seems harsh but people were genuinely in danger in an island they were unfamiliar with.

Fyre Festival was not planned out well by any means. The issue with influencers was just another problem in the giant disaster. It is a prime example of all the things that could have gone wrong when working with influencers. Both sides are at fault. Influencers get notoriety due to the number of followers they have. However, that does not mean that their followers will care about a specific brand and organizations need to do their research to find people that truly care about their vision. At the same time, this showed how some influencers do not properly research on their end as well regarding who they are partnering with. This was a brand-new festival and their posts were only promises yet they themselves were not going to be involved or actually experiencing what they were promoting. It is deceitful and people who see their posts trust in what they are saying. The influencers involved did not do their job in being truthful to their followers and just took their paycheck. The brand overpaid influencers for their voice online. They might not have anticipated the amount of backlash that happened but they could have saved themselves the trouble by not promoting something that they have not even been a part of that eventually caused a lot of people anguish.

Business Vs. Blogger

What makes things tricky for influencers is that majority of the work they do is reviewing or talking about products or businesses. Beauty bloggers often get PR packages filled with free items or others pair up with other brands to collaborate with a post. A good percent of their income comes from partnerships and advertisements. Influencers often reach out to brands asking for collaborations where they will receive product and/or compensation in return of their name getting mentioned to their thousands of followers (Robertson, 2017). Pinterest is filled with posts on how to reach out to a brand and how to create a media kit that showcases analytics and follower counts. It is an interesting practice because it is essentially emailing a business and asking them to work with you because of the amount of hits your blog gets or number of followers your Instagram has. This is a regular practice some influencers use to get brand partnerships. Elle Darby is a YouTuber with over 90,000 subscribers and 79,000 Instagram followers who reached out to The White Moose Cafe and Charleville Lodge Hotel for a free accommodation during Valentine's Day in return for her mentioning them on her videos and posts promising to bring them traffic (Tamplin, 2018). Darby emailed the business as any other blogger would asking to create content for them. These types of requests are not out of the ordinary for bloggers but the business owner did not take this request lightly.

The owner Paul Stenson hit back by posting her email on the White Moose Cafe's Facebook page saying how it was a ridiculous request and how would the employees helping her during her free stay would be paid but also argued that she would have only said good things of the hotel just because of the free stay, not because they truly provided good service (Sanz, 2018). The post, which is still up on White Moose Cafe's Facebook page, points out all of the hotel's social media stats and said, "The above stats do not make me any better than anyone else or

afford me the right to not pay for something everyone else has to pay for” (“The White Moose Cafe,” 2018). Stenson also pointed out that if a business wants to use an influencer, they will reach out and contact them. The response soon enough went viral and two sides developed. Many people were in support of Stenson and the business because influencers who have the money should be able to pay their way and not expect free things just because they have followers on social media. While others supported Darby because blogging is her job and she was going to mention the hotel in her posts getting them exposure. Darby responded back by making a video saying that being an influencer is the only job that has made her happy and she was offering free advertising to this business and they would never be able to do that with a commercial or a billboard advertisement and eventually her supporters began leaving the hotel one-star reviews simple because the owner bashed Darby (Hosie, 2018). She also said older people, mainly the older men attacking her, did not get social media and do not understand her job (Sanz, 2018). Her response ended up making the situation worse. Many begun to bash all bloggers because they felt privileged and how can they expect businesses to give up a room for a paying guest to give it to blogger for free.

Stenson again commented that the blogger was victimizing herself since he had blurred out her name from the email screenshot and argued that the blogging industry just wants everything for nothing (Tamplin, 2018). This brought up the question of privilege among influencers and bloggers. Traveling is a privilege on its own and there are people who spend their lives to make one trip. A lot of top bloggers have the money to make trips easily and need to be aware that promoting exotic places for people to stay at, while they got the opportunity for free or discounted can seem out of touch (White, 2017). Anyone can register their own domain and create a blog but only a few “famous” influencers can get free items from businesses just

because they have a high follower count. There are some bloggers that have gotten partnerships by emailing a business. However, they need to realize that there are people who cannot simply ask a business for a free stay or free products in general with the promise that they will talk about it. Some businesses have noted that some influencers overpromise their services but it can be hard to pinpoint what they can deliver when all they ask is for free materials (Congdon, 2017). Influencers have put emailing brands into practice because they have seen it work before. But as this practice becomes normalized, they need to realize that it is a privilege that they can build a career out of this and be grateful when businesses agree.

Businesses that want to create connections with influencers need to make sure both parties are on the same page. Both sides need to iron out the details before getting into a partnership. Practitioners have seen that it has to be a two-way communication but often bloggers want to be compensated for mentioning a brand because it is their voice they are putting out there and for many of them, it is their only job (Archer & Harrigan, 2016). Influencers take “time is money” to heart and see their time writing and creating content valuable. But at the same time, influencers who have been given PR packages from brands before or even all expenses paid trips, now see it as the norm to receive free things, whereas practitioners think it is inconsistent and they lose control when bloggers looking for payment only instead of connecting for the sake of the brand (Archer & Harrigan, 2016). Some brands send influencers PR packages with free items without expecting a post in return but some do hire influencers to talk about their latest releases. What Archer and Harrigan observed is that this confuses both sides because there is no established protocol and practitioners are stuck in the middle trying to figure things out (2016). The problem with Darby and the White Moose Cafe

only showed what happens when a business and an influencer are not on the same page regarding the power influencers have.

This situation brought to light the issues the influencer communities has in terms of how they work with businesses. Influencers believe they have the right to ask brands for things just because they have the following but how can businesses know that they will get consumers in return? Can influencers really get upset when a business says no to their request which will cost them money and all they will get is exposure online? There are tools that can measure analytics and the amount of hits a link within a post gets. But is that enough for businesses to put time and money on influencers' content? Practitioners need to step up and detail the demands for a business when an influencer partnership is requested. Businesses have a right to say no to influencers and they should accept that instead of adding negative reviews. Not every business has the availability to give out free items or pay someone who sits behind a screen whose sole purpose is to review businesses. Practitioners will have to navigate the waters and make sure influencers are not asking for more than they deserve and for businesses to see when influencers can truly benefit them.

Blogging the Right Way

What is unfortunate is that it is easier to find the bad examples of influencers than finding some that follow the rules the right way. However, despite the fact that influencers might have a bit of a bad reputation, there are still some that remain truthful. With influencers trying to stay on the good side of brands in order to keep partnerships going, it is hard to find the truth sometimes. YouTuber Jackie Aina has been one of the few voices that is not afraid to call out brands. Especially on YouTube where it is crucial for people to click on your video to get paid, it is rare to find an influencer who speaks up instead of just saying they love a product because it is

currently the popular one out. At the same time, it is hard for people to stand up for issues because they do not want to ruffle feathers and lose followers. As a woman of color, Aina has stuck to her guns and makes sure to talk about all brands honestly and stand up for people who may not have a voice. On YouTube where things are more visual, viewers can see the way bloggers and brands work. When multiple bloggers are talking about one item in their own channels, people can tell when it is partnered without even clicking on a video. This is why it is important to find the bloggers that will speak truthfully.

Brands partner often with YouTubers because they get double the content. For example, Tarte often invites YouTubers on free lavish vacations dubbed “#trippinwithTarte,” which majority of YouTubers eventually vlog their stay and create videos from their vacation, then go on to create dedicated posts using Tarte’s makeup (Connell, 2017). YouTubers are not required to post about the brand but many do anyway since they receive free products and get to go to places around the world. YouTubers are also generally seen doing PR hauls from the free items they receive and create vlogs about the events they get invited to. The perks are usually what makes these YouTubers talk in a positive light instead of speaking honestly. Majority of the times these things come for free, which means that YouTubers may tend to speak positively about it to stay in the brand’s good graces. For example, YouTuber Jeffree Star began to speak negatively about Kylie Jenner’s makeup line, which caused her to remove him from the PR list, which means he will no longer receive free items from the line (Silvia, 2018). If influencers do not feel safe being honest about a brand because they will lose a partnership, it creates a culture of false truths that will be sold to audiences.

Aina often creates reviews talking about how makeup items work, especially figuring out if a brand caters to all women. Her claim to fame was in 2016 when she did a video doing a

makeup tutorial with products she hates, which showed how badly it looked on her skin (Aina, 2016). The video got the attention of people because it was humorous but at the same time so spoke about how some of these products did not cater to women of color. It created a ripple effect and other YouTubers created similar videos. Since then, she has reached over two million subscribers and has been an active voice for diversity in the makeup industry. Aina's honesty is refreshing for the fact that it can be hard to find an influencer who speaks honestly about a product, especially when top beauty YouTubers belong to makeup brands' PR lists.

Unfortunately, her honesty has gotten her in hot water with some brands already.

Kim Kardashian has become a household name. When she announced her own makeup line, everyone was curious about how it would work. The day before it launched, Kardashian hosted a small gathering in her own home and invited the top YouTube beauty gurus to celebrate, which Aina was invited (Blyth, 2017). The influencers invited to the party were given Kardashian's contouring sticks and phone case (Blyth, 2017). The next day Aina posted her review on the products she received at the party, as well as some she purchased during the presale. In her review, she says she is thankful to be invited but begins by saying that the items are on the pricier side for the amount you get (Aina, 2017). She mentioned how the sponge applicator it came with was way too small for blending but overall, she had a generally good review and thanked her for having darker shades (Aina, 2017). However, her review was not full of praise compared to the other reviewers and people took notice and thanked her for her honesty. But when Kim Kardashian posted photos on her Instagram about the party, she tagged everyone except Aina (Wu, 2017). All fans were speculating about Kardashian being upset at the review. Aina did an Instagram Live where she mentioned that Kim knew what she was doing and did not understand why she would take it wrong when it was constructive feedback and did not

completely bash the contour sticks (Krause, 2017). Eventually Kardashian apologized but it brings up a different question of what happens when influencers are actually honest. Interestingly enough, Aina was not sent Kardashian's sister Kylie Jenner's full concealers collection but she noted that white YouTubers were sent the full collection (M, 2018). The beauty industry can seem catty but they depend on reviews to keep going. Although negative reviews are not what brands want, bloggers cannot be punished for telling the truth that can help audiences.

Honesty may be tough for influencers who rely on partnerships as part of their income. Sadly, many would rather stay on a brand's good side instead of helping their audiences. Just like with the Kardashian/Jenner issue, Aina came across another issue with a brand when she spoke against their color range. Huda Beauty is a brand that got popular on Instagram and created a cult following. When they put out pictures of their new foundation line, it was 30 shades that went from light to dark. However, once it was released, people noticed that the darkest shades were nowhere near close to what the pictures had shown (Simmons, 2017). Aina was going to try the product and was skeptical about it from the start. But she also noted in her review that the darkest shades were not as dark as they have shown and this caused her to be blacklisted from the brand (Anderson, 2018). Although many noticed that Huda Beauty was not providing what they claimed to and Aina was the one with the biggest following speaking out against it which put her on the blacklist (Anderson, 2018). Huda Beauty not staying truthful to the photos they put out is a whole different story but the fact that Aina pointed out something that others noticed too should not have put her on a compromising position when she was being honest and at least gave the product a shot. Brands cannot be upset and take it out against someone reviewing their items just because it is something they did not want to hear. This is why businesses and

influencers need to be on the same level because influencers will not give their audiences' what they need to hear just so a brand does not get upset.

Influencers have a voice that they can use for positive things and unfortunately many do not out of the fear or ruffling feathers. Aina speaks up for diversity and is still keeping her followers happy and pushing her career forward and it has paid off. Jeffree Star is no stranger to controversy. In one of her videos, Aina explained that she will not buy Star's products as it has been proven by posts and leaked videos that he has made racist comments before (Aina, 2017). As a black woman, Aina did not want to support someone who never apologized for his comments. Instead of backtracking and apologizing, Star blocked Aina and called her an "irrelevant rat" (Dickson, 2017). Star's racist videos have been seen by many and he has been known to block people who bring it up. Aina was bringing up very public comments Star made and never apologized for. Yet Star attacked her for it when she just wanted to bring awareness to an issue that was offensive not just to Aina but to people of color (Dickson, 2017). Aina speaks out for the women that look like her. She knows she has a platform that can create change. Thanks to her being vocal, she earned the first ever NAACP YouTuber of the Year, which she earned for using her platform to bring up issues still affecting people of color (Simmons, 2018). Beauty blogging can be all about creating makeup looks, but it is nice to know that people realize that there are people that realize their voice matters. Aina is an example of an influencer who has a platform and can still create good content but still speak up when things are not right.

It is unfortunate that it can be easier to find influencers who are not completely truthful. But there are still influencers looking out for the greater good even if it means that they will lose sponsorships. It is a catch 22 for influencers because they have to make a living but also still need to be truthful and not simply say things because they are getting paid. It is a tough place to

be in but goes to show that there needs to be more education on both sides on what can be done when influencers speak about them. Aina is not the only one but hopefully in the future as influencers become more solidified and practitioners begin to figure out how to work with influencers. Influencers have a responsibility to take care of their followers and should be acting in their best interest without thinking about the money that can be made. Their platforms may have been created from their own homes but their audiences are the ones that have put them on the map.

Further Research

As influencers grow and more issues that no one could have perceived come to light, there needs to be more research on influencers and their role in the industry. It is hard to tell what influencers can become, especially with the ever-going changes of social media. At the moment, it seems as though new knowledge comes as new problems come to light that no one could have known. These cases help as a way to learn from past mistakes but by researching before anything happens, it can begin to fill in the gaps. Further research is necessary because it will help create a base for practitioners to start off and a guide that influencers and businesses can reference. There are still lot of unknowns so any research can be beneficial to start gearing relations into a positive place.

Influencers at the moment have a lot of free reign on their content. As sole creators and their own bosses, there is no one that can really hold them accountable. It makes it harder since anyone can create a blog or start a YouTube channel and it is not common knowledge that the FTC has rules and there are laws people doing advertisements need to follow. Some businesses working with influencers have signed agreements or contracts that helps influencers stay accountable to their work (Donovan, 2017). There needs to be research looking at both sides and

finding out how much both know about the laws that are currently in place. This will help to figure out how to introduce the rules that everyone can understand and becomes part of the system so no new influencer or brand can claim ignorance. At the same time, it will also hold businesses accountable when it comes to influencers being honest about their products.

Businesses spend money sending free products or paying influencers which means they might feel some sort of right to be upset when an influencer says something negative. But there needs to be a rule that makes sure the audiences receiving the message are the priority. This seems to be one of the sore spots the industry has.

A more general perspective that needs to be looked at is the amount of focus that is put on social media. Influencers built themselves on platforms like YouTube and Instagram. However, what happens if these platforms lose popularity like MySpace did? Are influencers only effective online? Will people listen to them if they move on to other careers like acting or music? Influencers' main outlets are social media platforms. How can followers be measured in terms of using them as selling point? Influencers are only where they are at because people see something in them that makes them want to follow. There is a lot of gray area that needs to be covered to understand this group of people.

Conclusion

Things change fast online and there is no way to know where things can end up going. No one could have anticipated that a whole new career would have popped up from social media. Influencers are a group that are going to continue growing as social media becomes more predominant. They have forged a career that no one could have anticipated. Influencers make money off of reviews and what they provide their followers, but at the same time, their followers are their best asset because that is the only reason they made it to this point. Social media is not

just a way to kill time for influencers but they see it as a new way to create their dream jobs. In some ways influencers can receive the benefit of the doubt because it is new and everything learned so far has stemmed from trial and error. This means that they need to be analyzed because there is no way of knowing what can happen.

There are a lot of obstacles to navigate still but it has to be done. Influencers need to be held accountable for what they promote and how they do it. It should not just be because of money or the perks but because their voice matters. But this also pushes practitioners to do their homework when they partner with influencers. Just like in campaigns with celebrities, there is a common knowledge of the way things should be done on all sides. Influencer relations is just something that will have to be incorporated into the industry. It is a new frontier that also has shifted public relations into a new position. It is new waters that everyone has to tread but it is important to build towards better and honest partnerships.

References

- Aina, J. (2016, August 13). Products I hate makeup tutorial (Roasting Makeup Products). Retrieved April 02, 2018, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hE40GuXjUM0>
- Aina, J. (2017, June 21). KKW Beauty?! Watch This Review First. Retrieved April 03, 2018, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CPnzBNJdB4&t=188s>
- Aina, J. (2017, April 28). Anti Haul! Spring 2017 | Jackie Aina. Retrieved April 21, 2018, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77MATdJ9ndw>
- Anderson, M. (2018, March 19). Jackie Aina is tired of calling out racism in beauty, and that's OK. Retrieved April 03, 2018, from <http://www.revelist.com/makeup/jackie-aina-beauty-racism/12047>
- Archer, C., & Harrigan, P. (2016). Show me the money: how bloggers as stakeholders are challenging theories of relationship building in public relations. *Media International Australia (8/1/07-Current)*, 160(1), 67-77. doi:10.1177/1329878X16651139
- Barker, S. (2017, August 7). The Fyre Festival Marketing Disaster: 2 Important Influencer Marketing Lessons Learned. Retrieved April 02, 2018, from <https://www.inc.com/shane-barker/the-fyre-festival-marketing-disaster-2-important-i.html>
- Bilton, N. (2017, May 26). Exclusive: The Leaked Fyre Festival Pitch Deck Is Beyond Parody. Retrieved April 02, 2018, from <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/05/fyre-festival-pitch-deck>
- Blyth, A. (2017, June 21). I Went to Kim Kardashian's House. Retrieved April 02, 2018, from <https://www.elle.com/beauty/makeup-skin-care/news/a46127/kim-kardashian-kkw-beauty-launch-party/>

- Code of Ethics. (n.d.). Retrieved April 01, 2018, from <https://www.prsa.org/ethics/code-of-ethics/>
- Congdon, L. (2017, December 14). How Influencers Take Advantage. Retrieved April 21, 2018, from <https://www.influencive.com/influencers-take-advantage/>
- Connell, A. (2017, June 22). Here's how much makeup brands pay for those extravagant blogger trips. Retrieved April 02, 2018, from <http://www.revelist.com/bloggers/blogger-trips/8188/swag-24000/6>
- Conrad, A. (2018, March 7). How Fyre Festival fell apart. Retrieved April 20, 2018, from <http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/fyre-festival-founder-billy-mcfarland>
- Curtin, P. A., & Gaither, T. K. (2007). *International public relations. [electronic resource]: negotiating culture, identity, and power*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, c2007.
- Del Rowe, S. (2018). Tapping into social's sphere of influence: Digital influencers are the new stars of the internet, and the endurance of social media suggests they'll continue to be valuable. Here's what marketers need to know. *CRM Magazine*, (1). 26.
- Dickson, V. J. (2017, August 15). Cosmetics Mogul, Jeffree Star, Calls Jackie Aina an "Irrelevant Rat" After She Denounces His Treatment of Black Women. Retrieved April 21, 2018, from <https://lisaalamode.com/2017/06/17/cosmetics-mogul-jeffree-star-calls-jackie-aina-irrelevant-denounces-treatment-black-women/>
- Donovan, S. (2017, October 24). Influencer Contracts in Practice. Retrieved April 21, 2018, from <https://upfluence.com/influencer-marketing/influencer-contract-in-practice>
- Flanagan, A. (2017, May 03). A Second Lawsuit Against Fyre Festival Also Targets Its Tribe of Influencers. Retrieved April 02, 2018, from

<https://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2017/05/03/526758059/a-second-lawsuit-against-fyre-festival-also-targets-its-tribe-of-influencers>

Hansen-Horn, T. L., & Neff, B. D. (2008). *Public relations: from theory to practice*. Boston, MA: Pearson Allyn & Bacon.

Hosie, R. (2018, January 24). Elle Darby: Influencer banned by luxury hotel hits back in new video. Retrieved April 02, 2018, from <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/elle-darby-hotel-video-ban-influencer-video-dublin-response-latest-a8175451.html>

Johnstone, L., & Lindh, C. (2018). The sustainability-age dilemma: A theory of (un)planned behaviour via influencers. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 17(1), e127-e139.
doi:10.1002/cb.1693

Kaufman, G. (2017, May 2). Fyre Festival Fiasco: Timeline of a Disaster. Retrieved April 02, 2018, from <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/music-festivals/7777047/fyre-festival-timeline-fiasco>

Krause, R. (2017, June 27). Kim Kardashian West Just Responded to Rumors That She Shaded A Beauty Blogger. Retrieved April 03, 2018, from <https://www.refinery29.com/2017/06/161081/kim-kardashian-kkw-beauty-jackie-aina-controversy?bucketed=true>

Levin, S. (2017, May 02). Fyre festival: Social media 'influencers' traded posts for lavish perks. Retrieved April 01, 2018, from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/may/01/fyre-festival-social-media-influencers-paid-content>

Lord & Taylor Settles FTC Charges It Deceived Consumers Through Paid Article in an Online Fashion Magazine and Paid Instagram Posts by 50 "Fashion Influencers". (2016, May

- 23). Retrieved April 20, 2018, from <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2016/03/lord-taylor-settles-ftc-charges-it-deceived-consumers-through>
- López-Sánchez, D., Herrero, J., Arrieta, A., & Corchado, J. (2017). Hybridizing metric learning and case-based reasoning for adaptable clickbait detection. *Applied Intelligence*, 1-16. doi:10.1007/s10489-017-1109-7
- M, B. (2018, March 28). Jackie Aina has reignited her feud with Kim Kardashian. Retrieved April 21, 2018, from <https://www.girlfriend.com.au/jackie-aina-drags-kim-kardashians-concealers>
- M., S., & K., S. (2017). Impact of Influencers in Consumer Decision Process: The Fashion Industry. *SCMS Journal of Indian Management*, 14(3), 14-30.
- MacKinnon, B. (2011). *Ethics: Theory and contemporary issues*. Boston, MA. Cengage.
- Mendez, R. (2017, September 20). What's affiliate marketing? Should I care? Retrieved April 20, 2018, from <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2017/09/whats-affiliate-marketing-should-i-care>
- Mudge, A. R., & Shaheen, R. (2017). Native advertising, influencers, and endorsements: Where is the line between integrated content and deceptively formatted advertising?. *Journal of Internet Law*, 21(5), 1-16.
- Naslund, A. (2018). Social Media Trends to Put into Practice in 2018. Retrieved April 01, 2018, from https://hootsuite.com/webinars/social-media-trends-2018?utm_campaign=all-brand-social_trends-nalatam-en---demand_generation-social_media_trends_to_put_into_practice_in_2018_replay_dgp_follow_up_attended-__&utm_source=webinar&utm_medium=email&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiT0dNeE1EbGtabU5sTkRjNSIsInQiOiIzcEFxMzZOU3ZNSXdENjRPXC9Ka3dzVndCa01wQkloeUhfR2JQSnF

QUkM4R2ZSbmpzMVRRCsSzZUNQSmxXU0kzNzhFVVdVTGZpZWh6aEtFZ1IyZVh
 VZ09cLzVPb1orcE93MINhazRZSVI5SXYyVStjNTFOUVFKZU85M1dvZWhMc1hpIn
 0=

Ohlheiser, A. (2017). The complete disaster of Fyre Festival played out on social media for all to see. *The Washington Post*.

Roberts, J. J. (2017, May 7). Instagram 'Influencers' Face Peril in Fyre Festival Lawsuit.

Retrieved April 20, 2018, from <http://fortune.com/2017/05/07/fyre-festival-lawsuit/>

Robertson, S. (2017). Social-media 'influencers' lose trust amid regulations; Bloggers are seeing the biggest drop in viewer confidence, ranking lower than traditional advertising. *Globe & Mail (Toronto, Canada)*.

Sanz, C. (2018). Hotel owner hits out at 'cancerous' social media influencer industry. *Times, The (United Kingdom)*, 4.

Silvia, E. (2018, February 28). Jeffree Star Slams Kylie Jenner After He's Removed from Her Makeup PR List for Giving Bad Reviews. Retrieved April 21, 2018, from <http://hollywoodlife.com/2018/02/28/jeffree-star-removed-from-kylie-jenner-cosmetics-pr-list-bad-reviews/>

Simmons, S. (2018, March 20). Jackie Aina Is the NAACP YouTuber Of the Year & It's A Major Moment for The Activist Guru. Retrieved April 02, 2018, from <https://www.bustle.com/p/jackie-aina-is-the-naacp-youtuber-of-the-year-its-a-major-moment-for-the-activist-guru-7912421>

Simmons, S. (2017, November 17). People Think Huda Beauty's Foundation Range Isn't as Inclusive as The Brand Claims. Retrieved April 21, 2018, from

<https://www.bustle.com/p/huda-beauty-is-under-fire-for-allegedly-misrepresenting-its-faux-filter-foundation-shade-range-3911079>

Sisario, B., & Coscarelli, J. (2017). Fyre Festival Organizers Face Wrath of Attendees. *The New York Times*. p. 4.

Smith, R. (2009). *Strategic planning for public relations*. (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Tamplin, H. (2018, January 18). Hotel owner calls out YouTuber who asked for free overnight stay. Retrieved April 02, 2018, from <http://metro.co.uk/2018/01/18/hotel-owner-calls-youtuber-asked-free-overnight-stay-7240748/>

The White Moose Café. (2018, January 16). Retrieved April 21, 2018, from <https://www.facebook.com/WhiteMooseCafe/posts/2048406742106598>

Theaker, A. (2006). *The public relations handbook*. London: Routledge.

Tye, L. (2002). *The father of spin: Edward L. Bernays & the birth of public relations*. New York: Henry Holt.

Watson, T., & Noble, P. (2014). *PR In Practice: Evaluating Public Relations: A Guide to Planning, Research and Measurement* (3rd ed.). London: Kogan Page.

White, N. (2017, May 15). Travel Bloggers and The Pitfalls of Privilege. Retrieved April 21, 2018, from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/travel-bloggers-the-pitfalls-of-privilege_us_5917c4b7e4b02d6199b2f036

Wu, S. (2017, June 30). Kim Kardashian Just Responded to Fans Saying She Shaded a Blogger. Retrieved April 02, 2018, from <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/kim-kardashian-responds-to-jackie-aina-controversy>

Zhang, Y. Moe, W. & Schweidel, D. (2017). Modeling the role of message content and influencers in social media rebroadcasting. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 34(1), 100-119. doi:10.1016/j.ijresmar.2016.07.003