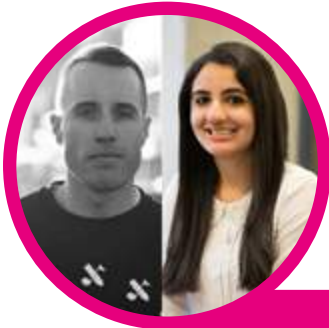


# Authenticity, Democratization of Information and the Changing Nature of Influence



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Many marketers still have the perception that those who can make the most noise or create the most outrageous stunt will cut through the clutter. However, while these things may have worked in the past, millennials are looking something different. This is a generation that hunts for, and cares about, real stories from real people.

Platforms like YouTube have led to the democratization of content and information by allowing almost anyone the freedom to express their ideas and opinions, the opportunity to be discovered, the chance to find their community, and gain access to the information of the world. Millennials today decide who, where and when they want to consume. To hear or see someone explain a raw emotion or an experience helps them understand if they are justified in their own personal feeling or experience. This change has elevated the importance of influencer marketing within the overall marketing mix.

As brand builders, we need to understand and embrace this major shift in the nature of influencer marketing as an integral part of brand strategy. This is a departure from the commonplace, last minute, surface-level advocacy at the launch of a new product or campaign. Too often, influence can be reduced to a short-term transaction in attempt to rent social media impressions. Whilst this “buzz” is good for drumming up awareness, it falls down when trying to build an iconic brand.

Coming from a more traditional CPG background, my current role at YouTube has shown me firsthand how the landscape of influence is rapidly changing. While the concept of influence is not new — as humans, we all have the ability to exert influence through relationships — it is the nature and scope of influence that has changed over the last decade. YouTube is a platform that enables one-to-one relationships by facilitating rich, immersive experiences through video that echo the feeling of being in the same physical space as the creator of the content. Experiences that were once limited are now available to anyone with a computer or a smartphone. Top executives no longer decide what content people consume — the people do. This changing landscape, and the sheer reach of individual influencers, has

opened a major opportunity for brands to tell their stories outside of traditional advertising.

## FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR BRANDS AIMING TO BUILD BRAND ADVOCACY WITH INFLUENCERS

### 1. *Quality Beats Quantity*

Segment your brand's user base to figure out who actually influences them. Once you understand who truly has clout with your users, it is imperative to work closely with a manageable group of individuals capable of spreading advocacy, both digitally and in person. Passionate support from someone with modest influence should always rate higher than a tepid vote of confidence from someone with a large audience.

### 2. *Start Niche to Reach Mass*

Audience size does not necessarily equal influence. The ideal state of influencer marketing is to reach a large audience by working with a few, targeted individuals. Get enough of the right people onboard, you have a chance of creating a groundswell.

### 3. *Treat People as Humans, Not Algorithms or Data Points*

The very reason brands want to work with influencers is for their unique cultural position, perspective, writing style, on and offline following or strong social presence. For this reason, being too prescriptive or micro-managing is not the way to go. Each influencer has a unique voice — try not to stifle it. Each of them may have a different way of talking about your product or brand, and that is ok.

Influence is a human behavior, prone to emotions with swift changes in tone, focus and sentiment. Embracing the unpredictable nature of influence and being agile in your thinking and actions will not only endear your brand to influencers but ensure that the brand stays current, relevant, and most of all, credible.

### 4. *Create Relationships, Not Transactions*

Influencer marketing is much like any relationship. Great relationships are built on

shared goals, interest, activities, understanding and trust.

To achieve a strong and mutually beneficial relationship with influencers you need to:

- Know the type of influencer that is right for your brand
- Understand their needs
- Make a memorable first impression
- Ensure the value exchange is mutually beneficial
- Demonstrate long-term intent

### 5. *Influence Can't Live Without Content or an Experience*

People need something to react to and share. Experiences and content are how we learn, what we remember and a way to connect to the world. As a result, you need to be consistently evolving and tailoring your approach to keep your influencer and audience base interested. By creating memorable, personalized content and experiences, you are more likely to interest



Jake O'Leary leads brand marketing for YouTube, the biggest music platform in the world. Not content with serving more than a billion users, he launched the new YouTube Music app on Android and iOS, which trended globally on Twitter (#2) and collected 591 million impressions in the first twelve hours. Jake was almost solely responsible for bringing the app to the world, from working hand-in-hand with product & engineering execs to identifying development scope based on consumer feedback. Jake previously spent his working life playing music and marketing world leading brands, including Pantene and Gillette.

Smriti Khanna is a full-time student in the Medill Integrated Marketing Communications program. She has worked in brand management in the CPG industry for the last four years in Asia. While working across a variety of brands and markets, the growing importance of Big Data and the increasing shift of control to consumers intrigued her and brought her to Medill. Smriti holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and marketing from Singapore Management University.