

## The Luxury Influencer's Role & Responsibility

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As the pandemic gripped the world, many questions previously asked inside the halls of environmental organisations have now come out in common consciousness. One of them is the role of the influencer.

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For something that was only recorded in the dictionary in 2019, the word “influencer” is an everyday term today. A common marketing strategy now, the influencer marketing industry is on track to be worth up to \$15 billion by 2022, up from as much as \$8 billion in 2019.

But that's not how it started.



From the medieval era days of the influence of the Pope (who was considered just next to God) and the royalty, to Josiah Wedgwood who made a tea set for Queen Charlotte in 1760 and publicized himself as the “Potter to Her Majesty”, to Coco Chanel’s incredible influence in the fashion industry in 1920s, to the Kardashians today, influencer marketing has become incredibly democratized due to the rapid popularity of social media – especially Instagram.

Today, not just actors and pop stars, but ‘regular’ people with a talent or innate sense of style can influence shopping and travel decisions, thus becoming influencers.

And while the astronomical recognition of influencers helped brands sell their products at a much more effective marketing cost than usual print or television advertising, the concept is increasingly coming under the scanner. More importantly, sustainability champions are begging the question – that with the Earth paying a heavy price for industrialization and overconsumption, are influencers also partly responsible for overconsumption, and consequently over production?

So we reached out to some luxury fashion and travel brands, sustainability advocates, luxury experts, and yes, influencers as well, to record their thoughts, while also asking them how influencers can promote the concept of sustainability.





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"In a way all of us that use social media platforms, whether privately or publicly, and share images of our trips are influencers in our own right. We may not be reaching thousands and thousands of fans, but reaching close friends and family members has also an impact in many fronts. So, in a way, everyone sharing pictures of their vacations on social media are responsible for this culture of overconsumption and glamorization of travel.

It has to come down to all of us with a social media voice, whether with a small audience of friends and family or large legion of fans, to talk more often and openly about responsible tourism, traveling with a purpose, sustainability, conservation and social responsible initiatives. Particularly coming out of a pandemic that has clearly had a devastating effect on communities that rely on tourism for their livelihood, it will be crucial for travelers to share the love and visit lesser-known destinations rather than following the trends."

**- Luca Franco, CEO, Luxury Frontiers**



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“Actually, the discovery and evaluation of a product through influencer marketing can represent a way of generating consensus and more thoughtful and aware consumption habits. In consolidation, social media’s use has grown in importance in what is the last step of the buying process, i.e. the post-purchase: in fact, the possible purchase experiences that a customer shares on social does have the great power to influence the decisions of other consumers, generating responses, even more targeted and less generic.

A new generation of 'nano' influencers is emerging: normal people, able to create digital contents not obvious, but strongly linked to their communities. The messages conveyed by these influencers are generally more authentic, thus improving the effectiveness of product communication and transforming commercial promotion in a less brazen way. In addition to this scenario, user-generated contents increasingly have the function of getting a message and a product to the end customer, making the promotion activity spontaneous and viral.”

*- Micaela le Divelec Lemmi, CEO, Salvatore Ferragamo*



*"We as influencers have the power of our voices to inspire and motivate people to learn and be aware about the products they consume and use."*

“In my opinion, influencers are definitely responsible for the culture of overconsumption; overproduction not so much, but definitely overconsumption. I feel like there is so much content out there, there are so many products that we as influencers promote, which is why I think it’s very important to pick and choose what you promote because there are so many brands and there are a lot of products. People are coming up with variations of products that are actually not required, just to make it sound and look a little different and to sell it as another product when in actuality it is just one product.

I feel that the influencers need to make sure to curate their content very carefully. We as influencers have the power of our voices to inspire and motivate people to learn and be aware about the products they consume and use.

I am very careful about the brands that I work with, I generally work with the brands that I believe in and only then promote it. Especially since COVID, we have seen an increase in sustainability awareness. Brands are more focused on introducing eco-friendly products as it is the need of the hour. Having said that, I feel that it’s a given that the product should be fabulous and does it’s job, and sustainability should just come with it, it’s just the norm. However, influencers also need to ensure that these products are advertised carefully in order to not promote overconsumption. It is more about the quality than the quantity.”

**- Sonam Babani, Luxury Influencer**

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"There are many different levels of parties involved in the purchase ecosystem so blaming the influencers would not be right. With digital being the predominant medium of communication with consumers and social media use on an increase, influencers play an important role today. Personally, I find influencers or bloggers a great intermediary for the discovery of brands and products, they do help create curiosity, help add a product to the consumer's consideration set but they are only one part of the purchase journey and ultimately the final decision to purchase remains in the hands of the consumer.

Young audiences today look for brands that carry a voice of authority while ensuring that they don't talk down to them. They aspire towards brands that are embracing authenticity, naturality, sustainability, purposefulness and timelessness. More than just promoting brands and their products, Influencers have an additional responsibility of sharing an authentic opinion that resonates with their audience, an opinion that speaks about these qualities that the consumer is looking for in a brand. I also believe that Influencers can play an important role in promoting & supporting local brands. A lot of influencers have been champions for small, indigenous brands and they are the reason we know of many homegrown brands, we have to give them credit for this."

**- Richa Singh, Managing Director India, Natural Diamond Council**



*"I think influencers gained influence in the first place because they gave a really honest, authentic and balanced perspective. With time, somehow that perspective became more about showing the world through rose-coloured lenses (or in their case filters) and they lost the authenticity."*

“Partly, yes. Influencers inspire FOMO and impulse buying, which leads to overconsumption because you don’t really think the purchase decision through properly. I think influencers gained influence in the first place because they gave a really honest, authentic and balanced perspective. With time, somehow that perspective became more about showing the world through rose-coloured lenses (or in their case filters) and they lost the authenticity. Now, it’s more about showing what looks beautiful rather than what’s actually real.

I think the pandemic has changed what people want to know about. This is a great time to lift up the hood of a particular product or brand and look at what’s underneath the beautifully polished exterior. If a brand is doing something really well – shout about it, and influencers can use their position of influence to inspire other brands to follow suit. Influencers have a responsibility to show the good and the bad – and if they can find a way to not mess up their feed – the ugly too!”

**- Carissa Nimah, *Guardian of the Brand*, Soneva**

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*"A lot of influencers show dual use of luxury items, easy hacks, etc. We need to think of them as a new channel of advertising and marketing instead."*

"I don't think influencers are responsible for over consumption. A lot of influencers show dual use of luxury items, easy hacks, etc. We need to think of them as a new channel of advertising and marketing instead.

Credible influencers seem to take great trouble and energy in promoting brands/articles/hotels in a fairly believable way. People who follow these influencers perhaps aspire to them and relate to them.

Sustainability is one big issue and I think packaging companies and big companies need to take some serious steps and innovate on cleaner ways to package and distribute the items."

**- Arundhati De-Sheth, Jewellery Advisor**





*When I see fashion influencers advocating for a new outfit every day, or a new handbag everyday, then yes. I do think social media has contributed to turning up the consumerism dial."*

"I think over consumption has been an issue for a long time - long before influencers came into existence! Influencers may have - to some extent - replaced traditional advertising as a way to get your items in front of potential consumers, but companies have always had advertising and market budgets. Influencers are simply an easy, effective, and direct to get your items out there in today's digital age!

When I see fashion influencers advocating for a new outfit every day, or a new handbag everyday, then yes. I do think social media has contributed to turning up the consumerism dial. In my niche – high-end luxury jewelry - it has always been a way to mark special occasions (engagements, weddings, birthdays, graduations, anniversaries and more!) and I don't think this has changed as a result of influencers. Some influencers have made certain items highly coveted - for example, there was a rush on Cartier Love Bracelets when multiple influencers were spotted wearing them! But in general, jewelry is a considered purchase, not an impulse purchase, which changes the role of jewelry influencers to be a more educational one, as opposed to one encouraging mindless consumerism.

I think jewelry influencers have a responsibility to be aware of the companies and the products they are posting. For example, is the gold ethically sourced? Were the gems mined in countries that empower the mining communities, and help in all aspects of development? Are safe labor practices enforced in factories and at mines?

**- Tracey Ellison, Jewellery Influencer**



*"Among the 'influencers' there are real people and fake ones. Consumers should learn how to filter authentic communication from shallow content."*

"Over consumption was happening before the influencers. Celebrities and influencers always existed, they just moved online and made non-famous people known. Over production is the result of fast design, fashion, jewellery which lowered the quality of content, material, impoverishing each sector. The post Pandemic scenario may be different as the society is becoming more conscious about the environment and social differences.

Influencers can bring positive thinking and behavior as everyone who has an audience has following. Among the "influencers" there are real people and fake ones. Consumers should learn how to filter authentic communication from shallow content."

*- Paola de Luca, Founder & Creative Director, The Futurist*

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*"The Insta culture of wanting to look good at all the times, various filters, and several self-proclaimed wanna be's drive gullible youth towards digital purchases not necessarily meeting quality and sustainability standards. Buy more buy cheap has been the mantra."*

"Yes I believe that the heightened euphoria around so called influencers, fake followers, commercialisation of UGC (user generated content), etc., are few reasons driving over consumption. Most brands have burnt there hand with large style influencers. The Insta culture of wanting to look good at all the times, various filters, and several self-proclaimed wanna be's drive gullible youth towards digital purchases not necessarily meeting quality and sustainability standards. Buy more buy cheap has been the mantra.

I believe the answer lies with the brands. They need to choose and reign in their influencer to communicate the correct message around safety, environment, sustainability and 'buy less buy quality culture'. Influencer marketing is no longer a numbers game; it's a people game, and only brands leading with empathy will succeed."

**- Abhay Gupta, CEO & Founder, Luxury Connect / Author of The Incredible Indian Luxury Bazaar**



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"In my opinion overconsumption and consumerism were rampant even before social media, the culture goes back to 1920s. Therefore we can't hold only influencers accountable for what is happening at the moment. Before the era of social media, brands used celebrities, magazine, TV/radio outlets to market their products and generate demand, which now has shifted to social media, as it is becoming clearer every passing day that the old marketing outlets are no longer suitable or better as they don't have the reach that social media provides.

Hence everyday we see more and more brands investing in social media marketing rather than using other platforms due to their vast reach, specially having access to global market rather than being limited to one state or country.

Influencers are becoming the bridge between brand and end consumer, their audience is actually demanding the content they are creating, otherwise if their audience weren't interested, influencers wouldn't have a job. There are many influencers promoting sustainable fashion, jewelry, etc., and the numbers are growing each day as we are all concerned for the future of our planet. I believe the end-consumer has the power to change the narrative by altering shopping habits, and once the demand reduces, brands and influencers will change their ways and move toward what the end-consumer dictates in sustainability. I can't emphasize enough the power of end-consumer and the shift is only achievable by educating the public on daily basis about overconsumption and how it is affecting our planet. At the end of the day, we as consumers are the main decision makers when it comes to purchasing products and we hold the strongest power: power to spend money!

In my personal experience as an influencer in the niche of high jewelry, gemstones and diamonds, it is becoming more apparent that my audience is familiarising/educating themselves about sustainability, and therefore I see it as my responsibility to only promote and create awareness about conflict free stones and sustainable gold for jewelry."

**- Bebe Bakhshi, Jewellery Influencer**

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*"Thinkfluencers are successful, they have been in your shoes, they have solutions to problems that you are facing today and are willing to share their way to solve them."*

"We interview hundreds of experts and key opinion formers in the luxury and sustainability industries and what we found is that there is a very defined trend coming our way... we call it  
"Smart is the New Sexy"

In 2019/2020 the world stood still and very quickly we did not want to see pretty men and women in new clothes, new cars and or in beautiful locations.

We wanted to know more, learn more, be inspired and reassured.

With the rise in popularity of Greta Thunberg talking about climate change, June Sarpong talking about diversity and inclusion, and Ian Somerhalder - activist & American actor best known for The Vampire Diaries - setting up his foundation with the objective of educating

people on the importance of protecting the environment and animals, we have seen the rise of the thinkfluencers movement.

Thinkfluencers are successful, they have been in your shoes, they have solutions to problems that you are facing today and are willing to share their way to solve them. If influencers need filters, good looks and large travel budgets, thinkfluencers need wisdom. Having knowledge and specialisation in your favourite area of interest and being able to share it with the world is the only prerequisite for success - as long as it's not fake news.

Journalists, political editors, entertainment critics and environmentalists are making a comeback. The influencer will take money to promote products, while a thinkfluencer will review them based on expertise. For businesses, it's important to realise smart is the new sexy."

***- Diana Verde Nieto, Co-Founder & CEO, Positive Luxury***