

## “Like, Study, and Share?”

Rachel, a 16-year-old social media influencer, has built a large following by posting study tips and organizing hacks. Her audience trusts her, and brands have taken notice. Sponsorships now bring in a steady income, which puts pressure on Rachel as her family relies on her income to cover school costs and other expenses.

Recently, she agreed to promote a new study app. The company framed it as a tool to make schoolwork “simpler and more efficient.” At first, Rachel thought it seemed useful enough. But when she began posting ads for it, she noticed a shift in her audience’s response. Students thanked her for the recommendation, but many of the comments focused less on learning and more on getting through work as quickly as possible: “I’m done in half the time now — finally free!” or “This makes homework so much less of a pain.”

Privately, Rachel feels torn. As a student herself, she knows school isn’t just about speed; some of her most valuable learning comes from slowing down, struggling through a problem, or debating ideas with classmates. She isn’t sure she agrees with the message her promotion is sending, even if she isn’t saying it outright. Still, the pay is significant, and walking away would mean turning down income she and her family need.

When Rachel raises her concerns with friends, they shrug it off: “It’s just advertising. Everyone knows influencers exaggerate.” But Rachel isn’t convinced. She worries that her influence, especially over younger followers, carries more weight than she intended. If her content shapes how students see their work, how should Rachel navigate her commitments to her followers and to the company that hired her?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What responsibilities do influencers have? Do they have greater responsibilities when their followers are mostly young students?
2. Should society hold influencers to the same ethical standards as teachers, mentors, or role models, given that they can shape attitudes and behavior?
3. How should Rachel balance her need for income with the well-being of the community she is serving?

Written by Katherine MacKay, age 15  
Kent Place School, Basking Ridge, New Jersey