

Should Influencers be Sponsored by Businesses

As social media increases in popularity, many people flock to influencers for advice and recommendations. Many companies now use the traction and power influencers have to promote and advertise products. Companies often pay influencers or gift them products, extensive trips, or invitations to events in turn for content promoting their products. However, these sponsorships for promotion are not always disclosed to the public. Should influencers be sponsored by businesses?

On the one hand, influencers should bear the responsibility of making sure their content is truthful and transparent. By becoming an influencer, they should be aware of their power and the scale of effect they have on followers. Once an influencer receives a sponsorship, the line between truthful and misleading content can be hard to discern. Oftentimes, once sponsored, released content becomes viewed more as a business opportunity by the influencer rather than as a platform for expression, education, or building community. This leads to sponsored content being untruthful and purely promotional— even when the endorsed product/service is unfamiliar to or untried by the influencer. Additionally, becoming an influencer or prominent figure on social media is something accessible to many people: it does not require experience, and anyone can use it as a platform, which can lead to people without proper knowledge endorsing products/services. An influx in sponsored content also takes away from the essence of social media many people value it for: as more videos just end up being sponsored content, viewers end up missing out on the genuine content social media once provided.

On the other hand, social media is an excellent and accessible platform for advertisement. With the popularization of social media, businesses now have a way to get their product out to a broader audience, especially through short form content. Moreover, having an influencer endorse their product with an outside voice and “opinion” can significantly increase the number of people who learn about the product. Since influencers are not all the same and have a diverse range of audiences and audience size, businesses both big and small are able to take advantage of this in different ways. For example, a smaller business could use a smaller creator geared towards an audience that aligns with the business as an accessible way to boost both the business and creator. Additionally, certain influencers use their platform to educate while having true expertise in the field. For example, some dermatologists use their influencer platform to educate people on products, ways to take care of their skin, etc. If one of these expert influencers are sponsored, they perhaps owe a professional duty to disclose the sponsorship.

Discussion Questions

1. Should there be a standard influencers need to meet in order for their sponsored content to be in good faith?
2. Do standards shift based on whether the influencer is a minor or an adult?
3. What are the roles or responsibilities of the platforms that influencers use to create content in making sure content is created in good faith.

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