MEDIACOM

USING RIGOR TO EVALUATE INFLUENCE

Background

A recent investigative piece published by *The New York Times* sheds light on the impact of identity fraud in the red-hot influencer space. Examples include bots that mimic innocent individuals, influencers who have knowingly or unknowingly benefited from fake followership and companies that have facilitated these deceptive practices. The incentive behind these and other spurious activities is the idea that the size of an influencer's fan/followers base is a vital metric.

Using fan/follower numbers to determine a user's sphere of influence is not a practice that aligns with MediaCom's approach to influencer activation. However, it reinforces the need to remain vigilant in partner selection and validating the authenticity of influencers we contract.

The Article: *The Follower Factory* (publication date: January 27, 2018)

MediaCom's Recommended Approach to Influencer Marketing

Metrics
Influencer activation should align with a brand's business goals and objectives. Establishing KPIs based on third party-validated brand lift or sales is a best practice. In the presence of these independent measurements, the most aggressive bots are unlikely to impact true performance and may instead produce only inflated "vanity" metrics. Business-related outcomes are the gold standard that helps insulate clients from earning useless exposure from those with unearned influence.

Content analysis
It's also important that agencies and brands have a deep understanding of an influencer's output. Naturally, such research can uncover potential problems but, overall, a deep dive into an influencer's content will reveal whether his/her voice will be seen as authentic.

When executed properly, influencer programs can create opportunities to increase a brand's social footprint, garner validation from persuasive voices and encourage purchase/trial consideration. We have worked successfully with influencers to:

- Reach new audiences via voices they like and trust
- Create new content and fresh storytelling opportunities
- Extend reach and generate attention, particularly in low-interest categories

Influencer Archetypes to Consider

- Campaign developer – An influencer that is promoted at the center of a campaign: one whose persona is seeded and shared multiple venues that may or may not include owned channels
- Brand collaborator – An influencer who extends a campaign by seeding and sharing supplemental content on his or her own channels
- Advocate – An influencer that delivers branded messages in his or her own tone and voice, often seeded on owned channels

How MediaCom Authenticates Influencers

MediaCom authenticates social media actors, including influencers, by applying the following six Social Intelligence components:

1. Audience growth– We know how quickly the fan/follower bases of various types of influencers usually grow. If we identify an accelerated growth pattern without an appropriate trigger, we take a closer look.
2. Audience demographics and interests – Digging into the overall habits of an influencer's fan base (e.g., understanding who else they follow), helps us determine whether an influencer is "real" and brand-appropriate.
3. Profile language – An influencer may be inauthentic if his or her bio or profile detail includes "engagement bait" language such as "get followers" or "follow for follow."

4. Active audience – By analyzing follower behavior over time we can detect inconsistencies that may warrant a deeper/closer look. We might delve more deeply, for example, if we detect an overly-active audience, one that interacts for a particular period of time only, or one that hardly interacts at all.
5. Erratic follower engagement – Comments that are unrelated to content, especially when written in a language that does not match the one used by an influencer, may suggest suspicious activity. Too many links in audience comments can also signal problems.
6. Brand-safe audience commentary – This would include the presence of fans or followers who share pornography, profane content or bot links.

These safeguards are applied over and above a "hygiene" level of investigation, which would include elements such as category and social platform expertise, usage rights, the MRC Social Media Measurement Guidelines and FTC regs and compliance measures.

MediaCom's methodology relies on a "tech stack" approach to ensure the most current and comprehensive social analytics tools are used. Highly skilled and experienced digital anthropologists certify results and verification.

What's Next?

Given the increasing popularity of influencer marketing, The New York Times' report may spur stricter enforcement of current policies set by channels where such campaigns are most often seen (e.g., Instagram and Twitter), along with a higher level of scrutiny used by agencies and brands to vet and authenticate influencers and their audiences. Just this week, it was reported that the New York Attorney General has opened an investigation of Devumi (the company profiled in the article) and its sale of bots using stolen identities. This speaks to the potential criminal nature of these practices and how they might be interpreted in the future.

The best thing a marketer can do is to work with a credible, trusted partner that not only has influencer marketing expertise, but understands its role and function on a larger stage.

To discuss MediaCom's capabilities, please reach out to *Jeff Semones at jeff.semones@mediacom.com*.

Contributors: MediaCom Organic Social team: Jeff Semones (team lead), Dani Klein (social strategy), Larisa Kluchman (social insights and analytics)

Amanda Grant, Head of Social US, GroupM

Erick Schwab, COO, SYLO