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Brands x Influencers

A report examining emerging trends
in the way brands are collaborating
with celebrities and influencers.

Insights from our network

We reached out to our network to gather expert perspectives on influencer- and celeb-led brand collaborations.

Jonathan is CEO of YCN Member Agency Lost Boys, a London-based creative digital agency, part of DigitasLBi, with particular expertise in social and content.

He spoke to us about the popularity of designer- and artist-led collaborations, and the importance of exploring dark social channels when communicating with Gen Z.

What's your take on the current influencer-marketing landscape?

The rise of influencer marketing can be attributed to the author Malcolm Gladwell who identified 'The Law of The Few' in his bestselling book The Tipping Point, published in 2000.

Gladwell argued: "The success of any kind of social epidemic is heavily dependent on the involvement of people with a particular and rare set of social gifts." He continued: "There are exceptional people out there who are capable of starting epidemics. All you have to do is find them."

Brands have been on a quest to locate and collaborate with these people ever since. This process accelerated with the emergence of social networks, leading to the rise of celebrity bloggers and vloggers.

After a period of rapidly increasing costs, many brands are at an inflection point where they are questioning the value of working with influencers. In our view, influencers can

add value to brands, but the purpose of the collaboration must be carefully considered and the results measured.

We see a trend towards more partnerships with 'makers' rather than 'mannequins', as this allows for genuine collaboration to happen – something that the new generation of creators, influencers, and consumers increasingly expect.

Which recent influencer-led brand collabs that have stood out?

Kanye West's recent collaboration with Adidas on his line of 'Yeezy' sports shoes sharply divided opinions, but sold out within 10 minutes of launching and generated worldwide buzz.

Adidas, which had seen sales slump by 20% in 2014, has since reported that first-

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Kanye West's collaboration with Adidas sharply divided opinions, but sold out within 10 minutes.



quarter sales for 2016 are up 31 percent, with its stock performing at a rate of +31 percent. Many people attribute this in part to the 'Kanye-effect'.

Of course sports brands have a long heritage of collaborating with top tier influencers in ways that generate significant impact. Over the last ten years, the rise of fashion and beauty bloggers has also disrupted the traditional gatekeepers in these industries, with some going on to launch brands in their own right. For example, Emily Weiss has transformed her blog Into the Gloss into a fully-fledged business raising \$10.4 million in funding and launching her own beauty range, Glossier in 2014.

Another example is rewardStyle, the affiliate platform for influencers launched by Amber Venz Box in the US. This



enables influencers to monetise their social presence by gaining a commission on sales they help to generate on behalf of brands and retailers. rewardStyle report that \$500m of revenue has been generated through their platform since 2011, with a further \$500 million forecast for this year alone.



There is undoubtedly a risk of oversaturation.



Is the market in danger of becoming oversaturated?

There is undoubtedly a risk of oversaturation, with notable examples of a backlash, such as when the Instagram model Essena O'Neill quit the platform in November 2015 claiming social media 'is not real life'.

However, when done thoughtfully and transparently, partnerships with influencers can still add value to brands.

What can brands do in response, to ensure they still stand out?

Duncan Watts, a sociologist specialising in social dynamics, advertising and trends, challenges Malcolm Gladwell's 'Law of The Few' theory. He argues that trends are not spread by a few individuals but by connected networks. Brands should therefore be wary of assuming that a one-off collaboration with an influencer will significantly shift the dial on their brand. Instead, they should focus their efforts on establishing positive collaborative relationships with a network of influential people who can in turn build credibility for the brand among their communities.

This approach has been successfully employed by Red Bull, which engages with a wide range of influencers across a number of related networks and communities. This has enabled it to elevate from the energy drinks category into an internationally recognised iconic brand.

Which collabs and campaigns are proving successful amongst Gen Z?

A particular challenge for brands seeking to engage with Gen Z is the rise of dark social messaging platforms such as Snapchat and WhatsApp.

According to recent research by RadiumOne, 69% of all content shared is done so privately. Brands such as Adidas are using WhatsApp to recruit dedicated 'squads' who will build hyper local, connected communities in cities across the world, sharing exclusive news and content on WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger during key sporting events.

What is the future of influencer-led brand collaborations?

With the time people spend on dark social channels now surpassing the time spent on open social networks, we can expect to

Trends are not spread by a few individuals but by connected networks.



The challenge for brands seeking to engage with Gen Z is the rise of dark social.



see more collaborations with influencers on channels such as WhatsApp, Snapchat and Messenger.

Another interesting development will be the rise of non-human influencers. Facebook's 'M', Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa and a plethora of other bots powered by AI may well become the most powerful influencers, as they make personalised recommendations and purchasing decisions on our behalf. As we enter the world of conversational commerce, our definition of what constitutes an influencer will need to expand.



We can expect to see more collaborations with influencers on channels such as WhatsApp, Snapchat and Messenger.



Tanya Korobka, Lucky Attitude

luckyattitude.co.uk

Tanya is Founder of Lucky Attitude, a millennial marketing blog and consultancy based in the UK.

She discusses how 'movements' lie at the crux of effective influencer campaigns.

How are influencer/celeb-led brand collaborations perceived amongst millennials?

Millennials find it hard to trust traditional self-promotional ads, and according to Voxburner's Youth Trends Report 2016 81% of 16-24 year olds relate to brand campaigns more if they use "real" people as opposed to celebrities or models.

Millennials embrace authenticity and don't aspire to be perfect. Real people are relatable and marketing at its core is about bonding with the customer on a personal level.

Peer-to-peer marketing also works so well amongst millennials because they rely so heavily on their communities when making purchase decisions, with 72% saying they only adopt once they have seen their friends benefiting.

Is the market in danger of becoming oversaturated?

The advocacy campaign needs to be executed properly — the partnership has to be organic and authentic. Influencers need

to be genuinely passionate and deeply convinced about the value of the brand. It's hard to fake it and millennials are savvy enough to see through it.

If a brand throws money at every social media superstar who has a massive following, then yes, it can look forced, and eventually becomes just another form of annoying advertising.

Influencer collaboration can't feel like a commercial arrangement, so it's important to find the people who not just inspire action, but who also genuinely believe in what you do. I believe that the best influencers are mobilised through movements of passion not money.

Marketers need to question: what topics are currently trending? What do people feel strongly about? How can you mobilize people through their passions? How do you incentivise them to advocate for you?

The best influencers are mobilised through movements of passion, not money.

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Movements are the reason influencer marketing works.

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Unlike commercial campaigns, movements are lasting and non-commercial by nature, which is why people are drawn to them. Movements are the reason why influencer marketing works.

Rather than paying big money for celebs or online influencers with big followings, you might look at influencer marketing as a way to empower and incentivise your current, most happy customers.

What is going to influence your buying behaviour more: a vote of confidence from an online celeb or an overwhelming statement of support from dozens, hundreds, or thousands of actual customers who have experienced the product and love it?

Which collabs have stood out?

I like what Mercedes-Benz did with generationbenz.com. It was an invite-only social network where consumers can



give feedback on vehicles. This platform allowed customers to connect with each other while connecting with the brand. The company leveraged the insight from the community to create a successful product and marketing campaign launching the Mercedes-Benz CLA product.

Mercedes-Benz partnered with the five most popular photographers to try out a CLA model. Each photographer was sent on a spectacular road trip and asked to post the best photos of their journey on Instagram. The ones who got most the likes, could keep the car.

Millennials are competitive by nature and love a challenge, so this campaign really hit home with young people.

Alexa is Co-Founder of Collectively, a US-based influencer marketing agency that helps influencers engage in effective and authentic collaborations, helping brands boost engagement and awareness through social media and beyond.

She spoke to us about how product development and co-creation offer brands and influencers authentic and more fruitful ways of working together.

Which recent influencer-led brand collabs that have stood out?

We helped Pandora recently with a really phenomenal campaign called "That's My S***", which celebrated the moment a song came on that you really love. We invited YouTubers, Viners, and Instagrammers to respond to the music they loved and we got back some really amazing and hilarious moments. This one from Baddie Winkle is one of my favorites.

The beauty market has seen tremendous success with influencer partnerships that involve product development, which has been a great way of pushing the envelope and getting influencers and their fans excited.

How do co-creation and product development enhance authenticity?

An example would be developing palettes,

shades or formulas of beauty products with the contributions of influencers. Typically these collaborations begin by gleaning an influencer's perspective on something they'd like to have in their make-up bag, or something they think is missing in the marketplace. And because the resulting product is developed with the point of view that an influencer's audience has come to love, the collaboration and endorsement both feel really authentic.

Given the popularity and prevalence of influencer-led brand collabs — is the market becoming oversaturated?

As an agency that really focuses on the strategic and creative elements of influencer marketing, we're genuinely concerned by all the platform/marketplace

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services that are popping up. They are threatening the very thing that makes influencer marketing effective: expertise, strategy, thoughtfulness, and authenticity.

With Gen Z in mind, what kind of content is getting younger audiences to engage with collaborations?

For younger millennials and Gen Z, platforms like Snapchat and YouTube are definitely the key. They're drawn to influencers whom they identify with — they're close to their age and deal with the same challenges. They love humor but are also probably more sophisticated



when it comes to beauty, fashion, and technology. Their exposure and knowledge is really impressive and they don't need to be talked down to on those topics.

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Emeka is Head of Communications at integrated marketing agency, Amplify. Based in Shoreditch, it helps global brands forge connections and build relationships with younger audiences. Through campaigns and activations driven by culture, Amplify aims to turn consumers into genuine fans.

We spoke to him about how brands are inviting influencers to act as curators and guest editors, and the importance of dark social platforms in attempts to engage with younger audiences.

How can partnering with the right influencer help a brand engage with younger audiences?

Partnering with the right influencer can help brands engage not just with a younger audience but with *any* audience. Influencers occupy the space somewhere between celebrity, journalist and trusted friend – they are people whose endorsement we most value because of their perceived expertise or allure. This can be very general, where the influencer's entire lifestyle is something to aspire to like Matthew Zorpas, or related to a specific passion point like Markiplier in gaming.

As younger audiences consume less traditional media than other demographics, influencers become especially important, as there are fewer other relevant ways to reach

and engage with them.

They are also the group most receptive to the use of 'real' people — 81% of 16-24-year-olds relate to brand campaigns more if they are seen to feature 'real people.'

Which campaigns are taking smart approaches to engaging a youth audience?

Superdrug's beauty range with Zoella became the retailer's fastest selling ever and seems like a smart move for both sides.

I'm also always interested to see what Dominos are up to. From emoji pizza ordering to their Dough to Door Snapchat video, the brand really takes a DIY approach and aren't afraid to try new things, which appeals to a young demographic.

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What makes for an authentic partnership?

Brand relevance: Your brand needs to be something that the influencer could genuinely be interested in. PewDiePie endorsing a game? Tick. Endorsing a brand of snacks? Still kind of relevant as gamers chow a lot of snacks. Endorsing an aftershave? Iffy ground. Even better is if the partnership is around a brand they already use. Nando's is so loved by Ed Sheeran and Example they wrote a song about it. Yes they get a Nando's Black Card but you get the distinct impression they would have done it anyway.

Channel relevance: The endorsement also needs to suit the channel. If we take the PewDiePie example, his YouTube channel is all gaming so unless you have



a game that needs endorsing, stay clear of that channel. But his Instagram channel features all kinds of content, and that's where I'd go with the previously mentioned snack endorsement.

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If you do anything to erode the audience's trust in the influencer, you've missed the point of influencer marketing.

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Passionpoint credibility: Even if the influencer is interested in the brand passion point, they also need to have some credibility. Fashion blogger Jordan Bunker might love football, but would you trust his endorsement of the latest Nike boots? No. The F2 football freestylers would be a far better move.

Brand passion: This could be that they already use the product or that they become genuinely excited once they try it. Either way, like any relationship, it won't work if only one side is into it. Influencers need to be excited by more than the money changing hands.

Honesty: Influencers are influential because they are trusted. If you do anything to erode the audience's trust in them you've missed the point of influencer marketing. It's like buying a Ferrari because you want to drive fast, then replacing the petrol with syrup and wondering why you're not getting anywhere.

Honesty is the fuel that makes the whole machine work. If you dictate that an influencer must do something for money, they need to flag when they do that thing #spon or #ad etc. This is a legal issue and the ASA come down hard on those that ignore the rules but really, if trying to fool their audience is something brands would want to get away with if they could, they won't have much of a future with youth audiences.

Where are the most impactful and sought after of the brand collabs coming from?

Definitely fashion. Fashion lends itself really well to creative partnerships and bringing to life creative vision. For a youth audience, anything that brings a touch of luxury or scarcity to an affordable brand is perfect. Collabs don't need to be fashion though. Cupcakes and Cashmere guest edited May's Birchbox, and you could see how the brand could continue to partner with other relevant influencers in the same way moving forward.

Given their popularity and prevalence, is the market in danger of becoming oversaturated?

Hell no. Granted, gone are the days when simply doing a collab was news, but it completely depends on the parties

Gone are the days when simply doing a collab was news.



The guest-editing approach, where brand work with different influencers to curate their brand, is growing.



involved. Try to tell me a Vetements/Topshop collab wouldn't sell out in minutes or a Golf Wang/ Uniqlo partnership wouldn't be all over Hypebeast. No chance! Both would rightly be huge because they are interesting creatively and provide something the audience wants, affordable 'luxury'.

What do you see as "the future" of influencer-led brand collaborations?

Revenue share is interesting as it means the influencer is super invested in the success of the collab.

I also think the guest editing approach, where brands work with different influencers to curate their brand every so often is growing. This works especially well for subscription based brands, although brands do need to be mindful to

retain their own voice and not just become a channel for influencers.

It's also worth thinking about more leftfield ideas. We're currently working with Airbnb on a campaign that will use influencer stories to power an interactive artwork. The influencers aren't known for their love of art but their stories are relevant to their passion points and the Airbnb brand and will be used to promote the campaign via their own channels.

Trends and themes

Informed by these expert perspectives and our own research, we've identified key trends and collated them alongside case studies and relevant reading.

Makers over mannequins

Makers over mannequins

Over recent years we've seen a rise in the number of brands collaborating with high profile designers, independent artists, up and coming illustrators and other creative practitioners.

Rather than famous figures fronting campaigns and acting as brand ambassadors on social media, collections are instead being co-created with makers, who are able to infuse their own distinctive style and skills into each collection.

Designer collaborations lie at the heart of online clothing customisation sites such as [Print All Over Me](#) and [Unmade](#), which offer illustrators and visual artists the chance to translate their work onto apparel, and craft new designs for knitwear, respectively. Whether rising stars such as Christopher Raeburn or Hattie Stewart, or established names such as Malika Favre, the growing popularity of these design collaborations evidences an appetite for partnerships that are more meaningful than a mere modelling contract.

We refer to "makers" not purely or necessarily in the artisanal sense, but encompassing a broad scope of creatives who can be brought into the design process in a more genuinely collaborative way, affording brands opportunities to make partnerships that are perceived as truly authentic.



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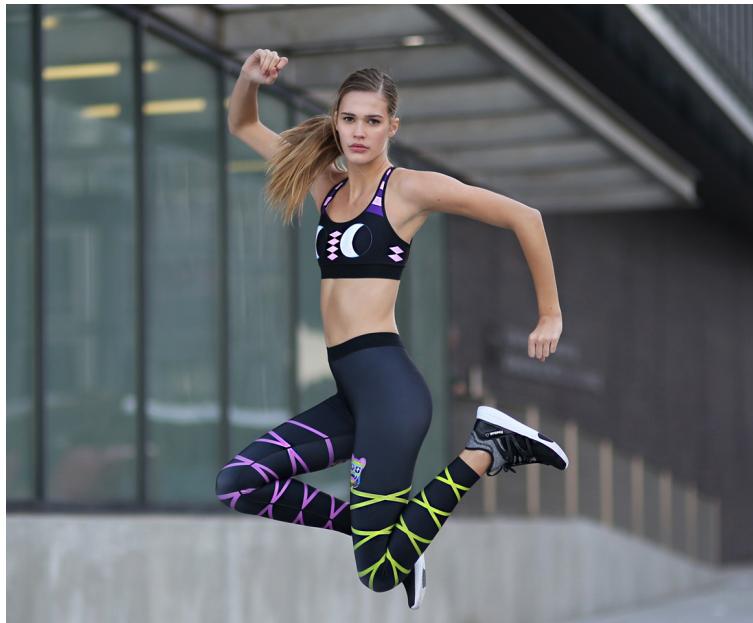
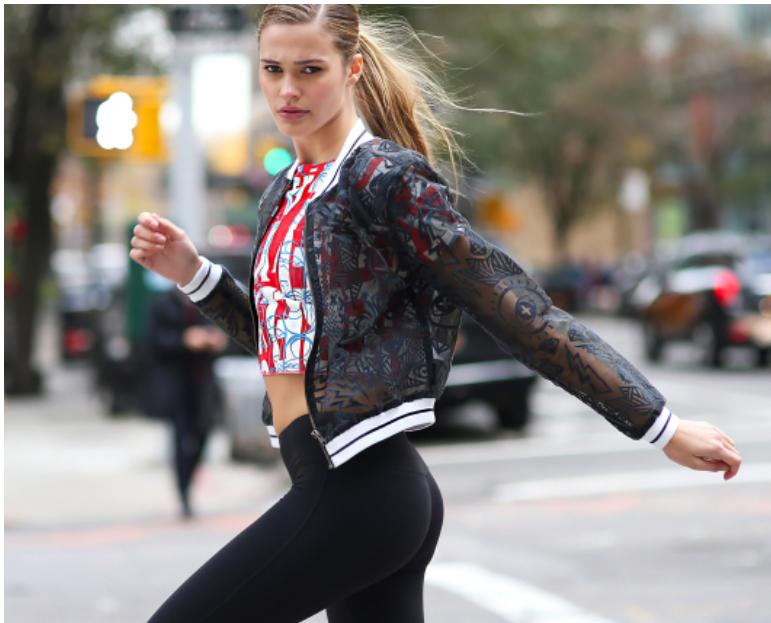
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Christopher Raeburn

Known for his ethical approach to design with military influences, the designer continues on his rise, with accolades including Topshop NME Awards in 2010 and British Fashion Award for Emerging Designer in 2011.



Bandier's artist-led activewear collection

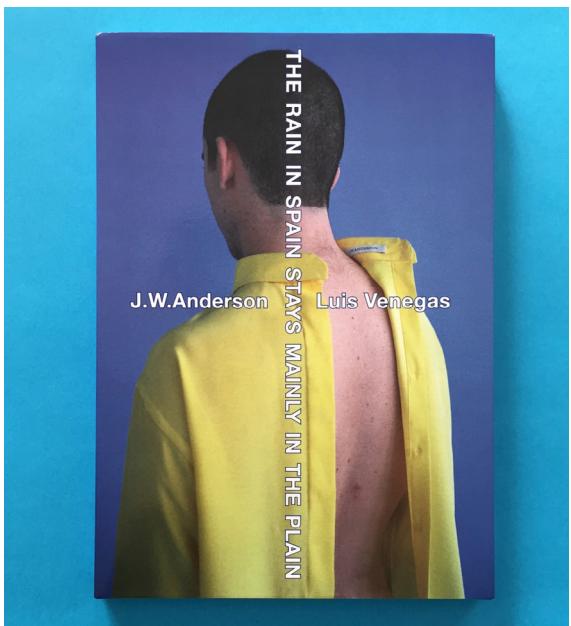


To coincide with Miami's Art Basel last December, activewear boutique Bandier launched a series of collaborations between athletic brands and street artists, sold in its five US stores and on its ecommerce site.

The collaboration saw London-based Malarko Hernandez's pixelated cartoon monster designs skateboarding down the legs of spandex leggings from Ultracor and across the brand's bomber jackets and tote bags; New York's Christopher Sauvé created prints that were applied to leggings and crop tops from Strut-This; while Upendo Taylor added bold graphic and typographic designs to sports bras and t-shirts from Reebok.

As the athleisure category becomes increasingly competitive, with brands all making the same promises with regards to performance, artist-led collaborations give collections a distinctive identity, helping brands stand out.

JW Anderson's Shoreditch store



JW Anderson has taken the concept of collaboration beyond product and into the physical space, opening a concept store in London's Shoreditch. Inspired by the Bloomsbury Group's Omega Workshops, Jonathan Anderson collaborates with a different artist each month to design a collection and transform the store into a cultural space.

The space launched in January with a collaboration between the brand and publisher and editor Luis Venegas, who together created a collection of clothing that was sold alongside limited edition magazines.

The following partnership saw photographer Ian David Baker showcase a series of limited edition prints alongside a capsule collection which featured his images overlaid onto items.

Makers over mannequins: Further reading

Artists and brands
should be at odds,
but they can still
collaborate

From successful pairings such as Takashi Murakami's 2002 collaboration with Louis Vuitton, which produced the iconic Multicolore and Cherry Blossom collections and boosted sales by 10%, to the overconspicuous logos of Montblanc's art bags, Flamingo's Alex Wilson considers the sometimes fraught, sometimes fruitful relationship between artists and brands — and examines what that means for collaborations.

[Read the Flamingo feature here]



Art is fundamentally about challenging and resisting other forms of culture, while even at their edgiest, brands are about legitimacy and conformity.



Champion independent artistic production and expression unconditionally. Don't demand concessions to the brand book.



Use your brand as a platform, like a gallery.



Makers over mannequins: Further reading

Runway-ready athleisure

JWT Intelligence examines the growing number of athleisure brands that are tapping high profile designers to increase their profile and stand out in a crowded market, taking notes from high fashion to keep their activewear strategy fresh and effective.

[Read the JWT Intelligence analysis here]



To sustain growth, athletic brands looking for a fresh angle are tapping talent straight from the runway.



Brands are hoping to draw new audiences through the intersection of fashion and celebrity.



Athleisure retailers will need to stay creative to maintain their edge.



Icon worship

Icon worship

Despite the growing popularity of “maker”-driven collaborations, big name celebrity collaborations still have currency, with Pharrell, Rihanna and Kanye embarking on a seemingly endless succession of partnerships that are still proving effective marketing exercises, as well as helping bolster sales figures significantly.

[Rihanna's capsule collection helped UK fashion chain River Island hit a 70% rise in 2014, while her 2015 Fenty x Puma Creeper collection boosted footwear sales for the brand](#), with the initial collection selling out in minutes and each time it's been restocked or recommissioned in new colourways.

Interestingly and in line with the “makers over mannequins trend,” the speight of recent celebrity collaborations are increasingly centred on co-creation, with the celebrity seen to be spearheading the design of each collection, often taking on a creative director role.

We've collated a selection of relevant reading that explores the effectiveness and authenticity of some of the most pertinent big-name brand collaborations, and looks at how and why some partnerships may have missed the mark.



Icon worship: Further reading

The power of Rihanna's personal brand

WGSN examines Rihanna's seemingly endless run of successful brand collaborations — from 2014's capsule collection for River Island, to her Fenty x Puma creepers which consistently sell out in every colourway.

[\[Read WGSN's perspective\]](#)



Rihanna's Puma collaboration reflects a huge shift in sportswear marketing from using athletes to using celebrities as the face of campaigns and brand ambassadors.



Rihanna is the most marketable of all big-name celebrities

A survey by consumer insights organisation The NPD Group assessed in detail the relative "marketability" of various famous names, from Beyoncé to Dr. Dre. It found that Rihanna boasted the most "strong brand endorsement opportunities," defined as endorsements, partnerships or tie-ups where fans of that celebrity are at least 50 percent more likely to use the brand.

[\[Read the report\]](#)



Celebrities are media properties in their own right, with audiences that have nuanced brand preferences.



Icon worship: Further reading

Is it the shoes? Steph Curry hasn't made Under Armour cool yet

Bloomberg considers how Under Armour is trying to cross over into the mainstream and cultivate a new image of cool with its ongoing collection of Currys sneakers, created in partnership with Golden State Warriors star Stephen Curry — but is encountering a few barriers along the way. Curry's family man image, coupled with perceptions of Under Armour as a performance brand and a go-to suburban staple — and topped off by the questionable design of some of the sneakers — has made it difficult for Under Armour to cross over into the covetable casual fashion space.

The partnership's problems are proof that big-name brand collaborations aren't always guaranteed to succeed, and a famous name isn't enough to bolster the "cool" of a brand.

[Read Bloomberg's analysis]



Curry has a family-man image, which has sometimes seemed at odds with being an avatar of cool.



What's the secret to celebrity designer success?

Dazed explores the secret to the success of certain celebrity designers — and the pitfalls that others fall prey to.

With the host of celebrities turning their hands to design in mind, the magazine considers what it takes to be taken seriously, examining how the likes of the Olsen twins and Victoria Beckham have overcome scepticism surrounding their creative abilities to build credibility within the fashion industry.

Considering Kanye's collaboration with Adidas, the piece also argues that credibility and sales don't always go hand-in-hand, with Kanye's name helping to shift product, without necessarily garnering respect in relation to his designs.

[Read the feature on Dazed]



Quite often, a celebrity moniker is not necessarily a helpful accessory.



Icon worship: Further reading

Marketing vs. Moneymaking

While Kanye's special-release, sell out sneaker collections with Adidas are helping boost its street cred and generating a lot of hype, it's Pharrell's single-colour Superstars that are making a significant positive impact on the sports brand's sales — with Superstars responsible for a remarkable 10% of Adidas' sales in 2015.

[[Bloomberg looks in detail here](#)]



The Yeezy becomes a marketing exercise more than an immediate moneymaker.



How Adidas Originals surpassed Adidas on social media

Digiday examines how high profile celebrity designer collaborations have not only helped boost Adidas' sales, but have been responsible for Adidas Originals overtaking Adidas' own success on social media — with 3.3 million followers on Twitter and 12.4 million on Instagram, compared to Adidas' 2.8 million and 8.9 million respectively.

[[Read the full analysis on Digiday](#)]

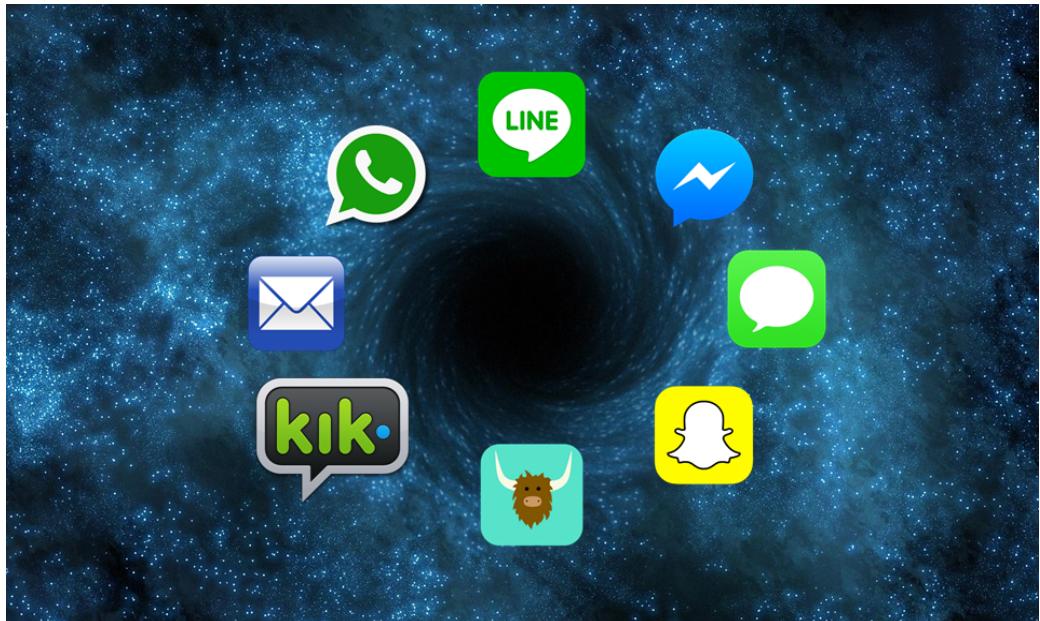


It's the celebrity status and the willingness of the fan armies to follow them.



Micro-influencers and dark social

Microinfluencers and dark social



With WhatsApp surpassing one billion users, and Snapchat boasting over 100 million, more and more consumers, particularly amongst younger demographics, are moving their communications and online activities to "dark social" platforms.

According to an oft-quoted study by RadiumOne, dark social sharing via email or messaging apps accounted for 74% of inbound web traffic in the UK in 2014.

As these usage figures continue to rise, brands are finding new ways to navigate these previously private spaces in the search for new opportunities to engage with consumers.

We've considered how Adidas is aiming to create new forms of organic advocacy that will allow them to have a presence and build influence on these previously unreachable platforms.

As the prevalence of influencer marketing continues to grow, marketers seeking to ensure partnerships remain fresh and fruitful are beginning to look beyond popular bloggers and celebrities, to "micro-influencers", defined as social influencers with smaller but more engaged followings.

As well as the increasing number of brands commissioning sponsored posts on social from multiple mid-tier influencers, the popularity of micro-influencers is also manifesting itself in the growing number of brands collaborating with less high profile influencers, celebrities, and other cultural figures — chosen not for their extensive social reaches, but rather to be hyper-relevant to each audience.

Beginning back in 2012, Uniqlo's "People" campaigns have long leveraged influencers local to each store location. The brand most recently appointed London grime artist Skepta as cultural ambassador for the relaunch of its flagship Oxford Street store. The cross-platform campaigns feature local influencers and tastemakers that embody the brand's spirit, and resonate with local audiences at the same time.

We've looked in greater detail at a more recent example from Finery that incorporates product development and co-creation too.

Adidas' approach to dark social

WhatsApp Squads

During the UEFA Champions League last year, Adidas began taking a grassroots approach to brand advocacy, using Twitter's DM functionality to invite a small group of brand advocates into a private conversation with one of its sponsored players.

Aiming to evolve its activities on dark social channels, in advance of the Copa America this June, the brand has been building "squads" on WhatsApp. The strategy aims to help the brand gain a greater understanding of the way private sharing works, as part of its broader intent to leverage dark social during blockbuster sporting events.

These groups or communities have been built in Berlin, London, Paris, Milan and Stockholm, and have been sharing early and exclusive news and content, as well as event invitations and opportunities to meet to Adidas' celebrity ambassadors.

The brand hopes that the offer of exclusive content and a more intimacy with the brand and its ambassadors will help temper feelings of invasiveness.

[The Drum looks in detail here]



WhatsApp was specifically chosen as our research shows that consumers already use the app to create their own micro-communities.



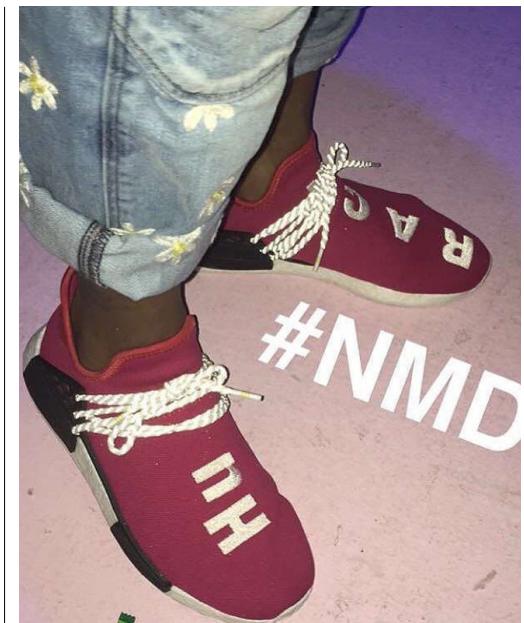
Adidas Originals Snapchat

The sports brand is leveraging its high profile influencers on its other dark social platforms too, giving over control of its Snapchat channel to celeb collaborators such as Pharrell, who leak photos of their upcoming designs through Snapchat Stories and to their own extensive audiences.

The channel's first Snapchat story saw musician Pharrell share moments from the LA launch of his latest line, and sharing the first glimpse of his "HU" NMD sneakers. The image was saved by users over 4,000 times using the app's screenshot function and later shared on other social platforms including Instagram and Twitter.

The strategy used Snapchat's various functionalities to the full, with Pharrell working with the brand's in-house design team to create a dedicated geofilter for the launch event, based on his own doodles. The filter was used by several guests including DJ Khaled.

[Read about the strategy on Digiday]



Finery Forever Pieces

finery.com/forever-pieces



Contemporary British apparel brand Finery collaborated with six women to each co-design an item for a collection of “Forever Pieces”, items they’d like to keep forever.

Each of the six women are creative professionals, highly successful in their own fields. And their different professions – and equally eclectic style – are designed to resonate with the brand’s own audience of sophisticated British women.

BAFTA-winning actress Vicky McClure created a jumpsuit inspired by her penchant for tailoring; author and Grazia magazine Editor-at-Large Polly Vernon reimagined the leather biker jackets of her teen years; while Agata Belcen, Stylist and Senior Editor at AnOther Magazine created her vision of the perfect pair of trousers.

Rather than opting for more high-profile, celebrity collaborators, the brand has instead centred a collection around a group of influencers that its audience will both closely identify with and aspire to be like.



Micro-influencers and dark social: Further reading

The power of the mid-tier blogger

Racked considers the rising popularity of micro-influencers amongst brands, who are beginning to understand the value of working with mid-tier bloggers over both A-list social influencers and actual celebs. With sponsored posts coming in at a smaller fee, marketers are able to work with multiple mid-tier bloggers, rather than blowing budgets on a single big-name blogger, which helps to create a more organic perception of the popularity of the brand.

Moreover, despite having smaller followings, mid-tier bloggers often boast more engaged audiences, meaning their opinions and endorsements are likely to be more meaningful and effective.

[Read the piece on Racked]



Having an impressive number of followers is certainly an asset — but who those followers are is just as important.



Luka Sabbat, the 18-Year-Old Fashion Influencer

The New York Times profiles the teenage model, stylist and social influencer, who offers his followers a blend of authenticity and aspiration that resonates strongly with his Gen Z audience.

While his followings of 184,000 on Instagram and 64,000 on Twitter are relatively modest, the engagement shown by his smaller but highly dedicated fans make for a more meaningful prospect for advertisers and brands.

[Read the NYT's profile of Luka here]



The relative modesty of Mr. Sabbat's online metrics is far outweighed by the fervid attention his followers pay to his every move.



Micro-influencers and dark social: Further reading

Join the conversation

We took a look at the growing wave of brands using messaging apps to take a more chatty approach to digital commerce and communications — whether that's Clarks' narrative-led WhatsApp campaign, or Made.com's collaboration with "conversational commerce" app, Hero.

[Read the feature on the YCN site]



Messaging is changing how we all communicate. The logical evolution is to use messaging to redefine how we interact with business.



Guest curation

Guest curation

Previously the sole purview of the art industry, curation as a practice is being adopted increasingly by brands across multiple channels, from books to bricks and mortar.

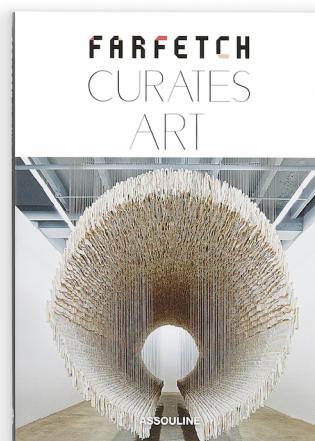
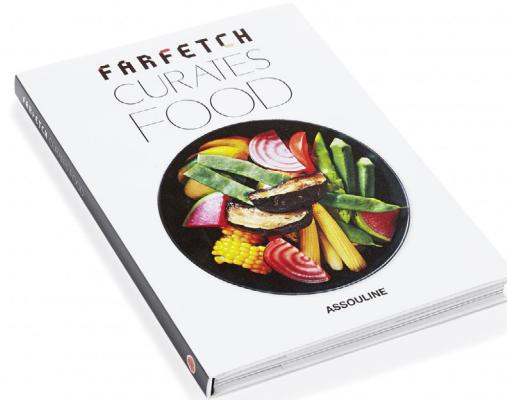
Online retailer Farfetch has extended its discerning curatorial eye beyond fashion and e-commerce, releasing a series of printed publications entitled "Farfetch curates..." that have so far covered food, design and art.

While New York boutique Story is taking the concept of curation into the physical retail space, periodically refreshing its interiors and product selection around a different theme, and in partnership with a different brand.

Brands are also inviting influencers to take the lead in this curatorial approach to commerce by guest-editing product selections or curating collections.

As well as inviting influencers to share their expertise and authority, these strategies open the brand up to each guest-curator's own audiences.

We've explored a few smart examples of brands leveraging influencers in editor or curator roles.

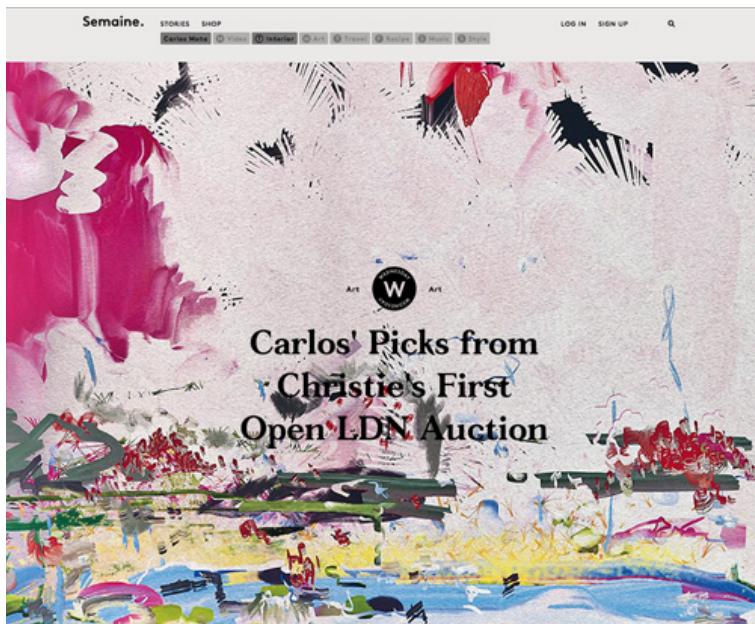
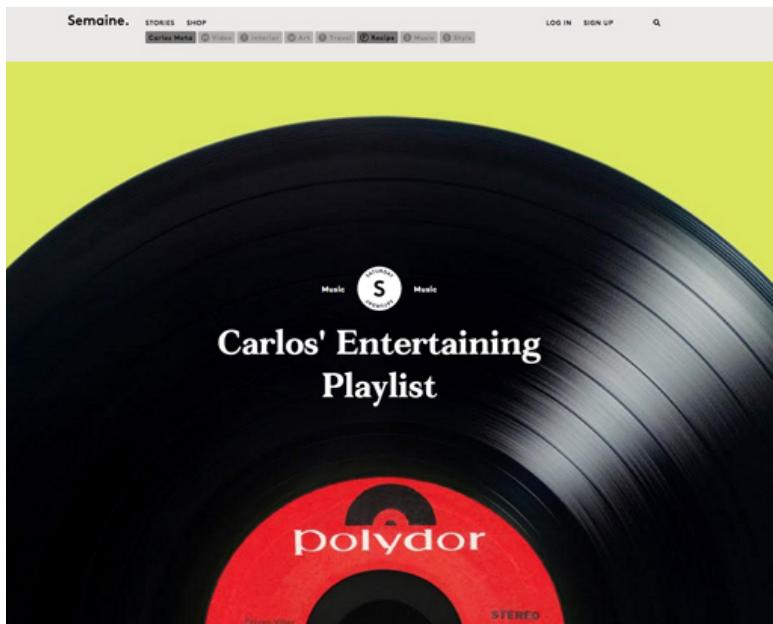
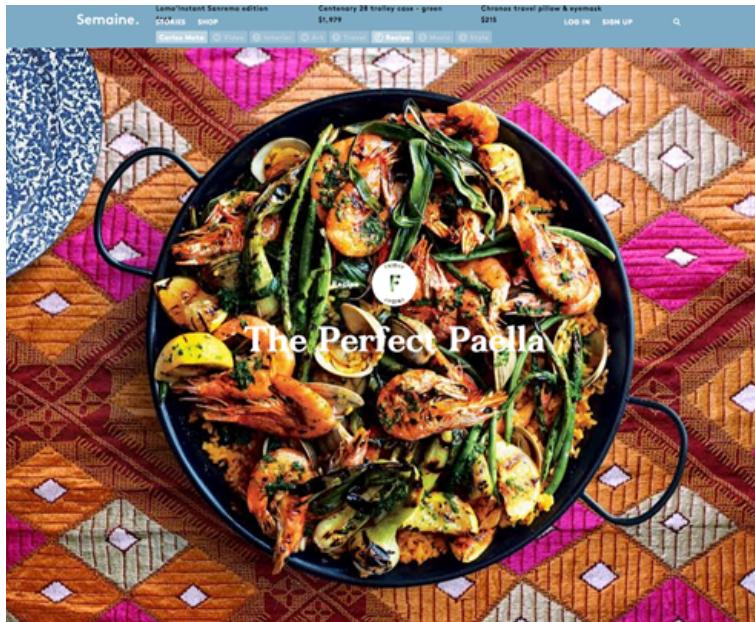




Alongside its own carefully curated monthly product selections, beauty subscription brand Birchbox partners periodically with beauty bloggers, celebrities, brands and publications, who are each invited to "Guest Edit" a box.

Previous partners have included The Lo Down's Lo Bosworth, as well a one-off box by Nicole Richie, and an ongoing partnership with make-up artist Mary Greenwell.

The concept was launched in the UK last October, with subscribers given the option to opt-in to receive a Guest Editor box, curated by either Mary Greenwell or Stylist magazine's Joanna McGarry.



Launched last September, Semaine is a stylish online platform that marries content and e-commerce to give visitors a weekly window into the lives of influential “tastemakers” — allowing them to shop each influencer’s lifestyle.

Founded by Michelle Lu, Georgina Harding and Fernanda Abdalla, the site plays host to a different guest curator each week — with the eclectic list of previous curators including shoe designer Charlotte Olympia, actress Jemima Kirke and stylist Carlos Mota.

Driven by image-led editorial, this approach to e-commerce and product discovery offers consumers the opportunity to immerse themselves in every aspect of each influencer’s lifestyle — whether that’s reading recommendations and favourite recipes, or homeware and workwear.

The concept takes influencer marketing further — offering people the opportunity not just to buy into, but to actually buy an influencer’s lifestyle.

Guest curation: Further reading

Semaine takes an editorial approach to e-commerce

When the site first launched last September, we considered how the site's approach marries guest curation and influencer marketing to offer an effective example of "retail as media."

[Read the feature on the YCN site]



Retail Media is the idea that retail can be a viable media channel. Just like traditional media, retail is capable of telling relevant stories that can be used by brands to drive consumer engagement and impressions.



How to blend content and commerce with Semaine

Protein spoke to Semaine founders Michelle Lu and Georgina Harding, about how Semaine's influencer-led, curatorial approach aims to help people make more meaningful purchase decisions.

[Read the interview on Protein]



Because we can have everything, we need to know why we want it. What we're doing at Semaine is creating the context so that they can understand the reason.



Guest curation: Further reading

The New Curator

We spoke to curator and author Natasha Hoare, whose book, *The New Curator*, explores how curation in the art world is evolving, and why brands are increasingly adopting curatorial approaches too.

[Read the interview on our site here]

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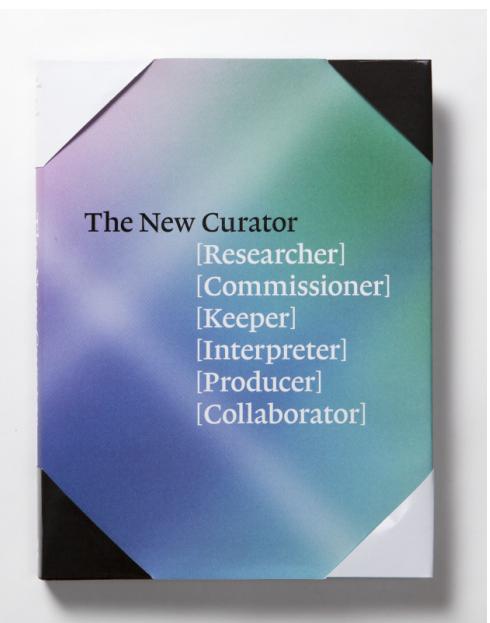
With the proliferation of consumables – both goods and services – the ability to ‘choose’ or ‘select’ has been elevated to a high status.

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Of course ideas such as ‘taste’ and ‘connoisseurship’ have existed as tropes for a long time, so perhaps ‘curate’ is just a new facet of this continuous need for figures who can navigate the chaotic material world that surrounds us.

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Thank you!
