Fashion icons

Influencers or Celebrities

What to choose when?
24 05 2017

Jackie Soekias
Fashion & Management
Amsterdam Fashion Institute
June 2017
500686438
Product

The final product is derived from the research of my graduation thesis. The article is inspired due to the fact of the arising power of new social media influencers. With new third-party endorsers entering the fashion industry celebrities have been gaining more competition. So, as a fashion brand, what are the elements to keep in mind when choosing one or the other?

The aim of my product is to make fashion brands aware of the differences as well as similarities between these two notions as the use of these iconic figures can enhance a companies’ marketing communication strategy. It is a simple guide translated in to an article which is presented to an online fashion platform in order to reach the professionals as well as target a big audience within the contemporary fashion industry.

The article is written for the audience of Business of Fashion (BoF). Through this platform I tend to reach (global) fashion businesses, as this is an online platform with global reach over 200 different countries. The founder of BoF created this platform in order to fill the the void for an informed, analytical and opinionated point of view on fashion businesses. By taking this in consideration the following article is represented to acquaint fashion businesses thus to provide an additional insight into the different marketing communication strategies.
Op-Ed | Fashion icons
Influencers or Celebrities
What to choose when?

Amsterdam, The Netherlands – Contemporary fashion brands have evolved to represent much more than only the traditional markers of trust, quality and reliability to the consumers. They now embed in the consumer psyche and offer them the opportunity for self-identity, self-realisation and self-expression. With an increase in advertising literacy, the traditional approaches – which are relied on storytelling and verbal communications – have become threatened. In addition, with the new third-party endorsers a new potent tool in brand communication has been arising: the social influencers.

Today more and more fashion brands are scrambling to partner with celebrities and social influencers. The practices of micro-celebrity and self-branding have been intensified in the recent years due to the popularity and ubiquity of social media platforms. The access to a celebrity status has become democratized as individuals now have become empowered participants in an emerging online economy, whereas their reputation is generated by social media participation. But in what ways does the use of a traditional celebrity differ from a social influencer? And how can companies distinguish one strategy for the other in order to enhance their future strategy?

But first, is there really a difference between the two?

Yes, the new star on the horizon definitely differs from traditional celebrities in considerable ways. Although both strategies make use of well-known people to influence their target market, the point of difference is how they are executed thus how they influence and who they influence.

IMPORTANT: recognize the differences
The first interesting point to highlight is their difference in achieving fame. Whilst celebrities have built up fame via traditional channels, influencers have become self-built stars via social media platforms. However, research shows that influencers are most likely labelled as specialist’s due to their expertise and knowledge on a specific topic. They have built a community around themselves in a niche space. When using an influencer in a marketing campaign the goal is not necessarily to gain notoriety, no instead it is generating true recommendations within the brands’ targeted community. For example, Rihanna and Kanye West do not necessarily need to be a fashion expert in order to recommend Puma or Adidas. No, they are so well-known within our society which means that it does not matter if the product lies outside their field of expertise. By using celebrities as the face of a company, individuals within the target market will associate thus recognize and correlate the endorser to the brand.

“Whilst influencers significantly carry more weight in the subject, celebrities gain more exposure. It is a question of mass impact vs. mass reach.”

According to Fashion and Beauty Monitor, influences are considered more effective. Influencers have grown organically over time which resulted in an increasing follower base due to similar likes, beliefs and mind-set. Because of this, the audience of a social influencer might have more interest in related products thus trust the expert more instead of a traditional celebrity.
In addition, influencers are also considered more engaged opposed to celebrities. Research claims that the main goal of a celebrity endorsement strategy is to be seen hence to be heard. However, this does not correlate towards social interaction like for instance social influencers have. Opposed to celebrities, social influencers are constantly running a dialogue with their following. Not only do they answer questions and respond to their followers’ comments, they also tend to go further in detail on certain points of interest. This opposed to celebrity endorsement whereas the goal is to reach as much and many people as possible. By taking this in consideration, you can see that influencers are most likely engaged in a community rather than celebrities are. This correlates to the statement mass impact versus mass reach.

Another difference between the notions is that influencers are deliberated creative content creators. Influencers have built up their social empire due to their creation of own (creative) content. While brands do the celebrities scripting, producing and distribution of the content, social influencers produce and distribute their own. Bloggers, for instance, write their own posts and YouTubers are the ones who film, script and edit the video. The followers consider the influencers message, from start to end, as their own. This often leads to more credibility as well as authenticity, which celebrities rarely emulate. The target market often perceives celebrity endorsement as a message from the brand rather than from the endorser. The endorser is, opposed to social influencers, only considered a messenger.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional celebrities</th>
<th>Social Influencers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Popular.</td>
<td>1. Influential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Target mass market.</td>
<td>3. Target niche market and are deliberated specialists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Build up credibility through their profession.</td>
<td>5. Build up credibility through honest opinions, therefore more authentic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 1](image.png) key differences between social influencer and celebrity

Creating more value

However, as these strategies are both capable and independent from each other, all marketers must know whether they want to engage with influencer marketing or celebrity endorsement. As mentioned above, the first and foremost important thing to note when implying these strategies to current your business, is notifying their differences. After you acquired this knowledge, clarification regarding your campaign objectives need to be set. Clarifying this, will help you obtain relevant information whether a traditional celebrity or (local) social influencer suits your companies’ objectives better. After these have been set it is important to tailor your influencer or celebrity strategy accordingly.

For instance, if your company is seeking for more interaction thus engagement within a specific market, choosing a popular among demographic influencer might be right answer for you. However, if you are looking for more mass awareness, a celebrity endorsement approach might make more sense. The difference in objectives lead to a different chosen strategy. However, research claims that within these strategies the similarity relies on authenticity, as this seems to be the most essential facet within every marketing campaign. It is important that the chosen endorser fits the brand accordingly as well as that their partnership make sense for both parties. Fashion consumers find advertisements much more interesting, persuasive and engaging when the relationship between a brand and the endorser is considered authentic.
Choose or mix & match

However, as both strategies have a different audience, both could be employed to create a successful thus integrated marketing campaign. While traditional celebrities reach the mass market and enhance more brand awareness, social influencers create more interaction and intimate connections between the audience and the endorsed brand. The combination of these strategies, when well executed, could result in more driven sales and thus lead to an increase in conversion.

An example of a comprehensive marketing campaign is for instance Hunkemöller. Recently the Dutch leading lingerie label has chosen supermodel Doutzen Kroes as the face of their integrated marking campaign strategy. However, in order to complement Kroes’ instant recognizable name and face, Hunkemöller has also chosen to collaborate with prominent YouTuber and digital social influencer Anna Nooshin. According to Hunkemöller, Anna Nooshin has helped driving more conversion thus attract more consumer audience as well as reinforced their marketing campaign.

So, does this mean that one strategy is better than the other? I think not. While the gap between celebrities and social influencers starts to close more and more, people should embrace these differences as the use of them can enhance different business strategies and fulfil different objectives.

In order to achieve a maximized effect, it is first important to distinguish one from the other, followed by setting your objectives and then applying your strategy accordingly. However, there is no need to out beat one strategy from the other as both can complement and thus function accordingly in an integrated marketing campaign strategy.