

# UNDER THE INFLUENCE

*As our purchasing power within the beauty industry becomes increasingly lead by influencers, AllBright takes a look at how exactly social media is shaping our shopping*

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Cast your mind back to the last time you were looking for beauty advice and answer this: where did you go for it? The most probable answer is not very far – after all, most smart devices are usually within arm’s reach. Today, boundless beauty advice is only a scroll away as digital platforms and social media personalities gain more influence than ever. In fact, a recent US study found that 72% of millennials buy beauty products based on Instagram posts, while 70% of Gen X-ers are likely to purchase something from a brand they follow online. Considering their spending power (Gen X earns 31% of the US’s total income, despite only making up 25% of the population), influencers clearly equate to big money.

The financial gains, however, are mutual, with digital content creators able to monetise their online presence. For example, with 1million followers on Instagram, beauty vlogger Patricia Bright

(@thepatriciabright) has revealed she earns a six figure salary easily. This income is generated via a three-pronged approach: recommending products or services in exchange for affiliate revenue (earning commission for sales they drive), creating one-off sponsored content on their platforms (a form of advertising that is clearly labelled) and collaborating with brands as ambassadors to create content, host events or simply to sell a specific product.

Case in point: Huda Kattan. The Dubai-based make-up artist started her blog in 2010, before launching her make-up brand Huda Beauty (@hudabeauty) in 2013. Starting with just one product – a pair of false lashes – Kattan used social media and her skills as a make-up artist to market the product. The brand now has 140 products in its line and 40 million Instagram followers, propelling Kattan to being the highest paid beauty influencer in the world. According to Forbes, the make-up mogul is now worth \$550 million.

Similar tales of beauty brand success have sprouted up across the industry. Take British make-up artists-cum-YouTube stars Sam and Nic Chapman (@realtechniques), who run make-up brush company Real Techniques, which has 2.5 million Instagram followers; or Ruth Crilly (@amodelrecommends), who created haircare brand COLAB Dry Shampoo. Across the pond, LA-based influencers Marianna Hewitt (@marianna\_hewitt) and Lauren Gores Ireland (@laurengores) recently launched Summer Fridays. Their first product, the Jet Lag Mask, became the best selling product on Sephora.com within a fortnight of launching and garnered approval from the likes of Kim Kardashian West and Jessica Alba. ‘Everything is done on social. We call ourselves a social-first brand and we mean that. We think Instagram first because we know it’s the most effective and fastest way to reach our audience,’ Marianna Hewitt told fashion news channel WWD.

It’s no wonder then that beauty brands are now taking the influence of digital talent seriously, with many major industry names valuing influencers equally with celebrities. Take Lancôme, who snapped up Lisa Eldridge (@lisaeldridgemakeup) as their Global Creative Director in 2015. Originally famed for her red carpet and editorial work, Eldridge was one of the first well-known make-up artists to adopt a digital presence. She started creating make-up tutorials for her website and YouTube platform in 2010 and now has a reach of 3 million across her digital channels. A following which no doubt incentivised her own sell-out lipstick

line, as well as a ring collection launched in response to the myriad comments she was receiving about the jewellery she wears in her YouTube videos. More recently, Lancôme appointed Chiara Ferragni (@theblondesalad), whose 777k Instagram followers saw her named Forbes’ No.1 most powerful fashion influencer, as their face.

But in an increasingly crowded digital space, influencers must stand out to succeed, with substance over style prevailing. ‘In an age where anyone can call themselves an ‘influencer’ and with a proliferation in the amount of social media content that’s available, audiences’ attention, loyalty and trust is becoming more hard won,’ observes Lucy Loveridge, Head of Talent UK at Gleam Futures, a digital-first talent agency operating in both London and LA. Consequently, audiences are eschewing advice based on personal opinions in favour of authoritative industry experts with extensive knowledge.

In the world of beauty, that space is being leveraged by established journalists to build online communities. Alessandra Steinherr (@alexsteinherr), former beauty director at Glamour Magazine UK, is just one of those industry names that has made the transition and now has 189k Instagram followers. ‘I’ve been a beauty journalist and editor for over 15 years,’ she says. ‘I’ve interviewed and learnt from the top experts in the field, but the industry is more confusing than ever, as there is more choice than ever. My advice and product recommendations are there to help people feel empowered to make the right choices about their beauty routines. So while the medium for my content may have changed, my approach remains the

same – rigorous research and only fact-based information.’

Similarly, Nadine Baggott, a 55-year-old Beauty Editor and TV Presenter with 30 years’ experience, shares advice with her 80k followers via Instagram (@nadinebaggott) and 100k subscribers via YouTube. ‘My industry experience gives me a unique position, and my background as a journalist makes me a combination of sceptical and informed. I can cut through the beauty bullshit and tell my followers what does and doesn’t work,’ Baggott commented. Her tagline, “No FaceTune, No Filters” reinforces this message, and positions her content as both authentic and trustworthy. ‘No one is following me because I am pretty, they follow me for honest advice,’ she explains.

Of course, there are other reasons consumers are heading in a digital direction for advice. While the beauty industry is often lambasted for promoting unrealistic beauty standards, a growing breed of social media accounts is offering an antidote to this glossy perfection. Part of the skin positivity movement, these accounts reject conventional beauty ideals and reconsider so-called ‘imperfections’.

Leading the charge is blogger Em Ford (@mypaleskinblog), who released a video in 2015 of her before and after make-up shots called ‘You Look Disgusting’. Highlighting the abuse she’d received online when posting make-up tutorials and raising awareness of adult acne, the video went viral, attracting attention from celebrities such as Kylie Jenner, and received 10 million views in the first week. Similarly, Kali Kushner (@myfacestory) started sharing her adult acne story via Instagram to feel less

alone. ‘Instagram was originally for pretty pictures, but it’s become a place to share stories and connect with like-minded people. We’ve not only been able to begin to normalise acne but we’ve been able to completely shift the conversation around skin,’ Kushner, who now has 60k followers, commented.

This democratic nature of online content has also given underrepresented communities in the mainstream media a louder voice. Ronke Adeyemi created brownbeautytalk (@brownbeautytalk) in 2014 as a space for women of colour to come together and discuss the beauty issues affecting them. Today the account has evolved into an online magazine and events business bringing together beauty brands and women of colour. Meanwhile, for influencer and trans activist Gigi Gorgeous (@gigigorgeous), building an online presence has helped her raise awareness of trans issues. With 2 million followers on Instagram, plus another 2 million subscribers and contracts with Revlon, MAC, and L’Oréal, her reach is extensive. ‘Social media is fast, direct and to the point,’ explains Gigi. ‘I think that’s why it resonates so much with people. Having this level of visibility makes discussing and learning about difficult topics much more comfortable, and people tend to be more receptive and willing to understand.’

As our lives become ever-more digitised, the influence of online creators is only set to grow. In fact, according to influencer marketing platform Activate, 67% of brands think influencer campaigns help them reach a more targeted audience. The message is clear: when it comes to beauty, get set to scroll on.



Left to right: Nadine Baggott (@nadinebaggott), Lisa Eldridge (@lisaeldridgemakeup), Alessandra Steinherr (@alexsteinherr), Sam + Nic Chapman (@realtechniques), Huda Kattan (@hudabeauty)

Left to right: Lauren Gores Ireland (@laurengores) and Marianna Hewitt (@marianna\_hewitt), Em Ford (@mypaleskinblog), Patricia Bright (@thepatriciabright), Gigi Gorgeous (@gigigorgeous)