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Morgan Noonan
University of Iowa

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SOCIAL MEDIA FITNESS INFLUENCERS: INNOVATORS AND MOTIVATORS

by

Morgan Noonan

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Kylah Hedding
Thesis Mentor

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Journalism and Mass Communication have been completed.

Travis Vogan
Journalism and Mass Communication Honors Advisor

Social Media Fitness Influencers: Innovators and Motivators

By Morgan Noonan

It's no secret that people today are glued to their phones. In any public or private place, a person is bound to find people staring at their phones, headphones in, completely engaged in the small screen in front of them. The small, handheld devices have grown to become one of the most powerful tools the world has ever seen by the way they capture and hold the attention of so many people around the world. The internet has created new opportunities that people in the past might not have even dreamed of; from typing a question into this small device and receiving millions of results, to taking a snapshot of your food and having the calories and macros counted, to seeing the face and hearing the voice of a loved one living across the world and connecting with billions of people all over the world through photos, videos, text and audio. Technology has completely changed life as we know it and though new changes and advances always bring about a few negatives and unease within society, there's no denying the truly remarkable benefits these tools have brought into our world.

Arguably one of the biggest novel concept brought about by the internet is social media. We've been given a platform to meet and connect with people all over the world. A social media user can see a person whom they've never met and lives a 25-hour plane ride away every day by simply opening up their Instagram app. The connectivity of social media has given people more of the best resources available, other people. This concept of connecting with virtually anyone anywhere has proven to create relationships and endless opportunities for people and their ideas. Some of these people have had ideas that many people latch onto and share with others about their newfound "inspiration" or person they admire. Eventually this person grows their following due to the content, ideas and information they share. This is a social media influencer. According to [Pixlee](#), a branding agency, another definition of an

influencer is, “a user on social media who has established credibility in a specific industry. A social media influencer has access to a large audience and can persuade others by virtue of their authenticity and reach,” (Pixlee, n.d.). Basically, people trust influencers and are interested in what they have to say because they many people want to imagine that they could bring the concepts these influencers speak of into their own life. This is why social media influencers are such a perfect resource for those interested in improving their health, nutrition and wellness. These influencers promote lifestyles that people can be inspired and motivated by through seeing them every day on their various news feeds. Inspired by all of the good that social media can bring, I have studied and followed various fitness influencers on social media and kept a blog, Twitter and Instagram account to document my findings and thoughts on a specific influencer each week ([Influential Health](#)). Through this process I have discovered a lot about the life of an influencer as well as the effect it can have on my own lifestyle.

Social Influencers Throughout History: Everything Old is New Again

“Influencers” or people endorsing products and/or lifestyles used to mostly be celebrities.



Companies have been using the influence of people in the spotlight for a long time, since 1760's according to an [infographic](#) created by Social Media Explorer (Wallace, 2017). What started as Josiah Wedgwood giving royal endorsements for his pottery then, has evolved all the way into Kourtney Kardashian posting an Instagram story of her drinking Fit Tea. Even in the earlier days when celebrities were more often

authors and poets than movie stars, artists like Mark Twain appeared on his own [three brands](#),

Great Mark Cigars and Mark Twain Cigars and Mark Twain flour (you have to love the mental image that appears of Mark Twain on a sack of flour) (“Celebrity Endorsement,” 2004). This later began to evolve into all-star athletes, baseball players in particular including Joe DiMaggio and Babe Ruth who appeared on Wheaties boxes. Ad technology evolved, whatever was most popular became the source of brands’ celebrity endorsement. [Anne Sheridan and Bing Crosby](#) posed for cigarette ads in the forties, TV star Bill Cosby (however controversial as of lately) danced during Jell-O commercials and NBA athletes like Michael Jordan have starred in commercials for the sports drink Gatorade (Holmes, Chris 2013).

The concept of an influential person in society promoting or endorsing certain products, concepts or theories is not a unique suggestion, the methods of which a person promotes this, however, has drastically changed through the years. In the past, the use of celebrities, athletes, artists and other popular figures worked so well because people like to imagine that they might be able to be similar to their favorite well-known figure. That just maybe, if they used the same CoverGirl Wetslicks lip gloss as Rihanna in the “Umbrella” music video, I can embody the confident and beautiful woman that she is (Creswell, Julie 2008). Though the partnership between a celebrity and a brand must be right, there’s no denying that using stars to promote products is generally a very good business idea due to people’s beliefs that if their favorite celebrity endorses it, it must be a product worth purchasing.

This has now come to be true of people who aren’t typically identified as celebrities. A new genre of influential people have been created and is often referred to as “social media famous.” These people aren’t starring in movies, they don’t have a record deal and they didn’t start a Fortune 500 company. These people simply created a personal brand by doing what they love and posting about it on their social media accounts. Many times they aren’t paid at all,

they simply produced content that was so relevant for so many people that they gained followers and continue to do so through the messages they convey. Social media has created a platform for regular people to become household names due to the connectivity without boundaries and the visual appeal of quick access to photos, videos and text content.

Social Influencers and the Health and Fitness Industry: A Perfect Match

Social media has allowed people to be creative with animation, videography and photography, all on their own mobile devices. For this reason, industries with visual appeal do particularly well on social media and health and fitness is a prime example. People can share videos of circuits or exercises as examples. They can share a series of stories where they show their workouts for the day. Every day, fitness influencer [Alexia Clark](#) posts her workout circuit from the day as well as a series of videos where she answers questions that people write in to her. [Kayla Itsines](#) often posts a very visually appealing photo of food with comments on food swap suggestions or ways to curb sugar cravings. Instagram in particular is one of the best platforms for fitness influencers due to the ability for so many visuals. Instagram also lets followers be choose-y about the content they view from the producer. For example, [Lexi DeYoung](#) often posts physical workout tutorial videos on her Instagram page and then saves the more personal videos of her simply talking and answering followers' questions for her Instagram story. This way, if followers aren't interested in hearing the questions or learning about Lexi on a more personal level, they can simply stick to the content that is shared on her page formally. This has worked well in my personal experience because depending on what portion of their personal brand I'm reviewing, I like to find content in specific places. For example, if I'm reviewing a full workout circuit by [Katie Austin](#), I'm definitely more likely to find

one on the Saved Stories on her page whereas she posts mostly sped up clips and pieces on her page posts.

Besides the visual and organizational aspect, social media is a prime platform for fitness influencers due to its communal energy. The creation of social media has meant the new concept of two-way relationships between brands and their audiences which is an overarching theme behind the social media influencer. The multi-dimensional relationship allows not only audiences to say what they think and feel directly to the brand but also gives the brand a chance to respond back, absorb feedback and change their business model due to quick response and evaluation. This is the golden standard of PR and social media helps to make this happen in real time. For companies with products and services, this helps to personify brands. However, for influencers, this helps make the person approachable and often times even more motivational. This helps make their brand tailored to their audience and seen as more of a resource than a distant and large entity. Followers can comment directly on posts with questions, comments or concerns and influencers are able to comment directly back to them. Through commenting, followers also have a platform to create a community around the influencer's ideas. People often tag friends in comments in order to bring them to the post and this creates a bigger following for the influencer as well as a community of like-minded people.

For many influencers, their personal brand has become a community for motivating each other. Fitness influencer [Kayla Itsines](#) created her own workout program called BBG and many followers share motivational posts surrounding their experience using #BBG on Instagram. My experience with BBG has been extremely positive and satisfactory and I believe a large part of that is due to the community surrounding the program. I was introduced to the

program by my two roommates who had done it previously and decided that BBG would be a great start for my blog. Seeing all of the positive and encouraging posts around people's success with the program was a driving factor for me to continue after my free trial was over. In the hashtag, you can see people's before and after photos, recipe ideas to try based off of suggestions from Kayla and genuine, confident photos of women at the gym excited about whatever week they are working on for the program or starting a conversation about women in the weight room or body positivity. It's full of nothing but support and it has really given me good ideas or suggestions to improve my BBG experience. Not only have I had positive reinforcement from my two roommates, but on a few occasions strangers have come up to me at the gym asking, "are you working on Week 6? I just finished leg day yesterday and I'm so sore!" People that are part of the community recognize exercises or circuits and are happy to share the experience with others, strangers or not. Social media has made the community aspect of fitness influencers a vital part of the influencer's personal branding.

When an influencer gains a decent following, they are a gold mine for brands with products like meal kits, athletic wear or gym memberships. A recent study done by Dr. Jonah Berger, a professor at the Wharton School showed that [88% of consumers](#) "were highly likely to follow a recommendation made by a micro-influencer," (Schall, Josh 2016). Because of this, brands are quick to take advantage of fitness Instagrammers with a good following. From my experience following the influencers, I found myself buying an essential oils kit, a specific brand of protein and certain bakery bites that contain two full servings of vegetables! It has introduced me to new products and I found myself purchasing things through Instagram quite often due to the level of trust and intrigue I have for certain influencers. According to an article

on [Entrepreneur](#), the US fitness-franchise industry currently brings in \$31 billion annually and is expected to grow 1.5% by 2022 (Carter, Clint 2017). An [article on Vice](#), covers the growth of bodybuilders in part to social media as well. In an interview with Oliver Bateman, a historian and professor at the University of Texas, he states that, “social media has enabled the sale of the self to happen on a level that we’ve never experienced before” (Chan, Victoria 2016). Though there’s no current studies to show that there’s a correlation between the booming fitness influencer numbers and the growing fitness-franchise industry and overall fitness activists, my own personal experience is an example of how that is definitely a probability.

Best Practices of Current Social Influencers: Content Marketing 101

My stories of impulse purchases based on the advice of an influencer is the perfect example of how it is that people become social media influencers: they are producing content that has value for their audience. There are many articles online about “How to Become a Social Media Influencer” and they all have similar steps. Almost all advise readers to find a specific niche they are passionate about, create a content plan that allows you to produce content often and regularly and to create content that provides some type of value to your audience. The last one is easily the most important but if it’s being accomplished the other two come quite naturally. The influencers I chose to follow initially produced information that I could use immediately: they had full recipes and how-to’s listed, they had videos of workouts and they had guides or eBooks with more instructional and helpful information. In general, they had content I could consume and apply to my life directly that didn’t usually cost money or require my information. These were the influencers that made a difference in my fitness goals because I valued their content which constantly brought me back for more.

I believe the concept that helps fitness influencers stand out, which differs from other industry influencers (such as beauty influencers, sports influencers, etc.) is the idea of creating and engaging a community through their online brand. Though establishing a relationship with an audience is important in all industries, it is particularly important in health and fitness influencers because the support and positivity that it produces can be a valuable asset for followers. This is just another way for the influencers to provide value to their audience, by creating a space for them to ask questions and find support in other followers. Fitness can be a difficult topic for many people so it is especially important for those looking for guidance to have a place where their questions are answered but are also encouraged by those giving the suggestions. A community of others wanting you to grow and succeed is a huge value for those seeking fitness influencers.

Social Influencers: A Personal Story

Social media and technology have brought a world of change for the people of today. Though there are negative aspects, there is no denying the ease, connectivity and creativity it has brought into people's lives. It has provided people with an awe-inspiring amount of resources, including the connection to strangers around the world. Endorsements that were once held for authors, actresses and athletes are now given to regular every day people who others find valuable. Normal people can make a difference in so many others' lives simply by using a tool that lets people connect. Creating my own fitness blog and social media accounts allowed me to understand what draws the average person in and why. Those with content that was easy for me to consume and apply to my life were the ones I followed closely and had content I consumed more often. Those with large support systems and communities of people

like me gave me the most benefit on my fitness journey. Seeing stories of workout circuits daily as well as delicious food that was also good for you, inspired me to make a lifestyle change that I have been able to stick with due to how often I am now exposed to it online. These influencers are average people that just want to help make a difference in other people's lives by spreading the message of their passion. By producing content that is meaningful and valuable to their audience, they can gain a large following that establishes them as a trustworthy leader in the industry. Their creativity and thoughtfulness online has helped grow the fitness industry and has people more conscious of their health. This positive change would not be entirely possible without social media and the power it has to create personal influencer brands out of the average person that is passionate about the industry. Social media has allowed people around the world to connect with each other and share ideas and motivation. The motivational influencers have innovated a new way for people to be inspired greatly by just a small screen in their hands. This is just the beginning.

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