

India's Influencer Evolution

GROWTH OPINION

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In India, the pattern of influence is changing and dramatically moving away from the old celebrity clichés, says Ana Thorsdottir

When we think about India and 'influencers', we often think Bollywood and sporting celebrities. True the country has no Zoella or Chiara Ferragni, but the pattern of influence is changing and dramatically moving away from the old celebrity clichés.

Instead, a vibrant new sector is slowly emerging, social media content creators driven by their obsession with food or comedy are starting to appear at enough scale to enable a new kind of influencer campaign.

This is a huge opportunity for brands looking to grow in this market, despite the

comparatively low levels of penetration. Just 25% of Indian adults use the internet according to Pew Research right now and social media usage is even lower.

That's partly because social media penetration is rising (Statista says it should reach 371m by 2022) and those currently in the loop are predominantly young and urban consumers (Mumbai and Dehli are hotspots). It seems that influencers and social media are already changing the way India makes its purchase decisions.

The direct nature of the communication between influencer and fan makes this a powerful channel both at the research stage and for the final stage of the purchase journey.

Data cited by [influencer marketing expert Gaurav Singh Bisen](#), reveals that:

- 86% of Indian women will look at social networks before making a purchase
- 71% of consumers are more likely to make a purchase based on social media
- 86% of the most viewed beauty videos on YouTube were made by influencers

Those kind of numbers are the reason why nine out of 10 marketers in India planned to run at least one influencer marketing campaign in 2018.

Bollywood vs the creators

While the biggest numbers are still to be found in Bollywood – last year, [Forbes India](#) named Bollywood's Salman Khan as the number one social media celebrity in the country – other types of influencer with reasonable scale also exist.

Sometimes dubbed macro influencers, these are professional bloggers, video content creators or creatives of multiple mediums. They feed rising consumer demand in areas such as comedy and take consumers beyond celebrity lifestyle and updates on the latest

movie-type content. Typically their follower counts are in the hundreds of thousands rather than the millions that can be delivered by celebrity accounts.

Nikunj Lotia, part of [Be You Nick](#), a popular Indian comedian, for example, posts weekly YouTube videos in Hindi with English subtitles and regularly gets more than 1m views.

Some are diversifying and expanding beyond one discipline or channel. Musician [Shirley Setia](#) is a good example of a varied content creator and has close ties with American businesses and stars like Marshmello.

At an even smaller level, there are also micro-influencers who have between 1,000 to 100,000 followers but have developed high levels of trust and daily direct communication with their audience. For brands, this means they can often achieve up to 30% engagement per post.

What we are seeing now is the slow evolution of an ecosystem focused on key audience passion points such as food, comedy, music and travel.

Successful influencer partnerships

With the market still developing in India, here are six tips to ensure successful influencer partnerships:

1. Ensure the influencer you select is a good 'fit' for your brand. This is not just a data exercise but also requires that subjective factors are taken into account.
2. Ensure influencers understand the creative direction of the campaign but let them be themselves. That means letting them generate content ideas but also signing off proposed video treatments in advance.
3. There are more than a hundred different languages and dialects spoken across India so ensure video content is subtitled if it needs to travel across the country.

4. Make the partnership public right from the start. Encourage influencers to interact with their audience about it. This could involve asking subscribers for suggestions on how to create relevant content, for example. This approach makes the audience feel much more part of the content, creating a more authentic, collaborative and engaging experience.
5. Be aware of additional production costs such as videographer, editors and props. It's quite common for Indian influencers to come with a crew, which is not that common in European markets.
6. Measure the impact. These will depend on campaign objectives and it's worth flagging them up to influencer partners, so they know what they are accountable for. But they will include awareness measures such as the number of impressions, total reach and number of views, engagement such as average video retention rate, average video duration and interaction percentages as well as saliency measures like traffic driven to the desired destination and the sentiment analysis of their comments and follower interaction with the content.

Looking at the recent stats, and based on our experience working with top tier influencers in India in 2018, it's clear that the market is still maturing. But India is catching up and brands should remember that they can get higher value for their small budgets here than in Europe or the USA. With social media usage rapidly growing in India, we're going to see even more content creators emerging and growing here, and it's an exciting market to observe in this space.

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