Influencers and creator economies: Imaginaries, platform evolution, and commercial value chains

USC Annenberg Research Network on International Communication

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How Social Media Content Creator Trends Have Changed (2010-2022)

Source: Google Trends
THE CREATOR ECONOMY

Influencer Marketing Global Market Size

“Brands can now only hope to influence the conversations that people are having about them — and to do so, they are enlisting a growing army of professional influencers who have become a new staple of digital marketing around the world”

Business of Fashion, "The age of influence", 2018
CHILEAN CONTENT CREATORS AS A CASE STUDY
THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA... THE DECLINE OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA SOURCES


--- Social Media
Television
Radio
Online (excluding social)
## Examining Content Creators Activities Through an Ethnographic Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011-2012</th>
<th>2014-2021</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9-month ethnography of 16 music bloggers in Santiago</td>
<td>65 Interviews with influencers</td>
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<td>Participant observation at a branding agency</td>
<td>3-month participant observation at an influencer agency</td>
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<td>Analysis of online content (Blogs/Websites, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)</td>
<td>Interview with influencer marketing agencies executives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Analysis of online content (Instagram post and stories N= 740) and promotional material (media kits, reports).</td>
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CONTENT CREATORS: BETWEEN VISIBILITY AND PRECARITY

A number of works have problematized users’ negotiations of hyper-commercialized identity online, through examining “self-branding” (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016; Marwick, 2015).

Others sketched the complex and far-reaching labour influencers undertake as they position content production as both an authentic genuine passion and a strategic act of entrepreneurship (Duffy, 2017).

Others explore the precarity creators experiment, depending on platform algorithms and rules to achieve visibility (Cotter, 2019; Bishop, 2019).
How this branch of cultural producers makes sense of themselves and their activities as “ordinary and accessible” while promoting consumption?
Influencers organize their social world in ways that enable them to justify moving between two contradictory poles of commerciality and authenticity. These navigations necessitate “influencer imaginaries”.

INFLUENCER IMAGINARIES HELP CREATORS TO:

Resolve information asymmetries in markets,

Differentiate influencers from celebrities and advertisers as average people; and

Negotiate self definition with regard to agencies, audiences, and themselves.
"We give valid opinions from better knowledge, like semi-experts, and help people with information when buying a product. We are a channel between brands and consumers, but closer because we are just normal people. We’re not celebrities, but we’re knowledgeable, or experts, about certain topics.”

Denisse, beauty influencer

“I want to create conversations with people to let them know what they are buying... to know if they are paying a fair price.”

Christian, fashion influencer
"I think it might become dangerous if you exclusively start focusing on [metrics], because I think that ultimately, what we do is a naturalness that brings likes, not the other way around. Not looking for likes, and then making it seem natural."

Natalia, influencer instructor

“The appeal of influencers is that they do what they like. That’s what distinguishes [an influencer] from a television celebrity. A celebrity might promote a product she doesn’t use, and it doesn’t matter because she doesn’t need to have that kind of credibility.”

Ignacia, fashion influencer
A brand might hire you to do a piece, but what I do is, like, make that bit fun for my followers. That brings the brand closer in the most natural way possible and isn’t as aggressive as saying to [...] my audience, ‘hey, buy this’.”

Maria, fashion influencer

“Before, (advertising) agencies were in charge of producing a fantasy; now, I build that fantasy for them. I have the power”.

Romina, beauty influencer
A CHANGING TECHNOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

How evolutions in platforms—including constant updates to their affordances—shape the activities and interpretive processes of content creators?
CREATORS EXPERIENCE
EVOLUTION IN PLATFORMS

In the form of different communicative styles

Temporal acceleration

Constant negotiation with other actors in the social network through which commercial activities are configured

"Having a blog was the basis of everything . . . all my content is there . . . if you didn’t have a blog, you’re nobody. On Instagram you can invite people to read your content through images."

Andrea, beauty influencer

“For instance, on Instagram I can share a picture of an outfit because Instagram is a visual platform. However, on my blog I write about seven reasons to use that outfit, I can give more details on a blog-post. On Instagram I give less details, only the picture, but I can invite my audience to visit my blog."

Mariana, fashion influencer
"It’s fun, (Instagram) Stories are like the new TV, and they are automatically deleted after 24 hours, and everything starts again after that. That’s fun. Also, you get instantaneous feedback from your followers."

Javiera, fashion influencer

“A blog with one or two posts per week can survive, but on Instagram, uploading one or two pictures per week, you’re dead. You need at least one picture daily.”

Ricardo, fashion influencer
"If you are not uploading content constantly, (Instagram’s algorithm) punishes you . . . before that you upload your picture and you can see it immediately, but now depends on the number of people who “likes” the picture and my kind of followers. You can upload a picture and if I don’t “like” it maybe I will not see your content for a long time."

Valentina, beauty influencer
MAKING SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE CALCULABLE

## Top 25 Latin American Influencers Adored by Their Followers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Influencer Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Eleonora Pons Maronese aka Lele Pons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Mariand Castrejon Castañeda aka Yuya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>German Garmendia</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Salice Rose</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Camila Coelho</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Olalia Lopez</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Luisa Fernanda</td>
</tr>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Andrea Espada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Bethany Mota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Marialejandra Marrero</td>
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GRACIAS

THANK YOU

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