

The new Advertising Regulatory Board governance regarding influencers

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18 Feb 2019

Authenticity is a key component in influencer marketing. But studies show that brands often shy away from terms like 'sponsored' and '#ad' on paid partnership posts, for fear of having a negative impact on consumer perception.



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The reality is that consumers don't mind brands advertising on social media, and there have been many clearly labelled ad campaigns that have generated high levels of engagement. Ultimately, it's about proactive transparency of partnerships that is important for effective influencer marketing because it builds trust with your audience.

One cannot deny that the industry has been subjected to major scrutiny in recent years regarding the lack of transparency of influencer product placement and paid media on social platforms. This ranges from brands not disclosing the nature of their partnerships, to influencers falsely portraying remunerated communication as their own, unsolicited opinion.

Guidelines

The [Advertising Regulatory Board's](#) (ARB) new proposed guidelines for social media advertising aims to promote full transparency in advertising and holds brands, agencies, and influencer marketing platforms accountable for ethical advertising practices.

The [Interactive Advertising Bureau's](#) (IAB) Code of Practice [guidelines](#) for social media can assist advertisers with this. These guidelines stipulate that advertisers are required to disclose whether content is part of a paid advertising campaign, as opposed to purely organic content. They advise that clear identifiers should be included in the content of the tweet or post to ensure that consumers understand it to be a paid-for advertisement, as opposed to an organic endorsement.

These guidelines not only protect the consumer but serve to legitimise the influencer marketing industry with a clear code of conduct. Advertisers that fail to adhere to these guidelines, run the risk of jeopardising their brands' reputation and possibly having their membership to professional bodies revoked.

But what does this mean for the industry?

The new ARB regulations are a step in the right direction for the industry since it protects consumers, advertisers, and influencers against unethical media practices and encourages responsible and authentic social messaging. Ultimately, brands and agencies have been tasked with the responsibility to educate influencers regarding these regulations and to ensure that they adhere to them.

Considering the nature of the industry – where Influencers are often members of the public and not necessarily qualified marketers, who have managed to generate engaged followings through their creative content – advertisers will be held accountable for any false claims or misconduct by an Influencer.

As stipulated in the code, brands and agencies must “ensure that all mandatory declarations and marketing regulations which apply to certain industries are clearly communicated to the influencer...” through a written contract that clearly specifies the details of the engagement.

In the coming months, hopefully we will see more social media platforms introducing the built-in feature which declares paid partnerships. Or, perhaps the industry will expand in coming years, to where influencers will also need to register as members of a regulatory body and receive an official e-media license that allows them to practice as content creators. The National Media Council in the United Arab Emirates has already implemented such a regulation.

New legislation will challenge brands

Whatever it may be, one thing is for sure, the new legislation will challenge brands, agencies, and Influencer marketing platforms to be more creative in the way they implement product placements into their social media content. Furthermore, brands will need to align themselves with influencers who accurately match their brand narrative in order to ensure authentic messaging in their campaigns.

Gone are the days of influencers simply taking a picture with a product, posting it on social media, and advertisers expecting it to generate talkability and most importantly, drive sales. Advertisers will need to develop innovative strategies to engage with consumers and build brand love.

We predict that sponsored campaigns with engaging and experimental content, paired with the right influencer and brand will flourish, even under these new regulations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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