



FROM STRATEGY TO ACTION:

*Bringing a Diverse and Equitable Approach
to Influencer Partnerships*

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70%

of Gen Z consumers try to buy from companies they consider ethical.

There is increasing demand for brands to represent the values of their consumers in their brand purpose, products, and business strategy. Seventy percent of Gen Z consumers try to buy from companies they consider ethical, and 65% try to ascertain the origins of products they are buying (McKinsey, 2018). **Values-based strategy is the future of business.**



65% of Black consumers are more likely to recommend a brand with advertising that positively reflects their culture.

(Google/Ipsos)

There are 1.85 billion people globally, with \$1.9 trillion in disposable income, **who identify as disabled.**

(Return on Disability)

68% of LGBTQIA+ consumers are more likely to purchase from a brand with advertising that positively reflects a variety of sexual orientations and gender identities.

(Google/Ipsos)

One of the fastest growing consumer segments, **Black Americans hold \$1.4 trillion in buying power.**

(Nielsen, 2020)

By 2023, U.S. **Latinx buying power** is expected to top \$1.9 trillion, higher than the GDP of countries like Australia, Spain, and Mexico.

(Nielsen, 2019)

Black Americans are now 58% more likely than the average consumer to expect the brands they buy to take a social stance and 37% more likely to buy a brand when they do.

(Nielsen, 2020)

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91%

of people surveyed consider racial profiling to be a problem in the advertising casting process.

In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, a spotlight has been shone on the particular ethical issues surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion from the boardroom to the warehouse floor to your Instagram feed. According to [WARC's 2020 study](#), 91% of people surveyed consider racial profiling to be a problem in the advertising casting process. With nearly 50% of Gen Z individuals being Black, Indigenous, or People of Color ([Pew Research Center, 2018](#)), it's time to start treating diversity, equity, and inclusion within your brand as the norm, not the exception.



This specifically includes your efforts in influencer marketing, which enlist individuals who can be your partners and true collaborators in strengthening your overall business. And Gen Z is listening. Many prominent, vocal figures — including YouTubers, gamers, influencers, and social celebrities — play a key role in this generation, from how they select what to purchase to what brands to support. If you aim to fill (predominantly) white spaces of opportunity with diverse voices of all races, genders, sexual orientations, body types, abilities, and overall lifestyles, your work can break free from commonplace stereotypes and misinformed social constructs. This also provides influencer marketing with the unique chance to effect change in marketing by forming mosaic representation, truly reflecting the composite world around us.

Ultimately, co-creating and collaborating with diverse influencers will help you make better campaigns and better products and be part of a bigger sociocultural shift beyond 2021.



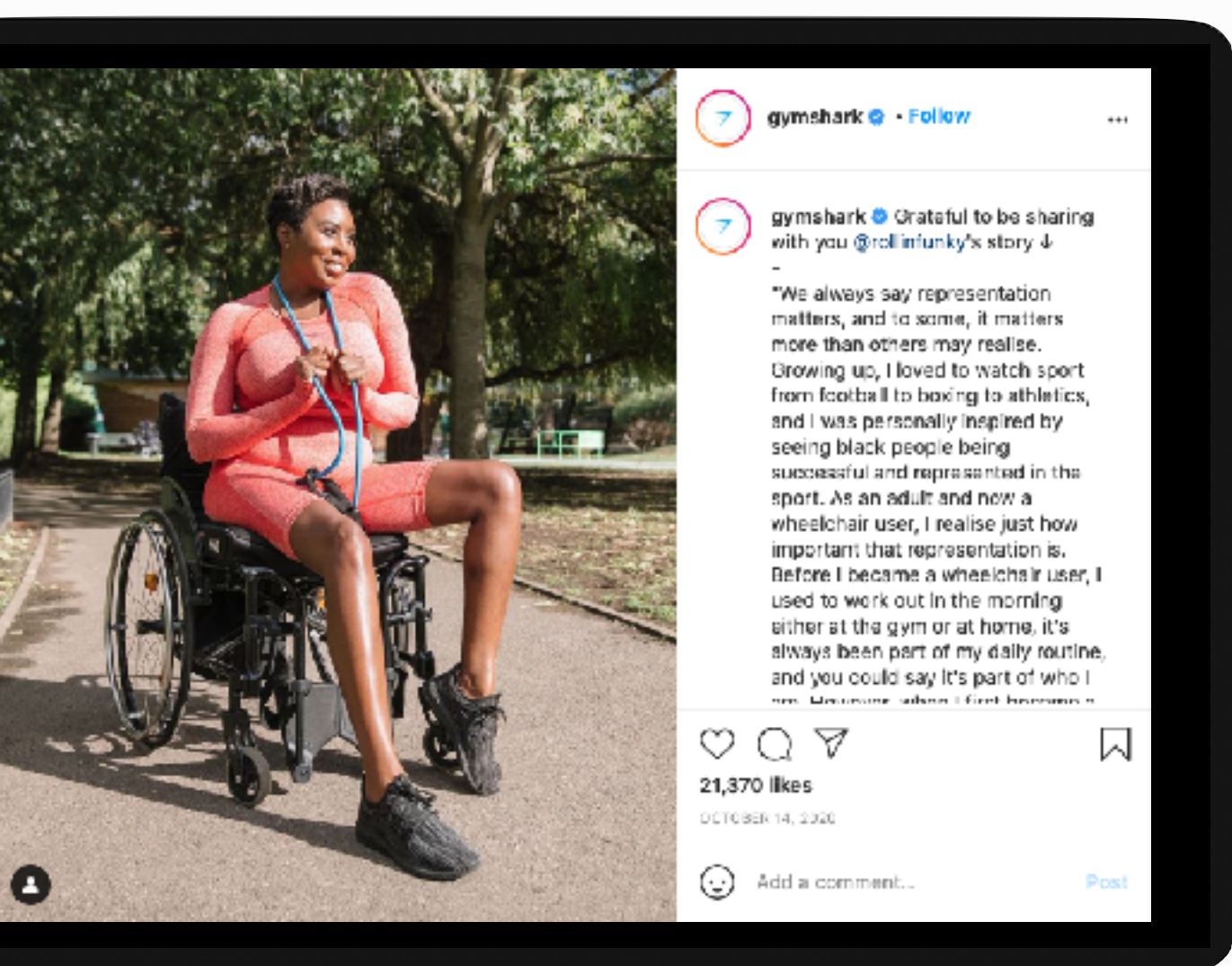
5

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1. Fill the “white” space and amplify overlooked and micro influencer voices.

Influencer marketing presents an opportunity to help precipitate change and show what the world really looks like. To create truly impactful work in influencer marketing, every activation should begin with comprehensive research. That said, research shouldn't just begin and end with data on what exists within a designated space; it should also uncover what doesn't. If you're looking to produce work that really matters, discover the voices often left unheard and faces unseen in marketing within your particular industry. For example, athletic wear brand Gymshark regularly defies stereotypes in mainstream fitness marketing by featuring a mix of influencers on its social feeds, including Black influencers, fuller-figured ambassadors, and wheelchair users like Clara Holmes, better known as “Rollin Funky.”

This means also considering microinfluencers, like Clara, that spark valuable engagement in niche communities or have unique stories to offer. Consider this and the next seven recommendations as opportunities to reach new heights as a brand by connecting with new communities in an authentic way.



Source: @gymshark

6

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Important Note

Having diversity on the team that reaches out to influencers can provide comfort to potential partners, offering them a snapshot of your business practices and allowing them to see their perspectives represented, likely deepening the relationship's potential.

2. Include diverse voices and minds in the strategy room and, ideally, in communications with influencers.

Right now, demand for transparency in business, especially with respect to hiring practices, staff representation, and creative development, is at an all-time high, especially due to the role of social media in sparking discourse. ([You can read more about that in Ogilvy's Brand Justice and Accountability paper, particularly section 3.](#)) As you consider diversity and inclusion while identifying influencers, take a step further to also think about representation of those voices in the strategy room and on influencer teams wherever possible. Having a variety of perspectives among key project stakeholders will ultimately encourage well-rounded thought and ensure all ideas are vetted for appropriateness, tone, authenticity, and effectiveness.

3. Reach the audience where they are — and challenge the places where they aren't.

If you as a marketer are going to truly walk the walk and implement practices that bring a variety of voices and experiences to the forefront (and keep them there), it's your duty to take a closer look at not only where you place your messages, but also the manner in which you are sharing them. While data and consumer insights may point you to specific viable platforms, be sure to take a step back and evaluate whether those channels support a variety of voices. This means reviewing their breakdown of user/audience ethnicities, lifestyles, habits, and more. If this information isn't available, don't be afraid to request it from your channel representative. Based on this information, explore a multichannel distribution plan that can holistically reach a composite target audience.

7

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4. Re-evaluate your influencer and content vetting criteria for unconscious (or conscious) bias.



Source: @Blairimani



Vetting criteria for influencers are at the core of the identification phase in every strategy. Having a diverse mix of influencers is key to sharing a range of stories from different perspectives. Often, strict brand safety guardrails can rule out influencer prospects unnecessarily and unfairly. Unconscious bias can be built into brand safety standards, and brands should consider re-evaluating such guidelines to make sure they represent values that don't sacrifice inclusion. Brands also tend to steer clear of voices that are highly active in speaking out about passionate, personal projects, such as support for social causes. Double standards around race, sex, body type, and modesty tend to run rampant at this phase of the program.

Why would brands censor an influencer for having a powerful message or appearance when they are partnering with that influencer because of their unique voice and individuality? Challenge these brand safety guidelines by asking your team whether, if these criteria were made public, your brand would be shown in a favorable light. If not, consider shifting your brand mindset from the start when it comes to vetting criteria.

For example, Smarties partnered with Blair Imani for her "Smarter in Seconds" series, which highlights problematic behavior and how to use active allyship to correct that behavior.

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5. Redefine partnership and collaboration.

How do brands define “partnership,” “collaboration,” and “co-creation”?

Are those just labels applied to a prescriptive brand message, amplified through the voice of an influencer?

How does this message translate to an influencer’s channel with a specific tonality?

9

These questions always come up when a successful program is being set up. Co-creation is what separates a cookie-cutter ad from a powerful point of view that does not sacrifice key brand messaging. In the most successful influencer partnerships, brands intentionally leverage the influencer’s expertise in content creation and audience engagement rather than being overly prescriptive in the briefing processes. Influencers, after all, are the best at gauging the content that will resonate the most with their audience. We all use “authenticity” as a buzzword, but true co-creation puts it into practice.

A strong, highly visual influencer brief allows room for creativity matched with an open discussion of a deliverable package that makes sense for the audience, ensuring that the message feels like it’s coming from a cultivated collaboration. This practice battles the notion that sponsored content is fake and inauthentic by fostering unique and dynamic content co-creation that better serves the brand. The best brand partnerships are ones that are nurtured over a long period of time with the intention of working together continuously. Repeated content collaborations further brand loyalty and are more likely to deliver lasting results.

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The CIDEA Pledge

The CIDEA is an extension of Socialyte, which is committed to equitable and inclusive casting practices. All proposed casts will include diverse representation based on:

1. Ethnicity and race
2. Gender identity and sexual orientation
3. Disability status, including disabilities that are visible and those that are not
4. Body shapes and sizes

Socialyte aims to ensure fair and equal pay for all talent. Rates will be calculated based on factors such as engagement rate, true reach and impressions, content quality, demand, content usage, and exclusivity.

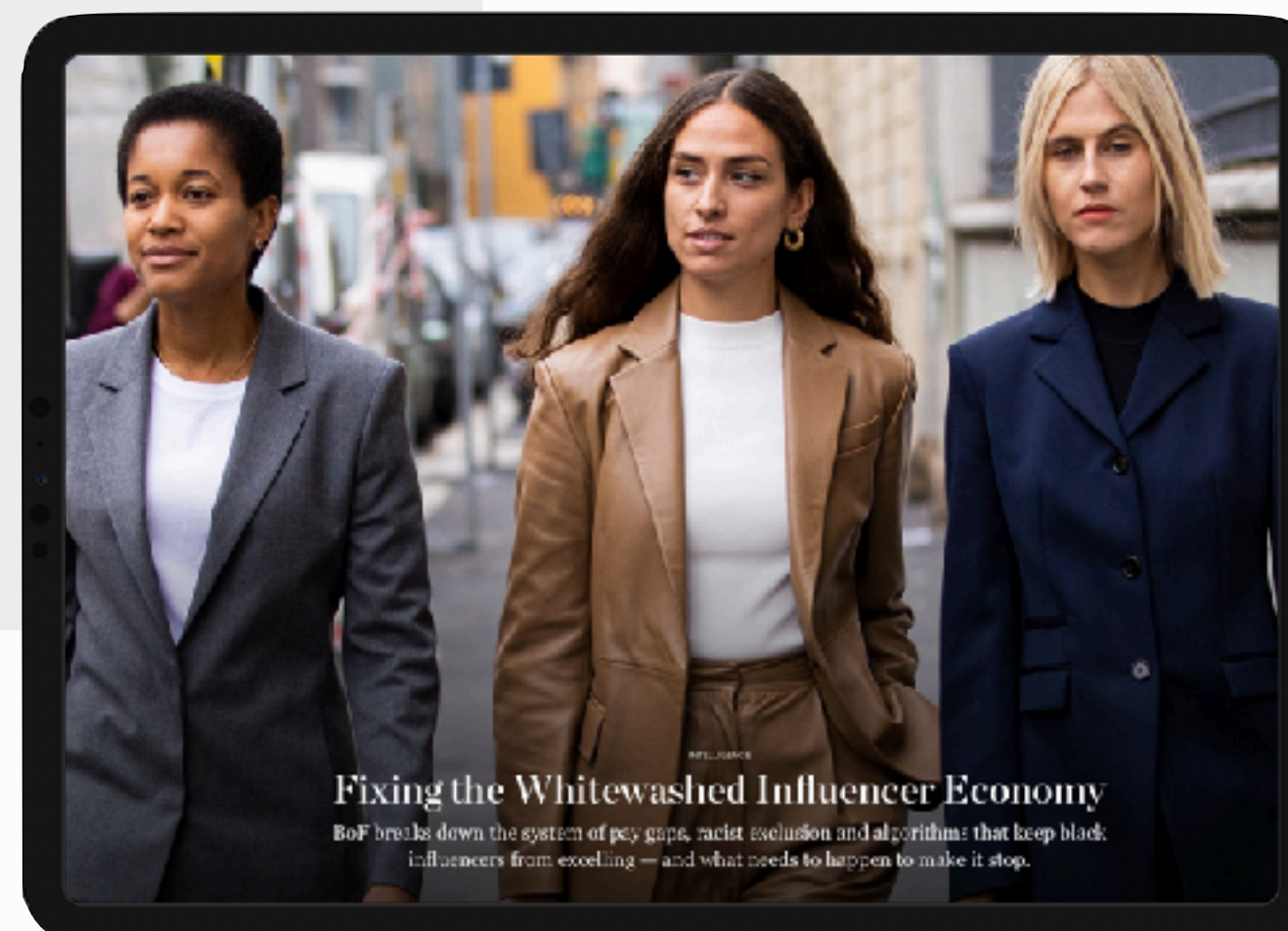
Source: [Business of Fashion](#), 2020

6. Understand that every influencer does not have access to the same resources.

When partnering with influencers, it's important to think about how your campaign is structured to support equity and equality. An influencer from an underrepresented demographic may not have the same resources, experience, expectations, or pay structure as their White, cisgender, or able-bodied counterparts. For example, if your influencer doesn't have a management team, contracting, briefing, and content capture may require a larger time investment on the agency's part. It's important that you, as their advocate, create the space and time to be a partner to and resource for this influencer. That might mean taking an extra call to talk about the brief before the influencer creates their content.

Additionally, during negotiation you may find that an influencer's rates are lower than those

of other influencers you are working with on the campaign. While it may be tempting to take that lower offer, we encourage you to pay each influencer what their counterparts in the campaign are being paid for the same scope of work. Pay equity is an important part of supporting diverse voices. Your agency and client may want to discuss developing salary bands based on engagement rate or even practice pay parity regardless of the influencer's engagement within each campaign. It's important for the brand and agency to have this values-based money conversation prior to influencer outreach. For example, in October 2020, Socialyte partnered with Black and Brown creators to launch the Creator Inclusion, Diversity & Equity Alliance ([CIDEA](#), 2020), outlining their revised casting protocol and pay equity goals.



10

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7. Make sure diversity, equity, and inclusion are pervasive throughout your company, not just online – and be prepared to speak on your brand’s approach, if prompted.

As a result of the Black Lives Matter movement, we have seen many brands pledge to work with diverse creators as part of their DEI commitments. However, if diversity, equity, and inclusion aren’t reflected within your employee base, product design, and other parts of your brand, a diverse social influencer campaign is merely performative.

Allyship is an active process. There is not an expectation of perfection across every facet of the company overnight. However, if all non-influencer social posts feature people who look White and able-bodied, that is problematic, as the diversity you are striving for isn’t aligned across your company. If you

have a diverse, activist brand platform, but your supply chain is plagued by labor-rights issues or you have a reputation for a non-inclusive, toxic company culture, it’s a problem. Think about how your influencers can be your partners to move the company forward across all its parts. For example, Eddie Bauer’s All Outside program engages their influencers as consultants on their products and marketing collateral. One All Outside influencer, Trevor Kennison, is a paraplegic skier who will be helping Eddie Bauer’s designers develop more adaptive gear.



Source: @nabela



Source: @trevor_kennison

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8. Expand your brand mindset to be a part of something bigger, not a bandwagon response.



Source: [Hollywood Reporter](#), 2018.

12

Consumers are quick to see through short-term, check-the-box strategies, so consider thinking beyond your usual ROI metrics. For example, if a post generates more DMs and peer-to-peer conversation, that is still a positive result, even if it wasn't the one you expected. You may have engaged a new community that uses social media in a different way.

Additionally, be prepared for your brand audience or even the influencer's audience to surface some initial criticism or backlash. For example, [after rejoining L'Oréal's Diversity Board](#), Munroe Bergdorf and L'Oréal Paris were slammed with a flurry of transphobic

and racist comments, as well as criticism that this first step was not enough. As stated above, this is about progress, not perfection, and if your company is committed to these influencer partnerships, the conversation will shift. That said, prepare influencers and the brand's social community manager by equipping them with tailored messaging that reinforces the positive progress manifesting from your partnerships.

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13

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Ogilvy's Influencer Standard

The power of influencer marketing remains unmatched in its ability to not only humanize brands and showcase their social consciousness, but also to empower rich creator perspectives. Based on the recommendations shared above, Ogilvy will be implementing the below commitments in our Social Influencer practice, moving our thoughts from ideology to firm action:



14

1. Surface vetting lists with influencers that are at least **50% diverse** and at least **30% Black, Indigenous, and People of Color individuals**.
2. Push to always **include at least one “wild-card,”** unexpected influencer option within recommended short lists to constantly challenge our influencer selection.
3. Partner with clients to identify and develop an authentic, brand-specific **DEI lens** that will inform long-term social strategies.

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A Best Practices Checklist

Finally, we've summarized our suggested principles as the following guiding actions for brands, agencies, and influencers to keep in mind for their own commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion within influencer marketing:

BRAND ACTIONS	AGENCY ACTIONS	INFLUENCER ACTIONS
Separate advocacy from brand safety.	Set consistent and fair benchmarks.	Be a co-conspirator, not an ally. Be an active partner to BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and disabled influencers.
Center diverse microinfluencer voices.	Combat tokenism with diverse and deep vetting lists (50% diversity with at least 30% individuals who cannot pass for White).	Know your influence and behave ethically. Don't participate in racially insensitive social media trends or engage in cultural appropriation.
Consider long-term partnerships, giving influencers opportunities to contribute to your business.	Pay equitably. Period.	Share the mic and the wealth. Use your platform to center diverse voices.
Make DEI pervasive throughout your branding, advertising, and company makeup – not just in selections for influencer activations.	Be bold and don't censor your selections just because an influencer may be "controversial."	Consider adding an inclusion rider to all your brand contracts.
Be consistent in your actions. It's a movement, not a moment.	Challenge clients to be their bravest, boldest, and best selves, while considering potential backlash.	



THANK YOU

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