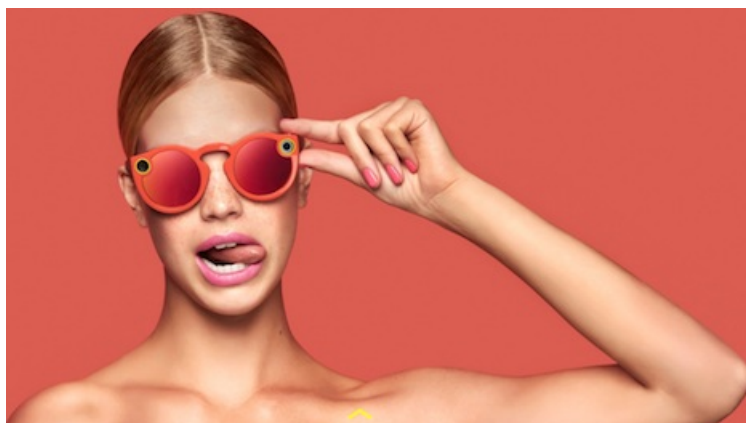MARKETING

Snapchat's new update displeases users, alienates them from influencers

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Snapchat's latest update creates a rift between users and influencers. Image credit: Snap

By DANNY PARISI

Earlier this month, Snapchat rolled out a major update to its user interface, segmenting brand content and user content into two distinct pages along with a number of other changes, to massive user disapproval.

The update has been met with such backlash that a Change.org petition with more than 1 million signatures has arisen asking the social platform to change it back. While users have been the most vocal, the update has also had a negative effect on the way influencers use the app.

Community backlash
Snapchat has been having a rough time with successfully monetizing its massive user base over the years.

While the platform is incredibly popular among young people, the exact mechanics of making money off this audience through brand partnerships has been difficult. As more advertisers flock to Instagram, Snapchat has been left in the dust.

A recent UI update has compounded marketers' problems, as Snapchat decided to segregate content created by publishers and brands into one page of the app and content created by friends on the other.
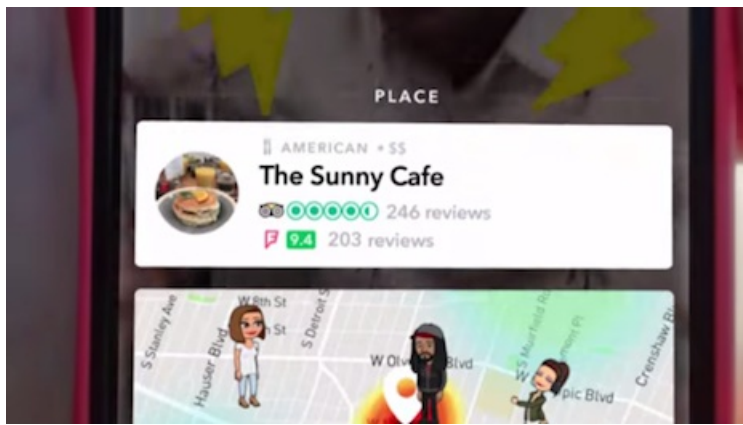
Snapchat's context cards expanded its advertising options. Image credit: Snap

From a user perspective, this has caused a number of problems. For one, it is more difficult to keep track of private messages and public Stories as the two are mingled together.

Additionally, the feed has gone from purely chronological to algorithmic, meaning that Snapchat shows users posts out of order based on what it thinks they want to see, a highly unpopular new feature.

But the change that will have the biggest effect for brands is how Snapchat users now engage with influencers. While a post from a user's mutual friend will go in the friends tab, posts made by users who do not follow the original user back, namely influencers and celebrities, will appear in the other tab.

This has already created a feeling of disconnect between users and their favorite influencers, who are now placed among advertisements and branded content instead of in the friends list.

Major problems
The change to how users and influencers interact could have a serious impact on those influencers' effectiveness. Snapchat understands this but seems to not think of it as a big deal.

At a Goldman Sachs conference on Thursday, Snap CEO Evan Spiegel said that his response to users feeling like celebrities and influencers they follow are not their friends was "exactly, they're not your friends."

Snapchat is in a rough position right now, as Instagram's increasingly large share of social advertising is causing the platform to reinvent some of its longstanding traditions.

For one, Snapchat is testing unskippable advertisements, something that has never appeared on the platform before, as well as moving content so that it is not exclusive to the application. As luxury brands and influencers increasingly move to Instagram, Snapchat is left to figure out how to keep advertisers without alienating users (see story).
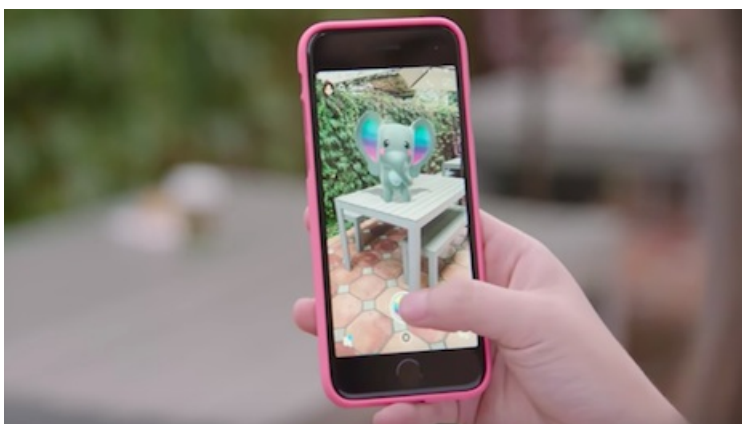
Snapchat Lens Studio was yet another effort to win over consumers. Image credit: Snap

To fix this, Snapchat began opening the door for advertisers to have greater interaction and call-to-action strategies on user-generated content.

Snapchat is investing in another inventive advertising strategy that offers more information to consumers while benefiting marketers. Snapchat's newly launched Context Cards feature allows users to swipe up for more information regarding a snap, powered by advertisers such as TripAdvisor, Foursquare, Michelin and Goop (see story).

But this latest update may be pushing it too far and the rift between influencers and users may be wide enough to push more of them to Instagram than before.