

FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

Modern beauty influencers are market experts

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Brands have a lot to learn from beauty content creators, especially when it comes to what consumer behavior. Image credit: Yves Saint Laurent

By NORA HOWE

From blogs and video diaries to TikTok clips, the influencer marketing industry has evolved over the last 15 years to feature content creators who acutely understand consumer trends and behaviors.

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As consumers of their industry themselves, beauty influencers act as liaisons between brands and consumers while building trust among their young, vocal community. During a session at the *Vogue Business* and Klarna Beauty Forum on Sept. 1, retail and marketing editor at *Vogue Business* Katie Chitrakorn spoke with three influencers and entrepreneurs who are redefining the beauty industry.

"I had never seen myself, a Korean-American person, at the forefront of beauty and never felt seen or heard," said David Yi, author of "Pretty Boys" and cofounder of **Very Good Light**. "Being othered has always been my narrative.

"In 2016, I set out to make beauty a conduit of change," he said. "I wanted to figure out a way to utilize beauty to tell stories, bring people into the conversation, and challenge the beauty norm."

Influence of beauty

Self-expression, creative freedom and inclusivity are now pillars of the beauty industry, and leaders or influencers who reflect these qualities build trust among consumers.

"When I started creating content, it was to spread the positive message of skincare, and the positive way it impacted my life," said Hiram Yarbro, skincare expert and founder of **Selfless**. "The first time I tried beauty products was the first time I ever felt truly empowered and beautiful an experience I wanted to share with other people.

"I wanted to communicate my skincare opinions based on accessibility and the expressed concerns from my audience."

Gen Z brings a unique and refreshing perspective to cosmetics and skincare, per Mr. Yarbro. These consumers yearn to understand the functionality and ingredients of products, are interested in simplicity and are focused on affordability and accessibility as many begin entering the workforce.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Hiram (@skincarebyhyram)

When it comes to influencer marketing and brand revenue streams, brand collaborations generate the most income for U.S. influencers' businesses (68 percent), followed by affiliate marketing (9.3 percent) and advertisements (7.1 percent).

"In 2006, I had 13 different revenue streams," said Tina Chen Craig, founder of **U Beauty**.

"Since then, I have had to reevaluate which streams were generating the most impactful amounts of money and hone in on those," she said. "While diversifying your portfolio is important, I do so, not by [widening the net], but by going deep with loyal customers."

One of the more challenging aspects of the evolution of tech platforms including TikTok and Instagram, however, is navigating the algorithmic changes and making sure content is visible to both the public and target audiences, according to Mr. Yarbrow.

"I see this as a positive challenge, or a push to innovate my content," Mr. Yarbrow said. "One of the reasons algorithmic changes take place is to benefit smaller channels by reallocating and distributing views across different players."

"This reiterates the importance of diversifying which platforms you're using and making sure to build a following on as many as you can," he said. "For instance, when the U.S. TikTok ban was being threatened, this generated a lot of fear among creators who relied exclusively on the platform."

While many creators and influencers are emerging from TikTok and other channels, Mr. Yi noted the rise of thought leaders and speakers as another revenue stream.

A significant portion of the work he does with Very Good Light is consulting with and advising brands as product and consumer experts, opening the conversation to diversity, equity and inclusion.



As diversity, equity and inclusion rises to the forefront of conversations in beauty, Sephora highlighted the presence of Black beauty in a recent campaign. Image credit: Sephora

"The way brand partnerships operate are so much more collaborative now," Ms. Chen Craig agreed. "As creators, our opinions are valuable to brands because they are depending on us to tell them how we want to work with them.

"We know our audiences and social environments, so we can effectively consult brands on how to go to market."

Power of young consumers

The beauty industry is expected to reach \$463 million by 2027, and young consumers have a considerable stake in its growth.

As a cohort, Gen Z is reimagining and challenging beauty norms, prioritizing personal values, self-care and authenticity when it comes to purchasing behavior. In its [Gen Z State of Beauty Report](#), Kyra Media explored how Gen Z engages with the beauty industry as their evolving attitudes toward culture and content impact their brand and product choices.

Self-expression and creative freedom are hugely important to young consumers, and experimentation plays a significant role in that sense of self-discovery. Gen Z sees makeup as a form of creativity and is seeking inspiration through video or social content ([see story](#)).

Additionally, as the majority of TikTok users are under the age of 35, it is important for beauty brands to tap influencer opportunities on the platform.

While 2020 was a difficult year for sponsored influencer content budgets, influencer marketing platform Traackr found that TikTok saw a 164 percent increase in sponsored beauty posts and a 481 percent increase in engagement ([see story](#)).

"Gen Z is not necessarily interested in luxury or experience right now, but rather wanting to learn how a product works," Mr. Yarbrow said. "They're also pushing sustainability and pushing brands towards recognizing how they can be more sustainable and ethical in the ways they operate."