

# Influencers

## THE NEW MEDIUM OF MARKETING

COURTNEY S. SCHILD

Just like any other adolescent female born in the late 1980s, I grew up watching Barney and playing with Barbie. I had no genuinely valid reasons for worshipping a purple dinosaur, or for playing dress-up with abnormally-figured dolls. So, what was it that drove me to carry out these acts of absurdity? Influence. I was simply influenced by my peers. I noticed which television programs they were watching and which toys they were playing with, and I merely followed suit.

We are all followers in some way, shape or form. As members of a capitalist society, we consume on a daily basis. So, how do we choose what to consume? Do we even have a choice? We would like to think so. The truth is we're more powerless to consumerism than we think, all due to the efforts of the marketing industry.

During our childhood years, we immersed ourselves in our favorite television programs and convinced our parents to buy us the latest and greatest toys available on the market. But as we've grown, our world has changed. Not only are we older and more mature, we now form a generation defined by new era, a completely digitized era, an era delineated by the fast-paced diffusion of innovations all around us. New media technologies have enhanced our sociality through the globalization of virtually everything. More importantly, however, these technologies also dictate how we consume, or adopt, innovations.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the constant influx of new media technologies into the everyday lives of consumers like you and I, our social networks are more connected than ever. The devices and platforms we refer to as new media allow everyday users to establish and maintain relationships; but most of all, these technologies encourage users to influence one another. However, there are some users whose influence on the rest of us is significantly greater than others'. These users establish and maintain more relationships than the average person, they are highly involved in a wide variety of activities, and they are looked up to and trusted by others. They are a group referred to as "influencers."<sup>2</sup> So, what effect do influencers have on the way innovations are introduced to and diffused into society? How do influencers facilitate the efforts of the marketing industry?

The diffusion of innovations through campaigns generated by marketers, as well as advertisers and designers, is now largely dependent upon the implementation of influencers. These industry professionals must recognize the potential of influencers

1. McLuhan, Marshall, and Quentin Fiore. *The Medium is the Message*. Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2005. Print.
2. "Influencer marketing - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Influencer\\_marketing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Influencer_marketing)>.

in the diffusion of the innovations, tangible or intangible, being marketed and sold to consumers. The immediacy, interactivity and intimacy of new media technologies demands there be changes made in the way we communicate and thus function as a capitalist society. Gone are the days of target markets. Rather, marketers must identify influencers and engage them in the diffusion of innovations through marketing, advertising and other design campaigns. Changes must be made for marketing professionals to reach consumers in this ever-changing world.

## A NEW ERA

In an article entitled “This Is Generation Flux: Meet The Pioneers Of The New (And Chaotic) Frontier of Business,” Robert Safian of Fast Company proposes the idea of a new generation no longer defined by age, but by an acceptance of change. Safian states, “This is less a demographic designation than a psychographic one: What defines [Generation Flux] is a mind-set that embraces instability, that tolerates – and even enjoys – [re-calibrating] careers, business models, and assumptions.”<sup>3</sup> Generation Flux is not the next generation, it’s our generation. We are living in a constant state of flux, of change. Those who embrace this change are those who define this age, as well as the pace at which society now functions within it.

In 1967, “The Medium is the Message” was first published. Over four decades later, critics hail the book for its “insights” and “cognitive observations,” which are still “disturbingly clear” and “remarkably accurate” today.<sup>4</sup> Within the first couple pages, author Marshall McLuhan states, “Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication.”<sup>5</sup> And quite evidently so. Without new media technologies, ranging from applications on smartphones and other mobile devices to social networking websites on the Internet, our society would still be functioning at the rate it did when telephones were our most immediate forms of communication. However, with the vast onslaught of Facebook and Twitter, especially via linked smartphone applications, users can communicate with one another just as if they were spending the day together. According to McLuhan, “Electric circuitry has overthrown the regime of ‘time’ and ‘space’ and pours upon us instantly and continuously the concerns of all other men.”<sup>6</sup> New media technologies have reshaped our society for widespread immediacy, interactivity and intimacy.

With platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, our social networks are also more relevant and larger than ever. McLuhan states, “Too many people know too much about each other. Our new environment compels commitment and participation. We have become irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other.”<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that McLuhan made this observation over four decades ago. Imagine the extent to which this observation holds true today. For, now our social networks are like living, breathing, growing organisms that demand our attention.<sup>8</sup> And social networking websites make it easier than ever to be attentive. In turn, we have become deeply embedded within our social networks. We are connected like we’ve never been before.

3. Safian, Robert. “This Is Generation Flux: Meet The Pioneers Of The New (And Chaotic) Frontier Of Business.” *Fast Company* 9 Jan. 2012: n. pag. This Is Generation Flux: Meet The Pioneers Of The New (And Chaotic) Frontier Of Business | *Fast Company*. Web. 21 Mar. 2012.
4. McLuhan, Marshall, and Quentin Fiore. *The Medium is the Message*. Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2005. Print.
5. McLuhan, Marshall, and Quentin Fiore. *The Medium is the Message*. Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2005. 8. Print.
6. McLuhan, Marshall, and Quentin Fiore. *The Medium is the Message*. Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2005. 16. Print.
7. McLuhan, Marshall, and Quentin Fiore. *The Medium is the Message*. Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2005. 24. Print.
8. “Nicholas Christakis: The hidden influence of social networks | Video on TED.com.” TED: Ideas worth spreading. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Mar. 2012. <[http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/nicholas\\_christakis\\_the\\_hidden\\_influence\\_of\\_social\\_networks.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/nicholas_christakis_the_hidden_influence_of_social_networks.html)>.

In a TED talk entitled “Seth Godin on the tribes we lead,” it is made clear we are living in a new era. Our purpose has been reshaped by the nature of the technology available to us. Godin, marketer and author, states, “It’s about leading and connecting people and ideas.” We connect not just through social networks, but through “tribes,” or “silos of interest,” through which innovations spread and changes take form. The “leaders” of these tribes are the agents of change.<sup>9</sup> They are those the marketing industry often refers to as influencers.

## INFLUENCE FOR CHANGE

Influencers have always been around. Influencers are people, just like you and I. And, just like you and I, no two influencers are the same.

The identification of influencers is often based on their most apparent quality: influence. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines influence as “the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command.”<sup>10</sup> In a documentary by R+I Creative entitled “Influencers, How Trends & Creativity Become Contagious.,” Jon Cohen, Co-CEO of Cornerstone, makes an important contribution to the definition of influence. Cohen states, “I think influence is all relative. It’s all relative to your personal taste: to what you like and who you look at.”<sup>11</sup> Just as some people are more influential than others, some people are also more apt to being influenced than others. Influence is subtle, yet powerful. It is the very reason we see change in the world. It controls both our conscious and subconscious thoughts and affects our every decision. A society void of influence would be a society void of reason. In a consumerist society, the power of influence manifests itself in every dimension of life.

For this very reason, influencers hold more importance than ever for the marketing industry. However, not all industry professionals would concur. While some agree with the importance of influencers to the marketing industry, others argue this form of marketing, known as “Influencer Marketing,” has essentially run its course and exhausted its value. I argue the former.

According to Wikipedia, “Influencer Marketing, [also Influence Marketing] is a form of marketing that has emerged from a variety of recent practices and studies, in which focus is placed on specific key individuals (or types of individual) rather than the market as a whole.” As a marketing discipline, there are four main activities associated with Influencer Marketing: identifying influencers, marketing to influencers, marketing through influencers and marketing with influencers.<sup>12</sup> In Influencer Marketing, influencers act as the medium through which marketing professionals connect with their target markets.

In a TED talk entitled, “Simon Sinek: How great leaders inspire action,” we are introduced to the concept that “People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it.” Sinek, leadership expert and author, introduces his audience to “The Golden Circle,” a model that supports his aforementioned theory. On a presentation board,

9. “Seth Godin on the tribes we lead | Video on TED.com.” TED: Ideas worth spreading. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Mar. 2012. <[http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/seth\\_godin\\_on\\_the\\_tribes\\_we\\_lead.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/seth_godin_on_the_tribes_we_lead.html)>.
10. “Influence - Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary.” Dictionary and Thesaurus - Merriam-Webster Online. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/influence?show=0&t=1332219431>>.
11. Influencers, How Trends & Creativity Become Contagious.. Dir: Paul Rojanathara. Perf. Jon Cohen, Rob Stone, Jeff Staple, Josh Peskowitz, Dao-Yi Chow, Deirdre Maloney, David Genster, Sky Gellatly, Damon Crepin-Burr, Antony Gormley. R+I Creative, 2011. Film.
12. “Influencer marketing - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.” Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Influencer\\_marketing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Influencer_marketing)>.

Sinek draws one circle in the center of the page, engulfed by a bigger circle, and yet again engulfed by an even bigger circle - essentially an image that looks like a target. Within the inner circle, he writes "why." Within the middle circle, he writes "how." And within the outer circle, he writes "what." Sinek explains that everyone knows what they do, some know how they do it, and very few know why they do it. His theory states that "all the great inspiring leaders and organizations in the world" operate in from the inside-out. Take, for example, a company like Apple; Apple finds itself a leader in the market for consumer-level technology because it operates based on the "why" instead of the "what."<sup>13</sup> Whereas most companies use their products as their main selling points, Apple markets its convictions for creating the products it sells. And because consumers can relate to Apple by believing in what the company stands for, they follow Apple's lead and ultimately buy Apple products.

As companies continue to supply and sell the products that consumers demand and buy, innovations will continue to diffuse into our society; but only with the help of the marketing industry. For, without some form of marketing, innovations would never diffuse and thus be nonexistent. According to "Diffusion of Innovations, 5th Edition" by Everett M. Rogers, diffusion is "the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system."<sup>14</sup> Rogers highlights four main elements of diffusion within his definition: the innovation, communication channels, time, and the social system.<sup>15</sup> "Adoption," or "a decision to make full use of an innovation as the best course of action available," is thus the end result of the diffusion process.<sup>16</sup>

Likened to consumers, "adopters" diffuse innovations through the mere act of adoption. The Diffusion of Innovations theory includes five "adopter categories." Rogers defines adopter categories as "classifications of the members of a social system on the basis of their innovativeness."<sup>17</sup> As stated, each adopter category represents a different type of adopter based on innovativeness, or "the degree to which an individual or other unit of adoption is relatively earlier in adopting new ideas than the other members of a system."<sup>18</sup> These categories include, in order of adoption and innovativeness, "innovators," "early adopters," the "early majority," the "late majority" and "laggards."<sup>19</sup> In their documentary on influencers, R+I Creative simplifies and modernizes these adopter categories, describing innovators as "trend-setters," early adopters as "visionaries," the early majority as "pragmatists," the late majority as "conservatives," and laggards as "skeptics."<sup>20</sup> Adopter categories indicate the points at which certain adopters participate in the diffusion process. Often, the more innovative the adopter, the more influence said adopter has over others.

In order to thoroughly understand the adoption of an innovation, researchers study diffusion curves, which include a bell-shaped curve as well as an S-shaped curve. Along the S-shaped curve is a point at which Malcolm Gladwell terms the "Tipping Point". In his book "The Tipping Point," Gladwell states:

'The Tipping Point' is the biography of an idea, and the idea is very simple. It is that the best way to understand the emergence of fashion trends, the

13. "Simon Sinek: How great leaders inspire action | Video on TED.com." TED: Ideas worth spreading. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Mar. 2012. <[http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action.html)>.
14. Rogers, Everett. Diffusion of Innovations. 5 ed. New York, NY: Free Press, 2003. 474. Print.
15. Rogers, Everett. Diffusion of Innovations. 5 ed. New York, NY: Free Press, 2003. 11. Print.
16. Rogers, Everett. Diffusion of Innovations. 5 ed. New York, NY: Free Press, 2003. 473. Print.
17. *ibid.*
18. Rogers, Everett. Diffusion of Innovations. 5 ed. New York, NY: Free Press, 2003. 475. Print.
19. Rogers, Everett. Diffusion of Innovations. 5 ed. New York, NY: Free Press, 2003. 270. Print.
20. Influencers, How Trends & Creativity Become Contagious.. Dir. Paul Rojanathara. Perf. Jon Cohen, Rob Stone, Jeff Staple, Josh Peskowitz, Dao-Yi Chow, Deirdre Maloney, David Gensler, Sky Gellatly, Damon Crepin-Burr, Antony Gormley. R+I Creative, 2011. Film.

ebb and flow of crime waves, or, for that matter, the transformation of unknown books into bestsellers, or the rise of teenage smoking, or the phenomena of word of mouth, or any number of the other mysterious changes that mark everyday life is to think of them as epidemics. Ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread just like viruses do.<sup>21</sup>

In terms of the Diffusion of Innovations theory, Gladwell's Tipping Point relates to Rogers' idea of a "critical mass," or "the point at which enough individuals in a system have adopted an innovation such that the innovation's further rate of adoption becomes self-sustaining."<sup>22</sup> This singular point on the S-shaped curve of diffusion validates the existence and thus, the importance of influencers to the marketing of innovations.

Along the bell-shaped curve, representative of adopter categorization on the basis of innovativeness, innovators account for 2.5%, early adopters account for 13.5%, the early and late majorities each account for 34% (or a total of 68%), and the laggards account for 16%.<sup>23</sup> As indicated, there is a very small percentage of adopters with high levels of innovativeness. For this reason, marketers often direct campaigns at the early and late majorities due to the greater percentage of adopters within these categories. In a TED talk entitled "Seth Godin on standing out," Godin states that this marketing strategy must change; instead, marketers must direct campaigns at innovators and early adopters, as these adopters account for the highest total level of innovativeness.<sup>24</sup> If innovators and early adopters, or influencers, are the ones who indefinitely adopt, and thus diffuse innovations, the marketing industry must work to reach these individuals.

## A NEW MEDIUM OF MARKETING

According to McLuhan, "All media work us over completely."<sup>25</sup> Not only do we consume old and new media on a daily basis, we are also consumed by it. The digitization of our world has both enabled and forced us to use the devices and platforms we refer to as new media technologies.

Often, professionals reason that media is new when it's not quite understood. This very characteristic that differentiates old from new media is also the characteristic that makes all media so powerful. At one of Fast Company's Fast Talk events, Jonah Peretti, Co-Founder of Huffington Post and Founder of BuzzFeed, describes his first-hand experience with the power of media. Peretti had customized a pair of shoes through NIKEiD with the word "sweatshop" on the side, simply because he wanted to see if Nike would send him shoes that said "sweatshop." After a few emails were exchanged, Nike ultimately decided they would not send him the shoes. As Peretti found this comical, he forwarded the email between himself and Nike to a couple of his friends. From there, it unintentionally and inevitably went viral. Peretti states, "If you can make something that ordinary people get really excited about and share it with other ordinary people, it will spread. It has the potential to spread to millions and millions of people."<sup>26</sup> Through the power of media, an otherwise pri-

21. Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2000. 7. Print.
22. Rogers, Everett. *Diffusion of Innovations*. 5 ed. New York, NY: Free Press, 2003. 474. Print.
23. Rogers, Everett. *Diffusion of Innovations*. 5 ed. New York, NY: Free Press, 2003. 281. Print.
24. "Seth Godin on standing out | Video on TED.com." TED: Ideas worth spreading. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Mar. 2012. <[http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/seth\\_godin\\_on\\_sliced\\_bread.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/seth_godin_on_sliced_bread.html)>.
25. McLuhan, Marshall, and Quentin Fiore. *The Medium is the Massage*. Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2005. Print.
26. Robischon, Noah. "Jonah Peretti on Going Viral: The Trick Is Finding the Right Networks | Fast Company." *FastCompany.com* - Where ideas and people meet | Fast Company. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.fastcompany.com/1699996/jonah-peretti-on-going-viral-the-trick-is-finding-the-right-networks>>.

vate email between two parties became the topic of discussions worldwide.

What if marketers were able to do the same with entire campaigns? There is no reason campaigns should be failing in this world full of new media technologies. In an era in which attentive consumers want things yesterday, the marketing industry must keep up with this demand. Influencers are the medium through which marketers can reach mass audiences in a society of consumers who expect immediacy, interactivity and intimacy due to the influx of new media technologies. It's not that Influencer Marketing should be the future, it must be the future.

Just as we are, children are also growing up in this fast-paced, consumer-driven society. Mere episodes of Barney and Barbie dolls are no longer enough to satisfy the dwindling attention spans of children. Inundated by and occupied with new media technologies, they also demand and expect stimulation through immediacy, interactivity and intimacy. This is their sense of normal - an indication that times are truly changing. Our previous notions of time and space are now entirely void. We have the ability to connect with whoever we want, whenever we want. A market defined by these things is not forgiving. Campaigns simply cannot fail. For this reason, influencers are invaluable assets to the marketing industry.

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