

Contents

List of Illustrations ix

Acknowledgments xi

Introduction	1
1 Groundwork	12
2 Setting the Terms for a Transactional Industry	36
3 Making Influence Efficient	62
4 Revealing and Repositioning the Machinations of Influence	100
5 The Industry Becomes Boundaryless	128
6 The Cost of Being Real	156

Appendix 173

Notes 179

References 191

Index 211

Introduction

Staring out from the cover of *New York* magazine's September 2019 issue was a close-up of a young woman's face, wide-eyed with a resigned "can you believe this?" expression, covered in red rubber darts. The cover line read, "What Instagram did to me." Readers familiar with the fashion blogosphere of the 2000s or New York City's arts or media scenes in the 2010s would recognize the face as that of Tavi Gevinson, who first made a name for herself in the late 2000s as a preteen style blogger. Her rise had been nervously and obsessively tracked by blog readers, journalists, and industry insiders. In the span of a few short years, Gevinson reaped enormous rewards from being an early entrant into the world of social media self-branding: from taking selfies to being photographed by Annie Leibovitz; from attending middle school to sitting front row at Fashion Week (and famously pissing off a *Grazia* editor by blocking the view with an enormous hair bow); from hanging out in the comments section of her blog to running her own digital teen magazine with the blessing of legendary editor Jane Pratt and radio producer Ira Glass. But by the time of this 2019 cover story, Gevinson, then aged twenty-three, had also been through the wringer. She had been a test case, patient zero, for the influencer industrial ethos: the idea that anyone can cultivate a loyal audience by providing consistent and relatable content on social media, and then use that audience's likes, follows, and other engagement metrics as evidence of "influence" to be leveraged for a range of social and economic rewards—many of them accessible through partnering with commercial brands to entwine their messages with one's own.

The notion that rewards await those who craft an authentic-seeming public image has existed for centuries, and it has been particularly salient in American entrepreneurial culture. As media historian Jefferson Pooley has pointed out, American literature of the early 1900s encapsulated a “core contradiction” of American culture then and now: “Be true to yourself, it is to your strategic advantage.”¹ Given fertile ground by the technological and socioeconomic conditions of the 2000s, this concept has grown wildly in the twenty-first century, powering a multibillion-dollar industrial machine that has reshaped the creation and flows of culture, ideas about who and what is powerful, and technologies and social norms of communication. This is the influencer industry. And Gevinson was finding the whole thing a bit existentially troubling.

In the accompanying essay for *New York*, Gevinson wrote about how her experience growing up online shaped her sense of self and her experience of the world, in ways that are both obvious and unknowable. The audience she cultivated through her blog and grew exponentially through Instagram provided her with job opportunities on stage, film, and high-end ad campaigns, as well as with friends, entrée to elite events, and an identity. It gave her an income, and even a home in a luxury apartment building where she lived rent-free for a year in exchange for posting about the experience. “I can try to imagine an alternate universe where I’ve always roamed free and Instagram-less in pastures untouched by the algorithm. But I can’t imagine who that person is inside,” she wrote. Gevinson is acutely aware that it was her seemingly effortless ability to be herself that spawned this existence, but she admitted to doing “rapid-fire stage-mom math” to keep her digital persona in line with others’ expectations. “Somewhere along the line, I think I came to see my shareable self as the authentic one and buried any tendencies that might threaten her likability so deep down I forgot they even existed,” she wrote. Among the many reasons to distrust Instagram—not least of which is its exploitation of leisure time with constant data collection and ad-targeting—she continued, “most unnerving are the ways in which it has led me to distrust myself . . . I think I am a writer and an actor and an artist. But I haven’t

believed the purity of my own intentions ever since I became my own salesperson, too.”²



Ten years before this cover hit newsstands, in the summer of 2009, I was an eager new college graduate with a longtime vision of working in magazines. I went to New York two weeks after graduation to start an internship in the features department of a storied fashion title. This was the exact sort of position in which I had dreamed I would land—aside, of course, from the lack of pay and stability. Another intern and I shared the job of department assistant, answering phones, scheduling, pulling products for front-of-book pages, and generally pitching in on whatever projects needed it. I was also continuing my paid job as a contributing writer at my hometown newspaper and relying on a loan from my parents, who had agreed to help with rent for two months. If I had not found a way to support myself fully by the time it ran out, my time in New York would be over. I knew the multidimensional absurdity of this situation, but I had accepted the toxic narrative that working for free was the only way “in” to a paying job at a major media company, and since no one in my life had ever pursued this type of path, that narrative was all I had. I was young and not ready to let reality get in the way of my ambitions.

On my first day, what struck me most was the emptiness and quiet of the offices. My desk was on the edge of the area where the staff sat; my view was of rows of empty white workstations. I swallowed my uncertainty and acted as though everything was normal, and that I belonged. But despite its seemingly impenetrable glamour, the Hearst Tower was not immune to the economic realities that seemed to be swallowing the world whole. Less than a year prior, the United States’ housing market had imploded and took with it the livelihoods and ways of life for millions of Americans and much of the world. In the months leading up to my move to New York, I read the news from my rural college campus with awe and nervousness. January 2009: 600,000 jobs lost. March 2009: 700,000 jobs lost. By May 2009 nearly six million jobs had been lost in

the United States and many millions more globally. I submitted dozens of applications to paying jobs with almost zero response.

At the same time, bloggers and the nascent term “social media” were increasingly hot topics of conversation, especially among journalists and other media workers. Bloggers were still considered amateurs and outsiders—interesting, for sure, but with no real expertise or credibility in the fields they claimed to inhabit. Yet editors and professors repeatedly suggested to me and my aspiring journalist peers that we work on blogs to pass the time until jobs opened up, conveniently overlooking that one typically needs to be paid to get by. My fellow department intern and I would go for walks at night, stomping around Greenwich Village in the day-old heat and wondering how it could be that the only way we were going to move forward was by selling ourselves for nothing on the internet.

Not long after, the magazine hired thirteen-year-old Tavi Gevinson to write a column. The blogger was quickly becoming a wunderkind due to her eccentric style and earnest takes on fashion that she published from her suburban Midwestern family home. That moment was existentially clarifying. I knew that the DNA of the industry I had trained and planned to work in had permanently changed—and that these changes represented a much more sweeping shift for our information and cultural environment. On one hand, as an aspiring media worker, I felt deeply the ridiculousness and unfairness in a system that essentially required preexisting economic and social capital to get ahead. I knew that I was more fortunate than most in that my family was able to help at all for those two months, but I also knew that their generosity would not be enough to float me into a paying position. I would be leaving in early August, then staying with my sister in Philadelphia and commuting to finish my internship. The commute was nearly three hours door to door on standing-room-only New Jersey Transit trains, which gave me a lot of time to worry. It was not difficult to make the connection that when the pipeline for media jobs was this inaccessible, those who make it through—and end up responsible for producing and marketing the information and entertainment that plays a significant role in constructing a society’s shared reality—are probably coming from a narrow

pool. On the other hand, I saw that while traditional media companies were laying off employees and demanding free labor of their entry-level and freelance workers, the public's demand for content was growing. And as our economic system crashed, it fanned the flames of deep skepticism of society's established institutions. People were hungry for content, but from providers who were "real"—who showed that they "got it" in a way that New York-based national and global media companies, from Condé Nast to the *New York Times* to the major television networks, never did.

Marching into this vacuum came bloggers. They followed different communication norms—in particular, a conversational tone and a lack of separation between their editorial content and that which was sponsored by a brand—and most of all, they portrayed themselves as driven by passion, indicating a wholesomeness and authenticity that elsewhere seemed lacking. They saw themselves as regular people searching for a like-minded community with whom to share and critique ideas, products, and more. Their independence was their power, though it would also become their meal ticket, and thus their most critical sacrifice. As bloggers and early influencers ceded independence for earning a predictable living—a perfectly rational and understandable choice, given the circumstances—they also helped create a growing digital media industrial machine interested in monetizing an authentic life, not embodying it.

I marveled over this state of affairs for another four years as I hopped around the tumultuous job market, working at a range of organizations as an assistant, then assistant editor, and later, a social media editor. I could not shake the feeling that my experience was a microscopic part of a world-shifting pattern of events, and I wanted to understand it better and help translate it for others. I went to graduate school ostensibly to study the shifting labor market for media workers and how this was impacting content. But fashion was my starting point of reference, and blogging was where these changes were going down. Turns out, as is so often the case, the fashion and retail industries were indicators of broader social and technological changes to come. Often, we get acclimated to new ways of life under the auspices of light-hearted commercialism, from viewing shopping as a route to self-actualization to

handing companies our personal data (in exchange for a discount, of course).³

For nearly a decade, I have followed along. I conducted in-depth interviews with dozens of people, attended industry events, and analyzed thousands of press articles and corporate and individual marketing materials, as “blogger” turned into multiplatform “influencer,” amateurs turned into professionals, niche content gave way to generalized lifestyle content (and started to swing back again), free product turned into multimillion-dollar deals, and an industry spun up to affirm and expand the chaotic marketplace of digital influence, repackaging and reshaping “realness” to suit its needs.

This book offers a critical history of the influencer industry’s formative years in the United States. I track its development from a haphazard group of creative people scrambling for work in the face of the Great Recession to today’s multifaceted, multibillion-dollar industry with expanding global impact. I contextualize the industry’s origins within key cultural and intellectual histories that predate the digital era, and explore some of its consequences—which, at the time of writing, are increasingly foreboding.

The influencer industry is a complex ecosystem, comprising influencers and those who aspire to be them, marketers and technologists, brands and sponsors, social media corporations, and a host of others, including talent managers and trend forecasters. I have interviewed people from all of these groups, except for the social media companies who did not answer my queries. I examined how these stakeholders negotiated the meaning, value, and practical use of digital influence as they reimagined it as a commodity for the social media age. The systems they created for producing, evaluating, and marketing “influential” content relied on a positive association with authenticity, or “being real.” Yet, as their industrial definition of authenticity shifted along with the needs of marketers, so too did the tools we use to communicate and the social norms and values that animate them. More than a decade into the influencer industry’s existence, these decisions have accumulated to something more than the sum of its parts. As the later chapters show, the industry’s participants created logics and tools

for social media communication that have extended beyond their intentions and control, enabling propagandists (and worse) to insert their messages and misinformation into our feeds under the veil of “just being real.”

Media professionals and researchers have long recognized that a sense of authenticity is critical to effective messaging. The meaning of authenticity has never been precise, but it is usually tied to some sense of genuineness or originality. As media scholar Gunn Enli wrote, authenticity is ultimately “about socially constructed notions about what is real”⁴—and thus, its exact meaning changes over time and in different contexts. In this book, I show how, in our current moment, authenticity is not just a social construction but an industrial one, continually tussled over by a sophisticated and complicated profit-making enterprise whose decisions about what expressions of reality are valuable help determine what types of content and tools for communication and self-expression are available to the world’s billions of social media users.

My findings confirm that those who learn to construct and exploit the ever-shifting language and aesthetic of “realness” online hold immense commercial, political, and ideological influence, but they also show how fraught, contingent, and transactional authenticity has become. Casual observers often deride influencers for vapid self-indulgence, but influencers’ messages about seemingly trivial decisions—such as how to dress, eat, travel, and work—shape our experiences of everyday life. Under the guise of superficiality, the industry has gone even further, shaping conversations about how to vote, raise children, and take care of oneself and one’s community. Indeed, in the later stages of research for this book, the influencer industry seemed to be undergoing a shift—becoming less about what to buy and more about what to think.

The story of the influencer industry’s development is marked by power shifts and attempts to make the intangible tangible. Democratic dreams gave way to industrial ossification. In retrospect, this story makes perfect sense. The influencer industry is both a symptom of and a response to the economic precarity and upheaval in social institutions that have characterized the early twenty-first century. Indeed, this is what enabled the influencer logic to expand and root itself so securely

in our way of life. While individual participants looked for a route to autonomy, stability, and professional fulfillment that seemed impossible elsewhere, they ended up creating a value system that advanced the erosion of boundaries between individuals' inner lives and commercialism, asking us to view ourselves as products perpetually ready for market, our relationships as monetizable, and our daily activities as potential shopping experiences. As such, I argue that influencers are neither "a flash in the pan" nor "a bubble about to burst," but indicators of a paradigm shift in the way we think about each other and ourselves.

The terms by which people refer to the industry help elide its consequences. Repeatedly and across time, in interviews and in the press, people use the term "Wild West" to describe the influencer industry. They use it to describe how no one seems to know for sure what is acceptable or what the future holds, and how people are figuring things out and testing boundaries as they go. For years now, though, the industry *has* had established norms and processes. Even if they are often shifting, they do so with the participation of people working in and around it. The influencer industry's "lawlessness," at this point, is a choice—one made and recommitted to daily by social media companies, who have had too much to gain by doing nothing (and more recently, acting only after problems seemed out of control), and regulators whose attentions are directed elsewhere. Further, "Wild West" as a descriptor makes it too easy for some to shrug off the industry's lack of transparency, persistent inequalities, and role as a conduit of mis- and disinformation.

By virtue of the time period that I conducted this research, as well as my position as a researcher following shifts I first noticed in the magazine world, this book focuses heavily on blogs, Instagram, and their associated technologies of self-commercialization—that expanding repertoire of tools that allows people to monetize their digital presence and adopt the ideology of the marketplace for their own self-expression. In this way, it could also be read as a study of what particular platforms—despite their frequent attempts to characterize themselves as neutral—make possible.⁵ But the patterns described here often repeat themselves: on blogs, then YouTube and Instagram, then Snapchat, then TikTok and Substack, and will likely continue in the future so long as the ideologi-

cal, technological, and regulatory infrastructures that support them remain unchanged. The industrial construction of authenticity is everywhere media industries are, particularly in times when people who create media content—not just influencers, but journalists and pundits, designers and musicians, and everyday people looking for an audience—have little to lose and a whole lot to gain by cultivating the right kind of “realness” online.

Yet, at the end of the first decade of the influencer industry, I am not cynical. This is a story of rampant commercialism, questionable ethical decisions, indignities and unfairness, and frightening opportunities for negative social impact, from rabid misinformation to the commercial colonization of our very sense of selfhood—plus the environmental and psychological impacts of the never-ending onslaught of goods from consumerism’s accelerating hamster wheel. But it is also a story of scrappy survival, especially for the women who have been at the forefront of this industry since its beginning, and of genuine efforts to live well and live better. In its complexity, you will see simple yet resounding calls for progress. Workers thrive with autonomy, resources, and opportunity. Our media environment best serves its consumers leading with intellectual honesty, understanding of the vast variations of human experience, and less noise. And from the technology that makes much of this possible, people demand transparency and respect rather than surveillance and exploitation. What academics, media professionals, and government and technology industry leaders need to do is listen—and act.



In the remaining chapters, I contextualize and untangle the development of the influencer industry, demonstrating how the “influencer economy” emerged as a locus of power tied to tangible economic and social rewards on the social media-driven, visual web. I critically examine how participants in this system construct and operationalize what it means to be an influencer. And I explore the consequences of this industrialization of “authentic” influence for the production of culture, technological innovation, and everyday life.

I refer to the development of the influencer industry as *industrialization* because it represents a coordinated collection, processing, and commodification of a good or service. Marketers, brands, influencers, social media companies, and others worked (and continue to work) together to make influence meaningful as a commodity—to give it social meaning as well as financial value, and to build infrastructures for its measurement and sale.⁶ The book’s chapters are loosely chronological, but they are not an attempt at periodization. Rather, the chronology offers a means of making sense of the industrialization of influence and authenticity *as a process* that was informed by and responsive to current events. As will become clear in the ensuing chapters, this process was not always linear or evenly paced.

In chapter 1, I explain how the logic of a digital influencer economy was born out of a long history of intellectual thinking about what influence is, as well as a “perfect storm” of events in the 2000s. In chapter 2, I show how a range of creative professionals began working together to rebuild their careers in the wake of the Great Recession and, in so doing, created the mechanisms and negotiated the terms by which the influencer industry would blossom. In chapter 3, I explore how, once the industry began functioning in a coordinated way, stakeholders aimed to maximize its efficiency by introducing various new technologies for relationship management and monetization. The industry grew precipitously, and its growing impact on various cultural products became eminently obvious. Soon, however, a sort of backlash developed. Chapter 4 highlights the changing cultural environment of the late 2010s and some specific public events that contributed to wider suspicion about—and regulation of—the influencer industry. It then explores how various participants repositioned their work so the industry could continue to thrive. Chapter 5 untangles a series of existential and practical issues brought to the fore by the social tumult at the turn of the 2020s. I explore potential futures and current concerns as the influencer industry moves beyond commercial interests and becomes a tool for propaganda and misinformation, as well as for prosocial messaging. In chapter 6, I take stock of the complex system the influencer industry has become by the start of the 2020s: one that ensnares business owners and brand

executives, professional and aspiring influencers, ordinary social media users, technology companies of various sizes and scopes, and governments in a marketplace whose rules and system of value are constantly shifting and being renegotiated, yet whose successful navigation is increasingly required for understanding the flows of culture and information in the twenty-first century. I reflect on the industry's promise and peril and suggest what we as a society should consider as we reckon with it. For now, let's go back to the beginning.

Index

- academia. *See* research; scholarship
- ad-blocking, 102
- Adorno, Theodor, 141–42
- advertising: and American culture, 13, 15–16; banner, 55; and content, 47; deceptive, 103–9; guidelines, 103–5, 111; as inescapable, 102; and influencers, 38, 42, 44–45, 49, 110; niche, 26; retail, 27–29; and social media, 2, 12, 26–27; strategies, 39–40, 111–13. *See also* branding; marketing firms
- aesthetics, 88–96, 169
- affiliate links, 55, 77–83, 149, 158. *See also* sponsorships
- Ajayi, Adesuwa, 134
- algorithms, 54, 121, 129, 150–51, 158, 161
- Amazon, 149
- American Influencer Council (AIC), 152–54, 162
- American literature. *See* literature
- analytics. *See* data; metrics; quantification
- Andrejevic, Mark, 168, 189n25
- Ang, Ien, 46
- anti-fans, 53, 120
- appropriation, 136
- Arriagada, Arturo, 42
- artificial intelligence, 112, 126
- AspireIQ, 143–45
- attention economy, 22–23, 168, 189n25
- attention spans, 78
- audience. *See* engagement; followers
- authenticity: and American culture, 2, 16, 179n3; and the audience, 5, 7, 109; definitions of, 7, 56–57, 70, 168–70; digital, 33–34; the downside of, 142–43, 154; evaluating, 131; the evolution of, 103, 122–23, 127, 140, 145, 147, 169; industrial constructions of, 7–9, 168–70; and inequality, 32; and the influencer industry, 6–7, 9, 14, 56, 96–98, 110, 122, 171; and influencers, 57–60, 69–70, 86, 88–90, 114–15, 124, 147, 169; and marketing, 38–39, 55–56, 59, 80, 102; monetizing, 5, 7–8, 13, 28, 32, 55–56; and pods, 121. *See also* realness
- authoritarianism, 17, 35, 128, 162
- authority, 15, 20, 27, 33, 36
- backlash. *See* criticism
- Banana Republic, 147
- Banet-Weiser, Sarah, 34, 40
- banner ads, 55
- Barton, Bruce, 15
- Baym, Nancy, 51, 54
- beauty vloggers, 151
- behavior, 14, 20, 160. *See also* social norms
- Berger, Jonah, 20
- Berger, Ryan, 40, 51, 65, 111, 115
- Bernays, Edward, 16, 21, 167
- Berry, Jon, 20
- Biden, Joe, 156
- Bishop, Sophie, 68, 71
- Black Lives Matter (BLM), 136
- black markets, 87, 109–10
- Blackout Tuesday, 137
- Blogger, 24

- blogging: decline of, 64; and employment, 4, 25–26; fashion, 1–2, 5, 27–28, 30–32, 36–37, 43; mommy, 24, 83; political, 24; and professional standards, 26–27; the rise of, 5; tensions, 37–38. *See also* digital influence
- The Blonde Salad, 96–97
- Bloomberg, Michael, 143–45, 153
- Booker, Cory, 143–45
- Boorstin, Daniel, 22, 156
- Box, Amber Venz, 77, 79
- Box, Baxter, 77
- brand ambassadors, 71–72
- branding: commercial, 1, 28, 38, 45, 50; humanizing, 39–41, 113, 117, 148; and inequality, 134–35; and licensing, 116–17; personal, 39, 41–45, 50, 68–69, 74, 76, 102, 122, 124; purpose-driven, 137–38, 145; and safety, 71, 92, 116–17, 167; self, 1, 8, 23, 26, 34, 50, 57–58, 64, 98; and technology, 24, 28–29, 68; values, 40–41. *See also* advertising; retail
- Braudy, Leo, 22
- Bristow, Laurel, 129
- Bruneteau, Qianna Smith, 152–53
- Bryanboy, 65
- bucket system, 71–72, 159
- Buy Instagram Followers, 85–86
- Campaigns, 79
- Cannes Lions, 110
- Carteris, Gabrielle, 153–54
- celebrity, 21–23, 72–73, 75, 102, 113, 120
- Centola, Damon, 188n1
- CGI influencers, 113–14, 115, 126
- Chanel, 93
- charismatic authority, 15, 179n3
- charity, 139
- Charnas, Arielle, 133–34
- children. *See* youth
- “Chocolate Rain,” 63
- churn and burn, 164–65
- Cialdini, Robert, 19–20
- civics, 138–39. *See also* government collaborations, 116–17, 158
- Collective Bias, 102
- Columbia School, 17
- commercialization, 5–10, 14, 27, 30, 76–87, 98–99, 102–3, 159–60, 170–71. *See also* technologies of self-commercialization
- commissions, 76–77, 82–83
- Committee on Public Information, 15–16
- communication norms, 5–7, 130, 142
- community leadership, 167
- connectivity, 61
- conscious commercialization, 30
- conspiracy theories, 129–31. *See also* misinformation; propaganda
- consulting, 116, 126
- content: and advertising, 47, 73–74; and audiences, 46, 48, 66; and authenticity, 88; and branding, 29, 73–74; children’s, 117–18; creators, 48; and lessons, 138–41; lifestyle, 75–76, 140; and metrics, 48–50, 54; niche, 63, 67; organic, 69, 74; and public demand, 5; and relatability, 58; social media, 1; sponsored, 27, 55, 58–59, 65, 69–70, 125, 129, 151, 167, 170; and trust, 70, 81, 108, 111–12; user-generated, 159–60. *See also* strategy
- contracts, 73, 134, 153
- controversy, 100–108, 114. *See also* scandals
- conversion, 79
- corporate buyouts, 157
- Council of Fashion Designers of America, 166
- COVID-19, 128–34, 142, 154, 156, 188n1. *See also* vaccination
- Craig, David, 163
- Creative Artists Agency, 65
- creativity, 47–49, 52, 55, 61, 64, 73, 84, 100–102, 116, 164. *See also* risk taking
- creator, 163
- Creel, George, 15–16
- criticism, 13, 53, 63, 97–103, 119–22, 126, 137, 181n78
- cult of personality, 22
- culture industry, 141–42

- Cunningham, Stuart, 163
Curalate, 96
- Dash Hudson, 62–63
data, 6, 34–35, 49–54, 62, 67, 79, 82–84, 96,
111–13, 159–60. *See also* metrics;
quantification
Decatur Study, 18–19
democracy, 16, 146, 168, 172
Democratic Congressional Campaign
Committee, 144
democratization, 7, 13, 21, 35–36, 98, 150, 165
demographics, 49, 65–66, 87, 111
Department of Homeland Security, 105
Design Lab, 103–4
Devumi, 109–10
digital influence, 28, 35, 50, 63–64, 66, 69,
71–72, 84, 94, 169. *See also* blogging
digital labor, 30, 33
Dijck, José van, 61
discrimination, 34, 51, 70–72. *See also* in-
equality; racism
diversity, 83, 171
@DKNYPRGIRL, 153
Douglas, Susan, 18–19
Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, 57
Duchesney, 104–5
Duffy, Brooke Erin, 32, 60, 65, 74
Dumitricia, Delia, 56
- Eadie, Blair, 80
economic crises, 3–8, 10, 14, 25–26, 37, 102
Edelkoort, Li, 164
efficiency, 64–65, 75, 79, 98, 142, 158. *See also*
optimization; streamlining
Elbaz, Alber, 164
elections, 138, 143–45
employment, 3–5, 25, 30–33, 37, 51
empowerment, 30, 165–66. *See also* power
engagement, 46, 51, 56, 66–68, 74, 78, 85–87,
150. *See also* followers
engineering consent, 19
Enli, Gunn, 7
entrepreneurship, 24, 102
environmentalism, 9, 160, 165
ethics, 9, 101–2, 144, 152–53, 164, 170. *See also*
value systems
Ewen, Stuart, 15
exclusion, 134
experiences, 92–95
exploitation, 30, 64, 72, 153–54, 168
- Facebook, 78, 101, 118, 126, 149
fashion, 1, 4–5, 27–32, 36, 44, 66, 93, 116–17,
136–37, 164–66
Fashiontoast, 65
Fauci, Dr. Anthony, 156
FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration),
104–5
Federal Communications Commission, 118
Federal Election Commission, 144
Federal Trade Commission (FTC), 103–4,
111, 122, 144, 167
fees. *See* influencer income
feminism, 18–19, 32–34, 93, 162. *See also* gen-
der; women
Ferragni, Chiara, 96–97, 99, 102
Floyd, George, 128, 134–37
followers: as assets, 45–51; and authenticity,
13, 15, 56–59, 86–87; and creativity, 47;
and engagement, 64; fake, 85–87, 109–12,
115, 119, 126; and influencers, 54–55, 72–74,
97, 108–10, 112–13, 130; and influencer
selection, 66, 68; and metrics, 28, 50, 52;
and race, 137; and sales, 58, 76. *See also*
engagement
Frier, Sarah, 136
Fyre (documentary), 108
Fyre Festival, 105–9, 119
Fyre Fraud (documentary), 108
- Gaden, Georgia, 56
gender, 13, 31, 74, 151. *See also* feminism;
women
genuinfluencers, 137–39, 142
Get Off My Internets (GOMI), 119–20

- Gevinson, Tavi, 1–4
gig economy, 25
Gitlin, Todd, 18
Gladwell, Malcolm, 20
The Glamourai, 65
Glass, Ira, 1
Goldhaber, Michael, 22–23
Google, 149, 157
government, 15–16, 138, 160. *See also* civics; politics; regulation
Greece, 14
- harassment, 53, 74, 119–20, 137, 151, 161, 181n78. *See also* women
Harris, Kamala, 156
Harvard Business School, 96–97
Hearn, Alison, 23
HelloSociety, 48, 157
Hennessy, Brittany, 59, 66, 68–69, 73, 99, 111
The Hidden Persuaders (Packard), 19
Hill, David, 160
H&M, 165
Home Shopping Network, 149–50
Horkheimer, Max, 141–42
housing market. *See* economic crises
Howard, Philip, 142–43
hypodermic needle theory, 17
- ideology, 141–42
idols of consumption, 22
idols of production, 22
imitation, 91–92
incentivization, 157, 161–62, 167–68
inclusivity, 135–36, 154
independence, 5, 25–26, 171
individualism, 162
inequality, 8–9, 30–32, 82–83, 134–37, 150, 166. *See also* discrimination; racism; women
influencer, definition of, 29, 162–63
influencer income, 72–74, 77–79, 82–83, 112–13, 117–18, 122–26, 131–35, 146, 159, 162. *See also* monetization
influencer industry. *See* advertising; commercialization; data; efficiency; marketing firms; metrics; optimization; processes; streamlining; women; specific social media sites
@InfluencerPayGap, 134, 147
influencer phenomenon, 10, 12–13
influencers. *See* advertising; authenticity; branding; CGI influencers; content; criticism; digital influence; exploitation; followers; insecurity; mental health; regular people; women; youth
influencer selection, 67–72, 74, 85, 135, 163
influentials, 18
information economy, 22
information: the search for, 128–31, 139, 167
insecurity, 122–27, 161
Instagram: and CGI, 113–14; and corporate power, 157–58; debate, 121; experiences, 92–95; face, 91–92; and fake followers, 85–87; and influencers, 1–3, 57–58, 71, 80, 161; marketing, 12, 29, 62, 73–74, 77–79, 81; and misinformation, 130–32; policies, 118; Reels, 147; shopping, 149, 158; and the Shorty Awards, 100–101; Stories, 122, 129, 136, 138, 140–41, 170; and visual trends, 88–93, 96
instameets, 94
institutional point of view, 46
intellectual history. *See* literature; scholarship
internships, 3–5
IZEA, 136
- Ja Rule, 106–8
Jerry Media, 108
Jesus (of Nazareth), 15
journalism, 26, 150, 167–68
- Kanai, Akane, 32
Kardashian, Kim, 104–5, 153
Katz, Elihu, 18, 62
Keller, Ed, 20

- Kendle-Godbolt, Jade, 49, 122
@KingGutterBaby, 129–30
Klout, 24, 50–51
- labor. *See* employment
- Lage, Ayana, 137
Lazarsfeld, Paul, 18, 62
Leibovitz, Annie, 1
Lewis, Tania, 75
Licht, Aliza, 153
lifestyle, 22, 75–76, 81–82, 88, 92, 109, 122–25, 150, 170
Likert, Rensis, 16–17
Likert Scale, 17
LikeToKnowIt, 77–78, 80–81, 83
Lingel, Jessa, 33
literature, 2, 14–15
@Little.Miss.Patriot, 129–30
live shopping, 149–50
Lord & Taylor, 103–4, 144
Lorenz, Taylor, 101–2, 151
Lowenthal, Leo, 22
LTK Shopping Video, 149
Luvaas, Brent, 30
- magic bullet theory, 17
MagicLinks, 135
The Man Nobody Knows (Barton), 15
The Man Repeller, 65, 134
marketing. *See* advertising; strategy
marketing firms, 38, 40, 48–56, 59–74, 79, 84–86, 90, 111–13. *See also* advertising; branding; retail
market saturation, 48, 91, 133
Marwick, Alice, 98–99
mass media, 21–22, 46, 141, 171. *See also* traditional media
McFarland, Billy, 107–8
McMahon, Sharon, 138–40, 142
McNamee, Megan, 135–36, 141
McNeal, Stephanie, 130
Mears, Ashley, 169
media. *See* mass media; traditional media
media kits, 42
Medine, Leandra, 41, 134
mental health, 97–98, 121–22, 129, 132, 141, 150–51, 165, 168
metrics, 1, 21, 28–29, 38, 48–54, 61–68, 72, 76, 84–91, 96–97. *See also* data; quantification
microcelebrity, 23
microinfluencers, 67, 80, 113, 123–24, 126, 145–46, 159
misinformation, 7, 9–10, 13, 101, 130–31, 139, 141–43, 160. *See also* propaganda
mobile phones, 64, 128, 183n6
modeling industry, 169
monetization: the changing definition of, 161–62; and influencers, 54–56, 61–63, 65, 71, 76–77, 98, 119, 131–32; of lifestyle, 81–82, 151; and marketing, 38–39, 54, 56, 62–63; of regular people, 148–49; and technology, 8, 10, 77; and women, 31–32, 54–55. *See also* influencer income
moral injury, 160
Morgado, Landon, 156
Mosseri, Adam, 161
Museum of Ice Cream, 94–95
music, 105–6
- nano-influencers, 67, 113, 123–24, 126, 145, 147
Napoli, Philip, 46
narratives, 63, 141, 150, 152, 172
Nazism, 17
New York Fashion Week, 1, 36
New York magazine, 1–2
Nickerson, Brian, 135
Nordstrom, 116–17
norms of communication. *See* communication norms
Nylon, 103–4
- Odell, Jenny, 168
O’Neill, Essena, 97–99, 102
optimization, 84–85, 93. *See also* efficiency; streamlining

- Packard, Vance, 19
paid messaging, 143–45, 167
Pally, Adam, 100–101, 103
parasocial relationships, 49. *See also* celebrity; engagement; followers
partnerships, 116–17, 158
passion, 5, 29, 38
PeerIndex, 24, 51
Peiss, Kathy, 13
The People's Choice, 17
perception, 56–60, 72–73
performative activism, 137
Personal Influence (Katz and Lazarsfeld), 18–19
Peters, Tom, 23
Piazza, Jo, 141
Pinterest, 28, 54, 96
Planoly, 91
pods, 87, 121
police, 128, 134
politics, 56–57, 101, 136, 143–46, 153–54.
See also government
Pony, 162–63
Pooley, Jefferson, 2
pop culture, 53–54
popular magazines, 22
Potter, Andrew, 169
power, 7, 53, 148, 151, 157–62, 164–66
Pratt, Jane, 1
precarity. *See* economic crises
pressure, 12, 58, 82–84, 96–100, 108–9, 121, 133, 145, 164, 167
processes, 12–13, 19, 63–65
professional success. *See* success
professional support, 150, 152–54, 161, 166
propaganda, 10, 13, 15–17, 142, 146, 160.
See also misinformation
Propaganda (Bernays), 16
prosocial messaging, 10, 97
protest, 134–37. *See also* reform
pseudo-events, 22, 156
public opinion, 16–18
public relations, 19, 22, 25, 116–17, 156
publishing, 23–24, 27, 48, 77
QAnon, 129–30
quantification, 28–29, 33, 38, 46, 50–52, 54, 61, 66. *See also* data; metrics
Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, 75
queer people, 71
QVC, 149–50
racism, 71, 134–37, 152, 154. *See also* discrimination; inequality
Rankin, Thomas, 40, 62
ratings, 53–54
rationalization, 64, 79, 99
realistic resistance, 168
realness, 6–8, 43–44, 56–60, 74–75, 83, 122, 141, 154, 169. *See also* authenticity
Refinery29, 94
reform, 134–36. *See also* protest
regular people, 5, 21, 51, 130, 146–51, 154–55, 159–60, 167
regulation, 8–10, 102, 111–13, 130–31, 142–46, 152, 155, 160, 167, 171. *See also* transparency
relationship management, 10, 115–18, 126
research, 18–24, 26, 97, 129, 150–51. *See also* scholarship
retail, 27–29, 48, 77, 83, 94, 116, 149–50. *See also* advertising; branding; marketing firms
RewardStyle, 77–84, 131–32, 149, 157
risk taking, 30, 64, 145, 158, 164, 166, 171.
See also creativity
Rodrigo, Olivia, 156
ROI (return on investment), 26, 111
Roper-ASW, 20
RStheCon, 83–84
SAG-AFTRA, 153–54, 162
satire, 88–89
scandals, 24–25, 101, 119, 125–26, 153. *See also* controversy
Schaefer, Mark, 20–21, 51
scholarship, 14, 16–18, 23, 30, 50, 169. *See also* research
Scott, Laurence, 15, 170
Senft, Theresa, 23

- Serazio, Michael, 39
Shakespeare, William, 14–15, 162
@SharonSaysSo, 138, 139–40
ShopStyle, 149
Shorty Awards, 100–101
Sobande, Francesca, 136
Sociality Barbie, 88–89
social epidemics, 20
social market-places, 118–19
social media. *See* advertising; branding; marketing firms; regulation; transparency; specific websites and handles
social norms, 6–8, 20. *See also* behavior; communication norms
social-psychology, 17–18
Something Navy, 133–34
sponsorships, 44–45, 55, 59–60, 69–70, 76, 103–5, 111, 118–19, 146, 148. *See also* affiliate links
Spotlight program, 148
“State of Influencer Quality Report,” 136
STEPPS, 20
strategy: branding, 86, 92–94, 115–16; content, 122; and e-commerce, 118–19; and inequality, 135; influencer, 48, 56–58, 67, 82–83, 87–90; marketing, 52–53, 64, 86, 111–14; political, 145
streamlining, 64–65, 72–73, 76, 98. *See also* efficiency; optimization
Style.com, 29
subprime mortgage crisis. *See* economic crises
Substack, 167, 170
success, 33–34, 52, 109, 150–51, 159
surveillance, 34–35, 105

Taylor, Breonna, 136–37
technologies of self-commercialization, 8, 77–87. *See also* commercialization
technology. *See* data; engagement; metrics
teenagers. *See* youth
The In Cloud, 29
Thurstone, Louis, 16–17

tiering, 71–72, 159
TikTok, 136, 141, 146–49, 167, 170
The Tipping Point (Gladwell), 20
Tolentino, Jia, 91–92, 106
traditional media, 3–5, 15. *See also* mass media
transparency, 8–9, 82, 118, 122, 134, 140, 160–61, 167, 170. *See also* regulation
Tribe, 143–44
Trump, Donald, 129–30
trust, 70, 81, 108, 110–12, 126–27, 139
Turner, Fred, 34–35, 162
Turning Point USA, 144
29 Rooms, 94
Twitter, 50, 85, 157
two-step flow model, 18–20

Under the Influence, 141
Unilever, 110
unionizing, 153–54, 162
United We Win, 143, 145
U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), 104–5

vaccination, 132, 141, 156, 188n1. *See also* COVID-19
value systems, 8, 11, 15, 39, 71, 170–71. *See also* ethics
Venz, Amber, 77, 79
vetting, 86–87, 112, 115, 126
visibility mandate, 151
visual trends, 88–96
Vogue, 28–29
voting. *See* elections; politics
vulnerability porn, 140

Wagner, Lindsay Peoples, 136
Walmart, 148
War of the Worlds, 17, 180n15
Wayfair, 129–30
weapons of influence, 19–20
Weber, Max, 15, 179n3
Weed, Keith, 110

- Welles, Orson, 17, 180n15
West, Kim Kardashian, 104–5, 153
What Not to Wear, 75
White House, 156, 188n1
white-listing, 153
Wild West, 8
women: and consumer culture, 13, 30–32;
and empowerment, 165–66; as influencers, 1–3, 31–32, 36, 43–45, 47–49, 52–53, 65, 71–74; and research, 18–19; and survival, 9, 122. *See also* criticism; feminism; gender; harassment; inequality
Women’s Wear Daily (WWD), 36–37, 64
word of mouth, 40, 51
WordPress, 24
work. *See* employment
the work of being watched, 168
XO Ayana, 137
youth, 1–3, 13, 117–18, 125, 156, 165–66
YouTube, 57–58
Zara, 165
Zondag, Tay, 63
Zuboff, Shoshanna, 160

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.