

Is Influencer Impact on Brand Image and Safety a Concern for Marketers?

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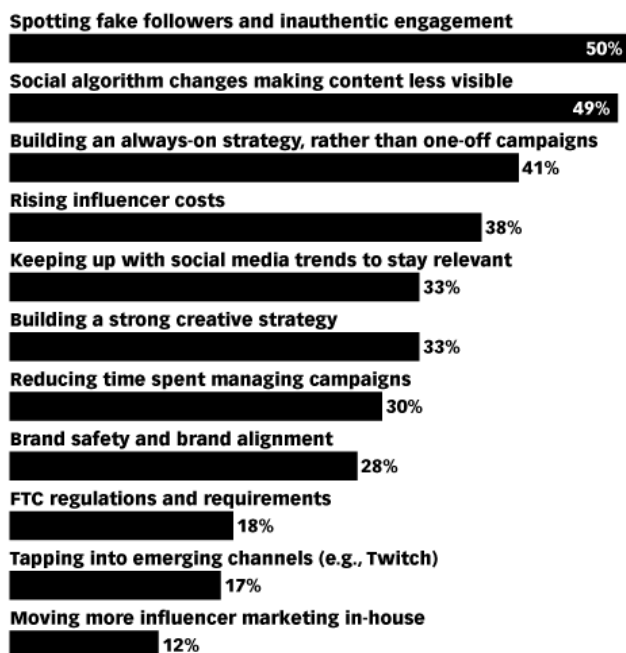
Earlier this month, a widely publicized feud broke out between two well-known beauty influencers, Tati Westbrook and her protege James Charles. [Bypassing the rather complex details](#), the debacle ensued after Charles posted an Instagram ad for SugarBearHair vitamins, a direct competitor of Westbrook's Halo Beauty vitamins.

The drama has since exploded to something more than just a business quarrel, with personal misconduct on Charles' part also being brought into the equation. As a result, he has lost millions of YouTube subscribers from his peak base of 16.5 million. That being said, for brands working with influencers, is maintaining brand image and safety a concern?

According to a January 2019 survey from influencer marketing agency [Mediakix](#), 61% of US marketers agreed that it's difficult to find the right influencers for a campaign. And more than one in four cited brand safety and alignment as a challenge when it comes to influencer marketing.

Leading Influencer Marketing Challenges According to US Marketers, Jan 2019

% of respondents



Source: Mediakix, "Influencer Marketing 2019," Feb 14, 2019

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Additionally, trusting influencers with brand reputation was the greatest concern for 14% of UK and US digital marketing respondents, according to an August 2018 survey from [Influencer Intelligence](#) and [Econsultancy](#).

These figures aren't overwhelmingly large—marketers are more focused on issues like content visibility and [flagging fake followers](#). But companies investing their money in influencers should be aware of the potentially problematic turns they can take.

Just three days after Westbrook posted a [YouTube video](#) calling out her 19-year-old mentee, Charles' subscriber count on the platform fell by nearly 3 million, [per CNN](#). However, when Westbrook posted a more compassionate follow-up video, Charles' began regaining subscribers. (His base is currently climbing to nearly 15 million.)

Westbrook has garnered an estimated 4.5 million followers amid the ordeal. These are certainly tumultuous times in the beauty blogger world!

But this feud goes to show just how much influencers' impact fluctuates. For brands that have hired an influencer tied to a public feud, what does an event like this do to brand image and safety?

“The influencer space is still the Wild West in many respects, and that definitely brings with it some risks for brands,” said eMarketer principal analyst Andrew Lipsman. “The personality traits that make influencers good at capturing attention are sometimes the same traits that court conflict and controversy. Brands need to enter into these partnerships with eyes wide open—and maybe do some vetting upfront to manage the risk.”

As marketers put more money into influencers, keeping brand safety in mind is a best practice. According to a February 2019 survey from influencer tech company [Activate](#), nearly one in five respondents said they planned to up their influencer marketing budgets by 25% to 49% this year, and some have plans to more than triple their budgets.

**Increase in Influencer Marketing Budget in 2019
According to US Influencer Marketers, Feb 2019**
% of respondents

1%-24%	40.5%
25%-49%	19.8%
50%-74%	6.3%
75%-99%	0.0%
100%-200%	0.9%
200%+	2.7%
No, not increasing my budget	29.7%

Source: Activate, "Double or Nothing: Betting Big on Influencer Marketing,"
March 5, 2019

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And, per a December 2018 survey from media brand [Glossy](#), 55% of fashion and beauty brand executives planned to increase their influencer budget this year.