

Hiding Likes on Instagram Could Change Influencer Marketing for the Better, Marketers Say

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Instagram has begun hiding 'likes' for select users worldwide, **expanding a test** that could determine whether or not they will be permanently hidden from public view. Instagram's CEO Adam Mosseri said the experiment will help **improve the mental health of users**, while some influencers and celebrities have argued that it may reduce engagement and make it harder to attract brands. But some marketers see this test as an opportunity to move away from such vanity metrics, particularly as audience measurement becomes more sophisticated.

"The hiding or removal of likes shouldn't negatively impact how brands work with influencers in developing successful content," said Dave McNulty, vice president of marketing at vodka brand Stolichnaya.

"Successful content is a result of brands building real relationships with credible influencers and giving them the creative license to be authentic with their audience."

Should Instagram move to hide likes permanently, individual users will still be able to see who liked their content. Brands can work with third-party vendors to gain direct access to their influencer partners' metrics

—including likes, impressions and reach—as long as the vendor is part of Instagram’s API partnership program.

While the immediate concern is that removing likes from public view will deter users from participating in vanity metrics, there are other ways to measure influencer campaigns beyond likes, said Daniel Schotland, COO of influencer marketing platform Linqia.

“Likes make up the majority of engagement numbers, so we do see the likelihood of an engagement rate decrease due to the removal of likes. However, we think this forced change will be good for the industry,” he said. “It will help encourage marketers to look at metrics beyond the like, such as brand and sales lift data.”

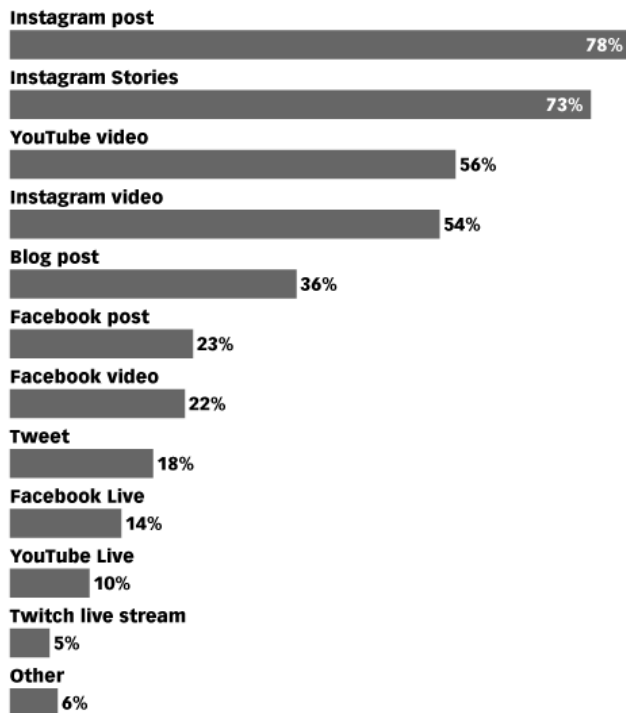
Ryan Detert, CEO and co-founder of the tech platform Influential, shared similar sentiments, adding that he tends to focus on attention metrics, which analyze how users engage with content. Metrics like video completion rates and whether a video was viewed with sound on become more important than the number of comments and likes alone, he said.

“We’re seeing that high amounts of likes don’t necessarily have high attention metrics, because people are auto-liking and keep on going,” said Detert. “The correlation between likes and attention is not there, and the correlation between likes and sales isn’t there, either.”

Instagram continues to be the top platform for influencer marketing in the US, according to January 2019 polling from influencer agency Mediakix. Nearly 80% of US marketers said that Instagram posts were among the most effective formats for influencer content.

Social Media Channels/Formats that US Marketers Find Most Effective for Influencer Marketing, Jan 2019

% of respondents



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

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Consumers commonly engage with influencers on Instagram as well, according to a September 2019 study from GlobalWebIndex. Nearly half (41%) of US and UK internet users follow influencer accounts on Instagram, more than any other platform.

When asked what qualities influencers should have, only 11% of social media users in the US and UK said the number of likes and comments an influencer receives were among the most important qualities.

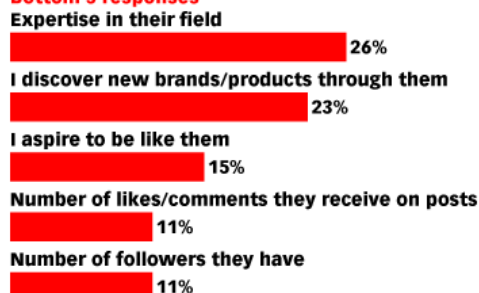
What Do US/UK Social Media Users* Say Are the Most Important Qualities for Social Media Influencers to Have?

% of respondents, Aug 2019

Top 5 responses



Bottom 5 responses



Note: ages 16-64; *who currently follow influencers on social media platforms

Source: GlobalWebIndex, "Influencer Marketing," Sep 24, 2019

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Tressie Lieberman, vice president of digital and off-premise at Chipotle Mexican Grill, said the restaurant's influencer strategy has never been about creating work that generates likes. It's about creating content that can capture attention in a busy feed. If likes go away, Lieberman believes that followers will still connect with posts that resonate with them. "We already see this level of engagement happening within Instagram stories, where viewership stats are not public," she said.

In early November, Instagram's Mosseri **announced that the test** would be coming to the US, saying that "a small portion of people" will have their likes hidden. In recent months, **Instagram has also hidden likes** for select users in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Ireland, Italy, Japan and New Zealand. Last week, the company announced it will be **taking the test worldwide**, but has not yet indicated whether the removal of likes will become permanent.

Joe Gagliese, co-founder and CEO of Ontario-based influencer agency Viral Nation, said that his clients have yet to report any major

interruptions in business since the test rolled out in Canada, and said he expects the same for the US.

“It really wasn’t even brought up as a topic,” said Gagliese. “I have already spoken with a number of our US clients, and it’s business as usual.”