the projects

# THE VALUES ECONOMY

AMS • LA • LDN • NY • SYD

## AN INTRODUCTION

# TO OUR RESEARCH

2020 has proven to be a pivotal year — societally, culturally, politically and economically. A host of significant events have touched all aspects of our daily lives.

Perhaps now more than ever, the values of brands and influencers need to match those of their consumers. The rise of 'cancel culture' has held brands and influencers to account. And it's forced our industry to raise its standards and think harder and more strategically about the production of content.

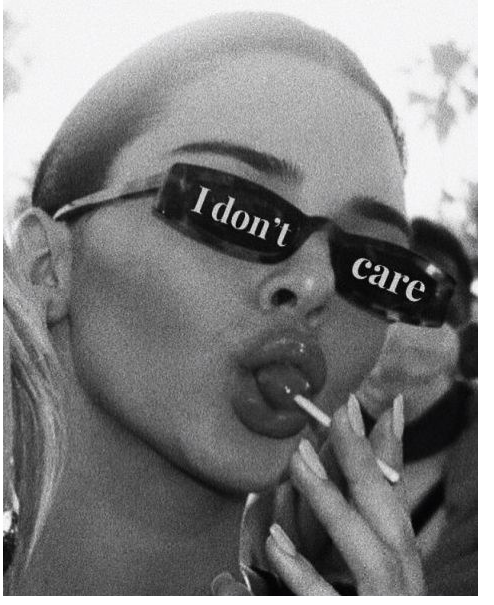
The question isn't whether you should or shouldn't amplify your brand's values in your marketing. It's about whether you have the courage to extend your values out to your partners, without exception.

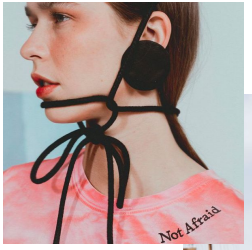
## BRANDS ARE SPEAKING
# BUT DOES ANYONE CARE?

In a hyperconnected world where social awareness is an increasing cultural requirement, we've become keenly aware not only of our own individual values, but the values of brands. As we enter a new decade filled with transition and transformation, we're turning to the brands who don't just show up — but who show up as forces for public good.

Having a clear purpose is nothing new when it comes to marketing. In fact, it's become the standard as we've shifted from a localised audience to an online global one. But audiences are becoming wary of brands' attempts at cause and values-based marketing; a brand's missteps are not only obvious, but glaringly so.

In light of this, influencer marketing presents an opportunity to not only tell a brand's story but to truly humanise and embody a brand's values by combining the personal with the purpose. As brands make values-based marketing their central strategy, influencers become advocates for both their audiences and their brand partners. We sought to understand the role of influencers in values-based marketing as they speak directly to our humanity: our values.






## METHODOLOGY

We sent surveys to UK-based members of every aspect of our industry: influencers and content creators, clients and brand managers and most importantly, everyday consumers - the audience, who are scrolling and double-tapping day in and day out.

## OUR DEFINITIONS

### VALUES

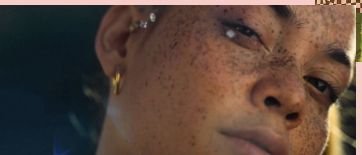
The guiding principles which motivate us and determine the way we make decisions: what's important to us, what inspires us and what makes us feel connected to one another.

### INFLUENCER

An individual (or a collective) who has built a sense of trust amongst a particular community, with a set of shared interests and values. Through IRL and URL relationships and community-building, they have perceived authenticity and therefore, authority in a given field.

INSIGHT 01.

# YOU'RE NOT GOING TO CHANGE PEOPLE'S VALUES



## BUT YOU MIGHT CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIOUR

Our audience respondents don't necessarily seek influencers to have their values changed. Rather, the majority of them stated that they're more likely to follow an influencer because they already have shared values. Recognising where their values align means our respondents seek reflections of themselves and follow influencers who mirror what they believe.

But social media is less a single mirror than a hall of mirrors - who we follow shows us every aspect of who we are, from our interests and earnestness to our indulgences and entertainment. So whilst our fundamental values may not change, our voyeuristic tendencies, aided by social media, can still expose us to new ways of thinking about our values.

**AUDIENCE**

I FOLLOW LOTS OF PEOPLE, AND EACH ONE RESPONDS TO ONE THING I VALUE - TOGETHER THEY FORM A TAPESTRY

**AUDIENCE**

I FOLLOW PEOPLE WHO REPRESENT MY LOVES, LIKES, BELIEFS - IT'S BEEN A LONG JOURNEY... TO ENSURE MY FEED IS POSITIVE, HUMOROUS AND INSPIRING. 100% MY VALUES HAVE BEEN REINFORCED AND MADE STRONGER

**77%**

OF OUR AUDIENCE RESPONDENTS SAID THEY HAVEN'T HAD THEIR VALUES CHANGED BY AN INFLUENCER

**WHO WE FOLLOW SHOWS US EVERY ASPECT OF WHO WE ARE, FROM OUR INTERESTS TO OUR INDULGENCES**

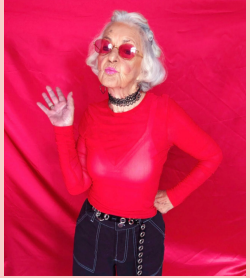
## DON'T START THE INFLUENCER PARTNER SELECTION WITH INFLUENCERS – START WITH YOUR FOLLOWERS

THE RIGHT INFLUENCER MATCH ISN'T NECESSARILY THE MOST OBVIOUS ONE

### LEARNING

About three quarters of our influencer respondents noted that they typically share similar values with their followers. So rather than focusing on changing fundamental values, the role of an influencer partnership should be to use those shared values as a foundation from which to expand beyond engagement and deepen connections to brands through partnerships. But the right influencer match isn't necessarily the most obvious one. To not only reach your audience, but inspire change, brands need to use both quantitative and qualitative data to understand their audience and their values at a granular level. Don't start the influencer partner selection with influencers — start with your followers.

Using manual and human insight, dig into your audience groups and find patterns with who they follow not only to reflect them, but to find wildcard and unexpected new voices that will resonate with these audiences and make your partnerships stand out from the crowd.



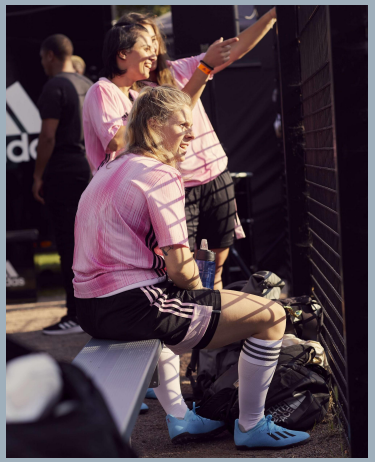
CASE STUDY

## BADDIE WINKLE X TARGET

To celebrate Target's annual Fall Style campaign, the projects* crafted a complementary influencer strategy around the spirit of *Targét.* With a diverse array of influencers, we created unexpected associations, bringing 'weird and wonderful' dimensions to the brand's defining message of the *joy of everyday life.*

By tapping the iconic and risque Baddie Winkle, we added a wildcard voice to our influencer cast that not only exuded the Tarzhay spirit, but expressed Target joy in a new way.

**BY USING A DIVERSE CAST OF INFLUENCERS YOU CAN CREATE UNEXPECTED ASSOCIATIONS WITH YOUR AUDIENCE**



INSIGHT 02.

# IT'S NOT ABOUT THE POSTS IT'S ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

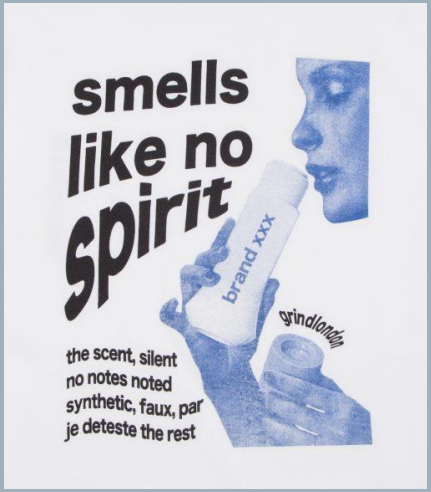
## INFLUENCERS WHO ARE EMOTIONALLY INVESTED IN YOUR BRAND TELL BETTER STORIES

For our audience respondents whose behaviours *were* changed by an influencer's posts, the shift happened not through one-off pieces of content but through extended narratives which brought the audience deeper into the world of the influencer and the brand.

There's ample opportunity for influencer partnerships to come across as 'mismatched' with singular paid posts, with crucial brand values lost in translation.

And for a savvy audience, one-off posts are increasingly unacceptable and may be the tipping point at which they unfollow an influencer — and a majority of our audience respondents have done just that.

It's clear the potential to truly present brand values lies with extended partnerships, where influencers can share their journey with a brand, fostering brand affinity through multi-dimensional narratives.




**INFLUENCER**

BUILDING A LONGER STANDING RELATIONSHIP WITH A BRAND CREATES VALUE FOR THE AUDIENCE, THERE IS A FAMILIARITY TO THE RELATIONSHIP

**INFLUENCER**

BRAND AMBASSADORS ARE IMPORTANT AND MUCH MORE BELIEVABLE AS IT'S A 'JOURNEY' - AND USUALLY CAN'T NOT FIT IN WITH THEIR LIFESTYLE/POSTS

**100%**

OF OUR INFLUENCER RESPONDENTS WOULD TURN DOWN PAID WORK IF THERE WAS A VALUES CLASH

## FOR A SAVVY AUDIENCE, ONE-OFF POSTS ARE INCREASINGLY UNACCEPTABLE

## BY GIVING ACCESS TO YOUR INFLUENCER PARTNERS, YOU'LL NOT ONLY INSPIRE BRAND LOYALTY, YOU'LL ALSO GIVE THEIR AUDIENCE UNPRECEDENTED ACCESS TO YOUR BRAND

### LEARNING

Two thirds of our influencer respondents stated that they preferred long-term partnerships over singular paid posts. And with brands already beginning to shift away from short-term transactional cash for comment type deals, it's clear our industry is pivoting towards long-term partnerships as a whole.

But long-term partnerships aren't just about telling brand stories over several posts or across different platforms. A true long-term partnership means shared equity and puts relationships at the centre. Let your influencer partners explore your brand holistically — not just your values or products — and bring their audience along for their journey. By giving access to your influencer partners, you'll not only inspire brand loyalty, you'll also give their audience unprecedented access to your brand.

## A LONG TERM COLLABORATION THAT HAS ALLOWED BOTH CREATOR AND BRAND TO EXPLORE DIFFERENT CAMPAIGNS TOGETHER

CASE STUDY

### HOTELS.COM + DOLLY PAWTON

Over the course of a year, the projects*, Hotels.com and Dolly Pawton have collaborated on three major campaigns, creating content in London, New York and at home. From being the launch face of a pet-friendly hotels campaign, to exploring the streets of Manhattan and even showing how to live her hotel life at home, Dolly's audience have been exposed to the Hotels.com brand and the genuine advocacy that she promotes.

INSIGHT 03.

# INFLUENCERS DON'T JUST INFLUENCE

## BRING YOUR INFLUENCER PARTNERS INTO THE BOARDROOM – THEY BRING NEW PERSPECTIVES

Our influencer respondents know their biggest strength is their audience, not as a metric but as a community. They spend hours engaging with that audience, on - and offline and have unique insights on their audience's needs, desires and values. This community-building gives influencers authority and credibility - precisely what makes their work so vital to brands. Because when influencers share their lives with their followers, they're showing up as their whole selves.

Our influencer respondents also know that they are representatives: of their interests, their audience, their values. They don't want to just to be plugged into a brand - they want to see themselves in brands, too. And audiences want to see their favourite influencers not as co-creators, but as co-chairs that can advocate for their diverse values and perspectives. So rather than engaging influencers as just spokespeople, engage them as consultants and you'll better equip your brand to understand that influencer's audience - and the influencer.

**THEY DON'T WANT TO JUST BE PLUGGED INTO A BRAND – THEY WANT TO SEE THEMSELVES IN BRANDS, TOO**

**INFLUENCER**

IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE DIVERSITY BEHIND THE SCENES. WE MAY SEE SOMETHING THAT OTHER PEOPLE ARE MISSING - CONSULTING IS A GOOD WAY TO GO

**INFLUENCER**

NOBODY UNDERSTANDS THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AUDIENCE BETTER THAN THE CONTENT CREATORS WHO ARE TALKING TO THEM EVERYDAY

**75%**

OF CLIENTS SAID IN THE PAST INFLUENCER PARTNERSHIPS HAD BEEN SOLELY ABOUT CONTENT AND ENGAGEMENTS, NOT ALIGNMENT OF VALUES

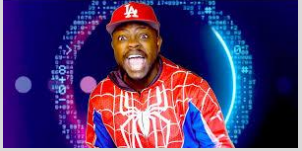
## INFLUENCERS DON'T JUST CREATE CONTENT; THEY CONSULT TOO

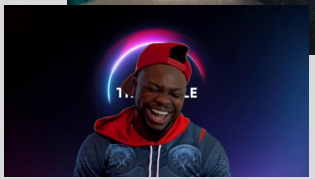
### LEARNING

Influencer marketing is a relatively young industry but it's increasingly becoming central to a brand's broader marketing efforts. While influencer marketing is common, real influence is harder to come by.

Real influence comes from creative and strategic collaboration. Influencers don't just create content; they consult too, and can find gaps in messaging or niches to fill that can diversify your brand voice. Include meetings and workshops in contracts to bring influencers into the metaphorical boardroom when you are devising a campaign, and this will add fresh perspectives that can not only deepen brand values but present them in new, varied ways. Involve your influencer partners in the creative process to help guide the storytelling behind campaigns - they know what will resonate with their audience. You'll not only get your influencer partner's expertise, you'll also better represent their diverse perspectives and their followers, creating real, values-driven influence.

## BRING INFLUENCERS INTO THE METAPHORICAL BOARDROOM WHEN YOU ARE DEVISING A CAMPAIGN





CASE STUDY

## CHANNEL 4

Channel 4's 'The Circle' saw contestants living alone in the same block of apartments, but only communicating virtually with each other through a bespoke social media platform with the aim of building their online persona to win the series. As a new format the projects* were tasked with raising awareness of the show but also educating viewers of the game rules, with many people viewing on VOD rather than in real time.

Our influencer partners watched the live shows, created teasers and round ups but importantly, were given the freedom to contribute their own concepts on how best to cover the series. Influencer ideas were pitched and discussed as a production team and then turned around ready for that evening's programme. Integrating different ideas gave the programme different perspectives within different audience groups, with our partners becoming true collaborators with the series.

**INFLUENCER IDEAS WERE PITCHED AND DISCUSSED AS A PRODUCTION TEAM AND THEN TURNED AROUND READY FOR THAT EVENING'S PROGRAMME**

the projects*

## WHAT THIS MEANS

**01.** START WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

Follow who they follow to find new voices which mirror their values and yours.

**02.** INVITE YOUR INFLUENCER PARTNERS TO EXPLORE YOUR BRAND

Give them meaningful access and they'll be able to tell broader, more persuasive stories.

**03.** FOSTER STRATEGIC COLLABORATION TO CREATE REAL INFLUENCE

Tap your influencer partners' unique expertise and insights to guide and diversify your brand.

## IN CONCLUSION

# THE NEW VALUES ECONOMY

If 2020 has taught us anything, it's that audiences care as much about what a brand or influencer stands for as what they're selling. Any brand or influencer whose sole focus is shouting the loudest or focusing on quick wins is going to be left behind. Because values shouldn't be a tick-in-the-box exercise — they should be a central pillar to every piece of marketing getting pushed out.

As we move further into the new decade, influencer marketing will have to transition away from older ways of transactional working. To make influencer marketing a truly credible and effective media channel, brands have to lead with their values. So when influencers temporarily take on your brand's equity, it's vital that they do so with shared values in mind.

We know there's a big change coming. Consumers want more transparency, more trust, more authenticity. And that begins with values.

the projects*

## WITH THANKS

We want to thank everyone who helped us with responses. We're grateful for your input, which was incredibly instructive in our thinking and analysis. You constant scrollers, content creators and trend-watchers gave us invaluable insight into the industry.

Thank you!

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# WITH THANKS

# THE VALUES ECONOMY

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