

JUST INFLUENCE 2022

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**A PAY PARITY STUDY
OF THE UK INFLUENCER
MARKETING INDUSTRY**

By **MSL**

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

“Shocked ... but not surprised.”

Over the last six months, as we have been working on this report, the reaction of over 99% of people that we have discussed the findings with has been “shocked...but not surprised”

The rumours of a pay gap in the Influencer marketing space have been an uncomfortable secret that has gone unaddressed by most and exploited by many.

Why have we created this report?

Well, firstly, it's inarguably the right thing to do. To fight for a fairer, more open and JUST Influencer marketing industry that benefits the many, not just the few.

Secondly, as a large communications agency that has the backing of Publicis Groupe, we have the privilege of having the resources that many others don't. We believe it's our responsibility to try and move our industry forward and use our platform to help amplify voices that would not be heard as loudly on their own.

So are we perfect?

Certainly not. We have our own journey to go on, and the lessons from this report are as much for us to reflect on as an agency as anyone else.

This report, this initiative, is asking questions from all elements of the Influencer marketing value chain....clients, agencies, agents and Influencers themselves. We believe that only by coming together can we create change.



“THIS REPORT IS ABOUT MORE THAN NUMBERS”

When you read the data, I imagine that you'll be part of the 99% who are “Shocked...but not surprised”. The numbers are important, but the series of op-eds that make up the latter half of this document provides the personal context that has given us the biggest pause for reflection. We are lucky to have pieces written from the perspectives of brands, educators, disabled activists and Influencers themselves and the holistic picture of their experiences is a powerful read that tells us just as much as an attention-grabbing statistic.

Equally, it's not just about reporting the data, it's about what we do next. After reading this report I'm not sure how anyone can sit back and do nothing so the end of this document is all about how we move forward. Again, we don't have all the answers but it's our starter for 10.

“Just Influence” as a project (research, report, event) is only the beginning. We'll have to write the next chapter, together.

Neil Kleiner
Managing Partner, MSL

ABOUT OUR PARTNERS

When we began this project, we knew that we wanted as many perspectives as possible on this issue, and we looked to two people who are already vocal advocates in the space of Influencer pay parity.

Tinuke Bernard (she/ her) is a UK-based Influencer and public speaker and has been a friend of MSL for some time. In the Spring of 2020, Tinuke compiled a directory of Black Influencers in the UK, which garnered viral attention and helped many Influencers get their work in front of brands and agencies who had not had a means of access beforehand.

We also wanted to acknowledge that although currently the largest report of its kind, this report is not the first. We had been inspired by the work of SevenSix Agency and its founder, Charlotte Williams, for their work in this space. In 2020, she and SevenSix Agency published a report called “Lifting the Lid: The Influencer Pricing Report,” which was one of the first major studies into racial pay gaps in the Influencer marketing space.

SevenSix Agency was founded in 2019 as a direct response to the lack of diversity within the ad industry and Influencer marketing.

We must also thank the team at Influencer agency Sixteenth, who supported us in sharing our survey to get it out to as many people as possible.



THE STORY BEHIND THE RESEARCH



The journey of this research study began in 2021, across the Atlantic ocean. MSL partnered with The Influencer League to publish a groundbreaking piece of research called “Time to Face the Influencer pay gap.” looking at racial pay gaps in the USA.

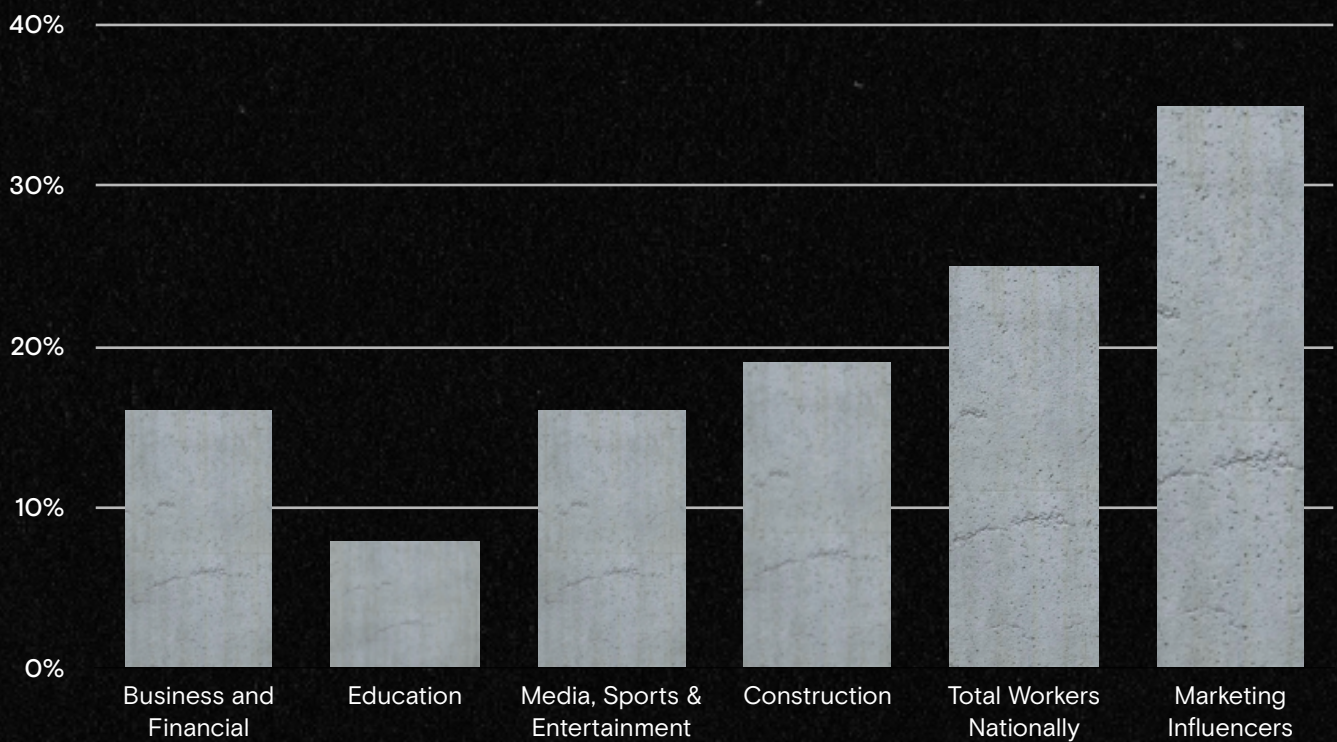
What we found was staggering.

**A 29% PAY GAP
BETWEEN WHITE AND
BIPOC INFLUENCERS**

**A 35% PAY GAP
BETWEEN WHITE AND
BLACK INFLUENCERS**

WE FOUND THAT THE PAY GAP BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE MARKETING INFLUENCERS IS GREATER THAN THE US NATIONAL GAP BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE WORKERS ACROSS ANY INDUSTRY

Comparison of Pay Gaps Across U.S. Industries by Ethnicity



AGAIN, THE NUMBERS ARE IMPORTANT.

But the causes of this pay gap and uncovering the actions needed to close this gap were vital to explore. We'll touch on some of this later in the report as it won't be a surprise to hear that there were many crossovers between the UK and US research.

Inspired by the US research, we wanted to look at the UK Influencer marketing industry from perspectives of race, but also other intersectional demographics such as age and disability.

In April 2022, MSL anonymously surveyed nearly 600 UK Influencers, gathering demographic, pay data and qualitative views and perspectives.

48% identified themselves as White, 30% Black, 20% Mixed 3% Asian and 2% other.

2% were aged 16-18 and there was a relatively equal split in all other age ranges of approx 20%.

76% of Influencers identified Instagram as their lead social channel, with TikTok being the second most used channel.

Regarding followers, the largest segment was the 10,001-50,000 segment. Still, our survey also included Influencers with over 1 million followers.

AND NOW, LET'S EXPLORE WHAT WE UNCOVERED.

THE DATA

THERE IS A RACIAL PAY GAP



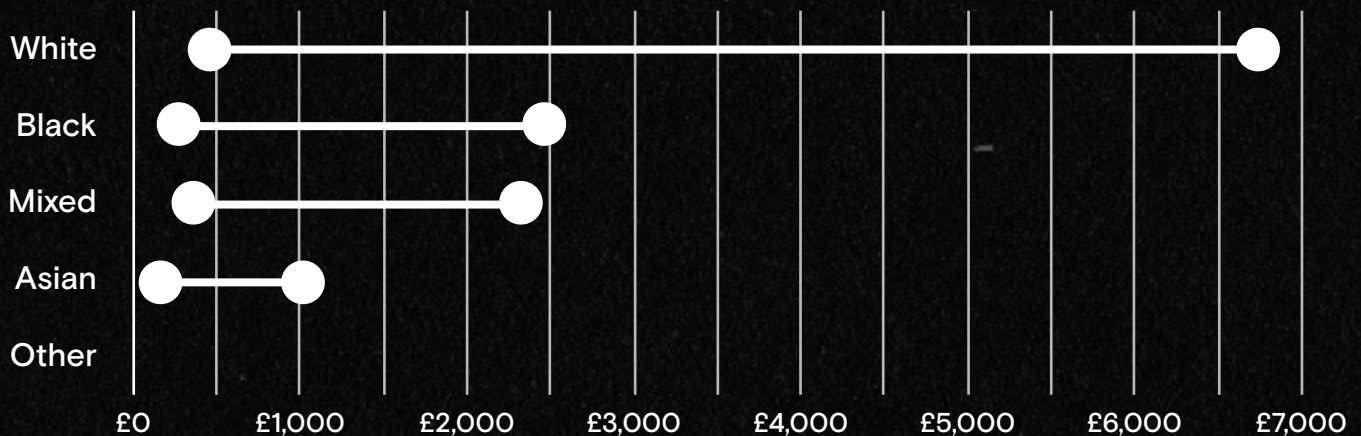
THERE IS AN **18.7%** PAY GAP
BETWEEN WHITE INFLUENCERS
AND INFLUENCERS WHO ARE
PEOPLE OF COLOUR.

BUT THIS INCREASES TO
21.5% WHEN COMPARING
WHITE INFLUENCES AND
BLACK INFLUENCERS.

35% OF ALL RESPONDENTS FEEL LIKE THERE WAS A DIRECT CORRELATION ABOUT SPEAKING OUT ON ISSUES OF DISCRIMINATION AND BRANDS NOT APPROACHING THEM.

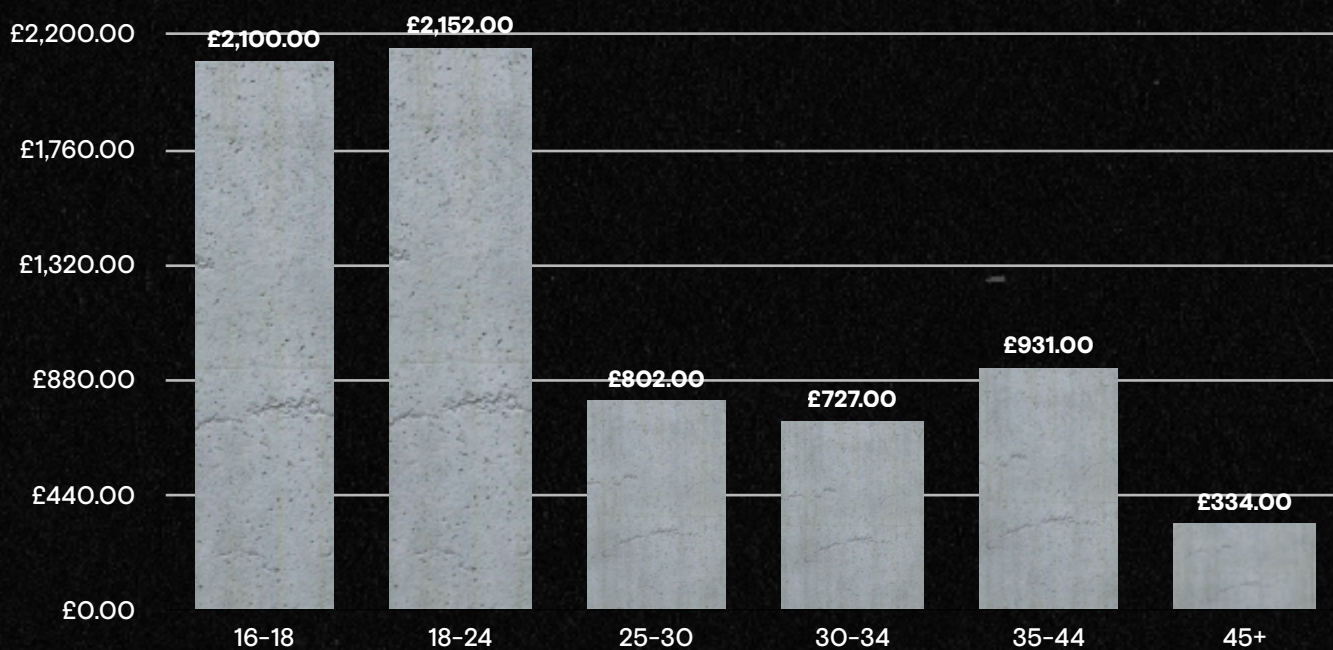
WHEN NEGOTIATING FEES, WHITE INFLUENCERS ARE NEARLY **3X** MORE LIKELY GENERATE A POSITIVE OUTCOME VS BLACK INFLUENCERS.

WE ASKED INFLUENCERS WHAT WAS THE MOST THAT THEY'VE BEEN PAID FOR A BRAND PARTNERSHIP AND WHAT'S THE LEAST. THE "EARNING POTENTIAL" OF WHITE INFLUENCERS LAYS IN STARK CONTRAST TO PEOPLE OF COLOUR.



THERE IS AN **AGE** RELATED PAY GAP

WE DISCOVERED 153.6% PAY GAP BETWEEN INFLUENCERS AGED 18-30 AND 30-45.



THERE IS A DISABILITY PAY GAP

**INFLUENCERS WHO
DEFINED THEMSELVES
AS HAVING A LONG-
TERM PHYSICAL OR
MENTAL HEALTH
CONDITION EARNED
23% LESS PER POST.**

WHY THE PAY GAP EXISTS

#1



NEGOTIATION SKILLS, CRUCIAL TO INFLUENCER SUCCESS, CONTINUE TO BE A KEY DEFICIT

In the absence of an agreed pay structure, our research shows that **23% of agencies approach Influencers with a set fee in mind** and don't start off with a discussion on what the Influencer is willing to charge.

The ability of Influencers to negotiate correct fees is vital to their financial well-being, but our research shows that White Influencers are nearly three times more likely to generate a positive outcome in fee negotiation Vs Black Influencers.

Perhaps more damaging is that our survey showed nearly **50% of Influencers who are people of colour stated that they believe that they are paid less because of race.**

“IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS, I’VE HAD THE MOST EMAILS I’VE EVER HAD ASKING FOR ME TO PRODUCE TIKTOK’S AND REELS IN EXCHANGE FOR SOMETIMES AS LITTLE AS £5 OR £10 WORTH OF PRODUCT”

- Anonymous response to Just Influence survey.

WHY THE PAY GAP EXISTS

#2



PEOPLE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO CHARGE

The biggest driver of the pay gap is the legendary lack of pay transparency in an unregulated industry that is only just beginning to reach maturity.

Our research shows that 52% of the Influencers we surveyed don't have a specific formula to determine what to charge and often work out their rates by asking peers for advice. Those with a formula base their fees on media metrics of reach and engagement, which ignores the proper value of Influencer marketing - its ability to drive reach and engagement but also resonance - literally, the power to influence an audience credibly.

What makes this lack of pay transparency worse is that Influencers are often asked to work for free in return for product or prestige, especially at the beginning of their career. This is something that agencies and brands appear to be guilty of exploiting.

As Influencers become more established, they either "professionalise" through confidence or get representation via talent managers who will negotiate on their behalf, so there is an opportunity to close the pay gap after success. Nevertheless, the harsh truth is that most minority Influencers appear to begin their career being exposed to exploitation.

**“YOU NEED TO STOP
LOWBALLING CREATORS.**

**BLACK, WHITE,
BROWN, WHATEVER
THEY ARE, REACH OUT
TO US ALL THE SAME”**

- Anonymous response to Just Influence survey.

WHY THE PAY GAP EXISTS

#3



SPEAKING UP IS BAD FOR BUSINESS

We all remember how Instagram turned into Black squares of protest during the peak to the Black lives matter moment. Brands also jumped into this trend, perhaps with the best intentions, but it seems without longer-term tangible commitments.

Our research shows that Influencers who speak up often see commercial partnerships revoked and removed 35% of respondents feel there was a direct correlation between them speaking out on discrimination issues and brands not approaching them.

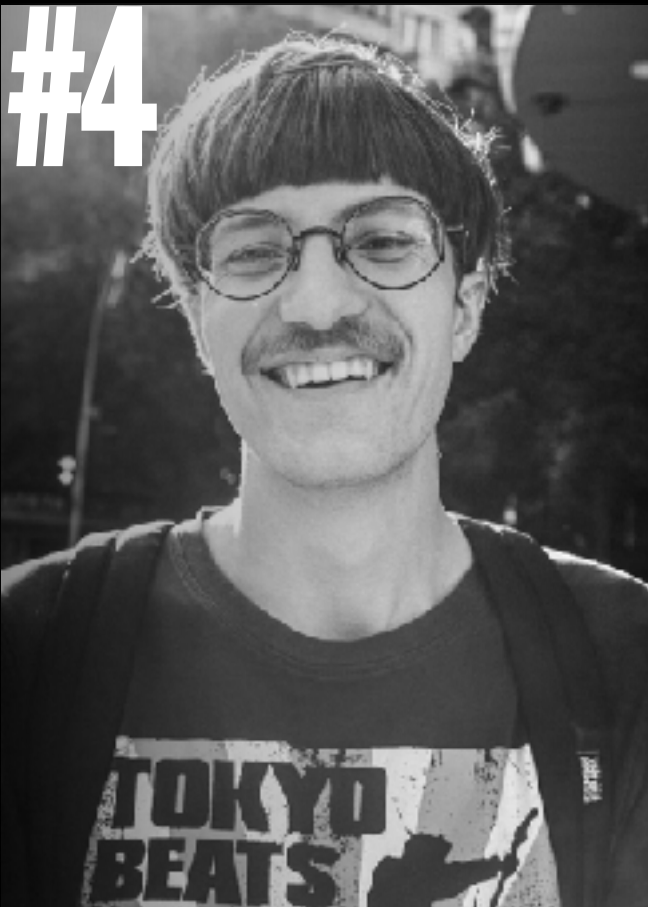
We want Influencers to be real people with genuine, relatable views on the world, but for some, these opinions are policed and judged too controversial to support a brand partnership.

“WE ALL SAW HOW A LOT OF BRANDS ACTED DURING THE BLM BOOM AND THEN WENT BACK TO THEIR OLD WAYS.

I MAKE THE MOST MONEY DURING BLACK HISTORY MONTH AND THEN WON'T HEAR FROM THAT BRAND/PLATFORM UNTIL THE NEXT YEAR”.

- Anonymous response to Just Influence survey.

WHY THE PAY GAP EXISTS



WE HAVE AN ISSUE WITH “NATIONAL REPRESENTATION”

Of course this report is about more than just race and taps into wider issues of our perception of “national representation”. Pay gaps around disability and age show that our industry continues to covet the youthful and the able-bodied as acceptable representations of and to our country.

The latest estimates from the gov.uk data indicate that 14.6 million people in the UK had a disability in the 2020/21 financial year. This represents 22% of the total population. The proportion of the population reporting a disability has risen by four percentage points over this period, up from 18%

And yet an Influencer who defined themselves as having a long-term physical or mental health condition earned 23% less per post.

Equally, our research shows a colossal 153.6% pay gap between Influencers aged 18-30 and 30-45. Yet the UK population is ageing dramatically with those over the age of 65 growing by 23% over the last ten years according to gov.uk data.

At a time when our country is getting older, and reporting on disability is increasing, we really need to question our view of what national representation really is; “Minorities” are not hidden on the margins and should be front and centre of our campaigns

“THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL INCIDENTS RECENTLY WITH BRANDS USING DISABLED INFLUENCERS PURELY FOR CONTENT AND THEN ACTIVELY EXCLUDING THEM FROM OTHER OPPORTUNITIES.

A PROMINENT DISABLED INFLUENCER WAS UNABLE TO ATTEND A BRAND EVENT BECAUSE IT WAS IN AN INACCESSIBLE BUILDING. DISABLED INFLUENCERS ARE BEING USED FOR OPTICS NOT FOR REAL CHANGE TOWARDS A MORE ACCESSIBLE OR INCLUSIVE BRAND.”

- Anonymous response to Just Influence survey.

OP-EDS



WE ASKED PEOPLE FROM ALL SIDES OF THE INFLUENCER MARKETING INDUSTRY TO GIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE DATA UNCOVERED IN OUR RESEARCH.



TINUKE BERNARD

Blogger and founder of
The Black Influencer Directory

I started blogging over a decade ago. Twelve years ago, to be precise. A friend recommended it when I was boring her with a story about my baby pooping in the bath during a dinner party. She said there were many mum communities online, and blogging would be a great place to meet like-minded people. In hindsight, she just wanted me to stop talking to her about baby bowel movements, but I'm eternally grateful for her advice because it introduced me to a world I'd known nothing about at a time when it was a very new frontier full of opportunity and community.

There have been many times when I wanted to pack it all in. When I felt that what I wrote would never make an impact on anyone but myself. Because for most of the time of 'mummy blogging' I felt like my story of parenting was seen as being too different.

Not because I was fairly young, having had my daughter in my early 20s. But, because of the colour of my skin, I found a home and community in blogging that spanned the globe. For some who probably resided in the same city as me, it was hard to relate to our similar parenting journeys.

Rather than make me stop writing and sharing little snippets of being a parent trying to juggle finding her voice, her career and being a badass mum, I decided to keep going. Yes, there were many times when I was the only person of colour at PR or blogging events aimed at parents or the only person of colour on a campaign. There were times when I wondered if I had been invited as part of a tick box exercise; in fact, that thought hasn't gone away! But, I decided that even if that were the case, I would show why I deserved space on my own merit.

Over the years, I saw more faces that resembled mine in the rooms I entered. Men and women from Black and mixed heritage backgrounds began taking space online and on social media. I've enjoyed being able to add more and more of them to my Instagram feed and to my Black Influencers Directory. We, as Black Influencers, Creatives and Bloggers, have been able to show that Blackness is not a monolith. We have varied life experiences, varied talents and varied passions. Our voices are both influential and worthy of space.

But, it seems from the results of our survey that although we are being recognised for our differences, those differences are not celebrated equally. As a dark-skinned, 'older' Influencer (I'm late 30's!) I'm likely to be offered substantially less for a campaign than my younger or lighter Black or mixed race peers. I was actually quite surprised by the pay discrepancies with regards to age, not so much skin colour as colourism has been rife within the Black community since the rise of colonialism, but for ageism to also be apparent was interesting.

Brands and PRs sometimes still use the line "you're not speaking to our target market," but we are living in a world where time and time again, we are proving that to be untrue. People across the colour spectrum have money to spend on your products. We all wear clothes, and we all buy dishwashing liquid or mobile phones. Your target market and your campaigns should be diverse and reflect the world we live in. By excluding people based on age, race, religion, etc you are doing both the Influencers and your own audiences a disservice.

I am raising two bold, beautiful, brave girls. I take comfort in the thought that this next generation is quicker to call out bull. They talk with their wallets and will not spend money on or work for brands that they see as being performative or shallow. My children will expect to see Influencers spanning all intersectionalities because that is how life is.

Gay, South East Asian, love doing up cars and live on a narrowboat? Bet. There's space for you. 30-something Black female living outside of London with your Frenchies? We need your story too.

There is space for us all. We all hold worth and should be judged on our merits alone. It's doable. So let's do the work. But what does that look like? How do we make real, impactful changes in an industry that, whilst is no longer new, is forever shape-shifting? I believe transparency is one way. Another is education. By being clearer about fees and the way fee offers are reached, it's harder for

there to be such discrepancies based on skin colour, gender or any other intersection which isn't valid (such as experience, skill etc). By educating both PRs, brands and Influencers, there will be a more level playing field as people will know how to negotiate and how to remove bias from their decisions.

That's not the be-all and end-all, but it might be a great place to start because we have to start somewhere and the sooner, the better.

We can and will do better.

Tinuke Bernard (she/ her) is a UK based Influencer and public speaker. In the Spring of 2020, Tinuke compiled a directory of Black Influencers in the UK which garnered viral attention and helped many Influencers get their work in front of brands and agencies who had not had a means of access beforehand.



CLEA BOURNE

Senior lecturer in the department of media, communications and cultural studies at Goldsmiths, University of London

We all know the digital landscape is rapidly changing the promotional industries; this includes traditional public relations, advertising and marketing, as well as all their new and existing offshoots. Influencers are an important site for academic research because they play such a vital role in generating the masses of content needed to drive digital platforms' business models. I also teach as well as research, and I now encounter a growing number of university applicants in the fields of media, communications and cultural studies who already consider themselves aspiring Influencers or want to study the technical and business skills to help them succeed should they pursue this path.

While these are interesting times, the rise of Influencers has laid bare some very old problems in the promotional industries –

notably the powerful undercurrent of inequality and exclusion. Some of the promotional industries, especially public relations, are already highly feminised, meaning that women now dominate numerically.

For women, feminisation in the promotional industries often means lower status, lower pay and a tendency to get 'stuck' in technical roles which, for men, are transitory. The challenges across the wider creative industries are always greater for under-represented groups, including neurodiverse and disabled workers, working-class practitioners, LGBTQ+, as well as racialised minorities.

Those of us who study diversity initiatives see the same issues repeated year after year because diversity initiatives are rarely designed to dismantle an industry's structural foundations.

As we watch the UK Influencer market strengthen and professionalise, it's worth learning from existing research on the wider promotional industries. One thing we already know is that regardless of efforts to start professional associations and introduce qualifications, and despite a shift to more algorithmically-driven skills, the promotional industries still place a great deal of weight on hiring and promoting people who have the right 'look', the right accent, personality and personal chemistry. These remain industry currency. Personal chemistry spans everything from an Influencer's ability to exude a bubbly, creative and happy personality to the use of 'charm' and even flirtation in response to client or agency encounters. All this will drive an Influencer's ability to negotiate pay.

No matter how industry skills may change, we are left stuck with the following structural problem wherein the standards for the right kind of look, charm and personality are still set by the dominant group who are typically White, male, middle class, neurotypical and not disabled. This dominant group has changed little in recent decades. They have the power to change things but little motivation to do so, which is why the most exciting diversity initiatives today are the ones launched by workers in entry-level roles, in middle-management, or in more entrepreneurial roles, as many Influencers are. If you have done nothing to support any of these initiatives, then you too are part of the problem.

The rise of the Influencer market highlights another vexing issue in which diversity has become commodified across the wider creative industries to help campaigns look more fun, creative and 'cool'. It's easy to see why this habit has become so widespread, and it supports the argument that diversity can be (at least temporarily) good for business. But it's a terrible way to treat people. When you celebrate someone's identity as a source of creativity, you reduce them to dispensable commodities whose economic justification is precarious. Once the cost of employing your Influencer (or indeed any other promotional worker representing a minoritised group) becomes greater than the economic return, the creative assets they bring to an organisation will be sought elsewhere or simply jettisoned.

Influencers and other workers caught up in this 'diversity is cool' spiral can oscillate between being hypervisible when useful, but invisible when not required. Worse still, minoritised

group will have less creative autonomy and will also lack the same 'freedom to fail', which adds to their precarity. The 'diversity is cool' cycle is just one contributor to the Influencer pay gap.

Equity can only be achieved when we design our structures to be equal to all. I see this every day in the university sector. When tuition fees were raised some years ago, there was an instant drop in minority applicants on my programme, and the numbers have never recovered. I also see structural issues play out as my graduates apply for jobs, and as they progress up the ladder. I talk about these issues in the classroom every week, it would be unethical to do otherwise. But I'd love to see the promotional industries set the example for the rest of Britain and move faster and more profoundly toward structural equity and change.

Dr Clea Bourne is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London. She has been director of Goldsmiths' MA Promotional Media: Public Relations, Advertising and Marketing for nearly a decade. Clea has published widely, and is author of Trust, Power and Public Relations in Financial Markets (Routledge) and Public Relations and the Digital: Professional Discourse and Change, soon to be published by Palgrave Macmillan. Clea is also co-editor with Paul Gilbert, Max Haiven and Johnna Montgomerie of the forthcoming book, The Entangled Legacies of Empire: Race, finance and inequality, to be published by Manchester University Press.



CLARA HOMES

UK based model, fashion and lifestyle content creator/influencer

I have been an Influencer working with brands and creating content for several years. Over the time I have personally experience a level of disproportion pay as a black disabled woman compared to my white non-disabled creators in the industry. I have been offered contracts 3 times low than other black female creators and contracts where they want me to work for free, compared to other white disabled creators.

In the beginning like everyone else you are happy that a brand notices you and would like to feature you on their platform in return for sending you 'gifted' items. However, these gifts started to come with conditions and deadlines and when I spoke with other influencers who were white, they were doing the same campaigns, but offered a fee. It was then I learnt to set a fee, but even when I did the brands that were keen to gift suddenly have no budget.

I realised this method of working was unsustainable as I can't give work for free then expect others to want to pay you or think next time the brand will pay me, because they won't. If a brand pays a low fee in the beginning, they will always try to pay that low fee.

I now know my worth and I have learnt in this industry you have to be strong and have the confidence to ask for what you think your deserved to be paid for your work and know what level of payment you would be happy to do the work for. Many I know are not that strong and unhappily do the work for free. Not everyone is like me to have the confidence to say no to working for free or at the fee they would be happy with. As they are more worried about the brand going elsewhere to those that will do it for free or at a low fee. In my experience some brands will, and they do.

However, the brand will come back if they respect you and your work.

While I am a disabled influencer, I also do a lot of consulting & public speaking events to brands about being more diverse & inclusive in their media and advertising campaigns, by working with and paying disabled people for their talent. Not only should they be more representative of society, but there are also too many companies out there working with black and/or disabled influencers/creators and want them to work for free or low pay. They must be paid appropriately for their art.

The Influencer world is a business and while some use agencies to negotiate better brand deals in my experience this can also be problematic and as the agent often still negotiates deals lower than the non-black and/or non-disabled person on their books for the same job because they didn't have the same vision or saw my worth. I think more needs to be done to empower influencers with tools to negotiate better deals with brands for themselves that they will be happy with and are equipped to guide their agent if they have one.

Clara Holmes aka @rollinfunky is a London, UK based Model, Fashion & Lifestyle Content Creator/Influencer.

She shares her passion for fashion, fitness and travel adventures, girl about town lifestyle and disabled joy. Clara has worked with many big brands on influencer campaigns like google pixel and have modelled and featured in Vogue Portugal.

Clara has Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS) which is an inherited connective tissue disorder it's a very painful and I have been a wheelchair for nearly 17 years. Clara is also a public speaker and often campaigns for more diversity in fashion, media and marketing and is part of Meta's 'Meet the Billion' for brands to become more inclusive in marketing and advertising.



CHARLOTTE WILLIAMS

Founder, SevenSix Agency

I launched SevenSix Agency in February 2019 as a direct response to the lack of diversity in the influencer industry. A lot has changed over the last three years and although we are seeing more creators from minority groups at the forefront of campaigns, there is still an inclusivity issue within the industry. In June 2020 we saw the internet turn black, with the digital world showcasing its solidarity with Black people which was supposed to signal the start of change, but according to a report from Blenddoor, companies that made #BlackLivesMatter pledges at this time had fewer Black employees. Additionally, the IPA's 2020 and 2021 censuses highlighted the extreme diversity issue within the advertising industry, which posed the question... how can we create an inclusive industry without a diverse workforce?

Pricing and fee structure is the most common topic of discussion in my company's DM's, online event chat boxes and 1-1s. Through anecdotal experiences from our Influencer Network, as well as our own experiences with the talent we manage, we understood early on that creators of colour were paid significantly lower than their white counterparts - especially if they had a darker skin tone. In 2020 we felt we needed data to highlight this so we created Lifting the Lid: The Influencer Pricing Report which was released in March 2021. Soon after MSL Group USA released their #InfluencerPayGap study which highlighted similar data, but from across the pond. The issue was clearly global and needed to be addressed.

This year we joined forces with MSL and Tinuke Bernard, creator of the UK Black Influencers Directory, to go deeper with the data and expand our reach. As a small Black-owned agency, we felt this collaboration was key to the amplification of cause. We hope this second report sparks the action we need to really close the pay gap and change the industry for the better. This report is broader than the 2020 piece as it also addresses the age pay gap and disability pay gap, two extremely important conversations in the influencer space. The 2010 Equality Act legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society and we feel that the right to be treated equally isn't taken seriously in the influencer industry. Equal pay is a right all creators should have, regardless of the fact that the industry is made up of freelancers.

The influencer industry plays an incredibly important role in shaping culture, because of this we feel it is imperative that creators are treated fairly and paid correctly to ensure that the influencer space isn't homogeneous and that there is room for a diverse range of voices.

SevenSix Agency was founded in 2019 by marketing consultant and influencer, Charlotte Williams, as a direct response to the lack of diversity within the ad industry and influencer marketing. The agency provides consultancy services to brands and influencers, centred around representation in advertising and helps create purpose-led campaigns that generate a positive impact. It runs an influencer partnership and management division with the goal of amplifying the visibility and work of some of the globe's most exciting yet overlooked content creators and their unique perspectives.

ADDRESSING THE PAY GAP

Exploring how the industry can achieve parity

More diverse agencies

= more diverse campaigns

“Still Shocked...but not surprised”

The communications industry has a huge diversity problem in the UK. A recent study called The Pay Gaps Project from PRWeek and People Like Us looked at the pay gaps within the PR industry. The data showed that only 22.2 % of the PR industry are non-White and only 14.8% of Senior industry are non-White.

More concerning is the pay gap. The industry mean salary is £54,250, but the mean salary for a non-White PR professional is £40,374 – a 34% pay gap.

So, yeah. We have a problem.

MSL UK has championed diversity and now proudly has over 38% of our employees defined as non-White (and we aren't stopping there), but we are one agency amongst many. As an industry we have to get better at this stuff.

Again, not just because it's inarguably the right thing to do, but also because diverse agencies create work that is more reflective of the wider world outside our agency windows.

Brands should ask more questions from their agencies

This isn't just an exclusive issue with Influencer Marketing, but one where this issue is perhaps most critical. Influencer marketing teams are employers of a critical freelance workforce and there needs to be more accountability.

It is accepted practice for brands to ask for diversity statistics of the people who make up a potential agency partner (especially as part of global RFPs). But brands should be questioning how agencies are treating suppliers. On the point of specific Influencers marketing RFPs, agencies should be able to declare the demographic and pay gap data. Clients ask about the diversity within the agency, but not the diversity of the work they act on their behalf. Clients need to hold their partners to account on this matter.

Influencer Diversity Audits

So as an immediate action, MSL will be surveying the demographic data of every Influencer we work with, alongside pay and social media data. This data will be declared in aggregate in every RFP response and shared externally every six months. We will be leading the charge on this initiative and encouraging as many agencies as possible to follow suit. We want to normalise an open, public conversation around pay in the Influencer marketing space and we need agencies to track and declare and brands to hold to account.

Education and training

The need to provide negotiation training and development of minority Influencers (especially at the beginning of their career) was one of the loudest take outs from both the US and UK research.

This year MSL has partnered with The Influencer League to train 500 Influencers in America on the topic of negotiation training. It's something that we will continue in the UK and in 2023 we support 500 more.

We will create two in-person workshops in March and September 2023 to bring together Influencers, agents, brands and educators to help nourish a more open and fair Influencer marketing industry.

So what's the plan?

- Train and support Influencers at the beginning of their career
- Encourage industry best-practices for agencies to track and declare their Influencer pay data
- Encourage brands to hold their agencies to account on diversity pay data
- Continue to champion diversity within agencies because more diverse teams = more diverse work
- Don't stop

So the last point is important. This report is year one, and when published in September 2022, we'll begin work on the next one. And the next.

We need your help, so if you are an Influencer, an agency or a brand and want to get involved in the project next year, please contact neil.kleiner@mslgroup.com

MSL | We Build Belief