

# Do Instagram influencer grease the wheels of capitalism?

## Introduction

Over the last decade and a half, the use of social media has soared. The usage of social media is ubiquitous among people of all ages and professions all over the world. Gone are the days when social media was merely used for posting birthday wishes and anniversary posts. Nowadays, people share, create and collaborate different contents of and about their lives. (Lucy M., March 24). The shift from content-sharing to content-creation allowed many users to express their viewpoints independently and conveniently where they could connect and share their lives with others and form communities via social media. Talking about communities, particularly influencer community has been growing and is idealized in the current times. Influencers are often seen to be spending their maximum time on the internet where they endorse products, collaborate with brands, and showcase their extravagant, quintessential life (Vaibhavi N. & Leena P., 2018). Most of these products cater to some ideology or “hype”, be it a fashion accessory, weight-control pills, body-enhancing smoothies powder, makeup products, the monetary exchange is facilitating capitalism. In this paper, I will be exploring whether Instagram influencers play an important role in catalysing capitalist market. Also, I will be considering how external factors like socialism and technology fit into the influencer-capitalism equation.

## The fashion and beauty gamble

The recurring product trend seen on Instagram boils down to fashion and beauty. In 2018, some Instagram influencers were called out for promoting clothing brand called Shein. Shein is one of the fastest-growing fashion e-commerce platforms, which is popular for its cheap and affordable apparel (Figure 2). It was under the radar because of its exploitative practices for procuring high profits at lesser production costs by paying low wages to its workers (Reem F., 2020). Similarly, the makeup industry on Instagram is notorious, wherein a 21-year-old college dropout named Kylie Jenner built a billion-dollar worth industry (Figure 1). Her beauty standards revolved around unnaturally pouty lips, the curvy body which is again strikingly sinched in the waist area, and the fancy avant-garde life of branded items of clothing, mansion, and cars. Another such incident that occurred in 2018 was of an Instagram model who posed as a woman of color to expand her fanbase and include people with darker skin tones (Figure 3). Beauty industry in fact is one of the ugliest, as it is indirectly and directly feeding racism, sexism and colorism (Manisha M., 2021).



Figure 1

Source: Retrieved from <https://www.ok.co.uk>



Figure 2

Source: Retrieved from [www.euronews.com](http://www.euronews.com)



Figure 3

Source: Retrieved from <https://www.glamour.com/>

In the above examples, the oppressive behaviours can be seen by exploitation of workers, feeding on people's insecurities, and fooling people to extract financial benefits. These practices align with the Capitalist agenda which seeks profits without regarding the morals and humanity of the workers class involved. "Current capitalism, by the same token, has

invented ways of extracting benefits from labour without explicit forms of oppression” (Hamid E. & Bonnie N.,2019). The growth of capitalism seems to have been accelerated by technological prowess and selfish political agendas. I will be discussing about how technology, automation and socialist hypocrites are contributing the capitalist wrongdoings using Instagram influencers as a guise.

### Automation and capitalism

The influencers lies between the organizations producing unethical and unhealthy goods and the consumer who is influenced into consuming it. In this picture, influencers champion the supply chain, which is the pivotal part of capitalism who thereby promotes global organizations to conduct oppressive practices by paying unrealistic personas on social media. It's worth noting that, influencers have been existing even before social media in the form of advertisers, marketers, salespersons, but the boom in social media exponentially strengthened the roots of influencers' culture. So, in a way technology is a vessel that paved an easy route for the capitalist economy's growth. Automation is the product of technological advent, which is redefining the skill requirements. Tailoring, which was earlier considered a job requiring high skills, is now being replaced by machinery, which in turn is reducing the value of that job. To view this in different light, a newly coined term which serves as an extension to automation is, “Heteromation”, which redefined the logic and process of wealth accumulation. Heteromation states that humans are working with and for machines, but they aren't getting remunerated for it or being paid very little. (Hamid E. & Bonnie N.,2019) Thus, it makes me question whether technology is also fuelling capitalism by using influencers? “To put it in a broader perspective, capitalism can be viewed as a social formation which revolve around aspects like reliance on capital gain and accumulations, division of power between private and public sector. These aspects work as a part of an institution or a societal system and have been surviving the volatility of the market. Therefore, assigning the role of technology in such a complex framework can be tricky as it could both support and go against capitalism.”(HEILBRONER, R., 1997)

### Socialist Instagram influencer

Instagram influencers as the name says are influencers, who can project an ideology or set of ideologies among their followers. These very followers are lured into buying or subscribing to the socialist products which could be anything from merchandise, fundings, or a mere “no-cost” publicity. Being a socialist social media influencer turns out to be a lucrative job. Nicole Sanchez, a gamer and streamer who rose to fame after a video of her popularizing the phrase "OK, boomer" while wearing a "Bernie Sanders for president" sweatshirt gained more than 50 million views. Likewise, her “tax the rich” hoodie went viral which was in support of socialist democrat leader Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. What's fascinating about Sanchez's

narrative is how swiftly and successfully she's been able to utilize her newfound internet celebrity to achieve a multimillion-dollar lifestyle owning a BMW and a humongous house. (Brad P., 2021). She claims to be a socialist, but the very essence of socialism, and that is equality was clearly lacking in her internet. In principle, under socialism, everyone is on an equal footing. In real life, hierarchies arise, with party officials and well-connected individuals gaining preferential access to favoured products. Influencers on social media promote a lifestyle that promotes capitalism consumption while proclaiming on their platforms that they support socialist ideals. Influencers on social media live a life of luxury and leisure and they continue to promote these behaviours as if they are the most desirable way of life. How can one expect or direct these individuals to stop persuading the rest of the world and humanity at large that a life of wasteful consumerism under the falsifies socialist fabric is undesirable when we have self-indulgent personas like these promoting these lifestyles as if they are desirable goals to strive for? At the same time, what are the just ways, where the freedom of individualism of these influencers is also not hampered?

### Technology, capitalism and socialism

The technological advent and automation proved to be a boon and bane for a plethora of reasons. The shortcomings of the same capitalism is the most prevailing economic system in the United states, but given its shortcomings, it's always shown in a negative light. So, if the capitalist economic system is unjust, is a socialist economic system the solution? "Socialism sounds very endearing against the brutality of the capitalist economic model, but the closer view reveals that socialism might lead people to put in comparatively fewer efforts to achieve their goals, as basic necessities will be taken care of by government and state." (Gomez F, Hannah & Paskor, Ann & Block, W., (2015). This means fewer inducements for invention and development.

Moreover, socialism and capitalism co-exist and co-support each other. Capitalist markets are governed by ruthlessly ambitious people and the socialist market is inundated with manipulative corrupt government officials. Capitalism drives the economic wheels of the country.

Although, capitalism has a ruthless side to it, but socialism does not guarantee sweet endeavours either. People are naturally ambitious and selfish and they can trace their presence in socialist society as well. In fact, giving control to the state in a socialist economy means giving control to government officials who can be manipulative and corrupt. It's debatable to predict exactly what is perfect, but history has shown the failure of socialism. The Soviet Union's Marxism-Leninism, Nazi Germany's National Socialism, Communist China's Maoism, and Venezuela's Chavez-Maduro socialism are all examples of socialist ideologies. It's never gotten near to Marx's vision of a society without classes.

Between these 2 extremist theories, lies technology, which both, encourages and debilitates their advancements. Encouraging in the sense where it provided resources for innovation

and globalization. Machinery did take away jobs, but it replaced the redundant and repetitive jobs thereby creating newer and different job opportunities. Social media platforms gave people voice to express their views, form their communities and work towards bringing radicalization. This same technology is employed in a negative way can notoriously destroy both the systems. Technology does not have a mouth to say or eyes to see, but it shows the consequences of the actions.

## Conclusion

Instagram influencers come in all shapes and sizes, with different ideologies and intentions. Some of them endorse products and services which are manufactured with a backdrop of unethical laborious works for meager wages. On the other hand, some influencers use this platform to sell ideologies, with both malicious and good intent. Instagram influencer, indeed facilitates the capitalist motives, but it's a type of job. This job may or might not be ethical than other jobs, but everyone has the right and freedom to choose their means of income and livelihood, with however means they wish. To emphasize further, Instagram's influencer culture is becoming more ruthless and saturated which in itself is creating a capitalist system. The necessity of getting a number of likes and comments to get a lucrative brand deal from corporations, the constant pressure to look ideal, the fierce competition from other fellow influencers, is resulting in many influencers being dragged into oppressive fire hole. They are in a way helpless, in fact, everyone in the societal structure is expected to deliver some work in order to survive. Even though the capitalist system can seem cold-hearted, but its counterpart socialism has lived up to the worst. This can be considered a tip of capitalism, but not just capitalism. Under the tip lies a humongous mass of ill-intended socialists, communists, political leaders, and whatnot. Technology in this system acts as a carrier, the carrier which is again dictated and governed by the very people of the system. To conclude, not just the influencers, but the consumers, the producers, the socialists as a whole are greasing the wheels of capitalism.

## Citations

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