



Influence

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I've been hearing the word "influencer" a lot lately. An influencer is someone whose opinion is trusted and can influence the decisions – typically buying decisions – of other people. Some time ago, Oprah became a celebrity influencer when her book club choices could induce a literary buying frenzy and send even an obscure or dated book to the top of the best seller list. When my daughter was actively blogging, random companies would send her free products in the hope that she would endorse them on her blog.



To be a top influencer, you need to have a following of people. Depending on the size of the niche in which you have influence, your following might number in the millions (celebrities) or the hundreds. Different from paid advertising, it is the influencer's trusted testimony that will make or break a product. Marketers that use social media have come to see influencers as "social relationship assets." When the influencer has a close social relationship with her followers, the authenticity of the recommendation is higher. Marketers are finding that "micro-influencers" have an unusually solid influence on their audience. These micro-influencers are described as ordinary, everyday people who offer their testimonies either online or in-person by word of mouth. Though small in scale now, they are predicted to be the "influencers of the future."

Maybe it's the massive reach of social media, with billions of people connected electronically, that makes "influencer marketing" noteworthy. The way I see it, this has been happening for a long time. I've relied on "micro-influencers" for my buying decisions for a long time. The difference is that I called these ordinary, everyday people my "friends," and I trusted their recommendations because I trusted them.

Having just celebrated a glorious Easter,

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

I remember again the influencers whom Christ chose to tell his story. From his birth, Christ's influencers were not of the celebrity-type. Shepherds abiding in the fields were the first to witness and give their testimony about the birth. Lepers and foreigners and thieves gave their testimony about his miracles. The women discovered the empty tomb and shared the miracle of the resurrection. At best, these were micro-influencers: ordinary, everyday people who had friends. Within their small circles at least, they had some degree of influence. Outside their circle of friends, they encountered skeptics, of course. The disciples thought the women's resurrection message to be "an idle tale." Their testimony, however, was enough to induce the disciples to check out the story for themselves.

I wonder who Jesus chooses as his influencers today. I suspect his grassroots marketing strategy is still rooted in micro-influencers. The simple, honest testimonies of ordinary, everyday people are much more influential than paid promotions. When we share our experience as a Jesus follower with our friends, we might not induce a Christian revival in celebrity-style, but they might trust us enough to check out the story for themselves. In this Easter season, we encounter again the Good News. I pray we will not keep it to ourselves.