



Beyond Marketing: The Institutionalisation of Influencers within the Public Relations Framework of India

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Abstract

The digital media ecosystem has broadened the definition of public relations beyond conventional press relations and one-way communications. Influencers are no longer simply an add-on to marketing campaigns. Influencers are now an essential role in the way organizations develop awareness, legitimacy, and trust. As cultural intermediaries, influencers co-create brand narratives, express organizational values, and help organizations listen and engage in a two-way dialogue with publics. Due to their perceived credibility and relatability, influencers tend to help bridge a gap between institutions and audiences, and as such, influencers have become even more important in media relations, stakeholder dialogue and community-building. Specifically, Indian brands are institutionalising these practices and embedding influencer engagement into a continuous public relations activity instead of treating it simply as a promotional tool.

This research utilizes a qualitative case study design to examine two prominent brand crises—Nykaa and FabIndia—focusing on both effective and ineffective influencer-driven public relations responses. Official brand communications, social media content, news articles, and trade assessments were gathered and analysed using qualitative content analysis, with coding categories centered on speed, tone, transparency, and digital innovation.

The data indicate that Nykaa effectively utilized influencers as co-creators of narratives and reputation safeguards, but FabIndia's inability to engage influencers rendered its campaign susceptible to cultural backlash. The cases collectively demonstrate that influencer integration transforms public relations from media-relations-focused approaches to networked, relationship-oriented practices, wherein legitimacy is co-managed with digital audiences.

Keywords: Crisis Communication; Public Relations; Influencers; Digital Media; India; Nykaa, Jash-e-Riwaaz

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