onestopenglish

Increased use of influencers in advertising

1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.

1. What kinds of products do you usually associate with online influencers?
2. What age group do you expect when you think of influencers?
3. Do you follow any influencers? If so, what ideas or products do they promote?

2 Key words

a. Match the words with their definitions. Then look at how the words are used in the article to check your understanding of them. The paragraph numbers are in brackets to help you find them quickly. Read the complete article to see how the words are used in context.

hire (1)	platforms (4)	investors (7)	disposals (10)	list (15)
brand (2)	board (5)	fund manager (7)	portfolio (11)	
underperforming (3)	ire (7)	denouncing (8)	shareholder (12)	

1. ____________________: anger
2. ____________________: the acts of eliminating something
3. ____________________: the type and name of a product made by a company
4. ____________________: doing less well or making less profit than expected
5. ____________________: hardware or software that host applications or services
6. ____________________: to employ someone to do a job
7. ____________________: people who put money into a company to get a profit
8. ____________________: critcising publicly
9. ____________________: the group of people that controls a corporation
10. ____________________: a collection of stocks and investments owned by a person or company
11. ____________________: a person or company that manages money for another person or company
12. ____________________: to make a company's stock available to buy on a stock exchange
13. ____________________: people who own shares (parts) of a company and get part of the company's profits and have the right to vote on company actions

Intermediate

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b. Complete the sentences with the correct forms of the words from the previous activity.

1. I've been buying this __________________________ of toothpaste for years.
2. We sold our stocks in the auto industry because they were __________________________ and we weren't making much money.
3. My uncle is a member of the __________________________ of directors of a big tech company.
4. A company with publicly traded stocks has the responsibility of making money for its __________________________.
5. It's better to have a diverse __________________________ of stocks so that you don't depend on just one or two stocks.
6. A company can be privately owned, or it can __________________________ its stock on a stock exchange.
7. Sometimes, the __________________________ of smaller divisions of a company is necessary in order to make the company more profitable.
8. Wealthy people often have a(n) __________________________ to help them use their money to make good investments.

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Unilever is investing more in influencer advertising in a bid to convince customers

NEW CEO SAYS MARMITE AND MAGNUM MAKER IS INCREASING SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING FROM 30 PER CENT TO 50 PER CENT OF TOTAL AD SPEND

BY MADELEINE SPEED

1 Unilever's new chief executive has said it will hire more social media influencers to market its products because consumers are "suspicious" of corporate branding, as he set out his vision for the Marmite and Magnum maker.

2 "Messages of brands coming from corporations are suspicious messages," said Fernando Fernandez, in his first public comments since taking over from ousted predecessor Hein Schumacher at the beginning of the month. "Creating marketing activity systems in which others can speak for your brand at scale is very important."

3 Speaking to Barclays analyst Warren Ackerman in a "fireside chat" uploaded by the company last week, Fernandez set out his priorities, which included focusing resources in the company's largest markets — the US and India — and speeding up the sale of underperforming food brands.

4 He said Unilever was also switching to a social media-first advertising model, increasing its investment on such platforms from 30 per cent to 50 per cent of its total advertising spend. The company has lifted its overall marketing spend from 13 per cent of turnover in 2022 to 15.5 per cent in 2024.

5 An Argentine who has worked at Unilever for almost four decades, Fernandez was appointed to replace Schumacher last month after the board lost patience with the pace of his turnaround plan for the London-listed group.

6 The company, which sells everything from washing detergent to deodorant, pot noodles and high end skin care products, is in the midst of a restructuring plan that includes cutting 7,500 jobs and separating out its ice-cream business.

7 In the past Unilever has attracted the ire of investors such as activist Nelson Peltz and UK fund manager Terry Smith for overemphasising brand "purpose".

8 Its marketing approach has typically associated its products with wider purposes, such as Hellmann's mayonnaise tackling food waste or Dove soap denouncing toxic beauty standards. However, the tactic has lost traction as consumers have increasingly turned to online influencers instead of corporations for recommendations.

9 "There are 19,000 zip codes in India. There are 5,764 municipalities in Brazil. I want one influencer in each of them," Fernandez said. "That's a significant change. It requires a machine of content creation, very different to the one we had in the past …"

10 Fernandez said the company was sticking to his predecessor's plan to only carry out bolt-on acquisitions and that he would accelerate the pace of disposals of smaller regional food brands.

11 "Every brand in our portfolio, every category in our portfolio has to earn the right to belong in our portfolio," Fernandez said, adding, "time will say what we do with our portfolio in the long run but that's the position at this stage."

12 Two top-15 Unilever shareholders told the Financial Times following Fernandez's appointment that the food business did not fit with the rest of the company's portfolio.

13 While Fernandez did not rule out a separation of the entire food portfolio, he said the division's two leading brands — Knorr and Hellmann's, which make up 60 per cent of the business — were accretive in margin and cash generation.

14 "It's a very attractive business, it gives us a lot of flexibility. And we are committed to grow that business. That's what I can say about food now," he said.

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15 Some investors have also questioned why Unilever has chosen to list its ice-cream business rather than sell it or form a joint venture that would return cash to shareholders.

16 Fernandez said he believed the demerger and listing was "still the most logical outcome" but that he had a fiduciary duty to analyse other options. "It has to be a really credible option to really ensure we don't follow this path."

FT

Madeleine Speed 10 March 2025

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3 Understanding the article

a. Choose the best option to complete each sentence.

1. According to the article, Unilever wants to use more influencers because …

   a. young people don't see traditional advertising.

   b. people don't trust advertising done by companies.

2. From 2022 to 2024, Unilever … the money it spent on marketing.

   a. increased

   b. decreased

3. Unilever has a new CEO because the board of directors wanted the company to make changes …

   a. more quickly.

   b. more carefully.

4. Unilever's restructuring includes … a lot of people.

   a. hiring

   b. firing

5. Investors were … the involvement of products in social issues like food waste.

   a. in favor of

   b. against

6. For the foods division, the new CEO wants to get rid of …

   a. brands like Hellman's mayonnaise.

   b. brands that are popular only in specific regions.

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4 Business language – corporate management and marketing

a. Complete the sentences with the phrases in the box.

market activity systems	turnover	bolt-on acquisition	fiduciary duty
at scale	turnaround plan	joint venture	

1. turnover is the amount of total earnings of a company.
2. A(n) bolt-on acquisition is a smaller company that a big company buys to increase its product offering.
3. A(n) fiduciary duty is the legal and ethical responsibility to act in the best financial interests of another person or group.
4. market activity systems are the structured, systematic processes that a company uses to influence the market and get sales of its products.
5. To do something at scale means to expand the activities and processes of a company to achieve more sales without a big increase in expenses.
6. A(n) joint venture is when two or more people or companies combine their resources for a business project or opportunity; the people or the companies maintain their separate identities.
7. A(n) turnaround plan is a strategy to make changes in a company that is having problems so that it starts to make more money.

b. Complete the sentences from the article with the correct forms of the words from the previous activity. When you have finished, scan the article to check your answers.

1. "Creating marketing activity systems in which others can speak for your brand at scale is very important."
2. The company has lifted its overall marketing spend from 13 per cent of turnover in 2022 to 15.5 per cent in 2024.
3. Fernandez said the company was sticking to his predecessor's plan to only carry out bolt-on acquisitions and that he would accelerate the pace of disposals of smaller regional food brands.

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4. …, Fernandez was appointed to replace Schumacher last month after the board lost patience with the pace of his turnaround plan for the London-listed group.

5. Fernandez said he believed the demerger and listing was "still the most logical outcome" but that he had a(n) fiduciary duty to analyse other options.

6. Some investors have also questioned why Unilever has chosen to list its ice-cream business rather than sell it or form a(n) joint venture that would return cash to shareholders.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

1. Why do you think many consumers are suspicious of corporate branding and advertising messages?
2. Do you trust social media influencers more than traditional advertising? Why or why not?
3. Would you like to be a social media influencer? Why or why not?

6 Wider business theme – becoming a social media influencer

a. Read the text and take the quiz.

More than half of Gen Z (people born between 1997 and 2012) say they would like to work as social media influencers. To many people, it seems like the perfect job – you can work when you want to, you just have to talk about things you love, you get a lot of free products, and you make money for doing that!

However, if you really want to become an influencer, you have to have some specific qualities and skills. Take this quiz to see if you would probably be a good influencer. You don't have to share your answers, so be honest with yourself!

1. Is there something you love talking about or doing all the time?

   a. Yes, definitely!

   b. More or less.

   c. Not really.

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2. Do you like filming yourself and posting the videos online?
    a. Yes, definitely!
    b. More or less.
    c. Not really.
3. Are you good at telling stories or anecdotes?
    a. Yes, definitely!
    b. More or less.
    c. Not really.
4. Do you like interacting with people that you don’t know?
    a. Yes, definitely!
    b. More or less.
    c. Not really.
5. Are you organised in your work or study habits?
    a. Yes, definitely!
    b. More or less
    c. Not really
6. Are you able to accept criticism?
    a. Yes, definitely!
    b. More or less
    c. Not really

If you have mostly **a** answers, you may want to consider becoming an influencer.

If you have mostly **b** answers, you may want to work on some of the points in the quiz.

If you have mostly **c** answers, you probably wouldn’t like being an influencer.

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b. Read the paragraph. Then follow the instructions to prepare a presentation.

> To be a good influencer, you have to prepare your presentations. Influencers don't simply stand in front of a camera and promote a product. They mention a company's product or products in the context of an interesting personal anecdote or while explaining how to do something. They talk about why they love the product so much, but it has to sound like a natural part of the anecdote or explanation.
>
> - Choose a product that you really like. Write down a description of the product and the reasons you like it. Mention specific features and benefits of the product.
> - Prepare a short anecdote that includes information about the product but is not entirely about the product itself, e.g. when and where you wore an amazing piece of clothing or why a certain tool is useful when you are doing a specific activity.
> - Make a list of the types of video scenes or photos you would use when you film your anecdote.

c. Tell your anecdote to your class as if you were doing it online. Answer their questions or respond to their criticisms about the product.

Useful language:

One of my favourite things to do / use is …

Doing/Using (product) makes (activity) so much easier/more fun.

This means that you can / don't have to …

As you can see, … This picture shows …

When I'm (activity), I love using / wearing (product) because …

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