How Influencers Will Rule or Ruin Life as We Know It

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Abstract
Influencer culture has become one of the most polarizing communication developments of the last several years. Is it the ultimate forum for opinion and digital self-expression or the latest marketing tool to dupe unwitting consumers out of their money? As today’s most trusted taste makers with millions of followers on platforms like YouTube, Instagram and Twitter, are influencers the antidote to fake news or some of the biggest contributors to the problem? This discussion will review the genesis of the influencer phenomenon, survey the pros and cons of contemporary influencer culture and consider the most useful path forward. Session 1: We’ll cover the genesis of influencers and state of influencer culture today. Please consider the following in advance of our discussion: • How do you define an influencer? Which influencers do you consistently follow? Why? • What do you consider the greatest attributes of influencer culture? • What do you consider the greatest shortcomings? Session 2: • Small-group discussions and group assessment of influencer culture • Charting the path ahead: What can/should be done on both a global and individual basis?

Faculty Biography
Stephen Jones is an adjunct instructor at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. He has held leadership roles at top global public relations agencies and is currently an executive director at Golin, where he leads one of the firm's largest accounts, Nintendo of America. A former journalist with publications such as the Los Angeles Daily News and BusinessWeek, Stephen is skilled in building product brands, developing corporate reputations and counseling executives in crisis situations. Stephen holds a BA in political science from the University of California, Los Angeles, and an MA in communication from Stanford University, where he was a Bickel Scholar.