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English Essay

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Title: Social Media Influencers:
Inspiration or Digital Deception?

Thesis Statement:

Social media influencers truly live by their title and inspire the audience in so many different ways. When ethical standards are observed by the content creators and the audience is media literate, then there is a minimal chance of individuals getting astray.

Outline:

- 1) Introduction
- 2) The evolution of digital ecosystem and appearance of social media influencers.
- 3) Areas of Influence of social media content creators:
 - a) Podcasts raising awareness among citizens and officials alike
 - b) Online tutors and mentors building educated and skillful workforce
 - c) Fitness experts bringing light to healthcare
 - d) Family and village life vloggers inspiring masses

e) Environmental activists leading online campaigns

4) The dark side of social media:
Influencing through manufactured reality

5) Not the influencers, but the viewers' demands direct the content format

6) Way forward to a more positive and less problematic social media influence

7) Conclusion.

Neil Postman: "Every Technology is both a blessing and a burden. It is not either-or, but this-and-that"

In the current digital era, social media holds immense power to influence the masses. With the rise in online activity at social media platforms, the world saw an increasing number of social media influencers, all over the globe, exercising their influence across diverse dimensions of everyday life. Online mentors and gurus, digital diaries showing the struggle-to-success stories; the family and village life vlogs, the healthcare and fitness enthusiasts have greatly changed the way ordinary people used to go about life. However, at times, people fail to recognize some hidden realities behind the camera lenses. This is when the social media influencers mislead the masses. Social media influencers truly live by their title and are inspiring the audience in so many different ways. It is needless to say that when ethical standards are observed by the content creators; and the audience is media literate, there is minimal chance of individuals getting astray.

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With the advent of internet, many sections of the world were revolutionized. One major shift was in the way mankind communicated. Various digital platforms like skype, facebook and viber were developed to connect people sitting miles apart, via radiowaves and algorithms. The humans got connected through screens. Initially this online ecosystem was meant for calls, conferences, sharing information and entertainment purposes. But, during COVID, when the whole world was locked in their homes, fearful, skeptical and uninspired, an interesting wave of social media influencers appeared. They served many roles, attracted huge viewership, earned money and helped viewers through the time of crisis. Finally, the COVID quarantine was over, but the influencers remained and continued to grow. Today, they are a significant part of our ~~significa~~ lives, influencing us in many ways.

The podcast videos constitute a specific format of online video content. Where the host invites certain influential figures, experts ^{or} ~~and~~ professionals. The host asks thought provoking

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and field specific questions. The guest and host engage in a constructive debate in a very ambient setting. The viewers get to know a broad perspective and nuances of a specific subjects while sitting at the comfort of their homes without booking any tickets or the time constraints. This podcast format not only inspires the viewers to be more insightful and aware but also helps to convey the messages and thoughts of common man to the influential figures. There by, opening doors for a collective good.

Online tutors and mentors have been a great blessing to the wider audience with the passion to learn. A number of top-notch educationist started creating subject specific educational video playlists. They delivered in-depth understanding of the subject. These videos can be accessed by any person, at any time and without any fee payments. The hassle of finding a tutor, travelling through cities to reach them and paying hefty sum for fees has all been now reduced. Many mentors have launched online skills learning

programs. The public gets to choose from a variety of different skill sets and master a few to enable them to earn a livelihood. This creates a chain reaction, where a person learns online skills, then earns from it and further teaches other individuals who follow the suit. Such influencers have transformed a whole generation of passionate and inquisitive minds.

There has been a surge in the fitness experts on the digital platforms. The population who has been so indulged in earning a livelihood is now getting to know the importance of healthcare, fitness and exercise through them. These experts not only impart the knowledge of healthy lifestyle but also conduct elaborate training sessions online. Their followers have continued to increase, benefitting from their services. Such followers become an inspiration themselves when they share their weight-loss journey or their exercise routines which helped them grow stronger and healthier. It is by virtue of such healthcare enthusiasts on social media that a

wider population has started taking their health seriously.

Some of the social media content creators revived the spirit of family life through their family vlogging videos. Their videos captures the little moments of family members coming together, celebrating their joyous moments, working together and sharing the struggles together. This gave people an incentive to rejoice their own families, embrace their loved ones and stick together through thick and thin. Another variant is village-life vloggers. Their vlogs introduce the urban masses to the realities and beauties of village life. They also communicate the hardships of people living in underdeveloped areas. Such content is not only inspirational, but educational as well.

There have been increasing environmental awareness campaigns on social media. Some environmental activists resorted to online platforms to get masses' attention towards the grave matter. - With the rise in climate related disasters, pollution and urbanization, the world seemed

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seems to be moving on the path of its own destruction. It was the dire need ~~to~~ the time to educate the wider population about environmental protection and conservation. For this many recognized influencers stepped forward to lead the environmental campaigns and invite more people to join them in the cause. These influencers thus created an air of saving the planet by stimulating the inhabitants through their social media handles.

There have been some parallel views of the critiques which label the social media influencer's reality as deception. This, to some extent, is true, as evident from promoting unrealistic beauty standards, well-crafted sets just for the cameras, and rhetorical narratives to get maximum attention. Also, to get higher viewerships, the quality of content is undermined and optics and visuals are focussed more by many content creators. Sometimes this leads to a perception where every online video seems to be a manufactured reality and a facade which is hard to identify.

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It is important to note, the social media influencers have helped a number of people to be a better version of themselves, and to sort out their lives. But with the rise in the number and diversity of such influencers, there has been a virtual competition to create more content, and get more viewership. In this race, the creators often deviate from displaying the actual truths and exaggerate the parts liked by the audience the most. Therefore, it is upon the viewer to redefine what they want to watch more of. If they admire the facade of perfection, that is what they get. But if the viewers start valuing and demanding the truthful and unaltered reality, then the social media influencers would be bound to produce such content.

The negative aspects of this digital media influence can be mitigated with an integrated approach. This demands media literacy of the masses, ethical responsibility of the content creators and government regulations to keep check on substandard data. The more people who are media

literate, more will be the push back for the poor quality and false content online. The social media influencers also need to recognize their responsibility to be highly prudent about the data they share online as it is viewed by viewers from different ethnicities, demographics, ages and economic class. At last, the government needs to devise a regulative mechanism to keep a check on below average and fake material being shared on social media to mislead the public and heavy penalties should be imposed on such ~~inf~~ so-called influencers.

The epoch of internet has been reshaped by the age of social media which amassed huge followers looking upto their social media influencers. These influencers hold power through their voices and visuals they choose to display. This audio and graphics combine to create a virtual force, in the form of online content, which leads the hearts and minds of viewers.

The social media influencers are being hailed ~~in many~~ for their services in many domains like Education, awareness

healthcare and environmental protection. However, if their power goes unchecked there is a possibility of converting this influence into a liability for the society as a whole. Therefore, measures should be taken to make the audience more media literate ~~and to hold the~~ and ethical responsibility should be instilled in the influencers. The influence can thus be as good or bad as its usage is.

As Neil Postman notes:

"Every technology is ~~can be~~ both a blessing and a burden. It is not either-or, but this and that."