

GUIDE

Brand ambassadors: navigating the risks of long-term endorsements

*A guide to preventing reputational
issues when partnering with
influencers, athletes and celebrities*



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*Colin Kaepernick, Bad Bunny,
Ye, Kyrie Irving, Aaron Rodgers,
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INTRODUCTION

Across all industries, from sportswear and luxury clothes to life insurance, cryptocurrency, and soft drinks, young athletes, up-and-coming pop stars and high-profile influencers have become the faces of major international brands agreeing to long-term sponsorship deals.

The end of 2022, however, saw several of these celebrities making the headlines in all the wrong ways. Nike and adidas severed ties with Kyrie Irving and Kanye West, Gisele Bundchen and Tom Brady were sued following FTX's collapse, and a list of other celebrities, including Justin Bieber, Paris Hilton and Madonna, were cited as defendants in a lawsuit against Yuga Labs for "unrealistically hyping up the value" of its Bored Ape Yacht Club NFTs.

This series of adverse news stories has shed a light on the potentially high risks associated with a powerful and successful strategy: influencer marketing and in particular celebrity endorsements.

Working with influencers, athletes and celebrities has proved a successful way for brands to connect with their audiences authentically. While it is just one of many marketing tactics, influencer marketing has become highly effective as consumers find recommendations from influencers and content creators more trustworthy. In the last 10 years, the use of influencer marketing has been expanding around the world, reaching a **MARKET VALUE OF \$16.4 BILLION** in 2022, up from \$1.7 billion in 2016. Research found that celebrity and athlete endorsement increases trust and can lead to **20-40 PER CENT GROWTH**.

Using high-profile individuals for advertising is nothing new, but rather than just seeing them as famous faces on a billboard, young people now perceive them as tastemakers and role models.



“

Gen Z sports fans aren't just sports fans anymore. They see the athletes they're following showcase their interest in other aspects of culture like art, music, and fashion, and it impacts their own tastes. Athletes are more than just athletes now; they're celebrities and tastemakers.”

Kevin Kim

Search Engine Journal

This has led marketing teams to invest time in vetting and selecting high-profile content creators, celebrities, and athletes to establish long-term partnerships, rather than identifying different influencers for every new campaign.

It's not about placement anymore, simply gifting products to influencers for them to be pictured with won't make the cut. Followers want to see that there is a real connection and partnership with the brand. Co-authoring social media content on both the company and the celebrity's accounts, using features such as Instagram Collabs posts, has allowed them to develop storytelling campaigns that speak to both audiences.

However, a negative spotlight on ambassadors risks creating a backlash against the brand too because of their association. Recent news has shown the impact a connection with controversial ambassadors can have on the endorser. Nike's cutting ties with Kyrie Irving and adidas with Kanye West, known as Ye, following their antisemitic comments have been a wake-up call for brands on the need to be prepared to react promptly to such situations.

This InsightX guide details how marketing and partnerships teams can both set up a process to select the right brand ambassadors and use in-depth intelligence to manage successful relationships with influencers, athletes, and celebrities. It has been written by our team of experts, who have worked with major international brands helping them mitigate reputational risks and offering communications and PR teams the insights they needed to navigate long-term endorsements.



FORBES' TOP CREATORS LIST

For the first time, in 2022 Forbes launched its **Top Creators List** ranking the 50 most successful social media influencers. This is not merely based on their following and engagement but on their estimated earnings and entrepreneurial success, which includes major deals with brands, such as Emma Chamberlain's Louis Vuitton deal and Khaby Lame's partnerships with Binance and Hugo Boss. The ranking shows that the worth of their personal brands goes well beyond likes and views and has a substantial monetary value associated with it.

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93 per cent of marketers have used influencer marketing

SocialPubli

8 out of **10** consumers have purchased something after seeing it recommended by an influencer

Rakuten Marketing

Celebrity and athlete endorsement increases trust and can lead to a **20-40** per cent growth

Journal of Advertising

MITIGATING REPUTATIONAL RISK

HypeAuditor reports that when it comes to influencer marketing, brands have shifted their focus to building long-term relationships: "With the increasing number of influencers, brands are expected to try and form meaningful, long-term relationships with influencers who tick the right boxes."

Choosing ambassadors for a brand is more than just signing the latest celebrities and athletes making the headlines or the most followed influencers on social media. The exposure that derives from such partnerships will be highly beneficial and fruitful for the brand only if reputational risks are avoided or successfully managed.

The stakes are higher than ever for marketing teams, as the budgets associated with celebrity deals have reached stellar figures. Estimates of adidas and Ye's partnership were evaluated at around \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion per year of which Ye could have been paid a 10 per cent royalty fee, equal to \$150 million to \$200 million per year. Revelations from the Financial Times that Taylor Swift was in talks with crypto group FTX before its collapse for a sponsorship deal worth \$100 million included comments from a person familiar with the negotiations who found the deal too expensive: "That's front of the soccer jersey level prices."

While these personalities bring their attractively-large platforms to the table, they also come with the caveat that the brand will not be able to control what they do and say in the public eye.

RED FLAGS AND RISK AREAS

For this reason, choosing celebrities that "tick the right boxes" is an essential part of the onboarding process, which should include assessing any potential risks in associating with them, their previous partnerships, and their connections to corporate entities, among other areas.

Some brands will choose ambassadors with a clean and non-controversial image as a form of insurance against the possibility that they will end up associated with controversies. For other brands, however, an outspoken, cool and slightly edgy celebrity is considered more valuable than a bland personality.

In both cases, in-depth research into their social media history, controversial media coverage, past partnerships, and financial and litigation issues needs to be a non-negotiable part of the vetting process.

Speaking to Campaign following the notable recent fallouts between brands and ambassadors, Laurie Kessler CEO of The Celebrity Source said: "The saga, which came shortly after Ye's ex-wife Kim Kardashian was fined by the FTC for improperly disclosing a crypto endorsement, raises the question for brands: How do you vet brand ambassadors and has that changed given the growing number of scandals from celebrity endorsements?"

While these scandals are nothing new and have always been considered a risk, their possible amplification via social media makes them a bigger threat to a brand than they might have been in the past. Ultimately, what ambassadors will say publicly at any time can't be controlled and the message they share might not always be the message the company wishes for.

However, the ambassador's views and past actions are available for analysis and offer a company enough clues about what might emerge. A thorough evaluation process helps the brand decide whether it's worth taking the risk, as well as prepare a solid PR and communication plan should anything happen.

Prompt response to any reputational crisis connected to a partner is key to showing customers that the brand is taking a stance and standing by or dissociating itself from the influencer. Due diligence analysis helps brands be aware of the areas to keep under scrutiny and possible emerging risks.



AUTHENTICITY AND VALUE ALIGNMENT

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90 per cent of consumers said that authenticity is important when deciding which brands they like and support

Stackla

Checking for red flags and avoiding obvious reputational risks are not the only thing that matters when it comes to celebrity endorsements.

In recent years, particularly among younger generations, there has been a shift in what consumers expect from brands when it comes to marketing and advertising. They want to see companies actively engaged across all aspects of society, openly taking a stand and declaring their purpose and values. But the key to this is that it all needs to be done in an authentic way.

This principle also applies to creative collaborations with celebrities. In the past, people had unconditional trust in anything advertised by a beloved celebrity. Now audiences want to know why that particular musician, actor, athlete or influencer represents that particular brand, what values they have in common and what they stand for together.

Carrying out proper due diligence and intelligence checks goes beyond making sure there can be a green light to work with them in terms of risks. It means making sure the sponsorship makes sense when it comes to shared values and causes.

Celebrities' work and their opinions can't be considered separate, which means a conflicting or controversial opinion from the ambassador will have a negative impact on the brand if it clashes with what the company stands for. Brands should always make decisions based on their values and not simply favour the latest up-and-coming personality.

Athletes and influencers themselves are putting their personal values and causes at the forefront of the corporate sponsorships they sign.

In April 2021, Olympic gymnast Simone Biles left Nike's roster of athletes to sign a long-term sponsorship deal with Gap-owned women's activewear brand Athleta. At the core of the new partnership, the brand and the athlete highlighted the "shared commitment to empower the next generation of girls", and presented various initiatives that will see the gymnast interact with Athleta's audience and support young women in sport. Biles stated she believed Athleta aligned better with her values and what she stands for. This came after Olympic medalist Allyson Felix left Nike in 2019 to become Athleta's first ambassador and other Nike athletes criticised the brand for the lack of support and understanding received during pregnancy.

Conversely, when Kourtney Kardashian was announced as the new sustainability ambassador of Boohoo, backlash from consumers and the media quickly followed, pointing out the lack of authenticity of such a partnership. With the brand being investigated by the UK's Competition and Markets Authority for greenwashing, and the influencer being repeatedly criticised for her unsustainable lifestyle involving fast fashion and private jets, such a reaction from the announcement should not have come as a surprise.

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"Brands need to integrate a celebrity into their communication in a manner that works off the celebrity's popularity and yet remains meaningful to their proposition. Using a celebrity only to beat media clutter is not just lazy marketing, it's also counterproductive. Authenticity and consistency are key, so it appears that the endorser genuinely believes in the brand proposition."

*Business strategist Lloyd Mathias
Financial Express*

ADVICE FOR SELECTING BRAND AMBASSADORS

InsightX recommends investigating the following in candidates:



These criteria provide a comprehensive picture of candidates and will allow brands to mitigate possible risks and ensure value alignment with the individuals that are being considered.

VERIFYING ENDORSEMENTS DISCLOSURE

- » An aspect of sponsorships that is becoming increasingly regulated by national governments is the disclosure of paid-for content created in partnership with brands. Social media users being paid for a campaign, whether as a one-off opportunity or long-term contract, need to be properly signalling the nature of these posts as advertising
- » In the UK, the Committee of Advertising Practice has issued guidance that all endorsement posts by influencers need to be marked as advertising and lack of compliance with the regulation sees the creator being flagged in a database of [“Non-compliant social media influencers”](#) on the Advertising Standards Authority’s (ASA) website
- » Similarly, in the United States, the Federal Trade Commission publishes [Endorsement Guides](#) clearly detailing how to declare endorsed posts and sends out letters to brands and influencers when these requirements are not met, warning them of the violation they committed. In October 2022, social media influencer Kim Kardashian was charged by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) with failing to disclose that she was paid \$250,000 to promote a cryptocurrency by EthereumMax on her Instagram profile. The case was settled for \$1.26 million but was also seen as a warning by the SEC to the flurry of celebrities promoting controversial crypto companies
- » China and India, where live e-commerce is growing as the latest playfield for influencer marketing, are also implementing stricter regulations and fines for online celebrities not properly disclosing financial ties with brands
- » Previous sponsored content published by potential ambassadors being vetted should be analysed to verify they properly disclosed endorsed content and lists such as ASA’s should be checked to confirm whether the influencer has been flagged for violating regulations

FEATURED EXPERTS



Alessandro Bogliari

CEO and Co-Founder at The Influencer Marketing Factory

It is essential for brands to choose the right influencers and brand ambassadors because the wrong ones can highly impact their reputation. Some brands have 100+ years of history but a social media post made by a brand ambassador that is going through a scandal, or a post that generates controversy, could potentially destroy a company in a matter of days. Even if the company breaks away from any association with the ambassador, the power of online communities and audiences has been growing in the past years and they have become important stakeholders.

It's also crucial that the influencer or brand ambassador really loves a specific product and the company behind it, especially for long-term partnerships, and that the ambassador's audience is in line with the company and product being promoted. Too many times brands only look at the metrics, appearance and history, and not at the type of demographic and psychographics that follows that brand ambassador.

RISKS VS. BENEFITS OF A CONTROVERSIAL BRAND AMBASSADOR

The main risk is that a company might be negatively impacted by the action of an individual not only in the short-term but more broadly in its overall brand reputation that took years to build - especially as the company doesn't have any

control over certain aspects such as the brand ambassador's personal life. One benefit might be that, if we follow the saying "any publicity is good publicity", the brand might still see an increase in brand awareness, brand searches online, followers on social media and potentially sales, both in-store and online. However, this is a high-risk gamble and it's not worth possibly jeopardising the reputation of the company in the long run.

PROS AND CONS OF LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS

Long-term partnerships have both pros and cons. The pro is that customers and online audiences can start associating a specific person with a brand and if they trust this person, or if this individual is aspirational, they will also trust the brand. But, on the other hand, if a specific ambassador becomes the sole face of the company and they go through a scandal, customers will also associate the scandal with the company that trusted 100% the person. You just need to think of Subway's Jared Fogle, who ruined the company's image, Oscar Pistorius for Nike, or Travis Scott X McDonalds after the Astroworld tragedy. It's difficult to know how a celebrity or influencer might act in the future in their personal life, which is why it can be tricky to choose the right ambassador only by studying their personality, unless there was a pattern in their past that can emerge from intelligence analysis.





Sara McCorquodale

CEO & Founder at CORQ

RISKS VS. BENEFITS OF A HIGH-PROFILE AMBASSADOR

The benefits are the phenomenal digital reach of someone who is topical. Social media prioritises people and content which generates a reaction and doesn't discriminate if that reaction is negative. So the main benefit is reach, the second is aligning yourself with someone who is polarising - for every consumer who strongly disagrees with them, there will be another who emphatically agrees. The major risk is how the subject of their controversy impacts the perception of your brand and how people feel to be associated with it. For example, a brand that continues to work with an individual who has expressed racist views will find they face intense online pressure to distance themselves or drop that individual. They may find that unless they react immediately, that the issue and the story very quickly becomes something which they cannot control, and that the damage done to their brand is significant.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DUE DILIGENCE AND BACKGROUND CHECKS

This is something we've built our business on at CORQ because some creators have a digital footprint that goes back ten or 15 years and there can be things in that history that a brand will find unacceptable. Due diligence is particularly essential in the age of TikTok. Perception of creators is very different there in comparison to how they are received on Instagram. In addition, Twitter can be very revealing when it comes to sentiment and rumblings of scandal. We recently halted a partnership between one of our brand subscribers and a major TikToker as we discovered employees from Sephora - where this TikToker's own brand of products was stocked - had leaked that it was being dropped by the retailer due to major issues.



Case Studies



COLIN KAEPERNICK



MAIN SPONSORSHIPS

NIKE 

MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNT

INSTAGRAM 

During the 2016 NFL season, former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick knelt during the performance of the US national anthem. The protest, which he devised with the advocacy of army veterans, was against police brutality and racial injustice in the country. He became a free agent the following year.

In 2017, Kaepernick filed a grievance with the league, accusing team owners of colluding to keep him off the field in retaliation to his protests by collectively refusing to sign him. He was successful in his claim but has yet to return to the league.

Kaepernick became the face of Nike's 2018 Just Do It campaign, which centred on the phrase: "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything."

The advert was poorly received by conservative America, drawing criticism from former president Donald Trump, boycotts of the company and even the performative destruction of Nike apparel on social media. However, Nike's sales surged 31 per cent, the value of the company surged by \$6 billion and the advertisement later won an Emmy.

Insight.X Grid

Corporate Relationships

Values

Social Media History

Adverse Media Coverage

Political Views

Behaviour

Social Media



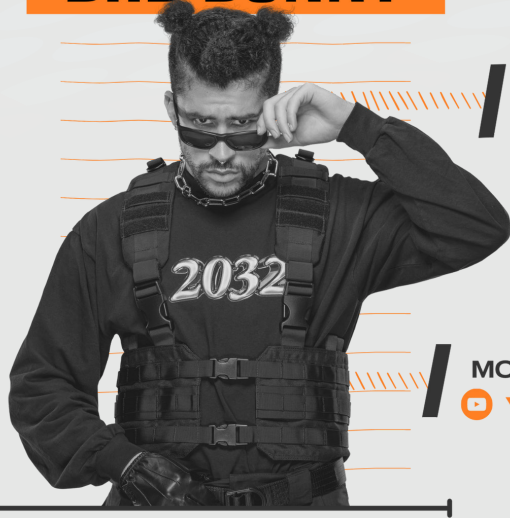
3.7
MILLION
FOLLOWERS



'Just do it' Nike campaign with Kaepernick

Credit: Nike

BAD BUNNY



MAIN SPONSORSHIPS
adidas **ADIDAS**

MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNT
YOUTUBE

Puerto Rican singer Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio aka Bad Bunny is one of the most streamed artists in the world. His latest album broke a number of streaming records on Spotify. He is due to appear in an upcoming Sony Marvel film, has appeared in WWE and currently has a “long-term partnership” with adidas which will see the pair collaborate on projects and products.

When he performed on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon in 2018, he opened the performance by showing footage of Hurricane Maria hitting his home country. During the montage, he said: “After one year of the hurricane, there are still people without electricity in their homes. More than 3,000 people died and Trump’s still in denial.”

He appeared on the show again in 2020. During the performance, in which he wore a skirt, he unveiled a t-shirt which said: “They killed Alexa, not a man in a skirt.” His t-shirt was a reference to the misgendering of a murdered transgender woman by the Puerto Rican press. Alexa was shot and killed after using a women’s bathroom.

Ocasio has long been a supporter of LGBGTQ+ rights and is unafraid to speak out against governments, criticising the Trump administration's handling of the pandemic and the Puerto Rican governor's attitude towards gender and sexuality. He has boosted the community's visibility by having same-sex couples and transgender women in his music videos. He has also criticised the homophobic views of some of his peers in music.

Despite being a cisgender straight male, Ocasio has often adopted a queer aesthetic and has been dubbed by fellow Puerto Rican artist Ricky Martin as a “queer icon”. At the 2022 MTV Video Music Awards, Ocasio shared a kiss with a male backing dancer, which led to some accusations of queerbaiting though others defended and praised him for doing so.

Insight.X Grid

Corporate Relationships	Values	Social Media History
Adverse Media Coverage	Political Views	Behaviour

Social Media



45.5
MILLION
FOLLOWERS

YE



MAIN SPONSORSHIPS

ADIDAS GAP BALENCIAGA 

MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNT

INSTAGRAM 

Ye, formerly known as Kanye West, was dropped by adidas in October 2022 after a number of incidents which began with his wearing a “white lives matter” t-shirt at Paris Fashion Week. He then appeared on Tucker Carlson Tonight to say that he thought that wearing the t-shirt was “funny”, despite anti-discrimination organisations detailing links between the statement and white supremacy groups. He also called the Black Lives Matter movement a “scam”. Ye then posted a series of anti-semitic statements to his social media pages, repeating stereotypes about jews being all-powerful before threatening to “go death con 3 on JEWISH PEOPLE”.

He added that he could not be anti-semitic because “black people are actually Jew [sic] also”, appearing to commit a common misinterpretation of anti-semitism; when it is argued that an individual cannot be anti-semitic because they have semitic heritage. The term is defined and generally understood as anti-jewish racism.

He later appeared on a podcast in which he claimed that George Floyd was not murdered, but in fact, was killed by a fentanyl overdose. He also said: “I can say antisemitic things, and Adidas can’t drop me.”

Ye’s relationship with adidas was long-standing and particularly profitable for the brand. Beginning in 2013, adidas reportedly made up to \$1.8 billion per year from the partnership. After dropping Ye, adidas expected to lose \$246 million in profit by the end of 2022.

Insight.X Grid

Corporate Relationships

Values

Social Media History

Adverse Media Coverage

Political Views

Behaviour

Social Media

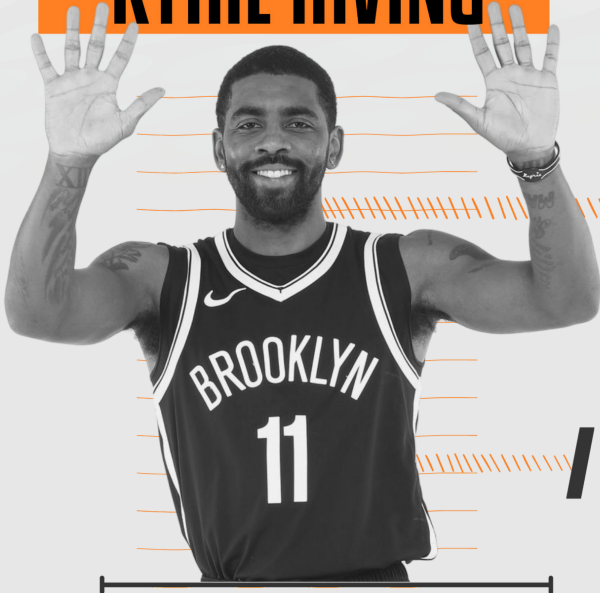
18.2
MILLION
FOLLOWERSYe’s suspended
Twitter account

@kanyewest

Account suspended

Twitter suspends accounts that violate the Twitter Rules. [Learn more](#)Credit: Screenshot via
Twitter

KYRIE IRVING



MAIN SPONSORSHIPS

- NIKE
- PEPSI
- PANINI
- 2K SPORTS
- FOOT LOCKER

MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNT

INSTAGRAM 

Kyrie Irving, a seven-time NBA All-Star, was dropped by Nike in November 2022 after tweeting a link to an anti-semitic film. He was also suspended by his now-former team, the Brooklyn Nets, for failing to disavow anti-semitism.

The first indication of Irving holding conspiratorial beliefs was during a podcast appearance in 2017 in which he said he believed "the Earth is flat". Irving later distanced himself from the comments.

He was later unable to play for the Nets due to New York State's vaccine mandate as he refused the Covid vaccine. He said that his decision was based on bodily autonomy. However, he had liked posts on Instagram which suggested that "secret societies" were plotting to implant Black people with vaccines in order to connect them to a master computer for "a plan of Satan". He was not the only NBA player to have flirted with the theory.

In 2022, Irving shared promoted Hebrews to Negroes, a book and film by Ronald Dalton Jr, which is widely regarded as anti-semitic and espouses the Black Hebrew Israelite theory. Dalton's work suggests that "using control of [the Black community's] money and the Mass Media, the European Jews gained control of our thinking". Irving was suspended by the NBA, and upon his return, he said he was "deeply sorry" while Black Hebrew Israelites rallied outside the arena in which the Nets play.

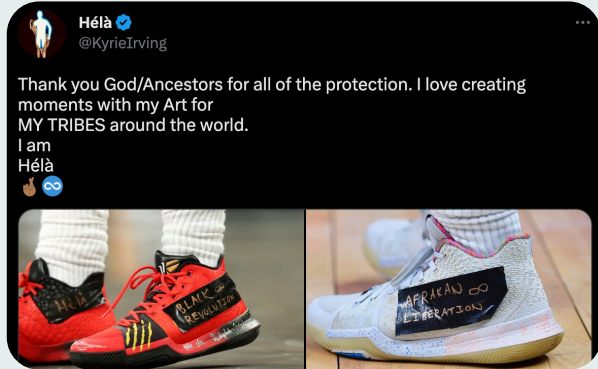
Insight.X Grid

Corporate Relationships	Values	Social Media History
Adverse Media Coverage	Political Views	Behaviour

Social Media



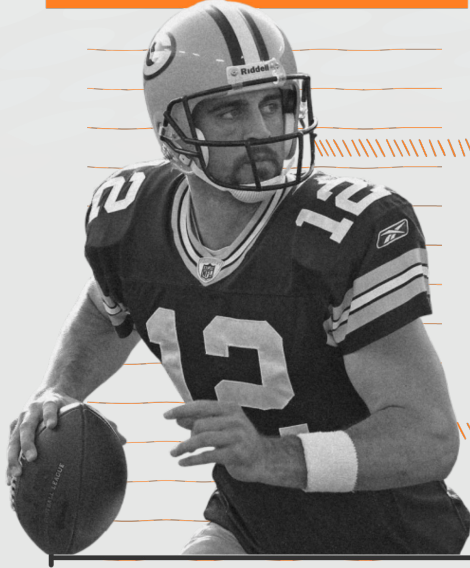
18.5 MILLION FOLLOWERS



Irving has begun elaborately covering up the Nike logo on his shoes since being dropped by the company

Credit: Twitter

AARON RODGERS



MAIN SPONSORSHIPS

ADIDAS 
 ZENITH WATCHES 
 PREVEA HEALTH 
 STATE FARM 

MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNT

TWITTER 

Insight.X Grid

Corporate Relationships	Values	Social Media History
Adverse Media Coverage	Political Views	Behaviour

Social Media



4.5
MILLION
FOLLOWERS

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic's effect on the sport, the NFL announced that it would not postpone games as a result of an outbreak among unvaccinated players or members of staff, forcing the teams to forfeit instead.

After Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers tested positive for the virus in August 2021, he responded to a question on whether or not he was vaccinated: "Yeah, I'm immunised." He later admitted he was not vaccinated and took responsibility for making a misleading statement. He also said he had been taking ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine to treat the infection which was never approved by major health bodies but widely used in the USA due to misinformation about the drugs.

He further cited fertility concerns, an allergy to an unspecified ingredient in the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines, and hearing of adverse reactions to the Johnson & Johnson vaccine as the reasons for not being vaccinated. While appearing on The Joe Rogan Podcast, he said that he had unsuccessfully petitioned the NFL to give him a medical waiver as he had received unspecified alternative Covid-19 treatments, giving the league "500 pages [of] case-reviewed studies around homoeopathy and immunisations". He went on to say that the league told him that it was impossible for a vaccinated person to pass on Covid, and when he questioned whether this was true, he was called a conspiracy theorist. He also said at the time that he felt he was "in the cross hairs of the woke mob" and that he feared being cancelled without being able to tell his side of the story.

Following the comments, Prevea Health, a healthcare company local to Green Bay, ended their nine-year partnership with Rodgers. State Farm, who Rodgers also has a long-standing relationship with, issued a statement saying it disagreed with his statements but respected his right to have an opinion.

Since the affair, Rodgers has endorsed other alternative medicines and therapies, and also admitted to using the hallucinogenic drug ayahuasca on a trip to Peru; however, the serious controversy around him had subsided. However, in November 2022, former teammate DeShone Kizer said that when he first met Rodgers, he asked him if he "believe[d] in 9/11". When Kizer said "why wouldn't I?" Rodgers reportedly responded: "You should read up on that." Kizer later said that the pair had also discussed "Inner Earth, moon landing, reptile people".

M.I.A.



MAIN SPONSORSHIPS

VERSACE 
H&M 
GQ 
VOGUE 

MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNT

FACEBOOK 

British rapper M.I.A. was dropped from the GQ Awards in 2022 after she equated misinformation spread by InfoWars presenter Alex Jones about the Sandy Hook massacre to what she deemed were "falsehoods" spread by celebrities who encouraged people to get vaccinated against Covid-19. Jones was forced to pay almost \$1 billion in damages to the families of the victims of the massacre for suggesting that the incident was a "false flag" operation perpetrated by "actors" on behalf of gun control activists and that "no one died".

M.I.A.'s track record on the Covid-19 vaccine is at best inconsistent. Following her comments about Jones, she said she is "not really" an anti-vaxxer. She claimed that three people she knew had died from the disease whilst three had died from the vaccine. She added that she felt that there was a "crackdown" on freedom.

However, in 2020 she said she would "choose death" over taking "the vaccine or chip". She later again claimed that she was not against vaccines, just against profiteering pharmaceutical companies and the "banks/ tech /hedge fund sector"; however, then appeared to suggest that Covid-19 was being caused by the rollout of 5G networks: "I think [5G] can confuse or slow the body down in healing process as body is learning to cope with new singles wavelengths [sic] frequency etc @ same time as Cov."

She later shared a conversation on her Instagram with Edward Enninful, the editor of British Vogue, who withdrew an offer of a feature with her because of her comments. Beneath the post, she denounced the anti-vaxxer label, suggesting it stokes division, and that all she had intended to do was generate healthy discussion. She then deleted the post.

Insight.X Grid

Corporate Relationships	Values	Social Media History
Adverse Media Coverage	Political Views	Behaviour

Social Media



**1.3
MILLION
FOLLOWERS**

TINX



MAIN SPONSORSHIPS

CHIPOTLE MEXICAN GRILL 
EREWHON MARKET 
ARMANI BEAUTY 
DIOR 

MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNT

TIKTOK 

Known as “TikTok’s big sister”, Tinx, aka Christina Najjar quickly ascended to social media stardom thanks to her viral pop-culture commentary posts, her ironic “rich mom starter pack” videos, and general dating and life advice. She has since launched her own podcast on SiriusXM’s Stars channel and collaborated with several brands creating new products including a signature salad bowl, smoothie and sippy cup.

In April 2022, Najjar came under fire when some old controversial tweets resurfaced and were shared by users online. Some of these posts were originally published between 2012 and 2014 with fatphobic and body-shaming comments towards celebrities including Kim Kardashian, Lindsay Lohan, and Tori Spelling.

Tinx quickly reacted to control the situation and published an apology on her Instagram account addressing the posts and commenting: “I was 21 and deeply, deeply insecure. I hated myself and had a bad relationship with my body.”

However, Reddit users started to highlight more recent controversial tweets dating back only to 2020, including her retweets of racist and misogynist posts, sharing of tweets from controversial personalities including Elon Musk and Piers Morgan, and her criticism towards the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The popular Substack newsletter ‘Scrolling with Sophie’ dived deeper into her past posts showing she had shared posts supporting conservative, right-wing views and politicians, including Donald Trump, Boris Johnson and Theresa May, before becoming famous and presenting herself in a more progressive and inclusive way to her audience.

Insight.X Grid

Corporate Relationships	Values	Social Media History
Adverse Media Coverage	Political Views	Behaviour

Social Media



**1.5
MILLION
FOLLOWERS**

CONCLUSIONS

As the above case studies have shown, the early identification of behavioural patterns, controversial values, or damaging social media posts can help a brand decide on the suitability of an ambassador and prepare a PR plan in case of future adverse reactions.

Taking the case of Ye, he did not become an anti-semitic overnight; he has a track record of controversial statements which predates his recent downfall. He suggested African-American slavery was “a choice” in 2008, that Harriet Tubman “never actually freed the slaves” in 2020 and that the #MeToo movement was “Nineteen Eighty-Four mind control” in 2021. Additionally, his recent flirtations with politics have seen him sport a MAGA hat and compare former President Donald Trump with MLK and Malcolm X. He has also twice announced that he would run for President, in 2020 and 2024, and also claimed Trump asked him to be his running mate in 2024. His interest in buying the right-leaning social media app Parler also showed his keenness in supporting and spreading conservative online discussions.

In the weeks following parting with adidas, Ye continued to make controversy, appearing on InfoWars, and making supportive statements about Hitler and Nazism. He was later suspended from Twitter after posting an image of a swastika.

The same appears to have happened with Kyrie Irving; ostensibly, the Flat Earth Theory is one of the more benign conspiracy theories. However, as with all such theories, it is adversarial between an “us”, who possesses forbidden knowledge and a “them” who is trying to suppress it. This “them” is regularly the Jews or the globalists or similar tropes. Irving’s espousal of the theory is an indicator that he was consuming alternative media which likely heightened his exposure to anti-semitic conspiracy theories. It is also true that once someone begins consuming this content, algorithms on social media websites will promote similar content which can quickly radicalise individuals.

Conversely, a positive track record of activism is becoming more important than a reputation of controversy and disruption. With 70 per cent of Gen Zers involved in a social or political cause, it follows that the individuals they listen to and aspire to emulate will need to exhibit similar characteristics. After adidas cut ties with Ye, it was suggested that the brand use Bad Bunny to fill the void

left by him. adidas had previously engaged with an initiative with the singer and Cheetos called the “Deja tu Huella” campaign, aimed at encouraging and rewarding members of the hispanic/latinx communities in the US and Puerto Rico to “leave their mark”.

Thorough due diligence and risk analysis have become a non-negotiable part of the vetting process of brand ambassadors. Not only can background and integrity checks uncover issues that do not align with a brand’s values, but they can also be an indicator of the potential for future issues. From our experience with major brands in sports, culture and business, this forewarning is often the element that protects a brand from reputational damage and ensures a successful endorsement.

To find out more about InsightX’s Ambassador Reports and see an example report, please get in touch at editors@insightxintel.com



OTHER RESOURCES YOU MIGHT FIND USEFUL:

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- [WALK THE WALK, TALK THE TALK: THE SPONSORS OF WOMEN'S SPORT](#)
- [A DUE DILIGENCE GUIDE TO GREENWASHING](#)
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Our industry-leading product provides enhanced and comprehensive intelligence undertaken by investigative journalists with years of experience in sport and a comprehensive understanding of gambling sponsorship.

At InsightX we provide specialist intelligence, due diligence and analysis to potential partnerships for sports organisations. Our reports focus on their backgrounds, business activities, ethics, human rights and environmental records, values, criminal or civil litigation histories, links with state or political actors and corporate associations.



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