

Return of Influence: The Revolutionary Power of Klout, Social Scoring, and Influence Marketing

Payal S. Kapoor

Mark W. Schaefer (2012). *Return of Influence: The Revolutionary Power of Klout, Social Scoring, and Influence Marketing*. McGraw-Hill (printed in the United States of America), Price: Rs. 1418, Pages 215, ISBN: 978-0-07.179109.0

A lot is being spoken and written about the power and reach of social media. Numerous books, articles and blogs have explored how social media is responsible for rapidly changing lifestyle of people and even various aspects of managing businesses. Despite the plethora of literature available, *Return of Influence: The Revolutionary Power of Klout, Social Scoring* by Mark Schaefer is the first book of its kind to bring forward a distinctive and an extremely critical aspect of social media: Influence. Millions of users are conversing with each other via social media platforms but how many of them have the true power recommendation to influence? Huge amounts of Word-of-Mouth (WOM) about products and services is generated via social media platforms and for the first time marketers truly have the means to capture, measure and even manipulating it to their advantage. Schaefer, in this book, calls this the rise of "Citizen Influencer". Citizen influencers are the everyday users of social media who possess both "offline" and well as "online" traits that make them powerful and influential on the social web. Different ways and means are being adopted by marketers to first identify these "citizen influencers" and second utilize them to meet their own marketing goals.

The book is divided into two parts with each containing six chapters: The roots of influence; Klout and social scoring revolution. First part, as the name suggests brings to fore traits that allow certain everyday ordinary user to be more influential than others on social media platform. The author kick starts the introduction of the concept of "citizen influencers" by sharing the example of the launch of Virgin America's route to Toronto. He explains how the markets with the help of social scoring application, Klout, identified 120 most influential users on social media for the given geography and the given

purpose. Once identified these 120 users became the epicentre of a programmed social media WOM campaign leading to a total of 7.4 million impressions by the end of the campaign. Author with this example explains that the true power of influence can arise through simple "conversations between real people", even if it is happening via social media. He highlights how marketers have begun to leverage it without spending millions of dollars in hiring celebrity spokespersons and executing multimedia campaigns. He then goes on to explain how selective users of social web become more influential than others and anchors his findings on seminal works that have been done in the fields of psychology and marketing to understand "offline" influence and WOM. The offline traits iterated by him, based on the work of Robert Cialdini, include: authority; likability; consistency and scarcity. With the help of anecdotes and further explanations he concludes that each of these offline traits is equally applicable and relevant on the online social media space as well, and further iterates two online traits: social proof and reciprocity. Social proofs, in the online context, are cues that add credibility and makes users more influential than others. These social proofs on the social media context include number of followers, friends, retweets, likes and favourites. He even goes to extend of saying that sometimes these social proofs, "badges of influence", may be more influential than authority derived from true knowledge and expertise. Finally he writes a full chapter on how good content is critical for deriving power and influence. In the last chapter of part one , the author highlights traditional examples of age old brand like 3M , Mary Kay Ash etc. to highlight how WOM and influence has played their role in the history of brand building.

The second part of the book focuses on the business of social scoring and how an application called Klout based on a complicated algorithm, developed by Joe Fernandez, has done the impossible: giving an influence score to every individual active on social media. The author traces the history of how the organisation came into being and even reveals three key aspects of a user's social web behaviour on which the algorithm is based: users true reach; amplification probability; network influence. He highlights, through examples of real brands where social scores derived from Klout and other similar applications have helped marketers execute and monitor an "administered WOM" campaign. However, he also candidly explores the limitations of the application. Further it brings to fore the criticisms the application has received. In the concluding chapters the author even suggests ways in which an individual user can actually increase his or her score by beating the system. He also brings forward views of marketers, consultants and even a few high scoring "citizen influencers" on the future of social scoring

Being the first book of its kind to talk about influence on the social web, it makes the book inherently useful. This book is targeted at practitioners, academicians, researchers and even individual aficionados of social media who are curious to increase their social score. While part one of the book, anchored quite a bit on traditional literature of the subject, is more valuable and substantial for the understanding of this unique trend of "citizen influencers", part two was very practitioner focused. Only one of the chapter dedicated towards writing good content on the social web was a bit monotonous and unnecessarily lengthy, but on the whole an interesting and enriching book for people who are interested in having a better understanding of the social web.

Payal S. Kapoor is a third year doctoral student at Indian Institute of Management Indore. Her area of research is Marketing.