

VOGUE

INDIA

YOUNG &
RESTLESS

ANANYA BIRLA

TALKS MUSIC, MICROFINANCE
AND MENTAL HEALTH



Using their influence

Their feed posts are fodder for cultural change and their captions ignite important conversations. These content creators use their social media as a mouthpiece for acceptance, awareness and activism, one cleverly crafted hashtag at a time



 @LIFESFORLIVING

AFSHAN NASSERI

The multicultural blogger and entrepreneur's feed spotlights the craft and culture of Lucknow

Influencer and entrepreneur Afshan Nasser straddles varied worlds: she was born in Montreal to an Indian mother and an Iranian father, raised in suburban Massachusetts, and is now a master's student in London. Her Instagram followers know her as @lifesforliving, and in between posts that encompass everything from her academic journey and her entrepreneurial ventures to her makeup routine, they've become accustomed to beautifully styled photographs that shed light on something very close to her heart: Lucknowi culture.

"My passion for Lucknow comes from the fact that I felt tasked by my grandfather to show the world the rich culture and history of Lucknow beyond the piling billboards, beyond the layer of dirt, beyond the years of corruption and ageing structures," she says. "He worked for the Canadian government and had moved there in the 1960s, but even then, he loved nothing like he loved Lucknow."

For Nasser, frequent returns to the City of Nawabs included volunteer work with her family's nonprofit, the Lucknow Project, as well as dance classes, sewing lessons and immersions in Lucknowi history. Her devotion to Lucknow has become a thread that weaves together much of her content—you'll often scroll upon her sharing her reflections on the significance of the graceful *adaab* gesture, thoughts on the Hindi-Urdu fusion dialect of Hindustani, virtual tours through the gullies of Lucknow and, of course, given her love for Indo-Western fashion, primers on the city's beautiful chikankari embroidery.

"I recently got very into textiles, especially chikankari," she says. "One of my family friends is super talented and needed some help with her business, so I thought I could help—together we opened Shop Awadh, an exclusive brand with real Lucknowi embroideries and styles, made by real Lucknowi artisans. I love that we're able to support people who carry this art."

— Sarah Khan

@LANAPATELXOXO



LANA PATEL

At the age of three, Lana Patel knew she was a girl despite being assigned male at birth

Growing up with parents of Afro-Indo Caribbean descent in Queens, New York City, introduced her to an abundance of cultural diversity. Yet unfortunately, she struggled with her identity due to her family's traditional values. However, Patel didn't let the disapproval shape her. Instead, she used it to fuel her creative and artistic endeavours.

As a trans woman of colour, activism has naturally become a large part of her life. Back in 2018, she became a host on the YouTube show *Girls Like Us*, focusing on telling the stories of trans women from various backgrounds. Additionally, she created The South Asian Exchange, a platform helping connect South Asian people within the LGBTQ+ community.

Using her online platform with over 24K followers, she showcases Black joy and along the way uplifts trans women of colour. Patel's push to create safe spaces for trans women is what helped her receive an award of recognition from US House Of Representatives member Gil Cisneros.

Now, as she recently turned 30, she reflects on what she would tell her younger self: "I would tell her that there's so much to learn, but to love herself first and find value in herself, which would have changed my life for the better." — Jada Jackson

NEERAJ JAIN (AFHSAN)

@EVERYDAY.LIKE.THIS



SOPHIA CHOWDHURY

The creator of @Everyday.Like.This takes to her platform to talk skin, style and owning her heritage

"My name is Sophia Chowdhury. I'm an Australian-born, Bengali digital marketer and stylist based in Melbourne. I started my blog, Everyday Like This, while studying my digital media and marketing degree as an outlet for fashion, as I never saw anyone who looked like me or dressed like me in Australian media.

"I grew up very shy—clothing was how I communicated. That's the thing I love about fashion, the way it can start a conversation and how it can say so much about you without having to say a word.

"The first photo I took was very special to me. I grew up having vitiligo and have always had a constant battle with it. I used to get my vitiligo spots edited out of my shoots and if it was on a big shoot, the teams would always retouch them further, implicating that it wasn't acceptable.

"There were so many times I nearly stopped Everyday Like This as my vitiligo spread. Fashion became my therapy in accepting this autoimmune disease. I also had some amazing people around me who helped me realise the beauty of my condition. This photo always gets me emotional because it sums up my journey and how powerful you can feel when you stop listening to what others tell you is beautiful." — *Vogue Australia*, August 2020 >



@ADITIMAYER

ADITI MAYER

Documentary photographer, sustainability activist and digital influencer Mayer tells us how these diverse mediums work together for her larger purpose

"Whether journalism, blogging, or influencing, I've always seen my role as a storyteller who helps synthesise and deliver knowledge.

My work in each domain informs one another; the core of my work will always explore the intersections of social and environmental justice as seen through the fashion industry. So for instance, my work as a sustainable fashion blogger equips me to speak on topics of sustainability from a personalised perspective. However, as a journalist, I'm able to de-centre myself and look at issues from a systemic perspective.

"It's hard not to feel pigeonholed in an age where your practice and personhood can so easily be reduced to an Instagram bio. My genesis in the world of sustainability and activism began through fashion. In 2014, I learned about the Rana Plaza Factory collapse. No longer was fashion just about a pretty dress. It was about the politics of labour and the industry's disproportionate burden upon communities of colour worldwide. Sustainability became a means for decolonisation.

"We need to ask, 'How can we reclaim the idea of an influencer and subvert it to influence the things that really matter?' I think it's important that work doesn't start and end on Instagram. So whether that's grassroots activism, media making, policy, business—social media is a bridge to disseminate knowledge and help reimagine a different world." — *Akanksha Kamath* ■

KIRAN MAYER (ADITI)