

### The influence of non-experts and amateur opinion

adapted from an article by Ashley Morgan

- 1 The internet today is a source of seemingly endless amounts of easily digestible material. Countless people contribute to its 'factual' information, and promote their own opinions as facts too. Through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, people – particularly celebrities – are also able to promote products and ideas in a much more immediate and visual way. In addition, they can frame or reinvent themselves as experts in completely different areas than the ones they gained fame in. They have broken away from the activities that made them famous – acting, singing, or sport – and reinvented themselves as business people. They are now more than just promoters of certain products. They are the 'go to' for fashionable lifestyles.
- 2 That celebrities are moving into business is not such a surprise. Yet, the way in which they adopt expertise in matters on which they have no training is a new twist in the rise of the amateur. When Victoria Beckham, former member of pop group the Spice Girls, first launched her clothing line in 2008, fashion editors were ready to be sceptical, but influential magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* were impressed. Despite no apparent training in design – her initial 'expertise' in this matter came from her personal interest in clothing and being photographed wearing fashionable clothes – Beckham recently celebrated a decade as a fashion designer.
- 3 8, actress Gwyneth Paltrow is now a lifestyle and 'health' guru and her 'modern lifestyle brand' GOOP sells face-creams and other products under the umbrella of health and beauty. Despite the chorus of criticism against Paltrow and GOOP's 'pseudo-science', the company is now reportedly worth US\$250m.
- 4 These new experts don't even have to be famous for another reason to demonstrate expertise. Ella Mills, for example, is a UK blogger who, through documenting her illness and experimenting with food, became a staunch advocate of 'clean eating'. This helped launch her 'natural and honest' food brand, Deliciously Ella, without any experience as a dietitian.



- 5 While social media can be considered a force for good in education, the dominance of a 'point of view approach' in this sphere – rather than true expertise – 10 expert knowledge itself, and the idea that you spend time to train and gain qualifications in a chosen field before claiming expertise. Besides, as more people turn to the internet and social media for knowledge of all kinds, it might arguably be much harder to tell 'point of view approach' from empirical and factual research, as they now both appear in the same place. A recent example of this is the wider proliferation of pseudo-science. Pseudo-science itself is based on amateur opinions, and the issue with this is that social media becomes the supreme platform for perpetuating it.
  
- 6 As social media has proved that people can be successful with no obvious qualifications or training, and viewpoints that are presented increasingly confirm people's perspectives, scientific expertise might arguably be eroded. While many people have benefitted financially and in terms of social status, the knowledge that has emerged from social media is increasingly narrow and difficult to gauge.

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