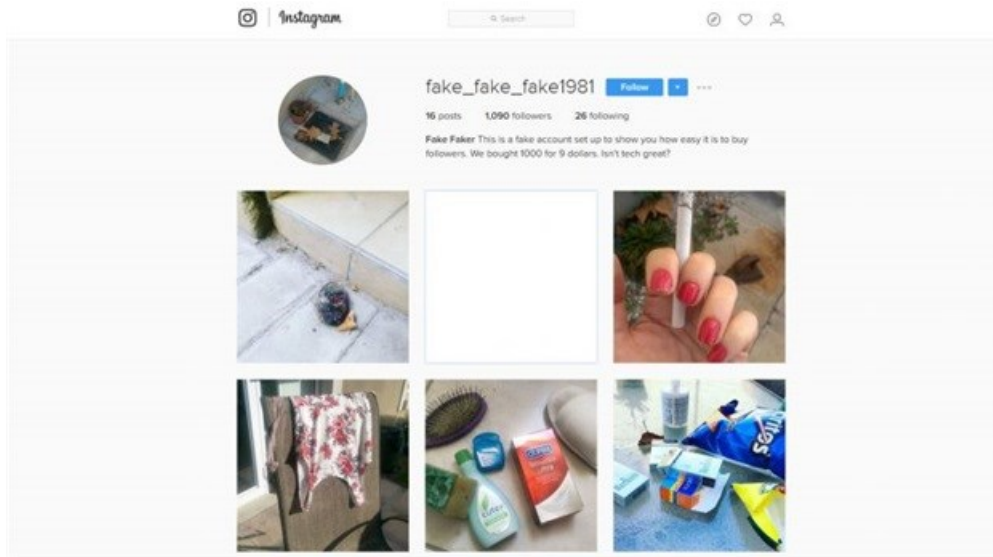


Fake followers are a massive problem, as SA duo proves

By [Hadlee Simons](#)

3 Apr 2017

It's almost become an unspoken fact over the years that social media has a major problem with fake followers. Now, two writers have brought the problem into the open by running a dummy Instagram account and buying fake followers in the process.



Original image © — [Memeburn](#)

[Lipgloss is My Life](#) editor Leigh van den Berg and Candice-Lee Kannemeyer, the editor of [In My Bag](#), created the [Instagram account](#) to find out how easy it was to buy followers in the first place.

“ So [@CandiceLeeKan](#) and I have just done an experiment. We set up a crappy instagram account in a bid to see how easy it was to buy followers.— Leigh van den Berg ([@lipglossgirl](#)) [March 29, 2017](#) ”

The duo also made it very obvious that their account was for nefarious purposes, calling it fake_fake_fake1981 and declaring that it was a fake account in the profile. If that wasn't enough, the writers were uploading low-quality snaps as well, such as a cooler box and a bare foot.

They bought 1000 followers for US\$9, following that up by purchasing 100 likes from a service for US\$3. Of course, they used all the likes on a photo of a white block.

“ Ooh! [@CandiceLeeKan](#) and I have just solved the lack of likes issue on our fake IG account 💎💎 [pic.twitter.com/cKKvYtqCkb](#)— Leigh van den Berg ([@lipglossgirl](#)) [March 29, 2017](#) ”

In an email interview with Memeburn, Van den Berg explained the reasoning behind the fake account.

“We work with a lot of brands and have recently been shocked by the amount that are now working with ‘influencers’ who’ve clearly bought their following. Having to sit at launches with Insta-fakers and watching brands lavish expensive campaigns on them has become seriously grating,” van den Berg wrote.

“We know how hard it is to work for years to garner a genuine audience and watching morons who buy it and then blacken the words ‘influencer’ and ‘blogger’ with their resultant rubbish ‘engagement’ is nothing less than maddening.”

The duo told Memeburn that buying followers is as easy as Googling ‘buy Instagram followers’, then paying via your credit card.

Instagram isn’t the only offender though, with Kannemeyer saying that the practice extended to the likes of Snapchat as well.

The prevalence of fake followers in SA?

Just how bad is the phenomenon in South Africa though?

“I’ll go out on a limb here and say that 80% of all South African IG ‘super stars’ with more than 100,000 followers are faking it. Not all. But 80% of them,” Van den Berg reckons.

“Our PR bestie who we won’t name emailed one of our suspected fakers this morning (30 March) asking for her rate card. The faker’s worked with several retail chains that should know better and has charged them R20 000 for a ‘monthly online presence’ but she won’t hand over her blog’s stats. Sadly, this isn’t a unique situation in the least,” she added.

For the uninitiated, why should users with fake followers be cause for alarm?

“For one, their ‘influence’ isn’t real. Any message they’re relaying is going out to a mix of dead/abandoned accounts and bots who have zero interest in what they have to say. Even likes, video views and comments can be bought and its not expensive either. It’s like buying an ad in a magazine that tells you it’s got millions of subscribers but in reality they’re only printing ten copies,” van den Berg answered.

Fake followers have become a massive issue in South Africa, Kannemeyer and Van den Berg said

“In short, it’s a waste of ad spend that could go to someone sparking genuine engagement with an authentic targeted audience that trusts their opinions. The whole movement towards consumers taking notes from influencers (as opposed to things like magazines) is the personal element and the notion that you’re hearing from an individual that you assume has integrity.”

Are the likes of Instagram and Twitter doing all they can to fight the trend, then? Kannemeyer isn’t so sure...

“Interestingly enough, if you read Instagram’s [good user policy](#), buying followers is NOT ILLEGAL (sic), yet they both state it’s against their terms of good use policy. Why they allow it, I don’t know.”

The duo said they’re in the process of creating a workshop so brands/people can identify users with fake followers.

ABOUT HADLEE SIMONS

Hadlee Simons is an editor at Menemburn. Terrible puns make Hadlee difficult to work with, but he brings almost seven years of tech journalism experience to the table. When he's not at work or watching motorsport, he's in the foetal position on a jiu jitsu mat.

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