



Strategic Mechanisms of Influence Marketing: Implications for Consumer Decision-Making and Market Dynamics

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Abstract

This study analyzes influencer marketing as a strategic mechanism within the Marketing 5.0 paradigm, examining its implications for consumer decision-making and market dynamics in digital environments. The purpose of the article is to clarify how influencer credibility, engagement, and platform-specific characteristics contribute to value creation beyond mere brand visibility. The study adopts a conceptual research design based on a systematic integrative literature review of academic and industry sources published between 2019 and 2025. The analysis highlights the role of parasocial interaction and perceived authenticity in shaping consumer trust and purchase intention, while also comparing the strategic effectiveness of different influencer typologies. The findings indicate that nano and micro-influencers tend to generate higher engagement and superior return on investment compared to larger influencers, particularly when aligned with appropriate platform strategies. The study concludes that influencer marketing performance should be evaluated through ROI-oriented attribution models and integrated into the broader marketing mix to enhance commercial value and brand safety.

Keywords: Parasocial interaction; Consumer trust; Engagement performance; Influencer credibility; Marketing performance measurement; Brand authenticity

1. Introduction

In recent years, Influencer Marketing has evolved from a peripheral communication tactic into a central pillar of digital strategy for brands operating in increasingly competitive and technology-driven environments. As consumers shift their attention from traditional media to social platforms, the role of digital creators has expanded, positioning influencers as key intermediaries between brands and audiences. This

transition has been accelerated by the rise of Marketing 5.0, which combines data-driven tools with human-centric communication, enabling highly personalized and authentic interactions.

At the same time, the digital landscape has become more complex, shaped by rapid changes in content formats, audience behavior, and regulatory demands. Short-form video, social commerce, and algorithmic recommendation systems now dictate how users discover information and make purchase decisions. In this context, influencers function not only as content producers but also as trust validators, capable of shaping consumer perceptions and reducing uncertainty in the decision-making process.

Given this scenario, understanding the mechanisms that sustain influencer credibility, audience identification, engagement dynamics, and overall impact on purchase intention is essential for evaluating the strategic potential of influencer marketing. This introduction provides the foundation for the theoretical framework that follows, offering a structured lens through which to analyze the evolution of digital marketing, the role of social media platforms, influencer typologies, and the metrics that guide performance evaluation in 2025.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual research design grounded in a systematic integrative literature review. The objective is not to generate primary empirical data, but to synthesize and structure existing academic and industry knowledge in order to develop an analytical understanding of the strategic mechanisms that underpin influencer marketing within the Marketing 5.0 paradigm.

Conceptual research is particularly appropriate in rapidly evolving digital domains, where theoretical consolidation is required to organize fragmented knowledge, clarify constructs, and establish integrative analytical frameworks. Influencer marketing represents such a domain, characterized by continuous technological change, platform evolution, and shifting consumer behavior patterns. Therefore, a theory-building and synthesis-oriented approach is methodologically suitable.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Digital marketing evolution

Understanding contemporary digital marketing requires an analysis of the evolution of the marketing concept itself, which has transitioned from a production-centered approach to an ecosystem focused on human experience and technology. According to academic literature, widely supported by the theories of Philip Kotler, this evolution is divided into five stages that reflect global economic and social development. Initially, Marketing 1.0 (The Product Era) focused exclusively on functional development and mass production, where communication was unidirectional and ignored the emotional needs of consumers, as demand largely exceeded supply (Kotler et al., 2021). With increased competition, Marketing 2.0 (The

Consumer Era) emerged, shifting the focus to customer satisfaction and retention through market segmentation, although interaction remained mostly passive (Voitto, 2025).

The shift towards a more humanistic approach occurred with Marketing 3.0 (The Values Era), where consumers ceased to be seen merely as buyers and began to be treated as whole human beings with minds, hearts, and spirits. In this phase, brands began to adopt missions and values aligned with social and environmental concerns, seeking not only to sell but to make the world a better place (Grupo Adapta, 2019). This paradigm shift was driven by the evolution of technological infrastructure, specifically the transition from Web 1.0 (static and read-only) to Web 2.0 (social and participatory). The rise of social networks transformed the user from a mere consumer into a content producer (prosumer), democratizing influence and allowing peer opinion to carry as much weight as corporate communication (HubSpot, 2022).

Currently, we are experiencing the convergence of these trends in Marketing 4.0 and Marketing 5.0. Marketing 4.0 marked the definitive digital transition, where the consumer journey became omnichannel, blurring the boundaries between physical and online interactions and guiding the customer from brand awareness to advocacy (MindMiners, 2022). More recently, Marketing 5.0 is defined by the application of technologies that mimic human behavior such as Artificial Intelligence and natural language processing to create, communicate, and deliver value at scale. This current stage seeks to use technology to enhance human capacity, allowing for massive personalization without losing the ethical and emotional focus achieved in previous phases (International Journal of Law Management & Humanities, 2021).

3.2. Dynamics of Consumer Attention

In the context of influence marketing, consumer attention has become a scarce and highly contested resource, shaped by the saturation of digital platforms and the continuous exposure to branded content. Influencer marketing operates within this competitive attention economy by leveraging social media creators as intermediaries capable of capturing, sustaining, and directing consumer focus throughout the consumer decision-making process (Durmishi & Durmishi, 2024).

Influencers play a central role in attracting consumer attention by blending promotional messages with personal narratives, lifestyle content, and perceived authenticity. Unlike traditional advertising, which often triggers resistance or avoidance, influencer-generated content is embedded within everyday social media interactions. This integration allows branded messages to bypass consumers' cognitive defenses, increasing initial attention and enhancing the likelihood of information processing related to products or brands (Durmishi & Durmishi, 2024).

The dynamics of consumer attention are further influenced by the credibility and expertise attributed to influencers. The authors emphasize that trust in influencers significantly determines the extent to which consumers allocate attention to

sponsored content. When influencers are perceived as authentic and knowledgeable, consumers demonstrate greater attentional engagement, even in highly saturated digital environments. This sustained attention supports deeper cognitive processing, facilitating the transition from awareness to evaluation and purchase intention (Durmishi & Durmishi, 2024).

Additionally, the interactive features of social media platforms intensify attention dynamics by promoting continuous engagement. Elements such as likes, comments, and shares extend the duration of consumer attention and reinforce the persuasive impact of influencer content. Durmishi and Durmishi (2024) argue that these interactions strengthen emotional bonds between consumers and influencers, anchoring attention at both cognitive and affective levels. As a result, consumers become more receptive to brand-related messages embedded within influencer narratives.

From a broader market perspective, the ability to capture consumer attention through influencer marketing reshapes competitive dynamics. Brands that collaborate with influencers capable of sustaining audience attention benefit from increased visibility and accelerated message diffusion. Consequently, attention becomes a strategic resource that influences consumer preferences and contributes to market differentiation, favoring brands that effectively integrate influencer-driven communication strategies (Durmishi & Durmishi, 2024).

3.3. Decision-making Process of Generation Z

Generation Z's decision-making process is deeply influenced by their nature as digital natives, which leads them to primarily use social media to gather information and validate products. According to Vaidya et al. (2024), digital influencers (SMIs) play a crucial role as information filters, with the final purchase intention being shaped by the assessment of the source's credibility and the perceived value of the message. At this evaluation stage, the influencer's expertise and reliability are key to mitigating the perceived risk and uncertainty associated with consumption.

In addition to trust in the source, the value of the content, which integrates the dimensions of informativeness and entertainment, is fundamental to generating a positive attitude towards the brand. According to Vaidya et al. (2024), purchase intention arises when consumers perceive that the content is both useful and rewarding, facilitating the transition from mere exposure to the purchase decision. This choice mechanism is further intensified by psychological bonds, such as parasocial interaction and social identification, which allow promotional communications to be processed as trusted advice between peers.

It is concluded that trust acts as the critical mediator in the decision-making flow of this demographic group, transforming the emotional relationship with the influencer into conscious and effective consumer behaviour. Vaidya et al. (2024) reinforce that effectiveness.

3.4. Social media marketing

While digital marketing provides the technological infrastructure, Social Media Marketing (SMM) constitutes the interactional layer where brands and consumers coexist, defining itself not merely as the promotion of products, but as a strategic process of value creation and exchange within a collaborative environment. Current literature emphasizes that the central objective of SMM has shifted from simple unilateral exposure (broadcasting) to dialogue and community building, where bidirectional interactivity is assumed to be the fundamental mediating variable for brand loyalty (RSIS International, 2025; Taylor & Francis, 2025). The relevance of this strategy in 2025 is dictated by its ubiquity: according to the most recent data from the Digital 2025 Global Overview Report, there are currently 5.66 billion active user identities on social media, representing approximately 70% of the world's population, transforming these platforms into the primary point of contact between companies and the public (Datareportal, 2025).

This evolution of the digital social ecosystem is further characterized by a significant shift in success indicators and consumption behavior. Whereas in the previous decade the focus lay on accumulating followers so-called "vanity metrics" the current market operates within the "attention economy," where engagement and retention are the priority currencies (GWI, 2025). In this context, the short-form video format, popularized by TikTok and Instagram Reels, dominates content consumption, requiring brands to produce fast-paced and visually stimulating narratives to capture user attention within the first few seconds (Taboola, 2025). Furthermore, a dissolution of the boundaries between "socializing" and "buying" is observed through the phenomenon of Social Commerce. Social networks have ceased to be merely discovery channels to become primary search engines for new generations and direct sales platforms, where digital influence and user-generated content act as essential trust validators to reduce friction in the purchasing decision (Sprinklr, 2025; IJFMR, 2025).

3.5. Concept of influencer marketing

The concept of Influencer Marketing transcends the simple hiring of public figures for product promotion, being defined in contemporary literature as a hybrid strategy that identifies and activates individuals capable of affecting the purchasing decisions of a specific segment through the creation of authentic content. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsement, which relies on distant aspiration, influencer marketing is grounded in the theories of "Source Credibility" and "Parasocial Interaction," where followers develop an illusion of intimacy and friendship with the content creator, perceiving their recommendations as genuine advice from a peer (word-of-mouth) rather than intrusive advertising (Karhawi, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). In 2025, this concept has evolved to become a central pillar of the marketing mix, where the influencer acts simultaneously as a content producer, media distributor, and trust validator, allowing brands to humanize their communication and overcome

consumers' increasing blindness and skepticism toward institutional digital advertising (Kotler et al., 2021; Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025).

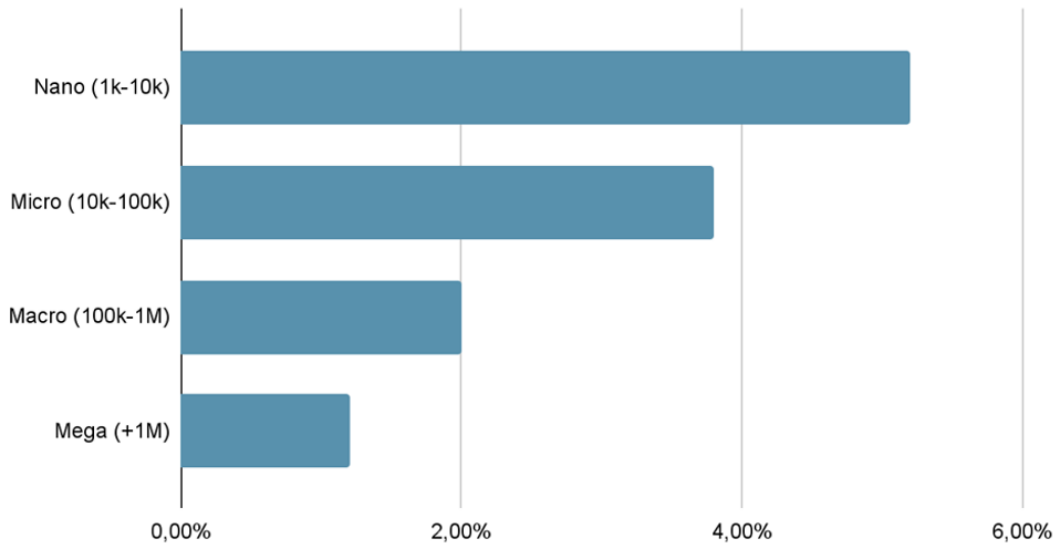
3.6. Digital influencer typologies

Academic and professional literature categorizes digital influencers according to two main dimensions: the quantitative dimension (number of followers and reach) and the qualitative dimension (origin of fame and nature of influence).

3.6.1. Mega, macro, micro, and nano influencers

Classification by "tiers" is the industry norm for market segmentation, based on audience volume. Although exact boundaries may fluctuate depending on the platform, the consensus in 2025 establishes four main categories, characterized by an inverse relationship between follower count and engagement rate (Graph 1).

Graph 1 - Paradox of Influence



Nano-influencers (1,000 to 10,000 followers): Considered the base of the pyramid, these are "ordinary people" with local influence or influence within hyper-specific niches. They present the highest interaction rates in the market (often exceeding 5%), as their audience is composed mostly of friends, family, and real acquaintances, granting them unmatched authenticity (IJFMR, 2025; Socially Powerful, 2025).

Micro-influencers (10,000 to 100,000 followers): Represent the "sweet spot" for most brands. They maintain a close relationship with their audience, being perceived as experts in specific topics (e.g., beauty, fitness, technology), but already possess a professional content creation structure. They typically generate the highest Return on Investment (ROI) due to the balance between cost and conversion (Sprout Social, 2025).

Macro-influencers (100,000 to 1 million followers): These are full-time professional content creators (e.g., YouTubers, Streamers). Their reach is vast, allowing for rapid generation of Brand Awareness, although the engagement rate tends to drop to values between 1% and 3% as the audience becomes more heterogeneous (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025).

Mega-influencers (+1 million followers): Include celebrities and internet-native stars who have achieved global fame. They are primarily used for massive reach campaigns and brand positioning, although the acquisition cost and emotional "distance" from the public make direct sales conversion more difficult compared to lower tiers (HypeAuditor, 2025).

3.6.2. Celebrity influencers vs. "common" influencers

Beyond numbers, it is crucial to distinguish the genesis of influence. The literature separates influencers into two ontological categories:

Traditional Celebrities: Their fame precedes their digital presence (actors, athletes, musicians). Their influence is based on aspiration and admiration of talent or social status. Social networks function for them as an amplification channel for existing offline fame (Karhawi, 2020).

Native Digital Influencers ("Common"): Individuals who built their reputation entirely online, starting from anonymity. Their influence is based on identification and "constructed intimacy." By sharing their routines, flaws, and private lives, they create stronger parasocial relationships, where the follower sees the influencer as "one of us" who achieved success, generating superior levels of trust in product recommendations (Lou & Yuan, 2019; IJFMR, 2025).

3.7. Influencer marketing platforms

Platform selection is not merely a technological choice, but a strategic decision that defines the message format, the audience demographic profile, and the marketing funnel objective (Awareness vs. Conversion). In 2025, the ecosystem is dominated by an "influence triad" Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube where each channel plays a distinct role in the consumer journey (Sprout Social, 2025).

3.7.1. Instagram

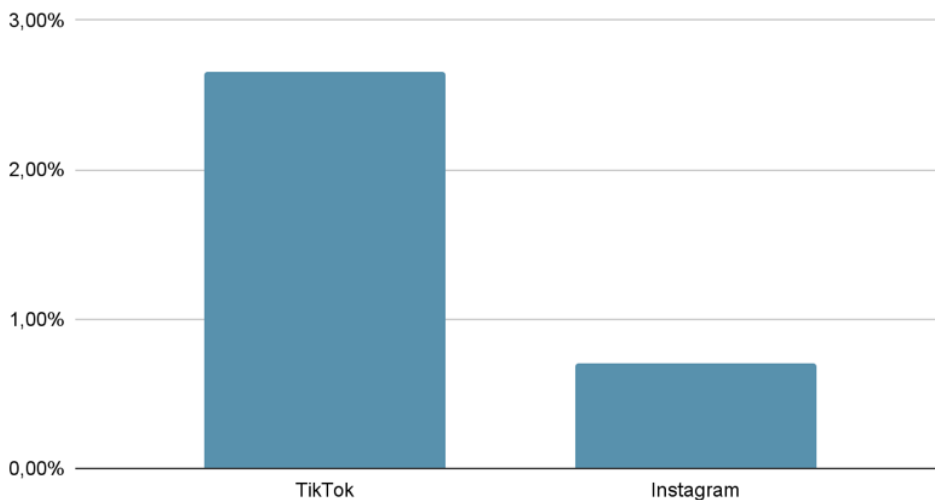
Often described as the "digital storefront," Instagram remains the dominant platform for the professionalization of influencer marketing. According to the State of Influencer Marketing 2025 report, this network concentrates 22.7% of all global sponsored content, surpassing its competitors in direct investment volume (HypeAuditor, 2025), as shown on Graph 2. Its strength lies in the versatility of its formats: while Reels compete with TikTok in discovering new audiences (top of the funnel), Stories foster daily loyalty and direct interaction with the community based on the social graph (who we follow). Furthermore, Instagram has consolidated itself as the platform of choice for Social Commerce, offering robust conversion tools

("Instagram Shopping") that allow influencers to transform aesthetic inspiration into immediate sales, especially in the fashion, beauty, and lifestyle sectors (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025).

3.7.2. TikTok

TikTok revolutionized the influence paradigm by transitioning from the "Social Graph" (connections with friends) to the "Interest Graph" (content recommended by algorithm). This shift allowed for a democratization of visibility, where creators with few followers can reach millions of views if the content is relevant, making it the most effective channel for Brand Awareness and virality (IJFMR, 2025). In 2025, TikTok stands out for presenting the highest engagement rates in the market (average of 2.65% vs. 0.70% for Instagram), as shown on Graph 2, driven by a culture of "unfiltered" authenticity that resonates particularly with Gen Z (HypeAuditor, 2025). It is also the birthplace of critical consumption trends, such as #DeInfluencing, forcing brands to adopt a more transparent and less corporate posture in their partnerships (Sprout Social, 2025).

Graph 2. Tiktok vs Instagram



3.7.3. YouTube

While TikTok and Instagram dominate rapid and ephemeral consumption, YouTube positions itself as the platform of depth and trust. It functions as a video search engine, where content is "evergreen," remaining searchable and relevant months or years after publication. It is the preferred channel for the purchase consideration phase, especially for complex or high-value products (technology, finance), as it allows for detailed analyses (reviews), tutorials, and long-form vlogs that build an authority that short videos cannot replicate (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025). The YouTube Shorts format has recently complemented this offering, allowing hybrid creators to capture

audiences through short videos and redirect them to long-form content with higher added value (GWI, 2025).

3.8. Ethics and legislation: transparency and #Pub

As influencer marketing has matured from a "hobby economy" to a multi-billion dollar industry, global legal and ethical scrutiny has intensified, with regulators and literature converging on the premise that the blurring of lines between editorial (organic) content and commercial content constitutes a deceptive practice that undermines consumer trust and distorts fair competition. In the European Union, the full implementation of the Digital Services Act (DSA) in 2024 marked a paradigm shift by legally classifying influencers who engage in regular commercial activity as "Traders," thereby equating them to any other business and obliging them to provide complete legal information and ensure that advertising content is immediately recognizable (European Commission, 2024). In the specific context of Portugal, regulation is led by the Directorate-General for Consumer Protection (DGC), whose Guide to Good Practices establishes that commercial relationships must be identified in an "ostensive and unequivocal" manner at the beginning of the post or description, explicitly discouraging the use of ambiguous hashtags or English terms such as #Ad or #Sponsored in favor of Portuguese identifiers like #Pub, #Publicidade, #Patrocínio (Sponsorship), or #ParceriaRemunerada (Paid Partnership) (DGC, 2024). This regulatory framework also introduces the concept of "Joint Liability," meaning that advertiser brands can be held legally responsible for infractions committed by the influencers they hire, making strict ethical compliance a fundamental pillar of Brand Safety strategies in 2025 (ARP, 2023; DGC, 2024).

4. Consumer behavior and influence mechanisms

4.1. Influencer credibility

Digital influencer credibility constitutes the fundamental mediating mechanism for consumer acceptance of advertising messages. According to the model by Lou and Yuan (2019), this construct is not unitary but rather three-dimensional, integrating expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Expertise reflects the influencer's technical mastery over a specific niche, validating the information and reducing perceived purchase risk. Simultaneously, trustworthiness ensures that the recommendation is interpreted as genuine peer advice rather than mere paid advertising, increasing trust in the content.

Unlike traditional celebrities, who are often perceived as contractual figures, social media influencers are viewed as authentic and relatable experts who leverage their status to create trusted recommendations. This perception is increasingly driven by the convenience of the content, which allows users to connect quickly and effortlessly, thereby fostering a stronger connection with brands. As Ilieva et al. (2024) argue, this convenience is a primary determinant of positive attitudes toward influencers, as modern consumers prioritize user-centric interfaces and easy access to information.

However, the effectiveness of this authority is not solely dependent on audience size. Recent findings by Ilieva et al. (2024) suggest that while interactivity (such as likes and comments) is a standard part of the social media experience, it may not significantly impact the attitudes of digitally native generations who take such engagement for granted. Furthermore, the relationship between credibility and attitude is moderated by factors such as education; more educated individuals may be more skeptical of influencer claims, relying less on perceived credibility when forming their attitudes. Thus, credibility is sustained by a voice that balances professional expertise with an accessible posture that resonates with the specific demographic preferences of the target audience.

4.2. Consumer identification with the influencer

Consumer identification with the digital influencer is a central psychological process that occurs when the follower perceives an alignment between their own identity and the content creator's public persona. Lou and Yuan (2019) explain that this phenomenon is often rooted in homophily, defined as the tendency of individuals to associate with and trust people they consider similar to themselves in terms of values, interests, lifestyle, or demographic characteristics. This perceived similarity is the primary driver for the development of parasocial interactions, where the follower cultivates a sense of intimacy and unilateral friendship with the influencer.

The strength of this identification is vital for mitigating consumer resistance, as followers often associate themselves with influencers whose values, lifestyles, or preferences align with their own. According to Ilieva et al. (2024), influencers leverage their status to create authentic and relatable content that fosters emotional relationships and stronger connections with the audience. This bond ensures that influencers are viewed as credible sources of information, making their endorsements feel like genuine recommendations rather than corporate advertisements. Consequently, customers benefit from tailored content that aligns with their interests, which can significantly affect their subsequent purchase decisions.

This identification process acts as a predictor of positive brand attitude, although its conversion into actual behavior is subject to modern social dynamics. Ilieva et al. (2024) note that the efficiency of an influencer is not solely dependent on audience size but also on maintaining perceived authenticity through transparency and consistent engagement. They warn that excessive or intrusive interactivity can actually lead to decreased favorability and trust, potentially due to perceptions of over-promotion or a lack of sincerity. Furthermore, in specific cultural contexts characterized by inherent skepticism, the identification process may be challenged by a general mistrust of the unknown, requiring influencers to prioritize long-term credibility over simple popularity.

4.3. Impact of influencer marketing on purchase intention

Purchase intention is the behavioral indicator that measures the probability of a consumer acquiring a product after being exposed to sponsored content. Lou and Yuan (2019) argue that this impact is mediated by the trust generated in both the content and the brand, fueled by the message's informative value (utility) and entertainment value. Compared to traditional marketing channels, influencer recommendations are now recognized as transformative tools for brand positioning. According to Ilieva et al. (2024), customers benefit from content that is more tailored and engaging, fostering a stronger connection with brands and potentially affecting their purchase decisions.

Regarding Generation Z and Millennials, who represent a significant portion of active followers, recent research confirms that they follow a higher number of influencers compared to users in other markets. Nadanyiova and Sujanska (2023) confirm a positive relationship between these marketing strategies and purchase intention. However, the effectiveness of this transition depends on specific drivers. Ilieva et al. (2024) emphasize that source credibility and perceived convenience (such as fast loading times and intuitive navigation) are statistically significant factors that shape attitudes toward products or services.

Research further indicates that purchase intention is maximized when the content aligns with user interests and perceived expertise. While Lou and Yuan (2019) maintain that expertise reduces perceived risk, Ilieva et al. (2024) found that in certain contexts, such as the Bulgarian market, high education levels can act as a negative mediator, making consumers less reliant on influencer credibility alone. Furthermore, they observed that in some environments, there may be no direct statistically significant link between attitude and immediate purchase intention due to cultural skepticism and economic factors. Thus, the impact on the purchase decision is the result of a complex acceptance mechanism where convenience and long-term source credibility must outweigh inherent consumer mistrust.

4.4. Influence of engagement and follower count

The evaluation of an influencer's effectiveness is framed by the distinction between quantitative reach and the depth of qualitative interaction. While audience size is categorized into tiers ranging from nano to mega-influencers, Ilieva et al. (2024) emphasize that overall efficiency is not purely a function of follower count, but rather depends on engagement rates and the influencer's ability to drive specific marketing outcomes. They further observe that the impact of reach is complex; for instance, younger consumers increasingly perceive interactivity as a standard, expected feature of the digital experience, yet excessive or poorly managed interaction can lead to a lack of perceived sincerity and decreased trust.

Engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares are recognized as primary indicators that an audience is attentive and responsive to content. According to Lou

and Yuan (2019), this involvement is driven by the message's informative and entertainment value. For Generation Z, Nadanyiova and Sujanska (2023) suggest that bidirectional engagement serves as proof of authenticity. Ilieva et al. (2024) expand on this by identifying that data-driven influencer marketing now allows brands to utilize data analytics to select influencers who provide measurable results, ensuring that partnerships yield higher engagement and increased conversion rates.

Current research indicates that the depth of the influencer-follower relationship is frequently a more significant driver of purchase behavior than raw audience magnitude. Ilieva et al. (2024) highlight that variables such as perceived convenience and source credibility explain a substantial portion of the variability in consumer attitudes towards both the influencer and the product. Furthermore, they argue that while mega-influencers remain vital for mass-scale brand awareness, the quality of content characterized by visual appeal, creativity, and storytelling is what ultimately resonates with the audience and fosters the trust required for purchase decisions. Thus, strategic success lies in balancing reach with authentic, high-quality content that minimizes consumer skepticism and enhances the overall user experience.

5. Strategic implementation

5.1. Defining objectives and target audience

The strategic definition of objectives is the first step toward a campaign's success. Brands must transition from vanity metrics to objectives that generate real value, such as increasing brand awareness, strengthening trust, and improving brand attitudes. Hughes et al. (2019) emphasize that influencer marketing campaigns are particularly effective in the "seeding" phase, where the goal is to generate organic engagement and disseminate the message through pre-established social networks. This stage is critical for establishing an online presence and leveraging the specialized knowledge of key figures to captivate specific audiences.

Regarding the target audience, selection should focus on consumers who demonstrate high identification with the influencer's expertise and content focus. Ilieva et al. (2024) highlight that while younger, urban audiences particularly females under 30 constitute a massive segment of social media users, demographic factors like gender, age, and place of residence do not always have significant mediating effects on purchase intentions. Instead, the target audience definition should prioritize psychological affinity and source credibility.

Crucially, Ilieva et al. (2024) suggest that educational level is a vital consideration, as it can significantly alter how an audience perceives credibility: more educated individuals tend to be more skeptical and less reliant on an influencer's perceived credibility when forming brand attitudes. Therefore, effective strategies must align the influencer's niche with the specific interests and educational backgrounds of the audience to foster a connection that transcends basic demographic categorization.

5.2. Influencer selection

Influencer selection should move beyond the magnitude of the audience to prioritize the quality of the connection with followers and specific campaign objectives. Ilieva et al. (2024) highlight that the efficiency of digital influencers is not a direct consequence of reach, but is instead determined by high engagement rates and the ability to produce authentic content that resonates with the audience. To ensure measurable results, modern brands increasingly rely on data-driven approaches, utilizing AI and analytics to identify influencers whose characteristics and content focus align perfectly with marketing goals. Campbell and Farrell (2020) reinforce this idea by classifying influencers into different typologies (nano, micro, macro, and mega), arguing that the choice should depend on the nature of the objective: massive reach (mega-influencers) or niche authority (micro-influencers).

A fundamental criterion in selection remains the "Product-Influencer Fit" or congruency. Ilieva et al. (2024) suggest that brands should carefully select influencers who are perceived as credible sources within their specific niche, focusing on those who demonstrate consistent expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness to foster trust and loyalty among followers. This alignment ensures that the influencer's trusted recommendations effectively drive engagement and conversions. Hughes et al. (2019) further suggest that selection should consider the influencer's ability to act as an effective "dissemination agent," prioritizing those who demonstrate higher retention and engagement rates over raw reach.

5.3. Types of sponsored content

The operationalization of the influencer marketing strategy materializes in the choice of content format, which must align not only with the platform's aesthetics but with the specific goal of the sales funnel, as synthesized in Table 1. Current literature categorizes sponsored content into "exposure" formats and "education/conversion" formats. Among the most common are Product Placement and Mentions, where the product appears organically in the influencer's visual or verbal narrative, making them ideal for subtle Brand Awareness. However, for products requiring greater consideration, the market privileges Reviews and Tutorials ("How-to"), formats where the influencer demonstrates the product's practical utility, mitigating perceived purchase risk and generating high trust (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025). In parallel, formats native to digital culture such as Unboxing and Hauls continue to be vital for segments like fashion and technology, capitalizing on the excitement of discovery and novelty. In 2025, however, an evolution towards more interactive and immediate conversion formats is observed, namely Live Shopping, where influencers sell products in real-time through livestreams, and Account Takeovers, where a brand temporarily cedes control of its social media to a creator to "pollinate" audiences (Sprout Social, 2025). Finally, the practice of Whitelisting (or Dark Posting) gains relevance, where brands pay to boost the influencer's organic content directly

through their account, combining creator authenticity with the targeting precision of paid advertising (Hootsuite, 2024).

Table 1 - Types of sponsored content

Platform	Main Goal	Strategic Strenghts
TikTok	Brand Awareness	Awareness (Discovery)
Instagram	Conversion (Sale)	Social Commerce e Integrated Store.
YouTube	Consideration (Trust)	In-depth reviews and tutorials.

5.4. Metrics and performance evaluation

The evaluation of influencer marketing effectiveness has transitioned from a superficial approach based on "vanity metrics" (such as follower count or likes) to a rigorous performance analysis driven by data and financial return. Current literature advocates for a measurement hierarchy that begins with the analysis of the Engagement Rate calculated by the sum of interactions divided by reach or follower count which serves as the primary indicator of content relevance and audience affinity (Sprout Social, 2025). However, to prove commercial value, brands in 2025 prioritize conversion and financial efficiency metrics, namely CTR (Click-Through Rate), CPE (Cost Per Engagement), and fundamentally, ROI (Return on Investment) and ROAS (Return on Ad Spend). A central challenge identified in the industry is the correct attribution of sales. To mitigate this, direct tracking models are used, such as unique Promo Codes, parameterized UTM Links, and tracking Pixels, which allow for the association of a specific sale with an exact influencer (Grin, 2024). When direct conversion is not the goal, EMV (Earned Media Value) is utilized, a metric that assigns an estimated monetary value to each social interaction based on what the brand would have to pay in traditional advertising to achieve the same reach, allowing for the justification of invested budgets to management boards (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025; HypeAuditor, 2025).

5.5. Integration of influencer marketing into the marketing mix

The maximum effectiveness of influencer marketing is only achieved when it ceases to operate in silos to integrate holistically into the company's global marketing mix, acting as a transversal "force multiplier" across communication channels. Recent literature highlights that Influencer Generated Content (IGC) plays a crucial role in omnichannel strategy, as it can be repurposed to fuel other strands of digital marketing, such as Email Marketing, where the inclusion of authentic social proof increases click-through rates, and SEO (Search Engine Optimization), through the

generation of quality backlinks in blogs and videos that improve the brand's domain authority (Forbes Agency Council, 2024; HubSpot, 2025).

One of the most robust integration trends in 2025 is the symbiosis between organic and Paid Media. Through practices such as Whitelisting (on Instagram) or Spark Ads (on TikTok), brands invest their advertising budget to boost the influencers' own posts, combining the creator's creative authenticity with the precise targeting capabilities of paid ads. Studies indicate that this method significantly reduces Cost Per Acquisition (CPA) compared to traditional studio advertisements, as consumers demonstrate lower cognitive resistance to content that appears native and human (McKinsey & Company, 2024; Sprout Social, 2025). In this way, the influencer ceases to be merely a distribution channel to become a co-creation partner that permeates the product, promotion, and distribution of the brand.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights that Influencer Marketing in 2025 has matured into a cornerstone of the Marketing 5.0 paradigm, where the synergy between technology and human-centric communication is paramount. The research establishes that strategic efficacy no longer relies solely on the massive reach of mega-influencers, but rather on the authenticity and high engagement rates of nano and micro-influencers, who foster genuine parasocial interactions and superior ROI. Consequently, brands must pivot from "vanity metrics" to a rigorous focus on the "attention economy" and tangible attribution models, viewing influencers not merely as media channels but as essential trust validators capable of mitigating consumer skepticism in an increasingly competitive digital landscape.

Furthermore, the long-term sustainability of this ecosystem depends on a holistic and compliant operational strategy. Leveraging the distinct roles of the "influence triad", Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, allows brands to address the entire sales funnel effectively, from viral discovery to deep consideration. However, this potential is contingent upon strict adherence to evolving regulations, such as the EU Digital Services Act and DGC guidelines, which mandate unequivocal transparency through identifiers like #Pub to ensure consumer protection. Ultimately, to maximize commercial value and brand safety, companies must integrate influencer-generated content into the broader marketing mix, treating it as a transversal force multiplier rather than an isolated tactic.

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