

Why Influencer Marketing is a Must-Have Strategy for Brand Growth

A deep dive into how brands are driving demonstrable lift with creator partnerships

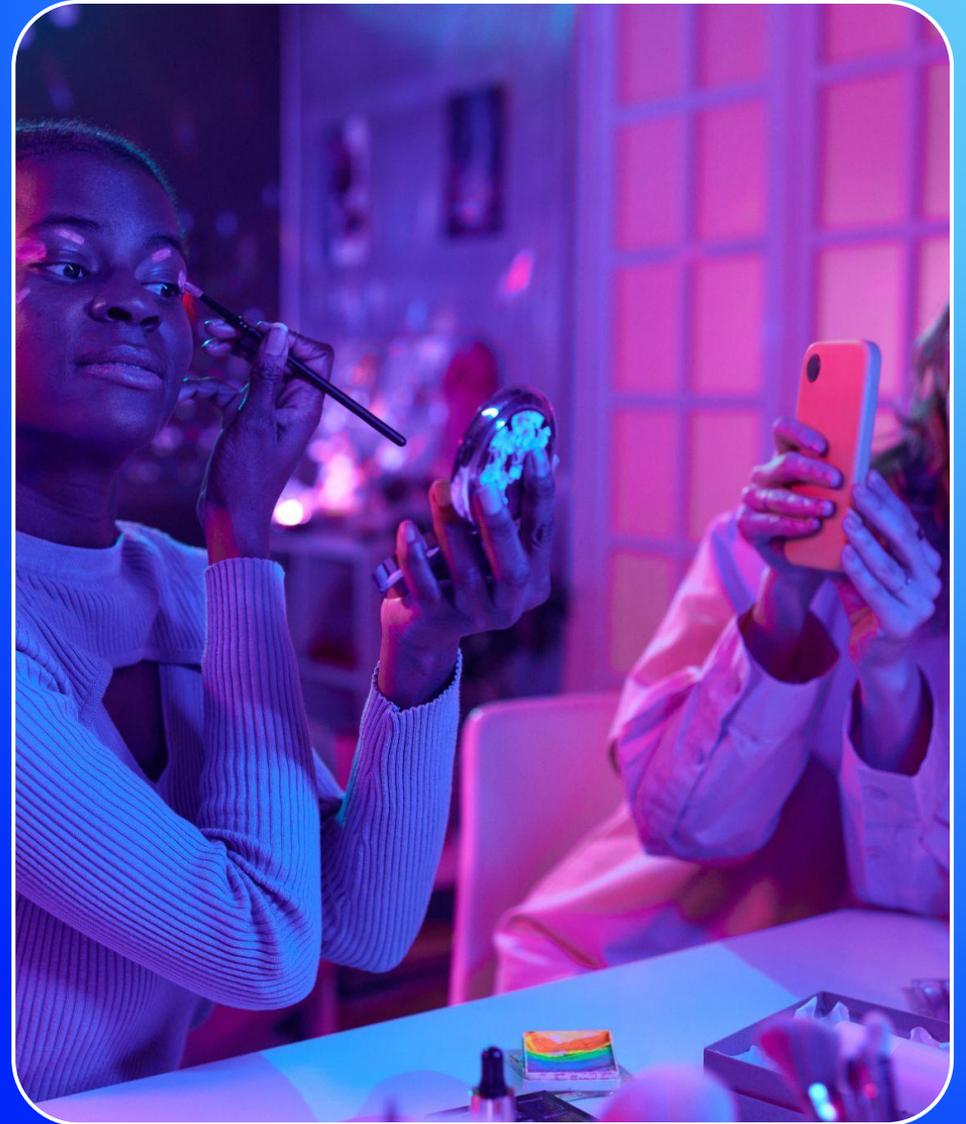


About This Report

This report, created in collaboration between **Influential** and **Swayable**, offers an in-depth analysis of how the current influencer marketing landscape impacts metrics across the funnel. Through a mix of qualitative and quantitative insights, we'll explore why brands from all industries—regardless of their maturity in the space—should consider creators as a central component of their overall marketing strategy.

Swayable methodology:

- Using genAI-powered classification on 14K+ creative tests to identify those featuring influencer or social content
- Measurements are based on Swayable's proprietary machine learning model, which uses population modeling to assess ad impact
- We aggregated upper and lower funnel measurements (e.g. NPS, purchase intent) of influencer/social ads using Swayable's AI tagging feature
- Lift results of influencer and social ads were compared to category benchmarks for all content types across Swayable's extensive benchmarks library





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“The \$30B+ influencer marketing industry has reached a turning point. The next chapter isn’t about likes or views, it’s about impact.

At Influential, we’ve built the technology, data, and expertise to transform creators into high-impact media channels, and we’re leading the way in proving their role alongside core media investments.”



Ryan Detert
Founder and CEO, Influential

“The big question is no longer whether people are watching influencer content. It’s about whether it’s actually working.

With randomized controlled trial (RCT) pre-testing, we can now definitively answer that.”



James Slezak
Founder and CEO, Swayable

Executive Summary

In an era of declining consumer trust, the way we discover and engage with brands is undergoing a fundamental shift.

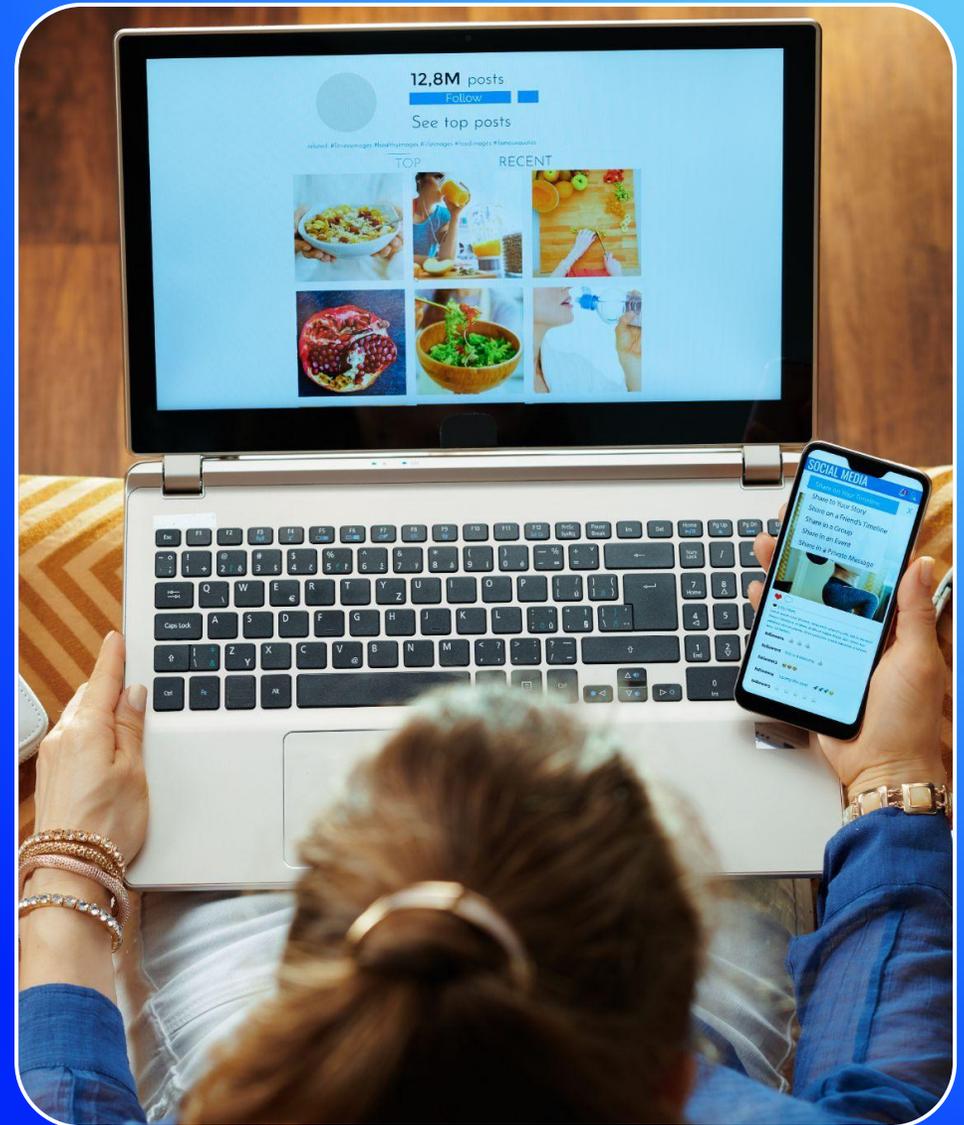
According to Qualtrics, only half of all consumers and just 28% of Gen Z trust the brands they interact with. Marketers are increasingly turning to influencers to communicate their message authentically and effectively.

Statista reports that marketers spent \$35 billion on creator-led campaigns in 2024. That figure is expected to reach \$60 billion by 2030—matching the current figure for TV advertising.

This growth marks influencer marketing's shift from an experimental tactic supporting a broader media strategy into a cornerstone of effective omnichannel marketing.

As the consumer landscape continues to change, the gap will widen between early adopters and those slower to adapt, facing a roadblock of identifying influencer use cases and proving value.

This report demonstrates that brands that don't quickly integrate influencer marketing risk falling behind and failing to meet the demands of today's consumers.



01

The State of Influencer Marketing:

Shifting from an experimental to essential channel



From an Experimental to an Essential Channel

The resilience and growth of influencer marketing are undeniable, yet several roadblocks continue to delay its adoption.

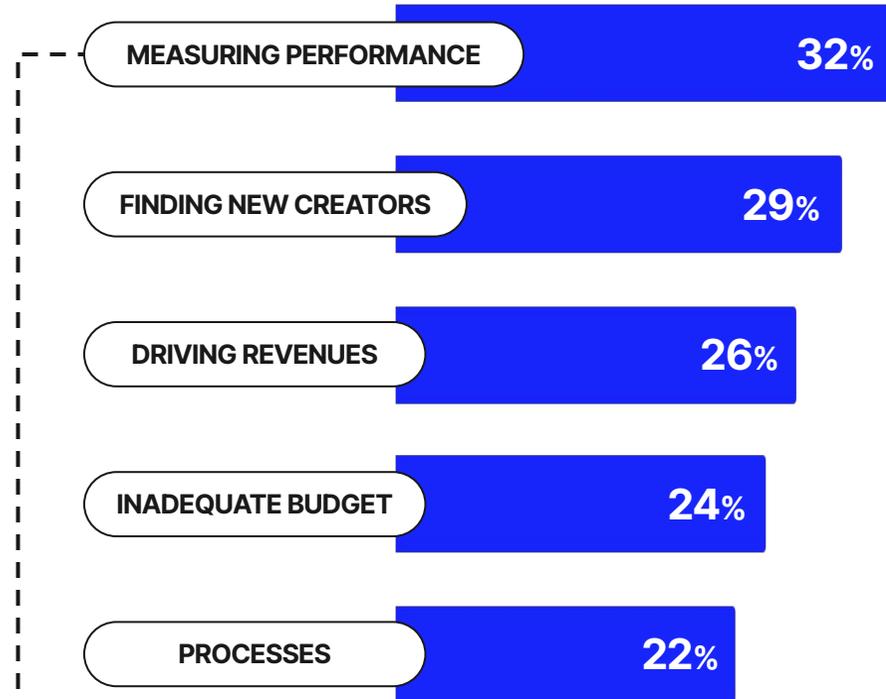
While industries like beauty and quick-service restaurants (QSR) lead with creative, agile, integrated campaigns, other sectors like finance and pharma have been slower to adopt.

According to Sapio Research, marketers cite measuring impact, sourcing the right influencers, and managing budgets as significant barriers to adoption.

Overcoming these roadblocks and leveraging the full power of influencer marketing is pivotal for brands to succeed in an ever-changing consumer landscape.

Proving the performance of influencer content is the **#1** roadblock to influencer marketing program growth

% OF BRAND MARKETERS WORLDWIDE WHO FACE THE FOLLOWING ROADBLOCKS TO INFLUENCER MARKETING SUCCESS

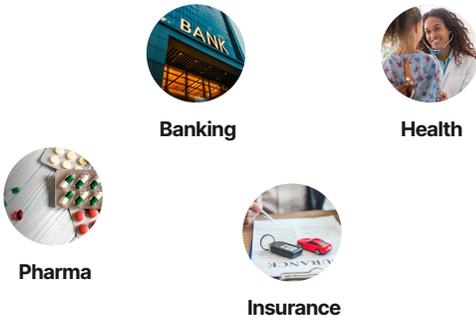


The Evolving Influencer Marketing Landscape

→ Marketers are looking to scale, but require performance proof and streamlined processes to build support

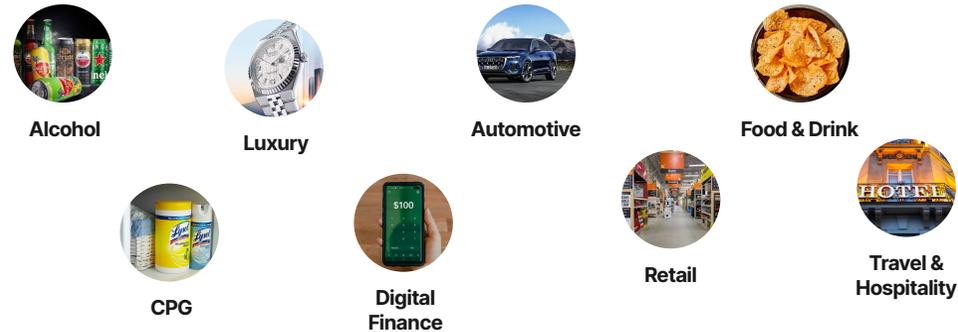
Budget, Process, Uncertain Performance

- Influencer as a test and learn channel
- Performance must prove continued activations



Proving Value to Generate Scale

- Influencer is defined as a channel which adds value
- Marketers are looking to scale, but requires performance proof and streamlined processes to generate support



Innovate to Stay Ahead

- Influencer is a core, integrated channel
- Creative activations and strategy drive the industry forward



FIRST STEPS

MATURITY

SHAPING THE MARKET

Overcoming the Roadblocks to Success

Our research examines marketing priorities and roadblocks across Performance, Activation, and Integration to inform brands at every stage of their influencer marketing journey.

We demonstrate why slow adopters are already at a disadvantage and will continue to fall behind without shifting to an influencer-first approach.

Performance

Influencer content outperforms other media throughout the entire funnel

Activation

Influencer content drives success regardless of demographics, providing unique strategic flexibility and agility

Integration

An integrated, influencer-first mindset is pivotal to achieving success in the evolving consumer landscape

FIRST STEPS

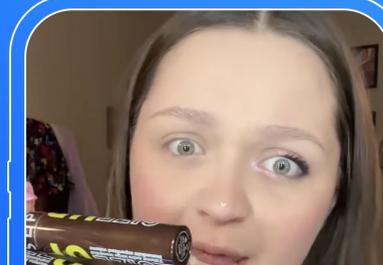
MATURITY

SHAPING THE MARKET

02

Performance:

Influencer is more than just a top of the funnel tactic



The Misconception: Influencer is an awareness play, right?

Brand awareness remains the number one objective for influencer marketing, as many brands take a top down approach.

With eMarketer reporting that Reach (CPM) is the leading measure of influencer content success among US marketers in 2024, it's clear that many brands are underselling its value as a full-funnel activation channel.

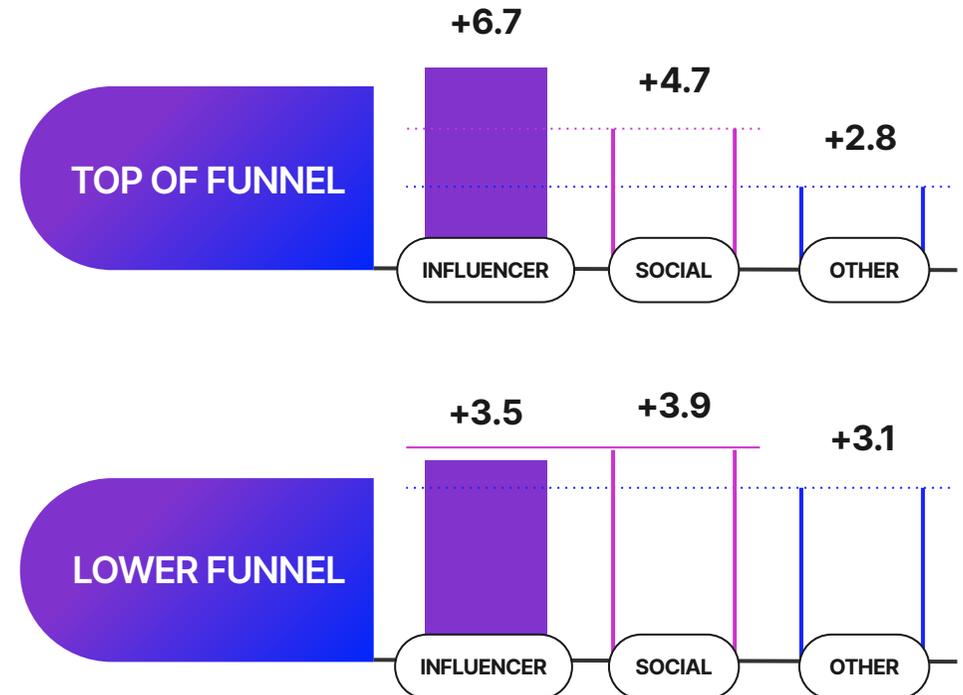
Swayable's extensive meta-study of campaign data proves that influencer marketing should take center stage for top-of-funnel objectives, where it far outperforms the average of category benchmarks for corporate social content and all other content types.

But it also highlights the often overlooked potential at the lower funnel, where influencer content matches or exceeds other channels in driving positive lift.

Source: Swayable, 2025; Note: Persuasion scores for influencer content calculated from 70k responses to 69 ads for NPS, and 54k responses to 56 ads for Purchase Intent. Scores for other content calculated from 50k responses to 54 ads for NPS, and 116k responses to 119 ads for Purchase Consideration

"Other" refers to the average category benchmark for traditional brand creative (static ads, video) that Swayable AI didn't identify as corporate social content and influencer content

AVERAGE PERFORMANCE LIFT ON CONTENT TYPES AT THE TOP AND LOWER FUNNEL



Influencer is **best-in-class at the top of the funnel**, but marketers should have no hesitation in using influencer to drive lower funnel objectives

 SWAYABLE

Influencer harnesses the growing power of community

Influencer marketing excels at the top of the funnel by aligning our desire for online community and connection, with the growing shift towards product discovery through social media content which inspires.

By creating a network of overlapping communities, connected by passions, lifestyles, shared experiences, and more, influencer content engages audiences that brand-led messaging cannot reach.

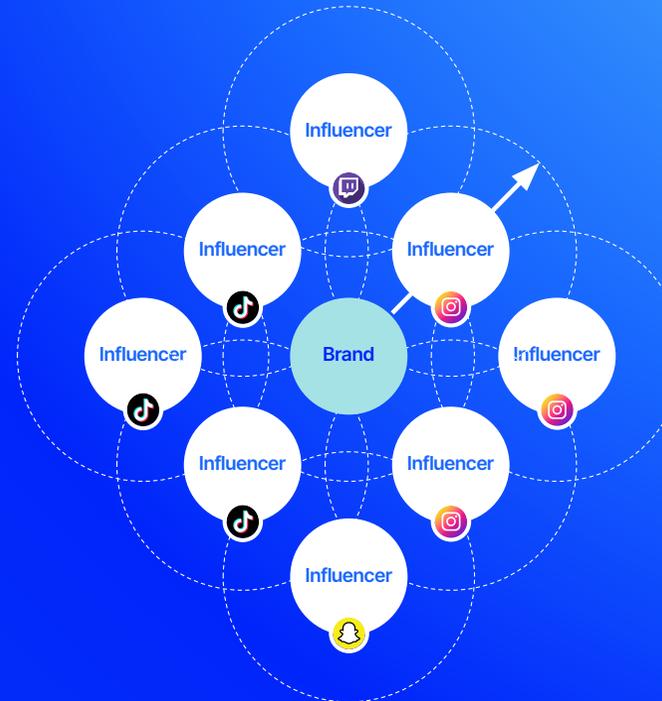
These relatable moments, told by people who mirror the consumer, add a layer of emotional connection to content, which can boost impact (4x), long-term brand equity (4x), and likelihood of virality (2.6x), according to Kantar.



Source: GlobalWebIndex, 2025; Forbes Advisor and Talker Research, 2024; Kantar x Affectiva, "Digital ads which evoke strong emotions are four times more likely to drive brand equity", March 2023



Brand channels speak to **variations of the same audience and community**



Influencer programs combine **communities of new audiences**, who overlap in traits that shape our decision making and purchase behaviors:

- Passions
- Lifestyles
- Shared experiences
- Purchase habits

Trust and Authenticity drive lower funnel performance

Influencer marketing uniquely impacts purchase decisions as consumers increasingly favor brands that resonate with their views and priorities.

Reliability, followed by authenticity, are the leading values consumers look for when discovering brands online.

Identifying influencers who convey messages with trust, and who create an authentic connection between brand, influencer, and consumer, can increase lower-funnel performance by as much as 67%.

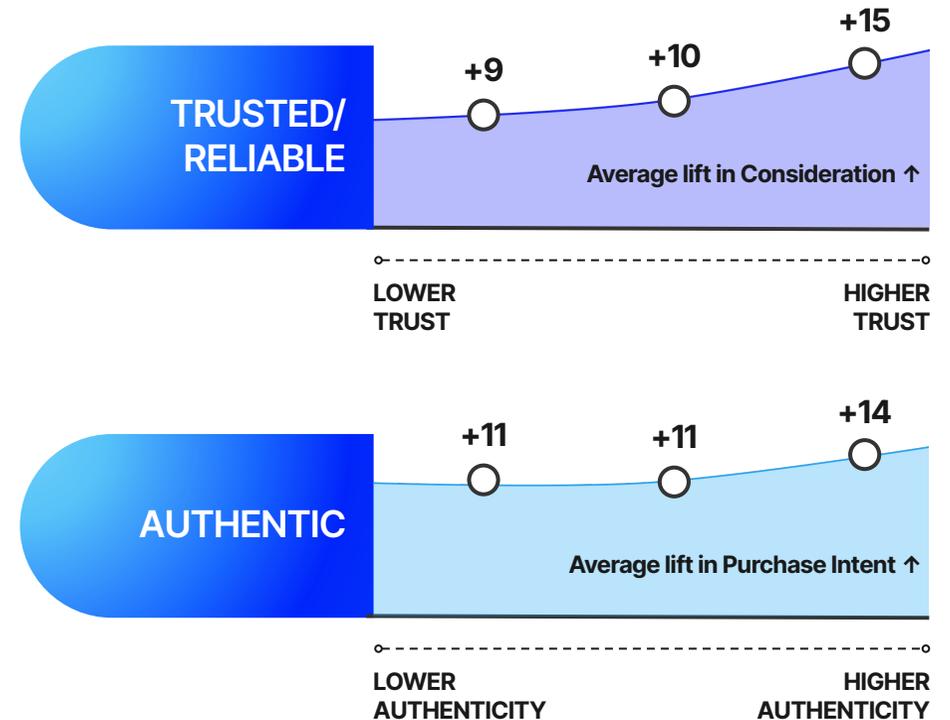
Similarly, content which feels creator-led, by giving influencers the opportunity to share their personal stories alongside the product, can boost trust and lower-funnel performance by 10%.

When making purchase decisions, people trust people. ... Influencers offer an unparalleled level of credibility and expertise that helps engage audiences.

Jessica Jensen
Chief Marketing and Strategy Officer, LinkedIn



IMPACT OF INFLUENCER TRUST AND AUTHENTICITY ON LOWER FUNNEL PERFORMANCE





Influencer marketing bringing financial power to all

Let's face it: Talking credit scores and budget tracking with a mobile-native audience isn't the easiest sell. But for Experian, whose mission is to bring financial power to all, that was exactly the task at hand.

With Gen Z and Millennials more likely to describe themselves as "money driven" than other audiences (65% more, in fact), Experian saw a golden opportunity to connect using influencer marketing.

Experian spotlighted tools like Bill Negotiation and Subscription Cancellation by using relatable creators who can influence and shape financial literacy among young people. This content turned influencer marketing into action by driving performance throughout the funnel.

Results: Improved efficiency in cost per install and registrations, through relatable creators who speak to the priorities and concerns of the target audience.

52%

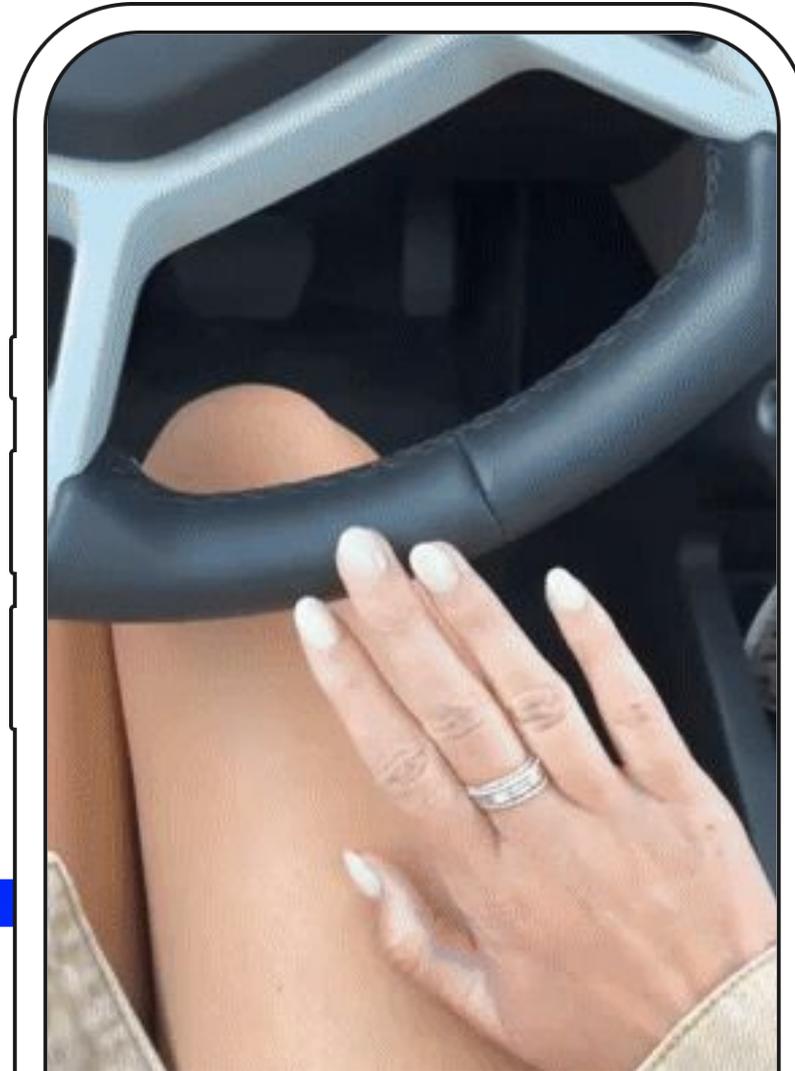
more efficient cost per install

51%

more efficient cost per registration

44%

higher click through rate



03

Activation:

How strategic flexibility and agility make influencer uniquely powerful



I've had so many different jobs in New York



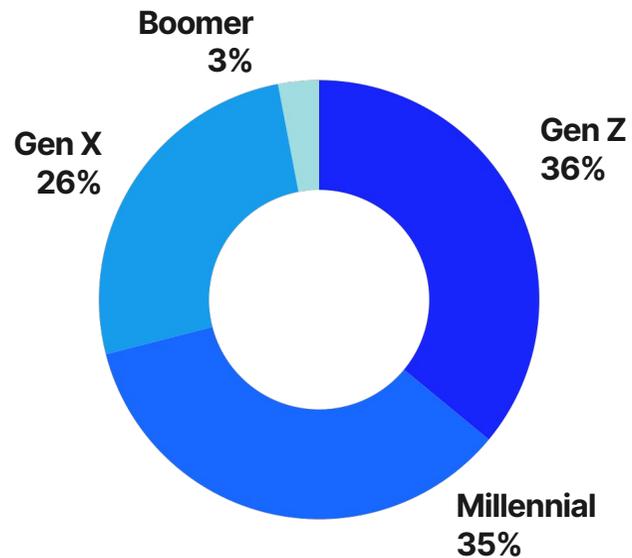
The (2nd) Misconception: Think beyond Gen Z and Millennials

Believing that influencer marketing solely targets younger consumers is a missed opportunity.

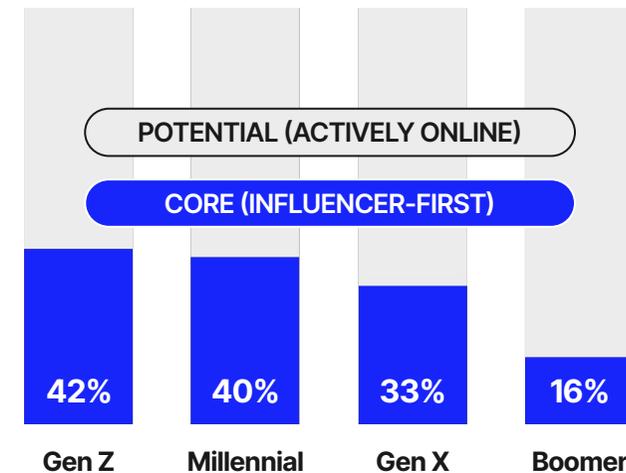
In fact, 33% of Gen X and 16% of Boomers actively seek out influencer content online.

Approaching influencer from a psychographic rather than demographic lens ensures you reach not only core influencer followers, but broader, actively online audiences who still discover influencer content.

AGE OF CONSUMERS WHO SEEK INFLUENCER CONTENT OR SOCIAL CONVERSATIONS



SHARE OF AGE GROUPS WHO SEEK INFLUENCER CONTENT OR SOCIAL CONVERSATIONS



Influencer achieves results across demographics

Influencer marketing not only reaches diverse age groups, but also drives consistent performance no matter the audience.

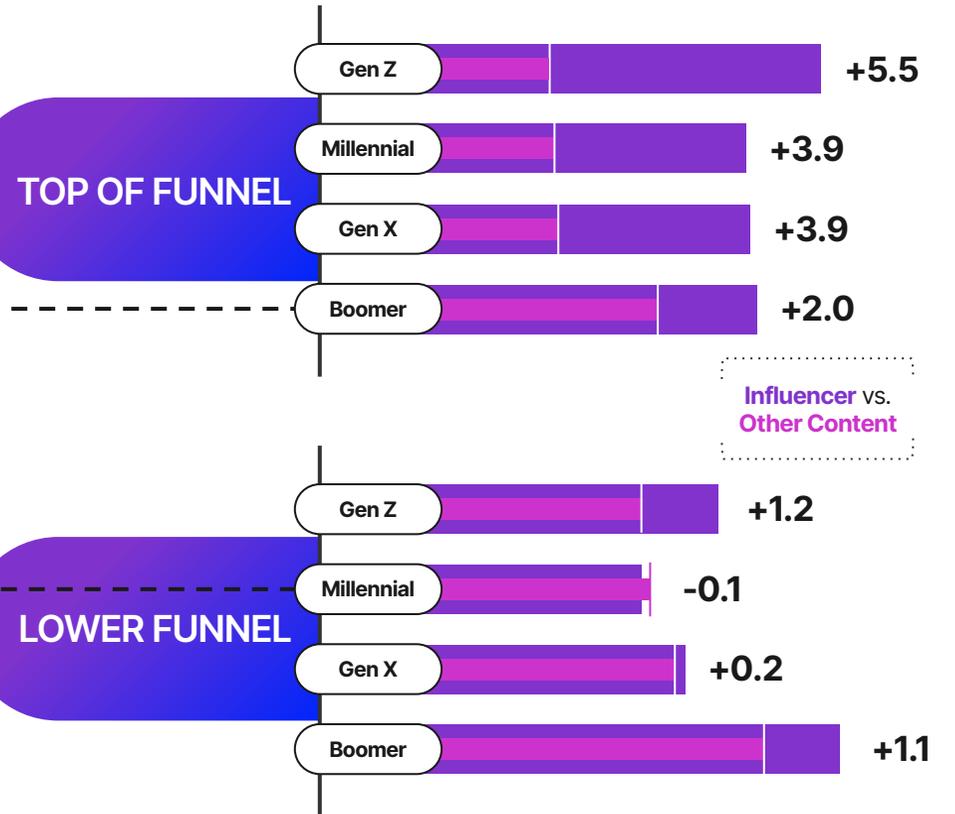
Data from the Swayable meta-study shows that at the top of the funnel, influencer content again delivers best-in-class performance across the board, and has a clear role to play in reaching older audiences.

At the bottom of the funnel, we see influencer outperform other media for Gen Z and Boomer audiences, with comparable performance at Millennial and Gen X.

Consider: Boomers watch 2x as much broadcast and streaming TV as any other audience. Their familiarity of TV as a brand discovery channel potentially boosts performance of 'other content' among Boomers.

Consider: Millennials touch 32% more channels in their purchase journey than any other generation (e.g. influencer, billboards, TV, podcasts, etc). This sheer volume of messaging could diminish the impact of individual channels, like influencer, on the purchase decision.

AVERAGE PERFORMANCE LIFT ON CONTENT TYPES AT THE TOP AND LOWER FUNNEL



SWAYABLE

Strategic flexibility and agility make influencer marketing unique

Consistent performance across objectives and audiences make influencers uniquely positioned to meet the needs of an evolving digital landscape.

As social media disrupts traditional search engines, social media trends shape our purchase habits, and the demand for personalized messaging grows, many traditional marketing channels lack the agility to respond to challenges and opportunities.

But the human voice of influencer content, coupled with its potential speed to market and flexibility in market, makes it the only channel capable of thriving in today's always-on digital world.

THE CHANGING DIGITAL WORLD ↓

PERSONALIZATION

71%

OF CONSUMERS EXPECT BRANDS TO DELIVER PERSONALIZED INTERACTIONS

SOCIAL AS SEARCH

39%

OF US CONSUMERS HAVE USED SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SEARCH ENGINE IN THE LAST MONTH

SHAPING CULTURE

41%

OF US CONSUMERS WANT BRANDS TO PARTICIPATE IN SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS

INFLUENCER CONTENT POWERS EVERY ASPECT OF TODAY'S BRAND DISCOVERY JOURNEY

Influencer content drives SEO and discovery





Capturing viral food moments with creator activations

Dunkin' launched a creator-led content series which playfully recreated the "Dubai Chocolate" flavor trend using Dunkin's own menu items.

While trend-inspired, the content clarified that this was a menu hack, not an official product, which made influencer the only channel capable of authentically capturing, and quickly activating against this trend.

Results: Three pieces of campaign content drove massive results on Instagram, with Video Engagement Rate performance more than doubling benchmarks.

This has been my go-to lately, it is SO good

I don't follow her she just came up on my fyp, are her recipes usually good

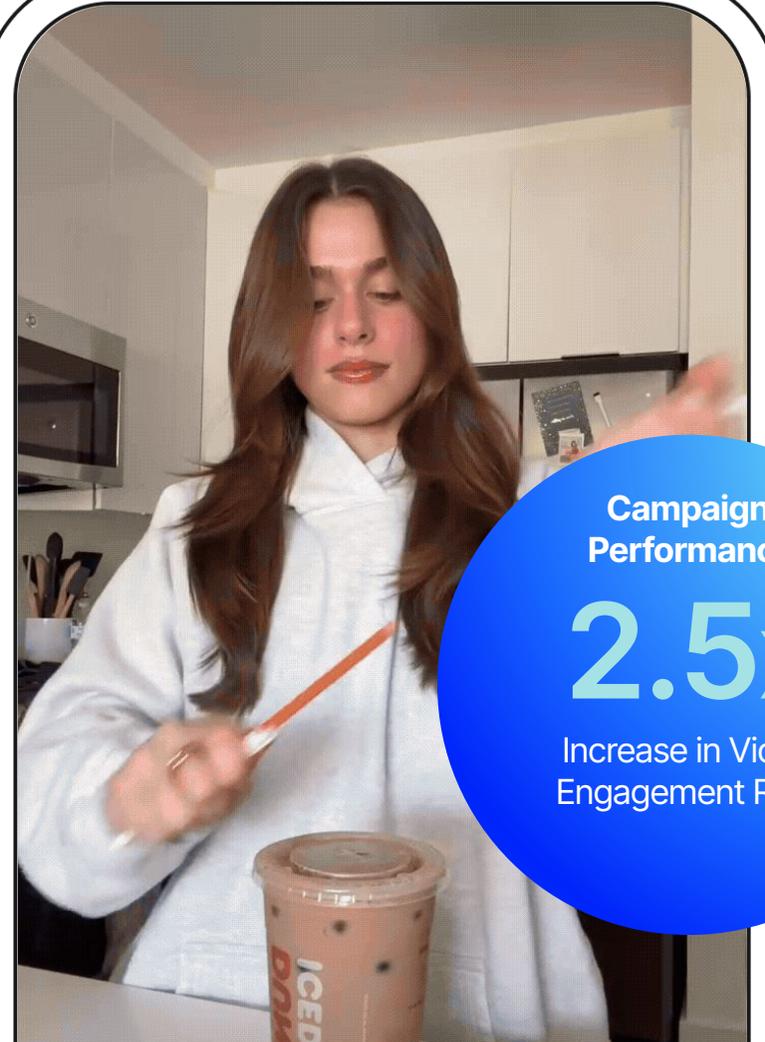
Gonna try this on my next run and will report back. This looks like it would be great!

r/DunkinDonuts

Various Reddit Users



3X MACRO CREATORS GENERATED MASSIVE SPIKES IN ENGAGEMENT FOR DUNKIN' - ALL WITHOUT AN IRL MENU ITEM



Campaign Performance

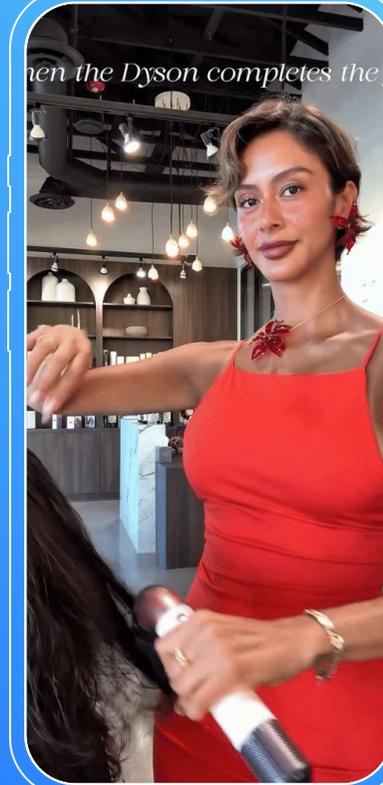
2.5x

Increase in Video Engagement Rate

04

Integration:

Shifting to a creator-first mindset



Readiness for omnichannel integration begins now

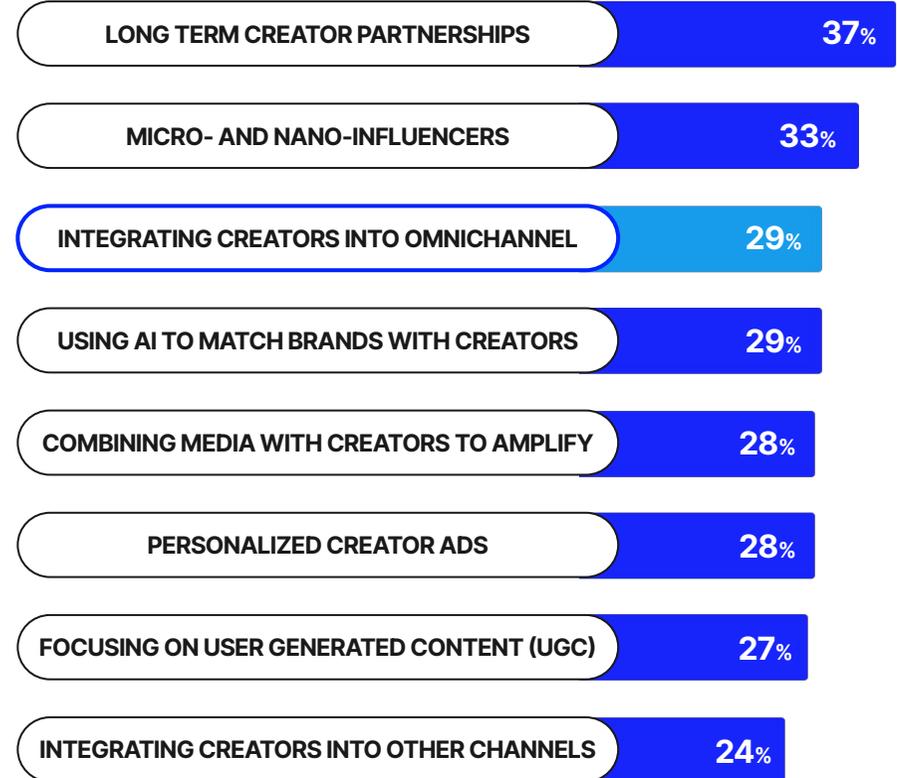
Evolving from channel-specific tactics to more holistic strategy shifts will drive the greatest impact for marketers.

Strategies like long-term creator partnerships and activating micro- and nano-creators can drive marginal gains, but marketers must quickly consider how they can integrate the power of creators into their broader marketing strategy.

A recent Adtaxi survey reports that for major events like the Super Bowl, 70% of viewers engage with multiple channels simultaneously, meaning that marketers must reach the consumer across multiple touchpoints for success.

By taking the first steps towards an omnichannel approach with influencer marketing at its core, brands will see improvement across their entire messaging platform rather than just individual channels.

EMERGING INFLUENCER TACTICS THAT MARKETERS THINK WILL BRING THE MOST VALUE



Other responses include affiliate marketing (23%), influencer partnered branded content series (22%), co-creating products (15%), subscription content (10%), live shopping (10%)

Influencer integration significantly boosts business results

This integrated approach, powered by influencer content, far outperforms siloed channel activations.

When analyzing the performance of campaigns which take an integrated vs. non-integrated approach, we see the following results:

- Up to **16x** higher ROI performance
- Up to **+75%** sales lift above benchmark
- Millions gained in incremental sales

An integrated approach infuses overall marketing strategies with the unique strengths of influencer marketing, such as its ability to build trust and authenticity throughout the funnel, and its agility to respond swiftly to consumer changes or market opportunities.

Regardless of their level of maturity in influencer marketing, all brands should prioritize integration to stay competitive in our constantly evolving media and consumer landscape.

ROI PERFORMANCE OF INTEGRATED VS. NON-INTEGRATED INFLUENCER CAMPAIGNS



An integrated approach increases ROI performance by up to

16x

Benchmark

Integrated

Based on historical Influential benchmarks across integrated and non-integrated campaigns on Instagram and TikTok



Influencers help reimagine retail with Walmart Realm

Walmart partnered with four dynamic creators who crafted their own immersive Realm spaces to showcase how they're gifting and transforming their homes for the holiday season.

These uniquely curated spaces featured handpicked selections of must-have gifts to showcase Walmart Realm's seamless online shopping experience, where they can effortlessly explore and purchase holiday gifts from the comfort of their homes.

Results: The campaign generated over 18.5 million views with zero negative sentiment across social media and customer interactions — an overwhelmingly positive reception.

Paid media integration delivered 260K+ link clicks, and achieved 201K+ landing page views, highlighting how Walmart captured consumer attention and drove action by taking an influencer-first approach to marketing for Realm.

260K

Total Paid Link Clicks

1.4X

Paid TikTok & Meta Landing Page View CTR Benchmark

+22pp

Above Positive Sentiment Benchmark



Conclusions



01

Don't be constrained by campaign objectives

As a leading channel across every phase of the customer journey, marketers can use influencer content to drive results no matter the objective

02

Projecting trust and authenticity are vital

Integrating trust and authenticity in influencer content improves lower-funnel performance by as much as 67%, making influencer selection a pivotal step in your strategic planning

03

Shift from demographics to psychographics

Influencers are no longer just a tool to reach Gen Z, but to engage broad cross sections of the population who overlap by lifestyle, passions, and shared experiences.

04

Flexibility and agility make influencers valuable

The human voice of influencers, coupled with their speed and flexibility in market, makes the channel uniquely powerful as brand discovery evolves from search-led to social first.

05

Integrate influencers into omnichannel strategies

Infusing influencer content throughout your entire marketing plan improves ROI by up to 16x. Brands who shift their approach now will be the biggest winners as creator-led marketing continues to evolve.

About Influential and Swayable

Influential

[Influential](#) powered by Captiv8 is the world's largest creator marketing company by revenue.

Using advanced AI, data, and human expertise, we connect brands with creators to drive measurable ROI and business outcomes.

Our ability to translate influence into proven impact across the funnel has earned the trust of more than 60% of Fortune 500 companies.

S W A Y A B L E

[Swayable](#) is the creative pre-testing platform used by top brands globally to measure persuasion.

Companies use the product to conduct rapid randomized controlled trial (RCT) survey experiments and gather relevant insights into how creative messaging impacts consumer perception.