

Influencer Perspectives on Digital Marketing: Strategies, Challenges, and Best Practices in Content Creation and Brand Collaborations

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ABSTRACT



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This research explores influencer perspectives on digital marketing, focusing on their strategies, challenges, and best practices in content creation and brand collaborations. Their audience-building strategies emphasize consistency in content creation, niche focus, and proactive engagement with followers. Preferred content formats are video-based, such as TikTok videos and Instagram Reels, due to their interactivity and wide reach. The study employs a qualitative research approach, drawing insights from semi-structured interviews with 17 influencers across diverse niches, including fitness, fashion, beauty, gaming, and lifestyle. Key findings reveal that influencers are primarily motivated by personal passion, the desire to build personal branding, and an emotional connection with their audience. The research offers practical recommendations for brands, stressing the importance of clear communication, understanding influencer characteristics, offering creative freedom, and building long-term relationships. This study contributes to the digital marketing literature by providing empirical insights into the operational realities of influencer marketing from the perspectives of those at its core, offering practical guidance for effective influencer and brand partnerships.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Content Creation, Brand Collaboration, Digital Marketing, Marketing Communication

1. Introduction

The popularity of social media platforms has ushered in a new era of marketing, with the social media influencer emerging as a highly effective advertising distribution channel for businesses. (Staniewski & Awruk, 2022). Influencer marketing has profoundly altered consumer attitudes and engagement with sponsored content, establishing itself as one of the most critical digital marketing tactics for firms. (Taillon et al., 2020). In collaborations between companies and influencers, content creators present a brand's products to their social media audience, thereby entrusting the company's image and reputation to the influencer. (Gruodyté, 2022; Walean & Makarawung, 2022).

Despite the year on year expansion of the influencer marketing sector and its proven success for many brands, collaborations with influencers are not without difficulties and hazards. One of the most frequently cited challenges by marketers is the process of finding and selecting the right influencer for

collaboration. Given the vital role influencers play in shaping consumer perceptions of a brand, businesses must establish clear criteria for selecting the most appropriate influencer to minimize potential risks.

Although there is a substantial body of scientific literature on the relevance of influencer marketing for businesses, a notable gap exists in studies specifically addressing the precise criteria organizations should employ to select suitable influencers and mitigate associated dangers. This research endeavors to bridge this gap by proposing requirements companies should define to achieve successful collaborations and avert potential risks in partnerships with influencers. These criteria will be identified through the real-life expertise of influencer marketing experts and specialists via qualitative interviews. This thesis aims to offer valuable insights, particularly for small businesses seeking to implement an influencer marketing strategy. The research aim is to examine the influencer marketing strategy

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process and industry-specific challenges, and by interviewing influencer marketing experts, this study aims to identify the requirements companies should determine when selecting social media influencers for partnership to prevent potential dangers and ensure the overall success of influencer marketing campaigns. The objectives are to reveal influencer selection processes from a theoretical standpoint, encompassing various types of influencers, and the threats and challenges inherent in this industry. To develop a qualitative research methodology to aid in discovering the criteria companies should establish when selecting influencers for collaboration. And for the last is to identify what requirements organizations should establish when selecting influencers for collaboration through qualitative interviews with influencer marketing specialists and extensive analysis of the acquired data.

Social media has become a tool for fast reaching target audiences and specific market groups, distinguishing social media marketing from traditional media through its power of promotion via user-generated advertising. Brands leverage influencer marketing primarily to increase sales, doing so in a more subtle way. A significant 82% of consumers trust recommendations found on social media for purchase decisions. Influencers, by showcasing products, sharing positive experiences, and suggesting usage, create content that consumers perceive as genuine recommendations rather than direct advertisements, thereby fostering trust. (Pisoni, 2023).

The influencer marketing industry has experienced rapid growth, with its market size increasing 8.12 times from 2016 to reach \$13.8 billion by 2021, and further growth is anticipated. (Hub, 2021; Iwan et al., 2025). This growth is driven by billions of people seeking recommendations or inspiration on social media daily. Beyond sales, influencer marketing significantly enhances brand awareness and trust, directly impacting users' decisions to visit websites, share information, and make purchases. A substantial 71.6% of internet users check social sites for brand information. This highlights the critical need for brands to align with influencers whose vision and mission resonate with their own, and whose profiles are visually appealing. (Maddalena, 2025). Young consumers, in particular, frequently seek product reviews and recommendations on platforms like Instagram and YouTube before making purchases, often buying items solely because trusted influencers promote them. This marketing approach can even lead to accidental or impulsive purchases, with 63% of consumers making such buys on social media. (Xiao et al., 2018).

Influencers are primarily categorized based on the size of their follower count, which determines their reach and strategic value for marketers. (Cowan et al., 2025). This classification creates a tiered system, beginning with nano-influencers (1,000–10,000 followers), who are characterized by their intimate audience connection and cost-effectiveness for smaller

brands. Following them are micro influencers (10,000 to 100,000 followers), who possess highly engaged, niche audiences, making them ideal for targeted marketing campaigns. Macro influencers (100,000 to 1 million followers), typically established bloggers or local celebrities, leverage their significant and loyal following to enhance brand exposure and awareness, despite potentially lower engagement rates. At the highest level, mega or celebrity influencers (over 1 million followers) offer extensive reach suitable for products with mass-market appeal. (Chen et al., 2024; Kembau et al., 2024).

In addition to audience size, influencers are also classified by their content niche, such as fashion, travel, or fitness. Many influencers operate across multiple niches to broaden their appeal in a competitive landscape. (Sruthi, 2024).

The effectiveness of influencers is underpinned by key psychological and social dynamics that foster a strong connection with their audience. A primary driver is their status as opinion leaders, who cultivate trust by consistently providing high-quality, seemingly impartial content. This positions them as more credible information sources than traditional advertising. This trust is further amplified by the development of parasocial relationships, where followers form one-sided, intimate connections, perceiving the influencer as a trusted friend. (Joshi et al., 2025). This powerful bond has a significant positive impact on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Finally, influencers are natural conduits for word of mouth (WOM) marketing. By demonstrating product usage and creating engaging visual content, they stimulate audience discussion and enhance brand visibility, effectively leveraging their credibility to generate organic interest. (Kembau, 2020; Liapriyanti, 2025).

The execution of influencer marketing requires a systematic, multi-stage approach analogous to traditional marketing campaigns. The process commences with a strategic planning phase, which involves setting clear campaign objectives, such as boosting sales or brand awareness. These goals directly inform the criteria for defining and identifying the ideal influencer, a critical selection stage where factors like industry expertise, content quality, brand alignment, and audience engagement are often prioritized over raw follower numbers.

Following the selection and negotiation of terms, the process moves to execution, where the influencer takes the lead in creating and promoting authentic content tailored to their audience. (Atiq et al., 2022). The final phase is dedicated to evaluation. Marketers must diligently track performance by monitoring key metrics like reach, engagement, and sales conversions. This data is essential for the ultimate step: measuring the return on investment (ROI), which assesses the campaign's overall profitability and provides critical insights for future marketing strategies. (Pan et al., 2025; Srimathi & Subashree, 2025).

Despite its widespread adoption, influencer marketing is fraught with significant challenges that can impede campaign success and brand reputation. A primary obstacle lies in influencer

selection and management. This includes the difficulty of identifying creators whose values align with the brand, the inherent risks associated with human error or personal scandals, and persistent communication difficulties. A second major area of concern involves issues of integrity and transparency. The industry's rapid growth and lack of regulation have fostered problems such as influencer fraud (e.g., buying fake followers), non-compliance with disclosure guidelines, and the use of inaccurate or misleading performance metrics, which obscure an influencer's true value. Finally, many brands struggle with performance measurement, finding it difficult to accurately track key metrics and calculate a definitive return on investment (ROI), often due to poorly defined initial objectives or inconsistent evaluation methods (Anand et al., 2019; Samanta, 2025; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2025).

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative research strategy to thoroughly explore the challenges and best practices in influencer marketing from varied perspectives. This approach is chosen because the aim is to understand underlying causes, behaviors, and viewpoints, and to discover novel insights, especially given the identified lack of clear, credible studies on specific influencer selection criteria in existing scientific literature. Qualitative research allows for a more flexible and open exploration than quantitative methods, which are often constrained by hypotheses and narrow questions. (Cho et al., 2022).

An explorative study interviewed 17 influencers from various niches, including fitness, fashion, beauty, gaming, and adventure. These interviews provide the direct experiences and perspectives of content creators on their motivations, audience building, content strategies, and collaboration challenges.

Primary data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure data fidelity. The analysis followed a thematic approach, beginning with data familiarization through multiple readings of the transcripts. Initial codes were generated to identify significant phrases related to influencer strategies and challenges. These codes were then collated into potential sub-themes and further refined into the overarching themes presented in Table 2, such as 'Brand Selection Criteria' and 'Collaboration Challenges'. To maintain analytical rigor, the coding process was managed using NVivo 15, and triangulation was achieved through peer reviews among the research team to ensure the consistency and credibility of the findings. Key areas of inquiry also focused on content creation preferences, performance metrics, and the management of audience feedback. To ensure the fidelity of the data for a thorough analysis, all interviews were audio-recorded. Participants were informed of the research objectives and assured of their confidentiality in line with ethical research standards. (Castro & Charles, 2023).

3. Result and Discussion

The empirical research revealed comprehensive insights from influencer marketing, shedding light on their perspectives regarding strategies, challenges, and best practices in content creation and brand collaborations. The interviewed influencers represent a diverse range of niches, including fitness (Feliciano), mechanical keyboard reviews (Rifvael), fashion & beauty (Angela, Zahra, Titania, Gracia, Abigail), digital marketing strategist & content creator (travel/adventure) (Walter Manuhutu), professional gamer/KOL (Vival, Marcellyn Deaprilia / Icell), lifestyle (Bill, Caroline), general entertainment/POV (Ales), self-improvement (Willy), perfume, lifestyle, fitness, relationship (Rico / Fakboiberkelas), and public speaking/storytelling (Charlene).

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Description	Details	Frequency	Percent age
Gender	Male	9	52,94%
	Female	8	47,06%
Age	18–24years	5	29,41%
	25–31years	10	58,82%
	32–38years	1	5,88%
Educational Background	Senior High School	5	29,41%
	Bachelor's Degree	12	70,59%
	Social Media Used (multiple choice allowed)	13	76,47%
	Instagram	17	100%
	Tiktok	13	76,47%
	X (formerlyTwitter)	15	88,24%
	WhatsApp	17	100%
Total Respondent		17	100%

Source: Processed data 2025

The motivations for individuals to become influencers are multifaceted, encompassing a blend of intrinsic, extrinsic, and strategic drivers. A primary intrinsic motivator is a genuine passion for a specific niche or hobby, coupled with a desire for self-expression and the ability to build a community through connection with an audience. Extrinsic factors also play a significant role, with the prospect of financial benefits including direct income, free products, and paid partnerships serving as a powerful incentive. Furthermore, the profession offers valuable opportunities for personal growth and the development of professional skills such as content creation and public speaking. Strategically, many influencers are also motivated to cultivate authenticity and relatability, creating content that resonates with the everyday experiences of their followers to foster a stronger, more trusting relationship.

Influencers utilize a multifaceted strategy for audience development, integrating content production, community interaction, and personal branding. Foundational to this process is a robust content strategy, which includes maintaining consistency in posting schedules, concentrating on a specific niche to manage audience expectations, and ensuring high content quality. To maximize visibility, influencers also leverage viral trends and adapt to platform algorithms. A critical component for building credibility is providing honest reviews and transparent feedback, which fosters significant follower trust.

Beyond content creation, audience growth is driven by direct interaction and engagement, such as responding to follower comments, and by expanding reach through networking and collaborations with other creators. All of these tactical efforts are unified under the development of a strong and authentic personal brand, which serves as the key differentiator for attracting and retaining a loyal community.

The selection of content formats in influencer marketing is a strategic choice, contingent upon the specific platform and campaign goals. There is a predominant preference for short-form video formats, such as TikTok videos and Instagram Reels, which are valued for their high interactivity, engaging nature, and potential for rapid, widespread audience reach. This medium is often perceived as more authentic and is particularly effective for product demonstrations. Instagram Stories are also widely used for their spontaneous, real-time feel and are considered highly effective for sales promotions due to the ability to embed active links. While video formats dominate, static photos retain their relevance for their simplicity and ability to convey a clear message. Overarchingly, a key principle for influencers is adaptability, with an emphasis on evolving with platform trends rather than rigidly adhering to a single content format.

Table 2. Thematic Visualization of Influencer Interviews

Theme	Subtheme	Respondent Quotes
Brand Selection Criteria	Alignment with niche and personal values	"I only choose brands that suit my audience and the niche I'm building." Caroline
Favorite Content Formats	Short Video (Reels/TikTok)	"Reels and TikTok are the most effective because they reach a wider audience in a shorter time." Titania
Prioritized Metrics	Engagement rate, reach	"I focus more on the engagement rate rather than just the number of views." Vival
Collaboration	Unclear brief,	"Sometimes

Challenges	high expectations	brands give briefs that are too general or don't even suit my character." Alesnih
Authenticity Values	Honesty and transparency towards the audience	"My audience can tell when I'm honest. So I always review things honestly." Gracia

Source: Processed data 2025

Influencers encounter numerous challenges in their collaborations with brands, which can be categorized into operational, relational, and product-related issues. Operational challenges are prevalent and include working with unclear or complex campaign briefs, experiencing slow or inconsistent communication, and facing unrealistic deadline pressures from brand partners.

A second category of challenges relates to relational and strategic misalignment. This includes a perceived imbalance between low compensation and high brand demands, disputes over content ownership rights, and a fundamental lack of brand understanding of the influencer's unique audience and niche. This misalignment can lead to requests for content that feels inauthentic, forcing influencers to "act" in a way that compromises their personal brand. Finally, influencers express concerns over product suitability, including the safety and appropriateness of products, which poses a direct risk to their credibility and the trust they have cultivated with their audience.

Influencers are highly selective when choosing brand partners, employing a multifaceted evaluation process to protect their integrity and maintain audience trust.

The initial and most critical criteria relate to safety and alignment. Influencers prioritize a brand's legitimacy and product safety, often verifying official approvals (e.g., BPOM certification in Indonesia) to protect their followers. This is followed by a thorough assessment of product suitability and relevance to their personal brand and niche, which may include a trial period to ensure a genuine endorsement. The brand's overall reputation and values are also scrutinized, as influencers tend to avoid partners with negative public images or misaligned missions.

From an operational perspective, influencers seek professional and respectful partnerships. Key considerations include fair compensation and clear contractual terms, a high degree of creative freedom to maintain authenticity, and prompt, effective communication from the brand. These criteria ensure that collaborations are not only safe and relevant for the audience but also professionally viable for the creator.

The prioritization of metrics in influencer marketing is contingent upon specific campaign objectives, encompassing both performance indicators and audience validation measures.

The engagement rate, which includes interactions such as likes, comments, shares, and saves, is widely considered the most critical metric, as it signifies genuine audience interest and content resonance. While metrics like views and viewership are valuable for assessing overall reach, campaigns with sales objectives prioritize conversions, which are tracked through tools like unique discount codes or custom URLs.

Beyond these performance indicators, marketers conduct a deeper analysis of the influencer's audience. This involves scrutinizing audience demographics and activity to ensure alignment with the brand's target market. Furthermore, to ensure investment efficiency and protect brand reputation, businesses place a strong emphasis on vetting the audience by identifying the percentage of active versus fake followers.

For brands to successfully leverage influencer marketing, a strategic framework encompassing diligent selection, effective management, and a long-term vision is recommended.

The initial phase requires a strategic approach to influencer selection. Brands are advised to conduct thorough due diligence by researching an influencer's unique character and audience, prioritizing niche relevance over sheer follower count. This vetting process should include background checks to mitigate reputational risk and an assessment to ensure the influencer's feed is not oversaturated with competitor advertisements, which could dilute the campaign's impact.

Effective collaboration management is predicated on clear communication and mutual respect. Brands should provide clear, comprehensive briefs while also granting influencers the creative freedom necessary to maintain their authentic voice. This relationship should be supported by fair compensation and consistent, responsive communication. For strategic protection, brands may also consider implementing non-compete agreements.

Finally, a focus on quality and long-term value is essential. This includes internal responsibility for ensuring product quality and a process for reviewing content drafts before publication. The overarching strategy should be to build long-term relationships, transitioning from short-term tests to sustained brand ambassadorships to foster deeper, more authentic connections.

This research addressed a critical gap in the literature by establishing explicit criteria for influencer selection, derived from a comprehensive literature review and qualitative interviews with industry experts and influencers. The study concludes that successful collaborations depend on a dual evaluation framework assessing both technical profile requirements and key personal characteristics.

Among the essential personal traits identified are creativity in content production, a diligent work ethic, a clear alignment of values between the influencer and the brand, effective communication skills, and a commitment to sincerity and transparency. To effectively assess these subjective attributes, the study proposes a

novel recommendation for brands to conduct interactive workshops. This proactive, face-to-face evaluation method allows marketers to observe these traits directly, thereby mitigating risks associated with human error, communication breakdowns, and value misalignment.

The research also found that influencers are motivated by brand reputation and product quality, often viewing initial, short-term projects as a test for potential long-term ambassadorships. Finally, the study suggests an avenue for future research by noting observable differences in content strategy and niche segmentation among influencers from various international contexts, which warrants further scholarly exploration. And also revealed that influencers are motivated to collaborate by a brand's reputation and the quality of its products. While initial collaborations often start as one-off projects to test suitability, successful outcomes can lead to longer-term partnerships and ambassadorships.

In addition to personal characteristics, the study concludes that brands must evaluate a range of technical requirements associated with an influencer's social media profile. A rigorous profile metrics analysis is crucial, examining not only engagement and reach but also audience demographics and the ratio of active to fake followers. The findings emphasize that niche alignment with the brand's target market is often more critical than raw audience size. To mitigate risk, brands are advised to conduct thorough background checks, assess the density of advertisements on an influencer's profile, and implement legal safeguards like non-compete agreements. Operationally, ensuring adherence to company briefs, verified through a content draft review process, is essential for a successful collaboration.

Overall, this research addresses the significant challenge of influencer selection by providing concrete, expert-derived requirements. By implementing these criteria, companies can enhance the effectiveness of their influencer marketing strategies, minimize potential risks, and foster more successful and authentic brand-influencer partnerships.

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