

Influencer Marketing in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing is a modern marketing strategy where brands collaborate with social media influencers. The evolution of the digital age and the rise of social networking sites brought changes to the consumer behavior. This transformation has led to an increasing number of opportunities and challenges. Influencers are chosen by several companies today because of their ability to communicate their brand effectively with a more authentic and personal touch. They can recommend a product or service without being overly exaggerated, thus maintaining the trust of their followers to choose a particular product or service. Influencer marketing is also expected to be able to build brands, namely designing communications so that brands can have unique, positive and strong associations in the minds of customers. Influencer marketing for the past decade has proven to have a powerful voice for brands in the age of digital marketing. The role of influencers continues to have the ability to motivate social attitudes and behavior within their online community towards the brands by the influencer. The communities built by these social media influencers continue to gain social acceptance with their authentic voices and inspirational content. There has been much research on the effectiveness of social media influencers for brands the past decade, and in this research, we will look towards influencer marketing in the digital age, which are not human but are digital recreations with levels of human likeness.

KEYWORDS: Content Creation, Brand Awareness, Engagement Rate Online Communities

INTRODUCTION

Social media remains deeply embedded in modern life and continues to grow rapidly across the world. As of 2025–2026, an estimated 5.17 – 5.42 billion people over 60 % of the global population are active on social media platforms, a dramatic rise from just a few billion users a decade ago. On average, individuals spend around 2 hours and 20–29 minutes per day on social networks, and in younger demographics the numbers are even higher. For example, younger Generation Z users now spend an average of more than 5 hours per day on social media, nearly double the overall average, highlighting how deeply ingrained these platforms are for daily routines and lifestyle habits. The majority of social media users are from younger generations, with Gen Z (roughly ages 16–24/27) showing particularly intense engagement. As many as 94 % of Gen Z individuals use at least one social platform daily, and YouTube, and Instagram dominate their online behavior, with Instagram frequently cited as the most used platform among this group. In fact, a large portion of Gen Z (e.g., 72 %) now uses social media as their primary source of inspiration for everyday decisions like planning meals, far exceeding reliance on traditional sources like cookbooks or personal networks, and a significant share of that generation also uses social media to discover and research products before buying. Traditional media such as newspapers, brochures, and television are no longer the primary avenues for reaching consumers; instead, companies now invest heavily in digital platforms where social discovery and interaction are strongest. Over 80 % of marketers report that social media is their primary channel for acquiring customers, and a growing number of brands now allocate more than 20 % of their marketing budgets to social media strategies to improve visibility.

One of the most significant developments in this era of digital marketing is the rise of influencer marketing, partnerships between brands and individuals who command large or highly engaged audiences online. The influencer economy continues to grow rapidly, with influencer marketing valued in the tens of billions of dollars annually and expected to keep expanding through 2026. However, income within the creator economy is uneven, with a small percentage of top influencers capturing a large share of total earnings while many smaller creators struggle to earn sustainable incomes. Today's social media environment also increasingly shapes consumer behavior outside pure entertainment, influencing how people shop, travel, and even form political or social views. For instance, platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have transformed tourism by turning relatively unknown destinations into viral trends, while interactive and shoppable ads allow users to engage with brands and purchase products directly from social feeds. These trends show that social media isn't just an addition to daily life, it's a central driver of modern social interaction, commerce, and cultural change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing has evolved from a niche strategy into a core component of modern digital marketing. Because of widespread use of social media, brands now invest heavily in influencers to increase engagement, build trust, and drive measurable sales outcomes. Research has shown systematic evolution in strategy, platform choice, influencer type, and measurement of effectiveness.

1. Rapid Market Growth

Several industry reports indicate significant expansion:

- The global influencer marketing market reached ~\$24 billion in 2024 and is projected to surpass \$32 billion by 2025–2026, showing strong year-over-year growth driven by digital adoption.
- Influencer budgets have increased, with about 26% of brands allocating more than 40% of budgets to influencer marketing in recent years and 12% allocating over 50%.

2. Effectiveness and Engagement

Academic and industry research highlights key aspects of effectiveness:

- Meta-analytic research synthesizing over 1,500 effect sizes found influencer marketing has significant impact on both attitudes/engagement and purchase behavior, with influencing drivers including post quality, influencer credibility, and audience fit.
- Influencer content tends to hold attention longer and create stronger engagement than traditional ads.

3. Platform Trends

- Instagram remains dominant for influencer collaborations, followed closely by YouTube.
- User-generated content (UGC) and short-form videos are increasingly preferred, especially for younger audiences.

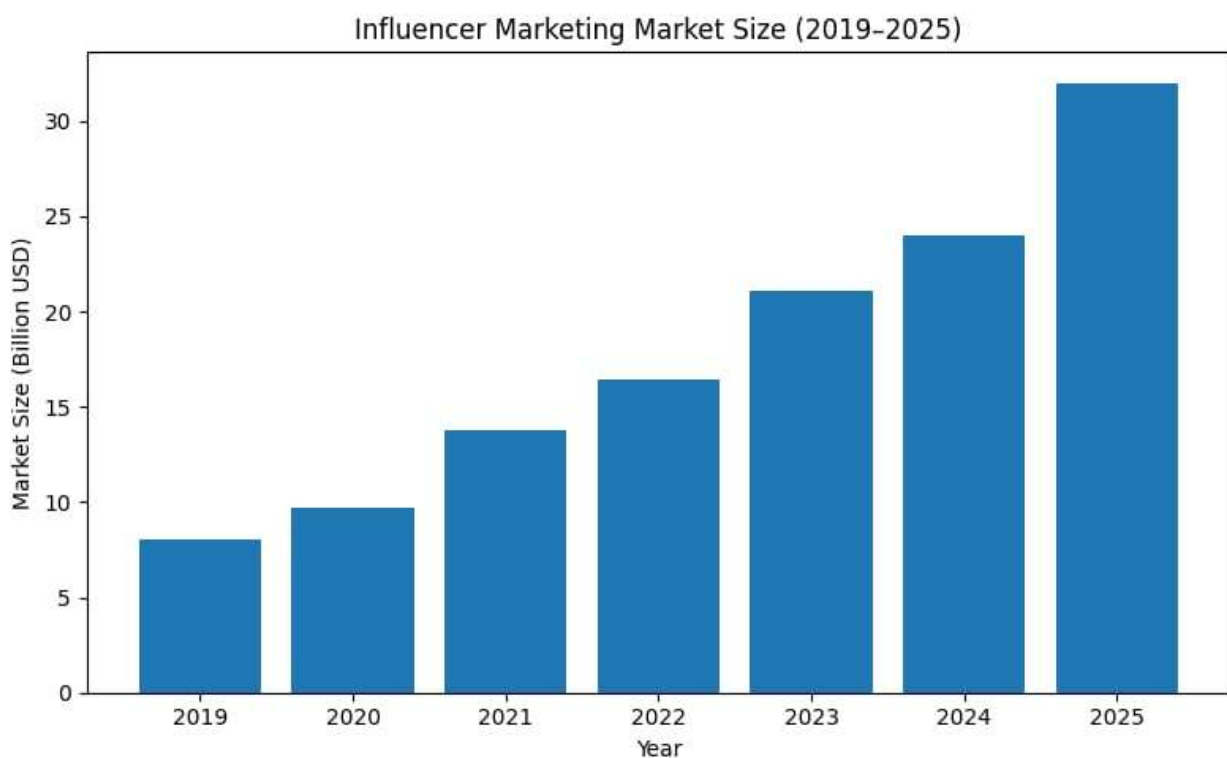
4. Emerging Dynamics

- The use of AI in influencer marketing (for content creation, optimization, identification, and performance tracking) is growing rapidly.
- Recent literature calls for better computational methods, improved ethical transparency, and regulatory alignment in influencer studies.

Key Influencer Marketing Trends & Statistics (2024–2025)

Trend / Metric	Measurement / Value
Global market size (2024)	24 billion
Projected market (2025)	>32 billion
ROI (Average)	5.78 per 1 spent
Instagram influencer preference	57–79%
TikTok influencer share	41–52%
Marketers planning to increase budgets	66–80%
Micro-influencer engagement	Higher than macro
AI adoption for influencer tools	63–73%
Platforms with highest influencer ROI	Instagram

Bar Graph:



Figure

- The graph shows a continuous increase in influencer marketing spending from 2019 to 2025.
- The industry grows sharply after 2020 due to rising social media usage and digital advertising.
- By 2025, influencer marketing is projected to reach its highest level, showing strong future potential.

RESEARCH METHOD

Data Collection and Measurement

This research adopts **Pentad Analysis**, based on Kenneth Burke's theory, to examine symbolic human action and identify the motivations underlying communication practices in the **contemporary digital era (2025–2026)**. As digital platforms and social media increasingly shape human interaction, Pentad Analysis provides a relevant and systematic

framework for understanding how meaning, intent, and ideology are constructed and communicated through digital content. The analysis focuses on five central elements of human drama: **Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose**.

The **Act** refers to the communicative action or message produced; the **Scene** encompasses the digital and socio-cultural context in which the action occurs, including platform characteristics, temporal setting, and audience environment; the **Agent** denotes the individual or organization responsible for the action; the **Agency** refers to the digital tools, platforms, and strategies employed to carry out the action; and the **Purpose** represents the intended outcomes, such as persuasion, engagement, branding, or identity construction.

In addition to these five elements, Burke introduced a sixth component, **Attitude**, which captures the agent's orientation, tone, or emotional stance toward the action. In the current digital landscape, attitude is especially visible through stylistic choices, narrative framing, visual aesthetics, and interactive engagement with audiences. By applying these elements, the study systematically analyzes digital communication to identify dominant ideologies, values, and strategic intentions embedded in contemporary messages.

This approach enables a deeper understanding of how communicators—particularly within social media and influencer-driven environments—use symbolic resources to shape perceptions, influence audiences, and construct meaning in the **digital age of 2025–2026**.

Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of this study were ensured through four qualitative trustworthiness criteria: **credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability**, as outlined by Sugiyono and widely applied in contemporary qualitative research.

Credibility was established through a **member-checking process** involving selected influencers to verify the accuracy and relevance of the data collected. Influencers were purposively selected using a **snowball sampling technique**, which remains effective in identifying information-rich participants within influencer communities in the current digital environment. This process ensured that interpretations accurately reflected the influencers' perspectives and professional practices.

Transferability was addressed by conducting **continuous observation and longitudinal content analysis** across digital platforms. By regularly analyzing influencer content over a defined time period, the study examined consistency in messaging, personal branding, and engagement patterns, allowing findings to be meaningfully applied to similar influencer communities operating within comparable digital contexts in **2025–2026**.

Dependability was ensured through **systematic documentation of research procedures**, including data collection, coding, and analysis processes. Detailed descriptions of influencer content strategies and personal branding elements were provided so that the study could be replicated or audited by future researchers examining influencer marketing in evolving digital environments.

Confirmability was achieved by minimizing researcher bias through **data triangulation and transparent analytic procedures**. This involved observing and analyzing influencer–follower interactions, particularly within comment sections and engagement metrics, to ensure that findings were grounded in observable data rather than subjective interpretation.

It refers to the consistency and dependability of the research findings over time and across different researchers. Reliability is ensured through systematic data collection procedures, such as analyzing influencer content over a fixed time period, applying consistent coding categories, and clearly documenting research steps. Inter-coder reliability can be improved by using standardized coding manuals and repeated observations of influencer posts across platforms.

Although digital content evolves rapidly, reliability in influencer marketing research is maintained by clearly defining the timeframe, platform features, and analytical criteria used in the study.

Overall, ensuring strong validity and reliability allows influencer marketing research to provide credible insights into how digital influencers shape consumer behavior, brand communication, and social interaction in the contemporary digital environment.

FINDINGS

Based on Pentad analysis, we could understand that: Influencer marketing is a phenomenon in the digital era, Types of consumer's interest is depend on the influencer's characteristics, and Influencers can act as digital advocates for the companies they work with.

1. Influencer marketing is a phenomenon in digital era:



Figure 3



Figure 4

MrBeast, whose real name is Jimmy Donaldson, is one of the most prominent examples of how influencer marketing operates in the digital era. He creates high-budget, emotionally engaging content primarily on YouTube, focusing on extreme challenges, large-scale giveaways, and philanthropic activities. His videos are carefully structured to capture attention within the first few seconds, maintain suspense through storytelling, and deliver a strong emotional payoff at the end. This approach maximizes viewer engagement and watch time, allowing his content to perform exceptionally well within platform algorithms. MrBeast strategically distributes his content across multiple platforms such as YouTube Shorts, TikTok, and Instagram Reels by repurposing key moments from longer videos, thereby expanding reach and visibility among diverse audiences.

MrBeast generates income through multiple revenue streams, including YouTube advertising revenue, brand sponsorships, merchandise sales, and his food brand, Feastables. His philanthropic initiatives, such as donating money, funding surgeries, and supporting environmental campaigns, are integrated into his content and serve both social and branding purposes. This combination of entertainment, generosity, and strategic monetization has transformed MrBeast from a content creator into a digital entrepreneur and media brand, illustrating how influencer marketing in the current digital landscape extends beyond promotion to become a powerful business and cultural phenomenon.

2. Types of consumer's interest is depend on the influencer's characteristics:

Influencers themselves consist of various categories that match the interests and personalities of the influencers themselves. For example, influencers in the fields of fashion, travel, culinary, lifestyle, cooking, make-up, politicians and so on. They will be seen as experts by followers who follow their accounts because they share content that matches their followers' interests. The selection of 2 samples in this study was carried out through strict criteria and considerations, where influencers were judged to have hobbies that match the content they endorsed. In addition, the followers of the selected influencers analyzed reflect the basic characteristics of the influencers themselves, one sample which selected because it considered the most suitable for analyzing this topic.

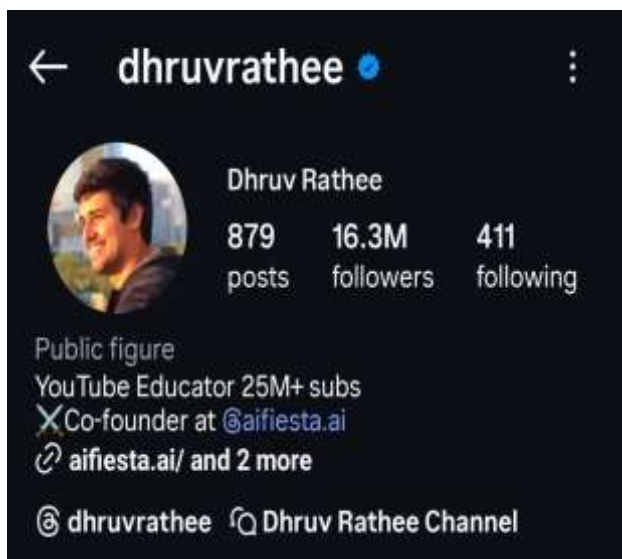


Figure 5

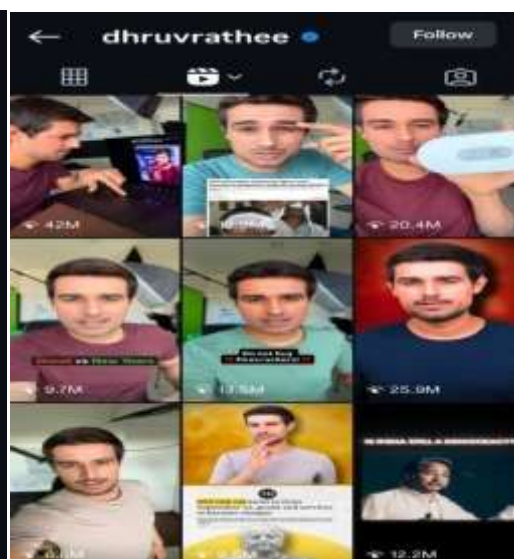


Figure 6

Dhruv Rathee is a prominent example of how **consumer interest varies according to an influencer's characteristics** in the digital age. He is known for creating **educational, analytical, and opinion-based content** on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and X (Twitter), focusing on topics like politics, social issues, environment, economics, and digital literacy. Unlike entertainment-focused influencers, Dhruv Rathee's core characteristic is **intellectual credibility**. He presents well-researched information using data, visuals, and structured explanations. This attracts consumers who are interested in **knowledge, critical thinking, and informed decision-making**, rather than impulsive consumption. The type of consumer interest generated by Dhruv Rathee depends largely on his **expertise, rational tone, and perceived authenticity**. His audience primarily consists of students, young professionals, and socially aware viewers who value factual content and logical arguments. He builds trust by citing sources, explaining multiple perspectives, and maintaining a calm, explanatory communication style. As a result, consumers are more interested in **long-form content**, such as detailed videos and explanatory posts, rather than short promotional messages. This shows that influencers with educational characteristics tend to attract audiences seeking **informational and value-driven content** rather than purely emotional or aspirational appeal.

Dhruv Rathee monetizes his influence through **YouTube ad revenue, brand collaborations, online courses, and sponsored content**, but he is selective about partnerships to maintain credibility. Brands related to education, finance, technology, sustainability, and digital tools align well with his influencer persona. His audience responds positively to such promotions because they perceive them as relevant and trustworthy. This demonstrates that consumer interest is closely tied to the **alignment between influencer characteristics and brand values**. In contrast to lifestyle or entertainment influencers, Dhruv Rathee's success highlights how **knowledge-based influence shapes consumer trust, engagement, and purchasing behavior**, reinforcing the idea that different influencer characteristics generate different types of consumer interest in the digital era.

3. Influencers can act as digital advocates for the companies they work with:

Influencers can act as digital advocates for the companies they work with. If a company previously had to work with well-known artists or figures as brand ambassadors, in influencer marketing, influencers will make themselves as representatives of a brand. The personality, attitude, and mindset of influencers will also influence how consumers translate a brand. Therefore, companies must be smart in choosing the right influencer according to the character that they want to create from a brand, considering that the influencer's character will closely attach to the brand image they represent. The most suitable example for analyzing this topic:



Figure 7

Figure 8

Elon Musk is a powerful example of how an individual can act as a **digital advocate for companies through personal influence**, even though he is primarily a business leader rather than a traditional influencer. Through platforms like **X (formerly Twitter)**, Elon Musk directly communicates with millions of followers, shaping public perception of his companies such as **Tesla, SpaceX, and Neuralink**. His personal characteristics—innovation-driven mindset, bold communication style, and strong personal branding—significantly influence consumer interest and trust. Elon Musk acts as a digital advocate by **personally promoting product updates, technological achievements, and company visions** in real time. For example, his tweets about Tesla's new features or SpaceX's rocket launches often lead to immediate public attention, media coverage, and increased consumer interest. Unlike paid influencers, Musk's advocacy feels authentic because he is deeply involved in the development of the products he promotes. Consumers who admire innovation, futurism, and entrepreneurship are particularly influenced by his communication style, demonstrating that **consumer interest depends heavily on influencer characteristics** such as authority, expertise, and visionary leadership.



Figure 9

However, Musk's advocacy is also controversial at times due to his spontaneous and opinionated online presence. While this can create volatility, it also strengthens engagement and visibility. Overall, Elon Musk exemplifies how influencers, especially founder-influencers, can act as digital advocates by using their personal voice to build brand awareness, shape consumer attitudes, and directly influence market behavior in the digital age.

DISCUSSION

The influencer marketing in the digital age is still a hot trend favored by companies to promote brands, be it in the form of products or services. A large and emotionally close fan base between followers and influencers becomes a profitable market share for companies to introduce products or services to potential customers, especially in industrial sectors that are close to the daily life and lifestyle of influencers. Of course, as a business actor, a company must have Key Performance Indicators (KPI) that can measure the effectiveness of influencer marketing. This can be seen from the number of reach, social interactions (in the form of likes, shares, comments, follows, and mentions), brand mentions, and the increase in traffic from the website. This aims to determine the effectiveness of influencer-generated content on consumer engagement with a brand. Likewise, the content strategy carried out by influencers must be in accordance with the ultimate goal desired by the company in introducing the brand. In this case, content with an unboxing type, a campaign with a special theme or hashtag, pre-release of the product to be launched, storytelling from a particular story, giveaways or a contest with product or service prizes, to discount codes. The right content approach will support how companies can maximize influencer marketing to introduce the products or services offered effectively. This also increases brand awareness of the brand being promoted

THEORITICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

Influencer marketing is a choice of digital marketing methods that are popular in reaching Generation Z who are in the 18-24 age range and use Instagram media. Theoretically, influencer marketing will increase consumer brand awareness of the brand being promoted, whether consumers see directly through the influencer's News Feed or indirectly through Instagram Stories. The interaction of followers with influencers when providing reviews about products or services indirectly exposes followers to potential consumers of the brand. Practically, the effectiveness of influencer marketing promotional activities is still a question, whether it is limited to brand recognition or up to the call for action stage for consumers. If influencer marketing is limited to brand recognition, then it should also be noted the validity of the interactions carried out by the followers of the influencer concerned. Are the likes, shares, and comments indicators made by followers of organic interactions or fake engagement. This needs to be a concern for companies that will use influencer marketing as their marketing method, especially for macro-influencers with a large number of followers.

CONCLUSION

Influencer marketing can be said to be an innovative marketing method in the digital era by utilizing the influencer's personality, attitude, and lifestyle in representing the brand to be promoted. Influencers' expertise and expertise in creating content can make followers bond emotionally which hopefully also affects how followers perceive the brand being promoted. The use of influencer marketing itself must be adjusted to who is the target market, budget, expected Key Performance Indicators, and suitability between influencers and brands. Through the right approach, influencer marketing can become an effective marketing strategy in the digital age era.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has several limitations, especially from the consumer perspective. This study does not provide room for followers, in this case potential consumers in telling and assessing their experiences when viewing content posted by influencers they follow in assessing the effectiveness of the program, both in terms of brand awareness and purchasing decisions. In addition, the influencers studied in this study are influencers who live in Indonesia, so it cannot be generalized to identify influencer marketing for influencers abroad. In addition, this study has not discussed the

strategic aspects of corporate marketing through influencer marketing through the interview, so we cannot know for sure the ultimate goal expected of influencer marketing by companies. This study can be a further research conducted to enrich research on influencer marketing.

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