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## THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS AND OPINION LEADERS ON SALES: FUNNEL TRANSFORMATION AND INCREASED BUSINESS ROI THROUGH BLOGGER ADVERTISING

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### ABSTRACT

The article examines the impact of influencers and opinion leaders on sales through the lens of the transformation of the consumer journey and the restructuring of managerial metrics in digital commerce. The relevance of the study is determined by the crisis of trust in traditional advertising, the fragmentation of media consumption, and the expansion of social commerce, where purchases are increasingly completed within social platforms via seamless shopping mechanics and algorithmic feeds. The purpose of this work is to systematize the psychological and economic mechanisms of influence, conceptualize the collapse of the sales funnel, and formulate a strategic framework for increasing ROI through advertising with bloggers. The scientific novelty lies in the synthesis of the Source Credibility Model, Parasocial Interaction Theory, and Elaboration Likelihood Model with market data for 2024–2026, as well as in substantiating the shift from reach-based evaluations to a financially oriented logic of LTV, CAC, and ROAS grounded in AI-based attribution and predictive scoring. The key findings demonstrate that micro- and nano-influencers in niche markets generate denser trust and a higher return on budget, and that the sales funnel is evolving into a cyclical community model in which content, social proof, and purchase form a self-sustaining loop that requires authenticity risk management and advanced multichannel analytics. The article is of practical value for marketers, e-commerce owners, and executives responsible for sales growth and the effectiveness of advertising investments.

**KEYWORDS:** influencer marketing, opinion leaders, social commerce, funnel collapse, parasocial relationships

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years, the global landscape of digital marketing and e-commerce has undergone a fundamental, paradigmatic shift (Hochstein et al., 2023). The driving force behind these tectonic changes has emerged less from the technological renewal of media channels or improvements in



targeting algorithms and more from the deep transformation of the model of consumer trust and the mechanism of decision-making. The crisis of trust in traditional corporate advertising, exacerbated by the widespread use of ad-blocking technologies and banner blindness, has coincided with an era of unprecedented growth in the creator economy (Ning et al., 2023).

The relevance of the present study is driven by the progressive fragmentation of media consumption and the rapid development of social commerce technologies that have radically and irreversibly altered customer paths to purchase (customer journey) (Mele et al., 2024). Social platforms have ceased to function solely as channels for social communication and have turned into new, self-sufficient centers of gravity for media and commerce. Research demonstrates that more than half of consumers, especially millennials and Generation Z, feel a significantly deeper emotional and parasocial connection with independent content creators than with traditional Hollywood or television celebrities (Su et al., 2021). Audiences place comprehensive trust in the recommendations of digital creators when making financial and consumer decisions. This process transforms influencers from simple brand megaphones into primary agents who validate quality, serve as trusted guides, and become full-fledged co-creators of the consumer experience.

The scientific and practical problem underlying this study consists in a critical cognitive and operational gap in corporate management. Despite growing investments in collaboration with opinion leaders, the overwhelming majority of companies continue to evaluate the effectiveness of these investments through outdated linear sales funnels and so-called vanity metrics, which include basic reach, view counts, and likes (Pan et al., 2024). There is an acute lack of understanding of how the tactical use of bloggers for generating initial traffic should be transformed into a strategic approach that restructures the entire operational model of the business around long-term customer lifetime value (LTV) and accurate revenue attribution (ROAS).

The purpose of this study is to systematize the psychological and economic mechanisms underlying opinion leaders' influence on consumer behavior, conceptualize the collapse of the sales funnel, and develop a scientifically grounded strategic framework for maximizing business return on investment (ROI) through precision influencer marketing.

In order to reach that goal, the theoretical foundations of influencers' perception are analyzed by means of social psychology and the use of reference models of communication. Secondly, the evolution of the funnel, its adaptation to the new logic of social commerce, and a comparison of the unit economics of different advertising channels are examined. Fourth and finally, theoretical constructs are validated based on practical outcomes using a case study of the beauty retailer Sephora.

The scientific novelty of the work consists of an original synthesis of fundamental theories of mass communication (Elaboration Likelihood Model, Source Credibility Model) with empirical data from



the global market for the period 2024–2026. The study substantiates the need to transition from traditional customer acquisition cost (CAC) metrics to models of a continuous customer life cycle that integrate artificial intelligence systems and deep parasocial ties. This transformation forms a new paradigm for assessing the effectiveness of digital marketing.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The methodological foundation of this work is based on a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach that organically combines concepts from behavioral economics, strategic digital marketing, and social psychology. The study is conducted within a mixed (positivist–interpretivist) paradigm. This makes it possible to evaluate return on investment quantitatively and also to interpret the deep motives of consumer behavior qualitatively.

The primary method for collecting and systematizing theoretical material is the Literature Review. Within this framework, relevant academic publications indexed in the international scientometric databases Scopus and Web of Science were analyzed, along with conference materials from IEEE and ACM for the period 2021-2026.

The first cluster of sources comprises fundamental works and empirical studies that reveal the psychological determinants of influence through the lens of classical communication theories. The second cluster includes empirical and analytical works on the collapse of the classical sales funnel, the development of social commerce, and the transformation of the consumer journey. The third cluster consists of sources focused on financial efficiency, end-to-end analytics, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into marketing, and the calculation of ROI, LTV, CAC, and ROAS metrics.

The applied part of the work is carried out using the case study method, which employs a structural approach to evaluating business processes. Consolidated data on Sephora's strategies serves as the primary source for verifying the theoretical conclusions under market conditions.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Theoretical Determinants of Influence: The Architecture of Trust and Decision-Making

The unexpected success of influencer marketing, which often yields higher returns than other mass media channels, as well as the basis on which it does so, cannot be explained in purely technical terms with social network ranking algorithms. Rather, influencer marketing at the intersection of socio-psychological mechanisms and a reconstruction of consumer trust. Analysis of the academic literature enables these mechanisms to be structured into three interrelated theoretical constructs.

First, the foundation is the Source Credibility Model (SCM). In its classical understanding, the persuasive impact of any communicator depends on three key factors: perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and physical or social attractiveness (Volkmer & Meißner, 2025). In contrast to macro-influencers and traditional celebrities, who are often perceived as distant figures with obvious



commercial motives, micro- and nano-influencers exhibit a very high level of homophily, that is, behavioral and social similarity with their audiences. Studies show that this perceived ordinariness and authenticity serve as powerful catalysts of trust. Consumers regard micro-influencers as independent experts or friends with shared interests whose reviews are devoid of aggressive transactional subtext (Ndasi & Cheung, 2025).

Second, the impact of influencers critically depends on Parasocial Interaction Theory (PSI). Parasocial relationships are psychological phenomena in which media users form illusory, one-sided emotional bonds with public figures (Abdinagoro & Bismo, 2024). In the era of Web 2.0 and Web 3.0, social networks have provided unprecedented opportunities for such interactions through live streams, comments, disappearing content formats such as Stories, and the display of unfiltered everyday life. Empirical analysis shows that the depth and quality of parasocial relationships directly moderate the user's purchase intention (Tyrväinen & Karjaluo, 2025). An important consequence of a strong parasocial bond is a significant reduction in persuasion knowledge, the consumer's natural defensive cognitive barrier. When a product is natively integrated into the content of an influencer with whom the viewer has established a strong parasocial connection, the brain decodes the advertising message as sincere, friendly advice rather than a paid commercial transaction.

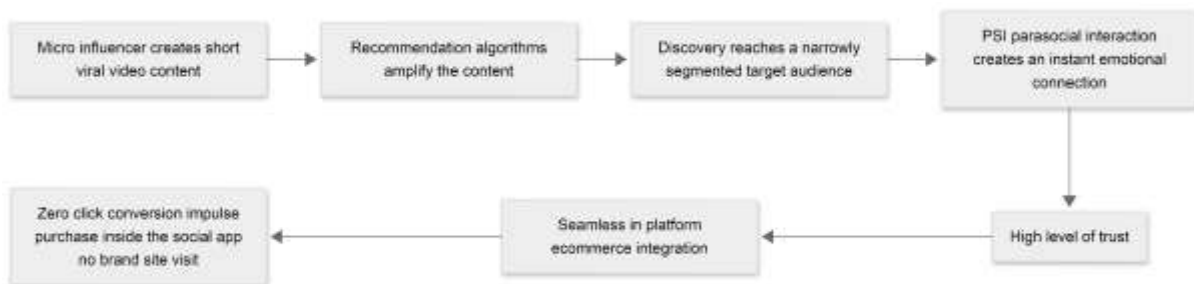
Third, the mechanism by which attention is converted into a transaction can be described by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). This model postulates that the human brain processes information via two alternative routes. The central route is rational and requires high cognitive involvement. The peripheral route is emotional and relies on heuristic cues (Hu et al., 2025). Strategically calibrated influencer marketing is unique in that it can activate both routes simultaneously. On the one hand, detailed, well-reasoned reviews of niche product characteristics, such as a micro-influencer's breakdown of a cosmetic product's composition, trigger the central processing route. On the other hand, visual aesthetics, the creator's charisma, and social proof in the form of thousands of likes and comments activate the peripheral route (Hu et al., 2025). A recent study based on conjoint analysis demonstrates that a hybrid interaction style, in which the blogger combines high authenticity with proactive engagement of followers, generates the maximum level of emotional resonance. This resonance statistically emerges as the primary mediator in the final purchase decision (Li et al., 2025).

### **3.2. The Era of Social Commerce and the Phenomenon of Sales Funnel Collapse**

The deep penetration of influencers into the architecture of e-commerce has triggered a tectonic shift that is widely discussed in academic and consulting circles (Libai et al., 2025). The traditional conceptual model of consumer behavior, built around linear stages such as AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action) or Awareness, Consideration, Decision, has ultimately lost its relevance in the realities of 2025–2026.

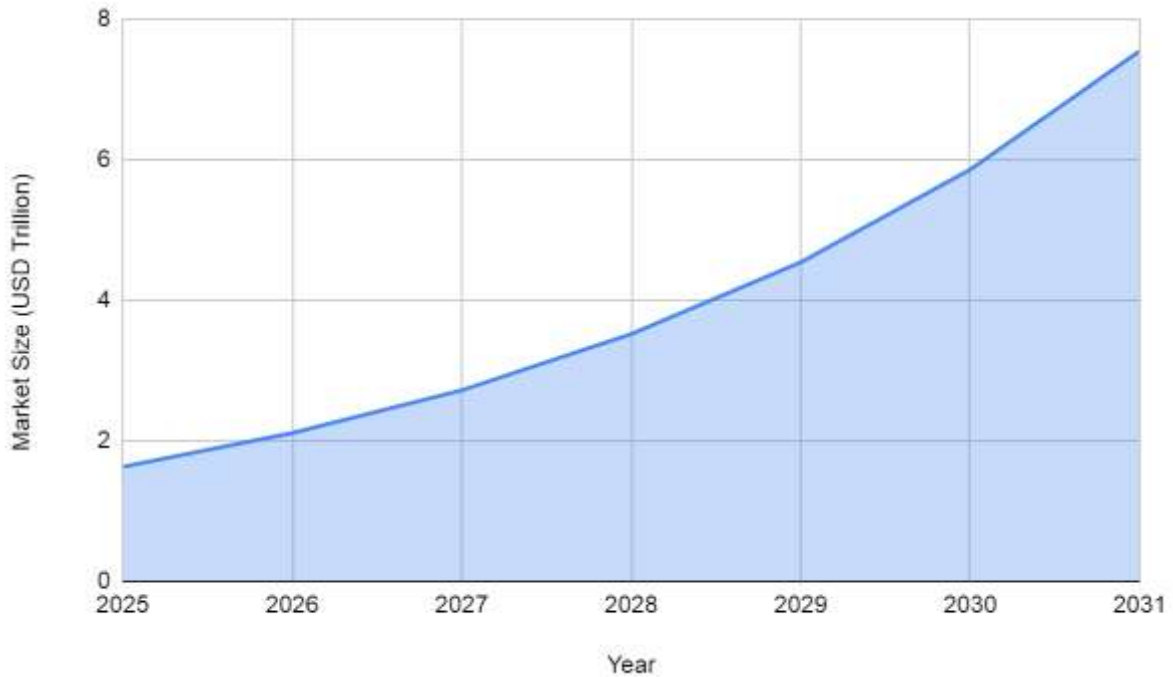
As recently as 2021–2022, digital marketing operated predominantly within a linear paradigm. Influencers were engaged by brands almost exclusively at the Consideration stage as an external, auxiliary instrument of social proof (Joshi et al., 2023). The typical user path assumed that the consumer encountered mass media advertising, then initiated an independent search for video reviews by profile bloggers on YouTube, and only afterward visited the retailer's official website or an offline store. This fragmented process took from several days to several months and was characterized by an extremely high loss rate at each transition stage.

By 2024-2026, algorithmic feed ecosystems (TikTok Shop, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts) and shoppable content tags have sharply compressed the online shopping funnel to a matter of minutes or even seconds (Meng et al., 2024). The system in its current form (see Figure 1) works as follows. A micro-influencer publishes short, viral videos. The recommendation algorithm ensures a narrowly defined audience sees their videos at the Discovery stage. The PSI (parasocial interaction) creates an instant emotional connection. This leads to a high level of trust, which is supported by seamless in-platform e-commerce integration, resulting in zero-click conversion (impulse purchase inside the social app, no brand site visit).



**Fig. 1. Modern Algorithmic Parasocial Commerce Loop**

The combination of the trust generated from the immediacy of emotion from the PSI and the convenience of the e-commerce experience within the social network, removed from the need to navigate away from the platform to the brand's website, has created the Zero-Click conversion. The Social Commerce Market size was USD 1.63 trillion in 2025 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 29.12% between 2025 and 2031, from USD 2.11 trillion in 2026 to USD 7.55 trillion between 2026 and 2031 (Mordor Intelligence, 2025).



**Fig. 2. Global Social Commerce Market Growth Forecast (Mordor Intelligence, 2025)**

In a strategic perspective, the sales funnel ultimately transforms from a linear vector into a closed, self-reproducing cyclical model whose functional core is a loyal digital community. Table 1 illustrates the evolution of the consumer journey architecture under the influence of influencer marketing

**Table 1. Evolution of the consumer journey architecture under the influence of influencer marketing**

<b>Evaluation criterion</b>	<b>Stage 1: Linear model (2021)</b>	<b>Stage 2: Funnel collapse (2024)</b>	<b>Stage 3: Cyclical community model (2026)</b>
<b>Cycle duration</b>	Weeks–months	Minutes–hours	Continuous, recursive cycle
<b>Key trigger</b>	Mass corporate advertising	Algorithm-driven viral content	Social proof (UGC) and loyalty
<b>Main conversion environment</b>	External websites, offline retail	Inside social platforms (Social Commerce)	Messaging + social network ecosystems

<b>Influencer's role</b>	External expert reviewer	Direct integrator and seller	Community moderator, ambassador, brand partner
<b>Target metric</b>	Reach, click-through (CTR)	Conversion rate (CR), return on ad spend (ROAS)	Customer lifetime value (LTV), retention

Within the cyclical model paradigm, the opinion leader ceases to function as a mere advertising billboard. The influencer assumes the role of community ideologist and curator who continuously moderates user-generated content (UGC). Once the client has made a purchase, the individual remains within the ecosystem. The customer returns to the influencer's social profile, posts a review, or creates content featuring the product. Algorithms transform this content into new social proof that acts as a trigger for involving subsequent users. A fundamental consequence of this conceptual shift is an imperative for marketing departments to change focus. Instead of tactics for buying isolated conversions, there is a strategic need to design ecosystems that maximize LTV.

**3.3. Comparative Effectiveness: Macro- and Micro-Influencers in Niche Markets**

It has also been suggested that an influencer's audience size negatively correlates with engagement and eventual monetary impact. Micro-influencers (with 1,000-100,000 followers) are found to have more impact than macro-influencers or celebrities in high-consumer-emotional-involvement niche markets such as beauty and health, fashion, travel, and tourism (Chen et al., 2024).

This apparent paradox can be explained by the mechanics of trust formation embedded in the SCM. Micro-influencers possess deep topical authority in narrow segments. They devote more time to interacting with their audiences, responding to comments, and personalizing content, which greatly amplifies the effect of parasocial presence (Conde & Casais, 2023). As a result, their recommendations are interpreted as expert assessments provided by a peer rather than as a standard advertising contract.

In academic studies from 2021 to 2025, researchers found that in Instagram, influencers with a smaller follower count at the nano- and micro-influencer levels were shown to outperform those at the macro- and mega-influencer levels in audience interaction. Smaller influencers tend to know their audience better and have higher engagement rates due to having a more narrowly representative audience. Conversely, mega-influencers, with over one million followers, tend to have a lower engagement rate. This pattern is documented in various studies investigating the impact of audience size on the effectiveness of social media campaigns and user engagement (Chen et al., 2024).

Moreover, macro-influencers often charge high fixed fees based on reach, thereby causing inefficient budget allocation or ad waste, because a significant part of their heterogeneous audience has little



interest in a specific niche product. Micro-influencers, by contrast, offer access to highly concentrated, pre-segmented communities, which sharply increases the likelihood of conversion and reduces the cost of acquiring each individual customer (CAC).

Furthermore, micro and nano influencers tend to have high levels of attention concentrated on small sub-communities in which the audience is very concordant regarding their behaviors, values, and interests (not just their age and gender). This includes clean skincare, conscious tourism, capsule wardrobes, and post-workout recovery. Such homogeneity reduces noise and increases the precision of message targeting. Therefore, even with lower reach, the overall effect can be stronger due to a higher number of relevant contacts. Macro-influencers tend to exhibit audience fragmentation and intense competition for attention among content items. This leads to a dilution of meaning when the advertising message loses persuasive power within a flow of heterogeneous interests.

From a behavioral economics perspective, a difference emerges in perceived purchase risk. Niche products often require a high level of trust in the information source. Cosmetics and health are associated with bodily consequences, while fashion and tourism are associated with social and financial costs of error. Under such conditions, a recommendation from a micro-influencer serves as social proof within a native group and reduces subjective uncertainty by allowing followers to witness a long history of product use, clarify questions in comments, and see consistency in the creator's position. In the case of a macro-influencer, the trust signal can weaken due to the frequency of advertising integrations and the lower visibility of actual long-term experience. The audience is then more inclined to interpret the message as standard advertising.

Effectiveness should also be assessed through the quality of interactions that precede conversion. Micro-influencers typically experience long comment threads with clarifying questions about ingredients, sizes, routes, contraindications, and alternative options. Communication thereby approaches a consultative format. This increases the chance that the initial contact becomes an intention and then a purchase. Another effect of spreading through local communities is user-generated content, repeated mentioning, and organic recommendations in local chats and communities. The micro-influencer as a node of trust and a moderator of meaning becomes most relevant in niches where opinions develop through discussions, comparison, and social confirmation.

### **3.4. Transformation of Metrics: From Reach to LTV, CAC, and Predictive AI**

The shift from a linear funnel to a cyclical ecosystem requires a radical revision of corporate key performance indicators. The move away from superficial vanity metrics toward strict financial performance metrics is a central trend in corporate governance in 2025–2026 (Morgan et al., 2021). Influencer campaigns exert a statistically significant positive impact on purchasing behavior and sales, indicating the commercial effectiveness of these strategies when campaign structures are appropriately designed (Pan et al., 2024).



Overall, econometric evidence comparing the effectiveness of customary advertising formats with influencer marketing has found influencer marketing to have a statistically important advantage over customary advertising formats in their direct conversion rate (CR) and return on investment. However, the CAC also rises due to the media space becoming saturated with algorithmic advertising. Influencer marketing was found to be a much more cost-efficient and return on investment (ROI) form of communication than customary marketing, especially in small supersegments and when targeting based on a particular set of business objectives (Pan et al., 2024). Influencer characteristics and engagement as outcome variables positively influence more commercial outcomes including sales and purchases, compared with customary marketing channels.

However, if the campaign is structured correctly and employs the right influencers, influencer marketing campaigns provide a better ROI with increased sales and the potential for lower customer acquisition costs than more conventional marketing methods.

At the same time, the deep integration of buyers into the brand's social community through bloggers substantially increases repeat purchase frequency and multiplies LTV. A healthy LTV-to-CAC ratio in optimized influencer strategies reaches the venture industry's golden standard of approximately 3:1 or 4:1.

The seamless integration of artificial intelligence systems has become an indispensable element of industry evolution. A transition from intuitive to precision influencer marketing is now infeasible without working with big data. Machine learning algorithms are applied to several critical tasks. First, they support predictive ROI scoring. Systems analyze historical sales cohorts for a given creator and compare them with the brand's audience demographics. Second, they support fraud detection. AI conducts real-time sentiment analysis of comments, identifying bot traffic and protecting advertising budgets. Third, modern SaaS platforms integrate directly with e-commerce engines such as Shopify and WooCommerce and provide mathematically accurate end-to-end attribution for every conversion initiated by a specific creator.

### **3.5. Industry Case Study: Strategic Superiority in Beauty Retail**

To empirically validate the theoretical constructs described above, a large-scale industry case study is useful. Beauty retail can be conveniently analyzed through the example of Sephora, which has built influence among opinion leaders through a managed system. At the center of this system lies the idea of trust that first transfers from a person to a product and then to the broader retail ecosystem. This pattern is critical for cosmetics because purchase decisions are made under high uncertainty. Shade, texture, skin compatibility, and usage scenarios are poorly represented by standard product pages.

Sephora's strategic architecture is built around formalized communities of creators with differentiated roles. The Sephora Squad program was launched in 2019 and has included more than 250 creators,



while the number of applications to participate is in the tens of thousands (Sephora, 2025). The company explicitly describes the logic of this creator ecosystem as a means of closing gaps in how customers discover new products and develop purchase habits. At the same time, Sephora has developed a network of professional skincare experts and a dedicated pool of makeup artists and stylists in order to connect entertaining content, consultation, and sales into a coherent chain.

At the level of behavioral science, this approach relies on predictable mechanisms. Meta-analyses of studies on parasocial engagement show that creator characteristics, including perceived competence and reliability, are associated with parasocial engagement (Tyrväinen & Karjaluo, 2025). This engagement is statistically associated with brand-related associations and purchase intention. The strength of the effect depends on the product's properties and the type of content. A similar pattern appears in beauty retail. Short form can drive beauty consumer interest, impulse buys. Long-form formats and responses to questions then consolidate conviction and alleviate doubts, especially in skincare.

As with other uses of the sales funnel, the Sephora case is compressed because of the transactional nature of the content. In showing a product, the creator is social proofing and explaining how to use it, as well as providing an opening to buy it. The company is very sensitive to the fact that they would want this point of entry, this attribution, to be tied not just broadly to a creator, but to a particular set of products. That's when influence becomes return on investment and that's when it becomes a question of financial performance.

The benefits of Sephora's investment in creators beyond the most popular become clear. Influence in cosmetics frequently operates through proximity and a sense of similarity rather than through the distance associated with fame. The combination of source credibility and parasocial relationships remains one of the most robust predictors of purchase intention in research on influencer advertising. This explains why annual programs involving selection, training, and long-term collaboration generate more predictable outcomes than single integrations. When contact is repeated across various contexts, audiences develop a habit of checking their choices against a specific creator.

Another line of strategic superiority is associated with live commerce because it reproduces in-store consultation and reduces several barriers to distance purchasing. Research on live commerce shows that format characteristics influence satisfaction, which, in turn, affects repeat-purchase intention and loyalty (Yun et al., 2023). In cosmetics, this is especially important for skincare and complex products where audience questions become integral to decision-making. For Sephora, this means that live streams and interactive formats drive more than one-off sales. They cultivate a habit of returning for personalized recommendations, which directly contributes to customer lifetime value.

A further element that enhances the economic effect of influence is the technological reduction of



uncertainty through digital try-on experiences. When the customer sees the result on their own face, their fear of error diminishes. Purchase probability increases, and return rates decline. A study of augmented reality cosmetic try-on applications shows that enjoyment, informativeness, and ease of use reinforce trust and behavioral intention (Micheletto et al., 2025). Excessively playful simplicity may intensify doubts. Therefore, the experience requires fine calibration. For Sephora, this naturally combines with creator content. The creator provides context and confidence. Technology provides perceptual validation of the decision.

From the perspective of the financial model, a key shift is the move from the cost of contact to the cost of proven action. Sephora collects first-party data through its loyalty program and links it to user behavior across digital channels. Opinion leader influence is used as a driver of validated intention. In such a system, a larger share of customers arrive with a pre-structured preference set, reducing pressure on discounts and supporting higher margins. At the same time, repeat purchases increase because creators bring audiences back not to a single product but to a care ritual, new product discovery, and seasonal updates to the cosmetic collection.

Thus, the Sephora case illustrates how orchestrated influence makes the funnel a cycle as content builds trust through consumer interactions. Trust leads to purchase, experience, and discussion, which becomes a different type of social proof, re-engaging an audience with repeated exposure. The long-term value of the model is not in the individual campaigns, but in the collective of organized groups of creators, participatory formats and risk-mitigation technologies that offer a sustainable competitive advantage around influencer impact.

### **3.6. Barriers, Systemic Risks, and Limitations**

Nevertheless influencer marketing has numerous advantages and a clear return on investment, the establishment of influencer marketing within a company's business processes is associated with some challenges.

Hyper-commercialization and the loss of authenticity are the most serious barriers. Research in consumer psychology highlights that bloggers with a strong commercial orientation towards their content quickly lose the finely tuned parasocial relationship they have with their audience (Migkos et al., 2025). When followers decode an advertising script as insincere, perceived trustworthiness within the SCM framework declines sharply. Advertising fatigue and irritation emerge. This may trigger unsubscribes and even active boycotts of the promoted brand. A justified solution is full transparency of sponsorship disclosure and a transition to genuine co-creation formats in which the brand grants the influencer extensive autonomy to adapt the core message to that creator's unique, native tone of voice.

The second significant barrier is the difficulty of scaling and maintaining cross-platform attribution



precision. Despite the rapid introduction of AI algorithms, most marketers still report substantial measurement gaps in ROI assessment for multichannel campaigns (Mou, 2024). A typical omnichannel behavior pattern arises when a consumer becomes engaged through a TikTok review but completes the conversion a week later via a search engine. This pattern critically distorts estimates of CAC for a particular creator. Overcoming this problem requires abandoning simplistic last-click attribution and implementing advanced econometric algorithms that evaluate the contribution of each touchpoint within Marketing Mix Modeling.

The third risk is the algorithmic filter bubble effect. The nature of social networks, which are oriented toward maximizing user retention, tends to confine content delivery to a limited pool of loyal followers for a given micro-influencer. This constrains brand expansion into new demographic segments without continuous discovery and onboarding of new influencer partners.

Synthesizing the presented data, the architecture for overcoming these barriers lies in strategic diversification. Brands should build pyramidal influence structures. The use of macro-influencers is primarily justified for generating initial, broad awareness at the top of the funnel. A broad, decentralized network of micro- and nano-influencers should be the core of the performance strategy to drive conversions, build community, and maximize LTV at the bottom of the funnel.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Influencer marketing has completed its historical evolution from a niche experimental tactical tool to a fundamental strategic core of the modern business model. In the context of the global transformation of the e-commerce industry, the widespread development of algorithmic social commerce platforms, and the shift toward the Web 3.0 paradigm, independent opinion leaders have consolidated their status as key drivers of operating profitability and business capitalization.

The conducted study fully confirms the achievement of the initially stated scientific and applied objectives. Relying on a solid theoretical foundation of psychological models, including the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the Source Credibility Model, and Parasocial Interaction Theory, as well as up-to-date empirical market data, the work demonstrates mathematically and logically that authentic, dialogic interaction with a segmented audience generates a level of loyalty and trust fundamentally unattainable for traditional corporate media advertising. The principal infrastructural consequence of this process is the irreversible collapse of the classical linear sales funnel. The complex, multi-day path from awareness to the final financial transaction is compressed into a single click within integrated social commerce ecosystems.

Formulating the study's key conclusions, several fundamental theses can be distinguished.

First, the exceptional economic efficiency of influencer marketing, expressed in an average ROI of approximately \$5.20–\$5.78 per dollar invested, arises primarily from phenomenally high conversion



rates rather than from low media contact costs. This conversion is created through the synergy of social proof and deep parasocial proximity that emerges between micro-influencers and their narrowly niche audiences.

Second, the architecture of contemporary digital marketing is rapidly and irreversibly shifting away from the practice of purchasing one-off sponsored posts towards strategic design of long-term, cyclical community ecosystems. In this new paradigm, the central financial metric of success is no longer short-term reductions in cost per click (CPC) or initial acquisition costs (CAC). The focal metric is the systematic maximization of each acquired customer's lifetime value (LTV) and the development of that customer's role as a brand advocate.

Third, the analyzed industry case demonstrates a regularity. Neglect of flexible, decentralized networks of micro-influencers in favor of conservative mass media leads to an inevitable strategic loss of the most active target audience, deterioration of margins, and erosion of market competitiveness.

To ensure sustainable scaling and survival in a highly competitive environment, modern companies urgently need to implement end-to-end precision analytics systems and AI-based partner scoring to segment the blogger pool strictly by function at different stages of the compressed sales funnel, and to adopt uncompromising, long-term partnership and co-creation formats with content creators.

The future of digital commerce belongs less to corporations with the largest budgets for buying abstract reach and more to adaptive brands capable of seamless integration into decentralized digital trust networks, where the social and reputational capital of opinion leaders is converted into measurable, long-term financial value.

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