

## Call for papers for *Recherche et Applications en Marketing* 2026 Special Issue

### Influencer Marketing Reconsidered: Analyses and Critical reflections of Effectiveness and Societal Influence

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**Deadline:** January 15<sup>th</sup> 2025

**Submission platform:** <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ram>

**Submission guidelines:** <https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/RME>

#### Background

With the omnipresence of social networks and digital marketing in individuals' daily lives, coupled with the growing distrust of traditional media advertising, numerous companies have ventured into influencer marketing. Influencer marketing, as a marketing practice, involves companies selecting and rewarding online influencers who actively engage their followers with the aim of promoting the company's offerings (Leung, Gu, and Palmatier 2022; Leung et al. 2022<sup>1</sup>). As a socio-cultural phenomenon, it reflects new power relations between personal brands and the marketisation of individuals as they become intertwined in the ecosystem of brands, agents, and managers. The industry has evolved into being a billion-dollar industry (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2023) that continues to grow due to influencers' strong engagement with followers (Hughes et al., 2019). Thus, influencer marketing does not solely impact marketing agendas but has become a phenomenon that affects our society in general (Kozinets et al., 2023).

Whilst influencer marketing's success has been significant, research has also depicted influencers' as precarious digital workers (Duffy et al., 2021), and consumers as targets of misinformation (Zofft, 2020) and as victims of images of overt materialism and overconsumption (Dinh & Lee, 2022), which adversely affect their mental health (Valkenburg, 2022). On the other hand, consumers are portrayed as savvy and questioning influencers' authenticity through anti-fandom (Mardon, Cocker & Daunt, 2023). Furthermore, influencers can enact market change (Scaraboto & Fisher, 2013) by disrupting cultural norms (Duthely, 2022) and boosting consumer self-esteem (Bond & Miller, 2021). In other words, it seems that influencer marketing has moved beyond being solely an effective strategy for marketers and into a new phase where new consequences and questions emerge.

In this special issue, we seek to address the impact of influencers on brands, consumers, and society from a critical perspective and understand new modes of influencer

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<sup>1</sup> "Influencer marketing," [is] a communication strategy in which a firm selects and incentivizes online influencers to engage their followers on social media in an attempt to promote the firm's offering (Leung, Gu, and Palmatier 2022; Leung et al. 2022).

marketing effectiveness. We aspire to encourage and broaden critical discussions on these practices by considering them from the standpoint of consumers, influencers, brands, and businesses, as well as from the broader socio-cultural and governmental perspectives. We wish to explore and probe the underlying currents in and around this marketing practice and the societal norms that have led to the success of influencer marketing and to expose the complex socio-cultural, technical, and economic drivers for this phenomenon.

The use of influencers implicitly refers to the practice of endorsement, which encompasses various terminologies designating brand spokespersons. Along with the evolution of influencers, a variety of categories of influencer types have emerged, such as micro-influencers, mommy-influencers, artificial influencer, and celebrity influencers (Ouvrein et al., 2021). There is still a scarcity of studies comparing the effects of the endorsement practice based on the type of influencers. The typologies, moreover, might also reflect different relationships with influencers' followers as well as different working conditions for the influencers. While the authenticity of influencers has been extensively discussed (Audrezet et al., 2018; Gannon & Prothero, 2016), the agency of influencers has received less attention. Although this duality seems naïve, they have been depicted either as empowered consumers (McQuarrie, Miller & Phillips, 2013) or marketing objects (Leung et al., 2022); instead, they appear as working human brands that are changing consumer culture and networks. However, research has also shown that influencers' platform agency is scarce, and they have been claimed to work in exploitative conditions, using their emotions as labour (Heeris Christensen, Gyrd-Jones & Beverland, 2023).

On the corporate side, modes of expression for companies and brands have significantly evolved over time, driven partly by increasingly diversified partnership practices and, on the other hand, by the opportunities provided by the internet and social networks and, more broadly, by the proliferation of touchpoints with consumers (Fleck & Ambroise 2019). As brands move away from more traditional communication channels, consumers react against overt brand relations where brands are "uninvited" and communities disinterested (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013). In some cases, brand communities and collectives become colonized by influencers, so that they become sites of tension and perceived commercialisation (Mardon, Cocker & Daunt, 2023). How do consumers respond? Furthermore, how should brands react and interact with these disaffected consumers? Are we witnessing another round of inflation in the dialectical relationship between brand and consumer (Holt, 2002), where influencers are the new go-between between the brand and consumers? Where does this leave the authenticity of the influencer and along with its effectiveness?

In the stage of consumer persuasion, influence marketing, based on influencers' posts and recommendations, aims to change followers' attitudes, opinions, or behavioral intentions, such as the intention to interact, recommend, and purchase. Is our current understanding of the nature of this influence sufficient to describe more critical consumers and perhaps adverse effects? Like classic celebrity endorsement, the foundations of the impact of marketing influencers integrate opinion leadership and parasocial relationships (Fariva et al., 2021). However, how do the social representations of "celebrities" and "influencers" as social objects differ, and can this lead to disparities in the nature, forms, and structures of the "brand endorser-consumer" relationship (Abidin, 2015)? How do disparities in the relational dynamics impact the processes of influence and persuasion by influencers (Lou et al., 2023)?

From a societal standpoint, influencer marketing is being scrutinized and questioned (Gallic & Marrone, 2020), particularly because the strategies or practices employed have faced negative criticism (Kim et al., 2021; Miklós-Thal et al., 2013). Do consumers not credulous about such initiatives or collaborations expect influencers to adopt more ethical and responsible stances and practices (Wellman et al., 2020)? If so, then what forms could they take? Influencers have changed business structures (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013) and the media landscape (Kozinets et al., 2023). They function as important role models in societal agendas, such as the green transition (Kapoor et al., 2023). On the other hand, they have also influenced consumers to more-consumption (Lee et al., 2022) and raised new ethical and equality challenges (Kozinets, Gretzel & Gambetti, 2023; Wellman et al., 2020). Moving forward, influencers' presentation of commercial content might need ethical and political regulation, both to protect followers and influencers themselves. Moreover, does public policy need to interfere with influencers' cultural production and impact on our society at large? Moreover, how do discussions and critical reflections of, for example, private and public matters help nuance the rather incredulous perception the general society have of influencers today?

**Finally, how do societal discourses influence influencers' precariat positions, for example, in relation to regulation, transparency, and consumer relations?**

### **Expected contributions**

This special issue aims to deepen the critical exploration, critical analysis, and development of theoretical, methodological, and managerial perspectives on influence practices and effectiveness. Expected contributions include conceptual or empirical approaches, regardless of the qualitative or quantitative nature of the methodology. We invite marketing specialists, psychology or consumer sociology researchers, and, more broadly, scholars in the humanities and social sciences to submit innovative, critical, and potentially interdisciplinary contributions about the intentions, processes, practices, and implications of influencer marketing.

Research questions could, indicatively and not exhaustively, focus on the following topics:

### **Influencers' Perspective**

- How do practices and effects based on different types of influencers (micro-, nano-, AI, and mega-influencers) differ? How can we understand the legitimation processes engaged by influencers and how different categorizations affect working conditions?
- In what way do platform affordances impact on influencers' working conditions, for example, in relation to algorithmic control or skillset that influencers need to attain?
- If we consider influencers as human or person-brands, how do they strategically work on themselves or quit their job as a human brand?
- How can we measure the attractiveness of influencers? Is there a social capital of influencers? How do they position themselves as identity references?
- How do we measure the brand value of influencer marketing? Can we depict a scale that nuances the effectiveness of human brands?
- What is the nature of influencers' agency from a stakeholder perspective?

## **Consumers' Perspective**

- What is the nature of the relationship between influencers, consumers, and brands (and maybe other stakeholders)? How is influence manufactured, and how is this changing?
- What are the sources of legitimacy, influence, and persuasion according to different types of influencers (micro-, nano-, and mega; lifestyle vs. expert, etc.)?
- What are the consequences of legislative changes to the influencer marketing industry aimed at protecting consumers?
- What are the mechanisms and processes of influence?
- How can we define (consumer or influencer) agency or non-agency in relation to socio-political or socio-cultural relations and consumer culture?
- What characteristics make individuals more or less sensitive to influence?

## **Brands' and Companies' Perspective**

- How can the effectiveness of the different types of influencers be assessed? Are current approaches sufficient?
- How does influencer marketing integrate into a digital strategy from a marketing (brand and communication management) or an information system perspective?
- How do influencers create value that support brands' objective?
- How can brands integrate influencers into their marketing campaigns?
- What is the interaction between brands and the brands of influencers and even the brands of consumers?

## **Government and Societal Issues Perspective**

- What is the impact of cultural differences on consumers' reactions to influencer marketing? And to what extent do the legislative contexts of countries impact these differences?
- How could the use of influencer marketing be implemented in public management?
- Why and how can vulnerable audiences (young people, less informed, less educated audiences) be protected?
- How can reflections and critical thinking based on French philosophy and sociology enrich our understanding of influencer marketing as social phenomenon?
- Is there a need to educate consumers to develop a critical mindset toward the practices and discourses of influencers? What might this look like?
- How do we protect influencers (and their kids) against themselves and market structures?
- Influencer marketing as a cultural phenomenon, future challenges, and possibilities?

Submissions must comply with RAM's guidelines. Proposals must be submitted directly on <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ram>, no later than January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The submission platform will be open from December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. Articles can be submitted in both French and English. The special issue will be published online in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2026. Accepted manuscripts will be published in French and English.

Finally, RAM is committed to transparent science and promotes the reproducibility of research. As such, the journal strongly encourages data sharing. For more information, please refer to the submission instructions at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/RAM>

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