

THE STATE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING FOR CONSUMERS IN 2023

Reaching value-driven customers
by forging relationships with
creators



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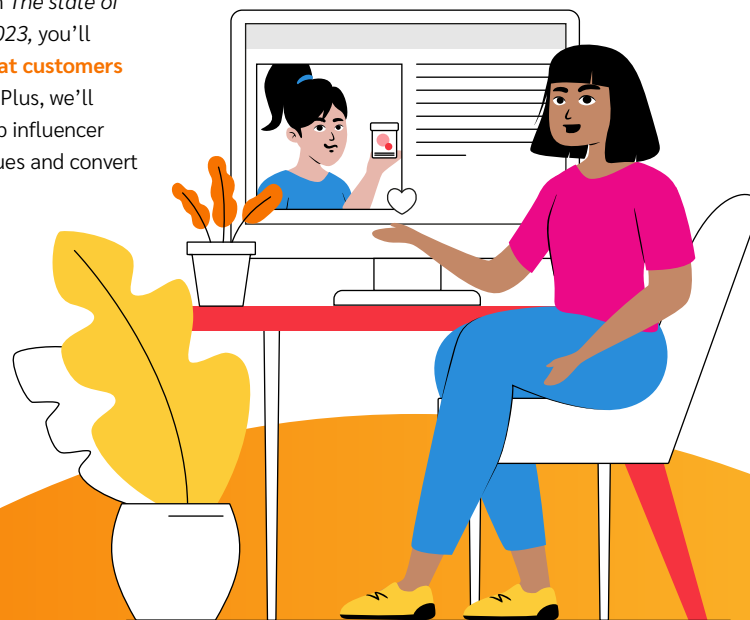
Introduction

Today's consumers like to believe they aren't easily persuaded, but their relationship with social media influencers reveal a different story.

The Know, Like, Trust Factor (KLT) is a time-tested marketing strategy based on the idea that people are likelier to buy something if someone they know, like, and trust recommends it. Nielsen reported that **89% of people trust personal recommendations** over other advertising channels. As consumers spend more time on social media, these word-of-mouth recommendations come from a familiar face they "know" but have never met.

Brands leverage social media influencers more than ever to reach new audiences and cultivate trust. Marketers often survey to learn more about the audiences they want to target. Still, most surveys miss one key: **consumer values don't always align with buying habits.**

Our latest research reveals some interesting – and often counterintuitive – discoveries about how consumers connect with and relate to influencers. In *The state of influencer marketing for consumers in 2023*, you'll find compelling insights that **expose what customers value when engaging with influencers**. Plus, we'll share innovative ways brands can develop influencer campaigns that align with consumer values and convert social media users into customers.



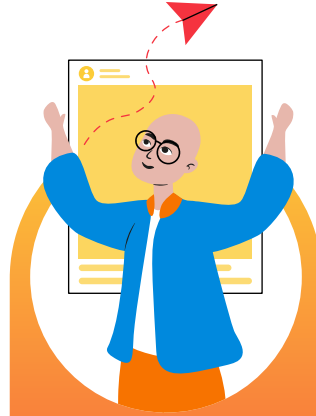
Key takeaways



Consumers say they look for transparency, integrity, and consistency to decide if an influencer is trustworthy



Nearly half of consumers say follower count impacts how much they trust an influencer, although this varies based on the countries surveyed



47% of consumers like when brands repost user-generated content (UGC)



More than half of all social media users say they frequently or always notice when an influencer promotes a brand or a product in their content



64% of consumers repeatedly make a purchase based on an influencer's recommendation or review at least some of the time

Who we surveyed and why

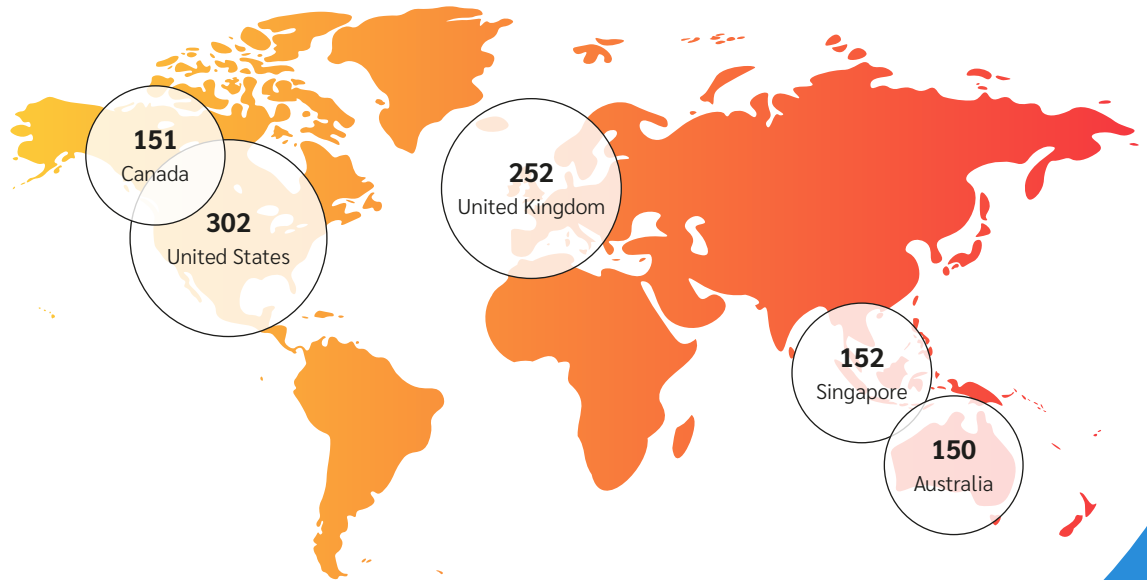
impact.com conducted a consumer research study to discover how much social media users over 18 trust the influencers they follow. This survey defines influencers as parenting/travel influencers, opinion/thought leaders, vloggers/bloggers, gamers, content creators, and others who regularly share sponsored and unsponsored content on one or more social media platforms.

Our researchers designed questions that reveal:

- How trust is built between the consumer and an influencer
- The role trust plays in establishing trust and authenticity
- How influencers impact the consumer's social media shopping decisions and behavior

This survey was conducted at a 95% confidence level. Its results provide compelling insights into **the gap between consumers' perceived values and influencer engagement**. With these findings, brands gain a new perspective on strategies for influencer marketing campaigns that resonate with them.

Survey period: August 17–19, 2022
Total responses: 1,007 social media users*



* Balanced according to census data

Influencer marketing success starts with trust

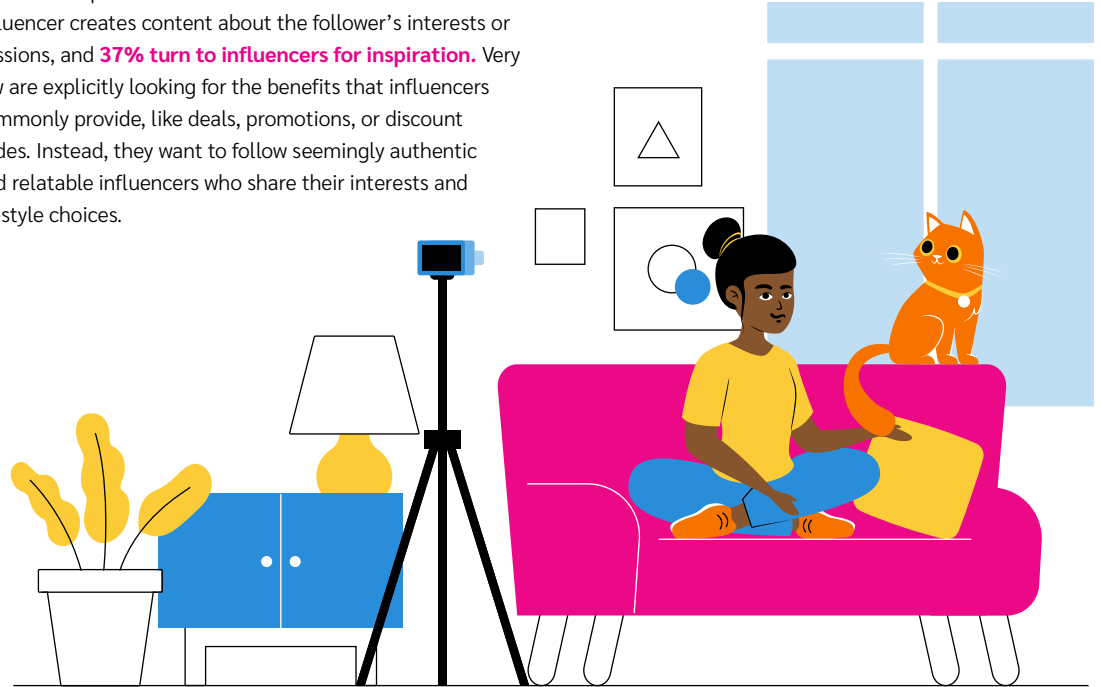
The KLT factor remains a core component of successful influencer marketing campaigns – and it has become even easier for influencers to become a trusted source with the ongoing rise of social media.

Now that **nearly 72% of people access social media platforms multiple times daily**, it's no surprise that influencers are gaining consumer trust. Influencers are quickly becoming as familiar to them as their friends and family, giving them a stronger role in buying decisions.

From the first time an influencer's post crosses a For You or Discovery page, they're enhancing the "like" factor. Even entertaining content can lead to a follow, establishing the "know" factor. And as consumers scroll social media for entertainment in small, free moments throughout their day, influencers have ample opportunities to build trust.

56% of consumers say one of the top three reasons they follow influencers is for entertainment.

Undoubtedly, most of these followers passively consume content. A reported 41% hit the follow button when an influencer creates content about the follower's interests or passions, and **37% turn to influencers for inspiration**. Very few are explicitly looking for the benefits that influencers commonly provide, like deals, promotions, or discount codes. Instead, they want to follow seemingly authentic and relatable influencers who share their interests and lifestyle choices.



Consumers follow creators for different reasons

Consumers most commonly turn to influencers for entertaining, inspiring, and educational content throughout their day. Establishing trust is the secret to turning passive scrollers into active buyers. Consistently posting great content – especially content that isn't overtly promotional – is one way to enhance consumer trust. But that's not the only thing they value.

They want to follow and buy from influencers who demonstrate transparency and integrity. The research, however, shows that these qualities may not be as critical as consumers want to believe.



58%

like entertaining content such as memes, humorous posts, and videos from influencers.



53%

report following influencers for expert advice or how-to content.



46%

enjoy inspirational quotes and personal stories from influencers.

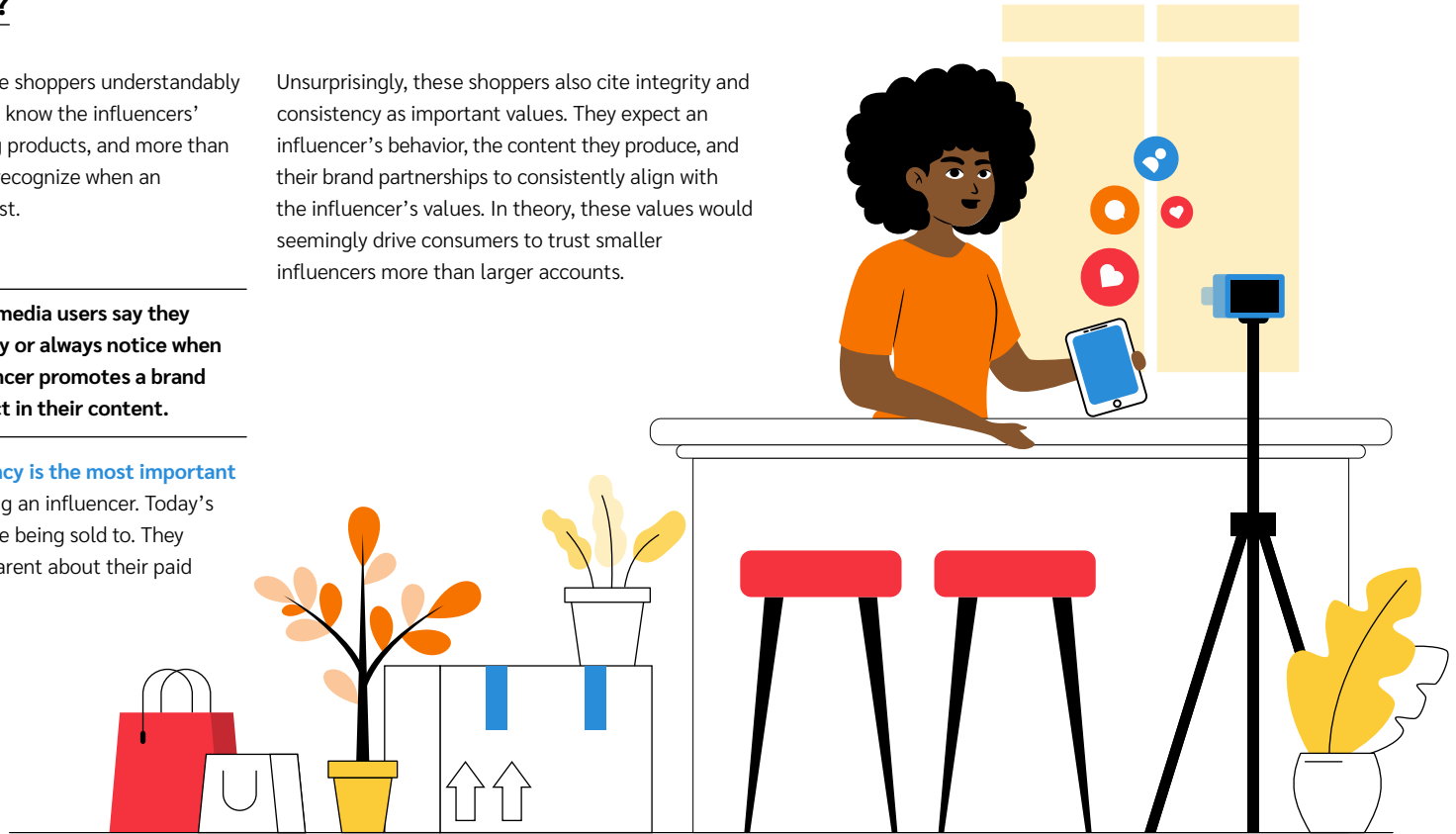
What creates trust?

Deceptive ad practices have made shoppers understandably wary of sponsored content. Many know the influencers' role in promoting and advertising products, and more than half claim they can consistently recognize when an influencer shares a sponsored post.

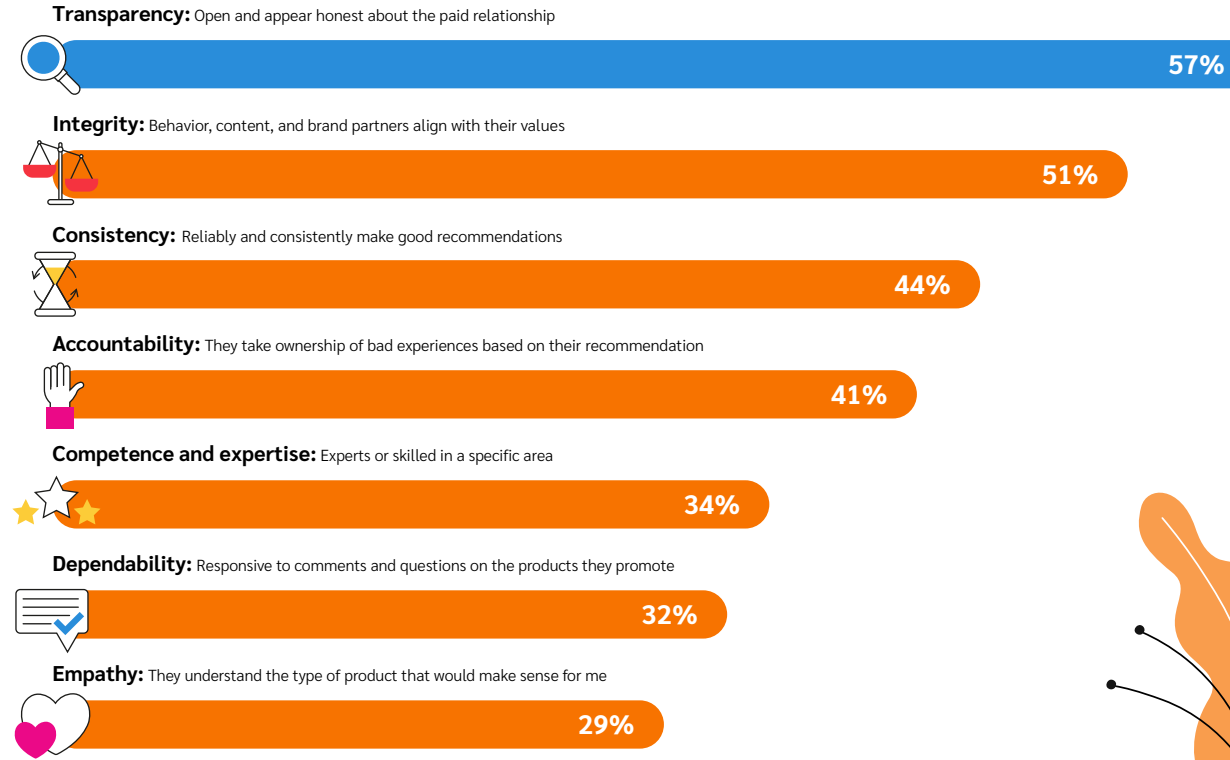
51% of social media users say they frequently or always notice when an influencer promotes a brand or product in their content.

Now, nearly **57%** say transparency is the most important value they look for when following an influencer. Today's buyers want to know when they're being sold to. They value influencers that are transparent about their paid relationships with brands.

Unsurprisingly, these shoppers also cite integrity and consistency as important values. They expect an influencer's behavior, the content they produce, and their brand partnerships to consistently align with the influencer's values. In theory, these values would seemingly drive consumers to trust smaller influencers more than larger accounts.



Characteristics of trustworthy influencers*



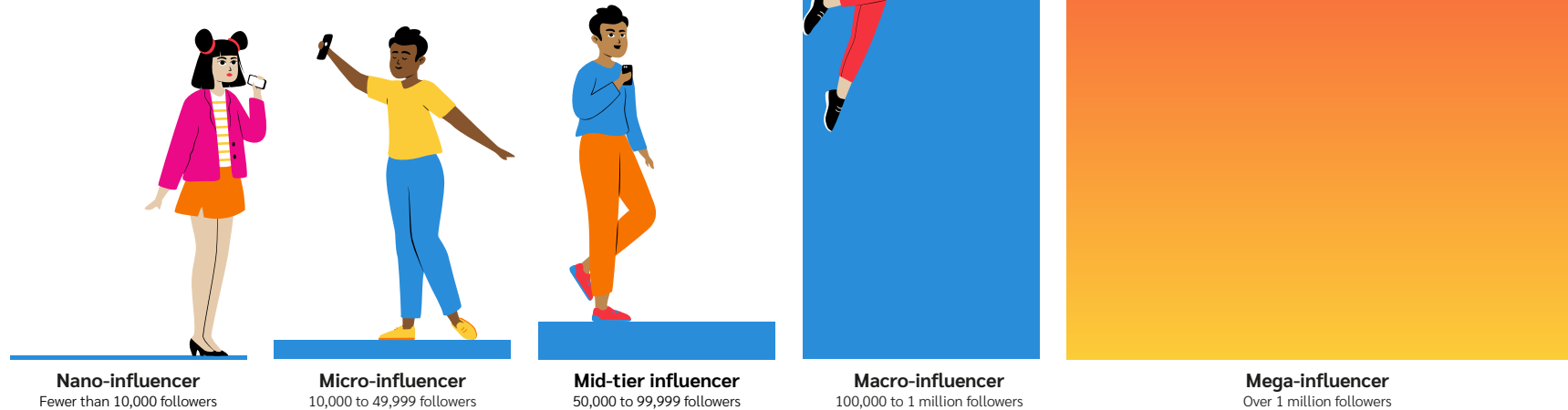
*Question: Select the top 3 characteristics that trustworthy influencers display.



Follower counts still matter for some consumers

35% of consumers who say follower count influences their trust report that they trust influencer opinions, recommendations, and reviews more in 2022 than in 2021.

Influencer types by size



51% of consumers don't believe follower count impacts influencer trustworthiness. However, there are differences in consumer responses between the countries we surveyed. For example: in the United States, 60% of consumers indicated follower count doesn't impact influencer trustworthiness. In comparison, only 31% of Singaporean consumers said the same, while 69% think follower count impacts an influencer's trustworthiness.

There could be a few reasons why consumers may value follower count when deciding whether an influencer is trustworthy. For instance, with **FTC oversight** consumers may recognize sponsored ads and endorsements more readily. Considering social media algorithms, consumers might see sponsored posts from creators with a larger following more often, giving them the impression that these creators are more transparent. FTC violations against prominent creators draw attention, partly because creators may be **fined up to \$48,000 per violation** if they fail to disclose paid ads.

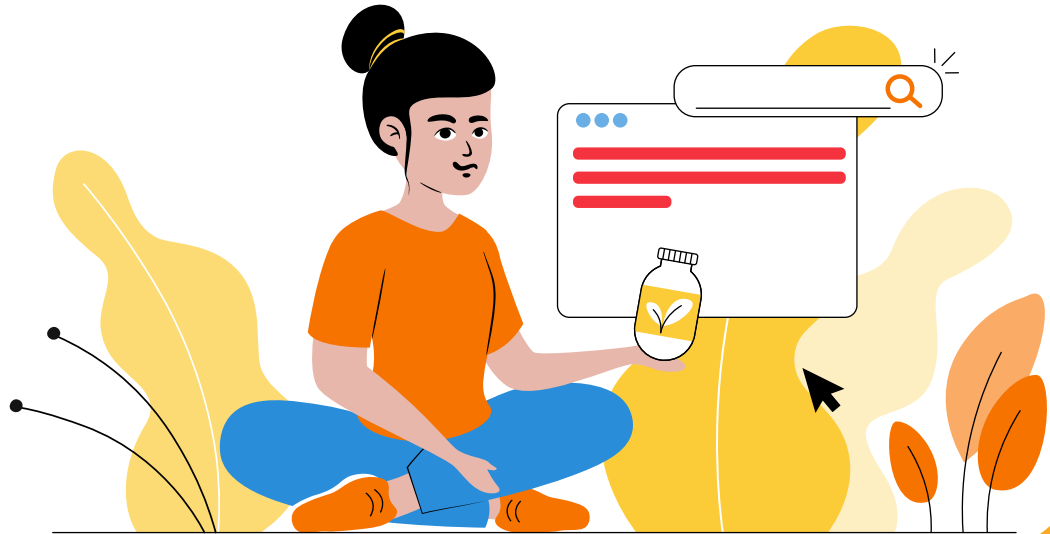
Comparatively, if influencers with a smaller following, perhaps new in their career, integrate brands into their content more organically – which **40% of consumers claim they prefer over obvious ads** – social media users may mistake an ad for an organic, unsponsored recommendation. For

most who value transparency, the nuances of mentioning brand relationships often lead them to trust these creators less than more established creators.

Influencers should consider a more balanced mix of content, providing consumers with more desired content – entertainment and insight into these influencers' lives. With a more robust content mix, consumers don't expect to be sold to when they engage with these influencers. More experienced

creators often don't share the types of content consumers find less engaging, including live shopping, discount offers, and product testimonials.

This disconnect reveals an interesting reality. Customers say that certain values inspire them to follow influencers, but do those prized values – namely transparency and integrity – truly reflect their perceptions of celebrities and mega-influencers on social media?



Most liked content types by consumers*

Entertaining content:

For example, humor, memes, and giveaways.



58%

Educational content:

For example, tips and tricks, how-to tutorials, and expert advice.



53%

Inspirational content:

For example, reading personal success stories or quotes.



46%

Opinion content:

For example, behind-the-scenes videos or product reviews.



40%

Promotional content:

For example, client testimonials and discounts.



36%

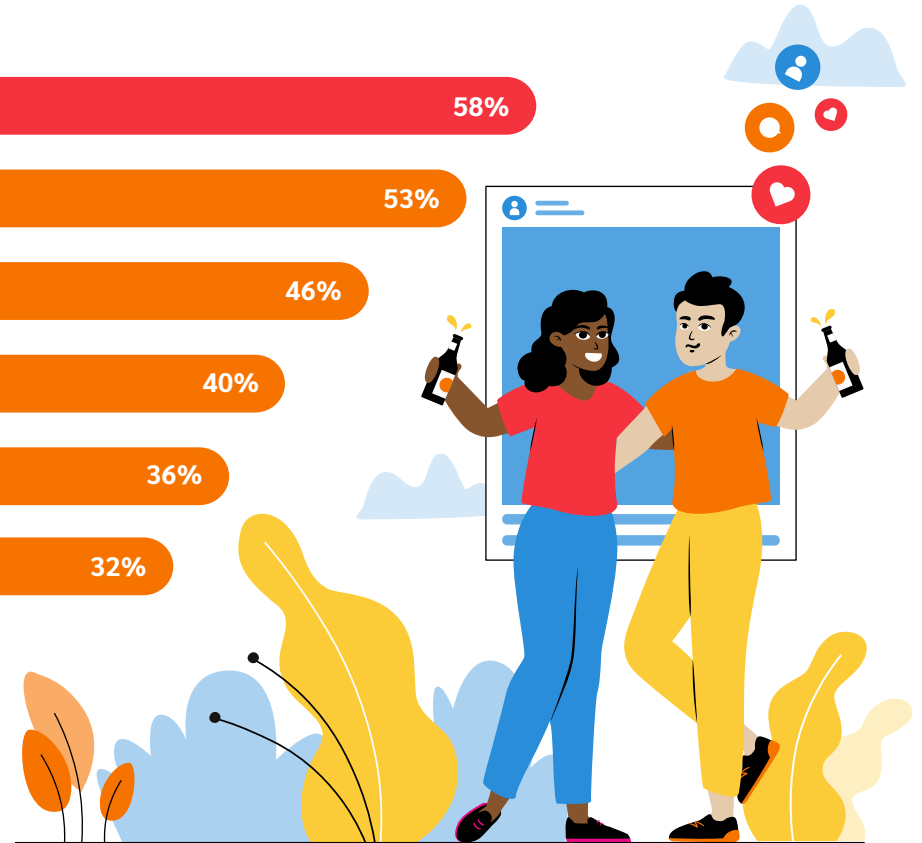
Interactive content:

For example, polls, Q&As, live workouts, and social media takeovers.



32%

*Question: Select what type of content you like most from the list below.



Influencers hold up a mirror to aspirational consumers

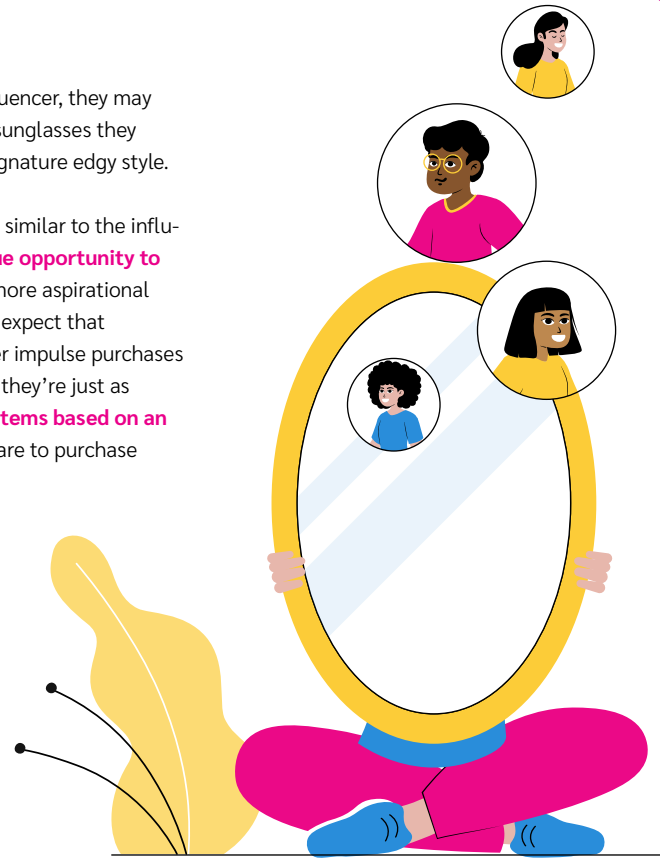
More than 6 in 10 consumers say they trust influencers they perceive to be like them, particularly if they share the same career or lifestyle choices. But are these influencers actually like them? They may feel driven to purchase from influencers who reflect what they perceive as a better version of themselves.

At face value, the instinct to connect more with micro-influencers would make sense. Presumably, consumers would find smaller influencers more relatable and less “fake” than the mega-influencers. Their lives are also more likely to resemble a micro-influencer's lifestyle than a mega-influencer or celebrity. But in reality, those who conflate follower counts with trust – are more likely to trust larger influencers' recommendations over smaller influencers.

As these consumers engage with content that aligns with their interests, passions, and lifestyle choices, **influencers hold up an aspirational mirror that accentuates similarities** and reflects their idealized version of themselves. This mirrored effect can drive hopeful consumers to purchase based on an influencer's recommendations, assuming the purchase will help them resemble an influencer they admire.

For instance, if they follow a fashion influencer, they may subconsciously believe that buying the sunglasses they promote will help them embody their signature edgy style.

With consumers focused on how they're similar to the influencers they follow, **brands have a unique opportunity to leverage larger influencers** to inspire more aspirational purchases. At first glance, brands might expect that shoppers are more likely to make smaller impulse purchases through influencer marketing. However, they're just as **likely to buy luxurious and expensive items based on an influencer's recommendation** as they are to purchase everyday convenience items.



64% claim that they will make a purchase based on an influencer's recommendation or opinion at least some of the time, and that percentage remains relatively steady regardless of product type.

For example, 57% buy luxury branded specialty goods like sports cars or designer clothing at least some of the time based on an influencer's opinion. Only slightly more consumers (60%) say the same for heavily-researched

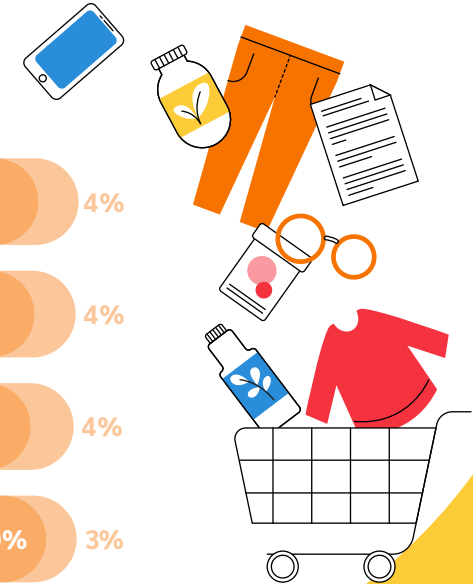
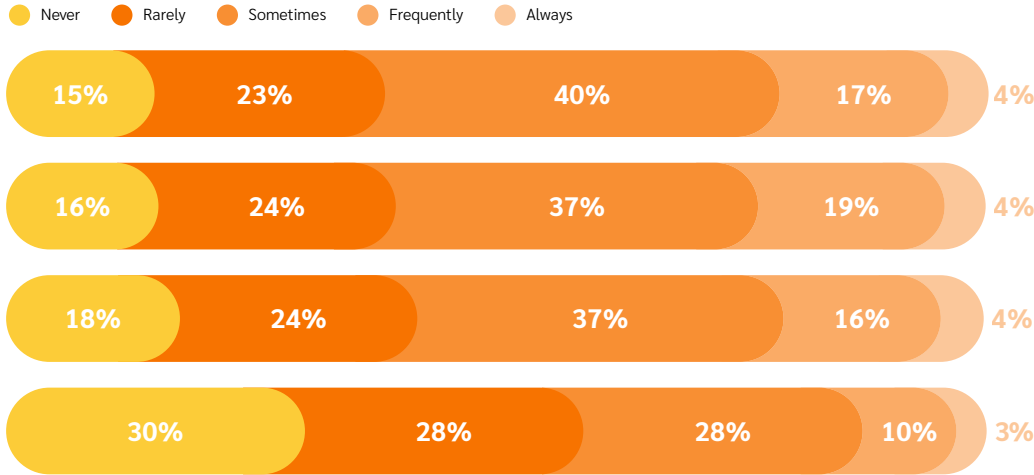
shopping goods like airline tickets, cars, or cell phones, and 61% will occasionally buy inexpensive and widely-available convenience goods like laundry detergent or chewing gum based on a recommendation.

1 in 5 customers

claim they will frequently or always buy convenience items, shopping goods, or specialty goods from an influencer's recommendation.

Still, not all consumers make these purchases to reinforce their lifestyle choices. Many turn to influencers for their industry expertise, such as specialists, to augment their research.

How often consumers make purchases based on influencer recommendations and reviews, according to product type



Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Expertise is valuable, but not in the way brands expect

Product demonstrations are the number one thing that encourages shoppers to act on an influencer's recommendation, and who better to give a product demonstration than an industry expert?

1 out of 3 value product demonstrations to help them make purchase decisions, and 57% think content is most authentic when an influencer shares their experience of that product. Industry specialists excel at creating authentic content because they:

1. Often have deep experience with the recommended product's use cases
2. Understand how one product compares to others in the market

It's no surprise, then, that more than half of consumers are likely or very likely to make a purchase based on the specialist's recommendation.

However, while specialists create content that engages social media users, that doesn't mean those users inherently trust specialists more than other influencers. Only **34% say competence and expertise impact how much they trust**

an influencer, and expertise is the least important trust factor for users under 42 years. This shows that a user isn't more likely to trust an expert based on education and background alone.

Some may trust specialist recommendations because they imagine these creators recommend products that align with their values and expertise. For consumers who said they were very likely to buy a product based on a specialist's recommendation, **54% claimed that integrity was an influencer's most important quality to them.**

A reported **40% also say the most authentic influencers organically promote products they genuinely love.** This gives brands an exciting opportunity to leverage expert influencers. Since industry practitioners often have better insight into the best products within the market, brands can work with these specialists who are genuinely excited about a product to create more product comparison and demonstration content. From there, brands can offer customers what they want but are reluctant to admit: discounts and deals.

60% of millennials trust the opinions of specialists who promote products in their industry.



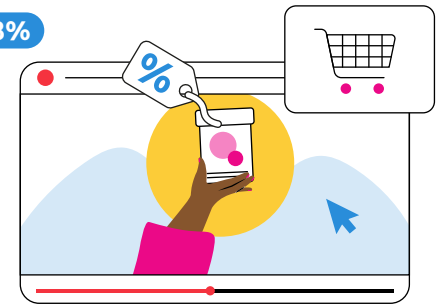
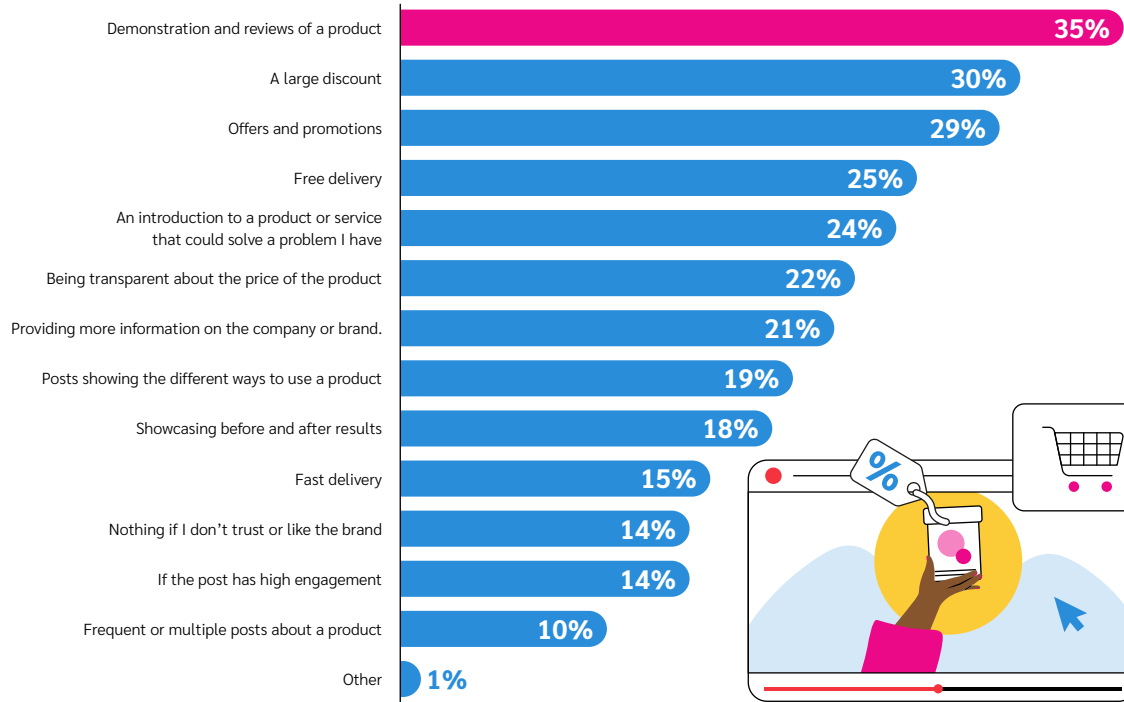
Discounts and deals still drive purchase decisions

It makes sense that once a consumer trusts an influencer, they're more receptive to the influencer's recommendations and opinions – especially if that **influencer takes a subtle selling approach**. But despite the preference for a less intrusive sales approach, many still base their purchase decision on the deal or discount offered.

Behind product demonstrations and reviews, large discounts, offers and promotions were the most popular drivers encouraging them to purchase from influencers. A reported **30% will buy a product if an influencer offers a promo code for a large discount**.

In comparison, **29% are swayed by influencers sharing exclusive offers** or promotions such as buy one get one free deals or the opportunity to earn extra points on loyalty programs. **Free shipping seals the deal for 1 in 4**.

Factors that encourage consumers to act on influencer recommendations

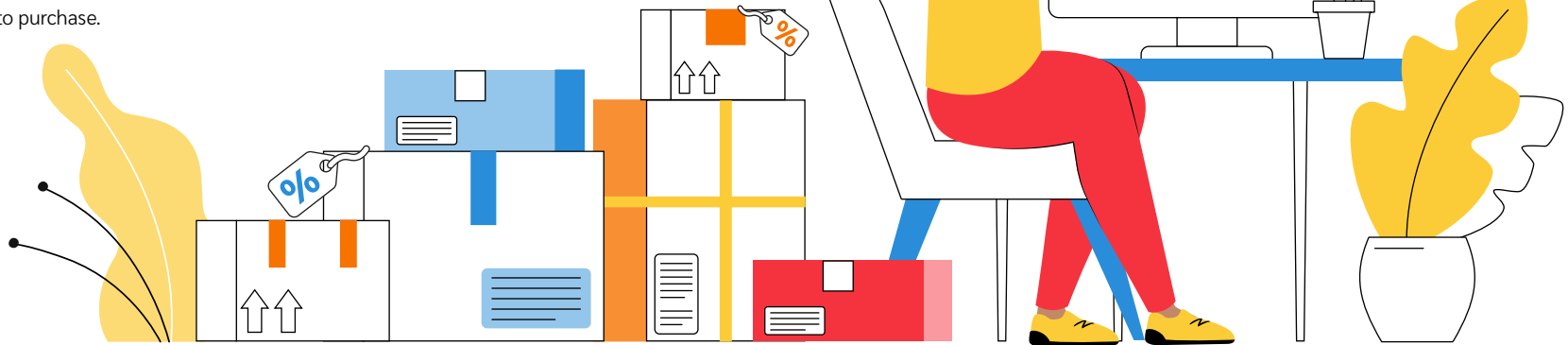


MORE **than 3 out of 4** —

consumers aged 18–35 indicate they use influencer promotion codes at least some of the time.

Interestingly, consumers don't claim to follow influencers based on the discounts, deals, and promotions they offer. **Only 9% say discount codes are the top reason they follow influencers, and 14% claim they follow influencers to learn about deals and promotions.** Plus, they are less interested in content that influencers use to promote or offer great deals, like posts about discounts.

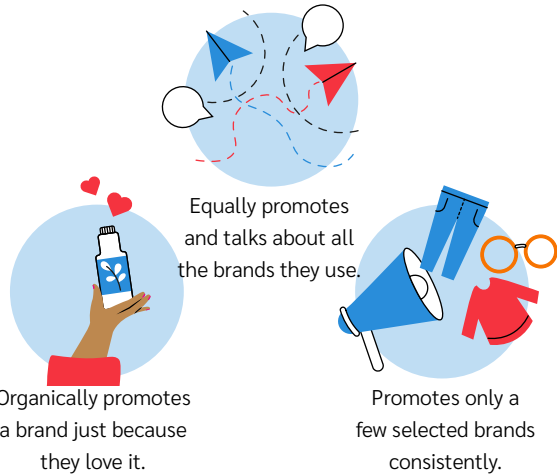
It seems that while consumers follow influencers for entertainment and expertise, they remain reluctant to buy without deals and discounts. Users aren't openly seeking out influencers for lower prices. Still, many have come to expect that there will be a benefit to buying from one. Deals play a major role in successfully persuading them to purchase.



Consumers prefer authentic influence over noticeable selling

Authenticity is important to consumers, but often, **influencer behavior can appear inauthentic when focused primarily on promoting products.** Over 90% recognize when a post contains an advertisement at least some of the time, so influencers don't need to hit consumers over the head with promotions. Instead, more subtle and natural influencing behavior can promote trust and authenticity.

Brand promotion feels authentic when an influencer ...



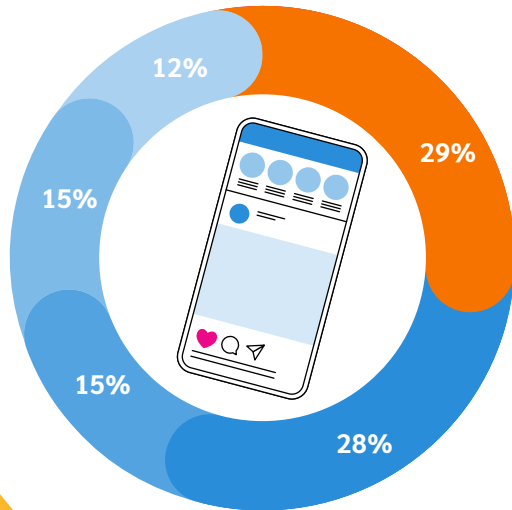
Too much promotion without other entertaining content can burn out shoppers and cause them to view an influencer as inauthentic. For instance, only 35% see influencers who post daily as authentic, while **43% see an influencer who posts two to three times a week as authentic.**

Customers also prefer to see influencers promote a product multiple times for one to two months, but longer campaigns seem less authentic. This aligns with consumer buying behavior – whereas the value of the product or the time spent making the purchase decision increases, the likelihood that they will purchase based on an influencer's recommendation decreases.



Brand promotion feels more authentic when an influencer posts about a product, brand, or service ...

- Several times
- Occasionally over a month or two
- Once
- Occasionally over three to twelve months
- Occasionally for more than a year



Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

That leaves brands and influencers with an interesting challenge: inspiring more impulsive purchases without overtly selling or over-promoting products. Demonstrations and other product knowledge content help drive consumers to an influencer's product links, but further incentives are needed to encourage conversions.

One major opportunity is for brands to give influencers access to big, surprising discounts on short campaigns. Considering that 69% use promo codes when making purchases at least some of the time, **a large, time-sensitive promo code can be a significant factor that turns scrollers into shoppers.**

Alternatively, brands can work with influencers to create **unique offers and promotions designed with their followers in mind.** Focusing these campaigns on an influencer's niche, lifestyle, or career can make shoppers even more likely to purchase. Exclusive gifts, events, and early-access sales boost engagement and foster excitement.



Better deals mean a lower purchase risk

Consumers turn to people they know, like, and trust for recommendations to reduce the purchase risk. However, influencers offer a unique opportunity to lower purchase risks that family and friends don't with discounts and promotions.

It's become **increasingly common for them to rely on influencers to round out their product research and decrease their perceived purchase risk**. Beyond a strong opinion, influencers demonstrate their recommendations in a variety of ways:

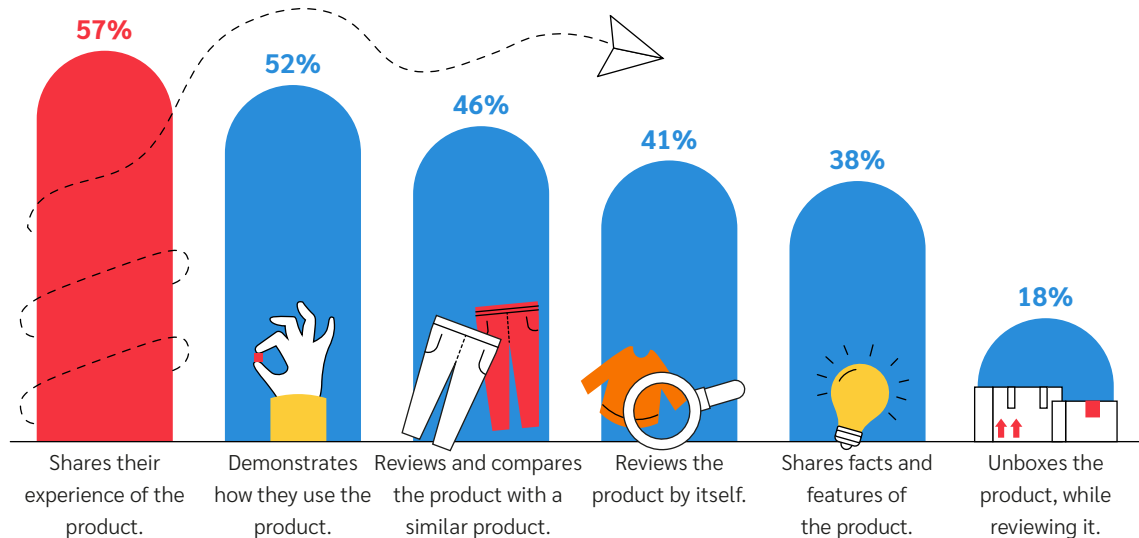
- Providing first-hand testimonials about their experiences with products
- Comparing products to others on the market
- Offering expert advice on how to use the product
- Showing demonstrations using the product

These options help consumers feel more confident about their purchase, even for more expensive specialty or shopping goods they buy less frequently. High-priced products often have a greater purchase risk than convenience items, so they look for more insight before they commit to a purchase.

However, a consumer purchases from an influencer largely on impulse. **Discount codes give a final push to purchase** something they may not see as necessary and would only consider if they were persuaded. These purchases can help them get closer to their aspirational selves and upgrade

their lifestyles without the same perceived purchase risk. But ultimately, engaging content that creates awareness isn't enough to drive conversions. Deals get customers in the door, forming a cornerstone of today's successful influencer marketing campaigns.

When an influencer does a product review, it feels most authentic when the influencer ...



6 ways brands can leverage consumer trust and choose the best influencers

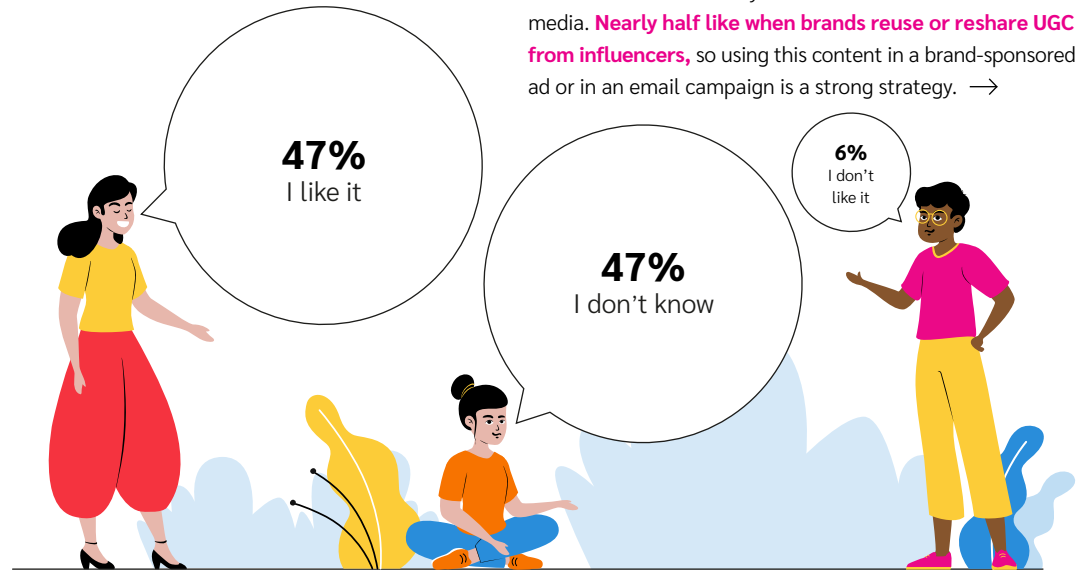
Campaign goals, budget, and content purposes start to shape the types of creators your brand can work with. Consider these six tips for discovering and recruiting creators for your marketing campaign.



1. Tap expert-led user-generated content for brand-sponsored ads

What are your thoughts on a brand or company reusing or resharing the influencer content, for example, on the brand's social media page?

User-generated content (UGC) is content created by a consumer or influencer that features your brand, including photos, videos, blog posts, testimonials, and more. This content is not necessarily shared on the creator's social media. **Nearly half like when brands reuse or reshare UGC from influencers**, so using this content in a brand-sponsored ad or in an email campaign is a strong strategy. →





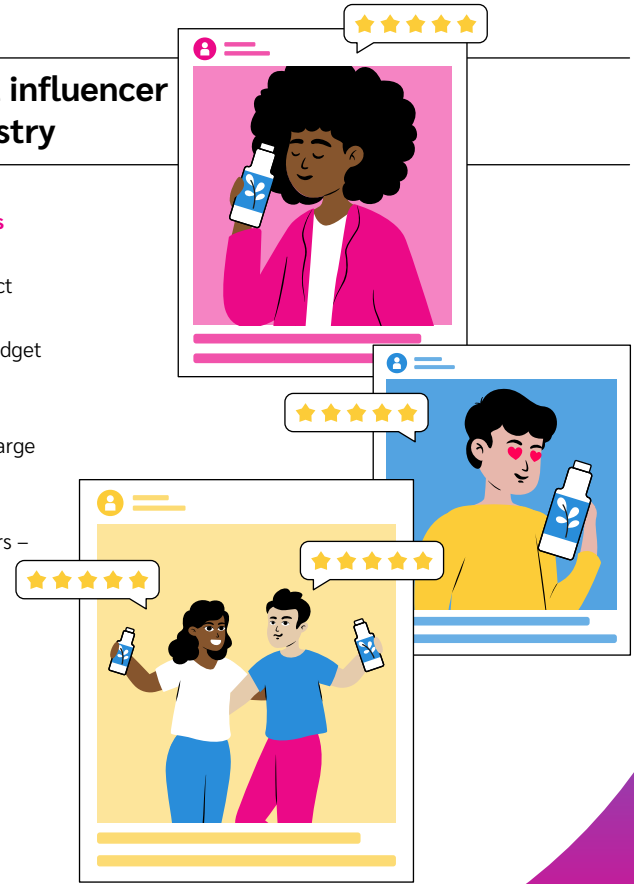
→ While UGC is unsponsored by definition, that doesn't mean you can't encourage influencers to create UGC for your brand. Gifting influencers free products can inspire them to create content that features your product. This strategy works especially well with experts and specialists inclined to share products they deem valuable to their audience.

Product-led videos by specialists make strong UGC content because they provide genuine insight into use cases and top benefits during product demos. For instance, a dermatologist showcasing their skincare routine will detail why they like each product while applying them. Instead of paying for promotional content up front, brands choose UGC that best reflects their brand and pay creators a licensing fee to use their content across multiple channels.

2. Partner with different influencer tiers in the same industry

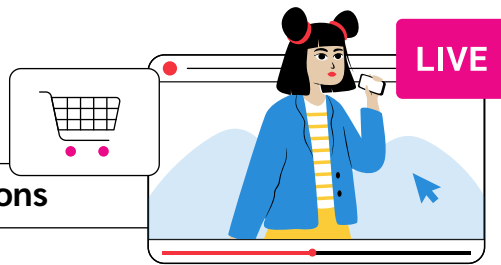
Mega-influencers may have a wider reach, but **creators with fewer followers can make a big impact**. 45% find it helpful when multiple creators mention a product during a single day, such as when a new product or service launches. So, there's no need to put all your budget in one bucket.

Instead, promote the same product line with a mix of large and small influencers within the same industry. Brands can also leverage different types of influencers – like specialists, minor celebrities, and niche lifestyle creators – to access buyers through varied content based on audience segments.



3.

Livestream shopping is catching on in some regions

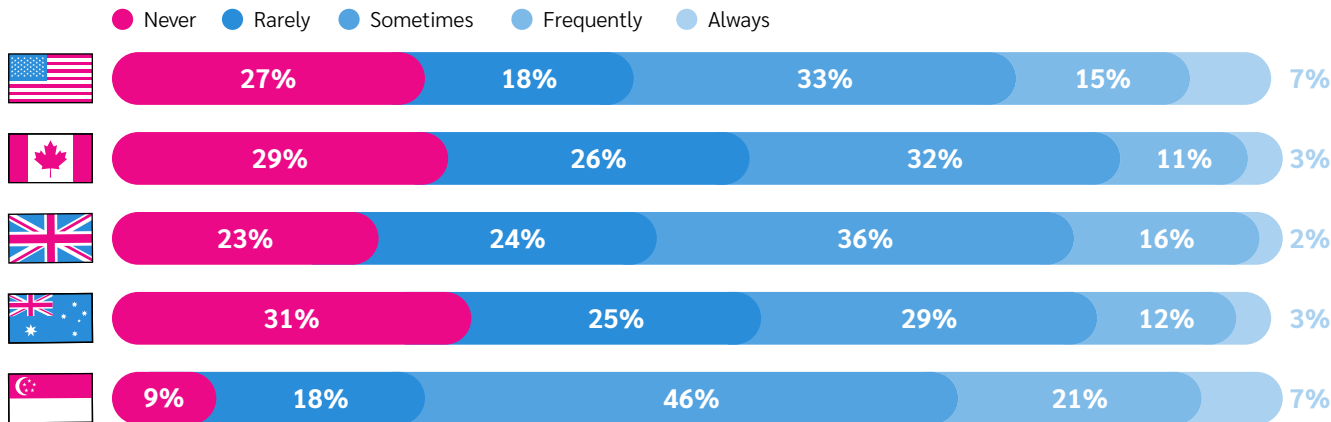


Livestream shopping has picked up on TikTok and Instagram, just not in the U.S. market – yet. But optimizing this content could prove valuable in the future. One way to do it? Diving deep into product features because consumers do research before purchasing. Overall, **19% frequently or**

always watch livestream shopping, while 35% sometimes do. However, we saw key differences among the regions surveyed. Brands could increase consumer purchase intent during livestream shopping by requesting that influencers **demonstrate how they use the product and share their**

experience. Next, offering an exclusive discount or promotion to the live audience can seal the deal. Telfar uses exclusive product “drips” during livestream shopping events, leveraging its [TV channel](#). Here, only active watchers can secure the latest designs. The brand launched its [vegan leather duffle bag](#) using a QR code flashed on-screen for one-minute intervals.

Indicate how often you watch livestream shopping hosted by an influencer



Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

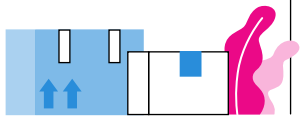
4.

Go beyond unboxing: “buying and trying” to move from awareness to conversion

The percentage of consumers who make purchases on social media will increase by 61% between 2019 and 2023 according to [eMarketer](#). **Unboxing content works well at the top of the funnel**, introducing customers to your brand and increasing awareness. Those interested in the latest iPhone releases, for example, can search YouTuber [iJustine](#)’s unboxing content. Here the user gets a brief look at the range and options available. But that’s where it stops.

Only 18% find unboxing product reviews authentic. It’s merely a first impression to most—not an experience or deep dive. So while this content has a place in the consumer journey, keep your brand goals in mind.

[Steph Vlogs](#) perfectly blends an unboxing with a “get ready with me” (GRWM) to create “buying and trying” content. She showcases the product and unboxing, then moves the experience to product demonstration and application in a single video.



5.

Use discount codes to reach new customers

While a consumer may not initially turn to an influencer to learn about new products, **many are open to trying a product with the right incentives**. Creating limited-time deep discounts can drive brand awareness, inspire new customers to make impulse purchases, and capture that customer’s information for retargeting.

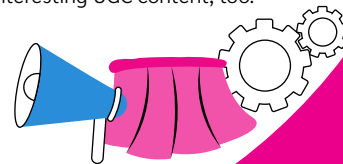
Leveraging the same influencer after a successful campaign can also allow your brand to promote ongoing deals and discounts. Since the customer already trusts the influencer and likes your product, they may be driven to repurchase without a discount code.

6.

Offer exclusive access with influencers

As previously mentioned, shoppers like receiving access to offers and promotions through influencers, and brands can leverage this by offering exclusive product access to a select audience, which works well during livestreaming. **Providing early access to new products, special event access, or a limited-edition gift with purchase** are great ways to foster excitement and engagement with influencers.

Tailoring these offerings to the influencer’s niche, lifestyle, or career can boost these campaigns even more. For instance, an athleisure brand could partner with a tennis influencer to offer early access to a limited-edition tennis skirt collection. Designing campaigns that offer unique, customized benefits for an influencer’s audience can drive even higher conversions and engagement than less personalized collaborations. These campaigns can inspire consumers to create interesting UGC content, too.



Fostering trust is key for influencer marketing in 2023

Today's consumers turn to influencers for much more than product recommendations. Influencers fill the small moments in their day, gradually building authentic brand trust. As consumers become more familiar with the influencers they follow, the KLT factor will continue to grow, giving brands an opportunity to reach new audiences.

Value-driven, aspirational shoppers are increasingly receptive to influencer marketing – as long as those influencers align with how they view themselves. With the compelling insights presented in this report, brands can design innovative influencer marketing campaigns that bring their realities closer to an idealistic view.

