

## **Spheres of Influence: How Influencers Impact Society**

**Abstract:** Influencers have become central to contemporary marketing, yet their impact extends far beyond brand preferences and purchase decisions. This special issue editorial introduces the *Spheres of Influence* framework, which conceptualises influencers' impact across four interconnected spheres of society: (1) consumption and markets, (2) culture and identity, (3) power and politics, and (4) health and well-being. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature, including the 14 articles in this special issue, we synthesise evidence of influencers' diverse, complex, and often contradictory implications for each sphere, highlight knowledge gaps, and identify future research directions. In doing so, we emphasise the importance of recognising how market actors within the broader influencer ecosystem (e.g., consumers, brands, social media platforms, influencer marketing platforms, regulators) shape influencers' implications for society. Together, this editorial and the papers published in this special issue aim to broaden marketing scholarship's engagement with influencers' multifaceted and far-reaching societal impact.

**Keywords:** *Influencers; Social Media Influencers; Influencer Marketing; Influencer Ecosystem; Societal Impact*

## **1. Introduction**

Influencer marketing has become a core component of many brands' marketing strategies, with the value of the global influencer advertising market projected to exceed \$80 billion by 2030 (Statista, 2025). A substantial body of marketing scholarship has emerged to guide influencer marketing strategies, examining how various factors impact influencer marketing effectiveness (e.g., Hugh et al., 2022; Leung et al., 2022a, 2022b; Wies et al., 2022). Whilst this work is important, influencers' impact extends beyond their effects on consumers' brand preferences and purchase decisions. Influencers shape broader aspects of society, from cultural norms to political discourse, and it is vital that marketing scholars explore this wider spectrum of influence. This special issue aims to advance our understanding of influencers' implications for society. Each of the 14 articles presented in this special issue deepens our understanding of influencers' societal impact, offering valuable theoretical contributions as well as implications for practice and policy. These papers span a wide range of geographical contexts (including China, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, and Finland) and influencer types (e.g., finfluencers, mindfulness influencers, sustainable fashion influencers, and child influencers), providing diverse and rich insights. Collectively, these papers advance our understanding of influencers as important and impactful social actors.

In this editorial, we synthesise the growing interdisciplinary body of literature on influencers' societal implications to help structure this emerging conversation. Although marketing scholars increasingly recognise influencers' societal impact, attempts to map and organise this literature remain rare. Whilst there are some notable exceptions, this work focuses predominantly on influencers' negative implications for society, highlighting issues such as misinformation, promotion of harmful products, improper disclosure of advertising content, and adverse effects on followers' psychological well-being (Ekinici et al., 2025; Hudders & Lou, 2023).

While these concerns are important, focusing on the ‘dark side’ of influencers risks obscuring the full scope of their societal impact. We therefore seek to highlight influencers’ diverse, complex, and often contradictory societal implications. We introduce the ‘Spheres of Influence’ framework, which identifies four interconnected spheres of society impacted by influencers – 1) consumption and markets, 2) culture and identity, 3) power and politics, and 4) health and well-being. Given the space constraints of this editorial, this framework is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to provide a useful tool for reflecting on and making sense of extant literature. We hope this special issue encourages further research that explores the wider impact of influencers on society and delves deeper into the complex and contradictory implications highlighted here.

We begin by defining influencers and highlighting their embeddedness within an interconnected ecosystem of market actors that shape their societal impact. We then introduce our ‘Spheres of Influence’ framework, before synthesising literature relevant to each sphere – including the articles comprising this special issue - highlighting research gaps and identifying future research directions. We conclude by discussing the value of this framework in sensitising scholars to overlooked areas of influence and setting an agenda for future research.

## **2. Influencers and the Influencer Ecosystem**

Influencers are personal brands that cultivate relationships with engaged audiences through a consistent flow of distinctive content on at least one social media platform (Kozinets et al., 2023). This definition is intentionally broad to reflect the considerable diversity within this category. For instance, influencers differ in audience size and the nature of their relationships with followers; nano-influencers typically have small but highly devoted audiences whilst mega-influencers attract followings that rival established mass media celebrities (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Influencers can attract a following due to their expertise (Scholz, 2021) or taste (McQuarrie et al., 2013) in a

specific domain, their aspirational lifestyles (Michaelidou et al., 2022), and/or their engaging personalities (Cocker & Cronin, 2017), whilst some gain visibility by capitalising on the fame of other high-profile influencers (Christin & Lewis, 2021; Jones et al., 2025). Whilst most influencers are human, this is not a defining feature; recent research has highlighted the growing popularity of non-human influencers such as animal influencers (Shamayleh & Arsel, 2025) and virtual influencers (Gambetti & Kozinets, 2024). Most influencers, though not all, collaborate with brands to monetise their online presence, whether through sponsored content, brand ambassadorships, affiliate marketing, or co-created products (Kozinets et al., 2023). However, many also seek revenue streams independent of brand partnerships, branching out into subscription-based content (via platforms such as Substack, OnlyFans, and Patreon) and even launching their own businesses. Thus, influencers are a highly heterogeneous group, and this diversity makes their societal implications both complex and, at times, contradictory.

To understand influencers' societal implications, we must look beyond individual actors and examine the broader ecosystem in which they operate. The influencer ecosystem is comprised of multiple, interdependent market actors, between which there are constant flows of resources (as well as frequent tensions surrounding these flows) (Arsel et al., 2025; Dolbec & Smith, 2025; Gurrieri et al., 2023; Kozinets et al., 2023). Although the influencer is the beating heart of this ecosystem, their actions and content - and thus their societal implications - are profoundly shaped by other actors. For instance, because most influencers monetise their following via brand collaborations, brands' preferences (both explicit and inferred) often shape influencers' content strategies. Indeed, influencers may attempt to render themselves attractive to brands by avoiding criticising the products of brands they wish to work with in the future and steering clear of discussing controversial topics that could jeopardise future brand collaborations. This dynamic

creates a tension between authenticity and commerciality, forcing influencers to develop sophisticated strategies for balancing the two (Audrezet et al., 2020, Hofstetter & Gollnhofer, 2024). Furthermore, influencers must not only consider brand preferences but also balance these with the expectations of their followers. Influencers rise to success because of their followers' attention and support, which must be sustained. Where influencers do not meet their followers' expectations, they can retaliate by unfollowing, disengaging, or participating in anti-fandom that can damage influencers' reputations and their relationships with brands (Cocker et al., 2021; Mardon et al., 2023a, 2023b). Thus, influencers face a challenging balancing act, as they strive to produce content that is simultaneously attractive to both consumers and brands.

Social media platforms themselves are far from neutral conduits; their technical architecture and governance policies actively shape the entire influencer ecosystem. For instance, their opaque and ever-shifting algorithms compel influencers to engage in "algorithmic gossip" (Bishop, 2019) in an attempt to understand what types of content will be granted greater visibility and to tailor their content strategies based on perceived platform preferences (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Bhatia et al., 2024; Cotter, 2018). Furthermore, platforms' monetisation policies determine what content is deemed advertiser-friendly and eligible for revenue, thereby incentivising self-censorship to avoid demonetisation (Caplan & Gillespie, 2020; Hallinan, 2023). Beyond social media platforms themselves, the rapid growth of the influencer marketing industry has also led to the emergence of numerous intermediary influencer marketing platforms designed to streamline and scale the relationship between brands and influencers (Kozinets et al., 2023). These platforms offer brands searchable databases of influencers, contract templates, automated payment systems, and performance analytics, streamlining the influencer marketing process through automation. Whilst appealing to brands, these platforms promote a metric-driven model of influencer

marketing that does not fully capture the value delivered by influencers (Arsel et al., 2025), and further encourages a form of "hustle" culture where paid influencers must strategically use hashtags, tags, and trends to make themselves attractive and legible to brand marketers (Carter, 2016; Kozinets et al., 2023). We can interpret this not merely as 'technology shaping markets,' but as the operation of technoculture: the rich intermingling of "various identities, practices, values" and other cultural elements with technologies and their consumption (Kozinets, 2019, p. 621). Working together, technologies and cultures co-produce norms of visibility, legitimacy, and value within the influencer ecosystem.

Finally, the entire ecosystem is bounded and shaped by the constraints imposed by regulators. These governmental and legislative bodies link the influencer market to wider social and political norms, enforcing laws related to advertising, consumer protection, and data privacy. For instance, in the United States, the Federal Trade Commission's "truth-in-advertising" laws mandate that influencers disclose sponsored content clearly and honestly, and these regulations apply not only to the influencer but also to the brands and agencies that benefit from their labour (Kozinets et al., 2023). Similarly, the European Union's Digital Services Act aims to create safer online environments by addressing misinformation and stereotypes in targeted advertising, including influencer marketing (Goanta et al., 2022). The influence of regulation can be highly specific to national contexts, such as the application of complex tax laws to the practice of gifting in Sweden, which directly impacts how brands and influencers can collaborate (Nilsson et al., 2023). These regulatory frameworks act as a critical, if sometimes slow-moving, force that embeds the rapidly changing influencer ecosystem within established legal and ethical standards.

Our intention here is not to provide an exhaustive account of all market actors in the influencer ecosystem; there are many more actors that we have not discussed here (e.g.,

influencers' management teams, content editors, and the mainstream media that shape wider cultural narratives surrounding influencers). Rather, we seek to highlight the importance of recognising how various actors within this ecosystem can shape influencers' societal implications. Whilst research increasingly acknowledges how the wider influencer ecosystem enables value to be created and exchanged (Dolbec & Smith, 2025; Gurrieri et al., 2023; Libai et al., 2025), less attention has been paid to how actors and dynamics within this ecosystem can shape influencers' implications for society.

### **3. Spheres of Influence**

We introduce the 'Spheres of Influence' framework (Figure 1) to organise prior research on influencers' societal impact. As discussed above, we recognise that these implications do not stem from influencers in isolation, but rather flow from the wider influencer ecosystem, which shapes influencers' actions and content. We propose that the influencer ecosystem has implications for various domains, or 'spheres', of society. Our use of the term "spheres" draws on longstanding sociological traditions - such as Talcott Parsons' functional subsystems (Lidz & Staubmann, 2022), Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory (Schwanitz, 1995), Pierre Bourdieu's fields (Hilgers & Mangez, 2014), and Michael Walzer's (2008) spheres of justice - that parse society into distinct yet interdependent domains. We identify four interdependent spheres impacted by the influencer ecosystem - (1) consumption and markets, (2) culture and identity, (3) power and politics, and (4) health and well-being. Each sphere represents an area of social life that influencers' actions may impact, both at an individual (influencing a specific person), collective (influencing particular groups), and societal level (influencing broader dynamics within society).

*Figure 1 – The Spheres of Influence framework*



As illustrated in Figure 1, rather than treating these spheres as discrete and sealed domains, we conceptualise them as overlapping, porous spheres of influence. For instance, wellness influencers may perpetuate misinformation in a way that shifts cultural norms surrounding wellness (thus influencing the sphere of culture and identity), fuelling increased demand for certain wellness products (thus influencing the sphere of consumption and markets) that negatively impact the physical health of their followers (thus impacting the sphere of health and well-being), prompting the introduction of additional regulation surrounding influencers' promotion of wellness products (thus impacting the sphere of power and politics). Recognising the

interconnected nature of the proposed spheres prevents an overly siloed view and encourages examination of implications that occur at the intersection of multiple spheres.

Furthermore, our visualisation positions the influencer ecosystem within these overlapping spheres, recognising that market actors within this ecosystem are themselves subject to influence within each sphere. For instance, whilst influencers may themselves impact beauty standards, they are also influenced in turn by existing cultural norms surrounding beauty. Similarly, changes in wider consumption patterns can shift brands' priorities, prompting influencers to recalibrate their content to align with perceived brand expectations. Thus, whilst the influencer ecosystem impacts society, societal influences also continually shape the influencer ecosystem. The arrows in Figure 1 capture this multidirectional flow of influence.

We present this framework as a useful lens through which to make sense of the growing body of interdisciplinary research on influencers' societal impact and to identify areas where gaps remain. We shall discuss each sphere in turn, outlining key themes, identifying knowledge gaps, and highlighting promising directions for future research.

#### **4. The Sphere of Consumption and Markets**

Unsurprisingly, marketing research has focused primarily on influencers' impact on consumption and markets. Such research often focuses on how various influencer and content characteristics influence sponsored posts' impact on desired influencer marketing outcomes such as brand awareness, brand attitudes, and purchase intention (see Spörl-Wang et al., 2025). However, research also reveals that influencers can impact consumption and markets in more profound ways. In this section, we shall discuss the capacity for influencers to contribute to more widespread shifts in purchase behaviours, transform consumption practices, and shape markets.

#### ***4.1 Influencing Purchase Behaviours***

Influencers can have a formidable impact on followers' attitudes and purchase behaviours (Han & Balabanis, 2023). Marketing scholars have long recognised influencers' role as trendsetting 'tastemakers', shaping what consumers perceive to be fashionable and desirable, and thus influencing what they choose to buy (McQuarrie et al., 2013). However, influencers' impact on purchase behaviours is complex, with some influencers fuelling concerning shifts in purchasing patterns that can have negative implications for consumers, businesses, society, and the environment. For instance, Ekinici et al. (2025) observe how influencers have promoted potentially harmful products such as diet pills, detox teas, and weight-loss supplements, whilst Shepherd et al. (2023) found that 22% of consumers had purchased at least one counterfeit product following an influencer's recommendation. Influencers have also been criticised for inspiring unethical consumption practices and driving excessive, trend-driven consumption as followers attempt to mimic influencers' materialistic lifestyles (Lee & Wan, 2023; Matheson & Sedgwick, 2021; Mundel et al., 2024).

However, whilst some influencers appear to be contributing to growing materialism and over-consumption, others encourage their followers to buy less and/or to make more considered purchase decisions. For instance, in late 2022 an influencer-led counter trend emerged that championed mindful and conservative consumption – the 'deinfluencing' movement. Deinfluencing involves influencers actively dissuading their followers from purchasing specific products and brands (Sheng & Yesiloglu, 2025). This special issue contains three papers offering novel insights into deinfluencing and its consequences. Kati Koivunen, Milka Haanpää, and Saira Saraniemi's (2025) article "*The emergence of cause-orientated influencers – Conceptualizing deinfluencing on TikTok*" introduces deinfluencing as a new and distinct form of cause-orientated

influencing that involves highlighting the complex consequences of the contemporary consumption environment and advocating for avoiding unnecessary consumption to enhance environmental, societal, and subjective well-being. The authors reveal how TikTok deinfluencers exploit the platform's affordances to maximise the reach and impact of their content. Nina Michaelidou, Ioannis Kostopoulos, and Emily Lowe's (2026) article in this special issue, entitled "*The dawn of 'deinfluencing' as a vehicle for moral responsibility and anti-consumption*", sheds light on the impact of deinfluencing content on consumption patterns and consumer well-being. Drawing from interviews with TikTok users, the authors reveal how beauty-related deinfluencing content can empower consumers to make more informed and conscious consumption choices and may positively impact consumer well-being by challenging the unrealistic beauty standards set by traditional influencer content. Finally, Gokcen Coskuner-Balli, Charlene Chu, Niklas Myhr, and Cristina Nistor's (2026) article "*Deinfluencers as institutional actors: Dramaturgical work and the embedded contestation of consumerism*" draws from a netnographic study of deinfluencers on Instagram and TikTok to theorise deinfluencing as a form of institutional work that contributes to the deinstitutionalisation of consumerism. The authors identify deinfluencers as embedded actors who mobilise their insider status to contest and destabilise established consumerist logics from within. Here, deinfluencing not only shapes consumers' purchasing habits at a micro level but has wider implications for the cultural meanings surrounding consumption, thus impacting the sphere of culture and identity.

Beyond the deinfluencing movement, research has explored the wider phenomenon of 'greenfluencers' who promote sustainable purchasing and consumption behaviours amongst their followers (Kapoor et al., 2023). Zhao et al. (2024) reveal that followers are more persuaded by greenfluencers who assume the role of informer rather than entertainer when promoting the

purchase of green products, whilst Kapoor et al. (2023) found that when greenfluencers promote sustainable products, a concrete message appeal creates a higher purchase intention amongst their followers than a more abstract message appeal. In this special issue, Mikyoung Kim and Hyun Ju Jeong's (2025) paper, "*Crafting green influence: The role of self-disclosure and influencer type in generation Z's pro-environmental engagement*", considers how variations in self-disclosure and influencer type impact consumers' pro-environmental behaviours. They find that effectiveness depends on both influencer type and follower gender. Such studies not only evidence the capacity for influencers to motivate more sustainable purchasing patterns but also provide valuable insights to enable influencers to do so more effectively.

Thus, research has highlighted the capacity for influencers to shape consumers' purchase behaviours in significant yet highly varied ways. Further research is needed to explore how consumers navigate and reconcile contradictory messaging from disparate influencers. This includes examining how consumers strategically curate their social media feeds to amplify content that encourages and facilitates conscious and socially responsible consumption behaviours and to minimise exposure to content that might tempt them to engage in less responsible purchasing behaviours (which can be difficult to achieve on today's algorithm-driven platforms). Scholars should also explore how influencers promoting conscious and socially responsible purchasing patterns can maximise visibility, even when platform algorithms do not favour such content.

#### ***4.2 Transforming Consumption Practices***

Influencers transform consumption by teaching followers not only what to consume (McQuarrie et al., 2013), but also how to perform consumption practices. For instance, Scholz (2021) discusses how beauty influencers can enable consumers to become more skilled in the practice of makeup application. He documents how consumers actively attempt to learn new techniques and skills by

following tutorials, adapting the influencer's performance of the practice where necessary (e.g., adjusting it to suit their own complexion, features, and personal style). Thus, influencers can enhance consumers' competence in consumption practices. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the context of 'finfluencers' (financial influencers), who are pushing back against the traditionally exclusive characteristics of the financial services market - including high barriers to entry, jargon laden terminology, and closed networks – in ways that challenge and disrupt traditional, hierarchical power structures (Meyer et al., 2023). Our special issue adds to this discussion with the publication of “*Understanding finfluencers: Roles and strategic partnerships in retail investor engagement*” by Marius Mölders, Lennart Bock, Eloy Barrantes and Henning Zülch (2025). Drawing from an online survey of German-speaking finfluencers, the authors find that these influencers attempt to increase financial literacy amongst their followers and normalise financial conversations in everyday life in order to empower consumers and foster greater inclusivity within the financial services market. Thaysa Nascimento, Isabela Morais, and Elaine Brito's (2026) article, entitled “*Influencers as socioeconomic intermediaries: Democratizing consumption*”, further reveals how influencers may help democratise consumption practices, translating them in a way that is accessible to those with more limited financial resources. Drawing from a multiplatform netnographic study of beauty influencers in Brazil, the authors reveal that these influencers often adapt their content strategies based on follower feedback surrounding affordability and accessibility. In doing so, they are able to demonstrate how to perform beauty practices in ways that suit their followers' socioeconomic realities, again fostering greater inclusivity and empowering consumers.

In addition to impacting how consumers perform consumption practices, influencers also shape the meanings consumers associate with these practices. For instance, Casey and Littler

(2022) reveal how ‘cleanfluencers’ have transformed the meanings associated with cleaning practices. Focusing their analysis on leading British cleanfluencer Mrs Hinch, whose cleaning videos on Instagram have attracted an audience of 4.8 million (as of March 2026) as well as a lucrative brand partnership with Procter & Gamble, the authors argue that cleanfluencers ‘refashion’ household chores by presenting them as a form of therapy that can help women cope with their stressful lives. In a similar vein, Drenten et al. (2024) explore how ‘gunfluencers’ curate a positive consumption ideology surrounding gun ownership, engaging in glamourising, demystifying, victimising, and tribalising tactics in order to promote a view of how Second Amendment adherents should look, behave, consume, and feel. Thus, influencers not only educate consumers on how consumption practices should be performed but also impact consumers’ experiences of engaging in these practices.

It is important to note that these processes may be shaped by influencers’ commercial interests. In this issue, the article “*The mindful marketplace: Ideological repackaging in influencer marketing*” by Amy Errmann and Marina Leban (2026) reveals how mindfulness influencers intertwine traditional Buddhist beliefs with modern notions of self-actualisation and tie mindfulness practices to specific objects (e.g., sound bowls and essential oils) to facilitate their commercialisation. Thus, whilst influencers can shape consumption practices in ways that can render them more accessible and inclusive, they may also intentionally transform practices in ways that serve their own commercial interests. Further research is needed to explore how brands may intentionally use influencer marketing to facilitate practice transformations that align consumer practices with their own commercial interests (e.g. presenting a branded product as central to the performance of a specific practice or altering the meanings of a practice in a way that encourages consumers to invest greater financial resources in its performance). Additionally, where

influencers intentionally reconfigure practices to serve their own commercial interests, or those of brands, research must examine the implications of such practice-shaping efforts for consumers and explore consumers' own awareness of, and potential resistance to, such efforts.

### ***4.3 Shaping Markets***

Whilst much marketing research looks at influencers as brand intermediaries, some scholars have recognised influencers as savvy market actors who can leverage their influence to achieve significant market change. For example, Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) studied 'frustrated fatshionista' bloggers who leveraged their influence to advocate for greater inclusivity for plus-size consumers within the fashion industry, thus contributing to market change. In a similar vein, Cayla et al. (2025) propose that influencers can drive market innovation. Drawing from an ethnography of Indian farmer influencers, they find that by disseminating knowledge in accessible and relatable ways and sharing narratives of aspirational success, they can help other local farmers to envision new goals and practices, thus encouraging them to be more ambitious and innovative in their own farming practices. Ultimately these influencers changed how farmers perceived the market and their own role in the market, increasing their sense of agency and shaping their actions, resulting in a more dynamic marketplace. Thus, research indicates that influencers can drive real change within markets, yet their market-shaping role remains underexplored in marketing scholarship.

Research in other fields indicates that the rise of influencers within a market can, in and of itself, shape market dynamics. Bishop (2023, 2025) discusses 'influencer creep', whereby actors within established markets are under increasing pressure to become influencers themselves since success in these markets has become increasingly contingent on social media visibility. Individuals in many professions, from authors and artists to psychologists and scientists, feel growing pressure

to engage in the microcelebrity practices typically associated with influencers by cultivating their own personal brand online, sharing ‘backstage’ insights into their everyday lives, building and maintaining positive relationships with their followers, and engaging in algorithmic optimisation (Bishop, 2023; Sari, 2025). These market actors may feel emotionally drained by the new demands created by influencer creep, whilst their growing reliance on social media platforms for their livelihood renders algorithm changes highly disruptive and creates deep-seated anxiety surrounding the risk of losing access to the platform, which would render these individuals “invisible” (Bishop, 2023). In her study of the art market, Bishop (2023) concluded that influencer creep disproportionately impacts women, highlighting broader implications for the sphere of power and politics as the costs and burdens associated with influencer culture are unevenly distributed across market actors.

Influencers’ role in market-shaping warrants further investigation. For instance, research is needed to examine how influencers disrupt and shape markets by launching their own products, which can serve as direct competitors to the brands they once endorsed. The competitive landscape of the beauty market, for instance, has undergone significant changes in recent years due to an influx of influencer-owned brands. Future studies could explore whether such an influx accelerates or diminishes overall market growth and innovation. Further research is also needed to explore how influencers – often aided and encouraged by their followers – facilitate greater accountability within markets by calling out brands for unethical practices. Research might also explore how influencers can splinter markets by cultivating highly niche online communities that shape brands’ segmentation and targeting strategies, unpacking the opportunities and issues these shifting market dynamics can present for brands. Marketing research has only just begun to scratch the surface of influencers’ market shaping potential, making this a promising area for future research.

## **5. The Sphere of Culture and Identity**

Influencers play a powerful role in shaping culture - the system of shared meanings, practices, and symbolic resources through which individuals make sense of their lives, form identities, and relate to others (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In this section, we shall consider the ways in which influencers shape cultural norms and impact consumers' identity projects.

### ***5.1 Shaping Cultural Norms***

By influencing beliefs and behaviours at scale, influencers can reinforce, contest, or reconfigure cultural norms. Yet prior research indicates that their cultural impact is diffuse and contradictory, with heterogeneity in influencer content producing fragmented, and at times conflicting, pockets of cultural meaning within specific follower groups.

Consider, for example, beauty norms. Influencers challenge beauty standards in ways that can empower consumers. Research on the body positivity movement (Anderson et al., 2025), older female fashion and beauty influencers (McFarlane & Samsioe, 2020; Veresiu & Parmentier, 2021), and Muslim fashion bloggers (Pemberton & Takhar, 2021) illustrates how influencers can facilitate more inclusive and diverse representations of beauty that push back against dominant market ideals. Yet influencers can also shift beauty standards in more problematic ways. Rodner et al. (2022) reveal that Instagram influencers contribute to the normalisation of cosmetic procedures, as consumers strive to imitate the idealised faces and bodies of their favourite influencers. Indeed, young adults who follow influencers who have undergone cosmetic procedures report higher intentions to also undergo these procedures (Hermans et al., 2022). However, influencers themselves may feel pressure to seek such procedures since conforming to established beauty standards is key to gaining and monetising attention online (Duffy, 2017), creating a vicious cycle.

Here we see that the implications of influencers for beauty norms are multifaceted and often contradictory; some influencers appear to be broadening beauty standards, rendering them more inclusive and accessible, whilst others are promoting beauty standards that are narrower, more exclusionary, and more difficult, time consuming, expensive, and potentially risky to achieve.

Findings surrounding influencers' impact on gender norms are similarly complex. Influencers can challenge gender stereotypes in ways that encourage individuals to experiment with and reimagine their gender identities beyond traditional norms. For instance, Campana et al. (2020) show how 'Instadads' critique mainstream depictions of fatherhood and instead promote a narrative of involved fatherhood in which fathering is more akin to traditional portrayals of mothering that emphasise domesticity and nurturing. In this issue, Shuyu Yang and Jack Waverley's (2026) article, *'Influencing differently: How Chinese Male Beauty Influencers develop influencer marketing beyond Silicon Valley'*, explores how these influencers tacitly broaden understandings of masculinity within China's politically conservative and platform-governed environment by promoting ideals (specifically the virtues of Zhēn, Shàn, and Měi) that bear a family resemblance to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) discourses. They argue that, in doing so, these influencers create an 'ideological antechamber' that enables them to incorporate DEI-adjacent ideologies whilst insulating themselves and their followers from institutional reactions. Their research demonstrates that specific cultural and political environments, as well as distinct platform affordances and regulatory contexts, can shape the mechanisms via which influencers seek to achieve cultural change.

Whilst influencers can encourage the performance of more diverse gender identities, they can also reinforce more traditional gender stereotypes. For instance, 'tradwives' promote heteronormative versions of femininity characterised by domestic labour and often reject feminism

as a threat to femininity (Sykes & Hopner, 2024). Of particular concern are manosphere influencers like Andrew Tate, who normalise extreme misogynistic ideologies amongst their followers by promoting a hyper-masculine ‘alpha male’ gender identity characterised by dominance, aggression, and emotional suppression (Haslop et al., 2024). Here, platforms’ role in shaping influencers’ societal impact comes to the fore, since YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram all banned Tate from their platforms in 2022, limiting his visibility, though his content still circulates through fan accounts on these platforms and through Tate’s own accounts on platforms such as X and Rumble. Again, influencers’ impact on cultural norms is not clear-cut, with different influencers shaping gender norms in highly varied and conflicting ways.

Influencers have also shaped cultural norms surrounding sexualisation. In this issue, in their article titled ‘*Consumer reactions to the use of sex appeals in influencer vs brand social media marketing*’, Nurul Hosen, Vlad Demsar, Carla Ferraro, and Melissa Wheeler (2025) argue that whilst gender equality discourses are reshaping how consumers respond to sex appeals, these dynamics are different in the context of influencers. They find that whilst brands’ use of sex appeals typically evokes negative consumer responses, seen as commercially motivated, objectifying, and exploitative, sex appeals by influencers elicit positive responses, seen as personal, authentic, and empowering. The authors express concerns that influencers may feel growing pressure to escalate their sexualised imagery, and that in doing so they may gradually shift views of what is considered acceptable and normal on social media. Indeed, Drenten et al. (2020) document how female influencers on Instagram have mainstreamed a ‘porn chic’ aesthetic in an attempt to attract and monetise consumer attention. Bussy-Socrate and Sokolova (2024) similarly find that sexualised content attracts more attention and engagement from followers, which is in turn rewarded by both the Instagram algorithm (in terms of increased exposure) and by

brands (via increased commercial opportunities and higher financial compensation), thus encouraging influencers - particularly women – to adopt more highly sexualised self-presentation.

Beauty, gender, and sexualisation norms are just three examples of the many cultural norms that are being shaped by influencers. Influencers also shape cultural norms governing romantic relationships, friendships, and family dynamics. They can shape the beliefs we hold surrounding work (e.g., what role work should play in our lives), consumption (e.g., what lifestyles are desirable and achievable), age (e.g., how individuals should behave at different life stages), mental health (e.g., whether, how, and with whom mental health issues should be discussed), and morality (e.g., what behaviours are considered virtuous or deviant). The cultural impact of influencers is far-reaching, and further research is needed to capture these implications in all their complexity. It is widely recognised that culture is fragmented and plural, and that multiple overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, cultural worlds can co-exist. It certainly appears that influencers can contribute to this fragmentation, cultivating insular collectives within which certain cultural norms prevail. Researchers must more directly and systematically explore the clashes that occur when these cultural worlds collide. For instance, how do followers navigate conflicting cultural norms perpetuated by different influencers? What tensions may emerge in consumers' offline relationships when their worldviews are shaped in dramatically different directions by the influencers they follow? How do influencers contribute to the culture wars phenomenon, whereby deeply polarised public debates occur surrounding values, beliefs, and social norms? Addressing such questions will deepen our understanding of how influencers shape contemporary cultural dynamics.

## ***5.2 Informing Identity Projects***

Since consumers use cultural meanings to construct, express, and negotiate their identities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), shifting cultural norms in turn have important implications for consumers' identity projects. However, marketing research that directly explores the implications of such shifts for consumers' identity projects is relatively limited. Research by Shehzala et al. (2024) indicates that influencers can serve as "identity exemplars" that shape consumers' ideal selves, creating discrepancies between their actual and ideal selves that can motivate them to emulate influencers' behaviours. Here, influencers' content can serve as a blueprint for consumers' own identity projects. However, further research is needed to explore the complex and varied ways in which engagement with influencers impacts consumers' own identities.

In their paper in this special issue, *'Child viewers' engagement with social media influencers: Exercising socialisation-driven agency'*, Junior Oliveira de Almeida, Peter Lugosi, and Sarah Quinton (2025) show that influencers now play an important role in children's socialisation. Using an innovative multimethod Mosaic approach that combines arts-based activities with focus groups and interviews with child consumers and their parents, they demonstrate that interacting with child influencers' content on YouTube can contribute to the development of 'socialisation-driven agency'. They find that children engage actively and critically with influencers' content, using it as a resource to learn in accessible ways, build confidence in their own abilities, and make sense of their place in the world. This study highlights the importance of exploring consumers' critical and reflective engagement with influencers' content, considering how they negotiate the cultural meanings presented by influencers. Just as consumers learn from and emulate influencers' consumption practices in discerning ways, adapting them to meet their own needs and circumstances (Scholz, 2021), how might they

intentionally and thoughtfully engage with influencers' content in relation to their own unfolding identity projects? For instance, might influencer content enable consumers to envision and reflect on the desirability, suitability, and feasibility of various identity goals? Do consumers always aim to emulate influencers, or do they sometimes engage with influencers to discern the identities they wish to avoid? How might engagement with influencers create, amplify, or help reconcile identity conflicts for consumers? Addressing such questions can produce a more nuanced understanding that recognises consumers as agentic and reflexive market actors whose engagement with influencers can shape their identity projects in myriad ways.

In this issue, Scott Jones, Emily Moorlock, and Elizabeth Dempsey's (2025) article, titled *'Under the influencer: Participatory culture and the rise of the viratoid'*, highlights a distinct way in which consumers can build their own identity projects in relation to influencers. Drawing from subjective personal introspection, collaborative autoethnography, netnographic analysis, and expert interviews, they argue that 'viratoids' are followers who develop their own personal brand and accumulate celebrity capital by posting content that piggybacks on fads, transgressions, and scams surrounding high-profile influencers. Thus, viratoids construct influencer identities that are fundamentally dependent upon, and intertwined with, the identities of existing influencers. Relatedly, prior work on anti-fans indicates that some consumers build their identities in opposition to influencers, devoting significant amounts of time to critiquing and retaliating against them (Duffy et al., 2022; Mardon et al., 2023b). Whilst prior work has documented anti-fan behaviours, we lack insight into anti-fans' own reflections; what role does anti-fandom play within their wider identity projects and how does this activity shape their self-perceptions? Is this behaviour motivated by a wider identity project that prioritises being a critical consumer or protecting the vulnerable, for instance?

In summary, the impact of influencers on consumers' identity projects has received surprisingly little direct attention within marketing scholarship, and further research is therefore needed to explore the ways in which consumers' highly varied engagement with influencers is influenced by, and impacts, their identity projects.

## **6. The Sphere of Power and Politics**

Influencers are playing an increasingly important role in shaping the political and power dynamics of contemporary society. In this section, we examine how influencers act as change agents, before considering the unequal distribution of power within the influencer economy.

### ***6.1 Influencers as Change Agents***

Influencers can be formidable agents of social and political change. Influencer activism involves influencers publicly expressing opinions on sociopolitical issues (Thomas & Fowler, 2023). Research documents how influencers can effectively mobilise their audiences to raise awareness of marketplace discrimination (Södergren & Vallström, 2023), advocate for greater market inclusivity (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), and publicly 'call out' brands to account for unethical practices (Lawson, 2020). For instance, Childs (2022) reveals how influencers contest colourism within the beauty industry by publicly calling out brands, exploring how the affordances of Instagram and YouTube facilitate influencers' activism efforts. Whilst some influencers devote their social media content to sustained activist agendas (e.g., greenfluencers or feminist influencers), others make a more occasional foray into activism (e.g., beauty influencers who advocate for greater inclusivity in response to specific instances of perceived exclusion). Influencer activism can potentially enable otherwise marginalised groups to gain greater influence within markets and society and render companies, organisations and governments more accountable.

Recent years have also seen the growth of political influencers – “content creators that endorse a political position, social cause, or candidate through media that they produce and/or share on a given social media platform” (Riedl et al., 2023, p.2). Drawing from interviews with political communicators from German political parties, Borchers (2025) concludes that political influencers are becoming an increasingly important component within election campaigns, due in particular to their capacity to engage voter segments that are otherwise hard to reach (e.g., young voters). Political influencers can play an educational role, increasing literacy around key political issues and party policies (Riedl et al., 2021), and raise interest in political issues amongst younger demographics (Schmuck et al., 2022). Research has begun to explore the distinct ways in which political influencers leverage their knowledge of social media platform affordances to shape political discourse. For instance, Harris et al. (2023) observe political influencers adopting aggressive tactics like "ratioing" to challenge opposing viewpoints and dominate online political conversations. The authors explain that ratioing describes instances when a dissenting reply earns more likes than an original post on social media, which can signal widespread disagreement with the post. Although this technique can potentially serve as a tool for amplifying marginalised voices, it also fosters a more polarised and antagonistic digital public sphere. Furthermore, scholars have expressed concerns that political influencers may spread misinformation and disinformation to mass audiences (Makse & Zava, 2024; Udupa, 2024; von Sikorski et al., 2025), potentially influencing public sentiment and even elections based on distorted or false information.

Thus, influencers are becoming increasingly embroiled in the world of politics, both through activism surrounding wider sociopolitical issues and by aligning themselves with specific political parties or candidates. However, many influencers remain reluctant to engage with such issues due to fear of negative repercussions. Thomas and Fowler (2023) find that influencer

activism improves attitudes toward the influencer only when it is followed by continued support for the cause. Engaging in more short-lived or occasional activism therefore risks undermining the authenticity and trust that influencers have worked hard to establish. Influencers' potential as change agents is therefore not fully realised, since influencers often avoid discussing sociopolitical issues unless they can commit to more sustained activist efforts. Indeed, Suuronen et al. (2022) find that influencers often avoid discussing political issues due to the risk of alienating audiences, facing backlash from aggressive internet commentators, and losing commercial partnerships. Furthermore, it is important to note that influencers' engagement in political discourse is mediated by market logic. In this special issue, the article "*The convergence of promotion and politics: How influencers curate their self-presentations through political talk*" by Hanna Reinikainen, Essi Pöyry, Nuppu Pelevina, and Elisa Kannasto (2025), argues that influencers engage in political discourse as a strategic form of impression management. By doing so, they cultivate a more "informed" and credible profile, which in turn attracts more meaningful and lucrative business partnerships. However, this dynamic subordinates political discussions to the logic of influencer marketing, since only commercially viable and brand-aligned political ideas are likely to be discussed by influencers. This raises critical questions about the authenticity and depth of such advocacy, and the societal implications that emerge when influencers only engage in political discourse that is palatable to potential brand collaborators.

Influencers' growing role as change agents warrants further investigation. For instance, more research is needed to understand the specific strategies through which marginalised and minority groups can effectively harness the power of influencer communities for collective mobilisation. Research should also explore how platform moderation practices (e.g., shadowbanning, demonetisation) may suppress activist movements and assess the extent to which

those responsible for the design and management of these platforms are aware of, and seek to counter, these constraints on influencer activism. Research is also needed to explore how consumers make sense of political influencers' content, and how they may attempt to amplify or suppress their impact on political discourse. A critical area of inquiry is the role that regulators and platforms should play in mitigating the spread of political misinformation and disinformation via influencers and what constitutes effective intervention.

### ***6.2 Influencer Power and Its Uneven Effects***

Early scholarship on digital creators emphasised their democratising potential. McQuarrie et al. (2013, p.136) conceptualised this shift as the “megaphone effect”, arguing that social media enables ordinary consumers to access mass audiences and cultivate influence “without the institutional mediation historically required,” effectively circumventing traditional gatekeepers like media organisations. By successfully performing public displays of taste, influencers accumulate cultural capital that can then be converted into tangible economic and social rewards. However, in practice, the promise of this democratised access to influence is not being equally fulfilled. A closer examination reveals that the influencer ecosystem is not a level playing field; rather, it often reproduces and even amplifies prevailing societal power structures and biases.

Influencer power is experienced and negotiated in relation to established social norms, which shape how consumers respond to influencers and their content. This issue's article "*Yasss queen! Towards an intersectional understanding of the social media influencer domain*" by Ava Le Blanc, Ross Gordon, Sue Ann Barratt, and Lisa Schuster (2026) illuminates the ways in which female influencers in the Global South navigate and assert their influence. The authors highlight the active role of consumers in conferring power upon influencers and demonstrate that they interpret and respond to these influencers according to normative standards of femininity and

respectability in Trinidad and Tobago. Their work points to a more dialogic and participatory model of influence, shaped by societal norms. In a similar vein, Duffy et al.'s (2022) research on the gendered nature of criticism on influencer gossip sites reveals that female influencers are often subjected to a disproportionate level of scrutiny and negative commentary compared to their male counterparts. This gendered critique, which often focuses on perceived inauthenticity, creates a significant power imbalance, imposing additional emotional and professional burdens on female influencers. This disparity is further exacerbated by what Duffy and Hund (2019) term the "authenticity bind," a double standard in which female influencers are expected to be both authentic and commercially successful, a pressure that is less intensely applied to men. Glatt's (2024) concept of the "intimacy triple bind" further deepens this understanding, highlighting the structural inequalities and immense relational labour demanded of influencers, a burden that disproportionately affects women and ends up making a precarious professional existence even more precarious. Thus, research indicates that prevailing societal expectations and biases can result in influencers being oppressed and privileged on the basis of their social identity.

The technological platforms that host influencers are, themselves, powerful arbiters of visibility and influence. The practice of "shadowbanning," whereby a platform's algorithm surreptitiously reduces the reach of a user's content, is a significant concern as we consider these power relations. The autoethnographic research of Are (2021) provides a firsthand account of how Instagram's content moderation policies are perceived by many creators to disproportionately target content related to women's bodies and sexuality, leading to the marginalisation of communities such as pole dancers. This algorithmic bias, as further explored by Duffy and Meisner (2023), demonstrates how platform governance can effectively render certain influencers, especially those from marginalised communities, invisible, thereby limiting their capacity to build

communities and exert influence. Furthermore, Bishop (2021) shows that the tools meant to help brands and influencers work together can be biased, because they might unintentionally favour certain creators or types of expression while trying to keep brands safe. The ultimate power of platforms lies in their ability to de-platform creators entirely, an action with devastating emotional and financial consequences, as documented by Are and Briggs (2023) in their study on the impact of de-platforming on creators at the margins. This precariousness of the influencer's position turns out to be a fundamental aspect of the power dynamics of the influencer economy, one that makes the industry profitable for brands and risky for the vast majority of influencers.

Brands too can contribute to the unequal distribution of power in the influencer economy. For those at the top of the paid promotional pyramid, the financial incentives for working with brands can be substantial. However, Christin and Lu's (2023) research on the influencer pay gap implies that the distribution of these rewards may not be equitable. Their work provides evidence of a racial pay gap, with Black influencers earning significantly less than their white counterparts for comparable work, a clear manifestation of racial capitalism within the digital economy. This economic disparity is a critical component of the power dynamics at play, since it plays an important role in determining which influencers are able to sustain a career within the precarious influencer economy.

Thus, whilst the influencer ecosystem can empower members of marginalised communities to develop and mobilise audiences in ways that enable them to foster supportive communities and contest dominant norms, it can also reproduce and reinforce structural inequalities, leaving some influencers subject to more precarious labour, unequal rewards, and intense scrutiny. In the previous section, we discussed the potential for influencers to act as change agents within society, and yet here we see that influencers' social identity can influence their capacity to do so; those

from marginalised groups may be less likely to take on such a role due to reduced visibility, lower financial security, and/or increased risks. Future research might explore what strategies successful marginalised influencers have employed to overcome these barriers, to assist others in following suit. Research is also needed to explore consumers' understandings of the barriers marginalised influencers face, and the strategies they may employ to assist these influencers in achieving power within the influencer economy. Most importantly, more research is needed to understand platform decision makers' awareness of how the ways they design and manage their platforms can contribute to inequality in the influencer economy.

## **7. The Sphere of Health and Well-being**

Influencer culture has implications, both positive and negative, for the health and well-being of consumers, and of influencers themselves. In this section, we discuss influencers' capacity to provide fitness education and inspiration, with both positive and negative implications for consumers, before discussing influencers' role in disseminating health (mis/dis)information and encouraging behaviours both beneficial and harmful to health. Finally, the well-being and health-related costs of pursuing a career as an influencer are considered.

### ***7.1 Fitness Inspiration and Body Ideals***

Influencers have emerged as a key source of fitness education and inspiration, with recent research suggesting that fitness influencers can increase consumers' motivation to exercise, promote healthy lifestyle behaviours, enhance accessibility of fitness-related expertise and knowledge, and foster realistic expectations of attainable fitness goals (de Brabandere et al., 2025a). However, influencers can also promote unattainable body ideals, often through the use of extreme diet and exercise routines and, in some cases, even performance and image enhancing drugs (Gibbs & Piatkowski, 2023). For instance, YouTube fitness influencer The Liver King (real name Brian

Johnson) claimed that his incredibly muscular physique was the result of a strict diet and intense exercise regime, but in 2022 it was revealed that he had been using steroids. Johnson was accused of putting his commercial success over the well-being of his followers, who may have been drawn to steroid use to achieve the muscular body ideal he promotes (Gibbs & Piatkowski, 2023). Influencer content featuring idealised fitness bodies can have negative implications for consumers' well-being, inducing contrastive comparison feelings (e.g., envy and resentment) and lowering body satisfaction (de Brabandere et al., 2025b; Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). Influencer content that displays overtly sexualised bodies - which, as discussed in section 5.1, is becoming increasingly prevalent, particularly for female influencers - has also been found to have a negative impact on consumers' mood and body satisfaction (Prichard et al., 2023). However, Anderson et al. (2025) introduce the concept of "affective aesthetic atmospheres" to explain how body positive influencers and their followers co-design an emotive and aesthetic space on the TikTok platform that resists and challenges unattainable body ideals. In designing this atmosphere, body positive influencers evoke collective struggles and emotions, and make use of body language, props, music, and visual effects embedded within the TikTok platform, whilst followers contribute to the creation of the affective aesthetic atmosphere by collectively offering feedback and engaging with the influencers' content (e.g., through liking, resharing, and commenting). In sum, extant literature highlights the capacity for influencers to perpetuate yet also resist unattainable body ideals, with contrasting implications for consumers' body satisfaction and their overall well-being.

There is a need for research examining how consumers navigate influencers' contradictory implications and exploring how other actors in the influencer ecosystem can shape these outcomes. For instance, how might consumers intentionally curate a social media feed filled with influencer content promoting healthy and attainable body ideals? How might platforms assist consumers in

achieving this goal in an increasingly algorithm-driven world, where users struggle to control their feeds? How might brands more intentionally select and collaborate with influencers in ways that promote healthier and more attainable body ideals?

## ***7.2 (Un)healthy Behaviours and Health (Mis/Dis)Information***

Influencers can encourage behaviours that are harmful to health by making these behaviours appear more appealing and socially acceptable (Hendriks et al., 2020; Pitt et al., 2024). For instance, concern has been raised over influencers being incentivised by alcohol brands, gambling companies and e-cigarette brands to promote their products (Hendriks et al., 2020; Vassey et al., 2023). Several studies have drawn attention to the lack of endorsement disclosure in these contexts and the need for stricter regulation to protect consumers, particularly vulnerable consumer groups (Pitt et al., 2024; Hendriks et al., 2020; Vassey et al., 2023). Recognising influencers' role in shaping the health-related attitudes and behaviours of consumers, prior studies have highlighted the potential for leveraging influencers in social marketing campaigns (e.g., responsible drinking campaigns, anti-smoking campaigns) to boost campaign reach and engagement (Kostygina et al., 2020; Harris et al., 2021; Engel et al., 2024). Studies have also highlighted influencers' promising role in boosting health literacy and promoting behaviours that improve health outcomes. For instance, Pretorius et al. (2022) suggest that mental health professionals as influencers on Instagram and TikTok have the potential to reduce mental health-related stigma, improve mental health literacy, and encourage help-seeking. While influencers have emerged as a key source of health information for many consumers, they can also disseminate inaccurate advice, including unintentional misinformation and deliberate disinformation (Engel et al., 2024; Powell & Pring, 2024; Xie et al., 2025). The Belle Gibson scandal is a noteworthy example of the harms associated with influencer disinformation. Gibson was a lifestyle and wellness influencer who falsely claimed

that she had been diagnosed with terminal brain cancer and was managing the disease through a healthy diet and lifestyle. Gibson's content inspired many followers diagnosed with cancer to forgo conventional medical treatment in favour of following her health advice, exposing them to serious health risks (Baker & Rojek, 2020).

Given the significant potential for harm, influencer-driven health mis/disinformation is an area that warrants additional research attention. For example, research should further examine consumers' ability to identify inaccurate health information by influencers, the factors that make some consumers more susceptible to influencer mis/disinformation, as well as consumers' responses to perceived mis/disinformation. Interestingly, there has also been a rise in influencers using their medical expertise to tackle inaccurate health information in the influencer space (e.g., @dr\_idz, a medical doctor with over 700,000 followers on Instagram). Future research could examine the effectiveness of such influencers in combatting mis/disinformation and boosting consumers' health literacy. Furthermore, more research is needed to better understand the role of platforms and regulators in effectively tackling health mis/disinformation.

### ***7.3 The Health and Well-Being of Influencers***

Whilst the existing literature tends to focus on influencers' impact on the health and well-being of their followers, recent work has begun to shine a light on the vulnerabilities and health-related costs of pursuing a career as an influencer. For instance, Ashman et al. (2018, p. 481) discuss "the quiet desperation, the self-doubt, the waning ambition" of aspiring YouTubers who are faced with navigating intense competition from other influencers, the demands of influencer intermediaries (e.g., talent management agencies), and ever-changing platform algorithms. Similarly, Mileros et al. (2025) highlight the inconsistencies and contradictions influencers experience as they strive to gain and maintain traction as an influencer, whilst simultaneously protecting their well-being. For

example, they find that in a bid to generate income and alleviate financial strain, influencers might be compelled to accept sponsorship opportunities from brands that undermine their intrinsic motivation and diverge from their personal brand identity and values. The relentless pursuit of performance metrics - including engagement figures and follower counts - can lead to significant health risks, as influencers compromise personal well-being to sustain or enhance their visibility and marketability (Mileros et al., 2025). In this issue, the article “*I want to be honest...but how much can I share?': Sustainable influencing and experiences of moral residue*” by Amira Mukendi, Iain Davies, Sarah Glozer, Pierre McDonagh, and Anne Marie Doherty (2026) identifies three moral dilemmas that sustainable fashion influencers face, which relate to (anti)consumption, (non)promotion, and (non)commercialisation. These dilemmas result in experiences of moral hypocrisy and an accumulation of moral residue – lingering negative feelings such as guilt, frustration, inferiority, self-doubt and stress that persist despite attempts to resolve moral dilemmas. The authors show that influencers engage in transparency management strategies in an attempt to reconcile moral dilemmas, ward off potential accusations of hypocrisy, and alleviate feelings of moral residue that arise. However, these strategies may also perpetuate accusations of hypocrisy and contribute to persistent feelings of moral residue.

Prior work has also revealed the significant toll that negative audience interactions can take on influencers, with critical, spiteful or antagonistic comments eroding influencers’ self-esteem and harming their well-being (Ashman et al., 2018; Glatt, 2024; Mileros et al., 2025). Platform algorithms can further amplify and accelerate hostility from audiences by unintentionally extending the reach of content that has high engagement even though this engagement is of a negative sentiment (Glatt 2024). In addition to dealing with critical comments, influencers must continually share personal aspects of their lives and maintain interactive relationships with their

audiences in order to secure engagement and income, but this “intimacy pact” (Mardon et al., 2023b) can have negative implications for their mental health and safety by opening them up to harassment, stalking, and doxxing from audiences, a phenomenon Glatt (2024, p.437) refers to as “weaponised intimacy”. Relatedly, Mardon et al. (2023b) found that influencers’ failure to maintain the disclosive and interactive intimacies they had once established with their audience, fuelled engagement in anti-fan communities dedicated to influencer critique and gossip. Within these communities, members engage in “forensic anti-fandom” searching for clues and evidence to reveal information about influencers’ private lives, behaviours that have the potential to cause harm to influencers’ mental health and safety (Mardon et al., 2023b).

Influencers have been found to adopt various strategies and tactics to manage the vulnerabilities and health-related costs of maintaining momentum as an influencer. The influencers in Mileros et al.’s (2025) study, for instance, report taking breaks from social media to protect their well-being. Similarly, Glatt (2024) documents how influencers manage their well-being by ignoring the trolls and bullies who leave hostile comments on their content, refraining from revealing information of a personal nature online to prevent doxxing, or retreating into more private communal spaces (e.g., Patreon, Substack) where they can interact with a smaller, more supportive, and more loyal segments of their audience. In addition, influencers utilise platform-enabled protective mechanisms that allow them to block or report hostile commenters as well as screen out critical or abusive comments, with only approved comments being displayed publicly (Mardon et al., 2018; Duffy et al., 2024). However, research by Mardon et al. (2023b) suggests that the use of these platform-enabled filtering and censorship mechanisms can have the adverse effect of prompting some followers to move to alternative platforms (e.g., influencer gossip forums) where they criticise and scrutinise influencers in a space free from the influencers’

ensorship, further exacerbating the issue of critical audiences, and potentially increasing the harm to influencers' mental health and well-being. Further insight is needed into the long-term effects of these strategies for reducing the impact of an influencing career on influencers' health and well-being, in order to better equip influencers to navigate these adverse implications.

In sum, existing literature has shed light on the health and well-being implications of influencers and influencer marketing, with greater emphasis placed on the negative implications (Powell & Pring, 2024). Further research is needed to fully understand the positive impact that influencers can have on consumers' health and well-being, including how such influence can be strategically amplified (e.g. via public health campaigns). An important avenue for future research is understanding the role that actors within the influencer eco-system (e.g., influencers, consumers, platforms, brands, marketers, regulators) can play in reducing the health and well-being related harms associated with influencer culture. For instance, what role can these various actors play in curbing influencers' role in spreading health mis/disinformation? What role can and should the various actors play in protecting influencers' mental health and well-being? Answering these questions will offer a more complete picture of influencers' impact on the sphere of health and well-being.

## **8. Conclusion**

In this editorial, we introduced the Spheres of Influence framework as a means to organise and synthesise the growing interdisciplinary body of research on influencers' societal implications. In doing so, we have demonstrated that influencers' impact extends well beyond the commercial sphere of consumption and markets and into the interconnected spheres of culture and identity, power and politics, and health and well-being. We encourage marketing scholars to recognise that influencers are not only market actors but also societal actors whose influence requires further

critical scrutiny. The proposed framework provides scholars with a useful lens for situating their work and for identifying underexplored areas of inquiry. However, this framework is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to serve as a starting point. We encourage other researchers to extend and augment it, either by integrating additional spheres of influence that are not currently captured, or by highlighting and exploring the spheres' intersection.

In applying this framework, above, we have highlighted a number of important and intriguing future research directions specific to each sphere. More broadly, we encourage researchers to attend to the important role of market actors within the influencer ecosystem in shaping influencers' actions and thus their societal implications. For instance, there is a need for further research exploring regulatory responses to ethical issues surrounding influencers and influencer marketing. Regulations surrounding advertising disclosure have generally been slow to catch up with influencer marketing practice; what implications do such time lags have for influencers and their societal implications? Research must also further explore the role of brands, social media platforms, and influencer marketing platforms in creating, amplifying, and/or addressing influencers' societal implications. To what extent are employees of these companies cognizant of their role in shaping influencers' societal impact, and what measures do they take (or consider taking) to steer this impact? Better understanding the roles played by these actors is valuable, because it enables us to identify multiple potential routes to mitigating influencers' negative implications and amplifying their positive societal impact. Furthermore, whereas previous reviews of literature on influencers' societal implications focus primarily on their 'dark side' (Ekinci et al., 2025; Hudders & Lou, 2023), we highlight that influencers' implications for each of the spheres discussed are often complex and contradictory. We therefore call for future research to explore consumers' coping mechanisms for dealing with the contradictory or

paradoxical implications of influencers, including measures taken to intentionally and strategically shape influencers' impact on their lives.

In conclusion, this special issue brings together 14 articles that advance our understanding of influencers' impact on society, offering fresh theoretical insights, novel methodological approaches, and important implications for practice and policy. We hope that these contributions not only deepen the field's understanding of influencers' impact on society but also inspire marketing researchers to further explore influencers' far-reaching societal implications.

## 9. References

- Anderson, K. C., Wallach, K. A., Albinsson, P. A., & Tracy, R. (2025). From Body Positivity and Beyond: Investigating Affective Aesthetic Atmospheres of Influencers. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 24, 1373–1391. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.2474>
- Are, C. (2021). The Shadowban Cycle: an autoethnography of pole dancing, nudity and censorship on Instagram. *Feminist Media Studies*, 22(8), 2002–2019. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1928259>
- Are, C., & Briggs, P. (2023). The emotional and financial impact of de-platforming on creators at the margins. *Social Media+ Society*, 9(1), <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231155103>
- Arnould, E. J., & Thompson, C.J. (2005). Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4), 868-882. <https://doi.org/10.1086/426626>
- Arriagada, A., & Ibáñez, F. (2020). “You Need At Least One Picture Daily, if Not, You’re Dead”: Content Creators and Platform Evolution in the Social Media Ecology. *Social Media + Society*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120944624>
- Arsel, Z., Zanette, M. C., & da Rocha Melo, C. (2025). Sponsored Content as an Epistemic Market Object: How Platformization of Brand–Creator Partnerships Disrupts Valuation, Coproduction, and the Relationship Between Market Actors. *Journal of Marketing*, 89(6), 57-76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429241296459>
- Ashman, R., Patterson, A., & Brown, S. (2018). ‘Don't forget to like, share and subscribe’: Digital autpreneurs in a neoliberal world. *Journal of Business Research*, 92, 474-483. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.055>
- Audrezet, A., De Kerviler, G., & Moulard, J. G. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 557-569. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008>
- Baker, S. A., & Rojek, C. (2020). The Belle Gibson scandal: The rise of lifestyle gurus as micro-celebrities in low-trust societies. *Journal of Sociology*, 56(3), 388-404. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783319846188>

- Bhatia, K. V., Pathak-Shelat, M., Sinha, S., & Mishra, T. (2024). Global influencers' content creation strategies: Negotiating with platform affordances to practice vernacular creativity. *Media, Culture & Society*, 47(1), 130-153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437241276408>
- Bishop, S. (2019). Managing visibility on YouTube through algorithmic gossip. *New Media & Society*, 21(11-12), 2589-2606. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819854731>
- Bishop, S. (2021). Influencer Management Tools: Algorithmic Cultures, Brand Safety, and Bias. *Social Media + Society*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211003066>
- Bishop, S. (2023). Influencer creep: How artists strategically navigate the platformisation of art worlds. *New Media & Society*, 27(4), 2109-2126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231206090>
- Bishop, S. (2025). *Influencer Creep: How optimization, authenticity, and self-branding transform creative culture*. California: University of California Press
- Borchers, N. S. (2025). How social media influencers support political parties in achieving campaign objectives, according to political communicators in Germany. *Public Relations Review*, 51(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2024.102532>
- Bussy-Socrate, H., & Sokolova, K. (2024). Sociomaterial influence on social media: Exploring sexualized practices of influencers on Instagram. *Information Technology & People*, 37(1), 308-327. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-03-2022-0215>
- Campbell, C., & Farrell, J. R. (2020). More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing. *Business Horizons*, 63(4), 469-479. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.03.003>
- Campana, M., Van den Bossche, A., & Miller, B. (2020). #dadtribe: Performing Sharenting Labour to Commercialise Involved Fatherhood. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 40(4), 475-491. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146720933334>
- Caplan R., & Gillespie, T. (2020). Tiered Governance and Demonetization: The Shifting Terms of Labor and Compensation in the Platform Economy. *Social Media + Society*, 6(2), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120936636>
- Carter, D. (2016). Hustle and brand: The sociotechnical shaping of influence. *Social Media + Society*, 2(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116666305>
- Casey, E., & Littler, J. (2022). Mrs Hinch, the rise of the cleanfluencer and the neoliberal refashioning of housework: Scouring away the crisis? *The Sociological Review*, 70(3), 489-505. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261211059591>
- Cayla, J., Bhatnagar, K., Nanarpuzha, R., & Dey, S. (2025). From social feeds to market fields: How influencer stories drive market innovation. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2025.03.001>
- Childs, K. M. (2022). "The Shade of It All": How Black Women Use Instagram and YouTube to Contest Colorism in the Beauty Industry. *Social Media + Society*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221107634>
- Christin, A., & Lewis, R. (2021). The Drama of Metrics: Status, Spectacle, and Resistance Among YouTube Drama Creators. *Social Media + Society*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305121999660>
- Christin, A., & Lu, Y. (2023). The influencer pay gap: Platform labor meets racial capitalism. *New Media & Society*, 26(12), 7212-7235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231164995>

- Cocker, H. L., & Cronin, J. (2017). Charismatic authority and the YouTuber: Unpacking the new cults of personality. *Marketing Theory*, 17(4), 455-472. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593117692022>
- Cocker, H., Mardon, R., and Daunt, K. (2021). Social media influencers and transgressive celebrity endorsement in consumption community contexts. *European Journal of Marketing*, 55(7), 1841-1872. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-07-2019-0567>
- Coskuner-Balli, G., Chu, C., Myhr, N., and Nistor, C. (2026). Deinfluencers as institutional actors: Dramaturgical work and the embedded contestation of consumerism. *Journal of Business Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2026.116152>
- Cotter, K. (2018). Playing the visibility game: How digital influencers and algorithms negotiate influence on Instagram. *New Media & Society*, 21(4), 895-913. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818815684>
- de Brabandere, M., Vanwesenbeeck, I., & Hudders, L. (2025a). Turning likes into lifts: Understanding how adolescents experience fitfluencer content and the opportunities it offers them. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2025.2467520>
- de Brabandere, M., Hudders, L., & Vanwesenbeeck, I. (2025b). #Fittok: How Fitfluencers' Videos on TikTok Impact Adolescents' Body Satisfaction, Workout Intention, and Behavior. *Psychology & Marketing*, 42(6), 1563-1587. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.22192>
- Dolbec, P. Y., & Smith, A. N. (2025). From fame and followers to fortune: How person-brands capture value in the creator economy. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2025.03.004>
- Drenten, J., Gurrieri, L., & Tyler, M. (2020). Sexualized labor in digital culture: Instagram influencers, porn chic and the monetization of attention. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 27 (1), 41-66. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12354>
- Drenten, J., Gurrieri, L., Huff, A.D., & Barnhart, M. (2024). Curating a consumption ideology: Platformization and gun influencers on Instagram. *Marketing Theory*, 24(1), 91-122. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931231207329>
- Duffy, B. (2017). *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*. Yale University Press.
- Duffy, B. E., & Hund, E. (2019). Gendered Visibility on Social Media: Navigating Instagram's Authenticity Bind. *International Journal of Communication*, 13, 4983-5002.
- Duffy, B. E., & Meisner, C. (2023). Platform governance at the margins: Social media creators' experiences with algorithmic (in) visibility. *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(2), 285-304. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221111923>
- Duffy, B. E., Miltner, K. M., and Wahlstedt, A. (2022). Policing "Fake" Femininity: Authenticity, Accountability, and Influencer Antifandom. *New Media & Society*, 24(7), 1657-1676. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444822109923>
- Duffy, B. E., Ononye, A., & Sawey, M. (2024). The politics of vulnerability in the influencer economy. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 27(3), 352-370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494231212346>

- Ekinci, Y., Dam, S., & Buckle, G. (2025). The dark side of social media influencers: a research agenda for analysing deceptive practices and regulatory challenges. *Psychology & Marketing*, 42(4), 1201-1214. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.22173>
- Errmann, A., & Leban, M. (2026). The mindful marketplace: Ideological repackaging in influencer marketing. *Journal of Business Research*, 203. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115768>
- Engel, E., Gell, S., Heiss, R., & Karsay, K. (2024). Social media influencers and adolescents' health: A scoping review of the research field. *Social science & medicine*, 340. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2023.116387>
- Gambetti, R.C., & Kozinets, R.V. (2024). From killer bunnies to talking cupcakes: theorizing the diverse universe of virtual influencers. *European Journal of Marketing*, 58(13), 205–251. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-12-2022-0948>
- Gibbs, N., & Piatkowski, T. (2023). The Liver King Lie: Misrepresentation, justification, and public health implications. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 114. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2023.103979>
- Glatt, Z. (2024). The intimacy triple bind: Structural inequalities and relational labour in the influencer industry. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 27(3), 424-440. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494231194156>
- Gurrieri, L., Drenten, J., & Abidin, C. (2023). Symbiosis or parasitism? A framework for advancing interdisciplinary and socio-cultural perspectives in influencer marketing. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 39(11–12), 911–932. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2023.2255053>
- Goanta, C., Bertaglia, T., & Iamnitchi, A. (2022). The case for a legal compliance API for the enforcement of the EU's digital services act on social media platforms. In: *Proceedings of the 2022 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency* (pp. 1341-1349). ACM. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3531146.3533190>
- Hallinan, B. (2023). No judgment: Value optimization and the reinvention of reviewing on YouTube. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 28(5), <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmad034>
- Han, J., & Balabanis, G. (2023). Meta-analysis of social media influencer impact: Key antecedents and theoretical foundations. *Psychology and Marketing*, 41(2), 394-426. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21927>
- Harris, J., Atkinson, A., Mink, M., & Porcellato, L. (2021). Young people's experiences and perceptions of YouTuber-produced health content: Implications for health promotion. *Health Education & Behavior*, 48(2), 199-207. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198120974964>
- Harris, B. C., Foxman, M., & Partin, W. C. (2023). “Don't Make Me Ratio You Again”: How Political Influencers Encourage Platformed Political Participation. *Social Media + Society*, 9(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231177944>.
- Haslop, C., Ringrose, J., Cambazoglu, I., & Milne, B. (2024). Mainstreaming the Manosphere's Misogyny Through Affective Homosocial Currencies: Exploring How Teen Boys Navigate the Andrew Tate Effect. *Social Media + Society*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241228811>
- Hendriks, H., Wilmsen, D., Van Dalen, W., & Gebhardt, W. A. (2020). Picture me drinking: Alcohol-related posts by Instagram influencers popular among adolescents and young adults. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02991>

- Hermans, A. M., Boerman, S. C., & Veldhuis, J. (2022). Follow, filter, filler? Social media usage and cosmetic procedure intention, acceptance, and normalization among young adults. *Body Image*, 43, 440–449. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2022.10.004>
- Hilgers, M., & Mangez, É. (Eds.). (2014). *Bourdieu's theory of social fields: Concepts and applications*. Routledge.
- Hofstetter, R., & Gollnhofer, J. F. (2024). The creator's dilemma: Resolving tensions between authenticity and monetization in social media. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 41(3), 427-435. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2024.07.001>
- Hosen, N., Demsar, V., Ferraro, C., & Wheeler, M.A. (2025). Consumer reactions to the use of sex appeals in influencer vs brand social media marketing. *Journal of Business Research*, 199, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115511>
- Hudders, L., & Lou, C. (2023). The rosy world of influencer marketing? Its bright and dark sides, and future research recommendations. *International Journal of Advertising*, 42(1), 151–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2022.2137318>
- Hugh, D. C., Dolan, R., Harrigan, P., & Gray, H. (2022). Influencer Marketing Effectiveness: The Mechanisms that Matter. *European Journal of Marketing*, 56(12), 3485-3515, <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-09-2020-0703>
- Jones, S., Moorlock, E., & Dempsey, E. (2025). Under the influencer: Participatory culture and the rise of the viratoid. *Journal of Business Research*, 199, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115547>
- Kapoor, P. S., Balaji, M., Jiang, Y. (2023). Greenfluencers as agents of social change: the effectiveness of sponsored messages in driving sustainable consumption. *European Journal of Marketing*, 57(2), 533–561. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-10-2021-0776>
- Kim, M., & Jeong, H.J. (2025). Crafting green influence: The role of self-disclosure and influencer type in generation Z's pro-environmental engagement. *Journal of Business Research*, 201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115687>
- Koivunen, K., Haanpää, M.A.A., & Saraniemi, S. (2025). The emergence of cause-oriented influencers – conceptualizing de-influencing on TikTok. *Journal of Business Research*, 197. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115463>
- Kostygina, G., Tran, H., Binns, S., Szczyпка, G., Emery, S., Vallone, D., & Hair, E. (2020). Boosting health campaign reach and engagement through use of social media influencers and memes. *Social Media+ Society*, 6(2), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120912475>
- Kozinets, R.V., 2019. Consuming technocultures: An extended JCR curation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 46(3), 620-627. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucz034>
- Kozinets, R.V., Gretzel, U., & Gambetti, R. (2023). *Influencers and Creators: Business, Culture, and Practice*. Sage.
- Lawson, C. E. (2020). Skin deep: Callout strategies, influencers, and racism in the online beauty community. *New Media & Society*, 23(3), 596-612. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820904697>
- Le Blanc, A., Gordon, R., Barratt, S.A., & Schuster, L. (2026). Yasss queen! Towards an intersectional understanding of the social media influencer domain. *Journal of Business Research*, 206. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115699>

- Lee, D., & Wan, C. (2023). The impact of mukbang live streaming commerce on consumers' overconsumption behavior. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 58(2-3), 198-221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10949968231156104>
- Leung, F.F., Gu, F.F., & Palmentier, R.W. (2022a). Online Influencer Marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 50, 226-251. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-021-00829-4>.
- Leung, F. F., Gu, F. F., Li, Y., Zhang, J. Z., & Palmatier, R. W. (2022b). Influencer Marketing Effectiveness. *Journal of Marketing*, 86(6), 93–115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429221102889>
- Lidz, V., & Staubmann, H. (Eds.). (2022). *Subsystems of American society: Manuscripts from the American society project II (Vol. 4)*. LIT Verlag.
- Libai, B., Babić Rosario, A., Beichert, M., Donkers, B., Haenlein, M., Hofstetter, M., Kannan, P. K., van der Lans, R., Lanz, A., Li, A., Mayzlin, D., Muller, E., Shapira, D., Yang, J., Zhang, L. (2025). Influencer marketing unlocked: Understanding the value chains driving the creator economy. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 53, 4–28. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-024-01073-2>
- Makse, H.A., Zava, M. (2024). Social Media Influencers and Politics. In: *The Science of Influencers and Superspreaders. Understanding Complex Systems*. Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-78058-5\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-78058-5_2)
- Mardon, R., Molesworth, M., & Grigore, G. (2018). YouTube Beauty Gurus and the emotional labour of tribal entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Research*, 92, 443-454. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.04.017>
- Mardon, R., Cocker, H., & Daunt, K. (2023a), “How Social Media Influencers Impact Consumer Collectives: An Embeddedness Perspective” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 50(3), 617-44. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucad003>
- Mardon, R., Cocker, H., & Daunt, K. (2023b). When Parasocial Relationships Turn Sour: Social Media Influencers, Eroded and Exploitative Intimacies, & Anti-Fan Communities. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 39(11-12), 1132-1162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2022.2149609>
- Matheson, E., & Sedgwick, D. (2021). Influencers and 21st century consumption. *Contexts*, 20(2), 18-23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/15365042211012066>
- McFarlane, A., & Samsioe, E. (2020). #50+ Fashion Instagram Influencers: Cognitive Age and Aesthetic Digital Labours. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 24(3), 399- 413. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-08-2019-0177>.
- McQuarrie, E.F., Miller, J., & Phillips, B.J. (2013). The megaphone effect: Taste and audience in fashion blogging. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(1), 136-158. <https://doi.org/10.1086/669042>
- Meyer, E. A, Sander, P., Cloutier, B. & Welp, I.M. (2023). High on Bitcoin: Evidence of emotional contagion in the YouTube crypto influencer space. *Journal of Business Research*, 164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113850>
- Michaelidou N., Christodoulides G., & Presi C (2022). Ultra-high-net-worth individuals: self-presentation and luxury consumption on Instagram. *European Journal of Marketing*, 56(4), 949–967. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-11-2020-0853>
- Michaelidou, N., Kostopoulos, I., & Lowe, E. (2026). The dawn of 'deinfluencing' as a vehicle for

- moral responsibility and anticonsumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 202, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115773>
- Mileros, M., Norrman, C., & Öberg, C. (2025). The health paradoxes of social media influencers. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 14(12). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13731-025-00472-1>
- Mölders, M., Bock, L., Barrantes, E., Zülch, H. (2025). Understanding influencers: Roles and strategic partnerships in retail investor engagement. *Journal of Business Research*, 198, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115462>
- Mukendi, A., Davies, I., Glozer, S., McDonagh, P., & Doherty, A.M. (2026). ‘I want to be honest...but how much can I share?’: Sustainable influencing and experiences of moral residue. *Journal of Business Research*, 204. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115872>
- Mundel, J., Wan, A., & Yang, J. (2024). Processes underlying social comparison with influencers and subsequent impulsive buying: The roles of social anxiety and social media addiction. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 30(7), 834-851. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2023.2183426>
- Nascimento, T. C., Morais, I. C., & Brito, E. Z. (2026). Influencers as socioeconomic intermediaries: Democratizing consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 204, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115873>
- Nilsson, J., Murto, R., & Kjellberg, H. (2023). Influencer marketing and the ‘gifted’ product: framing practices and market shaping. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 39(11-12), 982-1011. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2023.2253450>
- Oliveira de Almeida, J., Lugosi, P., & Quinton, S. (2025). Child viewers’ engagement with social media influencers: Exercising socialisation-driven agency. *Journal of Business Research*, 200. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115590>
- Pemberton, K., & Takhar, J. (2021). A critical technocultural discourse analysis of Muslim fashion bloggers in France: charting ‘restorative technoscapes.’ *Journal of Marketing Management*, 37(5–6), 387–416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1868551>
- Pitt, H., McCarthy, S., Randle, M., Daube, M., & Thomas, S. L. (2024). Young people’s views about the use of celebrities and social media influencers in gambling marketing. *Health Promotion International*, 39(1). <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daae012>
- Powell, J., & Pring, T. (2024). The impact of social media influencers on health outcomes: Systematic review. *Social science & medicine*, 340, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2023.116472>
- Pretorius, C., McCashin, D., & Coyle, D. (2022). Mental health professionals as influencers on TikTok and Instagram: What role do they play in mental health literacy and help-seeking? *Internet Interventions*, 30, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.invent.2022.100591>
- Prichard, I., Taylor, B., & Tiggemann, M. (2023). Comparing and self-objectifying: The effect of sexualized imagery posted by Instagram Influencers on women’s body image. *Body Image*, 46, 347-355. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2023.07.002>
- Reinikainen, H., Pöyry, E., Pelevina, N. and Kannasto, E. (2025). The convergence of promotion and politics: How influencers curate their self-presentations through political talk. *Journal of Business Research*, 201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115756>

- Riedl, M., Schwemmer, C., Ziewiecki, S., & Ross, L. M. (2021). The rise of political influencers—perspectives on a trend towards meaningful content. *Frontiers in Communication*, 6, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.752656>
- Riedl, M. J., Lukito, J., & Woolley, S. C. (2023). Political influencers on social media: An introduction. *Social Media + Society*, 9(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231177938>
- Rodner, V., Goode, A., & Burns, Z. (2022). “Is it all just lip service?”: on Instagram and the normalisation of the cosmetic servicescape. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 36(1), 44-58. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-12-2020-0506>
- Sari, B. (2025). The Rise of Influencer Practices Among Psychologists: From Therapy Rooms to Instagram Reels. *Social Media + Society*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051251353741>
- Scaraboto, D., & Fischer, E. (2013). Frustrated fatshionistas: An institutional theory perspective on consumer quests for greater choice in mainstream markets. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(6), 1234-1257. <https://doi.org/10.1086/668298>
- Schmuck, D., Hirsch, M., Stevic, A., & Matthes, J. (2022). Politics—simply explained? How influencers affect youth’s perceived simplification of politics, political cynicism, and political interest. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 27(3), 738–762. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612221088987>
- Scholz, J. (2021). How consumers consume social media influence. *Journal of Advertising*, 50, 510-527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2021.1980472>
- Schwartz, D. (1995). Systems theory according to Niklas Luhmann: Its environment and conceptual strategies. *Cultural Critique*, 30, 137-170. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354435>
- Shamayleh, G., & Arsel, Z. (2025). Digital Affective Encounters: The Relational Role of Content Circulation on Social Media. *Journal of Consumer Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucaf023>
- Sheng, J., & Yesiloglu, S. (2025). The de-influencing movement: Will it harm influencer marketing? In J. Costello & S. Yesiloglu (Eds), *Influencer Marketing: Building Brand Communities and Engagement*: Taylor & Francis.
- Shepherd, D., Whitman, K., Button, M., & Wilson, J. M. (2023). The impact of deviant social media influencers and consumer characteristics on purchasing counterfeit goods. *Deviant Behavior*, 44(12), 1746-1760. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2023.2233041>
- Shehzala, Jaiswal, A.K., Vemireddy, V., & Angeli, F. (2024). “Social media “stars” vs “the ordinary” me: influencer marketing and the role of self-discrepancies, perceived homophily, authenticity, self-acceptance and mindfulness. *European Journal of Marketing*, 58(2), 590-631. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-02-2023-0141>
- Södergren, J., & Vallström, N. (2023). Disability in influencer marketing: A complex model of disability representation. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 39, 1012-1042. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2022.2144418>
- Spörl-Wang, K., Krause, F., & Henkel, S. (2025). Predictors of social media influencer marketing effectiveness: A comprehensive literature review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, 186. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114991>
- Statista (2025). *Influencer advertising – Worldwide*. <https://www.statista.com/outlook/amo/advertising/influencer-advertising/worldwide>

- Suuronen A., Reinikainen H., Borchers N. S., & Strandberg K. (2022). When social media influencers go political: An exploratory analysis on the emergence of political topics among Finnish influencers. *Javnost—the Public*, 29(3), 301–317. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2021.1983367>
- Sykes, S., & Hopner, V. (2024). Tradwives: Right-Wing Social Media Influencers. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 53(4), 453–487. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912416241246273>
- Thomas, V. L., & Fowler, K. (2023). Examining the outcomes of influencer activism. *Journal of Business Research*, 154. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113336>
- Tiggemann, M., & Anderberg, I. (2020). Muscles and bare chests on Instagram: The effect of Influencers' fashion and fitness inspiration images on men's body image. *Body Image*, 35, 237–244. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.10.001>
- Udupa, S. (2024). Shadow Politics: Commercial Digital Influencers, “Data,” and Disinformation in India. *Social Media + Society*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231224719>
- Vassey, J., Valente, T., Barker, J., Stanton, C., Li, D., Laestadius, L., Cruz, T. B., & Unger, J. B. (2023). E-cigarette brands and social media influencers on Instagram: a social network analysis. *Tobacco Control*, 32(e2). <https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2021-057053>
- von Sikorski, C., Merz, P., Heiss, R., Karsay, K., Naderer, B., & Schmuck, D. (2025). The Political Role of Social Media Influencers: Strategies, Types, and Implications for Democracy—An Introduction. *American Behavioral Scientist*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642251344208>
- Veresiu, E., & Parmentier, M. (2021). Advanced Style Influencers: Confronting Gendered Ageism in Fashion and Beauty Markets. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 6(2), 263–273. <https://doi.org/10.1086/712609>
- Walzer, M. (2008). *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. Basic Books.
- Wies, S., Bleier, A., & Edeling, A. (2022). Finding Goldilocks influencers: How follower count drives social media engagement. *Journal of Marketing*, 87(3), 383–405. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429221125131>
- Xie, Q., Jiang, M., Feng, Y., & Phua, J. (2025). Curbing misinformation dissemination in influencer marketing: how misinformation interventions affect endorsement effectiveness. *International Journal of Advertising*, 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2025.2480014>
- Yang, S., & Waverley, J. (2026). Influencing Differently: How Chinese Male Beauty Influencers Develop Influencer Marketing Beyond Silicon Valley. *Journal of Business Research*.
- Zhao, X., Zhu, Z., Shan, M., Cao, R., & Chen, H.A. (2024). “Informers” or “entertainers”: the effect of social media influencers on consumers' green consumption. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 77. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2023.103647>