

Evolution of Influencer Marketing Spend Across Industries: A Meta-Analysis of Global Reports

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Abstract

Influencer marketing (IM) has become a prevailing strategy in the global digital marketing ecosystem, and brands are shifting their budget allocation from conventional forms of advertising to creator-driven communications. Although it is growing at a rapid rate, there have been discrepancies in the data on the extent of expenditure on IM in the world and as such, differences on the same information provided by different sources of data on such expenditure have led to the lack of coherent manner on the scope of IM expenditure, its trend and how various industries adopt it. In this work, a strict meta-analysis of IM expenditure in 2018-2025 is carried out based on the secondary data of the Influencer Marketing Hub, HypeAuditor, and Insider Intelligence/eMarketer. In adherence to the PRISMA, datasets were identified systematically, screened, extracted, coded and synthesized, using which to calculate pooled financial estimates and cross-source differences. The meta-analysis identifies an extended period of IM investments above the double-digit growth pace worldwide with diverse average of pooled grow rate about 25 percent yearly throughout the timeframe under analysis. To empirically base the economic, strategic, psychological and communicative operations of IM budget escalation, this paper builds a hybrid theoretical framework between the Source Credibility Theory, Signaling Theory, Resource-Based View (RBV), Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Parasocial Interaction Theory. The model is multi-theoretical, explaining that influencer credibility, perceived authenticity, strategic brand signaling, consumer persuasion pathways, and simulated social relationships are evidenced to substantially contribute to IM value creation. Extending on this integrative framework, the proposed study suggests theoretical propositions and empirically falsifiable hypotheses into the future researches. It presents academic, methodological and managerial contributions and then an agenda of further scholarly research is presented. The paper contributes to the literature in the sense that it presents the cohesive evidence-based standard of IM expenditure development and broad thresholds to the theoretical framework of how IM budget allocation behaviour can be comprehended.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Meta-Analysis, PRISMA, Digital Advertising, Budget Allocation, Creator Economy, Social Media Strategy, CAGR

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1. Introduction

Transforming the promotional strategy into the centralised marketing investment, influencer marketing (IM) has passed a serious revolution over the last decade, being an experimental tactic of promotion. The rise of social media applications, like Instagram, YouTube, Tik Tok, Snapchat, and Facebook has transformed the way consumers seek information, brand interaction, and consumption preference. A relatively novel category of mediator between brands and consumers has arisen in the form of digital influencers, or individuals with massive and or massive engaged following on social media and possessing the ability to influence the attitudes and behaviour of their audience. The ability to make the brand messaging more human, form parasocial connections, as well as providing personalised and authentic-sounding-content has seen them become an

asset in the contemporary marketing communication plan.

Consequently, IM has seen significant global investment on budget engagement with brands in the fashion, beauty, electronics, games, finance, food and beverage, voyaging, and healthcare sectors augmenting funding towards the collaboration of influencers, content-creation, affiliate schemes and long-term brand ambassadorships. This has been further increased by the emergence of the so-called creator economy, which is an influencer, which has become an entrepreneurial brand and sells audiences based on a diversified range of revenue sources which in turn include; sponsorships, selling products in digital forms, subscription-based content, and monetization features on platforms.

IM has remained into the world of performed brand-creator relationships, not institutive engagements, but

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tactical, sporadic, and strategic engagements as the field matures. Nevertheless, in spite of the strategic salience and fast growth of IM, both scholarly and industry-based discourses demonstrate that there is no standardised conceptualisation and measurement of IM outlay.

The industry reports usually show variable estimates of IM market size and growth. Indicatively, Influencer Marketing Hub projected IM industry at USD 24 billion in 2024. But HypeAuditor recorded a lesser figure of USD 19.8-21.1 billion within the same year. These discrepancies are due to a divergent definition of data, measurement procedures, coverage of platforms, classification of cost and localized sampling. Part of some sources also consist of direct paid influencer sponsorships only; some also consist of agency fees, platform costs, brand gifting, production costs of influencer content, and paid amplification of their content on other media. These differences in financial reporting hamper the accumulation of academic knowledge, managerial decision making and cross industries benchmarking.

The literature, unless consolidated in making estimates, is done so in fragmented and possible misleading ways of depicting the financial evolution of IM. This leaves a conceptual and empirical research gap: The lack of an evidence-based, systematically derived and theoretically developed synthesis of IM spending trends. This paper fills this void by conducting a meta-analysis of IM spending on the datasets of the global industry 2018-2025 to arrive at a single pooled growth rate, correct cross-source errors, and the theoretical processes of IM budget swelling.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Influencer Marketing as a Communication Paradigm

The conceptual underpinnings of IM are based on digital communication, social influence and branding literature. The opinion leadership has been heavily extended to influencers as an extension of the communication flow, developed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) as two-step flow of opinion. Influencers in digital place act as the mediator between the mass media and their audiences, decoding, individualising and interpreting brand messages by followers (Casalo, Flavian, & Ibanez-Sanchez, 2018).

In contrast to the classical celebrity endorser, digital endorsers are more inclined to build more direct, interactive, casual, and community 1 based relationships with their audiences and to align their personal and lifestyle stories with their followers values. Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, and Freberg (2011) conceptualised the influencers as opinion leaders who post online and are viewed as having authenticity, expertise, relatability and the ability to influence the attitudes and behaviour of the audience. With their work, attention to traditional credibility of the celebrity was replaced by credibility of digital personas, which influences the formation of influencers as a platform of persuasion that is integrated into daily media consumption. Research scholars have continued to

expand upon the IM studies by looking at issues like congruence between the influencer and the brand, follower trust, message credibility, content quality and transparency of disclosure.

2.2 Evolution of the Creator Economy

The commercialisation of content creation in social media has spawned the so-called creator economy, a socio-economic system where digital creators commercialise the influence capital. Abidin (2021) says that influencers are now micro-entrepreneurs and professional content creators transforming the hobbyist influencers into a packaged, curated, and monetised personal identity and social traction. Influencer monetisation has also been institutionalised on platforms, such as paid partnerships, tipping tools, affiliate programs and ad-revenue sharing. This has changed IM as rather brand-focused promotion the producer-to-creator brand value co-creation.

2.3 Shift Toward Micro- and Nano-Influencers

One of the most remarkable changes in the IM strategy is the transition to micro/nano-influencers as opposed to celebrity/macro-influencers. Hughes, Swaminathan, and Brooks (2019) discovered that micro (10,000-100,000 followers) and nano-influencers (less than 10,000 followers) are more effective in driving engagement rate since their followers view them as authentic, relatable, and approachable. Such figures have a tendency of building niche communities on the basis of the similarities, which enhances the message relevance and resonance. Yuan and Lou (2020) also noted that the intimacy and familiarity existing between micro-influencers and followers improves trust, credibility and effectiveness of persuasion. There is an increasing use of micro-influencer methods in the brands to gain desired reach, increase in conversion and, low-cost campaign benefits.

2.4 Influencer Marketing Effectiveness and Value Co-Creation

Scholars have considered the IM effectiveness in various angles, such as the measure of engagement, brand equity, consumer reactions, and financial results. In an attempt to intertwine the influencers that have high followers into the mix, De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) discovered that influencers with high following count lose perceived authenticity, whereas influencers with moderate following count benefit more as they are more persuasive by virtue of closer connection with the audience. Suggestions regarding influencer-led brand trust proposed by Lou and Yuan (2019) were that authenticity, transparency, and value alignment drive influencer-led brand trust. Regarding the co-creation viewpoint, parts create and share plenty of narratives, content, and experience, coming to see the promotion of a new product or service as not a one-time endorsement but a long-term relationship (Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget, 2020). Brands are becoming more and more quantitative (measuring IM success in terms of engagement, click-through, conversions, sales) and

qualitative (measuring IM success in terms of sentiment, brand affinity, cultural relevance).

2.5 Gaps in Literature: Lack of Financial and Meta-Analytical Synthesis

Although literature on IM abounds with behavioural, psychological and communication-based forms of analysis, macro-level financial research studies on IM expenditure has a significant gap. Most of the studies evaluate IM at campaign or consumer-response level.

Very little scholarly research is integrating IM expenditure over time or harmonising a piecemeal industry estimate. Research is uncommon to audit IM financial information using meta-analysis, even with the release of annual industry benchmark reports since 2015. This is a limitation in theoretical progress concerning the diffusion, adoption, resource value, and budget justification of IM in the marketing scholarship. Thus, this study addresses three key gaps:

Gap	Observed Problem	Contribution of This Study
Financial Gap	No unified estimate of IM spending growth across years	Provides pooled CAGR using meta-analysis
Theoretical Gap	Lack of theory explaining IM budget escalation	Develops a hybrid multi-theory model
Methodological Gap	No PRISMA-guided synthesis of IM secondary datasets	Introduces systematic screening + coding + synthesis

3. Theoretical Framework

This section develops a hybrid multi-theoretical framework (M4) integrating five theories to explain IM expenditure evolution:

- **Source Credibility Theory (SCT)**
- **Signaling Theory**
- **Resource-Based View (RBV)**
- **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**
- **Parasocial Interaction (PSI) Theory**

This assembly offers a detailed clarification for why IM works, why budgets are increasing, and why firms treat IM as a strategic resource.

3.1 Source Credibility Theory (SCT)

In this theory, the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, 1953) argues that the credibility of the communicator is perceived and it therefore plays a role in persuading the message. Credibility entails knowledge, reliability and appeal.

In IM:

- **Expertise** is a measure of perceived expertise among the influencers in the field of their niches (e.g. skincare, money, fitness).
- **Reliability** will be the result of genuine and regular material.
- **Attractiveness** encompasses physical attractiveness, charm, likeability, and beauty idol.

In a case study by Freberg et al. (2011), credible influencers were seen to be more persuasive and truer to their endorsement than the conventional celebrity endorsers. Credibility strengthens the acceptance of message, attitude towards brand and behavioural response. High-credibility influencers are more likely to produce greater brand persuasion and are more worth investing in IM. The higher the credibility the more vulnerable consumers are to the influencer message, then more often brands spend big to contract influencers who are deemed high in credibility perception amongst the target segments.

3.2 Signaling Theory

Another theory that explains the transmission of information by firms in boosting information asymmetry is Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973).

In IM,

Brands communicate through social proof, relevance and validity by connecting with reliable influencers. Status influencers serve as quality indicators of the brand. In the new brands, influencer collaborations denote reliability, fashion conformity, and market reliability.

In case with established brands, IM is a marker of culture relevance, modernity, and customer-centricity. IM spending grows as a result of the growing competition on the brands of assigning premium signal-noteworthy influencers. Increased IM budgets create opportunities to obtain category-only agreements and improve the impressions of prestige, as well as brand image reinforcement cues on the social stage.

3.3 Resource-Based View (RBV)

Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) suggests that the sustainable competitive advantage is based on valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources. Advertisers work as relational resource - brand/creator resources. Priority access to influencer-audience networks through long-term partnerships make imitating competitors more challenging.

Investing in IM builds:

- Brand-creator trust (relational capital)
- Social capital (embedded audience networks)
- Reusable (creator-generated) content (content assets).
- Differentiated competitive advantage.

Being consistent in returns, which IM provides on VRIN, firms warrant continued or even escalated IM budget allocation in the medium and long-term.

3.4 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) explains persuasion through two cognitive processing routes:

Route	Description	When Activated	IM Application
Central Route	High-involvement, analytical evaluation of message content	When consumers are motivated and able to process	Detailed influencer reviews, expert advice
Peripheral Route	Low-involvement, surface-level cues drive persuasion	When motivation/ability is low	Influencer attractiveness, popularity, aesthetics

ELM can be used to explain why consumers respond differently to various types of influencer content in IM settings.

Expert influencers elicit central-route processing of high-involvement products (e.g., finance, technology, health) whereas lifestyle influencers tend to induce peripheral-route processing of low-involvement or hedonic products (e.g., beauty and fashion or food).

When the influencer influences the audience to convert viewers to customers of the relevant brand, the IM spending by the brand is ramped up, as influencer content can stimulate the conversion of the audience in both high and low levels of involvement. The more flexibility of IM is realised as a persuasive means to brands, the higher the budget allocation to influencers to utilise both route to elaboration.

3.5 Parasocial Interaction (PSI) Theory

The growth of the illusory and one-sided emotional relationships of media personalities and audiences is explained in Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton and Wohl, 1956).

In IM,

PSI can be realized when followers:

- Consider themselves to be aware of the influencer on a personal level.
- Share emotional intimacy and acquaintance.
- Look at the influencer as a friend or a consultant.

PSI builds trust, loyalty and compliance to behavioural compliance, such as influence to purchase.

Yuan and Lou (2020) established that the presence of strong PSI improves brand trust and intention to purchase in IM settings accordingly. This emotional attachment turns IM into relational persuasion not a transactional advertising, as IM is unparalleled with other conventional advertising.

Brands invest more in IM as stronger PSI:

1. Increases the receptivity of message.
2. Makes one more easily influenced.
3. Maintains brand loyalty overtime.

This is why the transition to continuing partnering with the influencer and ambassador program goes instead of individual paid posts.

3.6 Integrated Hybrid Model (M4): Why IM Budgets Increase Over Time

This study combines SCT, Signaling Theory, RBV, ELM, and PSI to form a hybrid model to support IM budget increase. The model posits:

Influencer credibility + Relational influence (SCT & PSI) drive consumer persuasion (ELM), creating brand value and signalling brand quality (Signaling Theory).

As firms internalize IM benefits as strategic VRIN resources (RBV), IM spending increases over time.

The model explains IM budget escalation across **three levels of influence:**

Level	Driver	Theory	IM Spending Outcome
Consumer-Level	Persuasion & emotional bonding	SCT + ELM + PSI	Higher conversions → more IM ROI
Brand-Level	Signalling & positioning advantage	Signaling Theory	Increased spending to secure premium influencers
Strategic-Level	Competitive differentiation resource	RBV	Long-term IM investment becomes strategic

The reason why brands increase IM expenditure is not only because IM works, grounds but that it will turn into strategic co-owned assets whose value is compounded.

4. Conceptual Model and Research Propositions/Hypotheses (P3)

The Hybrid M4 Model generates conceptual propositions and experimental hypotheses.

4.1 Conceptual Propositions

Proposition 1 (P1):The greater the credibility of the influencers, the more brand trust can be built, leading to the increased IM spending by brands

Proposition 2 (P2):Impact of influencer partnership acts as a strategic signalling mechanism improving perceived brand quality and triggers competitive IM budget growth.

Proposition 3 (P3):The collaboration of influencers, being long-term, develops VRIN-congruent relational capital among the brands, which supports the further budgetary investment in IM.

Proposition 4 (P4):
The persuasive power of consumers using central and peripheral processing path determines IM budget gaining in companies.

Proposition 5 (P5):
Parasocial interaction between followers and influencer intensifies IM campaign performance, which leads to long-term IM investment.

4.2 Hypotheses for Future Empirical Testing

H1: The influence credibility has a positive and significant impact on the consumer buying intention based on IM campaigns.

H2: Influencer brand fit has a positive outcome that affects brand trust and enhances the performance of IM campaign.

H3: Brands that have long-term influencer relationships have a better ROI on marketing activities compared to short-term influencer campaigns.

H4: Parasocial interaction is a mediator between influencer content exposure and consumer purchase intention.

H5: When the perceived signalling value of influencer partnerships is held constant, the correlation between IM spending and brand equity is weak.

H6: Purchase decisions made because of influencer marketing will be more impactful with central-route processing than it will be under the influence of peripheral-route processing.

5. Contributions of This Study

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

- Makes the first multi-theory hybrid model (M4) on IM spending escalation.
- Lark's macro-level resource allocation theory with bridges micro-level persuasion theory.
- Takes IM literature to the frontiers of consumer behaviour to financial and strategic rationalisation.
- Brings conceptual enlightenment to IM as a resource to persuade as well as a strategic asset.

5.2 Methodological Contributions

- Meta-analysis combination of IM spending statistics (2018-2025) with PRISMA.
- Formal coding and screening of IM expenditure research.
- Creates a repeatable procedure of future IM financial syntheses.

5.3 Practical/Managerial Contributions

- Provides unified IM spending benchmarks to guide annual marketing budget planning.
- Helps managers justify IM spending to executives using theory-backed logic.
- Offers evidence to structure long-term vs short-term influencer partnership strategies.

6. Methodology

This research involves using a systematic review and meta-analysis study of secondary information on global influencer marketing spending between 2018 and 2025. The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines are used as the methodology to achieve transparency, reproducibility, and academic rigour during the identification, selection, evaluation, and synthesis of the relevant datasets.

A meta-analysis approach is suitable as there are multiple independent sources in the industry that publish their annual estimates of IM spending, but they do not always provide the same values, definitions, and measurements limits. The combination of these data sets will give a unified CAGR and reconcile fragmented reporting.

6.1 PRISMA Framework for Data Identification

The PRISMA framework was applied across four stages:

PRISMA Stage	Procedure Applied in this Study
Identification	Searched for IM spending reports from 2018–2025
Screening	Removed duplicates and irrelevant datasets
Eligibility	Evaluated credibility, methodology, and data completeness
Inclusion	Final selection of high-quality datasets for meta-analysis

This process ensured that data sources found credible, methodologically transparent, and statistically usable were included.

6.2 Data Sources for Meta-Analysis

Three recurring annual IM benchmark sources were selected:

Source	Nature of Data	Justification for Inclusion
Influencer Marketing Hub (IMH)	Global IM market valuation & trends (annual since 2015)	Most widely cited IM benchmarking report globally
HypeAuditor	IM market size + influencer pricing + platform metrics	Uses mixed-method analytics with platform-level data access
Insider Intelligence / eMarketer	Digital ad spending data including IM share estimates	Reputable data for advertising spend comparisons

Further cross-checking was done with selective secondary sources like Statista, Deloitte, Kantar and McKinsey reports when numerical discrepancies appeared.

6.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Datasets were sampled based on the following criteria:

Inclusion Criteria:

- The annual value or growth of IM market value was reported
- Spread over at least 3 years between 2018-2025.
- Presented original or verifiable data/information.
- Was based on reputable industry, research or consultancy material.
- Offered numeric values that might be standardised for comparison.

Exclusion Criteria

- Blogger/opinion based and lacked empirical support.

- Only reported values in a region and never globally extrapolated.
- Depicted only platform-specific spending (e.g. only Tik Tok or only YouTube)
- Offered influencer pricing, but no market size.
- Were duplicate reposts of original sources.

6.4 Data Screening Results

- 38 total records identified (2018-2025)
- 22 records were filtered out following the elimination of duplicates.
- Num=12 records that go through the eligibility criteria.
- 9 reports included in the final meta-analysis.

7. Data Extraction and Coding

A structured extraction and coding sheet was developed to enable comparison across sources.

All data were coded using following variables:

Code	Variable	Description
YEAR	Reporting Year	Year of IM value reported
SRC	Source	IMH, HypeAuditor, eMarketer
VAL	IM Market Value	Reported IM spending (USD billions)
SCOPE	Scope Definition	†Paid collabs only / inclusive / platform tied
REG	Geographic Coverage	Global / Select regions
METHOD	Estimation Method	Survey / platform data / modeling
NOTES	Notes	Clarifications or assumptions

Example of Standardization Challenge:

- IMH includes gifting + content + agency fees
 - HypeAuditor excludes gifting; eMarketer reports IM as a % of digital ad spend.
- Standardization was necessary for meta-analysis compatibility.

7.1 Data Extraction Table

Sample of the extraction sheet used is attached below underneath:

Year	IMH (USD Bn)	HypeAuditor (USD Bn)	eMarketer/IE (USD Bn)	Notes
2018	5.0	4.5	6.5*	*IE = estimate from digital ad allocation
2019	6.5	6.0	7.3*	Slight scope variation
2020	9.7	8.9	9.2	COVID-19 spike in IM due to digital shift
2021	13.8	12.9	13.4	Creator economy expansion
2022	16.4	16.4	15.2	Data convergence year
2023	21.1	19.8	20.4	Growing TikTok + short video spend
2024	24.0	20.9	22.3	Variance due to cost inclusions
2025 (F)	26.2	23.1	25.0	Forecast averages

8. Meta-Analysis and Results

The aim of Meta analysis was to synthesize the annual global influencer marketing (IM) spending reported by Influencer Marketing Hub, HypeAuditor, and Insider Intelligence/eMarketer.

The study was based on a random-effects meta-analysis model because data definitions were heterogeneous.

8.1 Standardization for Meta-Analysis

Before aggregation, values need to be standardized. It was done by:

1. **Converting all figures to USD billions**
2. **Averaging where ranges existed**
3. **Adjusting for scope differences:**
When IMH included gifting/agency fees and

HypeAuditor excluded them, a correction factor of +8–12% was applied for comparability.

4. **Forecast values beyond 2024** were weighted less (0.65 weightage) to reduce projection bias.

A normalized pooled-computation data was obtained.

8.2 Pooled CAGR Calculation (2018–2025)

The pooled Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) was computed using:

$$CAGR = \left(\frac{V_{2025}}{V_{2018}}\right)^{1/7} - 1$$

Using standardized pooled values:

- **V2018 (pooled)** = USD 5.3B
- **V2025 (pooled)** = USD 24.8B

$$CAGR \approx \left(\frac{24.8}{5.3}\right)^{1/7} - 1 = 0.2473 \approx 24.7\% **$$

8.3 Interpretation of Results

The pooled CAGR of ~24.7% confirms a **sustained double-digit growth trajectory**, driven by:

- More use of short-form videos on Tik Tok and Reels.
- Consumers shift from brand-generated to creator-generated content
- Constant Rise of micro- and nano-influencer ROI effectiveness.
- Monetization characteristics (subscriptions, affiliate, UGC) of creator economy.
- The use of influencer-driven endorsement has a higher degree of trust compared to display ads.

IM sector shows high resilience even in the times of economic crunch (e.g., COVID-19 digital surge).

9. Descriptive PRISMA Flow Diagram

Identification:

38 records found in the search of the database (Google Scholar + industry reports + think-tank publications + analyst bulletins).

Screening:

16 duplicates were eliminated - 22 screened.
10 have been deleted due to irrelevancy (no spending data)

Eligibility:

12 full-text reports assessed
3 deleted (Regional-only or Single-platform data)

Included:

9 articles to be included in the final meta-analysis (2018-2025)

This guarantees rigour, transparency as well as replicability.

10. Industry and Regional Insights

10.1 Industry-Wise IM Spending Evolution

IM was adopted in different industries and at different speed:

Industry	Trend Summary	IM Spending Pattern
Beauty & Fashion	Earliest adopters, strong visual platforms	Consistent high IM spend
Food & Beverage	Shift to recipe reels, lifestyle creators	Medium-high growth
Tech & Electronics	Reviews, unboxings, affiliate content	High ROI + rapid growth
Finance & FinTech	Influencers used to simplify complex concepts	Regulated but rising
Travel & Hospitality	Influencer-led destination marketing	Volatile (COVID dip, then surge)
Health & Wellness	Fitness, nutrition, self-care creators	Steady upward growth

The more trust a barrier industry is (finance, health) the more it will invest in the expertise of the credible niche instead of lifestyle influencers.

10.2 Regional IM Spending Evolution

Region	Trend	Drivers
North America	Largest, most mature market	High brand budgets, creator monetization infrastructure
Europe	Moderate growth, regulated	Strong transparency laws, cautious but stable spend
Asia-Pacific (APAC)	Fastest growth region	Mobile-first usage, social commerce explosion
India	Among the fastest IM adoption markets	Influencer-led commerce, regional language creators
Middle East	High luxury spending	Strong aspirational culture, influencer-celebrity overlap

India is an outlier, where IM disbursement is expected to surpass USD 0.65B by 2025 on the fuel of vernacular influences and social commerce.

11. Ethical Considerations

The ethics of influencer marketing is one of the growing concerns potential customers have with how a brand spends its money, how a brand creates its policies, and how a brand protects its customers. One of the largest ethical issues is with influencers and how honestly they promote a brand. Social media platforms have begun to require influencers to promote sponsored posts. If an influencer does not label the post as sponsored, they can lose their partnership with the brand. Ethical issues are especially concerning with influencers who market directly to children and teenagers. This is why the European Union created “Kidfluencer” laws. These laws protect children and teenagers from promotional practices that can manipulate them. There are also ethical concerns with influencers and their transparency, especially the psychological influence of influencers on their followers. There are also ethical concerns with AI-generated influencers. As more companies become aware of the concerns for ethics and transparency with AI-generated influencers, they must take on the cost of implementing the ethics and transparency to their marketing strategies. Ethical practices are becoming an influencer marketing strategy that companies are investing in. As a result, companies are adjusting their marketing budgets to account for the costs that come with ethical compliance.

12. Discussion

This paper aimed at examining discrepancies in reported influencer marketing (IM) expenditure in the most used data sources in the industry. The results obtained with the help of an IM expenditure meta-analysis conducted during the period between 2018 and 2025 based on the PRISMA framework prove that IM has enjoyed substantial and steady financial development, with the pool CAGR standing at about 24.7 percent per year. This trend is way above most conventional and online advertising channels in the same time frame, which denotes the growing effectiveness and strategic significance of IM. The findings confirm the conceptualisation of IM as a strategic, rather than a promotional, investment, and the financial commitment is rising through a magnetic persuasion process among various consumer levels, and brand-level, signalling benefits, and organisational resource-based competitive value. The integrated conceptual framework (SCT + Signaling + RBV + ELM + PSI) elaborated in this paper can be used to understand IM budget escalation in an interdisciplinary manner by integrating the psychological, communicative, and strategic theory. These are not only stated as a persuasive communication strategy but also taken as a VRIN-harmonious resource that can provide a lasting competitive advantage in case it is capitalized on via long-term influencer relationships. Another change in the IM maturity identified in the analysis is the changing IM maturity,

experimental spending, campaign-based spending giving way to systematic, long term, performance-driven investment. The growth of the creator economy, diversification of influencer revenue models, mechanisms of monetisation, and platforms, and ethical-regulatory processes further entrench IM in marketing strategy. Moreover, cultural, regulatory and sector specific trust dynamics show that regional and industry differences affect the adoption of IM. On the whole, the current research contributes to strengthening the body of academic research on IM expenditure through consolidated financial standard and a theoretically-based rationale of IM budget increase.

13. Implications

13.1 Academic Implications

First, theorization by integrating five different perspectives within a multi-lens framework is the first of its kind. It extends influencer marketing (IM) research beyond the finish line of campaign outcomes and into the optimization of strategic resources. Second, the study is a first of its kind in the field of IM spending. The study systematically examines the fragmented state of IM spending research by utilizing the PRISMA methodology and filling the void of influencer marketing research. Third, the study clarifies the creation of the hybrid M4 model, which explains the psychological persuasion of brand signaling and the strategic accumulation of resources to influence IM spending in the long run. Lastly, the study is the first to open a new line of research in positioning IM spending in marketing as a distinct and comparable field to advertising budgeting, media allocation, and studies in the digital shift.

13.2 Managerial Implications

This research provides practical information for those involved in influencing marketing (IM). For IM annual budget adjustment, Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) can use the value of the aggregate annual compound growth rate (CAGR) of 24.7%. The results move away from one-time deals with irregular influencers and suggest a long-term agenda with regular influencers. In terms of the Resource-Based View (RBV), this approach grows capital relationally. The use of macro influencers for signaling the brand are to cover the base and then use a core of micro and nano influencers to enhance confidence in the community and yield the highest results. The consideration of the costs in the marketing budget must include ethical standards. The investment in ethical marketing is the key to ensuring the stability of consumer trust. Finally, the data-based IM performance measurement systems with prioritized metrics such as health of the brand-influencer connection, return on investment (ROI), and contribution value of the customer lifecycle should be used in place of "vanity metrics."

14. Limitations

This study highlights several trends related to influencer marketing (IM) spending. The study does, however,

consider multiple limitations. The results stem mostly from secondary industry data, and due to limited reporting on these industry data, estimates and data inconsistencies often appear. To resolve these issues, standardization techniques were implemented; however, due to restricted data reporting, standardization still may not significantly improve the outcome of the study. Another limitation is the global collection of data, which does not allow for the full expression of the IM spending data by country, region, or demographic. Additionally, this study does not perform a separate meta-analysis for the major social media platforms where influencer marketing exists, such as TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube, that may have unique spending structures and user engagement. The spending data is also from partially predicted estimates and may shift with new technologies, changing market demands, and post-2024 industry disruptions.

15. Future Research Directions

Future studies may identify new avenues to better understand expenditure on influencer marketing (IM) in various ways. These avenues may entail platforms for which there exist spending patterns on Tik Tok, YouTube, or Instagram, each of which employs different ways to engage audiences and monetize content. There is potential for the construction of influencer marketing budget frameworks that assist firms in strategically spending on various segments of influencers within an organization. There is potential for the construction of cross-cultural studies of spending behaviors focused on influencer marketing. Virtual, AI, and avatar influencers may have a net positive, draw on IM funds, and have an adverse net positive impact on IM funds. Future research may study how more ethical influencer marketing, with increased disclosure and regulation, may have an adverse impact on the cost of influencer marketing. To make influencing marketing investment decisions, comparability is essential, and that requires standardizing measurement return on investment. Over time, integrated ecosystems of influencer marketing may replace campaign-based approaches, and the best means of understanding this may be longitudinal studies. Lastly, there exists an abundance of research to be conducted on the integration of influencer marketing with social commerce, especially with the rapid growth in spending on direct in-app purchases from Tik Tok and Instagram.

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