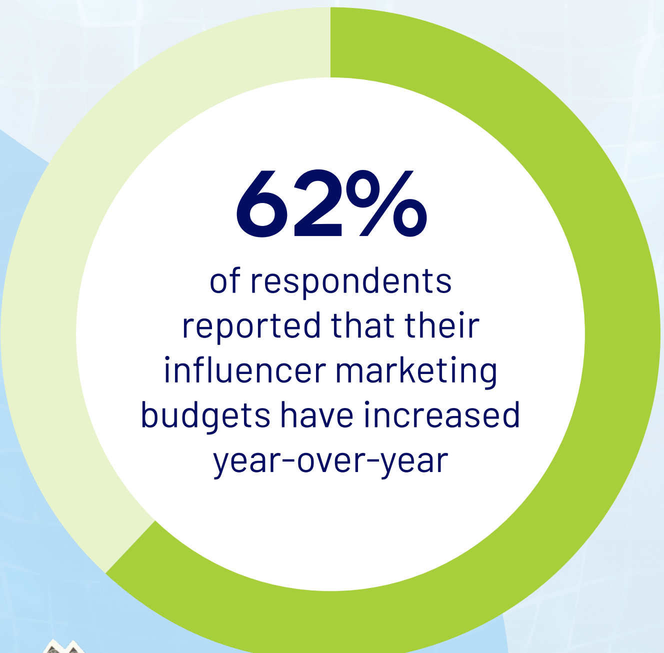
LINQIA

State of INFLUENCER MARKETING 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Influencer marketing has cemented itself as a powerhouse marketing channel and conversation has completely shifted, from “how to start” to “how to scale”.

With influencer content outperforming brand content across virtually every channel, this increased investment is not surprising.



33%

of marketers plan to spend more than **$5 million** in 2026

As brands experiment with new partnership models, adopt AI tools, and expand creator content to new channels, influencer marketing continues to evolve into one of the most dynamic areas of modern marketing.

At the same time, challenges remain. ROI, attribution, and the speed of execution are the top concerns for enterprise marketers. To navigate these hurdles, brands are increasingly leaning on specialist influencer agencies that can deliver strong creative strategies with best-in-class execution and full funnel measurement.

To create this year’s State of Influencer Marketing report, we surveyed over 200 enterprise marketers to explore how they are allocating budgets, leveraging AI, measuring performance, and choosing partners. The findings paint a clear picture of how influencer marketing is shaping the road ahead in 2026.

TOP 5 TAKEAWAYS

CREATOR CONTENT IS EVERYWHERE AND OUTPERFORMING BRAND CONTENT

Creator content is no longer limited to social. 100% of marketers say they are using creator content beyond creators' own social channels. Paid social leads the way at 94%, followed by brand organic social at 85%, and websites or product pages at 64%. The payoff is clear: 81% of respondents say that creator content outperforms brand-created assets.

ROI AND ATTRIBUTION ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES

Measuring ROI remains the top pain point for 79% of marketers, and attribution continues to be the missing piece, cited by 48% as the greatest gap in their current measurement. As influencer budgets grow, pressure to tie activity directly to business outcomes is only intensifying.

AI IS IN, VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS ARE OUT

74% of marketers are using AI in their influencer workflows, with the majority applying it to generate ideas, write influencer briefs, and streamline workflows. Yet, despite the AI buzz, 89% of respondents have no plans to work with virtual influencers, avatars, or digital clones in 2026.

SPECIALIST INFLUENCER AGENCIES ARE ON THE RISE AND CREATIVE STRATEGY IS THE MAIN DIFFERENTIATOR

Nearly half (49%) of marketers are now working with specialist influencer agencies, up from 28% in 2025; while in-house management dropped to 23%. When choosing partners, creative strategy ranked as the top differentiator, followed by proposed creators and measurement capabilities.

BUDGETS KEEP CLIMBING WITH MILLIONS ON THE LINE

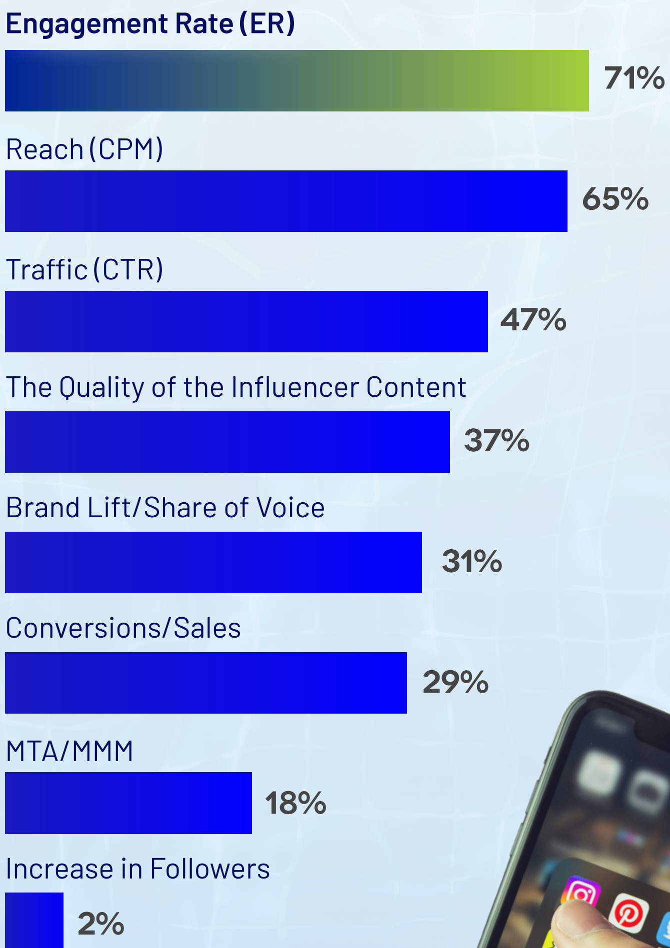
62% of respondents reported budget increases in 2026, with one third now spending more than $5 million annually. Only 10% spend less than $100K, underscoring that influencer marketing is no longer a test-and-learn channel, but a core investment area.

DIVE INTO OUR KEY INSIGHTS

ENGAGEMENT RATE IS THE TOP METRIC OF SUCCESS

Engagement Rate surpassed Reach this year as the #1 success metric for marketers. Reach came in second, and traffic overtook Conversions at third, demonstrating how creators are still primarily driving awareness and intent rather than immediate conversion.

What are your top 3 measures of success for your influencer marketing programs?



INSTAGRAM REMAINS THE #1 PLATFORM

Instagram is still the most leveraged platform for influencer partnerships, followed by TikTok and YouTube. Pinterest, Snapchat, and LinkedIn took the 4, 5, and 6 slots accordingly, and X (Twitter) was ranked last.

Rachel Karten, writer of Link in Bio, found the same trends in her own survey, with 92% of social media marketers considering Instagram as the priority platform, and 65% moving their brands away from X.

Rank the following social platforms in order of importance to your influencer efforts.

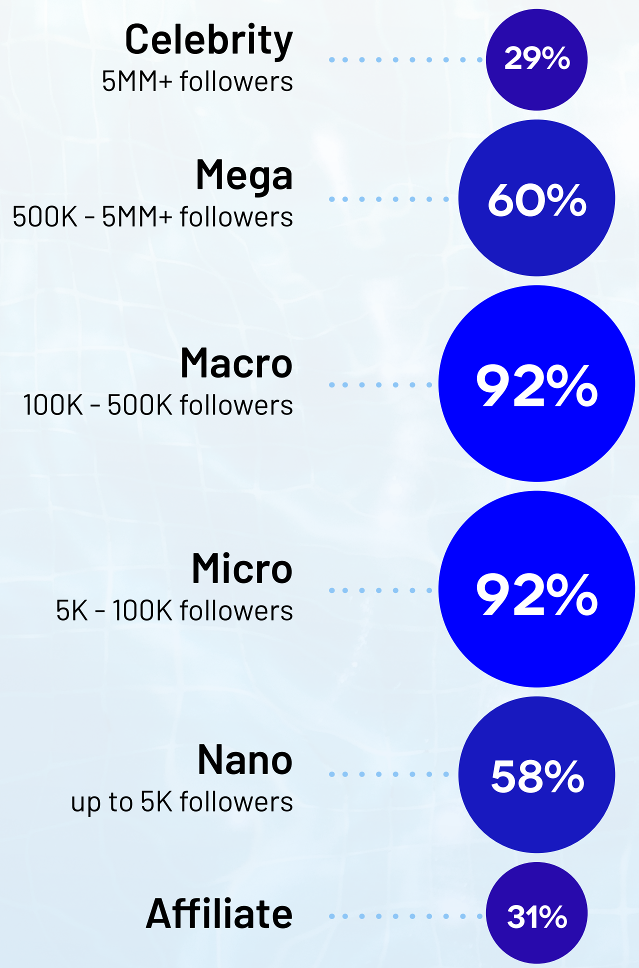
SHORT-FORM VIDEO DOMINATES INFLUENCER DELIVERABLES

Short-form videos are part of 100% of marketers' creator partnerships, with Stories close behind at 90%. Carousels are leveraged by 61% of marketers, long-form videos by 59%, and static images remain relevant in 47% of creator partnerships. Interestingly, podcasts are part of 23% of marketers' influencer strategies.

Which formats are you using with your influencer content?

MACRO AND MICRO CREATORS TIE FOR THE TOP SPOT

What type of influencers do you plan to work with in 2026?



Macro and micro creators tied for the top spot at 92%, while nano influencers had the biggest jump year over year, rising from 28% in 2025 to 58% in 2026. Marketers are showing that it's not an either/or, it's a combination of tiers that drives the best results.

SPONSORED CONTENT AND AMBASSADORSHIPS DOMINATE PARTNERSHIP TYPES

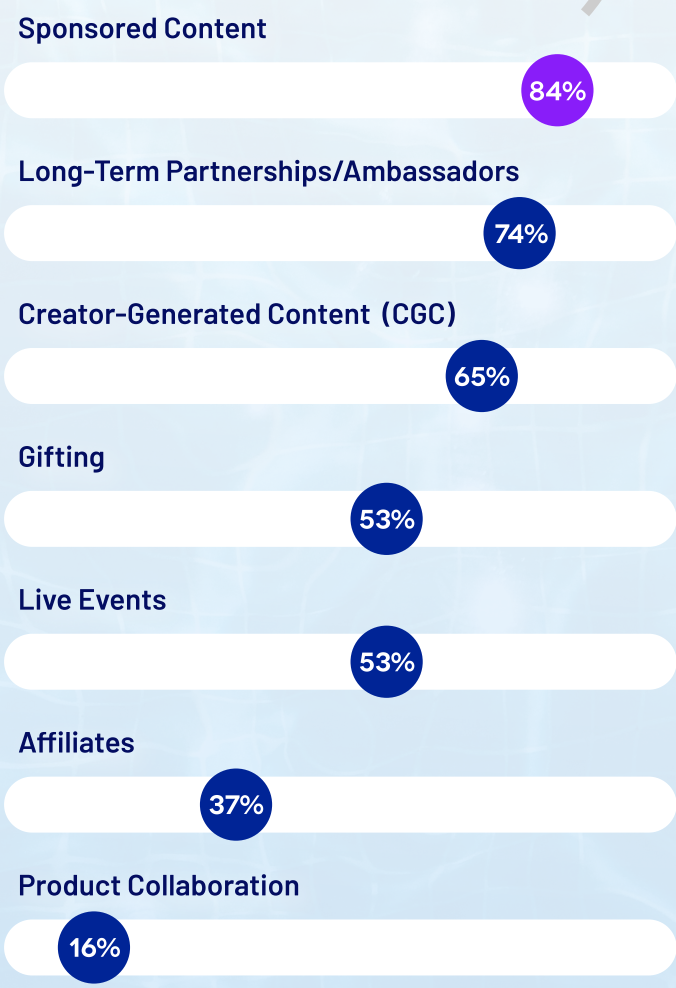
Sponsored content remains the most common type of creator collaboration used by 84% of marketers. Ambassadorships are close behind at 74%, followed by creator-generated content at 65%.

PARTNERSHIP STYLES ARE EXPANDING

Almost every activation type will see growth in 2026. Live events increased from 34% to 53%, gifting rose from 35% to 53%, creator-generated content grew from 40% to 65%, and long-term partnerships surged from 48% to 74%.

This is a great example of how brands continue to invest in influencer marketing. As we predicted last year, people are turning to their trusted influencers for community and connection, and the hunger for live events is not slowing down.

In what capacity are you working with creators?

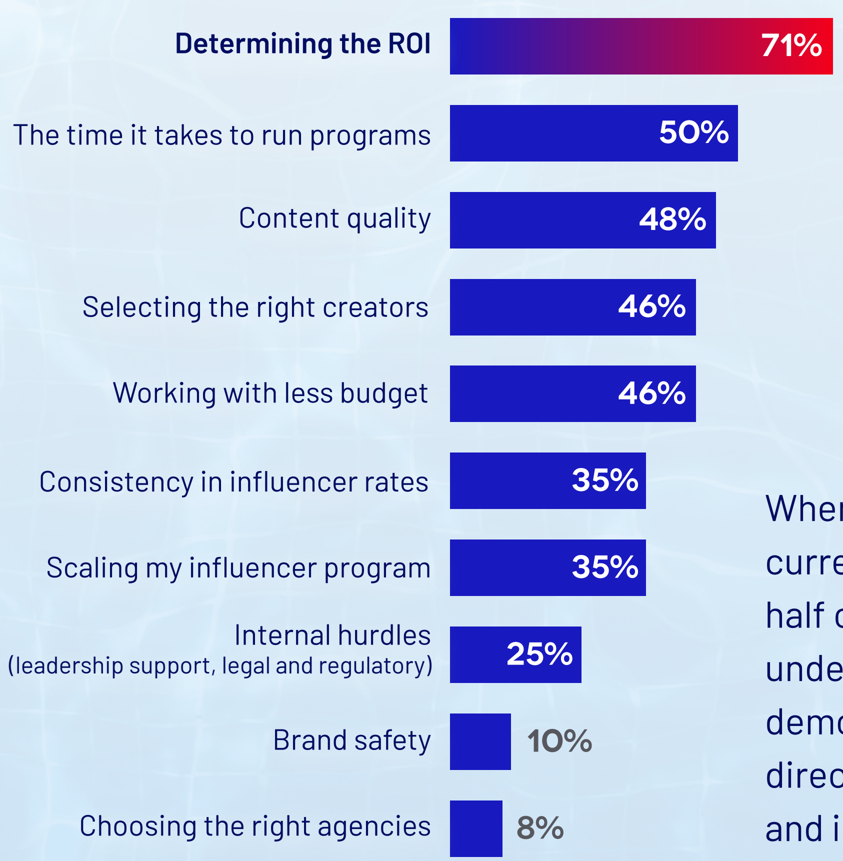


ROI REMAINS THE TOP CHALLENGE

Measuring ROI remains marketers' greatest challenge, cited by 79% of respondents. The time it takes to run programs rose to the second spot at 50%, followed by content quality at 48%. Selecting the right creators and working with less budget tied for fourth, each at 46%.

Large companies are clearly still trying to figure out how to move faster and understand the impact of their influencer investments.

What are the top challenges you face with influencer marketing?



ATTRIBUTION REMAINS THE MISSING PIECE

What is the biggest thing missing from your current measurement approach?

Correlating creator content to sales attribution

Lower funnel conversion metrics

Better integration into media and our MMMs

Clear attribution to conversions. We can track reach and engagement, but tying influencer content directly to sales or long-term brand impact is still a challenge

Real-time dashboard with organic and paid results

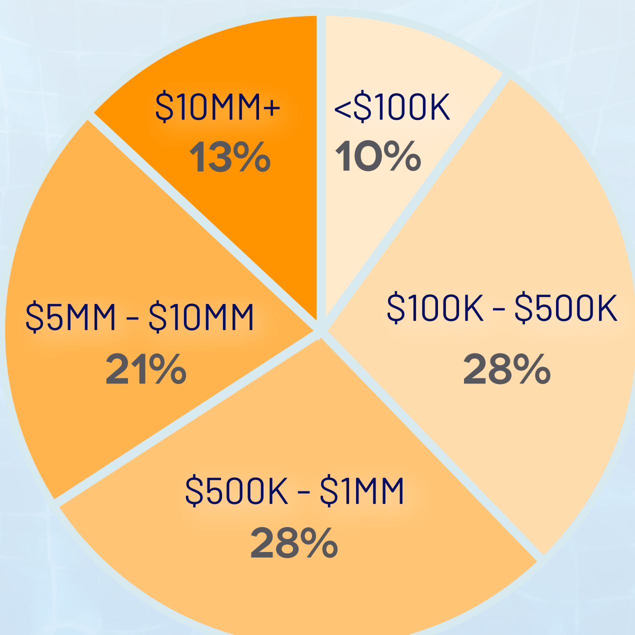
When asked what is most lacking in their current measurement approach, nearly half of marketers (48%) cited attribution, underscoring the ongoing difficulty of demonstrating influencer marketing's direct impact on sales, even as budgets and investment continue to grow.

INFLUENCER MARKETING IS NO LONGER A TEST AND LEARN TACTIC

In 2026, 33% of marketers are planning to spend more than $5 million annually on influencer programs, while only 10% are spending less than $100,000.

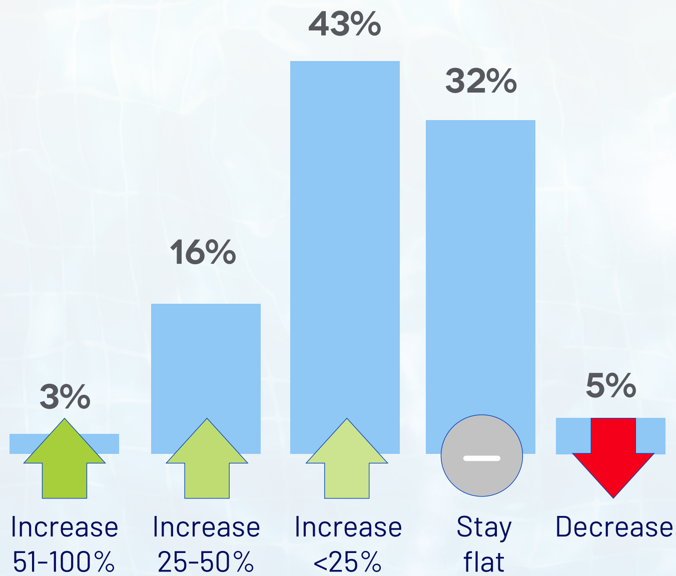
The willingness for brands to commit at this scale shows that influencer marketing has proven its ability to drive brand and business growth.

How much will your company invest in Influencer Marketing in 2026?



INFLUENCER BUDGETS CONTINUE TO RISE

How will your budget for influencer marketing change in 2026 vs 2025?



62% of marketers reported that their influencer budgets are increasing, 32% said budgets are staying flat, and 5% said they are decreasing. Of those with increases, 70% of the growth came as incremental dollars to the marketing budget, while 22% came from social budgets. Unilever made headlines this year by following this trend, striving to have 50% of its media budget allocated to social, along with boosting the number of creators they partner with twentyfold.

For those with budget decreases, overall marketing budget reductions and changes in the macroeconomic environment were the top 2 reasons cited, respectively.

PAID MEDIA AMPLIFICATION HOLDS STEADY

Paid amplification continues to be a major driver of influencer programs. 64% of marketers reported that at least half of their influencer budgets are allocated to paid media, an identical percentage to last year's findings.

As organic reach becomes less predictable and social media increasingly moves to an interest graph vs. a social graph, paid media amplification will continue to play a major role in influencer investments.

What percent of your influencer marketing budget will go to organic influencer posts vs. paid media/amplification in 2026?

CREATOR CONTENT IS EVERYWHERE

Marketers are discovering that a single creator campaign can fuel their entire marketing engine. A whopping 100% of marketers plan to use influencer content beyond the creators' social handles in 2026. Paid social leads the way at 94%, followed by brand organic social at 85%. Websites, landing pages, or product pages came in third at 64%.

Which channels do you plan to repurpose influencer content on?

CREATOR CONTENT OUTPERFORMS BRAND CONTENT

How does your creator content perform compared to your brand-created content?

81%

reported influencer content outperforms brand-created content

8% We have **never tested** the performance of influencer content compared to brand-created content

6% The **same as our** brand-created content

4% **Underperforms** our brand-created content

Influencer content is proving its value, with 81% of marketers reporting that it outperforms brand-created content.

Linqia data supports this trend, demonstrating that creator content outperforms branded assets by an average of 2.7x in controlled tests.

SOCIAL COMMERCE ADOPTION IS MIXED

A large percentage of marketers (42%) are not planning to enable social commerce at all in 2026. Of those who are, 50% are utilizing direct social shopping features like TikTok Shop and YouTube Shopping, while 27% are leveraging affiliate links with partners like Rakuten, CJ, and Impact. 19% are using third-party shopping platforms like LTK, ShopMy, and Mavely.

This data shows that as much as marketers want influencer marketing to be a sales and affiliate channel, most have not yet figured out how to integrate commerce effectively.

How do you plan to execute social commerce in 2026?

- **Direct social shopping** via TikTok Shop, YouTube Shopping, etc. — **50%**
- **Affiliate links** via partners like Rakuten, CJ, and Impact — **27%**
- **Shopping platforms** like LTK, ShopMy, and Mavely — **19%**
- **None of the above** — **42%**

AI CEMENTS ITS ROLE IN INFLUENCER MARKETING

Nearly 3 out of 4 influencer marketers (74%) are capitalizing on AI to support their influencer workflows and processes. Of those, 77% use AI to generate ideas and creative strategies, 69% to write influencer briefs, and 63% to streamline workflows. Only 26% of marketers are not using AI in any part of their influencer work.

This trend mirrors what we are seeing in the industry, with influencer agencies releasing new AI toolsets like AI briefs and engagement analytics to help drive efficiency.

How are you using AI today in influencer marketing?

- **58%** Come up with ideas/creative strategies
- **51%** Write influencer briefs
- **47%** Streamline workflows
- **34%** Find creators best suited for our campaigns
- **30%** Provide deeper performance analysis
- **26%** Not using AI
- **11%** Creating AI-generated content
- **9%** Repurpose influencer content for other formats
- **2%** Other

MARKETERS ARE STILL AVOIDING VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS

Are you planning to do any of the following in 2026?

9% Partner with virtual influencers

2% Create your own AI avatars

2% Partner with a digital clone of a creator

89% None of the above

Despite the current AI buzz, 89% of marketers are not planning to work with virtual influencers, AI avatars, or digital clones of creators in 2026. Though AI has created efficiencies in content production and campaign management, marketers remain hesitant to the concept of AI influencers.

Trust and reliability are core drivers of influencer marketing, giving brands pause when it comes to digital humans.

BRANDS SHIFT FROM IN-HOUSE TO SPECIALIST INFLUENCER PARTNERS

As the influencer industry becomes more crowded and complex, 49% of respondents reported that they are turning to specialist influencer marketing agencies to execute their work, up from 28% in 2025. Managing influencer marketing in-house decreased from 28% in 2025 to 23% in 2026.

CREATIVE STRATEGY IS THE KEY AGENCY DIFFERENTIATOR

When selecting agency partners, marketers ranked creative strategy as the most important factor, followed by quality of proposed creators and measurement capabilities.

There is a high demand for agencies that can deliver both strategy and execution as a strategic partner, and not just operate as a fulfillment house.

What's most important to you when choosing an influencer marketing partner?

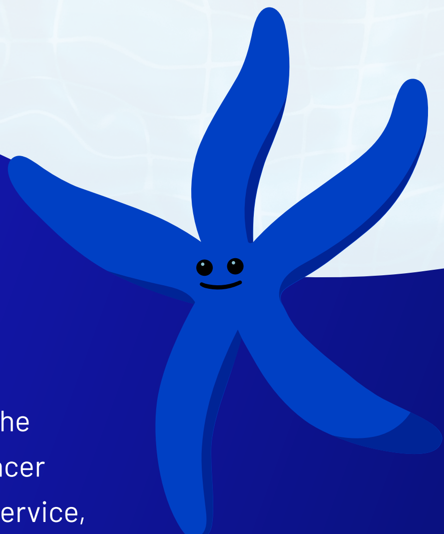
- **#1** Creative strategy
- **#2** Quality of proposed creators
- **#3** Measurement capabilities
- **#4** Price/volume of deliverables
- **#5** Technology platform
- **#6** Paid media capabilities

CONCLUSION

Influencer marketing has matured into a cornerstone of modern marketing strategies, with larger budgets, broader adoption, and deeper integration across every channel. As investment rises, so does the demand for better measurement, clearer attribution, and faster execution. Marketers know that proving impact, whether through engagement, reach, traffic, or sales, will define the next phase of growth.

2025 was the year AI came onto the scene, reshaping how briefs are written, strategies are developed, and workflows are streamlined. At the same time, creator content has become indispensable, with every marketer now repurposing influencer work across paid, owned, and earned channels, consistently seeing stronger performance than brand-created assets.

As brands navigate the growing complexity of platforms, content formats, and partnership models, the need for specialist expertise has never been greater.



ABOUT LINQIA

Linqia is the calm in the chaotic sea of influencer marketing. As a full-service, tech-enabled platform, Linqia handles campaigns for the world's leading brands from influencer selection to creative strategy to scale. While some influencer companies offer only technology and others operate as creative agencies, Linqia leverages both science and storytelling to help brands create emotive, human-first campaigns.

METHODOLOGY

Linqia's State of Influencer Marketing survey was fielded online in July 2025. More than 200 enterprise marketers completed the survey. Respondents were sent an email invitation to participate in the survey and were screened to ensure they were influencer decision makers for brands. The survey research was fielded and hosted by Centiment and covered marketers' budget allocation, sentiment and use of AI, advertising channel mix, and top challenges and opportunities within influencer marketing.

OTHER INFLUENCER MARKETING EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES:

The Top Women Shaping Influencer Marketing | Creator Economy Live Podcast | Culture Creators: An Interview Series | The Influencer Marketing Roundup

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