



Influencer Marketing & Social Commerce Trends to Watch in 2021



When the pandemic hit, [influencing as we know it](#) was declared over. Still, influencer marketing became the [fastest growing sector of digital media](#) in 2020. According to Business Insider Intelligence, we can expect influencer marketing to be worth more than \$22 billion by 2024 — up from \$8 billion in 2019.

Some but not all of this growth can be credited to the COVID pandemic, which accelerated online adoption. As a result, the same unfortunate event that was expected to end influencer marketing became fuel for growth.

D2C brands are also helping to drive the trend. These brands were already digitally enabled, and well positioned to take advantage of the accelerated online adoption. D2C brands are very bottom funnel focused and understand digital marketing, and market priorities are starting to shift, and reflect what these challenger brands value.

At the same time incumbent brands have been moving online and want to grow an online presence. But these brands want influencers to do more than just raise awareness. Incumbent brands want help driving sales and ROI.

All of these factors combined with the explosive adoption of social commerce and consumers looking for brands they can trust has made influencers a linchpin in the digital marketing ecosystem.

To get a sense of how businesses are preparing for the boom in influencer marketing, Open Influence partnered with Social Media Week to survey marketers around the world. We compiled the responses with analysis in the [2021 State of Small Business Influencer Marketing Report](#).

Here are a few key trends for businesses to watch — *and capitalize on in 2021*.



Social Commerce Is on the Rise

While social commerce has been growing in Europe and the US for a while, China has a significant head start in the market. However, with the pandemic-accelerated adoption of ecommerce, popular social platforms are launching better tools for converting influence into sales.

These new tools turn what was once a convoluted path to conversion, into a channel for direct sales. Influencers provide brands and businesses with the trust and relevancy necessary for connecting with online audiences. As a result, influencers are becoming the vehicle for driving conversion in the age of social commerce.

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Supercharge Influencer Campaigns With Paid Social


One way influencers are helping to drive conversion is by working with brands to create paid ads on social. Influencers are already a trusted source of validation brands need to connect to social consumers, but there are still limitations to any organic campaign.

Boosting a piece of influencer content is essentially removing that limitation by leveraging the influencer's likeness and trust, and combining it with the hyper-targeting capabilities of paid advertising.

Since paid ads are also more bottom funnel focused than your typical organic campaign, brands should also encourage influencers to be creative and focus on a clear call to action. For brands that find the right balance of trust and relevance, turning influencer campaigns can drive huge growth in the age of social commerce.

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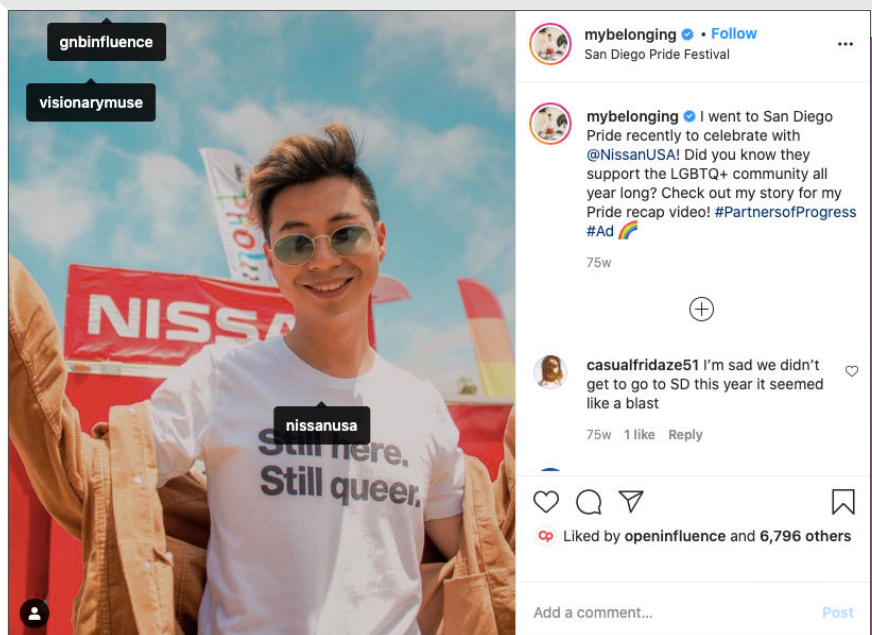
It's Time to Take a Stand

There was a time when brands could avoid the appearance of being political. However, today's consumers expect brands to have values and stand behind them.

We saw this come to a head this summer with the social unrest over racial inequality and other social justice issues. Social justice isn't "political," it's a matter of human rights and consumers are holding brands accountable.

The challenge for brands is to recognize and resist their own implicit biases. The good news is that many brands are excited about making inclusivity core to their business models and marketing strategies.

In the new year and going forward, brands and marketers are planning to focus more on cause-based marketing, and looking to work with a more diverse group of creators. This is all part of a larger trend to infuse more emotional intelligence and humanity into their messaging in order to resonate with today's audiences.



Don't Sleep on TikTok



According to our survey, there's some resistance among marketers when it comes to TikTok adoption, despite its growing popularity. However, the general cultural ethos for marketers is to avoid missing the boat. So while it may look like TikTok adoption is slow, early adopters are usually rewarded for taking a chance on emerging platforms.

In fact, the market has been waiting for a new platform and this is the perfect opportunity to be one of the first to establish an audience, learn the new landscape, and be part of shaping a new community.

Right now marketing on TikTok is still in the experimental stages and not really driving business results. But make no mistake, as the platform matures, we can expect brands to invest more heavily into using it to connect with young consumers.

TikTok is already positioning itself to deliver better value for brands, and the early adopters will be best positioned to make the most of the growing platform.



Invest in Snackable Video Content

Social and digital platforms used to be defined based on their core features. Now they're really in a fight for users' attention. Now, more than features, platforms are starting to monetize various content formats.

When it comes to short-form video, [TikTok](#) tapped into the zeitgeist and found a content format that works. Of course, the explosive growth of the more nascent platform made it competition for Instagram, which has already created its own copycat format.

It won't be long before other platforms also adopt the short, snackable video content format, and smart brands will invest in learning how to leverage the new format in their media mix.



View Influencer Marketing as Part of a Healthy Marketing Mix

Finding the right influencers and measuring ROI are consistently identified as pain points for brands working with influencer marketing. By comparison, no one questions the ROI of more traditional forms of advertising such as television or even banner ads.

Social commerce is making it easier to draw a straight line between sales and influencer campaigns. Still, it's important for brands to remember the value in building awareness and having your product introduced to 500,000 new people.

We are entering a new era of digital and social commerce and influential creators are the keys to validation and consumer trust. Even as measuring ROI becomes easier, brands and marketers must shift their focus to finding the right influencer for reaching their target audience — and view influencer marketing as a part of a holistic marketing mix.