



# **FUTURE OF INFLUENCE**

20

23

**The trends shaping  
the future of influencer  
marketing.**

**we  
are  
social**

# FOREWORD



**Mobbie Nazir**

Global Chief  
Strategy Officer  
We Are Social

In today's interconnected world, social media platforms are the new town squares where creators hold court. And even in the relatively short amount of time that influencers have been around, the dynamics of influence have undergone a profound transformation. The power of influence has shifted from traditional gatekeepers to everyday individuals, who have mastered the art of audience captivation.

Examined through the lenses of digital culture, the nature of influence – the people who influence, the platforms they use, and the ways in which they participate – is evolving into something very different from what we have experienced in the past.

Three key themes encapsulate this evolution, and define what it means for brands:

## 1 **Collective Influence**

Creators and influencers have been working on their content in isolation. In the increasingly saturated field in which they operate, this is leading to burnout. As a result of this, influencers are banding together in collectives to share the burden of the creative process. Be it hype houses, metalabels, or media collectives, influencers create economic, emotional, and creative alignment between collaborators. Rather than everyone competing for the same pie, thanks to these collectives, they are now engaging in co-opetition.

## 2 **Human only > Humans Extended**

Advances in technology inevitably lead to questions about how it will negatively affect humans and their influence on the world – the typical Black Mirror reference. In this particular case, it is whether AI, which now gives anyone with a device and Internet connection the power to create anything from their imagination, will drown out creators. We are already seeing influencers harnessing new technology, creating alternative revenue streams and extending their influence beyond the typical means of human life into different elements of the Web 3.0 world.

# FOREWORD

## 3

### **New Patronage**

Creators have major cultural clout with large dedicated communities who have helped shape their careers and make them who they are. However, creators know they've built their kingdoms on rented land and are at the mercy of the algorithms. Even the biggest of creators are small fish compared to the platforms. In a saturated IM market – one dogged by demonetisation – there's a recognition to rethink revenue streams and find a healthier way to turn a profit on their terms. Having built a fandom from scratch as well as learning a variety of desirable skills along the way and having an entrepreneurial spirit, they're moving away from endorsement and taking creative control by launching their own creator brands.

In the following pages, influencer experts from across our global network explore these three themes in greater detail.



### **Mobbie Nazir**

Global Chief  
Strategy Officer  
We Are Social

# FUTURE OF INFLUENCE

20

23

## 1 Collective Influence

From **Personalities** and Hype Houses to **Metalabels** and **moderators**

we  
are  
social



# Collective Influence



**Paul  
Greenwood**

Head of Research &  
Insight  
We Are Social

When YouTube launched in 2005, few could have predicted the scale and success of what we now call the Creator Economy. Its impact, with vast amounts of money flowing through it and “influencer” being seen as a legitimate and sought-after career choice for younger generations, has had a profound effect on the wider marketing landscape.

It’s made stars out of unknowns. People whose personalities, charisma and skills have been key to their enduring success. New behaviours, codes and language have developed around creators and the platforms on which they activate. And it’s given brands access to new audiences – turning on the tap to engaged and eager consumers.

Despite this success, the creator economy and its trappings have a dark side. Being at the mercy of platforms and the algorithms that underpin them, there’s a constant need for creators to be present across multiple platforms and to be “always on”. The parasocial relationships many followers develop with creators see the blurring of boundaries, with many fans overstepping.

***“Influencers are banding together in collectives to share the burden of the creative process.”***

It’s unsurprising that creator burnout is prevalent. Burnout can range from 61% to 90% depending on which survey you reference. Further, 71% of creators have considered quitting due to stress coming from platform changes, unstable income, and the pressure to produce. The pressure that creators feel can lead to content fatigue, an inability to switch off, and loneliness. The relationships creators and influencers have are increasingly transactional – whether that is with platforms, with brands or with their communities.

The late-stage-capitalism-feel of influencer marketing has taken the shine off what was seen as a fun, genuine and fresh way to interact online and build community.

It's clear fresh thinking was needed – one informed and influenced by web 3.0 / Gen Z characteristics of share-ownership, collaboration, and more purposeful and intentional in its outcomes.

### A new mode of collective participation

Instead of going alone, influencers are banding together in collectives to share the burden of the creative process, and strengthen their impact in a crowded space. Fresh thinking comes in the form of metalabels, media collectives or multi-contributor substacks that create “economic, emotional, and creative” alignment between collaborators. Rather than competing for the same pie, creators are engaging in co-operation, “pooling their skills, audiences, and resources in support of a larger creative vision or purpose.” Or what Yancey Strickler, co-founder of Kickstarter and Metalabel described as “creativity in multiplayer mode”.

And it's producing some innovative and impactful activations:

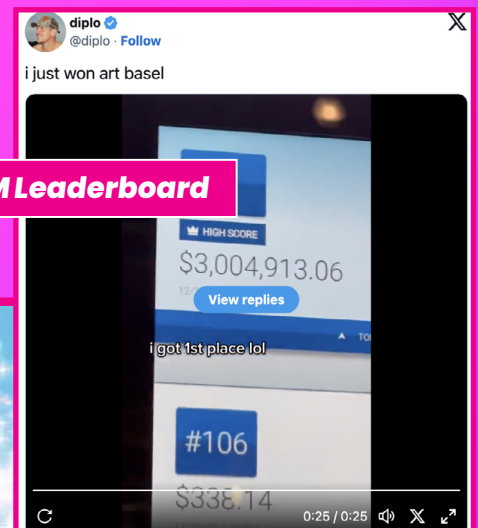
# 1

## Counterculture collectivism

MSCHF, an American art collective from Brooklyn, has been one of the most prolific collectives. From its internet-breaking Big Red Boots inspired by Astro Boy to its Tax Heaven 3000 dating site that generates tax returns to its Miami Basel ATM installation that ranks attendees by their disposable income, each “drop” critiques the current socio-economic situation and mainstream culture through absurdism and audience complicity. Its goal is to shape culture through a nod and wink.



Big Red Boots



ATM Leaderboard



## 2 Expert collaboration

The rise of collaborative substacks and the return of the multi-contributor newsletter are shaping the future Creator landscape. The likes of [Flow State](#), [The Dispatch](#) and [The Weekly Dish](#) substacks are produced by teams of experts and covers anything from the creation of musical playlists that help with deep thinking to US politics and current affairs.

This is a return to the first era of influence – long-form, text-based content grounded in expertise. Here people are trusted because they have the skillsets to explain complex narratives to those with time-stretched attention spans, and so become arbiters of influence.




**The Dispatch**

Sep 20, 2023

### House Republicans Saddle Up for More Chaos

Even their own colleagues aren't sure of what the GOP holdouts want from the spending impasse.

Michael Warren



**Flow State**

Flow State is a weekly newsletter that delivers great reads to your inbox. It's free, and we're not affiliated with any company or organization. We're just a group of people who love to read and share what we read. We're not affiliated with any company or organization. We're just a group of people who love to read and share what we read.

# 3

## Co-creating for the future

Other forms of collective creator action are taking form through DAOs (decentralised autonomous organisations). These have been likened to tech-powered cooperative movements, looking to create value and share it with the community based on effort. One such DAO is [RADAR](#), a group of 300+ researchers, early adopters and innovators, aiming to build “a foundational set of collective intelligence and imagination platforms for a better future”. In a similar vein, [Startupy](#) is an AI-powered search engine consisting of 100s of intellectuals “curating and interconnecting” the best parts of the Internet. It’s clear both collectives are looking to shape and inform the future of the web through action. The opportunities for this new type of influencer collaboration are exciting.

## 1 Culture creating and shaping

A generation of digital natives is becoming increasingly aware of the meta frameworks governing platforms and online culture. Collective Influence leans into this to subvert norms and shape culture. For forward-thinking brands who want to be at the bleeding edge of culture, this presents many new partners to work and collaborate with.

Brands more than ever will have to understand the codes, aesthetics and meta language of cultural spheres to play a role.

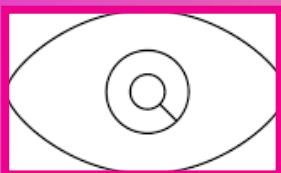
## 2 Purposeful and intentional

Collective influence often has a deeper purpose eschewing the transactional nature of influencer marketing of the past. Brands that are seen as co-opting a collective and paying lip service to passion or purpose will be given short shrift.

Values-based marketing will play a greater role in influencer Marketing and the Creator Economy of the future. Values that drive action.

## 3 Scaleable and impactful

The fragmentation of the influencer landscape means brands will have to do things slightly differently. If creators are naturally coalescing that helps create natural scale and impact, but an important question is how do brands maintain attribution when it could be diluted amongst many creators?



startupy.world



# FUTURE OF INFLUENCE

20 ——— 23

## Humans only 2 > Humans Extended

Extending **influence**  
beyond **human limits**

we  
are  
social

# Humans only

## > Humans Extended



### Agalia Tan

Planner  
We Are Social

Once the prerogative of internet celebrities, influence has now been democratised.

As big social moves towards embracing the personalised feed, platform algorithms have overruled the conventional playbook for achieving influence: build up an authentic personal brand, and speak your truth to amass a huge following.

The rules have already been changing ever since the pandemic fuelled our TikTok era, where anyone with a working internet connection and a device has the ability to achieve (albeit fleeting) influence, be it in the form of a hypnotising head-bobbing to 'M to the B', catchy dance moves, or wordless reaction videos.

Fast forward to today, we are residing in the era of the imagination economy.

Powered by generative AI, everyday people now wield the ability to modify or generate any type of media they can imagine, and enact prompt influence.

***“Everyday people now wield the ability to modify or generate any type of media they can imagine”***

Just like how Pablo Xavier, a 31-year-old construction worker from the Chicago area, broke the internet with his AI-generated image of [Balenciaga Pope](#). Or the anonymous Twitter user, who created an image of [the Pentagon explosion](#), and caused a [ten-minute-long dip](#) in the stock market.

And as synthetic media continues to proliferate, the lines between fact and fiction are blurring. Especially where regulations have not yet caught up with the speed of this AI hype train, everyday people are bringing remix culture to the next level.



Artists like STR4NGETHING, Benjamin Benichou, and Curious Refuge have demonstrated the brilliance of using AI to fuse together seemingly disparate concepts, aesthetics, or brands. Think hyperrealistic Renaissance-inspired footwear, Nike concept stores on Mars and Wes Anderson-style Star Wars. Beyond design, these remixes are also occurring within the music industry. Following the virality of the AI-generated track 'Heart on My Sleeve' by Drake and The Weeknd, TikTok is now rife with fan creations such as Harry Styles dueting 'Ceilings' with Lizzy McAlpine, and Blackpink's Rose singing 'I Kissed a Girl'.

At the speed that we are going, experts estimate that as much as 90% of online content may be synthetically generated by 2026.

Indubitably, this inundation of synthetic media will cause online audiences' attention to continue fracturing. For internet celebrities, this new social reality necessitates a pivot in their approach to navigating the landscape of influence.

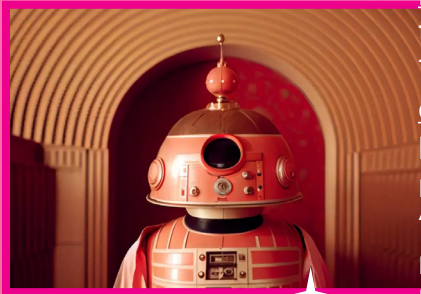
Already, we see several innovative individuals leading the charge towards new manifestations of influence by harnessing new technologies to amplify influence in two key ways.

## Extension beyond human capabilities

Some are leveraging AI to extend themselves beyond their human capabilities.

Korean music giant Hybe has utilised AI voice technology to launch MIDNATT, which serves as an alter ego of their existing artist, Lee Hyun. Whilst retaining Lee Hyun's original vocal texture and musical expression, MIDNATT can sing fluently in 6 different languages, thereby broadening his appeal to global audiences.

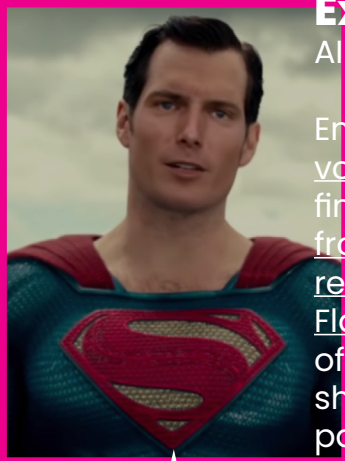
Whereas, other influencers like Caryn Marjorie have harnessed AI to create always-on touchpoints for fans. Dubbed CarynAI, her AI clone was trained on over 2,000 hours of her own YouTube content to infuse her personality into an immersive AI experience that offers followers a "one-of-a-kind interaction that feels like you are talking directly to Caryn herself".



Caryn.ai



Canadian musician Grimes has taken that fan-artist interaction even further. Coining it 'communal voice ownership', Grimes has paved the way to new models of fan-artist collaboration and co-creation, where she is allowing fans to utilise her voice without penalty, and share in the upside.



## Extension beyond life

AI has also become a means to resurrect or prolong influence.

Enlisting the help of AI technology to extract the late John Lennon's voice from an old demo tape, The Beatles will be releasing their final Beatles record later this year, drawing mixed reactions from fans. More recently, there was the controversial case of resurrecting the late Christopher Reeve and George Reeves in 'The Flash', which further raised questions around the commodification of individuals' image and likeness, the amount of control actors should have over their IP, and where we draw the line between paying homage and insensitive manipulation.



## Navigating the new landscape of influence

These questions are also reflective of the implications for brands.

With synthetic media being a permanent fixture in the imagination economy, brands need to form a perspective on how they plan to co-exist with AI.

Already, we see two different approaches, with brands like Heinz embracing AI as a multiplier of creativity, and others like Nikon choosing to champion real-life, human-made content.

Against the backdrop of an elevated remix culture where consumers still have free rein to manipulate brands' likeness in their creations, brands must also consider how far they are willing to cede control over their IPs, and its implications. Will enforcing stricter controls over copyright help protect brand equity, or further alienate consumers? Or, will adopting a shared ownership model become the new holy grail?

Ultimately, experimentation is key. Brands who will emerge victorious will be the ones who are fearlessly tinkering and iterating alongside generative AI, and eventually will be the ones to rewrite the contemporary playbook for navigating influence in this new social reality.



# FUTURE OF INFLUENCE

20 ——— 23

## New 3 Patronage

Entering a new era of entrepreneurship – from **Creator** endorsement to **Creative** control

we  
are  
social

# New Patronage



## Gigi Ouf

VP Influencer Marketing  
We Are Social /  
The Narrative Group

Influencer marketing has evolved over the last 10-15 years, moving from the early days of long-form blogs, through the rise of visual formats to the rise of fully-fledged social media celebrities. In this time, creators have always had major cultural clout. Their large dedicated communities are totally invested, having helped shape their careers and make them who they are.

However, creators know they've built their kingdoms on rented land and are at the mercy of the algorithms. Social platforms are being seen as less of an enabler and more of a crafty middleman, with some brands looking to creators primarily for distribution purposes.

Even the biggest of creators are small fish compared to the platforms. In a saturated IM market – one dogged by demonetisation – there's a recognition to rethink revenue streams and find a healthier way to turn a profit on their terms.

***“Creators are redefining the terms of patronage for themselves to get their rightful piece of the pie.”***

Today, creators are redefining the terms of patronage for themselves to get their rightful piece of the pie. There's been an evolution from watching their content to really buying into their brand – whether that's pledging to support their social cause, or buying their merchandise and products. Having built a fandom from scratch as well as learning a variety of desirable skills along the way and having an entrepreneurial spirit, they're taking creative control and launching their own creator brands.

Whether it's Logan Paul and KSI's Prime energy drink defining influencer popularity in 2023, or Kat and Latisha Clark – TikTok's top creators of 2022 – launching a successful podcast Basically Besties, taking it on a live tour complete with sold-out merch, or the rise creator-owned management companies and consultancies springing up. This year alone we have seen the formation of the D'Amelio talent management company and Alex Cooper of "Call Her Daddy" launching Trending, a Gen Z media venture that is "committed to elevating today's voices and crafting tomorrow's stories for an independent, resourceful and inclusive generation". Interestingly, two months after announcing Trending, Cooper launched The Unwell Network, inking development deals with influencers Alix Earle and Madeline Argy.

### Why this is a game-changer for brands

The implications for brands are far-reaching and how brands will engage with influencers and creators will need to be reconsidered, approaches refined and processes adapted.

#### 1 Brands will be competing with multiple niche creator-led brands or co-branded products.

Creators who would once have been hired as a mouthpiece for a market-leading brand are now setting up their own competitor companies, and taking their trusting, loyal audience of followers with them. They will also be more agile when it comes to growing and diversifying their product line so bigger brands will have to learn to think and act more nimbly too. Creator-led brands will be the ultimate challenger brand (and there will be lots of them!).

#### 2 Creators will become more expensive to work with and more selective.

As creators diversify their revenue streams, some of the largest will become less reliant on brands for patronage, meaning their communities will be more valuable and harder to access. Traditionally creators and influencers were an easy way for brands to access hard-to-reach audiences but with influencers now earning money fronting their own brands, they will be in a position to significantly hike their fees – particularly those creators with the biggest following and strongest relationships with their audiences as well as only working with brands that do not compete or complement their broader brand values.



Prime





This means brands will need to work harder to work out how they can reach audiences authentically themselves, or consider working with smaller, more up-and-coming influencers.

### 3 Influencers have created a shortcut route to innovation and product development

As mentioned earlier, influencers have access to a strong and very specific audience which they can – and increasingly do – use to test product ideas. They ultimately understand their audiences' preferences, pain points, and desires, allowing them to create offerings that resonate deeply. In turn, they can receive direct feedback (on tap) and tweak or develop products in response. This is a level of insight that brands rarely have on such a scale, and can disrupt traditional industries by introducing unique solutions and experiences.

Such is the growth in creator-led products that we're seeing a lot of smaller agencies – such as Warren James – being set up to help creators take products to market, helping with everything from product development and fulfilment to design and branding.

### 4 Loss of authenticity means loss of a competitive edge

Authenticity has always been hugely important in marketing, but with influencer-created brands, it takes on even greater significance. Without creators working with them, traditional brands may need to work harder to demonstrate their authenticity and connect with consumers on a personal level.

Influencers have offered brands a shortcut to authenticity, but they will now need to build up their own credibility. This might involve going back to using celebrity ambassadors or being more reliant on product reviews and community building.

### 5 Personalisation is more difficult for brands

Followers of influencers often perceived a certain closeness to them (parasocial relationships), with many feeling as if a purchase was akin to a one-to-one experience. Brands will now need to work harder to maintain that personal touch, going above and beyond traditional mass-market advertising campaigns to drive a personalised experience. But without the creator speaking for them that will be significantly harder to achieve.



Charli & Dixie D'Amelio





## **Opportunity For Brands: Embracing co-creation**

And while there will be a shift in how brands will engage in influencer marketing, now more than ever, brands have the opportunity to engage in co-creation with influencers.

This shift – if embraced in good faith – should see creativity flourish in influencer marketing as we move to more socially-first campaigns developed by digital and social natives who implicitly understand how to create content that cuts through the crap. With skin in the game, influencers and creators will want to flex and showcase their creative chops.

Brands can collaborate with influencers to design and develop products that genuinely address their audience's needs. Co-creation not only fosters a sense of ownership and pride for both the influencer and their followers but also results in unique offers that stand out in the market. By launching joint ventures and embracing these diverse approaches, brands can tap into the full spectrum of creative control models and reach a wider range of audiences.

***“The rise of influencer-created brands is reshaping the marketing landscape.”***

Forward-thinking brands have already noticed the shift and have started thinking about how they can facilitate and create communities themselves – either around a specific product, brand or cultural space. Community-building has become a buzzword within marketing in 2023. Creating a self-sustaining community is easier said than done. It will require a different type of skill set, a more nuanced understanding of what a community is and what it does (and can do) and will require brands to play the long game. Should brands get this right the gamble will pay off.

What we know now is the rise of influencer-created brands is reshaping the marketing landscape and challenging traditional brands to adapt their strategies to meet evolving consumer preferences. The key lies in understanding the unique dynamics of influencer-created brands and finding ways to collaborate, innovate, and remain relevant in this rapidly changing environment ■



## **About Us**

We are a global socially-led creative agency making ideas worth talking about for the world's biggest brands.

If you'd like to hear how we can help your brand harness the power of influencer marketing, get in touch

**[talktous@wearesocial.net](mailto:talktous@wearesocial.net)**