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## **A Systematic Review of the Effects of Influencer Marketing on B2B and B2C Sales Outcomes**

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### **Abstract**

Influencer marketing has emerged as a central component of digital communication strategies, yet its impact on sales outcomes varies significantly between Business-to-Consumer (B2C) and Business-to-Business (B2B) sectors. This systematic review synthesizes existing empirical and conceptual literature to examine how influencers shape purchasing decisions, trust formation, and sales performance across these two distinct market environments. Findings indicate that in B2C contexts, influencer marketing drives immediate and measurable effects through emotional engagement, persuasive storytelling, and strong parasocial relationships, resulting in rapid changes in consumer purchase intention and brand preference. In contrast, B2B outcomes are shaped by expertise-based influence, thought leadership, and long-term trust, where influencers function as credible advisors guiding complex, multi-stakeholder decision-making processes. While B2C campaigns rely on creative content and mass reach, B2B strategies prioritize credibility, technical knowledge, and sustained professional communication. Despite growing adoption, research on B2B influencer sales impact remains limited, highlighting a critical gap in measurement and strategic understanding. This review provides a comparative perspective that clarifies sector-specific mechanisms of influence and emphasizes the need for future studies exploring sales attribution, cross-platform effectiveness, and long-term financial outcomes.

**Keywords:** Influencer marketing, B2B marketing, B2C marketing, sales outcomes, digital strategy

### **Introduction**

Influencer marketing has become one of the fastest-growing strategies in the digital era, transforming how brands communicate with audiences across global markets. The concept began gaining traction in the early 2010s as social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and later TikTok enabled individuals to build large, engaged communities. These content creators quickly emerged as powerful opinion leaders, capable of shaping consumer preferences more effectively than traditional advertising channels. By 2016, the global influencer marketing



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industry was valued at approximately US\$1.7 billion, reflecting early commercial interest. The growth continued rapidly, reaching around US\$4.6 billion by 2018, and further increasing to US\$6.5 billion in 2019, showing how brands were beginning to shift budgets toward social-driven engagement models.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift, as digital consumption surged and consumers spent significantly more time on social platforms. By 2020, influencer marketing spending had grown to nearly US\$9.7 billion, with projections rising to US\$13.8 billion in 2021. This period saw a major expansion in the number of micro-influencers and niche creators, who offered brands more targeted and authentic communication channels. The rising trust consumers placed in creators made influencer collaborations central to product launches, brand storytelling, and e-commerce conversions. By 2023, the global influencer marketing industry was estimated at around US\$21 billion, driven by increased adoption across industries such as fashion, beauty, technology, travel, and even financial services.

The success of influencer marketing can be attributed to its ability to bridge the gap between brands and audiences through personalized, relatable, and community-driven content. Consumers often perceive influencers as peers, making their recommendations more credible than traditional advertisements. As the creator economy matured, brands increasingly leveraged influencers not only for awareness but also for sales, performance marketing, and long-term brand partnerships.

## **Purpose and Significance of the Review**

The primary purpose of this systematic review is to critically examine and consolidate existing research on the effects of influencer marketing on sales outcomes across Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Consumer (B2C) sectors. While influencer marketing has been widely studied in consumer markets, its expanding role in B2B environments has only recently attracted scholarly attention. This review aims to bridge that knowledge gap by synthesizing findings from diverse empirical studies, theoretical discussions, and industry analyses to understand how influencer strategies influence sales performance in both sectors. By comparing the mechanisms through which influencers affect purchasing decisions, relationship building, and brand trust in B2B versus B2C markets, the review seeks to provide a comprehensive perspective on the effectiveness of influencer-driven campaigns. Additionally, the review intends to highlight the methodological approaches used in prior studies, identify emerging trends, and uncover limitations in existing literature to support the development of more robust future research.

The significance of this review lies in its ability to inform both academic researchers and industry practitioners about the strategic value of influencer marketing in different market contexts. For marketers, understanding how influencer activities translate into sales outcomes offers crucial insights for designing effective promotional strategies, selecting appropriate influencer types, and optimizing campaign investments. For researchers, the review offers a



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structured synthesis of available evidence, revealing gaps related to measurement techniques, sector-specific challenges, and the evolving nature of digital influence. As influencer marketing becomes increasingly data-driven and integrated with analytics, its sales impact must be understood through a nuanced lens that considers sectoral differences, customer behavior patterns, and trust dynamics. By providing a clear comparative evaluation, the review contributes to a deeper theoretical and practical understanding of influencer marketing's role in driving measurable business growth across B2B and B2C domains.

## Definitions and Key Concepts

Influencer marketing refers to a strategic promotional approach in which brands collaborate with individuals who possess the ability to shape audience perceptions, preferences, and purchase decisions. These individuals—known as influencers—hold authority, expertise, popularity, or relatability within specific digital communities, making their endorsements more impactful than traditional advertising. Key concepts within influencer marketing include *social proof*, which suggests that people tend to mimic the behaviors of trusted figures, and *source credibility*, which emphasizes the importance of an influencer's trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness in shaping consumer attitudes. Another essential concept is engagement, which extends beyond follower count to include interactions such as likes, comments, shares, and click-throughs that signal genuine audience involvement. The marketing value of an influencer is often measured through metrics like reach, impressions, conversion rates, and return on investment. In addition, brand–influencer fit is a critical concept, referring to the alignment between an influencer's image and the brand's identity. When this fit is strong, audience trust increases, leading to improved campaign outcomes. Content authenticity is also central, as followers respond more favorably to endorsements that feel natural rather than overly promotional. Another component is *community influence*, which highlights how some influencers shape niche groups or professional networks, especially in B2B contexts. Overall, influencer marketing encompasses a dynamic system involving creators, platforms, content strategies, and audience behaviors, making it a multidimensional field that blends psychology, communication theory, digital engagement, and brand strategy.

## Evolution of Influencer Marketing

The evolution of influencer marketing is rooted in the broader shift from traditional media to digital and social media ecosystems. Initially, brands relied primarily on celebrities—athletes, film stars, and public personalities—to endorse products through television and print. As social media gained popularity in the mid-2000s, everyday users began building online communities, creating a new category of digital influencers who connected with audiences in more personal and interactive ways. Early platforms like YouTube and blogs allowed content creators to share expertise, entertainment, or lifestyle content, gradually earning follower trust.



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By the early 2010s, Instagram transformed influencer marketing by enabling visually driven storytelling and real-time engagement. Brands began recognizing the commercial potential of creators who maintained loyal and active followers. The introduction of features like hashtags, sponsored posts, and analytics tools accelerated the adoption of influencer partnerships. The late 2010s witnessed an explosion of micro-influencers, whose smaller but more engaged audiences provided cost-effective marketing opportunities. Simultaneously, new platforms such as TikTok reshaped content creation, emphasizing short-form, viral, and algorithm-driven visibility. During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital consumption surged, pushing influencers to the center of brand communication strategies. At the same time, data-driven influencer platforms emerged, enabling precise targeting, campaign measurement, and sales attribution. The evolution continued into the early 2020s with the rise of professional influencers in the B2B sector—industry analysts, thought leaders, and subject-matter experts—signaling the expansion of influencer marketing beyond consumer markets. Today, influencer marketing has evolved into a sophisticated, multi-platform ecosystem that integrates performance metrics, AI-driven recommendations, and long-term brand collaborations.

## **Types of Influencers (Micro, Macro, Celebrity, Industry Experts)**

Influencers differ widely based on their follower size, influence dynamics, content style, and relevance to brand objectives. Micro-influencers typically have smaller audiences—usually ranging from 10,000 to 100,000 followers—but exhibit high engagement rates and strong community trust. Their content often feels authentic and relatable, making them valuable for niche targeting and localized campaigns. Because micro-influencers maintain closer relationships with followers, their recommendations tend to be perceived as genuine, resulting in high conversion potential for both emerging and established brands.

Macro-influencers, with audiences ranging from 100,000 to over 1 million followers, offer larger reach and broader visibility. They often have professional content styles and established reputations within specific fields such as fashion, fitness, technology, or travel. While their engagement rates may be lower than those of micro-influencers, their ability to shape trends and influence sizable groups makes them suitable for brand awareness campaigns and large-scale promotional initiatives. Celebrity influencers, including film stars, athletes, and media personalities, operate at the top tier of influence with millions of followers across platforms. Their endorsements carry massive visibility, but their reach may not translate into high engagement if the audience perceives partnerships as commercial rather than authentic. Celebrities are often used for global campaigns, product launches, and brand-building exercises. Industry experts—commonly seen in B2B markets—include analysts, consultants, keynote speakers, and leaders with specialized knowledge. Their influence is rooted in expertise rather than popularity, making them particularly effective for thought leadership content, product



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demonstrations, webinars, and long-term relationship building. Their recommendations often influence high-value purchasing decisions within professional networks.

## **Distinctions Between B2B and B2C Marketing Environments**

B2B and B2C marketing environments differ significantly in terms of audience behavior, purchasing motives, decision-making processes, and the role of influencers. In B2C markets, purchasing decisions are often driven by personal preferences, emotions, lifestyle aspirations, and spontaneous buying behavior. Influencers in this space rely heavily on relatability, aesthetic appeal, and social engagement to shape consumer attitudes. Their content typically focuses on product reviews, lifestyle integration, and aspirational messaging that appeal to mass audiences. Sales cycles in B2C are generally short, with quick decision-making influenced by trends, recommendations, and social proof. In contrast, B2B marketing operates within complex decision-making structures involving multiple stakeholders such as managers, procurement teams, and executives. Purchases are often high-value, long-term, and strategic in nature. Here, influencers must offer authority, credibility, and technical expertise. B2B influencers engage audiences through whitepapers, industry reports, webinars, conference presentations, and expert commentary, shaping decisions based on rational evaluation rather than emotional appeal.

## **Literature Review**

Influencer marketing has evolved into a central topic within digital marketing research, with early studies focusing on the foundational qualities that define influencer credibility and audience perception. Freberg et al. (2011) provided one of the earliest conceptualizations of social media influencers, highlighting how personality traits, perceived authenticity, and communication style contributed to public perceptions of influence. This work established the basis for understanding influencers as opinion leaders within digital networks rather than traditional celebrities. De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) expanded this foundation by examining how the number of followers and content diversity shape audience attitudes toward brands. They demonstrated that follower count is both a signal of popularity and a heuristic for credibility, though excessively large followings may sometimes reduce relatability. Subsequent studies, such as Jin, Muqaddam, and Ryu (2019), reinforced the idea that influencers differ significantly from traditional celebrities due to their accessibility, authenticity, and parasocial interactions with followers. Collectively, these early studies form the groundwork for understanding influencer marketing as a psychologically driven communication framework where trust, social proof, and perceived closeness shape consumer behavior.

As research progressed, scholarly attention shifted toward identifying mechanisms that link influencer characteristics to consumer trust and purchase intention. Lou and Yuan (2019) argued that message value and influencer credibility are key drivers of trust in branded content, noting that visually engaging and informative messages increase consumer receptiveness. Building on



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this, Lou and Kim (2020) explored generational differences, finding that both Gen Z and Millennials respond positively to influencers who display transparency, creativity, and brand alignment. Their findings suggest that influencer effectiveness is contingent not just on follower numbers but on the perceived integrity of endorsements. Similarly, Casaló, Flavián, and Ibáñez-Sánchez (2020) emphasized the importance of opinion leadership, showing that influencers who demonstrate expertise and consistent content quality are more likely to shape attitudes and behaviors. These studies collectively highlight the multidimensional nature of influence, where personality, content relevance, credibility, and perceived authenticity interact to determine audience engagement. Additional research by Wang and Yang (2022) further clarified that trust emerges from three mediating components—credibility, authenticity, and clear sponsorship disclosure—suggesting that transparency enhances campaign effectiveness rather than diminishing it.

Another prominent thread in the literature explores consumer engagement and the psychological processes underlying follower–influencer relationships. Tafesse and Wood (2021) analyzed how brand-centric activities and influencer personality traits affect engagement on Instagram, demonstrating that influencers who integrate brand messaging naturally into their content generate higher levels of interaction. This aligns with the work of Balaban and Fitzpatrick (2022), who emphasized parasocial relationships as significant predictors of purchase intention. Their research showed that sustained emotional connections between followers and influencers deepen trust and increase the likelihood of consumers acting on recommendations. Complementing this perspective, Ki and Kim (2019) examined mimicry, explaining that consumers often subconsciously imitate influencer behavior, especially when they perceive the influencer as aspirational yet attainable. Studies focused on endorsement types, such as Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget (2020), highlighted differences between celebrity and influencer endorsements, suggesting that influencers often outperform celebrities due to their higher perceived authenticity and closer relationships with followers. In parallel, Kühn and Sahr (2022) demonstrated the growing relevance of micro-influencers, particularly within niche communities where authenticity and personal connections outweigh mass reach. Together, these studies reveal that psychological closeness, emotional connection, and identity alignment play crucial roles in shaping the persuasive power of influencer marketing.

Influencer marketing's effectiveness has also been analyzed across specific sectors and campaign styles. Zhang, Zhang, and Liu (2021) investigated the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer purchase intention, finding strong evidence that influencer-related cues—such as trustworthiness, expertise, and content quality—directly enhance intention to buy. Sedgwick and Spassova (2020) examined the role of sponsorship disclosure, showing that transparency (e.g., using #ad) affects user engagement variably depending on the influencer's perceived authenticity



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and audience trust. Marques and Ferreira (2022) explored the hotel and hospitality industry, illustrating how influencer collaborations can enhance brand experience, improve consumer perceptions, and stimulate booking decisions. Their findings support the idea that influencer marketing is highly effective in visually driven industries that rely on lifestyle representation. These sector-specific studies demonstrate the versatility of influencer marketing across domains while also showing that its success depends on the congruence between the influencer's persona and the product category. They collectively reinforce that influencer marketing is not a one-size-fits-all strategy but a nuanced approach sensitive to context, audience expectations, and industry dynamics.

A growing body of literature has recently shifted attention toward influencer marketing within the B2B landscape, recognizing that influence operates differently in professional markets compared to consumer markets. Cooley, Munch, and Hoxmeier (2023) discussed the unique characteristics of B2B influencer marketing, noting that expertise, professional credibility, and industry authority are more critical than popularity. Their findings challenge the assumption that influencers must rely on entertainment or lifestyle appeal, instead highlighting the role of thought leaders, analysts, and industry experts in shaping organizational decision-making. Mero, McLachlan, and Minnigan (2023) expanded on this by proposing managerial strategies for effective B2B influencer campaigns, emphasizing relationship-building, knowledge sharing, and long-term collaboration. They argue that B2B influence is rooted in trust, expertise, and mutual value creation rather than emotional persuasion. This distinction is significant, as it suggests that the mechanisms driving influence—parasocial relationships, authenticity, and social proof—manifest differently across B2B and B2C sectors. While B2C relies heavily on emotional appeal and aspirational identity, B2B depends more on credibility, demonstrated expertise, and the influencer's ability to reduce perceived risk in complex decision-making environments. These studies fill an important gap in the literature, demonstrating that influencer marketing has transitioned beyond consumer-based contexts into high-value, information-driven, and strategically oriented business markets.

## **Comparative Analysis of B2B and B2C Outcomes**

The outcomes of influencer marketing differ significantly between B2B and B2C sectors due to variations in audience expectations, decision-making patterns, and communication styles. In B2C environments, influencer marketing produces immediate and measurable effects, particularly on brand awareness, purchase intention, and emotional engagement. Consumers are more likely to make quick decisions influenced by creativity, aesthetics, and perceived authenticity of social media personalities. Influencers in B2C settings leverage storytelling, lifestyle integration, and aspirational branding to trigger impulse buying or strengthen preference for competing products. As a result, metrics such as likes, comments, shares, and click-through rates often directly



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correlate with sales outcomes. These rapid-response cycles allow brands to evaluate campaign performance quickly and optimize strategies in real time, creating a dynamic and fast-paced marketing environment.

In contrast, the B2B sector demonstrates more gradual and relationship-driven outcomes, primarily grounded in trust, authority, and cognitive evaluation. B2B influencer marketing impacts long-term business growth rather than immediate sales, influencing outcomes such as lead generation, brand positioning, problem-solving relevance, and industry credibility. Unlike B2C consumers, B2B buyers involve multiple stakeholders who rely heavily on expert opinions, case studies, and thought leadership to reduce perceived risk during procurement. Therefore, B2B influencers—often industry analysts, consultants, or subject-matter experts—play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of reliability and value. Their endorsements strengthen organizational trust, stimulate knowledge exchange, and guide high-stakes purchasing decisions. While B2B results take longer to materialize, they contribute to deeper relationships, larger deal sizes, and strategic brand authority. Influencer marketing produces strong outcomes in both sectors, but the pathways, speed, and nature of impact differ significantly.

## **Influencer Marketing in B2C Sector**

Influencer marketing in the B2C sector has become a cornerstone of modern digital promotion, primarily due to its ability to tap into emotional, aspirational, and lifestyle-driven consumer buying behaviors. B2C influencers, particularly micro- and macro-creators, build strong personal connections with followers, often shaping their preferences through authentic recommendations and relatable content. Their storytelling techniques, visual appeal, and creativity make products appear more desirable and seamlessly integrated into everyday life. As consumers frequently rely on social proof when making purchasing decisions, influencers amplify brand visibility, create trend momentum, and enhance perceived product value. This form of marketing is especially effective in industries such as fashion, beauty, electronics, travel, and food, where aesthetics, reviews, and experiences significantly influence buying intent. The immediate nature of B2C purchasing allows brands to observe direct sales spikes after influencer endorsements, making campaign evaluation highly efficient.

Moreover, B2C influencer marketing operates within a fast-paced digital environment where trends evolve rapidly and consumer attention is fragmented across multiple platforms. This dynamic encourages brands to collaborate with influencers who can generate quick impact through viral content, challenges, short-form videos, or interactive posts. Influencers often serve as cultural interpreters, helping brands remain relevant to younger demographics such as Gen Z and Millennials. Engagement metrics like likes, comments, click-throughs, and user-generated content function as indicators of campaign success and help refine targeting strategies. Additionally, the emotional and lifestyle-oriented approach of B2C influencers fosters brand



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loyalty and deepens long-term consumer connections. As a result, B2C influencer marketing not only drives immediate sales outcomes but also plays a crucial strategic role in shaping brand identity, positioning, and online community growth.

## **Influencer Marketing in B2B Sector**

Influencer marketing in the B2B sector has gained significant momentum as organizations increasingly recognize the value of expert-driven influence in shaping complex buying decisions. Unlike B2C influencers, B2B influencers derive authority from professional credibility, domain knowledge, and industry experience rather than popularity or entertainment appeal. These influencers—analysts, consultants, keynote speakers, and subject-matter experts—serve as trusted advisors to businesses navigating high-value procurement processes. Their insights, case studies, and evidence-based recommendations help reduce uncertainty, validate vendor choices, and guide strategic decisions. Instead of lifestyle-oriented content, B2B influencers engage audiences through webinars, whitepapers, LinkedIn articles, podcast discussions, and conference panels. The impact of their influence is reflected in lead quality, decision-maker trust, brand positioning, and long-term partnership development rather than immediate sales spikes.

Furthermore, B2B buying cycles involve multiple stakeholders and extended evaluation periods, making the role of influencers more foundational than promotional. Their contributions often shape early-stage awareness, mid-stage evaluation, and final decision-making by highlighting product capabilities, ROI potential, and industry relevance. B2B influencer marketing relies heavily on sustained relationships, consistent knowledge-sharing, and authentic problem-solving capabilities. As businesses prioritize risk reduction, influencers become bridges between vendors and corporate buyers, enhancing credibility and facilitating smoother negotiations. While results may take longer to materialize, they tend to be more stable, strategic, and scalable over time. This makes B2B influencer marketing an essential tool for firms seeking thought leadership, industry authority, and high-value client acquisition. B2B influencer marketing demonstrates that influence in professional environments depends not on popularity but on expertise, trust, and ability to provide meaningful insights.

## **Problem Statement**

Despite the rapid rise of influencer marketing as a dominant strategy in digital communication, there remains a significant gap in understanding how its effectiveness varies between Business-to-Consumer (B2C) and Business-to-Business (B2B) sectors. Existing research has extensively explored consumer-oriented influencer campaigns, emphasizing emotional engagement, authenticity, and social proof as core drivers of purchase behavior. However, the applicability of these mechanisms within B2B contexts—where decisions are rational, long-term, and involve multiple stakeholders—remains insufficiently studied. As organizations increasingly invest in



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influencer collaborations, the lack of comparative evidence creates uncertainty regarding which strategies deliver measurable sales outcomes in each sector.

Moreover, much of the available literature focuses on brand perception, trust, or engagement metrics rather than direct sales impact, leaving marketers with limited guidance on how influencer activities translate into financial performance. The distinction between influencers' roles in B2B and B2C markets also complicates strategic decision-making, as expert-driven influence in B2B contrasts sharply with lifestyle-driven influence in B2C. The absence of a systematic synthesis makes it difficult to determine the conditions under which influencer marketing yields optimal results, the types of influencers most effective for each sector, and the pathways through which influence affects sales. Therefore, a comprehensive comparative review is needed to bridge these knowledge gaps and provide clarity on the effectiveness, challenges, and strategic implications of influencer marketing across B2B and B2C environments.

## Conclusion

This systematic review demonstrates that influencer marketing exerts a powerful yet sector-specific impact on sales outcomes across B2B and B2C environments. In B2C markets, influencer effectiveness is driven by emotional appeal, lifestyle relevance, and strong parasocial relationships that translate into immediate purchasing behavior. Influencers create engaging narratives, enhance brand visibility, and stimulate quick decision-making, resulting in measurable short-term sales growth. Conversely, in the B2B sector, influencer marketing operates through credibility, professional expertise, and long-term relationship-building. Here, influencers function as trusted advisors who reduce perceived risk, educate decision-makers, and support multi-stage procurement processes. Although the sales impact unfolds more gradually, it significantly contributes to strategic business development and high-value transactions.

Comparing both sectors reveals that while the core principle of influence remains consistent—anchored in trust and perceived value—the mechanisms, timeframes, and outcomes vary substantially. B2C influence thrives on creativity and immediacy, whereas B2B influence depends on authority and informational depth. Understanding these distinctions is essential for designing tailored influencer strategies that align with sector-specific buyer motivations. Overall, the review highlights the growing relevance of influencer marketing as a strategic tool in both consumer and professional markets. It underscores the need for more empirical research on sales attribution, cross-platform effectiveness, and long-term financial impact, particularly in B2B settings. By clarifying the unique pathways of influence in each sector, this review provides a foundation for more informed decision-making and future advancements in influencer marketing strategy.



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