

The State of Influencer Marketing in East Africa: Insights from Online Consumers and Creators



BARAZA
Media Lab



Executive Summary

This report explores the evolving influencer marketing landscape in East Africa, providing insights into consumer behaviors, creator dynamics, and emerging trends. Conducted by Wowzi Media and Baraza Research, the study surveyed over 1,500 participants across Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, shedding light on the state of influencer marketing and its implications for brands, creators, and consumers.

Key Findings

Influencer marketing is rapidly gaining traction in East Africa, driven by the widespread adoption of smartphones and increased social media usage. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (X), and Facebook dominate among East African youth, with TikTok showing significant engagement. Respondents, aged 18-30, had a strong preference for short-form content like videos under 10 minutes.

Over 75% of survey respondents reported spending up to \$100 in the past year due to influencer endorsements, particularly in fashion, beauty, technology, and food and beverage. Trust remains a critical factor for influencer marketing as online consumers are becoming increasingly skeptical about overhyped or insincere endorsements.

Emerging Trends

We identified key shifts in the influencer marketing landscape:

Authenticity Over Follower Count: The traditional focus on follower numbers is being replaced by metrics like audience engagement, niche expertise, and community building. Creators who prioritize authenticity and align with personal values are increasingly favored by brands and audiences alike.

De-influencing: A growing counter-trend involves creators discouraging unnecessary consumption and advocating for alternatives. This approach highlights the ethical responsibility of creators and the increasing demand for transparency in influencer campaigns.

Community-Building: Creators skilled in fostering a sense of belonging through direct engagement and interactive content are emerging as a powerful force in driving audience loyalty and brand alignment.

Implications for Stakeholders

For Creators: There is a shift towards prioritizing meaningful engagement over promotional content. We encourage creators to maintain authenticity, diversify their content offerings, and carefully vet partnerships to sustain audience trust.

For Brands: The findings underscore the need for brands to focus on quality partnerships with creators who resonate with their target audiences. Data-driven strategies, transparency in campaigns, and long-term relationships with creators are key to maximizing impact.

For Policy Makers: Regulatory frameworks need to balance fostering creativity and innovation with addressing ethical concerns, such as fake engagement and misleading promotions.

Influencer marketing in East Africa is at a pivotal point, offering substantial opportunities for brands and creators to connect with engaged audiences. As the industry matures, collaboration among stakeholders will be essential to address challenges and harness the full potential of this dynamic digital marketing space. By fostering transparency, authenticity, and innovation, East Africa can lead the way in redefining influencer marketing as a powerful, ethical tool for engagement and growth.



Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Since inception in the late 1990s, social media platforms have grown in popularity around the world. Social media platforms have almost tripled their total user base in the last decade, [from 970 million in 2010 to more than 5.17 billion users in July 2024](#). This means over 62% of the world's population is on social media. As the popularity of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube has grown over the last decade, so too has the concept of “influencer marketing” as a marketing strategy. Well-known individuals such as celebrities understandably attract a large number of followers, driven by their already established popularity. But a new phenomenon has emerged thanks to the widespread popularity of social media where “regular people” are also accumulating large followings due to their engaging content and regular interactions with followers. Because of their ability to shape the decisions of their followers, these people have come to be known as “influencers”. As such influencers have become more prevalent, brands have begun to piggy-back on their influence, sending them free products and sometimes even payment in exchange for posts about these items to their audiences. This marketing tactic has become the industry known as influencer marketing.

In 2023, the global influencer marketing industry was estimated at [\\$21.1 billion dollars](#) with marketers stating they planned to increase or maintain their investments in it. Ad spending in the African social media advertising market is projected to be approximately [\\$1.22 billion dollars in 2024](#).

The growth in influencer marketing has shifted ideas about career paths for young people in the region as well. A 2024 nationwide survey of Gen Z youth in Kenya by Odipo Dev and Africa Uncensored found that the top dream career was to be self-employed or run a business. In second place, was [to be a “Tiktoker”](#) or influencer, tied with becoming a doctor. This shift in career aspiration mirrors a trend found in other parts of the world like the US where [over half of Gen Z individuals want to become influencers](#) and view it as a respectable career choice.

THE DREAM JOB OF GEN Z IS FLEXIBLE AND ONLINE

What's your dream job?

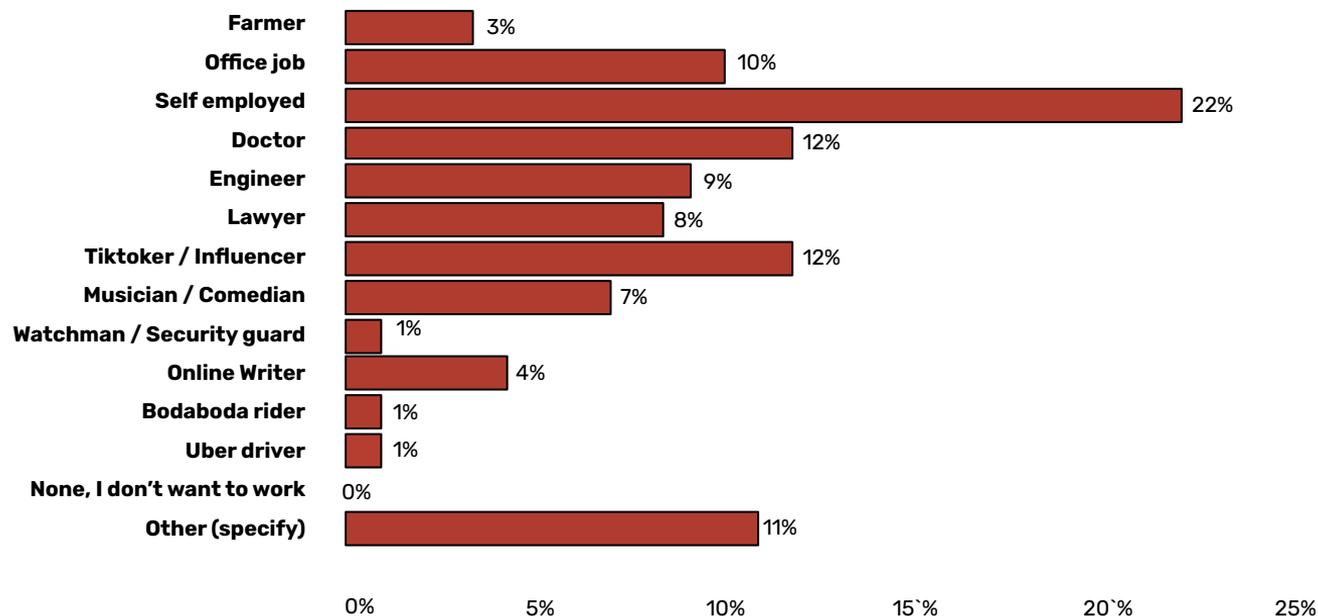


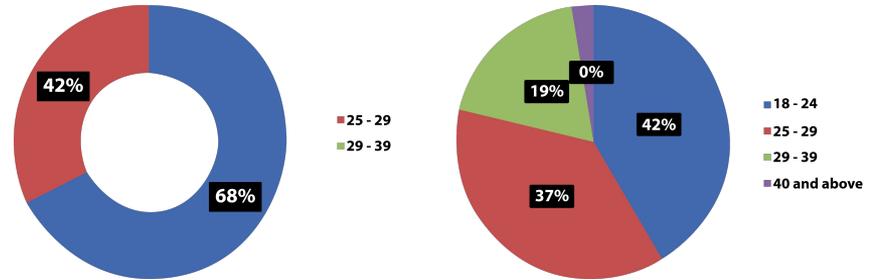
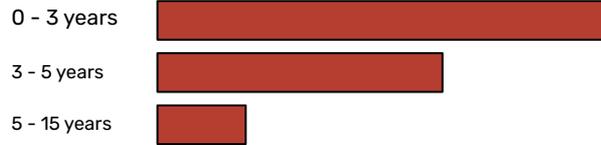
Image source: Odipo Dev. 2024. "Tiktoker' Is the Gen Z Career of Choice in Kenya, Over Doctors & Lawyers. They Have Good Reasons." The Elephant (blog). May 28, 2024. <https://www.theelephant.info/analysis/2024/05/28/tiktoker-is-the-gen-z-career-of-choice-in-kenya-over-doctors-lawyers-they-have-good-reasons/>.

Context of the Study

This report summarizes the findings of a survey conducted by Wowzi and Baraza Media Lab on the dynamics of influencer marketing, campaign strategies, consumer preferences and the evolution of this dynamic digital marketing strategy. The research aimed to better understanding this emerging sector with the main objectives being:

- To understand the current state of influencer marketing in East Africa
- Understand key trends of influencer marketing in East Africa
- Identify consumer perceptions about creator marketing in East Africa

Percentage distribution 'I have been purchasing goods and services as a result of influencer marketing for.'

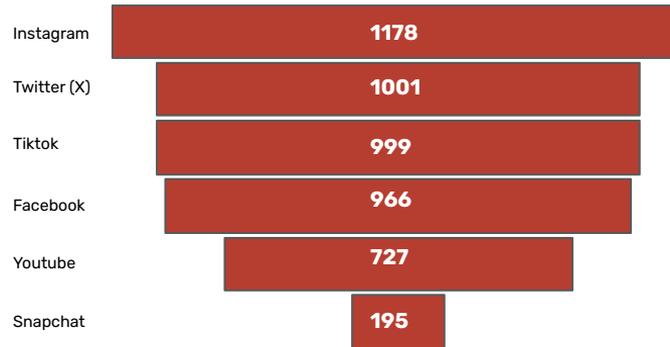


Responses were collected from over 1,500 participants across Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda through an online survey. All respondents had completed secondary school and a majority had completed their undergraduate education. 79% of respondents were between ages 18 and 30. 68% of respondents identified as men and 32% identified as women. The majority of respondents had been purchasing goods and services as a result of influencer marketing for 5 years or less. More details on the methodology are available in Appendix A.

Total number of respondents = 1526

East African youth follow influencers on Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok, and Facebook

"I follow influencers on the following platforms:"



Kabambe phones and SMS-based social media browsing are a thing of the past. In recent years as smart phones and data become more affordable, there has been a surge of engagement on social media. Our study shows that Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and Facebook are the most popular platforms where East African youth follow influencers. In a [Geopoll study conducted in 2023](#), participants in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa said they spend an average of 3 - 6 hours daily on social media platforms. About 54% of Kenya's Internet users are on TikTok, making it one of the most active African countries on the platform, according to a [survey by the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023](#).

Key Stats as a Glance

An overwhelming majority of respondents (over 80%) prefer to consume short videos that are under 10 minutes versus long-form content such as videos over 10 minutes or text content over 1,000 words. This preference aligns with the preferred platforms - Instagram, Twitter, and Tiktok - which host content primarily via reels, short texts, and short videos.

75% of East African youth attributed spending up to \$100 in the past year because of influencer recommendations

Survey participants were asked to estimate their collective spending on products and services based on influencer recommendations in the past year. 42% stated that they had spent between \$6 to \$49 while 33% estimated spending between \$50 to \$99 as a result of influencer recommendations.

PLEASE ESTIMATE YOUR COLLECTIVE SPENDING ON PRODUCTS OR SERVICES BASED ON INFLUENCER RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE PAST YEAR

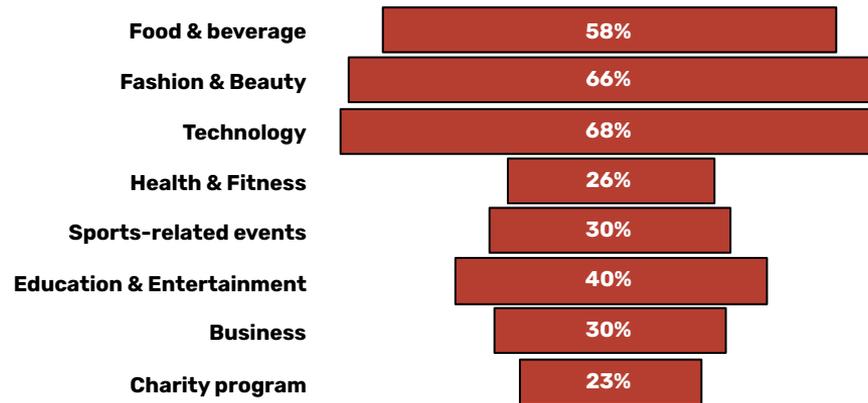


NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

East African youth purchased products and services in “fashion and beauty,” “technology,” and “food & beverage” as a result of influencer recommendations

Survey participants were asked which sectors they purchased products and services based on influencer recommendations in the past year. More than half of respondents stated that they purchased items in technology, fashion and beauty, and food and beverage as a result of influencer recommendations.

Sectors of Products/Services Purchased “As A Result of Influencer Marketing”



Some of the products or services I have purchased as a result of influencer marketing include:

Food & beverage 58%
 Fashion & Beauty (Hair/skin/body care, clothes, shoes, jewellery etc.) 66%
 Technology (Mobile phones, laptops, accessories, gaming Equipment, Telco products: airtime or data etc.) 68%
 Health & Fitness (Gym subscription, workout program, dietary supplements, medical care etc.) 26%
 Sports-related events, content or clothing. 30%
 Education & Entertainment (Books, podcasts, niche educational content like agribusiness, TV shows etc.) 40%
 Business (Imports/exports business, scaling, marketing, masterclasses, Land purchases, financial products, insurance etc.) 30%
 Charity program (Donations, volunteer opportunities etc.) 23%

Upcoming Trends

As with all industries, the influencer marketing sector continues to shift and morph. Several upcoming trends are worth mentioning for those interested in this sector.

Influence Measured By More Than Follower Count

Traditionally influencer marketing categorized influencers largely based on the number of followers. These tiers included nano-influencers (typically fewer than 10,000 followers), micro-influencers (10,000 to 100,000 followers), macro-influencers (100,000 to 1 million followers), and mega-influencers or celebrities (over 1 million followers). Each tier offered unique advantages and challenges, and brands strategically selected the most appropriate influencers to align with their marketing goals and target audiences. Moving beyond just follower count, influencer marketing evolved to more nuanced understandings of influencer reach, by considering factors like audience authenticity, engagement quality, and niche expertise. The shift reflects a growing recognition that the value of influencer partnerships is often not just in quantitative reach but also in the influencer's ability to foster genuine connections with diverse audiences. These are the emerging considerations and tiers based on these more qualitative metrics:

Authenticity-First Influencers/Creators: These creators prioritise genuine connections with their audience, often sharing personal stories, behind-the-scenes content, and unfiltered posts. Their authenticity makes their endorsements highly trustworthy and they generally turn down campaigns from brands that do not align with their personal value systems. An example is a faith-based creator who will turn down endorsements that are in conflict with their values, or a sports creator who might turn down an opportunity to work with a fast food chain brand.

Many survey respondents stated that they have seen influencer endorsements of products overhyping the product. They sense that these influencers are exploiting their followers for monetary gain. Promoting ineffective products could damage influencer reputation and break audience trust, something that influencer marketers need to be wary about. It's also important not to *only* post promotional content – if content is always sponsored, the audience could easily lose interest and unfollow an influencer.

Community Builders: Influencers in this tier are skilled at creating a sense of community among their followers. They are typically a group of creators who have mobilised to form a podcast or a YouTube channel. They frequently engage with their audience through Q&A videos with guests on their shows discussing current affairs and topics that range from financial literacy to relationship advice. Community builders intentionally engage directly with their audience through comments, direct messages and interactive content such as market days and Q&A discussions powered by Instagram stories and reels, fostering a loyal and active community.

Niche Experts, e.g. Medfluencers: Unlike traditional tiers based on follower count, niche experts may have varying sizes of followings but are highly regarded in specific industries (e.g., medical practitioners, dermatology, lawyers, sustainability, recruiters). Their expertise and qualifications lends credibility and authority as they influence within these specific circles as their audiences seek to engage with their content in order to learn a skill set, gain advice or seek professional consultation.

De-influencing

“[De-influencing](#),” where social media influencers share content on what *not* to buy, basically dissuading their community from purchasing certain overpriced goods or services. [Other reasons cited for de-influencing](#) include products or services that may cause physical or mental harm, environmental harm or excess waste, consist of poor quality or cost far more than they should.

Influencer marketing has come under fire, in these inflationary times, with many [questioning increased consumption and indulgence](#), urging people online to evaluate if they need some of the items showcased. In some cases, the “de-influencers” have presented their community with cheaper, more effective or ethically produced alternatives.

Some have argued that de-influencing has also helped hold brands accountable especially where the goods or services produced may have violated labour laws. Or brands that exclude certain races, persons with disabilities or underrepresented groups. The mission, as explained by some, is that online consumers should not trust everything they see or hear from influencers.

Building A Virtual Community

Many social media users engage with like-minded individuals to share experiences and form meaningful connections based on ideals, identities and experiences. Community-building, by adding a layer of trust is a crucial element in Influencer Marketing as it encourages engagement through real-time interactions such as live discussions, Q&As and follower games or challenges. When members of a community feel seen or heard, it makes them feel valued, creating a bond with the influencer as it fosters a sense of belonging, helping them build a social identity. And where influencers have leveraged storytelling, sharing daily struggles and other of life’s uncertainties this level of vulnerability has created [exclusive spaces that encourage interaction and connectedness](#).

Conclusion

While social media and influencer marketing continue to expand largely unchecked in many African markets, there is growing pressure to impose bans or restrictions due to worries expressed by policy makers about trust and safety. If official actions are taken, these could affect online content creators.

For example, in the US, [the Federal Trade Commission recently implemented a rule](#) that outlines heavy penalties for people who buy fake engagement on their social media accounts in order to mislead other users on their reach, validity, or influence. In African countries, governments seem focused less on fake users and more on regulating content, especially [anti-government political speech and dissent](#). For example, in September 2024, Kenya's video content regulator, the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB), said it would be [temporarily disabling the livestream feature on TikTok](#) due to the proliferation of explicit content. This begs the question of what the appropriate role is for policymakers in shaping this space.

As this report demonstrates, influencer marketing in East Africa is transforming how brands connect with their audiences, providing opportunities for meaningful engagement, authentic storytelling, and community building. For this industry to thrive sustainably, it's crucial for all stakeholders—creators, businesses, policymakers—to align their strategies with emerging trends and best practices. Here's what each group can focus on moving forward:

For Individual Content Creators

Keep it Real:	Authenticity matters more than ever. Your audience trusts you for your honesty, so partner only with brands that align with your values and say no to campaigns that feel forced or inauthentic.
Invest in Engagement:	Building a strong community is more valuable than simply growing your follower count. Use tools like Q&A sessions, polls, and direct responses to create a deeper connection with your followers.
Diversify Your Content:	Don't limit yourself to paid posts. Develop educational or niche content that sets you apart and showcases your expertise.
Protect Your Brand:	Take time to vet products and partnerships. Promoting something unreliable can damage your reputation, which takes years to build but moments to lose.

For Small and Medium Businesses

Start Small:	Work with nano and micro-influencers who are embedded in your community. They often have a more personal connection with their followers, making them ideal ambassadors for your brand.
Co-Create Value:	Collaborate with creators to develop content that tells a story about your product or service rather than just selling it. Authentic storytelling builds trust and curiosity.
Focus on Cost-Effective Wins:	Smaller-scale partnerships with creators can often deliver significant impact without the high costs associated with bigger campaigns.

For Policymakers

Foster Ethical Growth:	Establish guidelines that encourage ethical influencer marketing practices, such as requiring disclosure of paid partnerships and discouraging fake engagement tactics.
Protect Creative Expression:	While addressing issues like explicit content or misinformation, ensure regulations don't stifle creativity or the economic potential of the digital ecosystem.
Provide Support:	Develop programs that train young people in digital skills, helping them thrive as content creators or marketers in this growing field.

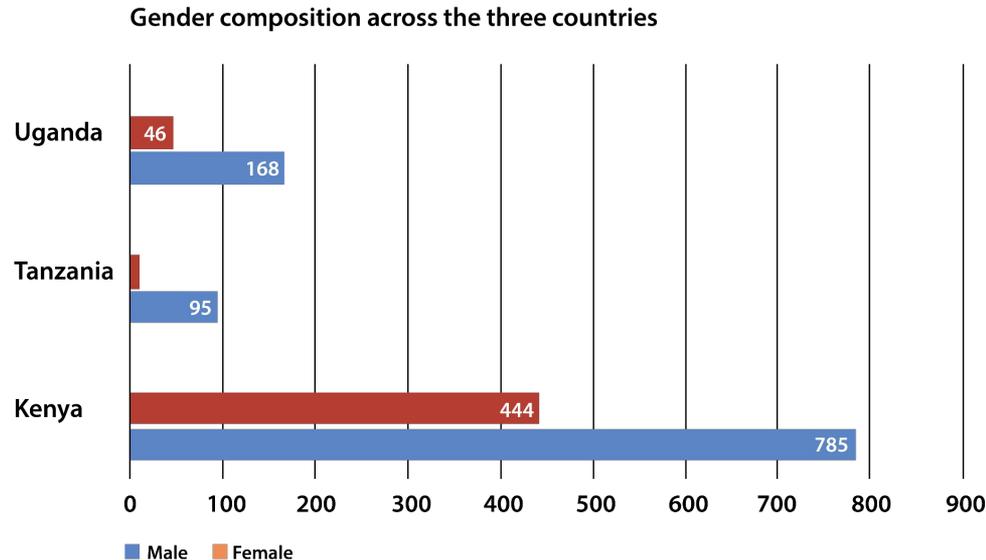
Appendices

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Methodology

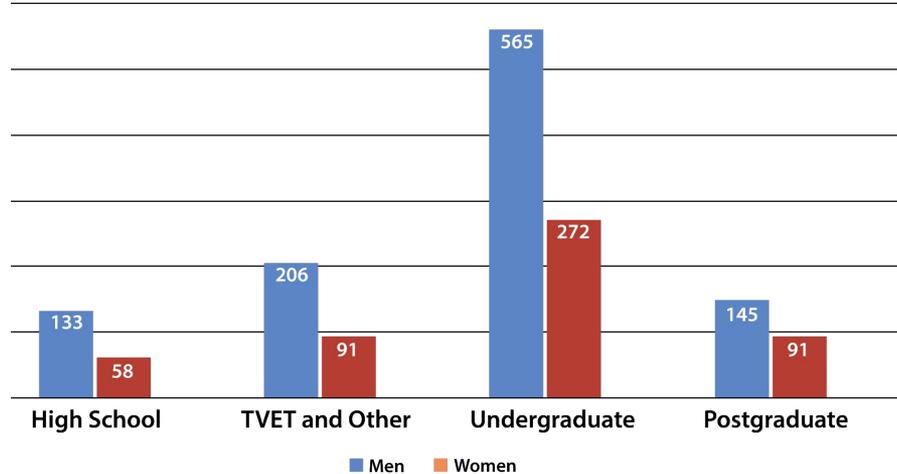
Baraza’s research team surveyed over 1,600 participants across Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda using an online questionnaire (see Appendix A for survey questions). The target audience was broadly men and women above the age of 18. The online survey had an incredible response rate of 84.3%, with a breakdown provided in Figure 1 below.



Caption: Gender composition across the three surveyed countries.

The survey was shared by Wowzi and Baraza Media with their respective communities. It was also posted as a paid advertisement post on Instagram and Facebook for 30 days with targeted geolocations for Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Responses were received through a Google Form. Respondents did not receive a financial incentive to participate in the survey. Data was analyzed in XLS by the Kenyan research team. The final report was written up in September 2024 by an external member of the team that was not part of the original data collection team.

Education composition across the Genders



Caption: Gender composition across the three surveyed countries.

Survey Questions

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Where do you currently reside?
4. Education level
5. I have been purchasing goods and services as a result of influencer marketing for:
6. I follow influencers on the following platforms:
Select all that apply:
 - Instagram
 - Facebook (Meta)
 - Twitter (X)
 - YouTube
 - TikTok
 - Snapchat
7. I am currently:
8. I see influencer marketing content as frequently as:
9. Some of the products or services I have purchased as a result of influencer marketing include: Select all that apply:
 - Food & beverage
 - Fashion & Beauty (Hair/skin/body care, clothes, shoes, jewellery etc.)
 - Technology (Mobile phones, laptops, accessories, gaming equipment, Telco products: Airtime or Data etc.)
 - Health & Fitness (Gym subscription, workout program, dietary supplements, medical care etc.)
 - Sports-related events, content or clothing
 - Education & Entertainment (Books, podcasts, Niche educational content like Agribusiness, TV shows etc.)
 - Business (Imports/Exports business, Scaling, Marketing, Masterclasses, Land purchases, Financial products, Insurance etc.)
 - Charity program (Donations, volunteer opportunities etc.)
10. Please estimate your collective spending on products or services based on influencer recommendations in the past year:
11. For \$200 and above, please tell us what you purchased:
12. What content do you find more influential?
13. What memorable influencer campaign(s) have you seen in recent time? (Please include the brand, product, and any other details)
14. Anything you don't like about influencer marketing? We would like to know.

