

2026 INFLUENCE TRENDS



ILLUSTRATION BY BOB DILLON

2026 INFLUENCER TRENDS

TREND 1:

Creator Commerce and the Rebirth of the Virtual Influencer



TREND 2:

Community-Powered Content Engines Fueling the Next Wave of UGC



TREND 3:

From Small Screens to Serialized Influence: 2026 Creators Are Building Worlds, Not Posts



TREND 4:

Equity Partnerships: and the Sports Creator Boom



TREND 5:

Thumbs Up: New Expectations for Influencer ROI



TREND 6:

Social Beyond the Feed: IRL and Private Messaging Come to the Fore



1.

CREATOR COMMERCE: AND THE REBIRTH OF VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS

How social selling is opening a
world of commercial growth



SOCIAL COMMERCE IS ALREADY HERE

\$1.6T

of the \$5trillion global eCommerce industry.

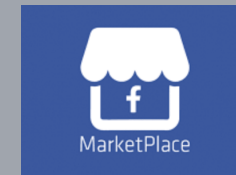
McKinsey
& Company

McKinsey has dubbed live selling "the next wave of the e-commerce revolution". sales could account for as much as up to **20 percent** of all e-commerce by end of **2026**

The screenshot displays the Amazon Live interface. At the top, there are navigation links: All, Today's Deals, Buy Again, Customer Service, Browsing History, Gift Cards, Registry, and Sell. Below this is the 'amazon live' logo with the tagline 'Shoppable livestreams'. The main content area is divided into 'Following' (with the note 'Creators you follow will appear here') and 'Featured Creators' (listing paige_desorbo, MyBalancedStyle, Wear It For Less, Lala Kent, Madison.LeCroy, Devyn Simone's Gift Closet, and Emile Ennis Jr.). The central video shows a host in a grey 'QUIVR' t-shirt presenting products. Below the video, the stream is titled 'Quivr Live!' and 'Streamed live on Mar 24, 2021'. There is a '+Follow' button for the Quivr channel. At the bottom, there are four product cards:

Product	Price
Quivr Nitro Cold Brew Hibiscus Tea Caffeine...	\$69.95
Quivr Nitro Cold Brew Decaf Coffee Caffeine...	\$69.95
Quivr Nitro Cold Brew Black Tea, 12 ounce, 1...	\$69.95
Quivr Tea Sachets 100% Natural, Premiu...	\$19.95

KEEP PACE WITH THE PLATFORMS

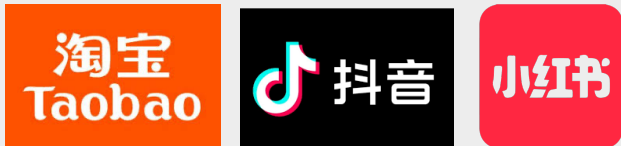


ASIA LEADING THE PAC

Liveselling
alone constitutes

\$625b,

(30%) of China's,
\$2.2t eCommerce market.



All Amazon sales in the
US is \$500b

TikTok Shop's global
sales is \$100b



Chinese Live Streamer
Zheng Xiang Xiang,
only spends 3 seconds
holding up every
product, amongst
hundreds in every
livestream, sold

\$18.3m

USD in **one week.**

THE REBIRTH OF VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS

In June 2025, a livestreaming event in China rewrote the rules for virtual influencers. Two hyper-realistic, AI-generated avatars based on their real human founders, collectively generated over

\$7 million

in product sales in a single seven-hour session. (CNBC).



CURATED
BY HUMANS,
SCALED BY
AGENTS:

A VISION OF THE FUTURE:



AWARENESS = CULTURAL INTRIGUE

AI Skepticism will ensure Human ambassadorship remains an integral component of grabbing & retaining initial attention.

SEPHORA



CONSIDERATION = HUMAN TRUST

Squad of human creators building relevance, trust & advocacy through relevancy.



CONVERSION = DETAIL

Your army of AI-generated Social Sellers, providing information running 24/7.

THE CATALYST TO YOUR CREATOR COMMERCE CASHFLOW

- 01 Pick your Platform**
Every platform performs differently, ensure you're testing each
- 02 Integrate Intelligently**
Social selling should be integrated into the bigger cross channel ecosystem
- 03 Scrutinize your Seller Selection:**
Pick sellers that are authentic advocates and natural social sellers
- 04 Creative, yet Clinical**
Integrate storytelling & relevance into your sales narrative
- 04 Invest In Analysis**
Many platform support the nuanced analysis of Live & social selling. A/B testing our performance is vital.



2.

COMMUNITY-
POWERED
CONTENT
ENGINES
FUELING THE
NEXT WAVE
OF UGC

Being *in* social,
not just on social





92%

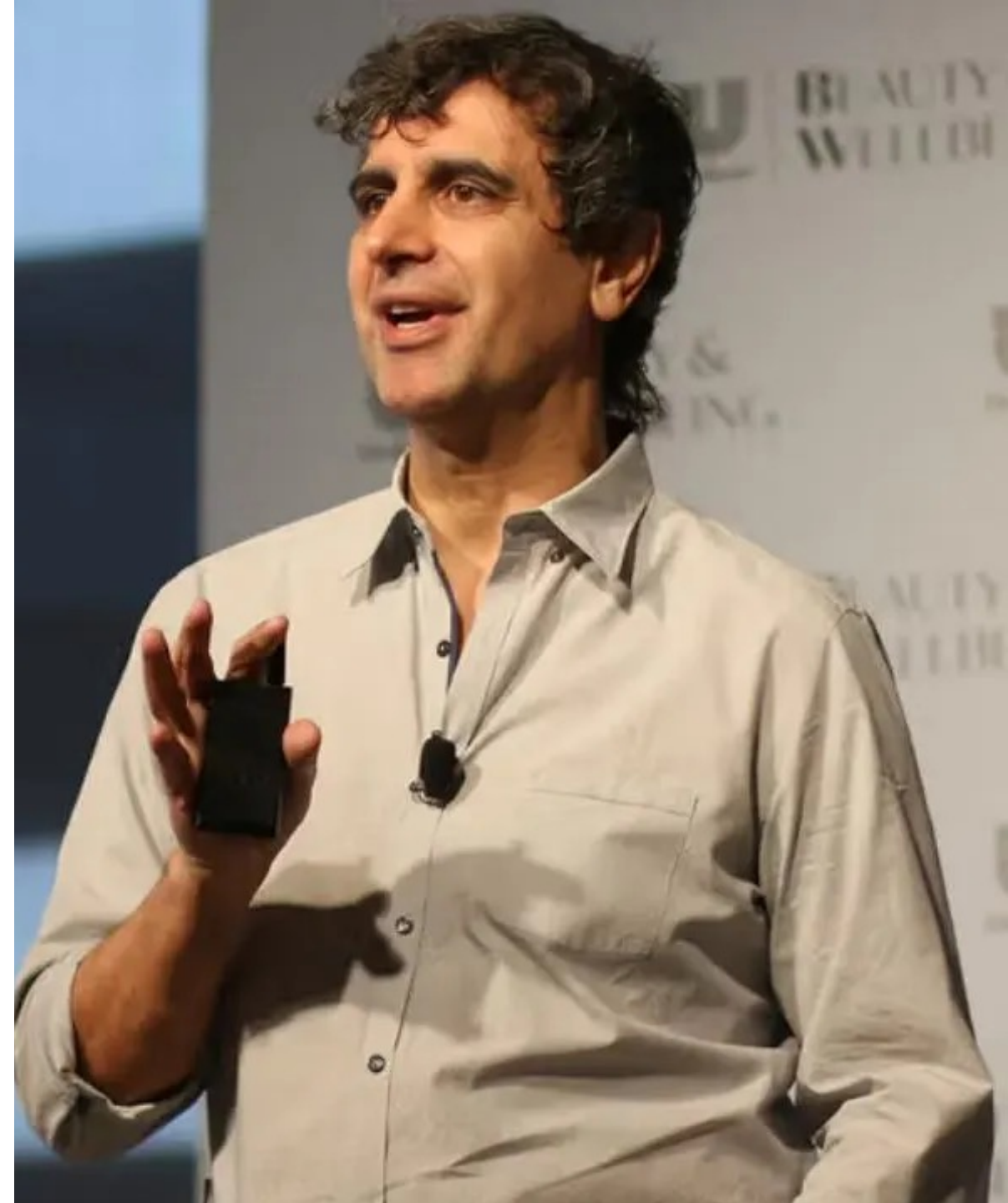
OF CONSUMERS
TRUST USER-
GENERATED
CONTENT (UGC)
OVER ADS

STRONGER AD RECALL.
HIGHER VIEW-THROUGH RATES.
HIGHER ENGAGEMENT RATES.
LOWER COST PER ACQUISITION.

Fernando Fernandez

Chief Executive Officer, Unilever

“ There are 19,000 zip codes in India. 5,674 municipalities in Brazil. I want one influencer in each of them. In some of them, I want 100. ”

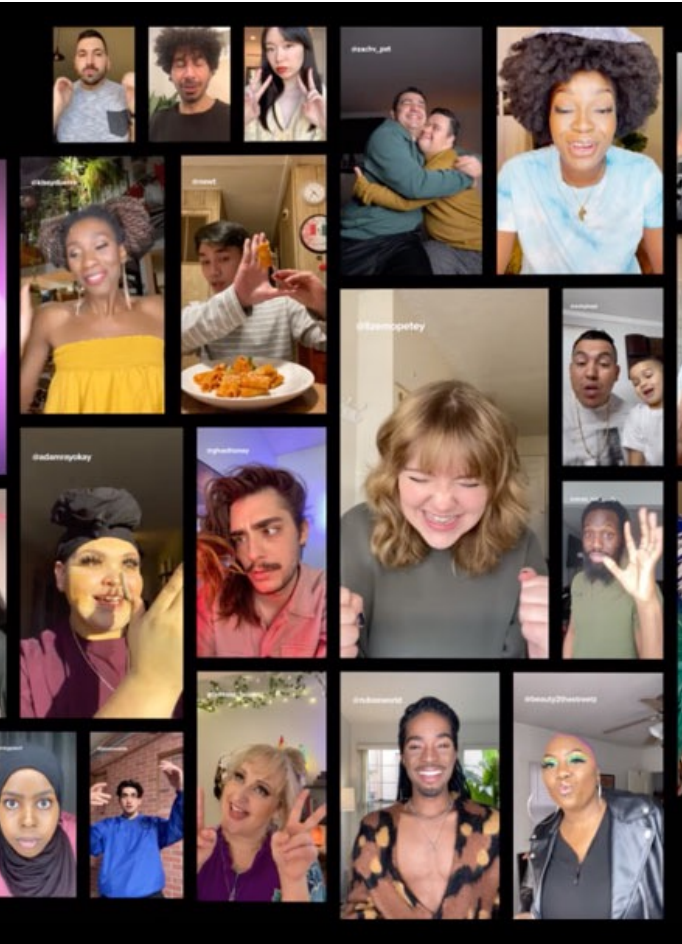


SCALE ISN'T OPTIONAL, IT'S THE WINNING STRATEGY

VELOCITY



VOLUME



VARIETY



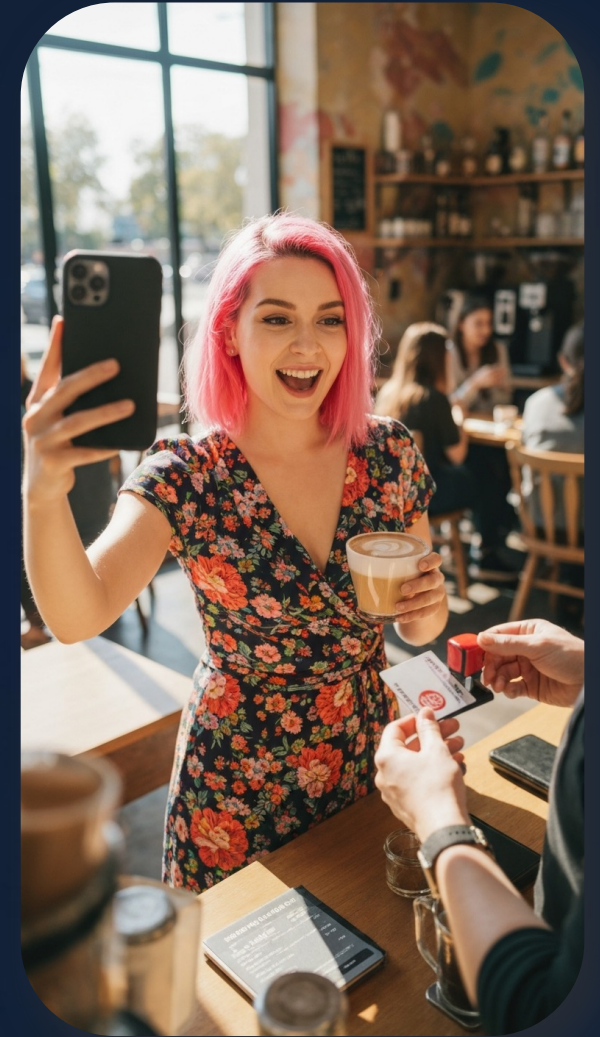
THE NEW WAVE OF UGC



CUSTOMER CONTENT LOYALTY PROGRAMS

POINTS FOR CONTENT

Brand-owned CRM platforms with an online portal for the everyday user to upload UGC to collect points, prizes, early-access products and exclusive fan experiences.



BUILDING COMMUNITY-POWERED CONTENT ENGINES

- 01 Design for creator (and content) diversity**
Look beyond follower count and build for diversity.
- 02 Design for speed to post, not speed to approve**
Set your creators the challenge of spotting and reacting to trends.
- 03 Build systems to capture and scale UGC**
Develop a process to identify, rights-manage and amplify high-performing content quickly.
- 04 Consumer loyalty program? Think Content loyalty program**
The next wave of UGC and always-on conversations will come from *content loyalty* from your everyday consumer.



6.

SOCIAL BEYOND
THE FEED

IRL AND PRIVATE
MESSAGING
COME TO
THE FORE

Back to reality
bringing us closer



THERE IS NO
DENYING THAT
AI-GENERATED
CONTENT IS
TAKING OVER
OUR FEEDS.

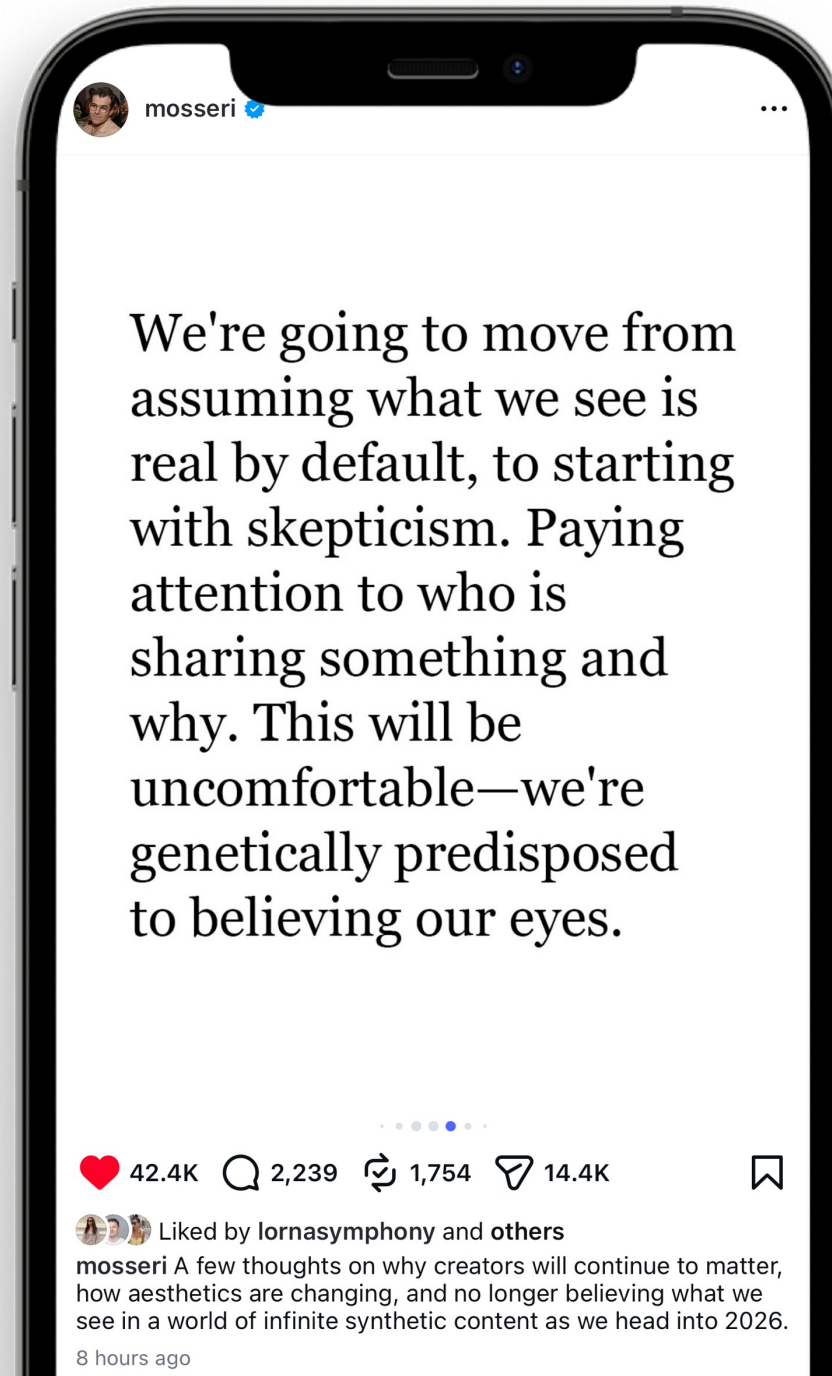
Over

1.3B

videos on TikTok are now labelled as
'AI-generated' content

Head of Instagram
Adam Mosseri
has even stated that
he expects people
are going to

“start with
skepticism”



THIS HAS
RESULTED IN
PEOPLE SEEKING
MORE OF WHAT
SOCIAL USED TO
BE-INHERENTLY
HUMAN.

We are seeing creators start to foster spaces where they can engage with their community in more trusted ways - whether that be IRL or on new social platforms.



OGILVY CASE STUDY

TCCC's First-ever Creator Summits

Immersive evenings of delicious food, coca-cola and content creation insights
800+ earned content | 3m+ views | 6 – 12% engagement rate | 4 markets



200+

Creators

@ BGC bustling Food Spot
Manila

171+

Creators

@ Tổng Duy Tân food street
Hanoi

100

Creators

@ ACO By the Pier
Sydney

57

Creators

@ Knots Café & Living in
Singapore

FOUR WAYS TO CONNECT WITH CONSUMERS, AS THEY SEEK SOCIAL BEYOND THE SMARTPHONE:

- 01 Facilitate IRL experiences:**
Support and co-create in-person events, meet-ups, and fan gatherings led by your partnered creators
- 02 Engage in private community platforms:**
Identify the Discord servers, Patreon groups, or Substack communities where your target audience and relevant creators congregate.
- 03 Sponsor exclusive content for subscribed members:** Collaborate with creators to offer their communities premium, in-depth content that rewards their most dedicated followers.
- 04 Strategically explore “dark social”:**
Consider WhatsApp channels (B2C) or Telegram (B2B) to meet consumers where they already are.



