

STYLE  AFRICA



**The State
of Influence**

2026



Agenda

01. Influence Has Evolved (But Most Strategies Haven't)

02. From Influencer Marketing to Creator Ecosystems

03. Creators Are the New Distribution Channels

04. The Rise of Micro & Niche Influence

05. Community Is the New Moat

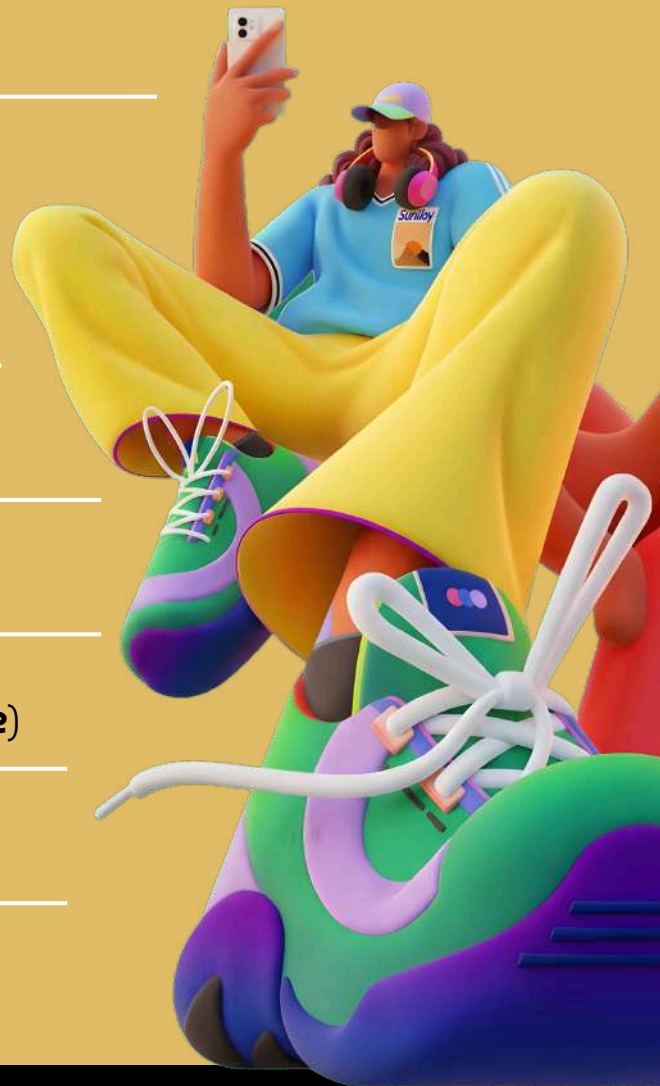
06. From Endorsements to Partnerships

07. What Brands Are Measuring Now

08. The Influence Maturity Curve

09. Live Campaign Breakdown (Interactive)

10. What This Means for You





Influence Has Evolved

(But Most Strategies
Haven't)

THE CREATOR ECONOMY HAS OUTPACED BRAND THINKING

- The creator economy is now a multi-billion dollar industry, growing faster than traditional media channels
- Audiences trust creators more than ads—peer-led influence is shaping purchase decisions
- Platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram have shifted power from brands → creators → communities

BUT...

Most brands are still:

- Running short-term, campaign-based influencer activations
- Treating creators as media placements, not partners
- Measuring success through reach, not relationship or impact



Creator Economy Revenue in South africa (2026)

R8.5 BILLION

Total Creator Economy Revenue

South Africa's creator economy revenue in 2026

R4.2 BILLION

Influencer Marketing Spend

Total influencer marketing budgets in South Africa

R56,667

Average Revenue per Influencer

Estimated annual earnings for an average Influence

150,000

Number of Influencers

Registered influencers across major platforms

18%

Didital Ad Spend Growth Rate

Year-over-year increase in digital advertising expenditure



**INFLUENCE
TODAY =
ECOSYSTEM**

Built on trust,
consistency,
and
community

Driven by niche
creators +
micro-
communities

Long-term
storytelling
over time

INSIGHT

Brands are
optimising for
visibility

Creators are
driving
believability

Audiences
respond to
authenticity
over advertising

BRAND BEHAVIOUR

One-off posts tied
to marketing
calendars

Focus on macro
creators for reach

KPI focus:
impressions, clicks,
CPM

From Influencer Marketing to Creator Ecosystems



CAMPAIGNS VS ECOSYSTEMS: TWO COMPLETELY DIFFERENT GAMES

Campaign-Based Influencer Marketing
(What most brands are still doing)

- Fixed start and end dates
- One-off content drops tied to campaigns
- Creator = distribution channel
- Transactional: “Post → Pay → Done”
- Success = reach, impressions, short-term spikes

The outlook? It feels like advertising

Always-On Creator Ecosystems
(What the industry is shifting toward)

- Continuous, always-on presence
- Creators integrated into the brand story over time
- Creator = partner, co-creator, brand voice
- Relationship-driven, not transactional
- Success = trust, consistency, cultural relevance

The outlook? Feels like community

What This Looks Like in Practice?



LONG-TERM CREATOR NETWORKS

- Brands build a roster of aligned creators
- Ongoing collaborations across campaigns, not once-off
- Creators show up consistently, building familiarity



AMBASSADOR PROGRAMS

- Creators become faces of the brand
- Long-term alignment with brand values
- Deeper storytelling vs surface-level promotion



CREATOR COMMUNITIES

- Brands cultivate ecosystems, not just individuals
- Encourage collaboration, UGC and peer influence
- Community becomes a distribution engine



Creators Are the New Distribution Channels

DISTRIBUTION WAS ALWAYS THE HARD PART

And Then It Changed Overnight

- For years, marketing success depended on two things:
 - Great content
 - Access to distribution

Content was never the problem.

Distribution was.

- Expensive to access
- Controlled by a few gatekeepers
- Slow to execute
- Difficult to scale

Brands didn't just compete on ideas - they competed on who could afford attention

The Old Reality





Platforms like YouTube and Facebook removed the gatekeepers.

- But they didn't solve the real problem.
- Visibility became easy. Trust did not.

What Changed

The Real Shift Wasn't Distribution - It Was Trust

Why Creators Changed the Game

Creators didn't just adopt these platforms.
They solved the trust problem.

While brands were:

- Buying reach
- Pushing messages

Creators were:

- Showing up consistently
- Building relationships
- Earning credibility over time



The Result

Creators became both:

- The storytellers
- The distribution channels

The New Reality

You're no longer competing with ads.

- You're competing with:
 - Opinions
 - Personal stories
 - Trusted voices

When Distribution Comes with Trust, Everything Changes



From Awareness → Action
When brands partner with creators:

- Distribution is instant
- Audiences are pre-qualified
- Messaging is trusted

Why It Outperforms

- Higher engagement
- Better conversion
- Lower Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC)

The Strategic Reality

Paid media still drives reach.
Creator-led distribution drives belief and action.

The New Reality

You're no longer competing with ads.

- You're competing with:
 - Opinions
 - Personal stories
 - Trusted voices

The Rise of Micro & Niche Influence



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- RELEVANCE IS REPLACING REACH
 - TRUST IS THE NEW METRIC
 - PLATFORMS + PROOF

Relevance is Replacing Reach



Core Insight

- We are seeing a corrosion of trust in mega influencers.
- They are no longer viewed as community leaders but as billboards for the highest bidder.

What's Changing

- Mega influencers → Drive visibility, not belief
- Micro & nano influencers → Drive trust, engagement, and conversion

Why This Matters

- People see macro influencers
- But they trust micro/nano creators

Key Statistic

- Micro-influencers: ~6% engagement rate
- Celebrities: ~1-2% engagement rate

Trust is the New Metric



The New Metrics of Influence

- Deep Engagement
- Community Connection
- Trust

Data Points

- 83% of Gen Z & 80% of Millennials trust influencer recommendations
- TikTok nano influencers: 10.3% engagement vs 7.1% macro

Why Micro & Nano Influencers Win

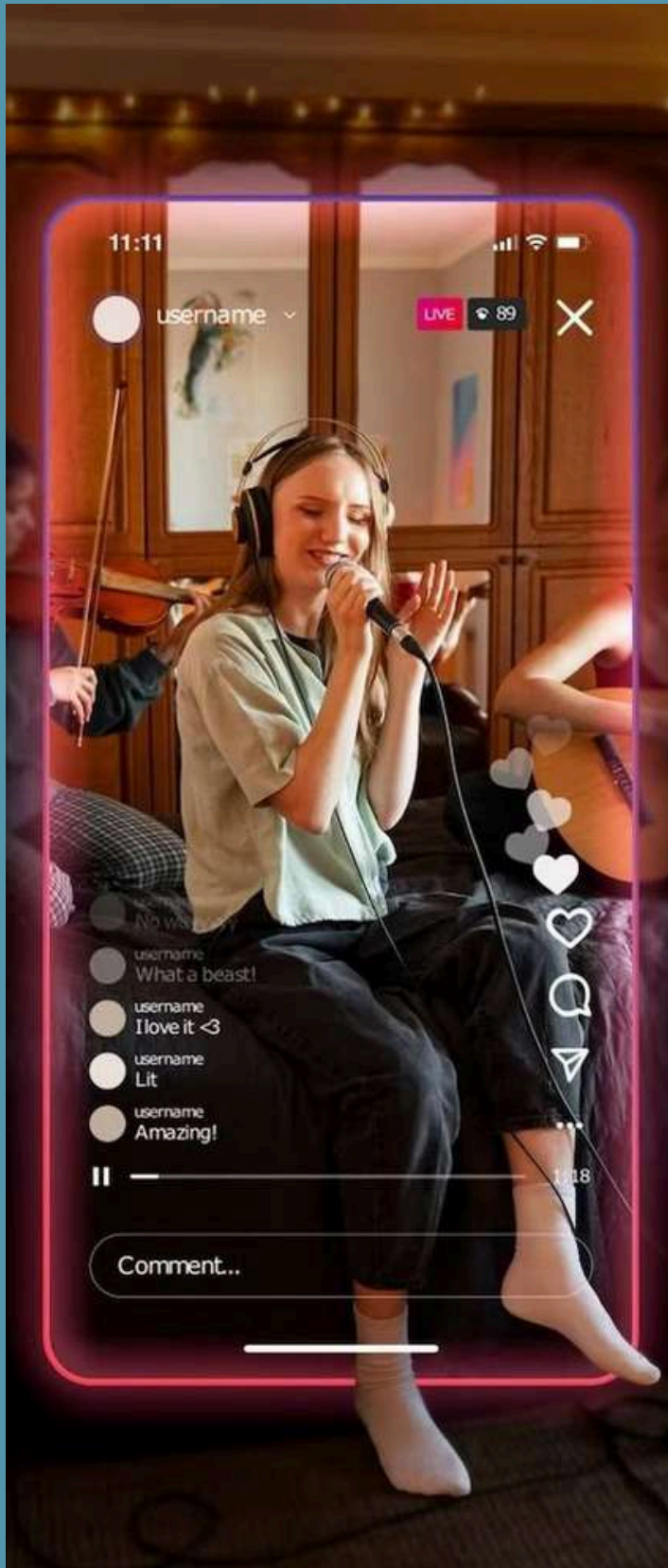
- Smaller audiences = stronger relationships
- High responsiveness (comments, DMs, conversations)
- Seen as peers, not advertisers

Strategic Advantage

- Better product–audience fit
- Higher conversion rates
- More cost-effective partnerships

Platforms + Proof

Where This Shift Comes to Life

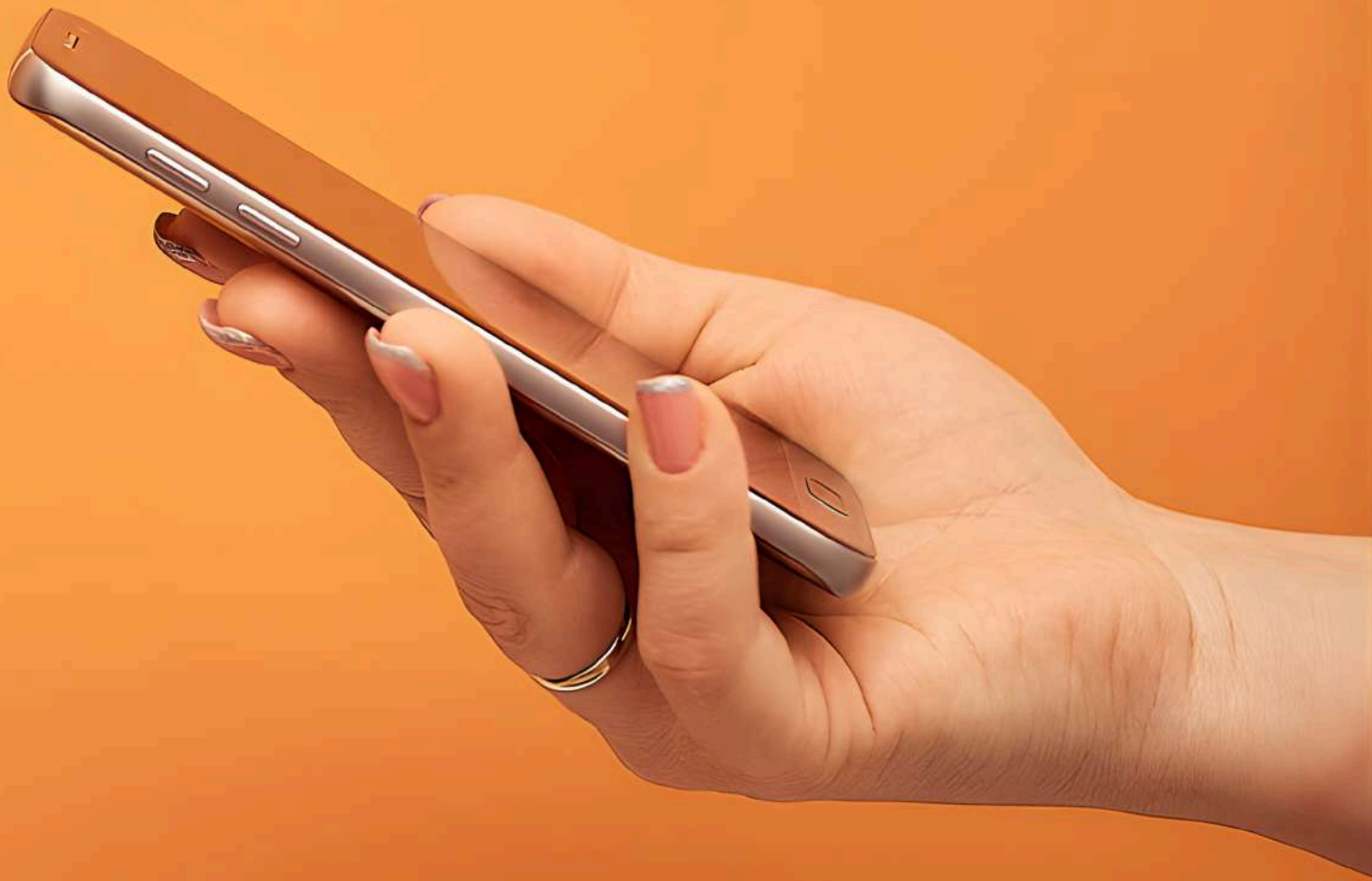


Platform Behaviour

- TikTok → Built for discovery, relatability, and engagement
- Instagram → Visual storytelling + direct community interaction
- YouTube (Shorts) → Scalable niche storytelling

Why Micro/Nano Thrive Here

- Algorithms reward engagement over reach
- Content feels native, not disruptive
- Conversations > impressions



Community Is the New Moat

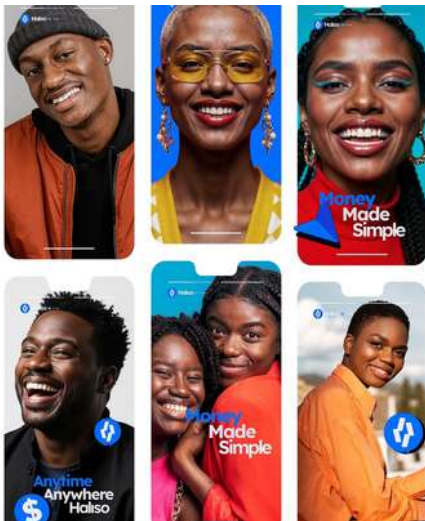
FROM AUDIENCE SCALE →
AUDIENCE DEPTH

From Audience Scale → Audience Depth



PROVOCATION

What if your biggest audience is your weakest asset?



THE SHIFT

- Then: Followers (Passive)
- Now: Community (Active, Invested)



CORE INSIGHT

- Reach is no longer scarce.
- Attention and trust are.

From Audience Scale → Audience Depth



FOLLOWER VS COMMUNITY MEMBER

- Follower → Opted in once
- Community member → Keeps showing up



WHAT DEFINES COMMUNITY

- Ongoing interaction
- Shared identity
- Two-way communication
- Trust that compounds over time



CULTURAL SHIFT

- ~60% of Gen Z prefer smaller, private communities over large platforms
- Trust in institutions declining → shift to peer-led trust



Community = Retention, Not Reach

↘ THE MOST UNDERRATED GROWTH ENGINE

Where Attention Is
Moving

- WhatsApp groups
- Discord servers
- Telegram channels
- Private subscriber communities

Spaces where:

- Algorithms fade
- Conversations deepen
- Trust is built directly

WHY IT MATTERS (COMMERCIALLY)

- Drives repeat engagement
- Builds loyalty
- Reduces reliance on paid media
- Turns customers into advocates

Retention can be up to 5x more cost-effective than acquisition

SEPHORA



WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT WORKS

- Sephora → Built a peer-driven community (not just content)
- Users engage with each other, not just the brand
- Brand facilitates → community leads



From Endorsements to Partnerships

FROM BRIEFING TO BUILDING -HOW
CREATOR RELATIONSHIPS ARE EVOLVING

From Briefing to Building -How Creator Relationships Are Evolving

THE STRATEGIC SHIFT

- Then: “Who can talk about us?”
- Now: “Who can build with us?”

WHAT PARTNERSHIPS LOOK LIKE

- Long-term creator relationships
- Always-on storytelling
- Cross-platform presence
- Creators as consistent brand voices

WHY IT WORKS

- Familiarity → Trust
- Trust → Action
- Action → Growth

Creators move from campaign assets → brand assets





Where Influence Meets Commerce

When Creators Move Closer to the Product

- Influence becomes embedded, not added on

EXAMPLES

Nike × NorBlack NorWhite

- → Cultural input shaped the product itself

Bathu

- → Community, culture, and product move together

THE OWNERSHIP SHIFT

Creators are no longer just partners—they are:

- Founders
- Investors
- Equity stakeholders

WHAT THIS MEANS

- Influence + commerce are converging
- Audiences trust creators → lower barrier to purchase
- 60% of consumers trust creators over ads

When Influence Stops Being Bought and Starts Being Built

THE OLD MODEL (ENDORSEMENTS)

- Brief → Post → Pay → Move on
 - Built for efficiency and scale
 - Treated creators like media placements
- 👉 Worked for visibility
- ❌ Failed at building trust

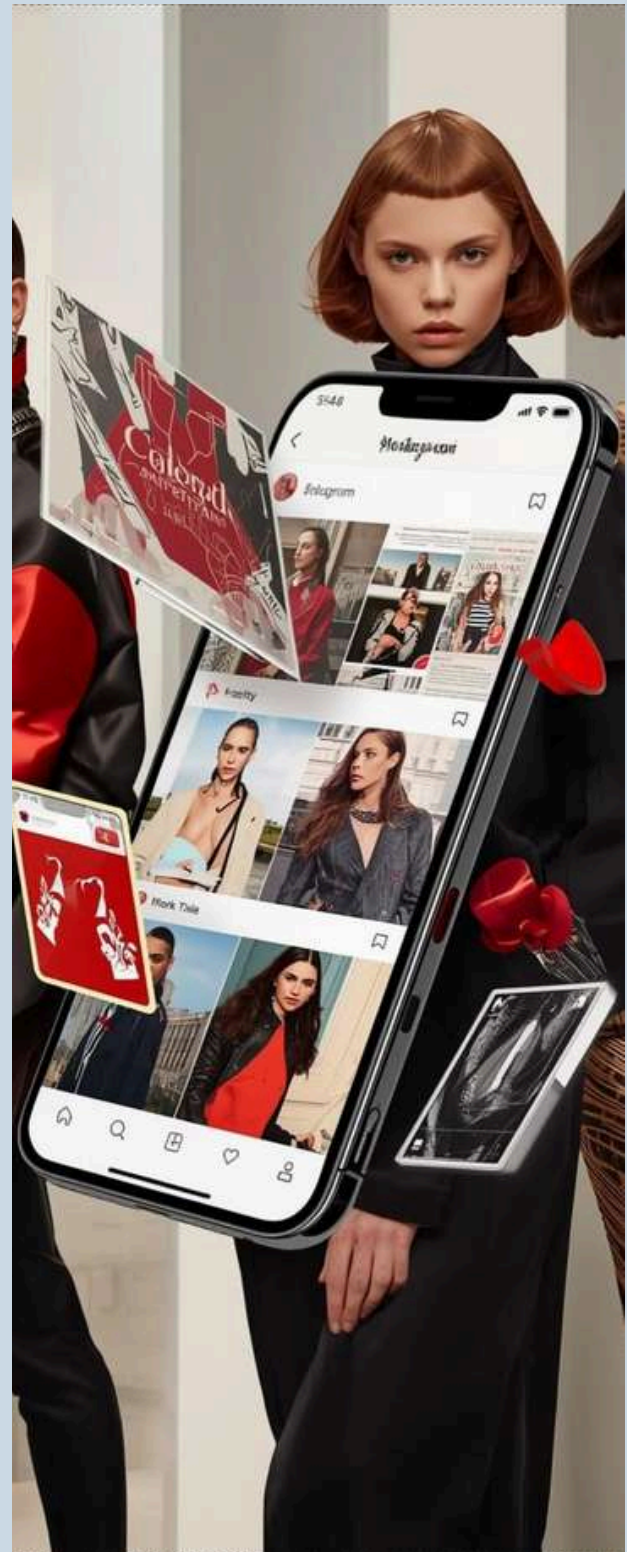
WHAT'S BREAKING

- One-off posts = interruption
- Audiences now respond to:
 - Familiarity
 - Consistency
 - Credibility

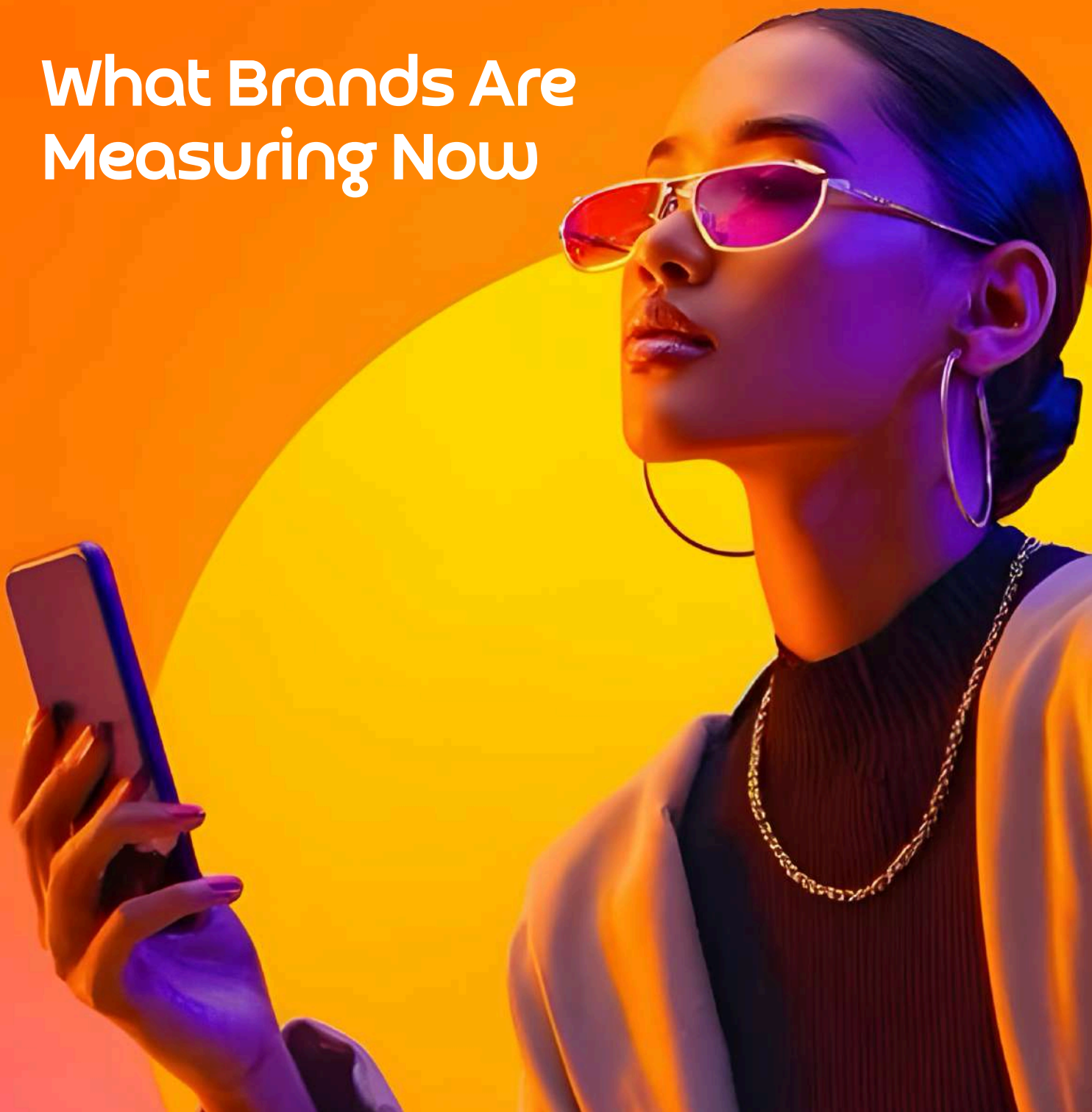
A single post can generate reach but it rarely builds belief

KEY DATA

- 73% of Gen Z rely on creators for purchase decisions
- Creator marketing investment up 170%+ YoY



What Brands Are Measuring Now



THE SHIFT

Brands are moving from visibility metrics →
business impact metrics



The Shift

THEN (VANITY METRICS)

- Likes
- Impressions
- Clicks
- Follower growth

Told us what people saw

NOW (BUSINESS METRICS)

- ROI (Return on Investment)
- Conversions & Revenue Impact
- Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC)
- Customer Lifetime Value (LTV)

Tells us what actually worked

CORE INSIGHT

Brands are prioritising proof over presence

Impressions can tell you who saw the ad

But not:

- Did it change perception?
- Did it build trust?
- Did it drive action?

The New KPIs of Influence

BRAND LIFT & SENTIMENT (THE “WHY”)

- Awareness
- Favourability
- Purchase intent
- Measures if campaigns are changing minds, not just reaching eyes

ENGAGEMENT QUALITY (NOT VOLUME)

- Saves
- Shares
- Comments (depth, not count)
- Time spent / attention

Focus: Are people actually engaging meaningfully?

LONG-TERM VALUE

- Customer Lifetime Value (LTV)
- Repeat purchases
- Retention

From spikes → sustained growth

SMARTER ATTRIBUTION

- Multi-touch attribution
- Incrementality testing
- Moving beyond last-click

Understanding what actually drives conversion

COMMUNITY GROWTH

- Returning audiences
- Owned communities (WhatsApp, Discord, etc.)
- Creator-led audience retention

From audience → community

The Influence Maturity Curve

From Campaigns → Ecosystems: How Influence Matures

STAGE 1: EXPERIMENTAL

Campaign-Based Influence

- Once-off influencer campaigns
- Short-term bursts of activity
- Focus: reach & awareness

STAGE 2: STRUCTURED

Repeat Creator Engagement

- Same creators used across campaigns
- Early relationship building
- Some consistency in messaging

STAGE 3: INTEGRATED

Always-On Influence

- Creators embedded into marketing strategy
- Ongoing content beyond campaigns
- Influence across multiple touchpoints

STAGE 4: ECOSYSTEM

Community + Creators + Content

- Creator networks + ambassador programs
- Community-led distribution (UGC, fans, micro-creators)
- Influence becomes self-sustaining

SO... WHAT'S

If You're a Brand / Founder

- Stop thinking in campaigns
- Start building influence systems
- Invest in long-term creator relationships
- Design for consistency, not spikes

If You're a Marketer / Agency

- Move beyond execution into strategy
- Shift from buying reach to building influence infrastructure
- Measure what matters: trust, relevance, community

Why? You need to build systems, not campaigns

Why? You need to sell strategy, not just execution

No matter where you sit - brand, agency, or creator - the shift is the same: move from short-term thinking to long-term influence.

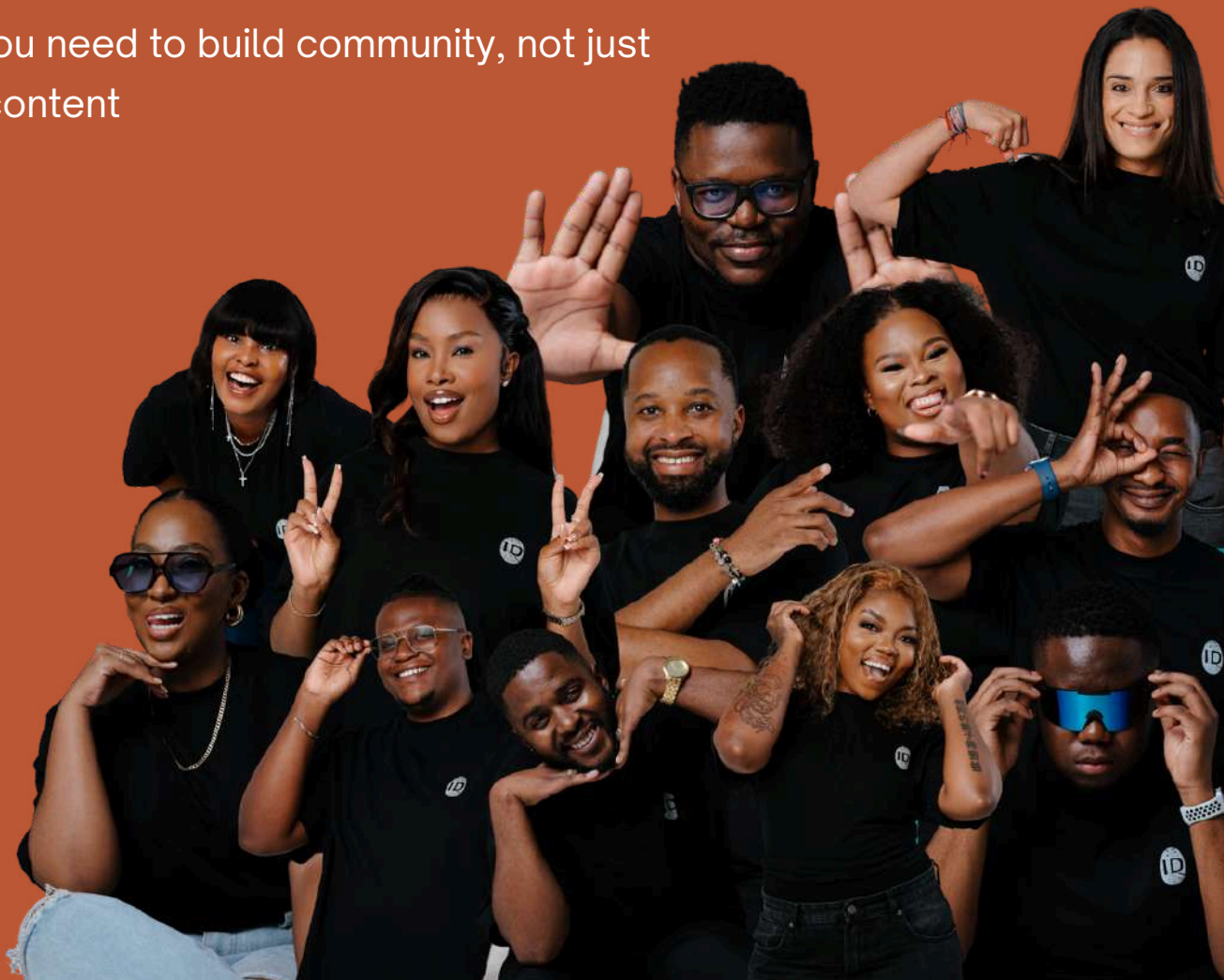
What This Means for You

NEXT?

If You're a Creator

- Your power is not just content-it's community
- Prioritise audience connection over virality
- Build something brands can plug into long-term

Why? You need to build community, not just create content



The State of Influence 2026

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