

# THE ROLE OF INFLUENCE MARKETING IN THE RUSSIAN MODERN MEDIA SPACE

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**Abstract:** *this article examines the role of influence marketing in shaping brand image and interacting with the audience in the modern media space. Special attention is given to the significance of this marketing tool for capturing consumer attention, analyzing the advantages and limitations of using influence marketing in contemporary realities. The author highlights the key trends in the development of the influencer marketing market.*  
**Keywords:** *influence marketing, bloggers, media space, advertising campaigns, marketing strategies, audience interaction.*

## РОЛЬ ВЛИЯНИЯ МАРКЕТИНГА В СОВРЕМЕННОМ РОССИЙСКОМ МЕДИАПРОСТРАНСТВЕ

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**Аннотация:** *в данной статье рассматривается роль маркетинга влияния в формировании имиджа бренда и взаимодействии с аудиторией в современном медиaproстранстве. Особое внимание уделено значению этого маркетингового инструмента для привлечения внимания потребителей, анализу преимуществ и ограничений использования маркетинга влияния в современных реалиях. Автор выделяет ключевые тенденции развития рынка инфлюенс-маркетинга.*  
**Ключевые слова:** *маркетинг влияния, блогеры, медиaproстранство, рекламные кампании, маркетинговые стратегии, взаимодействие с аудиторией.*

Researching the role of influence marketing in the modern media space is extremely relevant due to the rapid development of information technologies and social media, which are fundamentally changing how brands interact with their audiences. Today, social media occupies a central place in the lives of billions of users of all ages, offering unique opportunities for brands to capture audience attention through influential individuals. In this context, influence marketing strategy becomes a key tool for building more trustworthy relationships with consumers, facilitating more personalized communication.

Furthermore, ongoing changes in the media landscape, driven by digital technology advancements and audience shifts due to the blocking of social networks and the disabling of advertising accounts on major platforms, enhance the significance of advertising placements with influential personalities for brands. In the midst of such changes, studying the role of influence marketing becomes particularly important to understand how engagement with influencers can impact brand image perception and consumer decision-making. It also aids in developing more effective communication approaches to attract and retain audiences.

Investigating the role of influence marketing in these new realities provides a valuable instrument for optimizing interactions with influential figures. Additionally, it's crucial to assess the effectiveness of investments in this strategy and identify factors influencing the success of campaigns involving opinion leaders. This will allow advertisers and marketers to better comprehend how to adapt their strategies to meet modern media consumption demands and achieve their goals. The aim of this research is to define the role of influence marketing, highlight the main trends in its development amidst the transformation of the media landscape. The methodology includes analyzing scholarly literature and social media content, as well as describing, summarizing, and classifying the gathered data.

According to E. V. Savelieva, influence marketing is based on communicating with the target audience through opinion leaders, characterized by its naturalness, recommendatory nature, and seamless integration into an influencer's content [6, p. 78]. The core idea of influence marketing lies in collaborating with popular figures who possess an active audience on social media or other media platforms. Influencers possess the trust of their audience, and their opinions and recommendations are often perceived as more authoritative and objective compared to traditional advertising. Consumers frequently make decisions based on bloggers' recommendations, whom they perceive as like-minded or trustworthy individuals. This enables the increase in brand awareness, trust, and ultimately the company's sales.

According to E. N. Yudina, the media space is a separate entity within the broader social space, organizing the social actions and representations of active participants engaged in the processes of mass information production and consumption [10, p. 3]. Additionally, according to V. Pan, the internet is a crucial component of the media space [5, p. 5418]. According to a 2022 study by Rosstat, 83% of Russians use the internet [17]. Data from the research company Mediascope for the first quarter of 2023 states that 83% of Russians use the internet every day [13]. The analytics agency DataReportal notes that in January 2023, Russia had 106 million social media users, accounting for 73.3% of the population [11]. It can be said that there is currently a high prevalence of mobile devices and high-speed internet, leading to the growth of digital communication, digital media platforms, and services in Russia over the past decade. This includes online magazines, new media, news websites, internet radio, streaming video, and social media, resulting in a shift in audience preferences from traditional media to digital channels.

Social networks have become an integral part of the everyday lives, mass communication, and information exchange of many Russian users. They provide the opportunity for communication, community creation, and the exchange of opinions and impressions among users, which has long been a part of daily online communication and socialization. The popularity of obtaining news and information through online sources, including websites, social networks, and messengers, is also increasing. Traditional print publications and television face competition for user attention. Regarding digital marketing, K. V. Baryshkov notes that there is currently a transition to a new paradigm of digital promotion driven by the transformation of the advertising market as a whole [1, p. 5].

In turn, the role of influencers in the media space is significant and continues to grow with the development of social media and digital technologies. Collaborating with bloggers allows brands to penetrate new audience segments that may be inaccessible through traditional advertising channels. In the context of ad-blockers' prevalence and increasing banner blindness among users in the online environment, influencers represent a more successful method of reaching audiences, as their content is usually not subject to such blocks. Their content is often perceived by the audience as more organic and appealing, leading to greater engagement and influence on consumer behavior. Researchers emphasize the significant impact of blogging on the formation of opinions and behavior among teenagers and young adults [7].

N. P. Kuramina identifies three directions of influence marketing: ambassadorship, working with micro-influencers, and mass challenges [3, p. 163]. Other formats and tools for audience engagement successfully utilized in influence marketing include:

- Vertical videos: Video content adapted specifically for mobile viewing in a vertical format, enhancing convenience and attractiveness for the audience.
- Sponsored integrations and time-based insertions: Incorporating advertising elements or brand products into online shows or series that align in tone with the show's content – effective but requiring greater financial and time investments [9, p. 47].
- Product placement (native reviews, overviews, and recommendations) in personal blogs: Influencers share their opinions on products, services, or brands in their personal blogs, giving advertising a more natural and authoritative character.
- Seeding branded content: Spreading content support created by the brand or involving its storytelling among various influencers.
- Blogger participation in events: Collaborating with bloggers in organizing events, contests, or promotional activities to increase engagement.
- Affiliate advertising and partnership marketing: Utilizing affiliate links or influencer-promoted codes to drive sales and track the effectiveness of advertising activities.
- Creative special projects, guest publications, takeovers, challenges, and partnerships: Involving influencers in creating guest content on official brand platforms to increase visibility and impact.
- Giveaways, collaborations, and partnerships: Arranging contests and giveaways involving bloggers to attract and retain audiences.
- AR masks: Bloggers share videos and photos featuring masks that incorporate the brand's product or identity [2, p. 352].
- Interviews and Q&A sessions: Involving opinion leaders in interviews or question-and-answer sessions to establish the brand's expert image.

The influence marketing industry in Russia faces a number of challenges, including the issue of uncertainty in blogger self-identification. Bloggers often grapple with the question of how they want to be perceived by their audience: whether as media platforms and media outlets or as relatable idols for their followers. Some strive to present themselves as ordinary individuals, “just like everyone else.” This ambiguous self-identification among bloggers creates difficulties for advertisers and marketers who encounter a variety of influencers and their diverse approaches to collaboration.

Unlike other advertising tools such as targeted social media ads, which have clear regulations and guidelines, influencer partnerships represent a relatively new direction in Russian marketing. This field is challenging to standardize because the blogosphere and media landscape are still in the developmental stages. In the current stage, the blogger market in the Russian-speaking segment of social media can be categorized based on criteria related to their approach to blogging, the specifics of advertising placements, and collaboration characteristics. The characteristics of blogger categories are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories of Bloggers in the Russian-speaking Social Media Segment.

Blogger Category	Attitude Towards Blogging	Specifics of Advertising Placements	Collaboration Characteristics
Professional Bloggers	View blogging as their primary work and income source, perceive it as a business	Willing to feature almost any advertisement, driven by financial interest	Direct advertising and predictable promotional outcomes, easily negotiate terms
Enthusiast Bloggers	Blog as a platform for self-expression and intentional activity	More selective attitude toward advertisers, attuned to presenting material	Prioritize content quality, value granting greater freedom in integration scenarios
Celebrity Bloggers (Celebrities)	Popular not just on social media but beyond, use blogging for fan engagement	Collaborate solely with major brands	Vital to study individual traits and provide comprehensive technical briefs for the blogger's team
Universal Bloggers	Achieve self-fulfillment through blogging, expand both subscribers and advertisers	Employ diverse approaches for different advertiser types, including both overt and covert integrations	Capable of offering more creative and viral formats, capable of drawing higher audience engagement and expanding reach

In modern marketing communications, especially in social media, the strategy of collaborating with brand ambassadors is actively employed. According to M. A. Kuchmenko, brand ambassadors are advocates of a specific brand's products, hired by a company to convey its values, policies, corporate identity, and to showcase its products in a positive light. For successful collaboration with ambassadors, ensuring their alignment with the advocated brand and sharing its values is crucial, as it strengthens audience trust and loyalty, and solidifies the company's market position. However, it should be noted that Russian companies express skepticism toward influencers and often impose strict requirements that may compromise the influencer's authentic style and content creation approaches, potentially resulting in overly promotional content that discourages the audience and lacks interest.

According to expert assessments, the results of 2022 indicate a significant contraction of the advertising market for bloggers – a decline of 40%, leading to a decrease in volume to 6.6 billion rubles. Negative trends can be attributed to various factors, such as the departure of major foreign advertisers, freezing advertising budgets, mandatory advertising labeling, and temporary suspension of marketing activities. In this context, prominent media personalities who collaborated with major international brands under long-term contracts experienced the most significant losses. However, by the spring of 2023, the influence marketing market had begun to recover actively and continued to demonstrate growth. This resurgence reflects the market participants' adaptability to new conditions. It's worth noting that many brands only unfroze their advertising budgets in 2023. Nevertheless, due to the mandatory advertising labeling, influencers have become more selective about advertising offers. Thus, despite the decrease in volumes, the market showcased resilience and rapid recovery, indicating its significance and prospects in the modern advertising industry.

At present, it can be stated that the cost of integrations with bloggers is increasing, especially after the blockade of certain advertising options on social media platforms. According to estimates from RBK, influencer earnings in the first quarter of 2023 grew by nearly 30%. Increased demand has made obtaining advertising integrations easier, resulting in the growth of micro (up to 100K) and nano bloggers (up to 10K followers). However, many influencers have faced a reduction in their usual income levels due to the suspension of monetization on YouTube and the introduction of mandatory advertising labeling, along with increased content production expenses. Prominent incidents involving popular info-business influencers have dealt a reputational blow to bloggers releasing informational products. Nonetheless, some brands still successfully use blogs for paid promotion on social media platforms, as it remains the only way to reach an audience on certain platforms.

In the realm of influencer marketing, a shift towards the Cost Per Action (CPA) payment model for integrations is observed, as it allows for more precise tracking of campaign results and the influencer's effectiveness. Brands see advantages in the ability to pay only for real outcomes, while influencers are incentivized to actively promote products, create higher quality and engaging content, thereby attracting new customers. To track effectiveness within the CPA model, special promo codes or UTM tags are typically used, enabling the differentiation of traffic sources.

Analysis of major advertisers collaborating with opinion leaders in the Russian-speaking segment showcases diverse directions and trends linked to changing consumer preferences and market conditions. Due to the departure of many foreign brands, lesser-known local companies find it easier to capture audience attention through collaborations with bloggers. In the field of education, including supplementary education, IT and language courses, as well as online professional training, influencers actively partner with educational companies and platforms offering various skill development opportunities. Such collaboration allows advertisers to present their educational offerings to a wide audience and attract new students. In the fashion and beauty segment, bloggers remain key figures for advertising cosmetic, clothing, and accessory stores as their opinions and recommendations exert a strong

influence on the audience. According to researchers, beauty bloggers play a pivotal role in promoting this niche, as they showcase products as integral to their personal practices, successfully engaging their audience in their consumption.

In the banking sector, influencer marketing has also become a popular channel for advertising, as opinion leaders can share their experiences using banking products and influence their audience's decision-making process. Additionally, users increasingly heed information from social media regarding health-related matters. Hence, advertisers are advised to associate their brand with physical or mental well-being, demonstrating care for clients and the benefits of their services. This is particularly relevant for organizations offering services in online psychological assistance, fitness subscription services, and other health and lifestyle improvement domains. Furthermore, advertising in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector as well as travel and tourism remains relevant for bloggers, providing new opportunities to promote products and services in these fields.

Speaking of innovative technologies, it's noteworthy that more than 50% of surveyed brands, according to the Influencer Marketing Benchmark Report 2023, plan to integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into the realm of influencer marketing for collaboration optimization and campaign planning. Ad agency Ogilvy highlights the growing popularity of joint projects, where clubs and creative communities collaborate with other sports, cultural, and commercial communities, yielding more impactful results compared to collaborations with individual bloggers due to the exchange of audiences across media platforms.

AI influencers, also known as virtual bloggers or digital influencers, represent a new form of influencer marketing where characters are created using artificial intelligence (AI), CGI technologies, and machine learning, and are then used to promote brands and products on social media. Virtual bloggers have already appeared in Russia [16]. Importantly, digital influencers have the ability to automatically create and publish content, making them highly effective tools for brand promotion and campaign management. This approach could become a promising direction in the future, as AI influencers are not restricted by the time and resources that apply to real individuals. Moreover, they can adapt to the interests and preferences of the audience, enabling more effective communication. However, it's crucial to note that digital influencers spark discussions about ethics and transparency, as their creation is facilitated by software, not real personalities. In this context, rules and regulations should be developed to ensure transparency in interactions with virtual bloggers, avoiding misleading consumers and upholding ethical principles in advertising.

Therefore, the current market of bloggers and influencer marketing is experiencing several significant trends that should be considered when organizing advertising campaigns with opinion leaders:

- The media landscape is still undergoing transformation, with a redistribution of social media audiences.
- Blocking advertising tools and the suspension of monetization have increased the demand for using influencers in advertising campaigns, as integrations offer a way to circumvent the ban on in-platform embedded ads and become the sole means of promotion.
- Cross-platform strategies involve bloggers not forsaking old channels but duplicating content on various social media platforms, achieving broad audience reach; integration costs, however, differ across platforms.
- High contact frequency: placements and integrations are done across multiple influencers simultaneously, and long-term collaborations facilitate more frequent interactions with potential buyers, enhancing their interest.
- The influencer marketing market also faces challenges: some brands are reducing advertising budgets or suspending marketing activities, creating opportunities for lesser-known companies to emerge. On the other hand, bloggers are becoming more selective about the advertising they host due to legislative changes.
- The transition to the CPA payment model for integrations in influencer marketing signifies a significant step towards more efficient and transparent interaction between brands and influencers, reflecting the desire to improve campaign results and increase audience engagement.

Research results demonstrate that collaboration with influencers enables companies to effectively penetrate different audience segments and shape positive perceptions of their products and values. Statistical data indicate that influencers are becoming an increasingly sought-after channel for advertising and marketing, with their role continuing to grow alongside the development of social media and digital technologies. These platforms provide space for interaction between influencers and their audience, offering broad possibilities for various advertising formats and mechanisms of influence.

In conclusion, influencer marketing remains one of the most effective and demanded approaches in modern advertising, with its role continuing to expand. Collaboration with bloggers, the use of social media, and creative approaches to marketing campaigns can deliver successful outcomes for brands and enhance their audience interaction. However, limitations arise in terms of limited control over content, dependence on influencer personal opinions, and potential threats to brand reputation in case of negative associations with a blogger. In the new landscape, influenced by media transformation and technological advancements, influencer marketing remains relevant and promising. With the emergence of AI influencers and virtual bloggers, new opportunities arise for brands to reach target audiences, while also increasing content control.

The prospects for further research in the field of influencer marketing encompass several interesting and relevant topics that can significantly contribute to the development of this field: analyzing the effectiveness of micro- and nano-influencers, studying audience reactions to different types of advertising content, exploring the dynamics of interaction between digital influencers and their audience, as well as investigating contemporary tools for shaping publicity and enhancing the visibility of opinion leaders in new realities.

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