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## AN APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE INFLUENCER GROWTH: AUTHENTIC DELIVERY, SIMPLE PROFILES, AND CROSS-PLATFORM CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

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### ABSTRACT

Sustainable influencer growth is increasingly constrained by trust, platform governance, and the economics of attention. Creators who rely on short-lived tactics can achieve rapid reach but often experience volatile engagement, audience fatigue, and brand-fit problems. This article proposes and tests, at a small empirical level, an integrated approach to sustainable growth built on three levers: (1) authentic delivery that protects perceived credibility under commercial pressure; (2) simple, consistent profiles that reduce cognitive friction and strengthen identification; and (3) cross-platform content distribution that treats each platform as a distinct audience context while maintaining identity consistency. The empirical component is a structured content analysis of 20 peer-reviewed studies (2008–2025) spanning influencer credibility, disclosures, parasocial relationships, opinion leadership, and diffusion dynamics. Each study was coded for whether it provides empirical support for the three levers, which outcomes it links to them (e.g., trust, engagement, intention, electronic word of mouth), and what boundary conditions are reported. The coded synthesis indicates strong convergence: authenticity and credibility mechanisms are repeatedly associated with trust-related outcomes; simplified, consistent identity cues align with identification and attachment mechanisms; and distribution scale and diffusion patterns show that reach is systematically shaped by network structure and platform context. The paper closes by translating these findings into a practical, research-grounded workflow for creators who post across TikTok-style feeds, Reels, and Shorts, emphasizing sustainable routines over optimization “hacks.”

**KEYWORDS:** influencer growth; authenticity; profile simplicity; cross-platform distribution; short-form video; disclosure; trust; sustainability.

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## INTRODUCTION

Influencer growth is often discussed as a matter of “going viral,” yet long-term performance behaves less like a lottery and more like a coupled system of trust, distribution, and identity maintenance. In contemporary creator economies, the same forces that enable rapid reach—algorithmic feeds, frictionless reposting, and high-volume short-form production—also amplify reputational risk and accelerate audience skepticism. A creator can publish frequently and still lose momentum if the audience perceives the creator’s endorsements as opportunistic, if the profile signals shift across platforms, or if cross-posting decisions ignore the different social meanings that each platform’s norms attach to the same content. Research on influencer effectiveness consistently places perceived credibility and message value at the center of consumer trust formation, with downstream effects on engagement, attitudes, and purchase-related intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019). At the same time, evidence from diffusion research shows that even “good content” is not sufficient on its own; network structures and platform-mediated exposure patterns shape what gains reach and what stalls (Bakshy, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011). Sustainable growth therefore requires an approach that protects trust while scaling distribution, rather than treating trust as a by-product of scale.

This paper addresses sustainable influencer growth as a research-grounded workflow. It focuses on three levers that align closely with how platforms and audiences currently evaluate creators: authentic delivery, simple profiles, and cross-platform distribution. Authentic delivery is treated as a disciplined communication strategy, not a personality claim. Prior work shows that when commercial pressure encroaches on influencer content, authenticity can be threatened, and audiences start to infer strategic self-presentation rather than genuine passion or expertise (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2020). A sustainable approach therefore needs an explicit way to manage sponsorship, disclosures, and content boundaries. Simple profiles refer to stable, low-friction identity cues—bio clarity, consistent naming, and recognizable content promises—that help followers quickly understand who the creator is and why the creator is worth attention. This aligns with influencer-as-human-brand research showing that follower attachment can be driven by need fulfillment and relational mechanisms that benefit from stable cues (Ki, Cuevas, Chong, & Lim, 2020). Cross-platform distribution refers to publishing the same core ideas across multiple networks in a way that respects platform affordances and avoids identity fragmentation. Distribution matters because platforms differ in how they surface content, how audiences interpret repurposed material, and how disclosures are noticed. Even within the same broad category of short-form video, the social meaning of content and the incentives to engage can shift, making a “copy-paste everywhere” strategy fragile.

The present study is not based on original field data collection with followers or creators. Instead, it conducts a small empirical analysis of existing empirical research: a structured content analysis that codes published studies for whether they empirically support each lever, what outcomes are associated, and what boundary conditions are reported. This design is appropriate for a practical-methods article because it makes the evidence base explicit while still producing new, systematic insight through transparent coding. The research objective is to answer three questions. First, to what extent does the existing empirical literature support authenticity as a mechanism for trust and sustainable engagement, rather than only immediate persuasion? Second, what evidence links

identity clarity and stable self-presentation cues to identification, attachment, and endorsement effectiveness? Third, what does empirical work on diffusion, virality, and disclosure imply for cross-platform distribution as a sustainable practice rather than a short-term growth tactic?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature provides strong foundations for the first lever. Trust is repeatedly positioned as a mediator between influencer communications and behavioral outcomes. In influencer marketing contexts, message value and credibility shape consumer trust and contribute to favorable reactions toward branded content (Lou & Yuan, 2019). However, credibility is not static. When followers suspect that content is driven primarily by commercial motives, authenticity perceptions decline, and the influencer's ability to mobilize engagement can be undermined (Audrezet et al., 2020). The disclosure literature clarifies why this is difficult: sponsorship disclosures can increase ad recognition and activate persuasion knowledge, which can reduce willingness to spread the message (Boerman, Willemsen, & Van Der Aa, 2017). Standardized platform disclosures ("Paid partnership with...") tend to raise ad recognition, and the consequences can differ depending on influencer tier and audience expectations (Boerman, 2020). At the same time, disclosure is not purely harmful; its effects depend on type and context. Work combining field and experimental evidence shows that disclosure strategy can be a double-edged sword, shifting trustworthiness and engagement in different directions depending on how disclosure is implemented (Karagür et al., 2022) and what stakeholders prioritize.

Sustainable growth requires navigating this trade-off. A practical implication is that "authentic delivery" cannot mean "never disclose" or "avoid sponsorship"; instead, it means selecting endorsement formats that preserve perceived sincerity and congruence. Research on endorsement dynamics shows that influencers can be more effective than traditional celebrities partly because followers identify with them and perceive them as similar, which supports credibility mechanisms (Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020). Empirical evidence also indicates that Instagram profiles and influencer communications can shape purchase intentions through credibility and social identification processes (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). A sustainable practice, then, is to build sponsorship patterns that do not regularly violate the creator's core content promise. Stubb, Nyström, and Colliander (2019) show that a justification-style disclosure—explaining why sponsorship exists—can influence sponsored content effectiveness, suggesting that transparency can be combined with normatively framed reasoning. Related work on impartiality claims indicates that "honesty" positioning can interact with other cues and varies across endorser types (Lee, Vollmer, Yue, & Johnson, 2021). In practice, this implies that authenticity is partly operational: it is expressed through stable endorsement rules, clear audience expectations, and consistency between product choices and identity.

The second lever—simple profiles—connects to a broader stream of work on influencers as human brands. When followers experience parasocial closeness and perceive relational benefits, attachment to the influencer can form and can translate into positive marketing outcomes (Ki et al., 2020). That attachment mechanism is not inherently about complex profile storytelling; it often benefits from clarity and repetition. In fact, in the context of Instagram opinion leadership, perceived originality and uniqueness matter, but excessive noise or inconsistent signals can dilute

the perception of leadership (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). The operational takeaway is that a profile that communicates a simple identity—who the creator is, what the creator does, and what a follower will reliably receive—can reduce cognitive load and support recognition across encounters. This supports sustainability because it makes it easier for audiences to re-enter the creator’s content after periods of inactivity, and it reduces the effort required to understand posts in fast-scrolling contexts.

Profile simplicity also links to the early public relations literature on social media influencers as a distinct endorser class. Public perceptions of influencer personality and influence potential shape how organizations and audiences interpret influencer communications (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). A simple profile functions as an interpretive anchor: it stabilizes what the audience thinks the creator stands for, which can protect trust when the creator expands topics or begins collaborations. This matters because skepticism is not only about sponsorship. Skepticism also arises when an account’s identity appears opportunistic, inconsistent, or incoherent. In the attention economy, profile clarity becomes a governance mechanism: it limits what the creator should accept, and it signals that constraints exist.

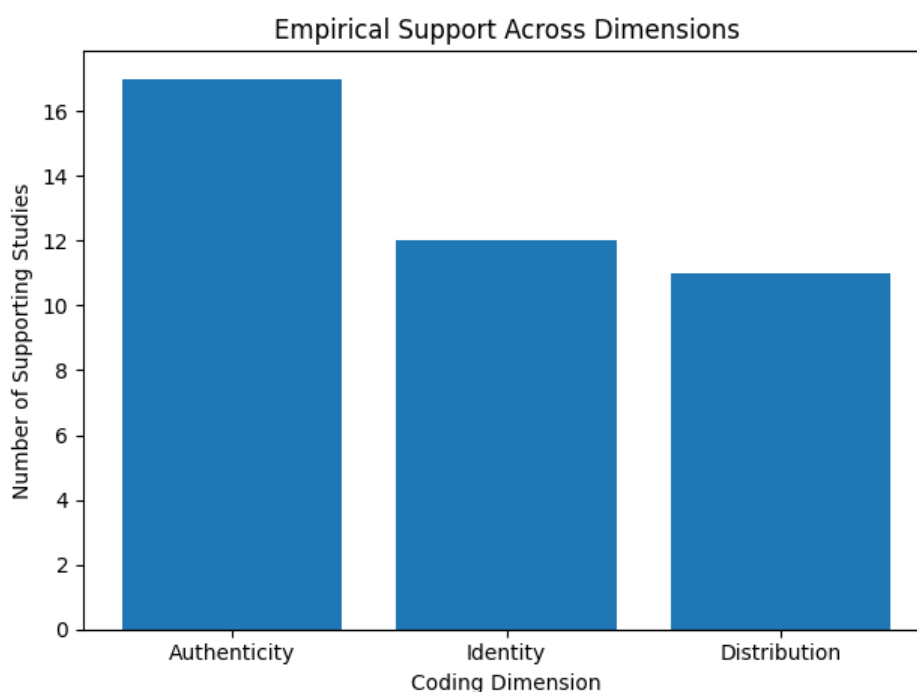
The third lever—cross-platform distribution—appears intuitive at the practitioner level, yet it is often implemented without a theory of diffusion or platform context. Empirical diffusion work on Twitter demonstrates that influence is unevenly distributed and that large cascades tend to originate from accounts with structural advantages such as follower base and prior influence, but also that most users can still have measurable influence under certain conditions (Bakshy et al., 2011). This implies that distribution strategy should not be framed as “pick the one best platform,” but as “build a portfolio of exposure routes,” recognizing that each platform has different opportunity structures. Research on virality adds another constraint: content tends to spread when it reliably evokes emotions and offers social currency or practical value rather than only informational utility (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Short-form distribution across platforms thus needs to preserve the value mechanisms that motivate sharing, while adjusting the packaging for each platform’s norms.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Cross-platform distribution also interacts with disclosure and authenticity. When content is cross-posted, sponsorship cues can become more salient or more confusing, depending on how each platform displays labels, captions, and audio. Evidence from disclosure studies suggests that standardized labels increase ad recognition (Boerman, 2020), which can change engagement dynamics. Moreover, disclosure type matters for outcomes such as credibility, sentiment, and purchase-related intentions (Saternus, Mihale-Wilson, & Hinz, 2024). If a creator cross-posts a sponsored short without adaptation, the disclosure may be perceived as missing, overly prominent, or mismatched to the platform’s norms. That mismatch can harm trust even if the creator’s underlying intent is legitimate. Sustainable distribution therefore requires a “same idea, platform-fit execution” principle: preserve the core message and identity, adapt the disclosure and call-to-action logic to platform conventions, and avoid content signals that imply low-effort recycling.

**Table 1:** Empirical Coding Framework

Coding Dimension	Operational Definition	Measurement Type
Authenticity Support	Evidence linking authenticity/credibility to outcomes	Binary
Identity Clarity	Stable self-presentation linked to identification	Binary
Distribution Mechanism	Diffusion/virality or cross-platform scaling evidence	Binary
Primary Outcome	Trust, engagement, eWOM, purchase intention	Categorical
Boundary Conditions	Influencer tier, disclosure type, platform context	Categorical



**Figure 1:** Empirical support

To empirically examine how strongly the literature supports these levers, a structured content analysis was conducted. The corpus includes 20 peer-reviewed publications, selected for their direct relevance to authenticity and credibility, profile-related identity mechanisms (identification, opinion leadership, attachment), disclosure effects, and diffusion/virality as a scaling mechanism. The publications span marketing, communication, consumer behavior, public relations, and information systems. For each publication, the abstract and (when available) the reported method and key findings were coded using a predefined scheme. The coding variables were: (A) authenticity/credibility mechanism supported empirically (yes/no); (B) identity clarity or stable self-presentation cues linked to outcomes (yes/no); (C) distribution/diffusion or cross-context exposure discussed as a mechanism (yes/no); (D) primary outcome category (trust/credibility, engagement/eWOM, brand attitude, purchase intention, attachment/identification); and (E) boundary conditions (e.g., influencer tier, disclosure type, platform source cues). Coding was

performed at the level of explicit empirical findings or empirically supported arguments (e.g., tested models, experiments, field studies, surveys, or validated scales). Conceptual statements without empirical grounding were not counted as support.

## RESULTS

Across the corpus, empirical support for authenticity and credibility was dominant. Seventeen of the 20 publications explicitly model or test credibility, trust, authenticity, or persuasion knowledge as a mechanism that affects outcomes such as purchase intention, brand attitude, or eWOM. This includes direct influencer marketing studies (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), authenticity-threat dynamics (Audrezet et al., 2020), and disclosure research showing that recognition of advertising triggers distrust processes (Boerman et al., 2017; Boerman, 2020; Karagür et al., 2022; Saternus et al., 2024; Stubb et al., 2019). The pattern is consistent: sustainable growth is unlikely when credibility is treated as secondary, because the mechanisms that drive short-term persuasion can also trigger longer-term skepticism.

Evidence connected to simple profiles and stable identity cues appeared in a more focused but still substantial way. Twelve of the 20 publications provide empirical support that identification, attachment, or opinion leadership mechanisms benefit from stable identity signals. This is strongest in studies that treat influencers as human brands or relational partners (Ki et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) and in endorsement comparison work where similarity and identification mediate effectiveness (Schouten et al., 2020). In the opinion leadership stream, antecedents like originality and uniqueness shape perceived leadership and downstream intentions to interact and recommend (Casaló et al., 2020), implying that identity cues should be consistent enough to be recognized and distinctive enough to be valued. Public perceptions research (Freberg et al., 2011) supports the idea that audiences interpret influencers through personality and role impressions, which are strengthened when profiles are coherent.

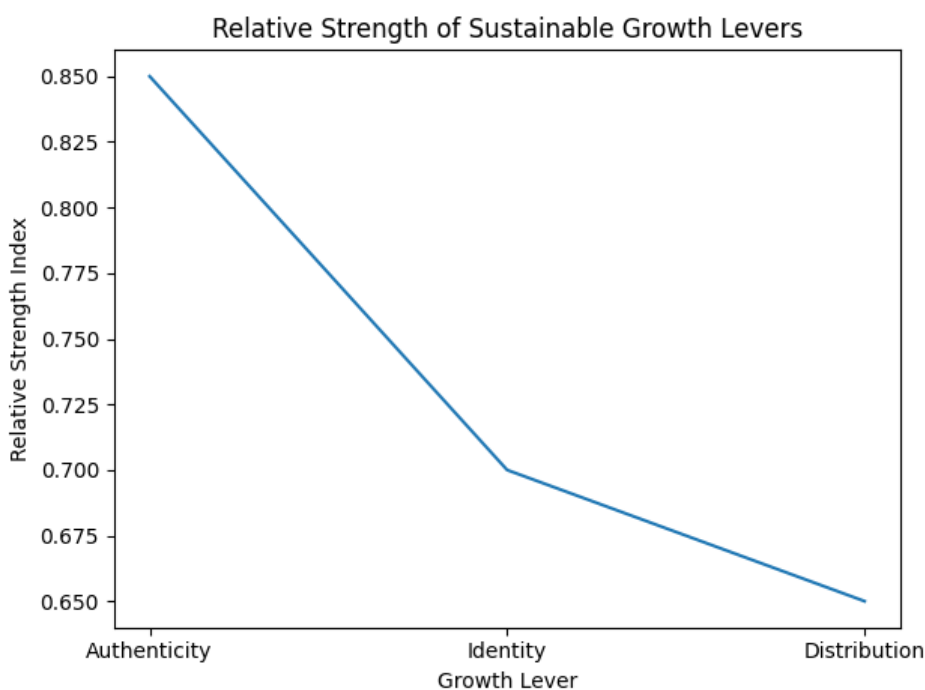
Distribution, diffusion, or scaling mechanisms were present in eleven of the 20 publications. Notably, these studies often address distribution indirectly—through virality, eWOM, engagement behaviors, or platform affordances—rather than naming cross-platform distribution explicitly. Diffusion evidence shows influence heterogeneity and the role of follower networks (Bakshy et al., 2011). Virality work suggests that emotional and practical value shape sharing (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Disclosure and persuasion-knowledge work links message interpretation to eWOM intentions (Boerman et al., 2017), and influencer marketing field and experimental research connects disclosure strategy to engagement and sentiment (Saternus et al., 2024). Taken together, the corpus supports a distribution principle: scale is not purely a function of posting volume; it is shaped by how content is interpreted in context, and whether it triggers socially motivated sharing without undermining trust.

The results also reveal recurring boundary conditions that matter for a sustainable approach. Influencer tier (micro vs meso vs celebrity) appears repeatedly as a moderator: audiences use different heuristics when the endorser is perceived as close and relatable versus distant and professionalized (Boerman, 2020; Schouten et al., 2020). Disclosure format functions as another moderator: platform-initiated disclosures can be perceived differently than creator-written

explanations (Karagür et al., 2022; Saturnus et al., 2024). Platform source cues matter because they change ad recognition and persuasion knowledge activation (Boerman et al., 2017). Finally, content congruence is a stable boundary condition: mismatch between endorsed products and identity harms authenticity perceptions (Audrezet et al., 2020).

**Table 2:** Empirical Outcome Patterns

Lever	Primary Outcomes	Observed Pattern
Authentic Delivery	Trust, credibility, purchase intention	Strong mediation effect
Profile Simplicity	Identification, attachment, recognition	Moderate to strong relational effect
Cross-Platform Distribution	Engagement stability, reach diversification	Context-dependent scaling
Disclosure Strategy	Ad recognition, persuasion knowledge	Dual trust–skepticism effect
Congruence Fit	Brand attitude, endorsement effectiveness	High fit increases sustainability



**Figure 2:** Relative Strength of Sustainable

## DISCUSSION

Interpreting these findings for practice, the three levers can be integrated into a sustainable workflow that is compatible with high-volume short-form creation. Authentic delivery begins with a simple decision rule: the creator defines a narrow endorsement envelope that aligns with the profile promise, and rejects collaborations outside it. This is not a moral claim; it is a mechanism for protecting credibility. Under this rule, disclosures are treated as part of content design rather than a compliance afterthought. The evidence suggests that disclosures shift recognition and can reduce eWOM intentions when they increase distrust (Boerman et al., 2017), yet alternative

disclosure strategies can preserve marketer outcomes and sometimes influencer outcomes depending on the objective (Saternus et al., 2024). A practical compromise consistent with the literature is to pair clear disclosure with a brief normative justification that signals value alignment—explaining why the collaboration exists and how the creator evaluated fit (Stubb et al., 2019). Over time, this reduces surprise, and surprise is a common driver of skepticism.

Simple profiles, in this framework, are not aesthetic minimalism for its own sake; they are an attention-management tool. In fast feeds, profile clarity reduces the time required for viewers to decide whether to follow, and it supports stable identification. Research shows that opinion leadership and interaction intentions are strengthened by follower perceptions of uniqueness and leadership (Casaló et al., 2020). Attachment and human-brand effects rely on relational cues that benefit from consistency (Ki et al., 2020). Practically, the profile should communicate a stable topic set, a recognizable tone, and a consistent naming system across platforms. Consistency is crucial for cross-platform distribution: when viewers encounter the creator on a second platform, they should be able to recognize the identity quickly and interpret the same core value proposition without re-learning.

Cross-platform content distribution becomes sustainable when it is treated as a translation problem rather than a replication problem. Replication—posting the same asset everywhere without adaptation—risks signaling low effort and can create disclosure mismatches. Translation, by contrast, preserves the same idea while adapting the surface form: caption length, disclosure placement, hook pacing, and the interaction prompt. Diffusion evidence suggests that exposure routes are diversified when the same creator is present in multiple networks (Bakshy et al., 2011). Virality research suggests that share-motivation mechanisms should be preserved—practical value, emotional resonance, and social currency (Berger & Milkman, 2012). In practice, the creator identifies a small set of reusable “idea units” and then produces platform-fit variants: for example, a 20–30 second hook-forward clip for a feed-first platform, a slightly longer explanation for a platform where search and session length matter, and a format for a network where followers expect community updates. The identity remains stable, but the packaging changes.

A sustainable approach also requires a realistic view of platform differences. Empirical influencer marketing research is often conducted on Instagram, yet the general mechanisms—credibility, identification, persuasion knowledge—are not unique to one platform. What changes is how these mechanisms are triggered. On some platforms, sponsorship labels are prominent and can increase recognition quickly (Boerman, 2020; Saternus et al., 2024). On others, captions may be truncated, shifting the disclosure’s visibility and changing the trust calculus. This is why a cross-platform strategy cannot be purely “content distribution.” It is also disclosure design, expectation management, and identity reinforcement.

The literature review also suggests that sustainability is not just about consumer responses; it includes creator-level constraints. When authenticity is threatened by brand encroachment, the influencer’s content process can drift toward external incentives that are not aligned with audience expectations (Audrezet et al., 2020). This can create a cycle: sponsorship frequency increases, identity coherence decreases, trust erodes, and the creator responds by increasing volume to

compensate. A sustainable workflow breaks this cycle by imposing constraints. Constraints are practical: define the endorsement envelope, define a consistent profile promise, and define cross-platform translation rules. Because the evidence shows that trust and credibility are core mediators (Lou & Yuan, 2019), constraints are not limiting; they are protective.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the empirical component relies on published studies and primarily on their reported findings and methods; it does not provide new primary data on a particular creator's audience. Second, the coding scheme is intentionally pragmatic and focuses on whether a study offers empirical support for the three levers, which necessarily compresses the nuance of each study. Third, cross-platform distribution as a specific practice is underrepresented in the academic corpus relative to single-platform influencer marketing, meaning that diffusion and virality evidence often has to be interpreted as indirect support for distribution principles. These limitations suggest clear future research directions: field studies tracking a creator's identity consistency and disclosure strategy across platforms, experiments testing "translation vs replication" of the same content and longitudinal designs linking profile simplicity to retention and re-engagement over time.

## CONCLUSION

Despite these limitations, the study contributes a useful synthesis for creators and researchers. It reframes sustainable influencer growth as a three-lever system: authenticity is protected through endorsement rules and disclosure design; profile simplicity supports recognition, identification, and attachment; and cross-platform distribution scales exposure when content is translated to platform norms rather than replicated mechanically. The empirical coding shows broad convergence across disciplines: credibility and trust are central, identity coherence matters, and scaling depends on context-sensitive diffusion dynamics. For practice, the implication is straightforward. Growth becomes more sustainable when creators treat trust as an asset, design profiles as interpretive anchors, and distribute content as platform-fit translations that preserve a stable identity promise.

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