

**Mini Review**

Copyright © All rights are reserved by Eline Nicolas

The Role of Influencer Marketing in Enhancing Transparency of Production Conditions Along the Supply Chain: The Case of Shein

Eline Nicolas^{*1}, Sandra Rimbart²*Doctor of Management Sciences Lecturer at the University of Orléans, France****Corresponding author:** Eline Nicolas, Doctor of Management Sciences
Lecturer at the University of Orléans, France**Received Date:** June 29, 2026**Published Date:** July 15, 2026**Mini Review**

The globalization of supply chains has profoundly transformed corporate production models by fragmenting activities among a multitude of actors distributed across the world. This organization increases the difficulty of monitoring the practices implemented by suppliers and subcontractors. In this context, companies are now expected to ensure that working conditions throughout their supply chains comply with human rights standards. However, information asymmetries, opportunistic behavior, and contractual limitations make it difficult to effectively monitor suppliers' practices. These social and environmental risks can damage corporate reputation and erode consumer trust. Consequently, transparency has become a major strategic challenge [1].

Although audits, certifications, collaborative platforms (cloud computing), and technological tools (blockchain, RFID, ERP systems) have improved traceability among supply chain actors, they remain primarily oriented toward business-to-business relationships and provide limited visibility for end consumers [2]. In this context, influencer marketing offers new opportunities to reduce information asymmetry and emerges as a complementary mechanism for enhancing transparency. Influencers can become genuine communication channels regarding production conditions and brands' ethical commitments. Moreover, the trust they cultivate with their communities generates reactions that reveal consumers' expectations concerning corporate responsibility.

The authors analyze the response strategies adopted by influencers following a wave of community activism triggered by a partnership with the Chinese e-commerce giant Shein. They demonstrate that followers' reactions constitute a valuable source of information regarding societal expectations in terms of corporate social responsibility. Consequently, influencers and their audiences can become key actors in promoting transparency downstream in the supply chain, encouraging companies to improve their social practices and communicate more credibly about their commitments [3].

The development of digital marketing and social media has transformed consumers into content creators through User-Generated Content (UGC), fostering the emergence of virtual communities based on shared interests, reciprocity, and trust. Within this environment, influencers occupy a central position because of their ability to build audiences, disseminate information, and influence purchasing behavior [4]. Beyond their commercial role, influencers can also raise awareness among their communities about societal issues, particularly working conditions and companies' environmental commitments, by making information that was previously difficult for end consumers to access more widely available. Their credibility and persuasive power are based both on their expertise as opinion leaders and on the parasocial relationships they establish with their followers, creating a climate of trust that can reinforce the credibility of brand messages.

Through a halo effect, this trust may also extend to the supply chain of the company with which the influencer collaborates.

However, the transparency generated through influencer marketing largely depends on the authenticity of both partnerships and the content shared by influencers. Communities assess the consistency between influencers declared values and those of the brands they promote [5]. When this consistency is perceived as genuine, influencers contribute to improving consumer information and highlighting companies' social commitments. Conversely, partnerships perceived as opportunistic or insufficiently transparent fuel distrust and may be regarded as manipulative. The article concludes that influencer marketing represents a promising tool for reducing uncertainty surrounding production conditions, provided that influence strategies are grounded in authentic and transparent communication, thereby fostering greater social responsibility throughout the supply chain.

The case of Shein provides a particularly revealing context for this analysis. Within only a few years, the Chinese company has become one of the world's leading ultra-fast fashion retailers. Its highly digitalized supply chain enables it to design, manufacture, and market several thousand new products every week. However, this logistical performance has been accompanied by persistent criticism regarding working conditions among its subcontractors. Controversies concerning excessive working hours, wages, and labor rights have gradually increased consumer distrust toward the brand, precisely when the company sought to strengthen its credibility ahead of its planned initial public offering (IPO). Against this backdrop, Shein organized a brand trip in 2023, inviting several American lifestyle influencers to visit one of its factories in Guangzhou, China. The objective was clear: to use influencer marketing as a transparency tool in order to demonstrate acceptable working conditions and restore consumer confidence [6]. However, rather than achieving the expected outcome, the campaign triggered significant backlash on social media, as the content shared by the influencers was widely challenged by their online communities.

To examine this campaign, the authors adopted a qualitative ethnographic approach. They analyzed a corpus of videos published by the six influencers, as well as their subsequent public statements following the backlash generated by the trip. Using thematic analysis supported by NVivo software, the study aimed to understand how influencers respond when their authenticity is questioned by their communities [7].

The findings reveal that trust between influencers and their followers is a fundamental component of brand communication. However, when this trust is weakened, content creators adopt three main response strategies, referred to as the "3Ds". Diversion strategy consists of redirecting attention away from controversies by emphasizing the tourist, technological, or emotional aspects of the trip [8]. Defense strategy involves justifying participation by relying on personal experience, information provided by Shein, or the audits announced by the company. And Desolation strategy is characterized by apologies, acknowledgment of insufficient prior

research, and a willingness to learn from the experience.

Beyond these response strategies, the study makes two original managerial contributions.

First, the findings suggest that influencer marketing operates as a dual mechanism for amplifying transparency. The first mechanism is driven by influencers themselves, who, by sharing their experiences and observations, make information about production processes, working conditions, and subcontractors' governance practices accessible to end consumers. In doing so, influencers help reduce the information asymmetries traditionally observed in the downstream part of the supply chain [9].

The second mechanism emerges when influencer communication is challenged by online communities. When published content is not perceived as sufficiently authentic, followers do more than simply express disagreement. They become transparency actors themselves by questioning promotional narratives, articulating new expectations toward the brand, and actively contributing to the circulation of information regarding production conditions. Consequently, backlash extends beyond criticism of influencer communication to become a form of citizen oversight capable of challenging corporate narratives and revealing information that institutional communications often fail to disclose. The authors emphasize that both trust and distrust toward influencers are transferred to the associated brand, creating a genuine halo effect. This phenomenon highlights the growing role of influencer activism in enhancing supply chain transparency [10].

Second, comments, reactions, and interactions within influencer communities constitute what the authors describe as "raw influencer data." These qualitative data, freely generated on social media, could be integrated into Supply Chain Management tools to detect early warning signals, improve transparency, and guide corporate social responsibility initiatives [11]. Through their amplifying effect, these data could encourage companies to strengthen the monitoring of their social and environmental practices throughout the entire supply chain.

The authors conclude that influencer marketing can contribute sustainably to supply chain transparency only when it is based on authentic and credible partnerships. Otherwise, consumers' digital activism becomes a powerful counterforce capable of sanctioning practices perceived as misleading and encouraging companies to improve their social performance over the long term. Consequently, brands can no longer view influencers merely as ambassadors responsible for disseminating promotional messages [12]. Together with their communities, influencers have become integral components of an information ecosystem that actively contributes to building transparency throughout global supply chains.

References

1. Audrezet A, G de Kerviler, J Guidry Moulard (2020) Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research* 117: PP 557-569.
2. D'Arco M, G Branca, V Marino, R Resciniti (2024) Influencer Activism: Insights for Effective Partnership with Brands and Organizations. *Psychology and Marketing* 42(3): PP 741-766.

3. Farivar S, F Wang, Y Yuan (2021) Opinion leadership vs. Para-social relationship: key factors in influencer marketing. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 59: PP 1-11.
4. Harrigan P, TM Daly, K Coussement, JA Lee, GN Soutar, et al. (2021) Identifying Influencers on social media. *International Journal of Information Management* 56: 102246.
5. Jin S, A Muqaddam (2019) Product placement 2.0: Do brands need influencers, or do influencers need brands? *Journal of Brand Management* 26(5): 522-537.
6. Khan M, GS Parvaiz, AT Dedahanov, OS Abdurazzakov DA Rakhmonov (2022) The Impact of Technologies of Traceability and Transparency in Supply Chains. *Sustainability* 14(24), 16336.
7. Lee A, S Sudarshan, K Sussman, L Bright, M Eastin (2022) Why are consumer following social media influencers on instagram? Exploration of consumers' motives for following influencers and the rôle of materialism. *International Journal of Adverstising* 41(1): 78-100.
8. Leung F, F Gu, Y Li, J Zhang, R Palmatier (2022) Influencer marketing effectiveness. *Journal of Marketing* 86(6): 93-115.
9. Mani V, CJ Chiappetta-Jabbour, K Mani (2020) Supply chain social sustainability in small and medium manufacturing enterprises and firms' performance: empirical evidence from an emerging Asian economy. *International Journal of Production Economics* 227.
10. Montecchi M, K Plangger, DC West (2021) Supply chain transparency: A bibliometric review and research agenda. *International Journal of Production Economics* 238: 108152.
11. Ojha R, A Ghadge, MK Tiwari, U Bittitci (2018) Bayesian network modelling for supply chain risk propagation. *International Journal of Production Research* 56(17): PP 5795-5819.
12. Thomas VL, K Fowler (2023) Examining the Outcomes of Influencer Activism. *Journal of Business Research* 154: 113336.