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Deceptive Influencer Marketing: Consequences for Consumers, Brands, Public Trust and Influencers

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ABSTRACT: Influencer marketing has become a central channel of commercial persuasion, yet its commercial value rests on a fragile asset: the audience's belief that a recommendation is sincere, informed and honestly labelled. This article examines what happens when that belief is exploited through deceptive practices, including undisclosed paid endorsements, false or unsubstantiated claims, fabricated reviews and followers, and the promotion of counterfeit, unsafe or fraudulent products. Drawing on persuasion-knowledge theory, information economics, and a structured reading of regulatory enforcement actions, academic studies and institutional reports, the article traces consequences across four groups. Consumers suffer financial loss, health risk and manipulated choice. Brand owners and legitimate creators face dilution of intellectual property, price and reputation damage, and unfair competition. The wider influencer economy suffers an erosion of public trust that raises the cost of every honest message. Influencers themselves face platform bans, settlements, civil penalties and, increasingly, criminal prosecution. The article argues that these harms are interdependent rather than separate, because they flow through a shared trust mechanism, and that effective governance therefore requires coordinated action by regulators, platforms, brands, agencies and creators. Practical implications and directions for future research are outlined.

KEYWORDS: influencer marketing, deceptive advertising, endorsement disclosure, consumer protection, counterfeit goods, platform governance, trust

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1. INTRODUCTION

The influencer economy has moved from the margins of marketing to its centre. Industry estimates placed global spending on influencer marketing at more than USD 20 billion in 2023, and analysts have valued the wider creator economy at roughly a quarter of a trillion dollars, with forecasts of near doubling by 2027 (Goldman Sachs, 2023; Influencer Marketing Hub, 2024). These figures should be read as indicative, since definitions vary between sources. What is not in doubt is that social media personalities now shape purchasing in categories as diverse as cosmetics, food supplements, fashion, financial products, travel and consumer electronics.

The reason for this influence is psychological as much as technological. Influencers are perceived as more relatable and more credible than conventional advertisers, because audiences follow them voluntarily, feel they know them, and attribute their recommendations to personal experience instead of commercial motive (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Horton and Wohl's (1956) classic account of para-social interaction, the one-sided intimacy that audiences feel toward media figures, has acquired new force in an environment where creators address followers directly, daily and informally. Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki and Wilner (2010) showed earlier that marketing messages embedded in communal conversation are persuasive precisely because they do not look like marketing.

This same property creates the conditions for abuse. When commercial intent is hidden, when claims are false, when social proof is purchased, or when the product itself is counterfeit, dangerous or fraudulent, the very qualities that make influencer communication effective become the instruments of harm. Regulators on several continents have responded. The United States Federal Trade Commission (FTC) revised its Endorsement Guides in 2023 and issued a rule in 2024 prohibiting fake reviews and the purchase of fake social media indicators (Federal Trade Commission, 2023, 2024). The European Union's consumer authorities have conducted

coordinated sweeps of influencer content, France has enacted a dedicated influencer law, the United Kingdom has expanded direct fining powers, and India has issued endorsement guidelines that impose duties on endorsers themselves.

Despite this activity, the literature remains fragmented. Studies of disclosure effects, studies of counterfeit consumption, studies of fake reviews and legal analyses of enforcement are generally conducted in separate disciplinary silos. Few works ask a simple integrative question: who bears the cost when influencer communication is deceptive, and how do those costs relate to one another? This article addresses that question. Its central claim is that consequences for consumers, brands, the public and influencers are not parallel streams but connected links in a single chain of trust, so that harm to one group predictably becomes harm to the others.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What counts as deceptive influencer marketing

Deceptive influencer marketing refers to commercial communication delivered through an individual's social media presence that misleads, or is likely to mislead, the audience in a way that affects their decisions. Five overlapping practices recur in the enforcement record and the research literature.

a. *Concealed commercial relationships*. Payment, free products, commissions, equity or other material connections are not disclosed, or are disclosed in ways that audiences cannot reasonably notice or understand.
b. *False or unsubstantiated claims*. The influencer asserts product benefits, such as weight loss, medical effects or investment returns, that lack evidence.
c. *Fabricated social proof*. Reviews, testimonials, followers, likes or views are bought, invented or manipulated to inflate apparent popularity and credibility.
d. *Promotion of counterfeit or unsafe goods*. The product infringes intellectual property, fails safety standards or is falsely represented as authentic.
e. *Promotion of fraudulent schemes.* The content advances scams, unregistered investment products, rigged giveaways or illegal gambling, whether knowingly or through reckless failure to check.

2.2 Persuasion knowledge and the disclosure problem

The Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright, 1994) holds that people develop folk theories about how persuaders operate, and use these theories to cope with persuasion attempts. Where audiences recognise an advertisement, they can activate scepticism and discount the message. Disclosure rules rest on this logic: a label restores the information needed to trigger persuasion knowledge. Empirical work supports the mechanism while also revealing its limits. Boerman, Willemsen and Van Der Aa (2017) found that sponsorship disclosure raised recognition of advertising on social media, and Evans, Phua, Lim and Jun (2017) showed that clearer disclosure language increased advertising recognition and tended to lower attitudes and behavioural intentions. Wojdynski and Evans (2016) found that the position and wording of labels strongly shaped whether people noticed them at all.

The implication is that concealment is not a technicality. It disables the audience's primary defence. A consumer who does not know that a "personal discovery" is a paid placement cannot discount it, and the influencer thereby obtains persuasive power that the audience has not agreed to grant.

2.3 Information asymmetry and credence goods

Information economics offers a second lens. Nelson (1970) distinguished search goods, whose quality can be judged before purchase, from experience goods, whose quality is revealed through use. Darby and Karni (1973) added credence goods, whose quality consumers cannot readily verify even after consumption, such as dietary supplements or financial advice. Many of the products most frequently promoted through deceptive influencer content are experience or credence goods. In such markets, buyers depend on signals, and Akerlof's (1970) analysis of the "market for lemons" shows that when buyers cannot distinguish good from bad quality, low-quality sellers can drive out high-quality ones. Influencers are signal providers. If the signal is corrupted, the market loses its ability to reward quality.

2.4 An integrative trust-chain model

Combining these perspectives, the article adopts a trust-chain model. Audience trust in an influencer is converted into trust in a product and its brand, and is aggregated into trust in the wider category of influencer communication. Deception injures each link. At the consumer level it produces direct loss. At the brand level it distorts competition. At the system level it depresses the baseline credibility of all creators. At the influencer level it eventually destroys the asset on which their income depends.

3. CONSEQUENCES FOR CONSUMERS

3.1 Financial loss

Direct financial harm is the most visible consequence. It takes several forms: money paid for products that do not perform as claimed, money paid above the fair value implied by false endorsement, money lost to fraudulent schemes, and indirect costs such as the time and expense of seeking refunds.

The FTC's *Consumer Sentinel* data have consistently shown that social media is a major starting point for reported fraud, with annual reported losses to scams originating on social platforms running to more than a billion US dollars in recent years (Federal Trade Commission, 2023a). Because these figures capture only reported losses, they are best viewed as a floor. Investment promotion is particularly costly. When the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) charged Kim Kardashian in 2022 for promoting a crypto asset security without disclosing a payment of USD 250,000, it noted that the failure deprived followers of information relevant to their decisions, and she agreed to pay approximately USD 1.26 million in penalties, disgorgement and interest (U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, 2022). Earlier, in 2018, the SEC settled with boxer Floyd Mayweather Jr. and music producer DJ Khaled over undisclosed promotion of initial coin offerings (U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, 2018). The orders did not establish that every follower lost money. They established that audiences were deprived of the information that a paid relationship existed, which is the harm the disclosure regime targets.

A distinct mechanism of loss is impersonation. Fraudsters increasingly use the faces, voices and names of well-known creators and public figures, now often through synthetic media, to advertise investment schemes and giveaways. The UK consumer finance campaigner Martin Lewis, for example, was repeatedly impersonated in fake advertisements in 2023 for investment products he had never endorsed (BBC News, 2023). Impersonation matters here because it shows how the borrowed credibility of influencer culture is itself a target. Consumers who have learned to trust creators become more exposed to counterfeit creators.

3.2 Health risk

When deception concerns products that people ingest, apply to their bodies or rely on for treatment, financial loss is joined by physical risk. Three channels are prominent. The first is unsubstantiated health claims. Weight-loss teas, detox products, hair-growth gummies and similar supplements are heavily promoted by influencers, often with before-and-after imagery and personal anecdote. In the FTC's 2020 action against the tea company Teami, the agency alleged that claims about weight loss and other health effects were unsupported, and that the company's celebrity and influencer posts did not disclose paid relationships. The case ended in a settlement with a large monetary judgment that was suspended because of inability to pay (Federal Trade Commission, 2020). The point for present purposes is the pairing: concealment of the commercial relationship and the promotion of unproven claims typically occur together, so that consumers lack both the cue to be sceptical and the evidence to evaluate the claim.

The second channel is counterfeit and falsified products. The OECD and the European Union Intellectual Property Office (2019) estimated that trade in counterfeit and pirated goods amounted to as much as 3.3 per cent of world trade in 2016, equivalent to roughly USD 509 billion. Not all counterfeit goods are hazardous, but the category includes cosmetics, skincare, electrical goods, toys and medicines, where noncompliant manufacturing can cause burns, allergic reactions, poisoning or fire. The World Health Organization (2024) issued an alert on falsified semaglutide products, the active ingredient in several high-demand weight-management medicines, after confirmed detection of fake products in multiple regions. When social media accounts promote cheap access to scarce medicines, the audience may have no means of checking provenance.

The third channel is the promotion of risky behaviour and the erosion of medical advice. Content that normalises extreme dieting, unproven treatments or the avoidance of professional care can delay diagnosis and treatment. Here the harm is less about a specific product than about authority: an influencer's confident personal narrative may outweigh a clinician's measured advice for people who identify with the creator. The evidence base on long-term health outcomes from influencer exposure remains thin, and causal claims should be cautious. Nevertheless, the regulatory record shows consistent concern that health claims by non-experts, delivered through intimate and trusted channels, warrant stricter scrutiny than ordinary product claims.

3.3 Manipulated choice

The third category is subtler and in some respects more fundamental: the loss of autonomous decision-making. Even where the purchased product is harmless and performs adequately, consumers whose choices were shaped by concealed incentives have not chosen on the terms they believed.

Several mechanisms are documented. Concealed sponsorship defeats the persuasion knowledge discussed. Fabricated social proof exploits the heuristic that popularity signals quality. Cresci, Di Pietro, Petrocchi, Spognardi and Tesconi (2015) showed that fake followers can be bought cheaply and at scale, and the later *New York Times* investigation into a major follower-selling firm documented how widely inflated metrics had spread among public figures (Confessore, Dance, Harris, & Hansen, 2018). On review platforms, Luca and Zervas (2016) found that fake reviews were more prevalent where businesses had weaker reputations or faced stiffer competition, and Mayzlin, Dover and Chevalier (2014) found evidence of promotional manipulation of reviews by hotels. He, Hollenbeck and Proserpio (2022) documented an active market for fake reviews, with sellers recruiting buyers through social channels and often compensating them. Each of these studies concerns reviews instead of influencers narrowly, but the mechanism is identical: manufactured signals of consensus.

Other practices influence choice through design. Scarcity cues ("only 24 hours left"), discount codes presented as exclusive, and countdown timers are widely used in influencer-led sales. The dark-patterns literature shows that such cues are often engineered to pressure decisions instead of informing them (Mathur et al., 2019). When embedded in a creator's warm, informal address, they carry added force because they come from someone the audience believes is on its side.

4. CONSEQUENCES FOR BRAND OWNERS AND LEGITIMATE CREATORS

4.1 Intellectual property and brand dilution

Brand owners are directly injured when influencers promote counterfeit or imitation goods. The immediate loss is displaced sales, but the broader injury concerns brand equity. Wilcox, Kim and Sen (2009) found that consumers buy counterfeit luxury goods for reasons including expressing social identity, which means that visible promotion of counterfeits by admired figures can normalise their purchase and weaken the exclusivity on which luxury positioning depends. Where counterfeits fail or cause harm, the damage is attached to the genuine brand, because consumers often cannot tell the difference or do not remember it.

Influencer content introduces particular problems of enforcement. Posts are ephemeral, volume is high, and the same infringing product may be promoted by many small accounts with links that change frequently. Takedown requires monitoring across platforms, notices, and often cooperation from intermediaries who face their own limits. The cost of this surveillance falls on rights holders.

A related issue is unauthorised use of brand identity and creative work. Content creators' original photographs, videos and designs are copied by accounts that promote lookalike products, and original creators lose the credit and income their work should generate. Smaller creators, who lack legal departments, are least able to respond.

4.2 Unfair competition and price distortion

Deceptive influencer practices distort competition among legitimate businesses. A firm that complies with disclosure rules and substantiates its claims bears costs that a non-compliant rival avoids, and a competitor that buys fake reviews or hides sponsorship gains an advantage unrelated to product quality. Akerlof's (1970) logic applies: when buyers cannot distinguish honest from dishonest signals, the honest seller's investment in quality earns a lower return, and the equilibrium shifts toward lower quality and greater deception.

Evidence on review fraud supports this. Luca and Zervas (2016) found that fraud is more common among firms with weaker reputations, which suggests that deception serves as a substitute for quality. Mayzlin et al. (2014) found that manipulation by rivals, including negative fake reviews, can damage competitors. Applied to influencer marketing, the implication is that a brand which refuses to buy followers or hide payments may lose visibility and sales to those that do.

4.3 Reputational spillover and brand safety

Brand owners who work with influencers inherit their conduct. A deceptive or scandal-prone creator can inflict damage on the partner brand, and when an influencer is publicly sanctioned, every brand associated with that person risks being drawn into the story. The Fyre Festival is the most frequently cited example. Promoted heavily through paid social media posts by models and influencers, many without disclosure that they were paid, the festival's reality fell far short of its marketing; its organiser Billy McFarland pleaded guilty to wire fraud and was sentenced in 2018 to six years in prison and ordered to forfeit about USD 26 million (U.S. Department of Justice, 2018). The episode remains a reference point for the proposition that the promotional chain can carry as much reputational risk as the underlying product.

The spillover also runs in the other direction. Brands sometimes incur liability for the conduct of influencers they engage. Under the FTC's guidance, an advertiser is responsible for monitoring and correcting the practices of those it pays to endorse its products, and for training them in disclosure (Federal Trade Commission, 2023). France's 2023 influencer law introduced joint liability between influencer and advertiser for certain damages (Loi, 2023). Brands that treat influencer work as a cost-per-click procurement exercise, with no vetting or compliance, therefore accept legal as well as reputational exposure.

4.4 Metrics fraud and wasted spend

Inflated audience metrics are a direct financial harm to brands, who pay for reach that does not exist. De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) found that follower counts shape perceived popularity, which is exactly why they are worth faking, and the FTC's 2024 rule now treats buying or selling fake social media indicators to misrepresent influence as unlawful (Federal Trade Commission, 2024).

4.5 Legitimate creators

Honest creators face their own set of consequences. First, they compete against peers who inflate metrics and exaggerate claims, which depresses their relative performance and bargaining position. Second, they bear the reputational burden of the category. Audiences who have been deceived by some influencers apply scepticism to all, and creators with years of earned credibility find their recommendations discounted. Third, compliance costs fall unevenly. Smaller creators may not know the rules of each market in which their audience lives, yet face the same expectations as professionals with agency support. Campbell and Farrell (2020) emphasised that influencer value derives from several components, including expertise, trustworthiness and relatability; deception by others erodes the shared reputation on which these components depend.

Finally, over-correction poses risks. Where regulation or platform policy is blunt, legitimate creators can be caught by automated moderation, lose monetisation or find that honest but unusual content is wrongly flagged. Governance design must therefore protect good-faith creators as carefully as it punishes bad actors.

5. CONSEQUENCES FOR PUBLIC TRUST IN THE INFLUENCER ECONOMY

5.1 Trust as the foundation asset

Trust is not merely a by-product of influencer marketing; it is the commodity being sold. Source-credibility research has long treated trustworthiness and expertise as the principal determinants of persuasive power (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990), and work on celebrity endorsement suggests that the meaning transferred from endorser to product depends on the endorser's perceived credibility (McCracken, 1989). In influencer contexts, Lou and Yuan (2019) found that perceived trustworthiness of the influencer, together with message value, shaped followers' trust in branded content and, in turn, their purchase intentions. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) reported that para-social interaction and credibility influenced purchase intentions among followers of beauty and fashion bloggers. If trust is the asset, deception is a form of asset depletion.

5.2 Contagion and generalised scepticism

Trust is difficult to rebuild and easy to destroy, and its loss spreads. Persuasion knowledge accumulates: audiences who have been burned learn to look for hidden motives, and apply that learning broadly (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Kapitan and Silvera (2016) showed that audiences make attributions about why endorsers recommend a product, and that attributions of commercial motive reduce persuasiveness relative to attributions of genuine liking. Scandals and visible enforcement actions teach audiences that commercial motives are common and often concealed. Consequently, even honest, fully disclosed recommendations are met with discounting.

There is also a measurable regulatory signal of how common non-compliance is. A 2023 to 2024 coordinated sweep by European consumer authorities and the European Commission examined 576 influencers and reported that the overwhelming majority, 97 per cent, posted commercial content, while only around one in five consistently disclosed it (European Commission, 2024). Such figures, whatever their methodological caveats, are the type of evidence that, once publicised, tends to shape public perception that disclosure is the exception instead of the rule. In the United Kingdom, the Competition and Markets Authority's review of hidden advertising led to formal undertakings from 16 well-known influencers in 2023 (Competition and Markets Authority, 2023). Each such announcement contributes to a public narrative that is damaging for the sector even as it demonstrates that enforcement exists.

5.3 The market-for-lemons dynamic at the system level

At the system level, the risk is that the influencer economy slides toward the equilibrium described by Akerlof (1970). When audiences cannot separate honest from dishonest creators, they may rationally discount everyone; honest influencers earn less, some exit, and the average quality of the pool declines. Disclosure, verification and reputation systems can restore the signal, but the point stands that sector credibility is a collective good, and individual deception imposes an external cost on every other participant.

6. CONSEQUENCES FOR INFLUENCERS

For a long time, the prevailing assumption among creators was that responsibility for compliance lay primarily with the brand or the platform. Enforcement over the last decade has progressively overturned that assumption. Influencers now face consequences at five levels.

6.1 Platform sanctions: demonetisation, suspension and bans

The most immediate and frequent consequence is platform-level action. Major platforms prohibit undisclosed paid partnerships, fake engagement, impersonation and the promotion of certain regulated products. Violations can lead to removal of content, loss of monetisation, reduced reach, suspension or permanent account termination. For a professional creator, loss of an account is loss of the business: the audience, the archive and the commercial relationships tied to it cannot easily be moved.

Platform sanctions are fast and require no court process, but they are opaque and inconsistent, and creators often report limited avenues of appeal. They also tend to follow public controversy more than systematic detection. Their significance for the present analysis is that they reduce the influencer's future earning capacity, a consequence that persists even if no legal sanction ever applies.

6.2 Regulatory orders and civil penalties

Regulators have used a graduated toolkit. Early US enforcement relied on consent orders without monetary penalties, aimed at changing behaviour. The FTC's 2016 settlement with the retailer Lord & Taylor, which had paid fashion influencers to post about a dress without disclosure, and its 2016 action involving Warner Bros. Home Entertainment's paid video promotions, illustrate this approach (Federal Trade Commission, 2016a, 2016b). In 2017 the FTC took action against two prominent YouTube personalities who promoted a gambling site they owned without disclosing their ownership (Federal Trade Commission, 2017). In these cases, the principal sanction was a compliance order with reporting obligations, enforceable by later penalties.

Penalties have since become sharper. The FTC's 2024 rule on consumer reviews and testimonials makes certain deceptive review and follower practices violations of a trade regulation rule, which permits civil penalties in excess of USD 50,000 per violation (Federal Trade Commission, 2024). The SEC's orders against celebrities who touted crypto assets show that securities law can be applied to influencers, with penalties, disgorgement and bans on future promotion of similar assets (U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, 2018, 2022).

Outside the United States, the picture is similar and in places more stringent. In the United Kingdom, the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 gave the Competition and Markets Authority power to impose fines directly for consumer law breaches, up to 10 per cent of global turnover for the largest businesses, instead of requiring court proceedings (Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act, 2024). In India, the 2022 endorsement guidelines issued by the Central Consumer Protection Authority place due diligence duties on endorsers, who may be fined and prohibited from endorsing for a defined period for misleading endorsements (Central Consumer Protection Authority, 2022). The Indian rules are notable because they treat the endorser as an independent duty-holder instead of an instrument of the brand.

6.3 Private litigation and settlements

Influencers also face private claims. Consumers, trustees in bankruptcy and investors may sue for damages. After the Fyre Festival collapsed, the bankruptcy trustee pursued payments made to individuals who had promoted the event, and model and influencer Kendall Jenner agreed in 2020 to pay USD 90,000 to settle a claim for payments received (Reuters, 2020). Such claims turn on theories such as fraudulent transfer rather than the fact of undisclosed promotion alone, but they demonstrate that promotional income can be clawed back where the underlying enterprise was fraudulent.

Settlements carry additional consequences beyond money: confidentiality terms, injunctions, undertakings to change practices, and publicity. For an influencer whose livelihood depends on audience trust, public association with a deceptive-marketing case may do more lasting damage than the sum paid.

6.4 Criminal prosecution

The most serious consequence is criminal liability, which is increasingly relevant for conduct at the severe end of the spectrum. Several legal routes exist.

First, fraud and related offences apply where an influencer knowingly participates in a scheme to obtain money by deception. The Fyre case, in which the festival organiser received a six-year prison sentence, shows how promotional activity forms part of the factual matrix of fraud, even where the influencers who promoted the event were not themselves prosecuted (U.S. Department of Justice, 2018).

Second, some jurisdictions have created specific offences. France's 2023 law governing commercial influence by social media influencers provides, for certain breaches, penalties including imprisonment of up to two years and fines of up to EUR 300,000, together with rules on labelling, a ban on promoting certain products and services, and joint liability with advertisers (Loi n° 2023-451, 2023). The law's significance lies in its explicit recognition of the influencer as a regulated professional.

Third, sector-specific criminal statutes apply to counterfeit goods, unsafe or falsified medicines and food supplements, unlicensed financial promotion and illegal gambling. In the United Kingdom, for example, the Financial Conduct Authority has brought criminal proceedings against individuals for promoting financial products without authorisation on social media (Financial Conduct Authority, 2023). In several Asian jurisdictions, including Vietnam, authorities have in recent years investigated well-known personalities in connection with the promotion of allegedly falsified dietary supplements and other products, and Vietnamese advertising law has been under reform to address the role of influencers more directly [verify the current legal text and case outcomes before citing]. These developments show a general trend: where products affect health or money at scale, prosecutors look beyond manufacturers and distributors to the people who publicised them.

Criminal liability generally requires proof of intent or recklessness. An influencer who sincerely believed a product was safe and legal, after reasonable checks, is in a different position from one who ignored warnings or knew of the deception.

6.5 Professional and economic consequences

Beyond formal sanctions, influencers lose brand contracts, face agency blacklisting and carry reputational damage across platforms. Because their economic value is a function of audience trust, a deception scandal strikes at the core asset. The payoff from any single deceptive promotion is small relative to potential fines, settlements, lost contracts and legal fees, so the economics favour compliance, although optimism bias and a weak enforcement history have sometimes obscured this calculus.

7. CONCLUSION

Influencer marketing derives its power from trust, and deceptive practices convert that trust into a vulnerability. This article has shown that the consequences of such practices extend across four groups. Consumers suffer financial loss, health risk and manipulated choice. Brand owners and legitimate creators confront counterfeit competition, distorted markets, wasted spending and spillover scepticism. The public loses confidence in the influencer economy as a whole, with the potential for an adverse-selection spiral in which honest voices are discounted along with dishonest ones. Influencers themselves, once regarded as peripheral to enforcement, now face platform bans, settlements, regulatory penalties and, in serious cases, criminal prosecution.

The central lesson is that these outcomes are linked through a common trust mechanism. Consequently, protection of one group is rarely achieved at the expense of another; clear disclosure, substantiated claims, authentic metrics and verified products benefit consumers, brands, creators and the public together. The most promising governance strategy is therefore a layered one, combining

clear legal standards, proportionate enforcement, platform design that makes honesty the default, brand diligence, and creator education. Future scholarship should extend the evidence base beyond the cases and contexts that currently dominate it, and should test which combinations of deterrence and support most effectively sustain a trustworthy influencer economy.

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