



INFLUENCER MARKETING BUDGETS ARE GROWING, BUT BRAND SAFETY MEASURES ARE FALLING BEHIND.

New survey reveals marketers' hands-off approach to influencer vetting—and the reputational risks of choosing the wrong partners

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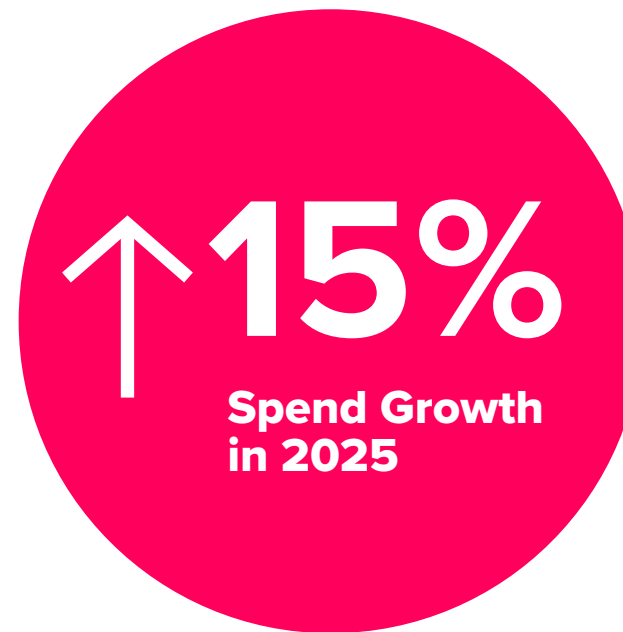
Introduction

When it comes to influencer partnerships, brand safety concerns are holding marketers back. 77.8% say brand safety influences their willingness to invest in the industry, per a new survey by EMARKETER and Viral Nation.

Despite this concern, consumers are engaging more with creators, and brands are increasing their influencer marketing budgets in kind. This year, 86.0% of US marketers are using this channel, and spend has jumped 15.0% to \$10.52 billion, according to EMARKETER.

While brands consider influencer marketing safe enough to up their investments, they have a lingering sense of risk and lack of control as spend grows.

While influencer partnerships offer visibility, they can come with reputational risk. Creators can help brands connect with audiences, but the wrong match could damage consumer trust.



Introduction



Marketers recognize the unique brand association risk but lack the framework and technology for scalable influencer vetting. Customization and control are top priorities, but current tools and vendor solutions haven't earned their trust.

Without a consistent, transparent process, brands struggle to align partnerships with their values and protect themselves from the reputational risks that come with choosing the wrong partners.

This report highlights the risks of downplaying brand safety when working with influencers and how a more thorough approach can increase marketer confidence in the space. Conclusions are based on a survey of 117 US marketers conducted by EMARKETER in partnership with Viral Nation, revealing the challenges that marketers face in the vetting process. Brand safety in this survey pertains to content created for creator-brand partnerships.

“What we’re seeing is that brand safety has become reactive rather than proactive. Instead of building comprehensive protection systems, teams are essentially gambling on good faith.”

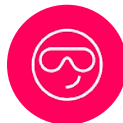
Nicolas Spiro, *Chief Commercial Officer at Viral Nation*

Introduction

Key Survey Takeaways:



While brands are investing more in influencer marketing, brand safety isn't a top priority. Since most brands and agencies already consider influencer marketing at least “somewhat safe,” they are more concerned with content performance and engagement metrics when choosing partners. As a result, there is a disconnect between influencer vetting and potential revenue loss.



Marketers generally view influencer partnerships as safe, but their confidence isn't backed by rigorous vetting. They don't have the resources to do vetting right, creating a gap between perception and practice. They also don't consider their current process scalable.



Marketers want to be involved in the influencer vetting process. They rarely outsource influencer vetting entirely to vendors or agencies. This could reflect both a desire for control and a sentiment that paying for influencer vetting isn't a worthwhile investment.



Brands and agencies recognize a lack of standardized vetting. Many brands don't feel that partners have a well-defined, standardized influencer vetting process, and agencies admit they don't offer one. While brands want documentation on how influencers are vetted before a campaign, few report actually receiving it.



Since brand safety is personal to each brand, marketers still need customization. When vetting influencers, marketers prioritize alignment with their individual brand values, signaling a need for bespoke solutions catering to their distinct criteria.

01

MARKETERS PRIORITIZE IMMEDIATE RESULTS OVER SAFETY MEASURES

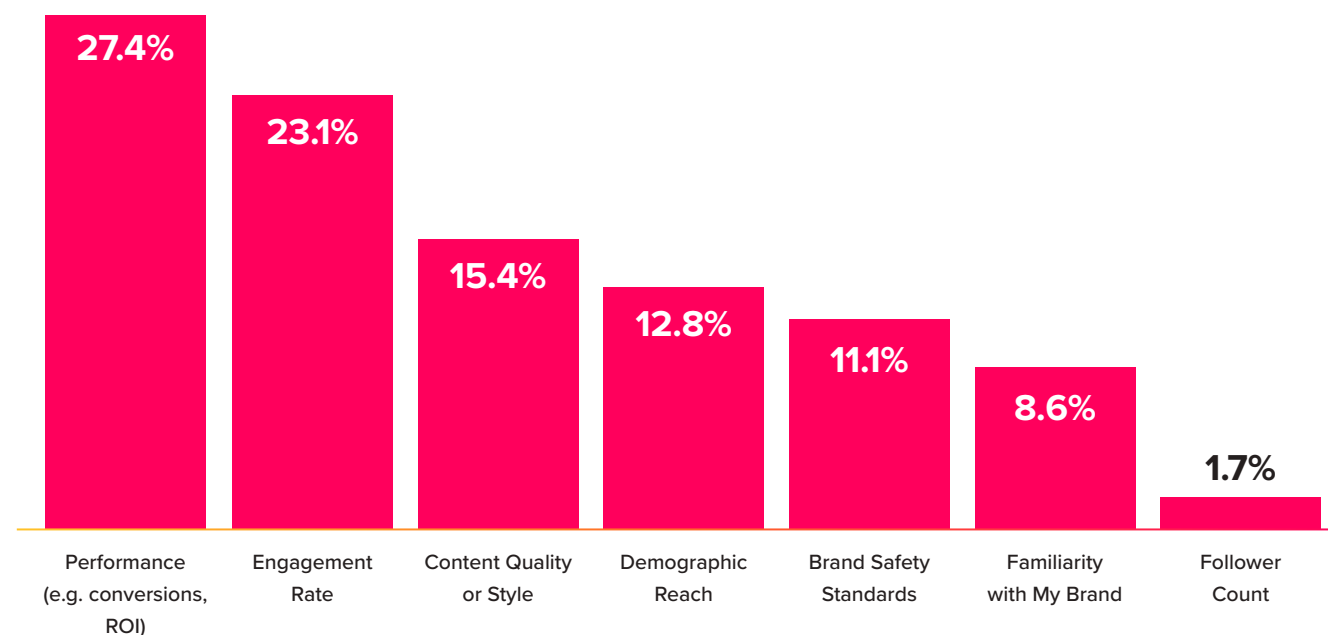


Marketers Prioritize Immediate Results Over Safety Measures

Marketers are not giving brand safety the same attention as other metrics. When evaluating an influencer marketing campaign, brands care more about the influencer's performance (27.4%), engagement rate (23.1%), content quality or style (15.4%), and demographic reach (12.8%). Only 11.1% of marketers ranked adherence to brand safety standards as the top success indicator.

Agencies also don't directly relate brand safety to influencer success. When executing YouTube campaigns, they somewhat prioritize metrics like ad performance, measurement, and audience targeting over brand safety and suitability, per a November 2024 Pixability survey.

Think about your influencer marketing campaigns. Rank the following factors from most important to least important to the success of those campaigns.



Source: EMARKETER and Viral Nation "Brand Safety and Influencer Marketing Survey" June 2025 n=117

Note: Data represents respondents who ranked each factor as the most important to the success of influencer marketing campaigns.

**Marketers Prioritize
Immediate Results
Over Safety Measures**



The focus on short-term outcomes is likely driven by mounting pressure to prove ROI. As influencer marketing budgets grow, so does the demand for measurable results. Measuring creator performance (32%) is the top barrier to influencer marketing success for brand marketers worldwide, per an August 2024 Sapio Research study.

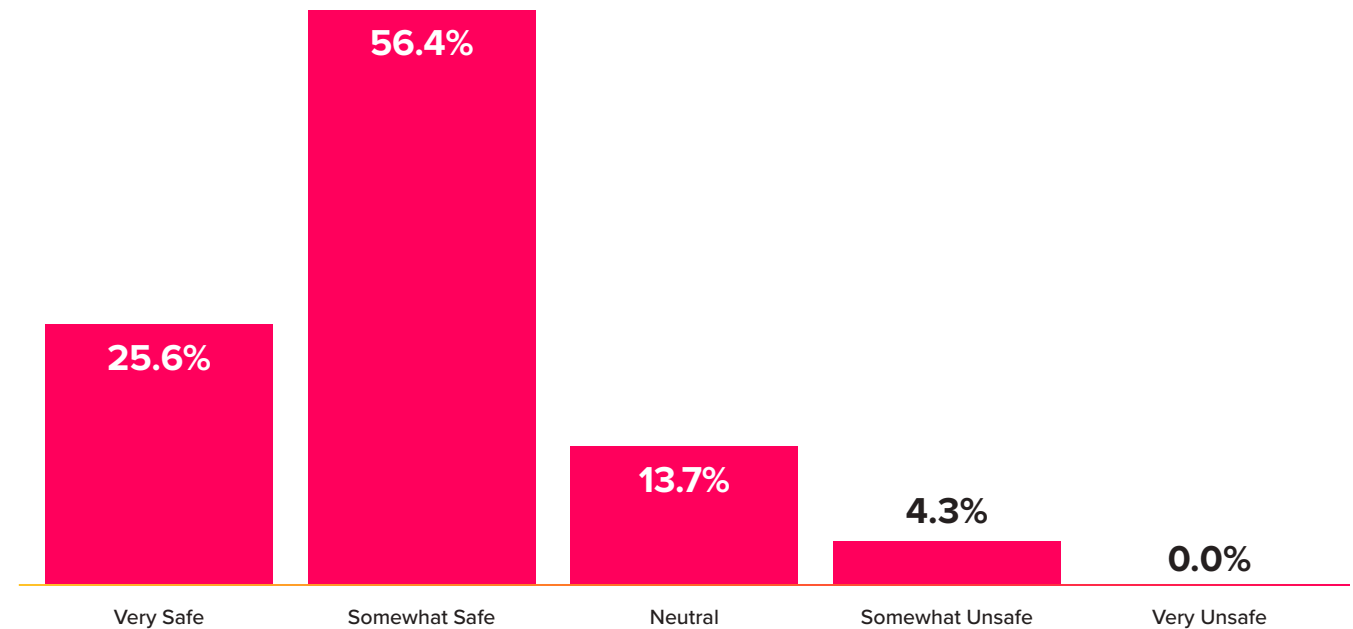
“ Brands are prioritizing speed and ease over comprehensive protection because influencer campaigns move so fast. There’s this constant pressure to keep up with the pace, and unfortunately, that pressure overrides protection every time. ”

Nicolas Spiro, *Chief Commercial Officer at Viral Nation*

Some 52% of US consumers have discovered a product that interested them through a creator or influencer in the last six months, per a March impact.com and EMARKETER survey. Awareness (49.6%) is the top objective among marketers in influencer marketing, making creator partnerships a consumer’s first impression of a brand, per the EMARKETER and Viral Nation survey.

Marketers Prioritize Immediate Results Over Safety Measures

How safe do you feel influencer marketing is for your brand/clients today?



Source: EMARKETER and Viral Nation "Brand Safety and Influencer Marketing Survey" June 2025 n=117

The reliance on creators to introduce consumers to a brand makes their behavior a reputational risk factor, yet marketers are downplaying that risk. Among the 70.9% of respondents increasing their influencer marketing investment in the next three years, 30.1% consider influencer marketing "very safe," and 55.4% "somewhat safe."

"The biggest misconception I see is 'If their content looks good, they're brand safe,'" said Spiro. "I've seen countless examples of high-performing, polished content that hides problematic histories, toxic community behavior, or major controversies lurking just beneath the surface."

02

MARKETERS AREN'T INVESTING IN INFLUENCER VETTING

Marketers Aren't Investing in Influencer Vetting

While most marketers say brand safety affects their willingness to invest in influencer marketing, this sentiment hasn't translated into true capital investment or structural change when it comes to vetting.

Brands believe they can manage some influencer vetting on their own, and only 9.4% fully outsource this process to a vendor or agency. While many use third-party platforms and social listening tools, 81.2% include a manual review of social content.

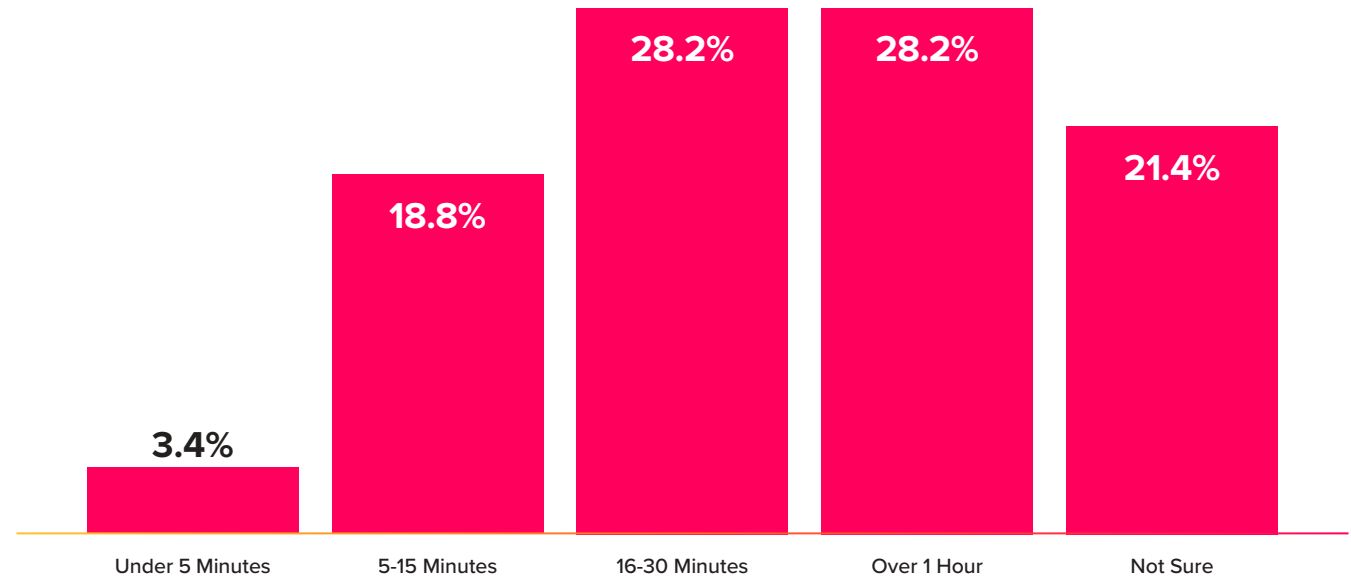


“Vetting still remains quite manual and time-consuming for many marketers, especially for high-profile partnerships and campaigns. But they may not trust a more automated or outsourced approach, instead wanting to see a creator's content for themselves before making a decision.”

Minda Smiley, *EMARKETER Senior Analyst*

Marketers Aren't Investing in Influencer Vetting

How much time does your team (or agency) typically spend vetting a single influencer?



Source: EMARKETER and Viral Nation "Brand Safety and Influencer Marketing Survey" June 2025 n=117

While about 82% of marketers consider influencer marketing to be at least "somewhat safe," over 50% spend 30 minutes or less vetting a single influencer. Viral Nation estimates that 0.01% of a creator's content history, on average, is vetted in a 30-minute time period. Given that most marketers conduct some vetting manually, it's impossible to do a thorough job in this time frame, said Spiro.

A thorough review goes beyond text vetting to include photo and video content, which is hard to conduct efficiently without the right technology, he said.

"In a single frame of content, there are so many elements to analyze," said Spiro, adding that "background details" that could include violent imagery or controversial symbols are often overlooked. "Brands need to be much more vigilant about identifying than what the human eye can reasonably catch."

Marketers Aren't Investing in Influencer Vetting

Marketers are dissatisfied and overwhelmed with their vetting process. Their biggest challenges in influencer vetting are that it's too time-consuming (38.5%), hard to keep up with ongoing monitoring (34.2%), and they lack tools for automation (28.2%). This frustration reflects an overall lack of investment in technology and resources.

Brands lack a long-term vision for influencer vetting, with only 9.1% defining their process as “very scalable.”

“The problem is that once you’ve had a major incident, legal teams get involved, and suddenly getting any influencer content approved becomes nearly impossible at the speed the market demands. Once you’ve lost that trust internally, it’s incredibly hard to rebuild it.”

Nicolas Spiro, *Chief Commercial Officer at Viral Nation*

03

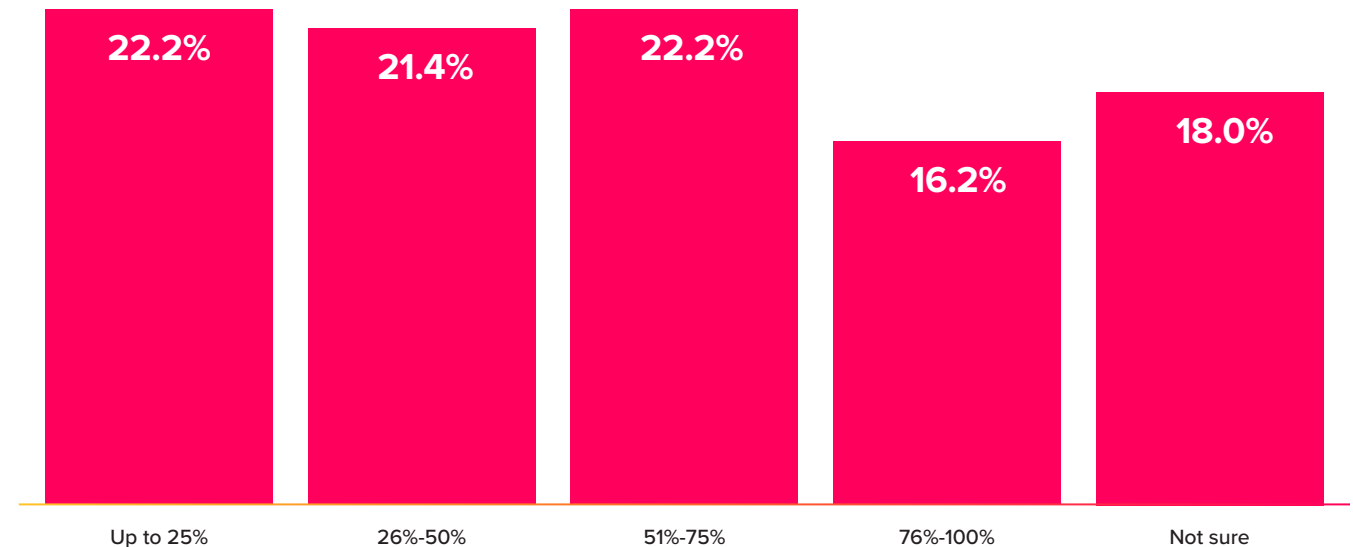
THE INDUSTRY LACKS SHARED BRAND SAFETY STANDARDS

The Industry Lacks Shared Brand Safety Standards

Marketers don't have a universal understanding of what thorough influencer vetting and brand safety require. Some 21.4% are unsure how long it takes to vet a single influencer, and 18.0% don't know what percentage of an influencer's content is reviewed. Among those who think they know, responses lacked consensus on vetting time or content review percentages.

"There's no shared definition of what 'brand safe' actually means," said Spiro. "Risk tolerance varies dramatically between brands, and even within the same organization, different teams, agencies, and platforms have completely different standards and interpretations."

Roughly what percentage of an influencer's content is reviewed during vetting?



Source: EMARKETER and Viral Nation "Brand Safety and Influencer Marketing Survey" June 2025 n=117

The Industry Lacks Shared Brand Safety Standards



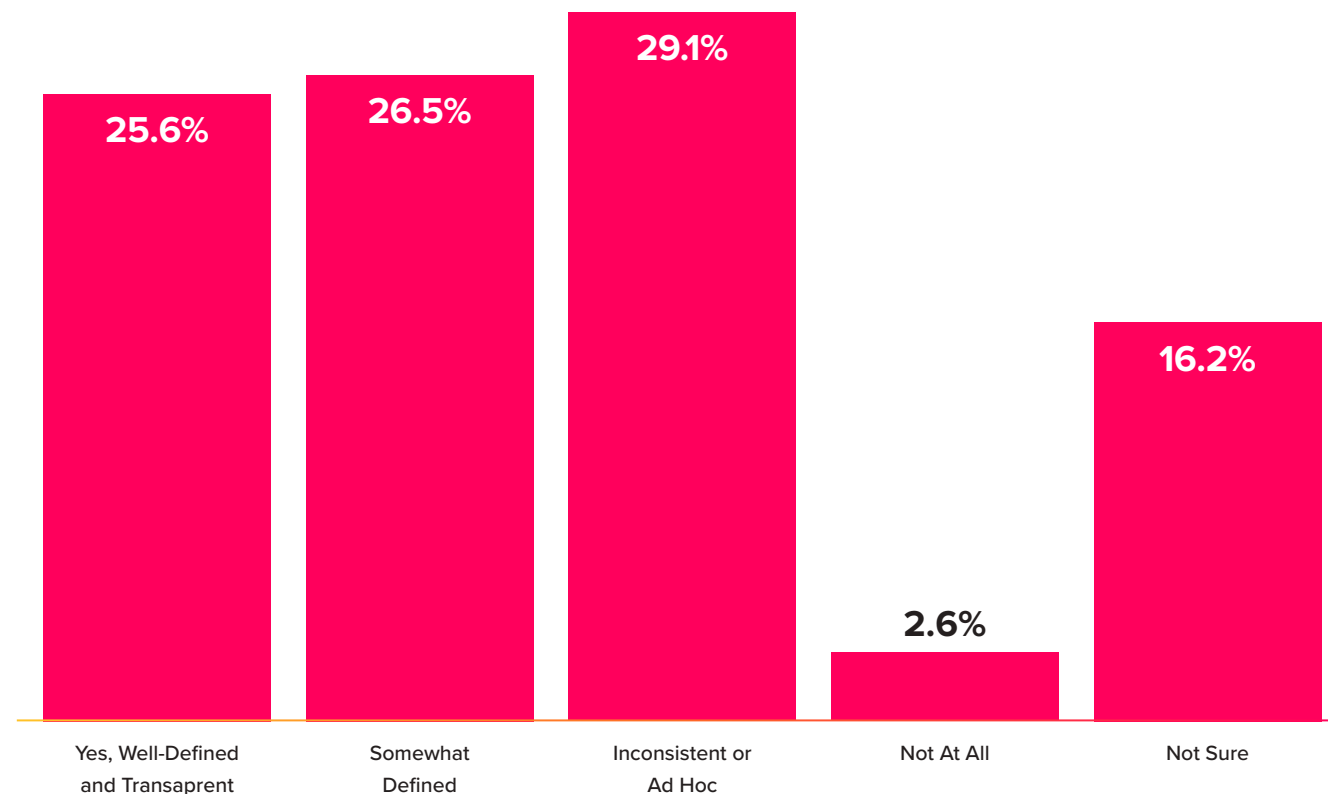
Brands don't trust their agency partners for influencer vetting. Only 21.8% of brands believe their agency partners have a well-defined and transparent vetting process, and that skepticism is warranted, according to the survey. Just 29.0% of agencies report actually offering this process, while 30.9% of brands describe their agency's approach as ad hoc or inconsistent.

If you are a brand:

Do your agency partners have a standardized influencer vetting protocol?

If you are an agency:

Do you offer a standardized influencer vetting protocol?



Source: EMARKETER and Viral Nation "Brand Safety and Influencer Marketing Survey" June 2025 n=117

The Industry Lacks Shared Brand Safety Standards

This trust gap stems from a lack of clear communication, transparency, and accountability. Only 9.1% of brands feel “extremely confident” that their agency partner conducts thorough influencer vetting. Their lack of knowledge on the process, specifically time spent vetting a single influencer and percent of content reviewed, reflects they don’t know what to ask for and what standards to set.

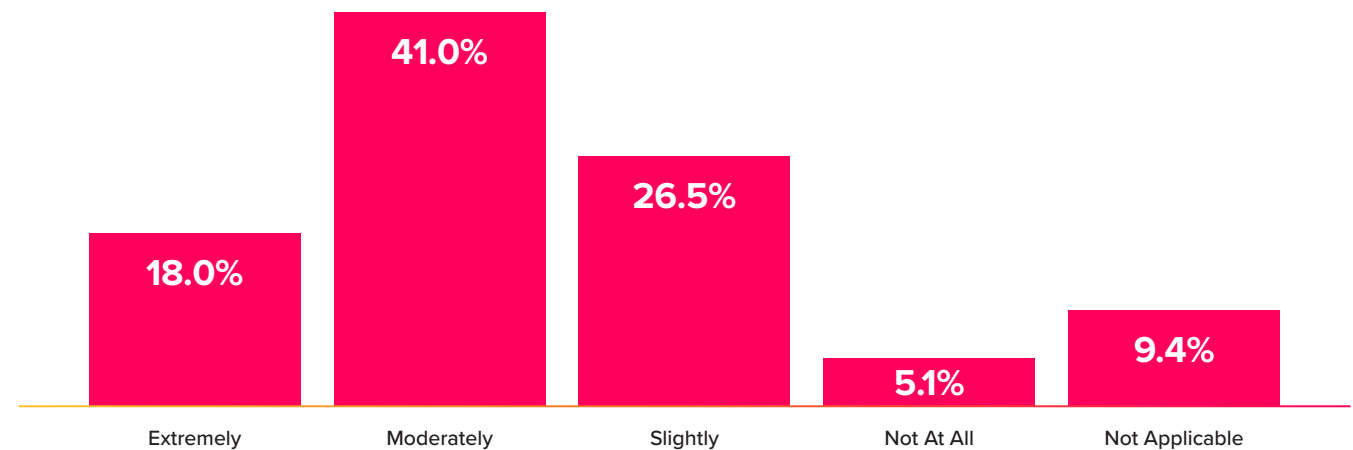
While 96.6% want documentation on how influencers were vetted before a campaign, only 25.6% always see it.

If you are a brand:

How confident are you that your agency partner conducts thorough influencer vetting?

If you are an agency:

How thorough would you describe your standard influencer vetting process?



Source: EMARKETER and Viral Nation “Brand Safety and Influencer Marketing Survey” June 2025 n=117

The Industry Lacks Shared Brand Safety Standards

While most marketers say this documentation matters, they are accustomed to being siloed from the influencer vetting process. This lack of transparency prevents brands from truly managing influencer marketing risks, said Spiro.

“Transparency is absolutely critical,” he said. “Agencies need to start reporting back to brands on what was actually vetted, what was flagged, and why certain decisions were made. Right now, too much of this happens in a vacuum.”

While marketers can’t afford to avoid brand safety, they inevitably hand over a degree of control to creators during these partnerships—a trade-off that often contributes to the channel’s effectiveness, said Smiley.

“Brands have become increasingly comfortable handing control over to creators when partnering with them, knowing that their appeal lies in their ability to genuinely connect with their audience,” she said. “By extension, brands may put less emphasis on brand safety even if it means taking on some risk.”



A woman with long, curly brown hair is smiling and looking at a tablet computer. She is wearing a pink sweater. In the background, a guitar is visible, and the scene is lit with warm, golden light.

04

**WHILE INDUSTRY STANDARDS
HELP MARKETERS, BRAND SAFETY
IS STILL PERSONAL**

While Industry Standards Help Marketers, Brand Safety is Still Personal

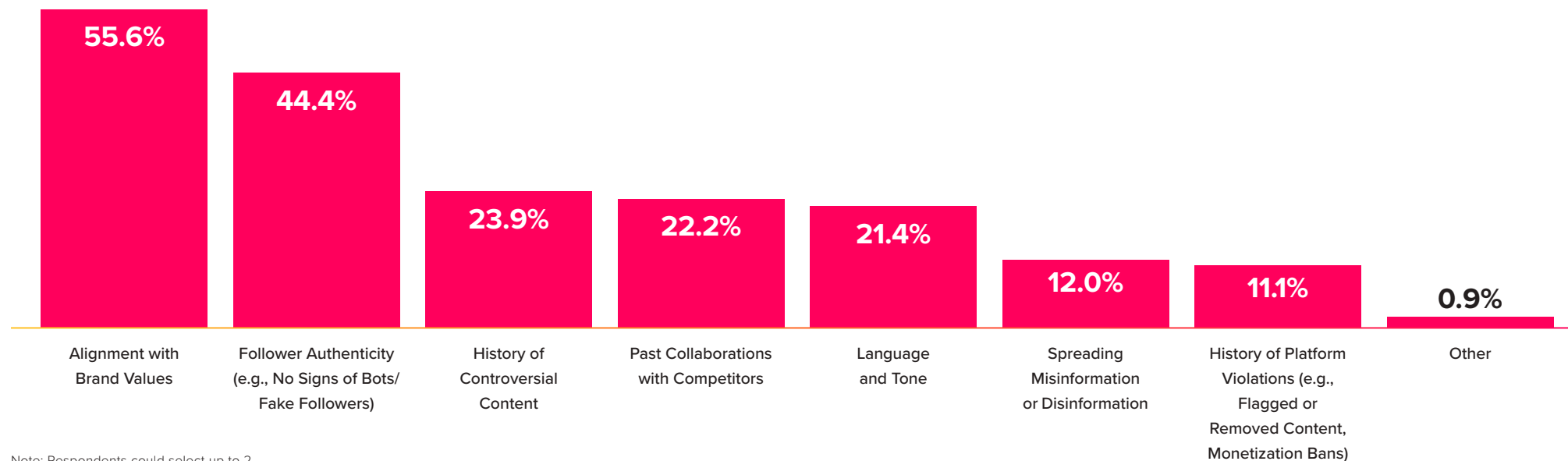
Marketers see influencer marketing as a brand awareness play (49.6%), and their biggest concern when vetting influencers is reputational damage (34.2%). The reliance of this channel as an awareness driver, and the connection between awareness and reputation, emphasizes the delicacy of influencer vetting.

While marketers benefit from industry standards, they want customized processes and solutions that cater to their own brand safety guidelines.

Alignment with brand values (55.6%) is the top priority when vetting influencers, which requires a bespoke process. Fewer marketers prioritized straightforward factors like past collaborations with competitors (22.2%) and history of platform violations (11.1%).

Among those increasing their investment in the next three years, 60.2% say brand values alignment is in their top two criteria when vetting influencers. This metric is subjective and hard to quantify, stressing the need for personalized resources.

What criteria are most important when vetting influencers?



Note: Respondents could select up to 2.

Source: EMARKETER and Viral Nation "Brand Safety and Influencer Marketing Survey" June 2025 n=117

**While Industry Standards
Help Marketers, Brand Safety
is Still Personal**

Alignment with personal values is the top quality US and UK consumers look for in creators, per a February 2024 Sprout Social survey. The wrong choices can break consumer trust and loyalty, but universal standards can lead to brands missing out on the audience that would resonate most with their brand.

Trust and shared values are a primary currency, highlighting the industry's need for a qualitative and nuanced approach to influencer vetting that doesn't come with a quick or universal fix.

Influencer marketing budgets are only growing, and to continue investing in this channel comfortably, brands need adaptable brand safety standards and a transparent, scalable influencer vetting process.

“The ‘Wild West’ days of influencer marketing are far behind us. As marketers commit more marketing dollars to this sector, they’ll want to ensure their creator partnerships are being carried out thoughtfully and with their brand’s values in mind.”

Minda Smiley, *EMARKETER Senior Analyst*

While Industry Standards Help Marketers, Brand Safety is Still Personal

**As they refine their approach to brand safety,
marketers should keep three things in mind:**

01

**Monitoring
online activity
is an ongoing
process.**

Just because a partner was the right fit at one point in time doesn't mean this will always be the case, said Spiro. "An influencer who was perfectly brand safe six months ago might have completely different associations, controversies, or community dynamics today," he said, adding that "aesthetics do not equal aligned values."

02

**The right
AI-powered
brand safety
partner delivers
personalization
and efficiency.**

While the nuance of influencer vetting requires human expertise, working with partners that develop specialized AI tools can help brands manage online activity in real time. "AI gives us the speed and scale to highlight potential risks across massive amounts of content and then humans can review those red flags and make brand-specific judgments that align with each company's unique values and risk tolerance," Spiro said.

03

**Demanding
transparency
is essential for
industrywide
progress.**

When marketers streamline influencer vetting and set consistent standards for their tech and agency partners, the industry moves closer to establishing universal guidelines for brand safety. "We need a shared language across the industry," said Spiro. "Brands, agencies, and platforms need common guidelines for what vetting practices should look like."

About the Survey

This survey was developed and fielded by EMARKETER in collaboration with Viral Nation in July 2025. We surveyed 117 US marketing professionals to assess their attitudes toward brand safety in influencer marketing.



EMARKETER is the leading research, data, and insights provider for marketing, advertising, and commerce professionals. Our data-centric forecasts and rigorous analysis empowers strategic decisions for revenue-driving teams. Through context from our expert analysts, carefully vetted data sources, and our proprietary research methodology, EMARKETER's forecasts, reports, and benchmarks enable companies to anticipate tomorrow's market trends for confidence today. EMARKETER is a division of Axel Springer S.E.

About This Report

Research for this report was compiled by members of the EMARKETER Studio team in partnership with Viral Nation, using reports, forecasts, and research by EMARKETER on influencer marketing, social platforms, and advertising conducted in July and August 2025.



Viral Nation drives global brand growth through social-first marketing, proprietary technology, and a creator-led ecosystem. We deliver influencer marketing, content, strategy, community management, and AI-powered brand safety—all anchored in the belief that creators and communities are the media of the future. Trusted by world-class brands, we redefine digital engagement at scale.

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