FROM INFLUENCING TO DEINFLUENCING: NAVIGATING BRAND STRATEGIES IN THE AGE OF DISTRUST

MBA. Nguyen Thuy Duong* - PhD. Tran Thanh Phuong*

Abstract: ***The emergence of deinfluencing-where social media users actively discourage product purchases or critique overhyped marketing-reflects a significant shift in digital consumer behavior. This systematic review synthesizes recent academic literature on the drivers, perceptions, and brand responses associated with deinfluencing, with particular attention to its implications for marketing strategies in the age of digital distrust. Guided by PRISMA 2020 methodology, six peer-reviewed empirical and conceptual studies published between 2023 and 2025 were analyzed. The findings identify authenticity fatigue, economic pressures, sustainability concerns, and evolving platform norms (especially on TikTok) as key triggers of deinfluencing behavior. Consumers perceive deinfluencing content as more credible and value-aligned than traditional influencer marketing, responding positively to transparency and critical curation. In turn, brands are beginning to adapt through practices such as embracing honest reviews, partnering with micro-influencers, and reframing their narratives around conscious consumption. Drawing on these findings, the review proposes strategic recommendations for Vietnamese brands, emphasizing transparency, ethical creator partnerships, and digital listening. Despite the nascent nature of the literature, this review contributes to marketing theory and practice by positioning deinfluencing as a lens for understanding post-influencer consumer culture and rethinking trust in branding.***

• Keywords: *deinfluencing; influencer marketing; consumer trust; social media skepticism; brand strategy; anti-consumption.*

Date of receipt: 07th Feb., 2026
Date of delivery revision: 22th Feb., 2026
Date of receipt revision: 25th Mar., 2026
Date of approval: 17th Apr., 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.71374/jfar.v26.i3.64

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the rise of influencer marketing has significantly reshaped how brands communicate with consumers. Social media influencers-often non-celebrities who build credibility through lifestyle content and personal narratives-have become key agents in shaping consumer preferences and driving purchase intentions. Their appeal lies in perceived authenticity, relatability, and parasocial relationships that create a sense of trust and closeness with their followers (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). As a result, influencer marketing has evolved into a multi-billion-dollar industry and a core component of digital branding strategies across industries from fashion and beauty to technology and finance (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

However, this model of influence is increasingly under scrutiny. In recent years, consumers-particularly Gen Z-have begun to express skepticism toward influencer content that appears overly commercialized or inauthentic. Influencers who once built trust through transparency and personal storytelling are now often perceived as sales-driven and disconnected from the values of their audiences (Berry, 2024). This erosion of trust has been amplified by scandals involving deceptive endorsements, hidden sponsorships, and algorithmic manipulation, leading many consumers to question the credibility of influencer recommendations (Zhang et al., 2023). In response to this growing distrust, a new and counterintuitive phenomenon has emerged: deinfluencing.

Deinfluencing refers to the practice of advising consumers not to purchase certain products, often accompanied by critical commentary about overhyped goods, misleading marketing, or unethical brand practices. This trend is most visible on TikTok, where the hashtag #deinfluencing amassed over 1.5 billion views by 2024, fueled by creators urging followers to reconsider impulsive purchases or reject influencer-promoted goods that fail to deliver value (Bainotti, 2024; Time Magazine, 2023). Deinfluencing content often includes product critiques, cost-saving advice, or calls for mindful consumption, resonating with audiences who are disillusioned with hyper-consumerism and increasingly motivated by authenticity, sustainability, and ethical responsibility (Khalil et al. in Communication, 2025).

The deinfluencing trend reflects a deeper shift in consumer culture, one characterized by a growing resistance to traditional marketing scripts and a search for more honest, transparent interactions between brands and consumers. Rather than blindly following influencer recommendations, many consumers now seek diverse perspectives-including critical ones-before making purchase decisions. In some cases, deinfluencing serves as a form of consumer empowerment and resistance, where individuals assert agency against pervasive advertising and algorithmic persuasion (Chokrane & Bainotti, 2024).

Although deinfluencing has gained considerable attention in the media and digital marketing circles,

* *Foreign Trade University, email: nguyenthuyduong.ktkdqt@ftu.edu.vn*

academic research on this topic remains nascent. Early empirical studies suggest that deinfluencers are often perceived as more credible and trustworthy than traditional influencers, particularly when their messages are grounded in personal experience or value-based reasoning (Elhajjar & Itani, 2025). Other scholars have highlighted the cultural and technological underpinnings of the trend, including the role of TikTok's algorithmic affordances, the influence of economic constraints, and the rising popularity of minimalist and anti-consumption lifestyles (Bainotti, 2024; Koivunen et al., 2025). However, there is currently no systematic synthesis of the available literature that explores the motivations behind deinfluencing, how consumers perceive deinfluencing content, or how brands are responding to this rapidly evolving landscape.

This paper seeks to address this gap by mapping and analyzing the emerging academic discourse on deinfluencing within the broader context of digital consumer behavior and brand strategy. The review is guided by three research questions:

1) What are the key triggers driving deinfluencing behavior on social media?

2) How do consumers perceive to deinfluencing content and its associated brands?

3) What strategic responses are brands adopting in light of the deinfluencing movement?

By synthesizing the available literature through a structured and transparent review process, this paper aims to contribute to the academic understanding of how trust, credibility, and resistance are negotiated in the influencer economy. The review also provides actionable insights for marketers and brand strategists seeking to navigate the age of digital distrust-an era where authenticity and skepticism coexist in shaping consumer-brand relationships.

2. Methodology

This systematic review was conducted to synthesize existing academic literature on the phenomenon of deinfluencing within the broader context of social media marketing. Specifically, the review aimed to explore the drivers of deinfluencing behavior, how consumers interpret deinfluencing content and its associated brands, and the evolving strategic responses from brands to this emerging movement. To ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and replicability, the review followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021), a widely adopted protocol for conducting systematic reviews in the social sciences.

The review was guided by three research questions:

1) What are the key triggers driving deinfluencing behavior on social media?

2) How do consumers perceive deinfluencing content and its associated brands?

3) What strategic responses are brands adopting in light of the deinfluencing movement?

A review protocol was defined prior to the screening process. This included eligibility criteria, search strategy, source selection, and procedures for data extraction and synthesis. The methodology emphasizes transparency in identifying, selecting, and synthesizing relevant studies.

Studies were included if they met the following criteria: (1) published in English between 2020 and 2025; (2) peer-reviewed journal articles, academic conference proceedings, or institutionally supervised theses; (3) directly addressed deinfluencing behavior or related constructs such as influencer credibility, consumer trust in social media, or brand strategies in response to digital skepticism. Studies focused on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube were prioritized. Studies were excluded if they were blog posts, opinion pieces, not academically reviewed, or unrelated to marketing, consumer behavior, or brand strategy.

The search was conducted between June and July 2025 across several databases: Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ResearchGate, Khalil et al. in Communication, arXiv, and DiVA Portal. A consistent search string was used across all platforms: ("deinfluencing" OR "de-influencing") AND ("influencer marketing" OR "social media" OR "consumer trust" OR "brand response" OR "digital marketing"). Reference lists of eligible articles were also screened for additional studies to ensure comprehensiveness.

A total of 104 records were initially identified. After removing 13 duplicates, 91 records remained for screening. Titles and abstracts were reviewed independently by the author, resulting in the exclusion of 80 records that were not relevant. Eleven full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Of these, five were excluded due to lack of relevance to the core research questions or methodological inadequacy. Ultimately, six studies were included in the final synthesis: four were empirical (quantitative or qualitative), and two were conceptual analyses or theoretically grounded academic theses.

Table 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

Stage	Number of records
Records identified through database search	104
Duplicates removed	13
Records after duplicates removed	91
Records screened (title/abstract)	91
Records excluded	80
Full-text articles assessed	11
Full-text articles excluded	5
Studies included in qualitative synthesis	6

Source: Authors' compilation

A structured data extraction form was used to capture key information from each included study. Extracted data included the authorship, year of publication, study objectives, research methodology, platform(s) studied, key findings, and relevance to the three research questions. Table 2 summarizes the extracted data from the six included studies.

Thematic narrative synthesis was used due to heterogeneity in methodological designs. Findings were grouped according to the three main research questions: triggers of deinfluencing behavior, consumer perceptions, and brand responses.

Table 2. Data extraction table of included studies

Author(s) & Year	Methodology	Platform Focus	Key Findings	RQ Addressed
Elhajjar & Itani (2025)	Experimental survey	Instagram, TikTok	Deinfluencers are more credible than traditional influencers; influence purchase intent	RQ1, RQ2
Khalil et al. (2025)	Qualitative interviews	TikTok	Consumers trust deinfluencers due to perceived honesty, value alignment	RQ2
Bainotti (2024)	Qualitative thesis	TikTok	Deinfluencing reflects resistance to overconsumption and trend surfing	RQ1, RQ3
Chokrane & Bainotti (2024)	Conceptual analysis	TikTok	Deinfluencing linked to sustainability discourse and authenticity narratives	RQ1, RQ3
Berry (2024)	Survey-based analysis	General (USA)	Demographics (education, income) influence distrust toward influencers	RQ1, RQ2
Koivunen et al. (2025)	Conceptual framework	Cross-platform	Brands respond by adopting cause-oriented messaging and controlled deinfluencing	RQ3

Source: Authors' compilation

The selected studies present several aspects of methodological approaches, including experimental design, qualitative content analysis, interview-based insights, and conceptual theorization. TikTok emerges as the dominant platform for deinfluencing discourse, reflecting its algorithmic affordances and cultural alignment with Gen Z authenticity norms. While the literature remains limited in volume, it reveals a clear thematic convergence around distrust, over-commercialization, and consumer desire for transparency-laying the groundwork for the findings discussed in the next section.

3. Findings

3.1. Triggers of Deinfluencing Behavior

The emergence of deinfluencing can be traced to multiple intersecting factors, including rising consumer skepticism, platform-specific cultural shifts, and socio-economic concerns. Scholars have consistently highlighted authenticity fatigue as a primary catalyst, especially among younger consumers exposed to oversaturated influencer content. As influencer marketing has matured, the perceived credibility of influencers has declined due to increased sponsorships and lack of transparency, prompting a shift from aspiration-driven content to more critical and grounded narratives (Berry, 2024). This decline in trust has led to the rise of deinfluencing as a form of consumer resistance to perceived manipulative marketing tactics.

The platform dynamics of TikTok play a particularly important role in shaping this trend. TikTok's algorithmic structure favors short, honest, and emotionally resonant content, which deinfluencing videos often embody. Bainotti (2024), in a qualitative study of #deinfluencing posts on TikTok, identified "resistance to overconsumption" and "trend surfing" as two dominant themes that motivate users to reject product hype. These themes often manifest in creators sharing negative reviews of popular items, calling out unethical brand behavior, or promoting minimalist and anti-haul perspectives.

Economic pressures have also contributed to deinfluencing behavior. Amidst rising inflation and concerns about sustainability, consumers-especially Gen Z-are increasingly critical of frivolous spending and overconsumption promoted by influencers. According to Chokrane and Bainotti (2024), deinfluencing has become a discursive tool through which users express financial responsibility and ethical consumption. Similarly, Berry (2024) found that individuals with higher levels of education and economic consciousness are more likely to distrust influencers and engage with alternative voices such as deinfluencers.

Moreover, the deinfluencing trend aligns with broader anti-consumption and postmaterialist values. It mirrors historical shifts seen in subcultures that resist mainstream advertising, such as the slow fashion and zero-waste movements. As noted by Khalil et al. (2025), deinfluencing does not merely reflect a rejection of products but signals a transformation in how consumers approach identity and decision-making in digital spaces. Collectively, these studies suggest that deinfluencing is not a momentary backlash but part of a broader cultural critique of commercial excess, performative authenticity, and algorithm-driven persuasion.

3.2. Consumer Perceptions of Deinfluencing Content and Brands

A central focus of recent scholarship has been the way consumers interpret deinfluencing messages and their attitudes toward both the content creators and the brands involved. Empirical studies suggest that deinfluencing creators are often perceived as more credible and trustworthy than traditional influencers. Elhajjar and Itani (2025), in an experimental study, found that participants rated deinfluencers significantly higher in perceived honesty and source credibility, which in turn influenced their attitudes toward the criticized products and their future purchase intentions. This suggests that deinfluencing is not simply about "saying no" to a product but about reframing consumer decision-making through trust and relatability.

The shift in perception is partly due to the tone and motivation behind deinfluencing content. Unlike traditional influencer marketing, which is often tied to brand deals and monetary incentives, deinfluencing is usually framed as unsolicited advice or personal experience. This aligns with the findings of Khalil et al. in Communication (2025), which highlight the importance of value congruence-consumers respond more positively to creators whose views align with their ethical, financial, or lifestyle beliefs. As a result, deinfluencing is often perceived as more transparent and user-centered, even when creators themselves maintain monetized accounts.

Importantly, consumer responses to brands mentioned in deinfluencing content are nuanced. While negative reviews may hurt a brand's short-term image, they can also foster perceived authenticity, especially when brands engage constructively with the critique. According to the Koivunen et al. (2025) conceptual analysis, brands that acknowledge and respond to honest consumer feedback-even when it is critical-can actually strengthen long-term consumer trust. Thus, consumer perception is shaped not only by the message but also by how the brand responds to the deinfluencing discourse.

The interplay between consumer perception and platform norms is also crucial. On TikTok, deinfluencing has gained legitimacy partly because the platform rewards vulnerability, critique, and emotional expression. Bainotti (2024) observed that users tend to valorize creators who "speak out" against overhyped products, contributing to a new model of credibility based on critical curation rather than enthusiastic endorsement.

3.3. Brand Responses to the Deinfluencing Movement

While academic research on brand responses to deinfluencing remains limited, emerging literature offers early insights into how companies are adapting to this shift. One notable strategy is the embrace of authenticity through transparency, whereby brands actively encourage honest product reviews-even if they include negative feedback-as a way to build credibility with skeptical audiences. Koivunen et al. (2025) conceptualizes this as "controlled deinfluencing," wherein brands create space for consumers to critique products and share real experiences without fear of censorship or backlash.

In addition, brands are increasingly turning to micro- and nano-influencers whose communities are built around trust and intimacy rather than reach alone. This approach aligns with Chokrane and Bainotti's (2024) observation that deinfluencing is often practiced by smaller creators who have not yet commercialized their online presence. These creators tend to carry higher levels of perceived authenticity and are thus valuable partners in shifting brand messaging toward honesty and user empowerment.

Some companies have gone further by incorporating anti-consumption narratives into their own branding. For example, campaigns that highlight when a product is not suitable for everyone, or that advise consumers to "buy only what you need," reflect a strategic alignment with deinfluencing values. This is not without risk, as brands must walk a fine line between genuine responsibility and what scholars have termed "authenticity-washing"-the strategic performance of realness without structural change (Khalil et al., 2025).

Still, the literature emphasizes that brands cannot afford to ignore the deinfluencing trend. As consumers increasingly rely on peer voices and critical content to inform decisions, companies must shift from persuasion-based models to dialogue-based engagement. Those that respond with humility, transparency, and consistency are more likely to retain credibility and trust in the age of digital skepticism.

4. Recommendations for Vietnamese brands

The findings synthesized in this review indicate that deinfluencing is not merely a passing trend, but a response to deeper shifts in consumer expectations, platform cultures, and economic realities. While most of the reviewed literature centers on Western digital contexts, the underlying dynamics-such as authenticity fatigue, growing skepticism toward influencer marketing, and a desire for transparent brand communication-are increasingly evident among Vietnamese consumers, particularly Gen Z and urban digital natives. For Vietnamese brands seeking to sustain consumer trust and engagement in this evolving landscape, several strategic directions are recommended based on the evidence discussed in Section 3.

First, Vietnamese brands should adopt a proactive transparency strategy, encouraging open dialogue and accepting critique as part of brand communication. As Elhajjar and Itani (2025) demonstrated, deinfluencers are perceived as more credible than traditional influencers, precisely because they prioritize honesty over persuasion. Similarly, the findings from Khalil et al. in Communication (2025) underscore that consumers today respond more favorably to creators-and by extension, brands-that openly acknowledge limitations, rather than presenting idealized images. In the Vietnamese context, where influencer marketing is prevalent but not always clearly disclosed, this shift toward transparency can differentiate brands positively in the eyes of increasingly media-literate consumers.

Second, brands should consider building long-term relationships with smaller-scale creators-such as micro- and nano-influencers-whose perceived authenticity remains intact. The literature reviewed, particularly Chokrane and Bainotti (2024), highlights that deinfluencing often originates from less-commercialized creators whose messages are rooted in personal experience rather than financial incentive. Collaborating with such individuals allows Vietnamese brands to tap into highly engaged communities where trust is still intact. This approach may be particularly effective for sectors like beauty, fashion, and wellness, where consumer skepticism of influencer endorsements is growing.

Third, Vietnamese brands are advised to reframe their value propositions to align with emerging anti-consumption and ethical consumption narratives. As discussed in Bainotti (2024) and Koivunen et al. (2025), deinfluencing often centers on critiques of overconsumption and product hype, reflecting broader concerns about sustainability, financial responsibility, and authenticity. Brands that promote minimalist messaging-such as encouraging mindful purchasing or highlighting product durability-are more likely to resonate with

younger consumers who are increasingly driven by value congruence rather than aspiration alone. This strategy aligns well with Vietnam's growing green economy agenda and the rise of socially conscious consumerism.

Fourth, companies should invest in real-time social listening and digital sentiment analysis to monitor conversations related to their products and brand image, including deinfluencing-related content. As deinfluencing often reflects unmet expectations or backlash against overhyped marketing claims (Berry, 2024; Bainotti, 2024), Vietnamese brands can use such insights to refine product design, improve customer experience, or adjust influencer partnerships. Listening actively to consumer critiques, especially on platforms like TikTok, enables brands to respond not with defensiveness, but with humility and improvement-a practice identified in the literature as positively influencing long-term brand trust (Khalil et al., 2025).

Finally, Vietnamese companies should prioritize internal education and ethical marketing governance, particularly in influencer management. Transparency in sponsorship disclosure, fair treatment of creators, and respect for authentic content-even when it is not entirely favorable-are essential practices in the current trust-driven marketing environment. As noted by Koivunen et al. (2025), brands that co-opt transparency without internal alignment risk falling into what some scholars term "authenticity-washing." In contrast, firms that develop ethical brand governance from within are better positioned to sustain credibility in a media ecosystem shaped increasingly by skepticism and peer evaluation.

In sum, deinfluencing presents not only reputational risks but also strategic opportunities for Vietnamese brands. Those that listen, adapt, and engage with authenticity-rather than resist or ignore the trend-will be more resilient in the face of shifting consumer expectations and competitive digital dynamics. The transition from influence to trust is not optional; it is the new imperative for brands in Vietnam's rapidly maturing digital economy.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review explored the emerging phenomenon of deinfluencing within the evolving context of social media marketing and consumer-brand relationships. Synthesizing six empirical and conceptual studies published between 2023 and 2025, the review addressed three guiding research questions: (1) What are the key triggers driving deinfluencing behavior on social media? (2) How do consumers perceive deinfluencing content and its associated brands? and (3) What strategic responses are brands adopting in light of the deinfluencing movement?

The findings point to a convergence of psychological, cultural, and technological forces behind the rise of deinfluencing. In response to oversaturated influencer content and authenticity fatigue, many consumers-especially younger users on platforms such as TikTok-are pushing back against hyper-commercialized marketing. As noted by Bainotti (2024) and Berry (2024), this shift is driven not only by distrust in influencers but also by economic pressures, sustainability concerns, and evolving digital platform norms. Deinfluencing represents a form of consumer resistance to commodified authenticity, challenging the persuasive foundations of traditional influencer marketing.

A critical insight emerging from this review is that consumers do not reject influence altogether-they instead recalibrate whom they trust and why. As Elhajjar and Itani (2025) empirically demonstrated, deinfluencers are often perceived as more credible and persuasive than traditional influencers, precisely because they foreground honesty, nuance, and critical evaluation. This dynamic is reinforced by platform cultures that reward emotional vulnerability and candidness (Khalil et al. in Communication, 2025). Deinfluencing, therefore, functions not as anti-brand discourse per se, but as a new grammar of influence-one that privileges transparency over aspiration and selective critique over blanket endorsement.

These developments pose both challenges and opportunities for brands. On one hand, critical content may threaten carefully crafted brand narratives, especially when consumers expose product shortcomings or hype inflation. On the other hand, the literature reviewed suggests that brands willing to embrace critique, partner with credible creators, and promote value-based messaging can actually deepen consumer trust (Koivunen et al., 2025; Chokrane & Bainotti, 2024). The shift from persuasion-based to dialogue-based marketing is no longer optional; it is imperative in a digital economy shaped by algorithmic curation and participatory culture.

For brands operating in Vietnam, these insights are particularly salient. The country's rapidly digitizing economy, rising consumer sophistication, and youthful demographic present a fertile ground for deinfluencing discourse to gain traction. As discussed, Vietnamese brands should prioritize transparency, ethical creator partnerships, social listening, and internal marketing governance to remain relevant in this shifting landscape.

References:

Bainotti, L. (2024). Trending resistance: A study of the TikTok #deinfluencing phenomenon [Master's thesis, University of Amsterdam]. DiVA Portal. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1877477/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Berry, J. (2024). Distrust of social media influencers in America [Preprint]. arXiv. https://arxiv.org/pdf/2406.02492

Chokrane, A., & Bainotti, L. (2024). TikTok deinfluencing trends and sustainability narratives [Bachelor's thesis, University of Amsterdam]. DiVA Portal. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1877477/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Djafarova, E., & Trofimenko, O. (2019). 'Instafamous' – Credibility and self-presentation of micro-celebrities on social media. Information, Communication & Society, 22(10), 1432–1446. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1438491

Elhajjar, J., & Itani, O. (2025). Examining the impact of social media deinfluencing on audiences. International Journal of Consumer Studies. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/389394993

Khalil, T., Mahmood, C. K., Singh, H., Aftab, F., Khan, H., Abdulhayee, I. A., Abdulhayee, K. A. (2025). The digital deinfluencing wave: Redefining trust in online communities. Frontiers in Communication. https://frontiers.in.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2025.1600657/full

Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. Journal of Interactive Advertising, 19(1), 58–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501

Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., & Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ, 372, n71. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71

Koivumen, K., Haanpaa, M. A. A., Saraniemi, S. (2025). The emergence of cause-oriented influencers: Conceptualizing deinfluencing. Journal of Business Research. https://sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296325002863

Espada, M. (2023, February 2). TikTok's deinfluencers are urging you not to buy. https://time.com/6251346/tik-tok-deinfluencers-reviews

Zhang, L., Zhao, Y., & Xu, K. (2023). Distrust in social media: A systematic review of trust in online platforms. arXiv preprint. https://arxiv.org/abs/2302.03671