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LIKE, SHARE, (IN) SECURITY IN THE AGE OF INFLUENCERS

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Abstract

Influencers occupy a powerful yet highly contested position in contemporary digital society, facing complex ethical, economic, and social challenges. Their impact on the society is huge, only that their messages can amplify polarization, toxicity, and harmful social behaviors. A simple post or story can create chaos for the audience by spreading unrealistic lifestyle content, manipulating the viewers by misinformation and low-quality knowledge. The present study analyzes some of the constraints that the public nowadays needs to face when it comes to choosing and following the content of influencers.

Whether it's about the tension between authenticity and commercial dependency based on brand partnerships and platform monetization, maintaining credibility for creators becomes really difficult. Critical thinking of the audience is the only capacity that can separate a sincere message from hidden advertising and personal opinion.

Influencers frequently address large and diverse audiences, including minors and vulnerable groups, yet they often operate without formal ethical training or regulatory oversight. The promotion of unrealistic standards raises serious concerns regarding psychological well-being, public health, and consumer safety.

Algorithmic pressure, labour precarity, political instrumentalization are other aspects that we have to take into consideration. The content creators' capacity to shape opinions makes them targets for coordinated political messaging, propaganda, and commercial-political hybrid campaigns. Many lack the institutional safeguards, editorial standards, or fact-checking structures

required to manage such influence responsibly. Legal and regulatory uncertainty, particularly regarding taxation, advertising transparency, data protection, and consumer rights often lag behind the speed of platform innovation.

In the next pages, through some relevant examples from Romanian media, we will observe the most recent cases of the influencers' challenges, that reflect upon fascinated and dependent audiences.

Key words: *content, social media, influencer, politics, e-commerce.*

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital economy, many content creators are increasingly driven by likes, shares, views, and comments rather than by ethical responsibility, professional deontology, or the safety of their audiences. Platform algorithms reward engagement above all else, pushing creators to produce content that is shocking, polarizing, or emotionally charged. As a result, controversy often becomes more profitable than accuracy, and virality outweighs responsibility. This dynamic encourages the spread of misinformation, harmful trends, unrealistic lifestyles, and sometimes dangerous challenges, especially among young and vulnerable audiences.

At the same time, many creators depend financially on this system, which puts them under constant pressure to remain visible and competitive. However, this dependency does not remove their ethical responsibility. When creators prioritize interaction metrics over audience well-being, they risk turning influence into exploitation. The growing gap between digital success and moral accountability raises serious questions about the future of online culture, trust, and the protection of public interest in the digital space.

I. CREATING INFLUENT CONTENT

The term "influencer" stands, according to the dictionaries, to "a person or thing that influences another" or in the last years to "a person who has become well known through regular social media posts and is able to promote a product or service by recommending or using it online"¹. Influencers are also known as content creators and are individuals with a strong online presence and a high number of followers, especially on social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.), who can influence opinions, behaviors, or purchasing decisions. They can gather large communities by online users around them, who follow the activity of influencers and who, over time, begin to trust the values they hold and the recommendations they make. Their authority is perceived as authenticity,

¹ <https://www.oed.com>, accessed on 12.09.2025. In the very beginning, the term is used in connection to the Church (1664) and later to the sovereignty and political power. Marketing borrows the term in the 1960s, and later "influencer" enters the fashion, media and publicity. After 2007, influencers are in regard with the internet field, bloggers, media campaigns and social media.

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expertise in a particular domain, because of an active and attractive lifestyle (authenticity must not be confused with sincerity). Social media creators can boost the visibility and brand awareness on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter and TikTok² by using content formats (stories, reels, live streams, and cross-collaborations).

By their profile type we can observe that there are the celebrities or the widely recognized public figures—typically from the film, music, or sports industries—who possess extensive audiences at a global scale; despite their substantial reach, their engagement rates are not consistently high), the domain specialist or the experts (who serve as authorities within particular domains, such as technology, fashion, or specialized subcultures. and whose evaluations are regarded as credible due to their established expertise), the cultural leaders or the trendsetters (that rapidly adopt and disseminate emerging trends, thereby positioning themselves as leaders in those areas, win an audience that follows them primarily to remain informed about the latest developments) and the consumers (influencers who reflect the perspectives of the general public by offering opinions and evaluations of products or services they personally use, they rely on authenticity, as they communicate from the standpoint of an average consumer).

According to their communities there are more types of content creators³: the mega-influencers or the hero creators (they are not experts in the industry, they are celebrities such as Cristiano Ronaldo, The Rock, Taylor Swift, Ariana Grande, smiley_omul, Andra, Andreea Balan, Gina Pistol; one of their posts sell online massively, and they have over one million followers from diverse backgrounds and interests); the macro-influencers (have between 100,000 and one million followers and most of them come from online, having a YouTube channel and being a vlogger-such as Kim Kardashian, Kiki, Jo Placencio, Priyanka Chopra, Mircea Bravo, Andreea Esca, Mihaela Radulescu, Alexia Eram, Calin Georgescu; they are the so-called brand ambassadors and are very expensive in campaigns, also some are disproportionately vulnerable to being implicated in various forms of influencer fraud); the micro-influencers (have between 10,000 and 100,000 followers and are considered experts in their niches by those who follow them, having a strong bond with them, because micro-influencers offer high-quality content characterized by authenticity, relatability, and meaningful value-such as Connor Norby, Russ Crandel, Ilie Bolojan, christiantour, romandra.travel, visit_oradea, places_romania, uoradea); the nano-influencers (are the ordinary people, that have under 10,000 followers, they sell brands products to smaller

² These platforms have massive audiences. At the moment the most convenient for content creators is Facebook, with nearly three billion active users. In the top follows Instagram with two billion people and then TikTok with one billion monthly users all around the world.

³ <https://mocapp.net/>, accessed on 15.10.2025

communities, such as family and friends, with whom they have real engagement and personal interactions-Chef Eugen Pocian, dorbobakery).

If we classify the influencers by their field of activity or content then we notice that there are as many as the domain they represent: beauty, fashion, gaming, auto, traveling, lifestyle, tech and gadget influencers, health, food and beverage, parenting, fitness and wellness, education, science, music, business influencers, but also photography, art/design, home, garden, shopping, parents, kids, outdoor, cinema, book lovers, blockchain/crypto, society/Politics, media, model, entertaining, sport/fitness⁴...

By the media channel used there are then the vloggers also named the YouTubers (are content creators who generally work on YouTube, the largest and most popular video platform in the online environment), the bloggers (are blog owners, who write on different themes, about different subjects, in a personal style) and recently the podcasters (they have and make podcast episodes about a certain niche, in which they discuss either alone or with guests).

No matter the type or the field the influencers come from, they are all interested to keep their followers, to bring new followers and to have an impact upon them. Talented and experienced content creators can produce high-quality, convincing, engaging content in order to sell a product (the creator's or the product of a different brand). The work of the social media creator is to obtain the likes, the shares and in the end, the profit (it can be visibility, popularity, brand awareness, different benefits, including financial ones). In order to be credible, the influencers should have a certain reputation, they must have tested the product, do some research about it, build their presentation and then actually present it and try to convince to audience to buy it. on the other hand, as happens to many digital jobs such freelancing, ride-sharing, platform work (*Cirmaciu D, Iancu E, 2025, pp. 265-277*) being a content creator offers flexibility but lack stability, safety benefits, paid leave, or long-term protection.

⁴ These are only some of the fields according to keepface.com, a world influencer marketing platform that "connects brands with curated influencers through ready-to-use data-driven lists". According to them, their target is to " make influencer discovery, outreach, and campaign management seamless" whether the influencer is "running a product launch, affiliate program, or brand activation.". On their site there are more influencer recommended lists, trending lists, discounted lists, new and noteworthy lists, that are "ready to deliver results" and are subclassified into: Instagram street style influencers-city looks to inspire, top motherhood influencers - find support, luxury style women influencers - discover the spark, skincare micro influencers: fresh faces to watch, female micro influencers specializing in travel, leading food influencers - savor local flavor, Romania's best influencers, micro beauty influencers to follow on Instagram: instant glow, Azerbaijan's science & education influencers: trending wisdom, US macro food influencers: bite into top trends today, turkiye's food influencers: savor the trends & connect now, Top Russian male Instagram photography creators - must-follow picks, Entertainment Instagram influencers greece - enjoy trending stars and many more... www.keepface.com, accessed on 09.10.2025.

II. FROM CONTENT TO REALITY

Media literacy and safety refer to the ability of users to critically and safely engage with new media, recognize manipulation, misinformation, and harmful content, and understand the psychological and social impact of digital media. Influencers can also have a very strong political role — not only as marketing entities, but as vectors of electoral influence. Critical thinking can save the mass to realize if their messages are “authentic” or “paid / directed”. The existence of coordinated campaigns of a certain creator raises questions about transparency and responsibility, scandals they are involved in also can get to backlash, the fake followers are still used on social media, so this can harm the reach and the influence of the influencer.

The public should remain vigilant and check from more sources of information when following influencers. It is also true that authorities (including consumer protection and electoral bodies) must keep up these new and surprising situations and should regulate this space more effectively to protect consumers (and voters). If we could compare a journalist with a content creator we observe that the differences are huge-the journalist has to obey a certain professional deontology, has the obligativity to check from at least two sources each information, while the influencer doesn't have any restrictions, but (in the best-case scenarios) his moral standards. If we refer to digitally created virtual influencers who are not even human⁵, but upload content and connect with their followers, social values such as trust, responsibility and transparency are in danger (*Robinson B, 2020, pp.4-6*). In Spain a deological code for the influencers is being created. The National Authority for Consumer Protection (ANPC) in Romania has started checking the Instagram accounts of the most important Romanian influencers, in order to assess how they reveal the commercial intent of their posts. The concrete recommendations to Romanian influencers who only slightly comply with the advertising rules are to clearly label commercial content using hashtags such as #advertising and #sponsorship and to make this visible and easy for followers to notice. The Romanian Advertising Council (RAC), an independent professional organization whose aim is self-regulation in advertising, has meetings with influencers where is discussed the need to initiate working groups to debate a code of good practices, as well as to create a certification project similar to the one in France, along with training and education programs for influencers.

⁵ Such as Miquela Souza, the first digitally created virtual influencer or a content generated imagery influencer, a fictional character, created by a real person, on the screen. There are many more: Imma, Barbie, Guggimon, Janky, Ana Tobor (in Romania) with millions of followers online. Virtual influencers are already part of the global Influencer Marketing industry and have an engagement rate three times higher than real influencers and are followed by women aged between 18 and 34 and by teenagers (13-17 years old). There is even a website dedicated to the industry, called virtualhumans.org, founded by Christopher Travers.

The European Union expresses their concern regarding the "unfair commercial practices" in order to protect the customers, but also to make the seller and the influencers more aware of a possible delict⁶. Under EU law, the public has the right to know if their "favourite athlete, singer, blogger is paid to endorse specific products and services", by sponsored endorsement being included "free gifts" (also unsolicited gifts), "free trips or discount codes", "partnership arrangement, free product or event invitation". The EU legislations states clearly that it is mandatory for influencers engaged in product promotion to disclose that they are acting as product sponsors and not merely consumers.

III. (IN)SECURITY WHISTLEBLOWING

While the press, the radio and the television are bound by very strict regulations, in the case of influencers it doesn't. The content creators can promote absolutely anything online, and no one can hold them accountable for what they say or verify what they do. From this point of view, influencers are more related to the advertisers than to the journalists. In theory, anyone such an advertising company, can promote anything, without having any kind of responsibility and without thoroughly checking what they are promoting. The audience will decide whether they test it or not. Here we are dealing with unfair marketing practices, that might sell the product and deceive the client.

To prove this fact, the vlogger Andrei Petroff decided to test his "companions". In 2023, Petroff revealed in a video that went viral on YouTube⁷ how he managed to persuade several influencers in Romania to promote a product that does not exist, namely "King Charles III's Cheese" sent for advertising by the so-called "Royal Court of Romania", institution that does not exist either. For the prank to be successful, he wrapped the cheese bought from the market in a way that would create the impression of a noble origin. Later on, Petroff contacted more influencers by email to arrange the promotion of the cheese, sending them a sample along with a bottle of wine. Those he contacted included Oana Roman, Alexia Eram, Ioana Grama, Alina Ceușan, and Ana Morodan. Some were delighted by the honour to present such a product and hurried to create the most original content⁸, and didn't even think to check whether the story was true. They delivered fake information along with their videos, for a paid request. The scandal

⁶ https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/consumers/unfair-treatment/unfair-commercial-practices/index_en.htm Whenever someone buys goods or services online and on the spot in the EU from a website they are protected against unfair practices, following different steps explained on the site. Sellers must provide clear, accurate, and easy-to-understand information about their products so the consumer can make informed decisions.

If sellers fail to do so, their actions may be unfair, and the consumer has the right to seek redress.

⁷<https://youtu.be/p-VOQglo-4M?si=n6TFf0mbr7uWZs16>, accessed on 23.10.2025.

⁸ Oana Roman posted a piece of content in which she expressed being impressed by the "king's cheese", a post she later deleted. She also threatened to sue them. vlogger, after checking the information received and trying to check the details with The Romanian Royal House.

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has brought attention to the issue of uncontrolled promotion by influencers and the need for a more responsible approach within the industry, who suffers because of the lack of specific regulation.

The absence of rules in the vast social media is considered "work in progress", also for the sake of the influencer, as a profession. Another scandal involving content creators with hundreds of followers got to court at the beginning of October 2025. A collaboration between a marketing agency, a company eager to extend the business and some parenting influencers remained with debts for the famous influencers, such as siblondelegandesc.ro.

IV. WHEN INFLUENCE MEETS E-COMMERCE

In the last decades, trading got to the next level: e-commerce. Through apps the content creators are having all the tools they need to put business first, not the client and its interests, nor the quality. Creator-led shopping is the concept where influencers post outfits, home decor, recipes, beauty looks with direct links to buy item. In return, influencers earn commissions when their followers⁹ purchase products from their shared links or storefronts. Easy money for the influencers, no matter their message type (funny, convincing, critique, sentimental), because the algorithms favour interactive posts of the users, regardless of whether the comments contain insults or praise. Massive, popular online marketplaces such as Shein, Temu, Trendyol, known for selling a huge variety of goods, especially fashion, at extremely low prices use influencers to sell their products. Trendyol¹⁰ has done exactly this: it built a home for creators where market comes first (*Kemora H., Pasaribu P.N, 2025, pp. 123-142*). The company is actively engaging influencers from Eastern Europe to support its growing presence across the CEE region, including countries like Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria. Through its affiliate program, the brand offers attractive commission rates (up to 75%), custom discount codes. Their program mainly targets fashion and lifestyle influencers with high local engagement on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok¹¹. Content creators connect consumers directly with

⁹ LTK (formerly LikeToKnow.it) is a leading creator-commerce platform that connects influencers or creators with shoppers, enabling them to share shoppable content. Users follow their favourite creators, discover trends and products then shop seamlessly across categories save items, get alerts or simply click to pay for the products. <https://www.shopltk.com>, accessed on 24.11.2025.

¹⁰ Trendyol is Turkey's top e-commerce platform, started in 2010 and has entered into agreements to raise \$1.5 billion Dollars from a number of high-profile investors, valuing the company over \$16.5 billion Dollars. Majority-owned (over 85%) by China's Alibaba Group, it is described as a "decacorn", in order to describe a privately held company with a valuation that exceeds \$10 billion (the term is a combination of the prefix "deca-", meaning "ten" and the word "unicorn", a one billion Dollars startup) to signify ten times that achievement). They serve over 40 million clients in the world and involve over 250.000 sellers. www.trendyol.com, accessed on 12.09.2025.

¹¹ In its first year on the Romanian market (2024), Trendyol recorded 1.3 million active shoppers and sold over 13 million products. In 2025 it reached 2,3 million users. Also with the support of

Turkish and Chinese manufacturers. It's win-win for all parties, up to a point: the bankruptcy of the local producers, artists, or entrepreneurs and their replacement with cheap and low-quality e-commerce platforms¹². In 2024, in Romania, more than 2,800 Romanian influencers also contributed to the Trendyol product promotion, posting around 150,000 Instagram stories on their social media accounts. In 2025 the number tripled in size: Trendyol is deploying over 9,000 influencers and three ambassadors into the Romanian market (the singers and TV presenters Theo Rose, Gina Pistol și Smiley)¹³. Interested creators can usually apply through dedicated sign-up pages or partner networks like Keepface and Takefluence, with basic requirements such as a minimum follower count (around 10,000 on Instagram) and solid engagement metrics.

In its rush for high profits, Trendyol had encountered in Romania a few great scandals, implying the lack of deontology. Famous creators such as Mircea Bravo chose to advertise for such a huge platform, no matter the image costs. Some influencers are open to any type of content. For example, in October 2025 one influencer made even the unbelievable possible: a reel with the proper funeral outfit... only from Trendyol¹⁴. The Romanian Football Club Rapid has taken the online retail platform Trendyol to court in April 2025¹⁵, when has accused the Turkish company of using the club's logo and branding without authorization on various clothing items offered for sale. Even the payment of taxes has become a question mark for these e-commerce platforms, as well as for the influencers who promote them (*Cirmaciu D.*, 2024, pp. 1-6).

V. IF IT'S FREE, THE USER IS THE PRODUCT

Influencers are present in every sector of life, but it can be a bigger danger when in politics. During the 2024 presidential elections, several TikTok influencers¹⁶ were involved in a campaign supporting the Romanian politician and

influencers that presented the company's products on social media. <https://business-review.eu/lifestyle/beauty-fashion/romania-becomes-trendyols-largest-market-in-cee-as-the-company-celebrates-one-year-in-our-country-278578>, accessed on 28.10.2025.

¹² Analysts state that in a few years, after the local specialized business will be suffocated by these platforms, the prices of their products will probably grow and customers will remain low-quality buyers.

¹³ It's the second consecutive year in which Trendyol is organizing its Black Friday campaign in Romania, and the first edition to include local Romanian merchants and brands. Currently, over 4,000 Romanian sellers are active on the platform and are participating in this year's event. <https://startupcafe.ro/black-friday-2025-turcii-de-la-trendyol-arunca-in-lupta-pest-9-000-de-influenceri-pe-piata-din-romania-88932>, accessed on 20.10.2025.

¹⁴ The influencer is called Iustina Loghin, has 225.000 followers and the funeral reel from her Instagram story gathered 2750 views. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/edKaYuCsAK4>, accessed on 22.11.2025.

¹⁵ <https://evz.ro/dan-sucu-a-dat-in-judecata-trendyol-razboi-si-cu-influencerii.html>, accessed on 24.08.2025.

¹⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20ndg1eeeno>, accessed on 11.09.2025

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agronomist, Calin Georgescu. Known for his praises of the WWII's fascist leaders in Romania, Georgescu¹⁷ appeared out of nowhere and won the first-round of Romania's presidential election. It was a shock for the media and the Romanian audience, especially that his campaign was held on social media, mainly on TikTok. Another shock was the fact that the elections were annulled¹⁸ amid accusations, suspicious TikTok accounts and secret payments to online influencers and of Russian interference (although Moscow denied interfering in the election). An unprecedented political crisis has emerged as Romanian authorities accuse TikTok influencers of taking part in social media campaigns that artificially amplified Georgescu's online presence. According to Romanian intelligence at that time, his sudden and unexpected rise in popularity stemmed from a "highly organized" and "guerrilla-style social media campaign" that disseminated identical messages and relied on influencers¹⁹, having spent a "zero budget" on election promotion, denying he was even campaigning. The intelligence documents identified later that in the period 24th October - 24th November that from one TikTok account were made payments of almost 400.000 Dollars to different users who were promoting Georgescu, although the TikTok campaigning was not being marked, in violation of the platform's rules and of Romanian electoral law. Georgescu denied knowing any of the influencers or funders mentioned in the reports. The subject created investigations for both the Romanian media and for the one abroad. The case was followed up by BBC, across four main reports²⁰. Some of the BBC articles mention that a campaign video of him "cantering through fields on a white steed" helped obtaining the likes and the shares needed to make him so famous overnight. In another report the use of influencers was called a "major attempt to interfere in the country's presidential elections" with the

¹⁷ <https://www.politico.eu/article/calin-georgescu-romania-elections-far-right-tiktok-nato-skeptic-russia-ukraine-exports/>, accessed on 20.09.2025

¹⁸ Georgescu was banned from running, which created many public reactions and protests in front of the Romanian state institutions. He was also detained, facing a criminal investigation that included an attempt to overthrow constitutional order, accusations that he denied. His speech found a ready audience because it related "the distrust of the System", "conspiracy theories swirl" (he questioned the existence of Covid, of the moon landing and claims that water is something other than H₂O). TikTok helped channel all the mass' frustration, poverty, the perception of corruption for Georgescu.

¹⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgq18w507dko>, accessed on 10.09.2025

²⁰ "Romania hit by major election influence campaign and Russian cyber-attacks" (signed by Sarah Rainsford, on 5th December 2024), "Romania's cancelled presidential election and why it matters" (signed by Paul Kirby and Nick Thorpe, 6th December 2025), "How meddling blamed on Russia exploited real grievances in Romania" (Sarah Rainsford, 10th December 2025), "The TikTokers accused of triggering an election scandal" (signed by Rowan Ings, 30th April 2025). It's interesting. It is worth noting that the greater the importance of the information, the higher the rank of the journalist assigned to sign the piece. (from a BBC Eastern Europe correspondent, in Bucharest, then Europe digital editor & Central Europe correspondent, to BBC Global Disinformation Unit & BBC Trending). <https://www.bbc.com/articles/cqx41x3gn5zo>, accessed on 13.09.2025.

use of the social media platforms, in particular TikTok, and "with a series of cyber-attacks", sharing "identical messaging and using influencers"²¹.

On the 30th of April, a few days before the second round of elections, BBC is publishing the text "Testimonials from Romanian influencers accused of promoting Georgescu on TikTok: «A clever approach»"²². Reading it, we are informed that TikTok influencers have been accused by Romanian authorities of taking part in social media campaigns that artificially inflated Georgescu's online visibility. He chose another, more efficient recipe: "had no campaign office" and "didn't engage in traditional campaigning". With the influencers, on TikTok videos that exploited the algorithms, showing Georgescu "practising judo". bathing in cold springs during winter, "riding horses in traditional Romanian outfits", he went viral before the election and soared in the polls, "winning almost 23% of the vote". From the same article is stated that for one month, over 100 influencers²³ were hired and posted "paid content indirectly" promoting Georgescu. The method used was quite unique. The campaign started a few weeks before the elections but didn't include mentioning a certain name of a candidate, but the hashtag "stability and integrity". A marketing platform (called FameUp) that allows brands to hire influencers at scale to promote products, was inviting the influencers to post different videos on their influencers' pages. Many of the influencers declared afterwards that they didn't even feel they were part of a propaganda process, some paid (but not curious to check where the money/gifts came from, many not declaring that were paid), some that were only sharing content that encouraged the Romanian population to vote. The influencers were impressed by the fast response of their communities, through likes and shares, but also waves of comments that were backing to the independent candidate Calin Georgescu. It was "a tactic to game TikTok's algorithm and get his name trending, which would in turn push his content into more users' feeds". In the same period "thousands of inauthentic accounts whose comments boosted Georgescu on the platform" were blocked²⁴.

²¹ According to the material, this was done with efforts "coordinated by a state-sponsored actor" (most probably, guided by Moscow). <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgq18w507dko>, accessed on 12.09.2025.

²² <https://www.bbc.com/articles/cqx41x3gn5zo>, accessed on 17.09.2025.

²³ Mostly were preferred and chosen the micro-influencers, who could get in an accessible way to more of their communities.

²⁴ TikTok reported that it had taken down a network of more than 27,000 fake accounts that employed fictitious personas to post comments about the Romanian elections. The BBC report also cites one of their TikTok sources that said they: "blocked millions of fake engagement attempts, removed hundreds of thousands of spam accounts, prevented impersonation of political candidates, and disrupted three covert influence networks with limited reach". The whole campaign seemed similar to an operation run in Ukraine, mentions the same article. Moreover, the so-called Romanian "King of TikTok", Bogdan Peschir, supposedly paid thousands of dollars to facilitate the campaign, and "cyberattacks, leaks, and sabotage" were possible online.

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The journalistic documentation presents interviews with three influencers²⁵ that took part in process and mentions the fourth one, Bogdan Peschir with the online name of bogPR. Regarding Bogdan Peschir there were many press materials that concerned the influencers' implications in the political matters, both in the national and international media. An influential business man and a former IT specialist, Peschir increased the notoriety of his TikTok account, to the maximum level, 50, having one of the highest scores in Romania and being among the highest in Europe. According to the criminal investigation authorities, Peschir paid almost one million Dollars to over 250 influencers via TikTok gifts in order "to induce them to vote for "a certain candidate" in the presidential elections", although his lawyers denied this claiming that "none of the donations made by Peschir on TikTok were for electoral purposes"²⁶. Some examples of conversations found on Bogdan Peșchir's phone during the digital search were shared through different media texts and present the context of the exchange, the sums of money (mostly sent through Revolut), the proofs for earning the gifts (screeshots, photos)²⁷. Many names of influencers, collaborators on Peschir, were made publically²⁸. In May 2025, BBC is making an audio documentary podcast about "The TikTokers inside an election fire-storm", with 47 influencers involved in the campaign²⁹. Peschir was arrested for one month, on the 21st March ³⁰ for "corrupting voters through electronic means of

²⁵ Cristina from Iasi, Romeo Rusu, from Constanta and Lucian Elgi, a musician and influencer.

²⁶ His lawyers also declared that his client feels "discriminated for his political views" and that Peschir had been active in the cryptocurrency market for seven years, donating money on TikTok for the last two years with no connection to any political affiliation. <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/bogdan-peschir-eliberare-arest-corupere-alegatori-calin-georgescu/33396956.html>, accessed on 19.09.2025.

²⁷ <https://www.g4media.ro/stenograme-din-dosarul-lui-bogdan-peschir-bogpr-am-si-io-orugaminte-am-venit-din-puscarie-si-sunt-amart-poti-sa-mi-dai-si-mie-cv-bani-contracost-fac-cevrei-inpar-pliante-cu-domnu-george.html>; <https://www.g4media.ro/ipocrizia-patriotilor-lui-calin-georgescu-care-boicoteaza-supermarketurile-ce-mananca-afaceristul-urmarit-penal-calin-donca-paste-din-italia-malai-din-slovia-hrisca-din-polonia.html>, accessed on 19.09.2025.

²⁸ Through them are Samuel Plesa and many "TikTok users", but also Victor Micula, who apparently earn 60.000 Dollars, sent through Revolut. He used the money to pay the TikTok influencers to promote the AUR extremist party and then admitted all the details in a TikTok video, along with other influencers; Makareli, Allin, Bamba, George Pian. <https://www.ebihoreanul.ro/stiri/ancheta-penala-dupa-ce-victor-micula-ar-fi-platit-influenceri-depe-tiktok-sa-promoveze-partidul-aur-190785.html>, accessed on 17.09.2025.

²⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/audio/play/p0l8lgd4>, accessed on 18.09.2025. Stability and progress are now mentioned by most of these influencers.

³⁰ The gifts were offered on TikTok during live sessions, or via Revolut. The largest gift (donation) on TikTok is called TikTok Universe and is worth 3,700 lei. Later on, a new twist of the case appeared in January 2025: #stabilityandintegrity campaign was paid for by the centre-right National Liberal Party (PNL), who were backing their own candidate in the elections.

communication"³¹. Other influencers were being under criminal investigation regarding the offense of voter bribery³².

Messages sent by influencers must be verified by themselves first of all, thought and created in such ways not to attack the rights and freedoms of the others. Legal state organs started in the same period to investigate different influencers and their electronic communication, observing not only the fact that some spread disinformation narratives³³, but also serious offenses that endanger voters' safety and the right to hold an opinion (*Ghergut-Babii, AN, Poleac, G., Obada, D, 2025, pp. 1-22*). There were five influencers charged by Prosecutor's Office attached to the High Court of Cassation and Justice, in a separate case, but related to these political involvements, with inciting violence, hatred, or discrimination; issuing threats; promoting the cult of persons convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes; and publicly supporting fascist, legionary, racist, or xenophobic ideologies or doctrine.³⁴

CONCLUSION

Content creators or influencers have become central actors in both e-commerce and contemporary political communication, exercising significant power over consumption patterns, public opinion, and behavioral norms. In trading, they function as key intermediaries between platforms, brands, and consumers, accelerating purchasing decisions through perceived authenticity and social trust. This has contributed to the rapid expansion of platform-based commerce, but also to increased risks related to misleading advertising, overconsumption, lack of transparency, and weak tax and regulatory compliance.

In the political sphere, influencers increasingly shape political narratives, normalize ideological positions, and mobilize audiences outside traditional institutional frameworks. Their impact is amplified by algorithmic systems that prioritize emotional engagement over factual accuracy, enabling the rapid spread of polarizing, manipulative, or misleading content. The fusion of commercial and political influence further blurs the boundaries between advertising, personal

³¹ According to Article 386 of the Criminal Code, voter bribery consists of "offering or giving money, goods, or other benefits with the aim of determining a voter to vote or not to vote for a certain list of candidates or a particular candidate" and "is punishable by 6 months to 3 years in prison and the prohibition of certain rights". www.just.ro, accessed on 24.10.2024.

³² Seventeen home searches took place on March in Bucharest and in the Romanian counties of Brasov, Botosani, Calarasi, Dolj, Galati, Giurgiu, Maramures, Mures, and Timis, at the residences of individuals, in a criminal case where a criminal investigation is being conducted regarding the offense of voter bribery. <https://www.digi24.ro/>, accessed on 24.10.2025.

³³ Ana Maria Prodan, Ana Tepus, Connect-er were just some of the Romanian celebrities accused of such posts on their personal Instagram, Facebook and TikTok pages. <https://www.veridica.ro/2024-anul-marii-resetari/naratiuni-rusesti-promovate-de-influenceri-pro-georgescu-pe-instagram-si-tiktok>, accessed on 21.09.2025.

³⁴ <https://www.romania-insider.com/romanian-prosecutors-pro-georgescu-influencers-voter-bribery-2025>, accessed on 23.09.2025.

opinion, and ideological persuasion. Only critical thinking can guide the security of the internet and social media users.

Overall, the growing power of influencers reveals a structural shift in authority from institutions to platform-based personalities. While this transformation creates new economic opportunities and participatory spaces, it also generates profound ethical, social, and regulatory challenges. Without stronger accountability mechanisms, transparent platform governance, and robust digital literacy, influencer-driven systems risk undermining consumer protection and security, democratic processes, and public trust.

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