



OCTOBER 2021

Goodbye Audience, Hello Community:

The state of brand advocacy in 2021



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Executive Summary

The global pandemic has given way to a seismic shift in how we use social media to connect and engage with our communities. This shift comes from a drive towards more consumer-focused marketing that places ‘real people’ at the forefront of the agenda in the digital marketing world.

Brand Advocacy is the leading solution to maintain relevance and impact in this new social media landscape. Now, the community brands foster with ‘real people’ is the new indicator of a success that can last. This report explores why brand advocacy is the most cost-effective approach to strengthening your brand with a social media generation that craves community over clout and authenticity over algorithms.

Our analysis dives deep into recent data to explore how consumer purchase decisions and loyalty are driven by factors such as trust, authenticity, and transparency. We uncover how demand for ‘real’ reviews by ‘real people’ puts pressure on digital marketing teams to include more organic, consumer-driven content and reconsider their approach to influencer marketing campaigns.

This report breaks down how to execute an effective brand advocacy programme to help drive engagement, increase sales, and prevent redundancy - all while keeping costs down. We unveil fresh insights into the following areas:

- **Section 2:** Why **brand advocacy** is an essential strategy for brands to harness the renewed interest in word of mouth marketing. Plus, discover how brands who don’t leverage the power of **organic, consumer-driven content** perform against brands who do.
- **Section 3:** We delve into the concept of ‘**brand love**’ and why **prioritising trust, transparency, and purpose** in your brand vision can help drive purchase decisions with everyday consumers.
- **Section 4:** Inauthentic brand advocacy strategies have failed brands in the past - we break down **the dos and don’ts of an effective brand advocacy programme**.
- **Section 5:** Why brand advocacy is the **most cost-effective** influencer marketing strategy to drive engagement and activate a loyal consumer base.
- **Section 6:** **Tiered gifting programmes** can help maintain a mutually beneficial brand advocacy programme. We break down how to keep your advocates happy in four simple steps.



2



**Know your influence.
Grow your influence:
How to harness word of
mouth marketing through
brand advocacy.**





What is Brand Advocacy?

The influencer marketing landscape has undergone a paradigm shift, spurred on by the global pandemic and a drastic rise in social media usage. While influencers can generate high engagement and curate professional content, content from genuine consumers can add a layer of trust and expertise.

C2C (consumer to consumer) marketing (or word of mouth marketing) follows the promotional strategy where everyday consumers share a product or service with their friends, families and fellow consumers based on their product usage and personal evaluation.

Alongside our research partner [Dectech](#), we analysed the social media habits of 1000 consumers. We found that **most people (71%) trust content from people they know than content from brands (36%)**. Shifting the focus of digital marketing back to 'real people' is the only way for brands to survive in the highly competitive social media landscape. Brand Advocacy

is a potent hybrid of influencer marketing and C2C marketing and is the number one way to build relevance with this generation of consumers.

Brand advocacy is a strategic approach to generating brand love and building an authentic online community that enables you to tap into the power of those who genuinely support your brand, all while maximising the capabilities of user-generated social media content. Brand advocacy is more akin to traditional word of mouth marketing, where your brand can locate 'ambassadors' within your consumer base who don't need to be convinced to rave about your product. Wearisma data revealed that organic content generates 20 times the Media Value compared to paid content. Adopting brand advocacy will bring added value to your brand and foster a more organic approach to community-building - a must for brands who want to maintain relevance alongside a consistent consumer base.

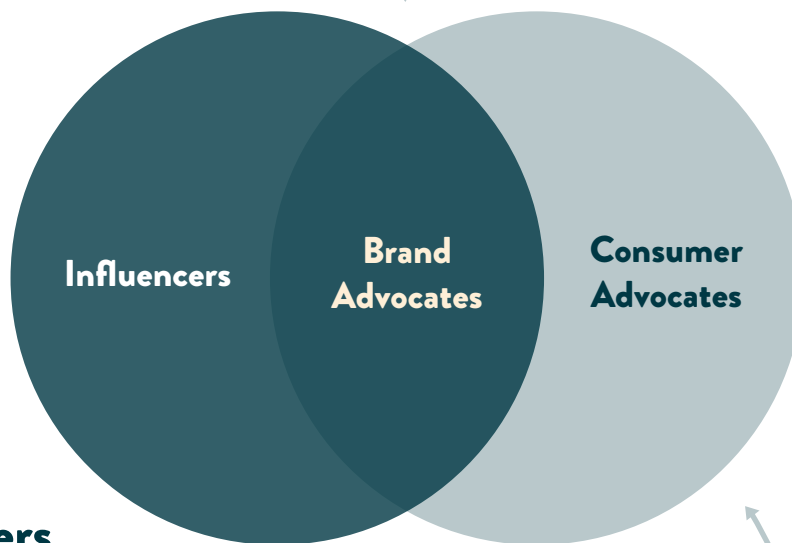


What is the difference between Influencers and Consumer Advocates?



Brand advocates

Brand advocates are passionate supporters of your brand who promote your products online through word of mouth marketing and reviews. Brand Advocates can be either traditional influencers or consumer advocates, as long as they are genuine fans of your brand who are eager to share their passion with others.



Influencers

Influencers come in many forms, from celebrities to beauty and fashion bloggers who often curate content for brands through paid partnerships. Wearisma considers influencers as those who have at least three out of the five following attributes:

- They mention and tag brands
- They post weekly
- Over 1K followers
- A business account
- A listed point of contact for brands



Consumer Advocates

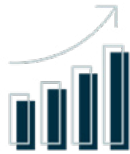
On Wearisma's platform, consumer advocates are social media users who don't subscribe to more than 2 of the 5 aforementioned attributes. They are social media users who authentically engage with your brand and are already talking about you online through positive reviews, mentions, and recommendations.



The benefits of consumer advocates

The benefits that influencers bring to a brand have long been established and partnering with influencers based on genuine passion rather than vanity metrics is crucial for 2021 and beyond. However, a winning brand advocacy strategy can not be created with influencers alone. Many brands are missing a trick by failing to partner with everyday consumer advocates.

At Wearisma, we believe brand advocacy is the leading solution to creating an ethical and authentic social media marketing strategy. Brand advocacy has the capacity to build brand awareness, increase engagement and impact your bottom line. In our study, **74% of people stated that more recommendations from people they know would encourage them to purchase from brands.**



“Brands have had to lean on brand advocates to drive core messages home to their customers, so they can relate but also retain customers especially in challenging times.”

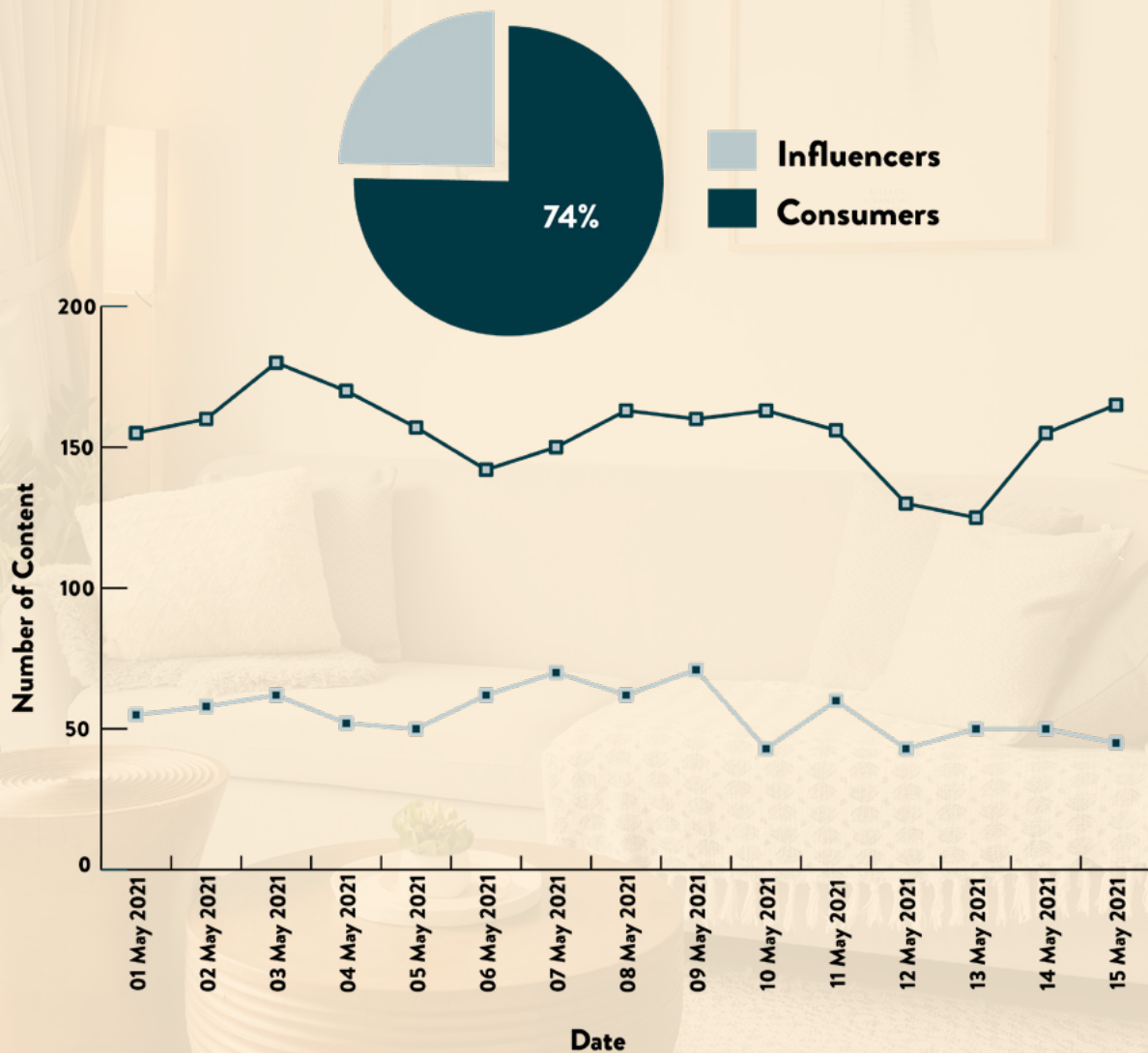


Olivia Tongo

Marketer, Strategist and Founder
[Life Of A Marketing Girl](#)



Consumer Advocate vs Influencer Content Client A, May '21



Source: Wearisma Data.

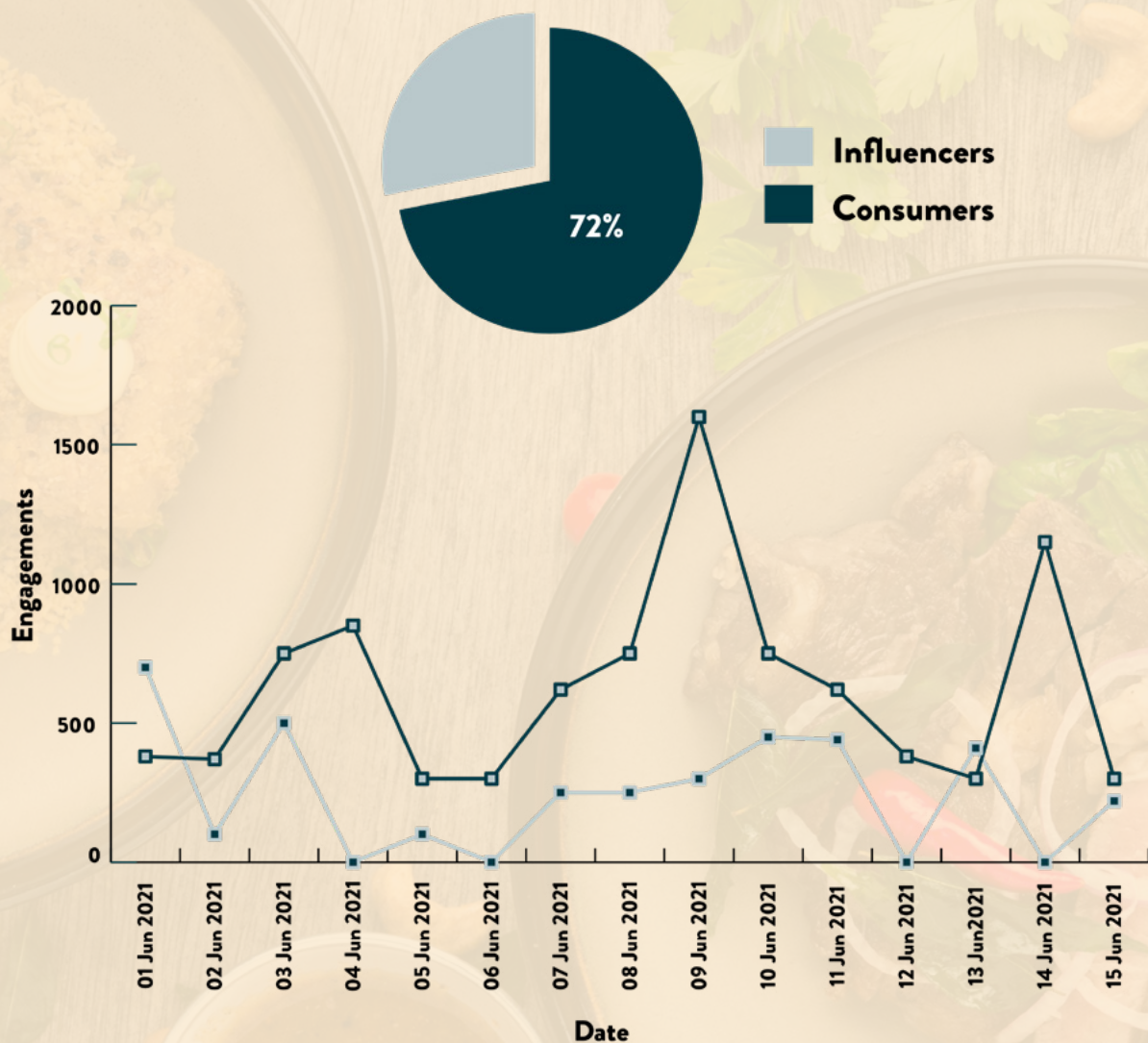
Figure 1. Wearisma data revealed that in May 2021 for Client A, a global homeware brand, consumer advocates generated 74% of content.

Utilising our new Consumer Advocacy tab we discovered that across certain campaigns, consumers advocates can outperform traditional influencers. As highlighted by figures 1, 2 and 3 across summer '21 consumer advocates contributed up to 75% of the engagements, content and media value for a

global homeware brand, food brand and fashion brand respectively. These insights prove that both influencers and consumer advocates are the key to building a brand advocacy strategy that truly adds value.



Consumer Advocate vs Influencer Engagements Client B, June '21



Source: Wearisma Data.

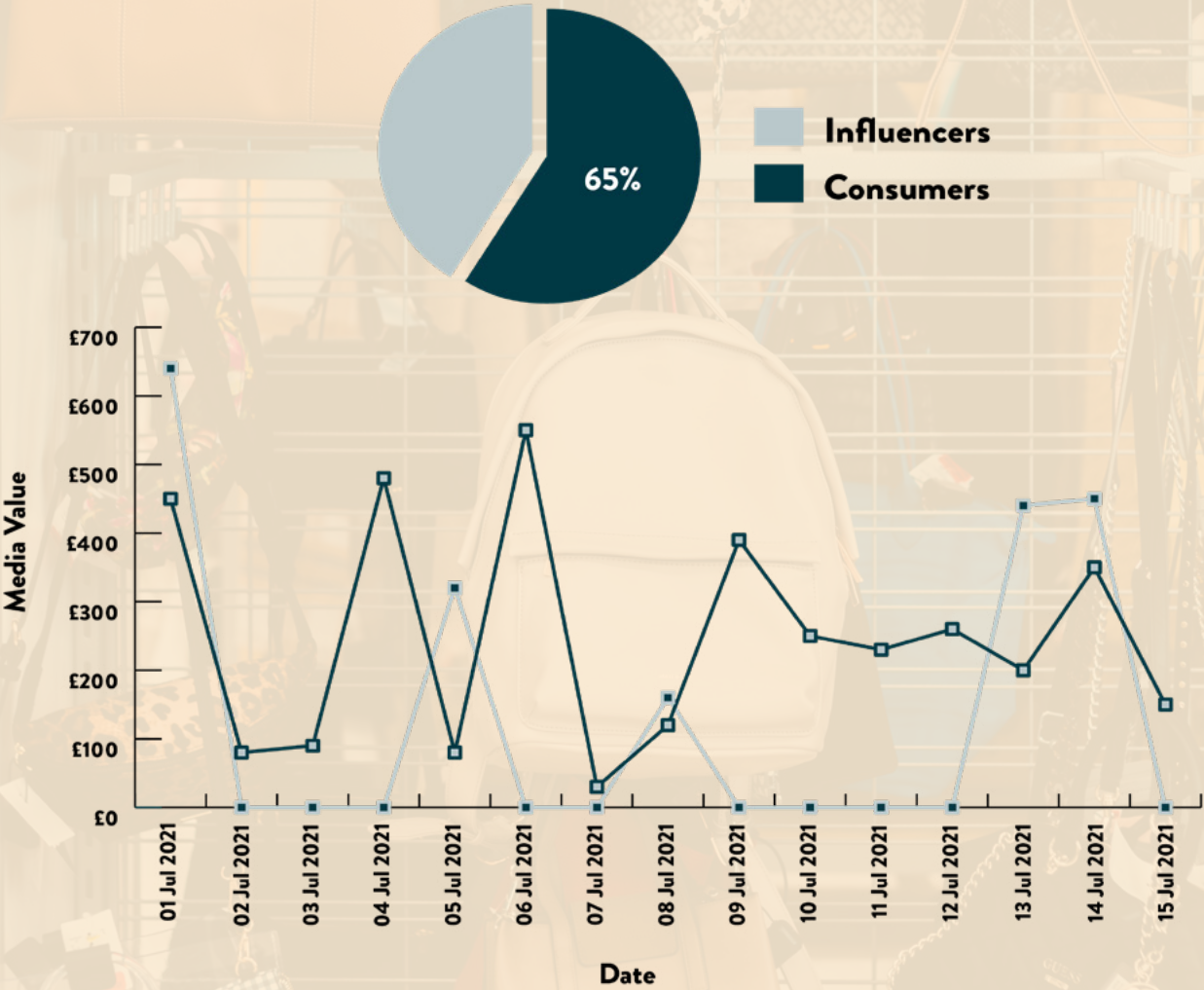
Figure 2. Wearisma data revealed that in June 2021, for Client B, a global food brand, consumer advocates' content had a spike in Engagements - generating at least 1.5K, 5X the amount of Engagement influencers received alone.



Partnering with a group of passionate advocates that includes both influencers and consumers is an effective way for brands to make the shift from building an audience to building a community and

generating brand love. While influencer marketing is not dead, it has evolved, with brand advocacy poised to dominate the digital realm.

Consumer Advocate vs Influencer Media Value Client C, July '21



Source: Wearisma Data.

Figure 3. Wearisma data revealed that in July 2021, for Client C, a global fashion brand, consumer advocates generated 65% of the Media Value.



(Brand) Love wins

By using Wearisma's solutions to build a community of passionate brand advocates and focusing on generating brand love, **MADE.COM** saw a **300% increase in the social media presence in every target market within six months.**

In the modern era, your brand advocates are already a part of your online community. Brands must equip themselves with the tools to identify their most loyal consumers and tap into their power.

“We’re really focused on building a community of true advocates and loyalty rather than just gifting in return for sales. We have moved away from a ‘gifting-for-sales-strategy’ into more of a paying it forward, and community-based focused project.

Not only does this give the creator more autonomy and purpose, it then creates more long-lasting relationships, and to do this, Wearisma’s tools have enabled us to not only find creators but also see how our project is performing and help us inform future campaigns.”



Emma Little

Global Brand Advocacy Manager
MADE.COM



The risk of ignoring Brand Advocacy

Even legacy brands, who would be mistaken to think they are safe from the pressures of keeping up with shifting consumer-brand relationships, can become redundant by failing to foster an authentic online community. For example, **despite Topshop's high brand awareness, which sits comfortably at 85%, they cannot convert awareness into online engagement; only 16% of those who know the brand follow them on Instagram.** By failing to adequately adapt their marketing efforts to a more consumer-minded approach, Topshop has failed to generate brand love with a conversion rate from awareness to followers that falls at only 19%.

On the other hand, **our research shows that digital-first brands such as Pretty Little Thing (PLT) have found more success in curating high follower (24%) and conversion rates (30%), despite lower levels**

of awareness (80%). One of the easiest ways to strengthen your community is by creating brand advocacy hashtags. Brand advocacy hashtags are hashtags that brands encourage their consumers to showcase their purchases and organic content with the brand's wider community. These tags enable everyday consumers to make the transition into advocates. Brand advocacy hashtags generate a higher engagement rate than simple brand hashtags think #prettylittlething vs the brand advocacy hashtag #everybodyinplt. Wearisma data reveals that **in July 2021, the #everybodyinplt tag generated nearly 2X the Engagement Rate (ER) (20%) of the branded tag #prettylittlething (13%).** PLT successfully maximised the impact of their existing consumers, increasing **brand awareness and engagement through** their use of the brand advocacy hashtag and frequently repurposing organic content.

Awareness to Social Media Following Conversion Rates

Social Platforms		Aware	Follow	Conversion
boohoo	Boohoo	89%	27%	30%
PRETTYLITTLETHING	Pretty Little Thing	80%	24%	30%
ESTRID	Estrid	7%	2%	28%
PIXI	Pixi Beauty	28%	6%	22%
SÉZANE	Sezane	5%	1%	22%
ISABEL MARANT	Isabel Marant	9%	2%	20%
REVOLVE	Revolve	20%	4%	19%
TOPSHOP	Topshop	85%	16%	19%
COS	COS	21%	4%	17%
MISSOMA	Missoma	15%	2%	15%
BILLABONG	Billabong	44%	5%	11%

Source: Dectech Data in partnership with Wearisma.

Figure.4. Fashion and Beauty brands ranked by conversion rates from awareness to following on social media.





PLT's ability to capitalise on organic, consumer-driven content shines through comparatively with Topshop who do not have a brand advocacy hashtag. #Topshop generated an ER of just under 4% in the same period. If an effective brand advocacy strategy is implemented, brands can tap into the power of organic content to increase brand awareness and engagement with everyday consumers.

The takeaway for brands is that failing to adequately

adapt your social media strategy to include brand advocacy can decrease your brand's interest, even from your core audience.

With our online communities craving recommendations and reviews from real people more than ever, even well-known brands can no longer hide behind an established logo or well-curated marketing campaign.



3



**Goodbye Audience,
Hello Community:**
**How trust, authenticity
and purpose drive purchase
decisions.**





Consumer-brand relationships have undergone a significant shift in recent years. With consumers demanding a genuine sense of connection to the brands, trust is crucial in dictating a brand's success.

That's why fostering an authentic community that stretches beyond traditional advertising and influencer marketing campaigns is essential. Research from the [International Journal of Consumer Studies](#) highlights that this shift in consumer-brand relationships results in 'emotions becoming a predictor of a brand's fate'. The power has shifted back into the consumer's hands, and now is the time for brands to listen.

In the mass digital age, community has quickly become the most sought-after online experience. With consumers trusting members of their physical and digital communities more than adverts, brands need to focus on leveraging the power of their entire community. [Studies](#) have revealed that 'the "pushing out" of messages is no longer applicable in the digital landscape because consumers have increased power

and can block messages they do not want to receive and access information that they do'.

Consumers can now control the content they do and don't want to receive. Hence, brands need to focus on building authentic online communities and engaging with consumers personally. Brand advocacy is the leading strategy to tackle this shift in consumer-brand relationships; rather than simply advertising to consumers, brands need to be engaging with them.

Trust, transparency and authenticity are invaluable for maintaining a community of loyal advocates who genuinely love your brand. Researchers [Joshi and Garg](#) explain, 'Brand love is defined as a construct that reflects the passionate, emotional attachment with a brand'. It has been [connected](#) with two well-established relational constructs: trust and commitment. Satisfied consumers experience brand love, and this satisfaction breeds loyalty which has given rise to the most powerful type of advertising: advocacy.



The traits expected from a brand advocate

At Wearisma, we delved deeper and conducted research asking consumers what they believe to be the key attributes that make someone a true advocate. The responses we received aligned with the importance of trust and authenticity when choosing the best-suited ones to advocate for your brand. The key themes coming out speak to a demand for influencers who are already passionate about the brand and can provide honest reviews highlighting

both the good and the bad, preferably by being a prior user of the product or knowledgeable in their own right. Answers also revealed that influencers need to share similar interests with the brand and be selective in who they work with for their content to feel genuine and perceived as true advocates. Respondents also provided several comments about transparency regarding partnerships.

What do you think are the key attributes that make a true advocate?



Source: Dectech Data in partnership with Wearisma.

Figure 5. Thematic analysis of the traits consumers consider a true brand advocate to have.

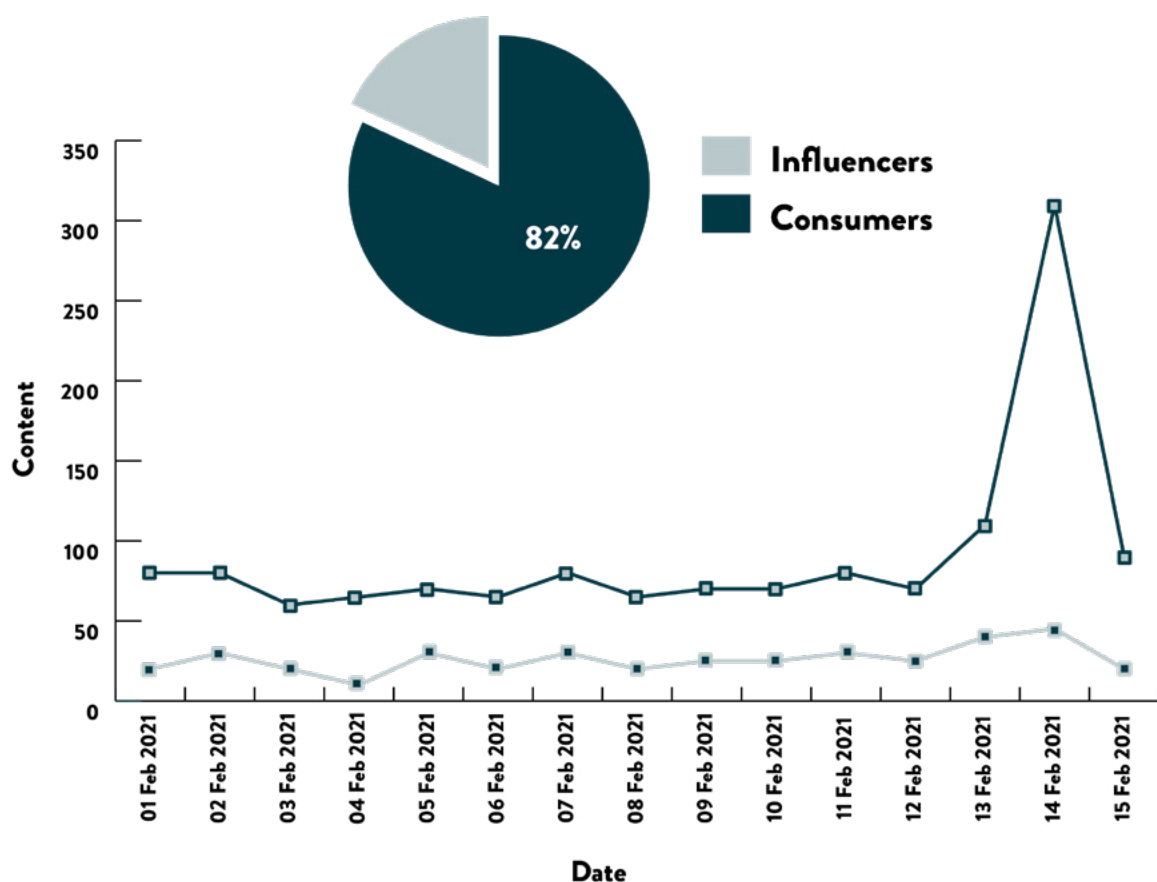


How Ann Summers cultivated their brand advocates

The success of our client Ann Summers' brand advocacy campaign highlights the importance of the link between building trust with 'real people' and generating 'brand love'. Keeping their mission to inspire and empower women at the forefront of the agenda, Ann Summers has cultivated an impassioned community of consumers turned advocates. By fostering a connection with those that share the same values as their brand they were able to substantially

increase engagement, generating an **impressive 1K of UGC posts every week**. Leading a purpose-driven brand with clear values your target consumers can connect with is invaluable when it comes to building a community of advocates and generating engagement. True brand advocates share your core values and are more likely to engage with your community if you have a vital mission at the forefront of your brand.

Consumer Advocate vs Influencer Content for Ann Summers, February 2021



Source: Wearisma Data.

Figure 6. Wearisma data revealed that in February 2021, consumer advocates generated 82% of content for Ann Summers.



Wearisma's Consumer Advocacy Tab proves that during February 2021, @annsummers was mentioned by more consumers than influencers across Instagram. Wearisma's data also shows 300 consumers posting on Valentine's Day, their highest spike in mentions. Whenever there's a spike in influencers posting, there's also a spike in consumers' content, suggesting that consumer advocates often set the tone for viral campaigns.

Ann Summers encourages their advocates to share creative and inspiring content with hashtags such as #styledwithAS. **During the final quarter of 2020, their advocates posted three times on average, gaining an above-average ER of 3.9%.**



Gen Z and millennials, in particular, are sensitive towards a brand's actions because they are not simply buying a product; they're aligning their consumer behaviour with their core beliefs and social values. It is essential to have a personality and purpose behind the brand that stretches beyond the product. Brands need to learn to tap into the art of conversation and stop talking like a brand, which involves a shift from 'broadcasting messages' to engaging with consumers on a personal level. Humanising your brand will make it easier to interact with consumers in a way that feels authentic on both ends. The evolution of this in recent years can be seen through 'brand banter' and the increased transparency of brands such as Innocent giving the team a voice on social media. Inviting consumers to engage with the personality behind the brand encourages more consumers to trust, and therefore advocate, for your brand.

An intelligent brand advocacy strategy can transform how you connect with consumers, increase engagement and drive purchases. You need an intelligent brand advocacy strategy to:



Foster **brand love** which is emerging as **the most powerful form of advertising**



Avoid becoming irrelevant and losing out to digital-first brands who focus on **community building**



Cut costs while **driving impact**

Lucy Seller's comments on how fostering trust and an authentic connection with 'real people' online help turn everyday consumers into passionate advocates.

"We have genuine stories of our customers who have gone from tagging us in their posts to featuring in our campaigns and are now firmly a part of our diverse girl squad".




Lucy Seller

Brand & Communications Manager
Ann Summers

Ann Summers' approach to curating a community of advocates is a great example of building trust with your community by showing your brand's actions align with your brand values.



4

A photograph of three young people sitting together. The person on the left is a man with glasses and a pink shirt. The person in the center is a woman with dark curly hair, wearing a pink blazer and holding a smartphone. The person on the right is a woman with long pink hair, also wearing a pink shirt. They are all looking towards the camera.

**Consumer advocacy
campaigns have been
misunderstood:
Leveraging the power of your
biggest fans.**





While understanding the value of the everyday consumer is essential to building a strong community of advocates, smaller digital-first brands have often missed the mark despite their best intentions. Smaller brands have previously opted to send out direct mass messages (or DMs) online to encourage random people to become ‘brand ambassadors’ by offering discounts in exchange for repurposed content. While this may have its benefits, these multi-layered marketing strategies can resemble a pyramid scheme and are often ignored because the message and sender appear inauthentic, often being mistaken for a

scam. This is a rushed and highly impersonal attempt at building a community of advocates, one that ultimately embodies the antithesis of an ethical and authentic brand advocacy campaign.

C2C marketing only works when brands commit to fostering authentic engagement. Pushing discount codes and a meaningless label of ‘ambassador’ to randomly selected consumers who may not even be aware of your brand repels possible customers from engaging with your product.



Brand advocacy strategies identify the consumers who already love your brand but don't position themselves as advocates. Whilst their reach might be smaller than a typical influencer, the everyday consumer has a considerable influence within their own network. If they already love your brand, you're already halfway

there; they are likely the market you need to target, and their followers may be similar. So, if they're already singing your praises online and buying your products - don't sell to them; give them something back to show them how much you value their support and want to hear about their journey with your brand.



Relationship building is key to any successful brand advocacy strategy

Our research shows that this authenticity is one of the key attributes that make someone a true advocate and generate high-engaging content. For example, **our client COTY's success with their #perfectasiam TikTok campaign for Marc Jacobs Fragrances broke records, achieving an Engagement Rate double the industry average.** COTY's Influencer Marketing & Comms Lead Grace Fung largely attributes this success to the authenticity of the people featured in the campaign and building long-lasting relationships with those that advocate for their brand.

This shift towards the demand for more personable and relatable content and the benefits of building long-lasting relationships with influencers and advocates speaks to the future of social media marketing.

Building a relationship with your everyday consumers, whether they have 200 or 2000 followers, through gifting and the repurposing of engaging content is an efficient extension of your influencer strategy that yields high results at a lower cost. Ultimately, brand advocacy is about passing the mic to those best situated to advocate for your brand - actual consumers who already love your brand.

Grace Fung spoke with Wearisma on this success:

“Influencers have changed the way they create content as well; it’s become more personable. We have established some more long term partnerships with influencers...When you invest in those long term relationships, you really see the benefits in the long run”.




Grace Fung

Influencer Marketing & Comms Lead
COTY UK & I



5

A hand holding a smartphone against a light-colored brick wall. On the wall, there is a large red heart with the number '1' inside it. The heart and number are painted or stenciled. The background of the entire slide is a dark teal color.

**Cut costs, drive
impact:
How to activate on your
consumer base.**





We partnered with Dectech to investigate the cost implications of brand advocacy strategies. The insights revealed that **influencers are 30% cheaper than other marketing strategies. In a head-to-head comparison with print media, Influencers generate 10% fewer sales but are 40% cheaper per impression. Overall, Influencer CPA (cost per acquisition) is 30% cheaper than traditional media.**

Even when people are unfamiliar with an influencer, influencer content positively impacts purchase intent (28%), slightly lower than the purchase intent (30%) from content from known brands.

These stats speak to the benefits of investing your brand's energy into building a community of advocates. Identifying those already speaking about

your brand and stepping aside to let their voices shine through is the most authentic way to promote your brand to the wider community. Particularly, working with influencers and implementing strategies such as brand advocacy is a much more cost-effective option, given brands will not need to invest a large number of exponential funds into shooting campaigns and generating professional content.

So, take a step back from branded advertising campaigns and let those who know your brand best - consumers - do the talking for you.



6



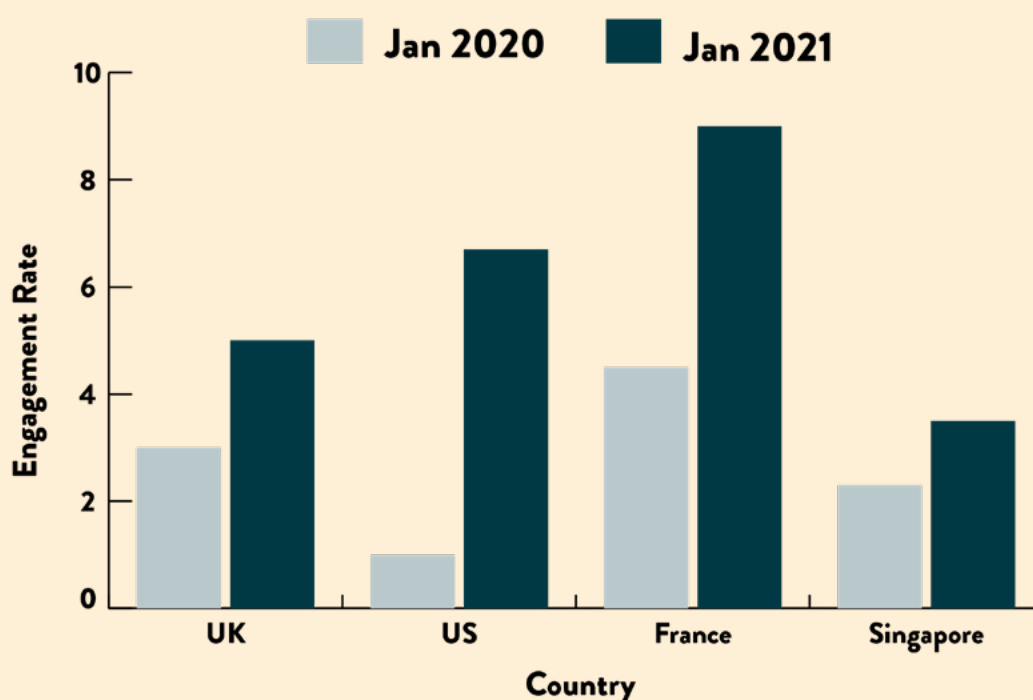
**From brand loyalty
to brand advocacy
and back again:
The smart way to nurture
your community.**



Brand Advocacy programmes should implement loyalty programmes to maintain a relationship that is equally beneficial for the consumer and reward advocates for authentically promoting your brand. Nurturing your community through meaningful and well thought out gifting strategies is a great way to maintain a positive relationship with your advocates and encourage more UGC, simultaneously raising brand awareness and engagement. **Wearisma's insights revealed that the ER for #gifted doubled**

YoY between 2020 and 2021, revealing that audiences are increasingly interested in content that shows brands rewarding advocates for their loyalty. Furthermore, **76% of people would be encouraged to purchase if they were first provided with gifts or freebies**, suggesting that reciprocity should be a key feature in brand advocacy programmes, creating a fulfilling two-way relationship between your brand and your community of advocates.

Engagement Rates for #gifted YoY



Source: Wearisma Data.

Figure 7. Engagement Rates for #gifted content saw a 127% increase YoY across the UK, the US, France and Singapore.

Tiered gifting is another approach brands can incorporate into their loyalty programmes. A tiered gifting system involves giving more significant rewards to brand advocates whose content is the highest-yielding and performs the best for your

brand. Operating your gifting activities according to a tiered system will ensure that you get the most out of your best advocates and maintain strong connections with your top performers.



4 Steps to Tiered Gifting

1

Create your tiers

The amount of tiers you have in your gifting system is entirely up to you, but each gift in your tier should align with the products you are currently promoting. For example, a tier-one gift may be a discount code, a tier-two gift could be sample products, while a tier-three gift would include a full-size product. Once you have discovered your advocates, they should all typically start on tier one.

2

Tracking

After rewarding advocates, you must keep a close eye on how they are performing. As well as rewarding your advocates for being loyal to your brand, tiered gifting activities aim to trigger the psychological principle of reciprocity, i.e. you gift your advocates and they reciprocate the gesture by creating organic content promoting your brand. However, the degree of reciprocity will be higher for some advocates than others which is why the next step is crucial.

3

Monitoring and Reporting

Wearisma's platform includes Monitoring and Reporting tools that will allow you to easily see:

- Who is promoting your brand more frequently
- Whose content is performing above average in terms of key metrics like Engagements, Engagement Rate and Media Value
- Who is driving more traffic and sales to your site

4

Evaluating Tier Placement

After reviewing your report you should be able to easily identify who is performing the best for your brand according to your KPIs. Once you have identified these top-performing advocates, you can reward them by moving them up a tier. For the advocates who have performed below or at average continue to reward them at tier-one as maintaining loyalty with your advocate community is always essential to an authentic brand advocacy programme.

To ensure your brand is making the most out of tiered gifting, repeat steps 2-4 to maintain your community and continue cultivating a strong community of brand advocates. Using Wearisma's intelligent campaign tools will support you through each step with ease and allow you to make the most out of your brand advocacy programme.





Conclusion

Incorporating brand advocacy into your digital marketing strategy is an essential move for brands looking to build and maintain relevance with the modern consumer.

At Wearisma, we believe brand advocacy is the leading solution to creating an ethical and authentic social media marketing strategy. Brand advocacy can build brand awareness, increase engagement and impact your bottom line.

Increasingly, the digital conversation surrounding influencer marketing signals a shift towards a more consumer-driven approach that must put 'real people' at the forefront of the agenda. Working simultaneously alongside both everyday consumers and established influencers diversifies your digital marketing strategy and creates opportunities to drive growth through organic, consumer-driven content. Building and maintaining an impassioned community of brand advocates is the leading solution to drive organic engagement and activate a loyal consumer base; a crucial move if brands want to maintain relevance in the modern digital era.



Glossary

Influencer

Influencers are self-made publishers who make a living discussing and reviewing products as experts online. Influencers come in many forms, from celebrities to beauty and fashion bloggers who often curate content for brands through paid partnerships. Wearisma considers influencers as those who have 3 out of the 5 following attributes:

- If they have a point of contact
- If they mention and tag brands
- If they post regularly
- Over 1K followers
- A business account

Consumer advocates

On Wearisma's platform, consumer advocates are social media users who don't subscribe to more than 2 of the above attributes. They are social media users who authentically engage with your brand and are already talking about you online through positive reviews, mentions, and recommendations.

Brand advocates

Brand advocates can be either influencers or consumer advocates. Brand advocates is an umbrella term used to describe both consumers and influencers, as long as they are advocating for your brand.

Brand advocacy

Brand advocacy is a strategic approach to build an authentic online community, increase sales and drive engagement. Brand advocacy is essentially a return to traditional word of mouth marketing, where your brand can locate 'ambassadors' within your consumer base who don't need to be convinced to rave about your product online.



Wearisma is one of the leading and most comprehensive insight and reporting platforms for influencer marketing with global reach and local expertise. In addition, Wearisma provides partner-friendly solutions, enabling brands and agencies to incorporate insight, reporting and optimisation tools seamlessly into their existing marketing stack.



hello@wearisma.com
www.wearisma.com

