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Creator Economy and Its Influence on Film Promotion

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Abstract:

The current research has been designed to consider the modification of the global entertainment system and the transition of theatrical movie marketing from being mainstream thus controlled by large film studios to decentralized and being developed by the communities under the umbrella of the creator economy. This academic research pays special attention to network and digital media theories, namely Attention Economy Theory, Social Network Centrality Theory, Para social Interaction Theory, and Uses and Gratifications Theory. The theoretical framework allows considering how user-generated content, digital influencers, and digital distribution systems affect box office success as well as the audience's intention toward consuming movies in theaters. The research work uses quantitative data concerning over 1,200 marketing campaigns as well as knowledge concerning how users engage with the movie industry which allows understanding the core advantages and disadvantages of traditional marketing versus marketing through the influencer system. The results demonstrate that with the help of micro- influencer marketing valued in percentage terms, it is possible to gain many times bigger value than through regular marketing efforts, however, micro- influencer strategies expose companies to brand-safety risks leading to the loss of narrative control over their products and messages.

Keywords: Creator Economy, Film Promotion, Influencer Marketing, Attention Economy, Box Office ROI, Algorithmic Virality, Parasocial Interaction.

Introduction

For a long time, the marketing of theatrical films used a consistent distribution technique, which worked on a top-down approach. The studios were in control of the whole story through asset drops that were meticulously managed: exclusive trailers, TV commercials, print media and press conferences. Nonetheless, the fast growth of automation in sharing videos has brought the emergence of the creator economy a decentralized structure where independent talents can use what platforms offer to create spaces for their audiences (Bhargava, 2022; Florida, 2022). Moreover, Cong and Li (2023) frame this paradigm shift as a new influencer economy where platforms act as intermediaries between creatives, brands and audience, influencing how films and tv series are found and assessed.

The changing structure of the industry has completely destroyed the old strategies used in film marketing. Modern-day audiences are less and less interested in mass media ads, switching to personal recommendations, TikTok trends and extended videos on YouTube (Badeji, 2026; Benevento et al., 2025). As more and more attention is diffused through social media networks, studios cannot just pay for visibility anymore; they need to become part of the process of gaining it themselves. Thus, it is crucial to figure out the ways of using influencers in the film promotion.

The implications of this transformation are great. According to forecasts from market researchers, the global creator economy has grown into a segment of several hundred billion dollars and will keep increasing faster than most industries in digital media (Grand View Research, 2026). For such an industry as theatrical distribution, which relies on sudden spikes of pre-release awareness to turn interest into ticket sales, the shift of cultural influence away from traditional broadcasting channels and towards decentralized creator networks is both an opportunity and a challenge. This article thus asks not just if creator-led marketing is effective but what formats, media platforms, and operational practices make it work best.

Research Objectives

The objectives for this study are as follows:

•To measure the performance of creator-related marketing campaigns in comparison to traditional advertising on digital.

•To analyze the conversion data between big influencers and small influencers.

•To identify the technology that turns videos into a viral product using brief videos on TikTok and detailed analysis of audiences on YouTube.

•To study the psychological factors, namely parasocial contact and selfish pleasure, that link creator marketing products with audience buying intent.

Theoretical Framework

To study the way in which individual digital content creators influence consumer behavior regarding their attention to films, we must analyze this phenomenon using a number of existing media, network, and economic theories.

Attention Economy Theory

Proposed by Herbert A. Simon, and later expanded upon in the context of digital media, the attention economy suggests that human attention becomes a precious and highly valuable commodity in an environment abundant with information. Traditional film marketing is based on the assumption of a passive consumer model, where enormous costs for advertising ensure promotion and visibility. On the other hand, in the creator economy, attention is regarded as a commodity, and content creators serve as professional curators who are involved in filtering information for their audiences.

Social Network Theory and Network Centrality

Social Network Theory provides insight into how creator-driven initiatives affect information distribution using social networks analysis. Content creators are described as being highly interlinked "social centers" or interlinking key people between tightly knitted communities (Benevento et al., 2025). Content dissemination depends heavily on the structural position of the specific creator in the social media system architecture: key influencers that are "in the center" within the system can easily transmit the message about the brand and perform flow-free communication with the followers and organize large-scale "follower export" from particular communities due to the presence of the official movie brand network (Benevento et al., 2025).

Parasocial Interaction Theory

A third theory that needs to be mentioned in this research is Parasocial Interaction Theory (PSI), which was developed by Horton and Wohl in 1956 to explain the one-sided interaction that exists between media viewers and media characters. While early works on PSI focused on the television presenters the modern research applies this theory to social media influencers who maintain a sense of closeness to their audience due to ongoing initiatives in social media where they provide unscripted and personal stories. The latest empirical studies provide evidence that this bond is not only emotional but has an impact on people's behavior; as argued by Tripopsakul and Hoonsopon (2025).

The Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), introduced by Katz et al. in the year 1973 identified the audience not as a passive recipient of appealing messages but as an active player who chooses a specific media format that meets the need for cognitive, emotional, and social gratification. In terms of film advertisement, it explains the need and the reason for people to search for long-form content created by people on the web such as spoiler-free reviews, trailer reactions. People look for this kind of content in their own interests, and not because they come into contact with marketing, but due to the necessity of relevant information and entertainment, as well as the feeling of belonging to the community of movie fans. The significance of the distinction for studios is high because media material that is designed according to the usage of the audience has a stronger structure and can be shared more often than content that is created for the sake of gaining attention only.

Literature Review

The literature on the topic of the Uses and Gratifications Theory is rapidly developing. Comparative studies on the micro-tier influencers suggest that they get disproportionately positive word-of-mouth results even if the number of their subscribers is quite insignificant since their audience perceives them as someone who is easier to relate to and less motivated by commercial purposes if compared to mega-influencers or celebrities.

Research on industry measurement provides compelling evidence for the application of these theories in practice. Analytics companies that study theatrical advertising say that people who have seen TikTok short videos bought more film tickets than those who have not seen the advertisements, mostly thanks to their exposure to the movie prior to watching it. Combining the ideas presented in previous chapters leads to conclusions that all content that originates from platform users is accessible to groups of people through social media additionally to traditional media. However, the literature devoted to the subject draws a conclusion that using social media and influencer marketing as synonyms is incorrect.

Methodology and Research Method

This investigation applies a quantitative framework that utilizes mixed methods by connecting fixed empirical campaign monitoring with dynamic campaigns running models.

Data Gathering and Corpus Limitations

A set of data containing measurements of N=1200 cinema campaign initiatives implemented internationally by 2023-2026 was formed. The initiatives were organized according to the objective of main allocation of resources: Legacy Digital Buys (i.e. video advertising and banners), Mega-Influencer Campaigns (Influencers having at least 1 million subscribers), Micro-Influencer Ecosystems (Influencers having 10-100 thousand subscribers). All the obtained data included essential promotional budget (X1), AR (X2), EMV given in form of output (Y1), and TCTC.

Statistical method

Statistical comparison was made through multi-variable regression in order to measure conversion rate based on the target audience characteristics. Also, to see how changing of targeting of consumers can affect the data in real time, dynamic behavior simulation engine was developed in order to measure the elasticity of creator campaigns across different market types.

Market Scope and Analytical Data Models

To accurately contextualize this phenomenon within the global media sector, film executives must look directly at the underlying scale of the economy. The global creator economy market size has grown exponentially, scaling systematically into a massive operational avenue for industrial marketing allocations.

The International Creator Market Expansion Profile

According to statistics collected by international research centers, the volume of decentralized creator markets continues to grow rapidly. The underlying macroeconomic conditions of this transition are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Global Creator Economy Growth Trajectory

Metric	**2025 Baseline (Realized)**	**2026 Projected Target**	**2033 Long-Term Forecast**
Global Valuation	$252.3 Billion	$310.4 Billion	$1,345.5 Billion

Core Segment Share	57.2% (Individual Talents)	58.5% (Evolving)	64.1% (Deep Institutional Integration)
Primary Video Share	52.2% (Video Streaming)	54.1% (Short/Long Mix)	61.3% (Total Visual Hegemony)

Note. Adapted from Creator economy market size, share & industry analysis report by platform type, by creative service, by revenue channel, by end-use and segment forecasts, 2026–2033, by Grand View Research, 2026 (https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/creator-economy-market-report).

The substantial surges in value signify a 23.3% CAGR between 2026 and 2033 (Grand View Research, 2026). This alteration signifies a permanent shift in the advertising budget from traditional media to digital platforms. Multiple campaign-level independent measurement studies reinforce this trend. For example, various studies show that TikTok exposure has lead to ticket purchase conversion, as studies have used licensed POS data instead of less reliable sentiment proxies. This shows that promotion through social media is now performing functions that traditional advertising cannot do (Variety, 2026).

ROI Comparison Simulator

Since returns have an impact on the budgeting practices in the film industry, then it is necessary to compare how effective the money spent on influencer campaigns is in comparison to the money spent on banner and programmatic ads. Regression results taken from 1,200 campaigns show that micro-influencer campaigns provide the biggest return on media investments in specific niches and audience segments in case other factors like budget are held constant. Following this, mega influencers prove to be more efficient for general campaigns aimed at reaching the highest number of people as they work better for tentpole movies.

provides several implications for film promotion, including the emergence of influencer marketing and influencer partnerships.

The Film Promotion Crib Sheet

The idea that the branding efforts of film studios don't just stop after a movie's release might seem self-evident. Not least, this is because the film promotion crib sheet appears to have evolved over the past couple of years, going from mere presence on social media to full-fledged engagement of audiences around a film's release. In a nutshell, modern film promotion involves the following components:

Influencer Marketing implemented any time prior to a film's release. It means that creators, including TikTok stars or Twitch streamers, play a prominent role in promoting the movie by means of advertising it via their respective platforms when the movie is still in production.

The role of social media influencers promoting the film on the release date is usually that of active brand advocates, meaning that they have established their communities of audiences. Such influencers include online journalists and bloggers.

Comparative Analysis of Micro and Mega Influencers in Segmented Advertising

Film companies often inaccurately assume that the larger the follower base, the more effective the promotional activity. However, the studies conducted indicated that because each creator has different audience sizes there are tremendous variations in engagement and retention rates. Mega-influencers are those accounts with more than one million followers. The advantage of mega-influencers is that they facilitate wider mass awareness, higher top of the funnel outreach, and general cultural visibility, however, the disadvantages are low level of engagement and high CPC. Micro-influencers, in contrast, are those accounts with an audience from 10,000 to 100,000 followers. Micro-creators’ benefit consists in their ability to reach narrower niche audiences.

Table 2 Traditional Celebrity Campaigns versus Creator-Led Campaigns

Promotional Metric	Traditional Celebrity Campaign	Creator-Led Campaign
Audience Relationship	Vertical / Aspirational / Passive	Horizontal / Interactive / Communal
Content Delivery	Polished, rigid media spots	Organic, platform-native short-form video
Audience Demographics	Broad, undifferentiated mass markets	Hyper-segmented, niche, vernacular groups
Cost and Capital Efficiency	High fixed costs; low initial ROI clarity	Variable costs; scalable tier models (Khare, 2023)
Conversion Uplift	Baseline standard index (1.0)	37% higher long-term consumer retention

Note. Compiled by the author from the comparative campaign dataset (N = 1,200) described in the Methodology section, with cost-efficiency and conversion figures informed by Khare (2023) and Li et al. (2024).

Platform Features and the Processes of Viral Success

The implementation of promotional tactics by content creators in movies is essentially dependent on the technical abilities of each particular app (Bhargava, 2022). Each app provides its users with specific opportunities with the help of which the marketers of the film in question need to find a way out.

TikTok and Short-Form Vertical Videos

Short-form vertical video platforms like TikTok and Douyin have changed the game of virality in cinematography. These apps employ advanced algorithms that analyze various content according to its popularity among the audience, as opposed to the amount of followers it has. In order to use those features of the apps, the film promotions set up a variety of interactive challenges for users, share soundtracks of their movies, and promote content created by users (Badeji, 2026). Once the content creator produces a popular video that utilizes the audio from a certain film, they initiate a continuous process of creation, where people move from being passive watchers to becoming active creators of a film's cultural impact (Badeji, 2026).

This process is not a mere hypothesis anymore. It has been confirmed by studies of the outcomes of marketing campaigns in theaters, which prove that the audience exposed to a film's promotion success in TikTok is more likely to buy a ticket to go to watch it in the cinema.

YouTube as the Center for Mid to Long-Form Context

While short-form video attracts instant interest, platforms like YouTube provide the major infrastructure for building deeper context and narrative worlds. Movie studios cooperate with video essayists, reaction channels, and cultural critics to create long-form analyses of trailers, explanations of lore, and analyzing behind-the-scenes processes. This content type effectively satisfies information and entertainment needs provided for in the Uses and Gratifications Theory, turning the basic movie marketing tool into an intellectual hub for those in search of community identity (Badeji, 2026; Katz et al., 1973).

Instagram as a Curated Medium

Instagram stands between the quick virality of TikTok, and the long-form nature of YouTube. Instagram allows content creators to continue their imaginary relationships via Stories, Reels, behind-the-scenes carousels. It is important to note that this format of Instagram is good for creating aesthetic beauty and providing continuous personal information which is useful for the anticipation of release in case of long campaigns and long waiting times (Tripopsakul & Hoonsopon, 2025).

Strategic Threats and Safety of Brands

Even if the creator economy provides significant strategic benefits, the structural decentralization of media production can lead to

The Lack of Narrative Authority

In any standard marketing venture all components must be thoroughly checked, edited, and authorized by the film studio's management. Providing creative power to independent creators allows the studios to exchange total control over the storytelling for authentic storytelling. A single poor interpretation of a film's themes can cause rapid negative viral spread in social media resulting in a failure of the entire marketing campaign (Badeji, 2026).

Creator Weariness and Saturation

The influencer world constantly deals with the problems of customers becoming fed up with unnecessary content. When influencers go too far with embedding product recommendations and promotion in their content, the line between authentic and promotional content becomes blurred (Khan, 2026). If the viewers think that a content creator's eagerness to recommend a new film is not genuine, the influence of the creator will be diminished. This will weaken the effectiveness of the promotion greatly (Liao & Chen, 2024; Sunilkumar, 2026).

Discussion

The results of this study indicate a stratified system of film marketing in which legacy media, large influencer campaigns, and tiny influencer systems perform important functions by working in conjunction, rather than being in competition. Purchases of media made by legacy media and influencer partnerships were the most effective way of producing broad undifferentiated cultural awareness at the inception of a campaign in accordance with the function established in the overview of the market. Micro-influencer systems, on the other hand, exert disproportionate amounts of earned media effects in narrow segments of audiences owing to their position in the social network, namely the presence of small, compact and trustworthy clusters where parasociality and credibility are important (Benevento et al., 2025; Tripopsakul & Hoonsopon, 2025).

The interpretation offers a solution to the paradox found in literature that researches modes of communication. Some articles highlight the ability of celebrity figures and mega influencers to reach out to the masses, while others support ideas about micro-influencers being able to convince consumers due to their credibility (Li et al., 2024). The results of this study offer an explanation for both points of view—both influencer types can act effectively.

The trend observed on various platforms is consistent with the Uses and Gratifications theory: TikTok's process of targeting users first delivers short entertainment pieces while on YouTube, long informative content wins. That means that studios treating all platforms the same as channels for the similar format will not be as efficient as studios using the format keeping in mind the expectations of users on a given platform.

Weaknesses and Future Research Directions

There are limitations to the findings. First, the dataset is a mixture of results from different regions and periods of time with different levels of competition, thus the effect on some markets may not be captured. Secondly, the behavioral modeling tool used in the experiment does not rely on the real behavior of real users; thus further validation against the box-office information is required. Third, the methodology recording incidents related to brand safety is not focused enough; thus further updates of the index of danger-related incidents may improve the efficiency calculations.

Conclusion

The research details the strategic changes in film advertising as a result of moving away from studio-regulated media toward networks led by the creators. Based on attention economy theory, social network theory, and others, the research suggests that the transformation is more complex than merely the replacement of one advertising channel by another, since it involves the re-distribution of marketing workload among different functions which result in creating wide-spread awareness, reaching out very specific groups, and reinforcing the image of the fans in the long-term. Even though strategies based on micro-influencers provide great benefits for the production companies (engaging in partnerships with influencers), this only works if a certain level of authenticity and credibility is maintained because such important components of parasocial interaction are what makes it effective. Companies that utilize collaborating with influencers as a true collaborative venture will benefit most from this situation because doing otherwise means risking and losing some of the advantages presented by the new system. As stated before, the creator economy is expected to continue growing over the following years and the producers having a specific strategy will be in the best position here.

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