

# INFLUENCER MARKETING UNBOXED

Exposing how the fast fashion  
and food sectors hook consumers



December 2025



The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) is the largest organisation promoting the general interests of Europe's consumers. Founded in 1962, it proudly represents more than 40 independent national consumer organisations from over 30 European countries. Together with our members, we inform EU policies to improve people's lives in a sustainable and fair economy and society.

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# THIS REPORT IN A NUTSHELL

Influencer marketing is everywhere and unavoidable for anyone on social media due to the high volume of content and boundless creativity of social media influencers. Between March and September 2025, 14 BEUC consumer organisations from 12 countries monitored about 650 posts and videos of social media influencers on TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat.

Although influencer marketing is present in nearly all sectors, this evidence-gathering focused on posts and videos promoting unhealthy food advertising and fast fashion as they are sectors where consumers are likely to be particularly at risks. Evidence confirms the widespread use of hidden advertising practices and how influencers appeal to emotions to shape consumers'

preferences. It also shows how brands use influencer marketing to give a positive spin to their reputation in the eyes of consumers, in particular the youngest ones.

As we identified in 2023, current EU law is only partially able to tackle the problems posed by influencer marketing and needs to be updated.<sup>1</sup> It must clarify the responsibilities of the different actors operating in the influencer marketing environment - from influencers and their agencies to brands and online platforms. This report provides additional evidence supporting ongoing policy discussions at EU and national level. This is particularly the case for the EU Digital Fairness Act and the evaluation of the Audiovisual Services Media Directive, both expected in 2026.

## KEY FINDINGS

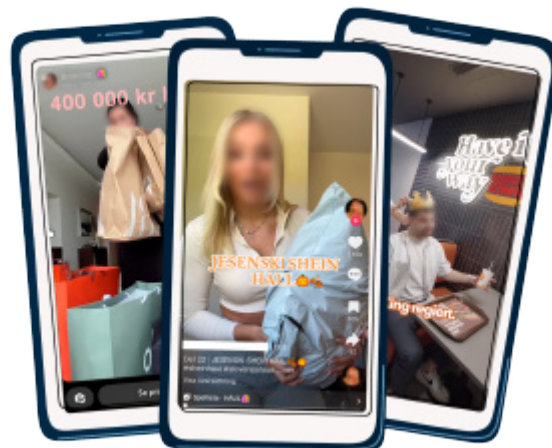
Influencer marketing is today one of the most **common online advertising techniques**. It refers to practices where brands cooperate with content creators against direct or indirect benefits for the purpose of advertising their products or services. It has **significant impact on consumer behaviour** and their online shopping experience, **considerably boosting brands engagement, reach and sales**. The evidence-gathering found that:

Influencer marketing keeps taking place and spreading in **opaque environments**. Collected evidence in the food and fast fashion sectors confirms **widespread hidden advertising practices**. Commercial messaging is often framed as expressions of personal style rather than advertisements, blurring the line between marketing and genuine personal views. Users have difficulties to differentiate them. Ads are often not labelled as such and when they are, the terminology is often unclear and misleading. Discount codes and promotional links are often buried in the comment section under the posts.



<sup>1</sup> Rules prohibiting unfair commercial practices (EU Directive 2005/29/EC – Unfair Commercial Practices Directive), rules regulating online platforms (EU Regulation 2022/2065 – the EU Digital Services Act) and audiovisual services (EU Directive 2010/13/EU – the Audiovisual Services Media Directive). For more information, see BEUC (The European Consumer Organisation), 'From influence to responsibility – Time to regulate influencer marketing', Position Paper, 2023. Available at: <https://www.beuc.eu/position-papers/influence-responsibility-time-regulate-influencer-marketing>.

Additional contentious practices have emerged over the years, such as influencers **toying with emotions, relying on gamification techniques**, contests and other challenges. Such practices hook consumers, encouraging **over-consumption and leading them to spend more time on platforms**. These practices, especially temporary stories that disappear after 24 hours, intensify the ‘fear of missing out’ effect, particularly effective on young consumers.



Some traders and brands – especially in the fast fashion sector – appear to also rely on influencer marketing to **boost their reputation and to make it more socially acceptable in the eyes of consumers**.

The **regulatory framework applying to influencer marketing is complex and fragmented**. Several pieces of EU legislation come into play.<sup>2</sup> At national level, some Member States have adopted complementary rules. This means that multiple sectoral authorities may be competent (consumer protection authorities, audiovisual regulators, etc.) and have come up with their own ways to address influencer marketing challenges.



**Self-regulation alone has often been insufficient to regulate influencer marketing effectively.** Social media platforms’ own policies (e.g., brand content policies, advertising policies, Terms and Conditions) applying to influencer marketing have been frequently bypassed and insufficiently enforced to date. In parallel, EU pledges, such as the one leading EU food companies set up to voluntarily restrict unhealthy food marketing to children, insufficiently addressed dubious influencer marketing practices.

<sup>2</sup> EU rules prohibiting unfair business-to-consumer commercial practices (Directive 2005/29 - the UCPD), rules regulating online platform’s activities (EU Regulation 2022/2065 - the DSA) and those applying to audiovisual media services (EU Directive 2010/13/EU – the AVMSD)

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## From a regulatory perspective

Several updates are necessary to rein in influencer marketing. They should be considered in the context of the upcoming EU Digital Fairness Act (DFA) expected in 2026. This includes:

1

Adding a clear definition of influencer marketing to the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (EU Directive 2005/29 – the UCPD).

2

Providing for a harmonised EU-wide disclosure standard on practices by influencers.

3

Establishing joint liability between influencers, their agencies and brands in case of breach of consumer law.

4

Prohibiting influencer marketing in specific areas, especially in risky sectors and for products and services that may be particularly harmful for consumers or society at large. This notably includes unhealthy food to children (in particular, foods High in Fat, Salt and Sugar – ‘HFSS food’).

### Read also:

1. BEUC position paper, [Towards the Digital Fairness Act \(2025\)](#).
2. BEUC position paper, [From influence to responsibility - Time to regulate influencer marketing \(2023\)](#).

## From an enforcement perspective

1

Monitoring the harmful practices regularly used by influencers to emotionally influence and regularly used by influencers to hook consumers, especially the youngest ones, and hidden advertising practices. Where needed, sanctions should be imposed to ensure compliance with the rules.

2

Ensuring that social media platforms have the sufficient internal policies to address the problems posed by influencer marketing and ensuring that they apply such measures diligently and timely. When platforms fail to comply, authorities should impose sanctions.

3

Strengthening the cooperation framework between the various authorities that oversee influencer marketing (such as consumer protection authorities, audiovisual authorities, digital services coordinators), both at national and EU level. This can be done by the publication of joint guidelines and the launch of joint investigations.

### Read also:

Three complaints submitted by BEUC to the European Commission and the CPC-Network:

- **Against Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and Twitter** in 2023 ([‘Hype or Harm? The great social media crypto con’](#)). The complaint highlighted the role played by social media for letting misleading advertisements of crypto assets by (among others) social influencers spread on their platforms.
- **Against TikTok** in 2021 ([‘TikTok without filters’](#)). The complaint highlighted how TikTok fails to protect children and teenagers from hidden advertising and other harmful content published (among others) by social influencers.
- **Against Shein** in 2025 ([‘Click here to buy more’](#)). The complaint stressed inter alia the social, societal and environmental problems posed by fast fashion and how SHEIN has been using online tricks to push consumers towards overconsumption.

BEUC, [‘Food marketing to children needs rules with teeth’](#) (2021). BEUC and 10 members submitted over 80 complaints to the EU Pledge’s own ‘Accountability Mechanism’ uncovering the fundamental flaws of the self-regulatory model.

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# ABOUT THE METHODOLOGY

BEUC and its members conducted two separate evidence-gathering exercises throughout 2025.

- **Fast fashion sector:** 12 BEUC member organisations from 10 countries (Arbeiterkammer in Austria, Forbrugerrådet Tænk in Denmark, KEPKA and EKPIZO in Greece, Altroconsumo in Italy, Forbrukerrådet in Norway, Federacja Konsumentów in Poland, DECO in Portugal, Zveza Potrošnikov Slovenije in Slovenia, Asufin and OCU in Spain, and Fédération Romande des Consommateurs in Switzerland) collected over 350 examples of how influencers promote fast fashion companies on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and Snapchat between June and September 2025. The evidence was collected both from the platforms' apps and web applications.
- **Food sector:** 5 BEUC member organisations (Асоциация Активни потребители in Bulgaria, DECO in Portugal, OCU in Spain, Sveriges Konsumenter in Sweden and Fédération Romande des Consommateurs in Switzerland) collected over 300 examples of how influencers promote unhealthy food (especially towards children) on Instagram between March and April 2025. BEUC selected 13 examples of influencer marketing promoting unhealthy foods to children relying on different marketing techniques and submitted them to the complaint mechanism of the self-regulatory EU Pledge, none of which were successful.<sup>3</sup>

This evidence-gathering should be considered as a snapshot of current practices from across Europe and not as a scientific assessment. Screenshots are in the Annex accompanying this report.

BEUC members participating in the evidence-gathering are:



<sup>3</sup> Launched in 2007, the EU Pledge (<https://eu-pledge.eu/>) is a self-regulation initiative of leading food companies in the EU to restrict unhealthy food marketing to children. Since 2008 the initiative allows the public to report potential non-compliance.



# THE BOOM OF INFLUENCER MARKETING AND ITS IMPACT ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Influencers are social media content creators with above-average reach on digital platforms.<sup>4</sup> They can be categorised by the size of their ‘followership’:

- ‘mega-influencers’ (+1 M followers)
- ‘macro-influencers’ (100,000 to 1M followers)
- ‘micro-influencers’ (10,000 to 100,000 followers)
- ‘nano-influencers’ (less than 10,000 followers).

According to a 2022 study,<sup>5</sup> the key elements defining influencers are:

- **Content creation**, namely the service provided by influencers to other users.
- **Commercial intent**, which is driven by direct revenue from brands (monetary and non-monetary), by revenues from audience engagement or by platform compensation.
- **Monetisation**, namely the generation of revenue through different business models, including but not limited to influencer marketing.
- **Trust and authenticity**, namely the influence born to the parasocial relationship of trust established with the audience and the perceived authenticity and relatability of the content.

Traders and brands have long seen the added value of cooperating with influencers to diffuse their products, reach out to new audiences and ultimately trigger consumption. A survey conducted in 2019 in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States investigated the impact of influencer marketing on consumer decision-making. It revealed that 41% of users frequently discovered new brands and products through influencers, and 87% were inspired to make a purchase based on what they saw from an influencer.<sup>6</sup>

A 2023 BEUC survey on fairness of the online environment found that 73% of consumers had seen promotional contents by influencers. More than half said they had bought products or services recommended by influencers.<sup>7</sup>

These patterns have fuelled an exponential rise in influencer marketing expenses. Globally, between 2015 and 2025 the value of influencer marketing has grown from USD 1.7 billion (approx. EUR 1.5 billion) to more than USD 32 billion (approx. EUR 28 billion).<sup>8</sup> In recent years, the sector has also become increasingly professionalised. Agencies and content managers coordinate campaigns across platforms using diverse monetisation models, such as payments, affiliate links, or in-kind rewards.<sup>9</sup> This reflects a broader shift in advertising: influencers marketing now operate through social interactions, and personal contents. Anyone with a digital presence can promote products. These developments raise new questions about the fairness, accountability of influencers, and more generally the regulation of online persuasion.

As opposed to traditional media where the audience is passively engaging with contents, influencer marketing is based on engagement with the audience. This is part of an advertising experience where “parasocial relationships”<sup>10</sup> develop, i.e. one-sided connections with an online personality users have never met. Influencer promotions blur the line between individual expression and commercial messaging. Consumers are more likely to perceive these advertisements as genuine recommendations, especially when the commercial intent is unclear.

88% of users aged 15 to 24 report being inspired or convinced by influencer content.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, *Guidance on the Application of the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive*, Section 4.2.6, December 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Michaelsen, F., Collini, L. et. al., 2022, *The impact of influencers on advertising and consumer protection in the Single Market*, Publication for the IMCO, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, European Parliament, Luxembourg.

<sup>6</sup> Rakuten Marketing, *Influencer Marketing Global Survey Consumer*, 2019, p. 10. Available at: [2019 Influencer Marketing Report - CombinedFINAL](#)

<sup>7</sup> BEUC (The European Consumer Organisation), *Connected, but Unfairly Treated: Consumer Survey Results on the Fairness of the Online Environment*, September 2023, p. 12. Available at: [BEUC-X-2023-113 Fairness of the digital environment survey results.pdf](#)

<sup>8</sup> Ross, Christopher, ‘Influencer marketing market size worldwide from 2015 to 2025’, *Statista*, 21 March 2025. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1092819/global-influencer-market-size/>

<sup>9</sup> BEUC (The European Consumer Organisation), *From influence to responsibility: Position paper*, 2023. Available at: [BEUC-X-2023-093 From influence to responsibility Time to regulate influencer-marketing.pdf](#)

<sup>10</sup> Exposure to media persona leads social media users to develop illusions of intimacy, friendship and identification. See for example D.C. Balaban, J. Szabolcs and M. Chirică, *Parasocial relations and social media influencers’ persuasive power: Exploring the moderating role of product involvement*, *Acta Psychologica*, Volume 230, 2022, Article 103731, ISSN 0001-6918. Available at [here](#).

<sup>11</sup> Michaelsen, F., Collini, L. et. al., 2022, *The impact of influencers on advertising and consumer protection in the Single Market*, Publication for the IMCO Committee, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, European Parliament, Luxembourg, PE 703.350, February 2022, p. 43.

# WHAT RULES GOVERN INFLUENCER MARKETING

## An EU regulatory piecemeal

Influencer marketing stands at the crossroad of several pieces of EU legislation. They apply in parallel to different categories of actors involved. This raises questions about the coordination, possible overlaps and gaps when these rules are interpreted and enforced.

### The Unfair Commercial Practices Directive

The Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (UCPD, EU Directive 2005/29/EC) applies to business-to-consumer commercial practices. Although the UCPD does not provide for a clear legal definition of influencer marketing, its Guidance document indicates influencers may qualify as ‘traders’ or can be seen as acting ‘on behalf of traders’ when they engage in endorsement activities on a frequent basis regardless of the size of their audience. The UCPD imposes on influencers to properly disclose the commercial intent of their posts. It specifically prohibits practices which do not make it clear that a trader has paid for the promotion of a product in editorial content. The UCPD prohibits aggressive commercial practices, which may apply when influencers target vulnerable consumers such as children or teenagers. It also prohibits direct exhortations towards children in all circumstances. In parallel, the UCPD also applies to online platforms when they contribute to disseminating misleading influencer posts. Social media platforms must exercise a certain level of care and diligence to ensure that their users are not harmed by other users, including influencers.<sup>12</sup>

### The Digital Services Act

The Digital Services Act (DSA, EU Regulation 2022/2065) aims to promote a safer online environment and therefore clarify online platforms’ roles and duties regarding advertisements. The DSA requires online platforms to provide an option for users to declare that the content they post is commercial.<sup>13</sup> Online platforms are not allowed to target or personalise advertising to minors based on their personal data.<sup>14</sup> In parallel, the European Commission should promote the development and implementation of voluntary standards that make transparency both effective and consistent across all EU online platforms.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the DSA requires online platforms to identify, analyse and assess any systemic risks, which arguably could come from influencer marketing content. Online platforms should address and mitigate any influencer misleading or harmful practice that might be a systemic risk upon identification.<sup>16</sup>

### The Audiovisual Media Services Directive

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD, EU Directive 2010/13/EU) covers all types of audiovisual contents, irrespective of whether it is TV or the internet. The AVMSD impose on Member States to ensure that all videosharing platforms in their jurisdiction have tools for users to indicate whether the videos they upload include ads or other commercial contents.<sup>17</sup> Hence, platforms must ensure that influencers can use appropriate disclosure tools on their interfaces.

<sup>12</sup> European Commission, *Commission Notice — Guidance on the interpretation and application of Directive 2005/29/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning unfair business-to-consumer commercial practices in the internal market*, 2021. Available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021XC1229\(05\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021XC1229(05))

<sup>13</sup> Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act), art. 26(2), OJ L 277, 27 October 2022. Available at: [Article 26, the Digital Services Act \(DSA\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act), art. 28(2), OJ L 277, 27 October 2022. Available at: [Article 28, the Digital Services Act \(DSA\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act), art. 44(h), OJ L 277, 27 October 2022. Available at: [https://www.eu-digital-services-act.com/Digital\\_Services\\_Act\\_Article\\_44.html](https://www.eu-digital-services-act.com/Digital_Services_Act_Article_44.html)

<sup>16</sup> Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act), arts. 34–35, OJ L 277, 27 October 2022. Available at: [Article 34, the Digital Services Act \(DSA\)](#) and [Article 35, the Digital Services Act \(DSA\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 March 2010 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive), art. 28b(3)(c), consolidated version (08 February 2025), OJ L 95. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02010L0013-20250208>

## At national level: additional rules and targeted bans

At national level, some Member States (e.g., Italy,<sup>18</sup> France<sup>19</sup> or Spain<sup>20</sup>) have adopted additional rules applicable to influencers. Some national consumer protection authorities have conducted in-depth investigations in the influencer marketing sector and run compliance checks.<sup>21</sup> Where needed, those authorities fined social media influencers for illegal commercial practices.<sup>22</sup>

Going beyond, some Member States have adopted, or are discussing,<sup>23</sup> targeted bans of influencer marketing.

They apply in specific sectors where consumers can be at great risk. For example, in April 2025, Norway banned marketing for unhealthy foods and drinks to children under 18.<sup>24</sup> The ban includes social media influencers promoting products to this age group. Similarly, the Danish Government announced its intent to ban advertisements for unhealthy food and beverages aimed at children under 15. This includes influencer marketing on online platforms.<sup>25</sup> In March 2024, France published a proposal to ban influencer marketing in the ultra-fast fashion sector.<sup>26</sup>

## Identified loopholes

The current EU rules applicable to influencer marketing have shown limitations, gaps and other loopholes over the years.

First, there is still no clear definition of “influencer marketing” under EU consumer law. This creates legal uncertainties about the type of activities covered and can lead to inconsistent interpretations across Member States.

Second, influencer marketing involves a chain of different actors who all play important roles in the value

creation process. Yet not all of them are adequately regulated. Influencers, their agencies and the brands whose products are promoted should bear joint and several liability to ensure compliance with applicable rules.<sup>27</sup>

Third, social media platforms make significant revenues thanks to influencers keeping and attracting new audiences and encouraging those to spend time on the platforms. Social media platforms have claimed to address issues arising from influencer marketing or

<sup>18</sup> In September 2025, Italy adopted guidelines and a Code of Conduct (Amendments to the guidelines referred to in resolution No. 7/24/CONS and approval of the code of conduct for influencers) applicable to influencer marketing. It specifies that influencers have at least 500,000 followers or an average monthly view count of one million. Its implementation will rely on monitoring systems, verification of compliance, and the application of sanctions in the event of violations. Penalties include fines of up to €250,000 for general violations and up to €600 000 if minors are involved.

<sup>19</sup> In June 2023, France adopted a law regulating influencers (French Law no. 2023-451 to prevent scams and abusive practices by influencers on social medias) providing a legal definition of influencer marketing. Influencers must inform their viewers of paid partnerships, either orally, through text or through features integrated on the social media platform. If the influencer mentions the partnership orally, in a video for example, the influencer must specify it again in the description in the first three hashtags associated with the post. Furthermore, the law also restricts influencer marketing for certain products, such as medical products and certain financial services.

<sup>20</sup> Spain regulates influencer marketing primarily through Law 13/2022, the General Law on Audiovisual Communication, and Royal Decree 444/2024, which defines “users of special relevance” on video-sharing platforms. Together, these instruments subject certain high-reach, monetised influencers to the audiovisual commercial communication regime, requiring that advertising — including content promoted in exchange for monetary payment or in-kind benefits such as free products, services or invitations — be clearly identifiable as such, within a broader framework in which both influencers and the brands or agencies commissioning their content may be held responsible for breaches of the rules.

<sup>21</sup> See for example DGCCRF in France (<https://www.economie.gouv.fr/actualites/influenceurs-bilan-des-contrôles-2022-et-2023-de-la-dgccrf>). The investigations revealed that 60% of influencers under scrutiny were non-compliant with consumer and advertising law and notably transparency requirements. Similarly, in November 2025, the Polish Office for Competition and Consumer Protection has launched two preliminary investigations into activities of influencers after raising “serious concerns” about influencer marketing targeted at children (<https://uokik.gov.pl/en/advertising-targeted-at-children-uokik-monitors-social-media>)

<sup>22</sup> For example, DGCCRF in France issued several fines against influencers. See *Le Figaro*, ‘L’influenceur Julien Tanti sanctionné pour pratiques commerciales trompeuses par la Répression des fraudes’, 10 March 2025. Available at: [L’influenceur Julien Tanti sanctionné pour «pratiques commerciales trompeuses» par la Répression des fraudes](https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/l-influenceur-julien-tanti-sanctionne-pour-pratiques-commerciales-trompeuses-par-la-repression-des-fraudes-20250310)

<sup>23</sup> In Switzerland, authorities announced the amendment of federal law to restrict food marketing to children after assessing that the voluntary Swiss Pledge does not go far enough but have since withdrawn their proposal – which our Swiss member FRC regrets. Available at: <https://www.frc.ch/dossiers/marketing-et-malbouffe-chez-les-enfants>

<sup>24</sup> Exemptions include sponsorships for “charitable purposes”, e.g. children’s sports, or brand marketing. See Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families, *Forskrift om endring i forskrift om urimelig handelspraksis mv.*, 25 April 2025. Available at: [Forskrift om forbud mot markedsføring av visse næringsmidler særlig rettet mot barn - Lovdata](https://lovdata.no/dokument/SST/vedtak/20250425-1)

<sup>25</sup> The Danish proposal was triggered, among other things, by the fact that food companies have violated the food industry’s own code of not targeting the advertisement of unhealthy foods to children under the age of 13.

<sup>26</sup> France has also put forward a proposal for a new law banning influencer marketing of ultra-fast fashion. See: Sénat français, *Proposition de loi visant à réduire l’impact environnemental de l’industrie textile*, Session 2023–2024. Available at: <https://www.senat.fr/leg/pp123-431.html>

<sup>27</sup> Influencer agencies operate without regulation despite their central role, with surveys showing 44% of brands don’t require disclosure and 3% actively discourage it. See: Michaelsen, F., Collini, L. et. al., 2022, *The impact of influencers on advertising and consumer protection in the Single Market*, Publication for the committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO), Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, European Parliament, Luxembourg, PE 703.350, February 2022, p. 54.

say they provide tools to facilitate the identification of commercial videos.

For example, YouTube's policy states that influencers should notify the platform when a video includes paid product placements, endorsements, sponsorships or any other content that requires disclosure. That way, the platform claims it facilitates disclosure to the audience.<sup>28</sup> TikTok's guidelines require influencers to disclose commercial content even though they are not in a paid partnership with a trader. Instagram requires users to disclose branded content for which the creator has been compensated, either with money or other value, by a brand or business partner.<sup>29</sup> Regardless of these policies, platform transparency features are not always available to content creators. When available, they vary from one platform to another. Some of them are still insufficient<sup>30</sup> or lack enforcement by the platform themselves.<sup>31</sup>

Fourth, other self-regulation initiatives have proved to be insufficient to regulate (influencer) advertising. In

the food sector for instance, self-regulation has shown its limits to protect children online from unhealthy food marketing.<sup>32</sup> At the EU level, the voluntary industry initiative to restrict this type of food marketing is known as the 'EU Pledge'.<sup>33</sup> Its members include some of the largest food and drinks companies, including McDonald's, Cola-Cola, Nestlé and Ferrero. Together, they cover over 80% of the food and beverage advertising budget in the EU.<sup>34</sup> In 2021, BEUC and 10 members submitted over 80 complaints to the EU Pledge's own 'Accountability Mechanism'. Results were compiled in a report that uncovers the many flaws of self-regulation.<sup>35</sup> Issues are that it relies on food companies' own definitions of which foods are healthy enough to market to children, and it tends to exclude brand marketing as well as user-generated content. It also fails to consider the significant exposure and powerful marketing techniques online, and ultimately to hold food companies accountable despite the complaint system.

## ISSUES WITH INFLUENCER MARKETING: OLD AND NEW PRACTICES

### Multifaceted hidden advertising practices

Hidden advertising practices are a form of promotion where commercial contents are not, or insufficiently, disclosed. This includes undisclosed paid endorsements. Disclosing paid promotion on social media platforms is a legal obligation for influencers in Europe, whether companies pay them in exchange for their advertising services, or gift them

with products or services. Hiding paid promotion can constitute a misleading commercial practice with penalties if influencers or brands infringe the rules.<sup>36</sup> Even when there is no contractual obligation between brands, their agencies and influencers, 'give-and-take' attitudes may still be encouraged through paid promotion agreements and gift-giving (i.e., sending

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<sup>28</sup> Google, *YouTube Help: Community Guidelines*, n.d. Available at: <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/154235?hl=en>

<sup>29</sup> Instagram, 'Instagram Help Center – What's an Instagram Help Page?', Instagram Help. Available at: [https://help.instagram.com/128845584325492?help-pref=faq\\_content](https://help.instagram.com/128845584325492?help-pref=faq_content)

<sup>30</sup> In 2021, the Danish Competition and Consumer Protection Authority stated in its publication "Consumers benefit from visually salient standardized commercial disclosures on Social Media" that "it is unclear whether standardized disclosure labels implemented by various video-sharing platforms in order to comply with the AVMSD follow these guidelines, which could mean that influencers cannot solely rely on declaring commercial intent via a platform-integrated functionality". Available at: <https://en.kfst.dk/media/z3lmycgw/20210617-consumers-benefit-from-visually-salient-standardized-commercial-disclosures-on-social-media.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> In 2023, BEUC and its members highlighted this problem as several social media platforms allowed misleading advertising for crypto assets by influencers taking place on their platforms. See BEUC (The European Consumer Organisation), *Hype or harm? Great social media crypto con*, n.d. Available at: [www.beuc.eu/enforcement/hype-or-harm-great-social-media-crypto-con](http://www.beuc.eu/enforcement/hype-or-harm-great-social-media-crypto-con)

<sup>32</sup> BEUC defines unhealthy foods generally as HFSS foods according to the nutrient profile model for restricting food marketing to children published by the WHO Regional Office for Europe nutrient profile model, World Health Organisation, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> EU Pledge (European Union Pledge on Responsible Food and Beverage Marketing to Children), *Homepage*, n.d. Available at: <https://eu-pledge.eu/>

<sup>34</sup> EU Pledge (European Union Pledge on Responsible Food and Beverage Marketing to Children), *Our members*, n.d. Available at: <https://eu-pledge.eu/our-members/>

<sup>35</sup> BEUC, *Food marketing to children needs rules with teeth: A snapshot report about how self-regulation fails to prevent unhealthy foods to be marketed to children*, 2021. Available at: [www.beuc.eu/sites/default/files/publications/beuc-x-2021-084\\_food\\_marketing\\_to\\_children\\_needs\\_rules\\_with\\_teeth.pdf](http://www.beuc.eu/sites/default/files/publications/beuc-x-2021-084_food_marketing_to_children_needs_rules_with_teeth.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> European Commission, 'Influencer Legal Hub', *Live-work-travel-EU – Consumer Rights and Complaints*. Available at: [https://commission.europa.eu/live-work-travel-eu/consumer-rights-and-complaints/influencer-legal-hub\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/live-work-travel-eu/consumer-rights-and-complaints/influencer-legal-hub_en)

products to influencers for “authentic” promotion).<sup>37</sup> As shown in our evidence-gathering, new promotional techniques incorporate gamified features such as brand-led challenges, augmented reality filters, viral trends, all designed to increase engagement without revealing their commercial nature.<sup>38</sup>

According to the EU’s Digital Fairness Fitness Check, 74% of consumers reported a lack of transparency about products’ paid promotion by social media influencers.<sup>39</sup>

In 2023, consumer protection authorities across Europe assessed posts of 576 influencers to verify whether they disclosed their advertising activities in line with EU consumer law. Result: 97% published posts with commercial content but only 20% systematically indicated it. Instead, influencers used various wording such as “collaboration”, “partnership” or generic thanks to the brands.<sup>40</sup>

## Focus on emerging practices: a deep dive into two key sectors

Although influencer marketing is present in all sectors, BEUC decided to focus this report on **fast fashion** and **unhealthy food advertising**. These two highly problematic sectors for consumers epitomise overall developments in influencer marketing.

On the one hand, unhealthy food marketing<sup>41</sup> is inundating children and teenagers daily. Children and teenagers are particularly vulnerable to marketers sophisticated, subtle and convincing techniques promoting unhealthy foods. A recent UNICEF report shows that while television still plays a role, social media is the top source of food and drink advertisements. While exposure to traditional advertising (e.g., on packaging or billboards) can vary depending on geographical location, exposure to digital advertising is widespread across countries and regardless of income

status. The food evidence-gathering builds up on BEUC’s 2021 report that shed light on the many online and offline techniques used to advertise to children and teenagers.<sup>42</sup>

On the other hand, the fast fashion industry relies on mass production, low prices, often low-quality materials and high sales volumes of clothing items<sup>43</sup>. Traders like SHEIN pose serious environmental, and social challenges for consumers and society at large. BEUC and its members set these issues out in an enforcement action launched before the network of EU Consumer Protection Authorities (CPC-Network) and the European Commission in June 2025, highlighting SHEIN’s use of dark patterns which contributes to overconsumption and impulse-buying.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Research shows that gift-giving, in its various forms and extents, links to feelings of reciprocity and positive attitudes towards promoted products, see for example Marchand, André; Holler, Andrea; Dünschede, Theresa (2024): Consumer perceptions of influencer gifting, *Psychology & Marketing*, ISSN 1520-6793, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ, Vol. 41, Iss. 10, pp. 2342-2354, <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.22058>

<sup>38</sup> Dewatmoko S., ‘Beyond Clicks and Likes: Unravelling the Power of Personalization, Gamification, and Influencer Marketing in Digital Consumer Engagement’, *Golden Ratio of Data in Summary*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2025, pp. 468–475. Available at: [View of Beyond Clicks and Likes: Unravelling the Power of Personalization, Gamification, and Influencer Marketing in Digital Consumer Engagement](#)

<sup>39</sup> European Commission, *Commission staff working document: Fitness check of EU consumer law on digital fairness*, 2024, p. 170.

<sup>40</sup> European Commission, ‘Sweeps – enforcement of consumer protection: 2023 sweep on influencers’, 2023. Available at: [https://commission.europa.eu/live-work-travel-eu/consumer-rights-and-complaints/enforcement-consumer-protection/sweeps\\_en#ref-2023--sweep-on-influencers](https://commission.europa.eu/live-work-travel-eu/consumer-rights-and-complaints/enforcement-consumer-protection/sweeps_en#ref-2023--sweep-on-influencers)

<sup>41</sup> As defined by the widely recognised WHO nutrient profile. See World Health Organization (WHO), *Tackling food marketing to children in a digital world: Trans-disciplinary perspectives*, 2016. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2015-6894-46660-67850>

<sup>42</sup> BEUC, *Food marketing to children needs rules with teeth: A snapshot report about how self-regulation fails to prevent unhealthy foods to be marketed to children*, 2021. Available at: [www.beuc.eu/sites/default/files/publications/beuc-x-2021-084\\_food\\_marketing\\_to\\_children\\_needs\\_rules\\_with\\_teeth.pdf](http://www.beuc.eu/sites/default/files/publications/beuc-x-2021-084_food_marketing_to_children_needs_rules_with_teeth.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> European Parliament, ‘Textiles and the environment’, European Parliamentary Research Service, Briefing 2022/729405, 2022. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/729405/EPRS\\_BRI\(2022\)729405\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/729405/EPRS_BRI(2022)729405_EN.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> BEUC, ‘Click to buy (more): Complaint on dark patterns by SHEIN’, 2025. Available at: [www.beuc.eu/enforcement/click-buy-more#the-action](http://www.beuc.eu/enforcement/click-buy-more#the-action)



# FOCUS #1: INFLUENCER MARKETING IN THE FAST FASHION SECTOR

## Spotted practices

### Clothing ‘hauls’ and ‘try-on hauls’

‘Hauls’ are marketing practices where influencers unpack and model large quantities of clothing, thus showcasing how much can be purchased with little money. The emphasis on volume and low prices trains audiences to value cheap, disposable fashion over quality and ethics. Influencers may purchase the clothes themselves but may also get them as gifts from traders. Some brands, like SHEIN, have influencer programmes (in SHEIN’s case: “SHEGLAM Influencer Program”) where aspiring influencers can sign up to show off clothes from SHEIN on Instagram and YouTube.<sup>45</sup>



shein €400...vestiti e accessori | TRY ON HAUL

In Italy, **Altroconsumo** identified a video on YouTube of an influencer with over 10,000 subscribers trying on clothes from SHEIN, a so-called try-on haul. In the comment section of the video, a debate has arisen among viewers regarding the promotion of fast fashion and consumption.<sup>46</sup>

### “Dupe” videos

These are videos presenting low-cost imitations of designer outfits and accessories as equivalent alternatives. These types of posts are likely to mislead consumers about the true quality and properties of the products. In some cases, dupe videos also compare similar items from two different fast fashion brands, in a quest for cheaper than cheap clothing.<sup>47</sup>



In Denmark, **Forbrukerrådet Taenk** spotted an influencer with 37,500 followers telling them about a viral jacket from Zara. She points out that since the trend will not last long, she will not spend DKK 400 (approx. EUR 55) on a jacket. She then suggests a similar jacket bought from SHEIN as a cheaper alternative.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> SHEIN, ‘Fashion Blogger A 475’, SHEIN EU. Available at: <https://euqs.shein.com/fashion-blogger-a-475.html>

<sup>46</sup> Screenshot taken 13 October 2025.

<sup>47</sup> Screenshot of Zara vs. SHEIN taken 8 October 2025.

<sup>48</sup> Please find a screenshot of this example in the Annex.

## Trend-based content and other seasons recommendations

Influencers buy new items to participate in short-lived online challenges or post “must-have” lists that reflect micro-seasons, creating constant pressure to update one’s wardrobe. They often appear in different outfits in one day, suggesting that repeating outfits is socially undesirable. This type of content typically increases during seasonal transitions, with influencers promoting items such as “cozy fall sweaters” or “flowery summer dresses.”

*In Spain, **OCU** spotted an influencer with around 11,000 followers trying on four different outfits accompanied by the following text: “Getting back into your routine has never been so simple (and stylish). These are my favourite outfits from SHEIN, perfect for workdays, studying, or simply for feeling comfortable without sacrificing that chic touch.”<sup>49</sup>*



*In Slovenia, **Zveza Potrosnikov Slovenije (ZPS)** spotted an influencer on TikTok with over 70,000 followers promoting SHEIN and other fast fashion brands by showing different products she has bought in videos. In this example, the influencer conducts a “autumn SHEIN haul”, showing 16 different products (from headphones, to clothes, to shoes). The influencer also has a playlist gathering a total of 28 “haul” videos on her page. Many contain SHEIN products.<sup>50</sup>*



<sup>49</sup> Screenshot taken 6 September 2025.

<sup>50</sup> Screenshot taken 19 November 2025.

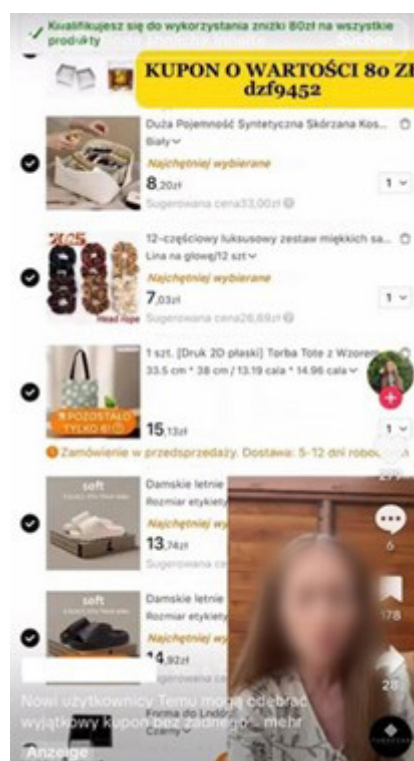
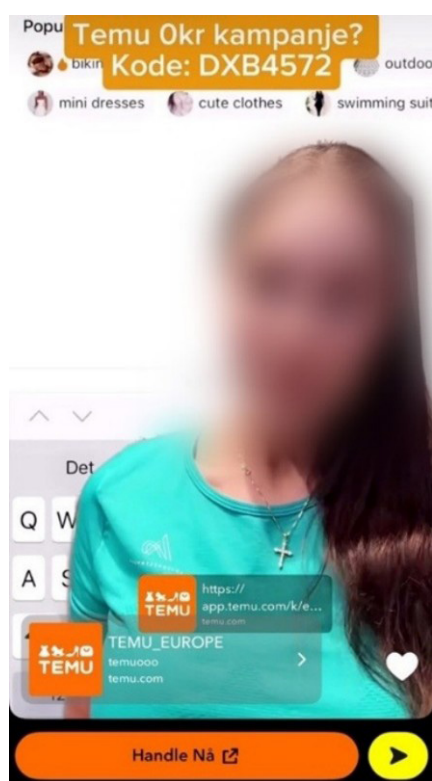
## Issues

### Lack of transparency and undisclosed partnerships

Evidence collected show that many influencers integrate promotional content into their personal narratives. They frequently share affiliate links (through which they earn a commission when consumers click or make a purchase), discount codes, or “exclusive deals” as gifts to their followers. As such, they mask commercial partnerships and pretend to make genuine recommendations. Promotional posts are often framed as expressions of personal style rather than advertisements, blurring the line between marketing and authenticity. Several BEUC members identified influencers telling consumers that they can get products and clothes on Temu for free with a special discount code, or when spending a specific amount. Influencers frequently hide disclosures within hashtag lists, display them briefly under profile pictures in reels before they disappear, or omit them entirely. Some influencers also promote the same clothing in several posts, but only tag some of them as “ads”.

In Norway, **Forbrukerrådet** identified an advertisement on Snapchat by Temu, where a famous influencer promotes the platform by claiming that purchases for “0 kr” (“EUR 0”) is possible with her discount code, potentially giving consumers a misleading impression of free products. The ad contains a button at the bottom saying “handle nå” (“purchase now”).<sup>51</sup>

In Poland, **Federacja Konsumentów** spotted a video on TikTok, featuring an influencer with 31,700 followers, promoting clothes from Temu for PLN 0 (EUR 0), when purchasing for a specific amount.<sup>52</sup>



<sup>51</sup> Screenshot taken 23 June 2025.

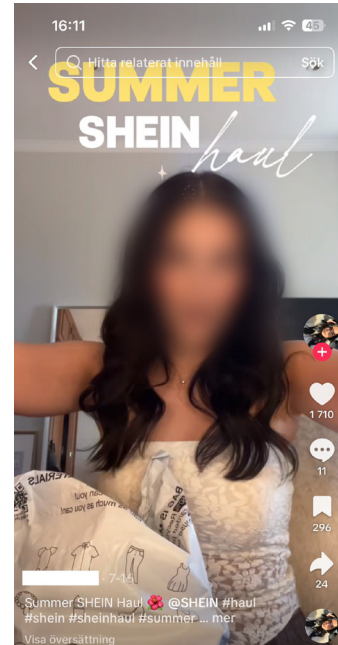
<sup>52</sup> Screenshot taken 9 August 2025.



In Spain, **Asufin** found evidence of an Instagram influencer with over 20,000 followers posting a video of a SHEIN try-on haul. The influencer tags @shein\_spain and shares a discount code but fails to declare whether the post is a paid partnership. She also uses the hashtag #brandambassador and includes the references to all the 16 clothing items she tried on in the video.<sup>53</sup>



In Portugal, **DECO** spotted an influencer with almost 33,000 followers promoting clothes from SHEIN on TikTok through a haul video, offering her viewers a discount code. The influencer tags SHEIN's official account and uses hashtags such as #SHEIN and #SHEINhaul. However, she does not inform her followers whether the video is part of a paid partnership.<sup>54</sup>



In Italy, **Altroconsumo** found evidence of an influencer (with 45,000 subscribers) conducting a try-on haul on YouTube, showcasing 39 SHEIN clothing items and accessories in a 16-minute-long video. The influencer fails to declare if the video is a paid partnership.

## Toying with emotions and pushing towards over consumption

Through carefully curated content, influencers present shopping not as a mere transactional act but as a form of self-care, identity-building, or emotional validation. This narrative encourages followers to purchase clothing to cope with stress, assert individuality, or feel socially accepted. This form of emotional influence harms consumers by exploiting the trust and intimacy they place in influencers to stimulate unnecessary and impulsive purchases. By presenting shopping as a form of self-care or a route to confidence and belonging, influencers normalise emotional consumption patterns that can lead to compulsive buying behaviour, financial stress, and long-term dissatisfaction.

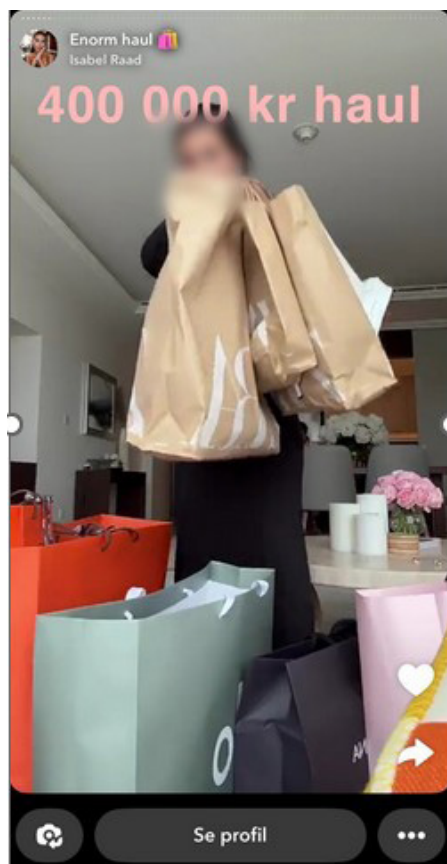
<sup>53</sup> Screenshot taken 3 November 2025.

<sup>54</sup> Screenshot taken 13 November 2025.

The perceived closeness between influencers and follower, often expressed through affectionate language such as “my darlings” or “best friends”, blurs the line between commercial endorsement and genuine personal connection. Influencers blend personal confessions and “big sister” advice with promotion of fast fashion clothes, cultivating a parasocial relationship in which their recommendations feel like caring guidance rather than advertising.

Influencers also use the ‘fear of missing out’ syndrome and the pressure to stay socially relevant. Gamified content, such as showcasing massive free hauls and suggesting viewers can win or earn the same, reinforces this effect. This is particularly concerning for younger audiences, who are more susceptible to social comparison and identity construction through consumption.

In Norway, **Forbrukerrådet** found that one of Norway’s biggest influencers (with nearly 381,000 followers on Snapchat) promoting a haul worth a sky-high EUR 35,000 (NOK 400,000), using the heading “enormous haul”. This haul does not seem to be sponsored by brands. The influencer usually starts her videos with affectionate greetings like “Good morning my darlings”, building an emotional relationship with her audience.<sup>55</sup> This post comes from Snapchat, which features “stories” of images and videos that disappear after 24 hours (unless saved by the influencer in their profile). This may trigger a sense of ‘fear of missing out’. This effect can be heightened when influencers use stories to promote time-limited discounts or other short-lived offers.



<sup>55</sup> Screenshot taken 8 October 2025.

<sup>56</sup> Screenshot taken 12 November 2025.

<sup>57</sup> Screenshot taken 4 November 2025.

In Greece, **KEPKA** identified an influencer with 438,000 subscribers on YouTube, posting a video where she unboxes large amount of “mystery boxes” (meaning that she does not know what the boxes she has bought contain) from SHEIN and Temu.<sup>56</sup>



In Sweden, we spotted one of Sweden’s major influencers (228,000 follower on Instagram) announcing a collaboration with the fast fashion trader NAKD. Between 21 and 28 September 2025, the influencer shared ten Instagram posts promoting NAKD and her upcoming collection, at times publishing more than one post per day. She also built anticipation using phrases such as “launching in two days (!!!)” and “launching tomorrow 9:30 CET!!!”.<sup>57</sup>



Tactics such as “happy washing,” where influencers imply that fashion can make up for personal difficulties (e.g. “life isn’t perfect, but your outfit can be”) deepen this emotional influence. Gamified messaging also fosters urgency and addiction, such as showcasing large “free” hauls and implying viewers can receive the same, despite misleading or inaccessible terms, as seen in certain Temu promotions. Limited-time discount codes further heighten pressure and builds anticipation, combining emotional appeal with artificial urgency. Collectively, these techniques affect consumer psychology, particularly among younger audiences, which may contribute to impulsive spending, material dissatisfaction, and negative mental health impacts.

*In Switzerland, **Fédération Romande des Consommateurs (FRC)** found that an Instagram influencer from Italy with 4 million followers shared a post together with the fast fashion trader Tally Weijl. The message was “Fun, bold, feminine – and it makes me feel unstoppable every single day.” The influencer used the hashtag #ad only at the end of the text, meaning it is hidden under the ‘View more’. This is a clear example of trying to hide a paid collaboration with a trader.<sup>58</sup>*



### Building brands image and ‘reputation washing’

Through lifestyle-oriented content, influencers reshape perceptions of fast fashion, making it appear trendy, affordable, and widely accepted. Seen as authentic and relatable, they build trust with their audiences and lend credibility to companies that might have ethically problematic practices. By portraying fast fashion in a positive light, influencers effectively rebrand ethically questionable companies, distorting consumer perceptions, undermining informed decision-making, and encouraging impulsive overconsumption.

Influencers play a strategic role in reshaping public perceptions of fast fashion companies, helping to rehabilitate damaged reputations and deflect criticism. In response to widespread scrutiny over labour exploitation and environmental harm, Shein invited six major influencers from the United States to tour its Chinese factories in 2023. Their social media coverage reaching millions portrayed SHEIN positively, presenting a curated, sanitised image of its operations. This marketing strategy leveraged influencers’ trusted status to legitimise a brand under ethical fire.<sup>59</sup> The strategy extended into political discourse. During France’s 2025 Senate debate on anti-ultra-fast fashion legislation, SHEIN mobilised influencers to shift public attention away from the law’s focus on environmental and labour concerns. The campaign reframed the issue around consumer rights, using slogans like “fashion is a right, not a privilege,” to oppose regulation and preserve market favourability.<sup>60</sup>

*In Spain, **OCU** spotted an influencer (with 170,000 followers on Instagram) posting a video from a music festival, thanking SHEIN for the invitation and the clothes. Although the post included hashtags such as #advertisement and #brandambassador, these were not visible on Instagram’s app unless the viewer clicked on the “view more” button.*



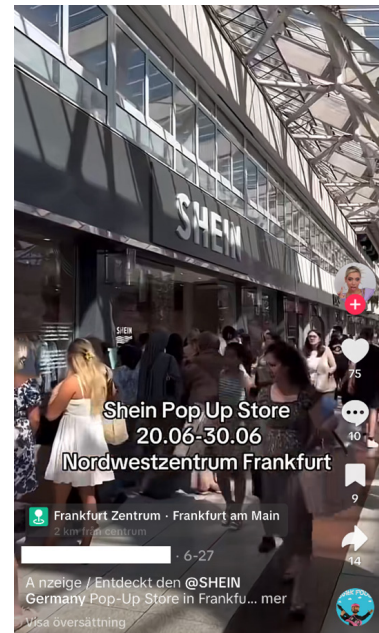
<sup>58</sup> Screenshot taken 3 November 2025.

<sup>59</sup> Izzy Wight, ‘Why Shein’s recent influencer ‘factory tour’ feels like a dystopian nightmare’, *Fashion Journal*, 27 June 2023. Available at: <https://fashionjournal.com.au/fashion/shein-influencer-trip/>

<sup>60</sup> Franceinfo, ‘On vous explique les accusations de lobbying visant la marque Shein avant l’arrivée de la proposition de loi antifastfashion au Sénat’, Franceinfo, 28 May 2025. Available at: [https://www.franceinfo.fr/economie/on-vous-explique-les-accusations-de-lobbying-visant-la-marque-shein-avant-l-arrivee-de-la-proposition-de-loi-anti-fast-fashion-au-senat\\_7283916.html](https://www.franceinfo.fr/economie/on-vous-explique-les-accusations-de-lobbying-visant-la-marque-shein-avant-l-arrivee-de-la-proposition-de-loi-anti-fast-fashion-au-senat_7283916.html)

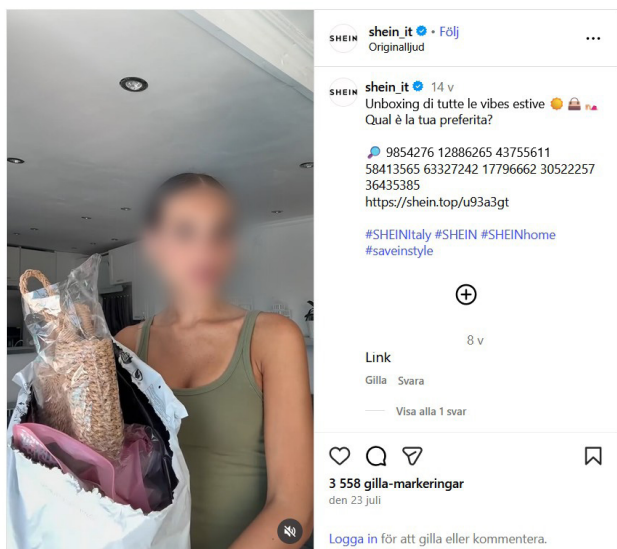


In Austria, **Arbeiterkammer** found an example of an influencer on TikTok with over 44,000 followers, promoting a SHEIN pop-up store in Frankfurt, Germany. The influencer informs her viewers of a 40% discount in the store and provides a discount code offering 15% and 25% off when ordering online for a specific amount. She tags @SHEIN Germany using hashtags such as #SHEINsummerescape and #SHEINforall.

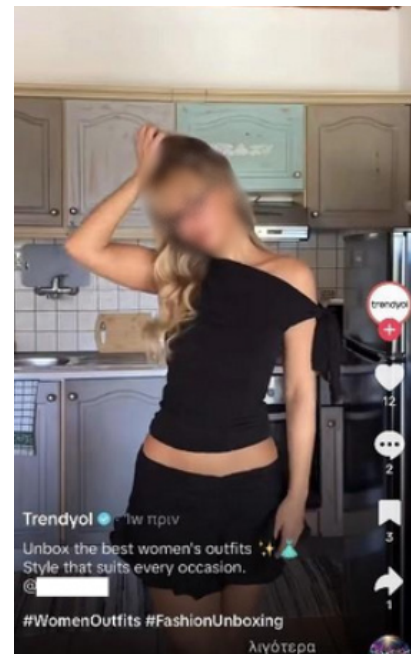


Consumer groups have also spotted examples of fast fashion brands reposting influencers' pictures and videos on their own social media accounts, using the work of influencers to promote their own brand. SHEIN is one of the brands regularly doing this.

In Italy, **Altroconsumo** identified SHEIN Italy reposting a video of an influencer showcasing accessories from SHEIN. SHEIN's Italian Instagram account has 612,000 followers.<sup>61</sup>



In Greece, **EKPIZO** identified the Turkish fast fashion platform Trendyol, trending in Greece, with 82,400 followers on TikTok reposting a video of an influencer doing a try-on haul.<sup>62</sup>



<sup>61</sup> Screenshot taken 31 October 2025.

<sup>62</sup> Screenshot taken 29 August 2025.

## FOCUS #2 INFLUENCER MARKETING AND UNHEALTHY FOOD ADVERTISING

### Spotted practices

#### Child-friendly visuals

Influencers often use a style that is visually appealing to younger audiences. It can include wearing bright, colourful clothing, often with recognisable branding or messages, and they often embody playful poses or dances for an attractive, fun and youthful atmosphere. Their content's setting and style is often visually aligned with trends appealing to teenagers and younger audiences.

*In Bulgaria, **BNAAC** found an example of a salty bread-snack brand that shows two influencers entering a magical, imaginary world where a ketchup bottle talks and acts like a person, guiding the characters through the fantasy world.<sup>63</sup> Using talking food characters or cartoons is a classic child-targeting technique, designed to capture attention and create emotional attachment to the brand. Studies have even demonstrated that children think a product tasted better when a licensed media character appeared on it.<sup>64</sup>*



#### Taste tests and flavour challenges

Many brands use influencers to promote their product ranges and flavours. Influencers post taste tests and ask followers for their favourites, encouraging them to try these products and engage with their content by commenting or by posting themselves and using a hashtag. Food brands like to use taste tests as a marketing technique as it seems like influencers are giving genuine product reviews, when the incentive to offer positive reviews is clearly given by the paid promotion or gifts.

*In Sweden, **Sveriges Konsumenter** found one example of an energy drink brand working with a fitness and lifestyle influencer who is playing a “guess the flavour” game with his friend.<sup>65</sup> The interaction feels spontaneous and playful, resembling a genuine interaction between peers. The tone and short format mimic the style of challenge videos on social media and strongly appeal to a teen audience by inviting them to compare flavours and debate in the comments which one is best. Energy drinks can pose serious risks for children and teenagers as they contain high amounts of caffeine and sugar.*



<sup>63</sup> Screenshot taken 5 August 2025.

<sup>64</sup> Roberto Christina A., Baik Jenny, Harris Jennifer L., and Brownell Kelly D., 'Influence of licensed characters on children's taste and snack preferences', *Pediatrics*, vol. 126, no. 1, July 2010, pp. 88–93. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2009-3433. Available at: [LicensedCharacters\\_Pediatrics\\_7.10.pdf](#)

<sup>65</sup> Screenshot taken 16 September 2025.

### Discount codes and giveaways

Influencers often offer discount codes for certain fast-food restaurants. They promote either the food products themselves or the brand and offer personalised discount codes to their followers.

Influencers are increasingly “hosting” these competitions or giveaways organised by brands. To enter the competition followers often have to follow a series of steps to boost the post in the platform’s algorithm and ensure that the campaign spreads quickly, especially among a young audience.

*In Spain, **OCU** found one example from sweets brand Haribo collaborating with an influencer and an electronics brand company.<sup>66</sup>*



### Embedding food products in lifestyle content and cooking experience

Food brands partner with influencers working with different types of content and audiences. We have identified several influencers promoting unhealthy food products who are not traditionally known as ‘food influencers’: beauty influencers promoting predominantly cosmetics, fashion, etc.; fitness influencers promoting sports brands and drinks; travel influencers promoting hotels and venues, as well as gamers who stream their sessions or promote gaming products. Influencers may use food products to align with their own content and follower base by adding their unique spin.

Another common way for influencers to advertise food and beverage products is by either incorporating them into a recipe or pairing them with a dish they are cooking or getting delivered. This food pairing strategy normalises the product as part of regular, home-cooked meals, reinforcing habitual consumption.

*In Portugal, **DECO** found that Cola-Cola ran a campaign in March 2025 praising how the beverage goes well with different dishes such as burgers, sushi, and pasta. They relied on two influencers and an influencer couple, who have over 3.1 million followers combined. The same campaign also relied heavily on daily relatable situations of friends and family having dinner together and making Cola-Cola feel like a natural, everyday product. One video shows an influencer looking into his empty fridge and opening the door to let his mother in with a home-cooked pasta dish and two Cola-Cola bottles.<sup>67</sup> This family-oriented narrative is simple, humorous, and easily understood by young viewers. It strongly appeals*

*to emotions of warmth, security, and belonging. BEUC submitted this example to the EU Pledge and the Panel deemed this post to not be marketing to children as it is aimed at “millennials and the problems they face when moving out of home”. The Panel stated the post only targeted users over 18. However, this does not prevent under 18-year-olds from seeing this ad.*



<sup>66</sup> Screenshot taken 6 August 2025.

<sup>67</sup> Screenshot taken 6 August 2025.



Other influencers associate food products with special occasions or seasonal events.

In Sweden, **Sveriges Konsumenter** shows two lifestyle influencers and a former professional skier promoting biscuits while skiing together carrying the cookie brand logo.<sup>68</sup> The snowy mountains, retro winter clothing and upbeat music evoke holiday spirit and nostalgia, turning these biscuits into part of the seasonal experience.

### Dance challenges and comedy sketches

Some influencers use techniques that engage a young audience, such as dance challenges. These simple choreographies to trendy songs encourage the audience to reproduce the dance and the video to go viral.

In Bulgaria, **BNAAC** found an example from a very popular soft drink and snack brand.<sup>69</sup> The products feature a large and bright teddy bear logo that looks very appealing to a young audience. The brand invited influencers to perform a choreography in front of a supermarket while holding soft drink bottles. It used a popular song adapted to feature a play-on-words. The content format (dance, song remix and humour) is optimised for social media virality, encouraging engagement from a young audience.



Some influencers also create short sketches or prank videos that feature food products or brand promotion blending comedy content with food advertising. Many re-create relatable everyday situations and interactions to normalise consumption in various situations.

In Switzerland, **Federation Romande des Consommateurs** found one example of a young influencer DJ who created a fun and light-hearted campaign for Burger King.<sup>70</sup> The influencer performs a catchy and original song in a fast-food restaurant with lyrics referring product features ("cheddar melts, bacon crunches"), turning the advertisement into a music video with multiple actors singing and dancing while eating burgers.

<sup>68</sup> Screenshot taken 7 August 2025.

<sup>69</sup> Screenshot taken 4 August 2025.

<sup>70</sup> Screenshot taken 6 August 2025.

## Emotional messaging ('treat yourself')

Many brands use emotional messaging to advertise their food products. Our examples show brands using influencers to associate having a sugary beverage or snack as a reward or treat for oneself or self-care.

In Spain, **OCU** found an example with a 21-year-old influencer praising Cola-Cola for helping her getting through an exam period,<sup>71</sup> while our Swedish member **Sveriges Konsumenter** saw an actress from a show popular with a young audience, who comes home to a fridge stacked full of Cola-Cola bottles with the caption reading 'it's the small things in life'. BEUC submitted both examples as complaints to the EU Pledge and the Panel did not consider either to be marketing to children, only aiming 'teens and young adults. Both Coca-Cola Spain and Sweden shared with us segmentation statistics of the influencers' followers showing that between 11% (out of 204 000 followers for the Spanish influencer) and over 16% of followers (out of 251 000 followers for the Swedish influencer) are under 18. In both cases those are still a considerable number of minors.



## Advocating for a good cause

Food brands often pair with influencers to raise awareness for a good cause.

In Spain, **OCU** spotted a mass influencer posting about McDonald's awareness raising activities on a relief project following the 2024 floods in Valencia.<sup>72</sup> The campaign ran over a few days in March 2025, with 23 stories in one single day, featuring celebrities and influencers totalling a following of over 16 million. This made McDonald's an inescapable presence, particularly in children's digital environment. Even though the posts and stories did not feature any McDonald's products, the campaign associated the brand with charity and community work, and solidarity – a form of 'social washing'. By relying heavily on football players who are often role models for children and teenagers, McDonald's reinforces their appeal to young people. BEUC submitted a complaint to the EU Pledge about this campaign which the panel deemed inadmissible because the ad does not display a non-compliant product.



<sup>71</sup> Screenshot taken 14 April 2025.

<sup>72</sup> Screenshot taken 7 August 2025.



## Invitations to events and festivals

Some food brands invite influencers to music festivals or sports events to promote both the event itself and their brand through prominent featuring of products.

In Switzerland, **Fédération Romande des Consommateurs** found a campaign in March 2025 where Cola-Cola worked together with 10 influencers to promote festival Tomorrowland Winter which they are a partner of.<sup>73</sup> Influencers posted from the festival, featuring and drinking Cola-Cola products and thanking the brand for this experience.



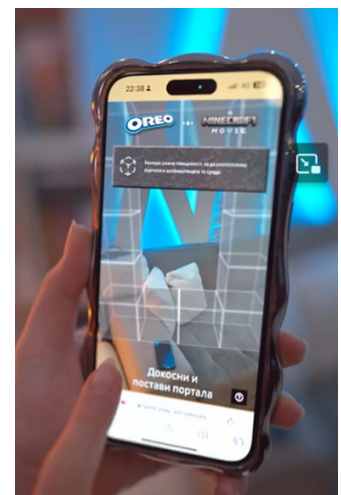
## Gamified content and partnering with other brands

The evidence-gathering uncovered 11 examples from Portugal, Spain and Bulgaria, of collaborations between food brands and the Minecraft movie creating a direct link between a food brand and child-friendly entertainment. Minecraft is one of the most popular games among children and teenagers with 20% of players under the age of 15.<sup>74</sup> The Minecraft brand brings strong child appeal through its blocky visuals, playful world-building, and widespread recognition among young audiences. Integrating unhealthy food products into the Minecraft narrative makes them appear as part of the gaming world, normalising consumption by associating unhealthy foods with play, fun, and rewards.

In Portugal, **DECO** found one example of McDonald's collaborating with a popular streamer and influencer venturing in a fantasy Minecraft-themed world.<sup>75</sup> As he walks through the brick world, McDonald's branded items are visible, e.g. two clearly identifiable packets of chips. The EU Pledge deemed this example inadmissible because the ad does not display a non-compliant product. The non-admission of this example to the EU Pledge shows its limitations and failure to truly protect children from unhealthy food marketing, because children will not differentiate between a product made from bricks and one made with real food.



In Bulgaria, **BNAAC** spotted posts of influencers using an Oreo Minecraft feature that turns their living room into a Minecraft world using augmented reality.<sup>76</sup> The caption reads "an exciting adventure you can dive into" linking Oreo cookies with a fun, immersive gaming experience. It encourages followers to visit the website to explore the Oreo Minecraft world, and to enter codes online to win rewards. BEUC submitted this example to the EU Pledge which the panel did not deem to be marketing to children but to an audience above 16. It argued 'children under the age of 13 would not understand the concept of a comic sketch' and that the post 'did include gamification elements' but that they were linked to the Minecraft movie and not the game. However, it is very likely the game and movie have a similar audience (teens between 13 and 17 accounted for 35% of the movie audience in the opening weekend).<sup>77</sup>



<sup>73</sup> Screenshot taken 7 August 2025.

<sup>74</sup> Naveen Kumar, 'How Many People Play Minecraft (2025) – Monthly Active Users', DemandSage, 2025. Available at: <https://www.demandsage.com/minecraft-statistics/>

<sup>75</sup> Screenshot taken 7 August 2025.

<sup>76</sup> Screenshot taken 4 August 2025.

<sup>77</sup> Marisa Jones, "A Minecraft Movie" thrives at the box office, and marketing is behind its success', eMarketer, 7 April 2025. Available at: <https://www.emarketer.com/content/a-minecraft-movie-thrives-box-office>

In Sweden, **Sveriges Konsumenter** found multiple examples from a sweets brand collaborating with influencers with around 340 000 followers combined and the popular TV show “The Masked Singer”.<sup>78</sup> This show is widely watched by families and children, making the partnership instantly appealing to a young audience. In the videos, a person dressed in as the sweets brand mascot visits people’s homes to deliver boxes of sweets and gifts, creating direct emotional engagement with children through the element of surprise and reward.



### On-site marketing events

Our analysis has found multiple examples of on-site marketing events in fast-food restaurants, including with influencers and artists.

In Switzerland, **Fédération Romande des Consommateurs** has found two examples of McDonald’s inviting an influencer and an artist to in-store events that predominantly featured children.<sup>79</sup> A 14-year-old Swiss DJ and kidfluencer played in a McDonald’s fast-food outlet twice. By using a minor as the centre of the event, the brand directly appeals to children, positioning the fast-food outlet as a fun place for young talents. The post caption says, “a pleasure to mix in such a crazy atmosphere and share my passion with the youngest”. The videos show the 14-year-old DJ-ing next to a large Disney mascot widely recognised among children in a restaurant full of balloons. Videos show many young children attending and dancing, including toddlers.

## Issues with unhealthy food marketing

While children and teenagers are vulnerable to influencer marketing in general, the food sector in particular needs strong legislation as the childhood overweight and obesity epidemic puts children at a much higher risk of developing serious health problems.<sup>94</sup> Many children and teenagers use digital media every day and algorithms have now bypassed children and teenagers’ media literacy. They are closely tailored to inundate them with increasingly harmful content as well as exposure to unhealthy practices and products such as high fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) foods and drinks.

<sup>78</sup> Screenshot taken 10 April 2025.

<sup>79</sup> Screenshot taken 8 August 2025.

## Pushing overconsumption and creating “cravings”

2025 is a historic turning point as for the first time obesity among school children (aged 5 -19) surpassed underweight.<sup>80</sup> One in three children in Europe is living with overweight or obesity and the World Health Organization has ‘unequivocally’ linked this trend to marketing of unhealthy foods high in fat, sugar and salt.<sup>81</sup> There is clear evidence showing that food marketing influences preferences, demand and consumption among children and young people and consequently their eating habits.<sup>82</sup> The increase in powerful advertising techniques, as well as constant exposure to unhealthy food marketing has become ubiquitous for children growing up in Europe. This is why regulating food marketing to children is a crucial measure to improve children’s health and wellbeing – well into their adult life – by making sure the healthy choice is the easiest, regardless of their parents’ financial situation and knowledge.

Constant exposure to unhealthy food content may not only lead to unhealthy dietary patterns but also stimulate and normalise overconsumption of such foods. Influencers praising a product’s tastiness, experiencing pleasure and satisfaction eating it increase the viewer’s desire to consume it. Tasty-looking foods, oozing with fat and sugar, close-ups, sizzling sounds, or ice-cold sparkling drinks for instance, work well with visual platforms such as Instagram. This stimulates the audience’s sensory engagement, evoking tastes and smells. Studies show that exposure to unhealthy food marketing increases hunger and cravings for both children<sup>83</sup> and adults.<sup>84</sup>

## Lack of transparency and undisclosed commercial partnerships

Out of the over 300 examples of influencer marketing of unhealthy foods BEUC received from its members, only a fraction disclosed their content’s paid promotion nature by adding ‘ad’, ‘product placement’ or the paid partnership label of the platform.

**67% of the monitored posts and stories, which seemed to have clear commercial intent, did not disclose a partnership with the brand, neither as a gift nor as a paid promotion.**

Among these, temporary stories predominantly did not feature any type of disclosure. Stories are only visible for 24 hours on Instagram and do not have a visible caption by default, this makes the enforcement of disclosure guidelines difficult. Influencers therefore need to disclose the paid promotion in a text box in the story itself, which was mostly missing

Even if influencers disclose paid promotion, studies have shown limited potential in minimising harmful effects of the unhealthy food content they promote. In a 2019 trial, children exposed to unhealthy foods’ influencer marketing consumed more calories after seeing content featuring a marketed product regardless of whether the influencer did or did not disclose a paid partnership with the brand. Children who viewed content with a disclosed partnership even consumed 41% more of the marketed snack compared to the control group.<sup>85</sup>

This evidence clearly shows that, in addition to transparency rules that need to be harmonised, the products themselves need to be regulated. While disclosing the advertisement to viewers serves the purpose of transparency and information, product regulation serves to protect children and their short- and long-term health.

## Breaking the prohibition to advertise unhealthy food to children and self-regulation shortcomings

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive provides that audiovisual commercial communications must not directly exhort minors to buy or hire a product or service by exploiting their inexperience or credulity. In addition, Member States shall encourage use of co-

<sup>80</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), ‘Feeding - Profit: How food environments are failing children’, *Child Nutrition Report 2025*, UNICEF, New York, September 2025. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/174091/file/CNR%202025%20-%20Feeding%20Profit%20-%20Final%20Report%20-%20English%20-%20FINAL.pdf.pdf>

<sup>81</sup> World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe, ‘Tackling food marketing to children in a digital world: Trans-disciplinary perspectives – Children’s rights, evidence of impact, methodological challenges, regulatory options and policy implications for the WHO European Region’, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016. Available at: <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/344003>

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Emma Boyland, Sarah Nolan, Bridget Kelly, Catrin Tudur-Smith, Andrew Jones, Jason C G Halford, and Eric Robinson, ‘Advertising as a cue to consume: a systematic review and meta-analysis of the effects of acute exposure to unhealthy food and nonalcoholic beverage advertising on intake in children and adults’, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, vol. 103, no. 2, February 2016, pp. 519–533. Available at: [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0002916523121563?ref=pdf\\_download&fr=RR-2&rr=9a075b63cc7a3d1a](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0002916523121563?ref=pdf_download&fr=RR-2&rr=9a075b63cc7a3d1a)

<sup>84</sup> Emma Boyland, Panagiotis Spanakis, Connor O’Reilly, and Paul Christiansen, ‘Associations between everyday exposure to food marketing and hunger and food craving in adults: An ecological momentary assessment study’, *Appetite*, vol. 196, 2024. Available at: [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0195666324000424#bib12](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0195666324000424#bib12)

<sup>85</sup> Coates AE, Hardman CA, Halford JCG, Christiansen P, Boyland EJ. ‘The effect of influencer marketing of food and a “protective” advertising disclosure on children’s food intake’. *Pediatric Obesity*. vol. 14, no. 10, October 2019, e12540. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ijpo.12540>

and self-regulation, e.g. through codes of conduct or initiatives like the EU Pledge.

BEUC and members submitted 13 complaints to the EU Pledge about Instagram influencer marketing content by Pledge signatories which featured techniques we considered to be unhealthy food marketing to children. The Pledge Secretariat deemed two of our complaints inadmissible because they “did not feature non-compliant products”: the McDonald’s campaign with footballers and influencers with a combined following of over 16 million followers, and the McDonald’s Minecraft collaboration (both examples described on p.24-25). The Pledge Panel concluded that none of our 11 remaining complaints were examples of marketing to children and that all content was compliant with EU Pledge requirements. However, many Pledge signatories provided us with numbers of influencers’ audiences and viewers of specific posts and stories. These numbers show that a significant number of children and teenagers see these posts and stories (up to 16% of viewers for one example were under 18 years old), even if they may not be the main target group.

This report focusing on influencer marketing confirms BEUC’s 2021 analysis of the EU Pledge’s shortcomings. Marketing restrictions put in place by the EU Pledge are so weak that food and drink companies are allowed to continue marketing unhealthy products to children, failing to protect them.

#### *What about brand marketing?*

Under self-regulatory models such as the EU Pledge, companies selling HFSS foods can continue marketing their brand to children as long as advertisements do not contain products themselves. Examples of unhealthy food marketing national regulation such as the new ban in Norway, still exempt brand marketing.

For the first time, a recent study has found evidence that brand-only advertising also affects what children eat, even when foods served to children were not the

same as those just seen by study participants and did not have branding information.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, a 2018 study in Australia found that children eat on average 50 calories more after watching unhealthy food advertising and do not compensate by eating less at later meals. The study found that this amount is high enough for these children to eventually become overweight in their adult life.<sup>87</sup> All this shows the immense power of unhealthy food ads have on children, and that any regulation exempting brand marketing is insufficient to protect children. As already stressed in BEUC’s 2021 report, **policymakers must restrict brand marketing, especially for those brands predominantly selling HFSS foods**, to avoid food companies simply highlighting healthier options in their marketing or omitting specific food products in their advertisements, whilst continuing to sell high amounts of HFSS foods.

#### **The need to protect children and teenagers alike**

While many social media platforms officially require their users to be over the age of 13, this has proved ineffective to protect children from online content that is not appropriate for their age. Children can easily circumvent age verification methods without their parents’ knowledge. Given how easy it is for underage children and teenagers to be active on social media, one can safely assume that advertising designed to reach teenagers will also reach younger children. At the same time, teenagers are at a life stage where they are highly sensitive to social acceptance and rewards, two techniques frequently used in digital marketing.

At EU level, the EU Pledge currently only includes guidelines on marketing to children under the age of 13, which fails to protect teenagers who are still particularly vulnerable to the marketing of HFSS foods. Thus, regulators should define a child as anyone under the age of 18 years old, as the WHO and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child recommend, and in line with most countries’ legal definition of a child.

<sup>86</sup> As of 20 November, the study has not been published yet. See *The Guardian*, ‘Children eat more after seeing just five minutes of junk food ads, study finds’, 11 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/11/children-eat-more-after-seeing-just-five-minutes-of-junk-food-ads-study-finds>

<sup>87</sup> Norman, J., Kelly, B., McMahon, AT. et al. Sustained impact of energy-dense TV and online food advertising on children’s dietary intake: a within-subject, randomised, crossover, counter-balanced trial. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act* 15, 37 (2018). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-018-0672-6>



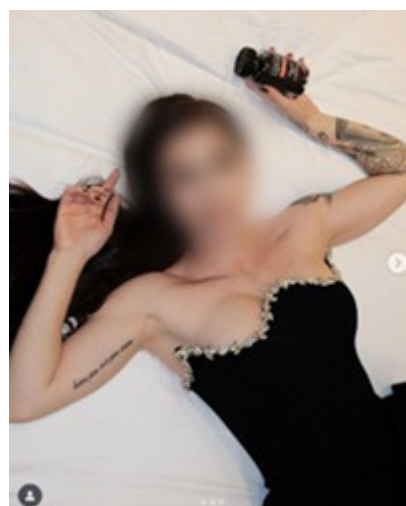
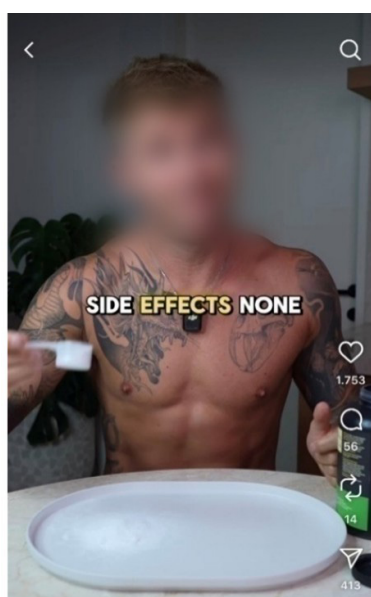
## Zoom in on food supplements

**Influencers increasingly promote food supplements** on social media, where investigations reveal serious problems in transparency, dosage safety, and audience-targeting. In Germany, a study<sup>88</sup> analysing 105 supplements promoted on Instagram found that about two-thirds exceeded recommended maximum daily amounts (as defined by the German Federal Risk Assessment Centre and EFSA), **without any warnings about overdosing**. Many posts were not labelled as advertising and presented supplements as “miracle cures”, with no mention of contraindications, or dosage risks. An evaluation by a German Food Safety Authority found that out of a total of 565 stories by influencers, about 90% of the health claims made were classified as inadmissible by the authorities.<sup>89</sup> Influencers therefore hardly comply with the provisions of the Health Claims Regulation

This trend is particularly **concerning among younger audiences**, who often perceive influencers as authentic and trustworthy health figures. Convinced they are doing something healthy, many overlook the commercial motives and scientific uncertainty behind such advice. This false sense of legitimacy increases the risk of overconsumption.

Many fitness influencers build a massive online following promoting high-protein products and workout supplements through food supplement brands and even their own brands. Influencers claim that creatine makes you stronger, whey protein builds muscle, and others boost energy or recovery, suggesting that combining them speeds up results. One example BEUC’s German member Verbraucherzentrale Bundesverband found shows a popular fitness influencer in a video titled “everything you need to know about creatine” claiming “side effects none”.<sup>90</sup>

A Belgian beauty influencer is promoting “Strength and growth” gummies, which she described as having “incredible results on her hair”.<sup>91</sup> These raspberry-flavoured gummies, enriched with zinc, selenium and horsetail extract, are marketed as vegan, natural solutions for stronger, shinier hair.



<sup>88</sup> Jan-Niklas Ricke and Roland Seifert, 'Disinformation on dietary supplements by German influencers on Instagram', *Naunyn-Schmiedeberg's Archives of Pharmacology*, vol. 398, no. 5, May 2025, pp. 5629–5647. Available at: [Disinformation on dietary supplements by German influencers on Instagram - PubMed](#)

<sup>89</sup> Chemisches und Veterinäruntersuchungsamt (CVUA) Stuttgart, 'Health promises for dietary supplements on Instagram – often off the legal side: An analysis regarding compliance with Regulation (EC) No. 1924/2006', 25 April 2022. Available at: [https://www.cvuas.de/pub/beitrag.asp?Thema\\_ID=2&ID=3577&subid=1](https://www.cvuas.de/pub/beitrag.asp?Thema_ID=2&ID=3577&subid=1)

<sup>90</sup> Screenshot taken 6 October 2025.

<sup>91</sup> Screenshot taken 6 October 2025.

Many people consume food supplements without real need, often influenced by marketing that creates a false sense of necessity. This perception encourages unnecessary consumption and overlooks that long-term or excessive use may carry certain risks. According to many public health authorities, food supplements do not substitute for a balanced and varied diet and are rarely necessary, especially for children. Spanish consumer group OCU recommends that food supplements should not be given to children at all, unless a paediatrician consider that deficiencies cannot be covered by improving diet or lifestyle habits.<sup>92</sup>

Over time, some supplements could contribute to cardiovascular strain, digestive issues, or mild liver and kidney stress.<sup>93</sup> Muscle-building products high in caffeine or stimulants may cause palpitations, sleep problems, or dehydration,<sup>94</sup> while beauty or weight-control supplements containing high levels of vitamin A or iron could, if overused, lead to vitamin A toxicity<sup>95</sup> or liver strain.<sup>96,97, 98</sup>

Supplement marketing does more than influence physical health, it can significantly affect mental health, especially among children and teenagers. As our Portuguese member DECO explains, exposure to

idealised body images and beauty standards online can negatively impact self-esteem, increasing the risk of anxiety, eating disorders,<sup>99</sup> and other mental health challenges. Findings from Norwegian BEUC member Forbrukerrådet<sup>100</sup> in 2024 show clear gender differences in supplement use, reflecting how these products are promoted online. Boys are often targeted with products emphasising strength and performance, while girls are more frequently exposed to supplements linked to beauty and weight control. These patterns not only reinforce traditional gender norms but also contribute to unequal psychological pressures, highlighting the need to consider the mental health implications of supplement promotion alongside physical risks. Forbrukerrådet have also found that unhealthy foods, dieting products and fitness advice are often presented side by side in the same posts highlighting that all these practices contribute to unhealthy eating habits and body image.

The combination of opaque influencer practices, frequent overdosing, weak and unclear regulation, and audience tailoring creates a potent public health risk, particularly among younger users.

<sup>92</sup> OCU (Organización de Consumidores y Usuarios), 'Complementos alimenticios: cuidado con los niños', OCU Salud, 2025. Available at: <https://www.ocu.org/salud/bienestar-prevencion/consejos/suplementos-ninos>

<sup>93</sup> See Andrew I. Geller, Nadine Shehab, Nina J. Weidle, Maribeth C. Lovegrove, Beverly J. Wolpert, Babgaleh B. Timbo, Robert P. Mozersky, and Daniel S. Budnitz, 'Emergency Department Visits for Adverse Events Related to Dietary Supplements', *The New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 373, no. 16, 2015, pp. 1531–1540. <https://nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMsa1504267>; for kidney issues, see Amy Christine Brown, Kidney toxicity related to herbs and dietary supplements: Online table of case reports. Part 3 of 5 series, *Food and Chemical Toxicology*, Volume 107, Part A, 2017, Pages 502–519, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fct.2016.07.024>; for liver issues see Reference 98.

<sup>94</sup> C. Ajibo, A. Van Griethuysen, S. Visram, and A. A. Lake, 'Consumption of energy drinks by children and young people: a systematic review examining evidence of physical effects and consumer attitudes', *Public Health Nutrition*, 2024. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0033350623003189>

<sup>95</sup> María L. Pestalardo, Cecilia S. Bevilacqua, and Marcelo Fabián Amante, 'Vitamin A toxicity and hepatic pathology: A comprehensive review', *World Journal of Hepatology*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2025, pp. 215–230. Available at: [Vitamin A toxicity and hepatic pathology: A comprehensive review - PubMed](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1875535925000318)

<sup>96</sup> Selim Eke, 'Unveiling the Hidden Dangers of Iron Overload – A Systematic Review', *Research and Reviews in Science*, December 2024. Available at: [Unveiling the Hidden Dangers of Iron Overload - A .pdf](https://www.researchandreviewsin.com/article/pii/S2666-5326(24)00031-8)

<sup>97</sup> Martin J. J. Ronis, Kim B. Pedersen, and James Watt, 'Adverse Effects of Nutraceuticals and Dietary Supplements', *Annual Review of Pharmacology and Toxicology*, vol. 58, 2018, pp. 447–467. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6380172/>

<sup>98</sup> Victor Navarro, Ikhlas Khan, Einar Björnsson, Leonard B. Seeff, Jose Serrano, and Jay H. Hoofnagle, 'Liver Injury from Herbal and Dietary Supplements', *Hepatology*, vol. 65, no. 1, 2017, pp. 363–373. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5502701/>

<sup>99</sup> DECO (Associação para a Defesa do Consumidor), 'Influencer Marketing: Digital Media Advertising', No. 1-2025, DECO, 2025. Available at: <https://deco.pt/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Influencer-marketing-and-Digital-Media-Advertising.pdf>

<sup>100</sup> Norwegian Consumer Council, 'Pressure, pills and powder: Use of dietary supplements among young consumers (13–24 years)', Norwegian Consumer Council, 2024. Available at: <https://storage02.forbrukerradet.no/media/2024/10/use-of-dietary-supplements-among-young-consumers-.pdf>

# CONCLUSION: INFLUENCER MARKETING BEYOND THESE TWO SECTORS AND FUTURE EU REGULATORY DEVELOPMENTS

Evidence collected show that influencer marketing is multifaceted and exposes consumers - especially children and teenagers - to fleeting marketing contents that often lack transparency. These posts and videos can be risky for consumers as they can trigger over- and impulsive consumption or creates a false sense of trust in influencers' advice.

The practices and issues highlighted in this evidence-gathering are by no means limited to the fast fashion and food sector. This is especially the case of influencers promoting financial investments or products such as crypto currencies. A consumer survey published by BEUC in October 2025 including data from 11 European countries show that 21,1% of survey respondents use social media and 14% rely on influencers as a source of information for their personal finances.<sup>101</sup> While the level of trust is not as high as it is for advice from bank staff or friends and family, most respondents still found the information received from social media and influencers useful.<sup>102</sup>

In parallel, several measures have been taken in the past years at national level to regulate influencer marketing of financially risky products. France limited influencer

promotions of risky financial products, such as crypto assets, only to products authorised by the French Financial Market Authority and where the influencer obtained a licence from the authority financial agent.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, the Dutch Authority for the Financial Markets clarified 'finfluencers' need a licence to give financial advice and that there is a ban on inducements, i.e. an influencer cannot accept fees for promoting investment products.<sup>104</sup>

Spain and Belgium recently introduced new rules which oblige influencer promotion for crypto assets to prominently disclose the risks associated with investing in these assets and include a clear risk warning.<sup>105 106</sup> The Dutch Authority for the Financial Markets published guidelines for finfluencers including warnings to give personal investment advice only if under a license, to be transparent about personal commercial interest and to refuse fees for bringing clients through affiliated links or referrals (as there is a ban on inducements in place in the Netherlands).

Looking beyond financial services, effective legislative measures to protect consumers from the risks posed by influencer marketing are necessary. The European Digital Fairness Act, and the evaluation of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive expected for the end of 2026 are opportunities to address this problem. Clear definitions, harmonised disclosure requirements, shared liability, and targeted bans for harmful products are essential to ensure accountability. Robust, enforceable standards are needed to create fairer, safer, and more transparent digital marketing practices for consumers across Europe. Finally, strong enforcement against influencers using harmful practices and/or relying on hidden advertising techniques to hook consumers remain essential.



<sup>101</sup> BEUC (The European Consumer Organisation), 'Greenwashing of sustainable finance products discouraging consumers from investing', press release, 30 October 2025. Available at: <https://www.beuc.eu/press-release/greenwashing-sustainable-finance-products-discouraging-consumers-investing>

<sup>102</sup> Social media "somewhat useful": 46,4%, "very useful": 27,4%; influencers: somewhat useful: 33,0%, "very useful": 16,1%.

<sup>103</sup> Loi no. 2023-451 du 9 juin 2023 visant à encadrer l'influence commerciale et à lutter contre les dérives des influenceurs sur les réseaux sociaux (1), *Légifrance*, 9 June 2023. Available at: [Légifrance - Publications officielles - Journal officiel - JORF n° 0133 du 10/06/2023](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000045133)

<sup>104</sup> The Dutch Authority for the Financial Markets (AFM), 'Finfluencing', AFM. Available at: <https://www.afm.nl/en/sector/themas/digitalisering/finfluencing>

<sup>105</sup> Arrêté Royal du 5 janvier 2023 portant approbation du règlement de l'Autorité des services et marchés financiers subordonnant à des conditions restrictives la commercialisation de monnaies virtuelles auprès des consommateurs, *Moniteur belge*, 17 March 2023. Available at: [reglem\\_05-01-2023\\_0.pdf](https://www.moniteurbelge.be/reglement/05-01-2023_0.pdf)

<sup>106</sup> Spanish National Securities Market Commission (CNMV), Circular 1/2022 of 10 January on the advertising of cryptoassets presented as a means of investment. Available at: [Circular 3\\_2021](https://www.cnmv.es/web/guest/circular-1-2022)



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