

**INTENT VS IMPACT:  
A DATA-BACKED GUIDE TO**

# **FIXING FLAWED INFLUENCER SEEDING**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of our series on Unlocking Brand Advocacy, this report dives into one of the *most efficient and effective, yet widely misutilised earned media tactic* in modern day marketing: influencer seeding. Seeding is a targeted marketing tactic that involves sending curated products to selected creators with the end goal of sparking authentic, unpaid content.

We surveyed over **150** senior marketers from leading global enterprises to understand how their organisation approaches seeding, from creator targeting, measurement to the strategic role it plays in building brand advocacy.

This report will outline some of the common challenges businesses face today when seeding without intent and offers a foundational **maturity framework** to help guide brands on where they currently stand and provides a clear roadmap to advance their approach. Our findings reveal a critical disconnect between practice and proficiency, and this report offers the insights needed to close that gap.

**150**  
senior marketers  
from leading global  
enterprises  
surveyed



# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

## **Advocacy**

Brand advocacy represents the organic promotion and active defense of a brand by individuals who genuinely support and endorse it.

## **Seeding (Influencer Gifting)**

A targeted marketing tactic that involves sending curated products to selected creators with the goal of sparking authentic, unpaid content and earned media.

## **Maturity Framework**

A frame designed to guide brands on where they currently stand in terms of seeding maturity and a roadmap to advance their approach.



# KEY INSIGHTS

While seeding is common, with

**94%**

surveyed marketers engaging in it,

**43%**

attribute **creator identification** as their biggest challenge when it comes to product seeding.

**45%**

surveyed marketers revealed they target creators to seed to based on **brand alignment and product fit**, yet creator **identification is the biggest roadblock** faced by a majority of them, showing a clear parity between intent and execution.

With

**35%**

of marketers blaming declining effectiveness of seeding campaigns on **creator fatigue** and

**38%**

admitting **creators feel spammed by outreach**, the industry is causing a systemic problem. The 'spray and pray' approach treats creators as a disposable commodity, not partners, eroding the trust and authenticity that makes seeding valuable in the first place.

Only

**18.7%**

of surveyed marketers operate at a **sophisticated, 'future-proof' level**. The vast majority are stuck in the lower stages of the 'maturity framework'.



# THE NEW BEAUTY BATTLEGROUND:

## A Market of Mounting Pressure

For modern beauty brands, the landscape has never been more challenging to navigate. A combination of market forces has created a perfect storm, making it harder than ever to capture and maintain consumer attention.

**Selective Consumers:** Rising living costs have curbed impulse buys, leading consumers to purchase fewer products with more intent. This research-heavy approach is driven by social media, where **50%** of Gen Z vet brands, making them **12%** more likely to purchase directly through social channels, but with more intent (GWI).

**Fierce Competition:** The beauty landscape is saturated with relentless product drops and constant newness. This has conditioned consumers to seek constant novelty, eroding brand loyalty and making it a challenge to maintain their long-term attention.

**Ad Fatigue:** Audiences are smarter than ever and increasingly skeptical of traditional advertising and being sold to. Trust has shifted dramatically from sponsored posts (#ad) to authentic, unpaid reviews, making genuine peer-to-peer recommendations more valuable than ever (McKinsey 'State of Consumer 2025').

1.1



#deinfluencing

3B

total views  
on TikTok

#under  
consumptioncore

305M

total views  
on TikTok



# EARNING CONSUMER TRUST:

In this new battleground, trust is the ultimate currency. **With 92% of consumers trusting peer recommendations more than any other form of advertising**, the ability to generate authentic, unpaid advocacy is a brand's modern superpower. This advocacy generates earned media, the social proof that builds deep credibility and drives action. When people talk about your brand not because they were paid to, but because they chose to, you create a level of influence that simply can't be bought. The question isn't just how to reach consumers, but how to truly earn their belief.

**And here's why seeding matters now more than ever..**



my lashes have never looked better

**MakeupMage** 🌸 @MakeupMage ¥ 13 Dec ...  
they meant it when they said waterproof.

13 36 38

1.2

Ugh the new mascara is literally the best.

64 83

**Lorraine75** 🌸 @Lorraine75 ¥ 13 Feb ...  
the brown version is gorg for green-eyed girlies

13 36 38





# Seeding as the Solution

Consumers are informed, discerning, and wary of being sold to. They are more resistant to slick advertisements and overly promotional content. When they see an organic, authentic review from an influencer they genuinely trust, it breaks through the noise and wins the battle for attention.

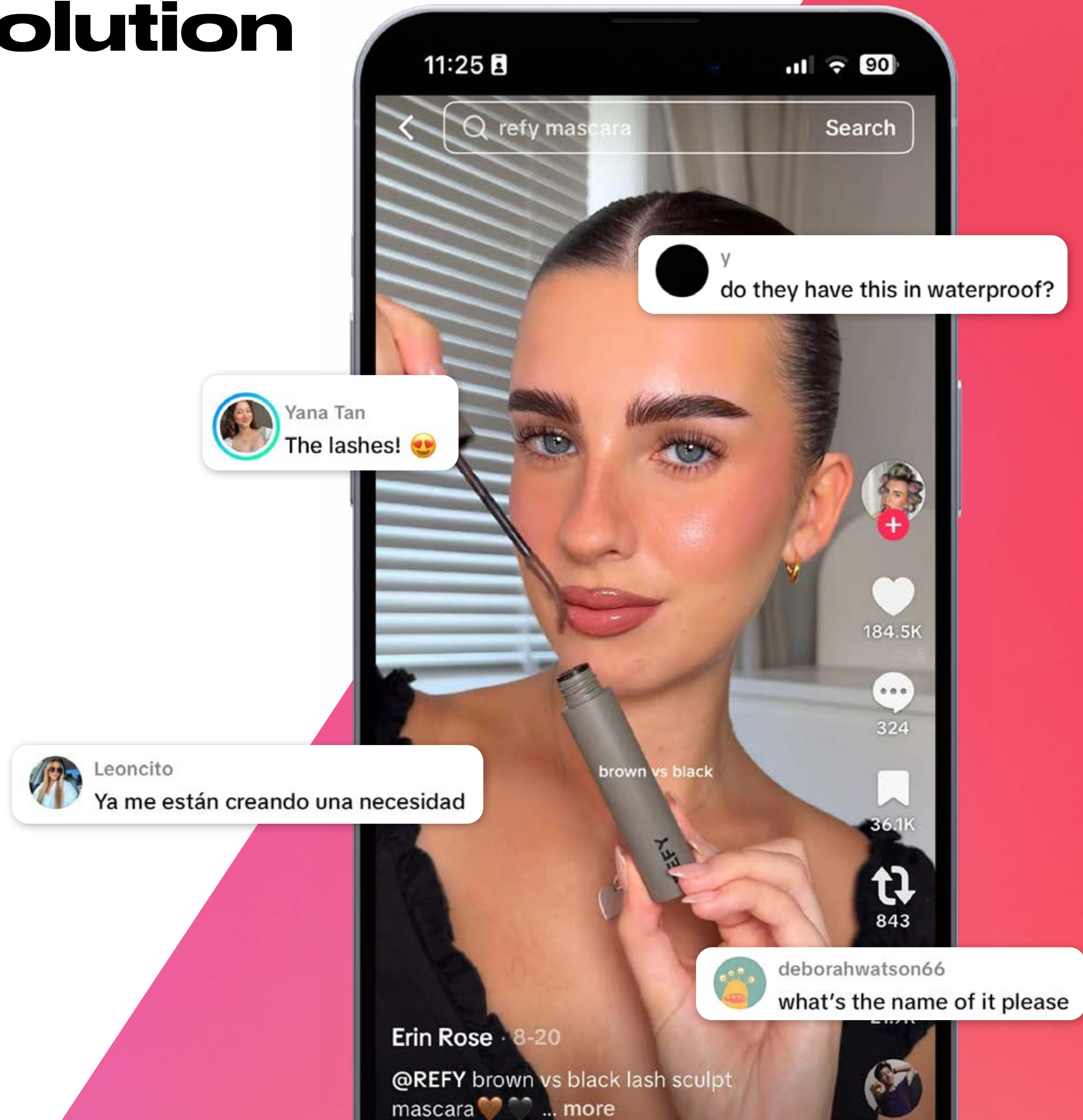
Seeding unlocks that. It's the social proof that builds trust and drives action.

## Seeding /si:d/

Seeding is a targeted marketing tactic that involves sending curated products to selected creators with the end goal of sparking authentic, unpaid content.

When people talk about your brand not because they were paid to, but because they chose to, you create a level of credibility that can't be bought.

Seeding gets your product in front of the people who matter, giving them a chance to have a tactile experience firsthand and share it with their network. It makes people feel chosen and valued. When you offer something worth trying, creators respond with content, conversation, and credibility that generates a compounding effect, influencing wider networks and building powerful social proof.





# INTENT VS EXECUTION:

1.4

## Why Your Seeding Investment is Vanishing

For most brands, the investment poured into product seeding vanishes long before it generates real value. As the potential of seeding becomes more apparent, brands are scrambling to scale their efforts, often at the direct expense of strategy, intent, and precision. Our data confirms this with **94%** marketers saying they do seed, but **43%** have difficulty finding the right creators to seed to, which is the **cornerstone of an effective seeding strategy**.

Real results come from seeding with precision (even when at scale), meaning you have to align the objective with the right creator, format, and moment.





# THE GREAT DISCONNECT:

**Mainstream Practice,  
Critically Flawed Execution**

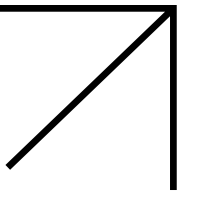
**94%**

marketers engage in seeding, but despite its widespread use, the execution is critically flawed.

**43%**

of surveyed marketers attribute identifying the right creators as their biggest challenge for product seeding. As a result, brands are shipping millions of gifted products into a void, hoping for a return they can't secure because they skipped the most critical step: targeting with intent.

This doesn't seem to be a strategic misstep, rather willful ignorance as brands are paralysed by a fear of getting it wrong, so they default to an outdated "spray and pray" model, rushing to scale quickly, often at the expense of precision. This leads to an endless cycle of throwing money at the problem, without reevaluating and optimising their approach due to the pressure of generating earned media quickly. Then it becomes a problem of not being able to justify spend due to an ad-hoc approach.







# THE GREAT IRONY OF THE “SPRAY AND PRAY” MODEL IS

that it actively undermines the immense value that a smart seeding strategy is built to deliver. When done right, seeding is a powerhouse: it drives authentic content at scale, builds genuine trust, and is a far more cost-effective solution. This value, however, is only unlocked by working with the right voices, creators who either already love your brand or have the potential to become true advocates.

Seeding needs to work smart to work hard. 100 mailers sent to real brand fans who will thoughtfully integrate a product into their routine and speak about it with passion will deliver exponentially more impact than one million mailers sent to random people. When this principle is ignored, brands waste products on ghosters, receive low-effort content, or see their gifts bundled into massive mailer unboxings.

The following symptoms are clear indicators of a strategy that is eating budget instead of building value.





# THE ANATOMY OF A FLAWED STRATEGY

## Symptoms of an Unsophisticated Approach

### Symptom 1:

#### Overly Broad Targeting & The Rise of Creator Fatigue

Brands getting impatient and broadening their targeting to capture the largest pool of creators possible. This leads to diluting advocacy by not seeding to the right creator partners. Creators as a result are less likely to post when the product is of no interest to them, leading to wasted product and resources when seeding to non-relevant creators.

**35%** of marketers cite overly broad creator targeting as a reason for declining seeding campaign effectiveness.

**38%** say creators feel spammed by outreach from brands.

### Symptom 2:

#### The Looming Creator Economy Pressure

Creators expect payment for their services, especially when they are re-engaged multiple times. This increases costs for seeding campaigns, damages authenticity of the post if the creator is paid for the activation and may lead to brands facing backlash for not supporting the creator economy.

**30.7%**

of marketers see creators requesting payment as a factor in declining effectiveness. This damages authenticity and increases costs, undermining the core value of earned media.

### Symptom 3:

#### Creator Fatigue and Switch Off

With creators being re-engaged by multiple brands, they are starting to switch off. This leads to tons of wasted product and resource when sending to un-engaged creators, a drop in response and posting rate, likely only generating posts from serial gifters who lack the audience to build advocacy.

**35%** of marketers cite overly broad creator targeting as a reason for declining seeding campaign effectiveness.

**23.3%** marketers report receiving low-quality or irrelevant content from creators as a key challenge.



# THE PATH FORWARD:

## Introducing the Seeding Maturity Framework

The solution is not to seed more, but to seed smarter. To achieve this, brands must first honestly assess their current capabilities. We've built a **Seeding Maturity Framework**,

a structure designed to show the level brands are in terms of seeding sophistication and where they can get to – providing a clear

roadmap from ad-hoc activity to strategic, future-proofed impact.

### Level 1: [Ad Hoc]

Pushing products to a mailing list with no targeting or clear KPIs

*Survey Data:* **15%** of marketers operate at this level.

### Level 2: [Basic]

Picking creators with simple filters (like follower count) and inconsistent measurement.

*Survey Data:* **21%** of marketers are here.

### Level 3: [Intentional]

Using targeted, strategically timed drops with consistent metrics, but optimisation is manual and siloed.

*Survey Data:* The largest group, **39%**, are at this stage, good, but not great.

### Level 4: [Future-Proof]

Seeding is fully integrated, data-led, precisely targeted, robustly measured, and continuously optimised.

*Survey Data:* Only **18.7%** of marketers have reached this stage.

The data clearly shows that while seeding is mainstream, maturity isn't. The vast majority of brands are operating at a basic or intentional level, leaving immense value on the table.

Low Sophistication

High Sophistication



# HOW TO FUTURE-PROOF YOUR SEEDING:

The goal for brands that want to do it right should be to unify their teams, build better and smarter processes, and begin to seed with the clarity, precision, and undeniable intent that defines a mature strategy.

A mature seeding strategy requires a fundamental shift away from outdated practices. It begins with a move towards **precision creator targeting**. The old model of chasing broad reach and large follower counts has proven to be not only inefficient but damaging, directly causing creator fatigue and burnout that results in declining campaign effectiveness.

The future of seeding lies in applying a data-led, multi-faceted approach. This means going beyond surface-level metrics to align with creators based on a deep understanding of their attributes, audience demographics, authentic product fit, and a proven potential for genuine brand advocacy. It's the difference between renting an audience and building a true long-term partner.

This precision must also extend to optimised frequency, cadence, and volume. The prevailing "scale-first" mentality, driven by a desire for volume over value, is a significant drain on resources. A more sophisticated approach deploys seeding with a smart, intentional rhythm.

This means prioritising key brand moments like product launches or major sales events with high-impact, concentrated campaigns to maximise buzz. This is then supported by a lower-frequency, "always-on" cadence designed to sustain momentum, keep the brand top-of-mind, and nurture creator relationships without overwhelming them.



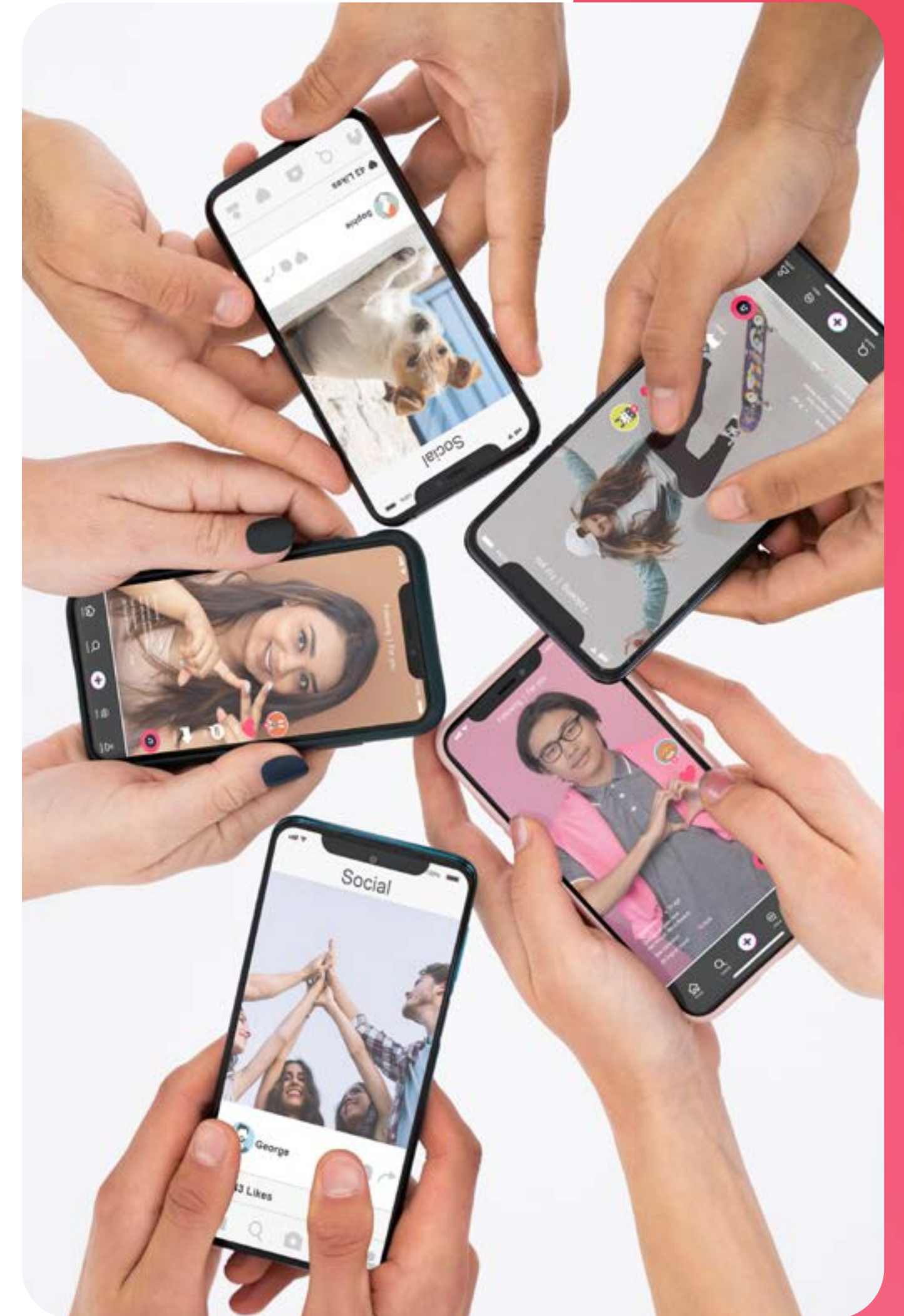


# A Snippet from Our Playbook

Success also demands **full seeding integration within broader advocacy levers**. For too long, seeding has been treated as a siloed, standalone tactic, limiting its potential impact. A future-proofed strategy embeds seeding as a core component of a holistic advocacy ecosystem. By integrating it with ambassador programs, you can nurture your most valuable relationships. By connecting it to affiliate or commission-based incentives, you create a powerful value exchange that drives performance.

To justify and improve these efforts, brands must adopt **standardised measurement and continuous optimisation**. The industry's reliance on fragmented, volume-based metrics like posting rates is a reaction to an immature strategy, with **37%** surveyed marketers only relying on engagement rate to determine seeding success. Measuring success requires a shift in focus from tracking activity to measuring value. By implementing standardised, outcome-focused KPIs such as Cost Per Mille (CPM), Cost Per Engagement (CPE), and Earned Media Value (EMV), brands can gain a true understanding of their ROI and make data-driven decisions to continuously optimise their approach for maximum impact.

Finally, this all comes together under a philosophy of **outcome-led governance**. The old way of working was driven by volume and misaligned processes, where the goal was simply to get as much product out the door as possible. A mature organisation implements strategic, outcome-first frameworks with clear priorities. This means defining what success looks like from the outset, understanding when to scale and when to focus on precision, and ensuring that every decision is aligned with achieving tangible business goals, not just hitting activity quotas.





# WIN THE FUTURE OF ATTENTION

The pressure to win with seeding is undermining its own impact, forcing brands to prioritise volume over the authenticity and effectiveness that make it powerful. Seeding can be the most effective modern marketing tool if done with precision of targeting the right creators as that can make or break your campaign. If a niche community sees their favourite creator promote a product authentically, that will resonate much more than a polished celebrity advertisement to today's socially native generation.

The “spray and pray” era is over. Future winners will seed with intent and when seeding reaches its full potential, it unlocks the unstoppable power of peer-to-peer advocacy at scale. The earned media era is still young and there is scope to win the future of attention.





# ABOUT SOCIALLY POWERFUL

Socially Powerful is a global social and influencer marketing agency founded in 2017, with a presence across the UK, United States, Europe, and the Middle East. Founded by social media pioneers who grew alongside platforms like Facebook and YouTube, the agency specialises in delivering bold marketing campaigns that leverage technology, creative storytelling, and deep social media insights. The agency excels in influencer marketing, social strategy, video content, and distribution, consistently achieving marketing performance that outperforms traditional channels.

