

INFLUANSWER *Arabia*

June 2025

Insights from content creators and influencers
in the Middle East and North Africa



Content

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Foreword

Online, everyone looks for someone to connect with, to engage with, to share something: moments of laughter, inspiration, life hacks, a special meal, an unusual experience, suggestions, recommendations, community. In real life, we have family, friends, and colleagues. In the digital world, we also have another group of people with whom we journey through life: content creators, who craft, share, and influence.

Whether micro- or macro-influencers, these creators have, over time, grown with their platforms, expanded their followings, experimented with new mediums, and matured in how they show up through their content. They know their value – and brands know it too. Earlier this year, as YouTube marked 20 years since going live, the platform shared new data highlighting significant growth in creator earnings across the MENA region. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the number of channels generating seven-figure annual revenues in SAR rose by 40% year over year.

While there are many reports on influencer marketing from the brands' perspective, few approach them from the viewpoint of the creators. When we launched our inaugural

InfluAnswer Arabia last year, it was because we were curious about how they saw their industry, what mattered to them, and the perspectives they had on best practices for brand collaborations.

The feedback we've received – from creators, brands, and industry peers – has been incredibly insightful. It has provided a new lens through which to view the growth of a dynamic, evolving, growing industry, enabling new approaches for positive and productive collaboration.

Spurred on by the impact, we've embarked on a follow-up report, tracking changes on insights from last year and exploring sentiment on new topics too. It's with great pleasure that Weber Shandwick MENAT now presents the second edition of InfluAnswer Arabia.

I'm grateful to everyone whose passion and thirst for deeper understanding have brought it to life. My sincere thanks also go to the many content creators who have generously shared their time and thoughts. I hope these insights will help you navigate this engaging landscape with confidence and new consideration.



Ziad Hasbani
Regional CEO - Weber Shandwick MENAT

A neon-themed graphic design on a dark blue background. A large, glowing cyan number '1' is the central focus, with a magenta glow at its base. The word 'INSIGHT' is written in a white, outlined, sans-serif font across the middle. In the bottom right, there is a faint, light blue star shape. The background is decorated with magenta and cyan neon lines forming geometric shapes and a reflective surface at the bottom.

1 INSIGHT

INSIGHT 1

59%

of MENA creators cite platform algorithms among their top hurdles to remaining authentic

Tension between visibility and authenticity

To remain relevant and commercially successful, creators count on their content being seen and performing well – content that is also an extension of their authentic selves. When it comes to their key challenges in showing up authentically online, almost six in ten MENA creators cite platform algorithms, followed by increasing commercialisation (54%) and brand restrictions (45%).

The unpredictability of platform algorithms can lead to frustration and discouragement, given that they significantly impact creators by influencing content visibility and audience reach. Our research suggests a growing tension for creators, who are caught in a delicate balancing act between authentic content, audience expectations, brand demands, and algorithmic pressures.



INSIGHT 1

Tension between visibility and authenticity

What does it mean for brands?

Understanding algorithms and adapting to their changes is crucial for creators to thrive on social media. As platforms evolve and monetisation ramps up, many influencers are exploring what authenticity means in a sponsored, optimised world. Some already have a strong understanding of how algorithms affect their pages, and what types of content tend to perform well.

Brands who are collaborative when shaping content strategies, open to experimentation and adaptation, and cognisant of the forces at play, will be seen by creators as partners who value trust and authenticity in content. Product placements in brand collaborations should be integrated into content in a way that looks and feels organic. A grasp of the latest 'algospeak' (coded language and euphemisms on social media platforms) may also be helpful in identifying some of the topics creators care about.



IN THEIR WORDS

- Audiences crave real, relatable content much more than staged perfection.
- Don't want to be in campaigns that also feature creators with different values.
- True storytellers will always be in demand.
- Looking for creative ways to monetise content beyond traditional methods.
- It's tough to produce content while also growing followers.

The image features a large, glowing neon number '2' in the center, with a color gradient from purple on the left to blue on the right. Below the '2', the word 'INSIGHT' is written in a white, outlined, sans-serif font. The background is dark blue with several glowing geometric shapes: a purple line forming a triangle on the left, a blue line forming a triangle on the right, and several white-outlined rectangles of various sizes on the right side. The neon '2' and the word 'INSIGHT' are reflected on a glossy surface at the bottom.

2 INSIGHT

INSIGHT 2

49%

of MENA creators are positive about the use of AI - up from just 29% last year

AI uncertainty shifts to positivity

Positive sentiment toward AI tools has soared as influencers move beyond neutrality into wider curiosity and active experimentation. Last year, over half (56%) were neutral or uncertain about AI; this has reduced to 36% in 2025. Digital creators say the top impact of AI will be the introduction of more advanced tools and analytics (63%), allowing them to automate repetitive tasks and focus more on storytelling.

This evolution reflects a growing maturity in how influencers view AI - not as a threat to creativity, but as a tool that, if used correctly, can amplify both efficiency and authenticity. The conversation has quickly shifted from if to how AI can be integrated into influencers' creative workflows. Despite the enthusiasm, many recognise its positive sides could come with an increase of deepfakes, which ranked third (41%) among the most prominent impacts of AI.



INSIGHT 2

AI uncertainty shifts to positivity

What does it mean for brands?

The speed at which AI evolves, use cases emerge, experimental content is posted, and new tools launch, makes it impractical to have a procedure for every occurrence. In addition to human creators using AI, there are also AI influencers – virtual creators and digital avatars crafted with AI. It can be a fine line: quirky, fun, and inventive on one side, facing off against opacity, trickery, and perceived fakeness.

If a brand has specific guidelines on how AI can (and cannot) be used – and how it should be tagged or identified – it's ideal to share these with creators before content production so that expectations and governance are aligned. Given how habitual GenAI has become for starter content ideas, brands should highlight and reiterate content that cannot be fed into AI-powered platforms, for example confidential or embargoed info.



IN THEIR WORDS

- AI tools will become indispensable; AI-powered content creation is set to become the norm.
- Good for generating scripts, crafting captions, editing videos, and creating art.
- Will see more AI campaigns and fewer natural brand collabs.
- AI can do a lot of some of the work for free, so possibly less demand for 'regular' creators.
- Only genuine and truthful influencers will stay in demand.

The background is a dark blue gradient. It features several glowing neon lines: a magenta line forming a large 'C' shape on the left, a cyan line forming a large 'C' shape on the right, and a magenta line forming a large 'C' shape at the bottom. A faint, glowing star is visible in the bottom right corner. The text 'INSIGHT' is centered in a white, outlined, sans-serif font.

INSIGHT

INSIGHT 3

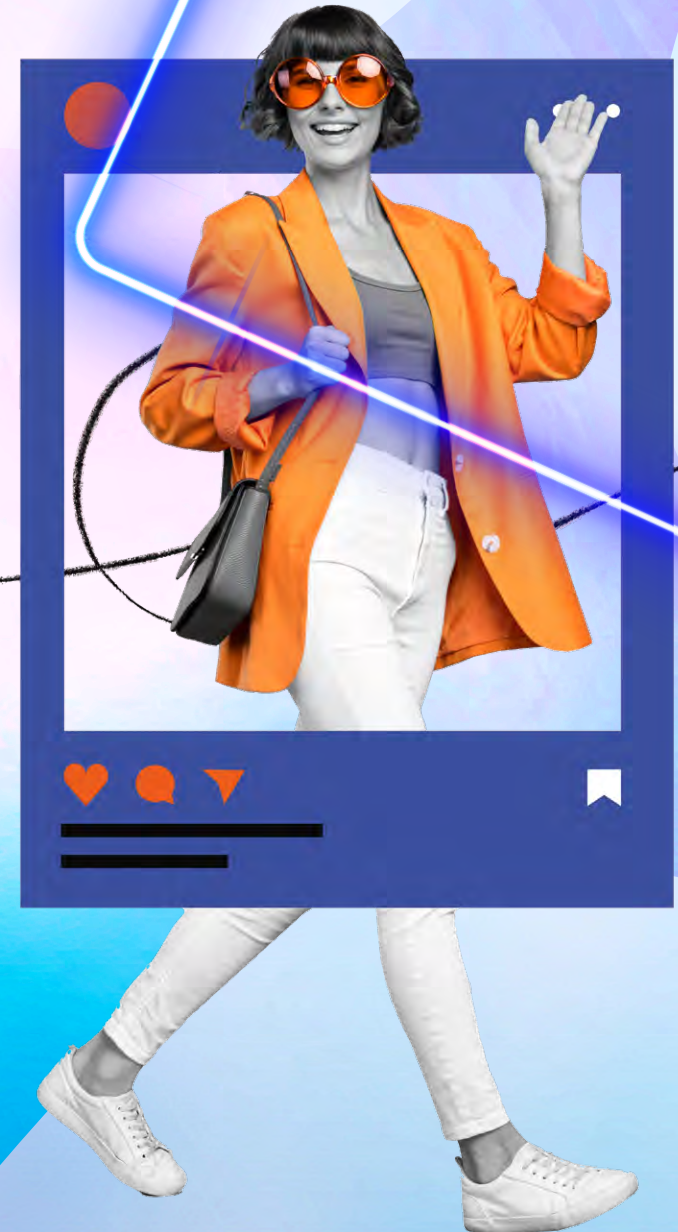
63%

of MENA creators say a VIP experience is important – a significant jump from 51% last year

IRL wins over URL

They may be digital creators, but real life is still where great content happens, is fully experienced, and where human connections are made. But with time and physical presence at a premium, nearly two-thirds (63%) of creators say events must deliver something beyond the ordinary. That said, the most important goal when considering attending an event is still the connection with the brand – and this sentiment is growing even stronger for creators, from 66% last year to 80% this year.

This shift signals a renewed appetite to engage physically, expand networks, share their own true selves, and immerse in real life. It also loops back to the tension around algorithms and authenticity. After all, everyone needs a break from digital fatigue and algorithm-choked feeds – and it's then that the lure of real-life engagement becomes even stronger. Surveyed influencers also say events and exhibitions (71%) are the best way governments can support the influencer industry and creator economy. A great example is the annual 1 Billion Followers Summit in Dubai, organised by the UAE Government Media Office.



INSIGHT 3

IRL wins over URL

What does it mean for brands?

Real-life events enable influencers to mingle with other creators, followers, and brands, as well as stay on top of new topics and trends. For both brands and governments, leaning into in-person events – and enhancing them with exceptional experiences, unique details, visual highlights, and memorable encounters – offers a powerful way to foster loyalty, collaboration, and community among creators.

When it comes to events, think meaningful, memorable, and shareable. After all, 64% of creators say access to a really unique event is the most likely reason they will post organic, non-paid content. Consider what influencers would really value given the time they're investing to attend. Not all events may be suitable for all creators. But doing the same thing time and again won't suffice. Influencers are comparing event invitations, past experiences, and feedback from other creators. Subsequently, the benchmark is getting higher for brands to impress at events. Creativity, novelty, and personality – of various blends – will capture the attention and engagement of influencers.



IN THEIR WORDS

- There's a craving for genuine human connection.
- Fewer paid partnerships, more experiences.
- Credibility can be boosted in person.
- People connect with realness, not perfection.
- Events should open doors to future collaborations.

The background is a dark gradient with vibrant neon lines. A purple line starts from the bottom left and extends towards the top left. A blue line starts from the top right and extends towards the center. The word 'INSIGHT' is written in a white, outlined, sans-serif font. A large number '4' is superimposed over the word, with its top and right sides glowing blue and its bottom and left sides glowing purple. The entire graphic is reflected on a glossy surface at the bottom. A faint, large star outline is visible in the bottom right corner.

INSIGHT

4

INSIGHT 4

62%
+
★

of MENA creators say long-form content is a great way to engage through organic storytelling

Long-form content plays the long game

While short-form content continues to dominate, long-form content is growing in prominence. Creators are carving out space for lengthy, in-depth sequences that allow for more personal storytelling and authentic expression.

Raw reels, storytimes, vlogs that attempt to 'stop the scroll', as well as podcasts with personal thoughts and detailed discussions are examples of long-form content formats deployed by creators to claim and keep their fair share of true followers. Nearly half (48%) are considering exploring opportunities around podcasting, and 11% say podcasting is already a key component of their content strategy.



INSIGHT 4

Long-form content plays the long game

What does it mean for brands?

Most creators see long-form formats as a space for building authenticity through organic content. Far fewer view long-form content, like vlogs, as an opportunity for brand promotion or product placement. On the other hand, short segments of podcast interviews may be useful for branding on social media.

Given their size and often ad-hoc nature, long-form formats may not be as suitable (or practical) for most branded content, but they represent untapped potential for more meaningful, story-led partnerships when used strategically.



IN THEIR WORDS

- Getting into content formats like podcasting is a great way to expand prominence.
- Short-form videos will remain dominant.
- Podcasts will increase.
- More content creators will get into TV, reality shows, and movies.
- More creators are doing longer-type content on YouTube, as it's more profitable.

The background is a dark blue gradient. It features several glowing neon lines: a magenta line forming a large '5' shape, a cyan line forming a large '0' shape, and a blue line forming a large '1' shape. These lines intersect to form the text 'INSIGHT'. There are also abstract geometric shapes, including a large magenta triangle on the left, a blue triangle on the right, and a faint star shape in the bottom right corner.

INSIGHT

INSIGHT 5

61%
+
★

of MENA creators say they posted more about causes they care about in the past year (consistent with previous survey)

Causes still close to creator hearts, but cadence evolves

The MENA region remains a place where devastating conflicts, geopolitical upheaval, cultural complexities, and climatic extremes are front of mind for many citizens, residents – and creators too. Gaza is the most dangerous place in the world to be a child. Lebanon has been rocked by an invasion. Syria is marking a monumental shift after nearly 14 years of civil war. Earth has just completed its hottest year on record. Two-thirds of MENA residents acknowledged facing mental health challenges in the past year.

Deep concern about human suffering, aid blockages, and displacement of family members and friends still commanded a big share of regional content feeds and creator posts. But the data also suggests that more creators are championing causes judiciously, spotlighting issues when they believe the moment calls for it, but prioritising their platforms for core content while considering algorithmic impact. This is evident given that 14% say they have posted less about causes in the past year.



INSIGHT 5

Causes still close to creator hearts, but cadence evolves

What does it mean for brands?

These days, when creators post to support or draw attention to a cause they care about, it's often with greater confidence, a more selective approach about what and when to post, and fewer worries about the commercial implications. Instead, many influencers view purpose-led content as a way to promote what they care about, build a like-minded tribe of followers, and catch the eye of brands with values that are aligned, and those looking to show indirect support.

By staying up to date with what's happening around the region and the wider world, brands can show sensitivity and empathy, winning hearts and laying solid foundations. It also means that strategic, values-aligned partnerships remain a critical part of authentic collaboration between brands and creators while simplifying execution.



IN THEIR WORDS

- Creators who focus on social impact and regional content will stand out.
- More brands are integrating social awareness, keeping it real, and excelling doing it.
- Newer generations will be able to talk freely about traumatic experiences.
- People look to people who are trying to make a better world.
- Less fear of being cancelled, more bold views and content.

A large, glowing neon letter 'C' in a vibrant cyan color, positioned centrally behind the word 'INSIGHT'.

INSIGHT

The background features abstract neon elements: a magenta line forming a triangle on the left, a cyan line forming a triangle on the right, and a faint cyan star shape in the bottom right corner. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and digital.

INSIGHT 6



Friendly Gulf competition is alive and well

While the friendly competition between the ambitions of some Gulf countries can be seen in the many initiatives of their national visions, such as landmark firsts and business incentives, it's interesting to see signs of this good-natured rivalry and loyalty spill over into the content creator landscape. When we asked influencers to choose which country they believe is positively transforming most across 13 areas, they often chose their home base in a sign of loyalty, but there were exceptions.

In terms of tourism and entertainment, a more nuanced landscape emerges, with content creators saying the leaders are the UAE (45%), Saudi Arabia (26%), Lebanon (10%), and Egypt (8%). The UAE leads the pack, driven by a robust portfolio of attractions and global events, alongside the continued success of Arabian Travel Market (ATM).



The recent announcement of Disney's new theme park resort in Abu Dhabi, the opening of teamLab Phenomena and House of Hype, and popular destinations like Yas Island and Dubai's Marsa Boulevard all contribute to its strong position. Major events, such as the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix and Dubai Shopping Festival, also help maintain the UAE's fame on the international tourism stage. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is rapidly asserting itself with high-profile projects and bold ambitions. Landmark initiatives such as NEOM, entertainment festivals like Riyadh Season, and the cultural heritage site of AlUla showcase the Kingdom's diverse offerings. Additionally, as host of the 2029 Asian Winter Games and the 2034 FIFA World Cup, Saudi Arabia is signalling a long-term commitment to becoming a global tourism and entertainment powerhouse.

INSIGHT 6

Friendly Gulf competition is alive and well

What does it mean for brands?

Content creators are very proud of the countries they call home or represent, and often excel in developing localised content. Brands that celebrate local identity and recognise the pride that many influencers (and residents) feel while weaving in Gulf-wide cultural touchpoints will likely resonate with audiences most strongly.

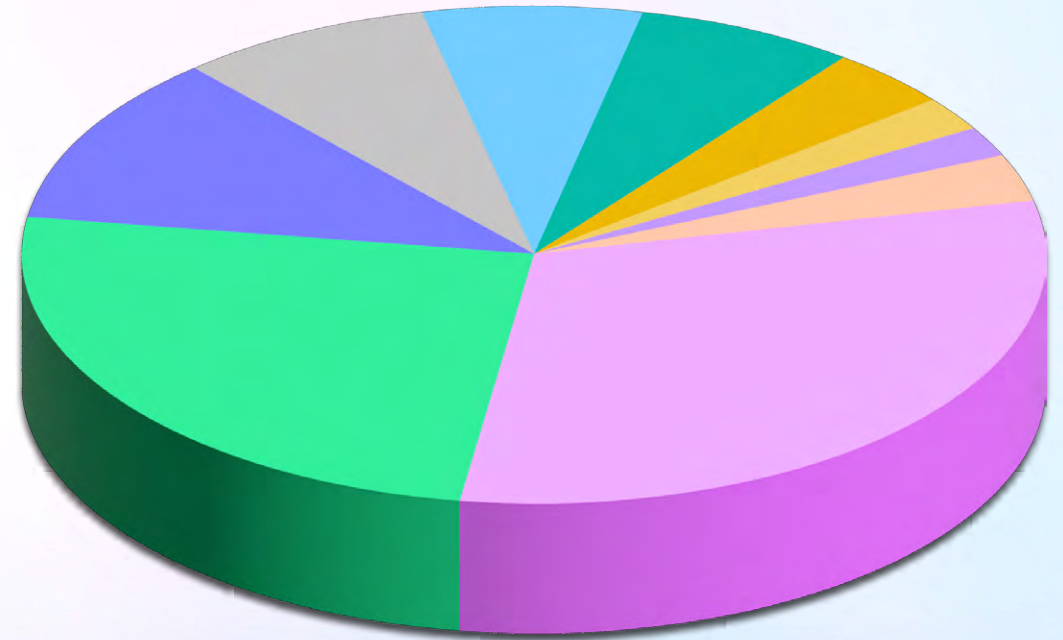
Successful strategies include tailor-making content briefs and campaign highlights for different countries or creating exclusive details where possible – a special flavour for a particular market, a unique hyperlocal partnership, or a competition that feels purpose-made. The national days of Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar all fall within a three-month span towards the end of the year. By timing the rollouts of a multi-market GCC campaign accordingly, brands can sustain momentum while elevating local flair.



The background features a dark, smoky texture in shades of purple and blue. Overlaid on this are three concentric white circles. The text is centered within these circles.

Thoughts on the region

Which country do you believe is positively transforming most in Sports



31%
Saudi
Arabia

25%
UAE

11%
Qatar

8%
Egypt

7%
Oman

7%
Lebanon

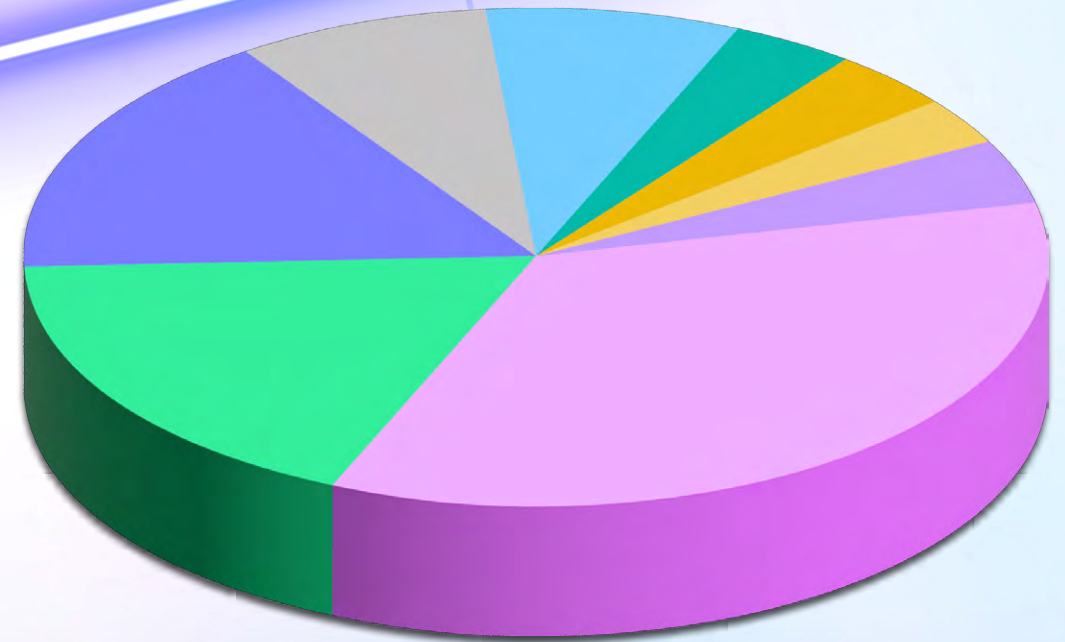
4%
Morocco

2%
Tunisia

2%
Algeria

3%
Other (Jordan,
Kuwait, Bahrain)

Which country do you believe is positively transforming most in Arts



35%
UAE

18%
Lebanon

16%
Saudi Arabia

8%
Qatar

8%
Egypt

4%
Morocco

4%
Jordan

3%
Oman

4%
Other (Kuwait, Bahrain,
Tunisia, Algeria)

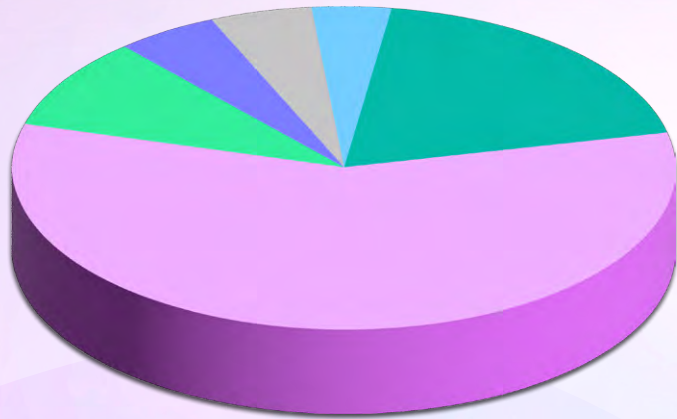
Areas where creators believe the most positive transformation is happening by country

	1	2	3
Egypt	Tourism & entertainment (8%)	Arts (8%)	Sports (8%)
Jordan	Healthcare (7%)	Higher education (7%)	Arts (4%)
Kuwait	Finance (8%)	Tolerance (4%)	Sustainability (3%)
Lebanon	Arts (18%)	Tourism & entertainment (10%)	Higher education (10%)
Oman	Sports (7%)	Sustainability (6%)	Mobility & transport (5%)
Qatar	Sports (11%)	Arts (8%)	Gaming & e-sports (7%)
Saudi Arabia	Gaming & e-sports (41%)	Sports (31%)*	Finance (29%)
UAE	Smart government (82%)*	Technology (78%)*	Mobility & transport (75%)*

*Considered by creators to be the region’s country most positively transforming in that area

cities that stand out

Which city do you consider the most Instagrammable in the region?



58%
Dubai

9%
Beirut

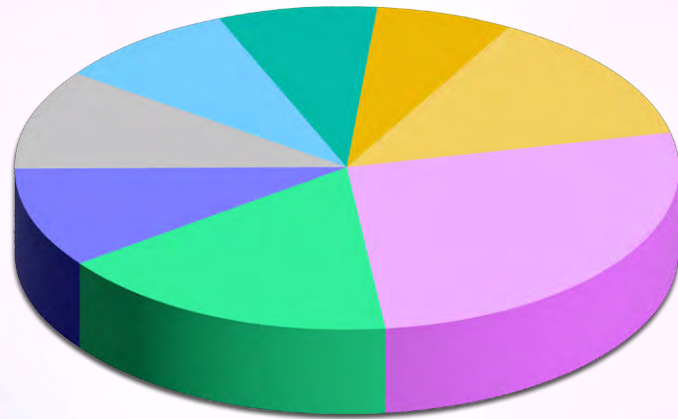
5%
Riyadh

5%
Doha

4%
Salalah

19%
Other

Which city do you think offers the best cultural experiences in the region?



24%
Dubai

15%
Cairo

9%
Riyadh

9%
Beirut

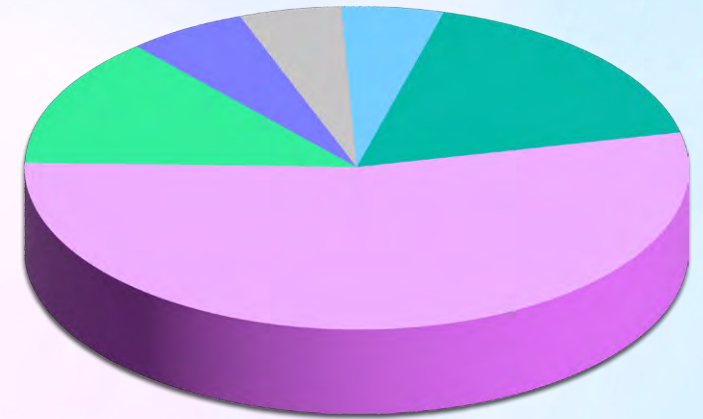
8%
Abu Dhabi

7%
Doha

6%
Sharjah

12%
Other

Which city do you think is the best place to start a small business in the region?



54%
Dubai

13%
Riyadh

6%
Beirut

5%
Abu Dhabi

5%
Doha

17%
Other

Practical considerations for better collaboration



1

Invest in and manage your brand's reputation

Top 3 factors when choosing a brand to work with:

2024



2025



Note: The importance of brand reputation is very pronounced this year, showing that beyond personal belief, creators also care more about wider public perception and the way other stakeholders view a brand's standing and stature.

2

Make it easy to collaborate with your brand

Top 3 factors for a healthy working relationship:

2024

Easygoing collaboration process

51%

Good budget

47%

Creative freedom

35%

2025

Easygoing collaboration process

53%

Good budget

49%

Creative freedom

42%

Note: The repeat of last year's classic trifecta shows how essential it is to keep things simple and straightforward, alongside fair remuneration and creative independence.

3

Focus on areas that offer social and emotional value

Top factors most likely to encourage creators to post organic non-paid content:



Note: In Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt, influencers are more likely to post organic, unpaid content related to causes important to them, or to foster a human connection – possibly due to their geographical proximity to regional conflicts.



THE FUTURE

**what creators believe
is coming next**

The future: What creators believe is coming next

Expanding exposure

Being an influencer (in the traditional sense) is no longer enough – they must be business-savvy artists with vibrant personalities who can build a devoted following. Digital content creators will need to expand their exposure through additional avenues, like airing podcasts, making appearances in entertainment shows, and inserting themselves into culture, business, and public opinion in new ways.

Rethinking monetisation

To enhance profitability, creators will diversify platforms and income streams. Beyond brand collaborations, they will increasingly explore subscriptions and direct-to-fan platforms, which would enable them to build deeper connections with their followers. The metaverse and immersive experiences will offer new creative avenues, while affiliate marketing, creator-developed merchandise, live shopping streams, and YouTube presence will increase.

Raw, real and relatable (but not ordinary) stories

Authenticity will continue to outperform curated perfection. Audiences are demanding more relatable and unfiltered content, though this is not to be confused with ordinary ‘everyday’ content. With the prevalence and accessibility of generative AI, there’s a feeling that the low-effort ‘sameness’ content produced by some will open a gap for others that bring unique insight, genuine inspiration, and fresh artistry.

The ‘private artisan’ approach

As audiences fragment, many creators believe the future is bright for micro- and nano- influencers, who will gain prominence given their close connections with followers, often resulting in richer interactions and deeper engagement. These creators tend to have a passion for something very specific and offer access to highly engaged niche communities by creatively crafting hyper-personalised, ultra-local content pieces that are greatly valued by brands.

Government collaboration

Influencers feel that regional governments have a good understanding of how content creators contribute to campaigns and help drive viral communications, sometimes taking on the role of community leaders. Though there are mixed views on certain new policies, rules, and regulations in some markets, there’s also appreciation for how events and education can help bring balance to the intersecting operating landscape of influencers, brands, and communities.

A legitimate career

Being a digital content creator who can influence, inform, and educate is gaining appeal as an acceptable career choice, rather than something that is pursued as a side gig. Influencers say they envision more courses and certifications for people who want to pursue this as a career – both at academic institutions and within creator communities. This may also serve to build trust in the industry, combat misinformation, and balance anecdotal worries about some new creators thinking of this as a get-rich-quick-with-little-effort career.

CONCLUSION

MENA's influencer landscape continues to mature, and despite increased competition, content creators are growing in confidence. The themes that are driving optimism and progress centre around authenticity, community-building, and strategic diversification in terms of platforms, content types, and monetisation. Adaptation remains critical. Those who can use AI tools while prioritising human storytelling and elevating unique perspectives will thrive.

As they embrace multi-dimensional roles as inspirational artists, social advocates, educators, community informers, marketers, and business contributors, influencers desire government support through visibility, education, and events – not just regulation. Meaningful, admirable, values-aligned partnerships with brands that have a good overall reputation are being pursued, outweighing the lure of ad-hoc prestige factors.



APPENDIX

Overview of Influencer
Respondents

Notes

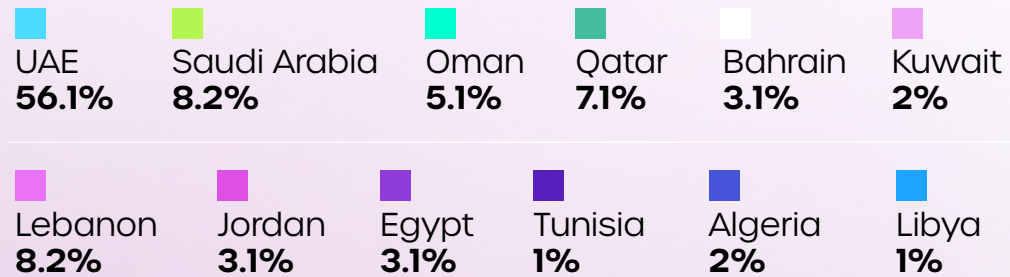
Weber Shandwick MENAT developed the questions and shared an email invitation with vetted influencers to participate in an online survey, hosted by 3Gem Research & Insights. A total of 359 complete responses were analysed by Weber Shandwick MENAT to produce this report.



Timeline

Responses were collected
between 11 January and 3 April
2025

Respondent Residence



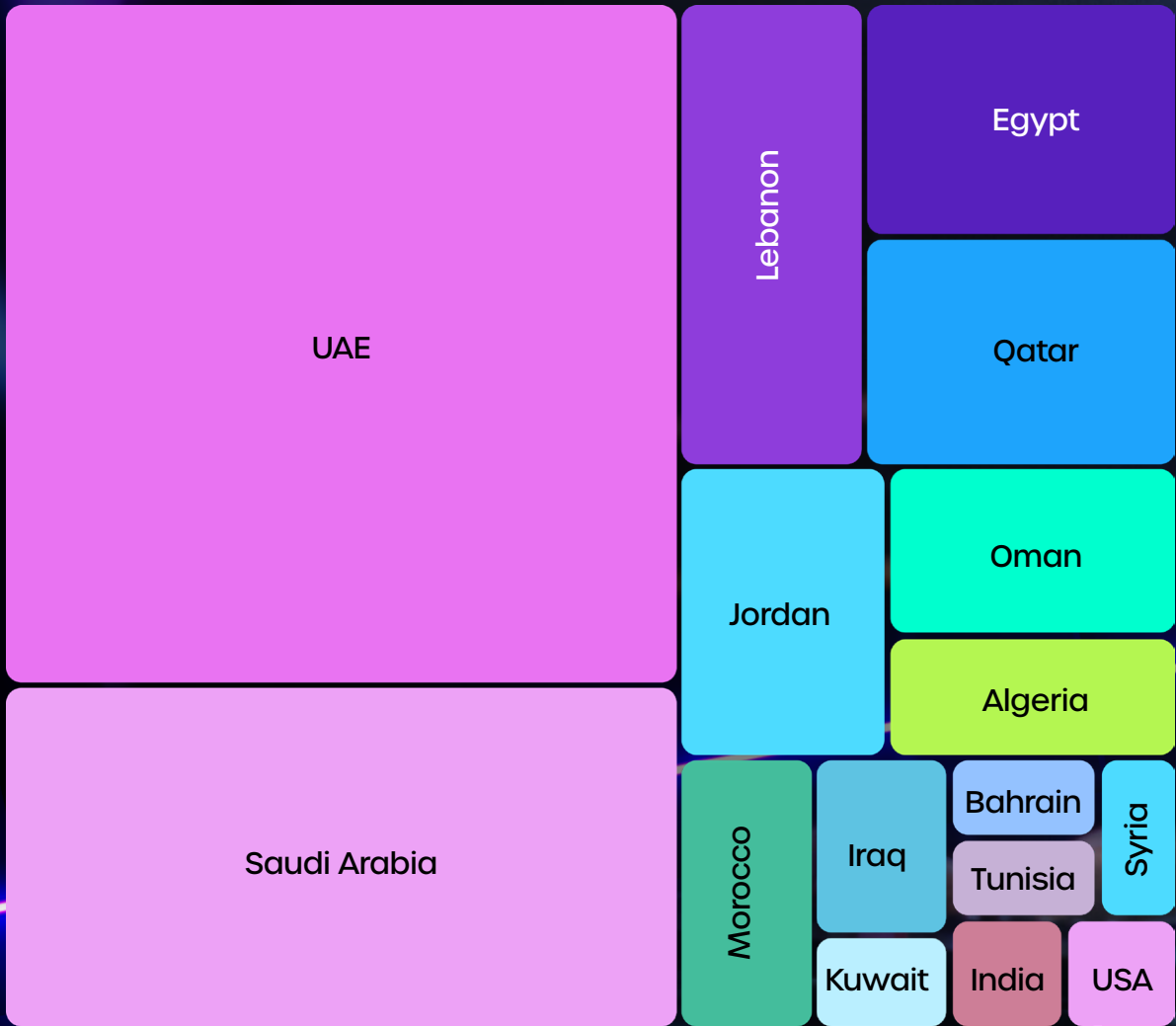
Respondent Followers

Four out of five respondents have a following of between 10,000 and 500,000



Respondent Audience

Around three in four MENA influencers report having a majority domestic audience. In the UAE, this falls to about one in three, while in Saudi Arabia, nearly all influencers say their audience is primarily local.





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Backed by the leading earned-first network, we harness our cultural intelligence, sector smarts, and creative force to help clients make bold moves which lead to meaningful action.

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& Insights

GENERAL INQUIRIES

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