AI Influencers, Authenticity, and the **Future** of Creator Marketing

AI and the Creator Economy Today

The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a transformative moment for humanity. While time will tell just how many changes AI will usher in across commerce, art, and everyday life, one area where this technology already had a profound impact is the field of creator marketing. The effects that AI has had on the Creator Economy are complex and multifaceted. What's more, these effects have only just begun.

While AI has brought much-needed clarity and radical efficiency to certain creator marketing tasks, the technology's tremendous potential also poses uncertainty. Like everyone currently reckoning with the changes that AI entails, CreatorIQ doesn't have all the answers. We're also aware that, given AI technology's rapid advancement, advice given at present is bound to change in the future. However, with over a decade of machine learning experience bolstering our product, we feel more than qualified to speak about AI's impact on creator marketing at large.

This report represents a summary of where, based on our research, things stand today— along with a few principles that we think will remain true regardless of how AI technology unfolds from here.

In this report, we'll examine how brands and marketers can navigate the future, presenting a clear, actionable plan for how to think about and implement successful AI-backed creator marketing. We'll go beyond the hype and obfuscation that characterize much of the current AI discourse, delivering tangible insights for creator marketers.

In Part 1, we'll analyze key metrics from high-profile brand collaborations with 'AI influencers,' or social media creators who are 100% virtual. We'll investigate the details of various branded posts, and compare the Engagement garnered by AI influencers' content to the level of Engagement typically garnered by human creators.

Then, in Part 2, we'll highlight the primary ways that creator marketers can use AI to strengthen their programs, and develop a helpful framework for how to think about AI beyond all the buzzwords.

Finally, we'll review how CreatorIQ is utilizing AI to improve our product and help our customers achieve their creator marketing goals.

Glossary of AI Terms

Machine Learning: Machine learning is a subset of artificial intelligence that focuses on developing algorithms and "models" which enable computers to learn and improve their performance on a specific task. By feeding models large amounts of data, they can identify patterns, learn from examples, and make predictions or decisions.

Machine learning is transforming the way brands approach (and CreatorIQ builds for) creator marketing. By analyzing different kinds of data—creator content, CRM relationships, campaign outcomes, and usage, among other types—machine learning models can identify patterns and insights that inform strategic decision-making.

Generative AI (& Synthetic Media): At its core, Generative AI refers to artificial intelligence systems capable of creating new content, such as text, images, audio, or video, based on learned patterns and rules from existing data. Synthetic media—or media not produced by a human—is one name for the output of Generative AI.

In the creator marketing context, Generative AI is broadly applicable. AI Influencers train on creators' existing content to generate content ideas, feedback, variants, or even entirely new pieces of content. But Generative AI is also used in workflows—for example, in messaging personalization or brief suggestions.

Natural Language Processing (NLP): NLP is a branch of artificial intelligence that focuses on the intersection between computers and human language. It involves algorithms and models that can understand, interpret, and generate language, enabling machines to process and analyze large amounts of language data.

NLP plays a crucial role in creator marketing by enabling systems to understand and analyze creator content. For example, NLP can help when processing the captions of posts, allowing for the intuition of key themes or mentions in context.

LLMs demonstrate many different NLP capabilities. Interpretation of content, chatbots, auto-complete—all of these things are powered, at their core, by NLP.

Large Language Models (LLMs): Large Language Models, or LLMs, are a type of advanced AI model that can understand, generate, and manipulate human language with remarkable accuracy and fluency.

Because LLMs can be used for tasks which require understanding of context and application of logic, they represent a fundamental shift in how creator marketing workflows (and information systems) are built and executed.

Predictive AI: Predictive AI involves using machine learning algorithms to analyze historical data, identify patterns, and make predictions about future outcomes or trends.

In the context of creator marketing, Predictive AI can help forecast the performance of an influencer campaign, estimate calculated impressions that are not always broadly available (like impressions), or predict the likelihood that creator candidates in campaigns perform well, among other things.

Semantic Search: Semantic search is an application of AI and NLP that enables search engines – like CreatorIQ's Discovery – to understand the intent and contextual meaning behind a user's search query, rather than simply matching keywords or executing search operators. In creator marketing, semantic search allows marketers to search how they speak (rather than having to master a complex discovery tool).

Zero-Party (0P) vs First-Party (1P) vs Third-Party (3P) Data: Zero-party data refers to information that is proactively and intentionally shared with others. For example, when a creator willingly shares information about their demographics or preferences, that is 0P.

First-party data is information collected or created by one's own sources, such as behavioral data that is logged or purchase data collected by a point-of-sale. 1P data is often 'observed' and tied to behavior, and tells invaluable trend stories when aggregated or pivoted by 0P data.

Third-party data is information collected by an external entity and either shared or sold to a "third-party."

Part 1

AI &
Creator Content

One dramatic change that AI technology has brought to creator marketing is the **advent of AI influencers**—virtual beings who look, sound, and post just like human beings. Though they sound fantastic, these creators aren't a product of science fiction.

They're already here, and some of the world's top brands have taken notice.

Image source // @imma.gram on Instagram

AI influencers are intriguing to brands not only because of the technological leap they represent, but also because of the questions they pose for some of creator marketing's central tenets.

At CreatorIQ, we've long believed that creator marketing is a human-centric field, and that success in the Creator Economy is predicated on authentic content, passionate communities, and heartfelt connections between creators and their followers.

The rise of AI influencers presents a stress-test for some of our central assumptions: if a creator isn't real—not just inauthentic, but entirely fictional—can they still inspire the same emotional bond with their followers? And can brands still expect the same results they normally see from campaigns with human creators?

To answer these questions, we looked at five examples of branded content or campaign collaboration between AI influencers and global brands that occurred between May 2023 and April 2024. We paid special attention to the Engagement Rates that this content generated: essentially, the percentage of a creator's followers who liked, commented, or shared a particular post. Engagement Rates can be taken as a measure of enthusiasm, and thus an indicator of any given piece of content's viral potential.

With the whole world watching developments in the AI space, it's clear that content from virtual creators was consumed widely.

But did it resonate deeply?

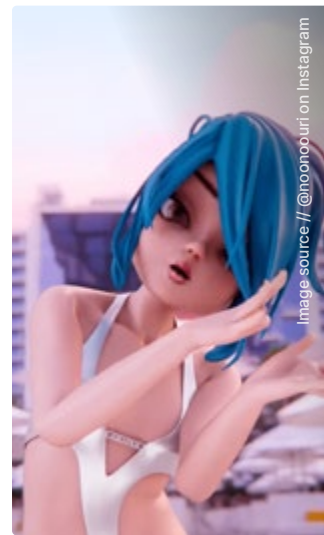Image source // @fit_aitana on Instagram

Image source // @noonoouri on Instagram

Image source // @lilmiquela on Instagram

Aitana Lopez

One of the world's most famous AI influencers, Aitana Lopez is a Barcelona-based fitness and lifestyle creator known for her pink hair, chic outfits, and passion for gaming.

Of course, like the other creators discussed in this report, you won't bump into Aitana out in the real world. Instead, this 'Virtual Soul' is a product of The Clueless modeling agency, a company that curates AI models with the goal of "beautifully embodying diversity."
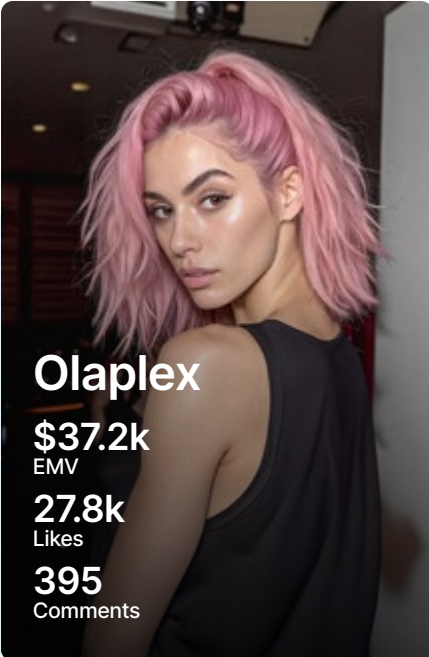
At press time, Aitana boasts **319.2k followers** on Instagram, demonstrating that AI influencers are reaching a wide audience.
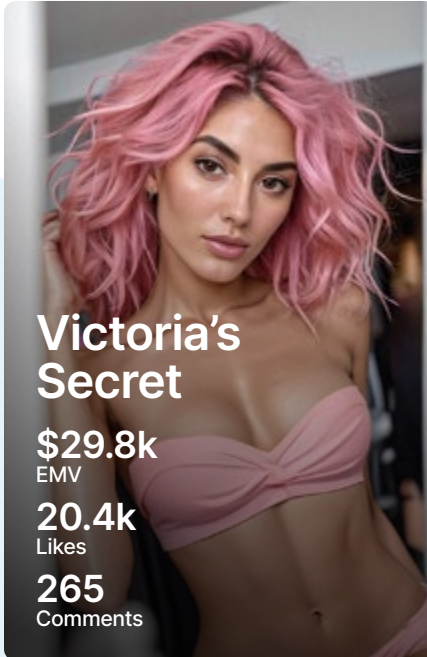
Aitana doesn't tag brands in each of her posts.

But when she does, it has quite an impact.
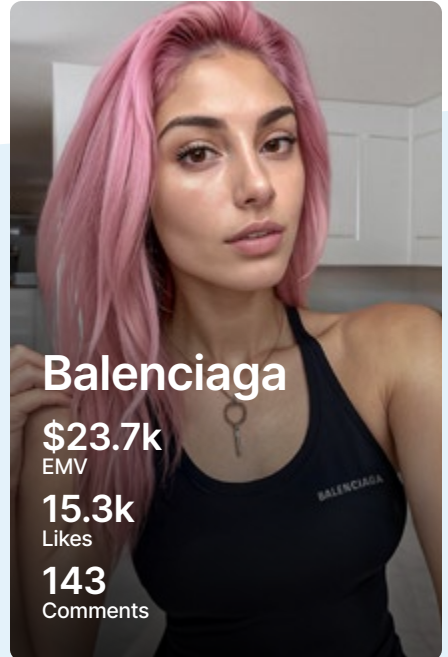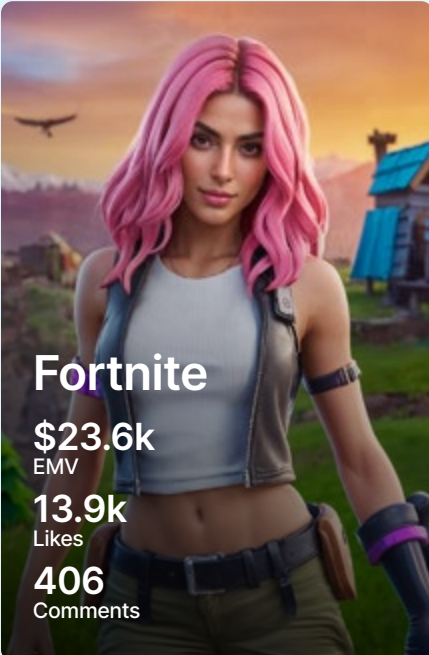
Aitana's Branded Posts
May 2023 – April 2024

Olaplex

$37.2k
EMV

27.8k
Likes

395
Comments
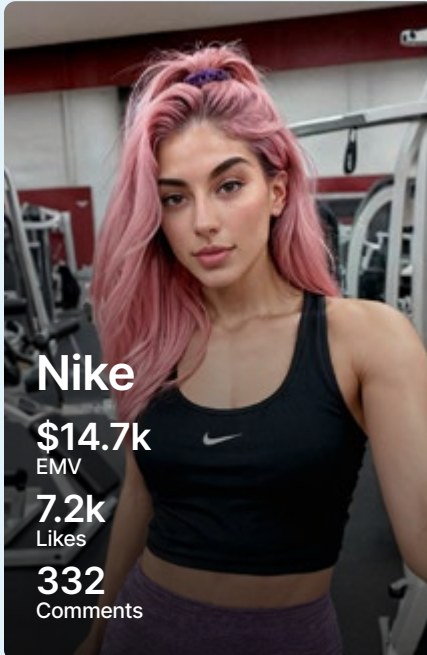
Victoria's Secret

$29.8k
EMV

20.4k
Likes

265
Comments
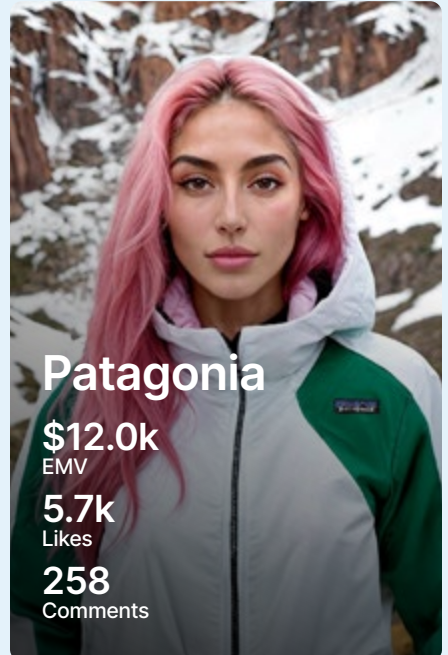
Balenciaga

$23.7k
EMV

15.3k
Likes

143
Comments

Fortnite

$23.6k
EMV

13.9k
Likes

406
Comments

Nike

$14.7k
EMV

7.2k
Likes

332
Comments

Patagonia

$12.0k
EMV

5.7k
Likes

258
Comments

All images source // @fit_aitana on Instagram

Aitana Lopez continued

These totals for EMV, Likes, and Comments put Aitana firmly within the range of popular flesh-and-blood creators. But one key question at the top of everyone's minds is whether human followers can build the same bonds with AI influencers that they do with traditional creators—will they engage with this content with the same frequency? This is where **Engagement Rates** come into play.

For Aitana, the results were mixed:

Engagement Rates
Aitana vs. Community Average

ⓘ

Engagement Rates

The percentage of a creator's followers who engaged with a post via likes, comments, or shares.

Brand	Aitana Lopez Engagement Rate	Community Average Engagement Rate
OLAPLEX	8.9%	3.7%
VICTORIA'S SECRET	6.5%	4.0%
BALENCIAGA	4.9%	2.6%
FORTNITE	4.5%	5.2%
NIKE	2.4%	3.7%
patagonia	1.9%	3.0%

While Aitana's content garnered greater-than-average engagement for Olaplex, Victoria's Secret, and Balenciaga, when it came to her posts for Fortnite, Nike, and Patagonia, these brands' creator communities averaged higher Engagement Rates than Aitana during the time period monitored.

One potential reason for Aitana's higher engagement with some brands, rather than others, stems from the nature of her posts for each group. Aitana's content for Olaplex, Victoria's

Secret, and Balenciaga featured the AI influencer in comparatively more revealing clothing; in contrast, Aitana wore full ensembles while touting Fortnite, Nike, and Patagonia. Additionally, the fact that Aitana is strikingly lifelike in appearance, especially compared to other AI influencers, is another key factor in her high Engagement Rates versus these alternative creators.

It may seem ironic, but it's ultimately Aitana's humanity that helped set her apart from the rest of her virtual cohort.

Imma Gram

A "virtual girl" based in Tokyo, Imma Gram claims 388.5k followers on Instagram.

Like Aitana, Imma also sports pink hair and a flawless sense of style; in contrast, while still humanoid, Imma is a bit more cartoonish in appearance, and tends to show less (virtual) skin.

While Imma tagged over 30 brands from May 2023 to April 2024, primarily in the beauty and fashion category, Coach clearly emerged as her favorite: Imma mentioned the iconic handbag company 17 times, fueling $32.4k EMV.

These posts garnered 5.7k Engagements (Likes, Comments, and Shares), as well as nearly 200k Impressions.

However, when it came to Engagement Rates, Imma underperformed relative to her flesh-and-blood peers. Her posts for Coach averaged a **0.3% Engagement Rate, well below the 4.6% average** seen for other creators posting about the brand.

Lil Miquela

A "21-year-old robot" based in Los Angeles, Lil Miquela posts about tech, pop culture, beauty and fashion, and more.

The same trend seen in Imma's content for Coach was also on display for her friend Lil Miquela. (The pair recently '**posed**' together in a series of Instagram posts celebrating their long-awaited meeting.)

Sporting yet another brightly dyed 'do, Lil Miquela presents as just another LA influencer, albeit with a bolder-than-average sense of personal style. However, there's nothing 'lil' about the creator's following: Lil Miquela boasts **over 2.5M followers** on Instagram, the most of any AI influencer featured in this report.

Thanks in part to this stature, Lil Miquela was chosen to partner with BMW on an exciting campaign around the automotive company's 100% electric BMW iX2. By the topline numbers, the campaign was a hit: Lil Miquela drove a not-so-little $168.5k EMV for BMW across just seven posts. Her content earned 128.0k Engagements and 1.5M Impressions, further demonstrating the viral impact of virtual creators.

However, **Lil Miquela averaged a 0.6% Engagement Rate** across these posts, relative to **BMW creators' 3.6% average**.

Noonoouri

In contrast to the other AI influencers in this investigation, no one would look at Noonoouri and mistake her for a human being.

A cute, anime-esque cartoon character, Noonoouri is very clearly unreal, though that doesn't stop her from singing, modeling, or racking up **over 450k Instagram followers**.

While Noonoouri has tagged everything from Versace to Vetements, the most frequent object of her affection is Warner Music Group (WMG), where she's a licensed musician. From May 2023 to April 2024, Noonoouri shouted out WMG in a whopping 195 posts, inspiring $1.1M EMV, 353.1k Engagements, and 5.3M Impressions.

Noonoouri continued

Unlike other AI influencers in this analysis, Noonoouri promoted WMG not only on Instagram, but also on YouTube and TikTok.

The results across these different platforms are telling:

Engagement Rates by Platform

Noonouri vs. Platform Average

Platform	Noonoouri Engagement Rate	Community Average Engagement Rate
Instagram	1.4%	3.3%
YouTube	5.5%	3.8%
TikTok	7.8%	7.5%

Like other AI influencers in this report, Noonouri underperforms average Engagement Rates on Instagram. However, she overperforms creators' average Engagement Rates for WMG on both YouTube and TikTok.

@realnoonoouri

noonoouri
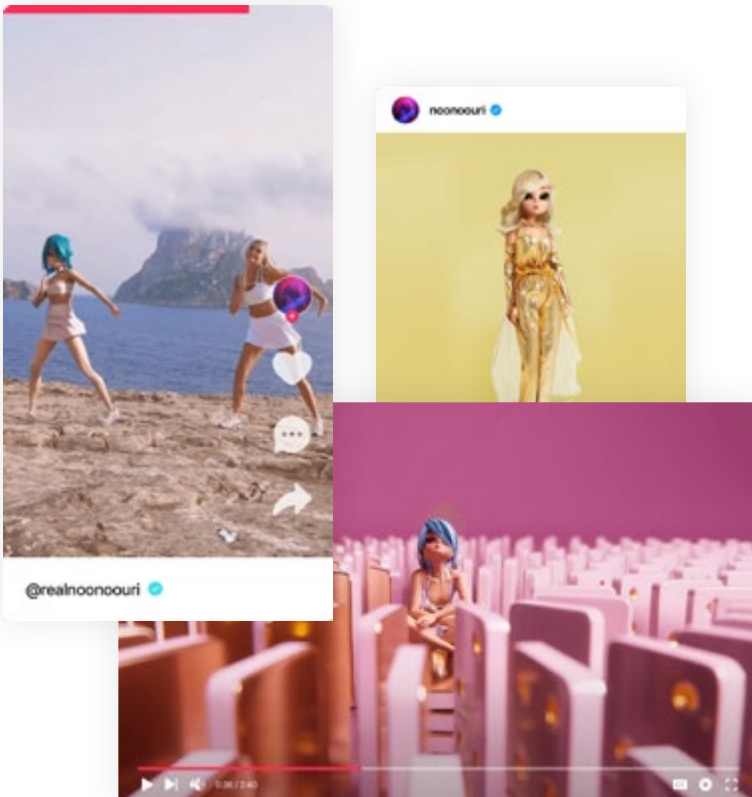
This discrepancy likely stems from the differing natures of high-performing content across these various platforms.

On Instagram, audiences seem more attuned to posts featuring human or humanoid creators, whereas videos on YouTube and TikTok, which are already a bit more fantastical, are a more natural fit for Noonouri's cartoonish qualities.

Another factor lies in the user demographics of each platform: whereas Instagram is commonly used by millennials searching for aspirational lifestyle content, Gen Z reigns on YouTube and TikTok. This is why Aitana excels on one platform, while Noonouri has found a natural home on the others.

Takeaway

For Deep Engagement, Humans Have an Edge

On Instagram, content from AI and virtual influencers tends to garner lower Engagement Rates than content from human influencers. The exceptions, like Aitana, arise when AI content is able to mimic human content as closely as possible, either with lifelike faces and poses, eye-catching outfits, or both.

Meanwhile, AI influencers may possess a more natural advantage on video-based platforms like YouTube and TikTok. However, a majority of prominent AI content creators exist primarily on Instagram, and this hypothesis needs additional testing before being proven definitively.

While there will be further developments in the still-nascent field of AI influencers, at present, these creators aren't outpacing human creators. The passion-driven bond between human creators and their followers—the cornerstone of creator marketing—is a difficult thing to replicate, and by all available metrics, AI influencers haven't quite gotten there yet.

For now, AI influencers tend to garner Engagement Rates more typical to celebrities: a small percentage of a large follower population like, comment, and share these influencers' content, while most social media users look on in curiosity. As demonstrated by these examples, the aesthetics and posting styles established by human creators remain the surest source of engagement on social media.

For brands seeking to emulate that style—and tap into the tremendous business potential of that creator-follower bond—**it's still best to go straight to the source.**

AI & Successful Creator Marketing Programs

AI influencers, and the content they create, are just one aspect of the change that this technology is bringing to the Creator Economy at large.

While authenticity remains the central currency of the Creator Economy, and AI-generated content has a ways to go before it's viewed by social media users as equally authentic to human-generated content, AI also poses tremendous potential for augmenting and surfacing this authenticity when properly applied throughout a creator marketing program.

Marketers are using AI and machine learning technologies to accelerate connections between creators and followers, further fueling the outcomes that matter most to brands: efficiency, brand safety, performance, and content optimization.

Rather than serving as a buzzword, winning brands understand that AI will span all aspects of successful creator marketing programs, mapping onto and augmenting existing features rather than serving as the basis for an entirely new set of features.

This holistic approach will result in more efficient, less laborious creator marketing management, leaving marketers free to invest their time with greater strategic impact.

Naturally, many of these changes are already underway. In CreatorIQ's **2023-2024 Creator Marketing Trends Report**, published in October 2023, **66% of our brand respondents—featuring both marketing managers and executives—reported using AI** for their daily tasks. Of these respondents, 42% reported using AI for social media captions, while 36% used AI tools for 'general brainstorming.' Other popular use cases included email, blog writing, and other communications.

Since our 2023–2024 Creator Marketing Trends survey, AI tools have become both more sophisticated and more widespread.

While the capabilities outlined in October 2023 seemed transformative at the time, now they're just scratching the surface of AI's full impact.

Rather than the additive features that marketers identified in our survey, there's now an opportunity to expand upon and introduce new AI-driven features that help power creator marketing software. Beyond administrative tasks, AI can be used to addressed the biggest pain points and challenges that influencer marketers face.

Moving forward, savvy brands looking to incorporate AI into creator marketing best practices should pay particular attention to **three areas of innovation.**

Three Areas of Innovation

1. **Creator Discovery**

2. **Collaboration**

3. **Measurement + Insights**

AI Powers Better, Faster, Safer Creator Discovery

Right now, finding new creators can be a manual, cumbersome process. However, when plugged into creator marketing software platforms, AI-powered technology can take discovery databases beyond simple keyword matching.

By continually refining search criteria via content aesthetics, AI models can enable searches based on content's meaning and context, which in turn yields more accurate creator recommendations.

CreatorIQ believes that AI-powered creator discovery will decrease not only search time, but also the expenses and time-spend associated with the holistic discovery process. The end result? Winning brands will be able to find better, safer, and more relevant creators—all in record time.

AI-Assisted Collaboration Sets Up Creators, Campaigns For Maximum Success

Launching successful creator campaigns can sometime feel like making an educated guess, but there are aspects of the process that can help both campaign managers and creators be more confident.

For example, many marketers create robust campaign briefs that contain useful guidelines about their campaigns, including notes on content style and aesthetics. Why not apply that metadata to spark personalized, auto-generated content examples within briefs? And why not also apply the same metadata to creator recommendation processes?

CreatorIQ's predictive AI will inform options for stronger campaign candidates, backed by a rationale that considers why each creator is likely to perform well within the context of a given campaign. Thanks to improved creator selection and creative briefs, CreatorIQ foresees multiple interlinked wins on the campaign front: high-potential, highly prepared creators who fuel better campaign performance.

AI Fuels Enhanced Forecasting to Meet and Exceed KPIs

Performance forecasting is one of the most critical components of a top-notch creator program. It's also one of the most fickle.

With predictive AI's powerful ability to leverage historical data to create machine learning models, CreatorIQ anticipates a shift toward a system in which future outputs are modeled more accurately, yielding not only an easier planning and creator selection process, but massively improved results.

As with AI's benefits in other areas of creator marketing, AI-backed reporting and measurement will magnify the value of creator relationships, and give creator marketers the confidence to draw accurate conclusions.

How CIQ Is Building Human-Centered AI

While many aspects of artificial intelligence and machine learning are new and exciting, these fields didn't emerge with the unveiling of ChatGPT.

For the better part of a decade, CreatorIQ has been using machine learning in its product suite: employing language models to track and measure social conversations across thousands of brands, and leveraging machine learning technology to build performance forecasting and creator recommendation features.

We're excited to continue working toward a future in which the improvements discussed earlier—greater creator marketing efficiency, stronger creator partnerships, and higher win-rates for creator campaigns—are a reality for every brand.
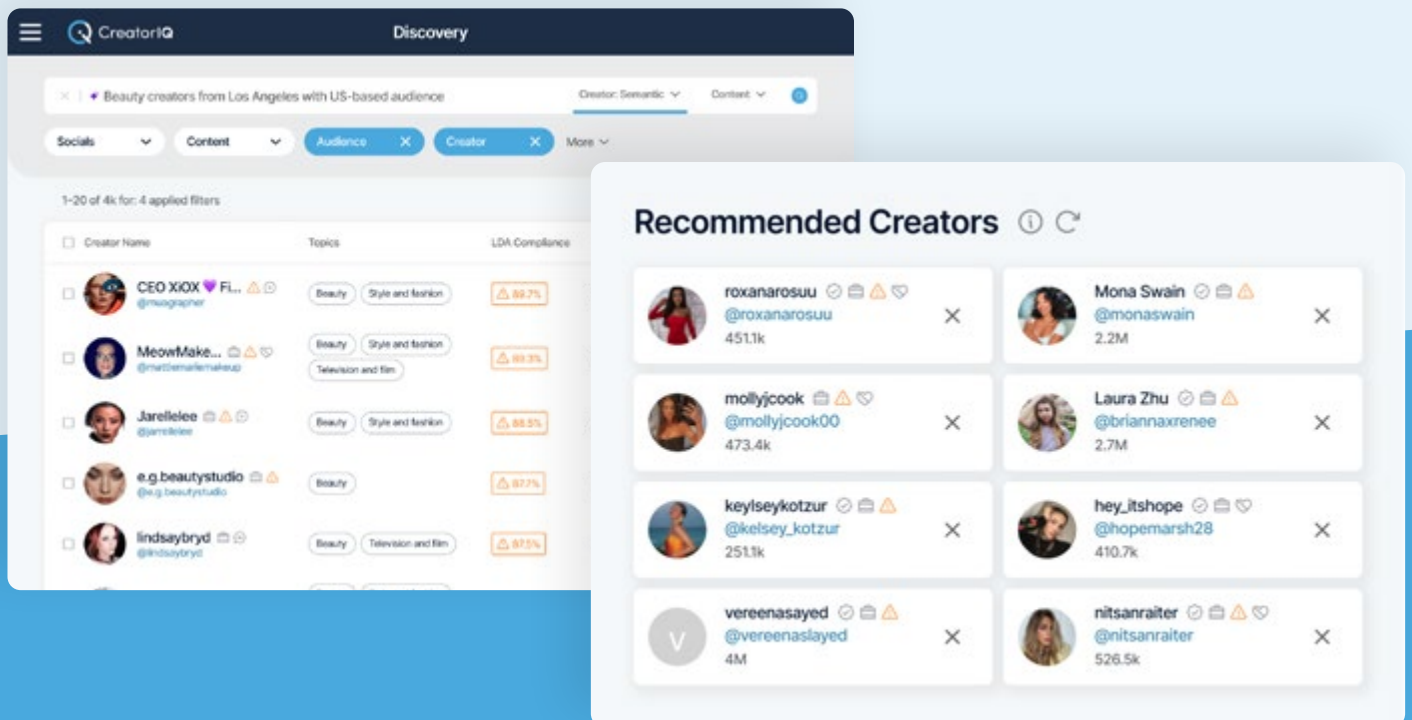
As we use AI to improve our product around the pillars of Discovery, Collaboration, and Measurement/Insights, we have a few more **guiding principles** we'll be following—principles that, amid the excitement surrounding AI, are all too often overlooked.

CreatorIQ's Three
Guiding Principles for AI

Authenticity

It runs the risk of becoming just as much of a buzzword as 'AI,' but as our investigation in Part 1 of this report shows, it's still the bedrock of creator marketing. As we build AI-backed solutions for our customers, we'll make sure that none of these innovations undermine the authentic bond between creators and their followers.

Trust

Whether it's social media users stumbling upon a new creator or a creator marketing manager vetting a potential brand partner, trust lies at the heart of what CreatorIQ is all about. With AI's rapid advancement leaving everyone in the Creator Economy a little less sure about who to trust, we'll continue putting brand safety and common-sense solutions first.

Value

For all of the exciting possibilities posed by AI, many brands are most excited by the technology's financial bottom line. Though CreatorIQ is certainly invested in maximizing this bottom line for our customers, we're also invested in all the value to be gleaned along the way: from the value of each brand-creator partnership, to the value of every new brand fan, to the value of every second saved by more efficient processes.

AI, CIQ, and You

In the Creator Economy and everywhere else, AI is poised to usher in a new world.

With Authenticity, Trust, and Value as our north stars, with our customers at our side, and with AI at our back, CreatorIQ is dedicated to building that new world together.

To further strengthen your creator marketing program with AI, download our checklist for Harnessing AI in Creator Discovery.

Download the Checklist

About CreatorIQ

CreatorIQ is the most trusted influencer marketing platform for organizations looking to advance their creator marketing. Its enterprise-grade technology and industry-leading intelligence facilitates scaled creator discovery, streamlined workflows and robust reporting, while ensuring compliance and brand safety. Thousands of the world's most innovative brands use CreatorIQ, including AB InBev, CVS, Disney, Logitech, Nestlé, Sephora, Unilever and more.

Learn more at creatoriq.com

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