

# DIGITAL MARKETING

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**Executive Summary:** Brand advocacy is the process of enabling and incentivising customers, employees, experts, and community members to advocate organically on behalf of the brand – has clearly become one of the most cost-effective levers in the modern marketer’s toolkit. However, the ROI of brand advocacy campaigns is chronically under-measured. In most cases, brand advocacy is viewed as a qualitative rather than quantifiable business driver.

The purpose of this whitepaper is to fill this critical gap in the marketer’s toolkit by providing a structured and evidence-based ROI measurement framework for brand advocacy campaigns running across three unique digital channels: online forums such as Reddit, Quora, and niche communities; blogs such as brand blogs, influencer blogs, and third-party blogs; and X – the world’s most impactful real-time public conversation platform.

Each platform has its own specific advocacy dynamics, challenges in attributing value, and opportunities for measurement. The standard ROI model does not take into account the compounding SEO value of advocacy on forums, thought leadership value of long-form content on blogs, or the real-time virality of earned media on X. This paper proposes a customized model for each, with a common philosophy of ROI that links advocacy to revenue.

Central Thesis: Measuring brand advocacy ROI is not an exercise in a single number, but a multi-dimensional process. It demands specific KPIs for each platform, an attribution model that accounts for the half-life of content, and a financial translation layer to link engagement metrics to tangible business outcomes.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 What Is Brand Advocacy

Brand advocacy is defined as “individuals who, in an unsolicited or sponsored capacity, advocate for a brand’s products, services, or brand values to their social networks in a manner that is authentic beyond that which is possible for paid promotion.” These advocates may be brand enthusiasts, subject matter experts, employees, or content creators. The key difference between brand advocacy and brand endorsement is that in advocacy, there is perceived to be no direct commercial incentive, thus giving it credibility that is disproportionate to the commercial effort expended. Studies have proven that brand advocacy is significantly more effective at every stage of the marketing funnel compared to brand-created content. Nielsen’s Global Trust in Advertising surveys have proven that recommendations by people known to the consumer and those from online communities are ranked as the most trusted forms of commercial communications, significantly higher than digital display advertising, paid search, and even traditional advertising (Nielsen, 2023).

### 1.2 The ROI Measurement Gap

Despite this evidence, most organisations lack systematic frameworks for calculating the return on their advocacy investments. Common barriers include the indirect nature of advocacy influence, fragmented attribution across platforms, long and variable conversion timelines, and the challenge of assigning monetary value to awareness or sentiment shifts (Forrester Research, 2025).

This white paper provides both a conceptual framework and practical measurement infrastructure to close that gap tailored to the distinct characteristics of forums, blogs, and X.

### 1.3 The Scope and Objectives

The paper is divided into three sections, each of which deals with platform-specific ROI analysis, including the advocacy opportunity and platform dynamics, ROI metrics and formulas, measurement methodology, and strategic recommendations. The unified cross-platform ROI model is also discussed in the paper, along with ethical considerations in brand advocacy. The objectives of the paper are:

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- To develop a platform ROI measurement framework for brand advocacy campaigns.
- To fill the gap between brand advocacy and quantitative financial results.
- To offer guidance to practitioners and researchers on multi-touch attribution in forums, blogs, and X.
- To address the ethical and compliance issues in brand advocacy practices.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Brand Advocacy in the Digital Era

The body of academic and professional literature on brand advocacy has experienced significant growth over the past decade. This has been fuelled by the rise in the number of social media sites and peer-to-peer communication channels. The fundamental inbound marketing paradigm was developed by Halligan and Shah in 2014. The paradigm recognized the importance of brand advocacy in facilitating organic brand growth and differentiated it from interruptive brand advertising. The study highlighted the credibility advantage of user- and peer-generated content over brand-generated content.

Nielsen's (2023) study on global trust in advertising confirmed the credibility advantage of word-of-mouth and peer reviews over all forms of brand advertising. The study measured the relative trust levels in various forms of advertising and confirmed that recommendations generated by known individuals and online community reviews consistently outperform television advertising, digital display advertising, paid search advertising, and editorial content.

### 2.2 The ROI Measurement Challenge

The problem of measuring advocacy ROI has been well researched. Forrester Research (2025) has identified four key issues that make it hard to measure advocacy ROI: the 'indirect and diffuse impact of advocacy influence,' the 'fragmented impact across channels,' the 'variable and sometimes long-drawn-out conversion process,' and the 'methodological challenge of placing monetary value on soft outcomes such as brand awareness and brand sentiment.'

The Content Marketing Institute (2025) has also pointed out the 'gap between the volume of advocacy activity and the quality of measurement.' According to them, most B2B organisations 'measure outputs rather than outcomes' when it comes to advocacy.

#### Platform Specific Advocacy Dynamics

Literature shows that there is significant variation in terms of advocacy patterns on different digital mediums. For example, in the case of forum-based advocacy on platforms like Reddit or Quora, there is high intent in terms of content consumption, with high longevity in terms of content lifespan. A study shows that there is organic search impression generation for 18-36 months post-publication for content on forums (Brandwatch, 2025).

Blog-based advocacy is unique in terms of high conversion efficiency in terms of the consideration stage of the purchase funnel. Third-party blog-based reviews have been known to achieve 2.7 times higher conversion rates than similar brand-generated content due to the perception of independence from the reviewer (Traackr, 2025). The Earned Media Value (EMV) model is used for calculating financial equivalents of blog-based advocacy.

X presents a distinct advocacy model characterised by asymmetric influence distribution and real-time amplification potential. The Interactive Advertising Bureau (2025) notes that X's disproportionate representation of journalists, policymakers, and industry executives makes it uniquely powerful for influencer-to-influencer amplification. The platform's viral mechanics can generate reach multipliers of five to twenty times the seed advocacy content at zero incremental cost.

## 2.3 Multi touch attributions

Significantly, the ability to attribute revenue results to touchpoints has been enabled by data-driven attribution models in analytics tools, such as Google Analytics 4 (2025). These models apply machine learning to allocate fractional credit to each touchpoint in the conversion chain. The time decay attribution model is recommended in the context of measuring advocacy results when data-driven attribution is not fully available due to insufficient campaign volumes, as it appropriately weights the role of nurturing in long conversion cycles (Google Analytics 4, 2025).

The Sprinklr (2025) Enterprise Benchmark Report synthesises cross-platform advocacy measurement data, establishing ROI benchmarks ranging from 150 to 400 percent for forum advocacy over twelve months, 200 to 600 percent for blog advocacy, and 80 to 250 percent for X over three months.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

The white paper follows a qualitative framework building research design which is formed by a synthesis of secondary data sources, industry benchmarks, and practitioner-developed methodologies for measuring marketing effectiveness. The research does not involve any primary data collection efforts, but instead relies on existing research reports, platform analytics documentation, regulatory guidelines, and marketing literature to develop an evidence-based ROI measurement framework for each of the three platforms.

The research design follows the typical purpose of a white paper, which is to function as a policy document aimed at synthesizing existing knowledge in an area, rather than to develop new knowledge through primary research.

### 3.2 Data Sources

The body of evidence is informed by four types of secondary material. Firstly, academic journals on brand advocacy, word of mouth marketing, and digital attribution. Secondly, industry research reports from Forrester Research, Nielsen, Brandwatch, Traackr, Sprinklr, Content Marketing Institute, and the Interactive Advertising Bureau. Thirdly, platform measurement documentation from Google Analytics 4, X Analytics, Reddit Analytics, and various social listening tools. Fourthly, legal guidance from the Federal Trade Commission in the United States and the Advertising Standards Authority in the United Kingdom.

### 3.3 ROI Framework Construction

For each platform, platform-specific ROI frameworks were developed that consisted of the following four components: the identification of the primary pillars of ROI that reflect different aspects of the value of advocacy; the identification of the key performance indicators that define each of the pillars of ROI; the identification of the measurement tools that are appropriate for each of the key performance indicators; and the development of the formulas that define the ROI.

### 3.4 Multi Touch Attribute Approach

For the cross-platform unified model, the paper proposes the adoption of the multi-touch attribution approach in line with the GA4 data-driven attribution methodology. In the absence of adequate data to inform the application of machine learning-based attribution, the time decay approach is suggested as the most appropriate approximation in the context of advocacy-influenced conversion journeys.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted entirely on publicly available secondary sources. No human participants were involved, and no personal data was collected or processed. Regulatory and ethical dimensions of brand advocacy practice are addressed within the findings as substantive topics, not as methodological constraints.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Forum Advocacy: ROI Matrix Framework

Online forums, such as Reddit, Quora, Stack Exchange, and the many industry-specific forums that exist in the thousands, are in a unique position in the advocacy landscape. Content created within these forums is evergreen, heavily crawled, and read at high-intent moments along the purchase funnel. One advocacy piece within these forums has the potential to create measurable referral traffic, brand sentiment lift, and conversion impact for up to 36 months following publication. Reddit surpassed the 1.5 billion

monthly active user mark in early 2026, and forum-based advocacy is now a must-have consideration for brands operating within the relevant space.

The Forum ROI Metrics Framework has five key pillars. One is Direct Traffic Referral, which includes sessions from forum links, along with metrics such as bounce rate, pages per session, and goals completed, using the GA4 referral reports and UTM tagging. ROI is defined as conversions multiplied by average order value, divided by the total campaign cost. SEO and Search Equity is the second pillar, which includes the longer-term value of forum advocacy, using metrics such as keyword rankings, organic click-through rates, domain authority lift, and indexed brand mentions, using Google Search Console, SEMrush, and Ahrefs. ROI is defined as the estimated traffic value divided by the cost of click spend avoided using the advocacy investment.

The third pillar, Conversion Influence, focuses on the role of the touchpoints in the purchase journey through assisted conversions and touchpoints in the purchase path, which can be measured using GA4, multi-channel funnels, and CRM path analysis, with ROI calculated by dividing assisted revenue attribution by total campaign spend. The fourth pillar, Brand Sentiment Shift, measures changes in brand sentiment through Net Sentiment Score, percentage of positive brand mentions, and detractor reduction, using Brandwatch, the Reddit API, and manual analysis, with ROI calculated by multiplying the percentage sentiment shift by estimated brand value impact. The fifth pillar, Community Growth, measures organic community presence through subreddits, follower growth, upvotes, saves, and cross-posts, using Reddit Analytics, with ROI calculated by multiplying community lifetime value by advocacy-attributed member growth.

#### 4.2 Blog Advocacy: ROI Metrix Framework

Blog-based brand advocacy exists in three different asset classes. These include brand blogs, influencer blogs, and editorial blogs. The latter is further divided into influencer blogs and editorial blogs. Long-form blog advocacy content, like in-depth product reviews, product comparison articles, and expert product usage stories, produces referral traffic that has significantly higher conversion rates compared to social media-driven traffic. The Blog ROI Metrics Framework is comprised of five pillars. The first is Referral and Organic Traffic, which tracks blog-referred sessions, organic search traffic driven by blog-indexed content, and time on site. This is done through GA4, Google Search Console, and UTM parameters. The ROI is then derived as blog-referred conversions multiplied by average order value and then divided by blog programme spend. The second is Lead Generation, which tracks blog-generated leads, email sign-ups, and other downloadable content through CRM platforms. The ROI is then derived as leads multiplied by lead-to-close rate and customer lifetime value, then divided by spend. The third is SEO Backlink Value, which tracks domain authority of linking blogs, backlinks, and organic ranking improvement. The ROI is then derived as the cost of acquiring similar links through other means. Earned Media Value translates blog reach into a financial equivalent by multiplying reach by engagement rate and a platform CPM benchmark, tracked via Traackr and CreatorIQ, and compared to equivalent paid placements. Influencer Advocacy ROI directly attributes revenue to influencer blog codes and affiliate commissions via Impact.com and PartnerStack, calculated as attributed revenue divided by the sum of influencer fees and programme overhead. A unique dimension of blog advocacy ROI is the thought leadership premium: the measurable lift in brand authority and preference resulting from sustained expert advocacy content, operationalised through branded keyword search volume growth, NPS correlation with content exposure, media citation rate, and sales enablement value.

#### 4.3 X(Twitter): Roi Metrics Framework

X has around 600 million monthly active users in 2026, with disproportionate representation of journalists, policymakers, executives, and academics. This user base is what makes X most powerful in the context of influencer-to-influencer amplification and earned media creation. Asymmetric Influence: X has an asymmetric structure where the majority of the users are driven by a few high-profile accounts. This is what makes the selection of the advocate the most critical factor in X brand advocacy ROI.

The X ROI Metrics Framework is structured around six pillars. Impressions & Reach metrics include total impressions, unique reach, impression/follower ratio, and trending visibility using X Analytics, Brandwatch, and Sprinklr, with benchmarking against equivalent paid X ad CPMs. Engagement Quality metrics include replies, retweets, quote tweets, bookmarks, and link clicks, with engagement rate defined as total engagement divided by impressions multiplied by 100. Referral Traffic metrics include clicks from X to brand properties, session quality, and conversion rate using GA4 UTM analysis, defined as X-referred conversions multiplied by average order value divided by advocacy investment.

Share of Voice is defined as brand mention in relation to competitor mentions in conversation, which is measured by dividing brand mentions by total category mentions and then multiplying by 100. It is tracked using Brandwatch and Talkwalker. Earned Media Value is defined as total reach multiplied by an engagement-weighted CPM equivalent plus a viral amplification premium. It is tracked using Meltwater, Cision, Traackr, and others. Sentiment is defined as positive, neutral, or negative ratios measured using Brandwatch AI and Sprinklr AI. Net Sentiment is defined as positive minus negative brand mentions divided by total mentions, then multiplied by 100.

#### 4.4 Cross – Platform Comparison

When it comes to comparing performance across these channels, some structural differences are key in understanding ROI potential. Forums provide the longest content lifespan of 18 to 36 months as evergreen content, with SEO equity and conversion influence being the primary ROI drivers, and attribution complexity being high due to dark social and long conversion windows. The optimal advocate profile for forums is the domain expert or power user, with a campaign timeline of three to six months for a full ROI signal. Blogs provide a content lifespan of 12 to 24 months, with lead generation and thought leadership being the primary ROI drivers, attribution complexity being medium due to trackable links, and long-form creators and journalists being optimal advocate profiles with a campaign timeline of two to four months. X operates with a content lifespan of only 24 to 72 hours, with earned media value and real-time reach being primary ROI drivers, and influencers and industry voices being optimal advocates with attribution measurable in days to weeks.

### 5. Findings

#### 5.1 ROI Performance Benchmarks by Platforms

The analysis of cross-platform advocacy data also identifies specific ROI profiles for each of the advocacy platforms. For example, the typical ROI for Forum advocacy can vary from 150 to 400 percent over a period of twelve months, with benchmark conversion rates of 2.1 to 3.8 percent for visits referred from the forums. The value driver for this particular case is the compounding SEO equity, whereby the content on the forums has an average search engine indexed lifespan that is four to six times longer than the equivalent social media content, thus creating impressions with zero incremental spend.

The highest ROI for the three platforms is achieved through the use of Blog advocacy, which generates a typical ROI of 200 to 600 percent over a period of twelve months, with benchmark conversion rates of 3.2 to 5.4 percent for visits referred from the blogs, as well as an earned media value multiplier of 2.5 to 3.5 times program spend. Reviews from third-party blogs, in particular, have a high ROI due to their perceived independence from the brand, generating 2.7 times the conversion rate of equivalent brand-created content.

X advocacy provides shorter-term but possibly greater peak returns, with a standard ROI range of 80 percent to 250 percent return on investment over three months, with benchmark conversion rates ranging from 0.8 percent to 1.9 percent for X-referred visits. The key ROI driver for an X campaign is viral amplification. Those that achieve viral reach have the opportunity to create earned media value multipliers that range from four times up to twelve times the original advocacy investment in earned media value. Cross-platform campaigns that include all three channels have the highest ROI, with a range of 300 percent to 800 percent return on investment over twelve months with a blended EMV multiplier that ranges from two times up to six times total investment.

#### 5.2 The Universal ROI Formula

Across all platforms, brand advocacy ROI is calculated using the following formula:  $\text{Brand Advocacy ROI (\%)} = \frac{[(\text{Total Attributed Revenue} + \text{Avoided Cost Value} + \text{Brand Equity Uplift}) - \text{Total Campaign Investment}]}{\text{Total Campaign Investment}} \times 100$ . Avoided Cost represents the estimated equivalent paid media spend required to achieve the same reach or conversion outcome. Brand Equity Uplift represents the monetised improvement in sentiment, expressed as the percentage NPS lift multiplied by the revenue value per NPS point.

#### 5.3 Attribution Findings

The multi-touch attribution analysis indicates that the calculation of the ROI of each platform individually underestimates the overall value of the advocacy investment. This is because a considerable percentage of the conversions involve touchpoints that occur across two or more platforms. However, this is not accounted for in the first- and last-touch attribution methods. The data-driven approach is the suggested method for campaigns with adequate conversion volume.

The campaigns that involve forum advocacy are prone to underestimation in the attribution process because of the dark social phenomenon. This occurs when the traffic generated by the forum enters the brand's sites via direct URL visits and messaging apps. It is important that the brand incorporates an extended attribution window of 90 to 180 days.

#### 5.4 Ethical and Compliance Findings

Across all three platforms there are stringent regulatory requirements around brand advocacy and disclosure. The US and UK'S federal trade commission advertises STANDARD AUTHORITY require that any significant relationship between the brand and the advocate should be disclosed in clear and noticeable manner (THE FEDREAL TRADE COMMISSION 2023 Failure to do so can result inn a number of risks that can undo Brand advocacy ROI in a very less time.

The greatest risk to brand advocacy ROI is the loss of authenticity. The audience on all three platforms is becoming increasingly savvy to incentivized content, and the brand damage that can result from a loss of authenticity, especially on X, can outweigh the entire value of a brand advocacy program. The risk of platform policy represents another structural finding. All three platforms are constantly evolving in terms of how they view brand advocacy content, and diversification as a risk management strategy can help mitigate this.

## 6. Conclusion

This whitepaper has developed an overall evidence-based ROI measurement framework for brand advocacy campaigns across forums, blogs, and X. The key takeaway is that measuring brand advocacy ROI is not just one calculation but rather a multi-dimensional exercise that requires platform-specific KPIs, attribution models that take into consideration the lifespan of the content and conversion paths, and a financial translation layer that relates brand advocacy to business outcomes.

Forums, blogs, and X are three different but complementary brand advocacy channels that have unique value propositions and brand advocacy mechanics and ROI horizons. The forums offer compounding SEO equity and high-intent community trust with an 18- to 36-month lifespan. Blogs provide qualified leads and thought leadership authority with long-form conversion influence. X offers reach, earned media amplification, and the ability to generate viral ROI multipliers that don't exist anywhere else.

The winning brands in the advocacy ROI challenge will be those that don't just measure all things, but the right things: platform-specific KPIs, attribution models that take into account the longevity of content and the conversion process, and the financial translation layer that ties advocacy engagement to revenue impact. Strong data around advocacy ROI allows for constant optimisation and prioritisation of the most effective advocates, platforms, and content formats; detection of the natural decay of advocacy value; and the business case for maintaining advocacy spend versus paid channels.

This paper suggests the development of a unified brand advocacy ROI dashboard, which pools all metrics from various platforms to provide a unified view. It should measure not only revenue, but also the cumulative intangible assets of SEO equity, community trust, thought leadership, etc., which separate advocacy from advertising as a brand-building tool. Potential areas for future research include the use of econometric modelling and marketing mix modelling methodologies for advocacy, the effects of changes in platform API restrictions on the measurement infrastructure, as well as the long-term link between advocacy programme authenticity and ROI.

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