



The Influence of Social Media and E-Commerce Based Affiliate Marketing on Customer Interest and Purchase Decisions: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

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Affiliate marketing has emerged as a prominent digital marketing strategy, especially through social media and e-commerce platforms, in the era of rapid technological globalization. This literature review aims to analyze the influence of social media and e-commerce-based affiliate marketing on customer interest and purchasing decisions. The study employed a purposive sampling technique and reviewed 10 selected sources, including peer-reviewed journals, theses, proceedings, and other academic literature published between 2018 and 2024. The inclusion criteria were based on relevance to the research topic and methodological quality. Findings from the reviewed literature consistently indicate that affiliate marketing via social media and e-commerce significantly enhances customer interest and drives purchasing decisions by leveraging personalized, visual, and trust-based communication. In conclusion, affiliate marketing strategies integrated with social media and e-commerce platforms are influential tools that shape consumer behavior and decision-making in the digital marketplace.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of information and communication technology has significantly transformed the landscape of marketing, giving rise to various innovative strategies in the digital domain. One such strategy is affiliate marketing, a commission-based system in which individuals or organizations promote third-party products or services in exchange for a share of the revenue generated from their marketing efforts (Rahman, 2022). This model, facilitated through the use of affiliate links, provides mutual benefits for both product owners and marketers, making it a cost-effective and performance-driven approach in the e-business era (Nugroho et al., 2024).

In recent years, affiliate marketing has experienced a surge in effectiveness and popularity, particularly with its integration into social media and e-commerce platforms. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube allow affiliates to build engagement

through visually compelling and personalized content, while marketplaces like Shopee, Tokopedia, and Lazada enable seamless purchasing processes (Brilianita & Sulistyowati, 2023). This synergy has created a digital marketing ecosystem that is not only interactive but also highly targeted and responsive to consumer behavior.

While existing literature acknowledges the potential of affiliate marketing in driving product visibility and sales (Sutandi et al., 2024), there remains a gap in understanding how social media and e-commerce-based affiliate marketing specifically influences customer interest and purchasing decisions. Additionally, many e-business actors have not fully optimized these tools, leaving untapped opportunities for conversion growth and trust-building.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the extent of the influence that affiliate marketing—when implemented through social media and e-commerce—has on consumer interest and purchase behavior, as well as to identify the mediating factors that enhance its effectiveness. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical contributions to digital marketing literature and practical insights for businesses seeking to strengthen their affiliate strategies in an increasingly competitive online environment.

Today's digital economy, consumer purchasing behavior is no longer driven solely by traditional advertising or in-store promotions. Instead, peer recommendations, user-generated content, and personalized engagement have emerged as powerful influences in shaping decisions. Affiliate marketing harnesses these dynamics by involving individuals—often micro-influencers or content creators—as credible intermediaries between brands and consumers. This shift from business-to-consumer (B2C) to consumer-to-consumer (C2C) communication highlights the importance of trust and perceived authenticity, two elements that are amplified through social media interactions.

Furthermore, the increasing mobile device penetration and digital payment accessibility have accelerated the adoption of affiliate-based strategies. Consumers today spend a significant amount of time browsing social media, watching product review videos, or reading testimonials before making a purchase. This presents a unique advantage for affiliate marketers who can seamlessly integrate product promotions into daily content consumption routines. According to recent surveys, consumers are more likely to trust influencers or individuals they follow on social media than direct brand advertisements, making affiliate marketing not just a cost-efficient method but also a psychologically impactful one.

However, despite this promising potential, not all businesses have successfully leveraged affiliate marketing strategies, especially in the context of social media and e-commerce integration. Some challenges include limited understanding of affiliate program mechanics, lack of proper monitoring tools, insufficient collaboration with influencers, and misalignment between affiliate content and brand image. These barriers often lead to suboptimal campaign outcomes and underperformance in customer conversion.

In addition, while numerous studies have analyzed digital marketing broadly, there is still a scarcity of research that focuses specifically on the influence of social media and e-commerce-based affiliate marketing on the two crucial behavioral outcomes—customer interest and purchase decisions. Most existing literature either examines affiliate marketing in isolation or explores social media marketing without linking it to the affiliate system. Therefore, this research seeks to bridge that gap by offering a comprehensive review of how affiliate strategies, when combined with social media and e-commerce ecosystems, drive consumer engagement and behavioral response.

The urgency of this research is further emphasized by the growing demand for measurable marketing ROI and the need for businesses to adapt to a more decentralized promotional landscape, where consumers no longer respond passively but expect relevance, personalization, and trust. By critically analyzing current literature and

identifying success factors and limitations of affiliate marketing across platforms, this study provides valuable insights for both academics and practitioners in navigating the evolving digital marketplace.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to examine the influence of social media and e-commerce-based affiliate marketing on customer interest and purchasing decisions. The SLR approach enables a structured, transparent, and replicable process for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant research literature.

a. Research Design and Strategy

The SLR process followed the five main stages as outlined by Kitchenham (2004) and Tranfield et al. (2003), adapted as follows: (a) Identification of Research Questions, What is the influence of affiliate marketing through social media and e-commerce on customer interest and purchasing decisions?, What factors enhance or hinder the effectiveness of affiliate marketing in the digital marketplace? (b) Literature Search and Identification

The search was conducted across several academic databases, including: Google Scholar, Scopus, ScienceDirect, DOAJ, ProQuest, Garuda, Sinta,

The following keywords and Boolean operators were used: (“Affiliate Marketing” AND “E-Commerce” AND “Social Media” AND “Customer Purchase Decisions”), (“Affiliate Marketing” OR “Referral Marketing”) AND (“Purchase Intention” OR “Buying Interest”).

The search was limited to: Articles published between 2020 and 2024, Articles written in English or Bahasa Indonesia, Open access and full-text articles.

b. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the literature, the following criteria were applied: (a) Inclusion Criteria: Peer-reviewed journals, theses, conference proceedings, or books, Studies that discuss affiliate marketing related to social media, e-commerce, purchase intention, or consumer behavior, Published between 2020–2024, Accessible in full-text. (b) Exclusion Criteria: Articles not written in English or Bahasa Indonesia, Duplicate entries, Non-scientific or opinion-based papers, Studies lacking a clear methodology or research findings

c. Screening and Selection Process

The selection process followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram, as shown below:

Tble 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram Summary

Stage	Number of Articles
Initial identification	87 articles
After removing duplicates	72 articles
Title and abstract screening	34 articles
Full-text assessed for eligibility	18 articles
Final included in review	10 articles

A visual flowchart (not shown here) was constructed to represent this PRISMA process in the final publication layout.

d. Quality Assessment

To ensure the credibility and quality of the selected studies, a simplified version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist was adapted. Each article was

assessed based on: (a) Clarity of research objectives, (b) Methodological transparency, (c) Relevance to the research question, (d) Validity and reliability of findings.

Articles scoring below the threshold of 60% quality rating were excluded from synthesis.

e. Data Extraction and Analysis

Data from selected studies were extracted using a standardized matrix including: (a) Author and year, (b) Title and objective, (c) Research method, (d) Key findings related to affiliate marketing, purchase intention, and purchase decisions, (e) Strengths and limitations.

The data were analyzed using descriptive narrative synthesis, which allowed the researcher to identify recurring themes, compare outcomes, and draw conclusions regarding the relationship between affiliate marketing and customer behavior.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. The Influence of Social Media and E-Commerce-Based Affiliate Marketing on Customer Purchase Intention and Decision

Affiliate marketing, when integrated with social media and e-commerce platforms, has proven to significantly influence customer purchase intention and decision-making. Luthfiani & Ahmadi (2024) emphasize the social and psychological dimensions of influencer recommendations, highlighting that consumers often trust content shared by individuals they follow on social media. Similarly, Andriyanti & Farida (2022) underline functional drivers such as trust, informativeness, perceived usefulness, and incentives as key components affecting consumer attitudes and purchase behavior.

A comparative analysis reveals that while both studies acknowledge the importance of trust and informativeness, they differ in emphasis: Luthfiani & Ahmadi focus more on emotional influence through social interactions, whereas Andriyanti & Farida stress rational decision-making driven by information quality and promotional incentives. This suggests that a hybrid approach—combining emotional engagement with factual content—may yield optimal results.

However, an existing research gap lies in the limited quantification of how much each factor contributes to purchase intention. Most current studies are qualitative or descriptive. Therefore, future research should explore empirical models to measure the exact influence of each variable and test causality within different demographic segments or product types.

b. The Interaction Between Affiliates and Customers in Shaping Purchase Intention and Decisions

Affiliate–consumer interaction is a critical mechanism for converting purchase interest into action. According to Noersabila in Sutandi et al. (2024), interactive strategies such as two-way communication, transparency, and consistent content delivery enhance consumer engagement and trust, leading to stronger purchase intent and long-term loyalty.

A thematic synthesis across studies reveals a pattern: higher engagement levels, especially when driven by perceived authenticity and personal relevance, result in stronger consumer–affiliate bonds. Nonetheless, different approaches exist. Some affiliates focus on high-frequency promotional content to maintain visibility, while others

emphasize quality, transparency, and emotional rapport. Each has advantages and drawbacks—frequency-based exposure risks "ad fatigue," while relational strategies may require more time to generate conversions.

What remains underexplored is how product type (e.g., high involvement vs. low involvement) moderates the effectiveness of affiliate–consumer interaction. For instance, relational strategies may be more effective for high-involvement products, while impulse-based methods may work better for low-involvement items. Future research should examine these nuances.

c. Customer Response to Affiliate Marketing in Terms of Purchase Intention and Decision

Customer response to affiliate marketing practices is predominantly shaped by purchase intention and trust. Studies by Satiawan et al. (2023) and Bogdan & Biklen in Sutandi et al. (2024) suggest that affiliate marketing significantly influences purchasing behavior, especially when consumers perceive the affiliate as credible and the offer as beneficial.

The synthesis indicates a consistent pattern: affiliate marketing is most effective when it delivers authentic, relevant content through trusted individuals, and when it includes incentives such as discount codes. Trust emerges as the pivotal construct, not only in how consumers perceive product credibility but also in the affiliate's alignment with their interests—reinforced by the performance-based model of affiliate marketing.

However, there are differences in how affiliates present their content. Blog-based affiliates tend to offer in-depth reviews and detailed analysis, while social media influencers often rely on short-form persuasive content. Although both formats are effective, they may appeal to different audiences or decision-making styles.

Notably, there is a gap in cross-platform comparative research evaluating the impact of affiliate marketing across various digital channels (e.g., Instagram vs. YouTube vs. blogs). This calls for more empirical studies exploring platform-specific strategies and their differential impact on trust and conversion rates.

d. Extended Discussion and Critical Reflection

Affiliate marketing continues to gain traction due to its low-risk, performance-based model and its ability to leverage social proof via social media platforms. However, beyond summarizing findings from existing literature, it is essential to examine the theoretical underpinnings that explain how and why affiliate marketing affects consumer behavior.

From the lens of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), purchasing decisions are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Affiliate marketing, particularly when implemented through trusted influencers, can shape subjective norms and positively influence attitudes toward a product. When consumers see their social peers or admired influencers endorsing a product, they are more likely to perceive the behavior as desirable and socially accepted. This can be especially powerful in tightly networked digital communities.

Furthermore, Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) provides another useful framework. When consumers are highly involved in the decision-making process, they process affiliate content via the central route—evaluating arguments, reviews, or

comparisons. When involvement is low, they rely more on peripheral cues such as the credibility of the influencer or the attractiveness of the message. This dual-pathway approach helps explain why both content-rich blogs and brief, persuasive Instagram posts can be effective—depending on the consumer's motivation and context.

e. Comparative Insights and Identified Research Gaps

Across the reviewed literature, common themes such as trust, informativeness, and incentives repeatedly emerge. Yet, there is limited discussion on: (a) Cultural Contexts – Most studies are conducted in single-nation settings. Cultural values (e.g., individualism vs collectivism) may influence how affiliate messages are interpreted. For example, collectivist societies may be more responsive to peer recommendations, while individualist consumers might value product specifications and independent reviews. (b) Consumer Digital Literacy – There is a growing segment of consumers who are becoming aware of monetization strategies behind affiliate links. This "savvy consumer" may discount affiliate messages unless they are perceived as highly transparent and unbiased. Literature has yet to explore how increased awareness of affiliate monetization affects trust and purchasing decisions. (c) Saturation and Authenticity Fatigue – As affiliate marketing becomes more widespread, consumers may become skeptical or fatigued by constant promotional content. This phenomenon has been underexamined, though it poses a significant threat to long-term effectiveness. Future research should investigate the threshold at which affiliate promotions begin to lose their persuasive power. (d) Post-Purchase Behavior – While much of the literature focuses on purchase intention and conversion, few studies explore post-purchase satisfaction, loyalty, or advocacy resulting from affiliate-driven decisions. This is an important area for marketers seeking to develop sustainable, relationship-driven customer bases. (e) Ethical Considerations – Transparency and disclosure in affiliate marketing remain inconsistent across platforms. Despite regulations in some countries requiring affiliates to disclose sponsorships, enforcement and compliance vary. Future studies should explore the ethical dimensions of affiliate marketing and its impact on trust.

f. Strategic Implications

For practitioners, the findings suggest that successful affiliate marketing strategies must go beyond simply selecting influencers with large followings. Brands must: (a) Prioritize long-term partnerships with affiliates who genuinely align with their brand values and audience expectations. (b) Encourage transparent disclosure to build trust and reduce skepticism. (c) Optimize content type and platform depending on the consumer journey stage—using short-form persuasive content for awareness and detailed comparisons or reviews for conversion. (d) Integrate data analytics to track not only click-through and conversion rates but also engagement quality, bounce rates, and post-purchase behavior.

g. Theoretical Contributions

This discussion contributes to the evolving body of knowledge by proposing that affiliate marketing's effectiveness hinges on both cognitive and affective processing mechanisms, as well as social proof and normative influence. It integrates behavioral theories into digital marketing strategies, which can help bridge the gap between academic theory and commercial application.

4. CONCLUSION

Affiliate marketing, when integrated with social media and e-commerce platforms, has a significant influence on customer interest and purchasing decisions. By leveraging the persuasive power of social media through engaging content and streamlining the purchasing process via e-commerce platforms, affiliate marketing has become a highly effective strategy for driving consumer conversions. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this approach is strongly determined by several key factors, including the credibility and authenticity of affiliates, the quality and relevance of the promoted products, and the overall customer experience within the digital environment.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions, This study contributes to the growing body of literature by synthesizing how social influence, trust, informativeness, and incentives jointly impact purchase intentions in affiliate marketing. It applies behavioral theories—such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)—to contextualize consumer responses in digital commerce settings. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for marketers and e-commerce platforms to enhance customer engagement strategies, suggesting that transparent communication, ethical practices, and personalized content are critical in building long-term consumer trust and loyalty.

Implications, For marketers and businesses: Building sustainable affiliate programs requires investing in credible influencers, ensuring product quality, and optimizing customer journey touchpoints to enhance trust and ease of use. For affiliates: Cultivating transparency, maintaining authenticity, and understanding audience preferences are vital for building influence and driving conversions. For platform developers: Enhancing user experience, facilitating seamless checkouts, and providing affiliate tracking tools are crucial to support conversion-friendly environments.

Limitations, This research primarily relies on literature-based insights, which may not fully capture evolving consumer behaviors in specific regional or cultural contexts. The absence of empirical data also limits the generalizability of the findings to broader consumer populations.

Recommendations for Future Research, Future studies should explore: Cross-cultural differences in consumer response to affiliate marketing. Longitudinal studies measuring post-purchase behavior, satisfaction, and customer retention. The impact of affiliate disclosure practices on consumer trust and purchase decisions. Quantitative modeling using real-world data from social media and e-commerce analytics to validate theoretical assumptions.

In sum, while affiliate marketing presents strong potential in influencing modern purchasing behavior, its effectiveness depends on how well it aligns with consumer expectations, trust frameworks, and ethical marketing standards.

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