

Influencer-Based Commercial Advertising and Its Impact on Users' Purchase Motivation: A Model for Social Media Networks

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted with the aim of presenting a model for commercial advertising on celebrity accounts on social media platforms and examining their impact on users' purchase motivation. Adopting a qualitative and exploratory strategy, the research employed the grounded theory method, with data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The qualitative participants included 15 managers, professionals, experts, and researchers in the field of social media advertising in Iraq during 2023–2024, selected using purposive sampling. The findings were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding, resulting in a model comprising six core axial codes: causal conditions (technological factors including innovative interactive experiences, boundary dissolution, emerging technologies, and alignment of needs), contextual conditions (online competencies such as online feedback, bilateral online connections, features of online advertising, and online behavioral traits), intervening conditions (influencer commitments including professional integrity, sensationalist advertising, and user respect; and online limiting factors such as filtering, privacy, and normativity), strategies (strategic account management involving social bond reinforcement, structured account content, and targeted advertising; along with account compliance management including online integration, online stickiness, and situational awareness), outcomes (consumer cognitive development involving satisfaction, compliance, and brand awareness; and consumer attitude development including persuasion, perceived competence, and social capital reinforcement), and a core category defined as the influencer advertising model, which encompasses justice orientation, honesty orientation, commitment-based approach, expertise, social interaction, and convergence. The findings demonstrate that influencers have emerged as highly influential actors in the business and marketing landscape on social media, and the proposed model may serve as a practical framework for corporate advertising strategies in Iraq, contributing significantly to the nation's economic development.

Keywords: Social Media, Commercial Advertising, Celebrities, Purchase Motivation

1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of digital marketing, social media has emerged not only as a space for interaction and entertainment but also as a formidable tool for commercial engagement. Within this digital ecosystem, influencer marketing has gained significant traction as a strategy that leverages the credibility and popularity of individuals to affect consumer behavior. The rise of social media influencers—individuals who exert influence over a significant audience by virtue of their knowledge, lifestyle, appearance, or authority in a specific niche—has shifted the dynamics of brand communication from traditional corporate-driven messaging to personalized, peer-influenced narratives. These influencers, through curated content and strategic collaborations with brands, shape consumer perceptions, evoke emotional responses, and drive behavioral outcomes such as engagement and purchase intention (Ao et al., 2023; Chen & Hsieh, 2024; Galdón-Salvador et al., 2024).

The growing relevance of influencers in shaping purchase motivation is strongly linked to the digital transformation of marketing and the consumer's increasing reliance on digital cues for decision-making. Studies suggest that the authenticity, relatability, and perceived expertise of influencers are pivotal in fostering trust and affecting consumer attitudes (Bevan-Dye, 2023; Hani et al., 2024; Yu & Zhang, 2023). Influencers—especially micro and nano-influencers—possess the capacity to build meaningful parasocial relationships with their followers, enabling brands to connect with consumers through more emotionally resonant and targeted content (Erwin et al., 2024; Moghaddar et al., 2024). This is particularly relevant among younger demographics such as Generation Z and Millennials, who display a preference for peer-based endorsements over traditional advertisements (Ghosh et al., 2024; Rambocas & Metivier, 2024).

The theoretical and practical implications of influencer-based advertising are multifaceted. On one hand, influencers serve as powerful intermediaries that bridge the communication gap between brands and consumers. On the other, the lack of standardization and regulation in the influencer marketing ecosystem has raised concerns regarding transparency, ethical conduct, and brand authenticity (Chaturvedi, 2025; McEnnis, 2023; Mirghaderi, 2022). Issues such as misleading endorsements, sponsored content disclosure, and algorithmic manipulation of content visibility further complicate the evaluation of influencer

impact (Polat et al., 2024; Saidi et al., 2022). Despite these challenges, the strategic importance of influencer marketing continues to grow, as evidenced by increased corporate investments in influencer partnerships and the development of advanced metrics for evaluating influencer performance (Qi, 2024; R, 2024).

From a consumer psychology perspective, influencers operate within a triadic framework involving influencer attributes (such as trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise), audience characteristics (including susceptibility to influence and personal identity), and contextual variables (such as platform norms and content formats) (Xin et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2024). This framework highlights the complexity of influence, which is not unidirectional but interactive and mediated by cultural, social, and psychological factors. Recent empirical studies emphasize the role of consumer emotions, self-construal, and brand-related schemas in mediating the effects of influencer content on purchase intentions (Ghosh et al., 2024; Motta et al., 2023; Yu & Zhang, 2023). Such findings underscore the need for a multidimensional model that integrates technological, psychological, and strategic elements in understanding how influencers drive consumer behavior.

Moreover, the increasing deployment of artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics in influencer marketing has introduced a new layer of personalization and precision. AI-powered tools are now used to identify suitable influencers, predict campaign effectiveness, and optimize content delivery (Mursalin et al., 2023; Rachmad, 2024). These technological innovations enable more nuanced targeting and allow brands to align influencer personas with specific consumer segments. However, this also raises ethical concerns about consumer manipulation, data privacy, and the dehumanization of marketing communication (Baudier et al., 2023; Musa et al., 2024). As AI-generated virtual influencers also gain popularity, the distinction between real and artificial identities becomes increasingly blurred, prompting scholars to explore the implications for consumer trust and brand equity (Xin et al., 2024).

The conceptual significance of influencer-based commercial advertising extends beyond consumer engagement to organizational strategy and market competitiveness. For brands operating in saturated and volatile markets, influencer collaborations offer a cost-effective and scalable solution for brand differentiation and customer acquisition (Dunn & Nisbett, 2025; Erwin et al., 2023). Furthermore, influencers contribute to value co-creation by fostering user-generated content, interactive

campaigns, and brand communities, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and customer lifetime value (Chen & Hsieh, 2024; Erwin et al., 2024). These dynamics are especially relevant in markets such as Iraq, where social media usage is growing rapidly, and traditional media channels face limitations in reach and resonance (Hani et al., 2024; Moghaddar et al., 2024).

Despite the growing body of literature on influencer marketing, there remains a gap in comprehensive models that systematically classify the conditions, mechanisms, and consequences of influencer-led advertising. Much of the existing research focuses on isolated factors such as source credibility, platform effects, or demographic preferences. However, there is a lack of integrative frameworks that encompass causal conditions (e.g., technological drivers), contextual enablers (e.g., online competencies), intervening variables (e.g., influencer ethics and online constraints), strategic responses (e.g., account management and compliance), and behavioral outcomes (e.g., consumer cognition and attitude formation) (Ao et al., 2023; Chaturvedi, 2025; Motta et al., 2023). This study seeks to fill this gap by developing a grounded theory model that captures the complex, multi-level dynamics of influencer advertising in the context of social media networks.

Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative, grounded theory approach, enabling the identification of latent patterns and emergent themes through in-depth interviews with experts, practitioners, and analysts in the field of social media marketing. The grounded theory framework is particularly suitable for exploring under-theorized phenomena and allows for the development of a conceptual model grounded in empirical data (Mishra et al., 2022; Saidi et al., 2022). In doing so, the study moves beyond descriptive accounts of influencer marketing to propose a theoretically robust and practically applicable model for understanding and designing influencer-based advertising strategies.

The practical implications of this research are significant for marketing professionals, brand managers, and policy-makers. By identifying the key components and relationships within influencer-driven campaigns, the proposed model offers actionable insights for designing effective content strategies, selecting appropriate influencer partners, and enhancing brand-consumer interaction. Moreover, the findings may inform the development of regulatory guidelines to ensure transparency, ethical conduct, and consumer protection in influencer marketing

practices (Chaturvedi, 2025; Galdón-Salvador et al., 2024; Mirghaderi, 2022).

In summary, this study aims to present a comprehensive and grounded model of influencer-based commercial advertising in social media, with a particular focus on how such advertising impacts user purchase motivation.

2. Methods and Materials

Given that the objective of the present study is to propose a model of commercial advertising on celebrity accounts in social media and to examine its impact on users' purchase motivation, the research approach is qualitative in nature. Accordingly, and based on the dimensions under investigation, the method employed is grounded theory. In this study, the systematic design and Strauss and Corbin's systematic approach were utilized.

The sampling method in the qualitative section of the present research was purposive. Initially, interviews were conducted with 10 selected individuals, and the interviews began to exhibit repetition. After presenting the preliminary findings to relevant experts and specialists and consulting them to ensure the validity of the study, it was decided to continue the interviews with additional participants from the study population. As a result, theoretical saturation was achieved after conducting interviews with 15 participants.

The data collection instrument used in this research for identifying the components and dimensions of the study constructs was the semi-structured interview. Since the core foundation of theory construction lies in conceptualization, a mechanism must be devised to identify concepts and expand them based on their properties and dimensions. In grounded theory, the initial step involves open coding, in which preliminary categories related to the studied phenomenon are extracted from raw data by questioning the data, comparing cases, events, and other aspects of the phenomenon to identify similarities and differences. From the raw data, a set of categories emerged through open coding. In the next phase—axial coding—one of these categories (the main category) becomes the central focus of the exploration process, and the other categories are theoretically related to it.

These categories include: causal conditions (justifiable causes of the main phenomenon), action/interaction strategies (actions or interactive strategies implemented to manage, handle, respond to, or control the main phenomenon), contextual conditions (specific situational conditions that affect the strategies), intervening conditions

(general background conditions influencing the strategies), and consequences (the outcomes of applying the strategies). These relationships among the categories are depicted in the form of a causal model, known as the coding paradigm.

The propositional statements or judgments of the research, which refer to the internal relationships among the categories, are considered the result of selective coding. After completing the coding process and confirming the credibility and reliability of the data, the theory was articulated. The theory consists of developed categories that are systematically linked through relational statements to form a theoretical framework that explains social, psychological, educational, health-related, or similar phenomena.

3. Findings and Results

Open coding is the first stage of data extraction, in which a semantic label is assigned to meaningful units (text, image, video, audio), and these units serve as valuable pieces of a puzzle that contribute to building a theory. It is important to note that this research employed MAXQDA software, version 2020, one of the prominent tools for analyzing qualitative data. In essence, preliminary coding refers to the initial assessment of documents and observations in preparation for the open coding process.

In this section, all documents—including 13 in-depth, semi-structured interviews—were initially examined. The documents were subjected to thematic analysis or latent content analysis, and preliminary or embryonic codes were extracted based on the meaningful units identified during the preliminary coding phase using MAXQDA software outputs. The number of non-repetitive initial codes amounted to 1,332, which was subsequently reduced to 168 unique initial codes after eliminating duplicates and consulting with academic advisors and consultants. In fact, through 13 interviews and categorizing the initial codes, the

researcher reached the point of theoretical saturation. The researcher's interpretations are based on the software output, i.e., the latent content analysis of the interviews, and the frequency of the codes did not influence the interpretation; however, for each of the 13 documents that led to saturation, an evaluation of their quality and informational contribution was conducted.

To provide the readers with additional insight, a word cloud graph of the extracted codes—based on their frequency—is presented. According to the research output, these 168 unique codes appeared with a total frequency of 1,332, as can be clearly observed in the word cloud of initial codes.

At this stage, categorization of initial codes with meaningful relationships was carried out using abstract focused coding. As noted earlier, some of the initial codes exhibited a higher level of conceptual and abstract significance and served as categories encompassing more operational codes.

Axial coding is the process of relating categories to their subcategories to enable the researcher to develop a conceptual framework with a high level of abstraction. The process is referred to as “axial” because coding revolves around a central category, and the categories are interrelated across dimensions and spectra. The goal of axial coding is to reassemble the data previously broken down during open coding. It is noteworthy that at this stage, the Strauss and Corbin paradigm model, specifically designed for grounded theory strategy, can be applied—categorizing the codes into groups such as causal factors, consequences, strategies, context, and background.

Next, the axial codes derived from conceptually related categories were classified, and this classification enabled the subsequent processing of selective coding, where interrelationships among axial codes were explored. An example is presented in the table below.

Table 1

Conceptualization of Influencer Advertising Model Codes

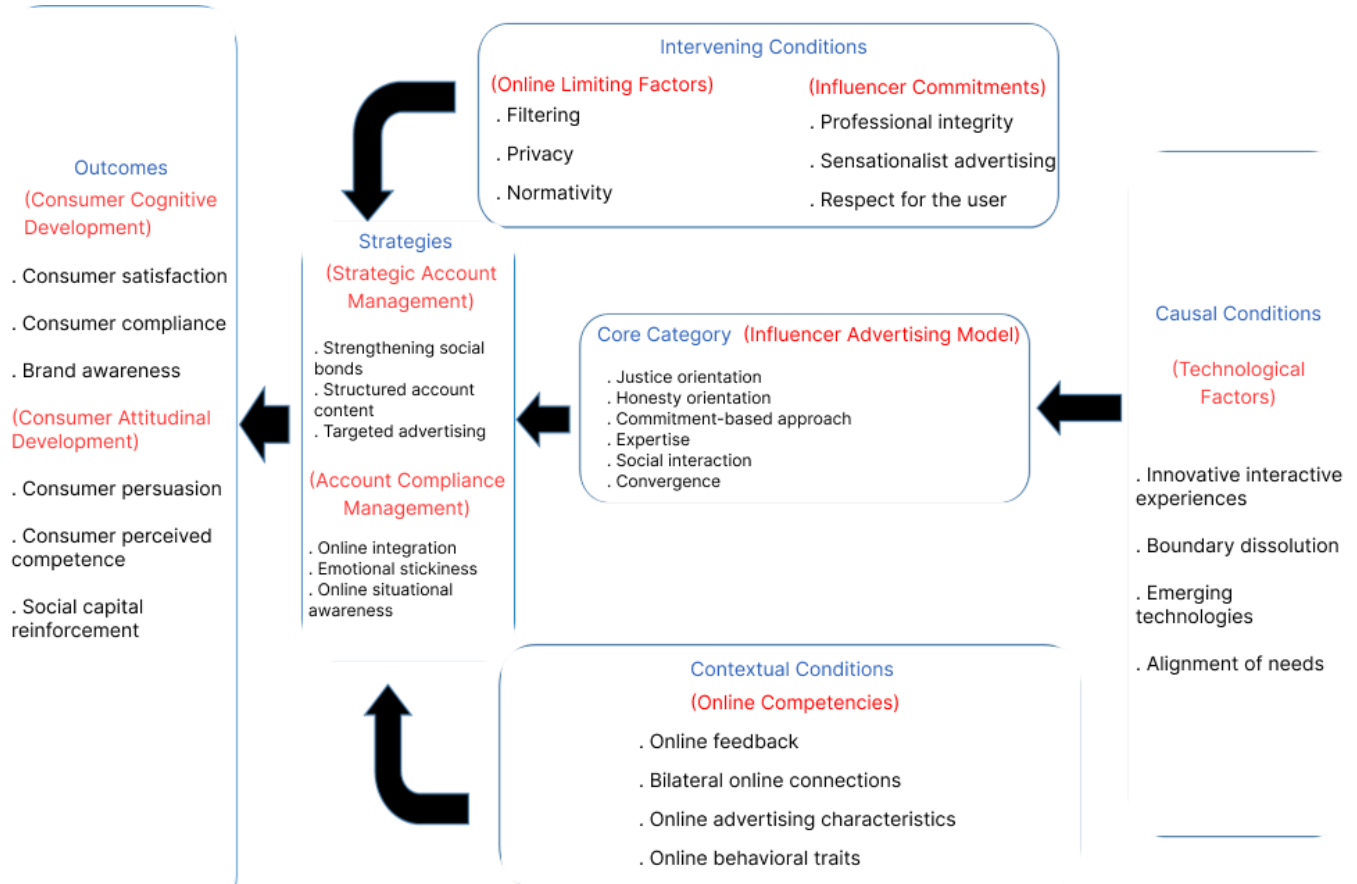
Initial Codes	Main Categories
Advertising justice, pricing fairness, informational fairness	Justice orientation
Honesty in speech, honesty in behavior, promise integrity	Honesty orientation
Commitment to customers, commitment to society, product quality commitment, product compliance commitment	Commitment-based approach
Expertise in advertising techniques, expertise in product knowledge, expertise in product presentation	Expertise
User connection, sense of intimacy, sense of trust, following influencers, comparing ideas with influencer	Social interaction
Lifestyle imitation, shared values, shared interests, shared goals	Convergence

In axial coding, the categories are systematically developed and related to their subcategories. However, the research findings take the form of a theory only when the main categories are integrated and form a broader theoretical framework. Therefore, selective coding refers to the process of integrating and refining categories and axial codes and exploring their interrelationships.

Ultimately, after analyzing the software outputs and examining the relevant literature, the overall model of this study was extracted. This theory, developed using Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory strategy and through three coding phases, is presented in a paradigm model. The model includes six axial codes or constructs, interconnected through five scientific propositions via the software.

Figure 1

Paradigm Model of Celebrity Advertising in Media



As illustrated, the paradigm model of this study contains nine axial codes that, based on their significance and qualitative data analysis, were positioned within the paradigm model structure. Accordingly, the axial code of technological factors—with four components (innovative interactive experiences, boundary dissolution, emerging technologies, alignment of needs)—was identified as the causal condition influencing the central category.

The contextual condition was represented by the axial code of online competencies with four components (online feedback, bilateral online connections, characteristics of online advertising, and behavioral features), which influence

the strategies. Furthermore, the axial code of influencer commitments—comprising three components (professional integrity, sensationalist advertising, and user respect)—and the axial code of online limiting factors—comprising three components (filtering, privacy, and normativity)—were identified as intervening factors affecting the strategies.

The axial code of consumer cognitive development—with three components (consumer satisfaction, consumer compliance, and brand awareness)—and the axial code of consumer attitude development—with three components (consumer persuasion, perceived competence, and

reinforcement of social capital)—were identified as the outcomes of this paradigm model.

The axial code of the influencer advertising model—with six components (justice orientation, honesty orientation, commitment-based approach, expertise, social interaction, and convergence)—was identified as the core category influencing the strategies.

In this model, the strategy construct includes the axial code of strategic account management with three components (strengthening social bonds, structured account content, and targeted advertising) and the axial code of account compliance management with three components (online integration, online stickiness, and situational awareness).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study, grounded in qualitative data analysis, revealed a comprehensive model of influencer-based commercial advertising that encompasses causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, strategic pathways, and consumer-level outcomes. The model consisted of six central constructs: technological drivers, online competencies, influencer commitments, online limiting factors, strategic account and compliance management, and two outcome categories—consumer cognitive development and attitudinal transformation. The core category, titled the *Influencer Advertising Model*, includes six fundamental dimensions: justice orientation, honesty orientation, commitment-based approach, expertise, social interaction, and convergence. This conceptualization reflects how influencer-led advertising on social media platforms serves as a powerful tool for shaping consumer motivation and guiding purchase behavior in digitally connected environments.

The analysis indicated that technological innovation, such as interactive user experiences, the blurring of boundaries, and personalized digital tools, plays a critical role as causal conditions in enabling influencer-based marketing to thrive. These findings align with research that emphasizes the transformative potential of digital affordances in creating immersive, interactive content that increases consumer engagement (Mursalin et al., 2023; Qi, 2024). The study also underscored the significance of online competencies, such as reciprocal communication, feedback mechanisms, and behavioral data, as essential contextual conditions that empower strategic content delivery and real-time personalization. These findings are consistent with the

literature that highlights the value of real-time interactivity and user feedback in shaping influencer effectiveness and campaign relevance (Erwin et al., 2024; Yu & Zhang, 2023).

The intervening conditions, particularly influencer-related ethical commitments and online limiting factors (e.g., privacy norms, filtering mechanisms), were identified as critical moderators of strategy implementation. Participants emphasized the importance of influencers exhibiting professional integrity, avoiding sensationalist advertising, and respecting user autonomy—elements previously confirmed in studies that associate influencer credibility and ethical behavior with consumer trust and persuasion effectiveness (Baudier et al., 2023; Mirghaderi, 2022). Furthermore, environmental constraints such as platform regulations and content visibility algorithms were found to mediate the impact of influencer strategies, a theme echoed by recent discussions on algorithmic influence and ethical challenges in digital environments (Chaturvedi, 2025; McEnnis, 2023).

One of the most critical contributions of this study is the identification of two major strategic categories—strategic account management and account compliance management. The former includes dimensions such as social bonding, content structure, and targeted messaging, which together enable influencers to build sustained audience engagement. The latter captures operational alignment strategies such as emotional stickiness, situational awareness, and platform integration. These findings corroborate prior studies that advocate for emotionally resonant, structured influencer content and the importance of aligning digital messaging with audience expectations and platform algorithms (Chen & Hsieh, 2024; Kilipiri et al., 2023; R, 2024).

On the consumer side, the results revealed two main outcome categories: cognitive development (involving satisfaction, compliance, and brand knowledge) and attitudinal development (involving persuasion, perceived competence, and social capital reinforcement). These insights are supported by previous empirical research suggesting that influencer content significantly affects both the informational and emotional aspects of consumer decision-making (Bevan-Dye, 2023; Ghosh et al., 2024; Hani et al., 2024). For example, the model confirms that consumers are not only persuaded by the product attributes conveyed by influencers but also internalize values and lifestyles modeled by them—thus highlighting the dual cognitive-emotional influence that influencers exert (Galdón-Salvador et al., 2024; Motta et al., 2023).

Additionally, the study found that the core category—the Influencer Advertising Model—acts as a mediating hub linking technological and contextual enablers with strategic behaviors and consumer outcomes. The model’s components (justice, honesty, commitment, expertise, social interaction, and convergence) encapsulate both ethical and functional dimensions of influence. These findings reinforce recent conceptual frameworks that advocate for holistic influencer evaluation, combining message content, ethical standards, and socio-psychological fit with target audiences (Dunn & Nisbett, 2025; Musa et al., 2024; Rambocas & Metivier, 2024). Notably, the dimension of convergence, which captures alignment in values, goals, and lifestyle between influencers and their followers, reflects the literature’s growing recognition of identity-based influence as a core mechanism in digital persuasion (Erwin et al., 2023; Moghaddar et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the model offers strong empirical support for the co-creation dynamic between influencers and followers. This co-creation includes shared meaning-making, lifestyle adoption, and social bonding—mechanisms that amplify trust and brand loyalty. Prior studies have shown that influencers who actively engage in dialogue, showcase user-generated content, and adapt their messages to audience feedback are more successful in motivating purchase decisions and fostering long-term consumer relationships (Erwin et al., 2024; Rachmad, 2024). The current findings extend this literature by providing a structured, multi-level pathway linking influencer identity, strategic behavior, and motivational outcomes.

Lastly, the model’s structural coherence highlights the increasing complexity of influencer marketing in today’s fragmented media environment. Rather than viewing influence as a linear, one-directional flow, the model suggests that influence operates as a multi-causal and interactive process. Influencers are not simply content producers but dynamic intermediaries navigating technological tools, ethical constraints, social expectations, and audience psychologies. This nuanced perspective challenges overly simplistic interpretations of influencer marketing and calls for more integrative models in future research (Polat et al., 2024; Saidi et al., 2022).

Despite its comprehensive findings, this study is not without limitations. First, the qualitative nature of the research, while offering depth and contextual insight, limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or geographic contexts. The data were gathered from a purposive sample of experts and professionals primarily

located within the Iraqi context, which may not fully reflect variations in influencer marketing practices across other cultural or economic settings. Additionally, the reliance on semi-structured interviews introduces potential for researcher bias, particularly in theme identification and interpretation. While MAXQDA software was used to enhance analytic rigor, the subjectivity inherent in qualitative coding remains a methodological constraint.

Future studies should consider extending the current model through mixed-method designs, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to validate and refine the proposed categories and relationships. Experimental or longitudinal studies could be conducted to assess the causal impact of specific influencer characteristics on consumer motivation, providing greater predictive power and control over confounding variables. Comparative studies across different cultures, industries, or influencer types (e.g., nano vs. macro vs. virtual influencers) would offer valuable insights into contextual variations. Finally, exploring the role of AI-generated influencers and algorithmic content delivery could add further depth to our understanding of digital influence in the next era of marketing.

Practitioners in marketing and brand management should adopt a holistic framework when engaging with influencers—one that goes beyond mere follower count or engagement metrics. Strategic selection should prioritize influencers who exhibit alignment with brand values, demonstrate ethical integrity, and possess strong audience resonance. Moreover, brands should invest in training and compliance tools to support influencers in content creation, ensure transparency, and safeguard user trust. Developing long-term partnerships based on mutual value creation, rather than transactional promotions, will foster stronger brand loyalty and sustained consumer motivation. Finally, marketers should use data analytics to continuously refine influencer strategies based on real-time consumer feedback and evolving digital trends.

Authors’ Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were considered.

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