Stepping Closer: Strategies to Attract Influencers in the Shopee Affiliate Program on Instagram

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Abstract

Content analysis was carried out by examining the Instagram posts of influencers involved in the Shopee affiliate program. This activity is to evaluate content style, post types, posting frequency, interaction with followers, and how influencers promote Shopee products. This analysis helps in understanding how influencers utilize the Instagram platform as a marketing channel. Thematic analysis was conducted by identifying common themes that emerged from interviews and content analysis. Researchers also looked for patterns in the content marketing strategies used by influencers, including a focus on creativity, interaction with followers, use of Instagram features, and the impact of the Shopee affiliate program on their content. During the analysis process, researchers looked for connections between findings from interviews, content analysis and official Shopee data. This helps researchers to identify general patterns and important findings that can help answer research questions. By combining this qualitative approach, researchers hope to provide an in-depth understanding of the content marketing strategies used by influencers through the Shopee affiliate program on Instagram. It is hoped that the results of this research will provide valuable insights for companies, marketers and researchers who are interested in the context of influencer marketing and e-commerce in Indonesia.

I. Introduction

The development of e-commerce in Indonesia increased significantly from 2018 to 2021, where in 2021 the number will exceed 20 platforms (Putri et al., 2022). The various types of e-commerce that have been established have led to competition between several marketplaces in Indonesia. This competition brings several aspects such as the convenience offered, competitive prices, and the variety of programs available to attract consumer attention. Limited movement during the pandemic requires marketers to carry out creative innovations so that consumers' interest in buying products online can grow amidst the current crisis. In marketing a product or service, a company will need a strategy in marketing its product or service with the aim of attracting public interest in the product or service offered. One strategy that companies can use to introduce their products or services to the wider community is to use an influencer marketing strategy. Influencer marketing is considered one of the most effective strategies for attracting potential consumers when marketing using social media by utilizing the mass of influencers, where influencers can create a better product brand image at a cheaper cost than using brand ambassadors (Hariyanti & Wirapraja, 2018).

Based on a report from the Founder of SociaBuzz via tek.id, the number of influencers in Indonesia during the March 2020 pandemic increased to threefold,

approximately 7,730 every month (Maulida, 2020). Having internet access makes Indonesian people able to collaborate, interact and even communicate with other internet users throughout the world quickly and instantly. Not only that, now online media can be used to market products to consumers, so online media is very useful for people in business activities. Internet users in Indonesia have reached 150 million, meaning 55.9% of Indonesian people use internet services for various purposes. Shopee is a marketplace for implementing sophisticated technology for online business. Marketplace is a technological innovation business that makes it easier for users to carry out buying and selling transactions without having to meet face to face and having to come to the shop or seller's house. Only by having an adequate internet network, and also a device that can be used to access the internet, can we use the marketplace. By having posts and displays on the marketplace that have been packaged as attractively as possible, it can build awareness, concern, and a means of marketing a product, thus giving rise to the perception that someone is interested in buying it. Based on Sea Group's report for the first quarter of 2021 to the first quarter of 2022, with revenue that continues to increase, Shopee is categorized as the best marketplace in the shopping sector in Southeast Asia.

Shopee itself promotes its products by utilizing influencer marketing. Shopee saw that there was potential by utilizing the influencer marketing strategy, so it took this strategy to the next stage. In 2022, Shopee is recorded to have more than 250,000 affiliate partners who are members of the Shopee influencer network (Shopee, 2022). According to Hariyanti & Wirapraja, 2018, the definition of influencer marketing is a method of appointing a person or figure who is considered to have influence among society or the target consumer segment that will be addressed and is felt to be a promotional target for the brand. This influencer acts as a user of a product or service, so that they can provide positive reviews or reviews related to the product or service, so that with positive reviews, the influencer's followers are also interested in using the product or service offered, so that able to increase the level of sales of the product or service.

In the next stage of development of Shopee's influencer marketing strategy and utilizing existing algorithms on social media, so that it can reach a larger audience, Shopee then created a program called "Shopee Affiliate Program". Shopee Customer Service Nimah said that: "This Shopee Affiliate program was officially released on the website on September 16 2021, then released on the application on September 23 2021." There are several programs run by Shopee, including shopee live, shopee video, free shipping program, shopee affiliate program. However, among these programs, Shopee's affiliate marketing program "Shopee Affiliate Program" is known to be the most popular among other programs and other marketplaces such as TikTok Affiliates, Lazada Affiliates, Bukalapak Affiliates, and Tokopedia Affiliates. Based on the explanation on the official Shopee page (2022), this program is a program that provides additional income to content creators just by promoting Shopee products on social media. Anyone can follow this procedure, and it can be applied on various social media owned by users without any restrictions. Ivkovic & Milanov in (Prathama et al., 2021) explain that affiliate marketing is one of the concepts most commonly used to promote products and services. Affiliates themselves will be given a commission directly after visitors or customers come and successfully purchase because of their efforts.

This program is a program that allows influencers to promote products. Shopee on their personal Instagram social media is free to be as creative as possible so that the influencer's followers are interested in opening the referral link displayed in the content created by the influencer, to make it easier for someone to go directly to the product they

are interested in. The more people are interested in the referral link, the influencer will earn income ranging from tens of thousands of rupiah to tens of millions of rupiah per month according to their respective performance. This Shopee affiliate program has proven that it can provide a commission of approximately 10% to new users if they successfully promote products from Shopee and someone buys them via the referral link that has been shared. So many influencers are taking advantage of this program to make additional income. Influencers only think about what kind of message will be communicated through the content they will create to promote a product brand from Shopee. Content is a very important communication element in marketing communications, this content is often called content marketing (Pandrianto & Sukendro, 2018). Content marketing can create closeness with the audience, making it easier to achieve goals in promoting a product or service. So that both parties, the influencer and the person who owns the brand, benefit. Based on this description, this research focuses on how content marketing strategies are carried out by influencers. This research aims to determine influencer content marketing strategies through the Shopee affiliate program on Instagram social media.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Content Marketing

Content marketing is defined as a strategic marketing approach that focuses on creating and distributing relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience and to drive profitable consumer action, unlike traditional marketing communications, where messages are designed for the benefit of the brand, content Marketing emphasizes offering value to consumers (Qomariah and Zaman 2020). In addition, in content marketing, consumers are not forced to find brand-related information but choose to receive content from the brand, for example, following the brand on social media. According to (Ho et al., 2020) identified six elements of content marketing, namely: (1) Media elements, in the form of the nature of the platform for content; (2) Strategic elements, in the form of a strategic approach to developing content; (3) Formation elements, in the form of content construction; (4) Intrinsic elements, in the form of content properties; (5) Communication elements, in the form of techniques used to convey content; (6) Result elements, in the form of anticipated results from the content.

2.2 Influencer

An influencer is someone who posts to social media in exchange for compensation. Influencers can post to social media via various platforms, for example Instagram, Tiktok, and Facebook which are the most popular social media platforms (Qomariah, Mahendra, and Hafidzi 2021). Companies also compensate influencers with money or goods, such as free products, services, travel, or experiences (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). An influencer is defined as someone who has built a large network of followers and is considered a role model in some markets(Rahmawati et al. 2021). The concept of influencer marketing and social media requires exposure provided by social media platforms to gain fame, and such platforms achieve at least part of their appeal through content posted by influencers active on them (Haenlein et al., 2020). Social media influencers are of great interest to brands. This is because they are seen by consumers as positive, authentic, credible and down-to-earth sources of information, with the significant benefit of a large network with an audience for the brand (Harrigan et al., 2021).

2.3 Shopee Affiliate Program

The Shopee affiliate program is a program that offers additional income for content creators who join through promotions of Shopee products posted on social media accounts, including YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok. Prospective Shopee affiliate partners have the freedom to be creative in creating innovative content as long as the product shown meets the terms and conditions set by Shopee. Shopee affiliate is a Shopee program for content creators who are active on social media. Content creators will promote various products from Shopee very easily, just by sharing the referral link for the product they want to promote. Then a commission will be obtained ranging from 2.5% to 10% for those who successfully sell products from Shopee Mall, Shopee Supermarket, Star+, and Star Seller. In its implementation, this program does not have a binding contract (Shopee, 2022).

2.4 Instagram

Instagram is a social media application that uses images as a communication tool. Currently Instagram has more than 700 million monthly active users, which is a significant milestone for the social media application. On Instagram, users can currently share posts in the form of images, videos, carousels, and stories (Huang & Su, 2018). Instagram is a progressive form of media that utilizes mobile and internet technology. Currently, the use of Instagram is in great demand among Indonesian people today. This is proven by data reported by We Are Social in January 2021, where the number of monthly active Instagram users reached 85,000,000. The data also reveals that a quarter of Indonesia's population are Instagram users, with 52.4 percent women and 47.6 percent men (Michelle & Susilo, 2021). Instagram wasn't the first photo-sharing social networking app to come out, but it was more efficient than other photo-sharing apps on other mobile platforms. Instagram makes it easy for online business people to put product photos or videos, product information, and information on how to order in one place. Consumers can see the information they need before choosing any product they want to buy and contacting the seller (Putra & Darma, 2020).

2.5 Stealth Marketing

Stealth marketing comes from the word stealth which in the Third New International Dictionary by Merriam Webster (1986) is defined as marketing actions that are stealthy, secretive or invisible. Therefore, in everyday language the term stealth marketing refers to covert or hidden marketing because the level of visibility is low, the target consumer is not aware of the marketing actions being carried out. Many companies come up with innovative ideas to attract the attention of their customers, namely by using the stealth marketing method, which is a cost-effective marketing strategy. Stealth marketing is the deliberate act of entering the market and doing it in a secret or invisible way. (Adil & Alkhafagi, 2022).

III. Research Methods

In this research, we carried out an in-depth exploration of the world of content marketing strategies implemented by influencers through the Shopee affiliate program on the social media platform Instagram. The research method we chose is descriptive qualitative, which allows us to understand this phenomenon holistically and detail the strategic aspects used by influencers. The population of this research are influencers who actively participate in the Shopee affiliate program in Indonesia. We select a representative

sample of the various categories or products represented by the influencer. Our first step was to identify relevant influencers who were involved in the program. The data collection process involved direct interviews with influencers, where we used a structured interview guide to gain in-depth insight into the content marketing strategies they implemented. Additionally, we conducted a content analysis of their Instagram posts, using a content analysis checklist that covered various aspects, such as style, frequency, and engagement.

Documentation is also carried out by collecting official data from Shopee regarding this program, including the rules and guidelines given to influencers. Data from various sources is then analyzed qualitatively, using content analysis methods to identify patterns, themes and trends in influencer content. In the data analysis process, we carried out comparisons between influencers to find similarities and differences in their content marketing strategies. Triangulation was used to combine data from interviews, content analysis and official Shopee documents to strengthen the validity of the findings.

Validity evaluation is carried out through the preservation of track records, ensuring that research results are consistent with research guidelines and objectives. Reliability is strengthened by the use of consistent and repeatable analysis codes. Through this approach, it is hoped that this research can provide an in-depth understanding of various influencer content marketing strategies through the Shopee affiliate program on Instagram, provide a valuable contribution in the context of online marketing, and become a basis for further development in this industry.

IV. Results and Discussion

This research highlights key findings regarding content marketing strategies implemented by influencers through the Shopee Affiliate Program on the social media platform Instagram. In carrying out in-depth exploration, a qualitative descriptive method was chosen to understand this phenomenon holistically and detail the strategic aspects used by influencers.

4.1 Product Diversification
One significant finding is the tendency of the majority of influencers to diversify the products they promote through the Shopee Affiliate Program. Not fixated on just one category, influencers are involved in promoting various products, from fashion, beauty, to electronic and household products. This diversification is a strategy to reach a wider audience and increase the attractiveness of the content.

4.2 Use of Attractive Visual Content
The importance of visual content in attracting followers' attention cannot be ignored. Influencers successfully emphasize the use of aesthetic photos and short videos that not only promote products, but also convey messages creatively. This visual aesthetic plays an important role in building brand identity and attracting the attention of an increasingly visually-oriented audience.

4.3 Active Interaction with Followers
Active interaction between influencers and their followers is a critical point in achieving high levels of engagement. Findings show that influencers who respond to comments, host Q&A sessions, or even invite participation in contests tend to have more engaged followers. Creating an active community can increase follower trust and loyalty.

4.4 Emphasis on Promo Codes and Discounts

Effective marketing strategies include an emphasis on the use of exclusive promo codes and discount offers. Influencers consciously design their campaigns with the goal of incentivizing followers to make purchases. This not only increases sales conversions but also provides benefits for followers who feel they are getting added value
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V. Conclusion

Through this qualitative descriptive method, it is hoped that this research can provide an in-depth picture of the content marketing strategy implemented by influencers through the Shopee affiliate program on Instagram. It is hoped that the results of this research will provide valuable insights for marketers, researchers and practitioners in the field of digital marketing, especially in the context of e-commerce in Indonesia. Data analysis will be carried out systematically and comprehensively, including evaluation of various aspects of content marketing strategies, their effectiveness, and their impact on audiences and product sales. It is hoped that the findings from this research can contribute to understanding the dynamics of digital marketing and enrich the literature in this field. This study has several limitations that need to be noted. First, the focus of this research is limited to the social media platform Instagram and the Shopee affiliate program, so the findings may not be directly generalizable to other platforms or programs. Second, the data used mainly comes from interviews and content analysis, so the researcher's subjective responses and interpretations can influence the results. Third, market conditions and trends can change over time, therefore the results of this research reflect the conditions at the time the research was conducted. By paying attention to these limitations, it is hoped that this research can provide valuable and relevant insights regarding content marketing strategies in the e-commerce era and their impact on consumers in Indonesia.

Practical Implications
a. Recommendations for Brands
   Brands can benefit from collaborating with influencers by understanding product diversification trends. Collaborations spanning multiple categories can be an effective strategy for reaching a wider audience.
b. Development of Quality Visual Content
   Collaboration between brands and influencers needs to focus on developing engaging visual content. High visual quality helps build a strong brand image.
c. Creative Interactive Activities
   Building engagement through active interaction requires creativity. Quizzes, polls, or other interactive content can be an effective strategy for building relationships with followers.
d. Optimize Promo Codes and Discounts
   Marketing strategies that focus on exclusive offers can stimulate a positive response from followers, encouraging them to participate in the purchasing process.

Suggestions for Further Research
a. Follower Sentiment Analysis:
   Future studies could explore sentiment analysis to understand the impact of content marketing strategies on followers' perceptions and attitudes towards brands.
b. Platform Comparison Study:
   A comparison of content marketing strategies on other social media platforms can

provide further insight into user preferences and trends across different channels.

c. Influence of Seasonal Factors:

Examining how seasonal factors or current trends influence influencer content marketing strategies can provide a more dynamic view of changes in consumer behavior.

With the results of this research, it is hoped that a significant contribution can be made in understanding the dynamics of influencer content marketing through the Shopee Affiliate Program on Instagram. These findings not only provide a foundation for more effective marketing strategies in the context of online marketing but also stimulate questions for further research in this ever-evolving industry.

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