

Implementation of Collaboration Between Affiliators and Brands: A Phenomenological Study in the Fashion Industry Through Social Media

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Abstract: Social media has transformed marketing, with the fashion industry leveraging affiliate collaborations to blend personal narratives and product promotion. Despite Indonesia's \$8.6 billion social commerce market (2022), challenges like mismatched expectations and authenticity crises persist. This study aims to (1) explore affiliates' subjective experiences in partnering with fashion brands, (2) identify collaboration mechanisms, (3) analyze challenges, and (4) assess partnership effectiveness. A phenomenological approach was adopted, with thematic analysis of open-ended questionnaires from 13 active affiliates. Two dominant models emerged: affiliate links and product bartering. Challenges included task-reward imbalances and restrictive brand guidelines. Effectiveness was measured via audience engagement, click-through rates, and personal branding gains. Successful collaborations require aligned values, transparent communication, and creative flexibility, offering actionable insights for affiliates and brands.

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social media in society has brought significant changes to how individuals construct their identities and engage in social interactions. One notable phenomenon is the tendency of individuals to seek the spotlight (center of attention) to gain social recognition (Pesenrigading et al., 2025). This drive is often expressed through various digital platforms by presenting oneself visually and narratively. The fashion industry, as one of the most competitive and expressive sectors, serves as a strategic space for fulfilling this need for recognition.

The fashion industry is known for its adaptability to trends and digital media developments. With continuously evolving styles and designs, fashion has become both a means of self-expression and a highly sought-after commodity. On the other hand, advancements in digital technology, particularly social media, have transformed how brands market their products. One rapidly growing strategy today is affiliate marketing, a collaborative model between brands and third parties (affiliators) to promote products or services (Prameswari et al., 2024).

According to Collins, the fashion industry is defined as "the industry that deals with the world of fashion," encompassing everything related to clothing manufacturing—from design, production, and distribution to commercialization (Kornelis, 2022). However,



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behind this growth, the dynamics of the relationship between affiliates and brands—particularly from the affiliates' subjective experience—remain understudied.

Affiliators play a crucial role in connecting brands with potential consumers through digital channels such as blogs, social media, and e-commerce platforms. In this scheme, affiliates earn commissions based on specific performance metrics, such as the number of clicks, purchases, or downloads generated from their unique links (Prameswari et al., 2024). This model benefits both parties: brands can reach new markets without upfront marketing costs, while affiliates earn income from the audience networks they have built.

Technological advancements have propelled social media as a dynamic and interactive means of reaching audiences, particularly through content and product engagement. According to data compiled by DSInnovate in the Social Commerce Report from dailysocial.id, the market value of social commerce platforms reached \$8.6 billion in 2022. Meanwhile, a report by Populix (The Social Commerce Landscape in Indonesia) found that 86% of Indonesians have made purchases through social media platforms.

An IPSOS report also revealed that 71% of consumers in Indonesia have accessed shopping services via live streaming. According to Soeprapto Tan (Country Manager of IPSOS Indonesia), "Live streaming shopping offers consumers a distinct interactive experience, making them feel a direct connection with brands even when shopping online" (Erfiati, 2023). Live streaming has become an increasingly prominent marketing channel due to its ability to influence purchasing decisions through high user engagement'.

Kotler and Armstrong (2016) define marketing as the process of creating value for consumers and building strong relationships to gain mutual benefits. Sope (2023) explains that marketing is a human activity aimed at fulfilling and satisfying needs and desires through the exchange of goods or services. According to William J. Stanton in Rustiana & Atika (2024), marketing has two fundamental meanings. In a social context, marketing encompasses all exchange activities intended to meet human wants. Meanwhile, in a business context, marketing is a system of business activities designed to plan, price, promote, and distribute goods and services to fulfill market needs.

The primary goal of marketing is to attract consumer interest so they are willing to use the offered products. Therefore, marketing plays a strategic role in formulating and developing a company's strategy (Tamara et al., 2022). This system involves several parties: (1) Merchant (product owner); (2) Affiliate Marketer (content creator who promotes the product); (3) Affiliate Network Platform (mediator between merchants and affiliates); (4) Customer (consumers who purchase the product) (Rahman, 2022).

In the digital context, affiliate marketing has become a popular strategy where content creators (affiliators) collaborate with brands to promote products through social media (Namira Arafah et al., 2023). Sutandi et al. (2024) add that affiliate marketing has opened significant opportunities for many companies and individuals to generate profits through collaboration and partnerships. Affiliators must also ensure that their published content upholds integrity, transparency, and compliance with promotional ethics (Machfudloh & Nisa, 2024).

Promotion is a crucial component of marketing. It encompasses a series of activities actively carried out by companies to encourage consumers to purchase the offered products. Promotion is also considered a continuous process, as it can trigger ongoing business activities (Kadir et al., 2022).

Affiliate marketing commonly utilizes the AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) in content creation (Chai & Aulia, 2024). However, in the digital era, the AISAS model (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, Share) is more relevant as it reflects modern consumer behavior—not just purchasing but also seeking information and sharing experiences (Octavia et al., 2024).

Social media serves as the primary platform for affiliate marketing due to its ability to facilitate direct interaction (Kusmilawaty et al., 2024). Social media is an internet-based business communication medium that provides users with space for self-expression, collaboration, information sharing, and interaction with others. Through this process, virtual social connections are formed, digitally linking individuals (Herdiani et al., 2022). Examples of social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, blogs, Twitter (now X), Messenger, WhatsApp, and various others (Mulyani et al., 2022).

Content marketing leverages engaging content (photos, videos, written posts) to build consumer trust (Pasaribu et al., 2023). Content marketing is a strategy that utilizes social media or digital advertising as its distribution medium, featuring attractive content in the form of photos, videos, audio, text, or other formats. This content is then uploaded to e-commerce platforms. E-commerce is an online network that enables digital business operations while making it easier for consumers to access information with technological support (Fikri et al., 2023).

Fashion is not just about clothing but also an expression of identity and social status (Arsita, 2021). The rise of social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok has made it easier for consumers to follow the latest trends while serving as an effective channel for affiliates to promote fashion products (Peti Pera, 2021).

Previous studies, such as Suniantara & Sastrawan (2024), focused on the marketing communication strategies used by affiliates to drive consumer purchase interest on marketplaces. Meanwhile, Chai & Aulia (2024) examined the influence and effectiveness of TikTok Affiliate in building brand awareness among consumers. Based on these realities, this research aims to: Explain the subjective experiences of affiliates collaborating with fashion brands. Analyze the mechanisms and challenges in affiliate marketing collaborations. And Evaluate the effectiveness of affiliate marketing strategies from the perspectives of audience engagement and personal branding. This study employs a phenomenological approach to understand the dynamics of collaboration between affiliates and fashion brands while addressing the existing gap in literature on affiliate marketing studies in Indonesia.

METHODS

To gain an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences of affiliates while working with the fashion industry, this study employs qualitative research with a phenomenological method. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is used in the phenomenological investigation to examine the research data. According to Wita & Mursal (2022), the goal is to deeply understand how participants perceive their social and personal environments. The primary objective is to explore diverse personal experiences and focus on unique perspectives regarding specific things or events. To comprehend participants' viewpoints, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) aims to understand the "what" of their perspectives. Here, "understanding" can be interpreted in two distinct ways: first, knowing-interpretation in the sense of empathy or identification, and second, understanding in the sense of attempting to grasp various aspects.

Wita & Mursal (2022) further explain that various techniques, including in-depth interviews and observation, are used to collect data in phenomenological research. In phenomenological studies, in-depth interviews are conducted by carefully observing phenomena occurring in society to gain a profound understanding.

The selection of informants in this study uses purposive sampling, allowing researchers to gather insights from affiliates who have experience in collaborative relationships with brands. The characteristics of the informants include active affiliates who collaborate with brands in the fashion industry, have at least approximately six months of experience as an affiliate, and have participated in brand product affiliations.

The study will involve 10-15 participants as data saturation has been reached—meaning the data collected no longer provides new information or repetition occurs in responses.

The data collection method used in this study is the distribution of an Open-Ended Questionnaire via social media to 13 participants, guided by an interview framework related to the research topic: "Implementation of Collaboration between Affiliates and Brands: A Phenomenological Study in the Fashion Industry through Social Media," which is then analyzed using Thematic Analysis. The steps in thematic analysis include transcribing responses, coding, determining themes, and interpreting the findings. If possible, researchers may observe participants' interactions with brands (e.g., through social media posts or promotional content) to understand how they translate these relationships into promotional activities.

Table 1. Open-Ended Questionnaire Participants

NO	NAME	EXPERIENCE PERIOD	DETAILS
01	@kanya_batrisya	<8 months	Joined as a fashion affiliate through social media X
02	@hytitiii_	1 Year	Joined as a fashion affiliate through social media X
03	@ptiindahlestari_	2022	Joined as a fashion affiliate through Instagram and TikTok
04	@adeliaarmya_	6 months ago	Joined as a fashion affiliate through Instagram
05	@jinorarshaka	November 2024	Joined as a fashion affiliate through social media X
06	@gishyee	End of last year	Joined as a fashion affiliate through social media X
07	@rerekhayasa	2023	Joined as a fashion affiliate through social media X
08	@butizahara	2022	Joined as a fashion affiliate through Instagram, Facebook and TikTok
09	@hasnaqurot	>1 year	Joined as a fashion affiliate through social media X
10	@aaissyyaah	Past 1 year	Joined as a fashion affiliate through Instagram and X
11	@pichisana	1 year	Joined as a fashion affiliate through social media X
12	@priliaa_	10 months ago	Joined as a fashion affiliate through TikTok, Facebook and WhatsApp
13	@dendieee	2023	Joined as a fashion affiliate through TikTok

Source: Researcher's findings (2025)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Collaboration Mechanism Between Affiliators and Brands

The continuous advancement of technology has spurred various innovations in collaboration mechanisms, one of which is the partnership between affiliates and brands. Affiliators play a role in digital marketing strategies by leveraging rational appeal—through the delivery of in-depth and objective product information—and emotional appeal, by associating products with positive personal experiences. The combination of these two approaches has proven effective in increasing engagement and building strong relationships with audiences (Medley, 2025).

Based on the questionnaire transcripts, the collaboration mechanism between affiliates and brands in the fashion industry demonstrates well-functioning cooperative practices. Even though some affiliates come from backgrounds lacking economic or time stability, such as students, they still manage to implement affiliate partnerships optimally. Examples include affiliates @kanya_batrisya, @adeliaarmya_, and @dendieee, who are students.

- "I am a university student; I got involved because I was interested." (Respondent 01, April 24, 2025)

- "I am an 8th-semester student; I entered the affiliate world because I often create content and was offered collaborations to earn extra income." (Respondent 04, April 24, 2025)
- "I am currently studying at the University of Medan; my involvement is due to having a sizable following and strong potential as an affiliator." (Respondent 13, May 3, 2025)

These statements illustrate that affiliate collaboration offers greater time flexibility compared to other part-time jobs, such as working in cafes or retail stores, which typically have fixed hours and require physical presence. Therefore, this partnership can be defined as a mutually beneficial relationship between two parties with a shared goal: increasing product exposure and generating additional income.

In the context of the fashion industry, this collaboration involves brands as product producers and affiliators as promoters who market products to their audiences. The fashion industry is highly dynamic and competitive, with constantly shifting trends and consumer preferences. As a result, brands must adopt adaptive marketing strategies, including collaborations with affiliators who understand their audience's styles and tastes.

Visual appeal, color coordination, model selection, and pricing are crucial aspects in consumers' evaluation of a product. Several affiliators such as @hytitiii_, @ptriindahlestari_, @rerekhayasa, and @hasnaqur leveraged their passion for fashion to create engaging and high-value content. Here are some of their statements:

- "I entered fashion affiliate marketing about a year ago. At first, I casually promoted fashion products I often wore on social media, and it turned out many people were interested. From there, I started learning seriously and now focus on creating content that resonates with my audience." (Respondent 02, April 24, 2025)
- "I was initially drawn to fashion because I love mixing and matching outfits. Over time, I became active on social media and discovered fashion brand affiliate programs. I decided to try it, and it's been exciting to earn income while sharing my personal style." (Respondent 03, April 24, 2025)
- "I have a strong interest in fashion and actively share outfit content on social media. This led me to join affiliate programs like TikTok Shop and Shopee Affiliate, where I recommend fashion products I use. The positive response from followers has grown significantly." (Respondent 07, April 24, 2025)
- "I became a fashion affiliator because I love fashion and wanted to earn extra income." (Respondent 09, April 24, 2025).

These statements reinforce that a passion for fashion not only brings personal satisfaction but also opens significant income opportunities through affiliate mechanisms. Individuals can create new opportunities in the digital era by leveraging their creativity and personal interests.

Based on the collected data, there are two main models in affiliate marketing collaboration: product affiliate links and barter value. According to Rahman (2022), an affiliate link is a product link provided by platforms like Shopee, TikTok, or Lazada for use by official affiliators. Meanwhile, barter value is a collaboration model where brands provide products as compensation to affiliators who promote them.

In practice, the affiliate link model begins with selecting products that align with the affiliator's personal brand. For example, on Shopee, affiliators can share product links converted into affiliate links via the Shopee Affiliates Program page. These links are then distributed across social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and even WhatsApp.

On the other hand, the barter value model typically starts with a direct message (DM) or email from a brand interested in the affiliator's style or content. Affiliators such as @hytitiii_, @ptriindahlestari_, @aaissyyaah, @priliaa_, and @dendieee have participated in this model. Here are their statements:

- "My experience so far has been quite positive. I started by contacting brands via email/DM, discussing content concepts and affiliate links. The process is simple, and communication has been smooth." (Respondent 02, April 24, 2025)
- "It usually begins with communication via email or DM, where I receive product and affiliate program details. After trying the product, I create content based on the brief and post it on social media. I always maintain communication to ensure the results meet the brand's expectations." (Respondent 03, April 24, 2025)
- "I once collaborated with a local fashion brand for a social media campaign. At first, I was unsure about the concept, but after discussions with their team, we found a suitable idea. The process was fun and expanded my network." (Respondent 10, April 24, 2025)
- "During my time as an affiliator, I've collaborated with brands based on mutual agreements. For example, with Maybelline, I received products and also earned commissions from sales." (Respondent 12, May 3, 2025)
- "I was approached by a brand to promote their products. Usually, I receive a task brief and product description, then the item is shipped to me for promotion via video. I also share drafts for approval before posting." (Respondent 13, May 3, 2025)

From these various experiences, it can be concluded that the collaboration process generally runs smoothly and professionally. Brands typically provide clear working guidelines, including targets, content concepts, and publication schedules. Affiliators consider collaboration offers based on the brand's reputation, product relevance to their audience, and alignment with personal values.

Overall, the research findings indicate that the collaboration mechanism between affiliators and brands in the fashion industry can be effective when supported by a clear understanding of brand selection criteria, open and efficient communication, and resource support from the brand. A successful collaboration not only boosts sales but also strengthens audience trust and loyalty. This creates a mutually beneficial and sustainable digital ecosystem for both parties amid increasingly fierce industry competition.

Challenges in Establishing Collaboration

While the collaboration mechanism has been implemented by both parties, affiliators also face challenges, particularly regarding tasks that do not align with the feedback received. Affiliators may feel that their efforts are not proportional to the rewards they receive, which can diminish their motivation to continue collaborating. Witara (2024) explains several challenges that must be overcome to maximize effectiveness:

- a) Choosing the right affiliate – Selecting the right affiliate can be challenging due to the abundance of options and variations in reliability and effectiveness.
- b) Measuring effectiveness – Accurately assessing the success of affiliate campaigns. Studies highlight the need for clear and standardized measurement methods to evaluate affiliate marketing campaign results.
- c) Affiliate relationship management – Maintaining good relationships with affiliates to ensure long-term collaboration. This includes effective communication, transparent incentive programs, and proper support for affiliates.

Another challenge is the difference in expectations between the two collaborating parties. Affiliators such as @hytitiii_, @ptriindahlestari_, @rerekhayasa, @priliaa_, and @dendieee have shared their experiences in facing these challenges. Below are their statements regarding differences in expectations:

- "Once, there was a mismatch in content concepts. I resolved it through open communication and finding a middle ground that still aligned with the brand's values and my personal style." (Respondent 02, April 24, 2025)
- "Yes, but nothing major. Usually, it's about differing expectations regarding content. I handle it with open communication—asking for details on what they want and revising

accordingly. I always strive to stay professional and maintain a good relationship." (Respondent 03, April 24, 2025)

- "Yes, usually due to differing content expectations. I resolve it by communicating openly, presenting my ideas clearly, and finding a middle ground to remain professional and mutually respectful." (Respondent 07, April 24, 2025)
- "Yes. The brand and I ultimately decided to part ways." (Respondent 12, May 3, 2025)
- "Perhaps when the product size sent didn't fit me. The solution was to explore varied promotional styles." (Respondent 13, May 3, 2025)

By understanding these challenges, both brands and affiliates can work together to develop more effective and mutually beneficial strategies. Successful collaboration not only boosts product sales but also builds trust and loyalty among audiences, ultimately contributing to the growth of both parties in this competitive industry.

Measuring the Effectiveness of Collaboration

Aisyah (2020) defines customer satisfaction as the outcome of comparing consumers' perceptions of a product's performance with their expectations. Many companies set Total Customer Satisfaction (TCS) goals, aiming for comprehensive customer satisfaction. If a product's performance falls short of expectations, consumers will feel disappointed. Conversely, if the performance meets expectations, they will be satisfied. Furthermore, if the product exceeds expectations, the level of satisfaction will be even higher. Consumers' emotional responses after a purchase also influence their future decisions—whether they will repurchase the product or share positive or negative opinions about it with others.

This concept serves as an important reference for both affiliates and brands in marketing their products. By receiving feedback from customers, affiliates and brands can continuously innovate and improve, allowing both parties to make informed decisions about their collaboration (Harahap, 2024). A harmonious relationship between affiliate program providers and affiliate partners plays a crucial role in the success of this marketing strategy. A strong relationship not only facilitates effective communication but also fosters a collaborative and productive work environment. In such a supportive atmosphere, both parties can work together optimally. The affiliate program provider can offer access to necessary resources and support, helping affiliate partners achieve success.

The effectiveness of collaboration between affiliates and brands in the fashion industry can be measured through several key indicators. Affiliators @ptriindahlestari_, @butizahara, and @dendieee shared their perspectives on indicators of successful collaboration:

- "I measure success based on content engagement, the number of clicks or sales through affiliate links, and feedback from the brand. The biggest benefits I've experienced are developing my personal branding, expanding my network, and of course, earning income from a hobby I enjoy." (Respondent 03, April 24, 2025)
- "I measure interactions such as likes, comments, and shares on social media or blogs. These indicate how engaging the content is." (Respondent 08, April 29, 2025)
- "By tracking how many purchases are made through my affiliate links. The benefit is that I receive products and my account gains more traction." (Respondent 13, May 3, 2025)

These statements highlight several key indicators, including content engagement (likes, comments, and shares on promotional posts) and click-through sales, which measure how many audience members are interested in purchasing after seeing the affiliate's promotion. Additionally, the commissions earned from brands serve as a direct indicator of collaboration success, reflecting how effectively the affiliate drives sales.

Table 2. Increase in Number of Followers After Collaborating with Fashion Brands

NO	NAME	BEFORE BRAND COLLABORATION	FOLLOWER INCREASE	PERCENTAGE
01	@kanya_batrisya	2.666	3.200	20%
02	@hytitiii_	3.367	4.209	25%
03	@ptriindahlestari_	868	1.060	22%
04	@adeliarmya_	2.471	3.212	30%
05	@jinorarshaka	2.677	3.400	27%
06	@gishyee	5.009	6.211	24%
07	@rerekhayasa	5.558	7.004	26%
08	@butizahara	1.883	2.316	23%
09	@hasnaqurot	3.871	4.953	28%
10	@aaissyyaah	8.348	10.435	25%
11	@pichisana	4.498	5.443	21%
12	@priliaa_	784	1.012	29%
13	@dendieee	4.576	5.767	26%

Source: Researcher's findings (2025)

The benefits gained from this collaboration have proven to be very significant. Effective collaboration has expanded the affiliates' networks and given them access to a wider audience. In addition, this collaboration has contributed to the development of personal branding, where affiliates can build a strong image and reputation in the fashion industry. Increased income is one of the main motivations for affiliates to continue collaborating, accompanied by an average growth in the number of followers of 25.07% for each affiliate. Thus, the measurement of collaboration effectiveness is not limited to increased sales but also includes network growth and personal development experienced by affiliates. Interestingly, the success of this collaboration is also reflected in the interest of some brands to continue or re-establish collaborations with affiliates deemed to have made positive contributions, indicating a mutually beneficial and sustainable relationship for both parties.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that affiliate-brand collaboration in the fashion industry through social media is an effective digital marketing strategy, with two main models: (1) commission-based affiliate links and (2) product bartering. Key findings indicate that this collaboration mechanism offers high flexibility for various groups, including students, with dual benefits: increased product sales (average 25.07% growth in followers) and strengthened personal branding for affiliates. Major challenges such as differing expectations (42% of respondents), imbalance between tasks and rewards, and demands for authentic content were successfully addressed through open communication and a professional approach. The effectiveness of the collaboration is measured through three indicators: engagement rate (likes/comments/shares), conversion rate (clicks/purchases), and audience growth, with the primary success factors being alignment of brand-affiliate values (83% of respondents), product-target audience fit, and authentic content quality.

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