

University of Twente

Bachelor Thesis

**The Pros and Cons of Affiliate Marketing for Media Content
Creators**

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Executive Summary

This bachelor thesis deals with the question: What are the advantages and disadvantages of affiliate marketing for content creators using affiliate marketing platforms, and how can they actively navigate its potential pitfalls and maximize its benefits? The question was explored through an extensive literature review, resulting in the identification of five advantages and five disadvantages.

The advantages for content creators utilizing affiliate marketing platforms encompass supplementary income, low barriers to entry, minimal investments, provided resources, and flexible work arrangements.

Conversely, the disadvantages include dependence on affiliate marketing platforms, the perceived trustworthiness of content creators, personal responsibility, competitive challenges, and an unpredictable income.

To optimize the use of affiliate marketing platforms for content creators, strategies to maximize benefits and minimize pitfalls were presented. Building consumer trust emerged as the foremost priority to cultivate a dependable follower base, which in turn maximizes income and enhances income predictability.

Choosing the right affiliate marketing platform is also crucial. It needs to offer a free membership and a suitable affiliate network. Additionally, selecting a platform that provides users with valuable tips for achieving their goals and maximizing their membership benefits can be advantageous.

Various strategies of maximizing benefits and minimizing pitfalls were identified, but follower engagement and the right selection of a suitable affiliate marketing platform turned out to be most important in order to overcome most disadvantages and maximize their profits. However, it is important to note that certain pitfalls could not be entirely eliminated or resolved.

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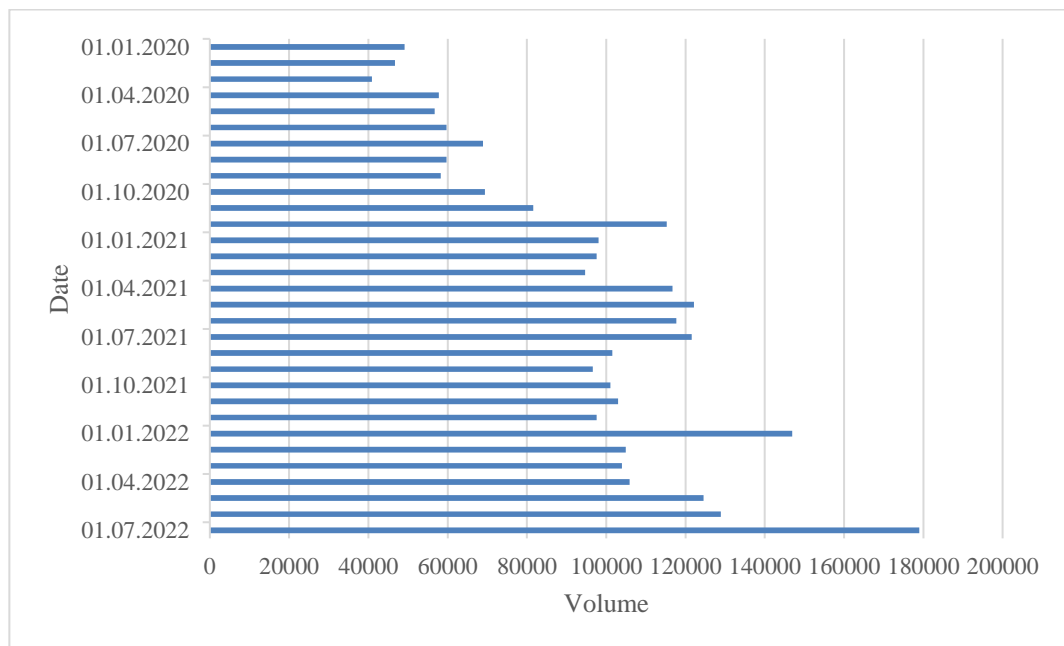
1 Introduction

Over the past few years, the importance of online networking platforms has experienced remarkable growth. In 2022, the global user base of these platforms surpassed four and a half billion individuals, and it is estimated to exceed five and a half billion users by 2027. (*Number of Worldwide Social Network Users 2027 / Statista, 2023*).

That is also reflected by retailers. With an affiliate marketing industry growth of 47% between 2018 and 2021, affiliate marketing has become the most important way of advertising for many merchants (Ross, 2022).

But not only merchants are interested in the business. In Figure 1 it can be observed, that there is an ongoing trend of the search term “affiliate marketing”. From January 2020 to July 2022 the number of searches increased by more than 250%.

Figure 1: Search volume for “affiliate marketing” from January 2020 to July 2022



Source: Author’s own illustration adapted from *Affiliate Marketing Benchmark Report 2023 (2023)*

The majority of studies focuses on giving guidance to merchants regarding the integration of affiliate marketing into their businesses or addressing various strategies for achieving successful business growth through affiliate marketing (Bormann, 2019; Fiore et al., 2001).

Other researchers aim to address the question of effectively managing affiliates to mitigate fraud risks and ensure equitable compensation practices (Mangiò & Di Domenico, 2022; Wiatr et al., 2020).

The presence of a research gap pertaining to the affiliates' perspective in the context of affiliate marketing was identified. A comprehensive review of the available literature revealed a dearth of information regarding the potential opportunities for content creators in utilizing affiliate marketing.

The main aim of this investigation is to fill this informational void and conduct a thorough analysis of affiliate marketing from the standpoint of content creators. It specifically focuses on understanding the factors that drive content creators to venture into affiliate marketing and explores the effective utilization of affiliate marketing platforms to generate revenue.

Research question:

What are the advantages and disadvantages of affiliate marketing for content creators using affiliate marketing platforms, and how can they actively navigate its potential pitfalls and maximize its benefits?

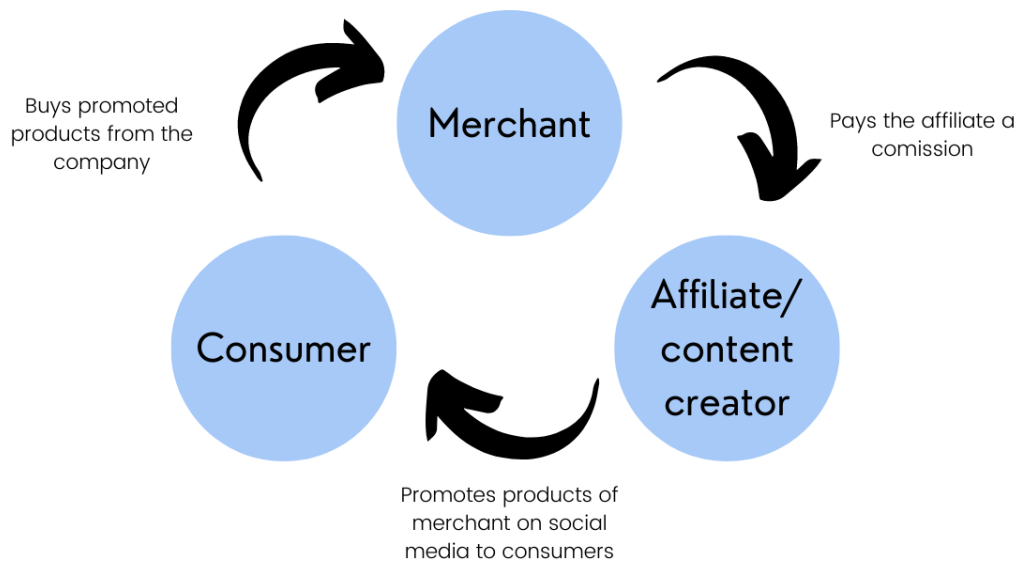
2 Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Affiliate Marketing

According to the Cambridge Dictionary from 2023 the definition for affiliate marketing is: "[Affiliate marketing is, author's note] an agreement in which a person or organization puts a link to a company's product on their website, and the company pays them [...] every time they sell a product through this link" (*Affiliate Marketing*, 2023).

For affiliate marketing three different actors are needed; a merchant, an affiliate and the consumers (Frankenfield, 2022). Figure 2 shows the relationship between the three actors.

Figure 2: The three actors of affiliate marketing



Source: Author's own illustration.

The merchant is the retailer that wants to increase sales by paying an Affiliate to promote their company or specific products online with affiliate links (Petersen, 2016). Those links can track the activity by consumers and the purchases made through that link. Depending on the company the affiliate will be paid a specific commission for each purchase made (Frankenfield, 2022).

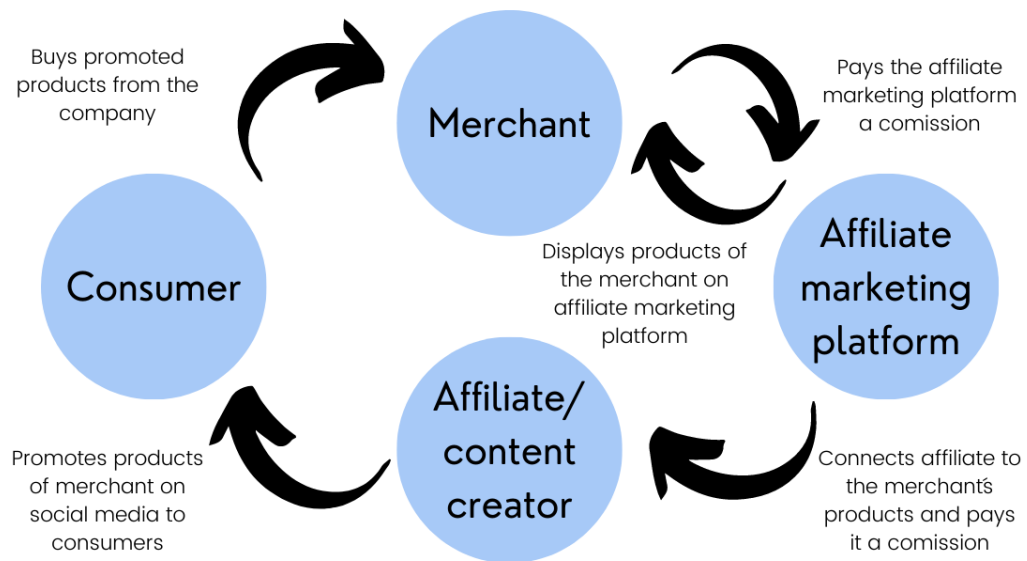
The affiliate is the content creator that displays the affiliate links on social media platforms. By doing so, the merchant and the affiliate create a win-win situation, because both actors generate income (Frankenfield, 2022).

The last actor are the consumers. As the affiliates post the links on social media, the consumers are social media users that will see the links on different online platforms. If they click on that link and purchase anything from the merchant, the affiliate will be compensated (Petersen, 2016).

2.2 Affiliate Marketing Platforms

Affiliate Marketing Platforms connect the affiliate with either one or different merchants (Zimmermann, 2011). In Figure 3 the role of affiliate marketing platforms is shown. When making use of an affiliate marketing platform, the platform will be added to the three actors of affiliate marketing (see Figure 2).

Figure 3: The role of affiliate marketing platforms



Source: Author's own illustration.

The circle of events will stay the same. Just the affiliate marketing platform will be added in between and the compensation will be different (see Figure 3)

The merchant wants to sell his products again to consumers. Zimmermann (2011) explains, that therefore affiliate marketing platforms display the products of the merchants on their website. The affiliate connected to the platform can see those products and can use given resources from the platform to create advertisements for the merchant's products. If then, the consumer buys something via that link, the affiliate marketing platform receives a specific percentage of the revenue made by the merchant.

The affiliate receives the compensation from the affiliate marketing platform (Petersen, 2016). There are different ways how a content creator can be compensated. Those will be further discussed in Chapter 3.1.1.

2.3 Content Creators

For the context of this research, it is important to understand what content creators are, as it is an important part of the research question.

Initially, content creation started on platforms like YouTube, but it has now evolved into a well-established ecosystem with a wide range of competitive platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter. These platforms offer a combination of online video sharing and social networking capabilities, which

allows content creators to connect with their audience and build a follower base (Cunningham & Craig, 2019).

Content is defined as published and outstanding through its creativity, but not by its professionalism (Brake, 2014). That means that content creators are not professionals like photographers or designers.

Content creators provide their expertise and knowledge in different areas while also offering personal opinions on services or products (Zhuang et al., 2023). That leads to a benefit for the content creator's followers, either in the way of knowledge or entertainment.

3 Literature review

3.1 Advantages

3.1.1 Additional income

Affiliate marketing offers different advantages for content creators using affiliate marketing platforms. One of them is the fact that content creators can earn an additional income (Koskie et al., 2023).

Content creators utilize social media platforms to share links that direct users to the merchant's website. As a result, when the followers of these content creators click on the provided links and proceed to make purchases, the content creators passively earn money (Koskie et al., 2023).

This type of compensation is also known as referral fees (Libai et al., 2003). There are different types of referral fees. One of the compensation models used is pay-per-conversion, which entails the affiliate receiving payment for each purchase made through their referral (Libai et al., 2003). In simpler terms, the affiliate is rewarded when a potential lead successfully becomes a customer for the merchant.

Pay-per-lead is an alternate model of referral fees, wherein the affiliate receives compensation for each consumer they successfully guide or direct into visiting the platform of the merchant (Libai et al., 2003). Unlike the pay-per-conversion model, this type of referral fee does not require the consumer to make a purchase through the affiliate links for the affiliate to receive compensation.

In addition to established compensation models, there are emerging or relatively new forms of compensation in the affiliate marketing landscape. One such model

is pay-per-call, which involves rewarding affiliates specifically for generating "hot leads" (Prussakov, 2011). In this arrangement, only referrals that result in direct phone calls to the merchant or prospects requesting a call back are eligible for compensation. However, it should be noted that the adoption of this method remains relatively limited at present, and it is not commonly encountered in the affiliate marketing industry (Prussakov, 2011).

There are different forms of receiving remuneration at affiliate marketing platforms. Dependent on the platform used, one of those will be utilized. Therefore, affiliates can decide which compensation method they would prefer by choosing the affiliate marketing platform.

Moreover, Duffy (2005) explains that there are no limits in compensation. A survey from 2021, including affiliates worldwide, shows that approximately 16% of the affiliates generated an income of up to 50,000 dollars, while 4% of the affiliates achieved a revenue exceeding 150,000\$ (Statista, 2023).

3.1.2 Low entry barriers

Content creators can sign up at affiliate marketing platforms to receive remuneration in exchange for affiliate links (Rolim et al., 2020). Platforms like stylink (Stylink Vergütungs-Plattform für Influencer, 2023a) or Metapic (*Influencer Marketing - Enabling Brands and Content Creators*, n.d.) are such platforms.

To exemplify the low entry barriers prevalent in the industry, the case of Stylink is considered. This platform offers an opportunity for content creators with a relatively small follower base to participate (Stylink Vergütungs-Plattform für Influencer, 2023b). Referred to as "micro-influencers" (Ehlers, 2021), these creators can connect with well-known brands across different countries through the platform.

By utilizing a simple tool, content creators can effortlessly convert product links from partnering brands into affiliate links (Stylink Vergütungs-Plattform für Influencer, 2023b). These affiliate links can then be shared on popular platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, or personal blogs.

The platform enables companies to track clicks and sales generated through these links, allowing for accurate compensation to the influencers based on their performance (Stylink Vergütungs-Plattform für Influencer, 2023b).

This user-friendly and accessible process exemplifies the ease with which content creators can engage in affiliate marketing and monetize their online presence.

In conclusion, the opportunity for influencers to join a platform that facilitates connections between micro-influencers and established brands is a significant advantage in the industry (Stylink Vergütungs-Plattform für Influencer, 2023b).

Content creators can swiftly sign up and commence their journey without encountering any entry barriers such as follower thresholds, entry costs, or specific qualifications (Stylink Vergütungs-Plattform für Influencer, 2023b)

3.1.3 Low investment costs

Another advantage not only for merchants but also for content creators are the low investment costs. As already explained (see Chapter 4.1.1.1) content creators can earn revenue per lead or per sale made.

Lammenett (2021) provides insights into the affiliate marketing landscape, highlighting that specific platforms may require affiliates to pay significant set-up fees, which can reach substantial four-digit sums. These upfront costs serve as an investment for affiliates looking to establish their presence within the platform, emphasizing the financial commitment involved in joining and participating in such programs.

Further, Duffy (2005) states that certain affiliate marketing platforms may impose fees on content creators, if no purchases are made through their affiliate links.

However, there are also platforms that operate without any set-up fees or charges for non-purchase instances. An exemplar of such a platform is Metapic (Terms of Use - Metapic, n.d.). This affiliate marketing platform enables content creators to create an account without any charges and offers compensation based on the number of clicks generated through their links, effectively operating on a pay-per-lead fee model (Libai et al., 2003; Terms of Use - Metapic, n.d.). Notably, influencers using this platform are not required to pay any additional fees to the

company in the absence of purchases made through their links. This results in non-compensation (Terms of Use - Metapic, n.d.).

All in all, that means that there can be different kinds of fees for the affiliates of different amounts. But content creators utilizing affiliate marketing platforms can influence the issue of having different fees, by choosing a platform that does not include payments of the users.

3.1.4 Provided resources

By the use of affiliate marketing websites, content creators utilize provided technology that ensures to provide access to links, banners, etc. as well as tracking the clicks and purchases (Duffy, 2005).

Duffy (2005) illustrates that affiliate platforms serve as intermediaries, facilitating the payment process between merchants and affiliates. These platforms establish a crucial link between the merchant and the affiliate, ensuring smooth transactions. Additionally, they play a pivotal role in calculating and determining the individual commission for each content creator, ensuring fair compensation based on their contribution (Duffy, 2005).

Lammenett (2021) highlights two additional benefits of affiliate marketing platforms: legal protection and access to a vast network of partners. By leveraging these platforms, affiliates can benefit from pre-established legal contracts that are readily available for use, ensuring a level of legal protection for their activities.

Furthermore, these platforms offer a multitude of partners who function as merchants. Affiliates can establish connections with these partners through the affiliate marketing platforms, enabling them to promote the partners' products and expand their network (Lammenett, 2021).

3.1.5 Flexibility

When affiliates register on an affiliate marketing platform (Rolim et al., 2020), they gain a significant advantage in terms of posting flexibility. Utilizing popular social media platforms such as Instagram or TikTok, content creators can exercise their complete creative freedom when crafting their posts (Are & Briggs, 2023). This flexibility empowers affiliates to showcase their unique style, engage their audience

effectively, and tailor their content to align with their personal brand and the preferences of their followers.

The only restrictions for affiliates are the products and brands they advertise. The merchants need to be in a cooperative partnership with the affiliate marketing platforms, in order for content creators to share and track links (Lammenett, 2021).

Upon registering on an affiliate marketing platform, affiliates consent to the terms and conditions set forth by the platform, but they are not bound by any specific posting frequency or format requirements (Stylink Vergütungs-Plattform für Influencer, 2023b). This gives affiliates the freedom to determine their own posting schedule and choose the content format that best suits their style, preferences, and the expectations of their audience.

When using affiliate marketing as an additional income, the flexibility is an advantage. Affiliates can post their content in their free time and can connect it with other jobs or obligations (Are & Briggs, 2023).

3.2 Disadvantages

3.2.1 Reliance on affiliate marketing platforms

Content creators can sign up on affiliate marketing platforms, where they get access to specific resources and will be compensated for sharing affiliate links (Rolim et al., 2020; Lammenett, 2021).

Amarasekara and Mathrani (2015) outline a drawback associated with affiliate marketing platforms. While affiliates can access information about their leads per click on these platforms, they often lack visibility into the actual purchases resulting from those clicks. This situation requires affiliates to place a significant amount of trust in the platforms since the tracking codes for sales are typically not visible to them (Amarasekara & Mathrani, 2015). That means, that the Affiliate Marketing Platforms could easily falsify the revenue made by the affiliate (Snyder & Kanich, 2016).

The revenue model of affiliate marketing is particularly susceptible to risks of manipulation, as highlighted by Snyder and Kanich (2016). Attackers have the capability to intentionally reduce the revenue earned by affiliates. The revenue model operates based on systems that evaluate the performance of affiliate links

generated by various content creators, subsequently translating this performance into compensations for the affiliates (Frankenfield, 2022). If the compensation is manipulated, it can disrupt the entire system, leaving content creators unable to rely on a consistent performance-based revenue (Snyder & Kanich, 2016).

3.2.2 Perceived trustworthiness

Another notable disadvantage lies in the perceived trustworthiness of affiliates in online advertisements as observed by Berger (2016). The landscape encompasses different types of advertisements, with one category comprising affiliates who strive to transform their followers into leads for the merchant. On the other hand, there are content creators who independently sell products directly to consumers.

These contrasting approaches raise varying levels of trust among consumers when it comes to evaluating the authenticity and credibility of the affiliate's promotions (Berger, 2016).

Berger (2016) discovered that advertisements from affiliates are perceived as more trustworthy by consumers compared to content-driven commerce. However, there are still certain factors that can diminish the trustworthiness of affiliate advertisements.

While it might appear that affiliates have the choice to conceal their advertisements and evade disclosure, it is important to note that in numerous countries, specific laws mandate content creators to disclose any form of compensation received for endorsing products or services on their social media platforms (Karagür et al., 2021). One example is Germany, where such legislation exists to ensure transparency and protect consumer rights (Frank, 2019).

For different platforms there are different options given to disclose advertisements. One is the option on Instagram to mark your post with the caption “paid partnership” (Campbell & Grimm, 2019).

Additionally, the Federal Trade Commission specifies that certain specialized products or services may be subject to additional regulations. In accordance with the law, advertisements must maintain truthfulness, refrain from unfair and misleading practices, and be supported by substantiating proof. (*Advertising and Marketing Basics*, 2023).

If content creators do not disclose their advertisements, they may harm their trustworthiness towards their follower base (Mangiò & Di Domenico, 2022).

Campbell and Grimm (2019) provide a summary of criteria, that indicate an incorrect disclosure of advertisements. The advertisements will be seen as disclosed incorrectly, if all of the three criteria are met:

1. The advertisement misleads the consumer by a wrong format of the advertisement, hidden information or false statements.
2. The advertisement misleads a significant number of consumers.
3. The deception influences consumers to make altered decisions regarding the promoted product, have a more favorable response or do respond in general more to the product.

To summarize, affiliates can undermine their trustworthiness by attempting to conceal their advertisements or by providing inaccurate disclosures. Maintaining transparency and adhering to proper disclosure practices are crucial for affiliates to establish and preserve trust with their audience.

3.2.3 Responsibility

The next drawback deals with the affiliates having their own responsibility of creating content. Content creators registered on affiliate marketing platforms have the advantage of being able to decide by themselves when they would like to share their content online (Are & Briggs, 2023).

The notable disadvantage is that the engagement with affiliate links and their associated content is contingent upon the frequency at which the content is shared (Tafesse & Dayan, 2023). This implies that content creators bear the responsibility of devising a well-defined strategy for the timing and distribution of their content to effectively share content to consumer preferences and maximize revenue potential (Tafesse & Dayan, 2023).

The perpetual presence of consumers (constant availability of online networking platforms) as well as the continuous stream of posts shared by other creators underscores the importance of maintaining a consistent frequency in content sharing. Posting at a low frequency can make it challenging to establish and nurture a strong bond alongside consumers (Tafesse & Wien, 2018; Li et al., 2021).

On the other hand, sharing content at an excessively high frequency can have a bad impact on consumer engagement. When inundated with an overwhelming barrage of posts or links, consumers may become bored and feel inundated, leaving them with insufficient time to digest and derive value from the content (Schmidt & Eisend, 2015).

Moreover, the consumers may perceive overshared content more as an advertisement, than as a recommendation or way of the affiliate to engage with his community (Barta et al., 2023; Cheung et al., 2022).

Affiliates bear a responsibility in finding right balance for content sharing. It is crucial for them to find a frequency that is neither too infrequent, which hinders the ability to establish a strong relationship with consumers, nor excessively frequent, which may hinder proper engagement with their community (Tafesse & Dayan, 2023).

3.2.4 Competition

Affiliate marketing is experiencing consistent growth as an industry, attracting an increasing number of content creators who choose to participate. In the past two years alone, the global creator community has witnessed an impressive influx of over 165 million new content creators (Creators in the Creator Economy: A Global Study, 2022).

As a result, the affiliate marketing business has become highly competitive. However, not all content creators serve as direct competitors to one another. The level of competition largely depends on the primary domain of interest of each content creator (Tafesse & Wood, 2022). Given the diverse range of interests, content creators specialize in various domains such as fashion, beauty, health, politics, and more (Audrezet et al., 2020).

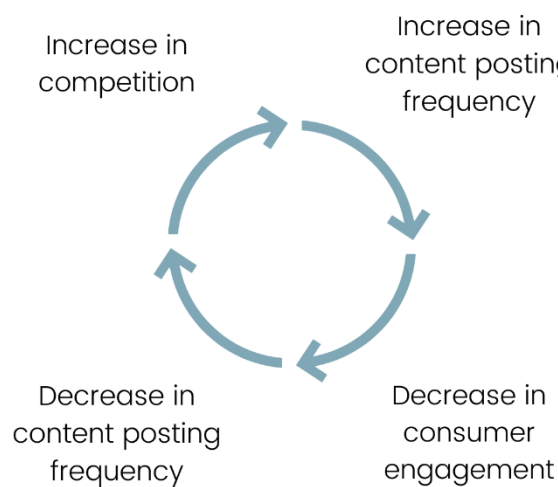
While creating content in a specific primary domain of interest, content creators share a similar audience with similar interests, resulting in becoming direct competitors with others in that primary domain of interest (Tafesse & Wood, 2022).

The growth of the global content creator community has led to the establishment of an attention economy (Smith & Fischer, 2021). Each consumer has a finite amount of attention to allocate, prompting content creators to engage in competition for that limited resource. Consequently, individual content creators face the challenge of

not being able to address every direct competitor in their domain, primarily due to limitations in time and resources (Tafesse & Wood, 2022).

Further, when content creators attempt to address this competition by increasing their content output, consumers may once again become bored or perceive the content as overly commercial (Tafesse & Dayan, 2023). The frequency of content and the presence of competitors operate in a circular fashion, as depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Cycle of finding the right content posting frequency



Source: Author's own illustration.

This dynamic poses a significant challenge for content creators to strike a balance, as the competitive landscape makes it increasingly difficult to find the optimal point of engagement (Tafesse & Wood, 2022).

Achieving the right equilibrium between content frequency and competition becomes a complex task for content creators as they navigate the ever-evolving demands of the audience while distinguishing themselves within the competitive content ecosystem.

3.2.5 Unreliable Income

Content creators need to have their own strategy in their way of sharing their content to build a relationship with their consumers. Without a follower base, content creators can hardly make any revenue.

The income of online content creators exhibits significant volatility (Barbos & Kaisen, 2022). It hinges on the prevailing trends and the preferences of the target audience. When a video or post garners extensive sharing and elicits a positive response, such as going viral, the content creator experiences a surge in earnings for a specific period. However, if subsequent content fails to generate a similar response, the income decreases accordingly (Barbos & Kaisen, 2022).

The income of affiliates is intricately tied to the size and engagement of their follower base, which, in turn, relies heavily on their social media marketing strategy (Barbos & Kaisen, 2022). This income is susceptible to fluctuations driven by evolving trends and consumer preferences.

Consequently, it cannot be viewed as a consistently reliable supplementary income source that yields predictable monthly returns. Instead, the earnings of affiliates are subject to the dynamic nature of the digital landscape, necessitating adaptability, continuous audience engagement, and strategic decision-making to maximize income potential (Barbos & Kaisen, 2022).

3.3 Navigation of pitfalls

Reliance on affiliate marketing platforms

As Zimmermann (2011) suggests, content creators have the autonomy to choose between building their own affiliate network or joining an existing one. However, if they opt to register on an affiliate marketing platform, they must heavily depend on these platforms to leverage the available resources, as highlighted by Amarasekara and Mathrani (2015).

Given that this thesis revolves around the utilization of affiliate marketing platforms, it is inevitable for content creators in this context to rely on them, because these platforms have the ability to track real-time purchases generated through affiliate links and can exert control over the compensation received by affiliates (Zimmermann, 2011).

Nevertheless, there is a strategy to mitigate the potential risks associated with manipulation by affiliate marketing platforms. Lammenett (2021) suggests that affiliates should conduct thorough research before selecting a specific platform. This can be accomplished by comparing various affiliate networks and identifying the one that aligns most effectively with their partner shops. It is worth noting that

certain affiliate networks specialize in specific categories of shops, such as electronics (Lammenett, 2021). By carefully evaluating and choosing the most suitable affiliate network, affiliates can minimize the likelihood of being manipulated.

The utilization of an affiliate marketing platform inherently carries the risk of manipulation. Consequently, it becomes crucial to carefully choose the platform to mitigate this risk. While the reliance on affiliate marketing platforms cannot be completely minimized, opting for a trustworthy platform that aligns well with the affiliate's needs can significantly reduce the likelihood of manipulation.

Perceived trustworthiness

If affiliates do not disclose their advertisements, they violate the law and may harm the trustworthiness towards their follower base (Mangiò & Di Domenico, 2022). That automatically leads to less monetized content.

Therefore, it is important that content creators make their advertisements visible to consumers. The three criteria of Campbell and Grimm (2019) to detect wrong advertising disclosure can also act as a guide for affiliates.

To ensure consumer trust, advertisements must refrain from employing misleading tactics such as incorrect formats, hidden information, or false statements. It is essential for advertisements to be clear and transparent, leaving no room for potential misunderstandings or misleading interpretations. Furthermore, disclosures should be presented in a manner that is honest and non-deceptive, ensuring that consumers make informed decisions or responses to the product without any misleading influence (Campbell & Grimm, 2019).

Affiliates need to avoid wrong advertising disclosure, because they are risking to defraud their consumers and therefore lose important customers for their affiliate links.

Dekavalla (2020) highlights an additional approach to gaining trust from consumers. It is emphasized that trustworthiness is positively influenced when affiliates engage in content sharing that involves verbal communication rather than solely relying on images (Tolson, 2010). By allowing followers to hear the affiliate's voice, a sense of trust is cultivated as real individuals are more trusted than mere images, contributing to a greater sense of authenticity.

To further enhance perceived authenticity, affiliates should embrace organic and unpolished content (Hayes et al., 2007). Little mistakes create a connection with the audience, making the affiliate relatable and conveying the sense that they are one among them.

Lastly, for affiliates to increase trust among their followers, it is important to transparently communicate the reasons behind specific links or recommendations (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). By providing consumers with additional background information, the content becomes more personalized, establishing a sense of authenticity and strengthening trust.

In summary, the key aspect for affiliates to maintain trust with their followers is to prioritize transparency and authenticity. Concealing the fact that certain content will generate revenue through clicks or purchases undermines trustworthiness and can potentially breach legal obligations. Additionally, affiliates should avoid speaking in front of the camera, embracing the possibility of making mistakes, as this is what the audience perceives as genuine and ultimately encourages engagement with the content:

Responsibility

Affiliates must strike a balance in their content sharing frequency to avoid both conveying an overly commercial image and causing consumer boredom (Tafesse & Dayan, 2023). It is important to find a middle ground where the frequency of posts is neither excessive nor insufficient, ensuring that consumers perceive the content as valuable and engaging without feeling overwhelmed or disinterested.

As proposed by Anand and Sternthal (1990) and supported by Pechmann and Stewart (2012), consumers tend to respond in two distinct ways to frequent advertising postings. The initial response is characterized by a positive disposition and favorable perception, particularly towards low to moderate levels of advertising (Pechmann & Stewart, 2012). By gradually introducing advertisements, consumers have the opportunity to be educated about the content and derive enjoyment from it (Schmidt & Eisend, 2015).

The second response, in contrast, tends to be negative in terms of consumer disposition and perception, particularly when exposed to moderate to high levels of advertising (Pechmann & Stewart, 2012). In such cases, consumers may experience

boredom due to limited opportunities for entertainment or educational value (M. L. Campbell & Keller, 2003).

Given the two different responses, a U-shaped relationship is created between high exposure of advertising and consumer engagement. A balanced level of promotional visibility would be the optimal approach to increase consumer engagement (Schmidt & Eisend, 2015).

The frequency at which affiliates should post content depends on the extent of their follower base as well as count of individuals that consider the affiliate as part of their audience (Tafesse & Dayan, 2023).

According to Tafesse and Dayan (2023), content creators with a substantial number of followers should avoid overwhelming their audience with excessive content, as it can lead to decreased follower engagement. Instead, affiliates are advised to share content less frequently, focusing on delivering unique and valuable content.

Similarly, Tafesse and Dayan (2023) discovered that content creators who follow a large number of individuals should consider reducing the frequency of their own content postings. This finding aligns with research by Valsesia et al. (2020), which indicates that following a multitude of people can potentially diminish the credibility and perceived value of the content creator's opinions among followers. By sharing content less frequently, content creators can cultivate a more valuable and influential perception of their opinions.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that affiliates should determine their own posting frequency to maximize their revenue potential. Affiliates need to experiment with both positive and negative responses to advertising exposure from their own follower base to identify the optimal balance. It is important to note that the optimal content sharing frequency may vary across different platforms.

However, Tafesse and Dayan (2023) have identified a benchmark of 44 to 45 posts per month as an effective strategy for increasing follower engagement. By conducting testing and leveraging this benchmark, affiliates can strive to optimize their posting frequency and enhance their overall success.

Competition

The presence of intense competition in the creator community is evident, given that the global creator community has witnessed over 165 million new content creators joining in just the past two years (Creators in the Creator Economy: A Global Study, 2022). This influx of creators highlights the substantial level of competition within the field.

To address this challenge, affiliates need to establish a primary domain of interest to gain insights into their competition (Tafesse & Wood, 2022). These domains can encompass various segments such as fashion, health, politics, and more. To identify creators operating within the same primary domain of interest, affiliates can visit their main pages on social media platforms, where this information is often provided (Valesia et al., 2020). This approach offers a comprehensive overview of direct competitors within the chosen domain.

In the context of the attention economy, content creators actively compete for consumer attention (Smith & Fischer, 2021). To outshine their competitors, many creator resort to increasing their posting volume, attempting to respond to every rival in the field. However, this approach often leads to a decrease in content quality due to the limitations of time and resources available to the creators (Tafesse & Wood, 2022).

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that prioritizing high-quality content is more crucial than posting frequently. Tafesse and Dayan (2023) emphasized that content creators should concentrate on producing creative and original content while maintaining a moderate posting frequency.

Additionally, affiliates should strive to identify a niche or primary domain of interest that has fewer competitors. This strategic choice helps to mitigate competition and makes the distribution and monetization of content less challenging (Tafesse & Dayan, 2023). By focusing on a niche with lower competition, affiliates can enhance their chances of success in the market.

Unreliable income

Affiliate income is characterized by its volatility and is heavily reliant on consumer trends and engagement (Barbos & Kaisen, 2022). The concept of an optimal posting frequency to enhance follower engagement was already explored. Additionally, it

was discussed the importance of reducing competition by identifying a niche on social media that boasts a substantial number of followers but has fewer content creators vying for attention. These strategies can help affiliates stabilize their income and achieve greater success in the competitive landscape of affiliate marketing.

Both of these implementations play a crucial role in boosting follower engagement. When follower engagement remains consistent and stable, it has a positive impact on the engagement levels for affiliate links. This stability is of utmost importance for affiliates as it directly influences their ability to generate revenue (Frankenfield, 2022).

Affiliates have the ability to exert influence over their income by maintaining a balanced level of follower engagement for their links. This can be achieved through a moderate posting frequency and by reducing competition in their niche (Tafesse & Dayan, 2023). By finding the right balance and optimizing these factors, affiliates can enhance their chances of maintaining steady follower engagement, which in turn contributes to a more stable and potentially higher income.

Ensuring a more reliable income can also be achieved by posting content that aligns with the latest trends, increasing the likelihood of widespread sharing (Barbos & Kaisen, 2022). One effective method for identifying these trends is by utilizing Google Trends, a tool that aids in forecasting emerging trends and provides insights into the most recent searches across different regions (Google Trends, n.d.; Springer et al., 2023). By leveraging Google Trends, affiliates can stay informed about the latest trends and incorporate them into their content strategy, thereby increasing the potential for wider reach and engagement.

In summary, when addressing the challenge of an unreliable income, it is important to recognize that income stability will always be subject to consumer engagement fluctuations (Barbos & Kaisen, 2022). However, by staying updated on trends, implementing an effective posting frequency strategy, and identifying the right niche, affiliates can enhance their chances of achieving a more reliable income stream. These proactive measures help to mitigate income volatility and create a foundation for greater financial stability in the affiliate marketing landscape.

3.4 Maximization of benefits

Additional income

Maintaining a stable income in affiliate marketing involves employing various strategies. Furthermore, there are multiple approaches to maximize income generation through affiliate marketing platforms, with many of them focusing on optimizing the advertisements themselves.

Brown (2009) explains, that the most important thing while advertising a product is, that content creators critically review the advertisement by themselves first. This implies that the affiliates ought to inquire within themselves, pondering whether they would personally purchase the product and the reasons behind their decision, whether for or against. (Brown, 2009). This provides the content creator with a glimpse into the consumer's perspective and offers initial feedback on the advertisement. If any aspects stand out as noticeable, they can be adjusted to make them more appealing to the consumer.

Further, Prussakov (2011) provides information on what to avoid while advertising products to consumers. The primary objective is to steer clear of promoting products that are already sold out. Consumers will not respond positively, and there is no possibility of generating revenue from products that cannot be purchased. In the event of a product being sold out, it is advisable to either link a similar alternative or conceal the advertisement altogether.

Also, no fraudulent shops or transactions should be linked, in order to not break trust with consumers (Prussakov, 2011).

Other ways to maximize income are to offer consumers a solution to a problem they may have and to really know the products Brown (2009). In that way recommendations become very personal and make the consumer think he needs that solution as well.

The last recommendation is to engage with merchants and inform themselves about their general terms and conditions Brown (2009). This ensures knowing the merchant's tactics in order to respond to consumers' interests. Moreover, it avoids a breach of rules and an execution from the merchant's network.

To summarize, one of the key aspects for affiliates is to have a deep understanding of the products and merchants they promote, and to critically assess the advertisements themselves. By considering whether they find the advertisements appealing from their own perspective, content creators can effectively put themselves in the shoes of their consumers and gain valuable insight into whether their followers would be inclined to purchase the product or not. This self-reflection helps affiliates make informed decisions and tailor their promotional efforts to better resonate with their audience.

Low entry barriers

The affordability of affiliate marketing is closely tied to its low entry barriers, as it entails relatively low investment costs. As the low investment costs are part of the low entry barriers, it is essential to consider them in conjunction with one another. By capitalizing on the low entry barriers and cost-effective nature of affiliate marketing, affiliates can optimize their efforts and maximize the potential benefits available to them.

As Duffy (2005) and Lammenett (2021) explained, there are affiliate marketing platforms that use referral- or setup-fees. But there are also platforms that do not include those fees like stylink (Stylink Vergütungs-Plattform für Influencer, 2023a) or Metapic (*Influencer Marketing - Enabling Brands and Content Creators*, n.d.).

From a logical standpoint, content creators have the freedom to select an affiliate marketing platform that aligns with their needs. In doing so, it is advisable to opt for a platform that offers a free and user-friendly setup process, thus capitalizing on the advantages presented by the low entry barriers. By choosing a platform that is cost-effective and straightforward to get started with, content creators can position themselves to effectively profit from the low entry barriers provided by the affiliate marketing industry.

Provided resources

In order to optimize the utilization of available resources within affiliate marketing platforms, the selection of the platform itself becomes crucial once again. Various types of affiliate marketing platforms exist, each offering different networks and features (Lammenett, 2021). These can vary in terms of categories of shops they support and size of their affiliate networks. By carefully considering these factors,

content creators can choose a platform that aligns with their specific needs and preferences, allowing them to effectively leverage the diverse opportunities presented by different affiliate marketing networks.

Furthermore, some platforms provide valuable insights and guidance through blog articles or social media posts, aiming to enhance the effectiveness and success of affiliate programs (Natarina & Bangun, 2019). These resources offer tips, tricks, and best practices that can be instrumental in maximizing the outcomes achieved through the respective affiliate program. By leveraging such platforms and their informative content, content creators can gain valuable knowledge and strategies to optimize their performance and achieve greater success in their affiliate marketing endeavors.

According to Duffy (2005), the primary role of affiliate marketing platforms is to offer affiliates specialized technology that encompasses various aspects such as tracking and compensation. As a result, affiliates can rely on these platforms to handle these technical functionalities, thereby alleviating the need for them to independently address such concerns.

Concluding, when selecting an affiliate marketing platform, affiliates should consider the number and niche of connected merchants, as well as the level of knowledge and support provided by the platform.

Flexibility

Another advantage highlighted is the flexibility afforded to affiliates in their work. Engaging in affiliate marketing allows content creators to have flexible schedules, giving them the freedom to choose when they want to share their content. Additionally, they enjoy creative freedom in designing their content (Are & Briggs, 2023; Rolim et al., 2020).

As mentioned earlier regarding the drawback of the affiliate's responsibility for their own content sharing strategy (refer to Chapter 3.3), finding the appropriate frequency to share content becomes crucial for affiliates. Sharing content too infrequently makes it challenging to build follower engagement, while sharing too frequently may lead to consumer boredom or create the perception of a commercial rather than a genuine recommendation. Striking the right balance is essential for affiliates to optimize their content sharing strategy.

That means that affiliates can work very flexibly, but still need to find a fitting schedule for themselves to share their content, in order to ensure a revenue.

Affiliates enjoy a high degree of flexibility in their work, but it is crucial for them to establish a suitable content sharing schedule to ensure a consistent revenue stream.

4 Discussion

The main aim of this research is to analyze affiliate marketing from the perspective of content creators, with the intention of to address the existing research gap.

Through an extensive review of literature, this study identified various benefits associated with utilizing affiliate marketing platforms, including additional income, low entry barriers, low investment costs, provided resources and the available flexibility of working times and content.

In contrast, the disadvantages of reliance on the affiliate marketing platforms, perceived trustworthiness, the content creator's own responsibility, competition and an unreliable income were uncovered.

The research reveals a balanced distribution of five advantages and five disadvantages. No clear dominance of either the advantages or the disadvantages could be identified.

However, this study highlights strategies to mitigate potential pitfalls and maximize the benefits of affiliate marketing. It emphasizes the significance of two key implementations for affiliates to generate revenue: selecting the appropriate affiliate marketing platform and enhancing follower engagement by establishing trust with consumers and cultivating a loyal follower base.

To identify the appropriate affiliate marketing platform, it is crucial to assess the resources offered by different platforms. The platform should have a suitable network of merchants operating in the relevant primary domain of interest, along with valuable knowledge resources. Additionally, it is advisable to select an affiliate marketing platform that imposes minimal or no expenses on the affiliate.

To enhance follower engagement, maximize revenue, and mitigate the uncertainty of income, affiliates must focus on establishing consumer trust. This involves ensuring proper disclosure and thorough review of advertisements to avoid

endorsing fraudulent merchants or websites. Additionally, affiliates should actively engage with their followers by presenting themselves authentically through on-camera interactions and sharing personal opinions. Lastly, content creators should determine an optimal posting schedule to maximize engagement.

Through the implementation of effective strategies, affiliates can minimize the drawbacks and maximize the benefits associated with affiliate marketing. By doing so, the advantages can outweigh the pitfalls. However, it is important to note that complete avoidance of reliance on affiliate marketing platforms and the inherent unpredictability of income may not be feasible.

This study is limited to a literature-based approach. In the future, it is recommended to incorporate content creators' personal opinions to determine the appropriate weighting and significance of the various topics discussed, thereby enhancing the research findings. Additionally, conducting empirical studies to test different strategies for mitigating pitfalls and validating the identified approaches with real-world data would provide further support and insights.

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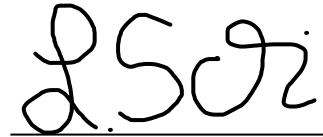
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I hereby confirm, that I have prepared my Bachelor Thesis with the topic

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Creators**

independently and without outside help, and I have specially marked all passages taken verbatim from other authors, as well as the explanations of my work that closely follow the thought processes of other authors, and I have cited the sources.

Münster, 25.06.23

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized letters that appear to be 'L. S. O. J.', written above a horizontal line.

(Unterschrift)