

Controversy In Digital Marketing Strategy: Analyzing Ethical Dilemmas In Influencer Support In The Fashion Industry

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Published: May, 2025

ABSTRAK

This research aims to analyze the controversy in digital marketing strategies through the ethical dilemmas faced by influencers in supporting fashion industry products. The unit of analysis in this study is a digital marketing campaign involving influencers on social media. The research uses a qualitative design with a case study approach to explore in depth the phenomenon being studied. Data sources are obtained from key informants such as influencers, brand managers, and consumers, who are purposively selected based on their involvement in the campaign. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, digital observations, and analysis of campaign documents. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify patterns of meaning related to ethical dilemmas and communication strategies. The findings show that the conflict between commercial interests and personal integrity is at the centre of controversy in influencer-based digital marketing. This research contributes to a critical understanding of ethical digital marketing practices and builds a conceptual foothold for the development of marketing communication regulations in the digital age.

Keywords: controversy, digital marketing strategy, influencer ethical dilemma

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PENDAHULUAN

Controversy in digital marketing strategies has become an interesting social fact as a material object in qualitative studies, especially related to ethical dilemmas faced by influencers in the fashion industry. This is important to analyze because the use of influencers as a promotional tool often blurs the line between personal opinion and commercial interests, thus raising ethical questions in marketing practices. Influencers utilize their perceived credibility to influence consumer perspectives, frequently resulting in followers interpreting sponsored material as authentic endorsements (Hudders & Lou, 2022). The efficacy of influencer marketing is ascribed to the para-social relationships cultivated between influencers and their followers, which may augment brand perceptions (Hudders & Lou, 2022). Many influencers promote fashion products without transparency regarding sponsorship relationships, which can mislead their followers and undermine public trust. Therefore, this phenomenon reflects a complex social reality, where digital marketing strategies are not only about sales effectiveness but also about moral integrity and social responsibility in digital communication.

Digital marketing strategies involving influencers have been widely discussed in the literature as an effective approach to shaping consumer perception and increasing brand engagement in the fashion industry. However, most studies tend to emphasize aspects of communication effectiveness and sales increase, while controversial aspects related to influencer ethical dilemmas, such as endorsement transparency and manipulation of public perception, are still underexplored in depth, especially in the context of local culture and digital social dynamics. The lack of uniform ethical standards significantly contributes to the prevalence of unethical practices. The Czech Republic has instituted a "Fair Influencer" Code of Ethics, which has received favourable acclaim from a diverse array of stakeholders (Ortová et al., 2023). The implementation of more stringent guidelines and the establishment of educational initiatives for influencers are crucial to fostering ethical advertising practices (Azharía et al., 2024). Ethical considerations must be contextualized to align with local cultural norms, given that the dynamics of influencer marketing can differ markedly across various regions (Mureşan, 2023). Some studies have revealed that influencers often do not disclose sponsorship relationships, but there have been no studies examining the social impact of this practice on public trust and brand credibility from a qualitative perspective. Therefore, this study fills the *knowledge gap* by offering a deeper understanding of the controversy in digital marketing strategies through the analysis of influencer ethical dilemmas as a complex and contextual social phenomenon.

This paper aims to fill the gap in the study on controversy in digital marketing strategies, especially related to the ethical dilemma of influencers in the fashion industry. Although there have been many studies that discuss the effectiveness of digital campaigns through influencers, there are still shortcomings in critically and contextually examining ethical aspects, especially in understanding how the practice is perceived by the public and its implications for public trust. Ethical influencers are mandated to exhibit transparency regarding sponsored content, a fundamental aspect that is essential for the sustenance of audience trust (Rosário & Boechat, 2024). Nevertheless, numerous influencers encounter challenges in adhering to these guidelines, resulting in ethical violations that may undermine consumer confidence (Azharía et al., 2024). Influencers who place a premium on ethical methodologies possess the potential to catalyze beneficial societal transformations, thereby fostering more constructive online communities (Rosário & Boechat, 2024). The "Fair Influencer" Code of Ethics in the Czech Republic serves as a notable example of a successful endeavour aimed at elevating ethical benchmarks within the domain of influencer marketing (Ortová et al., 2023). There are still few studies that explicitly trace how influencers decide to express support for a product, as well as the extent to which transparency and honesty in such promotions are a concern in digital communication strategies. Therefore, this study specifically wants to find out how this ethical dilemma is interpreted by actors and audiences in

digital marketing practices, in order to enrich critical discourse on ethical dynamics in the contemporary digital ecosystem.

Digital marketing strategies involving influencers in the fashion industry contain controversies rooted in ethical dilemmas, particularly related to transparency, honesty, and social responsibility. In the context of social media-based marketing, influencers are not only an extension of the brand but also cultural actor that influences audience perceptions and decisions, so unethical practices can undermine the integrity of marketing communications. Influencers are regarded as credible authorities within specific domains, frequently originating as typical consumers who disseminate their experiences and recommendations (Kiatkawsin & Lee, 2022). Their elevated visibility and perceived authenticity cultivate robust connections with their audiences, thereby amplifying their capacity to persuade (Semwal et al., 2024). Influencers assume a pivotal role in moulding consumer perceptions regarding brands, particularly within specialized markets such as Halal products (Rossanty et al., 2023). Their endorsements can precipitate augmented brand awareness and favourable alterations in consumer purchasing behaviours, particularly among younger cohorts (Semwal et al., 2024). Covert promotion without disclosure of the sponsorship relationship can create public distrust and worsen the brand's image in the long run. Therefore, the initial hypothesis in this paper is that the ethical dilemma in influencer endorsement is not solely the result of individual negligence, but is also the result of systemic pressures in the digital marketing ecosystem that demand high performance and instant visibility, thus triggering promotional practices that are vulnerable to bias and manipulation.

Controversy is at the core of social dynamics that reflect differences of views, values, or interests in responding to a phenomenon, including in digital marketing strategies. In the context of influencer marketing, controversy arises when there is an imbalance between commercial goals and ethical norms, thus triggering a public debate about the legitimacy and morality of the promotional strategy carried out. Numerous influencers frequently fail to adequately disclose sponsored content, choosing rather to employ understated references to brands (Fernández-Gómez & Quintas-Fraufe, 2025). This deficiency in transparency has the potential to undermine the trust that exists between influencers and their audience, resulting in ethical quandaries within marketing methodologies (Azharía et al., 2024). When an influencer promotes a product without disclosing the existence of a sponsorship relationship, the public can feel cheated, which then sparks a conversation on social media about integrity and honesty in digital marketing. Therefore, in this study, controversy is conceptualized as a form of social tension that arises due to the clash between business strategy and public ethical expectations in the practice of digital marketing communication through influencers.

In the context of digital marketing strategies, controversy can be categorized into several forms, namely normative, procedural, and representational controversies, each of which reflects a

type of ethical tension in marketing communication through influencers. Controversy in digital marketing strategies has become an interesting social fact as a material object in qualitative studies, especially related to ethical dilemmas faced by influencers in the fashion industry. **This is important to analyze because the use of influencers as a promotional tool often blurs the line between personal opinion and commercial interests, thus raising ethical questions in marketing practices.** Influencers utilize their perceived credibility to influence consumer perspectives, frequently resulting in followers interpreting sponsored material as authentic endorsements (Hudders & Lou, 2022). The efficacy of influencer marketing is ascribed to the parasocial relationships cultivated between influencers and their followers, which may augment brand perceptions (Hudders & Lou, 2022). Many influencers promote fashion products without transparency regarding sponsorship relationships, which can mislead their followers and undermine public trust. Therefore, this phenomenon reflects a complex social reality, where digital marketing strategies are not only about sales effectiveness but also about moral integrity and social responsibility in digital communication.

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In the context of digital marketing strategies, controversy can be categorized into several forms, namely normative, procedural, and representational controversies, each of which reflects a type of ethical tension in marketing communication through influencers. This typology is important to distinguish the sources and impacts of controversy, whether it concerns violations of ethical norms, unclear sponsorship communication procedures, or manipulation of product image representations in the digital space. The ethical ramifications of digital marketing communications are profound, particularly in scenarios such as the Ukraine conflict, wherein transparency and trust hold critical importance (Petrychak & Demianenko, 2024). The ambiguity inherent in sponsor communications may result in misconceptions and a lack of trust among consumers, thereby necessitating the establishment of explicit ethical standards (Petrychak & Demianenko, 2024). Normative controversy arises when influencers promote products that are value-contradicted in their image or lifestyle, while procedural controversy arises when there is no adequate disclosure of the sponsorship relationship. Therefore, this study uses a categorical approach to the concept of controversy to identify distinctive and recurring forms of ethical dilemmas in digital marketing practices, as well as to explore how these controversies are understood by the public and fashion industry players.

Digital marketing strategies can be conceptualized as a set of planned approaches that leverage digital platforms to reach, influence, and retain consumers in an all-connected communications ecosystem. In the digital era, this strategy not only includes product promotion through online channels but also involves creating an emotional relationship between the brand and the audience through digital actors such as influencers, which makes communication more personal and persuasive. Effective influencer marketing initiatives leverage psychological constructs such as social validation and authoritative presence, which resonate profoundly with consumers and foster brand allegiance (Pellegrino, 2024). Digital marketing methodologies facilitate precise audience segmentation through comprehensive data analytics, empowering brands

to customize their communications following distinct audience inclinations and behaviours (Habib et al., 2023). This methodical targeting approach enhances the overall efficacy of campaigns and elevates conversion rates, thereby reinforcing the emotional connections between brands and consumers (Habib et al., 2023). In the fashion industry, brands often use influencers to introduce the latest collections through soft-selling through social media, utilizing the influencer's lifestyle as a marketing medium. Therefore, digital marketing strategies in this study are understood not only as internet-based sales techniques, but as social and cultural practices that shape the meaning, values, and public perception of a product, and therefore have the potential to cause controversy when it clashes with communication ethical norms.

Digital marketing strategies in the context of the fashion industry can be categorized into several main forms, namely content marketing, social media marketing, influencer marketing, and data-driven marketing. This categorization is important to identify how each approach has different characteristics, objectives, and potential ethical risks in its communication practices. Ethical dilemmas in risk communication emerge from the possible repercussions on individuals and communities, thereby requiring meticulous formulation of messages (Fritz, 2023). For example, influencer marketing that involves the endorsement of social media celebrities often raises ethical dilemmas, especially when transparency regarding sponsorship is not clearly stated, thus triggering public controversy. Therefore, in this study, digital marketing strategies are not understood as a homogeneous unit, but rather as a spectrum of approaches that can cause ethical tension and negative perceptions from the audience, depending on their form and implementation in the field.

The ethical dilemma of influencers can be conceptualized as a problematic situation faced by influential individuals in digital media when they have to choose between commercial interests with the principles of honesty, transparency, and social responsibility in conveying marketing messages. In digital marketing strategies, influencers are often at the crossroads between the demands of the brands that fund them and the moral expectations of audiences that rely on the authenticity and integrity of the content. Authenticity is a critical component for influencers, enabling them to cultivate trust with their audience, especially within Generation Z, who exhibit a pronounced scepticism towards conventional advertising methods (Afef, 2024). Brands derive significant advantages from sustained collaborations with influencers, as such alliances cultivate authentic connections that resonate profoundly with consumers (Afef, 2024; Feng, 2024). Influencers frequently confront ethical dilemmas, including the compulsion to endorse products without authentic experience or to refrain from expressing negative evaluations (Grgurić Čop et al., 2024). When an influencer promotes a product they have never used in real-time or hides a sponsorship relationship, then public trust can be compromised and cause controversy. Therefore, in this study, the influencer ethical dilemma is understood as a value conflict inherent in digital

endorsement practices, which not only reflects individual actions but also power structures and social norms in a competitive and fast-paced fashion marketing ecosystem.

Influencer ethical dilemmas can be categorized into several forms, including transparency dilemmas, authenticity dilemmas, conflict of interest dilemmas, and social responsibility dilemmas. This categorization is important to systematically unravel how forms of ethical dilemmas arise in digital marketing practices, especially when influencers act as an extension of brands that target audiences emotionally and personally. More rigorous regulatory frameworks and pedagogical initiatives are imperative to guarantee adherence to ethical advertising standards by influencers (Azharia et al., 2024). The transparency dilemma arises when influencers do not disclose their sponsorship relationship with the brand; the dilemma of authenticity when they promote products that go against their lifestyle; Meanwhile, the dilemma of conflict of interest arises when they represent the products of two competing brands. Therefore, understanding this typology of ethical dilemmas allows this study to delve deeper into how the controversy of digital marketing strategies is shaped and perceived, as well as how communication ethics are at stake in an increasingly complex and commercial digital space.. The ethical ramifications of digital marketing communications are profound, particularly in scenarios such as the Ukraine conflict, wherein transparency and trust hold critical importance (Petrychak & Demianenko, 2024). The ambiguity inherent in sponsor communications may result in misconceptions and a lack of trust among consumers, thereby necessitating the establishment of explicit ethical standards (Petrychak & Demianenko, 2024). Normative controversy arises when influencers promote products that are value-contradicted in their image or lifestyle, while procedural controversy arises when there is no adequate disclosure of the sponsorship relationship. Therefore, this study uses a categorical approach to the concept of controversy to identify distinctive and recurring forms of ethical dilemmas in digital marketing practices, as well as to explore how these controversies are understood by the public and fashion industry players.

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METODE PENELITIAN

The material object in this study is a digital marketing campaign carried out by influencers in the fashion industry that caused public controversy on social media. This unit of analysis was chosen because the campaigns concretely represent how digital marketing strategies are carried out through influencers, while also showing the ethical dilemmas that arise due to the mismatch between commercial interests and the moral expectations of the audience. The phenomenon of influencer marketing has surfaced as an essential approach for brands, utilizing social media platforms to effectively engage specific demographic segments (Núñez, 2023). The emergence of diverse influencer categories, such as nano and micro-influencers, enables brands to establish genuine connections with specialized audiences, thereby augmenting both engagement and credibility (Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023). One example is the case of influencer support for fashion brands that are accused of being unenvironmentally friendly or socially unjust, thus triggering a wide debate in the digital space. This unit of analysis was selected through a purposive sampling process by considering aspects of virality, intensity of controversy, and influencer involvement with a large number of followers and significant influence in shaping public opinion. Thus, this research is focused on representative cases that can reveal in depth the complexity of the relationship between digital marketing strategy, communication ethics, and public perception in the contemporary fashion industry landscape.

This study uses a qualitative study design with a case study approach, which is focused on the controversy in digital marketing strategies through influencer endorsement in the fashion industry. This design was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in depth the social

dynamics, meanings, and ethical dilemmas hidden behind marketing practices that appear on the surface. The framework enables the analysis of multi-actor institutions and the complexities of fragmented market dynamics, which are crucial for comprehending the formation of marketing practices (Mason, 2024). Utilizing a diverse array of methodologies, encompassing ethnographic research and large-scale data analysis, significantly improves the capacity to reveal latent dynamics within marketing practices (Mason, 2024). through a case study of digital marketing campaigns from several fashion brands that had received public criticism due to the use of influencers that were considered unethical, researchers can trace the communication process, narrative strategies, and audience reactions as a whole. The work process in this design involves collecting data through in-depth interviews with industry players (influencers, brand managers, consumers), social media observations, and analysis of digital documents such as campaign uploads, netizens' comments, and online media reports. Thus, the design of this qualitative case study allows for a more contextual and reflective understanding of the complexity of ethical issues in today's digital marketing landscape.

The data sources in this study consist of three main categories, namely informants (influencers and brand managers), respondents (audiences or digital consumers), and digital texts (campaign uploads on social media and public comments). These three sources were chosen to gain a holistic perspective on the controversy, digital marketing strategy, and accompanying ethical dilemmas, while allowing for data triangulation to improve the validity of the findings. Organizations such as Tata Steel and Patagonia serve as paradigms of ethical marketing methodologies, illustrating the significance of transparent branding and adherence to regulatory frameworks (Nur Hidayat Saputra et al., 2024). Ethical quandaries frequently emerge within the realm of advertising, as corporations encounter difficulties in harmonizing their practices with consumer anticipations and moral principles (Nur Hidayat Saputra et al., 2024). For example, influencers who have been involved in controversial campaigns will provide insights related to strategic decisions and professional ethics, while audiences voice their perceptions and moral responses to the content. The selection process of informants and respondents was carried out purposively based on their direct involvement in the campaign that was the object of the study, as well as based on the popularity and level of content interaction on digital platforms. The digital text studied was selected from viral campaigns on social media in the last two years. With this strategy, the research is expected to be able to capture the complex and contextual dynamics of controversial digital marketing practices in the fashion industry.

This study uses data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews, digital observations, and document analysis. This technique was chosen because it follows the objectives of qualitative research that focuses on understanding subjective meaning, the dynamics of digital interactions, as well as the ethical narratives that form controversy in digital marketing strategies.

Qualitative research elucidates the intricate perceptions of stakeholders within the realm of digital marketing, illustrating how ethical quandaries impact decision-making frameworks (Ekawahyu Kasih et al., 2023). Comprehensive interviews and focus groups yield valuable insights into the personal experiences of marketers and consumers, underscoring the significance of ethical narratives in the formulation of marketing strategies (Ekawahyu Kasih et al., 2023). For example, semi-structured interviews were conducted with influencers and brand managers to explore perceptions and ethical considerations in choosing promotional strategies, while digital observations were conducted on social media to capture the public's response to campaign content. On the other hand, document analysis is applied to campaign uploads, user comments, and media reports to reconstruct the series of events and map the ethical dimensions that emerge. These techniques are carried out in stages, starting from the identification of controversial cases, and the selection of informants, to the collection and interpretation of data relevant to the focus of the research. Thus, this combination of techniques allows for rich and contextual data mining in examining influencer ethical dilemmas in the fashion industry's digital marketing landscape.

In this qualitative research, the data analysis technique used is **thematic analysis**. This technique was chosen because it can identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning (themes) that emerge from the narratives of informants and digital materials, especially in the context of controversy, digital marketing strategies, and influencer ethical dilemmas. Influencers exert considerable influence over consumer purchasing decisions, functioning as reliable sources of information within digital marketing frameworks (Yuliati & Huda, 2022). The authenticity and credibility of influencers are vital for cultivating consumer trust and engagement, especially within the highly competitive online fashion sector (Andika et al., 2024). The analysis process is done by transcribing in-depth interviews, examining social media content and campaign documents, and then openly coding the data before grouping it into themes such as "conflicts of interest," "self-image representation," and "audience responses." In this way, researchers can uncover in depth how ethical values are negotiated in digital marketing practices and how the power dynamics between brands and influencers fuel controversy in the public sphere.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

Table 1: Controversy in Digital Marketing

No	Controversy	Description
1	Ad Disclosure Transparency	Influencers don't always disclose that they get paid for promotions.

No	Controversy	Description
2	The Influence of Fake Followers	The use of fake followers by influencers to increase engagement rates.
3	Influence on Young Audiences	The great influence of influencers on the decisions of young immature consumers.
4	Unrealistic Beauty-Based Marketing	Marketing that displays unrealistic beauty standards.
5	Focus on Excessive Consumerism	The fashion industry leads to an excessive culture of consumptive consumption.
6	Public Trust in Influencers	Controversy related to audience trust in influencers who are seen only to pursue profits.

In this study, controversy in digital marketing in the fashion industry is the main issue that arises from interviews and data collected in Table 1. This is due to various ethical issues related to digital marketing strategies, particularly in the use of influencers as promotional tools. Some of the controversies found include ambiguities in ad disclosure, where influencers don't always disclose that they are paid to promote products, as well as the use of fake followers to increase engagement that undermines the credibility of marketing campaigns. In addition, unrealistic beauty standards are often promoted, which affects the audience's perception of beauty and lifestyle. Therefore, digital marketing strategies in the fashion industry need to be faced with greater awareness of the ethical dilemmas faced by influencers and the negative influences that can arise from non-transparent marketing practices.

In this study, the data shows three important things related to controversy in digital marketing in the fashion industry. First, many influencers don't explicitly disclose that they are paid to promote products, which creates ambiguity for the audience regarding the motivations behind their recommendations. Second, the use of fake followers by influencers to increase engagement is a serious problem that damages the credibility of marketing campaigns. Third, unrealistic beauty-based marketing is often promoted, affecting the beauty standards that society accepts and creating pressure on young audiences. Thus, this data highlights the importance of addressing ethical dilemmas in digital marketing strategies, so that marketing is more transparent, honest, and responsible to the audience.

The controversy in digital marketing in the fashion industry is closely related to some ethical dilemmas that arise from influencer usage practices. This is because many influencers don't disclose that they get paid to promote products, which creates ambiguity regarding the authenticity of their recommendations. For example, influencer followers may feel that they are being truthfully informed, when it is just a form of marketing that is not transparent. Additionally, the use of fake followers by influencers to increase engagement rates adds to the complexity of this controversy, as it undermines the audience's trust in the integrity of digital marketing campaigns. Finally, the

unrealistic beauty standards often promoted by influencers exacerbate the negative influence on young audiences who tend to judge themselves based on images that do not correspond to reality. From this data, it can be concluded that ethical dilemmas in digital marketing are directly related to how influencers shape audience perceptions and attitudes and that transparency and responsibility in marketing strategies are essential to maintaining consumer trust.

Table 2: Digital Marketing Strategy

No	Digital Marketing Strategy		Description
1	Use of Social Media for Advertising		The use of social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to promote products.
2	Marketing Through Influencers		Brands use influencers as a key part of their marketing campaigns.
3	Use of User Data for Ad Targeting		Brands leverage user data to target ads more precisely.
4	Paid Content Marketing		Use of paid advertising and sponsored content to increase reach.
5	Video-Based Marketing		Fashion brands use short videos to reach a wider audience.
6	Follower Content	Engagement with Influencers	engage their audience through collaboration and interactive content.

In this study, data obtained through interviews and Table 2 reveal some of the controversies associated with digital marketing strategies in the fashion industry. One of the important things that was found was the lack of transparency in advertising disclosure by influencers. Influencers often don't inform audiences that they're getting paid to promote products, which makes it difficult for audiences to distinguish between personal recommendations and ads. Some respondents in interviews mentioned that they felt deceived because they didn't know that the influencers they followed were benefiting financially from the promotion. From this data, it can be concluded that this ambiguity in advertising disclosure creates controversy in digital marketing strategies and has the potential to undermine the audience's trust in the fashion industry as a whole.

In this study, the data collected shows three important things regarding digital marketing strategies in the fashion industry. First, the increasing reliance on influencers as a marketing tool, adds to the challenge of maintaining credibility and transparency. This reliance often raises ethical issues related to ad disclosure, where influencers don't always disclose that they are paid to promote products, which can mislead audiences. Some influencers in the fashion industry don't always inform their followers that the promotions they are doing are commercial, which can reduce consumer trust. Second, the use of marketing techniques that involve unrealistic beauty standards, can affect the audience's perception of beauty values. Third, the use of audience personal data for highly specific ad targeting increases the effectiveness of campaigns but also poses a privacy dilemma. Overall, digital marketing strategies in the fashion industry need to be more careful in

managing ethical issues to maintain audience trust and maintain the sustainability of fair and transparent marketing practices.

In this study, the data shows that the ethical dilemma of influencers is a very important part of the digital marketing strategy in the fashion industry. One of the main issues that arises is the lack of transparency regarding the financial relationship between influencers and the brands they promote. When influencers don't disclose that they get paid to promote products, audiences can't tell the difference between personal opinions and paid marketing. In interviews, some respondents revealed that they felt trapped in dishonest promotions, especially when influencers didn't mention that they received compensation from the promoted brand. Thus, this ethical dilemma leads to consumer distrust of the marketing message being conveyed, which has an impact on the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in the fashion industry. Honesty and transparency are indispensable for digital marketing to be well-received by the audience.

Table 3: Influencer Ethics Dilemma

No	Influencer Ethical Dilemma	Description
1	Honesty in Ad Disclosure	Influencers don't always state explicitly that they get paid for promotions.
2	Influence on the Audience's Lifestyle	Influencers often promote an unrealistic lifestyle, impacting the audience.
3	Maintaining Integrity Amid Commercialization	Influencers' challenges in maintaining integrity when accepting ad offers.
4	Product Promotions That Don't Fit the Audience	Influencers promote products that don't resonate with their audience.
5	Manipulation of Consumer Opinion	Some influencers can manipulate audience opinion for personal gain.
6	Ethics in the Use of Environmentally Unfriendly Products	Influencers who promote products that are not environmentally friendly can pose ethical dilemmas.

In this study, data obtained through interviews and Table 3 show several important aspects related to the ethical dilemma of influencers in digital marketing strategies. One of the controversies that has arisen is the ambiguity in the disclosure of advertisements by influencers, which creates distrust among the audience. Many influencers don't disclose that they get paid or get rewards from the brands they promote, which can mislead their followers. Some respondents in interviews revealed that they felt influencers often exploited the trust of audiences for their gain, without providing transparent information about their affiliation with brands. This data indicates that ethical dilemmas in digital marketing can damage influencer credibility, which in turn can affect the overall effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in the fashion industry.

In this study, the data obtained shows three important things related to digital marketing strategies that involve the ethical dilemma of influencers. First, the high reliance on influencers as

a promotional tool creates ethical issues related to transparency in brand affiliate disclosure. Influencers often don't make it clear that they're getting paid to promote products, which can mislead audiences and lower their level of trust in digital advertising. For example, some influencers in the fashion industry assume that their audience already knows that they are being compensated, even though many followers are unaware of the financial relationship. This suggests that the ethical dilemmas associated with non-transparency in digital marketing can undermine influencer credibility and disrupt the effectiveness of marketing strategies in the fashion industry.

In this study, the influencer ethics dilemma emerged as a central issue that showed the close relationship between interview data and digital marketing context data. This ethical dilemma has to do with how influencers leverage their platforms to endorse products with or without disclosing their affiliation with the brand. Many influencers do not provide clear information about their financial relationship with brands, which leads to audience distrust of the authenticity of their recommendations. For example, some influencers in the fashion industry feel that disclosing financial relationships will damage their credibility, but interview data shows that audiences value that openness more. This relationship between data and context suggests that ethical dilemmas in digital marketing strategies can affect audience trust, which in turn can affect the overall effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns in the fashion industry.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that controversy in digital marketing strategies, especially related to influencer ethical dilemmas, affects the effectiveness of marketing campaigns in the fashion industry. This study aims to analyze how ethical dilemmas arise in influencer endorsements of fashion products and how they affect audiences as well as overall digital marketing strategies. The most glaring ethical dilemma is the lack of clarity in disclosing the financial relationship between influencers and the brands they support. Audiences, especially those belonging to younger demographics or economically disadvantaged populations, might be misinformed by influencers endorsing products without sufficient transparency, thereby jeopardizing their financial welfare (Vivek, 2024). Influencers can embrace ethical frameworks that emphasize sustainability and the welfare of consumers, thereby cultivating a culture of more responsible consumption (Islami et al., 2024). Some influencers confess that they are worried that openness about financial relationships will damage their relationship with their audience, even though data shows that audiences value that openness more. Overall, the study concludes that digital marketing strategies that ignore these ethical dilemmas can undermine audience trust and, ultimately, reduce the effectiveness of marketing campaigns in the fashion industry.

The results of this study indicate that controversy in digital marketing strategies, particularly those involving influencer ethical dilemmas, has a significant impact on the way audiences receive

and respond to marketing campaigns in the fashion industry. Ethical dilemmas, such as ambiguity about the financial relationship between influencers and the brands they promote, create tension between commercial goals and audience trust. This happens because many audiences are increasingly aware of the importance of transparency in marketing, especially in the context of product endorsements. Transparency initiatives have the potential to significantly bolster brand trust, as consumers exhibit a greater propensity to interact with brands that candidly articulate their sponsorships (Montecchi et al., 2024). Explicit disclosures enhance consumer perceptions regarding influencer transparency, which subsequently influences consumer assessments of product effectiveness and their intentions to purchase (Woodroof et al., 2020). Influencers who are open about their affiliation with brands tend to get a positive response from the audience, as the audience feels valued and has more confidence in their recommendations. Thus, the study reveals that digital marketing strategies that do not consider ethical aspects can damage the relationship between brands and consumers, which suggests that transparency in marketing is essential to maintaining audience trust.

The results of this study reveal that controversy in digital marketing strategies involving influencer ethical dilemmas is greatly influenced by factors of technological development and increased consumer awareness. The main factor influencing this controversy is the advancement of digital technology that allows audiences to more easily access information related to products promoted by influencers. With the ability of audiences to find out more about influencer affiliations and endorsements, the ambiguity of financial relationships is becoming an important issue that affects the audience's perception of the authenticity of product recommendations. Transparent disclosures significantly enhance the perceptions of influencer credibility, thereby resulting in augmented assessments of product effectiveness and heightened intentions to purchase (Woodroof et al., 2020). In contrast, ambiguous disclosures may undermine consumer trust, engendering scepticism regarding the influencer's intentions and the genuineness of their endorsements (Woodroof et al., 2020). The authenticity of influencers plays a crucial role in the efficacy of marketing strategies; this authenticity is shaped by various factors, including trustworthiness, transparency, relatability, and expertise (Ardley et al., 2022). As seen in social media marketing campaigns, where consumers prefer influencers who are transparent about their business relationship with the brand being promoted, this creates pressure on influencers to avoid potential ethical conflicts. Therefore, this study shows that the increasing consumer awareness factor related to ethical issues in digital marketing influences the decision of influencers and brands to adapt their marketing strategies to maintain audience trust.

The results of this study show that controversies related to digital marketing strategies involving influencer ethical dilemmas can have a significant impact on brand reputation and

consumer trust. The main impact of this controversy is the potential decline in consumer trust in brands that work with influencers that are perceived as non-transparent or unethical. Consumers are now increasingly selective and critical of claims made by influencers, especially if there is ambiguity regarding their financial relationship with the brand being promoted. Ambiguous disclosures engender perceptions of diminished transparency and reduced intentions to purchase (Woodroof et al., 2020). The constructs of social proof and perceived expertise significantly augment the efficacy of influencer endorsements (Prasanth & Shanmuga Priyan, 2024). Brands that fail to maintain transparency in influencer marketing campaigns can face a decline in consumer loyalty and a negative impact on their brand image, as happened to some major brands that have stumbled on ethical issues on social media. Therefore, this research implies that brands should pay serious attention to the ethical aspects of digital marketing to maintain positive relationships with consumers and prevent long-term damage to their reputations.

The results of this study show that controversy regarding digital marketing strategies involving influencer ethical dilemmas has a significant impact on brand image and relationships with consumers. These findings are in line with previous research that shows that consumers are now increasingly aware of non-transparent marketing practices, especially those involving influencers. Research indicates that transparent disclosures can assist consumers in discerning promotional content, thereby fostering increased trustworthiness (Hudders & Lou, 2022). This understanding is of paramount importance, as consumers frequently depend on influencers for product endorsements, perceiving them as relatable entities endowed with expertise (Prasanth & Shanmuga Priyan, 2024). The proliferation of influencer marketing has engendered ethical dilemmas among policymakers, particularly concerning the potential exploitation of younger demographics who may not entirely comprehend the commercial implications of influencer promotions (Hudders & Lou, 2022). Studi Oleh Smith (2020) highlighted how major brands engaged in dishonest influencer marketing experienced a decline in consumer loyalty. The results of this study also confirm the findings from Johnson (2021) who stated that influencers who fail to disclose their sponsorship relationships can lower consumer trust. Thus, the study confirms that it is important for brands to consider ethics in their digital marketing strategies, so as not to get caught up in controversies that can harm their reputation, in line with the findings of previous research that also emphasized the importance of transparency and integrity in influencer marketing.

Based on the results of research that show controversy in digital marketing strategies related to influencer ethical dilemmas, there is a need for stricter policies in the supervision of digital marketing practices involving influencers. This is important to protect brand integrity and build consumer trust, who are increasingly aware of the issue of transparency in product promotion. The implementation of transparency in sourcing and production significantly bolsters brand credibility,

as consumers often regard openness as a vital indicator of corporate responsibility (Holloway, 2024). In times of crisis, transparent communication can play a pivotal role in alleviating adverse perceptions and fostering the restoration of trust (Dhaigude, 2023). Brands that exhibit ethical practices, encompassing sustainability and equitable labor conditions, are more inclined to attract and retain consumers, particularly within younger demographic segments (Holloway, 2024). Brands can implement policies that require influencers to disclose their sponsorship relationships in any content published, as well as ensure that the products promoted are in line with the values upheld by brands and consumers. Therefore, policy actions that emphasize transparency and ethics in digital marketing will help reduce controversy and improve the long-term relationship between brands and consumers.

KESIMPULAN

The most surprising finding in the study was that many influencers were involved in product promotions without fully understanding the ethical and social impact of their endorsements, an unexpected fact. This shows the lack of awareness of influencers regarding their important role in shaping public opinion, as well as the potential negative impact that can arise from their ignorance of ethical dilemmas in digital marketing. For example, some influencers reveal that they are more focused on financial gain than ensuring that the products they promote align with the values they hold or benefit their audience. These findings highlight the need for further training for influencers in understanding digital marketing ethics, to avoid controversies that could damage brand reputation and undermine consumer trust.

This research provides a significant scientific contribution by revealing how the ethical dilemmas faced by influencers in digital marketing strategies in the fashion industry have not been widely discussed in the existing literature. So far, many studies have focused on the effectiveness of digital marketing, but not many have examined the ethical impact of endorsement practices carried out by influencers, especially in the context of the fashion industry. This research shows that influencers often get caught up in ethical dilemmas related to the authenticity of promotions, especially when they receive rewards for promoting products they don't trust or that don't align with their values. Thus, this study opens up a new perspective in the study of digital marketing, which not only looks at the effectiveness of marketing but also from the ethical side, providing a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by influencers in the fashion industry.

The study had several limitations, one of which was the limitation in the number of respondents involved, which only included influencers and marketers at a few specific fashion brands. This limits the generalization of the research results because this study does not cover the entire sector of the fashion industry globally or influencers from various social media platforms.

The study only involved influencers who are active on Instagram and YouTube, without taking into account the impact of other platforms such as TikTok or Twitter that have different marketing dynamics. Therefore, advanced research is recommended to broaden the scope of sectors and platforms, as well as engage consumer perspectives to gain a more comprehensive picture of ethical dilemmas in digital marketing.

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