American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (AJHSSR)
e-ISSN : 2378-703X
Volume-10, Issue-07, pp-08-10
www.ajhssr.com
Research Paper Open Access

Affiliate Marketing as a Social Science: Trust, Risk, and Digital Behavior

Ellie Yantsan

ABSTRACT : Affiliate marketing is often treated as a commercial referral model, but this paper frames it as a social science question. It examines trust formation, platform incentives, user interpretation, localization, and responsible promotion in digital economies. The analysis shows that conversion cannot be reduced to a link or dashboard metric: audience behavior depends on perceived legitimacy, language, payment confidence, regulatory boundaries, and the social role of the affiliate as an intermediary. The paper also considers gambling-related affiliate activity as a sector where risk, KYC, age restrictions, house edge, and responsible communication sharpen the ethical problem.
KEYWORDS: *affiliate marketing, digital behavior, digital economies, localization, platform incentives, trust*

I. INTRODUCTION

Affiliate marketing is usually described as a commercial system, but that definition is too narrow for academic work. It is also a social science problem because it examines how people respond to signals of trust, how communities process recommendations, how platforms reward certain behaviors, and how regulation shapes digital exchange, a process tied to trust, embeddedness, and innovation diffusion [1], [2], [3].

For a humanities and social sciences audience, the subject connects economics with sociology, communication studies, psychology, management, and digital anthropology. A campaign does not succeed only because a link exists. It succeeds when an audience accepts the source, understands the offer, and believes the action is worth the cost. That is social behavior, not just advertising.

Fig. 1. Affiliate analytics interface as a visual context for platform behavior.

II.BEYOND THE COMMISSION MODEL

A basic affiliate model looks simple: a publisher refers a user, and the advertiser pays when a defined action occurs. In practice, the model contains several layers. There is a traffic source, a message, a platform, an attribution rule, a conversion event, a fraud-control process, and a payment agreement. Each layer changes participants' behavior.

This is why affiliate marketing cannot be studied only through revenue. Researchers also need to examine incentives. If a partner is paid only for registration, the partner may optimize for sign-ups. If payment depends on verified deposits, retention, or revenue share, the partner has a reason to care about audience quality and long-term fit. The economic rule shapes the social action [4].

III.TRUST WORKS BEFORE CONVERSION

Trust is the first currency in affiliate marketing. Users rarely act on a recommendation because the advertiser exists. They act because a publisher, influencer, review site, comparison page, Telegram channel, or search result has reduced uncertainty. The user still carries risk, but the recommendation frames that risk [1].

This framing effect is visible in iGaming, finance, education, and subscription services. A user wants to know whether the platform is legitimate, whether the payment flow is clear, whether support works, and whether terms are readable. In gambling-related sectors, the trust question becomes stricter because age restrictions, KYC, responsible gambling rules, and house edge affect the ethical boundary of promotion.

IV.THE PARTNER AS A SOCIAL INTERMEDIARY

The affiliate is not simply a technical connector. The partner translates a commercial offer into the language of a specific community. That translation may involve local sports knowledge, payment habits, platform literacy, regional slang, search intent, and expectations about customer support.

In a Philippine-focused study, the role of a MelBet partner can be examined as a case of localized digital intermediation. The partner does not merely move traffic from one page to another. The partner interprets user demand, selects communication channels, and adapts the message to a market where mobile access, sports fandom, and trust in online payments may vary across social groups. This makes the affiliate relationship useful for studying how commercial trust is produced in platform economies.

The same point applies to language. A literal translation may carry the basic meaning of a phrase, but it may miss the social meaning. A research paper that analyzes partnership with a bookmaker (Filipino: pakikipagsosyo sa bookmaker) should therefore study more than vocabulary. It should ask how Filipino users interpret the concept of partnership, whether the phrase implies employment, collaboration, promotion, or commercial referral, and how that interpretation affects trust. Language is part of the conversion mechanism.

V.DATA DOES NOT REMOVE HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Affiliate dashboards create the impression that behavior can be reduced to metrics. Click-through rate, conversion rate, first-time depositor rate, retention, churn, and lifetime value are useful measurements. They help partners test content, compare channels, and detect weak traffic. But a metric is not an explanation by itself.

A low conversion rate may stem from poor landing page design, weak trust signals, payment friction, cultural mismatch, slow load times, unclear bonus terms, or a misread audience. A high number of clicks may indicate curiosity rather than intent. Social science matters because it asks why the number moved. Without that question, analytics becomes bookkeeping.

VI.ETHICS, REGULATION, AND RESPONSIBLE PROMOTION

Affiliate marketing also raises ethical questions. Some sectors carry low consumer risk, while others require stricter safeguards. Gambling promotion, in particular, must avoid claims that imply guaranteed income, easy winnings, or pressure on vulnerable users. Responsible communication should make the risk visible [5], [6], [7].

Researchers can treat this as a governance issue. Platforms set rules, affiliates respond to incentives, regulators define acceptable claims, and users interpret promotional messages through their own social context. When the system fails, harm can appear as misleading advertising, low-quality traffic, underage exposure, or distrust in legitimate digital commerce. Good affiliate practice needs clear attribution, source transparency, age controls, and honest wording around risk.

VII.CONCLUSION

Affiliate marketing deserves more academic attention because it sits at the intersection of everyday digital life. Search engines, social media, messaging apps, review sites, sports communities, and creator channels all participate in referral economies. People move from attention to action through social cues.

A useful study would combine interview data, content analysis, platform metrics, and regulatory review. It would compare what affiliates say, what users understand, what dashboards record, and what rules allow. That method would present affiliate marketing not as a narrow sales technique but as a measurable form of mediated trust in the digital economy [2], [3].

REFERENCES

[1] R.M. Morgan and S.D. Hunt, The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing, Journal of Marketing, 58(3), 1994, 20-38.

[2] M. Granovetter, Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness, American Journal of Sociology, 91(3), 1985, 481-510.

[3] E.M. Rogers, Diffusion of innovations, 5th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2003).

[4] B.J. Fogg, Persuasive technology: Using computers to change what we think and do (San Francisco, CA: Morgan Kaufmann, 2003).

[5] A. Mathur, A. Narayanan, and M. Chetty, Endorsements on social media: An empirical study of affiliate marketing disclosures on YouTube and Pinterest, Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 2(CSCW), Article 119, 2018, 1-26.

[6] Federal Trade Commission, Guides concerning the use of endorsements and testimonials in advertising, 16 CFR Part 255, Federal Register, 88(142), 2023, 48092-48109.

[7] Gambling Commission, Licence conditions and codes of practice, version effective from 6 April 2026 (Birmingham: Gambling Commission, 2026).