A Mixed-Method Approach on the Evolution of Influencer Marketing and Its Ethical Consideration in UAE

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to identify the evolution of influencer marketing along with ethical considerations taken in terms of celebrity endorsement. The research also considers ethical considerations, like "transparency and cultural sensitivity," as vital to successful influencer collaborations. This literature investigates the "evolution of influencer marketing" in the UAE, emphasising the change from celebrity confirmations to micro-influencers. It discovers the role of social media along with the influencer in determining purchasing decisions for the products. The review also classifies gaps in research regarding the influence of local cultural nuances and regulatory frameworks on "consumer behaviour and brand loyalty" in the influencer marketing scenery. The research study employs a mixed-method approach, mixing "quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews," to discover personalized influencer marketing's influence in the UAE. It measures consumer perceptions regarding awareness, data privacy, trust, and ethical practices, pointing to uncover key understandings that inform marketing strategies and regulatory frameworks in the area. Based on the findings from the data collected, customers are attracted to influencer marketing even in the UAE where several ethical considerations and regulations have been used. It is used to maintain data privacy, cultural sensitivity, and even transparency in influencer marketing.

Keywords: Consumer, Influencer Marketing, Marketing, Influencer, Social Media
JEL Classifications: M31, M37

1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, influencer marketing has become a potent tactic that capitalizes on the visibility and authority of people who have built a sizable social media following. Influencer marketing at first focused on celebrities promoting goods. But as social media and consumer behaviour have changed, it has expanded to include micro-influencers and specialized specialists. By leveraging the reach and trust that people—often referred to as influencers—have built inside their social media networks, influencer marketing has revolutionized the way companies interact with customers. Celebrities have historically dominated this marketing technique since their endorsements were seen as a sign of a high-end brand. However as social media platforms have grown in popularity, influencer marketing has expanded to include micro-influencers and specialized specialists, all of whom have a big impact on how customers think and behave. For companies, influencer marketing is a useful tool. It is anticipated that corporations will spend US$32 billion on influencer advertising by 2024. Its use enables hitherto unattainable levels of engagement and reach for specific groups. The "Wild West" days of influencer marketing have passed, however, and public scrutiny and regulation are growing both domestically and internationally. Because of this, it is becoming more and more crucial for businesses to carefully guard against

any legal and reputational harm when using influencers in their marketing initiatives.

The UAE's quickly evolving legal environment in this field is covered here, along with the factors that marketers should take into account when collaborating with influencers. In the digital age, influencer marketing has become a potent tactic that capitalizes on the reputation and reach of people who have built a sizable social media following. At first, influencer marketing was centred on celebrities promoting goods. But as social media and consumer behaviour have changed, it has expanded to include micro-influencers and specialized specialists (Hanaysha et al., 2021). By leveraging the reach and trust that people—often referred to as influencers—have built inside their social media networks, influencer marketing has revolutionized the way companies interact with customers. Celebrities have historically dominated this marketing tactic since their endorsements were seen as a sign of a prestigious brand. However as social media platforms have grown in popularity, influencer marketing has expanded to include micro-influencers and specialized specialists, all of whom have a big impact on how customers think and behave. For companies, influencer marketing is a useful tool. Influencer marketing is predicted to cost businesses $32 billion by 2024. Its use enables hitherto unattainable levels of engagement and reach with target groups. The "Wild West" days of influencer marketing have passed, however, and public scrutiny and regulation are growing both domestically and internationally. Because of this, it is more crucial than ever for companies to aggressively guard against any legal and reputational harm when using influencers in their marketing activities. The UAE's quickly evolving legal environment in this field is covered here, along with the factors that marketers should take into account when collaborating with influencers (Charles Russell Speechlys, 2024).

1.1. The Rise of Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing started in the 2000s, but with the increasing usage of the same platforms—Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok—it gained popularity in the early 2010s. Influencers offered a more genuine interaction with their consumers than conventional advertising techniques, as brands quickly realized (Bu et al., 2022; Elli 2017). According to Influencer Marketing Hub (2021), companies profited $5.78 on average for every $1 invested in influencer marketing. Marketing executives' most important social media platforms for influencer marketing strategy in the United Arab Emirates in 2023 (Influencermarketinghub 2021).

In the beginning stages, brands invested heavily in A-list celebrities to bolster their marketing efforts; assuming that the lustrous shine of celebrity would equal consumer interest and purchases. Endorsing products (especially for brands) has been a status symbol, almost telling customers half the price of prestige products in this direction either because celebrities lend an image just by being well-known. Brands like Pepsi and Nike, for instance, have always relied on A-list celebrities in their ad campaigns based on the belief that everyone can remember commercials featuring one of the people you hear or see everywhere (Del Giorgio Solfa et al., 2023). Often these partnerships were high-profile, as consumers not only wanted the products but also to connect with idolized

celebrities by having alike products and manoeuvring some level of shared admiration. With the change in consumer behaviour to value authenticity and relatable figures, the impact of celebrity endorsements was brought into question. In return, brands received instant attention from celebrities whose names graced their campaigns — but the appeal was often a bit hollower than many would like (Guergov and Radwan, 2021). The shift in consumer perception also created an opening for micro-influencers and niche experts who were able to establish more meaningful connections with their audiences via authentic interaction. Consequently, brands began diversifying into a wider range of marketing tactics looking for influencers who would provide a more real image to their products, and permanently changed the face of influencer marketing.

1.2. The Changing Landscape of Consumer Behavior

Influencer marketing's development reflects broader shifts in consumer behaviour, as customers want openness and truth. 63% of respondents trust influencers more than brand advertisements, according to Edelman Trust Barometer 2021 study. This shift demonstrates that readers prefer genuine suggestions to overt advertising. Social media profiles are also relevant in this situation (Alzoubi et al. 2019). Influencers may create engaging experiences that foster a sense of community with their followers by using platforms such as YouTube vlogs, Instagram Stories, and TikTok videos. This not only makes the influencer more popular with their audience, but it also increases the effectiveness of marketing initiatives that include them (Chopra et al., 2021).

1.3. The Growth of Social Media in the UAE

Social media use in the UAE has grown quickly, which makes it an excellent place for influencer marketing and digital marketing. According to current data, over 99 people are online, demonstrating the nation's well-developed digital infrastructure and widespread internet use. With the majority of users being young people, media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok play a crucial role in the everyday lives of many UAE citizens. Because influencers can connect with people in real-time, marketers are able to use the vast reach of the internet. In addition to helping influencers establish their businesses, global digital penetration gives companies a way to interact and communicate with customers (Kabiraj and Joghee, 2023). Influencers are reliable middlemen who can personalize brand messaging, and social media facilitates genuine connections and communities (Al Kurdi, 2024; Alshurideh, 2024). These platforms provide chances for innovative content methods, such as interactive marketing and live Q&A sessions, that aid in further engaging customers (Alzoubi et al., 2022). In order to achieve the ideal balance between local cultural and social settings, businesses that can collaborate creatively with local influencers will be rewarded with increased consumer loyalty and better penetration rates across the nation.

Global trends and distinctive regional characteristics have combined to create influencer marketing in the United Arab Emirates (Temouri et al., 2022; Yousaf et al., 2023). As with traditional advertising, firms first focus on well-known celebrities to promote their goods. These high-profile celebrity endorsements were an attempt to use their notoriety to attract attention and

increase brand awareness. However, when digital platforms like YouTube and Instagram gained popularity, marketers soon discovered that influencers had a stronger connection with their consumers despite having fewer followers (Alshurideh et al., 2023). This modification laid the foundation for a modest but fundamental shift in the UAE's marketing image. The rise in social media use, particularly among younger audiences, gave rise to a new kind of influencer marketing that included speciality specialists and micro-influencers. These individuals started to appear in marketing because they were relatable and reliable. Influencers started producing content on increasingly specialized hobbies, such as fitness, travel, and fashion, and marketers discovered that working with influencers who catered to a particular market allowed them to execute more focused campaigns (Alshurideh et al., 2023). In order to boost engagement and conversion rates, a beauty firm can collaborate with a skincare influencer who offers in-depth product evaluations and firsthand accounts of usage. In this kind of setting, the strategy shift started to gradually shift from generic celebrity endorsements to a more genuine, and much less likely to fail, focused marketing campaign.

In turn, changes in the UAE's legislative landscape have influenced the development of influencer marketing. Guidelines to encourage openness and moral behaviour were soon developed by the government and regulatory agencies as the sector developed. Adhering to the correct criteria about what constitutes ads vs real endorsements, prompted the need for some clarification from all influencers, which in turn helped to build trust between each influencer and their audience. These rules not only safeguard customers but also enhance influencer marketing's legitimacy as a conduit for advertising in the area. Brands that abide by these guidelines will probably establish a stronger bond with their target audience. Influencer marketing in the United Arab Emirates is at a unique intersection in 2023 between local cultural disposition halfway across the globe and global trends that eventually affect the psyche of the younger generation worldwide. As a result, marketers are spending more money on culturally relevant content that speaks to the UAE's diverse population as they begin to recognize the value of the knowledge and insight provided by influencers. As long as we continue to develop it from the inside out, influencer marketing will continue to be a part of any marketing mix, despite its artificialities: sincere relationships by being sincere and moral. Table 1 represents the evolution of the influencer marking in the UAE.

This overview of the evolution of influencer marketing in the UAE highlights key changes and developments within the industry, showcasing how it has adapted to the digital landscape and consumer preferences (Table 1).

1.4. Ethical Considerations

A number of ethical issues are raised as influencer marketing continues to grow in popularity in the United Arab Emirates. Transparency and disclosure are among the most important issues. In order to keep their audience's confidence, influencers must be transparent about whether their material is sponsored or a part of a compensated arrangement. Consumer trust and purchase choices are greatly impacted by advertising openness, according to research conducted by the European Commission in 2018. Working with influencers must be founded on an honest approach as UAE consumers become more aware of marketing tactics. This will help them gain credibility and establish enduring connections with their followers. Striking a balance between loyalty and innovation presents a new ethical conundrum. The fact that many influencers base their businesses on their own experiences and genuine relationships with their followers is one of the most important components of influencer marketing. However, it might be difficult to remain faithful when they begin to grow their content and collaborate with businesses. Influencers who prioritize money above empowerment will quickly discover that they are alienating their audience and that their advice is unlikely to be heeded. A 2020 research by Influencer Marketing Hub found that customers are more willing to interact with influencers who speak consistently and authentically, underscoring the fine line influencers must walk between credibility and commercialization (Akbar et al., 2021; Shaik, 2023).

In the UAE's multicultural environment, cultural awareness is crucial. Influencers must therefore fight for a position in this community that is full of various traditions, practices, and ideals. Creating and delivering content with cultural sensitivity in mind. Not doing so may harm the companies that influencers advocate and result in negative public perception or reaction against the influencer. When discussing a heterogeneous economy like the United Arab Emirates, the Dubai Press Club emphasizes the need for cultural knowledge in advertising and media. At the end of the day, however, ethical influencer marketing relies heavily on great consumer protection (Laub, 1999). Influencers are ultimately in charge of ensuring that the goods and services they endorse have met safety standards. However, the terrible results of promoting risky products by disseminating misleading information (Zahra, 2024) may have an impact on influencer marketing as well as people (Victoria, 2022). The UAE National Media Council claims that in order to safeguard consumers, they anticipate more

Table 1: Evolution of influencer marketing in the UAE

Phase	Description	Key characteristics
Early days (2010–2015)	Brands focused on celebrity endorsements to boost visibility.	High-profile partnerships, mass appeal, traditional advertising.
Emergence of micro-influencers (2015–2018)	Shift towards influencers with smaller, engaged audiences, emphasizing relatability.	Targeted marketing, authentic content, and higher engagement rates.
Niche experts rise (2018–2020)	Collaboration with specialists in specific fields, offering in-depth knowledge and trust.	Focused campaigns, community-driven content, specialized branding.
Regulatory framework (2020-Present)	Implementation of guidelines to ensure transparency and ethical practices in influencer marketing.	Required disclosures, increased consumer trust, and credibility enhancement.

compliance from social media influencers. This entails a thorough assessment of goods and services meant for marketing to guarantee adherence to ethical norms, public safety, etc.

The growth of influencer marketing in the UAE reflects both the dynamic evolution of digital platforms and the increasing influence of social media personalities on consumer behaviour (Kurdi et al., 2022). However, this rapid growth also brings with it a number of ethical challenges, particularly in the areas of transparency, privacy and consumer manipulation (Najla and Bouteïna, 2023). As brands and influencers leverage personalised marketing strategies, it becomes imperative to address concerns related to data protection and cultural sensitivity (Ozturk, 2024; Sukkari, 2024). This research aims to explore these evolving dynamics, assess consumer perceptions and evaluate the ethical frameworks and regulations governing influencer marketing in the UAE, ultimately contributing to a more responsible and transparent digital marketing landscape.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Rigour to Prepare the Literature Review Insights
Figure 1 depicts the theoretical rigour based on the insights of the literature review.

Figure 1 depicts the theoretical framework that represents the two aspects of social media and digital intervention along with the ethical considerations including maintaining transparency and cultural sensitivity that resulted in fulfilling the objectives.

2.2. Evolution of Influencer Marketing to Impact Digital Platforms and Micro-Influencers
Influencer marketing first circled celebrities approving products, as brands sought to influence the reach and standing of renowned figures to make consumer interest. Digital platforms like "Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok" gained popularity, where the scope of influencer marketing extended. Campbell and Farrell, (2020) noted that the platforms advantaged partnerships with

a range of influencers who are involved with niche audiences more genuinely than traditional advertising approaches. Digital Marketing Institute, (2024) denoted those businesses received an average return of $5.78 for every $1 spent on influencer marketing, emphasising its cost-effectiveness. Moreover, micro-influencers, defined as those with "1,000 to 100,000 followers," began gaining importance due to the higher engagement rates compared to macro-influencers effectively (Trend, 2020). Micro-influencers also make up to 60% higher engagement because their content reverberates on a more personal level with followers (Adams, 2024). The rise concurred with a rising consumer preference for authenticity, driving brands to diversify their marketing labours by appealing to influencers who create relatable and credible content.

2.3. Role of Social Media and Consumer Behaviour Shaping Purchasing Decisions
Social media has transformed consumers' interrelates with brands, changing from passive reception of advertisements to more collaborative, appealing experiences. According to Vrontis et al., (2021), influencer marketing leverages the change by turning social media into a word-of-mouth platform where influencers, as judgement leaders, shape consumer perceptions and drive purchasing decisions accordingly. Wang and Chan-Olmsted, (2023) stated influencer marketing is a form of relationship-building that improves brand trust through authentic, relevant content. A study by (Fernandes 2023) exposed that 63% of consumers trust influencer references more than traditional brand advertisements.

2.4. Analysis of Influencer Marketing through Internet Penetration and Digital Adoption in the UAE
The UAE provides a unique landscape for influencer marketing due to its high "internet penetration and digital infrastructure (Economictimes, 2023)." 5.17 billion population are active online, with platforms such as "Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube" playing integral roles in daily life (Dean, 2024). As a result, brands also effectively reach varied audiences through digital platforms, with influencer marketing being a key part of their strategy. Brands in the UAE, such as those globally, depend on celebrity commendations. However, the enhancement of digital influencers has led to a change

Figure 1: Role of influencer marketing in social media improvisation and ethical considerations
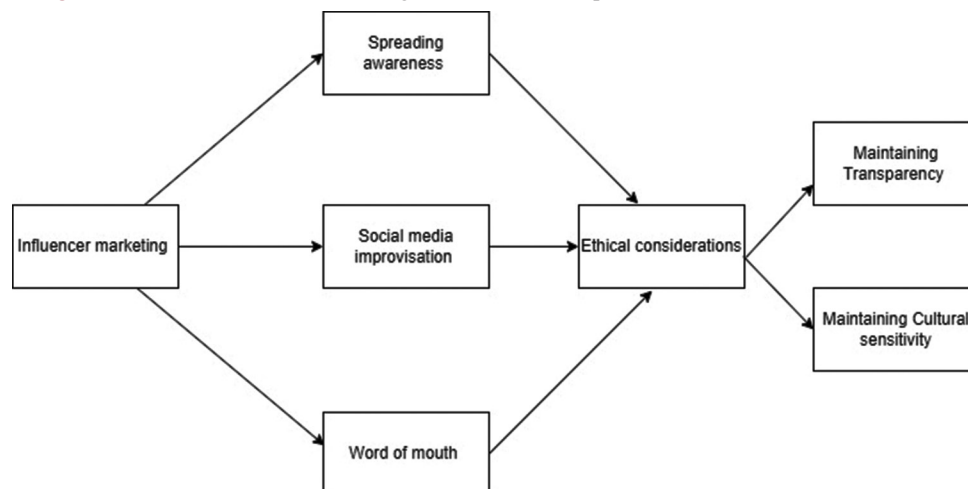
Source: Self-made

toward micro-influencers and niche experts, who deliver a more relevant and localised tactic to marketing (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2020). Conversely, Walaa Wahid ElKelish et al., (2024) noted that the UAE's regulatory environment has also changed, with authorities applying guidelines to confirm transparency and ethical practices in influencer marketing.

2.5. Discussion on Ethical Considerations to Govern Personalized Influencer Marketing in the UAE

According to Alzarooni, (2022), while influencer marketing delivers numerous benefits, it also offers ethical challenges, mainly around authenticity, transparency, and cultural sensitivity. Transparency is crucial and influencers disclose when content is supported to uphold trust with their audience. In the UAE, regulatory guidelines order clear disclosures, which defend consumers and augment the credibility of influencer marketing (LinkedIn, 2024). Authenticity is another important concern, where influencers build their standing on personal influences with followers, but over-commercialisation corrodes this trust.

2.5.1. Research gap
The research gap deceits in the limited exploration of "how cultural nuances and regulatory frameworks in the UAE" shape influencer marketing approaches, mainly regarding engagement metrics, authenticity, and ethical practices. Moreover, the study is required to assess the influence of local influencer dynamics on consumer behaviour and brand loyalty within the unique digital ecosystem effectively.

2.5.2. Objectives
- To investigate the evolution of influencer campaigns in the UAE.
- To explore the ethical concerns related to transparency, privacy, consumer manipulation, and cultural sensitivity in influencer marketing.
- To assess consumer perceptions of influencer marketing in the context of personalization.
- To identify regulatory measures and ethical guidelines that govern personalized influencer marketing in the UAE.

2.5.3. Research Questions
- How has the rise of personalized marketing influenced the strategies used by influencers in the UAE?
- What are the ethical challenges faced by influencers and brands when engaging in personalized influencer marketing in the UAE?
- How do consumers in the UAE perceive influencer marketing, especially in terms of privacy, transparency, and manipulation?
- What are the existing regulations and ethical frameworks governing personalized influencer marketing in the UAE? (Appendix 1)

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Hypotheses
- H_1: Personalized influencer marketing has a significant impact on consumer purchase decisions in the UAE.
- H_2: Lack of transparency in personalized influencer marketing

negatively affects consumer trust in both influencers and brands.
- H_3: Consumers in the UAE are concerned about data privacy when engaging with personalized influencer marketing content.
- H_4: Regulatory frameworks in the UAE play a significant role in shaping ethical influencer marketing practices.

3.2. Research Design
The study uses a "mixed-method approach" combining "quantitative surveys" and "qualitative interviews" to examine the influence of personalised influencer marketing in the UAE. Primary data is collected through structured surveys targeting 300 UAE residents who are actively involved with social media and have experienced influencer marketing. The below Table 2 represents the methodological rigour related to the demographic profile of the samples.

By considering the criteria for the survey activity, the methodological rigour is depicted in Table 1 where the involvement of the 300 responses is involved in this study in Table 2. The survey will include "Likert scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and yes/no questions" to measure "awareness, trust, data privacy concerns, and perceptions of ethical practices." Additionally, interviews with 5 social media influencers and digital marketing professionals who have firsthand experience with personalised influencer marketing strategies in the UAE will deliver in-depth insights, and secondary data from books, articles, and magazines that support the analysis (Figure 2). The data from the surveys will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to understand general trends and inferential statistics (e.g., regression analysis) to examine relationships between variables such as transparency, consumer trust, and purchase behaviour (testing will be done on this variable. Moreover, primary and secondary qualitative data are also analysed through thematic analysis making themes based on the collected data. Figure 2 depicts the planning for the selection of the participants and shortlisting which is depicted below.

Figure 2 depicts the methodological rigour which represents the categorisation of the 300 employees and 5 participants that resulted in the collection and fulfilling the study objectives.

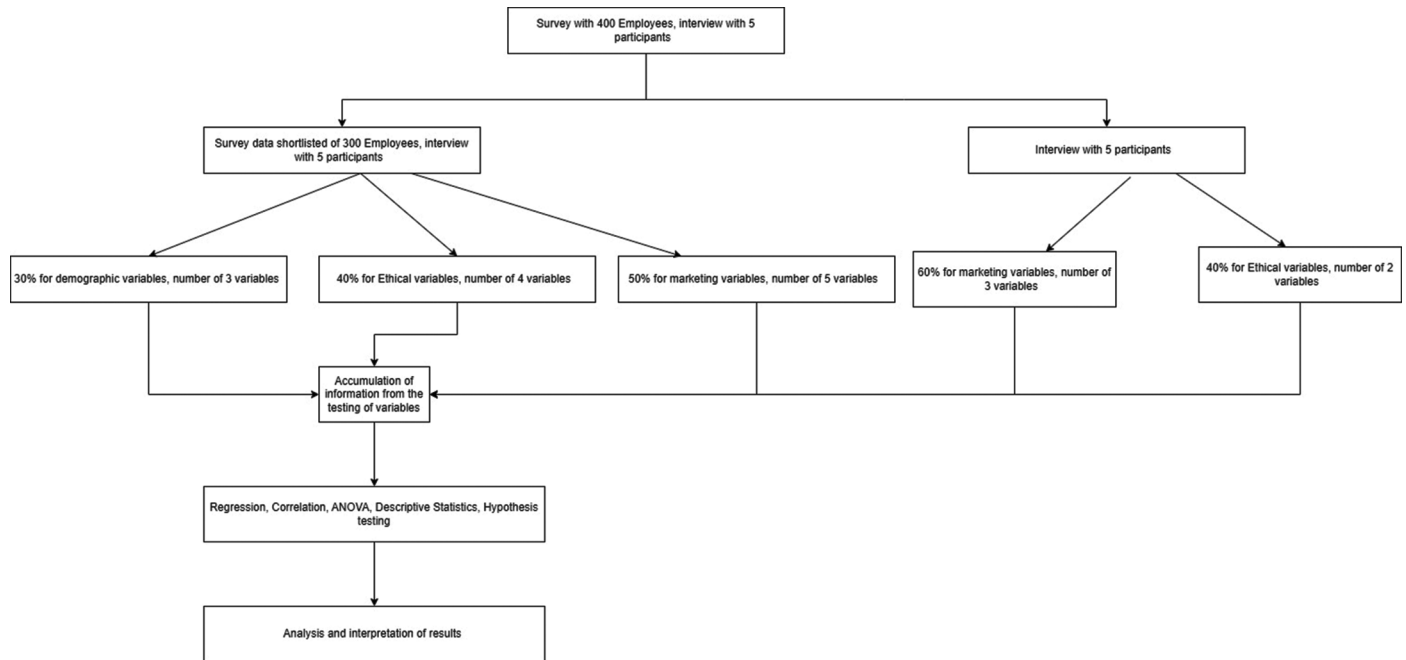### 3.3. Data Sources
Primary (survey and interview).

Table 2: Demographic profile of participants

Demographic profile	Categories	Respondents	Total
Gender	Male	216	300
	Female	84	
Age Group	18–25	52	300
	25–35	104	
	35–45	106	
	45–55	34	
	55-65	4	
Categories	Employees	300	300

Source: Self-made

Figure 2: Survey data collection and analysis framework

Source: Self-made

3.4. Survey Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your education level?
4. Does the UAE market focus on spreading awareness related to personalized influencer marketing?
5. Does personalized influencer marketing focus on transparency, data privacy, cultural sensitivity, and consumer manipulation?
6. consumers in the UAE are also concerned about data privacy at the time of engaging with personalized influencer marketing content.
7. The personalized influencer marketing increase the trust in the brand and influencer among the customers?
8. Does the lack of transparency in personalized influencer marketing affect negatively the trust of the customers both the brands and the influencer?
9. The UAE-based regulatory framework has played an essential role in shaping the ethical type of influencer marketing practice?
10. The influencer marketing in the UAE follow ethical guidelines and regulatory measurements to govern personalized influencer marketing within the UAE?
11. What kind of ethical challenges are faced by the influencers and brands while engaging in personalized influencer marketing within the UAE?
12. What is your opinion on improving ethical considerations in influencer marketing?

A structured survey will be designed to gather quantitative data on consumer perceptions of personalized influencer marketing in the UAE. The survey will address key areas such as:

- Awareness and experience with personalized influencer marketing.
- Concerns about transparency and data privacy.
- Trust in influencers and brands.
- Opinions on current ethical practices and regulations.
- Demographic data (age, gender, education level, etc.).

3.5. Sample Size and Sampling Method

By considering the survey questionnaire, the target population will include UAE residents who actively engage with social media and have been exposed to influencer marketing. A sample size of 300 respondents will be targeted to ensure statistical validity for the survey. Along with this, 5 social media influencers and digital marketing executives are employed in terms of executing the interview session. A non-probability sampling method, particularly convenience sampling and snowball sampling will be employed. The survey will be distributed online through social media platforms, email lists, and digital communities.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Statistical Analysis

Based on the consideration of the methods in Chapter 3, the primary research has been done using the SPSS to perform the descriptive, regression, correlation as well as hypothesis testing from the obtained survey data. The analysis of all of the statistical data to meet the objectives and hypothesis for the research has been detailed below.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 represents the demographic factors of the participants.

Table 3, it is represented that most of the respondents are from the age group of 35-45 who are engaged daily with social media.

The Table 4 related to the gender factor is represented below.

As per Table 4, it is identified that most of the respondents are male which is more than 72%.

Table 5 represents the educational level of the participants.

As per the Table 5 statistics, it is identified that most of the UAE residents who are participating in this survey are completing their graduation level and stated that they might be properly responding to the questions.

Table 6 related to the awareness in influencer marketing is represented below.

Table 6 shows that 93% of the respondents agreed that the UAE has focused on spreading a high level of awareness about influencer marketing that is highly personalised.

The Table 7 represented the influencer marketing.

Table 7 states that more than 89% of the respondents have agreed that "personalised influencer marketing" within the UAE has focused on data privacy, transparency, consumer manipulation as well as cultural sensitivity (Table 6).

Table 8 depicts the concerns of the UAE based consumers.

Table 8 statistics, it is identified that more than 44% of the residents agreed and even 37% of the residents highly agreed that customers in the UAE are highly concerned about data privacy at the time

Table 3: Age factor

What is your age?				
Age group	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
18–25	52	17.3	17.3	17.3
25–35	104	34.6	34.7	52.0
35–45	106	35.2	35.3	87.3
45–55	34	11.3	11.3	98.7
55–65	4	1.3	1.3	100.0
Total	300	99.7	100.0	
Missing				
System	1	0.3		
Total	301	100.0		

Source: Self made

Table 4: Gender factor

What is your gender?				
Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid				
Male	216	71.8	72.0	72.0
Female	84	27.9	28.0	100.0
Total	300	99.7	100.0	
Missing				
System	1	0.3		
Total	301	100.0		

Source: Self-made

Table 5: Educational level

What is your education level?				
Educational level	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid				
Diploma	27	9.0	9.0	9.0
Graduate	103	34.2	34.3	43.3
University	85	28.2	28.3	71.7
Masters	58	19.3	19.3	91.0
PhD	27	9.0	9.0	100.0
Total	300	99.7	100.0	
Missing				
System	1	0.3		
Total	301	100.0		

Source: Self made

Table 6: Awareness related to influencer marketing in the UAE

Does the UAE market focus on spreading awareness related to personalized influencer marketing?				
Response	Frequency	Per cent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid				
Yes	279	92.7	93.0	93.0
No	21	7.0	7.0	100.0
Total	300	99.7	100.0	
Missing				
System	1	0.3		
Total	301	100.0		

Source: Self-made

Table 7: Influencer marketing on transparency

Does personalized influencer marketing focus on transparency, data privacy, cultural sensitivity, and consumer manipulation?				
Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid				
Yes	267	88.7	89.0	89.0
No	33	11.0	11.0	100.0
Total	300	99.7	100.0	
Missing				
System	1	0.3		
Total	301	100.0		

Source: Self-made

Table 8: Concerns of the UAE-based consumers on the ethical consideration of "personalised influencer marketing"

Consumers in the UAE are also concerned about data privacy at the time of engaging with personalized influencer marketing content				
Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid				
Strongly agree	111	36.9	37.0	37.0
Agree	133	44.2	44.3	81.3
Neutral	32	10.6	10.7	92.0
Disagree	21	7.0	7.0	99.0
Strongly disagree	3	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	300	99.7	100.0	
Missing				
System	1	0.3		
Total	301	100.0		

Source: Self-made

of properly engaging with the influencer market that is focused on personalised content.

Table 9 related to the role of influencer marketing is represented below.

As per Table 9, it is highlighted that more than 42% of respondents have stated that influencer marketing with personalisation leads to an increase the trust in the brand as well as influencers among all of the customers (Table 8).

Table 10 depicts the tendency related to the lack of transparency in influencer marketing.

Table 10 stated that more than 90% of the respondents have stated that lack of transparency in influencer marketing that is personalised highly affects negatively on the customer's trust both in the influencer and even the brands.

Table 11 represents the UAE-based regulatory framework.

Table 11 shows that 42% of participants agree and even 38% strongly agree that the UAE-based regulatory framework has played a significant role in case of maintaining or shaping the ethics in the marketing practice that has been done by influencers.

Table 12 shows the ethics in influencer marketing in the UAE.

Table 12 stated that 43% of the respondents highly agreed and even 40% of the respondents agreed that the UAE-based influencer marketing highly followed the regulatory measurements and even the guidelines to foster personalisation in this marketing approach.

Table 13 represents the ethical challenges faced by the participants.

According to Table 13 data the respondents, it is identified that more than 61% of the respondents agreed that as an ethical challenge, the influencer marketing approach in the UAE that is has faced a lack of transparency, failing to disclose the potential level of conflict of interest, misleading the endorsement, as well as the use of the descriptive tactics for inflating the overall engagement.

Table 14 represents opinions on the improvement in ethical consideration.

The above Table 14 statistics stated that more than 67% of the respondents have stated that prioritizing transparency, monitoring the content, focusing on the values of the influencers, and educating the local or even regional influencer regulation might be beneficial to make improvements in the ethical consideration of influencer marketing.

Table 9: Role of influencer marketing in influencing customers

Personalized influencer marketing increases the trust in the brand and influencer among the customers				
Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid				
Strongly agree	125	41.5	41.7	41.7
Agree	125	41.5	41.7	83.3
Neutral	30	10.0	10.0	93.3
Disagree	18	6.0	6.0	99.3
Strongly disagree	2	0.7	0.7	100.0
Total	300	99.7	100.0	
Missing				
System	1	0.3		
Total	301	100.0		

Source: Self-made

Table 10: Lack of transparency in the influencer marketing

Does the lack of transparency in personalized influencer marketing affect negatively the trust of the customers both the brands and the influencer?				
Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid				
Yes	272	90.4	90.7	90.7
No	28	9.3	9.3	100.0
Total	300	99.7	100.0	
Missing				
System	1	0.3		
Total	301	100.0		

Source: Self-made

Table 11: UAE-based regulatory framework on influencer marketing

The UAE-based regulatory framework has played an essential role in shaping the ethical type of influencer marketing practice				
Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid				
Strongly agree	115	38.2	38.3	38.3
Agree	128	42.5	42.7	81.0
Neutral	36	12.0	12.0	93.0
Disagree	19	6.3	6.3	99.3
Strongly disagree	2	0.7	0.7	100.0
Total	300	99.7	100.0	
Missing				
System	1	0.3		
Total	301	100.0		

Source: Self-made

Table 12: Ethics in influencer marketing in UAE

Influencer marketing in the UAE follows ethical guidelines and regulatory measurements to govern personalized influencer marketing within the UAE				
Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid				
Strongly agree	129	42.9	43.0	43.0
Agree	120	39.9	40.0	83.0
Neutral	29	9.6	9.7	92.7
Disagree	19	6.3	6.3	99.0
Strongly disagree	3	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	300	99.7	100.0	
Missing				
System	1	0.3		
Total	301	100.0		

Source: Self-made

Table 13: Ethical challenges

Factor	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
What kind of ethical challenges are faced by influencers and brands while engaging in personalized influencer marketing within the UAE?				
Valid				
Lack of transparency	24	8.0	8.0	8.0
Misleading endorsement	50	16.6	16.7	24.7
Failing to disclose potential conflict of interest	23	7.6	7.7	32.3
Using deceptive tactics to inflate the engagement	20	6.6	6.7	39.0
All of the above	183	60.8	61.0	100.0
Total	300	99.7	100.0	
Missing				
System	1	0.3		
Total	301	100.0		

Source: Self-made

Table 14: Opinion on the improvement of ethical consideration

Factor	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
What is your opinion on improving ethical considerations in influencer marketing?				
Valid				
Prioritizing transparency	19	6.3	6.3	6.3
Monitoring content	41	13.6	13.7	20.0
Focusing on influencer values	11	3.7	3.7	23.7
Careful selection of the influencer	13	4.3	4.3	28.0
Educating the local and influencer regulation	13	4.3	4.3	32.3
All of the above	203	67.4	67.7	100.0
Total	300	99.7	100.0	
Missing				
System	1	0.3		
Total	301	100.0		

Source: Self-made

Table 15: Model summary

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R square change	F change	df1	df2	Sig. F change
1	0.763[a]	0.582	0.578	0.577	0.582	137.496	3	296	0.000

[a]Predictors: (Constant), Does personalized influencer marketing focus on transparency, data privacy, cultural sensitivity, and consumer manipulation? Influencer marketing in the UAE follows ethical guidelines and regulatory measurements to govern personalized influencer marketing within the UAE, Does the UAE market focus on spreading awareness related to personalized influencer marketing?
Source: Self-made

4.3. Regression Test

According to Table 15, Predictors: (Constant), influencer marketing in the UAE follows ethical guidelines and regulatory measurements to govern personalized influencer marketing within the UAE, Does the UAE market focus on spreading awareness related to personalized influencer marketing? Does personalized influencer marketing focus on transparency, data privacy, cultural sensitivity, and consumer manipulation? The UAE-based regulatory framework has played an essential role in shaping the ethical type of influencer marketing practice. This indicates that the overall regression model is statistically significant. A significance value of .000 means that there is a very strong likelihood (less than 0.1% probability of error) that the independent variables in the model collectively explain the variation in the dependent variable.

Table 16 represents the ANOVA analysis based on the collected survey data.

Table 16: ANOVA test

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1					
Regression	137.190	3	45.730	137.496	0.000[b]
Residual	98.447	296	0.333		
Total	235.637	299			

Source: Self-made.
[a]Dependent Variable: Personalized influencer marketing increases the trust in the brand and influencer among the customers
[b]Predictors: (Constant), Does personalized influencer marketing focus on transparency, data privacy, cultural sensitivity, and consumer manipulation? Influencer marketing in the UAE follows ethical guidelines and regulatory measurements to govern personalized influencer marketing within the UAE, Does the UAE market focus on spreading awareness related to personalized influencer marketing?

Table 16 states that here mainly three independent variables and even one dependent or mediated variable have been chosen. From the modal summary, it is identified that the value of the R square

is 0.58 that is ranging between 0-1 and even the ANOVA test has represented that the sig value between the test of the variables is 0.000 that has stated that the selection of the variables are a good fit for this research.

4.4. Correlation
The correlation analysis is performed in Table 17.

As per the Table 17 correlation analysis, it is identified that among all of the variables, the significant value that is 2-tailed is 0.00 which is less than 0.01 level which is justified for the person correlation (2-tailed) that has stated that the dependent and even the independent variables are highly correlated.

4.5. Hypothesis Testing
The hypothesis testing for the first hypothesis is performed in Table 18.

4.5.1. Hypothesis 1
From this statistic of Table 18, it is identified that the sig value is 0.00 which is less than 0.05 which has met the first hypothesis positively by exploring that influencer marketing with personalisation increases the trust among the influencers and brands among the customers (Table 14).

4.5.2. Hypothesis testing 2
The hypothesis testing for the second hypothesis is reflected in Table 19.

The sig value in that case of 0.00 is <0.05 which stated that lack of transparency within the "personalised influencer marketing" highly affects the trust of the customers that meet the second hypothesis positively (Table 19).

Table 17: Correlation table

Variable	Does personalized influencer marketing focus on transparency, data privacy, cultural sensitivity, and consumer manipulation?	Consumers in the UAE are also concerned about data privacy at the time of engaging with personalized influencer marketing content.	Does the UAE market focus on spreading awareness related to personalized influencer marketing?
Does personalized influencer marketing focus on transparency, data privacy, cultural sensitivity, and consumer manipulation?			
Pearson correlation	1	0.443**	0.655**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000
N	300	300	300
Consumers in the UAE are also concerned about data privacy at the time of engaging with personalized influencer marketing content			
Pearson correlation	0.443**	1	0.299**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000
N	300	300	300
Does the UAE market focus on spreading awareness related to personalized influencer marketing?			
Pearson correlation	0.655**	0.299**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	
N	300	300	300
The UAE-based regulatory framework has played an essential role in shaping the ethical type of influencer marketing practice			
Pearson correlation	0.509**	0.702**	0.386**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000
N	300	300	300

Correlations	
Variable	The UAE-based regulatory framework has played an essential role in shaping the ethical type of influencer marketing practice.
Does personalized influencer marketing focus on transparency, data privacy, cultural sensitivity, and consumer manipulation?	
Pearson correlation	0.509**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
N	300
Consumers in the UAE are also concerned about data privacy at the time of engaging with personalized influencer marketing content	
Pearson correlation	0.702**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
N	300
Does the UAE market focus on spreading awareness related to personalized influencer marketing?	
Pearson correlation	0.386**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
N	300
The UAE-based regulatory framework has played an essential role in shaping the ethical type of influencer marketing practice.	
Pearson correlation	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	
N	300

Source: Self-made
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 18: Testing of first hypothesis

One-sample statistics				
Variable	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. deviation**	**Std. error mean**
Personalized influencer marketing increases the trust in the brand and influencer among the customers	300	1.82	0.888	0.051

One-sample test						
Variable				Test value=5		
	t	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**Mean Difference**	**95% Confidence interval of the difference**	
					Lower	**Upper**
Personalized influencer marketing increases the trust in the brand and influencer among the customers	−61.979	299	0.000	−3.177	−3.28	−3.074

Source: Self-made

Table 19: Hypothesis test 1

One-sample statistics				
Variable	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. deviation**	**Std. error mean**
Does the lack of transparency in personalized influencer marketing affect negatively the trust of the customers both the brands and the influencer?	300	1.09	0.291	0.017

One-sample test						
Variable				Test value=6		
	t	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**Mean difference**	**95% Confidence interval of the difference**	
					Lower	**Upper**
Does the lack of transparency in personalized influencer marketing affect negatively the trust of the customers both the brands and the influencer?	−291.662	299	0.000	−4.907	−4.94	−4.87

Source: Self-made

Table 20: Hypothesis testing 3

One-sample statistics				
Variable	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. deviation**	**Std. error mean**
Consumers in the UAE are also concerned about data privacy at the time of engaging with personalized influencer marketing content	300	1.91	0.917	0.053

One-sample test						
Variable				Test value=5		
	t	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**Mean Difference**	**95% Confidence interval of the difference**	
					Lower	**Upper**
Consumers in the UAE are also concerned about data privacy at the time of engaging with personalized influencer marketing content	−58.432	299	0.000	−3.093	−3.20	−2.986

Source: Self-made

4.5.3. Hypothesis testing 3

Table 20 represents the third hypothesis testing below.

This hypothesis testing has represented that sig value 0.00 which is <0.05 meets the third hypothesis by stating that consumers in the UAE are concerned about the privacy of the data while engaging with the personalised contents of the influencer marketing (Table 20).

Table 21 depicts the fourth hypothesis testing of this study.

The sig value of this hypothesis testing is 0.00 which is <0.05 which meets the fourth objective by stating that the UAE UAE-based regulatory framework has played an essential role in shaping the ethics in the practice of influencer marketing (Table 21).

4.6. Thematic Analysis

After the quantitative data analysis, the establishment between the quantitative and qualitative data is performed in this section with the help of the interview transcript.

Table 21: Hypothesis testing 4

One-sample statistics				
Variable	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
The UAE-based regulatory framework has played an essential role in shaping the ethical type of influencer marketing practice	300	1.88	0.898	0.052

One-sample test						
Variable	Test value=10					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
					Lower	Upper
The UAE-based regulatory framework has played an essential role in shaping the ethical type of influencer marketing practice	−156.618	299	0.000	−8.117	−8.22	−8.014

Source: Self-made

4.6.1. Theme 1: Impact of personalized influencer marketing on consumer purchase decisions

"Personalised influencer marketing" significantly affects consumer purchase behaviours. Customers are more motivated to purchase products endorsed by influencers they trust, particularly when the content is custom-made to their preferences. Moreover, the personalisation creates a sense of "authenticity and relevance," making the marketing message more convincing. The change from traditional advertising to personalised strategies imitates the growing essential for brands to involve consumers in a more targeted manner, eventually driving higher "purchase conversions and brand loyalty."

4.6.2. Theme 2: Data privacy concerns in personalised marketing

"Data privacy" emerged as a significant concern for consumers appealing to personalised influencer marketing. Both the study "literature and interviews" emphasise that consumers are progressively aware of how their data is being gathered and used. There is a rising apprehension about data misuse, which also deters consumers from interrelating with personalised marketing content. However, the findings designate that brands and influencers need to be transparent about data collection practices and confirm they are acquiescent with privacy regulations to alleviate worries and build trust.

4.6.3. Theme 3: Transparency challenges in influencer marketing

Transparency leftovers a serious issue, as both "literature and interviews" disclose ongoing worries about disclosing sponsored satisfaction. However, lack of clear indicators and miscommunication between "influencers and brands" lead to trust issues among consumers. The UAE's regulatory framework inspires transparency, but application and adherence differ across the industry. Interviewees considered the challenge of balancing authentic content creation with the necessity for transparency, signifying that more vigorous enforcement and reliable guidelines are vital for upholding consumer trust.

4.6.4. Theme 4: Regulatory and ethical practices in influencer marketing

The efficiency of regulatory frameworks and "ethical practices" was a recurring theme. While the UAE has made paces in creating guidelines for ethical influencer marketing, gaps in implementation and constancy persist. Conversely, interview participants determined that stricter regulations are essential to resolve emerging issues, like "transparency and over-commercialisation." The literature also supports the assessment that ethical practices, counting "authenticity and clear disclosures," are energetic for sustaining the credibility of influencer marketing.

4.7. Discussion

From both the qualitative and quantitative findings it is obtained that consumers are highly likely to buy their products from the influencer when they trust in the content and thus the growth of the influencer marketing grew by more than $5.78% each year which helps in meeting the first objective positively. From both the quantitative and the qualitative data, it is identified that customers are focusing on transparency and even the regulatory framework highly has focused on ethical concerns and even the personalisation that helps in meeting both the second and even the third objectives. Both from the qualitative and even quantitative findings, it is obtained that the UAE has followed the regulatory measurements and well as ethical guidelines to make personalisation in influencer marketing which helps in meeting the fourth objective.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the above findings, it is concluded that the "evolution of influencer marketing" in the UAE has significantly redesigned the "digital marketing landscape," providing brands with a powerful tool to involve audiences. However, the rise of the marketing approach has also presented ethical challenges, including authenticity, transparency, and regulatory compliance. Moreover, statistical results specify a growing concern among consumers regarding misleading endorsements, emphasising the essential of stricter guidelines and responsible practices. The first research question explores the strategic changes and linking in terms of influencer marketing, directly addressing the objective of understanding its evolution.

5.1. Recommendations

In order to increase "ethical influencer marketing" in the UAE, brands should arrange transparency by clearly revealing paid partnerships. Moreover, influencers should adhere to ethical guidelines, confirming content complements privacy and evades

manipulation. Conversely, regulatory bodies are essential to create stricter frameworks to apply compliance, including consequences for misleading practices. Collaboration between brands, influencers, and regulators to adopt more socially sensitive campaigns, refining consumer faith.

5.2. Future Research
Future studies should inspect the efficiency of specific regulatory actions on refining ethical standards in influencer marketing across the UAE. Moreover, discovering the role of emerging technologies such as AI in "influencer campaigns and their ethical implications" delivers visions into the evolving industry. A proportional study of consumer perceptions of influencer marketing across diverse Middle Eastern countries also aids in considering cultural disparities and their influence on marketing policies.

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APPENDICES

Question 1: How do you observe the influence of personalized influencer marketing on "consumer purchase decisions" in the UAE?

Response 1: "Consumers are more likely to buy products promoted by influencers they trust when the content feels personalised."
Response 2: "It significantly boosts sales as consumers feel the content is tailored to their preferences."
Response 3: "Personalised influencer marketing creates a more engaging experience, leading to higher purchase conversions."
Response 4: "The impact depends on how well the content aligns with the consumer's needs and interests."
Response 5: "It can be actual but may sometimes feel intrusive, which could turn consumers away."

Question 2: What are the main challenges you face regarding transparency in personalised influencer marketing campaigns?

Response 1: "Ensuring that all promotional content is clearly marked as sponsored can be problematic."
Response 2: "Consumers are becoming more aware and expect clear indicators when content is paid or sponsored."
Response 3: "Miscommunication between influencers and brands on disclosure standards can lead to a lack of transparency."
Response 4: "Sometimes, brands do not want the promotional nature of the content to be too obvious, which creates transparency issues."
Response 5: "We are required to balance transparency with authentic content creation, which can be challenging."

Question 3: How concerned are consumers about "data privacy" when cooperating with personalised influencer marketing?

Response 1: "Many consumers express concerns, especially if they feel their data is being used without consent."
Response 2: "There is a general apprehension, but not enough awareness on how data is used in influencer marketing."
Response 3: "Consumers tend to trust influencers but are wary about how their data is collected and used for targeting."
Response 4: "Data privacy concerns are rising, particularly with the growing awareness of data breaches."
Response 5: "Data privacy remains a major issue; transparency in how data is collected could help alleviate concerns."

Question 4: In your experience, how operative are current ethical practices and regulations in the UAE for influencer marketing?

Response 1: "The regulations have improved, but there is still a lack of enforcement in some areas."
Response 2: "Many influencers and brands are aware of ethical guidelines, but adherence varies"
Response 3: "There is a need for stricter guidelines to ensure all parties are adhering to ethical standards."
Response 4: "Ethical practices are getting better, but the industry still needs more consistent standards."
Response 5: "The existing framework is a good start, but more robust regulations are needed to address emerging issues."

Question 5: What strategies do you consider are most operative in building consumer trust through personalized influencer marketing?

Response 1: "Authenticity is key, where influencers who genuinely use and believe in the products they promote build more trust."
Response 2: "Attractive storytelling that resonates with the audience helps create a deeper connection and trust."
Response 3: "Personalised content that aligns well with the influencer's usual style and tone is more effective."
Response 4: "Cooperating with influencers who have a long-term relationship with the brand can enhance credibility."
Response 5: "Transparent communication about sponsored content helps consumers feel informed and appreciated."