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THE IMPACT OF TIKTOK GO AFFILIATE MARKETING ON CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT AND TRAVEL TICKET PURCHASE DECISIONS

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Abstract

In the era of digital technology, customers' information-seeking and purchasing behaviors have undergone changes, especially in the tourism sector. TikTok Go is featured as an affiliate marketing platform, enabling creators to promote tourism products and services via interactive short video content. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of TikTok Go affiliate marketing on the engagement with the brand and the decision to buy a tourism ticket. In this study, the mediators between the two variables, including consumer engagement, are also examined. A quantitative approach was applied, with a survey of users of TikTok who had come into contact with TikTok Go content promoting tourist destinations. The data analysis technique used was the Partial Least-Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS 4.0 software. The findings indicate that there is a positive and significant relationship between affiliate marketing activities and the engagement of consumers and their willingness to purchase a tourist ticket. Additionally, consumer engagement also affects the customer's buying decisions. This was also found to be a mediator between affiliate marketing and purchasing decisions. These results show that the use of affiliate marketing on social networks is not only capable of engaging consumers but also helps to convert them into consumers who make purchases in the tourism sector. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of digital marketing literature, while practically, it offers insights for players in the tourism industry on leveraging TikTok Go.

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation has changed consumer purchasing habits and this is greatly due to the quick adoption of the Internet and social media platforms in daily life, changing how consumers seek information, explore options and make their final decisions. Social media now functions beyond its original role as a communication medium and it has developed into a strategic marketing channel that actively shapes consumer attitudes perceptions and behavioral intentions. According to Dwivedi et al. (2021) social media operates as an influential mechanism that guides how consumers interpret brands and products within digital environments.

Within the tourism industry consumers increasingly depend on social media platforms when they seek information about destinations and when they compare reviews recommendations and promotional offers before completing their purchasing decisions and this dependence is reinforced by the accessibility of user generated content as well as continuous real time interaction among users which collectively strengthens the decision making process. The digital interaction enables consumers to construct more informed judgments in relation to travel choices because the information they access is dynamic experiential and socially validated (Verma et al., 2022).

In the case of many social media channels, TikTok has shown rapid growth, which is largely fueled by the platform's algorithmic content distribution system, which operates on short form video architecture and maintains a

high level of engagement with users, thus shaping interactions among users. TikTok has become one of the most significant social commerce ecosystems, especially for younger consumers, as it is possible due to the integration of entertainment and purchasing functionality into the single application. According to Li et al. (2024), it helps to improve the role of TikTok in influencing consumer decisions by combining content consumption and transactional features of the platform.

This ecosystem TikTok Go provides content producers with an opportunity to include affiliate links in their videos and thus helps users to switch from the content consumption stage to the purchase stage in terms of tourism products and services without exiting the platform interface. The work of Lou and Yuan (2022) and Lim et al. (2023) shows that the consumer response is of high importance in social commerce environments as it is caused by their attractiveness and relevance to the needs of the users because all these aspects together make the basis for the development of the trust and purchase intention in the digital environment.

It has been already proved that the use of influencer marketing social commerce approaches and social media advertising are significant for the development of consumers' behavior and purchases. However, the empirical study devoted to the influence of the TikTok Go affiliate marketing on the tourists' tickets purchases by means of the mediator of the consumer engagement process is rare. The majority of scientific papers separate the constructs like consumer engagement influencer marketing effects and purchase intention and consider each of them individually instead of building up an integrative model for explaining these concepts' interconnections in the tourism sphere context. In light of this gap, the present study will develop an integrated model that integrates both the Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory and Consumer Engagement Theory in an effort to provide an explanation as to how affiliate marketing strategies on TikTok Go act as stimuli that impact consumer engagement states and eventually affect tour ticket purchasing behavior.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review The literature review section is meant to present the theoretical foundations of this study along with the systematic formation of hypotheses. In order to form a sound academic setting, it is important to integrate the theories behind digital mediums and consumer behavior with the most recent empirical research conducted on digital business systems.

2.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Background

2.1.1 Digital Marketing

Today in the present era, digital marketing is described as the marketing of products through the use of digital technology, which involves the use of different forms of communication such as website, mobile applications, social media, search engines, emails, and many other forms of digital media which work together within the connected online environment. With the invention of the internet in the 1990s and then its fast proliferation during the decade of 2000, digital marketing has completely revolutionized the communication systems of the businesses as well as how the consumers have started interacting with each other and how the promotional message designs and delivered in the digital world (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

With the development of digital marketing, digital technology has been increasingly becoming an integral part of the consumers' day-to-day activities. This has further been made possible with the increasing use of smartphones, social media platforms, and internet-based services, which has changed the pattern of the interactions of the consumers from the physical world to the interconnected digital world.

Moreover, the growth of the Internet has become increasingly influenced over the years, and an example of this is the emergence of the advertising scene, where digital marketing has become the strategy in attracting target audiences and examining the preferences of consumers in real-time. In addition to that, the Internet has become the replacement of various disadvantages of the traditional marketing system, which involves one-way communication. Some of the benefits of digital marketing include higher level of interactivity, greater level of personalization, and better decision making based on data. The digital marketing evaluates performance of campaigns in terms of various measurable metrics like reach, engagement, click-through rates, conversion rates, and this helps to optimize the strategies in the process of their execution (Hasnain, 2026). Moreover, there are some strategic benefits of digital marketing for organizations, and these include increased reach of markets, improved cost-efficiency, and enhanced customer engagement, as it enables organizations to address target audiences beyond the geographical borders while at the same time saving on costs of promotion as opposed to traditional media.

It is evident that the tourism industry digital marketing has a key role in influencing the consumer’s buying behavior since it offers easily available information and promotional content that affects how the consumer perceives the destination and makes purchasing decisions while social media platforms act as particularly powerful tools in this context since they offer the possibility of presenting destinations and interacting with prospective tourists.

2.1.2 Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing refers to a digital marketing approach where individuals or third parties known as affiliates receive a commission for the promotion of an organization’s products or services. Through affiliate marketing affiliates take prospective consumers to a merchant’s online store using unique affiliate links and get their commissions on predetermined events including clicks, registration, and purchases (Duffy, 2005).

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Technological advancements and developments in social media have led to a transition in affiliate marketing where it has become a creator based marketing approach rather than a static website based one and the transformation has been fueled by influencer economies and content driven platforms. For example social media platforms such as TikTok allow affiliates to create short videos of products in order to increase their visibility while at the same time affecting the behavior of consumers online in a positive way (Lou and Yuan, 2022). As far as social commerce is concerned affiliate marketing becomes a way of increasing brand recognition as well as trust among consumers since peer recommendations are perceived to be much more credible than traditional forms of advertisements (Lim et al., 2023).

The general approach to the affiliate marketing scheme includes several different forms of compensation and these forms involve Pay Per Sale, Pay Per Click, and Pay Per Lead approaches. Specifically, within the Pay Per Sale approach, an affiliate earns commissions from the sales made through the affiliate link, while within the Pay Per Click approach the payment depends on the number of clicks and within the Pay Per Lead approach, the affiliate gets money for completing the particular actions by users, such as registration or filling out certain forms (Duffy, 2005).

In the sphere of the tourism industry, affiliate marketing becomes particularly important since it involves the possibility of promotion of travel products, like destination packages, transportations, and accommodations. Furthermore, this type of marketing makes it possible to disseminate persuasive information that influences consumers' attitudes and creates purchase intention (Casaló et al., 2021). Additionally, due to the interactive nature of social media, it is possible for consumers to communicate their opinions and share content.

According to the Stimulus Organism Response theory, affiliate marketing acts as an external stimulus exposing consumers to digital content through the influence on the internal psychological state in particular, consumer engagement, resulting in purchase decision making as a behavioral response. Therefore, affiliate marketing plays an important role in determining engagement based purchasing behavior in digital marketing ecosystem supported by social media.

2.1.3 Consumer Engagement

Engagement of the consumer is the amount of consumer involvement with a brand product service or the marketing content. This involvement is not only in terms of purchase but includes other aspects such as cognitive emotional and behavioral aspects as they arise from consumer interaction with the marketing stimulus. Within the digital context consumer engagement is considered an important measure of marketing success because of the degree of involvement of the consumers with the content provided by the organizations.

As per Brodie et al. (2011), consumer engagement is a state of mind that comes about due to the interaction of the consumers with the brand or organization and this is because the state is developed due to constant involvement rather than isolated transactions. According to Hollebeek et al. (2022), consumer engagement has three elements; cognitive emotional and behavioral elements that motivate consumer involvement with the brand and digital content.

Consumer engagement in social media becomes evident through a variety of direct actions, including the acts of liking, commenting on and sharing certain content, saving posts, and even searching for additional information about a product or a service. All these activities indicate that customers are no longer just passive receivers of information; they have become active participants in the two-way digital communication process. As was stated by Harrigan et al. (2023), the more intense the consumer engagement is, the greater is the interest in the marketing message and the more emotional and cognitive connection there is to it. This could eventually affect the formation of behavioral intentions in the future.

In the case of TikTok, consumer engagement becomes crucial for the effectiveness of affiliate marketing because of the unique features of this platform. The main feature of the TikTok platform is that its content is represented by short videos that are visual, interactive, and shareable, making users interact with the different kinds of promotional content produced by creators. According to Lim et al. (2023), the more involved consumers become in the process, the higher the degree of trust they have towards the information sources they receive from such platforms. This results in an increased likelihood of making purchase decisions in the social commerce setting.Based on Consumer Engagement Theory, the process of engagement serves as a psychological mediator between the external stimuli in marketing and the reactions of the consumers, and in this research paper, the role of consumer engagement will be that of a mediating variable.

2.1.4 Purchase Decision

The purchase decision entails the process in which customers make purchases of products or services in an attempt to satisfy their specific needs and wants and this process marks the end result of a well-organized process that comprises of information search, alternatives evaluation, and purchase decision. In marketing research, the concept of the purchase decision is one of the main criteria in the evaluation of marketing performance since it reflects the behavior of consumers rather than just intentions or attitudes.

As noted by Kotler and Armstrong (2018), the process of the purchase decision involves five stages which are need recognition, information search, alternatives evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior and such stages suggest that consumer decisions are made via an organized thought process rather than impulsive behavior.

In the modern age, the consumer decision-making process has gone through considerable change in the sense that consumers rely greatly on digital information sources such as user-generated reviews, influencer opinions, social media content, and digital marketing campaigns prior to making their final purchase decisions and this change helps consumers evaluate their choices effectively and minimize the risk associated with the quality of products or services.

The purchase decisions in the tourism industry are affected by several factors such as the quality of destination information, traveler's experience, promotion, and booking system accessibility. Social media acts as an important source of information for the tourism sector since it offers visual and interactive content that allows consumers to experience destinations virtually before actually deciding to go there and thanks to TikTok Go, consumers can get tourism information, reviews, and promotions while at the same time making their transactions via affiliate links in their content streams.

According to the Stimulus Organism Response Theory, the purchase decision is defined as the behavioral response that results from exposing the consumer to marketing stimuli and their subsequent psychological processing, while in the said theory, TikTok Go affiliate marketing can be considered as the stimulus, consumer engagement as the organism, and the purchase decision as the response. In light of the said theoretical context, the purchase decisions are not only directly affected by affiliate marketing exposure but are also indirectly affected by the consumer engagement that mediates between affiliate marketing exposure and purchase decisions.

The following purchase decision indicators are adopted for use in this research, based on the consumer decision making process suggested by Kotler and Armstrong (2018), which are:

1 Need Recognition
2 Information Search
3 Alternative Evaluation
4 Purchase Decision
5 Post-Purchase Behavior

The above indicators will be used to measure the decision making process of the consumers following their exposure to TikTok Go affiliate marketing for tourism products and services.

2.2 Empirical Review and Hypothesis

Use of TikTok Go to conduct affiliate marketing creates opportunities for the promotion of messages in the format of short interactive videos distributed using algorithmic approach and this approach ensures more dynamic exposure of users to tourism-oriented content. The affiliate content that is informative, visually attractive, and authentic is likely to result in higher responsiveness from users and this responsiveness manifests itself in engaging activities including liking, commenting, sharing, and looking for additional information about the advertised tourism products. According to Omeisha et al. (2024), the quality and authenticity of the affiliate content are important factors determining consumer interactivity on social media platforms.

H1: TikTok Go affiliate marketing has a positive and significant impact on consumer engagement.

Presentation of real-time travel experiences, visual itineraries, and authentic reviews in short form videos increases the effectiveness of consumer search for information, makes messages credible and informative and as a consequence decreases consumer hesitancy in buying process and results in increased number of ticket booking. Research by Sesar et al. (2023) explains that high-quality digital information can reduce consumer uncertainty, thus supporting a more confident decision-making process in the context of online tourism. Consumers feel confident about evaluating different alternatives for destinations and services when they have good information that is relevant and credible. It implies that the quality of information is important for making a rational decision base in a digital world where there are many options and information is exposed.

H2: TikTok Go affiliate marketing positively and significantly impacts tourism ticket purchase decisions.

Those consumers who are engaged with promotions usually have a strong psychological and emotional connection with a brand/product. Such engagement produces cognitive reinforcement, which means that consumers analyze information better and accelerate the process of moving from the consideration phase to purchasing. That is, the stronger the engagement of consumers, the more likely they will make an impulse purchase due to the strong link between consumers and consumed content. According to Brodie et al. (2011), consumer engagement can be seen as a psychological condition that enhances the consumers' relationships with brands, and such a condition directly affects various behavioral outcomes, such as purchase decision.

H3: Consumer engagement positively and significantly influences tourism ticket purchasing decisions.

Affiliate marketing does not necessarily trigger direct purchase behavior since its effect works via intermediaries and in this case, the consumer engagement process is a crucial mediator where consumer exposure to advertising triggers intentions leading to actual purchasing decisions. In the beginning, the affiliate marketing content triggers consumer engagement and such engagement creates psychological motivation which enhances the likelihood of ticket purchases. Omeisha et al. (2024) and Sesar et al. (2023) both confirm that engagement serves as a crucial mediator between digital marketing stimuli and consumer behavior.

H4: Consumer engagement mediates the effect of TikTok Go affiliate marketing on tourism ticket purchase.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research adopts a quantitative research methodology, incorporating an associative survey design and framing the research within an explanatory paradigm that emphasizes investigating and validating causality and pathways between consumer engagement in TikTok Go affiliate marketing campaigns and tourism ticket purchase decision-making. The population used in the current study comprises of TikTok social media users who have been introduced to tourism promotions through the TikTok Go affiliate marketing system in the past year and are relevant for digital tourism consumption behavior.

Primary data collection involved the use of a time-framed method, covering the period from April 2026 to May 2026, while the sample used was identified using the non-probability, purposive sampling method and is based on the following inclusion criteria: a minimum age of seventeen years, having an active TikTok social media profile, being exposed to TikTok Go tourism affiliate campaigns and demonstrating engagement behavior, like viewing, liking, commenting, sharing or clicking affiliate links. The primary data was gathered directly from the participants in the form of digital questionnaires that were shared among them through social media channels such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, and secondary data was gathered from international peer-reviewed journals, academic reference books, and economic reports.

The measure used in this study involves the use of a standardized five-point Likert scale, which ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree, and this measure is used in gathering information about the affiliate marketing exposure level and purchase decision behavior of the respondents. The analysis will be done using Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares in SmartPLS 4.0. In the first phase, Outer Model evaluation is done where the measurement quality is determined using the convergent validity from factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted; the discriminant validity from the Fornell Larcker criterion and Heterotrait Monotrait ratio; and the internal consistency reliability from Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. In the second phase, Inner Model evaluation is done where the structural relationships are analyzed using the coefficient of determination R squared predictive relevance and bootstrapping methods producing T statistics and P values.

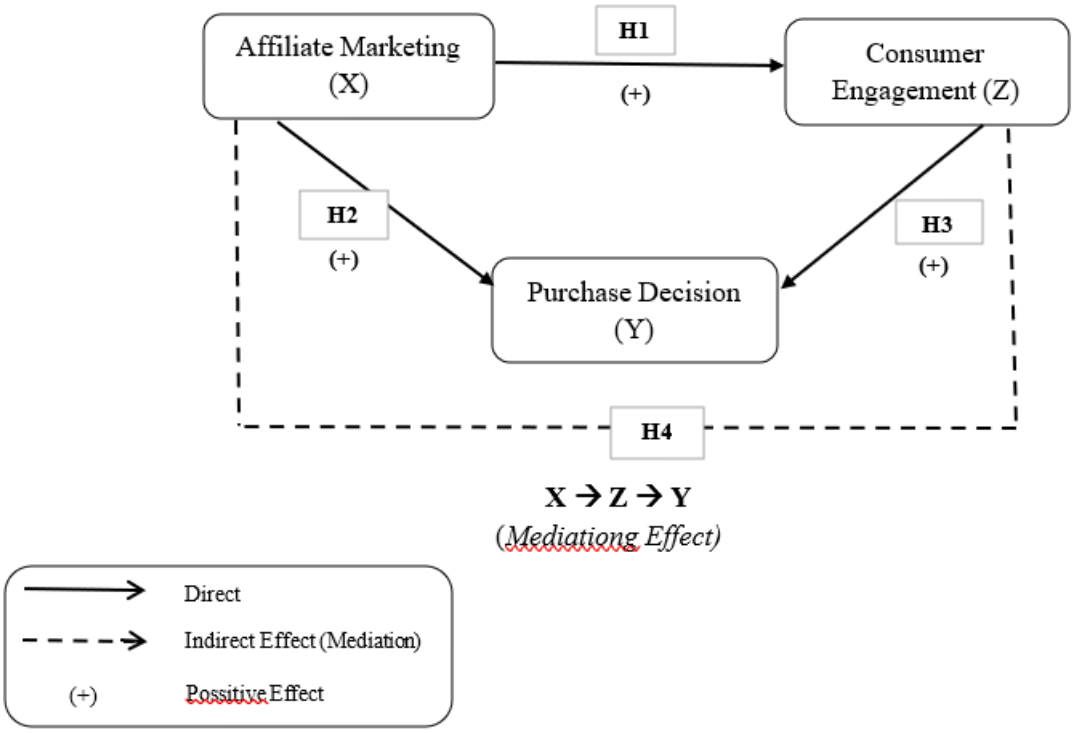


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Study
Source: Authors (2026)

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Result

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated to ensure that the indicators used in the study were both valid and reliable in representing the latent constructs, namely Affiliate Marketing, Consumer Engagement, and Purchase Decision. The evaluation followed the standards of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling by examining convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. Convergent validity was assessed through outer loading values and Average Variance Extracted. Outer loading reflects the extent to which each indicator correlates with its underlying construct. All indicators in this study produced loading values between 0.721 and 0.916 and these

values exceed the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70. This finding shows that all the indicators make a significant contribution to the explanation of their corresponding latent variable and none of the indicators can be dropped because of the low level of the indicators' strength in explaining the latent variable. The items observed in the questionnaire in substantive terms are consistent with the concept of each construct.

Further assessment was carried out using Average Variance Extracted. AVE is the average variance accounted for by the latent construct in indicators. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for the variables Affiliate Marketing, Purchase Decision and Consumer Engagement were all greater than the minimum accepted value of 0.50. In other words, the variance of the observed indicators that is not due to error in measuring the latent construct is less than 50 percent. Consumer Engagement had the greatest amount of explanatory power suggesting that it showed a relatively high degree of internal consistency, whereas the other constructs showed a lower degree of internal consistency. Hence, this design has a more stable representation of indicators in describing the variables measured.

To evaluate the internal consistency among the measurement items, reliability testing was done by using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Cronbach's Alpha values were found to be within the range of 0.915 to 0.950, which is very high within the constructs. In the meantime, the Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.931 to 0.958, reinforcing the evidence that all constructs have good reliability even within the differences between the loading weights between indicators. All these values were higher than the recommended value of 0.70, so it can be concluded that the measurement model has an adequate level of stability and consistency in representing the theoretical constructs studied. The indicators show good convergent validity and high internal consistency, thus there is no concern about the measurement bias and/or construct instability, and they are good indicators to proceed to the structural model analysis.

Table 1. Reliability and Validity Assessment

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Affiliate Marketing	0.937	0.948	0.694
Purchase Decision	0.915	0.931	0.629
Consumer Engagement	0.950	0.958	0.742

Source: Authors (2026)

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was tested using the coefficient of determination R squared and other model evaluation criteria to see how well the proposed relationships among Affiliate Marketing Consumer Engagement and Purchase Decision actually account for the variance in the data. A value of 0.846 for the Purchase Decision variable suggests that both Affiliate Marketing and Consumer Engagement together account for 84.6 per cent of the variance in consumers' purchase decisions.

This number is very high, meaning that the model has a strong power of explanation on the tourist ticket purchasing behavior, i.e. the result of the combination of the two predictor variables has a significant contribution in influencing the purchasing behavior of tourists. This means that most of the decision making changes in purchases can be attributed to the affiliate marketing mechanism and the amount of consumer involvement in the context of this study, the rest are affected by other factors not included in the model. It further implies that 15.4 per cent of the variation in the Purchase Decision is due to other external factors that are not accounted for in the model such as personal preferences, situational constraints and price sensitivity.

Additionally, the R squared value for the Consumer Engagement equals 0.788, suggesting that Affiliate Marketing explains 78.8% of the variance in Consumer Engagement. The findings highlight the dominant role of affiliate marketing activities in the cognitive, affective and behavioral engagement of users with promotional content on TikTok Go. The variance not accounted for by the above factors (21.2%) suggests other factors are influencing the purchase decision, including content quality, platform algorithms and individual differences in media consumption patterns. These factors are not included in this research model, but they still have the potential to contribute to variations in consumer behavior in the context of purchasing tourist tickets. This finding also confirms that the structural model used has strong explanatory power, especially in predicting Purchase Decisions and Consumer Engagement in the context of TikTok Go affiliate marketing and digital tourism ticket purchasing behavior.

Table 2. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Endogenous Variable	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Purchase Decision	0.846	0.842
Consumer Engagement	0.788	0.786

Source: Authors (2026)

In order to conduct the model fit evaluation, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual was used to compare the discrepancies between the observed correlation matrix and the model-implied correlation matrix. The SRMR value for the current research is equal to 0.086 and it is less than the generally recommended criterion of 0.10, thus indicating the acceptable model fit. It means that the structural model is capable of capturing the empirical data and that there is no considerable residual error between the observed relationships and the predicted relationships.

Practically, the model demonstrates acceptable fit and, thus, the structural connections between Affiliate Marketing Consumer Engagement and Purchase Decision can be considered appropriate for the data structure.

Table 3. Model Fit Assessment

Indicator	Value
SRMR	0.086

Source: Authors (2026)

Hypothesis Testing

In order to test the hypotheses, the bootstrapping technique was performed using the SmartPLS software to determine the significance of the structural relationship between Affiliate Marketing, Consumer Engagement, and Purchase Decision. For this purpose, the evaluation was made based on the path coefficient, t-statistic, and p-value for assessing the importance and statistical significance of the proposed relationship within the research framework.

As a result of the analysis, it can be concluded that there is a positive and statistically significant direct effect of Affiliate Marketing on Purchase Decision, where the path coefficient is 0.619, t-statistic is 7.751, and p-value is below 0.001. Therefore, it is possible to assume that the more consumers are exposed to affiliate marketing messages through the platform TikTok Go, the more likely they will make a decision to buy tour tickets.

In addition, Affiliate Marketing was also found to have a very strong positive impact on Consumer Engagement, with a path coefficient of 0.888, a t-statistic of 44.511, and a p-value less than 0.001. It can be seen from these results that the affiliate marketing content available on TikTok Go exerts an overwhelming impact on consumer interactions, reactions, and cognitive and emotional engagement with the promotional material for tourism services. The very high path coefficient value also signifies the very sensitive nature of consumer engagement to affiliate marketing.

Furthermore, Consumer Engagement has a positive and significant impact on Purchase Decision, with a path coefficient of 0.325, a t-statistic of 3.734, and a p-value less than 0.001. This signifies that the consumers who exhibit higher engagement with affiliate marketing on TikTok Go are more inclined to move onto the purchase decision stage of tourism tickets, albeit with a lower level of influence compared to affiliate marketing itself.

Additionally, the impact of Affiliate Marketing on Purchase Decision through Consumer Engagement was found to be significant, with a value of 0.288 as the coefficient, t-statistics at 3.762, and a p-value less than 0.001. This shows that there is indeed a mediation process involved, wherein affiliate marketing impacts purchase decision both directly and indirectly through consumer engagement in TikTok Go.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Affiliate Marketing → Purchase Decision	0.619	7.751	<0.001	Supported
H2	Affiliate Marketing → Consumer Engagement	0.888	44.511	<0.001	Supported
H3	Consumer Engagement → Purchase Decision	0.325	3.734	<0.001	Supported
H4	Affiliate Marketing → Consumer Engagement → Purchase Decision	0.288	3.762	<0.001	Supported

Source: Authors (2026)

The results of the structural model analysis indicate that all hypotheses in this study are supported by empirical data. Affiliate marketing has a significant direct influence on consumer engagement and purchase decisions. This indicates that exposure to affiliate content on TikTok Go plays a significant role in shaping how consumers interact with promotions and determine their purchase decisions. The magnitude of this influence is also an indication that affiliate marketing is the most important variable in the model as it has a significant contribution to the other variables.

This was also found to have a significant impact on consumer engagement and purchase decisions. This discovery suggests that consumers who are more cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally engaged consume more tour tickets. This is a confirmation that consumer engagement is an internal process that is connected between digital marketing exposure and purchase actions.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study will help enrich the social commerce literature by explaining the impact of TikTok Go affiliate marketing on tour ticket purchases via consumer engagement as a mediating variable. The results extend the knowledge that affiliate marketing not only serves as a promotional tool, but also as a stimulus that activates mental processes that result in purchasing decisions.

The Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) model of Mehrabian and Russell (1974) can explain this finding. Affiliate marketing on TikTok Go serves as a stimulator, from which consumer information is given. Consumer

Engagement is a living entity that mirrors the internal responses it generates through thoughts, feelings and actions of consumers. Purchase Decision is the response that emerges as the final result, namely the decision to purchase a tour ticket.This framework explains that consumer behavior in digital environments is not produced directly by external stimuli alone but is shaped through internal psychological mechanisms that mediate the relationship between exposure and action. The empirical results of this study support this theoretical logic because they demonstrate that consumer engagement partially mediates the relationship between affiliate marketing and purchase decisions which indicates that the effect of affiliate marketing on purchasing behavior operates through both direct influence and indirect psychological processing pathways.

Affiliate Marketing and Purchase Decisions

Thus, the results of research demonstrate that affiliate marketing has a notable influence on the purchasing decision of tourists' tickets, which could be explained from the point of view of the Source Credibility Theory, developed by Hovland & Weiss (1951). According to this theory, persuasion communication process becomes more effective if it is made by a credible source, and the credibility is associated with trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness of the information.

In particular, in the case of affiliate marketing on TikTok Go, creators and affiliates are usually social influencers and therefore their communication style is considered to be more sincere, informal, and non-commercial one compared to traditional advertisements. As a result, the information is perceived by consumers as credible while considering alternatives.

Nevertheless, the findings of the current study may be viewed as consistent with those of the previous studies conducted for international samples. As reported by Lou & Yuan (2019), the credibility of the influencer has an important influence on purchase intention since it promotes trust development and positive perception of brand image, whereas, according to Jin & Ryu (2020), the role of honest communication provided by the influencer is important for consumer purchase intention. Also, as shown by Sokolova & Kefi (2020) and Ki & Kim (2019), the product recommendations made by the influencer have an effect on purchase intention of consumers via trust building. Moreover, Yesiloglu & Costello (2021) state that promotion of the product with the help of affiliate content reduces risks of consumers and encourages purchases.

The application of the findings of the research to the tourism industry that involves products with high levels of experience value and uncertainty allows making an important contribution to the body of knowledge in the field. In particular, the contribution of the study to the Source Credibility Theory has been established.

Affiliate Marketing and Consumer Engagement

Affiliate marketing is also considered to be one of the strong determinants of consumer engagement and the reason behind that can be explained via Customer Engagement Theory where engagement is described as a multi-dimensional concept including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement in the interaction with the brand or marketing message. In this case, engagement does not just include behaviors but involves inner psychological involvement that builds up because of repeated interaction with the marketing stimuli in the digital environment.

The affiliate content posted on TikTok is usually created using short video posts combining entertainment value, informational content, and personal experiences and this makes up the communication medium that requires active response from users. The response from consumers takes the form of like, comment, share, search for more information and all these elements make up the level of consumer engagement in digital environment.

The empirical results of this research align with those found by Brodie et al. (2013), according to which interactive digital environments increase engagement through continuous interactions of consumers and brands. At the same time, Hollebeek et al. (2014) prove that engaging and interactive social media content increases engagement both cognitively and emotionally, Dessart et al. (2015) indicate that social media enables participation, which increases consumer engagement, and Kumar and Pansari (2016), as well as Shawky et al. (2020) reveal that social media marketing activities substantially increase consumer engagement through personalized communications and interactive content structure.

The presence of the very strong relationship in the current research implies that the algorithmic architecture of the TikTok platform is an essential factor that intensifies the engagement formation process through continuous exposure of users to content related to their interests and behaviors. This result proves that affiliate marketing needs to be perceived not just as an instrument of creating transactions but also as a tool of engagement development.

Consumer Engagement and Purchase Decisions

Consumer engagement proves to become an important determinant of purchases and the relationship can be justified using Customer Engagement Theory that states that highly engaged consumers have greater psychological attachment and trust. The psychological variables act as internal mechanisms that decrease uncertainty and increase consumer confidence during the purchase decision process.

The results of this research are in line with those of Harrigan et al. (2017) who prove that consumer engagement positively influences purchase behavior in digital settings. Moreover, France et al. (2016) prove that more engaged consumers display greater intentions for purchases and better conversion results whereas Pansari and Kumar (2017) point out that engagement becomes the crucial variable that connects marketing actions with consumers' behaviors.

Besides, Lim et al. (2022) and Cheung et al. (2021) provide evidence that engagement acts as the psychological mechanism linking exposure to marketing stimuli and purchase outcomes in digital environment.

The study adds to the body of knowledge by using the engagement-purchase link in the tourism industry, where consumption is primarily experiential and intangible. In such an environment, engagement becomes particularly important because through it customers are able to analyze information deeper and visualize their travel experiences, thereby reducing any risk associated with quality of services or destinations chosen. Engagement therefore acts not just as an indicator of behavior but also a cognitive and affective process that helps in minimizing risk and increases chances of tourism ticket purchase.

The Mediating Role of Consumer Engagement

Another one of the major results found during this research is that the relationship between affiliate marketing and purchase decisions is mediated by consumer engagement and this finding provides some empirical validation for the fundamental premise of the Stimulus Organism Response model according to which the effects of external marketing stimuli on consumer behavior are explained via internal psychological processes and not through actions.

Within this mechanism affiliate marketing does not directly lead to consumers' purchase behavior but serves as an initial stimulus for further consumer engagement, emotions, and interaction and these internal psychological processes subsequently transform into more pronounced behavioral intentions which eventually result in purchasing decisions. In this case consumer engagement can be viewed as the central psychological mechanism that turns consumers' exposure to affiliate marketing messages into behavioral outcome in the form of buying of travel tickets.

These research findings corroborate those by Lou and Yuan (2019) and Shan et al. (2020) who have shown that engagement serves as the mediator of the impact of social media marketing initiatives on purchase decisions. Similar findings were obtained by Djafarova and Bowes (2021) and Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo (2021). Yuan et al. (2023) further demonstrate the fact that engagement is an important mediator that acts as a mechanism connecting the exposure to digital marketing and purchasing decisions through online marketing tools.

The current research adds to the existing literature with a focus on the affiliate marketing of TikTok Go in tourism that was not covered in earlier studies and suggests that the engagement level of short-form video social commerce platforms makes the process of decision-making more involved and intensive for the consumers. Thus, the research provides an important contribution to the literature on social commerce through considering consumer engagement as an important mechanism explaining tourism purchases.

Theoretical Implications

There are several theoretical implications provided by this research that increase the knowledge of consumers' behavior in digital tourism marketing environment. First implication is the extension of Source Credibility Theory through the demonstration that affiliate marketers on TikTok represent credible information sources which affect consumer decision-making in context of tourism. This means that the role of credibility of expertise and authenticity of content creators in consumer assessment of information about tourism products and services should not be underestimated.

Second theoretical implication is the enrichment of Customer Engagement Theory as it proves that customer engagement is not only a result of marketing but also represents active psychological mechanism translating marketing stimuli into purchasing actions. In other words, customer engagement represents intermediate process connecting exposure to affiliate marketing content and creation of tourism ticket purchase decisions.

The third contribution empirically validates the Stimulus Organism Response model since it shows that the sequence of this process in which affiliate marketing is the stimulus, the consumer engagement is the organism, and the purchase decision is the behavioral response is valid. The existence of such a sequential relationship proves that the consumer behavior in the context of social commerce follows specific psychological sequences rather than direct impacts.

Apart from this, the current research makes another contribution to the wider social commerce literature by combining affiliate marketing and consumer engagement into an integrated model to explain tourist purchases in short form video sites. This integration gives us a better perspective of analyzing the interaction between the digital marketing strategies in the algorithmic environment.

Managerial Implications

With regards to managerial perspective, tourism organizations must change their affiliate marketing approaches through focusing on collaborations with content providers that have the highest level of credibility, authenticity, and audience trust since these factors are much more related to persuasion rather than mere exposure variables such as the number of followers. Therefore, organizations should consider measuring influencers according to the quality of interaction with the audience, the consistency of interaction, and relational trust built by influencers among themselves and their followers.

In addition to this, tourism organizations should design affiliate marketing activities which are able to elicit consumers' engagement through narratives, destination stories, experiential demonstrations, and interactive formats. Given that consumer engagement acts as the intermediary in consumer decision making, managerial evaluation of marketing activity performance should not be limited to direct results, but also should take into account engagement related performance metrics.

In addition, the tourism business can benefit from optimizing its operations by utilizing the algorithm-based structure of TikTok where the contents are ranked according to the behavior of the users and interactions, and this demands the creation of emotionally connecting and socially interacting content that will raise visibility and consumer engagement. With these measures in place, organizations can boost trust formation, increase consumer engagement, and ultimately facilitate tourism ticket purchasing decisions.

5. CONCLUSION

The empirical test in this paper proves that the TikTok Go affiliate marketing system plays a significant role in consumer engagement as well as purchase decisions in terms of tourism tickets and all structural hypotheses have been proven to be valid. The results confirm that short video affiliate systems create better immersion, decrease cognitive efforts during the process of decision-making and help to implement efficient conversion mechanisms. This mechanism contributes to the field of digital marketing by combining the metrics of affiliate marketing with psychological engagement processes of consumers in the field of tourism marketing.

However, the scope of the study can be limited by the analysis of one short video system in the specific period of time. It means that future studies need to analyze the effect of short video system and compare it with long form travel content as well as to involve additional variables such as consumer trust and destination image.

In terms of institution and policies, the findings indicate that there is a need for marketing strategies employed by tourism organizations and other public sector institutions to move away from static forms of online marketing towards interactive affiliate marketing schemes. This calls for the adoption of well structured collaboration models among digital content creators, establishment of credibility verification schemes, and production of engaging short videos which put emphasis on information integrity and quality. This will result in improved performance in digital tourism markets.

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