

## Impact of Affiliate and Influencer Marketing on Brand Awareness, Sales, and Consumer Engagement: Evidence from ASEAN Markets

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### Abstract

This study explores the strategic applications of influencer and affiliate marketing in Indochina, focusing on Thailand, Vietnam, and Lao PDR. Drawing from theoretical frameworks such as symbolic capital, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and performance-based marketing, the research examines how consumer trust, engagement, and brand perception are shaped across distinct regulatory and cultural contexts. The study compares the effectiveness of macro-and micro-influencers, highlighting how localized strategies impact consumer behavior and marketing performance. Case studies illustrate that while Thailand leverages micro-influencers for lifestyle branding, Vietnam combines macro-influencer reach with structured affiliate models, and Laos remains in the early stages of influencer marketing adoption. The findings contribute to both academic understanding and practical strategy by revealing how regional factors influence digital marketing outcomes. The study underscores the importance of cultural alignment, regulatory awareness, and contextual adaptability in designing influencer campaigns within emerging Southeast Asian markets.

**Keywords:** Affiliate marketing, Brand awareness, Influencer marketing, Macro-influencer, Micro-influencer

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## Introduction

The rapid rise of influencer and affiliate marketing has reshaped digital branding across Southeast Asia, offering brands new pathways to engage consumers and drive performance-based campaigns. As social media usage grows and e-commerce ecosystems expand, marketers increasingly rely on digital opinion leaders to influence purchase behavior, shape brand identity, and generate measurable results. However, while many studies have examined these trends in developed markets, far less attention has been paid to the emerging yet highly diverse region of Indochina comprising Thailand, Vietnam, and Lao PDR where varying levels of digital maturity, legal regulation, and consumer culture present both opportunities and challenges.

This article addresses this gap by exploring the theoretical foundations and practical applications of influencer and affiliate marketing across these three countries. Drawing on frameworks such as symbolic capital theory, performance-based marketing models, and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study analyzes how different influencer types (macro vs. micro) are adopted, how legal and ethical standards vary, and how branding strategies are localized. Through comparative case studies and regional analysis, the paper offers nuanced insights into how marketers navigate cultural expectations, regulatory constraints, and platform dynamics in Indochina. The findings aim to contribute to both academic understanding and practical strategy development for digital marketers operating in diverse ASEAN contexts.

## Research Objectives

1. To assess the impact of Affiliate Marketing and Influencer Marketing strategies on brand awareness, sales performance, and consumer engagement within the Indochina region, focusing on key performance metrics.
2. To evaluate and compare the effectiveness of Micro-Influencers and Macro-Influencers in enhancing consumer trust, engagement rates, and marketing return on investment (ROI).

## Literature Review

### 1. Influencer Marketing: Definition, Consumer Impact, and Emerging Trends

Influencer marketing has emerged as a core strategy in digital branding by leveraging the credibility and visibility of individuals with a strong online presence. Based on Bourdieu's (1986) theory of symbolic capital, influencers transfer their perceived authenticity to the brands they represent, fostering trust and emotional resonance among consumers. This effect is strongest when an influencer's persona aligns with a brand's values and audience identity (De Veirman et al., 2017). Psychological drivers such as intrinsic motivation and perceived social proof further influence consumer behavior, with transparency playing a key role in maintaining credibility (Boerman, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985). In Thailand, where influencer marketing is widely adopted in sectors like beauty and fashion, consumers respond positively to value-driven storytelling and well aligned brand personalities (Jansom & Pongsakornrungrasit, 2021). Vietnamese consumers also exhibit strong trust in influencers, particularly those who localize content and engage in product education an approach that reinforces brand reliability in competitive e-commerce markets (Dao et al., 2024).

Emerging trends across the Indochina region illustrate the shifting dynamics of influencer marketing. Micro-influencers have become particularly impactful in Thailand and Vietnam, where their relatability and perceived authenticity drive higher engagement rates than their macro counterparts (Kay et al., 2020; Park et al., 2021). These influences are often favored for localized campaigns targeting niche segments, such as eco-conscious consumers or regional dialect groups. In contrast, countries like Lao PDR are still in the early stages of influencer adoption. While social media use is growing, brands often rely on a handful of high visibility figures due to limited digital infrastructure and lower platform penetration (Vu, 2017). This creates a unique dynamic where macro-style influencers dominate by default, although micro-influencer models are expected to rise as internet access expands. Overall, strategic use of influences tailored to cultural and technological conditions has become essential in shaping brand trust and consumer engagement across Indochina.

## 2. Legal and Ethical Considerations in Influencer Marketing

Legal and ethical considerations play a vital role in ensuring that influencer marketing practices are transparent, trustworthy, and aligned with consumer rights. In Thailand, influencer activities are regulated under the Consumer Protection Act and related advertising laws, which require clear disclosure of paid content. This legal foundation, combined with high digital literacy, has made Thai consumers increasingly aware of influencer ethics, pushing brands to prioritize transparency and proper disclosures (Jansom & Pongsakornrunsilp, 2021). In Vietnam, the Law on Advertising (2012) and the Cybersecurity Law (2018) provide a regulatory framework for online endorsements and data handling. Influencers in Vietnam often comply with these laws by clearly marking sponsored content, especially in the e-commerce and tech sectors where product claims are scrutinized. These relatively mature legal environments foster greater trust between brands and digital audiences.

In contrast, countries such as Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Myanmar face significant regulatory and institutional gaps. In Laos, there is currently no formal policy requiring influencers to disclose paid promotions, leading to widespread ambiguity in content labeling and a lack of consumer protection (Vu, 2017). Similarly, Cambodia lacks comprehensive advertising regulations in digital spaces, which has resulted in inconsistent enforcement and low public awareness about ethical content practices (Richardson, 2011). Myanmar presents a unique challenge due to political instability; although social media use is growing, the absence of a consistent regulatory framework makes ethical violations common and enforcement difficult (Whitten-Woodring et al., 2020). These disparities highlight the need for localized ethical guidelines and training for influencers in emerging markets. Without proper legal backing, brands risk reputational damage, and consumers remain vulnerable to deceptive practices in an unregulated digital environment.

## 3. Regional Applications in Indochina

The adoption of influencer and affiliate marketing in Indochina reflects stark differences in digital development across countries. Thailand and Vietnam stand out as regional leaders. Thailand's mature digital infrastructure, regulatory clarity, and cultural alignment with influencer engagement have allowed brands to run ethical, effective campaigns that build trust and drive sales (Belanche et al., 2021; Jansom & Pongsakornrunsilp, 2021). Vietnam, meanwhile, benefits from strong e-commerce momentum and localized strategies supported by analytics, making it a rapidly growing hub for performance based digital marketing (Dao et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2022).

By contrast, Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Myanmar face significant barriers. In Lao PDR and Cambodia, weak digital infrastructure, limited marketing expertise, and inadequate legal frameworks constrain the scalability and impact of influencer campaigns (Richardson, 2011; Vu, 2017). Myanmar's potential is undermined by political instability and a fragile economy, making consistent brand communication difficult and risky (Leong, 2017; Whitten-Woodring et al., 2020). These disparities underscore the need for localized approaches tailored to infrastructure, regulation, and cultural readiness so that each country can maximize the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies.

#### 4. Branding and Digital Marketing Strategies

In the digital era, branding extends beyond logos and slogans to encompass emotional resonance, trust, and consumer connection. Effective digital branding strategies now rely on immersive storytelling, real-time engagement, and the co-creation of brand meaning with audiences. Keller and Swaminathan's (2020) framework on brand equity emphasizes the importance of consistent, value-driven messaging in building strong consumer associations. In Thailand, businesses have embraced influencer branding and affiliate marketing as core strategies, particularly in sectors like cosmetics and lifestyle retail. These approaches are designed not only to showcase products but to build a lifestyle narrative around the brand something that resonates deeply with millennial and Gen Z consumers (Jansom & Pongsakornrunsilp, 2021). Vietnamese firms have taken a data-driven approach to digital branding, integrating analytics tools with social media campaigns to deliver hyper-personalized content. This fusion of performance marketing and branding enhances both awareness and consumer retention in highly competitive e-commerce sectors (Dao et al., 2024).

In Lao PDR, branding through digital marketing remains at a nascent stage. While urban businesses particularly in Vientiane have begun experimenting with influence-led campaigns, there is limited strategic planning in how brands position themselves online. Branding efforts often focus more on visibility than differentiation, partly due to weak market segmentation and a lack of trained digital marketers (Vu, 2017). Nonetheless, small-scale brands are increasingly exploring partnerships with emerging local influences to promote cultural authenticity and community-based appeal. This reflects a broader trend in the region, where affiliate and influencer marketing are no longer just promotional tools but integral components of branding strategy. For markets like Laos, the path forward involves blending traditional brand values with digital innovation to build meaningful, sustainable brand identities in an evolving consumer landscape.

#### 5. Theoretical Frameworks for Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing is grounded in several key theoretical models that explain how partnerships can influence consumer behavior and optimize marketing performance. The Performance-Based Partnership Model posits that affiliates are most effective when incentivized through outcome-driven metrics such as clicks, leads, or sales (Sakas et al., 2024). This is especially relevant in Vietnam, where e-commerce platforms like Tiki and Shopee integrate affiliate systems tied directly to user actions. Trust and Commitment Theory also underpins successful affiliate relationships, emphasizing that sustained performance depends on transparency, fairness, and mutual investment (Yugita & Kasmoo, 2024). Vietnamese marketers often implement tracking tools and standardized commission structures to build long-term trust with content creators, strengthening campaign consistency and accountability. In Thailand, similar frameworks have been

adopted by lifestyle and beauty brands that partner with influencers in a hybrid affiliate role combining storytelling with trackable conversion.

In contrast, in countries like Lao PDR, affiliate marketing is still emerging and often lacks a structured theoretical foundation in practice. While interest is growing among small business owners and tourism operators, campaigns tend to rely on informal, trust-based networks rather than performance-linked contracts. The application of Social Capital Theory is more apparent here, as businesses depend on personal connections and community influence to drive word-of-mouth marketing (Harrison & Schipani, 2007). For example, some local enterprises have begun offering modest rewards to micro-influencers who promote eco-tourism or artisanal products, leveraging tight-knit audience networks. However, the lack of training in affiliate mechanics and digital analytics limits broader adoption. These contrasts highlight how theoretical frameworks can guide strategic development but must be adapted to local infrastructure, business culture, and digital maturity across Indochina.

#### 6. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in Digital Marketing

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), introduced by Ajzen (1991), offers a robust framework for understanding how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape consumer intentions in digital environments. In marketing contexts, TPB helps explain why consumers choose to engage with content, click on affiliate links, or trust influencer recommendations. For example, a positive attitude toward a brand, coupled with social approval and the confidence to act, significantly increases the likelihood of purchase. In Thailand, these dynamics are particularly evident in beauty and lifestyle campaigns, where influencers shape consumer norms and reinforce perceived behavioral control by demonstrating product use in accessible ways (Jansom & Pongsakornrunsilp, 2021). Vietnamese marketers have similarly applied TPB to structure campaigns that align with collective social values, especially among younger consumers who rely on peer validation and mobile accessibility when making online purchases (Dao et al., 2024).

In emerging markets like Lao PDR, TPB offers useful insights into the challenges of digital marketing adoption. Although internet access is increasing, many consumers still report low confidence in using e-commerce platforms, reflecting limited perceived behavioral control. Subjective norms also vary; in smaller communities, traditional word-of-mouth may carry more influence than digital endorsements, especially when influencers are unfamiliar or unaffiliated with local culture. However, recent initiatives such as government-supported digital literacy campaigns have begun shifting these behavioral patterns, making TPB even more relevant in guiding localized strategies (Vu, 2017). Brands targeting these markets must address all three TPB components by building trust through education, aligning messages with community values, and simplifying digital interaction to foster meaningful behavioral intention.

#### 7. Comparing Macro and Micro-Influencers

The distinction between macro- and micro-influencers plays a critical role in shaping campaign strategies across diverse digital markets. Macro-influencers, those with follower counts typically exceeding 100,000 are often used for mass visibility and large-scale brand positioning. In Vietnam, they are commonly employed in campaigns led by global brands in sectors such as electronics and fashion, where aspirational appeal and nationwide reach are essential (Dao et al., 2024). Thailand, by contrast, has witnessed a growing shift toward micro-influencers, particularly in lifestyle, wellness, and cosmetics sectors. Thai consumers

value relatability and personal storytelling, making micro-influencers more effective in fostering engagement and trust (Jansom & Pongsakornrungruangsilp, 2021). These influences typically generate higher interaction rates due to their strong, niche-based connections and perceived sincerity.

In Lao PDR, where digital ecosystems are still developing, influencer marketing remains largely limited to a small number of macro-style figures. These individuals often serve as default ambassadors due to their visibility across platforms and traditional media alike. However, there is growing interest in developing community-based micro-influencers, particularly in tourism and local product promotion. For example, eco-tourism operators in Luang Prabang have successfully collaborated with local content creators to promote sustainable travel experiences, despite lacking formal affiliate tracking systems (Harrison & Schipani, 2007). In Thailand, beauty brands like Srichand and Mistine combine micro-influencer outreach with affiliate links, offering commission-based incentives and increasing campaign measurability. Meanwhile, Vietnamese e-commerce platforms such as Shopee and Lazada provide dedicated tools for hybrid influencer-affiliate roles, enabling performance-driven partnerships. These regional case studies show that while macro- and micro-influencers serve different strategic goals, their effectiveness ultimately depends on cultural context, digital maturity, and alignment with consumer behavior.

## Methodology:

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to investigate the impact of affiliate and influencer marketing on branding, consumer engagement, and digital behavior within the ASEAN context, with particular attention to the Indochina subregion. To ensure rigor and transparency, the review process follows the PRISMA framework (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) and incorporates both qualitative and quantitative filtering mechanisms. A total of 350 articles were initially retrieved from academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and the Thai Citation Index (TCI), using predefined search terms including: “Affiliate Marketing AND Branding AND Influencer Marketing AND ASEAN” and “Impact of Digital Marketing Strategies on Brand Awareness in Southeast Asia.” Google Scholar was also used as a supplementary search tool, though only peer-reviewed sources were considered for final inclusion. After removing 70 duplicate entries, 280 unique articles were screened based on title and abstract relevance. Studies focusing solely on traditional (non-digital) marketing or Western-centric branding were excluded from further consideration.

Subsequent full-text review emphasized articles that provided clear empirical methodologies, sound theoretical underpinnings, and measurable outcomes related to branding and consumer engagement. This refinement process resulted in the selection of 80 articles that were ultimately included in the analysis. These articles spanned from 2017 to 2024 and encompassed diverse regional data from Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos. To extract insights from the included literature, the study employed thematic content analysis through a multi-stage process. First, all articles were read in full to gain contextual familiarity. Key segments were then manually coded using open coding techniques in Microsoft Excel. Codes reflecting core concepts such as brand trust, message credibility, engagement strategy, and influencer typology were grouped and refined into overarching themes. These themes were mapped against established theoretical models such as Symbolic Capital (Bourdieu, 1986), the Theory of Planned Behavior

(Ajzen, 1991), and the Source Credibility Framework (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), facilitating conceptual integration.

Furthermore, to contextualize findings, thematic patterns were analyzed comparatively across Indochina markets. Differences in consumer trust, cultural perception, and influencer effectiveness were highlighted to underscore the significance of regional variation in digital marketing strategy. The PRISMA flow diagram below visually summarizes the article selection process from initial identification through final inclusion.

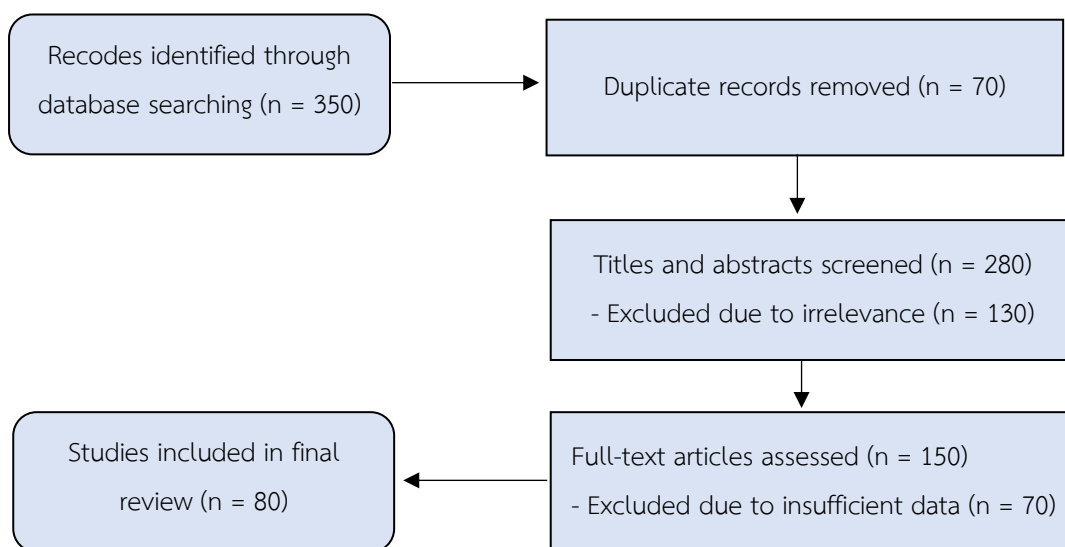
To ensure the rigor and relevance of the data used in this study, a systematic approach was applied in selecting and filtering the data sources. This process involved defining explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria aligned with the research objectives and regional focus. The table below presents a summary of these criteria, highlighting how sources were screened to support consistency and credibility in the study's findings.

**Table 1** Summarizing inclusion and exclusion criteria of data Collection Source Selection

|           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Inclusion | - Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2017–2024                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Criteria  | - Articles focused on Affiliate Marketing, Influencer Marketing and Digital Branding<br>- Empirical studies with measurable outcomes (e.g., brand awareness, sales performance)<br>- Articles covering ASEAN or international contexts relevant to the research objectives |
| Exclusion | - Non-peer-reviewed sources (e.g., blogs, opinion pieces)                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Criteria  | - Articles that focus solely on traditional marketing without a digital component<br>- Studies lacking clear methodology or empirical data<br>- Duplicates or articles that do not align with the research framework                                                       |

The figure below presents a PRISMA flowchart that maps the article selection process in a systematic and reproducible manner.

PRISMA Flow Diagram: The following PRISMA flowchart illustrates the article selection process:



**Figure 1** PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Article Selection Process

## Data Analysis and Validation

1. Following the systematic literature review, this study employed a directed content analysis to extract key themes from 80 selected articles. Four main themes were identified: (1) influencer selection, comparing the effectiveness of macro- and micro-influencers; (2) ethical practices, emphasizing transparency and sponsorship disclosure; (3) regulatory compliance, reflecting varying legal standards across ASEAN countries; and (4) technology integration, highlighting the role of AI and data analytics in enhancing marketing performance. These themes were then analyzed comparatively across ASEAN markets, revealing notable differences in digital infrastructure, consumer trust, and regulatory enforcement. The analysis supports the need for localized strategies tailored to each country's technological and cultural context.

### 2. Comparative Cross-Country Analysis

This study compares five ASEAN countries Thailand, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Myanmar based on digital readiness, cultural attitudes, and technology use. Thailand and Vietnam lead in digital marketing due to strong infrastructure and higher consumer trust in influencers. In contrast, Lao and Cambodia face challenges from limited digital access and weak regulatory frameworks. These disparities highlight the need for localized strategies tailored to each country's context.

### 3. Summative Analysis of Challenges and Opportunities

Key challenges include limited technology in emerging markets, inconsistent regulations, and ethical concerns. However, opportunities exist through AI-driven tools, cost effective micro-influencers, and improving digital infrastructure. Addressing these areas is crucial for effective and sustainable marketing in ASEAN.

To examine the strategic landscape of influencer marketing in Indochina, the study categorized influencer types into macro-, micro-, and nano levels. The following table outlines the distribution of these types across Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos, reflecting their market penetration and relative impact.

**Table 2** Summative Analysis of Challenges and Opportunities

| Challenges                                                                       | Opportunities                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| - Limited access to advanced technological tools in emerging ASEAN markets.      | - Adoption of AI and automation tools to enhance influence on marketing analytics.            |
| - Regulatory inconsistencies create ethical concerns in influencer endorsements. | - Stronger enforcement of advertising disclosure laws increases consumer trust.               |
| - High costs of macro-influencers reduce ROI for some brands.                    | - Growing reliance on micro-influencers due to their cost-effectiveness and niche engagement. |
| - Difficulty in measuring long-term brand equity impacts influence marketing.    | - Advanced consumer behavior analytics allow for more precise ROI measurement.                |

This analysis highlights the need for strategic adaptation in response to both market barriers and digital transformation trends.

### 4. Validation of Findings

To validate the findings, this study employed methodological triangulation, cross-referencing multiple data sources for robust verification. Peer-reviewed academic articles from established databases (Scopus, Web of Science, TCI) provided scholarly grounding, while industry reports and case studies offered

practical validation. Contemporary regional trends and post-pandemic consumer behavior shifts further confirmed the findings' relevance. This multi-source verification process strengthens the research's credibility and ensures alignment with current ASEAN digital marketing practices.

#### 5. Limitations of Data Collection and Source Selection

While this methodology provides valuable insights, it relies primarily on secondary data, which presents certain limitations. The availability of relevant research in high-impact databases such as Scopus and Web of Science were restricted due to predefined search criteria and regional research coverage. Consequently, only 80 articles met the inclusion criteria after a rigorous selection process. Future research should expand data collection through primary methods such as in-depth interviews with businesses, affiliate marketers, and influencers, alongside consumer surveys. This approach would provide deeper insights into affiliate marketing effectiveness, particularly in underrepresented markets like Lao PDR and Cambodia, where current data remains limited.

#### 6. Methodological Frameworks for Literature Review

To ensure methodological rigor, this study adheres to established systematic literature review (SLR) frameworks. The SPAR-4-SLR framework (Paul et al., 2021) provides a structured approach emphasizing transparency in article selection and data synthesis for business and marketing research. Complementing this, Tranfield et al. (2003) underscores the importance of replicability and consistency in systematic data collection and analysis. Additionally, Xiao and Watson's (2019) integrative review framework prove particularly valuable for digital marketing research by combining systematic and narrative synthesis approaches. The integration of these methodologies strengthens the study's academic credibility while ensuring

methodological transparency and reliability throughout the research process.

Understanding theoretical grounding is essential for interpreting the impact of digital marketing mechanisms. The table below summarizes the key theoretical frameworks adopted in the study and their relevance to each strategic element analyzed.

**Table 3** Research Design and Methodology Overview

| Aspect            | Details                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Research Approach | - Qualitative systematic review focusing on affiliate marketing and influencer marketing strategies in the Indochina region.                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Data Sources      | - Peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus, TCI, and other recognized academic databases.<br>- Industry reports and case studies.                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Time Frame        | - Articles and studies published between 2017 and 2024 to ensure relevance to current market trends.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Region of Focus   | - Thailand, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam, reflecting diverse digital marketing landscapes within Indochina.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Data Collection   | - Targeted searches using Keywords such as "affiliate marketing," "influencer marketing," "digital marketing trends Southeast Asia," and "Indochina marketing."<br>- Inclusion criteria: relevance, credibility, and regional focus.<br>- Exclusion criteria: outdated studies and non-peer-reviewed sources. |

| Aspect               | Details                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Analytical Framework | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Directed content analysis to identify patterns, themes, and gaps in existing literature.</li> <li>- Summative content analysis to synthesize findings in line with research objectives.</li> </ul>                       |
| Key Variables        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effectiveness of affiliate and influencer marketing strategies.</li> <li>- Cultural and regulatory influences on digital marketing adoption.</li> <li>- Role of technology in enhancing marketing efficiency.</li> </ul> |
| Validation Methods   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Triangulation through multiple data sources to ensure reliability and validity.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                               |
| Limitations          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scarcity of studies from underdeveloped markets like Lao PDR and Myanmar.</li> <li>- Potential biases in qualitative data synthesis due to limited regional studies.</li> </ul>                                          |

Table 3 provides a structured overview of the research design and methodology used to assess the effectiveness of affiliate and influencer marketing strategies in the ASEAN context. It outlines the data collection process, sources of information, analytical framework, and geographical scope, ensuring a systematic and transparent approach to the study.

### 1. Data Collection Methods

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) method to synthesize secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, industry reports, and case studies published between 2017 and 2024. The selection prioritizes high-impact and regionally relevant sources to ensure reliability and contextual accuracy. The review focuses on affiliate and influencer marketing trends within the Indochina region, covering Thailand, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Myanmar. By analyzing both academic and practical perspectives, the study provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding regional marketing dynamics and strategic developments.

### 2. Sources of Information

To ensure academic rigor, this study employs a multi-source data collection strategy that integrates diverse information sources. The research draws upon peer-reviewed journals from established academic databases including Scopus and TCI, which provide robust theoretical foundations. These scholarly sources are complemented by industry reports from authoritative platforms such as Statista and Social Blade, along with relevant regional government publications that offer valuable market insights. Furthermore, practical perspectives are incorporated through business and market analysis case studies. This comprehensive approach facilitates a balanced examination of both theoretical frameworks and real-world applications, thereby minimizing potential research biases and enhancing the study's validity. The triangulation of these varied data sources strengthens the research methodology and supports more reliable conclusions.

### 3. Analytical Approaches

This study applied a directed content analysis framework to identify key patterns in affiliate and influencer marketing. It compared regional trends across ASEAN countries, focusing on market structures, consumer behavior, and regulatory differences. Both quantitative and qualitative data were integrated such as engagement rates, ROI metrics, and consumer sentiment—to evaluate brand perception and campaign effectiveness. This mixed-method approach ensured a well-rounded and reliable analysis of marketing strategies in diverse regional contexts.

#### 4. Geographical Scope

This study focuses on five ASEAN countries: Thailand, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Myanmar. These nations were selected to represent a range of digital maturity from advanced markets like Thailand and Vietnam to emerging ones like Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Myanmar. The analysis considers differences in economic development, regulatory enforcement, and cultural factors affecting marketing influence. By examining these cross-country variations, the study offers practical insights for tailoring digital marketing strategies within diverse ASEAN contexts.

### Research Results

To contextualize behavioral outcomes, this table presents the primary motivational and cultural drivers influencing consumer engagement in each country studied. These insights help clarify how local dynamics shape responses to influencer and affiliate marketing.

**Table 4** Systematic Review of Effective Affiliate Marketing Strategies in ASEAN

| Country  | Key Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Challenges Identified                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Thailand | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Influencers with strong audience alignment enhance brand trust and drive consumer engagement (Belanche et al., 2021).</li> <li>- Credibility and ethical practices boost long-term consumer relationships (Tripopsakul &amp; Hoonsopon, 2025).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High competition among brands leveraging influence strategies.</li> <li>- Ensuring authenticity and transparency in influencer collaborations.</li> </ul> |
| Lao PDR  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Progress in internet accessibility and regional e-commerce adoption has opened opportunities for affiliate marketing (Vu, 2017).</li> </ul>                                                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited digital infrastructure and skills.</li> <li>- Underdeveloped legal frameworks to regulate affiliate partnerships.</li> </ul>                      |
| Myanmar  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increasing internet and mobile access offers potential for affiliate marketing (Leong, 2017).</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Political instability and economic uncertainty hinder investor confidence (Whitten-Woodring et al., 2020).</li> </ul>                                     |
| Cambodia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Early adoption of digital marketing and e-commerce highlights gradual integration of affiliate marketing strategies (Ly &amp; Ly, 2022).</li> </ul>                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High cost of digital technology and limited expertise outside urban areas (Richardson, 2011).</li> </ul>                                                  |
| Vietnam  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong digital ecosystem supports rapid growth of affiliate marketing (Dao et al., 2024).</li> <li>- Collaboration with international businesses accelerates adoption (Nguyen et al., 2022).</li> </ul>                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Need for advanced consumer data analytics to optimize affiliate strategies.</li> </ul>                                                                    |

The table below summarizes the systematic review of effective affiliate marketing strategies identified in the ASEAN region during 2017–2024. The findings are categorized based on the key factors influencing the success and challenges of affiliate marketing in the region, reflecting regional nuances and market dynamics.

The effectiveness of marketing strategies can be assessed through concrete outcomes. The following table summarizes the core metrics used to evaluate performance across markets, with a focus on brand awareness, sales impact, and consumer engagement.

**Table 5** Systematic Review of Key Pitfalls in Affiliate Marketing Strategies

| Category                 | Key Pitfalls                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Implications and Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Influencer Selection     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Choosing influencers misaligned with brand values (Kay et al., 2020).</li> <li>- Over-reliance on macro-influencers with low audience engagement (Jansom &amp; Pongsakornrunsilp, 2021).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conduct thorough background checks to ensure alignment with brand identity.</li> <li>- Focus on micro-influencers for higher engagement rates.</li> </ul>     |
| Transparency and Ethics  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of disclosure for sponsored content, leading to reduced consumer trust (Boerman, 2020).</li> </ul>                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enforce clear disclosure policies.</li> <li>- Monitor influencers' compliance with ethical standards to preserve brand credibility.</li> </ul>                |
| Content Quality          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overuse of generic, repetitive content that fails to engage audiences (Audrezet et al., 2020).</li> </ul>                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create diverse, localized, and engaging content tailored to target audiences.</li> <li>- Integrate audience feedback into content strategy.</li> </ul>        |
| Technological Adaptation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inability to leverage advanced analytics and AI for data-driven decisions (Dao et al., 2024).</li> </ul>                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Invest in AI and data analytics tools for more precise consumer targeting and campaign optimization.</li> </ul>                                               |
| Regulatory Compliance    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non-compliance with legal frameworks in regional markets, such as lack of consumer protection measures (Campbell &amp; Grimm, 2019).</li> </ul>                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regularly review local regulations and adapt campaigns accordingly.</li> <li>- Provide training for marketers on regional compliance requirements.</li> </ul> |
| Budget Allocation        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Misallocation of resources toward ineffective campaigns or high-cost influencers (Leung et al., 2022).</li> </ul>                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop a cost-effectiveness analysis to prioritize campaigns with the highest ROI.</li> <li>- Regularly reassess campaign budgets.</li> </ul>                |
| Market Understanding     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Neglecting cultural and demographic diversity within target markets (de Mooij &amp; Hofstede, 2010).</li> </ul>                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conduct market research to identify culturally relevant marketing strategies.</li> <li>- Customize campaigns for regional demographics.</li> </ul>            |
| Performance Monitoring   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of proper tracking systems to evaluate campaign success (Sundermann &amp; Raabe, 2019).</li> </ul>                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Utilize key performance indicators (KPIs) such as engagement rates, click-through rates, and conversion rates to measure success.</li> </ul>                  |

Analysis of Table 5 - Key Pitfalls in Affiliate Marketing Strategies highlights critical challenges in affiliate marketing strategies across ASEAN markets, emphasizing the need for strategic improvements to ensure long-term success. These challenges, including transparency issues, misaligned influencer selection, and inadequate performance tracking, directly impact consumer trust and marketing efficiency. The key insights derived from the table are as follows:

#### 1. Transparency and Ethical Concerns

A lack of transparency in sponsorship disclosures undermines consumer trust. Influencers who fail to disclose financial affiliations with brands contribute to consumer skepticism, particularly in highly regulated markets such as Thailand and Vietnam, where advertising laws require clear compliance. Implementing strict disclosure policies and monitoring influencer adherence to ethical guidelines is crucial in maintaining brand credibility (Boerman, 2020).

## 2. Misaligned Influencer Selection

Selecting influencers whose audience demographics and content style do not align with a brand's positioning often leads to ineffective campaigns. In ASEAN, this has been identified as a key factor in diminishing consumer engagement and marketing ROI (Kay et al., 2020). To mitigate this risk, brands should conduct thorough background checks and prioritize micro-influencers, who have been shown to deliver higher engagement rates than macro-influencers (Jansom & Pongsakornrungrungsilp, 2021).

## 3. Endorsement of Low-Quality or Unregulated Products

Affiliate marketers promoting substandard or exaggerated product claims pose legal and reputational risks. This issue is particularly relevant in emerging markets such as Lao PDR and Cambodia, where regulatory enforcement is still developing. Strengthening brand-influencer collaboration and ensuring product quality compliance are essential in avoiding consumer backlash and legal consequences.

## 4. Overreliance on Macro-influencers

While macro-influencers offer broader audience reach, their lower engagement rates and higher costs make them less effective for niche marketing strategies. In contrast, micro-influencers generate stronger consumer trust and higher engagement, making them a cost-effective alternative for businesses targeting specific demographics. Brands should optimize influencer selection based on ROI metrics rather than relying solely on audience size (Kay et al., 2020).

## 5. Ineffective Performance Monitoring

Many affiliate marketing campaigns lack proper performance tracking systems, leading to missed optimization opportunities. Implementing advanced analytics tools such as Google Analytics and social media insights allows brands to measure key performance indicators (KPIs), including engagement rates, conversion rates, and audience reach. This data-driven approach enhances marketing efficiency and ensures better resource allocation (Sundermann & Raabe, 2019).

To further contextualize the complexities of affiliate marketing when executed through influencer partnerships in the ASEAN region, Table 6 synthesizes the key strategic aspects alongside region-specific challenges. These insights are drawn from recent literature and highlight critical variables such as technological infrastructure, regulatory disparities, cultural adaptation, and influencer credibility—factors that substantially impact implementation success, particularly in developing digital economies like Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Myanmar. The structured comparison allows for a clearer understanding of cross-national readiness, guiding both academic exploration and practical application.

**Table 6** Key Aspects and Challenges in Implementing Affiliate Marketing with Influencers in ASEAN

| Category                 | Key Aspects                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Challenges                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Influencer Selection     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alignment with brand identity and values (Kay et al., 2020).</li> <li>- Prioritizing micro-influencers for high engagement rates and niche audience targeting.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficulty in identifying credible influencers in emerging markets (Dao et al., 2024).</li> <li>- Over-reliance on macro-influencers with low ROI.</li> </ul> |
| Technology and Analytics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leveraging AI and data analytics to enhance campaign precision and efficiency (Dao et al., 2024).</li> </ul>                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited access to advanced technological tools in underdeveloped</li> </ul>                                                                                   |

| Category                | Key Aspects                                                                                                                                   | Challenges                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                         | - Using advanced tools for tracking KPIs and consumer behavior.                                                                               | markets such as Lao PDR and Cambodia (Vu, 2017).                                                                                               |
| Cultural Sensitivity    | - Customizing campaigns to reflect regional cultural diversity (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).                                                   | - Risk of cultural misalignment leading to reduced consumer trust (Ly & Ly, 2022).                                                             |
| Regulatory Compliance   | - Adherence to local advertising and consumer protection laws in ASEAN countries (Campbell & Grimm, 2019).                                    | - Variations in regulatory frameworks across ASEAN countries (e.g., Thailand's Consumer Protection Act vs. Cambodia's newer regulations).      |
| Content Strategy        | - Developing creative and localized content that resonates with target audiences (Jansom & Pongsakornrunsilp, 2021).                          | - Overuse of generic content that fails to engage local audiences (Richardson, 2011).                                                          |
| Ethics and Transparency | - Ensuring clear disclosure of sponsored content to maintain consumer trust (Boerman, 2020).                                                  | - Lack of standardization in ethical practices across markets, leading to consumer skepticism (Audrezet et al., 2020).                         |
| Market Readiness        | - Growing e-commerce adoption in Vietnam and Thailand (Nguyen et al., 2022).                                                                  | - Limited digital infrastructure in countries like Myanmar and Lao PDR, hampering the scalability of affiliate programs (Leong, 2017).         |
| Performance Metrics     | - Tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) such as engagement rates, click-through rates, and sales conversions (Sundermann & Raabe, 2019). | - Lack of comprehensive tools for measuring the effectiveness of influencer collaborations in smaller markets (Whitten-Woodring et al., 2020). |

Table 6 outlines key factors and challenges in implementing affiliate marketing strategies with influences in ASEAN countries. These insights emphasize the need for strategic adaptation in diverse and evolving markets.

Effectively selecting influencers is crucial for building trust and driving engagement, with micro-influencers proving particularly effective in niche markets due to their high authenticity and interaction rates (Kay et al., 2020). However, countries like Lao PDR and Cambodia still struggle to identify credible influencers due to underdeveloped ecosystems (Dao et al., 2024). Technology further shapes campaign success, as AI and analytics enhance targeting precision and KPI tracking. Yet, limited access to these tools in less-developed regions hinders scalability, requiring localized solutions (Dao et al., 2024; Vu, 2017).

Cultural alignment also plays a key role in campaigns tailored to local norms foster stronger engagement, while misaligned messaging risks alienating audiences (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010; Ly & Ly, 2022). Regulatory inconsistencies across ASEAN demand careful navigation to maintain ethical standards (Campbell & Grimm, 2019). Similarly, generic content weakens impact; localized storytelling proves more effective (Richardson, 2011). Transparency remains vital, yet uneven ethical practices reduce consumer trust (Boerman, 2020). While Thailand and Vietnam support robust e-commerce infrastructures, other markets face readiness challenges (Nguyen et al., 2022). Finally, proper performance tracking is essential but often

underutilized in smaller markets (Sundermann & Raabe, 2019; Whitten-Woodring et al., 2020). Collectively, these insights highlight the value of localized, ethical, data-driven strategies for success in ASEAN.

Country specific findings on Influencer marketing risks and effectiveness: In **Thailand** and **Vietnam**, micro-influencers consistently achieve higher engagement rates, making them valuable for culturally adapted and cost-effective marketing strategies. When selected based on engagement metrics and brand alignment, they significantly enhance ROI. However, both countries have experienced reputational risks from influencer misuse. In Thailand, macro-influencers have promoted uncertified health products, leading to lawsuits and public backlash. Micro-influencers, though more localized, have also faced criticism for promoting unverified products, causing damage within niche audiences. In Vietnam, a high-profile case involving macro-influencer Nguyen Phuong Hang severely tarnished brand reputations due to defamatory public behavior.

In **Lao PDR**, the underdeveloped influencer market has resulted in micro-influencers promoting low-quality products, harming brand trust in local communities. **Cambodia** faces similar challenges, with micro-influencers endorsing unlicensed products, leading to legal repercussions and erosion of consumer confidence. In **Myanmar**, political sensitivities make influencer marketing particularly high-risk. Macro-influencers have sparked national backlash over political endorsements, while micro-influencers have triggered localized reputational damage in sensitive regions.

These findings highlight the importance of thorough vetting and strategic alignment between influencers and brand values. While macro-influencers offer broad reach, they carry greater reputational risk. Micro-influencers, despite smaller audiences, can still cause harm if poorly managed, especially in fragile markets.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the strategic role of influencer and affiliate marketing in shaping brand engagement across Indochina, a region characterized by diverse regulatory landscapes, cultural preferences, and levels of digital infrastructure. Through a comparative lens, it is evident that Thailand, Vietnam, and Lao PDR each exhibit distinct trajectories of influencer integration: Thailand emphasizes micro-influencers and lifestyle branding, Vietnam blends macro-reach with performance-based affiliate tools, while Laos remains in a formative stage, reliant on community networks and offline amplification (Dao et al., 2024; Harrison & Schipani, 2007; Jansom & Pongsakornrungrungsilp, 2021).

The application of theoretical frameworks such as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), and performance-based marketing models (Sakas et al., 2024) provides a comprehensive understanding of how consumer behavior, trust, and brand value are shaped within varying digital contexts. The findings also demonstrate that while macro-influencers are effective in visibility-driven campaigns, micro-influencers deliver stronger engagement and authenticity particularly when localized to suit regional cultures and communication styles (Kay et al., 2020).

For scholars, this study expands the regional discourse by introducing nuanced cases from underrepresented markets. For practitioners, it underscores the importance of aligning influencer strategy with national readiness and consumer expectations. Ultimately, the success of influencer and affiliate

marketing in Southeast Asia hinges not only on digital reach, but also on cultural fit, ethical transparency, and the adaptability of campaigns to localized dynamics.

## Recommendations

To fully leverage the potential of influencer and affiliate marketing in ASEAN, businesses must adopt strategies that align with regional consumer behaviors, technological readiness, and regulatory frameworks. The following recommendations are proposed to guide ethical, effective, and scalable practices.

1. Align Marketing Strategies with Legal and Ethical Standards: As ASEAN countries increasingly enforce consumer protection and data privacy laws such as Thailand's Consumer Protection Act and Singapore's PDPA transparency in influencer marketing is essential. Businesses should employ digital tools to monitor regulatory compliance and ensure sponsorship disclosures are clear and consistent. This enhances consumer trust and minimizes legal risk.

2. Prioritize Micro-influencers for Niche Engagement: Micro-influencers offer stronger audience connection and higher engagement rates, particularly in culturally specific or niche markets. Brands should partner with individuals whose content and values reflect their identity, strengthening authenticity and building long-term loyalty within targeted segments.

3. Strategically Use Macro-influencers for Brand Visibility: Macro-influencers are effective for broad awareness campaigns but require careful vetting to avoid reputational risk. Their use should be limited to industries where mass visibility is essential such as fashion, entertainment, or consumer goods and backed by clear alignment with brand values.

4. Leverage AI and Data Analytics for Optimization: AI-driven analytics platforms can improve decision-making by tracking KPIs like engagement, reach, and ROI. Businesses should integrate these tools to evaluate campaign performance in real time, enabling adjustments that improve marketing efficiency and maximize returns.

5. Implement Risk Mitigation Strategies: Influencer misconduct remains a critical concern. Brands must conduct due diligence, provide ethical training, and set clear communication Standards. Establishing guidelines for responsible content and brand alignment helps reduce reputational and legal risks.

6. Adapt to Post-COVID Consumer Behavior: The pandemic has reshaped consumer habits, accelerated digital adoption and opened new opportunities for performance-based campaigns. Businesses should implement incentive structures for influencers and affiliates that tie compensation to measurable outcomes, enhancing cost-efficiency and scalability.

Together, these recommendations offer a practical roadmap for navigating the diverse and evolving marketing environment across ASEAN, ensuring sustainable brand growth and consumer engagement.

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## Appendix

By organizing references into relevant groups, this appendix provides a structured reference framework that aligns with the systematic literature review methodology employed in this study.

### A. Academic Journals (Scopus Q1–Q4, TCI, and Regional Journals)

#### 1. Journals Related to Influencer Marketing & Branding

- Kay, S., Mulcahy, R., & Parkinson, J. (2020). *Journal of Marketing Management* (Scopus Q1)
- De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). *International Journal of Advertising* (Scopus Q1)
- Boerman, S. C. (2020). *Computers in Human Behavior* (Scopus Q1)

#### 2. Journals Related to Affiliate Marketing

- Sakas, D. P., Giannakopoulos, N., & Trivellas, P. (2024). *International Journal of Bank Marketing* (Scopus Q2)
- Dao, C. T., Nguyen, N. Q., Le, T. H., & Nguyen, T. M. P. (2024). *Cogent Business & Management* (Scopus Q2)

#### 3. Journals Related to Digital Marketing in ASEAN

- Jansom, A., & Pongsakornrunsilp, S. (2021). *Sustainability* (Scopus Q1)
- Nguyen, T. H., Le, X. C., & Vu, T. H. L. (2022). *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity* (Scopus Q1)

### B. Books and Theoretical Frameworks

- Keller, K. L., & Swaminathan, V. (2020). *Strategic Brand Management (Brand Equity & Management)*
- Ajzen, I. (1991). *Theory of Planned Behavior* (Behavioral Science)

### C. Strategic Reviews and Management Frameworks

- Leung, F. F., Gu, F. F., & Palmatier, R. W. (2022). *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* (Scopus Q1)

### D. Legal and Policy Documents in ASEAN

- Consumer Protection Act, B.E. 2522 (1979). *Thailand Government Gazette*
- Law on Advertising (2012). *Vietnam*
- Personal Data Protection Act (2012). *Singapore*
- Law on Cybersecurity (2018). *Vietnam*

### E. Theoretical Research Papers and Systematic Literature Review Methods

- Paul, J., Lim, W. M., O'Cass, A., Hao, A. W., & Bresciani, S. (2021). *International Journal of Consumer Studies* (Scopus Q1)
- Tranfield, D., Denyer, D., & Smart, P. (2003). *British Journal of Management* (Scopus Q1)
- Xiao, Y., & Watson, M. (2019). *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (Scopus Q1)