



**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND BEHAVIORAL STUDIES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF MASTERS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY**

**The Psychology of Social Media Influence in Addis Ababa: An Analysis of  
Influencer Experiences, Strategies and Effectiveness**

**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Psychology, CEBS, AAU in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Social  
Psychology**

**By: Amanuel Melaku**

**November, 2024**  
**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**



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**Endorsed by:**

1. Advisor (PhD) _____	Signature _____	Date _____
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**Declaration**

I, the undersigned, declare that the study entitled “The Psychology of Social Media Influence in Addis Ababa: An Analysis of Influencer Experiences, Strategies and Effectiveness” is the result of my effort and study that all sources of materials used for the study acknowledged. I have conducted the study independently with the guidance and comments of the research advisor.

This study has not been submitted for any degree in any other university. It is all sources of material used for the thesis have been fully acknowledged and conducted for the partial fulfillment of the Degree of Master of Social Psychology.

**Name:** Amanuel Melaku

**Date:**

**Signature:**

**Place:** Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Statement of Certification**

This is to certify that Amanuel Melaku has carried out his project work entitled “The Psychology of Social Media Influence in Addis Ababa: An Analysis of Influencer Experiences, Strategies and Effectiveness”. This work is original in nature and is suitable for submission for the award of the degree of Master of Social Psychology.

\_\_\_\_\_ (PhD)

Advisor name

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Signature

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Date

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## **Abstract**

*This study investigates the experiences, strategies, and effectiveness of social media influencers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, focusing on their role as marketing agents within a culturally unique and digitally evolving environment. Employing a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, the research integrates qualitative insights from 22 semi-structured interviews with influencers and quantitative evaluations from 50 structured questionnaires distributed to businesses that have engaged in influencer collaborations. The findings reveal that influencers leverage authenticity, cultural relevance, and audience engagement to build trust and credibility, aligning with psychological frameworks such as Cialdini's principles of influence, Social Identity Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model. Influencers in Addis Ababa emphasize the use of personal storytelling, local language, and cultural symbols to foster relatability and group identity, addressing the unique socio-cultural expectations of Ethiopian audiences. Quantitative results underscore the effectiveness of these strategies in driving brand visibility, audience engagement, and positive ROI for businesses, though challenges such as balancing authenticity with commercial goals were identified. This study contributes to the growing literature on influencer marketing in non-Western contexts, offering actionable insights for influencers and marketers while expanding theoretical applications in social psychology. The research underscores the importance of adapting global digital marketing strategies to local cultural dynamics and provides practical recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness and ethical standards of influencer marketing in Ethiopia. It also identifies areas for future research, including the exploration of audience perspectives and the role of influencers in other emerging markets.*

**Keywords:** *influencer marketing, social media, audience compliance, cultural adaptation, social psychology, Addis Ababa*

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The digital transformation of the 21st century has profoundly reshaped how individuals interact, communicate, and consume information. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook, have emerged as dominant tools for both personal expression and commercial activities. These platforms enable users to connect globally, share ideas, and access information instantaneously. One of the most significant phenomena arising from this digital shift is the rise of social media influencers—individuals who have cultivated substantial online followings and possess the ability to shape the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of their audiences. With their personalized and relatable content, influencers have become central figures in modern marketing strategies, fundamentally altering traditional advertising approaches (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Influencer marketing, defined as the strategic collaboration between brands and social media influencers to promote products or services, capitalizes on the trust, relatability, and credibility that influencers build with their audiences. These collaborations leverage the authentic connections influencers establish with their followers, making their recommendations more impactful than traditional advertisements (De Veirman et al., 2017). Through fostering a personal connection between the influencer, the brand, and the audience, influencer marketing enhances audience compliance, which refers to the likelihood of adopting the behaviors, attitudes, or purchasing decisions recommended by influencers (Jin et al., 2019). Consequently, influencers have emerged as pivotal players in shaping consumer behavior and driving brand loyalty.

Globally, influencer marketing has become an established practice, particularly in Western markets, where extensive research has underscored its effectiveness (Hayes, 2008). However, its application and impact in non-Western contexts, such as Ethiopia, remain significantly underexplored. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's rapidly urbanizing capital, provides a fertile ground for investigating this phenomenon. The city's growing smartphone penetration, expanding internet access, and active social media user base have facilitated the rise of local influencers who create culturally relevant

and authentic content. Platforms like TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have become integral to urban digital culture, particularly among the city's youthful population (Deloitte, 2019).

In Addis Ababa, the interplay of global marketing trends and local traditions shapes how influencer marketing operates. Communal values, high interpersonal trust, and a cultural emphasis on authenticity strongly influence audience behavior (Poushter et al., 2018). Yet, academic research on influencer marketing within this context is limited. Without a nuanced understanding of these dynamics, brands risk implementing culturally misaligned strategies, while influencers may inadvertently undermine their credibility or fail to engage their audiences effectively. Moreover, the absence of empirical data on the effectiveness of influencers as a marketing strategy further limits stakeholders' ability to optimize campaigns for audience compliance.

Social psychology provides valuable theoretical frameworks for examining the mechanisms through which influencers shape audience compliance. Key theories include Cialdini's six principles of influence, which explore how reciprocity, authority, scarcity, consistency, liking, and social proof drive persuasion (Cialdini, 2001); Social Identity Theory, which explains how group membership and shared identity influence compliance (Tajfel & Turner, 1986); Real reference and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which distinguishes between central and peripheral routes of persuasion depending on audience involvement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). These frameworks provide a robust foundation for understanding how influencers build trust, relatability, and engagement with their audiences, particularly in a socio-cultural context like Addis Ababa.

Additionally, advancements in data analytics and digital marketing tools offer influencers innovative means of targeting audiences. Strategies such as audience segmentation, personalized messaging, and performance tracking enable influencers to refine their approaches and measure their impact (Kumar & Gupta, 2016). However, the success of these strategies hinges on maintaining cultural alignment and the authenticity that underpins audience trust.

This research investigates how social media influencers in Addis Ababa navigate these challenges and opportunities, focusing on both their strategies and the effectiveness of these efforts in gaining audience compliance. By examining their experiences and the psychological factors underlying their influence, the study contributes to a broader understanding of influencer marketing in non-Western contexts. Furthermore, this research offers practical insights for brands and marketers seeking to optimize influencer collaborations and for influencers aiming to adopt ethical and

culturally sensitive practices. Evaluating the effectiveness of influencers as a marketing strategy adds a critical dimension to this inquiry, providing evidence-based recommendations for leveraging social media to shape consumer behavior in Addis Ababa's unique setting.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

In recent years, one of the most significant developments in digital marketing has been the rise of social media influencers—individuals who leverage their online presence to shape the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of their followers. Influencer marketing, where brands collaborate with these individuals to promote products or services, has proven to be a highly effective strategy, particularly in Western contexts where its potential has been extensively studied (De Veirman et al., 2017). However, in non-Western contexts such as Ethiopia, the adaptation, effectiveness, and overall impact of influencer marketing remain significantly underexplored.

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's rapidly urbanizing capital, provides a unique and dynamic environment for studying this phenomenon. The city is characterized by a youthful population, increasing internet penetration, and widespread reliance on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. These factors have catalyzed the emergence of local influencers who engage audiences through culturally relevant and authentic content. Despite the growing prevalence of social media influencers and their apparent impact, there is limited empirical research on the strategies they employ, the psychological mechanisms underlying their influence, and the effectiveness of their efforts in shaping audience compliance—the likelihood of audiences adopting behaviors, attitudes, or purchasing decisions recommended by influencers (Jin et al., 2019).

This research is inspired by the noticeable shift in how Ethiopian consumers interact with digital content and make purchasing decisions. As social media becomes a dominant source of information, influencers increasingly shape narratives around products, services, and social issues. However, the extent to which influencers effectively drive audience compliance and deliver tangible results for brands remains unclear, particularly in a cultural context like Ethiopia, where trust and authenticity play pivotal roles. This study seeks to bridge the gap between academic understanding and real-world practices, driven by a recognition that Ethiopia's unique cultural, social, and digital ecosystem remains largely overlooked in global influencer marketing research.

The core issue lies in the absence of detailed research into the psychological strategies employed by influencers, the mechanisms through which they influence their audiences, and the effectiveness

of their strategies in delivering desired outcomes for brands and campaigns in Addis Ababa. Established social psychology theories, such as Cialdini's six principles of influence, Social Identity Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), offer valuable frameworks for understanding how influencers create trust, relatability, and engagement (Cialdini, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). However, these frameworks have not been comprehensively applied to Ethiopia's unique socio-cultural setting. This lack of research leaves influencers to rely on trial-and-error methods, which may diminish their effectiveness, while marketers struggle to craft campaigns that resonate with Ethiopian audiences or measure the outcomes of their collaborations effectively.

Failing to study this phenomenon poses several risks. Without a nuanced understanding of the psychological, cultural, and operational factors driving influencer marketing in Addis Ababa, brands risk implementing strategies that are culturally misaligned, leading to ineffective campaigns and wasted resources. Influencers may adopt practices that fail to engage their audiences or erode trust by appearing inauthentic or overly commercialized. From an academic perspective, neglecting Ethiopia in influencer marketing research perpetuates a Western-centric view of digital marketing and social influence, leaving critical insights into non-Western contexts unexplored. Moreover, the absence of research on the tangible effectiveness of influencers in achieving marketing objectives limits the ability of businesses to assess the return on investment (ROI) of influencer marketing strategies.

This research addresses these challenges by exploring how global trends in influencer marketing are adapted to Ethiopia's cultural context and evaluating the effectiveness of influencers as marketing tools in gaining audience compliance. It investigates the experiences and strategies of social media influencers in Addis Ababa, focusing on the psychological factors that drive audience compliance and the measurable outcomes of their efforts. By applying social psychology theories to this unique setting, the study aims to fill the existing knowledge gap, providing both theoretical and practical insights.

Specifically, this research identifies the strategies influencers use to build credibility, connect with their audiences, and navigate challenges in an evolving digital landscape. It evaluates how Ethiopia's communal values, emphasis on authenticity, and trust-based relationships shape the effectiveness of influencer marketing. By addressing these gaps, the study contributes to academic

literature while offering actionable insights for influencers and marketers seeking to enhance their practices within Ethiopia's rapidly expanding digital economy.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This research tries to address the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences, content creation strategies, and challenges faced by social media influencers in Addis Ababa?
2. How are influencer marketing practices adapted to the Addis Ababa online community?
3. What psychological factors and strategies do social media influencers in Addis Ababa use to influence their audiences?
4. How effective are these influencers as a marketing strategy to gain audience compliance?

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

#### **General Objective**

To understand the experiences of social media influencers in Addis Ababa, identify the psychological strategies they employ to influence audience compliance within the local socio-cultural context, and evaluate the effectiveness of influencers as a marketing strategy.

#### **Specific Objectives**

1. To gain insights into the content creation strategies, challenges, and experiences of social media influencers in Addis Ababa.
2. To explore how influencer marketing practices are adapted to the Addis Ababa online community.
3. To analyze the psychological factors and strategies employed by social media influencers in Addis Ababa to influence their audiences.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of influencers as a marketing strategy in gaining audience compliance.

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study holds significant value for both academic research and practical applications, addressing the underexplored phenomenon of influencer marketing within the Ethiopian context, specifically in Addis Ababa. The findings are particularly relevant to three key groups: social psychology academics, marketers, and social media influencers, each of whom stands to gain distinct benefits from the insights provided. By incorporating an evaluation of the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies, this research broadens its impact, offering actionable insights for these stakeholders.

For social psychology academics, this study contributes to a broader understanding of social influence and consumer behavior by examining influencer marketing within a non-Western socio-cultural context. Existing research on influencer marketing is predominantly rooted in Western markets, leaving a gap in understanding how global theories of influence—such as Cialdini’s six principles, Social Identity Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)—apply to culturally distinct settings like Ethiopia. This research enriches academic discourse by highlighting the role of communal values, interpersonal trust, and authenticity in shaping audience compliance and evaluating the tangible effectiveness of these strategies. By providing empirical evidence from Addis Ababa, the study lays the groundwork for further exploration of social influence in other non-Western contexts, promoting a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of global consumer psychology.

For marketers, this study offers practical insights into the psychological, cultural, and operational factors that drive audience compliance in Addis Ababa. Understanding elements such as influencer credibility, content relevance, emotional engagement, and measurable outcomes equips marketers with the tools to create more targeted and effective campaigns. By evaluating the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies, the study enables marketers to assess return on investment (ROI) and make informed decisions about resource allocation. Marketers can learn how to localize global influencer marketing practices to align with Ethiopia’s unique socio-cultural values, ensuring that campaigns are impactful, culturally appropriate, and ethically sound. Additionally, these findings guide marketers in fostering long-term consumer relationships and brand loyalty in a competitive and rapidly evolving digital market.

For social media influencers, the research provides evidence-based guidance on refining their strategies to enhance audience engagement and campaign effectiveness. By understanding the psychological principles that contribute to effective persuasion, influencers can improve the quality, impact, and credibility of their content. The study's evaluation of effectiveness helps influencers identify practices that resonate most with their audiences, enabling them to maintain authenticity and trust. Furthermore, the findings offer practical advice for navigating the challenges of professional growth while aligning with ethical standards, promoting sustainable success, and fostering long-term engagement with followers.

Overall, this study bridges a critical knowledge gap, offering both theoretical and practical insights into the dynamics of influencer marketing in Addis Ababa. For academics, it expands the understanding of social influence in diverse cultural settings and introduces an evidence-based assessment of influencer marketing effectiveness. For marketers, it delivers tools to optimize strategies and measure success within Ethiopia's unique digital economy while respecting cultural norms. For influencers, it provides a framework to build meaningful and sustainable relationships with their audiences while ensuring ethical and culturally aligned practices. By addressing these gaps, the study ensures more effective, impactful, and culturally relevant influencer marketing practices in Ethiopia's growing digital landscape.

## **1.6 Scope and Limitations**

This study focuses on social media influencers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, examining their strategies, experiences, and effectiveness as marketing tools. Platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are emphasized, as they are prominent in the local social media landscape. The study considers influencers from selected categories, including Comedy Skits, Vlog Discovery, Creative Editing, Art and Poetry, Business/Education, Information/News, Inspirational Content, and Health, chosen for their relevance and prominence in Addis Ababa's social media ecosystem. Categories such as gaming and beauty are excluded due to their limited influence within this context.

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, with a primary emphasis on qualitative methods. The qualitative component involves in-depth interviews with social media influencers, providing rich insights into their strategies, experiences, and challenges. The quantitative component comprises a questionnaire targeting businesses that have worked with these influencers. This quantitative data is designed to assess the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies in

achieving business objectives, including brand awareness, audience engagement, and conversion rates.

The geographical focus on Addis Ababa introduces certain limitations. While the findings provide valuable insights into influencer marketing practices in Ethiopia's capital, they may not be generalizable to other regions with different socio-cultural dynamics. Additionally, the study reflects current practices, which may evolve alongside trends in social media and digital marketing. Time constraints also limit the scope of data collection and analysis, focusing on influencers and businesses active at the time of the research.

Access to participants introduces potential selection bias, as the study relies on influencers and businesses willing to participate. Furthermore, while the quantitative data provides a broader understanding of effectiveness, the qualitative data focuses on influencers' strategies and experiences, excluding direct input from their audiences. As such, audience perspectives on credibility, trust, and engagement are inferred rather than directly measured.

Despite these limitations, this research offers critical insights into influencer marketing in Addis Ababa. By combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, it establishes a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological strategies employed by influencers and their effectiveness as marketing tools. The study lays a foundation for future research to explore broader contexts, including additional categories of influencers, other regions in Ethiopia, and the perspectives of audiences who interact with influencers.

# Chapter Two

## Literature Review

This literature review critically examines the landscape of social influence techniques, with a specific focus on social media influencers. This study delves into the intricate mechanisms employed by influencers to shape audience behavior. While existing research has laid essential groundwork, this review aims to discern gaps in our understanding of social influence techniques in the context of influencer marketing. By scrutinizing compliance strategies and their efficacy, exploring the role of social identity, and acknowledging the evolving tactics within online persuasion, this review endeavors to contribute to the nuanced comprehension of the digital influence landscape.

Through this exploration, we seek not only to synthesize existing knowledge but also to pinpoint areas necessitating further investigation, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted interplay between influencers and their audiences.

### **2.1 Social Media as a Catalyst for Influencer Marketing**

The digital landscape has undergone a profound transformation, with social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram emerging as powerful forces in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors. These platforms have evolved far beyond their initial roles as mere tools for social interaction, becoming dynamic arenas where consumer knowledge, attitudes, and intentions are actively shaped. This shift is driven by the robust mechanisms of information sharing and value enhancement that these platforms facilitate, enabling them to exert a significant influence on how consumers think and act (Bagozzi & Lee, 2002).

A key element in this transformation is the concept of social influence, which is primarily facilitated by group-based interactions within online communities. These interactions play a critical role in shaping individual behavior, as people are often influenced by the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of their peers within these digital spaces. This dynamic has given rise to a new paradigm in consumer behavior, where social media not only serves as a platform for communication but also as a powerful tool for influencing decision-making processes (Dholakia et al., 2004).

In the realm of influencer marketing, the strategic use of social media has become indispensable. Social media platforms provide a fertile ground for digital influencers who have harnessed the

power of these networks to exert a significant impact on consumer decision-making processes. These influencers are adept at leveraging the inherent social dynamics of these platforms, using their reach and influence to mold consumer behavior in ways that traditional marketing strategies could not. This marks a pivotal shift in modern marketing, where the role of the influencer is increasingly central to the success of campaigns and consumer engagement (Usman & Okafor, 2019).

As influencer marketing continues to evolve, it is becoming increasingly important to understand the complex relationships between social media mechanisms and their influence on marketing practices (Baker, 2021). The ability of social media to facilitate widespread influence suggests a profound capacity for shaping the future directions of digital marketing strategies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This is particularly true when considering the efficacy of influencers and their ability to engage consumers on a deeper level. By understanding these dynamics, marketers can better harness the power of social media to create more effective and impactful campaigns, ultimately driving consumer engagement and shaping the future of the digital marketing landscape (Freberg et al., 2011). In summary, the digital landscape has transformed into a powerful arena where social media platforms play a critical role in shaping consumer behavior. Through the strategic use of social influence, particularly within the realm of influencer marketing, these platforms have become essential tools for modern marketers, enabling them to reach and engage consumers in ways that were previously unimaginable. This evolution underscores the importance of understanding the intricate relationships between social media and marketing practices as the field continues to develop and grow.

## **2.2 The Evolving Role of Social Media Influencers in Marketing**

In the current digital age, social media influencers represent a pivotal shift in marketing dynamics. These individuals possess the capability to significantly influence public opinion and consumer behavior through their active presence on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Their impact goes beyond traditional word-of-mouth strategies, extending to a wide range of social media channels where their frequent interactions, personal persuasiveness, and the strategic centrality of their social networks play critical roles (Nonprofit Business Advisor, 2015). Influencers are characterized not merely by their follower counts but more so by their ability to forge genuine connections with users, engaging them in meaningful ways (Keller & Berry, 2003).

The advent of influencer marketing represents a notable departure from conventional advertising methods. This modern approach leverages the extensive reach and trustworthiness of influencers within online communities, transforming the traditional word-of-mouth concept into a sophisticated, strategic marketing tool (Duan & Whinston, 2008). Influencer marketing has been particularly enhanced by digital platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat, where influencers collaborate with brands to create targeted content or endorse products, thereby integrating commercial messages into their regular content streams (Williamson, 2016).

The professionalization of influencers has evolved significantly, transitioning from mere product seeding to structured, paid collaborations. Financial incentives play a substantial role in this evolution, with a considerable number of influencers motivated primarily by monetary gains from brand partnerships (Griffith, 2011). A study indicated that 82% of influencers cite financial compensation as a key motivator for brand collaborations, underscoring the commercial nature of modern influencer engagements (Fashion and Beauty Monitor & Econsultancy, 2015). However, this shift also introduces complexities for brands, particularly in terms of escalating costs and the challenges in measuring the tangible impact of influencer campaigns on consumer behavior and sales (Fashion and Beauty Monitor & Econsultancy, 2015).

Zietek's (2016) master's thesis on the characteristics and components of fashion influencer marketing further elaborates on these dynamics, providing insight into how influencer marketing has been tailored to fit the fashion industry, and highlighting the nuances of engagement strategies and the implications for brand partnerships.

### **2.3 Diversity and Dynamics of Social Media Influencers**

Social media influencers represent a diverse array of specialties and audiences, as vividly illustrated by Forbes' 2017 ranking of "Top Influencers". This list highlights leaders across varied domains such as fashion, beauty, fitness, parenting, travel, pets, entertainment, technology, business, home, food, kids, and gaming. These categories often reflect traditional gender roles, with female influencers primarily dominating fashion, beauty, and parenting sectors, while male influencers are more visible in areas such as comedy, technology, and gaming. This segmentation not only underscores the persistence of gender scripts in digital media but also illustrates how historical media norms are adapted and perpetuated in the digital age (Forbes, 2017; Bishop, 2019).

Despite their modern context, social media influencers rely on the ancient marketing technique of word-of-mouth, drawing on community-based trust dynamics historically attributed to ordinary consumers, especially women. This approach is rooted in the early 20th century but remains effective in the digital era, emphasizing the authenticity and relatability that contemporary consumers demand (Serazio & Duffy, 2018). Moreover, today's influencers often embody the traits of traditional celebrities, merging this appeal with the accessible and seemingly intimate nature of microcelebrity dynamics. This blend of old and new media practices not only enhances their influence but also brings ethical considerations to the forefront, particularly regarding the transparency of product endorsements and the authenticity of their recommendations (Khamis et al., 2017).

The ethical dimensions of influencer marketing are increasingly scrutinized, with a focus on how influencers manage the balance between personal authenticity and commercial endorsements. The challenge lies in maintaining credibility while navigating the commercial pressures of the industry, which often demands disclosures about sponsored content to preserve consumer trust and comply with regulatory standards (Duffy, 2020).

#### **2.4 Categorization and Impact of Social Media Influencers**

The landscape of influencer marketing is marked by a typology that reflects the multifaceted roles influencers can adopt within their networks. According to Isabel Morteo's comprehensive review, influencers are segmented into various categories based on their roles, sources of influence, follower counts, and engagement levels. These include opinion leaders, experts, consumers, social media luminaries, celebrities, trendsetters, bloggers, and potential influencers, each playing a distinct role within the sphere of digital marketing (Morteo, 2018).

**Opinion Leaders and Experts:** Both opinion leaders and experts gain their influence through professional credibility, where their authority is built upon their knowledge and positions within specific fields. This category is crucial for brands seeking endorsements that require a depth of knowledge and a high trust quotient among audiences.

**Consumers and Social Media Luminaries:** Consumers wield influence by demonstrating how products fit into everyday life, appealing through relatability and personal taste. In contrast, social media luminaries influence through high-quality content and active engagement, capitalizing on the broad reach and accessibility of platforms like Instagram and Twitter.

**Celebrities and Trendsetters:** Celebrities use their widespread recognition and public persona to influence consumer behaviors, often across diverse domains. Trendsetters, on the other hand, drive the adoption of new products and ideas by highlighting emerging trends and positioning themselves at the forefront of market changes.

**Bloggers and Potential Influencers:** Bloggers are trusted for their detailed and authentic reviews, often fostering a niche community around specific topics or industries. Potential influencers, though smaller in scale, hold significant sway within their circles due to perceived authenticity and personal connection.

Influencers are also classified by the size of their audience into mega-influencers, macro-influencers, and micro-influencers, with varying levels of engagement. This classification helps organizations in selecting the appropriate influencers to align with their marketing strategies effectively (Morteo, 2018). The strategic selection of influencers based on these categories ensures that marketing efforts are not only aligned with the influencer's audience but also with the campaign's overall objectives. Brands must engage with influencers whose authenticity and style resonate with their audience, enhancing the credibility and effectiveness of their marketing messages. In today's digital marketing environment, where 92% of people reportedly trust influencers more than traditional advertising or celebrity endorsements, the role of carefully selected influencers is increasingly central to consumer decision-making processes.

## **2.5 Theoretical Foundations of Social Influence**

Social psychology has profoundly contributed to our understanding of social influence, integral to the discipline's theoretical and empirical foundations. The field's exploration into how social influence molds human behavior and perceptions has been highlighted through seminal works over the decades. For example, Muzafer Sherif's 1935 study on the autokinetic effect demonstrated how social influence could alter perceptions of ambiguous stimuli, observed in a dark room where a stationary light seemed to move, highlighting the impact of group consensus on individual perception (Smith et al., 2011).

Further significant contributions were made by Solomon Asch in 1956, whose experiments compellingly showed how social pressure could lead individuals to conform to a majority's incorrect judgment about the lengths of lines, thus influencing perceptions even against clear evidence. This study underscored the power of conformity in structured settings. Stanley Milgram's

obedience experiments in 1963 (often cited incorrectly as 1974) delved into the darker aspects of social influence, revealing how far individuals would go in obeying authority, even to the extent of inflicting apparent harm on others. This work shed light on the dynamics of authority within social influence.

Additionally, Serge Moscovici and Pierre Faucheux in 1971 provided insights into minority influence, demonstrating that a steadfast minority could change the majority's view, adding layers to the understanding of influence dynamics beyond majority rule (Moscovici & Nève, 1971). Kurt Lewin's action research in 1947, which aimed to alter meat consumption patterns among American housewives, emphasized the applied nature of social influence, showing how group discussions could lead to behavior change in practical contexts. These foundational studies collectively highlight the pervasive and multifaceted impact of social influence, setting the stage for modern applications in areas like influencer marketing, where understanding the dynamics of influence is crucial for effective strategy development (Smith et al., 2011).

### **Social Influence and Compliance**

Social influence, a cornerstone concept in social psychology, encompasses the processes by which people's attitudes and behaviors are shaped by the real or imagined influence of others. Vaughan and Hogg (2013) define it as the interaction where individual actions are swayed by others, encapsulating the essential dynamics of compliance, conformity, and obedience, which are the primary forms of social influence observed within the field.

**Compliance, Conformity, and Obedience:** While compliance pertains to behavior changes elicited through explicit requests or subtle persuasions, conformity involves aligning one's behavior with group norms or responses, and obedience strictly refers to actions under the directives of an authority figure (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Brehm et al., 1996).

**Detailed Exploration of Compliance:** Freedman (1966) notably described compliance as the escalation of adherence to requests, starting small and increasing in demand. This phenomenon studied extensively, shows how social influence can manifest through varying forms of communication such as directives, laws, or social etiquette (Charles, 1985; Gralinski & Kopp, 1993; Soper, 2002). Moreover, compliance can be viewed as either an acquiescence to explicit requests

or, as Nail et al. (2000) suggest, a form of conformity where individuals publicly align with requests without necessarily agreeing privately due to external pressures.

Robert (2004) further refines this by describing compliance as a targeted response to specific requests, which can be influenced by the status of the requester and the context of the request. This perspective highlights the nuanced nature of compliance as it interacts with external social forces and internal psychological dynamics, underscoring the complexity of this form of social influence (Gibson & Smart, 2017).

**Implications and Modern Applications:** Understanding compliance is crucial in various applied fields, particularly in marketing and public policy, where influencing behavior is a primary objective. The insights from foundational and contemporary social psychology research offer valuable guidelines for designing effective influence strategies that are ethically sound and socially responsible.

### **Cialdini's Principles of Influence in Online and Face-to-Face Contexts**

Robert Cialdini's seminal work was based on extensive observational research in diverse real-life scenarios such as sales, advertising, and fundraising, and has identified six key principles of influence: scarcity, reciprocity, commitment/consistency, authority, social validation, and liking/similarity. These principles provide a framework for understanding the mechanics behind successful compliance tactics in both direct and mediated interactions (Guadagno, 2017).

**Authority in Online Contexts:** The principle of authority underscores the impact of perceived expertise and status on compliance. While highly effective in direct interactions, the transition to online environments introduces complexities. Studies by Dubrovsky et al. (1991) and Guéguen and Jacob (2002) indicate a reduction in the effectiveness of authority cues in digital communications, attributing this to the diminished salience of social cues in computer-mediated communication (CMC). Further, research by Okdie et al. (2013) suggests that authority's influence online varies significantly across different contexts, particularly with nuances in gender dynamics and in-group versus out-group status. These findings emphasize the need for a deeper exploration of how authority functions in digital platforms.

**Commitment and Consistency Across Digital Platforms:** The principle of commitment and consistency finds robust applications online, particularly through strategies like the foot-in-the-door

(FITD) technique. Guéguen's (2002) work effectively demonstrates FITD's success via email, highlighting the principle's adaptability to various online formats, including websites and virtual worlds, as shown in studies by Guéguen and Jacob (2001) and Eastwick and Gardner (2009). The principle's core internal consistency within the influence target ensures its effectiveness irrespective of external cues, marking it as a vital tool for digital persuasion.

**The Role of Liking in Online Influence:** Cialdini's liking principle outlines the increased susceptibility to influencers who are deemed likable. Guadagno and Cialdini's research (2002; 2007) explores this principle in the context of gender differences in CMC and FTF interactions, revealing that likability significantly mediates women's responsiveness to persuasion in email communications. This principle underscores the importance of crafting messages that project likability and foster a sense of affinity, especially when targeting female audiences online.

**Social Validation in Uncertain Online Environments:** Social validation leverages the influence of peers' actions on individual behaviors, particularly in ambiguous situations. Studies by Guadagno et al. (2013) utilizing fictitious blogs and virtual environments (Guadagno et al., 2007) underscore the principle's effectiveness in online settings. These findings suggest that social validation is a potent tool for influencing online behavior, meriting further investigation in digital contexts that are rich in evolving social norms.

**Exploring Reciprocity in Virtual Settings:** The principle of reciprocity, which involves mutual exchange and the obligation to return favors, extends into online interactions. The effectiveness of the door-in-the-face (DITF) technique in virtual environments, as demonstrated by Eastwick and Gardner (2009), highlights the potential for nuanced applications of reciprocity online. However, the limited research in this area suggests that the traditional models of reciprocity may need adjustments to align with the unique dynamics of online communication platforms.

**Scarcity and Consumer Behavior Online:** Finally, the scarcity heuristic is a powerful influencer of consumer behavior, suggesting that items limited in availability are perceived as more valuable. While well-documented in traditional contexts, such as Cialdini's meat distributor study (2009), the application of this principle in online environments remains underexplored. Predictive models suggest that computer-mediated communications could effectively leverage scarcity, particularly when combined with exclusivity cues, to influence consumer behavior dramatically.

**Elaboration Likelihood Model:**

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), conceptualized by Petty and Cacioppo in 1984, serves as a pivotal theoretical framework for understanding the mechanics of persuasion, particularly in influencer marketing. Stemming from the Information Adoption Model (IAM), ELM introduces dual processing paths that influence the persuasiveness of messages: the central route and the peripheral route (Mun et al., 2013).

**Central and Peripheral Routes of ELM:** The central route entails a deep, cognitive engagement where individuals assess information critically, activated especially when the audience is motivated and possesses a high ability to evaluate the content. This route often leads to durable attitude changes as it involves careful and thoughtful consideration of the persuasive content (Wu & Shaffer, 1987). Conversely, the peripheral route relies on superficial cues such as the attractiveness or credibility of the communicator or heuristic cues embedded in the message. This route is typically triggered when the motivation to process information is low or when the individual's capacity to evaluate is hindered (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984).

**Application of ELM in Digital Contexts:** Within the dynamic environment of digital media, the likelihood of an individual following the central route increases when detailed content and user reviews are accessible, prompting meticulous evaluation of the information. On the other hand, peripheral processing prevails under conditions where minimal cognitive effort is required or when the audience relies heavily on environmental or contextual cues (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

**Influencer Marketing and ELM:** In social media, influencers play a critical role in shaping consumer behaviors through persuasive messaging. The effectiveness of these messages, as delineated by ELM, hinges on the argument's quality and the context in which it is delivered. Influencers, as modern-day opinion leaders, leverage their platforms to influence consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions, making the understanding of these dual routes essential for effective marketing strategies (Meng & Wei, 2015). However, while influencers can significantly sway consumer preferences, their impact on the actual purchasing decisions can vary. The depth of influence depends largely on the consumers' perceptions of the influencers' credibility and the genuine connection they feel towards them. This underscores the importance of aligning influencer personas with brand values and ensuring that influencers deliver content that resonates authentically with their audience.

**Strategic Implications for Marketers:** Marketers are advised to enable influencers to personalize their promotional content to enhance relevance and effectiveness. Additionally, integrating sales promotions such as discounts or exclusive offers through influencers can further amplify engagement and influence purchasing behaviors. Sectors like fashion, beauty, and hospitality have seen considerable success in employing influencer marketing strategies, supported by research indicating that nearly 75% of marketing professionals utilize influencers to disseminate brand messages (Olasiligi et al., 2022b).

### **Exploring Social Identity, Interest Fit, and Opinion Leadership in Influencer Marketing**

Influencer marketing has emerged as a dominant force in digital advertising, where influencers leverage their authority and community engagement to shape consumer behaviors. This review examines the intricate roles of social identity, interest fit, and opinion leadership, grounded in seminal research and contemporary studies.

**Social Identity in Influencer Marketing:** The construct of social identity plays a critical role in the dynamics of influencer communities. Influencer communities not only engage with the influencer but also participate in a broader network of follower interactions, which significantly influences individual behavior and perceptions. As noted by De Veirman et al. (2017), follower engagement extends beyond interactions with the influencer to include significant peer communication, which can solidify group norms and enhance the community's influence. Coelho et al. (2018) add that such interactions cultivate shared experiences and a strong sense of belonging, increasing the persuasive impact of the influencer. Identification with an influencer's group can significantly predispose followers to respond more positively to endorsements, acting as a powerful heuristic in decision-making processes (Hogg, 2020).

**Interest Fit and its Impact on Engagement:** Interest fit is essential in maintaining follower attention and enhancing the persuasiveness of influencer communications. Interest, defined as a trait-like preference that drives attention and engagement, plays a pivotal role in how followers interact with content. According to Petty and Brinol (2011), interest motivates followers to engage deeply with content, enhancing cognitive processing and message retention. Shah et al. (2019) further emphasize that interest alignment can significantly affect how messages are processed, with high-interest fit leading to better memory and favorable attitudes toward the messages.

**The Influence of Opinion Leadership:** Opinion leadership significantly shapes the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Influencers with strong opinion leadership are perceived as credible sources of information, making them particularly effective in persuading their followers (Karlsen, 2015). Dempsey & Mitchell (2013) discusses how the perceived activeness and expertise of influencers in disseminating opinions enhance their ability to affect consumer attitudes and behaviors. The ELM supports this by suggesting that followers use source cues, such as the perceived expertise of the influencer, to facilitate decision-making in environments that require less cognitive effort (Petty and Brinol, 2011).

**Strategic Recommendations for Marketers:** Marketers must strategically select influencers whose attributes align with their target audience's preferences and the brand's values. This alignment enhances the authenticity and effectiveness of promotional messages. Moreover, creating and nurturing a sense of community among followers can amplify the effects of influencer campaigns, as shared social identity and mutual interests lead to higher levels of engagement and brand loyalty.

## **2.6 Influencer Credibility and Its Impact on Consumer Behavior**

Influencer marketing, a rapidly evolving domain within digital communication, significantly hinges on the credibility of the influencers, often termed "micro-endorsers." These influencers mirror the role of traditional endorsers seen in commercials but within the dynamic and interactive sphere of social media. Credibility, as conceptualized in the seminal work of Baig and Shahzad (2022), encompasses three primary dimensions: expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness, each playing a critical role in influencing consumer behavior.

**Expertise:** Expertise refers to the depth of knowledge that an influencer possesses regarding specific products or services and their ability to communicate this knowledge authentically. The perception of an influencer's expertise directly impacts the persuasive power of their endorsements. Consumers are more likely to trust and follow the recommendations of influencers who are viewed as knowledgeable and competent in their respective domains. This dimension of credibility not only affects the immediate acceptance of the endorsed product but also enhances the influencer's long-term authority and influence within the community (Baig & Shahzad, 2022).

**Attractiveness:** Attractiveness extends beyond physical appeal to include the overall aesthetic and style that an influencer presents. This attribute significantly affects how audiences perceive and

engage with influencer content. Attractiveness can enhance the likability of the influencer, which in turn increases the effectiveness of their endorsements. The appeal of an influencer can lead to higher levels of engagement, thereby amplifying the reach and impact of their messages across their follower base.

**Trustworthiness:** Trustworthiness involves the degree to which followers believe in the influencer's sincerity and the authenticity of their communications. This dimension is crucial for building a lasting relationship between influencers and their audience. Factors contributing to perceived trustworthiness include consistency in content quality, transparency regarding sponsorships, and the influencer's ability to maintain a friendly and safe community atmosphere. High levels of trustworthiness encourage a deeper emotional connection with the audience, fostering a sense of psychological safety and acceptance that can significantly bolster the influencer's persuasive capacity.

**Implications for Marketers:** Understanding the nuances of influencer credibility is vital for marketers aiming to leverage influencer marketing effectively. Selecting influencers who not only align with the brand's image but also exhibit high levels of expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness can lead to more successful marketing campaigns. These dimensions of credibility should be carefully assessed to ensure that influencer partnerships foster trust and engagement, thereby driving consumer behavior positively.

## **2.7 Research Gaps in Social Influence and Influencer Marketing**

**Cultural Variations in Social Influence Theories:** The application of Western-developed social influence theories to non-Western contexts such as Ethiopia remains underexplored.

Future research could focus on contextualizing these theories within Ethiopian cultural norms and values, which may differ significantly from those in Western societies. Such studies could help determine whether these theories require adaptation to fit diverse sociocultural landscapes, potentially leading to the development of more globally applicable models.

**Influencer Perspectives on Social Influence:** Existing literature predominantly examines social influence from the follower or consumer's perspective, largely neglecting the viewpoint of influencers. There is a critical need to incorporate the influencers' experiences, strategies, and challenges. By adopting a dual-perspective approach, future studies can offer a more

comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play, including the negotiation of authenticity versus promotional intent by influencers themselves.

**Cross-Industry Generalizability of Findings:** Much of the current research on social influence is confined to specific industries, such as fashion or technology, which limits the generalizability of findings. To bridge this gap, it is essential to conduct comparative studies across various industries to understand universal and industry-specific dynamics of social influence. Such research could illuminate common patterns and unique discrepancies in how social influence operates across different economic sectors.

**Psychological Dynamics of Social Influence:** There is a notable deficiency in research integrating deep psychological insights into the study of social influence within online communities. Future investigations should delve into the psychological underpinnings that drive user engagement and influence on digital platforms. This includes exploring cognitive, emotional, and social psychological processes that influence how users perceive and interact with influencer content.

**Influencer Marketing Techniques and Impact:** While influencer marketing is often discussed within the broader context of social media marketing, a detailed examination of specific influencer marketing techniques and their effectiveness remains sparse. Research should focus on identifying and analyzing unique strategies employed by influencers, examining the dynamics of influencer-brand collaborations, and assessing the direct impact of these collaborations on consumer behavior and brand success. This could also extend to exploring the ethical dimensions and consumer perceptions of transparency and authenticity in influencer marketing.

By addressing these refined research gaps, future studies can enhance the understanding of social influence mechanisms in influencer marketing, offering insights that are culturally nuanced, psychologically rich, and broadly applicable across different industries and platforms.

# Chapter Three

## Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to explore social media influencer experiences and evaluate the effectiveness as a marketing strategy on audience compliance in Addis Ababa. It deals with the research design, approach, and methods used to collect and analyze data. The chapter also discusses the sampling strategy, data collection tools, and data analysis. This methodology is designed to address the research objectives and answer the key research questions effectively.

### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a Sequential Exploratory Mixed-Methods Design, implemented in two main phases: Exploration and Evaluation. These phases are designed to investigate influencer marketing strategies and their effectiveness within the Ethiopian context. While the primary focus of the study is qualitative, the quantitative component supplements this by evaluating the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The primary objective of the exploration phase is to gain a deep, qualitative understanding of the strategies, motivations, and experiences of social media influencers in Addis Ababa. This phase is conducted through semi-structured interviews with influencers, primarily active on TikTok and Instagram, as these platforms dominate the city's digital landscape. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility, allowing the researcher to probe into specific topics while also enabling participants to share rich, detailed narratives. This method provides insights into influencers' personal experiences, professional challenges, and the strategic approaches they employ to engage their audiences.

The qualitative data collected during this phase is analyzed using theoretical frameworks from social psychology, including Cialdini's principles of influence, Social Identity Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). These frameworks provide a structured lens for examining themes such as trust, authenticity, audience engagement, and cultural relevance. For instance, Cialdini's principles highlight how influencers build credibility and authority, Social Identity Theory explains how cultural alignment fosters group-based audience compliance, and the ELM explores how message framing and audience involvement drive engagement. This theoretical

grounding ensures the analysis uncovers psychological mechanisms underpinning influencer marketing strategies. The findings from this phase inform the development of a quantitative survey used in the subsequent phase, ensuring that the survey reflects the nuances identified in the qualitative data.

The evaluation phase builds upon the findings of the exploration phase, using quantitative methods to assess the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies from the perspective of businesses that collaborate with influencers. In this phase, structured questionnaires are distributed to businesses across various sectors that have engaged influencers for marketing campaigns. The questionnaires include Likert-scale items to measure perceived effectiveness of influencer's impact on audience behavior, as well as tangible outcomes such as campaign ROI, audience reach, and satisfaction with influencer partnerships. Quantitative data offers empirical evidence to support or refine the themes identified in the exploration phase, providing a comprehensive evaluation of influencer effectiveness across different business contexts.

### **Rationale for the Design**

The Sequential Exploratory Mixed-Methods Design was chosen due to the complex and multifaceted nature of influencer marketing, which requires both in-depth understanding and empirical validation. Influencer marketing operates at the intersection of global trends and local socio-cultural dynamics, particularly in Addis Ababa. A sequential approach allows the qualitative phase to uncover the nuanced experiences, strategies, and challenges of influencers, providing depth and context that would be difficult to achieve through quantitative methods alone. The emergent themes from the qualitative data then guide the development of a quantitative survey tailored to these specific insights, ensuring that the quantitative phase is grounded in the realities uncovered in the exploration phase.

This design also allows for a complementary integration of methods, addressing the study's dual objectives. The qualitative phase provides rich, context-specific data on the socio-cultural and psychological factors driving audience compliance, while the quantitative phase evaluates the measurable effectiveness of these strategies from the perspective of businesses. The sequential nature of the design ensures that each phase informs and enhances the other, offering a comprehensive understanding of influencer marketing.

The choice of this design is further supported by the lack of existing research on influencer marketing in Ethiopia. The qualitative phase addresses this gap by providing a detailed exploration of local practices, while the quantitative phase ensures that findings are not only descriptive but also supported by empirical data. Together, these methods enable the study to deliver actionable insights for influencers, businesses, and academics, while ensuring that the results are both culturally relevant and practically applicable.

This methodological approach reflects the study's emphasis on qualitative depth while recognizing the value of quantitative evidence in evaluating the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies. By integrating these perspectives, the research design ensures that the findings are robust, nuanced, and grounded in both theory and practice.

### **3.2 Study Area**

This research is centered in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia and a vital hub for economic, social, and cultural activities. As a burgeoning digital and social media nexus, Addis Ababa offers a unique and dynamic setting for examining influencer marketing strategies within a rapidly evolving market environment. The city's role as a cultural and technological bridge between traditional Ethiopian values and global digital trends makes it particularly relevant for this study.

In Addis Ababa, the widespread engagement with social media, particularly among the city's youthful and tech-savvy population, creates an ideal environment to explore the dynamics of influencer marketing. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram dominate the digital landscape, fostering a thriving ecosystem of content creators and influencers who shape consumer behavior and brand narratives. This high level of social media adoption provides fertile ground for investigating how influencers employ various strategies to engage their audiences and drive compliance, as well as how these strategies align with local cultural and social dynamics.

The city's unique blend of traditional Ethiopian culture and modern digital influences enriches the contextual framework for this research. Addis Ababa exemplifies how global digital trends are adapted to fit local socio-cultural norms, providing insights into how influencers navigate these intersections. The study applies theoretical frameworks such as Social Identity Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to understand how cultural and social contexts influence

audience engagement and the effectiveness of influencer strategies. For example, Social Identity Theory highlights how shared cultural values and group affiliations foster stronger audience connections, while the ELM explains how audience involvement and message framing impact engagement and compliance. These frameworks help uncover the subtle ways in which cultural alignment and persuasive communication strategies shape audience behaviors.

Addis Ababa's position at the forefront of digital content creation and innovation underscores its significance to influencer marketing research. The city's vibrant influencer ecosystem, illustrated by its engagement with events like the TikTok Creative Awards 2023, showcases a community of creators who actively contribute to shaping Ethiopia's digital marketing landscape. By focusing on Addis Ababa, this study captures the interplay between local cultural factors and global marketing strategies, offering a nuanced understanding of influencer marketing in an emerging market context.

The findings of this research are anticipated to contribute significantly to the discourse on digital marketing in non-Western settings. By examining the application and effectiveness of various influence and persuasion tactics within Addis Ababa's socio-cultural context, the study provides valuable insights into how influencers can strategically incorporate cultural understanding into their campaigns. Additionally, the research highlights how businesses can leverage these insights to enhance marketing effectiveness and optimize their collaborations with influencers, making it a vital contribution to the evolving field of digital marketing in Ethiopia and beyond.

### **3.3 Population of the Study**

This study specifically targets social media influencers and businesses that have collaborated with them, all based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It focuses on influencers who are active on TikTok and Instagram, platforms identified as pivotal in shaping contemporary consumer behaviors and marketing strategies within the local digital ecosystem. The selection of these platforms reflects their dominance in Ethiopia's influencer marketing landscape and their alignment with the study's objectives to explore strategies and evaluate the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

### **Justification for Sampling Framework**

The sampling framework for this study was determined following a preliminary analysis of the most popular platforms among influencers in Ethiopia. This analysis identified TikTok, Instagram,

and YouTube as the primary platforms used by local content creators. However, the selection process was guided by several practical and contextual considerations to ensure the study remains focused on relevant and accessible data.

Instagram and TikTok were chosen as the platforms of focus due to their strong alignment with the study's objectives and the nature of the content shared by influencers. While YouTube is also a widely used platform in Ethiopia, it was excluded because the most popular content on YouTube primarily revolves around topics such as religion, politics, and film, which are less relevant to the influencer marketing strategies this study seeks to explore. By contrast, TikTok and Instagram are predominantly used by influencers for creating content that aligns with consumer marketing, making them more suitable for examining the intersection of audience engagement and marketing strategies.

TikTok was particularly prioritized due to the availability of structured and well-organized datasets provided by initiatives such as the TikTok Creative Awards. These awards celebrate influencers excelling in various categories and showcase those actively involved in innovative marketing collaborations. By leveraging this dataset, the study ensures that the selected influencers are representative of current digital marketing trends in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the TikTok Creative Awards provide a practical solution to the challenges of data accessibility and organization that are often associated with Instagram, where much of the essential data is disorganized, unclear, or accessible only through paid services. The inclusion of TikTok influencers ensures the study captures a diverse and relevant pool of participants engaged in effective and creative marketing practices.

This strategic selection of platforms aligns with the study's qualitative focus on understanding influencers' strategies and the supplementary quantitative evaluation of their effectiveness. It ensures that the sampled influencers are actively shaping the digital marketing landscape in Ethiopia while being accessible for detailed analysis.

### **Business Sampling and Rationale**

To evaluate the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns from a business perspective, the study adopts a systematic approach to identify and select businesses that have collaborated with the influencers sampled during the exploration phase. Business participants were identified through

referrals provided by the influencers interviewed in the initial phase. This method ensures that the businesses selected are directly relevant to the influencer marketing strategies under investigation and have firsthand experience working with the influencers.

After completing their interviews, influencers were asked to list businesses they had partnered with for marketing campaigns within the study’s specified timeframe. This approach ensures that the quantitative evaluation is grounded in recent and relevant marketing collaborations. The selection criteria for businesses were designed to ensure relevance and comprehensiveness. Only businesses that had engaged in at least one marketing campaign with the participating influencers were included, ensuring that the data collected directly pertains to the strategies being analyzed. Additionally, businesses were selected from diverse industries to capture a wide range of perspectives and to understand how influencer marketing strategies vary across different sectors. This diversity facilitates the identification of universally effective strategies and highlights sector-specific practices.

The combination of influencer and business sampling frameworks ensures that the study captures a comprehensive view of influencer marketing dynamics within Addis Ababa’s unique socio-cultural and digital context. The integration of these perspectives contributes to a richer understanding of the strategies employed by influencers and their measurable effectiveness as perceived by businesses. This sampling framework supports the study’s objectives by enabling an in-depth exploration of influencer marketing strategies and a robust evaluation of their outcomes

Table 3.1

Number of Influencer Nominees and their Category

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of Influencers Nominees</b>
Funniest comedy skits	15
TikTok Creative award of the year	2
Best Dance performance	12
Best Discovery Vlog (places and Reviews)	10
Creative Editing and Effects	11
Best Musician/ Producer	11
Best Artist/ poet/painter	10
Business and Educational Content	5
Best Informative Content	9
Best Charitable Person	6
Best Inspiration Content	7

Best Health and Medical Content	8
Best sport	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>

### 3.4 Sampling Strategy for Influencers

The sampling strategy for influencers in this study is designed to ensure the selection of participants who provide a representative and relevant perspective on influencer marketing strategies within the Addis Ababa context. Given the study’s focus on the nuanced dynamics of influencer marketing and the evaluation of its effectiveness, a **purposive sampling approach** is adopted to gather rich and detailed insights into the strategies and innovations employed by influential content creators.

#### Rationale for Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was chosen for its ability to identify and select information-rich cases that are directly relevant to the research objectives. This approach is particularly effective for the qualitative component of the study, as it focuses on influencers who have demonstrated significant impact and engagement within their domains. By prioritizing influencers recognized for their achievements and audience engagement, the study aims to uncover sophisticated marketing strategies and provide meaningful insights into influencer marketing practices in Addis Ababa.

The selection of influencers was guided by the following criteria:

1. **Platform Activity:** Influencers selected for this study must be actively engaging with their audiences on TikTok or Instagram. Active engagement is characterized by regular posting schedules, consistent interactions with followers through comments, and recent involvement in marketing campaigns. This criterion ensures that the study focuses on influencers who are currently relevant and influential in their fields.
2. **Recognition:** Priority is given to influencers who have been nominated for or received awards at the TikTok Creative Awards 2023. Recognition at these awards serves as an indicator of the influencers’ impact, creativity, and excellence in content creation, making them valuable subjects for exploring successful marketing strategies.
3. **Location:** The study exclusively targets influencers based in Addis Ababa to examine influencer marketing dynamics within this specific urban and cultural setting. Addis

Ababa's unique blend of traditional and modern digital influences provides a rich backdrop for the research.

4. **Diversity in Content:** To capture a comprehensive view of influencer marketing across different niches, the study includes influencers from a variety of content categories recognized by the TikTok Creative Awards. This diversity ensures that the research analyzes a broad range of strategies and their resonance with different audience segments.
5. **Business Collaboration History:** Influencers with a documented history of partnerships with businesses for marketing campaigns are prioritized. This criterion ensures the inclusion of participants with practical experience in implementing influencer marketing strategies, providing insights into their collaboration processes and outcomes.

### **Implementation Strategy**

The implementation of the sampling strategy involves three key steps to ensure that the selected participants align with the study's objectives:

1. **Identification:** A review of the list of nominees and awardees from the TikTok Creative Awards 2023 was conducted to identify potential participants who meet the selection criteria. This step focused on influencers recognized for their innovation, creativity, and engagement.
2. **Preliminary Assessment:** The online activity and engagement levels of the identified influencers were evaluated to ensure they meet the study's requirements for active engagement and substantial audience impact. This assessment included reviewing their posting frequency, content quality, and interactions with followers.
3. **Recruitment:** Selected influencers were contacted through their preferred communication channels, including social media and email. The outreach process involved providing detailed information about the study's scope, its academic purpose, and the benefits of participation. Influencers were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews, with assurances of confidentiality and ethical research practices.

## **Sample Size**

The sample size for this study was determined based on a discussion with the research advisor, considering the scope of the study, time constraints, and the depth of qualitative inquiry required. A total of 30 influencers were selected to participate. This sample size is sufficient to capture a diverse range of perspectives and experiences while remaining manageable within the timeframe of the research. It ensures a balance between depth and breadth, enabling the collection of detailed narratives without overwhelming the analytical process. The selection process was carefully structured to ensure that the sample reflects the diversity of Addis Ababa's influencer ecosystem, including variations in content niches, platform engagement, and collaboration history.

This structured sampling strategy for influencers ensures the inclusion of influencers who are not only impactful and recognized for their contributions but also represent a cross-section of the diverse influencer ecosystem in Addis Ababa. By focusing on influencers with documented excellence and engagement, the study captures the strategies and practices driving influencer marketing in Ethiopia. The diversity of content types, platforms, and collaboration experiences among the participants allows for a nuanced analysis of how influencers resonate with audiences and achieve marketing objectives. The inclusion of a well-defined sample size ensures that the study remains focused and achievable, providing robust and actionable insights into the dynamics of influencer marketing in an emerging market context.

### **3.5 Sampling Strategy for Businesses**

To evaluate the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns from a business perspective, a targeted sampling strategy was employed. This strategy ensures the inclusion of businesses that have directly collaborated with the selected influencers, providing insights into the real-world applications and outcomes of influencer marketing strategies in Addis Ababa.

#### **Selection of Business Participants**

A total of **50 businesses** were selected for this study, based on their documented history of partnerships with the influencers interviewed in the qualitative exploration phase. Businesses were identified through a referral process, where influencers were asked to list organizations they had worked with on marketing campaigns within the specified timeframe of the study. This referral-

based method ensured that only businesses with direct experience in influencer collaborations were included, guaranteeing the relevance and authenticity of the data collected.

To capture a broad perspective on the effectiveness of influencer marketing across various industries, the selection process prioritized diversity in business sectors. By including businesses from different industries, the study examines how influencer strategies may vary by context, identifying both universally effective approaches and sector-specific trends.

### **Recruitment of Business Participants**

The recruitment process for business participants was straightforward yet effective in ensuring meaningful engagement:

1. Businesses were contacted via email or social media, with the initial communication outlining the study's objectives, academic purpose, and the relevance of their participation.
2. Participants were invited to complete a structured survey designed to assess key marketing outcomes, such as return on investment (ROI), brand awareness, audience engagement, and overall satisfaction with influencer partnerships.
3. Follow-up communication was conducted as necessary to ensure a robust response rate and to address any questions about the study.

This streamlined recruitment approach minimized redundancy while ensuring the participation of businesses that could provide valuable insights into influencer marketing effectiveness.

The inclusion of 50 businesses enables the study to gather comprehensive data on the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies. This sample size balances the need for diverse industry representation with the practical constraints of the research timeline. By focusing on businesses with direct influencer collaboration experience, the study captures authentic and actionable insights into the measurable outcomes of these campaigns. The findings from this sample contribute to a nuanced understanding of how influencer marketing operates in Addis Ababa's dynamic digital and socio-cultural context.

### **3.6 Data Sources: Data Collection Instruments**

The depth and richness of this study's findings rely on carefully designed data collection instruments tailored to the needs of two key participant groups: social media influencers and businesses.

These instruments draw on both primary and secondary data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of influencer marketing strategies and their effectiveness in Addis Ababa.

### **Data Collection Instruments for Influencers**

Primary data from social media influencers were gathered using semi-structured interviews, which served as the core qualitative data collection method. These interviews provided an in-depth exploration of influencers' experiences, strategies, and their perceptions of their impact on audiences. The interview guide was developed to cover a wide range of themes relevant to the study. Open-ended questions encouraged influencers to discuss their content creation processes, including how they tailored content to engage audiences and meet brand objectives. The guide also explored influencers' criteria for selecting brand partnerships and the strategies they used to foster trust and engagement with their followers.

The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling the researcher to probe deeper into specific topics while maintaining consistency across key themes. This approach ensured the collection of detailed narratives that captured the nuances of influencer marketing within the Ethiopian context. Influencers were also asked to reflect on their roles within the broader marketing ecosystem, providing insights into how they viewed their contributions to audience behavior and brand promotion.

Secondary data supported the primary data collected from influencers. The TikTok Creative Awards served as a significant secondary source, offering detailed information on recognized influencers, including their categories of expertise and content types. Publicly available analytics from TikTok and Instagram, such as follower counts, engagement rates, and audience demographics, provided additional context to the qualitative data collected through interviews.

### **Data Collection Instruments for Businesses**

For businesses, structured questionnaires were used as the primary data collection tool. These instruments were designed to capture quantitative insights into the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns. The questionnaires focused on several key areas, including businesses' evaluations of their marketing objectives and the outcomes achieved through influencer partnerships. Specific sections assessed engagement metrics, such as audience interactions and

brand visibility, as well as broader measures of success, including campaign ROI and satisfaction with influencer collaborations.

To enhance the depth of data collected, the questionnaires incorporated both quantitative and qualitative components. Likert-scale items allowed businesses to rate the effectiveness of influencers on various dimensions, including their credibility, audience reach, and ability to drive conversions. Open-ended questions provided businesses the opportunity to share additional insights into their experiences and challenges in working with influencers, adding a qualitative layer to the predominantly quantitative data.

Secondary data further informed the analysis of business responses. Industry reports and market analyses were used to frame the study within the broader context of digital marketing in Ethiopia. These reports provided key insights into trends in social media usage and influencer marketing practices, enriching the understanding of how businesses approach influencer collaborations. Additionally, social media analytics from platforms like TikTok and Instagram supplemented the primary data, offering quantitative measures of campaign performance and audience engagement.

By employing these carefully designed data collection instruments for both influencers and businesses, the study ensures a robust and detailed exploration of the dynamics and effectiveness of influencer marketing in Addis Ababa. The integration of primary and secondary data sources provides a solid foundation for subsequent analysis while maintaining the methodological rigor necessary for reliable and meaningful findings.

### **3.7 Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection process for this study was carefully structured to ensure transparency, ethical compliance, and the collection of high-quality data from both influencers and businesses. This section outlines the procedures used to gather qualitative data through interviews with influencers and quantitative data through questionnaires distributed to businesses.

#### **Interviews with Influencers**

The data collection process for influencers began with identifying potential participants through publicly available contact information or the TikTok Creative Awards contact list. Influencers were initially contacted via their preferred social media platforms or email addresses. The first communication included a concise introduction of the researcher, a summary of the study's

objectives and significance, and a clear outline of what participation would entail. To ensure ethical compliance, an informed consent form was shared digitally with all potential participants. The form detailed the voluntary nature of participation, participants' rights, and the confidentiality measures in place to protect their identities and data. Consent was obtained before any interviews were scheduled, and participants were encouraged to ask questions about the study to ensure they fully understood their involvement. Interviews were scheduled at times that were convenient for the participants. The mode of the interview—either online via platforms such as Zoom or Skype, or in-person—was determined based on the participant's geographical proximity and current health and safety guidelines. Each interview was designed to last between 30 and 60 minutes. Participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded, and their explicit permission was obtained before recording began. Recording the interviews ensured accuracy during the data analysis phase and reduced the risk of misinterpretation. Once recorded, the interviews were transcribed verbatim to create accurate and comprehensive textual data for analysis. Participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to confirm accuracy and provide any necessary clarifications or additional insights. This process enhanced the validity and reliability of the data, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected the participants' experiences and perspectives.

### **Questionnaires for Businesses**

The quantitative data collection process involved distributing structured questionnaires to businesses identified through referrals provided by the participating influencers. Businesses were contacted through email or direct messaging to invite them to participate in the study. The initial communication provided an overview of the study, emphasized its significance, and explained how their contributions would be valuable for understanding the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns. A link to the online questionnaire, hosted on user-friendly platforms such as Google Forms, was included in the initial communication. To encourage participation, the questionnaire was designed with clear instructions and an estimated completion time of 10 to 15 minutes. This approach was intended to minimize participant burden and maximize response rates. To further enhance response rates, follow-up reminders were sent to businesses that had not completed the questionnaire. These reminders reiterated the importance of their input to the study and encouraged their timely participation. Businesses were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, reinforcing their trust in the research process.

The questionnaire itself was structured to collect comprehensive data on the perceived effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns. It featured a mix of Likert-scale items, which allowed participants to rate various aspects of campaign success, and open-ended questions, which provided an opportunity to elaborate on their experiences and insights. This combination ensured that the data captured both measurable outcomes and nuanced perspectives on influencer marketing effectiveness.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

This study employs a comprehensive data analysis approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a nuanced understanding of influencer marketing strategies and their effectiveness. Thematic analysis is applied to qualitative data from influencer interviews, while descriptive statistical analysis is used for quantitative data collected through business questionnaires. The integration of these methods enables a holistic interpretation of findings, allowing the study to connect influencers' strategies with their measurable outcomes.

#### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

The qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with influencers is analyzed using **thematic analysis**, a robust method for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. The analysis follows the six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to ensure rigor and depth.

The first phase involves familiarization with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts. This process allows for a holistic understanding of influencers' narratives while beginning to identify preliminary patterns. During this phase, the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study—Cialdini's principles of influence, Social Identity Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)—serve as analytical lenses, highlighting potential connections between the data and psychological mechanisms such as trust-building, cultural alignment, and message framing.

The second phase involves generating initial codes by systematically labeling segments of text with concise descriptors that capture their core meaning. Codes such as "authenticity," "audience engagement," and "cultural adaptation" emerge from the data and reflect both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) processes. For example, instances of influencers using

relatable personal stories to build connections are coded under "authenticity," while references to leveraging cultural symbols to appeal to Ethiopian audiences are coded under "cultural resonance."

In the third phase, these codes are grouped into broader themes that encapsulate influencers' strategies and experiences. Themes such as "Establishing Credibility," "Leveraging Cultural Identity," and "Adapting Global Trends Locally" are identified to provide insight into how influencers navigate the unique socio-cultural and digital landscape of Addis Ababa.

The fourth phase reviews and refines these themes to ensure they accurately represent the data and are consistent across participants. Themes are cross-referenced with original transcripts to verify their validity and relevance. This step ensures that the findings remain grounded in the data.

In the fifth phase, themes are clearly defined and named. Each theme is connected to the theoretical frameworks, which provide a structured interpretation of the data. For instance, "Social Proof and Audience Engagement" is linked to Cialdini's principle of social proof, illustrating how influencers use metrics such as likes and shares to build credibility.

The final phase involves producing a cohesive narrative report that integrates the themes with examples from the data. This report connects the themes to the research questions and theoretical frameworks, demonstrating how influencers' strategies align with psychological mechanisms to influence audience behavior.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

The quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires from businesses is analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. The analysis focuses on summarizing and interpreting key variables related to the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns. Data is encoded and analyzed using **SPSS Version 26**, ensuring accuracy and reliability in statistical processing.

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means are employed to analyze responses. Frequency tables are used to summarize demographic variables, campaign objectives, and satisfaction levels. Likert-scale responses are analyzed to quantify businesses' perceptions of influencer performance across metrics such as ROI, audience engagement, and brand visibility.

The analysis also highlights patterns and trends within the quantitative data, providing measurable insights into the commercial impact of influencer marketing campaigns. These findings offer a

numerical foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of the strategies reported by influencers, enabling the study to assess the alignment between influencers' practices and business outcomes.

### **Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings**

The integration of qualitative and quantitative analyses ensures a comprehensive understanding of influencer marketing in Addis Ababa. The thematic analysis provides in-depth insights into the strategies, experiences, and challenges of influencers, revealing the psychological and cultural factors driving their practices. These qualitative findings are then contextualized with quantitative data from businesses, offering empirical evidence of how these strategies translate into measurable outcomes.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

This study adheres to rigorous ethical standards to ensure the protection, respect, and dignity of all participants. Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the ethics committee of Addis Ababa University, signifying compliance with institutional and professional guidelines for conducting research involving human subjects. All participants were provided with detailed informed consent forms before their involvement in the study. These forms outlined the study's purpose, objectives, and procedures, ensuring participants understood the scope and significance of their contributions. The forms also emphasized participants' rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without explanation or consequences. Consent was obtained digitally or in writing before any data collection commenced. The confidentiality of participants was prioritized throughout the research process. All identifiable information was anonymized to ensure participants' privacy. Codes or pseudonyms were used in place of real names in transcripts and data records. Any information that could indirectly reveal participants' identities, such as specific campaign details or business affiliations, was either generalized or excluded from the study. Data collected from both influencers and businesses were securely stored, with access restricted to the researcher and, where necessary, the supervising academic team. The data will be retained only for the duration necessary to complete the study and its related academic requirements, after which it will be securely deleted. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Potential participants were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw at any point during the research process without any negative repercussions. This principle was upheld to ensure that participants felt no coercion or obligation to participate. The data collected during this study is strictly used for

academic purposes, including the completion of this research and potential publications arising from it. Participants were informed that their anonymized data might be used in academic reports, presentations, or articles, but that no identifying details would be disclosed. The study followed internationally recognized ethical principles for research, including respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, as outlined in the Belmont Report. Additional considerations were taken to ensure cultural sensitivity, given the study's focus on Addis Ababa's socio-cultural context. By upholding these ethical considerations, the study ensures the integrity of the research process and fosters trust between the researcher and participants. These measures reflect the commitment to conducting research that respects the rights, privacy, and autonomy of all involved.

# Chapter Four

## Results

This chapter presents the findings of the study, structured according to the research objectives. The results are drawn from qualitative data collected through interviews with influencers and quantitative data gathered from questionnaires completed by businesses. Each objective is addressed systematically, ensuring that the findings align with the study's goals and provide a comprehensive understanding of influencer marketing strategies and their effectiveness within the Addis Ababa context.

The qualitative findings, derived from thematic analysis, offer in-depth insights into influencers' strategies, experiences, and challenges. These findings address how influencers adapt to the socio-cultural environment of Addis Ababa and employ psychological principles to engage their audiences. The quantitative findings, analyzed using descriptive statistics, evaluate the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies from the businesses' perspectives, focusing on metrics such as ROI, audience engagement, and satisfaction levels.

The results are presented in an integrated manner, linking the qualitative insights from influencers to the quantitative evaluations from businesses. This approach ensures a holistic understanding of influencer marketing, addressing both the strategic and practical dimensions of its application in Addis Ababa.

### 4.1 Background information of Participants

#### Social-demographic Characteristics of Influencers

Based on the thematic analysis of interviews conducted with influencers from various categories recognized in the TikTok Creative Awards, this section presents a detailed account of their experiences, strategies, and perspectives. The influencers were categorized based on their niche, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their unique approaches and challenges. Out of the planned 30 interviews, 22 influencers responded across nine categories such as Comedy Skits, Vlog Discovery, Creative Editing, Art and Poetry, Business/Education, Information/News, Inspirational Content, Health, and Sports. The reason for the exclusion of other categories is due to the lack of brand collaborations that could be observed, and the positiveness of the contents. In addition, due to the popularity of vlog discovery and comedy skits, additional participants were added. The

categories and number of influencers interviewed were Comedy Skits (4), Vlog Discovery (4), Creative Editing (2), Art and Poetry (2), Business/Education (2), Information/News (2), Inspirational Content (2), Health (2), and Sports (2).

The social-demographic characteristics of the participants highlight the diversity and reach of influencers in Addis Ababa. With a broad age range, varied niches, and significant follower counts, these influencers provide a comprehensive perspective on the dynamics of influencer marketing in Ethiopia. The insights gathered from these influencers are crucial for understanding how social media strategies are tailored to engage audiences and promote brands effectively within the Ethiopian context. The social-demographic characteristics of the participants provide an essential context for understanding the diverse backgrounds and reach of the influencers involved in this study. The data gathered includes the age range, primary social media platforms used, primary niche or focus of content, approximate follower count on each platform, and the duration of their influence on social media. This section presents a detailed analysis of these characteristics across different categories of influencers.

### **Age Range**

The ages of the influencers interviewed range from 20 to 30 years, reflecting a broad spectrum of young to middle-aged adults actively engaged in social media influencing. Table 4.1 indicates that the majority of the respondents have an average age range from 23-26. The result indicated that the majority of the respondents (10) were between 18-23, and respondents in the age range between (24-30), and 31-36 were 8 and 4 respectively. The study has no respondents between 0-18 years, and above 37-75 years. The age range indicates that the majority of the respondents are young (18-30) and are highly engaged with social media platforms. The respondents in this age range are highly active on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. They engage with short-form content and are drawn to visual, interactive media, and social engagement. Table 4.1 below shows respondents' age ranges across the nine influencer categories.

Table 4.1

Age Range of Respondents

Age Range (years)	Number Respondents
<18	0
18-23	10
24-30	8
31-36	4
> 37	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>

**Primary Focus of Content**

Almost every influencer specializes in a specific niche, which dictates the type of content they produce and their engagement strategies. The niches range from entertainment to education, providing a diverse set of insights. However creative editing can utilize different kinds of content as long as it demonstrates visual appeal. Table 4.2 shows the primary focus of the nine influencer categories.

Table 4.2

Primary Focus of Content

Category	Primary Focus of Content
Comedy Skits	Humor and Relatable Situations
Vlog Discovery	Travel, reviews, and Exploration
Creative Editing	Innovative Visual Effects and Humor
Art and Poetry	Traditional and Contemporary Art
Business/Education	Business Tips and Educational Content
Information/News	Local News and Current Events
Inspirational Content	Motivational Stories and Quotes
Health	Wellness Tips and Health Advice
Sports	Sports News, workout tips, and Activities

**Approximate Follower Count per Platform and Duration**

The follower count varies significantly across platforms, indicating the influencers' reach and engagement levels. Influencers in categories like Comedy Skits and Vlog Discovery tend to have higher follower counts due to the broad appeal of their content. According to Table 4.3, comedy

kits have the highest follower count with 300k average followers count and an average of 3.5 years as influencers.

The length of time participants has been active as influencers varies, with some having established their presence more recently and others having been active for several years. This variation provides insights into the evolving nature of influencer marketing in Ethiopia. Table 4.3 indicates that Business/Education influencers have the highest average duration. The result indicated that a higher follower count has a larger audience reach and higher level of engagement with their content which is important to collaborate for promotions or advertising. A longer duration as an influencer indicates that the influencer has experience and credibility and develops a deeper understanding of their niche and established audience. Regarding this, the selected blogs and kits were appropriate for this study. Table 4.3 shows the average followers and average duration as influencers of the nine influencer’s category.

Table 4.3

Followers Count and Duration as Influencer

Category	Follower Count Range	Average Follower Count	Duration As Influencers	Average Duration
Comedy Skits	100K-500K	300K	2-5 years	3.5 years
Vlog Discovery	50K-200K	125K	1-4 years	2.5 years
Creative Editing	75K-150K	112.5K	1-3 years	2 years
Art and Poetry	60K-120K	90K	2-5 years	3.5 years
Business/Education	30K-100K	65K	3-6 years	4.5 years
Information/News	20K-80K	50K	2-5 years	3.5 years
Inspirational Content	40K-90K	65K	1-3 years	2 years
Health	25K-75K	50K	1-4 years	2.5 years
Sports	50K-150K	100K	2-4 years	3 years

### Platform Used by Influencers

Each influencer category has its own choice of platform based on different criteria like their target audience, content type, goals, and their engagement. Table 4.5 shows that the primary social media platforms utilized by these influencers are TikTok and Instagram, with a few also active on YouTube and Facebook. This distribution highlights the preference for visually driven and interactive platforms among Ethiopian influencers. Table 4.5 shows the primary platform choice of the influencers.

Table 4.4

Primary Platform Used

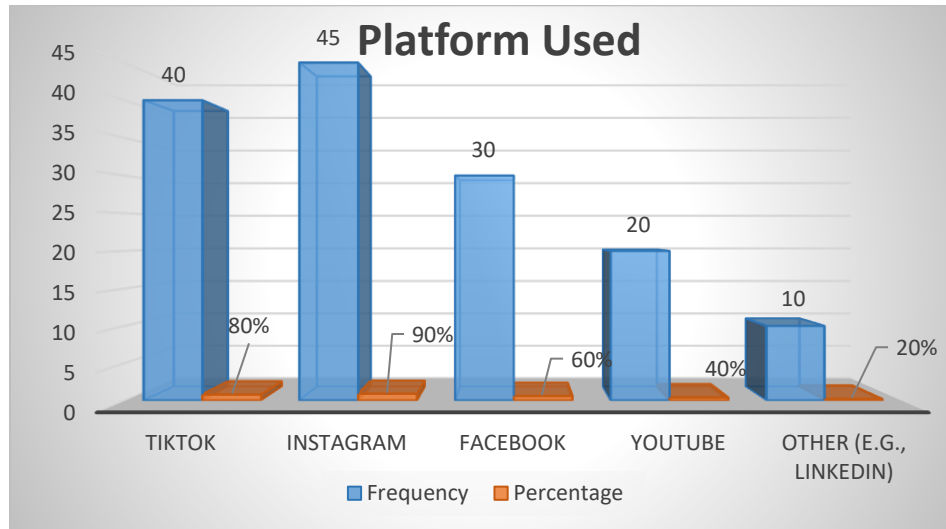
Category	Primary Platforms
Comedy Skits	TikTok, Instagram
Vlog Discovery	TikTok, Instagram, YouTube
Creative Editing	TikTok, Instagram
Art and Poetry	TikTok, Instagram
Business/Education	LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok
Information/News	Twitter, Instagram, TikTok
Inspirational Content	Instagram, TikTok
Health	Instagram, Facebook, TikTok
Sports	TikTok, Instagram, YouTube

### Platform used for Influencer Marketing

The survey also gathered data on the platform businesses use for their influencer marketing campaigns. Figure 4.1 illustrates that Instagram is the most popular platform, used by 90% of businesses. This high percentage is likely due to Instagram's visual-centric nature and extensive user base, making it highly effective for influencer marketing. TikTok follows closely, used by 80% of businesses, reflecting its rising popularity and its appeal to younger demographics. Facebook is used by 60% of businesses, highlighting its continued relevance. YouTube is used by 40% of businesses, indicating its value for long-form content and detailed demonstrations. Other platforms, including LinkedIn, are used by 20% of businesses, showcasing their role in more niche or professional contexts. Figure 4.1 shows how much each platform was used by the influencers by allowing multiple responses to be given.

Figure 4.1

Platform Used for influencer marketing



### Information on Businesses with influencer marketing experience

This section presents a detailed analysis of the data collected from 50 businesses through a structured survey. The survey aimed to capture the experiences and perspectives of these businesses regarding influencer marketing strategies on social media platforms. The data has been organized into four key areas: business profile, experience with influencers, effectiveness of influencer campaigns, and influencer relationship management. Using descriptive statistics, we provide insights into the industry distribution, business sizes, years in operation, platform usage, campaign objectives, and overall satisfaction with influencer collaborations.

The survey collected data from 50 businesses across various industries as presented in Table 4.4. The Food & Beverages sector has the highest representation, accounting for 20% of respondents, followed by Restaurants & Cafes (16%) and Fashion & Cosmetics, and Education (both at 14%). The Technology sector has the lowest representation at 6%. The result indicated that almost all business sectors were considered in this study which helps to generalize the results. The size of the businesses was categorized based on the number of employees as small, medium, and large. As shown in Table 4.4, small businesses (1-50 employees) constitute the majority at 56%, followed by medium-sized businesses (51-200 employees) at 34%, and large businesses (201+ employees) at 10%.

The result showed that the study incorporated small companies to large companies that have experience with influencer marketing which in turn increases the credibility of the study. The operational longevity of the businesses was assessed to understand the distribution of new versus established entities. Table 4.4 reveals that half of the businesses (50%) have been in operation for more than three years. Businesses operating between one to three years constitute 40%, while those with less than one year of operation account for 10%.

The data on the experience in influencer marketing indicates varying levels of engagement with this strategy. As depicted in Table 4.4, half of the businesses (54%) have between one to three years of experience with influencer marketing. Thirty percent have more than 3 years of experience, and 14% have <1 year of experience. The survey collected data on the number of influencer campaigns conducted by businesses. As shown in Table 4.5, a majority of businesses (50%) have conducted between one to two influencer campaigns. This indicates that many businesses are in the early stages of utilizing influencer marketing. A significant portion of businesses (36%) have conducted three to five campaigns, showing a more engaged use of influencer strategies. A smaller percentage (14%) have conducted six to ten campaigns, reflecting a deeper integration of influencer marketing within their overall marketing efforts. Table 4.4 shows the business profile of organizations included in this research based on the industry distribution, size of business, year of operation, experience in influencer marketing, and number of campaigns conducted.

Table 4.5

Business Profile

<b>Industry Distribution</b>		
	Frequency	Percent
Education	7	14.0
Restaurant and Café	8	16.0
Fashion	7	14.0
Entertainment	5	10.0
Food & Beverage	10	20.0
Health & Wellness	5	10.0
Technology	3	6.0
Real state	5	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Size of Business</b>		
Small (1-50 employees)	28	56.0
Medium (51-200 employees)	17	34.0

Large (201+ employees)	5	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Years of Operation</b>		
< 1 year	3	6.0
1-3 years	20	40.0
3+ years	27	54.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Experience in Influencer Marketing</b>		
<1 year	7	14.0
1-3 years	27	54.0
3+ years	16	32.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Number of Influencer Campaigns Conducted</b>		
1-2	25	50.0
3-5	18	36.0
6-10	7	14.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### 4.2 Experience, and Challenges of Social Media Influencers in Addis Ababa

Influencers across all categories shared specific goals and objectives they aim to achieve through their social media presence. These goals provide insight into their strategic approaches to building and maintaining their influence.

**Maintaining High Levels of Engagement:** A primary objective for many influencers is to maintain high levels of engagement with their followers. They strive to build a loyal community by regularly interacting with their audience, responding to comments, and engaging in direct messages. As one influencer mentioned, in “My goal is to engage with my audience as much as possible, responding to comments and messages to build a strong community.” This continuous interaction helps to foster a sense of belonging and loyalty among followers, ensuring sustained engagement.

**Ensuring High-Quality Content:** Another critical goal for influencers is to consistently produce high-quality content. They focus on creating visually appealing, informative, and entertaining posts that captivate and retain their followers. An influencer stated, "I invest a lot of time and effort into creating high-quality content that stands out and keeps my followers coming back." This commitment to quality helps influencers differentiate themselves in a crowded social media landscape and maintain their audience's interest.

**Becoming Reputable Brand or Personalities:** Many influencers aim to establish themselves as reputable brand or personalities to monetize their influence while maintaining authenticity. They seek to build a strong following that aligns with their values and can bring positive change to their communities. As one business influencer shared, “I aim to build a strong following so that I can bring change to my community, aligning with my values and offering genuine value.” This objective shows their intention to use their influence for community and personal development, making sure that their social media presence matters”.

Influencers across various categories focus on maintaining engagement, ensuring high-quality content, and establishing themselves as reputable figures within their niches. These objectives guide their content strategies and interactions with followers, helping them to build and sustain their influence effectively.

### **Content Creation Process/Strategies**

This research paper provides an in-depth examination of their content creation processes, obstacles, and significant milestones, shedding light on the nuanced journeys of these influencers in different industries. Influencers across different categories employ unique strategies to create engaging content, each tailored to their niche and audience preferences.

**Comedy Skits:** Influencers in this category draw inspiration from everyday situations and cultural references, emphasizing spontaneity and humor that resonates with a wide audience. As one influencer noted, “I get ideas from funny things that happen around me and from trending topics. It's all about making people laugh and feel connected.” This highlights the importance of relatability in their content, as everyday scenarios allow viewers to see themselves in the humor, fostering a sense of community. Maintaining originality and consistently producing fresh, relatable content is a significant challenge. A comedy skit influencer shared, “It can be tough to keep things fresh and funny all the time, especially with the pressure to post regularly.” This statement reflects the high expectations placed on influencers to deliver engaging content consistently, which can lead to creative fatigue. To address this, many influencers rely on collaboration, often stating, “Working with fellow comedians helps generate new ideas and perspectives that keep our content lively. “Creating a comedy skit involves several key steps to ensure that the material is entertaining, engaging, and suitable for the target audience. These steps include identifying the target audience

(age group, interests, etc.), which is crucial for tailoring content that resonates. An influencer explained, “Knowing who you’re creating for helps shape the humor and ensures it hits the mark.”

Influencers research and gather materials from various sources like comedians, comedy shows, movies, and social media. As one influencer noted, “I watch a lot of different comedians and shows to find inspiration. You never know where a good joke might come from.” This cross-pollination of ideas enriches their content.

Once ideas are brainstormed, they create content, with one influencer emphasizing the iterative nature of this process: “I often shoot multiple takes and variations of a skit. Sometimes the funniest moments come out of experimenting.” They then review and seek feedback from peers or followers, enhancing the final product's quality. An influencer commented, “Feedback is crucial. My audience’s reactions guide me in understanding what they find funny or relatable.”

Keeping track of how the comedy skit is received and being open to updates based on audience feedback is essential. As a comedy influencer explained, “Engagement metrics and comments help me gauge what resonates. I try to stay flexible and adapt my content to keep my audience entertained.” Through this multi-step process, comedy skit influencers navigate the challenges of content creation while ensuring their work remains engaging and relevant to their audience.

**Vlog Discovery:** These influencers focus on showcasing new places and experiences, tailoring their content based on current trends and viewer interests. Authentic personal experiences are emphasized to engage their audience. As one vlogger noted, “I plan my vlogs based on what my audience wants to see. It's all about discovery and sharing new experiences.” This statement underscores the importance of audience feedback in shaping content, as understanding viewer preferences enables influencers to create vlogs that resonate and spark interest. By aligning their travels with the desires of their followers, vloggers can build a loyal community eager to explore new locations vicariously.

The logistics and costs associated with travel pose significant challenges for these influencers. One vlogger explained, “Traveling frequently can be expensive and time-consuming, but it's worth it to provide fresh content.” This reflects the considerable financial investment and planning required to produce high-quality travel vlogs, emphasizing their dedication to delivering engaging experiences. To mitigate these challenges, many vloggers strategically plan trips around sponsorship

opportunities or partnerships with businesses, with one influencer stating, “Collaborating with brands helps offset costs and allows me to create content that feels genuine and exciting.” Vlog Discovery influencers must stay attuned to current trends and viewer interests to remain relevant. An influencer shared, “I follow social media trends closely to see where people are traveling or what experiences are popular. This helps me decide my next destination or activity.” This adaptability is crucial in a rapidly changing digital landscape, allowing influencers to pivot and adjust their content strategies based on emerging trends. Vloggers often share personal anecdotes and insights from their travels to deepen the connection with their audience. One vlogger emphasized, “I love to include little stories about my experiences, whether it’s a funny mishap or a memorable encounter. It makes my audience feel like they’re traveling with me.” This narrative approach adds a layer of authenticity, fostering engagement and relatability. Vlog Discovery influencers navigate the complexities of content creation through audience engagement, logistical planning, and trend awareness, all while emphasizing authentic experiences that resonate with their viewers.

**Creative Editing:** Prioritizing innovative editing techniques and visual effects, influencers in this category captivate their audience with visually stunning content. As one creative editor explained, “I spend a lot of time perfecting my edits. Creative editing is about creating something visually stunning that stands out.” This statement highlights the meticulous attention to detail that these influencers apply to their work, showcasing their commitment to quality and originality. The visual appeal of their content is crucial in attracting and retaining viewers, as striking imagery can make a significant impact in the crowded social media landscape. The technical difficulties and time required for high-quality edits are notable challenges. One influencer remarked, “The editing process is very time-consuming and requires a lot of technical skill.” This underscores the reality that creating captivating content involves extensive knowledge of editing software and techniques. Many influencers invest significant time in learning these skills, with one creative editor noting, “I constantly seek out tutorials and practice new techniques to keep my editing skills sharp.” This dedication to skill development reflects their desire to stay ahead of the competition and continuously improve their craft. In addition to technical challenges, creative editors often face the pressure of meeting tight deadlines. As one influencer noted, “Balancing quality with the need to post regularly can be tough. I have to manage my time effectively to ensure I don’t sacrifice quality for speed.” This emphasizes the balancing act that these influencers must perform to maintain both

the artistic integrity of their work and the expectations of their audience. The choice of editing style plays a significant role in defining an influencer's brand. One influencer stated, "I try to develop a unique editing style that people can recognize instantly. It's part of my identity as a creator." This personal branding aspect is vital, as a distinctive style can help influencers stand out and attract a dedicated following. Influencers in creative editing navigate the complexities of technical skill development, time management, and personal branding, all while prioritizing innovative techniques to create visually stunning content that captivates their audience. One final note is that influencers in this category seem to have a freedom of what kind of content they can create. While utilizing their editing skills they can make dramatic or emotional edits as well as light hearted funny skits as well.

**Art and Poetry:** Influencers in this category adapt their content to reflect local art forms and cultural narratives, integrating traditional and contemporary elements. As one art and poetry influencer shared, "I incorporate Ethiopian traditional art into my work to make it more relatable to my audience." This statement highlights their commitment to cultural authenticity and connection, illustrating how they draw inspiration from rich local traditions to create art that resonates with their audience's experiences and identity. By weaving cultural references into their work, these influencers foster a deeper connection with their followers, celebrating shared heritage. Sometimes balancing traditional art forms with contemporary trends to appeal to a modern audience can be challenging. One influencer noted, "It can be challenging to stay true to traditional art while making it appealing to a younger audience." This reveals the tension between honoring cultural heritage and embracing modern aesthetics, a challenge many artists face in today's fast-paced digital landscape. The need to innovate while remaining respectful of tradition requires skillful navigation, which these influencers strive to achieve through thoughtful integration of both elements.

The content creation process for influencers in this category involves several key steps. First, they identify and research what inspires them and their audience, recognizing the importance of relevance in their work. As one influencer explained, "Understanding what resonates with me and my audience helps me create art that speaks to them." Following this, they develop ideas based on their inspiration, ensuring that the concepts are fresh and engaging. After executing their ideas, they actively seek constructive feedback from peers or mentors, emphasizing the collaborative nature of the creative process. One influencer stated, "I value feedback because it helps me refine my work

and grow as an artist.” Finally, they share their creations through social media, leveraging these platforms to reach a wider audience and stimulate discussions about their art. As one influencer put it, “Social media is a powerful tool for sharing my art and connecting with people who appreciate it.” Art and poetry influencers navigate the complexities of cultural integration and modern appeal while adhering to a structured creative process. Their dedication to reflecting local narratives and engaging with their audience fosters a vibrant artistic community that honors both tradition and contemporary expression.

**Business/Education:** Influencers in this category focus on delivering valuable information and establishing authority within their niche.

One business influencer articulated, “I make it a priority to utilize detailed information and credible sources because trust is the foundation of my relationship with my audience. When they see that I back my claims with data and research, they are more likely to believe in the value I provide.” This highlights their commitment to producing high-quality content that not only informs but also builds credibility. By leveraging factual and well-researched information, these influencers position themselves as trusted experts, enabling their followers to make informed decisions based on the insights they provide.

Their main challenge lies in keeping content informative yet engaging and accessible. As one influencer explained, “Finding the right balance is critical; I often say that my job is to transform complex theories into digestible content. If I lean too far into academic language, I risk losing my audience's interest. On the other hand, if I oversimplify, I dilute the value of the content.” This underscores the delicate balance these influencers must strike to avoid overwhelming their audience with technical jargon while still delivering substantial insights.

To overcome this challenge, they employ various strategies to present complex information in a digestible manner. For instance, one influencer noted, “I use storytelling techniques and relatable case studies to connect the material to real-world applications. This not only enhances understanding but also keeps my audience engaged and invested in the content.” By merging narratives into their lessons, they create a more relatable learning experience for their followers. Influencers in this category typically follow several key steps to ensure that the material is both informative and engaging. First, they determine the content's objectives—whether it's to teach a specific concept or enhance a particular skill—and identify the target audience. One influencer

emphasized, “By understanding my audience’s needs and learning styles, I can tailor the material to resonate with them. It’s essential to meet them where they are.”

Next, they conduct comprehensive research on the topic, delving into current trends, theories, and best practices while also analyzing competitors. As one influencer noted, “Staying abreast of industry trends and competitor strategies is vital. It allows me to provide fresh insights that my audience can't find elsewhere, making my content more valuable.” After gathering the necessary information, they create a detailed outline that logically organizes the content and selects an appropriate format for delivery, whether it be a blog post, video, or webinar. Following the outline, they produce the content using engaging visuals and relevant examples to enhance comprehension. One influencer stated, “I incorporate visuals like infographics and charts because they can simplify complex ideas and make the content more engaging. My goal is to create content that is as visually appealing as it is informative.” Once the content is created, they meticulously edit for clarity and coherence, often testing it with a sample audience to gather feedback. Another influencer explained, “Feedback is invaluable. I want to ensure that my audience finds the material accessible and engaging, so I actively seek their input before I publish.” Finally, after incorporating any necessary adjustments, they finalize and distribute the content across various platforms, ensuring it effectively reaches the intended audience. Business and education influencers navigate the complexities of providing valuable, research-backed information while maintaining an engaging presentation style. Their systematic approach to content creation not only establishes their authority but also fosters a supportive learning environment for their audience.

**Information/News:** Concentrating on local news and events, these influencers provide a regional perspective that resonates with their audience. One news influencer stated, “I focus on covering news that matters to my local audience, focusing on issues and events that directly affect their daily lives. By doing so, I aim to create a sense of community and inform people about the topics they truly care about.” This emphasizes their role in fostering community engagement through relevant and relatable content. Similar to business and education influencers, they prioritize sharing information from credible sources to establish trust with their audience. As one influencer explained, “In a world filled with misinformation, I make it a point to verify my sources and provide my audience with well-researched, factual content. When my followers see that I rely on reputable sources, it strengthens their trust in my reporting.” This commitment to accuracy and credibility is

essential in maintaining the integrity of their content and ensuring that followers view them as reliable sources of information. Ensuring timely and accurate information while maintaining objectivity is crucial for these influencers. One influencer highlighted, “Staying up-to-date and ensuring accuracy is not just important; it’s often challenging, especially with the rapid pace of breaking news. I have to balance the need for speed with the responsibility to provide fact-checked information.” This statement reflects the pressure they face in the fast-paced world of news reporting, where the demand for immediate updates can sometimes conflict with the need for thorough fact-checking.

They also engage with their audience to foster a sense of community around their content. Another influencer explained, “I encourage my followers to share their opinions and experiences related to the news I cover. This interaction not only enriches my content but also makes my audience feel more involved in the conversation.” By inviting audience participation, they create a more interactive and engaging news platform, reinforcing their role as community-centric influencers.

Information and news influencers play a vital role in providing localized, credible, and timely news. Their commitment to accuracy and engagement with their audience establishes them as trusted sources in their communities, helping to bridge the gap between current events and local concerns.

**Inspirational Content:** Emphasizing motivational messages and personal narratives, these influencers strive to inspire their followers by sharing their journeys and insights. One inspirational content creator articulated, “I want to inspire others by sharing my successes and struggles. It’s not just about the highlights; it’s about the journey and the lessons learned along the way. When I share my story, I hope it resonates with those who may be facing similar challenges.” This statement highlights the importance of authenticity in their messaging and the desire to foster a connection with their audience.

Balancing personal vulnerability with motivational content presents a unique challenge. As one influencer reflected, “Sharing personal stories can be daunting, but it’s essential for authenticity. It requires a level of vulnerability that not everyone is comfortable with. Yet, I believe that when I open up, it encourages others to do the same, creating a supportive community.” This underscores the delicate balance they must maintain between being open about their struggles while also serving as a source of motivation and encouragement for their followers. To effectively engage their audience, inspirational content creators often employ various strategies. One influencer shared, “I

incorporate storytelling techniques into my content to make my experiences relatable. By framing my journey as a story with highs and lows, I can captivate my audience and provide them with valuable takeaways.” This narrative approach allows them to connect with their followers on a deeper level, transforming personal experiences into universal lessons that can inspire others. These influencers utilize various platforms and formats to reach their audience. Another influencer explained, “Whether it's through videos, podcasts, or written posts, I aim to adapt my content to the medium that resonates most with my audience. I find that sharing my messages through engaging visuals or heartfelt audio can make a more significant impact.” This adaptability not only broadens their reach but also ensures that their motivational messages are accessible to a diverse audience. Engaging with their followers is also a priority for these influencers. One inspirational content creator emphasized, “I encourage my audience to share their own stories and challenges. This interaction not only enriches my content but also creates a sense of community where we can uplift one another.” By fostering this dialogue, they create an inclusive space where followers feel empowered to share their experiences, further strengthening the bond between the influencer and their audience. Inspirational content creators play a vital role in motivating and uplifting their followers through authentic storytelling and personal narratives. Their commitment to sharing their journeys, combined with their ability to foster community engagement, allows them to inspire others while navigating the challenges of vulnerability and authenticity.

**Health:** These influencers aim to raise awareness in the health and well-being community by leveraging their expertise and knowledge to provide valuable insights. As one health influencer stated, “I interact with my followers and offer advice on health-related topics. It’s about creating a healthier and well-informed community. I strive to empower my audience with knowledge that can help them make better lifestyle choices.” This statement underscores their commitment to fostering a positive and informed environment where followers feel encouraged to take charge of their health. A significant challenge for health influencers is ensuring that their content is both informative and supportive while avoiding the pitfalls of providing direct medical advice. One influencer elaborated, “I have to be very careful with the information I share. While I want to guide my followers, I also recognize the importance of not overstepping into the realm of medical advice. It's crucial to promote health while emphasizing the need for professional consultation when necessary.” This highlights the delicate balance they must maintain to uphold their credibility and protect their audience's well-being. To ensure that the information they share is accurate, relevant, engaging, and

useful to their target audience, health influencers typically follow several key steps in their content creation process. One influencer explained, “First, I determine the goal I want to achieve with each piece of content—whether it’s to inform, educate, or promote wellness. Having a clear objective helps shape my message and ensures it resonates with my audience.” This strategic approach allows them to tailor their content effectively. Next, they perform comprehensive research and analysis, including selecting relevant topics, conducting in-depth research, and analyzing competitors. As one influencer mentioned, “Research is the backbone of my content. I look at current trends, scientific studies, and what other influencers are discussing to ensure I’m providing fresh and valuable information.” This diligence not only enhances the quality of their content but also establishes them as trusted sources in the health community. Once the research is completed, health influencers create their content with a focus on clarity and engagement. One influencer noted, “I try to present the information in a way that’s not only factual but also relatable. Using anecdotes, visuals, and practical tips can make complex health topics more digestible for my audience.” This approach aims to foster understanding and encourage active participation from their followers. Finally, they distribute their content across various platforms and actively respond to feedback. An influencer shared, “I believe in maintaining a dialogue with my audience. After posting, I engage with comments and messages to ensure they feel heard and supported. This interaction helps build a sense of community and trust.” By fostering this two-way communication, health influencers create a supportive environment where their followers can seek guidance and share their experiences.

Health influencers play a crucial role in promoting awareness and education within the health and well-being community. Through careful content creation, rigorous research, and active engagement, they strive to empower their audience while navigating the challenges of providing accurate and supportive health information.

**Sports:** Engaging their audience through interactive content such as challenges and live discussions, sports influencers share personal stories of discipline, dedication, and overcoming challenges. One sports influencer explained, “I engage my audience in real-time conversations and challenges. It makes them feel part of a larger community, fostering a sense of belonging and motivation. When I host a live workout session or a fitness challenge, I can see my followers pushing themselves, and that creates a supportive environment where we all thrive together.” This

emphasizes the role of community in motivating individuals to stay active and committed to their fitness goals. Maintaining audience engagement and motivation in physical activities is crucial for sports influencers. One influencer elaborated, “It’s not just about showing my workouts; it’s about providing guidance and encouragement. I often share tips on proper form, nutrition, and recovery because I want my followers to feel empowered to make positive changes in their lives.” This perspective highlights the dual responsibility influencers have: not only to entertain but also to educate and inspire their audience towards healthier lifestyles. In addition to sharing personal stories of their fitness journeys, sports influencers employ various content strategies to enhance engagement. For example, one influencer noted, “I frequently organize fitness challenges where my followers can participate and share their progress. This not only keeps them accountable but also creates a vibrant community where we can celebrate each other’s victories, no matter how small.” Such initiatives encourage active participation and create a sense of camaraderie among followers, reinforcing the idea that fitness is a collective journey. To adapt their content effectively, sports influencers often analyze audience feedback and trends. One influencer remarked, “I pay attention to what my audience is responding to—whether it’s high-intensity workouts, yoga sessions, or nutrition advice. This feedback helps me tailor my content to meet their interests and needs.” By staying attuned to their audience, these influencers can provide relevant and engaging content that resonates with their followers. Sports influencers frequently emphasize the importance of mental health alongside physical fitness. As one influencer shared, “I talk about the mental challenges that come with staying fit. It’s not just about physical endurance; mental resilience is equally important. By discussing my struggles and triumphs openly, I aim to normalize these conversations and remind my followers that it’s okay to face setbacks.” This holistic approach underscores the multifaceted nature of fitness, where mental and emotional well-being is just as critical as physical strength. Sports influencers play a pivotal role in inspiring and motivating their audience to engage in physical activities. Through interactive content, community-building initiatives, and a focus on both physical and mental wellness, they create an inclusive environment that encourages individuals to pursue their fitness goals while supporting one another along the way.

## **Memorable Experiences and Milestones**

Influencers shared significant milestones and memorable experiences that marked their journeys, providing insight into the pivotal moments that shaped their careers. Achieving virality with specific posts was a common milestone that significantly boosted their follower count and engagement. One comedy skits influencer remarked, “After one of my videos went viral, my follower count exploded overnight. It was a turning point in my career; suddenly, I was receiving opportunities I never imagined. The attention felt overwhelming, but it motivated me to keep creating content that resonated with my audience.” This moment not only marked a surge in popularity but also catalyzed the influencer’s growth, pushing them to explore new creative avenues.

Successful collaborations with well-known brands were highlighted as key achievements, enhancing their credibility and reach. A business influencer shared, “Collaborating with a well-known brand was a huge milestone for me. It not only boosted my credibility but also expanded my reach to a broader audience. Working alongside established companies provided me with invaluable experience and resources that I could incorporate into my content.” This perspective underscores how strategic partnerships can serve as a vital stepping stone in an influencer's career, fostering professional growth and expanding their influence. Influencers also take immense pride in making a positive impact on their communities, whether through inspirational content, educational information, or support networks. A health influencer expressed, “Receiving messages from followers about how my content has positively impacted their lives is incredibly rewarding. I once got a message from someone who shared that my advice helped them overcome a health scare. Moments like that remind me of the responsibility I have, but they also motivate me to continue producing content that can change lives.” This highlights the profound sense of purpose that drives many influencers, as they recognize their role in promoting wellness and positivity in their audiences. Some influencers emphasized the importance of personal growth throughout their journey. One inspirational content creator reflected, “When I first started, I focused solely on gaining followers. But over time, I realized that the true value lies in building genuine connections and fostering a community. My content has evolved, and I’ve learned to share more of my authentic self, which resonates better with my audience.” This perspective illustrates how the journey of an

influencer is not just about achieving external milestones but also about personal development and self-discovery.

The detailed analysis of interviewee answers related to their experiences as social media influencers reveals a complex and dynamic landscape. Influencers adopt various strategies for content creation, set specific goals, and face multiple challenges in their journeys. Despite these challenges, their ability to innovate, engage, and positively impact their community's stands out as a testament to their influence and effectiveness. This analysis provides valuable insights into the experiences of Ethiopian influencers, highlighting the critical factors that contribute to their success and the unique challenges they navigate in the digital space.

### **Influencer Experience with Brand Collaborations**

Influencers across various categories have diverse experiences with brand collaborations, which benefit all parties involved. These partnerships not only allow brands to reach new audiences but also enhance brand visibility by leveraging the strengths and unique resources of both the influencer and the company. One Discovery vlog influencer explained, "Collaborating with brands allows me to share products I love with my audience, but it also helps the brand connect with people who might not have discovered them otherwise. It's a win-win." Many influencers began engaging in influencer marketing campaigns after building a substantial audience and being approached by businesses to promote their products. An influencer in the sports space shared, "Once my follower count grew, brands started reaching out. It was exciting, but I was careful about which ones I chose to work with. It had to feel genuine." These collaborations often involve creating sponsored content that integrates seamlessly with the influencer's usual posts, ensuring that it doesn't feel forced or out of place. "My followers know when I'm being authentic, and that's why I make sure to only promote products that fit naturally into my life," explained a lifestyle influencer. According to influencers, these collaborations offer several benefits, such as cost savings through shared resources, increased exposure and potential sales, as well as boosting the credibility and prestige of both parties involved. One creative editing influencer noted, "Working with established brands not only helps me financially but also increases my credibility. When people see I'm collaborating with trusted brands, they're more likely to gain the trust of other businesses and brands as well." In addition to credibility, collaborations can lead to creative and innovative products. A business influencer remarked, "I love it when brands give me the creative freedom to interpret their product

in my own style. It leads to some of my most innovative content.” These collaborations are also seen as an opportunity to inject fresh ideas and content into their feeds. However, influencers also pointed out the challenges of balancing multiple partnerships while maintaining a consistent and authentic presence on their platforms. “It’s tricky sometimes, especially when you’re juggling several brands. You don’t want to overload your followers with ads,” said a fitness influencer. This constant balancing act is crucial for maintaining the trust and engagement of their audience. One influencer in the personal finance niche explained, “I always prioritize what’s best for my followers. If a collaboration doesn’t fit or feels like I’m doing too many at once, I take a step back.”

Another key challenge mentioned by influencers is managing the creative control in collaborations. One creative editing influencer highlighted, “There are times when a brand wants to dictate every aspect of the collaboration, but if it doesn’t match my style, it won’t resonate with my audience. Finding brands that trust my vision is essential.” This highlights the importance of aligning with brands that respect the influencer’s creative process while understanding their audience.

While brand collaborations can lead to mutual growth and innovation, influencers must carefully select partners and manage relationships to maintain authenticity and foster long-term audience trust. “At the end of the day, my reputation with my followers is everything. If I compromise that for a quick buck, I’m risking everything I’ve built,” remarked an entrepreneur influencer.

**Criteria for Selecting Brand Partners:** When selecting brand partners, influencers prioritize alignment with their personal brand and values, as well as the relevance of the collaboration to their audience. They understand that authenticity is key to maintaining trust with their followers, and that trust can be easily eroded by endorsing brands that don’t align with their identity. A business influencer shared, “I aim to work with brands that align with my values and can offer genuine value to my followers. It’s important to me that my audience knows I’m promoting something I believe in.” Influencers consider various factors when choosing their partners. The reputation of the brand is a crucial element, as well as the quality of the products or services being offered. One health influencer explained, “I’m very selective about the brands I work with, especially in the health space. I need to know that the products are backed by science and can really benefit my followers’ well-being.” Health influencers often emphasize working with reputable brands that provide scientifically-backed products to ensure that they are not promoting misinformation or potentially harmful products. On the other hand, influencers in categories like Vlogging and Comedy Skits

often work with a wider range of brands, owing to the more general nature of their audience. “My audience is diverse, so I’m open to collaborating with brands from various sectors, as long as it’s something that can connect with them,” shared a popular vlogger. These influencers tend to have a broader appeal, making them ideal for partnerships with brands in different industries, from fashion and food to travel and tech. In contrast, influencers in more niche categories are typically more selective in their endorsements. One news influencer highlighted the importance of staying relevant to his niche, stating, “My audience is usually older and look for serious content if I promote a brand outside of the relevant space, it won’t resonate with my audience. I have to stay true to what they expect from me.” This selectivity is crucial for maintaining consistency and trust with a specialized audience, as endorsing an irrelevant product could confuse or alienate their followers. Comedy skit influencers also tend to be versatile but remain mindful of their comedic style when choosing brand partners. “I’ve worked with different types of brands, from food to mobile services. But I always make sure it fits within the type of humor I do,” said one influencer in this space. This highlights how influencers in broader categories still need to ensure that the brand and content align with their unique style to keep their messaging coherent.

Influencers emphasize the importance of long-term relationships with brands, as these tend to feel more authentic to their followers. A comedy skit influencer explained, “I prefer working with brands over the long term because it shows my audience that I truly use and believe in their products. It’s more genuine than one-off deals.” Building lasting collaborations also helps influencers avoid the pitfall of promoting too many different products in a short time, which can lead to over-saturation and reduce their audience’s trust. Influencers carefully evaluate potential brand partnerships by considering alignment with their values, audience relevance, and the brand’s reputation. This selective approach ensures that their endorsements are meaningful and maintain the trust they’ve built with their followers. As one lifestyle influencer concluded, “At the end of the day, my followers are like my community. If I lose their trust, I lose everything.”

**Maintaining Authenticity in Sponsored Content:** Maintaining authenticity in sponsored content remains a key priority for influencers, as it directly impacts the level of trust and engagement they maintain with their audience. For influencers, sponsored content must feel natural and aligned with their personal brand. “I always make sure my sponsored material feels like an organic extension of the content I already produce,” shared one vlogger influencer. “It’s important that my followers

don't feel like I'm just trying to sell them something—it needs to feel like a genuine recommendation.” To maintain this level of authenticity, influencers often conduct thorough research on the brands they collaborate with, ensuring that the products or services align with their personal values and lifestyle. “I won't promote something I wouldn't use myself,” emphasized a comedy skit influencer. “My followers trust me because I'm selective, and that's how I keep that trust intact.” This approach helps influencers create content that integrates the brand's message in a way that feels seamless and genuine. Relevance is another crucial factor in maintaining authenticity. A news influencer highlighted how he chooses not to promote restaurants or cafes, explaining, “It's outside the interests of my audience, and it would feel forced. I'd rather stick to content that resonates with them.” This perspective illustrates how influencers prioritize their followers' interests when deciding which partnerships to pursue, ensuring that their sponsored posts feel meaningful and relevant. Authenticity also involves being transparent about collaborations. As one fitness influencer noted, “I make it clear when a post is sponsored, but I always explain why I'm working with that brand and why I think it's valuable. That way, my audience knows there's a real reason behind it, not just money.” This honesty is crucial for maintaining long-term trust, which is the foundation of an influencer's relationship with their followers.

**Memorable and Successful Campaigns:** Influencers shared several memorable and successful campaigns that stood out for their creativity and impact, demonstrating how a well-executed campaign can resonate deeply with an audience. One health influencer recounted a campaign with a wellness brand, where she produced a series of educational videos on healthy living. “The campaign was a success because it didn't just focus on selling the product—it gave my audience something valuable, which made the brand feel like a trusted resource,” she explained. The combination of practical content with genuine product promotion allowed the campaign to connect with followers on a deeper level.

Similarly, a comedy skit influencer shared the success of a collaboration with a local food brand. “We made a funny, relatable skit about everyday life that featured the product naturally. The humor clicked with my audience, and the engagement was through the roof,” he noted. This type of campaign, where the influencer's creative style aligns perfectly with the brand's message, showcases how blending entertainment and product promotion can lead to high engagement and positive results for both parties. An influencer also highlighted the importance of creativity, sharing

a campaign where he tested and reviewed a series of gadgets for a global tech brand. “It wasn’t just about pushing a product. I created detailed reviews, and my audience appreciated the depth of the content, which helped build credibility for both the brand and myself,” he explained. This campaign succeeded by providing value to the audience while reinforcing the influencer’s authority in his niche. The success of these campaigns underscores the importance of authenticity, creativity, and alignment with the influencer’s content style. As a fitness influencer concluded, “When a campaign is done right, it doesn’t feel like advertising. It feels like you’re genuinely sharing something that your audience will love.” These examples highlight how successful campaigns go beyond just promoting a product—they engage, educate, or entertain, making the content more impactful and memorable.

**Anticipated Trends in Influencer Marketing:** Looking ahead, influencers predict several evolving trends in influencer marketing. One key trend is the increasing emphasis on authenticity and transparency, with audiences becoming more discerning about sponsored content. “Audiences can spot inauthentic collaborations from a mile away,” explained a influencer. “It’s no longer enough to just promote a product. You need to believe in it, and so do your followers.” As a result, influencers anticipate more long-term brand partnerships that focus on building genuine relationships, rather than short-term promotional posts. “I see a shift towards more meaningful collaborations where both the brand and the influencer invest in a long-term relationship,” shared a Vlog influencer. Another expected trend is the greater integration of advanced analytics to measure campaign effectiveness. Influencers recognize that brands are becoming more data-driven in their approach to marketing, seeking tangible metrics such as engagement rates, conversions, and return on investment. “Brands are asking for detailed reports on how the campaigns performed, and we have to show them the numbers,” said a fitness influencer. This shift is leading to increased use of tools that track and analyze influencer marketing campaigns, enabling brands and influencers to make data-informed decisions.

Video content is also predicted to remain a dominant medium for engagement, particularly on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. “Video is where the most engagement happens. It’s personal, it’s dynamic, and it allows you to connect with your audience on a deeper level,” remarked a comedy skit influencer. With the rise of short-form video content, influencers anticipate brands will continue to focus on video-centric platforms. While Instagram remains the most popular

platform for influencer marketing due to its robust promotion tools and analytics, influencers see potential in other platforms based on the company's strategy and the influencer's reach. "I've started using TikTok more for brand collaborations, and the engagement is amazing. It's becoming a key player," said a comedy skit influencer.

### **Challenges and Obstacles in becoming an influencer**

Influencers face a variety of challenges in their social media journeys, which they strive to overcome through different strategies. These challenges span across content creation, platform dynamics, and personal well-being, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the influencer profession.

**Content Saturation:** Content saturation refers to a state where the volume of content produced in a particular niche or on a specific platform exceeds the ability of audiences to consume it effectively. As the number of influencers continues to grow, standing out in a crowded social media landscape has become increasingly difficult. One creative editing influencer shared, "It's incredibly hard to come up with fresh ideas. The space is saturated, and I constantly feel the pressure to offer something new to my followers. It's like you're competing for attention in a sea of content." This saturation drives influencers to innovate and adapt continuously to stay relevant. Another influencer noted, "You always have to find a new angle. Just copying trends doesn't work anymore; people get bored. You have to be unique, but that's easier said than done." The result is increased competition among influencers, making it harder to maintain audience engagement. As one lifestyle influencer pointed out, "There are days when it feels like no matter how much effort you put in, your content is just lost in the noise. It can be discouraging."

**Negative Criticism and Verbal Insults:** The public nature of social media exposes influencers to both positive feedback and negative criticism, which can be mentally taxing. An influencer candidly explained, "One of the hardest things about being in the public eye is the constant scrutiny. Whether it's about my content, my appearance, or even my personal life, there's always someone ready to criticize. You need to develop thick skin to survive."

Criticism and verbal insults, especially on platforms where anonymity is prevalent, can affect an influencer's mental well-being. "I've had days where I just want to quit. The negative comments can get to you, and you start doubting yourself," shared a art influencer. Another influencer

emphasized the impact on their mental health: “You can’t please everyone, but that doesn’t stop the harsh comments from causing anxiety or even depression. Sometimes it’s relentless.” The pressure can also damage an influencer’s brand, leading to financial repercussions. “People don’t realize that negative criticism can affect our business. If your reputation takes a hit, brands might not want to work with you, and that directly impacts your income,” said a health influencer.

**Maintaining Authenticity and Trust:** Balancing the need to monetize their influence with maintaining authenticity and trust is a common challenge. As one business influencer explained, “I can’t just promote anything for a paycheck. My followers trust me, and if I start endorsing things that don’t align with my values, I’ll lose that trust.” Another influencer noted, “It’s tempting to take on every sponsorship that comes your way, especially when you’re just starting out. But in the long run, it’s better to be selective and work with brands that resonate with your audience.” The struggle is real, as influencers must juggle their integrity with the pressure to sustain their careers financially. “I’ve turned down offers that would’ve paid me well, but the product just wasn’t something I could get behind,” said a sports influencer.

Maintaining this balance is essential for long-term engagement and credibility. As one influencer put it, “It’s a fine line between making money and staying true to yourself. Once you lose authenticity, it’s hard to recover.”

**Technical Challenges:** For influencers in categories such as creative editing, technical difficulties and the time required for high-quality edits are significant obstacles. “The editing process is brutal,” remarked a creative editor. “You can spend hours or even days editing a single video, and people don’t realize the effort that goes into it. You can’t cut corners if you want to produce top-notch content.” Other technical challenges include dealing with platform changes, video removals, and unexplained bans. “Algorithms change constantly, and it feels like you’re always trying to figure out a new way to get your content seen,” explained one influencer. A vlogger echoed this sentiment, “It’s frustrating when your videos get flagged for no reason, or your reach drops because of an algorithm tweak you can’t control.”

**Financial Constraints:** For vloggers and influencers in the Vlog Discovery category, financial constraints are a significant barrier. “Traveling isn’t cheap. Between flights, accommodations, and equipment, the costs add up fast,” explained a travel vlogger. Despite these challenges, they noted that the investment was worth it. “It’s expensive, but I do it because I love bringing new experiences

to my audience. Plus, it keeps my content fresh.” In categories like Creative Editing, improving visuals often requires expensive technology and equipment. “The better your gear, the better your content. But high-quality cameras, lights, and editing software don’t come cheap,” said a tech influencer. Many influencers rely on brand sponsorships to offset these costs, but securing these partnerships can also be a challenge. “Sponsorships help, but getting those deals can be tough when you’re just starting out or if your niche isn’t mainstream,” added a creative editor.

### **4.3 Influencer marketing strategies adapted to the Addis Ababa online community.**

Influencers in Ethiopia tailor their content to resonate deeply with the country's conservative and collectivist identity. This cultural sensitivity involves being mindful of local norms and values, which play a significant role in shaping both content and engagement strategies. By aligning their content with cultural expectations of respect, community, and family, influencers can build stronger connections with their audience, ensuring that the content feels relevant and respectful of their cultural identity

#### **Cultural Adaptation in Influencer Marketing**

**Social Identity Theory:** Social Identity Theory explains how individuals derive their identity from the social groups they belong to. Ethiopian influencers leverage this concept by creating content that reinforces their followers’ social and cultural identities. For example, a comedy skit influencer remarked, “The jokes I make often come from shared cultural experiences. People love it because they see themselves and their families in the characters I create.” This reflection of everyday Ethiopian life helps followers feel a stronger connection to their cultural group, reinforcing their sense of belonging. Similarly, influencers focusing on business or inspirational content tap into the collective aspirations of their audience. “My content is about helping people realize that success is possible for anyone, regardless of where they come from,” noted an inspirational influencer.

**Community Building:** Creating a sense of belonging among their audience is a key strategy for Ethiopian influencers. Comedy skit influencers, for example, use humor drawn from shared cultural experiences to foster a strong community bond. “The humor I create is based on things we all go through—family, friends, work. My followers tell me they laugh because they’ve experienced the same situations. That’s what brings us together,” explained one comedian. By reflecting the shared realities of their audience, these influencers strengthen the connection between themselves and their followers. Inspirational content creators also build strong communities by sharing personal stories

that resonate with their audience. “I talk about the challenges I’ve faced in life because I know my followers are going through similar things. By being open and honest, I create a space where people feel they belong and can achieve their goals,” mentioned one influencer. This authenticity fosters an environment where followers feel supported, motivated, and part of a group working towards self-improvement.

**Identity Reinforcement:** Influencers also reinforce the social identities of their followers, making them feel part of a larger group. Sports influencers, for instance, highlight local sports heroes and events to foster a shared identity among sports enthusiasts. By showcasing regional sports achievements and engaging in local sports discussions, these influencers help their followers identify more closely with their community and feel proud of their local sports culture. Information and News influencers focus on regional news and events to reinforce the local identity of their followers. They share content that resonates with the experiences and interests of their audience, thereby reinforcing a collective identity. One influencer mentioned, "I share content that resonates with who my followers are and the people they aspire to be and give them a sense of belonging."

Influencers use Social Identity Theory to build and reinforce the social identities of their followers. Through community-building efforts and identity reinforcement, they create a sense of belonging and shared identity among their audience, which is crucial for maintaining engagement and loyalty. This approach highlights the importance of understanding and leveraging social identities in influencer marketing strategies, ensuring that the content resonates deeply with the audience's cultural and social context.

**Adapting Content to Cultural Norms:** Adapting content to cultural norms is essential for Ethiopian influencers who strive to connect meaningfully with their audience. They often tailor their content to align with the cultural expectations of their followers, incorporating elements of Ethiopian traditions, language, and values into their posts. For instance, influencers might use traditional music or attire in their videos or discuss culturally significant topics during holidays and festivals. One influencer emphasized, “I make sure my content respects Ethiopian cultural values and promotes a sense of community. During holidays like Meskel, I create content that showcases the significance of the celebrations, using traditional songs, food like Kitfo and attire to resonate with my audience. It’s not just about entertaining; it’s about honoring our heritage.” A health influencer echoed this sentiment, stating, “Cultural context is crucial in health discussions. When I

share wellness tips, I ensure they're relatable to my Ethiopian audience. For instance, I incorporate local foods and traditional practices in my advice. It's about making health accessible and relevant to our lifestyle, not imposing foreign concepts." This approach not only makes the content more relatable but also promotes healthier practices rooted in local culture. Comedy skit influencers also understand the significance of cultural adaptation. A comedy skit creator mentioned, "My humor comes from everyday Ethiopian life. I draw inspiration from common experiences, traditions, and local dialects. When my audience sees themselves in my content, they engage more deeply. It's about reflecting our culture in a way that brings joy and laughter." This illustrates how cultural relatability can enhance engagement and foster a loyal following. A business influencer highlighted the importance of cultural adaptation in establishing authority within their niche. They noted, "When discussing business concepts, I make it a point to reference local market conditions and cultural practices. It's vital to present ideas that align with Ethiopian business realities. This not only builds trust but also encourages entrepreneurs to embrace their unique contexts." Such insights reflect the influencers' commitment to providing value while honoring local culture.

This emphasis on cultural adaptation not only helps influencers build a connection with their audience but also fosters a sense of pride and identity among their followers. As influencers continue to navigate the digital landscape, their ability to authentically incorporate cultural elements into their content remains a vital aspect of their success in Ethiopia's diverse market.

**Avoiding Sensitive Topics:** In the conservative Ethiopian context, influencers are particularly cautious to avoid topics that may be deemed controversial or inappropriate. Issues such as politics, sexuality, and certain social behaviors are often approached with sensitivity or avoided altogether. This careful curation of content ensures that it remains respectful, preventing the alienation of any audience segments. A comedy skit influencer elaborated on this, stating, "By its nature, comedy can be a powerful tool to address sensitive topics; however, I choose to steer clear of subjects that could offend or spark controversy. My goal is to make people laugh without crossing lines that could alienate my audience. It's necessary to keep the content respectful and enjoyable for everyone." This perspective reflects the balancing act influencers must perform to entertain while remaining culturally sensitive. Similarly, a health influencer shared, "When discussing health issues, I'm very careful about how I frame my messages. Topics like mental health or sexual health can be sensitive in our culture. I prefer to focus on universally accepted health practices and lifestyle

tips that resonate without triggering discomfort.” This approach helps to provide valuable information while ensuring that it aligns with cultural norms. A business influencer explained the importance of neutrality: “In discussions about economic issues or business challenges, I avoid politically charged topics. It’s essential to foster a dialogue that encourages entrepreneurship without getting involved in divisive conversations. My focus is on providing practical advice that anyone can benefit from, regardless of their political views.” This strategy emphasizes the need for inclusivity in professional discussions. By carefully navigating sensitive topics, influencers in Ethiopia create content that resonates with their audience while respecting cultural boundaries. This strategy not only fosters a positive community but also enhances their credibility and appeal across diverse segments of society.

**Adapting Trends to Fit Local Contexts:** While global trends often serve as a source of inspiration for Ethiopian influencers, they consistently adapt these trends to align with the cultural and social norms of their local audience. This often involves modifying popular challenges, memes, or viral content to make it more relatable and appropriate for Ethiopian viewers. For example, a global dance challenge might be recreated using traditional Ethiopian music, or a widely-shared meme could be reinterpreted with Ethiopian humor and references. One creative editing influencer explained, “Whenever I see a trend go viral, I always ask myself, ‘How can I make this Ethiopian?’ Whether it's adding a traditional dance step or shooting in a local setting, it's important that my followers see themselves in the content I create.” This adaptation not only keeps content fresh but also fosters a deeper connection with the audience by embracing elements of Ethiopian culture.

Similarly, in the comedy skit niche, one influencer shared, “Global memes are a big hit, but they work best when I tweak them to fit local humor. A joke that might be funny elsewhere needs to reflect our day-to-day experiences to really hit home. By making it Ethiopian, I ensure the humor resonates on a personal level.” This demonstrates how influencers repackage global trends to create content that feels unique yet relatable.

In the health and fitness space, adapting trends can involve localizing international wellness challenges. A fitness influencer mentioned, “I take popular fitness challenges from around the world and adjust them to suit our environment and lifestyle. For example, I encourage my followers to use what’s available locally for workouts, like traditional dancing or walking in the community, rather than expensive gym equipment.” This local adaptation allows the influencer to promote

healthy living in a way that feels accessible to a broader Ethiopian audience. Incorporating these global trends, while adding a local flavor, ensures that influencers remain relevant and engaging to their Ethiopian audience. It's a delicate balance between staying connected to worldwide movements and ensuring the content is relatable and culturally respectful.

**Promoting Local Identity:** Influencers in Ethiopia play a vital role in fostering national pride and promoting the local identity by celebrating culture, traditions, and achievements. This involves showcasing everything from local artisans and Ethiopian products to national holidays and historical landmarks. One influencer in the vlog and discovery category shared, "I make it a point to wear Ethiopian-made clothes in my posts on special occasions. I believe in supporting local businesses, and it's a great way to remind my audience about the beauty and quality of our local craftsmanship." This not only encourages economic support for local brands but also builds a sense of pride in Ethiopian culture among their followers.

Influencers in the vlog and discovery category, for example, often showcase Ethiopia's breathtaking landscapes and rich heritage. "I love traveling within Ethiopia because it allows me to show the beauty of our country to my followers. It's about making them feel proud of where they come from while also promoting tourism in Ethiopia," mentioned one travel vlogger. By celebrating Ethiopia's natural beauty and history, influencers contribute to the country's positive image both locally and internationally.

#### **4.4 Psychological factors impacting influencer marketing strategies.**

The analysis of interviewee answers related to content strategies provides a comprehensive understanding of how influencers design and implement their content to engage with their audiences. This section examines the influencers' approaches to content creation through the lens of Cialdini's Six Principles of Influence and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

#### **Cialdini's Six Principles of Influence Strategies**

Cialdini's Six Principles of Influence: Influencers use a combination of Cialdini's Six Principles of Influence Liking, Reciprocity, Commitment and Consistency, Social Proof, Authority, and Scarcity depending on the type of content or brand partnership. Here, we discuss the dominant principles within each influencer category.

**Liking:** Liking emerged as the most important and prevalent principle across all categories during thematic analysis. Influencers consistently build personal connections with their followers through relatable content, interactive engagement, and the sharing of personal stories. This approach creates a sense of familiarity and trust, essential for sustaining long-term engagement. As one inspirational content creator emphasized, “I share my struggles and successes to motivate others. It's about being authentic and relatable.” This sentiment aligns with the broader strategy of fostering personal connections, which influencers across different niches utilize. For instance, a comedy skit influencer explained, “People love humor that reflects their everyday life. When they see something, they’ve experienced, they feel closer to me.” In addition to content relatability, influencers also employ factors that contribute to Liking—such as physical attractiveness, similarity, compliments, and familiarity—to strengthen these connections. As one Discovery vlogger influencer noted, “Complimenting my audience on their knowledge about their next recommendations always sparks more engagement. They feel seen and appreciated.” These factors confirm that Liking is the most widely used influencing technique because, psychologically, people are more easily influenced by those they feel a personal affinity for.

**Reciprocity:** Reciprocity is also prevalent across all categories, as identified through thematic analysis. Influencers provide something of value, such as useful information, entertainment, reviews, discounts, or giveaways, to encourage reciprocity from their followers. For example, health influencers frequently share valuable health tips and engage with their followers on health-related issues, creating a sense of indebtedness among their audience. One business influencer noted, “I share tips and engage with my followers on education by telling them about different courses online. It's about showing opportunities and providing value to my followers.” This act of giving creates an implicit expectation that followers will reciprocate, whether through continued engagement, support, or purchasing products promoted by the influencer.

According to the interviews conducted, reciprocity was described as the most widely used influencer marketing technique, with several influencers affirming its effectiveness. As one comedic skit influencer pointed out, “When I do giveaways or share exclusive discount, I see a spike in followers showing appreciation by liking, sharing and positive comments.” This observation supports the broader psychological principle that people tend to feel obliged to return

a favor when someone does something for them, making reciprocity a powerful tool in building sustained engagement and loyalty.

**Commitment and Consistency:** Commitment and Consistency play a key role in audience engagement, as individuals are more likely to stick with something once, they have made a commitment. Psychologically, people value consistency and often strive to align their actions with their values and past commitments. This influence strategy is commonly employed by inspirational, health, and sports influencers who encourage their followers to participate in challenges or regular engagement to maintain consistency. Health influencers, for example, often run fitness or wellness challenges that require daily participation, fostering a sense of commitment among their followers. As one sports influencer explained, “I involve my followers in challenges and live discussions to increase engagement and make them invested in themselves and my content.” This approach creates a cycle of commitment that enhances audience loyalty and engagement. Other influencers, particularly in comedy skit and news categories, rely more on spontaneity and creativity to engage their audience, focusing less on structured commitment. As one news influencer noted, “I don’t run challenges or ask my followers to commit. My content is more about the information I provide and if they like it, they engage with it naturally.” Similarly, a comedy skit influencer shared, “My followers engage with my content because it’s fun and unpredictable. I want them to be excited about what’s coming next. “This differentiation highlights how Commitment and Consistency are effective in building a loyal audience for some, while others leverage more fluid, spontaneous strategies to foster engagement.

**Social Proof:** Social Proof is predominantly utilized by Information and News influencers, as well as Vlog Discovery influencers. Information and News influencers leverage their knowledge of current events and public opinion to showcase their expertise and attract new followers.

As one news influencer noted, “I cover news that matters to my local audience, things that are relevant to their daily lives.” This focus on pertinent information not only builds credibility but also encourages audience trust. In contrast, Vlog Discovery influencers present a specific lifestyle and demonstrate how to enjoy oneself, appealing to viewers seeking authentic experiences. By highlighting high engagement on their posts, these influencers demonstrate their popularity and influence, encouraging others to follow suit. An example comes from a discovery vlogger who stated, “When I share my experiences and show others enjoying the same moments, it naturally

draws more viewers who want to be part of that lifestyle.” Some influencers in areas, such as health or art content, may not heavily rely on Social Proof to engage their audience. A health influencer remarked, “I focus on providing clear, valuable insights rather than worrying about how many likes or shares I get. My goal is to educate, not to follow trends.” Additionally, an art and poetry influencer shared, “I prefer to offer unique content rather than chase engagement metrics. If people find value in my works, they will come back.” This contrast illustrates that while Social Proof is a powerful tool for certain influencers, others may prioritize authenticity and expertise without necessarily relying on the validation of social engagement.

**Authority:** Authority, as a psychological influencing technique, suggests that people are more likely to follow the lead of credible experts. Psychologically, individuals tend to be persuaded by those who are perceived as authorities in a particular area. This principle is effectively utilized by influencers in the Health, Sports, and Business/Education categories, who establish credibility through their expertise. As one business influencer stated, “I use detailed information and credible sources to establish trust with my audience.” This approach underscores the importance of reliable content in fostering audience confidence. In the health sector, many influencers are themselves health professionals, such as doctors or nutritionists, which significantly enhances their authority and trustworthiness within their niche. For instance, a health influencer noted, “Being a certified professional helps me connect with my audience. They know I’m sharing advice grounded in science and experience.” Comedy skit influencers rely more on personality and relatability than expertise. A discovery vlog influencer remarked, “I don’t consider myself an authority; I’m just someone who loves going out and having adventures and shares what I like. My audience engages with me because of my taste”. This differentiation highlights that while Authority is a powerful tool for many influencers, others successfully engage their audiences through authenticity and personal connection rather than perceived expertise.

**Scarcity:** Psychologically, when people perceive something as scarce or in limited supply, demand tends to spike because they want it more and take action to obtain it. Scarcity is the least used principle by influencers and is often employed when a brand partner requests it. This strategy works by creating urgency through limited-time offers or exclusive content. For instance, Vlog Discovery influencers sometimes share exclusive travel experiences or promote limited ticket availability for certain events, generating a sense of urgency. As one influencer explained, “I sometimes create

limited-time offers by restaurants or delivery service apps that encourage immediate engagement.” Some influencers do not find Scarcity effective or necessary for their content. A fitness influencer mentioned, “I don’t create urgency. My content is about long-term commitment and growth, not quick decisions.” Similarly, a creative editor shared, “Scarcity doesn’t work for me. I want my audience to enjoy what I create and have a lasting impression.”

While Scarcity isn’t commonly used, it can still be an effective tool in specific marketing campaigns, especially when time-limited promotions or exclusive deals are at play. Influencers across different categories employ a combination of Cialdini's Six Principles of Influence to engage their audiences. Liking and Reciprocity are universally prevalent, while other principles like Commitment and Consistency, Social Proof, Authority, and Scarcity are used more selectively based on the influencer's niche and content strategy. This analysis highlights the strategic use of these principles in crafting effective influencer marketing campaigns.

Table 4.6

Use of Cialdini’s six Principles across different influencer categories

<b>Influencer Category</b>	<b>Liking</b>	<b>Reciprocity</b>	<b>Commitment and Consistency</b>	<b>Social Proof</b>	<b>Authority</b>	<b>Scarcity</b>
<b>Comedy Skits</b>	X	X				
<b>Vlog Discovery</b>	X	X		X		X
<b>Creative Editing</b>	X	X				
<b>Art And Poetry</b>	X	X				
<b>Business/Education</b>	X	X			X	
<b>Information/News</b>	X	X		X		
<b>Inspirational Content</b>	X	X	X			
<b>Health</b>	X	X	X		X	
<b>Sports</b>	X	X	X		X	

**Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM):** The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) explains how individuals are persuaded through two distinct routes: the central route and the peripheral route.

Influencers strategically use both routes to engage their audience, often relying more on the peripheral route initially to capture attention and then transitioning to the central route to deepen engagement.

**Peripheral Route of Persuasion:** The Peripheral Route of Persuasion is particularly relevant given the short attention spans of social media users and the quickness of video content. Influencers often rely on this route to gain initial attention by utilizing superficial cues, such as attractive images, catchy phrases, and engaging visuals. For instance, Vlog Discovery influencers utilize visually appealing travel shots and catchy captions to quickly engage viewers. As one vlog influencer explained, “I use visually stunning imagery and snappy titles to hook my audience right away.” Similarly, Comedy Skit influencers employ humor and relatable scenarios to capture attention immediately, with one influencer noting, “I use humor and relatable scenarios to grab attention quickly.” Art influencers and creative editors also leverage the Peripheral Route effectively. An art influencer remarked, “I focus on vibrant colors and striking compositions in my posts to draw people in. Once they’re interested, they engage more deeply with my work.”

A creative editor added, “In the fast-paced world of social media, I rely on bold visuals and engaging snippets to catch the eye. It’s all about making a quick impression.” These elements are crucial for drawing in viewers and encouraging them to engage further with the content, highlighting the importance of visually appealing and engaging elements in influencer marketing strategies.

**Central Route of Persuasion:** Influencers in categories such as business education, news, sports, and health often rely on the Central Route of Persuasion once they have captured their audience's attention through the Peripheral Route. This method involves presenting detailed and well-reasoned arguments that require thoughtful consideration, engaging followers through comprehensive insights and data that appeal to their need for detailed information. As one business education influencer explained, “I focus on creating detailed and informative content that shares my perspective and makes them question and think deeply.” In the realm of news, an influencer noted, “I strive to provide in-depth analyses of current events, breaking down the complexities so my audience can understand the bigger picture.” Similarly, a sports influencer emphasized the importance of data in their content, stating, “I delve into statistics and performance metrics to give my audience a clearer understanding of the game. It’s not just about highlights; it’s about the deeper

narrative.” Health influencers also employ the Central Route effectively. One health professional shared, “I provide thorough explanations of health topics, supported by scientific research, to empower my followers to make informed decisions.” These approaches illustrate the effectiveness of using detailed and logical arguments to engage and retain audiences, reinforcing the importance of thoughtful content in influencer marketing strategies.

**Combination of Both Routes:** While influencers initially rely on the peripheral route to attract attention, they effectively combine both routes to maintain and deepen engagement. For instance, a Comedy Skit influencer might start with a humorous, attention-grabbing skit and then follow up with thoughtful commentary or discussions that encourage deeper engagement. Vlog Discovery influencers might use stunning visuals to draw viewers in but then provide detailed information and insights about their travel experiences to keep the audience engaged.

This strategic use of both the peripheral and central routes allows influencers to first capture their audience's attention with engaging, easily digestible content, and then transition to more substantive, detailed information that requires deeper cognitive processing. This approach ensures a sustained engagement and a more meaningful connection with their audience.

#### **4.5 Effectiveness of Influencer Marketing as perceived by Businesses**

The effectiveness of influencer campaigns was measured on a scale from 1 (Not achieved) to 5 (Fully achieved). Table 4.7 shows that a majority of businesses (40%) rated the achievement of their campaign objectives as achieved, indicating a high level of satisfaction, and 7(14.0%) rated as fully achieved their campaign. A significant portion (30%) rated it as slightly achieved (3), suggesting moderate success. Only a small percentage (6%) rated it as not fully achieved, indicating that their objectives were not achieved. Even if the rate varies 42(84%) rated their campaign as achieved the objective.

The impact of influencer campaigns on sales or revenue was rated on a scale from 1 (No full impact) to 5 (Significant increase). As shown in Table 4.7, 36% of businesses reported a significant increase in sales or revenue (rating of 5), while 28% rated the impact as a 4. Only a small fraction (8%) reported no impact. Generally, 40(80%) of the respondents indicated that the influencer campaign has a positive impact on their company sales. The percentage increase in sales or revenue attributed to influencer campaigns varied among businesses. Table 4.7 indicates that 12(24%), and 15(30%) of the companies get a 0-10% and 11-20% increase in their sales respectively. The others indicated

that the campaign resulted in more than a 20% increase in their sale which constituted 23(36%) of the total.

Businesses rated the effectiveness of their influencer campaigns in increasing brand awareness on a scale from 1 (Not effective) to 5 (Very effective). Table 4.7 shows that 40% rated it as 4, indicating high effectiveness, while 30% rated it as 3. A small percentage (6%) found it not effective at all. Even if the effectiveness rate varies 42(84%) of the companies achieved brand awareness. Table 4.7 breaks down the effectiveness of a campaign in achieving the organization's objective, sales revenue, and creating brand awareness.

Table 4.7

Effectiveness of Campaign

<b>Achievement of Campaign Objectives</b>		
	Frequency	Percent
Not Fully Achieved	3	6.0
Not Achieved	5	10.0
Slightly Achieved	15	30.0
Achieved	20	40.0
Fully Achieved	7	14.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Impact on Sales or Revenue</b>		
No Fully Impact	4	8.0
No Impact	6	12.0
Slightly Impact	8	16.0
Increase	14	28.0
Significant Increase	18	36.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Percentage Increase in Sales or Revenue attributed to the campaign.</b>		
0-10%	12	24.0
11-20%	15	30.0
21-30%	10	20.0
31-40%	8	16.0
41-50%	5	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>How effective were the campaigns in increasing brand awareness?</b>		
Very Ineffective	3	6.0
Ineffective	5	10.0

Slightly Effective	15	30.0
Effective	20	40.0
Very Effective	7	14.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### **Effectiveness in Increasing Brand Mentions and Visibility Post-Campaign**

The survey asked businesses whether there was an increase in brand mentions and visibility post-campaign. As shown in Table 4.8, a majority of businesses (80%) reported an increase in brand mentions and visibility whereas the remaining 10(20%) showed no increase in brand mention and visibility. The result indicated that collaborating with influencers allows products or services to tap into new and diverse audiences. Since influencer promotion is considered a personal recommendation, it significantly increases trust and the likelihood of brand mentions among target audiences.

The impact of influencer campaigns on engagement metrics (likes, follows, comments, shares) was rated on a scale from 1 (No full impact) to 5 (Significant increase). Table 4.8 indicates that 36% of businesses reported a significant increase in engagement metrics. The remaining 8(16), and 14(28%) show slight increase and increases in the engagement metrics. Whereas the remaining 4(8%), and 6(12%) show no full impact and no impact on their engagement metric respectively. Even if the rate varies majority of the respondents (80%) agreed that the campaign has a positive impact on engagement metrics by leveraging the reach, authenticity, and relatability of influencers.

Businesses were asked if there was an improvement in audience interaction with their brand post-campaign. Table 4.8 shows that a significant majority (76%) reported an improvement in audience interaction. Whereas 12(24%) of the respondents show no improvement in audience interaction with their brand. The result indicated that influencer campaign significantly helps foster more meaningful interactions compared to general advertising through enhanced credibility, targeted content, community engagement, and incentivized promotional activities. The effectiveness of influencer campaigns in acquiring new customers was rated on a scale from 1 (Not effective) to 5 (Very effective). Table 4.8 shows that 34% of businesses rated it as effective, and 10(20%) indicated high effectiveness in acquiring new customers. Even if the rate varies 49(78%) of the respondents agreed that their influencer campaign is effective in acquiring new customers. Table

4.8 shows the impact of a campaign on brand mention visibility, impact on engagement metrics, improvement in audience interaction, and effectiveness in acquiring new customers.

Table 4.8

Effectiveness and Related Issues of Campaign

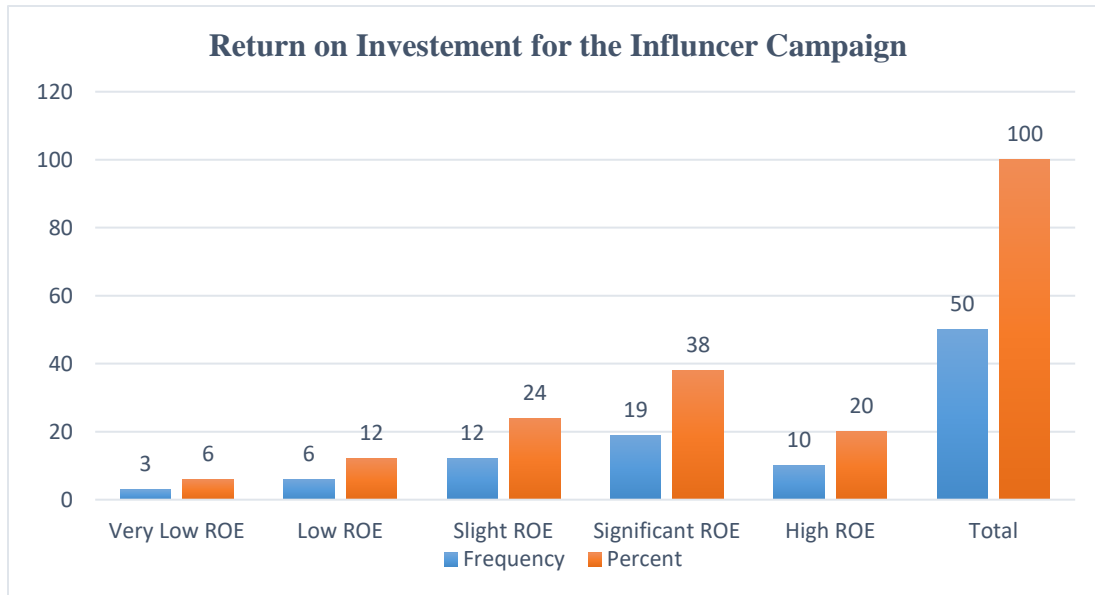
<b>Increase in Brand Mentions and Visibility Post-Campaign</b>		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	40	80.0
No	10	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Impact on Engagement Metrics</b>		
No Fully Impact	4	8.0
No Impact	6	12.0
Slight Impact	8	16.0
Increase	14	28.0
Significant Increase	18	36.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Improvement in Audience Interaction with Your Brand</b>		
Yes	38	76.0
No	12	24.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Effectiveness of the campaign in acquiring new customers</b>		
Very Ineffective	5	10.0
Ineffective	6	12.0
Slightly Effective	12	24.0
Effective	17	34.0
Very Effective	10	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Effectiveness in Increasing Return on Investment**

The return on investment (ROI) for influencer campaigns was rated on a scale from 1 (Low ROI) to 5 (High ROI). As shown in Figure 4.2, 38% of businesses rated the ROI as a 4, indicating a high return on investment. Even if the rate varies almost 82% of the respondents indicated that influencer marketing leads to higher conversion rates that in turn enhance Return on Investment (ROI).

Figure 4.2

### Return on Investment for Influencer Campaign



### Influencer Selection Criteria

The extent to which follower count influences the decision to select an influencer was measured on a scale from 1 (Not influential) to 5 (Very influential). Table 4.9 shows that a significant portion of businesses (40%) rated follower count as a 4 (influential), indicating that it is a highly influential factor. Another 30% rated it as a 3, suggesting moderate influence, and only a small percentage (6%) rated it as a 1, indicating that follower count was not influential at all. Even if the rate varies majority of the respondents 42(84%) indicated that it is important to consider follower count before selecting an influencer marketer.

Even if follower count is important an influencer with a large number of followers but a low engagement rate may not be as effective as expected. The importance of engagement rate in the influencer selection process was rated on a scale from 1 (Not important) to 5 (Very important). As shown in Table 4.9, 42% of businesses rated engagement rate as a 5, indicating that it is a very important criterion. Another 30% rated it as a 4(important), showing high importance, and only a small fraction (6%) rated it as a 1, suggesting that engagement rate was not important at all. Generally, the majority of the respondents 42(84%) indicated the importance of considering influencer engagement rate before selecting an influencer.

The criticality of aligning the influencer's brand with the company's brand was rated on a scale from 1 (Not critical) to 5 (Very critical). Table 4.9 indicates that 50% of businesses rated this alignment as a 5, showing it is very critical. Another 30% rated it as a 4 (critical), suggesting high criticality, and only 4% rated it as a 1, indicating that it was not critical at all. The result indicated the significance of aligning the influencer brand with the company's brand for different reasons such as authenticity, audience relevance, and brand image and reputation. The significance of the quality of content produced by the influencer was rated on a scale from 1 (Not significant) to 5 (Very significant). Figure 4.3 shows that 48% of businesses rated the quality of content as a 5, indicating that it is very significant. Another 30% rated it as a 4, showing high significance. Only 4% rated it as a 1, indicating that it was not significant at all. Table 4.9 and Figure 4.3 show the significance of considering follower count, engagement rate, alignment of influencers' content with company brand, and quality of the content in the selection process.

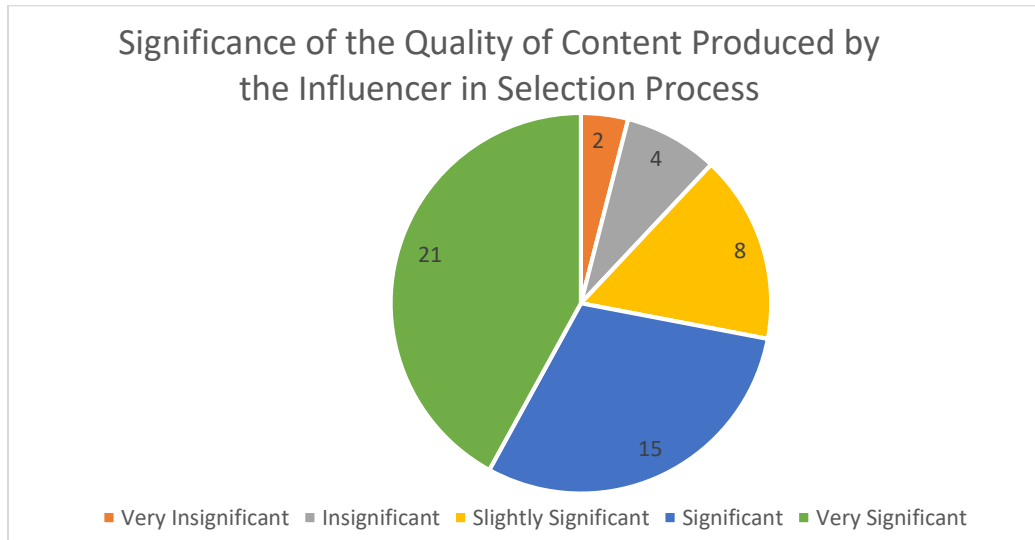
Table 4.9

Influencer Selection Criteria

<b>Extent does follower count influence your decision to select an Influencer?</b>		
	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Influential	3	6.0
Not Influential	5	10.0
Slight Influential	15	30.0
Influential	20	40.0
Very Influential	7	14.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Importance of Engagement Rate in the Selection Process</b>		
Very Unimportant	3	6.0
Un important	4	8.0
Slightly Important	7	14.0
Important	15	30.0
Very Important	21	42.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Criticality Aligning Influencer's Brand with the Company's Brand</b>		
Not Very Critical	2	4.0
Not Critical	4	8.0
Slight Critical	4	8.0
Critical	15	30.0
Very Critical	25	50.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Figure 4.3

Significance of Quality Content Produced



**Influencer Relationship Management**

Influencers should act as brand ambassadors it is important to be responsive to questions and comments to build trust, to make followers feel valued and understood. The effectiveness of an influencer's communication and responsiveness was rated on a scale from 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Excellent). As shown in Table 4.10, 20(40%) of businesses rated the communication and responsiveness of their influencers as excellent (5), while 30% rated it as very good (4), and only 6% rated it as poor (1). The result is shown in Table 4.10, majority of the respondents 43(86%) the influencer's communication and responsiveness were good. The professionalism and reliability of influencers were rated on a scale from 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Excellent). Table 4.9 indicates that 34% of businesses rated the professionalism and reliability of their influencers as excellent (5), and another 30% rated it as a 4. The remaining 3(6%) and 4(8%) rated it as very poor (1) and poor (2) respectively. The result is shown in Table 4.10, the majority of the respondents 43 (76%) had good professionalism and reliability. Generally, influencers' professionalism and reliability significantly help to build trust with their audience and partnerships with brands that in turn lead to successful campaigns.

The flexibility and adaptability of influencers were rated on a scale from 1 (Not flexible) to 5 (Very flexible). As shown in Table 4.10, 19(38%) of businesses rated their influencers as very flexible (5), and 32% rated them as flexible (4). The remaining respondents indicated that 2(4%) and

5(10%) rated as fully inflexible and inflexible respectively. Even if the rate varies, 43(86%) of the influencers were flexible and adaptable. Table 4.10 shows the influencers' communication and responsiveness, professionalism and reliability, and flexibility and reliability.

Table 4.10

Influencer Communication, responsiveness, and Reliability

<b>Influencer’s communication and responsiveness</b>		
	Frequency	Percent
Very Poor	3	6.0
Poor	4	8.0
Good	8	16.0
Very Good	15	30.0
Excellent	20	40.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Influencer’s Professionalism and Reliability</b>		
Very Poor	3	6.0
Poor	4	8.0
Good	11	22.0
Very Good	15	30.0
Excellent	17	34.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Influencer’s flexibility and adaptability</b>		
Fully Inflexible	2	4.0
Inflexible	5	10.0
Slightly flexible	8	16.0
Flexible	16	32.0
Fully Flexible	19	38.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Satisfaction with Influencer’s Skill**

Satisfaction with the influencer’s content creation skills was rated on a scale from 1 (Not satisfied) to 5 (Very satisfied). Table 4.11 shows that 42% of businesses were very satisfied (5) with their influencer's content creation skills, and 15(30%) rated their satisfaction as satisfied (4). The remaining 2(4%) and 4(6%) were very unsatisfied (1) and unsatisfied (2) respectively. Even if the rate varies majority of the respondents 45(95%) were satisfied with influencer content creation

skills. Satisfaction with the influencer's techniques for engaging with their audience was rated on a scale from 1 (Not satisfied) to 5 (Very satisfied). As shown in Table 4.11, 40% of businesses were very satisfied (5), 28% rated their satisfaction as a 4 (satisfied), and only 6% were not satisfied (1) respectively.

Satisfaction with the creativity and innovation demonstrated by the influencer was rated on a scale from 1 (Not satisfied) to 5 (Very satisfied). Table 4.11 indicates that 38% of businesses were very satisfied (5), and 30% rated their satisfaction as a 4. As shown in Table 4.11, the remaining 3(6%) and 5(10%) were very unsatisfied (1) and unsatisfied (2) with the influencer's techniques for engaging with their audience respectively. Even if the influencer's engagement with their audience varies depending on several factors the majority of the respondents 42(84%) were satisfied with the influencer technique and engagement.

Regarding the respondents' satisfaction with the creativity and innovation demonstrated by the Influencer, 36% of businesses rated their likelihood as very satisfied (5), 30% rated it as a 4 (satisfied), and only 2(4%) and 4(8%) were rated as fully unsatisfied (1) and unsatisfied (2) respectively. The result indicated that respondents were satisfied with influencers' innovation and creativity. The likelihood of collaborating with the same influencer in the future was rated on a scale from 1 (Not likely) to 5 (Very likely). Table 4.11 shows that 40% of businesses rated their likelihood as very likely (5), 30% rated it as a 4, and only 3(6%) and 5(10%) were rated as fully unlikely (1) and unlikely (2) respectively. Even if the rate varies majority of the respondents 42(84%) have the likelihood to work together with other related influencers if both the influencer and organization benefit from the collaboration. Table 4.11 shows a majority of 42 (84%) rated the likelihood of collaborating with the same influencer in the future. Overall satisfaction with influencer marketing was rated on a scale from 1 (Not satisfied) to 5 (Very satisfied). Table 4.11 indicates that 42% of businesses were very satisfied (5), and 30% rated their satisfaction as a 4. Only 4% were not satisfied (1). Table 4.11 Satisfaction of influencers with influencers' content creation skills, and engagement with their audience, with creativity and demonstration, and overall satisfaction.

Table 4.11

## Satisfaction with Influencers

<b>Satisfaction are you with the influencer's content creation skills?</b>		
	Frequency	Percent
Fully Unsatisfied	2	4.0
Unsatisfied	3	6.0
Slightly Satisfied	10	20.0
Satisfied	15	30.0
Fully Satisfied	20	40.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Satisfaction with the influencer's Techniques for engaging with their audience?</b>		
Fully Unsatisfied	3	6.0
unsatisfied	5	10.0
Slightly Satisfied	11	22.0
Satisfied	14	28.0
Fully Satisfied	17	34.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Satisfaction with the Creativity and Innovation Demonstrated by the Influencer</b>		
Fully Unsatisfied	2	4.0
unsatisfied	4	8.0
Slightly Satisfied	11	22.0
Satisfied	15	30.0
Fully Satisfied	18	36.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Likelihood to Collaborate with the Same Influencer in the Future</b>		
Fully Unlikely	3	6.0
Unlikely	5	10.0
Slightly Likely	11	22.0
Likely	15	30.0
Fully Likely	16	32.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Overall Satisfaction with Influencer Marketing</b>		
Fully Unsatisfied	2	4.0
unsatisfied	4	8.0
Slightly Satisfied	10	20.0
Satisfied	15	30.0
Fully Satisfied	19	38.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## **Challenges Faced in Influencer Marketing that could Affect Effectiveness**

Influencers face numerous challenges and ethical dilemmas when collaborating with brands, and navigating these successfully is crucial for maintaining credibility. One of the most common challenges is managing expectations from brands while ensuring that the content remains authentic. Tight deadlines and specific deliverables can create pressure to compromise creativity. “Sometimes, the timelines are so tight that you don’t have the space to produce your best work,” shared an influencer. “I’ve had to push back and negotiate more time to ensure the content stays true to my style and voice.” Another significant challenge is dealing with scam businesses or companies that don’t live up to their promises. “I’ve worked with brands that didn’t follow through with payments or delivered products that weren’t as advertised,” explained a comedy influencer. This can lead to difficult decisions about whether to continue a partnership or walk away to preserve their credibility. Influencers must remain vigilant about the authenticity of the brands they partner with, as promoting unreliable products can damage their reputation. “I’ve turned down offers when I felt the brand wasn’t credible or transparent with their values,” noted another influencer, highlighting the need to protect their long-term reputation. Navigating conflicts between personal beliefs and brand messages is another ethical dilemma influencers often face. “I’ve had instances where I had to turn down lucrative offers because the brand’s values didn’t align with mine,” shared a fitness influencer. “It’s tempting to take the money, but it’s not worth losing your followers’ trust.” Maintaining transparency and honesty with their audience is a key strategy to address these issues. Influencers emphasized that being upfront about their decisions fosters stronger relationships with their followers, even if it means passing on financially attractive deals.

Negative feedback is inevitable in influencer-brand collaborations, but how influencers handle it can make or break their relationship with their audience. Influencers employ various strategies to address criticism and maintain their credibility. One common approach is to engage directly with their audience by responding to concerns and clarifying their stance. “I always take the time to reply to criticism and clarify my views. This helps in maintaining transparency and trust,” noted an influencer. By addressing feedback openly, influencers not only diffuse potential backlash but also create opportunities for dialogue, strengthening their connection with their audience. In some cases, influencers rely on their established rapport with followers to mitigate the impact of negative comments. “My followers know my content style and trust that I’m always honest with them. When I explain why I chose to work with a brand, most of them are understanding,” shared a vlogger

influencer. This rapport allows influencers to weather the storm of negative feedback while continuing to build on their long-term relationships. By being responsive and transparent, influencers can turn negative feedback into opportunities for growth and deepen their connection with their audience.

From the perspective of businesses the complexity of customer experiences measurement and the lack of data collection tools or techniques, there is a lack of measuring ROI which significantly impacts business decisions and strategic planning. The survey collected data on whether businesses faced challenges related to the lack of measurable ROI in their influencer marketing campaigns. As shown in Table 4.12, 60% of businesses reported facing this challenge, while 40% did not. The difficulty in finding the right influencers for campaigns was another challenge reported by businesses. Table 4.12 indicates that 70% of businesses experienced difficulty in finding suitable influencers, while 30% did not. The result indicated that to find the right influencers organizations should develop a strategic approach that aligns with the brand values, target audience, and campaign goals with the influencers' reach, engagement, and authenticity.

Managing the authenticity and credibility of influencers was identified as a challenge by many businesses. The result suggests that in the age of information overload and digital communication, organizations should Manage authenticity and credibility by defining their core values and beliefs, by sharing their experiences, successes, and failures openly, and by using a consistent message. Table 4.12 indicates that 32(64%) of businesses experienced difficulty in managing authenticity and credibility, while 18(36%) did not.

The high costs associated with influencer partnerships were reported as a challenge by a significant portion of businesses. As shown in Table 4.12, 34(68%) of businesses reported this as a challenge, while 16(32%) did not. The result indicated that influencer fees (fees for posts, stories, or collaborations), content creation fees (photography, videography, editing), travel and accommodation costs, legal and contractual fees, long-term partnership costs, gifting products (if it is influencer marketing technique), and other related costs are challenges for organizations. Communication and coordination issues between businesses and influencers were also highlighted as a challenge. The presence of miscommunication, lack of clear expectations, ineffective use of communication tools, cultural differences, and others can be the source of communication and

coordination problems. Table 4.12 indicates that 58% of businesses faced these issues, while 42% did not.

Table 4.12

Challenges of Social Media Influencers

<b>Lack of Measurable ROI</b>		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	30	60.0
No	20	40.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Difficulty in Finding the Right Influencers</b>		
Yes	35	70.0
No	15	30.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Managing Authenticity and Credibility</b>		
Yes	32	64.0
No	18	36.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>High Costs of Influencer Partnerships</b>		
Yes	34	68.0
No	16	32.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Communication and Coordination Issues</b>		
Yes	29	58.0
No	21	42.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>

# Chapter 5

## Discussion

This chapter interprets and contextualizes the study's findings within existing literature and theoretical frameworks, offering insights into the strategies, psychological mechanisms, and effectiveness of influencer marketing in Addis Ababa. The discussion bridges the gap between the study's results and the broader academic discourse, contributing to a nuanced understanding of how influencer marketing operates in Ethiopia's unique socio-cultural context.

The analysis is organized around the research objectives, addressing influencers' experiences, content strategies, cultural adaptations, psychological mechanisms, and the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns. By situating the findings within established theories such as Cialdini's Six Principles of Influence, Social Identity Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the discussion highlights both universal principles and local adaptations, identifying implications for practitioners and academia while suggesting directions for future research.

### 5.1 Interpretation of Results by Objective

#### Influencers' Experiences and Strategies

The findings revealed that influencers in Addis Ababa employ diverse strategies to establish and maintain their presence on social media platforms. Central themes included leveraging authenticity, maintaining consistency in content creation, and aligning with audience preferences. Influencers emphasized the importance of relatability, achieved through personal storytelling and transparent communication. These findings align with Cialdini's principle of liking, which posits that individuals are more likely to be influenced by those they like or find relatable (Cialdini, 2001). By sharing personal stories and engaging with their audiences on a human level, influencers create trust and foster a loyal following.

Additionally, influencers noted that content quality and innovation are critical for sustaining audience interest. Prior research supports this, indicating that creativity and novelty are key drivers of engagement in digital marketing (Boerman et al., 2017). The challenge of balancing product promotion with maintaining authenticity was a recurrent theme, echoing studies such as Audrezet et al. (2020), which highlight the fine line influencers must navigate to preserve audience trust while meeting brand expectations.

Professionalization emerged as a significant factor, with successful influencers adopting structured approaches such as content calendars, audience analytics, and strategic planning. This reflects broader global trends in the professionalization of influencer marketing, where influencers are evolving into sophisticated marketing agents (Abidin, 2016). Such professionalization enhances their ability to collaborate effectively with brands, optimize their strategies, and achieve sustainable growth.

### **Adapting Strategies to Local Audiences**

Cultural adaptation was a key finding, underscoring the importance of tailoring influencer marketing strategies to the Ethiopian context. Influencers in Addis Ababa strategically incorporated cultural elements such as the Amharic language, Ethiopian traditions, and local humor into their content. These adaptations not only enhanced relatability but also strengthened the influencers' connection with their audiences, aligning with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This theory suggests that individuals are more likely to engage with content that reinforces their group identity.

Participants also highlighted the careful avoidance of culturally sensitive or controversial topics, demonstrating cultural intelligence in their approach. This aligns with Ang et al. (2007), who emphasize the importance of cultural adaptation in marketing to ensure resonance with local audiences. The integration of Ethiopian cultural elements reflects a nuanced balance between global trends and local expectations, contributing to a deeper understanding of influencer marketing in non-Western contexts.

### **Psychological Factors Underlying Influencer Impact**

The psychological mechanisms driving influencer effectiveness were central to the findings. Influencers demonstrated the importance of trust, authority, and perceived expertise in engaging their audiences. Many participants noted that audiences responded more favorably to influencers who showcased expertise in specific niches, consistent with Cialdini's principle of authority, which posits that credibility enhances influence (Cialdini, 2001). Trust was another recurring theme, with influencers emphasizing the role of authenticity and transparency in maintaining audience confidence. This finding aligns with Reinikainen et al. (2020), who identify trust as a critical mediator of audience compliance in influencer marketing.

The study also highlighted the strategic use of social proof, with influencers leveraging metrics such as likes, comments, and shares to enhance their perceived credibility. This reflects Cialdini's principle of social proof, where visible audience engagement reinforces the influencer's authority and reliability.

Furthermore, influencers employed dual persuasion pathways as outlined in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). They used the central route to engage highly involved audiences with detailed and informative content, while simultaneously leveraging the peripheral route through visually appealing and emotionally resonant cues to attract broader, less engaged audiences. This dual approach demonstrates the psychological sophistication of influencer strategies, offering valuable insights into their adaptability and effectiveness.

### **Effectiveness of Influencer Marketing**

The effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns was evaluated from the perspective of businesses collaborating with influencers. Quantitative findings revealed that 65% of businesses reported meeting or exceeding their marketing objectives, particularly in areas such as brand awareness and customer engagement. Satisfaction levels were high, with 78% of businesses expressing confidence in the value influencers added to their campaigns.

The effectiveness of these campaigns was closely tied to the influencers' ability to balance authenticity with brand alignment. Businesses highlighted that campaigns involving culturally resonant content and transparent communication were more likely to succeed. These findings support existing literature emphasizing the importance of authenticity and cultural alignment in influencer marketing (Boerman et al., 2017; Reinikainen et al., 2020).

The results also underscore the role of metrics in evaluating effectiveness. Influencers who demonstrated high engagement rates and ROI were perceived as more effective. This aligns with the growing emphasis on data-driven decision-making in digital marketing (Kumar & Gupta, 2016). However, businesses noted challenges in attributing direct sales impacts to influencer campaigns, suggesting the need for improved tracking and analytics tools to measure effectiveness more comprehensively. The combination of qualitative and quantitative findings highlights the dual impact of influencer marketing: enhancing brand visibility and fostering long-term audience

engagement. This integrated approach underscores the strategic value of influencers as marketing agents in Addis Ababa's emerging digital economy.

## **5.2 Comparison with Existing Literature**

The findings of this study align with and expand upon existing literature, contributing unique insights into the Ethiopian context. The emphasis on authenticity, trust, and cultural alignment mirrors global trends in influencer marketing while highlighting distinctive local adaptations.

### **Alignment with Existing Literature**

The role of authenticity in building trust is consistent with prior studies, such as Reinikainen et al. (2020), which emphasize the importance of perceived genuineness in audience engagement. Similarly, the strategic use of social proof and authority aligns with findings by Boerman et al. (2017), highlighting these principles as central to effective influencer marketing.

The integration of cultural elements reflects broader trends in cultural intelligence and localized marketing strategies, as noted by Ang et al. (2007). Ethiopian influencers' use of local language, humor, and traditions underscores the importance of cultural resonance in building audience connections.

### **Divergences and Contributions**

Unique to this study is the emphasis on cultural preservation and grassroots engagement. Unlike global trends emphasizing homogenization, Ethiopian influencers prioritize integrating local traditions, highlighting a distinctive approach to maintaining authenticity. Additionally, the use of offline community-building tactics complements digital strategies, reflecting the unique interplay between online and offline networks in emerging markets.

Another novel contribution is the integration of central and peripheral persuasion routes within single campaigns, as outlined in the ELM. This dual strategy, combining detailed narratives with visually engaging cues, demonstrates innovative adaptations of psychological frameworks to maximize impact in resource-constrained settings.

# Chapter 6

## Conclusion

This chapter provides a summary of the study's key findings, discusses its implications for academia and practice, and outlines recommendations for future research. The study aimed to explore the strategies employed by social media influencers in Addis Ababa, the psychological mechanisms underlying their effectiveness, and the impact of these strategies on audience engagement and brand promotion. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the research sheds light on the intersection of global influencer marketing trends and the unique socio-cultural dynamics of Ethiopia.

This study explored the strategies, psychological mechanisms, and effectiveness of social media influencer marketing in Addis Ababa, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis. The findings are organized around the study's four primary objectives, offering insights into influencers' experiences, their adaptations to local audiences, the psychological underpinnings of their strategies, and the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns.

The first objective, examining influencers' experiences and strategies, revealed that authenticity, consistency, and audience alignment are central to their success. Influencers frequently leveraged personal storytelling and relatable content to foster trust and engagement, reflecting Cialdini's principle of liking. Professionalization emerged as another key theme, with successful influencers adopting structured approaches such as maintaining content calendars, analyzing audience metrics, and collaborating strategically with brands.

The second objective, focusing on cultural adaptation, highlighted the role of local cultural norms and traditions in shaping influencer strategies. Influencers tailored their content to resonate with Ethiopian audiences, using the Amharic language, local humor, and traditional references to create a sense of familiarity and connection. These findings align with Social Identity Theory, which emphasizes the importance of group identity in fostering engagement and loyalty.

The third objective, investigating psychological factors, underscored the importance of trust, authority, and social proof in driving influencer effectiveness. Influencers who demonstrated expertise in specific niches and maintained transparent communication were more likely to gain audience trust and compliance. The strategic use of both central and peripheral persuasion

pathways, as outlined in the Elaboration Likelihood Model, highlighted the psychological sophistication of their approaches. Influencers used detailed, informative content for engaged audiences while leveraging visual and emotional cues for broader appeal.

The fourth objective, evaluating the effectiveness of influencer marketing, demonstrated that businesses collaborating with influencers reported high levels of satisfaction with campaign outcomes. Metrics such as brand visibility, audience engagement, and customer retention were identified as key indicators of success. However, businesses also noted challenges in attributing direct sales impacts to influencer campaigns, pointing to the need for improved analytics tools. Despite these challenges, the findings confirm that influencer marketing is a valuable tool for reaching target audiences and achieving marketing objectives in Addis Ababa's evolving digital ecosystem.

Overall, the study highlights the interplay between global trends and local adaptations in influencer marketing, providing a nuanced understanding of how Ethiopian influencers navigate cultural dynamics and psychological principles to engage audiences and promote brands effectively.

### **6.1 Implications of the Study**

The findings of this study carry significant implications for both academic research and practical applications in the fields of social psychology, marketing, and digital influence. These implications underscore the strategic importance of influencer marketing as a tool for engaging audiences and promoting brands, particularly in culturally unique contexts like Addis Ababa.

#### **Implications for Academia**

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on influencer marketing by addressing the gap in research focusing on non-Western contexts. By applying established psychological frameworks such as Cialdini's principles of influence, Social Identity Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the research highlights how these universal principles manifest in culturally distinct settings. For example, the study's emphasis on cultural alignment, such as the use of Amharic language and Ethiopian traditions, adds depth to the understanding of localized influencer strategies.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative data in this study provides a comprehensive methodological approach that can inform future research. The thematic analysis offered detailed

insights into influencers' strategies and experiences, while quantitative metrics allowed for the evaluation of campaign effectiveness. This mixed-methods approach can serve as a model for future studies seeking to explore complex, multi-dimensional phenomena like influencer marketing.

Additionally, the study's findings challenge homogenized views of influencer marketing by emphasizing the importance of cultural preservation and grassroots engagement. This highlights the need for academic discourse to move beyond Western-centric perspectives and explore the nuances of digital marketing in emerging economies. The research also contributes to the theoretical development of the Elaboration Likelihood Model by demonstrating how influencers effectively integrate both central and peripheral persuasion routes within a single campaign.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings provide actionable insights for marketers, brands, and influencers aiming to optimize their strategies in Ethiopia's digital landscape. The importance of authenticity and cultural alignment emerged as critical factors for success. Marketers are encouraged to collaborate with influencers who resonate with their target audiences by demonstrating cultural awareness and maintaining transparent communication. Campaigns that leverage culturally relevant content, such as traditional themes, language, and humor, are more likely to foster trust and engagement among Ethiopian consumers.

For influencers, the study highlights the value of professionalization and strategic planning. Maintaining content calendars, analyzing audience metrics, and adopting a structured approach to collaborations can enhance influencers' effectiveness and long-term sustainability. The research also emphasizes the importance of maintaining authenticity while promoting brands, as overly commercialized content can erode audience trust.

From a business perspective, the findings suggest that influencer marketing is a valuable tool for achieving objectives such as brand visibility, audience engagement, and customer retention. However, the study also identifies challenges in measuring direct sales impacts, pointing to the need for businesses to invest in advanced analytics tools to track campaign outcomes more effectively. Brands are advised to establish clear metrics and expectations with influencers to maximize campaign success.

## **Broader Implications**

This study underscores the transformative potential of influencer marketing in emerging markets, where digital penetration and socio-cultural dynamics are rapidly evolving. By demonstrating how Ethiopian influencers adapt global trends to local contexts, the research highlights the importance of cultural intelligence in digital marketing. These insights can inform global brands seeking to enter non-Western markets, emphasizing the need for localized strategies that respect and reflect local traditions and values.

Additionally, the findings have implications for policy and regulation in the digital marketing space. As influencer marketing continues to grow in Ethiopia, there is a need for frameworks that ensure transparency, ethical practices, and accountability. Establishing industry standards can protect consumers while fostering a more professional and sustainable influencer ecosystem.

The implications of this study extend beyond Addis Ababa, offering valuable lessons for academics, practitioners, and policymakers interested in the dynamics of influencer marketing in culturally unique contexts. By highlighting the interplay between global principles and local adaptations, the research advances the understanding of digital influence and provides a foundation for future exploration in emerging markets.

### **6.2 Limitations of the Study**

Despite its significant contributions, this study has several limitations that must be acknowledged to provide a balanced perspective on its findings and implications. These limitations are related to the study's design, scope, and methodological constraints, which may influence the generalizability and depth of the results. The study is geographically limited to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital city. While Addis Ababa is a vital hub for digital and cultural interactions, the findings may not fully represent influencer marketing dynamics in other Ethiopian cities or rural areas, where socio-economic, cultural, and technological factors differ significantly. This urban-centric focus limits the ability to generalize the findings across Ethiopia or similar non-Western contexts. The purposive sampling approach used in this study targeted influencers recognized at the TikTok Creative Awards and businesses that have collaborated with these influencers. While this approach ensured that participants were relevant to the study objectives, it may have excluded less prominent influencers or smaller businesses, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives. Furthermore, the sample size, though sufficient for the qualitative and quantitative analyses, may not capture the

full spectrum of influencer marketing practices in Addis Ababa. Both the interviews with influencers and the questionnaires completed by businesses relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias. Influencers might overstate their strategies or successes, while businesses may underreport challenges or overestimate campaign outcomes. This reliance on subjective accounts limits the ability to verify the accuracy of the data independently. The quantitative component of the study focused on descriptive statistics to evaluate the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns. While this approach provided valuable insights into metrics such as ROI and engagement, it did not include more advanced statistical techniques or predictive analyses that could offer deeper insights into causal relationships or trends over time. The study reflects the influencer marketing landscape during a specific period. Given the rapid evolution of social media platforms and marketing practices, the findings may not fully capture long-term trends or emerging dynamics in the field. Changes in platform algorithms, audience behavior, or cultural trends could influence the relevance of some findings over time. While the study explored the experiences of influencers and the effectiveness of their strategies as perceived by businesses, it did not directly examine audience perspectives. Understanding how audiences interpret and respond to influencer content could provide a more comprehensive view of the effectiveness and impact of influencer marketing strategies.

These limitations highlight areas for caution in interpreting the findings and underscore the need for future research to address these gaps. Expanding the geographical scope, incorporating diverse participant groups, employing advanced quantitative methods, and integrating audience perspectives are recommended to build on this study's contributions and provide a more holistic understanding of influencer marketing dynamics in Ethiopia and beyond.

### **6.3 Future Work**

The findings and limitations of this study highlight several opportunities for future research to deepen and broaden the understanding of influencer marketing strategies, psychological mechanisms, and their effectiveness in Ethiopia and other emerging markets. Future studies can build on the foundation laid by this research to explore new dimensions and address existing gaps.

Future research should extend beyond Addis Ababa to include other Ethiopian cities and rural areas. By exploring influencer marketing in diverse socio-cultural and economic settings, researchers can uncover variations in strategies, audience engagement, and effectiveness. Additionally, examining

different demographic groups, such as older audiences or niche markets, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse landscape of influencer marketing. While this study focused on influencers and businesses, future research should include the perspectives of audiences who consume influencer content. Understanding how audiences perceive and respond to influencers' strategies can provide critical insights into the psychological mechanisms of influence and compliance. Audience surveys, focus groups, or sentiment analysis of social media interactions could enrich the findings. Longitudinal studies tracking influencer marketing campaigns over an extended period could provide valuable insights into the long-term impacts of these strategies on brand equity, consumer behavior, and audience loyalty. By examining how influencer marketing evolves with changes in social media platforms and cultural trends, future research can offer a dynamic perspective on its effectiveness. Future work could employ more advanced statistical techniques, such as regression analysis, structural equation modeling, or machine learning, to identify causal relationships and predictive patterns in influencer marketing effectiveness. These methods could provide a deeper understanding of which strategies are most impactful and under what conditions. As social media platforms and technologies continue to evolve, future research should explore how new tools such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and live streaming are transforming influencer marketing. Investigating how influencers leverage these technologies to enhance audience engagement and brand collaboration can shed light on emerging trends in digital influence. Comparative studies across different countries or regions can provide insights into how global principles of influencer marketing are adapted to various cultural contexts. For example, comparing Ethiopia with other African nations or non-Western countries could highlight similarities and differences in strategies, challenges, and audience behaviors. Future research should explore the ethical implications of influencer marketing, such as transparency in sponsored content, the potential for manipulation, and its impact on vulnerable audiences. Additionally, examining regulatory frameworks and their role in shaping ethical practices can contribute to the development of guidelines for responsible influencer marketing.

Future research should strive to address these areas to advance the field of influencer marketing in emerging markets like Ethiopia. By exploring new perspectives, employing advanced methodologies, and incorporating evolving technologies, future studies can contribute to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the dynamics and effectiveness of influencer marketing in diverse cultural and economic contexts.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### Addis Ababa University

### School of Psychology

#### Interview Guide with Influencers

Greetings, my name is Amanuel Melaku, and I am currently a Social Psychology student at Addis Ababa University. I am working on my thesis, which focuses on the role of influencer marketing in Ethiopia, and I am eager to include your valuable insights in this research.

#### Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

- **Explore** the experiences and perspectives of influencers like yourself who are active on social media platforms.
- **Understand** the strategies you employ, the challenges you face, and the overall impact of your work within the context of influencer marketing in Ethiopia.
- **Investigate** how collaborations between influencers and brands influence consumer behavior, and assess the effectiveness of these partnerships.

#### Requirements for Participation

Your participation involves providing honest and detailed responses during this interview. Your unique insights are crucial in helping us achieve the objectives of this study.

#### Interview Protocols

- **Format:** The interview will be conducted in a semi-structured format. This allows us the flexibility to explore topics deeply and adapt the discussion based on your responses.

- **Content:** We will discuss various aspects of your experience as an influencer, including but not limited to content creation, your engagement with the audience, and your experiences with brand collaborations.

**Consent:** By participating in this interview, you are voluntarily contributing to this academic research. You may withdraw from the interview at any point without any adverse consequences.

**Confidentiality:** Be assured that all information you provide during this interview will be kept strictly confidential. Your identity and the details of your responses will be anonymized in the final presentation of our research findings, ensuring your privacy is maintained.

**Appreciation:** Thank you for considering participation in this study. Your insights are incredibly valuable and will significantly contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of influencer marketing in Ethiopia.

### **Part One: Background Information**

1. What is your social media handle or username?
2. Your age?
3. Which social media platforms are you currently active on?
4. Could you describe the primary niche or focus of your content?
5. Can you provide an approximate estimate of your follower count on each platform you're active on?
6. How long have you been an influencer on social media?

### **Part Two: Influencer Experience**

1. Could you walk us through your content creation process for social media? How do you come up with ideas and plan your content?
  - **Probes:**
    - Can you tell us about how you started your journey as an influencer on social media?
    - Are there any specific goals or objectives you aim to achieve as a social media influencer?
    - What inspired you to create content on these platforms, and how did you establish your presence?

- Have you encountered any challenges or obstacles in your journey as an influencer on these platforms? If so, how did you overcome them?
- Have you always focused on the same niche/community, or have you explored different content areas over time?
- Can you share any memorable experiences or milestones you've achieved as an influencer?

### **Part Three: Content Strategy**

1. Can you describe the types of content you typically create on your platforms and what influencer marketing strategies you have adopted?

- **Probes:**

- When creating content, what persuasion and social influence strategies do you use and why? Can you share any specific examples or strategies you've used to effectively engage with your audience on your platforms?
- How do you adapt existing trends or create new trends to specifically resonate with the Ethiopian audience? Could you provide examples where you tailored your approach to better fit local preferences and cultural nuances?
- How do you create content that makes your followers feel like they are part of a community or group? What kind of content helps your followers connect with each other and with you?
- How do you ensure that your content maintains a high level of credibility and authenticity, essential elements in influencer credibility?
- When you create your posts, do you focus more on providing detailed information and reasons for your followers to be interested in something, or do you tend to use attention-grabbing elements like images, quick tips, or catchy phrases? Could you share some examples of how you do this in your posts?

2. Can you share with us your evaluative approach?

- **Probes:**

- How do you measure the effectiveness of your content strategy on each platform? What metrics do you track?
- How do you respond to feedback from your followers, and how does it influence your future content creation?

#### **Part Four: Influencer Marketing**

1. Can you tell us about your experience with brand collaborations and influencer marketing campaigns?
  - **Probes:**
    - How did you initially start collaborating with brands?
    - What is your preferred platform for influencer marketing and brand collaborations?
    - When selecting brand partners, what criteria do you consider to ensure alignment with your brand and values?
    - How do you ensure that sponsored content aligns with your own voice and resonates with your audience while maintaining authenticity?
    - Can you share any memorable or successful influencer marketing campaigns you've been a part of? What made these collaborations stand out?
    - Have you ever encountered challenges or ethical dilemmas in your collaborations with brands? How did you navigate these situations?
    - How do you handle negative feedback or criticism from your audience regarding sponsored content?
    - What trends do you anticipate in the future of influencer marketing?

Thank you so much for your time and insights. Before we conclude, is there anything else you would like to share or any final thoughts you'd like to add?

## **Appendix B: Questionnaire for Businesses**

### **Addis Ababa University**

#### **School of Psychology**

My name is Amanuel Melaku, a Social Psychology student at Addis Ababa University, currently working on my thesis on the dynamics of influencer marketing in Ethiopia. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this important survey.

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

- This survey is designed to explore the experiences and perspectives of businesses on influencer marketing on social media platforms.
- To understand the strategies, challenges, and impacts of influencer marketing within the Ethiopian business context.
- To investigate the effectiveness of collaborations between influencers and brands in shaping consumer behavior.

**Your insights and experiences are invaluable in advancing our understanding of these areas.**

We ask that you provide honest and detailed responses to the questions presented. Your perspectives as industry practitioners are crucial for a comprehensive analysis of the influencer marketing landscape in Ethiopia.

**Consent:** Participation in this survey is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Completing and submitting the survey indicates your consent to participate and contribute your insights to this research study.

**Confidentiality:** Rest assured that all responses will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality. Information provided will be used solely for academic purposes, and all results will be anonymized in the final presentation of the research findings.

**Appreciation for Your Participation:** We greatly appreciate your contribution to this study. Your responses will help shed light on the effectiveness and challenges of influencer marketing in Ethiopia, providing valuable insights that could shape future marketing strategies.

**Part I: Business Profile**

**1. Company Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Industry**

*Mark only one oval.*

Education

Automotive

Fashion

Entertainment

Food & Beverage

Health & Wellness,

Technology

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Size of Business**

*Mark only one oval.*

Small (1-50 employees)

Medium (51-200 employees)

Large (201+ employees)

**4. Years in Operation** \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Experience with Influencer**

Marketing *Mark only one oval.*

< 1 year

1-3 years



Yes     No

13. How did the influencer campaign impact engagement metrics (likes, follows, comments, shares)?

*Mark only one oval.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Not fully impact     No impact     slightly impact     Increase     significant increase

14. Did the campaign improve audience interaction with your brand?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes     No

15. How effective was the campaign in acquiring new customers?

*Mark only one oval.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Not very Ineffective     Ineffective     Slightly effective     Effective     Very Effective

16. What was the overall sentiment of customer feedback post-campaigns?

*Mark only one oval.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Strong Negative     Negative     Neutral     Positive     Strong Positive

17. How would you rate the return on investment for the influencer campaign?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Very Low ROE     Low ROE     Slight ROE     Significant ROE     High ROE

**Part IV: Influencer Selection Criteria for Selecting Influencers**

18. To what extent does follower count influence your decision to select an influencer?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5





34. Communication and Coordination Issues (*Mark only one oval.*)

Yes     No

35. If there are any other challenges please specify

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