Two decades of research on affiliate marketing: a systematic literature review

Santroop TANWAR
Central University of Rajasthan, India
santrooptanwar@gmail.com
Prof. Praveen SAHU
Central University of Rajasthan, India
praveen@curaj.ac.in

Abstract. *Rapid technological advancements have changed the way of communicating goods and services to customers. Businesses use different channels of advertising to promote their goods and services. Affiliate marketing has become the fastest-growing customer acquisition technique. Despite being a multi-billion-dollar industry, affiliate marketing has not seen considerable attention from the researcher's point of view. Thus, this research introduces a systematic literature review on affiliate marketing and comprehensively analyses extant literature using different databases. The descriptive analysis infers the year in which the research has been published, the countries where the research has been performed, the research methodology used, and the journals where the literature has been published. The paper features the theories used by the previous researchers and classifies the literature into four major themes. Furthermore, the article also performs a citation analysis of the available literature to outline highly cited studies, authors, and journals using Google Scholar, Research Gate, and SCImago Journal Ranking. Keyword analysis has been imparted using bibliometrix R package to observe the different trends of research. This study enriches the current body of knowledge and concludes with an agenda for future research linked to the corresponding literature gaps.*

Keywords: affiliate marketing, affiliate risk, consumer perspective, systematic literature review, affiliate marketing operations, bibliometric.

JEL Classification: M31, M37, L81.

Introduction

The ubiquity of the internet is now an implicit reality across the world, especially in advanced countries. High-speed internet access and continuous developments in technological products have transformed the way businesses used to operate. One such impact can be witnessed as a massive disruption in the global supply chain, bringing e-commerce into the picture. Over the last few years, e-commerce has developed into an indispensable part of the universal retail framework by facilitating individuals to trade beyond the physical landscape. Moreover, it creates a single platform where merchants can showcase their products, advertise their merchandise, collect sales money, and receive customer feedback. The 24*7 availability of the marketplace allows sellers to create a strong image of their products/services in consumers' minds by updating information on a real-time basis. However, the firms operating long via e-commerce channels have realized the redundancy of generalized advertising. Consequently, every business strives to administer a unique way to promote its products to ensure a competitive advantage over its rivals. Given this context, affiliate marketing has become the most rapidly expanding method for gaining customers through promotional efforts (Daniele *et al.*, 2009); Prussakov, 2007; Mohamed & Fahmy, 2013; Slivar, 2008; Fox & Wareham, 2012).

Affiliate marketing is "a form of online marketing in which a firm (an advertiser or a merchant) signs an agreement with another firm (a publisher or an affiliate) to feature a link from its website on affiliated sites" (Goff, 2006) (pp. 11). It is the online operation of promoting others' services/products to gain brokerage from sales leads provided (Hoffman and Novak, 2000) and generally involves three parties viz., merchants, affiliates, and customers. In an affiliate marketing program, the online merchant places the link of their products on third-party websites, which, when clicked by a visitor, redirects him to the original website. The affiliates are liable to earn a commission when the visitor completes the specified action, i.e., visit the sponsor's website, subscribe to a magazine/ newsletter, fill out a form, purchase the product, etc. This arrangement enables the merchants to implement cost-effective promotional programmes as the commission is disbursed only after attaining the required target. The affiliate marketing industry is advocating significant growth, $13 billion market in 2022 and approximately $15.7 billion by 2024 (Geyser, 2022). The number of companies offering affiliate marketing-related services increased by 26%, with nearly 10,000 firms managing to raise more than 300 million dollars in funding in 2021 alone (Geyser, 2022). Despite such growth, the affiliate marketing industry is still in its nascent stage. It provides ample opportunities to merchants as well as affiliates to broaden their customer base and add an extra revenue stream to their business. To facilitate the development of better affiliate marketing programmes, it is essential to learn the recommendations of previous studies and analyze the unanswered issues. Given the complex relationship among multiple parties in affiliate programs, this topic demands a comprehensive review of extant literature to encapsulate the present body of knowledge.

The current topic has witnessed a growing number of articles, but a thorough review of existing studies is still missing. The research on affiliate marketing is somewhat fragmented and requires regular reviews to keep researchers up to date. This is relevant to provide a cumulative understanding of the topic to discover important research gaps and avoid

repeated studies in the future. Accordingly, the current research aims to conduct a systematic literature review (SLR) on different facets of affiliate marketing and propose promising future research directions. This manuscript is perhaps the first study to assimilate the trends of affiliate marketing and explore the different research areas related to this topic. This review will provide the opportunity to look behind and review the cumulative brilliance accumulated from a assorted body of literature employing distinct theories, samples, and methods (Hanafizadeh, Keating and Khedmatgozar, 2014).

Accordingly, this paper strengthens the body of affiliate marketing literature in the following ways. First, by reviewing 63 articles on affiliate marketing, this article paints the most recent and comprehensive picture of the state of AM research to date. Second, citation analysis will help researchers to locate significant studies and authors relevant to this research area. Third, the findings of this research will assist advertisers, affiliates, and merchants in devising effective strategic plans while implementing affiliate marketing programs.

The remaining article proceeds as follows. In the coming section, we introduce the review procedure adopted. Afterwards, we discussed the findings related to the **general characteristics of reviewed paper, citation analysis**, and different themes on which research has been performed. Finally, we addressed extant research gaps and highlighted promising directions for research to advance affiliate marketing research.

Definitions:
"Affiliate marketing is one of the most common techniques used to promote web sites, products and services, and affiliates are rewarded for every visitor or customer who came because of their marketing efforts" (Ivkovic and Milanov, 2010) .
"Affiliate marketing is an agreement between merchant and content providers to promote merchant's products and services at their website" (Hossan and Ahammad, 2013).
"Affiliate marketing is a popular form of pay-per-action or pay per- sale advertising whereby independent marketers are paid a commission on "converting traffic" (e.g., clicks that culminate in a sale)" (Chachra, Savage and Voelker, 2015).
"Online affiliate marketing is a commercial system in which an online retailer attempts to increase traffic to their site – and hopefully their sales – by compensating third parties to promote the retailer's goods and services" (Snyder and Kanich, 2016).

Methodology

This study applied an SLR approach, a literature review method that intends to produce a comprehensive analysis of extant literature on a certain topic by extracting appropriate researches from research databases (Kim *et al.*, 2018). Hemingway and Brereton (2009) proposed when there are numerous research articles on a particular field of interest or a variety of incongruous findings, the most favored method is the systematic literature review (SLR). It guarantees that the examined research studies are aligned with the goal of remaining objective about the area of interest, and it offers clarity on every step of the selection process (Senivongse, Bennet and Mariano, 2017). Systematic Literature Review

(SLR) produces precise results by presenting proof that corroborates the research inquiry (Boell and Kecmanovic, 2015).

SLR approach has been adopted across different subject areas, viz., management, and marketing research (Christofi, Vrontis, and Cadogan 2021; Paul and Feliciano-Cestero 2021), software engineering (Brereton *et al.*, 2007), blockchain applications (Casino, Dasaklis and Patsakis, 2019), corporate citizenship (Lee, 2008), supply chain finance (Xu, Xu and Li, 2018) and social sciences (Tranfield, Denyer and Smart, 2003). Globally, in the research domain, SLR has been considered as "the most reliable and comprehensive statement about what works", as the approach involves recognizing, combining, and evaluating the available information to identify areas where research is lacking and to establish future directions, taking into account a comprehensive viewpoint. (Kim et al. 2018; Mallett et al. 2012).

This research adopts the three-stage framework given by Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003) and Siddaway (2014) to execute the literature review. The procedure involves three sets of operations: (1) Planning: identification, conceptual discussion, flexibility, and review protocol; (2) Incorporating: data extraction and synthesis; (3) Reporting results.

The SLR begins with discovering appropriate literature through online and manual searches. We utilized the Scopus and Web of Science (WOS) databases to locate the relevant studies on affiliate marketing from May 2003 to May 2022. These two databases are multidisciplinary in nature and provide the finest published studies. Scopus and WOS are two of the oldest databases and have temporal coverage from 1788 & 1900, respectively, to present. WOS serves as an interdisciplinary research platform facilitating accessible literature between various branches of research knowledge (Gupta and Dhingra, 2022). Both databases accompany each other as neither of the resources is extensive in nature.

The bibliometric analysis method was also incorporated to assess and classify the research directions and patterns in affiliate marketing literature. Bibliometrics is a comprehensive and efficient quantitative technique that is utilized to gauge the impact of various factors related to a specific research topic.

The following Boolean was run in the month of May 2022 to find all the relevant studies related to affiliate marketing:

TI = "Affiliat* Market*"

Articles having "affiliate marketing", "affiliated marketing", "affiliate marketer", or "affiliate market" in their title were considered for the present study. Scopus and Web of Science databases resulted in 48 and 7 articles, respectively. Duplicate articles (seven) and articles not written in the English language (two) were eliminated from the study. To cover a broader perspective, backward referencing was used to locate more articles on affiliate marketing which are not published in Scopus and WOS databases. The process resulted in seventeen more articles. As illuminated in the *PRISMA diagram* given by (Moher *et al.*, 2009) (Figure 1), a total of 63 articles were taken for full-text review.

Figure 1. *Prisma diagram*
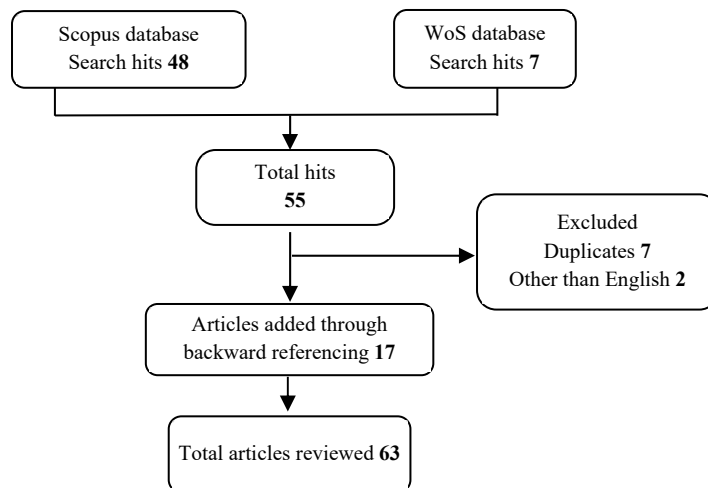
Findings

We encountered four different types of documents where research pertaining to affiliate marketing is published, which includes articles, conference papers, book chapters, and reports. Out of 63 research publications, there are 39 articles (62%), 12 conference papers (19%), 11 book chapters (17%) and 1 report (2%).

Distribution by Year of Publication

The distribution of articles in terms of their years of publication helps to comprehend about the development of academic research with regard to a specific topic or concept. As shown in Figure 2, the research on affiliate marketing started emerging in the year 2003.

Figure 2. *Year-wise published number of studies*
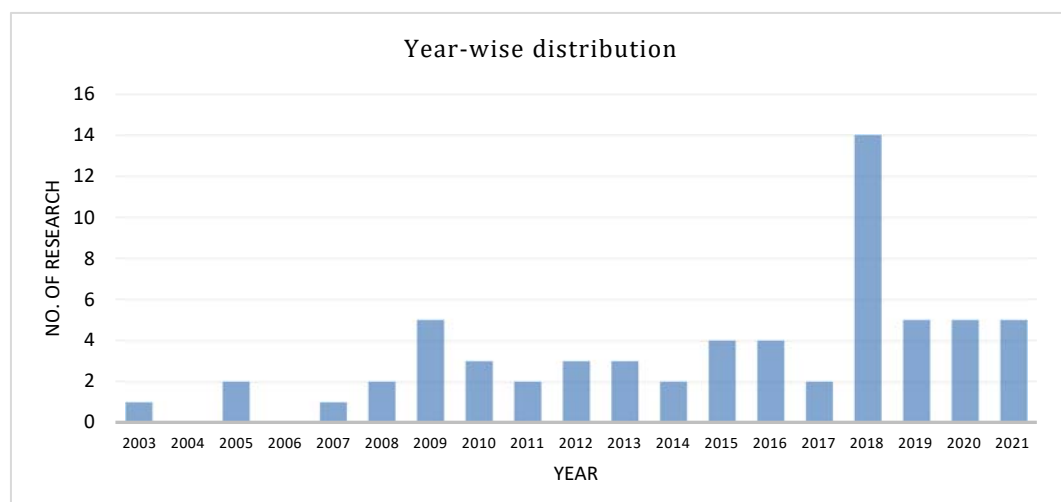
However, no article was published in the year 2004 and 2006. There was an increase in the number of articles until 2010, after which the research in the area of affiliate marketing witnessed an uneven growth. Out of 63 articles, the maximum number of manuscripts (thirteen) were published in the year 2018, owing to a special book issue named "Driving Traffic and Customer Activity Through Affiliate Marketing".

Country

From 63 research manuscripts, there are 123 authors from 19 different countries contributing towards affiliate marketing research. The maximum number of authors are from India (35), followed by the UK (22) and the USA (17). The authors from Norway, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic have each published only a single article in the field of affiliate marketing.

Geographical segregation of the studies reveals that maximum research is administered in India (17 articles), followed by UK and US with ten articles each, and Israel and Spain with three articles each. The rest of the articles are distributed across 16 countries (four countries with two articles each and 12 countries with 1 article each).

The highest number of studies in India reflects the continuous and growing innovation in the country that has helped India to achieve the status of a digital economy. The low-risk pay-on-performance affiliate model, increasing users of e-commerce and a rise in affiliate marketing service providers have made a significant contribution to the growing acceptance of affiliate marketing in India.

Figure 3. *Country-wise distribution of studies*
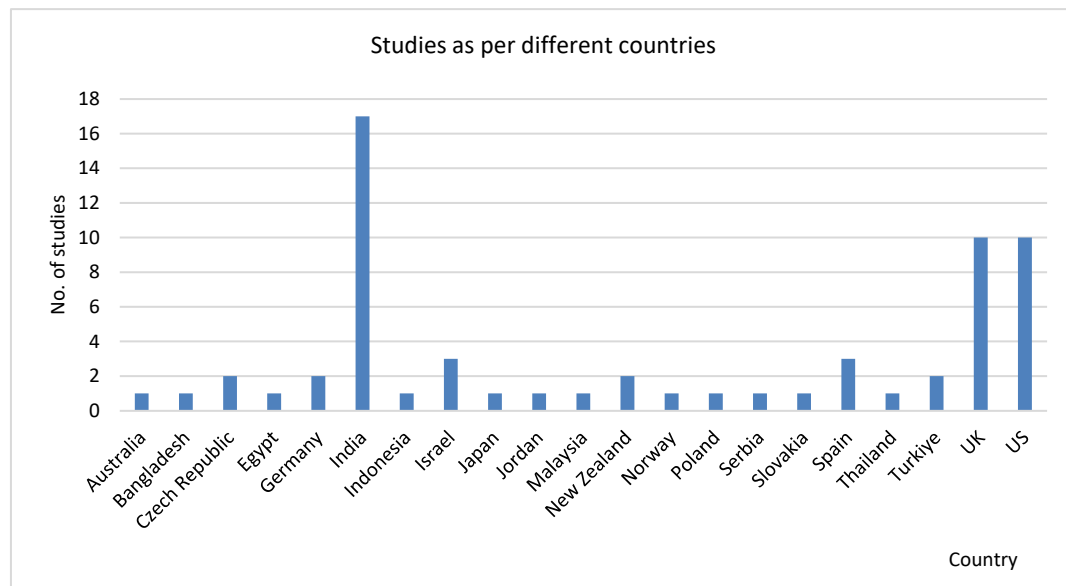
Journal

Table 1 shows that the research on affiliate marketing was published in 37 different journals. *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, a highly professional and authentic source of information in the space of the internet applications in marketing and advertising, has published two research on affiliate marketing. *New Media Age* journal from ProQuest publishers has also published two articles. All the remaining 35 journals have only a single article on the given topic. It is interesting to note that affiliate marketing is lacking in the research field, despite being a growing promotional marketing technique.

Table 1. *Citations of Journals*

Journal	Total Citations	Frequency
'Indian Journal of Science and Technology'	13921	1
'Journal of Travel Research'	13695	1
'Journal of Marketing Research'	11675	1
'Journal of Service Research'	7279	1
'Journal of Consumer Marketing'	3890	1
'Autonomous Agents and Multi-Agent Systems'	3322	1
'Journal of Advertising Research'	2862	1
'Espacios'	2761	1
'International Journal of Engineering and Technology'	2601	1
'Information Systems and e-Business Management'	2259	1
'International Journal of Supply Chain Management'	2162	1
'International Gambling Studies'	1796	1
'Library Trends'	1082	1
'International Journal of e-Business Research'	671	1
'Journal of Cybersecurity'	637	1
'International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising'	388	2
'e-Review of Tourism Research'	337	1
'International Journal of Electronic Finance'	306	1
'Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice'	255	1
'International Journal of Electronic Business'	204	1
'ABA Bank Marketing'	5	1
'Review of Applied Socio-Economic Research'	4	1
'International Journal of Innovative Research in Engineering & Management'	-	1
'International Journal of Research in Business Studies'	NA	1
'International Journal of Research Studies in Management'	NA	1
'Journal of Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Fayoum University'	NA	1
'Journal of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels-University of Sadat City'	NA	1
'Jurnal The Messenger'	NA	1
'Lecture Notes in Electrical Engineering'	NA	1
'Pacific Business Review International'	NA	1
'Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities'	NA	1
'SMS Journal of Entrepreneurship & Innovation'	NA	1
'The Marketing Review'	NA	1
'The Service Industries Journal'	NA	1
'World Journal of Social Sciences'	NA	1
'International Journal of Online Marketing'	NA	1
'New Media Age'	NA	2

Citation analysis

Citation analysis has been considered as one of the prominent methods to evaluate scholarly influences. Scholars acknowledge other researchers' contributions and cite them while writing their research articles. Thus, number of times a study is cited can serve as a proximate indication of its importance (Peng and Zhou 2006; Aggarwal and Kapoor 2018) . To the best of authors' knowledge, no citation analysis has been performed on the current topic in past research studies. The present study has reviewed research manuscripts of the past 18 years (2003-2021), representing a broader and true perspective of the past literature. For the analysis work, the citation count of the selected 63 research manuscripts is recorded in MS-Excel to discover the journal with maximum citations, highly referred articles, and authors.

Top Cited Journals: The 63 conclusive research manuscripts are published in 37 different journals. An analysis has been conducted on 37 journals using the "Elsevier's Scopus indexed SCImago Journal Ranking (SJR)" database for citation analysis. The assessment was carried out over a period of eleven years from 2011 to 2021, considering data availability and easy management. The table 1 shows the top 10 journals on the basis of their cumulative citation count. A glance at the table shows that the *Indian Journal of Science and Technology* tops the list with 13921 citation count, an open access journal covering research fields viz., computer science, biophysics, environmental science and many more. *Journal of Travel Research, Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Service Research, and Journal of Consumer Marketing* follows the list with citations count of 13695, 11675, 7279, and 3890, respectively.

Highly Cited Articles: As of May 2022, Table 2 displays the top 10 articles with the highest number of citations out of the list of 63 articles. The citation count was exercised through a title search on "Google Scholar" and recording the same in a tabular form. The research performed by Duffy (2005) has received maximum citations (204), which establishes a relationship between site navigation, product images, product description, shipping policy, and conversion rate. This research is a case study focused on exploring the working of affiliate marketing. The second most cited research is by Libai, Biyalogorsky, and Gerstner (2003) with 135 citations, which focuses on the commission received by affiliates by converting a potential buyer into a customer. The study presents different commission models available to remunerate affiliates, i.e., pay-per-lead, pay-per-conversion and the conditions where one commission model is preferred over the other.

Table 2. *Top 10 cited articles*

S.no.	Article reviewed	Citation count
1	'Affiliate marketing and its impact on e-commerce'	204
2	'Setting referral fees in affiliate marketing'	135
3	'Affiliate marketing in tourism: determinants of consumer trust'	117
4	'Risk, information, and incentives in online affiliate marketing'	112
5	'Method of and system for crediting an online publisher in an affiliate marketing relationship'	107
6	'Unintended consequences in the evolution of affiliate marketing networks: a complexity approach'	53
7	'Affiliate crookies: characterizing affiliate marketing abuse'	52

S.no.	Article reviewed	Citation count
8	'Affiliate marketing: an overview and analysis of emerging literature'	50
9	'Endorsements on social media: an empirical study of affiliate marketing disclosures on youtube and pinterest'	45
10	'Affiliate marketing programs: a study of consumer attitude towards affiliate marketing programs among Indian users'	28

Most Cited Authors*:* Table 3 outlines the highly cited researchers (authors) in the area of affiliate marketing. The citation analysis has been carried out based on the authors' citation count on Research Gate and Google Scholar. Stefan Savage has received the maximum citation with 46466 counts. He has carried out significant research on cookies used in the functioning of affiliate marketing. The second most frequently cited author is Yogesh K. Dwivedi, with 38013 citations, who has performed a literature review in the field of affiliate marketing. The list is followed by Voelker G.M. with 27337 citations, Kraus S. with 25724 citations and Narayanan A. with 21344 citation counts.

Table 3. *Top 10 cited authors*

S.No.	Authors	Papers reviewed	Citation count
1	Savage S.	'Affiliate crookies: Characterizing affiliate marketing abuse'	46466
2	Yogesh K. Dwivedi	'Affiliate Marketing: An Overview and Analysis of Emerging Literature'	38013
3	Voelker G.M.	'Affiliate crookies: Characterizing affiliate marketing abuse'	27337
4	Kraus S.	1. 'Information Design in Affiliate Marketing' 2.'Information disclosure and partner management in affiliate marketing'	25724
5	Narayanan A.	'Endorsements on social media: An empirical study of affiliate marketing disclosures on YouTube and Pinterest'	21344
6	Barnes S.	'Assessing the value of online affiliate marketing in the UK financial services industry'	19618
7	Nripendra P. Rana	'Affiliate Marketing: An Overview and Analysis of Emerging Literature'	18071
8	Thomas M Connolly	'A new personalized approach in Affiliate Marketing'	14237
9	Libai B.	'Setting Referral Fees in Affiliate Marketing'	10104
10	Edelman B.	'Risk, information, and incentives in online affiliate marketing'	9562

Keyword analysis

Authors uses keywords in their research article to portray a picture of the manuscript by using some words. Keywords are used to emphasize the main focus of an article and aid scholars in understanding its primary research contexts (Jin, Yuan and Chen, 2009). Thus, a tree map (Figure 4) has been prepared using bibliometrix package in R software and biblioshiny (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017). Tree map is prepared on the basis of word frequency of authors' keywords used in the selected sample of research articles. Out of 134 keywords, affiliate marketing was used in 33 research articles followed by e-commerce (8 articles), affiliate (4), online advertising (4 articles) and so on. Results put on evidence that affiliate marketing lacks researches from the perspective of affiliate risk, consumer, consumer behavior, consumer attitude, security and purchase intention.

Figure 4. *Keywords tree map*

Methodology used

In terms of data analysis tools, more than 80% of empirical studies have used a quantitative approach to examine the data. The analysis revealed that regression had been used four times (Abdelhady, Kamal, and Abd El Samie 2020; Gregori, Daniele, and Altinay 2014; Olbrich, Schultz, and Bormann 2019; Haq 2012), SEM one time. With regards to the qualitative approach, authors have applied thematic analysis (Daniele *et al.*, 2009), in-depth interviews (Mariussen, Daniele and Bowie, 2010) and content analysis (Bowie, Paraskevas and Mariussen, 2014) tools to analyze the results. Principal component analysis and k-means clustering algorithm tools have also been incorporated in two studies. With reference to Sampling techniques, non-probability sampling, viz., convenience, purposive, and snowball sampling, have been used for collecting data.

Themes

Though the area of affiliate marketing has witnessed fragmented research, an attempt has been made to identify the key research focus of reviewed articles and categorize them into broader research themes. For this, full text of the articles was reviewed thoroughly, and major outcomes, discussions, and findings were noted. The articles pertaining to common subject matter were grouped together and assigned a different theme name. This procedure results in four different themes, viz., Conceptual, Operational, Risk, and Consumer perspective.

Table 4. *Major research themes in the area of affiliate marketing studies*

Themes	Author(s)
Conceptual	Duffy 2005; Hossan and Ahammad 2013; Jurisova 2013; Glasgow 2009; Natarina and Anugrah Bangun 2019; Ivkovic and Milanov 2010; Chaturvedi 2018 ; Narang and Trivedi 2018; Kaur 2018; Singh 2018; Daniele et al. 2009; Mazurek and Kucia 2011; Rodríguez Vázquez et al. 2016; Mariussen, Daniele, and Bowie 2010; Prabhu and Satpathy 2015; Harris 2008; Molander 2005; Aydin & Bikari 2019

Themes	Author(s)
Operational	Shrimpling 2012; Beranek 2019; Dixit and Kesarwani 2018; Kaur and Wadera 2018; Brear and Barnes 2008; Newton and Ojo 2018; Iwashita and Tanimoto 2016; Suryanarayana, Sarne, and Kraus 2019; Suryanarayana, Sarne, and Kraus 2021; Shukla, Vyas, and Shastri 2018; Mariussen 2011; Libai, Biyalogorsky, and Gerstner 2003; Wilson 2009; Malik and Connolly 2012; Akçura 2010; Beranek 2018; Olbrich, Bormann, and Hundt 2018; Bowie, Paraskevas, and Mariussen 2014; Olbrich, Schultz, and Bormann 2019; Singhal and Anand 2021; Miller 2010
Consumer Perspective	Singh 2018; Haq 2012; Abdelhady, Kamal, and Abd El Samie 2020; Ghosal, Prasad, and Singh 2021; Fahim and Nasabi 2020; M et al. 2018; Suresh et al. 2018; Patrick and Hee 2021; Gregori, Daniele, and Altinay 2014; Dwivedi 2017; Mathur, Narayanan, and Chetty 2018; Haikal et al. 2020; Deepa et al. 2021
Risk	Houghton, Moss, and Casey 2020); Amarasekara and Mathrani 2016; Edelman and Brandi 2015; Amarasekara, Mathrani, and Scogings 2020; Snyder and Kanich 2016; Chachra, Savage, and Voelker 2015; Fox and Wareham 2007; Amarasekara and Mathrani 2015; Fox and Wareham 2012

Concept Of Affiliate Marketing: The articles in this category outline a new concept by synthesizing knowledge from available work and providing the platform to conduct future studies.

Out of 63 research articles, 19 articles focus on the concepts and conceptual framework linked to affiliate marketing. Some authors have simply dwelled on the basic concept of affiliate marketing to make the topic clearer and more understandable (Jurisova, 2013); (Hossan and Ahammad, 2013). Many studies have emphasized on the role played by affiliate marketing in e-commerce (Duffy 2005; Natarina and Anugrah Bangun 2019; Kaur 2018). Affiliate marketing has been identified as a prominent promotional tool to increase traffic on the online platform (Narang and Trivedi 2018; Daniele et al. 2009). Likewise, Prabhu and Satpathy (2015) mentioned affiliate marketing as an extensively growing and innovative customer acquisition programme. Narang and Trivedi (2018) proposed a conceptual framework named MECHULUP, indicating social media, honesty, mobile friendliness, e-commerce, audio/video, content quality, link building, and persistence. Affiliate Marketing has shifted the burden of responsibility from advertisers to content providers. Any person can become an affiliate and may earn commission from any place at any point of time through affiliate marketing (Kaur, 2018).

Operational: Out of 63 research articles, 21 emphasized the functioning of affiliate marketing. Authors have focused on multiple operational factors that may impact the smooth functioning of affiliate marketing, such as transaction system (Iwashita and Tanimoto, 2016), referral fees (Libai, Biyalogorsky and Gerstner, 2003) and click path of affiliate marketing (Olbrich, Schultz and Bormann, 2019). Miller (2010) discussed the methods of crediting an affiliate, viz., pay-per-lead, pay-per-sales, pay-per-click & pay-per-mile. Singhal and Anand (2021) showed how different operating systems impact the performance of affiliate marketing mechanisms. Bowie, Paraskevas, and Mariussen (2014) evaluated the effectiveness of online performance assessments led by practitioners and recommended a shift away from technology-driven measurement methods in affiliate marketing. Libai, Biyalogorsky, and Gerstner (2003) highlights the requirement to have separate and distinct affiliate programs for diverse product and services offered by different industries.

Further, they have given four variables, viz., online process simplicity, product homogeneity, ease of exit and product visualization, measuring the potential of affiliate marketing in the UK's financial industry. Iwashita and Tanimoto (2016) showed concern about the transaction system on which affiliate marketing operates. They observed how false transactions could create issues in generating commissions for the affiliates. To combat the issue of the falsified transaction, they have proposed a system of transactions including hashed values. Conclusively, it can be said that the working of affiliate marketing has observed a paradigm shift from referral fees to online information designing.

Consumer Perspective: Consumer perspective is an integral element of the purchase decision process in the context of affiliate marketing. It comprises of consumers' attitude, satisfaction, purchase intention, behaviour, trust and loyalty. Despite being an intrinsic component, only 13 articles are published in the time span of 19 years in this context. Haq (2012) observed that incentive, usefulness, perceived trust, and informativeness are strong predictors of consumer attitude towards affiliate marketing. Many authors have studied the relationship between affiliate marketing and different aspects of consumer perspective, such as consumer attitude (Haq 2012; Fahim and Nasabi 2020), consumer trust (Gregori, Daniele and Altinay, 2014), customer loyalty (Abdelhady, Kamal and Abd El Samie, 2020), consumer's purchase intention (Ghosal, Prasad and Singh, 2021) and customers' satisfaction (M *et al.*, 2018).

Risk: Affiliate marketing is associated with inherent risks. Too much trust on information available on the internet enables the publishers/ content providers to perform fraudulent activities. Publishers/affiliates use different approaches to manipulate information available on the internet. Cookie stuffing is one of the main activities linked with affiliate marketing used to transfer cookies in the user's browser from different sources without the user's consent (Amarasekara, Mathrani, and Scogings 2020; Amarasekara and Mathrani 2016). According to Snyder and Kanich (2016), over 33% of content providers participating in affiliate marketing programs employ deceptive methods such as cookie stuffing to generate commission from advertisers. Amarasekara, Mathrani, and Scogings (2020) have considered stuffing, squatting, and sniffing as sham activities performed in affiliate marketing. Unlawful or unsuitable activities carried out by affiliates to boost traffic on a retailer's website may have an adverse impact on the retailer's brand reputation in the eyes of customers. Fox and Wareham (2007) inferred that the risk of inappropriate behaviour and misconduct results from a lack of transparency in restrictions and guidance provided to affiliates.

Research gap & future scope

A thorough examination of existing literature on affiliate marketing reveals several research areas that have not been critically analyzed and require scholarly attention. The systematic review highlights the fragmented nature of research on the topic, with only a few theories and analysis tools being utilized. Therefore, the authors summarise different research areas that demand researcher's solicitude to encourage research on affiliate marketing.

First, the majority of empirical studies have adapted the convenience sampling approach (Fahim and Nasabi 2020; M et al. 2018; Dwivedi 2017) and purposive sampling approach (Daniele et al. 2009; Bowie, Paraskevas, and Mariussen 2014; Mariussen, Daniele, and Bowie 2010), which limits the generalization of the findings to the society (Alkhowaiter, 2020). Researchers can utilize other sampling techniques while administering the data for their work.

Second, the literature review observed that conceptual papers were dominant in the field. Also, no prominent theories have been used in the past literature. Patrick and Hee (2021) have used Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Diffusion of Innovation (DOI), Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) & Competing Values Framework (CVF) in their study to determine the variables influencing the intention to use affiliate marketing for small & medium enterprises. Bowie, Paraskevas, and Mariussen (2014) employed grounded theory to have an apparent understanding of affiliate marketing which was not covered in the past literature. And Mariussen, Daniele, and Bowie (2010) constituted their research with complexity theory to explore outcomes of affiliate marketing that are not foreseen or intended inside tourism distribution channels. Researchers can employ related theories and can perform analysis by collecting empirical data from users of affiliate marketing.

Third, consumers are the foundation of any business. Understanding the motive behind their purchase decision is the major research area in the marketing field. In the background of affiliate marketing, the consumer behaviour aspect is touched by very few researchers. Taking considerations from the tree map prepared using authors' keywords, future studies can work with consumers to determine their perspective about affiliate marketing in respect of their attitude, purchase intention, and satisfaction.

Fourth, Affiliate marketing operates through web infrastructure, therefore comprising the inherent limitation of internet distrust and cyber security. Given the extent of privacy invasion associated with the collection of data about individuals' browsing habits to place targeted ads, the primary concern arises about sharing the information on the internet. Trust, therefore, could play a crucial role in building the foundation for initial relationships and encouraging users to avail of affiliate marketing services. Despite this, affiliate marketing has not seen any significant research related to trust, with Gregori, Daniele, and Altinay (2014) making an exception.

Fifth, tourism websites are using affiliate marketing as the primary source of promoting their services. Consumers are using many travel affiliate websites to book travel packages. This segment of consumers encompasses a large population, thus allowing the researchers to perform research which will help both the consumers and the travel companies.

Sixth , conducting cross-country studies can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the current topic. No author has engaged in longitudinal or comparative studies. The insights gained from these studies will be valuable for marketers worldwide, since consumer behaviour is very dynamic in nature. This will help the advertisers to strategize marketing campaigns at a global level.

Limitations

The present research is bounded with several limitations. First, the search process for this review is only restricted to the Web of Science and Scopus, which narrowed the number of articles for this review. Therefore, other databases such as EBSCO, Google Scholar, and Science Direct can be opted for future research. Second, the articles procured in this systematic literature review are limited to conferences, journals, book chapters and reports. Consequently, media sources like newspapers, magazines and dissertations may be considered for future research. Third, there is a likelihood of inadvertently excluding some articles due to search terms and keywords.

Declaration of conflict of interest:

The authors report there are no competing interest to declare.

References

Abdelhady, M.H., Kamal, N.M. and Abd El Samie, H., 2020. Impact of Affiliate Marketing on Customer Loyalty, *Journal of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels-University of Sadat City*, 4(1/1), pp. 50-71.

Aggarwal, V. and Kapoor, M., 2018. Innovation growth from knowledge transfer in international strategic alliances, *Journal of Strategy and Management*, 11(4), pp. 483-496. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSMA-06-2018-0054>

Akçura, M.T., 2010. Affiliated marketing, *Information Systems and e-Business Management*, 8(4), pp. 379-394. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10257-009-0118-4>

Alkhowaiter, W.A., 2020. Digital payment and banking adoption research in Gulf countries: A systematic literature review, *International Journal of Information Management*, 53(2020), p. 102102. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102102>

Amarasekara, B., Mathrani, A. and Scogings, C., 2020. Stuffing, sniffing, squatting, and stalking: Sham activities in affiliate marketing, *Library Trends*, 68(4), pp. 659-678. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2020.0016>

Amarasekara, B.R. and Mathrani, A., 2015. Exploring risk and fraud scenarios in affiliate marketing technologies from the advertiser's perspective, in *Australasian Conference on Information Systems 2015, Adelaide, Australia*. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1606.01428>

Amarasekara, B.R. and Mathrani, A., 2016. "Controlling risks and fraud in affiliate marketing: A simulation and testing environment", in *2016 14th Annual Conference on Privacy, Security and Trust, (PST)*. IEEE, pp. 353-360. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1109/PST.2016.7906986>

Aria, M. and Cuccurullo, C., 2017. Bibliometrix: An R-tool for comprehensive science mapping analysis, *Journal of informetrics*, 11(4), pp. 959-975.

Beranek, L., 2018. An empirical investigation of factors that influence commitment and active participation in in-house affiliate marketing network, *International Journal of Electronic Business*, 14(3), pp. 189-211. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJEB.2018.095957>

Beranek, L., 2019. The development of an in-house affiliate marketing network – a case study, *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, 13(3), pp. 271-283. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJIMA.2019.102580>

Boell, S.K. and Kecmanovic, D.C., 2015. Debating systematic literature reviews (SLR) and their ramifications for IS: a rejoinder to Mike Chiasson, Briony Oates, Ulrike Schultze, and Richard Watson, *Journal of Information Technology*, 30(2), pp. 188-193. Available at: <https://www.ptonline.com/articles/how-to-get-better-mfi-results>

Bowie, D., Paraskevas, A. and Mariussen, A., 2014. Technology-Driven Online Marketing Performance Measurement, *International Journal of Online Marketing*, 4(4), pp. 1-16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4018/ijom.2014100101>

Brear, D. and Barnes, S.J., 2008. Assessing the value of online affiliate marketing in the UK financial services industry, *International Journal of Electronic Finance*, 2(1), pp. 1-17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJEF.2008.016881>

Brereton, P. et al., 2007. Lessons from applying the systematic literature review process within the software engineering domain, *The Journal of Systems and Software*, 80(4), pp. 571-583. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jss.2006.07.009>

Casino, F., Dasaklis, T.K. and Patsakis, C., 2019. A systematic literature review of blockchain-based applications: Current status, classification and open issues, *Telematics and Informatics*, 36, pp. 55-81. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2018.11.006>

Chachra, N., Savage, S. and Voelker, G.M., 2015. Affiliate crookies: Characterizing affiliate marketing abuse, in *Proceedings of the ACM SIGCOMM Internet Measurement Conference, IMC*, pp. 41-47. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/2815675.2815720>

Chaturvedi, M., 2018. "Affiliate Marketing Empowers Entrepreneurs", in S. Singh (ed.) *Driving Traffic and Customer Activity Through Affiliate Marketing*. IGI Global, pp. 64-80.

Christofi, M., Vrontis, D. and Cadogan, J.W., 2021. Micro-foundational ambidexterity and multinational enterprises: A systematic review and a conceptual framework, *International Business Review*, p. 101625. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2019.101625>

Daniele, R. et al., 2009. "Affiliate Marketing in Travel and Tourism", in *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2009*, pp. 343-354.

Deepa, S. et al., 2021. "Enrichment of affiliate marketing using K-Means clustering algorithm for early stage affiliates", in *AIP Conference Proceedings*, p. 140016.

Dixit, S. and Kesarwani, H., 2018. "Affiliate Marketing for Entrepreneurs: The Mechanics of Driving Traffic to Enhance Business Performance", in S. Singh (ed.) *Driving Traffic and Customer Activity Through Affiliate Marketing*. IGI Global, pp. 81-100.

Duffy, D.L., 2005. Affiliate marketing and its impact on e-commerce, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 22(3), pp. 161-163. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760510595986>

Dwivedi, R., 2017. Analyzing Impact of Affiliate Marketing on Consumer Behavior with M-Commerce Perspective, *SMS Journal of Enterpreneurship and Innovation*, 3(2), pp. 55-69. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.21844/smsjei.v3i02.9733>

Edelman, B. and Brandi, W., 2015. Risk, information, and incentives in online affiliate marketing, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 52(1), pp. 1-12. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.13.0472>

Fahim, T. and Nasabi, A., 2020. A Study on Consumer Attitude towards Affiliate Marketing for E-Business, *International Journal of Innovative Research in Engineering & Management*, 7(4), pp. 58-62.

Fox, P. and Wareham, J., 2007. "Controlling your brand: Contractual restrictions placed by Internet retailers on affiliate marketing activities in Spain", in *20th Bled eConference - eMergence: Merging and Emerging Technologies, Processes, and Institutions - Conference Proceedings*, pp. 125-142.

Fox, P.B. and Wareham, J.D., 2012. "Governance mechanisms in internet-based affiliate marketing programs in Spain", in *Transformations in E-Business Technologies and Commerce: Emerging Impacts*. IGI Global, pp. 222-239. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4018/jebr.2010100901>

Geyser, W., 2022. *Affiliate marketing benchmark report*. Available at: <https://influencermarketinghub.com/affiliate-marketing-report/>

Ghosal, I., Prasad, B. and Singh, P., 2021. Predicting Factors influencing Consumer's purchase intention: A Study of Consumers redirected through Affiliate Marketing Program, *Pacific Business Review International*, 13, pp. 76-86.

Glasgow, R., 2009. Affiliate Marketing: A ray of light in dark times, *New Media Age*, pp. 1-3.

Goff, C., 2006. Affiliate Marketing, *New Media Age* [Preprint].

Gregori, N., Daniele, R. and Altinay, L., 2014. Affiliate Marketing in Tourism: Determinants of Consumer Trust, *Journal of Travel Research*, 53(2), pp. 196-210. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287513491333>

Gupta, S. and Dhingra, S., 2022. Past, present and future of mobile financial services: A critique, review and future agenda, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 46(6), pp. 2104-2127. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12855>

Haikal, E.K. et al., 2020. The role of supply chain strategy and affiliate marketing in increasing the demand for ecommerce-Social media POV, *International Journal of Supply Chain Management*, 9(1), pp. 832-844.

Hanafizadeh, P., Keating, B.W. and Khedmatgozar, H.R., 2014. A systematic review of Internet banking adoption, *Telematics and Informatics*, 31, pp. 492-510. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2013.04.003>

Haq, Z.U., 2012. Affiliate marketing programs: A study of consumer attitude towards affiliate marketing programs among Indian users, *International Journal of Research Studies in Management*, 1(1), pp. 127-137. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrsm.2012.v1i1.84>

Harris, T.A., 2008. Untangling the New Rules for Affiliate Marketing, *Bank Marketing*, 40(3), p. 28.

Hemingway, P. and Brereton, N., 2009. What is a systematic review?, *International Journal of Number Theory*, pp. 1-8. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1142/S1793042112501047>

Hoffman, D.L. and Novak, T.P., 2000. How to acquire customers on the Web, *Harvard Business Review*, 78(3), pp. 179-188, 218.

Hossan, F. and Ahammad, I., 2013. Affiliate Marketing: The Case of Online Content Providers in Bangladesh, *World Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(2), pp. 103-113.

Houghton, S., Moss, M. and Casey, E., 2020. Affiliate marketing of sports betting – a cause for concern?, *International Gambling Studies* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14459795.2020.1718737>

Ivkovic, M. and Milanov, D., 2010. Affiliate internet marketing: Concept and application analysis, in *ICEMT 2010-2010 International Conference on Education and Management Technology, Proceedings*, pp. 319-323. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICEMT.2010.5657647>

Iwashita, M. and Tanimoto, S., 2016. "Highly secure transaction system for affiliate marketing", in *2016 IEEE 5th Global Conference on Consumer Electronics, GCCE 2016*, pp. 1-3. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1109/GCCE.2016.7800492>

Jin, R., Yuan, H. and Chen, Q., 2009. Science Mapping Approach to Assisting the Review of Construction and Demolition Waste Management Research, *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 140, pp. 175-188.

Jurisova, V., 2013. Affiliate marketing in the context of online marketing, *Review of Applied Socio-Economic Research*. IGI Global, pp. 106-111.

Kaur, J. and Wadera, D., 2018. "Affiliate marketing strategy of Amazon India", in S. Singh (ed.) *Driving Traffic and Customer Activity Through Affiliate Marketing*, pp. 33-50. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-2656-8.ch003>

Kaur, T., 2018. "Amazon Associates: A Model of Affiliate Marketing", in S. Singh (ed.) *Driving Traffic and Customer Activity Through Affiliate Marketing*. IGI Global, pp. 51-63.

Kim, M. et al., 2018. Mobile financial services, financial inclusion, and development: A systematic review of academic literature, *Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*, 84(5), pp. 1-17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/isd2.12044>

Lee, M.D.P., 2008. A review of the theories of corporate social responsibility: Its evolutionary path and the road ahead, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 10(1), pp. 53-73. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2007.00226.x>

Libai, B., Biyalogorsky, E. and Gerstner, E., 2003. Setting referral fees in affiliate marketing, *Journal of Service Research*, 5(4), pp. 303-315. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670503251111>

M, V.S. et al., 2018. A Study on Customers' Satisfac tion on Affiliate Marketing in E-Commerce Business with reference to Chennai City, *International Journal of Research in Business Studies*, 3(1), pp. 83-90.

Malik, Z.K. and Connolly, T.M., 2012. "A New Personalized Approach in Affiliate Marketing", in *IADIS International Conference e-Society 2012*, pp. 235-255.

Mallett, R. et al., 2012. The benefits and challenges of using systematic reviews in international development research, *Journal of Development Effectiveness*, 4(3), pp. 445-455. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19439342.2012.711342>

Mariussen, A., 2011. Rethinking marketing performance measurement: Justification and operationalisation of an alternative approach to affiliate marketing performance measurement in Tourism, *e-Review of Tourism Research*, 9(3), pp. 65-87.

Mariussen, A., Daniele, R. and Bowie, D., 2010. Unintended consequences in the evolution of affiliate marketing networks: A complexity approach, *Service Industries Journal*, 30(10), pp. 1707-1722. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02642060903580714>

Mathur, A., Narayanan, A. and Chetty, M., 2018. "Endorsements on social media: An empirical study of affiliate marketing disclosures on YouTube and pinterest", in *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3274388>

Mazurek, G. and Kucia, M., 2011. "Potential of Affiliate Marketing", in *International Conference Management of Technological Changes*, pp. 1-4.

Miller, J.B., 2010. *Method of and System for Crediting an Online Publisher in an Affiliate Marketing Relationship*. United States.

Mohamed, H.A.E.S. and Fahmy, T.M., 2013. What Factors Influence Consumers' Trust in Travel Affiliate Websites? An Exploratory Study, *Journal of Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Fayoum University*, 7(2), pp. 120-138.

Moher, D. et al., 2009. Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: the PRISMA statement, *Annals of internal medicine*, 151(4), pp. 264-269.

Molander, J.G., 2005. *The Evolution of Affiliate Marketing*. Available at: <http://affiliatetip.com/news/>

Narang, R. and Trivedi, P., 2018. "Affiliate Marketing: Experiences of Different Companies", in S. Singh (ed.) *Driving Traffic and Customer Activity Through Affiliate Marketing*. IGI Global, pp. 11-32.

Natarina, R.A.E. and Bangun, C.R.A., 2019. The Use of Affiliate Marketing in Improving Pegipegi Sales, *Jurnal The Messenger*, 11(2), pp. 157-167. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.26623/themessenger.v11i2.1210>

Newton, S. and Ojo, M., 2018. "Driving Traffic and Customer Activity Through Affiliate Marketing: Understanding and Addressing the Differences Between Affiliate Marketing in the USA", in S. Singh (ed.) *Driving traffic and customer activity through affiliate marketing*. IGI Global, pp. 101-112.

Olbrich, R., Bormann, P.M. and Hundt, M., 2019. Analyzing the click path of affiliate-marketing campaigns: Interacting effects of affiliates' design parameters with Merchants' search-engine advertising, *Journal of Advertising Research*, 59(3), pp. 342-356. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-2018-043>

Olbrich, R., Schultz, C.D. and Bormann, P.M., 2019. The effect of social media and advertising activities on affiliate marketing, *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, 13(1), pp. 47-72. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJIMA.2019.097896>

Patrick, Z. and Hee, O.C., 2021. Affiliate marketing in SMEs: The moderating effect of developmental culture, *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 29(2), pp. 1249-1271. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.29.2.27>

Paul, J. and Feliciano-Cestero, M.M., 2021. Five decades of research on foreign direct investment by MNEs: An overview and research agenda, *Journal of Business Research*, 124, pp. 800-812.

Peng, M.W. and Zhou, J.Q., 2006. Most cited articles and authors in global strategy research, *Journal of International Management*, 12(4), pp. 490-508. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2006.04.001>

Prabhu, S. and Satpathy, T., 2015. Affiliate Marketing's Future in India, *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*, 8(S4), pp. 278-282. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17485/ijst/2015/v8i>

Prussakov, E., 2007. A practical guide to affiliate marketing, *Safford, VA: AM Navigator LL* [Preprint].

Rodríguez Vázquez, C. et al., 2016. Application of technology of information and communication in the business world: The value of affiliate marketing, *Espacios*, 37.

Senivongse, C., Bennet, A. and Mariano, S., 2017. Utilizing a systematic literature review to develop an integrated framework for information and knowledge management systems, *VINE Journal of Information and Knowledge Management Systems*, 47(2), pp. 250-264.

Shrimpling, M., 2012. OFT extracts undertakings from affiliate marketer MoreNiche, *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice*, 14(1), pp. 71-72. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/dddmp.2012.19>

Shukla, P., Vyas, P.H. and Shastri, H., 2018. "Investigating the mechanics of affiliate marketing through digital content marketing: A key for driving traffic and customer activity", in S. Singh (ed.) *Driving Traffic and Customer Activity Through Affiliate Marketing*. IGI Global, pp. 113-127. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-2656-8.ch008>

Siddaway, A., 2014. What is a systematic literature review and how do I do one, *University of Sterling*, pp. 1-13.

Singh, S., 2018. "Affiliate Marketing and Customer Satisfaction", in S. Singh (ed.) *Driving Traffic and Customer Activity Through Affiliate Marketing*. IGI Global, pp. 1-10.

Singhal, K. and Anand, A., 2021. "Analysis of YouTube Channel Analytics and Affiliate Marketing with Operating System", in G.S. Hura (ed.) *Advances in Communication and Computational Technology*. Springer, pp. 1527-1537. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-5341-7_117>

Slivar, I., 2008. Tourist affiliate program while using online booking system with possibility of entering B2B code, *Turizam*, 12, pp. 46-52. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5937/turizam0812046s>

Snyder, P. and Kanich, C., 2016. Characterizing fraud and its ramifications in affiliate marketing networks, *Journal of Cybersecurity*, 2(1), pp. 71-81. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cybsec/tyw006>

Suresh, V. et al., 2018. A study on impact of an affiliate marketing in e-business for consumers' perspective, *International Journal of Engineering and Technology*, 10(2), pp. 471-475. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.21817/ijet/2018/v10i2/181002050>

Suryanarayana, S.A., Sarne, D. and Kraus, S., 2019. "Information disclosure and partner management in affiliate marketing", in *First International Conference on Distributed Artificial Intelligence*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3356464.3357703>

Suryanarayana, S.A., Sarne, D. and Kraus, S., 2021. Information Design in Affiliate Marketing, *Autonomous Agents and Multi-Agent Systems*, 35(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10458-021-09509-7>

Tranfield, D., Denyer, D. and Smart, P., 2003. Towards a Methodology for Developing Evidence-Informed Management Knowledge by Means of Systematic Review, *British Journal of Management*, 14(3), pp. 207-222. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.00375>

Wilson, S., 2009. Affiliate Marketing: Affiliate viewpoint, *New Media Age*, pp. 1-2.

Xu, L. Da, Xu, E.L. and Li, L., 2018. Industry 4.0: State of the art and future trends, *International Journal of Production Research*, 56(8), pp. 2941-2962. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207543.2018.1444806>