

Exploring Student Experiences in Developing Digital Entrepreneurship through the Shopee Affiliate Programme

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore students' experiences in developing digital entrepreneurship through the Shopee Affiliate programme. This qualitative approach uses a case study method involving two active students who are users of the Shopee Affiliate programme. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and analysed using thematic analysis techniques. The results of the study: first, students' motivation to join this programme is driven by the desire to gain financial independence as well as practical experience in digital business; second, students develop creative promotion strategies and personal branding through social media, which strengthens their communication skills, digital literacy, and creativity; third, involvement in the affiliate programme fosters entrepreneurial values such as initiative, responsibility, and the ability to adapt to technological developments. Overall, the research results confirm that Shopee Affiliate is not merely a platform for earning additional income, but also serves as an effective experience-based learning medium in shaping the character and digitalpreneur competencies among students.

Keywords: digitalpreneurs, digital entrepreneurship, experiential learning, shopee affiliate

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has given rise to new business models that are revolutionising the way people do business. One such innovative new business model is affiliate marketing, where individuals can promote products through affiliate links and earn commissions on every transaction that occurs (Marianingsih et al., 2025). In Indonesia, affiliate programmes such as Shopee Affiliate have become popular among students as a way to earn additional income through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (Sissy et al., 2023). This phenomenon shows that digital entrepreneurship is not only limited to those with large capital, but is also accessible to individuals from diverse backgrounds (Pratesa et al., 2025).

Student involvement in the Shopee Affiliate programme reflects the growing spirit of economic independence and creativity that utilises digital technology. Students are faced with the challenge of developing digital marketing strategies, both through personal branding techniques and effective communication to reach audiences (Setiawan et al., 2025). In this case, some students use affiliate marketing as a source of additional income, while others see it only as a side activity. Research by Irianto et al. (2022) highlights the importance of open, practice-based entrepreneurship learning programmes to enhance students' understanding of how to do business in a digital context.

However, there are still variations in students' experiences with this programme. It has been noted that not all students have the same understanding of affiliate marketing strategies and implementation (Andrianata et al., 2025). Several studies show that more structured digital entrepreneurship learning is rarely researched, especially in the Indonesian context (Rezvi et al., 2025). Therefore, it is important to analyse in depth the motivations, strategies, and learning gained by students from their participation in the Shopee Affiliate programme (Rofifah et al., 2025). This research is expected to provide a comprehensive overview that can be used to develop entrepreneurship curricula in higher education, enabling students to adapt quickly to the challenges and opportunities in the digital market.

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The Shopee Affiliate Programme also serves as a relevant learning medium, where students not only learn about marketing strategies but are also trained in managing their own digital businesses, which can stimulate their entrepreneurial skills (Tedjomurti and Mutiah, 2025). The results of various studies show that effective training and guidance in the use of digital platforms will greatly help in improving students' digital marketing skills, as well as providing them with practical experience that can be applied in the real world (ТАРАНИЧ and Pelekhtskiy, 2023). Meanwhile, the role of technology in enhancing the competitiveness of student businesses is also an important focus, especially in the Society 5.0 era which prioritises connectivity and digital interaction (Hastuti et al., 2025).

Previous research shows that student engagement in social media, especially in the context of digital marketing, contributes significantly to increasing entrepreneurial interest and developing digital skills (Agusni and Nuringsih, 2024). However, studies on students' specific experiences in implementing the Shopee Affiliate programme are still limited, especially in Indonesia. Although many studies have highlighted the importance of utilising social media to promote products and branding, few have explored how students' experiences in this context can shape their entrepreneurial orientation (Sa'adah et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important to understand their experiences in utilising this programme to learn and innovate in digital marketing relevant to the needs of the Industry 4.0 era.

Through this research, the focus will be directed at exploring students' experiences in running the Shopee Affiliate programme, looking at the promotional strategies they choose, and the entrepreneurial values formed from their involvement in these affiliate activities. The research questions asked include: what are students' experiences in running the Shopee Affiliate programme as a form of digital entrepreneurship? What strategies do students use to promote products and build personal branding? What entrepreneurial values are formed from student involvement in digital affiliate activities? By exploring these questions, it is hoped that deeper insights can be gained into the process of digital experience-based entrepreneurship education and the relevance of experiential learning theory in the context of student entrepreneurship. The results of this study are expected to enrich the literature on experience-based entrepreneurship education, provide practical benefits for educational institutions in designing more applicable curricula, and inspire students to develop innovative and independent digitalpreneur potential. In addition, for future researchers, these results can be the basis for developing research on digital entrepreneurship education models that are adaptive to technological advances and the dynamics of the creative economy in the modern era.

2. Research Method

This qualitative research uses a case study design to explore students' experiences in developing digital entrepreneurship through the Shopee Affiliate programme. A qualitative approach was chosen due to its in-depth nature and focus on understanding the subjective meanings, motivations, and learning dynamics of participants in a real-world context. Furthermore, this approach allows researchers to explore the nuances and complexities of students' personal experiences as digital entrepreneurs, which cannot be achieved through quantitative methods.

The case study design is used to examine specific phenomena that occur in individuals or small groups in a particular context. In this study, the main focus is on the digital entrepreneurship practices carried out by students through their participation in the Shopee Affiliate programme. Thus, researchers can describe in detail the dynamics and experiences of students in carrying out their roles as digital marketers. Case studies as a methodology support a deep understanding of the context and conditions that influence student behaviour.

The research subjects consisted of two active students who had participated in the Shopee Affiliate programme for at least three months. They were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that the participants had experience relevant to the research objectives. This research was conducted at the Al-Fatihah Islamic Institute in Bojonegoro, focusing on students who had an interest and involvement in digital entrepreneurship practices.

Data was collected through a combination of in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation to obtain a comprehensive perspective. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the experiences, motivations, and strategies applied by students in the Shopee Affiliate programme. Observations took place during the participants' digital activities, including how they promoted products and interacted with audiences on social media. Meanwhile, documentation such as screenshots of social media posts and proof of affiliate commissions supported the data obtained. Source and method triangulation procedures were applied to enhance data credibility.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach following the steps formulated by Braun and Clarke (2023). The process included familiarisation with the data, initial coding, identification of main themes, review of themes, and compilation of descriptive narratives based on research findings. The themes to be explored included student motivation, digital marketing strategies, challenges faced, and entrepreneurial lessons learned from their experiences.

This study applied the four criteria of trustworthiness described by Lincoln and Guba (Atinga et al., 2025). Credibility was achieved through triangulation of sources and methods, as well as member checking. Transferability was obtained by providing detailed contextual descriptions. Dependability was maintained by documenting the entire research process, and confirmability was achieved through the researcher's reflection on potential biases that might arise during the study.

3. Result and Discussion

This study involved two students who actively participated in the Shopee Affiliate programme, namely NNN and AAA. Based on the analysis of their activity reports, reflections, and evaluations, thematic findings were obtained that describe the process of digital entrepreneurship learning among students through direct experience in online affiliate activities. The analysis was conducted by identifying three main themes, namely: (1) motivation and orientation towards digital entrepreneurship, (2) creative strategies in content production and promotion, and (3) learning and reflection on entrepreneurial values.

Motivation and Orientation towards Digital Entrepreneurship

Both participants in the Shopee Affiliate programme demonstrated strong motivation to develop financial independence and gain real experience in digital business. In this context, both identified the affiliate programme as a learning tool that allows them to understand marketing practices without requiring large capital. NNN mentioned that these activities are 'a safe way to learn business without having to bear losses,' expressing a positive attitude towards low risk in the context of entrepreneurial learning, while AAA focused on developing promotional skills and understanding online consumer behaviour. This view supports findings that engagement in practical activities such as affiliate programmes can shape positive entrepreneurial attitudes among young people (Arilla et al., 2023; Basry et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2021).

Although significant financial results have not yet been achieved, the exploratory motivation of these participants highlights a digital entrepreneurial learning orientation. This is in line with Liu's (2022) view that exploratory motivation is fundamental in fostering the spirit of young entrepreneurs through active involvement in technology-based economic practices. In an era where technology adoption is crucial, there is growing recognition of the importance of digital skills and entrepreneurial attitudes in achieving business success (Çağa et al., 2024).

Furthermore, research shows that practice-based entrepreneurship education, such as affiliate programmes, can improve entrepreneurial skills among young individuals, promote creativity, and build the confidence needed to run a business (Basry et al., 2024). Thus, this approach serves as a means to not only equip participants with technical skills but also build the character and entrepreneurial attitudes necessary to adapt to modern business challenges.

By adopting an experience-based learning approach, there is a deeper understanding of the risks and rewards in the business world, which in turn can strengthen the intention and courage to become an entrepreneur in the future. Therefore, programmes such as Shopee Affiliate not only act as a portal for channelling the desire to learn but also as a stimulus for the development of a sustainable entrepreneurial spirit among the younger generation (Aliano et al., 2024).

Creative Strategies in Content Production and Promotion

During the implementation phase of the product promotion programme through social media, both students, NNN and AAA, utilised platforms such as TikTok and Instagram to reach a wider audience and introduce products in creative ways. NNN chose to create engaging visual content using Canva to promote fashion and beauty products, while AAA focused more on varying video formats, such as OOTD (Outfit of the Day), storytelling, and skincare reviews. NNN's more routine approach appeared to be less effective than AAA's strategy, which succeeded in obtaining more affiliate link clicks, even though both still faced challenges in the form of reduced reach due to TikTok's ever-changing algorithm (Kennedy et al., 2022). Here are some examples of AAA and NNN content.

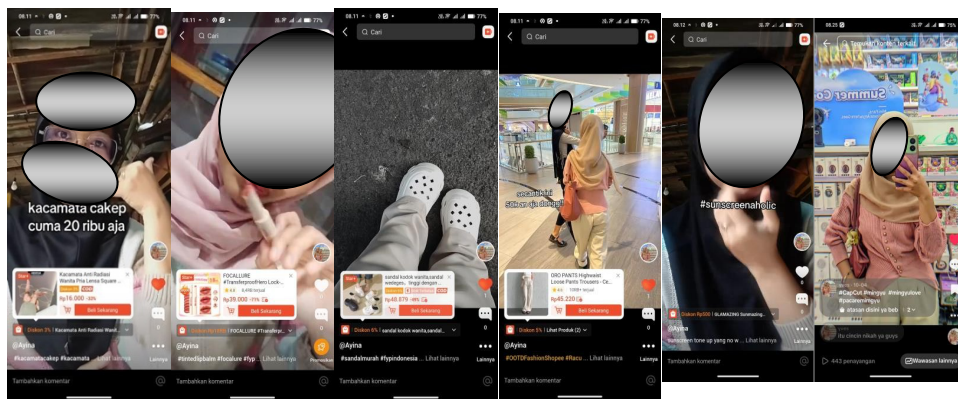


Figure 1. The examples of AAA content

Based on Figure 1, Student **AAA** has completed the Shopee Affiliate project by producing six pieces of diverse product promotion content. The first piece features fashion eyewear with an emphasis on lightweight frames that suit a variety of styles, while the second piece focuses on lipsticks, highlighting the colour, texture, and durability of the products through informative swatches. In the third piece of content, AAA promoted comfortable and practical casual sandals for daily activities. Psychological comfort can be

influenced by societal and emotional factors, such as the desire for fashionable yet comfortable footwear (Price et al., 2021). Followed by the fourth piece, which reviewed trendy trousers with explanations about the material, cut, and suitability for various outfits. The fifth piece of content promotes a light-textured sunscreen with education on the importance of protecting the skin from UV rays, while the sixth piece introduces casual-elegant women's tops, visually demonstrating their comfort and versatility. In product marketing, communicating comfort is a crucial element, especially for everyday footwear, where comfort can be a deciding factor for active consumers (Albinfalah et al., 2025). Through all of this content, AAA demonstrates its ability to create promotional material that is informative, persuasive, and relevant to the characteristics of Shopee Affiliate's audience. Here are some examples of NNN content.

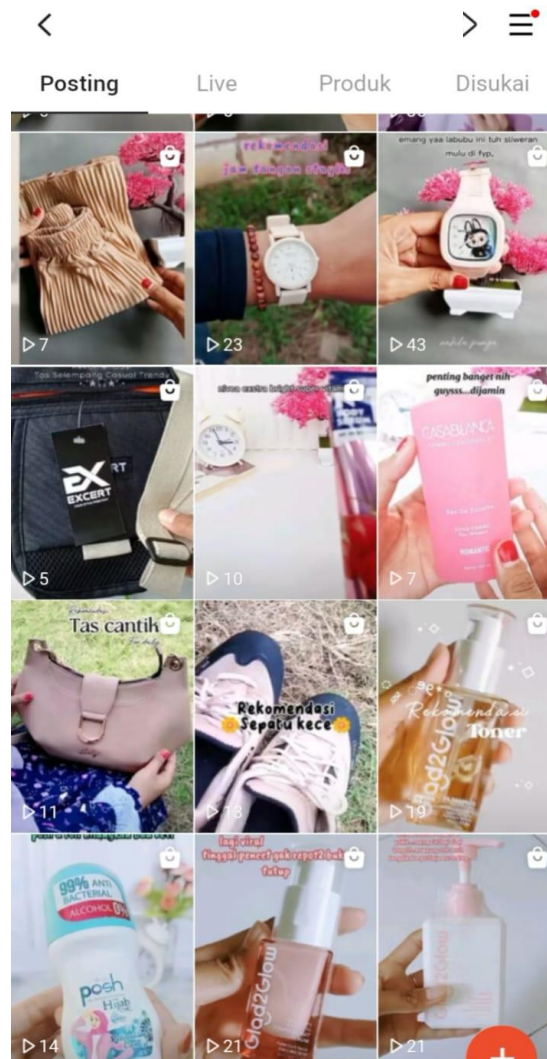


Figure 2. The examples of NNN content

Based on Figure 2, student NNN has completed the Shopee Affiliate project by producing diverse and informative product content. For products such as women's skirts, NNN has successfully described the design, materials, and flexibility, which are important for attracting consumers with various styles of dress. Research indicates that good product design has a strong impact on consumer purchasing decisions, as it influences the aesthetic and functional assessment of the product (Paramita et al., 2023). Watch promotions with detailed visuals that emphasise a modern look and elegant impression demonstrate a focus on visual appeal, which is an important factor in the fashion industry. Research shows that an attractive appearance can increase user interaction and interest in the product (Paramita et al., 2023). By using clear and appealing visuals, NNN not only showcases the physical characteristics of the watch but also creates a positive image in the minds of consumers. The emphasis on comfort, material quality, and suitability for everyday activities demonstrates a deep understanding of consumer needs. Previous studies indicate that products offering tangible benefits, such as comfort, are more likely to attract consumers seeking products for everyday use (Spytska, 2024). Throughout the content about perfume, attention to aroma, freshness, and durability is also crucial. Aroma is one of the key factors in purchasing decisions for cosmetics and everyday items, so a complete and appealing description can help potential buyers feel

more confident about the product being offered. Therefore, the content produced by NNN demonstrates its ability to convey product information in an informative and persuasive manner in line with Shopee Affiliate's marketing objectives, which focus on attracting attention and building interest among potential buyers.

AAA's success in attracting more interactions highlights the importance of content innovation in digital marketing, as well as flexibility in adapting communication styles to evolving trends on social media. Research shows that the effectiveness of promotional strategies on social media is highly dependent on their ability to adapt to algorithm changes and understand consumer behaviour (Fan, 2023). Meanwhile, the lack of significant interaction with NNN content reflects a lack of content innovation that can attract the audience's attention amid the abundance of competing information on the platform (Xu, 2024).

In facing similar obstacles, both NNN and AAA demonstrated adaptive efforts by changing their posting times, increasing interaction in the comments, and diversifying their content. This reflects their critical thinking skills and awareness of algorithmic dynamics in digital marketing. Torres et al. (2025) argue that the success of digital entrepreneurs is highly dependent on content innovation and effective social media management. This is relevant in the context of both students, demonstrating that understanding good digital marketing strategies, including social media management and adaptability, is key to achieving success in affiliate and digital marketing (Ibrahim and Aljarah, 2023).

The application of social media as a promotional tool shows great potential, especially in understanding and responding to the ever-changing digital environment, which is an important factor for the success of their marketing strategies in the future. By responding to these challenges creatively, the two students can develop their skills in digital marketing and explore the potential of affiliate marketing more effectively in the future (Garg and Kumar, 2021).

When reviewing the number of followers on social media accounts used to carry out the Shopee Affiliate project, student **NNN** had **53 followers**, while student **AAA** had **10 followers**. This difference in the number of followers indicates that NNN's audience reach is relatively wider than AAA's, so the potential exposure of content and opportunities for interaction on each NNN post tends to be higher. Nevertheless, both are still able to produce promotional content that complies with the assignment requirements and strive to optimally utilise their respective follower reach in affiliate marketing activities. The following are profile pictures of the AAA and NNN accounts showing the number of followers.

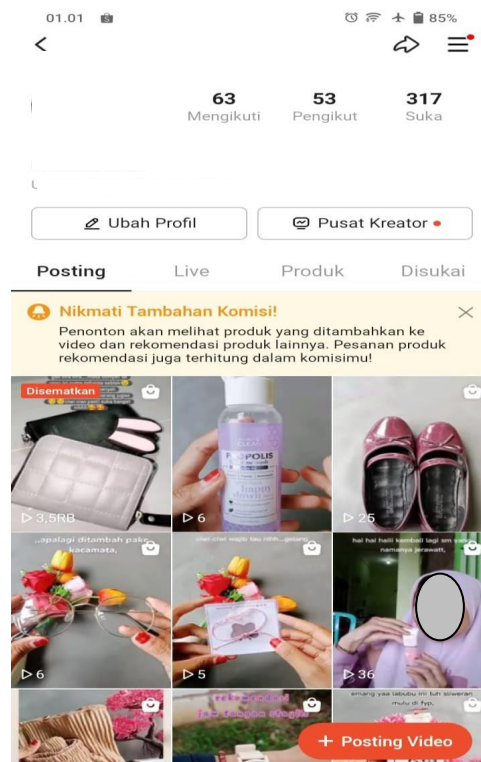


Figure 3. NNN's Shopee account

The Shopee account belonging to student NNN, which has been followed by 53 people, is a clear indicator of audience interest and engagement with the content produced. This achievement is the result of NNN's active and consistent creation and sharing of promotional content, which has significantly increased the account's visibility and attracted more users to follow it (Zniva et al., 2023). The quality of content created, especially when it is relevant and engaging, can strengthen one's presence on social media platforms, which is important for increasing engagement levels (Leung et al., 2022).

Active promotion of content not only contributes to an increase in the number of followers but also to a higher level of interaction with the audience. Marketing strategies that utilise content creators or influencers on social media have been proven to increase brand awareness and encourage user

engagement through content that is relevant and aligned with their interests (Dauhan and Langi, 2024). Therefore, genuine and engaged followers are crucial, as their involvement can extend the reach of information to a wider social network (Boulianne and Larsson, 2021).

In addition, consistency in sharing informative and engaging promotional content plays an important role in building stronger relationships with followers. When audiences feel connected to the content presented, they are more likely to engage in activities such as liking, commenting, and sharing, all of which contribute to greater visibility on the platform (Cao et al., 2021). Research shows that content with high visual appeal and relevance not only attracts attention, but also encourages the audience to interact further, leading to more positive purchasing decisions (Leung et al., 2022).

Greater user involvement in the affiliate marketing activities carried out by NNN is not only beneficial for expanding social networks, but also increases the chances of success for ongoing marketing projects. This is clearly evident in the practice of utilising social media as a tool for interacting with consumers and promoting products, where authentic interactions can significantly influence purchasing decisions (Thakur et al., 2023). Therefore, the success of the Shopee NNN account in attracting and retaining followers reflects an effective content strategy that focuses on consistency, relevance, and engaging delivery. This approach is in line with contemporary marketing trends, where the use of social media and influencers has proven to be key in expanding reach and increasing audience engagement.

Unlike the account belonging to student NNN, the account belonging to student AAA has only gained 10 followers. This could be because student AAA does not create content regularly and on a schedule. Here is student AAA's account.

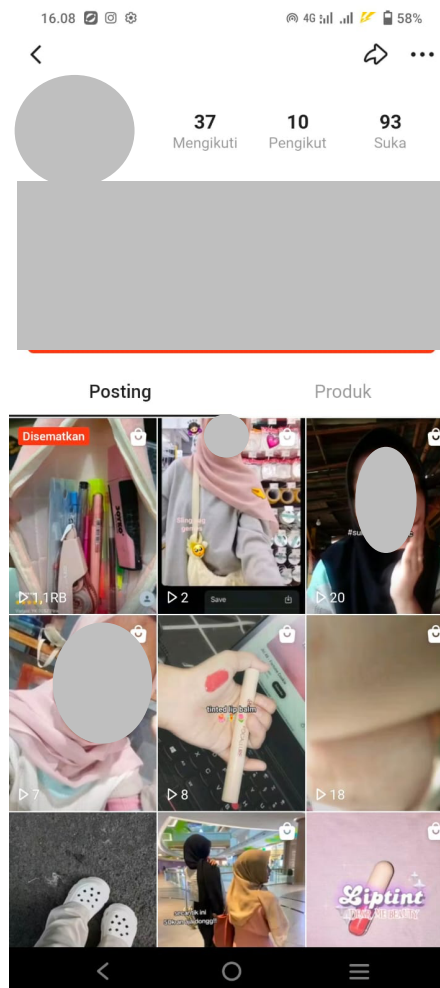


Figure 4. AAA's Shopee account

The Shopee account belonging to student AAA, which only has 10 followers, can be attributed to a lack of consistency in content creation. Research shows that the frequency and regularity of posts greatly influence account growth on social media, including e-commerce platforms such as Shopee. When content is posted regularly, it helps increase visibility and attract a larger audience (Suryawirawan et al., 2023). Students who do not upload content regularly tend to have difficulty building a loyal audience, because audiences need to feel that they are getting value from the content produced (Molyo et al., 2021).

Success in attracting followers also depends heavily on the type of content shared. Social media, including Shopee, provides opportunities for users to interact through content that is interesting,

innovative, and informative. Without content development that is in line with the audience's interests, it will be difficult for accounts to attract the attention of other users. Well-packaged and informative content can increase engagement, which in turn can convert followers into loyal customers (Krowinska, 2023).

The lack of a schedule for content uploads also affects the audience's perception of the account's credibility. Research shows that accounts that regularly update their content tend to be considered more professional and trustworthy, making the audience feel more comfortable following and interacting with them (Suryawirawan et al., 2023). In addition, a lack of interaction on the part of the account owner, such as responding to comments or interacting with followers, can reduce the audience's interest in further engagement with the content offered (Molyo et al., 2021).

Therefore, to increase the number of followers, it is necessary to take strategic steps that involve increasing the frequency and consistency of creating interesting and relevant content. This includes uploading content regularly, increasing interaction with viewers by responding to comments, and identifying and understanding the characteristics of their target audience. By doing so, not only will the number of followers increase, but engagement and the potential to convert followers into customers will also be much greater.

Entrepreneurial Learning and Development in the Digital Age

Both participants in the Shopee Affiliate programme demonstrated a meaningful learning process related to the development of entrepreneurial values such as creativity, consistency, responsibility, and adaptability. Through direct experience in creating and publishing content, students learned to manage time effectively, understand audience preferences, and measure the effectiveness of marketing strategies using analytical data from the Shopee Affiliate dashboard (Fahrurrozi, 2024). This experience contributed significantly to the formation of digitalpreneur character, which will be important for their future success.

AAA students, for example, demonstrate reflective abilities by planning more engaging content such as skincare routines and product bundles. This reflects a deep orientation towards self-improvement, where they continuously seek ways to enhance the quality of the content they produce (Doty et al., 2022). NNN, on the other hand, identified the need to enrich content types by using unboxing and testimonial formats, demonstrating an awareness of the importance of creativity as a core value in digital entrepreneurship. Through this experience, they not only learned about marketing but also developed a proactive attitude in facing challenges and uncertainties in the digital market (Thanasi-Boçe, 2020).

These findings align with the concept of experiential learning stated by Kolb (2013), which emphasises that entrepreneurial learning becomes more meaningful when generated through direct experience, reflection, and adaptive action to real situations. Through this process, students not only gain theoretical knowledge but also the practical skills needed to operate in a digital business environment (Chen, 2024). The emphasis on direct experience and reflection as part of this learning supports the development of creativity and innovation, which are critical for success in entrepreneurship (Aysi et al., 2024).

Overall, participant engagement in Shopee Affiliate shows that, especially for the younger generation, practical experience in a business context can be a strong foundation for developing entrepreneurial values and professional skills relevant to rapid technological developments and market dynamics. Therefore, it is important for educational programmes to continue integrating experience-based learning approaches into their entrepreneurship curricula to facilitate the growth and development of students as aspiring entrepreneurs in the digital age (Rahmawati et al., 2023).

4. Conclusion

This study aims to explore students' experiences in developing digital entrepreneurship through the Shopee Affiliate programme. Based on the results of thematic analysis of two participants, three main findings were found that are interrelated and form a complete understanding of the digital entrepreneurship learning process among students. The main motivation for students to join this programme is the desire to gain financial independence as well as direct experience in digital business practices. Through this programme, students have the opportunity to experiment in the world of entrepreneurship without having to spend a lot of capital, making these activities an applicable learning tool that is relevant to current developments in the digital economy.

In addition, students develop creative strategies in product promotion and build personal branding on various social media platforms. The ability to create interesting content, manage visual communication, and understand digital consumer behaviour are important aspects that contribute to increased audience engagement and sales conversions. This process fosters strong communication, creativity, and digital literacy skills that prepare students to face the challenges of the modern workplace.

Furthermore, involvement in the affiliate programme has an impact on strengthening entrepreneurial values such as initiative, responsibility, consistency, and the ability to adapt to changes in technology and the market. Through this hands-on experience, students not only learn the technical aspects of digital marketing but also develop an innovative and solution-oriented entrepreneurial mindset. Overall, the research findings indicate that the Shopee Affiliate programme plays a significant role as an experiential learning platform, offering not only economic opportunities but also shaping the character and digital entrepreneurial competencies of students.

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