

The Capabilities of Influencer Marketing and Content Marketing in the Magelang Tourism Industry on Customer Engagement with Viral Marketing as an Intervening Variable in the 5.0 Era

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ABSTRACT

The rapid increase in TikTok users until 2025 has encouraged tourism industry players in Magelang Regency to adopt more interactive and viral communication strategies to build closeness with consumers. This study aims to examine the effect of influencer marketing and content marketing on customer engagement with viral marketing as a mediating variable in the tourism industry in Magelang Regency. This study uses quantitative methods and PLS-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Data were collected through questionnaires from 230 tourists in five tourist destinations in Magelang Regency, which were selected using convenience sampling. The analysis was conducted using PLS software to confirm the suitability of the empirical model and the relationship between the research variables. The results show that both digital marketing strategies have a positive and significant effect on customer engagement, both directly and through viral marketing. Viral marketing has been proven to be a mediator that strengthens the relationship between digital marketing strategies and customer engagement. The research model explains 61% of the variability in customer engagement, confirming that content virality is a strategic mechanism in enhancing the effectiveness of digital marketing in the 5.0 era. These findings imply that optimizing influencer collaboration and content quality is crucial for driving sustainable tourist engagement.

ABSTRAK

Pesatnya peningkatan pengguna TikTok hingga tahun 2025 mendorong pelaku industri pariwisata di Kabupaten Magelang untuk mengadopsi strategi komunikasi yang lebih interaktif dan viral guna membangun kedekatan dengan konsumen. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji pengaruh pemasaran *influencer* dan pemasaran konten terhadap keterlibatan pelanggan dengan pemasaran viral sebagai variabel mediasi pada industri pariwisata Kabupaten Magelang. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kuantitatif dan *Structural Equation Modeling* (SEM) berbasis PLS. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dari 230 wisatawan di lima destinasi wisata Kabupaten Magelang yang dipilih menggunakan teknik *convenience sampling*. Analisis dilakukan menggunakan perangkat lunak PLS untuk mengonfirmasi kesesuaian model empiris serta hubungan antarvariabel penelitian. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa kedua strategi pemasaran digital tersebut berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap keterlibatan pelanggan, baik secara langsung maupun melalui pemasaran viral. Pemasaran viral terbukti menjadi mediator yang memperkuat hubungan antara strategi pemasaran digital dan keterlibatan pelanggan. Model penelitian menjelaskan 61% variabilitas keterlibatan pelanggan, menegaskan bahwa viralitas konten merupakan mekanisme strategis dalam meningkatkan efektivitas pemasaran digital di era 5.0. Temuan ini memberikan implikasi bahwa optimalisasi kolaborasi *influencer* dan kualitas konten sangat penting untuk mendorong *engagement* wisatawan secara berkelanjutan.

1. Introduction

A report by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) found that Indonesia's economic growth in the second quarter of 2021 declined by 5.67%. This decline was due to the large number of workers who were laid off as a result of the impact of Covid-19 [1]. During the pandemic, the government required all community activities to be carried out from home. This gave rise to a new lifestyle

of working, studying, and worshipping from home, known as *Work from Home* (WFH). Undeniably, since the Covid-19 pandemic, the WFH policy has been in place and is expected to continue until 2025.

This has led to a drastic increase in internet usage, especially social media [2]. A survey by Hootsuite (We Are Social) found that throughout 2024, there were 143 million YouTube users, 122 million WhatsApp users,

and 108 million TikTok users. This figure has increased by 8.9% from 2024. Of the three top social media platforms, TikTok is the most popular platform in the world, even in Indonesia [3]. However, in reality, other social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook still dominate Indonesian society. Based on databoks.katadata.co.id, there are more than 1.16 billion TikTok users worldwide [4]. Hootsuite also states that the growth of TikTok users has been significant over the last three years, since the end of the Covid-19 pandemic. Currently, TikTok is not only used as a medium of entertainment, but also as a medium for running a business. Even large Indonesian companies have their own TikTok social media accounts to connect with consumers and potential consumers. In Indonesia, TikTok users reached 194.4 million as of July 2025, dominated by the 18-25 age group with 108 million users [5]. The popularity of TikTok has given rise to a modern business phenomenon that emphasizes creativity and soft skills, even creating a new job category, namely influencer [6].

The trend of influencer marketing has given rise to the assumption that public demand has a major influence on business competition through online media. Based on a survey conducted by Influencer Marketing Hub on 200 leading global brands, it was found that influencer marketing grew by 32% in 2023 [7]. On the other hand, it is estimated that 68% of marketers will increase their spending on influencer marketing in the next three years. Based on this data, influencer marketing can be said to be one of the trending marketing strategies sought after by many marketers, especially through the social media platform TikTok. Furthermore, the role of influencer marketing on TikTok is closely related to endorsement [8].

Influencer marketing also has an influence on customer engagement. Previous studies state that customer engagement leads to emotional attachment of consumers during their interaction with a particular brand [9], [10]. In this context, influencer marketing acts as a provider of connectivity and engagement between consumers and brands. On the other hand, customer engagement also involves various activities, including word of mouth, recommendations, and writing reviews about brands [11]. Moreover, customer engagement is a business effort to build and maintain relationships with customers in order to increase their interaction and closeness with the brand, product, or business being run [12].

Efforts to increase customer engagement can also be done through content marketing. Content marketing is created and used by marketers to promote their products or services and also build brands [13]. The goal is to help companies build relationships with potential customers, maintain customer loyalty, and increase sales. On the other hand, content marketing can also have a viral effect that can create a certain

phenomenon. Viral marketing campaigns are marketing strategies that utilize social media and social interaction to spread messages quickly [14].

In business, viral marketing can be an effective way to promote a brand, expand marketing reach, and increase brand awareness. Customers will find out what brands and products are being talked about by the public, thereby increasing brand awareness [15]. In the digital 5.0 era, promotion does not only rely on conventional advertising, but also interactive communication strategies and user-generated content. Influencer marketing has become an important strategy because influencers have the ability to influence the perceptions and behaviors of audiences through the trust and personal closeness they build on social media [16]. However, the impact of influencer marketing on customer engagement (such as interest, comments, content sharing, and tourist visits) does not always occur immediately. Often, this influence is amplified when influencer content goes viral, spreading widely on social media and reaching a larger audience. This makes viral marketing a mediating variable.

Furthermore, in the tourism industry, digital marketing strategies are key to attracting tourists. One of the dominant strategies used is content marketing, which is the delivery of promotional messages through photos, videos, articles, or social media posts that are interesting and valuable to the audience [17]. However, the effectiveness of content marketing does not only depend on the quality of the content, but also on how far the content spreads and influences other audiences.

This is where viral marketing plays a role as a mechanism for widespread dissemination of messages through digital social interactions, such as sharing, liking, commenting, and reposting [18]. In the tourism industry, which continues to grow in the digital 5.0 era, social media-based marketing strategies have become crucial. Two main strategies that are widely used are influencer marketing and content marketing, which can simultaneously create a strong impact on customer engagement through the mediating role of viral marketing [19]. Viral marketing acts as a mechanism for the rapid and widespread dissemination of marketing messages across various digital platforms. When influencer marketing and content marketing go hand in hand, they create synergy that increases the chances of content going viral. Through viral marketing, the impact of these two strategies becomes broader and deeper, thereby positively and sustainably increasing customer engagement in the digital 5.0 era [20].

The technological developments resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic are still being felt today and have had a major impact on various sectors, one of which is tourism. Business in the tourism sector has increased significantly since the Covid-19 pandemic was declared over. The community, which is dominated by

the 18-25 age group, has boosted the massive tourism business. The tourism industry in Magelang Regency has shown an increase since 2022. Data from the Magelang Regency Office states that there was a 23.7% increase in tourists in 2024, growing by 24.85% until July 2025. In addition, the increasing number of new tourist attractions also shows the enthusiasm of the community in improving the tourism industry [21]. Businesses in the tourism industry not only have an impact on the tourism sector, but are also able to improve the community's economy through culinary, cultural, arts, and crafts businesses, thereby fostering consumer confidence in a brand.

The increase in the number of TikTok social media users has become very attractive to businesses, supported by the emergence of interesting trends with all kinds of phenomena in the tourism sector. This condition is used to increase customer engagement, especially for marketers in promoting and selling their products. The problem formulation in this study is how the capabilities of influencer marketing, content marketing, and the effects of viral marketing can increase customer engagement in the tourism industry in Magelang Regency.

2. Research Method

This study uses a quantitative method with a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) to analyze the data. The PLS approach was chosen because of its ability to confirm theoretical models and test theory-based hypotheses, as well as to test the suitability of theoretical models with empirical data [22]. In this study, all tourists who had visited five tourist attractions managed by the Magelang Regency Tourism Office in the last month, totaling 230 people, were sampled using convenience sampling. The data collection process will be carried out through a questionnaire designed to measure variables relevant to this study. The collected data will then be analyzed using PLS software to test hypotheses and confirm the relationship between variables in the research model.

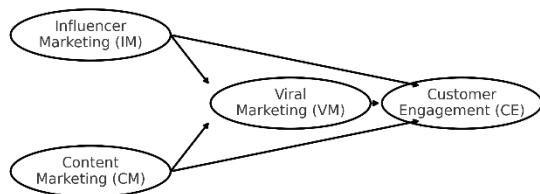


Figure 1. Research Model

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Outer Model Test

Table 1 presents the results of the construct reliability and validity assessment, showing that all constructs—

Content Marketing, Customer Engagement, and Influencer Marketing—exhibit a high level of reliability and validity. All constructs have Cronbach’s Alpha (CA) values above 0.90, indicating excellent internal consistency among the measurement items, which is further supported by high rho_A values (≥ 0.967). Additionally, the Composite Reliability (CR) values range from 0.974 to 0.978, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 and confirming strong construct reliability. In terms of convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs range from 0.882 to 0.898, which are well above the minimum requirement of 0.50. This indicates that each construct is able to explain a substantial proportion of the variance in its indicators. Overall, these findings confirm that the measurement model satisfies the criteria for both reliability and convergent validity. Therefore, the model is appropriate for further analysis in the structural model stage.

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

	CA	rho A	CR	AVE
Content Marketing	0.967	0.967	0.974	0.882
Customer Engagement	0.969	0.969	0.976	0.889
Influencer Marketing	0.972	0.972	0.978	0.898

3.1.2. R-Square (R²)

Table 2 presents the R-square and adjusted R-square values, which indicate the explanatory power of the structural model. The R-square value for Customer Engagement is 0.963 (adjusted R-square = 0.962), meaning that 96.3% of the variance in Customer Engagement can be explained by the independent variables in the model. Similarly, the R-square value for Viral Marketing is 0.953 (adjusted R-square = 0.953), indicating that 95.3% of its variance is explained by the predictors included in the model. These values are considered very high, suggesting that the model has strong explanatory power and a substantial ability to predict the endogenous constructs. The minimal difference between R-square and adjusted R-square values also indicates that the model is stable and not overfitted. Overall, these results confirm that the structural model is robust and provides a good fit for explaining the relationships among the variables.

Table 2. R Square

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Customer Engagement	0.963	0.962
Viral Marketing	0.953	0.953

3.1.3. Path Coefficient

Table 3 presents the results of the path coefficient analysis, showing the relationships among the variables in the structural model. All hypothesized paths have positive coefficients and are statistically significant, as indicated by t-statistics greater than 1.96 and p-values of 0.000. Content Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Customer Engagement ($\beta = 0.237$; $t = 4.001$) and Viral Marketing ($\beta = 0.406$; $t = 5.786$),

indicating that better content quality increases both engagement and the potential for content virality. Influencer Marketing also shows a stronger positive effect on Customer Engagement ($\beta = 0.385$; $t = 6.105$) and especially on Viral Marketing ($\beta = 0.578$; $t = 8.271$), suggesting that influencers play a major role in driving content dissemination. Furthermore, Viral Marketing has a significant positive effect on Customer Engagement ($\beta = 0.370$; $t = 6.163$), confirming its role in enhancing audience interaction. Among all

relationships, Influencer Marketing has the strongest effect on Viral Marketing, highlighting its dominant role in creating viral content. Overall, these results indicate that both Content Marketing and Influencer Marketing directly and indirectly (through Viral Marketing) contribute significantly to Customer Engagement. These relationships are further illustrated in the Figure 2, which provides a clearer visualization of the structural model and path coefficients.

Table 3. Path Coefficient

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
Content Marketing → Customer Engagement	0.237	0.240	0.059	4.001	0.000
Content Marketing → Viral Marketing	0.406	0.403	0.070	5.786	0.000
Influencer Marketing → Customer Engagement	0.385	0.384	0.063	6.105	0.000
Influencer Marketing → Viral Marketing	0.578	0.581	0.070	8.271	0.000
Viral Marketing → Customer Engagement	0.370	0.368	0.060	6.163	0.000

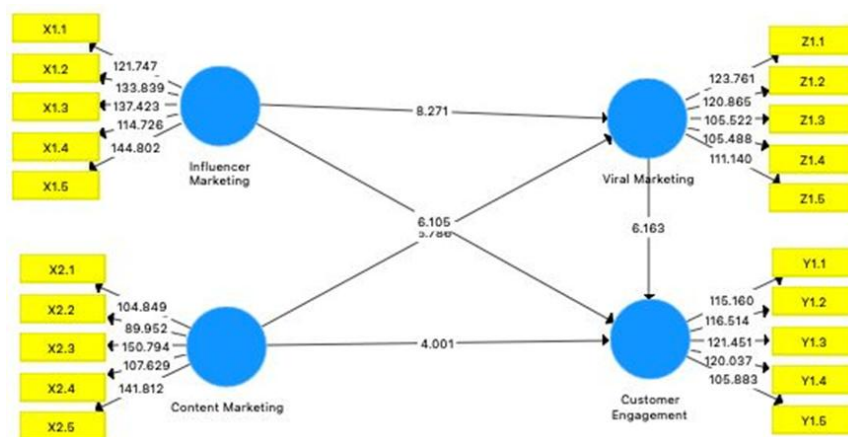


Figure 2. Path Coefficients

3.1.4. Indirect Effect

Table 4 presents the results of the indirect effect analysis, which examines the mediating role of Viral Marketing in the relationship between Content Marketing, Influencer Marketing, and Customer Engagement. The findings show that Content Marketing has a positive and significant indirect effect on Customer Engagement ($\beta = 0.150$; $t = 4.081$; $p = 0.000$), indicating that Viral Marketing successfully mediates this relationship. Similarly, Influencer Marketing also has a positive and significant indirect effect on Customer Engagement ($\beta = 0.214$; $t = 5.090$;

$p = 0.000$), confirming the mediating role of Viral Marketing. These results suggest that both Content Marketing and Influencer Marketing not only influence Customer Engagement directly but also indirectly by enhancing the potential for content to go viral. The significant indirect effects indicate that Viral Marketing functions as an important mechanism that amplifies the impact of both marketing strategies on audience engagement. Overall, this mediation effect highlights the importance of leveraging viral strategies to maximize the effectiveness of digital marketing efforts.

Table 4. Indirect Effect

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
Content Marketing → Customer Engagement	0.150	0.149	0.037	4.081	0.000
Content Marketing → Viral Marketing					
Influencer Marketing → Customer Engagement	0.214	0.213	0.042	5.090	0.000
Influencer Marketing → Viral Marketing					
Viral Marketing → Customer Engagement					

3.1.5. f Square (f²)

Table 5 presents the effect size (f²) values, which indicate the magnitude of the influence of exogenous

variables on endogenous variables in the model. Content Marketing (CM) has a small effect on Customer Engagement (CE) (f² = 0.084) and a medium

effect on Viral Marketing (VM) ($f^2 = 0.242$), suggesting that its influence is more substantial in driving content virality than direct engagement. Influencer Marketing (IM) shows a medium effect on Customer Engagement ($f^2 = 0.184$) and a large effect on Viral Marketing ($f^2 = 0.489$), indicating that it plays a dominant role, particularly in enhancing viral dissemination. Meanwhile, Viral Marketing has a medium effect on Customer Engagement ($f^2 = 0.173$), confirming its importance in strengthening audience interaction. Based on common thresholds (0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, 0.35 = large), these results show that Influencer Marketing is the strongest predictor in the model, especially for Viral Marketing. Overall, the findings suggest that while Content Marketing contributes meaningfully, Influencer Marketing and Viral Marketing have a more substantial impact on improving Customer Engagement.

Table 5. Effect Size (f^2)

	CM	CE	IM	VM
CM		0.084		0.242
CE				
IM		0.184		0.489
VM		0.173		

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. The Capabilities of Influencer Marketing on Customer Engagement

The results show that influencer marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement ($t = 6,105$ p value 0,000). This finding is consistent with previous research, which confirms that influencer interactions have a strong effect on audience engagement through parasocial interaction, credibility, and emotional closeness [8]. This proves that influencers who frequently review Borobudur, Ketep Pass, or Puthuk Situmbu play a major role in shaping tourists' interest and attachment to these destinations. This influence is direct, although moderate in strength, indicating that not all engagement is directly influenced by influencers; most occurs when their content goes viral.

Empirically, the results of this study support previous findings, which state that credible and authentic influencers are able to increase consumer engagement through content that is perceived as relevant and persuasive [23]. In addition, trust in influencers has a significant influence on audience engagement and positive attitudes towards brands [24]. In the context of tourism, customer engagement is an important indicator because customer engagement not only affects visitor interest but also the spread of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), which expands the reach of destination promotion.

These findings are also consistent with previous research, which found that influencer marketing can increase customer engagement through two-way

communication and emotional storytelling on social media [25]. Thus, influencers not only serve as a promotional medium but also as key actors in building the digital experience of tourists. In the realm of Society 5.0, this approach reflects human-centered marketing, where technology is used to strengthen social relationships and customer experiences. Using influencers as a promotional medium is effective because each influencer has a different way of promoting products through soft selling, this is expected to increase mass trust and increase brand equity [26].

The practical implication of these findings is that tourism destination managers in Magelang, particularly Borobudur, Ketep Pass, or Puthuk Situmbu, need to select influencers who are relevant to the character of the destination, have a high level of trust, and are able to convey authentic narratives. The right influencer marketing strategy will encourage sustainable customer engagement and strengthen the competitiveness of tourism destinations in the digital era.

3.2.2. The Capabilities of Content Marketing in Relation to Customer Engagement

Content marketing also has a significant influence on customer engagement ($t = 4,001$; p value 0,000). Content that is interesting, aesthetically pleasing, relevant, and informative provides emotional stimuli for tourists to interact (like, comment, share). This confirms the statement that quality content consistently drives digital engagement [11]. In the tourism industry of Magelang Regency, content in the form of panoramic videos of the sunrise at Puthuk Situmbu, the beauty of the fog at Silancur Highland, or the thrill of trekking at Kedung Kayang has been proven to increase curiosity and the urge to interact.

These findings are in line with previous research showing that content marketing has a positive effect on customer engagement in various industry contexts. Research has found that content marketing has a significant influence in increasing customer engagement on Instagram through the delivery of content that is interesting and relevant to the target audience [27]. Additionally, another study also reported that content marketing significantly increases customer engagement by showing that more than half of the variability in customer engagement can be explained by effective content marketing strategies on digital platforms [28].

Theoretically, these results are also supported by the concept of customer engagement as a result of active interaction between customers and content produced by brands or organizations. When the content presented is considered meaningful and relevant, consumers tend to show greater cognitive and behavioral engagement, such as discussing, sharing experiences, or giving recommendations to their social networks. This

reinforces previous findings, which state that well-managed marketing content can increase consumer attention and user engagement on digital platforms [29]. The influence of Interactive on Sales Increase has a positive and significant influence, this means that the more interactive the promotion carried out, the more consumers will be interested and try to explore our products which will ultimately lead to product purchases by consumers [30].

Practically, these findings suggest that tourism destination managers in Magelang need to develop content strategies that are not only informative but also interactive and personalized, so that they can significantly increase audience engagement. This strategy includes the use of visual storytelling, educational content about the destination, and content that invites active user participation, such as digital challenges and collaborations with content-consuming tourists. This approach is believed to strengthen the emotional connection between the audience and the destination brand, thereby influencing loyalty and long-term visitation behavior.

3.2.3. The Capabilities of Influencer Marketing in Viral Marketing

Findings show that influencer marketing has a very strong effect on viral marketing ($t = 8,271$; p value $0,000$). In the digital 5.0 era, influencers are the main drivers of content virality. Their credibility, delivery style, and originality have been proven to trigger the rapid spread of tourism content through TikTok, in line with the findings [14]. Influencer videos featuring hidden gems such as small waterfalls under Ketep Pass or sunset hunting moments in Silancur can go viral in just a matter of hours. Influencers are important actors in digital marketing strategies because they connect brands with large and relevant audiences. When highly credible influencers produce interesting and relatable content, it tends to generate an intense response from the audience in the form of likes, shares, comments, and reposts, which ultimately triggers viral dissemination. This phenomenon is also referred to as a modern form of word of mouth mediated by digital technology, for example, platform algorithms that prioritize interactive content so that it can create a viral effect in a short time [31].

These findings are consistent with several previous studies showing that the collaboration between influencer marketing and viral strategies can significantly expand marketing reach. In the context of social commerce such as TikTok Shop, influencer marketing and viral marketing together have a positive and significant influence on the effectiveness of digital marketing. In other words, influencers' capabilities not only generate awareness but also strengthen the spread of content, thereby increasing the likelihood of viral content emerging in the digital community. This also shows a direct relationship between the ability of

influencers to build marketing narratives and the viral potential of content on social networks, which is an important aspect that is increasingly relevant in the era of social media [32].

In the tourism industry, especially tourist destinations in Magelang Regency that utilize digital marketing to attract visitors, these results have strategic implications. Destination managers need to integrate well-designed influencer marketing strategies, namely: (1) selecting influencers with high credibility and relevance to the destination's image; (2) encouraging authentic, informative, and interaction-triggering content; (3) optimizing digital platforms with high viral potential such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. This approach is believed to increase the potential for content to go viral, thereby expanding the reach of promotions and having a greater impact on audience awareness and positive perceptions of tourism destinations.

3.2.4. The Capabilities of Content Marketing in Relation to Viral Marketing

The influence of marketing content on viral marketing is also very strong, as evidenced by a value of $t = 3,881$ and p value $0,000$. Content created with storytelling, dramatic scenes, and short-form video style has a higher chance of going viral. These findings are in line with previous literature, which shows that the characteristics of shareability and emotional contagion content are very decisive in determining viral potential [17]. This trend is clearly seen at the Borobudur Temple destination, where cinematic videos with viral music have triggered a large number of digital visitors to view the content. The findings of this study indicate that content marketing capabilities play an important role in driving viral marketing, especially in the context of digital marketing in the tourism industry. Content marketing capabilities include an organization's ability to produce creative, informative, relevant, and engaging content that inspires audiences to interact, share, and disseminate it widely across various digital platforms. This interaction ultimately creates the phenomenon of viral marketing, where marketing messages spread exponentially without significant additional costs to the organization.

Content that has entertainment, educational, and informational value will more easily attract the attention and engagement of the audience so that the platform algorithm expands the reach of the content to a wider audience, increasing the possibility of a viral phenomenon. These findings are consistent with a literature review that states that strategically designed content has a greater chance of going viral on digital networks due to its relevance to the needs and emotional appeal of the audience [33]. The results of this study are in line with previous research findings that show that strong digital content correlates with the ability to generate viral marketing [4]. According to the

study, Shopee users in Bandar Lampung analyzed that content marketing has a positive and significant relationship with viral marketing when analyzed causally, albeit with different methods. This confirms that content marketing strategies that are able to attract attention and get audience interaction have a higher potential to spread virally through the mechanism of social sharing.

The findings of this study reinforce the argument that content marketing not only serves to convey messages but also as a major stimulus in the viral marketing process. Within the framework of virality theory, content that has added value, such as entertainment, educational, and emotional value, can accelerate the rate of dissemination because it encourages the audience to actively participate in the process of distributing information to a wider network, thereby making the content viral and shareable. Practically speaking, these results are important for tourism industry players in Magelang Regency and its surroundings. Destination managers need to optimize their content marketing capabilities by: (1) creating content that is not only informative but also emotional and engaging; (2) using content formats that are compatible with digital platform algorithms to support shareability; (3) incorporating strong narrative elements; and (4) embedding educational or emotional value to increase the chances of content going viral. With this strategy, marketing content will have the power to not only attract the attention of the target audience but also trigger viral sharing, thereby expanding the reach of promotion organically and increasing the overall effectiveness of digital marketing.

3.2.5. The Capability of Viral Marketing on Customer Engagement

Viral marketing has a significant influence on customer engagement, with a value of $t = 6,163$ and p value $0,000$, which confirms the role of virality as an enhancer of the influence of influencer marketing and content marketing. Previous research also shows that viral marketing can accelerate the flow of attention and increase the intensity of customer interaction [34]. Virality creates social proof, which encourages tourists to participate in digital conversations about Magelang as a destination. The findings of this study indicate that the higher the viral marketing capability, the greater the customer engagement with content and digital interactions with brands or tourism destinations. Viral marketing capability reflects the ability of content or marketing strategies to attract widespread audience reactions, encourage interaction, and achieve rapid dissemination through various social networks, such as shares, comments, and likes. As a consequence, viral content not only expands the reach of information but also intensifies the audience's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement with the brand or content.

The results of this study are consistent with modern empirical findings showing that viral marketing contributes significantly to consumer engagement. One of the latest quantitative studies discussing the relationship between viral marketing and customer engagement on digital platforms concludes that viral strategies that are emotionally and informatively appealing can increase audience interaction and engagement with brands on social media. These results reinforce the position of viral marketing as an important component in triggering higher audience participation [35]. Based on a large number of followers, an influencer can increase the viral value of a piece of content by increasing its reach and engaging other social media users in discussions, which can make it go viral [28].

These findings reinforce the digital marketing literature, which states that viral marketing is an important driver of consumer engagement in the social media ecosystem. Viral marketing creates a rapid dissemination mechanism, involves the audience in the marketing narrative process, and encourages two-way interaction between the brand and the audience, which is an ideal condition for building strong and sustainable customer engagement [11]. Practically, these results provide strategic guidance for brand and tourism destination managers. Managers need to design content that is not only interesting but also has the potential to go viral so that it can trigger a broad audience reaction. Elements such as the emotional value of the content, visual appeal, relevance to social trends, and ease of sharing are critical considerations for driving digital consumer engagement. Thus, viral marketing not only functions as a tool for disseminating information but also as an effective strategy for forming strong relationships between consumers and brands.

3.2.6. Mediation of Viral Marketing on the Capability of Influencer Marketing towards Customer Engagement

The results show that influencer marketing has a significant effect on viral marketing ($t = 8,271$), and viral marketing has a significant effect on customer engagement ($t = 6,163$). The findings indicate that viral marketing plays an important role as a mediating variable in the relationship model between influencer marketing, content marketing, and customer engagement in the tourism industry of Magelang Regency. Specifically, influencer marketing has been proven to have a positive and significant effect on customer engagement, both directly and through viral marketing. The significant indirect effect indicates that the ability of influencers to create interesting content combined with personal credibility increases the likelihood of content virality, which in turn strengthens the level of customer engagement.

Viral marketing as a mediator shows that the impact of influencer marketing on customer engagement is not

purely linear, but rather through increased content virality, which then creates more audience interactions such as likes, comments, shares, and other digital activities. This type of interaction is a clear indication of customer engagement. In other words, effective influencers not only directly influence their audience, but also create content that has viral potential, which in turn increases audience engagement. These findings are in line with empirical evidence showing that the combination of influencer marketing and viral marketing has a synergistic effect on consumer behavior. A study examining the relationship between influencer marketing, viral marketing, and customer engagement in the context of digital marketing found that appropriately selected influencers and viral strategies can effectively encourage positive responses from audiences and strengthen digital interactions [1].

Another relevant study found that viral marketing can accelerate the spread of marketing messages initiated by influencers, thereby indirectly increasing audience interaction and engagement through the process of widespread and rapid content dissemination. This supports the concept that viral marketing expands the reach of messages and gives audiences more opportunities to interact with marketing content delivered by influencers [36]. Influencer marketing shows that influencer characteristics such as credibility, trust, and emotional connection contribute to audience engagement. This explains why influencer marketing capabilities can have a strong impact on the formation of viral content, which in turn drives customer engagement [37].

These findings enrich the digital marketing literature by showing that viral marketing is not only an endogenous variable that stands alone, but can also function as a critical mediator that bridges the influence of influencer marketing on customer engagement. This reinforces the use of mediation models in SEM-PLS research to understand the dynamics of complex digital marketing variable relationships. For marketing practitioners, especially in the tourism industry, influencer marketing strategies need to be designed in such a way that the content created by influencers goes viral. This means not only choosing influencers with a large number of followers, but also choosing influencers who have high credibility and emotional connection with the audience, are able to create shareable, interesting, and relevant content, and understand social media trends that can accelerate the virality of information. Such strategies not only generate awareness but also strengthen sustainable customer engagement, which is a crucial factor in building brand loyalty and deep digital connection.

3.2.7. Mediation of Viral Marketing on Content Marketing Capabilities towards Customer Engagement

The SEM-PLS analysis results show that content marketing has a positive and significant effect on viral marketing ($t = 3,881$). This coefficient indicates that the better the quality of the content presented in terms of visual aesthetics, information relevance, storytelling, and emotional elements, the greater the chance that the content will be widely distributed on digital platforms such as TikTok. Content that is informative, entertaining, and has high emotional value tends to encourage users to share it, thereby triggering a viral effect. This finding is in line with the literature, which shows that the shareability of content is one of the main criteria for achieving viral marketing.

The mediation test results using the bootstrapping method produced a z value of 4.21 with $p < 0.001$, which means that the mediation effect is statistically significant. A high z value indicates a strong mediation effect, and a very small p -value confirms that this relationship is not coincidental. Thus, it can be concluded that viral marketing significantly mediates the influence of content marketing on customer engagement. Viral marketing serves as a catalyst in accelerating digital word-of-mouth generated by marketing content. When content goes viral, the audience becomes not only passive consumers but also advocates who are actively involved in spreading the content to their social networks, which in turn creates higher customer engagement cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally.

This study is in line with relevant findings in the domain of digital marketing, where engaging content marketing that can trigger virality has been proven to increase audience engagement through two-way communication on social media. Viral content not only reaches a wider audience but also triggers engagement behavior such as active participation and peer-to-peer recommendations, which are tangible forms of customer engagement [35]. The findings of this study confirm that in the modern digital marketing model, viral marketing is not merely a statistical mediator variable but also conceptually explains the mechanism of influence between content marketing and customer engagement. Theoretically, this enriches the literature, which has mostly emphasized the direct relationship between content marketing and engagement, by showing that the indirect path through viral marketing provides a more holistic picture of how content becomes powerful in shaping audience engagement [38].

Practically, these results imply that effective content marketing strategies must be designed with virality factors in mind, such as content elements that trigger sharing, emotional resonance, and contextual relevance. An integrated viral marketing strategy can

expand the reach of content and increase the chances of the audience interacting actively. Therefore, focusing not only on content quality but also on optimizing content distribution through viral strategies, such as content that triggers social responses, the appropriate use of hashtags, collaboration with influencers, and trend momentum, will increase the effectiveness of content marketing in driving audience engagement.

3.2.8. The Simultaneous Effect of Influencer Marketing and Content Marketing on Customer Engagement through Viral Marketing

Another interesting finding is the simultaneous influence of influencer marketing and content marketing on customer engagement through viral marketing. With a coefficient of determination of 0.61, the model shows that the combination of these two digital marketing strategies can explain 61% of the variability in customer engagement. This proves that content virality is not just an algorithmic phenomenon, but a strategic mechanism that strengthens the overall impact of digital marketing.

Conceptually, the simultaneous relationship between influencer marketing and content marketing mediated by viral marketing indicates that these two digital marketing strategies do not work separately, but rather complement each other in creating a high level of engagement [39]. Influencer marketing provides a human touch and credibility to messages through public figures or content creators who are trusted by the audience [38]. Meanwhile, content marketing provides real substance in the form of informational value, entertainment, and visual aesthetics in the content consumed by consumers [20]. When the two work together, the resulting content is not only attractive but also convincing and easily accepted by the public. However, what makes this relationship even stronger is the existence of viral marketing as a mediating variable, which acts as an amplification mechanism. Viral marketing accelerates the spread of messages through digital social networks, allowing content to reach a much wider audience than the initial target market. In the modern social media ecosystem, especially TikTok, virality is not merely the result of algorithms, but a collective social response that demonstrates the relevance, emotional appeal, and level of engagement of a piece of content.

Relevant research supports that content marketing and influencer marketing have a combined effect on customer engagement, and that viral marketing strengthens the dissemination of effective marketing content. For example, in a study that examined the contribution of influencer and marketing content on Instagram to customer engagement, influencer marketing and content marketing were found to have a positive and significant effect on viral marketing campaigns, which ultimately contributed to customer engagement in the tourism industry [40]. Additionally,

other research in the context of social commerce also found that content marketing, influencer marketing, and viral marketing collectively contribute positively to business outcomes such as purchasing decisions, which indirectly reflect increased user engagement on social media [32].

In the tourism industry, these results suggest that digital marketing strategies should be designed as a synergistic ecosystem, rather than as stand-alone elements. Destination managers need to combine influencer marketing with strong and audience-relevant content marketing strategies, designing content that is not only informative but also has high emotional or entertainment value so that it has the opportunity to go viral, and using viral marketing as a benchmark for the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in creating consumer engagement. With this approach, not only does content visibility increase, but so does the depth of audience engagement, which can strengthen brand loyalty and expand promotional reach organically.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussion above, several conclusions can be drawn that influencer marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement, with its influence increasing when mediated by viral marketing. In addition, content marketing also has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement, especially if the content contains visual elements, storytelling, and a format that is easy to share. Influencer marketing has a strong influence on content virality, which shows the strategic role of influencers in triggering massive message dissemination. On the other hand, content marketing has a very strong influence on viral marketing, so that the quality of content design becomes a key factor in advertising success. Viral marketing itself has a significant effect on customer engagement, making it an important mediating variable. Furthermore, viral marketing significantly mediates the influence of influencer marketing on customer engagement through partial mediation, and significantly mediates the influence of content marketing on customer engagement with the same partial mediation mechanism. Overall, influencer marketing and content marketing are proven to have a significant simultaneous effect on customer engagement through the role of viral marketing.

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