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TRANSFORMING DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY THROUGH INFLUENCER MARKETING: A CONCEPTUAL SYNTHESIS INTEGRATING KURT LEWIN'S AND JOHN KOTTER'S CHANGE MANAGEMENT MODELS

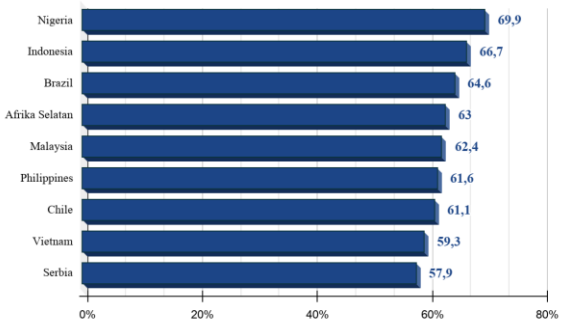
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Abstract
The transformation of digital marketing strategies has encouraged organizations to adopt influencer marketing as an approach to engage consumers in the social media era. However, the success of influencer marketing implementation is determined not only by influencer selection or content quality but also by an organization's readiness to manage the changes associated with its adoption. This study aims to examine the role of change management in influencer marketing implementation through the integration of Kurt Lewin's and John Kotter's change management models. A literature review method was employed by analyzing previous studies related to influencer marketing, digital transformation, and organizational change management. The findings indicate that influencer marketing should be viewed as part of digital marketing strategy transformation that requires organizational readiness, effective management of change barriers, and the integration of change into organizational systems. Based on the synthesis of the literature, this study proposes the Influencer Implementation Readiness Canvas (IIRC), which consists of four main components: Organizational Readiness, Influencer Marketing Implementation Readiness, Change Barriers, and Change Integration. Conceptually, the IIRC offers a diagnostic framework that can assist organizations in assessing their readiness before implementing influencer marketing as part of their digital marketing strategy transformation.
Keywords: *Influencer marketing, digital marketing transformation, change management.*

1. Introduction

Advances in digital technology have transformed how people access information. As the world's fourth most populous country, Indonesia represents a very large digital market, with a population of approximately 288,3 million by the end of 2025 (Worldometer, 2026). Indonesia also ranks highest globally in the use of mobile devices to access the internet, at 98,7% (We Are Social & Meltwater, 2025). Table 1 shows that Indonesia records one of the higher rates worldwide of social media users aged 16 and above who use social media to search for information about brands, at 66,7%. This indicates that social media has become a primary channel for consumer information search and decision-making, pushing organizations toward more adaptive, digitally based marketing strategies, including influencer marketing, in which organizations engage individuals with social media influence to reach consumers more personally. Digital marketing transformation is therefore no longer merely an option but a strategic necessity for organizations seeking to remain competitive.

Table 1. Social Media Users Who Search for Brand Information, Selected Countries (%)



Source: We Are Social & Meltwater (2025), Digital 2025: Global Overview Report, processed by the authors (2026).

Despite this large digital opportunity, the shift from conventional to digital marketing strategy is far from straightforward. In a qualitative study of a major Indonesian telecommunications company, Bist et al. (2022) found that organizations face a dilemma in balancing conventional marketing aimed at retaining existing customers with digital marketing aimed at reaching new segments, a dilemma compounded by regional digital divides. A similar pattern appears in Khoerunnisa et al. (2025), whose study of an Indonesian company found that the success of digital transformation depends not only on technological readiness but also on the capacity of human resources to adapt, alongside barriers such as digital competency gaps and resistance to established work cultures. This suggests that the central challenge of transformation lies in internal organizational factors, particularly people and work culture rather than in technology itself. Robing and Fitri (2024), in a qualitative study of twelve owners of Indonesian micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), found that although influencers can increase sales visibility, the costs involved do not always match the results, and content control remains a persistent concern. Influencer adoption therefore carries not only opportunity but also risk that must be actively managed.

Furthermore, high failure rates in organizational transformation suggest that change is closely tied to complex strategic challenges. Organizational change that is not guided by an appropriate change-management approach tends not to achieve its objectives, even when supported by a large potential market. In the change-management literature, Kurt Lewin's model (unfreeze → change → refreeze) emphasizes the importance of a gradual transition from an old condition to a new one (Lewin, 1947), while John Kotter's model offers a more structured, eight-step approach to change (Kotter, 1996). Both models remain relevant as analytical frameworks for understanding how organizations manage resistance, build readiness for change, and implement digital marketing strategies effectively.

Prior research has generally treated influencer marketing as a marketing instrument focused on engagement, brand awareness, or purchase decisions. Change-management research, on the other hand, has largely discussed organizational transformation in general terms, without linking it specifically to the adoption of influencer marketing as part of digital marketing strategy transformation. As a result, understanding remains limited regarding how organizations build readiness for change, manage internal resistance, and integrate influencer marketing into their working systems on a sustained basis. Studies that integrate Lewin's and Kotter's change models within the specific context of digital marketing transformation are, on the basis of the literature reviewed here, still relatively scarce. This study therefore proposes the Influencer Implementation Readiness Canvas (IIRC) as a conceptual framework intended to help map organizational readiness, guide implementation, and support the sustainability of influencer marketing strategy. In doing so, the study aims to contribute theoretically to change-management and digital-marketing scholarship, and practically by offering organizations a structured starting point for managing digital marketing transformation.

2. Literature Review

A comprehensive review is needed to understand digital marketing strategy transformation through influencer marketing and the role of Lewin's and Kotter's change-management perspectives in its adoption. The following subsections present the literature review and conceptual framework underpinning this study.

2.1 Digital Marketing Transformation and The Adoption of Indluencer Marketing

Digital marketing strategy transformation has become organizations' response to changing consumer behavior in digital spaces. A number of studies indicate that social media and influencer marketing are no longer simply promotional channels but part of how organizations build relationships with consumers. Lou and Yuan (2019) show that the informational and entertainment value of influencer-generated content, together with source credibility, shapes consumer trust, which in turn affects purchase intention. This is reinforced by De Veirman et al. (2017), who find that an influencer's follower count and the perceived fit between the influencer and the endorsed product significantly shape brand attitude. Even so, most prior research still focuses on the effects of influencer marketing on consumers and marketing performance. Research on how organizations prepare themselves to adopt influencer marketing as part of digital marketing strategy remains comparatively limited even though the success of such a strategy depends not only on influencer effectiveness but also on the readiness of the adopting organization.

2.2 Influencer Marketing as a Form od Organizational Change

Where prior research has focused mainly on influencer marketing's effect on consumer behavior, this study places the organization itself at the center of analysis. In practice, implementing influencer marketing requires more than using influencers as a promotional medium; it also requires organizations to adjust how they design marketing strategy, manage digital campaigns, and use data in decision-making. This is consistent with the broader concept of digital transformation, which holds that successful innovation adoption depends not only on technology but on organizational capacity to adapt. Vial (2019) explains that digital transformation drives organizations to change their processes, structures, and value-creation methods through digital technology, while Verhoef et al. (2021) argue that digital transformation involves changes in strategy, business processes, and organizational capabilities. Influencer marketing implementation can therefore be understood as part of a digital marketing strategy transformation that requires organizational readiness across human resources, work processes, and cross-functional coordination.

2.3 Organizational Readiness for Influencer Marketing Implementation

Change-management literature identifies organizational readiness as one of the key determinants of successful change implementation. Weiner (2009) defines organizational readiness for change as the collective commitment and confidence of an organization's members regarding their ability to carry out planned change. Organizations with high readiness tend to be better able to allocate resources, address obstacles, and sustain commitment throughout the change process. Gfrerer et al. (2020) show that differing perceptions of digital readiness between management and employees can themselves become a barrier to implementing innovation. Organizational readiness also involves multiple actors in the change process: top management as strategic decision-makers, middle managers as the link between policy and implementation, and marketing and supporting functions engaged in digital marketing activity. Organizational readiness should therefore be understood as a collective condition reflecting an organization's overall capacity to support change.

2.4 Barriers to Change in Influencer Marketing Impementation

Beyond organizational readiness, change implementation is also shaped by a range of inhibiting factors. Lewin (1947) explains that change is always confronted by restraining forces that hinder an organization's movement toward a desired condition. In the context of digital transformation, such barriers typically take the form of resistance to change, limited digital

competency, insufficient communication, and an organizational culture that still favors established ways of working. Hanelt et al. (2021), in a systematic review of the digital transformation literature, similarly identify organizational inertia, resistance to change, and misalignment between existing structures and new digital practices as recurring barriers to successful transformation. Similar barriers can be expected to arise in influencer marketing implementation. Organizations may struggle when employees do not yet understand the importance of the new strategy, when digital skills are limited, or when a conventional marketing mindset persists. Identifying such barriers early is therefore an important step in reducing the risk of implementation failure.

2.5 Lewin's and Kotter's Change Models

This study uses Lewin's and Kotter's change models as its conceptual foundation. Lewin's model holds that change begins with building organizational readiness, managing barriers to change, and integrating change into a new steady state (Lewin, 1947). In the context of a strategy transformation from conventional to digital marketing, the model helps explain how an organization builds awareness of the importance of digitalization (unfreezing), implements a new strategy such as influencer marketing (changing), and integrates that practice into day-to-day marketing activity (refreezing). Kotter's model offers more operational guidance through the creation of urgency, the formation of a coalition for change, the communication of a vision, and the reinforcement of change within organizational culture (Kotter, 1996). The two models are complementary: Lewin helps explain the conditions that must be prepared before change is undertaken, while Kotter helps explain how change can be carried out and sustained effectively. Integrating the two models is therefore useful for understanding influencer marketing implementation as part of digital marketing strategy transformation.

2.6 Integrating Lewin and Kotter into the Influencer Implementation Readiness Canvas (IIRC)

The literature synthesized in this review suggests that influencer marketing research remains dominated by discussion of its effects on consumers, while the question of organizational readiness for adoption is comparatively underexplored. Conversely, the change-management literature indicates that successful implementation of a new strategy depends on organizational readiness, the ability to manage barriers, and the ability to integrate change into the organization. On this basis, the study develops the *Influencer Implementation Readiness Canvas (IIRC)* as a conceptual model to help organizations assess their readiness before implementing influencer marketing. The IIRC comprises four main components: *Organizational Readiness, Influencer Marketing Implementation Readiness, Change Barriers, and Change Integration* each derived from the synthesis of the influencer marketing, digital transformation, and Lewin/Kotter change-management literatures reviewed above.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is organized to clarify the factors underlying organizational readiness to implement influencer marketing as part of digital marketing strategy transformation. The study treats influencer marketing adoption as involving not only changes to marketing activity but also organizational readiness to face and manage the accompanying change process. The change-management perspective is used here as the conceptual foundation, through the integration of Lewin's and Kotter's change models, as summarized in Figure 1.

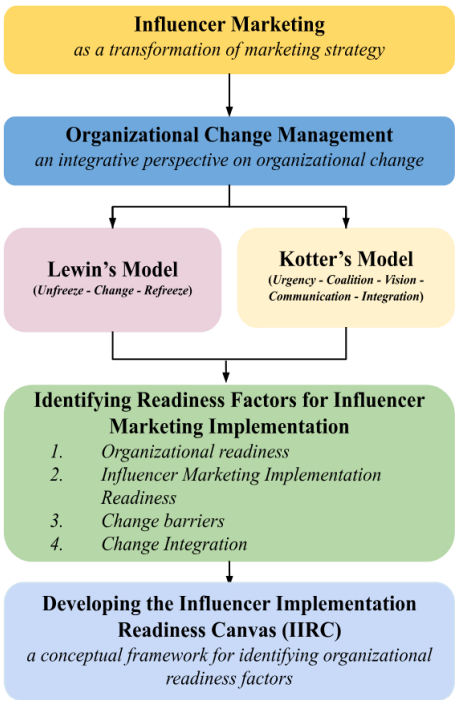


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Source: developed by the authors (2026).

Based on this framework, the study develops the IIRC as a conceptual tool for mapping organizational readiness to adopt influencer marketing. The primary aim, accordingly, is not to measure the success of influencer marketing itself, but to identify the organizational readiness factors needed for its implementation to be more structured and sustainable.

3. Research Methods

This study employs a literature review using a descriptive-qualitative approach. This method was chosen to explain the transformation of digital marketing strategies through influencer marketing, as well as its relationship to Kurt Lewin's and John Kotter's change management theories. A literature review is a research method that focuses on collecting and analyzing information from various written sources to understand a phenomenon systematically and comprehensively (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Data sources were obtained from scientific articles, journals, statistical data sources, digital research reports, and other academic sources relevant to the research topic. The literature used was selected based on the relevance of its content, the clarity of its discussion, and its connection to influencer marketing, digital marketing, and organizational change theory (Snyder, 2019).

Data collection was conducted through a literature search using appropriate keywords, such as *influencer marketing, digital marketing*, Kurt Lewin's theory, John Kotter, and change management. The data was then analyzed thematically by reading, selecting, grouping, and comparing the content of each source to identify the relationship between influencer marketing and change theories. The results of the analysis were subsequently organized systematically to explain how Kurt Lewin's and John Kotter's theories can serve as a framework for understanding changes in digital marketing strategies in Indonesia.

4. Research Findings

The literature synthesis indicates that digital marketing strategy transformation through influencer marketing depends not only on technology adoption but on organizational readiness to manage change. Influencer marketing is not merely a digital promotional channel; it is part of an organizational transformation that affects competencies, work systems, and internal culture. Three main findings emerge from the synthesis: (1) the success of influencer marketing is shaped by

internal organizational readiness particularly digital competency, managerial support, and work-system readiness; (2) the primary barriers to transformation lie in organizational resistance rather than in technology itself; and (3) Lewin's and Kotter's models complement one another in explaining change, with Lewin clarifying readiness for change and Kotter clarifying its implementation.

5. Discussion

5.1 Influencer Marketing as an Instrument od Transformation

The literature reviewed indicates that adopting influencer marketing does not simply change a marketing communication channel; it also drives change in work processes, market-information management, and marketing decision-making within organizations. Organizations no longer fully control the marketing message as they might through conventional media; instead, they must collaborate with influencers to create content suited to digital audiences. The resulting change extends beyond the use of new media to how organizations design strategy and evaluate marketing performance consistent with Bist et al. (2022), who argue that digital transformation encompasses changes in strategy, process, and organizational capability.

The literature also indicates that the success of influencer marketing is frequently measured through engagement, reach, and visibility. While these indicators matter, they do not necessarily reflect business success: high audience attention does not automatically translate into purchases, customer loyalty, or improved organizational performance. The central challenge of influencer marketing implementation therefore lies less in the ability to capture market attention than in organizational readiness to convert that attention into sustained business value. This indicates that the effectiveness of influencer marketing depends not only on content quality or influencer credibility, but also on organizational readiness to support the change process it entails.

5.2 Organizational Readiness as the Foundation for Implementation

The literature reviewed suggests that many transformation failures are attributable not to the strategy chosen but to organizational unreadiness to carry out change. In the context of influencer marketing, readiness involves more than the ability to use social media; it also encompasses managerial support, human-resource competency, organizational culture, and work-system readiness. This suggests that an organization may have an adequate marketing budget or access to relevant influencers and still struggle in the absence of supportive internal conditions. Organizational readiness is therefore treated here as the primary foundation that must precede influencer marketing implementation.

5.3 Barriers to Change in Influencer Marketing Implementation

The literature indicates that the challenges of influencer marketing implementation arise not only from external factors but from internal organizational dynamics. The most frequently cited barriers are limited digital competency, resistance to new ways of working, and insufficient alignment between marketing objectives and operational execution. This suggests that influencer marketing adoption is not merely a technical matter but a change process capable of generating uncertainty within an organization. When a new strategy is not fully understood or is not supported by adequate coordination, organizations risk treating influencer marketing as a passing trend rather than a strategy with lasting impact.

5.4 The Role of Lewin's and Kotter's Models in Explaining the Change Process

Lewin's model is well suited to explaining readiness for change: organizations must first let go of established ways of working before adopting a new strategy. At the unfreeze stage, organizations need to recognize that conventional marketing patterns are no longer sufficient; without this recognition, influencer marketing tends to be treated merely as supplementary promotion. The change stage reflects a shift toward marketing that is faster, more open, and more responsive to audiences. The refreeze stage underscores the importance of embedding new practices as routine work though in a digital context this stage is arguably better understood

as adaptive stabilization rather than a fixed end-state, since digital change is inherently dynamic and rarely settles permanently. This tension between Lewin's original refreeze concept and the fluid nature of digital environments is a genuine limitation of applying the model as-is, and is one reason later change-management scholarship (for example, Kotter's own subsequent work on "*accelerators*" for continuous change) moved away from a strict three-stage, end-state view of organizational change.

Where Lewin explains readiness for change, Kotter (1996) explains its execution. Kotter's model offers more operational guidance through the formation of a change team, a clear vision, cross-functional communication, and short-term targets; it is more directly actionable, but tends to be linear and to rely heavily on leadership decisions. Integrating the two models suggests that the success of influencer marketing implementation depends not only on the decision to change but on an organization's capacity to manage the change process systematically and sustainably.

5.5 Development of the Influencer Implementation Readiness Canvas (IIRC)

Building on the integration of Lewin's and Kotter's change theories and the synthesis of the influencer marketing literature, this study develops the Influencer Implementation Readiness Canvas (IIRC) as a conceptual model for assessing organizational readiness to adopt influencer marketing. The IIRC comprises four main components: *Organizational Readiness, Influencer Marketing Implementation Readiness, Change Barriers, and Change Integration*. Used to map the factors that shape organizational readiness before and during influencer marketing implementation. The structure of the IIRC is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Influencer Implementation Readiness Canvas (IIRC)

Organizational Readiness *Is the organization ready to change?* • *Managerial support* • *Digital competency of relevant staff* • *Organizational culture* • *Work-system readiness*	**Influencer Marketing Implementation Readiness** *Is the organization ready to run influencer marketing?* • *Clarity of purpose for using influencers* • *Fit with existing marketing strategy* • *Readiness for the collaboration process with influencers*
Change Barriers *What factors could hinder implementation?* • *Staff resistance* • *Weak cross-divisional coordination* • *Digital competency gaps*	**Change Integration** *How is the change sustained?* • *Cross-divisional collaboration* • *Evaluation mechanisms* • *Use of data in decision-making* • *Commitment to sustained implementation*

Source: developed by the authors (2026).

The Organizational Readiness component emphasizes the importance of internal conditions prior to change: managerial support, digital human-resource competency, organizational culture, and work-system readiness form the foundation that determines an organization's capacity to accept a new strategy. Without this readiness, influencer marketing implementation risks becoming a temporary activity without lasting impact. Influencer Marketing Implementation Readiness, in turn, focuses on organizational readiness to translate strategy into practice an organization that is ready to change is not necessarily ready to integrate influencer marketing into its existing marketing strategy, so clarity of purpose, strategic fit, and readiness for collaboration with influencers are essential considerations.

The change process is always confronted with barriers. Employee resistance, weak cross-divisional coordination, and digital competency gaps can reduce implementation effectiveness if not identified early; the Change Barriers component is included to help organizations recognize the factors most likely to impede influencer marketing adoption. The final component, Change Integration, emphasizes that success should be measured not only by whether influencer marketing is implemented but by an organization's capacity to sustain that change over the long term. Cross-divisional collaboration, evaluation mechanisms, data-informed decision-making, and organizational commitment are treated as the factors that determine whether influencer marketing becomes genuinely integrated into marketing strategy on a sustained basis. Therefore, the IIRC serves as a diagnostic framework that helps organizations assess their readiness before implementing influencer marketing.

6. Conclusion

This literature synthesis indicates that influencer marketing implementation cannot be understood solely as a digital promotional strategy, but as part of a broader marketing strategy transformation that requires change at the organizational level. The success of influencer marketing implementation depends not only on content quality or influencer credibility but also on organizational readiness to manage the accompanying change. The synthesis suggests that factors such as managerial support, digital human-resource competency, organizational culture, and work-system readiness play an important role in supporting implementation, while internal resistance, weak cross-functional coordination, and digital competency gaps act as barriers that may reduce the effectiveness of change.

Integrating Lewin's and Kotter's change models suggests that the two frameworks play complementary roles in explaining organizational transformation: Lewin helps explain the importance of readiness and the management of barriers to change, while Kotter offers more operational guidance for implementing and sustaining change. On this basis, the study develops the Influencer Implementation Readiness Canvas (IIRC), comprising four main components: O*rganizational Readiness, Influencer Marketing Implementation Readiness, Change Barriers, and Change Integration*. As a conceptual contribution, the IIRC extends the influencer marketing literature beyond its predominant focus on consumer-level effects toward an organizational-readiness perspective.

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