

# **The role of Instagram influencers and their impact on millennials' consumer behaviour**

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<p>Since social media is becoming a bigger part of our everyday life, businesses have no other choice but join in the world of social media themselves too. Social media can increase the sales and website traffic if it's used in the right way. Influencer marketing is one form of it. Theoretical framework presents the theories of social media, influencer marketing and consumer behaviour.</p> <p>This thesis is research-oriented, and the goal of the research was to find out how influencer marketing based on Instagram is affecting consumer buying behaviour and how reliable influencers and influencer marketing are seen. For this research, qualitative research approach was used to collect data. Data collection happened through one-on-one interviews, during the fall 2020. There were 10 participants, aged between 25 to 29. It was required that the participants are active users of Instagram and were familiar with the concept of influencer.</p> <p>Results showed that influencers are mainly trusted among the participants and they'd rather trust on influencer marketing compared to traditional marketing. Most of the participants remember buying a product recommended by an influencer. Those who didn't remember buying anything, definitely saw it possible in the future. The main reasons that drove them to make a purchase were interesting product itself and professionalism, high quality and enthusiasm of an influencer.</p> <p>There are many features that make influencer credible and reliable, mostly mentioned were transparency, interesting personality, experience and loyalty to their own brand. It was found out that when the influencers show their true personality, they are easier to approach and relate. Being able to relate increases trust and again trust has a big role in buying behaviour. Consumers listen carefully experiences and recommendations from the people they trust.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> influencer marketing, Instagram, consumer behaviour, social media	

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# 1 Introduction

In these days, social media is very normal part of our everyday lives. We spend even hours on different social media platforms during a day. This has opened new doors for businesses to increase sales and traffic on their websites. Social media can be very efficient marketing channel if companies use it in the right way. The field is constantly changing, therefore it's necessary to educate oneself in order to keep up and improve.

Influencer marketing is one way of doing marketing in social media. It's powerful especially when marketer wants to reach out for the younger audience. Influencer marketing is not a new invention. For decades there has been influencers, such as actors and athletes, who have been used in marketing campaigns. During the era of social media this field has rapidly grown and nowadays, anyone can become an influencer and part of influencer marketing.

The key concepts of this study are influencer marketing, Instagram and consumer behaviour. Influencer marketing means in this study that a brand is collaborating with an online influencer to market its products or services. The focus in this study is on Instagram. Instagram is a free social media platform where users can post photos and videos. Followers can comment, like and share the content. Lastly, consumer behaviour means in this study the motivations that drive consumers to make a purchase.

This thesis is a research that the author has done independently. The aim is to find out how influencer marketing based on Instagram is affecting millennials' buying behaviour. The research is finding answers to the following main questions:

1. *Does influencer marketing based on Instagram, affect millennials' buying behaviour?*
2. *What are respondents' thoughts about trustworthiness of influencer marketing?*

As mentioned, this research concentrates on influencer marketing that is happening on Instagram. Therefore, the results don't apply on the other social media channels. All the participants that took part on this research were aged 25 to 29 so the results apply only for this age group.

Chapters from two to four present theoretical framework for the research. Those chapters introduce the concepts of social media, influencer marketing and consumer behaviour.

These topics are important in order to research the stated issue. After theoretical framework the chosen research method and the structure of the research are presented. Chapter six presents then the results of the research. Seventh chapter presents the discussion of the research and then conclusion of the whole thesis process.

## **2 Social Media**

In these days it's almost impossible to completely avoid social media. It has become a part of our everyday life in all over the world. This chapter introduces the concept of social media and presents different social media channels. Also marketing in social media and especially in Instagram will be covered.

According to Dollarhide (2020) social media is “computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities.” Hudson (2020) explains that “social media is any digital tool that allows users to quickly create and share content with the public.” Social media users can publish and share content, such as photos, videos, documents and information. Originally social media was meant for friends and families to interact. In these days it has many networking opportunities from job seeking to finding new relationships. Later social media has become a big part of business plans as well. It is efficient tool for marketing and communication purposes. (Dollarhide 2020.)

In January 2020 there were 7.75 billion people in this world and 5.19 billion of them were mobile phone users. 4.54 billion had access to internet. In the beginning this year, 3.80 billion people were active social media users. This is almost 84% of all internet users which is of course a lot. The average time worldwide that we spent on social media is 2 hours and 24 minutes per day. (Kemp 2020.)

### **2.1 Types of social media**

There are several social media channels that are used daily. These channels can be divided into different groups by their type. Also, some of the channels can belong to more than just one group. The following groups that will be introduced next are just a few major types with examples.

Social networks are meant for users to stay connected and exchange thoughts, ideas and content with each other. Social networks can be used for both business and personal purposes. Examples of social networks are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. Even though there are new popular competitors for Facebook, it is still the most used social media channel with over two billion users. (Kenton 2020.)

While social networks are based on users to share and exchange thoughts, media networks are meant for sharing mainly videos and photographs. Example of a media network is YouTube. Also, Instagram can be categorised as media network. How media

networks work then? A user uploads content, in this case photo or video, and other users can like, dislike or comment it. Users can also follow other users that create interesting content. (Hudson 2020.)

Discussion networks are ideal environments for creating growing and developing conversations between users. One example of discussion network is Reddit. According to some sources, blogging sites can also be included to discussion networks even though they can also be categorised as their own type of social media. On these sites, user can leave a comment and others can reply to that comment etc. so it can become a full conversation. (Hudson 2020.)

Review networks then are platforms that allow users to leave reviews of products and services. These kinds of networks are for example Yelp and TripAdvisor. On these sites you can review businesses and products while also interact directly with others who leave reviews. (Hudson 2020.)

## **2.2 Social media marketing**

Social media marketing means using different social media platforms in order to connect with the audience. The goal is to build the brand, increase sales and grow website traffic. Publishing excellent content, listening and engaging with the followers, analysing the results and running social media advertisements are all included in this process. (Buffer 2020.)

Because social media has become very popular and it's growing rapidly, it's very important tool for businesses for marketing purposes. It's been researched that in this world where social media is taking more and more foothold, companies have no other choice than getting into virtual community (Moriuchi 2015). Social media as a marketing tool can be efficient and gives a lot of opportunities for businesses to grow. The advantage of using social media as marketing tool has been recognized. Social media is becoming more commercialized all the time (Lyons 2016, 62). This field is constantly changing and developing so it's essential to continually study and educate in order to get the most out of it.

According to several sources, in getting the best out of social media marketing, there are five core pillars that should be followed. The core includes strategy, planning and publishing, listening and engagement, analytics and reporting and advertising (Buffer 2020).



Figure 1. The Five Core Pillars of Social Media Marketing. (Adapted, Buffer 2020.)

First thing is to make a social strategy. You could ask yourself first that what is your goal. Then think about which social media platform would help you the most in order to achieve your goal. The last thing is to think about what kind of content would attract the audience you want to reach. These are helpful questions while making the strategy. (SF WP Experts 2020.)

The second thing is planning and publishing. When you know your goal, the most suitable platform for your needs and the kind of content you want to share, it's time to publish images and videos on your profiles. In order to get the most out of social media marketing you should be aware of few things. For instance, knowing when your target audience is active on social media, engaging on your posts and crafting the posts carefully are major factors. Important thing is also analysing the reach of your posts. (SF WP Experts 2020.)

Third pillar is listening to the audience and engaging with them. Little by little when you keep posting engaging content, more people might comment on your posts, tag you in their posts and message you directly. Always keep an eye on the audience's comments, help them if it's needed and thank them when they give positive feedback. (Buffer 2020.)

After being active and growing your social media marketing, it's time for analytics and reporting. This is very important to do along the way. Knowing how the social media marketing is performing, helps you to improve. There are various analytics tools to use for this purpose. (Buffer 2020.)

The last pillar is advertising. When it's time to invest more on social media marketing, the next step would be social ads. This way you can spread awareness of your brand and your brand will be more visible also to those who are not following you. By using social media advertising platforms, it's possible to create the target audience for your ads. Target audience can be created based on for example demographics, interest and behaviour. (Buffer 2020.)



### **2.3 Instagram marketing**

Since the focus of this research is on Instagram, it's a good thing to know about the Instagram marketing a bit deeper. According to Instagram's Help Center (2020) "Instagram is a free photo and video sharing app available in iPhone and Android." It works so that people can upload content (videos and photos) and share them with their followers or with just a selected group. Users can like, comment and share other users' posts. (Instagram 2020.) The amount of Instagram users has grown steadily during its 10 years of existence and in 2020 the number of monthly active users is around 1 billion people (Chen 2020).

Because of its big number of users, Instagram has a lot of opportunities for businesses if they use it properly. According to Decker (2020) 90% of Instagram users follow at least one business. Instagram has helped 83% of users to find new products and services. It can be said that Instagram is definitely a global platform for brands to be able to showcase their products, humanize their content, inspire the audience and even allow recruiting new talents. (Decker 2020.)

There are a lot of tips and guides available online and as books of how to start and improve Instagram marketing. Here are some of the tips that could be smart to obey in order to have successful Instagram marketing strategy.

Instagram has free tools for business profiles to use. They show statistics such as impressions, engagement data and demographics of your users. These include age, gender, location and most active hours. You can also follow the insights of your posts, such as how many impressions your post got and what were the top posts. Using these tools are beneficial because they show exactly how users are interacting with the content. (Neil Patel 2020.)

At the same time, when business should market their products on Instagram, they shouldn't be too pushy because that will just scare the users away. The solution for being too aggressive is product teasers. Product teaser is a post that doesn't try to force people to buy anything. It can be an image where customer is using the product, or it can be just an attractive image of the product and the text that says something short and tempting. (Neil Patel 2020.)

Another efficient way to use Instagram in marketing purposes is Instagram Stories. They are available only for 24 hours, but they can be saved and reused later. Benefits of this

feature are endless. It's an easy way to get viewers, and the content of the Stories can vary a lot from the feed where posts should maybe be more high-quality. On Stories businesses can share for example behind the scenes material and live videos that might bring customers closer. (Neil Patel 2020.)

One thing that has a lot of opportunities and this thesis is somehow about, is partnering with influencers. This is very good and fast way to get wider reach. Influencer marketing will be presented next on this thesis but shortly said, people trust other people's opinions and experience. Influencers have built large audiences that follow them and trust them. Finding the best match for your brand gives your business an opportunity to get much more visibility and potential customers. (Neil Patel 2020.)

### **3 Influencer Marketing**

This chapter explains the concept of an influencer and influencer marketing. The meaning of an influencer is explained, as well as how they can be segmented and what kind of influencers are there. Influencer marketing, different forms of it and importance of it will be discussed as well. In order for influencer marketing to do favour for the business, it's important to find the right match from the influencers. That will also be handled in this part of the thesis.

#### **3.1 Definition of influencer**

When talking about the influencer marketing, it's important to understand the meaning of an influencer. Who can be called an influencer and what do they do? First, few words about the history of influencers. There have always been influencers throughout the human history. Some people have always had the power to affect other people's mindset, opinions and decisions. In the early 2010 there were mainly bloggers in the field of social media marketing. A bit later youtubers stepped in. Lately, the era of social media has revolutionized the concept of influencing and the possibilities to become one. Nowadays basically anyone have the possibility to become an influencer. Those who were earlier focusing only on the blogs or YouTube are now influencing in many other social media channels too, such as Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter. (Halonen 2019, 11-12.)

In these days the concept of influencer is wider than before. Over the decades, athletes, musicians, actors and models have been used to advocate for companies. Because of digitalization and the growth of social media there are new ways how influencers are born. It doesn't necessarily require traditional achievements, such as successful sport or acting performance, to become famous. Nowadays it's possible to gain attention only by social media. (Halonen 2019, 14.) From bloggers to celebrities and online entrepreneurs, anyone can be an influencer (Digital Marketing Institute 2020).

What is the difference between a celebrity and an influencer then? Celebrity has built his/hers influence through traditional channels, for example radio, television and magazines (Barker 2019). These people are for instance actors, musicians, models and athletes (Halonen 2019, 14). Influencer has built his/hers influence through non-traditional media channels, such as blogs, vlogs and other social media channels. When influencers gain their followers in a specific niche by creating relevant content to them, celebrities usually achieve their social following because people admire their talent and enjoy their performances. (Barker 2019.)

A user of social media, who has achieved credibility in a specific industry, can be considered as a social media influencer (Pixlee 2020). He/she is a person who has the power to affect other people's purchasing decisions. There are several reasons why they have the power, it can be because of their authority, knowledge or position. (Influencer MarketingHub 2020.) Some of them might also have such a strong relationship with their followers that the followers feel connected to the influencer and feel that they are part of the inner circle. Whenever influencer recommends some product or service, followers are open to try them too. (Influencer Agency 2020.)

According to Digital Marketing Institute (2020), social media influencer "has the tools and authenticity to attract many viewers consistently and can motivate others to expand their social reach." Influencer can also be defined as a person who has above mediocre reach or influence by word of mouth. Influencer's credibility is very important since it determines his/her value as an influencer. (Halonen 2019, 13.)

One great example of social media influencer in Finnish market is Miisa Rotola-Pukkila, who is also known by the name Mmiisas. For years she has been among the list of the most influential people on Finland and last year she was chosen to be the most influential social media person in Finland (Seppälä 2019). Mmiisas has over 400 000 followers on Instagram. This makes her a mega influencer in Finnish market. On her Instagram page she mostly shares moments of her life and publish collaborations with well-known brands. Along with Instagram she has lifestyle YouTube channel with almost 400 000 followers and she also host a podcast (YouTube 2020).

Social media influencers can be divided into different groups in many ways. Probably the most common one, is to segment them by the number of followers. The groups by followers are mega influencers, macro influencers, micro influencers and nano influencers. Influencers can also be divided into groups by content and industry. Different contents can be for instance youtubers, bloggers and podcasters. Various industries include for example food, fashion, makeup and travel. (Medium 2019.)

It's important to know that depending of the market size in different countries, there are differences between the number of the followers in each group (Halonen 2019, 22). Mega influencers are typically celebrities. In the United States, where the market is bigger, mega influencer has over 1 million followers and the price tags for collaborations are very expensive. (Medium 2019.) When comparing to market in Finland, mega influencers normally have hundreds of thousands of followers (Ruotsalainen 2019). In Finland, macro influencers have 10 000-100 000 followers (Ruotsalainen 2019). In the bigger market in

the US the number is between 100 000 to one million (Medium 2019). In Finnish market, micro influencers have typically 1000-5000 followers (Halonen 2019, 22). According to some sources the upper limit for micro influencers is 10 000 followers. Nano influencers are the group with the smallest number of followers, with about 1000 of them. (Ruotsalainen 2019.)

### **3.2 Influencer marketing**

Influencer marketing means that a brand collaborates with an online influencer to market its product or service (Influencer MarketingHub 2020). It is a type of social media marketing when companies use endorsements and product mentions from influencers (Chen 2019). These collaborations are agreed together between the brand and influencer. Influencer always gets reward from them; it can be money or for instance free products or services from the company. (Halonen 2019, 48.)

Even though influencer marketing has become very popular during the past few years, it is not completely new marketing form. As I mentioned earlier, celebrities have been used to advocate and support the brands for decades (Halonen 2019, 14). Because of the rapid rise of social media, influencers have now more channels to reach larger audience. Through these new channels the sphere of influence has expanded. Sharing information, opinions and experiences has become much easier and faster. This has made social media influencers very interesting strategic marketing tools for companies. (Halonen 2019, 47.)

There are various forms of influencer marketing. It can be for example content on influencers channel, where she/he tells about the products or services and gets paid for that. Companies can also hire influencers to be their brand ambassadors. (Halonen 2019, 48.) One extremely popular way of doing influencer marketing is giveaways. This means that influencer asks followers for example like and/or comment the post, answer the questions asked on the post or enter their emails. After this the winner is selected and the price is usually some product or service from the brand. Affiliate marketing is also popular form of influencer marketing. In this case, influencer has a link on their website or post, that promotes some product. When purchase is happened through this link, the influencer gets rewarded. (Bhat 2018.)

Carefully planned and successfully executed influencer marketing process can be very beneficial for the business and also for the influencer. There are so many reasons why it's efficient and here are some of them.

Influencers have the power to increase the brand awareness. Most importantly, consumers trust influencers' opinions. When an influencer recommends the brand or the product, their followers take a notice. (Grin 2020.) 83% of consumers trust friends' and families' opinions and 66% trust other consumers' experiences and reviews online. 43% of consumers trust mobile advertising and 42% trust banner ads. (Halonen 2019, 67.) These numbers prove that it's beneficial to have collaboration with influencers. The image below shows the power of influencer marketing and how wide the word can spread.

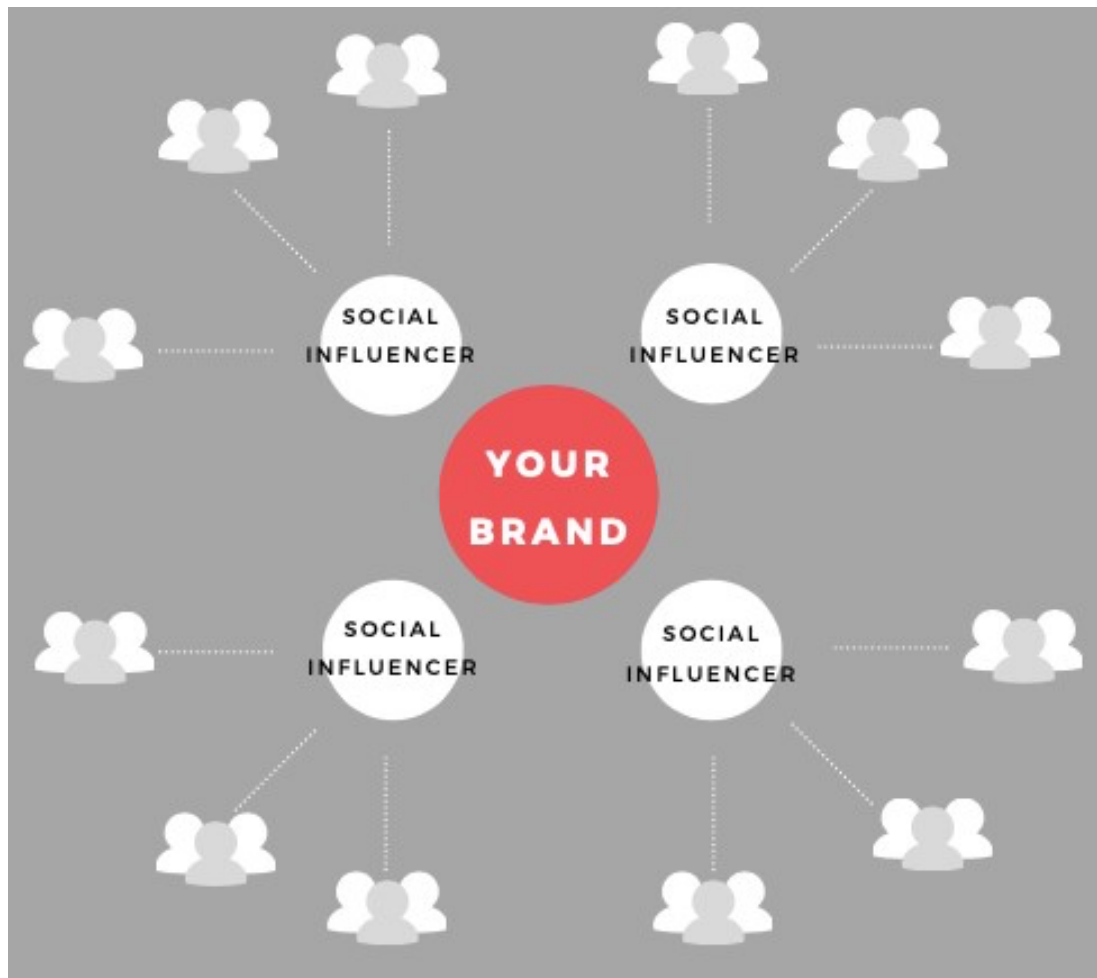


Figure 2. The power of influence marketing. (Adapted, Babylon 2020.)

Other important notice is that by influencer marketing it's easier to reach also challenging audiences, for example young people. Millennials (those who are born in 1981-1996) are a bit more concerned towards traditional marketing and advertising than older population. Most of them use social media as a helping tool while making purchasing decisions. This is the chance for those brands, that are aiming for the younger target group, to affect their opinions and behaviour. (Halonen 2019, 75.)

The last reason of the importance of influencer marketing is influencers' skills and expertise. Influencers know their audience very well and know what kind of content interests them. They are experts of their own field. With the help of influencers, businesses can offer productive, insightful and fresh content of their product. Influencers have the ability to create content that their audience wants to see. (Halonen 2019, 83.)

Even though influencer marketing is very important for businesses because of these reasons listed above, the crucial thing is to understand that the influencer has to be the right one for the brand. This way both, the brand and influencer, maximize the power of the collaboration.

### **3.3 The right match between the brand and influencer**

When a company is interested in creating collaboration with an influencer, the important thing to understand is that bigger is not always better. Each brand has its own personality. The same applies to each influencer. They have also created their personality and the content they create retell their image. By following the next five rules, the collaboration is success for both parties. (Halliburton 2019.)

First one, defining the niche and audience. Before contacting possible influencers, brand needs to know who their niche and target audience is. (Halliburton 2019.) For example sneaker brand, there might not be point in having collaboration with political influencer, since the niche is not the most optimal.

Second thing is real-time researching. It might be beneficial for the brands to follow influencers themselves. Stepping into audience sometimes gives the brand a larger perspective of the influencer and current trends. (Halliburton 2019.)

Third one is the content. Content has to be good quality since the viewers nowadays are super informed. High quality content goes viral, meaning that the content and the brand are in the top positions in terms of ranking online traffic. Brand needs to find the influencer who is able to be loyal to their personality and reaching the same end goal with the brand. (Halliburton 2019.)

Fourth one to remember is keeping an eye on the results. Being aware of how and when to measure the results is important. The aim is to attract engagement from the viewers. This means that the influencer who has a large number of followers but not a proper amount of likes, comments, views and shares isn't probably the right match. (Halliburton 2019.)

The last thing to keep in mind is commitment and authenticity. It's important to find an influencer who is dedicated on their work. Things like frequent posts, putting effort and updating the quality of the content, engaging in genuine interactions with the followers are the things that brands might need to look for. Checking the authenticity of the influencers' content is also recommended, since the association of the campaign is with the brand. When the content is authentic it's more credible and believable, which is what the brand needs. (Halliburton 2019.)

There are many ways of how businesses can market themselves and different forms of it, but the most important thing is to remember the personality of the brand. Influencer marketing is one great way of marketing, that's efficient, dynamic and works very well. The boundaries are almost limitless, because the social media is everywhere. (Halliburton 2019.)



## 4 Consumer Behaviour

In this chapter the concept of consumer behaviour will be introduced. What factors influence consumer behaviour and what is the process of consumers' decision making.

People make buying decisions every day. Some of the purchases we make are impulsive while others are necessary in our everyday life. In order to create successful marketing strategy, it's essential to understand the process of customers' decision-making. (Blythe & Sethna 2019, 6-11.) There are several definitions for the concept of consumer behaviour. According to Nawal (2020) "consumer behaviour is the study of how consumers make decisions about what they need, want, and desire and how do they buy, use and dispose of goods." In the other words, consumer behaviour is about what motivates consumers to make a purchase (DemandJump 2020).

### 4.1 Influences of consumer behaviour

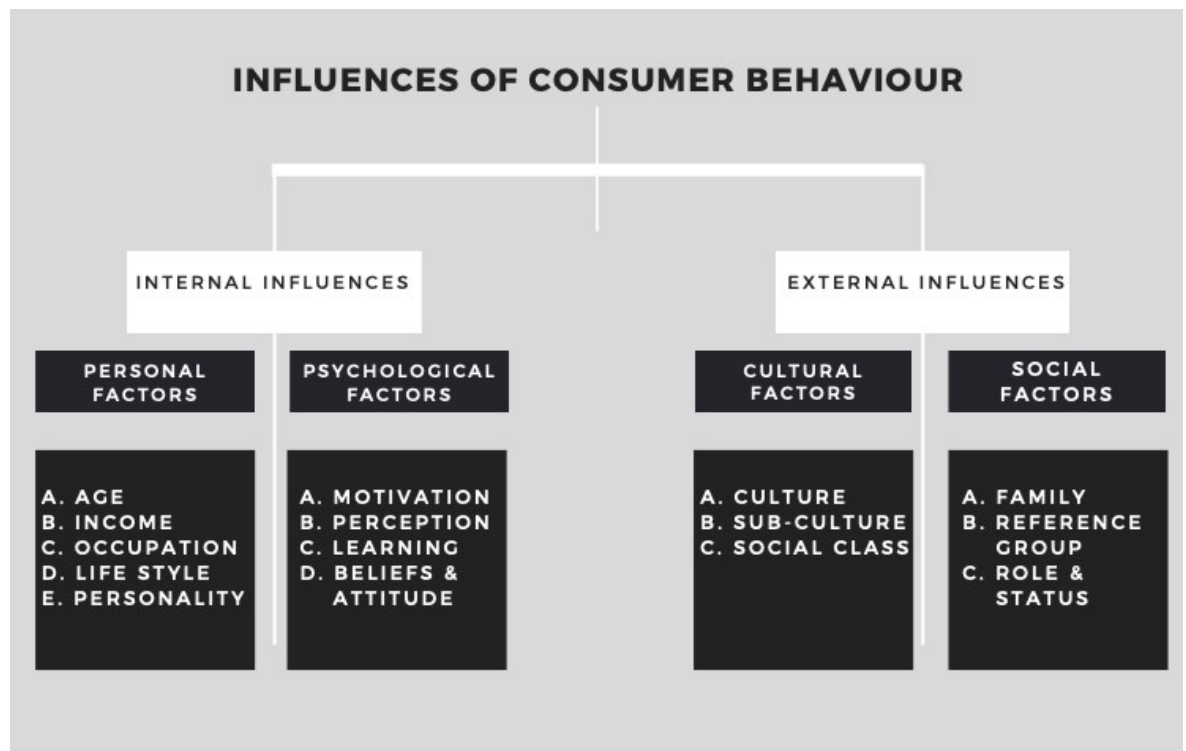


Figure 3. Influences of Consumer Behaviour. (Adapted, eNotes MBA 2014.)

It's important to understand that consumer behaviour is a combination of other disciplines (Blythe & Sethna 2019, 18). There are different factors that have influence on consumer behaviour. These factors can be divided into internal and external factors. Internal influences contain personal and psychological factors while external influences include cultural and social factors. These four categories then include various drivers for consumer behaviour.

Personal factors include drivers such as age. Age has an important impact on consumer behaviour. When people grow, their needs also change. Teenagers and elderly people don't usually use money for the same purposes. Their choices of products and brands are different from each other. This is also a matter for marketers to know when planning marketing strategies. There are lots of products that are marketed only for the millennials but also products that are mainly targeted for older people. (Pratap 2019.)

Other driver in this category is income. Income level is very important matter that has effect on buying decisions of consumers. People from different income levels use money in different ways and purchases vary from each other. Someone in the middle class usually makes their purchasing decisions based on what they need. Not like upper class, who might enjoy design or luxury and make the decisions based on those features. (Pratap 2019.)

The next driver in this category is occupation. It matters where the individual is working and what is their role in the working place and in the society. For example, a lawyer might have totally different purchasing habits than a teacher or a mailman. (Business Jargons 2020.)

Lastly, personality and lifestyle have also important impact on consumer behaviour. What do we like, what are we interested in, what are our opinions or values and what are our activities or hobbies? Some of us prefer healthy food and avoid junk food. Some of us drive Ford instead of Mercedes Benz. All of these matters define us as who we are and how we want to spend our money. (Blythe & Sethna 2019, 19-20.)

One of the psychological influences on consumer behaviour is motivation. According to Blythe & Sethna (2019, 19) motivation is "the internal force which encourages people to act in specific ways." So, the motivation is the driving force which steer the purchasing decisions of the consumer (Sodexo 2020).

The next driver in psychological category is perception. Perception is about how we see and experience the world. It's about creating "mental map" of the reality (Blythe & Sethna 2019, 20). While thinking about making the purchase, a person uses senses to observe the options and their own needs. People's purchasing behaviour and the opinion of products and services rely densly on perceived attributes. (Blythe & Sethna, 2019, 288.)

Third driver in this category is learning. Learning means changes in behaviour because of the experience (Blythe & Sethna, 2019, 20). People learn about brands and products all

the time. What we learn from them, has direct impact on our decision making and then again, our consuming behaviour. (Batkoska & Koseska, 2012, 71.)

The last drivers in this category are beliefs and attitudes. People have a tendency to react the same way towards things that they have some kind of an attitude for. In consumer behaviour context it means person's thoughts and feelings about the brand. (Blythe & Sethna, 2019, 340.) Beliefs then, are those thoughts that consumer uses to make a judgment (Blythe & Sethna, 2019, 345).

Cultural factors are external influences on consumer behaviour. Cultural factors include values and ideologies of a community. A person living in a particular community learns values and ways to behave from other people in the same community. This community includes family members, relatives and other important people around them. (Juneja 2020.)

Inside of cultural groups there are many subcultures. Subcultural groups as well share the same values and beliefs. Subcultures include people from for example different religion, geographies, nationalities, age groups, gender groups and status. (Clootrack 2020.)

Social class is also part of the cultural factors. As I've mentioned before, income level affects heavily on people's consuming behaviour. Social class is not just about the income level, it also includes occupation, family background, education and the location where a person lives. Social class is also important driver on consumer behaviour. (Clootrack 2020.)

Other external influences on consumer behaviour consists on group of social factors. Social influences have significant role in consumer behaviour. One of these factors are reference groups. These groups consist of people that are close to us, such as friends, family and co-workers. We tend to choose the products that our friends and family recommend to us. They might have experience of them, and the products are familiar to them, so it is easy to trust the recommendations. (Juneja 2020.)

Besides different reference groups, person's role and status also has an impact on consumer behaviour. For instance, if the person has high position at work, his/her purchasing behaviour is influenced by the status. This person most likely would use products that advocate his/her status. Lower position employees can have different consuming habits.

(Business Jargons 2020.)

## 4.2 Consumer decision making process

Now, when the influences that affect consumer behaviour has been introduced, we can take a look at the decision-making process of a consumer. Whether we buy a house or a coffee from the coffee shop, we have to make a decision. In this chapter those steps that we go through during the decision-making process, in case to find the best products and services for our needs, are presented. The figure below shows that there are five steps in this process.



Figure 4. Consumer Decision-Making Process Overview. (Adapted, Lucidchart 2020.)

The first step is problem recognition. In other words, it means recognizing the need of product or service. Recognition of the need can arise internally or externally. This leads to a want. When consumer recognize a want, they start to seek information of how to fulfil it. (Lucidchart 2020.)

Fulfilling a want begins with information search which is the second step of the decisionmaking process. As in the first step, during the second step the influence of internal and external factors have a remarkable role. We rely easily on these factors, but also our past experience of the product or brand. We also seek information and options through online, for instance customer reviews. Word of mouth is very important way for consumers to get information. We tend to trust more on other people's experiences than the businesses. (Lucidchart 2020.)

Third step is evaluation of alternatives. It is logical transition after information search. At this point customer knows what they want from the product and has created some kind of criteria. It's time to start investigating selection and compare convenient alternatives. (Lucidchart 2020.) Consumer might go back and forth between the second and third steps several times before making the final decision. When we know what we want and find interesting products, we might want to know some more information from other people and so on. (Professional Academy 2020.)

After finding the product or service that seems to be perfectly suitable for the buyer and has good reviews from previous customers, it's time to take the fourth step and make a purchase decision. At this point the buyer decides what is the final product or service and where would be the best place to purchase it. (Lucidchart 2020.)

The final step is post-purchase evaluation. At this stage the consumer evaluates the product they purchased. Consumer analyses the usefulness of it, satisfaction delivered from it and overall value of the product. If the product is valuable and meets the needs and expectations, the consumer will become loyal customer of the product and brand. (Farooq 2020.)

## **5 Research methods**

This chapter introduces the methodology that is chosen for this research and explains why it was the most convenient for this research. This chapter will also explain the basic theory of the chosen method. The frame of how the author collected data for the research is also covered. The validity and reliability of the research is also discussed.

### **5.1 Research approach**

The used research approach is always chosen based on what is the aim of the research and thinking about what the best way is to get all the answers to the research questions. There are two basic research approaches, qualitative method and quantitative method (Kothari, 2004, 5). Quantitative research focuses on collecting data by precise measurements using numerical and statistical analysis (Campbell 2014). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative approach helps to understand perspectives of participants of their everyday practices and experiences concerning the studied issue (Flick, 2011, 2). Meaning that qualitative research focuses on gaining deeper understanding of the phenomenon through open-ended and conversational communication. Qualitative research doesn't only ask what people think, but also why do they think that way. (QuestionPro 2020.)

There are various methods inside of qualitative approach. The following methods are most frequently used: one-on-one interview, focus groups, ethnographic research, case study research and record keeping research (QuestionPro 2020).

The chosen method for this research is qualitative research approach and one-on-one interviews. The purpose is to gain deeper understanding of respondents' opinions about the research problem and questions. What are their experiences and thoughts, why do they think that way, what are the things that affect their opinions? Choosing one-on-one interview as a method offers an opportunity to ask additional questions and clarification. And again, this helps in gaining deeper understanding of respondents' thoughts.

### **5.2 Data collection process**

When collecting data for a research, it's needed to select a sample. In most cases it's impossible to collect data from everyone in the desired group. The sample is a group that is collected from the population to take part in the research. There are two types of sampling methods: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling includes random selection. It allows the researcher to make statistical conclusions. These

methods are mainly used in quantitative research. Non-probability sampling includes non-random selection based on some criteria. These techniques are suitable for qualitative researches when the aim is to gain deeper understanding. (McCombes 2019.)

The aim of this research was to have a larger understanding of respondents' thoughts about influencer marketing, how it affects their buying behaviour and what are their opinions about trustworthiness about influencer marketing. Critical matter was also finding out why do they act or think the way they do. This is why voluntary response sampling technique was used which belongs to non-probability sampling techniques (McCombes 2019).

In the research there were 10 respondents who were all women and aged between 25 to 29. Like it was mentioned earlier, millennials are challenging group for marketers since they are a bit more concerned towards traditional marketing than other age groups. They spend a lot of time in social media, so influencer marketing is one way to reach them. (Halonen 2019, 75.) This age group was chosen to examine their feelings about the influencer marketing and its effectivity. All of the respondents were highly interested about the topic and conversations were full of interesting content.

The interviews were semi-structured interviews. It means that there weren't strict list of formalized questions and interviews were more conversational with leading questions (Doyle 2020). There were 16 questions in total and they were categorized into four groups to make it easier to go through the results. (Appendix 1) Participants were able to freely share their thoughts and additional questions and clarifications were asked if needed. Interviews were held via video chat and the length of them varied from 25 to 35 minutes. In order to ease the results analysing, each interview was given its own code. These codes were simply P1-P10, according to ten participants. Anonymity of the respondents were highly respected; any personal information wasn't collected. Interviews were audio recorded but the records were deleted as soon as they were transcribed. The records were transcribed word by word so everything that was said wouldn't be missed.

Four categories for the questions were general questions, general questions about influencers/influencer marketing, buying behaviour and experiences of influencer marketing and reliability of influencers/influencer marketing. First category included general questions about the participant. Age and gender were asked. It also included question about what social media channels participant uses and how much do they use Instagram.

Second category included general questions about influencer marketing. It was confirmed that respondents know what is meant by influencer and influencer marketing, what kind of influencers do they follow and what are their general thoughts about influencer marketing.

Third category was about their experiences about influencer marketing and buying behaviour in general. It was discussed have they ever made purchase decision based on influencers recommendation and if yes, what was the reason they decided to purchase a product/service. It was also asked what were the things that usually affect their buying behaviour and if they search information of interesting products/services from the influencers.

Fourth and the last category covered the matters concerning trustworthiness and credibility of influencers and influencer marketing. How well do the respondents trust on influencers, what are the things that affect their trustworthiness and what are the matters that influencers should take into consideration when making collaborations with the companies. The author also wanted to know if respondents trust more on influencer marketing or traditional marketing. Based on these discussions, which one would they more probably make positive purchase decisions.

### **5.3 Reliability and validity of the research**

Reliability and validity are the ways to evaluate the quality of the research. Validity indicates the accuracy and truthfulness of the research findings. Reliability indicates the consistency, stability and repeatability of the findings. It also measures the researcher ability to collect information accurately. Essential matter is that information remains the same despite of how many times it is researched. Other terms that can be used to describe reliability and validity are for instance credibility, trustworthiness, truth, value, consistency and confirmability. (Brink, 1993, 35.)

In the interviews, it was made sure that respondents understood the questions clearly and clarifications were added if they were needed. It worked the other way also, if the answer was unclear then additional questions were asked. The participants had as much time to think about their answers as they needed. It was also crucial that the interviewer didn't add own feelings and thoughts into the conversations so that respondents couldn't agree and shared truly their own thoughts. It was also clearly stated to the participants that the interview was anonymous and the records were deleted right away after the interviewer wrote the answers down.



## 6 Results

This chapter presents the results of the research. As mentioned earlier, results were achieved through the one-on-one semi-structured personal interviews. Interviews were held during the autumn 2020.

### 6.1 General questions

Interviews started with the general questions asking respondents age and gender. As mentioned earlier, the respondents were aged between 25 to 29 and all were females. The researcher wanted to know what kind of social media channels they use. To be able to take part in the research the participant were required to use Instagram. All of the participants use Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. Five of them also uses LinkedIn, three of them uses Pinterest and Snapchat and also three of them are the users of YouTube. When asking about the amount of time they spend on Instagram daily, the answers were solid that Instagram is the most used social media channel among the participants beside the WhatsApp. All of the ten participants said that they use Instagram several times during a day. Four of them were able to estimate that the daily usage of Instagram is hours.

*“Each time when I need a little break during a day, Instagram is always the first app that I browse.” (P2)*

*“Instagram is my “main social media channel”.” (P3)*

### 6.2 Influencer/influencer marketing

The next questions handled the idea of influencer and influencer marketing. General thoughts about influencers and influencer marketing were discussed and also the niche of influencers they like to follow. All of the participants were highly familiar with the concepts of influencer and influencer marketing. It was also required in order to participate to this research. However, the concepts were explained to them just to ensure that the meanings are clear.

When asking about the niche of influencers participants follow on Instagram, the selection was really wide. All of the participants follow lifestyle influencers. The second common niche was fashion. Other niches that were mentioned were politics, media, interior, building, food, family, wellbeing, natural nutrition, sports, environment and traveling.

*“I follow the kind of influencers who share the same values with me.” (P6)*

The next question was about what kind of general thoughts influencer marketing cause among the participants. All participants' uppermost opinion was that it's definitely a good thing and it has a lot of great impacts. One comment was that it's a job for someone like any other job. It was said by many participants that it's a great way to find new products/services to try themselves. It also inspires and encourages to try new things. Two respondents also said that it gives a lot of opportunities for people to employ themselves.

*“It's interesting to see reviews of products that I haven't tested myself. It inspires and encourages to try new things.” (P8)*

However, there were some negative feelings as well regarding the topic. The most common point, that was stated by six participants, is that basically too much is too much. It gets annoying when most of the posts are commercials or collaborations. It was also stated that the channel gets uninteresting very easily if the person behind the influencer doesn't stand out.

*“It's a good thing as long as every post is not a collaboration. There must be other content too that followers can relate.” (P5)*

*“In my opinion it's a positive thing, but for example product recommendations must be honest.” (P6)*

*“And then there are for example pr-events that many influencers have participated. The next day everyone has exactly same content from the party. Or then some product campaign has started, and many influencers has stories and posts with same slogans, that's boring too. Then I just view stories from one or maybe two influencers and skip the rest. I feel like in those situations the repetition starts to annoy me. Although the product sticks in peoples' minds of course.” (P1)*

### **6.3 Buying behaviour and experiences**

In this section the participants' buying behaviour and experiences of influencer marketing are analysed. Questions covered if participants had ever purchased anything inspired by influencer on Instagram and if they had, what drove them to make the positive purchase decision. The aim was to get deeper knowledge for the question why, why did they decide to make a purchase? The matters that affect their purchasing decisions generally were

also discussed. One question was also if they seek information of interesting product from the influencers.

Eight of the respondents said that they clearly remember buying a product/service inspired by an influencer. Mostly bought products among the participants were cosmetics, wellbeing products, clothes and food. The rest two said that they don't remember buying anything but would definitely see it possible. They also said that they might not purchase a product right away but might remember it in the future and then purchase it later.

The more important thing for the researcher was to know what the reasons were, why they decided to buy a recommended or advertised product. The main two reasons among the participants were that the product was interesting itself and the advertisement was professional. Influencers knew well what they were talking about and knew the product they were selling. Influencer was credible and got viewers excited about the product being excited themselves too. Couple of participants mentioned regarding the cosmetics, that the thing that also mattered and increased the reliability was that influencer had tested the product for a while before recommending it. It proved that the product was good quality. The important thing among all participants was also the influencer. If the influencer was the kind they trust and relate to, it's a lot easier to trust them.

*"The product was interesting itself and the way how convincingly and professionally it was recommended totally got me. It was easy to trust that." (P2)*

*"Maybe the product somehow came alive when I saw it in the idyllic context where it was used by a real person that I somehow feel I know personally, and who is not just some random face on the TV." (P9)*

Next question was if participants search information of interesting product/service from influencers. Two of the participants said that they do it rarely. Everyone else said that they do it almost every time, but three of them uses influencers experiences only with cosmetics. The major said that the main channels to find information are blogs, since Google makes it easy to find bloggers' reviews. Only one said that she doesn't like reading blogs and she rather finds information from Instagram since it's easier and faster to read. One participant also said that with clothing, it can be easier to find the right size for yourself with the help of an influencer.

*"With the clothing, it's easier to find the right size because the influencers usually tell what size they are using. It's easier to see how the clothes are fitting when influencer is wearing*

*them on the video rather than see just one photo of the product wore by a model. Especially if the influencers body is somehow same shape as I have.” (P3)*

The last question of this category was about the matters that affect participants' buying behaviour in general. Two of the most popular features that came out were price and quality. Many of the participants said that they rather buy rarely and save money for the better quality than buy often and poor quality. Ethicalness were also mentioned a few times. One of the participants said that advertising matters too because it gives the first impression of the product.

*“I buy mainly for the need. I aim to buy better quality and long-lasting products.” (P1)*

Influencers were also mentioned. Six of the respondents said that they do impulse shopping influenced by influencers. Even some of those who said that they want to invest on quality and long-lasting products. Most of them said that this kind of impulse shopping mainly happens in grocery store. Cosmetics were also one of the most impulsively purchased product among the participants. One of the participants said that she uses a lot of discount codes that influencers share. One participant said that the reason why influencers drive to make impulsive purchases are that they seem to cause some kind of obsession of the product or service they are advertising. When asking about the features that might cause the obsession, things such as quality of the advertising, professionalism and enthusiasm of the influencer were mentioned.

*“I use discount codes that influencers share. Even though I wouldn't need a product right at that moment, those discounts drive me to buy or at least check the selection.” (P3)*

*“I do impulse purchases a lot and I'm kind of easy target for influencers. I might buy a product even though I would still have the kind of product left.” (P7)*

#### **6.4 Reliability of influencer marketing**

This section of the interview focused on the reliability of influencers and influencer marketing. What are the features that make influencer reliable, what is important to take into consideration when planning collaborations and the differences of reliability of traditional marketing and influencer marketing?

The first and second question were do the participants trust on influencer marketing and what makes influencer reliable and credible. All of the participants said that they mostly

trust on influencers. However, most of them mentioned that they are aware of the fact that influencers receive money or free products for return.

*“In these days I trust them more because many influencers highlight that they are very selective towards the collaborations and brands they work with.” (P1)*

*“I trust on certain influencers. But I never make purchase decision only based on influencers recommendation. I always search for more reviews and experiences from the internet and people that are close to me.” (P6)*

In opinions of the participants, there are plenty of things that affect on influencer's reliability. Almost all of the participants, seven of them, said that influencer who shares personal things, brings out their real personality and their everyday life is more reliable and approachable. Also, most of the participants said that it's crucial that collaborations fit with influencers' brand and go hand-in-hand. It was also mentioned that influencing on other ways too than just commercials is important. This includes for instance sharing facts of the things that influencer is personally interested in. It was also mentioned by couple of participants that knowledge of the products that are advertised is important too. Being able to answer to the questions correctly makes an influencer more professional and that supports especially credibility. Other things that were mentioned few times were experience and transparency.

*“Experience brings credibility and reliability. I think that experienced influencers don't accept just any kind of collaboration offers.” (P7)*

*“For me it's important that collaborations go hand-in-hand with the influencers brand and the way he/she does their work.” (P10)*

*“One of the influencers who I follow is a vegan. She shares a lot of pieces of her everyday life on Instagram. For example, she presents her groceries at a times. Being able to support what you say you are by showing the life you live endorses credibility. It doesn't need much.” (P8)*

When asking about the matters that make influencers unreliable the answers were again somewhat concerted. Most of the respondents said that when almost all of the content is commercials, it easily starts to look that the money is the only motivation for the influencer. Also, if there's not at all or very little personal things in the channel, such as pieces of everyday life and experiences, it makes influencer not interesting and unreliable. One thing

that was mentioned by a few participants was that if advertised products are contradictory with each other, it's a sign of unreliability. Two of the participants said that if all the products are hyped for being the best it easily gets unreliable.

The next questions were about the traditional marketing and influencer marketing. Which one participant trust more and based on which one of these they'd rather make purchase decision. And again, knowing why, was crucial to know. The answers were not unambiguous. Three of the participants said first that they probably trust more on traditional marketing. One reminded that influencer always gets something from the collaboration so it's not 100% trustworthy in her opinion. After considering the question and different angles of the issue, two of those who first answered traditional marketing changed the opinion to the influencer marketing. Seven of the respondents said that they trust more on influencer marketing. The most common reason was that recommendation is based on experience. Couple of participants also stated that it's easier to trust someone you have created some kind of bond with. Many of them also said that it depends a lot who is the influencer behind the advertisement, but they mainly do trust on those who they follow themselves.

*"Traditional marketing rarely gets me interested of a product. Somehow, it's very different when someone who I have created some kind of bond with, recommends the product based on their experience, rather than just some random face on TV." (P9)*

When discussing about which one of these marketing forms would most probably drive them to make a purchase, all of the respondents said influencer marketing. The reason for this was mostly the same as why they trust influencers more. Recommendation based on experience was the most mentioned reason. One of the respondents said that on Instagram she probably faces the product more often, so it sticks to the mind.

*"I feel that traditional marketing is more like an information that "hey, we got this new product" and then influencers shares their experiences and tips how to use the product. I would rather buy it based on influencer marketing since it gets me more interested." (P5)*

The last question was what are the issues that influencers should take into consideration when making commercial content and doing collaborations. Almost all of the respondents said that it's very important to know the product/service very well. Should be able to answer the questions that followers may ask about the product. Transparency was also mentioned couple of times. Also a few of the participants said that it would be good to create own selling pitch if that's possible. During the campaigns, many influencers have exactly same slogans and pitches and that doesn't seem to be a good thing. It easily gives

a feeling that influencer doesn't have anything to say about the product themselves. As it came out earlier, most of the participants said that it's highly important that the product goes along with the influencers brand seamlessly.

*"It's a plus that they know the product well and doesn't share ready-made speech about it. Just an advertising is not enough. They need to know something about the product and have some kind of opinion about it." (P1)*

At the end of the interviews, the researcher asked if there's anything else they would want to share related to the topic. Many of the respondents said that they are actually quite surprised how much influencer marketing affects their behaviour. Some said that this was interesting learning experience for them and opened their eyes a little bit to think about these things. Some also said that especially when spending so much time on Instagram and exposing to influencer marketing many times during a day, it's important to awake themselves to see how much they buy things influenced by Instagram.

## **6.5 Analysis of the interviews**

The three content topics in this research were thoughts about influencers/influencer marketing, consumer behaviour and reliability of influencer marketing. To start with, it must be said that questions were formed quite clear since all the participants understood the questions right away and clarifications weren't usually needed. Questions caused a lot of discussions and feelings among the participants and it was noticed that the topic interested them too. Participants considered the questions carefully and thought over the different angles of the topics.

First topic was about general thoughts about influencers and influencer marketing. First thoughts were mainly positive, and participants thought it's definitely a good thing and has a lot of great impacts. After conversations proceed further the negative issued came up also. The most top feeling was still positivity towards the issues.

Second topic handled participants buying behaviour and experiences of influencer marketing. Almost everyone remembered buying something recommended by an influencer. Participants hadn't thought much about how much influencer marketing is affecting their buying behaviour. The more they thought about it, the more interesting points they realised about their own behaviour. When the participants had time to ponder questions and think about different angles out loud, the answers were truthful.

The last topic was about the reliability of influencer marketing. This topic aroused a lot of feelings among the participants. Everyone had instantly something to say. Interesting thing in this category was the question about the reliability of the influencer marketing compared to traditional marketing. Many respondents had to think this one more carefully and clearly, they didn't first have straight opinion about this. After discussing about the topic some of them realised that they actually think in the other way they first thought.

Even though some questions aroused a lot of different feelings and participants had to think more of them, the outcome was clear and at the end of the discussions everyone were satisfied and felt that they were able to disclose well their thoughts and experiences about the topics.



## 7 Discussion

For this research, 10 females were interviewed. Participants were aged between 25 to 29. Interviews were arranged during the autumn 2020. To begin with, there were a lot of interesting conversations full of experiences and great thoughts and insights.

As mentioned in the theory, in these days more and more people use various social media channels. This research proved it right that people spend a lot of time on social media and it's a big part of our everyday life. The majorly used channel among the participants was Instagram. It turned out that influencer marketing is seen as a positive phenomenon. It has good effects, such as it helps audience to explore new products/services and offers employment opportunities for different aged people.

Major of the participants (80%) clearly remember buying something recommended by an influencer on Instagram. The most bought products were cosmetics, wellbeing products, clothes and food. The main reasons why something was bought was interesting product itself and professionalism of an influencer. The most important features that made influencers professional were high knowledge of the product, enthusiasm and high quality of and advertisement, visually and verbally. It also seems that influencers drive people to make impulsive purchases, even though they wouldn't normally do it that often. Most of the respondents said that they do impulsive shopping encouraged by an influencer. As mentioned in the theory, peoples' buying behaviour is somewhat affected by people surrounded them. This research proves that recommendations by other people really matter and can drive to positive buying decision even though the product was not necessarily needed at that moment.

The first research question was "Does influencer marketing based on Instagram, affect millenials' buying behaviour?" Based on this research, the answer is definitely yes. I would say that the main consumer behaviour factors that can be seen in the research results are psychological factors and social factors (eNotes MBA 2014). Psychological drivers that can be found in the results are learning and beliefs & attitudes. Consumers learn about the brands and products from the influencers' experiences. Influencers share knowledge and information about the brands and/or products/services. They have the ability to affect other peoples' mindset and opinions (Halonen, 2019, 11-12). As mentioned in the theory, when thinking about the consumer behaviour, it matters what we learn about the products. (Batkoska & Koseska, 2012, 71.) Another important driver that can be adapted is beliefs & attitude. As mentioned in the theory, consumers create beliefs and attitudes towards

products and brands. These are the thoughts and feelings about the brands and products, and they affect our buying behaviour. (Blythe & Sethna, 2019, 340.)

The social factors can also be adapted to this topic. In the research answers it was noticed that in the best case, followers can trust and relate on influencers' word like they do on their closest people. Influencers can this way be seen as a part of the reference group that is one social factor in consumer behaviour. As mentioned earlier in the theory, we tend to choose the products that has been recommended by the people that are close to us. (Juneja 2020)

The second research question was "What are respondents' thoughts about trustworthiness of influencer marketing?" The research shows that influencers are mainly trusted. However, people keep in mind that they get a reward of recommendations. Many things were mentioned when talking about the features that make influencers trustworthy. It's important to show the personality behind the commercial content. When people can somehow relate to the influencer, they can trust them better. In the theory, there was mentioned that the brand match is very important in order influencer marketing to be effective. Followers has also noticed this, since this was mentioned many times that collaborations need to match with influencers' brand. Also, knowledge of the products and high quality of the content were mentioned. These features are valuable and endorse credibility and trustworthiness of an influencer.

This research shows that among these participants influencer marketing is more reliable than traditional marketing. It's easier to buy something advertised by a person who are relatable rather than advertised by someone who is totally unknown. Influencer marketing also drives them to make a purchase more often than traditional marketing.

## **7.1 Conclusion**

I am genuinely highly interested of the topic that I had chosen for this thesis. The goal that I set for myself was to learn more about influencer marketing and I think I learnt a lot during this process. I enjoyed reading all the sources and material and I tried to storage as much information as I could.

Interviews also gave a lot of interesting insights and aspects of the topic. It was very interesting to have conversations with the participants and hear how they think and act. This topic also awaked many research participants to think how easily they can be steered by influencers. It felt nice that I was able to offer them something to think about. It also

surprised me how much participants had same kind of thoughts and opinions about the topics with each other. This somehow strengthens the results.

My main issue during this process was definitely time management. I wasn't able to reach my original finishing date that I had set to myself. However, the more I did it, the easier the writing got, and I was able to finish the whole process early before the very last deadline. My other issue was finding decent and up-to-date literature sources for the theory part. There wasn't much literature about influencer marketing.

Overall, the aim that I had set for this research was reached and I got answers for the research questions. I'm satisfied with the results that was found. Qualitative research approach was suitable choice for this research since it gave me an opportunity to ask additional questions and find the answer for the question; why.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview questions

#### **General questions**

1. Age, gender
2. What social media channels do you use?
3. How much do you use Instagram?

#### **General questions about influencers/influencer marketing**

4. Are you familiar with the meaning of influencer?
5. Are you familiar with the concept of influencer marketing?
6. What kind of influencers you follow on Instagram?
7. What are your general thoughts about influencer marketing?

#### **Buying behaviour and experiences of influencer marketing**

8. Have you ever purchased a product/service inspired by an influencer on Instagram?
9. If yes, what are the reasons that encouraged you to make positive purchase decision?
10. When you get interested in certain product/service, do you search for more information and experiences of the product/service from influencers?
11. What kind of matters affect to your buying behaviour and purchase decisions in general?

#### **Reliability of influencers/influencer marketing**

12. Do you trust influencers recommendations and commercial content?
13. What makes influencer reliable and credible?
14. If you think about the traditional marketing and influencer marketing, which one is more reliable in your opinion? Why?
15. Would you rather make purchase based on traditional marketing or influencer marketing? Why?
16. What are the matters that influencers should take into consideration while making collaborations with other companies?