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Attitudes of Younger Generations Towards Influencer Marketing

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Nuoremman sukupolven asenteet vaikuttajamarkkinointia kohtaan

Tiivistelmä

Sosiaalisesta mediasta on tullut keskeinen osa elämäämme. Vaikuttajista jotka ovat keränneet merkittävän seuraajamäärän sosiaalisessa mediassa, on tullut yrityksille tapa mainostaa itseään. Nuoremat sukupolvet käyttävät sosiaalista mediaa enemmän kuin kukaan ja ovat selvä kohderyhmä vaikuttajamarkkinoinnille. Tutkimus näiden nuorempien sukupolvien mielipiteistä vaikuttajia kohtaan voisi avata uusia ovia markkinoinnin saralla.

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli sukeltaa nuoremman sukupolven mieleen ja selvittää heidän mielipiteensä sosiaalista mediaa ja vaikuttajamarkkinoinitia kohtaan, jotta nähtäisiin miten nuo mielipiteet vaikuttavat heidän ostokäyttäytymiseensä. Tämä tarjoaisi yrityksille ja vaikuttajille enemmän tietoa siitä, minkälainen vaikuttajamarkkinointi olisi tehokkainta. Tutkimuksessä käytettiin sekä primääristä että sekundääristä dataa vastataksesen tutkimuskysymyksiin. Primäärinen määrällinen data kerättiin kyselyn avulla, joka vastaanotti 87 vastausta. Sekundäärinen data esitettiin kirjallisuuskatsauksen muodossa, joka kokosi tietämyskannan jo olemassa olevasta kirjallisuudesta.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat että nuoremmilla sukupolvilla oli varsin neutraalit mielipiteet niin sosiaalista mediaa kuin vaikuttajamarkkinointiakin kohtaan. He käyttivät sosiaalista mediaa päivittäin ja kohtasivat vaikuttajamarkkinointia usein. Huolimatta vaikuttajamarkkinoinnin näkyvyydestä, nuoremmat sukupolvet eivät kokeneet sillä olevan suurta vaikutusta heidän ostopäätöksiinsä. Vaikuttajan luonteenpiirteet nähtiin isona vaikuttajana hänen uskottavuuteensa. Personallisuus ja tuttuus nähtiin tärkeimpinä tekijöinä.

Avainsanat (asiasanat)

Sosiaalinen media, vaikuttajamarkkinointi, vaikuttaja, kyselytutkimus, kuluttajien asenteet

Muut tiedot (salassa pidettävät liitteet)

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Abstract

Social media has become an integral part of our lives. Influencers, who have gathered a significant following on social media have become a way for companies to advertise themselves. Younger generations use social media more than anybody and are a clear target audience for influencer marketing. Research on what are the opinions of these younger consumers towards influencers would open new doors in terms of marketing opportunities.

The goal of the study was to dive into the minds of younger generations and find out their opinions on social media and influencer marketing to see how those opinions affected their buying behavior. This could provide companies and influencers more information on what type of influencer marketing would be the most effective. Research with both primary and secondary data was conducted to answer the research questions. The primary qualitative data was collected through survey, which received 87 responses. The secondary data was presented in the form of a literature review, which compiled a knowledge base from already existing literature.

Results of the research indicated that younger people had quite neutral view on both social media and influencer marketing. They used social media daily and encountered influencer marketing often. Despite the coverage of influencer marketing, younger generation did not feel like it had a big impact on their buying decisions. Characteristics of an influencer were seen as a big factor on their credibility. Personality and familiarity were seen as the most important factors.

Keywords/tags (subjects)

Social media, influencer marketing, influencer, questionnaire study, consumer attitudes

Miscellaneous (Confidential information)

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1   Introduction

1.1   Background

Originally, social media was a place where people could share their daily life and accomplishments with their inner circle and make new friends. The origin of social media has remained the same, but throughout the years commercialization and the world of business have started to implement themselves into this digital phenomenon. The popularity of social media has made companies realize the never-ending possibilities of creating brand awareness and acquiring new customers. (Husain et al., 2016). According to Mount & Martinez (2014) especially social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter have become key marketing tools for companies. Digital and social media marketing have become fundamentals of marketing in general.

Colossal popularity of social media has created the concept of social media influencers. People who have gained a large following in social media have substantial influence and power in the platform. These online creators often have a large number of followers who they have an influence on since they are often seen as celebrities or even idols (Leung et al., 2022). Companies have started to pick up on the popularity and power that influencers hold and have begun utilizing that visibility in marketing. Influencer marketing has turned into one of the main marketing tools as it is often beneficial and effective for both parties; the company and the influencer (Brooks et al., 2021).

Internet and social media have become an essential part of our everyday life. Deep (2015) acknowledges that this is especially true in the case of teenagers and younger generations. This has made younger consumers a prime target group for influencer marketing. But how do these younger generations concern to all of this? How can influencer marketing be improved in the future? This thesis focuses on the attitudes and perceptions of younger people towards influencer marketing. The thesis examines how younger people view influencers and what makes an influencer appealing in their eyes.

1.2 Motivation

The number of influencers on social media has been growing exponentially in the recent years. It is nearly impossible to go even a day without being exposed to a variety of advertising every time you open one of your social media platforms. An increasing amount of this advertising is done by social media influencers. Especially younger people get easily attached to their favorite influencers and start following them more intensively. Once this influencer, that a young person has followed for a long time and almost feels connected to, recommends a product or a service, it is more likely to affect the buying behavior of the youngster.

The motivation for this study becomes mainly from the author´s interest towards social media as a platform for marketing purposes. The fact that a place that was initially meant just for meeting friends is now being utilized for marketing purposes is fascinating and shows how everything is being commercialized now. The concept of using social media influencers as a marketing tool is a relatively new subject and more research on the topic is needed. Especially the effects of influencer marketing towards younger generations are crucial knowledge in order to better understand the concept of influencer marketing. Therefore, the author felt that more advantageous research on the subject would be beneficial to all the parties involved; consumers, social media influencers and companies utilizing them.

1.3 Research Objectives & Questions

Social media influencers are advertising various products and services on social media and the constant stream of this advertising is hard to ignore. Especially younger people that spend more time on social media are a target audience of influencer marketing. To further improve the effectiveness of influencer marketing, it is essential to understand how influencer marketing and influencers themselves are perceived by younger generations.

To get a better understanding of influencer marketing on younger generations, the following research objectives were set:

RO1: To understand what younger generations think of social media influencers as a concept.

RO2: To gain knowledge on how younger generations see the concept of using social media influencers as a marketing tool.

RO3: To provide more information on what characteristics make a good influencer in relation to influencer marketing.

In order to answer these objectives, the following research questions were set for this study:

RQ1: "What are the general attitudes of younger generations towards influencers?"

RQ2: "How do younger generations view influencer marketing and how does it affect their buying decisions?"

RQ3: "What qualities make an influencer appealing and credible in the eyes of younger people

1.4   Thesis Structure

The following thesis has been divided into five chapters. The introduction covers the basis and reasoning for the conduction of this research. It explains the motivation for this study and presents the research objectives and questions, that will later be examined during the research. Literature review will then overview already existing literature on the topic and give a foundation for the actual research. After previous literature has been examined, research methodology of the study will be explained. Then the actual implementation process will explain in detail how the research was conducted and how the results were analyzed. Next, results of the research will be presented and further analyzed. Finally, Discussion and conclusions will answer previously set research questions and give final reflections on the whole research and thesis process. Limitations of this research and suggestions for further ones will also be included in the final chapter.

2   Literature Review

The following chapter overviews and briefs literature related to the topic. By reviewing related literature, theoretical background and some frameworks can be established. Already acknowledged facts and common findings of the field can be explained and adapted further. Grounds of social media, different social media platforms and influencers will be explained. Additional findings and theories will also be introduced.

2.1   The Concept of Social Media

At one time families would gather around the TV every night to watch the latest hit shows and competitions. Every family would do the same and the next day the main topic of discussion in every office and school class was last night´s episode. All this has changed with the rice of internet, and later social media. Nowadays, everyone can watch their favorite shows at anytime and anywhere, from various gadgets and screens (Williams, 2019).

Social media is a common name for Internet and mobile-based platforms, that give its users a chance to create and observe user-created content and take part in online exchanges and communities with other users (Library of Parliament, 2010). A common perception of social media is that it only consists of big networking websites like Facebook and Instagram, while in reality the concept is much broader. Social media includes networking sites, podcasts, blogs, micro blogs, internet forums, wikis and much more (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). Social media is a huge concept with new meanings and definitions added every day.

Social media is a major concept that covers a large part of the internet. This text will focus mainly on the more commonly known sides of social media and its bigger platforms, since social media marketing is mainly focused on those. With social media being as broad as it is, there will surely be something for everyone in it. That is one of the reasons it so popular (Power, 2014). No matter what an individual's interests or preferences are, there will be something suitable from them on social media. This makes social media so addictive as well. There is always more interesting and suiting content available.

2.2 Evolution of Social Media

To properly understand how social media works today, it is important to have an understanding of its evolution and origins (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). The first steps of social media were taken somewhere in the 1950´s, when the first telecommunication systems appeared. They obviously were far from the social media we know today, but the beginning of virtual communication had started.

The next step was the Bulletin Board Systems in the 1980`s and 1990`s (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). They were servers on a computer attached to a modem. Through these systems users could message or e-mail others. Usenet was also a popular messaging form, similar to Bulletin Board Systems. Bulletin Board Systems were the forefathers of the modern social networking sites. In the 1990`s, when internet became more popular, Bulletin Board Systems lost their popularity and more modern types of messaging systems took their place.

According to Taprial and Kanwar (2012), in 1991 the World Wide Web (WWW) was made available for everyone to use. It had been in limited use for years before that, but in the mid 90`s many internet providers started operating publicly and the internet opened for everybody. This was a major accomplishment in the history of social media because it allowed a free access to internet and therefore to different messaging forums.

In 1983, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) was created. It was the first popular messaging system, where users could talk and interact in real-time. It was also the first site where people started using hashtags and made status updates about their life (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). IRC was the first type of social media platform that resembles the popular sites that we have nowadays. It had a major impact on future sites.

Taprial and Kanwar (2012) state that starting from the late 90`s it became clear, that internet and messaging through it were here to stay. The popularity of internet grew rapidly, when more and more users wanted to be able to interact with friends via computer. Taprial and Kanwar (2012) continue that slowly the concept of social networking emerged from all of this. More and more sites like Myspace and Friendster, where users could find new connections and share their pictures, files, and status with them emerged. These sites evolved with technology, and slowly the social media sites that we know today started to take place with Facebook being the first major

flagship. The following figure form Statista demonstrates more recent popularity of social media. Daily time spent on social media has constantly increased every year.
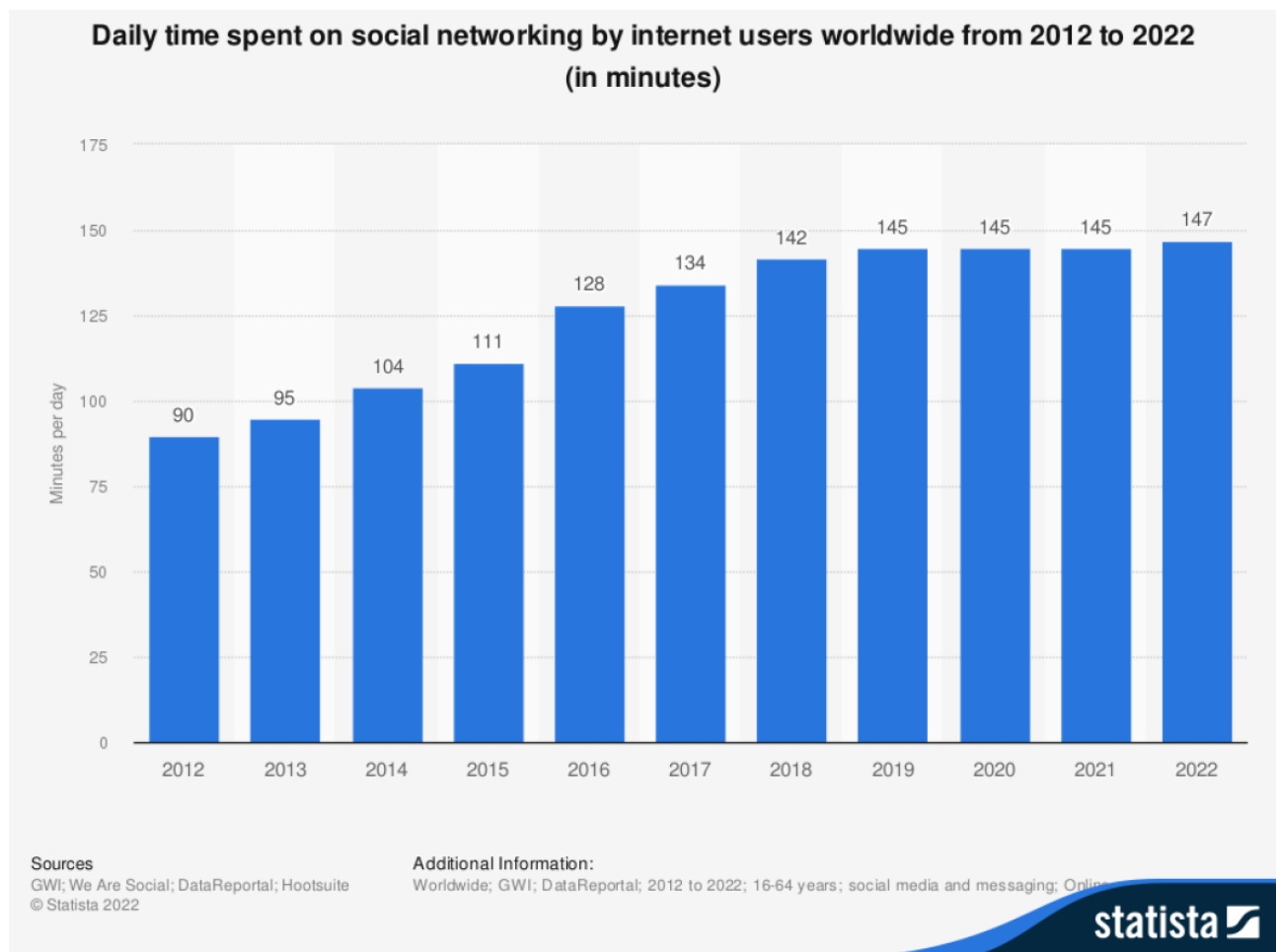
Figure 1. Daily time spent on social media. (Statista, 2022)

2.3 Social Media Platforms

Social media consists of various platforms and sites (Tuten, 2020). Most of the biggest sites are similar in their main idea and operation method. Firstly, they require an account from their users. With their accounts, users can create their own content while following and commenting the creations of others. This way communication and following of other accounts is created (Tuten, 2020).

According to Statista (2022), some of the most popular social media platforms include:

2.3.1 Facebook

A networking site that offers synchronous interactions, where users make personal profiles with their own faces and names and can then update their status and pictures with their friends (Lewis, 2010). People can comment other users' publications and like and share them. Companies use Facebook as well, with almost every business having their own Facebook page these days. Although it has lost some of its users to other platforms, Facebook is still the biggest social media platform in the world. In 2017 It was close to reaching 2 billion monthly active users and has passed that number already. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has said that he believes the platform can reach 5 billion active users by 2030 (University Wire, 2017). With other social medias taking more space from Facebook, it is unlikely for Facebook to hit such ambitious numbers even if its growth is inevitable.

2.3.2 Instagram

A photo sharing app, where people can share all kinds of pictures of themselves, nature, animals, food or anything else they can come up with (Seetharaman, 2016). They can put filters, their location and text in their photos. Followers of the person can then like and comment their photos and interact in a similar way to Facebook (Jones Institutional News 2012). Launched in 2010, Instagram has become the most talked platform and has over billion users. According to Henden (2020), in some statistics it has even been argued that people use as much time in Instagram as they do in Facebook

2.3.3 Twitter

In twitter users can post, or "tweet" short messages or status updates (Lewis, 2010). The updates are like text messages in the way they are formed. Other users can then like, comment, and retweet those messages. Users can also follow others and post pictures and videos. Lewis (2010) continues that Twitter is also an important part of news sharing. Multiple news stations and reporters from all kinds of journalisms publish their texts and articles in Twitter.

2.3.4   Snapchat

A popular social media app, where people can share their pictures and videos with friends. The videos only appear for 10 seconds before disappearing (University Wire, 2016). Much like Instagram, users can add filter and text to their "snaps". Snapchat differs from other major social media platforms by being only available on mobile (ABC Premium News, 2016).

2.3.5   TikTok

The most previous rising star of social media platforms is TikTok (Petter, 2019). It is a mobile application that allows its users to create short videos of them with music or sound effects in the background. Dancing and lip-syncing videos are the most popular and common ones. The app is particularly popular among teenagers and has quickly risen in popularity over the past few years (Petter, 2019).

2.3.6   LinkedIn

LinkedIn is different from other platforms on this list. While the other platforms are primarily meant for social interaction with friends, LinkedIn is designed for professional use (Richard, 2011). It is a professional networking site that companies and employees use, but it has a social side to it as well. That is the ability to share things and add friends. LinkedIn is a great way for businesses, managers and employees to showcase themselves and find new business connections (Richard, 2011).

According to Tuten (2020), over 4 billion people use internet daily with most of them being active on at least one social media platform. Tuten (2020) continues that the average user spends two hours in a day in social media. The biggest platforms all have hundreds of millions of users every month and are a major part of people´s everyday lives. With so many different platforms for different users, there are countless opportunities for businesses to market their products and services. Social media is becoming more popular everyday with new platforms and sites launched continuously (Tuten 2020).

2.4 Influencers

Influencers are a huge part of social media marketing (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). An influencer is an individual who has enough following on social media to attract their followers into buying decisions. Companies pay influencers to promote their products or services in their social media platforms to attract customers. Companies pay influencers either with actual money, or in other ways such as free products or trips. A common partnership between a company and influencer includes the company sending its product for the influencer for free. In exchange for the free product, the influencer shows the product in their social media and talks about it in a positive manner (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018).

Influencers are such a powerful marketing tool because of their popularity (Lee, 2020). Followers often see the influencers as idols or role models. If they see their favorite influencer wearing a certain brand´s product, it gives them a more positive image of the brand and company.

2.5 Types of Influencers

There are different types on influencers based on the platform they use and ways they market the products (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). The four types according to Kadekova and Holiencinova (2018), are:

1. Blogger:

   A person who writes their own personal blog on their website. The content is unique and can contain text, pictures and much more. People reading the blog can often comment on the posts and interact with the blogger. Blogs are often shared in social media platforms and given more visibility (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018).

2. Vlogger:

   A person who makes videos on a platform called YouTube. Vloggers are often called YouTubers as well. These videos or vlogs can consist of countless different types on content, with the main point being that the vlogger creates the content by themselves (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018).

3. Celebrity:

   A person who is famous for something else as well. Most often a singer, actor or an athlete. These celebrities often get a large following on social media due to their popularity (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018).

4. Instagrammer:

   An influencer using specifically Instagram, who has been able to get a large number of followers due their somehow appealing pictures. Most common once are influencers who share model-like pictures of themselves. Users can like and comment their pictures and that way communicate with the Instagrammer (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018).

Since there are so many different types of influencers that can be used in marketing, there is something for everyone. It is easy for a company to choose the type of influencer that best suits their product and target audience to promote their product. The influencer must also create quality content and have characteristics suitable for the product and brand.

2.6   Use of Influencers

Trustworthiness refers to the level of honesty and reliability that a person offers (Venus et al., 2019). People are more likely to trust someone who they can relate to, and feel are like them. The processing of messages is far more accurate and effective if the message comes from someone who is similar to the audience. Influencers are often perceived as regular people rather than as celebrities (Venus et al., 2019).

Since social media influencers are seen as trustworthy and regular people, they are often more effective in creating brand awareness than regular celebrities (Venus et al., 2019). Regular celebrities are often seen as superiors, and they are hard to relate to. According to Venus et al. (2019) sports stars are a good example of that. They have big sponsorship campaigns, and are often seen as just commercial campaigns, in which the celebrity does not actually think the same about the brand as they say in the commercial. If an Instagram influencer with 20 000 followers says that hey use the product and explain why they like it, the brand is seen as more reliable, and the message feels more authentic and real. According to The Guardian 90% of consumers trust peer recommendations, while only 33% trust normal advertisement. When an influencer a consumer follows and feels connected to recommends a certain product or brand, the consumer is multiple times more likely to make a buying decision than with regular advertisement of that same brand (Venus et al., 2019).

2.7   Target Audience

Influencer marketing is all about building strong and lasting relationships between consumers and brands (Madumere, 2017). Brands are more willing to use influencers as marketers who can create that relationship for the brand. Even if the audience is sometimes smaller than with bigger celebrity endorsers, the are more engaged and get emotionally more connected to the brand (Madumere, 2017). This way brands are more likely to create lasting relationships with consumers and have them spend more time and money on the brand in the future.

Influencers often create specific type of content, and their audience is specific too (Sahil, 2020). An Instagram model whose every picture is taken with their dog in their lap, likely has an audience that likes animals and dogs. With the right kind of influencer, companies can target the right kind of consumers that are a good target audience for their product and brand.

2.8   Conclusions

Social media´s popularity has risen rapidly in the last 15 years, and it has become a large part of most people´s everyday lives. Due to its huge popularity and large number of users, social media is a great marketing place for companies and brands. Brands are making a shift from regular marketing to more digital and social media marketing.

Influencers are a huge part of social media marketing and are a great way to bring consumers closer towards the brand. There are several types of influencers that can market the brand and their products to their audience. It is important to find the right kind of influencer with the right audience to direct the marketing towards a right target audience. There are countless ways and opportunities to utilize influencers in social media marketing with almost any brand. With the continuing growth of social media with new platforms launching all the time, the affect and importance of efficient social media and influencer marketing will only increase in the future.

3   Research Methodology & Implementation

In the following chapter methodology and implementation of the research will be covered. The chapter explains the research framework and design of the conducted research. Furthermore, it reviews the data collection and analyzing phases of the research process. Covering these topics is essential in forming a complete picture and understanding of the conducted research.

3.1   Research Design & Approach

Research design defines how the subsequently assessed research questions are going to be answered (Saunders et al., 2016). A good research design will include explicit objectives related to the research questions. It will also explain the sources where the needed data will be gathered and how that data will subsequently be analyzed. A well-planned research design will also consider and evaluate possible ethical issues of the research that is being conducted. According to Cooper & Schindler (2013), a research design is the outline that the researcher should follow throughout the whole research process. While covering the entire process, it offers a great framework for the research. Without a well inducted research design, conducting a proper and reliable research will be challenging. Saunders et al. (2016) state that a good research design makes it apparent the author has undoubtedly considered every part of the research process.

Cooper & Schindler (2013) define the essentials of research design as follows:

- An activity- and time-based plan.
- A plan always based on the research question.
- A guide for selecting sources and types of information.
- A framework for specifying the relationships among the study´s variables.
- A procedural outline for every research activity.

The author and researcher of this thesis found the research framework called "onion" helpful when conducting the research design for the study. The research onion is a method suggested by Saunders et al. (2016), that can be used as a tool during the research process. The "onion" describes research design as a process with six layers. Following the layers of the onion step by step can aid in organizing the research and making it easier to follow (Melnikovas, 2018). The author found this to be true.
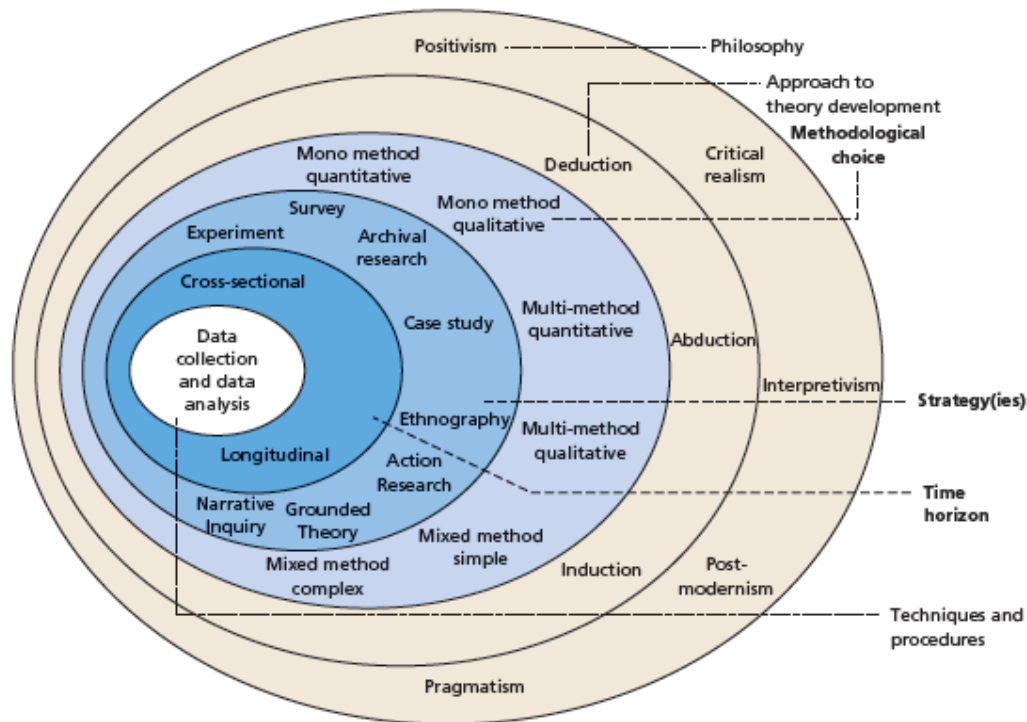
Figure 2. The research "onion" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016)

This research followed the inductive approach. Inductive approach derives new theories based on the data that has been collected (Armat et al., 2018). Inductive approach starts with a detailed look into relevant, already existing literature, that is related to the topic. Without a strong base knowledge on the subject, proper inductive research is difficult to conduct. This is the reasoning for the thorough literature review at the start of this thesis. After getting familiar with the subject, research objectives and questions will be answered based on the new conducted research (Saunders et al., 2016). The goal of this thesis and research is to get a better sense of how younger generations view social media influencers. Inductive approach is used when deeper and more detailed understanding of a certain subject is trying to be gained. Consequently, it is an appropriate research method for this thesis.

3.2   Sample

According to Coope and Schindler (2013), sample members for the research are usually selected using either probability or nonprobability sampling techniques. Research for this thesis used the probability technique, since the aim was to learn more about how younger people generally feel about the topic, rather than trying to find out what a specific group of youngsters thought about the matter.

Research of this thesis was conducted using the qualitative research method in the form of a survey. The thesis analyzes the attitudes of younger generations; therefore, the survey was sent to younger people. The sample selection based on the age of the respondents was set between the ages of 18 and 25. Having an age within that selection was the only required characteristic for the respondents. Anyone within that sample frame was allowed to answer the survey. In quantitative research, the sample size should be large in order to form as accurate and reliable data as possible (Coope & Schindler, 2013). The survey received 87 responses giving it a sample size of 87.

3.3   Data Collection

Data that is being collected for research, can be divided into two categories: primary data and secondary data (Coope & Schindler, 2013). Primary data is the researcher's original data that they have collected for the purposes of that study. Primary data can be collected through various methods such as interviews, surveys, or observations. Secondary data is an interpretation of already existing primary data and can be found from sources like previous research studies, journals, or encyclopedias. Secondary data is often used as a tool for setting up the research and getting familiar with the topic before starting primary data collection (Coope & Schindler, 2013).

This thesis used both primary and secondary data collection methods on different parts of the process. Firstly, secondary data was used to conduct the literature review. Following that, primary data was collected with a survey to form new information.

3.3.1   Literature Review

As mentioned above, secondary data for this research was collected in the form of a literature review. Literature review of this thesis is designed to give the reader a precedent about the topic. It

covers already existing literature relevant to the thesis, and therefore makes it easier for the reader to understand the purpose, relevance and meaning of the study. A good literature review was also an important help when the author was collecting and analyzing primary data.

Secondary data for the literature review of this thesis was for the most part collected from internet databases such as Janet Finna, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. Google Scholar and Statistica were also used to find suitable sources. Peer-reviewed and trustworthy sources were used.

3.3.2   Quantitative Research

Quantitative research was used to collect the needed primary data for the research of this thesis. Quantitative research method can be used to conduct research that aims to form new information to support existing literature (Flick, 2015). According to Saunders et al. (2016) a single data collecting technique can be used when conducting quantitative research. This method is called a mono method quantitative study. The mono method was used for this thesis and the data collecting technique was a survey conducted through internet. A survey was an effective method to collect a large quantity of data, which was essential on this study. A survey was easy to distribute and share for a large audience, which had a positive effect on the coverage that the survey received. An internet survey offered a cost-effective way to collect primary data and it allowed the respondents an opportunity to answer the survey at their own time and pace. All previously mentioned reasons affected and supported the decision to select an internet survey as the method of choice.

The internet survey for this research was made with a survey administration software called Google Forms. The survey was distributed through various electronic platforms including e-mail, WhatsApp, and Discord. Being a young adult themselves, the author had good networks to reach the wanted age group. To avoid response bias from respondents that know the author, the author also shared the survey to groups where the participants had no prior relationship with the author. Given the strict sample age of the study, collecting answers for the survey was relatively slow. At the beginning the response rate was rather low, but once more people heard about the survey, the number of responses started to grow.

Even though the study was conducted in Finland, the aim was to give everyone an opportunity to answer the survey regardless of their origins or linguistic abilities. Therefore, the survey was made

in English. The questions were formed to be as straightforward and simple as possible to avoid any misunderstandings among the respondents. Explanations for terms social media influencer and influencer marketing were included in the survey to ensure that every respondent was familiar with those concepts before answering. At the beginning of the survey there was information about the aim and relevance of the study. To avoid responses from people outside of the sample group, there was a disclaimer which stated that only people between the ages of 18 and 25 were to answer the survey. Included was also information that responding to the survey should not take more than ten minutes. After a respondent had finalized and sent the survey, there was a message thanking them for taking the time to answer the survey.

Coope and Schindler (2013) underline the importance of pilot testing as part of the research process. A pilot test identifies potential weaknesses within the study and offers improvement ideas. The survey part of this research was pilot tested to ensure the effectiveness and trustworthiness of the survey. A form of pilot testing called pretesting was used. Coope and Schindler (2013) continue, that pretesting takes place, when the survey is beforehand sent to a small group to answer. They will then offer their opinion on the survey before more extensive distribution. Pretesting method was used for the survey of this thesis. The survey was sent to ten respondents, and they answered the survey. The respondents offered the author a few improvement ideas and the appropriate changes were made. After that, the survey was ready to be sent to a larger audience.

3.4   Data Analysis

After enough data has been collected, the next step is generating actual information and drawing conclusions from that (Coope & Schindler, 2013). Data analysis is the process of gathering, structuring, and managing the data and finally transforming those findings into new conclusions and findings to answer the research questions of the study. Survey data of this research was analyzed applying the analytics offered by Google Forms. Utilizing the Google Forms software, the author was able to create charts and analytics, that presented the gathered data in a clear way. Microsoft Excel was also used to create tables that further analyzed the results. The author felt that those analytics were an advisable way of analyzing the data, since they offered effective tools to generate information from the research.

4   Research Results

This chapter presents the results of the primary data. The data was collected through an online survey, which eventually received 87 responses. The results have been divided into categories, with figures and tables added to help visualize the results.

4.1   Demographics

First part of the survey consisted of questions related to the respondents' demographics. Those were necessary to ensure that the respondent was suitable to take part in the survey. Knowing the demographics also provided a good foundation for the survey and offered a better understanding of the respondents in general.

The first question of the survey regarded the respondent´s age. Since this thesis studies the attitudes of people between the ages of 18 and 25, those alternatives were given. The ages were divided into three categories for better data analyzation purposes. 54% of the respondents were 21-23 years old, representing the largest sample group out of the three. Second largest group were 24-25 years old (29,9%) and 16,1% were 18-20 years old.
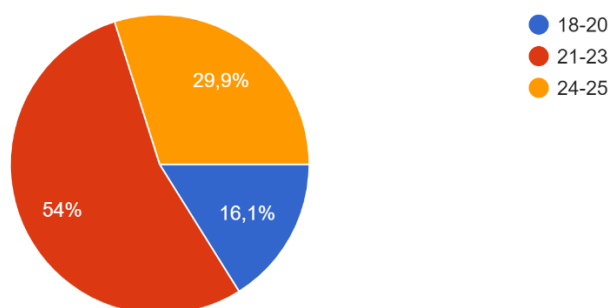
Your age?
87 vastausta

Figure 3. Q1. Respondent age

Second question was about the gender of the respondents. More than half (59,8%) were male and 39,1% were female. One respondent represented other genders or did not want to tell their gender.
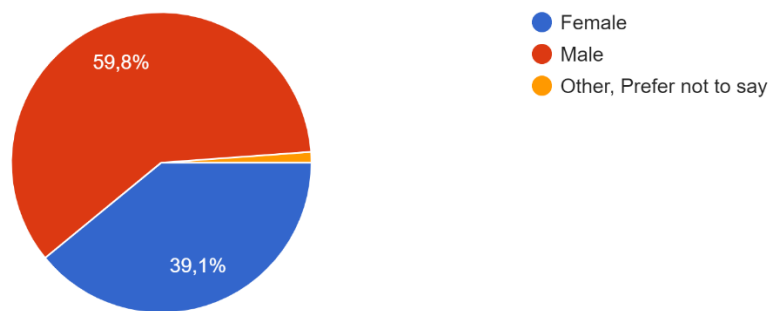
Your gender?
87 vastausta

Figure 4. Q2. Respondent gender

As can be seen from the figure below, a majority (88,5%) of the respondents were Finnish. This was expected seeing that the survey was conducted in Finland and distributed mainly through Finnish channels. The survey was however shared to some international people as well, and 10,3% of the respondents were nationals of some other European country outside of Finland. One respondent was also a national of a non-European country.
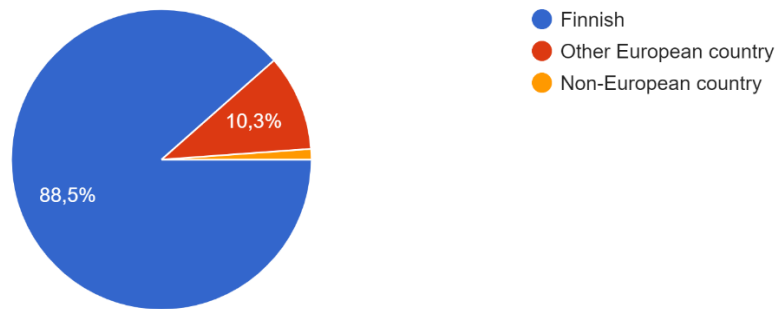
Your nationality?
87 vastausta

Finnish
Other European country
Non-European country

Figure 5. Q3. Respondent nationality

Country of current residence of the respondent´s was understandably mostly in correspondence with their nationalities. Some of the non-Finnish respondents were still living in Finland, since even a larger percentage (92) reported Finland as their current country of residence. 8% were living in some other European country and none outside of Europe.

Your country of residence at the moment?
87 vastausta

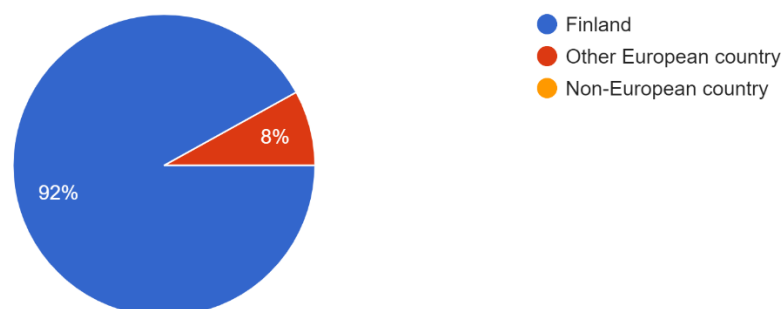Finland
Other European country
Non-European country

Figure 6. Q4. Respondent country of residence

Occupation of the respondents was divided into four categories. 51,7% were full time students while 34,5% were students who also worked along their studies. 13,8% were fully in working life. None of the respondents reported being unemployed. The large number of students out of the respondents is again a result of the channels which the survey was mostly shared through.
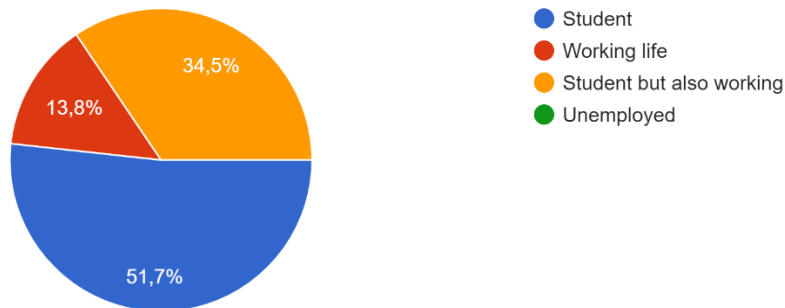
Your occupation?
87 vastausta

Figure 7. Q5. Respondent occupation

4.2 Use of Social Media

Second part of the survey charted the social media use of the respondents. First question of the section asked how often the respondents used social media. Five different options were given. The question indicated well how much social media younger people consume these days; 78,2% of the respondents said that they used social media daily. 19,5% used it on a weekly basis and only two respondents (2,3%) told that they used it less than that. None of the respondents never used social media or used it less than once a month.

How often do you use social media?
87 vastausta

Legend:
- Never
- Less than once a month
- Less than once a week
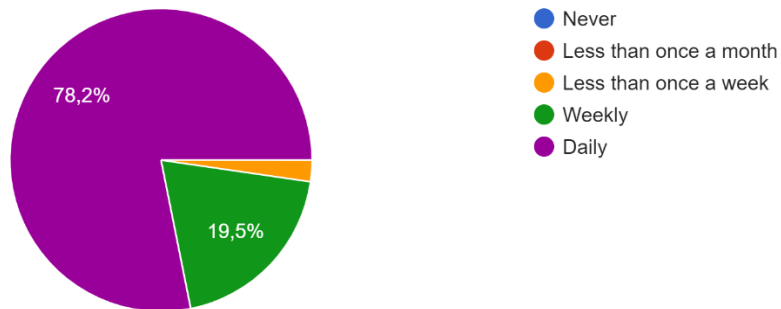- Weekly
- Daily

78,2%

19,5%

Figure 8. Q6. Use of social media

After finding out how much the respondents used social media, the survey questioned the platforms that were the most used. Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok and Facebook were given as options because of their popularity and prominence. There was also an option for an open answer in case the respondent used some other platforms more. Each respondent was instructed to choose 1-3 options. This chance was given, since some respondents were possibly actively using multiple social media platforms, while others might be using only one. Instagram was clearly the most used platform with 85,1% selecting it as one of their answers. Snapchat was second with 55,2% and TikTok third with 49,4%. Twitter was selected by 26,4% and Facebook by 18,4% of the respondents. Other answers given that only received a few votes were BeReal, Reddit, LinkedIn and Youtube.

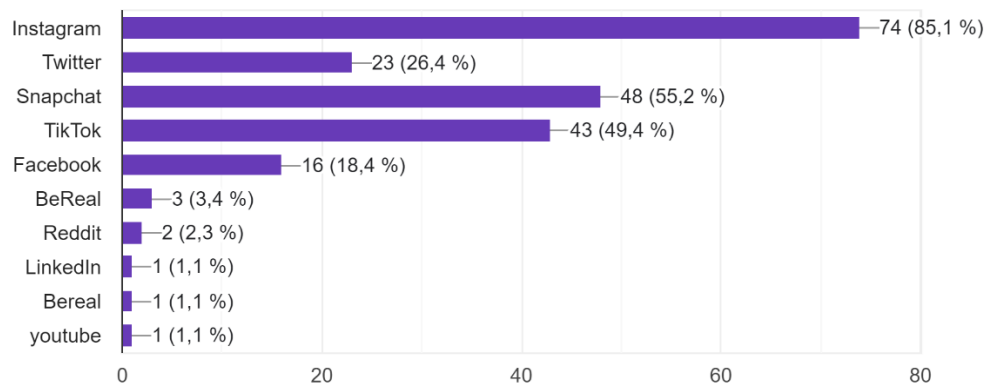What social media platforms do you use the most? Choose 1-3

87 vastausta

Figure 9. Q7. Social media platforms

4.3   Familiarity with Influencers

This part of the survey was meant to examine how familiar the respondents were with social me-
dia influencers. The first question clearly demonstrated how prominent social media influencers
these days are. All but one (98,9%) of the respondents knew who social media influencers are.
One respondent was not sure and zero answered no. After this question, there was an information
box explaining the concept of social media influencers. It was important to make sure that the re-
spondents were familiar with concept before continuing the survey further.

Do you know who social media influencers are?
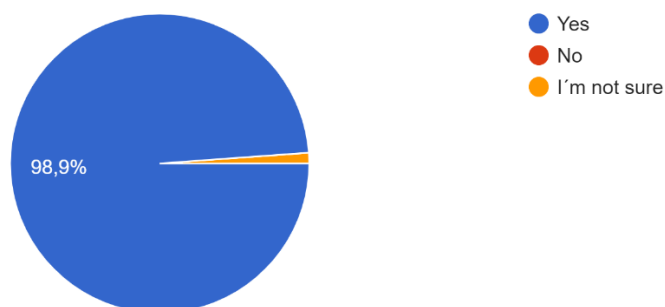
87 vastausta

Figure 10. Q8. Concept of social media

Question about the number of influencers the respondents followed received a vast range of responses. As can be seen from the figure below, majority of the respondents followed at least one influencer, with 1-5 being the most common answer (32,2%). 5-10 was almost as common (29,9%) with 10-20 (17,2%) and more than 20 (14,9%) following that. Only 5 respondents reportedly did not follow any influencers. These results proved that influencers are a common concept for younger people, and they have knowledge about the topic.

How many people who you would consider influencers do you follow?
87 vastausta
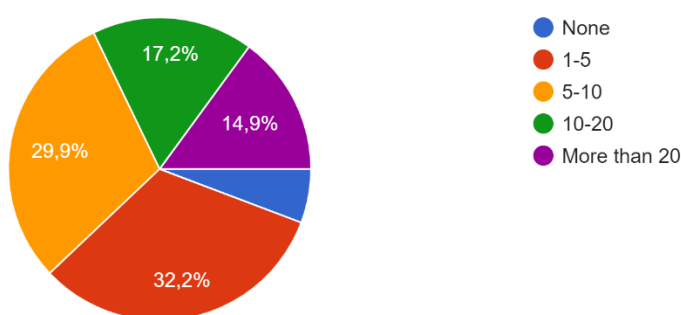
Figure 11. Q9. Follow amount of influencers

4.4   General Attitudes Towards Influencers

When asked to describe their general opinions towards influencer marketing, the survey gave options from 1 to 5. There was an explanation that 1 equaled extremely negative and 5 equaled extremely positive. The results showcased that the general feelings towards influencers were quite neutral. Over half (51,7%) of the responses were answer "3", which would indicate neutrality on the subject. 31% had more positive opinions with answer number 4, while 5,7% answered a perfect "5". 11,5% answered a more negative "2", but no one answered the extremely negative "1".

How would you describe your general opinions towards influencers on a scale of 1-5?
87 vastausta
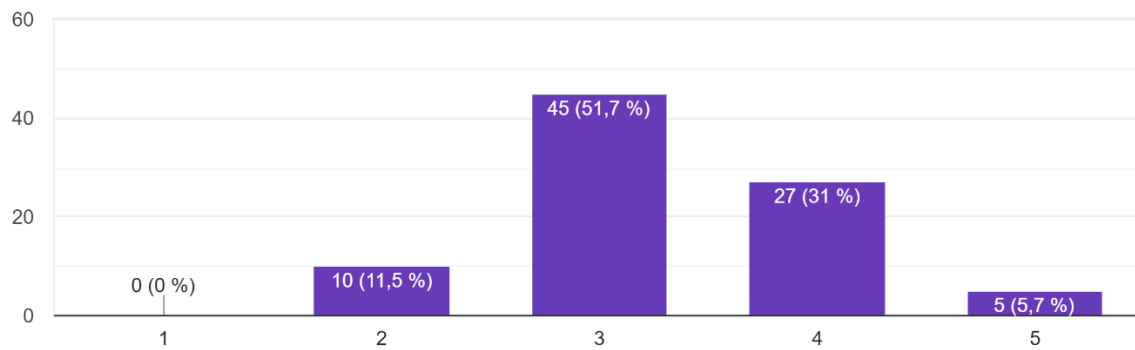
Figure 12. Q10. Opinion on influencers

4.5   Familiarity with Influencer Marketing

Next part of the survey discovered how familiar the respondents were with the topic of influencer marketing. Over 90% reportedly knew the meaning of influencer marketing, with the rest being unsure or not knowing at all. While most of the respondents were familiar with the concept, the number was a little lower compared to the same question about influencers in general. After this question, there was again an explanation box about influencer marketing for those who were unsure about the concept.

Do you know what influencer marketing is?
87 vastausta
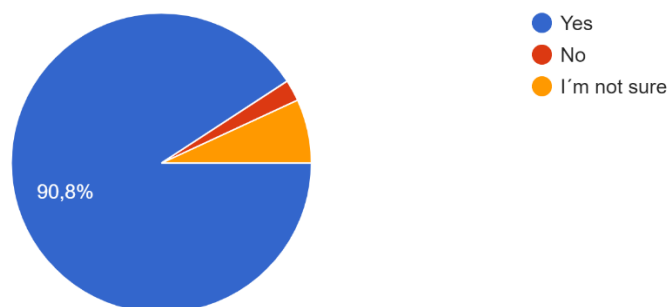
Figure 13. Q11. Concept of influencer marketing

The following pair of questions clearly indicated how common influencer marketing is. 95,4% of the respondents had encountered it while using social media and only 4,6% had not encountered it or were unsure.

Have you encountered influencer marketing when using social media?
87 vastausta

Legend:
- Yes
- No
- I´m not sure

95,4%
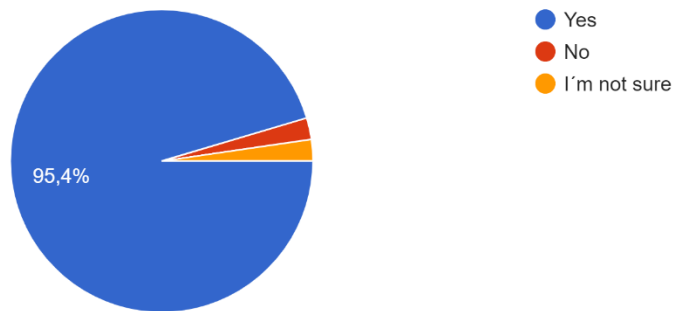
Figure 14. Q12. Encountering inlfuencer marketing

Almost 70% responded to either encountering influencer marketing often, or even almost every time they used social media. 25% encountered it sometimes as well. This left only 6% of the answers to being rarely or almost never. These results speak volumes about how common influencer marketing on social media is.

If you answered yes to the previous question, how often do you encounter that?
84 vastausta

Legend:
- Almost never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Almost every time I use social media

53,6%   15,5%   25%

Figure 15. Q13. Amount of encounterment

4.6   View on Influencer Marketing

The following questions examined how the respondents viewed influencer marketing and how it affected their buying decisions. The question about general opinions towards influencers was formed in the same way as question 10 (Q10). Answer number 1 once again represented extremely negative feelings while answer number 5 meant the opposite. Once again over 50% (51,7) had quite neutral feelings on the matter, while 18,4% had a more positive attitude with response number 4. One respondent felt extremely positive about the subject with answer 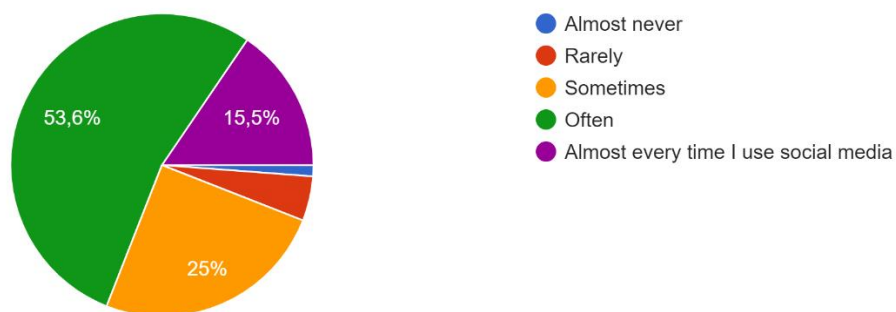number 5. 27,6% of the respondents had a more negative opinion with answer number 2 while one respondent felt extremely negatively about the matter. All though the answers were quite similar compared to attitudes towards social media influencers in general, a more negative response was apparent.

How would you describe your general opinion about influencer marketing on a scale of 1-5?
87 vastausta
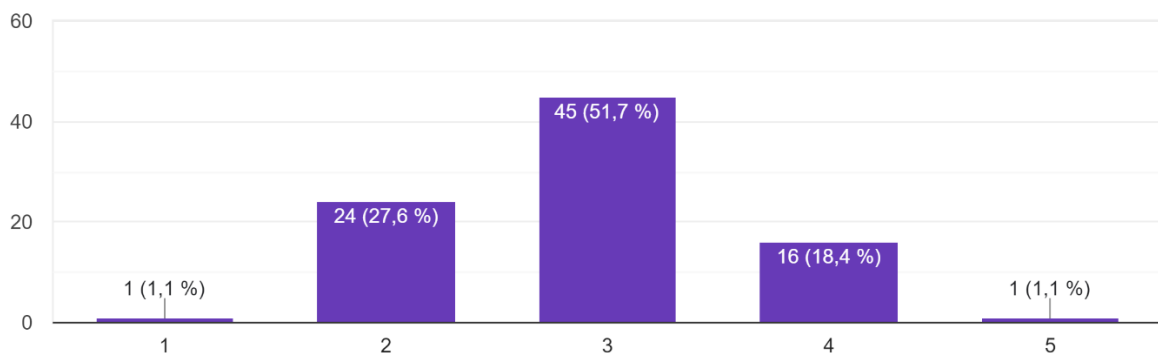
Figure 16. Q14. Opinion on influencer marketing

Two following questions addressed the effect of influencer marketing on younger generation´s buying decisions. 16,1% reported to never have been affected by influencer marketing and almost 60% answered that it was rare. 25,3% were sometimes affected by it, with only one respondent choosing the option often. Considering the commonness of influencer marketing, the respondents felt that it had a surprisingly low effect on their buying decisions.

How often has influencer marketing affected your buying decisions?
87 vastausta
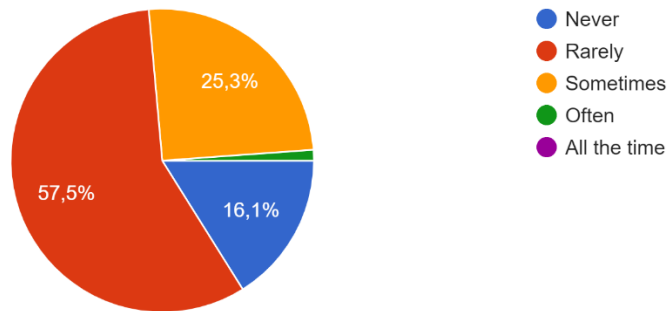
Figure 17. Q15. Bying decisions

According to the next question, even if the respondents felt that the effect of influencer marketing on their buying decision was relatively low, the effect, when it occurred, was usually positive. 65,1% answered that the effect was positive while 28,9% felt those decisions were equally positive and negative. Only 6% answered that those decisions were more negative towards the prod-ucts/services the influencer is promoting.

Are those buying decisions more negative or positive towards the product/service the influencer is promoting?
83 vastausta
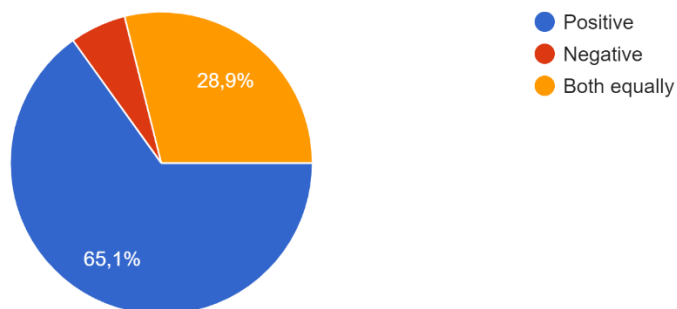
Figure 18. Q16. Nature of buying decisions

4.7 Influencer´s Qualities

The final three questions examined the effect the influencer's qualities had on their credibility. The first question proved how important good characteristics are with 97,7% agreeing that they have an effect on the credibility.

Do characteristics of the influencer have an affect on his credibility?
87 vastausta
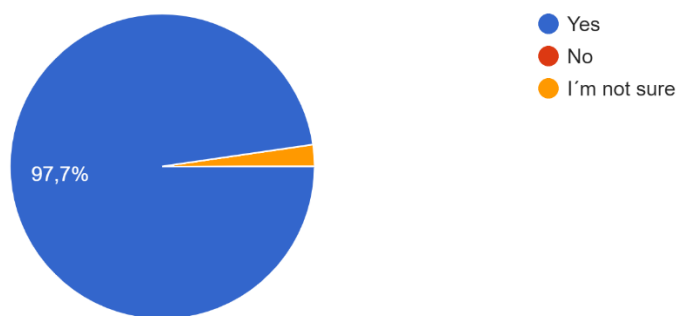
Figure 19. Q17. Characteristics of influencer

The last pair of questions tried to gain a better understanding of what those characteristics were. The first question was "If you answered yes to the previous question, what are those qualities? Choose 1-3". Answer options were personality, appearance, follower count and familiarity. There was also an option for open answer. As the table below demonstrates, personality was seen as the most important quality, with 72,9% of the respondents choosing it as one of their answers. Familiarity was second with 60%, and appearance third with 45,9%. 38,8% chose follower count as one of their options.

Table 1. Q 18. Qualities closed answers

If you answered yes to the previous question, what are those qualities? Choose 1-3

An-swer	Personality	Appearance	Follower count	Familiarity
%	72,9	45,9	38,8	60

The following answers were given as an open answer:

Table 2. Q18. Qualities open answers

	Open answers for the same question
1	Comments on their posts
2	Trustworthiness
3	Do they seem like a person I can trust
4	How they talk about the thing they are promoting
5	Amount of likes on the post
6	Ethicality
7	What kind of companies does the influencer collaborate with
8	Has to be about my age
9	Honesty
10	Creativity
11	How genuine they seem
12	How often they do marketing collaborations, too many is too much
13	Trust factor

The last question asked, which one of those qualities the respondents saw as the most important one. As the following table shows, familiarity (40%) and personality (30,6%) were clearly seen as the two major ones. Follower count (14,1%) and appearance (12,9%) received significantly less votes. Two respondents chose their own open answers as the most important quality.

Table 3. Q19. Most important quality

Which one of those would you consider the most important one?						
Answer	Personality	Appearance	Follower count	Familiarity	Do they seem like a person I can trust	Ethicality
%	30,6	12,9	14,1	40	1,2	1,2

5   Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter provides discussion and conclusion on the topic and the whole thesis. Research questions set at the beginning of thesis are answered and discussed. The author will also offer his reflection on the entire thesis process and ethics and reliability of the thesis will be discussed. Finally, the chapter will go through limitations of this study and offer ideas for future research.

5.1   Discussion

This research about the attitudes of younger generations towards influencer marketing has made it extremely clear, how much younger people use and consume social media and how much it can affect them. Regardless of their gender or occupation, most of the respondents of the survey used social media daily and used multiple different social media platforms. Social media influencers and influencer marketing are both familiar concepts for younger people and they can influence youngsters buying behavior. Characteristics of the influencer are also important and particular characteristics are seen as more important than others.

5.2   Answering Research Questions

The main objective of this thesis was to get a better understanding of influencer marketing on younger generations. At the beginning of the thesis three research objections were set. Three additional research question were also set to provide answers on these research objectives. After conducting research and collecting both primary and secondary data, this sub-chapter answers those research questions based on the aforementioned data.

5.2.1   Research Question 1

RQ1: "What are the general attitudes of younger generations towards influencers?"

In general, the attitudes of younger generations towards influencers are quite neutral. Results of this study indicate that younger people are extremely familiar with the concept of influencers and follow them a considerable amount. Over 60% of the respondents of this study followed at least 5 influencers while only 5% did not follow any.

Looking closer at the attitudes of youngsters toward influencers, the results indicate that over 50% of them have neutral feelings towards influencers and do not feel negative or positive attitudes towards them. Overall, the attitudes are more positive with approximately 30% of younger people having more positive than negative feelings about influencers. Only 10% of younger people feel negatively about the topic. In general, the attitudes are quite neutral and strong feelings, both negative and positive, are almost non-existent.

5.2.2 Research Question 2

RQ2: "How do younger generations view influencer marketing and how does it affect their buying decisions?"

The study establishes that influencer marketing as a concept is well-known among younger generations. Nearly every respondent of the study was familiar with the concept and encountered influencer marketing on a regular basis. Results indicate that most younger people come across influencer marketing often and virtually none of them never encounter it.

Younger generations view influencer marketing in a quite similar way compared to their views on influencers. Majority have general opinions on them and strong feelings to either direction are rare. The attitudes towards influencer marketing are however slightly more negative. Almost 30% feel more negatively towards the subject, while under 20% have a positive view on it.

According to the study, even though younger generations encounter influencer marketing constantly, they feel that it doesn´t affect their buying decisions that often. Only quarter report it affecting them even sometimes, while the majority is affected by it only rarely or even never. When influencer marketing does affect their buying decisions, that effect is generally positive. At worst, those effects are both negative and positive equally and more negative effects are unusual.

5.2.3 Research Question 3

RQ3: "What qualities make an influencer appealing and credible in the eyes of younger people?"

Results of the study indicate that characteristics and qualities of an influencer have a definite impact on their credibility. While there are multiple qualities that younger generations see affecting that, more internal and sentimental factors are seen as the most important ones. Familiarity with the influencer was seen as the most important quality in the study with personality of the influencer coming as a close second. These results show that qualities affecting the trustworthiness of the influencer are important to younger consumers. More external factors, such as the appearance or follower count of the influencer are not seen as important qualities as the internal ones. These external qualities still have an effect as well and they should not be ignored.

5.3 Reflection on the Thesis Process

The thesis process in total was extremely interesting. The topic was a close interest of the author, and it made the process go relatively smoothly. Secondary data collection for the literature review was undoubtedly the most challenging and time-consuming part of the thesis. Going through a large number of research papers and articles related to the topic was interesting, but also troublesome at times. Narrowing all the information down to the most important data provided the biggest challenge. The research part of the thesis went considerably smoother but was still extremely intriguing. A well-designed research process was the key to making the process go as planned. Analyzing data and presenting the results was the final part, which also went mostly well. Looking back, some of the questions in the survey that collected primary data were perhaps unnecessary for the purposes of the study and analyzing them offered extra work for the author. Every question however gave the author a more in depth understanding of the topic and thus it was a positive that those were included. The author did not have much prior experience about conducting a major research and thesis. The process taught the author a lot about academic research in its entirety.

5.4 Ethics and Reliability of the Research

Research ethics are being strongly insisted by Coope and Schindler (2013) as being an integral part of a research process. They continue, that research ethics need to be evaluated to assure that the rights of everyone that the research concerns are respected and met. This includes the subjects of the research as well as everyone who might be affected by it. Coope and Schindler (2013) emphasize that every research must be conducted in a way that that ensures the safety of everyone involved. To ensure that the participants of a study do not suffer any form of physical or mental displeasure, Coope and Schindler (2013) have combined these three guidelines that research should adhere to:

1. Explain study benefits.
2. Explain participant rights and protections.
3. Obtain informed consent.

This research followed the mentioned guidelines when collecting primary data, and the information was included at the beginning of the survey. Privacy of the respondents was also considered. The survey did not request any personal information and the questions were formed in a way that made it impossible to figure the identity of the respondents. Data security was assured by keeping the survey results in a locked computer that required a password. To avoid questionnaire bias, the questions of the survey were formed in an equal way that did not persuade the respondents to answer in a certain way. As mentioned before (3.2.2), the survey was also pilot tested with a smaller respondent group before it was published to everyone.

Reliability of the collected primary data was reinforced with a diligent data analysis process. One aspect that could negatively affect the reliability of the research, was the honesty of the respondents. There was no way for the author to verify that the respondents answered the questions truthfully. However, it should be assumed that the anonymity of the survey would have made the respondents comfortable to answer the survey realistically. The author also felt that if a respondent was ready to spend their time answering the voluntary survey, there would be no benefit for

them to be untruthful in their responses. Some incorrectness and general error in the received answers was naturally expected, but the research concluded that with most of the primary data being correct, it would not hinder the reliability of the research.

To assure ethicality of the secondary data collected for this study, authors and texts of the gathered data were correctly credited within in-text citations. At the end of the thesis a reference list composed of every source is also included. The reference list provides details about the sources so that they can be retrieved if necessary. Reliability of the secondary data was reaffirmed with the use of reliable and academically claimed sources. The sources were critically examined before used in the thesis. Research ethic guidelines and ethical principles of JAMK University of Applied Sciences were also followed throughout the thesis process to ensure the ethicality of the entire thesis. The authors possible own opinions or believes did not affect the thesis process at any moment.

5.5 Limitations of the Research

Limitations of the research should also be discussed to ensure its integrity. The study´s target were younger generations and their opinions on influencer marketing. Since the study was conducted in Finland, most of the respondents were Finnish nationals or at least lived in Finland. This would suggest that the results of the study are more a presentation of the views of younger generations in Finland, rather than in the entire world. Considerable amount of the respondents were also studying full time, or working and studying at the same time. Unemployed people were not well-presented in the study. Provided that the demographic limitations of the study would be considered, with influencer marketing being a global thing and affecting the majority of today´s younger generations, the findings of this study could still be benefitted extensively and globally. The survey for collecting primary data received 87 responses. While the amount was adequate to provide concrete data, a larger sample size would have increased the reliability of the research findings.

5.6 Ideas for Further Research

Influencer marketing towards younger generations is a phenomenon that will keep growing and evolving in the future. It would be beneficial to research the topic more in the future, as it would offer new ideas and findings to consumers, social media influencers and companies that use those influencers in their marketing. As mentioned in the previous chapter (5.4), wider research with more primary data could offer even more reliable data. More international approach could also benefit audiences in different areas of the world outside of Finland and Europe.

The thesis topic for this study was quite broad and could have been narrowed down in some extent. Future research could narrow the subject down to a more specific research topic of a study area. This could possibly offer more accurate and precise findings. This study established that younger generations view influencer marketing in a slightly more negative way than they view influencers in general. Reasons for that could be studied more. Future research could also be done to provide more information on why specific traits of influencers are seen as more effective than others. The differences between the views of younger and older generations could also be studied.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Survey questions

1. Your age?

   - 18-20

   - 21-23

   - 24-25

2. Your gender?

   - Female

   - Male

   - Other, prefer not to say

3. Your nationality?

   - Finnish

   - Other European country

   - Non-European country

4. Your country of residence at the moment?

   - Finland

   - Other European country

   - Non-European

5. Your occupation?

   - Student

   - Working life

   - Student but also working

   - Unemployed

6. How often do you use social media?

   - Never

- Less than once a month

- Less than once a week

- Weekly

- Daily

7. What social media platfroms do you use the most? Choose 1-3

- Instagram

- Twitter

- Snapchat

- TikTok

- Facebook

- Other, what? (open answer)

8. Do you know who social media influencers are?

- Yes

- No

- I´m not sure

9. How many people who you would consider influncers do you follow?

- None

- 1-5

- 5-10

- 10-20

- More than 20

10. How would you describe your general opinion towards influencers on a scale of 1-5? (1= Extremely negative, 5= Extremely positive)

- 1

- 2

- 3

- 4

- 5

11. Do you know what inlfuencer marketing is?

- Yes

- No

- I´m not sure

12. Have you encountered influencer marketing when using social media?

- Yes

- No

- I´m not sure

13. If you answered yes to the previous question, how often have you encountered that?

- Almost never

- Rarely

- Sometimes

- Often

- Almost every time I use social media

14. How would you describe your general opinion about influencer marketing on a scale of 1-5? (1= Extremely negative, 5= Extremely positive)

- 1

- 2

- 3

- 4

- 5

15. How often has influencer marketing affected your buying decisions?

- Never

- Rarely

- Sometimes

- Often

- All the time

16. Are those buying decisions more negative or positive towards the product/service the influencer is promoting?

- Positive

- Negative

- Both equally

17. Do characteristics of the inlfuencer have an affect on their credibility?

- Yes

- No

- I´m not sure

18. If you answered yes to the previous question, what are those qualities? Choose 1-3

- Personality

- Appearance

- Follower count

- Familiarity

- Other, what? (open answer)

19. Which one of those would you consider the most important one?

- Personality

- Appearance

- Follower count

- Familiarity

- Other, what? (open answer)