



Karelia University of Applied Sciences  
Bachelor of Business Administration  
International Business

# International Influencer Marketing

How Social Media Creates Demand for  
International Goods

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Abstract

The topic of the thesis was influencer marketing on social media and its effects on consumer behaviour through increased demand for international goods. Influencer marketing is a fairly new phenomenon on social media and has been acknowledged to increase impulsive buying behaviour and overconsumption, but it has not been broadly studied from the perspective of international trade.

The theoretical framework consists of theories of consumer behaviour, social media and marketing, influencer marketing and international business and the study itself was implemented as a mixed-method research. The methods used in the research were a questionnaire for quantitative data and a written interview for a qualitative perspective. Both methods were implemented online through a survey. The survey was shared on multiple social media platforms and was open to individuals with varied demographics. The aim of the survey was to assess whether influencer marketing creates demand for international goods.

The results of the research prove that influencer marketing does not necessarily increase the need for international trade, although most individuals have indulged in purchasing something as a consequence of being influenced by a content creator. The results of the research can be utilized by businesses that plan to enter foreign markets and apply influencer marketing campaigns to raise awareness.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Word of mouth communication was recognized as the most impactful way to influence consumer behaviour several decades ago. (Sweeney, Soutar & Mazzarol 2007, 344-345.) While some argued the concept to have lost importance over the years, technological improvements have transformed it into commercially incentivized action where even regular consumers can be reimbursed for spreading a message through social media platforms. (Lang & Hyde 2013.) Alongside advanced technology, the growing accessibility and popularity of social media has kept transforming not only consumer behaviour but the ways brands raise awareness amongst consumers and marketing strategies. When most information searches moved to the internet and social media, the concept of electronic word of mouth was created, evolving into online influencer marketing. (Nurniati, Savitri & Faddila 2023.)

Social media influencers gather an audience through creating interactive content resulting in the creation of a personal brand often viewed as personal, credible and relatable by the population. While influencing started as a hobby in the early 2000s, it has now become a full-time job for many individuals, which has been enabled through paid collaborations with brands. The influencer's role in the collaboration is to spread a positive message about the product or the service the brand offers, raising brand awareness and engagement along with increasing brand loyalty. Since influencers are viewed as more reliable than traditional advertisements or celebrity endorsements amongst consumers, the expertise an influencer presents highly influences the consumers' purchase intentions and decisions. (Joshi, Lim, Jagani & Kumar 2023.)

Influencers often possess a deep understanding of cultural differences and preferences amongst their followers resulting in tailored content according to their followers and their diverse backgrounds. The ability to appeal to consumers anywhere in the world is a true benefit to globally operating companies and companies preparing for foreign market entries through retail or e-commerce. Collaborations with influencers from foreign countries is crucially important for many global brands as of today. These present plenty of

opportunities for foreign trade through growing interest in foreign brands and products prompted by influencers. (Azhar, Wel & Hamid 2024.)

## **1.2 Aim of the thesis and research questions**

The aim of the thesis is to explore the phenomenon of influencer marketing and to examine the role of influencer marketing in creating consumer demand for international goods. The research aims to discover how influencer marketing affects consumer preferences and purchasing intentions and decisions of international goods in addition to brand awareness. The secondary aim of the thesis is to find out how consumers perceive influencer marketing, what factors affect the purchasing decisions of international goods not available in the domestic market, what types of influencers consumers perceive to be the most credible and what platforms consumers use to follow social media influencers.

The main research questions are:

Q1: How does influencer marketing affect consumer preferences and demand for international goods?

Q2: What role do influencers play in shaping the purchasing decisions of consumers for international products?

The secondary research questions are:

Q3: How does influencer marketing impact consumer awareness for international brands and products?

Q4: How do consumers perceive social media influencers and the concept of influencing?

Q5: What types of influencers do consumers perceive to be the most credible?

## **2 Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 International business**

“International business (IB) is about firms engaging in international (cross-border) economics activities and/or the activity of doing business abroad” (Peng & Meyer 2019, 5).

The importance of engaging in international business has increased through recent decades due to developing technologies and trade liberalization. International business has allowed countries and businesses to use their unique resources and expertise effectively. Consumers have discovered a variety of products and services possibly enhancing their living standards. (Muller 2022, 2-5.) Companies may proceed as sellers, buyers or both when entering the international market. The most used way to start international business is through selling products to customers abroad. This can be tricky for inexperienced firms. To enter the market despite the challenges, the company may also use a middleman that specializes in exporting. (Peng & Meyer 2019, 307-310.)

Due to digitalization also cross-border services have been massively growing in the last decade. Cross-border services are services that can be sent abroad or done online, including a wide range of different services, such as commercial flights and product deliveries that require physical movement in addition to software applications and live streams, which can be done without any physical movement. However, the most important actors in international business are MNEs (multinational enterprises) that can be defined as companies that engage in FDI (foreign direct investment. FDI means that the companies are directly investing in, controlling and managing activities across borders. (Peng & Meyer 2019, 5 & 312.)

### **2.2 E-commerce and international trade**

E-commerce consists of different online business activities with all communication and transactions happening electronically (Gupta 2014). The

term itself originated in the 1990s as a result of new software and technologies that allowed the internet to form into a commercial environment. The technologies for electronic transactions were developed in the 1970s and were supported by the continuous development of technology and the internet to allow consumers to view and purchase products online. (Rosário & Raimundo 2021.)

In 2024 33% of the world's population are shopping online, and the e-commerce sales are expected to reach 6.3 trillion US dollars by the end of the year. (Sellers Commerce 2024.) The growing popularity of online shopping has presented many benefits to both consumers and businesses, and it comes as no surprise that the industry of e-commerce is expected to continue growing in the future. E-commerce offers a cost-effective way to sell goods at lower operational costs along with being able to reach a wider audience geographically. It is also convenient for consumers, since there are no limitations with the place or the time, and they are able to choose between a variety of companies and products and read reviews before purchasing. (Taher 2020.)

E-commerce can be divided into six different types: business to business, business to customers, customer to customer, customer to business, business to administration and customers to administration. The two most well-known business models in e-commerce are B2B (business to business) and B2C (business to customers). B2B takes place when a company sells services or goods to another company and B2C when a company sells goods or services to an individual. C2C (customer to customer) means consumers selling products or services to other consumers, such as selling a used product through an online second-hand store, while in C2B (customer to business) a consumer sells goods or services of their own to a business. In B2A (business to administration) businesses and governmental agencies trade and exchange information on central websites, and in C2A (customer to administration) individuals can request information from governmental establishments. (Taher 2021.)

International trade essentially means exchanging goods and services between two or more countries. Through importing, consumers are able to access goods

which are either not available locally or are available at a higher cost, which increases customer satisfaction. The need for foreign trade comes from different countries having different resources and capabilities of producing, which are also factors affecting the price of the goods, hence the law of comparative costs. The goods a country exports and imports are determined in relation to its trading partners. It comes down to the ability to produce at the lowest price, in regards to natural resources, labour, technology or capital. (Vijayasri 2024.)

International trade is the oldest and the most important driving factor of international business and has been growing ahead of GDP (gross domestic product) for decades now (Peng & Meyer 2019, 120.) However, since e-commerce was recognized in 1998 in the context of the World Trade Organization, it has made the process of cross-border trading easier and faster in addition to opening markets (Terzi 2011) and playing an important role in global production (Zhang 2016). The rule-based system of the World Trade Organization was created in 1995, and years after recognising e-commerce the first Joint Statement on Electronic Commerce was released in 2017 (Ismail 2020).

Due to international trade's long history, it holds many theories, with some classified as classic theories and some as modern theories. The first theory about international trade was Mercantilism, which essentially holds the belief that countries that export more and import less would become richer. The theory was established in the 1600s and is still being used by politicians, although being widely discredited by scholars. The second classic theory originated in 1776 suggested that free trade enables each country to benefit by specializing in economic activities in which they have an absolute advantage. When Smith suggested the theory of absolute advantage, he opened the doors for the free-trade policy which still stands today, reducing governments' involvement in determining the scale and scope of economic activities. (Peng & Meyer 2019, 123-125.)

The theory of comparative advantage was then created in response to the theory of absolute advantage for its rare occurrence. The theory of comparative advantage focuses on relative advantages in one economic activity the country

does in relation to other countries and suggested that even without an absolute advantage the country may still specialize in said economic activity as long as it is relatively more efficient. Both the theories of absolute advantage and comparative advantage largely focus on the efficiency of production, which prompted Heckscher and Ohlin to respond with the factor endowment theory in 1977. The factor endowment theory suggested that countries gain a comparative advantage through the locally available resources, which simply means producing and exporting goods that are created from the resources the country holds the most. (Peng & Meyer 2019, 127-129.)

The modern theories of international trade were established in the late 1900s. The theory of product life cycle was the first dynamic theory to recognize the changes in the patterns of trade since the classic theories were created. The theory suggests that production will move to low-cost developing countries that export the products to developed countries and that the comparative advantage can differ along the product's life cycle. The second modern theory suggests that the involvement of governments may actually increase the odds of international success within certain industries, becoming the first theory to suggest that government involvement might not actually be disadvantageous to the market. (Peng & Meyer 2019, 130-132.)

Similarly, the theory of the national competitive advantage of industries was created, making it the latest theory of international trade. The theory, widely known as the diamond model, suggests that the competitive advantage of some industries forms in response to the pressures and opportunities a company faces. The pressures and the opportunities are categorized into four groups: resource endowment, domestic demand conditions, strategies, structure and rivalry and related and supporting industries. This multilevel theory argues that the competitive advantage of leading industries can be explained through connecting the aspects of the four categories. (Peng & Meyer 2019, 132-133.)

## **2.3 Social media**

### **2.3.1 The definition of social media**

Social media started as a way to network socially through the internet with the earliest forms allowing individuals to post public messages evolving into blogs. The evolving technology and internet access allowed the concept of social media to spread rapidly around the world, which also led to the creation of Facebook and MySpace. (Kaplan & Haenlain 2009, 60-61.) Currently, there are 5.17 billion social media users globally, and the average internet user spends over two hours on social networking sites daily. (Statista 2024.)

Compared to traditional media, social media allows its users to engage with each other and the content in real time. While the early forms of social media platforms were mainly used for communicating with family and friends, it has evolved into a place where one gets to share opinions, connect with like-minded people, learn about new topics, follow the news, post and read reviews for products and services and so much more. While having many benefits for individuals, social media also keeps presenting opportunities for businesses. It is a way for businesses to acquire new customers, communicate with customers in real time, creating a different type of trust between the business and the customer in addition to enhancing the brand image. (Taprial & Kanwar 2012, 28-29.)

### **2.3.2 Social media platforms**

The most used social media platforms in 2024 are Facebook, Youtube, Instagram and Tiktok. Facebook currently has 3065 million users, while Youtube has 2504 million, Instagram 2000 million and Tiktok 1582 million users across the world. (Statista 2024.) The most used platform, Facebook was launched in 2004, and its main purpose was connecting with friends and family by sharing messages, photos and videos through the platform in addition to joining groups of like-minded people and connecting with them online. (Davis 2009.) Facebook is owned by Meta Platforms, which also bought Instagram in

2012, two years after it was first launched to the public. The purpose of Instagram used to be sharing photos to a select group of people in its early days, but the application has since evolved into an entertainment app with a focus on video content. (Laestadius & Witt 2022.)

Similarly focusing on generating short video content is Tiktok, which was founded in 2016 as musical.ly and renamed a year after. Tiktok is the most successful application created in China regarding global distribution. Although the application started as a platform for lipsyncing to popular music, it is now also used for educational content, political discussions and live online sales along with many other topics and purposes. (Montag, Yang & Elhai 2021.)

While Tiktok specializes in short video content, Youtube was launched in 2004 as a platform for sharing longer video content and social networking. Youtube was the start of user-generated content, with some saying it turned consumers into producers. (Soukup 2014.)

### **2.3.3 Social media marketing**

Social media provides interactive alternatives to traditional media, with many consumers turning to their electronic devices for information searching, word-of-mouth and purchasing. The social media marketing industry has shifted from publisher-centric to consumer-centric with consumer-generated content being much preferred over traditional self-published content by companies.

Consumer-generated content can be product reviews posted on a company's website, videos of a product or a service posted on Youtube or Tiktok or pictures posted of a product or a service on Facebook or Instagram. The fundamental principle of CGC (consumer-generated content) is that the content is created and published by a nonprofessional for the general public to see. (Moriuchi 2019, 2-11.)

There have been arguments that the traditional Four Ps of marketing do not necessarily apply to social media marketing and consumer-generated content, but rather a new marketing mix. The Four Cs has been proposed due to it addressing changes in marketing tools and consumer perspectives. The Four

Ps of marketing are product, price, promotion and place, but the more recently proposed Four Cs are concept, channel, costs and communication. The Four Cs have been explained to emphasize the value of customers and the importance of relationships, while the traditional marketing mix is centered around the product, proposing a perspective shift from marketer to customer. (Quesenberry 2019, 44-46.)

## **2.4 Influencer marketing**

Social media keeps transforming the way people interact with each other. Due to constantly developing digital technologies it has become a norm for individuals to use social media daily in some form. (Jain 2021, 76.) Social media platforms started as a way to communicate with friends and family, but in recent years the platforms have started to present a lot of new career opportunities to their users. The usage of social media has led to consumers creating content not only for their friends but also for the whole world to see, which has led to some “normal people” becoming influential to other consumers. (Campbell & Farrell 2020, 2.)

Online influencers are individuals who have gained a following in social media through sharing content on one or more platforms. The generation of personal content and active interaction with followers creates trust between the influencer and the followers, which leads to the influencer being able to build themselves a personal brand. (Leung, Gu & Palmatier 2022, 6.) Through gaining an audience and creating a personal brand, the influencers can engage in paid collaborations with brands who are hoping for them to promote their products in an authentic way through their social channels. (De Veirman, Hudders & Nelson 2019.)

Influencers can be divided into four categories: nano-influencers, micro-influencers, macro-influencers and mega-influencers. Nano-influencers have less than a thousand followers and therefore they tend to influence smaller communities, while micro-influencers' number of followers can be anywhere between a thousand and a hundred thousand. They are considered to be topic specialists and tend to be opinion leaders. Macro-influencers usually started

influencing through generating relatable or inspiring content, and their follower count lies between a hundred thousand and a million. Mega-influencers however are considered to be more like celebrities than influencers and have more than a million followers. (Cmswire 2023.)

Nano-influencers have become the most desirable group of influencers for small to medium-sized companies. This is considered to be due to cost-effectiveness but also suggested to be due to the high engagement rates. According to the same study, 79.8% of survey respondents reported to having increased sales due to influencer campaigns on social media. Tiktok was also revealed to be the most profitable platform while participating in an influencer campaign. Tiktok is currently the most used channel for paid collaborations and branded marketing content, with 69% of brands using influencer marketing on said platform. (Influencer Marketing Hub 2024.)

The coronavirus pandemic truly changed consumer behaviours and the ways that brands communicate to consumers, and today influencer marketing is the most effective way to raise brand awareness, increase sales and boost brand loyalty (Johansen & Guldvik 2017, 17). The year before the pandemic began in 2019, influencer marketing was worth 4.6 billion dollars, and since then it has grown rapidly. The growth has not slowed down since the quarantines but is expected to reach 24 billion dollars by the end of 2024. (Influencer Marketing Hub 2024.)

While consumers used to look up to traditional advertisements or celebrity endorsements, now influencers are the driving force for trends and product recommendations. A study conducted by an influencer marketing agency established that 50.7% of people surveyed had bought a product after seeing an influencer use it online, with 61% of people surveyed admitted to trusting influencer product recommendations more than traditional advertisements. (Izea 2024.)

Although the benefits of influencer marketing are undeniable, there are certain risk factors for all parties involved. Due to influencer marketing having a great sense of freedom, the brand might face backlash for communicating an imprecise message, which could result in distrust between the brand and its

customers or even a ruined brand image. The consumers could also be affected by the post resulting in impulse buying or a lack of self-confidence due to highly edited social media presences amongst the influencers. (Loyen 2023.)

## **2.5 Consumerism**

Consumerism is a socioeconomic phenomenon that is closely related to the development of capitalist societies, consisting in overconsumption to meet the needs raised by psychological, social, and political demands, and encouraged by the belief that consuming is good for economic growth and personal well-being. (Lage, Lins & Aquino 2022.)

Consumerism emphasizes the importance of buying and consuming products and stems from the idea that people need to buy and own more products for their country to develop economically (Bourdeau 2024). This economic theory has created an excellent space for materialistic culture to thrive, and it might just be the downfall of the environment and the population's mental well-being. (Doherty 2022.)

## **2.6 Consumer behaviour**

### **2.6.1 The definition of consumer behaviour**

Consumer behaviour essentially analyses consumers' buying habits. Although the field of study is greatly connected to psychology, it has become a more important topic in the marketing industry as well. (Brooks 2022.) The field of study focuses on how consumers make buying decisions based on their needs and wants, and what influences those decisions. Through carefully analyzing the patterns, brands are able to create such marketing strategies that appeal to consumers personally and influence their purchasing decisions in the brand's favour. (Naim 2023.)

## **2.6.2 Consumer decision-making process**

The traditional consumer decision-making process consists of five steps. The first step is recognizing a need or a problem, which can happen either internally or from external influences. The second step is searching for information on said need or want, which can also be internal, external or both. The third step is evaluating the need and the alternatives and can either lead to a purchase decision or the realization that there is no actual need for the product. After purchasing an item, the consumer decides whether the need or want was fulfilled and whether or not they are satisfied with the product. (Stankevich 2017.)

## **2.6.3 Theories used in understanding consumer behaviour**

### **2.6.3.1 Maslow's hierarchy of needs**

Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs presents basic needs and is usually represented as a pyramid, with survival needs in the bottom and self-fulfilling needs at the top. The survival needs are biological needs such as nutrition, oxygen and water. When the physiological needs are fulfilled, safety needs become apparent and when they are both met, needs for love, affection and belongingness take place. When all of those are met, needs for esteem emerge, meaning self-confidence and a sense of feeling valued. Lastly, at the top of the pyramid are the self-actualization needs, which are simply any personal desires or passions. (Simons, Irwin & Drinnien 1987.) The hierarchy of needs is illustrated in Picture 1.

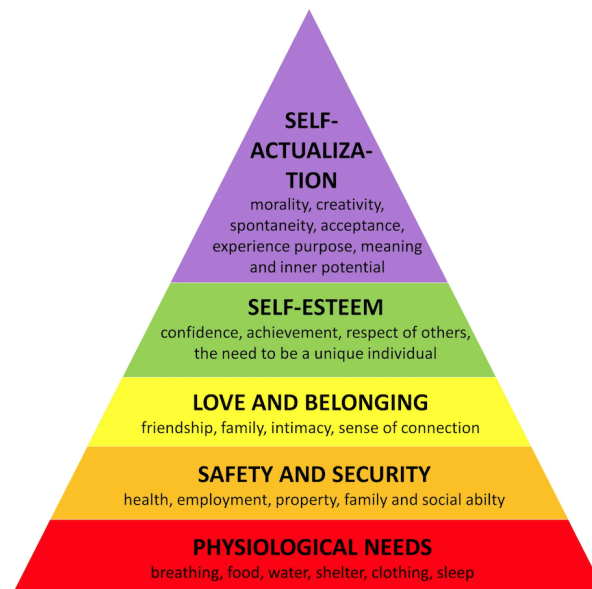


Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Figure: Swifterm 2023).

The correlation between Maslow's hierarchy of needs and consumer behaviour is that marketers must understand how their product is needed by the consumer in all stages of the pyramid. Some products may be marketed to customer groups that have needs in the lower stages, and others to customer groups that only have needs in the upper stages. Personalization for all different stages is just as important as personalization for all different target groups of all different products. (Swifterm 2023.)

### 2.6.3.2 Theory of planned behaviour

Azjen's theory of planned behaviour states that behaviour is driven by intentions, and intentions form from attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ryan & Worthington 2024). In the context of online shopping, forming the intention to shop online can be done through positive experiences, presumptions and preferences, but can as easily be revoked if there are negative experiences or the fear of possible exposure to security risks in the back of the mind. The intention or the lack of intention is driven by attitudes. (Gu & Wu 2019, 230-232.)

Another aspect is the social acceptability of the possible behaviour, in this context online shopping. On social media platforms individuals can be

influenced by campaigns and word-of-mouth, and the purchase intention can be swayed in one direction or another. There is usually overlap between individual attitudes and societal norms, and it is difficult to predict which one the individuals will follow, but the results of a survey state that the youth were more easily swayed with societal norms and trends. (Gu & Wu 2019, 232-233.)

According to a study conducted in Indonesia, online shopping intentions can be directly influenced by perceived behavioural control and that is driven by the perception of the individual's own ability and resources to perform the behaviour as well as the individual's assessment of their own ability to perform the behaviour. All in all, the studies indicate that all the factors of the theory are linked to behavioural intentions. (Gu & Wu 2019, 233-244.) The connection between behaviour, intention, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control are illustrated simply in Figure 2.

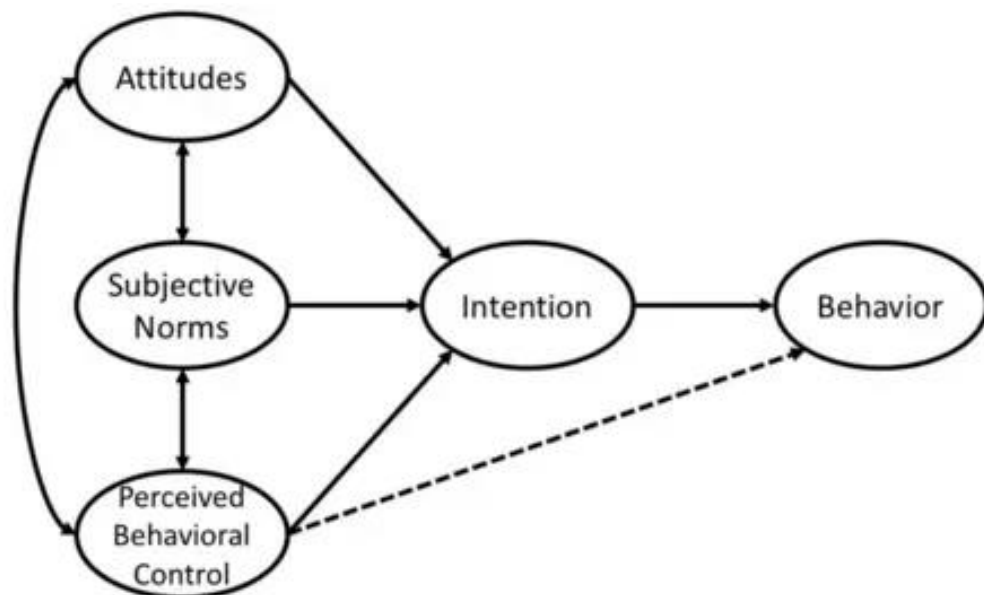


Figure 2. Theory of planned behaviour (Figure: ASCN 2019).

### 2.6.3.3 Social learning theory

Social learning theory stems from the idea that individuals' behaviour patterns are shaped by observing and imitating other people's behaviour. Behaviours that get a positive response from society or other individuals get repeated, and behaviours that get a negative response get discarded. The learning of these behaviours can happen through live models, verbal instructions and symbolic

models. (Bhasin 2018.) The modeling process for learning a new behaviour consist of four steps: paying attention to the model, remembering the observed behaviour, having the ability replicate the behaviour and having the motivation to replicate the behaviour. (Nabavi & Bijandi 2011.) The modeling process is illustrated in Figure 3.

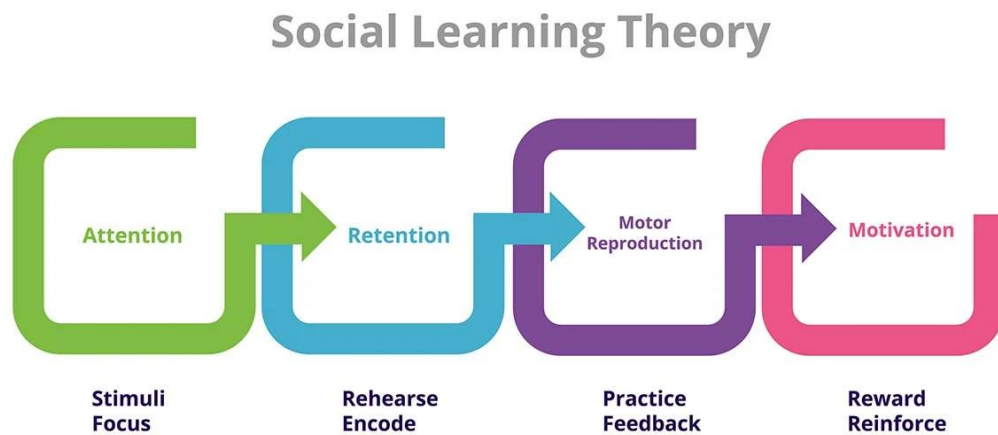


Figure 3. Social learning theory (Figure: McLeod 2024).

Since social learning theory is specifically concentrated on social settings, the theory can directly be applied to consumer behaviour. Consumers are constantly getting information about brands, products and consumption habits through their inner circle and social media, and the theory suggests that they are likely to adopt similar behaviours. Some examples that might affect an individual's buying behaviour could be someone from the inner circle getting positive feedback about a product they bought or similarly seeing a positive online review of a product. (FasterCapital 2024.)

#### **2.6.4 Factors that influence consumer behaviour**

Consumer behaviour consists of selecting, buying and consuming a product based on a need or a want, and the buying process is often influenced by cultural, social, personal and psychological factors. (Gajjar 2013.) Culture forms from shared beliefs and behaviours of a specific group, and it influences the way people view a certain product, make purchase decisions and consume the product. (Alemohamad 2023.) The social factors consist of reference groups and the role and the status of a person in a society. Previous experiences from

the reference groups can influence a purchase decision, and the role and the status can be a factor when determining the price or the importance of the product. (Management Study Guide 2024.)

Personal factors consist of demographic information, such as age, economic situation and lifestyle. Different life cycles and attitudes present very different types of needs and wants for individuals, while income level can affect the need's importance for survival. Personality and self-concept define what kinds of products resonate with a person so that they can match them to whom they are. Psychological factors include perception, feelings, beliefs, attitudes and motivation, which Maslow's hierarchy of needs is based on. (Albrecht et al. 2023.)

### **2.6.5 How social media impacts consumer behaviour**

Social media has shortened the customer journey, since the flow of information on new products and brands is constant, research happens quickly through searching online content, and purchasing usually happens within minutes of seeing a product through a link or an application (Barysevich 2020). Social media has embraced a culture of materialism, which has created an increase in impulse buying, which has said to account for 40% of all online expenditures. (Fook & McNeill 2020.)

Impulse buying is generally triggered by an external influence and is highly driven by emotions and social influence (Jain 2023). Impulsive buying behaviour lacks the ability to evaluate the consequences of the purchase and control in the moment (Rodrigues, Lopes & Varela 2021), and when the emotional response wears off, it often leads to regretting the purchase (Saleh 2024). Another downside of impulse buying is that the conflict between getting an immediate reward or facing negative consequences can trigger compulsive buying behaviours and shopping addiction (Darrat, Darrat & Amys 2016).

### **2.6.6 Sustainable consumer behaviour**

The key aspect of sustainable consumption is considering the environmental impact when making purchasing decisions, which can be implemented through

considering the environmental impact of a product or a service when making purchasing decisions or reducing consumption altogether (Sargin & Dursun 2023). Sustainable consumer behaviour has been linked to the value-attitude-behaviour model proving that values play a big part in ecological attitudes, thus the attitudes also reflect on purchasing decisions. (Paço, Alves, Shiel & Filho 2013.)

The studying of sustainable consumption originated from studies of ethical consumerism but did not provide a systematic approach to it. Since then, a variety of models has been suggested for explaining sustainable consumer behaviour, with most of them finding a connection between pre-behavioural determinants and sustainable consumption. One of the models is the cube of sustainable consumption behaviour, which consists of a sustainability dimension, a consumption phase, consumption areas and the impact of chosen behaviour. (Dimitrova, Ilieva & Angelova 2022.)

The sustainability dimension stems from more traditional approaches to sustainable development, connecting ecological, economic and social dimensions. The corridor model considers the limitations of the ecological system as well as the social and economic conditions. The consumption phase is connected with the general consumption model, and sustainable consumption is inspected through three main phases of consumption. The areas of consumption are based on the theory of single consumption behaviours into areas of consumption, which stem from unfulfilled needs. The impact of chosen behaviours measures the ecological consequences of concrete behaviours. (Geiger, Fischer & Schrader 2018.) The SCB-cube is illustrated in Figure 4.

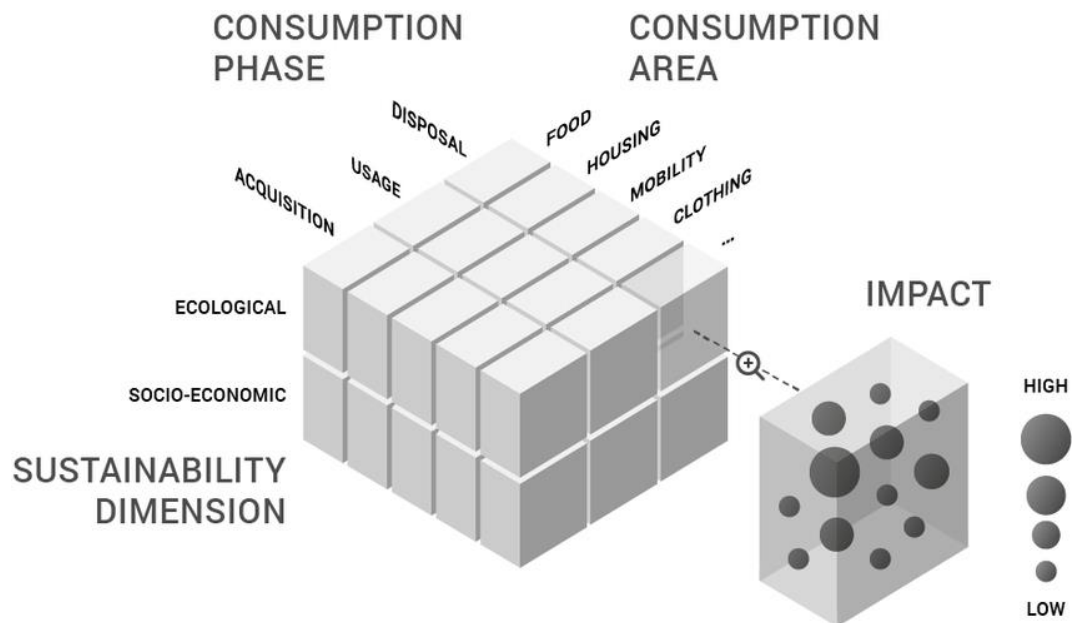


Figure 4. SCB-cube (Figure: Fischer 2018).

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Data collection

Choosing a method of data collection occurs in response to research questions and objectives. Data collection may be qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods, which combine the two. Qualitative research tends to be more subjective as opposed to quantitative research, since the data is often collected through questions open to different narratives and experiences, while quantitative research utilizes numbers and statistical analyses of the numbers, leaving less room for interpretation. (Felix & Smith 2019, 94-95.)

Quantitative research can be conducted through surveys, correlational research, experimental research and causal-comparative research. The data collected from survey participants provides statistical information on specific behaviours of groups which can be related to the entire population with a degree of certainty. Due to the nature of the research method choosing a random group of individuals to participate is essential. (Sukamolson 2007.)

Qualitative research on the other hand includes a variety of research methods such as interviews, case studies, benchmarking and ethnographic research. Relevant to qualitative research is that the participants are interacting with their

social world. The qualitative research method is often chosen due to a lack of existing theory on the matter and because the researcher is the primary instrument for the data collection and analysis, making the research descriptive and able to convey what the researcher has learned. (Merriam 2002, 3-6.)

Mixed-method research combines quantitative and qualitative research. However, the questions used in the study are not blended but rather parallel. The mixed-method research design has been argued to be greater than only using qualitative or quantitative research methods since it can answer questions that the single paradigms are not able to answer. The approaches combined may verify each other's findings or serve as ground work for one another, enabling the data to be examined from different perspectives. (Pole 2007, 35-37.)

### **3.2 Sampling**

The purpose of sampling is to gather enough answers from a group of people that can represent the whole population of interest. Collecting data from a sufficient group of people provides an estimate of responses from the population, since collecting information from every single individual is likely not possible. Selecting a random group of people for the research increases the chances of the information collected to accurately indicate the data would be the same or similar from an entire population of interest. (Ponto 2015.)

Sampling can be divided into two different types, convenience sampling and purposive sampling. Convenience sampling can be defined as sampling where the target population gets chosen due to practicality to the researcher, such as being available at a certain time, easy to reach or willing to participate in the research. A common characteristic convenience sampling is not strategic. Purposive sampling means that the participants for the study are carefully selected through considering the characteristics of the study and the qualities of the participants. This type of sampling requires the participants to be identified and possess adequate knowledge on the topic of the research. (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim 2015.)

### **3.3 Methodology used in the thesis**

The research for this thesis was conducted in mixed methods through a research survey. The research survey consisted of a questionnaire and an interview, to gather both quantitative and qualitative information. Using both quantitative and qualitative research provides a more comprehensive understanding of the thesis topic and allows the topic to be explored from different angles, presenting statistics and supplying more complex answers. Mixed-method research may validate the findings of either the qualitative or the quantitative research, producing numerical and measurable results in addition to adding depth to the results. Due to the nature of the topic and data collection methods the only requirement for participants was for them to be social media users. Sharing the questionnaire and the interview on social media platforms enabled random sampling to ensure the reliability of the data collected.

## **4 Results and discussions**

### **4.1 Quantitative research**

The questionnaire was answered by 127 individuals. Ninety-four percent of the participants in the research were Finnish with 6% different nationalities and only one disclosing their nationality as Polish. Ninety-four percent of the participants identified as females, 3% as males, 2% as non-binary and 1% preferred not to disclose that information. Thirty-two percent of the participants were aged from 18 to 24, 44% from 25 to 34, 14% from 35 to 44, and 9% of all participants were 45 years old or above. Thirty percent of the participants were students, 55% full-time employed, 9% part-time employed and 6% unemployed. Thirteen percent of the participants earning less than 500 euro monthly, 24% earning from 500 to 1500 euro monthly, 20% from 1500 to 2500 euro monthly, and 23% from 2500 to 3500 euro monthly. Fourteen percent earned more than 3500 euro monthly, and 14% of the participants preferred not to disclose that information.

Eighty-four percent of the participants stated that they use social media very often, 15% often and only 1% sometimes. None of the participants in the research reported that their social media usage would be rare. Instagram was reported as the most used social media platform with 40% of the respondents

favoring it. This was followed by Tiktok, with 26% of the respondents indicating its use. Closely following this was Facebook, with 24% of the respondents reporting the platform to be their most used one. Lastly came Youtube, with only 6% favouring the platform over others. Four percent answered other, commenting that they either prefer Snapchat or Instagram and Tiktok equally.

Ninety-four percent of the respondents use Instagram, which also proved to be the most preferred platform amongst the respondents. The second most used platform was Facebook, with 92% of the respondents using it, 65% also using Tiktok and 61% using Youtube. Twenty-six percent of the respondents also reported using other social media platforms, including Threads, Pinterest, X, LinkedIn, Wordpress, Jodel, Whatsapp, Reddit and Snapchat, which was the most preferred answer to the ones who added a social media platform to the list of platforms they use. According to the answers on social media usage, social media users very rarely use only one social media platform but prefer to utilize multiple platforms simultaneously.

Similarly to Instagram being the most used and mostly preferred platform, it also proved to be the most preferred platform to follow social media influencers on according to the respondents. Eighty-three percent of the respondents reported following influencers on Instagram, and 42% on Tiktok, making it the second most preferred platform to follow influencers on, 28% on Youtube and 18% on Facebook. Four percent of respondents claimed to also follow influencers on other platforms such as Snapchat, Twitch, X, Wordpress and LinkedIn, and 2% of the respondents stated that they do not follow social media influencers on any platform. Sixty-two percent of the respondents answered that they prefer the content of Finnish social media influencers to foreign influencers, with the remaining 38% preferring the content of social media influencers from abroad.

The most preferred content style according to the respondents was lifestyle content. Lifestyle influencers are online personalities who have built themselves a platform by sharing personal content related to their everyday lives. The content reflects the influencer's lifestyle, which can include beauty, health, fitness, fashion, travel, food and cooking or anything else that is characteristic to the specific influencer. Lifestyle influencers are typically followed for daily inspiration and advice. (Influencity 2024.) Lifestyle content can be integrated

into any influencer's page, but some influencers choose focus on a specific niche. The content styles beauty and health and fitness were the second most preferred ones amongst the respondents for the research, with 52% following influencers for these specific styles of content.

Forty-two percent of the respondents enjoyed food and cooking content and 28% travel content. Twenty-eight percent of the respondents also answered that they follow influencers for other types of content. The other types of content were home decoration, music, gaming, books, technology, business development, art, animals, knitting and crocheting, building, culture, entertainment, cleaning, true crime, photography, plants, investing and sustainable development. Some respondents also specified that they enjoyed following reaction channels, some families' everyday life, artists and personal brands, handicraft and renovation content. Interestingly, many respondents reported to follow various influencers for different types of content to fulfill their different types of interests. One respondent also answered that they do not follow any influencers for any type of content.

An influencer's career is based on paid collaborations, which means that they have to create and post promotional content to be able to make a living. Out of the respondents 57% reported to seeing influencers promoting products from foreign brand frequently, 17% answered very often and 40% answered often. Thirty-five percent admitted to coming across an influencer promoting foreign goods sometimes and only 7% reported to rarely seeing influencers promote foreign brands and goods. Only 1% answered with the option very rarely and specified that they do not follow any social media influencers, meaning that they do not come across any promotional content from influencers online. Figure 5 represents the percentages of responses to the question of how often they see influencers promoting products from foreign brands.

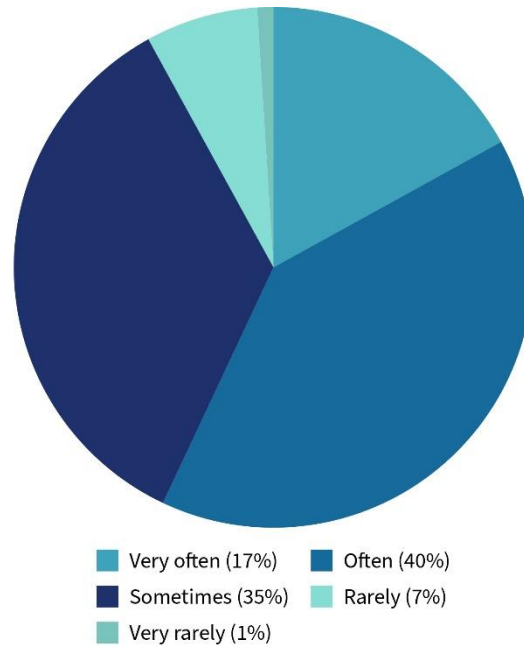


Figure 5. Pie chart of replies to how often the respondents see influencers promoting products from foreign brands.

Similarly to the content types that most of the respondents preferred, most respondents revealed that they mostly see beauty, health and fitness products promoted by the influencers they follow, with 66% of the respondents reporting seeing health and fitness products being promoted the most and 65% seeing beauty products being promoted the most. The third most promoted types of products were fashion related and then lifestyle, although lifestyle was voted as the most preferred style of content amongst the respondents. Forty-three percent of the respondents reported to seeing food and cooking related products promoted by the influencers they follow, and 24% responded with travel. Thirteen percent of respondents responded with other, specifying with seasonal home decoration, mobile games, culture, diving, cleaning supplies, fabrics and pet food. Two percent of respondents reported that they do not see any promotional content, and 1% responded that they rarely see any promotional content.

When asked about whether the respondents trust influencer marketing or traditional marketing more, only 22% answered that they trust influencer marketing more, and 33% answered that they trust both equally. Traditional marketing got 25% of the votes, meaning 3% more than influencer marketing. Twenty percent answered that they trust neither, and only 9% of the respondents stated that they trust influencers more than friends and family

when it comes to product recommendations. Although influencer marketing is not deemed as the most credible marketing strategy in the eyes of the respondents, 62% of the respondents have previously purchased a product due to an influencer's review or recommendation, and 40% have also ordered a product from abroad due to an influencer promoting the product. Figure 5 represents the answers to the question regarding trusting product recommendations from influencers or traditional advertising more.

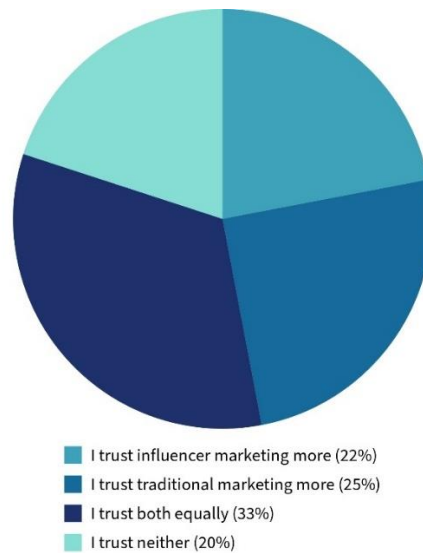


Figure 6. Pie chart of replies to whether the respondents trust influencer marketing or traditional marketing more.

The respondents were also asked to consider what types of influencers they trust the most when it comes to product recommendations. Forty-six percent answered that they trust micro influencers the most, meaning influencers with more than 10,000 but less than 100,000 followers. The second most credible type of influencers amongst the respondents was nano influencers, which are influencers with less than 10,000 followers. Macro influencers, influencers with more than 100,000 but less than a million followers, got 15% of the votes, and lastly mega influencers, influencers with more than a million followers, got 12% of the votes. The reason for many SMEs preferring nano influencers for their influencer campaigns seems not to be only for the cost effectiveness, but the effectiveness in general. Figure 7 represents the division between the votes for what type of influencers the respondents trust the most.

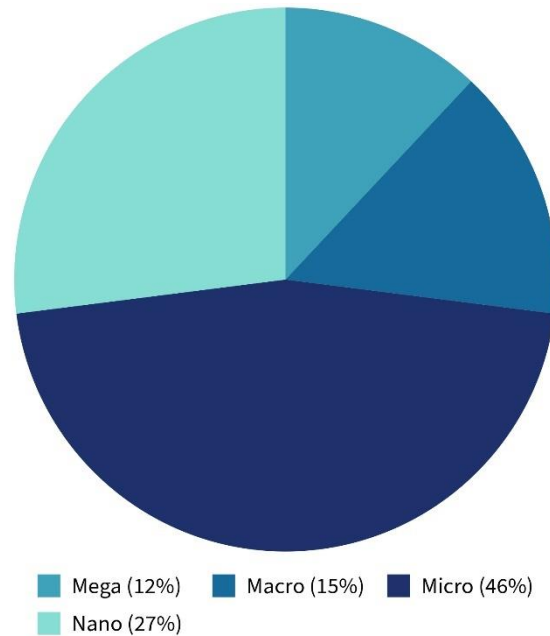


Figure 7. Pie chart of replies to which types of influencers the respondents trust the most.

According to the respondents, beauty products are the most bought products due to influencers' recommendations. There are thousands of beauty influencers on various different platforms including the ones that the respondents use regularly. (Influencer Marketing Hub 2024.) Beauty influencers often get sent PR packages by brands or PR agencies with a variety of the brand's most popular or newest products in hopes of the influencers reviewing the products for their followers. (O'Reilly 2024.) It comes as no surprise that the various reviews create curiosity within consumers, along with trends and even scandals. A widely known scandal about mascara happened in 2024, when the beauty influencer Mikayla Nogueira praised one brand's mascara while viewers noticed her using false eyelashes in the video. (Jokic 2023.) The so-called 'mascara gate' not only angered some viewers, but created curiosity around the product, which many then bought and tried for themselves.

43% of the respondents have purchased a beauty product due to an influencer's post about it although only 22% of them stated that they trust influencer marketing more than traditional marketing. 24% of the respondents have also purchased a fashion, health and fitness related product making the categories the most purchased types of products due to an influencer's review or recommendation. Six percent of the respondents also responded to having purchased other types of products apart from the product categories suggested

and the answers included fabrics, household goods, cleaning supplies and gadgets, electronic devices, yarn and games. Figure 8 represents the number of respondents who have purchased a product in that category due to an influencer's post.

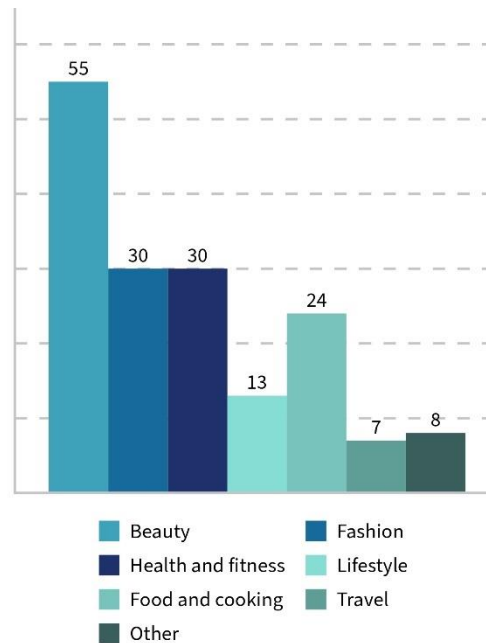


Figure 8. Bar chart of replies to what types of products the respondents have previously purchased due to an influencer's recommendation.

As previously mentioned, only 22% of the respondents trust influencer marketing more than traditional marketing, 62% have purchased a product due to being influenced by influencer marketing, and 40% have ordered a product from abroad due to being influenced. However, 76% of the respondents actually prefer local brands as opposed to foreign brands, and 42% agreed that influencer marketing has increased their interest in foreign brands and products. Nine percent of the respondents also admitted to feeling pressured to buy products in order to keep up with social media trends, and 35% stated that they feel somehow pressured to keep up with trends. Forty percent have also made an impulsive purchase after seeing an influencer review a product online.

Although 40% of the respondents has previously ordered a product online from abroad, 57% answered that they order products from abroad very rarely and 21% rarely. Only 4% answered that they order products from abroad often and 18% sometimes. Sixty-one percent of the respondents also prefer online shopping as opposed to in-store shopping and reported that discount codes or

limited-time offers would increase their likelihood of ordering a product online from abroad. Only 28% admitted to being more likely to place an online order from abroad due to an influencer's product recommendation, and 58% agreed that curiosity towards the product would increase the probability. However, the source of that curiosity could still stem from social media and influencer marketing, with 77% of the respondents agreeing that influencer marketing makes it easier to discover new brands and products.

When asked about what factors would then increase the likelihood of placing an online order from abroad due to an influencer's product recommendation, discount codes and reviews from influencers did not place that much importance to the 127 respondents. Positive comments from other social media users or non-influencers places more value in the decision-making process than the original post made by an influencer, with 76 respondents answering that it would potentially influence their decision-making process. Seventy-three respondents also agreed that positive products reviews on the company's website would increase their likelihood of purchasing more. Discount codes which were previously placed at high value would not indeed affect the decision-making process when ordering from abroad after being influenced by a content creator. The division of answers to the question are represented in a bar chart in Figure 9.

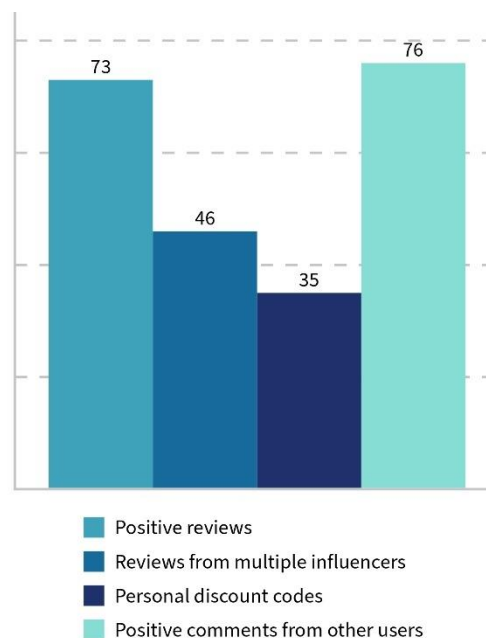


Figure 9. Bar chart of replies to what would increase the respondents' likelihood to purchase a product from a foreign brand.

Apart from how often the participants in the research order from abroad due to an influencer or the factors that would increase their likelihood of ordering from abroad, the participants have also previously encountered challenges when ordering from abroad. Poor return policies on foreign online stores seems to be the challenge that most of the respondents agree on and could be the reason why many of them avoid placing online orders due to influencer marketing as well. The respondents have also battled high shipping costs and delays in delivery, creating negative memories around the shopping experience and possibly preventing future online purchases. The other challenges not suggested that the respondents have previously encountered were poor websites, unethically and the products received being of poor quality. The division of the number of answers to the question of what challenges the respondents have encountered when placing an online order are visualized in Figure 10.

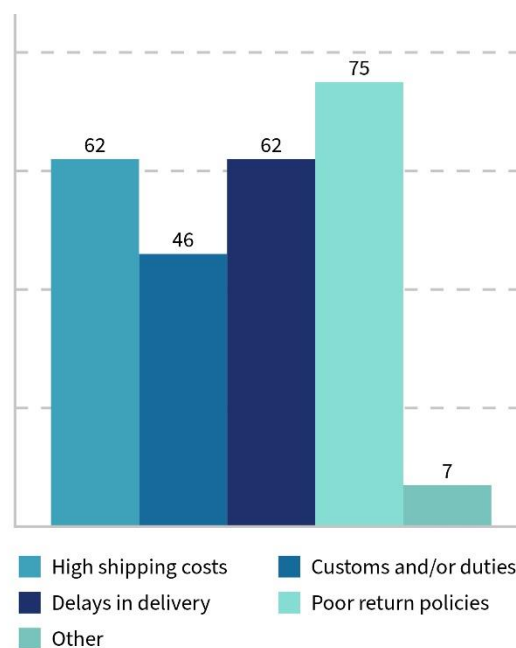


Figure 10. Bar chart of replies to what challenges the respondents have previously encountered when ordering a product from abroad.

## 4.2 Qualitative research

According to the survey results, the social media platforms used the most by the respondents were Instagram, Facebook and Tiktok. The respondents were asked to consider why they use the specific platform the most. A common

theme amongst the respondents who used Instagram the most was that it was the most effortless platform to keep up with friends, to either share one's own everyday life through posting photos or share entertaining reels through direct messaging. Another common trait for Instagram users was that the platform is used to find inspiration, tips, experiences, educational content and entertainment.

The second most used platform by the respondents was Tiktok. A common reason for using Tiktok the most was that the platform is extremely interactive and addictive, and the content on the platform is versatile and interesting in addition to new content being posted continuously. Tiktok is a platform where the respondents look for entertainment, tips and education. One respondent wrote that they use Tiktok the most since any type of content can be found on the platform. Some examples that they used were recipes, book recommendations, inspiration for decorating and travel content and added that the versatility is the best thing about the platform. Another respondent said that they use Tiktok the most, mostly due its addictive nature. They also shared that the content on the platform offers good tips for working out, cooking, decorating and dressing up in addition to all the humorous content.

A common theme for the respondents who used Facebook the most was that it was the platform that they have used the longest and that it was used a lot by their peers. Another commonly answered trait about the platforms was the groups. One interviewee mentioned that they use Facebook the most since a lot of their peers use it, they find out about current news on the platform and there are a lot of Facebook groups that one can spend a lot of time scrolling through. Another respondent said that since they knit a lot they use Facebook the most due to there being a lot of groups for knitting in specific, where other users share ideas and tips. One person also mentioned that they use Facebook to cure boredom and one listed their reasoning for using the platform the most to be due to their old age and that it is more difficult for them to learn to use new social media platforms.

Youtube was most commonly used by the respondents for background noise in the form of videos, podcasts or music. One respondent mentioned that Youtube has made it easier for them to find content that truly interests them; another one

leaves their playlists on helping them fall asleep and one respondent wrote that they leave the videos on Youtube on to numb the feeling of loneliness. The respondents who used Snapchat the most used it for mostly interactive purposes. One respondent said that they use Snapchat a lot to message their friends and to watch stories. Snapchat is said to generate the most money for content creators, attracting many high-profile creators to post content there. (Sternlicht 2023.) Only one respondents reported to using X the most and said that they only used it to keep up with politics.

The most used platforms for following influencers were Instagram, Tiktok and Youtube. Tiktok was the most used platform for following social media influencers, but 76% of the respondents who followed influencers on Tiktok also followed influencers on Instagram. The most common reasons for using said platforms to follow influencers were that the influencers are the most active on those platforms and that the platforms are the easiest ways to keep up with the content of those influencers. One respondent wrote that they have followed some influencers on Instagram and Youtube for many years and in Tiktok the beauty content is the most interesting and helpful in finding new brands and receiving beauty tips. Another one said that keeping up with the influencers they follow and the brands they promote is the most effortless on those specific platforms.

The most common reasoning for using Youtube to follow influencers was that the respondents preferred longer video content over photos or short videos. One respondent wrote that they do not consciously follow social media influencers, but on Youtube the content creators automatically become influencers as well. They also added that they only follow friends and some familiar brands on other social media platforms. Another respondent said that the content on Youtube is refreshing as opposed to the other platforms, where they only follow their friends. They also shared that some influencers create different quality content on different platforms, such as some influencers creating high-quality content on Youtube and not prioritizing content on Instagram, making it less satisfying to follow. One respondent also said that they do not find the content on Instagram credible, but do find the content on Youtube realiable, making it their most used platform to follow influencers on.

Most respondents also preferred Finnish influencers' content over foreign influencers' content. Fourteen respondents stated that the reason for this was the ability to relate to the Finnish influencers and their content. Three said that the reasoning was that their English language skills were not good enough to be able to follow the content made in the language. Five interviewees said that they follow both Finnish and foreign influencers. One elaborated that they only know how to knit in the Finnish way and the way that Americans knit does not make sense to them, thus they only follow Finnish influencers for that type of content. The respondent also shared that other types of content, such as food-related, can be in any language. One respondents explained that influencers that share tips for sustainable development are more useful for them in the Finnish context, which is why they prefer the content of Finnish influencers. A common theme for being interested in both Finnish and foreign creators content was that the respondents preferred different content on different platforms.

Out of the respondents who preferred the content of foreign influencers, nine were Finnish with Finnish also being their native tongue. The reasons were that foreign content creators seem to create higher quality content and that there are more foreign content creators than Finnish ones. One respondent also wrote that English language feels more natural to them and the content of foreign creators exposes them to a wider variety of different brands, aiding them to discover new products prior to them being launched in Finland. Out of the five respondents who preferred the content of foreign influencers over Finnish influencers, two stated that they would enjoy the content of Finnish influencers, but there is a language barrier. One wrote that they would relate to Finnish content more but it is often times in the Finnish language, limiting their ability to follow the influencers. Another one wrote that they simply understand foreign creators' references and jokes more, while one respondents shared that they are interested in everything international, making bot Finnish and foreign creators equally as interesting to them.

There was also a clear correlation between the types of products the influencers followed by the respondents were promoting and what type of content the influencers created. Sixty-two percent of the respondents admitted to having purchased a product due to an influencer's recommendation, but only two respondents out of 26 answered that they researched the product more before

purchasing rather than just trusting the influencer's promotional content. One respondent also shared that they have gotten interested in a product due to an influencer's recommendation, researched the product further, but then decided not to purchase the product. Two respondents mentioned that they made the purchase due to the influencer offering a discount code, and 16 shared that they have purchased or ordered an unfamiliar product fully due to an influencer's recommendation without researching the product further.

One respondent shared their opinion on cosmetics such as skincare and makeup being products that consumers tend to purchase the most due to an influencer's recommendation alone. Seven respondents out of 26 did specifically share their experience buying beauty products due to a recommendation alone. The other commonly purchased products due to an influencer's recommendation were activewear, clothing in general and food products. Only three of the respondents shared that they ended up being happy with the products they purchased, with one sharing that they have kept supporting the brand they first discovered due to an influencer.

As previously mentioned, 40% of the respondents had also ordered a product from abroad due to an influencer's review or recommendation. The respondents were asked to share what influenced them to order the product and what the experience was like. Three out of ten respondents had ordered activewear from abroad after seeing influencer campaigns on the products. All three were also very pleased with the products, and two out of the three have stayed loyal to the brand and made multiple purchases from them. Two respondents also shared that they have ordered cosmetics from abroad, with one's reasoning being that the products were not available locally and the other's was that the brand was trending on social media, which is why they placed the order in the first place. One respondent also shared that they have made orders from fast fashion brands Shein and Temu due to an influencer's recommendation and indicated that they were pleased with the products when comparing the quality to the price.

The respondents were then asked to consider whether they prefer local brands and locally produced products or foreign brands and products that are manufactured abroad. Seventy-six percent of the respondents did prefer local brands and products, and many agreed that the reasons for that were

sustainability practices, the quality and durability of the products and the want to support small local brands. The respondents who preferred foreign brands listed lower price and more selection as their reasons. Many pointed out that they would like to support local businesses more and buy locally produced products, but their financial situations make that nearly impossible. One respondent also wrote that as a dark skinned black woman, there aren't many products available in Finland that cater effectively for their skin tone and /or body size. Therefore, they mainly use products from foreign brands.

Although many of the respondents in the survey had previously purchased a product or ordered a product from abroad due to an influencer's recommendation, only 22% stated that they trust influencer marketing more than traditional marketing, and 33% answered that they trust both equally. The ones that trusted both influencer marketing and traditional marketing equally as much had varied opinions on the matter. One respondent shared that they think that the marketing methods compliment each other. They elaborated that in an influencer's recommendation one can see the product being used in real time, while traditional advertisement offers more practical information. Another one said that they feel immune to marketing, making a purchase only when they have a need. They shared that they also very rarely make impulsive purchases in store and do not feel that social media influencers make them discover a need for any product. Two respondents also discussed that an advertisement is always paid, and that they always think critically when it comes to marketing. Two also agreed that an influencer could be promoting a product that they do not even use and that one can never know whether the influencer is telling the truth.

A common theme amongst the respondents who trust traditional marketing more was that they acknowledged that influencers are being paid for promoting a product, which made them feel wary about the products being promoted. One respondent wrote that an influencer's opinion changes according to the brand they are promoting, making them think that influencers are not reliable. Another one with a similar take on the topic said that influencer marketing is very fake and that they do not believe in the hype that nearly all influencers partake in. They added that when seeing an influencer promoting something they can only think about them being paid to say something specific, making

their opinions fake. The nine respondents who answered that they do not trust either influencer marketing or traditional marketing had similar opinions to the ones who answered that they trust traditional marketing more, but towards both and in a more neutral way. One wrote that they always conduct their own research on a product since it is difficult to view a paid promotion as neutral and credible. Another one said that they do not naively trust in influencers, because they believe that no product can work for all people.

The respondents who answered that they trust influencer marketing more than traditional marketing were also mostly neutral on the matter and acknowledged that all influencers are still humans and have a reputation to uphold. One respondent wrote that they believe that influencers actually test the products and think they work, adding that the influencer's reputation is on the line if they decide to lie about a product. One also said that advertisement is always paid, but necessary for influencers and recommending a product is not necessarily paid, which creates a feeling that the recommendation is more reliable. A few respondents also mentioned that influencers get to test the products and by doing that on camera, they give a more realistic idea of the product they are promoting. One respondent also gave a very insightful answer, writing that they could not decide between trusting neither marketing method or trusting both equally. They added that they believe blindly trusting any type of marketing is questionable and risky, acknowledging that marketing is supposed to make them interested in a product. The respondent shared that they feel that it is up to them to research the product that is being promoted and find out whether it is fitting for them.

The respondents were then asked about what types of influencers they trust the most when it comes to paid advertisements or promoting a product. As mentioned before, businesses tend to favour influencers with lower follower counts due to the cost effectiveness, but there might be another benefit as well according to the survey answers. However, many of the respondents agreed that they do not care about the amount of followers and have not even necessarily noticed the follower counts of the influencers they choose to follow. A couple respondents who preferred micro influencers wrote that influencers with a lot of followers just want profit and that influencers with less than a million followers have a lower chance of lying about a product and don't think that they

will just get easy money for promoting something. A few respondents that found mega influencers more credible pointed out that influencers with less followers might take on any collaboration just to get followers out of it. Another one said that an influencer with more followers has many collaboration opportunities to choose from which is why they can choose one whose products they actually use and not make a choice based on the amount they are getting paid.

Social media influencers drive trends. When asked about whether the respondents felt pressured to keep up with different trends, the answers were quite varied. Most respondents answered that they do not feel pressured by trends themselves, but acknowledged that specifically teenagers do. One wrote that they do not feel pressured by trends themselves, but younger people for sure do, which is not good in their opinion. Another one wrote that it is easy for influencers to keep up with trends since they get sent free stuff. They also added that it creates a lot of pressure for younger people to buy the same products the influencers possess. One respondent also pointed out an important thing about influencing as a career in today's world, writing that they feel like they have reached a point where they are not influencer by content creators half as much as they used to be, adding that they used to have more influence previously when they used to be more reliable. They said that nowadays influencers seem to have a celebrity status and that it seems to be just a job title, instead of being a random relatable person with a camera and a living room.

Lastly, the respondents were asked to consider what they think are the most positive and most negative impacts of influencers and influencer marketing on consumers. Twenty-nine out of 49 respondents answered overconsumption and specifically impulse purchasing. Multiple respondents also mentioned the terms panic buying and hysteria to keep up with trends, to describe the phenomenon. One respondent wrote that the most negative impact of influencer marketing is unnecessary consumption and that needs and wants have gotten mixed up. They added that there are a lot of misperceptions of what a product can achieve and some people neglect their financial situations to own the products influencers are promoting. Another similar opinion was that people think that they need every single product an influencer has and keep creating a distorted image of their own consumption. They continued that in reality, the products

that are being promoted might be borrowed just for the post or free gifts or that the influencers might not even like the products they are promoting and they might not even be suitable for them.

Many respondents also pointed out that influencer marketing is especially harmful for young people and the unethically of promoting fast fashion. One said that the most negative impact is the pressure inflicted on young people and that it affects not only the young people, but also their families. The respondents stated that many face the problem of their financial situation not matching their amount of consumption. Another one also mentioned the vulnerability of teenagers, saying that not keeping up with trends and owning all the trending products may lead to bullying and harassment. When considering promoting unethical brands and products, the respondents brought up Shein and Temu. One respondent wrote that some products that are being promoted are actually bad and the companies are questionable, using Shein and Temu as an example. Another one added that influencers promoting products like that are only doing it for the money and neglecting their values.

The negative impacts of influencer marketing prompted 49 statements, with many of the respondents agreeing on the impacts. Forty-two respondents also found something positive to say about influencer marketing. Many agreed that it is a brilliant way to raise awareness about new brands and different products, presenting new choices for the consumer to consider when making a purchase decision. Some varying answers were that influencer marketing makes finding solutions for different problems easier, provides more discount codes that are easily available, making it easier for small brands to get awareness, getting inspiration, and improving knowledge about trends and new products. One interviewee also mentioned that even environmental consciousness has increased due to influencers and influencer marketing.

### **4.3 Further discussions**

Tiktok is the most used application amongst 18 to 24 year-olds, but it is not the most used for following social media influencers. Tiktok seems to be used for entertainment, while Instagram is the app where 18 to 24 year-olds choose to follow like-minded influencers for inspiration. For 25 to 34 year-olds, the most used app is Instagram. It is also the app used the most for keeping up with their

favourite influencers. Most 18 to 34 year-olds also prefer Finnish influencers and Finnish content, but regularly see foreign products being promoted on the influencers' pages. The promotional posts do not however peek interest for international products amongst the followers; therefore, promotional content on foreign products does not create more demand for international goods.

People aged 35 or above do not use social media any less than people from younger generations, but they mostly use Facebook and Instagram. For people aged 45 or above, Facebook seems to be the most used platform due to it having been around for the longest time. However, they do not follow influencers on Facebook, but it is strictly used for networking, entertainment, inspiration and educational content. Coming across influencers who promote foreign brands and products is also not less frequent. Individuals of all generations seem to follow influencers for similar interests, mostly beauty content, lifestyle content and wellness content, but people aged 35 or above seem to prefer cooking content more than beauty content.

Although influencer marketing has not made foreign brands and products sound more appealing to people over the age of 18, most people from all age groups have ordered a product from abroad due to getting intrigued after seeing an influencer post about it. However when asked, most people answered that they order products from abroad very rarely and that paid promotional posts do not really make them feel a need for the promoted product. It seems that for people aged 18 to 44 curiosity towards a product or available discount codes make a greater impact in completing a purchase. On the other hand, curiosity towards a product can still happen as a consequence of social media and influencer marketing. For people aged 45 or above, discount codes and product recommendations from influencers played the most important role in the decision-making process.

People from all age groups had also encountered challenges when placing an order from a foreign brand. Most people seem to think that high shipping costs, delayed deliveries and poor return policies have shaped their customer journeys before making the purchase into a negative experience. Nevertheless, people aged 18 to 34 are more likely to order products from abroad if the product reviews and the comments under an influencer's promotional post are positive.

For people over 45 years-old positive comments and also reviews from multiple different influencers on the same product might make them more interested in trying the product, therefore encouraging them to place an order.

Individuals between 18 and 34 years are more inclined to trust influencer marketing than traditional marketing, while individuals older than 35 years of age seem to find traditional advertisement more reliable. The types of influencers that consumers find the most credible on the other hand do not matter, since most consumers reported not paying any attention to the number of followers an influencer has. Even though there is a difference, most people from all age groups have purchased a product promoted by an influencer before. Although the common belief is that younger people are most likely to feel pressured to keep up with social media trends, 18 to 24 year-olds reported the most to not feeling pressured by trends, and 25 to 34 year-olds had the most individuals who admitted to feeling pressured. The division between the felt pressures explains why there were also no significant differences in the number of individuals from all age groups reporting to having made an impulsive purchase due to influencer marketing before.

Although many people seem to view influencer marketing negatively, most of them have fallen for it and can agree that there are loads of positive sides to it as well. Most people agree that influencer marketing makes it easier to discover new brands and products and many also recited that it is an essential tool for many small brands. Despite the research suggesting an increase in purchases made because of influencer reviews and recommendations, the marketing method is mostly viewed as a negative phenomenon with unfavourable repercussions on young minds.

Many of the respondents reported to making impulsive purchases before, proving that the traditional decision-making process is getting shorter and has started to lack some stages in the digital age. The theory of planned behaviour supports the results of the research, since positive experiences from the respondents themselves and other people whether they were influencers or consumers that had previously purchased the products clearly caused a shift in the decision-making process on whether to or not to purchase from a foreign brand. Several respondents also expressed that young people are more likely to

get influenced by trends and societal norms which is again supported by Gu & Wu's research conducted in 2019.

The social learning theory also supports the research and the observations on how trends and influencers affect young minds more than adults. Social learning happens in social settings and seeing a friend get praised for their latest purchase can be enough for a young person to make their decision on a purchase. In addition positive online reviews from influencers and from consumers commenting on the influencer's post can sway the purchase decision. All in all teenagers and young adults are more at risk to partake in impulse buying due to peer pressure and the possible lack of self-control. (Devdiscourse 2024.)

## **5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the research was conducted to determine the role of social media and influencer marketing in creating demand for international goods and to examine whether the need for international trade has increased strictly due to influencer marketing. Based on the results, influencer marketing does not seem to significantly affect international trade in terms of business-to-consumer importing, but it does appear to increase interest in foreign products that are available locally through business-to-business importing and retailers. Consumer preferences are experiencing some changes, since influencer marketing opens up new markets and indirectly facilitates for a wider variety of products available. According to the research, influencer marketing plays an important role for consumers in discovering new brands and products and for businesses in increasing brand awareness and loyalty.

The quantitative data suggests that even though influencer marketing is viewed as untrustworthy by consumers, most of the population has still participated in the phenomenon by making a purchase simply due to an influencer recommendation. Consumers are mostly sceptical about paid advertisements and promotional posts, but being frequently exposed to persuasive content seems to arouse an interest towards the products promoted, eventually finishing the consumer decision-making process by purchasing the product whether there was an actual need or it created an impulsive desire. The qualitative data

also indicates that consumers are aware of today's trends in marketing, and high usage of social media does not necessarily correlate with a high engagement with influencers or even an interest in following influencers. In addition the data proves that consumers do not pay attention to the number of followers influencers have and do not follow them strictly for product recommendations, but rather ideas and inspiration.

While influencer marketing has proven to be an effective tool in increasing brand awareness internationally, it might not be the most effective marketing method on its own. For brands looking to enter the market, choosing authentic influencer for campaigning, designing fair international return policies and being transparent about pricing, extra costs and logistical challenges could be the most effective way to successfully entering the market.

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## Questionnaire questions

1. What language do you speak?
2. How old are you?
3. What gender do you identify as?
4. What is your nationality?
5. What is your current employment status?
6. What is your monthly income?
7. How often do you use social media?
8. What social media platforms do you use?
9. What social media platform do you use the most?
10. On which platform(s) do you follow social media influencers on?
11. Are you more interested in the content of Finnish influencers or influencers from abroad?
12. What type of content do the influencers you follow create?
13. How often do you see influencers promoting products from foreign brands?
14. What types of products do the influencers you follow promote on their channels?
15. Do you trust product recommendations from influencers or traditional advertisement more? 1
16. Have you ever purchased a product due to an influencer's recommendation peeking your interest in it?
17. If you answered yes to the previous question, what type(s) of products have you purchased based on an influencer's recommendation?
18. Have you ever ordered a product from a foreign brand based on an influencer's recommendation?
19. How often do you purchase/order a product from a foreign brand after seeing an influencer use it?
20. Have you ever made an impulsive purchase after seeing an influencer use/promote a product?
21. Do you feel pressured by social media and influencers to keep up with trends?
22. Do you prefer local or foreign brands?
23. What factors would increase your likelihood of purchasing or ordering a product from a foreign brand?

24. Which of the following factors would increase your likelihood of purchasing or ordering a product from a foreign brand that an influencer is promoting?
25. Do you prefer online shopping or going to a store?
26. When ordering from a foreign brand, what challenges have you encountered?
27. Do you think that influencer marketing makes it easier for you to discover new products and brands?
28. Has influencer marketing increased your interest in the products of foreign brands?
29. What types of influencers do you trust the most (when purchasing or ordering a product from a foreign brand based on an influencer's recommendation)?
30. Do you trust product recommendations from influencers or friends/family more?

## **Interview questions**

1. Please share what platform you use the most and why you use that platform the most.
2. Please share on what platforms you follow influencer on and why you choose to follow influencers on those specific platforms.
3. Please share whether you are more interested in Finnish or foreign influencers' content and why.
4. Please share what type of content the influencers you follow create and why you choose to follow influencers who create that type of content.
5. Please share which type of marketing do you trust the most and the reason for your answer!
6. Please share about your experience purchasing a product due to an influencer's recommendation.
7. If you have ordered a product from a foreign brand based on an influencer's recommendation, please share what made you place the order and what your experience was like.
8. Give your take on impulsive purchases and social media trends!
9. Why do you prefer local or foreign brands more?
10. Please share what types of influencers you trust the most and why!
11. What do you think is the most significant negative impact of influencer marketing on consumers?
12. What do you think is the most significant positive impact of influencer marketing on consumers?