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# **Social media influencer marketing**

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<p><b>Tiivistelmä</b></p> <p>Markkinointikenttä muuttuu samanaikaisesti digitalisoitumisen myötä. Sosiaalinen media välineenä käy markkinoijille entistä tärkeämmäksi, eikä sosiaalisen median informaatiotulvassa edukseen erottuminen ole helppoa. Sosiaalisen median vaikuttajamarkkinointi voisi olla yksi hyvä vaihtoehto muiden markkinointityyppien sijasta. Toimeksiantajan tarve, sekä kirjoittajan kiinnostus aihetta kohtaan toimivat motivaation lähteinä työn tekemiseen. Opinnäytetyön toimeksiantajalla, Sääskilahti konsultoinnilla, on sosiaalisen median vaikuttajaverkosto Somevaikuttajat, joka tarjoaa sosiaalisen median vaikuttajamarkkinointia palveluna. Opinnäytetyössä pyrittiin selvittämään, onko palvelun tarjoaminen toimeksiantajalle kannattavaa.</p> <p>Konseptit sosiaalisen median markkinointi, vaikuttajamarkkinointi ja word of mouth – markkinointi käsitellään kirjallisuuskatsauksessa. Kvalitatiivisen tutkimuksen lähestymistapa valittiin, jotta saataisiin syvä ymmärrys ilmiön perustana oleviin syihin ja motivaatioihin. Tutkimuksen osallistajat olivat olleet alttiina vaikuttajamarkkinoinnille ja seurasivat valittuja vaikuttajia. Aineistonkeruumenetelmäksi valittiin teemahaastattelut, ja niistä saatu aineisto analysoitiin. Analyysimetodina käytettiin teemoittelua.</p> <p>Tutkimustuloksista ilmeni, että vaikuttajien seuraajat kokivat vaikuttajat vertaistovereinaan. Vaikuttajamarkkinoinnin kautta autenttisesti mainostettu brändi, tuotteet ja palvelut saavat seuraajien huomion. Markkinoijien tulee kiinnittää huomiota siihen, kuinka vaikuttajamarkkinointi tulisi toteuttaa, jotta se tuottaisi haluttuja tuloksia. Mahdollisena jatkotutkimuksena voisi olla esimerkiksi vaikuttajamarkkinoinnin toteutustapojen tutkiminen.</p>		
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<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>The marketing field is changing simultaneously with the digital world. Social media is getting more and more important to marketers, and there is a need to stand out in the social media noise. Social media influencer marketing could be a good alternative to other types of marketing. A need from the consignor and the interest of the author were the motivations for conducting the study. Sääskilahti Consulting has a social media influencer network Somevaikuttajat, which is offering social media influencer marketing as a service. This thesis aimed to find out whether or not it is reasonable to offer that service.</p> <p>Concepts social media marketing, influencer marketing and word of mouth marketing were analyzed in the literature review. A qualitative research approach was chosen in order to get an insight into and an understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations. The participants of the study have been exposed to influencer marketing and were following the influencers' chosen. Theme interviews were conducted and the data gained was analyzed. Analysis method was thematizing.</p> <p>Based on the results of the study influencers are seen as peers to the followers. Through influencer marketing, the brand, products and services advertised authentically get the followers' attention. Marketers need to pay attention to how influencer marketing is executed in order to get the impact wanted. Possible future studies could research on how influencer marketing should be executed.</p>		
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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Social media has fundamentally changed the balance of power between customers and brands, states Wong (2014) from the Forbes magazine. Wong adds that now peer recommendations on social media affect purchasing decisions a lot and that marketing-inspired word of mouth generates more than twice the sales of paid advertising. Social media influencers have strong and huge follower bases in niche subjects, such as fashion and food on for example Instagram and Twitter and are seen as fellow social media users. That is why influencer marketing is a hot topic in the marketing field.

Celebrities have been used in advertisements for a long time but according to Crowdtap (2014), consumers today avoid messages through the traditional media (TV, print and radio) and the messages through them rank low on trust. Peer-created social content or user-generated content is trusted more than other types of media. Through social media consumers have gotten closer to the celebrities and influencers. Over time they have formed a relationship and consumers trust the influencers.

Social media influencer marketing is a hot subject, especially in the U.S. and finding its way in Sweden, but in Finland the marketing method is not as common or even as well known among marketers. There have not been any studies in Finland about social media influencer marketing and its effectiveness. The consignor of the study is using social media influencer marketing as a method and believes that it is an efficient way to stand out from the mass marketing noise.

The consignor is using social media influencer marketing but is uncertain of its effectiveness and whether or not it should be a service the company is offering. That is a managerial decision problem. Are there enough reasons for the company's clients to use their money in the social media marketing method what they are

offering. This research will not give a straight answer to the managerial decision problem but provides information to help with the decision.

## **1.2 The motivation of the case company**

The consignor of the research is Sääskilahti Consulting (<http://somevaikuttajat.fi/>). The subject for this study came from the interest of the researcher as well as a need of the consignor. The researcher was working at SomeWorks Ltd. from the beginning when the network SomeWorks Influencers was put to action (later on Somevaikuttajat owned by Sääskilahti Consulting), thus gaining the needed knowledge of and interest in the subject.

Sääskilahti Consulting is a sole proprietorship founded in 2010 by Hannu Sääskilahti. Sääskilahti Consulting offers marketing consultant and content producing services. It offers knowledge in all the aspects of marketing: offline, online and socially. Also trainings for marketing problems, such as Facebook advertising or Power Editor trainings are part of the menu. Photo and video shooting is also a service offered.

A new addition to the services is a concept called Somevaikuttajat. Somevaikuttajat was launched in the spring 2015 under the name SomeWorks Influencers for a company called SomeWorks Ltd. Due to an acquisition SomeWorks Influencers is now called Somevaikuttajat and owned by Sääskilahti Consulting.

Somevaikuttajat is a network of more than 60 Finnish social media persons. The network includes for example athletes, actors, YouTube stars and bloggers with a substantial social media follower base. The main business for Somevaikuttajat network is social media influencer marketing. Social media marketing done through influencers is usually content marketing. Often the aim of this type of marketing is to boost brand awareness and visibility, as well as to generate positive buzz around the brand/ product.

Various campaigns have already been conducted for companies by Somevaikuttajat that have met the set goals, but marketers still tend to be a bit suspicious still of the effectiveness of social media influencer marketing. This study aims to explain the perceptions of social media influencer marketing from the viewpoint of a consumer.

Now that the world is shifting to social, marketers have had to adapt to the changes of consumer behaviour. This research is important because the subject is not studied so much especially in Finland. The research aims to answer the research question and generate new knowledge on the matter. The purpose of the research is to familiarize the researcher with the subject and be able to exploit the gained knowledge in the future. The research also gives valuable information for Sääskilahti Consulting, similar companies and everyone dealing with marketing.

## 2. Literature review

Social media is everywhere. People spend their time online, more and more at their mobile phones, checking Facebook, uploading photos to Instagram or Tweeting about their day. According to Safko (2012, xvi) social media is a worldwide phenomenon. In this chapter the researcher tells shortly about social media and the most relevant networks concerning the study. After explaining social media in general, social media marketing is discussed, then more in depth about social media influencer marketing and its current state in Finland. An explanation of word of mouth marketing is in the end of the chapter.

### 2.1 Social media

“The term social media encompasses all of the interactions between people online- all the ways they participate in and share information, knowledge, and opinions while using web-based applications to communicate”.

Safko and Brake (2009)

Social media is such a big part of everyday life nowadays and everything is online. The younger generation are the trendsetters in social media. They are quicker at taking over new platforms and customs. For example a social media network Snapchat has more than 100 million users but only 14% of them are more than 35 years old (Snapchat, 2015).

Social media for a brand is a chance to set the tone, tell a story, reinforce the brand and build impressions (Vaynerchuck, 2013, 3). To succeed in social media a company has to listen to the consumers, to be native and participate to the conversation. Probably the most important thing in social media for a brand is that it can bring the brand closer to customers. The power has changed from companies to customers and social media is a channel for a two-way communication.



There are a lot of different networks in social media. This study concentrates on Instagram, where most of the campaigns for Somevaikuttajat are focused. Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat are also discussed briefly since they are usually on a supportive role in the campaigns.



Figure 1. Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat & Twitter logo's (Somevaikuttajat 2015)

### **Instagram**

Instagram is a visual-centric social network aiming to be a fun and quirky way for sharing lives through a series of photos. According to Instagram (2015) the platform is nowadays a home for visual storytelling for everyone from celebrities, newsrooms and brands, to teens, musicians and everyone with creative passion. Instagram offers easy possibilities to enhance the photos, what makes the usage even more pleasant to the users.

Advertising became possible in Instagram on September in 2015 (Valtari, 2015) also in Finland and being owned by Facebook, Instagram has the same data and targeting opinions as Facebook. But brands are still doing strong on Instagram without advertising, with content and influencer marketing, as people like to follow interesting brands and influencers bringing out the brands in their own profile in a native way to Instagram. The amount of content a person sees on Instagram is not as overwhelming as on Facebook so the messages from brands don't go as easily unnoticed.

## **Facebook**

The biggest social media platform Facebook was founded already at 2004. According to Facebook (2015) the mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. There are one billion users in Facebook and 70 languages support it.

The amount of news going through a persons feed in Facebook on a daily basis is fantastic. But Facebook controls quite a lot what a person sees on his feed by an algorithm, designed to show the most relevant content for everyone based on their activities on Facebook and online. When people see relevant content, they are more likely to engage with their news feed, also stories from businesses (Facebook, 2015). Standing out in Facebook is challenging for brands, but when learning to advertise a brand in a native way in Facebook, advertising can be really cheap and effective. There are a lot of different campaign opinions and targeting opinions in Facebook are more precise than in any other platform because of the huge amount of data Facebook have been able to collect from its users.

## **Snapchat**

Snapchat was founded in 2011 at the name Picaboo, and has grown rapidly ever since. According to Snapchat (2015) there are 100 million “snapchatters” and the account is constantly rising. The platform gets over 4 billion video views every day. “Snaps” are pictures and videos that are a reflection of who you are in the moment. Snaps can either be sent separately to the chosen Friends or added to MyStory for everyone who follows to view. Stories can be updated in real-time and they expire after 24 hours.

The value of Snapchat is reported to be 15 billion U.S dollars (Mander, 2015). As the usage of Snapchat has exploded, marketers are starting to find the network as well. Advertising is not possible in Europe, not yet at least, but like Instagram, Snapchat is

a good channel for content and influencer marketing. Influencers in Snapchat can bring the brands message the influencer's followers in an authentic way.

### **Twitter**

Twitter is a micro blog network, where the users can read and send "tweets", which are short 140-character messages. Videos, photos and links can be added to the messages. Twitter has 320 million active monthly users and 35 languages supported. Twitter's mission is to give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers (Twitter 2015).

Advertising in Twitter is quite new in Finland, since Twitter enabled it here only at the end of 2014. Twitter advertising is effective when wanting for example more traffic to a web page or arouse more conversation around products or services. The lifespan of one tweet is normally only around 17 minutes, but by advertising the lifespan is significantly longer. In Twitter also normal tweets can get viral if they are found interesting.

## **2.2 Social media marketing**

Paloranta (2008, 21) stated "marketing is knowledge, which is provided to consumers from marketers' products and services. The basic meaning of marketing is to further the demand of products and service." Another example of the meaning of marketing goes as follows: "Marketing is a social process, through which persons and groups satisfy their needs and wants by exchanging products and creating value with others" (Kotler, Amstrong, Wong & Saunders 2008, 7).

Vaynerchuck, G. (2013, 3) argues that the trend in marketing for the past five years has been dividing marketing campaigns to three categories – traditional, digital and social. The power of traditional marketing (TV, radio and print) has been loosing its relevance for quite some time, but now that social media is addicting people, peoples attention is being pulled away from digital media as well. Social media is

nothing but a new set of tools and new technology allowing a more efficient way to connect and build relationships with existing and possible new customers argues Safko, (2012, 5). It is doing what traditional marketing did previously but it is exponentially more effective. Yet it is hard for a marketer of the social media age to stand out from the massive flow of information and keep track on the rapidly changing trends.

According to the Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority (2015) “Consumers have the right to know when attempt are being made to influence them commercially. This requirement concerning the recognisability of marketing applies to all forms and channels of marketing, including social media”. Being such a new channel of marketing and advertising, the rules in social media marketing are more than vague. The Finnish law does not even recognize the word Internet, yet alone social media. This gives marketers liberties, but also great deal of challenged and responsibilities.

### **2.3 Social media influencer marketing**

In the Strategic Direction interview (2012) Schaefer stated that the biggest mistake a marketer could do is treating the social web like any other kind of advertising channel. Schaefer said that people are sick of being advertised to, of being sold to, but they are always looking for people who are helpful, who can help them save money, time and have fun with their lives. Well-made social media influencer marketing can achieve those things.

People follow influencers’ lives in social media, and through the right execution influencer marketing seems like a natural part of their lives rather than advertising, which is usually even is. Influencers posting about brands and products in their social media are usually seen as fellow social media users by their followers, there by the message of the brands are seen as more credible and trustworthy. Kassoway (2015) states that influence is a long-term proposition that is grown and nurtured over time.

Long-term relationships between professional influencers and the consumers are the key to succeed in today's social world.

According to Wong (2014) influencer marketing can loosely be defined as a marketing form that identifies and targets individuals with influence over potential buyers. But having an influence is far more than having a lot of followers. It is about the relationship between the influencer and his or her followers and the expertise and credibility of the influencer. This study examines not only the perceptions about social media influencer marketing, but also the credibility of the influencers studied.

Social media influencer marketing in Finland is a fairly young phenomenon. Social media trends tend to arrive in Finland a bit later than for example in The U.S. and we are adapting to the trends set in there. More than 50% of the population in Finland is using different social media networks. Facebook is the most used channel, and highly used by older generation as well, as Facebook recognizes over 90 000 65+ years Finnish users (SomeWorks, 2015). Instagram is really popular with the younger generation, and the user base of up-and-coming Snapchat is growing fast. Social media influencer marketing is not used that much yet in Finland. Consequently it gives a marketer a good chance to bring the brand in front of the eyes of current and possible new customers in a way that is native to the consumption habits of the users.

## **2.4 Word of mouth**

Word of mouth (VOM) is a highly used term in marketing, especially now in the social age. According to a definition by Silverman (2001, 25) of word of mouth is "communication about products and services between people who are perceived to be independent of the company providing the product or service, in a medium perceived to be independent of the company". In other words, people who are not involved with the company talk about the brand, products and services of the company.

VOM can be either good or bad. It can be conversations between peers, or in the present day social media is a highly active place for VOM, where the word can spread through easily and also outside the normal reach. Most marketers think that VOM is out of their reach but Silverman (2001, 21-24) argues that VOM can be the most powerful way of making the decision to use the company easier and accelerate the decision process. He believes that advertising, salespeople and other traditional marketing is confusing and ranks low on credibility, where VOM is credible, can reach more people and fast, can break through the clutter and can get people to act.

As stated earlier, peer recommendations on social media affect purchasing decisions a lot and marketing-inspired VOM generates more than twice the sales resulting from paid advertising (Wong, 2014). Since influencers are seen as peers in social media and they are widely trusted, word of mouth by influencers have a lot of impact and a wide reach.

### **3. Research methods**

#### **3.1 Research objectives and questions**

As any research, this marketing research is systematic and follows a certain path. The research was planned and documented. The research has a scientific basis and with data collection and analysis the researcher is able to draw conclusions (Malhotra, 2013, 20). The first step is to define a research problem, which is turned into research questions. Answers to those questions are sought from the research data, by using different methods. Specifying the research problem is really important, because it leads the whole research process (Kananen, 2014, 29).

People spend their time in social media so it is only natural for companies to try to find ways to be heard and seen in there. Social media influencers are followed in social media really much and the followers have developed a relationship with the influencers – followers trust the opinion of the influencers. Even though celebrities and influencers have been used for a long time in advertisements, promoting products or services in influencer's own social media channels is not used so much, since marketers are only finding the ways to do it especially in Finland.

Using social media influencer marketing is not a practice in most of the companies in Finland, at least not yet, and not so much studied. Because there are not so much studies about it, it is not easy to justify reasons to use influencer marketing in social media. That is the reason for this research, to see if influencer marketing is truly effective or not.

This problem could be researched in many ways, but the researcher decided to study the problem in the customer point-of-view. The research question is:

# How consumers perceive social media influencer marketing?

**Figure 2. The research question**

The aim of this study is to find out how followers of chosen influencers perceive content marketing in the influencer's own social media channels. Do they think of it as advertising or a normal display of the influencers' lives? Studying how consumers think about the subject gives marketers valuable information. As stated before, people are sick of being advertised to, but they want to find helpful and valuable information. Can social media influencer marketing achieve the status of valuable information or is it seen as annoying advertising? At the same time the research gives information to the influencers about how trustworthy the influencer is seen by the followers.

The research problem is solved with research methods. Research methods can be divided into data gathering methods and analysis methods (Kananen 2014,47). The methodology is discussed more on the next chapter.

## **3.2 Data collection**

Malhotra (2013, 86) states that marketing researches are classified as explanatory or conclusive. Explanatory research was chosen to gain insights for developing an approach to the problem. The researcher chose to approach answers to research problem with qualitative approach, which is an unstructured, explanatory research methodology based on small samples. The qualitative approach was chosen in the present study since the aim is to understand the underlying perceptions of the



consumers towards influencer marketing (Malhotra, 2013, 173). Data description contains a small number of nonrepresentative cases. Data collection method is unstructured, data analysis is nonstatistical and the outcome of the method seeks to develop a richer understanding (adopted from Malhotra, 2013, 174).

Interviews are one of the most used data gathering methods of qualitative research. Face-to-face theme interviews were chosen because the phenomenon was not known and the research seeks understanding. Theme interviews are loosely structured conversations between the interviewer (in this case the researcher) and the respondents. The respondents are representatives of the settled target audience. The author chose theme interviews because it enables a chance for free atmosphere at the discussion. According to Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara (2013, 208) theme interviews tries to find meaningful answers to the research question. Malhotra (2013, 185) points out that the interviewer prepares a discussion outline to guide the interview. The interviewer asks probing questions to understand the answerer's motives, beliefs and attitudes. When progressing with the interview, the answers define what kind of questions, probes and wording of the questions is used.

The researcher always has a prejudice of the phenomenon, so the author was able come up with the themes for the interview. With themes the author made sure that every relevant matter is discussed concerning the phenomenon. That way the researcher makes sure in advance that all the areas are covered during the discussion. Before conducting the interviews the author drew up the body for them (can be found in the appendix). Also during the conversation new themes might come up and the researcher has to wrap onto those as well (Kananen 2014, 77).

Before conducting the interviews, it is important for the researcher to be aware of what is expected of the interviewer. When doing an interview, it is important that the interviewer does not appear as superior. She should put the respondents at ease, be objective but personable at the same time. She should form and ask the questions in an informative manner and probe the respondents. It is important to ask

experiencers rather than generalizations. She also should make sure of her own understanding and clearing out the metaphors (Malhotra (2013, 186), Kananen 2014, 97).

Advantages of conducting theme interviews include:

- Uncovering deeper insights about underlying motives.
- Attributing the responses directly to the respondents.
- Having free exchanges of information.

Disadvantages include:

- Possibly lacking skills of the interviewer.
- Lack of structure of the interviews makes the results susceptible to the interviewers influence.
- The data obtained might be difficult to analyse and interpret.

According to Kananen (2014,82-83), (originally from Strauss & Corbin 1998, 77), questions can be categorized by their nature to four groups:

- Sensitizing questions that lead the researcher to the phenomenon.
- Theoretical questions, which help to understand the processes and differences of the phenomenon and make connections between them.
- Practical questions, which can be divided to descriptive and causal questions.
- Guiding questions

### **Target audience**

The ideal participant of to the research is 20-30 years old native social media user. The age distribution was chosen to have participants who have purchasing power and fit in the majority of native social media users. S/he has an Instagram account and s/he follows the chosen social media influencers.

Kananen (2014, 97) states that it is important to pay attention when choosing participants to a qualitative research. In the present study the participants were

chosen because the participants have been under the influence of social media influencer marketing thus have a great knowledge about the subject. The researcher chose both female and male participants to gather a wider understanding of the subject.

One requirement of the participants was that they follow either one or both influencers who were chosen to represent the Somevaikuttajat network. The chosen Influencers to this research were Sauli Koskinen and Eveliina Tistelgren. Sauli Koskinen is a TV personality with more than 40 thousand Instagram followers. Eveliina Tistelgren is a fitness star with 24,7 thousand followers. Both of them are members of the influencer network Somevaikuttajat and have conducted many marketing campaigns in social media for different brands. A table for chosen participants is below.

	Age	Gender	Degree of social media use	Follows in Instagram
Participant 1	25	Male	Active	Sauli Koskinen
Participant 2	23	Female	Active	Eveliina Tistelgren
Participant 3	24	Female	Active	Eveliina Tistelgren, Sauli Koskinen
Participant 4	26	Male	Active	Sauli Koskinen

**Table 1. Chosen participants**

### 3.3 Data analysis

According to Ereaut (2002, 3) analysis portrays “a specific type of intensive work done on data collected from fieldwork”. He adds that actually it is a wider practical and intellectual process. The analysis of the data is a vital ingredient in a qualitative research to form conclusions. Nair (2009, 121) states that the purpose of data analysis is to transform the data into information.

The data was acquired from the theme interviews. After conducting the interviews, the data needed to be transcribed into a text. Transcribing the data makes it easier to handle it using programmes designed for qualitative data analysis. Qualitative material can be handled also without separate programmes, for example text editors. Because of the nature of the data, the researcher found that a text editor was a good enough choice for analysing. After collecting the data it is the researchers job to get acquainted to the data and find answers to the research questions. (Kananen 2014, 106.)

If there is a lot of data, it has to be summarized so the relevant matters to the research are dredged up. When transcribing the data, usually a fairly general level is enough if it covers the core of the matter. The author decided to add some word-for-word citation in the results part to strengthen the claimed arguments. (Kananen, 2014, 109.)

The researcher familiarized her with the transcribed text by reading it several times, so that the material started to shape. Sometimes only reading will produce the solution, but often the key to finding the solution is dismantling the text to pieces. In the present study the author found dismantling necessary. Each of these pieces formed their own segments. After coding the segments they were categorized and the material got tighten. (Kananen, 2014, 113.)

The researcher gathered the data in a way that shed light on the researched phenomenon as diversely and holistically as possible. The gathered data brought

understanding and a result to the research problem. The researcher seeks understanding to the phenomenon. (Kananen 2014, 117.)

### **3.4 Implementation**

Before the interviews the dates of the interviews were agreed on with the respondents and were made aware of the topic of the interview. The interviews were recorded and the recorder was tested and the battery checked. The author had already formed the themes for the interviews and thought of some probing questions so that all the themes were discussed thoroughly. The structure of the theme interviews can be found in the appendix.

After the first interview the author transcribed the data to a text form. The author started analyzing the data already after the first interview since; according to Kananen (2014, 98) in qualitative research it is important to synchronize the data gathering and data analysis. Kananen adds that gathering data without an analysis leads to a dead end. The researcher must know what to look for from the data and what the data included to be able to draw conclusions.

After each interview an analysis was made to be able to gather more specific and deeper information. It was necessary to formulate the questions better in the latter interviews. Based on Kananen (2014, 113) recommendation the author first read the data a few times to understand the content. After that the author started to colour code the data to form themes from the data. After that the author made an excel table for the compression of the colour-coded data.

Four interviews were conducted. Throughout the process learning happened, which was shown by the lengths of the interviews. The interviews were longer towards the end, which is a sign of internal validity. More information is available in the chapter of validity and reliability.

## 4. Consumer perceptions on social media influencer marketing

In this chapter the main results of the research are presented. The researcher found three different themes from the analysis of the data, which are social media channels, advertising and influencers. The results answer the research question and are a basis for discussion.

### 4.1 Social media channels in use

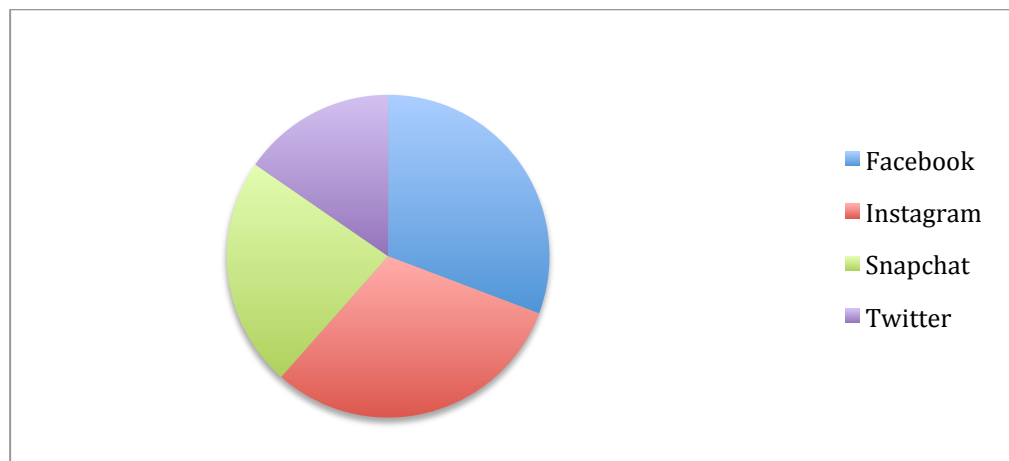


Figure 3. Social media channels in use

As it was a pre-requisite for the participants to use social media, all of them used Facebook and Instagram. Snapchat was used by three of the participants and two had an account in Twitter, though one was inactive. The major reason for social media usage was to see what is going on in friends' lives, though the reasons and habits on the usage varied.

#### Facebook:

All of the participants were using Facebook and it has been in use for the longest. The main reason for using Facebook is to see what friends are doing in there. The amount of data in Facebook is enormous, so there is a lot other posts going through one's feed. One of the four participants said that he is active in Facebook, adding pictures and posts and participating in the conversations. The others were passive users, mostly just reading the feed and not participating.

The participants also said that Facebook is a good place to check events. One respondent said that it is now the main medium to check an event, rather than for example a website. The respondents stated that it is a good thing that one can be invited to events and one can invite people to events because some events that would otherwise go unnoticed can be found from Facebook. The participants also use groups in Facebook. There is easy to do for example school work and plan own events. All the participants said that Facebook is the one social media channel where is a lot of advertisements.

**Instagram:**

Three the participants said that they like Instagram the most among social media channels. They thought it is easy to use and pictures and videos are liked more than texts among the participants. Like in Facebook, also in Instagram the main reason is to see what friends are doing. But in Instagram all the participants like to check other profiles and pictures too. Like it was one of the pre-requisites for attending the research, all of the participants are following influencers in Instagram. The required influencers were either Sauli Koskinen or Eveliina Tistelgren, but all of them follow other influencers as well. Also some brands were followed in Instagram, as well as “novelty accounts”, accounts that are not personal accounts for a person, but accounts where the account manager is most likely unknown and there are pictures posted of many people, usually without their permission. An example of such an account is @femalemotivation. See a figure below.

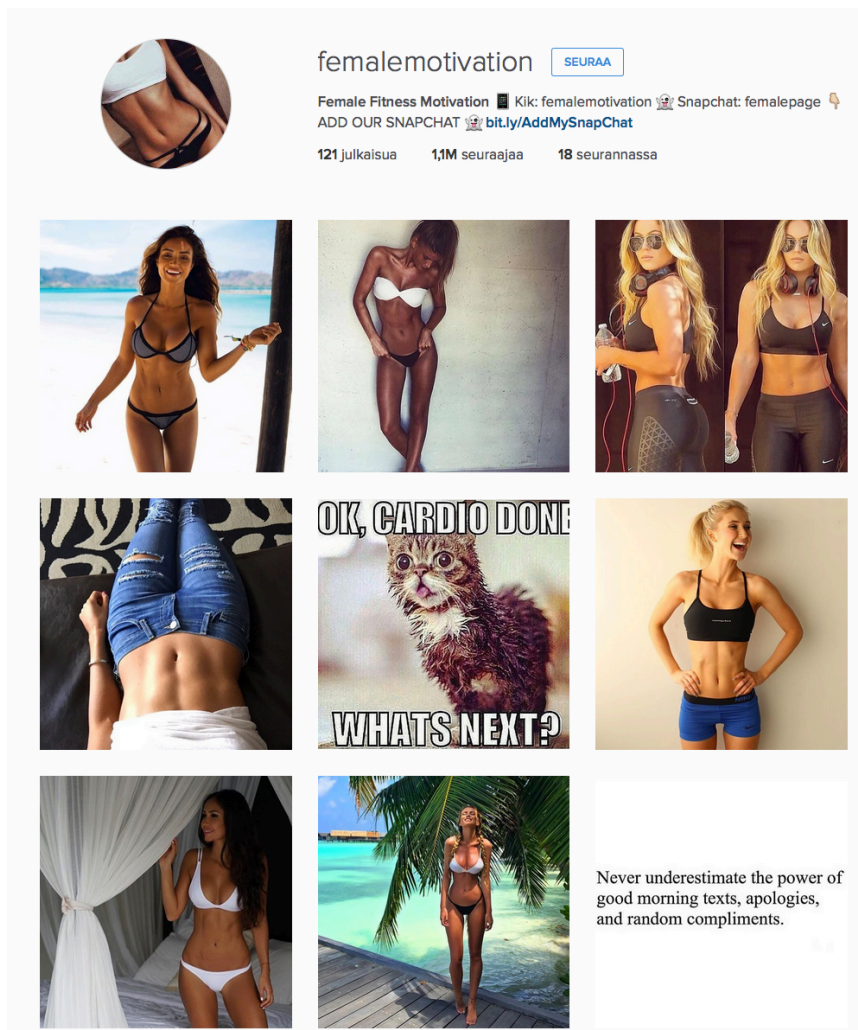


Figure 4. Account @femalemotivation (Instagram 2016)

In the account there are photos of fit females, inspirational quotes, healthy food ideas and some advertisements. The account has 1,1 million followers, so it is considered as influencer.

#### **Snapchat:**

Snapchat was used by 3/4 of the participants. It was the newest social media channel that was used among the participants. Two of the participants said that they are very active in Snapchat and one said that is quite active. All the “snapchatters” follow their friends and some influencers in Snapchat.

“Snapchat is the best channel to use because it shows real life.”



Male, 25-years old

Respondents argued that where Instagram is a great channel because of the good-looking photos and videos, Snapchat shows more “real life”, and is not so polished, therefore really liked.

Snapchat is used for looking through peoples My Stories, but the respondents feel that it is also a good channel to stay in touch with people. Sending for example a text or a WhatsApp is felt more difficult but sending a Snap is easier and the fact that the pictures or videos are not saved anywhere lowers the threshold to send them.

**Twitter:**

Two of the participants had a Twitter account. Only one of the participants is using the channel, not writing him self but reading it quite actively. He follows some friends, influencers and organizations in Twitter and thinks it is a best way to keep up to date for example in current phenomenon, events and game scores etc. The other participant said that he had created an account but barely used it.

## **4.2 Advertising**

All of the participants said that there are advertisements in Facebook. After some probing, they also realised that there are advertisements in Instagram as well, and the one respondent who uses Twitter also recognizes advertisements on Twitter. Snapchat has some global advertisements at Discover- section but they are easy to pass if one does not want to see what is on them. In Facebook, Instagram and Twitter the advertisements come to one’s feed and have to get through them when browsing the feed.

The respondents recognized Facebook advertisements as photo, video and text advertisements. The advertisements that come to one’s feed are marked “sponsored” but two of the respondents said that because they don’t pay attention to the advertisements sometimes they can watch for example a picture or for a long

time before recognizing that it is not a picture that one of their friends have added, it is actually an advertisement. Advertisements in Facebook might not be easy to recognize, because the advertisements come to one's feed if he or his friends have liked the picture or the brand behind it.

The respondents recognized that there have not been advertisements for long in Instagram. And there are not so many advertisements as in Facebook. Two of the respondents find advertisements in Instagram annoying. They also found that Instagram advertisements are not as well targeted as in Facebook. Instagram is owned by Facebook, so they have the same targeting tools, but the respondents were not aware of that. None of the respondent said that they would click the advertisements or buy because of them in Instagram.

“Insta advertising is stupid. It is annoying and irritating.

I want to see my friends not some ads.”

Male, 23-years old

Snapchat's layout is different from Facebooks, Instagrams and Twitters, which is more or less similar in them, where advertisements are added to one's feed. Snapchat has a Discover- section, that unlike in for example Facebook, one has to specifically tap the figures of to watch the advertisements. All of the respondents knew that there is a Discover –section but none of them are looking at the content behind the figures. One of the respondents said that when very bored, she has watched a few stories a couple of times. Snapchat has as well a Live –section, where one can find different on going events collected in one big Snapchat- story. Those events have covered for example London Fashion Week and Super Bowl. The respondents said that they all have watched the Live- section a few times, when there is an event that they are really interested in.

So all the participants recognize that there are advertisements in social media, but they find them quite inconspicuous.

“Advertisements don’t really bother me but I don’t find them often useful.”

Female, 23-years old

### 4.3 Influencers

A pre-requisite for the participants to attend the research was to follow one or both of set influencers. One participant followed both; two followed only Sauli Koskinen (@saulikoskinen) and one only Eveliina Tistelgren (@eevsku). All of the respondents are also following other influencers in all of the social media channels discussed.

The respondents said that the reasons to follow influencers in social media are:

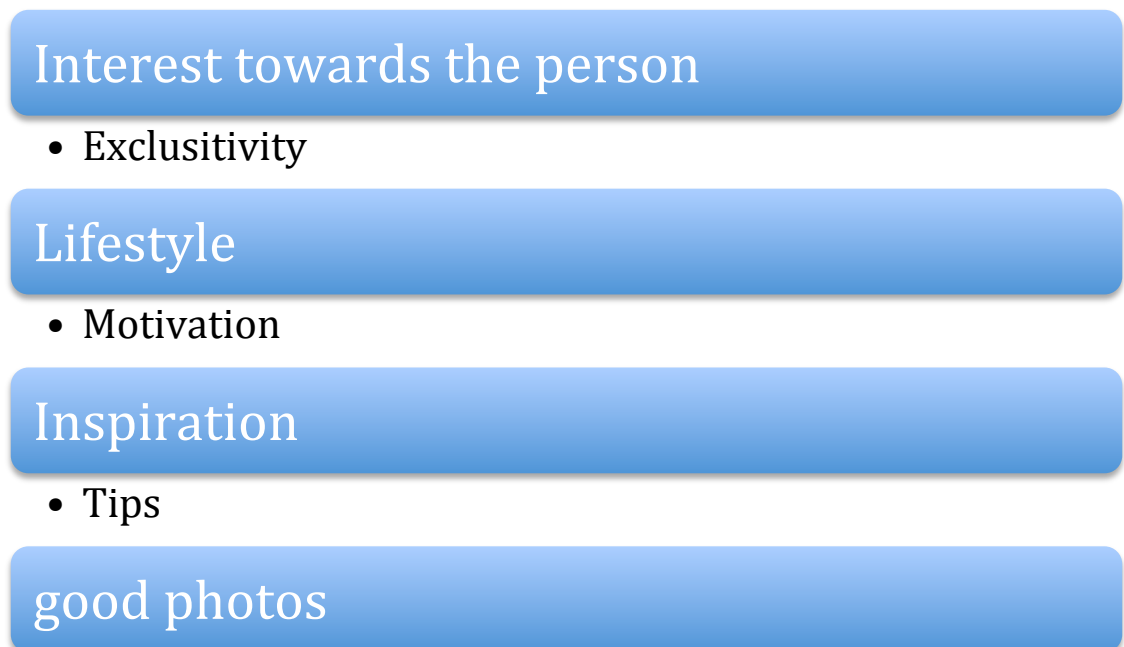


Figure 5. Reasons for following influencers

Celebrities, idols and influencers are interesting and social media opens their world to the followers. Social media is as channel open the curtains of what is going on in the lives of influencers and to see their lifestyle. Comparing lives, looking to the other side of the curtains what “normal persons” are not able to do and finding out the exclusive lives are the reasons the respondents said for following influencers. They also liked the pictures being usually good and visual and the content inspirational.

Influencers are called influencers because of their ability to influence. The respondents said they follow influencers to get inspiration, motivation and tips. Fashion, lifestyle, travelling, sports and food were things that the respondents mentioned.

“Influencer marketing is that someone famous puts a picture of some product to his own Instagram channel and gets paid for advertising it”

Male, 26-years old

As can be seen above from a respondents answer, influencer marketing seems like that to the respondents. The respondents said that even though it is clear that there is influencer marketing in influencers’ social media channels, they do not pay attention to it. If the product advertised is fitting to the picture or video, usually the respondents do not think that it is advertising. One respondent gave an example:

“If there is a fit influencer that wears cool training clothes in a picture possibly working out at the same time, that is a good advertisement. That way you can see that the influencer really wears them and then I could buy the clothes if they look good.”

Female, 24-years old

The respondents said that advertisements are appropriate if the products or services feel suitable for the influencer and are not “pushed”. Then the influencer seems credible. All of the respondents said that they could buy a product or a service based on an influencer’s recommendation. If there are too many clear advertisements in influencer’s social media channels, the respondents said that they would not trust the influencer’s opinions anymore and would most likely stop following them.

Influencers also have give-aways, competitions and other campaigns to promote products or services. They divided the thoughts of the respondents. One said that he

do not like them at all, two said that they had never participated but would be willing to do so if the prize is good and they would not have to do much for it. Only one had participated in competitions and give-aways and also said that if the participation is easy and fits her profile, she could do more of them.

## 5. Discussion

The purpose of the research was to help the consignor to gain knowledge for the managerial decision problem. The author also gained a lot of new knowledge while making the thesis. The information gained about social media influencer marketing is good not only for the author's future, but also for Sääskilahti Consulting and other companies dealing with influencer marketing and social media.

The study has shown that the main reason for using social media channels is to stay connected with friends, see what they are doing in there and also to enjoy time. Facebook is still the most popular channel, though the respondents were more active in Instagram and Snapchat. Facebook and Twitter were liked because they offer easy access to information. Instagram is liked because of the nice photos and videos and Snapchat because of it is a channel where the content is not polished, but shows real life.

There is advertising in all of the discussed social media channels. Most advertisements are in Facebook. Advertisements in Instagram have not been available for long, which is probably the reason why they bothered the respondents more than Facebook advertisements. Facebook and Instagram have the same targeting opinions, but the respondents said that Instagram advertisements are not targeted as well as in Facebook. Snapchat has Discover – and Live –sections where some global brands and events are on display. They go quite easily unnoticed but were liked among the respondents. Data about Twitter advertising was constricted, and could be an issue for future studies.

The results of this study show that social media brings influencers closer to their followers. This is consistent with Wong's (2014) statement that influencers are regarded as peers. Therefore their opinion is valued. This information is important to Sääskilahti Consulting and other marketers. Influencer marketing is valuable if it is

executed well. Influencer marketing works well especially in Instagram and Snapchat where the message is received authentically.

Clear advertisements in an influencer's social media channels, especially if they do not "fit the person" are not really liked. Authenticity is the most important thing in influencer marketing. If the brand, product or service influencer is advertising do not seem to be that kind of brand that the influencers would use and promote even without getting paid, the influencer starts to lack credibility. This information can be used to develop a social media influencer-marketing plan. The most important aspect is to find suitable influencer/ influencers to the advertised product or service and find an authentic way to promote it in the influencer's social media channel.

Sauli Koskinen and Eveliina Tistelgren are popular influencers because of their positivism and authenticity, which is also visible in their social media channels. The respondents follow them because of their good looking photos and interesting content. The respondents all recognized that there is influencer marketing in both of their social media channels, but that the methods they used to do it were good and fitted their personalities.

The research revealed valuable information of social media, social media advertising and social media influencer marketing. For future research the author recommends to further study on how influencer marketing campaigns and advertisements should be manufactured. Also the benefits of social media influencer marketing could be studied in more detail, focusing on return on invest.

### **5.1 Validity and reliability**

Sharan (214, 209) states "All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner". Consequently this research was also carried out in that manner. The author collected, analysed and interpreted the data paying attention to validity and reliability.

Internal validity, according to Saharan (2014, 214, originally from Maxwell 2005), cannot be proven or taken for granted. But internal validity in a qualitative research is important and in this research can be seen for example in learning through the process. One example of that are the lengths of the interviews. The interviews grew longer as the researcher got more knowledge and training. Thus, she was able to better understand the participants and the interview process. Because of the nature of the subject, it is unlikely that the respondents were not truthful during the interviews and they were all aware of that their privacy was looked after.

In order to make sure that she had not made misinterpretations of the interviews, the author did a “respondent validation”, got some feedback on the findings of one of the respondents when the author was in the writing stage of the results and checked whether he thought the findings seemed solid. Having enough knowledge on the matter beforehand also from encoding the data and creating the themes reduced misinterpretations.

External validity is about how the findings can be applied to different situations (Saharan, 2014, 223). In this research, generalizations cannot be made because there were only a few participants. The author tried to find specific deep information of carefully chosen participants, rather than general truths, which is a nature of qualitative studies commonly. Saharan adds that thinking like a reader or user of the study tells if the findings of the study can be applied to other situations including the people in those situations. This research provides enough information for readers to compare the findings to their situations.

Reliability in a qualitative study is hard to prove since reliability is about whether the research can be repeated generating the same results. Qualitative research, according to Saharan (2014, 220), seeks to describe the world in a way how the participants experience it. Even though all the participants have a different view of life, different answers, and different experiences on social media and other themes



that were discussed, similarities were apparent in the answers. There is a several ways to interpret the same data, but reliability is shown in that the results are coherent with the data. The author documented the whole research process and saved all the notes and data for future need.

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## Appendix

### Theme interview

Interviewer

Date

Duration

Participant

Theme 1      Social media

Why do you use social media?

How do you use social media?

What channels do you use?

Theme 2      Social media marketing

Tell me your experiences about social media marketing?

Does social media marketing affect you social media usage?

Theme 3      Influencer marketing

What comes to mind from a term influencer marketing?

How do you explain influencer marketing?

Why do you follow influencers in social media?

Can you tell what are influencer's own opinions and what are advertisements in influencer's Instagram channel?

Would you participate to competitions or purchase products based on influencer's recommendation?