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Social Media Influencers and their Social Responsibility: Factors that Affect Micro Influencers' Decisions to Collaborate with a Company

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Influencer marketing has become one of the most powerful forms of marketing in recent years. Social media influencers have created a unique position where their followers regard them as trusted and important sources of information. Still almost anyone can be a social media influencer.

Because influencers are important sources of information affecting people's opinions it is important to research if they should have some kind of social responsibility, as companies have with corporate social responsibility. The aim of this thesis is to answer the research question: Do social media influencers have social responsibility? If yes, what kind of social responsibility do they have? If no, should they have? In addition, this research finds out what factors affect influencer decisions to collaborate with a company. To be able to answer these questions this thesis focuses on topics and literature important to fully understand this topic. Also, this research focuses on the interviews of three social media micro influencers to gain deeper knowledge and hear the opinion of the professionals.

This research found that there are no similar guidelines for influencer social responsibility as exist for companies in the form of corporate social responsibility. However, influencers' decision making has a lot of similarities to companies who follow corporate social responsibility, as one of the key factors of decision making is personal values.

Keywords	Social media influencer, Influencer, Social responsibility

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Glossary

CSR   Corporate social responsibility. Developing different sections of the company and paying attention to their non-financial actions which benefit the society at large as.

IMO   Influencer marketing office. A marketing office which manages influencers and helps to connect with companies.

SMI   Social media influencer. A person who is creating sponsored and other content on social media which has an effect on other people's opinions.

WOM   Word of mouth. Power of verbal recommendation person one know. Also, a form of marketing where social media influencer uses their power to advertise and recommend a product.

1   Introduction

Social media influencers (SMI) are people who advertise products and services through content they publish on their social media channels. Influencers can affect people's opinions with their recommendations and content. These social media influencers are considered to have similar effects to people's opinion as traditional opinion leaders (Uzunoğlu 2014). In the following chapters this thesis will research what are the motives for influencers to do their job, whether influencers have social responsibility and if not, should they have.

Many social media influencers make a living with sponsored content in different social media platforms. In 2018 one of Finland's best paid influencers is blogger and social media content creator was Sara Vanninen (Jääskeläinen 2020). Currently (04.01.2021) she holds 53 000 followers on her Instagram account @saratickle. Her gross income in 2018 was about 235 000 euros (Palokangas 2019, Jääskeläinen 2020). This shows that individuals can earn a lot of money with a social media influencer career. According to Darma (2019) how much an influencer is paid per post depends on two factors: number of followers and the engagement rate. The number of followers means that the more followers the influencer has the more people one post can reach. Engagement rate means how strongly the followers trust the posts of an influencer and how often the recommendation turns in to buying. Darma (2019) also defines that a single sponsored post from a SMI can cost from 100 euros to 50 000 euros in the US market. However, the social media advertising market size in Finland is about $273 million whereas in the United States it is about $ 37, 878 million (Statista 2020). This shows that the market size is significantly larger in the United States. Therefore, it can be expected that also in Finland price scale for one post is most likely significantly lower. Still, Vanninen's income shows that influencers can earn a significant income also in Finland. This indicates that influencer marketing is big business in Finland as well.

This topic extremely important because sometimes social media influencers share content which contains fake news, manipulated pictures and misinformation and thus the impact on the followers can be negative and contrary to reality. Because SMIs are opinion leaders their content has an effect on people's opinions and beliefs, and hence they have

an impact in societies. Therefore, misinformation can be very crucial and have negative effects on people who see that content.

Influencers' impact has also been studied from the point of its effectiveness. According to a study presented at the European Congress on Obesity in 2018, it was found that children who saw YouTube stars consuming unhealthy snacks went on to consume over one quarter more calories (26%) than children exposed to non-food products (BBC 2018). In this study 176 children were split into three groups where each group were shown pictures of YouTube personalities whom they knew with either unhealthy snacks, healthy foods, or non-food products. After the pictures were shown the participants were offered a range of different healthy and unhealthy snacks to choose from, such as grapes, carrots, chocolate, and sweets. The study found that children who had just before seen the unhealthy pictures consumed an average 448 calories while other children consumed 357 calories. This study shows that pictures of known YouTubers eating something unhealthy affected to these children's decision on choosing what to eat and the effect is not necessarily always positive. Dr Emma Boyland, one of the researchers from the University of Liverpool, says "children place significant trust in vloggers and view them as "everyday people" much like their peers" (BBC, 2018). This means that children do not think that a social media influencer, such as YouTube start, is advertising something to them straight or unconsciously. This shows that due to their young age and lack of experience children are not always able to make rational decision by themselves.

However, the effects on adults are similar. For example, in the beginning of global COVID-19 pandemic Finnish influencer Piritta Hagman said in her Instagram stories that vitamin C prevents the infection of Covid-19 (Ylimutka 2020). Later, she corrected her message due to feedback she had received by saying that she had made a false claim. An even more radical example of misinformation, which could also be labelled as fake news, is the U.S. President Donald Trump's comment that disinfectant should be injected to people to treat Covid-19 (Mehrotra 2020). This comment made even one producer of disinfectant, Lysol, publish a release that it can be danger to your health if the disinfectant is used internally (Mehrotra 2020). This kind of publishment from the company shows that they expected that someone could believe Presidents statement. The correlation of President Trump's and Piritta Hagman's claims and consumption of these products has

not been researched. However, given the response of Lysol, it can be assumed that some people have believed these claims because of the power and position of the persons who made them.

Influencers have a unique position as a professional or expert in a specific topic which is why they have created a loyal follower base. However, sometimes their content can be misleading or even misinformation. Because influencers can have an effect on people's opinions and minds their content can have even more significant consequences for people than even the influencer can expect. However, if an influencer is spreading false information, intentionally or otherwise, it can be assumed that the effect cannot be positive because the information is not true. Due to these reasons, it is important to research this topic and find out whether social media influencers have social responsibility or not, and if not, should they? In more details, this research aims to answer the questions: do social media influencers have social responsibility? if yes, what kind of social responsibility do they have? If not, should they have? In addition, this research finds out what factors affect social media influencers' decisions to collaborate with a company.

1.1 Research methods and structure of the research

To understand the behaviour and work of an influencer, influencers themselves need to be heard. To answer the research question, this thesis uses qualitative research as a research method, more specifically literature review and interview. Qualitative research method is used in general because it gives a deeper understanding of the work, beliefs, and behaviour (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey 2010) of the research topic. By contrast, literature review is used to "evaluate the state of knowledge on a particular topic" (Snyder 2019), in this case to understand what are SMIs and corporate social responsibility.

Following the literature review this research moves on to a second main part of the thesis which is the interviews. Interview is the most suitable method for data gathering because of the need to create comfortable atmosphere, as the interview topics can be sensitive (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey 2010). Interview is an important research method to hear the opinion of a professional working in the field studied to gather data which cannot be found in available literature. Therefore, for this thesis has been interviewed three Finnish

social media influencers. The opinion of these influencers is very valuable to understand their decisions and the work itself. As a method for an interview this thesis uses email interview which will be followed with data analysis. Because interviews contain sensitive topics influencer names will not be published in this thesis and the interviews will be handled anonymously.

Following the literature review in chapter 2, the interviews data will be analysed in chapter 3, and then compare interviews to the literature to create a discussion between these two in chapter 4. These methods enable this thesis to answer to the research question: Whether SMIs have social responsibility or not, and should they have it or not.

2 Literature Review

This literature review will go through the basics of corporate social responsibility, marketing ethics and will explain what an influencer is. The material is gathered from selected books, journals and other academic references related to corporate social responsibility, marketing ethics and influencer practices. These topics are important to comprehensively understand and answer the research question from many different perspectives.

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has multiple different definitions. Because of the variety of the definitions there is a need to have a deeper look into a subject in order to create an idea what CSR really is.

N. Craig Smith describes corporate social responsibility as "the integration of business operations and values whereby the interests of all stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, and the environment are reflected in the organization's policies and actions" (Smith 2002, p. 42). Kok, McKenna and van der Wiele define corporate social responsibility as "the obligation of the firm to use its resources in ways to benefit society, through committed participation as a member of society, taking into account the society at large independently of direct gains of the company" (Kok et al. 2001, p. 287).

This means that CSR involves a company taking responsibility for its own actions and trying to develop its processes to serve the benefits of stakeholders better even if these actions have negative effects on its profit.

To give a broader definition of CSR the European Commission has defined corporate social responsibility as companies' impact on society where they are responsible for "integrating social, environmental, ethical, consumer, and human rights concerns into their business strategy and operations", as well as "following the law" (European Commission 2011). To support and give more detailed definition to the European Commission's definition the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines CSR as "the responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, resulting in ethical behaviour and transparency which contributes to sustainable development, including the health and well-being of society; takes into account the expectations of stakeholders; complies with current laws and is consistent with international standards of behaviour; and is integrated throughout the organization and implemented in its relations" (Youmatter 2020). To combine these definitions Corporate Social Responsibility is the reporting of a company's non-financial activities which benefit society, making the business more transparent by taking responsibility for the effects of the business on the world at large. Overall, CSR is a business approach that contributes to sustainable development by delivering economic, social, and environmental benefits for all stakeholders (Altinbasak-Farina and Burnaz 2019).

Today corporate social responsibility is considered as one of the key elements of corporate strategy (Altinbasak-Farina and Burnaz 2019) and companies have started to observe and report more on both their financial and non-financial activities to the world at large (Idowu et al. 2019). Practicing and reporting CSR have become important for companies to show their accountability, transparency, and good business practice (Idowu et al. 2019). These are also important values for consumers (Altinbasak-Farina and Burnaz 2019). With CSR actions and reporting, a company can show to its stakeholders what are important values for them and its engagement with different topics, and this way create trust with different stakeholders, such as consumers and shareholders.

In today's society companies' CSR policy has an even more important role than before. Markets have changed from local to global which has multiplied consumers' options significantly. Nowadays consumers can choose from various alternatives when buying a product or service. If the company or their brand is stained it is easy for consumers to shift to another alternative which supports their personal values (Altinbasak-Farina and Burnaz 2019). Because CSR has become so popular among the companies it is no longer a key to differentiate from the mass. On the other hand, if a company is not showing any progress or engagement to CSR it can be very crucial for their popularity.

2.1.1 Corporate social responsibility actions

Adams and Zutshi (2004) claim that there are two key recognitions for companies to be socially responsible and to be accountable for the activities and impacts of their business. The first recognition is moral justification. This means that companies should recognize their real power in society and accept the fact that they also have responsibilities in the society besides earning money for their shareholders. The second recognition is that it is businesses' own benefit to report their CSR activities. In addition to Adams and Zutshi's research also Altinbasak-Farina and Burnaz (2019) and Idowu et al. (2015) noted that reporting CSR activities is beneficial and can create opportunities and even competitive advantages for the company.

Adams and Zutshi's (2004) studies show that many companies have set long-term sustainability goals on their overall business, for example on production lines and product recycling. One example of these is Marimekko, a Finnish clothing and home accessory brand. In recent years Marimekko has made a lot of decisions to be more socially responsible, starting with sustainability. In their 2020 sustainability commitment Marimekko defined multiple areas under development. For example, providing better quality, long lasting products which are made of more sustainable raw materials, providing training on sustainable matters to employees, and only working with suppliers who support human rights and environmental protection. Along with these factors Marimekko also focuses on reducing waste and carbon footprint in its operations, having transparency in every level of its business, and to support circular economy by supporting actions and companies focusing on it and taking part in the public conversations (Marimekko Sustainability Review 2019).

2.1.2 Effects of corporate social responsibility in company

CSR activities can also create beneficial effects inside the company. Adams and Zutshi (2004) found in their research multiple benefits from companies adopting CSR and reporting. These benefits are for example better recruitment and retention of employees, improved internal decision making and cost-savings, improved corporate image, better relations with stakeholders and financial returns. Also, other studies have found similar results as Adams and Zutshi. In those studies, the most important results of CSR are that it has affected employee behaviors and wellbeing as well as productivity, which has affected companies' profitability positively (Tziner 2013, Aguilera et al. 2007; Soloman & Hansen, 1985). This shows that CSR not only benefits the company and the business itself but also the whole working environment and its employees. In addition to companies' profitability, it has also been studied that sustainability is an important factor for people choosing where they want to work and many even choose the company depending on its CSR actions (Schooley, 2020; Idowu et al, 2015). This kind of behavior from the employees could indicate rising awareness of and interest in societal issues.

2.1.3 Company's CSR actions effect on consumer buying decision

In addition to CSR actions having positive effects on a company's employees, it also has some effect on consumer buying. Harris Poll (2016) surveyed around 2 000 United States residents older than 18 to find out if CSR has any effect on their buying decision in years 2007 to 2016. In 2016 32-percent of the respondents stated that CSR has sometimes affected their decision, while 16-percent stated that it had strong effect on their decisions, 20-percent of respondents said it did not have any effect and 24-percent that CSR affected every once in a while. In 2010 35-percent responded it affected sometimes, 18-percent that it affected strongly, 23-percent that it affected once in a while and 17-percent that CSR did not have any effect at all on their buying decisions. The changes in percentages per class are very small and no significant change happened from 2010 to 2016. More importantly from these numbers it can be seen that in 2016 CSR had at least some effect on 72-percent of the respondents' buying decision. The result of this survey can indicate that some people pay more attention to which kind of company they are buying a product from. As some respondents answered CSR affects sometimes or once in a while their decisions, so this can also indicate that they decide

to take a more CSR-focused product if it is available or can compete in price or other qualities.

Already in 1999 Cone Communications showed in their survey that at least 80-percent of those surveyed had more positive image of the company if it supported a cause important to the customer (Mohr et al., 2001). Furthermore, two-thirds of the people were likely to pay more for quality and even change a brand or retailer to a more responsible and active company (Mohr et al., 2001). The study made by Cone Communications shows that in 1999 people were more likely to buy the product if the company supported similar values, or they would even pay a little more for the product (Mohr et al., 2001). This survey indicates that if consumers were making a purchase decision based on only the companies' values, they would most likely choose the one which shares similar values with them. This survey also shows that people have been evaluating their buying decisions already some time ago. However, there has most likely been changes in 20 years over the values of the company and the consumers which is why these surveys cannot be compared.

Today different issues such as global warming have affected consumers' decision making. Consumers are more aware of global issues than ever before, which has made them more demanding, skeptical, and less tolerant of poorly designed or implemented marketing activities (Altinbasak-Farina and Burnaz 2019). This kind of behavior can be noticed especially with the younger generations (Altinbasak-Farina and Burnaz 2019). This is because younger generations have grown among internet and social media. Therefore, they have good media literacy, and higher expectations. A Harris Poll survey (2016) even found that millennials tend to take CSR more into consideration than other generations. This means that consumers value honesty, transparency, authenticity, fairness, and social and environmental responsibility from the organizations (Altinbasak-Farina and Burnaz 2019). Comparing these values to the ones describing organizations' CSR values there can be noticed similarities such as transparency and responsibility. Because both parties value similar things it can be assumed that consumers appreciate and would more likely be customers of companies who invest in their CSR success.

2.2 Marketing Ethics

Ethics is a difficult subject because everyone has a subjective idea about what is right and wrong (Poff and Michalos 2013). Ethics are individuals' or institutions' basic principles that guide their decision making (Altinbasak-Farina and Burnaz 2019). Ethical ideology comes from individual values which can shape people's perceptions and actions, depending on their cultural, religious, and spiritual background (Penn 2020) as well as on family background, life experience and personal opinions (Murphy et al. 2016). Therefore, there is no one correct definition for ethical marketing, more likely a set of guidelines to follow. When someone is considered to be acting ethically it is usually because their behaviour is regarded as morally correct (Murphy et al, 2016). This is why ethical marketing should rather be seen as a philosophy than as a business strategy (Shewan 2020).

Shewan (2020) describes ethical marketing as a process where companies evaluate how their products benefit both customers and society at large. In contrast, Laczniak and Murphy (1993) define marketing ethics as the systematic study of how moral standards are exploited in marketing decisions, behaviours, and institutions. Combining these two definitions, ethical marketing could be described as evaluating and completing marketing decisions that benefit both consumers and society at large. Companies which focus on ethical marketing evaluate decisions from a business perspective as well as a moral perspective, for example if a marketing campaign will deliver desired return and if the made decision is ethically right (Shewan 2020). Various researchers, including the American Marketing Association (2020), have named ethical marketing values as honesty, responsibility, fairness, respect, transparency, and citizenship (Shewa 2020; Altinbasak-Farina and Burnaz 2019; Murphy et al. 2016). In practice these values can be shown as emphasizing trustworthiness, through responsible marketing or organizational policies, and by exhibiting integrity and fairness to consumers and other stakeholders (Murphy et al. 2016). This means that before a company publishes a marketing campaign the campaign and marketing decisions are evaluated on the basis of ethical marketing values.

Sometimes marketing decisions can be unethical even if they are following the law. Murphy, Laczniak and Harris (2016, p.24) state that "ethics embodies higher standards

than law". This means that ethics implies higher standards of professional and moral responsibility and law is only the baseline to follow the regulations of the country. Therefore, if a company is following the law in all sections of their business it still might not be ethical or morally right.

2.2.1 Example of ethical marketing gone wrong

Ethical Marketing values, as defined earlier, create the guidelines for ethical marketing. These values mean that for example in advertising the advertisement should be trustworthy about the qualities of a product rather than creating for the customer an image of something else, for example health benefits. However, in some case marketers exploit trendy topics against their real values. These topics can be for example environmental sustainability or healthy nutrition to claim products are ecological or organic; this kind of action is called greenwashing (Zara 2013). In more detail, greenwashing occurs when a product is made to look more desirable or trendier for the consumer by claiming or creating an image of different benefits. As an example of a case of greenwashing in 2009 Coca-Cola introduced its new PlantBottle to the market by claiming that this new kind of bottle is 100% recyclable and up to 30% of the material is plant based. The Coca-Cola advertised PlantBottle with environmentally friendly imagery such as leaves and used several other marketing ploys which are usually connected to environmentally friendly action, including for example green colours and a circular arrow logo, symbolizing recycling. However, the campaign's claims regarding the environmental benefits were not as significant as Coca-Cola made these appear (Zara 2013). In this example case Coca-Cola used green colour and circular arrow logo which people usually connect to recycling and nature. With this kind of marketing Coca-Cola created people an image of the product as more sustainable and better for the nature without actual proof of it.

2.3 Influencer

Before making a decision people often try to reinforce their opinion with opinion leaders (Rogers and Cartano 1962). Opinion leaders are people who exert an outsized amount of influence on people's decisions (Rogers and Cartano 1962) due to special knowledge,

personality, other uniqueness (Kotler 1998; Bergstrom 2019), authority, activity or position (Bergstrom 2019). Opinion leaders often share information, suggestions, and own opinions via different channels (Zhang and Ding, 2008). They can also be referred to as industry insiders, decision makers or influencers (Bergstrom 2019). A good example of an opinion leader is a social media influencer who is a person with a large influence on their followers due to relatability and trustworthiness. Compared to celebrities who are known in traditional media, social media influencers are regular people who have become known by creating content on social media (Lou and Yuan 2019). Social media influencers are seen as more accessible, believable, intimate and easy to relate to than celebrities (Abidin 2016; Schau and Gilly 2003). Due to this even 6 in 10 teenagers are more likely to follow advice from social media influencers over celebrities due to a strong and more personal relationship with the former (Digital Marketing Institute 2020).

Influencers are trusted figures who are believed to have knowledge or expertise of the product or service they are advertising (Mathew 2018). For a brand finding the right influencer to work with it is extremely important because the right influencer can provide recommendations, give personal comments and professional knowledge for a company to promote its products, as well as reach the right audience and create value for the product (De Veirman et al. 2017). Companies should look for influencers with similar values, the right target audience, suitable tone of the posts and right kind of personality when choosing an influencer to work with (Newberry 2019).

2.3.1 Social media influencer

Today social media channels are taking over. Traditional mass communication channels such as television, radio and newspapers are no longer the most dominant and efficient sources of information for consumers (Lou and Yuan 2019). Instead, consumers are more likely to use social media for searching and exchanging information, and creating relationships (Hair, Clark and Shapiro 2010). Social media influencers have become so valuable and important because they are one of the main sources of information in these channels. Social media refers to websites and applications connected to internet which are designed for people to share content efficiently and in real-time (Hudson 2020). Social media influencers (SMI) are influencers who create content on different social

media channels: for example, to YouTube, Instagram, or personal blogs (De Veirman et al. 2017; Agrawal 2016; Varsamis 2018). SMIs provide followers an insight on their personal everyday lives which makes them more relatable to their followers (De Veirman et al. 2017). Sharing content about their everyday challenges and thoughts, to which followers can relate, makes influencers trustworthy, relatable and creates a relationship between the followers. This is what makes social media influencers extremely valuable and important. SMIs often have a specific expertise around which they build their content, such as beauty, fashion, healthy lifestyle, or travel (Lou and Yuan 2019; Thatcher 2020). This means that the social media influencers often share tips and knowledge on the area of their expertise as well communicate with the followers on these topics. Usually their collaborations with companies are also based on the same topic.

Social media influencers can be divided into categories depending on the amount of their followers. There is no single correct definition and most of them differ in follower amounts per class. Bella Foxwell on her blog in Iconosquare (2020) has divided Instagram influencers into four levels. These levels are:

1. Mega influencers with over 1 million followers,
2. Macro influencers with followers from 100 000 to 1 million,
3. Micro influencers with followers from 10 000 to 100 000, and
4. Nano influencers with followers of 10 000 or under.

Mega influencers are usually celebrities who have become known for something else before their social media page, such as a tv series. However, today there are also many self-made influencers who have become mega influencers. Mega influencers are the most efficient in raising awareness of a brand due to large number of followers. Macro influencers have usually grown their following in social media and the internet, for example with a blog. Because of this long relationship macro influencers know their followers well. Therefore, macro influencers' audiences can be more engaged than Mega influencers. Micro influencers are the most common influencers in Instagram. Micro as Macro influencers usually also have longer history with their audience, but they often are more specified by a certain topic. Due to this expertise micro influencers are seemed as more trusted which is why they have high engagement rates on their posts. Nano influencers carry maximum 10 000 followers and therefore they usually influence the

local community or in smaller areas. Nano influencers know well and often communicate with their followers. Nano influencers could even have created personal relationships with some of their followers. Therefore, their posts are taken as most credible and the engagement rate is very high. Depending on the goals of a company with a collaborating with an influencer they should choose who to work with. Influencers with a bigger following might reach larger audience and create higher brand reignition but the engagement rate is higher with nano and micro influencers.

2.3.2   Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing is a form of marketing where brands invest in selected influencers to create and promote branded content to influencers' own followers as well as to a brand's target audience (Yodel 2016; Lou and Yuan 2019). Influencers promote the brand's products or services in different channels such as Instagram and YouTube (Mathew 2018, Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). This means that a brand for example sends a product to an influencer who then posts a picture about it in Instagram for their followers to see in exchange of money. In some cases of influencer marketing, brands are not necessarily looking for raising the sales significantly but more importantly raising brand recognition (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020) which can be more beneficial in long run. Brand recognition means that when a consumer sees brands logo or name it raises some feeling due to some deeper knowledge of the brand and products (Marrs 2020). It can be more valuable for a company to raise brand recognition because people will know their brand. In the long term when people are looking for a specific product, they already know this brand and remember the recommendation of an SMI. Influencer marketing has risen to be such an important part of marketing because influencer-produced branded content is considered to have more organic, authentic, and direct contact with potential consumers than brand-generated ads (Talavera 2015). Because consumers see influencer content as more organic, authentic, and relatable, influencer marketing has become a valuable form of marketing. This means that influencer content that contains an ad does not seem to be a straightforward selling to a customer, rather instead a recommendation from a friend.

Today at least 75% of marketers are using influencer marketing (Augure 2015; De Veirman et al 2017; Odell 2020). The most important social media channels for influencer

marketing have video- and photo sharing possibilities where products can be visually available and named in the caption (De Veriman et al, 2017). This is because the product can be shown in the picture and described more closely in the caption. These channels are for example Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and TikTok. Of these Odell (2020) describes Instagram as the most important channel of influencer marketing. According to Statista research made by Clement (2020) in 2018 Instagram reported to have over 1 billion monthly active users worldwide, of which 500 million were daily users. Bailos (2020) even claims Instagram to be the most important and impactful channel of 2019 as companies spend over six times more on influencer marketing in Instagram than in YouTube. The most used format for influencer marketing is Instagram posts, followed by Instagram Stories, with the third used format YouTube and Instagram videos (Bailos 2020; MediaKix 2019). In all these forms can be added picture, video and text which were earlier described as most important features. According to research made by Influencer Marketing Hub (2020), one dollar spent on influencer marketing created an average $5,78 value of publicity in 2019 for a company. This means the value with which a company gained publicity measured in dollars. For spending one dollar they gained publicity in the value of 5,78 dollars so almost six times more than they had spent. This shows that influencer marketing has been a very effective form of reaching people.

Influencer marketing is efficient and effective and therefore it has become significant form of marketing. Grin (2019) has defined 5 reasons why influencer marketing is important for a company. First, to establish credibility and trust. Influencers have proven to their followers to be trustworthy and by endorsing a brand's product the brand is also seen as more credible. Second, influencer marketing improves brand awareness and consumer engagement. With influencer marketing a brand can reach new and larger audiences as an influencer's follower base can be even more than one million, this helps to create brand awareness. Thirdly, influencer marketing allows targeted outreach. As many influencers have a specialized topic on which they are focusing with their content, for a company it is easier to reach the right target by choosing the right influencer. For example, a sports clothing brand would collaborate with an influencer focused on healthy lifestyle and working out. This creates for the consumer an image that the products are good for the specific action as the influencer is recommending and using them. Fourth, better search engine rankings. The higher company is in search engine rankings the more traffic they will generate to their page. To be able to do that a company needs to

generate more visitors to its page, which can be done with influencer marketing. Fifth, value addition for consumers. Through influencers a company can provide valuable and informative content to the consumers. Such topics can be about the process of creating the product and special features of the product, for example. This kind of additional content as well as influencer recommendations are valuable and can create a better image of the product to the consumer.

2.3.3 Word of mouth

People who have little knowledge or who are highly doubting the purchase are very likely to seek information from someone they know (Beatty and Smith 1987). Young and less-experienced consumers rely heavily on the expertise of others (Alba and Hutchinson 1987). According to a study made by Nielsen (2012) which surveyed more than 28 000 respondents in 56 countries people are most likely to trust recommendations from friends and family. The second most trusted source of brand and product information is online consumer reviews (Nielsen 2012). This kind of consumer behaviour is called word-of-mouth communication (Goldsmith and Clark 2008). The key of WOM communication is human interaction in which the opinion leader is a the most important factor (Chan and Misra 1990). This means that in word of mouth communication there is a one person who recommends a product or service to another. Consumers find word of mouth communication more credible (Berkman and Gilson 1986) and more personal recommendation and interaction than mass media advertising (Chan and Misra 1990). Followers see influencers as trustworthy and people whom they know, therefore influencer recommendations have stronger effects on consumer decision making (De Veirman et al. 2017; Goldsmith and Clark 2008). This means that due to special relationship recommendation from an influencer is very valuable as the follower trusts sees the influencer as trustworthy. Also, multiple researchers have proved that personal sources are very significant, if not the most important sources of information (Chaney 2001; Urbany et al. 1989; Midgley 1983).

Today social media, such as Instagram and Facebook, represent the ideal tools for electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Jansen et al 2009; De Veirman et al. 2017). Various researches have shown that eWOM, which most of the influencer content is, has a very strong effect on consumers' decision making (Goldsmith

and Clark 2008; Boyd and Ellison 2007; Jansen et al. 2009; Knoll 2016; Lyons and Henderson 2005). A study made by Olapic (2017) shows that at least 31% of consumers have bought a product or service after seeing a post of it from an influencer. Electronic WOM is especially important to social media influencers work to reach the right people and effect with their opinion. "Unlike mass media, word of mouth has the advantage of clarification and feedback opportunities" (Chaney 2001). This statement made by Chaney explains that eWOM is particularly efficient, due to possible communication and feedback. Word of mouth communication can be face-to-face or in social media for example. Both of these accept communication, which adds a lot value to the product or service. For example, a follower can ask more specific questions of qualities of a product from an influencer who has recommended that product in social media posts, comments, or direct messages. WOM is especially important to SMIs because followers see them as honest and experts in specific areas. In addition, followers are able to communicate with influencers and ask more specific questions. What consumers should also remember is that influencer content is not necessarily always sponsored but they can also post information voluntarily and share their opinions (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Jansen et al 2009; De Veirman et al. 2017). That is when an influencer recommendation can be seen as even more honest and real as it is not paid or sponsored.

3 Interviews

All three interviews were delivered by email which was the most suitable way for the interviewees due to ongoing pandemic situation and tight schedules. The author sent the request for an interview to the influencers by email and it was commonly agreed that they had a possibility to answer either in English or Finnish. Full interview transcripts can be found in the appendix. It was also agreed that the interviews should proceed anonymously. Each interview contained 13 questions which focus on influencer work. These questions were chosen to understand better influencer work and the factors affecting their decision making as well as their opinion on specific topics.

This chapter will first introduce the interviewed influencers. After that, the interview questions are compared under each question. With this structure it is possible to understand influencers' work and decision making better.

3.1   Interviewees

Interviewee A is an influencer who started blogging in 2013. She describes influencing became her career around 2018 when she started to put more effort into it. Currently (04.01.2021) she has a follower base of 13 000 in Instagram and 5 500 on YouTube, of which Instagram is her main channel according to her activity. From the definition made by Bella Foxwell (2020) this influencer is a Micro influencer. Influencer A's content focuses on beauty and fashion among which she talks almost daily about topics important to her, such as feminism.

Interviewee B has over 10 years' experience of creating content. Her career started with a blog in 2009 which rapidly gathered a large audience. Currently (04.01.2021) she creates content on her personal blog and Instagram, where she holds follower base of 16 400. Therefore, influencer B is also a Micro influencer. Her content is focused on home decor, style, and everyday life with her child.

Interviewee C first got paid for an Instagram post in 2016 which motivated her to blog and create more goal orientated content. Currently (04.01.2021) she has 12 700 followers on Instagram. Along with Instagram content creating she also has a podcast. Influencer C's Instagram follower number makes her a Micro influencer like the other interviewees. The central topic in influencer C's content is wellness. However, she also shares content on beauty and style, for example.

3.2   Summary of the interviews

This section will summarize each question and the answers of the interviewees. Each interviewee is named with own letter (A, B and C) which has already been defined in the profile description in chapter 3.1. Questions are marked as Q.

Q1: Which kind of different tasks and projects do you work with as an influencer?

 A described the following as part of her job. "I style, shoot, write, send emails, make offers, create graphics, communicate with followers, answer questions and comments".

Influencer B said her work is mainly photographing, reporting, writing, selling as well as background work of her company. Influencer C describes her work as a combination of multiple different tasks. Such as traditional collaborations with companies to her Instagram or blog which include planning, producing, photographing or video shooting, editing, and writing. She values long term relationships with companies which has let her to do more than just advertising for them. For example, for a company she has also photographed products, modelled, and given social media consulting. Along with these she does interviews, hosts and teaches yoga in wellness workshops, plans clients' PR events and hosts a podcast. This shows that there are some main tasks which all of these influencers work with but also multiple different tasks, depending on their own interests.

Q2: Do you use any influencer marketing office? Why?

A has her blog and YouTube channel under an influencer marketing office (IMO) to be able to focus more on the content. She also says that the IMO will take care of the emails arising from those channels. However, she does not think that it has been that helpful. She also prefers to sell her Instagram campaigns by herself to avoid the IMO taking part of the payment. Interviewee B said she uses multiple media offices, both Finnish and international. This saves her time on selling as many of the collaboration requests come through these offices. Influencer C does not use an influencer marketing office anymore. She prefers to personally be in touch with the company to be able to create a genuine relationship with them. This shows that there are different preferences depending on what the influencers themselves value. For example, B wants that someone takes care of the communication with companies whereas C wants to communicate with the companies by herself to create a more personal relationship.

Q3: Are you able to pay your bills by being a full-time influencer? How much do you earn?

Influencer A says she is able to cover her expenses. She is earning a few hundred over 10 000 euros per year which she says is the maximum she can earn as a full-time student without losing her student benefits. If she is crossing the limit that she can earn as a student, she needs to cut campaigns. B earned in 2019 about 70 000 euros which

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included the income of content she had created to her own channels, content to different brands social media channels, and photography. Influencer C has her own company through which she charges companies she works with. She says that her turnover varies each year and in 2019 it was 75 000 euros. This shows that influencers with approximately 15 000 followers on Instagram can already earn a great income. Also, that you do not need to be Macro or Mega influencer to be able to employ yourself as an influencer full-time.

Q4: What affects your decision to work with a company in a project or campaign?

Influencer A names company values if she likes or has already used the product and the impact of the product as the most important factors. For influencer B the main importance is that the product/service fits to her social media channel brand and meets her own values. Another important factor for B is terms of collaboration such as implementation, reward, and schedule. Also, influencer C wants that the product, company, or the campaign fits her personal brand as B. Influencer C also values transparency and sustainable companies with good reputation. She loves to work with Finnish brands, help smaller businesses and do pro bono. Which means for example working voluntarily or not charging for the work. This shows that there are multiple different factors that affect the influencers' decision to work with a company. These differences mostly come from the person's own opinions and values.

Q5: What qualities or values of a company, or a product/service, affect your decision to work with the company?

Influencer A wants to work with companies which support similar values as her, such as feminism and sustainability. If a company is supporting misogyny (prejudice or hate against women), racism, or anti-global warming she would not associate with them. As for influencer B it is important that that she has or could use the product/ service. Influencer C as well as influencer A values companies that have similar values as her. C values for example, transparency, sustainability, domesticity and that the product/service serves followers' wellbeing. For A and C values seem to be a very important factor as they have also named values which are important to them. By contrast, influencer B does not find values that important, more likely the usability of a product.

Q6: If a company has different values than your own, does this affect your decision? How do you decide if their values are different than yours?

Interviewee A says that it does. She researches the company and if there are still some questions, she talks with the company to find out their values. Influencer B says that if she could decide she would most likely work with Finnish companies who produce quality product/service responsibly. However, she does not feel that she is in a position where she could decide who she wants to work with. B does collaborations with Finnish and international brands with whose activity she is already quite aware and rarely works with companies which are totally new to her. If she is not familiar with the company she goes through the background of the company from their website or with her contact person. As for A, also interviewee C thinks different values affects the decision to work with a company. Interviewee C says it is easiest to see and hear from how the company communicates, how and where their products are produced and how their employees are treated. She says sometimes it is not that easy to spot shady business. Therefore, sometimes she finds it safer to work with big companies that have public pressure already. Or small and local businesses whose owners she personally knows. From these answers can be seen some differences. However, each of the influencers will talk with the company if there is something they need to ask about. B would feel most comfortable working with Finnish companies that she knows are responsible. As C thinks it is easiest to work with big companies that already have pressure to avoid working with companies which are not supporting similar values. Overall, from the answers it can been seen that for these influencers it is important to find out the company's values before engaging to collaborate with them.

Q7: What are the reasons why you would not work with a company?

Influencer A would not work with a company that promotes fast consumption, meat, or is against feminism. "I can't work with a brand that does not align with my core values" (Interviewee A). Influencer B would not work with the company if she cannot stand behind the brand or product she is advertising. Likewise, B will not do collaborations which she does not feel that fit naturally to other content. She says there is no specific description and therefore she goes through each collaboration case by case. Influencer C sees poor communication skills as a red flag such as e-mail, website, and social media page. Also,

if the company has a bad reputation, she will not work with them. For influencer C transparency is the key. These answers show that values are the key for all of these influencers. A has even defined her core value which against she would not work. However, there are also other factors that affect the decision, such as bad reputation. All in all, factors if an influencer works with a company or not vary a lot and the main determinant of this is the influencer's own opinions and values.

Q8: What kind of effect do you think your content has on your followers?

According to her own words' interviewee A is not sure of the effect of her content but she receives feedback which says her content has affected the follower. She hopes the impact is positive. Influencer B believes that people in a similar phase of life find her content inspirational and easy to identify with. Similarly, influencer C hopes followers find her content inspirational and has positive effect. According to the feedback influencer C receives she is creating content which is relatable and genuine. These answers show that influencers might not have that much knowledge and proof of the effect of their content. But at least they can build image of the effectiveness over the feedback they receive. Each influencer has an image they have positive and inspirational effect on their followers.

Q9: How do you feel about discussing controversial topics on your channels?

Influencer A says she takes some time before publishing a post about a controversial topic to think about it to make sure the subject is something she really wants to talk about, and that she has knowledge and facts about the topic as well as mental capacity to discuss it. After publishing she receives messages from people who think differently, and it takes a lot of mental capacity to read and reply to those messages. Interviewee A even says sometimes she needs to handle those messages in therapy. According to her own words influencer B does not publish that much content which takes a stand. However, sometimes she feels that she wants to talk about a topic important to herself. Talking about such a topic makes her nervous but, in the end, she feels confident because the topic is important for her. She has found verbally sharing her thoughts in podcast easier way to exploit viewpoints. Interviewee C thinks it is important to break barriers and talk about taboos. As with influencer B, C says she has kept it safe which means that she

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has not talked about controversial topics that much or she has been careful about what topics to discuss. This shows that there are big differences among influencers. Influencer A wants to talk about topics important to her even if that is mentally hard. By contrast B and C have not talked about controversial topics on their own channels that much. However, along with A also C finds talking about those topics important. These differences in preferences can come from for example knowledge or interest. Some might not find it that important for controversial topics to be discussed publicly or feel that they do not have enough knowledge to talk about something. Also, as influencer A said, talking of such topics publicly can be mentally hard, which can also be a reason why someone prefers not to take a stand in social media.

Q10: Do you think it is your and other influencers' responsibility to talk about those topics openly and take a stand in your channels? Why?

"In a way yes, and then again, no" (Influencer A). A says it is important not to spread misinformation. However, as talking about important topics can be hard on one's mental health due to mean and attacking messages, she understands it is easier for many not to take a stand. Also, influencer B thinks it is not one influencer's responsibility to speak up on a specific matter. In her opinion everyone has a right to publish the content they want in their own channels by taking a stand or not depending on how they personally feel. Whereas influencer C says it is definitely important for influencers to talk about hard topics openly in their channels as well as not to spread fake news. She thinks influencers have responsibility to stick to the facts on their posts. Previous scandals of influencers making false claims on social media has affected influencer C's communication about wellness and health tips. She thinks it is still important to share about wellness even though there not might be a scientific proof on everything she posts. Influencer C also thinks that the receiver has some responsibility to view the content with some criticism and common sense. There can be seen some diversity in these answers. C finds it important for influencers to talk about hard topics in their channels. This way they can raise the awareness and knowledge. On the other hand, A and B think it is each influencer's own decision if they want to take a stand. However, A and C think influencers should never spread misinformation. Overall, influencer C thinks that the receiver has some responsibility as well. This means that the receiver of the content should also be

able to evaluate the content critically and not blindly believe everything they see on social media.

Q11: How much effect do your posts have? Has this changed in recent years? What do you think is the reason for this?

Influencer A says her posts have reached more people in 2020 as she has started to talk more about subjects which she finds important. Her most viewed post has reached over 100 000 people and most shared post has 5 000 shares. A thinks she is reaching more people because people want to learn and expand their worldview. Influencer B thinks that effect and interaction between she and her followers has risen since she had a child. However, she does not think that there has been a radical change in her behaviour in the past few years. Whereas Influencer C thinks the percentage of effect still remain similar. However, she is now active on multiple platforms, not only in her own blog and Instagram, which has grown her audience. C finds it rewarding to receive good feedback from both company and followers. As well as when the sale goal of collaboration has been reached. Also, posts and podcast receive feedback on how the content has had effect on one's life. Influencer C describes heart-warming feedback as the motivator to why she is an influencer. Each influencer evaluated their effectivity on a slightly different scale. Numbers that A say, most shared and seen post, tell that influencer posts can reach a lot more people than just their own followers. Whereas influencer B and C think their effectives has not risen significantly even if they might be reaching new audiences.

Q12: What do you like the most in your job?

A says there is many qualities to love in her job. She names people to work with, creativity, writing, and feedback as few of the qualities. Influencer B says the best qualities of her job are being able to work with versatile projects and tasks that she finds interesting. One very important point for B is the freedom of schedules and standards as an entrepreneur. Also, influencer C finds similar things as the best qualities of being an influencer. She names meeting people through her work, diversity of daily work and endless possibilities. Being an introvert influencer C describes working on her own terms as one of the greatest benefits. She is excited to see how the industry is going to develop in a few years, since its evolution has been so rapid in a short time. These answers show

that there are similar reasons why these influencers like their job. Most important could be versatility of tasks.

4   Discussion

In order to answer to the research questions, do SMIs have social responsibility? and what factors affect SMIs' decision to collaborate with a company?, interviews (Chapter 3) must be compared to the theoretical part of this thesis (Chapter 2). Thus, this chapter discusses the main themes of chapters 2 and 3. These main themes are influencer work and decision making compared to corporate social responsibility and influencer word of mouth.

4.1   Influencers work and CSR

As defined earlier, CSR is companies' non-financial actions which benefit the society at large. These actions can be for example development of processes to be more sustainable, being more transparent and taking responsibility of how company's actions affect to society or nature. This means that CSR is focused on working behalf values which benefit the society. CSR is not based on strict rules but more likely guidelines to follow. Also, it is important that companies report their CSR actions so they can prove themselves responsible in their processes. However, while CSR is not compulsory for the company, not showing engagement to CSR can be crucial.

In contrast to companies, influencers do not have this kind of standard to follow and as seen from the interviews they work with whichever company they want to. For influencers the values, interests and useability of the product are some of the key factors when choosing with whom to collaborate. However, when interviewed influencer A and C name benefitting their followers or society as important factors for them. This shows that even if influencers do not have specific guidelines for influencer work, such as CSR, they still are following similar outlines as companies in CSR. This is because influencers make their decisions based on their own values. Anyway, there are differences in each influencer's decision making because everyone evaluates for themselves what they regard as good values. Because influencers are small operators their effect on society

is smaller. It can be expected that mostly their effect is on their followers. Therefore, people do not expect influencers to report their social actions as they already can represent it through their values and that way influence people.

Also, Adam and Zutshi (2004) define that corporates have two key ways to act socially responsible. The first of these two keys is moral justification, which means that company has the responsibility to benefit society at large with its actions rather than just earn money for their own stakeholders. The second key is that it is for the company's own benefit to report its CSR actions. The first recognition can be applied to influencers as well as to companies. Even though influencers are not earning money for stakeholders their actions have effect on society. In Influencer work this moral justification would mean more likely that influencers should advertise, and that way encourage people to use products which are from companies working towards wellbeing of society. This is because influencers have the power to show examples of what is acceptable and what is not.

4.1.1   Values as part of influencers' work and CSR

In CSR values seem to play a major role for a company to show what they see important and what do they want to reach with their actions. For the influencers interviewed their own values seem to be the most important factor to work with a company. Influencers interviewed named their values to be such as sustainability, transparency, and anti-global warming. These values are very similar as the values for companies following CSR policies.

According to the interviews to many influencers, as for companies, values and other factors are more important than income. For example, from influencer A's interview answer it can be assumed that she would not work with a company against her own core values even for greater reward. In addition, companies might need to change some of their product lines to reach more sustainable and responsible outcome with larger cost. However, from the interviews can also be seen that all influencers are not supporting similar values or values are not the most important factor. Therefore, it can also be assumed that there are also influencers on whose decision-making their own values do not have that much effect. This shows that there are more responsible influencers who

are interested in such topics and influencers who base their decision making in other factors. In other words, there are influencers who in their work have similar aspects as companies CSR policies, such as values that they follow and responsibility of the collaborations. And there are influencers who are not that interested on these factors, due to lack of interest or importance of other factors such as reward for example. Most likely, influencers want to share content of products/services and from brands which they feel comfortable with by sharing similar values. By only working with companies with similar values influencers avoid predisposing their followers to something which the influencer finds against own values or unethical.

4.1.2 Influencer responsibility

Along with values many influencers also choose a collaboration depending on whether they would use the product or not. Therefore, it can be assumed that some influencers want to recommend products they find useful and a logical fit to their own values and life. This makes them more trustworthy and genuine and is a good example of word-of-mouth communication. Also, in CSR as for influencers, trustworthiness is one major factor of responsibility. Thus, an influencer only wanting to advertise products of which they have experience shows responsibility. This kind of behaviour can also be seen as ethically right as the influencer has real experience of the product. It also makes the recommendation more genuine and trustworthy.

However, there can be different signs of responsibility. An influencer can evaluate if she/he should collaborate with a company through multiple different factors. However, thinking of how the follower will benefit from the advertised product/service shows greater responsibility than thinking how an influencer will benefit from a specific collaboration. Interviewed influencers did not mention reward as the most important factor but most likely there are many influencers who still find reward as one of the key elements when deciding should they do a collaboration or not. That kind of action tells a lot about the motives of the influencer which is rather to make money than act responsibly, for example. Overall, influencers mostly earn their income with collaborations and therefore it can be understood that money is an important factor. However, when the number of influencers increases, and the competition of the collaborations becomes more intense it can be assumed that rewards become an even more important factor in influencers'

decision making. This would most likely have a negative impact on the responsibility of the influencers as well.

4.2   Taking a stand in social media

None of the influencers interviewed think that it is the influencer's responsibility to talk about controversial topics on their channels, such as racism or climate change. However, C still thinks it would be important that influencers talked about controversial topics and share knowledge. Anyway, A and C think that any information influencers publish should avoid misinformation.

As described in chapter 2.3 influencers are opinion leaders and have a strong effect on their followers due to WOM and thus, they would have a good platform to take a stand and share information. However, taking a stand is not always easy and comfortable for an influencer. Of the three interviewees, influencer A seems to be the most comfortable talking on controversial topics. However, she has found it mentally hard as she has received a lot of negative feedback and even attacking messages. B and C do not publish that much content on topics which share opinions, and this has been their conscious decision. This can be due to lack of knowledge or that they want to avoid negative and attacking feedback by staying neutral.

Influencers are easily criticized on social media which is one reason why they receive a lot of feedback, both positive and negative. It is more likely that influencers receive more negative feedback and sometimes even threatening messages when they have published content on topics which share opinions. This can be one reason why some influencers do not feel comfortable on taking a stand in social media. Influencer A says in her interview that talking about such topics in social media can be mentally hard and she has even needed to process the messages she has received in therapy. Therefore, it can be agreed that it is not one lone influencer's responsibility to speak up on a specific matter. However, influencers should at least make sure the content they publish is legitimate and true. Because influencers have power to effect on people's opinions, they should be even more aware of the legitimacy of their content.

However, since influencers are free to publish almost any kind of content and share any kind of information their content can also contain misinformation or manipulated pictures. Therefore, the follower holds also a responsibility to evaluate the truth of the information she/he is reading. This is something that influencer C also points out. According to her it is also important that the receiver of the content, follower, views the content with common sense and critically. Thus, users of social media should be able to evaluate critically the content that they see in order to notice false claims.

4.3   Discussion conclusion

Some influencers also take a stand and talk openly of social matters. Interviews opened influencers' own opinion and experiences how it is mentally hard. However, influencers are an important source of information due to their power with WOM which makes them trusted. Therefore, influencers taking a stand and talking of important matters can make such topics less taboo as well as raise awareness and knowledge. However, it cannot be assumed that each influencer would take a stand in social media as it can lead to attacking messages.

Also, influencers are not companies and they are working depending on their own values, beliefs, and opinions. Because influencers are not affecting as many people as companies, they do not have social responsibility as companies. Also, due to these reasons neither should they have strict guidelines to follow. More likely influencers make their decisions depending on their own interests, values and multiple other factors which can be seen from the interviewee answers. However, because this thesis has only interviewed 3 micro influencers it can be assumed that there are also different opinions, and some influencers base their decision making on other things than values. Also, because this research is based on the interviews of three micro influencers there can be differences with mega, macro or nano influencers' opinions and behaviours.

Due to their position as trusted figures influencers still should take different factors into consideration when posting on their social media channels. Some of these are responsibility and legitimacy. Because influencers have so great effect on people, they should understand their effect and consider what they want to express in their channels. Due to their position and effectiveness with WOM it would be important for influencers to

work for the benefit of the society. For example, by growing awareness and knowledge on different topics by choosing more ethical companies to collaborate with. It should be remembered that also the receiver of the content has responsibility to critically read the content they see because the content on social media can also be misinformation or manipulated. Most importantly, influencers should focus on publish content which is based on facts and knowledge

5   Conclusion

This research aim was to answer the research questions: do influencers have social responsibility? and what are the factors affecting to their decisions to work with a company? This research also wanted to find out what are the motivators behind influencer work. Also, how responsible is their work or do influencers even have an obligation to share responsible content. In literature review (chapter 2) important topics, including corporate social responsibility, marketing ethics and influencer as a concept, are explained to be able to later evaluate these factors in the discussion. These topics are extremely important to be able to fully understand the research questions and to be able to fully answer these. Also, three micro influencers were interviewed to gather a better understanding of influencer work and hear the opinions of the professionals of the field, the influencers themselves. These interviews gave this research extremely valuable knowledge of influencer work which could not be found in academic references. However, because this research has only interviewed three micro influencers it cannot be assumed that these interviews represent also mega, macro, and nano influencers opinions.

This research found out that there is no such concept as influencers' social responsibility. More likely each influencer's decision is affected by their own values and interests. Influencers who are socially more aware are most likely to work with responsible companies or products/services. Also, people who talk about their values loudly and openly in social media, such as interviewee A, are most likely to put more effort to work with companies with similar values. However, the interviewed influencers' work still has a lot of similarities to CSR as they base their decisions on their own values and two of interviewed influencers even aim to create benefit to either society or followers. Also,

due to their important position and effect with WOM, influencers have a great position to talk about important topics to create awareness. Still, even though it would be important it is not influencers' responsibility to talk about these subjects. Because influencers are individuals and not necessarily experts of the fields it is their follower's responsibility to view influencer content critically and with common sense.

Due to these reasons, it can be said that influencers do not have similar social responsibility as companies. Still, it should be remembered that influencers base their decisions most importantly on own values which vary according to the person. Also, in CSR values are one of the most important factors. Therefore, this research shows that values play one of the most important roles for influencers choosing with whom to collaborate.

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Interviews

Q1. How did your career as a social media influencer start? When?

A: I started a blog when I was 15, but it only became my career when I put full effort on it in my 20s.

B: Ura alkoi hieman vahingossa, kun vuonna 2009 perustimme ystäväni kanssa hetken mielijohteesta yhteisen blogin, joka keräsi heti yllättävän suuren määrän yleisöä. [My career started in 2009 by an accident when we started a blog with my friend which immediately gathered a surprisingly large audience.]

C: Around 2016 I got paid for my first Instagram post. After that I was motivated to start blogging goal-oriented.

Q2. Which kind of different tasks and projects do you work with as an influencer?

A: I style, shoot, write, send emails, make offers, create graphics, communicate with followers, answer questions and comments...

B: Pääosin myynnistä, valokuvaamisesta, raportoimisesta, kirjoittamisesta ja kaikesta taustatyöstä, mitä yrityksen pyörittämiseen yleensäkin kuuluu. [Mostly of selling, photographing, reporting, writing as well as all the background work of entrepreneurship.]

C: Where do I start! Nowadays mostly marketing collaborations on Instagram with different companies. I always aim on working long term with companies and I value my relationships with my clients. This has led me to do more than just social media collaborations. For example I've done some product photography, modeling, and social media and marketing consulting for clients.

I also do several interviews per year for magazines, books, radio and theses. I also love hosting wellness workshops for followers and love teaching yoga at events. I've also done some event planning for clients' PR events.This year I've started podcasting, so there's been a lot to learn about the audio world; mostly producing podcast episodes, learning to use my voice and editing audio clips. I love learning new stuff, so it's been a nice ride. All the Instagram and blog collaborations take time to plan, produce, photograph and/or video shoot, edit, write copies for captions and blog posts. Having multiple blogs has also taught me to work with different kinds of online platforms. I'm also opening my own online store, so there's that hassle too! The learning never ends. And of course, there's lots of tasks and obligations as a multipreneur.

Q3. Do you use any influencer marketing office? Why?

A. My blog and YouTube are under Babler. I wanted to get less emails and focus more on my content. I can't tell if it has helped at all though. Usually sell all my Instagram-campaigns straight to clients so there won't be anyone else taking a piece of the payment.

B: Työskentelen useampien eri mediatoimistojen kanssa (suomalaisten sekä kansainvälisten). Toimistojen kautta tulee paljon yhteydenottoja ja se säästää aikaa omalta myyntityöltäni. [I work with multiple different media offices, both Finnish and international. Many of the collaboration requests come through the media offices which saves my time.]

C: Not anymore. It was great as a starting blogger, but I prefer to be personally in touch with my clients and value genuine relationships with them, which makes the marketing office impractical.

Q4. Are you able to pay your bills by being a full-time influencer? How much do you earn?

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A: I am, but I'm a full-time student, so that helps. I earn as much as the school allows me. Some hundred over 10 000 I think. I need to stop campaigns for the year any time I am close to going over, so that I don't have to give back my housing benefits.

B: Pystyisin, mutta teen vaikuttajan työn lisäksi yritykseni kautta muitakin töitä; esimerkiksi tuotan sosiaalisen median sisältöjä eri brändeille ja valokuvaan. Viime vuonna tienasin n. 70 000e.

[I could, but among with my influencer work I also create social media content for brands and photograph. Last year I earned about 70 000e.]

C: Yes, this is a real job! :D My earnings vary every year. Last year my company's turnover was 75 000€. This year is going to be different, since I started another a new company.

Q5. What affects your decision to work with a company in a project or campaign?

A: Their values and do I like the product - have I used it. What's the impact of it...

B: Suurimpana kriteerinä yleensä punnitsen, että sopiiko yrityksen tuotteet/palvelut yhteen omien somekanavieni sekä arvojeni kanssa. Jos edellä mainitut täsmäävät, niin seuraava merkittävä kysymys on, että pääsemmekö sopimukseen yhteistyön ehdoista (toteutustapa, palkkiot, aikataulut ym..)

[The main criteria are if the product or service fits to my social media channels and meets my values. If yes, next we need to agree terms of collaboration, such as implementation, reward, schedules…]

C: The product, company or the campaign must be a brand match with my personal brand. I also value transparency and sustainable companies that have a good reputation. I also love working with Finnish brands and helping smaller businesses, plus pro bono.

Q6. What qualities or values of a company, or a product/service, affect your decision to work with the company?

A: Misogyny, racism and anti-global warming are values I can not associate myself with. I need the values to correlate with mine: feminism, sustainability etc are the bare necessities.

B: Minulle on tärkeää, että tuote tai palvelu on sellainen, jota joko itse käytän tai sen käyttäminen on minulle hyvin luontaista.

[For me is important that product or service is what I use or could use.]

C: I value companies that have the same values as I. For example transparency, sustainability, domesticity, and that the product/service serves my followers' wellbeing. This world has already too much crap that marketers are trying to sell.

Q7. If a company has different values than your own, does this affect your decision? How do you decide if their values are different than yours? (Website, conversation?)

A: It does. I research them and if I have questions still, I usually ask them for some numbers etc to make sure they are open about their sustainability.

B: Kaikista mieluiten työskentelisin kotimaisten laadukkaita sekä vastuullisia palveluita/tuotteita tuottavien yritysten kanssa. En kuitenkaan koe olevani tällä hetkellä siinä pisteessä, että minulla olisi työssäni niin isosti varaa valita yhteistyöt joihin lähden mukaan. Suurin osa yhteistyökumppaneistani ovat aika tunnettuja suomalaisia tai kansainvälisiä toimijoita, joiden toiminnasta olen usein melko hyvin kartalla jo etukäteen. Harvemmin lähden tekemään yhteistyötä minkään itselleni täysin uuden yrityksen kanssa, mutta sellaisessa tapauksessa ehdottomasti käyn läpi taustoja joko yrityksen nettisivujen tai yhteyshenkilöni kautta.

[In the most pleasant situation, I would work with Finnish brands which produce responsible quality products/services. However, I don't feel that I am in a position where I could decide who I want to work with. Most of the companies I work with are quite well-known Finnish or international brands whose activity I am quite aware already. Rarely I collaborate with companies who are totally new to me. But in those cases, I definitely go through the background of the company through their website or my contact person.]

C: Yes, it affects my decision. The easiest way is to see and hear how the company communicates. How the products are produced, where the products are produced and how the company workers are being treated.

Sometimes it's really easy to spot on shady businesses, but not always. Sometimes the safest way is to work with big and known companies who have the public pressure already on them - or on the contrary, small and local businesses, who's owners I know personally.

Q8. What are the reasons why you would not work with a company?

A: If they promote fast consumption, meat or are against feminism. I can't work with a brand that does not align with my core values.

B: En tee yhteistöitä, jos en voi ihan rehellisesti seisoa mainostamani brändin tai tuotteiden takana. En myöskään lähde toteuttamaan sellaisia yhteistöitä, joiden en koe luonnollisesti istuvan muun tuottamani sisällön joukkoon. Minulla ei ole tähän tarkkoja raameja, vaan mietin kaikki caset aina tapauskohtaisesti.

[I don't work with a company if I can not stand behind the brand or their products. Also, I don't do collaborations which I don't feel that fit naturally to my other content. I go through and evaluate each collaboration case by case.]

C: Poor communications skills are always a red flag: e-mail, website, social media page etc. Also if the company has a bad reputation. Transparency is key!

Q9. What kind of effect do you think your content has on your followers?

A: I am not sure. I get messages that it affects them a lot, but that's just a few hundred people - I don't know about the rest. I hope I can have a positive impact.

B: Uskon, että kanavistani löytyy samaistumispintaa samankaltaisessa elämäntilanteessa oleville sekä inspiraatiota monessa arjen asiassa.

[I believe that people in similar phase in life find my content relatable and inspirational in everyday life.]

C: According to the feedback I get, I'm able to create content that is wholehearted, relatable and genuine. I hope that my content has a positive effect to inspire my followers to take care of themselves a little better.

Q10. How do you feel about discussing controversial topics on your channels?

A: I think about it for a while before publishing. It takes a lot of mental capacity to answer people that think differently - or just to read their comments and messages. Sometimes I have to handle them in therapy. So I want to be sure the subject is something I actually have the facts on and that I have the mental resources to discuss further.

B: En loppujen lopuksi tuota kovinkaan paljon kantaa ottavaa sisältöä. Toki välillä koen jonkin tietyn aiheen itselleni tärkeäksi ja aina sellaisten aiheen esille ottaminen hieman jännittää, mutta loppujen lopuksi koen olevani aika itsevarma. Pidimme aikaisemmin äitiyteen liittyvää podcastia erään ystäväni ja kollegani kanssa ja minulle oli selkeästi puhesisällön kautta helpompi tuoda omia näkökantojani esille.

[Afterall I don't create that much content which takes a stand. Of course, sometimes I find a topic important to myself. Talking about a such a topic makes me a little nervous

but in the end, I feel confidence because it is important to me. I had a podcast earlier about motherhood where I found that for me it is easier to verbally tell my viewpoints.]

C: I think it's important to break barriers and talk about taboos. But so far I've kept it pretty safe. It really depends what controversial means nowadays in our world. Social media and the speed of communication has led to a point where almost anything is discussable. Talk about sexuality has grown into a very important discussion even though sexuality might have been a controversial topic before.

Q11. Do you think it is your and other influencers' responsibility to talk about those topics openly and take a stand in your channels? Why?

A: In a way yes, and then again, no. I think it's our job to not spread misinformation, but considering how hard it can be on one's mental health to get mean and attacking messages, it's easier for many to not take a stand, and I understand them very well.

B: En koe, että mihinkään asiaan tarttuminen olisi kenenkään yksittäisen vaikuttajan vastuulla. Jokaisella on oikeus tuottaa kanavissaan omanlaistaan sisältöä ja ottaa tai olla ottamatta julkisesti kantaa oman fiiliksen mukaan.

[I don't think that it is on one influencer's responsibility. Everyone has a right to publish the kind of content they want in their channels by taking a stand or not depending on how they feel.]

C: Yes definitely, but I also find it important to skip spreading fake news. We have the responsibility to stick to facts. This has been an issue with most wellness influencers (including myself!) in the past year(s). It's no longer okay to inspire people to drink water with lemon since there's no scientific proof for its health benefits. I'm referring to the case Martina Aitolehti and lemon water that was a scandal earlier this year.

As an influencer this has affected the way I communicate about wellness and health tips. I still find it important to share about wellness even though there might be no scientific

proof. The world is full of things that the scientists haven't yet been able to prove. I also find it important to find a borderline when "inspiring" people, whether it's about lemon water or vaccines, I find that there's a huge difference!

Also, I think that the receiver has also the responsibility to view the content with some source criticism. Common sense never hurt anybody.

Q12. How much effect do your posts have? Has this changed in recent years? What do you think is the reason for this?

A: They have become more viral this year, when I finally decided to talk about subjects I care about. Most viewed posts have 100k reach and the most shared was shared 5000 times. I think people like to learn, to expand their worldview and support people who give them something in return.

B: Tuntuu, että lapsen saamisen myötä ns. vaikutus sekä myös vuorovaikutus minun ja seuraajieni välillä on voimistunut. Viime vuosina en koe tapahtuneen omalla kohdallani kuitenkaan mitään kovin radikaalia muutosta.

[I feel like since having a child effect and interaction between me and my followers has grown. However, during the past years I don't think there has been a radical change on my behalf.]

C: I think it has been pretty much the same in percentage, but the audience has grown and also having a podcast has expanded the media platform. It's not anymore all on the blog or Instagram but on other platforms too.

When it comes to collaborations, I find it rewarding when I get great feedback both from the client and followers, but also when posts are tracked up to sales and the goal has been reached.

Posts and podcasts that have had an effect are also extremely rewarding. Getting straight heart warming feedback that someone has gained something from my work is the reason why I do this. I love the conversations and the best thing is when I learn something new. My followers are also significant influencers for me. It goes both ways.

13. What do you like the most in your job?

A: The people I get to work with. Creativity. Writing. The feedback. There's a lot to love

B: Siitä, että pääsen työskentelemää monipuolisesti itseäni kiinnostavien asioiden parissa. Pidän myös yrittäjyyden tuomasta vapaudesta aikataulujen ja toimintatapojen suhteen.

[Being able to work with versatile projects and tasks that interest me. Freedom of schedules and standards as an entrepreneur.]

C: There's so many things that it's challenging to pick only one! As an introverted person, I'm grateful to be able to work on my own terms. On the other hand, I love meeting people through my work. I get to meet the most kind-hearted and fun people. I also love the diversity of this job and the possibilities feel endless. It's going to be interesting to see where the industry is going to be in a few years, since it has evolved rapidly in a very short time.

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