

# Impact of Finnish and Swedish Instagram influencers on Finnish consumers

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<p>This bachelor's thesis study researched how consumers perceive influencer marketing and what are the reasons why consumers follow Swedish and Finnish influencers. The research question was built based on the objectives: How are 18 to 30-year-old Finnish fashion consumers affected by Finnish and Swedish Instagram influencers? This research-oriented study focuses only on Swedish and Finnish influencers on Instagram. The perspective of companies and influencers was taken into consideration in order to obtain the broadest possible perspective.</p> <p>The theoretical section was collected from reliable sources such as journals, books, and articles. The central theoretical concept was parasocial relationship theory, which sets out the reasons for the relationship between influencers and consumers. The ICA framework was used to identify a company's needs based on influencers' individual characteristics, content, and audience. The media priming concept examines influencer's effects on consumers. The empirical part consisted of both qualitative and quantitative research. A quantitative questionnaire (n=71) was conducted through Webropol. The questionnaire supported the collected theory and provided a more in-depth picture of consumers' requirements. The qualitative research was conducted through interviews with Finnish influencers. Altogether three influencers were interviewed.</p> <p>The key findings indicated that Finnish influencers are more popular than Swedish influencers among the consumers. Content and inspiration are seen as the most critical factors for both Swedish and Finnish influencers. Finnish influencers are seen as more relatable and authentic. Swedish influencers are followed mostly because consumers want to find inspiration for their lifestyle and fashion style. Findings also indicated that influencer marketing is mainly seen as an acceptable and effective method of marketing. However, consumers are not aware of how much influencers can affect their purchasing decisions. Companies want influencers who holistically think about their followers, content, and individual characteristics. Findings indicated that companies select influencers based on what they want to achieve and whether they can help with those goals. Transparency, reliability, and authenticity are the most critical factors for both Finnish consumers and companies.</p> <p>The future recommendation for companies is to use influencers as part of marketing. It is important to evaluate carefully is the influencer suitable for the company and whether they fulfill the company's image. Finnish consumers trust influencers' words more than traditional marketing. In order to success, companies should collaborate with authentic and transparent influencers. Finnish consumers want to relate to and trust influencers. Those aspects build trust. Key findings also indicated that influencers' content needs to be interesting and match with consumers' values.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Instagram, influencers, influencer marketing, brand awareness, customer perceived value	

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# 1 Introduction

This thesis is a research type of a bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in International business in the major specialization of customer relationship management and communication. Bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in International Business taught at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences.

The purpose of the introduction chapter is to explain the basic idea and structure of the thesis. The plan summarizes all the necessary information, such as research questions, supportive investigative questions, and research objectives. The chapter also provides the benefits, key concepts, and demarcation of the thesis. There are explained why this topic was chosen and the reasons behind that choice.

## 1.1 Background

Instagram has potential for every advertiser. It is the fastest growing social media platform that improves the organic presence of brands. The platform has grown by 357 percent between 2014 and 2017. There are monthly over 700 million users around the globe, and one-third are using Instagram daily. In 2020, the platform had approximately 2.1 million active users in Finland. This number is estimated to increase to 3.3 million users by 2026. No matter who your audience is, there is an opportunity for everyone to reach the target group via Instagram marketing. (Statista 2020; Newstex 2017.) Instagram is also the biggest platform for fashion influencers. Over 70 percent of fashion influencers use the application rather than another social media platform. Influencers prefer Instagram because their work is a highly visual niche. Photos and videos are essential in the fashion business, which can be implemented on Instagram. (Annalect 2017.)

Instagram influencers have been popular for some time. Consumers rely more and more on peer-to-peer communication. That is why influencer marketing has continued to grow as a vital component of an organization's marketing strategy. Almost 75 percent of marketers use influencers to spread information about their products and brand on social media. Instagram has the strongest influence on shopping compared to other social media sites. Over 70 percent of consumers on Instagram are ready to make a purchase only based on what they saw on the platform. (Newstex 2017.) On Instagram, over 200 000 posts were only shared by influencers. Also, in 2018 there was a massive increase in the influencer marketing-focused agencies. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 81.)

Between 2013 and 2020, the share of Swedish internet users increased drastically. Also, the number of Instagram users increased massively. The primary reason for Swedish consumers to use Instagram is to keep in touch with friends and family. The second most common reason was for entertainment use, whereas less than ten percent of the interviewees reported using Instagram for professional networking. (Tankovska 2020.) The most followed Swedish influencers on Instagram have nearly 10 million followers. That number itself proves how Swedish influencers have found their place permanently. Over twenty percent of Finnish consumers are mainly or only following foreign influencers. Also, over 35 percent of consumers are following both Finnish and foreign influencers. (Annalect 2017.)

In Sweden, influencer marketing is ahead of Finland. The most followed Instagram influencers in Sweden have together almost 50 million followers. In Finland, the amount is 15 million. (Palmén 2021.) In 2019 some of the most followed fashion influencers were Sandra Hagelstam, Jenni Rotonen, and Mikko Puttonen (Ehren 2019). In Finland, it is extremely influential in having 5 000 or even 10 000 followers (Heikkilä 2020).

When the worldwide pandemic started to roam around the world in 2020, Finland called cavalry: influencers. Social media influencers were critical actors to society during a crisis. Finland is the only country in the world that defined social media as a crucial operator. In today's world, young people get their news through social media. Most people trust social media influencers more than the media. (Heikkilä 2020.) This shows how important social media influencers are and how much impact they have on consumers.

This topic was chosen because it is one of the top methods of marketing at the moment. Companies have the opportunity to reach their target audience in a way that feels more genuine than traditional advertising. Influencer marketing can be highly influential if it is done correctly. Organizations need to find the perfect fit with the influencer who can represent the brand in a required way. Additionally, among the other social media platforms, Instagram is increasing in the number of active users related to the fashion industry. Fashion brands have significantly more interaction and followers than other types of brands. Fashion is one of the past decade's economic success stories. The industry has grown by 5,5 percent annually, and it is worth 2,4 trillion dollars. The fashion industry is the world's seventh-largest economy. (Casaló, Flavián & Ibáñez-Sánchez 2020; Amed, Berg, Brantberg & Hedric 2016.)

## 1.2 Research Question & Investigative Questions

In this chapter, the research question and supportive investigative questions are explained. The flow of the research is easier to follow when the main questions are understood correctly. Questions are formulated based on the research objectives and goals.

**RQ:** How are 18 to 30-year-old Finnish fashion consumers affected by Finnish and Swedish Instagram influencers?

**IQ 1.** Why do consumers follow Swedish fashion influencers?

**IQ 2.** Why do consumers follow Finnish fashion influencers?

**IQ3.** How is influencer marketing perceived by the target group?

**IQ4.** What companies want from the influencers?

**IQ 5.** How influencers could improve their Instagram marketing?

This thesis's research objective was to understand how consumers perceive influencer marketing and what are the reasons why consumers follow Swedish and Finnish influencers. The perspective of companies and influencers was taken into consideration in order to obtain as a broad perspective as possible. This thesis aims to develop influencer marketing in Finland by examining influencers, companies, and consumers' views. In this way, an extensive perspective on the topic was obtained.

The results are beneficial for Finnish companies and influencers. By comparing both Swedish and Finnish influencers, it is possible to find construction areas and plan the future of influencers' marketing. Because companies' perspective was also taken into consideration, influencers see what companies want from them, and they can compare it to their activities. The influencer's perspective combines the research questions and investigative questions together and provides a valuable point of view for companies. This thesis will create an understanding of why consumers follow influencers and how consumers feel about influencer marketing.

Table 1 visualize the overlay matrix of the thesis. The table illustrates the theoretical framework, research methods, and the result chapters for each investigative question.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative question	Theoretical Framework	Research Methods	Results (chapter)
<b>IQ 1.</b> Why do consumers follow Swedish fashion influencers?	Parasocial relationship theory	Qualitative method Survey Desktop research Interview	4.2.1
<b>IQ 2.</b> Why do consumers follow Finnish fashion influencers?	Parasocial relationship theory	Qualitative method Survey Desktop research Interview	4.2.2
<b>IQ 3.</b> How is influencer marketing perceived by the target group?	Media priming	Qualitative method Survey Desktop research Interview	4.3
<b>IQ 4.</b> What companies want from the influencers?	The ICA framework	Quantitative method Desktop research Interviews	4.4
<b>IQ5.</b> How influencers could improve their Instagram marketing?		Quantitative method Survey Interviews Comparative analysis	5.1.5

The degree programme requires that the thesis have an international aspect. This thesis fulfills the criteria. The topic area is not delimited only to Finland. The impacts of Swedish influencers on Finnish consumers have been analyzed. The interest of Finnish consumers in Swedish influencers has also been investigated. International sources such as articles and literature were used to support the thesis. Analysis and findings can be applied to international businesses because Instagram and influencer marketing are used worldwide.

### 1.3 Demarcation

The target group for this research was 18 to 30-year-old fashion consumers from Finland. Instagram was the only social media platform that was used for this research. Instagram was chosen because it is one of the most popular social media platforms worldwide, and it reaches millions of people every day. Fifty-five percent used Instagram in Finland in 2019 (Tankovska 2019).



This thesis focused only on to retail industry and fashion. Fashion brands have significantly more interaction and followers than other types of brands on Instagram. The fashion industry is worth 2,4 trillion dollars, and it is the world's seventh-largest economy. (Amed, Berg, Brantberg & Hedric 2016.) Over forty percent of Swedish influencers are using Instagram daily (Sweden culture 2020).

This research had three data collection phases: secondary research, quantitative questionnaire, and qualitative interviews. Consumers were contacted via questionnaire. Also, multiple influencers were interviewed for this thesis in order to gain the broadest perspective possible. Influencers were chosen based on their content and the number of followers. Statistics are supporting the findings and opinions. This research will help influencers to find improvements and have the opportunity to compare themselves with international influencers'.

#### **1.4 Benefits**

This chapter will focus on the benefits that this research aims to provide for three stakeholders. This thesis will provide value for Finnish companies, influencers, and the author's own future career.

Influencers and companies benefited the most from this research. Influencer marketing is constantly growing. Therefore, it is important to investigate it from different perspectives. The questionnaire was created to find the answers to why consumers follow influencers and what is affecting that decision. With that information, influencers have an opportunity to improve their work. When influencer marketing is done correctly, it can lead to a profit increase and growth in the number of followers.

Influencer marketing is widely used worldwide, and therefore it is crucial that companies are aware of it. Companies will benefit from this research because this thesis provides insights into what consumers think about influencer marketing. This research also provides valuable information about Finnish influencer's opinions. These information's can help companies to cut out their costs and create more brand awareness.

Social media is constantly growing, and it has a lot of potential in it. The author will benefit from this research because she is passionate about the industry. In the future, the author also wants to work in that field, and this thesis will open many new opportunities. The thesis topic supports her personal interest so that she will gain a lot of essential knowledge from different marketing aspects.

## 1.5 Definition of Key Concepts

This subchapter provides the five key concepts related to this research. These concepts are essential to understand because these concepts support the research question and objective.

**Instagram** is a method of communication. Users can share their life by taking photos and videos. Application has had a rapid growth in the users since it launched in 2010. Instagram is the most popular photo capturing and sharing application. (Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati 2014.)

**Influencers** have created a new form of digital practices. Influencers accumulate following blogs and social media through textual and visual marathons of their everyday lives, upon which advertorials for services and products are promised. (Abidin 2016.)

**Influencer marketing** is a new way of marketing. It is an essential method of marketing because salesforce us to understand and support it. It directly addresses the sales barriers within prospective customers and focuses attention on those individuals who advise decision-makers. (Brown & Hays 2008, 11.)

**Brand awareness** is an essential part of the communications process. If there is no brand awareness occurring, no other communication effects can occur. If consumers want to buy the brand, consumers must first be aware of it. Brand attitude cannot be formed, or intentions cannot happen unless brand awareness has occurred. (Macdonald & Byron 2003, 1.)

**Customer perceived value** is a trade-off between sacrifices and benefits customer perceives. It is crucial because it affects profitability and customer loyalty. Value creation is different than customer-perceived value. A company can offer the best quality, but customers might not perceive it in the same way. There are several dimensions of benefits such as utility, economic, symbolic, experiential, and rational. (Echchakoui 2018, 139.)

## 2 Factors Affecting Influencer Marketing

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss different studies and theories relevant to the thesis. Theories are implemented to analyze the findings. First, influencers are examined and analyzed in detail. Secondly is explained how the target group sees influencer marketing, and lastly, the influencer's point of view is examined.

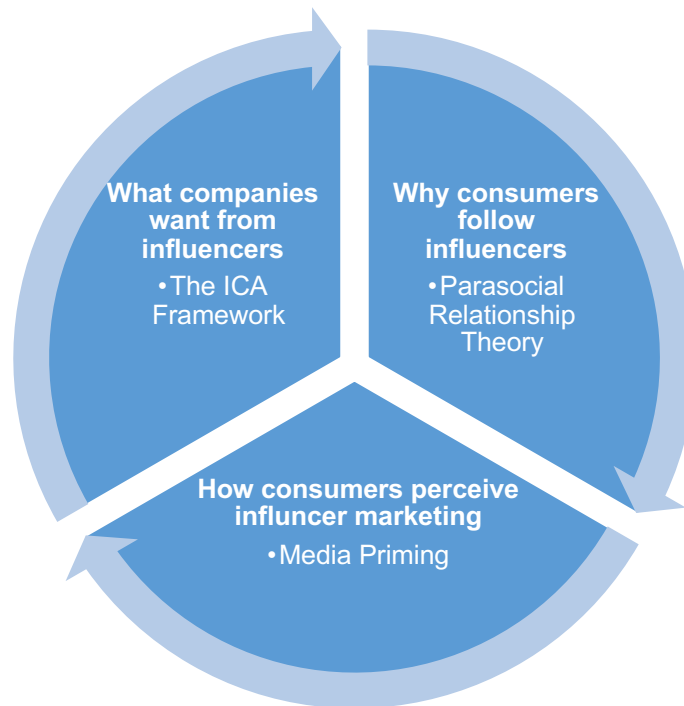


Figure 1. Theories and concepts

### 2.1 Why Consumers Follow Influencers

When social media became the new universe, all marketers and advertisers changed their way of marketing. Organizations traditionally created direct communication paths with their audience on social media. When influencers started to gain interest worldwide, they began to have a significant impact on people, the online community, and decision-making. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 1.) Instagram is the biggest platform for fashion influencers. Approximately 80 percent of the influencers use Instagram as their primary channel because it offers photo and video sharing possibilities. The platform allows users to see and visualize products and brands. Users also have the opportunity to get more familiar with the organization right away. Instagram is considered to be one of the top social media sites with over 1 billion active users. Twenty-five percent of the sponsored posts on Instagram are from fashion and beauty. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 223.)

Instagram is the third most used social media platform in Finland. Over 80 percent of the users used the application daily. Instagram is mainly used for socializing and entertainment. In 2020, the Instagram engagement rate in Finland was relatively high. The more famous the influencer is, the lower the engagement rate is by followers. Nano-influencers with one to five thousand followers produced a nearly eight percent engagement rate when micro-influencers generated over 4 percent engagement rate. Mega-influencers generated a little over 3 percent. In 2019, forty percent of Finnish Instagram users used the platform to follow brands and companies. (Tankovska 2020.)

Parasocial relationship theory explains the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Researchers in consumer behavior and marketing have utilized theory to explore the relationship between the influencer and a consumer, parasocial advertising, the strength of the parasocial relationship, and what kind of characteristics are most likely to create a strong relationship. The theory also explains why consumers trust and follow the advice of specific influencers and what makes them unique. Consumers have developed a parasocial relationship already with traditional marketing, but social media offers better opportunities due to its open and interactive nature. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 121.) The similarity between interacting individuals in terms of beliefs, social status, and education is related to the number of interactions the consumer has. Similar communicators are more likely to depend on each other. The repeated interaction helps to develop a parasocial relationship. (Sokolova & Kefi 2020.)

The relationship between the influencer and the followers is not a traditional media relationship because it is not unidirectional. Followers can message an influencer who can answer on a personal level which builds a stronger connection for followers. Two-sided interaction strengthens the parasocial relationship. An interactive question between influencer and consumer creates an illusion of friendship. That illusion starts when consumers admire influencers and consumers feel a strong connection with them. Micro-influencers who have followers from 10 000 to 100 000 have typically highly loyal and highly engaged followers. Macro influencers tend to have a less engaged audience. Because of the nature of a relationship with the audience, micro-influencers are seen as authentic and more trusted. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 120-122.)

The compliance occurs when influencers can withhold material or psychological resources on which the achievement of followers' intentions depends. Therefore, consumers want a self-definition relationship with the influencer. That also becomes part of the audience's self-image. The audience maintains the relationship and the self-definition by imitating the influencer. The influencer can be chosen based on attractiveness, popularity, or creativity. The reason can also be that followers lack some aspect of what the influencer has, which

makes an ongoing relationship with the influencer desirable. (Wondwesen & Bronwyn 2021.)

Followers accept influence if it is similar to their value system. Also, the content of the influence itself is essentially rewarding for the audience. Content can help resolve a problem, is compatible with their personal orientation, or is demanded by their value system. (Wondwesen & Bronwyn 2021.) The audience wants to follow content that is entertaining and easy to absorb. Content also needs to fulfill their information and mood management needs. Physical attractiveness can also be viewed as an argument for fashion influencers. (Sokolova & Kefi 2020.) Influencers' expertise and credibility are essential because these characteristics are directly tied to the influencer's content. Followers accept influencers to the extent that they find them credible, relatable, or popular. (Wondwesen & Bronwyn 2021.)

Three characteristics are seen as fundamental: authority, credibility, and social attractiveness. Consumers want to be and feel the same way as an influencer. Attractiveness drives this even more. Millennials frequently borrow some aspects of their lifestyle and personalities to look like influencers'. Most appreciated influencers also often support their audience on Instagram, give positive reviews, and help them by reflecting a positive image of themselves. (Sokolova & Kefi 2020.)

Over forty percent of Finnish consumers are only or mainly following Finnish influencers on Instagram. Thirty-six percent of the respondents stated that they follow both Finnish and foreign influencers. (Annalect 2017.) A total of ten percent of the consumers have bought products that influencers have advertised (Statista 2020). There are multiple reasons why consumers follow Finnish influencers. One of the biggest reasons why consumers follow influencers is that consumers want to relate. People want to connect to influencers' daily life, thoughts, struggles, and suggestions. Therefore, influencers are posting about their personal interests, which brings more relatability to the influencer. When influencers are recording their lives, followers can easily get attached to influencers and even feel that they know each other. Reason can also be admiration towards influencers. Followers are admiring the way they are living, or they want to live similarly. (Lehtinen 2019.)

Finnish influencers are seen as authentic and trustworthy persona. When influencers are authentic, also their product recommendations are more reliable. That is why micro-influencers can be more valuable for organizations. Micro-influencers are also more dedicated and loyal to their audience. Mega influencers can have difficulties engaging because of the large number of audiences. (Annalect 2017.)

Cheerful content interests consumers. Also, the topic area needs to be interesting and put consumers in a good mood. The topic is not the only important factor, but also pictures are necessary to take into consideration. The quality and the visual look of the images are affecting the reasons why influencers are being followed. Consumers might be looking for helpful information about the topics that are important to them. Information can be, for example, current trends and phenomena. (Annalect 2017.)

## **2.2 Influencer Marketing Perceived by Target Group**

Social media is changing drastically and transforming the balance of power of public relations. Power has been in the organization's hands, but in today's world, positions have changed. Everyone can be somebody because consumers have a louder, direct voice, and consumers have more power than ever. Companies can receive the same emphasis in a user's social media site as in their own social media feed. Because social media is growing drastically, it is also affecting attitudes. (Doyle & Lee 2016.) Priming refers to the effect of some event or stimulus on how we react. When priming is added to the context of media, it refers to the impact of the content of the media on consumer's judgment or behavior related to the content. (Ewoldsen, Roskos & Carpentier 2002, 97-98.)

Consumers react and behave differently on Instagram than on other social media sites. Consumers take action and purchase more often after looking at some company's post. Also, the company's engagement rate is higher than in other social media sites. (Casaló, Flavián & Ibáñez-Sánchez 2020.) Consumers are exposed to marketing messages that contain priming constantly. Consumers who are exposed to priming messages use those messages later to analyze the organization, influencer, or products. (Doyle & Lee 2016.)

Every other consumer thinks influencer marketing is acceptable if it is communicated openly and the influencer is genuinely interested in the products (Annalect 2017). Consumers then react more positively to a promoted product, especially if they are familiar with the brand or a product. (Coco & Eckert 2020.) The audience feels less annoyed by influencer marketing than traditional marketing. That was proven by a study made by Annalect (2017) that consumers under the age of 35 feel positive about Instagram influencers. An audience can also be unaffected by sponsored posts marked as promotions (Coco & Eckert 2020). Eighty-three percent of consumers are aware of the paid collaborations that Instagram influencers are posting. However, there are still less than half of the users who are aware of the hidden advertising. (Annalect 2017.)

When influencers start to work on Instagram full-time, their authenticity may be threatened. Due to declining ethicality and trust, consumers have stopped believing in endorsements and influencers' positive attitudes and behavior towards brands. Three in four consumers avoid advertising, using avoidance strategies. Consumers do not necessarily pay attention to paid collaboration, and some might even consider advertising to be negative and intrusive. Also, consumers are not always aware of the paid structure of the content. Some see influencers as more credible than organizations in their decision-making. Consumers trust more influencers' words than companies' own advertising. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 89.)

Consumers are not only interested in product content and brand marketing. They want uniqueness and originality. Sometimes when influencers admit that they are being paid for a brand-based post, it may have a negative impact on consumers. It may cause negative feelings on their attitude and intentions to share the content because the credibility of the influencer is diminished. (Casaló, Flavián & Ibáñez-Sánchez 2020.)

Social media influencers have a vital role in the fashion industry. Consumers are trying to find inspiration for clothing, and it is affecting their shopping behavior. Forty-five percent of consumers follow fashion trends on Instagram daily, and the number is even higher for fashion innovators. Ninety-five percent of innovators use applications for viewing fashion trends daily or between different seasons. (Tomovska 2020, 4.) Consumers talk a lot to each other about new trends and styles, forward suggestions, and exchange information, highlighting the role social communication plays in diffusing fashion trends. Consumers are trying to avoid risks in the purchasing processes that are carried out with the help of the information and knowledge provided by the influencer. (Casaló, Flavián & Ibáñez-Sánchez 2020.)

### **2.3 What Companies Want from Influencers**

When companies are selecting suitable influencers, different factors are affecting the decision. Finding the right influencer can be challenging for organizations. According to the ICA framework, an organization's decision-making criteria can be divided into three categories: the individual, the content, and the audience. These categories intertwine when adapted in combination. Categories are maximizing the selection of influencers. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 61.)

The influencer framework has been built base on the number of followers the influencer has. This is one reason why marketers have started to organize their influencer marketing

work. Organizations have begun to think about what they want to accomplish with influencer marketing and what kind of an influencer is the best option for the organization. All organizations have their own preferences and needs for the influencers. The choice of influencer depends, for example, on the budget, product type, and niche. The expectations can be different with different levels of influencers. Influencers with fewer followers might collaborate for free, but the influencers with a high number of followers might ask 10 000 dollars per post. (Miles 2019, 16.)

### **2.3.1 Individual Characteristics**

Individual characteristics are the most common criteria adopted. Important characteristics such as influencer's authority, trust affinity, authenticity, and uniqueness are important aspects. Authenticity is considered to be the most critical aspect of influencer marketing. With authenticity, influencers can stand out among the others. Authenticity and originality can be addressed by referring to quantitative characteristics such as distinctness, newness, unusualness, innovativeness, and sophistication. Traditional advertising is not enough to persuade consumers because of its aggressive nature. When influencers make too many agreements with irrelevant brands, they lose their authenticity as a result. With uniqueness, influencers can gain and sustain a competitive advantage over competitors. Sincerity is an essential factor in evaluating authenticity. It can be either transparent or passionate authenticity. Passionate authenticity emerges when an influencer is driven by their desires and passion. Transparent authenticity is more about fact-based information about the product or service at the center of a product collaboration. Instead of endorsing a brand mechanically, influencers should create original and sincere stories combined with the brand. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 49-89.)

The purpose of advertising is to persuade consumers to purchase products or services. Due to the transformation of consumers' needs, the persuasion approach is changing. Marketers should use persuasive influencers who are perceived as trustworthy, authentic, experts in their own field, and have a fit with the product. The credibility, trustworthiness, authenticity, and persuasiveness of influencers' accounts are based on their power in consumer's perception. Usually, the power of influencers' Instagram accounts is measured by the number of followers. However, the number of followers has become a second in order. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 85.)

The most widespread criticism is the deceptive nature of influencer marketing. Consumers' insight into whether the influencer has a commercial orientation is an extremely important aspect when choosing the right influencer. Consumers appreciate more non-commercial orientation. That is why consumers may lose their interest in influencers if they give the impression that their content is overly commercial-oriented. If influencers' content



is only posted because of commercial motivations, consumers start to think about the ethicality of the influencer. Organizations may be negatively affected if consumers feel that the influencer made a financial agreement in return for endorsing the brand. Not only organizations receive negative repercussions but also influencers. If consumers understand that the influencer has posted about the brand in exchange for a payment, the influencer may face unfavorable repercussions. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 88-89.)

The fit between the influencer and consumer is emphasized most commonly. Often suitability between the brand and the influencer is forgotten about. The brand must choose influencers that would be representative of their brand identity. Self-presentation identifies influencers' efforts to build and manage a persona in the eye of the audience. Influencers create their identities to be able to address their audience. Influencers should manage an extensive process of building an online persona because influencers must present themselves as a consistent being. This includes, for example, their identity, the content they convey, personality, and the language they use. Influencers do not always have complete control over their public persona. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 88-90.)

### **2.3.2 Content**

The suitability between the consumer and the message content is essential. The content that the influencer is posting is a critical factor when choosing the right influencer. The brand that is recommended by the influencer may be well suited to the influencer's interests but still be incompatible with the content of an account. That is a reason why influencers should be aware of their content accordingly to their followers' interests. It is also vital for influencers to construct a coherent identity not because it would appeal to relevant consumers but because it would reinforce their identity as well. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 87.)

The number of followers is not the most critical factor for organizations. A more meaningful metric is a post engagement and how many consumers influencers can reach. Post engagement presents the actual influence the influencers have on their audience (Miles 2019, 16). When the campaign is launched, important key metrics are follower's growth rate, number of impressions, and loading page traffic. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 49.) Influencer marketing is turning into a two-sided market where influencers and marketers are becoming refined. (Miles 2019, 16.) Influencers grow specific online leadership authority based on their social reaches, such as comments and likes. When influencers build their social space, it is essential to remember to maintain their relationship with existing followers by sharing new information. This is helping to have a tremendous social reach both socially and commercially by responsive to the needs and interest of the audience. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 12-49.)

Engagement is used to measure the demonstration of resonance. Influencers can involve followers, activate them in the topics discussed, get customer feedback and conversations about products and brands. Engagement is more about proactive behavior rather than a simple exchange proposition. Engagement is measured by the number of times receivers forward the message, the number of connections that the messages jumped, and the number of replies and comments on each message. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 45-50.)

Some companies are interested in influencers existing collaborations and how the paid posts are made. Companies might want to know, for example, how many posts are paid and are sponsored posts genuine or forceful. (Halonen 2019.) Co-developed collaborations with influencers are most widespread in the fashion industry. Companies have started to become more willing to create long-term partnerships with influencers. (Backaler & Shankman 2018, 61.)

Two-thirds of markets are having difficulty selecting a suitable influencer for the brand (Yu September 2019). When an organization has found the right influencer, an organization wants to continue to work with them. When long-term contact is made with an ambassador, organizations can make sure that the influencer is not working with any other competitor at the same time. Both the organizations and the influencer can benefit from the partnership. (Backaler & Shankman 2018, 61.) The long-term collaboration creates trust between the audience. When followers see that the influencer is loyal to one brand for several months, it has a massive impact compared to what a one-off post can achieve. That relationship with a brand inspires consumers and creates trust. When an influencer has posted multiple photos over some time, organizations can explore different aspects and offerings of products. It is easier to test different approaches and try different strategies. The long-term partnership gives influencers the security to choose the brand. When influencers are choosing brands carefully, the audience can sense authenticity. Also, influencers have the opportunity to be more creative. (Yu 11 September 2019.)

Organizations also evaluate other additional factors. Content creativity, information credibility, and language are important factors when choosing the right influencer. An important aspect is to know how influencer designs their content and how it attracts the target group's attention. Instead of recommending the product or the brand in a straightforward way, influencers should integrate the product into their personal stories. Images are also important because they should be high quality and attractive for the influencers to be worth following. Besides, the quality and variety of the writing are also as important as stories and images. Influencers have different ways to express the deal with a brand to a consumer. An influencer and a brand need to have the same language when it comes to

partnerships. Consumers trust more the information which comes from a credible source. For the information to be evaluated as reasonable, it is important to ensure the source's credibility. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 89-90.)

### **2.3.3 Audience**

The audience-fit is an essential factor for brands. The reason why a brand's campaign fails can be because not enough attention is not placed on audience fit. Often influencer is a perfect fit at face value, but when an influencer is evaluated more closely, the influencers' audience is not what the company is looking for. Most of the influencer's audience can be located, for example, in a country where the company is not operating at all. (Backaler & Shankman 2018, 90.)

Influencers' popularity is usually measured by the number of followers, comments, or likes. An influencer who has more followers may be seen as more reliable, and therefore the product or service the influencer promotes is seen positively. Consumers' perception of influencers' popularity is an essential factor for organizations. The popularity cannot only be limited to the number of followers because the opinion leader is not directly dependent on the number of followers. Organizations try to find influencers who do not have a significant number of followers, especially if the aim is to endorse a unique product because such collaborations can create a discrepancy. Organizations try to find influencers who are well-accepted among their targeted audience. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 88.)

The fit between the influencer and consumer is one of the crucial aspects when choosing the right influencer. Influencers' ability to elicit reflections, actions, and emotions from the audience is essential. An influencer is resonating well with the target audience when influencers make people understand that followers are not only a number. Influencers want to convey to the audience that they are interested and engaged in their content. Consumers want to be part of influencers' life. Even when an influencer is a total stranger, they need to look alike in order to connect. When a consumer and an influencer have a great fit between each other, it ensures the acceptance of an engagement with the influencer. Specific age groups have an impact on some particular age groups. The equality between the influencer and the consumer regarding the generation they belong to also affects this relationship. Influencers may affect consumers more effectively if both actors of this communicative act are demographically similar. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 50-90.)

It is essential to know how consumers and influencers are engaging with each other (Halonen 2019). Monitoring the conversation with followers is an aspect that will help the organization recognize the influencers who are capable of spreading messages from the company's perspective. Influencers can gain success with their credibility, empathy, and

relevance to customers. When consumers share their opinions and experiences of goods and services with other consumers, it is in the hands of influencers to hold positive online conversations and persuade other customers. Influencers are resonating well with the target audience when influencers make people understand that their audience is not just a number but is interested and engaged in their content (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 45-50.)

The major challenge for organizations is to find an influencer who can influence the target audience with social media behavior. Organizations should use an authentic person who is reliable in their words, persuasive, and trustworthy enough to make the consumer take action. Also, influencers need to be credible in their social network, powerful enough to affect the audience, and expert about what they are talking about.

Values, the level of alignment, and interests between the influencer and the company are crucial. Relevance also depends on the content such as photos, campaigns, long and short texts, and audio that influencers use to transmit their messages. Relevance is also referring from the company's perspective to how closely the influencer's community matches up to the company's target audience. Also, how closely influencer's content aligns with fundamental topics that the company wants to associate with. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 49.)

## **2.4 Theory Summary**

In this chapter, the theory section is summarised. This chapter makes the structure of the theory easier to understand. The figure below helps to understand the main findings. Figure 2 clarifies the similarities between consumers' and companies' perspectives.

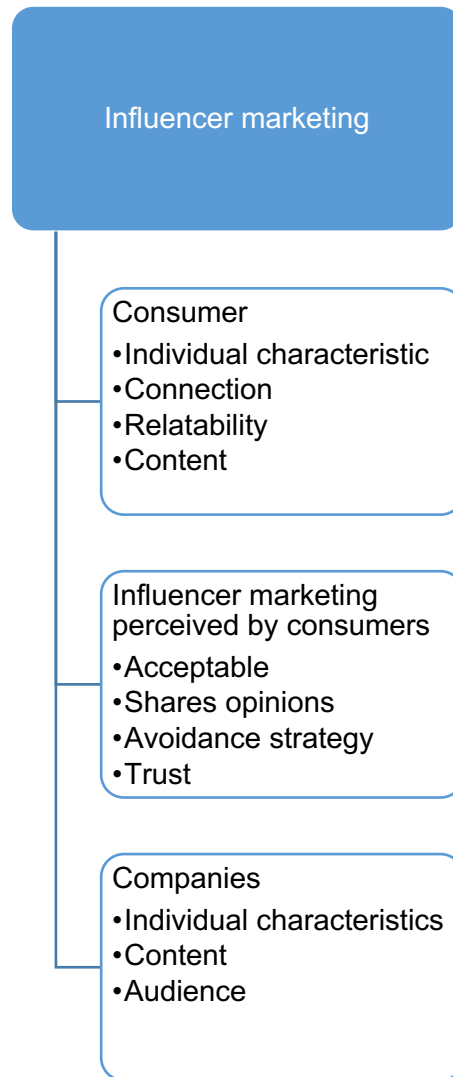


Figure 2. Main findings of influencer marketing

The effectiveness of influencer marketing can be measured with parasocial relationship theory. It explains the relationship between the influencer and a consumer, the strengths, and the essential characteristics. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 121.) The similarities between an influencer and a consumer will draw them to depend on each other. The repeated interaction helps to develop a parasocial relationship. (Sokolova & Kefi 2020.)

Consumers want to relate. The audience is constantly borrowing their personalities and lifestyles to look like them. Admiration often leads to a situation where consumers want to be and act the same way as influencers. Physical attractiveness is a big part of this. Two-sided interaction strengthens the parasocial relationship. Consumers can message influencers, and influencers can indicate interactive questions, which creates an illusion of a friendship. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 120-122.) A self-defined relationship is important for consumers. Consumers maintain the relationship and the self-definition by imitating the influencer. Critical factors for consumers are attractiveness, creativity, popularity, authenticity, and trustworthiness. (Wondwesen & Bronwyn 2021.)

Consumers behave and react differently on Instagram than on other social media sites. Consumers will more likely purchase a product or a service after looking company's social media post. (Casaló, Flavián & Ibáñez-Sánchez 2020.) Consumers are constantly exposed to marketing that contains priming. Priming messages are usually later used to analyze the organization, influencer, or product. (Doyle & Lee 2016.) When creating content, it needs to match a consumer's values, personal orientation or solve their problems. Content needs to be easy to absorb and entertaining to watch. When content is correctly made, it fulfills the required information, increases influencers' credibility and expertise. (Wondwesen & Bronwyn 2021.)

Influencer marketing is seen as a unique and original method of marketing. Consumers are trying to find inspiration, and it is affecting their purchasing behavior. Commonly influencer marketing is seen as acceptable if it is communicated openly (Annalect 2017). When there is a genuine interest in the product, consumers feel more positive about the paid promotion (Coco & Eckert 2020). Influencer marketing is also seen as less annoying than traditional marketing. Approximately eighty-three percent of consumers are aware of the paid collaborations, but only half of the application users are aware of the hidden advertising. (Annalect 2017.) Three in four consumers are avoiding advertising. Some consumers do not pay attention to it or are even considering advertising to be negative and impulsive. Paid, brand-based posts can cause negative attitudes and intentions to share content. Consumers still trust more influencers' messages than the company's own advertising. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 89.)

Companies' needs can be divided into three basic categories; individual characteristics, content, and audience. Important individual characteristics are authority, trust affinity, authenticity, and uniqueness. The company wants an original and sincere story that the influencer is combining with the brand. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 49-89.) Influencers need to be good at persuading consumers to purchase a product or a service. The persuasive approach is constantly evolving due to the transformation of consumers' needs. Marketers commonly use persuasive influencers who are experts in their own field and have a fit with the product. Earlier, the power of the influencer was only measured by the number of followers. Nowadays, authenticity and fit between the influencer and consumer are emphasized more. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 85.)

There are multiple factors in influencers' content that are evaluated before choosing the right influencer. Organizations want influencers who have all aspects covered. Previous campaigns, content creativity, information credibility, picture, and writing quality, and used language are assessed. Also, how content is designed and how it attracts the attention of

the target group. The brand can be incompatible with the account's content even when the influencer's interest is suited to the brand. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 87-90.) An important metric is post engagement and how many consumers can be reached. That is a fundamental metric to see the actual influence. (Miles 2019, 16).

Most commonly, brand-fit is the one that is talked about, and audience-fit is left behind. Audience-fit is an essential factor for brands. The influencer can be an excellent choice, but the influencers' audience is not ideal. Influencers' popularity needs to match the company's requirements. It is not only about the significant number of followers. Organizations want an influencer who is well-accepted among the audience. Influencers' engagement and how messages are delivered to consumers are essential factors. Organizations want an influencer who can influence their target audience. Also, values and the level of alignment is crucial. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 49-88.)

### **3 Research methods and methodology**

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research design and methods that have been used in this research. This chapter will provide detailed information on how the process went and what methods were used. Lastly, there are risks explained.

#### **3.1 Research Design & Methods**

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate consumers' opinions about influencer marketing. The perspective of influencers and consumers was also considered in order to gain a broad understanding of the topic as possible. Marketing is constantly evolving, and companies are continuously looking for new methods of marketing. This research helps both companies and influencers to make their work more efficient. Therefore, this thesis is conducted as both qualitative and quantitative research. Secondary research is utilized in a theoretical framework to gain supportive information for both qualitative and quantitative analysis.

The nature of this research design is exploratory research. The primary purpose of exploratory research is to explore an issue or a topic (McGivern 2014, 46). Exploratory research is informal research to gain information on the main research problem. The main uses of exploratory research are to gain background information, define terms, establish research priorities, and clarify problems and hypotheses. Exploratory research is flexible, so it allows the researcher to investigate different sources and, that way gain an understanding of the problem at hand. This research is usually chosen when the researcher does not know much about the problem and additional information is needed. A variety of methods are used to collect exploratory data. Some of the most common qualitative methods are secondary data, experience surveys, focus groups, and case analysis. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 94-96.)

The data collected during the research process can be divided into two broad categories: qualitative and quantitative. The majority of marketers use mixed methods marketing to combine the values and abilities of qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Mixed methods research is utilized in this thesis. Mixed methods research is the combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Mixed methods allow gaining the advantage of both methods. Quantitative data provide an answer to the question of what, and qualitative data provide the why. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 143-144.)

This research is implemented in three stages. The first step was to collect secondary data to gain basic knowledge and information on the topic. There are a lot of secondary data



available, but it is essential to have other data so the perspectives could be as broad as possible. In this research, quantitative techniques precede exploratory qualitative methods. That order was chosen because it helped to understand the findings in the quantitative phase. Quantitative analysis also provided new perspectives to the collected secondary data. In-depth interviews were implemented lastly because that helped to develop rich profiles to the collected secondary research and quantitative research. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 144-146.)

### **3.2 Secondary Data**

Desktop research was conducted by using secondary sources. The purpose of the secondary research was to collect a base for qualitative and quantitative studies. Secondary data is supporting all of the investigative questions. The collected data was used in a theoretical framework. The theoretical framework helps to understand the idea of influencer marketing and how consumers and organizations perceive it.

Secondary data can be divided into internal and external secondary data. Internal secondary data have been collected within an organization. That data includes, for example, sales records, invoices, and complaints. External data is obtained from outside of the organization. Most of the available external sources are online, but some sources are only available in print. External data can be divided into three categories: published sources, official data, and data aggregators. Books, newsletters, white papers, magazines, journals, and reports are the most common way to publish-secondary data. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 119-123.)

External data sources were used for this research. All used secondary data were from reliable sources, and data was carefully assessed by its quality and validity. Secondary data such as books, articles, newspapers, and reports were used for this research. Official statistics were also used in this research. Official statistics can be both quantitative and qualitative, and it provides information from multiple topics (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 123). Statistics support the collected theories and concepts. All secondary data such as articles, books, and statistics are used equally to provide as detailed answers as possible.

Secondary data is preferred because it can be obtained quickly, it is easily available, it is inexpensive, and it provides a contemporary look for trends and issues. Sometimes secondary data may be all that is needed to achieve the research objectives. Some problems might occur in secondary data. Problems include incompatible reporting units such as area units, timelines, mismatched units of measurements, lack of information needed to assess the credibility, and differing definitions used to classify the data. These problems appear when secondary data have not been explicitly collected to address the problem,

but the data collection has been for some other problem. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 123-126.)

### **3.3 Quantitative Data**

Quantitative research was conducted after secondary research. The purpose of quantitative research is to collect data from a large sample in a structured way (McGivern 2013, 189). Quantitative research is often referred to as survey research. Data collection falls into two basic categories: interrogative methods and observational methods. Data format and sources are clearly defined. The assembly and formatting of the data gathered follow an orderly procedure that is largely numerical. Statistical analysis and interoperation of the answers are a big part of quantitative research. Quantitative research involves a set of structured questions with predetermined response options to a significant number of respondents. It contains a sizeable representative sample of the population and proceeds for gathering data. The survey allows collecting a massive amount of data in a systematic, economical, and efficient way. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 144-172.)

Quantitative research was implemented through surveys. It contained interviews with a large group of people using a predesigned questionnaire. This method was chosen because the questionnaire allowed to collect a significant amount of data efficiently and in a limited amount of time.

A questionnaire is created for consumers, which will clarify their opinions, attitudes, and behaviors (Farnsworth 2019). When a questionnaire is compared to other qualitative methods, a questionnaire allows collecting a massive amount of data from a large sample size systematically and efficiently. The advantages of using questionnaires are ease of administration, standardization, ability to tap the unseen, sensitivity to subgroup differences, and suitability to tabulation and statistical analysis. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 172.)

The questionnaire was a computer-administrated questionnaire, where a computer plays a vital role in posing the questions and recording answers. A computer-administrated survey is most commonly an online survey in which respondents are directed to a website where the respondents can complete the questionnaire. Web-based questionnaires can easily qualify respondents, add administrated stimuli, skip questions, display graphics and audio-visuals, and accomplish various tasks in place of a human interviewer. A computer-administered questionnaire is relatively inexpensive, respondents are quite comfortable with this questionnaire type, and it has multiple user-friendly features. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 179.)

The questionnaire was created through a Webropol. The questionnaire was carefully designed to make answering for respondents as easy as possible. The questionnaire was modified so that the questionnaire design skipped questions that should not be asked based on previous answers. It included both open-ended questions as well as multiple-choice questions. Seventy-one consumer from Finland was conducted for this survey. The questionnaire was created based on the theoretical framework, and it supports the main research problem. The questionnaire consisted of 23 questions in which all respondents answered identical questions in the same order. The target group was 18 to 30-year-old consumers from Finland. Seventy-one persons were conducted for this survey.

### **3.4 Qualitative Data**

In this research, qualitative research was conducted after quantitative research. The primary purpose of qualitative research is to support the main research problem and give a broader perspective to the topic. There are multiple qualitative research techniques available. Those techniques influence, for example, focus groups, in-depth interviews, observation techniques, and online communities. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 146-159.)

Qualitative research is chosen most commonly because large-scale questionnaire often feels inappropriate. The qualitative research technique offers valuable insight into consumer behavior. This technique involves collecting and analyzing unstructured data by observing people. Questions and observations are open-ended, which is the reason why observations and statements are not standardized. Qualitative data can be categorized but not quantified. Qualitative data gives valuable information about consumer behavior and first-hand knowledge of the research problem. Any study that is conducted using unstructured questioning or observational technique can be identified as qualitative research. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 144.)

This thesis was conducted through in-depth interviews. Interviews are supporting the main research question, quantitative and secondary research. Interviews were done with Finnish influencers. The purpose of the interviews was to give more in-depth perspective and rich insight to all investigative questions. Interviews support the collected secondary data and questionnaire. In-depth interviews obtain opinions to ask questions that helped to understand different dimensions of the opinions better. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 160.)

In-depth interviews are defined as situations where an interviewer asks a set of probing questions from a respondent. The interviewer wants to determine what the respondent thinks about something or why they act in a certain way. Questions are either open-ended

questions or in a list of topics. The objectives of in-depth interviews are the gain unrestricted comments and opinions. In-depth interviews will help to get a better understanding and reasons for different dimensions of those opinions. In-depth interviews are beneficial when there is a need to understand decision-making on the individual level. The place where the interview is conducted depends on the situation. Sometimes it is conducted in the respondent's home or at a central interviewing location where several interviews in a relatively short time. The data will be collected into a summary report to identify shared themes. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 159-160.)

There are advantages and disadvantages to in-depth interviews. Most common in-depth interviews are more revealing than responses to predetermines survey. The reason for that is that interviewers have the opportunity to ask as many additional questions based on participant's answers. This way interviewer can generate rich and deep responses. These interviews can offer valuable insight into consumer's behavior. Sometimes there is a lack of structure in the process. Often interviewers need to be well trained because if they are not, the results may vary to give enough insight into the problem. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 160.)

For this research, three Finnish influencers were interviewed. Interviews were collected successfully, and no misunderstandings occurred during the interviews. Interviews occurred on different dates. One of the interviews was conducted as an email interview and two via online. Interviews were conducted by using semi-structured and structured techniques. This helped in the interview process because there was a premade structure for the interview. Additional questions were asked during the interview to get as detailed answers as possible. Also, respondents had the opportunity to start to discuss the topics and questions as much as needed.

The themes of the interviews were divided into three different categories.

1. The reasons why consumers follow Swedish and Finnish influencer
2. How consumers perceive influencer marketing
3. What companies want from influencers

The interviews started with an ice-breaking question to make the interviewee feel more comfortable. An essential part of the interview was discussing privacy issues and asking permission to record the interview. It is necessary to record the interview because it is easier to analyze the discussion afterward. The interviews lasted between 30 to 40 minutes, depending on the depth of the interviews. Lastly, closing questions were asked, and the interviewer thanked for taking the time for the interview. This structure helped to keep the conversation going smoothly throughout the interview.

### **3.5 Risks and Limitations**

Multiple risks might occur during the research. When risks are identified already in an early stage, they are easier to avoid. Risks are divided into three categories.

Risks in the desktop study are limited and not up-to-date sources available. Also, many sources may not be free to use. This was eliminated by ensuring the amount and the quality of the sources beforehand.

There has been a decline in the willingness of consumers to take part in questionnaires. Marketers have opened new efficient ways to collect data, and computer and telecommunication technology have advanced drastically in the past decade. Other reasons for declined willingness to participate in questionnaires have grown a desire for privacy, reduced amount of free time, poor response rate, and risks in validity and reliability of the information received. Often the reason is in a questionnaire. If the questionnaire is too long, unclear or questions are too complicated, consumers may skip the questionnaire entirely. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 174.) Because the questionnaire was conducted in English, language barriers might have emerged. These problems have been avoided by creating a questionnaire that was easy to answer. The questionnaire was simple and not too long. Questions were easy to understand, and they were designed so that all consumers could answer them. The questionnaire was sent to consumers who belonged to the target group. Also, reminder messages were sent to consumers.

There are risks in interview research. Lack of structure and a trained interviewer can cause varied results. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 160.) A timeline can cause problems also. In email interviews, the response rate is usually relatively low. That was eliminated by reminding them about the topic. Calls were also made for the interviewees about the interviews. The quality of replies was ensuring by straightforward and easy questions.

## 4 Results

The findings of the research are analyzed in this chapter. Results have been categorized into three categories: why consumers follow influencers, how consumers perceive influencer marketing and what companies want from influencers.

### 4.1 Participants

The questionnaire was conducted anonymously, although demographic questions were asked from respondents. Demographic questions aimed to get to know the respondents as extensively as possible.

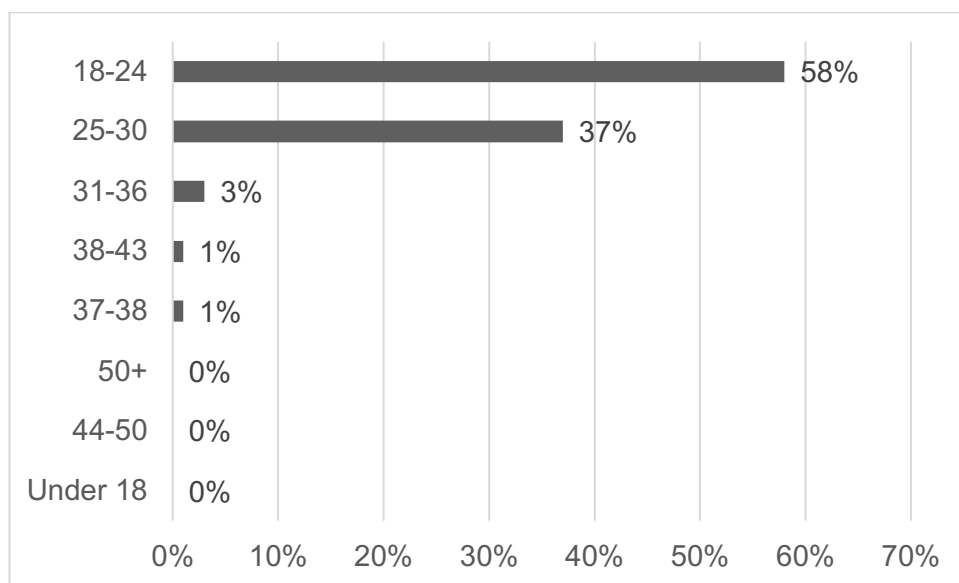


Figure 3. The age range of the respondents

The target group for this research was 18 to 30-year-old consumers from Finland. Almost all the respondents belonged to the target group. As shown in figure 3, only a couple of percent did not belong to the target group. The largest age groups of respondents were 18 to 24-year-olds. The second-largest age group was 25 to 30-year-olds. All respondents were from southern Finland. Most of the respondents were students. The majority of the students are working part-time along with the studies. Only 6 percent of the respondents are unemployed.

### 4.2 Reasons Why Consumers Follow Influencers on Instagram

In this section, reasons why consumers follow influencers are analyzed. Data was collected by interviewing Finnish influencers and creating a questionnaire for consumers.

These research methods enabled to gain valuable insights from both consumers and influencers perspective. The most common answers are presented in this chapter summarized.

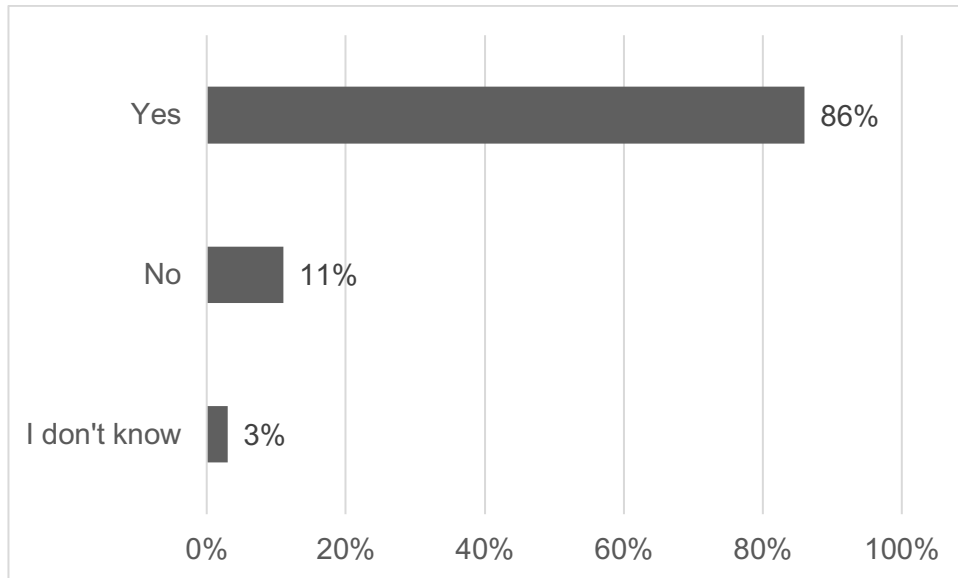


Figure 4. The percentage of the respondents who are following influencers on Instagram

As stated earlier in chapter 2, Instagram is considered to be one of the top social media platforms with over 1 billion active users. Instagram is also the biggest platform for fashion influencers, and approximately eighty percent use it as their primary channel. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 223.) The same results appear in the results of the questionnaire. All the respondents said that they use Instagram regularly. Instagram is seen as a new communication method, which is why it is used the most for socializing and content sharing. Consumers follow most topics around fashion and lifestyle. As shown in figure 4, over eighty-five percent of the respondents are following some influencer on Instagram. Also, forty-six percent of the respondents said that they use Instagram mainly to follow various influencers and companies.

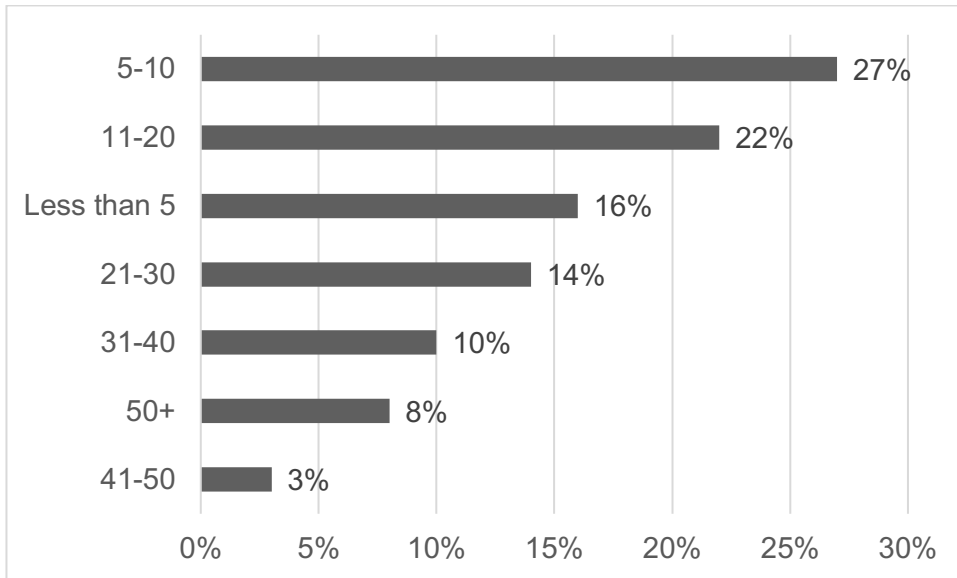


Figure 5. How many respondents follow influencer profiles on Instagram

Finnish consumers follow multiple influencers on Instagram. As shown in figure 5, the results were relatively evenly distributed. As figure 5 shows, twenty-seven percent stated that they follow 5 to 10 influencers simultaneously. This category was also the most popular among respondents. Figure 5 also shows that many respondents follow more than ten influencers at the same time. Influencers stated in the interviews that consumers follow influencers for a different reason. Consumers want to see different lifestyles, and often consumers would like to live a similar life. Also, consumers follow influencers because of their style and fun or beautiful content.

#### 4.2.1 Swedish Influencers

Key findings of consumer's reasons to follow Swedish influencers are presented. Findings have been divided into four main categories. The results from the open-ended questions and interviews are presented in an aggregated form.

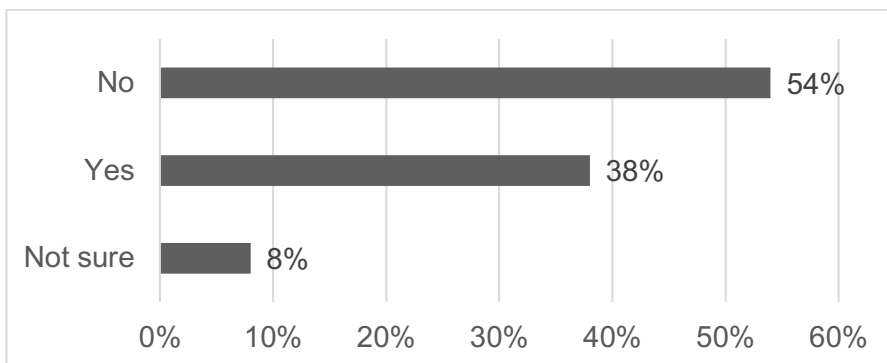


Figure 6. The percentage of the respondents who follow Swedish influencer



Figure 6 shows that 38 percent of the respondents follow Swedish influencers on Instagram. As shown in figure 6, the majority of respondents do not follow any Swedish influencers. However, Swedish influencers have gained their popularity in Finland. Figure 6 shows that thirty-eight percent of the respondents do follow Swedish influencers on Instagram.

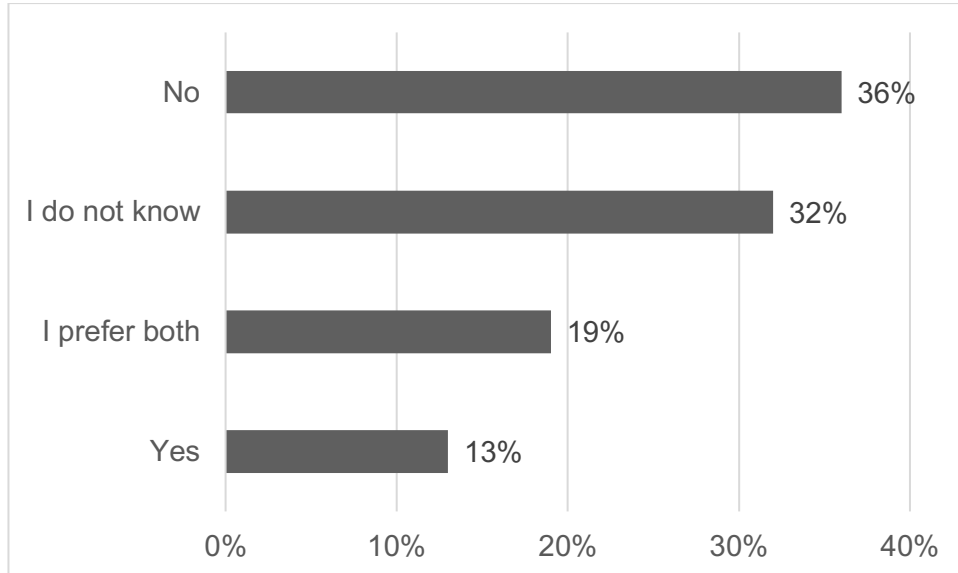


Figure 7. The percentages of respondents who prefer Swedish influencers over Finnish influencers

Finnish consumers prefer Finnish influencers over Swedish influencers. As shown in figure 7, thirty-six percent of the respondents do not prefer Swedish influencers over Finnish influencers. However, figures 6 and 7 show signs of how Swedish influencers have gained their popularity in Finland. Thirty-two percent of the respondents said in figure 7 that they cannot specify which influencer they prefer. Consumers often stated in a questionnaire that it is hard to choose between Finnish and Swedish influencers because they differ a lot from each other or they both have interesting content.

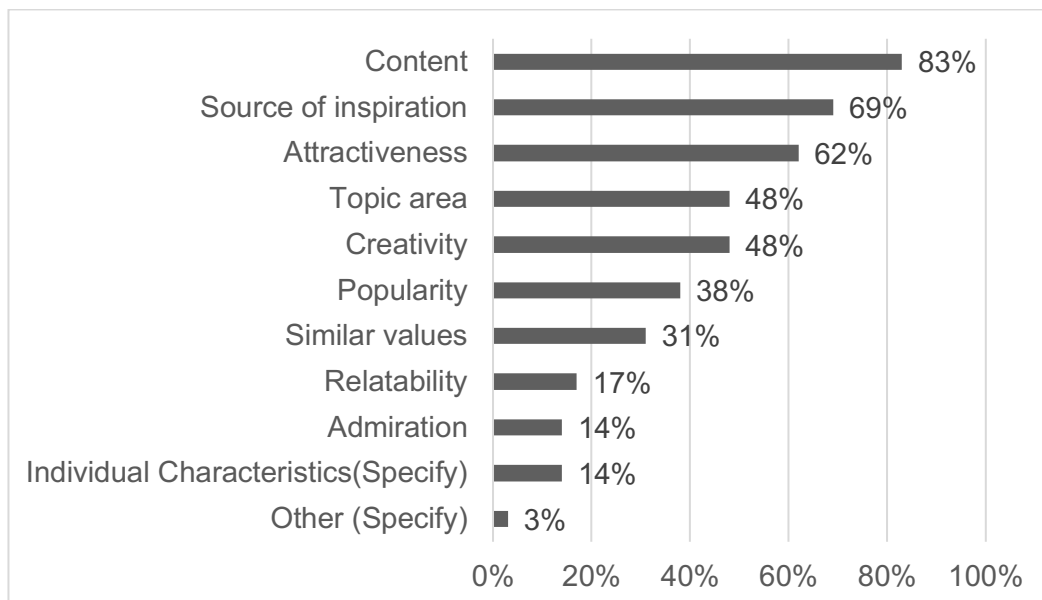


Figure 8. Reasons why consumers follow Swedish influencers

Consumers are less interested in the individual characteristics of Swedish influencers. From figure 8, we can see that the most critical requirement of parasocial relationship is influencers' content. Almost all requirements are related to content. Respondents said multiple times that Swedish influencers create interesting, creative, and attractive content compared to Finnish influencers.

Respondents' second requirement is influencers' sense of style. Fashion and inspiration rose a lot in the questionnaire. Swedish influencers are seen more as sources of inspiration than a person to whom consumers can relate. Attractiveness is also linked closely to content and inspiration. That is one of the essential reasons why Finnish influencers follow Swedish influencers. All these aspects make Swedish influencers a source of inspiration.

Finnish consumers admire Swedish influencer's lifestyles. Their lifestyle differs from Finnish ones, and that interests Finnish consumers. Influencers stated in the interview that Swedish influencers have an excellent ability to catch beautiful moments. Consumers do not realize that most of the scenes are created so that influencers' life would look even better. Those beautiful photos and moments make consumers envious of their lifestyle, and that creates fascination. Influencers also stated that influencers' lifestyles could create insecurities among consumers.

There are few aspects of why consumers prefer Finnish influencers over Swedish influencers. The biggest reason is the language. Some Swedish influencer uses Swedish on their social media channels, so that creates discomfort among the respondents. Many stated that they do not speak the language at all or are not that good at it. That is the most significant difference between Swedish and Finnish influencers.

Swedish influencers are seen as more international when compared to Finnish ones. Internationality is seen both as a negative and a positive factor. As stated earlier in chapter two, consumers follow influencers because consumers want to relate to influencers' daily life, thoughts, struggles, and suggestions (Lehtinen 2019). Many respondents said that internationality reduces relatability. When an influencer is more international, content is not as personal, and consumers cannot relate the same way as before. On the other hand, internationality increases inspiration. Swedish influencers most often promote different products that have not yet be seen in Finland. That raises consumers' interest because often, these products have not been seen before.

#### 4.2.2 Finnish Influencers

Key findings have been presented in this chapter. A questionnaire collected results with both open-ended and multiple-choice questions. The most common answers from the open-ended questions were analyzed. Consumer requirements of parasocial relationships have been divided into main categories. Finnish influencer's insights are presented in a supportive manner.

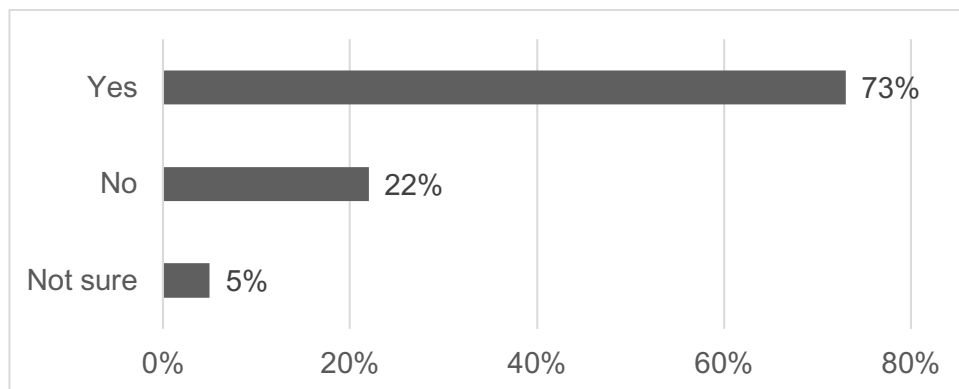


Figure 9. The percentage of the respondents who follow Finnish influencer

Influencers have become one of the essential marketing tools. Figure 8 shows that seventy percent of the respondents are following Finnish influencers on Instagram. Consumers follow both Finnish and Swedish influencers for different reasons. The most significant difference between Finnish and Swedish influencers is their relatability.

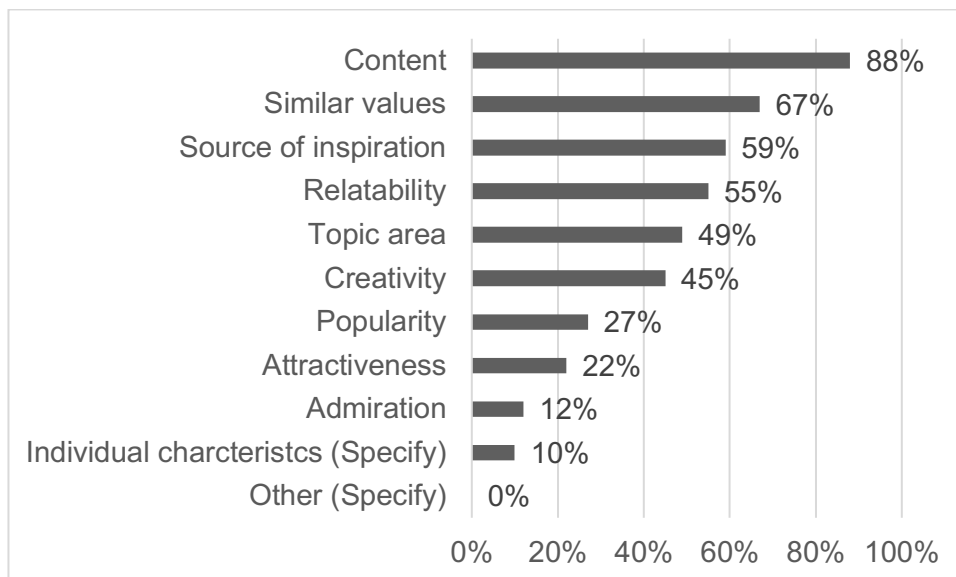


Figure 10. Reasons why consumers follow Finnish influencers

The first requirement that consumers want from Finnish influencers is relatability, which is essential for consumers. In figure 10, relatability was not the most chosen aspect, but relatability connected all the requirements together. As shown in figure 10, fifty-five percent said that relatability affects their decision to follow Finnish influencers. Relatability is not only the most significant factor affecting consumers' decision-making, it is also one of the most important differences what Finnish and Swedish influencers have. Finnish influencers are seen as more authentic and reliable. The word, content, and personality of Finnish influencers are seen as more trustworthy. Relatability also reflects to Finnish influencer's paid collaborations. Promoted products and services are more easily available for Finnish consumers, and they can benefit from them.

Language is the most significant benefit for Finnish influencers. Finnish consumers can relate better to Finnish influencers because of the same language. That weakens the credibility and relatability of Swedish influencers. Most of the respondents said that they are not good with Swedish, and they feel more comfortable following Finnish influencers. Also, collaborations are more credible and reliable in the eyes of Finnish consumers when it is done in Finnish. Many respondents stated that they want to support friends and relatives who are working as an influencer.

The third identified requirement of parasocial relationships is influencers' personality. That requirement reflects relatability because consumers can connect with influencers who have similar personalities and values as they do. Finnish influencers stated in the interview that consumers want to know influencers on a deeper level. Influencers get the most engagement when they tell something personal about themselves so that the audience can get to know them on a deeper level. Consumers want to see influencers' insecurities

and bad and good moments without hiding anything. That creates connectivity, and consumers can truly build a connection with the influencer. Similar values and interests are the fourth identified parasocial relationship requirement. Similar values and interests are strongly connected to personality and relatability. When values are not the same, a connection is hard to build.

The fifth requirement is influencers' content and inspiration. As shown in figure 10, the most popular category is content. It is essential for consumers that the content and the topic area are interesting. Consumers want to see a balance in the content of influencers. Consumers do not only want to see paid collaboration posts; they also want to see authentic pictures. Influencers stated that consumers feel more comfortable with Finnish influencer content because their marketing targets Finnish consumers. Also, the collaborations are chosen to meet the needs of Finnish consumers.

### 4.3 How Consumers Perceive Influencer Marketing

This chapter analyzes how consumers perceive influencer marketing. Data were collected by a questionnaire and by interviewing Finnish influencers. Questions were both open-ended and multiple-choice questions. All answers are in a summarized form.

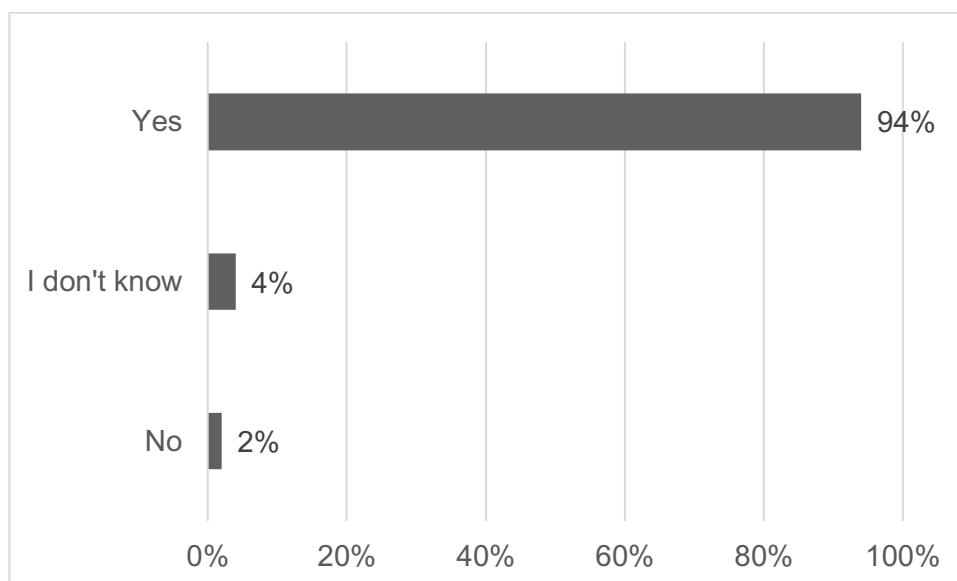


Figure 11. The percentage of how many consumers is aware of influencer marketing

Awareness of influencer marketing is presented in figure 11. The figure shows that over ninety percent of the respondents are aware of influencer marketing on Instagram. The reasons for awareness are the transparency of influencers and regulations related to influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is heavily regulated in Finland, so the recognisability of advertisements is covered by the Consumers Protection Act. According to the regulation, consumers have the right to know when someone is trying to influence them for the purpose of a commercial. (Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority 2019.)

Influencer marketing strongly divides opinions. According to the questionnaire, influencer marketing is mainly seen positively or neutrally. Consumers trust the words of an influencer more than traditional marketing, and it is seen as a relatable marketing method. In the interviews, influencers stated that the perception depends mainly on how many influencers consumers follow. If most of the content contains marketing, consumers are often more critical in terms of marketing. On the other hand, consumers' awareness is also influenced by current trends, such as the general perception of marketing and marketing content.

Some respondents do not feel positive about influencer marketing. Consumers often feel that influencers are not genuine and do not stand behind the products that they promote. Consumers feel more positively about influencer marketing if it is done transparently. Consumers want to know when an influencer is trying to affect their purchasing decisions. The work of influencers is also seen positively if it suits the brand and image of the influencer. An influencer can cause negativity in the consumer's eyes if the influencer collaborates with several companies within the same field.

In the interviews, influencer stated that consumers do not realize that the work of influencers is a large complex which consists of many parts. Consumers often see influencer marketing as a simple deal between the organization and influencer. However, there is, for example, a lot of hidden marketing. Influencers advertise everything that they post on their account. For example, influencers' everyday posts can draw more attention than posts dedicated to collaborations. That way, consumers can genuinely see what influencers enjoy wearing. When influencers are transparent and honest, they can affect consumers' judgments and behavior related to content and products. Influencers need to be interested in the products and the brand in order to build trust with consumers because they want to relate and hear honest opinions about the products.

Influencers stated in the interviews that consumer's purchase decisions often seem to be based on recommendations. In many cases, when a consumer is making a purchasing decision, a comparison between products is not necessary because consumers base their advertising decision. The more consumers see a product in the media, the more likely the consumer is to make a purchasing decision. Human psychology is also widely used in marketing. Therefore, the consumer may not always know that their purchasing decision is based on influencer marketing. This is also influenced by the consumer's relationship with the influencer. For example, when a consumer has followed an influencer for a long time, they will more easily trust the opinions and recommendations of the influencer, and purchasing decisions are made unconsciously and on a lower threshold.

#### **4.4 What Companies Want from Influencers**

This chapter is written based on interviews with Finnish influencers. Influencers provided valuable insights from their perspective and experiences. Companies' needs are divided into three main categories; individual characteristics, content, and audience.

Individual characteristics, attributes, and values are often seen as relevant in communicating and presenting a company's values. The essential characteristic is influencers' authenticity and reliability. The company also appreciates the straightforward and friendly approach of the influencer. Consumers want to relate to and trust the influencer. If the influencer is not an own genuine self, the consumer does not believe the influencer's message.

Companies want content from influencers that catches consumers' attention. Influencers' content needs to be transparent and trustworthy, which helps consumers to build trust. Companies want high-quality pictures which are as authentic as possible. That way, content is more credible. In the interviews, influencers stated that companies should check influencers' latest collaborations and content. That way, companies can identify whether their values and beliefs are compatible with influencers. Companies want influencer content to be consistent and follow the same values as the company. This way, the influencer creates credibility as part of the company's face.

Influencers' audience is vital for companies because it helps identify an image a company seeks to create for consumers. The most critical aspects in an influencer's audience are age, gender, and region. These categories help companies to delimit influencers who have the wrong audience. The number of followers is often an important aspect when choosing the right influencer. Some companies do not check influencer audiences beforehand. This can lead to a failed campaign because the influencer's audience may be completely different from what the company is looking for. There is a belief that the more followers an influencer has, the better. In most cases, the number of followers does not tell if the influencer is worth the investment. For example, influencers might have a large number of followers but a low engagement rate. Therefore, companies might invest in the wrong influencer. Many companies do not do collaborations with influencers who do not have enough followers. Companies want to selectively choose who they collaborate with because they do not want to give the impression that they collaborate with every influencer.

All categories are essential for companies. Companies want an influencer who pays attention to its audience, content, and engagement. Influencers' media image is also neces-

sary. Bad media image can ruin influencers' possible collaborations. In the interviews, influencers noted that influencer marketing is still not for all companies. Companies need to identify what their customer base is and what they want to achieve. If influencer marketing is not a suitable marketing method for the company, it might cause more harm than good.



## **5 Conclusion and Discussion**

In this chapter, all thesis findings are summarized in order to determine the key results of the research. The key findings are presented to answer the research question. The reliability and validity are indicated secondly. Recommendations for influencers, companies, and future research are provided. Lastly, the author's own learning during the research process is reflected.

### **5.1 Key Findings**

The research objective of this research was to gain an understanding of how consumers perceive influencer marketing and what are the reasons why consumers follow Swedish and Finnish influencers. The research question was built based on the objectives: How are 18 to 30-year-old Finnish fashion consumers affected by Finnish and Swedish Instagram influencers? The perspective of companies was taken into consideration in order to obtain as broad a perspective as possible. Therefore, the investigative questions were divided into five questions:

**IQ 1.** Why do consumers follow Swedish fashion influencers?

**IQ 2.** Why do consumers follow Finnish fashion influencers?

**IQ3.** How is influencer marketing perceived by the target group?

**IQ4.** What companies want from the influencers?

**IQ 5.** How influencers could improve their Instagram marketing?

The leading target group in the questionnaire was 18 to 24-year-olds (58%), and the second-largest age group was 25 to 30-year-olds (37%). The majority of the respondents were female (72%), and only 27 percent were male. Also, all the respondents were from Finland and mainly from Uusimaa.

#### **5.1.1 IQ 1. Why Do Consumers Follow Swedish Fashion Influencers?**

Finnish consumers follow Swedish and Finnish influencers for different reasons. As stated earlier in chapter 4, Swedish influencers are not as popular as Finnish influencers. Still, Swedish influencers have their audience in Finland, as 34 percent follow Swedish influencers. One reason why Finns do not favor Swedish influencers is their language. Some Swedish influencers use Swedish on their social media channels, and that creates discomfort among the respondents. Respondents stated that they do not either speak the language or are not good at it.

The main requirement for consumers is influencers' content. The influencer can be chosen based on attractiveness, popularity, or creativity. The reason can also be that followers lack some aspects of what the influencer has, which makes an ongoing relationship with the influencer desirable. (Wondwesen & Bronwyn 2021.) In the questionnaire, consumers stated that Swedish influencers create more interesting, creative, and attractive content when compared to Finnish influencers. Influencer's sense of style is also seen as one of the main reasons why consumers follow Swedish influencers. Swedish influencers are seen more as sources of inspiration than a person that consumers can trust and relate to.

Another critical requirement is an inspiration. Swedish influencers are seen more as sources of inspiration than a person to whom consumers can relate. Consumers admire influencer's style and lifestyle. Their lifestyle interest Finnish consumers because it differs a lot from Finnish ones. Also, Swedish influencers have the ability to catch and create beautiful moments.

In the interviews, influencers stated that the audience maintains the relationship and the self-definition by imitating the influencer (Wondwesen & Bronwyn 2021). Consumers often want to live a similar lifestyle that the influencer is living, so the audience is constantly borrowing their personalities and lifestyles to look like influencers. Admiration often leads to a situation where consumers want to be and act the same way as influencers. Physical attractiveness is a big part of this. Two-sided interaction strengthens the parasocial relationship. Consumers can message influencers, and influencers can indicate interactive questions, which creates an illusion of a friendship. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 120-122.)

### **5.1.2 IQ 2. Why Do Consumers Follow Finnish Fashion Influencers?**

The first requirement of why consumers prefer Finnish influencers is their relatability. Relatability is also the most significant difference between Finnish and Swedish influencers. Fifty-five percent said that relatability is an essential aspect in Finnish influencers, while only seventeen percent said the same from Swedish influencers. People want to relate to influencers' daily life, thoughts, struggles, and suggestions (Lehtinen 2019). Finnish influencers are posting more about their personal life and interest which bring more relatability to influencers. Paid collaborations also affect Finnish consumers more because products that influencers promote are more easily available. The word, content, and personality of Finnish influencers are seen as more reliable. The audience accepts influence better if their value system matches with the influencer. (Wondwesen & Bronwyn 2021.) The similarity between interacting individuals in terms of beliefs, social status, and education is related to the number of interactions the consumer has. Similar communicators are more

likely to depend on each other. The repeated interaction helps to develop a parasocial relationship. (Sokolova & Kefi 2020.)

One of the requirements for consumers is influencers' personality. Consumers can connect better to influencers when their personality matches with theirs. Finnish influencers are seen as authentic and trustworthy persona. When influencers are authentic, also their product recommendations are more reliable (Annalect 2017). Consumers want to see influencers' bad and good moments without hiding anything. That creates connectivity, and consumers can truly build a connection with the influencer.

Influencers' content is an essential requirement for consumers. Consumers want to see a balance in the content of influencers. Consumers do not only want to see paid collaboration posts; they also want to see authentic pictures. Influencers stated that consumers feel more comfortable with Finnish influencer content because their marketing targets Finnish consumers. Also, the collaborations are chosen to meet the needs of Finnish consumers.

### **5.1.3 IQ 3. How is Influencer Marketing Perceived by the Target Group?**

Consumers are aware of influencer marketing. The study found that 94 percent of consumers are aware of it. The reasons for awareness are a large number of influencers in the market and regulations related to influencer marketing (Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority 2019). Consumers are not always aware of the paid structure of the content and only see it as a simple deal between an influencer and a company (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 89).

Influencer marketing still strongly divides opinion. The majority of consumers mostly feel positive about it. Consumers see influencer marketing as a relatable marketing method, and they trust the word of an influencer more than traditional marketing. Influencer marketing is seen positively if it suits the brand and image of the influencer. It is also essential that it is communicated openly and the influencer is genuinely interested in the products (Annalect 2017). Consumers' purchasing decisions are most commonly based on recommendations, and comparison between products is not necessary. Consumers who are exposed to a priming message use those messages later to analyze the organization, influencer, or the products (Doyle & Lee 2016). Consumers may not always know that their purchasing decisions are based on influencer marketing. Human psychology and the relationship between influencer and consumer are affecting a lot to the decision-making process.

Consumers who do not feel positively about influencer marketing often think that influencers are not genuine. Influencers need to be transparent and honest about their collaborations and products that they are marketing. An influencer might lose their credibility in the eyes of a consumer if influencers collaborate with several companies within the same field. Also, if influencers start to work on Instagram full-time, their authenticity may be threatened. Three in four consumers avoid advertising, using avoidance strategies. Consumers do not necessarily pay attention to paid advertising, and some might even consider them to be negative and intrusive. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 89.) Consumers' perception depends largely also on how many influencers consumers follow. If most of the content that consumers see contains marketing, consumers are often more critical in terms of marketing. Current trends such as the general perception of marketing and marketing content affect how consumers perceive influencer marketing.

#### **5.1.4 IQ 4. What Companies Want from the Influencers?**

This subchapter presents the results of what companies want from the influencers. The results are summarized from the questionnaire, interviews, and the theoretical framework. The ICA framework was used to categorize the companies' requirements into three categories: individual characteristics, content, and audience. All these categories are explained separately in this chapter.

The individual characteristics of influencer, audience and content affect a company's decision to choose the right influencer. The number of followers is not the most critical factor, but rather companies want an influencer who has aspects from every category. For example, influencers with a large number of followers might have low engagement rate but the influencer with a smaller number of followers have a high engagement rate. That metric presents which influencers can truly influence their audience (Miles 2019, 16).

Individual characteristics are the most common criteria adopted. Due to the transformation of consumers' needs, marketers want an influencer who is perceived as trustworthy, authentic, an expert in their own field, and fits the product. Important characteristics such as influencer's authority, trust affinity, authenticity, and uniqueness are also essential aspects. Authenticity is considered to be the most critical aspect of influencer marketing. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 49-89.) Individual characteristics, attributes, and values are often seen as relevant in communicating and presenting a company's values.

Consumers' insight into the influencers' commercial orientation is an important aspect when companies are choosing the right influencer. Consumers appreciate more non-commercial orientation. Consumers feel negative if influencers' content is overly commercial-

oriented and only posted because of commercial motivations. That can cause that consumers start to think about the ethicality of the influencer. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 88-89.) An influencer might lose their credibility in the eyes of a company or consumer.

Companies want content from influencers that catches consumers' attention. Influencers' content needs to be transparent and trustworthy, which helps consumers to build trust. Instead of endorsing a brand mechanically, influencers should create an original and sincere story that they combine with the brand (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 49-89). Companies should check influencers' latest collaborations and content. The suitability between the consumer and the message content is essential (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 87). That way, companies can identify whether their values and beliefs are compatible with influencers. Also, this way influencer creates credibility as part of company's face.

Influencers' audience is essential for companies because it helps to identify what kind of an image a company seeks to create for consumers. When the main reasons are identified, it allows companies to delimit influencers who have the wrong audience. Some companies do not check influencer audiences beforehand. This can lead to a failed campaign because the influencer's audience may be completely different from what the company is looking for. Organizations try to find influencers who are accepted among their targeted audience. Also, the fit between the influencer and consumer is crucial when choosing the right influencer. (Yesiloglu & Costello 2021, 50-90.)

#### **5.1.5 IQ 5. How Influencers Could Improve Their Instagram Marketing?**

Consumers prefer both Finnish and Swedish influencers for different reasons. Finnish influencers are seen as more valuable because consumers can relate better to Finnish influencers. Consumers want to believe influencers' words, and influencers are often seen as more trustworthy than traditional media. In order for companies and consumers to build trust, influencers need to be honest, transparent, and reliable in their work. Consumers prefer influencers that are natural and believe in the products that they promote. Therefore, influencers should focus more on showing their personality.

Influencers' content is extremely important for consumers. Consumers want influencers' content to be more natural, unique, and easier to approach. Consumers want to see more personal and unique content. Therefore, influencers should share more about their everyday life, thoughts, and struggles. Also, it is essential that not all posts are paid ads. That can cause a loss of credibility.

Influencers' should avoid collaborating with several companies in the same field. That can cause negativity for influencers, and therefore, influencers may lose their trust with consumers. Consumers might feel overwhelmed, and therefore trust is almost impossible to rebuild. As a result, companies may also gain negativity and lose the value of their brand. It is essential that the influencer only advertises products that they like and use. It is also vital that the brand fits into their lifestyle. That creates credibility and reliability. Consumers want influencers' to be honest about their collaborations. Therefore, influencers should focus more on the clear visibility of paid partnerships with companies. Also, influencers should be more transparent about the gifts that they receive.

## **5.2 Assessment of Reliability and Validity**

This subchapter provides detailed information on how the reliability and validity of this research were ensured. With the reliable measure, a respondent response in a similar manner to an identical question. Validity refers to the accuracy of the measurement, and it is always truthful. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2016, 215.)

All measurements that have been used in this research are reliable and valid. This has been ensured through careful research planning and data collection procedures. A lot of high-quality sources were used to write the theoretical framework. The main sources were books and articles. Only recently published and reliable sources were used for this research. All primary and secondary data sources have been referenced correctly and presented with academic integrity. All steps are clearly explained, and all possible additional appendices and figures have been attached. The results are based on the literature, quantitative questionnaire, and qualitative interviews.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used for this thesis, ensuring that the study is reliable and accurate. The questionnaire was carefully designed to obtain the most reliable responses from the respondents. The questions were designed based on the theoretical framework. Multiple consumers also tested the questionnaire before sending it to the respondents. Based on the feedback from the consumers, the questionnaire was modified numerous times. This ensured that the questionnaire worked in the best possible way and that the questions were both straightforward and easy to answer. All of these steps ensured that the data obtained were of the best possible quality. Data were analyzed by using Excel, which ensured that the received data is as accurately presented as possible. Data was demonstrated by using statistical graphs. The qualitative interview

questions were written based on the theoretical framework and the questionnaire. Questions were carefully worded to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Additional questions were asked in order to obtain the most accurate answers possible.

This study is not entirely valid. The size of the sample weakens the validity. This study cannot be applied to the whole population because 71 respondents answered the questionnaire. Qualitative interviews with influencers improve the validity of the research.

### **5.3 Recommendations for Companies**

This subchapter provides recommendations to companies. The recommendations are compiled based on the questionnaire, interviews, and theoretical framework. Influencer marketing is seen as an effective marketing method, and therefore, companies should use it as part of their marketing plan. Still, influencer marketing is not for all businesses. The companies must choose influencers that match their brand and values. It is important to evaluate whether the influencers are able to achieve your business goals.

The first recommendation is to focus on Finnish influencers. Most consumers prefer Finnish influencers because they are seen as more authentic and sincere. Consumers can also relate better to Finnish consumers because of their language. The same language makes the influencer more reliable as well as more credible. Paid collaborations are also easier to promote because influencers' marketing is targeted at Finnish consumers. Therefore, the collaborations meet easier the needs of Finnish consumers.

The second recommendation is to choose influencers who show their personality. Consumers want to see their personality in their everyday content. Consumers prefer Finnish influencers because of their reliability. When the content is fun, genuine, and authentic content consumers can relate to it. Companies should choose influencers that are transparent about their collaborations. Consumers prefer influencers who genuinely like the brand and the products that they promote. Content is also vital because that way consumers can build the connection and trust with the influencers.

### **5.4 Recommendations for Future Research**

Influencer marketing is currently a very popular method of marketing, and it is constantly evolving. Influencer marketing is also changing all the time as new social media channels are emerging. Therefore, companies need to investigate influencer marketing constantly. Both qualitative and quantitative data are essential for future research. Especially qualitative information for future developments is important. Qualitative data is necessary for the

future because it provides in-depth opinions and insights into why consumers feel a certain way about influencers' and they work.

In the future, the opinions of companies could be researched more deeply. Influencer marketing has a significant impact on companies, as influencers need to work closely with the companies to meet their needs. Therefore, companies' insights are essential for them to succeed. Through qualitative research, companies could give valuable insights and value to the research.

In order to ensure the validity of future research, the sampling method could be different. The results of the questionnaire cannot be applied to the whole population with certainty. A limited time frame, a global pandemic, and limited resources are affecting the sample. In future research, only Finnish influencers could be researched. Finnish companies could benefit more from that study, as the study would focus on only one county. That way, deeper questions could be asked from consumers. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods could be utilized in the research. Quantitative research would help to get an overview of the topic, while qualitative research would help to find out consumers' opinions.

## **5.5 Reflection on Learning**

The thesis process was extremely interesting and educational. The process taught a lot of beneficial information for a future career. The author learned better academic writing as well as referencing during the research. This process taught time management skills, dedication, and how to implement long projects. A lot of valuable insights and new perspectives of consumer's opinions on influencer marketing were learned. Overall, the research was completed successfully with valuable information.

The biggest challenge was when the plan changed during the research process. Initially, companies were supposed to be interviewed at the end of the process, but they were not possible to implement. The global pandemic and the willingness of companies to participate in the research slowed down the process. The challenge was also to write the thesis together with full-time work. The scheduling of the thesis was challenging, but all the author's free time was used to complete the thesis.

Overall the research was completed successfully despite the challenges and changes during the process. The author learned a lot of valuable information, and she expanded her



knowledge on the topic of influencer marketing. These skills and knowledge will help the author's future career.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Questionnaire

1. Do you follow any influencer on Instagram? \*

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

2. Select from the following list the social media platforms which you actively use? \*

- Instagram
- Facebook
- YouTube
- Twitter
- Tjktok
- Pinterest
- I do not use any social media platform
- Other

3. Select which of the following topics of influence are the most interesting on Instagram? \*

- Health
- Fitness
- Cooking
- Fashion
- Beauty
- Lifestyle
- News & Politics
- Music
- Other (Specify)

4. Select the main reasons of yours for the use of Instagram \*

- Socializing
- Content sharing
- To follow brands
- To follow influencers
- Business use
- Engaging
- Other (Specify)

5. How many influencer profiles do you follow on Instagram? \*

- Less than 5
- 5-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 50+

6. Do you follow any Swedish influencer profiles on Instagram? \*

- Yes
  - No
  - Not sure
-

7. List at least three attributes which affect why you follow Swedish influencer profiles on Instagram? \*


8. What are the reasons you follow Swedish influencers on Instagram? \*

- Individual Characteristics (Specify)
- Creativity
- Popularity
- Content
- Topic area
- Admiration
- Similar values
- Source of inspiration
- Attractiveness
- Relatability
- Other (Specify)

9. Do you follow Finnish influencer profiles on Instagram? \*

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

10. List at least three attributes which affect why you follow Finnish influencer profiles on Instagram? \*




11. What are the reasons you follow Finnish influencers on Instagram? \*

- Individual characteristics (Specify)
- Creativity
- Popularity
- Content
- Topic area
- Admiration
- Similar values
- Source of inspiration
- Relatability
- Attractiveness
- Other (Specify)

12. Do you prefer Swedish influencers over Finnish influencers? \*

- Yes
- No
- I prefer both
- I do not know

13. Because you answered yes to the previous question, can you justify why you prefer Swedish influencers over Finnish influencers? \*


14. Can you justify, why you prefer Finnish influencers over Swedish influencer \*


15. Please justify why you prefer both Finnish and Swedish influencer \*


16. Are you aware of Influencer marketing on Instagram? \*

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

17. How do you perceive influencer marketing? \*


18. How could influencers improve their work? \*


19. Is there anything else you would like to add about influencer marketing?


20. What is your gender? \*

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

21. How old are you? \*

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-30
- 31-36
- 37-38
- 38-43
- 44-50
- 50+

22. How would you describe your employment status? \*

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Unemployed
- Student

23. Do you work as an influencer? \*

- Yes
- No
- I prefer not to say

24. Where do you live (specify)? \*

- Finland
- ~~Sweden~~
- ~~Norway~~
- ~~Other~~

Appendix 2. Qualitative interview framework

Qualitative Interview Frame		
Thematic Category	Questions	Additional and Assisting Questions
<b>Introduction</b>	1. How would you describe influencer marketing from your point of view?	
<b>Topic Area 1:</b> Why Consumers are Interested in Influencers	1. Do you think Finnish consumers are more interested in Finnish influencers than influencers from abroad? Why?  2. What make Finnish influencers interesting?  3. Do you follow any Swedish influencers?  4. What are the biggest reasons/attributes why consumers follow influencers?  5. Do you have anything to add?	3 a. Do you think Finnish consumers are interested in Swedish influencers?  b. What make Swedish influencers interesting?
<b>Topic Area 2:</b> How consumers perceive influencer marketing	1. How consumers perceive influencer marketing?  2. Do you think influencers can affect consumers' purchasing decisions, and how?  3. Do you think influencers have a more significant impact on consumers than original media channels, and why?  4. Do you think influencers can affect consumers' judgment and behavior related to the content?  5. Do you have anything to add?	1. a. Do you think influencer marketing is seen more positively or negatively? Why?  b. Are consumers aware you hidden marketing?  c. Do you think consumers are aware of it?  2. a. Do you think consumers are affected by influencer marketing without them realizing it?  3. a. Can influencers have a better trust with consumers than traditional media?
<b>Topic Area 3:</b> What companies want from influencers?	1. Do you think all companies should do influencer marketing?  2. Are individual characteristics important for companies? When? Why?  3. Is influencers' content important for companies, and why?	2. a. What are the most critical attributes for companies?

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Is the influencers' audience an important aspect for companies, and why?</li> <li>5. What are the most important attributes/aspects when companies are choosing an influencer?</li> <li>6. Do you think the number of followers is an essential factor for companies and why?</li> <li>7. Are there any other attributes that are affecting to company's choice?</li> <li>8. Do you have anything to add?</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Closing</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When you are creating content for Instagram, do you have any pressures? Why?</li> <li>2. What is the future of influencer marketing?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Do you think about companies/consumers when creating a post?</li> <li>b. Do you think that you have to change yourself?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Do you think influencer marketing could be the main source of marketing?</li> </ol>