The impact of social media influencer marketing on purchasing decisions of Millennials in Finland

Abstract

Author(s)	Publication type	Published
Heinonen, Niina	Bachelor's Thesis	2021
	Number of pages	
	40	

Title of Publication

The impact of influencer marketing on purchasing decisions of Millennials in Finland

Degree and field of study

Bachelor of Business Administration

Abstract

In the first quarter of 2021, the number of internet users worldwide was more than 4.6 billion, and the number of social media users had also passed the 3.8 billion mark. These numbers indicate that almost 60 percent of the people worldwide are now online, and numerous studies propose that more than half of the world population will be using social media by the end of the year 2021. The power and impact of social media is indisputable.

The main purpose for this research was to examine how social media and the marketing power of its influencers effect on buying demeanours of Millennials in Finland. Because of social media, people are more connected than ever, and they can access to any sort of information with their smart devices. For the brands social media has offered a new way to stay connected with their customers, but at the same time the competition between brands has increased. Social media has taken the marketing game of brands to another level and this on the other hand has affected on the decision making of consumers.

Social media is changing and developing daily. This means that if something was epoch-making this week, there is a chance it will be old news next week. In the marketing point of view, this means that the social media strategy for brands should be strong but also adjustable. In strategy building more focus should be put on understanding consumer purchasing behaviour. This research introduces several kinds of factors influencing the purchasing behaviour of people, along with the most general types of buying behaviours.

Concepts like social media, social media platforms, newest social media trends, social media marketing, and influencer marketing were analysed and discussed in the literature part of this study. For the research part a qualitative research was performed in order to receive more realisation and understanding of the underlying reasons and drive of people. All the participants of this research were familiar with the concept of influencer marketing and most of them were following influencers on their social media platforms. Theme interviews were conducted and after the interviews the data was analysed.

The data collected during this research is showing that Millennials see influencers more like acquaintances in social media, but when the advertising is executed in the right manner, influencers have an impact on the purchasing decisions and information seeking of Millennials in Finland. When the influencer marketing is implemented properly it has long-lasting consequences and this is something brands should put their focus on. The significance of social media on consumers purchasing behaviour is very apparent and assumably only increases in the future with new technologies emerging in the market.

Keywords

Social media, Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Customer, Purchase, Consumer behaviour, Millennials

Contents

Appendices

Appendix 1. Theme interviews form

1   Introduction

Social media has taken over an essential part of people's daily life and routines. With ongoing changes in ambience and trends, social media plays an enormous role in daily communication methods and decision making of people. The aim of this research is to analyse and examine the relationship between social media and a consumer group called Millennials in Finland and uncover the answer to the main research questions, which is: How social media influencer marketing is affecting on purchasing decisions of Millennials in Finland? The objective is to show how this examinee group of people use and perceive social media, social media marketing, and social media influencer marketing.

In order to attain the main research questions and objectives in this research, it is essential to understand consumer behaviour as a concept. Consumer behaviour is widely studied topic and there are several different ways to study its impact. This research work gives a little more insight for anyone, who is interested to get a better understanding on how this group of people deal with social media influencer marketing.

Social media influencer marketing has been blooming for quite some time now and influencers are the people, brands and personalities that people tend to trust. Social media influencers are said to be people who spark discussion and who inspire action (Dean, 2019). The most important task for any brand, no matter what category they belong to is to find the influencers close to their audience and form a strong and mutually beneficial relationship with them. In this study different social media influencer types are introduced by the number of followers, by types of content, and by their level of influence.

This thesis introduces the most used social media platforms and most recent social media marketing trends. Marketing on social media is expected to only increase in the future and it should be included to the marketing plan of every organization. However, keeping up with social media network changes might be challenging, since the updates happens weekly, and the social media strategy needs to follow those updates.

The theoretical framework of this research consists of social media, social media marketing and social media influencer marketing. The main research method used in this research was qualitative and theme interviews were conducted to examine the factors of social media affecting on purchasing decisions of Millennials in Finland. Moreover, this research is aiming to get a better understanding on how certain age group of people are following, perceiving, and qualifying the information on social media in the process of buying something online.

2   Social Media

Social media plays a notable role in the way people perceive and carry out their personal, philosophical and business lives. It is everywhere and people are spending more and more time on different social media platforms, checking Facebook, uploading photos and stories on Instagram, making funny content on Tik Tok or Tweeting on Twitter about some current topic of the day (Geyser 2021). This chapter portrays the phenomenon called social media and it is divided into five parts. The first part focuses on Social media in general and in the second and third part, different kind of social media platforms and current trends are being discussed. The last two parts of this segment centres on social media marketing and influencer marketing on social media.

> *"Social media refers to websites and applications that are designed to allow people to share content quickly, efficiently, and in real-time".*
>
> (Hudson 2020)

Nowadays smartphone applications are the most effortless way for people to tap into social media. However, it all started with computers, which were the first devices for communication. As for now, social media can allude to any internet communication device including computer, tablet or smartphone that enables sharing content and engross with other people (Hendricks 2021). Social media has moulded everything around us, its potency to share photos, opinions and, events online has changed our way of living and doing business (Hudson 2020).

Social media comprises an extensive selection of websites and applications. The uniqueness of social media is the unrated content people can engender there. Compared to other ways of mass communication such as newspapers, television channels, and radio stations, social media has less limitations as in what people can share (Hudson 2020). A social media account can be activated by anyone with an internet access. The content they are sharing is optional and it can obtain their nearest and dearest if the profile is private. However, some users prefer public profiles which means anyone who visits their profile can see the content they are sharing.
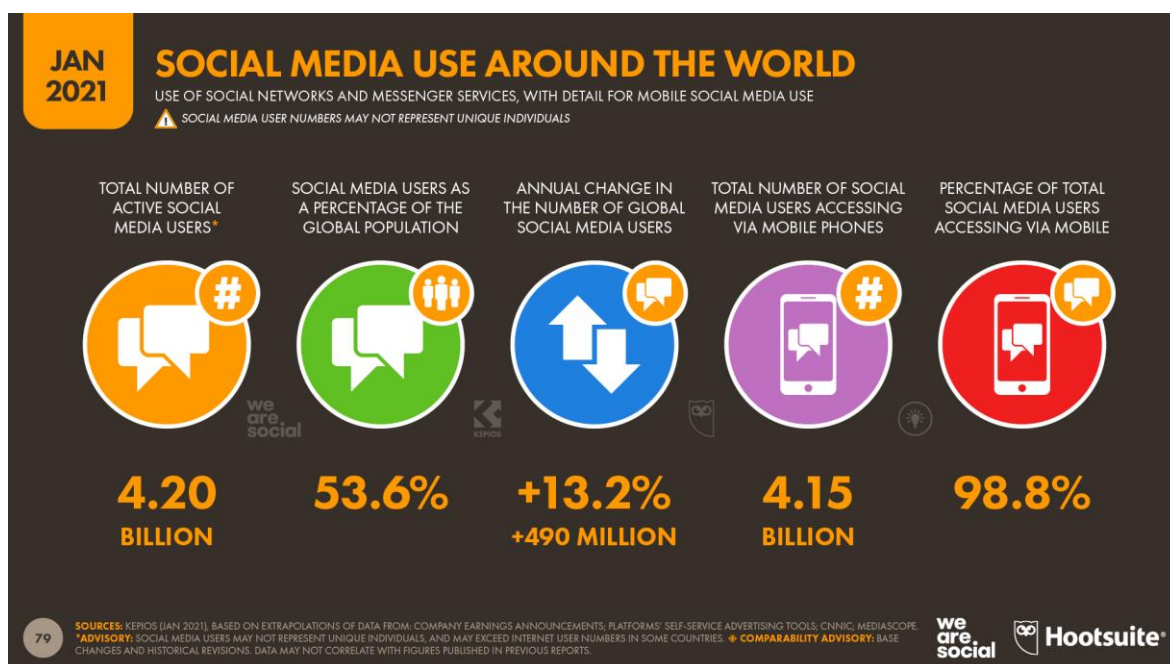
Figure 1. Social media use around the world in January 2021 (Hootsuite 2021)

2.1   Social Media Platforms

People often tend to think social media is a new phenomenon, when in fact its roots stretch far deeper than people could imagine. A brief overview in the history of social media will reveal that many platforms are the natural result of several decades of social development (Hendricks 2021).

Social media is often connected to smartphones, but actuality the first recognizable social media site, Six Degrees, was invented in 1997, well before smartphones. Six Degrees made possible for users to upload a profile and connect with other users. First blogging sites started to gain popularity in 1999 and this form of writing, sharing photos, and other media that is self-published online is still popular today. The popularity of blogging activated social media demand in people. In the early 2000s, sites like LinkedIn and Myspace obtained notability and online photo sharing took a stride with sites like Photopucket and Flickr. The invention of YouTube in 2005 started an entirely new era and way for people to be connected and it also shattered geographical limitations. Facebook and Twitter made their grand entrance in 2006 and they are still the most popular social media networks to this day. Other sites like Tumblr, Spotify and Pinterest started to emerge to fulfil certain social networking niches. However, the invention of Instagram in 2010 and Snapchat in 2011 changed the way of photo and video sharing for good. These two giants were followed by Chinese video-sharing service called Tik Tok in 2016 and it has taken video sharing to a completely new level (Hendricks 2021).

Today, the amount of social networking platforms is extensive, and some platforms are even linked together. Good examples of this are Facebook and Instagram who both allow their users to do cross-posting. This on the other hand generates an environment, where people can obtain maximum number of people. This chapter presents the most used social media platforms in the social media marketing point of view. According to Statista (2021) The top five includes: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Tik Tok.
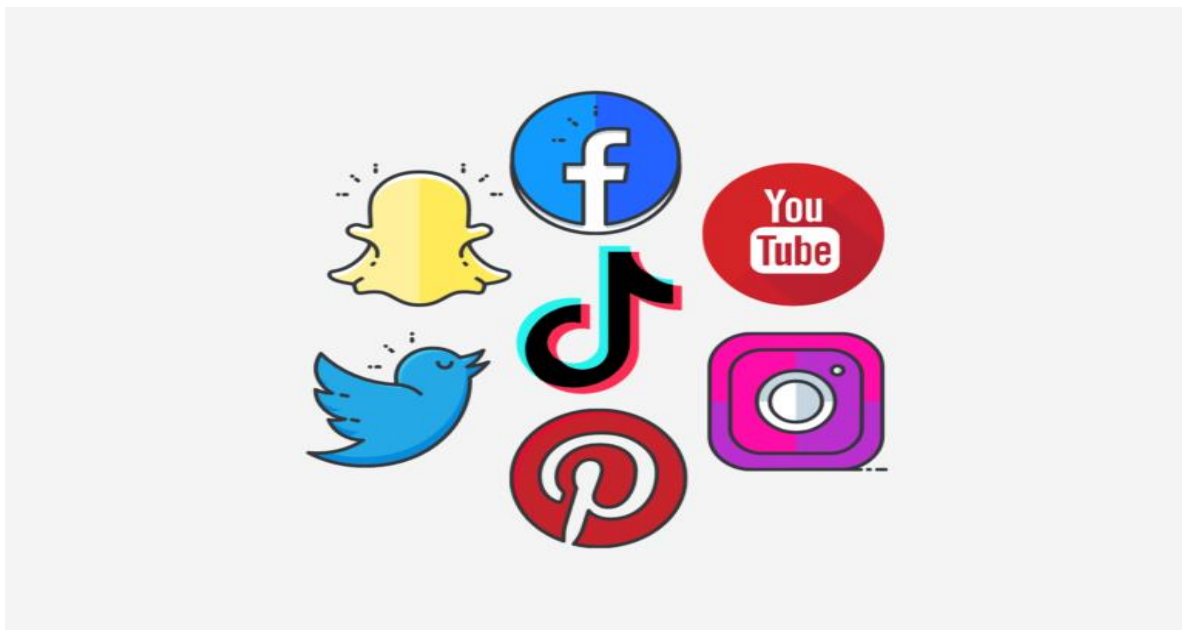
Figure 2. Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, Snapchat, and Tik Tok logos (simplyisfan.com)

Facebook is the biggest and most used social media platform with over 2.8 billion monthly active users (Newberry 2020). According to Facebook (2021) its main mission is to bring the world closer together and give people the power to build a community. Facebook is all about staying connected with family and friends, staying up to date of what is going on in the world, and to share and express what is important to people. Currently, Facebook is available in 111 languages (Facebook 2021) and it has its own communication tool called Facebook messenger. It enables users to send messages, photos, videos, files, and supports voice and video calling. In the social media marketing point of view Facebook marketing is in the key position, if a brand is looking to thrive on social media. Whether we are talking about a big corporation or a small local business, Facebook certainly is an effective marketing tool. It is a powerful space to keep customers informed all the time, develop brand identity, and broaden the extent (Newberry 2020).

Instagram is a mobile application, which allows people to share photos, stories, and videos with their followers (Dubovik 2013). According to Forbes (2021), it was the fourth most downloaded free application in 2020. Instagram is a good platform for companies to promote their products and services with the help of influencers. Compared to other social media platforms, Instagram stands out with its visual based strategy. This means that everything on Instagram is about photos and 15 seconds long videos. As a marketing channel, Instagram is still quite new in the game. The transformation started in 2018, when Instagram started to launch new tools for businesses. These included: Advanced analytics, Shoppable Instagram posts, Instagram stories, and the new standalone video platform called IGTV (Decker 2021).

YouTube is the world's most popular video sharing service. It is owned by Google and it has more that 2 billion active monthly users according to Statista (2021). It has always been a source of entertainment for people, but in recent years it has become a necessary tool for marketers as well. The magic of YouTube is that it can help to enhance the marketers Search engine optimization (SEO) and all- embracing brand existence. This on the other hand helps marketers to come up with content that is effortless for viewers to consume and share (Coleman 2020).

According to twitter (2021), it is an open service and a home to a diverse people, perspectives, ideas, and information. It can be introduced as a micro blog network that allows people to send and receive short posts called tweets. Tweets are normally short and maximum 280-character messages, that can include links, photos and videos to some relevant websites and resources (Cyca 2020). Marketing on twitter can be veritably beneficial for companies. Twitter marketing can boost sales, generate market domination, enhance clicks, and increase downloads. The downside is that on Twitter things are moving rapidly compared to other social media platforms. The lifespan of one tweet is approximately 18 minutes and more than 7000 new tweets are being sent every single second (Cyca 2020).

Finally, there is Tik Tok, a social media giant that was one of the fastest growing brands in 2020. It was created in 2016 by Chinese tech giant Byte Dance and back then it carried a different name. The content on Tik Tok is based on short-term videos, from variety of genres that have a duration from 15 seconds to three minutes. The popularity of Tik Tok is based on its use of music and quaint high-performance algorithm, which can discover what kind of content users like to see much faster than any other application (Tidy 2020). There is a huge database of songs, filters and movie clips people can lip sync to.

With over 800 million monthly active users and an average daily view time of 52 minutes, it is justifiable to say that Tik Tok is one of the fastest growing platforms in the social media scene right now (Rendlen-Kaplan 2019). From the marketing point of view this means that it has a huge audience ready to be elated by creative and fast-thinking brands. Content is the centre in Tik Tok and even accounts with a few or even zero followers can get millions of views on a new video. Using Tik Tok as a marketing tool is rather effortless and there are three main options to follow when brands want to use this platform for promotion. The first option is to create own channel for the brand and upload videos relevant to the brand. The second alternative is to contact suitable Tik Tok influencers and with their help reach their well-targeted audience. The third option is paid advertisement on Tik Tok and it is most suitable for brands that are already somehow established (Rendlen-Kaplan 2019).

2.2 Current Social Media Trends

Even though social media marketing is nowhere near a new strategy to utilize in the business world, it is a constantly changing phenomenon. In 2020 the world was shaken by COVID-19 and the consequences of it are longstanding. Many brands started to see social media as the lifeline between business and its customers. During the pandemic, social media usage has climbed more than 10 percent and it means that there is more potential than ever before to overtake the former and even gain some fresh audience (Carlson 2021). This chapter presents a better standpoint to the matters that will have a big role in social media success in 2021.

The first thing worth to cover is Ephemeral content, which means temporary content on social media. This kind of content stays on the social media page for a short duration and disappears afterwards. Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat stories are all good examples of this type of content. Recent studies have suggested that because people tend to have shorter attention spans nowadays, it has changed their ways to consume social media content. This on the other hand explains the popularity of format like stories. They are short, mesmerizing and addictive in a way people can pass time for hours by scrolling over story after another (Werner 2021).

The next topic that is necessary to mention is social commerce. It means that the selling of products happens directly on social media (McLachlan 2020). Many brands have marketing and selling history in the biggest platform on social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest. Social commerce has moulded a totally new retail avenue for brands, and this trend is not going to fade away anytime soon. The Prediction is that social commerce is on its way to becoming a mainstream retail channel amongst websites and offline stores (Werner 2021).

Many social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram already have social commerce features. A company can create their own Facebook shop or compose an appealing post on Instagram to execute this trend. These two examples show that social networks are on their way to evolve into retail platforms. This field is something that every brand and marketer should include in their sales strategies.

Video content will be in key position on social media and many social media experts suggest that by 2022, more than 82 % of online content will be video content (Werner 2021). It is the most mesmerizing form of content and it has increased its popularity year by year. Whether the viewer likes to watch short videos, like the ones posted on Tik Tok or Instagram stories or longer video content on YouTube, video content is the future of social media. Also, Interactive, real-time live content, such as Facebook Live, Instagram Live and YouTube live are a great way to share any brand in front of live audience. Life streaming is expected to become a form of customer service in the business world soon (Werner 2021).

Social listening is a matter that cannot be disregarded by any brand, who is looking to grow its social media strategy. It is a tool of audience research, that allows brands to track, analyse, and respond to any discussion on social media about them (Amaresan 2020). Moreover, it gives any brand access to valuable content of their customers, market, and competition: It is a situation where the brand is receiving answers to their questions, without asking any questions (Werner 2021).

2.3 Social Media Marketing

The main idea behind social media marketing for companies is to use social media platforms as a link to connect with the wanted audience. Whether the goal is to construct the brand, increase sales, or bring up website visitor counts, it involves lot of work from the marketing point of view. On top of publishing great content on the brands social media accounts, social listening plays a huge role in the result analysing, and advertising on social media (Buffer 2020).

At first, social media marketing was about publishing and trying to generate traffic into companies' websites, in pursuit to induce sales. Nowadays, businesses are using social media for innumerable different ways. However, there are five main pillars that every business should follow to be successful in social media marketing (Buffer 2020).

Figure 3. Five Pillars of social media marketing (mopdog.com)

1. Strategy is the first matter to consider, when starting marketing journey on social media. Questions such as: What is the goal for the brand? Which social media platforms should be used? and what kind of content is most suitable for the brand? are all essential questions.

2. Organized planning and publishing are the next thing to take into consideration. For the brand it means coherent attendance in social media. Being present equals to an opportunity for the brand to be discovered by potential customers.

3. Listening and Engaging with the audience. It is normal that the conversation of any brand increases, as their business and social media follower base grows. This is the reason why brand would like to monitor any social media conversation about them. Usually, time is very limited matter for the brand and checking all the notifications from different social media platforms would be very time-consuming. For this purpose, there are many social listening and engagement tools available, which can do all the monitoring for the company.

4. By analysing wanted information the company will be aware how well their social media marketing is achieving consumers. Matters like monthly follower increases or the number of positive or negative mentions, can be studied with several social media analytics tools.

5. Social media advertising allows the brand to reach a wider audience than just those who are following the brand already. These advertising platforms on social media are extremely powerful and easy to modify to reach the wanted audience.

2.4   Social Media Influencer Marketing

"People do not buy goods and services. They buy relations, stories, and magic". These are the famous words of marketing guru Seth Godin. These words can also be seen as the core of influencer marketing.

To be able to understand influencer marketing as a concept, it is necessary to comprehend the concept of an influencer at first. An influencer is someone who has the power to impact the purchasing decisions of other people. This being the outcome of his or her authority, abilities, status, or relationship with the followers he or she has (Influencer Marketing Hub 2021). Influencers are not necessarily celebrities, and they can be anywhere and anyone. The thing that makes them influential is their huge following base on the web and social media. Many studies and opinion polls show that people are fed up being vend to but at the same time they are looking for people who they can relate to, share common interest with and on top of that are helpful and can save their precious time and money. This is what properly done and well executed social media influencer marketing is all about.

Influencer marketing encompasses collaboration between a brand and an online influencer, who's main mission is to market their products and services in exchange of agreed compensation (Werner 2021). Influencer marketing can be extremely powerful way to promote your brand. In 2020, the influencer marketing industry was worth more than 9.7 billion dollars and it is anticipated to obtain close to 13.8 billion in 2021 (Werner 2021). However, assuming that the influencers with the widest following base are the influencer of niche is where the social media marketing plan takes a wrong turn for some brands. The most important task for a brand is to be able to find the right influencer for their product and tailor the brands approach according to it.

It is an obvious fact that influencer marketing is here to stay for as long as social media continues to grow and evolve. All the brands in E-commerce can certainly benefit from working with influencers, regardless of what their objective is (Patel 2021). Influencers can grow the brands following, help to increase sales, and plainly just get the word out about the brand.

3   Different types of social media influencers

As explained in the previous segment, a social media influencer is someone who can impact the purchasing decisions of other people because of their influence, knowledge, status, or relationship with their crowd (Werner 2021.) Having a discernible niche is also an important factor and the number of followers is usually tied on the size of the influencers' topic of the niche.

Nowadays, people commonly turn to social media and look up to influencers, when they need guidance with decision making. Social media influencers are known for their knowledge and proficiency on a certain topic. They post about that topic on a regular basis on their social media channels and engender notable amount of devoted followers, who share their viewpoints about things (Werner 2021). This is the reason why brands love social media influencers. They know how to create and start trends and encourage their followers to purchase products they are advertising.

There is a large scale of different kind of social media influencers, and they can be assorted in multiple ways. The most used methods are by number of followers, by types of content, and by their influence level (influencer Marketing Hub 2021). Influencers can also be classified by the niche in which they function. This signifies that influencers, who possibly show up in a low rubric by one measure can be perceived more influential when viewed at in another way (Werner 2021).

3.1   Influencers by follower numbers

On top of the list, there are the mega influencers that according to Gil Eyal, CEO and founder of influence marketing platform HYPR Brands are defined as being more famous than influential. They are not necessarily subject matter experts, but they provide a lot of reach in one hit (Eval 2019). They are the people with enormous number of followers on their social media network. A general opinion is that mega influencers have more than one million followers on their social media networks, even though there are no appointed rules on the limit between different types of followers (Brown 2019). Mega influencers are often celebrities who have obtained their fame outside of social media. They can be musicians, movie stars, people in sports, and sometimes reality television stars. However, in some cases mega influencers have accomplished their voluminous followings through their online and social undertaking. From the influencer marketing point of view, a common outlook is that the services of mega influencers are usually valuable, and they are generally precise who they want to partner with (Brown 2019).

Some mega influencers can receive up to one million dollars per a post on social media and are mainly approached by major brands, who have the money and in return are pursuing to get their product or service in front of as many people as possible.

One step down from mega influencers there is a group called Macro influencers. Even though, there are many similarities between these two groups, the main difference is that macro influencers usually have gained their fame through their social media platforms (Ismail 2018). Their following base is in the range between 100 000 and one million followers, and they are successful online experts, such as bloggers, podcasters, vloggers, social media stars, and b-list celebrities (Werner 2021). They are high profile people that expertise at raising awareness amongst people. Macro influencers are bigger group compared to mega influencers and for this reason brands can easily find a macro-influencer willing to work with them. Nevertheless, brands must be careful when working with this level of influencer. In this category influencer frauds are common, meaning that it is not unusual that some macro-influencers have purchased their followers (Werner 2021).

The third group is called Micro-influencers and they are a division of everyday ordinary people who are known for their extensive knowledge about a specific topic. Their audience ranges from 10 000 to 100 000 followers on a single social media platform, and they have gained wide following amongst supporters of their niche. The respect they are savored with comes from their proficiency on their identifiable topic (Werner 2021). They often stick to one topic and leverage their know-how to build their brand. Many times, Micro influencers are very careful who they work with on social media and the first thing a brand must do, is to convince the influencer of their worth (Werner 2021). This group is showing that the nature of influence is changing little by little and Micro influencers are becoming more demotic and well-known. Some of them have climbed up from virtual generality to being almost as well-known as traditional celebrities. Generation G has had an impact on this matter, since they are the generation that spend more time on the internet than watching television or going to movies, or sports events (Werner 2021). The services of a Micro Influencer are especially beneficial for small brands as they are cost-effective. Moreover, their engagement rates compared to macro influencers are higher, which means that the brand will be noticed by bigger crowd.

The last and most recent influencer type to receive attention is the nano influencers. This influencer type has between 1000 and 10 000 followers, but all of them are enthusiastic and very committed people, who are eager to undertake with the nano influencer and pay close attention to their opinions (Werner 2021). A Nano influencer is often someone who can make a difference within their small community (Ismail 2018). However, most brands will see this as a lack of adequate influence and because of this they will consider working with them negligible. Nevertheless, they can dispense great visibility for brands that make highly niche products. Additionally, they are not in the business to recommend products constantly or receiving compensation for their reviews and for this reason their posts about a product or a service are often more authentic and genuine (Werner 2021). Since Nano influencers are more affordable for brands, they can hire more of them for the same budget they would use to engage with fewer number of traditional influencers.

Types of Influencers

Mega-influencer
Audience: 1M+
Who: Celeb, Athletes, Actors
Pros: Large audience, diverse & extensive reach
Cons: very expensive
Goals: large awareness

Micro-influencer
Audience: 10k~50k
Who: Experts in their niche
Pros: higher engagement rate, more cost effective
Cons: hard to find a match
Goals: grow engagement, more UGC

Macro-influencer
Audience: 50k~1M
Who: Rising celeb
Pros: broad audience and faster growth
Cons: lower engagement
Goals: grow awareness, better UGC

Nano-influencer
Audience: 1000~10k
Who: brand advocates, rising ambassadors
Pros: easy to build trust, lowest cost
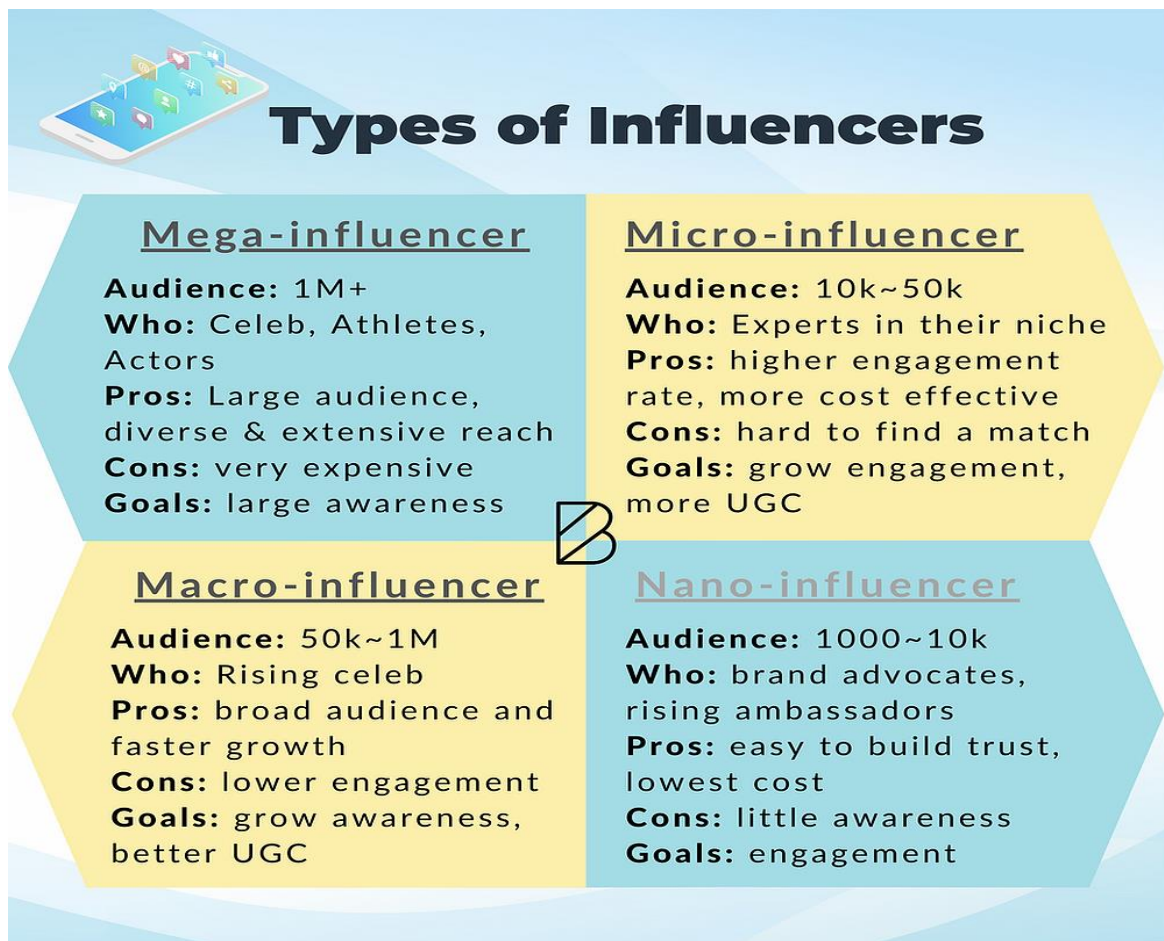**Cons:** little awareness
Goals: engagement

Figure 4. Types of influencers (blingyte.com)

3.2 Influencers by types of content

The most popular types of influencers are bloggers and vloggers that usually have a huge follower base on their blog or YouTube channel. Their follower numbers make them fall in the category of macro-and mega influencers. Bloggers often have the most genuine and active relationship with their followers and brands are taking a full advantage of it (Werner 2021). The connection between blogging and influencer marketing has been increasing for some time now and the assumption is that when a well-known blogger positively mentions some product in a post, there is a good chance that the blogger's followers will want to try out that product as well. Many bloggers tend to influence in a specific field of interest, such as fashion, music, fitness, health, finance, traveling, personal development, and many other topics. When the blog is popular and influential enough, brands can buy a sponsored post in the blog. This means that the blogger will present the service or product of the brand demonstratively by written presentation and pictures. Vloggers are no different from bloggers. Their focus is on the video content and they can improve brand awareness by generating enchanting videos that their followers would like to browse and share onward. Moreover, they can have an impact on the brands website visitor count and their sales, when they add links to their videos and encourage their crowd to click on them (Werner 2021).

Gaming influencers who are also known as live streamers are another high-quality content group. Gaming has become a popular niche for influencers, and it is also the most well-known niche followed by men. Gaming influencers have gained their popularity by live-streaming games on platforms like YouTube and Twitch, which is the world's most well-known live streaming platform (Werner 2021). Millions of people who wants to get better at gaming follow their live streams intensively. This is the place for brands to increase their brand awareness, since so many people are watching these live streams attentively. In addition, they can promote offers and engender sales through these gaming influencers.

Niche photographers and subject-matter experts (SME) cannot be forgotten when talking about the types of content Influencers. Niche photographers are on the top of the list as content creators, and their posts are always high-quality content. Their skills give other social media stars a chance to partner with brands from variety of industries (Werner 2021). Subject-matter experts on the other hand are people, who are authorities in a certain area or topic (Werner 2021). They are not only educated on their subject, but also have qualification to share their knowledge on social media with other interested parties. These types of Influencers might include: Doctors, Nurses, Lawyers, Academic podcasters, etc.

3.3   Influencers by the level of influence

Celebrities are known as the original influencers and they still obtain a huge segment in the influencer marketing world (influencer marketing hub 2021). This group comprehends well-known musicians, actors and actresses, models, and professional athletes. These influencers are followed by millions of people worldwide and they are collaborating with famous brands as brand ambassadors. Working with them will surely attract media attention for any brand and make it a household name.

However, the expenses when partnering with someone from this group are high due to their extensive scope and engagement rate. Another important aspect to consider before working with influencers from this group is that the brand's values match with theirs. If a celebrity working with the brand lacks credibility when promoting their product to the target audience, it might ensue unsatisfactory results. Even though this group usually have massive following on social media it is sometimes uncertain to utter how much real influence they hold over the people who are following them on social media channels.

Another group that can hold an important position for brands are the key opinion leaders, such as journalists, Academics, Industry experts, and professional advisors. They have gained their respect because of their proficiency, position, or knowledge about their topic of expertise (influencer marketing hub 2021). If a brand happens to gain the attention of a journalist in a national newspaper and the journalist writes positively about the brand, it can be seen as a way of influencer marketing. Another benefit of this scenario is that the journalist will probably write the repost free of charge in this situation. The focus when working with key opinion leaders should be on their reputation that normally have been built in an offline setting and it results with less active social following (influencer marketing hub 2021).

In recent years climate change and global warming has been the most talked about matters in the politics and in different media publications. This and other political and social causes have helped a group called activist to gain more attention in social media and even reach influencer status. Activists are people who try to shape the opinion of their audience by promoting a certain cause that is close to their heart (Influencer marketing hub 2021). Their audience is very niche-specific and believe in the cause they are supporting. From the influencer marketing point of view activists are good to partner with if the brand believes in the same cause. However, it is important for a brand to scrutinize them carefully as some of them may have very precipitous views that can affect the brand.

4 Consumer behaviour on social media

Today, social media is the most important communication tool between people, and it has become an essential daily activity for people. Primarily, people log in to their social media accounts for social interactions and to access to news and information, and to seek help in their decision making. Moreover, people have started to use social media to share their experiences about products and services. This information is consumed by many people because of the connections people have on social media. The outcome is that all the information becomes a source of influence to consumers and their buying behavior (Radu 2021). These decisions might seem very inconsequential to consumers sometimes, but they keep marketers up at night. Understanding the cycle behind customer's decision-making results as increase in revenue for brands (Radu 2021).

"Consumer behavior is the study of consumers and the processes they use to choose, consume, and dispose of products and services, including consumer's emotional, mental, and behavioral responses." (Radu, 2021)

4.1 Why is understanding consumer behavior important?

Studying and understanding consumer behavior is important to marketers because it gives them more understanding of the aspects that influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Radu 2021). Having the knowledge of how consumers select a product helps to identify the products that are needed and dispose all the outdated products. Another benefit is that it helps marketers to select how their products should be presented in a way it evokes maximum impact on their consumers. The outcome of understanding consumer buying behavior contributes to reaching and captivating clients and engender them to purchase the product (Radu 2021)

A consumer behavior analysis should consist of:

- How consumers perceive different alternatives (brands, products, companies, etc.)
- What matters make the consumer to select between many options.
- How consumer is behaving during the researching and shopping process.
- What kind of influence does consumers environment (friends, family, media, etc.) have on their behavior?

This analysis shows that consumer behavior is often affected by many different factors. For this reason, it is pivotal for marketers to study consumer purchasing patterns and figure out what the recent buying trends are (Radu 2021)

4.2   What affects consumer behavior?

Brands often influence consumer behavior only through things that they can control (Radu2021). A good example of this is the Swedish furniture and home accessories giant IKEA, where you always end up spending more money than what you intended to do.

There are four categories of factors that influence consumer behavior. Those factors are: Personal factors, Psychological factors, Social factors, and Cultural factors.

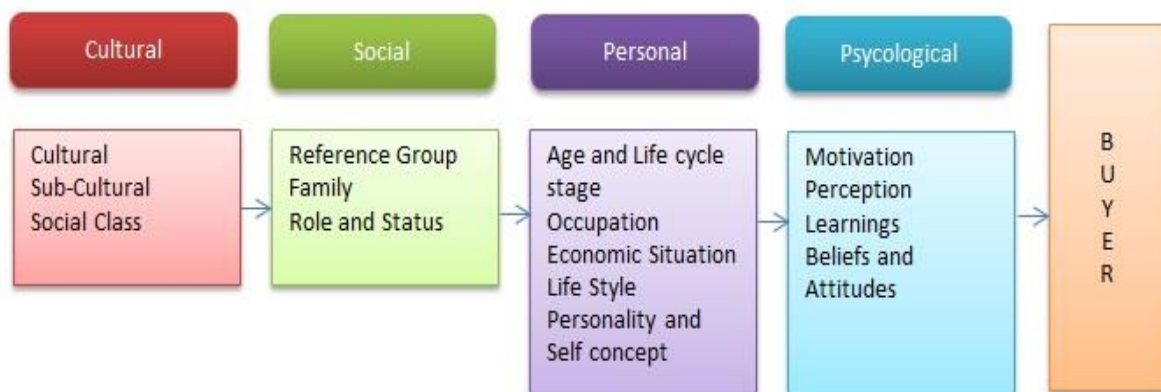| Cultural	Social	Personal	Psycological	
Cultural Sub-Cultural Social Class	Reference Group Family Role and Status	Age and Life cycle stage Occupation Economic Situation Life Style Personality and Self concept	Motivation Perception Learnings Beliefs and Attitudes	B U Y E R

Figure 5. Consumer behavior factors

Personal factors deal with the interests and opinions of individuals. As every person in this world is a unique individual, there might be clear differences in their interests and opinions, and this on the other hand produce diverse perceptions and consumer behavior. Personal characteristics such as age, income, occupation, personality, and lifestyle are influencing on purchasing behavior of people (Clootract 2020).

Psychological factors are another important determinant in consumer behavior. They are often very difficult to measure yet still they have powerful impact on the decision making. Psychological factors are the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and attitudes of an individual's response to a marketing message (Clootract 2020).

Social factors comprise all the relationships that people have with other people. Humans are born with the desire to be close to each other and that kind of congruence has an influence on their behavior, naturally. Social factors are family, friends, education level, social media, income, and any other social network, group, role, or status (Clootrackt 2020). All those factors have a strong influence on purchasing behavior of people.

The cultural factors also have a strong influence on decision making of people. There are as many cultures in the world as there are different countries and consumer purchasing decisions change repeatedly from one country to another. Cultural factors consist of values, behaviors, needs, preferences, and wants that people learn from the environment they are living in (Clootract 2020).

4.3   Four types of consumer behavior

Consumer's purchasing decision are connected on the type of products they are planning on buying (Clootrack 2020). It is considered self-evident that the behavior of a person purchasing milk from the grocery store differs from a person buying new computer. It is understandable that purchases that are more complex and upscale require more. consideration and involvement from the buyer. There are four different consumer behavior types, and they are specified by the usage, quality, features, purchasing recurrence and pricing of the product (Henderson 2021). These four different consumers buying behaviors can be categorized in the following: Complex buying behavior, Dissonance-reducing buying behavior, Habitual buying behavior, and Variety seeking behavior.

In complex buying behavior the customer is very involved in the purchassing process and does a precise background research about the product in question. This type of behavior is usually connected to when buying an expensive, rarely acquired product. Good example of a complex buying behavior is, when a consumer is purchasing a house or a car (Radu 2021).

The second type of customer buying behavior is dissonance-reducing buying behavior. In dissonance-reducing buying behavior the customer is also very participating in the purchase process but experiences difficulties choosing between different brands (Radu 2021). When purchasing a product, consumer might worry regretting the choice he/she made later, and this is when ´Dissonance´ happens. A good example of this kind of buying behavior is when purchasing a new coffee maker, the decision is made based on price and suitability, yet after the purchase the customer will seek consolidation that the choice was the right one.

Variety-seeking buying behavior happens when consumer involvement is low. The differences between brands are notable and consumers practices a lot of brand switching. This happens because of variety seeking and not always because they were unsatisfied with the previous product. The cost of trying something new is low and sometimes happens just out of curiosity or boredom (Clootrack 2020).

The fourth kind of buying behavior is called habitual buying behavior. This behavior applies when a consumer has very little involvement in the product brand category. Most of the products people use every day, such as bread, butter, and toilet paper are part of this category. Consumers do not seek or require information about this kind of products, they just buy them without any specific consideration (Clootrack 2020).

Types of Buying Decision Behavior

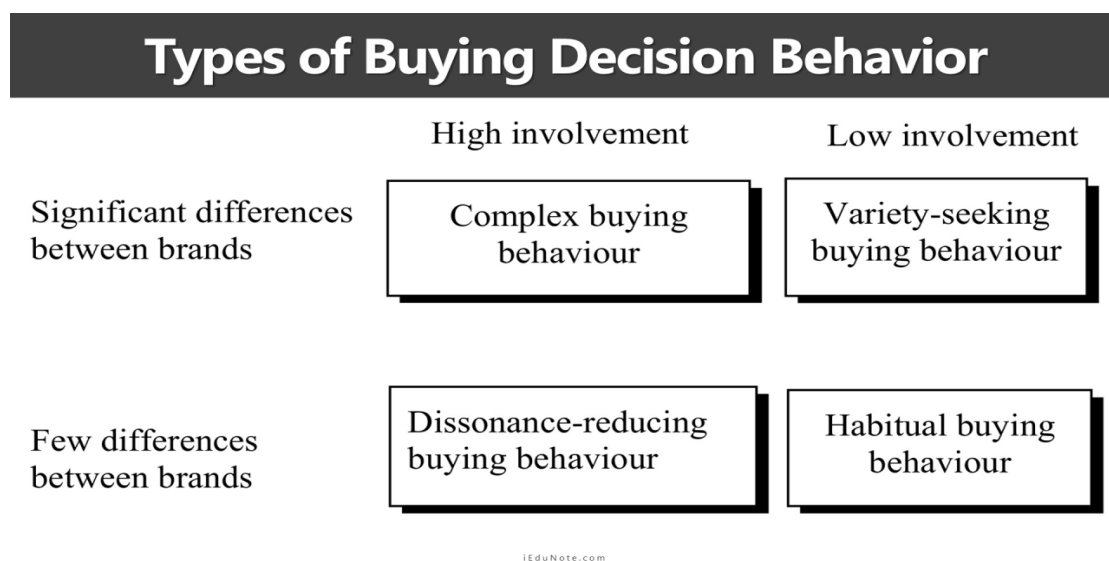|	High involvement	Low involvement
Significant differences between brands	Complex buying behaviour	Variety-seeking buying behaviour
Few differences between brands	Dissonance-reducing buying behaviour	Habitual buying behaviour

iEduNote.com

Figure 6. Four types of buying behavior (iedunote.com)

4.4   How does social media influence consumer behavior?

As mentioned before, people are purchasing more and more things they need and want online. Consumers are eager to read good reviews and recommendations. For marketers this means that it is inevitable to have conspicuous online attendance on different social media platforms (Clootrack 2020).

In marketing, social media is a powerful platform and it can effect on potential customers from the start, until the point of purchase and beyond as well. At the beginning, consumers need knowledge about the brand and what it can offer to them. Afterwards, when they start the selection process, and they see an influencer on social media talking positively about a brand and their products, Influence over customer happens.

The relationship between customer and the brand stays ongoing, when the relationship is strong. Compelling and detailed content can stick customers to the brand. There are four ways of how social media influences consumer behavior (Clootract 2020)

1. **Builds product awareness:**

   People tend to search for a solution whenever they are faced with a problem about a product or service. At times, finding the right solution might be rather troublesome and this is when social media arrives to help. It has an enormous influence on consumers when they are looking for information about a certain product. An extensive group of people comes familiar with any brand because of the content the brand is sharing on social media. Being present on social media is the easiest way of any business to influence consumer behavior.

2. **Social Proof as a greater force of buying decisions:**

   Social proof is based on the idea that people have the tendency to follow other people around them in order to imitate their behavior in specific situations (West 2021). Social media has boosted the advancement of social proof as a major force for consumers purchasing decisions. When customer purchases a product and is pleased with that product, the outcome usually is that he/she will praise the product on social media with likes, shares, reviews, and comments. Marketers on the other hand are making their social appearance more truthful by sharing these reviews, comments, likes, and tweets of their customers to build trust and increase conversation rate.

3. **Promotions, Discounts and Deals on social media:** Nowadays almost all the social media users are part of a group or forum that they are interested in. The moment consumers see promotions, discounts or deals from the brand they are following on social media, it influences their purchasing behavior. Brands should always make sure that their target audience sees their products and promotions online and react to them. This action helps the brand to influence consumer behavior.

4. **Social Media Influencers:**

   The studies have shown time after time that consumers are more eager to buy a product when they receive recommendation from a person who is trustworthy to them. As mentioned before celebrities and other popular people are considered as mega-influencers and their task on social media is to inspire their audience and have an impact on their purchasing behavior. Influencer marketing has proven to make a difference for any brand by inducing more customers.

5 Research methods

5.1 Research objectives and questions

A term research methodology is used, when there is a topic and the aim is to apply certain methods to identify, designate, process, and construe the information about that topic (Mehta 2021). In this research the main objective is to find out how social media and specifically influencer marketing are affecting on purchasing decisions of millennials in Finland. In order to be able to answer the main question, it is necessary to form research questions that support the topic. By using various procedures, the responses to research questions can be found on the research data (Mehta 2021). All things considered, specifying a research problem is very important.

These days, social media is the commander of not just people´s spare time but their working life as well. Companies are trying to invent new, innovative, and even risky ways to be heard and seen on social media. Social media influencers have increased their status over the last few years and most of their followers are in a situation, where they have developed a relationship with the influencers and give great value to their opinions. Throughout the times companies have been using celebrities and influencers in their advertising, but now the situation has changed and nowadays the co-operation and promotion of products and services are mainly executed on the social media channels of the influencers.

Social media influencer marketing has been a growing phenomenon around the world and brands are taking all the advantage of this somewhat new marketing wave. 73% of marketers believe that their efforts through social media marketing have been "somewhat effective" or "very effective" for their business (Buffer, 2019). In Finland influencer marketing is still rather fresh field in the big picture of marketing, even if it has shown growth in the recent years. It is becoming more conventional for Finnish companies to use influencer marketing as a part of their marketing plan. Companies have been finding it profitable, effortless, and cost-effective. Many studies about social media influencer marketing indicate its power in the marketing field and in this research the concentration is more in the certain group of people (Millennials) and their knowledge and opinions about the topic.

This is a topic that could have been presented in many ways, but the researcher decided to examine the problem at a standpoint of customers in a particular age group. The research question is: What is the impact of influencer marketing on purchasing decisions of Millennials in Finland.

The main goal of this study is to find out how and if social media influencers can influence the purchasing habits of the observed group of millennials. Do they see influencer marketing as advertising and business or as normal content in between other publications the influencers are sharing? How consumers experience this topic, gives businesses and brands valuable information, such as, is social media influencer marketing the area to insert more resources on? In addition, this research gives precious feedback to influencers on how well they are succeeding in their mission and do people find them convincing.

Research methods are applied to solve a research problem. they are designated procedures to collect and analyse data. Developing research method is an essential part of the research design (Mehta 2021). These factors are discussed more on the next chapters of this research.

5.2   Data Collection

In the social media market research quantitative or qualitative data is gathered from social media platforms to understand social, consumer, or market trends (Arora 2021). In this study, the researcher decided to use qualitative method to approach answers to the research problem. It is a market research method, where the focus is on acquiring data through open-ended conversational information. Qualitative research methods are planned in a manner that help manifest the demeanours and observation of the targeted audience with reference to the topic in question (Arora 2021). As the examinee group of people in this research is quite exclusive, the author concluded that qualitative research would be the best and most accurate way of collecting data. The aim of this study was to receive information of the effect of social media influencer marketing on the purchasing habits of Millennials in Finland.

Conducting interviews is one of the most general qualitative research methods. It is an interactive method that can present profound details from the interviewee. The advantage of this method is that it can dispense a great chance to gather accurate data about what people believe in and how they perceive the matter in question (Arora 2021). Face-to-face theme interviews were chosen in order to get a better opportunity to understand the respondents' experiences and opinions concerning the topic. All the respondents are representatives of in advance chosen target audience. The researcher chose theme interviews because it will allow the conversation to go deeper, and more insights are likely to be collected.

As the researcher always has preconceptions about the topic, it was important for the author to form subject matters for the interviews. With the subject matters the author was able to make sure that all the substantive matters were discussed and covered during the interview.

The author also designed an explicit list of questions before conducting the interviews (can be found from the appendix). Creating the right kind of questions for the interview is a pivotal part of the research design and it must support the theoretical framework and be able to show the impact of social media influencer marketing on their purchasing decision making, if there is any. The first theme of the interview contained basic questions about social media and its usage. The second part of the survey concentrated on questions that would give the author more knowledge about social media marketing and why, when, and how it would have an influence on the decision making of the respondents. In the final part of the survey, more information is prospected on social media influencers and their impact on buying behaviours of the respondents. The data was collected between 01.04.2021-30.04.2021 and 01.09.2021-15.09.2021 and 12 people were interviewed during that time period.

Before beginning the process of interviews, it is essential for the interviewer to know what the expectations for her are. During the interview situation, it is relevant that the interviewer is welcoming, conversational, but also considerate. The interview should have a good flow to it, and the interviewer should be able to put respondents at ease, have a purpose and be distinctive at the same time. The questions should be asked and formed in an informative way and the interviewer should be able to feel out the responses of the interviewee. It is essential to form the answers from personal experiences rather than from generality.

Target audience

The ideal participant of this research is a person who was born in Finland, between years 1981-1996 (25-40 years old in 2021) and is by that reason considered as a Millennial. Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are one of the most talked-about generations in current business literature (Loeb 2020). They are also the largest and fastest growing segments of any consumer base today. What makes Millennials stand out from the previous generations is that they are the first generation that grew up in the age of internet and mobile technologies. They are digitally fluent with purchasing power and enlightened about issues around them. Millennials have seen the climb of social media influencer marketing in the frontline and are always willing to share their thoughts on that (Loeb 2020).

In a qualitative research it is important to put focus on the selections of the participants (Mehta 2021). In this study the participants were chosen according to their age category, since the examined group of this study are the Millennials in Finland.

Another reason for choosing this group of people is that they have been under the influence of social media influencer marketing and they have hands-on knowledge about the topic.

The researcher chose both female and male participants from different age groups and diverse educational and occupational backgrounds to be able to gather more extensive understanding of the subject. All the participants were found through social media, mainly from Facebook and Instagram and the researcher has connection to all of them. Nevertheless, the researcher decided not to use any family members or close friends in this research, in order to have less background information about the participants and their demeanours on social media. Finding the most suitable participants was effortless, since the researcher is reckoned as a Millennial herself and she has plenty of connections in that category.

Participants	Age	Gender	Occupation
Participant 1	40	Female	Financial Advisor
Participant 2	38	Male	Real Estate Agent
Participant 3	36	Male	Tax Officer
Participant 4	35	Female	Nurse
Participant 5	34	Female	Lawyer
Participant 6	33	Female	Flight Attendant
Participant 7	32	Female	Stay at home mom
Participant 8	30	Male	Consultant
Participant 9	28	Female	Teacher
Participant 10	27	Female	Beautician
Participant 11	26	Female	Hairstylist
Participant 12	26	Male	Airline Pilot

Table 1 Chosen participants

5.3 Data analysis

Data analysis can be described as a process of exploring, cleansing, modifying, and forming data to discover information, conclusions, and to support decision-making. It focuses on the process of turning the untouched data into useful statistics, information, and explanation (Arora 2021). In the business world it is a significant mean to improve certain viewpoints about the products, and services, along with overall brand image and customer experience. It detects where the focus and efforts should be put on.

Qualitative Data Preparation and Analysis

Get familiar with the data
Start by reading the data several times to get familiar with it and start looking for basic observations or patterns. This also includes transcribing the data.

Revisit research objectives
Revisit the research objective and identify the questions that can be answered through the collected data.

Develop a framework
Identify broad ideas, concepts, behaviors, or phrases and assigns codes to them. This is helpful for structuring and labeling the data.

Identify patterns and connections
Start identifying themes, looking for the most common responses to questions, identifying data or patterns that can answer research questions, and finding areas that can be explored further.

Figure 7. Qualitative data preparation and analysis

All the data in this study was obtained from the theme interviews. After accomplishing the interviews, the gathered data needed to be transcribed into a text form. This part makes the data more easily handled when using programmes designated for qualitative data analysis. The material is possible to analyse without separate programmes and in this case the researcher decided that text editor was the best option to analyse the data received from the interviews.

The amount of the data received was huge and it had to be compressed to be able to display the most relevant matters to the research. In the process of transcribing the data a generic level is more than enough if it includes the core of the case. The researcher examined the interviews and written responses numerous times, so that the material would become more familiar, and it would start to take a shape. This on the other hand directed the researcher to form segments to be able to receive more from the results. The data was gathered in a way that enlightened on the researched topic as variously and comprehensive as possible. It also offered an understanding and a conclusion to the research problem.

5.4   Implementation

The interviewing process started by finding suitable dates with the respondents for the interview and by revealing the topic in question. The interviews were recorded and written down in a notebook. As mentioned before, the author had formed themes for the interview in advance and this way it was easier to engender a scheme for the interviews. The structure for the interviews can be found in the appendix.

Formation of data to the text form and analysing it started right after the first interview was conducted. This is important because it gives benefit, when the data gathering, and data analysis are being synchronized for the results. Gathering data without analysing it will not give any accurate information and the main goal for the researcher is to know how to process the data in order to reach a conclusion (Arora 2021).

As the author wanted to receive more designated and profound information, it was important to perform an analysis after every interview. Also, the question layout changed a little along the way, even though the main content stayed the same. The author decided to make an excel table to form themes from the received data. This way it was easier to keep on track of the interviews and themes in question.

All together twelve interviews were conducted. Over the interview process learning happened and the level of comprehension increased. It was mostly shown by the duration of the interviews and overall fluency that increased towards the end. These findings are discussed more in the key results part of this thesis.

6 Key Results

This chapter presents the main findings of the research. During the interviews three different themes from the analysis of the data were found and they are: Social media platforms, Social media advertising and Social media influencer marketing. The results that are presented next will answer the research question and are the starting point of all discussion.

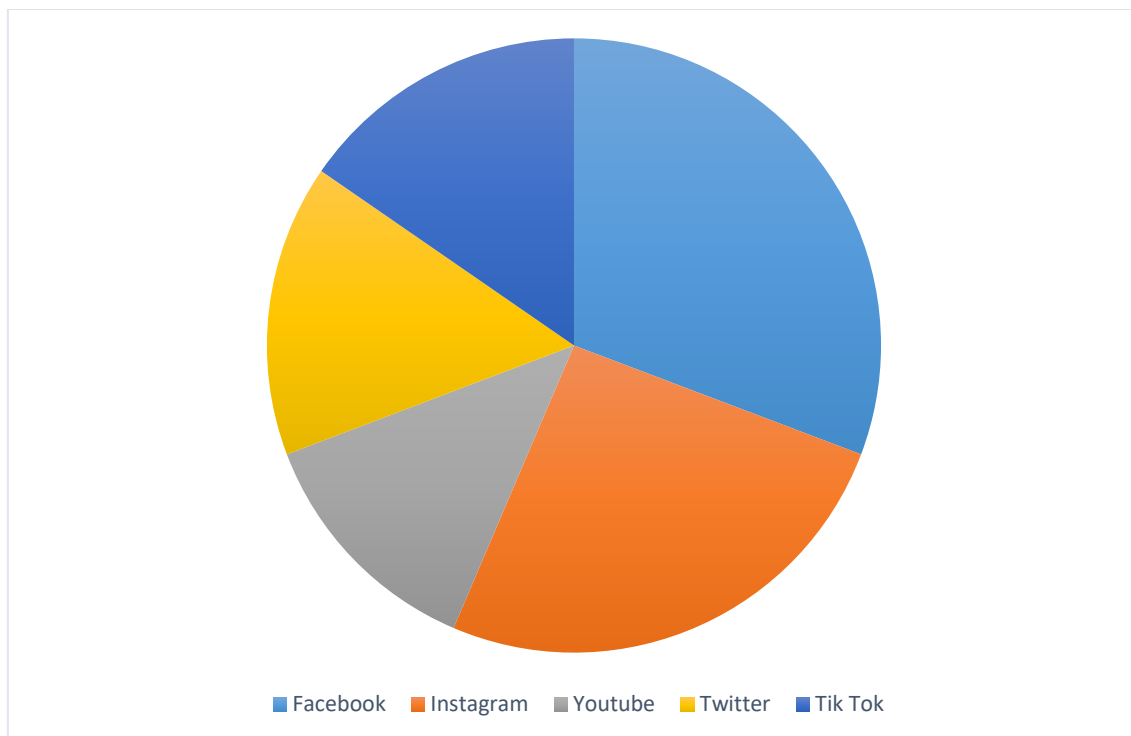### 6.1 Social Media Platforms in use

Figure 8. Social Media Platforms in use

The requirement for the participants was that they are all active users of social media. All of them used Facebook and 10 out of 12 people were active on Instagram. The biggest differences were shown in the usage of YouTube, Twitter, and Tik Tok. Only 5 out of 12 people were active on YouTube and Twitter. Tik Tok was used by 6 participants and it was more popular amongst younger participants. The main reason for social media usage was to see the daily life of friends and family, even though the cause and style to use social media platforms varied quite a bit.

Facebook:

All the participants were Facebook users, even though two of them said they are not using it daily. Facebook was the platform that had been in use for the longest and the main reason for using Facebook is to keep contact with family and friends. Nowadays the functions on Facebook are versatile and half of the participants found it even complicated to use because of the many new features. All the participants said that they are more passive than active on Facebook, which means that they are not actively participating but rather just following what other people are posting there.

Half of the participants said they are using Facebook because of the marketplace, where people are selling anything from houses and cars to services and old belongings. According to participants Facebook is also a good place to create and check events. One participant stated that event creating on Facebook is more effortless than anywhere else and it always keeps people of that event up to date. In addition, two male participants said that they are using Facebook videos as an entertainment to pass the time. Different kind of Facebook groups were popular especially among the female participants and many of them stated that membership in a Facebook group have had a positive impact on them. Almost all the participants found advertisements on Facebook unsatisfactory, mainly because it effects on other posts the participants would rather see in there.

Instagram:

All the participants who are active users of Instagram, said that this is the social media platform they use and like the most. According to them it is user friendly and more visual than Facebook. They also liked the fact that Instagram is more personal in comparison to other platforms, and it is seen almost as autobiography, where you get a little insight of stories of people and it helps you to form an opinion about them. Like in Facebook, the main reason in Instagram was to see what friends and family are up to. However, one thing that stood out was the amount of Instagram influencers and celebrities the participants said they are following. They explained that when they see posts from other people, it provides them with a level of inspiration to become better and strive for more.

One participant also mentioned that photography is an art and Instagram is all about photos and videos. You can get easily inspired on Instagram and it also stimulates you to be more creative in your photos, so you can post better content in your account.

Instagram stories feature received compliments from all the participants and story's function was seen as a bridge to get more familiar with the people you follow, as you can react to their stories and this on the other hand may start conversations. Some of the participants had notice that advertising has increased in Instagram, but according to them it has not reached the level of being disturbing yet.

YouTube:

YouTube was the least used platform amongst the participants. During interviews all the participants mentioned that all of them are familiar with YouTube, but only 5 out of 12 are active users with an account on YouTube. All the active users said that it is the best platform for leisure time and moreover a great environment for learning. In addition, they said it is one of the best ways to communicate with a wide audience, whether you are promoting something or providing information to people. The active users of YouTube experienced advertising to be strong and even aggressive on YouTube.

Twitter:

Half of the participants had a twitter account but only two were active users in there. They said that the main reason for their twitter use is to follow friends, influencers, brands, and to be aware of the current phenomena around the world. All the participants agreed that is one of the best platforms for professional networking and It allows you to build connections with interesting and relevant people around the world, who share your interest of any current topic. The four, (not so active) twitter users said that the main purpose for their twitter use is mainly professional through their work. The participants saw advertising on twitter to be in the centre, because unlike some other platforms where advertisements are pushed to the side in twitter they are in-stream.

Tik Tok:

Just like Twitter, Tik Tok was also used by six of the participants. The only difference was that all the participants are active users on Tik Tok. Most of the participants using Tik Tok belonged to the age group from 25 to 32 and this is what this platform is targeting, young mobile phone users. All the participants liked using Tik Tok because of its facile nature. They thought it is a place, where people can talk about even the most difficult topics, such as personal struggles, money, politics etc through humour. One female participant called Tik Tok a unique way to transmit and consume information. All the users found it appealing also because of its intensity such as, loud, meaningful music and bright lights.

6.2   Social Media Advertising

All the participants had noticed that there are advertisements on all the social media platforms that were observed in this study. However, the participants felt that advertising is more intense on the certain platforms. They thought that it is most visible and forceful on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, because the advertisements show up to your feed automatically and they cannot be hidden. The participants using twitter had noticed advertising on there as well, but they found it not so intense and invasive compared to other platforms in question. Advertising on Tik Tok is still a little bit of question mark according to the participants. Tik Tok is quite new phenomenon in Finland and the users had noticed steady increase of advertising on Tik Tok. Their presumption was that advertising on Tik Tok will reach the same level as in Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube soon.

Facebook has admitted that their advertising is targeted to users based on their location, demographic, and profile information. All the participants had noticed several ad formats on Facebook such as images, videos, instant experiences (a platform in Facebook that is premeditated for advertising), and collections. All the participants had also noticed that the advertisement on their feed is usually based on their current google history search or any other matter they have searched or had a conversation with someone lately. This was found bizarre and even frightening among the participants. Some of the participants even admitted that they are avoiding giving likes on Facebook sometimes in order to evade unnecessary advertising.

All the participants using Instagram agreed that even though Instagram advertising has increased in the recent years, they do not see it as irritating as in Facebook. They thought that Instagram advertising is more obvious and apparent. This is because Instagram ads are posts or stories a brand pays to influencers to promote their product or services. Those advertisements often look like regular Instagram posts, but are always identified by a "sponsored" label. Instagram is a constantly growing platform, and they are updating new features all the time to keep audience engaged. Almost all the participants that are using Instagram mentioned that they are following some influencers. This is good news to the advertisers because it helps their job to target the wanted audience. From the marketing point of view, it is relevant to mention that Instagram is owned by Facebook and this can be seen in the marketing strategy of both platforms. Instagram can utilize Facebook's advertising platform and it makes easier for advertisers to manage Facebook and Instagram advertisements in one place. All the participants were aware of this ownership fact and some even saw similarities with Facebook and Instagram advertising.

The participants who have YouTube account and are using it regularly, admitted that they have removed all the advertising and Pop ups from their profile. However, this is possible only if you have a profile on YouTube. For this reason, all the other participants without active profile found YouTube advertising annoying. The advertisements on YouTube can be placed before, during, or after the main video. Nonetheless, the creator of the advertisement will receive compensation only if the viewer watches 30 seconds of the video. The main reason why the participants found YouTube advertising irritating was the fact that it cuts off their main purpose, which is to watch a video of their interest. Moreover. the advertising during videos were found more disturbing than advertising before or at the end of the video.

According to the participants using twitter, advertisements seen on there did not bother them at all. They all agreed that they have noticed some advertising, but it is less visible than in other platforms. In Twitter all promoted advertising are distinctly marked as "Promoted" when an advertiser is paying to be seen on twitter. Moreover, all promoted advertising are just like any other tweets and they can be retweeted, replied to, and liked. The participants all agreed that for certain industries that they are following on twitter, such as news, entertainment, technology, and politics twitter is a functional platform.

All the participants that are active on TikTok agreed that the marketing there is more creative and fun than on the other platforms in question. One entrant even stated that it is so adaptable she will not even notice that she has been advertised to. Just like the application in general, TikTok advertising is also quite new phenomenon. They started showing short advertisements in early 2019. For this reason, TikTok has not set up any formal profit-sharing system just yet. All the entrants using TikTok had noticed companies and brands setting up their own TikTok profiles to promote their products and services. The entrants found this very creative and functional way to promote almost anything. Almost all of them believed that marketing on TikTok will reach new level in the future. Because of the same "influencer" phenomenon people have witnessed previously with Instagram, participants had expectations for influencer marketing to become as popular on TikTok as well.

6.3 Influencer Marketing

A pre-requisite for the participants to attend this research was that they are familiar with the concept of influencer marketing or that they are following influencers on social media. Only 2 out of 12 participants said that they are not following influencers on their social media platforms. Nonetheless, the researcher decided to include them in this survey to be able to receive different kind of perspective.

The interviews revealed that the participants are following different kind of influencers for various reasons. All the participants listed personal experiences, preferences and fascinating content as a reason to follow the influencers they are following. The influencer subjects that connected all participants were: Food, Travel, Wellness, Movies, and Music. All the participants were following someone connected to one of these topics on social media. There were also some differences between male and female participants, where the males were devoted to follow influencers from fields, such as sports, technology, investment, comic art, and gaming, females were more interested with fashion, beauty, parenting, and blog content.

All the participants were following at least one mega influencer on their social media platforms, even though most of the influencers they followed belonged to the micro and nano influencer categories. The explanation to this might be that not many Finnish influencers have reached the mega or macro influencer status yet and the following level of Finnish influencers was slightly higher compared to foreign influencers among the participants.

Here are the reasons why the respondents are following influencers on social media:

- **They want to be interested:** For the respondent's content is the centre, when choosing an influencer, they want to follow. To be able to connect with someone over a mutual interest or passion, no matter what it might be, is the key.

- **They want to be entertained:** a personality that stands out is an important issue for the respondents. They are looking for an influencer that is comprehensible, powerful and authentic. They want to follow someone who is funny and has clear, unique, and straightforward delivery on any topic.

- **They want to relate:** All the respondents agreed that they want to follow influencers that post about their everyday life, including all the ups and downs. They want to see authenticity and think it is best shown when influencers are comfortable enough sharing about their prosperity and failures as well.

- **They want to be inspired:** All the respondents wanted to follow influencers who can motivate and inspire them in some way. Most of them admitted that they are attracted to the inspirational and visual aspect of the influencers and when they experience that, "why didn't I think of that myself?" moment, it summarizes the reasons for their following. They thought that influencers can help in the process of becoming better versions of themselves and to grow as individuals.

The two participants that are not following any influencers on social media said that their reason for that is mainly because they want to see what is going on with their closest people and following people, they do not know would distract their approach. However, they both understands the power and popularity of influencer marketing and found it very useful.

The interviews showed that all the Millennials in this study have been under the influence of social media influencer marketing. The respondents stated that they are following influencers to get inspiration, motivation and tips. The most popular areas among the respondents are fashion, beauty, sports, traveling, and music. None of them found advertising on the social media channels of the influencers they are following annoying. One participant explained this by saying that when you follow the influencers for a certain time period, you start to feel like she/he is a close person to you and when you feel close to a person, you do not get irritated by them so easily. All the respondents thought that influencer marketing is functional if the product or service the influencer is promoting is something she/he believes in and it also fits her/his brand.

In case the influencer would start to promote any products or services just to achieve financial stability etc, the respondents would most likely stop following them. All the respondents agreed that social media marketing is one of the best ways to get Information of new upcoming products and services. In addition, it also offers the best information of promotions and discounts according to the respondents. Most of them had bought something recommended by an influencer they are following. However, they all stated that when purchasing a new product or service the opinions of their family and friends have more effect on their purchasing decisions than the opinions of the influencers, they are following. Social media and influencers are seen like a useful tool to seek more information of the wanted products, in order to make faster decisions on different purchasing situations.

The interviews showed that the perceptions and attitudes towards social media influencers are favourable. The way people from different age groups perceive influencer marketing is extremely important to the future of influencer marketing. All the participants agreed that today's people are forward- thinking individuals, who are taking world issues and ethical matters seriously and brands needs to be aware of this and they must work harder and smarter than ever before to be able to connect and engage with the people of this digital age.

7   Conclusion

It is a well-known fact that information is power and without a means of extending information people cannot deploy power. Sharing information is the positive impact of social media and with the help of social media platforms the information can spread all over the world within seconds. The longer social media users can actively access the information, the more discussion will be provoked and the greater the social media impact will be. Nevertheless, when the amount of information increases every day, it can make people feel overpowering, which leads to perceiving distinct aspects of information on social media. People can access and share the information about their experiences faster than ever and this has influenced the brands to be even more customer-centred with their approach to avoid negative prestige.

The target of social media marketing for brands is to advertise their products and services on social media and have an outlook on how consumers are responding to their content. In the marketing point of view, the created content should be high-quality and consumer relevant to be able to meet the demand of consumers. However, Social media marketing is a constantly changing field and the biggest challenge for any company is to stay one step ahead, when creating social media content. The idea of the theoretical framework of this study was to form an understanding on how marketing has changed through social media and why creating models to know your customer base is important.

The objective of this research was to gain more information on how the Millennials in Finland are perceiving social media influencer marketing and if it influences their purchasing decisions. During the process the author also gained a lot of new knowledge about the never-ending world of social media, social media influencer marketing, the classification of different social media influencer types, and why studying consumer behaviour is important.

The research has shown that the main reason for the millennials in Finland to use different social media platforms is to stay connected with friends and family. Even though, Facebook is the most popular channel, the respondents were more active on other social media channels. Facebook and Twitter were liked because of their information sharing. Instagram was popular because of the high-quality visual content and real-time photo and video options. YouTube and Tik Tok were seen as the place for entertainment and fun whenever they wanted to take a break from their daily routines.

The respondents had also noticed advertising on all the social media platforms that were examined. According to the respondents, advertising was most notable on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube and almost unnoticeable on Twitter and Tik Tok. Nevertheless, all the respondents understood the importance of advertising on social media.

The result of this research shows that Millennials in Finland have a positive approach towards social media influencers. The longer time they had followed influencers, the more connected they felt towards them. The features that were considered most important were authenticity and uniqueness. This information is prominent to all the marketers, who implement marketing through social media influencers. This research showed that the best social media platform to execute influencer marketing among the Millennials in Finland is Instagram. All the respondents also appreciated that influencer marketing is distinctly apparent on all social media platforms.

From the findings of this research, the conclusion is that millennials in Finland are using social media and influencers as an appurtenance to confirm their purchase decisions and to seek up to date information. However, they still value the opinions of the people they know personally more, when making purchasing decisions.

This research expressed essential information about social media, social media influencer marketing and customer behaviour on social media. For the future research the author would recommend to study more different age groups to be able to receive better understanding on the effects of social media influencer marketing on purchasing behaviour of people in general. Moreover, Social media influencer marketing as a concept, would be an interesting subject to learn more about as well.

7.1   Limitations and Validity

This research only presents the findings and conclusions that are valid with the chosen group of people and for that reason, they cannot be extrapolated elsewhere because of the differences in environmental factors and the individual opinions that were received during the interviews. To be able to receive information of social media behaviour of all consumers and how much social media has an impact on their purchasing decisions, a wider research geographically and by using different kind of data collection and analysis would be required.

The data was collected, analysed, and interpreted by the author and attention was focused on the validity of the data. Internal validity is the coverage of the monitored results that shows the truth in the group of people that are studied. In qualitative research internal validity is a key factor and in this research for example, it can be seen as a learning through the process element.

A good example of this are the interviews that were organised during this research process. The length and content of the interviews grew and evolved as the researcher got more information and training.

External validity in a research shows how the findings can be generalized to different situations. In this research, some generalization can be made because of the decent group of participants. Even though, finding general truths is the nature of qualitative studies, the author of this research tried to find more profound information of the participants that were carefully chosen.

Reliability of this research is almost impossible to prove because in a qualitative study it would mean that when repeating this research, the same results would be generated. A qualitative research paints the picture in a way the participants are experiencing it. Considering, all the participants have different values, different approaches in life, different answers to the questions, and different social media experiences, yet resemblances can be seen in the answers. The whole research process was documented by the author and all the data, notes, and recordings were saved for future needs.

References

Ahmad, I.2018 The History of social media. Retrieved on 5 March 2021. Available at:

https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/the-history-of-social-media-infographic-1/522285/.

Amaresan, S. 2020. What is social listening & why is it important?

Retrieved on 6 March 2021. Available at: https://blog.hubspot.com/service/social-listening.

Arora, S. 2021. What is data Analysis? Methods, Techniques& Tools. Retrieved on 20 August 2021. Available at:

https://hackr.io/blog/what-is-data-analysis-methods-techniques-tools

Buffer. 2021. What is social media marketing? Retrieved on 15 March 2021. Available at:

https://buffer.com/social-media-marketing#.

Brown. 2019. 6 Types of influencers (Mega, Macro, Micro, Advocates, Referrers, Loyalists) Retrieved on 20 August 2021. Available at: https://bondai.co/blog/6-types-of-influencers/

Carlson, N. 2021. Five Social Media Trends to Follow in 2021. Retrieved on 12 March 2021. Available at:

http://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2021/02/12/five-social-media-trends-you-need-to-fol-low-in-2021/?sh=fff0e9c15f.

Clootrack. 2020. How does social media influence consumer behaviour. Retrieved on 1 September 2021. Available at: https://clootrack.com/knowledge_base/how-does-social-media-influence-consumer-behavior/

Clootrack. 2021. Major Factors Influencing Consumer Behaviour. Retrieved on 2 September 2021. Available at: https://clootrack.com/knowledge_base/major-factors-influ-encing-consumer-behavior/

Coleman, B. 2020. YouTube Marketing. Retrieved on 24 March 2021. Available at: https://www.hubspot.com/youtube-marketing

Cyca, M. 2020. Twitter marketing: The complete guide for business. Retrieved on 22 March 2021. Available at: https://blog.hootsuite.com/twitter-marketing/

Dean, K. 2019. The role of social media influencers. Retrieved on 20 March 2021. Available at: https://www.manobyte.com/growth-strategy/the-role-of-social-media-influencers

Decker, A. 2021. Instagram Marketing. Retrieved on 19 March 2021. Available at: https://www.hubspot.com/instagram-marketing

Donawerth, S. 2020. Millennials: Social Media and Influencer marketing statistics. Retrieved on 20 April 2021. Available at: https://getcarro.com/blog/millennials-by-the-numbers-influencer-marketing-statistics/

Dubovik, O. (2013). Instagram as instrument of marketing. Majesty of marketing, 39.

Available at: http://mk.nmu.org.ua/ua/majesty2013/majesty2013.pdf#page=39

Facebook. 2021. Retrieved on 25 March 2021. Available at: https://about.facebook.com.

Geyser, W. 2021. What is an Influencer? -Social Media Influencers Defined. Retrieved on 30 August 2021. Available at: https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-an-influencer/

Henderson, C. 2021. 4 Types of consumer purchasing behaviour and what drives them. Retrieved on 1 September 2021. Available at: https://zipordering.com/en/digital-analytics/purchasing-behavior.html

Hendricks, D. 2021 Complete History of Social media: Then and Now.

Retrieved on 5 March 2021. Available at:

 https://smallbiztrends.com/2013/05/the-complete-history-of-social-media-infographic.html

Hudson, M. 2020. What is social media? Retrieved on 18 March 2021. Available at: https://www.thebalancesmb.com/what-is-social-media-2890301

Influencer Marketing Hub official website. 2021 Social Media Trends for 2021 and Beyond.

Retrieved on 4 March 2021. Available at:

http://influencermarketinghub.com/social-media-trends/

Influencer Marketing Hub official website. 2021. What is influencer marketing: An in depth look at marketing's next big thing. Retrieved on 20 March 2021. Available at:

https://influencermarketinghub.com/what -is-influencer-marketing/.

Instagram. 2021. Retrieved on 25 March 2021. Available at:

https://business.instagram.com/

Ismail, K. 2018. Social media Influencers: Mega, Macro, Micro or Nano. Retrieved on 28 August 2021. Available at: https://www.cmswire.com/digital-marketing/social-media-influencers-mega-macro-micro-or-nano/

Kemp, S. 2020 Digital 2020: 3.8 billion people use social media.

Retrieved on 2 March 2021. Available at:

https://wearesocial.com/blog/2020/01/digital-2020-3-8-billion-people-use-social-media .

Loeb, W. 2020. Social Media plays a big role in how Millennials Shop, but so do stores. Retrieved 4 April 2021. Available at:

https://www.forbes.com/sites/walterloeb/2020/01/21/why-millennials-shop-on-social-media-but-also-like-to-shop-in-stores/?sh=7b73977b350c

Mclachlan, S. 2020. What is social commerce and why should your brand care? Retrieved 3 September 2021. Available at: https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-commerce/

Mehta, S. 2021. Types of Research Methadology. Retrieved on 25 April 2021. Available at: https://eduvoice.in/types-research-methodology/

Newberry, C.; Mclachlan, S. 2020. Facebook Marketing in 2021: How to use Facebook for Business. Retrieved on 8 March 2021. Available at:

https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-marketing-tips/.

Niinimäki, E. 2020 Social media usage in Finland- statistics & facts. Retrieved on 2 March 2021. Available at:

https://www.statista.com/topics/4173/social-media-usage-in-finland/

Patel, S. 2021. How you can build a powerful influencer marketing strategy in 2021. Retrieved on 20 March 2021. Available at:

https://www.bigcommerce.com/blog/influencer-marketing/#what-is-influencer-marketing.

Rendler-Kaplan, L. 2019. 8 ways that brands can utilize tiktok in their marketing.

Retrieved on 18 March 2021. Available at:

https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/8-ways-that-brands-can-utilize-tiktok-in-their-marketing/565611/.

Safko, L.;Brake, D. 2009. The Social Media Bible: Tactics, Tools & Strategies for business Success. United States of America: John Wiley & Sons.

Saharan, M. 2014. Qualitative Research: A guide to Design and Implementation. Hoboken: Jossey-Bass.

Schabdach, S. 2020 The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Millenials Versus Gen Z. Retrieved on 1 March 2021. Available at:

https://www.mitchcommgroup.com/2020/02/06/the-impact-of-influencer-marketing-on-millennials-versus-gen-z/

Simplilearn. 2021. Understanding the impacts of social media (pros and Cons) Retrieved on 22 March 2021. Available on: https://simplilearn.com/real-impact-social-media-article.

Statista official website. 2021. Global digital Population 2021. Retrieved on 25 March 2021. Available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/

Tidy, J.; S.G, S. 2020. TikTok: The story of social media giant. Retrieved on 17 March 2021. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-53640724.

West, C. 2021. Social proof: How to use psychology in digital marketing. Retrieved on 30 August 2021. Available at: https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-proof/

Appendix 1. Theme Interviews

Interviewer:

Date

Duration

Participant

Male / Female

Occupation

Theme 1. Social Media Platforms

- What comes to your mind when you hear the word social media?
- Why do you use social media?
- What do you think are the pros and cons of social media?
- What social media platforms do you use?

Theme 2. Social media advertising

- What do you think when you hear the word social media advertising?
- Do you have personal experiences on social media advertising?
- How does social media advertising effect on your social media usage?

Theme 3. Social media influencer marketing

- When you hear the word "influencer" what do you think?
- How would you explain influencer marketing?
- Do you follow influencers on social media? Why do you follow them?
- What kind of influencers are you following on social media?
- What do you think about paid partnership content?
- Have you ever bought something online based on the recommendation of an influencer?