THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON PURCHASE DECISIONS

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### Abstract

The main objective of this thesis was to investigate how social media influencers impact Savonia University of Applied Sciences students’ purchasing decisions. The aim was to analyze Instagram and TikTok influencers and their impact on Bachelor of Business Administration as well as Bachelor of Tourism and Hospitality Management students.

The method used in this research was a quantitative questionnaire, which was conducted by Savonia University of Applied Sciences students. The questionnaire had 25 multiple-choice questions. The online questionnaire was created on Webropol. The link to the questionnaire was shared in Finnish and English among Bachelor of Business Administration as well as Bachelor of Tourism and Hospitality Management students. In addition, we collected qualitative data from 3 different types of influencers.

The result of the quantitative research and analysis indicates that Instagram and TikTok have a minor to moderate impact on Savonia students’ purchasing decisions. Instagram is a more popular social media channel compared to TikTok. The qualitative data indicates that it’s common and useful for brands to work with influencers in order to promote and reach a wider audience.
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1 INTRODUCTION

Different social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have become part of people’s everyday lives, especially for younger generations. Most Finnish people use social media daily (Statistics Finland 2023a). The rise of social media’s popularity has created a new type of celebrity, the social media influencer. Social media influencers are individuals that have gained followers and established credibility. They also have the ability to influence customers’ purchasing decisions (Geyser 2023). They have become an important marketing tool for businesses, for their ability to influence the purchasing decisions of their followers.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how big of an impact, social media influencers have on Savonia University of Applied Sciences students’ purchasing decisions. This thesis aims to help us to understand the impact of social media influencers on purchase decisions and how it affects consumer behavior. We want to understand the impact of influencers on consumers, which will be helpful in the future working environment. We decided to focus on Instagram and TikTok as both are one of the most downloaded apps of 2022 and one of the most popular social media apps in the world.

This thesis consists of quantitative research which we conducted via an online questionnaire. It was shared in Finnish and English among Bachelor of Business Administration as well as Bachelor of Tourism and Hospitality Management students. The questionnaire was sent to the students in order to find out their attitudes and behaviors towards Instagram and TikTok influencers and to what extent these influencers impact their purchasing decisions.

The idea of this thesis topic came easily to us. As daily social media users, we have seen the effects influencers have on purchasing decisions and also been influenced to buy goods we didn’t necessarily need. As social media plays a huge part in the current world, we felt like this topic would be perfect for us. Not only is it interesting, but it also allows us to gain insight into Instagram and TikTok as marketing tools.
2 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media refers to online platforms and applications that allow users to share ideas and information (Tufts s.a.) Some popular social media platforms are Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (Dollarhide 2023). Social media is rapidly changing, and the popularity of social media platforms has increased exponentially in the past decade. As of January 2023, there are 4,76 billion social media users around the world and the number is increasing (DataReportal s.a.). Due to that reason, the popularity of social media marketing has risen. Social media marketing refers to companies’ use of social media to promote and sell their products and services. Currently, many companies use influencer marketing to market their products and services to consumers.

The first true social media site began just a little over two decades ago, in 1997, with a platform called Six Degrees. To be more specific, Six Degrees was the first platform which featured the needed elements for a social media site. These features include users having their own profiles, and the ability to create and share content as well as associate with other users (Ortiz-Ospina 2019).

As we know, social media plays a huge part in our everyday life. According to the DataReportal by Simon Kemp (2022), an average person spends 2 hours and 21 minutes on social media daily. That might not seem like a lot, but that’s because it’s calculated among all social media users. Now let’s look at how much time teenagers use on social media per day. According to The Healthy Journal, teens ages 13 to 18 spent an average of 8 hours and 39 minutes on social media daily (The Healthy Journal s.a.). That is a huge difference.

Social media has many positive aspects. Social media allows people to communicate with their friends and family. Through social media, it is also easy to find friends with similar interests and stay connected with them regardless of location. Also, it is easy to search for and discover new information. Starting a social media account is also very easy. The only thing that you need is your mobile phone.

Even though social media is a useful tool and has positive uses, the research also suggests that there are negative sides to using social media. Studies show that social media may have a negative impact on mental health. There is increased depression, anxiety, addiction, and low self-esteem (Robinson & Smith 2023). According to the World Health Organization (2022), misinformation on social media may cause distress and have a negative effect on mental and public health.

Social media has an increased negative effect on physical health. Research suggests that spending a long time sitting using electronic devices may lead to health issues such as increased headaches and back pain (Gambiini 2022).

2.1 Social Media in Finland

In Finland, the use of social media has risen over the years. We currently have 4,62 million social media users. According to Statista (2023a), the three most used social media channels in Finland are WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram.
According to 2022 Statistics Finland’s annual survey (see Figure 1), about the use of information and communications technology by individuals, 93% have used the Internet during the past three months. 100% of the students said to have used the Internet during the past three months. There has been a rise during Covid-19 in 2020, but after that, it has stayed at 93% since 2021. 73% of the respondents use the Internet several times a day. 91% of the students use the Internet daily (Statistics Finland 2023b).

![FIGURE 1. Total and student’s use of the Internet in the past 3 months (Statistics Finland 2023a)](image1)

According to Statistics Finland (see Figure 2), 93% of 16–24-year-olds use social networking services. 25–34-year-olds’ use of social networking services has slightly decreased. In 2022, it dropped to 89% from the previous 92%. Also, 75-89-year-olds’ social media usage has decreased by 2%. Compared to 35–44-year-olds and 45-54-year-olds have had an increase in social media usage (Statistics Finland 2023b).

![FIGURE 2. Use of social networking service in the past 3 months by age (Statistics Finland 2023b)](image2)

According to Statistics Finland, in 2022 (see Figure 3), 70% have used at least one social networking service in the past 3 months. 91% of the students answered to have used a social networking...
service in the past 3 months. 84% of the male students have used social networking service in the past 3 months. 76% of the male students use it almost daily. Compared to the 98% of female students who have used social networking services during the past 3 months. 88% of female students use social networking services almost daily. Social networking services are more popular among females than men (Statistics Finland 2023b).

FIGURE 3. Use of social networking service in the past 3 months by sex (Statistics Finland 2023b)

2.2 Instagram

Instagram is a free social media platform launched in 2010. Instagram users are able to share photos and videos on their profiles and do live streams on the app. Also, they are able to follow other accounts and share, like, and comment on their posts. In 2021, there were 1,21 billion monthly active users on Instagram (Statista 2023a). As of January 2023, Instagram is the 4th most popular social media platform (Statista 2023c).

The app allows users to decide whether they want to share their content with the public or inclusively to only accepted followers. As companies and individuals have seen the potential of Instagram and how many users they can reach through this social media platform, many companies have created a main user account, in order to reach new potential customers, keep up the relationships with old customers, as well as to build audience engagement.

2.3 TikTok

TikTok is a social media platform launched in 2016. It allows users to create and share videos up to 10 minutes long. Users are able to like, comment and share each other’s posts. As of 2021, the app has over 1 billion monthly active users (TikTok 2021). TikTok’s user base is also growing. It was the most downloaded app worldwide in 2022. It was downloaded 672 million times (Statista 2023d). As of January 2023, TikTok is the 6th most popular social media platform in the world (Statista 2023c).

What makes TikTok special is that you see more authentic content, while Instagram is more polished and put together in a way. On TikTok, you can see a large number of videos in a short period of time, which is one of the reasons why it is so popular. Viewers don’t get bored on the app, as users put out different types of content. Anyone is able to create videos, and either publish them to everyone who uses TikTok, or just for friends, or even just for themselves.
TikTok makes it easier for users to see influencers even if a user doesn’t follow them. The videos shown in the FYP, which stands for For You Page, are the result of the algorithm. What that means is that based on the data collected from the user’s device, the algorithm changes your FYP to match your preferences. For example, people who like animals tend to watch animal-related videos, rather than skip them, which results in more animal-related videos in the user’s FYP. In TikTok, a user can also mark a type of video they are not interested in, which affects the algorithm and that way the user’s FYP (World Stream 2022).
3 SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

An influencer is a social media user who has established such credibility, they have the ability to influence customers’ purchasing decisions. They provide recommendations and endorsements for products and services. Over time, influencers can gain trust and credibility with their followers, which may in turn impact their purchasing behavior. There are different types of influencers that can be categorized based on the number of followers and reach (Geyser 2023).

Being a social media influencer can be a real job for some people. Nowadays, influencers get paid for sponsored posts and brand partnerships, and the amount of money they get can be surprising. According to New York Post, influencers can earn up to a 6-figure salary by doing social media (New York Post 2017).

3.1 Global and Local Influencers

Global influencers usually have millions of followers. They are mostly celebrities such as actors and athletes, or other worldwide known people, that have gained popularity through active usage of social media platforms (Halonen 2019, 19). A good example would be Kylie Jenner, who gained popularity through their family reality show called Keeping Up with the Kardashians. As of April 2023, Kylie Jenner has an astonishing 385 million followers on Instagram (Instagram 2023a). Also, she has 52 million followers on TikTok (TikTok 2023a). In addition, she is also known for her makeup brand, and relationships with other celebrities.

Local influencers, on the other hand, are mostly known in a specific area. Due to the limited market size, for example, a Finnish Instagram user with 100 000 followers has more power to impact consumers than an American Instagram user with the same number of followers. It’s not always just about the number of followers, as we need to look at the whole context, which includes the size and number of people in the country (Halonen 2019, 19-21).

3.2 Niche Influencer

Niche influencers are local or international experts on a specific topic. These niche influencers typically have a few thousand followers and a tightly integrated community. The number of followers depends on the size of the niche topic. The most known topics are hobbies, travel, and lifestyle. These types of influencers are considered more authentic and trust-worthy, as their followers consist of people who are interested in the same topics (Halonen 2019, 19-20). Brands prefer to work with niche influencers as they have a high engagement rate as well as a more exclusive and trusted community with their followers.

3.3 Macro Influencer

Macro influencers are social media users who have gained a following of 10 000 - 1 million on one platform. These influencers have gained a huge community and fame through the internet itself. Brands are more likely to do brand deals with macro influencers rather than micro-influencers, as they reach a much wider audience faster. Although, using a macro influencer is much faster, it is also more expensive (Halonen 2019, 20).
It is common for macro influencers to be known as something else rather than an influencer. They are often TV personas, athletes, or celebrities. Due to the already existing fan base, it is easy for them to achieve a huge following in a short period of time.

### 3.4 Micro Influencer

Micro-influencers are quite similar to Macro influencers. The biggest difference is the number of followers. Micro-influencers are everyday social media users who have under 10,000 followers on one platform. These influencers have a constant presence on their social media platform, in which they share their recommendations, topics of passion, and opinions. These influencers are perceived as authentic as they typically don’t talk about products or experiences that cost more than the average person can afford. Micro-influencers tend to keep up with their relationships with their followers by replying to comments and questions they receive (Halonen 2019, 20).

### 3.5 Nano Influencer

When a social media user has under 1,000 followers on a platform, they are considered a nano influencer. Nano influencer’s posts usually consist of videos of their loved ones such as family, friends, and pets, or funny posts such as memes. These influencers share positive and funny content out to the public (Halonen 2019, 20).

According to a survey by Social Media Today, the people who have the biggest impact on purchasing decisions are not these typical influencers but rather family and friends, with a clear 23% to 60% ratio (Social Media Today 2017). Nano influencers don’t usually get paid, other than getting the product, and for that reason, they are great for smaller brands that are just getting started.

### 3.6 Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is a form of online marketing. It is a cooperation between a company and a social media influencer. The goal is to promote and sell products or services to consumers. The end product is often a post on the influencer’s social media channel. Influencers may receive compensation for their post. For example, money, free products, or a trip. Influencer marketing is subject to Consumer Protection. Influencers and companies have to oblige guidelines and laws when doing influencer marketing (Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority 2019).

Influencer marketing is one of the most popular and effective ways for brands to get more exposure on the internet. In fact, so much, that marketers believe influencer marketing to have the highest Return on Investment (ROI), with the statistics of 1 dollar generating back 18 dollars (Oberlo 2023).
A consumer is a person who buys services or goods. They are the end users of the distribution chain. While customers and consumers are often seen as the same thing, it’s good to know that that is not always the case. Customers are the ones buying the goods or services, while consumers are the end users of them. An easy example is gift-givers, the person buying the product is the customer but the person receiving the gift and using it is the consumer. In the same way, when a person buys goods for themselves, they are both the customer and the consumer (Square s.a.). This enormous use of social media has opened a great possibility for brands to connect with new potential customers, as well as to influence the role of the customer journey.

4.1 Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior refers to the buying behavior of the final consumer. It consists of how cultural, social, personal, and psychological preferences influence their purchasing decisions (Armstrong & Kotler 2011, 164). Also, it helps companies to understand consumers better and create the most efficient way to market products to buyers.

One of the most important aspects of consumer behavior is the buyer decision process. It is the process that individuals go through while making purchases. The process has several stages (see Figure 4). It includes problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation. The process is not always consecutive, and consumers can move between stages depending on the situation (Armstrong & Kotler 2011, 179).

![Decision-making process](image)

FIGURE 4. Decision-making process (After Armstrong & Kotler 2011)

The decision-making process begins with recognition. The consumer recognizes a problem or a need that requires a solution. It could be that the need is created by internal or external factors. Internal factors are feelings or thoughts. External factors are such as advertisements or recommendations (Armstrong & Kotler 2011, 180).

Information search means that consumers will often seek information to help them make a decision. Information can be obtained from personal or commercial sources. Personal sources are, for example, talking to friends and family. Commercial sources are, for example, searching for information online and advertisements (Armstrong & Kotler 2011, 180).

Evaluation of alternatives happens after gathering information. After information gathering consumers will have a set of alternatives that they will compare. They will identify the pros and cons of
each alternative and compare their options based on different attributes such as price, features, and quality (Armstrong & Kotler 2011, 181).

After all the alternatives have been evaluated, consumers will decide and purchase the product or service based on the evaluation. In the post-purchase evaluation stage, consumers will evaluate their decision and the product or service they bought. Post-purchase evaluation can affect consumers’ future buying decisions. Consumers may or may not re-purchase the product or service based on their experience. Also, it may affect their desire to continue purchasing from the same brand (Armstrong & Kotler 2011, 181).

4.2 Customer Journey

A customer journey describes the entire experience a customer goes through when making a purchasing decision. This customer journey can be either online or offline, and in this case, we are looking it through an online MRACE Model (see Figure 5). MRACE stands for Measure, Reach, Act, Convert and Engage (Lahtinen, Pulkka, Karjaluoto & Mero 2022).

There are many benefits brands get from using the MRACE model. It makes it easier to visualize the marketing process and point out what needs to be modified. The MRACE model helps marketers to become more customer-oriented and focused on the customers' buying process. Marketers will also become data-based by measuring and analyzing data, which is the one and the only way to be able to develop marketing. Overall, the MRACE model simplifies marketing management and helps marketers to focus on the right paths (Lahtinen et al. 2022).

![MRACE model](image_url)

FIGURE 5. MRACE model (After Lahtinen et al. 2022)
Phase 1: Measure

A new element to the RACE model is the phase measure. As digital marketing is changing all the time, it is important to continue testing and measuring to be able to develop the results. As the digital channels are full of data, it is important to know what you are measuring and how to get the correct data. This new phase makes it possible to develop digital marketing (Lahtinen et al. 2022).

Phase 2: Reach

The goal is to be discoverable by the buyers, and to guide users online to the brand’s website. This means getting the brand, its products, and services knowledgeable and visible for potential buyers. In this phase, the buyers can be divided into 3 segments:

1. Buyer who is looking for your brand’s product
2. Buyer who is looking for a product similar to your brand
3. Buyer who is not looking for your brand’s products

To reach these different types of buyers, marketers can use either Google Ads or social media channels to get the buyers’ attention (Lahtinen et al. 2022).

Phase 3: Act

Shortened from interact, the goal is to get the potential buyers in contact with the brand and their products and services. This can mean looking at their website, following them on social media, or liking their posts. Any process where a potential buyer is guided towards making a purchase. Here you want to keep the buyer on the brand’s website for as long as possible and consume information about the brand’s products.

In the Act phase, online marketing plays a huge part. As so many people use social media, there is a huge possibility that if the marketing is done correctly, the buyer might come in contact with the brand and their products again on social media. Making the buyer more likely to purchase a product or service the brand is marketing (Lahtinen et al. 2022).

Phase 4: Convert

In this phase, the main goal of marketing is to get the buyer to purchase a product or service online or offline. Marketers can do this by creating offers for the buyer or by helping them with the deal. Whatever the barrier is that is stopping the buyer from purchasing, the marketer needs to solve it. Create a vision that the product or service is going to be good for them and worth purchasing (Lahtinen et al. 2022).

Phase 5: Engage

The last phase is all about engaging with old customers and keeping up good relationships with them. The goal of marketing is to ensure the buyer will stay committed to the brand so the purchases will continue. You want to create loyal customers that will choose your products and services rather than the competitors. The way this can be done is through social media platforms and email, by sending out newsletters and creating content the customers can review (Lahtinen et al. 2022).
5 RESEARCH

5.1 Quantitative Research

This is a research thesis that includes quantitative research. In quantitative research, the most common method of data collection is a questionnaire (Kananen 2011, 12). The data collection method used in this thesis was a quantitative online questionnaire. A questionnaire was chosen as a data collection method because it allows to collect data from a larger group of people efficiently and anonymously. The questionnaire was conducted anonymously to encourage honesty and increase participation (see Appendix 1).

The aim of our research was to collect data and find out how social media (Instagram and TikTok) influencers have impacted the purchasing behavior. The online questionnaire was created on Webropol. The link to the questionnaire was shared in Finnish and English among Bachelor of Business Administration as well as with Bachelor of Tourism and Hospitality Management students. The questionnaire was conducted during spring 2023. The questionnaire was conducted anonymously. The response time was one week. The questionnaire had 1670 recipients. In total, we received 186 responses. The response rate was 11.14%.

The questionnaire consisted of a total of 25 multiple-choice questions, of which 2 were standard demographic questions, 11 Instagram related, and 11 TikTok related questions. One question asked about Instagram and TikTok usage. If the respondent did not use either social media application, it ended the questionnaire. Demographic questions were mandatory, and rest of the questions were vital for our research to gain insight to the subject.

5.2 The Results of The Quantitative Questionnaire

Over half of the respondents (see Figure 6) were between 18 to 25 years old, 1/4 of the respondents were between 26 to 35 years old, and a smaller number of the respondents were between 36-45, and the rest of the respondents were over 45 years old.

![Figure 6. Ages of the respondents (n= 186)](image_url)

From our second demographic question (see Figure 7), we could see how the majority of our respondents, 77% identify as women, 22% as men, and 0.5% as other. The reason why there are
more answers by women may be affected by the fact that more women tend to use social media. As of January 2023, Instagram and TikTok have a larger female user base (Statista 2023e,f). Also, research suggests that more women tend to answer online surveys than men (Royall 2020).

FIGURE 7. Respondent’s gender (n= 186)

The majority of the respondents (see Figure 8) use both Instagram and TikTok. 90.9% of the total respondents use Instagram, either alone or with TikTok. A relatively small percentage uses only TikTok (3.2%). Surprisingly, there were only a few people who do not use either platform.

FIGURE 8. Platforms the respondents use (n= 186)

5.2.1 Results of The Instagram Related Questions

169 out of 186 respondents answered Instagram related questions.

When asked whether the respondents use Instagram daily, nearly all of the total Instagram users responded yes, with just 9 individuals who answered no.

When asked for what reason the respondents usually use Instagram (see Figure 9), most of the respondents said for entertainment. The second most answers got communication and the rest of the choices got just a couple of answers. Some of the respondents mentioned other reasons why they
use Instagram for were to follow up with friends, using the app as it has become a habit, and finding information.

![Graph](image)

**FIGURE 9. The respondent’s usual purpose of using Instagram (n=169)**

The majority of respondents follow influencers on Instagram. When asked if the respondents had ever bought a product or service after it was recommended by an influencer on Instagram, just a little over half of the respondents said yes, and a little under half said no. Falling for the same category, we also asked if the respondents had ever decided not to purchase a product or service, when an influencer on Instagram did not like it. Only about 1/3 of the respondents said yes, while 2/3 said no.

From the questionnaire, we found out how often the respondents purchase products or services based on Instagram influencer recommendations. Most of the respondents answered less than once a month, which was followed up by those who had never purchased a product or service based on Instagram influencer recommendation. Once a year was also a popular answer.

The results show, influencers on Instagram do not have a major impact on the respondents’ purchasing decisions (see Figure 10). Most of the respondents were said to have a minor impact, followed up by moderate impact, and no impact at all.
One of the most interesting questions we wanted to find answers to was, what type of products or services the respondents usually purchase based on recommendations made by an influencer on Instagram (see Figure 11). Surprisingly two options got the most answers. 1/3 of the respondents said they don’t purchase anything based on Instagram influencer recommendations, and another 1/3 of the respondents chose cosmetics. As most of our respondents identify as women, that may be the reason why cosmetics got so many answers.

When asked if the respondents trust recommendations made by influencers on Instagram, most of the respondents said sometimes. Rarely and no got also answers, but not one person responded yes, always.
For the next questions, we only got answers from those respondents, who said they have made a purchase based on Instagram influencer recommendations. The number of responses from this point on was 95. When asked if the respondents have ever regretted a purchase they made based on a recommendation from an influencer on Instagram, 1/3 said yes, and 2/3 said no.

From the last Instagram-related question, we found out just a little over half of the respondents said they have purchased a product or service, recommended by an influencer on Instagram in which they were not originally interested. In return, just under half said they haven’t done that.

5.2.2 Results of The TikTok Related Questions

104 out of 186 respondents answered TikTok related questions. The following questions are the same as above but regards of TikTok instead of Instagram.

The results indicate that almost all of the respondents use TikTok daily, and just a small number of the respondents do not. We found out the most common use for TikTok is for communication followed up by searching for information. Both communication and work got the least number of answers. A few respondents said other reasons, and for those the factor was friends.

From the questionnaire (see Figure 12), we found out over half of the respondents follow influencers on TikTok, and only a little less than half don’t. That doesn’t come as a surprise to us, as TikTok is an app where you see videos from different users, and therefore are more likely to come across content made by an influencer.

![Pie chart showing the percentage of respondents following influencers on TikTok](image)

Do you follow any influencers on TikTok?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 12. The percentage of respondents following influencers on TikTok (n=104)

From the questionnaire, we found out just a little over half of the respondents have purchased a product or service, after it was recommended by an influencer on TikTok. On the other hand, a little under half of the respondents have not.
When asked whether the respondents have decided not to purchase a product or service because an influencer on TikTok didn’t like it, 40.4% said yes, and 59.6% said no.

The result, of how often the respondents purchase based on recommendations on TikTok, is quite similar to the results in the same question regarding Instagram (see Figure 13). In this case, more respondents buy products or services once a month, and in exchange, the number of at least once a year was less.

Influencers on TikTok seem to have a bigger impact on the respondents’ purchasing decisions (see Figure 14). Compared to Instagram, 1.8%, influencers on TikTok have 5.8% major impact on the respondents. Although the increase is only 4%, it’s clear that influencers on TikTok have more impact over the respondents’ purchasing decisions. Other than that, the results appear to be similar.
Yet again, cosmetics are the most bought category among users of Instagram and TikTok. Followed by other factors, that the respondents said to be, for example, food, tools, and cleaning supplies. Fashion, travel, and technology got the least number of answers.

According to the questionnaire, the respondents never fully trust recommendations made by an influencer. Most of the respondents (see Figure 15), with 72%, trust the recommendations sometimes.

There is a clear distribution, with the respondents' answers to the question, have you ever regretted a purchase that was recommended by an influencer on TikTok? Majority of the respondents haven’t regretted a purchase they have made, while a minority said they have.

![Figure 15](image_url)

**FIGURE 15.** The percentage of how many of the respondents have regretted a purchase (n=104)

The results of the last question are almost identical to the same question, regarding Instagram. It appears, that almost the same number of respondents have and have not purchased a product or service recommended by an influencer on TikTok that they were not originally interested in.

5.2.3 Comparison Between Results from Instagram and TikTok

It’s clear that there are many similarities between the results of Instagram and TikTok. Both platforms are used mainly for entertainment. From the questionnaire we found out it is more common to follow influencers on Instagram than it is in TikTok. As we mentioned before, that doesn’t come as a surprise, as TikTok is an app where the content you see is up to the algorithm.

Also worth mentioning, TikTok is meant to be fast-paced. With one swipe, the user will see another video. The amount of content the user is exposed to in a short period of time is immense. Whereas Instagram is more unrushed in a way, where the main purpose is to take your time and look at other peoples’ posts and share your own.
The biggest difference we conducted from the questionnaire was about which apps the respondents use. Though about 50% use both Instagram and TikTok, 38% of the respondents use only Instagram and only 3% use only TikTok.

The notable difference between the platforms is the percentage of respondents who decided not to purchase a product or a service because an influencer didn’t like it is higher for TikTok (40%) than Instagram (37%). On the other hand, the respondents purchase more based on recommendations made by an influencer on Instagram rather than on TikTok.

As most of the respondents identified as women, that could explain why the most bought items are cosmetics, followed by fashion. On social media, many influencers recommend cosmetics that are easily accessible for most people, as they usually fall in the price range of $6.46 to $9.64 (Statista 2022). That being said, the cheaper and accessible the product, the more likely it’s going to impact social media users’ purchasing decisions.

5.3 Qualitative Research

In order to achieve a deeper understanding of influencers, we chose to research 3 different types of social media influencers who use both Instagram and TikTok as their platform. With this qualitative research we get a better understanding of these influencers’ social media behaviors. For this qualitative research, we wanted to focus on Local, Macro, and Global influencers.

5.3.1 Local Influencer: Ville Merinen

Ville Merinen, more commonly known as terapeuttiville is an example of a local Finnish influencer. Merinen is a 38-year-old psychotherapist and nurse. He rose to fame through TikTok. As of April 2023 (see Figure 16), he has gained over 115 thousand TikTok followers (TikTok 2023b). He is especially popular among the Finnish youth. He started making mental health related TikTok posts targeted especially toward the younger generation. His most viewed video has been viewed over 880 thousand times. It is about how to stop overthinking (TikTok 2023b).

Currently, Merinen is a member of the Finnish parliament. He was elected during spring 2023. He is part of the Social Democratic Party of Finland (SDP). He purchased only one campaign for the election, and he mostly promoted himself on social media. He got 6271 votes. During the Finnish youth mock election for under 18-year-olds in Pirkanmaa he was the most voted candidate. He received more votes than Sanna Marin the incumbent prime minister of Finland at the time (Mansikka 2023). Overall, he was the 4th most voted candidate (YLE News 2023).

Merinen caters his content to the Finnish demographic. He makes his videos in Finnish and uses Finnish hashtags. He interacts a lot with his followers. He answers their questions and comments on his account. A lot of people consider him authentic.
5.3.2 Macro Influencer: Ilona Ylikorpi

Ilona Ylikorpi is a 24-year-old Finnish content creator and DJ, who first became popular through a Youtube channel called IlonaJulia, which she started with her friend Julia Ahonen in 2013, and ended in 2017. IlonaJulia Youtube channel had over a hundred thousand subscribers, which was a huge number for a Finnish social media user. As of today, Ylikorpi has her own Youtube channel called ILONA, which has over a hundred thousand subscribers. Since she had already redeemed a lot of fans from the old Youtube channel, she was able to quickly increase the number of followers on her newer platforms.

Ylikorpi also has a presence on other social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok. On her Instagram page (see Figure 17), she shares content of her own, as well as paid partnerships. Even though most of Ylikorpi’s content is in Finnish, she has internationalized her brand by writing her
Instagram bio in English. That indicates she isn’t only trying to attract Finnish followers but makes it so she could do partnerships with foreign brands and that her platform is also available for the international audience.

As for her TikTok account, she shares more content regarding her everyday life, and does paid partnerships. Almost all of her videos on TikTok are aimed at the Finnish audience. On the basic influencer scale, Ylikorpi would be a macro influencer, but due to the limited size of the market in Finland, she can be considered a bigger influencer (Halonen 2019, 20).

![Screenshot from Ilona Ylikorpi's Instagram](image)

FIGURE 17. Screenshot from Ilona Ylikorpi’s Instagram (Instagram 2023b)

5.3.3 Global Influencer: Matilda Djerf

Matilda Djerf (see Figure 18) is a 26-year-old influencer from Sweden, who became popular for her Instagram account only two years after she started to use the social media platform in 2016. By 2018 she had created a huge following, which kept growing when she created her Youtube channel, and her own clothing brand, Djerf Avenue, in 2019 (Djerf Avenue s.a.).
Djerf joined TikTok at the beginning of 2021 and, in a short period of time, she managed to create a huge following, and known for her stunning hair, classy style, and her clothing brand (McKenna 2022). As of April 2023, Djerf is known as a global influencer, who has 270 thousand followers on Youtube, 2.9 million followers on Instagram, and 1.4 million followers on TikTok. Her clothing brand has 535 thousand followers on Instagram, and 295 thousand followers on TikTok.

While she is a global influencer, she connects with her followers and produces beautiful content on each of her platforms.

FIGURE 18. Screenshot from Matilda Djerfs Instagram (Instagram 2023c)
5.3.4 Differences and Similarities Between the Influencers

What we noticed was different between each of these influencers is the way they communicate with their audience. Our local influencer Merinen replies to his followers’ comments, while macro influencer Ylikorpi doesn’t so much. On the other hand, our global influencer Djerf does also, but as she has her own clothing brand and a marketing team working side by side with her, it gives her an advance when it comes to keeping up with her audience.

We also saw differences in the audiences. Merinen’s audience consist of young people, adults, elderly people, and different genders. The content he creates caters to all demographics. Compared to Djerf’s audience which contain mostly of girls and young adults, mainly due to the fact the content she creates in around beauty and fashion. On the other hand, Ylikorpi has created an audience of young girls and boys. From the layout of their social media account, we can clearly see Ylikorpi and Djerf have more polished and visually appealing Instagram and TikTok accounts. Merinen’s accounts appear to be more focused on the actual content rather than the looks.

There are also some variations on how often our local, macro, and global influencers post on social media. Our global and local influencers Djerf and Merinen have similar patterns. They post quite constantly on Instagram, but it appears Merinen shares post he has shared on his TikTok account as well. Unlike Djerf who has different posts for her Instagram and TikTok accounts. Djerf is also a bit more consistent with her posts on Instagram, as she shares new content every day. On the other hand, they change places when it comes to TikTok, as Merinen shares content more often than Djerf. It appears that our macro influencer Ylikorpi shares the least amount of content on her social media accounts. On both Instagram and TikTok she shares content about couple times a week, or less.

In conclusion, all these influencers obtain similar features in their social media accounts. Obviously, the audience and type of content they create are a bit different, and the layout of their accounts. It appears that the only main difference between the chosen local, macro, and global influencers is the number of followers.
CONCLUSION

This thesis helps to understand the impact of influencers on purchasing behavior. The findings may also provide insights for businesses seeking to use social media influencers as marketing tools. Based on the questionnaire results, it can be concluded that Instagram and TikTok influencers have significant impact on the purchasing decisions of our sample group.

Instagram is a more popular app among the respondents and holds a bit bigger influence compared to TikTok. We found that the respondents purchase more based on Instagram influencer recommendations. Over half of the respondents stated that they have purchased a product or service based on Instagram or TikTok influencer recommendation. However, it was noted that respondents feel that influencers have minor to moderate impact in terms of how much influencers impact their purchasing decisions. The most purchased products based on influencer recommendations were cosmetics, followed by fashion.

The consensus is that the respondents usually do not regret purchases they have made due to influencer recommendations. Most of the Instagram and TikTok-related answers have relatively small differences. In addition, most of the respondents trust influencer recommendations sometimes. Nobody always trusts influencer recommendations. Also, 1/10 of the respondents do not trust influencer recommendations.

In conclusion, the rise of social media has changed marketing. Businesses approach influencers to market their products. Compared to traditional advertising, influencer marketing is easier and cheaper for companies. Usually, the influencers are responsible for the creative process and production of the advertisements. Also, it is important for companies to choose correct influencers to reach an audience that would purchase their products.
7 REFLECTION

It is important to note that the questionnaire results are limited to the sample size. There are a few things we could have done differently when it comes to the questionnaire. It would have been interesting to see from each answer the gender and age distribution. That way, we could have made deductions about the differences in purchasing habits.

Our main limitation was time. If we had more time, we could have contacted different influencers in hopes of getting their perspective on this subject. In addition, the gender division among the respondents is quite large. A lot more women answered the questionnaire. Because of a larger portion of female participants, the results may not accurately reflect the population of interest. We also could have had more in-depth and open-ended questions, for example, who are the influencers that the respondents follow. That would have made the questionnaire longer, which in turn could have affected the number of answers we would have received.

Working together came naturally for us, as we have worked together on multiple occasions. That is the reason we were able to prepare and conduct the questionnaire within a limited schedule. There are some parts we weren't able to do due to the limited schedule. A good addition would have been to monitor our chosen influencers' activities for a specific period of time. Although we were not able to do that, we managed to research and obtain an overall picture of their activities. For further research, it would be interesting to see the influencers' impact from the companies' point of view.

In conclusion, we are pleased with the outcome of our thesis. Despite the fact our time was limited, we managed to create a comprehensive thesis. This thesis includes theory, research, and analysis of the results. The research went smoothly, and we are satisfied with the number of responses. The outcome of the research was similar to what we had expected. All in all, we are proud of ourselves for being able to finish our thesis on time.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Age *
   - Under 18
   - 18-25
   - 26-35
   - 36-45
   - Over 45

2. Gender *
   - Woman
   - Man
   - Other
   - Prefer not to say

3. Do you use Instagram or TikTok? *
   - Instagram
   - TikTok
   - Both
   - Neither

4. Do you use Instagram daily? *
   - Yes
   - No

5. For what purpose do you usually use Instagram? *
   - Entertainment
   - Searching for information
   - Communication
   - For work
   - Other, please specify:

6. Do you follow any influencers on Instagram *
   - Yes
   - No
7. Have you ever purchased a product or a service after it was recommended by an influencer on Instagram? *
   - Yes
   - No

8. Have you decided not to purchase a product or service because an influencer on Instagram didn't like it? *
   - Yes
   - No

9. How often do you purchase a product or service based on recommendations made by an influencer on Instagram? *
   - More than once a month
   - Once a month
   - Less than once a month
   - At least once a year
   - Never

10. How big of an impact do influencers on Instagram have on your purchasing decisions? *
    - Major impact
    - Moderate impact
    - Minor impact
    - No impact
    - Not sure

11. What type of products or services do you usually purchase based on recommendations made by an influencer on Instagram? *
    - Cosmetics
    - Fashion
    - Technology
    - Travel
    - Other, please specify:
      - I don't purchase based on influencer recommendations
12. Do you trust recommendations made by influencers on Instagram? *
   - Yes, always
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - No

13. Have you ever regretted a purchase that was recommended by an influencer on Instagram? *
   - Yes
   - No

14. Have you purchased a product or service recommended by an influencer on Instagram that you were not originally interested in? *
   - Yes
   - No

15. Do you use TikTok daily? *
   - Yes
   - No

16. For what purpose do you usually use TikTok? *
   - Entertainment
   - Searching for information
   - Communication
   - For work
   - Other, please specify:

17. Do you follow any influencers on TikTok *
   - Yes
   - No

18. Have you ever purchased a product or a service after it was recommended by an influencer on TikTok? *
   - Yes
   - No
19. Have you decided not to purchase a product or service because an influencer on TikTok didn't like it? *
   - Yes
   - No

20. How often do you purchase a product or service based on recommendations made by an influencer on TikTok? *
   - More than once a month
   - Once a month
   - Less than once a month
   - At least once a year
   - Never

21. How big of an impact do influencers on TikTok have on your purchasing decisions? *
   - Major impact
   - Moderate impact
   - Minor impact
   - No impact
   - Not sure

22. What type of products or services do you usually purchase based on recommendations made by an influencer on TikTok? *
   - Cosmetics
   - Fashion
   - Technology
   - Travel
   - Other, please specify:
     - I don't purchase based on influencer recommendations

23. Do you trust recommendations made by influencers on TikTok? *
   - Yes, always
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - No

24. Have you ever regretted a purchase that was recommended by an influencer on TikTok? *
25. Have you purchased a product or service recommended by an influencer on TikTok that you were not originally interested in? *

- Yes
- No