

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

**Jyväskylä University
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ABSTRACT

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<p>The increasing use of social media and the vast amount of multifaceted content online has led to an increased need to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content. Every social media user comes across substantial amounts of content published by different entities, and evaluating the trustworthiness of the content is nearly completely the users' responsibility. The use of social media as a source of information has also notably increased. This creates a problem that is highlighted in the case of young social media users, who are in a more vulnerable position when coming across untrustworthy or misleading content. Young people also use social media more actively compared to older demographics. Thus, it is important to understand, how young people evaluate trustworthiness on social media.</p> <p>This research aims to discover the types of mechanisms young people use to evaluate trustworthiness on social media, what types of content creators they trust, and how their personal agency impacts trust. The target group of this research are 15-29-year-old Finnish and British social media users. The data used in this research was gathered in 2019 as part of the #Agents project, and it has nearly three thousand replies in total. The data and research methods are both quantitative and qualitative.</p> <p>The research found a total of fourteen mechanisms that young people use to evaluate trustworthiness on social media. Based on this research it can be said that young people use a variety of mechanisms and possess a lot of knowledge about assessing trustworthiness on social media. On the other hand, the research also showed that many young people are not quite sure how to evaluate trustworthiness on social media. In comparing the trustworthiness of content from different publishing entities, the study shows that young people place the most trust on content created by public authorities, educational institutes, and their friends. The least trustworthy publishers were found to be bloggers, videobloggers, brands and journalists. This research also attempted to establish a relation between trust and young peoples' personal agency in the context of social media. However, this research did not establish a significant correlation between trust and personal agency.</p> <p>This thesis sheds light on how young people evaluate trustworthiness on social media, the publishers young people trust on social media, as well as a discussion about how personal agency might impact the trust formation process.</p>	
<p>Key words: trustworthiness, trust, trust formation, social media, agency, young people</p>	
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TIIVISTELMÄ

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<p>Sosiaalisen median käytön yleistymisen ja siellä tuotetun sisällön lisääntyminen ja moninaistuminen on johtanut korostuneeseen tarpeeseen arvioida sisällön luotettavuutta. Jokainen sosiaalisen median käyttäjä kohtaa suuria määriä eri tahojen julkaisemaa sisältöä, jonka luotettavuuden arviointi on lähes täysin käyttäjän vastuulla. Sosiaalisen median sisältöjen käyttö myös informaationlähteenä on yleistynyt huomattavasti. Tämä muodostaa ongelman, joka korostuu erityisesti nuorten käyttäjien kohdalla, sillä he ovat usein haavoittuvaisemmassa asemassa kohdatessaan epäluotettavaa ja harhaanjohtavaa sisältöä sosiaalisessa mediassa. Nuoret myös käyttävät sosiaalista mediaa vanhempia ikäluokkia aktiivisemmin. Siksi on tärkeää ymmärtää, kuinka nuoret arvioivat sosiaalisessa mediassa kohtaamansa sisällön luotettavuutta.</p> <p>Tässä tutkimuksessa tutkitaan, millaisia mekanismeja nuoret hyödyntävät sosiaalisen median sisältöjen luotettavuuden arvioinnissa, millaisiin julkaisijoihin he luottavat, ja kuinka heidän henkilökohtainen toimijuutensa vaikuttaa luottamukseen. Tutkimuksen kohderyhmää ovat 15–29-vuotiaat suomalaiset ja isobritannialaiset nuoret, jotka käyttävät sosiaalista mediaa. Tutkimuksessa käytettiin vuonna 2019 kerättyä kyselyaineistoa, johon on vastannut lähes 3000 nuorta. Tutkimuksessa on hyödynnetty sekä laadullisia että määrällisiä tutkimusmenetelmiä.</p> <p>Tutkimustulokset osoittavat yhteensä 14 mekanismia, joita nuoret hyödyntävät sosiaalisen median sisältöjen luotettavuuden arvioinnissa. Voidaan siis todeta, että monella nuorella on useita työkaluja ja tietotaitoa, joita luotettavuuden arvioinnissa voisi hyödyntää. Samalla tutkimusaineisto kuitenkin osoitti, että moni nuori ei oikein tiedä, miten luotettavuutta voisi arvioida. Tulokset osoittavat, että tässä tutkimuksessa tutkituista sosiaalisessa mediassa sisältöjä julkaisevista tahoista nuoret luottavat eniten julkishallinnon, oppilaitosten, sekä ystäviensä tuottamaan sisältöön. Vähiten luottamusta taas nauttivat bloggajat, videobloggajat, brändit sekä journalistit. Tutkimuksessa etsittiin myös yhteyttä luottamuksen muodostumisen sekä nuoren henkilökohtaisen toimijuuden välillä, mutta sellaista ei tällä tutkimuksella pystytty todentamaan.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus tarjoaa lisätietoa siitä, millaisia keinoja nuoret käyttävät arvioidessaan luotettavuutta sosiaalisessa mediassa, ja millaisten tahojen julkaisemiin sisältöihin nuoret sosiaalisessa mediassa luottavat. Lisäksi tutkimuksessa pohditaan nuorten sosiaalisen median käyttäjien henkilökohtaisen toimijuuden vaikutusta luottamuksen muodostumiseen.</p>	
Asiasanat:	
luotettavuus, luottamus, luottamuksen muodostuminen, toimijuus, sosiaalinen media	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Young people are active users of different social media platforms. For example, 92% of Finns aged 16-24, and 92% of those aged 25-34 use social media, and over 80 % of them follow social media daily, or nearly daily (Suomen virallinen tilasto [SVT], 2020a; SVT, 2020b). In total, over 3.6 billion people were using social media platforms worldwide during 2020, and the number of social media users is estimated to arise to almost 4.41 billion by 2025. The global social media usage rate was 49 % across all ages in January of 2020. The average amount of time spent on social media and messaging apps stands at an estimated 144 minutes per day. (Dixon, 2022.) Different social media platforms have emerged at a fast pace and have gathered billions of users worldwide since the mid-2000's. Social media applications are fuelled by user-generated content, and they allow users, both individuals and organisations, to create their own profile. (Obar & Wildman 2015, pp. 745-746.)

Social media is often influential, and it offers its users vast amounts of information. However, social media can also be used for manipulation and spreading misinformation or disinformation both intentionally and unintentionally. Disinformation is a type of misleading information that can be perceived as having been intentionally created to lead in the wrong direction (Fallis, 2015, pp. 404-406). Meanwhile, misinformation is similarly misleading information, but its intent is not to mislead (Fallis, 2015, p. 402). Misinformation can exert a lot of influence on the social media users consuming the information, which can in turn have repercussions in the real world outside of social media as well (Norri-Sederholm et al., 2020, p. 279).

Young people are at high risk of being exposed to misleading information, as more often than not they are frequent users of social media platforms. On social media the evaluation of the trustworthiness of viewed content relies heavily on the user, meaning that these young social media users have the responsibility to make judgements on whether or not the information they are receiving is true. (Leeder, 2019, pp. 1-2.) Even though younger people tend to be more fluent social media users due to the frequency of use, they might still lack the critical thinking skills and knowledge needed for recognising misleading information (Riikonen et al., 2020, p. 241).

This thesis focuses on young people's conceptions of their agency on social media and the ways in which they are able to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content. The dataset used in this thesis was gathered as a part of the #Agents research project during February and March of 2019. The 2674 respondents are aged 15-29, residing in Finland or the UK. The dataset as a whole consists of 146 variables, out of which this thesis will concentrate on analysing one open

question; “How would you advise young people to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content?”. Additionally, variables related to the amount of trust the respondents place on different publishers are considered, as well as variables related to the respondents’ demographic.

Through the aforementioned data, this thesis aims to find answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: What kinds of mechanisms do young people use to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content?

1.1: What kinds of differences can be found in the mechanisms used by generations Y and Z?

1.2: What kinds of differences can be found in the mechanisms used by Finnish and British respondents?

RQ2: How strongly does the trustworthiness of content created by different publishers vary from the point of view of young social media users?

RQ3: What kind of a part does a young person’s personal agency play in how they place trust in a social media context?

The research questions are further presented in chapter 4.2 (Research questions).

This master’s thesis is structured so, that the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis is presented and discussed first, together with the definitions of central terms. The theoretical framework is separated into two chapters, with the first discussing agency and related terms, and the second discovering trustworthiness, social media, and related concepts. This will be followed by the introduction of the data and methodology, after which the results of the study will be presented and analysed, and conclusions drawn. Lastly, the limitations and possible future directions for research are discussed.

Tools powered by artificial intelligence (AI) have not been utilized in the making of this thesis.

2 AGENCY AS A MATTER OF IMPORTANCE FOR ORGANISATIONS

From the point of view of the organisation, agency forms an important part of the way their stakeholders engage and build a relationship with the organisation. Agency can play a role in the way stakeholders see themselves in relation to the organisation. The definitions of stakeholder engagement as well as brand co-creation, which is closely related, are presented in the first sections of this chapter. The following subchapters will then go on to define agency within different academic fields.

From the point of view of communication, the concept of agency can be seen as closely related to empowerment and voice. These terms and their definitions as well as the differences between their definitions will be presented in the following chapters after agency.

2.1 Stakeholder engagement

There are a variety of ways and points of view from which the process of stakeholder engagement can be described. However, in generalised terms, stakeholder engagement can be defined as a process of involving stakeholders, like individuals and groups that can either have an impact on, or are impacted by, the activities of the organisation. (Freeman, 1984, p. 45; Sloan, 2009, p. 26) Stakeholder engagement also entails the practices that an organisation undertakes in order to involve its stakeholders in its organisational activities. The aim is to engage in a positive manner. (Greenwood, 2007, pp. 317-318)

The theory of stakeholder management and engagement initially arose from the belief that the shareholders of the organisation should be the primary beneficiaries when it comes to the activities of a company. Contrary to this belief, stakeholder theory includes all groups and individuals that have a stake in the company's operations. (Phillips, 1997, p. 52) Since the set of different stakeholders is quite varied, yet all of them are deserving of consideration in the organisational decision making, the engagement practices can be present in many different types of organisational activity. These can include public relations, supplier relations, customer service, management, accounting, human resource management and others. (Phillips, 1997, p. 52; Greenwood, 2007, p. 318)

When stakeholder engagement is effective, fair, and transparent, it offers a valuable opportunity for successful execution of organisational policies and services. It helps develop a mutual understanding between the organisation and its

stakeholders, which allows all participants to voice their thoughts and preferences without the fear of another party dominating the discussion. (Collier et al., 2014, p. 248) Therefore, stakeholder engagement can be seen as a process of learning that develops the stakeholders' understanding of the values, norms, and objectives of the organisation. (Girard & Sobczak, 2012, p. 217) Ideally, stakeholder engagement is mutually beneficial and a "moral partnership of equals" (Phillips, 1997, p. 54 in O'Riordan & Fairbrass, 2013, p. 123).

2.1.1 Brand co-creation

Brand Co-creation considers the stakeholders an active partner in the formation of the brand alongside with the brand itself (Coupland, 2005, p. 106). There are multiple ways in which a stakeholder can take part in brand-meaning formation, such as providing a reference, generating positive (electronic) word-of mouth or media publicity, co-promoting the brand, designing, and communicating the brand or creating new contacts (Mäläskä et al., 2011, pp. 1147-1149). Thus, in order to have stakeholders be willing to co-create it is important to have a brand that resonates with the target audience and engaging them actively in the brand-meaning formation process (Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016, p. 316).

2.2 Agency in different fields

Agency as a term has been used and defined across multiple different academic fields. These fields include, yet are not limited to, psychology (e.g., Metcalfe & Greene, 2007), education (e.g., Ketelaar et al., 2012), sociology (e.g., Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Emirbayer & Miche, 1998), social science (e.g., Flaherty, 2002; Brown, 2008), business ethics (e.g., MacArthur, 2019), administration (e.g., Lambricht, 2008), and philosophy (e.g., Ford, 2013).

As presented on Table 1 below, the definitions of agency as well as the viewpoints from which it is perceived vary across the different academic fields. There are also some core similarities that can be recognised between the perceptions of the term from different academic fields. The following sections (2.2.1-2.2.5) will further define and explain the concept of agency from the point of view the different fields in which it has been researched prior.

Academic field	Definition
Psychology	A fundamental characteristic of human behaviour (Mercer, 2011, p. 428)
	Acts that are done intentionally (Bandura, 2001, p. 6)
	Being an agent means that a person can make things happen through their actions . Agency allows the person to take a part in

	<p>the way in which they develop, adapt, and renew along with changing times. (Bandura, 2001, p. 2)</p> <p>Related to the pursuit of a goal of the self, arising from a will to develop oneself. Involves qualities like ambition and dominance. (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007, p. 751)</p>
Communication	<p>Inclusive communication creates a sense of belonging, and act as a source of engagement and perceived agency. Inclusive communication can lead to stakeholders experiencing high levels of agency. (Luoma-aho & Pekkala, 2019, p. 15; p. 19)</p> <p>Young people can have a tendency of constructing their identities and agency through social media platforms in a way that creates an attractive, but in some cases fake, representation of themselves (Norri-Sederholm et al., 2019, p. 234)</p>
Business	<p>Personal agency represents the traditional point of view that derives from psychology and sociology, in which people are able to perform a behaviour or a set of behaviours that are needed in order to reach or create a certain goal or outcome, or to avoid an undesired one. (Landau et al., 2015, p. 695)</p> <p>Personal agency is the root of personal control. Personal control is a fundamental human motivation that allows people the possibility of psychologically defending themselves against the uncertainty and unpredictability of their environment, in order to gain a feeling of control and to avoid anxiety caused by the unpredictability (Beck et al., 2020, p. 872; Tullett et al., 2015, p. 628; Cutright & Samper, 2014, p. 731).</p>
Marketing	<p>A product portrayed as an instrument of empowerment and control is appealing for people with low personal agency and low personal control. People with low control are more likely to be attracted to products that can offer them a sense of perceived control. (Cutright & Samper, 2014, p. 742)</p> <p>Empowering instruments are a way for people to increase their personal control and achieve a desired level of personal agency (Beck et al., 2020, p. 872).</p>
Leadership	<p>Being seen as agentic can serve as a feature that helps a person get ahead of others and leads to gaining popularity and attaining leading positions within social groups (Rau et al., 2019, pp. 201-202).</p>
Education	<p>The feeling of being in control of one's own actions and being capable of intentionally taking action through will, autonomy, freedom, and choice (Ketelaar et al., 2012, p. 275; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011, p. 812).</p> <p>Teachers with a high degree of agency have a higher possibility to influence their response to external changes (Ketelaar et al., 2012, p. 275)</p>

	An agentic teacher is someone who has the skills to not only teach what is stated in the curriculum, but to develop both their own and their students' growth and capabilities of life-long learning (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011, p. 812).
	Learner agency refers to the learner initiating the action instead of being pressured into taking action by their teacher or other external source (Teng, 2020, p. 65).
Sociology and social sciences	Agency is a possibility to create change while facing structural constraints (Brown, 2008, p. 370).
	Human agency is a process of social engagement that is informed by past actions and consequences, but also oriented toward imagining alternative possibilities in the future, as well as the present moment. (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, pp. 962-963)
	People are actors who act agentially in engaging with the structures of their environment but are not concrete agents themselves (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1004).
	For an action to be agentic, a defining, though complex, feature is that at any stage of the action it could have been performed differently, meaning that it is guided and either intentionally or unintentionally chosen amongst other options (Giddens, 1979, in Flaherty, 2002, p. 380).

TABLE 1: Definitions of agency in different academic fields

2.2.1 Psychology

Agency is one of the fundamental characteristics of human behaviour (Mercer, 2011, p. 428). In psychology, agency refers to acts that are done intentionally (Bandura, 2001, p. 6). Agency is viewed as a psychological construct that is fundamental to understanding how people act and how people control their actions (Metcalfe & Greene, 2007, p. 184). According to Bandura (2001, p. 2), being an agent means that a person can make things happen through their actions. At its core, agency allows the person to take a part in the way in which they develop, adapt, and renew along with changing times (Bandura, 2001, p. 2). Bandura (2001, p. 3) relates agency closely with functional consciousness that involves processing information deliberately through intentional mobilization.

People are not only hosts of internal mechanisms that are impacted by external events – instead of merely undergoing different experiences, people are also agents of those experiences. People are not only exposed to stimulation, but also go through agentic actions within and regulate their motivation and activities. (Bandura, 2001, p. 4.) People like to feel like they are in control, and they tend to seek out this feeling, even if sometimes that feeling that people perceive to be free will is actually an illusion initiated by the brain before the decision has taken place (Metcalfe & Greene, 2007, p. 184).

Abele and Wojciszke (2007, p. 751) present agency as one of the two basic dimensions of judgements of the self, with the second dimension being communion. Agency relates to the pursuit of a goal of the self, arising from a will to develop oneself, and involving qualities like ambition and dominance. Meanwhile communion relates more to considering others and while striving to integrate the self in a social unit. (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007, p. 751) Thus, agency can be referred to different self-improving or attaining attributes like self-confidence, assertiveness, and dominance (Rau et al., 2019, p. 201).

Biologically having a high level of agency has a positive impact on how people perceive and react to stressful situations and circumstances (Shankar et al., 2019, p. 165). Stress can be harmful to people's health and has been linked to multiple different medical issues, thus being able to contradict some of the negative impacts of stress through one's agency can act as a buffer (Shankar et al., 2019, p. 165). People with a higher level of personal agency have lesser negative medical impacts of stress, and often have a better range of positive psychological resources, such as environmental autonomy, the feeling of social support, better self-esteem and reduced symptoms of distress or anxiety (Thoits, 2006, p. 318).

2.2.2 Communication

In the field of communication, agency can be perceived through inclusion. Inclusion and inclusive communication can be thought to be the basis for interactivity and co-operation. Inclusive communication can create a sense of belonging, as well as act as a source of engagement and perceived agency. Thus, inclusive communication can lead to stakeholders experiencing high levels of agency, meaning that they feel like they can have a concrete impact on the organisation's operations. (Luoma-aho & Pekkala, 2019, p. 15; p. 19)

Agency taking place on digital social media platforms can be considered a type of "networked individualism" (Quinn & Papacharissi, 2017 in Norri-Sederholm et al., 2019, p. 234). The ways in which people, especially young people, build their agency varies notably between different platforms as well as between age groups and genders (Karakainen & Karakainen, 2018, p. 235; Norri-Sederholm et al., 2019, p. 234). Young people can have a tendency of constructing their identities and agency through social media platforms in a way that creates an attractive, but in some cases fake, representation of themselves (Norri-Sederholm et al., 2019, p. 234).

Networked individualism refers to the phenomenon in which an individual has multiple, partial memberships in several networks. Networked individualism is advanced by the development of the internet and social media platforms, as they facilitate the possibility of a partial membership in different networks. (Wellman et al., 2003; Park et al., 2015, p. 831) Networked individualism is built around personal autonomy (Chua, 2013, p. 602).

2.2.3 Business and marketing

In the field of business, agency is perceived as something that can be divided into two categories: personal and brand agency (Beck et al., 2020, p. 871). Personal agency represents the more traditional point of view that derives from psychology and sociology, in which people are able to perform a behaviour or a set of behaviours that are needed in order to reach or create a certain goal or outcome, or to avoid an undesired one. People possess resources such as skills, knowledge and different capabilities that allow the person to take action. (Landau et al., 2015, p. 695.)

Personal agency is viewed to be the root of personal control (Beck et al., 2020, p. 872). Personal control is a fundamental human motivation that allows to psychologically defend themselves against the uncertainty and unpredictability of their environment, in order to gain a feeling of control and to avoid anxiety (Tullett et al., 2015, p. 628; Cutright & Samper, 2014, p. 731). The lack of personal control has been associated with indicators of well-being, and in situations where control is lost, a common response for many individuals is to look for a regained feeling of perceived control (Beck et al., 2020, p. 872; Landau et al., 2015, p. 695).

Personal agency has been researched in marketing and consumer behaviour, as it can be used as a tool in marketing campaigns to increase purchase intention. For example, Cutright and Samper (2014, pp. 742-743) demonstrate, that a product portrayed as an instrument of empowerment and control is appealing for people with low personal agency and low personal control. People with low control are more likely to be attracted to products that can offer them a sense of perceived control (Cutright & Samper, 2014, p. 742). Empowering instruments are a way for people to increase their personal control and achieve the desired level of personal agency (Beck et al., 2020, p. 872).

Brand agency is a key feature of brand leadership, which refers to a brand being superior within its industry or category (Beck et al., 2020, p. 873; Kamins et al., 2007, p. 592). Brand agency can be conceptualised as the brands' response to consumers' low personal agency – it can be seen as the brand being capable of exerting influence over widespread outcomes (Beck et al., 2020, p. 873). Brand agency acts as a facilitator for the symbolic completion of deficits in people's personal control (Beck et al., 2020, p. 883).

Agency is also important in the pursuit of leadership, whether it be in a business context or a social one. People judge agentic characteristics of others both intuitively and purposefully in social situations (Rau et al., 2019, p. 201; Rosenberg et al., 1968, p. 283). Rau et al (2019, pp. 201-202) argue that being seen as agentic can

help a person get ahead of others and leads to gaining popularity and attaining leading positions within social groups.

2.2.4 Education

In the field of education, agency is defined relatively similarly as in psychology, as the feeling of being in control of one's own actions and being capable of intentionally taking action through will, autonomy, freedom, and choice (Ketelaar et al., 2012, p. 275; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011, p. 812). However, in this field the importance of teachers having agency is highlighted, as it plays a significant role in building their professional identity (Beijaard, 2009 in Ketelaar et al., 2012, p. 275).

The impact of external events causes a need for agency in the changing teaching environment: teachers with high degree of agency have a higher possibility to influence their response to external changes (Ketelaar et al., 2012, p. 275). An agentic teacher is someone who has the skills to not only teach what is stated in the curriculum, but to develop both their own and their students' growth and capabilities of life-long learning (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011, p. 812). Agentic teachers gain agency through empowerment in their social practices and responsibility in the classroom (Edwards & D'arcy, 2006, p. 149).

In addition to teacher agency, education often also refers to learner agency. Learner agency refers to the learner initiating the action instead of being pressured into taking action by their teacher or other external source (Teng, 2020, p. 65). The learner has the freedom to choose to act. Learner agency is a complex and dynamic system that is unobservable in nature, and its critical foundation lies in the learners' belief system (Mercer, 2011, p. 428).

2.2.5 Sociology and social sciences

In sociology and social sciences agency is viewed as the possibility to create change while facing structural constraints (Brown, 2008, p. 370). Emirbayer and Mische (1998, pp. 962-963) conceptualize human agency as a process of social engagement that is informed by past actions and consequences, but also oriented toward imagining alternative possibilities in the future, as well as the present moment. People are actors who act agentially in engaging with the structures of their environment but are not concrete agents themselves (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1004). Agency is closely related to culture and social networks – it is something that individuals exercise within the confines and structures of their surrounding culture and social norms (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994, p. 1438; Frank, 2006, p. 284).

Agency does not equal social action, but rather is present in all actions (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994, p. 1443). For an action to be agentic, a defining,

though complex, feature is that at any stage of the action it could have been performed differently, meaning that it is guided and either intentionally or unintentionally chosen amongst other options (Giddens, 1979, in Flaherty, 2002, p. 380).

2.3 Empowerment

Empowerment is, similarly to agency, a complex phenomenon that does not hold a singular clear definition, and that has varying definitions used across different academic fields. However, it can be conceptualised as the “manifestation of social power at individual, organisational and community levels of analysis” (Speer & Hughey, 1995, p. 730). Empowerment is an internal feeling of power, and a process of change that gives an ability to make a choice to people who have not possessed this possibility before (Siitonen, 1999, p. 59; Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). The initiator of a process of empowerment can be internal or external, but in the core of the process the best authority to create empowerment comes from within (Siitonen, 1999, p. 86).

In addition to the process of a person being empowered, people can also engage in the process of empowering one another. To empower someone else can be seen as “a voluntary, collaborative process in which power and resources are redistributed and shared with the aim of enhancing individual and collective capacities, efficacy, and well-being, addressing inequities” (Lawson, 2005, p. 147). It is about having the power to redefine, broaden and enhance the capabilities or possibilities of individuals or groups (Eyben et al., 2008, p. 5). Empowerment takes place when people gain the ability to imagine something in their life or their world in a different way and are able realise that by making new choices and by changing the power relations (Eyben et al., 2008, p. 6). However, empowerment is not merely something that can be built and then accomplished, but rather a process or a path, that shapes a person’s identity (Eyben et al., 2008, p. 6).

Empowerment can be created through many different factors, events and internal and external indicators that culminate in empowerment – one factor alone is rarely sufficient in order to empower (Järvinen, 2009, p. 9). Beairsto (2000) has divided empowering factors into three categories: cognitive, conative, and affective, which are presented with the empowerment indicators below in Table 2.

Cognitive	Knowledge
	Understanding
	Thinking Skills
	Insight
	Intrapersonal Skills
	Interpersonal Skills

	Persistence
	Will to Learn
	Self-Regulation
	Self-Evaluation
Conative	Motivational Control
	Goal Orientation
	Self-Esteem
	Self-Efficacy
	Curiosity
Affective	Honesty
	Optimism
	Courage

TABLE 2: Empowerment indicators (Beairsto, 2000)

Empowerment and agency are quite closely related, with both having an impact on individual's decision-making. According to Drydyk (2010, in Lindridge et al., 2016, p. 1655), something can be "empowering to the degree that people's agency is thereby engaged to expand their wellbeing". Empowerment refers to the surrounding external and internal conditions of the person's capabilities to engage in actions, while agency represents the level of autonomous involvement to which people are taking part in their own activities (Drydyk, 2010 in Lindridge et al., 2016, p. 1655). Practically, empowerment could be seen as a tool to increase agency (O'Hara & Clement, 2018).

2.4 Voice

There are many different ways to look at the concept of voice. In our everyday lives 'voice' usually refers to the sonic set of sounds we create in order to speak and express ourselves (Weidman, 2014, p. 37). However, in this thesis voice is referred to as the voice we all have within, that we are able to use in order to 'speak up,' to 'have a voice' or to 'voice our opinions' (Macnamara, 2015, p. 17; Weidman, 2014, p. 38). In a democratic setting the basic expectation is that every citizen or 'stakeholder' has a voice that they are able to use, and that they are urged to find and use (Macnamara, 2015, p. 17).

In this sense, voice can be very closely linked to power, individuality, authority, and personal agency - voice is how people historically have been able to express their personalities and opinions, in order to be heard and to make a change (Macnamara, 2015, p. 17; Weidman, 2014, p. 38). Weidman (2014, p. 39) equates having a voice with agency, as voice is the way we express self and identity.

The concept of voice can be defined through Albert O. Hirschman's (1970) theory of exit, voice, and loyalty. Though the theory is primarily associated with economics, the concept of voice has been studied in the field of communications as well later on. Hirschman (1970, p. 30) defines voice as

“any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilize public opinion.”

The premise of Hirschman's theory is, that a dissatisfied customer or member has two options: exit, or voice – meaning that they would either leave the organisation, possibly switching to a competitor, or voice their dissatisfaction and have their voice heard (Hirschman, 1970, p. 4). Thus, in this case, the second option, voicing their opinion, would then lead to improvement and finally, the customer's loyalty towards the organisation (Hirschman, 1970, p.4).

In order for the customer or member to have a voice that they can express, they also need to be listened to – if a customer voices their opinion but it's not heard and leads to nothing, they will likely still opt to exit, possibly even more dissatisfied than they originally were (Hirschman, 1970, p. 33, Macnamara, 2015, p. 17). Thus, organisational listening can be viewed as a counterpart to a customer's voice – it's not enough to give someone a voice – they also need to be listened to, and that is what counts (Macnamara, 2015, p. 18).

Voice comes from someone and is directed to someone else, whether that target audience be another person, an organization, a leader or a whole nation, or anything in between. It is the communication of suggestions, ideas, opinions, or concerns that are expressed by someone, towards someone, usually in order to improve something. (Detert et al., 2013, p. 625). If the ideas one has had are not voiced, they will not be heard either, and if that is the case, things will not change (Morrison et al., 2011, p. 183; Macnamara, 2015, p.18). In everyday life voice is often equated to speaking, yet speaking as an action fails to account for the other side of the conversation – who is listening and how effectively are they listening (Macnamara, 2015, p. 7).

In the fields of business and leadership, voice has been researched most in reference to employee voice, meaning the voice an employee has within the company they are employed by. In their research into ethical leadership, Lam et al. (2016, p. 278) found that ethical leaders emphasize two-way dialogic communication, and they are more willing to listen to their employee's voices, and to give them more space to have a voice. Similarly to the company – customer relationship that Hirschman (1970) explored in the theory exit, voice, and loyalty, employees are also more likely to exit the organization they are employed by, if they are not given a voice (Lam et al., 2016, p. 279).

Social media and its popularity have led to people having more channels through which to use their voice and have it heard. If used right, social media also provides a company more channels through which to hear their stakeholder's voices – it is no longer only governments and journalists that have a platform through which to be heard. This also leads to a higher need for organizations to be present and interactive on an increasing number of platforms. (Macnamara, 2015, p. 17) Even though this can be viewed as an additional workload, voice is still generally viewed to be a good thing, and its absence can be considered to be problematic (Detert et al., 2013, p. 625). Therefore, voice is urged and encouraged with freedom of speech and requests for customers to 'tell us what you think' (Macnamara, 2015, p. 7).

3 YOUNG GENERATIONS' TRUST FORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

This chapter explores the process of trust formation on social media, and concepts related to it. Starting with the definition of social media, and then moving onto trust formation and trustworthiness, as well as terms such as credibility, authenticity, and transparency, which are closely related. Later the process of assessing trustworthiness on social media is discussed, followed by the definitions of misleading information, information influencing and lastly the younger generations Y and Z.

3.1 Defining social media

“New media” is a defining feature of communication in the current climate. It is a broad concept that describes the use of internet and social media platforms as tools for communication. The term was first created in the late 20th century. (Allen, 2017, p. 1091) In turn, social media as a concept has emerged at a relatively fast pace in the 2000s and the 2010s. Sometimes also referred to as “social networks”, new social media platforms are constantly arising, changing the way we perceive social media. (Obar & Wildman, 2015, p. 764) Thus, social media as a concept is not simple to define, as its boundaries are unclear.

New media, including social media, is notably more interactive and accessible compared to traditional media. Social media platforms often offer a way for anyone to take part in the conversation, or to create content themselves – the conversation and content are created because someone has an interest in the topic. (Allen, 2017, p. 1091) User-generated content (UGC) refers to different types of social media content, including written, audio, and visual, that is created by users, both individuals and organisations. The networks themselves do not create the content; they only provide the platform on which the content can be published. (Fader & Winer, 2012, p. 370.) UGC has also become a notable source for information, due to the growth of social media (Ho-Dac, 2020, p. 137).

Social media platforms often allow their users to create a profile on the platform, which then allows the users to post content on their profile (Obar & Wildman, 2015, p. 746). These profiles are often seen as extensions of the users' private and public selves, with the content varying based on the users' interests (Allen, 2017, p. 1091). For many people, social media has become one of the preferred ways of communicating with others. Having a profile on a social media platform gives its users the possibility to interact with other users and browse their profiles. (Zhang & Gupta, 2018, p. 914.) The possibility to share information about yourself

through your profile, and to connect with others, is a defining feature of social media platforms (Carminati et al., 2011, p. 108).

Social media challenges traditional media in terms of its virtually limitless accessibility in terms of time or space, provided the user has a suitable device and an internet connection. All of the information available on social media can be compressed, shared, stored, and manipulated, which makes the content and information often easy to use, send and receive, but also easy to tamper with. (Allen, 2017, p. 1091; Westerman et al., 2014, p. 171) This leads to major questions regarding the use of social media a source of information, and how users determine the credibility of the information they find on social media (Westerman et al., 2014, p. 199).

This thesis follows the definition of social media by Obar and Wildman (2015, p. 746), who have defined social media as applications that are based on web 2.0, that allow interactivity and engagement. These applications are fuelled by user-generated content (UGC), and they allow users, both individuals and organisations, to create their own profile (Obar & Wildman, 2015, p. 746).

3.2 Trust formation

“Trust is the foundation of all communication” (Warner-Søderholm, et al., 2018, p. 303). However, trusting another party is inherently accompanied with negative “side effects”, such as risk, uncertainty, unpredictability, and vulnerability (Jones & George, 1998, pp. 531-532). Thus, it can be argued that in order to be perceived as trustworthy and thus be able to communicate effectively, it is important to understand what makes a person willing to place their trust on someone else.

Trust can be seen as something constructed of three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p. 969). These dimensions bring their own differentiations when it comes to forming trust, as each dimension of trust is based on distinct types of actions. Cognitive trust is built upon knowledge about the other party (McAllister, 1995, p. 26). The basis of cognitive trust expresses that an individual is able to make the decision to trust or distrust the other party based on the information they have regarding this party (Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p. 970).

While cognitive trust is considered more rational, emotional or affective trust consists of the emotional bond between the parties, which can create a foundation for trust (McAllister, 1995, p. 26). This viewpoint acknowledges that both emotions and moods can have an impact on how trustworthy we perceive the other party to be. We often assess the other party’s trustworthiness initially by the

feeling we experience when interacting with them, and a negative feeling can lead to initial distrust. (Jones & George, 1998, p. 534).

Behavioural trust relates more towards how each party behaves in different situations. Lewis & Weiger (1985, p. 971) suggest that we are more trusting of parties that imply they trust us, while on the other hand, we are more likely to distrust someone that, through their behaviour, words, or actions, appears to not trust us. Additionally, our value system guides us into understanding what kind of behaviours we find desirable or undesirable (Jones & George, 1985, p. 971).

Overall, the formation of trust is a complex process in which the trustee often unknowingly considers multiple different factors to varying extents. According to prior research, in addition to cognition, emotions, and behaviour, other factors are often taken into account either knowingly or unknowingly; these include, but are not limited to, attitudes, social standing, ethical principles, expectations, psychological status, compatibility, and familiarity (Pucetaite et al., 2010 p. 198; Jones & George, 1998, pp. 534-535; Shareef et al., 2020, pp. 3-4). Due to the number of factors impacting the process, it can be difficult to appear trustworthy to everyone.

3.2.1 Trust and trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is often defined through the concept of trust, as the two can be perceived as each other's counterparts and are thus very closely related. Trust can be generally described as one's basic belief in the goodness of others – the expectancy that the other person will behave in a predictable way (Rotter, 1971, p. 444; Gefen, 2002, p. 288). Trust can be defined as the way in which we rely on the word, promise or statement of another person or group to be true (Rotter, 1971, p. 444).

While it is quite human to wish for control in everything we do, we are rarely capable of performing every task ourselves, and we must rely on other agents to perform them for us (Gefen, 2002, p. 288; Jones, 2012, p. 63.). As such, we tend to look for predictability in any interaction, but it is not always possible to accurately predict how another person, or an organisation, behaves in any given situation (Gefen, 2002, p. 288). Trust is a tool through which we can relinquish some of that need for complete control (Gefen, 2002, p. 288). Depending on the level of trust we have on the other agent's goodwill and competency, we can either profit from being social and relinquishing that power, or we can view it as a risk (Jones, 2012, p. 63).

Trust and trustworthiness are often considered to be each other's counterparts – if you perceive another agent to be trustworthy, you feel safer trusting them. Trusting another agent often leaves us vulnerable and gives them the power in the situation. (Jones, 2012, p. 65.) Thus, it can also be argued that in certain social

situations, in order to have power, you must be perceived as trustworthy – if you are not trusted, you have less power or influence over other agents (Jones, 2012, p. 65). Being able to trust others and in turn being trusted yourself is “as important as breathing fresh air every day: all relationships depend upon trust” (Warner-Søderholm et al., 2018, p. 303).

Similar to a personal relationship, in an organisational context trust is a fundamental part of the relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders. Stakeholders are actively placing their trust on the organisation to perform the way it is expected to. (Greenwood & Van Buren III, 2010, p. 425.) To appear trustworthy, an organisation must be able and willing to act in its customers best interest (Özer et al., 2018, p. 475). By nature, there is a power imbalance in the organisation-stakeholder relationship, as the organisation tends to hold more power than the individual stakeholder. As such, the correlation between holding power and being trusted by the other party is not as strong as in an individual-individual relationship. (Greenwood & Van Buren III, 2010, p. 425; Jones, 2012, p. 65).

However, being trustworthy can be seen to be embedded in the duties of the organisation – in most cases the whole purpose of an organisation is to act in the best interest of its customers (Greenwood & Van Buren III, 2010, p. 425). If customer’s trust is lost, the business outcome will likely be poor (Özer et al., 2018, p. 475). Thus, it is in the best interest of the organisation itself to perform in a way that does not have a negative impact on customer trust.

3.2.2 Credibility

Similar to trust and trustworthiness, credibility is also seen to be created through consistency between one’s words and actions (Casse & Banahan, 2013). Credibility is often nearly completely equated with believability – as Tseng & Fogg describe it, “Credibility can be defined as believability. Credible people are believable people; credible information is believable information” (1999, p. 39).

Credibility is often brought up when considering the trustworthiness of social media content. The nature of user-generated content (UGC), which social media platforms are inherently built on, causes multiple issues relating to the assessment of content credibility (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013, p. 438). With UGC based platforms as common as they are in the 21st century communication culture, the skill of evaluating the credibility of UGC and other online content is increasingly important (Lucassen, Muilwijk, Noordzij & Schraagen, 2013, p. 254).

	Information user	Information giver	Information
Trust	x		
Trustworthiness		x	

Credibility			x
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TABLE 3: Trust, trustworthiness, and credibility as each other's counterparts in the context of online communication (Lucassen et al., 2013, p. 255)

As mentioned in chapter 3.2.1, trust and trustworthiness are often viewed as each other's counterparts. In the context of online content, credibility can be added as the third counterpart – as presented in the above Table 3, trust can be seen as a quality of the internet user, trustworthiness as a quality of the person giving information online, and credibility as a quality of the content (Lucassen et al., 2013, p. 255).

3.2.3 Authenticity

Authenticity is a multidisciplinary concept that has been used across many different fields, including philosophy, psychology, sociology, business, and many others. Each field has a slightly different point of view, but the central idea is often based on philosophy, in which authenticity is described as “being true to oneself - - and the complexity surrounding the notion of the “self” to be true to” (Liedtka, 2008, p. 238). A Sartrean view into authenticity highlights the way in which humanity is reflected in one's essential freedom, moral character, and one's manner of being – authenticity reflects the way in which one orients themselves to the world (Jackson, 2005, p. 308; p. 319).

A psychological viewpoint into authenticity centres around the notion of one being true to oneself, instead how one represents oneself to others. Kernis (2003, p. 13) argues that “authenticity has at least four discriminable components: awareness, unbiased processing, action, and relational orientation”. Being authentic requires a certain level of self-knowledge and understanding one's own personal traits, strengths, and weaknesses – authenticity is what makes each person unique in their own way (Kernis, 2003, p. 13; Liedtka, 2008, p. 238).

In addition to one experiencing authenticity in their own actions, authenticity can also be perceived by others, and individuals can have varying perceptions of the authenticity of the same issue or person. Authenticity can be considered as a claim or an assertion that one makes, that others then either accept or reject. (Peterson, 2005, p. 1086) The view of authenticity requiring acceptance from others can also be expanded into an organisational context – i.e., a brand is not authentic unless consumers accept its claim of authenticity. From a brand's perspective, authenticity is fundamentally an evaluation of how real or genuine the consumer considers the brand to be. (Beckman et al., 2009, p. 199)

3.2.4 Transparency

Transparency as a concept appears most often in different business disciplines, as a descriptor of the way a business performs. Transparency refers to the

distribution of information – e.g., sharing, visibility, quality, and availability (Pagano & Röell, 1996, pp. 579-580). Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016, p. 1788) define transparency as “the perceived quality of intentionally shared information from a sender”. Transparent communication can be initiated by stakeholder’s requests for information, or it can be unprompted by external influences (das Neves & Vaccaro, 2013, p. 641).

3.3 Assessing trustworthiness and credibility on social media

There is an enormous amount of UGC (user-generated content) on different social media services offering a lot of helpful and interesting knowledge on various topics. This content, however, is contributed mainly by strangers on the internet, which means its trustworthiness is tremendously difficult to determine. (Moturu & Liu, 2011, p. 239.) Social media platforms have an ecosystem in which content is created by people, and content created by other people is presented to them. While this offers its users a high degree of variety, it also creates issues such as information fraudulence and copyright infringement, among others. (Zhang & Gupta, 2018, p. 915)

Before the development of the internet and new media, information was mainly provided by traditional media and public authorities – the main sources of information were effortlessly recognised by their credentials as trustworthy (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013, p.211). The information also passed through “professional gatekeepers” (journalists, experts, editors etc.), who were in charge of the truthfulness and credibility of the information they allowed to be spread (Westerman, Spence & Van Der Heide, 2014, p. 173). As social media platforms lack these professional gatekeepers, the responsibility of evaluating the credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness of the content falls mainly on social media users themselves (Leeder, 2019, p. 2; Westerman, Spence & Van Der Heide, 2014, p. 173; Metzger, 2007, p. 2079).

Studies show, that if the information one encounters on social media comes from an acquaintance or a family member, we are more likely to trust it (Zhang & Gupta, 2018, p. 916). However, if information comes from a source that we are not familiar with, determining its trustworthiness can be a difficult task, and determining the factors that have an impact on the perceived trustworthiness can be crucial (Wijenayake et al., 2021, p. 12).

Metzger (2007, p. 2079) presents five criteria that information seekers should use in order to assess the credibility of online information:

“Accuracy refers to the degree to which a Web site is free from errors, whether the information can be verified offline, and the reliability of the information on the site.

The *authority* of a Web site may be assessed by noting who authored the site and whether contact information is provided for that person or organization, what the author's credentials, qualifications, and affiliations are, and whether the Web site is recommended by a trusted source. *Objectivity* involves identifying the purpose of the site and whether the information provided is fact or opinion, which also includes understanding whether there might be commercial intent or a conflict of interest on the part of the source, as well as the nature of relationships between linked information sources (e.g., the meaning of "sponsored links" on a Google search output page). *Currency* refers to whether the information is up to date. *Coverage* refers to the comprehensiveness or depth of the information provided on the site. These recommendations require a range of activities on the part of users, from simple visual inspection of a Web site to more laborious information verification and triangulation efforts." (Metzger, 2007, p. 2079).

While the above criteria are geared towards web-based information and assessing the credibility of websites, it also has its applications with social media content. However, although researchers have been able to offer advice, it brings to question the issue of the social media users' motivation, ability, and willingness to evaluate the trustworthiness of the information they are exposed to (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013, p. 213). For example, the above five-fold assessment tool is, while effective, sometimes time-consuming especially with the often-enormous quantities of information (Metzger, 2007, p. 2079).

Maintaining trust in a digital environment can be a difficult task, as the trust formation process consists of factors that differ from the offline world, and on social media distrust can create a problem that can be hard to overturn (Warner-Söderholm et al., 2018, p. 303). If non-trustworthy content was not as present as it currently is on social media, it would be easier for people to expect trustworthiness from the content they face on a daily basis (Zhang & Gupta, 2018, pp. 917-918). However, knowing that there are vast amounts of misleading information, misinformation, and disinformation on these platforms, people are far less likely to blindly trust all content they see (Warner-Söderholm et al., 2018, p. 303).

3.4 Misleading information and information influencing

Misleading information is not a new phenomenon - there is evidence of misinformation and disinformation as well as propaganda as early as in the Roman times (Posetti & Matthews, 2018, p. 1). However, the widespread use of social media has greatly increased the risk of misleading information being disseminated across the platforms. Whether the information is misleading on purpose or unintentionally, the chances of the information spreading fast and wide are not small, as information tends to move quickly on social media through peer-to-peer distribution. (Norri-Sederholm et al., 2020, p. 278; Posetti & Matthews, 2018, p. 1)

Misleading information can be categorised into two different types that differ based on the motivation and intent in sharing misleading information:

misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation refers to misleading information that is not intentionally created to mislead, and is not meant to harm others, but is still distributed across different (social media) platforms (Fallis, 2015, p. 401). Misinformation is inaccurate, but the people who created or shared it had no obvious malicious intent. The cause of the spread of misinformation can be negligence, a simple failure of understanding or verifying the information before sharing it, or an unconscious bias that the informant has not recognised. (Jack, 2017, p. 2; Fallis, 2015, p. 402)

Disinformation, on the other hand, is misleading information that is intentionally created and spread for the purpose of deceiving people (Lazer et al., 2018, p. 1094; Fallis, 2015, p. 401). Freelon and Wells describe three criteria that disinformation consists of: “1) deception, 2) potential for harm, and 3) an intent to harm” (2020, pp. 145-146). For information to be considered disinformation, it should fill all three criteria. Thus, misinformation, which can be deceiving and have potential for harm, lack the third criteria – harmful intent. Similarly, online bullying, for example, can have both potential and an intent to harm, but is not deceiving and thus, again, is not considered disinformation. (Freelon & Wells, 2020, pp. 145-146.)

Disinformation can be spread in the form of deceitful advertisements, propaganda, doctored photographs, fake documents, maps, websites or manipulated Wikipedia entries, for example. Disinformation is never a mistake, but rather an intentional attempt to mislead. (Fallis, 2015, p. 401.) However, recognising, and separating mis- and disinformation can be complicated, as the intention behind the misleading information is often unclear (Jack, 2017, p. 3). Understanding disinformation as a phenomenon requires a deeper, wider understanding of how information gets produced, circulated, and engaged with (European Commission, 2018, p. 11).

Information influencing refers to activities that aim to impact the target audience’s perceptions, behaviour, and decisions (Norri-Sederholm et al., 2019, p. 234). The term entails a malicious intent and will often include attempts to mimic legitimate communication. Information influencing can be used for different malicious purposes, for example to disturb elections, isolate vulnerable social groups, such as a younger and more impressionable demographic, or manipulate public opinion on certain issues. (Pamment et al., 2018, pp. 4-5; Norri-Sederholm et al., 2019, p. 234)

3.5 Disinformation on social media

The amount of false information present on social media can be considered a major threat for young social media users. Social media can expose younger, curious

users to a large and constantly increasing amount of incorrect and even radicalised information (Norri-Sederholm et al., 2020, p. 280). Disinformation always entails a malicious intent, and thus it always has the potential to be harmful for individuals, organisations, or society at large (European Commission, 2018, p. 5).

The information flow on social media is vast, misleading content can be spread very easily, and younger users might not yet have the tools or mechanisms to assess the trustworthiness of the information they come across. (Norri-Sederholm et al., 2020, p. 280) Thus, the amount of misleading information online and its fast increase can be viewed as an urgent concern around the world (Leeder, 2019, p. 1).

Disinformation on social media often includes either text or visuals, or in the case of multimodal disinformation, both (Hameleers, 2021, p. 648, in Dan et al., 2021). The visual or audio-visual content can consist of manipulated or deceptively cropped pictures or videos that are meant to serve as proof and support the credibility and believability of the content (von Sikorski, 2021, p. 642, in Dan et al., 2021). Especially multimodal disinformation that offers (audio)visuals as “proof” can be very effective in its purpose to deceive the recipient of the information. (Shu et al., 2020, p. 5; Hameleers, 2021, p. 651, in Dan et al., 2021)

The development of different electronic tools has made it increasingly easy to produce, publish and spread different types of disinformation. The content can be produced by humans or machines, or a combination, using tools equipped with AI (Artificial Intelligence) that can help create realistic textual, visual and audio-visual content (deepfakes) (Shu et al., 2020, p. 5; European Commission, 2018, p. 11; Paris & Donovan, 2021, p. 642, in Dan et al., 2021). Social media functions as the platform to publish and spread the content, and the platforms’ algorithms often end up presenting the content to users that might have been interested in a similar topic earlier, facilitating the spread and virality of the claims (Shu et al., 2020, p. 3; Grimes, 2020, p.1).

3.6 Generations Y and Z

Discussion about internet and social media often refers to the generations that are considered digital natives – commonly known as generations Y and Z. The concept of a generation can be loosely defined as a group or a cohort of people who were born around the same time (Twenge et al., 2010, p. 1120). Each generation has its defining generational characteristics, attitudes, and values, that are influenced by the collaborative experiences, such as similar historical, social, and cultural events (Mahmoud et al., 2021, p. 194; Twenge et al., 2010, p. 1120). These influencing external forces distinguish generational cohorts from each other (Twenge et al., 2010, p. 1120).

Different sources define the generations slightly differently in terms of their time of birth. However, in terms of digitalisation, generation Y is often considered the generation that grew up with the fast technological and digital development, and generation Z as having been born into it (Stachowiak-Krzyżan, 2019, p. 71).

The exact generational divides are not simply determined, and there are no clear definitions on which years of birth each generation includes. For example, Bejtkovský (2016, p. 106) defines Generation Z as those born 1996 and after, and Generation Y as those born between the years 1977 and 1995. Meanwhile Twenge et al. (2010, p. 1118) group both generations Z and Y into the same cohort born in 1982-1999, naming it Generation Me for the generation's individualistic and self-focused nature.

The definition of the two generations used in this thesis are further discussed in chapter 4.1 (Data).

3.7 Trust and agency

Agency and trust are closely related to each other. Their relation, however, is not straightforward, but rather a somewhat complex phenomenon. Both trust and agency play their part in how we make decisions, and how we approach situations where a decision needs to be made. They both also relate to the feeling of control, or the feelings associated with the loss of control.

In simplified terms, personal agency plays a significant part in cognitive trust. Whether it is made intentionally or unintentionally, trusting or distrusting another person or organisation is a choice (Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p. 970). Meanwhile, agency plays its part in the way we make decisions. As defined by Giddens (1979, in Flaherty, 2002, p. 380), an agentic action is something that could have, at any stage, been performed differently, if a different choice had been made. Thus, it could be argued, that the decision to trust is an agentic action that could have been performed differently.

As discussed in the earlier chapters, people tend to have a deep-rooted need for control. However, the situations in which we are able to perform and control every task ourselves, are rare and far apart, and thus we need to rely on others (Gefen, 2002, p. 288; Jones, 2012, p. 63.). Relying on others requires trust, and trust is inherently accompanied by uncertainty, unpredictability, and vulnerability (Jones & George, 1998, pp. 531-532). Personal agency leads to a higher capacity of defending ourselves against unpredictability and uncertainty, as it acts as the foundation for personal control, which we often seek in response to the feeling of losing control (Beck et al., 2020, p. 872; Tullett et al., 2015, p. 628; Cutright &

Samper, 2014, p. 731). Thus, having a higher level of personal agency would, in theory, make it easier to trust, as it helps combat the negative side effects of trusting.

4 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The following chapter presents the data used in this thesis, followed by a more in-depth discussion about the chosen research questions. Lastly, the methodology is presented and described.

4.1 Data

The data used this study has been gathered in a survey conducted in February and March 2019 as a part of a research project titled #Agents – Young People’s Agency on Social Media. The #Agents project started in the beginning of 2019 and ended in 2022, and its aim is to develop knowledge and understanding of agency on social media from different aspects. It is a joint project between the Universities of Jyväskylä and Helsinki, and the Finnish National Defence University, with contributions from the international partner universities from Oklahoma and Adelaide as well.

The data was gathered through a survey carried out between February 25th and March 28th in 2019. The dataset consists of 146 variables in total, out of which this study utilises 15. There are 2674 respondents, who are aged 15-29. Out of these 2674, 1344 reside in the United Kingdom, and 1330 in Finland. The Finnish respondents have completed the survey in Finnish, while the UK respondents have completed it in English. However, the content of both the Finnish and the English surveys is the same. This means, that the open-ended question has replies in both languages.

The data set consists of Likert scale quantitative variables as well as open-ended questions. The main variable for this study is one open-ended question: “How would you advise young people to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content?”. Approximately half of the respondents have answered to this question.

The data was gathered from people ages 15 to 29, meaning that their year of birth would have been between 1990 and 2004. In the questionnaire the ages of the respondents were divided into two groups: 15-24 and 25-29, which in terms of their years of birth translates to 2004-1995 and 1990-1994. Thus, this thesis follows a modified version of Bejtkovský’s (2016, p. 16) definition, and defines the younger age group as representatives of Generation Z, and the older age group as representatives of Generation Y, as presented in Table 4 below.

Definition	Years of birth	Generation
Bejtkovský (2016, p. 16)	1977-1995	Y

	1996 →	Z
This thesis	1990-1994	Y
	1995-2004	Z

TABLE 4: Generations Y and Z in Bejtkovský (2016, p. 16) and this thesis

As presented in Table 5 below, out of the 2674 respondents, 251 were either 30 years old or older, or replied “no” when asked if they use social media, or both. These participants are highlighted in red in Table 5. Since the aim of the study is to concentrate on people between the ages of 15 and 29, who use social media, these 251 respondents are not taken into account. In the younger age groups (15-24 and 25-29) the number of respondents who do not use social media is a small minority (4,2% of those aged 15-24 and 2,7 % of those aged 25-29). Thus, in this research the number of responses considered is a total of 2423.

			Do you use social media? (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, etc.)		
			Yes	No	Total
Age	15-24	Count	1511	66	1577
		% Within age	95,8%	4,2%	100,0%
	25-29	Count	944	26	970
		% Within age	97,3%	2,7%	100,0%
	30 years or older	Count	103	24	127
		% Within age	81,1%	18,9%	100,0%
Total		Count	2558	116	2674
		% Within age	95,7%	4,3%	100,0%

TABLE 5: Crosstabulation of the variables Age & Do you use social media

4.2 Research Questions

As presented in the review of the theory and literature, the process of forming trust, especially in the context of young people on social media, is complex. Social media is a significant source of information that is not always trustworthy, and thus, the importance of understanding the mechanisms in which young people utilize to estimate trustworthiness is high. In order to create a safe online environment and trustworthy content for young people, understanding what types of content and publishers young people trust is imperative. Additionally, this thesis brings to question the connection between agency and trust, in order to

better understand the significance of a social media user's level of agency when encountering untrustworthy content on social media.

The research questions are set as follows:

RQ1: What kinds of mechanisms do young people use to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content?

This question specifically aims at discovering the mechanisms and practices young people use to determine whether or not they consider the content they come across on social media as trustworthy. This question is mainly answered through the main variable (no. 100) used in this study, which is an open-ended question asking the respondents to tell what kind of mechanisms they would recommend others use in determining trustworthiness. The exact wording of the question being: "How would you advise young people to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content?".

The number and variety of the mechanisms found will then be compared between the two age groups (generations Y and Z) as well as the nationality of the respondents (British and Finnish). Thus, there are two follow-up questions for this research question:

RQ 1.1: What kinds of differences can be found in the mechanisms used by generations Y and Z?

RQ 1.2: What kinds of differences can be found in the mechanisms used by Finnish and British respondents?

RQ2: How strongly does the trustworthiness of content created by different publishers vary from the point of view of young social media users?

This research question investigates the amount of trust the respondents place on social media content overall, and specifically concentrates on how greatly the perceptions of trustworthiness vary depending on who published the content.

This research question is mainly answered through variables 80 through 88, which are claims titled as follows:

- I trust information produced by journalists
- I trust information produced by educational institutions (schools, universities)
- I trust information provided by public authorities
- I trust information from non-profit organisations (e.g., Red Cross, Greenpeace)
- I trust information from brands
- I trust information from my friends
- I trust information from impartial consumer review sites
- I trust information from bloggers

- I trust information from videobloggers

The response options to these claims are on a 1-5 Likert scale, with the options varying from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

The level of trust is calculated per variable as well as at an aggregate level. The individual variables can then be compared to the general average to see which publishers sit below or over the average.

After the amount of trust has been assessed, the discoveries will then again be compared with the generation, nationality and gender variables.

RQ3: What kind of a part does a young person’s personal agency play in how they place trust in a social media context?

This research question evaluates the comparison between how much the respondent trusts social media content, and how high their level of personal agency is. The level of agency is determined through assigning each tool found in RQ1 a number based on the amount of agency the tool represents. The main basis for this is that the higher the level of persons’ personal agency is, the more they feel like they are able to impact external events.

The levels assigned are as follows:

1. Low agency
2. Moderate agency/neutral
3. High agency
4. Not applicable

After determining each respondent’s level of agency, this is then compared to the levels of trust they place on different publishers as found in RQ2.

The setting of the question in the main variable places the respondent into the role of an advisee, instead of asking how they would do this themselves. This sets the respondent into a third-person effect point of view. As defined by Davison (1983), the hypothesis of the third-person effect suggests that people expect others to be more strongly influenced by communications that they are themselves.

4.3 Methodology

The following chapters will present the methodological choices made during the research process. The first subchapter discusses quantitative and qualitative research methods, and the use of a secondary data set, followed by the description

of the process of preparing the data for research. The following subchapter discusses the thematic analysis and the process of quantifying the data through coding. Lastly, the final subchapter focuses on GDPR and the ethics of this study.

4.3.1 Quantitative and qualitative research methods

Qualitative and quantitative research methods are the two main types of research that are frequently used in different types of studies (Adams, Khan & Raeside, 2014, p. 6). These can be difficult to distinguish completely, and they can be seen as methods that complement each other instead of being each other's opposites. Quantitative research methods are often performed on numerical data and are used to measure and compare measurable phenomena. Qualitative research, in turn, is more focused on the non-measurable phenomena – experiences, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours, for example. (Adams, Kahn & Raeside, 2014, p. 6)

The data set used in this thesis combines both quantitative and qualitative data. Thus, the research methodologies are also both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative data is analysed through the method of thematic analysis, which also allows the quantification of qualitative data to ensure its comparability with the rest of the numeric data.

4.3.1.1 The use of a secondary data set

As described in the chapter 4.1, this thesis uses a secondary data set and thus functions as a secondary analysis. The data collection process has already been done by other researchers before the beginning of this research process. The data set was seen to offer more information on a secondary subject that it was not primarily gathered for, making it possible to perform more research on the same set of data. As the set of data was already gathered and prepared for examination in the form of an SPSS file, it was seen to offer advantages in comparison to gathering a new set of data for the same purpose. The data set is quite large in quantity, making it a time-consuming process to gather a set of data with a similar quantity and versatility. Thus, the use of a secondary set of data was deemed more time efficient.

There are many advantages to using a secondary data set. When compared to primary data, a secondary data set often covers a broader sample and thus often represents a larger part of the population (Vartanian, 2010, p. 9). Secondary data can offer access to larger amounts of information, and in many cases a sample of a similar quantity could very well be out of reach for one individual researcher (Vartanian, 2010, p. 13; Adams, Khan & Raeside, 2014, p. 105). The use of a secondary data set also allows the researcher to focus more on the analysis and interpretation of the data instead of gathering and formatting (Adams, Khan & Raeside, 2014, p. 105). Secondary data often comes in a form that is already

prepared for use with a specific software, such as STATA, SPSS, or SAS (Vartanian, 2010, p. 15).

However, in addition to the advantages mentioned above, secondary data does also have its disadvantages. The major difference is that as in the case of a primary data set, the data is collected by the researcher who also performs the analysis and examination of that data, and they obtain the information necessary for analysis through the process of collecting the data (Vartanian, 2010, p. 3). Thus, in the case of a secondary analysis the process of gathering data is replaced with the process of the researcher familiarizing themselves with the data. Additionally, the use of secondary data raises the question of data compatibility – is the data truly compatible with the research? (Adams, Khan & Raeside, 2014, p. 105).

4.3.2 The preparation of the data

As the data was gathered through a survey with a variety of different questions and for the intentions of a different research project, the data needed to be prepared before being used for this research. The first step taken was to choose and determine the variables that are to be used in this research.

The chosen variables included questions that were not all compulsory for the respondents. This resulted in missing entries. As such, to ensure the validity of the research, it is necessary to evaluate the number and significance of these missing entries.

4.3.2.1 Choosing the variables

As the data set has been gathered for a different research project, and this thesis planned to utilise only part of it, the variables used to respond to the research question needed to be carefully chosen. The variables were evaluated in comparison to the research questions in order to determine which variables were the most relevant for this specific thesis. The initial research questions were also slightly adjusted when finalizing the chosen variables, as the drafted research questions did not match the data available.

In total, there are 146 variables in the original data set, of which this thesis utilises the following:

- V2 Age
- V3 Gender
- V4 Do you use social media?
- V80 I trust information produced by journalists
- V81 I trust information produced by educational institutions
- V82 I trust information provided by public authorities
- V83 I trust information from non-profit organisations
- V84 I trust information from brands

- V85 I trust information from my friends
- V86 I trust information from impartial consumer reviews
- V87 I trust information from bloggers
- V88 I trust information from videobloggers
- V100 How would you advise young people to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content?
- V146 Country

These variables were considered to be the most relevant in terms of this research project. These were extracted from the original set of data in order to create a cleaner version for the purposes of this research.

As described in chapter 4.1, the outlying responses, meaning the respondents over 30 years of age as well as those that do not use social media at all, were filtered out of the data to ensure that all responses are in the group of interest for the purposes of this research.

4.3.2.2 Missing entries

As the data set was gathered through a relatively large survey, there is a large number of responses and since some of the questions were not compulsory to answer in order to complete the survey, there are numerous missing entries in this data set. These need to be handled appropriately in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the results. Missing data is a common issue with this type of surveyed research data. (Hair et al. 2015, 318)

Within the specific subset of the data utilised in this thesis, there are missing entry points on most of the used variables, however the remaining amount of data was still deemed sufficient. No systematic patterns of missing entries were recognised. In the numeric variables the amount of missing data stays well below 15%, which would be considered a large proportion of data (Hair et al., 2015, 318). Thus, when evaluating the variables, the missing data point were ignored.

The one qualitative variable, the open-ended question, had a much larger portion of missing data entries. In the quantifying process all empty entries were coded as 0, and as illustrated later in Table 6, over half (55,1%) of the respondents decided against answering the coded open question. In this case the missing entries were excluded from further examination. The same was done to those respondents whose answers were coded as irrelevant answers, as they did not bring any additional value to the research.

4.3.3 Thematic analysis and the coding process

The variables used in this research include one open-ended question. As the data resulting from this question is qualitative, but the rest of the data is quantitative

and the data set is relatively large, it was necessary to transform the qualitative data results to a quantitative form in order to ensure comparability. In this case the quantification of the data was done through coding the responses into categories that have an assigned number, that can then be evaluated and compared numerically to the rest of the data.

In this data the open-ended question that had to be quantified was the following variable:

- V100 How would you advise young people to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content?

As the wording in the responses was quite varied, and in two languages (English and Finnish), automatic coding tools were considered incapable or unusable in coding this sort of data. Thus, it was assumed that even though manual coding has a relatively high chance of human error or a differing perception, manual coding would be more accurate than an automatic process.

The coding process was inductive, meaning that the categories were not pre-existing, but rather decided upon while evaluating the data. The coding was done through the researcher going through all qualitative data and identifying common words, phrases, themes, or other types of patterns in the responses. These common themes were then assigned a code to make quantitative data analysis possible. The categories were numbered, but the numerical order had no meaning. The numeric order of the categories was later changed to match the order of frequency for the purpose of the analysis. (Hair et al., 2015, 319).

The categories were created during the first round of coding. After the first round there were 36 categories in total. However, the original categories included some overlap with each other, and some categories only had 1 or 2 entries, so the categories were adjusted and merged to then, in the second round of coding create a total of 23 categories. Later, during the third and final round of coding the number of categories was reduced to the final 14 that are presented later in this thesis. The three rounds of coding were all done by the same researcher, but they took place on different days to ensure some amount of reliability.

Some responses included more than one category, and those were coded accordingly – thus, the number of categorised replies outnumber the amount of respondents. This was done to ensure that all the replies were thoroughly calculated, as it was not possible to diminish the responses with multiple categories into only one category. Some responses were coded into as many as four categories.

The data from the open-ended questions include entries that are obviously not relevant to the question asked, consisting of (at least seemingly) random letters,

numbers, or words that do not relate to the question. These were perceived to not add any research value to this data and were coded as irrelevant and ignored in further evaluation. The recognition and evaluation of irrelevant data entries is also dependent on the perception of the researcher, and thus there is an underlying possibility of the researcher having misunderstood the respondent's meaning and categorized a reply as irrelevant while it might have had some relevance.

4.3.4 Research ethics and GDPR

The set of data used in this research includes some demographic characteristics of the respondents: age, gender, country, and level of education. The data does not include any other identifying information such as names, email addresses, phone numbers, postal addresses, or social security numbers. This information collected about the respondents' characteristics is not sufficient to identify the specific person even through combining the information. Thus, the data is GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) compliant. The data has not been shared with anyone external to this research project by the researcher, and it has not been published or stored on any online platform.

5 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The following chapters present the findings following the order in which the research questions were presented in chapter 4.2. The first section will present the mechanisms and practices young people use to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content, showing how they were found and coded in the data. The second section will evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content from the perspective of young people. The third section will then discuss the results found for the third research question about the relation between the level of agency and trusting.

5.1 Mechanisms used to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content

The mechanisms used to evaluate trustworthiness on social media were recognised and evaluated through the open-ended question “How would you advise young people to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content?”. In order to quantify the data from this open-ended question, the replies were coded into categories.

The categories found, as well as their frequencies, are presented below in Tables 6 and 7. In the following subchapters the categories will be presented and discussed further, alongside direct quotes from the responses. The quotes that were in Finnish have been translated by the researcher, meaning that the translations might not be word-for-word, but the content has been kept as similar as possible.

Categories		Responses	
		N	Percent
1	Check other/multiple sources	234	8,8%
2	Don't trust everything	114	4,3%
3	Consider the bias or financial gain of the content creator	92	3,5%
4	Check the sources of the content	81	3,1%
5	Use common sense	77	2,9%
6	Be careful	57	2,2%
7	Be critical	52	2,0%
8	Read independent reviews	42	1,6%
9	Do not trust anything on social media	23	0,9%
10	Only trust well-known websites or main-stream content	22	0,8%

11	Seek trustworthiness from real life	22	0,8%
12	Nothing, it doesn't matter	10	0,4%
13	I don't know	57	2,2%
14	Other	16	0,6%
0	Empty	1467	55,3%
0	Irrelevant answer	285	10,8%
Total		2651	100,0%

TABLE 6: The categories found in the open-ended question “How would you advise young people to evaluate trustworthiness on social media?” and their frequencies

As shown in the above Table 5, there were numerous missing entries as well as irrelevant replies found in the data. These were coded into categories Empty and Irrelevant answer. Their frequencies are visible above, but they will not be included in further evaluation, because they offer no additional value to the research. Even though these constitute the majority of the responses to the open-ended question (1 971), sufficient information can be extracted from the remaining 899 responses. The following table (Table 7) shows the adjusted frequencies without the irrelevant data.

Categories		Responses	
		N	Percent
1	Check other/multiple sources	234	26,0%
2	Don't trust everything	114	12,7%
3	Consider the bias or financial gain of the content creator	92	10,2%
4	Check the sources of the content	81	9,0%
5	Use common sense	77	8,6%
6	Be careful	57	6,3%
7	Be critical	52	5,8%
8	Read independent reviews	42	4,7%
9	Do not trust anything on social media	23	2,6%
10	Only trust well-known websites or mainstream content	22	2,4%
11	Seek trustworthiness from real life	22	2,4%
12	Nothing, it doesn't matter	10	1,1%
13	I don't know	57	6,3%
14	Other	16	1,8%
Total		899	100,0%

TABLE 7: The categories found in the open-ended question “How would you advise young people to evaluate trustworthiness on social media?” and their frequencies, without the irrelevant variables.

5.1.1 Check other or multiple sources

The most common tool with 234 mentions (26,0%) was to advise the young people to check other sources or do their own research (Table 7). Many of these responses advise to check more than one source about the same topic. This category was originally divided into two different categories, with one being “check multiple resources” and the other being “do your own research”, but these included a lot of overlap and were difficult to distinguish from each other in several cases, so these were combined in the second round of coding.

The responses in this category mostly advised to research, check multiple sources, cross-reference and to compare, in other words:

Check other online sources to assess credibility
-respondent 174

Cross-reference with unrelated sources, Always.
-respondent 371

Search for other sources, compare information, always question what you read or watch
-respondent 452

I would advise young people to go to multiple sources of information before forming an opinion.
-respondent 497

search else where not just social media as there is a lot of stuff posted on social media that is untrue
-respondent 818

It is a good idea to gather opinions from many different sources, that are both pro and against, because then you get both parties opinions.
[Kannattaa kerätä mahdollisimman paljon eri lähteistä mielipiteitä, jotka ovat sekä puolesta että vastaan, koska silloin saa molempien osapuolten mielipiteen.]
-respondent 1868

Some respondents specifically mention that it is important to also check sources that you might not agree with, or that might have a different point of view compared to the original source. Comparing different sources from different viewpoints was seen as important by many respondents, for example:

To look for other alternatives when looking for answers before looking at social media content and to look for content that shares both and positive and negative detailed thoughts of whatever is being promoted
-respondent 623

Look at other sources and even some that you disagree with
-respondent 854

they should check several sources and compare them
-respondent 1039

In addition to recommending researching the topic from multiple sources, some respondents also gave advice on which sources they use, or where they recommend checking information from. They also specifically recommended looking for information outside of social media platforms, and rather on different websites.

Seek reputable sources on the things you read, and cross-check the information. Reuters is a good source for news content that is balanced and neutral for example. Wikipedia can provide a good overview on most topics as well, especially if you follow the references for the article.
-respondent 858

I would encourage everyone to cross-examine any information they receive from any source. Credible units for current facts include Reuters and Financial Times. Look for corroborating evidence from multiple outlets...not just a Facebook meme and your mum's whiny gym partner, Janine!
-respondent 961

		Check multiple sources	Total
Age	15-24	138	234
	% <i>Within age</i>	9,1%	
	25-29	96	
	% <i>Within age</i>	10,2%	
Country	UK	157	234
	% <i>Within country</i>	12,7%	
	Finland	76	
	% <i>Within country</i>	6,3%	
Gender	Male	97	234
	% <i>Within gender</i>	8,2%	
	Female	134	
	% <i>Within gender</i>	10,7%	
	Other	3	
	% <i>Within gender</i>	15,0%	

TABLE 8: Adjusted crosstabulation of "Check multiple sources", Age, Country, and Gender

As visible on Table 8 above, this category was found in a total of 234 responses. The older group mentioned this tool more frequently at 10,2% of their age group, compared to 9,1% of the 15-24 age group (Table 8). This could be explained quite simply by the older group having more experience and higher education attainment, which helps them better acknowledge the amount of misleading information available online, and the possibilities that doing your own research can offer. Table 8 also shows that this category was much more commonly mentioned by the British respondents (12,7%) in comparison to the Finns (6,3%). There is no obvious reasoning for this and it is thus unexpected that there is such a relatively large difference in the most common category.

In comparing the genders, the respondents who chose 'other' as their gender were the most inclined to recommend using this tool in evaluating trustworthiness at 15,0% of their gender group (Table 8). The second most mentions were by females (10,7%) and the least by males (8,2%).

5.1.2 Don't trust everything

Don't trust everything was the second most mentioned category with 114 mentions, covering 12,7% of the data (Table 7). "Don't trust everything" is a rather straight-forward piece of advice. The advice to not trust everything is not a very exact tool to use, and maybe more of a helpful guideline in understanding how untrustworthy social media content is in the respondents' opinion. A lot of the responses in this category were very to the point, like the examples below:

Just not to believe in everything they see and read on the social media.
-respondent 75

Take it with several grains of salt. Or a pound.
-respondent 918

Trust it as much you would a stranger on the street with a sign saying look at this.
-respondent 1030

Don't trust everything you see on the internet
[älä luota aina kaikkeen mitä netissä näät]
-respondent 1628

This category was also quite often combined with some of the other categories, which in turn is more helpful as advice.

Don't trust everything you see. Try to find out the source to understand whether it is trustworthy or not.
-respondent 34, coded as 2 & 4

Don't believe everything you see online. Look up reviews
-respondent 233, coded as 2 & 8

Look for other opinions and take everything with a pinch of salt. If something seems too good it probably is
-respondent 671, coded as 2 & 5

Make sure the source of the information is trustworthy. Don't trust everything you read.
[Varmista tietojen lähde että se on luotettava. Älä luota kaikkeen mitä luet.]
-respondent 1992, coded as 2 & 4

		Don't trust everything	Total
Age	15-24	62	114

	% <i>Within age</i>	4,1%	
	25-29	52	
	% <i>Within age</i>	5,5%	
Country	UK	68	114
	% <i>Within country</i>	5,5%	
	Finland	46	
	% <i>Within country</i>	3,8%	
Gender	Male	38	114
	% <i>Within gender</i>	3,2%	
	Female	75	
	% <i>Within gender</i>	6,0%	
	Other	1	
	% <i>Within gender</i>	5,0%	

TABLE 9: Adjusted crosstabulation of “Don’t trust everything”, Age, Country, and Gender

As presented in Table 9 above, this category was found in a total of 114 responses. It was slightly more commonly mentioned by the older age group at 5,5% of their age group, compared to 4,1% of the younger group (Table 9). The difference between the age groups could be explained by older respondents being more likely to exhibit higher levels of scepticism due to their age and experience.

From a residency perspective, this category was more commonly mentioned by the British respondents (5,5% within country), in comparison to the Finns (3,8% within country) (Table 9). The difference between the two countries could be partly due to the language; the amount of English language is significantly higher than Finnish content online – as the amount of content increases, the amount of untrustworthy content increases as well. This might lead to English-speaking social media users having to spend more time and effort in trying to determine the trustworthiness, and thus leading to an overall feeling of distrust.

Finally, the gender comparison shows male respondents being the smallest group in this category (3,2% within gender), in comparison to female respondents (6,0% within gender) and those who chose ‘other’ as their gender in this survey (5,0% within gender) (Table 8). This is well in line with the results discussed later in the second research question – as discussed in chapter 5.2.3 (gender), the male respondents were more trusting of bloggers and videobloggers than female respondents and those who chose ‘other’ as their gender in this survey. Thus, these two research questions seem to be in line with each other.

5.1.3 Consider the bias or financial gain of the content creator

The third most recommended tool was to consider the bias or possible financial gain of the content creator. This category was mentioned by 92 respondents,

covering 10,2% of the data (Table 7). These included many recommendations to think about the motives of the organisation or individual behind the post. This category includes responses that in some ways advise to think what the person or organisation could be motivated by, what they could gain from the content, or who they are as a person or as an organisation.

look at who it's been produced by and think about why it's been produced
-respondent 31

look into the person i am hearing it from
-respondent 893

Think carefully about the reasons why someone may post something or say something on social media.
-respondent 911

think about who it is and if they could have any ulterior motives or gains
-respondent 1033

This category was originally split into two different categories, "Think about the motives behind the post" and "Check for sponsorship". Upon further research these two categories had very notable overlap, and they were combined during the third round of coding. Even though thinking about the motives does not directly mention sponsorship, in a lot of the cases the recommendation was related to considering whether or not the person posting the content might have something (financial) to gain. Some of the most notable quotes that include overlap of the two previous categories were similar to the examples below:

Think about why they may be giving that answer - is it a sponsored post? Are they reliable? Do you really know them that well that you would trust them to tell you the truth?
-respondent 46

It's important to think about who wrote the content and what they might maybe want to say with the content. Have they for example been paid to promote a product, or are they genuinely telling their own opinion? If something sounds too good, bad or weird, it's important to look deeper into it: on social media things are often painted a bit too black and white to get clicks or to raise interest
[On tärkeä miettiä, kuka sisällön on kirjoittanut ja mitä kirjoittaja ehkä haluaa sanoa sisällöllä. Onko kirjoittajalle maksettu esim. tuotteen mainostamisesta, vai onko hän aidosti kertomassa oman mielipiteensä? Jos jokin kuulostaa liian hyvältä, pahalta tai oudolta, on tärkeä selvittää asiaa yleensä tarkemmin: sosiaalisessa mediassa asiat yleensä maalataan hiukan liian mustavalkoisesti klikkien tai kiinnostuksen herättämiseksi.]
-respondent 1931, coded as 3 & 5

Some of the respondents merely recommended learning to recognise paid advertising. Many did not specify their advice about sponsored content any further than that, so it might be assumed to mean that sponsored content should not be trusted, or that it's trustworthiness should be questioned.

Understanding how brand deals work
-respondent 259

I would advice young people to be looking out at tell tale signs for collaborations.
-respondent 403

To look for signs of a paid ad.
-respondent 710

Look to see if it is sponsored, do the creators of the content have something to gain by only showing one side etc.
-respondent 863

The most important thing is to recognise commercial content from impartial information.
[Tärkeintä on osata erottaa kaupallinen sisältö puolueettomasta tiedosta.]
-respondent 2023

Some responses also referred to the bias that sponsorship might cause, and that the content creator might be prone to providing untrue information about the product if they are paid.

you should always do the research because more and more content is been paid to be advertised and isn't always genuine
-respondent 101, coded as 3 & 1

Look out for advertisements and influencers which are only doing it for the money
-respondent 1268

Paid advertisements aren't always true.
[Maksetut mainokset eivät aina ole totta.]
-respondent 2374

They should understand, that if person x has been paid for something, they might not necessarily tell their honest opinion about it.
[Heidän pitäisi ymmärtää, että jos jostain on maksettu henkilölle x, hän ei välttämättä kerro rehellistä mielipidettään siitä.]
-respondent 2414

In addition to financial gain and the overall consideration of the motives of the post, considering the bias of the person posting also appeared in multiple responses. As every person most likely has some sort of bias towards different issues, it is important to consider how it might impact their thoughts or opinions they choose to voice in the content they produce. In turn when looking at research related content produced by an organisation, perhaps instead of bias it is worth looking into who has funded the research and evaluate their bias.

Always check how bias they are
-respondent 245

Source criticism, who produced the information, who has funded the research
[Lähdekriittisyys, kenen tuottamaa tietoa on, kuka on rahoittanut tutkimuksen]
-respondent 1358, coded as 3 & 7

Ensuring the information through multiple sources. Looking into the content creator's other videos to recognise possible bias.
[Tiedon varmistaminen useista eri lähteistä. Sisällöntuottajan muihin videoihin

tutustuminen mahdollisen puolueellisuuden tunnistamiseksi]
-respondent 1424

		Consider the bias or financial gain	Total
Age	15-24	61	92
	% <i>Within age</i>	4,0%	
	25-29	31	
	% <i>Within age</i>	3,3%	
Country	UK	57	92
	% <i>Within country</i>	4,6%	
	Finland	35	
	% <i>Within country</i>	2,9%	
Gender	Male	29	92
	% <i>Within gender</i>	2,4%	
	Female	62	
	% <i>Within gender</i>	5,0%	
	Other	1	
	% <i>Within gender</i>	5,0%	

TABLE 10: Adjusted crosstabulation of “Consider the bias or financial gain”, Age, Country, and Gender

As demonstrated by the table above (Table 10), this category was mentioned a total of 92 times. The younger group mentioned this category more frequently at 4,0% within their age group, compared to 3,3% of the older age group (Table 10). The reason the younger age group is more concerned about the bias or financial gain of the content creator could be a result of this group having grown up in a social media atmosphere in which influencer marketing is very difficult to avoid. There has also been a change in how influencer marketing is discussed both online and at schools, for example. Influencer marketing was not as present on social media, and social media was not yet considered an informational source, when the older age group was in school, leading to them no having been educated as much on the subject.

As shown in Table 10, this category was more commonly mentioned by the British respondents at 4,6% within their country, compared to 2,9% of the Finns. This could be explained by the sheer amount of content and information, as well as sponsored content and influencer marketing, that is available online in English. There are a lot more English-speaking influencers in comparison to Finnish, as the language base is much larger. Finns are also a stereotypically very honesty-driven society that values transparency in many situations. Thus, Finnish influencers might be more driven towards transparency in declaring when their content is sponsored.

When looking at the gender evaluations, Table 10 shows that those who declared 'female' or 'other' as their gender in this survey mentioned this category the most (female: 5,0% within gender, other: 0,5% within gender, in comparison with male: 2,4% within gender). This is consistent with the findings presented in chapter 5.2.3 (gender). As discussed later, the respondents who chose 'female' or 'other' as their gender in this survey are less trusting of content created by bloggers and vloggers than the male respondents. This could suggest that these less trusting respondents are also more likely to have suspicions of sponsorship or bias in the content they are viewing.

5.1.4 Check the sources of the content

Check the sources of the content was the fourth most common recommendation. This tool was mentioned by 81 respondents, covering 9% of the data (Table 7). This category includes mentions of advising young people to check what the sources of the content are, and not just take the information at face value. It differs from the "check multiple sources" category in that this advice refers to the specific sources of whatever content the person is evaluating, instead of advising looking elsewhere.

SEE THE SOURCES OF INFORMATION
-respondent 73

Look at the source, find out where it comes from before trusting it
-respondent 640

Look for the source and original author
-respondent 1169

As demonstrated in chapter 5.1.2 in which the category "don't trust everything" is presented, categories 2 (don't trust everything) and 4 (check the sources of the content) appeared together in multiple responses. Additionally, "Check the sources of the content" also appeared along with other categories.

If an influencer makes a questionable statement or starts listing facts, check their sources and do your own research as they may have been misled or bribed.
-respondent 399, coded as 4 & 1

Check the credibility of the sources. Think about who's telling the information, and what thoughts they might have had about the information beforehand.
[Kannattaa varmistaa lähteiden luotettavuus. Mieti, kuka tiedon kertoo ja mitä ajatuksia hänellä on tiedosta ollut jo alunperin.]
-respondent 2354, coded as 4 & 3

Some respondents turned it around, saying that if there are no sources cited, the content should not be trusted, or that the lack of sources should at least raise some alarms as to whether the information can be trusted.

If it doesn't have a source, question why.
-respondent 630

If there's no source or guarantee of trustworthiness, don't believe it
[Jos ei ole lähdettä tai vakuutta luotettavuudesta, älä usko]
-respondent 2034

Don't trust anything without sources
[Ei kannata luottaa mihinkään ilman lähteitä]
-respondent 2337

While for some it was sufficient that sources are mentioned in the post, others advised to take a closer look; checking what the content of the sources cited is to ensure its credibility. These respondents felt that the sources also need to be thoroughly researched as well, in order to make sure that not only the content itself, but also the sources are trustworthy and credible.

To find information in multiple sources and comparing it. To set certain websites to the top in trustworthiness (i.e. the websites of universities), and by comparing other information with information given there. By remembering to check sources, and not only that sources can be found, but also what is found behind each source – does it take you anywhere and if it does, who maintains the website and what information can be found there.

[Etsimään tietoa monesta lähteestä ja vertailemaan sitä. Asettamalla omassa mielessä tietyt sivustot luotettavuudessa kärkeen (esim. yliopistojen sivut) ja vertaamalla muuta tietoa siellä olevaan tietoon. Muista tarkistaa lähteet eikä vain sitä, että lähteet löytyy, vaan myös sen mitä sen lähdelinkin takaa löytyy - mm. viekö se edes minnekkään ja jos vie, niin kuka sivustoa ylläpitää ja mitä tietoa sieltä löytyy.]
-respondent 1601, coded as 4 & 1

If sources are written on them.
[Jos niihin on kirjoitettu lähteet.]
-respondent 2151

It's important to find out the original source and what the information is based on.
[Olisi tärkeää selvittää tiedon alkulähde ja mihin tieto perustuu.]
-respondent 2164

Some respondents also advised to not ask or even demand sources if they are not freely given, and that even opinion pieces must be backed up by some sources that can be cross-checked.

By looking for/demanding sources for the information spread. Even opinions need to be based on something, and if someone doesn't give a reason for their opinion, it is a good idea to question their motives. So, keep source criticism in mind, and also what these influencers can gain from spreading the information.

[Etsimällä/vaativalla lähteet levitetulle tiedolle. Mielipiteidenkin tulee perustua johonkin ja jos joku ei mielipiteelleen syytä anna, kannattaa kysenalaistaa henkilön motiiveja. Lähdekriittisyys siis mielessä ja myös se mitä nämä vaikuttajat saavat sisällön leviämisestä irti].
-respondent 2404, coded as 4, 3, & 7

	Check the sources of the content	Total

Age	15-24	52	81
	<i>% Within age</i>	3,5%	
	25-29	28	
	<i>% Within age</i>	3,0%	
Country	UK	37	81
	<i>% Within country</i>	3,0%	
	Finland	44	
	<i>% Within country</i>	3,6%	
Gender	Male	31	81
	<i>% Within gender</i>	2,6%	
	Female	50	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	4,0%	
	Other	0	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,0%	

TABLE 11: Adjusted crosstabulation of “Check the sources of the content”, Age, Country, and Gender

As demonstrated by the table above (Table 11), this category was found in a total of 81 responses. The younger, 15-24 -year-old age group mentioned this tool more frequently at 3,5% of their age group, compared to 3,0% of the older group (Table 11). The younger group being larger in this category is somewhat unexpected, as common sense would have the older age group be more prone to check the sources, due to age and life experience. However, it is worth considering that as generation Z has grown up in a much more digital environment, they might have had more education on checking the sources of social media content from a younger age.

This category was more common amongst the Finnish respondents at 3,6% within country in comparison with 3,0% of the British respondents (Table 11). The Finns being a larger group in this category than the British could be explained by source criticism being very often discussed in Finnish education and in social media environments.

When comparing the genders, this category was most commonly mentioned by the female respondents (4,0% within gender), in comparison with 2,6% of the male respondents (Table 11). None of the respondents who chose ‘other’ as their gender in this survey mentioned this category.

5.1.5 Use common sense

77 of the respondents referred to using common sense in evaluating the trustworthiness of social media content, covering 8,6% of the responses (Table 7). This category was originally divided into four different categories, namely “Use common sense”, “Think twice”, “Make your own decisions”, and “Be realistic”.

However, a high degree of overlap was observed, and thus they were all combined during the last round of coding. Even though they have slightly different nuances, all of these categories are similarly “unhelpful” as a specific tool, and mostly just recommends using one’s own judgement.

Always go with gut instinct
-respondent 133

That they make their own decisions
[Että tekee omat päätöksensä]
-respondent 1475

By using their brain
[Käyttömällä aivojaan.]
-respondent 1651

It’s a good idea to think many times what you believe
[Kannattaa aina miettiä useamman kerran mitä sita uskoo]
-respondent 2051

Use common sense
[Käytä maalaisjärkeä]
-respondent 2504

Many respondents in this category suggested being realistic and to keep in mind that if something seems too good to be true, it most likely is.

Be more realistic
-respondent 276

Be realistic with your hopes
-respondent 655

If it sounds too good it’s likely not true
[Jos se kuulostaa liian hyvältä niin se ei todennäköisesti pidä paikkaansa]
-respondent 2489

Some of the responses have a tone that suggests they might consider the person they are advising to be naïve or as someone who does not have any common sense. Some responses almost give the impression that the advisees need to be given “permission” to use their best judgement instead of just blindly following what they are told.

Use the common sense you still have left
-respondent 454

Use common sense if you have any. If someone says online that potatoes are washed with soap, it doesn’t mean you really have to wash them with soap.
[Käyttäkää maalaisjärkeä jos sellaisen omistatte. Jos joku sanoo netissä että perunat pestään saippualla niin se ei tarkoita että ne pitää oikeasti pestä saippualla]
-respondent 1543

It's a good idea to look for information from multiple sources. If something sounds too good to be true, it usually isn't true. Don't believe everything naively.
 [Kannattaa etsiä tietoja monesta eri lähteestä. Jos jokin kuulostaa liian hyvältä ollakseen totta, se yleensä ei ole totta. Kaikkeen ei kannata sinisilmäisesti uskoa.]
 -respondent 2469, coded as 5, 1 & 2

		Use common sense	Total
Age	15-24	29	77
	<i>% Within age</i>	3,2%	
	25-29	28	
	<i>% Within age</i>	3,0%	
Country	UK	36	77
	<i>% Within country</i>	2,9%	
	Finland	41	
	<i>% Within country</i>	3,4%	
Gender	Male	34	77
	<i>% Within gender</i>	2,9%	
	Female	43	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	3,4%	
	Other	0	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,0%	

TABLE 12: Adjusted crosstabulation of "Use common sense", Age, Country, and Gender

As demonstrated by the Table above (Table 12), this category was found in a total of 77 responses. This category was more commonly mentioned by the representatives of generation Z at 3,2% within age, in comparison with 3,0% of generation Y (Table 12). As this is not a very specific tool but rather a relatively vague piece of advice, the reason younger people mentioned it more might be partly caused by their inexperience. However, especially since this category also included hints of the respondent seeing the person they are advising as a naïve, young person who does not yet realise that not everything is as it seems, there could have been a reasonable expectation that a majority of these responses would have been from the older group.

This category was more common amongst the Finnish respondents (3,4% within country) in comparison with 2,9% of the British respondents (Table 12). This could be partly explained by Finland being a highly individualistic society in which people prefer to have and give personal space and to take care of themselves. However, when compared to the UK, according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede Insights, 2022), the UK scores higher on individualism. However, Finland's high individualism paired with Finland as a society valuing realism and common sense (Lewis, 2005), does give some explanation to why Finns mentioned this category more commonly.

When comparing the genders, the female respondents mentioned this category the most frequently at 3,4% within their gender, in comparison with 2,9% of the male respondents. No respondents who chose other as their gender in this survey mentioned this category. (Table 12)

5.1.6 Be careful

57 of the respondents (6,3%) advised to be careful when using social media or trusting the content (Table 7). This, similar to the prior category 5, "Use common sense", is not a very exact tool, but more of a mindset to keep when evaluating social media content.

be careful what you read and buy
-respondent 141

Be reserved about most of the information. It's good to check everything from multiple websites, even if it takes more time.
[Suurempaan osaan tiedosta kannattaa suhtautua varautuneesti. Kaikki on hyvä tarkastaa useammalta sivulta, vaikka siihen meneekin enemmän aikaa.]
-respondent 1761, coded as 6 & 1

Always be careful
[ole aina varovainen]
-respondent 1783

It's good to be careful about sources as everything is not always true.
[Kannattaa olla varovainen tiedonlähteiden suhteen sillä kaikki ei välttämättä ole aina totta.]
-respondent 2074

Many of the respondents also suggested to be careful when considering what one decides to share on social media themselves:

Be careful of what you publish
[olkaa varovaisia mitä julkasut]
-respondent 1704

research the site and be careful what information you give out
-respondent 52, coded as 6 & 1

Be careful what you post as anyone can see it and manipulate it
-respondent 114

		Be careful	Total
Age	15-24	39	57
	% <i>Within age</i>	2,6%	
	25-29	18	
	% <i>Within age</i>	1,9%	
Country	UK	39	57
	% <i>Within country</i>	3,2%	
	Finland	18	

	<i>% Within country</i>	1,5%	
Gender	Male	29	57
	<i>% Within gender</i>	2,4%	
	Female	28	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	2,2%	
	Other	0	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,0%	

TABLE 13: Adjusted crosstabulation of “Be careful”, Age, Country, and Gender

As shown on the table above (Table 13), this category was found in a total of 57 responses. It appeared more commonly in the responses of the younger age group at 2,6% within age, compared to 1,9% within the elder group (Table 13). This, again, is a relatively non-specific and rather vague piece of advice, which could be the result of the younger group’s inexperience.

This category appeared more commonly amongst the British respondents at 3,2%, compared to 1,5% amongst the Finns (Table 13). This finding paired with the opposite findings in the next category, ‘be critical’, would suggest, that, while the Finnish respondents lean more towards being critical, the British respondents prioritise being careful.

When comparing the genders, we can see that this category was similarly common amongst both male (2,4% within gender) and female (2,2% within gender) respondents (Table 13). The respondents who chose other as their gender in this survey did not mention being careful in any of their responses.

5.1.7 Be critical

Keeping a critical mindset was suggested by 52 respondents (5,8%) (Table 7). This category includes mentions about purely being critical about social media content, the platform, sources, advice, and to question everything and everyone. This category is relatively straightforward but does not provide a very specific tool for evaluating trustworthiness.

Source criticism
[Lähdekriittisyys]
-respondent 1374

Be critical in everything you see and read!!
[ole kriittinen kaikessa mitä näät tai luet!!]
-respondent 2157

You can be critical with everything!
[Kaiken kanssa saa olla kriittinen!]
-respondent 2426

Think about everything critically on social media, as anyone can write anything without knowing its truthful background.

[Suhtaudu kaikkeen kriittisesti sosiaalisessa mediassa, sillä kuka vain voi kirjoittaa asioita tietämättä niiden todenmukaista taustaa.]
-respondent 2560

This category also appeared alongside other categories, especially 5, “use common sense”. These combine quite well, as a critical mindset could be considered to be a part of having common sense.

One of the most important factors is to have a critical mind set, together with logic and common sense
-respondent 789, coded as 7 & 5

Always think critically about the trustworthiness of content and use common sense.
[Suhtaudu aina ensin kriittisesti sisältöjen luotettavuuteen ja käytä maalaisjärkeä.]
-respondent 2001, coded as 7 & 5

		Be critical	Total
Age	15-24	35	52
	% <i>Within age</i>	2,3%	
	25-29	17	
	% <i>Within age</i>	1,8%	
Country	UK	7	52
	% <i>Within country</i>	0,6%	
	Finland	45	
	% <i>Within country</i>	3,7%	
Gender	Male	14	52
	% <i>Within gender</i>	1,2%	
	Female	37	
	% <i>Within gender</i>	3,0%	
	Other	1	
	% <i>Within gender</i>	5,0%	

TABLE 14: Adjusted crosstabulation of “Be critical”, Age, Country, and Gender

As shown on the table (Table 14) above, this category was mentioned a total of 52 times. This category was more commonly mentioned by the younger age group (2,3% within age), when compared to the older group (1,8% within age) (Table 14).

When comparing the two countries, Table 14 shows that this category was much more prominent with Finnish respondents (3,7% within country), when compared with the British respondents (0,6% within country). As mentioned in chapter 5.1.6, this could suggest that Finns place more importance on critical thinking. Additionally, as one of the respondents mentioned (below), source criticism is often spoken about in school in Finland, which might be part of the reason why Finns seem to more commonly display this mindset. Critical handling of information as well as source criticism are also prominent in the Finnish national basis for high school curriculums (Opetushallitus, 2019, p. 65).

Source criticism, called for by Finnish language teachers.
[Äidinkielen opettajien peräänkuuluttama lähdekritiikki.]
-respondent 1375

As demonstrated by Table 14, this category was most commonly mentioned amongst those that chose 'other' as their gender in this survey at 5,0% percent within gender. Female respondents were the second most common in this category at 3,0% within gender, and male respondents the least common at 1,2% within gender (Table 14).

5.1.8 Read independent reviews

42 of the respondents (4,7%) recommended checking independent reviews to see how it compares with the social media content, that could have a financial motivation (Table 7). Independent reviews are available on different platforms, and they are meant to be impartial and non-commercial. Thus, reviews published or paid for by a brand itself are not considered independent reviews.

Trusted reviews are a good way to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content.
-respondent 196

always check sources or if its a product impartial reviews
-respondent 689, coded as 8 & 1

Find reviews already made of the product
[Etsi tuotteesta jo tehtyjä arviointeja.]
-respondent 2463

First look for information or ask your friends. Or read others' reviews.
[Etsi ensin tietoa ja kysy kavereilta. Lue vaikka muiden arvostelua]
-respondent 2566, coded as 8, 1 & 11

Some respondents recommended impartial reviews as an "opposite" option to social media content. The reviews were recommended as more trustworthy specifically compared to social media content or social media influencers:

To read the reviews of 'normal' customers
-respondent 257

Read up on reviews or talk to people you trust, a social media page will only show the positive, not the negative.
-respondent 957, coded as 8 & 11

Look at reviews of the product on different websites by impartial people that have bought the item of their own back.
-respondent 1192

Some respondents also gave examples of websites outside of social media where impartial reviews can be found:

Just to do your research as well such as trip advisor or trust pilot
-respondent 154

Look on certain sites like TrustPilot to see if anything about that person is on there.
-respondent 970

by seeing reviews from app store or google play store
[kattomalla arvosteluja sieltä app storesta tai google play kaupasta]
-respondent 1675

		Read independent reviews	Total
Age	15-24	24	42
	% <i>Within age</i>	1,6%	
	25-29	18	
	% <i>Within age</i>	1,9%	
Country	UK	36	42
	% <i>Within country</i>	2,9%	
	Finland	6	
	% <i>Within country</i>	0,5%	
Gender	Male	14	42
	% <i>Within gender</i>	1,2%	
	Female	28	
	% <i>Within gender</i>	2,2%	
	Other	0	
	% <i>Within gender</i>	0,0%	

TABLE 15: Adjusted crosstabulation of “Read independent reviews”, Age, Country, and Gender

As demonstrated by Table 15 above, this category was found in a total of 42 responses. Both generations mentioned this evenly, with the generation Y being slightly larger in this category at 1,9% within age, in comparison to generation Z at 1,6% within age.

The difference between the British and Finnish respondents was unexpected – British respondents were much more likely to recommend checking impartial review sites at 2,9% within country, than the Finns were at only 0,5% within country (Table 15). Part of this might be explainable by the number of reviews that are available in English than in Finnish.

Finally, as shown on Table 15, the female respondents were more likely to recommend checking independent review sites (2,2% within gender) when compared to male respondents (1,4% within gender) or those who chose other as their gender in this survey (0,0% within gender).

5.1.9 Don't trust anything on social media

This category was mentioned a total of 23 times (2,6%) (Table 7). These responses advised, often straightforwardly, not to trust social media at all in any case whatsoever. These respondents do not seem to believe that any social media content could be trustworthy and would rather trust some other types of sources. An interesting point to note is, that as explained in chapter 4.1 (data), even though these respondents do not trust social media, or at least advice others to not trust any of it, they still use it.

Do not trust the content from social media period
-respondent 143

I would say don't trust it
-respondent 353

Not to use it
-respondent 1150

Assume it's all untrue.
-respondent 1198

Some were slightly less strict about never trusting social media at all, but still quite adamant that social media is biased and should never be the only source of information:

Never trust social media content from the get-go
-respondent 330

don't trust it get off the computer go outside learn something for yourself
-respondent 661

Don't. Accept that everything you read is biased in some way and fact check outside of social media.
-respondent 717

Like some of the responses in the "use common sense" category, some of the responses in this category seemed to give the impression that the person giving the advice might perceive their advisee to be quite naïve. Of this, the below quote is an interesting example:

Any young person who isn't yet capable of sufficiently evaluating whether a piece of information is trustworthy or not, shouldn't be aloud on the internet, because they're gonna die. However, whether a young person is able to evaluate the trustworthiness of a source in any given situation is purely down to the individual. Although underdeveloped, they are still people with differing temperaments. Not all young people are the same-although most of them are annoying. If I thought I had a young person with a functional enough brain to listen to anything I had to say regarding social media, I'd tell them not to trust any of it. If they're stupid enough to trust everything they read, when they get what's coming I'd say that that's called natural selection doing it's job.
-respondent 433

		Don't trust anything on social media	Total
Age	15-24	13	23
	<i>% Within age</i>	0,9%	
	25-29	10	
	<i>% Within age</i>	1,1%	
Country	UK	19	23
	<i>% Within country</i>	1,5%	
	Finland	4	
	<i>% Within country</i>	0,3%	
Gender	Male	13	23
	<i>% Within gender</i>	1,1%	
	Female	10	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,8%	
	Other	0	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,0%	

TABLE 16: Adjusted crosstabulation of “Don't trust anything on social media”, Age, Country, and Gender

As presented on the table above (Table 16), a total of 23 responses advised against trusting anything on social media. There is no major difference between the two generations, with the older age group having mentioned it slightly more frequently at 1,1% within age, and the younger group at 0,9% within age (Table 16).

When comparing the countries, the British respondents were much more prone to mention this category at 1,5% within country, compared to only 0,3% within country for the Finnish respondents (Table 16). There is no clear or obvious reasoning for this, and it is thus quite unexpected that there is such a relatively large difference in this category.

Finally, this category was slightly more common amongst the male respondents at 1,1% within gender, compared to the female respondents at 0,8% within gender and those who chose other as their gender in this survey at 0,0% (Table 16). An argument could be made to explain this by male individuals being more prone to offer straightforward and absolute advice.

5.1.10 Only trust well-known websites or mainstream content

22 respondents (2,4%) recommended to only trust websites that you're familiar with, or websites that are usually well-known or popular (Table 7). They also recommended only trusting official websites or government websites. However, mentions of government/official websites specifically mentioned the website, not their social media channels, which many government agencies also have. This

would suggest that they would rather recommend looking for information outside of social media.

Use well known websites
-respondent 311

Only use recognised websites. Government websites etc.
-respondent 391

Only trust official websites
-respondent 395

Check who it is that shares the information. Officials (i.e. Police) are trustworthy, but a random comment might not be.
[Kannattaa katsoa, kuka sitä tietoa jakaa. Viralliset (esim. Poliisi) on luotettavaa, mutta satunnainen kommentti ei välttämättä.]
-respondent 2537

Some respondents also referred to content created by verified accounts or accounts well known to be trustworthy:

If it has a blue tick, then it is their official brand
-respondent 274

If it's very well known or otherwise everyone just knows that it's trustworthy
[Jos se on todella tunnettu tai muuten vaan kaikki tietää että sen luotettava.]
-respondent 2036

		Only trust well-known publishers or mainstream content	Total
Age	15-24	16	22
	<i>% Within age</i>	1,1%	
	25-29	6	
	<i>% Within age</i>	0,6%	
Country	UK	19	22
	<i>% Within country</i>	1,5%	
	Finland	3	
	<i>% Within country</i>	0,2%	
Gender	Male	9	22
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,8%	
	Female	13	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	1,0%	
	Other	0	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,0%	

TABLE 17: Adjusted crosstabulation of "Only trust well-known publishers or mainstream content", Age, Country, and Gender

As shown in Table 17 above, this category was found in a total of 22 responses. The younger group mentioned this more commonly at 1,1% within age, compared to 0,6% within age for the older group. This could be attributed to a slight naivete of the younger age group with a seemingly high trust on publishers and mainstream content. The older group might have more of a critical perception of, for example, placing trust on a verified social media account.

This category was more commonly mentioned by British respondents at 1,5% within country, compared to 0,2% within country for the Finnish respondents. In the gender comparison, this category was slightly more common amongst the female respondents at 1,0%, compared to 0,8% or the male respondents (Table 17). None of the respondents who chose other as their gender in this survey mentioned this category in their responses (Table 17).

5.1.11 Seek trustworthiness from real life

22 respondents (2,4%) mentioned that their advice for evaluating trustworthiness is to seek trustworthiness from real life rather than from social media or any other electronic source (Table 7). Many of these respondents recommended asking others, most commonly people you know in real life, or someone who is an expert on the subject.

To ask others
[kysymään mulita]
-respondent 1997

To share opinions about it with friends
[Jakamaan ystävien kesken mielipiteitä asiasta]
-respondent 2272

This category also appeared alongside other categories in many answers:

For them to make sure the content they're seeing it's trustworthy by talking to other people and seeing their reviews about it.
-respondent 226, coded as 11 & 8

To use multiple social media sites and discuss what they've found with others before deciding how trustworthy it is
-respondent 1028, coded as 11 & 1

Everything is not true, so it's not a good idea to trust. Rather ask people you know or an expert in the field :-)
[Kaikki ei ole totta joten ei kannata luottaa. Kysyy mielummin omilta tutuilta tai alan ammattilaiselta :-)]
-respondent 1976, coded as 11 & 2

Some advised to only ever trust people you know outside of social media:

Don't subscribe to brand pages. Follow who you know
-respondent 279

Only trust friends
-respondent 523

Don't trust it unless you know the person personally
-respondent 762

		Seek trustworthiness from real life	Total
Age	15-24	14	22
	<i>% Within age</i>	0,9%	
	25-29	8	
	<i>% Within age</i>	0,8%	
Country	UK	15	22
	<i>% Within country</i>	1,2%	
	Finland	7	
	<i>% Within country</i>	0,6%	
Gender	Male	6	22
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,5%	
	Female	15	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	1,2%	
	Other	1	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	5,0%	

TABLE 18: Adjusted crosstabulation of “Seek trustworthiness from real life”, Age, Country, and Gender

As demonstrated by the table above (Table 18), the advice to seek trustworthiness from real life instead of social media was mentioned by 22 respondents in total. The age groups were very even on this category, with generation Z mentioning it slightly more frequently at 0,9% within age, compared to generation Y at 0,8% within age.

The British respondents were twice as likely to recommend this category at 1,2% within country, compared to 0,6% within country. Those who chose other as their gender in this survey were the most likely to recommend this category at 5,0% within gender. Female respondents mentioned this the second most frequently out of the genders, at 1,2% within gender when compared to 0,5% within gender for males.

5.1.12 Nothing, it doesn't matter

10 respondents (1,1%) felt that there is nothing that needs to be done in order to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content (Table 7). Some merely stated that nothing needs to be done, while others admitted that they do not think it matters to them whether the information they see on social media is true or not. The respondents could have meant that they do not give any importance to social

media content and its trustworthiness in general, or they might feel like it is pointless to even try to assess trustworthiness. Its difficult to determine whether this category offers additional value, but it was deemed to deserve a mention in this research.

Nothing
-respondent 732

It does not matter if the content is true or not
-respondent 790

		Nothing, it doesn't matter	Total
Age	15-24	5	10
	<i>% Within age</i>	0,3%	
	25-29	5	
	<i>% Within age</i>	0,5%	
Country	UK	7	10
	<i>% Within country</i>	0,6%	
	Finland	3	
	<i>% Within country</i>	0,2%	
Gender	Male	7	10
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,6%	
	Female	3	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,2%	
	Other	0	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,0%	

TABLE 19: Adjusted crosstabulation of "Nothing, it doesn't matter", Age, Country, and Gender

As shown on Table 19 above, this category was mentioned a total of 10 times. The age groups are quite equal, with the older group having mentioned it slightly more frequently at 0,5% within age, compared with 0,3% within age for the younger group. In the country comparison, this category was more common amongst the British respondents at 0,6% within country, compared to 0,2% for the Finnish respondents. In comparing the genders, the male respondents mentioned this category the most frequently at 0,6% within gender, compared to 0,2% within gender for the female respondents and 0,0% within gender for those who chose other as their gender in this survey.

5.1.13 I don't know

57 of the respondents (6,3%) replied, in some form, that they do not know how to advise young people in evaluating trustworthiness on social media (Table 7). This makes it one of the largest categories, which also speaks for the importance of including it as its own category. This category was originally considered as

part of the “irrelevant answer” category, but at closer inspection, this reply can also be seen to add value. In some replies, as seen in the examples below, the respondent admitted that they do not know how to evaluate trustworthiness themselves, and that is the reason they do not know how to advise others on the matter either. Thus, the “I don’t know” replies were seen to give off the impression that the respondent is unsure of any mechanisms to use in evaluating the trustworthiness of the social media content they meet online.

i dont know how to properly myself too easy to be mislead
-respondent 880

Difficult question, as it’s also a bit difficult for me at times.
[Vaikea kysymys, kun itsellenikin vähän hankalaa toisinaan.]
-respondent 1874

Difficult question, I don’t know how to answer
[Vaikea kysymys, en osaa vastata]
-respondent 2468

		I don’t know	Total
Age	15-24	43	57
	% <i>Within age</i>	2,8%	
	25-29	14	
	% <i>Within age</i>	1,5%	
Country	UK	45	57
	% <i>Within country</i>	3,6%	
	Finland	12	
	% <i>Within country</i>	1,0%	
Gender	Male	23	57
	% <i>Within gender</i>	1,9%	
	Female	34	
	% <i>Within gender</i>	2,7%	
	Other	0	
	% <i>Within gender</i>	0,0%	

TABLE 20: Adjusted crosstabulation of “I don’t know”, Age, Country, and Gender

As shown above in Table 20, this category was mentioned a total of 57 times. The “I don’t know” variable was more commonly used by the younger age group at 2,8% within age, compared to 1,5% within the older group. The younger respondents could have also struggled with the setting of the question, as it asked to advise young people while they were still young themselves. Thus, they might have difficulty putting themselves in the role of an advisor. The older group is more likely to be able to advise people younger than themselves

This category was more common amongst the British respondents at 3,6% within country, compared to 1,0% within country for the Finns. In the gender comparison, the female respondents mentioned this category the most frequently at 2,7% within gender, compared to 1,9% within gender for the male respondents. None of the respondents who chose other as their gender in this survey said that they do not know. (Table 20)

5.1.14 Other

This category was created during the second round of coding, out of the original categories that only included less than 10 mentions. The use of an “Other” category is recommended in the case of separate categories getting too small to be accurately represented, as long as the “other” category covers less than 10% of the total data (Hair et al., 2015, p. 233). In this study the “other” category has 16 mentions, covering 1,8% of the total data (Table 7). The way the responses are distributed across the age groups, countries and genders are demonstrated in the table below (Table 21).

		Other	Total
Age	15-24	9	16
	<i>% Within age</i>	0,6%	
	25-29	7	
	<i>% Within age</i>	0,7%	
Country	UK	12	16
	<i>% Within country</i>	1,0%	
	Finland	4	
	<i>% Within country</i>	0,3%	
Gender	Male	11	16
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,9%	
	Female	5	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,4%	
	Other	0	
	<i>% Within gender</i>	0,0%	

TABLE 21: Adjusted crosstabulation of “Other”, Age, Country, and Gender

One interesting theme was observed where some respondents felt that the content on social media needs to be regulated. They mention that young people will believe untrustworthy content on social media quite easily. Instead of leaving the responsibility of evaluating the trustworthiness to the user, they place more emphasis on the social media platforms’ responsibility to make sure the content on their platform can be trusted.

I think a lot more needs to be done to regulate the content before advice can be given. Young people are impressionable, and can believe whatever the influencers say.
-respondent 153

They are too gullible - but i think social media needs to do something more
-respondent 238

Some respondents also felt that these types of mechanisms and reliable sources should be taught in school, and not left for the young people to learn by themselves:

I believe it is a teachers job to be able to educate young people on how trustworthy the internet is and where they should actually get their information from.
-respondent 1312

Some gave the advice to act the same on social media as you do in real life:

Be the same as in the real life
-respondent 83

only write/say on there what you would say to your mum and dad!
-respondent 592

Some respondents felt that the best tool for evaluating trustworthiness is gaining experience on the subject:

Just experience it enough and eventually you will know the difference
-respondent 741

5.2 Trustworthiness of social media content created by different publishers

The amount of trust the respondents place on different outlets was one of the topics covered in the questionnaire. The respondents were asked how often they trust information coming from different sources through multiple choice questions. The claims they answered are as follows:

- V80 I trust information produced by journalists
- V81 I trust information produced by educational institutions
- V82 I trust information provided by public authorities
- V83 I trust information from non-profit organisations
- V84 I trust information from brands
- V85 I trust information from my friends
- V86 I trust information from impartial consumer reviews
- V87 I trust information from bloggers
- V88 I trust information from videobloggers

The choices the respondents were given fall on a 5-fold Likert scale as follows:

- 1=never
- 2=almost never

- 3=sometimes
- 4=almost always
- 5=always

As shown in the table below (Table 22), the averages are all above 3, meaning that overall, all types of publishers are somewhat trusted by the respondents. The overall trust for all publishers together averages at 3,38. The most highly trusted source are educational institutions, followed by public authorities, friends, and impartial review sites. As expected, bloggers and videobloggers have received the lowest score. Journalists being the third least trusted source is, however, quite unexpected. According to the data shown in Table 22, journalists are less trusted than brands.

Claim	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Variance
I trust information produced by journalists	3,1	2355	1,142	1	5	1,305
I trust information produced by educational institutions (schools, universities)	3,74	2371	1,045	1	5	1,093
I trust information provided by public authorities	3,67	2363	1,054	1	5	1,112
I trust information from non-profit organizations (e.g., Red Cross, Greenpeace)	3,46	2356	1,073	1	5	1,152
I trust information from brands	3,16	2352	1,117	1	5	1,248
I trust information from my friends	3,65	2346	1,008	1	5	1,016
I trust information from impartial consumer review sites	3,56	2311	1,046	1	5	1,094
I trust information from bloggers	3,03	2338	1,136	1	5	1,292
I trust information from videobloggers	3,1	2334	1,158	1	5	1,342
Overall trust in different publishers	3,38	2180	,781	1	5	,609

TABLE 22: Trust in different sources

5.2.1 Trust in different publishers by generation

The table below (Table 23) presents the amount of trust the two generations, generation Z and generation Y, place on different publishers. As presented in the table (Table 23), the differences between the two generations are relatively small.

Overall, generation Z, the younger generation, appears to be slightly less trusting in all publishers, compared to generation Y, apart from one category (trust in videobloggers), in which they are tied. This suggests that overall generation Z is slightly less trusting of social media than generation Y. There is an explanation to this phenomenon: according to research done by Pew Research Center (2021), in USA, generation Z is the first generation to have reported a decline in social media use. Generation Z has showed signs of becoming disillusioned with the social media applications that they grew up with and might have grown to the realisation that social media platforms with their like and follower counts are, in some cases, not good for the user's mental health or self-esteem (Bandara, 2022).

Claim	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
I trust information produced by journalists	15-24	1445	3,04	1,160	,031
	25-29	910	3,19	1,108	,037
I trust information produced by educational institutions (schools, universities)	15-24	1453	3,70	1,092	,029
	25-29	918	3,80	,964	,032
I trust information provided by public authorities	15-24	1451	3,65	1,077	,028
	25-29	912	3,69	1,017	,034
I trust information from non-profit organizations (e.g., Red Cross, Greenpeace)	15-24	1443	3,46	1,083	,029
	25-29	913	3,47	1,058	,035
I trust information from brands	15-24	1441	3,14	1,126	,030
	25-29	911	3,18	1,103	,037
I trust information from my friends	15-24	1437	3,65	1,040	,027
	25-29	909	3,67	,955	,032
I trust information from impartial consumer review sites	15-24	1404	3,50	1,080	,029
	25-29	907	3,64	,985	,033
I trust information from bloggers	15-24	1427	3,01	1,145	,030
	25-29	911	3,07	1,122	,037

I trust information from videobloggers	15-24	1430	3,10	1,155	,031
	25-29	904	3,10	1,164	,039
Overall trust	15-24	1322	3,36	,804	,022
	25-29	858	3,42	,742	,025

TABLE 23: Age * Trust in different sources

5.2.2 Trust in different publishers by nationality

The table below (Table 24) presents the amount of trust the respondents from the two countries, Finland and the United Kingdom, place on different publishers.

As Table 24 shows, the Finnish respondents were less trusting than the British in all but two categories: journalists and public authorities. These two publishers being more trusted by the Finnish respondents is somewhat expected. Freedom of the press is highly valued in Finland, and the media is highly trusted – as noted in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022 (Newman et al., 2022, p. 10), Finland has the highest levels of overall trust in their national media at 69% out of the 46 countries in the report. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom ranks at 36/46 in the same ranking, at 34% (Newman et al., 2022, p. 63). Finnish citizens are also found to have a high level of interest in current news and a low level of active news avoidance (Newman et al., 2022, p. 15). Finns also have the highest confidence in journalism being independent from politics (Newman et al., 2022 p. 16).

The Finnish respondents having a higher level of trust in public authorities than the British is also well in line with previous research. For example, the 2022 Eurofound research report states that when it comes to trusting national institutions, the government, or police force, Finland is at the top of the rankings within the 27 countries in the European Union (Eurofound, 2022). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found in their survey, that in 2021 71,4% of Finnish citizens trust their government, while in the United Kingdom the corresponding number is only 39,5% (OECD, 2022).

While trust in public figures and journalists is relatively high amongst the Finnish respondents, the publishers that require a level of social relationships, such as friends, bloggers and videobloggers, are less trusted by the Finns (Table 23). This is somewhat unexpected, as culturally Finland is often perceived as a very trusting country that values and expects honesty from their peers, which was also proven by the 2018 special Eurobarometer, which found that 85% of Finnish citizens felt like most people in their country can be trusted. Meanwhile, the corresponding number amongst the UK citizens was 50% (Eurobarometer, 2018, p. 7).

Claim	Country	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
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I trust information produced by journalists	United Kingdom	1199	3,06	1,188	,034
	Finland	1156	3,14	1,092	,032
I trust information produced by educational institutions (schools, universities)	United Kingdom	1205	3,75	1,042	,030
	Finland	1166	3,73	1,049	,031
I trust information provided by public authorities	United Kingdom	1197	3,54	1,042	,030
	Finland	1166	3,80	1,051	,031
I trust information from non-profit organizations (e.g., Red Cross, Greenpeace)	United Kingdom	1189	3,62	1,023	,030
	Finland	1167	3,31	1,101	,032
I trust information from brands	United Kingdom	1190	3,32	1,134	,033
	Finland	1162	2,98	1,074	,032
I trust information from my friends	United Kingdom	1186	3,80	1,001	,029
	Finland	1160	3,51	,995	,029
I trust information from impartial consumer review sites	United Kingdom	1183	3,62	1,050	,031
	Finland	1128	3,49	1,038	,031
I trust information from bloggers	United Kingdom	1187	3,20	1,135	,033
	Finland	1151	2,86	1,113	,033
I trust information from videobloggers	United Kingdom	1187	3,25	1,162	,034
	Finland	1147	2,94	1,134	,033
Overall trust	United Kingdom	1116	3,46	,789	,024
	Finland	1064	3,30	,764	,023

TABLE 24: Country * Trust in different sources

5.2.3 Trust in different publishers by gender

The table below (Table 25) presents the amount of trust the three genders, male, female, and other, place on different publishers.

The findings show that men are slightly more trusting of social media content overall than women are, and those who chose 'other' as their gender in this survey are the least trusting of all (Table 25). Women are expectedly less trusting, as

they are often generally more sensitive to risk and betrayal (Wu et al., 2020, 1). Publishers that require a level of social relationships, like journalists, bloggers and videobloggers, are less trusted by women – this is also in line with men being less sensitive to social risks (Wu et al., 2020, 1). The only publisher that requires a level of social trust that women trust slightly more than men is friends.

The respondents who chose ‘other’ as their gender in this survey were the least trusting in all categories, with some averages sitting notably below the overall average. This could perhaps be explained by the small sample size, but there is also a need understand more deeply how and why those who identify as neither male nor female build trust in a social media context. The level of trust those who chose ‘other’ as their gender in this survey place on their friends is unexpectedly low, and notably lower than the male and female respondents’ trust levels in friends.

Gender	Male			Female			Other		
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Journalists	3,14	1141	1,264	3,06	1198	1,012	2,56	16	1,031
Educational institutions	3,73	1150	1,114	3,75	1203	0,971	3,17	18	1,200
Public authorities	3,63	1145	1,087	3,71	1201	1,018	3,12	17	1,166
Non-profit organizations	3,49	1146	1,118	3,45	1193	1,029	3,41	17	1,004
Brands	3,27	1137	1,199	3,05	1198	1,020	2,59	17	1,228
Friends	3,64	1132	1,046	3,68	1196	0,961	2,89	18	1,323
Review sites	3,56	1133	1,093	3,56	1160	0,995	3,39	18	1,243
Bloggers	3,11	1136	1,208	2,96	1185	1,058	2,76	17	1,200
Videobloggers	3,21	1134	1,224	3,00	1183	1,081	3,00	17	1,323
Overall trust	3,41	1057	,847	3,36	1108	,710	3,09	15	,850

TABLE 25: Gender * Trust in different sources

5.3 Agency and trust in relation to each other

The following sections discuss how the overall level the respondents’ personal agency can be determined and compared to their level of trust for the purpose of this research.

5.3.1 Determining the respondents' level of agency

In order to answer the question of how different levels of agency impact trust, it is first necessary to find a way to determine how high or low the respondents' level of agency is. However, agency is not very easily measured as it is a very intangible concept and as such it can be difficult to determine one's own, or somebody else's level of agency. The scale of measuring agency used in this thesis is very simplified in order to place the focus on the relation between agency and trust. The scale is based on the perceptions of the researcher.

For the purposes of this study, the respondents' level of agency was determined through the mechanisms they recommended using for determining the trustworthiness of social media content, as presented in RQ1. Each mechanism was assigned one of three levels of personal agency: low, moderate, or high. The "other" category was classed as "not applicable".

The basis for using the respondent's recommendation as a proxy for determining their level or personal agency is, that the more the respondent feels like they are able and willing to take action, the higher their agency is. In turn, the less control the respondent seems to feel like they possess, the lower their level of agency is classed. Thus, the mechanisms that indicate a proactive approach in task of evaluating trustworthiness, are ranked as high agency. Recommendations that put more emphasis on careful consideration but do not advice to actively seek confirmation of the information consumed are ranked as moderate agency. Finally, the categories that suggest the respondent has given up, or does not think they can do anything about the trustworthiness of the content they see, are ranked as low agency. The responses from the "other" category are not ranked by level of agency.

The categories were divided into levels of agency as follows:

Categories		Level of agency
1	Check other/multiple sources	High
2	Don't trust everything	Low
3	Consider the bias or financial gain of the content creator	Moderate
4	Check the sources of the content	High
5	Use common sense	Moderate
6	Be careful	Low
7	Be critical	Moderate
8	Read independent reviews	High
9	Don't trust anything on social media	Low

10	Only trust well known websites	Moderate
11	Seek trustworthiness from real life	High
12	Nothing, it doesn't matter	Low
13	I don't know	Low
14	Other	Not applicable

TABLE 26: The levels of agency assigned to each category

Through the assigned levels of agency as shown in the table above (Table 26), the number of respondents that are assigned to each level of agency is shown below in Table 27. This shows that the highest number of responses are those with a high level of agency, and the smallest group is the one with a moderate level of agency.

Level of agency	N
Low	252
Moderate	226
High	334
Not applicable	16

TABLE 27: The number of respondents by level of agency

5.3.2 Agency in comparison with trust

The table below (Table 28) shows the comparison of the three levels of agency and the sum variable of the trust variables V80-V88, which are explained in chapter 5.2 (Trustworthiness of social media content created by different publishers). As demonstrated by the table below (Table 28), there is no obvious dependence to be found - the means of each agency level are very similar, with low agency being the most trusting.

The group with a moderate level of agency is the least trusting. This could perhaps be explained by the nature of the categories that were coded into the moderate level of agency - the categories were the kind that encouraged the advisee to think instead of taking direct action or not doing anything. This might demonstrate a flaw in the coding of the mechanisms. In creating this scale taking direct action was considered to demonstrate an higher level of agency, but perhaps critical thinking and questioning the issue at hand in actuality demonstrates a higher level than acting.

Level of agency	Overall trust		
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Low	3,44	218	,752
Moderate	3,28	210	,600
High	3,41	310	,638

Not applicable	3,65	16	,845
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TABLE 28: The comparison of overall trust and level of agency

6 DISCUSSION

The final chapter of this thesis will discuss and conclude the results of this study, present the limitations recognised in the process of concluding this research, and offer some possible future directions for research relating to this topic.

6.1 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to shed light on how young social media users evaluate trustworthiness on social media and whether or not the level of their personal agency is a factor in their trust formation process.

Personal agency is a relatively complex concept to define or measure. Agency as a concept is quite multifaceted and not very easy to grasp as it is something quite intangible, and the definitions differ amongst different academic fields. As presented in chapter 2.2, there are multiple different ways to define agency depending on the academic field and point of view. Agency in relation to social media is an interesting subject to study, but the field remains to be researched further in order to better understand what types of factors impact or build agency on social media, and how it might relate to trust.

Social media platforms present their users with vast amounts of user-generated content that goes through very little, if any, fact-checking (Allen, 2017, p. 1091; Westerman et al., 2014, p. 171). Thus, having the skill of knowing what to trust and how to determine trustworthiness has become increasingly important in the social media environment of the 21st century (Westerman et al., 2014, p. 199). Fortunately, as demonstrated by the results of this study, both generations Y and Z appear to have a relatively good grasp of what kinds of mechanisms they can use in order to determine the trustworthiness of the content they see online.

6.1.1 Mechanisms used to assess the trustworthiness of social media content

This chapter presents the findings related to the first research question and its follow-up questions as listed in chapter 4.2 (Research questions).

RQ1: What kinds of mechanisms do young people use to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content?

This study found a total of 12 different mechanisms that were recognised from the data. In addition to these mechanisms, the recognised categories also include

separate categories for “I don’t know” and “other”. The found mechanisms vary from actively conducting further research on the topic, to keeping a careful and critical mindset, to not doing anything.

As found in this study, the most popularly recommended mechanisms for assessing trustworthiness are doing more research and checking multiple sources, as well as checking the sources of the content on social media. These mechanisms encourage looking further and deeper into the subject, and not taking the information at face value. This is certainly a valuable skill to have, and it is a positive that at least according to the responses in this study, the respondents would encourage their peers to do this as well.

However, while doing research and cross-checking information can be a helpful strategy, it does have its pitfalls as well. As explained by Eysenbach (2008, p. 143), cross-checking information online requires internet literacy to the point of being able to formulate a query in a neutral way, in order to ensure that the users’ pre-conceptions do not influence the findings. Cross-checking can also be time-consuming and thus requires time and motivation (Eysenbach, 2008, p. 143)

On the other hand, the amount of respondents that did not quite know how to assess trustworthiness is perhaps unexpectedly high. Should we be worried about the amount of young people that don’t know how to evaluate the trustworthiness of social media content? Considering the fact that these respondents do also use social media, and they will likely come across misleading or otherwise untrustworthy content relatively commonly, what kinds of perceptions might they run into during the time they spend scrolling through content?

It is also important to note that although the assumption might be that all social media users want to ensure the content they see on social media is trustworthy and credible, this might not be the case in reality. They might simply lack the time, motivation, ability or willingness to do so (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013, p. 213).

RQ 1.1: What kinds of differences can be found in the mechanisms used by generations Y and Z?

Out of the total of 12 mechanisms found in this study, generation Y was the larger generation in only four categories: check multiple sources, don’t trust everything, read independent reviews, and don’t trust anything. The other eight mechanisms were more commonly mentioned by the respondents from generation Z.

The four mechanisms more commonly mentioned by generation Y are of two different types – two mechanisms that encourage actively researching the topic further, and two that suggest a general distrust and unwillingness to trust. These

can be considered as being on two opposite ends of the spectrum. Is there really such a divide within generation Y?

Checking multiple sources and reading independent reviews are similar types of advice. Both of these encourage looking elsewhere in order to establish the trustworthiness of the content or information they see on social media. These mechanisms being more commonly mentioned by generation Y could be due to their age leading them to having more life experience and likely a higher level of education.

It is not unexpected to find that the two mechanisms that can be perceived to encourage distrust (“don’t trust everything” and “don’t trust anything”) are more commonly mentioned by the same generation. Generation Y has grown up in an environment where the internet and social media platforms were only beginning to form, and as something new and unknown they raised more suspicions during generation Y’s formative years. This might act as a basis for having a generally distrusting attitude towards information on social media platforms.

The mechanisms that were more commonly recommended by representatives of generation Z are:

- Consider the bias or financial gain,
- Check the sources of the content,
- Use common sense,
- Be careful,
- Be critical,
- Only trust well-known websites or mainstream content,
- Seek trustworthiness from real life, and
- Nothing, it doesn’t matter.

While generation Y seems to be divided into two ends of the spectrum, generation Z seems to be more aligned even though there is a higher number of mechanisms that were more commonly mentioned by the younger respondents. A majority of these mechanisms encourage a somewhat passive attitude, apart from “check the sources of the content” and “seek trustworthiness from real life”, which are more active in nature. The other mechanisms rather encourage thinking, considering, and a general careful or critical attitude, not so much actively doing and researching.

Additionally, as discussed in chapter 5.1.13, the category “I don’t know” was found to be much more commonly mentioned by the younger generation. This would suggest that within generation Z there is a higher number of those that do not yet know how to assess trustworthiness or how to offer advice on the subject.

RQ1.2: *What kinds of differences can be found in the mechanisms used by Finnish and British respondents?*

When looking at the data as a whole, the differences between the respondents from Finland and the United Kingdom were relatively small overall. However, in looking at specific mechanisms, there are some differences to be noted. The categories in which the two countries were the most even were categories 4 “check the sources of the content”, 5 “Use common sense”, 11 “Seek trustworthiness from real life” and 12 “Nothing, it doesn’t matter”. In these aforementioned categories the difference equals to less than 10 people, and less than 1,0%.

Meanwhile, the largest differences between the Finnish and British respondents were found within mechanisms “Check other or multiple sources”, “Be critical”, “Read independent reviews” and “I don’t know”. In these categories the difference between the two countries is greater than 2,0% and 30 or more respondents. The rest of the mechanisms fall in between and do not have major differences.

Within the four mechanisms that had the largest difference between the two nationalities, only one was more common amongst the Finnish respondents: be critical. As discussed in chapter 5.1.7, critical thinking and source criticism has been widely discussed and encouraged in Finnish schools, which could explain some part of this difference (Opetushallitus, 2019, p. 65). The other three mechanisms with the more notable differences between nationalities were more common amongst the British respondents.

6.1.2 Trustworthiness of social media content created by different publishers

This chapter presents and discusses the findings related to the second research question and its follow-up questions as listed in chapter 4.2 (Research questions).

RQ2: How strongly does the trustworthiness of content created by different publishers vary from the point of view of young social media users?

The aim of this research question is to investigate how trustworthy young social media users find content created by different types of publishers to be, and how greatly the perceptions of trustworthiness vary depending on who published the content.

The overall average of trust in content created by the aforementioned publishers on social media was 3,38 (Table 22), which is relatively close to a neutral standpoint. Thus, the respondents appear to be relatively trusting of social media content in general.

In order of most trusted to least trusted (Table 22), the publishers that were evaluated in this study are:

1. Educational institutions (schools, universities) (3,74)

2. Public authorities (3,67)
3. Friends (3,65)
4. Impartial consumer review sites (3,56)
5. Non-profit organisations (e.g., Red Cross, Greenpeace) (3,46)
6. Brands (3,16)
7. Journalists (3,1) and videobloggers (3,1)
8. Bloggers (3,03).

The first five publishers (educational institutions, public authorities, friends, impartial consumer review sites, and non-profit organisations), are all above the overall average of 3,38. These most highly trusted publishers could be divided into two groups: well-established and known entities (educational institutions, public authorities, and non-profit organisations), as well as our peers (friends and impartial consumer review sites). Another unifying factor between these publishers is them not having an obvious financial interest in offering information on social media. Although possible, these publishers perhaps less likely to be interested in financial gain through their social media presence.

Meanwhile, the last four publishers sit below the overall average: brands, journalists, videobloggers and bloggers. Especially brands, videobloggers and bloggers are, opposite to the aforementioned more highly trusted publishers, likely to be motivated by financial gain. This might lead to social media users being less willing to trust their content at face value, as the motivation behind the content might not be informative, but rather financial. However, journalists are a somewhat unexpected outlier amongst the least trusted publishers. Is traditional media losing its trustworthiness in the eyes of generations Z and Y in the context of social media, or are journalists and their media outlets seen as separate entities?

When comparing the two generations, the younger generation (Z) is slightly less trusting of social media than their elders. As discussed in chapter 5.2.1, generation Z has shown signs of becoming disillusioned by social media, which could offer an explanation to their lower level of trust (Bandara, 2022). The overall averages, however, sit quite close together at 3,36 for generation Z and 3,42 (Table 23) for generation Y, so the difference is not very large.

The comparison of the two nationalities showed that the British were slightly more trusting, with the overall trust average for the British respondents being 3,46 and the same for the Finnish respondents being 3,30. Thus, overall, the British respondents were the most trusting, although the difference is relatively small. When looking at the different publishers, as shown on Table 24, the British respondents were more trusting of all publishers apart from two: journalists and public authorities. As discussed in chapter 5.2.2, both public authorities and journalists are generally well-trusted in Finland according to prior research as well, with high freedom of the press, high trust in the impartiality of traditional media,

and high trust in public authorities (Newman et al., 2022, pp. 10, 16; Eurofound, 2022).

Out of the three genders represented in this study show that men are slightly more trusting than women, and those who chose 'other' as their gender in this survey are the least trusting (Table 25). As discussed in chapter 5.2.2., women are often more sensitive to risk and betrayal and thus expectedly slightly less willing to trust, especially the publishers that require a level of social relationships. Meanwhile men tend to be less sensitive to social risks. (Wu et al., 2020, p. 1).

6.1.3 Agency and trust in relation to each other

This chapter presents the findings related to the third research question as listed in chapter 4.2 (Research questions).

RQ3: What kind of a part does a young person's personal agency play in how they place trust in a social media context?

The expectations based on the theoretical background were, that agency creates a feeling of personal control, which gives people the possibility of psychologically defend themselves against uncertainty (Tullett et al., 2015, p. 628; Cutright & Samper, 2014, p. 731). As explained in chapter 5.3.2, the levels of agency did not match the levels of trust and no straightforward correlation was found. As demonstrated by Table 28, the level of trust was highest with the respondents that were found to have the lowest agency, which is quite the opposite of what was expected.

The moderate agency level having the lowest trust was unexpected, but perhaps there is an explanation – is the passive action of “thinking” (such as “use common sense” or “think about the motives”) actually more agentic than actively looking for other sources – were the levels of agency perceived inaccurately in this study?

The respondents that were considered to have the lowest level of agency actually ended up having the highest level of trust – is there an explanation to this? This does not seem to be in line with theory, but maybe there is something that was missed in this assessment. In order to measure agency more accurately, a different type of a data set could be more fruitful. Perhaps a more qualitative approach with in-depth interviews or a focus group study could offer a deeper understanding of how exactly the research subjects perceive their personal agency. Numeric data is less helpful in understanding a concept that is as this intangible as agency.

As discussed in the theoretical background of this study, there could, in theory, be a correlation between personal agency and trust. Someone with a higher level

of personal agency has a higher capacity of defending themselves against the unpredictability that is created by making the intentional or unintentional decision to trust another agent. Thus, as this thesis did not establish a significant correlation between trust and agency for young social media users, the topic remains to be researched further.

6.2 Limitations of the study

As all research does, this study also has its limitations and challenges. Most of the possible limitations are related to the data set being secondary and partly qualitative, the time the data was collected in comparison to when the research was completed, and the data having been collected via a large online survey.

As part of the data is qualitative, this meaning the replies to the open question, it was coded through the perceptions of the researcher. Thus, there is always a possibility of something having been misinterpreted or misunderstood in the coding process. Since the coding was done manually, there is also a possibility of human error.

The use of a secondary data set comes with its limitations, as the data was not gathered specifically with this study in mind, and the researcher was not present during the data collection process. The data could have been more specifically suited for the purposes of this thesis, if the data had been gathered to respond to the specific research questions in this study.

Gathering data through a large online survey is sometimes challenging, as the replies are not governed by the researchers and can include people who are not taking the survey as seriously as others. This issue is easily demonstrated by the amount of missing and irrelevant entries, especially in the open-ended question. Many respondents chose to either not reply to the non-compulsory questions at all, or to write seemingly random characters that were perceived to have no meaning.

Measuring agency is a challenging task, as personal agency is a very intangible factor to measure. In this research the measuring of levels of personal agency was done through a self-established scale, that was likely influenced by the perceptions of the researcher. A different type of a scale and possibly a different type of data could have been more effective in establishing a connection between trust and agency.

As the data was gathered in 2019, and this study was completed in 2023, there is a relatively notable time gap between the collection and research processes. Thus, some perceptions might have gone through a change during the time in between.

Especially this time period happened to include some major world events, like the COVID-19 pandemic, the US presidential election of 2020, and the Russo-Ukrainian War, for example.

6.3 Future directions for research

There is still a lot to discover about agency, youth, misleading information, and social media. Agency does not appear to be very highly researched in the field of communications, or in the context of young people on social media. Thus, there still remain different types of research gaps to discover.

As mentioned in chapter 6.1 within the limitations of this study, the data was gathered before some major world events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the US presidential election of 2020, and the Russo-Ukrainian war, for example. The aforementioned world events have increased both the amount of misleading information on social media, as well as social media users' awareness of misleading information, and the amount of conversation about misleading information itself. Additionally, they have also lead to social media platforms taking more action towards warning people about misleading information. For example, all COVID-19 related posts on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok now have an automatically generated message that directs the user to a trustworthy website for more information on the topic. This has been done to both spread credible and well-researched information and to attempt to reduce the spread of false information. These steps show that social media platforms have in the past years further acknowledged the increasing amount of misleading information and are taking action towards combatting the issue.

Therefore, the aforementioned could be one future direction of research – the impact of these major world events and the resulting conversation around misleading information, in relation to young peoples' agency and trust formation process. The increase of misleading information as well as awareness of its existence might have implications on trust formation processes as well as the mechanisms used to evaluate trustworthiness.

Additionally, it might also be an interesting topic to discover the effectiveness of different mechanisms to use in evaluating trustworthiness, as this research merely focuses on the mechanisms and their existence but not their use and effectiveness. For example, are the mechanisms found in this research effective in truly finding out whether content is true and trustworthy, or not? How effectively do they help in recognising and separating trustworthy content from misleading content?

Since the main open-ended question used in this research was set as “how would you advise others”, setting the respondent in the role of an advisor instead of the agent, it might also be interesting to compare the advice given with how well the respondents follow their own advice in reality. Does the advice the respondents gave out to their peers correlate with what they do in their everyday lives when scrolling through social media platforms?

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