# EFFECTS OF MICRO-INFLUENCER MARKETING ON Z-GENERATION CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

**Jyväskylä University
School of Business and Economics**

**Master's Thesis**

**2023**

Author: Maija Vanha-aho
Subject: Effects of micro-influencer marketing
on Z-generation consumer behavior
Supervisor: Aijaz A. Shaikh

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

**ABSTRACT**

| Author | |
|---|---|
| Maija Vanha-aho | |
| Title | |
| Effects of micro-influencer marketing on Z-generation consumer behavior | |
| Subject | Type of work |
| Digital Marketing and Corporate Communication | Master's thesis |
| Date | Number of pages |
| 06/2023 | 66 |
| Abstract | |

Abstract

This master's thesis examines the connection between Z-generation consumers, social media, and micro-influencer marketing. The study uses semi-structured thematic interviews to collect data and acquire insights into the perspectives and attitudes of the Z-generation about social media and micro-influencer marketing. Eight members of the Z generation, including both men and women, participated in the interviews. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which produced some valuable results regarding the Z generation's use of social media and attitudes toward social media marketing and micro-influencer marketing. The results show that social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok are popular among this generation, and that micro-influencer marketing has a substantial impact on how the Z-generation behaves as consumers. The study also shows that the Z-generation appreciates authenticity, credibility, and relatability in micro-influencer marketing and that they are more likely to believe endorsements from micro-influencers they believe to be sincere and reliable. This conclusion supports source credibility theory, which emerged as one of the main themes of the thesis. The more trustworthy the source is viewed, the more effective their recommendations and content are perceived. In order to maximize their influence on consumer behavior, businesses should prioritize choosing micro-influencers who fit their company profile and with whom they can form long-term collaborations. The research comes to the conclusion that micro-influencer marketing is a valuable strategy for businesses targeting the Z-generation.

Key words

Micro-influencer marketing, Source credibility theory, Social media marketing, Generation Z, Consumer behavior

Place of storage

Jyväskylä University Library

**TIIVISTELMÄ**

| Tekijä | |
| --- | --- |
| Maija Vanha-aho | |
| Työn nimi | |
| Digital Marketing and Corporate Communication | |
| Oppiaine | Työn laji |
| Digital Marketing and Corporate Communication | Pro gradu -tutkielma |
| Päivämäärä | Sivumäärä |
| Kesäkuu 2023 | 66 |

Tiivistelmä

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma tutkii suhdetta Z-sukupolveen kuuluvien kuluttajien, sosiaalisen median ja mikrovaikuttajamarkkinoinnin välillä. Tutkielma hyödyntää kvalitatiivista tutkimusmenetelmää ja puolistrukturoitujen haastatteluiden avulla kerätään dataa Z-sukupolven näkemyksistä ja asenteista sosiaalista mediaa ja mikrovaikuttajamarkkinointia kohtaan. Haastatteluihin osallistui kahdeksan Z-sukupolven edustajaa, joista viisi oli naisia ja kolme miehiä. Tutkimuksen analyysimetodina käytettiin temaattista analyysia, joka paljasti mielenkiintoisia havaintoja Z-sukupolven sosiaalisen median käytöstä ja asenteista sosiaalisen median markkinointia ja mikrovaikuttajamarkkinointia kohtaan. Tutkielman löydökset viittaavat siihen, että mikrovaikuttajamarkkinoinnilla on merkittävä vaikutus Z-sukupolven kuluttajakäyttäytymiseen ja eri sosiaalisen median kanavat, kuten Instagram ja TikTok ovat isossa roolissa tämän sukupolven päivittäisessä elämässä. Lisäksi tutkielman myötä voidaan tehdä johtopäätös siitä, että Z-sukupolvi arvostaa autenttisuutta, uskottavuutta ja samaistuttavuutta mikrovaikuttajista puhuttaessa. Z-sukupolvi luottaa mielellään mikrovaikuttajien suosituksiin, sillä ne koetaan aitoina ja luotettavina. Tämä johtopäätös tukee lähteenuskottavuusteoriaa, joka on yksi tutkielman pääteemoista. Mitä luotettavampana lähde nähdään, sitä tehokkaampana hänen suosituksensa ja sisältönsä koetaan. Tutkimuksen johtopäätöksenä voidaan todeta, että mikrovaikuttajamarkkinointi on arvokas strategia yrityksille, jotka haluavat tavoittaa Z-sukupolven jäseniä ja täten yritysten tulisi priorisoida mikrovaikuttajia, jotka ovat yhteensopivia yrityksen profiilin kanssa ja joiden kanssa voidaan muodostaa pitkäaikaisia yhteistöitä maksimoidakseen sisällön vaikutuksen kuluttajakäyttäytymiseen.

Asiasanat

Mikrovaikuttajamarkkinointi, lähteenuskottavuusteoria, sosiaalisen median markkinointi, Z-sukupolvi, kuluttajakäyttäytyminen

Säilytyspaikka

Jyväskylän yliopiston kirjasto

# CONTENTS

# LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

## TABLES

## FIGURES

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction to the topic

Influencers play a crucial role in promoting brands nowadays in a new era of marketing caused by the growth of social media platforms. Due to their capacity to develop a close relationship with their audience, micro-influencers have been growing in popularity among marketers in recent years (Fitri, Kusumawati & Aprilianty, 2021). The Z-generation, born between 1995 and 2010, is one of the largest consumer groups and has grown up with social media playing a significant role in their daily life. Because of this, they are more susceptible than previous generations to being influenced by social media marketing (Mahapatra, Bhullar & Gupta, 2022). This thesis aims to examine the effects of micro-influencers' marketing on Z-generation consumer behavior.

Social media has changed the relationship that customers have with brands, giving marketers new chances (Park & Kim, 2014). According to research by Ioanăș and Stoica (2014), social media significantly affects customer attitudes and actions. Before making purchases, consumers utilize social media to research products, read reviews, and get recommendations (Varghese & Agrawal, 2021). Social media platforms also serve as a source of entertainment, with users spending a significant amount of time browsing content (Mude & Undale, 2023). On social media, anyone can create any kind of content, which enables them to create a unique online persona. This is a noteworthy and relevant phenomenon in the marketing industry, where collaboration between social media influencers and businesses has grown to be a crucial component of corporate marketing (Ki et al., 2020).

Influencer marketing has become a prominent marketing strategy where influential individuals with a sizable following on social media are used to promote goods or services (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). This kind of marketing has been proven to be successful in raising brand recognition, cultivating brand loyalty, and boosting sales (Varghese & Agrawal, 2021). Consumers perceive influencers as trustworthy and relatable (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

This study focuses on micro-influencers with 1000−10 000 followers (Halonen, 2019). Micro-influencers are individuals that have smaller but more targeted follower bases and have grown in popularity in the influencer marketing sector. Because they are perceived as more authentic and relatable than traditional celebrities and bigger influencers, micro-influencers have more credibility and influence (Rios, Casais & Camilleri, 2021). Since their content is more specialized and geared to their expertise, micro-influencers also often have more engaged audiences (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

The generation Z is the subject of this study because they are the first to have grown up in a society where social media is prevalent making them a prime

target for marketers (Kahawandala, Peter & Niwunhella, 2020). Gen Z, i.e., people born in 1995-2010 (Mahapatra, Bhullar & Gupta, 2022) value authenticity and transparency and are more likely to support brands that align with their values. Additionally, they are more inclined to communicate with friends, use social media as a source of information and entertainment, and base their purchasing decisions on the content of social networks (Budac, 2014).

The popularity of social media and social media influencers can be seen in everyday life in consumers' behavior. Digitalization has not only affected companies' marketing and relationships between people, but also consumer behavior. Consumer behavior is more than simply what people buy; it also encompasses everything from using social media to seek for items to using them. The primary driver of changes in consumer behavior is technological improvements, and this study aims to explore Generation Z consumer behavior from a social media perspective. Using influencer marketing to reach consumers, especially young ones, on social media platforms is effective (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Influencer marketing industry has doubled its value since 2019 and in 2022 the market value was USD 16,4 billion (Statista, 2022). Influencer marketing has been the subject of some research, but there is still much to learn and comprehend about the topic given how new and dynamic the phenomena is. Despite the significant expansion of influencer marketing, research on it is still in its infancy (Martínez -López et al., 2020).

## 1.2    Purpose of the thesis and research questions

Despite the fact that influencer marketing is now a crucial tool for businesses, little research has been done on the effects of various forms of social media content on consumer behavior. Several research have concentrated on studying the phenomena from the perspective of businesses, giving the general perspective less attention. The purpose of the study is therefore to illustrate generation Z consumers' experiences with micro-influencers' content on different social media platforms. Given that the Z generation accounts for a sizable number of customers and that their habits and preferences differ from those of earlier generations, this study emphasizes the significance of the Z generation as consumers. Companies attempting to reach this segment might benefit from knowing how they react to marketing strategies like micro-influencer marketing.

One of the main themes of the thesis is to find out what kind of influencers are effective. Previous research has utilized source credibility theory. According to the theory, the effectiveness of the message presented by the endorser is influenced by the expertise and trustworthiness of the source (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). This thesis examines whether Generation Z sees a link between the credibility of the micro-influencer and the effectiveness of their recommendation. The study also seeks to find what other factors affect the effectiveness of the recommendation and what attributes make micro-influencer effective.

The study focuses on micro influencers with 1000–10,000 followers, providing a completely unique and more focused perspective on a subject that is frequently examined from the viewpoint of larger influencers. The majority of earlier studies have focused on macro-influencers or celebrities when examining consumer-influencer engagement (Rungruangjit et al., 2022), brand trust (Almahdi, Alsayes & Alabbas, 2022) or brand attitude (Dhun & Dangi, 2022). Only a few studies, such as Pornsrimate and Khamwon (2021) and Wei, Dai and Liang (2021), have focused on micro-influencers although recent reports from the industry have showed that they are more effective than macro-influencers at attracting attention and achieving higher-quality engagement rates through close communication with their smaller followings (Kim & Kim, 2022). Despite the growing popularity of micro-influencer marketing and the benefits it has been shown to have, little is known about how it affects customer behavior, particularly among members of generation Z. If micro-influencer marketing is found to be effective in reaching and engaging Generation Z consumers it could be a useful tool for businesses looking to raise brand awareness, boost sales, or cultivate customer loyalty. It's important for companies to keep ahead of the competition: As more firms turn to micro-influencer marketing, it's critical to comprehend how it affects consumer behavior. Brands wishing to target members of generation Z through the use of micro-influencer marketing can learn important lessons from this study.

This master's thesis examines how micro-influencer marketing affects the behavior of generation Z consumers. The goal of the thesis is to examine how consumer behavior and influencer marketing have evolved as a result of digitalization and how Generation Z, particularly in the context of social media, is reflecting these changes. This thesis specifically aims to identify the factors influencing generation Z customers' attitudes and purchasing behaviors as a result of exposure to micro-influencer marketing, as well as their perceptions of and engagement with it. By examining these topics, this thesis aims to add to the body of knowledge on micro-influencer marketing and consumer behavior while also offering brand-relevant insights. The following research questions are developed based on the research objectives:

1. How has the contemporary research defined and conceptualized micro-influencers?
2. What influencer marketing is and what are characteristics of micro-influencers?
3. What influencer marketing tactics should be used to reach generation Z as effectively as possible?
4. What factors, beyond source credibility, influence the effectiveness of micro-influencer marketing on Generation Z consumers' attitudes and purchasing behaviors?
5. How has digitalization and especially social media shaped consumer behavior?

    a. What factors influence generation Z consumer behavior online?

These study questions seek to fill the knowledge gap about the effects of micro-influencer marketing on Generation Z customers and explore the elements that make it effective, such as credibility, other influencing factors, and the influence of various social media platforms. Researchers may advance our understanding of micro-influencer marketing and customer behavior by responding to these questions, which will help companies that are using this marketing technique to reach Generation Z with useful data.

## 1.3 Research structure

The research starts off with a review of theories, definitions of essential terms, and an introduction to trends in influencer marketing, micro-influencer marketing and generation Z consumer behavior. The study's data collection process, data collection methods, and analysis will then be given in stages. Lead decisions regarding the research questions are made and mirrored with earlier studies based on the presentation of the outcomes. Ultimately, recommendations for additional research are made while also taking the research's limitations and successes into account.

# 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Source credibility theory

The source credibility theory, which contends that a communication source's perceived credibility is a key factor in determining how convincing a message is, is the main theory used in this study (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). According to Reinikainen, Munnukka, Maity, and Luoma-aho (2020) and Ohanian (1990), there are many different aspects of credibility, such as the endorser's attractiveness, knowledge, and trustworthiness. According to the source credibility theory, a source's mate-rial has a higher influence on the customer when it is regarded as more depend-able and trustworthy (Ohanian, 1990). The reliability of the source becomes crucial, especially in today's digital environment where information reliability might be unpredictable (Chich, Wang, Hsu, & Huang, 2013). The legitimacy of the source can increase the perception of the information's dependability, strengthening its influence on people. In order to better understand how attractiveness, knowledge, and trustworthiness affect a message's persuasiveness, this study makes use of the source credibility theory. The researchers hope to offer light on the mechanisms by which source credibility affects consumer behavior and decision-making in a society that is becoming more and more digital and information-driven by looking at these elements.

## 2.2 Influencer marketing as a marketing tool

Celebrities have long been used in advertising because consumers admire and trust them. Similar concepts are used in influencer marketing, except instead of celebrities, companies work with regular people who have established themselves as well-known online celebrities through the creation and posting of content on various social media platforms. Often these social media influencers have a specific topic in which they create content, such as travel, beauty, or lifestyle (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Where celebrities have achieved popularity for a particular non-social media activity, like sports, social media influencers are born on the social media platforms and have grown popular there (Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2020). Bloggers started to show up in social media marketing in the 2010s, and vloggers, or YouTube video creators, quickly followed. Since then, there are more social media platforms available, and many influencers have abandoned their blogs in favor of these other platforms. Because of this, influencers are no longer classified according to the platforms they utilize; instead, they are simply referred to as "influencers," a phrase that encompasses everyone from social media influencers to video bloggers (Halonen, 2019).

According to Word-of-Mouth Marketing Association (2015, p. 2) an influencer is "A person who has a greater than average reach or impact through word of mouth in a relevant marketplace". Halonen (2019) asserts that influencers have been for as long as there have been people. Some people have always been able to have an impact on the thoughts and choices of others. It is only with digitalization and social media that a true influencer culture has emerged, enabling thousands and even millions of people to reach. According to Interactive Advertising Bureau (2018, p. 5) social media influencers are "users who have the potential to create engagement, drive conversation, and/or sell products/services with the intended target audience; these individuals can range from celebrities to more micro-targeted professional or nonprofessional peers." When an ordinary person is able to reach a few dozen people, the influencer can reach thousands. The influencer has power over these followers, and they are able to shape their opinions and behavior. This, on the other hand, is often the result of the fact that influencers have a higher status in the social network, they are seen to have credibility and expertise (Halonen, 2019). For decades, researchers have been examining the credibility of the source and how it affects the consumer. According to source credibility theory, a consumer's perception of the source's credibility determines how effective an endorsement is (Ohanian, 1990). According to Kapitan and Silvera (2016), the endorser's credibility is based on their moral character, the quality of their case, and how well they match with the product being recommended. In recent years, the idea of source credibility has been widely employed to evaluate the efficacy of celebrity endorsements (Jaeed & Badgish (2021).

It would be important to be able to measure this influencer marketing efficiency in some way, and therefore Halonen (2019) mentions the framework developed by the research company Altimeter Group, according to which influencer marketing's effectiveness is based on three basic pillars. These three pillars are 1. reach, 2. relevance and 3. resonance. *Reach* refers to the extent to which the influencer can reach audience through all channels. This can be measured, for example, by the number of followers or the number of subscribers to the channel. *Relevance* refers to the suitability of the content of the influencer in relation to the recipient of the message, i.e., to compatibility with the interests of companies or people. This relevance can be measured by considering how well the content created by the influencer covers the interests of followers. The last basic pillar, *resonance*, refers to the degree of interaction. The more interaction between the influencer and the followers, the better the algorithms react to the influencer. This can be measured with likes, views, and shares. These three factors can therefore be used to assess the suitability of an influencer as a partner of a particular company. It would be important for companies to find an influencer that is the best combination of the three areas mentioned above. Companies should choose an influencer that reaches plenty of potential and relevant consumers (Haenlein et al., 2020).

In 2020 the influencer marketing sector was worth 10 billion USD and since then the value has only increased (Ye et al., 2021). Already in 2018, the Association of National advertisers reported that 75% of advertisers benefit from

influencers and the number has only increased over the years (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). The effectiveness and popularity of the influencer marketing is based on the fact that the content influencers create is seen authentic and recognizable by consumers (Khan, Zaman & Musleha, 2022; Schouten, Jansen & Verspaget, 2020). According to Lin, Bruning and Swarna (2018) influencers spread word of mouth on different platforms and thus influence consumer consumption decisions. The recommendations of the influencers on products are seen as more reliable than traditional advertising, and this is due to their professionalism and popularity (Ye et al., 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

## 2.3    Types of social media influencers

Influencers can be categorized in a variety of ways. According to Kay et al. (2020), influencers can be divided into two levels: micro and macro, depending on the number of likes or followers. Micro-influencers have less followers than macro-influencers do. Halonen (2019) presents division into global and local influencers. Global influencers refer to the biggest celebrities with millions of followers. In contrast, local influencers refer to more local actors who are more well-known in a smaller area. In addition to this, we can talk about niche influencers, i.e., experts in a very narrow area, who can operate both locally and on a global scale. This study draws on the definition of micro- and macro-influencers and takes micro-influencers for closer monitoring, the definition of which is further developed in the following paragraph.

Globally, micro-influencer is defined as an individual with between 10 000 and 100 000 followers (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020), or between 10 000-50 000 followers (Kim & Kim, 2022). However, because this study is being conducted in Finland, the term "micro-influencer" is used to refer to someone who has between 1000 and 10,000 followers. The market for influencers is significantly smaller in Finland due to the size of the country, as in the United States for example, and thus an influencer with 100 000 followers is counted as a very large influencer (Halonen, 2019).

Micro-influencers have a smaller audience and a narrower reach than macro-influencers, but they are nonetheless prosperous enough to support themselves as influencers. Their follower base is typically more regionally focused, and their primary source of income comes from occasional partnerships with different brands (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Marketers appreciate the targeted audience of micro-influencers, as they often have a closer connection with their followers (Kim & Kim, 2022). Many "ordinary" social media users may also have enough followers to be counted as micro-influencers, but it is important to note that the number of followers alone is not enough to define the micro-influencer. Micro-influencers get more reactions and conversation than the usual social me-

dia user does. Due to their smaller number of followers, they have a higher degree of commitment, and they are considered less commercial and more authentic (Halonen, 2019).

Employing micro-influencers is not only a wise financial move for businesses, but studies have also proven that there are other benefits to doing so. Micro-influencers are more in tune with their followers' wants and passions. Commercial collaboration between bigger influencers and companies is common, yet it might be seen as unauthentic and just a hasty way to get money (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Micro-influencers are more approachable and viewed as regular people since they have fewer followers, and because they are more prompt in responding to their followers' messages and comments, they are more engaged than macro-influencers (Kim & Han, 2020). Because micro-influencers publish so much more than just advertisements, their infrequent commercial content receives more attention and prominence (Halonen, 2019). Because of their small followings, micro-influencers' followers are more devoted to their content, and this attachment has been found to positively affect, among other things, followers' attitudes of the influencer's content. The stronger the follower's attachment is towards the micro-influencer, the more loyal they are and the more reliable the influencer is seen (Kim & Kim, 2022). According to earlier studies friends and other acquaintances have an impact on consumer's purchasing behavior. The same tendency applies to micro-influencers, who are perceived as being comparable to friends (Portsrimate & Khamwon, 2021).

According to the source credibility theory, a source's credibility can be influenced by a variety of characteristics, including trustworthiness, attractiveness, and knowledge. The more credibility that an influencer has, the more influential their information is seen to be (Ohanian, 1990). Other research has also discovered certain characteristics that define the efficiency of influencer's content. *The authenticity* is the first factor, and it is thought to have a favorable effect on consumer behavior. The second feature is *the meaning of the influencer* (Pornsrimate & Khamwon, 2021). This refers to features that allow influencer to form deep relationships with their followers, like a friend (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011). The third feature is *the specific content*, i.e., the influencer creates content that focuses on a specific area of interest (Pornsrimate & Khamwon, 2021). By focusing on a specific area and creating unique content, the influencer has a better consumer engagement (Godey et al., 2016). *Secret sharing* is the final of the four micro-influencer's characteristics. In social media, an influencer might share secrets to improve relationships with their followers and come off as a likeable individual (Pornsrimate & Khamwon, 2021).

Recent studies have shown that the use of micro-influencers in marketing may be more effective than the use of macro-influencers, as micro-influencers have a larger personal connection with their followers and thus a higher degree of commitment (Kay et al., 2020). According to Halonen (2019), this claim is also supported by a study carried out by Markerly (2018), which found that there is a correlation between Instagram influencer's number of followers and the degree of commitment. The study found that the fewer followers the influencer has, the

higher the degree of commitment of these followers is, i.e., the number of likes and comments. Therefore, today marketers are increasingly using influencers with a smaller number of followers and thus a greater positive impact on consumers.

## 2.4    Digital marketing – Evolution and development

Early direct marketers, such as catalog businesses, direct mailers, and telemarketers, collected consumer names and primarily offered things over the phone and by mail. However, due to the rise in Internet usage and online shopping as well as the quick development of digital technologies, such as smartphones, tablets, and other digital devices as well as the proliferation of social and mobile media, marketing has undergone a significant transformation (Kotler, Armstrong, Harria & Piercy, 2017). Today digital marketing is a common part of people's daily life all around the world (Hien & Nhu, 2022). Digital marketing is defined as the use of digital technologies to more effectively meet customer needs and establish channels for reaching potential customers in order to further the objectives of the business (Sawicki, 2016). According to The American Marketing Association (2023) digital marketing refers to "any marketing methods conducted through electronic devices which utilize some form of a computer. This includes online marketing efforts conducted on the internet. In the process of conducting digital marketing, a business might leverage websites, search engines, blogs, social media, video, email, and similar channels to reach customers". Digital marketing is often confused with internet marketing and e-marketing, but these terms are actually not synonyms (Sawicki, 2016).

There are several fundamental forms of digital marketing, such as content marketing, search engine optimization, social media marketing, pay per click, affiliate marketing and email marketing (Hien & Nhu, 2022). Digital marketing also includes direct marketing, which refers to individually targeted marketing communications for consumers. Businesses use direct marketing to modify and adapt their products and content to the requirements and preferences of specifically targeted audiences, or even individual customers. They increase sales, build brand community, and customer involvement in this way (Kotler et al., 2017). The forms of direct marketing include email marketing, direct mail and text (SMS) marketing. Technological developments have enabled growth in direct marketing and companies can today reach more distinct consumer groups compared to the mass marketing (Abraham & Joseph, 2019).

The concept "digital marketing" was initially coined in the 1990s, referring primarily to consumer advertisements. However, the idea was expanded between the years 2000 and 2010 when new social and mobile tools emerged (Fierro, Arbealez & Gavilanes, 2017). The development of marketing has been strongly linked to technological developments. The Internet is one of the biggest creators of change and has enabled power to be transferred from marketers to

consumers (Jain & Yadav, 2017). According to reports, there were only 16 million internet users in December 1995 (Faruk, Rahman & Hasan, 2021) and today the Internet is used by 5.3 billion people around the world (Statista, 2023). In recent years, the inventory of web 4.0. has further changed digital marketing (Faruk, Rahman & Hasan, 2021).

The Web 4.0 is an ultra-intelligent Web, which combines a number of technologies, and it has developed as the fourth generation of Web technology. Web 4.0 is related to technologies, including the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, telecommunications, and controlled interfaces (Khaleel Ibrahim, 2021) Web 4.0, a next Web generation, incorporates all the characteristics of Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 and is viewed as a technology that can be used anywhere (Almeida, 2017). It sees, consults, anticipates, directs, and controls the information that is available for us. Since the streamlined digital understands people and organizes each user's life, people are more and more connected and synchronized with this macro medium in their daily lives (Elias, 2021).

Web 4.0 is the latest version of the web and is preceded by web 1.0, web 2.0 and web 3.0. The first era of the Internet is referred to as the Web 1.0. Users in this web were passively positioned on a web network and could not interact with others. Additionally, it was forbidden for online users to edit or add any content (Khaleel Ibrahim, 2021). Web 1.0 expanded significantly in the 1990s even though users accessed their web media only to gather information (Almeida, 2017). Web 1.0 was essentially a static, read-only, one-way network that was exclusively concerned with information acquisition (Khaleel Ibrahim, 2021).

Between 2000 and 2009, the second stage of the Web—commonly referred to as Web 2.0—took shape. Web 2.0 is more advanced and includes social networks, more interaction and user-generated content (Almeida, 2017). Additionally, web 2.0 enables individuals to freely associate with any other entity they choose, possibly in public, and to create a persona or profile (Newman, Chang, Walters & Wills, 2016). Several well-known platforms, such as Wikipedia, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram, were launched during web 2.0 (Almeida, 2017).

The Web's third phase, known as Web 3.0 or the Semantic Web, ranges from 2010 to 2019. Web 3.0 aims to organize how users search for and see content. Based on user history, interests, and preferences, it is intended to personalize and optimize online search. Web 3.0 is sometimes referred to as the intelligent Web by certain authors because its features go beyond those of conventional search engines (Almeida, 2017). By deriving meaning from the context in which the material is presented, Web 3.0 can use unstructured information on the Web more intelligently and it can produce and distribute all types of data over all types of networks using all kinds of technologies and devices (Rudman & Bruwer, 2016).

Web 4.0 and technological development have changed people's lifestyles and changed the means of communication between marketers and consumers. Consumers spend more and more time online and on social media looking for information about companies and brands and buying products (Faruk, Rahman

& Hasan, 2021). In addition, consumers communicate about their own experiences online with other consumers (Alghizzawi, 2019). Digital marketing is convenient, quick and private for consumers. It provides customers access to an almost infinite variety of products and a plethora of product and purchasing information, wherever they are and at any time. Digital marketing through internet, mobile, and social media offers a sense of brand engagement and community to customers, giving them a platform to exchange brand knowledge and experiences with other brand enthusiasts (Kotler et al., 2017). Marketers have understood the potential of digital marketing and the value of the sector has increased enormously. In 2020 the digital marketing sector was globally worth $350 billion and by 2026 it is estimated to grow to $786.2 billion (Marino, 2023). Direct marketing offers sellers a low-cost, effective, and quick alternative for reaching their markets. Direct marketers today have the option of focusing on single clients or small groups. Due to the one-to-one nature of direct marketing, businesses can communicate with clients over the phone or online, learn more about their requirements, and tailor goods and services to particular client preferences (Kotler et al., 2017).

## 2.5  Social media marketing

As we've already covered in this section, the explosion of Internet use as well as other digital technologies and gadgets have given rise to a dizzying diversity of online social media and digital communities (Kotler et al., 2017). Businesses are utilizing social media platforms to broaden their geographic reach to consumers, forge tighter relationships with clients and support positive brand reviews (Li, Larimo & Leonidou, 2021). Social media marketing is a term that is used in a variety of industries to describe the process of creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that are valuable to the stakeholders (Jacobson, Gruzd & Hernandez-Garcia, 2020). Social media is now considered to be a very important tool in marketing as it enables communication between the company and the consumer (Jamil et al., 2022). Today 59,3 percent of the global population uses social media (Datareportal, 2022). In Finland the number of social media users is even bigger, 85,2% of the population uses social media (Datareportal, 2022).

In the public sector, social media is frequently used to distribute information and foster user involvement. In the private sector, social media is frequently used as a communication medium to promote and sell goods and services. Social media offers the chance to create, maintain, and build social and professional ties with friends, family, and businesses (Jacobson, Gruzd & Hernandez-Garcia, 2020). Social media can therefore be seen as bringing new media features to the market. These include the opportunities offered by digitality, which enable free speech on different platforms. Anyone can write reviews, share content or even write a blog post. Consumers are pro-active and can participate in content production. In addition, consumers can tell and see everything in real

time, for example on Twitter or on Facebook. Social media is everywhere, and consumers can reach each other or companies on mobile devices, from anywhere in the world (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). It is useful for companies to create a strong brand in social media platforms, as it helps to develop customer relationships, increase brand awareness, and monitor market reactions. Brands' social media pages encourage two-way communication, deepen relationships between consumers and brands, and provide information and benefits to users (Chiang, Wong & Huang, 2019) Social media is more targeted and personalized than traditional media, which gives marketers the opportunity to produce and distribute custom brand material to specific customers and customer communities. Social media is participatory, which makes it perfect for starting and joining customer dialogues and gathering feedback from customers (Kotler et al., 2017). Instead of emphasizing demography, such as gender, age and income levels, marketers should focus on the apparent behavioral preferences of each consumer group (Ather et al., 2018).

Customers are now increasingly exposed to a variety of product offers as a result of the increased rivalry among firms in various online marketplaces. This exposure will ultimately affect how consumers choose which items or services to use to meet their needs. Word of mouth is one of the main aspects that may allow consumers to make reasonable purchase selections (Hanaysha, 2021). Word of mouth (WOM) is one of the earliest methods of knowledge dissemination. One of the early definitions was offered by Katz and Lazarsfeld in 1966, who defined it as the sharing of marketing information among consumers in a way that has a significant impact on their behavior and attitudes toward goods and services (Heute-Alcocer, 2017). Electronic word-of-mouth, or eWOM, is the modern name for online WOM communication. With the introduction of internet platforms, this type of communication has become one of the most powerful information sources on the Web (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). Since these new forms of communication enable customers to learn or exchange information about companies, products or brands, it can be said that technological developments have changed consumer behavior (Heute-Alcocer, 2017). Word of mouth is one important marketing tactic that is frequently used by companies due to the fact that buyers constantly rely on the suggestions and advice of their friends, relatives, or other people who have previously made purchases from particular businesses (Taghizadeh, Taghipourian & Khazaei, 2013). Word-of-mouth recommendations from friends, family members, and sources other than the vendor are trusted and regarded as reliable (Ng, David & Dagger, 2011).

One of the options provided by social media is content marketing, which boosts brand perceptions and sales among consumers by encouraging interaction and engagement with them through digital material (Nieves-Casasnovas & Lozada-Conteras, 2020). As more and more customers indicate they prefer reading online material to traditional advertising, the significance of digital content marketing is growing (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Digital content marketing is focused on boosting potential customers' appreciation of the brand or firm by giving value to their lives, such as by teaching them about the brand, as opposed

to advertising that aims to persuade them to acquire focal offerings (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). The most often utilized formats of digital content are images, videos, and animations, e-books, white papers, podcasts, webinars, infographics, blog entries, and social media posts (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Chaffey & Smith, 2013). Conversation, storytelling, and customer contact and involvement are the three characteristics of content marketing that researchers have identified in the context of social media (He et al., 2021). Content marketing is a strategy for producing and disseminating material that is relevant to customers' interests and engaging enough to draw in and keep customers. It is also a potential tool for communication that influences decision-making by consumers, enhances brand recognition, fosters loyalty, and forges long-lasting connections (Hardey, 2011; He et al., 2021).

The subject of how the social networking environment affects consumer behavior has resurfaced in recent years. Social media marketing brings many benefits to companies. These advantages include increasing sales, promoting a brand, fostering interpersonal communication, and sharing information across businesses (de Vries, Gensler & Leeflang, 2012). Social media marketing can enhance brand loyalty when a brand offers beneficial campaigns, relevant and popular content, and appears on a variety of platforms (Erdoğmus & Cicek, 2012). Social media platforms are crucial for giving and sharing information and this two-way flow of information and communication influences not only how businesses may reach their target audiences but also how decisions are made at all stages of the decision-making process. Social media marketing thus has an impact on the identification of needs, the search for information, the weighing of options, and the final purchasing decision and subsequent activity. It can therefore be said that social media marketing is an effective way of affecting the consumer (Tashtoush, 2021).

## 2.6   Digital consumer behavior

The scientific field of consumer behavior is extremely wide and covers a broad range of aspects. It examines the process in which individuals or groups choose, buy, and use products and services to satisfy their desires and needs. Consumer behavior is a continuous process and not just the moment when the consumer pays for the product or service. This process, in which both the consumer and the company gain some value, is an important part of marketing. Consumers range from children to the elderly and consumption ranges from food to music (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2006). Consumer behavior includes different experiences, activities, and decisions that consumers make every day, such as dental visits or reading a book. Consumers make decisions about buying on a continuous basis, every day and for marketers, it is important to find out what consumers buy and to investigate not only the purchase processes but also the use and disposal of products and services (Hoyer, MacInnis & Pieters, 2011).

According to Hoyer and others (2011), factors affecting consumer behavior can be divided into four groups. The first is *the psychological core*, which includes motivation, ability, opportunity, exposure, attention, perception, memory and knowledge and attitude change. This psychological core therefore refers to the information the consumer needs before they can make a decision on consumption. The second domain is *the process of making decisions*. The decision-making process begins when the consumer discovers a problem that needs to be addressed. After that, the consumer will look for information either in their memory or from external sources such as the Internet. The third domain is *consumer's culture*. This area covers various aspects of how cultural factors such as friends, social media, religion or sexual orientation affect consumer behavior. The fourth and last domain is *consumer behavioral outcomes and issues*. This area covers key issues related to decision-making and the outcome of consumer behavior (Hoyer et al., 2011).
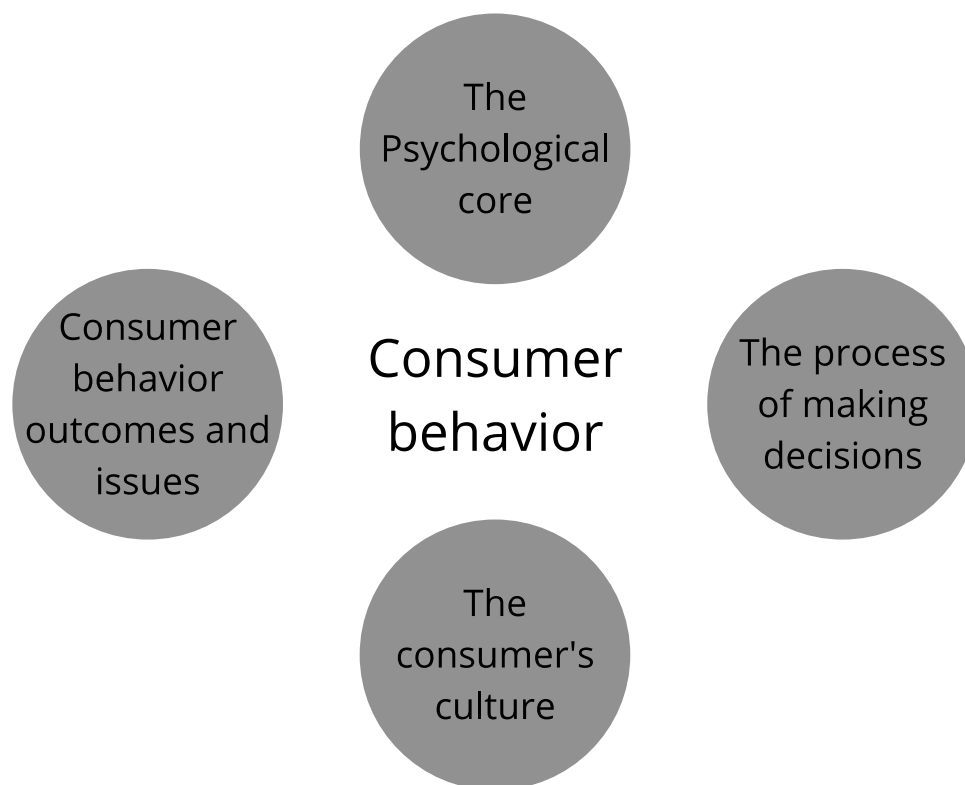
FIGURE 1 Consumer behavior basic domains (Hoyer et al., 2011)

The decision-making process outlined above has undergone significant alteration in recent years. The main problem for many customers in Europe today is that there are too many options rather than too few (Solomon, Bamossy, Hogg & Askegaard, 2016). This example is an indication of how much society and consumption have changed over time. This consumer decision-making process is often divided into five stages: Problem recognition, information search, evaluation

of alternatives, purchase/product choice and post purchase evaluation (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1994, 566-580; Solomon, Hogg, Askegaard & Bamossy 2019).

When a consumer notices a substantial discrepancy between the desired and the current state of affairs the *problem recognition* takes place. In order to get from the situation consumer is in to the state they desire, they need to find a solution to the problem (Solomon et al., 2019). *Search of information* refers to the moment when the consumer is considering their decision and looking for information and weighing different options before reaching a conclusion (Chopra & Gupta, 2020). *Evaluation of alternatives* refers to the use of the information collected by the customer when assessing the purchase decision. In today's modern society, making the choice is not easy, as there are endless alternatives (Solomon et al., 2019). *Purchase* selection refers to the decision the consumer makes. This is the stage where the consumer chooses what and where they want to buy and how they want to pay. This decision is influenced by the attitudes of others, the economic situation, and the expected benefits (Kotler, et al., 2017). *Post-purchase evaluation* suggests whether the consumer is satisfied with their choice. Satisfaction with a product or service has a significant impact on future behavior. This customer satisfaction is extremely important and therefore good marketers are constantly trying to improve it (Solomon et al., 2019).

Problem recognition → Information search → Evaluation of alternatives → Purchase → Post-purchase evaluation
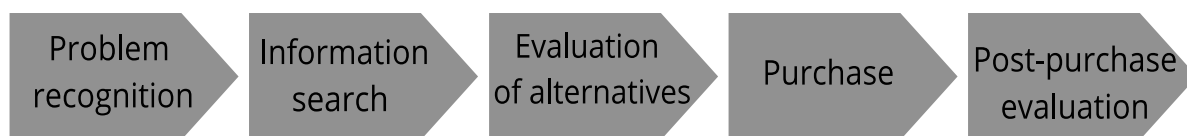
FIGURE 2 Decision-making process (Schiffman & Kanuk; Solomon et al., 2019)

In Europe we have had steady growth in income for many years, there has been a change in women's roles as more of them have entered the workforce and also in educational attainment as the number of people who have completed upper secondary education has increased across Europe (Solomon et al., 2016). Consumers now look for new ways to meet their needs. The increased wealth of society, diversity of market offerings, modern technologies, alternations in living circumstances and internet has created a new modern consumer, who is a purchasing expert (Oszust & Stecko, 2020).

There are certain trends that can be identified in today's consumer behavior. One of these trends is consumers' *social comparison (*Solomon et al., 2016*).* Consumer behavior is influenced by and guided by social comparison. Consumers compare their material possession with friends and celebrities in order to obtain satisfaction. Today, consumers are increasingly materialistic and learn these values from friends and celebrities through social media and TV (Islam et al., 2017). Comparative behavior is created by this social online contact between people, which has an impact on consumers' purchasing habits. Social media use has

permeated every aspect of human life because people frequently compare themselves to others. This behavior is more common among younger people (Ozimek & Bierhoff, 2016).

In addition to social compatibility, other *social factors* are strongly linked to consumer behavior and consumers' attitudes. These factors are reference groups, family, role and status. Every person is surrounded by some persons who have an impact on them. These reference groups consist of individuals whit whom people contrast themselves, for example friends, family members or co-workers. In addition, everyone has a role to play in society and a social role that defines consumption habits (Gajjar, 2013). Each person is part of various social groups, trying to please others, and adapt to the crowd. For instance, for sportspeople their sports team may play an important part in their identity, and they copy the customs and behavior of this group they admire (Solomon et al., 2016). Whereas a member of a friend group may easily buy the same computer as their friends, as consumers tend to buy products that others recommend (Gajjar, 2013).

*Lifestyle* also has a proven impact on consumer behavior and purchasing behavior. Lifestyle means:" someone's way of living or the things that a person or a particular group of people usually do". Lifestyle affects individual's decision-making process and is one of the modern elements of consumer behavior (Géci et. al., 2020, p. 318). Lifestyle is also strongly associated with the increased interest in *health and wellness* in recent years. People's interest in healthy life has given rise to new line of businesses and products related to food, sports equipment, and clothing (Gierszewska & Seretny, 2019). The size of the sector and the interest of consumers reflect the growth in the sector, which has been staggering in recent decades. In 2019 the global value of the sector was estimated at $4.9 trillion, but due to the covid 19 pandemic, the value dropped in 2020 to $4.4 trillion. However, the sector is expected to grow by 9.9% per year (Global Welnness Institute, 2022).

Relations between companies and communities are changing and the need for companies to act *ecologically and ethically* is increasingly at the center of focus (Gierszewska & Seretny, 2019). Consumers are increasingly aware of the damage caused by consumption to nature and thus increasingly pay attention in their consumption to how ecological it is and how ethically the product or service has been produced (Durmaz & Cavus, 2022). Ethical consumers are seen to be interested in religious, environmental, political, or social motives (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). Consumers today, for instance, are concerned about whether manufacturers use cheap labor and whether the packaging is made of recyclable materials (Oszust & Stecko, 2020). They are interested in animal rights, human rights, and fair trade (Beck & Ladwig, 2021). Ethical consumers either buy goods produced in a socially sustainable way or boycott unethical products (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). An increasing number of consumers are trying to reduce the acquisition of unnecessary property, i.e., downshifting, meaning less consumption and buying (Solomon et al., 2016).

*The use of time* has been studied to influence consumer decisions in many ways. Time is one of the most valuable resources for consumers and how the

consumer values time influences various stages of consumer decision-making and consumption (Solomon et al., 2016). Time is economical variable, and it is a resource that needs to be divided between different tasks (Kaufman, Lane & Lindquist, 1991). By devoting the right amount of time to different tasks, consumers aim to maximize satisfaction (Solomon et al., 2016). Each person has a unique perspective about time, which is influenced by their personality and culture. Time has an impact on aspects that affect consumer behavior, such as purchasing decisions in relation to the time available and the allocation of time between different activities (Usunier & Valette-Florence, 2007). Today, consumers have become more and more willing to use their time as efficiently as possible, many consumers struggle with time poverty; feeling that they are more pressed in time than ever before (Solomon et al., 2016). Today, consumers value above all leisure time, which many feel they have too little (Whillans, Macchia & Dunn, 2019). For this reason, convenience, ease, and a large selection of products in the same place are important factors especially for online shoppers (Svatosová, 2013).

*Digitalization* and technological development are one of the most important things that have shaped consumer behavior in recent years. Internet has changed how consumers buy and behave when buying products and services (Darley, Blankson & Luethge, 2010). Online retailers, where customers may easily and rapidly buy anything at any time, are one of the main variables influencing consumer purchasing behavior. Within a few days, consumers receive their ordered goods, and they have the option of returning them to the merchant if they are dissatisfied. A mobile app can be used to manage all these online shopping-related tasks with ease (Gujrati & Uygun, 2020). According to Statista (2022), there were 15.96 billion mobile devices worldwide in 2022 and in 2025 they are predicted to be up to 18.22 billion. Similarly, the number of mobile applications has been on the rise, and only in the third quarter of 2021 there was 6,4 billion app downloads in Europe (Statista, 2021). People carry around mobile devices like smartphones all the time in today's world. According to research, 69% of people are looking for information on their smartphone when they are looking for travel ideas and 82% of people are using their phones when they are at a store to see if they want to buy the product. Smart devices have therefore become a major part of the decision-making process (Singh & Jang, 2022).

Moreover, the *Covid-19 pandemic* has altered peoples' purchasing habits. Online shopping for groceries and other goods has become increasingly popular. With the Covid-19 pandemic, people have increased the buying of utilitarian products, such as masks and healthy food, and made more careful purchasing decisions (Tao et al., 2022). According to Güngördü Belbağ (2021, p. 339) covid caused "fear, anxiety, uncertainty, stress, depression, boredom, perceived threat and risk" and these all factors affected consumers' behavior. As a result of the pandemic, consumers have started to make more use of online platforms and have started to pay more attention to the place of purchase and its security and convenience (Butu et al., 2020). According to Güngördü Belbağ (2021), in addition to online stores, contactless services and delivery and various technologies are important for consumers when they adapt to the new normal.

## 2.7    Consumer behavior online

Consumer behavior is an ever-changing and evolving concept and has changed most in recent years due to digitalization and social media (Solomon et al., 2016). There is no single definition of social media. Kaplan and Hainlein (2010) define it as internet-based applications that exploit technology and thus enable user-driven content to be created and shared. Carr and Hayes (2015, p. 50) define social media as "Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others". The benefits and popularity of social media are primarily based on interaction with other users (Kaplan & Hainlein, 2010). Social media platforms have in common the ability to create content, engage in dialogue and interact with others (Moser & Eijkeren, 2016).

A number of social media platforms have recently risen and created a place for consumers to gather, communicate with others and share perspectives and information (Kotler et al., 2017). In 2022 social media is used by 4.62 billion people around the world. This figure has increased by more than 10% over the year. 14.8% of people consider Instagram as their favorite platform and 14.5% of people prefer Facebook. However, the most popular platform globally is WhatsApp (Datareportal, 2022). The most popular platforms in Finland are Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, TikTok and Snapchat (Markkinointimaestro, 2022).

*Facebook*

Facebook was founded in 2004 and from the beginning registration on the platform has been free of charge. On Facebook, users can create a profile for themselves and add other users as friends. Users can create posts and like and comment on other peoples' posts (Moser & Van Eijkeren, 2016). There are approximately 2,5 million people using Facebook in Finland (Datareportal, 2022).

*Instagram*

Instagram is a free social media platform published in 2010 where users can share images, videos and stories, which are posts that are visible for only 24 hours. Users can view and like other peoples' posts and comment on them. (Instagram, 2022) In Finland Instagram is one of the most popular social media channels and has approximately 2.4 million users (Datareportal, 2022).

*YouTube*

In YouTube, users can search and watch videos and create their own profile and download their own videos to the service. Users can like, comment, and share other peoples' videos. Youtube was founded in 2005 and is now owned by

Google. (Leskin, 2020) According to statistics, Finland has 2,5 million YouTube users (Gaasly, 2023).

*TikTok*

TikTok is an application owned by a Chinese company where users can make short videos on any subject. TikTok offers various effects as well as sounds and music for the background of videos. Users can add friends and like and comment on other peoples' videos. (Geyser, 2022) The application was launched in 2018 and used in Finland by 1.2 million people (Datareportal, 2022).

*Snapchat*

Snapchat is an application where users create a profile for themselves and can add friends and send them photos, messages, videos and add content to the stories section, where content is only visible for 24 hours. The content sent to friends is called "snaps"(Dixon, 2022). The application was launched in 2011 and has 1.4 million users in Finland (Datareportal, 2022).

Below is a table that shows the uses of different platforms in accordance with the classification of Aichner and Jacob (2015).

| Platform | Type of social media |
|---|---|
| Facebook | Social network |
| Instagram | Photo sharing/social networks |
| YouTube | Video sharing |
| TikTok | Video sharing |
| Snapchat | Photo / video sharing |

TABLE 1 Social media platform types

Internet users around the world spent 147 minutes per day on social media on average in 2022. Social media has a profound and pervasive influence on many aspects of life, including offline behavior as well as online activity (Dixon, 2022). This shift in behavior toward dependence on social media has grown significantly. Because of its potential to facilitate social networking, social media has grown exponentially, satisfying the demand of users to uphold their social identities. Social media users routinely check their social media accounts to see whether their posts are being liked, if their friends are excluding them, and if their friends are saying unfavorable things about them (Wang, 2017).

Studies show that people have different levels of commitment incentives to use social media. Some users are passive, with low levels of commitment and some users are active, with high levels of commitment. Passive users browse different channels but do not participate in the creation of content. Active users, on the other hand, create content in the form of messages and dissemination of information (Shahbaznezhad, Dolan, Rahidirad, 2021).

People use social media for a variety of reasons such as entertainment, finding friends, and information (Kim, Sohn & Choi, 2011). These motives can be divided into two different categories according to gratification theory: social gratifications and communication gratifications (Al-Menayes, 2015). This theory illustrates why and how people use social media. Maintaining relationships with old friends, finding like-minded people, keeping in touch with family and friends, and being popular (number of followers) are all examples of social gratifications. Contrarily, the ability to control one's communication as well as the potential to make new relationships on the site provide communicative gratification (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). In addition, a distinction can be made into rational and emotional motives. Sharing knowledge with the world and taking a certain stance on a subject are two examples of rational motives. Creating social ties with friends, family, or other Internet users (social connections) or engaging in entertainment are examples of emotional motives (Krishnamurthy & Dou, 2008).

Consumers today can continuously interact with other people, living near or across the globe. This change has brought with it a culture in which consumers communicate about products and services to each other and share their opinions online (Solomon et al., 2016). This has turned consumers from recipients of information into providers of information on social media (Elisabeta, 2014). Consumers are also increasingly involved in creating relationships with companies (Sashittal, Hofis & Sriramachandramurthy, 2014) and can demonstrate brand loyalty through their social media behavior, such as liking and following (Kabadayi & Price, 2014).

Information shared by consumers in social media is called electronic word-of-mouth (WOM). WOM in social media is conceptualized as consisting of opinion seeking, providing, and passing (Chu & Kim, 2011). Consumers who are seeking for opinion are more likely to consult internet reviews and recommendations of others before making a purchase (Sarah, Suhartanto & Suhaeni, 2019). Consumers consider social media a more reliable source of information than brands' own market-generated content (Chu & Kim, 2011).

## 2.8    Gen Z consumer behavior

Generation Z refers to people born between 1995 and 2010. They represent the most technologically advanced generation and are active on social media (Mahapatra, Bhullar & Gupta, 2022). They have grown up in a time when technological developments have been the biggest and fastest and many of them have grown accustomed to mobile phones, Internet, computers, and other digital innovations (Dangmei & Singh, 2016). Therefore, they are the most tech-savvy generation. They have grown up in a world where the middle class has grown, the financial crises have been present and globalization has shaped the world. In this way they

have become more precise in terms of spending and value education as well as financial response and networking capabilities (Turner, 2015).

The Z generation is optimistic about the future, but they are impatient, and their concentration is weaker. They depend on technology and matter. They are concerned about the environment and about diminishing natural resources, such as water (Dangmei & Singh, 2016). Gen Z has grown in a time of terrorist attacks and school shootings, but at the same time tolerance has increased and gen Z is inspired to change the world (Miller, 2018). Gen Z has witnessed the first black president in America and the increased rights of sexual minorities and improved equality (Talmon, 2019).

Salleh, Mshbob & Baharudin (2017) propose four characteristics of generation Z. They have *hypertext mindset*. As mentioned earlier, they have grown up in the digital world and have become dependent on the virtual world. This generation will find all information instantly on the Internet and they are able to do many things at the same time. They rather look for information online than read it in a book or magazine (Jaleniauskiene & Juceviciene, 2015).

Another one of the characteristics is that they are *overprotected*. This generation has been referred to, among other things, as "the curling generation", which refers to parents of the Z generation protecting them from obstacles and making it easy for them to move forward in life (Salleh, Mahbob & Baharudin, 2017; Cowan, 2014). The third characteristic *is lack of communication skills* (Salleh, Mahbob & Baharudin, 2017). Social encounters are often virtual, and gen Z have become impatient, and they want everything to happen right away. The digital world has made this generation less capable of developing personal relationships in the real world. This generation is described as self-directed and individualistic (Turner, 2015). *Instant gratification* is the fourth identified characteristic. Generation Z had become impatient, needy of rapid gratification, introverted, and alienated with society as a result of being heavily exposed to the internet. People today are susceptible to various inputs and outputs and therefore they have become dissected, contentious, impulsive, and tense (Shalleh, Mahbob & Baharudin, 2017). Gen Z is used to getting everything quickly and effortlessly, they can buy fast food and order goods at home and, they have access to an unlimited amount of information and services on their mobile devices (Wood, 2013).

In addition to these features, gen Z appreciates the diversity at workplace and everyday life. They are more open to differing opinions and are free to express their views. They are motivated more by a common purpose and cause than, for example, the economic situation and thus value equality (Mahapatra, Bhullar & Gupta, 2022). They have been exposed to different cultures since they were young and have become open-minded and accepting (Shatto & Erwin, 2026).

As mentioned earlier, gen Z is very active online and in social media. Their lives are determined by belonging to various online communities and social media. Their media skills differ significantly from previous generations and are skilled users of the Internet, social media, and smart devices (Rahja, 2013). For

them, the virtual world is every day and for them it is as real as physical reality (Koulopoulos & Keldsen, 2016).

Since the digital world is such an important part of Gen Z life, it is important to illustrate it also in figures. According to statistics, 92% of Finns aged 16 to 24 use the Internet daily and 84% use social media daily or almost daily (Tilastokeskus, 2022). Because this generation is so used to being online and using social media, their share of digital consumers is large. It is common for them to interact with others and to look for information online, which has made them market experts. This generation is part of a market segment that is growing rapidly and therefore it is important for marketers to understand their consumer behavior (Kahawandala, Peter & Niwunhella, 2020). This generation wants advertisements to be realistic and truthful, they want targeted content, and they want efficient and personalized service (Huang & Copeland, 2020). They don't watch TV, they prefer streaming services. They don't listen to the radio, they listen to Spotify and other music services. Different social media platforms such as Instagram have generated new industry of social media influencers (Haenlein et al., 2020). Social media influencers are popular among gen Z and 70% of them follow at least one influencer on some social media platform. Their popularity is based on their perceived reliability and credibility. Influencers' familiarity and relatability is what makes them popular among Gen Z consumers (Pradhan, Kuanr, Anupurba Pahi & Akram, 2022).

# 3 METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This chapter describes the qualitative method used in the study and describes the methods used for the collection and analysis of the data and justifies their choices.

## 3.1 Research method

When choosing the appropriate method of study, it is important to take into account the nature of the study subject. The purpose of research and research questions also play an important role in considering the appropriate way to collect research data. There is not one right way to conduct research, as there are many things that the researcher must take into account (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008).

Research methods can be divided into qualitative and quantitative methods, and they are suitable for different purposes. Qualitative research is able to study the subject in more depth and answer questions as to why and how. The qualitative method of research enables a thorough review of the subject and contains different trends and methods of analysis. It was important for the implementation of this study to allow for a free-form situation in which the participant can express their opinions and views without any pre-allocated options (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). Therefore the data of this study was collected through interviews. Interview is a very common method for collecting qualitative data and enables in-depth information on the subject (Hirsijärvi & Hurme, 2000, 34-35). The interview is preplanned, with a goal of gathering information. Different types of the interview include a structured interview, a theme interview and an unstructured interview all of which are suitable for different types of studies. These methods can be utilized separately or in conjunction (Hirsijärvi & Hurme, 2022). Another advantage of interviews is that the researcher can select participants who are knowledgeable about the subject of the study and have thoughts about it (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009).

The aim of this study is to understand in greater depth how the content of micro-influencers affects generation Z consumer behavior and therefore a semi-structured theme interview was chosen as the method of implementation. A semi-structured interview is often referred to as an intermediate form for a structured interview and an unstructured interview. A typical feature of a semi-structured interview is that some of the themes and perspectives of the interview have been decided in advance and the discussion is focused on specific topics relevant to the study. All interviewees are asked the same questions, but the interviewees can answer them in their own words (Hirsijärvi & Hurme, 2000) This means that the questions had been prepared on a thematic basis, but they were used more only to help go through the different themes. In order to get the most honest answers possible, it was decided to interview each person separately. This way, the

interviewee's opinions are unaffected by the responses of other interviewees. When requested for an interview, the interviewers were reminded that honesty is important and that the replies should be sincere. Additionally, it was made clear to the respondents that their names could not be determined based on their responses. It was thought that anonymity would improve the answers' sincerity. Before the interview, the participants were provided with a data protection form.

## 3.2   Data collecting

The interview was conducted using a semi-structured interview, in which the questions were based on four predefined themes, that were 1. *Social media behavior, 2. Gen Z and social media marketing, 3. Micro-influencer marketing, and 4. The effectiveness of influencer marketing*. The advantage of a semi-structured interview is that the study setting can be specified as the study progresses. The themes were reviewed with all interviewees, but the interview frame was flexible, which allowed a freer discussion around the themes. The interviewers can answer the questions in their own words, and the answers are not tied to specific responses. The aim of the theme interview is to find meaningful answers to research questions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). The benefit of a theme interview is that it gives interviewees a chance to freely express their thoughts. As a result, unexpected information that the researcher was unable to elicit may come up (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2000). When conducting a theme interview, the fundamental ideas and phenomena are thoroughly researched by reading relevant literature and prior research. The researcher defines the themes of the theme interview based on these earlier theories and studies. In order to guarantee the interview went smoothly and to stay on topic, some useful additional questions were also asked of the interviewers.

First interview theme provided insight into the interviewees' social media usage. The discussion was then expanded to include how Gen Z views social media marketing and how they believe it impacts them. The third theme studied the use of micro-influencers in marketing and the types of micro-influencers that interviewees follow. The final theme provided insight into how the micro-influencers' content is viewed and how it might affect behavior. The interview frame and the various themes are presented in Table 2.

| | |
|---|---|
| Theme 1:<br>Social media behavior | Which social media channels do you use and why?<br><br>How often do you use social media?<br><br>What is the most important social media channel for you and why?<br><br>In addition to cell phone, what devices do you use to access social media?<br><br>For what purpose do you use social media channels? |
| Theme 2:<br>Gen Z and social media marketing | What kind of marketing activities have you noticed on social media channels?<br><br>How has social media marketing affected you buying on purchasing behavior?<br><br>In your opinion how do you think that social media marketing is different from traditional marketing practices? Please explain |
| Theme 3:<br>Micro-influencer marketing | Which micro-influencers do you know or follow? And why these?<br><br>What products/services do these influencers market on social media?<br><br>Do you agree that your decisions to buy a product or service largely depends on the micro-influencer's recommendations and why? |

| Theme 4: Effect of micro-influencer marketing | In your opinion, have you been affected by micro-influencer marketing practices? If yes, how? |
|---|---|
| | What are the things that make the micro-influencer and their content effective? |
| | How does your image of micro-influencer change if they market products/services for a financial benefit? |
| | What kind of influencer marketing tactics would work best on you? |
| | What would make you buy/why do you buy the recommended product/service most likely? |

TABLE 2 Interview frame

Both women and men of the Z generation were selected for the interviews. In order to provide ample perspective on how the digital revolution has changed consumer behavior, people born closer to the year 1995 than 2010 were selected for the interviews. They were in different life situations, working people and students from different fields and cities. The total number of interviews was eight, of which five were women and three were men. Five of the interviews were conducted live face-to-face and the remaining interviews were conducted remotely using Zoom video service due to long geographical distance. The first interview took place on February 12, 2023, and the last interview took place on March 13, 2023. Early in February before the actual interviews, a practice interview was conducted in order to see how well the questions worked and how long it would take to complete them. It was possible to refine the question setting even further on the basis of this test interview.

As a criterion, the participants in the interview were to belong to the Z generation and were selected using the researcher's social contacts. Interviews were sampled so that those who readily agreed to be interviewed were chosen. It was also important to interview people of different genders, life situation, and regions of Finland. Although all of the people interviewed were Finns, it was easier to conduct the interviews in English because the research was conducted within this language. Therefore, all interviewees were required to be fluent in English. Each interview started with a brief explanation of the study's topic, the definition of a micro-influencer, and what social media marketing entails. This made sure that the interviews understood the thesis's topic and interview questions.

The interviewees are presented in Table 3, which shows their gender, year of birth, locality and occupation. The lengths of the interviews varied between 25 and 35 minutes and each interview was preceded by a free discussion during which the interviewees were able to relax and prepare for the interview. The interviews were captured as a recording on a cell phone.

|  | Interviewee's gender and year of birth | Profession | Locality |
|---|---|---|---|
| Interview 1 | Female, 1998a | Marketing coordinator | Helsinki |
| Interview 2 | Male, 1996a | University student | Jyväskylä |
| Interview 3 | Female, 1999a | University student | Jyväskylä |
| Interview 4 | Male, 1998a | Property manager | Turku |
| Interview 5 | Female, 1998b | Teacher | Espoo |
| Interview 6 | Male, 1996b | E-sports player | Jyväskylä |
| Interview 7 | Female, 1999b | IT-specialist | Helsinki |
| Interview 8 | Female, 1996a | University student | Oulu |

TABLE 3 Interview information

Eight interviews were conducted, practically all of which centered on the same findings but also included fresh viewpoints. The interviews progressed quite accurately according to the interview frame, but the interviewees also reported a lot of their own views from outside the questions, which is typical in theme interview. Each interview followed the same interview structure, but further questions were also asked. It was decided to terminate the interviews after eight interview, as significant new results were no longer received. Eight interviews were enough to provide a comprehensive amount of information on the subject of the study. There were no discernible variations between the responses of the students and working people from various regions of Finland who were chosen to be questioned; rather, the reasons why there were diverse responses were related to personality characteristics. After eight interviews, the material was dissembled from the recordings.

## 3.3    Analysis of the data

The material should be dismantled immediately after the data collection, while the entire interview and any additional questions it raises are still in memory (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008). In this study, material was read through several times and information related to themes and important for research issues was collected separately. The information gathered separately for this study was significant information with reference to the themes and research questions. It is good to remember to not only look for common observations in the data but also for abnormal issues (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). The thematic analysis can therefore be seen as a good means of analysis, as it can highlight aspects relevant to the research problem (Eskola & Suoranta, 2014). The necessary information was then organized in the form of a table to make it simpler to assess the responses. Interesting and exceptional observations were collected under the themes. The results were then written down in text format.

Thematic analysis was used as an analyzing method in this study. In thematic analysis the material highlights the themes corresponding to research questions and compares the presence of certain themes in the material. First step is to identify the key issues that arise from the material and then the key issues that need to be identified from the perspective of the research problem (Eskola & Direct, 1998).

It was crucial to get the information into text format at the start of this investigation because the information was captured as a recording. The recorded audio was transcribed, meaning put down exactly as it was said. Each interview's length and date were documented, as well as its key points which were grouped into the interview frame's themes. Next, the data was examined for recurrent and common viewpoints. The key findings of the study are examined in the subsequent chapter in relation to the themes.

# 4   RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the results of the studies by theme. The themes are largely the same as in the interview frame, but there are also interesting sub-themes presented. The first paragraph shows how the Z generation behaves in social media on the basis of interviews. This is followed by a chapter on how the Z generation views social media marketing and how social media marketing has affected their purchasing behavior. The following paragraph focuses on micro-influencer marketing. Which micro-influencers interviewees follow and for which reason. Also, what products these micro-influencers market and how respondents' decision-making is influenced by the recommendations of micro-influencers in social media. The last chapter focuses on how effective the content of the micro-influencers is perceived and how the micro-influencers should make the content so that it would be perceived as effective as possible. Below are presented different themes and their sub-themes in the form of a table.

| Theme | Subthemes |
|---|---|
| Gen Z consumer behavior online | • Use of social media channels<br>• Reasons for using certain social media channels<br>• Using social media on different devices |
| Social media marketing and consumer behavior | • Different type of social media marketing<br>• Social media marketing effectiveness<br>• Social media marketing vs. traditional marketing |
| Micro-influencers and generation Z | • Why Gen Z follows micro-influencers<br>• What products/services micro-influencers market<br>• Micro-influencers' marketing affecting purchasing behavior |
| Micro-influencer marketing efficiency and enhancing | • Micro-influencer marketing effectiveness<br>• Micro-influencers' sponsored content<br>• Best micro-Influencer marketing tactics |

TABLE 4 Themes and sub-themes

## 4.1    Generation Z consumer behavior on social media

The theoretical part highlighted the extent to which technology and its development have changed consumer behavior and the everyday nature of e.g., browsing social media and ordering goods online. Half-structured interviews aimed to delve deeper into the subject and learn more about the Z generation's usage of social media on a daily basis.

The first theme of the interview covered how gen Z uses social media and how often. Moreover, the first questions were used to explain why they are using certain channels and what devices they use for social media. On the basis of the interviews, it can be said that the social media is strongly present for all members of Gen Z. All respondents said that they used social media daily, even for several hours. Social media channels have become an integral part of everyday life, and many uses social media constantly, as it is so easily accessible. The initial interview frame was changed so that it included a question asking respondents what time of day they use social media. The answers to this question varied depending on whether the interviewee was a student or a worker. Among student interviewees, many admitted that they use social media continuously throughout the day, while working peoples' social media use focuses on evenings and leisure time. Many respondents said they had small moments throughout the day as they look at social media, even if only to respond to messages. So, the use of social media was not always for several minutes or hours.

> *I actually use all the "basic" channels including Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok every day, even several hours. (Male, 1996)*

> *Well, I'm a phone addict so I use a lot of Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. (Male, 1996)*

> *I watch TikTok far too much these days, almost embarrassingly so. (Female, 1998)*

The interviewees were also asked what the most important social media channel for them is and why. All respondents had several social media platforms at their disposal, ranging from a few to seven. The most important social media platforms were Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp. In addition to these, few mentioned Twitter, YouTube and Yodel. There were no appreciable variations between the responses of men and women apart for the fact that only males said that YouTube and Twitter are among their favorite channels. Among all respondents YouTube was mentioned to have been a more popular and important channel some years ago, but in recent years its use has decreased considerably. A similar trend can be seen for Facebook, which was now in use for only among few interviewees, and they mainly follow the news from there or just briefly visit the

site to see that there is nothing interesting there. Almost all interviewees reported actively using TikTok. It is a newer platform and suitable for modern consumer behavior, where constantly changing and entertaining content is consumed. In fact, many people mentioned entertainment when asked why they use certain social media platforms. In addition to TikTok, the interviewees used Yodel and YouTube to entertain themselves, but these platforms were used less frequently, rather than on a daily basis. Among the latest platforms you can find not only TikTok but also BeReal. It is an application for image sharing where users get a once-a-day at a random time a notification to take a picture. The idea of the platform is to show your friends what you do in real time, without too much smoothing and editing images (Mileva, 2022). BeReal was used since it is a quick way of discovering where and what your friends are up to right now.

*"I use Facebook every once in a while, usually I go for a peek, and there's nothing interesting to see"* (Female, 1998a)

*"On YouTube I follow a few social media influencers and also watch some sports assemblies every now and then"* (Male, 1996a)

*"Not long ago I downloaded BeReal, it's a fun way to see where my friends are and what they're doing"* (Female, 1999a)

As mentioned earlier, Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp are among the most popular platforms. These platforms were used primarily by the interviewees to communicate and see what their friends and other people who they followed do. Snapchat is used to send messages and pictures to friends. In Snapchat people also watch their friends' and influencers' MyStorys. WhatsApp was seen above all by a channel of communication where you can also share images and different types of links, either for individuals or for group chats.  In Instagram, interviewees follow what their friends and social media influencers and celebrities post. The interviewees told that they are watching mostly stories, as they quickly tell what other people are doing.

*"Snapchat is the most important channel for me because there I communicate with friends every day"* (Female, 1999a)

*"WhatsApp is pretty important because you can talk to people there, and there are different groups where you can catch up"* (Male, 1996b)

*"Instagram is the most important one, there I just follow friends and I'd say I look at the stories more than the feed, because then I see where everybody is and what they are doing"* (Female, 1998a)

The respondents said quite unanimously that they were using social media platforms primarily by mobile phone. The phone is constantly nearby, and it is easy to browse throughout the day, right from the moment you wake up until you go to bed. Some respondents also said that they use some social media platforms on computer, but less often. These platforms were YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp. In particular, WhatsApp application was seen to be useful on a computer, because when working or studying, for example, you do not have to keep your phone close to you, but you can respond to your messages on a computer. Other platforms were also used with computer, but significantly more with mobile phone.

*"I use a computer to browse YouTube and Facebook, but I also use these platforms on my phone" (Male, 1998a)*

*" WhatsApp is probably the only channel use actively on a computer because it is so easy to write and respond to messages quickly" (Female, 1999a)*

## 4.2 Social media marketing affecting consumer behavior

The sector of social media has experienced a significant shift due to digitalization, which has also sparked the explosion of numerous social media platforms. As was previously described in the theoretical section, social media is today widely used for marketing purposes. The interviews were used to understand how the Z generation felt about social media marketing and to see whether it had influenced their purchase behavior. The general understanding of social media marketing among the Z generation was the second theme of the semi-structured interview, and all respondents were aware of its exposure on various platforms. In order to ensure that everyone understood what social media marketing means, the main features of social media marketing were briefly explained at the beginning of this theme. All interviewees stated how companies and influencers advertise, for instance on Facebook and Instagram today. The participants had noticed social media marketing especially on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Companies advertise on their own accounts and in addition use paid advertising on different platforms. Many of the respondents had noticed advertising, especially on Instagram between the stories and in influencers' posts.

*"I constantly see ads, for example, in Instagram between stories, and often they're pretty well targeted" (Female, 1998b)*

*"There are so many influencers today and many of them constantly advertise something on their social media channels" (Female, 1998a)*

*"On YouTube, everyone is constantly promoting something, and there are a ton of ads in between videos" (Male, 1996b)*

The interviews revealed that everyone had noticed not only regular advertisements in social media but also a lot of influencer marketing. In Instagram, influencers embed advertisements and product and service recommendations into their regular content. On YouTube, there are also a lot of ads, at the beginning, between and at the end of the videos, and many influencers also add commercial content in their videos. Almost all of the interviewees told that they followed several influencers and celebrities on Snapchat some years ago but today they only rarely see their posts as Snapchat is mainly used to communicate with friends. The influencer-created material on Snapchat was deemed to be less convincing and contain less advertising than the content on Instagram right now. Many respondents reported that excessive advertising in social media channels is annoying today and was mainly perceived as negative. In particular, advertising by companies was seen as disturbing. Advertising was seen to be mostly useless content, and even often poorly implemented. Influencer-created content was also viewed as somewhat irritating, particularly if it was done in excess.

*"If the influencer publishes sponsored content and ads all the time, it'll get annoying" (Male, 1998a)*

*" There are a lot of ads between Instagram stories these days. It's annoying" (Female, 1999a)*

The respondents were asked whether they felt that social media marketing had an impact on their purchasing behavior. Many reported that advertising in social media channels is nowadays more targeted than traditional marketing and thus more effective. Advertising in Instagram in particular is often similar to your own web browsing or talk topics. This targeted marketing was seen as both positive and negative. Many interviewees reported that targeted advertisements were sometimes the reason why they went to a particular online store via a link in the advertisement. On the other hand, targeted advertisements were also seen as frightening, as the respondents had noticed that advertisements were coming, for example, on subjects they discussed aloud. In fact, many people considered advertisements to be negative, even if they were somewhat targeted at them. Only three out of eight interviewees told they had bought something purely inspired by the social media marketing, and almost all the rest suspected that social media marketing had had a certain impact on buying behavior but could not remember whether they had purchased a particular product or service inspired by it. Above all, the way in which social media marketing is implemented can be seen as an

important role, because according to the interviewees, poorly implemented social media marketing gives a bad impression of the brand, while well-run content does the opposite.

> *"Well executed social media marketing attracts more attention and interest" (Male, 1996b)*

> *"I saw this interesting product and then looked more closely for information and then decided to order it, it was a led nightlight which reflects stars in the ceiling" (Male, 1996a)*

> *"I bought an energy stick, just because it was advertised quite a lot in TikTok" (Female, 1999a)*

> *"I don't feel that it has had a huge impact on my purchasing behavior, but if I have noticed that someone is constantly talking about a product and complimenting it, it may have affected the purchase decision somehow, at least subconsciously" (Female, 1999a)*

The interview also asked about the differences between social media marketing and traditional marketing. The respondents all agreed that the effectiveness of traditional marketing has fallen considerably in recent years. Only one of the respondents said that they enjoyed, for example, browsing magazines and watching advertisements there. All respondents agreed that social media marketing is now a necessary means of reaching people of the Z generation. Social media marketing was seen as more entertaining and creative than traditional marketing. The interviewees also realized that it was much cheaper than advertising on TV, for example, but at the same time it could reach a much wider audience. Above all, the targetability of today's advertising was emphasized in the responses from the interviewees. Advertising on social media is considerably more relevant to individual interests and is lot more targeted. In addition, social media marketing was found to be more difficult to avoid, as it just appears on the screen, while in the magazine, for example, you can easily turn the next page. This aspect was also seen as irritating. Some respondents also expressed their concerns about how much companies know about us today. In order to be as targeted as possible, companies must be aware of what interests different consumers.

> *"Of course, you can also choose which social media influencers you follow and therefore what kind of content you see" (Female, 1998a)*

> *" You can get a million people to watch your ad in no time" (Male, 1996b)*

*" Everything is targeted, and our data has been sold forward a million times"*
*(Male, 1996b)*

## 4.3  Micro-influencers and generation Z

The theoretical part dealt with the main characteristics of micro-influencer marketing in social media. Influencer marketing has grown rapidly and is seen as an effective way of marketing. The interview was used to find out which micro-influencers the members of the Z generation follow on different social media platforms and why. In addition, it was asked what products/services they marketed and whether their marketing has affected the decision of the interviewees to purchase a product or service. Before the interviewees were asked questions about the micro-influencer marketing, the definitions of influencer marketing and micro-influencers were further explained to them. All interviewees already had an idea of what influencer marketing is and what the influencer term refers to. This study examined micro-influencers, so it was important yet to give a definition of this.

*" There are a lot of influencers these days and I'm sure almost all follow even some of them" (Female, 1996a)*

It was asked if the representatives of the Z generation follow micro-influencers and if so, who and why. Each interviewer said that they were following more than one micro-influencer. For some interviewees it took a while to think about who they were following, because many of the micro-influencers they followed were familiar people to them. In fact, many dug up their cell phone and visited social media platforms, mainly Instagram, to check who they were following. The micro-influencers, mentioned by the interviewees, had usually closer to 1000 than 10 000 followers and they published commercial content occasionally. Almost invariably all interviewees reported that they follow certain micro-influencers just because they know them personally. Some, however, also listed individuals who they followed, even though they are not familiar people. Many had noticed that their own acquaintances/friends with big follower base have become influencers in recent years and have started to implement their own content along with occasional commercial content. The key motivation for following a micro-influencer was not just that they might know them, but at least some interest in their content.

*"One of my friends makes some commercial content, he has 2100 followers on Instagram" (Female, 1998a)*

*" I don't follow any influencer just because they're an influencer. I always know them somehow" (Male, 1996b)*

*" I follow this one micro-influencer, although I don't know him but he's the same age and does interesting content and good collaborations" (Male, 1996a)*

*" I'm interested in their everyday lives and also their work as an influencer, and we have the same interests" (Female, 1999a)*

Several remarked that the influencer marketing industry has transformed, and anyone can be an influencer today. One interviewee said that they had never considered some of their friends as influencers before this study. When asked which influencers they follow on social media, all of the interviewees looked to Instagram first. It is one of the channels where influencer marketing is most prevalent. Unlike the original question-battery, the interviewees were asked which platforms they follow these micro-influencers on. Everyone mentioned Instagram, and some micro-influencers are also active on TikTok and Twitter. The bigger influencers, known as macro-influencers, were followed in more channels.

*" I don't really follow anywhere but on Instagram" (Female, 1999b)*

*" On Instagram I follow most, then on Twitter there are some smaller sports accounts I follow" (Male, 1998a)*

When the interviewees had been asked which influencers they were following and why, it was time to find out which products or services they were marketing. Because micro-influencers have between 1000 and 10,000 followers, they have naturally smaller collaborations with companies than larger influencers. Some people mentioned that smaller influencers occasionally market different energy drinks and protein drinks, from such brands as Nocco and Protein Company. In addition, some mentioned clothing, and accessories, from brands ICANIWILL and Huawei. Interviewers who followed some e-sports players mentioned collaborations with different technology brands and gaming-related brands. One interviewee has a profile for their own home on Instagram and they said that they follow other home accounts, that often market home-related goods, cleaning materials and others. According to one of the interviews, smaller social media influencers favor promoting less expensive goods and services from smaller brands, and usually, collaborations don't appear to have been compensated properly. On the other hand, other respondent said that smaller influencers have familiarized themselves well with the product, as they cannot afford to advertise bad product. So, there were different opinions to this subject.

Despite the size of the collaboration brands, everyone believed that micro-influencers were engaging in marketing that somehow complemented their own brand and image. In many cases, commercial cooperation between company and micro-influencer was carried out in Instagram, both in feed and in stories section. In addition, products and services were advertised using various discount codes and contests.

*" I would say that commercial content suits these influencers in some way, for example, a person who doesn't have a dog doesn't advertise dog food" (Female, 1999b)*

*"They promote slightly smaller brands and collaborations are often quite small" (Female, 1998a)*

The final question of this theme was how micro-influencers recommendations affect the purchase decision and why. The theoretical part dealt with the subject from different perspectives and the interview wanted the Z-generation views on whether the micro-influencer recommendation affected their decision to purchase a product or service. According to the theory, micro-influencers are more closely and personally linked to their followers than larger influencers. Smaller influencers are seen to be more authentic and approachable. This is why the use of micro-influencers for marketing has become more widespread recently.

*"If someone you identify with recommends a product, I'd rather buy it than a product recommended through a TV ad" (Female, 1999a)*

As a supplementary question, it was also asked whether the influencer's number of followers had any effect on the effectiveness of the recommendation, so the respondents were asked whether an influencer with closer to 1000 followers was somehow more credible than an influencer with 10,000 followers. Almost without exception, the respondents felt that the number of followers did not matter, but how the content was implemented. The recommendation of even a small influencer is seen as credible if the cooperation is well implemented and fits the image and normal content of the influencer. Overall, the effectiveness of the recommendations also depends on how well they respond to own interests.

*" It doesn't matter how many followers they have, but rather how well that campaign has been made and if the product is something I could use." (Female, 1998a)*

## 4.4    Micro-influencer marketing efficiency and enhancing

The last theme of the interview focused on micro-influencer marketing efficiency and thus how to improve its efficiency even further. Nowadays, influencer marketing is a successful method of advertising, particularly for younger generations who spend a lot of time on social media. The effectiveness of influencer marketing and its effects, such as those on purchasing intentions, have been studied in the past, but the research on the topic from the perspective of the Z generation is still scarce. For this reason, the interview sought to get the Z generation's view on what kind of influencer marketing is efficient and why. The first question was whether interviewees felt that micro-influencer marketing practices had affected them, and if yes, how. Despite the fact that only couple of the respondents had directly purchased some products, all interviewees agreed that micro-influencers' marketing had undoubtedly had some impact. Again, it was emphasized that if a need already exists, it is simple to be swayed by the micro-content influencer's and to get additional approval for the purchase. It was discovered that the influencers' content has an impact on more than only consumer behavior; for instance, some hobbies may be influenced by influencers.

> " Well, for example, there are a lot of cleaning accounts in Instagram and TikTok, so I've looked at some cleaning tips" (Female, 1998b)

> "I have decided to buy skin care products and to I have also studied collaboration products in more detail" (Male, 1996a)

> " I mean, if I see someone playing a new game, it easily inspires me to try it too" (Male, 1998a)

One of the respondents pointed out that some time ago, for the first time, they bought some sports clothes from brand Röhnisch and was inspired by the fact that many influences wore them. Today, we get different data from everywhere and from every direction and products are advertised in many different channels and encourage people to spend money. However, not all consumers buy the recommended products directly. It is possible that consumers are influenced even if they are not directly able to combine certain behaviors inspired by some micro-influencer. One of the respondents pointed out that the consumer may not be able to directly link the micro-influencer's actions with them, but it is certain that they could affect behavior unnoticed. Consumers may therefore take inspiration from the content of the influencers and attract interest in the product. It can be said that the content of micro-influencers does not always lead directly to buying but may still affect consumers' perceptions and behavior.

*" I can't say anything specific, but if a product is advertised in many different channels, it will certainly affect you and you may want to try the product yourself."*
*(Male, 1996b)*

*" I've got some inspiration, and I might have clicked on some brand's online page, but I still may not have bought anything" (Female, 1998a)*

Little has already been said about how the Z generation is impacted by the recommendations and content of the micro-influencers. The factors that make the content effective was also determined through the interview. One of the prevailing views was that the most crucial factors were the *quality* of the content and the *style* in which, for instance, commercial collaboration was conducted. Content should be visually pleasant and coherent. The content should indicate that the micro-influencer does it seriously. One important observation was that people want to identify themselves with the influencer and that is why genuine content is appreciated. Influencers who solely create commercial content risk losing their authenticity, thus it is wise for them to create other types of content as well. However, there were varying viewpoints on this, since some felt that, in the case of acquainted micro-influencers and their content had nothing to do with its success, because they are familiar people and are thus more understanding of them.

*" What matters most is how well the campaign is done, and whether it's credible or whether it seems like they've done it just for the money." (Female, 1996a)*

*" If they are my friends, I can't think the same way about them, as I understand that they want to make money out of their work" (Male, 1998a)*

One of the most important things is that the sponsored content is suitable for the influencer's normal everyday content and does not seem false. Authenticity and reliability are themes that were also highlighted in the theoretical part and in previous studies. The majority felt that the motive behind advertising should not be just money, or at least it should not shine through the recommendation. The influencer could therefore sometimes recommend a product purely of their own accord and not always through commercial cooperation, thus making the content more credible. The Z generation spends a lot of time on social media, and they can be expected to notice easily what is a genuine product recommendation and what is done purely for the money. The interviews also showed that if an influencer recommends a product, they should justify why it is worth buying. Today it is no longer enough to take a picture of the product and share it in social media channels. Consumers want to know if the product or service is genuinely good. The credibility is also enhanced by longer-term collaborations with different

brands, as they create an image that the product or service is worth trying. Reliability is also enhanced if you can easily contact the influencer and ask him for more information on the products on the social media platform.

> *"I think the content should be above all genuine and credible, I'm not buying anything if there's just one picture of it in Instagram stories" (Female, 1999a)*

In addition to authenticity and credibility, the answers highlighted originality. Small influencers in particular should stand out by some means, as today there are so many influencers. If consumer sees original, entertaining, and interesting content, it is also more likely to be effective. One of the respondents raised the issue of multi-channelism and how today the influencers can make use of many different social media platforms and create different content in them. For instance, Instagram can be used to make more relevant and controlled content, while TikTok is suitable for videos made with humor, for example. Above all, the content must be natural to the influencer, because fake or forceful content does not impress anyone.

> *" I follow one micro-influencer that makes different content for different channels. I especially enjoy the content in TikTok where it's somehow more authentic and relaxed"(Female 1996a)*

The interviewees were also asked how their image of micro-influencer changes if they advertise products or services for financial gain. The answers showed that advertisements or content made for money do not primarily evoke negative feelings, as it is understood to be influencers' line of work. Nevertheless, the commercial content produced too often does not give reliable feeling, and such influencer won't be followed for long in social media. If commercial content does not come too frequently and the quality of publications is good, consumers will be understanding for the influencer. The content needs to sigh that the influencer is genuinely satisfied with the product they advertise, as the consumer becomes more critical when the influencer advertises something for financial gain.

> *"If the influencer keeps making content just for money, I can't keep up with that kind of person for long unless they are my friend" (Female, 1999b)*

In the following question, the interviewees were asked what kind of influencer marketing tactics work best for them. Although it was clear to all participants

what influencer marketing is, it was felt necessary to explain to them at the beginning of this question what influencer marketing tactics exist. The respondents again highlighted the authenticity of marketing and the need for the influencer to convince the viewer that they are using or could actually use the product. If marketing is done so that it is skillfully immersed in the content, it is more effective. In an ideal situation, marketing would not obtrusively draw attention to itself but rather would blend in with other content, given it a more trustworthy and sincere feel. Even though marketing would blend in with the regular content, it must be made clear that it is a partnership with a firm in order to avoid appearing suspicious. Consumers, especially today, are skeptical of influencers that use misleading marketing tactics, leaving them unsure of whether the influencer is giving an honest endorsement or whether they are being paid for it. In addition to unclear collaborations, efficiency is not increased by distorting or cheating facts. One of the respondents raised issues such as cooperation with different suspicious and unethical companies. Today, consumers are increasingly appreciating responsibility and influencers, who have clearly investigated cooperation companies.

> *"In my opinion it is important that the content isn't just commercial and that it has been done well and the influencer has clearly familiarized themselves with the product or service" (Male, 1996a)*

> *"If the influencer doesn't make it clear that content is commercial marketing, it's pretty suspicious and it's gonna lower the reputation of that person"(Female, 199b)*

Several interviewers believed that various discount codes are currently efficient marketing tactics. The respondents were particularly fond of discount codes from online stores, as they thought they were both appealing and practical. In addition to this, various draws and giveaways were also seen as effective means. However, it should be easy to participate in the draw or giveaway. For example, leaving a comment in the picture or tagging another person was seen as an easy way to participate, while adding an image to one's own story or profile reduces the likelihood of participating in the draw. One of the respondents pointed out that they also felt that long-term collaborations were credible, as they give an impression that the influencer genuinely liked the product and that it has been in their use for a long time. Free experiments on various services were also mentioned as an effective tool. For example, streaming services, food ordering applications and different audiobook services offer such benefits through influencers.

*" For me, the discount codes are perhaps the most effective, because in the draws e.g., you usually have to like, follow, comment and do this and this"* (Female, 1996a)

*" Probably draws that are easy to participate in and also free experiments with different services, such as Netflix, are the most effective"* (Male, 1996a)

The last question focused on the factors which would make the consumer buy the recommended product or service most likely. In the past, it has already been stated what factors make the content effective and answers to this question were somewhat similar. Answers from respondents emphasized the need for the content to be relevant to their needs in some way. The good or service must be suited for the customer's needs or interests, or the customer may already have a pressing need for it. But it isn't always essential because occasionally, well-made content can trigger an impulsive buy. The product or service should be properly described, and the influencer's endorsement should be motivated by their knowledge of the advertised good or service. If more than one influencer unintentionally promotes the good or service on their own accounts, it will also strengthen the recommendation. This response once more emphasized the need of presenting the information appropriately and attractively.

*" If a person who is similar to me in terms of age and lifestyle recommends a product then it increases the likelihood that I will purchase the thing"* (Female, 1999a)

*" It should be necessary and timely for me and also if the advertisement is well implemented"* (Male, 1996b)

In addition to the appearance and style of the recommendation, the influencer must be approachable and represent the same values in order to be believed. A similar influencer creates an image of how the consumer themself could use a product or service and thus make it easier to imagine it in their own life. In addition to the fact that the influencer should be approachable. It is useful to include a discount coupon or other hook to the suggestion in addition to the influencer needing to be approachable. The discount code increases the likelihood that the consumer will buy the product, especially if they have already expressed interest in it.

*" If I see a post that advertises some online store that I've been thinking about buying anyway, and then if there is a discount code and I can identify myself with the influencer, then it increases the likelihood that I'd buy the product"* (Female, 1999a)

## 4.5    Summary of the results

Table 5 presents the key results of the study by theme in the form of a table.

| Consumer behavior online | Social media channels are used a lot, even several hours a day. The most popular ones in use are Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and WhatsApp. In addition to these platforms, respondents reported using Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and the latest trend is BeReal. Different social media platforms are used to entertain, communicate with friends, and view informative content. All respondents report that they use social media most on their phones and certain platforms such as YouTube are also viewed on the computer from time to time. |
|---|---|
| Social media marketing and consumer behavior | Respondents had a clear understanding of what social media marketing means and everyone had noticed, alongside traditional social media marketing, the emergence of an influencer marketing, which has become more common with even small numbers of followers. Since that social media marketing is so much more targeted than traditional marketing, it is now considered to be a powerful strategy. However, the interviewees were worried by the fact that information is continuously being gathered about us and companies are using it to different purposes. |
| Micro-influencers and Generation Z | All of the interviewees followed several micro-influencers. Many especially followed familiar people and friends who publish occasional commercial content. In addition to this, some interviewees also followed random micro-influencers, who produce interesting and relatable content. Micro-influencers marketed different products and services and their marketing was seen to have at least some effect on purchasing behavior. |

| Micro-influencer marketing efficiency and enhancing | The marketing of micro-influencers was seen to be effective, above all when the content is well produced, genuine, trustworthy and targeted on the consumer. It must be made very clear when marketing is paid for and when it is a genuine recommendation. Different discount codes, raffles and free trial periods were seen as effective marketing methods. |
| --- | --- |

TABLE 5 Summary of the results

# 5 DISCUSSION

The study concentrated on the consumer behavior of the Z generation and the role of social media in their lives. The main focus of the thesis was micro-influencer marketing. The first part of the thesis focused on the subject of the thesis, i.e., consumer behavior in the Z generation and micro-influencing marketing in social media. Four research questions that were addressed by both theory and research were developed based on the study's topic. The research method used was a semi-structured thematic interview, and eight interviews were arranged. Many interesting facts emerged during the interviews. Many things were repeated in almost all interviews and the Z-generation representatives had similar views on the themes of the interview. In this section, the interview findings are compared to academic research, and theoretical and managerial implications, future study directions, as well as the study's limitations and reliability and validity are discussed. The ongoing usage of social media and how pervasive it is in daily life—your phone is the first thing you see when you wake up and when you fall asleep—were significant topics highlighted. In addition, the Z generation has observed that social media influencers have proliferated even with modest followings, and attitudes toward them are often skeptical. The *popularity, trustworthiness, and authenticity* of micro-influencer marketing were underlined.

## 5.1    Theoretical implications

The first research question focused on how modern literature has defined micro-influencers. Internationally, micro-influencers are defined as influencers with 10 000 to 100 000 followers (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). In Finland, however, the definition of micro-influencer is between 1000 and 10,000 followers due to the smaller size of the country (Halonen, 2019). According to Campbell & Farrell (2020), micro-influencers have a smaller audience than macro-influencers, but they are nevertheless able to support themselves by creating content for social media. Recent research, such as Campbell & Farrell (2019) and Kim and Han (2022), have shown that micro-influencers have a higher level of commitment among their followers because they are perceived as regular, approachable people. In light of these findings, an increasing number of businesses have shifted to using micro-influencers in their marketing. Representatives of the Z generation had also made this observation, noticing that influencers with relatively small followers were creating an increasing amount of commercial content. Recommendations from micro-influencers were shown to be just partially effective. Even in research literature, it was mentioned that influencer marketing is now more efficient than traditional marketing. Previous studies had not taken into account the fact that micro-influencers may be familiar to followers. Especially in

Finland, where the number of followers of micro-influencer is between 1000 and 10,000, they are still relatively small influencers and can be seen as ordinary people. Many interviewees claimed that they follow certain micro-influencers simply because they are acquaintances, or even friends. This was an interesting discovery and shows that the Finnish micro-influencer field is slightly different from the global one. In addition to following personally known micro-influencers, the Z generation also reported following some unknown micro-influences, who are inspiring and approachable.

The second question of the thesis was "What influencer marketing is and what are characteristics of micro-influencers?" The thesis identified the definition of influencer marketing as well as the primary characteristics of micro-influencers. According to the literature review, the rise of digitalization has led to an increase in the popularity of influencer marketing. Influencers are social media users who influence consumers and have a wider audience than the usual and they provide material for social media platforms. Social media influencers can be divided into different categories, usually to macro-influencers and micro-influencers. In this study, the focus was on smaller influencers, in other words micro-influencers with between 1000 and 10,000 followers. As mentioned earlier smaller influences are seen to be more genuine, more approachable (Kim & Han, 2020) and more concentrated in a given geographical area (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

The content of the micro-influencers was seen to be partially effective in supporting the results of previous studies. Gupta and Mahajan (2019) concluded in their study that the micro-influencer commitment rate is bigger than the larger influencers' rates. By identifying the types of content that appeal to Generation Z and investigating the different characteristics that make micro-influencers and their content effective, this study provided a significant contribution. According to the source credibility theory, a source's perceived dependability directly affects the impact of its material on consumers (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). According to the hypothesis, among other things, expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness all contribute to source credibility (Ohanian, 1990). The subject of trustworthiness that arose throughout this thesis has been thoroughly explored in other studies on influencer marketing. Understanding how trustworthiness affects the effectiveness of micro-influencers and their content was the main goal of this study, which recognized the significance of trust in consumer decision-making. The research intends to offer useful insights into the methods by which these influencers might build credibility and successfully engage Generation Z by exploring the characteristics of trustworthiness. According to Gupta & Mahajan (2019) micro-influencers have gained popularity especially since they are regarded as trustworthy. Consumers can establish relationships with influencers through virtual connection in social media and thus become loyal to both the influencer and the product they advertise (Kim & Kim, 2022). The results of this study support the same argument as the respondents considered that micro-influencers can easily be contacted and, for example, ask for more information on the products.

In addition to *trustworthiness*, the study found that micro-influencer is perceived as effective if their content is *relatable, authentic, and visual*. Study's finding about relatability, also supports previous studies where it has been found that followers like to follow similar persons to themselves (Kim & Kim, 2022). Among the interviewees, similarity and relatability were raised several times. Consumers want to follow people with similar interests, lifestyle and values. These features make the influencer more credible and make it easier for the consumer to imagine the products and services advertised by the influencer in their own lives.

One of the most important features in a micro-influencer is authenticity. This means how authentically the influencer recommends the product or service. Does it seem that they really like it and use it, or does the advertisement appear merely as a means of making money. The product must therefore fit well with the influencer's lifestyle and other content. The more genuine the influencer seems, the more reliable they appear. Since influencers are seen as peers, they are trusted in their recommendations (Lou & Yuan 2019). Similar results were also obtained in this study, as the influencer's personal experience of using the product and authentic passion for the product or service were appreciated. In addition, the interviews showed that the design of the content was important and that visually pleasing content was considered effective, the more naturally the advertisement merges with the content, the better. According to a study carried out by Tsen and Cheng (2021), young consumers in particular assess influencers based on the content production techniques and layout.

In addition to different features such as the relatability, authenticity and visuality, various influencer marketing tactics also emerged when the respondents considered the effectiveness of micro-influencer's recommendation. One of the main objectives of the study was to find out what kind of micro-influencer tactics work best for Z-generation consumers. For smaller influencers, there are several different tactics and strategies including product reviews, giveaways, partnerships, sponsored associations, and tip sharing (Gupta & Mahaja, 2019). The majority of respondents to this study followed micro-influencers, especially in Instagram, where the most popular tactics were different discount codes and giveaways or draws. In particular, if the consumer has already considered buying a particular product, the discount code serves as a good incentive. According to a study by Haenlein et al. (2020), different strategies operate differently on various social media platforms, and posting just one image of the recommended product to an influencer's feed might not be effective enough. The respondents believed that in order to keep consumers interested, influencers have to be more innovative and original than merely posting a picture with a recommendation to Instagram's feed or stories section. In addition to having different content in different channels, according to Haenlein et al. (2020), using multiple channels is also a technique that works in many cases. The study's participants concurred since they observed that various types of content were effective across a variety of channels. Also, it was thought that endorsements from multiple influencers or

long-term partnerships with businesses would increase credibility. This same opinion is also supported by a study by Hainlein et al. (2019).

In addition to micro-influencer marketing, the second main theme was digitalization and, in particular, how social media has shaped consumer behavior. The study's findings indicate that the generation Z spends a lot of time using different gadgets, particularly their smartphones. The majority of phone use is spent on social media, which is used for many hours each day. In particular, those interviewees who were employed noted that phone use is more prevalent at night, whereas students reported using smartphones all day. The Z generation belongs to a demographic that needs regular stimulation. They have lived their entire lives surrounded by diverse information flows and have grown up with digital technology. The phone is always nearby, and in addition to making and receiving calls, you can also use it to watch movies, listen to music, and stay in touch with friends on social media. Recent studies, such as Mason et al. (2022) have shown that especially young adults are mobile phone addicts. A survey commissioned by Sprout Social (2021) found that the primary reason the Z generation uses social media is to pass the time. This confirms the study's findings that people frequently browse social media, even for a brief period of time between tasks. It was difficult for interviewees to estimate the total time they spend on social media every day because of this fragmented use. However, it is clear that the Z generation uses social media more than previous generations and it is present in everyday life, which is one of the most important findings of the study. A survey commissioned by Statista found that Gen Z spends 3 hours per day browsing social media, compared to 1.5 hours per day for Gen X (those born between 1965 and 1980. (Dixon, 2022). According to Singh et al. (2022), Gen Z would be online up to 8 hours a day.

In addition to killing time, research has shown that social media is used to entertain, communicate, and search for information. Several platforms have been discovered to fulfill various purposes in earlier studies. For instance, YouTube can be considered an entertaining platform, Instagram is good for killing time, and Twitter serves as an information source (Voorveld et al., 2018). The most popular platforms in this study were Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and WhatsApp. In addition, some respondents used Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Yodel. As the latest platform, many had recently started using BeReal. No significant gender differences were observed, but YouTube and Twitter were popular, especially among male respondents, while female respondents reported using more Instagram.

Instagram and Snapchat were used to share own images and follow other people's content. In addition, interviewees followed different social media influencers in these platforms, especially on Instagram. WhatsApp was only used to communicate and share images and links with individuals or groups. According to Voorveld et al. (2018), Instagram provides a quick update and social interaction with others. Snapchat, on the other hand, allows one to share their own images and messages and communicate with others. One purpose for using social

media was thought to be entertainment, in addition to communication. Particularly TikTok was regarded as an entertaining service. One of the most common reasons people use social media is for enjoyment. Social media is increasingly being used by people to unwind, and it could even be said that today's users use it more for enjoyment than information sharing (Ojomo & Sodeinde, 2021). TikTok is suitable platform for Gen Z, since they have poorer concentration abilities than earlier generations and are always seeking for stimuli (Rothman, 2023). According to MarkkinointiMaestro article (2022), Finnish young people currently use Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok the most. These results are in line with this study, and it can be said that Facebook, for example, has lost popularity, especially among younger users. However, other generations still use Facebook more, because in 2022 Facebook was the second most popular platform among Finns (Marketing Maestro, 2022).

This study's primary focus was on understanding how the Z generation views social media marketing. The Z generation had noticed that social media channels today show a lot of advertisements. For instance, on Instagram, ads can be seen in the feed and in the stories section between posts; on YouTube, they can be seen before, during, and after videos; and on TikTok, they can occasionally be seen in between videos. Ads were thought to be generally unpleasant, especially when they prevent users from browsing social media. As the themes of social media marketing were studied, the prevalence of micro-influencers was also highlighted, and how many interviewees had noticed that many of their friends with bigger following base today make commercial content and are referred as micro-influencers. Since the interviewees only followed micro-influencers whose content they enjoy or who they personally know, their advertisements were seen as more favorable. According to the Z generation, one of the key findings of the study was the targetability of advertisements. The commercials and other online marketing were considered to be more directly targeted to consumers than traditional marketing and therefore it is seen as more effective. As stated by the respondents, we are continuously bombarded with information today and that different marketing activities definitely influence customer behavior. Singh et al. (2022) assert that the ability of social media to create connections with customers has a favorable effect on generation Z consumer behavior and attitudes toward brands. Although the interviewees considered that properly targeted marketing increases the likelihood of buying a product or service, they were also concerned about their own privacy and data. The interviewees emphasized, for instance, how their own talking points appear as advertisements for social media platforms. Therefore, businesses should think about using "social media listening" because some consumers dislike it and may develop unfavorable impressions of the company, which might affect behavior (Jacobson, Gruzd & Hernandez-Garcia, 2020).

## 5.2    Managerial implications

Influencer marketing has been the subject of extensive research recently due to its popularity and relevancy. Yet, there hasn't been a lot of research done specifically on the Z-generation approach for influencer marketing. Also, micro-influencer marketing has been shown to be a relatively small research topic, compared to studies that have focused on macro-influencers or all social media influencers. The influencer marketing topic has been the subject of multiple earlier studies and many of them have utilized quantitative research. This study expands on pre-existing theories and delves deeper utilizing qualitative method, which means conducting interviews. The main conclusions of this study were the increasing popularity of micro-influencer marketing, the significance of the influencer's truthfulness, trustworthiness and authenticity, the targeting of consumers by social media marketing, and the degree to which social media is an integral part of daily life for the Z generation. The findings of this study add to previously available data on the topic, such as how much time the Z generation spends online and which social media platforms they prefer. This study investigated the motivations for using particular social media platforms and gave more specific information on how social media is used. The impact of social media influencers' content on matters such as purchasing behavior and brand perception has been extensively examined, and this study added to the body of knowledge on why micro-influencers' marketing is viewed in particular ways. This study offers extensive information on why this size micro-influencers are followed, what content is most effective, and what types of social media advertisements are perceived to be best for both influencers and companies. From the perspective of the Finnish micro-influencer definition, meaning social media influencer with 1000–10,000 followers, micro-influencer marketing has not been studied much. The Finnish Z generation's preference to follow familiar social media micro-influencers more than unknown influencers is a new and unexpected finding that sheds new light on the motivations behind following certain influencers.

The results of this study provide useful information to both micro-influencers and marketers. The main focus was on micro-influencer marketing efficiency and the results of the research provide practical information on how influencers can create the most effective content for different social media platforms from the perspective of the Z generation. Based on the research, micro-influencers are able to implement both authentic and commercial content in the best possible way. In addition, the data will help marketers choose the ideal influencer to promote their brand and goods. Also, marketers and influencers will be educated about the platforms that the Z generation finds most appealing and why they utilize particular ones.

## 5.3 Future research directions

As a follow up study, it would be interesting to conduct more research on micro-influencers and how their effectiveness is impacted by the possibility that many of their followers are acquainted with or even friends with them. A similar study from the Finnish influencer market, concentrating on influencers with between for example 5000 and 20 000 followers, would also be fascinating to conduct. This would undoubtedly give additional insight into the content of relatively minor influencers and the ways in which consumer opinion changes once it is a somewhat bigger influencer. Moreover, consumer attitudes toward targeted advertising and their effects on advertising effectiveness could be studied from the perspective of social media marketing.

## 5.4 Limitations

Even though this study's credibility and quality were upheld by the use of the proper methodology and convincing arguments, a few restrictions should be mentioned. It is obvious that a larger sample size is required in order to draw reliable conclusions on the key subjects. Eight people took part in the study's interviews, and based on their comments, it was possible to draw generalizations regarding micro-influencer marketing that were then supported by findings from related earlier studies. The fact that the interviewees were Finns between the ages of 22 and 27 and that the findings of this thesis mostly reflect the opinions of this group should also be mentioned as a limitation.

## 5.5 Reliability and validity of the study

Validity and reliability are particularly important when evaluating the credibility of quantitative research. Evaluation of reliability in qualitative research is more difficult than in quantitative research since the findings are based on the researcher's analysis rather than precise measurable values (Eskola & Direct, 2014). The researcher has a crucial role to play in qualitative research, and they must constantly weigh their choices and the reliability of the information. The researcher's awareness that they are a crucial research instrument and that they are always evaluating the process boosts the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Also, the absence of contradictions in the study raises the possibility of some reliability (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). The reliability of this study has been confirmed by the comprehensive descriptions and detailed reports of the various study process stages as well as the method used for data collecting and analysis. In order to best respond to the research questions for the study, the subject has

been described as carefully as possible, and the theory that underpins the study subject is presented in the context of the thesis. Each interviewee fulfilled the criteria for the study's sample, which included using social media, having opinions, and having some understanding of micro-influencer marketing. One way to describe reliability is that the results of the study are reproducible. In other words, if the same person is examined at different times of the study and the same results are obtained, they can be said to be reliable (Hirsjärvi et al., 2000).

Validity refers to competence, that is, the fact that research measures what it is meant to measure. To put it another way, how relevant the concepts used in the research are to the investigation (Ruusuvuori et al., 2010). The concepts chosen for this study were highlighted in interviewees' comments when they discussed their opinions on the social media use and behavior there, on the social media marketing and on the micro-influencer marketing and its effectiveness. The interviewees had prior understanding of the subject and the persons selected for the interviews were suitable, as they were also able to bring different perspectives to the topics. Validity and reliability can also be improved by selecting the material and method of carrying out the research as wisely as possible. In addition, one goal can be to attempt comparing the results of the study with other research results (Eskola & suoranta, 1998).

The size of the sample that will be used is not stated in the qualitative study. The fact that the material becomes saturated, and answers eventually start to repeat the same findings is one technique to assess the content's suitability. Interviews for this study produced a lot of replies that were quite similar, and after the eighth interview, it was decided that expanding the sample would not have been beneficial. However, the small size of the sample can be seen as a restriction of the study.

## REFERENCES

Abubakar, A. M., & Ilkan, M. (2016). Impact of online WOM on destination trust and intention to travel: A medical tourism perspective. Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, 5(3), 192–201.

Aichner, T., & Jacob, F. (2015). Measuring the Degree of Corporate Social Media Use. International Journal of Market Research, 57, 257–275.

Alghizzawi, M. (2019). The role of digital marketing in consumer behavior: A survey. 3, 24–31.

Almahdi, M., Alsayed, N., & Alabbas, A. (2022). In Influencers We Trust? A Model of Trust Transfer in Social Media Influencer Marketing, 159–173.

Almeida, F. (2017). Concept and Dimensions of Web 4.0. International Journal ff Computers & Technology, 16, 7040–7046.

Al-Menayes, J. (2015). Motivations for Using Social Media: An Exploratory Factor Analysis. International Journal of Psychological Studies, 43-50.

American Marketing Association (2023). What is Digital Marketing? https://www.ama.org/what-is-digital-marketing/

Ather, S. M., Khan, N. U., Rehman, F. & Nazneen, L. (2018). Relationship between Social Media Marketing and Consumer Buying Behavior. Peshawar Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences (PJPBS), 4(2).

Beck, V. & Ladwig, B. (2021). Ethical consumerism: Veganism. Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews. Climate Change, 12(1), e689-n/a.

Güngördü Belbağ, A. (2022). Impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on consumer behavior in Turkey: A qualitative study. Journal of Consumer Affairs, 56(1), 339–358.

Budac, A. C. (2014). Strategic Considerations on How Brands Should Deal With Generation Z. Revista Economică, 66, 6-14

Butu, A., Brumă, I. S., Tanasă, L., Rodino, S., Dinu Vasiliu, C., Doboş, S., & Butu, M. (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 Crisis upon the Consumer Buying Behavior of Fresh Vegetables Directly from Local Producers. Case Study: The Quarantined Area of Suceava County, Romania. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17(15).

Campbell, C., & Farrell, J. R. (2020). More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing. Business Horizons, 63(4), 469–479.

Chaffey, D. and Smith, P.R. (2013) E-Marketing Excellence: Planning and Optimizing Your Digital Marketing. 4th Edition, Taylor & Francis, London.

Chiang, I.-P., Wong, R., & Huang, C. (2019). Exploring the Benefits of Social Media Marketing for Brands and Communities. International Journal of Electronic Commerce Studies, 10(2).

Chih, W., Wang, K.Y., Hsu, L.C., & Huang, S.C. (2013). Investigating electronic word-of-mouth effects on online discussion forums: The role of perceived positive electronic word-of-mouth review credibility. Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking, 16(9), 658–668.

Colliander, J. & Dahlen, M. (2011). Following the Fashionable Friend: The Power of Social Media Weighing Publicity Effectiveness Of Blogs versus Online Magazines. Journal of Advertising Research, 51(1), 313–320.

Chu, S.-C., & Kim, Y. (2011). Determinants of consumer engagement in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in social networking sites. International Journal of Advertising, 30(1), 47–75.

Dangmei, J., & Singh, A. (2016). Understanding The Generation Z: The Future Workforce. 3, 1–5. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305280948_understanding_the_generation_z_the_future_workforce

Datareportal. (2022). Digital 2022: Finland. DataReportal – Global Digital Insights. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-finland

Datareportal. (2022). Digital 2022: Global Overview Report. DataReportal – Global Digital Insights. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report

Darley, W. K., Blankson, C., & Luethge, D. J. (2010). Toward an integrated framework for online consumer behavior and decision making process: A review. Psychology & Marketing, 27(2), 94–116.

De Vries, L., Gensler, S., & Leeflang, P. S. H. (2012). Popularity of Brand Posts on Brand Fan Pages: An Investigation of the Effects of Social Media Marketing. Journal of Interactive Marketing, 26(2), 83–91.

Dhun, & Dangi, H. K. (2022). Influencer Marketing: Role of Influencer Credibility and Congruence on Brand Attitude and eWOM. Journal of Internet Commerce, 0(0), 1–45.

Dixon, S. (2022, Mar 21). Snapchat – Statistics & Facts. Statista. https://www.statista.com/topics/2882/snapchat/

Dixon, S. (2022, June 21). Social media - Statistics & Facts. Statista. https://www.statista.com/topics/1164/social-networks/#topicHeader__wrapper

Dixon, S. (2022) Global average time spent per day on social media by generation 2021. Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1314973/global-daily-time-spent-on-social-media-networks-generation/

Djafarova, E., & Foots, S. (2022). Exploring ethical consumption of generation Z: Theory of planned behaviour. Young Consumers, 23(3), 413–431.

Elias, H. (2021). Interfacing with the Macromedium: The Web 4.0 and the Digital Media Converging into a Medium of All Media. In M. M. Soares, E. Rosenzweig, & A. Marcus (Eds.), Design, User Experience, and Usability: Design for Contemporary Technological Environments (pp. 289–302). Springer International Publishing.

Elisabeta, I. (2014). Social Media and its Impact on Consumers Behavior. International Journal of Economic Practices and Theories, 4.

Erdoğmuş, İ. E., & Çiçek, M. (2012). The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Brand Loyalty. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 58, 1353–1360.

Eskola, J., & Suoranta, J. (1998). Johdatus laadulliseen tutkimukseen. Vastapaino.

Eskola, J., & Suoranta, J. (2014). Johdatus laadulliseen tutkimukseen. Vastapaino.

Faruk, M., Rahman, M., & Hasan, S. (2021). How digital marketing evolved over time: A bibliometric analysis on scopus database. Heliyon, 7(12), e08603.

Fierro, I., Arbelaez, D. A. C., & Gavilanez, J. (2017). Digital marketing: A new tool for international education. Pensamiento & Gestión, 43, 241–260.

Fitri, G., Kusumawati, N., & Aprilianty, F. (2021, November 1). The Impact of Micro-Influencer on Brand Image and Purchase Intention in Local Culinary Products on Instagram.

Carr, C. T., & Hayes, R. A. (2015). Social Media: Defining, Developing, and Divining. Atlantic Journal of Communication, 23(1), 46–65.

Gaasly. (2023). Social Media Landscape in Finlans 2023. https://www.gaasly.com/blog/social-media-landscape-in-finland-2023

Géci, A., Krivošíková, A., Nagyová, Ľ., & Cagáňová, D. (2020). The influence of lifestyle on consumer behavior and decision making in research aimed at protein bars. Potravinarstvo Slovak Journal of Food Sciences, 14, 318–327.

Geyser, W. (2019, January 18). What is TikTok? - Everything You need to Know in 2023. Influencer Marketing Hub. https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-tiktok/

Gierszewska, G., & Seretny, M. (2019). Sustainable Behavior – The Need of Change in Consumer and Business Attitudes and Behavior. Foundations of Management, 11(1), 197–208.

Global Wellness Institute. (2022). Statistics and facts. https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/press-room/statistics-and-facts/

Godey, B., Mathinou, A., Pederzoli, D., Rokka, J., Aiello, G., Donvito, R. & Sing, R. (2016). Social media marketing efforts of luxury brands: Influence on brand equity and consumer behavior. Journal of Business Research, 69(12), 5833–5841.

Gujrati, R., & Uygun, H. (2020). Digital marketing: Changing consumer behaviour. International Journal of Forensic Engineering, 4.

Gupta, S., & Mahajan, R. (2019). Role of Micro-Influencers in Affecting Behavioural Intentions. International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering, 8, 189–192.

Haenlein, M., Anadol, E., Farnsworth, T., Hugo, H., Hunichen, J., & Welte, D. (2020). Navigating the New Era of Influencer Marketing: How to be Successful on Instagram, TikTok, & Co. California Management Review, 63(1), 5–25.

Halonen, M., & Hakkarainen, O. (2019). Vaikuttajamarkkinointi. Alma Talent.

Hanaysha, J. R. (2021). Impact of Price Promotion, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Social Media Marketing on Word of Mouth. Business Perspectives and Research, 9(3), 446–461.

Hardey, M. (2011). Generation C: Content, Creation, Connections and Choice. Retrieved 26 January 2023, from

He, A.-Z., Cai, Y., Cai, L., & Zhang, Y. (2021). Conversation, storytelling, or consumer interaction and participation? The impact of brand-owned social media content marketing on consumers' brand perceptions and attitudes. Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, 15(3), 419–440.

Hennig-Thurau, T., Malthouse, E. C., Friege, C., Gensler, S., Lobschat, L., Rangaswamy, A., & Skiera, B. (2010). The Impact of New Media on Customer Relationships. Journal of Service Research, 13(3), 311–330.

Huete-Alcocer, N. (2017). A Literature Review of Word of Mouth and Electronic Word of Mouth: Implications for Consumer Behavior. Frontiers in Psychology, 8. https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01256

Hien, N. N., & Nhu, T. N. H. (2022). The effect of digital marketing transformation trends on consumers' purchase intention in B2B businesses: The moderating role of brand awareness. Cogent Business & Management, 9(1), 2105285.

Hirsjärvi, S., Sajavaara, P., Liikanen, P., & Remes, P. (1997). Tutki ja kirjoita. Kirjayhtymä.

Hirsjärvi, S., & Hurme, H. (2000). Tutkimushaastattelu: Teemahaastattelun teoria ja käytäntö. Yliopistopaino.

Hirsjärvi, S., Remes, P., & Sajavaara, P. (2004). Tutki ja kirjoita (10. osin uud. laitos). Tammi.

Hirsjärvi, S., & Hurme, H. (2008). Tutkimushaastattelu: Teemahaastattelun teoria ja käytäntö. Gaudeamus Helsinki University Press.

Hollebeek, L. D., & Macky, K. (2019). Digital Content Marketing's Role in Fostering Consumer Engagement, Trust, and Value: Framework, Fundamental Propositions, and Implications. Journal of Interactive Marketing, 45, 27–41.

Hovland, C. I., & Weiss, W. (1951). The Influence of Source Credibility on Communication Effectiveness. Public opinion quarterly, 15(4), 635-650.

Hoyer, MacInnis, D. J., & Pieters, R. (2011). Consumer Behavior, International Edition. Cengage Learning. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/jyvaskyla-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5132771

Huang, O., & Copeland, L. (2020). Gen Z, Instagram Influencers, And Hashtags' Influence On Purchase Intention Of Apparel. 24(3). https://www.abacademies.org/articles/Gen%20z-instagram-influencers-and-hashtags-influence-on-purchase-intention-of-apparel-1528-2678-24-3-302.pdf

Instagram. (2022). Mikä on Instagram? | Ohje- ja tukikeskus: Instagram. https://help.instagram.com/424737657584573

Interactive Advertisin Bureau. (2018). Why Publishers are Increasingly Turning to Influencer Marketing -and What That Means for marketers. https://www.iab.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/IAB_Influencer_Marketing_for_Publishers_2018-01-25.pdf

Ioanăş, E., & Stoica, I. (2014). Social Media and its Impact on Consumers Behavior. International Journal of Economic Practices and Theories. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Social-Media-and-its-Impact-on-Consumers-Behavior-Ioan%C4%83%C8%99-Stoica/f76fd98949ae0bc38290e0b34773aaeab159a27e

Islam, T., Sheikh, Z., Hameed, Z., Khan, I. U., & Azam, R. I. (2018). Social comparison, materialism, and compulsive buying based on stimulus-response-model: A comparative study among adolescents and young adults. Young Consumers, 19(1), 19–37.

Jacobson, J., Gruzd, A., & Hernández-García, Á. (2020). Social media marketing: Who is watching the watchers? Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 53, 101774.

Jaeed, F., & Badghish, S. (2021). The Effect of Social Media Influencers' Trustworthiness and Expertise on Online Purchase Intentions of Saudi Consumers and the Mediating Role of Attitude. 2, 2021.

Jain, E., & Yadav, A. (2017). Marketing and Technology: Role of Technology in Modern Marketing. IOSR Journal of Business and Management, 19, 49–53.

Jaleniauskiene, E. & Juceviciene, P. (2015). Reconsidering University Educational Environment for the Learners of Generation Z. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292177338_Reconsidering_University_Educational_Environment_for_the_Learners_of_Generation_Z

Jamil, K., Dunnan, L., Gul, R. F., Shehzad, M. U., Gillani, S. H. M., & Awan, F. H. (2022). Role of Social Media Marketing Activities in Influencing Customer Intentions: A Perspective of a New Emerging Era. Frontiers in Psychology, 12. https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.808525

Järvinen, J. & Taiminen, H. (2016) Harnessing marketing automation for B2B content marketing—ScienceDirect. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0019850115300018

Kabadayi, S., & Price, K. (2014). Consumer – brand engagement on Facebook: Liking and commenting behaviors. Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, 8(3), 203–223.

Kahawandala, N., Peter, S., & Niwunhella, H. (2020). Profiling purchasing behavior of Generation Z. 155–160.

Kapitan, S., & Silvera, D. H. (2016). From digital media influencers to celebrity endorsers: Attributions drive endorser effectiveness. Marketing Letters, 27(3), 553–567.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. Business Horizons, 53(1), 59–68.

Kaufman, C. F., Lane, P. M., & Lindquist, J. D. (1991). Exploring More than 24 Hours a Day: A Preliminary Investigation of Polychronic Time Use. Journal of Consumer Research, 18(3), 392–401.

Kay, S., Mulcahy, R., & Parkinson, J. (2020). When less is more: The impact of macro and micro social media influencers' disclosure. Journal of Marketing Management, 36(3–4), 248–278.

Ki, C.W. (Chloe), Cuevas, L. M., Chong, S. M., & Lim, H. (2020). Influencer marketing: Social media influencers as human brands attaching to followers and yielding positive marketing results by fulfilling needs. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 55, 102133.

Khaleel Ibrahim, A. (2021). Evolution of the Web: From Web 1.0 to 4.0. Qubahan Academic Journal, 1(3), 20–28.

Khan, S., Zaman, I., Khan, M. I., & Musleha, Z. (2022). Role of Influencers in Digital Marketing: The moderating impact of follower's interaction. Global Management Journal for Academic & Corporate Studies, 12(1), 37–64.

Kim, S., & Han, J. (2020, October 7). Detecting Engagement Bots on Social Influencer Marketing.

Kim, J., & Kim, M. (2022). Rise of Social Media Influencers as a New Marketing Channel: Focusing on the Roles of Psychological Well-Being and Perceived Social Responsibility among Consumers. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(4), 2362.

Kim, Y., Sohn, D., & Choi, S. M. (2011). Cultural difference in motivations for using social network sites: A comparative study of American and Korean college students. Computers in Human Behavior, 27(1), 365–372.

Kim, D. Y., & Kim, H.Y. (2022). Social media influencers as human brands: An interactive marketing perspective. Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, 17(1), 94–109.

Koulopoulos, T., & Keldsen, D. (2016). : The Six Forces Shaping the Future of Business. Routledge.

Kotler, P, Armstrong, G., Harris, L. & Piercy, N. (2017). Principles of Marketing 7th Edn PDF EBook. Pearson Education, Limited. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/jyvaskyla-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5186192

Krishnamurthy, S., & Dou, W. (2008). Note from Special Issue Editors. Journal of Interactive Advertising, 8(2), 1–4.

Leskin, P. (2020). YouTube is 15 years old. Here's a timeline of how YouTube was founded, its rise to video behemoth, and its biggest controversies along way. Business Insider. https://www.businessinsider.com/history-of-youtube-in-photos-2015-10

Li, F., Larimo, J., & Leonidou, L. C. (2021). Social media marketing strategy: Definition, conceptualization, taxonomy, validation, and future agenda. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 49(1), 51–70.

Lin, H., Bruning, P. F., & Swarna, H. (2018). Using online opinion leaders to promote the hedonic and utilitarian value of products and services—ScienceDirect. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0007681318300107

Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer Marketing: How Message Value and Credibility Affect Consumer Trust of Branded Content on Social Media. Journal of Interactive Advertising, 19(1), 58–73.

Mahapatra, G. P., Bhullar, N., & Gupta, P. (2022). Gen Z: An Emerging Phenomenon. NHRD Network Journal, 15(2), 246–256.

Marino, S. (2023). 165 Powerful Digital Marketing Statistics for 2023. WordStream. https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2022/04/19/digital-marketing-statistics

Markerly. (2018) Instagram Marketing: Does Influencer Size Matter? – Markerly Blog. https://markerly.com/blog/instagram-marketing-does-influencer-size-matter/

MarkkinointiMaestro. (2022). Sosiaalisen median tilastot 2022. https://www.markkinointimaestro.fi/sosiaalisen-median-tilastot-2022

Martínez-López, F. J., Anaya-Sánchez, R., Fernández Giordano, M., & Lopez-Lopez, D. (2020). Behind influencer marketing: Key marketing decisions and their effects on followers' responses. Journal of Marketing Management, 36(7–8), 579–607.

Mason, M. C., Zamparo, G., Marini, A., & Ameen, N. (2022). Glued to your phone? Generation Z's smartphone addiction and online compulsive buying. Computers in Human Behavior, 136, 107404.

Maslow, A. H., & Frager, R. (1987). Motivation and personality (3rd ed). Harper and Row

The End of Shops: Social Buying and the Battle for the Customer. https://web-p-eb-scohost-com.ezproxy.jyu.fi/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHh3d19fNTMxNzg2X19BTg2?sid=b9dcac9f-dfef-4781-acaa-d4c487513e62@redis&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1

Mileva, G. (2022, September 12). What is BeReal? – Social Media's Next Big Thing. Influencer Marketing Hub. https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-be-real/

Miller, J. (2018). 10 Things You Need to Know About Gen Z. HR Magazine, 63(7), 50–56.

Moser, C., & Eijkeren, A. (2016). User-generated content? Get serious! Understanding the interactions between organisations and customers on social media. International Journal of Business Environment, 8, 284.

Mude, G., & Undale, S. (2023). Social Media Usage: A Comparison Between Generation Y and Generation Z in India. https://www-igi-global-com.ezproxy.jyu.fi/article/social-media-usage/317889

Müller, J., & Christandl, F. (2019). Content is king – But who is the king of kings? The effect of content marketing, sponsored content & user-generated content on brand responses. Computers in Human Behavior, 96, 46–55.

Newman, R., Chang, V., Walters, R. J., & Wills, G. B. (2016). Web 2.0—The past and the future. International Journal of Information Management, 36(4), 591–598.

Ng, S., David, M. E., & Dagger, T. S. (2011). Generating positive word-of-mouth in the service experience. Managing Service Quality: An International Journal, 21(2), 133–151.

Nieves-Casasnovas, J. J., & Lozada-Contreras, F. (2020). Marketing communication objectives through digital content marketing on social media. Forum Empresarial, 25(1), 57–82.

Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and Validation of a Scale to Measure Celebrity Endorsers' Perceived Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness. Journal of advertising, 19(3), 39-52.

Ojomo, O., & Sodeinde, O. A. (2021). Social Media Skits: Reshaping the Entertainment Experience of Broadcast Audience. SAGE Open, 11(3), 21582440211032176.

Oszust, K., & Stecko, J. (2020). Theoretical Aspects Of Consumer Behaviour Together With An Analysis Of Trends In Modern Consumer Behaviour. Modern Management Review, 113–121.

Ozimek, P., & Bierhoff, H.-W. (2016). Facebook use depending on age: The influence of social comparisons. Computers in Human Behavior, 61, 271–279.

Park, H., & Kim, Y.-K. (2014). The role of social network websites in the consumer–brand relationship. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 21(4), 460–467.

Pornsrimate, K. & Khamwon, A. (2021). How to convert Millennial consumers to brand evangelists through social media micro-influencers. Innovative Marketing, 17(2), 18–32.

Pradhan, D., Kuanr, A., Anupurba Pahi, S., & Akram, M. S. (2023). Influencer marketing: When and why gen Z consumers avoid influencers and endorsed brands. Psychology & Marketing, 40(1), 27–47.

Raacke, J., & Bonds-Raacke, J. (2008). MySpace and Facebook: Applying the Uses and Gratifications Theory to Exploring Friend-Networking Sites. Cyberpsychology & Behavior : The Impact of the Internet, Multimedia and Virtual Reality on Behavior and Society, 11, 169–174.

Rahja, R. (2013). Nuorten mediamaailma pähkinänkuoressa. Mediakasvatusseura ry.

Reinikainen, H., Munnukka, J., Maity, D., & Luoma-aho, V. (2020). 'You really are a great big sister' – parasocial relationships, credibility, and the moderating role of audience comments in influencer marketing. Journal of Marketing Management, 36(3–4), 279–298.

Rios, I., Casais, B., & Camilleri, M. A. (2021). The Effect of Macrocelebrity and Microinfluencer Endorsements on Consumer–brand Engagement in Instagram (pp. 131–144).

Rudman, R., & Bruwer, R. (2016). Defining Web 3.0: Opportunities and challenges. The Electronic Library, 34(1), 132–154.

Rothman, D. (2023). A Tsunami of Learners Called Generation Z. http://ce.wvu.edu/media/15624/needs-different_learning_styles.pdf

Ruusuvuori, J., Nikander, P., & Hyvärinen, M. (Eds). (2010). Haastattelun analyysi. Vastapaino.

Rungruangjit, W., & Charoenpornpanichkul, K. (2022). Building Stronger Brand Evangelism for Sustainable Marketing through Micro-Influencer-Generated Content on Instagram in the Fashion Industry. Sustainability, 14(23), 15770.

Salleh, M., Mahbob, N. & Baharudin, N. (2017). Reconsidering University Educational Environment for the Learners of Generation Z. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292177338_Reconsidering_University_Educational_Environment_for_the_Learners_of_Generation_Z

Sarah, I. S., Suhartanto, D., & Suhaeni, T. (2019). Assessing hierarchical model of word of mouth in social media: Its implication for entrepreneurs. IOP Conference Series. Materials Science and Engineering, 662(3).

Sashittal, H. C., Hodis, M., & Sriramachandramurthy, R. (2014). Is Your Brand a Living Entity? MIT Sloan Management Review, 55(3), 95–96.

Sawicki, A. (2016). Digital Marketing. World Scientific News, 48, 82-88

Schiffman, L. G., & Kanuk, L. L. (1994). Consumer behavior (5th ed). Prentice-Hall International.

Schouten, A. P., Janssen, L., & Verspaget, M. (2020). Celebrity vs. Influencer endorsements in advertising: The role of identification, credibility, and Product-Endorser fit. International Journal of Advertising, 39(2), 258–281.

Shahbaznezhad, H., Dolan, R., & Rashidirad, M. (2021). The Role of Social Media Content Format and Platform in Users' Engagement Behavior. Journal of Interactive Marketing, 53(1), 47–65.

Shatto, B., & Erwin, K. (2016). Moving on From Millennials: Preparing for Generation Z. The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing, 47(6), 253–254.

Singh, S., & Jang, S. (2022). Search, purchase, and satisfaction in a multiple-channel environment: How have mobile devices changed consumer behaviors? Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 65, 102200.

Singh, D., Katoch, R., & Singh, P. (2022). Social Media Marketing and Gen Z: A Study of Brand Attitude, Self-Brand Connection and Purchase Intention. IUP Journal of Marketing Management, 21(3), 7–23.

Solomon, M. R., Bamossy, G., Hogg, M. K., & Askegaard, S. (2006). Consumer behaviour: A European perspective (3rd ed., enhanced media edition). Prentice Hall.Statista. (18.10).

Solomon, M. R., Bamossy, G. J., Hogg, M. K., & Askegaard, S. (2016). Consumer behaviour: A European perspective (Sixth edition). Pearson Education Limited.

Solomon, M. R., Askegaard, S., Hogg, M. K., & Bomossy, G. J. (2019). Consumer behaviour: A European perspective (Seventh edition). Pearson.

Global influencer marketing value 2016-2022. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1092819/global-influencer-market-size/

SproutSocial. (2021). How Different Generations Use Social Media—And What this Means for Your Business. Sprout Social. https://sproutsocial.com/insights/guides/social-media-use-by-generation/

Statista. (2021). Mobile app usage in Europe – Statistics & Facts. https://www.statista.com/topics/8693/mobile-app-usage-in-europe/#topicOverview

Statista. (2022). Number of mobile devices worldwide 2020-2025. https://www.statista.com/statistics/245501/multiple-mobile-device-ownership-worldwide/

Statista. (2023). Internet users worldwide 2023. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1190263/internet-users-worldwide/

Sudha, M., & Sheena, K. (2017). Impact of Influencers in Consumer Decision Process: The Fashion Industry. SCMS Journal of Indian Management, 14(3), 14–30.

Svatosová, V. (2013). Motivation of Online Buyer Behavior. Journal of Competitiveness, 5(3), n/a.

Taghizadeh, H., Taghipourian, M., & Khazaei, A. (2013). The Effect of Customer Satisfaction on Word of Mouth Communication. Research Journal of Applied Sciences, Engineering and Technology, 5, 2569–2575.

Talmon, G. A. (2019). Generation Z: What's Next? Medical Science Educator, 29(1), 9–11.

Tao, H., Sun, X., Liu, X., Tian, J., & Zhang, D. (2022). The Impact of Consumer Purchase Behavior Changes on the Business Model Design of Consumer Services Companies Over the Course of COVID-19. Frontiers in Psychology, 13. https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.818845

Tashtoush, L. (2021). The Effect of Social Media on Consumer Buying Behavior in Commercial Banks. Saudi Journal of Business and Management Studies, 6, 28–38.

Tilastokeskus. (2022). Väestön tieto- ja viestintätekniikan käyttö muuttujina Vuosi, Ikä ja Tiedot. PxWeb. https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/fi/StatFin/StatFin__sutivi/statfin_sutivi_pxt_13ud.px/table/tableViewLayout1/

Tsen, W. S., & Cheng, B. K. L. (2021). Who to find to endorse? Evaluation of online influencers among young consumers and its implications for effective influencer marketing. Young Consumers, 22(2), 237–253.

Tuomi, J., & Sarajärvi, A. (2009). Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi (6. uud. laitos). Tammi.

Turner, A. (2015). Generation Z: Technology and Social Interest. The Journal of Individual Psychology, 71(2), 103–113.

Usunier, J., & Valette-Florence, P. (2007). The Time Styles Scale: A review of developments and replications over 15 years. Time & Society, 16(2–3), 333–366.

Varghese, Mr. S., & Agrawal, Ms. M. (2021). Impact of Social Media on Consumer Buying Behavior. Saudi Journal of Business and Management Studies, 6(3), 51–55.

Voorveld, H. A. M., van Noort, G., Muntinga, D. G., & Bronner, F. (2018). Engagement with Social Media and Social Media Advertising: The Differentiating Role of Platform Type. Journal of Advertising, 47(1), 38–54.

Wang, T. (2017). Social identity dimensions and consumer behavior in social media. Asia Pacific Management Review, 22(1), 45–51.

Wei, Q., Dai, Q., & Liang, Y. (2021). Influencer Marketing for Start-ups: The Rise of Micro-influencers. 2179–2182.

Whillans, A., Macchia, L., & Dunn, E. (2019). Valuing time over money predicts happiness after a major life transition: A preregistered longitudinal study of graduating students. Science Advances, 5(9), eaax2615.

Wood, S. (2013). Generation Z as Consumers: Trends and Innovation. NC State University, 1-3.

Word of Mouth Marketing Association. (2015). Influencer Handbook. https://painepublishing.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Influencer-Handbook-v4-2.pdf

Ye, G., Hudders, L., De Jans, S., & De Veirman, M. (2021). The Value of Influencer Marketing for Business: A Bibliometric Analysis and Managerial Implications. Journal of Advertising, 50(2)