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Jesse Tuominen

Young Consumers on Social Media

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND
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ABSTRACT

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Social media plays an ever-increasing role in young consumers' lives, who are active users of social media. In this study, young consumers are referred to as consumers aged 15–35. Young consumers are constantly exposed to consumption-related content on social media. For instance, a variety of products and services are constantly advertised on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Notably, many of these products and services are endorsed by social media influencers, such as YouTubers, who have a significant effect on young consumers' purchase intentions, buying decisions, and brand attitudes. On the other hand, young consumers can also actively read other consumers' product reviews before making purchase decisions and contact brands directly via social media. Thus, prior consumption research can be roughly classified into two streams: the first stream treats consumers as passive targets, while the second stream treats consumers as active agents. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, there is a lack of a comprehensive understanding of young people's role as consumers in the social media environment. This dissertation takes a cross-cultural perspective by investigating the role of young Finnish, British, and American consumers in the social media context from two opposing perspectives. First, this study will consider young people as active and determined consumers who utilize the assets of social media for their own purposes. Second, this study will focus on the role of young consumers as targets of influence in the social media context, whose attitudes, values, and behaviors are influenced by external sources, such as peers and social media influencers. This dissertation draws on widely used theories from the fields of sociology, marketing, social psychology, and communication but discusses them in the modern social media context. The present study is based on four sub-studies and utilizes three datasets, including young Finnish, British, and American participants. This study uses only quantitative methods. This study was guided by research questions related to young consumers' roles in social media as targets of influence and active agents. Thus, by addressing these research questions, this study contributes to filling the significant gap in previous research by providing a deeper understanding of how young consumers from different countries are simultaneously active consumers and targets of influence in the social media context. What unites the sub-studies of this dissertation, in addition to the fact that they focus on young consumers, is the context of social media. The first and fourth articles discuss how young consumers' values, purchase intentions, and behaviors are influenced by social media influencers. The second and third articles focus on young people's consumer activism on social media and how young people use consumer goods and consumer symbols to give the impression of possessing a high social status. The results indicate that young consumers can be seen both as active consumers and as targets of influence. In terms of being targets, the results show that certain social media influencers can contribute to the development of young people's materialistic values and higher purchase intentions. In addition, the findings reveal that social media influencers can affect young consumers' actual consumer behaviors. On the other hand, the results also showed that young people actively participate in consumption-oriented impression management on social media and are active boycotters, which highlights their active role as consumers.

Keywords: consumption, social media, young consumers

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

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Sosiaalinen media on muokannut erityisesti nuorten kulutuskäyttäytymistä ja nuorten rooli kuluttajina sosiaalisessa mediassa on kahtiajakoinen. Nuoret käyttävät aktiivisesti sosiaalisen median alustoja, joille yritykset ja brändit kohdentavat jatkuvasti lisää mainontaa. Yritykset tekevät myös kaupallista yhteistyötä somevaikuttajien kanssa, joita nuoret seuraavat erityisen aktiivisesti. Näin ollen nuoret ovat jatkuvasti kaupallisen vaikuttamisen kohteena. Toisaalta nuoret voidaan nähdä myös aktiivisina kuluttajina sosiaalisessa mediassa. He voivat osallistua tai järjestää kuluttajaboikotteja somessa, kirjoittaa ja lukea tuotearvosteluja ennen ostopäätöksen tekemistä ja rakentaa omaa identiteettiään somessa kulutusvalintojen kautta. Nuorten kulutustottumuksia ja arvoja sekä niihin vaikuttavia tekijöitä tulisi tutkia enemmän, koska tieto esimerkiksi ylikuluttamisen tai impulssiostamiseen vaikuttavista tekijöistä olisi esimerkiksi maapallon kestokykyä ja nuorten velkaantumista ajatellen tärkeää. Tästä huolimatta aihetta ei ole tutkittu riittävästi. Tarkastelen väitöskirjassani sosiaalisen median roolia nuorten 15-35-vuotiaiden kuluttamisessa. Väitöskirja sisältää neljä osatutkimusta, joissa on käytetty useita kvantitatiivisia menetelmiä kuten regressioanalyysia, varianssianalyysia, latenttia profiilianalyysia ja konfirmatorista faktorianalyysia. Aineistonkeruumenetelmänä käytettiin kyselytutkimusta. Väitöskirjan tulokset osoittavat, että nuoret kuluttajat ovat sosiaalisen median kentällä samanaikaisesti sekä aktiivisia toimijoita että vaikuttamisen kohteita. Tuloksista käy ilmi, että esimerkiksi somevaikuttajat vaikuttavat nuorten materialistisiin arvoihin, ostoaikeisiin ja kulutuskäyttäytymiseen. Toisaalta tulokset osoittavat myös, että nuoret ovat aktiivisia kuluttajia boikotoidessaan erilaisten yritysten tuotteita ja palveluja. Havaitsimme myös, että nuoret voivat luoda aktiivisesti ideaalikuvaa itsestään kuluttajina sosiaalisessa mediassa esimerkiksi lisäämällä kuvia, jotka liioittelevat heidän varallisuuttaan. Väitöskirja vastaa lisääntyneeseen tarpeeseen tutkia nuoria sosiaalisen median alustoilla ja antaa konkreettisia neuvoja esimerkiksi yrityksille, tutkijoille ja poliittisille päättäjille.

Avainsanat: nuoret kuluttajat, sosiaalinen media, kuluttaminen

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One thing that drove me to write this dissertation was a lecture I attended years ago while studying social psychology at the University of Tampere. The lecturer combined sociological and social psychological thinking with luxury consumption. I found the lecture incredibly inspiring. Later, I contacted the lecturer and expressed my interest in doing research on this topic. Many years have passed since that lecture, and now I am finishing my dissertation on consumption. I am privileged to have been supervised by Terhi-Anna Wilska, the same person who gave that inspiring lecture on luxury consumption. I would like to express my deepest gratitude for your help, teaching, and support throughout this interesting and challenging project. I truly appreciate the time and effort you invested in answering my questions, reading my manuscripts, and guiding me on how to conduct high-quality research that readers understand. I am also grateful to you for providing the resources and funding that enabled me to work full-time and gain international experience. Additionally, I want to express my gratitude to the funding providers – The Academy of Finland, The Strategic Research Council, and The University of Jyväskylä's Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy.

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Helsinki, November 2023.
Jesse Tuominen

FIGURES

TABLES

CONTENTS

LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

I Tuominen, J., Rantala, E., Reinikainen, H., & Wilska, T.-A. (2022). Modern-day socialization agents: The connection between social media influencers, materialism, and purchase intentions of Finnish young people. *The Journal of Social Media in Society*, *12*(1), 21–48. https://thejsms.org/index.php/JSMS/article/view/1107

II Tuominen, J., Rantala, E., Reinikainen, H., Luoma-aho, V., Wilska, T-A. (2022). The brighter side of materialism: Managing impressions on social media for higher social capital. *Poetics,* 101651. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2022.101651

III Tuominen, J., Rantala, E., Tolvanen, A., Luoma-aho, V., Wilska, T.-A. (2022). Young consumers' boycotting profiles in the UK and Finland: A comparative analysis. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/08961530.2022.2140465

IV Tuominen, J., Rantala, E., Nyrhinen, J., Reinikainen, H., Warren, C., Wilska, T-A. When does parasocial interaction make influencers more influential? (in review).

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and rationale

Consumption, in all its different forms, has played a significant role in Western democracies for a long time. However, there is no consensus on the specific birthday of consumer society. Research suggests that the consumer revolution and the birth of consumer society have their origins in the 18th century in the United Kingdom (Halkier et al., 2017; McKendrick et al., 1982) or in the 17th century (Slater, 2015), although this view has also been questioned (Heinonen, 2009). Sassatelli (2007) suggested that today's consumer society is closely connected to historical periods when certain materials and products began to spread globally, such as sugar in the 17th and 18th centuries, clothes in the 19th century, and cars in the 20th century. Pantzar (2014), in turn, dated the birth of consumer society to the beginning of the 20th century, when wage labor achieved an established position in American society. In Finland, consumer society evolved relatively late, from around the 1950s onwards (Heinonen, 2000). However, even though there is no general agreement on the specific birth date of consumer society (i.e., a society that is organized around production and consumption), Buckingham (2011, p. 67) argued that it is safe to say that consumer society evolved along with the development of modern capitalism.

After the 20th-century mass consumer society (Trentmann, 2004), the next remarkable phase in consumption, especially from the viewpoint of this dissertation, occurred when consumption began to digitalize at the end of the 20th century (Ruckenstein, 2017). During that time, new forms of digitalized consumption, such as shopping at online stores, took over (Lehdonvirta, 2012). At the beginning of the 21st century, new forms of consumption appeared rapidly, such as mobile phones (Wilska, 2003) and virtual consumption (Lehdonvirta et al., 2009). What illustrates virtual consumption well is the virtual world, such as Habbo Hotel, in which users can buy virtual commodities with real money (Lehdonvirta et al., 2009). Lehdonvirta (2012) concluded that digitalization provides consumers with possibilities and challenges. Where

digitalization allowed for fast and effortless online shopping and convenient online price comparison, it was also argued that it eroded the interactivity between consumers and sellers that was typical within brick-and-mortar stores. One reason why digitalization was an important turn with respect to consumption is that it empowered consumers by providing them with new ways to search for information for their decision-making (Peterson & Merino, 2003). For example, car buyers started to use the Internet to search for the best price for a potential car; thus, when they went to a car dealership, they had more power to negotiate for the right price (Ratchford et al., 2007).

Subsequently, the advent of social media has changed consumption practices significantly, partly because consumers' decisions are no longer merely affected by the producers' information but by the information (e.g., reviews) by other consumers (Bronner & De Hoog, 2014). Thus, before making an actual purchase decision, consumers can search for others' experiences on the social media of the products and services in which they are interested and use that information to support their decisions (Salminen et al., 2022). Such information can also persuade consumers to buy. For example, research shows that consumers who read high-quality online reviews (i.e., logical and well-reasoned reviews) have higher purchase intentions than consumers who read low-quality online reviews (i.e., emotional and subjective) (Park et al., 2007). Likewise, a study revealed that consumers who perceived online reviews as useful (i.e., reviews make me purchase easier) also had higher intentions to make purchases from online stores (Ventre & Kolbe, 2020). Social media refers to the web and mobile tools that provide people with the possibility to consume and create content as well as to connect to others (Hoffman et al., 2013). They also specified that social media refers to technologies that allow people to do things (e.g., connect to each other) rather than specific platforms. The importance of social media in current consumption cannot be overemphasized. Consumers can use social media to explore new services, products, and brands (Alshaer et al., 2020). In addition, research suggests that consumers typically compare their possessions to others' possessions and that consumers might become dissatisfied with a certain product they previously liked if others had something better (Ackerman et al., 2000). Today, given that social media serves as a great basis for social comparison (Vogel et al., 2014), such a comparison of possessions is much easier than before because people can show off their cars, bags, and other products on social media.

Importantly, social media plays a significant role, especially in young consumers' lives. That is, companies use a vast amount of money to collaborate with social media influencers (SMIs) to reach desired target groups on social media (Borchers & Enke, 2021; Enke & Borchers, 2019; Haenlein et al., 2020), and these target groups are commonly young people (Enke & Borchers, 2021). For instance, a study revealed how influencers have increasingly promoted products for younger age groups on YouTube (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). Thus, young consumers are ever-increasingly exposed to advertisements on social media, which presumably influence their consumer values, intentions, and

behaviors. SMIs are independent endorsers who collaborate with firms to monetize their role as opinion leaders, and who shape their followers' attitudes and behaviors (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019; Freberg et al., 2011; Suuronen et al., 2022). Firms collaborate with influencers because influencers are typically famous and persuasive; that is, firms can efficiently reach potential consumer groups with the help of influencers who endorse their products or services and are rewarded for this action (Reinikainen, 2022). Companies also collaborate with influencers because they are capable of creating engaging content for audiences (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

This dissertation examines young consumers on social media from two contrasting theoretical perspectives: consumers as targets of influence (e.g., targets of advertising) (sub-studies 1 and 4), and consumers as active agents (e.g., how consumers manage impressions on social media with consumption-related pictures) (sub-studies 2 and 3). Specifically, this study will focus on how young consumers' following SMIs is related to their higher purchase intentions and materialistic values and how influencers can affect their followers' consumer behavior. Additionally, I will explore the reasons behind young consumers' boycotting decisions and investigate how young consumers' materialistic values and status-seeking activities on social media are connected to desirable consequences, contrary to popular belief. The main research question of this dissertation is as follows: How do young consumers operate on social media as both targets of influence and active agents?

Scholars have traditionally treated consumers from passive (e.g., manipulated by producers and advertisements) and active (e.g., motivated, sovereign, and demanding) perspectives (Gabriel & Lang, 2015; Schor, 2007; Wiedenhoft-Murphy, 2017). I acknowledge that this distinction between passive and active consumers is artificial in a theoretical sense because it is too simplistic. Individuals are likely to be both passive and active consumers from time to time; they can be manipulated or persuaded to buy a new expensive product today but participate in a boycott tomorrow. However, this dichotomy is helpful in a practical sense. The dichotomy illustrates how the sub-studies of this dissertation can be divided into a larger theoretical dichotomy (active agents vs. targets of influence), making it easier for the reader to understand how the sub-studies are related to each other. My definition of consumers as targets of influence and active agents is inspired by the dichotomy of passive agents versus active agents (see Wiedenhoft-Murphy, 2017) and reads as follows: when consumers are seen as targets of influence, their values, decisions, intentions, and attitudes are affected by different online and offline agents, such as peers, advertisers, and SMIs. In turn, active consumers are capable of using impression management tactics online (e.g., portraying themselves on social media with symbols related to high social status) or boycotting a company because of wrongdoings, illustrating their consumer power and sovereignty.

The literature on consumer research, especially in the social media context, can be divided, though somewhat arbitrarily, into two streams based on the aforementioned theoretical distinction in which consumers are primarily seen as

passive or active agents (Gabriel & Lang, 2015; Wiedenhoft-Murphy, 2017). One research stream considers consumers on social media from a passive point of view. For example, studies show how consumers' purchase intentions are affected by SMIs (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016 Schouten et al., 2020; Reinikainen, 2022) and online advertising (Balakrishnan et al., 2014; Ho Nguyen et al., 2022) and how peers can influence consumers' brand decisions (Hoyer et al., 2018). Research also suggests that social media usage is related to higher materialistic values among consumers (Hwang & Jeong, 2020; Kamal et al., 2013; Thoumrungroje, 2018), implying that social media transmits such values to users. Studies also suggest that social media usage is positively related to problematic consumer behavior, such as impulsive and compulsive buying (Aragoncillo & Orús, 2018; Pahlevan Sharif & Yeoh, 2018). Thus, the common denominator in this body of research is that it perceives consumers as somewhat suppressed and passive consumers whose decisions are heavily guided by external forces.

The second research stream, in turn, highlights consumers' active role in consumption. That is, consumers can participate in online or virtual brand communities, such as the Lego community, with other admirers of the brand (Habibi et al., 2014; Madupu & Cooley, 2010; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), and consumers are typically motivated to engage in such communities to be entertained and to share and receive information (Haverila et al., 2021). Consumers can also participate in online consumption communities based on their members' shared interests and knowledge of a particular consumption activity (Kozinets, 1999). For instance, Närvänen et al. (2013) studied a consumption community based on its members' interest in a low-carb diet. Moreover, research suggests that consumers buy digital items in virtual communities because such items assist in creating a preferred image of themselves online (self-presentation) (Belk, 1988; Kim et al., 2012; Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). Consumers can also utilize online reviews when considering a new purchase (Cheng & Ho, 2015), and they can participate in online boycotts to punish companies and organizations for their wrongdoings (Yousaf et al., 2021). For example, Finnish consumers expressed their boycott attitudes on social media toward a Finnish company Nokian Tires, which allegedly reported benefiting from the Russia–Ukraine war as other business competitors had left the country (Siltanen, 2022). Thus, this research stream highlights consumers' active agency in that consumers are capable of taking responsibility for collective things through boycotting and actively sharing their experiences in online consumption communities.

There are several reasons for this dissertation: the topicality of consumption as a theme because of climate change, for instance, and the lack of research in the specific areas in which I am interested. Today's controversial global situation makes consumption, in general, an interesting research topic, especially among young people who are the most active social media users (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). There is a common call for more sustainable consumption because of climate change. In some sense, young people can be seen as promised future

sustainable consumers. For instance, research suggests that Generation Z (born ca. 1997–2012) is more concerned about climate change issues than other generations (Tyson et al., 2021) and that younger consumers are more willing to pay more for green practices (Namkung & Jang, 2017). Young consumers also value products with sustainable features (Lago et al., 2020).

At the same time, when young consumers are more sustainable—perhaps, they are expected to be so—they are also seduced to consume more: companies spend an increasing amount of money on online advertising (Knoll, 2016; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013) while the influencer marketing market size (Statista, 2023) and the amount of money spent on social media advertising have grown steadily and are expected to grow further (Statista, 2022). Moreover, social media advertising (e.g., product promotion) is commonly targeted at young consumers (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018); thus, young consumers can barely use social media without encountering traditional advertisements or sponsored content by SMIs (Stubb & Colliander, 2019). In addition, given that young people are still developing their identities (Mannerström et al., 2019; Meeus, 2011), and they are more prone to social influence and especially peer influence (Croghan et al., 2006; Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010; Miles et al., 1998; Stok et al., 2016), it seems that they stand in a difficult position as consumers. They are expected to be sustainable consumers but are still exposed to adverts and other influential sources, such as peers who encourage them to consume more.

Studies show that social media might have direct and indirect negative effects on consumers' lives (and societies), but this research domain remains understudied. In their article "*The Dark Side of Social Media,*" Pellegrino et al. (2022) revealed that high-intensity social media users were more likely to buy compulsively and conspicuously (e.g., products with high status). Likewise, as mentioned earlier, it has been shown that Facebook and Instagram usage triggers impulsive buying (Aragoncillo & Orús, 2018), and excessive social media usage triggers compulsive buying (Pahlevan Sharif & Yeoh, 2018), which might lead to consumers' debt problems (Achtziger et al., 2015) that are already worryingly common among Finnish young people (Oksanen et al., 2016). Furthermore, social media usage has been linked to higher materialistic values (Kamal et al., 2013; Thoumrungroje, 2018). Research also suggests that following SMIs (e.g., YouTubers, bloggers, and Instagrammers) is connected to higher materialism (Lou & Kim, 2019). High materialism, in turn, is connected to multiple negative outcomes, such as decreased well-being (Dittmar et al., 2014) and lower life satisfaction (Lipovčan et al., 2015). In addition, people often evaluate other people with high materialistic values as selfish and self-centered (Shrum et al., 2014). Higher materialism may also lead to lower intentions to consume sustainably (Suárez et al., 2020). Therefore, it seems important to enhance our understanding of who and what type of influencers on social media can transmit materialistic values and purchase intentions to young consumers. However, even though materialistic values are typically connected to negative outcomes, it is not clear whether the outcomes of materialism are always negative. For instance,

Shrum et al. (2014) noted that when consumers face a self-threat (e.g., a threat to self-esteem), they can use consumption to restore or maintain their self-esteem.

Third, as mentioned earlier, consumers are active agents, as they collaborate with brands to develop the brands' products and services (Cheung et al., 2021). Consumers are also active collaborators in boycotts and other forms of activism (Kam & Deichert, 2020; Kyroglou & Henn, 2021), especially on social media (Yuksel et al., 2020). For instance, Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2014) illustrated how certain negative events such as the oil-spill catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico engendered a huge Facebook boycotting group against the BP company that was responsible for the oil spill. It is also likely that consumers are now better aware of different boycotts and the reasons behind them. For example, people with large networks are more likely to receive boycott invitations (Boulianne, 2015). Consumers can also start an effective boycott easier than before: one can tell their negative customer experience on social media with a tweet: *"I will never buy products from this company again."* That took 10 seconds to launch and probably reached a lot of consumers on social media. However, while consumers might be active boycotters and activists on social media, not enough research has paid attention to the antecedents of their boycotting decisions. Research suggests that many social groups, such as SMIs, can affect consumers' behavior (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Reinikainen et al., 2020), but the role of influencers as well as other different social groups (e.g., peers and idols) in young consumers' boycotting decisions remains unclear.

Fourth, SMIs play an essential role in consumers' lives. For instance, many studies have indicated that SMIs can affect their audiences' purchase intentions (De Jans et al., 2018; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Pöyry et al., 2019; Rinka & Pratt, 2018; Schouten et al., 2020; Stubb & Colliander, 2019) as well as actual behavior (Koay et al., 2021; Shamim & Islam, 2022; Xiang et al., 2016). Many of these studies have also specified that consumers' perceived parasocial interaction with an influencer is positively related to followers' higher purchase intentions toward products and services that influencers promote (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Xiang et al., 2016). Parasocial interaction refers to a viewer's illusion of having a face-to-face interaction or friendship with the influencer (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Parasocial interaction may increase the effectiveness of an influencer's message. For instance, Reinikainen et al. (2020) revealed that parasocial interaction enhanced the influencer's credibility, which subsequently increased brand trust and purchase intention. Influencers can also discourage their viewers from buying services and products. In fact, there is a rising trend on TikTok called "de-influencing," in which influencers tell their audiences what kinds of products and services they should avoid (Shadijanova, 2023). However, even though influencers can discourage their viewers, not enough studies have examined the role of parasocial interaction (PSI) when influencers discourage their audiences.

As the role of social media (e.g., YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram) in consumers' lives is a relatively new phenomenon (e.g., TikTok was launched in

2016), the role of social media in consumption is naturally, at least to some extent, an understudied area. Thus, researchers have much to do if they want to thoroughly understand the effects of social media on consumers and how consumers utilize social media in their everyday consumer actions. Therefore, what makes this study unique is that it comprehensively focuses on the interplay between young consumers and social media from opposite perspectives (active agents and targets of influence) using different methods within cross-cultural contexts. In addition, the novelty of this dissertation comes from the collaboration of different disciplines. That is, the sub-studies of this dissertation have been conducted in collaboration with researchers from the fields of sociology, marketing, communications, and psychology. Therefore, this study brings new ideas on how to approach young consumers in the social media context by applying theories from different fields of study. Furthermore, given that social media is changing constantly in the sense that new social media trends are taking place (Geyser, 2022), there is a growing need to keep the research field updated.

1.2 Aims, Structure, and Research Questions

This dissertation focuses on young consumers on social media by perceiving them as targets of influence and as influencers and active consumers. Thus, social media, young people, and consumption are recurring themes throughout this dissertation. This study addresses the aforementioned research gaps by responding to the research questions presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the articles and the research questions

Research question	Article	Theoretical viewpoint
RQ 0 . How do young consumers operate on social media as both targets of influence and active agents?	Unifying research question	Targets of influence vs. active agents
RQ 1. How is young consumers' following of social media influencers related to their consumer values and purchase intentions?	Article I	Consumers as targets of influence
RQ 2. What kinds of outcomes do young consumers' materialistic values and impression management have on social media?	Article II	Active consumers

RQ 3. Who and what shape young consumers' boycotting decisions, and what kinds of boycotting groups can be identified on that basis?	Article III	Active consumers
RQ 4. What is the role of PSI when an influencer encourages or discourages young consumers?	Article IV	Consumers as targets of influence

To address research question 1, I will examine the role of different SMIs (e.g., YouTubers, TikTok and Snapchat influencers) in transmitting materialistic values to young Finnish consumers and increasing their purchase intentions. To address research question 2, I will explore whether consumers' materialistic values and their status-seeking impression management activities on social media (e.g., posting luxury pictures) have positive outcomes in the social media context. To address research question 3, I will investigate what kinds of boycotting groups can be identified in Finland and the United Kingdom. These boycotting groups will be identified based on how the participants perceive that their prior boycotting decisions have been affected by different influential sources (e.g., peers, idols, and video bloggers). Lastly, I will address research question 4 by comparing the role of the audiences' perceived PSI with a social media micro-influencer (e.g., consumers' illusion of having a face-to-face interaction with an influencer) (Horton & Wohl, 1956) in audiences' decision to listen to a song when the influencer either recommends listening to it or discourages participants from listening to it. Research questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 will together address the larger unifying research question 0 (see Figure 1) by giving more detailed information about how young consumers operate on social media as both targets of influence and active consumers. Figure 1 illustrates how each sub-study in this dissertation relates to a certain research question and how the sub-studies are connected to the larger theoretical division (active consumers vs. targets of influence).

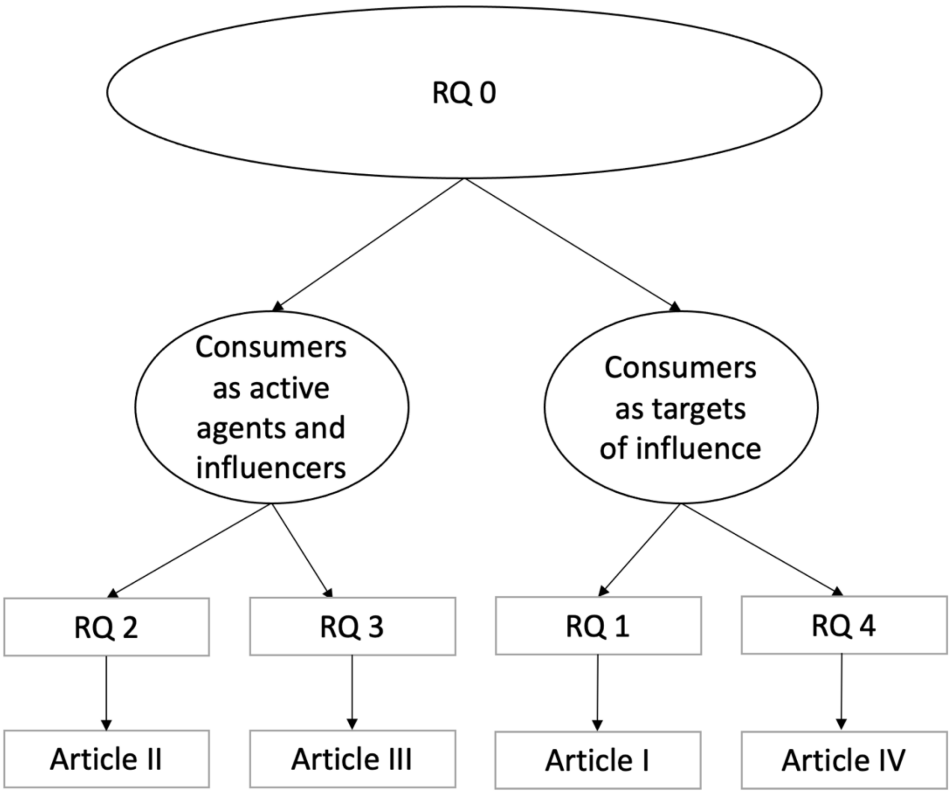

Figure 1. The Conceptual Model of this dissertation

By addressing the research questions, this dissertation enhances our theoretical and practical understanding of how young consumers are, at the same time, active consumers and targets of influence on social media. This study contributes to creating a better understanding of the role of social media in young consumers' lives, which has been, and still is, an understudied area. This study might also assist in understanding how to make consumers more sustainable. For instance, by revealing the influencers on social media who affect consumers' materialistic values and purchase intentions and by identifying influencers' persuasive techniques, such methods can be used for better purposes: to transmit more sustainable values and behavioral patterns to consumers. This dissertation can also enhance our understanding of how young consumers' materialistic values and their idealized online self-presentation, such as representing oneself on Instagram as richer than in reality, might also have positive outcomes. Likewise, by revealing boycotting groups in Finland and the United Kingdom, this study builds a better understanding of who affects young consumers' boycott decisions, which can be utilized further. For instance, if an activist organization wants to start a boycott, it can try to activate groups (e.g., video bloggers, idols, and campaigns) that can affect young consumers' boycotting decisions.

This study focuses on relatively young consumers (aged 15–35). The participants in this dissertation are from Finland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Moreover, although social media is the context of this dissertation, drawing a clear demarcation between online and offline media is not always necessary. For example, if the participants are asked to evaluate the extent to which their friends have influenced their purchase decisions, specifically on social media, it may be difficult for them to distinguish between the influence that occurred on social media and the influence that occurred in face-to-face situations. On the other hand, since social media is an inseparable part of young consumers' lives, one may ask whether it even makes sense to distinguish between online and offline influences.

The structure of this dissertation is as follows: Chapter 2 deals with consumer culture and consumption in general and discusses the consumer socialization (CS) process, social influence by social groups, and young consumers as a special consumer group. Chapter 3 more specifically deals with the history of the digitalization of consumption, the role of social media in consumption, SMIs, and their persuasion power, as well as social capital and online impression management. The purpose of Chapter 4 is to summarize the theories used and present clearly how these theories and theoretical concepts relate to each other. In that chapter, I will also consider these theories in light of the theoretical division used (i.e., targets of influence and active agents). In Chapter 5, I will present the rationale for the methodological choices and analysis methods used and justify my scientific-philosophical point of view in this chapter. In Chapter 6, I will present the empirical results based on the sub-studies and their underlying assumptions. In Chapter 7, I will summarize the main results of the dissertation and consider their relationship to prior research. In addition, I will consider the practical implications and limitations. This study used artificial intelligence software cautiously and mainly to assist in the exploration of potential references. For instance, I used the ChatGPT chatbot in some cases to find the most relevant and highly cited articles. Likewise, ChatGPT was helpful in detecting grammatical errors and typos. Lastly, the author made a significant contribution to the article-writing process. Table 2 summarizes the author's contribution to the research process of each article.

Table 2. The author's contribution to each article in this dissertation

Article name	Literature review	Design and data	Methods and results
Article 1. Modern-Day Socialization Agents: The Connection Between Social Media Influencers, Materialism, and Purchase intentions of Finnish Young People	Mainly responsible for reading and writing the literature review. However, the co-authors revised the text and gave valuable feedback.	Mainly responsible for designing the study. The co-authors also helped design the study. I also participated in data collection by formatting and creating a questionnaire.	Mainly responsible for reporting results and writing conclusions and theoretical contributions. Shared responsibility for interpreting the results and conducting the statistical analysis.
Article 2. The brighter side of materialism: Managing impressions on social media for higher social capital	Mainly responsible for reading and writing the literature review. However, the co-authors revised the text and gave valuable feedback.	Mainly responsible for designing the study. The co-authors also helped design the study. I also participated in data collection by formatting and creating a questionnaire.	Mainly responsible for reporting results and writing conclusions and theoretical contributions. Shared responsibility for interpreting the results and conducting the statistical analysis.
Article 3. Young consumers' boycotting profiles in the UK and Finland: A comparative analysis	Mainly responsible for reading and writing the literature review. The co-authors also suggested literature and revised the manuscript.	Mainly responsible for designing the study. The data were already collected, so I did not participate in the data collection in this study.	Mainly responsible for reporting results and writing conclusions and theoretical contributions. Shared responsibility for interpreting the results and conducting the statistical analysis.
Article 4. When does parasocial interaction make influencers more influential?	Mainly responsible for reading and writing the literature review. The co-authors also revised the manuscript and helped with the language editing.	Shared responsibility in designing the study and data collection.	Mainly responsible for reporting results and writing conclusions and theoretical contributions. Shared responsibility for interpreting the results and conducting the statistical analysis.

2 YOUNG PEOPLE AS CONSUMERS

In this section, I will focus on consumption from the viewpoint of young people. I will first discuss consumption and the different dimensions of consumption in general and then focus on consumer activism. Then, I will deal with young consumers, such as what makes them a unique consumer group and therefore worth studying. After that, I will consider young consumers' materialistic values and present the process of Consumer Socialization that has been used to explain how consumers adopt materialistic values from external sources. Then, I will analyze the role of social influence in young people's consumption, especially when social influence is exerted by significant reference groups, such as friends and families. However, it is worth noting that even though Chapter 3 deals with young consumers in the social media context more thoroughly, I will also focus on aspects related to social media in the present chapter since social media is a central part of this dissertation.

2.1 Consumption and consumer culture

Even though consumption has played a significant role in peoples' lives for a long time, it was difficult to find a clear definition of what consumption means. One reason for this might be the fact that consumption refers to multiple things. Bauman (2007) noted that if consumption is to be understood as a process of ingestion to egestion, the history of consumption reaches back to ancient times. In parallel, Aldridge (2003) mentioned that in history, the concepts of "consume" and "consumer" referred to the actions to use something up or to destroy something. However, Bauman (2007) argued that the revolution of consumption occurred when consumption was replaced with "consumerism," meaning that consumption started to play a central role in people's lives, and consumption became a meaning of life. Campbell (1995, p. 102) defined consumption as the process of selecting, buying, using, maintaining, repairing, and disposing. However, such a definition does not have much to say about the

symbolic and social values (e.g., conspicuous consumption) that commodities and consumption might have for consumers. Therefore, in his definition of consumption, Warde (2017, p. 5) proposed that consumption refers to the appropriation, appreciation, and acquisition of services and commodities. Instead of reducing consumption as a concept from a purely economic standpoint, he emphasized the importance of consumption to people and the social nature of consumption; for example, consumption can be used for social distinctions (see also Bourdieu, 1984). Thus, he underlined both aspects of consumption: everyday consumption (e.g., everyday routines) and conspicuous consumption (Warde, 2017).

Consumption is also closely connected to one's self and identity. For instance, titles such as "*We are what we buy*" (Cutright et al., 2013) and "*I shop, therefore I am*" (Kruger, 1990) tell the story of the interplay between consumption and the self. As Belk (1988) put it, our possessions reflect our identities. Consumers can also use brands and products to express themselves. For instance, Berger and Heath (2007) revealed that consumers are more likely to choose a product that is less owned by others (especially products related to one's identity) to express their identity to others. Belk (1988) noted that we cannot understand consumers' behaviors if we do not first understand what kind of meanings consumers attach to their possessions, and he ended up claiming that consumers are what they have. However, it seems that the centrality and significance of the possessions for one's self are easier to understand through the loss of possessions, as Belk (1988) suggested: as products are part of one's self, the loss of product leads to the loss of self. To summarize, consumption is a multifaceted phenomenon that includes not only buying, maintaining, and disposing but also social aspects such as self, identity, social distinction, and many other dimensions.

In this dissertation, when I refer to consumption, I not only refer to mundane consumption practices, such as buying products or shopping frequency, but also to aspects related to consumer culture, such as the values, status, and meanings attached to consumption practices (Lury, 2011, p. 11). Consumer culture does not have a widely accepted definition (Kravets et al., 2018, p. 1), though one of the most useful definitions is provided by Slater (2015), who stated that consumer culture is a centrality of consumption as well as the centrality and the role of consumer identity in individuals' social life, suggesting that individuals achieve social position and social status through consumption. In addition, Belk (2004) stated that consumer culture is not only about purchasing commodities but rather includes a social aspect such as status consumption and social competition. Thus, for instance, if one posts a picture on social media from a Michelin-rated restaurant, such a picture not only reflects the actual consumption practice (e.g., buying a dinner) but also the high social status attached to the restaurant.

It has been suggested that even though consumer culture is closely related to the concepts of materialism and consumerism, they should not be used interchangeably since consumer culture is a wider term that includes socioeconomic changes after the Second World War (Southerton, 2011). Lury

(2011) argued that consumer culture is 1) a vast amount of different types of goods accessible for consumers in the marketplace, 2) the commodification of different aspects of human lives such as education, 3) shopping as a leisure activity, 4) increasing numbers of consumption-related platforms (e.g., Amazon), 5) more places for shopping (e.g., shopping malls), 6) the rise of brands, and 7) the increase in the number of advertisements. The roots of consumer culture can be traced back to the industrialization and evolution of capitalism (18th and 19th centuries), while consumer culture gained an increasing foothold after the 1950s because high-status products were increasingly available for consumers; thus, people were able to use the symbolic value of such products to distinguish themselves from others (Southerton, 2011). However, Southerton (2011) also noted that several researchers have traced the roots of consumer culture as far back as the Renaissance era.

In general, social scientists became interested in consumption as a result of the rise of mass production of commodities in the United States and Western Europe between 1930–1960 (Warde, 2017). However, a remarkable turn in terms of consumption occurred during the 1970s, when scholars started to challenge the economists' and critical theory perspectives that considered consumers as passive targets and rational and self-interest actors with a perspective that underlined consumers' active agency and their emotions, desires, and lifestyle and highlighted consumption as a central part of consumers' lives (see "cultural turn") (Warde, 2017, pp. 40–47).

Scholars have used a variety of theoretical approaches to understanding consumption. Aldridge (2003) presented the following socially constructed archetypes of the consumer. First, economists typically see consumers as "the rational actor" who aims to pursue their own interests. Second, "the communicator" underlines the fact that consumers buy and use things to express themselves to others in a certain way through consumption. Third, "the victim" approach highlights that consumers can buy a broken car or make other mistakes. Fourth, "the dupe" approach stems from the Frankfurt School, which proposes that consumers are manipulated and controlled by market forces (Aldridge, 2003, pp. 16–23). In the same manner, Stillerman (2015) noted that the traditional "homo economicus" approach considers consumers as rational actors, and practice theorists argue that individuals' consumption practices are, to some extent, guided by their daily routines, while others have emphasized that consumption is a way to achieve social status (Stillerman, 2015). However, as consumption is a multidimensional phenomenon, Stillerman (2015) suggested that scholars should study consumption with multiple theoretical approaches instead of trying to explain consumption with a single approach. Therefore, this dissertation evaluates young consumers on social media from multiple perspectives (e.g., targets of influence and active agents) with different theoretical approaches and is not merely interested in buying commodities but also consumer values, consumption as an impression management strategy, consumers' decision making (behavior), and political consumption (boycotting).

2.2 Active consumers

A wide range of practices make consumers look active. Active consumers might respond to rising prices by restraining their purchases (Barda & Sardianou, 2010) or spend less money during the economic crisis (Wilska et al., 2020). Consumers may also make conscious purchases such that ecologically concerned consumers may prefer cars with zero emissions (Mills, 2008). It has been suggested that the rise of the Internet has presumably reinforced consumers' active roles in consumption. In their article entitled "*From Consumer Response to Active Consumer,*" Stewart and Pavlou (2002) proposed that the Internet changed the consumer–advertiser relationship such that consumers no longer merely responded to what marketers promoted and that consumers' roles in this relationship were reinforced. For example, the Internet has allowed consumers to seek more detailed information about products and to seek ideas from blogs on how to decorate their apartments (Heinonen, 2011). Consumers have also been able to spread negative information on social media based on their poor experiences with retailers (Balaji et al., 2016). Importantly, it seems that the Internet has allowed young consumers to be active in a novel way. For instance, in social media communities, it is easy for young people to start participating in boycotting campaigns and thereby take a stand toward unethical production and consumption (Cortés-Ramos et al., 2021). In fact, young consumers are also active in general. For instance, over 75% of respondents belonging to generation Z reported that they would avoid and spread negative information about companies whose campaigns they perceived as homophobic, macho, or racist (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

A common way consumers show their activity is through consumer boycotts. If consumers are disappointed with actions conducted by companies or organizations, they can actively show their dissatisfaction with the company through their consumer actions, such as writing a bad review, declaring their bad experiences to their friends, or boycotting the given company. Such consumer activity can be seen through the theoretical framework of political consumption. Political consumption refers to consumer behavior that aims to express political concerns (Shah et al., 2007; Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). More specifically, political consumption refers to the process in which people use their consumer power by buying or avoiding products and services for political reasons (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022). However, before discussing boycotts more thoroughly, it is important to note that boycotts should be distinguished from buycotts. Neilson (2010) illustrated this difference as follows: buycotts refer to consumers' actions that aim to reward a company for its actions (e.g., I buy products merely from this company because they share the same ethical values as me). Boycotts, in turn, refer to consumer actions that aim to punish companies for their wrongdoings (e.g., I avoid this company because of its usage of child labor). Additionally, buycotts and boycotts also differ from each other in terms of who participates in

them. Neilson (2010) showed that buycotters have higher social capital and higher trust in institutions and are more likely to be women than boycotters.

Boycotts that have actual goals are typically called "instrumental boycotts," while boycotts that aim to express consumers' dissatisfaction are called "expressive boycotts" (Friedman, 1999). Boycotts are perhaps the best-known forms of political consumption and have a long history. One famous boycott called "*the Boston tea party*" took place in 1773 in America in which American rebels dumped hundreds of boxes of British tea into the sea because Britons had put excessively high taxes on the tea (Glickman, 2009). Another example also illustrates the long history of boycotts. The free produce movement persuaded consumers to boycott commodities made by slaves in America in the 1820s (Glickman, 2009). A more recent example of a boycott comes from Finland, in which Finnish customers started to boycott Nokian Tires on social media because the company continued doing business in Russia after its cruel attack on Ukraine (Siltanen, 2022). Likewise, the famous beer company Anheuser-Busch, which owns large beer brands such as Bud Light, recently decided to collaborate with a transgender influencer, which caused boycotts among conservatives (Stewart, 2023).

Stolle and Micheletti (2013, pp. 27–45) proposed that since consumers no longer trust traditional political agents (e.g., government) to take responsibility for the things in their interest and do not consider traditional political participation forms appealing, consumers participate in politics through more individualized forms of actions (e.g., through boycotts). Not surprisingly, political consumption can occur on social and digital media because it allows for the fast diffusion of information and interaction between different agents (Copeland & Atkinson, 2016; Johnson et al., 2019). That is, on social media, people are increasingly asked to sign petitions to boycott (Yuksel et al., 2020). In addition, consumers can use tweets on Twitter for political consumption purposes (Johnson et al., 2019), and they can use social media to boycott tourism (Luo & Zhai, 2017; Yousaf et al., 2021) or brands (Liaukonyte et al., 2023), for instance. Albinsson and Perera (2012) concluded that digital and social media have revolutionized consumer activism because people have better access to all kinds of information thanks to digital media, and they can spread information rapidly on social media with one click on a button (Albinsson & Perera, 2012). To further illustrate the connection between political consumption and social media, studies suggest that the more consumers received information about boycotting and buycotting via online channels, the more likely they were to buycott and boycott (Kelm & Dohle, 2018). Additionally, reading and posting political information on social media were positively connected to higher boycotting (Boulianne, 2022).

As consumers actively participate in boycotts, the question remains as to how effective boycotts are in that to what extent they can negatively affect the company on target. The results appear to be mixed (e.g., Makarem & Jae, 2016). Some studies imply that boycotts are effective. For instance, a boycott that focused on environmental protection was successful as Heinz and Bumble Bee Seafoods agreed to the boycotters' demand to stop tuna fishing in a way that

killed dolphins (Friedman, 1999, p. 191). In addition, it has been shown that consumer boycotts are effective in decreasing companies' stock prices and, thus, companies' market values (Davidson et al., 1995; Pruitt & Friedman, 1986). Consumer boycotts can also decrease firms' profits (Tyran & Engelmann, 2005). However, other studies have suggested that boycotts do not have any effect on target firms (Koku, 2012; Koku, 2015). Likewise, Liaukonyte et al. (2023) showed that the boycott against Goya (Latin food brand that praised Donald Trump and caused a boycott) did not have a significant long-lasting effect on the firm's sales. Thus, to conclude, there seems to be no consensus on whether boycotts are effective.

Political consumption, however, is not only about boycotting. Stolle and Micheletti (2013) proposed that boycotts, buycotts, and discursive and lifestyle political consumerism are all forms of political consumption, while political consumption actions such as veganism can have characteristics of all of these forms (Jallinoja et al., 2019). It is also worth noting that despite its name, researchers suggest that political consumption is not necessarily closely related to traditional political participation but rather to lifestyle politics (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022; Koos, 2012) that refers to peoples' everyday decisions in their private lives (e.g., clothing) that might have political consequences (de Moor et al., 2017). Others have suggested that political consumption is more strongly related to civic engagement (e.g., attending discussions about neighborhood problems) than traditional political participation; thus, political consumption should not be associated solely with conventional politics but also with civic behavior (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014).

Research has detected an increasing trend in political consumption (Endres & Panagopoulous, 2017). For instance, there was a significant rise in boycotting behavior between 1975–1999 (Stolle et al., 2005). Political consumption is also quite common in general. According to the European Social Survey (2008), 30% of Finnish consumers stated that they had boycotted products during the last 12 months. In addition, a recent online survey by LendingTree revealed that 38% of Americans boycotted at least one company in 2020, and the major reason for this trend was their disagreement with the companies' political stances (Holmes, 2020). Likewise, Copeland and Boulianne (2022) argued that political consumption is an appealing way to affect politics all around the world.

Consumers have a variety of reasons for their boycotting decisions. Consumer boycotts between 1970–2000 in the United States were triggered by the quality of goods and high prices (Friedman, 1999). On the other hand, some consumers have boycotted a company because its owners were anti-abortion activists (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998). Relatedly, FIFA World Cup Qatar was heavily boycotted, mainly because of Qatar's human rights violations (Russel, 2022). Makarem and Jae (2016) also identified human rights issues, such as racism, as drivers for a boycott but also noted that corporate failures, such as poor customer service and corruption, can cause a boycott. Albrecht et al. (2013) found that if consumers perceived that the boycott was likely to succeed, they had higher intentions to participate in the boycott. Some consumers are also more

willing to participate in boycotts for self-enhancement reasons—that is, to impress others by doing the right and good things (Özer et al., 2022). Many reasons to boycott are also social. Consumers' perceived social norms (e.g., I am expected to participate) predicted higher intentions to boycott (Delistavrou et al., 2020; Farah & Newman, 2010; Garret, 1987; Klein et al., 2004). More specifically, Sen et al. (2001) noted that consumers might participate in boycotts not only because of the boycott's aims but also because the consumers want to comply with the boycotting group and, thus, be approved by that reference group (boycotting group). More recent studies have also shown how social influence affects consumers' boycotting behaviors (Zorell & Denk, 2021). Surprisingly, it has been argued that more research is needed to explore what drives young consumers' political consumption (Kyroglou & Henn, 2021).

We may ask whether young consumers who are active on social media are more active political consumers than older consumers. The results regarding age and political consumption are inconsistent. In terms of political participation, older people vote more often than younger people, but young people are more likely to participate in nonvoting activities, such as political participation, in Internet forums (Dalton, 2017). Likewise, Theocharis et al. (2019) revealed that digitally networked participation is the preferred form of political participation for young people.

2.3 Young people as consumers and targets of marketing

Young people have been considered potential consumers for a long time in history. For instance, the historical roots of children's consumer culture reaches as long back as the 19th century, while in the 1920s, children were increasingly seen as potential customers (Buckingham, 2011). The role of young consumers strengthened from the 1950s onwards, especially in Western countries, and reached an even more significant foothold as a consumer group during the 1990s and 2000s because of the enhanced educational level and increased leisure time (Wilska, 2017). Nowadays, young consumers form an ever-important consumer group (Ramzy et al., 2012; Wilska, 2017). Young consumers have a lot of purchase power (Wilska, 2017), and they can also affect their parents' consumption practices (Martin & Bush, 2000). The importance of young people as a consumer group can also be illustrated through the money invested in advertisements targeted at young people (Packer et al., 2022). In addition, the influencer marketing market size has grown vastly (Statista, 2022), and young people are the most active followers of SMIs (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Calvert (2008) argued that marketers have increasingly targeted young consumers (children in this case) because young people have more money than before (i.e., discretionary income), more influence on their parents' shopping behavior than before, and the media has allowed for more targeted advertising for young people. In that sense, it seems that young consumers are a more relevant target group for advertising and commercial power than ever before.

Young people can also be seen as a consumer generation that differs from other generations (Wilska, 2017). Mannheim's (1952) theory of generations suggests that generations are born when individuals within the same temporal and cultural locations share similar experiences and events. He also noted that individuals cannot be categorized into a certain generation simply by their date of birth; rather, individuals need to have experienced significant historical events (e.g., war) during their young adulthood (see also Schuk et al., 2020). Such experiences are typically quite enduring within a generation throughout their lives (Marjanen et al., 2019). It has been suggested that generational experiences and events may affect members' consumption values, orientations, and consumer behaviors (Wilska, 2004). For instance, consumers belonging to younger generations are more likely to cut off relationships with companies than consumers belonging to older generations (Ngobo et al., 2010). In addition, consumers from older generations are more likely to show positive attitudes toward shopping mall hygiene attributes, such as the cleanliness and safety of the mall, than younger generations (Jackson et al., 2011). Likewise, consumers belonging to older generations value higher in-store services than consumers belonging to younger generations (Parment, 2013). However, it is also notable that even younger generations, such as millennials (Generation Y) and Zoomers (Generation Z), differ in their consumption practices. For example, millennials have been described as adventure seekers (e.g., they will travel as much as possible) and as a consumer group whose purchase decisions are heavily influenced by their peers (Fromm & Garton, 2013), while Zoomers have been characterized as environmentally and ethically aware consumers who intend to consume in a sustainable way (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). Thus, the aforementioned literature efficiently describes how consumers of different generations vary in their consumption orientations, such as values, attitudes, and behaviors. Given that today's young consumers' young adulthood takes place during the current ecological and environmental crisis, it can be, as generation theory suggests, that such a crisis will shape their consumption patterns in a more sustainable direction.

However, what makes young consumers an interesting group to study? First, young people, in general, are susceptible to social influence. Research shows that peers can affect young people's drinking behaviors (Jamison & Myers, 2008) and that those participants who thought their peers would accept drink-walking had higher intentions to drink-walk in the future (Gannon et al., 2014). Furthermore, young participants had a greater intention to exercise a certain amount of time if they thought that their peers (i.e., the reference group) thought it was a good idea, but this was true only for those who strongly identified with the reference group (Terry & Hogg, 1996). It is noteworthy that social influence is closely related, if not a parallel concept, to peer pressure. That is, social influence refers to the process in which one intentionally or unintentionally influences or changes others' attitudes, values, and behaviors (Gass, 2015), while peer pressure refers to the process in which peers change individuals' attitudes,

values, and behaviors so that they are consistent with the source of influence (peers, in this case) (Hu et al., 2021).

In the consumption context, many studies have shown the impact of social influence and social norms on young and adult consumers' lives. For example, Banerjee (1992) argued that one of the most illustrative examples of social influence is when consumers choose restaurants and stores based on their popularity, implying that consumers follow what others are doing. Moreover, Li and Pavlou (2014) showed that social influence has a positive effect on young consumers' buying intentions. Social influence also plays a role in gambling and gaming in that social influence makes young people try new gambling activities (Sirola et al., 2021). Social influence can also affect people's eating behavior: relatively young participants ate more if they thought that other participants also ate more (Robinson & Field, 2015). Moreover, young consumers who perceived higher social influence from important others had higher intentions to use Internet banking (Bashir & Madhavaiah, 2014). It has been found that social norms (e.g., I am expected to use digital consumer innovations) increase the likelihood that consumers will use consumer digital innovations in the future (Vrain et al., 2022). Likewise, one study showed how young consumers who were exposed to social norms (e.g., others had bought eco-products) bought more eco-products than those who were not exposed to such norms (control group) (Demarque et al., 2015). Lee (2008) also noted that social influence best predicts green consumer behavior among young consumers. Moreover, as young people are more susceptible to social influence (Stok et al., 2016), it presumably has a more important role in young consumers' lives than older consumers' lives.

Second, young consumers are the most active group on social media (Auxier & Anderson, 2021), resulting in several potential challenges. Consumption is strongly related to young consumers' identities and self-perceptions (Belk, 1988; Wilska & Lintonen, 2017). When young people consider their status or position as consumers, they tend to compare themselves and their possessions to others (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Since many young people on social media perform impression management (Ellison et al., 2011; Michikyan et al., 2014), such as showing only the best parts of their lives (e.g., luxury cars and trips), young consumers might obtain unrealistic pictures of what kind of consumers they should be by observing such a perfect consumer lifestyle. For instance, according to a recent Bankrate survey, 46% of US participants belonging to Generation Z reported that they had posted something on social media that made them look successful (Foster & Wisniewski, 2022). Likewise, Hoffower (2019) provocatively argued that Instagram has become an arena for millennials to show off the wealth they do not have. In addition to young consumers being presumably exposed to unrealistic and materialistic content on social media, companies have also shifted their advertising focus to social media (Calvert, 2008; Goldfarb, 2014; Voorveld et al., 2018); thus, young consumers are constantly exposed to advertisements when using their smartphones or computers, which might lead to impulsive buying (Deshpande et al., 2022), or higher materialistic values (Jiang & Chia, 2009). On the other hand, it is interesting that social media

can also nudge consumers in a more sustainable direction. Sustainable consumption styles are disseminated on social media (Strähle & Graff, 2017), consumers' green purchase intentions are guided by their online social groups (e.g., peers) (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018), and SMIs can also promote sustainable consumption styles (Jacobson & Harrison, 2022). Either way, considering the aforementioned facts, social media is one factor that makes young consumers an interesting group to study.

Third, young people build and express their identities (Årseth et al., 2009; Erikson, 1968; Klimstra et al., 2010; Mannerström et al., 2019), and it is well acknowledged that consumption contributes to consumers' self-concept and identity formation (Belk, 1988; Miles, 2003, p. 173; Wilska et al., 2023). For example, interviewees revealed how the participants' loved objects, such as antiques and cigarette boxes, supported their identities (Ahuvia, 2005). In addition, many consumers use clothing to present their inner selves and identities (Niinimäki, 2010). Thus, it is especially interesting to discover how young people represent their identities and self-concepts on different social media applications through consumer symbols (e.g., luxury products and travel pictures) because social media provides users with new possibilities for self-presentation (Baumeister & Bushman, 2016). However, researchers have not reached a consensus as to whether people are showing their authentic or idealized selves on social media (Schlosser, 2020).

2.3.1 Are young people materialistic consumers?

In his book entitled *The Material Child- Growing up in Consumer Culture,* Buckingham (2011) argued that children have become increasingly potential consumers and that companies use a variety of strategies to reach them and target their advertising toward children while the products and services targeted to children have also expanded rapidly. At the same time, many studies have suggested that materialism has been on the rise, especially among young consumers in today's consumer societies (Dittmar et al., 2014; Vandana & Lenka, 2014; Masoom et al., 2017). To illustrate this trend, Twenge and Kasser (2013) showed that 12th graders from younger generations (millennials) showed higher materialistic orientations compared to 12th graders from older generations (boomers).

Materialism refers to three-dimensional consumer value, including the essential role of possessions in life (e.g., commodities are the central part of life), possessions as a source of happiness (e.g., commodities bring happiness), and possessions as an indicator of success (e.g., one's own and others' success in life can be reduced to their possessions) (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Richins (2010) provided a more concise definition of materialism as a consumer's tendency to place high importance on commodities and possessions. In the same way, Belk (1984) defined materialism as a consumer's tendency to attach a lot of importance to commodities and possessions. Consumers with high materialistic values are prone to think that acquiring material possessions is a way to achieve important goals in their lives (Richins, 2010). However, it is noteworthy that consumers

cannot be categorized into non-materialist and materialist groups because materialism is a continuous scale ranging from low to high (Richins, 2010). It is also notable that some scholars have used the concept of materialism to refer to societies in which individuals tend to highlight materialistic values (e.g., the United States) (Srikant, 2013). However, in this dissertation, I refer to materialism as a three-dimensional consumer value, as Richins and Dawson (1992) suggested, instead of a larger societal perspective.

Materialism can be perceived in multiple ways. Larsen et al. (1999) presented four perspectives for understanding materialism: 1) The first aspect states that materialism is innate and good (e.g., materialism is understandable because people have a natural tendency to value possessions, and because possessions cause pleasure, people should enjoy them). 2) The second aspect states that materialism is innate and bad (e.g., people born with a tendency to gain possessions, but this tendency is condemned). 3) The third aspect states that materialism is acquired and good (e.g., it is good when people want to accumulate things because it creates pleasure for themselves and the whole society). 4) The fourth aspect implies that materialism is acquired and bad (e.g., people do not naturally appreciate materials, but capitalism makes people believe that materials bring happiness that subsequently results in unsustainability). It is also interesting that while people with high materialistic values are prone to think that material possessions bring happiness, studies have shown that spending on experiences makes people happier than spending on material possessions (Van Boven, 2005; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003).

Materialism can have both positive and negative outcomes, even though fewer studies have focused on positive outcomes. For instance, on a societal level, materialism creates higher wealth and high-paid jobs that benefit the whole society, while materialism also yields environmental problems, less social capital, higher shoplifting, and produces individuals without inner purpose (Larsen et al., 1999). Prior studies have also linked materialism to depression, anxiety (Shrum et al., 2014), increased shopping time, and lower environmentalism (Segev et al., 2015). Scholars have also noted that higher materialism is related to lower subjective well-being (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2022), reduced happiness, and lower vitality (Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002). Even though some studies have been more optimistic about materialism, to the best of my knowledge, the majority of studies have highlighted its negative outcomes. Kasser (2002) presented in his book entitled *The High Price of Materialism* how materialism is associated with lower life satisfaction, lower personal well-being, and lower psychological health. He argued that materialism occurs when consumers' basic needs (e.g., security) are not satisfied; when people feel insecure, they think they can buy security to satisfy such basic needs. Materialism has also been connected to compulsive buying (Ridgway et al., 2008), financial worries, and higher spending tendencies (Garðarsdóttir & Dittmar, 2012). People with high materialistic values have more credit cards than people with low materialistic values, and people with high materialistic values have higher money-spending tendencies (Watson, 2003).

Even though materialism is an interesting concept in terms of all age groups, it is especially interesting among young people, given that materialism has many negative outcomes that they might carry throughout their lives. For instance, Goldberg et al. (2003) suggested that if young people's materialism leads to increased unhappiness, society should consider actions to address this concern. They argued that because young people's adopted materialistic values affect the balance of public (e.g., spending on public goods) and private choices (e.g., private spending) throughout their lives, materialism among young people remains worth studying. Their (Goldberg et al., 2003) findings showed that more materialistic young people were less likely to have savings and had a higher shopping frequency than their non-materialistic counterparts, although they did not find a negative connection between materialism and happiness. Richins (2017) argued that peers can influence young consumers' materialistic values because social interactions with materialistic peers might bolster each other's materialistic values and tendencies. Richins (2017) concluded that because materialism has many negative outcomes, there is a general interest in diminishing consumers' values. In addition, given that she noted that materialism is mostly a learned value, the question remains: Where and how do consumers absorb such values?

2.3.2 Becoming a consumer—consumer socialization

Consumer socialization (CS) is a theoretical approach to understanding how young consumers learn values, attitudes, and behaviors from external sources. Thus, for instance, the socialization process can be used to explain how young people learn materialistic values. Therefore, CS depicts young consumers' roles as targets of influence by different socialization agents. CS is a process in which young consumers learn consumer-related values and attitudes from socialization agents, such as family and peers (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). In practice, it has been suggested that young consumers learn about money and products by shopping with their parents (Ozgen et al., 2006). Interestingly, while childhood is a key period for people to learn consumer values, behaviors, and attitudes (Roedder John, 1999), the process typically lasts for a lifetime, as older people also learn new consumer roles (De Gregorio & Sung, 2010). The socialization process includes three learning mechanisms: 1) modeling (e.g., children imitate their parents' behavior), 2) reinforcement (e.g., young consumers learn to repeat the behavior that they have been rewarded for), and 3) social interaction (e.g., parents' or peers' expectations affect consumers' values and attitudes such that frugality is preferred) (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). The socialization process also includes antecedents, such as family size and gender, that might affect learning outcomes (e.g., males were more likely to learn materialistic values) (De Gregorio & Sung, 2010; Moschis & Churchill, 1978).

Even though Moschis and Churchill (1978) considered whether CS is a combination of the social learning process (Bandura) and the cognitive development process (Piaget), they concluded that the CS process is first and foremost based on Bandura's (1971) theory of social learning. However, they did not argue that cognitive development does not matter but proposed that the

cognitive approach is more suitable for explaining the development of young people's consumer knowledge and their development to act as a consumer, while the social learning perspective better explains the development of values and attitudes (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). Thus, cognitive development should not be ignored in this process because it also plays a key role in CS: as young people get older, their cognitive capabilities improve; thus, enhanced cognitive capability improves their consumer skills (John, 1999). John (1999) presented three socialization periods: 1) perceptual stage (aged 3–7), when consumers are one dimensional and self-centered with only a little understanding of the existence of stores for instance, and their decision-making is based on a limited amount of information, 2) analytical stage (aged 7–11), when perceptual concrete thinking is replaced by more symbolic and abstract thinking, and consumers are more thoughtful and more capable to process information and thus have enhanced understanding of the marketplace, and 3) reflective stage (aged 11–16), when consumers have better information processing skills than in earlier stages, and they become more susceptible to social influence (e.g., others' opinions become important) (John, 1999). Older kids seek more information before purchasing decisions, and when consumers of different ages were asked the reason for the price of a product, younger kids (preschoolers) explained the reason for a price with visible and concrete features (e.g., size), whereas older kids (13-year-olds) were able to explain with more abstract features, such as the higher quality of the product (John, 1999).

Research suggests that consumers learn materialistic values through the socialization process (Benmoyal-Bouzaglo & Moschis, 2010; Moschis et al., 2009; Nguyen et al., 2009). That is, research has suggested that communication with peers about consumption (social interaction) is related to increased materialism (Churchill & Moschis, 1979) and that adolescents can obtain materialistic values from their mothers (Flouri, 1999). More specifically, Richins and Chaplin (2015) interestingly showed how parents who had warm relationships with their children were more inclined to reward their children with materials (e.g., rewarded good grades with money or products), which subsequently made their children more materialistic. Today, as people increasingly use social media and commonly interact with peers, families, and SMIs on social media, it seems that the socialization process has also moved online. For example, peer communication about consumption via the Internet has been found to be related to consumer behavior (Lueg et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2012). In addition, the findings that social media usage (Hwang & Jeong, 2020; Kamal et al., 2013; Thoumrungroje, 2018) and following SMIs (Lou & Kim, 2019) are related to higher materialism can be seen as a part of the CS process.

In terms of outcomes other than materialistic, Mishra et al. (2018) drew on the socialization perspective and showed how media, peers, and family can positively affect young people's technological readiness. Chinchanachokchai and Gregorio (2020) also used socialization theory in the social media context and showed that consumers who were susceptible to social media influence (e.g., I buy products that are promoted on social media) had more favorable attitudes

toward social media platform advertising. Likewise, Hill and Beatty (2011) noted that there is a need to update the CS process to incorporate the Internet as a socialization agent. Furthermore, Thaichon (2017) proposed that social media and the Internet are important socialization agents for young consumers and showed, for instance, how one participant reported that his purchase decisions were largely influenced by Justin Bieber's Facebook images. In fact, some scholars have considered SMIs to be today's socialization agents from whom consumers learn values, attitudes, and behavioral patterns (Nafees et al., 2021).

2.3.3 Social influence and reference groups

In consumer studies, it is well established that social groups, such as peers, family, celebrities, and SMIs, can affect young consumers' decisions about what to buy, what to avoid, and what kinds of brands they prefer (Mangleburg et al., 2004). Such influence is referred to as social influence, which highlights young consumers' role as targets of influence. Baumeister and Bushman (2016) distinguished between two types of social influence: 1) Normative social influence occurs when a consumer buys a particular brand or boycotts certain companies because they think their peers, for instance, expect them to do so and thus conform with their expectations to be liked and accepted. 2) Informational social influence occurs when a consumer, for instance, buys a product based on others' opinions because they believe others know more about the given product than they do (Baumeister & Bushman, 2016, pp. 260–262; Deutsch & Gerard 1955; Shepherd et al., 2011). In the same manner, scholars have also differentiated between descriptive and injunctive social norms: descriptive norms tell consumers what is commonly done in a certain situation, and consumers are typically motivated to follow such norms because acting in a common way can be effective (e.g., "if others do this, this must be a good idea") (Cialdini et al., 1991). In turn, injunctive norms guide consumers' behavior by telling them what they should do, and consumers are typically motivated to follow injunctive forms in fear of social sanctions (Cialdini et al., 1991; Goldstein & Cialdini, 2009).

Social influence is also closely related to the concept of conformity. The classical social psychology experiment by Asch (1955) showed how participants made incorrect judgments under social pressure: a group of individuals were in the same room and were first shown a paper with a black line and subsequently a second paper with three lines. Then, the participants needed to judge which of the three lines on the second paper matched the line they saw on the first paper. The participants did not know that other members of the group were instructed to give, occasionally, incorrect judgments to see how they affected the participants' judgments. They found that when other group members gave an incorrect judgment, such group pressure affected the participants in such a way that they often conformed to the group and ended up giving an incorrect judgment. This experiment might also explain why consumers sometimes buy products in the presence of others that they end up not liking: group pressure may lead them to make incorrect decisions.

The groups that can exert social influence (e.g., peers) on consumers are called reference groups. The effects of reference groups on young people are especially interesting since young consumers are more susceptible to social influence (Stok et al., 2016), even though older adolescents show higher peer influence resistance than younger ones (Sumter et al., 2009). For instance, a systematic review showed robust evidence of how peers influence young people's alcohol consumption (Leung et al., 2014). Likewise, Harakeh and Vollebergh (2012) found that peers affect (passively) young people's smoking habits but noted that peers do not necessarily pressure young people to smoke; rather, young people imitate others' smoking.

Hyman (1942) originally coined the concept of the reference group, while Merton (1968) later extended the discussion by focusing on the connection between the reference group and relative deprivation in the context of "American soldier." He thought that deprivation arose from the reference group comparison. For instance, Merton (1968, p. 283) noted that when soldiers are drafted, a married soldier feels deprived when compared to his unmarried counterpart because he has much more to lose (e.g., family). A reference group can be an individual or group that influences consumers' behaviors (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Brinberg & Plimpton, 1986; Schulz, 2015). Typically, scholars have identified three reference groups: membership groups are groups we belong to, such as peers and gender; aspirational groups are groups we would like to be part of and to which we identify; and dissociative groups, which we do not want to be associated with (White & Dahl, 2006). The reference groups can be further divided into two categories according to their degree of contact: primary (face-to-face contact) and secondary (no direct contact) (Hoyer et al., 2018).

Research has repeatedly shown what kind of impact reference groups can have on consumers. For instance, neighbors have been shown to influence peoples' car-buying decisions (Grinblatt et al., 2007). Likewise, participants who were informed that their peers chose sustainable products were also more likely to choose sustainable products (Salazar et al., 2013). In addition, Johnstone and Hooper (2016) showed how consumers' green consumption behavior is affected by others. Furthermore, research suggests that peers and families can have a positive impact on consumers' sustainable consumption (Lazaric et al., 2020). With respect to young consumers, research has proposed that friends can reduce young consumers' energy consumption through social influence (Jain et al., 2013). Moreover, social influence by important others (e.g., friends and family) predicted young people's higher intentions to use Internet banking (Bashir & Madhavaiah, 2014), and social influence by friends was also the strongest predictor of young consumers' green purchasing behavior (Lee, 2008).

Relatedly, studies have also shown how social norms guide consumers' behaviors, even if the reference group in these cases is not necessarily concrete and clear. Studies have also suggested that young people's intentions and behaviors are especially influenced by the perceived social norms of their peers (Lally et al., 2011; Sierksma, 2014; Silke et al., 2017). To illustrate how social norms affect people, Cialdini et al. (1991) showed that consumers were less likely to litter

when the room was clean (injunctive norm that confronted littering) than when it was already littered (descriptive norm that favored littering). Likewise, Goldstein et al. (2008) illustrated in their experiment how hotel guests reused the towels more often if they were shown a sign, which indicated that other hotel guests were also doing so (descriptive social norm). Furthermore, even though it might be intuitive to jump to the conclusion that injunctive norms are always more powerful than descriptive norms, this is not always the case. For instance, Melnyk et al. (2022) provided compelling evidence in their recent meta-analysis that social norms indeed affect consumers' behaviors but specified that descriptive norms were more effective than injunctive norms because injunctive norms can trigger reactance. Reactance theory suggests that when people perceive that their freedom is under threat (e.g., an injunctive norm), they will behave in the opposite way to resist that influence (Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Steindl et al., 2015; Van Petegem et al., 2015). For instance, if consumers perceive that a sales agent is too pushy, they might feel that their freedom is under threat and leave the store immediately to restore their freedom.

Along with the rise of social media, many relevant reference groups and thus the sources of social influence, such as peers, social media campaigns, SMIs such as videobloggers, and brands, have shown up in social media. Such reference groups have a significant impact on consumer behavior. For instance, it is well documented that SMIs can affect their audiences' (Ladhari et al., 2020) and young audiences' (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Reinikainen et al., 2020) purchase intentions. Likewise, Chen et al. (2021) showed how YouTube celebrities can affect their relatively young followers' purchase behaviors. Furthermore, Wang et al. (2012) revealed that consumption-related peer communication on social media was positively related to consumers' more positive product attitudes, which were subsequently indirectly related to higher purchase intentions. Likewise, it has been shown that peers can positively affect consumers' trust in fashion brands through online peer communication (Harrigan et al., 2021).

3 YOUNG CONSUMERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In this section, I will emphasize the role of social media in young consumers' lives more than in the previous section. I will start by describing how consumption became digitalized at the turn of the 21st century and then proceed to illustrate more current themes, such as how persuasive SMIs are taking place in consumers' lives and how certain consumption values, such as materialism, are cultivated on social media. Furthermore, I will also focus on young peoples' online impression management and social capital in its traditional and online forms.

3.1 Digitalization of consumption

Around the turn of the millennium, digitalization started to play an increasing role in people's lives in general. For instance, Turkle (1997) argued in her famous book *Life on the Screen* that people learn how to live within virtual worlds (e.g., through games) and demonstrated how people have virtual boyfriends and girlfriends and how computer games provide people with possibilities to express their multiple selves and to try different identities. It seems that many scholars have been particularly interested in the relationship between young people and digitalization. To illustrate, digital terms were attached to the names of the younger generations, such as the Net generation (Tapscott, 1997), Nintendo generation (Green et al., 1998), e-generation (Wilska & Kuoppamäki, 2017), and MTV generation (Guzdial & Soloway, 2002), which highlight the centrality of digitalization in these young people's lives. Notably, such digital generations were occasionally also filled with negative tones. For instance, young people who were growing up surrounded by digital media were called the Net generation (born 1977–1997), and this generation was typically described with negative characteristics, such as a selfish, money-oriented, and cynical generation without social values (Tapscott, 1997). However, some scholars were more pessimistic about the digitalization trend than others. For instance, it has been suggested that video games, especially those targeted at boys, produce gender-stereotypical

images, such as masculinity (e.g., violence) (Alloway & Gilbert, 1998). In terms of video games, an article entitled *"Is Mr. Pac-Man Eating Our Children"* by Emes (1997) concluded that video games can have both negative and positive effects on children. Gillard et al. (1998) showed some optimism toward digitalization, as they found that young people tended to use mobile phones to communicate with peers, in contrast to the belief that mobile phones make young people isolated (Gillard et al., 1998). To support this optimistic stance, Wilska and Kuoppamäki (2017) concluded that many researchers thought that if young people are constantly exposed to information and communications technology (ICT), they are more ready for digital environments.

Importantly, digitalization also took place in consumption and consumers' lives during the 1990s and 2000s. Wilska (2017) argued that new technologies (ICT) during the 1990s and 2000s made young people more relevant and important as a consumer group. People increasingly started to buy digitalization-related goods, such as ICT items, in Finland in the 1990s (Wilska, 2003). It is also notable that while ICT items provided consumers with new possibilities to reach out to new consumable items, ICT goods were also consumable items (Wilska & Kuoppamäki, 2017). Digitalized consumption can be defined as a concept illustrating how digital devices (e.g., smartphones and computers) change the ways people consume (Ryynänen et al., 2018). For instance, today, consumers are able to buy their daily products with smartphones, send and receive money via online banking applications, and write product reviews with smartphones (Cochoy et al., 2017).

It has been suggested that digital consumption, such as online retail, has developed over the past 50 years (Ruckenstein, 2017). However, the more specific turning point of the digitalization of consumption is somewhere between the 1990s–2000s. At the beginning of the 21st century, digitalization started to play a role in consumption, especially among young Finnish consumers. For instance, Wilska (2003) found that young consumers' consumption styles corresponded with their mobile phone use: consumers who used phones more frugally also had more frugal consumption styles. Likewise, at the same time, the famous virtual consumption game "*Habbo Hotel*" gained huge popularity among young consumers in different countries (Lehdonvirta et al., 2009). In this game, users were able to buy virtual goods (e.g., different types of furniture) with real money and then exchange these virtual goods with other players. Virtual consumption games allowed young consumers to carry out their luxury fantasies, such as driving with a luxury car (Molesworth & Denegri-Knott, 2012), which were not necessarily possible in the real world. Likewise, in Habbo Hotel, players were able to decorate their own room in a way they could not afford in real life. Several studies have also dated signs of the digitalization of consumption to the 1990s. The first recommendation systems (i.e., the system recommends a product to consumers based on their previous actions) took place in the 1990s (Vayre et al., 2017), and marketing also started to digitalize during that time (Sjöblom et al., 2017). Likewise, as people increasingly started to use the Internet during the 1990s, retailers moved to the Internet (Lehdonvirta, 2012). Lehdonvirta (2012)

argued that the first digital consumers took place in the 1990s, when consumers started to distribute information about digital goods (e.g., music and movies) with digital technologies.

Along with digitalization development, consumers were seen to have new characteristics. Tapscott (1997) characterized the young consumers who belonged to the Net generation as follows: 1) they require and want a lot of choices because they have grown up in a free and digital world, 2) they want highly customized products (e.g., product upgrades), and such products are to be made to fulfill their needs and expectations, 3) these consumers change their minds often, 4) these consumers try products before they buy them; thus, firms should provide free trials for them, and 5) they appreciate the fact that something works; they do not care about the technology per se.

Today, social media plays an ever-increasing role in consumers' lives. A Finnish fashion researcher Annamari Vänskä argued in a recent news article that social media encourages young consumers to acquire new goods constantly and that social media represents the idea that it is normal to buy clothes worth hundreds of euros all the time (Launis, 2023). Social media refers to a group of applications (e.g., YouTube and Facebook) that are based on Web 2.0 and allow for user-generated content (e.g., images by users on social media) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In this dissertation, I refer to social media as social media platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitch, LinkedIn, or other platforms, websites, and communities that have interactive features. By interactive features, I mean that users on such platforms or websites can share their content (e.g., thoughts, videos, and images) with other users online and offline.

Young people are especially active on social media. For instance, 35 % of US teens reported that they use YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, or Snapchat almost constantly (Vogels et al., 2023). Likewise, nearly all young Finnish people watched YouTube videos in 2020 (Kohvakka & Saarenmaa, 2019). Some people also use social media addictively (Sun & Zhang, 2021). A more recent report revealed that one in five US teens used YouTube almost constantly, while over half of the teens reported that it would be hard to stop using social media (Vogels et al., 2022). They also noted that while YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram are currently the most popular platforms among US teens, Facebook lost its popularity between 2014 and 2022.

Social media allows companies to interact with customers and customers to interact with other customers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Companies have created and invested in social media brand communities to establish strong, long-lasting relationships with their customers (Baldus et al., 2015). Such brand communities have been shown to lead to higher consumer purchases (Goh et al., 2013). Social media also allows consumers to carry out their active roles. Consumers can interact within brand communities (Brogi, 2014) and ask questions of others, while some consumers are motivated to engage in brand communities because they want to share their love and passion for brands with other members (Sung et al., 2010; Van Heerden & Wiese, 2021). Consumers can

also utilize social media to gain more information about new products and brands (Alshaer et al., 2020). In addition, social media allow consumers to watch product-review videos (e.g., Unbox Therapy) on YouTube (Fitriani, 2020) before their purchase decisions (see also Bronner & De Hoo, 2014), and it has been shown that online reviews can affect consumers' purchase intentions (Park et al., 2007). Consumers can also boycott through social media (Dynel & Massimo Poppi, 2021) because of bad customer service or pricing issues (Makarem & Jae, 2016). From a viewpoint that underlines young consumers' role as targets of influence, prior research has shown how SMIs affect consumers' purchase intentions (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Schouten et al., 2020; Trivedi & Sama, 2020). Likewise, online advertising has been shown to have an impact on consumers' purchase intentions (Balakrishnan et al., 2014; Ho Nguyen et al., 2022). Several studies have also indicated that consumers' social media use is positively associated with consumers' higher materialistic values (Hwang & Jeong, 2020; Kamal et al., 2013; Thoumrungroje, 2018) and that social media usage can lead to impulsive buying (Aragoncillo & Orús, 2018).

3.2 Social media influencers

One way to demonstrate how young consumers can be seen as targets of influence is by showing how SMIs affect young consumers' consumption practices. SMIs play a remarkable role in young consumers' lives, and young consumers are the most active followers of such influencers. For instance, according to a recent report, within the comparison of generations, participants of generation Z followed celebrities and influencers more actively than other generations (Buckle & Moran, 2022). One of the factors that explains influencers' robust role in consumers' lives is their ability to create hype over certain products. For example, according to recent news, famous SMIs Paul Logan and KSI made a "prime" sports drink famous in many countries by promoting it on social media, and its popularity has recently skyrocketed (Pandey, 2023).

SMIs are individuals who brand themselves on social media and who have followers they can entertain, whose attitudes and behaviors they can affect (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). Freberg et al. (2011), in turn, defined SMIs as independent endorses who shape their audiences' attitudes through social media. SMIs have also been defined as opinion leaders who mainly operate on social media, who collaborate with firms to monetize their roles as opinion leaders, and who try to create strong relationships with their followers (Suuronen et al., 2022). The arrival of SMIs undoubtedly parallels what Turner (2010) referred to as a demotic turn: "increased participation of ordinary people in the media" (p. 6). He noted that the Big Brother television show was a way for ordinary people to achieve fame and publicity. Likewise, SMIs are typically ordinary citizens (though they can also be celebrities) who successfully reach followers' awareness by performing on social media. There are different types of influencers: 1) influencers with over 1 million followers are typically considered celebrity or

mega influencers, 2) influencers with 100,000–1 million followers are defined as macro-influencers, 3) influencers with 10,000–100,000 followers are referred to as micro-influencers, and 4) influencers with less than 10,000 followers are considered nano-influencers (Park et al., 2021).

Given that the influencer marketing industry has risen steadily (Santora, 2023), it implies that organizations spend a lot of money on influencer collaboration (Santora, 2023) because influencers can be used as strategic partners to reach special consumer groups, such as teenagers (Enke & Borchers, 2019). Therefore, where brands have used influencers to promote their products in the hope of increased sales (Jin et al., 2019), public organizations, such as the Finnish Prime Minister's office, have used influencers to spread reliable information about the COVID-19 pandemic (Pöyry et al., 2022). In its simplest form, the influencer–brand collaboration works as follows: the influencer promotes a company's products or services on social media for financial compensation (Reinikainen, 2022).

From a critical point of view, some charismatic SMIs can also persuade their audiences to make hazardous decisions or promote unhealthy behavior, such as consuming unhealthy food (Alruwaily et al., 2020). Weber (1978/1921, p. 241–242) referred to charisma as an individual's particular type of personality that is not available to everyone, and its possessor is perceived as an exceptional and supernatural individual. Weber (1978/1921, pp. 1112–1120) noted that charismatic leaders such as heroes presented their gifted charisma to their followers and used their authority based on their charisma. He argued that charismatic leaders can only obtain their authority by demonstrating their forces in reality. As Weber (1978/1921) put it, "He must perform heroic deeds if he wants to be a warlord" (p. 1114). However, Weber (1978/1921) pointed out that because of the vulnerable and volatile nature of charismatic authority, a person can lose charisma, resulting in followers abandoning the charismatic person (p. 1114). In parallel with Weber's (1978/1921) theory of charismatic authority, SMIs can be seen as archetypes of charismatic leaders. They constantly advise their followers on what they should and should not do. In addition, the role of influencer is not suitable for everyone but rather for gifted individuals. Furthermore, charismatic influencers can acquire their authority by proving their capability to their followers by presenting, for example, their expertise on social media. Furthermore, influencers can also lose their charisma on social networking sites (SNS), resulting in people starting to unfollow such influencers.

SMIs are effective persuaders. Many studies have shown that influencers can increase their audiences' purchase intentions (De Jans et al., 2018; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Pöyry et al., 2019; Rinka & Pratt, 2018; Schouten et al., 2020; Stubb & Colliander, 2019). Studies also show that influencers can affect their audiences' actual consumer behavior, such as impulsive buying (Zafar et al., 2021), and influencers can persuade their followers to make actual purchases (Croes & Bartels, 2021). They can also shape their followers' brand attitudes (Nafees et al., 2021), while few studies have

indicated that following SMIs is related to higher materialism (Lou & Kim, 2019). Notably, influencers also appear to be more effective persuaders than typical celebrities. Studies have revealed that SMIs are more trustworthy (Jin et al., 2019), identifiable (Schouten et al., 2020), powerful, and credible (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) than traditional celebrities. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found that females perceived Instagrammers and bloggers to be more influential on their purchase intentions than celebrities. Likewise, adult consumers felt more similar to influencers than celebrities and were thus more inclined to like their endorsements and buy their products (Schouten et al., 2020). Thus, celebrities with millions of followers are not necessarily more effective than influencers with fewer followers. In the same way, Kay et al. (2020) revealed that consumers who saw a product promotion Instagram post by a micro-influencer had higher product knowledge (one's familiarity with a product) afterward than those who were exposed to the post by a macro-influencer. They explained that consumers presumably tend to resist macro-influencers' attempts to use their high popularity to persuade participants in contrast to micro-influencers.

3.2.1 Social media influencers and persuasion

When SMIs affect their young audiences' attitudes, cognitions, values, and behaviors, this process can be seen as persuasion (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007, p. 665). In general, it has been suggested that credibility (e.g., one's expertise and trustworthiness) and likability (e.g., similarity and attractiveness) are the two characteristics that make SMIs and other endorsers especially persuasive (Baumeister & Bushman, 2016). Therefore, it is not surprising why influencers' attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness have been connected to higher purchase intentions (Weismueller et al., 2020). Studies have also shown that SMIs' authenticity increases their followers' purchase intentions (e.g., Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Pöyry et al., 2019).

So far, most studies have focused on how following SMIs is related to their followers' higher purchase intentions toward products the influencers promote (e.g., Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Ladhari et al., 2020; Reinikainen et al., 2020). This suggests that most influencer studies have considered how effective influencers are when they use positive persuasion (e.g., I recommend trying this product). Even though influencers are indeed effective endorsers, studies have not examined how effective influencers are when they use negative persuasion (e.g., don't buy this smartphone). It has recently been suggested that there is a rising trend on TikTok, in which influencers and other endorsers use negative persuasions, such that they tell their audiences what kind of products and services they should avoid (Shadijanova, 2023). Thus, it would be important to further explore this recent trend by examining the impact of influencers' negative persuasions on followers.

The reason that negative persuasion can sometimes be even more effective than positive persuasion is that negative information is generally more powerful than positive information. This phenomenon is also called negativity bias or negative–positive asymmetry. In their famous article entitled "*Bad is Stronger*

Than Good," Baumeister et al. (2001) convincingly showed how negative experiences, negative feedback, and negative events are more powerful than their positive counterparts. For instance, they showed how punishment is more powerful than reward. Likewise, Rozin and Royzman (2001) also proposed that negative is more powerful than positive such that losing 100 euros yields relatively more negativity than finding 100 euros yields positivity. Such negativity bias has been found in multiple contexts. For instance, studies have shown that people detect angry faces from happy faces more efficiently than happy faces from angry faces (Horstmann & Bauland, 2006; Fox et al., 2000). Likewise, in terms of online retailing, one-star reviews had a stronger impact on readers than 5-star reviews (Chevalier & Mazylin, 2006). Furthermore, perceived low-level food quality (i.e., taste of food) in a restaurant had a higher impact on customers' dining satisfaction than high-level food quality (Liu et al., 2020). People are also more likely to trust knowledge that includes risks than no risks such as health dangers (Siegrist & Cvetkovich, 2001).

It has been suggested that human brains respond differently to positive and negative information (Ito et al., 1998) such that negative information is processed more thoroughly (Baumeister et al., 2001). Despite the existence of convincing evidence to support that bad is stronger than good, not all studies have supported negativity bias. For instance, studies have also found that angry faces do not pop out of crowds but rather that happy faces were detected faster and more accurately than angry faces (Becker et al., 2011). Likewise, Wu (2013) showed that negative reviews are not necessarily more helpful than positive reviews. In terms of memory, research also suggests that positive memories can be stronger than bad memories (Sedikides & Skowronski, 2020). However, even though the results of whether bad is stronger than good are mixed, SMIs are likely to be influential persuaders in affecting their young audiences' purchase intentions, attitudes, and behaviors in both cases when they use positive and negative persuasions.

3.2.2 Parasocial interaction

One thing that makes SMIs influential endorsers and appealing collaborators for firms is their ability to create PSI with audiences that primarily consist of young people. The term "parasocial interaction" was first coined by Horton and Wohl (1956), who suggested that a television viewer may feel as having an illusion of a face-to-face relationship with the television performer. In terms of SMIs, PSI refers to the viewer's illusionary and one-sided experience of being in social interaction with an influencer (Dibble et al., 2016). Research suggests that PSI has many similarities to actual social interaction situations (e.g., Perse & Rubin, 1989). In this dissertation, I rely on the PSI definition by Hartmann and Goldhoorn (2011), who suggested that PSI is an experience that can be measured using the parasocial experience scale. The scale measures the intensity of the viewer's perceived parasocial experience, such as mutual awareness, mutual attention, and mutual adjustment, with the influencer (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). Notably, scholars have mistakenly used the term PSI interchangeably with

parasocial relationships, which refers to more long-lasting relationships than PSI (Dibble et al., 2016).

Studies have shown different ways to yield PSI experiences to viewers. To create a parasocial experience within a research setting, scholars have typically shown participants a short video in which the performer addresses the audience bodily (looking directly at the camera) and verbally (adjusting the speaking style) (Dibble et al., 2016; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). Importantly, the performer's characteristics, such as attractiveness, can also strengthen the PSI experience (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). There are also other ways to increase the feeling of interactivity in the videos, such as using the pronoun "you" and asking viewers to leave their comments in the video's comment section (Penttinen et al., 2022). Additionally, Kim and Song (2016) showed how celebrities' self-disclosure (e.g., revealing personal things) made their fans feel that such celebrities are socially present, which subsequently increased fans' parasocial experience.

Research has continuously shown the positive outcomes of PSI. By positive outcomes, I refer to the benefits that companies or influencers can gain as a result of the created PSI with their audiences. First, PSI has been positively linked to higher purchase intentions toward products that influencers endorse (Lee & Lee, 2022; Lin et al., 2021; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The mechanism by which PSI increases viewers' purchase intentions can be, for example, the fact that viewers feel higher proximity to the influencers and, thus, have higher intentions to buy what influencers promote (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). To further illustrate, Aw and Labreque (2020) showed how PSI makes young adults feel more attached to (e.g., celebrities), which was positively connected to their higher purchase intentions. On the other hand, others have suggested that perceived PSI with YouTubers helped young adult shoppers evaluate and understand the products, which reduced their perceived risk and thus increased their purchase intentions (Lee & Lee, 2022). Lastly, research has also shown how lonely old consumers (TV shoppers) created higher PSI with the TV hosts to cope with their loneliness, which further increased their TV shopping satisfaction (Lim & Kim, 2011). In the sense that PSI increases influencers' effectiveness such that consumers who experience PSI with influencers are more likely to buy products the influencers promoted, consumers' role in this relationship can be seen as somewhat passive targets. The camp that has emphasized consumers' passive roles (e.g., Frankfurt School) might even argue that with the help of PSI, consumers are deceived to buy commodities and services that they do not need.

3.3 Cultivation process on social media

I have earlier demonstrated how young consumers learn materialistic values from socialization agents (see Chapter 2.3.2). An alternative way to explain how young consumers and children in particular may adopt materialistic values is through the cultivation process (see Russel & Shrum, 2021). Notably, the cultivation process successfully exemplifies young consumers' roles as targets of

influence. Studies have suggested that people can learn materialistic values from traditional media (O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997; Shrum et al., 2011) and social media (Debreceni & Hofmeister-Toth, 2018; Kamal et al., 2013; Lou & Kim, 2019; Thoumrungroje, 2018). That is, social media usage is positively related to higher materialism among users (Kamal et al., 2013). Sometimes, social media can be an even more effective source of materialism; participants who used the Internet intensively had higher materialistic values than those who read newspapers intensively (Bush & Gilbert, 2002).

The basic idea of cultivation theory is simple: the theory (Gerbner, 1988) posits that people absorb the social reality and ideas that are presented on television such that people who are exposed to violent content will overestimate the prevalence of violence in general (Gerbner et al., 2002). Shrum et al. (2005) summarized the idea of cultivation theory as follows: television portrays a distorted reality (e.g., an excessive number of crimes), which affects viewers' beliefs so that they overestimate the prevalence of crimes in reality. The actual cultivation effects illustrate how television affects viewers' first-order judgments (e.g., one's estimate of the average affluence of a consumer) and second-order judgments (e.g., values and attitudes) (Shrum, 2004; Shrum et al., 2011). First-order judgments are also known as the "accessibility model," which suggests that people's judgments are based on their memories (Shrum et al., 2011). That is, television typically overrepresents certain content (e.g., crimes) compared to reality; thus, the crimes are more accessible in viewers' memories. Therefore, when people are asked to estimate the prevalence of crime, viewers tend to rely on their memories as a basis for their judgment; thus, heavy viewers of such crime content overestimate the occurrence of crime compared to light viewers because the crime content is more accessible in their memories (Shrum et al., 2011). To illustrate, O'Guinn and Shrum (1997) showed that heavy TV viewers reported higher affluence estimates than light viewers. Second-order judgments (e.g., values and attitudes), in turn, are formed in an online manner, that is, during the time they are exposed to certain information; thus, people use that new information to develop and update new values and attitudes, such as materialistic values (Shrum, 2004; Shrum, 2007; Shrum et al., 2011). Shrum and Lee (2012) concluded that the more consumers are exposed to certain television content, the more likely their attitudes and values align with the attitudes and values presented on television. To illustrate the online process, Shrum et al. (2011) showed how participants reported higher materialistic values after being exposed to a short materialistic video clip (19 minutes).

As mentioned earlier, the cultivation process has been used to explain how people absorb materialistic values: television, including ads and programs, expresses materialistic worldviews and beliefs that its viewers will adopt after repeated exposure (Russel & Shrum, 2021). For instance, research revealed that television and reality TV viewing was positively connected to higher materialism (Good, 2007; Opree & Kuhne, 2016; Shrum et al., 2005) and that overall celebrity media consumption (e.g., celebrity magazines and celebrity blogs) predicted higher materialism among young people (Lewallen et al., 2016). In addition,

participants who watched a movie portraying materialistic values (Wall Street) reported higher materialistic values than those who watched a movie with low materialism (Gorillas in the Mist), but this effect was found only among those who were immersed in the story of the movie (Shrum et al., 2011). There is also strong evidence showing that advertising cultivates materialism in young consumers (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017).

Given that social media platforms include a lot of commercial content, such as algorithm-based advertisements, brand–influencer collaboration, product reviews, and materialistic content, cultivation theory could be a promising approach to understanding the absorption of materialistic values in the social media context. Studies have used cultivation theory in the social media context, but only a few have focused on materialistic values. For instance, Intravia et al. (2017) used cultivation theory to understand how social media usage increases young adults' fear of crime. Likewise, Tsay-Vogel et al. (2018) found that Facebook usage decreases users' perceptions of the threat of online privacy. Wei et al. (2020) used cultivation theory to show how consumers' constant exposure to tweets by brands on social media shapes their attitudes toward a brand. In terms of materialistic values, Hwang and Jeong (2020) found that Instagram use was positively related to higher materialistic values. Furthermore, Ho et al. (2019) hypothesized that consumption-oriented SNS usage would be positively related to higher materialism, but their hypothesis was only partially supported. To summarize, when theorizing how young consumers especially learn or absorb materialistic values, it seems that cultivation theory and CS theory are both appropriate for understanding this process.

3.4 Impression management and social capital on social media

As people share bits of their lives on social media with videos and pictures, they inevitably give a certain impression of themselves to others. Impression management can be especially important for young people because they have a high need to fit in (Vartanian, 2015). It has also been suggested that social media is an important venue for young people to test different self-presentation styles and see others' reactions (Fullwood et al., 2016). Research also shows that young people with a less coherent sense of self are more prone to deceptive impression management (Michikyan, 2020). Thus, it is possible that young people are more willing to give an idealized version of their lives on social media. For instance, young consumers can represent themselves as wealthier than they are in reality (Smith, 2020) to achieve followers, admirers, or higher social status. Thus, impression management can be used to increase social connections and resources (i.e., social capital; Putnam, 2000). Social capital, in turn, can be especially important for young people. For example, Tuominen and Haanpää (2022) showed that social capital was positively connected to young people's well-being, such as higher life satisfaction. Likewise, Webster et al. (2021) revealed in their systematic review that adolescents' social capital was positively associated with

subjective well-being and self-esteem. Along with the rise of social media, social capital has evolved into *online* social capital because social connections are mainly created on social media (Shahzad & Omar, 2021). Webster et al. (2021) also noted that young people's online social capital (e.g., online social networks) was positively related to their subjective well-being.

3.4.1. Impression management

In this dissertation, impression management elucidates young consumers' active roles and agency. In his widely cited book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* Goffman (1959) argued that individuals try to control the impression that the audience forms of them. In general, it has been suggested that people are prone to give an idealized picture of themselves rather than a fully authentic one (Hogan, 2010). Goffman (1959, p. 2) claimed that individuals' ability to make an impression is dependent on how they express themselves. These expressions are either intentionally "given" or unintentionally "given off" (Battershill, 1990, p. 170; Goffman, 1959, p. 2–4). Goffman's (1959, as cited in Powell, 2013, p. 16; Rogers, 2011, p. 284) work was influenced by the theory of symbolic interactionism, especially by one of its main pioneers, George Herbert Mead. Mead (1934) saw individuals as inherently social who develop a sense of "self" in reference to others. He thought that it is not possible to develop the complete "self" or "conscious self" without first being an object to oneself by taking other agents' perspectives (Mead, 1934, 137–142).

Goffman (1959) considered people as "actors" in dramaturgy and proposed that individuals' behavior takes place in the front and backstage. Frontstage refers to a place where an actor performs a certain role in front of the audience and manages the impressions the audience gets, while backstage refers to a hidden place where an actor can relax and leave the role (Mills et al., 2010). For example, a personal trainer may wear athletic clothes and talk about the importance of recovery and nutrition when with a client (frontstage) but might go out drinking that same night (backstage), which could potentially threaten his role and impression given on frontstage. Self-presentation has typically been used interchangeably with impression management (Owens, 2006; Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011), while I will use the concept of impression management, which refers to one's attempt to control what kind of impressions others form of them (Goffman, 1959; Leary, 2001). People are motivated to perform impression management because the audience can reward them (e.g., impression management on the job interview may open the applied position) and because impression management can be satisfying for oneself (e.g., becoming ideal me) (Baumeister, 1982). However, it is also noteworthy that while the majority of studies have focused on how individuals try to affect how others perceive them, impression management also takes place in an organizational context, as their representatives try to control how others perceive their firms (Bolino et al., 2008).

Impression management is a ubiquitously used strategy, and people have a variety of tactics and strategies to conduct impression management. Impression management can be an especially appealing strategy for younger people. One of

the best-known tactics is when young people try to impress their peers by smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol or when men do risky things to impress women (Baumeister, 2022). Jones and Pittman (1982) presented five impression management strategies: 1) Ingratiation: people can ingratiate (e.g., by doing favors) others so that others like them. 2) Self-promotion: people can use self-promotional tactics (e.g., by praising themselves) to seem competent. 3) Exemplification: exemplifiers highlight their integrity (e.g., by constantly working overtime) to be respected and admired. 4) Supplication: children can present themselves as helpless (I cannot vacuum) to make their parents do that task instead. 5) Intimidation: people can intimidate others to show they are dangerous; for instance, by being aggressive, they manage social relationships because others fear them. Lee et al. (1999) distinguished between impression management tactics that aim to defend one's identity (defensive tactics) and develop one's identity (assertive tactics). Defensive tactics are, for instance, apologizing or self-handicapping (e.g., a student may not read for the exam because they can then explain that the poor result was due to poor preparation, not their incompetence) (Funder, 1999; Lee et al., 1999). Assertive tactics include entitlement (e.g., taking credit for positive outcomes) or basking (e.g., connecting with groups or persons that have a positive reputation) (Lee et al., 1999).

The theoretical framework of impression management can also be applied to the social media context. Impression management appears to be easier online than offline (Baumeister & Bushman, 2016). In the social media context, one's visible social media profile refers to frontstage behavior, while instant messages with friends that are unseen by others can be seen as backstage (e.g., Holmberg et al., 2018). In general, social media is a promising venue for people to present their idealized selves (Baumeister & Bushman, 2016) because people can control the information they obtain about them (Papacharissi, 2002). Thus, individuals can emphasize the aspects that they think others will respect and play down those that would potentially spoil their idealized picture of themselves. For example, young people reported that "looking good" is the most important aspect when choosing their profile picture on social media (Chua & Chang, 2015; Siibak, 2009). Likewise, male users underlined their social status through formal dressing in their LinkedIn profile pictures (Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2018), and bloggers showed their competence by underlining their intellectual capability (Trammel & Keshelashvili, 2005). In addition, dating app users attempted to create profiles that presented their idealized selves (e.g., thinner than in reality) (Ellison et al., 2006; Toma et al., 2008). Although most people manage impressions to some extent, such as cleaning their houses before the guests arrive, people vary in the extent to which they manage such impressions, especially on social media. For example, Instagram profiles can present one's real everyday life, an idealized version of one's life, or something in between.

Impression management has been linked to negative and positive connotations. For example, young adults with low self-esteem were more likely to use online self-presentation tactics, such as enhancing their photos and using self-promoting mottos (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Likewise, young adults who felt

more anxious in interviews were more likely to use deceptive impression management tactics, such as lying (Powell et al., 2021). In addition, people who were more concerned about others' negative evaluations of them on social media (e.g., I am concerned if others liked my new photo) were more motivated to do impression management online to avoid such negative evaluations (Lee & Jang, 2019). Others' positive self-presentation on social media can also affect viewer's affective well-being negatively because viewers may feel deprived (e.g., others are doing better than me) (Fan et al., 2019). Impression management has also been connected to narcissism (Hart et al., 2017) and neuroticism (Michikyan et al., 2014). On the other hand, studies have also shown that among young adults, positive impression management on social media is linked to higher subjective well-being, as positive self-presentation may affirm their positive self-image (Kim & Lee, 2011). Moreover, adolescents' positive online impression management increases positive feedback, such as likes from friends (Metzler & Scheithauer, 2017). Additionally, Liu et al. (2016) showed that people can use online impression management, such as self-disclosure (e.g., telling selected facts about themselves), to strengthen their old social ties and thus have more social capital. Consumers can also display a high social status, for instance, by posting pictures of luxury goods (Siepmann et al., 2022). However, they might not reveal that they do not necessarily own such things. Consequently, their followers or old friends can come to discuss with them just out of curiosity, which might lead to stronger relationships with them.

Even though impression management might sound deceptive, it must be noted that impression management actions are not necessarily obvious lies. For instance, Goffman (1959, p. 62) noted that doctors tell patients a lot of white lies not to hurt their feelings. Likewise, Instagram influencers can upload pictures in front of a luxury hotel, thus giving an impression to the audience as if they have a booking there, although in reality, they might be sleeping in a two-star motel far away from luxury. However, technically speaking, they did not lie because they did not say they were staying in that luxury hotel. To summarize, impression management has been linked to many negative connotations, but impression management, especially when performed on social media, may also produce highly beneficial outcomes for young consumers, including not only well-being-related outcomes but also increased social capital.

3.4.2. Social capital—offline and online

Many famous social scientists, such as Granovetter, Coleman, Putnam, and Bourdieu, have theorized the concept of social capital (Ruuskanen, 2001), although their interpretations of social capital differ from each other. Bourdieu (1986) stated that capital has three forms: economic capital (e.g., money and income), cultural capital (e.g., one's pronunciation, academic qualifications, and paintings), and social capital (e.g., family and neighbors). He further stated that while economic capital can be exchanged into money, cultural capital and social capital can also be exchanged, in certain situations, into economic capital. I interpreted Bourdieu's (1986, p. 229) original and somewhat unclear definition of

social capital as follows: social capital refers to social acquaintances, social relationships, and social networks, such as group membership, and social capital is collectively owned by the members of such networks, and the membership probably produces profits for the members.

Coleman (1988), in turn, implied that social capital is a resource available for individuals and organizations (Hellsten, 1998) and presented three forms of social capital. The first form underlines actors' reciprocity (e.g., individuals favor each other), and this form requires trust between individuals. The second form underlines the information within social relations (e.g., by interacting with others, people can utilize others' information to keep themselves updated on current issues). The third form is social norms (e.g., norms that encourage people to ditch their self-interest will have positive effects for the public good) (Coleman, 1988).

Putnam (2000) is perhaps the most cited social capital theorist. In his famous book *Bowling Alone,* Putnam (2000) defined social capital as social networks and connections between humans characterized by the call for reciprocity and trust. He separated two forms of social capital: bridging *(inclusive)* and bonding *(exclusive)*. Bonding groups, such as country clubs or football teams, are typically dense, loyal, and homogenous and provide psychological and social support to their members (Putnam, 2000, p. 20). In turn, bridging groups are not as dense as bonding groups (e.g., civil rights organizations) but rather include "weak ties" and are effective for spreading information to its members (Putnam, 2000, p. 20). To support these definitions, Liu et al. (2016) proposed that bridging social capital refers to making and maintaining social connections that are not strong or intimate (e.g., large networks), while bonding refers to making and maintaining strong and intimate social groups, such as a tight-knit friend group. Bhandari and Yasunobu (2009) concluded that in general, social capital refers to a collective asset, including norms, trust, social networks, and institutions, that produce social cooperation and collective action for the public good. They also noted that a common denominator of different social capital definitions is their tendency to emphasize how social networks yield benefits for individuals and societies (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). One of the most practical illustrations of the nature of social capital is provided by Valenzuela et al. (2009), who noted that people who have a large and diverse network (e.g., contacts) are said to have higher social capital than those who have a small and homogeneous network.

As with many other concepts, social capital can have both negative and positive outcomes. For instance, bonding and bridging social capital can enhance entrepreneurs' performance in that social capital provides entrepreneurs with more information and psychological support (Xie et al., 2021). Likewise, research suggests that social capital facilitates better information access and higher solidarity (Adler & Kwon, 2000). Social capital can also enhance people's career success (e.g., higher salaries and more promotions) (Janasz & Forret, 2008; Seibert et al., 2001) and increase career satisfaction and career achievements (Zhang et al., 2010). Higher social capital has also been linked to higher happiness (Bjørnskov, 2008; Rodrı´guez-Pose & Berlepsch, 2014) and higher well-being (Helliwell, 2006). On the other hand, scholars have also argued that the outcomes

of social capital are not always positive. Research suggests that social contagion can be seen as a negative outcome of social capital because people might, for instance, adopt others' health-damaging behaviors, such as drinking (Villalonga-Olives & Kawachi, 2017). Young people who participate in youth associations have a higher risk of smoking and drinking (Takakura et al., 2015).

Importantly, although Bourdieu (1984) and Coleman (1988) ignored the role of social capital in young people's lives, social capital can be especially important for young people during their life transitions and identity-building (Holland et al., 2007). More specifically, it was shown that children who moved into a new school were able to utilize social capital (i.e., old friends) to settle into that school, as old friends made them more confident and looked after them. Likewise, a systematic review by Pherson et al. (2013) revealed the positive outcomes of social capital among young people, such as better self-esteem, better self-worth, better nutritional health, better general health, higher physical activity, and better dental health, while social capital also acted as a buffer for depression and suicidality. On the other hand, they also noted that social capital might have negative outcomes: social capital might sometimes increase the likelihood of smoking and alcohol use within certain social circles (e.g., sports clubs).

It is notable that many scholars are currently using the online version of social capital. That is, since social connections and resources (e.g., followers and friends) can nowadays be accessed through social media, scholars have paid increasing attention to online social capital. Ellison et al. (2007) noted that people can maintain and create new connections on social network sites (e.g., Friendster and Myspace) and that these connections can include, for instance, love relationships, professional relationships, and other significant relationships. They underlined that users can use Facebook to strengthen existing relationships and to create new acquaintances and noted that many studies have suggested that social media is especially helpful for creating bridging social capital (Ellison et al., 2007). While offline social capital refers to face-to-face social connections and resources, online social capital refers to such connections and resources on social media (e.g., Instagram and Facebook) (Abbas & Mesch, 2018). Scholars have measured online social capital with statements such as "Interacting with people on Facebook makes me want to try new things" and "Interacting with people on Facebook makes me feel like a part of a larger community" (Abbas & Mesch, 2018).

Research has focused on the connection between the Internet and social media use and social capital and has proposed that SNS can be used to increase social capital (Phua & Jin, 2011). In her comprehensive review article, Neves (2013) concluded that there is a positive association between Internet usage and social capital and specified that the Internet complements, maintains, and creates social capital. It has also been found that users' SNS use for news predicts higher social capital (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). Chen and Li (2017) also illustrated how participants' communicative social media use (e.g., staying in touch with friends) was positively related to higher bonding and bridging social capital. Furthermore, research shows that Twitter users had the highest bridging social capital, while

Snapchat users had the highest bonding social capital (Phua & Jin, 2017). In terms of more specific platforms, Valenzuela et al. (2009) found that a higher intensity of Facebook usage was positively related to higher social capital, although the effect was relatively small. However, Johnston et al. (2013), in turn, revealed a strong and positive relationship between Facebook usage and social capital.

Only a few studies have indicated the positive effects of online social capital. That is, online bridging social capital has been linked to higher life satisfaction (Lee et al., 2018). In addition, online social capital is positively connected to higher online political participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). However, much of the research presented above has focused on offline social capital (e.g., Chen & Li, 2017; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2009) instead of online social capital. It can be difficult to distinguish between online and offline social capital. One reason for this can be that it is not always necessarily reasonable to make a rigid demarcation between online and offline social capital because in most cases, they are conflated. For instance, if participants are asked whether they have someone on social media to whom they can turn (statement of online social capital), they are likely to interpret this "someone" as a friend, accessible online and offline. Likewise, Spottswood and Wohn (2020) argued that the clear distinction between online and offline social capital is meaningful only if online resources cannot be accessed offline. However, they added that because people increasingly interact online with their offline connections, this distinction is no longer significant.

4 THEORY INTEGRATION AND SUMMARY

I have presented the most essential theories and concepts for this dissertation above. Next, I will bring together the theories by presenting their interconnections—for instance, how materialism and impression management are linked to each other in this dissertation. This will help the reader understand why these theories are relevant and how they are used in sub-studies. Therefore, this section serves as an interim summary.

Social media plays an ever-increasing role in young consumers' lives, who are active followers of SMIs (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Therefore, advertisements, product reviews, and other consumption-related content have moved to social media. For example, TikTok (Widdicombe, 2020) and Snapchat (Moss, 2014) have a lot of materialistic content, and Instagram also includes a lot of idealized and glamorous content (Hwang & Jeong, 2020; Lup et al., 2015; Marwick, 2015). Likewise, YouTube includes a lot of product promotion (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2019) and is especially famous for its product reviews (Fitriani et al., 2020). Additionally, SMIs promote firms' products and services on social media (Reinikainen, 2022). Consequently, scholars have considered the effects of social media on consumers in the same way that they had previously examined the effects of television and traditional advertising on consumers. Thus, in the first sub-study, I draw on cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1988; Shrum et al., 2005) and CS theory (Moschis & Churchill, 1978) to understand in the social media context how young consumers adopt materialistic values and gain higher purchase intentions as a result of following SMIs such as YouTubers, Instagrammers, and TikTok influencers.

As mentioned earlier, one factor that makes SMIs particularly effective persuaders is that their audiences may experience PSI with them (Dibble et al., 2016). For example, consumers with higher PSI with influencers had higher purchase intentions toward products the influencers promoted (Lee & Lee, 2021; Lin et al., 2021; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). However, the focus has been on the role of PSI in increasing the effectiveness of positive persuasion (e.g., when an influencer recommends buying something). Studies have not examined whether consumers who experience a high PSI with an influencer are also more likely to

follow the influencer's negative persuasive message, such as "don't buy this product." Research suggests that bad is stronger than good; negative emotions outweigh positive emotions, and being criticized is more effective than being praised, while negative information is processed more thoroughly than positive information (Baumeister et al., 2001) (see also positive–negative asymmetry) (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Thus, it can be said that negative persuasion does not necessarily require as much PSI as positive persuasion to be effective. On the other hand, it is also possible that PSI makes negative persuasion even more effective. Despite recent interest in deinfluencing (e.g., do not buy this product), this topic has not been sufficiently studied. Therefore, in the fourth sub-study, I will examine whether the young people's experienced PSI with a social media influencer would matter more when the influencer gives a positive recommendation (listen to this song) than when she gives a negative recommendation (don't listen to this song).

In general, social media is a promising venue for people to present their idealized selves (Baumeister & Bushman, 2016), because people can control the information they obtain about them (Papacharissi, 2002). Thus, individuals can emphasize the aspects that make them look good and avoid aspects that would potentially destroy their idealized picture of themselves. One way to create a certain impression on social media is to use a materialistic or status-seeking style, such as appearing richer than one really is (Smith, 2020). However, materialism has typically been connected to negative connotations, such as lower life satisfaction (Ryan & Dziurawiec, 2001) and lower well-being (Kasser, 2018; Dittmar et al., 2014). Impression management has also been connected to negative outcomes (Hart et al., 2017), although not to the same extent. Materialism and impression management can also have positive outcomes, such as positive self-image (Kim & Lee, 2011), enhanced self-esteem (Shrum et al., 2014), and even higher social capital (Liu et al., 2016). However, the positive aspects of materialism and impression management are understudied. Thus, in the third sub-study, I will shed more light on the positive outcomes of young people's materialism and impression management by showing how materialism and online status-seeking impression management are connected to higher online social capital.

Political consumers can use their consumer power by participating in boycotts, and such boycotting is increasingly taking place on social media (Johnson et al., 2019; Yuksel et al., 2020). However, the crucial question remains: What are the factors that affect young consumers' decisions to boycott? I have shown earlier that reference groups have a lot of influence on consumers (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Lee, 2011; Mangleburg et al., 2004; Niu, 2013; Reinikainen et al., 2020). However, not enough studies have examined the role of different reference groups in young consumers' boycotting decisions. Thus, in the fourth sub-study, I will address this gap in research by looking at how young consumers' boycotting decisions have been influenced by their reference groups (e.g., peers and videobloggers) and personal experiences (e.g., poor customer service) in Finland and the United Kingdom. Both well-developed countries share some

welfare state commonalities, such as high education levels. However, as consumer societies, they still differ in several respects. As an older consumer society, the United Kingdom has a longer history of consumer activism than Finland. In the United Kingdom, there have been boycotts for centuries, for instance, the historical sugar boycotts between 1790–1820 (Glickman, 2009, p. 63). In Finland, the standard of living only started to rise after the Second World War, and modern urban consumer culture was born only in the 1960s (Wilska, 2014; Soinne, 2018). In this sense, one could think that British consumers are more active and experienced boycotters than their Finnish counterparts. In addition, social classes have had a more robust role in the United Kingdom than in Finland (Biressi & Nunn, 2013) and are more important for Britons than Finns (Erola, 2010, p. 38). Thus, given that Finland and the United Kingdom differ in several respects, it might be that Finns and Britons differ in who affects their boycotting decisions and to what extent.

Figure 3 shows how the theories used in the sub-studies fit into a larger theoretical division (consumers as targets of influence and active agents). In the first study, I used CS theory (Moschis & Churchill, 1978) and the cultivation process (Gerbner, 1998) to explain how young consumers absorb materialistic values and higher purchase intentions from SMIs as a result of their following such influencers. Thus, as the focus was more on the consumers' role as receivers of such values and intentions, these theories belong to the "consumers as targets of influence" column. Likewise, in the fourth study, I used PSI (Dibble et al., 2016; Horton & Wohl, 1956) to understand how SMIs can affect their audiences' consumer behavior (to listening to a song). Thus, as young consumers were perceived as an audience whose decision-making process was affected by the external influencer, PSI was placed under the "consumers as targets of influence" column. In sum, it seems logical to attach the theoretical concepts from the first and fourth studies to the consumers as targets of the influence section because these concepts more or less emphasize consumers' role as targets whose values, intentions, and behaviors are influenced externally.

On the other hand, the second study focuses on how young consumers can use a status-seeking impression management style on social media (e.g., sharing luxury pictures or intending to be seen as wealthier than in reality) (Goffman, 1959), which can subsequently increase their online social capital (Putnam, 2000). Thus, if one uses consumption-related symbols and cues to represent one's high social status, it is evident that such actions clearly underline consumers' active roles. Thus, impression management and social capital were placed under the "consumers as active agents" column. Likewise, as the third article considers young people to be active political consumers (i.e., boycotters), it is impossible to overlook their roles as consumer activists. That is, boycotters can actively use their consumer power to punish a certain company, for instance, by avoiding its products and services. Therefore, political consumption (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013) was placed under the "consumers as active agents" column. Lastly, I used the theoretical concepts of reference groups (Bearden & Etzel, 1982) and social influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955) to explain political consumption. Even

though political consumption itself emphasizes consumers' active roles, reference group and social influence theories emphasize consumers' roles as targets of influence. That is, reference groups and social influence theories were used to understand how significant others (e.g., peers and idols) affect and shape young consumers' boycotting decisions; thus, consumers in this case were the targets of social influence. Thus, it was logical to place such theories under the "consumers as targets of influence" column.

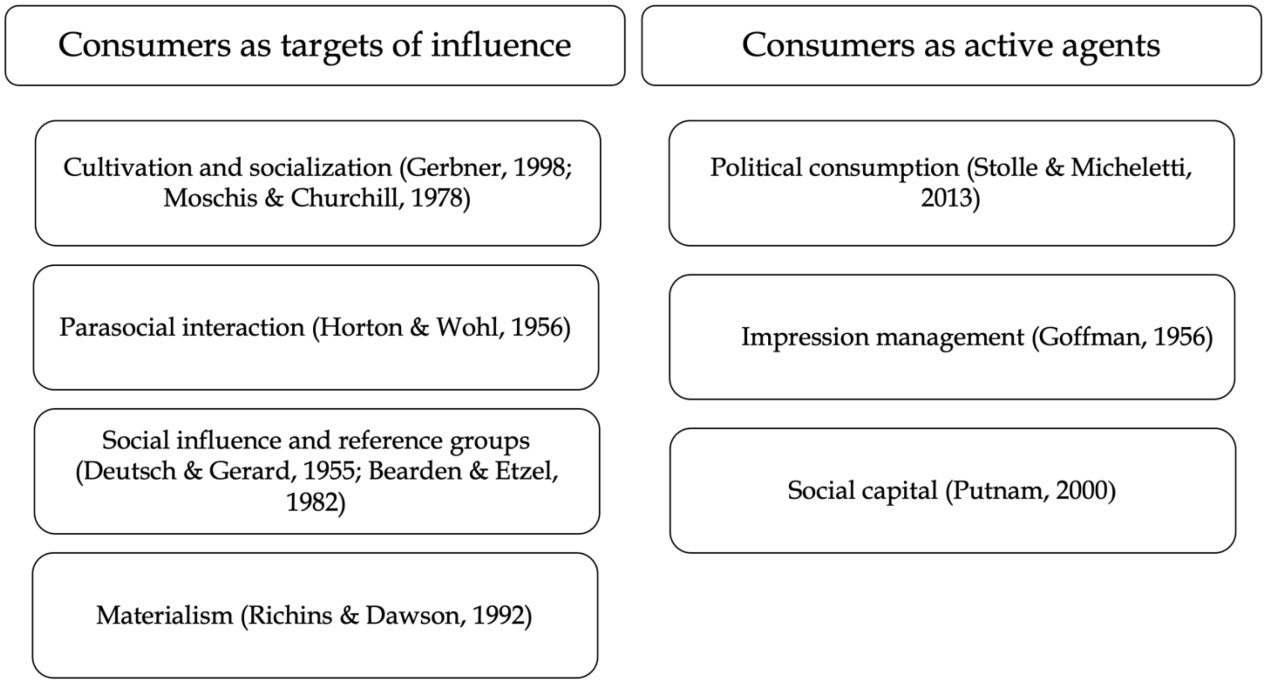

Figure 2. The summary of the theoretical framework of this dissertation

5 METHODOLOGY

Research methods in the social sciences are traditionally divided into quantitative and qualitative methods (Valsiner, 2000). This division has also resulted in debates in academia (Gelo et al., 2008; Howe, 1992; Trafimov, 2014); thus, we have witnessed an increasing trend of combining both methods (mixed methods) over the past decades (Seawright, 2016). Qualitative and quantitative methods address different questions. While the qualitative approach typically focuses on participants' subjective experiences and utilizes small sample sizes (e.g., interviews), the quantitative approach addresses more specific research problems, commonly with testable hypotheses among larger samples collected, for instance, through surveys and experiments (Burrel & Gross, 2017).

This dissertation consists of four sub-studies in which only quantitative methods are applied. From a philosophical point of view, this dissertation focuses on realism. Even though realism itself has many different approaches, I present two that I believe are the most relevant for this dissertation: critical realism (Bhaskar et al., 2018) and scientific critical realism (Niiniluoto, 1999). Critical realism posits that scientific knowledge does not have to be based on direct tangible observations (e.g., I can see something happen) (Bhaskar et al., 2018; Töttö, 2005). Danermark et al. (2002) noted that critical realism assumes that reality exists independent of our observations of it and that reality cannot be observed directly. Therefore, science can be used indirectly to obtain pieces of reality. They added that critical realism includes three ontological stages: empirical (observed experiences), actual (not necessarily observed events), and real (mechanisms that cause something we can observe). To acquire adequate information about something, it is crucial to know what produces empirically observable things; critical realism also assumes that scientific knowledge is not the absolute truth (Danermark et al., 2002). Mahoney and Vincent (2014) illustrated the interplay between ontological stages with a great example: if scientists see that an apple falls (empirical stage), they might further examine other apples and see that they are prone to fall (actual stage), which will lead them to think about the real mechanism behind the process or what caused the observable events (i.e., gravity) (real stage).

On the other hand, scientific critical realism (Niiniluoto, 1999) has the following assumptions that differentiate it from other forms of realism, such as naïve realism (p. 10):

R0: Reality is at least partly independent of our observations.

R1: Truth is a relationship between language and reality, and he relies on correspondence theory; the statement that snow is white is true if snow is white.

R2: Concepts of truth and falsity can be applied to any linguistic scientific outcome.

R3: Science aims to achieve truth.

R4. Truth is hard to achieve, and science can be wrong, but truth can be achieved.

R5: Science is close enough to the truth, and its self-corrective nature ensures progress toward the truth.

To illustrate how scientific critical realism and critical realism approaches can be applied to this dissertation, when I asked the participants to fill in different questionnaires, their responses were based on their empirical observations and were always subject to errors, moods, and biases. Therefore, even though I consider their responses to be adequate and reliable results, I do not argue that such results represent absolute and objective truth. However, I do believe that the truth can be achieved with well- and carefully planned and repeated examinations. Thus, I acknowledge that science is fallible, but I believe that future studies will correct our results if necessary and thus will lead us closer to the truth and a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. To summarize, I am not arguing that this study strictly follows the tenets of realism or any other scientific-philosophical point of view. Rather, as I think that this dissertation complements previous results and thus brings us closer to the truth and that this study aims to improve the world, my scientific-philosophical stance is quite consistent with the ideas of scientific critical realism and critical realism.

The following section is divided into two parts. First, I present the arguments for why I decided to mainly use statistical methods in this dissertation. Second, I will present the data collection procedure for each article and argue in a more detailed manner why a specific statistical method was chosen for each article. I will also shed light on the purpose of each statistical method. Henceforth, statistical and quantitative terms are used interchangeably.

5.1 Rationale for the quantitative approach

There are several reasons for my decision to use statistical methods in this dissertation. First, my research interests largely determined the requirement of using statistical methods. As I aimed to examine causal and noncausal connections and probabilities and to test hypotheses, quantitative methods served as a great basis for such purposes (Stockemer, 2019). For example, my aim in the fourth article was to test how SMIs' bodily and verbal orientations affect consumers' decisions to follow an influencer's recommendation. Likewise, in the first article, I looked at how young consumers with a high following intensity of certain influencers differed in their materialistic values from those with a lower following intensity. In addition, as I aimed to identify latent boycotting groups and compare them in the United Kingdom and Finland, statistical methods were the most relevant approach for this aim. Thus, my methodological decisions were mainly determined by the research aims and goals (Burrel & Gross, 2017). Second, practical reasons also contributed to my decision to use a statistical approach. Throughout my dissertation work, I conducted research as part of two large research consortiums, including experts in quantitative research who supported me in executing high-quality statistical analysis. Additionally, as these research projects enabled the collection of large and expensive datasets, I decided to use large datasets that commonly require statistical methods.

5.2 Data collection and statistical methods

In the first article, a research company was assigned to collect the data in the winter of 2019–2020, and the target group was Finnish teenagers aged 15–19 (N = 800). The company's only responsibility was to collect the data. The research company used structured phone interviews, which took approximately 30 minutes. The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity has stated that young people older than 15 are allowed to participate in surveys without parental consent. The sample was randomly chosen from the Finnish Population Register; thus, the sample was nationally representative by age (by one year), gender, and area of residence. All the participants were adequately informed about the study, and they were given a small gift for their participation. The dataset did not include any sensitive or identifiable information. In the analysis section, I used a research population (N = 686) instead of full data (N = 800) because I excluded participants (N = *114*) who reported that they had not followed SMIs at all. As I focused on the connection between young consumers' social media usage and their materialistic values and purchase intentions, it did not make sense to include the participants who did not follow any of them since they would have been unable to answer the questionnaire.

An independent samples t-test (single parameter), multiple regression analysis, and joint-hypothesis F-test were used as statistical methods. T-test is used

to test whether two independent groups differed in terms of certain variables. For instance, I tested whether those who generally followed SMIs differed in their materialistic values from those who did not (Livingston, 2004). Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between multiple independent variables and the dependent variable (Moore et al., 2006). For instance, I predicted higher purchase intentions with age, gender, and materialistic values. Within multiple regression, where t-statistics examine a single regression coefficient at a time, the F-test examines multiple coefficients at the same time (overall significance) (Hanck et al., 2020). For instance, a t-test might show that following YouTubers is individually positively associated with higher purchase intentions, but when examined together (jointly) with other predictors, such as following Instagram influencers and bloggers, an F-test may show that these predictors are not jointly significant (Hanck et al., 2020; Wooldridge, 2012).

In Study 2, I used the same data and data collection as in the first article. However, unlike in Study 1, I used the full sample in this study (N = 800). In the analysis, I used a covariance-based structural equation model (CB-SEM). The basic idea of SEM is that latent factors (i.e., concepts that cannot be measured directly, such as materialism) are constructed of indicator variables (e.g., someone attaches a lot of importance to goods), and then the relationships between such latent factors are tested (e.g., between materialism and intelligence) (Bollen, 1989; Wang & Wang, 2020). More specifically, SEM consists of the measurement model (confirmatory factor analysis [CFA]) and the structural model. While the connections between indicator variables and latent constructs are evaluated in the measurement model, the structural model examines the relationships between latent factors (Fan et al., 2016; Halme et al., 2014; Schreiber et al., 2010; Wang & Wang, 2020). The robustness of the final structural model can be tested by including covariates in the model and evaluating whether the coefficients vary in terms of the model without covariates (Lu & White, 2014).

In Study 3, a research company was assigned to collect data during the winter of 2019. The target groups were Finnish and British participants (aged 15–29). The research company collected data from the online consumer research panel (CINT) using a random sampling method to form a study population to whom survey invitations were sent. The company's system adjusted the target groups so that they were balanced and comparable. The system also ensured that duplicate invitations were not sent to the same person. The company also sent invitations to new participants if it did not receive enough responses to the first invitations. The entire panel (*N = 30,000)* consisted of 126 panels from Finland and 268 from the United Kingdom. The final sample size was 2,455 (Finland *N = 1,219,* The United Kingdom *N = 1,236).* The final sample was representative of age, gender, and area of residence. In this study, latent profile analysis (LPA) was used as an analysis method.

LPA is used to identify hidden groups from the data. LPA assumes that people can be categorized into different groups or profiles based on, for instance, their different behavioral patterns (Spurk et al., 2020). In other words, LPA is a statistical technique used to group people who share a similar response pattern

(in terms of indicator variables), and LPA gives each participant a certain probability of belonging to one profile (Salmela-Aro et al., 2020). To put it simply, LPA recovers hidden groups based on the observed variables (Oberski, 2016). For example, Lahti et al. (2021) measured participants' Internet activities (e.g., searching for information or reading blogs) and thus identified an abstinent profile whose participants had low involvement in all internet activities. Oberski (2016) also illustrated the logic of LPA efficiently using the following example. He had measured the height of all people in the population but forgot to measure their sex. However, he was able to identify the sexes based on the participants' heights because men are typically taller than women. He specified that even though some women are taller than men, the final result will be very close to the result where sex has been measured.

In general, if researchers want to compare mean differences between two groups, they must ensure that these groups have understood the questions within the questionnaire in the same way (Holden et al., 2020; Millsap & Kwok, 2004; Putnick & Bornstein, 2016) to avoid erroneous interpretation. As my aim was to compare the profiles between Finland and the United Kingdom, I followed the multigroup approach, including six steps for the similarity test proposed by Morin et al. (2016). To compare the latent profile solutions between the United Kingdom and Finland without potential errors, the similarity of the profile solution (or measurement invariance) is needed (Morin et al., 2016). In the first step (configural similarity), the number of solutions was compared between the United Kingdom and Finland. In the second step (structural similarity), the equality of the means of the profiles between countries was tested. In the third step (dispersion similarity), I tested whether the profiles' variances were equal in both countries. In the fourth step (distributional similarity), I tested whether the profile sizes were the same between the groups. Lastly, in the fifth step (predictive step), whether the country had a moderation effect on the link between covariates and profiles was tested (see the more detailed process in Sub-study 3).

In Study 4, my purpose was to examine whether consumers were more likely to follow the social media influencer's recommendation when the perceived PSI was high than low and when the recommendation was positive rather than negative. Bodily and verbal addressing styles were used to yield PSI experiences for the participants. Thus, I used a 2 (addressing: high, low) x 2 (recommendation: positive, negative) experimental design, which is especially suitable for testing causal links (Check & Schutt, 2017). The participants of this study were US citizens aged 18–35 years and were paid 1 dollar each for their participation. The data collection took place in the fall of 2022. The participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk ($N = 400$). They first needed to consent to participate in the study. Then, the participants read instructions that they were going to see a short video in which a micro-influencer would talk about a recently published song. A doctoral researcher, Julia (a native English speaker), played an influencer in the videos. The study included four videos, and each participant was randomly assigned to watch one of them. In the first video, the micro-influencer recommended a song by artist Left Vessel titled "This Year Be"

with high addressing. In the second video, the micro-influencer recommended the same song with low addressing. In the third video, the micro-influencer criticized "This Year Be" with high addressing. In the fourth video, the micro-influencer criticized "This Year Be" with low addressing.

Having watched the video, the participants were shown a condition in which they had to choose which of two songs they wanted to listen to—"This Year Be" or the alternative song "Eclipse" by the band Wages that the influencer did not discuss. The selection situation was manipulated so that if the micro-influencer endorsed a song, the song she endorsed had fewer views than the song she did not endorse. Likewise, if the micro-influencer criticized a song, that song had more views than the song she did not criticize. The participants were able to listen to a song at the end of the survey. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and logistic regression analysis were used to analyze the data in this study. ANOVA is used to examine the connections between categorical independent variable(s) and continuous dependent variable(s) (Cribbie & Klockars, 2019). In practice, ANOVA is commonly used to examine the differences of means between more than two groups (Fraiman & Fraiman, 2018), although ANOVA can also be used to compare two groups (Emerson, 2017). I used ANOVA to test whether those who watched videos with high addressing differed in their perceived PSI from those who watched videos with low addressing. Logistic regression analysis is an analysis method in which the outcome variable can have only two values (binary) (Peng et al., 2002). For instance, we can predict individuals' drug use (yes or no) according to their educational level (Agresti, 2017). Logistic regression estimates, for example, the odds ratio and risk ratio with which we can examine, for instance, whether those who received cancer treatment (a) are more likely to die than those who received cancer treatment (b) (Sperandei, 2014). Figure 4 brings together the process of data collection for each sub-study.

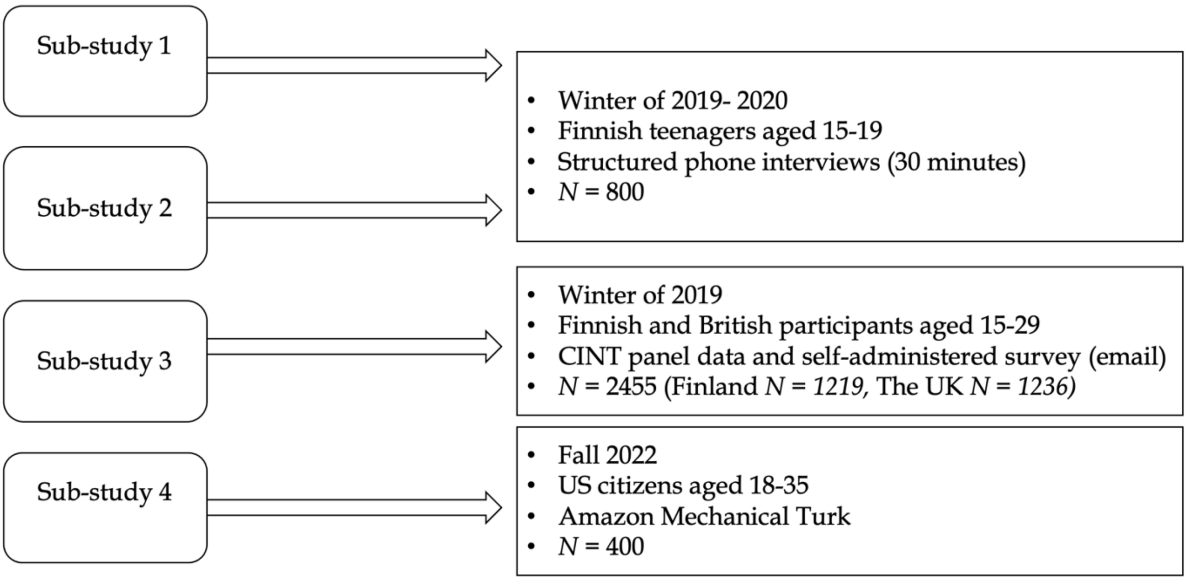

Figure 3. Summary of the data collection process

5.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues have played an increasing role in academia. When scholars submit their articles or apply for funding, they are typically asked to evaluate potential ethical issues that their research possesses or might produce (von Bonsdorff et al., 2018). Fisher (2020) has listed the following aspects that researchers should consider when planning research: 1) confidentiality (e.g., the collected data should be stored and handled), 2) informed consent (e.g., participants' participation in the survey is voluntary and based on their consent), 3) anonymity (e.g., no identifiable information about participants will be collected), 4) persuasion and pressure (e.g., participants should not be pressured to participate in the interest surveys), and 5) failure to disclose interest (e.g., funding sponsors of the study should be disclosed). Thus, it is necessary to evaluate how well the sub-studies of this dissertation follow the ethical guidelines listed above.

First, in all data collection processes, all the research participants were able to refuse or cancel their participation at any point. They were all at least 15 years old, which means that parental consent was not necessary. Second, we did not collect any information that included personally identifiable information, such as name or home address. The research questions did not include questions that could be considered sensitive. Third, I did not pressure the participants to participate in our surveys or experiments. Fourth, all the collected data has been treated and restored appropriately. The datasets of sub-studies 1 and 2 will be public 3 years after the end of the research projects. The datasets of sub-studies 3 and 4 are available upon reasonable request. Fifth, because my research topics mainly concerned consumption and consumer behavior, it is quite safe to say that I did not collect information that can be seen as very sensitive. Sixth, I disclosed the funding bodies (Academy of Finland; Strategic Research Council established within the Academy of Finland) when I submitted the articles to the selected journal.

Sub-study 4 was a special case in this dissertation because experiments with human participants might need an ethical review. We followed the general ethical principles provided by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2019), which stated that a study needs an ethical review if:

a) The research deviates from what participants have been informed and what participants have agreed on
b) The research interferes with participants' physical integrity
c) The research includes minors (under 15 years old) and does not have separate consent from their parents or parents have not been informed that they could prevent children's participation
d) The research participants are exposed to exceptionally strong stimuli
e) The research can cause mental harm for participants or to their family members
f) If the research can threaten researchers, participants, or their family members

Since our study did not include any of these factors, an ethical review was not required. Participation in this study was voluntary, and the participants could have refused to participate at any time without consequences. The participants were also informed about the study, and they needed to give their consent before participating. We did not collect any personal information, including indirect identifiers. In addition, this study did not include sensitive or harmful content that could be seen as ethically questionable.

6 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will present the main empirical results of the four sub-studies. I will also illustrate how these results address the proposed research questions. In addition, before presenting the actual empirical results, I will briefly summarize the topic and the aims of the articles.

6.1 Article 1. How is following social media influencers related to young consumers' materialism, and purchase intentions?

The first article aimed to examine how young consumers' following of different SMIs (e.g., YouTubers and Instagrammers) is related to their materialistic values and purchase intentions. I measured what specific SMIs young participants followed as follows: 1) YouTubers, 2) Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers, 3) bloggers, and 4) other influencers, including LinkedIn influencers and game streamers. Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers formed one group because their platforms included short videos and photos. As the videos on these platforms were and still are typically short, they were defined as instant platforms. In turn, YouTubers were treated separately, as YouTubers' videos were much longer than those on instant platforms, and their content did not include photos. Bloggers were also treated separately, as their content was mainly written as opposed to other types of influencers. Then, I asked participants how often they followed these influencers: 1 = only a few times a year, 2 = monthly, 3 = weekly, 4 = daily, or almost daily. The following frequency was converted into dummy variables using "only a few times a year" as a reference group. As the distance between only a few times a year and monthly is not equal to the distance between weekly and daily, the following frequency was treated as categorical. Materialism was measured with a six-item scale (Richins & Dawson, 2004). Purchase intentions were measured using a three-item scale adapted from prior studies (Chakraborty, 2019; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Lee et al., 2015). Data were collected in the winter of 2019–2020,

and the target group was Finnish teenagers aged 15–19 (N = 800). The research company's only responsibility was to collect the data (see more details in Chapter 5.2). A t-test, multiple regression analysis, and joint-hypothesis F-test were used as statistical methods.

The results of this sub-study address research question 1 (RQ 1): *"How is young consumers' following of social media influencers related to their consumer values and purchase intentions?"* The results revealed that young consumers who followed TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram influencers more actively (i.e., weekly or daily) had higher materialistic values than those who followed them more passively (i.e., only a few times a year). Moreover, the findings showed that consumers who followed YouTubers more actively (i.e., weekly or daily) had higher purchase intentions toward products that influencers promoted than those who followed them more passively (i.e., only a few times a year). It was also found that boys were more materialistic than girls and that higher materialism was positively related to higher purchase intentions.

Since the regression models do not reveal whether following an influencer predicts higher materialism or whether materialistic people are more likely to follow an influencer (Chu et al., 2015), I determined this direction based on existing theories (Widermann & von Eye, 2015). Through the lens of CS theory (Churchill & Moschis, 1979; Rasmussen et al., 2021), I proposed that young consumers learn materialistic values from SMIs who operate as modern-day socialization agents. When a viewer "interacts" with an influencer on social media (Lueg et al., 2006), the influencer may transmit materialistic values or purchase intentions to viewers (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). In the same manner, cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1988; Gerbner et al., 2002) posits that people constantly exposed to materialistic content will absorb such materialistic values and will thus be more materialistic than those who are not exposed to that content. Therefore, in line with cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1988), I suggested that those who followed Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers more actively had higher materialistic values because influencers on these platforms cultivate content that is closely related to materialistic values (Hwang & Jeong, 2020; Lup et al., 2015; Moss, 2014; Widdicombe, 2020). It has also been proposed that active followers have higher purchase intentions because young people learn favorable attitudes toward products from influencers, which subsequently leads to higher purchase intentions (Ajzen, 2011).

As following Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat influencers was associated with higher materialistic values, and following YouTubers was associated with higher purchase intentions, this raises a question about the role of the platform in this process. A plausible explanation for this is that YouTube has a lot of product promotion and is favored by advertisers (Gerhards, 2019; Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). In addition, as YouTube allows for longer videos, YouTubers can make more detailed videos about products (e.g., product reviews) than on the other platforms. This might engender higher purchase intentions among users because longer videos can be more persuasive and convincing than short videos on instant platforms. On the other hand, following Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat was connected to higher materialistic values, probably because

such platforms include a lot of materialistic content. For instance, TikTok and Snapchat have a lot of conspicuous materialistic content (Widdicombe, 2020; Moss, 2014). Furthermore, it has been shown that those who used Instagram more actively had higher materialistic values than those who used it passively (Hwang & Jeong, 2020), not surprisingly given that Instagram content is often polished (Lup et al., 2015) and includes a lot of luxury content (Marwick, 2015).

6.2 Article 2. The positive outcomes of materialism and impression management.

The second article investigated the connections between young consumers' materialistic values, online impression management, and online social capital. Impression management refers to individuals' attempts to control how others see them (Goffman, 1959; Leary, 2001). In this article, status-seeking impression management was defined as one's impression management actions and intentions that are used to achieve better social status in the eyes of others (e.g., I have intentionally uploaded content onto social media that gives the impression that my life is more prestigious than in reality). Online social capital refers to one's online social connections, social resources, and social networks (Abbas & Mesch, 2018). Materialism was defined in accordance with Richins and Dawson (1992): materialism is a set of consumer values including three pillars: acquisitions play a central role in a consumer's life, consumers pursue happiness through acquisitions, and consumers determine their own and others' success in life through acquisitions.

Most prior studies have connected materialism and impression management with negative outcomes, such as decreased life satisfaction (Lipovčan et al., 2015) and narcissism (Hart et al., 2017). Thus, it was interesting to explore whether materialism and impression management could have positive outcomes.

Online social capital was measured with scales adapted from previous studies (Abbas & Mesch, 2018; Putnam, 2000; Williams, 2006). Likewise, materialism was measured with a six-item scale (Richins & Dawson, 2004). Since I could not find a scale concerning status-seeking impression management, I decided to create a scale that focused on consumers' online impression management, aiming to seek and present higher social status (e.g., I have intentionally uploaded content onto social media that gives the impression that my life is more prestigious than in reality). Data were collected in the winter of 2019–2020, and the target group was Finnish teenagers aged 15–19 (N = 800) (see more details in Chapter 5.2). I used CFA as a statistical method in this study.

In response to research question 2 (RQ 2), "*What kinds of outcomes do young consumers' materialistic values and impression management have on social media?*", my findings revealed that while materialism was positively connected to online status-seeking impression management, such impression management, in turn,

was positively associated with higher online social capital. Specifically, materialism was treated as an antecedent of status-seeking impression management, and social capital was treated as a positive outcome of status-seeking impression management.

The reason for the connection between materialism and status-seeking impression management might be that both concepts rely on external factors; when materialists evaluate others, they emphasize external things (e.g., luxury cars), while those who do online status-seeking impression management are also concerned about how others see them (external orientation) (Chatterjee & Hunt, 1996). On the other hand, status-seeking impression management on social media was positively related to higher social capital: bridging and bonding. I proposed that uploading luxury or prestigious content on social media might attract new users and therefore bring new acquaintances into their lives (bridging) or might awaken their old friends to interact with them and thus strengthen the existing though weak relationship (bonding) (Liu et al., 2016). The theoretical framework of this study consisted of the theory of impression management (Goffman, 1959) applied in the social media context and the theory of social capital (Putnam, 2000), which was also applied in the online context (Abbas & Mesch, 2018).

6.3 Article 3. Who and what affect Finnish and British consumers' decisions to boycott?

Boycotting occurs when an individual or group attempts to persuade others not to buy a certain product or service to achieve a specific goal in the marketplace (Friedman, 1985). Consumers, in general, may have multiple drivers for their boycotting decisions. This article examines the role of social reference groups (e.g., friends) and consumers' personal experiences (poor customer service) in boycotting decisions. The aim was to identify latent boycotting profiles among young Finnish and British consumers. These profiles were identified based on consumers' perceptions of how different social groups and their own experiences have affected their boycotting decisions. The participants were asked to evaluate the extent to which the following sources affected their boycotting decisions: poor customer service, campaigns, friends, stories from people they did not know personally, idols (e.g., musicians), bloggers, and videobloggers. Data were collected during the winter of 2019. The target groups were Finnish and British participants (aged 15–29). The final sample size was 2,455 (Finland *N = 1,219,* the United Kingdom *N = 1,236*). In this study, I used LPA as an analysis method.

In response to RQ 3, "*Who and what shapes young consumers' boycotting decisions, and what kinds of boycotting groups can be identified on that basis?",* I identified four different profiles that were similar in both countries. Consumers in the first profile "unlikely to be influenced" reported that social groups and their own experiences (e.g., poor customer service) had a small impact on their

boycotting decisions. Consumers in the second profile "influenced by personal things" reported that sources that can be seen as personal (e.g., poor customer service and social influence by friends) had a relatively high impact on their boycotting decisions, while non-personal sources did not. Consumers in the third profile "likely to be influenced" reported that all sources have had a significant role in their boycotting decisions. Lastly, consumers in the fourth profile "moderately likely to be influenced" reported that all sources have had a moderate effect on their boycotting decisions. Even though the profiles were identified in both countries (the similarity test showed that they are similar in both countries) (Morin et al., 2016), Britons were more likely to belong to the "likely to be influenced" profile, and Finns were more likely to belong to the "unlikely to be influenced" profile.

Thus, I suggested that as the United Kingdom has longer historical roots in boycotting, Britons might be more experienced and sensitive to boycott activism and thus participate in boycotts with a lower threshold than Finns. In addition, I proposed that as social classes are more visible and important in the United Kingdom than in Finland (Biressi & Nunn, 2013), Britons might have stronger identification with such social classes and, thus, are more susceptible to the social influence from these classes. For instance, someone might conform to others' expectations to boycott a certain company only because they want to avoid being unpopular. The reference group theory and political consumption constitute the theoretical framework of this article. As I examined the role of social groups in young consumers' boycotting decisions, reference group theory and the literature on social influence were used to understand and explain why friends, for instance, can affect one's decision to boycott a company.

6.4 Article 4. When does parasocial interaction make influencers more influential?

The aim of the fourth article was to study the role of young consumers' perceived PSI with SMIs when the influencer either discourages consumers from trying an option (do not listen to a song) (negative recommendation) or when she encourages consumers to try the option (listen to a song) (positive recommendation). In this experimental study, I predicted that consumers' perceived PSI with the influencer is less likely to increase the extent to which consumers follow the influencer's recommendation when the influencer discouraged (negative) consumers from listening to a song than when the influencer encouraged (positive) them to listen to it. This is because negative information is more influential and persuasive than positive information (Baumeister et al., 2001; Hilbig, 2009; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Vaish et al., 2008). Thus, it is plausible that a negative recommendation does not require as much PSI as a positive recommendation to be effective. On the other hand, it is also possible that PSI further increases the effectiveness of negative recommendations.

I attempted to yield the PSI experience by varying the influencer's bodily addressing style (e.g., smile and body position) and verbal style (e.g., welcoming viewers back to the channel), as prior studies have proposed (Cummins & Cui, 2014; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Tukachinsky & Sangalang, 2016). Data were collected through Amazon Mechanical Turk during the fall of 2022, and the participants were US citizens (aged 18–35) (N = 400). I used ANOVA and logistic regression analysis to analyze the data in this study.

Addressing manipulation failed to have the expected effect on PSI. Therefore, it was impossible to answer RQ4: "*What is the role of PSI when the influencer encourages or discourages young consumers?*" However, even though the manipulation failed, I examined the effects of addressing (bodily addressing and verbal addressing) and recommendation (negative and positive) on whether the participants complied with the influencer's recommendation. I found that consumers were more likely to follow the influencer's recommendation when she encouraged them (listen to a song) than discouraged them (do not listen to this song). Thus, my results do not support the notion that bad is stronger than good (Baumeister et al., 2001; Hilbig, 2009; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Vaish et al., 2008). However, the participants were more likely to follow the influencer's advice when the influencer addressed them bodily and verbally, regardless of whether the recommendation was positive or negative; thus, an interaction effect was not found. This is consistent with the findings suggesting that a smile has a positive impact on purchase intentions (Trivedi & Teichert, 2019) and that eye contact predicts cooperative behavior (Luo et al., 2016). To summarize, although the hypothesis was not accepted or rejected because the manipulation failed, the study provided valuable information by revealing that consumers are more likely to follow the influencer's recommendation (regardless of whether positive or negative) when the influencer addresses them bodily and verbally. Additionally, the study showed that the participants were more likely to follow the influencer's positive recommendation than the negative recommendation. Table 3 summarizes the results of the methods of all sub-studies.

Table 3. Summary of the articles

Article	Name	Stage	Keywords	Data and Methods	Results
I	Modern-Day Socialization Agents: The Connection Between Social Media Influencers, Materialism, and Purchase intentions of Finnish Young People	Published	Social media influencers, purchase intentions, young consumers, materialistic values	Survey, t-test, F-test, Regression analysis	Young consumers who followed Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers more often had higher materialistic values than consumers who followed them less often. Also, young consumers who followed YouTubers frequently had higher general purchase intentions toward products influencers promote than consumers who followed such influencers less frequently.
II	The brighter side of materialism: Managing impressions on social media for higher social capital	Published	Materialistic values, Status-seeking impression management, social capital	Survey and Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)	Consumers' higher materialistic values were positively related to online status-seeking impression management. Impression management was also positively related to higher bonding and bridging of online social capital.
III	Young consumers' boycotting profiles in the UK and Finland: A comparative analysis	Published	Social influence, reference groups, boycotting, political consumption	Survey and Latent profile analysis (LPA)	We identified four similar boycotting profiles in the UK and Finland: *unlikely to be influenced*, *influenced by personal things*, *likely to be influenced*, *and moderately likely to be influenced*. However, more Britons belonged to the *likely to be influenced* profile, while more Finns belonged to the *unlikely to be influenced* profile.
IV	When does parasocial interaction makes influencers more influential?	In review	Consumer behavior, parasocial interaction, social media influencer, young consumers	Experiment, ANOVA, and Logistic regression analysis.	Consumers were more likely follow the influencer's recommendation when the influencer encouraged rather than discouraged consumers, and when the influencer used high than low bodily and verbal addressing techniques.

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation focused on young (aged 15–35) Finnish, British, and American consumers' roles as targets of influence and active agents in the social media context. This dissertation consists of four sub-studies that jointly address this important and understudied research area by revealing how young consumers' purchase intentions, consumer behavior, and materialistic values are affected by different social groups, such as SMIs and peers. In this sense, young consumers can be seen as targets of influence on social media. This study also showed that young consumers act on social media as agents and influencers and that they are active political consumers (e.g., boycotters). The study also showed that young people participate in impression management actions on social media. Thus, from this point of view, young consumers can also be seen as active agents on social media. The four sub-studies were conducted in collaboration with researchers from the fields of psychology, marketing, communication, and sociology. My approach to consumption was inspired by Stillerman (2015), who argued that researchers need to use different theoretical perspectives to understand consumption, which is a complex phenomenon. Therefore, I drew on theories that have been widely used in communication, marketing, and social psychological research. In addition, from a larger theoretical perspective, I considered consumers from two opposing perspectives (targets of influence and active agents), which further underlines my multidimensional perspective on consumption. The present study used different quantitative methods, such as LPA, SEM, and multiple and logistic regression analyses.

Digitalization has shaped consumption since the 1990s, when new technologies, such as mobile phones and the Internet, became more common in peoples' lives (e.g., Wilska, 2003; Wilska & Kuoppamäki, 2017). Today, social media plays an ever-increasing role in young consumers' lives. It has been argued that social media has adopted the role of traditional media (e.g., newspapers and television) in influencing consumers' attitudes and behaviors (Duffet, 2017). As social media has gained vast popularity among consumers, advertisers have become active on social media (Dehghani et al., 2016). Thus, young consumers are constantly exposed to large numbers of advertisements on

social media. For instance, the amount that companies have used for social media advertising in the United States has risen in recent years; the amount was about 56 billion US dollars in 2023 (Statista, 2023). It has also been suggested that consumer marketing will keep its place on social media in the future (Stephen, 2016). Additionally, young consumers follow SMIs who are actively endorsing firms' products and services for their audiences (Reinikainen, 2022; Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018), and these influencers have been found to affect consumers' purchase intentions (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Masuda et al., 2022; Weismueller et al., 2020), actual consumer behavior (e.g., Xiang et al., 2016), and brand attitudes (Nafees et al., 2021). The flip side of the coin is that social media also provides consumers with opportunities to reinforce and empower their active consumer roles. For instance, consumers can become aware of boycott- and buycott campaigns by actively exploring social media sources (e.g., others' posts about their participation in boycotts) (Boulianne, 2022). They can also seek online reviews to obtain more detailed information about products (Cheng & Ho, 2015). However, despite the fact that social media plays a significant role in young consumers' lives, the relationship between social media and young consumers has been largely understudied.

In addition to the fact that I addressed a thematically important research gap, there are additional reasons that make this study unique. First, this study focused on young consumers, who are an especially interesting consumer group because they are more susceptible to social influence than other age groups (Jamison & Myers, 2008; Stok et al., 2016). Young consumers are also more active on social media than others (Auxier & Anderson, 2021), and social media allows them to build and express their identities (Årseth et al., 2009; Mannerström et al., 2019), especially through commodities and consumption-related symbols and objects (see Belk, 1988; Wilska et al., 2023). Second, this study applied traditional and widely used theories in a new social media context. For instance, social capital (e.g., Putnam, 2000) was used in an online context, meaning that consumers' online resources and social connections were underlined. Likewise, a theory of impression management (Goffman, 1959) was adapted for social media and consumption contexts by highlighting how consumers can use consumption-related impression management to achieve a higher social status. Furthermore, it was shown how many reference groups, such as peers and SMIs, have taken place on social media and thus can affect consumers' boycotting decisions. Third, this study tackled a topical and important theme by showing what kinds of roles different SMIs play in young consumers' lives. Such influencers will presumably have an increasing role in endorsing various products and services for consumers in the future. Fourth, this study took a multidimensional approach to consumption that some authors have recommended (e.g., Stillerman, 2015). That is, theories from the fields of sociology, social psychology, psychology, marketing, and communication were used. Using theories from different fields to explain consumption presumably yields a more comprehensive picture of how young consumers and social media are interconnected. Fifth, from a methodological perspective, this study utilized rich datasets by including participants from the

United Kingdom, Finland, and the United States. By focusing on young consumers within different cultural contexts, this dissertation provides a more diverse picture of the relationship between young consumers and social media than a study focusing only on a single county.

To summarize, the results of the four sub-studies addressed the unifying research question of this study: "*RQ 0. How do young consumers operate on social media as both targets of influence and active agents?"* This dissertation responds to the unifying research question by showing how young consumers are targets of influence on social media in that their purchase intentions, materialistic values, and actual consumer behavior are influenced by different actors, such as SMIs and peers (Sub-studies 1–4). However, at the same time, I also underlined that young people are active consumers in the sense that they can use status-related impression management on social media, which was subsequently positively related to higher online social capital (Sub-study 2). Likewise, I also presented how British and Finnish young people are active political consumers (Sub-study 3). Thus, this study utilized a traditional theoretical question as to whether consumers are passive targets or active agents (e.g., Gabriel & Lang, 2015; Schor, 2007; Wiedenhoft-Murphy, 2017) in a social media context. Next, I will summarize these results and consider more specifically how they address the main research question and how they are connected to prior research. Then, I will proceed to the final remarks section, in which I will consider the larger implications of this dissertation. I will also outline several limitations of this study. To help the reader grasp the overall picture of the results, I have illustrated how the results of the sub-studies relate to the theoretical distinction between targets of influence and active agents (see Figure 5).

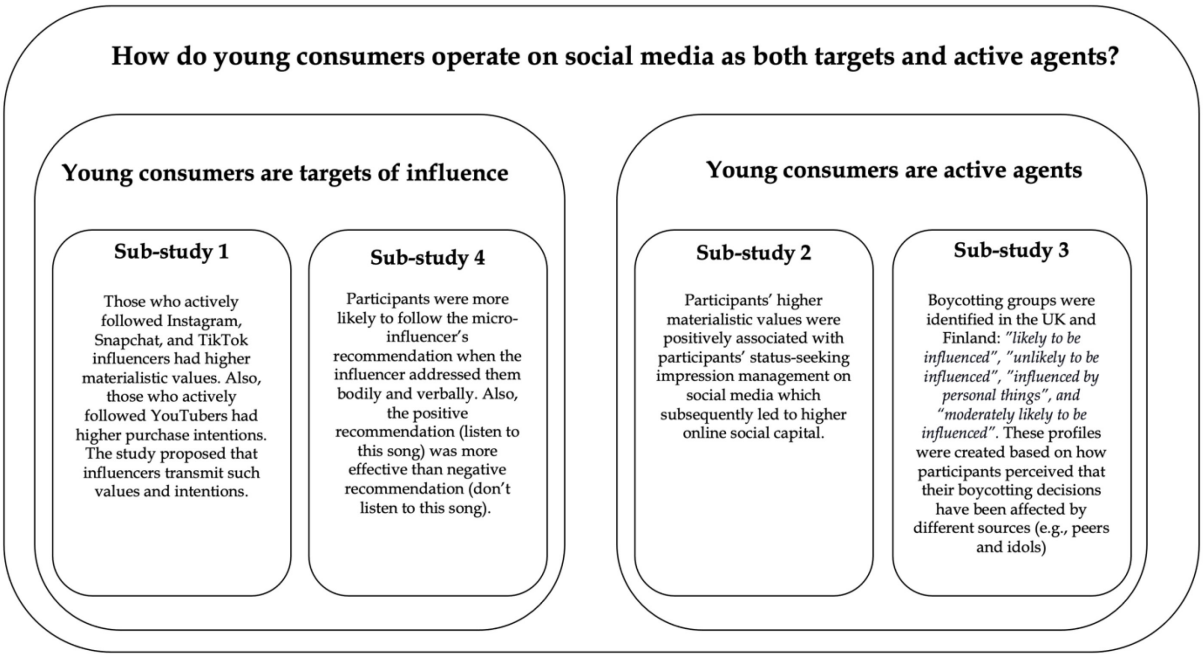

Figure 4. Summary of results

7.1 Young consumers as targets of influence

Before the 1970s, "cultural turn" scholars typically considered consumers, according to economists and critical theory, as passive targets and rational actors (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2020; Warde, 2017). Likewise, more recent studies have also studied consumers both in the offline and social media contexts in a way that highlights their passive role as consumers. For example, research has suggested that consumers can be nudged toward making better food consumption choices (Bucher et al., 2016; Pliner & Mann, 2004; Vandenbroele et al., 2021) or to spend more sustainable way (Demarque et al., 2015). Relatedly, Goldstein et al. (2008) showed how consumers' more sustainable behaviors could be nudged by using social norms (e.g., others also behave this way). In addition, many studies have focused on the relationships between social media marketing and purchase intentions (Alalwan, 2017; Sun et al., 2022) and between Facebook advertising and purchase intentions (Duffet, 2015) and have explored whether SMIs can affect consumers' purchase intentions (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Li & Peng, 2021; Masuda et al., 2022; Reinikainen et al., 2020; Saima & Khan, 2021; Weismueller et al., 2020). Prior studies also suggest that young people who use social media very actively have a higher tendency toward compulsive buying (Pahlevan Sharif et al., 2022); some people have even developed online compulsive buying disorder (Müller et al., 2022). This viewpoint emphasizes consumers' roles as targets whose decisions, intentions, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors are influenced by external sources.

My results support the notion that young consumers can also be seen, though not exclusively, as targets of influence on social media. However my aim is not to claim that young consumers are passive targets without desires, emotions, and preferences. The main point is that when young consumers spend a lot of time on social media, they are not only active agents, but their product preferences, consumption values, and consumer behaviors are also influenced by external sources, such as SMIs. The reason for using the dichotomy of targets of influence and active agents was also practical; such categorization helped the readers understand how the sub-studies of this dissertation can be seen through the lens of two larger opposite theoretical viewpoints.

Previous studies have focused on how social media usage (Kamal et al., 2013) or following SMIs is related to materialism (Lou & Kim, 2019) and how influencers, such as YouTubers, can produce higher purchase intentions (Lee & Watkins, 2016). However, few studies have examined materialism and purchase intentions. In addition, studies have not examined the effects of following different influencers (e.g., Instagrammer vs. YouTuber) on consumers' materialistic values and purchase intentions. To address these gaps in the research and to address RQ 1, I showed how following Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat influencers was related to higher materialistic values, while the active following of YouTubers was connected to higher purchase intentions.

Similarly, prior research has mainly focused on whether consumers who experience high PSI with influencers are more likely to follow influencers' positive recommendations (e.g., try this option) (De Jans et al., 2018; Lee & Watkins, 2016). However, prior studies have ignored the question of whether consumers who experience high PSI with influencers are also more likely to follow their negative recommendations (e.g., do not try this option). This gap is interesting, especially given that the negative recommendation "deinfluencing" trend is rising on social media (Shadijanova, 2023). To address this gap in the research and to address RQ 4, I examined the role of PSI with a social media influencer when she discouraged consumers from trying an option rather than when she encouraged them to try the option. I failed to yield PSI experience to the participants with bodily (eye contact and smile) and verbal (engaging speaking style) addressing techniques. However, when the influencer addressed the participants bodily and verbally, the participants were more likely to follow the influencer's recommendation, whether positive or negative. In addition, I found that the participants were more likely to follow the influencer's recommendation when the influencer encouraged them (listen to this song) rather than discouraged them (do not listen to this song). This is one of the first studies to show that addressing techniques are also effective when an influencer gives a negative recommendation.

Interestingly, what connects the above-presented results is that SMIs are influential sources for both. Thus, my results are in line with prior studies suggesting that SMIs play a significant role in young consumers' lives by affecting their attitudes, values, behaviors, and intentions. However, it would be too simplistic to argue that consumers are merely passive targets of influencers. For example, if someone follows a YouTuber, the following process presumably requires some sort of activity from the audience. Additionally, it is possible that some consumers use influencers' videos to verify their already-existing intentions to buy a certain product. In such cases, consumers are not mere targets of influence. However, it is also notable that many smartphone users browse TikTok and Instagram feeds on a random basis and are thus likely to be exposed to the content that the algorithm recommends, not that they consciously chose. This perspective, in turn, supports the idea that consumers are sometimes targets of influence rather than active agents.

7.2 Young consumers as active agents

Many prior studies have highlighted the position of young consumers as active agents. For instance, online retailers, such as Amazon, allow people to tell their experiences of a given product (Gupta & Harris, 2010), which might help others when making purchase decisions (Cheng & Ho, 2015). It is also common for consumers to watch online reviews on YouTube, which helps them make purchase decisions (Penttinen et al., 2022). Moreover, given that goods and commodities can be used as symbolic signifiers of one's social status (Dittmar &

Pepper, 1994), social media is a great venue for people to signify their status with different status symbols (e.g., pictures of luxury cars). Likewise, consumers can mention brand names on social media for self-presentational purposes (Sekhon et al., 2016) and associate themselves with brands that have a desired image (Kim et al., 2012; Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). Furthermore, in terms of consumer activism, scholars have noted that digital and social media have revolutionized consumer activism; digital media allows consumers to access information and spread information rapidly at low costs (Albinsson & Perera, 2012). For instance, Platon (2019) illustrated how consumers started to boycott the Gillette brand on Twitter #*boycottgillette* as a result of the brand's problematic advertising.

My results support the notion that young consumers are also active consumers in the social media context. Prior research has mainly connected materialism and impression management with negative connotations and outcomes (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Hart et al., 2017; Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002; Lee & Jang, 2019; Michikyan et al., 2014; Powell et al., 2021; Segev et al., 2015; Shrum et al., 2014). Not enough studies have explored whether materialism and impression management may also have positive outcomes. To address this research gap and RQ 2, my findings indicate that young consumers' materialistic values are positively connected to higher status-seeking impression management on social media, leading to higher social capital. This implies that young consumers can actively associate themselves with objects and symbols that signify a high social status on social media (e.g., I intend to be seen as wealthier than I actually am on social media). In this way, consumers might be able to strengthen their existing relationships or gain new acquaintances or followers on social media, even if they do not necessarily consciously aim for increased social capital. Thus, in contrast to prior studies, our findings imply that materialism and impression management can also yield positive outcomes, especially on social media.

Prior studies have studied consumers' boycotting behaviors in the social media context (e.g., Boulianne, 2022) and examined how social factors affect people's boycotting participation (Delistavrou et al., 2020; Farah & Newman, 2010; Garret, 1987; Klein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2001; Zorell & Denk, 2021). However, the role of different types of reference groups, such as peers and idols, in young consumers' boycotting decisions is unclear. In addition, few studies have explored how these reference groups affect young consumers' boycotting decisions in different countries. To fill this gap in research and to address RQ 3, I identified four boycotting groups in Finland and the United Kingdom: "unlikely to be influenced," "influenced by personal things," "likely to be influenced," and "moderately likely to be influenced." Such profiles or boycotting groups occurred in both countries, while Britons were more likely to belong to the "likely to be influenced" profile and Finns to the "unlikely to be influenced" group. Although the findings highlighted the role of reference groups (e.g., peers and idols) in affecting consumers' boycotting decisions, the overall theme of the study illustrates how young consumers are also active political consumers, underlining their active agency.

7.3 Theoretical and practical implications

At the end of this dissertation, I will discuss the study's impact on the existing literature and theoretical knowledge. These results shed more light on the position of today's young consumers, who are growing up as consumers with symbiotic relationships with social media. This dissertation deepened our understanding of how young consumers are, at the same time, active consumers and targets of influence on social media. This dissertation addressed all the research questions based on the research gaps in the existing literature. Thus, the study contributes to fulfilling these gaps in the existing literature by showing how young people absorb materialistic values and purchase intentions from SMIs and how SMIs can have an actual impact on young peoples' consumer behaviors. Additionally, I showed how materialism and online impression management can lead to positive outcomes, such as higher online social capital. I also revealed the different kinds of young boycotting groups whose decisions to boycott are influenced by external sources. Filling research gaps is valuable in itself because it enables the development of consumption research and creates a good basis for future studies. Furthermore, many of the theoretical concepts used in this dissertation, such as impression management (Goffman, 1959), reference groups (Merton, 1968), and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), are relatively old. This study indicates that these concepts are still usable and relevant, especially in the social media context. In fact, I agree with those (e.g., Baumeister & Bushman, 2016; Papacharissi, 2002) who argued that impression management, for instance, is even more relevant in the social media context than in the offline context. I also showed how these theories can be used together, such as reference groups and political consumption or impression management and social capital.

This dissertation also has practical implications. Young consumers are especially important consumer groups because they will be future consumers whose decisions will make an impact on the whole of society. As mentioned earlier, Goldberg et al. (2003) proposed that young consumers' adopted materialistic values can affect the balance of public and private choices throughout their lives. This study may assist in understanding how to make consumers more sustainable. I revealed that young consumers learn materialistic values and higher purchase intentions from SMIs and that SMIs also affect consumers' decision-making processes. Thus, given the influencers' effectiveness as endorsers, and that influencers have already been used to promote common good (see Pöyry et al., 2022), it seems plausible to suggest that influencers could also be employed to promote more sustainable attitudes, values, and behaviors to their followers. For instance, encouraging followers to buy sustainable clothes and avoid fast fashion might have a huge environmental impact. In fact, such influencers already exist. For instance, Lauren Singer (@trashisfortossers) is a sustainability influencer with over 350 thousands of followers on Instagram who focuses on reducing daily waste. My results support the idea that such influencers can be employed even more actively.

On the other hand, I showed that materialism and impression management on social media are not always necessarily linked to negative aspects, as previous studies have suggested (Dittmar et al., 2014; Kasser, 2018; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Powell et al., 2021; Ryan & Dziurawiec, 2001). A negative attitude toward impression management on social media and toward materialism has also been common in popular media. To illustrate this, we can consider the following titles of the news articles: *"Why Everyone and Everything on Social Media Is Fake?" (*Deutsch, 2018), "*Appearing wealthy on social media has become its own industry - Wannabes looking to 'flex' on Instagram and TikTok are using Photoshop, renting luxury goods"* (Smith, 2020), and lastly "*Today's Teens More Materialistic, Less Likely to Work Hard"* (Langfield, 2013). These examples clearly illustrate that the general attitude toward impression management and materialism is negative. Thus, the results of this study, which state that materialism and status-seeking impression management on social media can also lead to higher social capital, should ease the publicly presented concerns that materialism and impression management inevitably have negative outcomes. However, on the other hand, I agree with scholars and other authors that materialism and impression management might have negative outcomes, although that is not always the case. Even though status-seeking impression management, for instance, can be beneficial for performers, one's impression management can also be harmful to others through social comparison mechanisms. For instance, Richins (1991) argued that when consumers are exposed to idealized images in the media (e.g., persons with idealized levels of wealth), they start to compare themselves with idealized images; however, because most consumers do not meet these idealized standards, consumers become dissatisfied and might start achieving such standards. Therefore, young consumers should be better informed (e.g., by educators) that consumption-related social media content by users and influencers typically represents an idealized version of what consumers should be, what products and brands they should possess, and how much wealth they need.

I identified distinctive boycotting groups within Finland and the United Kingdom, and such groups were based on the participants' evaluations of the extent to which peers, idols, bloggers, vloggers, and poor customer service, for instance, have affected their boycotting decisions. These results can be interesting for both commercial firms and activist organizations. That is, it can be important for firms to understand how poor customer service can engender a boycott or how SMIs can promote negative information about firms on social media and thus affect consumers' boycotting decisions. At the same time, this also tells activist organizations that if they are willing to affect consumers' boycotting decisions, they may want to collaborate with bloggers and videobloggers, for instance, to have the desired impact.

7.4 Concluding remarks and limitations

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first comprehensive study with four sub-studies that have examined young consumers in the social media context in multiple countries. Overall, this study provides scholars, policymakers, and stakeholders with a deeper understanding of the position of young consumers in the social media context as targets of influence and active agents. However, there are also several limitations in this dissertation that I would like to acknowledge. First, there are some methodological limitations. Even though the methodological choices for the sub-studies were relevant from a statistical perspective, it would have been interesting to use additional methods that would have allowed causal inferences to be made. For instance, as I found with regression analysis that following SMIs was connected to higher materialism, it remains unclear whether influencers transmit materialistic values to their followers or whether more materialistic participants follow influencers more actively. For instance, Chu et al. (2016) suggested that people with higher materialistic values are more likely to make social comparisons and, thus, are more likely to use social media, which serves as a great venue for social comparison. Thus, future studies could benefit by examining the direction of this relationship more extensively. For example, longitudinal research would allow for measuring repeated exposure to materialistic content, and its effect on consumers' materialistic values would be a promising way to verify this direction.

In addition, although I used research populations from different countries (e.g., the United Kingdom, the United States, and Finland), only one sub-study was thoroughly comparative (boycotting profiles). Therefore, these findings cannot necessarily be generalized to other countries without caution. Relatedly, it would have been more interesting to compare such boycotting profiles between more distinctive countries than the United Kingdom and Finland. Thus, future studies could benefit from further exploring whether different boycotting profiles could be identified in more diverse countries (e.g., between the United States and China). Likewise, this dissertation could have utilized the mixed-method approach to add depth and breadth to the analysis (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009). For example, before analyzing how materialism and purchase intentions are connected to following certain types of influencers, I could have interviewed the participants to get a clearer picture of why they followed such influencers because some participants may have followed SMIs for entertainment purposes, while others may have followed them for more serious purposes (e.g., viewing product reviews). Furthermore, I could have asked the participants, for instance, what kind of YouTubers they followed (e.g., product reviewers vs. sustainable influencers) to achieve more specific results. For instance, it is possible that following sustainable YouTubers can reduce their followers' purchase intentions.

The second methodological limitation is related to the philosophy of science. As the scientific results obtained from the self-reported surveys are necessarily based on the participants' own empirical observations and opinions, we cannot

say that the results represent absolute and objective truths. Relatedly, when we asked the participants to evaluate who has affected their boycotting decisions, it is well documented that people often erroneously explain the real reasons that drive their behaviors (e.g., Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Likewise, it is notable that participants' emotions, ability to concentrate, and motivation might affect their responses and that participants may not always respond correctly or honestly (see self-report bias; Adams et al., 1999). Lastly, it needs to be acknowledged that some researchers have pointed out the validity issues regarding MTurk, such as MTurkers not paying enough attention to the treatments and not necessarily understanding the English instructions well (Aguinis, 2020). For instance, it is possible that the influencer's bodily and verbal addressing did not yield PSI experience to the audience if the participants did not focus enough on the treatments they were assigned to.Therefore, the readers should interpret the results of the sub-study 4 cautiously.

In conclusion, I propose that this dissertation provides a solid and comprehensive starting point for future research on the relationship between social media and young consumers. The central claim of this dissertation is that young consumers operate on social media as both targets of influence and active agents. Their role as targets of influence can be illustrated by the findings showing that young consumers' purchase intentions, materialistic values, consumer behaviors, and boycotting decisions are guided by SMIs and other important social reference groups, such as peers. On the other hand, I showed that young people are active consumers of social media. They actively managed their impressions on social media with consumer-related content and were active political consumers through boycotting behaviors. To sum up the main contribution of this dissertation: even though earlier studies on consumption and social media can be categorized into two research streams (targets of influence vs. active agents), this dissertation with four sub-studies specified and added to prior research by tackling those research gaps that the previous studies have left unaddressed. Also, from the larger point of view, this dissertation responds to the need for a better understanding of young consumers' role on social media by providing a multidiscipline and comprehensive overall picture of how young consumers operate on social media both as targets of influencers and active agents. This theme remains an important research topic because social media and its different platforms are constantly changing. That is, new social media platforms are taking place and replacing old ones. Thus, it is important to keep this important research field updated, especially among young people who are the most active users of social media.

SUMMARY IN FINNISH

Tämä väitöskirja käsittelee nuoria kuluttajia sosiaalisen median alustoilla. Tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella nuoret kuluttajat voidaan nähdä samanaikaisesti sekä aktiivisina toimijoina että vaikuttamisen kohteina sosiaalisessa mediassa.

Kuluttajat ja erilaiset kaupalliset toimijat, kuten yritykset ja sosiaalisen median vaikuttajat, ovat yhä enemmän läsnä erilaisilla sosiaalisen median alustoilla, kuten YouTubessa, Instagramissa ja TikTokissa. Aiemman tutkimuksen mukaan nuoret käyttävät sosiaalisen median alustoja erityisen aktiivisesti. Nuoret ovat myös tärkeä asiakasryhmä kaupallisille toimijoille, ja monet brändit ja yritykset ovatkin siirtyneet mainostamaan tuotteitaan ja palveluitaan nuorten suosimille alustoille. Kaupalliset toimijat tekevät yhteistyötä sosiaalisen median vaikuttajien kanssa tavoittaakseen nuoret, koska nuoret ovat yleisesti ottaen olleet haastavasti tavoitettava kohderyhmä. Kun nuoret kuluttajat ja kaupalliset toimijat kohtaavat yhä enemmän sosiaalisen median alustoilla, herää kysymys siitä, miten tämä vaikuttaa kuluttajiin. Ostavatko nuoret kuluttajat esimerkiksi tavaroita, joita sosiaalisen median vaikuttajat suosittelevat?

Kuluttajat voivat toisaalta myös osoittaa aktiivista toimijuuttaan kuluttajina sosiaalisen median alustoilla. Sosiaalinen media mahdollistaa esimerkiksi arvostelujen kirjoittamisen liittyen yritysten tuotteisiin ja palveluihin. Kuluttajat saavat myös sosiaalisessa mediassa tietoa erilaisista kulutusboikoteista, ja toisaalta boikotin aloittaminen sosiaalisessa mediassa on kuluttajille aiempaa helpompaa.

Vaikka sosiaalinen media on tuonut nuorille kuluttajille sekä haasteita että mahdollisuuksia, aiheesta on tehty toistaiseksi vain vähän tutkimusta. Tämä väitöskirja havainnollistaa nuorten kuluttajien ja sosiaalisen median suhdetta neljän kvantitatiivisen osatutkimuksen avulla. Ensimmäisessä osatutkimuksessa osoitetaan, että nuorten aktiivinen YouTube-vaikuttajien seuraaminen liittyy nuorten korkeampaan ostohalukkuuteen, kun taas aktiivinen TikTok-, Snapchat- ja Instagram-vaikuttajien seuraaminen liittyy korkeampiin materialistisiin arvoihin. Neljännessä osatutkimuksessa osoitetaan tarkemmin, miten sosiaalisen median vaikuttaja voi vaikuttaa kuluttajien käyttäytymiseen kehollisin ja verbaalisin keinoin. Toisessa osatutkimuksessa osoitetaan, että kuluttajien korkeammat materialistiset arvot liittyvät sosiaalisessa mediassa tapahtuvaan statushakuiseen vaikutelman hallintaan ja sitä kautta korkeampaan sosiaaliseen pääomaan. Kolmannessa osatutkimuksessa käsitellään nuorten kuluttajien sosiaalisessa mediassa tapahtuvaa boikotointia ja siihen vaikuttavia tekijöitä.

Tulokset osoittavat, että nuoret ovat sekä vaikuttamisen kohteina että aktiivisia kuluttajia sosiaalisessa mediassa: sosiaalisen median vaikuttajat vaikuttavat nuorten kulutusaikomuksiin, arvoihin ja käytökseen. Samalla nuoret voivat kuitenkin osallistua kuluttajaboikotteihin somessa ja rakentaa omaa identiteettiään sosiaalisessa mediassa kulutusvalintojensa kautta.

Väitöskirjalla on myös rajoituksensa. Neljännessä osatutkimuksessa vastaajina käytettiin Mturkin avulla hankittuja vastaajia. On huomautettu, että Mturkin kautta saatuihin tuloksiin tulisi suhtautua varoen, sillä vastaajat eivät

välttämättä kiinnitä riittävästi huomiota kokeeseen. Jatkotutkimuksissa olisi hyödyllistä kokeilla tulosten toistettavuutta esimerkiksi muulla tavalla hankituilla vastaajilla. Toisessa osatutkimuksessa havaittiin, että somevaikuttajien seuraaminen liittyi korkeampiin materialistisiin arvoihin. Jatkotutkimuksessa olisi hyödyllistä tarkastella pitkittäisaineiston avulla, johtaako vaikuttajien seuraaminen materialismiin vai seuraavatko materialistisemmat kuluttajat enemmän vaikuttajia.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

MODERN-DAY SOCIALIZATION AGENTS: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS, MATERIALISM, AND PURCHASE INTENTIONS OF FINNISH YOUNG PEOPLE

by

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Modern-Day Socialization Agents: The Connection Between Social Media Influencers, Materialism, and Purchase Intentions of Finnish Young People

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This paper investigates how following social media influencers is associated with Finnish adolescents' materialistic values and purchase intentions. Although the interlinkages between social media, materialism, and purchase intentions have been presented in previous studies, little is known about how following social media influencers is connected to their followers' materialistic values and purchase intentions. Cultivation theory and consumer socialization theory were applied to understand the cultivation process in young people's materialism and the antecedents of their purchase intentions. Finnish participants (n = 800), aged 15-19 were interviewed by phone. The sample was based on a nationally representative sample by age (by one year), gender and area of residence. Regression analysis was used as our statistical model. Frequent following of Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers was positively related to materialism. Active followers of YouTubers had higher purchase intentions, but they were no more materialistic than their peers. This is one of the earliest studies, which has underlined the role of different influencers as disseminators of materialistic values, and measured the influence capability of an individual influencer on the followers' purchase intentions.

Keywords: materialism, purchase intention, social media influencer, consumer socialization, adolescents

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Research suggest that materialistic values among young people have been increasing during the past decades (Richins, 2017; Twenge & Kasser, 2013). The rise of commercialised content on social media at the same time has raised questions about the possible effects of this content on the increase of materialistic values. For instance, it has been argued that the media's role in internalizing materialistic values among children and young people has been growing along with the increasing exposure to digital media (Richins, 2017). Materialism refers to the three-dimensional consumer value including the central role of possessions in life, possessions as

a source of happiness, and possessions as an indicator of success (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Cultivation theory suggests that media users adopt the ideologies presented in the media (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). In parallel, it has been reported that the usage of traditional media (Shrum et al., 2011) and social media (Thoumrungroje, 2018) are associated with young people's level of materialism.

However, materialistic values are not adopted solely by the media. It is well acknowledged that peers and parents have a significant impact on children's and young people's materialistic values (Chaplin & John, 2010). This transmission can be seen through the lens of consumer socialization (CS) in which children and adolescents learn consumer skills and attitudes from, for example, peers and television (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). The CS process can also take place virtually (Lueg et al., 2006), which is not surprising given that young people are increasingly interacting with peers online. In addition, young people's consumer behaviour has been increasingly affected by social media influencers – bloggers, YouTubers, Instagram celebrities in recent years. Therefore, the influence of social media influencers has been acknowledged by both companies and academics (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Reinikainen et al., 2020). Companies try to attract young consumers, and thus, the companies are collaborating with influencers as their strategic partners to reach these consumer groups (Borchers & Enke, 2021; Enke & Borchers, 2019). Likewise, some research has even provided *a "how-to guide"* for companies to be successful with influencers (Haenlein et al., 2020).

Although materialism is associated with social media (Thoumrungroje, 2018), and influencers appear to affect consumers' purchase intentions, there has been far too little research on how following social media influencers on various platforms is related to the materialistic values and purchasing intentions of their followers. Further, given that research has associated materialism with detrimental attributes such as lower well-being and lower life-satisfaction (Dittmar et al., 2014; Lipovcan et al., 2015), it is important to explore the potential sources of materialistic attitudes.

To the authors' knowledge, only a single study (Lou & Kim, 2019) has considered social media influencers' impact on their followers' materialism and purchase intention. However, previous studies did not examine what role the platform types used by influencers played in these relationships. That is, social media is not a monolith but rather includes multiple platforms that are used in various ways by young users which calls

attention to study the role of such platforms in developing consumers' materialistic values and purchase intentions. To address this gap, we take an explorative approach to study how following social media influencers on different platforms such as Youtubers or Instagrammers is related to the young followers' level of materialism and purchase intentions. More specifically, we explore if the relationships between young people and the influencers are determined by the types of social media platforms (e.g., YouTube, Instagram or TikTok) on which the influencers and the followers interact. Our study was carried out in Finland, where adolescents are very active social media users, as 85% of 15-19-year-olds reported using Snapchat, while 81% of adolescents used Instagram (Kohvakka & Saarenmaa, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The dissemination of materialistic values

Materialism refers to the mindset that highlights the role of the purchases and acquisition for achieving happiness (Richins & Dawson, 1992). It is one's disposition to over-emphasise the material goods as a part of their life goals (Richins, 2004). It seems that scholars also place a great emphasis on investigating materialism in terms of young people, especially when considering that materialism scales have been developed for the younger age groups (Kühne & Opree, 2019). Previous studies suggest that one can adopt materialistic values through social interaction (Churchill & Moschis, 1979), traditional media (Shrum et al., 2011), and social media (Kamal et al., 2013; Thoumrungroje, 2018). Relatedly, scholars have clarified this process of adoption of materialistic values with consumer socialization theory (CS) (Moschis & Churchill, 1978) and cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

Consumer socialization theory

Consumer socialization is a process through which young people learn consumer skills, attitudes and values from socialization agents such as peers and family (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). Churchill and Moschis (1979) presented the actual socialization process in which one may learn, for example, materialistic values or a specific behaviour through reinforcements, modelling, and social interaction. Modelling refers to the process where a learner emulates the behavior of a socialization agent, while their behaviour can be negatively or positively reinforced (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). Social interaction was

loosely defined by Churchill and Moschis (1979), but they perceived it as a combination of reinforcements and imitations, and that social norms within interaction processes between agent and learner (e.g., frugality is preferred) shape the learners' behaviour and attitudes (Churchill & Moschis, 1979; de Gregorio & Sung, 2010). As Bush and colleagues (1999) summarised, the socialization agents transmit the behavioral models, attitudes, and values to the learners. Thus, in addition to materialistic values, the socialization approach serves as a basis to understand how purchase intentions may be transformed from the influencers to their followers as a result of the socialization process.

Cultivation theory

Cultivation process suggests that people absorb the social reality presented on television; frequent exposure to violent content presented on television was correlated with their audiences' exaggerated perceptions of the amount of violence in the USA (Gerbner et al., 2002). The cultivation process includes first-order effects and second-order effects: first-order effects illustrate how mass media consumption affects people's estimates of the probability or frequency of (e.g., crime) while second-order effects describe how media affects people's attitudes and values (e.g., materialism) (Shrum et al, 2011; Stein et al., 2021). In terms of second-order effects, Shrum and Lee (2012) suggested that the more people watch a certain content (e.g., television), the more their attitudes and values will align with that content. Likewise, research showed the more frequently people watched television the higher their materialistic values were (Shrum et al., 2005; Shrum et al., 2011; Shrum & Lee, 2012). Opree and colleagues (2014) also found a longitudinal effect of tv-advertisements on children's materialism. Researchers have also applied cultivation theory to the social media context and showed how higher Instagram (Hwang & Jeong, 2020) and Facebook (Hermann et al., 2020) usage was related to higher materialistic values. Furthermore, it is notable that even a short exposure to materialistic content can affect a viewer's materialistic values, though temporarily (Shrum et al., 2011). However, given that materialism is a personal value (Shrum et al., 2011) and that personal values are enduring (Shrum & McCarthy, 1997; Shrum et al., 2011) a repeated exposure to materialistic content can potentially have long-term cultivation effect on viewers.

At first, cultivation analysis was merely focused on the message system analysis, and instead of specific programmes (e.g., soap opera or crime shows), its main goal was to

examine the broader patterns of representations integrated throughout television content (Gerbner et al., 2002). Later, a majority of cultivation research has taken a content or genre-specific approach (Potter, 2014). This has raised a debate as to whether genre-specific cultivation research is in harmony with the tenets of the original theory, and whether it is to be seen as a cultivation process at all (Morgan et al., 2014; Potter, 2014). Regardless of this debate, as our research field is increasingly moving toward accepting genre and programme effects as a part of the cultivation process (Record, 2018), we position this study as cultivation research.

Materialism and social media

Social media has been defined as web-based tools and applications where people both consume and create content and cultivate social connections (Hoffman et al., 2013). During the past decade, social media has become largely commercialised. For example, in Germany, the usage of affiliate links on YouTube videos more than tripled during 2009-2017 (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). The number of brand-sponsored influencer posts has also multiplied between 2016 and 2020 (Statista, 2020). Thus, social media appears to be an efficient channel for the dissemination of materialistic values. Previous studies have suggested that social media usage and intensity had an impact on the users' level of materialism (Kamal et al., 2013; Thoumrungroje, 2018). Hwang and Jeong (2020) supported this argument by showing how Instagram usage had a cultivation effect on users' materialistic values. However, it remains unclear as to whether materialistic people use more social network sites (SNS), or whether social media itself spreads materialistic values. For example, Chu and colleagues (2016) argued that higher materialism will lead to increased SNS usage due to their willingness to engage in social comparison.

Social media influencers can potentially transmit materialistic values to their followers. Dhanesh and Duthler (2019) suggested that social media influencers are people who use personal branding to create relationships with their followers on social media, and who affect their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour. Influencers' commercial nature is also conspicuous. A recent literature review showed that a majority of the studies on social media influencers between 2011-2020 were focused on their commercial potential (Hudders et al., 2020). Also, interviews with business representatives revealed the influencers' important role as companies' strategic partners (Borchers & Enke, 2021). The

influencers can, for instance, promote a product of a certain company and get that product in return for an endorsement (Hudders et al., 2020). Based on the above-mentioned literature, we regard social media influencers as commercially oriented individuals who are able to affect their followers' attitudes, values, behaviour, and knowledge, and who are in touch with their followers on social media.

However, little is known about how following social media influencers relates to the followers' materialistic values. According to a recent study, adolescents' perceived parasocial relationship with social media influencers was related to materialism and purchase intentions (Lou & Kim, 2019). The parasocial relationship refers to an illusion of an actual face-to-face relationship with a media persona (Horton & Wohl, 1956). As the influencers' role in young people's daily lives is remarkable (Lou & Kim, 2019), it appears to be inevitable that they learn values, behaviours, and intentions that influencers represent. We suggest that social media influencers can, for example, reveal their polished and glamorous lifestyles on social media. As a result, active followers are repetitively exposed to the influencers' materialistic content, which in line with cultivation theory, affects their adoption of materialistic values. From the socialization perspective, the followers learn materialistic values from the influencers through the socialization process.

Social media influencers' impact on purchase behaviour

A number of studies have found that social media influencers can affect their followers' purchase intentions through various mechanisms (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Schouten et al., 2020; Trivedi & Sama, 2019). For example, consumers' attitudes towards influencer, such as perceived authenticity (Pöyry et al., 2019), and perceived attractiveness were related to higher purchase intention (Taillon et al., 2020; Weismueller et al., 2020). Trivedi and Sama (2019), in turn, found that influencers had an indirect impact on consumers' purchase intention via brand attitude and brand admiration. This study, in turn, explores the differences between social media platforms used by influencers (e.g., YouTube and Instagram) and their connections to the followers' purchase intentions Such impact of social media influencers on consumers' purchase intentions and behaviour can be seen through the socialization perspective. In earlier studies, peers, parents, and television, for instance, were considered as socialization agents that shaped consumers attitudes (Bush et al., 1999). Today, social media influencers can be seen as potential socialization agents. For example, Nafees and colleagues (2021) perceived social media

influencers as socialization agents and found that influencers affected their followers' attitudes toward endorsed brands. Likewise, we suggest that influencers can be seen as socialization agents, as they may affect their followers' purchase intentions. For example, modelling is one socialization mechanism by which people acquire consumption-related knowledge and attitudes from socialization agents through observational learning and imitation (Churchill & Moschis, 1979; de Gregorio & Sun, 2010). Thus, when an influencer promotes a certain product with a favourable attitude, their followers may learn attitudes and norms related to a given product which, in turn, generate purchase intentions (e.g. Ajzen, 2011). Lastly, it is also noteworthy that materialistic values have predicted higher purchase intentions (Kamal et al., 2013; Lou & Kim, 2019).

Why would a platform matter?

The connections between following social media influencers, materialism, and purchase intentions are presumably dependent on the platform where the influencers operate since influencers' content varies by platform (Haenlein et al., 2020) (see Appendix A for a detailed description of the platforms). However, due to the lack of previous studies on these relations, only general assumptions can be made. Although researchers have not paid much attention to the materialistic side of TikTok or Snapchat, journalists have found that materialistic content is very popular on TikTok (Widdicombe, 2020) and Snapchat (Moss, 2014). Needless to say, all platforms have different types of influencers whose content varies. For example, many popular TikTok influencers such as (@khaby.lame) or (@jennifererica) are famous for their short dance and comedy videos. Nevertheless, Instagram has been connected to impression management (Tian et al., 2019), polished pictures (Lup et al., 2015), and glamorous and luxury lifestyles (Hwang & Jeong, 2020; Marwick, 2015). To illustrate this, Kylie Jenner (@kyliejenner) is one of the most famous Instagrammer in the world, whose Instagram feed conspicuously portrays a glamorous and wealthy lifestyle including luxury shoes, cars, and private jets. Interestingly, she is also extremely popular on Snapchat. In sum, we assume that following influencers on these instant platforms (Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat) is positively related to materialism. Moreover, as Instagram has a lot of product placement (Jin et al., 2019), and TikTok is well-known for its product-centred challenges, such as the Samsung Galaxy mobile phone challenge #GalaxyA, these platforms may also yield higher

purchase intentions. Also, Shahpasandi and colleagues (2020) found that a hedonic Instagram browsing led to the feelings of pleasure and flow experience which further enhanced impulsive buying behaviour.

YouTube has a lot of product promotion (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2019), and so does Instagram, but YouTube has longer videos allowing more detailed product reviews (Brown, 2019). As an illustration, the YouTube channel called unbox therapy by Lewis Hilsenteger has four billion total views and 18 million subscribers, in which the boxes of technological products are opened and described. Research also suggests a potential link between following YouTubers and purchase intention. That is, higher usage of YouTube (and Facebook) has been linked to more positive attitudes toward marketing on social media (Akar & Topçu, 2011). In the same manner, Anubha and Shome (2021) found that consumers' perceived advertisement-value on YouTube had a direct effect on purchase intentions but also an indirect effect via positive attitudes toward advertisement. Lastly, Lee and Watkins (2016) found that a parasocial relationship with YouTubers was indirectly related to purchase intentions via brand perceptions. Therefore, it can be assumed that following YouTubers has a positive connection to purchase intention (see Reinikainen et al., 2020). Also, when one is constantly exposed to the products on YouTube, it may enhance the importance of possessions in one's life, and lead to materialism. Of course, many YouTubers such as one of the most popular YouTuber PewDiePie focuses on entertainment (e.g., gaming) rather than products. However, sometimes products are tacitly endorsed. That is, the gaming videos can also be seen as product reviews as the games are carefully reviewed and played, which might attract followers to acquire these games.

Following LinkedIn influencers or game-streamers (other influencers) is not presumably related to materialism or purchase intentions as LinkedIn is a professional work-oriented platform, where glamorous lifestyles or luxury products are not present to the same extent as on Instagram or TikTok, for instance. Regardless of the above-mentioned argument that following PewDiePie for instance, may engender purchase intention in some cases, we do not believe this to be very common. Also, following bloggers is less likely to be related to materialism or purchase intentions than following YouTubers or Instagrammers for instance, as their written content is not as interactive, compelling, and engaging as video content.

METHODS

Based on the theoretical framework and questions raised from previous studies, our specified research questions are:

RQ1: How is following social media influencers in different platforms connected to young people's level of materialism and their purchase intentions when socio-demographics are controlled for?

RQ2: How are the connections between following social media influencers, materialism, and purchase intentions dependant on the type of platforms where influencers operate, such as YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat?

A research company was assigned to conduct a survey that was carried out in winter 2019-2020. The target group consisted of adolescents aged from 15 to 19 who lived in Finland. According to the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, young people at the age of 15 or older are allowed to participate in surveys without parental consent. Data were collected with structured telephone interviews that lasted approximately 30 minutes. The sample of the study was randomly selected from the Finnish Population Register and is nationally representative by age (by one year), gender, and area of residence. Those who completed the survey received a gift for participation from the research company. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study. The data did not contain any variables by which the participants could be identified, and no other information was combined with the survey data. The final data contained 800 cases, where 98% of the young participants reported using social media. However, a subpopulation (n = 686) was used in the analysis among those respondents who reported having followed social media influencers at least once during the past year. Those who had not followed any social media influencers (n = 114) were excluded from further analysis. The data and the variables used in the analyses contained a few missing values (see Tables 1 and 2). Listwise deletion was used to handle missing data in the regression analysis (OLS), (final n = 676). Stata was used to perform all statistical analyses.

Measurements

The following variables were used in our analyses (see Table 1 and Table 2). Only observed variables (mean aggregated composite or raw) were used in our statistical

modelling. Please, see Appendix A for more detailed information on all measurements used in this study.

Materialism. Participants' materialistic values were assessed by using a shortened 6-item version adopted from Richin's scale of materialism (Richins, 2004). The adaptation of this scale has also showed good reliability across different age groups (Kühne & Opree, 2019). The scale showed good reliability in this study, Cronbach α=.72.

Purchase intention. Purchase intention was assessed by using a 3-item scale, adapted from previous studies (Chakraborty, 2019; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Lee et al., 2015). The original items were modified so that they were compatible with our research aim, Cronbach α=.77.

Economic situation of the family. Young people's socio-economic background may affect their level of materialism. For example, adolescents from poorer families scored higher than their more affluent counterparts on the measures of materialism (Chaplin et al., 2014). Therefore, the family's economic situation was used as a control variable.

Following social media influencers. Influencers were identified according to their platforms such as YouTubers and Instagrammers. Influencers were chosen for this study according to their estimated popularity (e.g., Smith & Anderson, 2018) among young people. Influencers were grouped into categories by the nature of their platform. The categories were: 1) YouTubers; 2) Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat influencers; 3) bloggers; and 4) other influencers including LinkedIn influencers and game streamers (e.g., Twitch) (see the full rationale for categorization in appendix A). Participants were first asked to report whether they followed social media influencers such as Instagrammers, bloggers, and YouTubers. Those who answered yes were then asked to report how often they followed the following influencers: 1) YouTubers 2) Instagram, TikTok, or Snapchat influencers, 3) Bloggers, 4) Other influencers such as LinkedIn influencers or game streamers. The used scale was: 1= Only a few times a year, 2= Monthly, 3= Weekly, 4= Daily or almost daily. In the analysis, the following frequency was converted into dummy variables by having "only a few times a year" as a reference group. As the distance between time points (1 – 4) in the scale was not equal, it was statistically sufficient to treat the followership as categorical.

Gender. Gender was chosen to be a control variable since some studies have suggested that men have scored higher than women on materialism (Kamineni, 2005). On

the other hand, women have been reported to be more prone to hedonic consumption and more committed to luxury brands and fashion that influencers typically present (Tifferet & Herstein, 2012).

Age. Since age affects the consumer socialization process (Moschis & Churchill, 1978), age was involved in our sample as a control variable.

Table 1
Continuous Variables

Variable	n	Scale	Mean	SD
Materialism	686	1-5	2.66	0.84
Purchase Intention	686	1-5	2.27	1.01
Age	686	15-19	16.98	1.41
Family's economic situation	686	1-5	3.85	0.76

Table 2
Categorical variables (%)

Scale/Variable	YouTubers	Instagram/TikTok/Snapchat Inf[a]	Bloggers[b]	Other influencers[c]
Following intensity	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1=Only a few times a year	3.6	17.4	71	62.2
2=Monthly	18.7	10.4	16.9	15.3
3=Weekly	32.0	17.9	8.8	15.1
4=Daily or almost daily	45.7	54.3	3.2	7.4
Gender[d]	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Notes. Total N=686, [a]Missing N=2 [b]Missing N=5 [c]Missing N=5, [d]Girls = 53.4, Boys = 46.6

Analysis strategy and methods

First, a t-test with robust standard errors was used as a preliminary analysis to see whether those who followed social media influencers and those who did not differ in their materialism. Our aim was to obtain more detailed information about these groups.

Regression analysis was then used to explore how following influencers on different platforms is connected to materialism and purchase intentions, when gender, age, and the economic situation of the family were controlled for. Also, the relationship between materialism and purchase intention was tested. Unstandardised coefficients were used and standard robust errors were used to manage the possible non-normality of the statistical testing. In addition to a single parameter test (*t*-test), joint hypothesis test (*F*-test) (robust Wald) was executed to obtain more accurate results and to test the overall significance. That is, some independent variables might have significant *t*-statistics when tested individually but appear to be insignificant when tested jointly (*F*-statistics), or vice versa (Wooldridge, 2020, p. 149). Hence, following all influencer types (categorised by platform) were tested separately and all influencers' specific parameters were assumed to be zero to test the overall significance of variables.

RESULTS

Following social media influencers and materialism

The t-test showed that those who followed social media influencers (n = 686) scored higher on materialism (M = 2.66) than those who did not (n = 114) (M = 2.50), but the result was not statistically significant ($p = .058$). Even if we did not find statistically significant differences in materialism between these groups, it does not rule out the further examination of the relationship between materialistic values, purchase intentions, and following social media influencers. That is, those who did not follow influencers could have gained materialistic values from other sources. Also, those who did not follow influencers would not have been able to answer the questions regarding purchase intentions as they were related to influencers (See appendix A). Consequently, we executed a further analysis only for those who followed social media influencers to obtain more accurate information about the connections between following social media influencers, materialism, and purchase intentions.

Table 3 illustrates the relationship between following a specific influencer and one's level of materialism. The results indicate that following Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers is positively connected to materialism. More specifically, the results revealed that those who followed the aforementioned influencers every week ($b = 0.37$ $p < .001$), and daily or almost daily ($b = 0.46$, $p < .001$), differed significantly from the passive followers

in their materialism. Thus, more active Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok followers were more materialistic than their passive counterparts. More surprisingly, Table 3 illustrates that the active and passive followers of YouTubers, bloggers, and other influencers did not differ significantly from each other in terms of materialism. Interestingly, boys were more materialistic than girls (b = -0.35, p <. 001). However, neither family's economic situation nor age predicted materialism. Lastly, joint hypothesis tests (see the results in Appendix B) showed that only the following of Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers was a statistically significant (p <. 001) predictor of materialism.

Table 3 *Regression analysis of materialism*

Dependent: Materialism	*B (Unstandardised)*	*Robust SE*	t	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	*p*>t
YouTubers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	-0.09	0.18	-0.05	-0.36	0.34	0.958
Weekly	-0.06	0.17	-0.33	-0.39	0.28	0.742
Daily or almost daily	-0.03	0.17	-0.18	-0.36	0.30	0.858
Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	0.23	0.12	1.89	-0.01	0.46	0.059
Weekly	0.37	0.11	3.52	0.16	0.58	0.000***
Daily or almost daily	0.46	0.09	5.43	0.30	0.63	0.000***
Bloggers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	-0.07	0.08	-0.85	-0.23	0.09	0.395
Weekly	0.12	0.13	0.93	-0.13	0.36	0.353
Daily or almost daily	-0.23	0.16	-1.45	-0.55	0.08	0.148
Other Influencers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	0.14	0.09	1.54	-0.04	0.31	0.123
Weekly	0.10	0.09	1.12	-0.08	0.28	0.265
Daily or almost daily	0.21	0.12	1.86	-0.01	0.44	0.063
Gender						
Boys	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Girls	-0.35	0.07	-4.97	-0.49	-0.21	0.000***
Age	0.00	0.02	0.16	-0.04	0.05	0.873
Family's economic situation	-0.02	0.04	-0.40	-0.10	0.07	0.688
Cons.	2.50	0.47	5.29	1.57	3.43	0.000

Notes. n = 676, R-Squared=0.10. *** p < .001.

Following social media influencers and purchase intentions

The results of the relationship between following social media influencers and purchase intention are presented in Table 4. The results reveal that those who followed YouTubers every week ($b = 0.51$, $p = .003$), and daily or almost daily ($b = 0.61$, $p < .001$) differed significantly from passive followers. Interestingly, statistically significant differences were also found between those who followed other influencers daily or almost daily and the passive ones ($b = 0.39$, $p = .013$). The passive group also differed significantly in purchase intention, solely from those who followed bloggers every month ($b = 0.23$, $p = .024$), but not from the other, more active groups. Furthermore, materialism ($b = 0.34$, $p < .001$) predicted higher purchase intentions. Lastly, gender, family's economic situation, or age did not predict higher purchase intention.

Similar to materialism, additional joint hypothesis tests were executed (see Appendix B). Only following YouTubers was found to be a significant (overall) predictor of purchase intentions ($p < .001$) This specifies the results of single parameter testing. Thus, only a clear and consistent relationship regarding single and joint hypothesis testing was with following YouTubers and purchase intention. In contrast to our expectations, a connection between following instant platform influencers (Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat) and purchase intentions was not statistically significant.

Table 4 *Regression analysis of purchase intentions*

Dependent: Purchase Intention	*B (Unstandardised)*	*Robust SE*	t	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	p>t
YouTubers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	0.34	0.18	1.85	-0.02	0.69	0.064
Weekly	0.51	0.17	2.94	0.17	0.85	0.003**
Daily or almost daily	0.61	0.17	3.54	0.27	0.95	0.000***
Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	0.01	0.14	0.10	-0.27	0.29	0.923
Weekly	-0.03	0.12	-0.27	-0.27	0.21	0.789
Daily or almost daily	0.13	0.10	1.30	-0.07	0.33	0.195
Bloggers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	0.23	0.10	2.26	0.03	0.43	0.024*
Weekly	0.17	0.13	1.33	-0.08	0.43	0.184
Daily or almost daily	0.32	0.22	1.42	-0.12	0.77	0.155
Other Influencers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	0.08	0.12	0.69	-0.15	0.31	0.493
Weekly	0.15	0.11	1.35	-0.07	0.37	0.176
Daily or almost daily	0.39	0.16	2.48	0.08	0.70	0.013
Gender						
Boys	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Girls	0.12	0.08	1.39	-0.05	0.28	0.165
Age	-0.02	0.03	-0.59	-0.07	0.04	0.557
Family's economic situation	0.05	0.05	0.96	-0.05	0.15	0.337
Materialism	0.34	0.05	6.78	0.24	0.43	0.000***
Cons.	0.68	0.55	1.24	-0.40	1.77	0.217

Notes. $n = 676$, R-Squared=0.15. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

DISCUSSION

To date, very few studies have explored how consumers' purchase intentions and materialistic values are related to specific platforms. This study addresses this gap in research as follows: we assumed that following YouTubers and instant platform influencers (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok) would be connected to purchase intention and materialism. Surprisingly, we found something more specific. Those who followed more

actively Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat influencers had more materialistic values than their passive counterparts. However, active and passive followers of instant platform influencers did not differ in their purchase intentions. These findings are consistent with the previous studies that have reported the relationship between materialism, traditional media usage (Opree et al., 2014) overall social media usage (Hwang & Jeong, 2020; Kamal et al., 2013; Thoumrungroje, 2018), and following social media influencers (Lou & Kim, 2019).

In turn, the active followers of YouTubers had higher purchase intentions than passive ones. However, in contrast to our assumptions, passive and active followers of YouTubers did not differ in their materialistic values. These findings support the previous research which suggests that influencers can affect followers' purchase intention (Lou & Kim, 2019; Rasmussen et al., 2021; Schouten et al., 2020). We also found that materialism predicted higher purchase intention, which agrees with Kamal and colleagues (2013) and Lou and Kim (2019). In addition, our finding that boys scored higher on materialism than girls, is in line with the findings of Kamineni (2005). Overall, our findings are in line with Lou and Kim (2019) who found that following social media influencers was connected to materialism and purchase intention. However, they did not examine what role the platform types used by influencers played in these relationships. Therefore, this study adds to previous findings by showing how following instant platform influencers (Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat) was related to higher materialism while active following of YouTubers was connected to higher purchase intentions.

Our research was framed by consumer socialization (CS) theory (Moschis & Churchill, 1978), and Cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). The latter was used to explain the larger process of transmission of materialistic values from the influencers to their followers. Our finding that active followers of instant platform influencers (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok) had a higher level of materialism compared to the passive followers is in line with the idea of the genre-specific cultivation process (especially when this difference was not found in other platforms).

CS-theory was used to explain how followers of influencers develop purchase intentions and materialistic values. The socialization process proposes that individuals learn values and behaviours from the socialization through imitation, reinforcement, and interaction (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). We found that social media influencers can play a

pivotal role as socialization agents. Thus, when one actively follows product reviews by YouTubers, for instance, followers might want to have the same products as the socialization agent in order to be like them (Churchill & Moschis, 1979; Rasmussen et al., 2021). Moreover, when interacting with influencers (e.g., Instagrammer), followers might absorb the social norms and materialistic values presented by social media influencers, for example, that being wealthy and having luxury products is worthwhile. Applying the conclusion by de Gregorio and Sung (2010): followers' attitudes are shaped by influencers they are interacting with. The followers generate both materialistic values and purchase intentions that can be seen as outcomes of the socialization process.

Differences between influencers

Research shows that product promotion, product placement, and product reviews are increasingly popular on YouTube (Fitriani et al., 2020; Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2019) and that YouTube is an appealing platform for advertisers (Gerhards, 2019). Also, given that YouTubers' review videos affect viewers' purchase intentions (Lee & Watkins, 2016) our findings that active YouTube followers had higher purchase intentions than passive followers is in line with previous studies. Also followers might create stronger relationships with YouTubers than Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok influencers. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found a connection between the engagement with YouTubers and Instagrammers, but they did not specify their differences. Although we did not measure participants' engagement levels, we suggest that the followers of YouTubers watch longer videos than the followers of Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok followers. Therefore, they become familiar with the influencer in a different way and are more likely to engage with them, which has been associated with purchase intentions (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Lou & Kim, 2019). For example, Kurtin and colleagues (2018) found that higher exposure to YouTube was related to stronger parasocial relationships with YouTubers. In parallel, it is possible that since YouTubers' videos are longer than videos by other influencers, it indicates higher exposure, which might result in a stronger parasocial relationship. This might explain higher purchase intentions. On the other hand, higher exposure can also imply greater overall consumption of YouTube content, not just longer videos. YouTubers might also endorse products more straightforwardly and extensively than other influencers due to their content: professional product reviews and unboxing videos

(Fitriani et al., 2020). YouTubers can also be more authentic than Instagrammers, for instance, who are more inclined to impression management (Tian et al., 2019), and thus, YouTubers might generate higher purchase intentions.

That is not to say that YouTubers do not disseminate materialistic values, but rather, it might be far easier to be exposed to materialistic values by following Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok influencers. For example, conspicuous materialistic content has been trending on TikTok (Widdicombe, 2020) and Snapchat (Moss, 2014). Moreover, Instagram has been described as an excessively materialistic platform (Hwang & Jeong, 2020), and its pictures are typically polished and filtered (Lup et al., 2015). Also, Instagram includes a lot of conspicuous consumption and luxury accounts, which are highly appreciated by young people (Marwick, 2015). Industry reports have also claimed that visual appeal and attractiveness are more important than personality on Instagram, whereas YouTube is less about aesthetics and thrives more on the personality and relatability of the YouTuber (Brown, 2019). Moreover, Tian and colleagues (2019) proposed that Instagrammers are more inclined to impression management than YouTubers. Thus, the threshold to post short and not necessarily truthful materialistic content, can be lower on these instant platforms compared to YouTube.

Furthermore, it may be that following YouTubers was not related to materialistic values because of the nature of their content. Videos by YouTubers can indeed be product centred, but product reviews, for instance, are usually quite professional and focused on the details of a certain product (Fitriani et al., 2020; Pfeuffer et al., 2021). In contrast, glamorous and polished lifestyles are typical characteristics of Instagram (Hwang & Jeong, 2020) and TikTok (Widdicombe, 2020), and the focus on these platforms are not necessarily placed on the products' attributes, but on the centrality of these acquisitions in their lives.

At the single parameter level, active followers of bloggers and other influencers differed from the passive ones in their purchase intention. However, when parameters were tested jointly, bloggers and other influencers did not predict purchase intentions statistically significantly (see Wooldridge 2012, 149-150).

Theoretical contribution

Hermann and colleagues (2020) claimed that research of cultivation effects has mainly focused on traditional media. Our study, in turn, suggests the applicability of the

cultivation theory in social media, especially by showing how young consumers' active following of social media influencers were related to higher materialism. Compared to passive followers, active followers' exposure to materialistic content is higher, and thus the cultivation effect as well. However, as discussed earlier, it remains controversial whether a genre-specific approach can be perceived as a part of cultivation theory. As it seems that our research field accepts the genre-specific approach (Record, 2018), and the majority of the cultivation studies have taken this approach (Potter, 2014), we see this approach providing a complementary perspective to the original theory. While CS-theory (Moschis & Churchill, 1978), has been applied to internet studies (Lueg et al., 2006), and social media (Nafees et al., 2021), the current study enhances our understanding of how social media influencers can act as socialization agents. Influencers transmit behavioural models, values, and attitudes to their followers, which can have a significant effect on their consumer behaviour. Critical implications should be considered as influencers can disseminate values and world views that are too much based on materialistic elements.

Practical implications

Although many social media influencers are commercially motivated and co-operate with companies and brands, and even if they disseminate materialistic world views, their influence could also be utilised for more idealistic purposes. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, Finnish social media influencers were authorised by the government to spread the evidence-based knowledge about the virus (Henley, 2020). In sum, today's social media influencers are able to affect almost all kinds of values and behaviours of children and young people. The increasing societal and commercial power of influencers is something that companies and policy makers should be better aware of in the future.

Limitations

Due to the correlational nature of this study, we cannot determine a causal relationship between following social media influencers and the outcomes. Thus, it is open to question as to whether more materialistic people follow social media influencers for social comparison purposes (Chu et al., 2016), or whether influencers cultivate materialistic values. It is also likely that this relationship is bidirectional. We also acknowledge that as we focused on the social media influencers, we did not control for whether participants' materialistic values and purchase intentions were merely absorbed

from the influencers and not from the television or parents for instance. It is also notable that people may be also unintentionally exposed to the influencers' content. For example, the Instagram algorithm can recommend content to its users by influencers they do not actively follow. However, as it is difficult to measure reliably to what extent this happens, we focused on those consumers' materialistic values and purchase intentions who reported following influencers. This study is also limited by the lack of information about who were the influencers that participants followed and what actual content the participants were exposed to. In the future conducting comparative research designs are needed. Future studies could also benefit by assessing why participants followed the influencers (e.g., for entertainment or genuine interest) and whether this would play a role in materialism and purchase intentions. Future studies should also examine the effect of following influencers on followers' actual buying behavior.

Conclusion

This study adds to our current understanding of the role of social media influencers in adolescents' materialism and consumer behaviour. While previous studies have shown that endorsements by social media influencers are associated with higher levels of purchase intention (Lee & Watkins, 2016) and trust toward the endorsed brands (Reinikainen et al., 2020), knowledge of the connection between following social media influencers and young people's materialistic values has been scarce. Our findings showed that following instant platform influencers (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok) was positively related to higher materialistic values, and following YouTubers was, in turn, connected to higher purchase intentions. As different social media platforms operate in different ways, deeper knowledge is needed about how social media influencers communicate with young people on different platforms. Thereby we can better comprehend the true impact of the influencers on young people's behaviour, values and world views -now and in the future.

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Appendix A

Measurements

Materialism. Participants' materialistic values were assessed by using a shortened 6-item version adopted from Richin's scale of materialism (Richins, 2004). The adaptation of this scale has also showed a good reliability across different age groups (Kühne & Opree, 2019. The participants were presented the following statements: "I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes", "I like to have a lot of luxury in my life", "The things I own tell a lot about how well I'm doing in life", "Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure", "I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things", and "I'd be happier if I owned nicer things". These items were summed up to composite variable. A 5-point Likert scale was used (1=totally disagree and 5=totally agree). Cronbach α=.72

Purchase intention. Purchase intention was assessed by using a 3-item scale, adapted from previous studies (Chakraborty, 2019; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Lee et al., 2015). The original

items were modified so that they were compatible with our research aim. That is, the purchase intention statements had to be related to social media influencers. The final scale included 3-items: "I attempt to purchase products and services recommended by a social media influencer I appreciate", "I would be ready to recommend a product or a service to others that is recommended by a social media influencer I appreciate", and "Social media influencers help me to decide what to buy". These items were summed up to a composite variable. A 5-point Likert scale was used (1=totally disagree and 5=totally agree). Cronbach α=.765. We also analyzed exploratively whether those who followed influencers and those who did not differ in their purchase intentions. The results showed that followers had higher purchase intentions (M = 2.27) than those who did not follow (M = 1.87) ($p <$. 001). However, we did not include this result in our manuscript because we thought that participants who did not follow any social media influencers would not be able to answer credibly to the questions regarding purchase intentions because they were related to the social media influencers.

Economic situation of the family. Young people's socio-economic background may affect their level of materialism. For example, adolescents from poorer families scored higher than their more affluent counterparts on the measures of materialism (Chaplin et al., 2014). Therefore, the family's economic situation was used as a control variable. The respondents were asked, "How would you describe your family's economic situation" (1-5 Likert scale with 1=very poor and 5=excellent). Although 20% of the respondents were officially adults (aged 19), a great majority of young people in that age group still live in their parental homes.

Following social media influencers. Influencers were identified according to their platform such as YouTubers and Instagrammers. Influencers were chosen for this study according to their estimated popularity among young people (e.g., Smith & Anderson, 2018). Influencers were grouped into categories by the nature of their platform. Categories were: 1) YouTubers; 2) Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat influencers; 3) bloggers; and 4) other influencers including LinkedIn influencers and game streamers (e.g., Twitch). YouTube is a video-based social media platform, that has a relatively long videos (over 10 minutes on average), a large variety of topics, and over two billion users. Instagram is a hybrid platform, including short videos, video stories, reels and pictures. Instagram has a lot of topics and approximately 1 billion users. TikTok is a short video platform including a lot of topics and has over 1 billion monthly users. Snapchat is a platform including short videos and pictures which automatically disappear after 24 hours, and has a lot of different topics and over 250 million daily users. Bloggers share their writings and pictures in different places on social media. Their topics and number of followers can vary a lot. LinkedIn-influencer: someone who has a lot of followers and influence capability on LinkedIn, which is a professional job-related platform, and includes pictures, writings and short videos. Game-streamers, in turn, stream their online gaming sessions, for example, through Twitch, in which followers may chat with a streamer.

The data was gathered in 2019, and then the maximum length of Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat videos was one minute. They were thus treated as instant platforms and were put into same category. In turn, the average length of YouTube videos was over 10 minutes and therefore YouTubers were treated as a

single category. Bloggers formed a single category as their content is mostly in written format. Other influencers (e.g., LinkedIn influencers and game streamers) were combined into a single category, as their nature differed from other categories and their popularity was assumed to be moderate. The respondents were then asked what particular influencers (e.g., YouTubers) they followed and how often by using a 1- 4-point scale: 1=Only a few times a year, 2=Monthly, 3=Weekly, 4=Daily, or almost daily. In the analysis, the following frequency was converted into dummy variables by having "only a few times a year" as a reference group. As the distance between timepoints (1 - 4) in the scale was not equal, it was statistically sufficient to treat the followership as categorical.

Appendix B

Results of f-statistics

Table 5.1

Following social media influencers and materialism

Dependent: materialism	df	F	p>F
YouTubers	3	0.11	0.957
Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers	3	10.33	0.000***
Bloggers	3	1.31	0.271
Other Influencers	3	1.57	0.194

Notes. All denominators = 660. *** p < .001.

Table 5.2

Following social media influencers and purchase intentions

Dependent: purchase intentions	df	F	p>F
YouTubers	3	5.44	0.000***
Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers	3	1.18	0.316
Bloggers	3	2.47	0.061
Other Influencers	3	2.26	0.080

Notes. All denominators = 659. *** p < .001.

II

THE BRIGHTER SIDE OF MATERIALISM: MANAGING IMPRESSIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA FOR HIGHER SOCIAL CAPITAL

by

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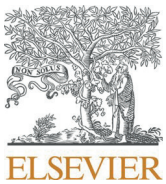

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The brighter side of materialism: Managing impressions on social media for higher social capital

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ABSTRACT

Individuals adjust their behavior on social media to varying extent, and commonly in their idealized way. Most studies have focused on the problems associated with materialism and social media use, yet their potential positive contributions remain less clear. In fact, impression management holds potential for both negative and positive: it has been linked with materialistic attitudes, but also increased amounts of self-reported social capital. This study examines how young people's materialistic values connect with status-seeking impression management on social media, and subsequently to social capital, within the same model. Eight hundred Finnish participants aged 15–19 participated in our structured phone survey. We applied structural equation modeling to examine the connections between materialism, impression management, and online social capital. Our findings show that materialism is positively related to impression management, while impression management is positively associated with online social capital. Additionally, we found positive indirect effects between materialism and both bridging and bonding social capital through impression management. In sum, more materialistic young people who engaged in higher impression management had higher amounts of social capital.

1. Introduction

Young people are heavy users of social media (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2021) and social media has become an inseparable part of their lives. As young people have unlimited access to social media, they are constantly exposed to various content and topics, including commercial content. At the same time with the emergence of commercial social media, materialism has increased among youth in the past decades (Twenge & Kasser, 2013) . According to Richins and Dawson (1992) materialism refers to consumers' values, and their widely-used scale constitutes of three factors: the pivotal role of acquisitions in one's life, pursuing happiness by means of acquisitions, and the determination of one's success through possessions. There is already empirical research indicating that social media usage has a positive impact on materialism (e.g., Kamal, Chu & Pedram, 2013; Thoumrungroje, 2018).

Social media has also provided a new arena for people to manage their impressions in their desired way ((Baumeister & Bushman, 2015, p. 102). Impression management refers to people's tendency to try to control and influence how others perceive them (Cole & Chandler, 2019; Leary, 2001). Theoretically, impression management derives from Goffman's (1959) work, which suggested that

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when individuals are in front of others, they adjust their behavior so that it conveys their preferred impression to the audience (p. 4) . Studies have suggested that impression management is easier to control online than in face-to-face situations (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006; Fullwood, 2019; Ward, 2017) , and not least because people have far more time to consider their next steps online. Thus, a lot of studies on impression management have focused on the social media context (Ellison, Hancock & Toma, 2011; Gadgil, Prybutok, Peak & Prybutok, 2021; Michikyan, Subrahmanyam & Dennis, 2014; Sun & Wu, 2012). For example, Chen (2016) found that some people tend to upload carefully considered content on YouTube which reflects their idealized selves.

Along with the rise of social media, researchers have shown increasing interest in the online version of social capital (Abbas & Mesch, 2018) , as people can attain social capital in both online and offline environments. While offline social capital refers to the individuals' social networks labeled by the call of reciprocity and trust (Putnam, 2000, p. 16) , online social capital, in turn, refers to the resources and connections on the internet and social media (Abbas & Mesch, 2018). While studies have found that social media usage is positively connected to social capital (Utz & Muscanell, 2015), focus has been on specific issues, such as how to measure online social capital (e.g., Williams, 2006).

In this study we examine associations between status-seeking impression management, materialism, and online social capital among young people. Researchers have typically associated materialism with negative connotations (Balikcioglu & Arslan, 2020; Dittmar, Bond, Hurst & Kasser, 2014; Lipovčan, Prizmić-Larsen & Brkljačić, 2015). More importantly, materialism correlated with self-monitoring, as they were both linked to the external rather than inner cognitive orientation (Chatterjee & Hunt, 1996). Self-monitoring is related to impression management to some extent, as high self-monitors used impression management tactics more effectively than low monitors (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). This suggests a connection between materialism and impression management. Actors always take the audience into consideration when performing a certain act. Although this study builds on Goffman's impression management framework, our operationalization of impression management refers to its applied version with an emphasis on status-seeking perspective and online context. Status-seeking impression management on social media can be, for example, exaggerating wealth or overemphasizing luxury experiences to indicate higher social status

Some researchers have proposed that online impression management contributes to developing social capital (Abro & Zhenfang, 2013). Social capital is highly valuable as it provides access to otherwise unattainable resources (Huysman & Wulf, 2004), and it can be a channel to significant assets, such as emotional and financial support (Liu, Ainsworth & Baumeister, 2016), and higher well-being (Bae, 2019). In this study, social capital refers to the forms it appears online (Abbas & Mesch, 2018; Williams, 2006). As online impression management frequently leads to the desired outcomes, people might perceive social capital as a valuable by-product of status-seeking impression management.

Although many previous studies have focused on the negative implications of materialism, it is not always a negatively valued concept. For example, Wang, Gu, Jiang and Sun (2019) published an article titled *"the not-so-dark side of materialism"* in which they showed how people with greater materialistic values behaved more eco-friendly in public situations (in contrast to private situations) due to their impression management motives.

While some studies have examined the relationship between materialism and impression management (Christopher & Schlenker, 2004; Christopher, Morgan, Marek, Keller & Drummond, 2005; Wang et al., 2019), and between impression management and social capital (Abro & Zhenfang, 2013; Krämer & Winter, 2008), there is very little scientific understanding of how materialism, status-seeking impression management, and social capital work together within the same model. To address this gap, we explore whether materialistic attitudes along with status-seeking impression management have a positive link to higher social capital, which researchers typically perceive as a beneficial asset. Thus, building on the idea of the brighter side of materialism (e.g., Wang et al., 2019) our perspective further enhances our understanding of materialism as not necessarily negatively deemed concept, when accompanied by impression management. We use structural equation modeling (SEM) which allows us to examine relationships between those theoretically derived concepts (materialism, impression management, and social capital). Such a model not only provides generalizable but also valuable information without measurement error.

2. Impression management and social media

Impression management stems from Erving Goffman's theory on human behavior "*dramaturgy*", according to which individuals are like actors whose everyday actions take place on the stage (Goffman, 1959). Leary and Kowalski (1990, p. 34) defined Impression management as *'individuals' attempt to control the impressions others form of them'*. Many scholars have used impression management interchangeably with self-presentation, although the latter is rather a part of impression management (Owens, 2006, p. 211) .

Researchers have shown growing interest in applying the concept of impression management to social media platforms such as YouTube (Chen, 2016), Facebook (Sun & Wu, 2012), blogging (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005), and online dating (Ellison et al., 2011). People can manage their impressions more strategically online than in face-to-face situations (Ellison et al., 2006; Papacharissi, 2002), for example, by exaggerating their sense of humor and wisdom, and using self-promotional tactics (e.g., declaring their positive accomplishments on social media) (Huang, 2014). That is, the risk of getting caught is significantly smaller online than in face-to-face situations.

Scholars have noticed impression management tactics such as ingratiation, self-enhancement, self-promotion, apologizing, and excuses (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Lee, Quigley, Nesler, Corbett & Tedeschi, 1999). These tactics are also present online. Bloggers used ingratiation by being kind to their audience rather than critical or vicious (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). Likewise, Taiwanese social media users uploaded idealized content on YouTube (Chen, 2016). Similarly, Holmberg, Berg, Hillman, Lissner and Chaplin (2018) found that overweight individuals used impression management tactics by not uploading content related to their bodies or weight on social media.

Studies have focused on the motives (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990), goals (Rosenbaum, Johnson, Stepman & Nuijten, 2009), and outcomes of impression management (Gioaba & Krings, 2017; Wayne & Kacmar, 1991)). Leary and Kowalski (1990) suggested that the value of the desired goal and the goal-relevance of impression are the main motives behind impression management. Our understanding of impression management emphasizes young people's desire to attain higher social status through impression management actions, and thus we define it as status-seeking impression management. Status-seeking refers to multiple actions aiming to enhance one's social value within their social circles (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007).

These motives and goals appear to be reasonable as intentionally managed impressions are somewhat profitable. When older job applicants engaged in impression management tactics, they received more favourable assessments in terms of the hiring process than those who did not (Gioaba & Krings, 2017). Also, supervisors rated those subordinates' performance higher who participated in impression management (Wayne & Kacmar, 1991). However, actors are not always aware of the outcomes of their impression management. For example, one can try to impress their followers on Instagram with stylish impression management, which simultaneously engenders commercial partnership proposals.

Impression management can be deceptive, relatively sincere, or something in between. For example, Goffman (1959, p. 62) stated that people can give a false impression without telling serious lies. Deceptive impression management can be a little lie (Toma & Hancock, 2010), or a discrepancy between the real and ideal (Ellison et al., 2011). In contrast, some authors have underlined the individuals' motivation to be authentic in their impression management (Rosenbaum et al., 2009, p. 21) . Hence, our operationalization of impression management includes clearly deceptive and more sincere statements. Deceptive impression management can be especially relevant to young people, who might boost their lower self-esteem (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling & Potter, 2002), and certainty in self (Hogg & Grant, 2012) with deceptive status-related pictures. These pictures, in turn, might generate likes from their friends which positively predict their self-esteem (Marengo, Montag, Sindermann, Elhai & Settanni, 2021).

While almost everyone occasionally manages their impressions, especially online, the degree to which people engage in impression management online varies. Researchers have associated impression management with negative traits such as neuroticism (Michikyan et al., 2014) and narcissism (Hart, Adams, Burton & Tortoriello, 2017), as well as more neutral traits such as extraversion (Krämer & Winter, 2008). Interestingly, Wang et al. (2019) suggested that materialistic people value more social status, impression management motives, and are more sensitive to others' opinions compared to their nonmaterialistic counterparts. However, scholars have paid far too little attention to examining connections between impression management and materialism.

3. Materialism as an antecedent of status-seeking impression management

As mentioned above, materialism refers to the mindset that emphasizes the role of acquisitions and possessions in one's life, their role as instruments for achieving happiness, and their role as indicators of success (Richins & Dawson, 1992, pp. 304-307) . In line with Richins and Dawson (1992), we perceive materialism as reflecting consumers' values and attitudes rather than personality traits in this study. Researchers have typically associated materialism with negative things, such as lower well-being (Dittmar et al., 2014), lower life-satisfaction (Lipovčan et al., 2015), as well as depression and anxiety (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Materialism is typically high among young people as it reaches its highest peak during the adolescence and young adulthood (Jaspers & Pieters, 2016) . Young people are building their identities and therefore they are especially susceptible to peers' opinions. This may increase their materialistic attitudes (Roberts, Manolis and (Jeff) Tanner, 2008), and risky behavior (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005).

Materialism appears to be positively related to status-seeking activities. Fournier and Richins (1991) found that materialistic people are motivated to acquire goods to display their social status. Status-seeking, in turn, refers to a common motivation to achieve respect and appreciation from others (Goldsmith, Reinecke Flynn & Clark, 2014), while people can achieve status through multiple ways. Therefore, we expect that more materialistic people are also more interested in activities related to status-seeking impression management on social media.

Researchers have suggested that status consumption (consumption that aims for attaining social status) (Heaney, Goldsmith & Jusoh, 2005), is an outcome of materialism (Goldsmith & Clark, 2012). Also, Heaney et al. (2005) found a positive relationship between status consumption and materialism. On social media, people are seeking status through impression management; not necessarily by buying products per se, but also by presenting status symbols such as luxury goods and experiences.

Chatterjee and Hunt (1996) found that materialistic people and high self-monitors shared a similar cognitive orientation as they both underline the external factors as a reference point. They noted that the importance of legitimate possession for materialists and socially acceptable behavior for high self-monitors reflects the salience of their external orientation. By self-monitoring, we refer to the definition by Gangestad and Snyder (2000) according to which people differ in how much they are concerned about whether their self-presentation is socially appropriate, and thus, monitor their self-presentation so that it conveys a socially desirable image. Consequently, high self-monitors are more inclined to regulate their behavior according to the social and situational factors. In contrast, low self-monitors' behavior conforms to their inner attitudes and emotions (p. 530).Although impression management and self-monitoring are two discrete phenomena, high self-monitors use impression management tactics more effectively than low monitors (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). Also, Xie, Huang, Wang and Shen (2019) found that self-monitoring is positively related to impression management tactics. Lastly, Gangestad and Snyder (2000) noted that the self-monitoring scale is closely related to "status-oriented impression management motives" (p. 547) , and thus suggests a potential link between materialism and impression management.

Furthermore, Christopher and Schlenker (2004) stated that materialism correlated with the concerns of impression management (e.g., fear of negative evaluation). Subsequently, Christopher et al. (2005) found that materialistic respondents avoided impression management tactics such as ingratiation to avoid showing weakness but surprisingly did not use self-promotion either. They suggested that materialistic people doubt their capability to impress others through direct behavior, and thus they are prone to use indirect

conventions through symbolic possessions as a safer way. Status-seeking impression management might also be what Christopher et al. (2005) referred to as symbolic possessions that materialistic people might prefer when they need to make an impression indirectly on social media. Based on the above arguments, we assume that materialism is positively related to online status-seeking impression management among young people.

4. Social capital as an outcome of impression management

Putnam distinguished two different forms of social capital based on the type of networks and connections: bonding and bridging (Putnam, 2000, p. 20) . Bonding refers to group inertia, 'strong ties', emotionally close relationships, such as family and close friends, and bridging to links beyond the group or 'weak ties', loose connections with people who can offer new resources and information. Both ties have value depending on the needs of the network, but access to novel resources usually results from bridging social capital (Luoma-aho, 2016). It is valuable as social capital created in one context is usable in other contexts (Coleman, 1988). Abro and Zhenfang (2013) found that impression management on social networking sites (SNS) assisted social media users to create bridging social capital. In parallel, Liu et al. (2016) found that online self-disclosure, which relates to self-presentation, was positively associated with both social capital forms, albeit mainly by strengthening already existing social ties. Nevertheless, this suggests a connection between impression management and social capital.

Researchers have distinguished offline social capital from online social capital. Abbas and Mesch (2018) noted that online social capital refers to online social resources, while in the case of offline social capital these resources are mainly face-to-face connections. Researchers have described social capital as an outcome rather than a network itself (Williams, 2006). In this study, we perceive social capital as an online version of social capital and as an outcome or by-product of status-seeking impression management.

Many studies have focused on the motives (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990), goals (Rosenbaum et al., 2009), tactics (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Lee et al., 1999), and outcomes of impression management (Gioaba & Krings, 2017; Wayne & Kacmar, 1991)). Even though some researchers have examined the connection between impression management and social capital (Abro & Zhenfang, 2013; Krämer & Winter, 2008), much uncertainty still exists about that relationship.

Social capital has commonly been associated with positive concepts such as health and well-being (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Oksanen, Kouvonen, Vahtera, Virtanen & Kivimaki, 2010) and subjective happiness (Han, Kim, Lee & Lee, 2013). More importantly, social capital seems to be especially important for young people, who are building their identities and social networks and identifying with their reference groups (Holland, Reynolds & Weller, 2007). Also, studies have associated both family social capital and community social capital (e.g., peer support) with better mental health among teenagers (McPherson et al., 2014). Thus, social capital is not only a valuable outcome of impression management but also a goal worth pursuing behind impression management. However, the question as to whether social capital is an outcome or a goal, depends on how conscious individuals are about their goals. Hence, social capital can be an intentional goal, an unintended outcome, or both. In this study, we perceive social capital as an unintended by-product of impression management since we operationalized social capital accordingly.

In general, a systematic literature review has shown that people can use SNS for enhancing and nurturing social capital (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Williams, 2006). That is, while an intensive Facebook usage was related to higher bridging social capital (Ellison et al., 2007), a meta-analysis including 50 studies showed that SNS usage correlated with both bridging and bonding social capital (Liu et al., 2016).

Existing literature suggests a link between online social capital and status-seeking impression management. For example, positive online self-presentation was related to positive feedback from a Facebook community (Metzler & Scheithauer, 2017). People can get positive feedback from their friends, but also from strangers, which may assist in building up social capital, or strengthening weak ties (Liu et al., 2016). Krämer and Winter (2008) found that those with higher self-efficacy in terms of impression management had more virtual friends. In parallel, Abro and Zhenfang (2013) stated that impression management strengthened the connection between social media use and social capital, underlining the importance of impression management in creating social capital. Also, Liu et al. (2016) found that online self-disclosure was positively related to both social capital forms by strengthening already existing social ties. Thus, we assume a positive link between both sides of social capital and impression management.

5. Research questions

As described above, previous studies have suggested the connections between materialism, self-monitoring (Chatterjee & Hunt, 1996), and impression management (Christopher & Schlenker, 2004), and also between impression management and social capital (Liu et al., 2016). How these components work together remains unclear. In this article we tackle this research gap by analyzing materialism, status-seeking impression management, and online social capital in the same model.

The main objective of our study is to examine the interconnections between materialism, status-seeking impression management, and bridging and bonding online social capital. The specific research questions are:

RQ 1: What is the connection between materialism and status-seeking impression management on social media?

RQ 2: What is the connection between status-seeking impression management and online social capital (both bridging and bonding)?

RQ 3: What kind of indirect connections exist between materialism and online social capital?

Thus, we assume that materialism will have a direct positive relationship to status-seeking impression management, and that impression management also has a positive and direct connection to both bridging and bonding social capital (Fig. 1). In addition, via impression management, we assume a positive indirect connection between materialism and both aspects of social capital.

6. Method

6.1. Participants

We collected the survey data in collaboration with a research company (IRO Research) during December 2019 and January 2020 among young people aged 15–19. Data sampling and data collection were the company's only responsibilities. The data were obtained through structured telephone interviews that took approximately 30 min. The data sample was randomly selected from the Finnish Population Register. The randomly selected sample size was 16 000. The final sample (n = 800) was adjusted to be nationally representative by age (by one year), gender, and the area of residence. That is, data collection was discontinued since the desired sample size of a certain subpopulation (e.g., gender) was achieved. According to the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, young people at the age of 15 or older are allowed to participate in surveys without parental consent. The participants received a small reward from the research company for their participation. Questions did not involve any identifiable information, and thus do not raise any ethical issues. Also, very few missing values exist in our dataset. The final data contains 800 participants, aged 15–19 who live in Finland. The majority of participants are studying, and almost everyone reported using social media (Table 1). The survey was conducted in Finnish and then translated to English.

6.2. Measurements

All statements are shown in (Table 2 (see appendix) and Table 4).

6.2.1. Materialism

We assessed the participants' materialistic values by using a shortened 6-item version adopted from Richins' scale of materialism (Richins, 2004), with the Likert scale (1–5) (1=totally disagree and 5=totally agree). The materialism scale focuses on three dimensions: the centrality of possessions in one's life, and the role of acquisitions in determining happiness and success. Six statements are shown in Table 2 (see appendix) and Table 4.

6.2.2. Social capital

We used an online social capital measurement, adapted from Williams (2006) and Abbas and Mesch (2018), with the Likert scale (1–5) (1=totally disagree and 5=totally agree). Originally, these operationalizations stems from Putnam's (2000) framework of social capital and thus have two forms of social capital: bridging and bonding. Bridging items measure aspects such as one's feeling of belongingness to a larger community, or outward-looking (e.g., trying new things) while bonding items measure, for instance, emotional support (e.g., There is someone one can turn to when advice is needed) (Williams, 2006).

6.2.3. Status-seeking impression management

As a complete measurement for status-seeking online impression management was missing, the authors decided to create a measurement based on the articles related to impression management and its derivatives such as deceptive self-enhancement (see items 7–11). All items of this scale reflect online impression management aiming to seek and present higher social status. We used the Likert scale (1–5) (1=totally disagree and 5=totally agree) and described a rationale for the items below.

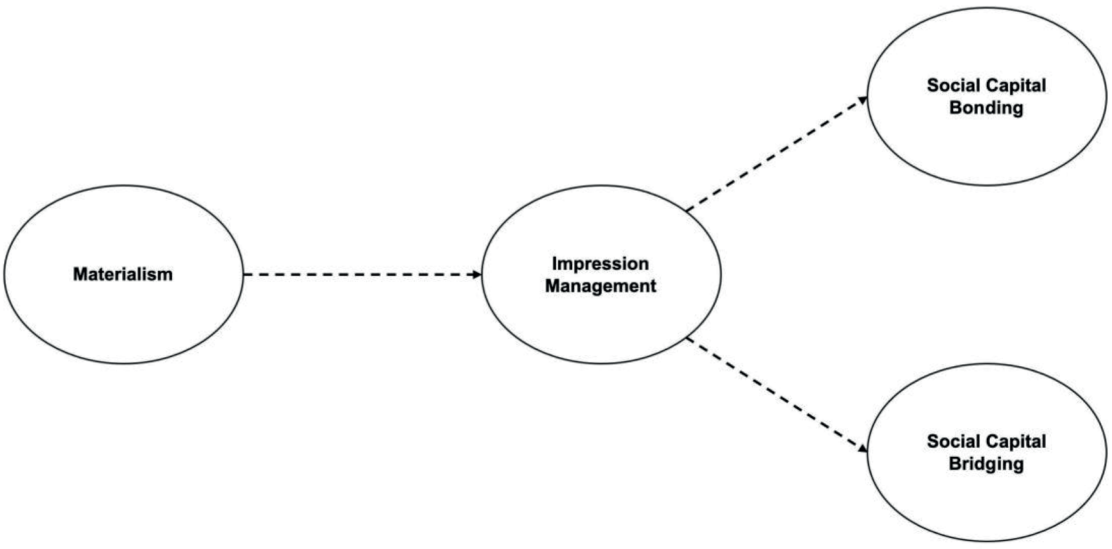

Fig. 1. Proposed Model.

Table 1
Participants' Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	n[b]	%[a]
Gender		
Male	400	50
Female	400	50
Age		
15	152	19
16	168	21
17	160	20
18	160	20
19	160	20
What do you do for a living?		
Studying	699	87
Working	64	8
Military or civil service	14	2
Other	23	3
Do you use social media?		
Yes	784	98
No	16	2

[a] Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.
[b] Maximum (n) full sample in data = 800.

Table 3
Covariates for The Robust Model.

Variable	Mean[a]	Variance	Scale	Value	*n*[b]
Gender	0.5	0.25	0/1	Female/Male	800
Age (continuous)	17.0	1.99	15–19	Years	800
Personal financial situation[c]	0.67	0.22	0/1	Good	797
	0.26	0.19	0/1	Moderate	797
	0.07	0.07	reference	Poor	797

[a]with dichotomous variables, mean (=*p*) gives a proportion to what extent the value 1 has been answered. Proportion of zero answers can be calculated from Equation 1-p.
[b]Maximum (*N*) in data = 800.
[c]Variable included three classes which where dichotomized (dummy) for the analysis.

Item 7 measures one's attempt to affect how others perceive them through modifying their appearance with filters and is thus a fundamental part of impression management. Filters allow people to enhance their appearance on social media, and thus support their intended high social status impression. Therefore, we interpret this item as a part of the self-enhancement strategy (see e.g., Toma & Hancock, 2010).

Items 9 and 10 suggest a deceptive and exaggerated impression management behavior and intentions to look more prestigious and wealthier than in reality (higher social status), and thus are part of deceptive self-enhancement. For example, Toma and Hancock (2010) suggested that one can enhance their social status by lying about their income. Therefore, we adapated items 9 and 10 from the ideas of deceptive impression management (e.g., Carlson, Carlson & Ferguson, 2011; Toma & Hancock, 2010), and from the impression management self-enhancement scale by Lee et al. (1999).

Items 8 and 11 measure impression management behavior and an intention that aims to let everyone know about their social relationships and luxury experiences (social status). We adapted these items from the impression management self-promotion scale by Bolino and Turnley (1999).

6.3. Data analysis

We used the covariance based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) as an analysis method in this study. SEM consists of the measurement model and the structural model (Fan et al., 2016). The first step in our analysis is to create and evaluate a measurement model that examines the connections between the latent factors and its indicator variables by using Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Kline, 2011, p. 121) . The second step is to specify our model by using SEM to test the connections between the latent factors. We treated all indicator variables as categorical. Table 2 (see appendix) shows the frequencies and used scales. In addition, Table 3 presents the details of gender, age, and personal financial situation that we treated as covariates and tested in the model. Since a commitment to impression management vary between genders (Singh, Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2002), and when materialism correlates with age (Jaspers & Pieters, 2016), gender (Kamineni, 2005), and financial situation (Chaplin, Hill & John, 2014), we incorporated these variables into our model. The third step is to test the robustness of our SEM model by adding these covariates into our model and examining how coefficients will behave (Lu & White, 2014).

We used Mplus 8.4 package as a statistical program in this study, and WLSMV as an estimator in this model due to the categorical

Table 4
Results from a Measurement Model.

Items[a]	Factor loadings[b]	R-Square
Materialism		
1. I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes.	.74	.55
2. The things I own tell a lot about how well I'm doing in life.	.48	.23
3. Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.	.65	.42
4. I like luxury in my life.	.69	.48
5. I'd be happier if I owned nicer things.	.55	.30
6. I would be happier if I had much more money.	.37	.14
Impression management		
7. I have modified my appearance, (e.g., by using filters) on social media.	.46	.21
8. It is important for me to show on social media that I have friends (e.g., photos with friends).	.62	.38
9. I have intentionally uploaded content onto social media that gives the impression that my life is more prestigious than in reality.	.73	.53
10. I intend to be seen wealthier than I actually am on social media.	.81	.65
11. I especially share pictures of my luxury experiences on social media (e.g., traveling).	.67	.44
Social capital (bonding)		
12. There are several people on social media I trust to help solve my problems.	.80	.65
13. There is someone on social media I can turn to for advice about making very important decisions.	.87	.75
14. There is no one on social media that I feel comfortable talking to about intimate things (reversed).	.68	.47
Social capital (bridging)		
15. Interacting with people on social media makes me feel like part of a larger community.	.62	.39
16. Interacting with people on social media makes me interested in what people different than me are thinking.	.58	.33
17. Interacting with people on social media makes me want to try new things.	.62	.39
18. Interacting with people on social media gives me new people to talk to.	.69	.48

Note. Estimator WLSMV. $N = 800$. All items are significant at $p < .001$.
[a] Items are numbered so that they can be identified in Fig. 2.

nature of our indicator variables. Also, we used standardized coefficients (STDYX) in our analysis. Moreover, we estimated our model fit in comparison to widely accepted cut-off criteria suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999): 0.95 for the TLI and CFI, 0.08 for SRMR, and 0.06 for RMSEA. These cut-off criteria are also suitable for categorical outcomes (Yu & Muthén, 2002). Furthermore, the SRMR fit index replaced the WRMR fit index for WLS estimators in Mplus 8.1 (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2018) and is thus used in this study.

7. Results

Table 4 presents the results of the measurement model, p-values, factor-loadings, and communalities of these variables. Latent factors were materialism, impression management, and social capital, which included two sub-factors: bridging and bonding. Table 5 shows correlations between latent factors. Modification indices showed that the model fit would improve if items' (5 and 6) as well as (16 and 17) residual covariances could be estimated freely. These items had similar statement structure in the questionnaire, which explains why residual covariance existed. Therefore, their residual covariances were freely estimated in the analysis.

Our measurement model (Fig. 2) showed a good fit: *(accepted cut-off criteria in parenthesis)* (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Yu & Muthén, 2002) $x^2 = 405{,}423$ $df = 127$, $p < .001$(>0.05), $RMSEA = 0.052$ (<0.06), $CFI = 0.951$ (>0.95), $TLI = 0.941$ (>0.95), $SRMR = 0.047$ (<0.08). Therefore, we were able to execute a further analysis of the model (SEM).

Also, a test model (SEM) showed good model-fit: *(cut-off criteria in parenthesis* (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Yu & Muthén, 2002) $x^2 = 386$, 709, $df = 129$, $p < .001$ (>0.05), $RMSEA = 0.050$ (<0.06), $CFI = 0.955$ (>0.95), $TLI = 0.946$ (>0.95), $SRMR = 0.048$ (<0.08), which suggests that the tested model is acceptable. Although the significance of our Chi-square remains significant, it is highly sensitive to the big sample size (Kline, 2011, p. 201) and cannot be used as the only indicator for making decisions about model fit (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger & Müller, 2003). Therefore, we considered other diagnostics (CFI and TLI, see above) to assess the model fit.

Fig. 3 illustrates the results of the SEM. The analysis revealed a positive and significant connection between materialism and impression management ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < .001$). Likewise, impression management was significantly and positively related to the social capital, while the effect of impression management on bridging was ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .001$) and on bonding ($\beta = 0.14$, $p = .003$). In addition, we found a significant and positive connection between bridging and bonding social capital ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < .001$).

Table 5
Correlation Matrix of Latent Factors.

Variable	*n*	1	2	3	4
1.Impression management	800	–			
2.Materialism	800	.57***	–		
3.Social capital (Bonding)	800	.12*	.11*	–	
4.Social capital (Bridging)	800	.40***	.24***	.53***	–

Note. Correlations are estimated with STDYX.
***$p < .001$. **$p < .01$. *$p < .05$.

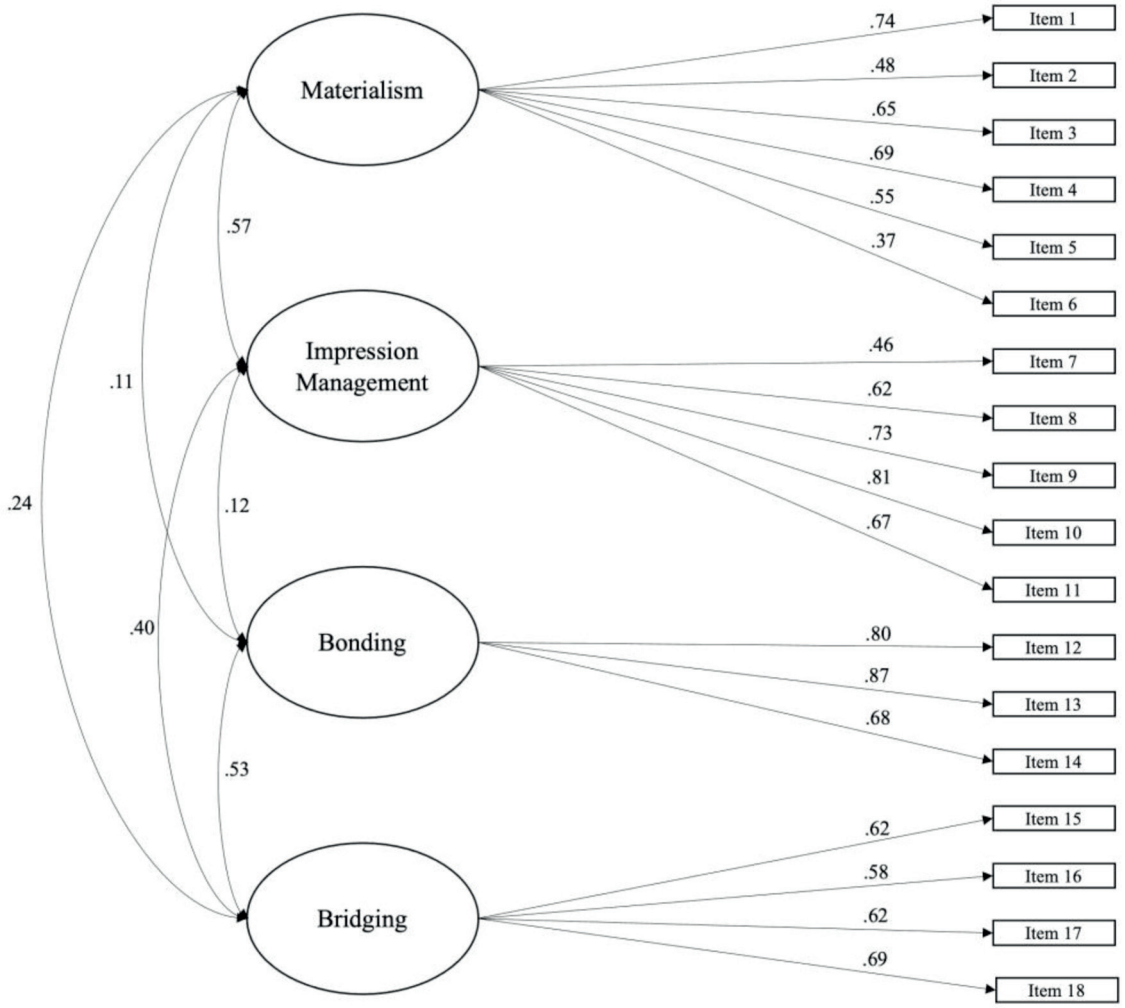

Fig. 2. Measurement Model

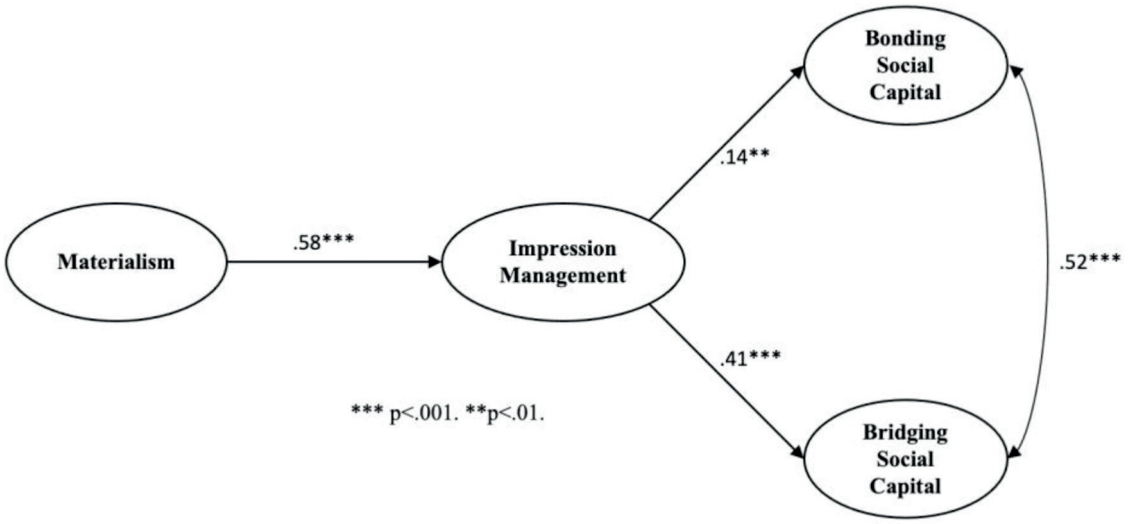

Fig. 3. Tested Model

In addition, the analysis showed an indirect and positive relationship between materialism and bonding social capital, mediated by impression management ($\beta = 0.08, p = .003$). Also, we found an indirect relationship between materialism and bridging social capital, mediated by impression management ($\beta = 0.24, p < .001$).

We executed an additional analysis to examine the effect of covariates (Table 3) on our tested model and whether the coefficients will alter. Covariates did not have a significant effect on the coefficients, which suggests our model is robust. The maximum difference between the robust model and the tested model was in the connection between impression management and materialism. The coefficient of this connection in the robust model was only 0.05 higher than in the tested model.

Also, the results of indirect connections between the tested model (Fig. 3) and robust model did not substantially differ. In the robust model, the indirect effect of materialism on bonding social capital was ($\beta = 0.09, p = .003$) and on bridging ($\beta = 0.25, p < .001$), with both mediated by impression management.

8. Discussion

Social media has contributed to the development of consumers' materialistic values and created a new arena for impression management and social capital. This study investigated the relationships between materialism, impression management, and online social capital among young people. We used SEM to analyze our survey data, composed of Finnish participants aged 15–19, and to show how materialism, impression management, and social capital are intertwined concepts. We perceived materialism (Richins & Dawson, 1992) as an antecedent for the actions of impression management on social media (Goffman, 1959), and online social capital (e.g., Putnam, 2000; Abbas & Mesch, 2018) as an unintended outcome of impression management.

The current study showed a positive association between materialism and impression management and bridging social capital. More surprisingly, we found a positive connection between materialism, impression management, and bonding social capital. Our results revealed an acceptable and complete structural model, including both direct and indirect connections between factors. That is, materialism was also indirectly and positively connected to social capital mediated by impression management. Furthermore, covariates did not have an influence on our model, which suggests the robustness of the model.

Although previous studies have suggested relationships between materialism and impression management (Christopher & Schlenker, 2004; Christopher et al., 2005), and between impression management and social capital (Abro & Zhenfang, 2013; Krämer & Winter, 2008), the evidence on this question was still scarce. Our findings add to our presumption that materialistic values can be positively related to higher impression management on social media and thereby result in higher online social capital.

Our findings expand previous approaches that have connected both online and offline impression management with negative characteristics (Hart et al., 2017; Michikyan et al., 2014). These results also differ from the earlier studies which emphasized negative implications of materialism (Dittmar et al., 2014; Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Lipovčan et al., 2015). Our results, in turn, present the brighter side of materialism among young people by showing the indirect positive connection between materialism and bonding and bridging social capital via impression management on social media. That is, given the expected beneficial effects of social capital on individuals (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Holland et al., 2007; Oksanen et al., 2010), and since materialistic values were related to higher social capital through status-seeking impression management in this study, our findings indeed suggest the brighter side of materialism. The question remains whether social capital is always beneficial (see e.g., Villalonga-Olives & Kawachi, 2017).

While impression management was positively related to materialism, it could be as Chatterjee and Hunt (1996) earlier suggested that people with higher materialistic values share the same externally focused cognitive orientation as do those with higher activity in impression management, or as in their case, self-monitoring. Although our measurement of status-seeking impression management is not about self-monitoring, it includes many features that are externally oriented such as editing one's appearance online, giving a more prestigious picture of one's life than in reality, and showing-off one's popularity and luxury experiences. These items, especially a deceptive one, reflect one's cognitive orientation and social concern of what other people might perceive as external indicators of high social status, and are thus externally oriented.

In parallel, researchers have suggested a link between status consumption and materialism (Goldsmith & Clark, 2012; Heaney et al., 2005). The goal behind status consumption has similarities with our measurement of status-seeking impression management as they both are status-seeking activities, and have a shared psychological mindset underlying their goals: to attain higher social status. This especially concerns young consumers who are probably not capable to attend status consumption themselves due to their financial dependency on their caregivers. Thus, their preferred alternative might be status-seeking impression management on social media that enables them to exaggerate and enhance those indicators signaling social status (e.g., wealth and luxury).

Alternatively, Christopher et al. (2005) suggested that materialistic people are prone to indirect impression management through their possessions. Likewise, impression management took place solely on social media in this study and therefore can be an indirect way of impression management. Moreover, our scale of impression management included many characteristics related to our participants' possessions such as showing luxury experiences and intention to appear wealthier than was the case in reality.

Our results are partially in line with Liu et al. (2016), who found that self-disclosure (part of self-presentation) was positively related to both bonding and bridging social capital. Liu et al. (2016) added that self-disclosure is not so much about creating totally new connections but rather about strengthening already formed relationships. In contrast, we found that status-seeking impression management was positively related to the bridging factor, whose one part suggested the arrival of new people they could talk to. Hence, we suggest that materialistic people are more inclined to online status-seeking impression management such as showing off their luxury experiences or wealth and thus they might attract other social media users' attention more than would be otherwise and bring new people into their lives.

However, as we mentioned earlier, it can also be that young people attend to status-seeking impression management in the hope of

receiving likes from their friends on social media to boost their self-esteem (Marengo et al., 2021; Robins et al., 2002). One could argue that pursuing likes on social media is conscious behavior, and therefore is inconsistent with our perception of social capital as an unintended by-product of impression management. First, although social media likes can be seen as an element of social capital to some extent, given its capabilities to connect people, we do not see likes on social media as equal to social capital. Even at their highest function, likes on social media are only one small part of social capital, and therefore the interpretation of conscious like accumulation and conscious social capital building as equal terms is not reasonable. Second, although we do not see the aforementioned concepts to be interchangeable, one could argue that their relationship depends on one's conscious goals behind the like accumulation: if someone consciously seeks likes in order to gain social capital, these two concepts seem to be interconnected, and thus they are conflicting with our perception. However, we suggest that most young people aim to get likes, which subsequently produces higher social capital, although unintentionally.

Surprisingly, we also found that impression management was positively associated with bonding, such as having someone to trust or turn to. The mechanism behind this connection might follow the same logic as Liu et al. (2016) suggested. People may have given polished impressions about themselves online, for example, by uploading photographs of their exotic travel experiences. This may have prompted their old connections, formed on- or offline to inquire more deeply about their trip and to ask what they are doing with their life nowadays. Consequently, their online discussions may be deepened and lead to higher trust among both sides. On the other hand, impression management can also lead to two strangers bonding as well. For example, one can upload a photograph about an exotic travel experience on Instagram, which in turn can encourage a total stranger, who shares the same interests, to have a discussion with the content uploader. As a result, these strangers might form a mutual feeling that they have someone whom they can trust or turn to.

Researchers have long been interested in the relationship between individuals' values and behavior, while it has been somewhat controversial how strong the relationship is (e.g., Lee et al., 2021). However, studies have suggested, for example, that materialism is negatively related to pro-environmental behavior (Hurst, Dittmar, Bond & Kasser, 2013), and that motivational type of values such as benevolence, in turn, predicts pro-environmental behavior. In the same manner, Homer and Kahle (1988) drew upon value-attitude-behavior model and showed how values influence behavior through attitudes. Since we consider materialism as a value-oriented mindset and impression management as, at least partly, a behavioral concept, our suggested model appears to have some parallels with these earlier mentioned value-behavior models. However, our model included an unintended outcome variable (social capital) which is rarely seen in the value-behavior model. Thus, our model, as it stands, and value-behavior models are not directly comparable.

With the statistical model (SEM) we were able to evaluate how well our theory derived model fits the data. Although we obtained valuable information about the relationships between materialism, impression management, and social capital, and even if the model serves as a basis for future research, our statistical model is not without limitations. First, even though statistical models aim to predict people's real-life behavior, they commonly are simplified approximations and predictions about real-life (e.g., Burnham & Anderson, 2002, p. 21)). Relatedly, as in all surveys, respondents' feelings and emotions might affect to their responses which pose epistemological and analytical challenges. That is, statements regarding materialistic values or impression management are, in general, value-laden by themselves. This could have resulted in socially desirable answers at least to some extent, if the respondents wanted to give less materialistic answers or played down their impression management tendencies, ironically, due to the impression management motives (see social-desirability bias).

8.1. Theoretical implications

Along with social capital and materialism, we adapted Goffman's (1959) theoretical framework of impression management for our research interests in social media and status-seeking impression management. This study adds to the knowledge of impression management, by analysing it in online environments. According to our results, online impression management actions took place on social media, which we consider as what Goffman referred to as the frontstage. On the other hand, it can be assumed that those actions that would have had any potential threat to the participants' desired impressions on the frontstage were hidden in the backstage. Our results suggest that Goffman's theory is applicable for studies on social media and, hence, these findings consider online impression management as a generator of higher social capital especially for young people. Interestingly, the increase in social capital happened even if the motives for impression management were unintended. This further deepens our understanding of the potential unintended and positive outcomes and/or by-products of impression management.

This study also adds to the theory of social capital and the long discussions of its contents. The antecedents and consequences of online social capital raise a question of the need for re-defining the concept of social capital in digitalised communities. As the core of the theory of social capital is mutual trust between individuals as well as between individuals and organisations (Luoma-aho, 2016; Putnam, 2000), online social capital primarily refers to a high number of connections in social media communities (Abbas & Mesch, 2018) . In those communities, appearances and impressions increase the number of connections. Our results suggest that even false and deceptive impressions that are connected to materialistic values, may lead to higher social capital, perhaps in a similar way as swift or fast trust in online environments (Blomqvist & Cook, 2018). Further, our findings raise the question of whether social capital is merely beneficial, and what are its unintended trade-offs and consequences in the online environment.

Even if materialism and impression management among young people have been associated with negative characters, this study showed that these antecedents are not always fundamentally negative. Materialistic attitudes along with the online impression management together may help people not only to strengthen their existing relationships but also to find new friends and connections that might have a crucial positive effect on their life, career, and overall well-being. From that perspective, status-seeking impression

management appears to be a promising and poorly understood phenomenon. We should keep this aspect in mind when considering young people's idealized or misleading behavior on social media. That is what Cooley (1902, p. 320) suggested: *'If we never tried to seem a little bit better than we are, how could we improve or train ourselves from the outside inward'*.

8.2. Limitations and future directions

We need to mention several limitations of this study. Due to the absence of valid statistical tests, our model was unable to explain the precise mechanisms of why materialism and impression management led to higher social capital. Thus, future studies could contribute to this gap by examining the potential mechanisms behind this connection. In addition, as we used a cross-sectional data, it was not possible to evaluate causality. Lastly, we could not test differences between genders because of the lack of metric invariance.

As the participants of this study were solely from Finland, our model could also be tested further in other cultural contexts. Also, future studies would benefit by taking new covariates into consideration within robust checking and they could specify and develop this model by examining new predictors. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive basis for further examination of these connections in other contexts, age groups, and datasets.

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Data availability statement

The data used in this article is owned by the research project of #Agents - Young People's Agency in Social Media, and is available upon request.

Author contribution statement

All authors have contributed this article and agreed to the submission.

Submission declaration

This article is not currently being considered for publication by any other print or electronic journal.

Declaration of Competing interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Supplementary materials

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III

YOUNG CONSUMERS' BOYCOTTING PROFILES IN THE UK AND FINLAND: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

by

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Young Consumers' Boycotting Profiles in the UK and Finland: A Comparative Analysis (11502) words excluding tables and figures)

This study uses latent profile analysis to identify boycotting subgroups within Finland and the UK and to explore their potential differences across countries. These subgroups are based on how young British and Finnish consumers assess that reference groups and their personal experiences have influenced their boycotting decisions. This study is based on comparative data obtained from the UK (n = 1,236) and Finland (n = 1,219). We identified four boycotting profiles: *unlikely to be influenced*, *influenced by personal things*, *likely to be influenced*, *and moderately likely to be influenced*. Our findings are especially relevant to consumer researchers, brands, and companies.

Keywords: boycotting, consumer behavior, comparative analysis, reference group influence, latent profile analysis

Introduction

Boycotts are becoming more prevalent. As a result of Russia's military attack on Ukraine in February 2022, not only have companies abandoned Russia, but consumers have also started to boycott companies who have continued doing business in Russia. Such sudden consumer boycotts are becoming a globally impactful financial burden for companies, and therefore, it is crucial to develop a better understanding of the antecedents of consumers' boycotting behavior. This study constructs boycotting profiles for young consumers in the UK and Finland. More specifically, we aim to identify boycotting subgroups based on how participants perceive their boycotting decisions to be influenced by their personal experiences and social reference groups. Furthermore, potential differences in such boycotting groups will be explored between

the two countries.

Consumer boycotts are defined as an effort by individuals or groups to persuade others not to buy certain products in the marketplace to achieve specific goals (Friedman 1985, 97). Researchers have distinguished between boycotts and buycotts: while buycotting refers to actions that aim to reward a company by favoring its products, boycotting, which is the focus of this study, refers to actions intended to punish a company, such as avoiding its products (Hoffmann and Hutter 2012).

The history of consumer boycotts dates at least as far back as the 18th century (Friedman 1999, 3–4), and boycotts became more common during the latter part of the 19th century (Glickman 2009, 116). Studies have revealed a growing boycotting trend, with a more than fourfold increase in consumers' participation in boycotts worldwide during 1975 and 1999 (Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005). Likewise, Endres and Panagopoulos (2017) noted that the boycott participation rate among regular voters during the previous 12 months ranged from 39%–50% in the USA. The current *cancel culture* (Saldanha et al. 2022) has also shed more light on boycotts. In addition to growing boycott trends, researchers have indicated the significance of the topic through their recent scholarly interest (Ackermann and Gundelach 2022; Cheng, Zhang, Gil de Zúñiga 2022; Shim and Cho 2022; Zorell and Denk 2021).

Social media and other digital platforms have presumably increased consumers' awareness of boycotts, which is likely to affect the size of such actions (e.g., their participation rates) and, consequently, their effectiveness. As Albrecht et al. (2013) noted, using the Internet, a few people can quickly disseminate information about boycotts and persuade others to participate. Thus, the role of social media is also considered in this study, yet it is unnecessary to draw a strict line between online and offline boycotts, as such actions commonly have characteristics of both.

Previous research has explored different reasons and motives for boycotting (Ackermann and Gundelach 2022; Albrecht et al. 2013; Braunsberger and Buckler 2011; Ettenson and Klein 2005; Hoffmann et al. 2018; Kozinets and Handelman 1998; Lindenmeier, Schleer, and Pricl 2012; Palacios–Florencio et al. 2021; Shim and Cho 2022) and emphasized the role of social pressure and social influence in consumers' boycotting intentions and participation (Delistavrou, Krystallis, and Tilikidou 2020; Farah and Newman 2010; Garret 1987; Klein, Smith, and John 2004; Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz 2001; Zorell and Denk 2021). Although it is widely accepted that different reference groups, such as peers, family members, and vloggers, can affect consumers' decisions to varying extents (Hoyer, MacInnis, and Pieters 2018), to our knowledge, no study has explored the role of different reference groups in consumers' boycotting decisions, especially in the same study. Furthermore, prior research has examined the connections between emotions, such as anger (Braunsberger and Buckler 2011; Makarem and Jae 2016), outrage (Lindenmeier, Schleer, and Pricl 2012), and animosity (Palacios–Florencio et al. 2021), and boycotting intentions, motives, and behavior. However, knowledge about the role of personal experiences, such as poor customer service, in consumers' boycotting decisions is scarce. Lasarov, Hoffmand, and Orth (2021) recently acknowledged that this topic has not been investigated before and showed that customer service and its quality can affect consumers' boycotting intentions. Moreover, while some research has investigated the role of a reference group's influence on consumers in different countries (Bolton, Keh, and Alba 2010; Yang, He, and Lee 2007), it remains unclear whether the influence of such reference groups on consumers' boycotting behavior varies across countries and cultures.

To address these research gaps, we will identify potential boycotting profiles among young people in the UK and Finland. The established boycotting profiles are

based on young consumers' perceptions of to what degree their personal experiences (poor customer service) and different reference groups (e.g., peers, idols, musicians, and vloggers) have influenced their boycotting decisions. The identification of such boycotting subgroups and their connections to sociodemographic factors will improve our scientific understanding of the boycotting phenomenon. Moreover, the identification of possible boycotting subgroups will clarify the role of different reference groups and consumers' personal experiences in their boycotting decisions in different countries.

Reference group theory is used as a framework to understand the role of a social group's influence in consumers' boycotting decisions. Previous research on reference groups has implied that certain social groups (e.g., peers) can have a normative or informational influence on individuals' decision making and consumer behavior (Deutsch and Gerard 1955; Hoyer, MacInnis, and Pieters 2018; Luo 2005; Mangleburg, Doney, and Bristol 2004; Mehta, Lalwani, and Ping 2001; Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz 2001). While normative social influence refers to individuals' tendency to conform to others' expectations, informational influence refers to one's willingness to rely on others' knowledge about reality (Deutsch and Gerard 1955).

The definition of a reference group is somewhat ambiguous as it also refers to individuals. For instance, Solomon (2018, 417) noted that scholars commonly use the concept of reference group more loosely to refer to any external social influence exerted not only by actual groups but also by individuals (see also, Bearden and Etzel 1982; Park and Lessig 1977). Likewise, we use the term *reference group* in this article to refer to social influence from groups and individuals. Notably, as individuals spend ever–increasing time on social media (Pew Research Center 2021), we treat their potential reference groups in the context of such media.

Boycotts are part of political consumption. Political consumption refers to consumers' use of the marketplace for political purposes to affect perceived issues, such as ethical problems (Stolle and Micheletti 2013, 39). Political consumption activities (e.g., boycotts) emphasize individualized responsibility taking instead of traditional forms of political participation (Stolle and Micheletti 2013). In this study, we draw on political consumption literature and findings on the impact of reference groups. We suggest that political consumption actions are, to some extent, guided by the social influence of different reference groups. For instance, consumers might decide to boycott to acquire social rewards by complying with their friends (e.g., Price, Nir, and Cappella 2006).

Young people are an especially interesting group for the aim of this study. First, young people are especially active in political consumption activities (Kyroglou & Henn, 2021; Ziesemer et al. 2021), underlining the importance of young consumers as a target group of this study. Second, as we focus on the role of social media in consumers' boycotting decisions, it is noteworthy that young people are the most active group on social media (e.g., Pew, 2021). Thus, they are also more exposed to boycotting-related content such as boycotting campaigns or celebrity influence than older generations for instance. Third and relatedly, young people are more susceptible to social influence than others (Stok et al. 2016).

From a methodological perspective, we applied the person–centered approach of multi–group latent profile analysis (LPA) in this explorative study. This serves as a basis for identifying hidden boycotting subgroups in the data and comparing the differences in boycott profiles between Finland and the UK. Few studies on boycotts (Shim and Cho 2022) have taken the LPA approach, which highlights the novelty of using this methodological perspective in the current study.

Theoretical Background

Political Consumption and Boycotts

Boycotts are part of political consumption (Austgulen 2016; Cheng, Zhang, and Gil de Zúñiga 2022; Stolle and Micheletti 2013; Zorell and Denk 2021). While the term "political consumption" has been used interchangeably with ethical consumption and political consumerism (Micheletti 2011, 1097–99), we use the definition of political consumption throughout this article.

Stolle and Micheletti (2013) noted that in the current society, because conventional political agents have failed to take responsibility for human rights, for instance, individuals are determined to take on that responsibility, reflecting individualized forms of political participation. That is, traditional political forms and organizations have lost their attraction and have been replaced by more informal networks and new forms of action, which underline individualized responsibility taking (Hershkovitz 2017; Stolle and Micheletti 2013, 25, 32–33). Thus, political consumption underlines individualized responsibility taking, while political consumption forms, such as boycotts, are concrete examples of individualized responsibility taking (Stolle and Micheletti 2013, 27–42).

Digital media is also crucial for political consumption (Yuksel, Thai, and Lee 2020) because digital platforms not only provide better access to information but also allow consumers to interact with like–minded others (Copeland and Atkinson 2016). This is especially true for young people who are active users of social media. Interestingly, the novel perspective of political consumption is that it relates to the current and controversial topic of cancel culture, which is also prominent in social media. Cancel culture refers to people's use of social pressure to put someone or something into cultural isolation as a result of the latter's inappropriate statements or

actions (Norris 2021). Although cancel culture has more severe characteristics than traditional boycotting (e.g., social shaming) (Saldanha, Mulye, and Rahman 2022), boycotts and cancel culture also share similar features, such as their willingness to punish actors for their wrongdoings. Also, some scholars have closely linked boycotts to cancel culture (Lee and Abidin 2021; Mueller 2021). Therefore, it seems that both social media and cancel culture highlight the topicality of political consumption.

Although consumer boycotts call for individual responsibility, they do not eliminate the impact of external sources on individuals' decisions to participate in such actions. Studies have shown the role of social pressure and the influence of reference groups on consumers' boycott participation (Garret 1987; Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz 2001). For example, de Zúñiga, Copeland, and Bimber (2014) found that social media use predicted political consumption as social media includes social influence, such as a friend's persuasion to avoid a certain product for environmental reasons. Likewise, Schlozman, Brady, and Verba (2018, 50) noted that some consumers are not politically active because no one has asked them to participate. Moreover, Baek (2010) found that political consumers discussed politics with friends and family more than those who did not participate in boycotts or buycotts. The aforementioned indicates the necessity of the framework of reference groups when considering the antecedents of political consumption.

Personal experiences and emotions are also crucial for political consumption. Research suggests that boycotts are stages for consumers to express their emotions (Kozinets and Handelman 1998) and that consumers' negative emotions, such as anger (Braunsberger and Buckler 2011; Ettenson and Klein 2005), outrage (Lindenmeier, Schleer, and Pricl 2012), and displeasure (Makarem and Jae 2016), are drivers of higher boycott participation. Similarly, consumers' negative experiences can affect their

boycotting intentions. For example, Bolfing (1989) suggested that poor customer service can generate huge losses for companies as a result of consumers' boycotting decisions. As negative experiences are often entangled with negative emotions, they both presumably contribute to consumers' boycotting decisions. However, to date, only a few studies have investigated how customer service relates to consumers' boycotting willingness (Lasarov, Hoffmann, and Orth 2021). Thus, the role of consumers' personal experiences (poor customer service) in their boycotting decisions is considered in this study.

The Influence of Reference Groups

Reference group theory enhances our understanding of the role of social influence in consumers' boycotting decisions and thus in political consumption. A reference group refers to an individual or group that exerts its social influence on, in this context, consumer behavior (Bearden and Etzel 1982; Schulz 2015). To illustrate reference group influence, Hoyer, MacInnis, and Pieters (2018) suggested that friends can affect consumers' brand choices: consumers tend to buy similar brands what their friends buy. Also, Mangleburg, Doney, and Bristol (2004) noted that reference groups have an impact on young consumers' shopping activities such as shopping enjoyment and frequency. Likewise, Luo (2005) found that the presence of peers had a positive effect on consumers' impulsive buying behavior, especially in regard to consumers who were more susceptible to social influence. In parallel, Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz (2001) considered the role of reference group influence in individuals' boycott participation.

The premises of social influence can be understood through conformity. People tend to change their attitudes and behavior to align with a group's attitudes and behavior (Asch 1955; Baumeister and Vohs 2007). There is a large amount of empirical evidence

showing that a need to belong is a crucial motivation for humans (Baumeister and Leary 1995), and thus, people might conform to others' expectations and opinions for fear of social rejection.

Research has recognized three reference groups: membership (i.e., groups we belong to, such as peers and gender), aspirational (i.e., groups we would like to be part of and with which we identify), and dissociative (i.e., groups with which we do not want to be associated) (White and Dahl 2006).

A significant body of research has focused on the influence of reference groups on consumer behavior. Childers and Rao (1992) replicated Bearden and Etzlen's (1982) study and found that reference groups influenced consumers' product decisions. Moreover, consumers form a better self–brand connection with brands whose images they perceive as consistent with their understanding of their own in–groups (Escalas and Bettman 2005). Regarding boycotts, Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz (2001) found that social groups affected peoples' boycotting willingness. They added that the effect of consumers' expected participation rates (how many will attend) on their boycott willingness was higher among those who were more susceptible to social pressure. Thus, those with a higher susceptibility to normative influence may participate in boycotts as a result of their reference group's expectations (see also Klein, Smith, and John 2004). More recent studies have also found that social pressure predicts consumers' boycotting intentions and political consumption (Delistavrou, Krystallis, and Tilikidou 2020; Farah and Newman 2010; Zorell and Denk 2021).

Research has also examined the connections between consumer behavior and certain types of reference groups, such as membership groups (Moschis 1976; White and Dahl 2006), aspirational groups (Hoyer, MacInnis, and Pieters 2018), and dissociative groups (White and Dahl 2006). Despite the previous research on social

influence, there is a lack of understanding of the role of different reference groups in consumers' boycotting decisions and, thus, what kind of boycotting subgroups can be identified based on how consumers see their boycotting decisions as being affected by the social influence exerted by different reference groups and consumers' personal experiences. As mentioned before, peers, family members, and idols can all play a different role in consumers' decisions; therefore, we contend that it is valuable to explore multiple reference groups in the current study.

Reference groups serve as a basis for understanding what affects consumers' decisions to boycott products or services; therefore, their role is underscored in this article. For instance, peers' climate change concerns and their willingness to avoid unecological products (e.g., cars) might affect their friends' boycotting decisions as a result of social pressure and normative expectations. Likewise, idols (e.g., musicians or vloggers) can share their negative experiences with certain brands on social media, which might lead consumers to accept this opinion as evidence of reality, causing them to boycott such products. Notably, while people have always been susceptible to reference groups' social influence, it might be that today's social media platforms, offering 24/7 unlimited contact with multiple agents, lead to greater exposure to social influence than ever before.

In this study, we include the following sources of social influence and personal experience factors: Friends constitute a typical membership reference group (White and Dahl 2006). Idols, bloggers, and vloggers are considered aspirational reference groups. Idols form a quite traditional aspirational reference group (Hoyer, MacInnis, and Pieters 2018, 299). Furthermore, given social media influencers' (such as bloggers') huge popularity and remarkable influence on young consumers' behavior, they constitute a group of admired influencers and thus are seen as an aspirational group. Stories from

random people form a reference group in the sense that stories are told by people (social influence), but these cannot be strictly categorized into the membership or aspirational group. Thus, stories from random people are defined as more loosely referring to a general social reference group with a low tie strength (Hoyer, MacInnis, and Pieters 2018, 301). On the other hand, such stories can also refer to those told by social media influencers, which form part of the aspirational reference group. Campaigns that an individual has been asked to join make up a similar reference group to stories from random people to the extent that invitations come from people (social influence). Accordingly, we define campaigns as a more general social reference group. Lastly, poor customer service by brands is considered as a personal experience.

Importantly, when participants are asked to assess who has influenced their boycotting decisions (on social media), they can presumably recognize the influence of bloggers and vloggers quite accurately because these individuals' influence is limited to social media. However, it is far more difficult to determine whether the influence of friends or campaigns they have been invited to join, is limited exclusively to social media. For instance, one might have been invited to join a campaign on social media, which friends may then have personally reminded them of. Thus, as it can be hard to indicate that a specific influence derives merely from social media or face–to–face situations, it is more convincing to take both of them into account.

Comparison Between Finnish and British Young Consumers

Although there is comparative research on boycotting (e.g., Hoffman 2014; Neilson 2010) and some studies have also examined differences in reference group influence across countries, there is a need for a better understanding of the role of different social influence sources on consumers' boycotting decisions in different countries and cultures. This article focuses on young consumers in

Finland and the UK. While the previous literature has not provided unambiguous evidence about factors that could thoroughly explain the potential differences between Finnish and British young consumers in their boycotting decisions, some differences may still be anticipated.

Finland and the UK differ in several respects, and therefore, make them interesting to compare to each other. Social classes have traditionally been quite visible in the UK (Biressi and Nunn 2013). While some scholars have noted the widened class divisions in Finland (Kantola and Kuusela 2019), Finns do not identify with social classes as strongly as Britons do (Erola 2010, 38), and social classes do not determine Finns' social positions in society as strongly as in Britain (France and Roberts 2017, 10). Also, although the UK and Finland are both European welfare states, Finland is much younger consumer society than the UK. Likewise, Finns have higher trust in public authorities than Britons (European Social Survey 2018). Consequently, as social classes are more prevalent in the UK, Britons are more likely to identify with them as reference groups than Finns, presumably making young Britons more susceptible to social influence. These differences might have an impact on how consumers react to social influence (i.e., those who identify more strongly with social classes might be more sensitive to others' opinions and social influence).

The full picture is however more ambiguous. Stolle and Micheletti (2013) noted that Finns reported relatively high buycott and boycott activism compared to UK consumers, while their actual behaviors, such as fair–trade coffee consumption, were relatively low compared to those of UK participants. Conversely, according to the European Social Survey (2008), 24% of UK consumers and 30% of Finnish consumers reported boycotting certain products during the last 12 months, indicating that Finns might be more active boycotters. Additionally, unlike in the UK, which has declining

numbers, there was an increasing boycotting trend in Finland between 2002 and 2010 (Stolle and Micheletti 2013, 50–51). Kjaernes, Harvey, and Warde (2007) found that Britons were more active in participating in food boycotts than Norwegians and proposed that Britons were more willing to take individual responsibility and more inclined to think that their voices as consumers mattered (107–110).

Some research has examined differences in reference group influence across countries. These results can be viewed in relation to potential differences between Finland and the UK, yet they are not unambiguous either. Yang, He, and Lee (2007) investigated how US and Chinese consumers differ in how reference groups affect their purchase behaviors. They hypothesized that reference groups would have a higher influence (informational, utilitarian, and value–expressive) on Chinese consumers, as China is typically associated with collectivism and conformity to social norms versus the individualistic leaning of Americans. In contrast to their expectations, reference groups had a higher informational and utilitarian influence on US consumers, while such reference groups had only a higher value–expressive influence on Chinese consumers. The authors speculated that their hypotheses were outdated because the influence of US culture has already affected young Chinese consumers, such as through Hollywood movies. Bolton, Keh, and Alba (2010) examined how Chinese and American consumers reacted to pricing discrimination (i.e., paying a higher price than their in–group [friends] vs out–groups [strangers]). While Americans perceived it generally unfair to pay more than others, Chinese consumers were especially sensitive to paying more than their in–group (friends), as Chinese culture is more collectivistic and in–group oriented.

Thus, it is difficult to make reliable hypotheses on cultural differences between Finland and the UK, especially because their cultures are not as distinct as the

differences between China and the USA. Moreover, social media might have blurred the cultural differences between these countries, given that social media platforms have penetrated young consumers' lives in both countries. Based on the discussion above, our specified research questions are as follows:

RQ1. What kinds of boycotting profiles can be identified according to how Finns and Britons assess that their personal experiences and social groups have influenced their boycotting decisions?

RQ2. How do Finnish and British young consumers differ in their boycotting profiles?

RQ3. What is the role of sociodemographic variables in predicting participants' belongingness to different boycotting profiles?

Methods

Participants

A research company was hired to conduct a survey using an online consumer research panel system (CINT). The data was collected between 25 February and 28 March 2019. The target groups from the UK and Finland were formed based on age groups (15–19, 20–24, and 25–29 years old) and gender. The system used random sampling to form a research population to whom survey invitations and reminders were emailed. The target groups were adjusted to ensure they were balanced and comparable. The overall panel (N = 30,000) included 126 panels from Finland and 258 panels from the UK. The individuals from these panels constituted the research population for each country. The total sample size was 2,455 (Finland: n = 1,219; UK: n = 1,236). The sample was representative of age, gender, and area of residence. The system ensured that survey invitations were not sent to the same person twice and that enough time had passed

since their latest response to another survey. Descriptive statistics of the participants (Table 1) and their boycott activation (Table 2) are presented below.

(Insert Table 1 here)

(Insert Table 2 here)

Analysis Strategy

Participants were asked to assess, in general, who on social media had influenced their boycotting decisions and to what degree on a scale of 1–5 (1 = not at all, 5 = very much) (Table 2) (see also Appendix B). Importantly, when participants are asked to assess who has influenced their boycotting decisions, we do not assume that participants would be fully aware of the reasons for their acts in a way that they would be explicitly understood reasons. Rather, their answers are treated as their personal estimates and attitudes about how important certain sources have been in their boycotting decisions. This approach serves as a good basis for latent profile analysis . LPA was used to detect the hidden boycotting subgroups in the data by estimating the respondents' likelihood of belonging to a certain group (Ferguson et al. 2020). As we were interested in the differences between Finnish and British consumers, a six–step multi–group approach was taken, as suggested by Morin et al. (2016), which provided information about possible differences between latent constructs in different groups (Millsap and Kwok 2004). This six–step procedure (Morin et al. 2016) comprises configural, structural, dispersion, distributional, predictive, and explanatory tests for similarities between groups. The last two steps are not mandatory. The predictive step provides information about whether groups differ in their relationship with predictors (covariates), while the explanatory step assesses the relationship between profile memberships and outcomes (distal outcomes).

We employed the first five steps sequentially (the earlier steps are preconditions for later steps; see Morin et al. 2016). In the first step (configural), the number of profiles in the groups (UK and Finland) was estimated separately. If the groups had a similar number of profiles, we proceeded to the second step (structural), which tested whether the means of the profiles across the groups were equal. If the means were equal (the profiles had the same shape and were interpreted as being the same for the two countries), we proceeded to the third step (dispersion), which tested whether the variances in profiles across groups were equal (when they were, we could say that participants' behavior within profiles was similar for the two countries). The fourth step (distributional) tested whether the profile sizes were equal between the groups. As we were also interested in the relationships between the boycotting profiles and sociodemographic variables, we performed the fifth step (predictive), which tested whether the groups differed in their relationships with the predictors (covariates) and profiles.

The analysis was performed with Mplus 8 (version 8.1). The maximum likelihood robust (MLR) estimator was used to handle possible problems in statistical testing caused by non–normality and missing data. The MLR estimator is a full information version of the maximum likelihood estimator and is applicable when missingness is random (MAR). The percentage of missing values within our models was, at most, 3.7% (2,364/2,455).

The LPA model was executed with fixed variances (variances of indicator variables are constrained to keep them equal between latent groups but not between countries) because of convergence problems in modeling. This is typical of LPA modeling, which is why the fixed variance procedure is frequently used (Morin et al. 2016).

Results

Test of Similarity

The similarities between the UK and Finnish profiles were assessed first. To test configural similarity, LPA was performed separately for both countries to determine the number of profiles for each country. Previous research has suggested various statistical tests for choosing the correct number of profiles for the model (McLachlan and Peel 2000). The Bayesian information criterion (BIC), sample–size adjusted BIC (SABIC), and consistent Akaike information criterion (CAIC) (Morin et al. 2016) were used as the main indicators when making our decision on the optimal number of profiles, while lower values indicated a better fitting model (Tolvanen 2007). The AIC was reported but not used due to its tendency for over–extraction (Morin et al. 2016; Tolvanen, 2007). In parallel with Morin et al. (2016), we used three information criteria (BIC, SABIC, and CAIC) to test the similarity with constraints, and the similarity was supported if the majority of the fit indices (2/3) supported it. The Vuong–Lo–Mendell–Rubin (VLMR) test was also used to support our decision. The bootstrap likelihood ratio test (BLRT) was reported but not used because it did not support any estimated model and proposed an excessive number of classes to be included. Theoretical and practical reasoning and statistical indicators were used to choose the best model (Ferguson, Moore, and Hull 2019; Masyn 2013, 587). Table 3 presents the details of the fit indices in terms of the enumeration process performed across the countries.

(Insert Table 3 here)

Table 3 shows that entropy was at a satisfying level (> .8) in both countries within all the profiles (Clark 2010, 31–32). Additionally, the values of the AIC, BIC,

SABIC, and CAIC decreased systematically in both countries when additional profiles were added. However, the decrease was rather minor after the four profiles were included. Morin et al. (2016) noted that these indicators tend to suggest additional classes (sometimes endlessly), especially with a large sample size, and they suggested using elbow plots as an indicator of the correct number of profiles. This shows the point where the fit indices do not decrease significantly if additional classes are included.

The elbow point of the fit indices (BIC, SABIC, CAIC) was at Profile 4, suggesting a model with four profiles for both countries (see Figs. 1 and 2 in the Appendix A). In addition, the VLMR test was consistent with the information criteria for the UK, supporting four profile solutions ($p = .169$) when comparing five profile solutions to four profile solutions. For Finland, the VLMR test supported the five–class solution ($p = .3$) when comparing five profiles to six profiles and did not agree with the results of the information criteria. However, the fifth class was quite small (4.6%) and hard to distinguish from the other classes, resulting in problematic interpretations. Thus, the more parsimonious four–class model was chosen, as it was theoretically more meaningful to interpret (Ferguson, Moore, and Hull 2019; Masyn 2013, 571, 587), and it was supported by the information criteria (see the elbow plot in Fig. 2 in the Appendix A). In summary, the requirement of configural similarity was met (Morin et al. 2016), and the specific results are presented in Table 3. The means of the profiles by country are presented in Figs. 3 and 4 (see the Appendix A), demonstrating the similarities between the profiles for Finland and the UK.

Table 4 shows the results of the sequentially performed similarity tests. As Table 4 reveals, all the tests showed similarities except for the distributional test, indicating that the profiles' shapes and the participants' behavior within all the profiles were similar across countries, while the sizes of the profiles varied between countries. The

details of the profiles and their shapes in the dispersion model are shown in Table 5 and Fig. 5.

(Insert Table 4 here)

(Insert Table 5 here)

(Insert Fig. 5 here)

Interpretation of the Profiles

The participants from Profile 1 scored relatively low on each item, suggesting that they do not perceive that their boycotting behavior is heavily influenced by any of these sources. Poor customer service, which can be seen as a personal experience, was the only source that had a slight impact on their behavior. Thus, this profile was named *unlikely to be influenced.*

The participants from Profile 2 reported that poor customer service and friends had a major impact on their boycotting behavior. Interestingly, they also reported that stories from random people affected their boycotting behavior to some extent, which contrasted with the personal aspect. However, as their boycotting decisions were merely dependent on more personal–related factors, namely friends and poor customer service, this profile was named *influenced by personal things*.

Participants from Profile 3 reported that their boycotting decisions were heavily influenced by all the sources. That is, in addition to their own experiences, these participants saw that reference groups, such as friends, idols, bloggers, and vloggers, significantly impacted their boycotting behavior. Thus, this profile was named *likely to be influenced.*

Participants from Profile 4 reported that all the named sources had at least a moderate impact on their boycotting decisions. Although the impact of the sources on participants' boycotting decisions did not vary greatly in this profile, personal experiences (friends and poor customer service) seemed to have the highest impact on boycotting behavior. Thus, this profile was named *moderately likely to be influenced.*

Moderation and Profile Sizes

Next, we examined how the different profiles were related to sociodemographic variables and tested whether the country had a moderation effect on the relationship between the covariates and profiles. We also investigated the effect of the country on profile sizes. The covariates were age, gender, education, employment, and residential area (see Tables 1 and 2).

The moderation test and the effects of the covariates were tested through Morin et al.'s (2016) fifth step. That is, the best model from the similarity comparison was chosen, and then the covariates were included in the model. In our case, a dispersion model was chosen; the means and variances were constrained to keep them equal between the countries, while the profile sizes could change. The predictive test was performed sequentially. Initially, the effects of the covariates on the profiles were allowed to vary with regard to the two countries, but they were later compared to the model in which the effects were constrained to keep them equal. The final decision on the moderation effect was based on the information criteria (see Table 6).

(Insert Table 6 here)

As shown in Table 6, the majority of the criteria (BIC, SABIC, and CAIC) supported the model with no moderations, as they showed lower values. This indicates that the effect of the covariates on the profiles was similar in both countries.[1]

As the profile sizes differed for the two countries, Table 8 illustrates these differences by showing the percentages of the membership of profiles by country (see Morin et al. 2016). Interestingly, the *unlikely to be influenced* profile was more prevalent in Finland (23.1%) than in the UK (12%), while the *likely to be influenced* profile was more prevalent in the UK (29.9%) than in Finland (18.1%). However, there were no notable differences between the UK and Finland in terms of the prevalence of the *influenced by personal things* profile (the UK: 19.6% and Finland: 23.5%) and the *moderately likely to be influenced* profile (the UK: 38.6% and Finland: 35.4%).

(Insert Table 8 here)

Table 9 contains the results of the effects of the covariates on the profiles (multinomial logistic model; see more about parametrization in Morin et al. 2016).

(Insert Table 9 here)

[1] Due to the addition of the covariates, the observations were lower than in the models where they were not present. This was because values were missing from the covariates. The number of observations declined from 2,382 to 2,364. This small decline did not change the profiles' structures.

The impact of the covariates on the profiles was similar between countries. Notably, the *moderately likely to be influenced* profile was treated as a reference category in terms of the results in Table 9. In this case, the reference group described how covariates were related to the probability of being in a certain boycotting profile when compared to the *moderately likely to be influenced* profile (University of California, Los Angeles, 2016). As Table 9 shows, age (b = 0.054, p = .004) positively predicted membership in the *unlikely to be influenced* group. In turn, employed participants had a lower probability (b = -0.667, p < .001) than those who were not employed of belonging to *the unlikely to be influenced* profile. Likewise, those who lived in big cities had a lower probability (b = -0.273, p = .040) than those who lived in rural area or small cities of belonging to the *unlikely to be influenced* profile.

Age also positively predicted (b = 0.039, p = .040) membership in the *influenced by personal things* profile, indicating that the older participants were more likely to belong to this profile. However, employed participants had a lower probability (b = -0.402, p = .005) than those who were not employed of belonging to the *influenced by personal* things profile. Interestingly, females had a lower probability (b = -0.337, p = .007) than males of belonging to the *likely to be influenced* profile. Moreover, employed (b = 0.402, p = .003) participants were more likely to belong to the *likely to be influenced* profile than those who were not employed. Lastly, those who lived in big cities were more likely (b = 0.246, p = .053) to belong to the *likely to be influenced* group than those who lived in rural area or small cities.

Discussion

This study explored what kinds of boycotting profiles can be identified among young consumers in the UK and Finland. We identified four boycotting profiles in both countries*: unlikely to be influenced*, *influenced by personal things*, *likely to be*

influenced, and *moderately likely to be influenced*. Interestingly, these boycotting profiles were similar in both countries in the sense that the participants' behavior was consistent within all the profiles for the two countries. This means that their boycotting decisions were similarly affected by their own experiences and reference group influences. However, cultural differences were evident, as the results showed that Finnish and British young consumers differed in the extent to which it was likely that they belonged to a certain boycotting profile. For example, when comparing Britons with Finns, more Britons belonged to the *likely to be influenced* boycotting profile, while more Finns belonged to *the unlikely to be influenced* profile. In the moderation analysis, we did not find a moderation effect between the countries regarding sociodemographic variables.

As mentioned earlier, although the role of social influence in consumers' boycotting intentions and participation has been studied (Delistavrou, Krystallis, and Tilikidou 2020; Farah and Newman 2010; Klein, Smith, and John 2004; Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz 2001; Zorell and Denk 2021), there is a lack of a more specific understanding of the role of different reference groups in consumers' boycotting decisions. Also, the impact of consumers' personal experiences (e.g., poor customer service) on their boycotting decisions has been understudied (Lasarov, Hoffmann, and Orth 2021). The present study addressed these gaps by revealing boycotting subgroups that were based on young consumers' own perceptions of to what extent their personal experiences (poor customer service) and reference groups (e.g., peers, idols, musicians, and vloggers) influence their boycotting decisions.

Also, although Shim and Cho (2022) used LPA to explore ethical consumer profiles, including several boycotting aspects, to the best of the authors' knowledge, there are no previous studies that focus solely on boycotting profiles. The identified

boycotting subgroups have improved our understanding of how young consumers differ in the extent to which they see their boycotting decisions as being affected by their personal experiences and different reference groups. For instance, we found a group whose members reported that all the reference groups, as well as personal experiences, had a large impact on their boycotting (*likely to be influenced*), as opposed to another group, whose decisions were only slightly influenced by reference groups (*unlikely to be influenced*). Importantly, we also identified a group whose decisions were only influenced by friends in terms of the specified reference groups, and which emphasized the role of poor customer experience in its boycotting decisions (*influenced by personal things*), in line with Lasarov, Hoffmann, and Orth (2021). The findings on the connections between boycotting subgroups and sociodemographic factors also provided a more detailed understanding of the participants' characteristics in a certain profile. Lastly, our findings enhanced our understanding of how such processes differ across countries, namely in the UK and Finland.

Our findings suggest that there are no cultural differences between Finnish and British consumers in terms of boycotting decisions. With regard to our findings on similar boycotting profiles, Shim and Cho (2022) examined ethical consumer profiles in culturally diverse countries (the USA and Malaysia) and found both similar and distinctive profiles between countries. Given that the UK and Finland both represent European consumer societies, when compared to the USA and Malaysia, which differ more from each other, our results appear to align with their results for different profiles. However, the similar profiles identified among culturally distinctive countries contradict our results. Nevertheless, it is notable that because the research topic of the present study differs from that of ethical consumers, our results are not directly comparable with the findings of Shim and Cho (2022).

We found similar profiles across countries that may suggest cultural similarities (e.g., between Western and European cultures), but we also found that more Britons belonged to the *likely to be influenced* profile and that more Finns belonged to the *unlikely to be influenced* profile. This raises a question about the cultural and national differences between these countries and implies that Britons' boycotting decisions are more susceptible to reference group influence and personal experiences compared to Finns.

Britons have a longer history of boycotts and consumer activism than Finns; thus, they might be more experienced in and sensitive to such matters. As stated earlier, the UK is typically associated with a clearer division of social classes compared to Finland. Therefore, Britons may have a stronger identification with such social classes and be more sensitive to social and group norms, which likely results in a higher sensitivity to reference group influence. It is well-established that social norms affect consumer behavior (e.g., food choices) (Pliner and Mann 2004) though not always in the desired way (Melnyk, Carrillat, and Melnyk 2022; Lasarov, Hoffman, and Mai 2022; Schultz et al. 2007). Nonetheless, Goldstein, Cialdini, and Griskevicius (2008) found that hotel guests were more likely to reuse the towels when they were exposed to a message including social norms (how others behave) than a more generic sign (please help the environment). Thus, it is possible that Britons are more sensitive to social norms and explain why the *likely to be influenced* boycott profile was prominent in the UK. Finland, however, is a relatively new and modern consumer society with less visible social divisions. Consequently, young Finnish consumers do not necessarily identify as strongly with social classes as young Britons and are therefore not as sensitive to the influence of their reference groups. This may explain why the *unlikely to be influenced* profile was important in Finland.

Alternative explanations for the cultural differences can also be derived from the free-riding literature (Klein, Smith, and John 2004; Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz 2001). Thus, it is possible that more Finns belonged to the *"not likely to be influenced"*-profile because Finns are more inclined to free-riding (i.e., don't participate in boycotts but enjoy the consequences of others' participation) (Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz 2001). For instance, when comparing Norwegians (close to Finland) to Britons, Kjaernes, Harvey, and Warde (2008) found that Britons were more inclined to think that their voices as consumers mattered. In turn, research suggest that consumers are more likely to free-ride if they believe that their contribution does not matter (Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz 2001; see also Klein, Smith, and John 2004). Therefore, Finns might think that their voice and contribution do not matter, and tend to free-ride, and therefore, are not as sensitive to social influence as Britons. Finns may also think that institutions will take care of boycotting-related issues, because Finns have higher trust in public authorities than Britons (European Social Survey 2018), and therefore tend to free-ride and are not as heavily influenced by different social factors as Britons.

Social media provides one explanation for our finding of similar profiles across the UK and Finland. Yang, He, and Lee (2007) hypothesized that the normative influence exerted by reference groups will be higher on Chinese consumers compared to their US counterparts because China is typically perceived as having a collectivistic culture with high conformity to social norms. Although Yang, He, and Lee (2007) found differences in their study, these were not in line with their hypotheses. Therefore, the researchers proposed that Western culture has perhaps influenced Chinese culture. In parallel, it is possible that social media has blurred the cultural differences between the UK and Finland, which would explain why similar boycotting profiles were identified in the two countries. However, while young Finns and Britons differed in the

extent to which they belonged to a certain boycotting profile, one could perceive the previous argument to be inconsistent. Nevertheless, it is notable that even social media cannot blur all cultural differences by any means.

The finding that young men are more likely to belong to the *likely to be influenced* profile than young women contrasts with Stolle and Micheletti (2013) and Copeland (2014), who noted that women are more likely to be political consumers than men. However, our finding that employed respondents were more likely to belong to the *likely to be influenced* profile than the non–employed aligns with Stolle and Micheletti (2013), who found that employed people were more likely to be political consumers than non–employed people. The result that revealed that older participants were more likely to belong to the *unlikely to be influenced* profile compared to the reference group and that education did not have a statistically significant effect on the profiles aligns with Austgulen (2016). However, as non–employed people were mostly students and participants were relatively young (18–29) in this study, these results should be compared to those of other studies cautiously. Importantly, political consumption is a multifaceted phenomenon, and its measures and results vary between studies. Therefore, as we aimed to identify boycotting profiles, it is possible that our results are not directly comparable with those explicitly examining, for instance, gender differences in different political consumption actions.

Lastly, we also acknowledge that boycotts are typically launched and organized by nongovernmental organizations (e.g., Ali 2021; Klein, Smith, and John 2004), and social media contributes heavily to the spread of information about boycotts because social media enables never-ending access to information and other consumers' experiences: this is quite close to what Aral (2021) referred to as "hype machine". However, this study took an individual approach emphasizing the role of young

consumers' social groups and their personal experiences in their boycotting decisions, and thus, rather explored the boycotting decisions at a grassroots level.

Theoretical Contributions

The findings of our explorative research make several important theoretical contributions to the current knowledge. The present study has enhanced our understanding of how reference groups work together with political consumption. That is, our study, in general, suggests that social reference groups, such as friends, vloggers, and idols, play a significant role in young consumers' boycotting decisions. While political consumption actions typically call for individualized responsibility (Stolle and Micheletti 2013), we also highlighted the role of the different social groups in this process. The present study expands the theoretical concept of political consumption by revealing new perspectives on the precursors of boycotting. We found four distinct boycotting groups (*unlikely to be influenced*, *influenced by personal things*, *likely to be influenced*, *and moderately likely to be influenced*), which show how consumers differ in to what extent they perceive their boycotting decisions to be determined by their reference groups and personal experiences when making such decisions.

Our findings also make several smaller theoretical contributions to the current knowledge. The present study revealed the high potential of social media in young consumers' boycotting decisions. When we asked participants who affected their boycott decisions, the importance of online environments became clear. In addition to vloggers, who are clearly enmeshed within the Internet, other reference groups, such as friends, campaigns, and idols, as well as stories from random people, are easily available on social media. Thus, social media might serve as a basis for multiple agents and their effective information sharing and persuasive messages about boycotts (see also de Zúñiga, Copeland, and Bimber 2014). Therefore, our study underlines the

potential of social media in both theoretical concepts: political consumption and reference groups.

Additionally, while we emphasized the role of reference groups in young consumers' boycotting decisions, we also acknowledged the role of consumers' experiences, such as poor customer service. As experiences are commonly entangled with emotions, and scholars have noted the significance of negative feelings in boycott participation (Braunsberger and Buckler 2011; Ettenson and Klein 2005; Lindenmeier, Schleer, and Pricl 2012), our results not only align with these findings on emotions and political consumption, but also improve our understanding of how poor customer service can precede boycotts and thus political consumption.

Limitations and Future Directions

The findings of this study are subject to several limitations. As we studied young consumers, these results cannot be generalized to the whole population. Moreover, reference groups and their types of social influence are difficult to classify unequivocally. For instance, it is hard to determine whether the respondents' boycott decisions were affected by normative or informational influences because this was not measured. Also, although campaigns and stories from random people were considered as reference groups, it is hard to classify them into specific types of groups.

Additionally, as we focused on the participants' perceptions of the influence of social and personal factors on their boycotting decisions, a further study with more focus on the causality is therefore suggested. Also, as our dataset is limited to participants' perceptions of social influence and personal experiences on their boycotting decisions, we encourage future studies to include the actual behavioral indicators such as whether participants have boycotted or not to fill the potential gap between attitudes and behavior. Finally, we had to use fixed variances in our LPA

model (the variances were constrained to keep them equal), but freely estimated variances could have provided a more accurate and proper picture of the boycotting profiles (Mäkikangas et al. 2018).

Conclusion

We identified four similar boycotting profiles in the UK and Finland (*unlikely to be influenced*, *influenced by personal things*, *likely to be influenced*, *and moderately likely to be influenced*). However, while the *likely to be influenced* profile was prominent in the UK, the *unlikely to be influenced* profile was more prevalent in Finland. Our findings highlight the contribution of personal experiences and reference groups to consumers' boycotting decisions. Our study also illustrates how young consumers differ based on the influencers and motivators of their boycotting decisions in the sense that four distinctive boycotting profiles could be identified.

Our findings provide effective insights, especially in the field of consumer studies. Understanding how the thresholds for boycotting behavior differ is a starting point for further studies exploring culture– and nation state–specific boycott traits. Our results highlight differences in the triggers of boycotting. For instance, we have shown how some consumers need a personal experience to start boycotting (*influenced by personal things*), while others' boycotting decisions are sensitive to a larger spectrum of sources (*likely to be influenced*). This is something that future studies need to take into account: if researchers overlook consumers' need for personal experience to start boycotting, they can inadvertently treat these individuals as passive consumers. This is also something that activists should consider: if they want to affect consumers' boycotting decisions, they should consider such different triggers of boycotting. Also, to succeed, activists may want to contact especially employed men from big cities, use word-of-mouth to engender personal contact, utilize different social media channels and

collaborate with social media influencers. Thus, we have further established that young consumers' boycotting decisions and boycotting groups are multifaceted. These not previously identified boycotting profiles can assist in future boycotting and cancel culture studies to understand the antecedents of these phenomena: social influence and personal experiences.

These findings also provide a better understanding of how the complex dynamism of negative sentiments turns into actions in society among young consumers. In the future, these behaviors will become dominant as younger generations take over. A better understanding of boycotts will also contribute to social studies and communication research, branding, and marketing, as dissatisfied consumers must always be understood in their cultural and socio–temporal contexts. Furthermore, identifying the cultural specificities of boycotts will help us understand the dynamics of the differences in online public spheres of societies in the UK and Finland. As this study was an exploration of two western democracies, whose consumer societies yet differ in many respects, we call for future studies to test our findings in more diverse cultural settings such as in the largest global economies (e.g., China, the US, and Russia).

For brands and companies, understanding the nature of the diverse routes behind emerging boycotts may prove insightful for their public relations, customer relationship management, and issues management. Angry publics and negative sentiments easily spill over to a brand, even when anger is not directly related to the reasons for the boycott (Bowden et al. 2017), and strong reactions from a brand may even backfire. While every boycott is different, and no universal findings can be distinguished, understanding the different boycott behaviors serves as a beneficial starting point for organizations interested in planning and managing the rising negative sentiment around brands and companies. Moreover, Hoffman (2014) noted that companies should avoid

being boycotted because boycotts, in general, harm their business (e.g., stock price). Based on our findings, consumers' boycotting decisions are also influenced by personal experiences such as poor customer service. Thus, we suggest companies to pay increasing attention to their customer service to avoid boycotts. Relatedly, as our results indicate that social media actors such as vloggers, bloggers, and idols influence young consumers' boycotting decisions, companies need to be careful with their actions as these influential social media actors can reach a lot of different consumer groups.

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Appendix A.

Fig. 1 Elbow plot of the United Kingdom

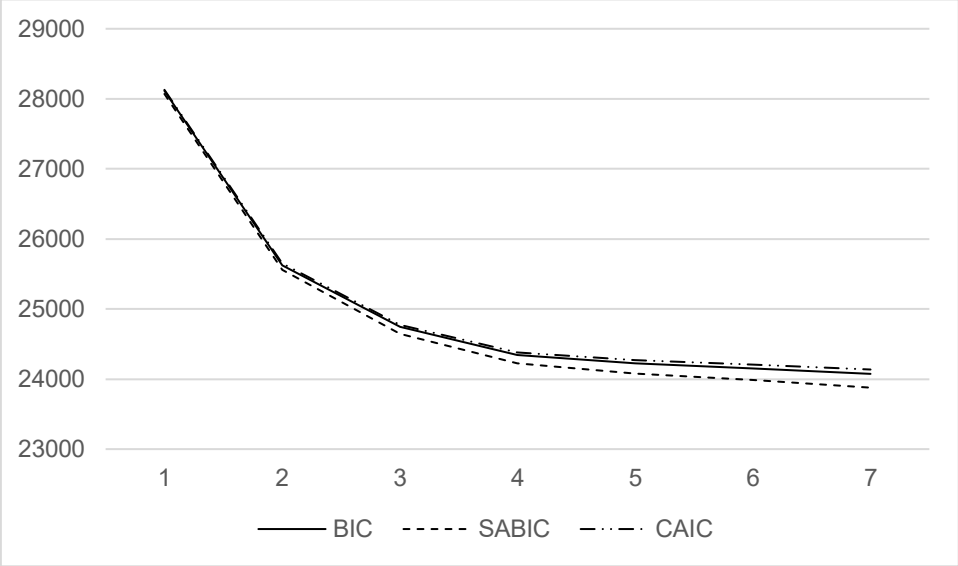


Fig. 2 Elbow plot of Finland

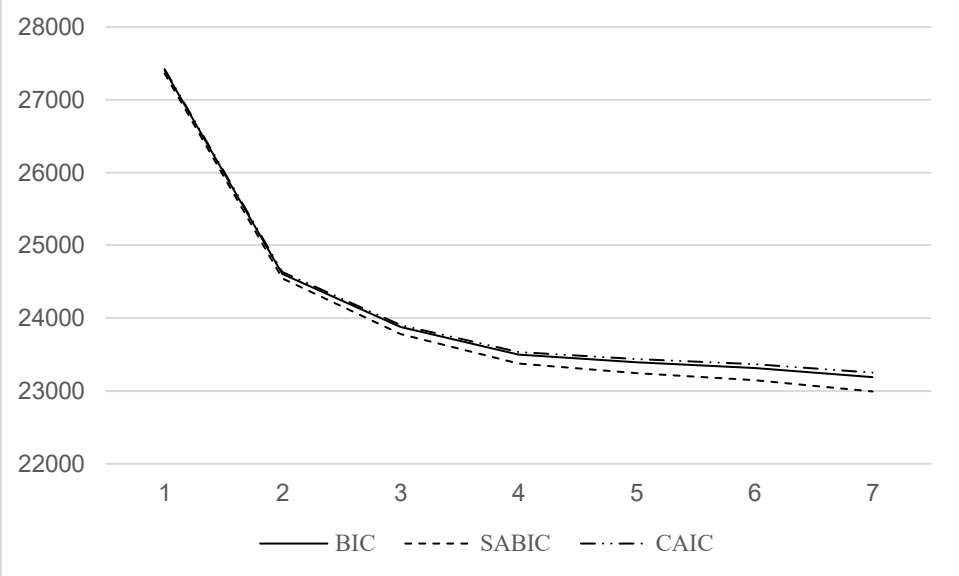


Fig. 3 Profiles for the United Kingdom

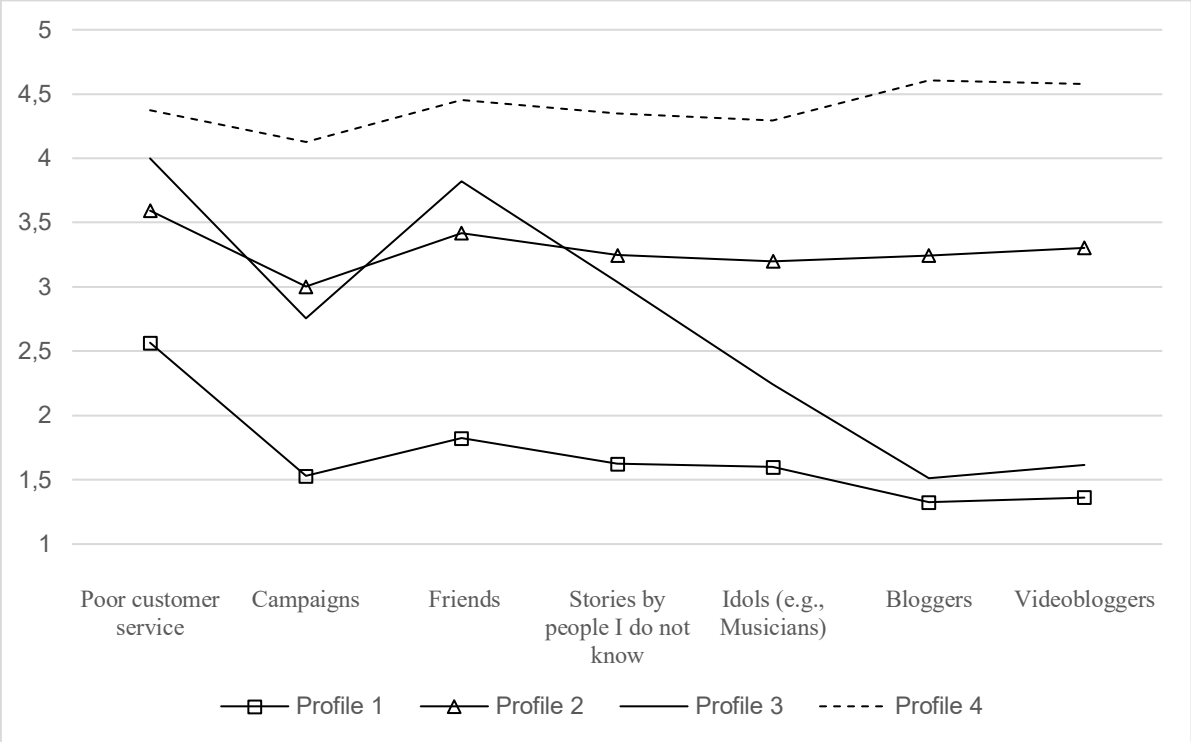
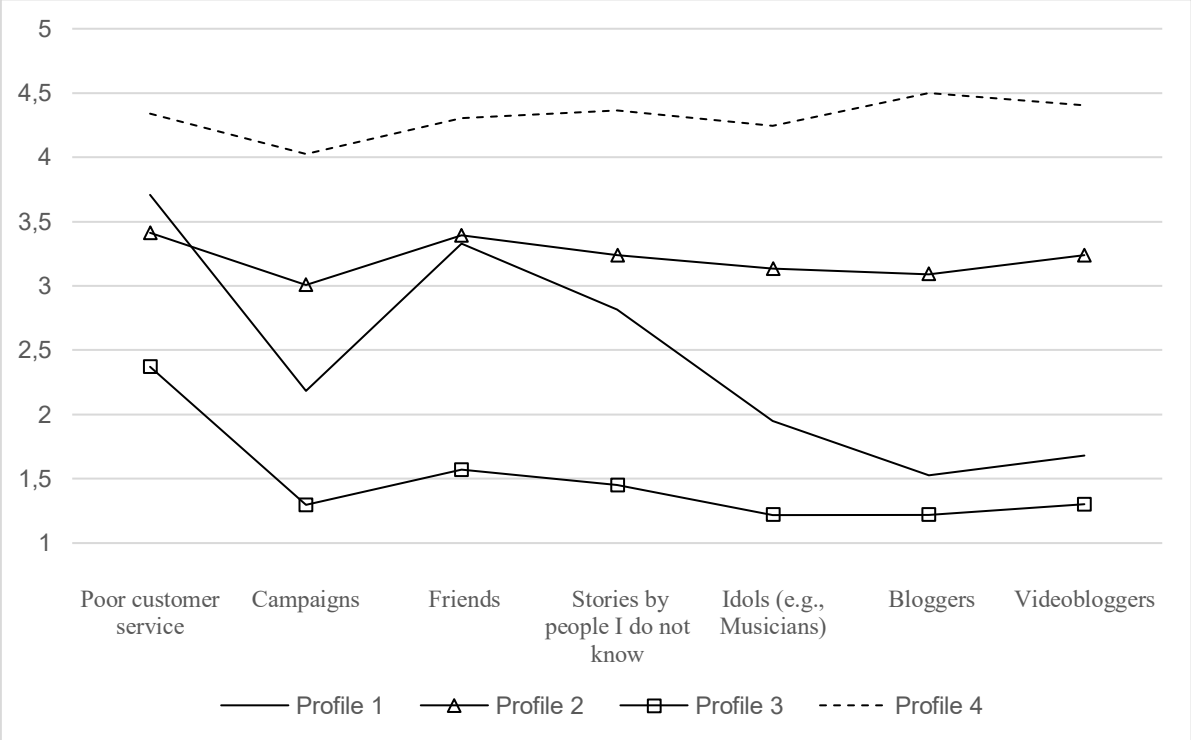


Fig. 4 Profiles for Finland



Appendix B.

Panel questions

On social media stories told by others can make us avoid some product or service. In general on social media: (1 = not at all, 5 = very much)

1. Poor customer service by brands has influenced my decisions to boycott some product or service

2. Campaigns that I have been invited to join (e.g. buy nothing day) have influenced my decisions to boycott some product or service

3. Friends have influenced my decisions to boycott some product or service

4. Stories by people I do not know personally have influenced my decisions to boycott some product or service

5. Idols (musicians, movie stars) have influenced my decisions to boycott some product or service

6. Bloggers have influenced my decisions to boycott some product or service

7. Videobloggers have influenced my decisions to boycott some product or service

Tables

Table 1 Demographic characteristics

	United Kingdom		Finland			
Variable	*N*	Percent %	*N*	Percent %	Total	Missing (*n*)
Country	1,236	50.3	1,219	49.7	2,455	0
Gender[a]	1,230	50.5	1,205	49.5	2,435	20
Male	597	48.5	587	48.7		n.a
Female	633	51.5	618	51.3		n.a
Level of education[b]	1,236	50.3	1,219	49.7	2,455	0
Lower	406	32.8	833	68.3		
Higher	830	67.2	386	31.7		
Current employment status[c]	1,236	50.3	1,219	49.7	2,455	0
Not working	479	38.8	633	51.9		
Working	757	61.2	586	48.1		
Place of residence[d]	1,236	50.3	1,219	49.7	2,455	0
Major or big city	672	54.4	715	58.7		
Small city or rural area	564	45.6	504	41.3		

Note: Those who reported that they did not use social media (n = 116) were excluded from the analysis.

[a]Those who reported their gender as "other" (n = 20) (Fin = 14), (UK = 6) were excluded from the analysis.

[b]Lower = elementary, middle school, high school, vocational school; higher = college or university.

[c]Not working = unemployed, homemaker, student, or other; working = full-time employment, part-time employment, or self-employed.

[d]Major or big city = major city environment or big city environment; small city or rural area = small city environment or rural area or village environment.

Table 2 Variables of boycott activation

Variable	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*Missing (N)*
Poor customer service by brands has influenced my decisions to boycott a product or service	2,333	3.6	1.27	122
Campaigns that I have been invited to join (e.g., buy nothing day) have influenced my decisions to boycott a product or service	2,286	2.86	1.36	159
Friends have influenced my decisions to boycott a product or service	2,333	3.37	1.25	122
Stories from people I do not know personally have influenced my decision to boycott a product or service	2,342	3.14	1.29	113
Idols (musicians, movie stars) have influenced my decision to boycott a product or service	2,325	2.89	1.38	130
Bloggers have influenced my decision to boycott a product or service	2,314	2.82	1.42	141
Videobloggers have influenced my decision to boycott a product or service	2,319	2.88	1.44	136
Age[a]	2,455	22.7	3.96	0

[a]Ages (minimum = 15, maximum = 29) were included in this table to avoid creating unnecessary columns in Table 1.

Table 3 Enumeration process

	k	*LL*	*#fp*	*AIC*	*BIC*	*SABIC*	*CAIC*	*Entropy*	*VLMR*	*BLRT**
United Kingdom										
1 profile	1	-14,007.723	14	28,043.445	28,114.799	28,070.330	28,128.800	-	-	
2 profiles	2	-12,735.585	22	25,515.170	25,627.298	25,557.417	25,649.298	0.835	0.000	0.000
3 profiles	3	-12,264.096	30	24,588.191	24,741.093	24.645.801	24,771.094	0.864	0.000	0.000
4 profiles	4	-12,036.808	38	24,149.617	24,343.292	24,222.589	24,381.291	0.857	0.000	0.000
5 profiles	5	-11,949.156	46	23,990.311	24,224.760	24,078.646	24,270.761	0.863	0.169	0.000
6 profiles	6	-11,885.635	54	23,879.271	24,154.494	23,982.968	24,208.493	0.866	0.020	0.000
7 profiles	7	-11,817,242	62	23,758.484	24,074.481	23,877.544	24,136.481	0.820	0.022	0.000
Finland										
1 profile	1	-13,654.781	14	27,337.561	27,408.516	27,364.047	27,422.516	-	-	
2 profiles	2	-12,228.604	22	24,501.208	24,612.708	24,542.828	24,634.708	0.888	0.000	0.000
3 profiles	3	-11,831.047	30	23,722.094	23,874.139	23,778.848	23,904.139	0.854	0.000	0.000
4 profiles	4	-11,615.000	38	23,305.999	23,498.590	23,377.888	23,536.591	0.830	0.001	0.000
5 profiles	5	-11,535.185	46	23,162.371	23,395.507	23,249.394	23,441.506	0.853	0.042	0.000
6 profiles	6	-11,467.937	54	23,043.873	23,317.555	23,146.032	23,371.555	0.852	0.300	0.000
7 profiles	7	-11,375.948	62	22,875.896	23,190.122	22,993.189	23,252.123	0.879	0.119	0.000

**There were computational problems in some bootstrapped tests.*

Note: K = class, LL = Log-Likelihood, #fp = free parameters, AIC = Akaike information criterion, BIC = Bayesian information criterion, SABIC = sample-size adjusted BIC, CAIC = Consistent AIC, VLMR = Vuong–Lo–Mendell–Rubin test, BLRT = Bootstrap likelihood ratio test.

Note: Classification probability was > p = 0.70 for all groups in all models.

Table 4 Results of the similarity tests

Similarity	*k*	*LL*	*#fp*	*AIC*	*BIC*	*SABIC*	*CAIC*
Configural	4	-25,302.642	77	50,759.284	51,204.012	50,959.367	51281.0
Structural (mean)	4	-25,336.330	49	50,770.661	51,053.670	50,897.986	51,102.7
Dispersion (mean, variance)	4	-25,362.115	42	50,808.230	51,050.809	50,917.366	51,092.8
Distributional (mean, variance, Probabilities)	4	-25,400.048	39	50,878.096	51,103.348	50,979.437	51,142.3

Table 5 Four profile details

	Unlikely to be influenced		Influenced by personal things		Likely to be influenced		Moderately likely to be influenced	
Variable	Mean	Variance	Mean	Variance	Mean	Variance	Mean	Variance
Poor customer service by brands has influenced my decisions to boycott a product or service	2.435	1.216	3.849	1.216	4.370	1.216	3.508	1.216
Campaigns that I have been invited to join (e.g. buy nothing day) have influenced my decision to boycott a product or service	1.375	1.031	2.436	1.031	4.104	1.031	3.002	1.031
Friends have influenced my decision to boycott a product or service	1.666	0.787	3.557	0.787	4.409	0.787	3.400	0.787
Stories from people I do not know personally have influenced my decision to boycott a product or service	1.531	0.830	2.901	0.830	4.368	0.830	3.246	0.830
Idols (musicians, movie stars) have influenced my decision to boycott a product or service	1.372	0.845	2.086	0.845	4.284	0.845	3.169	0.845
Bloggers have influenced my decision to boycott a product or service	1.267	0.435	1.517	0.435	4.566	0.435	3.183	0.435
Vloggers have influenced my decision to boycott a product or service	1.332	0.597	1.638	0.597	4.513	0.597	3.289	0.597

Note: All p-values were significant $p < 0.01$.

Table 6 Moderation analysis

	k	*LL*	*#fp*	*AIC*	*BIC*	*SABIC*	*CAIC*
Moderation	4	-25,092.845	72	50,329.691	50,744.994	50,516.236	50,816.994
No moderation	4	-25,111.171	57	50,336.342	50,665.125	50,484.024	50,722.124

Table 8 Percentages for each profile

	Unlikely to be influenced	Influenced by personal things	Likely to be influenced	Moderately likely to be influenced
UK	12%	19.6%	29.9%	38.6%
Finland	23.1%	23.5%	18.1%	35.4%

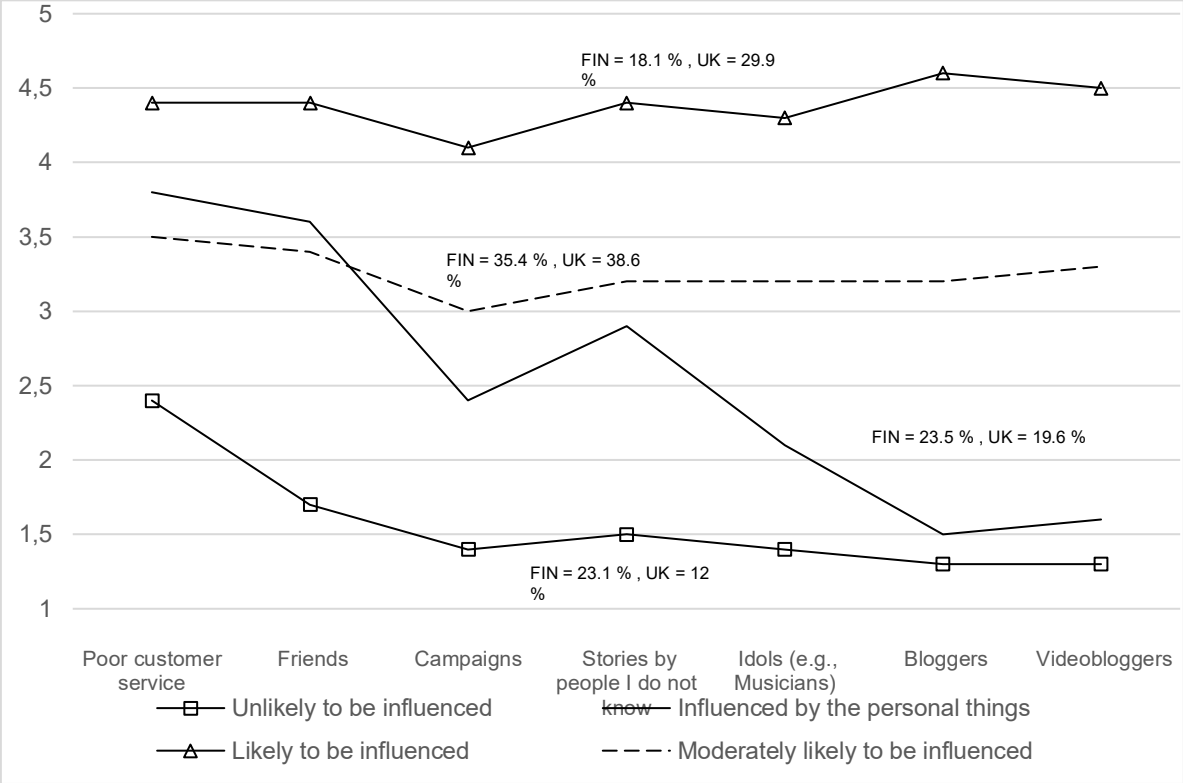
Table 9 Effects of the covariates on profiles

	Coef.	***p***
Unlikely to be influenced		
Gender (male/female)	-0.041	0.769
Age (years)	0.054	0.004
Education (no college/college)	-0.265	0.074
Employment (other/employed)	-0.667	0.000
Place of residence (rural area/small city or big city)	-0.273	0.040
Influenced by personal things		
Gender (male/female)	0.247	0.062
Age (years)	0.039	0.040
Education (no college/college)	0.184	0.199
Employment (other/employed)	-0.402	0.005
Place of residence (rural area/small city or big city)	0.024	0.854
Likely to be influenced		
Gender (male/female)	-0.337	0.007
Age (years)	0.024	0.171
Education (no college/college)	0.034	0.805
Employment (other/employed)	0.420	0.003
Place of residence (rural area/small city or big city)	0.246	0.053

Note: The reference profile/group is 4 (Moderately likely to be influenced).

Figures

Fig. 5 The chosen model has four classes



Note: Means from Table 4 were rounded to one decimal.

IV

WHEN DOES PARASOCIAL INTERACTION MAKE INFLUENCERS MORE INFLUENTIAL?

by

Tuominen, J., Rantala, E., Nyrhinen, J., Reinikainen, H., Warren, C., Wilska, T-A.

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