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INFLUENCER MARKETING STRATEGIES: A STUDY ON THE SYNERGY BETWEEN
COMPANIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Bachelor Thesis

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I have written this Bachelor Thesis independently. Any ideas or data taken from other authors or other sources have been fully referenced.

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Introduction

We live in the age of social networking and digital communication, where marketing and brand promotions have undergone significant changes. New advertising methods were introduced, one of which is a phenomenon of social media influencers (SMI), who hold remarkable power in defining consumer opinions and influencing purchasing decisions.

Nowadays, even boutiques and small enterprises are willing to invest in local social media influencers with a few thousand followers rather than spend thousands on web or television advertisements, which have formally been reduced to background noise (Agrawal, 2016). With SMI, companies are receiving focused exposure because they are targeting consumers who are already interested and inclined to pay attention to the product or service. The only thing that has changed for consumers is that they still see ads when going through Instagram feed. However, they simply cannot know immediately. As they already follow their favorite influencers, who are representing businesses and pushing items while maintaining their own voice and narrative.

These changes in traditional marketing have introduced a dynamic concept of influencer marketing. This enactment was rapidly recognized by many companies that are seeking to navigate through the complex digital landscape of social media platforms.

However, despite all the benefits of influencer marketing for brand promotion, like increased brand awareness and reach, increased sales, and enriched content strategy, it is still essential for marketing managers to acknowledge that there are numerous challenges and risks that need to be considered (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

The lack of control over influencer behavior, potential alignment with controversial content, and unforeseen reputation damage pose substantial risks to brands, necessitating a nuanced examination of the inherent complexities and liabilities within influencer-brand collaborations. Consequently, it becomes imperative for marketing departments within brands to conscientiously weigh both the potential advantages and pitfalls of engaging with social media influencers. Acknowledging and comprehensively evaluating both sides of the coin is paramount for informed decision-making, ensuring that brands navigate the influencer landscape with prudence and foresight, safeguarding their reputation and long-term brand equity.

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to assess the benefits and challenges of the synergy between influencer marketing and business practices, with a specific focus on the Estonian

context. This research addresses the significant gap in the existing literature by conducting empirical investigations and interviews specifically within the Estonian context, shedding light on the synergy between local influencers and companies. This area has remained largely unexplored in prior studies focused on social media influencer marketing.

The researcher has delineated specific tasks aimed at achieving the objectives of the study:

- Define and expound on the diverse roles and classifications attributed to social media influencers.
- Evaluate the efficacy of social media influencers in enhancing brand visibility and promotional efforts.
- Investigate the potential drawbacks and risks associated with the utilization of influencer marketing.
- Evaluate the research designs and methods used in previous studies that investigate the benefits and risks of influencer marketing.
- Implement your own empirical study by conducting interviews with both influencers and companies that utilize influencer marketing strategies.
- Rigorously evaluate the outcomes of interviews to derive insights into collaborative dynamics and systematically compare these findings to the theoretical basis, highlighting consistencies and discrepancies to ground empirical observations within the established academic framework.

This paper consists of both the theoretical and empirical parts. Chapter 1 will present an analysis of definitions of the key concepts, theoretical background, and an overview of empirical studies. Chapter 2 will discuss the methodology used to conduct the empirical research and the empirical analysis of the data gathered. Further on, the results will be compared with those of previous studies.

Keywords: Social media influencer (SMI), influencer marketing, brand marketing, risk management, benefits, drawbacks.

1. Influencer Marketing: Exploring Types, Benefits, and Challenges of Social Media Influencers

1.1 Social Media Influencers, their role, and types

In today's digital age, consumers increasingly rely on social media as a primary source of information, significantly shaping their decision-making processes. The pervasive reach and interactive nature of social media platforms have transformed them into vital hubs where individuals seek information. Consequently, the number of social media influencers has risen. The emergence and evolution of social media influencers represent a pivotal shift in the digital marketing landscape, redefining the interaction between brands and consumers. This reliance on social media has given rise to the concept of influencer marketing, a novel paradigm in the digital marketing arena. Influencer marketing is a relatively new kind of marketing approach in which consumers' brand awareness and purchasing decisions are influenced by opinion leaders (Reinikainen et al., 2020). It is often described as a tactic where a company selects and rewards social media influencers to interact with their followers and use their unique resources to promote brands, products, or services, effectively enhancing customer acquisition and sales and ultimately improving business performance. (Leung et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2023).

At the core of this innovative marketing strategy are social media influencers, who have emerged as central characters in the narrative of influencer marketing. These “characters” employ strategies including affiliate marketing, coupon codes, giveaways, and helpful content to market products to their sizable followings and fill in unmet market gaps (Dajah et al., 2020). As the next phase of this discussion, it is imperative to explore the various definitions of social media influencers, shedding light on their roles and influence in the digital marketing sphere.

The definitions by Al-Alnsi et al. (2023), De Veirman et al. (2017), Geyser (2023), and Dajah et al. (2020) contribute unique insights into the role of SMIs. After a thorough examination of these definitions, the author found the definitions by Geyser (2023) and Dajah et al. (2020) to be the most comprehensive and informative for the purposes of this study (see Table 1).

Table 1

Definitions of social media influencers

Author	Definition
Al-Alnsi et al., 2023	“Social media influencers (SMIs) are endorsers who influence audience behavior through their videos, reels, posts, tweets, and messages.”
De Veirman et al., 2017	“Social media influencers are referred to as people who have built a sizeable social network of people following them. In addition, they are seen as a regard for being a trusted tastemaker in one or several niches.”
Geyser, 2023	“Influencers in social media are people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic they make regular posts about that topic on their preferred social media channels and generate large followings of enthusiastic, engaged people who pay close attention to their views.”
Dajah et al., 2020	“Social media influencers are individuals with large followings on platforms like YouTube and Instagram who market products using techniques like affiliate marketing, discount codes, giveaways, and useful content.”

Source: compiled by author based on sources presented in the table

Geyser's (2023) definition encapsulates a holistic view of SMIs, emphasizing not just the variety of content or the size of the social network but also the crucial aspect of establishing a reputation based on expertise in a specific area. This focus on expertise aligns well with the role of influencers in shaping opinions and fostering engagement among their followers.

Additionally, Geysner (2023) explicitly acknowledges the significance of an engaged follower base and the influencers' preference for certain social media channels, which is particularly relevant in the context of digital marketing strategies.

On the other hand, definition by Dajah et al. (2020) acknowledges not only the presence and

reach of social media influencers, as described by Al-Alnsi et al., 2023, and De Veirman et al., 2017, but also elaborates on the marketing techniques employed and the type of content influencers create. Dajah et al., (2020) definition incorporates the commercial aspect of influencer marketing, like affiliate marketing, discount codes, and giveaways, which directly relates to the business performance outcomes mentioned. This inclusion provides a clearer picture of how influencers operate within the marketing ecosystem and the specific tactics they use, offering a more pragmatic and actionable definition for marketing professionals.

In contrast, while Al-Alnsi et al. (2023) and De Veirman et al. (2017) provide valuable perspectives on the diversity of content forms and the role of influencers as trusted tastemakers in specific niches respectively, these definitions do not encompass the breadth of influence and engagement that Geysler (2023) and Dajah et al., (2020) address. Therefore, author has decided that combining these two definitions would be beneficial for this study, as it would create a holistic description that encapsulates both the influential marketing techniques and the reputation and expertise of influencers, offering a well-rounded perspective on their roles and strategies within social media marketing. The final definition is: Social media influencers are individuals who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on specific topics, regularly engaging with large followings on platforms like YouTube and Instagram by making posts that garner enthusiastic engagement, and they also market products using techniques such as affiliate marketing, discount codes, giveaways, and the creation of content that provides value to their audience (Geysler, 2023; Dajah et al., 2020).

The position, audience size, influence, and behaviors of recognized social media digital content creators varied greatly, suggesting a hierarchy and important distinctions in recognition and status (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019). In exploration of social media influencer marketing, it is imperative to address the significance of understanding the distinct types of influencers, as this foundational knowledge is pivotal for grasping the nuances of this strategy. Additionally, this understanding is crucial to the study as different types of influencers may present varying degrees of benefits and risks to companies utilizing them for brand promotion.

According to Conde & Casais 2023, the classification of SMIs is typically based on the size of their follower base, with common categories including micro-influencers, who have a relatively smaller but highly engaged audience, macro-influencers, who boast a larger follower count and wider reach, and celebrity mega, who are often well-known public figures with a

substantial, sometimes even global following, as shown in Table 2. A mega influencer has more than one million followers, a macro influencer has 10,000–1,000,000, while a micro-influencer has 500–10,000 followers (Van der Nolk van Gogh, 2017 as cited in Blomqvist-Eriksson & Järkemyr, 2018). In order for digital content creators to be effective and valuable in brand collaborations through paid endorsements, it is essential for them first to establish a substantial audience that meets the size and type criteria sought by brands, as their market value as influencers largely depends on this alignment (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019).

Table 2

SIMs types and characteristics

Type	Followers	Characteristics	Advantages	Disadvantages
Micro influencers	500–10,000	Niche-focused	High engagement, authentic, hyper targeted	Lower reach, hard to measure ROI
Macro influencers	10,000–1,000,000	Diverse content, trendsetters	Broader reach, professional	Lower engagement, higher costs
Mega influencers	1,000,000 and more	Celebrity status, global influence	massive reach, global influence	Even lower engagement, highest costs, easy to measure ROI

Source: compiled by author based on Van der Nolk van Gogh, 2017 as cited in Blomqvist-Eriksson & Järkemyr, 2018; Conde & Casais 2023

Despite smaller networks, micro-influencers are commonly regarded as more genuine and approachable than highly popular influencers like macro or mega ones, whose accessibility tends to diminish as their follower base expands. Their ability to convey authenticity and accessibility is exactly what resonates and establishes a connection with their audience (Bernazzani, 2018). Another significant advantage of these micro digital content creators is that they are hyper-targeted. Micro-influencers have the capability to assist a brand in precisely targeting individuals and engaged followers, potentially resulting in increased conversions (Markerly, 2020). These influencers, with their specific niche focus, often engage deeply with a dedicated segment of followers, such as fitness enthusiasts or organic food consumers. This hyper-targeted approach

enables them to effectively resonate with and influence these specific groups, making them ideal partners for brands seeking to reach these distinct audiences. Additionally, a study by marketing platform Markerly (2020) has shown that engagement decreases as the follower count increases. The engagement levels, particularly in terms of comments, are significantly higher for the micro-influencers, nearly 13 times more than others, and this trend is also evident in the rate of likes. On Instagram, influencers with fewer than 1,000 followers experience a like rate of 8%, while those with 1,000 to 10,000 followers see a 4% like rate. For influencers with 10,000 to 100,000 followers, the like rate stands at 2.4%. These findings were also confirmed in the study by Beichert (2023): when it comes to bringing in instant money for direct-to-consumer businesses, influencers with fewer followers do better than those with more, and engagement is a major factor in this relationship.

For macro and mega influencers, their substantial following stems from transitioning their digital activity into a full-time, business-oriented professional pursuit, characterized by a potent presence across multiple platforms and the strategic use of cross-promotion to amplify their value to brands (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019). According to Conde & Casais (2023), another distinctive trait of larger influencers includes achieving broader reach within specific markets and delivering a superior return on investment compared to micro-influencers, with the added advantage of more straightforward measurement of ROI. However, particularly in the case of mega influencers, this often comes at a higher cost, as they typically command premium rates for partnerships.

1.2 Benefits of Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is an efficient method for promoting products, individuals, or ideas, supplying creative content to businesses, and facilitating natural engagement with specific target groups (Peng, 2018, as cited in Kadekova & Holienčinová, 2018). This marketing strategy has transformed into a powerhouse in the area of digital brand promotion, offering a multitude of benefits that extend beyond traditional advertising methods. This chapter will explore the variety of rewards of influencer marketing, as highlighted in Table 3, underscoring why this approach is increasingly becoming a cornerstone in modern marketing strategies.

Facing the growing challenges in the digital advertising landscape, particularly issues like ad fraud and ad blocking, companies are adapting their strategies. Amid these concerns, there's a notable shift towards earned media as businesses seek distribution channels that are immune to

blocking and ensure effective reach to the targeted audience (Biaudet, 2017). In contrast, influencers stand out as a valuable resource, having already built strong connections with your target audience. While there's potential for audiences to overlook content, engagement and message absorption are notably higher when the content is shared by an influencer who is both trusted and well-regarded by their followers (Markerly, 2021).

Regardless of your specific market niche, establishing trust with your audience is essential for them to confidently make purchases of your products or services. However, cultivating this level of trust is often challenging for brands, requiring consistent effort and authentic engagement to transform audience interest into tangible sales. Aligning with an already trusted influencer is the most effective strategy for brands to gain customer trust, as the inherent credibility between an influencer and their audience is a level that brands often need help to achieve directly with customers (Biaudet, 2017; Hall, 2016).

In today's competitive market, the ability to target the correct demographic effectively remains a pivotal challenge for many brands. Identifying and reaching the right demographic is crucial for brands to ensure their marketing efforts resonate effectively with the intended audience; however, it can often be a struggle for brands. Collaborating with a suitable influencer grants you immediate access to an existing audience already receptive to your promotional efforts, a significant advantage of leveraging influencer marketing (Markerly, 2021). This strategy not only streamlines reaching the target audience but also amplifies the message through trusted voices.

Moreover, the power of content in marketing cannot be overstated. Engaging and relevant content is extremely important for effective brand promotion, as it captures consumer interest and establishes connection. Companies can significantly benefit by leveraging influencers, who are often more trusted by consumers and attuned to their preferences, which can result in content that is not only more engaging but also more likely to drive sales than typical in-house efforts (Markerly, 2021). This approach underscores the importance of influencers in today's marketing strategies, where authenticity and relevance reign supreme.

Social media influencers can play a pivotal role in the growth and recognition of new businesses. By presenting a brand's narrative through their unique perspectives and connecting with their followers, influencers offer authentic storytelling that resonates with potential customers. Their endorsements can also enhance a brand's online visibility, where sharing links

to a brand's website or product pages can bolster search engine rankings through high-quality backlinks (Glenister, 2021). This strategy is particularly advantageous for startups because it taps into an established and engaged audience, offering exposure without the substantial costs typically associated with traditional marketing channels. Moreover, the cost efficiency of influencer marketing is significantly enhanced through barter deals, where compensation for influencers' efforts can be provided fully or partially with products in exchange for social media posts or campaigns. This arrangement not only reduces cash expenditures for startups but also allows influencers to authentically engage with the brand's products, enhancing the credibility of their endorsements. According to Glenister (2021), leveraging influencers is an ideal strategy for startups as it offers a cost-effective way to engage with a pre-established audience aligned with the brand's market. Given these advantages, it becomes clear why the influencer approach is beneficial and essential for startups. This method efficiently harnesses the power of influencers' established connections and trust with their audience.

Building upon this foundation, previous studies have identified several benefits of influencer marketing for brand promotion. They provide an extensive scope of information and insights, uniquely addressing the positive perspectives of this synergy. The study by Biaudet (2017) highlights benefits like efficacy in leveraging social media presence and emphasizing the trustworthiness and credibility conveyed through influencer endorsements. Moreover, influencer marketing is perceived favorably compared to traditional methods due to its voluntary following and cost-effectiveness. Comparatively, the Santiago and Castelo (2020) study shifts the focus slightly by delving into the influencers' role in sharing personal experiences and opinions. This method effectively conveys not only product features but also their functionalities through content creation, contributing to audience engagement. This angle enriches our understanding of influencer impact by showcasing how personal testimonials add a layer of authenticity and engagement that earlier studies, such as Biaudet (2017), did not explicitly explore.

Table 3

Benefits of Influencer Marketing

Benefit	Description
Efficient Promotion	Surpasses traditional ads
Ad Blocking Immunity	Access to effective, unblockable channels
Trust & Engagement	Enhanced through influencer credibility
Targeted Reach	Direct access to relevant demographics
Content Engagement	More engaging than in-house content
Cost-Effective for Startups	Economical strategy for exposure
Credibility & Social Presence	Builds trust and utilizes influencers' social media
Engagement with Audience	Influencers create relatable content
B2B Value & Trust	Increases lifetime value and market trust in B2B sectors

Source: compiled by author based on Peng, 2018 as cited in Kadekova & Holienčinová, 2018; Biaudet, 2017; Markerly, 2021; Hall, 2016; Glenister, 2021; Santiago and Castelo, 2020; Cartwright et al., 2022.

Lastly, the study by Cartwright (et al., 2022) brings a new perspective, showing benefits for B2B organizations, which include a strong focus on creating lifetime value through interconnected relationships in a broadening customer base and being more trustworthy while enhancing the credibility of the marketing efforts. In conclusion, these studies collectively underscore the variety of advantages of influencer marketing across different contexts. Whether through enhancing credibility, deepening customer engagement, or fostering long-term B2B relationships, influencer marketing continues to evolve as a powerful tool in the modern promotional arsenal. This synthesis not only highlights the progression of the field but also points towards an integrated approach where traditional and new-age marketing strategies coexist and complement one another.

1.3 Potential Risks of Influencer Marketing

Despite the numerous benefits of influencer marketing outlined in the previous chapters, it is critical to acknowledge and understand the associated risks. If neglected, these risks can lead to detrimental consequences for a company, potentially undermining the very advantages sought through influencer collaborations. This chapter aims to explore the various challenges and pitfalls of influencer marketing, comprehensively exploring these risks by providing a balanced perspective on influencer marketing. Table 4 will present an overview of these potential risks to

give readers a clear understanding of what to consider when entering into influencer partnerships.

Measuring the Return on Investment (ROI) of a marketing campaign is crucial as it provides tangible metrics to evaluate the effectiveness and financial viability of the campaign, enabling businesses to make data-driven decisions and strategically allocate resources for future marketing endeavors. Assessing and quantifying the return on investment (ROI) in influencer marketing practices poses a significant challenge in the execution of influencer marketing campaigns (Santiago & Castelo, 2020; Linqia, 2018). Advanced marketers are increasingly evaluating the entire consumer journey in influencer marketing, focusing on driving not only awareness and engagement but also lower-funnel metrics such as clicks (59%) and conversions (54%), with engagement (90%) being a primary indicator of the success of these programs (Linqia, 2018). The broader approach of evaluating influencer campaigns through metrics like engagement, clicks, and conversions clarifies why assessing ROI for more significant influencers is typically more straightforward, offering direct insights into campaign effectiveness.

One of the most crucial and common risks in influencer marketing is the lack of control brands have over an influencer's daily behavior. This lack of control can lead to brands inadvertently receiving negative associations from the actions or statements of their collaborating opinion leaders (Samuelsen et al., 2010, as cited in Olsen & Sandholmen, 2019). When high-profile opinion leaders behave in ways that contradict accepted norms or values, brands often need to take measures to protect their reputation and the integrity of the company as a whole. For example, in 2020, fashion brand H&M ceased collaborating with social media influencer Olivia Jade following her involvement in the college admissions scandal, reflecting the brand's stance on maintaining ethical partnerships and distancing itself from controversial or unethical behavior.

Another significant concern in utilizing social media influencers as a marketing tool is the prevalence of fake followers and bots. Some social media accounts achieve influencer status by buying fake followers instead of organically building a genuine audience, resulting in a lack of real influence and ineffective brand promotion if a partnership is formed unknowingly with such accounts (Pfund, 2019). The issue of fake followers and engagement bots in influencer marketing not only undermines the authenticity of campaigns but also significantly impacts the measurement of ROI. This kind of manipulation increases influencer marketing costs and skews

the metrics used for ROI calculation, leading to inaccurate assessments of campaign effectiveness and audience reach (Anand et al., 2020). To address the challenge of engagement bots, researchers such as Kim and Han (2020) have devised a network model capable of identifying these bots. This model discerns bots by analyzing user aspects like text, behavior, and graph representations of users.

Additionally, Keller (2013) suggests there is a perception among consumers that celebrities may endorse products merely for financial compensation rather than a genuine belief in the product's benefits. This concern was brought to the forefront with world-famous supermodel Kendall Jenner's endorsement of Proactiv. As a figure many young women look up to, Jenner claimed that Proactiv had been a solution during her struggles with acne. Later, it appeared that she had sought treatments from highly acclaimed dermatologists instead of using Proactiv. This revelation led to media and public scrutiny, undermining her endorsement due to previous statements about her skincare regime. (Olsen & Sandholmen, 2019)

Expanding on this groundwork, the field of influencer marketing has been scrutinized for its complexities and potential pitfalls. This critical perspective is reflected through the empirical studies of Biaudet (2017), Santiago and Castelo (2020), and Cartwright et al. (2022), each delving into the nuanced challenges and disadvantages inherent in leveraging influencer partnerships.

Table 4

Potential Risks of Influencer Marketing

Potential Risk	Description
ROI Measurement	Quantifying campaign success is challenging
Influencer Behavior	Potential brand reputation damage
Fake Followers	Compromises authenticity and metrics
Endorsement Skepticism	Questions of authenticity impact credibility
Guideline Balance	Ethical and authenticity issues
Compensation Challenges	Standardization and differentiation issues
B2B Strategy Alignment	Resource and strategy alignment challenges

Source: compiled by author based on Santiago & Castelo 2020; Linqia 2018; Samuelsen et al., 2010 as cited in Olsen & Sandholmen, 2019; Pfund, 2019; Kim and Han, 2020; Keller, 2013 as cited in Olsen & Sandholmen, 2019; Biaudet, 2017; Cartwright et al., 2022

Firstly, the study by Biaudet (2017) underscores the delicate balance required in setting guidelines for influencers, emphasizing the need for these guidelines to adhere to ethical norms and legal boundaries. The study reveals that too loose guidelines can lead to confusion among

influencers, resulting in unclear outcomes. In contrast, overly strict guidelines might compromise the authenticity and genuineness of influencer-generated content. This, in turn, can affect trust and credibility among their audience by deviating from the influencer's unique style and voice. Building on this, Santiago and Castelo (2020) explore the operational complexities from the perspective of businesses. They address challenges such as "reward management" due to the lack of standardized practices and the undisclosed fees charged by influencers, complicating compensation strategies. Furthermore, they underscore the critical need for "differentiation" in creating campaigns that are not only innovative but also relevant to consumers and address the issue of fake followers, which poses a significant threat to the authenticity and effectiveness of marketing campaigns. The last study by Cartwright et al. (2022) investigates the challenges faced by B2B organizations in implementing influencer marketing, focusing on resource allocation, planning, influencer development, selection, and its alignment with broader marketing strategies. These elements are crucial as they point out the need for strategic foresight and precise alignment with overall marketing objectives, which are particularly vital in the B2B sector. In conclusion, these studies provide a comprehensive overview of the critical aspects and potential drawbacks of influencer marketing. They collectively highlight the importance of ethical guidelines, strategic planning, and authenticity in influencer campaigns. Understanding these challenges is essential for marketers to navigate the complexities of influencer partnerships effectively and sustainably.

1.4 Overview of previous empirical studies on the benefits and drawbacks of Influencer Marketing for brand promotion

This part will focus on discussing the methodologies utilized in previous empirical studies on influencer marketing. Given the limited number of studies focusing specifically on the benefits and risks of influencer marketing for brand promotion, as most of the research tends to concentrate on influencers' impact on customers, the selected studies are particularly valuable. The key findings from these studies have already been reflected upon in earlier chapters, highlighting their contributions to understanding the benefits and drawbacks of influencer marketing for brand promotion. In this chapter, the author will specifically examine how these studies were conducted, providing insight into the diverse research approaches and data collection techniques employed to gather comprehensive insights from influencers and companies involved in influencer marketing campaigns.

As seen from Table 5, the methodologies used in the empirical studies by Biaudet (2017), Cartwright et al. (2022), and Santiago & Castelo (2020) all adopted qualitative research approaches with a focus on in-depth, semi-structured interviews as their primary method for data collection. These methods allowed for acquiring rich, nuanced insights into influencer marketing from different industry perspectives.

Table 5

Previous empirical studies

Study Reference	Methodology	Data Collection Models	Sample Size	Conduct of Study	Focus Group
Biaudet (2017)	Qualitative	Semi-structured interview	1	Interview with CEO to explore influencer marketing strategies	CEO of influencer marketing agency
Cartwright et al. (2022)	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews	22	Interviews with senior marketing professionals across various sectors	Senior Marketing Professionals
Santiago & Castelo (2020)	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews	8	Interviews with professionals in the beauty sector on Instagram campaigns	Professionals in the Beauty Sector

Source: compiled by the author based on sources presented in the table

In their study, Biauudet (2017) seeks to clarify the practical steps of building an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram, focusing specifically on the operational strategies that organizations can use. To achieve that, they engage in a comprehensive interview with the CEO of an influencer marketing agency to explore the strategic facets of influencer marketing. On the other hand, research by Cartwright et al. (2022) directs attention to how influencer marketing might be advantageous to B2B organizations, especially when it comes to the strategic benefits like trust-building and creation of long-term business ties. Expanding Biauudet's (2017) approach, the author conducted interviews with 22 senior marketing professionals, offering a wide-ranging

perspective on the dynamics of B2B influencer marketing across various sectors. Additionally, a study by Santiago and Castelo (2020) aims to ascertain how influencers' personal experiences and content creation influence consumer engagement and the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. For their study on this relatively new marketing approach authors honed in on the beauty sector with eight interviews with professionals who had firsthand experience with influencer marketing campaigns on Instagram. This study uncovered the processes behind influencer marketing campaigns, emphasizing the significance of digital influencers and the critical role of creative freedom, authenticity, and credibility for the success of these campaigns.

In summary, despite the scarcity of available empirical studies on a relevant topic, a careful review has yielded valuable insights into the benefits and risks of influencer marketing. The virtues of trustworthiness, credibility, and cost-effectiveness emerge clearly, alongside potential hazards such as loose ethical guidelines and the dilemma of fake followers, which pose a threat to authenticity. Moreover, the optimal sample size for such studies appears to hinge on qualitative depth rather than quantitative breadth, with semi-structured interviews emerging as the method of choice for rich, contextual understanding. Building on these foundations, the author of this thesis aims to enhance the existing body of research by conducting a series of interviews with both companies and influencers, seeking to uncover even more nuanced dynamics within influencer marketing.

2. Empirical Research on the benefits and drawbacks of Influencer Marketing for brand promotion

2.1 Methodology of the empirical study

In this empirical study, the dynamics of social media influencers within the sphere of brand marketing will be scrutinized. To build on existing literature and enhance the understanding of influencer marketing, interviews will be conducted with an equal number of participants from both sides: five influencers and five companies actively involved in utilizing such marketing strategy. Such methodology was chosen as it is the most popular data collection method and has been widely used in similar studies on this topic. This approach seeks to overcome the limitations identified in previous research, such as Biaudet's (2017) study, which was based on a single interview, and to offer a more balanced view than the company-centric perspectives provided by Santiago and Castelo (2020) and Cartwright et al. (2022).

By integrating insights from both influencers and marketing executives, this study will uncover the collaborative mechanisms that shape successful brand promotion and establish synergy between both parties. Employing semi-structured interviews will grant the flexibility to investigate the nuanced experiences, specific challenges, and strategic approaches that characterize influencer partnerships. This dual perspective aims to capture a holistic view of the influencer marketing landscape and its impact on brand success.

The first step of the empirical research, visualized on a Graph 1, involved contacting representatives of companies and social media influencers involved in influencer marketing. The approach to reaching out to companies was through emails and direct messages on Instagram, using contact information sourced from their official websites and social media platform pages. For social media influencers the same approach was utilized. In selecting companies, special attention was given to those focusing on leveraging influencer partnerships for brand enhancement and marketing campaigns. A total of 30 companies and influencers were approached: 20 companies and 10 influencers. The second step of the empirical research involved scheduling the interviews, which was efficiently coordinated using email and social media private messages. During this phase, suitable times were agreed upon that accommodated both parties, and the details regarding how the interviews would be conducted were discussed and finalized.

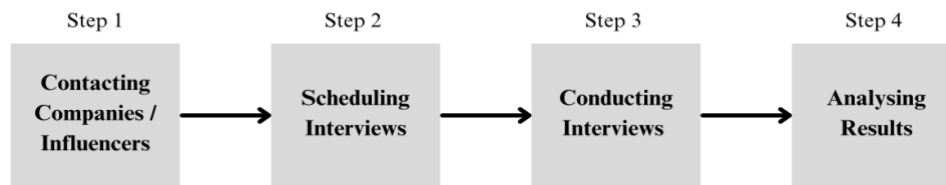


Figure 1. Steps of Empirical Research

Source: compiled by author

Of the companies contacted, five agreed to participate. Consequently, five interviews have been conducted. Among the influencers, five showed a willingness to be interviewed. Therefore, five were successfully interviewed. General details about companies and influencers, exact dates, duration of the interviews, and the length of the transcripts have been reflected in

Table 6 and Table 7. This methodical approach aims to provide a comprehensive and unbiased exploration of the current influencer marketing landscape.

Table 6

The list of interviewed SMI

Influencers	Type	Niche	Collaboration Experience	Date	Duration	Pages transcription
Influencer №1	Macro-influencer	Lifestyle	Redbull, BubblyBoba, Mõnnakas, Basaar	02.04.2024	28 min	11 pages
Influencer №2	Micro-influencer	Food, humor	Nocco, Farmi Piim, Chinese Embassey	04.04.2024	31 min	8 pages
Influencer №3	Macro-influencer	Lifestyle	Nike, FitBit, Kotex, Rimi, Zalando	05.04.2024	37 min	9 pages
Influencer №4	Macro-influencer	Motherhood, lifestyle	AirBaltic, Sportland, Pandora, Addidas	05.04.2024	33 min	11 pages
Influencer №5	Micro-influencer	Photo/Videography	Redbull, Mõnnakas, Nocco	09.04.2024	20 min	4 pages

Source: compiled by the author based on conducted interviews

The initial phase of step three of the empirical research involved conducting a sample of five interviews with both micro and macro-influencers across diverse content niches. These influencers have amassed significant experience through dynamic collaborations with a broad range of brands within the Estonian market. It is important to note that some of the interviewed influencers have previously collaborated with some of the interviewed companies. For example, Influencer 1 has collaborated with Company 1 and 4, and Influencer 4 has worked with Company 2. This overlap adds depth and provides more comprehensive insights into the research.

Table 7

The list of interviewed companies

Companies	Industry	Position of Interviewee	Date	Duration	Pages transcription
Company №1	Clothing	SMM	08.04.2024	35 min	12 pages
Company №2	Sports clothing and supplies	Head of Marketing and SMM	10.04.2024	43 min	14 pages
Company №3	Food delivery	Marketing Manager	18.04.2024	26 min	9 pages
Company №4	Café chain	Owner	28.04.2024	60 min	13 pages
Company №5	Event organization	Marketing Manager	28.04.2024	66 min	15 pages

Source: compiled by the author based on conducted interviews

The second phase comprised five interviews with company representatives who have demonstrated expertise in leveraging social media influencer marketing to enhance their brand promotion. The sample included interviews with company founders and heads of marketing, providing invaluable firsthand insights into this relatively new approach to marketing. While most interviews were conducted online via the Zoom platform, adding flexibility and convenience, two of the interviews were held face-to-face which deepened the interaction quality. The interviews took place between the beginning and the end of April 2024. The interviews ranged in length from 20 to 66 minutes, for a total of 379 minutes (about 6.32 hours), while the transcriptions ranged from 4 to 15 pages, resulting in a total of 106 pages.

Following the framework established in the methodology structure, the interviews conducted in this study were semi-structured in nature. This approach provided a blend of focus and flexibility, allowing for thorough exploration within specific topic areas while also granting the latitude to pursue deeper understanding through follow-up inquiries. The interview questions were meticulously crafted, rooted in the theoretical foundation explored in chapters 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 of this study. These chapters laid strong foundation to explore the alignment and discrepancies between the established theoretical framework and the real-life experiences of influencers and companies in Estonia. For instance, to investigate the challenges of balancing creative freedom, which Santiago & Castelo (2020) emphasized, companies were asked: "What strategies do you employ to maintain a balance between giving influencers creative freedom and

ensuring brand message consistency?" Similarly, to investigate the issue of influencers promoting products primarily for rewards, a concern raised by Keller (2013), influencers were asked: "How do you ensure that your promotions provide genuine value to your followers while aligning with the brands' goals?" These questions were designed to investigate the practical application of these theoretical concerns within the influencer marketing industry. For transparency and easy reference, the full list of questions for both influencers and companies has been included in Appendix A and Appendix B. This structure ensured that each interview not only aligned with the study's scholarly groundwork but also provided the flexibility to capture the richness of each respondent's insights.

To gain comprehensive insights into the synergy between social media influencers and companies, as well as the benefits, drawbacks, and other nuances of such collaborations, the interview questions for influencers were thoughtfully categorized into four sections: Brand Partnership Criteria and Outcomes, Authenticity and Audience Trust, Operational and Measurement Strategies, Future Trends and Projections. This structured approach was designed to explore each aspect in depth, ensuring a thorough understanding of the dynamics at play in these partnerships. Consequently, interview questions for the companies were structured into seven groups: Selection and Brand Alignment, Campaign Impact and Management, Compensation and Content Creation, Challenges and Resolutions, Benefits and Industry Influence, Strategic Integration and Feedback, Relationship Building and Future Trends.

Given that the data collected is qualitative in nature, "Trint" platform was employed by the author to transcribe the interviews. Considering the manageable number of interviews conducted, it was decided to manually code the interview results, foregoing the use of specialized software for this process.

2.2 Analysis, Outcomes, and Discussion of Empirical Findings from the Perspective of Social Media Influencers

This chapter investigates the empirical findings from interviews with social media influencers, examining the data through a structured analytical framework. As discussed earlier, the approach to analyzing these interviews involved predefined themes, topics, and categories, which were established prior to the commencement of the analysis (APPENDIX A). The author developed concise coding tables for each theme to provide a more detailed explanation.

The first explored theme, “Brand Partnership Criteria and Outcomes,” seeks to explore the complexities of how influencers make decisions about which brand partnerships to pursue. It looks at the standards influencers consider when selecting brands, exploring factors like how a brand aligns with their values and relevance to their audience. It also investigates what makes collaborations successful pinpointing elements, like shared objectives and clear communication. Lastly, it examines how influencers’ distinct content influences brand promotion strategies, highlighting how this content boosts the effectiveness of campaigns and increases brand exposure. APPENDIX C displays the codes extracted from the interviews together with the categories that were assigned to them.

When evaluating potential collaborations, most influencers emphasized the necessity of conducting thorough research on a brand's mission and vision to ensure alignment with their own values, thereby preventing potential conflicts. An essential component of this preliminary research also includes confirming that the expected content type aligns with the influencer’s creative vision and capabilities. Three out of five influencers stressed the importance of genuinely liking the brand and product before agreeing to a collaboration. Consequently, they have negotiated terms that allow them to test the product needing promotion before formalizing the partnership. This practice helps them maintain their authenticity and avoid uncomfortable situations. Additionally, all three interviewed macro influencers stated that compensation is critical when agreeing to collaborations, as each post and social media publication involves hours of creation and editing. However, when it comes to micro-influencers such as Influencers 2 and 5, who are just beginning their careers, there is a tendency to accept nearly all promotional offers. This approach can pose a risk to their authenticity, aligning with the concerns mentioned in the theoretical foundation of this thesis. Specifically, Keller (2013) warns of the risk that consumers may perceive endorsements as driven by financial incentives rather than genuine belief in the product’s benefits.

The primary factors contributing to successful collaborations, as identified by the interviewed influencers, include robust communication with company representatives and the opportunity to work with a skilled professional team that encourages and respects the influencers' creative vision. All five influencers agreed that effective communication is crucial, as it facilitates the discussion and agreement on the collaboration's concept and execution. An illustrative example provided by Influencer 4 highlighted their work with Company 4, where

continuous and open communication was prioritized, including face-to-face interactions. This approach allowed the influencer to freely express and implement creative ideas while maintaining a flow that complemented the company's objectives. This kind of engagement not only establishes personal connection but also enhances the professionalism of the content produced. This dynamic of building personal yet professionally targeted content with influencers underscores the value of authentic testimonials in product promotion, enhancing engagement—a benefit noted in the study by Santiago and Castelo (2020).

The second theme, "Authenticity and Challenge Management," encompasses a broader range of topics than others and aims to explore issues such as the alignment of values between influencers and companies while maintaining authenticity. This theme also addresses the challenges of retaining followers' trust and the experiences influencers have had with fake followers. It seeks to explore how influencers navigate these complexities to preserve their credibility and the integrity of their partnerships. The codes that were taken out of the interviews and the categories that were given to them are shown in APPENDIX D.

Maintaining authenticity while running an online blog is crucial for its success, especially when integrating promotional content. This aspect becomes increasingly significant as the authenticity of the content directly influences audience trust. Three out of five influencers interviewed highlighted that their followers are quick to detect insincerity, particularly if the influencer promotes products they would not personally use or buy. Influencer 1 shared a pertinent example where, early in their career as a content creator, they struggled with selecting appropriate brand collaborations. They recounted a promotion deal where, during the shooting process, they realized they did not like the product. The resulting post needed more sincerity, leading to significantly lower engagement and unsuccessful outcomes. This experience underscored the importance of thoroughly researching a company and its products before committing to a promotion. Four out of five influencers emphasized the importance of requesting products in advance to ensure that the items align with their personal standards and authenticity. This practice is particularly vital for macro influencers, for whom authenticity is not just important but essential. As Bernazzani (2018) points out in the theoretical framework, authenticity is what truly resonates and establishes a connection with its audience, making it imperative for influencers to uphold this standard in all collaborations. Despite numerous challenges in maintaining authenticity, all of the interviewed influencers reported that they have

never experienced a significant loss of followers. Influencer 4 noted that, throughout their career as an influencer and the evolution of their content, it is natural for some followers to decide that the content no longer resonates with their interests and choose to unfollow. This attrition is seen as a regular part of an influencer's journey rather than a direct consequence of authenticity issues.

To maintain trust and keep their audience engaged, it is crucial for influencers not only to be authentic but also to deliver genuine value through their promotional content. Influencers must understand their followers' interests and demographics to create targeted content that resonates deeply with their audience. This approach not only keeps engagement high but also enhances message absorption, a significant advantage of influencer marketing, as highlighted by Markerly (2021). Research indicates that collaborating with a well-matched influencer provides brands with immediate access to an audience already receptive to their promotions, significantly boosting the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. Three influencers emphasized the importance of utilizing social media metrics to research the demographics represented by their followers. This data helps in crafting content that is finely tuned to the followers' interests, thereby increasing the impact of marketing efforts. Additionally, providing tangible value through physical gifting, such as discount codes or giveaways, is another effective strategy. All interviewed influencers mentioned that they negotiate with brands to include perks for their followers in their partnership agreements. This strategy not only engages the audience but also enhances brand awareness and sales by encouraging followers to try out the product. Such activities heighten audience interest and engagement, underscoring the unique benefits of influencer marketing.

One of the significant hidden risks of influencer marketing, as outlined in the theoretical framework, is the issue of fake followers. Pfund (2019) notes that some social media accounts gain influencer status by purchasing fake followers rather than organically cultivating a genuine audience. This can lead to a lack of authentic influence and ineffective brand promotion if brands unknowingly partner with such accounts. From the results of four interviews, influencers asserted that they have never encountered this issue nor engaged in buying followers. They also highlighted that fake followers are more commonly associated with larger influencers. This is partly because, in the early days of influencer marketing in Estonia, brands primarily focused on follower counts when selecting partners, inadvertently encouraging some influencers to boost their numbers artificially. Despite this, Influencer 3 shared an experience where their account

was affected by fake followers they had not purchased. The influencer explained that when another influencer with similar demographics and content acquires fake followers, these bots often spread to other similar content creators. Consequently, Influencer 3 inadvertently acquired bot followers. They mentioned that they chose not to remove these fake followers manually, and over a period of six months, these bots naturally unfollowed their accounts. It's noteworthy that Influencer 3 reported that this issue with fake followers did not impact their market presence or collaborations with brands. This was mainly due to their established reputation and familiarity with Estonian brands, which allowed them to maintain their professional relationships despite the presence of fake followers.

The third theme that interviews with social media influencers explored was “Operational and Measurement Strategies”. This part of the research is particularly critical for any marketing initiative, especially for influencer marketing, where the challenges of measuring success and ensuring fair compensation stand out as predominant uncertainties. These issues are vital as they significantly impact the effectiveness and synergy of partnerships within this dynamic marketing strategy. The codes that were taken out of the interviews and the categories that were given to them are shown in APPENDIX E.

To ensure a mutually beneficial partnership, all five interviewed influencers emphasized the importance of thorough research by both parties. Companies should investigate the influencer's content, style, and messaging, while influencers need to familiarize themselves with the company's values, product, and whether it aligns with something they would personally use or endorse. It is crucial for companies to clearly define the objectives they wish to achieve from the collaboration and communicate these to the influencer. This allows content creators to tailor their messages to suit their needs better. Influencer 2 shared an experience where a brand wanted to promote an upcoming event but failed to specify the desired message and atmosphere, leading to a misalignment in expectations. Biaudet (2017) notes that vague guidelines can cause confusion among influencers, resulting in unclear outcomes. Therefore, while it is essential for companies to provide clear guidelines, they must also allow enough creative freedom for influencers to express their individuality and maintain their authentic voice. This balance is key to creating effective and resonant promotional content.

To analyze the success of a partnership, influencers commonly utilize analytics tools available on social media platforms. All interviewed influencers reported that they do not use

any external tools to measure the impact of their collaborations. Instead, they rely on built-in metrics such as likes, comments, and reach. These metrics are critical indicators of how well the content resonates with the audience. Different metrics are considered depending on the influencer marketing campaign's objectives. For example, Influencer 2 mentioned that if a brand's goal is to increase its audience and brand awareness on social media platforms, they typically take screenshots of the company's page before and after the partnership to monitor any increase in followers. Additionally, three influencers shared that when a brand's objective is to boost sales, they request data from the company on the number of purchases made using their personal discount code, which was provided to followers during the collaboration. This approach helps both the influencer and the brand to accurately assess the effectiveness of the partnership in achieving specific marketing objectives.

Another critical element of successful collaboration and synergy between brands and influencers is fair compensation. Santiago and Castelo (2020) highlighted the challenges associated with agreeing on fair compensation due to the lack of standardized practices and undisclosed fees by influencers, which can complicate compensation strategies. Larger influencers, such as Influencers 3 and 4, have established specific price lists for posts, stories, videos, or even long-term collaborations. They seldom face issues with compensation disputes as they have extensive experience working with various brands, and their rates are well-known in the market. These larger influencers generally avoid accepting barter deals—compensation in the form of services or products—unless the value of the product closely matches what they would typically charge for their content. For example, Influencer 4 accepted airplane tickets from an airline collaboration because the ticket value aligned with their usual rates. Conversely, smaller influencers encounter more challenges with fair compensation. Influencer 1 pointed out that some brands fail to recognize the effort required to attract new followers and create content, often offering inadequate compensation. Meanwhile, micro-influencers like Influencers 2 and 5, who are just beginning their careers, are more likely to accept any offer, regardless of the compensation amount or whether it involves a barter deal. This makes micro-influencers particularly well-suited for startups and small businesses seeking cost-effective marketing strategies. As Glenister (2021) notes, leveraging such influencers can be an ideal approach for startups, providing them access to a pre-established audience that aligns with the brand's target market at a lower cost.

As looking toward the future of influencer marketing, it is essential to consider the evolving trends and projections that are shaping this dynamic field. The final segment of the interviews with influencers unveiled their unique perspectives on the future of this practice, along with their thoughts and insights. The codes that were taken out of the interviews and the categories that were given to them are shown in APPENDIX F.

All of the influencers emphasized the current dominance of TikTok and the trend toward short video content. Increasingly, companies are requesting short video content on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Influencers note that this format makes it easier to engage in storytelling compared to traditional posts. Influencer 2 highlighted that in their home country, it is becoming increasingly popular for influencers to promote products through live sessions on social media platforms, suggesting that this trend may soon spread to other countries like Estonia. However, some influencers expressed concerns about the direction in which influencer marketing is heading. With the rising demand for influencer marketing, an influx of new influencers primarily motivated by monetary gains is perceived to be diluting the authenticity that is central to effective influencer marketing. Additionally, there is growing awareness about the use of AI-generated content by some influencers. This type of content, which requires less effort and lacks authenticity, is becoming increasingly common across various markets due to its ease of creation, further complicating the landscape of influencer marketing.

To conclude, the author has compiled a table to represent the generalized findings based on the first part of the empirical analysis (see Table 8).

This chapter has provided a nuanced exploration of the empirical findings from interviews with social media influencers, systematically analyzed them. The research explored crucial themes such as "Brand Partnership Criteria and Outcomes" and "Authenticity and Challenge Management," revealing the decision-making processes of influencers and the pivotal factors that contribute to successful brand collaborations. The benefits of influencer marketing are clearly underscored through influencers' emphasis on the alignment of brand values with their own, the importance of clear communication, and the creation of authentic content that resonates with their audience. These practices not only enhance the effectiveness of marketing campaigns but also bolster brand exposure and consumer trust.

Table 8

Generalized results of empirical findings and their correlation with the theoretical background

Key Empirical Findings	Correlation with Theory	Additional Insights Gained
- Influencers select brands that align with their personal values	Supports Keller (2013): Importance of value alignment to avoid consumer skepticism.	- Influencers test products before collaboration to ensure authenticity
- Shared objectives and clear communication are vital for success	Correlates with Santiago and Castelo (2020): Communication enhances engagement and campaign success.	- Turning routine into engaging content increases campaign impact
- Authentic content boosts campaign effectiveness	Aligns with Bernazzani (2018): Authenticity resonates deeply with audiences.	- Influencers use their unique style to enhance brand message delivery
- Risks of misalignment causing bad experiences due to poor research	Aligns with Keller (2013): Influencers might promote products solely for rewards.	- Difficulties maintaining sincerity across varied brand partnerships
- Fair compensation is crucial, varies with influencer scale	Correlates with Santiago and Castelo (2020): Fair compensation practices are crucial for successful partnerships.	- Micro influencers often accept lower or barter deals, impacting perceived value
- Acquiring fake followers is not common thing among influencers nowadays	Contradicts with Pfund (2019): Fake followers undermine authenticity.	- Influencer’s page can be “attacked” by fake followers even without their will

Source: compiled by the author based on empirical results

These findings align well with existing theoretical frameworks, such as those proposed by Keller (2013), who emphasizes the risks of endorsement perceived as insincere, and Santiago and Castelo (2020), who highlight the value of genuine testimonials in enhancing engagement. However, the research also highlights significant risks associated with influencer marketing. Issues such as the potential for inauthentic endorsements and the challenge of maintaining authenticity amidst commercial pressures. These risks necessitate a careful approach to influencer selection and relationship management to ensure alignment with brand values and to maintain the authenticity that is critical for engagement. Not to mention, this part of the empirical study discovered the importance of thorough research by both parties to mitigate

potential risks and establish strong synergy. This crucial aspect had not been emphasized in the theoretical framework or highlighted in previous empirical studies.

2.3 Analysis, Outcomes, and Discussion of Empirical Findings from the Perspective of Companies

This chapter explores the empirical findings from interviews conducted with company representatives, analyzing the data through a structured analytical framework. As previously outlined, the method for analyzing these interviews involved predefined themes, topics, and categories that were established before the analysis began (APPENDIX B). The author created concise coding tables for each theme to offer a more detailed explanation.

The first topic explored, "Selection and Brand Alignment," aimed to explore the strategies brands use to select influencers. It examines the crucial criteria brands consider when choosing content creators who align with their values and marketing objectives. This section also explores how brands maintain consistency while collaborating with multiple influencers and the practices they employ to balance providing guidance with allowing creative freedom. The codes that were taken out of the interviews and the categories that were given to them are shown in APPENDIX G.

Influencer selection is a pivotal initial step in a successful influencer marketing campaign, crucial for establishing synergy between a company and a content creator. Company 1 adopts a unique approach to this process, using the platform "Promoty" to find influencers. Similar to a traditional recruitment process on platforms like LinkedIn, they post a notification outlining specific requirements for the promotion and desired qualities in influencers. After receiving applications, they meticulously review candidates, conduct thorough research, and select the most suitable one. This method not only saves time but also opens opportunities to discover new influencers. As emphasized by all interviewed companies, prior research is essential. Company 2 places significant importance on content authenticity and storytelling alignment with its brand, opting to work primarily with macro and micro-influencers. Despite having the option to collaborate with larger influencers, they find that smaller ones are more relatable to their customers, enhancing brand accessibility and authenticity. This approach also tends to drive more sales. Supporting this, a study by Beichert (2023) notes that, particularly for direct-to-consumer businesses, influencers with fewer followers often achieve better immediate financial results due to higher engagement levels. Another critical factor in influencer selection is

the suitability of the influencer's audience and their engagement levels, such as comments and likes. Both Company 1 and 2 also consider the type of content an influencer produces; it is crucial that the content not only inspires but also resonates with the brand's values. They expect influencers to uphold these values consistently, even outside sponsored posts. Conversely, Brand 4 takes a different approach, de-emphasizing the alignment of influencers' personal values with their brand during collaborations. However, this strategy poses risks, as highlighted in the literature by Samuelsen et al., 2010 (as cited in Olsen & Sandholmen, 2019), pointing out the potential for brands to inadvertently receive negative associations from an influencer's behavior outside of campaign activities. This lack of control over influencers' actions can sometimes result in unfavorable repercussions for the brand.

Collaborating with multiple influencers, each with their distinct image, vision, and storytelling style, poses a potential challenge in maintaining brand consistency. However, none of the companies interviewed identified this as a significant issue. For instance, the marketing manager of Brand 5 noted that although they require the same message from all influencers, the resulting content, while varied, consistently conveys the intended message. This diversity in execution helps the brand maintain consistency and appeal to a broad range of demographics. Additionally, the social media manager of Company 1 pointed out that their product line plays a crucial role in ensuring brand consistency. The brand's clothing line is characterized by bright and bold designs, naturally leading to similar visuals and messages across different influencers' content. This visual coherence helps reinforce the brand's identity across various promotional campaigns.

Maintaining a balance between providing influencers with creative freedom and setting clear guidelines is a critical issue. Biaudet (2017) notes that while companies must offer clear guidelines, they also need to allow influencers enough creative freedom to maintain their authenticity and individuality. All the companies interviewed have encountered challenges with giving too much freedom, which sometimes resulted in poor outcomes. Company 1 shared its approach to managing this balance. Using the platform "Promoty," they set basic guidelines for what they expect from a promotion. During the application process, influencers pitch their campaign ideas, and if the brand approves, they proceed with that influencer. However, they have encountered instances where the final content did not meet their expectations, despite the initial promise of the idea. The platform agreement allows them to reject such inadequate

promotions and conserve resources. On the contrary, Company 2 takes a more hands-on approach in their collaborations. They described having the opportunity to participate directly in the content creation process with influencers. This involvement allows them to tweak the creative process and idea generation, ensuring the final product meets their expectations. This collaborative approach helps safeguard the quality of the content while respecting the creative input of the influencers.

The second and most broad research topic, "Campaign Impact and Management," investigates the vital aspects of influencer marketing collaborations. This segment of the research examines the effectiveness of campaigns, measures the return on investment, and addresses the issue of fair compensation for influencers. It also provides insights into collaborations that have positively impacted sales and brand awareness, offering a thorough analysis of the critical metrics and strategies that contribute to successful influencer partnerships. The codes that were taken out of the interviews and the categories that were given to them are shown in APPENDIX H.

When assessing the success and effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns, all interviewed companies emphasized that the most crucial metrics include clicks on special links and purchases made using promo codes provided by influencers. These promo codes not only allow influencers to strengthen their relationships with followers by offering tangible value but also serve as robust metrics for brands to measure campaign effectiveness and Return on Investment (ROI), as they directly indicate sales generated from specific actions. Company 5 highlighted the importance of a critical approach to measuring success, noting that while promotional content may garner millions of views, these views are the least accurate metric for engagement or sales potential. Not all viewers may click through to make a purchase or attend an event, making it crucial to analyze the customer journey to understand sales impact truly. Another effective method to gauge the success of a campaign and the overall synergy between an influencer and the brand is to cultivate a culture of open communication and feedback between both parties. Brands should also regularly review promotional posts to monitor audience feedback. This strategy not only strengthens the relationship between the company and the content creator but also promotes continual improvement by identifying what aspects were successful and what areas need further attention. Despite the challenges in ROI measurement described by Santiago & Castelo (2020) and Linqia (2018), none of the companies reported this

as a major concern. Companies 2 and 4 pointed out that effective budgeting is key. It's crucial to understand the expected revenue and determine the appropriate marketing budget to forecast how investments in influencer marketing translate into views and sales. The marketing manager of Company 5 emphasized that brands would only face challenges in measuring ROI if they undertake proper budgeting and allocate resources judiciously for marketing efforts. Proper planning and budget management ensure that financial investments in marketing are proportionate to the expected outcomes, enhancing the accuracy and reliability of ROI calculations.

The process of negotiating fair compensation for influencers can lead to potential conflicts and difficulties due to the absence of standardized practices, as noted by Santiago and Castelo (2020). All interviewed companies reported encountering such issues on multiple occasions, each adopting different strategies for determining compensation. For instance, Company 1, which utilizes the platform "Promoty," explicitly states the compensation they are willing to offer directly in their influencer recruitment posts. This transparency allows influencers to decide upfront if the proposed payment meets their expectations. However, the social media manager of Company 1 noted instances where an influencer initially agreed to the stated price but later requested more money, a request that was subsequently denied. Company 2 generally approaches influencers first, allowing them to research and evaluate potential partners. If an influencer finds the proposed compensation inadequate, Company 2 is open to friendly negotiations to reach a mutually agreeable solution. Company 3 has adopted a unique compensation strategy that involves exclusively barter deals, providing products in exchange for promotional content. They use this approach to showcase their food delivery service, believing the value of the service aligns with what they would otherwise pay monetarily. The marketing manager of Company 3 mentioned that despite minor conflicts arising from influencers seeking additional monetary compensation, they currently have no plans to revise this strategy. This approach, while cost-effective, can be problematic as influencers grow and evolve from micro-level engagements where barter deals might be more acceptable. These diverse strategies highlight the complexities of influencer compensation, reflecting the need for flexibility and clear communication in establishing agreements that align with both the brand's budget and the influencer's value expectations.

Reflecting on the key factors that contribute to successful synergy between companies and content creators, this section will explore the insights from interviewed companies regarding their most successful collaborations and the elements that made them effective. Each company emphasized that their most fruitful partnerships were characterized by authenticity, with created content that resonated well with their brand visuals, message, and objectives. Such successful collaborations were underpinned by friendly and pleasant communication and consistently met their primary objectives, whether driving sales or enhancing brand awareness. For instance, Company 1 recounted a particularly successful collaboration that was not only authentic and visually compelling but also expanded their customer base by engaging an influencer who created content in languages other than Estonian. This strategic choice broadened their brand's reach to a new demographic, effectively increasing both awareness and sales among an audience eager to engage with their products. This example highlights how embracing diversity in influencer partnerships can significantly amplify a brand's market presence and appeal.

The third researched topic, “Challenges and Resolutions” explores the challenges that interviewed companies have encountered while utilizing social media influencer marketing for brand promotion, including fake followers, lack of authenticity and misalignment. The codes that were taken out of the interviews and the categories that were given to them are shown in APPENDIX I.

During interviews with company representatives, several challenges associated with influencer marketing were highlighted. Company 2 noted that one of their biggest hurdles is maintaining positive communication with influencers, who, being individuals with distinct personalities and temperaments, sometimes lack teamwork experience and can be overly dramatic, not fully considering the company's interests. Furthermore, the head of marketing at Company 2 pointed out that their brand maintains an apolitical stance, and strong political statements from collaborators can pose a threat to their brand's reputation. This is corroborated by Samuelsen et al. (2010, as cited in Olsen & Sandholmen, 2019), who noted that when high-profile opinion leaders act against established norms or values, brands must safeguard their reputations. Company 4 mentioned that a significant issue for them is the perception among some content creators that influencer marketing is merely an easy way to earn money. This perspective can strip away the authenticity that is crucial to influencer marketing, diminishing its advantages over other digital marketing strategies. This concern echoes the sentiment expressed

by Influencer 1, highlighting a broader issue within the industry where the foundational elements of influencer marketing are compromised by a focus on financial gain over genuine engagement.

To prevent common pitfalls in influencer marketing, all interviewed companies emphasized the importance of conducting thorough preliminary research on potential influencers. This step is crucial not only for assessing alignment with the brand's values but also for mitigating the risk of partnering with influencers who have fake followers. As noted by Anand et al. (2020), collaborating with influencers who engage in such deceptive practices can inflate the costs of influencer marketing, distort the metrics used for ROI calculations, and lead to inaccurate assessments of campaign effectiveness and audience reach. All five companies reported that it is relatively simple to identify if a content creator has purchased followers or used bots, by analyzing the ratio of followers to engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and reposts. Thanks to vigilant research, none of the companies interviewed have had negative experiences working with influencers who manipulate followers. Another crucial strategy to mitigate potential issues is maintaining high-quality communication with influencers throughout the collaboration process. Companies 2 and 3 pointed out that, at the end of the day, both companies and influencers are composed of people, making effective communication essential. Most of the interviewed influencers also highlighted this emphasis on interpersonal relations, underscoring the importance of human elements in these partnerships. These insights, which have not been extensively covered in previous theoretical researches, are invaluable for understanding and improving the dynamics of influencer marketing.

The next topic of the interview research was “Benefits and Industry Influence”. During this part of the interview, companies shared their insights and experiences regarding the benefits of using social media influencers for brand promotion. This discussion also aimed to assess the impact of influencer marketing on traditional advertising methods within the industry in which the brand operates. Furthermore, this part of the research explores how well influencer marketing integrates with traditional advertising techniques. The codes that were taken out of the interviews and the categories that were given to them are shown in APPENDIX J.

As outlined in the theoretical section of this thesis, influencer marketing offers a multitude of benefits and advantages over other marketing strategies. To enhance this theoretical foundation, the author will share insights gained from the interviews conducted. For instance, Company 1 ventured into a partnership with an influencer who was not their typical choice, yet

this collaboration led to successfully tapping into a completely new demographic that has since become loyal to their brand. This experience underscores a significant benefit of influencer marketing, as Companies 2, 4, and Biaudet (2017) noted: the ability to precisely target specific audiences. The insights from these interviews further reveal that influencer marketing can also attract entirely new customer segments to a brand. Another key benefit discussed during the interviews is the approachable and genuine nature of influencer promotions. This strategy makes the brand more accessible and relatable to consumers, enhancing trust through influencers' authentic connections with their followers. This approach is particularly advantageous for industries like fashion and food, where trust plays a critical role in consumer decisions. For clothing companies such as Companies 1 and 2, the established trust between influencers and their followers translates into impactful endorsements. Followers value the opinions of influencers they trust, and in the fashion industry, this can mean persuasive, firsthand reviews of apparel from a trusted source. Similarly, for the food industry, exemplified by Companies 3 and 4, a trustworthy relationship between influencers and their audience provides credible, honest reviews. Consumers are more likely to try new food and beverages when they are recommended by influencers, they believe in. Overall, established trust is a cornerstone of influencer marketing, offering significant advantages. Additionally, compared to traditional marketing strategies, influencer marketing is highlighted for its cost-effectiveness and broader reach. Company 5 pointed out that traditional advertising mediums like TV commercials and banners are losing their impact, a statement echoed by Biaudet (2017), who mentioned that ad blocking reduces the effectiveness of conventional ads. Influencer marketing, in contrast, offers unblockable content that reaches wider audiences and is more cost-effective, considering the diverse compensation models available for different influencers.

When discussing the integration of influencer marketing with traditional advertising methods, Company 2 has provided an exemplary case. While influencer marketing is a potent tool on its own, its effectiveness is significantly enhanced when combined with traditional advertising. By disseminating the same message through diverse channels such as TV commercials and billboards, the campaign gains a multidimensional reach, appealing to various target audiences simultaneously. This approach not only reinforces the message but also piques the interest of a broader audience in the brand and its products. Although this strategy can be

costly, for companies that can allocate the necessary budget, it offers a comprehensive reach that can greatly amplify the impact of the campaign.

The final part of this empirical research, titled "Future Trends and Projections" was designed to gather insights from company representatives about current trends and those anticipated to emerge in the near future. The codes that were taken out of the interviews and the categories that were given to them are shown in APPENDIX K.

The most important trend identified in the research is the increasing importance of user-generated content that is filled with authenticity. Promotional content that is seamlessly integrated into social media posts with a personal touch from the influencer tends to be better received by the audience, often not even perceived as advertising or as an imposed opinion. Additionally, Company 2 highlighted another emerging trend: organizing events for influencers. This strategy aims to enhance their relationship with the brand, foster strong synergy, and build a robust community around it. Such events not only strengthen ties with influencers but also deepen their engagement and commitment to the brand's values and objectives.

To conclude, the author has compiled a table to represent the generalized findings based on the second part of the empirical analysis (see Table 9).

This chapter has analyzed the empirical findings from interviews with company representatives, providing a deep analysis framed through predefined themes. The analysis highlights the aspects of influencer marketing from the perspective of companies, particularly focusing on the selection and brand alignment, the management of brand consistency, and balancing creative freedom with clear guidelines. The key benefits that have been identified, include strategic influencer selection based on alignment with brand values and marketing objectives, which are crucial for establishing effective partnerships and maintaining brand consistency across various campaigns. Companies emphasize the importance of authenticity and the ability to resonate with the target audience, which can significantly enhance engagement and sales, particularly for direct-to-consumer businesses as noted by Beichert (2023). However, the empirical findings also uncovered potential risks, such as the challenges in managing influencer behavior that may not always align with brand expectations, posing threats to the brand's reputation, which was also highlighted by Samuelsen et al. (2010).

Table 9

Generalized results of empirical findings and their correlation with the theoretical background

Key Empirical Findings	Correlation with Theory	Additional Insights Gained
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brands prioritize influencers who align with their values and objectives, emphasizing content authenticity and the influencer's audience engagement. 	<p>Supports Beichert (2023): Emphasis on engagement and direct-to-consumer success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some brands choose influencers based on their ability to inspire and on absence of bad habits or controversial activity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brand 4 de-emphasizes the alignment of influencers' personal values with the brand outside collaborations. 	<p>Contradicts Samuelsen et al., (2010): Risks of negative associations from influencers' misaligned actions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Importance of thorough research on influencer before offering collaboration.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Companies struggle to balance providing clear guidelines with allowing influencers creative freedom, sometimes leading to poor outcomes. 	<p>Aligns with Biaudet (2017): Importance of clear guidelines yet allowing creativity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guidelines can be established before recruiting influencer - Company and Influencer both partaking in content creation to avoid outcome issues.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negotiating fair compensation is complex due to lack of standardized practices, with some companies opting for barter deals or facing renegotiations over compensation. 	<p>Aligns with Santiago and Castelo (2020): Challenges in influencer compensation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluating influencer through analysis of their metrics - Barter deals is most cost-effective approach as well as most problematic one.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Importance of metrics like clicks and promo code usage for measuring campaign effectiveness and ROI 	<p>Contradicts with Linqia (2018): Challenges in measuring ROI and importance of budgeting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Measuring ROI is not an issue when good budgeting is established.

Source: compiled by the author based on empirical results

Moreover, the necessity of balancing strict guidelines with granting creative freedom is a delicate task that companies navigate to preserve influencer authenticity without compromising the campaign's objectives. Not to mention, the statements from companies about the importance of communication and alignment in values echo the sentiments shared by influencers in the previous part of this research, indicating a shared understanding between both parties about what are the key elements to establishing synergy in such collaborations. Additionally, this section of the empirical research revealed that issues commonly emphasized in theoretical frameworks, such as fake followers and ROI measurement, do not pose significant threats to companies operating in Estonia. These challenges can be effectively mitigated through meticulous research on influencers and careful budgeting strategies.

Conclusion

In today's marketing landscape, traditional promotional methods such as television commercials, billboards, and flyers are increasingly seen as outdated. As digital advertising faces challenges with widespread ad-blocking technologies, the necessity for innovative marketing approaches has become apparent. In our digital age, where daily life is closely connected with social media usage, the introduction of a new, engaging marketing method on these platforms was inevitable. Enter influencer marketing, a strategy introduced several years ago that leverages the credibility of highly trusted individuals with significant social media followings to convey promotional messages to their audience. This approach is quickly gaining popularity, transforming brand promotion with its ability to engage consumers directly. Nevertheless, the complexities of influencer marketing, with its significant influence on modern business strategies and consumer engagement, should not be underestimated.

This thesis explores the ambiguous nature of influencer marketing, shedding light on its significant benefits as well as its potential challenges. Through an in-depth analysis of existing theoretical frameworks, the author has synthesized definitions by Geysler (2023) and Dajah et al. (2020) to formulate a definition that is more pertinent to this study. This refined definition offers a comprehensive view of social media influencers, encapsulating their roles and strategies within the sphere of social media marketing. Additionally, this research categorizes influencers into types—micro, macro, and mega—and explores their unique characteristics and the specific advantages companies might gain by partnering with each type. For instance, leveraging micro-influencers is highlighted as the most cost-effective strategy, often yielding greater exposure and

engagement compared to partnerships with mega-influencers. Theoretical research has underscored several significant benefits of influencer marketing, such as cost-effectiveness, pre-established trust, targeted reach, and engaging content. Additionally, the research highlights the critical need for awareness of potential drawbacks that could threaten the success of collaborations and the establishment of synergy between companies and influencers. Examples of such threats include fake followers, endorsement skepticism, challenges in balancing guidelines, and uncontrolled influencer behavior.

The author conducted comprehensive empirical research to identify the benefits, potential risks, and key insights into successful synergy in influencer marketing partnerships. This empirical study included five semi-structured interviews with social media influencers and an additional five with company professionals involved in influencer marketing strategies and operating in Estonia. The interviews were meticulously coded, deeply analyzed, and compared against the established theoretical framework to enhance the understanding of influencer marketing dynamics.

Throughout this research, interviews with influencers and company representatives have underscored the critical importance of alignment between influencers and brand values. Influencers emphasized the need for authenticity and genuine connection with the brand to engage their audience and produce meaningful content effectively. The empirical findings from this research reveal that successful influencer marketing campaigns are established on good communication, clear objectives, and clearly shared goals between brands and influencers. These elements are crucial to overcoming the hidden challenges of influencer marketing, such as managing unpredictable influencer behavior, maintaining authenticity and measuring the true return on investment, which often needs to be discovered in digital marketing metrics. Moreover, the potential negative impacts of influencer marketing, such as the dilution of message due to poorly managed collaborations or the backlash from influencer misconduct, are significant. These issues can lead to decreased consumer trust and potential brand damage, mirroring the consequences of high stress levels in organizational settings that lead to decreased productivity and company reputation. Therefore, organizations need to recognize the powerful leverage that influencer marketing can provide and approach it with a strategic framework that includes rigorous influencer research and establishing adaptive engagement strategies. Preventative measures should be established to avoid misalignments and potential issues. It is important to

mention that while some findings of the empirical research correlated with the theoretical frameworks, others diverged, illustrating the dynamic nature of real-world applications. Additionally, the statements by companies echoed those of influencers, emphasizing a shared perspective on key aspects of influencer marketing.

In conclusion, while influencer marketing presents a vibrant and highly beneficial approach for modern digital marketing, it necessitates a nuanced, informed strategy that balances innovation with risk management. This thesis provides an in-depth exploration of influencer marketing within the Estonian context, yielding firsthand insights that greatly enrich our understanding of how to capitalize on its advantages while minimizing potential risks. This knowledge is crucial for fostering a successful synergy between companies and social media influencers.

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Appendices
APPENDIX A.

Interview questions for social media influencers

Topic	№	Question
Brand Partnership Criteria and Outcomes	1.	What criteria do you use to decide which brands to partner with?
	2.	Can you describe a successful brand partnership you have had and what made it work well?
	3.	Can you describe a campaign where you felt your unique content significantly benefited a brand's promotion strategy?
Authenticity and Challenge Management	4.	How do you ensure that your collaborations with brands remain authentic to your personal brand and resonate with your audience?
	5.	How do you ensure that your promotions provide genuine value to your followers while aligning with the brands' goals?
	6.	Can you discuss a challenge you have faced in maintaining your authenticity while fulfilling a brand's promotional needs? How did you overcome it?
	7.	How do you manage the risk of losing followers' trust when promoting products?
	8.	Have you faced any challenges with fake followers or engagement bots, and how did you address them?
Operational and Measurement Strategies	9.	What practices have you found effective in managing your relationship with brands to ensure a mutually beneficial partnership?
	10.	How do you measure success of your sponsored posts? Can you share some ways you have seen brands measure the success of your collaborations?
	11.	How do you and brands you work with decide on fair compensation for your promotional posts? Have you faced any challenges in showing the value of your work to brands?
Future Trends and Projections	12.	What trends do you foresee in influencer marketing in the near future?

Source: Compiled by the author based on subchapters 1.1 , 1.2 and 1.3

APPENDIX B.

Interview questions for companies

Topic	№	Question
Selection and Brand Alignment	1.	Can you describe how you select influencers to align with your brand values and marketing goals? What criteria do you use?

Campaign Impact and Management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. What strategies do you employ to maintain a balance between giving influencers creative freedom and ensuring brand message consistency? 3. How do you maintain brand consistency across different influencer campaigns? 4. Could you share an experience where influencer marketing significantly impacted your brand awareness or sales? What lessons were learned? 5. How do you assess the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns in achieving your marketing objectives? What metrics do you consider most critical? 6. How do you measure the ROI of influencer marketing campaigns? 7. How do you determine fair compensation for influencers' work? Can you share your approach? Have you face any issues?
Challenges and Resolutions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. What are the main challenges you've encountered in influencer marketing, and how have you overcome them? 9. Have you encountered challenges with influencers who have fake followers? If so, how did you resolve this issue? 10. How do you manage and mitigate the risks, such as influencer misalignment or authenticity issues, in your influencer collaborations?
Benefits and Industry Influence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. How has influencer marketing impacted traditional advertising and marketing strategies within your industry? 12. What benefits have you observed from utilizing influencer marketing compared to traditional advertising methods? 13. How does influencer marketing integrate with your other marketing strategies to create a cohesive campaign?
Future Trends and Projections	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. What trends do you foresee in influencer marketing in the near future?

Source: Compiled by the author based on subchapters 1.1 , 1.2 and 1.3

APPENDIX C.

Interviews with influencers. Theme 1

Theme of the topic	Codes from the interviews	Category
Brand Partnership Criteria and Outcomes	- Like/use brand themselves	Criteria for brand selection
	- Can get profit	
	- Brand aligns with their values	
	- Good team communication	Factors of successful collaboration
- Creative freedom		

-
- Image alignment
-

Source: Compiled by author based on conducted interviews

APPENDIX D.

Interviews with influencers. Theme 2

Theme of the topic	Codes from the interviews	Category
Authenticity and Challenge Management	- Learn about your audience	Remain authentic and provide value
	- Provide promocodes/giveaways	
	- Research the brand	
	- Communicate with brand	Potential challenges mitigation
	- Find agreement	
	- Fake followers are common for bigger influencers	

Source: Compiled by author based on conducted interviews

APPENDIX E.

Interviews with influencers. Theme 3

Theme of the topic	Codes from the interviews	Category
Operational and Measurement Strategies	- Research from both parties	Keys to successful collaboration
	- Good communication	
	- Understanding of the goal	
	- Generic metrics (likes, link clicks)	Campaign evaluation and compensation
	- Established price list	
	- Rare acceptance of barter deals	

Source: Compiled by author based on conducted interviews

APPENDIX F.

Interviews with influencers. Theme 4

Theme of the topic	Codes from the interviews	Category
Future Trends and Projections	- Short-term video content	Insights on future of influencer marketing
	- Promotion through Tik Tok live rooms	
	- AI generated content	
	- Tik Tok supremacy	
	- Unfortunate lack of authenticity	

Source: Compiled by author based on conducted interviews

APPENDIX G.

Interviews with companies. Theme 1

Theme of the topic	Codes from the interviews	Category
Selection and Brand Alignment	- Check authenticity	Selection criteria
	- Conduct research	
	- Use recruiting platform	
	- Check audience alignment	
	- Check engagement rates	
	- Deliver same message to all influencers	
- Maintain image through bright product		
- Do not give strict guidelines		

Source: Compiled by author based on conducted interviews

APPENDIX H.

Interviews with companies. Theme 2

Theme of the topic	Codes from the interviews	Category
Campaign Impact and Management	- Content aligned	Examples of successful collaborations
	- Authentic and genuine content	
	- Generated awareness and sales	
	- Opened new demographic	
	- Link clicks, likes	Success assessment and ROI measurement
	- Views are not sales	
	- Budgeting/predicting	
	- Rate influencer based on their metrics	Reward Management
- Use barter deals		
- Know market prices		

Source: Compiled by author based on conducted interviews

APPENDIX I.

Interviews with companies. Theme 3

Theme of the topic	Codes from the interviews	Category
Challenges and Resolutions	- Lack of authenticity	Potential risks and Influencers with fake followers
	- Availability of fake followers is detectable	
	- Politics involvement	
	- Unacceptable behavior	

-
- Poor teamwork skills
-

Source: Compiled by author based on conducted interviews

APPENDIX J.

Interviews with companies. Theme 4

Theme of the topic	Codes from the interviews	Category
Benefits and Industry Influence	- Reach new demographics	Observed advantages and alignment with traditional marketing
	- Target your demographic	
	- Relatable content	
	- Established trust	
	- Bigger exposure	
	- Cost effective	
	- Has even stronger impact when combined with traditional marketing	

Source: Compiled by author based on conducted interviews

APPENDIX K.

Interviews with companies. Theme 5

Theme of the topic	Codes from the interviews	Category
Future Trends and Projections	- User-generated content	Insights from the companies on future trends
	- Smoothly integrated promotions with personal touch	
	- Event for influencers	
	- Strong community	

Source: Compiled by author based on conducted interviews

Resüme

Tänapäeva turundusmaastikul on traditsioonilised meetodid nagu televisiooni reklaamid, plakatid ja flaietid muutumas vananenuks. Reklaami blokeerimise tehnoloogiate leviku tõttu ei jõua digitaalsed reklaamid sageli oma sihtrühmani, mis nõuab uuenduslikke lähenemisi. Sotsiaalmeedia laialdane levik on sillutanud teed mõjutajaturundusele, strateegiale, mis kasutab tuntud sotsiaalmeedia isikuid brändisõnumite edastamiseks nende suurtele jälgijaskondadele. See lähenemine on kiiresti populaarsust kogunud, pakkudes otsest võimalust tarbijatega tõhusalt suhelda.

Selle bakalaureusetöö eesmärk on hinnata mõjutajaturunduse sünergiid ja väljakutseid, keskendudes Eesti turule. Uurimus täidab märkimisväärse lünga olemasolevas kirjanduses, uurides kohalike mõjutajate ja ettevõtete koostööd, valdkonda, mis seni oli vähe uuritud. Uuringu eesmärgid on järgmised:

- Määratleda sotsiaalmeedia mõjutajate roll.
- Hinnata suunamudijate mõju brändi nähtavusele.
- Uurida mõjutajaturundusega seotud riske.
- Analüüsida olemasolevaid uurimismeetodeid.
- Viia läbi intervjuud suunamudijate ja ettevõtetega.
- Hinnata intervjuude tulemusi teoreetiliste raamistike alusel.

Töö teoreetiline osa käsitleb mõjutajaturundust, ühendades kaks definitsiooni, et pakkuda selgemat arusaama sotsiaalmeedia suunamudijate rollidest. Töö klassifitseerib mõjutajad mikro-, makro- ja megaklassidesse, uurides nende ainulaadseid omadusi ja ettevõtetele pakutavaid eeliseid. Kuigi mõjutajaturundus suurendab brändi nähtavust ja müüki, kaasnevad sellega ka väljakutsed, nagu mõjutajate ettearvamatu käitumise juhtimine, autentse sõnumi tagamine ja investeringutasuvuse täpne mõõtmine. Need keerukused võivad nõrgendada brändisõnumeid või esile kutsuda negatiivseid reaktsioone, mõjutades tarbijate usaldust ja brändi mainet, mistõttu on oluline mõjutajatega koostööd hoolikalt juhtida.

Empiiriline uurimus hõlmas viit poolstruktureeritud intervjuud suunamudijatega ja viit intervjuud ettevõtete professionaalidega, kes tegelevad Eestis mõjutajaturundusega. Intervjuude tulemusi analüüsiti põhjalikult ja võrreldi teoreetiliste raamistikega, paljastades nii järjepidevusi kui ka erinevusi, mis pakuvad sügavamaid teadmisi mõjutajaturunduse dünaamikast.

Intervjuud rõhutasid mõjutajate autentsuse ja brändi väärtuste vastavusse viimise tähtsust, et luua sihtrühmaga resoneeriv ühendus. Eduka mõjutajaturunduse kampaania võtmetegurid on tõhus suhtlus ja brändide ning suunamudijate vahel jagatud selged eesmärgid. Need elemendid aitavad navigeerida mõjutajaturunduse väljakutsetes, nagu autentsuse säilitamine ja täpse investeringute tootluse mõõtmine. Uuring paljastas ka, et kuigi mõned empiirilised leiud ühtisid teoreetiliste ootustega, erinesid teised, peegeldades mõjutajaturunduse praktilisi keerukusi. Lisaks peegeldasid ettevõtete esindajate arusaamad sageli suunamudijate omi, rõhutades vastastikust arusaamist kriitiliste turundus aspektidest.

Kokkuvõttes, kuigi mõjutajaturundus pakub dünaamilist ja tõhusat lähenemist kaasaegsele turundusele, nõuab see hoolikat strateegilist planeerimist, et tasakaalustada potentsiaalseid riske eelistega. See töö pakub põhjalikku ülevaadet mõjutajaturunduse praktilistest rakendustest Eestis, suurendades arusaamist, kuidas selle eeliseid tõhusalt ära kasutada samal ajal seotud riske vähendades. Need teadmised on olulised edukate partnerlussuhete loomiseks ettevõtete ja sotsiaalmeedia mõjutajate vahel, tagades, et mõlemad pooled saavutavad oma turunduseesmärgid säilitades samal ajal usalduse ja autentsuse oma sihtrühmade ees.

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COMPANIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS**

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