Which social media platforms influence consumer behaviour the most?

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Abstract:

This thesis examines the impact that different social media platforms have on consumer behaviour. For many business their social media channels are crucial in their marketing campaigns, but some companies still fail to utilize these channels with doubts of their end results. The methods utilized in this thesis are a quantitative survey and analysis done using the Hayes process network model. The survey was conducted in Finland for 128 respondents and distributed through online platforms. The questions asked focused on preliminary data, social media use and online behaviour. I find that Facebook and Instagram have the most influence over consumers because of their reach, successful targeting, brand awareness, creativity, and lead generation.

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1 Introduction

Digital marketing is something most businesses should be aware of in this day and age. The main avenue many companies take to implement their digital marketing plans is through social media. It is seen as a cheaper alternative to traditional advertising that has potential to really pinpoint and connect with potential customers. With the rise of our digital age and continued advancements in our social networks, many claim this is the way to go. Even if it can be seen that the reach, personalization and demographic pinpointing lets you target the right customers, it is important to see how it translates to customer decision making and ultimately sales. Many new and smaller companies choose social media as their main way to communicate with their customers as it can be cheaper than other marketing. On the other hand, depending on the industry and platform used, many companies do not see social media as a useful tool and continue to use traditional methods. Previous literature covering this topic has shown a majority of consumers taking social media into account when making decisions, leading to possible conclusions of a strong influence (Voramontri and Klieb, 2019). Different studies mention that even with a high usage of these platforms tied to decision making, it does not lead to any noteworthy conclusions. In this thesis, I want to ultimately examine what social media platforms play the largest role in consumer decision-making.

The main research question for this thesis is 'which social media platforms influence consumer behavior the most?'. This will lead me to find objective reasoning on the impact that each social media platform has on consumers' decision making. In this context, consumer decision making is defined as interactions, behaviour, and purchases. I will be measuring the main research question based off my survey findings and other research that has been done on the topic. Other questions that I will be addressing are what platforms are most/least effective and how are consumers affected at different stages of their decision-making process. Due to the wide scope of social media, consumers can be affected in many ways. Different platforms can have influence on different demographics, and certain age groups or areas can be affected differently. For this reason, I will be looking at what platforms are most/least effective and how they influence different consumer groups. To go along with this, different stages of the consumer journey will be looked at, seeing when/if influence is greater at that stage. The demographic I will be looking at will focus primarily on working class people around the ages of 18-55. These consumers will be more likely to have a social media presence and at the same time have the funds to be making purchases. The main hypothesis is that Facebook and Instagram will be the platforms that lead to the greatest consumer influence. The reasoning behind the hypothesis will be explained within the theoretical framework chapter. The major limitations to be

found in this thesis is the location (only Finland) where the research took place, the sample size and not having the aid of a commissioning company.

The rest of the thesis is structured as follows; chapter two discusses the relevant framework and is split into two parts: social media and consumer behaviour. Chapter three covers the empirical data, showing and analysing my survey. Also, the Hayes network process model is utilized for additional data analysis. Chapter four concludes by discussing the final results and providing an evaluation of the thesis.

2 Theoretical framework

For this thesis, the theoretical framework will be broken into two main sections: social media and consumer behaviour. For each part, I will be delving into the basic understanding of each section, and then going deeper into more research specialized areas. The social media part covers areas such as the classification of social media, social media as a communication network, and the different types of online applications. The consumer decision making part covers areas such as the consumer decision making process, consumer decision behaviour, consumer buying behaviour, consumer decision making styles, and social media's impact on decision making. Covering all these core aspects will give me the ideal framework leading into my own research, hypothesis evaluation and research conclusions.

2.1 Social media

2.1.1 Classification of social media

By definition, the term social media refers to a large spectrum of internet and mobile services that let users communicate, participate in online communities and share content. Essentially, any online or mobile application that includes social networking and content sharing falls into the category of social media. Dewing (2010) states that the most common social media platforms can be classified into the following categories:

- Media sharing sites
- Social network sites
- Blogs
- Status update services
- Wikis
- Virtual world content
- Social bookmarking

With the popularity of the internet growing in the late 1990s, the first social media platforms began to be established. Many of the first platforms came out strong but did not last long. During the late 2000's, the major players of social media, such as Facebook started to appear, leading to the widespread popularity and acceptance of these platforms.

After understanding the basics of social media and how it started, it is important to understand the attributes that affect its users. The different attributes a social platform is comprised of can determine how its users interact with one another online. The main notable attributes presented by Dewing (2010) are:

- Accessibility
- Searchability
- Replicability
- Persistence

These core characteristics can help outline the fundaments of online interaction, allowing for comprehensive and appropriate communication. Although, determining the attributes is important, in practice it is difficult to clearly predict them. Humans are highly unpredictable and their motives and tendencies can vary.

Connecting this to social media as a whole, and how consumers can be influenced, the core fundaments are crucial to know. What makes up social media platforms, their purpose, and user attributes are key components in finding out what makes users do what they do. These attributes alone are not enough, and a deeper understanding of what is done on these platforms, along with an understanding on consumer behaviour is needed.

2.1.2   Social media as a communication network

As the popularity of social media has grown over the last decade, it has become the main method of communication for many users. What makes social media so favourable to its users is the personalization. These platforms offer a way for individuals to communicate and receive feedback from their peers. As mentioned by Pempek, Yermolayeva and Calvert (2009), social media users' attitudes can be greatly affected while engaged in these networks. Users are encouraged to build an online presence and it often includes considerable amounts of personal information. With this personalization, Pempek et al. (2009) also states that a strong bond and intimacy can be achieved through these methods of communication. This shows the influence that these networks can have on individuals' views, based off their peers. Before drawing conclusions, it is important to look at a study done by Sponcil and Gitimu (2013). Although being connected on social platforms, their survey found that only 50% of users regularly communicate with family and friends.

Looking at social media as a whole, it is clear that it has influence on its users. With the personalization involved, users' peers can play a large impact on what they are thinking. For businesses, this can be effective when deploying their social media campaigns and overall brand image. Although the effect on users can be very influential, Sponcil and Gitimu (2013) show that not all users are activity participating and engaging with their peers.

2.1.3 Types of web applications

Briefly touched on in the classification of social media section, there are many types of web applications. According to O'reilly (2005), social media is recognized by many as 'Web 2.0'. Simply put, Web 2.0 emphasizes a better version of the internet that focuses on the new era of web applications. The web is used as a platform that utilizes collective data and intelligence from users across the globe. Further analysing Web 2.0, O'reilly (2005) breaks the components into three main dimensions: application types, social effects and enabling technologies.
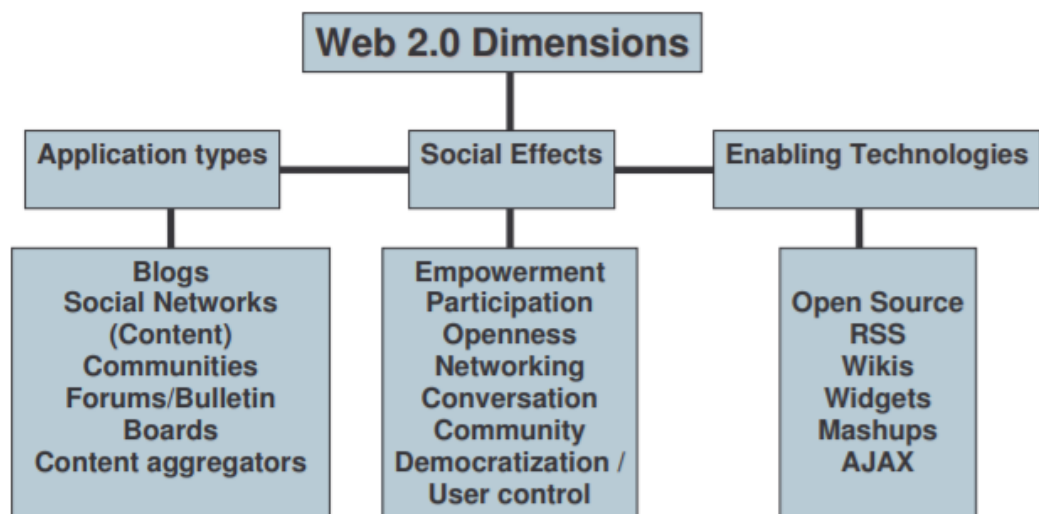

Figure 1. Three dimensions of the web (O'reilly, 2005)

Many application types fit the criteria of the shown illustration, but they can be grouped into five major categories.

- Blogs: short web logs, e.g. online journals, podcasts or videocasts.
- Social Networks: online applications that enable users to create personal websites, e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
- Content Communities: websites that focus on sharing particular types of content, e.g. YouTube, Flickr, and Wikipedia.
- Forums/Bulletin Boards: sites that allow users to interact and exchange information and ideas, e.g. Python and Epinions.
- Content aggregators: websites that give users access to web content. These can vary from sites that give access to customized web content, or sites that gather specific web content for the user, e.g. Google, Yahoo and Net vibes.

The discussed categories give a good benchmark when categorizing the web applications involved in online marketing. Although the Web 2.0 model does not cover every specific platform, it gives a good overall understanding. When going into more specific instances, this could lead to a limiting factor. Having knowledge of these applications will help to fur-

ther the understanding on how consumers behave when interacting in these different environments. The scope of social media is larger than most of the general public understand, and as a result, looking at all the applications can create results that may not have been otherwise known.

To further analyse the specific social media platforms, I will be conducting the table below and using the research by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as a reference.

	Advantages	Disadvantages	Reach	Coverage
Facebook	• Creativity • Brand awareness • Targeted advertising • Lead generation	• Negative feedback • Competition • Time and resources	• Very wide reach (has a lot of users)	• Global
Instagram	• Attract engaged traffic • Utilize user generated content • Trackability • Brand awareness	• Less effective links • Limited audience (mostly younger) • Less advanced ad features	• Very wide reach (has a lot of users)	• Global
Twitter	• Reach a wide audience • Customer service • Receive feedback	• Limited word count • Time sensitive • Negative feedback • Spam	• Very wide reach (has a lot of users)	• Global
LinkedIn	• Target audience already there • Build B2B relationships	• Time investment • Fewer interactions types	• Mostly business to business orientated	• Global
Blogs	• Quick results • Long-term links • Cheap	• Short lifetime • Link removal • Google penalization	• Varies on popularity of blog/content	• Can vary

Each specific platform has its advantages and disadvantages, as well as its similarities. The two platforms that stick out the most are Facebook and Instagram. Based on these findings, I am able to back up my main hypothesis that Facebook and Instagram will be the most influential platforms. These platforms emphasize creativity and brand awareness. Combining that with successful targeting and lead generation, they prove to be effective platforms. The other platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Blogs share some of these positive points, but each have some restrictions, making them less viable for the bigger picture. In terms of disadvantages, most of the platforms share the same theme,

receiving public criticism. Feedback is good to have, but too much negative feedback can sway consumer views. An important limitation that stands out, is the age demographic of Instagram. Earlier I stated that Instagram would be one of the preferred platforms, but when targeting larger demographics, it will have its downfalls. Twitter, LinkedIn and Blogs all have certain specialties, and when looking at social media as a whole, these can lead to be large inconveniences. In terms of reach and coverage, all the main platforms have a significant presence. The only channel that could fall short would be Blogs. Although larger Blogs may not face this issue, many Blogs are more specified and can be location specific, leading towards less reach and coverage.

2.2 Consumer decision making

2.2.1 Consumer decision making process

When trying to find a correlation between social media and consumer decision making, first, it is important to gain an understanding on the consumer decision making process. The consumer decision making process is the procedure where consumers identify the needs they have and then evaluate their options/alternatives, ultimately leading to their end buying decision. It is an often-complex procedure, unique for every consumer, based off their personal needs and daily habits. The consumer decision making process covers all aspects from the initial problem identification to the activities the consumer takes part in post-purchase. As presented by Shaw (2018), the consumer decision making process can be divided into five steps:

Figure 2. Overview of the consumer decision making process (Shaw, 2018)

Problem recognition:
The first stage of the process is problem recognition. Problem recognition is where the consumer identifies its need for a product or service. This can be triggered by an external or internal motive, but it all comes down to the deciding factor of 'a want'. This stage of the consumer decision making process can be influenced when focusing on external factors. During this stage, companies use strategies such as marketing campaigns and brand

awareness initiatives. At this stage in the decision-making process, social media plays a large role in making the consumer aware. The correct advertising can influence the consumers and put the idea in their head of the potential problem before they even begin to act.

Information search:

The second stage of the process revolves around the information search. During this stage, consumers weigh out and compare various options. A heavy emphasis is put on the internal and external factors, but previous brand interactions are also involved. Prior positive or negative experiences carry a strong influence. The information search can be done at physical locations, but online platforms such as Google, and other internet reviews play a strong factor. During the information search phase, social platforms play an important role through search advertising. When browsing online for products, being able to display adds that associate with your product, and the consumer problem is key when being evaluated as a potential option.

Alternatives evaluation:

The third stage of the process is the alternatives evaluation. At this stage in the process, the consumer has decided on set criteria of what they want. Now they begin to compare their initial choices with the alternative prospects. Factors that are looked at are any additional benefits, lower pricing, and any personal preference choices. At this point, companies need to focus their marketing efforts into convincing the customers that they have the superior product. At the alternatives' evaluation stage, social media can influence a few different factors. When comparing all the alternatives, the option for consumers to read product reviews that are left by peers can play a large role in the final decision. With this, having targeted marketing is crucial as at this stage all options are being weighted, having your brand or company in mind can go a long way.

Purchase decision:

The fourth stage of the process is purchase decision. At this stage, a decision has been thought through and the customer is waiting to make the actual purchase. All the options have been weighted and facts looked at. The consumer now tries to come to a conclusion on what service or product to go with. If the marketing is done right, the customer should realize that your product or service is the best option. At the point of the final decision, it is important to have all your social media checks and balances in order. Any small mistakes could throw the consumer off, wasting the work that has been done during previous steps.

Post-purchase evaluation:

The fifth and final stage of the process is the post-purchase evaluation. At this point in the process, both the consumer and seller reflect on the buying experience. Things that should be looked at are if the needs were met, if the customer was satisfied, and if the parties continue to do business together. It is important for the seller to ensure that the post-purchase experience is smooth. Follow up contacts such as emails can be useful, making sure to keep a connection for additional business in the future. At this point in the decision journey, it is important for social media marketers to follow up and build a good connection with users. Supplying avenues for users to get help or answer questions on products/services can go a long way.

How consumers decide and make their purchases is a crucial component in this research. Although, not every consumer is the same and their paths to an end decision can vary, the consumer decision making process framework gives a good basic when moving forward. When finding social media's influence on consumer decision making, this can be broken down, and each stage of the process can be looked at.

2.2.2   Consumer decision behaviour

Now it is time to look beyond the consumer decision making process and focus on the behavioural side of things. Consumer decision behaviour looks at how consumers act on an instinctual level. More instinctual decision behaviour is when the buyer does not necessarily put much thought into the purchasing process. This can happen when steps in the decision-making process are skipped. Simply put, this can come down to consumers buying things just because they want them. The purchasing of a product in this manner is more commonly known as impulse buying. Tanner and Raymond (2012) state that when impulse buying is introduced, it turns into a concept known as the 'level of involvement' decision behaviour. This behaviour can be split into two parts, low-involvement, and high-involvement decisions. For the majority of instances, low-involvement decisions usually focus on low-risk decisions. This could involve products or services that do not cost much or do not run a high risk for the consumer making a purchasing mistake. On the other end of the spectrum, there are high-involvement decisions. These are decisions that tend to bring higher risk to the consumer and can have consequences if not carried out correctly. Often times, these are more complex and expensive purchases. Making decisions like this usually force the consumer to spend more time and cover all aspects of the potential purchase.

In relation to this thesis, it is important to understand the consumer on a more instinctual level. Although, a large part of how consumer work can be looked at through different

models, there are aspects of decisions that cannot be predicted. Being able to identify these possibilities is important when drawing conclusions on why consumers make their decisions.

2.2.3 Consumer buying behaviour

Consumer buying behaviour relates to the buying behaviour of the end customer. Factors such as characteristics and different specificities play a role in influencing the results. Ultimately preferences such as what brands are favoured, purchasing decisions and shopping habits are decided here. Ramya and Ali (2016) state that the main forces driving buying behaviour are:

- Cultural
- Social
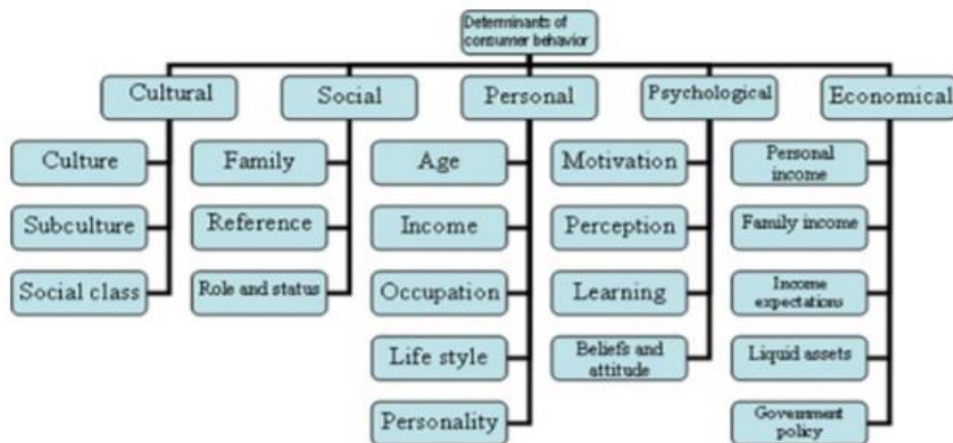- Personal
- Psychological
- Economical

Figure 3. Factors affecting consumer buying haviour (Ramya and Ali, 2016)

As seen in the above illustration, determining consumer behaviour can be broken into five sections, containing their own sub sections. In order to fully understand consumer buying behaviour as a whole, each section should be investigated, leaving no issues left uncovered. For example, when focusing on specific demographics, a certain aspect (e.g. income or status) can be looked further into.

Another research done by Sharma (2014), looks at a cognitive theory surrounding consumer buying behaviour. Sharma (2014) focuses on the end results of consumer buying behaviour through the Cognitive dissonance theory. This theory looks at buyers' perceptions and beliefs, looking for the consistency behind them. Factors such as why the consumer made a certain purchase, what influenced these purchases, and the continued changes in society are all considered.

When connecting consumers' behaviour to social media influence, both researches come into play. It is important to categorize concrete factors to understand consumers at a face value, but also look back at why these actions are occurring. For a business looking to implement digital marketing into their campaigns, these behavioural aspects are crucial in acquiring customers business. Studying and understanding the consumer is key to overall success in the market.

2.2.4 Decision making styles

Decision making styles can be looked at as the mental orientation that characterizes the consumers approach to making decisions. Sprotles and Kendall (1986) categorize the decision-making styles in three sections: psychographic/lifestyles, consumer typology, and consumer characterises. These can include characteristics that range from factors such as impulse buying, quality consciousness and rational shopping. When differentiating consumer decision making styles, there are eight common factors consumers fall into:

- Impulsiveness
- Brand consciousness
- Confusion from too many choices
- Recreational consciousness
- High-quality and perfectionism
- Brand loyalty
- Novelty consciousness
- Price and value

These eight factors are the basis when analysing why consumers make the decisions that they do. When measuring the mentioned consumer decision making styles, Sprotles and Kendall (1986) state that there are four main areas that need to be looked at. The first area is the mental characteristics area where covering aspects such a consciousness and altruism are done. Second, the complete characteristics of the category is looked at such as the small independent decision-making trends. Third, characteristic measurements that rate how consumer values each trait are measured and analysed. Lastly, the characteristic measurements that focus on individuals' professional interests are determined. Measuring the above areas allows for the most common consumer decision making styles to be categorized and give companies an advantage when trying to focus on them.

In relation to this report, knowing the consumer decision making styles is crucial when analysing how consumers behave. When looking at the different decision-making style categories, these can be used in coordination with the social media channels and demographics. Although valuable knowledge, this data could be difficult to obtain about customer groups. Doing surveys or tracking passed behaviour could aid in this obstacle.

2.2.5 Social media's impact on consumer decisions

For many consumers, social media is seen as an important communication tool. Aspects such as customer engagement, brand awareness and website traffic are all beneficial factors revolving around social media, but when looking deeper there is more to gain from these platforms. All around the world, these platforms are used to bring people and organizations together. Through these platforms, users share their content and life experiences with others. This can be very beneficial from a business point of view, as these users are the consumers and can share information and reviews about products or services. A study done by Deloitte (2015) states that social media has the capability to influence people behaving a certain way. The study performed investigated the many factors of social media that influences consumers and differences between age groups and demographics. They found that social media does exceptionally well with the millennial age group. Of this demographic, 47 percent of the participants were found to be influenced by social media when making purchases, opposed to the other age groups 19 percent. To go along with this, the results also showed that consumers that incorporate using social media during their purchasing are four times more likely to make the purchase. Although business cannot control what customers are on social media, they can make an impact with that they see through their social media channels.

A study conducted by Mangles (2017) indicates what consumers are looking for from companies when making online purchases:
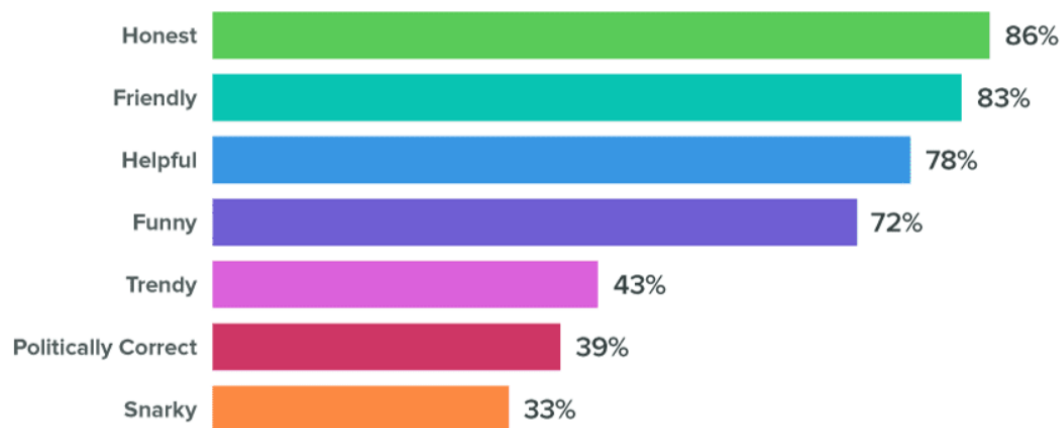

Figure 4. Behaviour that consumers want when being on social media (Mangles, 2017)

From this graph, I can see the main components that drive consumers towards certain brands. From the results, the main three attributes consumers are looking for are honesty, friendliness, and helpfulness. Seemingly straight forward but often overlooked by companies. When looking to gain the most influence through your social media campaign, it is

imperative not to miss the fundamental components that drive consumers to your brand. For this thesis, seeing how these factors affect survey respondents will help in determining final conclusions and correlations with the survey results.

3   Empirical part

Next, I will be covering the empirical part of this thesis. The objective here is to make clear connections that show how social media platforms play in consumers decision making. Different social media platforms will be looked at, as well as different stages of the consumer decision making journey.

3.1   Methods

This thesis focuses on a quantitative research method, data collection, in the form of a survey. Additionally, I utilize the Hayes (2012) process network model. This tool helps aid in analysing the social media part of this data and categorizing it within the different consumer sections. Next, I will give an overview of the quantitative research method and the Hayes process network model and explain how I collected my data.

Quantitative research:

Quantitative data focuses on large counts of numbers and data sets. Quantitative research allows for in-depth analysis as well as statistical analysis. There are many forms of quantitative data, such as data projections and sensory calculations, but for this particular research, the quantification of entities will be focused on, e.g. getting information from respondents, in the form of a survey. Within this form of quantitative research, there are two major categories: cross sectional studies and longitudinal studies. Cross sectional studies being the observation of data from a specific point in time, and longitudinal studies being the repeated observation of a group under certain variables. In this thesis, I will focus on cross sectional studies due to the objectives of the thesis. To implement quantitative tactics into this research, I will be conducting a survey focusing on a quantitative sum of respondents.

Hayes Process network model:

A model that will be utilized in this research is the Hayes process network model. This is a moderated mediation model that focuses on social media use. I will be using this model when looking at consumers initial reactions, their perception/evaluation of what they see and how it ends up leading to a decision/satisfaction.
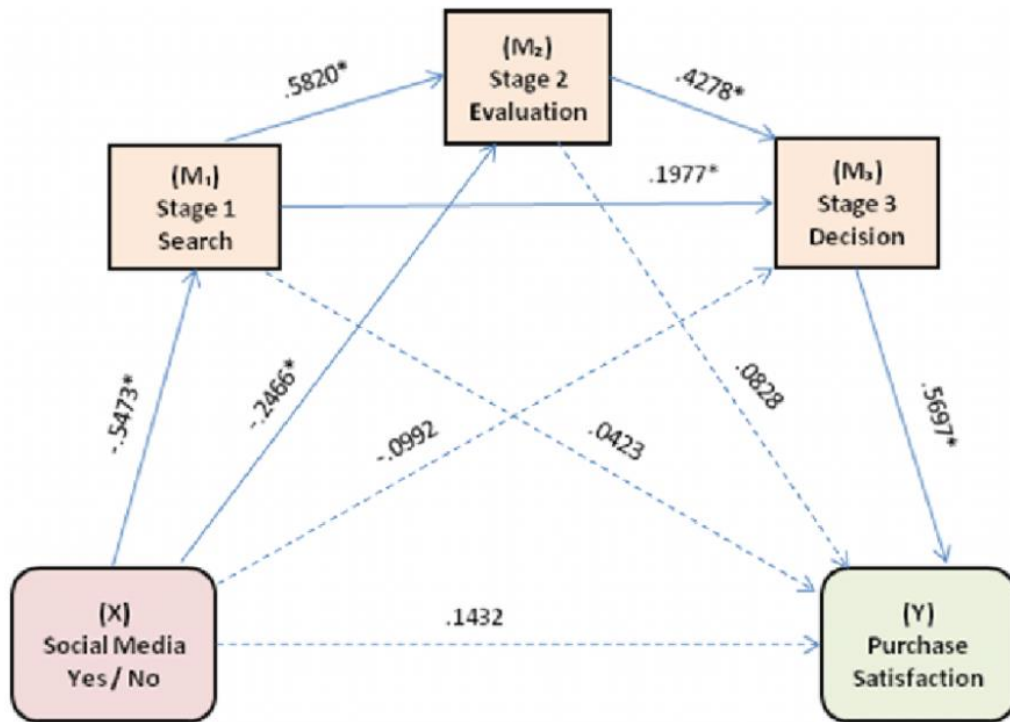
Figure 5. Hayes process network model (Hayes, 2012)

The Hayes process network model focuses on five major parts of consumer decision making, in accordance to social media. The first part in the model is the identification phase. This is where the methods in question are determined to be social media based or not. At this point it is also analysed if social media is the correct manner to go forward with. Next stage in the process is the search stage. At this point, the manner in which consumers search for products using social media is analysed. This could be factors such as how they are searching, and what types of channel advertisements are bringing consumers to the next stages. After the search stage, consumers move onto the evaluation stage where social media channels are utilized to allow consumers to compare different options. Aspects such as reviews, and product comparisons play an important factor. Moving forward, the consumers move into the decision stage. Using social media at this point, consumers get ready to make their final decision. Targeting advertising to any final product/service exposure is the key. At this point in the process, the consumer has a strong idea of what they want and what product/service they will choose. Lastly is the product satisfaction phase. At this time follow ups with the customer, getting feedback and posts or contributions about the product/service happen. It is important not to skimp here as this is where repeat purchases happen as well as reviews/input that can lead to gaining other customers. Overall, the Hayes process model follows the standard consumer buying journey, looking at the process strictly from the social media side of things. As this thesis focuses on social media's effect on consumer behaviour, when analysing the final results of

this thesis, the Hayes model is a useful tool when pinpointing influence at each stage of the process.

Data collection:

Next, I will explain how the data was collected. To begin the data collection process, I first created a survey. Keeping my research question in mind, and utilizing the findings from my framework, I created questions around this. My survey was split into three sections: preliminary, social media, and consumer behaviour. To implement the survey, I used the tool Webropol. Webropol is a survey tool that allows users to create questionnaires, reach survey respondents, collect data, and create graphs and tables. The survey was sent to the respondents via email and posting on online communities.

There were 128 respondents within my survey. The people that were involved were based in Finland, with the majority being in the Uusimaa area. The age group for this survey focused on respondents aged 18 to 55. This was done as this group is likely to be active on social media channels, are of working age, and have the means to make purchases. The survey questions that were asked from the respondents can be found in the appendix at the end. I encountered two main issues when conducting my survey. The first issue was getting responses. Gathering information of respondents can often be a difficult task, and when focusing on quantitative results, it is important to obtain an adequate sample size. To counter this, I simply sent they survey through various groups and social networks.

3.2   Data

The questionnaire that was utilized focused on three main components: general preliminary questions, social media-based questions, and consumer behavioural based questions. This allows me to see any differences in relation to personal preference and see a broad scope of user preferences and habits. After the data was collected, and appropriate graphs or diagrams were made.

Preliminary data:

The following are some basic preliminary questions to get an understanding of the survey respondents. This information can be useful when pinpointing outlier information and serves as a benchmark when comparing my results to other researches.
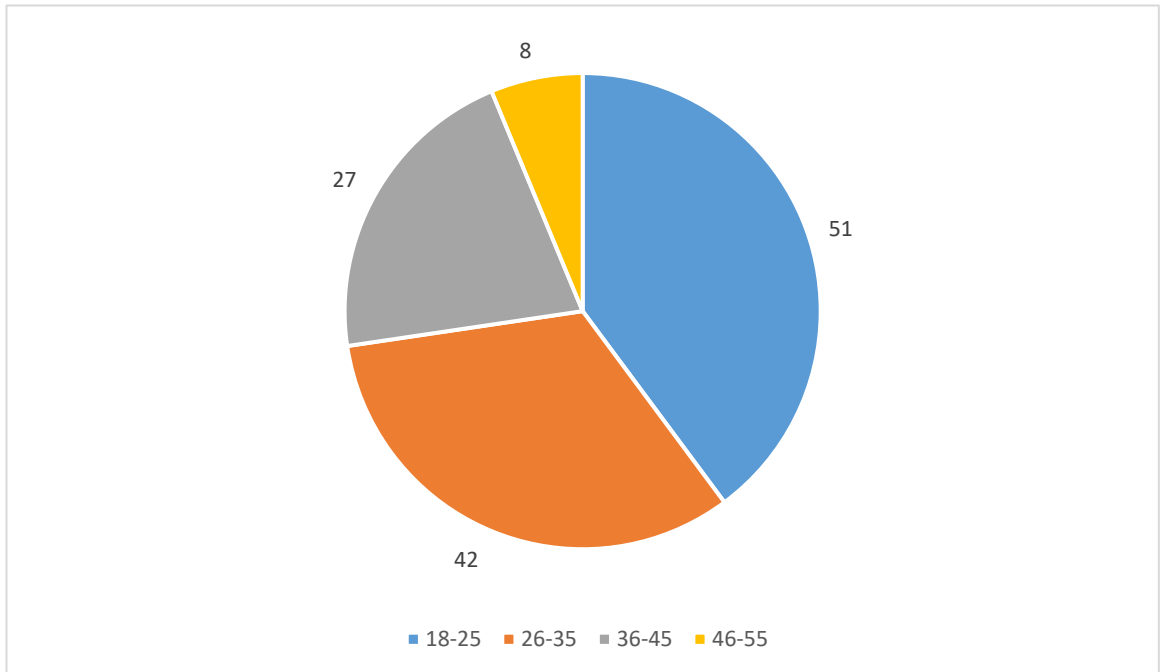
Figure 6. Age

It is important to identify the age ranges for this research in order to see different patterns in the data. For much of the population, use of social media usually trends for younger age groups. That is not to say social media could not influence older consumers, but it is important to be able to identify any outliers in the data. You can see from the graph that most of the respondents were in the age group of 18-25. This gives some perspective of the typical age of users on these platforms but should not be a deciding factor. Factors such as where the data was gathered from can play a role, as this could have been an area with more respondents in this age group. The main reasoning behind gathering the age of respondents is to compare and contrast later in the discussion, seeing if age plays a large factor on how the consumers act.
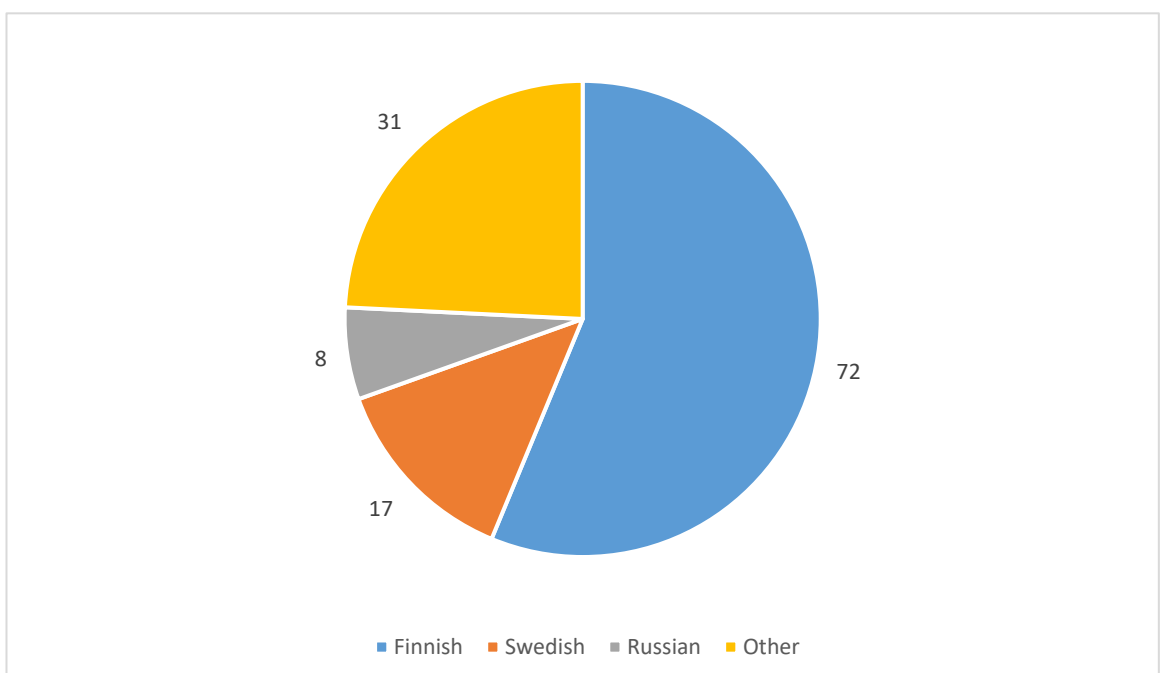
Figure 7. Nationality

Nationality is an important aspect to look at since the data collection from respondents took place in Finland. As seen from the data, the majority of respondents are Finnish, but there was also a large amount of non-Finnish respondents. Finland is known for being a technology orientated country and could have deeper connections when it comes to social media. A problem that was encounter during the questionnaire, was the other category. Many different nationalities make up this section, and it is hard to draw very much from them as the sample size is relatively small.
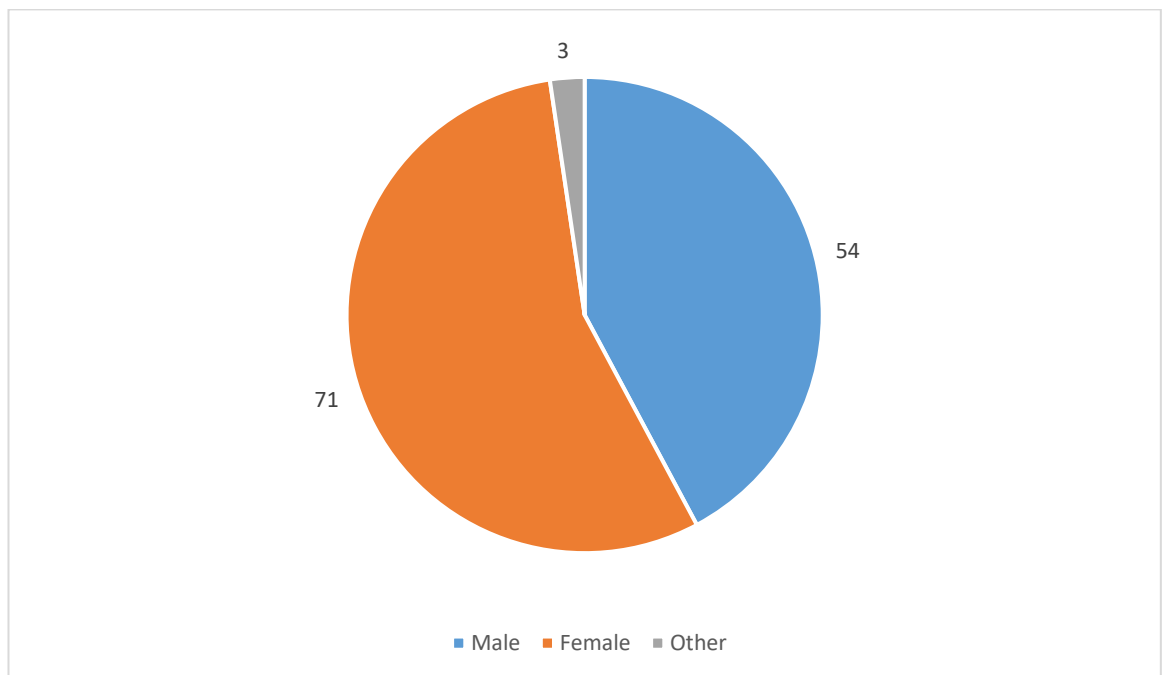

Figure 8. Gender

For the last preliminary piece of data, I look at the gender of the survey respondents. For the most part, there is a good sample size of both male and female respondents. The 'other' option was added to the survey to give respondents an option to opt out if they do not feel comfortable releasing the information, or if they have other preferences. With only three of the respondents selecting this option, it does not play a significant role in the findings. Knowing the gender of the survey respondents allows for any patterns or discrepancies to be found. Furthermore, looking at research outside of my own, it has not been indicated what gender the respondents are, so this variable will not be affected.

Research Data

The next survey results focus on the research question itself, which social media platforms influence consumer behaviour the most. The main focus points of these questions are about consumers social media use, preferred social media platforms, online buying habits and how they are influenced by these media platforms.
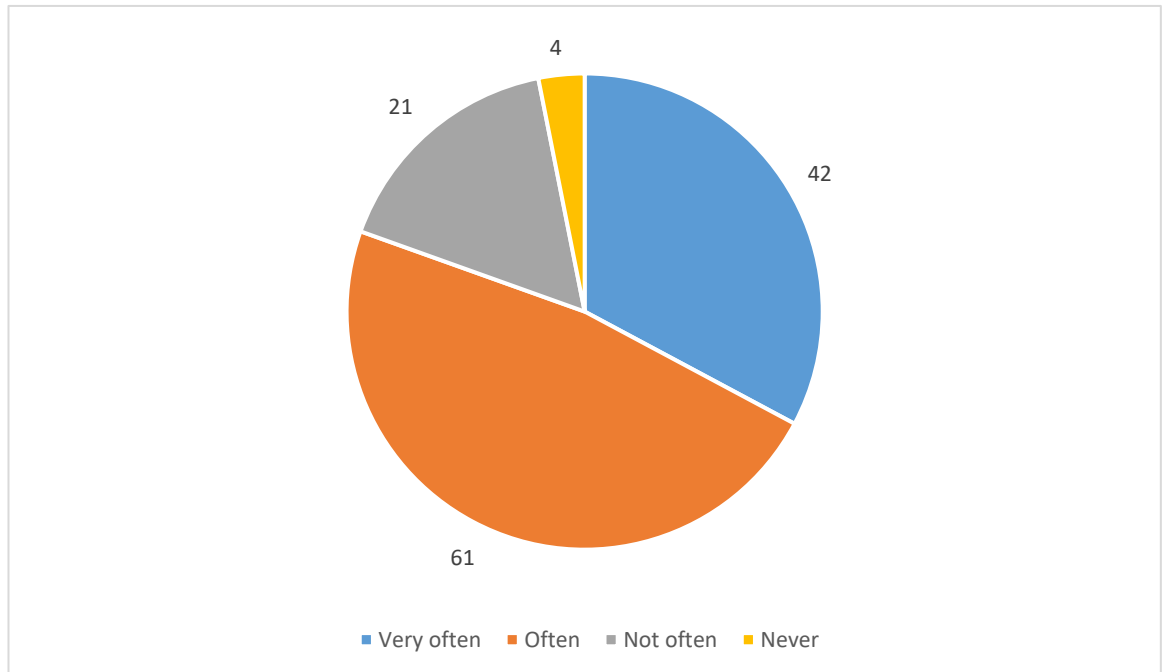

Figure 9. Social media use

The first step to further this research is to capture the respondents' social media use. To gain insights on whether consumers are influenced by social media, first it is important to see to what extent they use these networks. From the results, you can see that a majority of respondents use social media (with only four saying the never use it). 'very often' and 'often' seem to be the areas where the majority of respondents fall. This is most likely a result of the survey being distributed online. From this it is apparent that the respondents are active on social media, and frequent different platforms on a daily basis. In terms of final results, this allows for reliable results as they are putting themselves in the situations where social media would affect their behaviour. At this point in survey, the extent that the respondents see social media as a purchasing avenue is unknown, but the exposure aspect is there. The primary channel from those falling in the 'often' to 'very often' were Instagram and Facebook. A close follow up by LinkedIn can be seen by respondents.
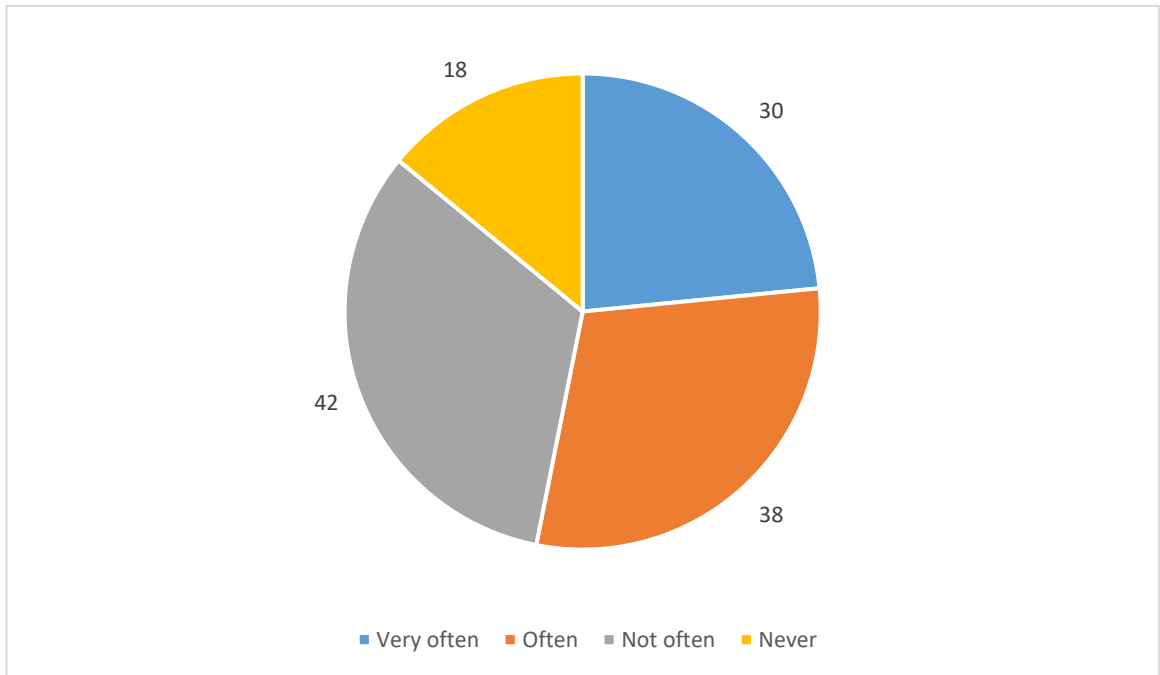
Figure 10. Online purchasing frequency

Next, the survey respondents were asked about their online purchasing frequency. Online purchasing frequency holds importance in this research as it shows how many of the respondents make purchases online, as well giving an indicator of their online behaviour. From the data, it is visible that over half of the respondents make purchases 'often', or 'very often'. Although the influence of the decision making is not visible yet, it is a good indicator that they are openly making purchases online. From the respondents that were not as likely to shop online, many of them still admit to making the occasional purchases, and only 18 of them report to never use online outlets. Based on these results, it does not necessarily mean that the respondents are not influenced at all. It can be that the advertisements they see online do not lead to any direct purchasing. Respondents still could be influenced at the end of their buying journey from what they find online and end up making their purchases in person. When looking at the social media channels respondents preferred, in correlation with their online purchasing tendencies, no clear connection was seen within the survey.
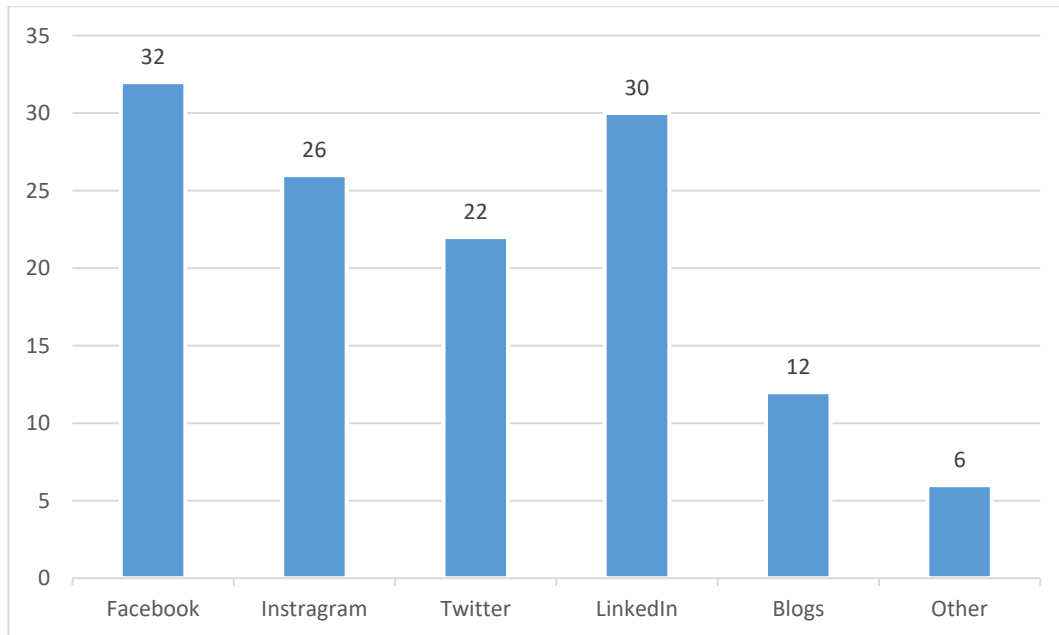
Figure 11. Social media platform preference

Next, the respondents were asked to identify their social media preferences. The main platform that are highlighted are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Blogs and Other. From my findings, these are the most popular social media platforms, and the ones most likely to be used by respondents. Looking at the data, the most preferred social media platform by respondents is Facebook. As mentioned before when covering the different types of social media, Facebook is a platform for users to share content and connect with peers and businesses. On this platform, users are exposed to many advertisements, and are able to check reviews on businesses when purchasing. With the peer aspect present, users can also receive recommendations and see reviews written by their peers. The other three most chosen platforms: LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter share many similarities with Facebook. They tend to be focused on connecting with peers and sharing user created content. This shows that the peer-to-peer experience, as well as content sharing holds a high precedence with respondents. The influence that is presented by friends is very valuable and can directly affect how consumers behave. With this data, I can see what the most popular channels are, and in later data make the connections to see what significance is shown per channel.
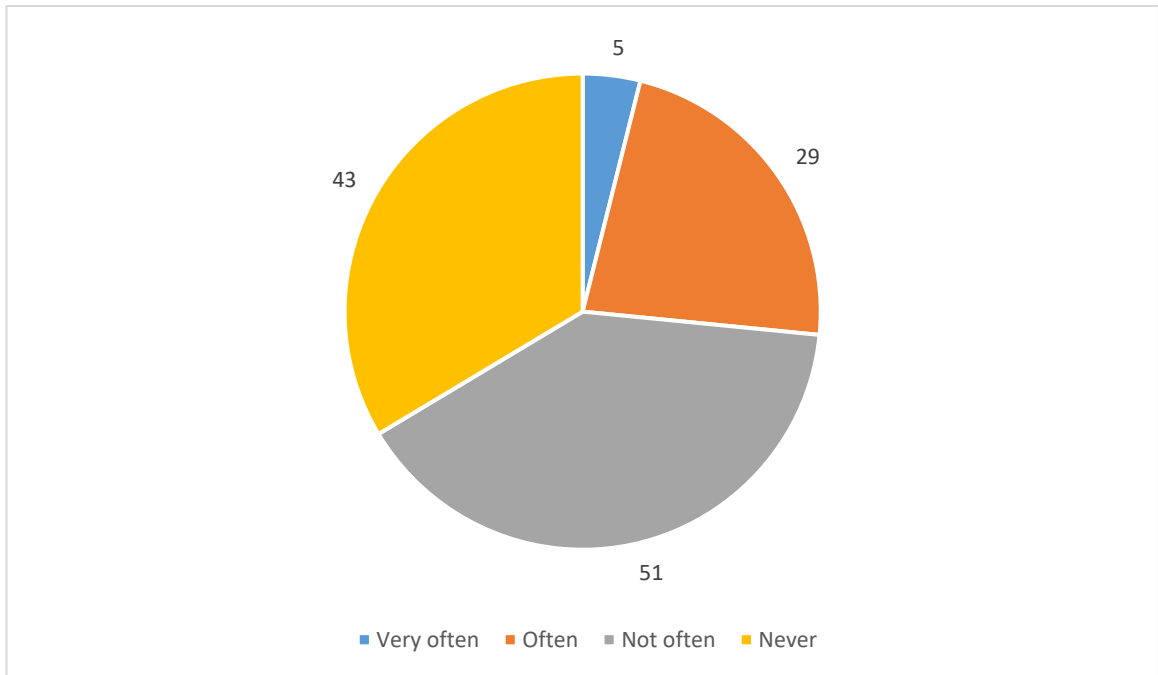
Figure 12. The consideration of social media ads

Moving forward, I have seen that a majority of respondents are on social media and make purchases online. The next question respondents were asked was to what extent they consider social media ads whilst online. From the survey, I can see that many respondents said that they would not consider making a purchase based off social media ads. With this in mind, it is important to consider that this is from the point of view of the respondents. Subconscious decision making could play a factor here, and even though the respondents have been influenced, they think that they have not been. A majority of the respondents who answered that they have been influenced by social media ads have also chosen Facebook or Instagram as their preferred platforms. From the chart presented in the theoretical framework, I learned that these platforms have wider reach, excellent targeting, and a strong level of creativity. A notable point that is related to this data, is that almost all the respondents that had chosen Facebook as their preferred channel, had noted some consideration in the ads they were presented with. Connecting back to the social media platform table, this would make sense because of how targeted the ads can be. Strong influence can be seen when showing the respondents ads that are specified for them, along with products they are interested in.
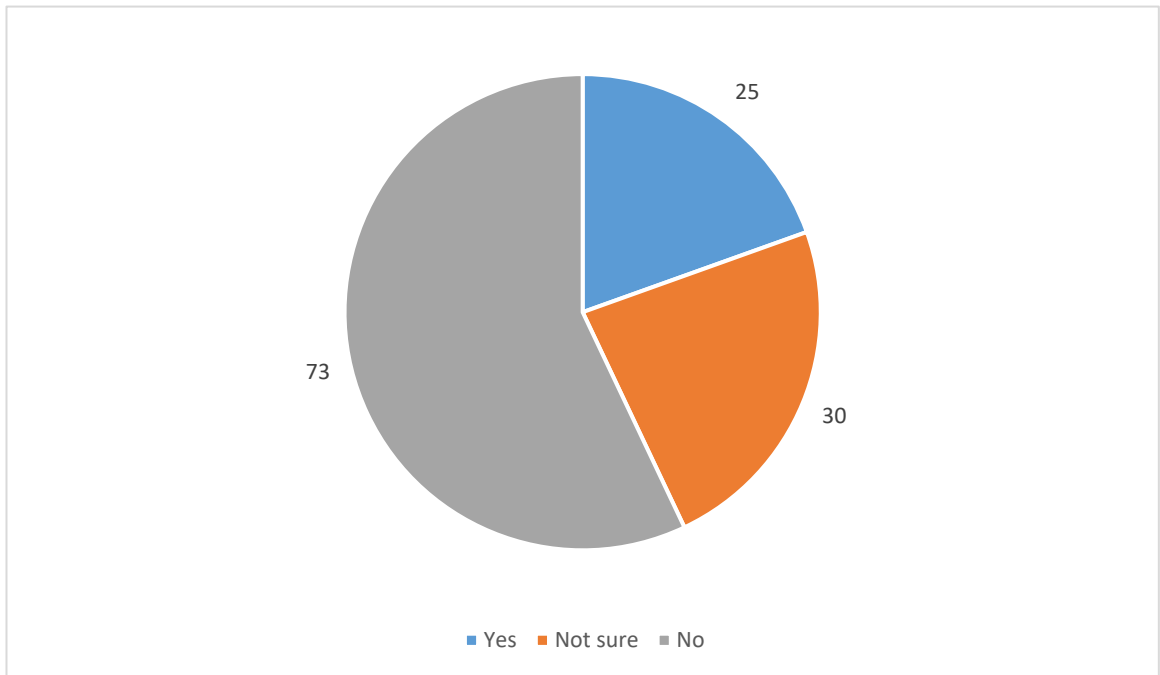
Figure 13. Recent purchases that have been influenced by online media

Looking at recent purchases that have been influenced by online media, a similar pattern can be seen as in the consideration of social media ads section. Many users say that social media has had no influence in their online purchases. From a straightforward analysis, this could implicate that the users see an add on a social media channel and chose not to make the purchase. When looking at the data on a deeper level, this can be harder to track. In some cases, there is a possibility that users had been influenced on a subconscious level. Influence can be present without the consumer being aware through being shown a certain product or service. Being aware of subconscious decision making is an important factor as it can lead to a purchase down the line, a decision of not picking that product, or potentially a purchase of a similar product of a competitor. Saying that no influence at all has been involved by that large of a sample is possible but seems unlikely when looking at it from all angles. Of the users that answered 'yes' or 'not sure' approximately half had chosen LinkedIn as their preferred social media and the rest chose Facebook or Instagram. A trend that is starting to form here is the users that prefer Facebook or Instagram seem to be much more aware of the influence side, and some even indicating that it does influence them or even lead to a purchase.
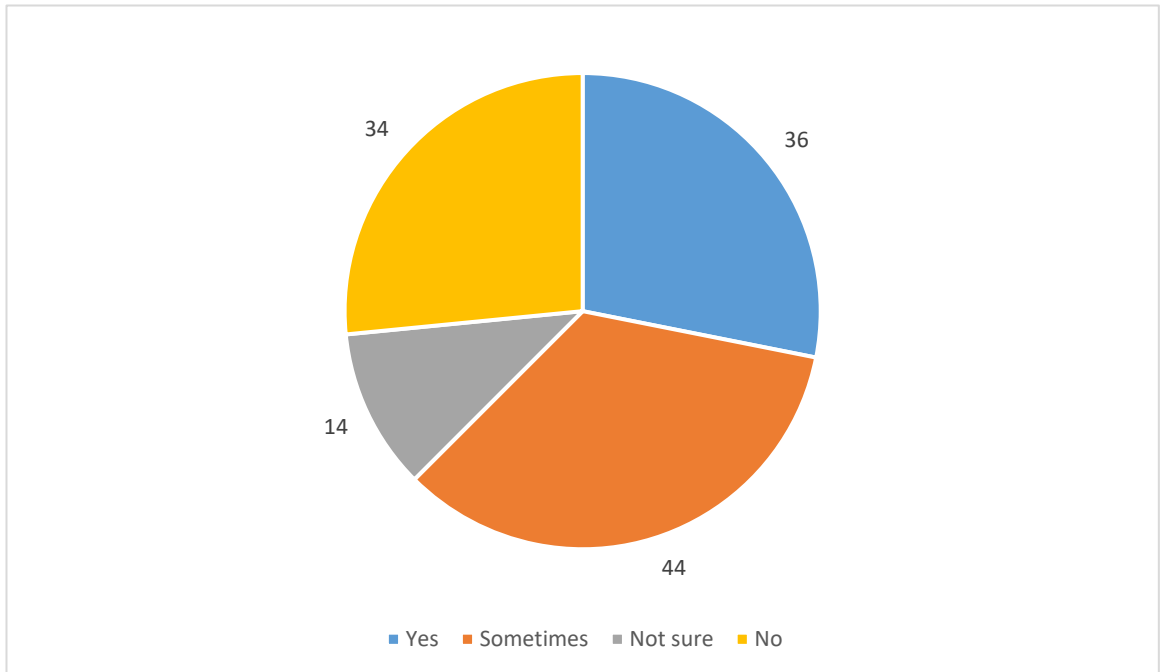
Figure 14. The utilization of product reviews found on online platforms

Next, the utilization of product reviews found on online platforms will be analysed. From the data I can see that over half of the respondents at least utilize online product reviews to some extent, with 36 respondents answering 'yes', and 44 answering 'sometimes'. When looking at the respondents that answered 'no', the data shows no clear social media platform preference. Many of these respondents following the trend of not using social media or being influenced by it in general. A majority of users that answered 'yes' to utilizing reviews found on online platforms, seemed to favour Facebook and Twitter as their channel of choice. Facebook and Twitter are both platforms with high engagement and allow for customers to communicate with business. In terms of social media marketing, this can be a successful avenue for businesses as they are able to give customer support and answer/help with any feedback given. That being said, positive reviews and feedback that a business receives can be a strong influence for consumer decision making. Many users trust the opinion of their peers and will consider purchasing based off this alone. A point to be noted about the respondents that said 'no', is that most of them fell in line with the above and answered 'no' to multiple questions.
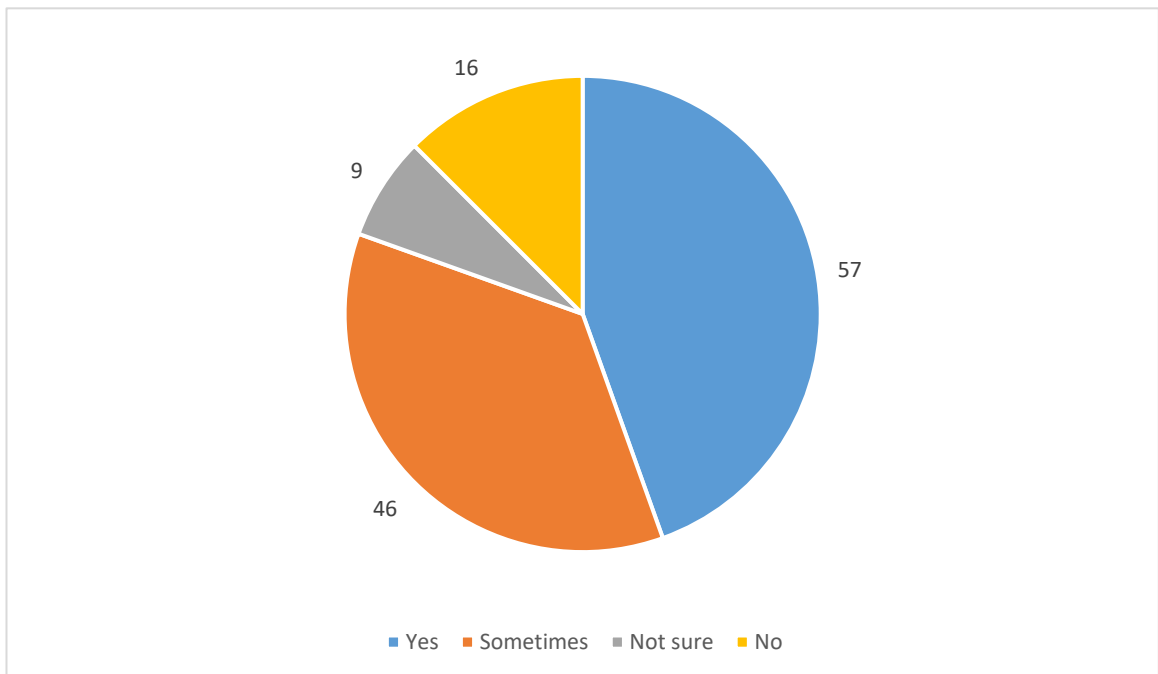
Figure 15. The likelihood of making a purchase based on recommendations

Now I will look at 'the likelihood of making a purchase based on recommendations'. From the data I can see that majority of respondents take into account recommendations, with 57 answering 'yes' and 46 'sometimes'. This reinforces the notion that peer influence on social media platforms has a high importance. When looking at the platforms that are preferred by these users, once again Facebook and Instagram are high. An interesting aspect is that almost all respondents that chose blogs as their preferred channel fell into the 'yes' or 'sometimes' category. As these are platforms that promote products and involve influencers, this does make sense. Although not a platform with as high reach as the others, the strong follower engagement involved makes for good influence. Analysing the 'no' and 'not sure', categories, there does not seem to be a link between platforms. A finding that is important to point out here is that many of the respondents fell into the older age categories. Based off the results from this data, I can see the connection of social media platforms and online purchasing. Peer influence is of high importance, and platforms that can utilize this area of marketing will gain a way into consumer decision making.
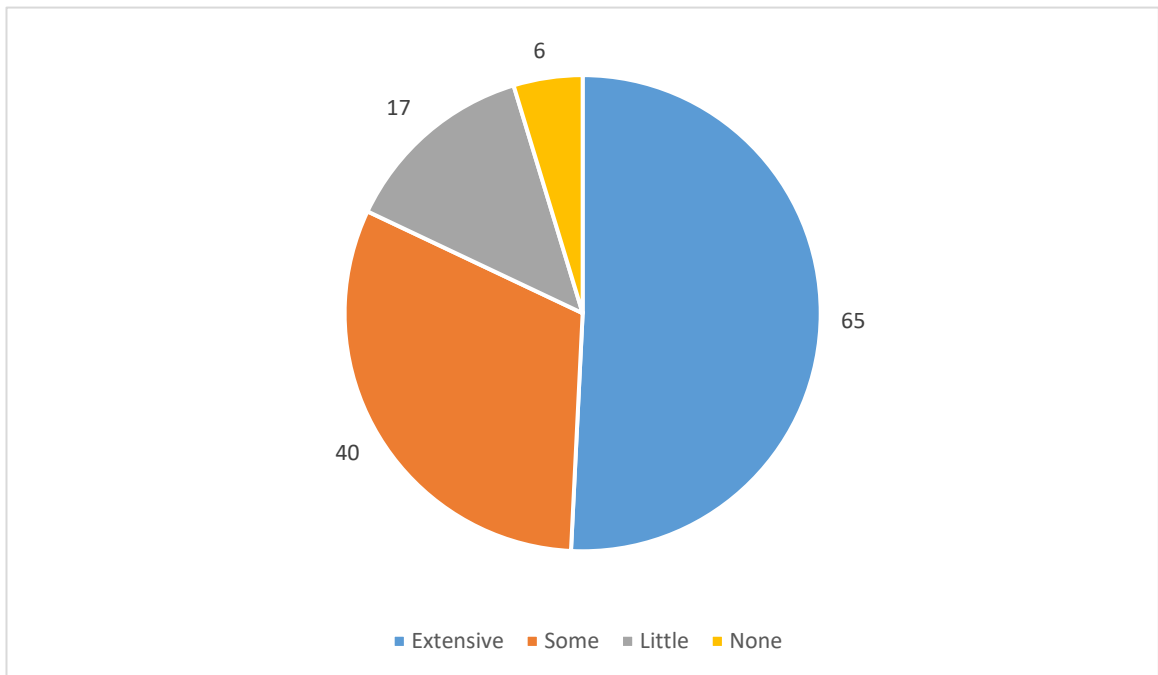
Figure 16. The amount of online research that goes into purchasing decisions

The following section looks at 'the amount of online research that goes into purchasing decisions'. From this, I am able to see how much consumers utilize online resources in their decision making. From the data, I can see a majority of respondents utilize online research in their decision making, with 65 answering 'extensive' and 40 answering 'some'. For the most part, these results were expected and shows the utilization of online platforms when making decisions. Looking at the platforms, there are no direct correlation between the answers and preferred platform. When analysing the 'little' and 'none' section, there is a trend with the respondents being older. All the answers fell between the '36-45' and '46-55' age categories. The reasoning for this is not entirely clear, but some factors that potentially play a role could be a lack of trust in online platforms, and general low use associated with the older age groups. The platform preferences for the 'little' and 'none' answering respondents were primarily Facebook, and a small amount of LinkedIn. With this in mind, these may not be the correct target groups when looking at the decision making or evaluation stages in the consumer decision making process.
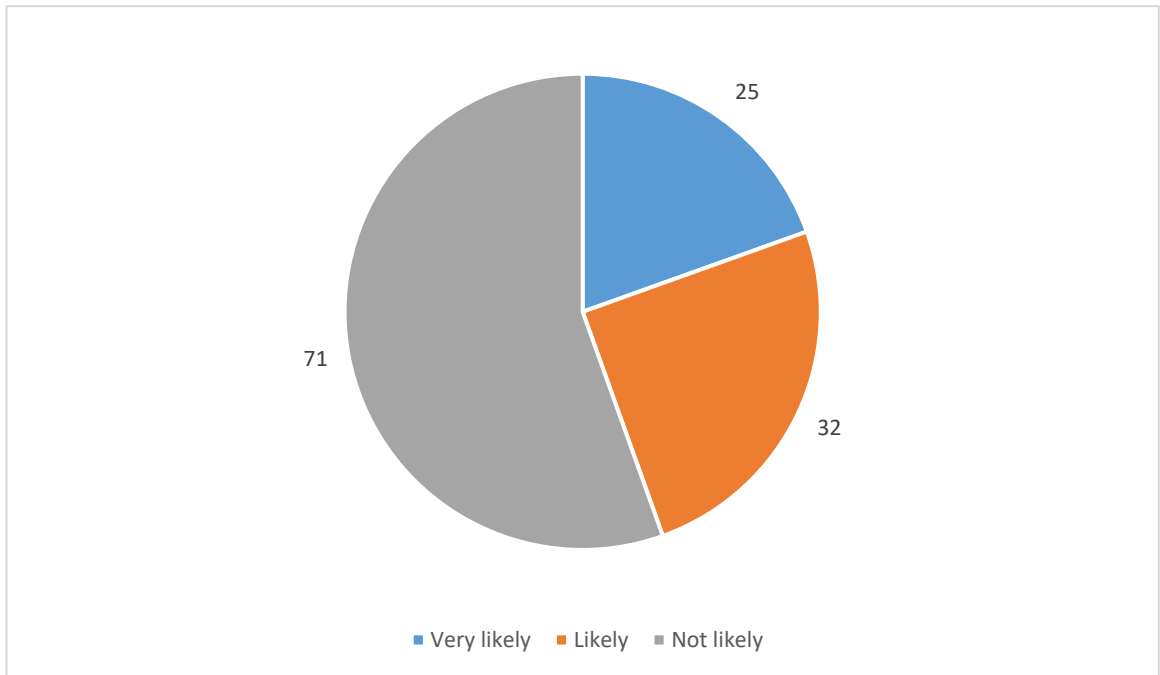
Figure 17. The likelihood to click on online ads

Next, the likelihood to click on online ads will be analysed. This data shows that when presented with an online ad, what are the chances that the respondent will act on it. From the data, I can see a large number of respondents, 72, answered that they are not likely to click on online ads. The age groups for these respondents vary for the most part but tend to favour the older audience. Of the respondents that answered likely, a majority of them favour Facebook as their preferred social media platform. The respondents that answered very likely are primarily Facebook users as well. Being a platform that is advertisement heavy, it is not that surprising to see the trend between the platform preference and the respondents' answers. From this data, I can see the act of clicking on a target ad is not popular among respondents. Although this data may not come as that big of a surprise, the analytics associated with it can bring some insights. Many of the other platforms that were involved in this survey, tend to not have as many clickable ads and chose to advertise in other ways, for example paid promotions in the form of a post.

Figure 18. The identification of being influenced by online ads

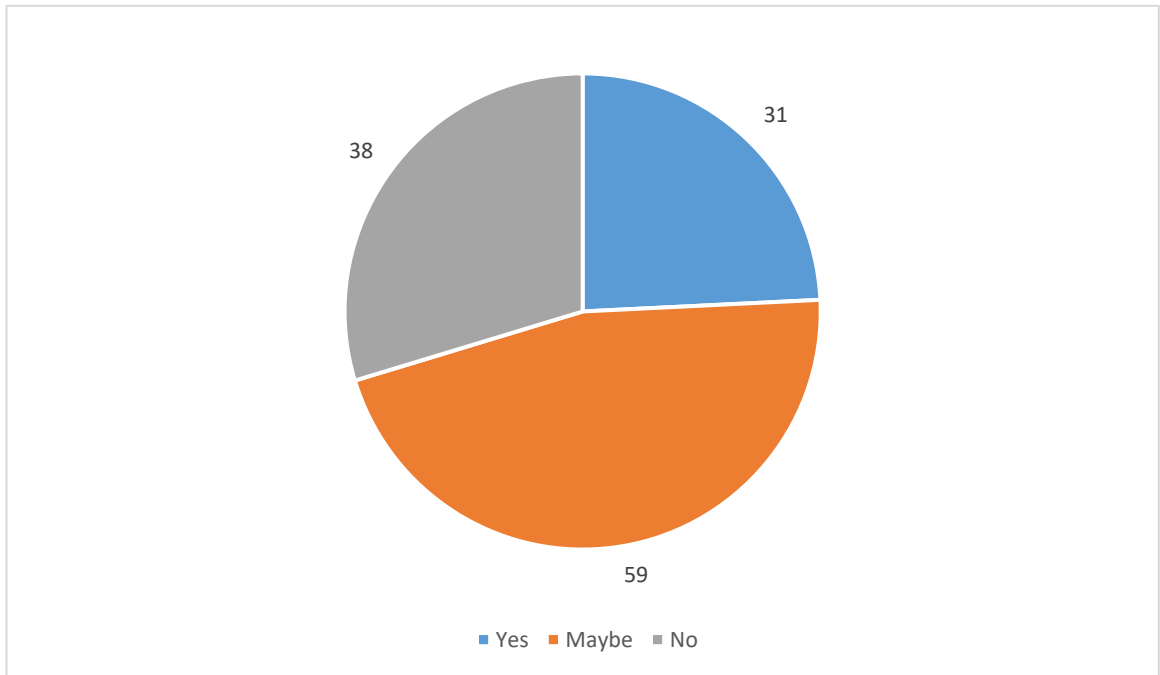The last question was about the identification of being influenced by online ads. This question was asked to analyse respondents' online awareness, as well as seeing if they have made decisions from the ads that they receive online. From the survey, I can see that the 'yes' and 'no' answers are similar, but what stands out to me is the 'maybe' section. This shows that respondents may have not initially been aware that they have been influenced by social media but looking back may have thought about a recent encounter. Regardless, something resonated in the respondents, making them unsure if they have been influenced or not. Analysing those that have selected 'no' can also bring some sense to the topic. Those respondents have definitely had exposure to advertising on social campaigns but may not have noticed what was going on. Although, this is hard to tell, it could be due to lack of marketing initiative from the businesses, or the respondent generally not interested in what they were being shown. Many of the respondents that believed to be influenced by online ads fell into the younger age category. From these findings, there was not any clear connection to the preferred social media channel.

Looking back at the survey, in general I felt it did a good job at covering what I wanted. The general understanding on the respondents' awareness, and how they receive social media marketing was achieved. A few of the questions may have been difficult to answer truly, as it is not that easy to identify how you are being influenced, from a personal view-point. As expected, there were some trends among the respondents, regarding age

groups and social media preferences. In most cases, this was not enough to sway the data to a great extent, but there were some notable instances.

Hayes network process model:

As the primary focus of this data revolves around social media, I will be using the Hayes network process model to analyse the consumer buying behaviour of the results from a social media standpoint, as well as explaining how each platform can be utilized at that stage. When using the Hayes network process model, I will only be focusing on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and Blogs. The participants that preferred other social media platforms when answering will not be utilized in this model.

Facebook:

To begin, I will first analyse Facebook using the Hayes network process model. Looking at the first stage of the model, Facebook fits into the category of being an appropriate tool to use. As shown in the results, many respondents favoured this option and opted it as their preferred channel in the survey. At the early stage, Facebook can be used well to capture consumers attention and reach a wide audience. Moving onto the search stage, Facebook does well as it enables marketers with the ability to target the audience efficiently. In the data, I was able to see that respondents using Facebook as their primary social media had higher chances to click ads that they were presenting. Utilizing this can result in companies' products or services being found more effectively. Next, looking at the evaluation stage, Facebook does well in terms of its reviews and recommendation section. From the survey, I can see that respondents were likely to take advantage of these features. Having an avenue for feedback or suggestions on any social media platform is very helpful when consumers are in the evaluation stage. For the decision or purchasing stage this may be an area where Facebook is lacking. As most of their direct efforts are put into different areas of the process. From the survey respondents, I can see most of them stated they do not click through to ads on the platform. Coming to the end, the purchase satisfaction stage is where Facebook does decently. There is support available by most brands via their messenger, but it tends to be not as responsive as other platforms.

Instagram:

Instagram shares similar qualities to Facebook. In the first stage of the model, where channel viability is assessed, Instagram does good for the most part. It shares similar strong points to Facebook but ends up lacking in the demographic section. From the research data, many respondents that chose Instagram, fell into the younger age group. Although maybe not ideal for overall reach, marketers can utilize this depending on their

campaign metrics. In terms of the search stage, Instagram again fairs similarly to Face-book. Differences can be seen in how ads are presented, and the types of marketing done on the platforms. According to the data, Instagram did well when looking at factors such as influence, and ad successfulness. At the evaluation stage, Instagram reaches some is-sues. One major issue is the lack of reviews and peer recommendations. Instagram does have these but implements them in different ways and mostly focuses on influencers, op-posed to peers. Moving onto the decision stage, respondents were less likely to click through to ads shown by Instagram, as well as having lower direct influence by the chan-nel. This comes back to the influencer involvement, which is effective but can come across as indirect. Adding more peer influenced reviews and suggestions could be benefi-cial but goes against the platform's tactics. The purchase satisfaction stage is an area where Instagram does well. Having consumers use hashtags when portraying a product can help the company to gage satisfaction and bring new customers. When looking at the table 'amount of online research that goes into purchasing decisions based on channel', I can see that many respondents using Instagram based their decisions off recommenda-tions. This can tell that although the site itself does not have specific product recommen-dations, the views from influencers can affect the consumer.

Twitter:

Assessing the viability of Twitters influence, overall, it is a solid channel. Similarly, to the before mention channels, Twitter has excellent reach and is a middle ground in terms of demographic preferences. Overall, Twitter is a good communication network for consum-ers and businesses. When looking at the search stage of this channel, it is lacking in some areas. Twitter focuses on short bodies of text and often these can get lost or over-looked with all the other competition. The evaluation stage is another area where Twitter does not perform well either. When looking at the data, those who preferred Twitter pri-marily fell into the 'sometimes' or 'not often' sections when it came to online influence. From a user viewpoint, there is still some possibility, like they could ask opinions from peers or even questions from the companies via tweets. When it comes to the final deci-sion there is not much data showing that Twitter is a strong option. Although the communi-cation aspects are strong, many respondents did not associate the platform with their final decision making. An area that Twitter performs excellent in, is the post purchase satisfac-tion. Being a great communication channel, Twitter allows users to receive customer sup-port via the platform. This type of engagement with the customers is of up most im-portance and can leave a strong impression. From the data I can see that a considerable number of respondents who prefer Twitter had answered 'extensive' with the amount of research that goes into buying decisions. Browsing this online platform and seeing the re-sponsiveness is something many consumers find valuable.

LinkedIn:

Being a business-to-business orientated platform, LinkedIn tends to have less of a general reach compared to others. That being said, LinkedIn has its benefits and is worth considering when looking to influence consumers. Delving into the search stage of the process, LinkedIn seems to generally be a decent platform. When looking at the business-to-business realm its excellent, and in regard to general social media it performs decent. When looking at the data, many of the users that preferred LinkedIn answered 'no' or 'unsure' when being asked about social media influence. The majority of its users are job seekers or companies looking for services or products to aid their business. Looking into the evaluation stage, LinkedIn again does well, when it comes to business-to-business activities. Comparing and looking at what product or service is right for you is presented clearly on the platform. When asked about the research that goes into decision making, many LinkedIn users answered 'some', although not as strong as other platforms, the users are still using the platform to evaluate their alternatives. The decision-making stage is an area of success for LinkedIn. Many companies even use LinkedIn as a way to create sales. When asked about online purchases that have been influenced by social media, a majority of LinkedIn users answered 'yes', which shows that the marketing they are doing is leading to sales. Getting to the purchase satisfaction stage, LinkedIn performs decent. Although lacking in customer feedback and service, the platform allows you to stay connected and follow the businesses. Having its benefits as well as downsides, LinkedIn is ultimately a business platform, and for business looking to do business in this area it is great. Any business focusing on different market sectors would do better looking elsewhere.

Blogs:

Although one of the least preferred channels by respondents, blogs still have strong benefits in consumer decision making. The initial consideration phase for blogs tends to be somewhat weak. When targeted at the right audience it can be a great channel, it just generally does not have the reach as other platforms. Very few respondents chose blogs as their preferred social media platforms. Moving into the search stage, blogs do not perform that well, unless content they host is specially searched for. If someone is searching for a specific product/service and a blog has written about it, then it could end up being very strong at this stage. Looking at the evaluation stage, this is an area where blogs could do very well. When looking at different products online, search results leading to blogs could host valuable material about a product or service. Although, looking at the data, only half of the respondents that preferred blogs said they are influenced by online platforms. Going forward to the decision stage, this is another potentially strong phase for blogs. Many companies host their own blogs writing about their products, in turn bringing

consumers back to their sites ready to make a purchase. To further this, backlinks and other traction from outside blogs can also help companies at this stage. Finally, the purchase satisfaction stage is somewhere blogs perform decent. Although not generally being a place for direct customer service, many company blogs offer tools for users to fix their problems. Follow up information from companies could help leave a lasting impression for the end user.

4   Discussion

This section will be discussing the thesis paper as a whole, outlining the steps and finalizing what has been done. I will focus on looking at the results received from the data, and drawing final conclusions based off my research question and hypothesis. The findings that I have come to will also be compared to other studies done on this topic.

4.1   Overview of results

The main results of this research are that Facebook and Instagram lead to greater influence over consumers. When completing the theoretical framework section of this research, signs of this began to be noticeable within the platform comparison chart. The chart showed that Facebook and Instagram had some of the widest reach, best brand awareness, trackable/targeted advertising, and strong lead generation. Other platforms also performed well but were lacking in areas and seemed to have weak points. From the survey conducted, I was able to see that Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram were the most preferred platforms for consumers. From the data, I was able to see the influence that social media played on consumers and how likely it was to affect them in their purchasing. Addition to the general survey questions, some graphs were made comparing demographics and social media channel preference. These graphs were created to find trends in the data and any noteworthy occurrences that took place. For these graphs, I chose to focus on three major categories: preferred channel by age, purchases made based on recommendations by social media channel and amount of online research that goes into purchasing decision based on channel.
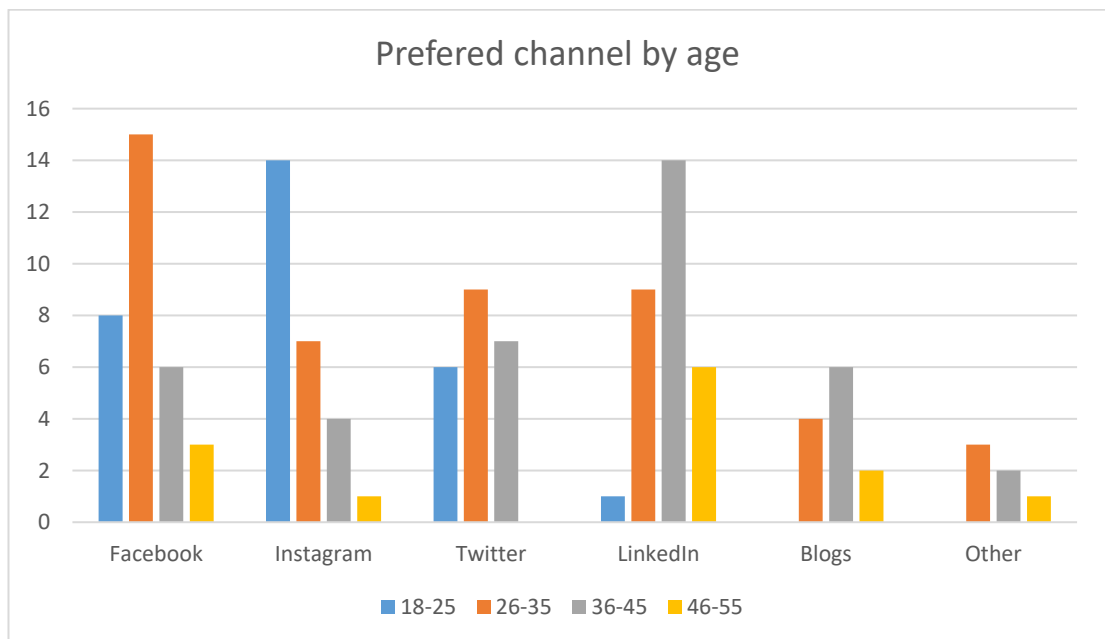

Figure 19. Preferred channel by age

Preferred channel by age is an important aspect to investigate as it gives a general con-scious of what age groups tend to gravitate towards different channels. This data is based on the survey conducted for this research and could give different results to a larger data group. It is visible that the most influential channels, Facebook and Instagram, are more preferred by the younger demographics. When developing this research further, this may be a strong demographic to target when looking at the specific influence with these chan-nels. The further down I get with the demographic results, Facebook and Instagram tend to fall behind and other platforms such as LinkedIn, Blogs and other start to catch up. Alt-hough, having a sample size of only 128, the question can be raised if it is specifically the age that affects consumers' behaviour online, or if its more correlated with the social me-dia preference, and what the users are exposed to.
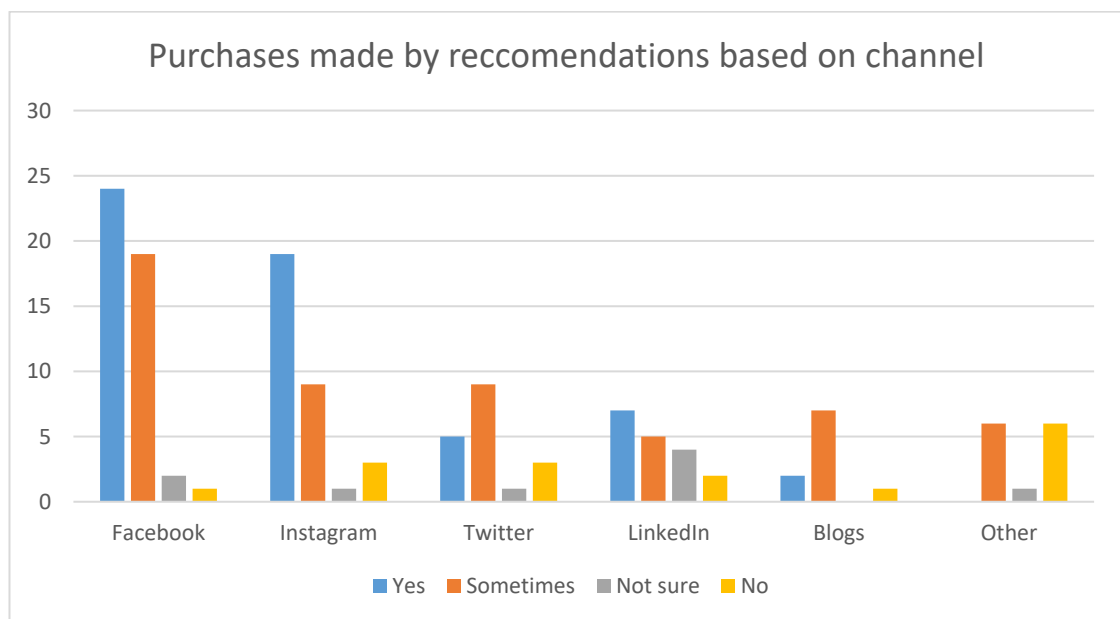

Figure 20. Purchases made by recommendations based on channel

Purchases made by recommendations, based on social media channel preferences is an-other important aspect to investigate. Comparing the variables of channels and purchases allows for connections to be made concerning the most efficient channels. Following the above results in the data, it is visible that Facebook and Instagram perform well in pur-chasing power. Compared to the 'preferred channel by age', the data matches and a trend can be seen developing. Moreover, it is hard to pinpoint the exact cause of the above mention graph, when looking at channel specifics, I can draw some conclusions. When taking into consideration the social media comparison table from the framework, both channels Facebook and Instagram performed well in terms of target audience, reach and overall social media marketing use. In the end, many factors can play into the perfor-mance of a channel. For example, aspects such as if the channels are designed more for

attracting customers to the ads, the demographics of the survey favoured the channels more or if they are overall the most influential when it comes to consumer decision making.
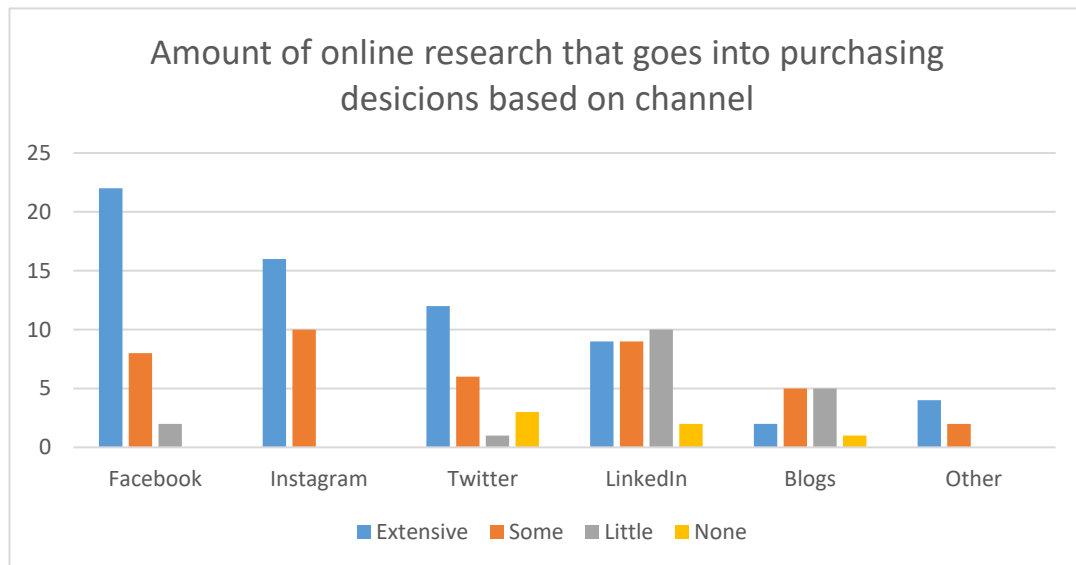

Figure 21. Amount of online research that goes into purchasing decisions based on channel

To find more evidence that Facebook, and Instagram are the most influential channels when it comes to consumer decision making, it is important to look at how consumers use these channels when gathering information on a product or service. From the graph, I can see that the majority of respondents that use 'extensive' research when making purchase decisions favour Facebook and Instagram. Going back to the social media platform comparison table, this could be based on the advantages presented. At the very least, for companies wishing to gain influence over a larger audience, Facebook and Instagram seem to be the most successful channels. It is important to note that other platforms may still have significant influence over their target audience, but when aiming for overall influence, it is clear what the top platforms are.

Overall, the comparison charts played a strong role in aiding with the final results of this thesis paper. Gaging these comparisons allowed for trends to be noted that were not otherwise seen in the survey data. From these comparisons, I was able to see that respondents that answered the survey in a way that shows influence, preferred Facebook or Instagram as their primary social media platform. When cross analysing the data, I can see that LinkedIn, although popular, did not achieve the greatest results. Facebook and Instagram fared much better.

Additional results that are notable from this research is the impact demographic components such as age and location can play on consumer influence. From my survey results, tracking the data sets became a crucial component when backing up my hypothesis. To further these findings, other studies that focused on the impact of demographics were looked at. A study done by Deloitte (2015) shows how social media significantly influences millennials. When beginning the research, demographics was an area of interest as it was probable that it would have an effect on the end results. Another study by Forbes (2013), states that consumers are making buying decisions directly from recommendations they find in social media. The main factor is that these recommendations are based off users that are considered 'peers' and not those who are influencers or believed to be paid.

Concluding my findings, Facebook and Instagram are the most effective social media platforms for influencing consumers. Therefore, I fail to reject my hypothesis, and conclude this discussion.

4.2 Trustworthiness and Ethical viewpoints

In this section, I will be covering the trustworthiness and ethical viewpoints of my research. Aspects that will be investigated are the limitations of the studies, and any positive and negative aspects associated with how the research was carried out. Although I feel like I made good use of my resources and networks, all data should be questioned, and ethical viewpoints examined to help improve future endeavours.

Looking at the limitations of this study, there are many factors to be analysed. The first point to be made here is the location of the survey group. As mentioned before, the survey respondents were only located in Finland. Doing this research for a broader demographic and bringing in different cultures could have made a considerable difference. When looking back at the study by Deloitte (2015), a large portion of U.S. and Hispanic consumers showed higher influence than the survey results I gathered in Finland. Although this could have just came down to the specific sample group, having a larger pool of respondents always benefits the result. In the end, both data sets reached similar conclusions but ultimately bringing in more research could potentially give different results and shine some light on any inconsistencies in the data. Furthermore, the sample size of the data needs to be addressed. For the scope of this research report, I felt 128 respondents to be satisfactory. That being said, it still tends to be a small sample size. Almost always, the larger the data that is required, the more credible the data is. To back up the data, other research was looked at regarding the influence of social media. When comparing my results to other researches, there are minor discrepancies and the main results lead to similar conclusions. Another factor presented to strengthen the data was the tracking of respondents.

Doing so, allowed me to create my comparison graphs and make crucial connections between the questions at hand. An example of this is the connections made by looking at the different demographics in relation to their preferred social media platforms, furthering my end results.

Next, I would like to delve into the ethical viewpoints of this research. To begin, all respondents used in this research chose to voluntary. The survey was allocated to respondents via public means and was completed through their own intent. When giving the respondents the option to take the survey, I stated what the survey will be used for and the result I ended to create. Although each participant was separately tracked, no names were asked for during the survey and all respondents remain anonymous. In my opinion, there was no negative impact on respondents, and they all participated knowing what was taking place. To further help with the ethics of this research, I could allow respondents to see the final survey results, as well as having access to the final research report if they wanted.

4.3   Development, ideas, and suggestions

The following section will focus on the development, ideas, and suggestions that have come from this research report. I will be looking at the main takeaways from the research I have conducted, as well as drawing ideas from other articles written on the subject.

To begin, I would like to discuss the development of future research on this subject. As my work focused primarily on the most common social media platforms, I would like to further this research and go more in depth looking at different social media platforms. Doing this, I believe could uncover different aspects of the consumer decision making journey that may not have been seen with the chosen platforms. While bringing in additional platforms, I would also like to put more of an emphasis on specific platform performance in different areas. An example of this could be how Twitter performs within the food service industry. I believe making connections would be valuable when seeing where exactly the different platforms excel, allowing companies to create a more dynamic social media plan. Although in my research I touched upon the relationship between different demographics and social media platforms, I feel this is also an area that could benefit from further analysis. Another idea that could help in benefitting this research would have been to delve deeper in my follow ups. Making the connections between participants and survey results was effective but going even deeper could have helped with the conclusions. A way of doing this may have been by looking at any interesting points, or discrepancies in the data, and attempting to follow up with that respondent and conduct a more qualitative based interview. These insights would have helped lead to deeper understanding of the answers

given. In General, I feel that the research is satisfactory to this paper. Saying that, it would have been interesting to see more in-depth responses done in an interview format. Offering insights into the minds of the respondents and getting an understanding why they behave as they do as well as why they answered as they did. To add to this, I could also go back and conduct a similar survey or interview again, seeing if participants social media preferences or buying behaviour have changed. A suggestion for this research report in the future would be to use a commissioning company to carry out the research for. By doing this it would grant access to their social media platforms, allowing for access to their analytical data. Tracking this data would help to see what ads and platforms are done well, what users have clicked on, and at the end see what these actions have ultimately led to. Lastly, as mentioned previously, I would like to gather results from different regions to expand the data. From my past experiences and work placements, I have business connections and networks within the US. Being able to acquire data from this region would allow me to do some cross-sectional comparisons to see if the data is similar or if there are any notable discrepancies.

4.4   Thesis evaluation

Next, I will give a general evaluation of my thesis. I will cover my research goals, questions and hypothesis and then begin to go through each section, giving my opinion on how I faired in these areas. At the end, I will give an overall analysis and reasoning how I got there.

I will be beginning by looking at my research question. When starting my thesis, the research question was an area where I struggled. My initial idea ended up being too broad and drawing any direct conclusions from it deemed to be a challenge. After receiving feedback, I was met with the same problem and needed to make changes. For this I began to restructure my idea into something more deliverable and achievable with the data I had at hand. The final research question I came to, was more pin pointed and made coming to direct results an easier task. Although there is always room for improvement, I was content with this research question and continued to progress. With the change of my research question, came change to my hypothesis. As before, what I was trying to determine seemed to be too broad and in general hard to achieve. After restricting my hypothesis, I came to a final result that ended up focusing on specific components of my research.

In regard to framework, I feel I did a good job gathering sources for both aspects of my research paper, social media and consumer behaviour. It is possible I could have gone more in depth at certain parts, and also made some areas shorter, but overall, I felt good about this section. Section that could have been added would be sources that focused

more on consumer behaviour relative to social media. In general, it may have been possible to combine certain parts and give the framework a better flow.

Moving onto the empirical part, I felt like I had solid quantitative data and received good results. Similar to the framework, some parts may have been able to be combined but overall, the length was satisfactory when reaching my results. It would have been nice to add some qualitative data in the form of interviews, but for my specific objectives the survey served me well. A beneficial tool added to my empirical section was the Hayes process network model. This was crucial when comparing the social platforms, the results and how they could be beneficial. In the discussion section, I felt I was able to come to concrete conclusions and successfully analyse my data. Bringing in outside research aided in the overall reliability of my research and backed up any findings I came to. If I were to do this thesis again, I would have spent more time on the planning portion. Making sure my research questions and objectives were stronger at first, may have helped the rest of the process go smoother.

4.5 Learning experience

Overall conducting this research on 'which social media platforms influence consumer behaviour the most?', has been a beneficial learning experience. I learned fundamental work practices, theory behind my subject and gained understanding about the topic I have chosen. For this section, I will go into the specifics of what I learned, and the main takeaways I have received from doing this thesis.

First, I would like to look at the framework section of this report. To complete this research, the two main sections I needed to research for my framework were focused on social media and consumer behaviour. When looking at the social media aspect of this framework, I learned how social media affected consumers as well as what are the major social media platforms and their strengths and weakness. From the consumer behaviour section, I learned a lot about how consumers make decisions, the buying journey and about the different ways consumers make decisions. This aspect of the research was important for me to learn as they will be beneficial to me for future jobs.

Next, going into the empirical section, I learned about a tool to analyse social media for consumers, the Hayes process network model. This model was useful for me for analysing the channels after my data had been collected. This is a useful tool, and I can see myself using it in the future. Lastly, doing this research, I felt like I advanced myself a lot when it came to data analysis. This is something I have done in my previous studies, but for this report I was able to incorporate all my results and analyse different cross aspects.

The biggest take away for me doing this thesis is that change is acceptable, and it is fine to start over. During the course of this thesis, many ideas seemed fine at first but needed to be re-worked or even done over completely. Starting major parts over can be discouraging and a daunting task, but in the end being able to accept this and make the change can lead to a greater final product.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Thesis structure

Cover page, abstract, table of contents
Introduction − General introduction − Objectives, (research) problem setting, delimitation − Structure
Theoretical part − Social media − Consumer decision making
Empirical part − Methods − Data − Hayes process model
Discussion − Overview of results − Trustworthiness and Ethical viewpoints − Development, ideas and suggestions − Thesis evaluation − Learning experience
References
Appendices − Survey

Appendix 2. Survey

1. What is your age?
   - o 18-25
   - o 26-35
   - o 36-45
   - o 46-55
2. Nationality?
   - o Finnish
   - o Swedish
   - o Russian
   - o Other
3. Gender?
   - o Male
   - o Female
   - o Other
4. How often do you use social media?
   - o Very often
   - o Often
   - o Not often
   - o Never
5. How often do you make online purchases?
   - o Very often
   - o Often
   - o Not often

o Never

6. What social platforms do you currently use?
   o Facebook
   o Instagram
   o Twitter
   o LinkedIn
   o Blogs
   o Other

7. Do you consider social media ads when making a purchase?
   o Very often
   o Often
   o Not often
   o Never

8. Have any of your recent purchases been influenced by online media?
   o Yes
   o Not sure
   o No

9. Do you utilize product service reviews on online platforms?
   o Yes
   o Sometimes
   o Not sure
   o No

10. How likely are you to click on online ads?
    o Very likely
    o Likely
    o Not likely

11. Would you likely make a purchase off a friend's recommendation?
    o Yes
    o Sometimes
    o Not sure
    o No

12. How much online research goes into your purchasing decisions?
    o Extensive
    o Some
    o Little
    o None

13. Have you ever been swayed by online ads?
    o Yes
    o Maybe
    o No