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The rise of social media marketing and its impact on consumer purchasing behavior in sports apparel

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Title of publication The rise of social media marketing and its impact on consumer purchasing behavior in sports apparel		
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Abstract The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of social media marketing on consumer behavior in sports apparel. The objectives of this study were to go through the history of Instagram and TikTok, to determine the impact of social media on consumer behavior, and to offer recommendations to sports apparel companies on how to use or improve their social media marketing strategies The thesis included a survey with questions regarding consumer behavior. Multiple-choice questions, rating scale questions, and open-ended questions were included. The responses helped the author in determining how seriously people take social media advertisements and whether or not they have an effect on them. The research was conducted quantitatively, and the results were quite significant. The survey was answered by 74 participants, and the conclusion reached is that social media has an impact on consumer behavior. In terms of survey results analysis, the author offered recommendations to sports apparel brands and retail managers in general who would want to use social media to increase revenue growth. In conclusion, the author was able to provide information to sports apparel companies or any type of company on whether it is advantageous, to use social media for promotion, and if so, which platforms would be the best.		
Keywords Digital marketing, social media, sports apparel, fitness industry, influencers, ambassadors, online branding, consumer behavior, Instagram, TikTok		

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION.....	4
2 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES	6
3 MARKETING COMMUNICATION.....	7
3.1 Thesis framework.....	7
3.2 Social media	7
3.3 Instagram.....	8
3.4 TikTok.....	10
3.5 Current trends in social media.....	11
3.6 Social media marketing	12
3.7 Example of social media marketing strategy: Nike	13
3.8 Influencer marketing	14
3.8.1 Risks of influencer marketing.....	16
3.8.2 Negative effects of influencer marketing	17
3.9 Word of mouth.....	17
4 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR.....	18
4.1 Factors influencing consumer behavior	18
4.2 Consumer decision-making process	19
4.3 Consumer behavior in sports apparel.....	21
5 RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION	22
5.1 Research design	22
5.2 Data collection.....	22
5.3 Survey results	24
5.4 Analysis and recommendations.....	32
6 DISCUSSION	34
6.1 Main conclusions	34
6.2 Research limitations	35
6.3 Suggestions for further research.....	36

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

1 INTRODUCTION

Social media is a new marketing method for businesses and consumers. Brands have the opportunity to reach their target audiences and communicate with their customers in an online environment that is affordable and at the same time very effective (Hayes, 2021). Social media marketing is a term that is used in a variety of contexts, and a basic understanding of it is necessary. The internet is a daily habit for most people. However, the number of people who "surf" is increasing daily. Most importantly, the majority of consumers now search, compare and buy online products and services. Digital marketing is a never-ending process of analyzing and monitoring customers in order to satisfy their needs. Nowadays, traditional marketing techniques are no longer as effective as digital marketing, which is rapidly evolving. Digital Marketing is applied electronically and online. This means that brands are much more likely to reach customers through email, videos, social media and search engines. Online content and marketing have become so common that consumers rely heavily on it to gain knowledge about products and services (LYFE Marketing, 2019).

The internet is today's most recent and advanced form of global communication. People have discovered and invented new ways to share knowledge and ideas with extreme speed over the last century, thanks to the internet's rapid growth. Internet-based digital communication involves not only the exchange of information between users, but also the delivery of information to a wide audience.

Millions of users are spending an increasing amount of time on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok daily. As a result, businesses with a presence on social media channels, where its users' internet and prospective customers spend more time, can make significant contributions to the growth of the business.

Social media contributes to the international market and beyond because it is now an integral part of the digital market and is possibly the primary means of promotion. The adoption of social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok has greatly occupied businesses, which are now attempting to use the internet as an easy-to-use tool for advertising. Entrepreneurs now have the potential to address a specific consumer audience based on their preferences. Every business has as a priority to inform consumers about the products and services that are available through a marketing element, which is none other than advertising which is achieved more effectively and economically with social media. Besides that, social media has many benefits that are mentioned in this paper, and if brands use them properly, will significantly reduce their disadvantages. In general, there is a need to invest in advertising, and increasing traffic to a website or advertising on it results in real economic benefit.

The sports apparel industry has clearly grown in recent years, as consumers continue to spend a significant amount of time exercising at the gym or at home. Initially, sports apparel was mostly worn by athletes, but it has since become popular among regular gym-goers and other non-athletes (Bringé, 2021). Contributing factors to the growth of the sports apparel market include increased health awareness and the adoption of fitness activities. The sports apparel industry spends a lot of money on advertising with the help of famous influencers and celebrities, which has a big impact on getting individuals to exercise. Besides that, the collaborative effort of athletes with sports apparel brands can convince consumers to purchase activewear. Therefore, innovative marketing and business strategies are expected to drive market growth (Dataintel, 2019).

The topic of the thesis is the rise of social media in marketing and its impact on consumer purchasing behavior in sports apparel. This topic is beneficial to companies operating in consumer markets. Today, social media has become a key marketing channel for brands and its impact on them is significant. Understanding how social media strategies impact brand equity and the image is critical for organizations so that resources can be allocated appropriately.

2 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of social media marketing on consumer behavior in sports apparel. The objectives of this study were:

1. To describe the history of Instagram and TikTok
2. To determine the impact of social media on consumer behaviour
3. To offer recommendations to sports apparel companies on how to use or improve their social media marketing strategies

The thesis included a survey with questions regarding consumer behavior. Multiple-choice questions, rating scale questions, and open-ended questions were included. The responses helped the author in determining how seriously people take social media advertisements and whether or not they have an effect on them. In terms of survey results analysis, the author offered recommendations to sports apparel brands and everyone else who would want to use social media to increase revenue growth.

The author decided to concentrate on Instagram and TikTok since they are two of the most popular social media platforms. TikTok is the newest platform and it is rapidly evolving, while Instagram is the most important and influential social media channel for influencer marketing.

3 MARKETING COMMUNICATION

3.1 Thesis framework

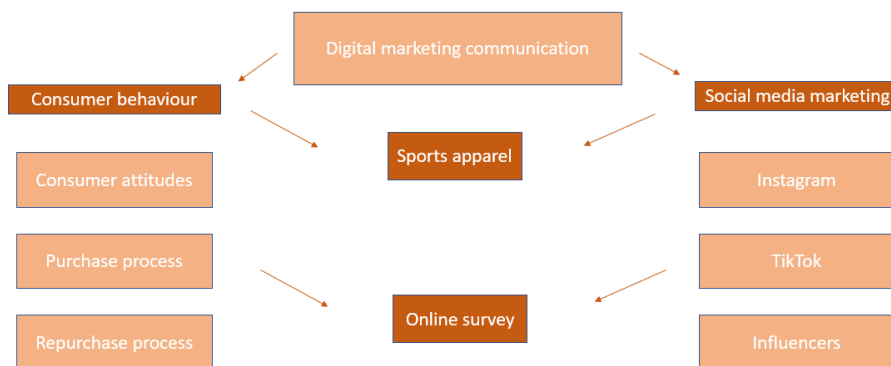


Figure 1 Thesis framework

Figure 1 above shows the thesis framework. This framework presents the core concepts of the theoretical part and the core elements of the practical part of the process. Within the following chapters, the study expects to explain the impact and interaction of each of those concepts.

The thesis' main focus is on social media marketing in the sports apparel industry and how it can impact consumer behavior. An online survey will be used to collect important data in order to better understand how social media users are affected.

3.2 Social media

Social media is a computer-based technology that allows the exchange of ideas and opinions, content sharing, and collaboration through digital platforms (Lutkevick, 2020). Social media platforms are available to everyone who has internet access and a smartphone or computer. It has become a dominant part of the internet in recent years, so most businesses are now growing and implementing marketing strategies, considering that they will have a significant influence on consumers and the general public. The social media community is now a global phenomenon that allows businesses to communicate with their customers in a highly interactive manner. More

than 3.8 billion people around the world are active social media users (Dollarhide, 2021). It is an efficient way for people to communicate and interact with friends and family while sharing photos and videos. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter are the most used apps today. This field is changing and evolving day by day with new applications such as TikTok. Social media users have direct access to international news and information sources from around the world. From their presence on social networks, it is possible to find information and photographic material in the international media in a short time.

3.3 Instagram

Instagram is a free social media platform built especially for sharing pictures and videos. It is the most popular social media app among consumers, content creators, and digital marketers (Barker, 2021). It was created in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger (Instagram, 2021). In the beginning, it was only available on Apple iPhone but in 2012 it became also available for Android (Stegner, 2021). From the year 2012, Facebook has become the parent company of Instagram. Like most social media apps, on Instagram people can follow as many users as possible, celebrities, companies, brands, and interact with them by liking and commenting on their content. In addition, Instagram supports stories, direct messaging, IGVT for longer videos, and Reels for shorter clips (Stegner, 2021).

Instagram Shopping is a collection of features that allow users to purchase photos and videos. It provides a company with an interactive shopfront where consumers can explore one's best quality items (Instagram, 2021). Instagram Shopping includes:

- A resizable shopfront that allows customers to buy directly from business profiles
- Shopping tags that feature products from the company's catalogue and direct customers to buy those products from their website or app
- An explore tab that allows consumers to browse tagged shopping content from brands and designers

- A group of products that businesses can curate for their store to help customers find the products they want
- A product-focused page that displays pertinent information about a product or service, such as pricing and product descriptions
- Product-tagging advertisements, businesses can increase the reach of their shopping content by boosting new or existing shopping tagging advertisements.

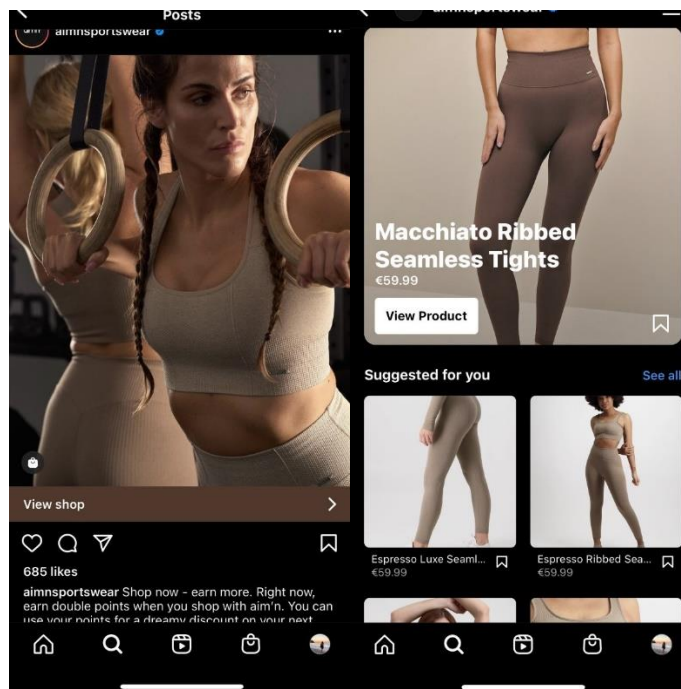


Figure 2. Example of Instagram Shopping feature

In general, this photo-sharing app is free and a tool for individuals and businesses who want to grow while reaching new customers. By creating a professional account, users can see the insights and adapt to new marketing methods if the traffic is not as they expected. Instagram began as a simple photo filter application but has since evolved into a social platform and branding tool (Daniel, 2021). A big disadvantage of Instagram is that it does not provide a traditional desktop program, so it is only available on devices such as smartphones and tablets.

3.4 TikTok

In 2018, a Chinese company named ByteDance became the owner of the Musical.ly app and rebranded it as TikTok (Geysler, 2021), a free video-creating application that allows users to create three-minute short videos. According to Wallaroo (2022), the app is available in 150 countries, and it has over 1 billion active users. In June of 2020, it was downloaded 87 million times. Now, TikTok is considered one of the most popular social media platforms where people can create, share and discover. Lip-syncing, comedy, dancing challenges, and live streaming are some of the features of the platform. Users of the TikTok app get to choose from a plethora of background music tracks and add unique effects and filters. The flexibility to post about anything is TikTok's most fascinating feature. Every topic is accessible, including fitness, travel, music, art, and choreography. Nowadays, educational, motivational, and business-oriented content is on the rise, while entertainment appears to be a major attraction (Daniel, 2021).

TikTok allows its users to speed up or slow down the videos and add different transition styles. Moreover, it allows people to collaborate with other users to create content in a variety of ways. TikTok provides stitch and duet options, enabling creators to use each other's content and team up to create fun videos.

As it develops, the platform attracts the attention of both brands and celebrities. The goal of brands is to create videos that catch the attention of viewers and tempt them to buy their product or service. It is also an excellent opportunity for small businesses to promote their goods. Many products, for example, have gone viral, including TikTok leggings, galaxy projectors, and many beauty care products from different brands.

According to a new forecast, TikTok will be the world's third-largest social media platform. Insider Intelligence (formerly known as eMarketer), forecasts that TikTok will reach 755 million active monthly users during 2022, after growing by almost 60 % in 2020 and 41% in 2021 during its first forecast on TikTok's global install base (Perez, 2021). TikTok appears to be especially popular with younger people, with its greatest impact being between the ages of 16 and 25, and nearly half of its users being

under 30. If a company is also addressing a young audience, the brand must have a dynamic presence on the platform (Wallaroo, 2022).

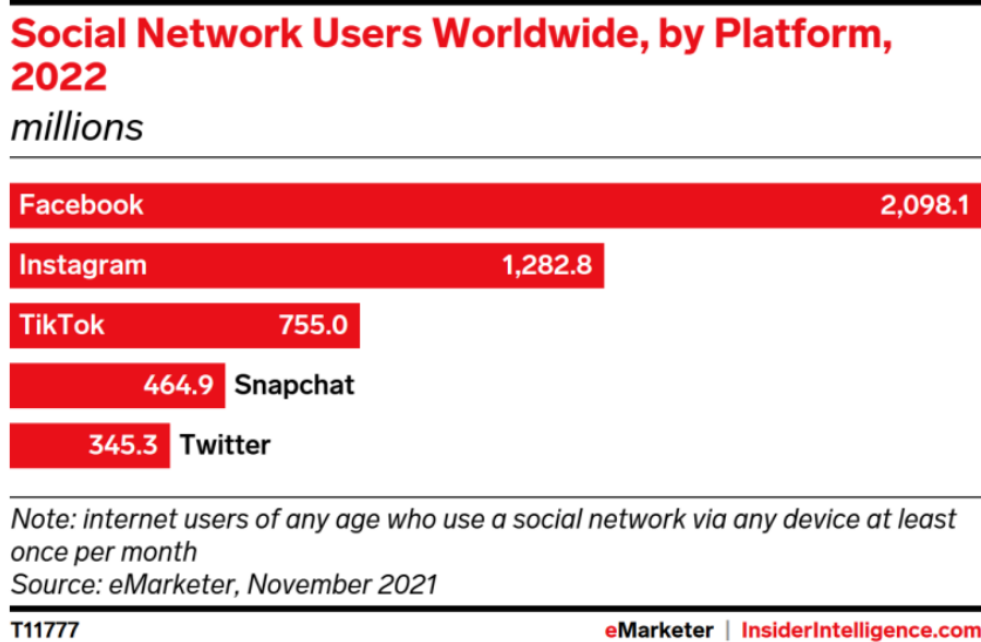


Figure 3. TikTok growth forecast 2022 (Perez, 2021)

TikTok recently announced a new partnership with IPG Mediabrands, where both parties will establish a series of new programs to link IPG's customer base with TikTok sponsorship opportunities. The platform will also hold regular "Creator Camps" where influencers will provide consulting services to brands and businesses. Experts have estimated that it will take some time before TikTok's measurement tools can cover its effectiveness. For the time being, companies will have to invest more in factors such as engaging users and developing a user community through influencers or otherwise (TikTok Newsroom, 2021).

3.5 Current trends in social media

When social networks upgrade and improve their algorithms, social media trends change. These rapid changes present an entirely new set of challenges for organizations and social media marketers, who must constantly evaluate and adjust

their current strategies to include new forms of content. Marketers must constantly monitor the latest trends shaping the future of social media and adjust their strategies accordingly (Zote, 2021).

During the global health crisis of 2020, many companies went online to maintain social distance and avoid the spread of COVID-19. Online platforms are used for business meetings and job interviews. The use of live streaming services on social media is also increasing (Zote, 2021). Instagram and TikTok saw a massive rise in live streaming from individuals and companies. It is an effective way for brands to reach their customers and as it continues gaining popularity, it should be adopted for every company as social media marketing strategy.

Augmented reality (AR) is an emerging technology that has a significant impact on social media applications. Augmented reality filters are rapidly becoming a popular way for brands to promote new products and services while increasing social media fan activity. This keeps the viewers engaged, and with the right promotion, it may even help businesses attract new customers (Zote, 2021). Augmented reality may be used to convince people to purchase items. In 2019, Instagram launched shopping options that allow people to try on things such as clothes and accessories by using their phone cameras. TikTok has also adopted similar features. This kind of effect is expected to grow in demand and will be a useful marketing tool and will help companies to stand out.

In general, customers expect businesses to be more authentic. This involves maintaining the authenticity and honesty of the goods and operations. Honesty is undoubtedly the key to gaining trust.

3.6 Social media marketing

Identification of needs and business problems are required for marketing strategy. The goal is to grow the company's sales. In addition to the needs of the business, the needs of the customer must be identified. These are relevant to all types of marketing, whether social or traditional. The use of social media and social networks to sell a

company's products and services is referred to as social media marketing. Businesses can use social media marketing to connect with existing clients and attract new ones. Moreover, they can keep a track of their activities with social media marketing's data analytics tools (Schmitt, 2021). Businesses can use a variety of techniques and methods to advertise their content and get users to interact with it. The most common platform which is used for marketing purposes is Instagram which is one of many social media platforms that allow users to share specific data such as location, age, and personal information permitting advertisers to target their messages to what users would be most willing to respond to (Schmitt, 2021).

3.7 Example of social media marketing strategy: Nike

There are many famous sports brands who have created successful social media marketing campaigns and they could set as a good example for other companies. Nike is a great example of this. Nike holds multiple profiles across all social media platforms. Some of these pages include Nike Football, Nike Woman, Nike Training, and Nike Running. Communication includes elements such as simple, powerful slogans and emotional storytelling. Nike does not make a lot of posts and their content is insightful and intriguing. The brand creates video content on a regular basis and has three YouTube channels: Nike, Nike Football, and Nike skateboarding. Nike has long sponsored and collaborated with the world's most famous athletes, including Cristiano Ronald, Russell Wilson, Rafael Nadal and Tiger Woods and this leads to great profits (Katarzyna, 2022).

Nike has an impressive and unstoppably increasing number of followers around the world. Even though the brand has a large audience on social media, maintaining a high engagement rate without investing in paid advertisements is challenging. Nike has a large number of ambassadors who promote their products on their personal social media channels. Building brand awareness and cooperating with ambassadors is an excellent way to win with algorithms. It is always worthwhile to investigate the new features that social media platforms have to offer. Nike's Reels on Instagram has millions of followers (Katarzyna, 2022).

TikTok is responsible for many of the most popular mentions. However, not from Nike's main account. Instead, from consumers who mention their products. A simple video about a gym outfit, for example, received 4,2 million views and over 470k comments (Katarzyna, 2022).

Furthermore, Nike has an impact on the world of sports. Instead of simply selling products, it promotes a healthy lifestyle and encourages people to participate in everyday activities with the famous hashtag #JustDoIt.

3.8 Influencer marketing

A collaboration between a brand and an influencer/ambassador is known as influencer marketing. Through multiple social channels such as Instagram and TikTok, the influencers promote the brand's service or product which they usually have experience with (Mathew, 2021). Influence marketing allows brands to locate and advertise directly to their target audience. Companies choose the influencers they want to cooperate with according to their number of followers and insights. There are different types of influencers starting with mega-influencers who have millions of followers due to their celebrity status, macro-influencers with 500.000 – 1 million followers, micro-influencers with few thousand followers, and last, nano-influencers with less than 1k followers (Sanders, 2021). Of course, it also depends on the size of the budget the company has. An influencer with millions of followers would need a lot of money contrary to a nano-influencer who could advertise a product for a minimal fee. The figure below shows possible influencer pricing on Instagram and TikTok.

Instagram:

- **Nano-influencers:** \$10–\$100 per post
- Micro-influencers: \$100–\$500 per post
- Mid-tier influencers: \$500–\$5,000 per post
- Macro-influencers: \$5,000–\$10,000 per post
- Mega-influencers: \$10,000+ per post
- Celebrities: Varies, but \$1+ million isn't unheard of

Figure 4. Instagram average payment (Geyser, Influencer Rates: How Much do Influencers Really Cost in 2022?, 2021)

TikTok

- **Nano-influencers:** \$5–\$25 per post
- Micro-influencers: \$25–\$125 per post
- Mid-tier influencers: \$125–\$1,250 per post
- Macro-influencers: \$1,250–\$2,500 per post
- Mega-influencers: \$2,500+ per post

Figure 5. TikTok average payment (Geyser, Influencer Rates: How Much do Influencers Really Cost in 2022?, 2021)

In sports apparel industry, businesses must work hard to differentiate themselves from their competitors. The most efficient way to accomplish this is to establish a strong social media strategy. The cooperation with influencers can help to boost brand online visibility, attracting a broader variety of consumers and increasing revenues. Influencers are a great way to get people to notice the company's new lines of clothes or shoes because they already have a large following of people who trust their product reviews and recommendations. Besides that, by picking the correct influencer (bodybuilder, tennis player, personal trainer) companies can locate their target market with pinpoint accuracy which is far more effective than basic ads (Bellanger, 2019).

For sports fashion consumers, influencers represent a major achievement of fitness, wellness and lifestyle goals (Chan, 2022). Influencer marketing is a powerful, effective marketing strategy that gives quick results, and many sports apparel brands believe it will keep growing significantly in the upcoming years. It also empowers sports brands to build a reputation in the sports community at a low cost and in a short period of time (Bellanger, 2019).

Since athletes are seeking more diverse sources of activity and motivation than gym, social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are playing a much more crucial role as a source of motivation and guidance. Consumers in sports fashion and fitness cultures do not just align themselves based on the goods they buy. Rather, they establish close communities focused on a specific interest and exchange information, give support and guidance with one another (Chan, 2022).

3.8.1 Risks of influencer marketing

As the popularity of influencer marketing has increased, so has the number of fake influencers, known as bots. Individuals develop collaborations with businesses to promote themselves and become real influencers. Some influencers collaborate with multiple brands at the same time, which can lead to competition between all these brands. Consumers can recognize when influencers create inauthentic and misleading content, and they are tired of it. This can lead to a loss of legitimacy for both the brand and the influencer (Iurillo, 2019).

Companies must invest significant time and resources in evaluating influencers and their social media accounts to determine their legitimacy. Companies should partner with influencers who have used and liked their product or service, with influencers who have authentic connections to their brand (Iurillo, 2019). Moreover, some employees may be able to become social media influencers for the company they work for. Employers can encourage their employees to share the brand on social media to promote it within their networks by giving them a small salary raise (Barker, 2021).

3.8.2 Negative effects of influencer marketing

The major source of toxicity on Instagram is the social pressure and intimidation that young girls experience as a result of using the social network, issues that are inextricably linked to the fact that social networks are essentially popularity contests. Young adults are more vulnerable and susceptible to adult influence. As a result, while shaping their character, they accept a plethora of patterns and lifestyles that have a direct impact on them. Considering the nature of Instagram, which is entirely based on images, these templates have the surface as their main feature, necessitating the need to imitate those who receive many likes and followers. When this imitation fails, young adults feel unworthy, and their self-esteem suffers (WSJ, 2021).

Instagram AR filters and editing tools make women and girls believe that their bodies are not beautiful and that they require editing. Many people tend to use filters with plump lips and raised cheekbones to share photos with their followers, but there are many who strongly disagree with these actions. Those who do not agree with the trend argue that such AR filters are deceptive, resulting in elusive beauty patterns that can have a negative impact on the psychology of users, particularly young people. Back in 2019, Instagram announced that will ban all augmented reality filters that promote cosmetic surgery. However, these filters are still available (BBC, 2019).

Although it appears that Instagram is taking steps to make it a safe and positive environment for its minor users (note that anyone over the age of 13 can register on Instagram or lie about being over the age of 13), in recent years, more and more people believe that its use (as well as other social networks) should be avoided by children and young adults.

3.9 Word of mouth

The oldest mode of communication is word of mouth. Marketers have adopted this strategy to advertise their products and services, in which consumers share information about a product or service. As an informal Internet-based communication where all consumers are exposed to the social media innovations that allow, electronic word of

mouth has surpassed traditional word of mouth. Today, consumers can share product information, and this information is available to both active and passive consumers globally. Consumers' use of technology can have positive and negative effects on a business, and if bad publicity about a product or service grows uncontrollable, a business may not be able to handle it. From purchase decisions to post-purchase decision behavior, buyers are affected by the social media updates such as dissatisfaction comments on ratings and reviews (Reyes, 2020).

4 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

4.1 Factors influencing consumer behavior

In 2022, social media is considered a key factor in consumer socialization. Consumers are encouraged to socialize in these online communities through the development of relationships and interactions between known and unknown individuals. The purchasing public appears to reject traditional sources such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines. Consumers are now demanding easy access to information about product and services, and as a result, social media is regarded as the more convenient option.

The process of people making decisions about what they buy, want, need about a product, service, or brand is referred to as consumer behavior. For companies, understanding consumer behavior is important for forecasting how potential customers will react to a new product or service (Schofield, 2016).

To fully comprehend how consumer behavior impacts marketing, it is critical to first comprehend the three factors that influence consumer behavior: psychological, personal, and social. Consumers are being affected by several problems that are different from their thought processes. Psychological aspects can include a person's attitude, the perspective of a need, capacity to acquire or interpret concepts, and ability

to learn or understand concepts. A person's attitudes and perceptions impact how they react to a marketing message. As a result, marketers must consider these psychological traits when designing ads to guarantee that they appeal to their key audience (Schofield, 2016).

Personal factors are traits that are particular to a person and may not be shared by others in the same group. A person's decision-making process, specific habits and hobbies, and perspectives are all examples of these attributes. Age, gender, background, culture, and other personal difficulties all play a role when it comes to personal factors (Schofield, 2016).

Because social factors are so different, evaluating them when developing marketing strategies can be challenging. Family, socializing, work or school communities, or any group of individuals with whom a person interacts are all examples of social influencers. It can also refer to a person's socioeconomic position, including income, living conditions, and educational achievement. Because social factors are so varied, evaluating them when building marketing strategies can be tricky (Schofield, 2016).

4.2 Consumer decision-making process

External environmental elements have an impact on the decision-making process, and these are referred as environmental influences. The environment has an impact on the consumer decision-making process since it forms the consumer's personal influence from the early stages of data search as well as providing as a source of information that will influence the overall decision-making process. Despite the environment assisting the consumer in making a purchase decision, their individual characteristics and influences affect the type of choices that they will make in the final moment, as they will be capable of conducting an international comparison. Knowledge, consumer resources, inspiration, awareness, character, and beliefs are all examples of individual differences and influences (Reyes, 2020. chapter 3).

Psychological factors enable the consumer to undertake both information search and alternative evaluation as they interact in data processing, which may consequence in a decision to purchase, which leads to a learning stage and specifies whether the individual will continue to purchase as they enter the post-purchase stage. Learning, behavioral changes, behavior, and data processing are all examples of external factors (Reyes, 2020. chapter 3).

The online environment has a significant effect on the consumer decision-making process as it can provoke the problem identification stage through a consumer's online interactions and impact the entire process up until the post-purchase stage by providing both search process, evaluating alternatives, and purchasing options. The online environment also allows for social interactions, which might also affect a consumer's final purchase decision. Website quality, experience and satisfaction are examples of online environmental aspects (Reyes, 2020. chapter 3).

Before reaching the market's end point, consumers go through a five-stage decision-making process. The recognition of necessity is the first step in the decision-making model. The consumer is in a position to fill in the gaps that appear to be missing and then begins to search for information in the second phase. That is, when looking for possible stores/online websites that the product might be sold. The third stage is the alternative evaluation. After locating the places where the specific product is sold, the consumer compares the prices, quality of product, cost of shipping, and any other detail that will affect the final decision. The fourth stage is the purchase decision and the purchase itself, while the fifth and final stage is post-purchase behavior where the consumer evaluates whether it was the right decision selecting that product over another alternative (Nicasio, 2022).

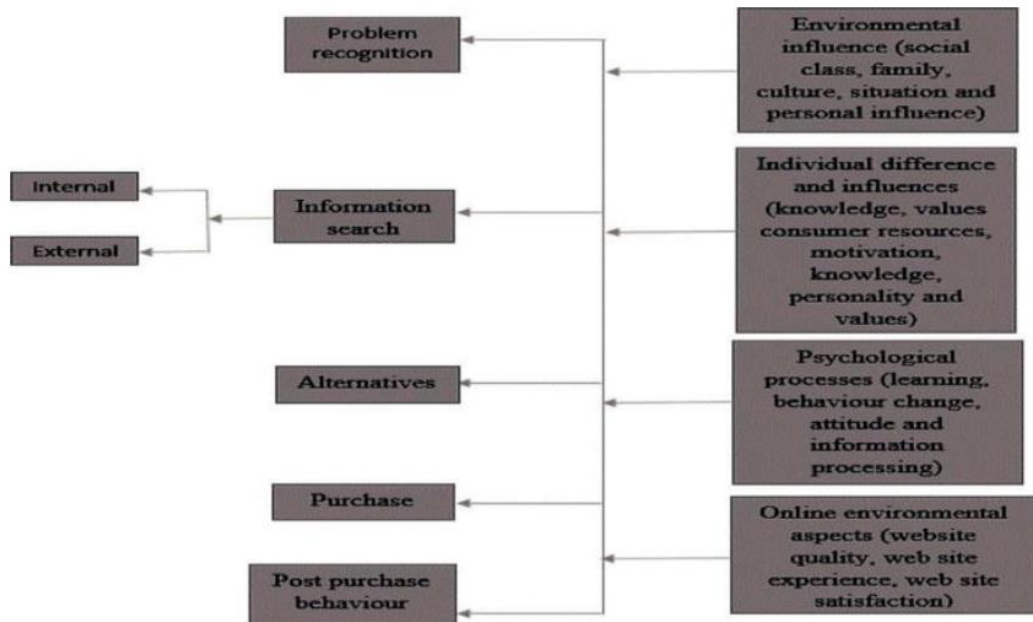


Figure 6. Consumer decision-making process. The five-stage decision-making process (Reyes, 2020)

Every consumer is different. This is due to the fact that everyone's environment and psychosynthesis are very different. Everyone's lifestyle, for example, differs from another. The way of life is characterized by both internal and external factors. The internal factors are education, memory, personality or behavior, motivations, beliefs, or values. Culture, subculture, social class, demographic features, social media, or even group reference such as family, friends, associates, etc. are considered external factors.

These types of factors, along with the individual's life experience, form the basis upon which needs and desires are recognized. So, once the needs and desires are identified, and a person begins the purchasing process, will follow the Kotler purchasing model which mentioned above. During this process, the consumer will gather knowledge that will influence the next purchases (Nicasio, 2022).

4.3 Consumer behavior in sports apparel

Sports have always had a significant impact on people's lives. Sports and fitness have grown in popularity, particularly in recent years, and people regularly purchase sports

apparel as it affects their performance and allows them to show off their new outfits and shoes on social media. So, today's generation purchases sports apparel not only because they need it, but also because they want to flaunt it. Even people who do not really do sports tend to wear athletic clothes daily just because they are more comfortable. Furthermore, athleisure has become a new trend that people are gravitating toward. Athleisure, a combination of the words "athletic" and "leisure," refers to athletic clothing that can be worn in non-athletic situations (Heuritech, 2020). According to Allied Market Research's Global Athleisure Market Report (2022), athleisure is on the rise. The athleisure market was valued at \$155.2 billion in 2018, and it is expected to reach \$257.1 billion by 2026.

5 RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Research design

The survey was designed on the Google Forms website in January 2022, and it was available online for two weeks until enough responses were received. The survey was posted on author's Instagram page and it was seen by almost 500 people but received 73 responses in total, which is a satisfactory amount to support the thesis outcomes. During the survey response collection period, the author used the two main social media platforms referred to in the thesis, Instagram and TikTok, as main platforms for obtaining survey responses. The author intended to target people from various nationalities to collect a diverse dataset. Nationality is important because different countries have different cultures and habits. In this case, Greek and Finnish individuals were primarily targeted.

5.2 Data collection

Primary data are data generated by the author, such as surveys, interviews, and experiments designed specifically to understand and solve the research problem at

hand. Secondary data means existing data was collected by someone else earlier (Wagh, 2021).

In this study, primary data was collected because the author wants to learn firsthand how social media marketing in sports apparel brands affects consumer behavior. Data was gathered specifically from active Instagram and TikTok users via a survey of seventy-three participants.

The survey consisted of fifteen questions total, including multiple-choice questions, rating scale questions, and open-ended questions. The first four questions were designed to gather basic information about the respondent's background. The survey was designed to be as simple and clear so that respondents could answer without devoting too much time. The following questions were designed to obtain information about the respondent's purchasing habits.

1. What age group do you belong to?
2. What is your gender?
3. Kindly indicate your employment status
4. Do you use Instagram and TikTok?
5. How much time on average do you spend on Instagram and TikTok daily?
6. How often do you come across sports apparel goods online?
7. Do influence marketing affect your online purchase habits?
8. What type of content piques your interest the most in sports apparel brands profiles?
9. How likely you are to purchase a product recommended on Instagram and TikTok?
10. What is your experience with Instagram Shopping?
11. Do you use discount codes given by influencers?
12. How much money on average do you spend on sports apparel monthly?
13. Have you ever been unsatisfied with a product because it did not meet your expectations?
14. Which are your favorite sports apparel brands?
15. Would you consider becoming an ambassador for sports apparel brands?

5.3 Survey results

Question 1: What age group do you belong to?

What age group do you belong to?

73 responses

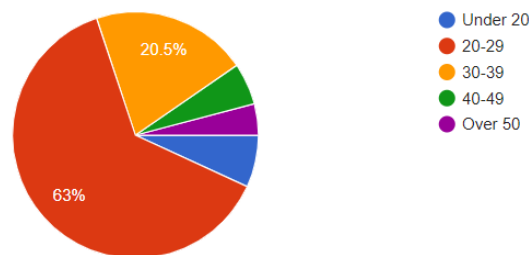


Figure 7. Investigate question 1: What age group do you belong to?

More than half of the participants (63 %) were between the ages of 20-29. Participants between 30-39 years old, made up the second-largest age group (20.5 %), while participants under 20 years old, between 40-49 years old, and over 50 years old made up the smallest age groups.

Question 2: What is your gender?

What is your gender?

73 responses

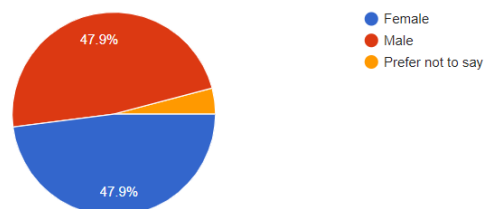


Figure 8. Investigate question 2: What is your gender?

There were 35 women and 35 men among the 73 participants. Three people did not want to reveal their gender. This could mean that both, male and female, are interested on social media marketing the same, or it was just a coincidence.

Question 3: Kindly indicate your employment status

Kindly indicate your employment status

73 responses

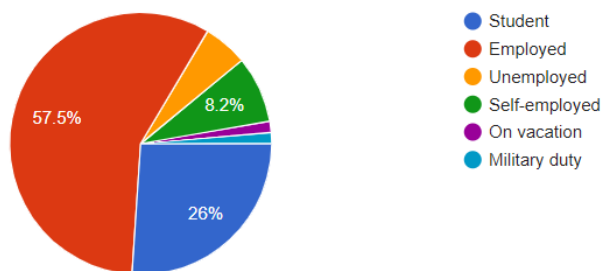


Figure 9. Investigate question 3: Kindly indicate your employment status

Question 3 was included in the survey to determine if the respondents can afford to purchase products or services that have been promoted to them. This could be one of the key questions in identifying if social media marketing can benefit enterprises. If an Instagram or TikTok user is unemployed, they may not be easily persuaded to buy a product or service that they consider unnecessary. The majority of participants, almost 58%, stated that they are employed. The 26 % were students, the 8.2 % were self-employed, and the 5.5 % were unemployed. This means that most of them have a salary and the ability to spend more money purchasing sports apparel items.

Question 4: Do you use Instagram and TikTok?

Do you use Instagram and TikTok?

73 responses

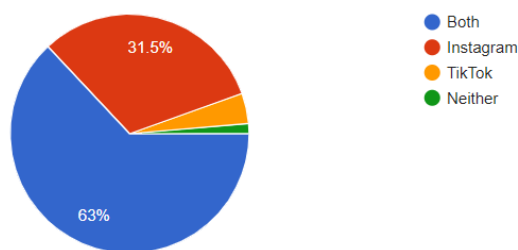


Figure 10. Investigate question 4: Do you use Instagram and TikTok?

Most of the respondents use both, Instagram and TikTok (63 %). 23 people use only Instagram and 3 people use only TikTok. If a respondent was not using either of the applications, it was not possible to continue the survey.

Question 5: How much time on average do you use on Instagram and TikTok daily?

How much time on average do you spend on Instagram and TikTok daily?

73 responses

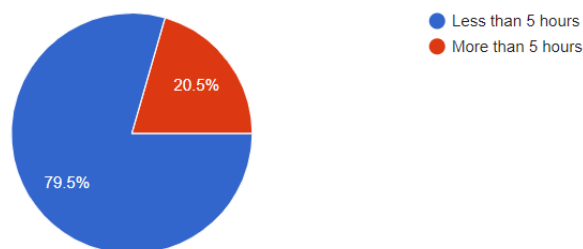


Figure 11. Investigate question 5: How much time on average do you use on Instagram and TikTok?

Almost 80 % of the respondents spend less than five hours online while the rest of them could reach more than five hours daily. According to Statista Research Department (2022), in 2020, the average user spent 2 hours and 24 minutes per day on social media (Statista, 2022).

Question 6: How often do you come across sports apparel goods online?

How often you come across sports apparel goods online?

73 responses

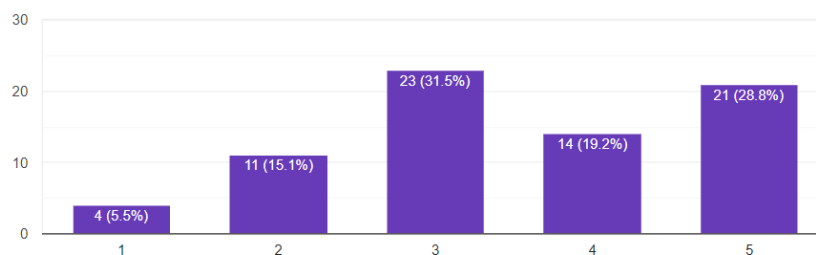


Figure 12. Investigate question 6: How often you come across sports apparel goods online?

This question was designed to determine whether Instagram and TikTok marketing campaigns are successfully reaching their target audience. The majority of respondents come across sports apparel regularly, while a few encounter it only occasionally. This is largely determined by the type of content with which people interact most frequently on their social media accounts. For example, if a person watches and likes mostly beauty-related videos and pictures, Instagram and TikTok will automatically show more content about beauty products.

Question 7: Does influence marketing affect your online purchasing habits?

Does influence marketing affect your online purchasing habits?

73 responses

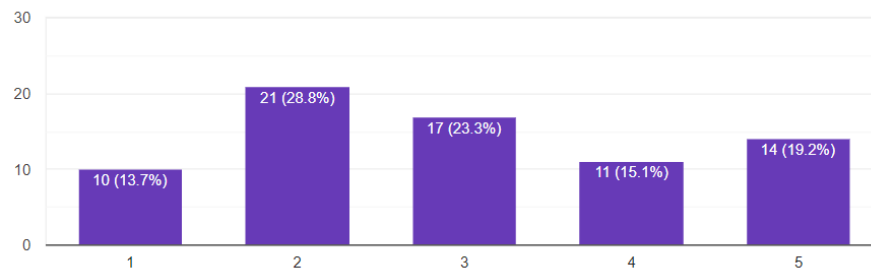


Figure 13. Investigate question 7: Does influence marketing affect your online purchasing habits?

Influencer marketing seems to be the least trusted form of social media marketing. Only 14 out of 73 participants admitted that they are very affected by influencers. In general, most of the social media users are skeptical of the content they find online. On the other side, there are also people who believe that the majority of information and content shared on social media can be accurate.

Question 8: What type of content piques your interest the most in sports apparel brands profiles?

What type of content piques your interest the most in sports apparel brands profiles?

73 responses

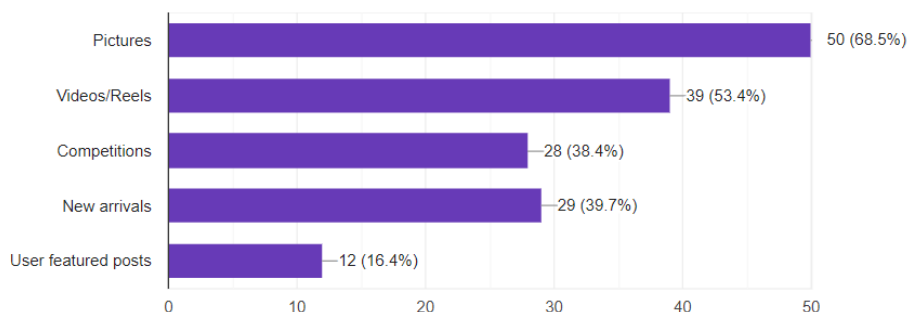


Figure 14. Investigate question 8: What type of content piques your interest the most in sports apparel brands profiles?

Almost 70% of respondents prefer to see pictures in the profiles of sports apparel brands. Many of them are also interested in video/reels, new arrivals, and competitions. The least interesting content is user-featured posts. When it comes to Instagram

competitions, they are a good marketing strategy tool when companies want to increase their reach, followers, and loyal brand ambassadors.

Question:9 How likely you are to purchase sports apparel products recommended on Instagram and TikTok?



Figure 15. Investigate question 9: How likely you are to purchase sports apparel products recommended on Instagram and TikTok?

This question was asked regarding people's willingness to buy sports apparel based on what they have been seeing on Instagram and TikTok. Some people are very unlikely to buy sports apparel recommended on Instagram and TikTok, whereas many others would buy anything recommended as a "must-have."

Question:10 What is your experience with Instagram Shopping?

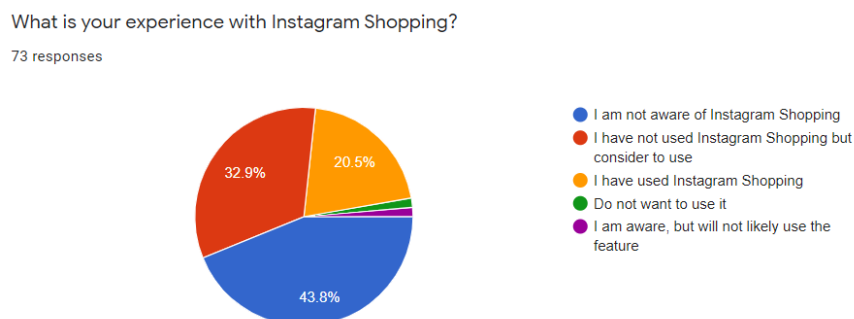


Figure 16. Investigate question 10: What is your experience with Instagram Shopping?

Almost half of the participants are unaware of the existence of Instagram Shopping. Some have not used it but are thinking about doing so, while only 20% have used it. Instagram Shopping is a very useful tool that, once people learn how to use it, will make their lives easier.

Question 11: Do you use discount codes given by influencers?

Do you use discount codes given by influencers?

73 responses

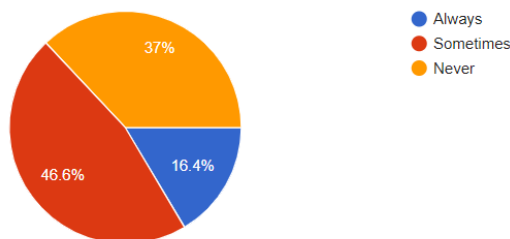


Figure 17. Investigate question 11: Do you use discount codes given by influencers?

Question 11 was aimed at determining whether the participants had ever used a discount code provided by influencers. Almost half of the participants said they use discount codes occasionally, a few said they always use them, and 37% said they have never used them. Discount codes are easily found on the profiles of ambassadors. It is a cost-effective way for consumers to save money and for brand ambassadors to make more profit.

Question 12: How much money on average do you spend on sports apparel monthly?

How much money on average do you spend on sports apparel monthly?

73 responses

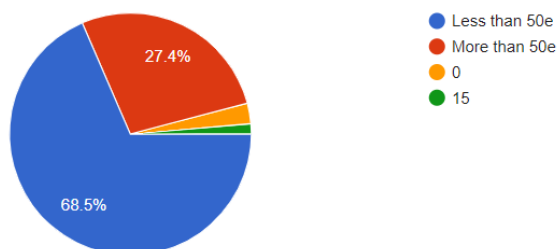


Figure 18. Investigate question 12: How much money on average do you spend on sports apparel monthly?

Almost 70% of people spend less than 50 euros per month on sports apparel, while the rest can spend more. People who train frequently are more likely to purchase new clothes or shoes. Males do not purchase new clothing since they do not care how they look when they train, as compared to females, who want as many sports outfits as

possible. Many individuals believe that buying new clothes and shoes regularly motivates them to exercise more.

Question 13: Have you ever been unsatisfied with a product because it did not meet your expectations?

Have you ever been unsatisfied with a product because it did not meet your expectations?

73 responses

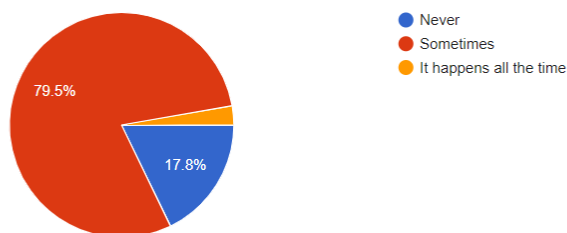


Figure 19. Investigate question 13: Have you ever been unsatisfied with a product because it did not meet your expectations?

80 percent of respondents have been unsatisfied with a product they purchased online at some point, and only a few are always satisfied with anything they buy. This is determined by the brand's quality and, in some cases, how influencers introduce the product. Influencers must provide honest feedback in order to avoid situations where consumers are unsatisfied. Consumers should always double-check that they are purchasing the correct size or color and conduct a small research on a specific product to see reviews from other people.

Question 14: Which are your favorite sports apparel brands?

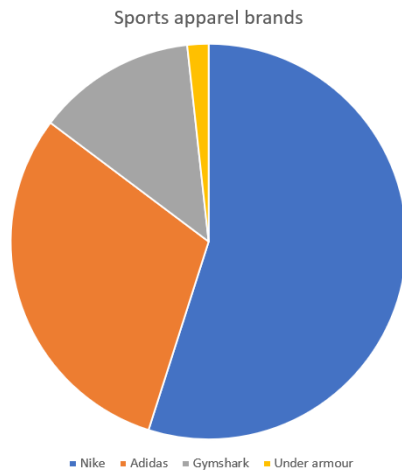


Figure 20. Investigate question 14 Which are your favorite sports apparel brands?

Nike and adidas seem to be people's all-time favorite sports apparel between the 14 brands mentioned. The participants said that they also like ICIW and Gymshark which are "new" brands in the market, both founded in 2012, but it seems like they evolve fast and becoming more popular especially in Europe. Other brands mentioned are Under Armour, Puma, Rapid Wear, Reebok, My protein, Peak Performance, Venum, Columbia, Revolution Race and Vans.

Question 15: Would you consider becoming an ambassador for sports apparel brands?

Would you consider becoming an ambassador for sports apparel brands?

73 responses

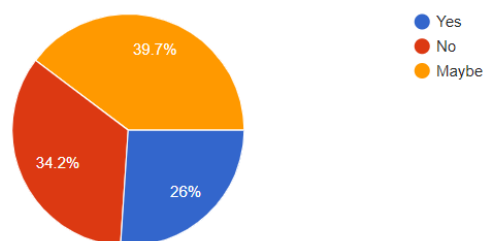


Figure 21. Investigate question 15: Would you consider becoming an ambassador for sports apparel brands?

Most of the participants would most likely consider becoming ambassadors for sports apparel brands and some of them would not. Becoming a brand ambassador, gives the opportunity to gain valuable knowledge and skills that people may not be able to obtain in their day job, making them more valuable to employers. It looks great on a resume,

especially if they can demonstrate how someone's contributions played significant a role in the company's performance.

5.4 Analysis and recommendations

Based on the findings of the literature and empirical research presented and discussed in this paper, the author can proceed with further proposals-recommendations to sports brands who are hesitant about the possibility of their participation in Instagram and TikTok. The study's findings confirmed the high participation of social media users, and the ability social media platforms have in influencing shopping intent and consumer behavior. Specifically, companies that use the findings of this research may conclude that it is beneficial to be promoted through social media based on the products they sell and promote to the buyer.

In 2018, 81% of marketers said that using influencers to boost their marketing plans was a winning approach (Jurillo, 2019). Influencer marketing on Instagram and TikTok social media platforms, is one of the most efficient ways for a company to reach its target audience. On the other hand, influencer costs can vary a lot depending on the influencer's followers number and the type of partnership. As explained in the second chapter, influencers may not be trustworthy because many of them pay for fake followers (bots) and even fake likes. As a result, before selecting the right influencers, businesses must conduct extensive research. There have been numerous cases where big brands have collaborated with influencers who have many fake followers to appear as they have a larger audience. Fortunately, there are now online pages where businesses can type in the name of an influencer and find out how many bots are associated with their profile. For example, MODASH is one of the most known websites where businesses can find the follower count, engagement rate, fake follower, average likes and more. This useful engine will also show the influencer's location and whether contact information is available (Modash, 2022).

Furthermore, it would be beneficial for businesses to hire their own employees as brand ambassadors. According to the survey results, many participants would be interested in becoming brand ambassadors for sports apparel companies (investigate

question 15). Both employer and employees benefit from this scenario. Employers will not need to do research in purpose to find trustful ambassadors and will not need to spend a huge amount of money, and employees will earn some extra money or benefits from their already existing workplace.

The reviews, photos, and tags created by Instagram and TikTok users are an outstanding and simple way to advertise a product. Furthermore, social media is the most direct and reliable way for a company to listen to the needs of the consumer and create products that meet those needs. As a result, businesses could be closely monitoring their customers' reactions via social media, as recent years have had a significant impact on people's purchasing behavior.

The products and services that businesses promote to consumers must be reliable and of high quality, just as the ambassadors have determined. Brands must ensure that their ambassadors provide a trustworthy review to their audience. Customer satisfaction is the key for business success. According to the survey results, many people do not trust influencers and would not buy products or services promoted on Instagram or TikTok (investigate questions 7,9,13). The only way to change this is to be honest. Providing some sort of product guarantee may help people to reconsider purchasing.

Brands must provide 100% accurate product information, especially when it comes to sports apparel. There have been multiple cases where the color of the product differed from the image on the website, or the size was not corresponding to the actual one. It is critical to include the model's measurements and wearing size in the product description.

Investing in video marketing to increase sales and customer base in the store is a brilliant idea. A promotional video is the simplest, most understandable, and quickest way to communicate a business message to customers. People nowadays are flooded with information and do not have the time or motivation to read a lot before making a purchase. They will pay more attention to images, videos, reviews, and product prices. Even better for business promotion if brands still have the ability and time to create videos for some of their own products. Having as example, the sports shoe brand X. Creating some short videos for some basic sneaker models will undoubtedly earn the

brand a place in the hearts of website visitors as well as an advantage over the competition. When the competitor's website only shows few photos of a specific sneaker, whereas the X brand's website includes a short video close-up of the specific product and how it performs in conditions such as running in the rain, etc., the X sports shoe brand has clearly gained an advantage (Duda, 2021).

Since Instagram and TikTok are visual platforms, sports apparel brands must provide unique brand videos and images with interesting, inspiring and motivating content for their followers.

In conclusion, the author is able to provide information to sports apparel companies on whether it is advantageous, to use social media for promotion, and if so, which platforms are the best. In addition, those companies who intending to become known in consumers, regardless of the products they sell, are given the opportunity to learn which one is the most popular social media, through which the buying public will quickly get to know them. So, for example, for a start-up company that is now launching its sports collection, the author would recommend promoting mainly via Instagram and TikTok.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Main conclusions

Social networks play an important role in the lives of consumers, and their use is ongoing and necessary for businesses that want to use them for promotional and sales purposes. Specifically, social networks are now a part of consumers' daily lives. Depending on one's personality, social media marketing can have an impact on people's purchasing habits or have no impact at all. People nowadays spend a lot of time on social media platforms and have learned to recognize which sports apparel brands they can and cannot trust. Furthermore, usage time is related to purchases, i.e., the more time a user spends on Instagram and TikTok, the more ads they will see, and

especially the same, the more likely they are to make a purchase. Although social media is a means of socialization, it is not the most important part of the decisions made by users of a product or service. This relates to consumer insecurity because it is unclear whether social networks are secure in terms of product quality and transactions, particularly in terms of electronic payments.

Instagram and TikTok are important communication platforms for sports apparel brands and their customers. According to the findings of the research, social networks have been introduced for good in the operation of the modern market. As a result, brands that are active on social media today have a better chance of increasing their profits. Consumers are influenced by advertisements on social networks and make purchases through them. It is found that social networks are now a part of consumers' daily lives. Based on the above, businesses must now invest in social media networking and advertising their products and services through them to increase profits. Instagram and TikTok greatly benefit the fitness industries by allowing them to share visual content, which helps sports apparel companies promote their brand and increase their sales. Instagram and TikTok are excellent platforms for cultivating a loyal fan base and community around a brand. Although these two platforms are ideal for sports apparel companies' strategies, increasing brand awareness and promoting a brand on Instagram and TikTok is a tricky process that requires a variety of skills.

According to the research findings, all of the respondents had experience with social media marketing. This means that social media is an important component of modern communication, and that social media marketing is a very strong marketing tool. The evolution of social media is credited to current technological innovations because people can access it from anywhere at any time.

6.2 Research limitations

The study was primarily focused on Instagram and TikTok, two of today's most popular social media platforms that are used as key marketing tools by both small sports apparel businesses and famous sports brands. To gather information about consumer behavior, the author conducted a survey with open-ended questions in which

participants may mention specific brand names that were noted in the thesis but not discussed in the theory section. The target of the survey was women and men between the ages of 20 - 50 who have a monthly salary and, as a result, a larger budget available. Some of the participants were underage and students as well. The number of people who responded to the survey was small, with 74 answers. The expected number was at least 100. Of course, this could be due to the short time frame, as the survey was only available for two weeks. However, even 74 responses were enough to continue the research.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

For further research, the author suggests, for example, conducting a study on methods that will help individuals in reducing their sense of insecurity towards influencer marketing. Another interesting research topic would be to examine whether it would be beneficial for sports apparel companies or companies in general, to hire employees with a monthly salary to perform as brand ambassadors for their brand name. Moreover, one more interesting topic would be to compare sports industry traditional marketing methods to social media marketing. From this comparison, it would be interesting to look back on how consumers have been affected over time, what factors-influencing factors have remained constant, and which have been replaced by newer, more powerful ones.

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Investigate questions

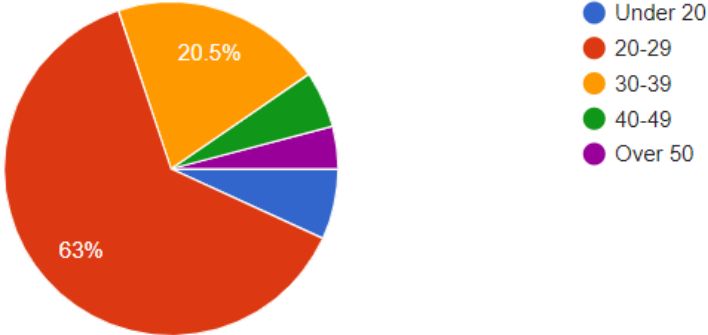
1. What age group do you belong to?
2. What is your gender?
3. Kindly indicate your employment status
4. Do you use Instagram and TikTok?
5. How much time on average do you spend on Instagram and TikTok daily?
6. How often do you come across sports apparel goods online?
7. Do influence marketing affect your online purchase habits?
8. What type of content piques your interest the most in sports apparel brands profiles?
9. How likely you are to purchase a product recommended on Instagram and TikTok?
10. What is your experience with Instagram Shopping?
11. Do you use discount codes given by influencers?
12. How much money on average do you spend on sports apparel monthly?
13. Have you ever been unsatisfied with a product because it did not meet your expectations?
14. Which are your favorite sports apparel brands?

Would you consider becoming an ambassador for sports apparel brands

Survey results

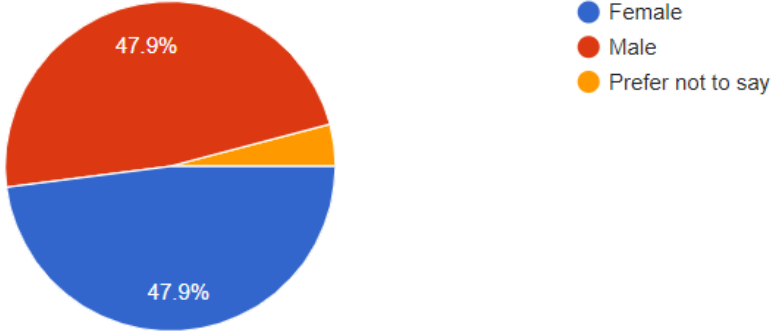
What age group do you belong to?

73 responses



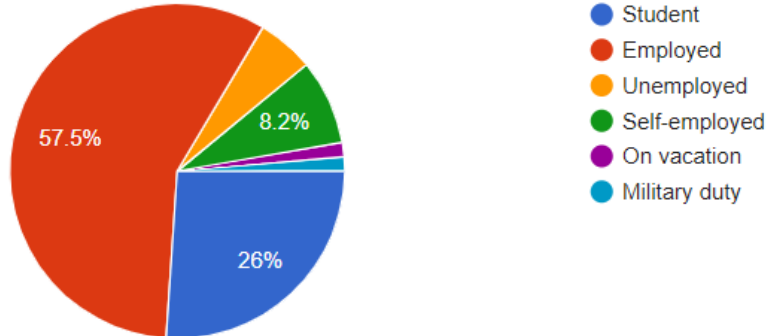
What is your gender?

73 responses



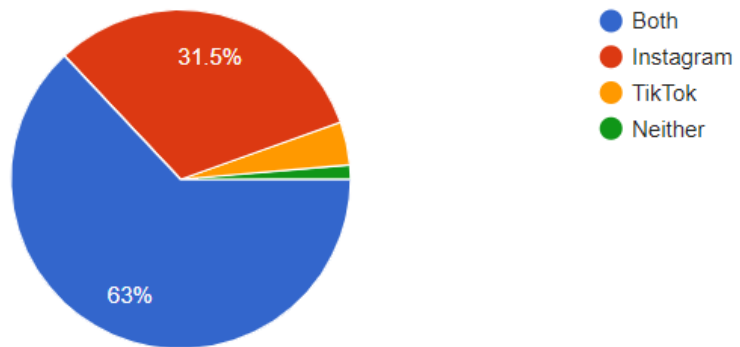
Kindly indicate your employment status

73 responses



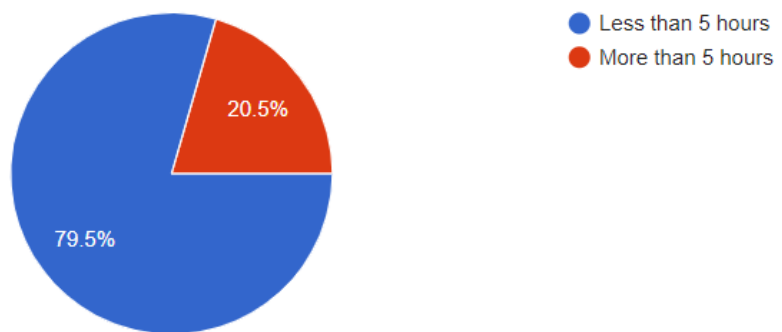
Do you use Instagram and TikTok?

73 responses



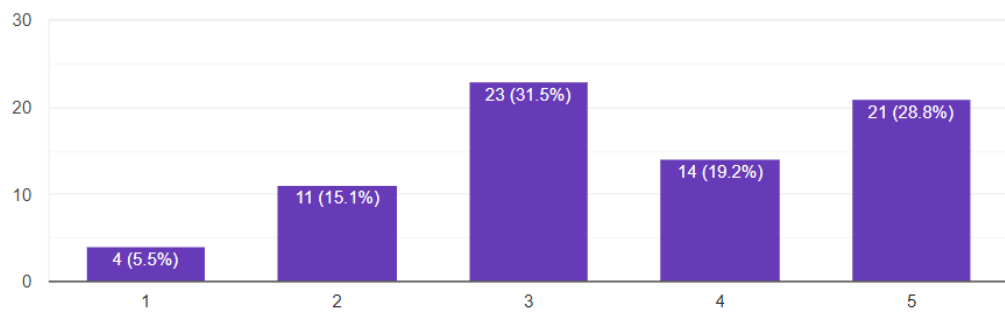
How much time on average do you spend on Instagram and TikTok daily?

73 responses



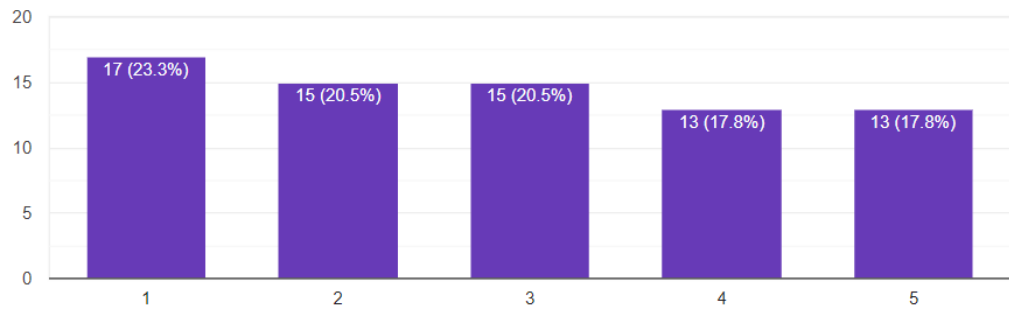
How often you come across sports apparel goods online?

73 responses



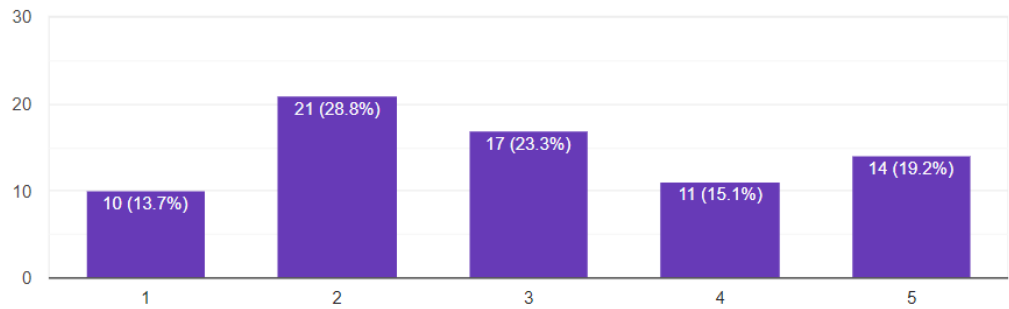
How likely you are to purchase sports apparel products recommended on Instagram and TikTok?

73 responses



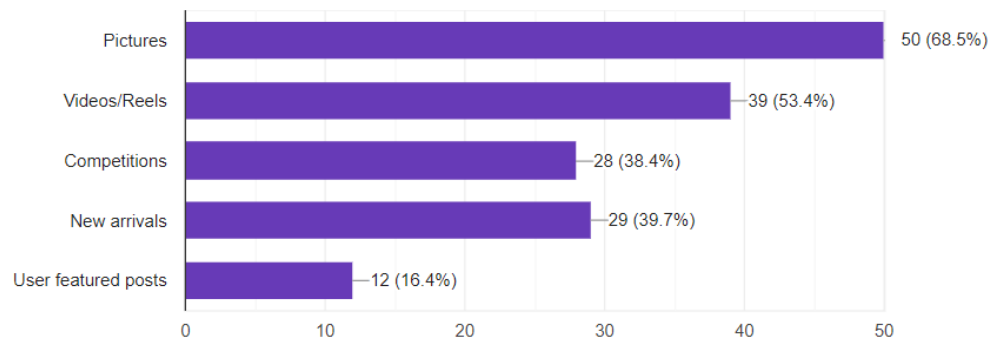
Does influence marketing affect your online purchasing habits?

73 responses



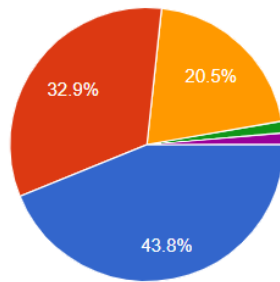
What type of content piques your interest the most in sports apparel brands profiles?

73 responses



What is your experience with Instagram Shopping?

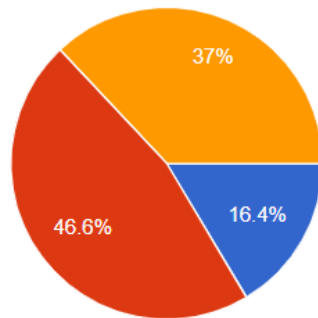
73 responses



- I am not aware of Instagram Shopping
- I have not used Instagram Shopping but consider to use
- I have used Instagram Shopping
- Do not want to use it
- I am aware, but will not likely use the feature

Do you use discount codes given by influencers?

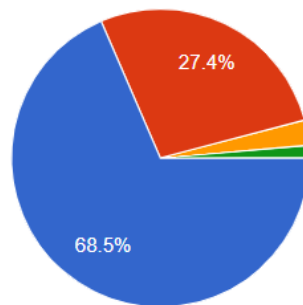
73 responses



- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

How much money on average do you spend on sports apparel monthly?

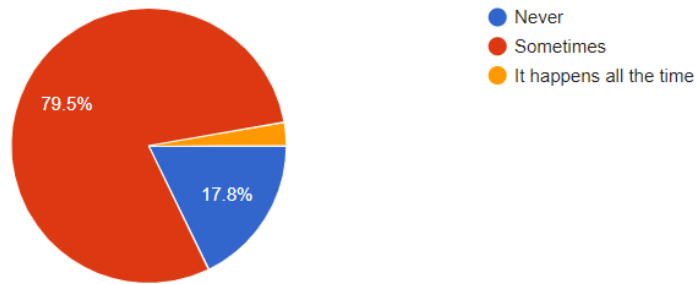
73 responses



- Less than 50e
- More than 50e
- 0
- 15

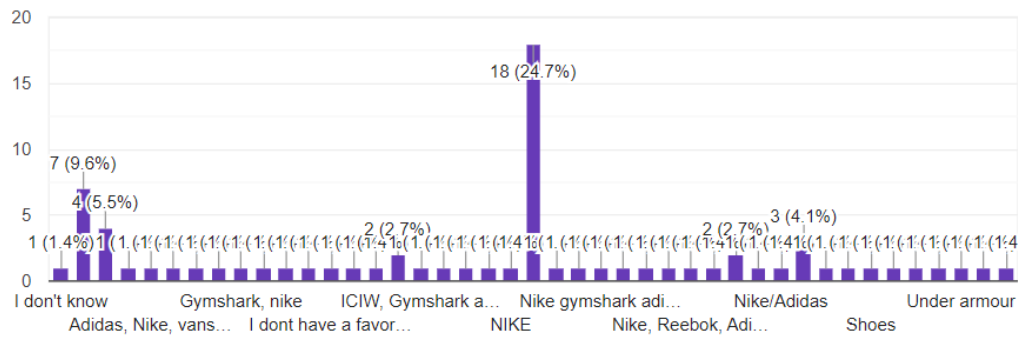
Have you ever been unsatisfied with a product because it did not meet your expectations?

73 responses



Which are your favorite sports apparel brands?

73 responses



Would you consider becoming an ambassador for sports apparel brands?

73 responses

