SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND THEIR IMPACTS ON COLLEGE
STUDENTS’ CONSUMING BEHAVIOR

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Bachelor’s Thesis
Instructor:

Date of submission:

Declaration

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### Objectives

The main objectives of this study were:  
1. To identify what social media do on social media platforms  
2. To identify the relationship between college students’ purchase intention and social media influencers’ sponsored content  
3. To identify the relationship between college students’ purchase intention and recommendations from social media influencers

### Summary

Social media influencer is becoming a major role in marketing strategy. As a new appeared role, it has been growing and self-improving at a very fast speed, and as such, it is important to understand its impact towards people. Among people, college students are a group that react the fastest to new trend based on their age and time. The study included a survey in order to have better understanding of the changes of college students’ purchase intention towards recommendations from social media influencers and sponsorship.

### Conclusions

1. Social media influencers are people who have certain amount of followers and impact on social media platforms.  
2. To college students, recommendations from social media influencers with their own using experience will enhance their trust.  
3. To college students, if there is sponsored content in social media influencers post, will decrease their trust.  
4. The study research is based on college students but does not mean conclusions cannot apply on other group but acquire further study.

**Key words:** social media influencers, college students, consuming behavior, impact


**Language:** English
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In recent decades, more and more people are using social media in their daily life due to the fast development of internet technology and smart phone industry. Nowadays, going through social media platforms has already become a basic daily routine for many people, especially college students, going through social media could be consider as a type of fragmented reading, people would always like to going through social media to spend the small pieces of time. Based on this phenomenon, there are more and more social media platforms appearing in peoples’ daily life, such as TikTok, people do not need to concentrate on the content and spend a certain amount of time to understand and digest the post, the length of short videos from TikTok are usually 10s to 1 min, so people can spend their short break on these types of social media platforms. After a whole day, these small pieces of time would accumulate quite a long time. Merchant realize this situation and started to use social media influencers as a marketing strategy.

Social media influencers, a new type of marketing strategy, also consider as opinions leader on social media platforms. A youtuber called Kathleen Lights who is in makeup section, often provides useful makeup recommendations and creatives makeup look. A makeup brand named Morphe notice her, and wants to use her popularity to increase its own brand value. Firstly, Morphe provides free new products for Kathleen to try on, then Morphe offer financial support for Kathleen to mention and promote Morphe’s products in her video. Finally, Morphe and Kathleen established cooperate relationship, they made jointly-
designed makeup, Morphe increased its own brand value, earn attention while Kathleen had financial payback. Merchant had realized influencers’ big influential among people, especially college students. Most of the college students are at the stage of first time living away from parents, have the rights to make decision independently and at least partly financial independent. Brands reached out to influencers to make promotion to reach more customers. For social media influencers, to be more popular, it would be a good idea for them to know how they behave will affect the college students' purchase intention.

1.2 Research topic

1.2.1 Social media influencers and college students

The reason why social media influencers can be the new marketing strategy is because influencers are covering a wide area, they are appearing everywhere, basically when people connect to Internet, and will see influencers and receive message sent by influencers. An report from influencer marketing hub stated that the influencer marketing is growing in a rapid speed. In four years, from 2016 to 2020, the market size of influencers grows from 1.7 billion to 9.7 billion. Also, due to the high proportion of influencer marketing in marketing strategy, there are 380 more platforms and influencer marketing agencies were created last year (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2020). Secondly, influencers are influential, the way they organize the words, how they express themselves, are attracting followers. Also, studies show that using social media influencers as promotion, can enable the brand have more awareness and gain value to maintain followers (Mediakix, 2019), some merchants would even willing to pay for social
media influencers to study skills for promotion. Social media influencers are a new but important role in marketing, the connection between social media influencers and followers are tight and easy to build. A social media influencer called WenWan from TikTok gains nine million of followers over a week just because of a short dancing video with an earworm. WenWan went viral on social media platforms especially on TikTok, merchants reached out to her, and asked her to make promotion on TikTok with financial payback. TikTok earns a big amount of money because of this social media influencers’ popularity. In all these followers, college students are an attractive consumer category because college students are the future main force, especially in consumption area. Comparing with the rest of the population, college students are the population both have time and money to spend on social media platforms. By studying what factors will affect their purchase intention can help merchants better to reach out their target groups and make better marketing strategy to attractive consumers.

The aim of the thesis is to investigates what are social media influencers and to extent, what social media influencers do will affect college students’ purchase intention. In order to achieve the aim, the factors choose as social media influencers’ content are sponsorship or not and social media influencers’ posts have personal experience included or not will affect college students’ purchase intention. To this extent, to realize the factors will affect or not, will conduct a survey of target college students in order to understand their attitudes towards social media influencers’ sponsored content and sharing experience.

1.2.2 Target Group Justification

College students were chosen as one of the research objects of this project for
following reasons. First of all, college students are the main force of consumption of the future, understanding their thinking pattern can help with analyze consuming behavior and conducting marketing strategy. Secondly, comparing with young people such as teenagers, college students are more independent and have more chances to make choices on their own (McQuail, 1993). Most of the college students are expected to manage their personal finance situation, parents cover their daily basis expense and college students are able to decide how to spend the money. Thirdly, comparing with people who have full-time job and fully financial independent, college students have more free time to spend online to follow the newest trend and willing to get in touch with new things. Last but not least, according to survey, college students spend more time on shopping online than in stores, they can view how other consumers grade the products, looking for recommendations and they consider as a way of saving time (Chen, 2008), that means college students will spend more time on going through social media influencers’ posts and their reaction differences towards different content will show how social media influencers affect college students’ purchase intention.

Non-college students were not included in this research, but the study results may apply to non-college students, this acquires further studies. In macro aspects, the behaviors from social media influencers affect college students’ purchase intention, will also affect non-college students. It is possible that both college students and non-college students have identical key factors to affect their purchase intention.

1.3 Research questions

1.3.1 What are social media influencers and the relationships
between social media influencers and followers?

In order to understand why and how a group is being influential, one must know who they are, how to define them and what social media influencers do. This part will lead out social media influencers basic works, why they will become a new role of marketing, and why merchant would prefer social media influencers than traditional advertisement.

By understanding what are social media influencers, then the study can move on to investigate the relationship between social media influencers and followers. This can show how social media influencers have effectiveness towards their followers and how to attract followers, and most importantly, what followers want to gain from social media influencers. With this question solved, study on the further part about social media influencers factors' towards college students purchase intention will have a better foundation.

1.3.2 How do social media influencers promote products have effectiveness towards college and their consuming behaviors?

This part is to explain the relationship between promotion of social media influencers and college students, how social media influencers promote to attract college students to become their followers and how college students consider of social media influencers, are social media influencers as a type of tool for them to gather information or social media influencers as a model to gain recommendations.

In this part, the study will focus on whether social media influencers share their
own personal experience or not while promoting products in their post will affect college students' purchase intention.

1.3.3 How will social media influencers’ sponsored content will affect college students' purchase intention?

This research chooses two factors to measures how the social media influencers affect college students' purchase intention. The first factor is social media influencers’ personal experience. The second factor is sponsored content of social media influencers. How do college students react to sponsored content? Will they hold a positive attitude toward sponsored content? When college students saw the sponsored post, are they willing to keep looking and trust what social media influencers said?

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 To identify what social media influencers do

Based on the first question, the first research objectives of this thesis is to identify what social media influencers do, including how to become a social media influencers, the typical ways social media influencers use to attract, communicate with followers and some examples to elaborate.

This research objective set down foundation for later study, with the explanations and elaboration, would better proves the connection between
social media influencers and marketing, social media influencers and college students' consuming behavior and purchase intention.

1.4.2 To identify the relationship between college students’ purchase intention and social media influencers’ sponsored content

Sponsorship is a major way of social media influencers to earn money, sponsorship is considered as an activity that merchants spot potential influencers and classified them as valuable promoters, then merchants will offer financial incentives to influencers to make posts about their products to earn attention and increase brand value.

Based on the second questions, the second research objective of this thesis is to identify will sponsored content affect college students’ consuming behavior, and how sponsored content makes differences towards students’ purchase intention.

The different attitudes of college students towards sponsored content and changes of purchase intention will be identified through the answers of the survey, by analyzing and describing the data.

1.4.3 To identify the relationship between college students’ purchase intention and recommendations from social media
The way to identify the third research objective, in this thesis, will use the same method as the second research objective. With specific questions and scenarios, data analysis in the survey, will find out how the social media influencers make recommendation will affect college students’ purchase by comparing average score of question 7 and 8. Question 7 and 8 were set to compare college students’ attitudes changes when social media influencers have experience sharing or not.

In this thesis, will mainly focus on whether the influencers share their own using experiencer or not will affect college students’ consuming behavior.

1.5 Definitions

1.5.1 Social media influencers

Social media influencers are individuals or teams who have certain amounts of followers or certain effectiveness on social media platforms. Normally, social media influencers gain money by making promotion to their followers, insert advertisement, marketing message in their post, etc. Most of the social media influencers would prefer to build their own brand on one of the social media platforms then after reaching certain amount of brand value and popularity, then they will expand on other social media influencers to increase their effectiveness. The most common social media platforms are Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc.
1.5.2 Impact

Impact is the action form social media influencers’ effectiveness to college students and their consuming behavior, purchase intention. In this project, impact will be defined as changes and differences of college students’ purchase intention. It will be measured by multiple questions and answers on the survey.

1.5.3 College students

College students are the observing objective in this thesis. College students are students who admitted and enrolled in a university or college globally. Partly of the survey is to find out connection between college students’ consuming behavior and social media influencers. In the survey, if question: Are you currently studying at university or college? with a positive answer and people’s age is from 18-33 will be consider as college students.

1.5.4 Consuming behavior

Consuming behaviors is one of the dependent variables in this research. For the purpose of this project, whether social media influencers share their personal experience or not, and the post is sponsored content or not will have connection with college students’ consuming behavior. In this thesis, purchase intention will be the consuming behavior that measure and analyze in the
survey with specific questions answer by college students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

New media is taking higher and higher proportion of people’s living, people will use small piece of time to check social media to follow the newest trend, when consumers are interested in some products, they will also search on social media to gain more information. As it is getting mature, social media started to form their own business model, more and more social media influencers from different species, such as technology influencers, fashion influencers, food blogger, etc, affecting people’s behaviors, thoughts, actions, etc.

Welling (2016) points out the path of social media influencers growing, there is a social media influencer called Jeffery Star who is a makeup youtuber, at the early stage, she sings and makes makeup video, many people attracted by her because her richness and the characteristic of only saying truth. Merchant would choose her to make promotion is also because her funny speaking way. She gains wealth and reputation, for further development, she start up her own makeup company. How social media influencers start with pure sharing and posting to self-branding and use their impact to gain profits Linda(2017) shows how consumer is getting affected by social media influencers, the method she used is showing and analyzing different stages of the purchase decision process such as implants consuming conscious by recommended products or
offer discounts to followers. Social media has tight connection with people, this also includes college students. In fact, college students as a group that is familiar with technology and willing to follow the newest trend, they have closer relationship with social media. Irshad (2012) shows how popular social media among college students. Norton (2008) points out internet and social media influence college students by exploiting new area, setting up new ideas and providing information that college students are interested in.

For the purpose of this review paper, the thesis is focus on how social media influencers affect college students’ consuming behavior, how different ways of advertising affect college students’ purchasing willingness. Who should regulate social media influencers and how to regulate in normal circumstances. Using information from the existing literatures, such as Neti (2011) observed the significantly role of social media in marketing, Wang (2011) found notable differences of college students between those who use social media more and use social media less. Differences include, social status, communication, consuming behaviors, etc. College students as a big proportion of people who lives in digital age, familiar with using social media and willing to spend time on it, definitely will affected by social media influencers. However, there is no existing literatures show the connection between social media influencers and college students and how social media influencers affect college students.

Emily (2018) is different from Shabnoor (2016) in a number of aspects, they define negative effect brought by social media influencers in different ways, such as having plastic surgery this behavior, is good or bad to college students, Emily consider plastic surgery is good for college students because plastic surgery can make college students have better image, it would be easier to make new friends, fit in new environment, have a better self, on the
contrary, Shabnooris holding a opposite opinion, normally plastic surgery needs a big amount of money, college students would do things that is not good for their future development to gain the money, such as taking a loan illegally, also college students cannot afford the price if the surgery is not success and it is bad for students’ mental health.

The gaps the thesis trying to fills are, firstly, how college student followers are different from other followers. Secondly, when social media influencers make recommendations to college students, will social media influencers sharing their own using experience this behavior affect college students’ purchase intention. Thirdly, whether sponsored content from social media influencers will affect college students’ purchase intention or not. In my opinion, college should also provide guidance for college students to form the right consumer confidents to avoid negative effect by social media influencers.

The thesis is divided into four parts. To understand how social media influencers have effect towards college students’ consuming behavior and how to regulate social media influencers to avoid having negative effect, we first need to know what are social media influencers, what is their job and why social media influencers are influential. The second part of the thesis is discussing the role social media influencers are playing in marketing, their working routine, what they do will bring out what kinds of results. The third part will focus on consuming behavior differences between college students with and without the effect of social media influencers. The last part talked about social media influencers regulations from government and college guidance for college students.

2.2 Social media influencer
To have basic understanding of social media influencers and how they works in marketing, we need to have definition of social media influencers. As Peltola (2019) mention in her literature, social media influencers are people who have their personal profiles on social media and post their works to influence their followers. Social media influencers use social media as platform to share their works to build reputation, when they reach certain amounts of followers, merchant will find social media influencers to make promotion of their products to gain attention and sales. There is a social media influencer called David, at the beginning of his influencer career, he just filming vlogs about his daily life with his friends, to become more popular, he holds many give away activities to attract followers, when followers reach certain amount, merchant would reach out to him and David will insert ad in his viedos to earn money

Freberg (2011) refers to social media influencers as new opinion leaders, who affect their followers by blogging, vlogging. Promotion in their content will obtain brand recognition among their followers. In Laurell (2014) articles mention, most of the social media influencers have very similar characteristics, like willing to share, have great infection ability, etc.

Due to the development of social media platform, people are spending more time on social media and social media platforms have already become the major way of communication in daily life. A Mangold mention in the literature, social media influencers are more likely to work as soft marketing strategies, instead of showing directly to consumers (Mangold, 2009) like sponsored content, as soft marketing strategy, blogger will not mention anything about sponsored, just stating this is recommendation. This indicate that social media influencers would be a key role of advertising and marketing (Carolina, 2019)
In Brown’s works, he defines social media influencers as people who have the power to affect others, including people, events, things. Social media influencers always have various ways to present themselves to followers, such as offering buying advice, sharing using experience, etc. Some social media influencers would establish a favorable atmosphere in order to attract followers to buy products they recommend. (Brown, 2008) These type of social media influencers always have a high reputation in their field and they can convince others easily.

In Katz’s two-step theory, the effect brought by social media influencers can be divided to two parts: merchant to social media influencers and social media influencers to followers (Katz, 1955). The theory implies that social media influencers as the opinion leaders translate and summarize the message to followers to gain multiple reaction. Social media influencers as the role of translating information to others, play a critical role in networking, especially those who rely on people’s information summarize (McQuail, 1993) The reason why social media influencers are influential is not only because they are wealthy or popular, but they have the ability to become the central point to educate others and attract others attention. Comparing with celebrities and advertising, social media influencers are more realistic and closer to people, it is easier to relate social media influencers to normal people. Therefore, social media influencers are more likely to considered to be opinion leaders than paid endorsers (Jensen, 2003)

2.3 The role of social media influencers in marketing

In this digital age, social media has adjusted the way of advertising, instead of
putting products directly in front of consumer and tell them all the information of the products, merchant would prefer letting social media influencers use the products in daily life to let consumer know about and like the products unconsciously in this social media environment.

Followers will get involved with social media influencers life through watching what social media influencers present (De Veirman, 2017). This is how social media advertising different from traditional advertising. TV and other traditional advertising would just present the products directly, followers are not receiving any advice or reaction of the products. Social media will insert some small pieces of information in their work, but followers will consider this as pure using experience sharing.

Sponsored content is a major way for social media influencers to get paid. Sponsored content is something posted by social media influencers, but the merchant will pay the social media influencers because they mention brands or products in their post (Evans, 2017). Different from the normal type of posting, some social media influencers dealing with sponsored content will have different attitudes including extract the advantages or hiding disadvantages of the promotion products, not expressing their true opinions, etc.

The reason why merchant would prefer social media influencers as a promotion more often than traditional promotion is because social media influencers are able to motivate their followers as soon as they share something on social media. (Lu, 2014) They do not need to do anything big like making a fabulous advertisement that requires high editing and filming knowledge, just mentioning the brand or products appearing in the content would attract followers’ attention, especially those with the products link. Followers would also share influencers’ work with their friends. This action is
easy and immediate. (Sammis, 2016). As the followers’ desire show up, and social media influencers get familiar with their business, it would form and perfect the social media influencers marketing program.

2.4 College students’ consuming behavior

College students are growing rapid at this period. They are acquiring autonomy and developing self-esteem (Benson 2011). College is the first period of time for them to be independent and have the right to spend more money with people at their age. They can make more choices on their own especially personal matter than the teenagers (Smetana, 2005). In this period, college students are expected to handle their financial situation like living expense and have more freedom to decide how to spend money (Palan, 2010).

In Li’s studies, college students will pay more attention than those who busy with working on their image and care about popularity and fashion (Li, 2013). To become popular in their circle, college students need to capture the newest trend, they want to have good living conditions such as nice car and house, no worries about money and life time is not fully occupied by work so that they can do whatever they want. Therefore, college students can be considered as enthusiastic consumers in marketing especially comes to the latest products, comparing to those have more experience of control and decide on consuming.

College students appears to be curious about what things happen, learn how things happen and what to do next. They can easily find the answers due to the development of technology, college students are able to find information
they need in variety of ways and learn the information of the item they are interested in before buying it. Because of the convenience of finding information and shopping online, college students' willingness of consuming will increase. (Animalz, 2018)

As Chen mention in his studies, college students prefer online shopping than offline. The reason why college students choose online shopping is that they are able to view detail information, buyers commands, some even have simulated use to help them decide to the item is suitable or not (Chen, 2008). According to the survey of Roland Berger Agency, college students spend average 3.4 hours on their smartphone per day. (Roland Berger Agency,2019)

It is important for government to have regulation of social media influencers to form a positive image for college students. And college should offer guidance to college students, so that they can know how to recognize what is right to form values (Digital Commerce, 2019).

The thesis is focus on college students but it does not means the effects and findings cannot apply on other groups. Applying findings on other groups needs further study.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodology Summary

The data used in this research project is gathered from college students all over
the world who participate in the anonymous survey on the Internet. To make sure the survey will only be taken by college students, the survey link will only send among college community group chat. The dependent variable of the survey is college students’ purchase intention, and the independent variable of the survey are social media influences’ experience sharing and sponsorship. The survey was done with the webropol-page provided by Aalto University for student. The data was shown on Webropol and Excel, and the analyzing and exporting process was done by SPSS. The data gathering period is from 2021. 03.10 to 2021. 03.15. Descriptive was the primary channels of the data. Also, participants will provide feedback to the survey to improve the research quality and limitations.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Quantitative Survey

The data used in this research project is gathered from college students who participate in the survey (Appendix 1) anonymous survey on the Internet. The survey was made with webropol 3.0. The survey was sent by Internet, and distributed via Whatsapp group chat, Wechat group chat, Instagram. In the survey, participants were anonymous, and only disclosed their gender, age, study status.

The survey questions were divided into three parts. The first part of the survey was choosing scenarios based on participants’ month of birth. The scenarios were set to test college students’ reaction to sponsored content and experience sharing by social media influencers these two behaviors different. To make the
test group random and equal, participants’ birth month will decide which scenario he/she will be sent to. From January to March, participants will be sent to scenario 1. From April to June, participants will be sent to scenario 2. From July to September, participants will be sent to scenario 3. From October to December, participants will be sent to scenarios 4. The second part of the survey were answer on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 means ‘I do not agree at all’, and 5 is ‘I agree completely’. At the stage of coding data, 1: disagree at all, 2: disagree somehow 3: neither disagree or agree 4: partly agree 5: agree completely. The third part of the survey was to gather demographics information of participants, information such as gender, age, student status was included. The scale using in the survey is to be more visually, and convenience to analyze the data while maintain the initial meaning. In the survey, the scale from 1 to 5 were using the same key points like ‘agree’, ‘partly agree’ to avoid the words influence the participants’ ability to estimate their feeling, and using numbers from 1-5 to represent the levels of agree in the survey would be able to minimize the influence.

The purpose of the survey was to observe the differences of college students’ purchase intention whether the social media influencers share their personal experience or not, and whether the post is sponsored content or not. The results of the survey will show their attitudes.

Second part is makes up of question 6 to question 11. Question 6 has to do with the reason for participants follow social media influencers. Question 7 and 8 are about how well do college students trust recommendation from social media influences. Comparing with question 7, question 8 has an extra condition ‘share their own using experience’. From here, by comparing the results of question 7 and 8, it is possible to know whether social media influencers share their own using experience will affect college students’ purchase intention. Question 9 and 10 are about recommendations from social media influencers.
Question 9 is to find out whether participants have the experience of following recommendations from social media influencers or not, and question 10 is to find out what is the key aspects for participants to trust social media influencers’ recommendations. Last question in the second part is to measure the attitudes of participants towards social media influencers’ sponsored content by scaling from 1 to 5.

In the third part of the survey, if a respondent answered ‘No’ to question ‘Are you currently studying at college or university’ (question 14), or the respondents’ age is not in the range from 18 to 33, respondent will skip to the rest of the survey and straight to the end. This is because these two questions will confirm the identity of participants, and the aim of the survey is to collect data from college students and analyze data.

3.2.2 Data processing

Firstly, the survey has four scenarios, 1. Share own experience, sponsored content 2. Not sharing own experience, sponsored content 3. Share own experience, not sponsored content 4. Not sharing own experience, not sponsored content, to measure the relationship between experience sharing, sponsorship and college students’ purchase intention. Participants’ month of birth will assign them to corresponding scenarios. With different scenarios, participants will have different attitudes towards sponsored content and recommendation.

The data and results are extracted from webropol. After extracting data from webropol, and using statistical analysis tool to process the data.
4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Sample

This is an overview of the participants’ demographics. The number of participants for the survey was 104 (N=104).

Of all the 104 respondents, 53 were male, and 51 were female. 51 (49%) were age 18-22, 41 (39%) were age 23-26, 10 (9%) were age 27-30, 2 (1%) were age 30-33. 72 (69%) of the participants follow influencers on social media platforms and 32 (30%) never follow social media influencers on social media platforms.

Graph - Age

The mean age of the sample was 23.2. The largest contribution of participants group’s age was from 18 to 22.
4.2 Survey results

4.2.1 Recording

The data used in the research was directly extracted from Webropol 3.0 to SPSS. In the second part, questions’ scale needs to be flipped, and renamed them so that in the later study to provide useful statistical analysis. The following questions were flipped, Question 6 and Question 10, then the results will be better present to readers that what do college students’ think highly of when come to recommendations from social media influencers and reasons to follow social media influencers.

4.2.2 Analysis

Analysis was conducted by comparing college students (N=104) in different scenarios has different purchase intention and attitudes towards social media influencers’ sponsored content and experience sharing.

The first noteworthy finding was that social media influencers share their own using experience will increase college students’ willingness to trust their recommendation and purchase intention. In question 3, when social media influencers give recommendation without sharing own using experience, 12 participants (N’= 12, N=104) choose not at all on trusting level, 25 participants (N’=25, N=104) choose partly doubt on trusting level, 38 participants (N’=38, N=104) choose medium on trusting level, 27 participants (N’= 27, N=104)
choose partly trust on trusting level, 3 participants (N'=3, N=104) choose strongly trust on trusting level). The average score of question 3 is 2.85.

Comparing with question 3, in question 4, with an extra condition, social media share their own using experience, 4 participants (N'= 4, N=104) choose not at all on trusting level, 8 participants (N'=8, N=104) choose partly doubt on trusting level, 15 participants (N'=8, N=104) choose medium on trusting level, 53 participants (N'= 53, N=104) choose partly trust on trusting level, 25 participants (N'=25, N=104) choose strongly trust on trusting level). The average score of question 4 is 3.83.

Graph – Question 3

Graph – Question 4

The other noteworthy finding is from question 7, about participants’ attitude
towards sponsored content. Both participants’ who follow influencers on social media platforms (N’= 73, N=104) and not follow influencers on social media platforms (N’=32, N=104) have low favorable towards sponsored content. In the scenarios that social media influencers share their own using experience, with sponsored content, and social media influencers do not sharing their own using experience, with sponsored content, participants both have low favorable towards sponsored content and low purchase intention.

Graph – Question 7

The initial observation from the survey is that college students, both follow influencers on social media platforms (N’= 73, N=104) and not follow influencers on social media platforms (N’=32, N=104) have very similar reasons to follow social media influencers (question 2) and reasons why trusting social media influencers (question 6). In question 2, the four conditions: 1. To spend small pieces of time because it is fun to do so 2. To follow the newest trend 3. To learn about products and brands 4. To listen to their true opinion, have similar average score from 3.14 to 3.45. In question 4, the three conditions: 1. They can express their true thoughts and experience 2. They have great promoting skills 3. They are more professional than me in this industry. The average score is from 2.99 to 3.29.

Graph – Question 2
5. DISCUSSION

To analyze the relationship of social media influencers’ impact and college students’ purchase intention, we should go back to the basic question: what are social media influencers? Social media influencers have many identities, such
as net working person, opinion leaders, new type of promotion, an important role in marketing, etc. However, in this research, social media influencers were defined as people with certain amounts of followers on the Internet and post content on social media platforms. Social media influencers have impact towards followers. College students as part of the followers, they will follow the trend closely, because comparing with teenagers who have not enter college, and adults who already working, college students’ financial situation and daily schedule allow them to spend more time on the Internet. When students at college, most of their parents will offer them money monthly to cover daily expense, and most of the college students will use their free time to do part-time job to earn extra money for themselves. So, college students are more able to afford things than teenagers and less life stress than adults. And normally at the college stage, they will pay more attention on following trend and brands, and care about their image more than non-college students.

There are many things social media influencers do will affect college students’ purchase intention. In this research, we only focused on sponsored content and experience sharing. To observe the relationship, conducting a survey would help finding and analyzing, and excluding other factors that will influence the results. From the survey results, with each scenario, participants’ have different attitudes toward sponsored content and sharing experience.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Limitations
In this research projects, there are two limitations. First of all, the thesis is to find out whether social media influencers share their own using experience or not and whether social media influencers have sponsored content or not will have connection with college students' purchase intention. Although, the results can learn by gathering and analyzing data. However, experience sharing and sponsorship from social media influencers might also have impact to non-college students, but in the survey, there is not a control group, non-college students comparing with college students. in conclusion, the results gain form college students might also apply to non-college students, they might have exactly the same results to these factors, or non-college students will have different attitudes towards theses factors. To find out how non-college students will react to theses factor acquire further study. To find out the different attitudes between college students and non-college students acquire comparison in the survey and data analyze.

The second limitation of the research is spotted from email sent by participant. In his/her email, it is said that sharing experience and sponsored content are not actually affecting his/her purchase intention that much, and his/her purchase intention will not have much big differences even social media influencers share their own using experience or it is not a sponsored content. Maybe factors such as exclusive discount information, give away information, etc will influence his/her purchase intention better. In future, it is necessary to conduct a survey about what people care about social media influencers first then to start the survey.

6.2 Further study
Further social media influencers research should be done with wider sample to summarize a more general conclusion that able to apply to the wider range. A wider sample size for a similar attitude-measuring survey in this project would be more beneficial to get accurate results to support the conclusion. It would still be an attractive topic to measure attitudes towards different factors from college students and non-college students.

Not only survey sample and factors can be improved in further study, it is also recommended that the study regulation of social media influencers internationally could also be done. Globalization is the unstoppable trend now, while business, technology is mixing together internationally, culture is also affecting each other. Because social media influencers as an active part on Internet and a part of culture that spread in fast speed, to avoid culture conflicts, it is necessary to set up regulations for social media influencers. After knowing what social media influencers do and their role in marketing, further study can provide some examples about positive and negative effects brought by social media influencers, and some example of regulation of social media influencers, then lead to the topic, how to regulate social media influencers internationally.

The study shows many information about social media influencers and how they work in the marketing, although there are many advantages of using social media influencers is marketing, there bad things such as social media influencers violating consumers’ right. An social media influencers called Xiaohua Dong is extracting the products function, she said the products also can lighten skins but later some consumer found out that none of the ingredients in the product has this function.
In the further study, to protect consumers’ right, it is necessary to standardize the regulation of social media influencers. Such as social media influencers making recommendation to followers are needed to be based on truth and needs to be clear and simple (FTC, 2019). There are examples of regulators such as a national regulators called the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC). On April 2017, the FTC promulgate a warming, the social media influencers and merchant are obligate to disclose sponsorship. This would help customer identify whether the products are really good as social media influencers mentioned in their posting.
REFERENCE LIST


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   *New York ; Longma*

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   *International Journal of Computer Applications Technology and Research*

   *Journal of Communication Management*

   *American Behavioral Scientist*
APPENDIX:

social media influencers and college students consuming behaviors survey

Mandatory fields are marked with an asterisk (*) and must be filled in to complete the form.

The survey studies consuming behavior, marketing related to social media influencers and their impact to college students’ consuming behaviors. The survey is voluntary, and the data will only use for this research, the whole process of the survey will be anonymous.

The survey will take about 3 minutes or less to finish. If you have any questions for the survey or thesis, please send me an email at bailing.zhang@aalto.fi. The survey studies consuming behavior, marketing related to social media influencers and their impact to college students’ consuming behaviors. The survey is voluntary, and the data will only use for this research, the whole process of the survey will be anonymous.

1. Which month were you born in? *

- January, February, March
- April, May, June
- July, August, September
- October, November, December
2. Emily is a 24-year old Instagram user. She has been using a new Mac foundation (Foundation is a liquid or powder makeup applied to the face to create an even, uniform color to the complexion, cover flaws and, sometimes, to change the natural skin tone) lately and, since she really likes the foundation, she frequently recommends this product to her followers. Emily shares her personal experience and feeling about the foundation in her posts, especially the fact that the product feels natural and is long-lasting on her face. Although Emily has many followers, Mac has not identified Emily as a valuable promoter. In other words, Emily does not receive financial incentives from Mac every time she posts reviews of Mac-related products.

Please read the whole content

3. Emily is a 24-year old Instagram user. She has been using a new Mac foundation (Foundation is a liquid or powder makeup applied to the face to create an even, uniform color to the complexion, cover flaws and, sometimes, to change the natural skin tone) lately and, since she really likes the foundation, she frequently recommends this product to her followers. Emily shares her personal experience and feeling about the foundation in her posts, especially the fact that the product feels natural and is long-lasting on her face. Mac has identified Emily as a valuable promoter (due to her large number of followers) and financially supports her efforts. In other words, Emily receives financial incentives from Mac every time she posts reviews of Mac-related products.

Please read the whole content
4. Emily is a 24-year old Instagram user. She has been doing a lot of research lately about new foundation products (Foundation is a liquid or powder makeup applied to the face to create an even, uniform color to the complexion, cover flaws and, sometimes, to change the natural skin tone). She came across some articles about a new Mac foundation that is supposed to feel natural and is long-lasting on the face. As a result of her reading, Emily shares these findings about the foundation in her posts and she frequently recommends this product to her followers. Mac has identified Emily as a valuable promoter (due to her large number of followers) and financially supports her efforts. In other words, Emily receives financial incentives from Mac every time she posts reviews of Mac-related products.

Please read the whole content

5. Emily is a 24-year old Instagram user. She has been doing a lot of research lately about new foundation products (Foundation is a liquid or powder makeup applied to the face to create an even, uniform color to the complexion, cover flaws and, sometimes, to change the natural skin tone). She came across some articles about a new Mac foundation that is supposed to feel natural and is long-lasting on the face. As a result of her reading, Emily shares these findings about the foundation in her posts and she frequently recommends this product to her followers. Although Emily has many followers, Mac has not identified Emily as a valuable promoter. In other words, Emily does not receive financial incentives from Mac every time she posts reviews of Mac-related products.

Please read the whole content
6. Why do you follow influencers? *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To spend small pieces of time cause it is fun to do so</td>
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<td>To follow the newest trend</td>
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<td>To learn about products and brands</td>
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<td>To listen to their tune opinion</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7. How well do you trust the influencer’s recommendation? *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly doubt</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>strongly trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8. Will you trust recommendations from influencers better if they share their own using experience? *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Much better</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9. Have you ever followed a recommendation from an influencer? *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>never</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
10. Why will you trust recommendation from influencers? *

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<th>3</th>
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<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They express their true thoughts and experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>They have great promoting skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>They are more professional than me in this industry</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

11. Please rate your attitudes towards sponsored content *

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Favourable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unfavourable</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Gender *

- Male
- Female

13. Age *

- 18-22
- 23-26
- 27-30
- 30-33

14. Are you currently studying at college or university? *

- Yes
- No
15. Do you follow any influencers on social media platform? *

- Yes
- No