

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS, AND INFLUENCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

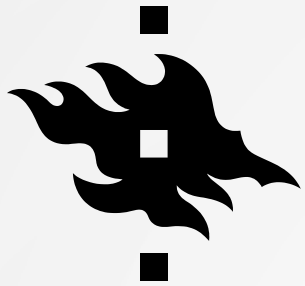
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AGENDA OF THE DAY

- Who are social media influencers?
- Why are social media influencers so appealing?
- What is the nature of the profession?
- How do social media influencers use their influence?



NICE TO MEET YOU!

- **Me:** Dr. Hanna Reinikainen, postdoctoral researcher, University of Helsinki, Centre for Consumer Society Research
- **Thesis:** Fostering organizational intangible through strategic social media influencer communication, 2022 (@JSBE)
- **Research projects:** Influential politicians and political influencers // Pleasing the algorithm in the influencer industry



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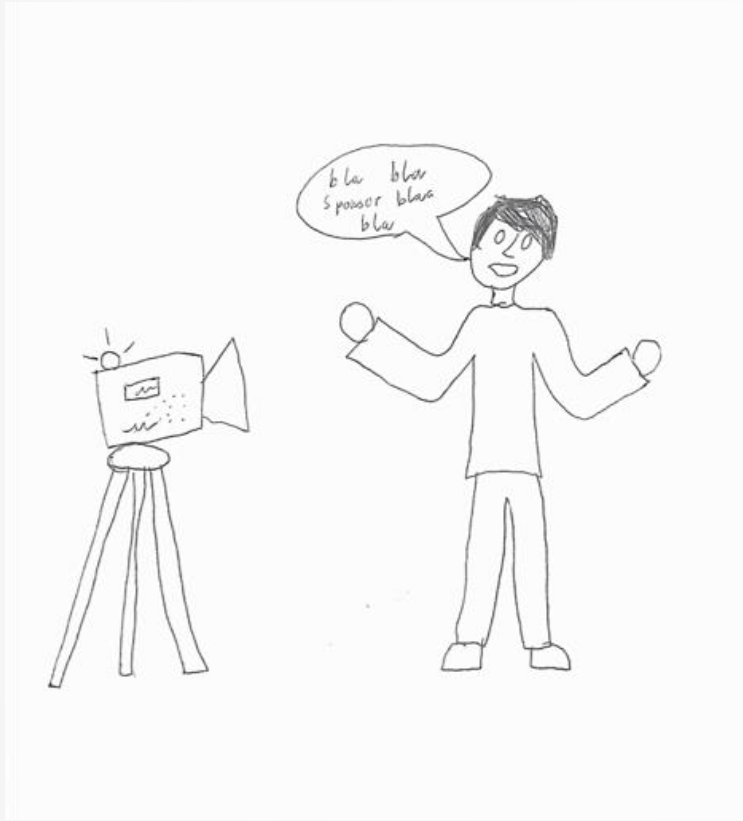
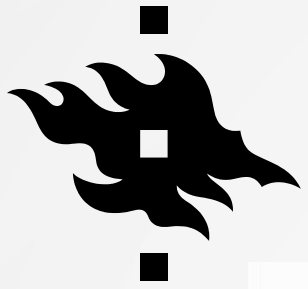


PUBLICATIONS

- **Reinikainen, H.** (2023). Somevaikuttajat ja organisaatioiden strateginen viestintä. In: H. Reinikainen & S-M Laaksonen (eds.). *ProComma Academic 2023: Vaikuttava viestintä* (pp. 13-28). ProCom - Viestinnän ammattilaiset.
- **Reinikainen, H.**, & Valentini, C. (2023). Chapter 28: Digital corporate communication and public sector organizations. In V. Luoma-aho & M. Badham (eds.), *Handbook on digital corporate communication*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
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- **Reinikainen, H.**, Tan, T. M., Luoma-aho, V., & Salo, J. (2021). Making and breaking relationships on social media : the impacts of brand and influencer betrayals. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 171, Article 120990.
- **Reinikainen, H.**, Munnukka, J., Maity, D., & Luoma-aho, V. (2020). 'You really are a great big sister' - Parasocial relationships, credibility, and the moderating role of audience comments in influencer marketing. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 36(3-4), 279-298.



**WHAT IS THE FIRST THING THAT COMES INTO
YOUR MIND WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT
"SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS"?**



Student view



AI view



PRESENTING A PERSONA ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- **Self-presentation:**
Behavior that attempts to convey some information about oneself or some image of oneself to other people (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987).
- **Impression management:**
One's attempt to control others' perception of them (Goffman, 1956; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Tuominen et al., 2022).





TOWARDS MICRO-CELEBRITY

- The concerted and strategic **cultivation of an audience through social media** with a view to attaining celebrity status (Khamis et al., 2016).
- *”Something one does, rather than something one is”* (Marwick, 2015).





DEFINING SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

- "A new type of independent **third-party endorsers** who **shape audience attitudes** through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media" (Freberg et al., 2011).
- "... everyday, **ordinary** Internet users who **accumulate a relatively large following** on blogs and social media through the **textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles**, engage with their following [...], and **monetize their followings**" (Abidin, 2016).
- "... a person who, through **personal branding**, builds and maintains **relationships with multiple followers** on social media, and has the ability to **inform, entertain, and potentially influence** followers' **thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors** (Dhanesh and Duthler, 2019).



DEFINING SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

- Modern day **opinion leaders**, who operate on social media platforms and typically:
 - Build **personal brands**
 - Engage in **interaction** and **relationship building**
 - Affect **attitudes, opinions, and behaviors**
 - Engage in **influencer marketing** activities

(Suuronen et al., 2022).





TYPICAL FOR INFLUENCERS

- Perceived by their followers as **intimate friends**, or even as **family members**, like **sisters** (Berryman & Kavka, 2017; Raun, 2018; Reinikainen et al., 2020).
- Often viewed as **more relatable** and **authentic** than traditional celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Pöyry et al., 2019)
- Their social media content is often perceived **more credible** than the content that organizations produce (Jin & Muqaddam, 2019).
- Are able to **capitalize their relationships** with their followers (Abidin, 2016).
- Don't necessarily have to be real human beings! **Virtual influencers** (e.g. Lil Miquela) and **petfluencers** are gaining ground.



WHY ARE THEY SO INTRIGUING?

- “Simulcramum of conversational give and take” aka **parasocial interaction**

AND

- “Illusion of a face-to-face relationship”, aka **parasocial relationship**

(Horton & Wohl, 1956)

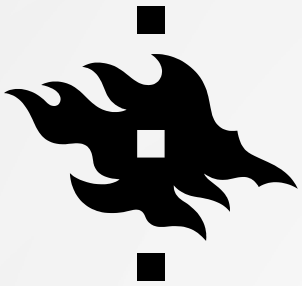
@mmiisas



AUTHENTICITY

- An idea often attached to social media influencers is that they are **authentic** – **genuine** and **true to themselves** (Luoma-aho et al., 2019; Pöyry et al., 2019).
- "The capitalization of intimacy" (Raun, 2016) creates **tension** between the the "**authentic self**" and the "**brand marketer**" (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020).
- What truly is authentic on social media?





INFLUENCERS = BAD?

From racism to The Savoy: The biggest influencer scandals there have been in 2022

When they get it wrong, they get it so, so wrong

CONTROVERSY

Kanye West's Antisemitism Scandal: The Complete Fallout From His Controversial Remarks

Influencers' Biggest Scandals: Revisiting James Charles, Shane Dawson & More Controversies

Wellness influencers fueled pandemic misinformation. Now they're targeting another crisis

The arrest of misogynist influencer Andrew Tate, explained

The 36-year-old was recently arrested on charges of rape and human trafficking in Romania.



BUT ALSO: PEER SUPPORT AND ROLE MODELS

**How Can Mental Health Influencers
Help Support You?**

These 10 Influencers Are Normalizing Stretch
Marks on Social Media RN

THEIR TRANSPARENCY FEELS LIKE A BREATH OF FRESH AIR.

**Influencers and Celebrities Come
Out for Equality in 2021**

POLITICS • ELECTIONS

How Democrats Are Using Social Media
Influencers to Get Out the Vote



SEVERAL PARADOXES ATTACHED TO INFLUENCERS

- Social media influencers are both **peers and members of social media communities** and **marketing agents for brands** (Munnukka, 2023).
 - Social media influencers are both **authentic** and **commercial** (Audrezet et al., 2020)
 - Their influence is both **bemoaned** että **belittled** (Abidin, 2016).
- These paradoxes potentially **generate tensions** and **conflict** to influencer-follower relationships, to public debates, and the influencers' partnerships



INFLUENCING = EMOTIONAL LABOR

- Being a social media influencer is also **a profession**.
- Due to the nature of the work, it has been called "**aspirational**" or "**emotional labor**" (Duffy, 2016).
- **Negatively engaged followers** may enforce influencers to resort to various kinds of acts of emotional labor (Kalvi & Knuutinen, 2020).
- Influencer may also end up performing emotional labor for their **partner brands** (Reinikainen, 2023).



Pic: [Freepik](#)



INFLUENCING = PLATFORMED LABOR

- As the work is done on social media platforms, influencers typically **compete for visibility** (Cotter, 2018).
- It is also very consuming work and influencers are typically caught between **conflicting expectations** and the “**mixture of intimate and algorithmic logics**” (Lehto & Mannevu, 2022).
- Acts of “**trying to please the algorithm**” may lead to exhaustion, anger, urge to quit – but the “visibility game” can also be very addictive (paper forthcoming).



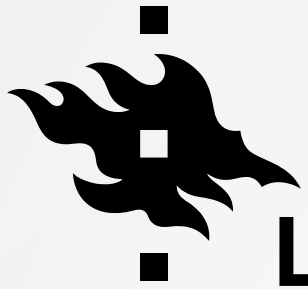
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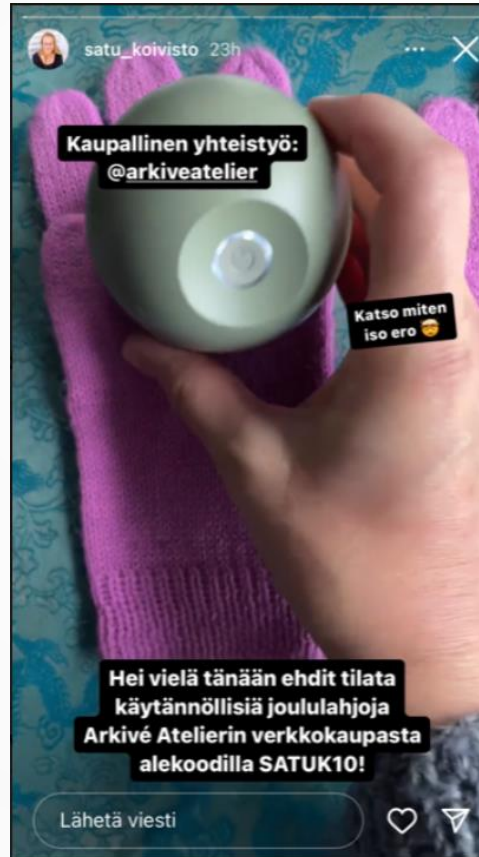
UNDER THE INFLUENCE

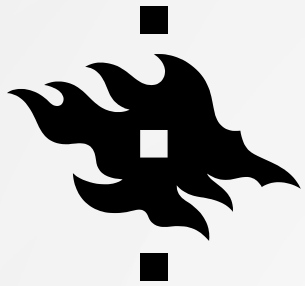
- Personal brand offers a possibilities for **monetization**
- This is also leading to the convergence of **promotional** and **political influence**





SUGGESTING DESIRABLE LIFESTYLES – WITH THE HELP OF BRANDS





IS IT EFFECTIVE?

- Collaborations can have a positive effect on:
 - Brand attitude (Munnukka et al., 2019)
 - Brand trust (Reinikainen et al., 2020)
 - Brand engagement (Hughes et al., 2019)
 - Brand perception (Lee & Watkins, 2016)

→ Thus, a powerful way to drive **brand-related consumer behavior**



THE NUMBERS KEEP RISING

- The value of influencer marketing in Finland in 2022: **52,5 million euros***
- Growth from 2021 about **20%**.
- Globally the value of influencer marketing is expected to reach **24 billion USD** (up from 1.6 billion in 2016)

• (*[IAB](#), **[Statista](#))



THE CONVERGENCE OF PROMOTION AND POLITICS

- Social media influencers have been largely examined from the point of view of influencer marketing → Interest has been focused on "**endorsement effectiveness**" and **consumer behavior** (see, e.g., Hughes et al., 2019; Lee & Watkins, 2017; Munnukka et al., 2019)
- Influencers generally considered as "**unpolitical**" (e.g. lifestyle influencers) have also started to comment political issues and themes research interest has risen (see, e.g. Cheng et al., 2023; Riedl et al., 2021).
- For "**ideological intermediaries**" see Arnesson, 2023 and "**political agents**", see Naderer, 2022.



EXAMPLES



@nataliasalmela



@mona_bling



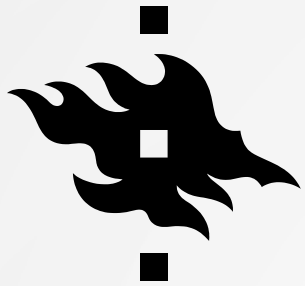
@jennipupulandia



@mariaveitola

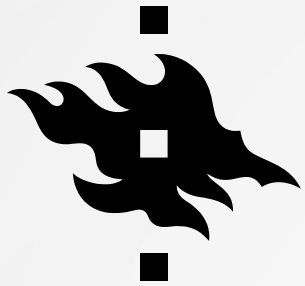


@terapeuttille



SUMMARIZING

- People have an amazing ability **to experience connection** with other people, including in digital environments. These connections are also **actively sought and built**.
- Some people have the ability **to commercialize this strong sense of connection** that others feel towards them and even make **it a profession for themselves** – a profession that is **platformized** and requires performing **emotional labour**.
- **The methods of influencing** used by social media influencers spread effectively online and are **adopted** by an increasing number of professional groups.
- Today, both **commercial and political influence** can be very **subtle and require a lot of media literacy**: the desired lifestyle can include not only **products and brands**, but also **ideologies**.

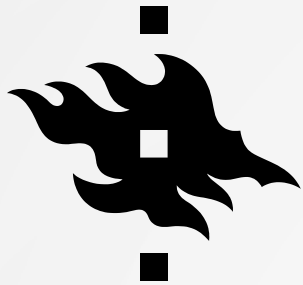


THE FUTURE?

- A lot of **guidelines** and **regulations** have been drawn up for the sponsored content of social media influencers, but political influence is still a new phenomenon. **Should political influencer talk also be regulated, and if so, how?**
- And what will be the role of **technology and the responsibility of platforms** in the future? Algorithms and AI may take influencing in very surprising directions in the future, especially in terms of, for example, **microtargeting, image and text generation, fake content, misinformation** and **disinformation**. What are **implications when it comes to social media influencers and their audiences?**



QUESTIONS?



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THANK YOU!