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Research Exposé:

"The impact of social media influencers on consumers conspicuous and inconspicuous sustainable consumption"

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Abstract

Social media influencers are becoming more involved in the marketing field by promoting products and services for their followers, and the growth of sustainable awareness continues to impact consumers' consumption habits. One female and male social media influencer who are promoting both conspicuous and inconspicuous products have been selected. In this study, we examine how Instagram influencers impact consumers' para-social relationship between value perception and sustainable consumption. The study is going to differentiate between conspicuous and inconspicuous sustainable consumption while taking into account the PSI relationship between social media influencers and followers to see if there is a significant difference between conspicuous and inconspicuous sustainable consumption. The survey is an online questionnaire that will target 18 to 30 years old users who have liked the selected Instagram post of the influencer. The data will be collected by using four different questionnaires: conspicuous and inconspicuous products from both influencers. The study contributes to expanding previous studies which combined influencer marketing and sustainable consumption (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018) and in addition, contribute from consumers' point of view how influencers impact younger generations and their sustainable consumption behavior on visible (conspicuous) and non-visible (inconspicuous) products. Businesses and social media influencers could use this valuable information in the future to re-design their marketing strategies to maximize their outcome.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, Social media, sustainable consumption, conspicuous consumption, inconspicuous consumption, para-social interaction, value perception

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List of Abbreviations

PA   Physical attractiveness

SA   Social attractiveness

PSI   Para-social interaction

CV   Conspicuous value

PV   Personal value

SV   Social value

VP   Value perception

SC   Sustainable consumption

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past decades, the awareness of sustainability has been brought into the minds of society (Carrington et al., 2010). Due to the raising awareness of the environmental problems, consumers have been noticed to pursue more sustainable options (Chen et al., 2019). According to Johnstone and Lindh (2017), it's mainly because of the rising awareness of environmental issues, sustainable consumption has become a key target of people's purchasing decision-making process. For the fashion industry, the movement closer to the sustainable solution is no easy task since consumers are used to fast-paced fashion cycles. The author adds that to achieve that transformation, the market has to support the idea and also demand sustainable fashion from the companies. The author also states that the consumption of fashion products is closely related to social identity, and most consumers consume excessively in pursuit of the ideal, which seem to be the problem of the younger consumers who are more exposed to the social aspects (McNeill & Venter, 2019)

While talking about younger consumers, as for the contrast, studies in the past have shown how the younger generation, especially the millennials are considered to be more interested in sustainable products (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018), and also the majority of the consumer research on sustainable fashion brands has shown that Generation Z is one of the most loyal consumer groups (Grazzini et al., 2021). Since the internet has been growing rapidly in past decades, at least millennials have generated understanding towards ethical issues and therefore being able to change their consumption behavior. Internet and digitalization themselves have made it possible for consumers to be informed about environmental issues and sustainable options (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018).

Since we have learned, the growth of the internet is affecting the younger generation, they are also frequent users of social media platforms (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). The activity of the younger generation has also changed companies' business models in direction to be more present on these social media channels (Berne-Manero et al., 2020; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013). While companies continue to abandon traditional advertising techniques and increasingly focus more on social media influencers, who endorse brands' products and services to their target group. (Abidin, 2016) These human beings are an important link between companies and potential customers since influencers can influence trends, lifestyles,

and even ideas to their consumers (Berne-Manero, 2020). In today's world, influencer marketing, which can be defined as marketing communication, is predicted to grow nearly double beyond its $ 8 billion value by 2022 (Belanche, 2021). Social media influencers are people who have built over time a large social network of people, who are following their life. Influencers are seen as a tastemaker, who promote the brand's offerings on their social media accounts and therefore influence others. (Abidin, 2016) That branded content shared by social media influencers can be found on social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook (Glucksman, 2017). In influencer marketing, the key aspect is reliability, and it has been proven that influencer marketing engages and also influences consumers more than other marketing styles (Lim et al., 2017). Social media influencers have an impact on consumers' consumption behavior and also on purchasing behavior if they are seen as an expert in a specific field, like fashion (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). According to Bakka (2018), it is important to remember that it is more common to see influencers in fashion, beauty, and lifestyle areas.

Based on the previous research on fashion consumption, it seems that consumers' increased concerns for environmental issues do not always directly reflect on their behavior (McNeill et al., 2015). Since consumers are argued to be trend sensitive and need to keep up with norms, from a social aspect which is related to status and trends are usually seen as a key priority other than sustainability when choosing fashion products (Chetioui et al., 2020; McNeill et al., 2015).

While going through existing researches about influencer marketing and sustainability, findings proved that there are existing studies of influencer marketing and its impact on consumption behavior (Chetioui et al., 2020; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). From the sustainability point of view, studies have focused on the drivers of sustainable consumption, and how marketing teams can affect consumers' habits and push them towards sustainable options (White et al., 2019; Schaefer et al., 2005). Developing a sustainable future requires maintaining or achieving balanced consumption on economic, social, and environmental levels (Zulauf & Wagner, 2021).

According to Chetioui et al., (2020), influencers marketing has a high impact on fashion consumption among young people. Bedard and Tolmie (2018) on the other hand have made a research about the combination of social media and sustainable consumption, but they have not

been taking into account how influencer marketing could impact sustainable consumption behavior among younger generations, therefore there is a narrow but existing gap. According to our best knowledge, our current study is also one of the first to examine influencer marketing and sustainable consumption while adding conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption as a part of the research. Therefore, another existing research gap would be regarding the comparison between conspicuous and inconspicuous sustainable consumption.

The current study contributes to developing the theoretical research which combines influencer marketing and sustainable consumption, and in addition, contribute from a consumer's point of view how influencers impact their sustainable consumption behavior while taking into account visible (conspicuous) and non-visible (inconspicuous) products. From a practical point of view, current research help brands, companies, and marketers who are using influencer marketing as a marketing strategy to understand how influencer marketing can stimulate younger consumers towards sustainable products. The study also creates a deeper understanding of consumers' motives to participate in sustainable consumption, which can be valuable information for companies and social media influencers in the future.

That to be said, the research aims to get more understanding on how social media influencers impact consumers' sustainable consumption and therefore to see if there is visible contrast in behavior among the younger generation while consuming conspicuous and inconspicuous sustainable products.

The study firstly explains the content of the study with terms explained, theoretical framing of the theories that have been used to develop the research model, and hypotheses regarding the model. In the methodology section research design will be developed, sample description, data collection, and data evaluation will be explained as well. Expected contributions of the study will be briefly explained following up the chapter overview and work plan for the upcoming months and also the list of references used to create the theoretical support for the study.

Chapter 2: Content of the study

This chapter provides definitions of the terms that are relatively important to understand the context of the study. Terms like influencer marketing and sustainable consumption are explained and how they relate to each other. In addition, there is also a need to understand how the consumption of the younger generation is connected to influencer marketing and sustainable fashion consumption.

2.1 Influencer Marketing and consumption behavior

We are living in a world where digitalization is a major trend and the rise of social media channels has provided improved ways of communicating with the investors and also where the opportunity to progress a discussion with consumers has begun (Bakker, 2018). Based on Evans et al (2017) claim, it has become even more common for companies to connect with consumers on social media platforms, for example through influencer marketing. Other than allowing better access to communication and commitment with companies' target groups, influencer marketing can increase brand awareness through the commitment of new possible customers (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencer marketing differentiates from previous marketing strategies by involving celebrity endorsers (Glucksman, 2017), which means that different companies are investing in people that customers find as likable and trustworthy (Erdogan, 1999). On the other hand, De Veirman et al. (2017) point out that social media influencers and past concepts of celebrity influencers are different since influencers are considered more open, credible, and easy to connect to since they share perspectives of their life with their followers. Influencer marketing is a growing marketing strategy because of the influencers' ability to communicate with a huge number of followers, and therefore consumers can trust an influencer more than a typical marketing campaign (Evans et al., 2017).

Influencer marketing has a major impact on consumers' decision-making process. Influencers can encourage consumers to purchase specific products by promoting different products on their social media accounts (Bakker, 2018). Except for influencing customers' decisions, it has been proven that influencers can impact consumers' purchasing behavior and attitudes towards products and brands (De Veirman et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2017). Sheldon and Bryant (2016) point out potential differences between genders that come to the power of

influence. It has been proven that women are more interactive on social media platforms and use it as a chance to build personal relationships.

While talking about influencer marketing, social media influencers need to be able to build trust with their followers to influence them (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Furthermore, Bakker claims that influencers' social media post has to be genuine and imaginative at the same time to deliver the message to the consumer. Lou and Yuan (2019) argue that the trust towards influencers might also develop from special occasions, and then consumers see influencers as personal experts in a particular field. Furthermore, to the topic, Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro (2020) state that influencers who have fewer followers, such as "micro-influencers", have been shown to create a more profound and greater bond with their followers while macro-influencers are seen as more desirable than micro-influencers. Companies have an important role while choosing the right influencer that fits their advertising plan (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017).

Influencer marketing has and will face criticism because consumers don't always get when the post on social media platforms is advertising and when it's just a regular post (Evans et al., 2017). According to De Veirman et al. (2017), since influencers' posts are greatly personal, it may lead to consumers detecting those statements as opinions and becoming easily convinced. Lou and Yuan (2019) found that consumers trust an influencer's view as much as they trust the opinion coming from their close friend. Sometimes consumers remember certain products only because they have seen influencers promoting them and they can relate to that product more easily (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017).

While combining influencer marketing with the fashion industry, Chetioui et al (2020) have claimed that social media influencers can impact consumer behavior way more than before. The reason behind the growth could be mainly because the new generation of consumers is becoming even more trend-sensitive while talking about fashion consumption and in addition influencers are also being considered to be working in the front line in the development of new fashion trends. Also, it's notably to say the researchers claim that besides fashion influencers could affect consumers' belief in different brands, they can increase consumers' buying intention.

2.2 Sustainable consumption

Back in 1992, after the Rio Earth Summit, the term "sustainable consumption" became an official topic of conversation (Seyfang, 2005). The discussion related to sustainable consumption has gotten more attention in media and its importance in public policy formulation worldwide (Pepper et al., 2009). Sustainable consumers are motivated mainly by the attitudes towards the values but on the other hand, other factors like price, quality, and availability of the product are important as well. Previous research found out that consumption behavior is closely related to the psychological and social identity of the person, and these factors can create some challenges while trying to increase the engagement in sustainable consumption. (Schaefer et al., 2005)

Other than previous results, White et al, (201pointsint out that the pro-environmental commitment is most likely to grow when the context of the post or the communication is directly pointed to psychological factors such as social influence, habits, feelings, etc. While considering these factors stated before, the attitudinal behavior gap has been continuously been linked to sustainable consumption. Attitudinal behavior gap means that even though consumers have been able to develop a positive attitude towards sustainability their behavior and action in real life usually do not match with their purchase intention. This may be for example because the consumer feels powerless and also knows that their action alone cannot solve the global problem (Schaefer et al., 2005).

Younger consumers, as for the contrast, studies in the past have shown how the younger generation, especially the millennials are considered to be more interested in sustainable products (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018), and also the majority of the consumer research on sustainable fashion brands has shown that Generation Z is one of the most loyal consumer groups (Grazzini et al, 2021). Recent studies have been focusing on younger consumers and the development of their environmental attitudes and behaviors (Casaló et al., 2016; Otto et al., 2014). According to Naderi et al., (2018) findings, most of the time consumers find themselves more attitudinal green than behavioral. The author also adds that millennials tend to choose green options only when the benefit is higher than the actual cost, which might be due to socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, education, and income. Another complicated aspect is that lack of product attributes to become more sustainable doesn't seem to be an option for the consumers and even sometimes consumers are having difficulties detecting green

products from non-green, which reflects miscommunication problems between consumers and companies. (Lu et al., 2013)

In sustainable fashion consumption, it is hard to point out a single definition since there is no industry standard. On the other hand, sustainable fashion includes a variety of terms such as organic, green, eco, sustainable, recycled, slow, upcycled, etc. (Cervellon et al, 2010) Each of these terms seek to separate a variety of detected mistakes in the fashion industry such as animal cruelty, behavior damaging environment and the abuse of workers (Bianchi et al, 2010; Bray, 2009). In sustainability, since the fashion industry is one of the main important players contributing to social and environmental problems, the industry has been pushed to provide other options that could lower the environmental effect. (McNeill et al, 2019) The same author also points out that fashion consumption is indeed highly connected with how the consumer expresses their identity in social situations, therefore understanding how consumers build their identity is necessary to find out the motivations behind consuming fashion. (McNeill et al, 2019)

Based on researches in the past (McNeill et al., 2015; Bray et al., 2011) it seems that while consumers need to decide between sustainable and fashionable choices, ethics might be a secondary priority. Park et al., (2020), point out that even though younger people are believed to be well aware of sustainable fashion, they are still consuming products that represent a low level of ethics. Besides the negative aspects, what comes to fashion consumption younger generation can be considered to have a price-quality perspective and they understand that sustainable fashion is something that could be another choice to fast fashion products. Social pressure coming from the friends and people around might affect on person's moral choices such as sustainable behavior in the stage of building and creating own ego (McNeill et al., 2019).

2.3 Sustainable influencer marketing

Besides influencers who promote beauty and fashion products, in our society, we have another kind of influencers who display a sustainable engagement by promoting sustainable green products and, thus, lead people towards environmentally friendly behavior via social media accounts. On social media, influencers share their concerns and knowledge regarding sustainable products to increase products' credibility and, therefore, share the benefits of a

sustainable lifestyle. Influencers who support sustainable communication most likely focus on the benefits of green behavior instead of the impact that sustainable consumption might have on the planet. (Chwialkowska, 2019) Thereby, social media influencers' sustainable communication keeps inside valuable information, and according to Lou and Yuan (2019) influencers' informative value seems to have a progressive impact on the buying intentions of their social media followers'.

Furthermore, social media advertisement most likely has more commercial targets than sustainable ones. Thus, it also depends on what kind of influencer each customer engages with (Berne-Manero et al., 2020). By selecting the right kind of influencer and message, the company may increase its customers' sustainable awareness. The author furtherly explains that sustainable awareness seems to be higher among older customers, while the impact of social media influencers seems to be advanced for younger consumers. Sustainable influencers could be used to increase the general knowledge of sustainability and the issues by that way changing people's lifestyle to support the environment since consumer behavior is greatly shaped by social norms. (Johnstone et al., 2017)

2.4 Conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption

Conspicuous consumption is one of the ways that consumers can express publicly their wealth and enhance their prestigious status in other people's eyes (Shao et al., 2019). Brands such as Gucci with its GG logo and Burberry with its plaids are signs which reflect the wealth of the person (Eckhardt et al., 2015). What comes to the psychological motives of conspicuous consumption, it closely related to self-monitoring. People tend to regulate their self-presentation by tailoring their actions by immediate situational cues (Lennox et al., 1984). Multiple studies show how people with high susceptibility to normative and interpersonal influence consider whether their behaviors are socially appropriate (Huang et al., 2010; O'cass et al., 2004). Those people are trying to comfort other people's opinions, expectations and also enhance their self-image through connecting with a reference group (Hoffmann et al., 2009). People with high self-monitoring are more sensitive to interpersonal influence and therefore trying to maintain their appearance, image and while caring too much about their social image, those individuals try to adapt their behaviors to social context and norms (O'cass et al., 2004; Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2018).

During past years, the trend of consumption behavior has changed towards more sophisticated and low-profile brands. These brands represent inconspicuous consumption which means products that don't reflect the status or wealth of the user. (Eckhardt et al., 2015) According to the author, the rise of inconspicuous consumption is because rich consumers who prefer to use inconspicuous products tend to feel uncomfortable showing their social status during economic difficulties. The author also states that since inconspicuous products are less noticeable, consumers are showing less of their social status to the others but also care about social equality. Lee et al., (2020) express that based on the past studies, people who have a low need for social status most likely purchase inconspicuous luxury products to separate themselves from general people to gain acceptance and recognition from a smaller group of people who share the same values.

Title	Author	Year	Contributions
"Millennials' green consumption behavior: Exploring the role of social media"	**Bedard, S. & Tolmie, C.**	**2018**	The research contributes to the field of literature by examining the unique connection of millennials, social media, and green consumption to see how social media influence impact on millennials' green purchase intention.
"Solving the puzzle of sustainable fashion consumption: The role of consumers' implicit attitudes and perceived warmth"	**Grazzini, L. Acuti, D. & Aiello, G.**	**2021**	The aim is to put together previous findings and contribute them to the literature findings on sustainable fashion. Proposed that sustainable attributes like recycled, upcycled materials positively impact consumers' purchase intention. Also, using sustainable attributes to fill the gap between fast and sustainable fashion adds value to the product itself.
"Influencer Marketing: How Message Value and Credibility Affect Consumer Trust of Branded Content on Social Media"	**Lou, C. & Yuan, S. (2019)**	**2019**	The research uses a preliminary study to create an understanding of the mechanism by how influencer marketing impacts consumers on social media. Furthermore, the integrated model- the social media influencer value model- take into account advertising value and source credibility.

"The rise of inconspicuous consumption"	Eckhardt, G. Belk, R.W & Wilson, A.J	2014	The research contributes to explaining the shift from conspicuousness to inconspicuousness and also puts together luxury and conspicuousness.
"The effect of power distance beliefs on the inconspicuous versus conspicuous consumption of luxury accessories in China and the USA"	Jiang, L., Gao, H., & Hui Shi, L.	2021	The research contributes to creating a deeper understanding of consumers' purchase intention of conspicuous and inconspicuous brands by using social attitude functions theory and power distance belief.
"Consumer motivation and luxury consumption: Testing moderating effects	Shao, W., Grace, D. & Ross, M.	2019	The study contributes to examining the influence of consumer goal attainment on intention to purchase luxury products.

Table 1. Literature review part 1.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framing

The purpose of this chapter is to understand which theories are used in this study and what previous studies have found out related to these theories. In this point, understanding the theories that are going to be used in this study is highly important.

3.1 Para social Interaction (PSI)

Para-social interaction is described to be a virtual online relationship between social media personalities and their followers (Cohen et al., 2018). The opposite of social interaction, Para-social interaction is one-sided interaction where social media users actively interact with social media influencers and build an online relationship with them (Kassing et al., 2010). Quite often the relationship between the social media users and social media personas are described as the way of getting guidance and help from friends and also imagine being part of the bigger popular group of people (Rubin et al., 1985). That kind of relationship is self-made

and therefore the other part, social media personas might not even be aware of that and still influence it. (Kelman, 1958).

Along with female social media users, having a PSI relationship with social media personas or celebrities and own the same products as they do to belong to the same club. (Greenwood et al., 2008). The relationship between social media users and celebrities can be seen as the same as the relationship between social media users and social media influencers. On social media, users can create a relationship for example with bloggers, when they subscribe and start to follow the content that social media persona is posting. While having multiple followers they can even create an online community where the members of the group share the same values, beliefs, and interests (Nambisan and Watt, 2011).

In social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, the relationship between influencer and users is not unidirectional, since users can like, comment, and discuss the content, while influencer is also able to answer back to them. Influencers are not able to answer back to every follower they have since most likely the number of followers is huge. According to Labrecque (2014) and Lee et al, (2016), Online bloggers are seen the same as celebrities of traditional media and therefore real friendship is more illusion than friendship between bloggers and followers. The usage of social media networks is positively connected with the development of the para-social relationship with celebrities. (Kim et al., 2015)
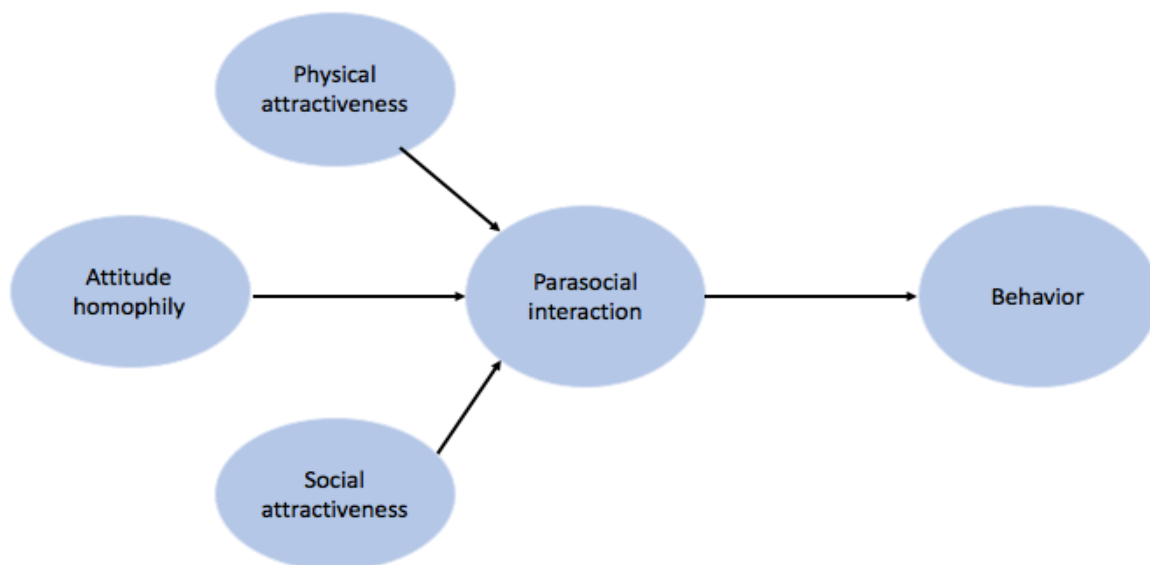

Figure 1. Para-social interaction (PSI)

3.2 Value perception

"The concept of "perceived value" emerged as the defining business issue of the 1990s and has continued to receive extensive research interest in the present century" (Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2007). As the author mentioned, people had a growing interest in perceived value and therefore it was listed on the research priority list of Marketing Science Institute back in 2006-2008.

Lapierre et al., (1999) argue that "perceived value" is frequently badly separated from the related constructs like "values", "gain", "price" and "quality". Even though there is extensive research done on these constructs, the relationships among them seem to remain indistinct. Even some cases "value" and "values" are assumed to be the same even though the value is the result of an evaluative judgment and values, on the other hand, are criteria, norms, rules, and standards that are the basis for the judgment (Holbrook, 1999).
Other authors have specified conceptualization of value as a compromise between benefit and sacrifice. They also argue that "perceived value" is a multidimensional structure where different notions such as perceived price, quality, benefit, and sacrifice are gathered together (Sweeney et al., 2001; Sinha et al., 1998; Holbrook, 1999).

Multiple studies have been conducted about fashion and social media influencers, but studies about how social media influencers impact sustainable consumption are limited (Bedard et al., 2018; Chetioui et al., 2020), therefore we aim to study the relationship between para-social interaction, value perception and sustainable consumption with young consumers and also to see if there is difference between conspicuous and inconspicuous products. From multiple dimensions of the value, this study will pursue the relationship between para-social interaction and consumer value perception from a social, personal, and conspicuous value point of view (Pongsakornrungslip et al., 2011).
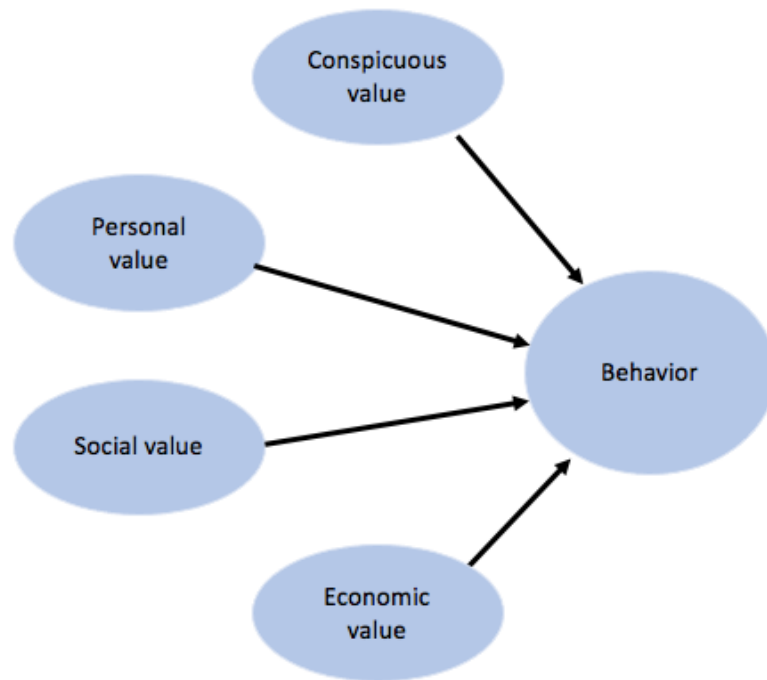
Figure 2. Value Perception

3.3 Value-Belief-Norm

The Value-Belief-Norm theory created by Stern et al., (1999), provides a comprehensive understanding of public support in an environmental context. It's been believed that public support is the most critical resource to deal with social problems. Public problems are large-scale problems, which need help from social movements to be solved collectively (Stern et al., 2000). The Value-Belief-Norm-Theory (VBN) has been used for years to demonstrate sustainable innovations (Zulauf & Wagner, 2021). VBN builds upon and generalizes the adapted model which combines Schwartz Value System, New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) of Dunlap and Norm Activation Theory (NAT) of Schwartz (Topal et al., 2021). In VBN theory, environmental awareness is most often promoted by collective values such as altruistic values, biospheric values, and egoistic values. Altruistic values motivate individuals to care about the well-being of others and society, while biospheric values refer to the motivation towards the environment and other species and egoistic values refer to the importance of self-interests within the society (Stern, 2000). Stern uses the mediator model of NAT, which predicts creating a chain between awareness of consequences, the ascription of responsibility, and personal norm and eventually causes the final behavior (Topal et al., 2021).

Personal norms can be defined as behavior in a certain situation that is based on personal values and beliefs (Stern, 2000).
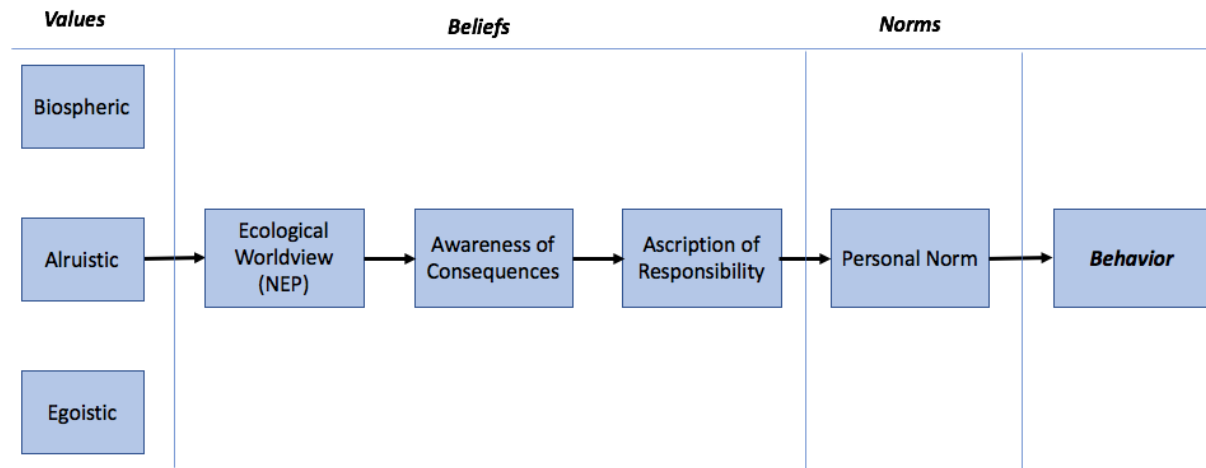

Figure 3. Value-Belief-Norm Theory

VBN theory is considered to be an alternative theory because it includes values, beliefs, norms and considers them from environmental aspects. The model combining Para-social interaction and value perception was selected since its more convenient to examine what is the outcome of the relationship between social media influencers and consumers while taking into account different values that consumers have.

Title	Author	Year	Contributions
"How Instagram Influencers Affect the Value perception of Thai Millennial Followers and Purchasing intention of Luxury Fashion for	**Jansom, A.**	**2021**	The study goes through concepts of social and physical attractiveness, PSI, and value perception. Those were employed to understand the relationship with purchase intention. Key findings of the paper contribute to reducing the negative impacts of social media using the relationship of social and physical attractiveness and para-social interaction.

Sustainable Marketing"			
"The concept of perceived value: a systematic review of the research"	**Sánchez-Fernández, R.**	**2007**	The study contributes to the literature on the subject by providing a comprehensive and systematic review of the other researches. The study will facilitate a deeper understanding of nature and measure value perception.
"SNS users' para-social relationships with celebrities: social media effects on purchase intentions"	**Kim, H., Ko, E., Kim, J.,**	**2015**	The study contributes to building a theoretical foundation of the impact on the para-social relationship between consumers and celebrities. The study also helps to clarify gender roles in the relationship between celebrity reputation and PSI relationships, and also between celebrity reputation and purchase intention. This study also contributes to offering helpful information for the marketers of the fashion industry by showing gender differences in attitudes towards celebrity reputation, PSI and purchase intention
"Understanding value co-creation in a co-consuming brand community"	**Pongsakornrungsilp, S., Schroeder, J.E.,**	**2011**	This study contributes to previous literature on brand community and value co-creation by showing the dynamic roles of consumers in value co-creation, exposing new forms of a

			consumer organization and visualizing how consumers work among themselves in managing brand communities.
"Exploring Urban Sustainable Understanding and Behaviour: A Systematic Review towards a Conceptual Framework	**Topal, H.F., Hunt, D.V.L., and Rogers, C.D.F.,**	**2021**	The study contributes to extending previous studies which have been specific-behavior-focused research and provide a promising contribution to Urban Sustainability research. Research provides potential to understand human behaviors towards the urban and natural environment.

Table 2. Literature review part 2.

Chapter 4: The hypotheses development and Research model

In this Chapter, hypotheses will be explained, and the research model will be presented. In the process of explaining the selected hypotheses, these actions will be also supported with literature findings.

4.1 Physical and social attractiveness of Instagram Influencers

Each person is different and therefore they observe information differently based on their persona. In social media platforms, influencers promote products via posts (like photos, videos, reels, etc.) which can be the driver of a source of attraction. (Purnamaningsih et al., 2020) Therefore, the photo posted by an influencer can be seen as a visual message which is related to the physical message that they are expressing. These influencers attract both: physical and social attention, which can be used as a driver of para-social interaction (Perse et al., 1989).

Based on social psychology literature, psychological attractiveness deals with how appealing or pleasing a person's physical features and aesthetic beauty are. These may differ across cultures and periods but remain strongly related to social interaction. (Reis et al., 1980) Physical attraction among influencers and vloggers relates to the physical appearance of the persona, like an attractive body shape, or facial features. In previous studies, for example in the context of the influence of online relationships, physical attractiveness has been found as a

predictor of para-social interaction. (Lee and Watkins, 2016) Therefore, the following hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1. The physical attractiveness of an Instagram influencer increases para-social interaction

Social attractiveness can be defined as the likelihood to be a friend or to choose the media figure as a social partner. While talking about television, newspapers, and even social media, both social and physical attractiveness has been demonstrated as a predictor of para-social interaction (Rubin and McHugh, 1987; Lee and Watkins, 2016; Kurtin et al., 2018). The study of French social media users found out that social attractiveness positively supported the relationship between influencers and their followers, while physical attractiveness supporting users' para-social interaction and purchase intention were found negative (Sokolova et al., 2020). Nevertheless, according to authors (Rubin et al., 1987; Lee et al., 2016; Kurtin et al., 2018), social attractiveness is said to be the main factor to influences para-social interaction. Therefore, the following hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2. The social attractiveness of an Instagram influencer increases para-social interaction

4.2 The impact of para-social interaction on Consumer value perception.

Consumer value is about value creation for the consumer, so if a consumer is buying certain products or services, they will gain positively from purchasing it so in the other words: The purchased item creates value for the consumer (Vargo et al., 2015). While customers are purchasing products, they can see the quality, social and conspicuous value of the product, and therefore buying expensive, sustainable, or just well-known products they express their status to the other people around them (Segal et al., 2013; Vigneron et al., 1999). Since multiple dimensions of the value include many aspects of value, this study will pursue the relationship between para-social interaction and consumer value perception from conspicuous, personal and social value point of view (Pongsakornrungslip et al., 2011).

Conspicuous consumption and sustainability are commonly argued to be odd together. Conspicuous consumption itself is associated with striving to raise a person's social standing and therefore traps people in a consumption circle, which leads to override of material possessions (Podoshen et al., 2012). In the process, positional treadmills and habits have an

impact on overconsumption. So-called "positional treadmill" refers to the social comparison process where individuals in an excessive cycle of conspicuous consumption, pursue the effort to raise higher than the others in the society and therefore in the level of higher-standard groups. (Hudders et al., 2011; Linssen et al., 2010). Habit on the other hand is related to familiarization of the possessions, which tend to lower their sense of satisfaction and pleasure, and later start to look for superior and finer material possession to maintain or even increase their level of satisfaction (Chang et al., 2002).

Materialistic orientation is related to life displeasure and a lower level of well-being (Sukhdev et al., 2013). It's been stated that materialistic values may affect pro-social and public welfare disposition and decrease the likelihood of people engaging in sustainable behavior (Podoshen et al., 2012; Kasser et al., 2000). According to some authors, the conflict between materialism and sustainable consumption is the opposite nature of the value orientations which guide these behavior perspectives. Materialism is seen as an obsession with owning a lot of products and is related to personal happiness and related with self-interest and self-enhancement values to promote an emphasis on their interests. Meanwhile, sustainable consumption is described as promoting the limiting of possessions and rationalizing a purchase. Other than selfishness, sustainable consumption is related to self-accomplishment values that represent selflessness, harmony, and concern about public welfare. (Sevgili et al., 2014; Pepper et al., 2009).

Existing studies have shown that there is a negative relationship between materialism and sustainable consumption since materialism has been seen to impact negatively on ecological, environmental, and pro-environmental behavior (Ku & Zaroff, 2014; Bergman et al., 2014; Kilbourne et al., 2008). Besides of negative aspects of the combination of sustainability and conspicuous consumption, a growing number of studies have focused on status as an important driver for sustainable consumption (Van der Wal et al., 2016; Brooks et al., 2015; Zabkar et al., 2013). Sustainable products like food or clothes have often the same or even higher prices than normal, lower quality ones. People can communicate their willingness and ability to bear additional costs to protect nature and society by buying sustainable products.

According to Griskevicius et al., (2010) experiment, the author explains that the motive of consumer status promotes their willingness to choose the more ecological and greener version or products. Another author, Sexton et al., (2014) states that consumers are inclined to

spend additional money for example on a hybrid car, to express their social status. Dastrup et al. (2012) argue that in the neighborhood where the majority of the people own hybrid cars, they show greater environmental awareness than others, and therefore houses with photovoltaics tend to have a higher price than houses without photovoltaics. Of course, it is important to remember that these positive effects of status motives on sustainable consumption do not directly appear unconditionally. The alternative options for sustainable consumption depend on the visibility of the product. To achieve the status effect, the product needs to be visible and easy to recognize by the other to get the positive effect from status motives for sustainable consumption. That to be said, status motives are thought to increase the desire for visible and publicly used greener products. (Griskevicius et al., 2010)

O'Cass and Siahtir (2013) have argued that Chinese young adults would prefer Western fashion brands over Asian brands since they seem to address more effectively status and wealth. Nevertheless, since earlier stated that there are both: positive and negative aspects of the relationship between conspicuous consumption and sustainable consumption; therefore, the following hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 3a. Instagram influencers and para-social interaction together positively increase conspicuous value perception towards sustainable products

Hypothesis 4a. Conspicuous value perception of sustainable products positively motivate consumers towards sustainable consumption

Personal value is self-projection through objectives that the person thinks to correlate their attitudes, feelings, and perceptions. The personal value for an individual on the other hand is the image of how that person believes other people see them, and therefore certain products can boost their identity and reflect it (Oe et al., 2018; Neisser et al., 1994; Belk et al., 1988; Sirgy et al., 1982). As we have seen from the literature, people are expressing themselves through different styles and products, few studies show positive findings of personal value increasing purchase intentions (Oe et al., (2018); (O'Cass et al., (2013), so, therefore, following hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 3b. Instagram influencers and para-social interaction together positively increase the personal value perception of sustainable products

Hypothesis 4b. Personal value perception of sustainable products positively motivate consumers towards sustainable consumption

Social value relates to the perceived efficiency from the relationship between a product and social groups from cultural, demographic, or socioeconomic aspects (Sheth et al., 1991). Social values go together with making recognition and self-image look better (Sweeney et al., 1991) which impacts green consumers' decision-making (Finch, 2006). People belong to different socio-economic groups that would fundamentally differ in their consumption, income, social status, and social class background (Dittmar et al., 1994). Based on the literature, Malaysian consumers are affected by the social value, and as a consequence, it has a substantial impact on their concerns of the environment and, therefore to their purchasing behavior of green products (Biswas et al., 2015). The social image of green buying habits could encourage individual people to engage with green buying behavior and therefore impact purchase behavior. Studies also show that in China, people tend to think more about social values instead of environmental concerns while purchasing products (Chen et al., 2021). In collectivistic countries, social status and social evaluation seem to be a more important push for consumers to conduct pro-environmental behaviors than in individualistic countries (Kaufmann et al., 2012). Also, according to Suki (2016), the acceptance of eco products is highly dependent on the opinion of peers.

Hypothesis 3c. Instagram influencers and para-social interaction together positively increase the social value perception of sustainable products

Hypothesis 4c. Social value perception of sustainable products positively motivate consumers towards sustainable consumption

4.3 The impact of para-social interaction on consumers sustainable consumption

Over the past few years, social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube have received higher attention from marketers trying to find opportunities to activate consumers to purchase more. Influencers' credibility in an endorsement situation has been seen as critical to influencer consumers' purchasing intention through social media platforms (Zhu et al., 2016; Sokolova et al., 2020). Zheng et al., (2020) stated that in China, the perception of Para-social interaction in social media is positively related to the user's social commerce intention. Even though, the personalities in social media platforms push users to look, follow, share and even comment on the content to others who have the same style or interest. The para-

social interaction between the followers makes them accept the recommendations coming from the influencer and the other users and treat them as "real-life friends" who have an impact on their subsequent behavioral intention.

The study of Tran, (2020) found that there is mediating effect of para-social interaction on product consumption. Therefore, the following hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 5. Instagram influencers and para-social interaction together positively increase sustainable consumption
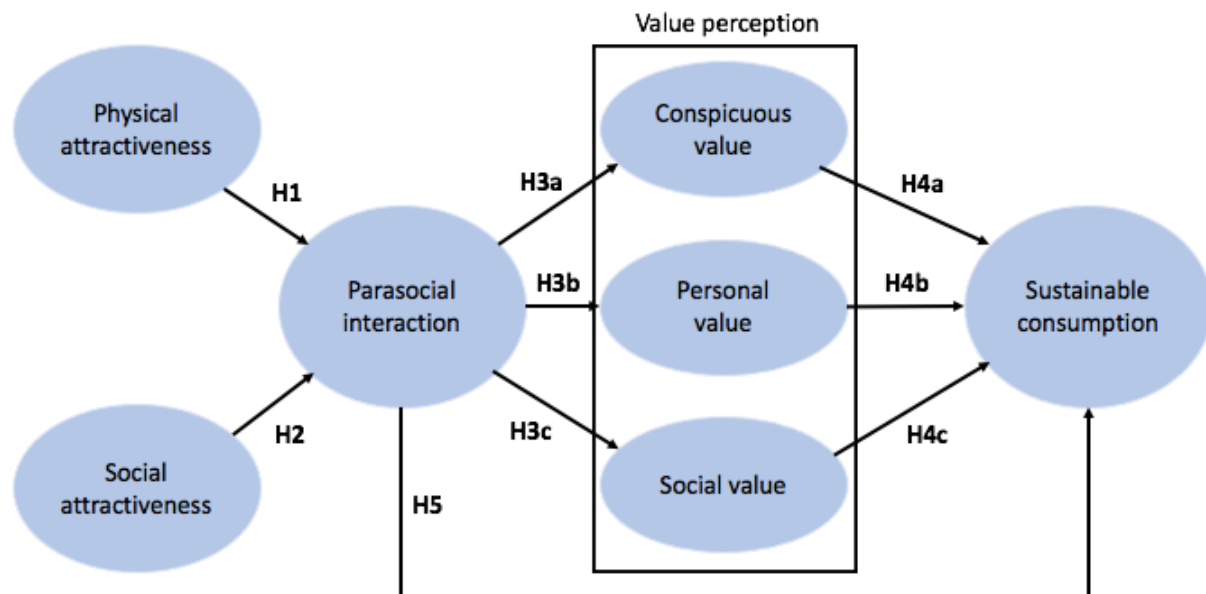
4.4 Research model

Figure 4. Research model

The research model of this study is a combination of two theories which were explained earlier in Chapter 3. of theoretical framing. From multiple dimensions of the value, this study will pursue the relationship between para-social interaction and consumer value perception from a social, personal, and conspicuous value point of view (Pongsakornrungslip et al., 2011), and therefore to examine how those will impact sustainable consumption behavior.

Title	Author	Year	Contributions
"Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy it? How credibility and para-social interaction influence purchase intention"	**Sokolova, K. & Kefi, H.**	**2020**	The contributes to adding knowledge to previous studies of influencer marketing by using influencer credibility and para-social interaction on the purchase intention of users in social media. In addition to younger generation values para-social interaction and what they perceive as a personal attachment to the influencers or credibility.
"The effect of materialism on conspicuous vs inconspicuous luxury consumption: focused on the need for uniqueness, self-monitoring, and self-construal	**Lee, M., Bae, J., & Koo, D.M.**	**2020**	The research contributes to narrow gap in the literature between conspicuous and inconspicuous luxury consumption by using "need for uniqueness" and "self-monitoring". Furthermore, the study shows that these two mechanisms are strongly sustained in different ways depending on the consumer's level of self-construal.
"Institutions and axioms: an extension and update of service-dominant logic"	**Vargo & Lusch**	**2015**	The article contributes to updating FBs of S-D logic and highlights the consolidation into a smaller set of axioms and therefore adjust other things like language. Point out the concept of service ecosystems to identify what is the role of institutions. Also, to point towards future directions for S-D logic theory development and research.
"Supply Chain Management in Vietnamese Fashion Vlogger Attributes Vs Product Consumption: A Double Conceptual Framework"	**Tran, Q.H.**	**2020**	The study contributes to defining the mediation effect of supply chain management interaction in the relation between video bloggers attributes and product consumption of Vietnamese consumer point of view by using SEM technique to detect the effect. The study also takes into account para-social interaction and trustworthiness aspects.
"Media coverage of climate change and sustainable product	**Chen, Y., Ghosh, M.,**	**2019**	Like earlier researches in the marketing field to empirically investigate the actual adaption of sustainable products. Also, the study will contribute to

consumption: Evidence from the Hybrid Vehicle Market"	Liu, Y., & Zhao, L.		the psychology and behavioral economics literature on the motivations behind the PSI behavior by studying the actual purchase behavior of hybrid cars and the role of media in generating reinforce a proposal norm that influences the purchase behavior of consumers

Table 3. Literature review part 3.

Chapter 5: Methodology

In this chapter, used methodologies will be briefly explained. The methodology starts with research context, design and sample description, followed by data collection and data analysis procedures.

5.1 Research context, design and sample description

The methodological approach for the study is a quantitative approach. In this study, the goal is to get a deeper understanding of how social media influencers impact consumers' sustainable consumption while comparing conspicuous and inconspicuous items. One female and male social media influencer have been selected based on the following criteria:

1. Social media influencer,
2. Who has a large scale of followers and therefore likes,
3. Who is using Instagram to promote sustainable products,
4. Who is promoting both, conspicuous products (e.g., shoes, clothes, etc.) and inconspicuous products (e.g., makeup, skincare, shampoo).

The study will be conducted via an online survey to gather more respondents all over the world. There will be four different samples because of the comparison of conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption. The same comparison will be done for both: female and male social media influencers. The participants are selected based on the following criteria:

1. People who are using Instagram,
2. Who are from 18 to 30 years old,
3. Who has liked the specific photo from the selected social media influencer.

To get the full benefit out from the answers of the respondents, it would be valuable if they have even purchased that product. The online survey will be sent to the people who have liked the selected photo of the social media influencer via Instagram direct message. This way, we can be more confident to reach out to people who fell inside of our selection criteria.

In the beginning, there will be a short introduction to explain the aim of the study without exposing too much about the outcome the study wants to achieve. The survey will start with general questions about gender, age (to be sure that they belong to the target group), country (to see if there is any contrast between the answers of the respondents and their country of origin), and income (to see if there is a link between revenues and sustainable behavior). After general questions, participants will be informed why they have been selected to be part of the survey. The post published by selected social media influencers will be shown to the participants to make sure they know to which product these questions are related. Besides general questions, other topic areas will be related to influencer marketing, para-social interaction, value perception (social, personal, conspicuous value), and sustainable consumption (different samples for a conspicuous and inconspicuous product).

5.2 Data collection

In our study, the number of respondents will not be counted from the population of one specific country or continent such as Asia or Europe, since our study is not specified to any region. The data is collected from the Instagram users who have liked the selected post by social media influencers and the respondents can be from all around the world mostly depending on how well known that influencer is. Since at this point It's hard to predict in which area respondents are coming from, it is convenient to use an alternative way to calculate the ideal sample size for the study. Barclay et al., (1995) created the 10-times rule which was later on accepted in the PLS- structural equation model literature. In 10-times rule, the minimum sample size of the research should be equally as large as 10 times the largest number of formative indicators used to measure one construct or 10 times more than the largest number of structural paths directed at a particular latent construct in the model (Hair et al., 2017). In the case of this study, reaching a minimum of 150 respondents of each subgroup to have a reasonable number of respondents who directly belong to the target group. In this way, the ideal sample size will be more accurate, since all of the respondents have seen the post before on which the survey is related.

5.3. Data analysis

The survey will be designed and spread by using an online platform SphinX Declic. Collected data from SphinX Declic will be analyzed through SmartPLS to understand the data by using Structural Equation Modeling. In many scientific fields, structural equation modeling (SEM) has become a common method for evaluating the plausibility of theoretical models that could explain the interrelationships among a collection of variables. The SEM represents a set of hypotheses concerning the generation and relationship of the different variables in the study. The SEM technique implementation thus begins with the formulation of a model to be estimated. This model helps the user to evaluate the relationships between different variables which were connected with hypotheses. As a result, the two main goals are to estimate the parameters of the hypotheses and find out if those fit the study. (Hu et al., 1999)

Chapter 6: Expected Contributions

The purpose of this chapter is to go through expected contributions to understand why this research has been made in the first place. These contributions will be about compared to previous studies and also how they will implicate on business, society and academic wise.

6.1 Scholarly Contributions

There are existing studies of influencer marketing and its impact on consumption behavior (Chetioui et al., 2020; Sudha et al., 2017), and also from a sustainability point of view, studies that have focused on the drivers of sustainable consumption and how marketing teams can affect on consumers habits and push them towards sustainable options (White et al., 2019; Schaefer et al., 2005).

Our current study contributes to developing the theoretical research which combines influencer marketing and sustainable consumption (Bedard et al., 2018), and in addition, contribute from a consumers' point of view how influencers impact younger generations and their sustainable consumption behavior while taking into account visible (conspicuous) and non-visible (inconspicuous) products.

In the marketing world, influencer marketing has been growing rapidly over the years and sustainable awareness, especially among younger generations. The current study increases ecological value in marketing research. To start with the first criteria's, the study touches reality check 1, "Have you looked to the real world of marketing, not just literature, for ideas" and 4: "Have you avoided the jingle and jangle fallacies", since the study exposes differences between conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption behavior which are related to marketing world but has not been studied before. Our study also relates to reality check number 13, "Are your dependent variables meaningful to your marketing stakeholders" This shows the relevance of the study for the managers who are responsible for making marketing decisions and strategies for the company. (Van Heerde et al., 2021)

6.2 Implications for Business and Society

From a practical point of view, current research help brands, companies, and marketers who are using influencer marketing as a marketing strategy to understand how influencer marketing can stimulate younger consumers towards sustainable products. The study also creates a deeper understanding of consumers' motives to participate in sustainable consumption, which can be valuable information for companies and social media influencers in the future. Previous studies have shown that younger generations are considered to be more interested in sustainable products (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018) and Generation Z to be the most loyal consumer group (Grazzini et al., 2021). Studies also show that influencers can impact consumers' sustainable behavior and attitudes towards products and brands (De Veirman et al., 2017). Previous information itself is not enough to understand how influencer marketing impacts consumers' consumption habits. People tend to express their social status and wealth through conspicuous consumption (Shao et al., 2019), it would be an eye-opening experience to learn if Instagram influencers impact differently on their follower's sustainable consumption inconspicuous and inconspicuous consumption. It can be that influencers can affect consumers' conspicuous sustainable consumption behavior, but is that also the case while it's about inconspicuous consumption? In this manner, businesses and social media influencers could learn in which product area influencer marketing is working as a marketing strategy and whether they should centralize their focus somewhere else.

Chapter 7: Chapters Overview

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Table 4. Chapter overview

Chapter 8: Work Plan

Every project needs a plan to follow. The purpose of the work plan is to remind you about each step you need to go through to achieve your final goal, which is in the defense of the thesis. Table 2. Represents my research work plan, which includes the obstacles and period to do all the necessary tasks.

	Task	September					October					November					December					
		36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	1	2	3
1	Topic acceptance																				
	Literature research																				
	Literature reading																				
2	Theoretical framwork																				
	Model creation																				
	Hypotheses development																				
	Methodology development																				
	Deadline for Exospe																				
	Expose modification																				
3	Survey development																				
	Test period																				
	Approval																				
4	Data collection																				
5	Data evaluation																				
	Development of literature																				
6	Results and conclusion																				
	Final check																				
7	Deadline for thesis																				
9	Defence																				

Table 5. Work plan

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