

**Czech University of Life Sciences Prague**

**Faculty of Economics and Management**

**Department of Management**



**Bachelor Thesis**

**The role of Instagram influencers in the Decision-making process**

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## BACHELOR THESIS ASSIGNMENT

Aliaksandra Sonets

Economics and Management

Economics and Management

Thesis title

**The Role of Instagram influencers in the Consumer Decision Making Process**

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### Objectives of thesis

The objective of the thesis is to identify the main consumer behaviour characteristics of the Instagram users in the chosen market segment and to propose an implementation of these findings in the marketing communication on the selected market segment.

### Methodology

The thesis will consist of two parts. The first part should deal with the elementary theoretical overview. It should deal with the theory of consumer behaviour and decision making including principles, models and its evaluation. The theoretical part of the thesis will be based on the critical review of the information gained from the study and the comparison of relevant resources. The fundamental, empirical part will be focused on specific Instagram profile from a selected market segment. Data for the empirical part will be gained using appropriate data collection techniques. Based on the research, the relevant conclusions of the thesis must be drawn.

Recommended structure of the thesis:

1. Introduction – an explanation of the topic importance.
2. Thesis objectives and methodology – the main objective of the thesis will be divided into partial objectives based on the knowledge gained from the study of consumer behaviour theory. Appropriate methods of data collection and processing will be explained in the methodology of the thesis.
3. Literature review – a critical review of current knowledge in the field of consumer behaviour and decision-making process, its models and tools in the online environment. Emphasis will be given to the role of influencers.
4. Specification of the selected industry – profile of the given market segment.
5. Practical part – analysis of data gained from own research according to the methodology.

6. Results and recommendation – formulation of own proposal of improvements.
7. Conclusion – review of main results and evaluation of the contribution of the theses.
8. References
9. Appendices



**The proposed extent of the thesis**

30-40 pages

**Keywords**

Instagram, influencers, consumer decision making, consumer behaviour.

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**Recommended information sources**

CLOSE, Angeline, 2012. Online consumer behavior: theory and research in social media, advertising, and e-tail. New York: Routledge. 401 s. ISBN 9781848729698.

Journal of Consumer Behaviour, ISSN:1479-1838

Journal of Consumer Psychology, ISSN 1057-7408

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SMITH, Andrew, 2019. Consumer Behaviour and Analytics: Data Driven Decision Making, New York: Routledge. 217 s. ISBN 9780429953361.

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## **Declaration**

I declare that I have worked on my bachelor thesis titled "The Role of Instagram influencer in the Decision-Making Process" by myself and I have used only the sources mentioned at the end of the thesis. As the author of the bachelor thesis, I declare that the thesis does not break copyrights of any their person.

In Prague on 15.03.2021

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## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to thank my Bachelor Thesis supervisor Ing. Lenka Platilová, and all other persons, for their advice and support during my work on this thesis.

# **The Role of Instagram influencers in the Decision-Making Process**

## **Abstract**

The main goal of this study is to understand what impact Instagram influencers have on the decision-making process of consumers. The first theoretical part of the dissertation describes consumer behaviour and the factors that affect it, as well as the decision-making process, its steps, and factors, based on marketing communications in the modern world. The Instagram social network will be discussed as a marketing tool for the specified industry, which is fashion. Instagram accounts of several different types of fashion influencers will be studied in order to understand how they affect the decision-making process about the purchase of their followers.

**Keywords:** Consumer behaviour, marketing, decision-making process, social media, Instagram, models of communication, marketing communication, marketing strategy, content analysis, influencer.

# The Role of Instagram influencers in the Decision-Making Process

## Abstrakt

Hlavním cílem této studie je pochopit, jaký dopad mají vliv Instagram na rozhodovací proces spotřebitelů. První teoretická část disertační práce popisuje chování spotřebitelů a faktory, které ji ovlivňují, stejně jako rozhodovací proces, jeho kroky, a faktory, na základě marketingové komunikace v moderním světě. Sociální síť Instagram bude diskutována jako marketingový nástroj pro konkrétní odvětví, což je móda. Instagram účty z několika různých typů módní vlivných budou studovány s cílem pochopit, jak ovlivňují rozhodovací proces o nákupu jejich účastníků.

**Klíčová slova:** Chování spotřebitelů, marketing, rozhodovací proces, sociální média, Instagram, modely komunikace, marketingová komunikace, blogger, marketingová strategie, analýza obsahu, influencer.



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# 1 Introduction

A new global phenomenon called social media, which has emerged over the past decade and has been actively developed thanks to modern technologies, has forever changed the traditional ways of marketing. Nowadays, influence marketing is becoming more and more popular. Companies collaborate with influencers to promote their brands, the growth of popularity and hence increasing the market share. Influencers are people who started blogs with a particular topic, for example, fashion, and become famous for their fashion photography and storytelling about it. They create their own mix and match styles, sharing them with their social following. In doing so, some have managed to acquire thousands, or even millions, of followers. Instagram is one of the social networks that influencers usually use.

Instagram is the breakout social network of the iPhone revolution. In less than two years, it has grown into a full-fledged social network that boasts more than 100 million users. Marketers have not been slow to leverage the new tool, as over 50 percent of top brands are now using Instagram. Nowadays, more than 1 billion people use Instagram each month. Marketing through these people, who are basically running personal media companies through taste-making, storytelling, and entertaining, is now a multibillion-dollar industry (Frier, 2020). Thanks to the “tag” and “link” features, it becomes easier to promote new products, which leads followers to consumers. Easy access to digital devices also makes it easier for people to buy products and/or services promoted by influencers. There is a wealth of research on how influencers impact consumer buying behavior. They are mainly based on the development, advantages and disadvantages, and the factors of consumer behavior. However, there is not much research on how peoples’ purchasing behaviour is affected by influence marketing.

Thus, this thesis will provide information about how Instagram influencers motivate people to buy products. The most effective way to reach the followers is considered to be running fashion blogs, where influencers share their experiences and recommendations through the platform.

## **2 Objectives and Methodology**

### **2.1 Objectives**

The aim of the research is to understand how influencers on the Instagram social network impact the consumers' (their followers) buying decision process in a particular market segment industry.

As a result of the research, the following questions will be answered:

Which of the analysed brands are more preferable for followers?

Does the largest number of influencer followers always provide the largest number of new customers for the brand?

What kind of opinions about the product people express in the comments?

### **2.2 Methodology**

The theoretical part of the thesis involves a critical review of the current knowledge, gained from studying and comparing primary and secondary sources in the field of consumer purchasing decisions, with particular attention to the role of influencers in this process. It explains how bloggers can influence the perception of a brand, its popularization, and change the attitude of people. For this purpose, relevant literature from various scientific journals, several professional thematic books, electronic and Internet sources, which deal with the problem, was used. All the information was found using keyword search and their impact factor. In order to scientifically substantiate the research problem, the analysis, synthesis, and generalization of the sources were performed; empirical research was conducted based on quantitative research methods – statistical analysis and graphic data processing. Thus, it was served as a basis for processing the research in the practical part.

In the second part of the thesis, the analysis of Instagram content in the fashion industry was conducted. The first step for the research was to select a specific segment – the footwear market. It is worth noting that the analysis was conducted specifically for European niche brands that present their products exclusively on the Internet. After analysing the appropriate options, the most popular niche brands on the Internet have been identified. It turned out that the newest and fastest-growing brands on Instagram were founded in the Netherlands and Sweden. In this regard, these two countries were taken for the analysis.

The data collection began with a statistical *analysis of the popularity*.

On the Instagram account of the brand, there is a separate tab called "tagged" in which all the photos where this account was marked can be seen. Due to the fact that Instagram is used by different people (not just influencers), it was decided to filter out the first 20 photos with the brand mark that scored more than 1000 likes. This led to influencers with an audience ranging from 1516 to 6,2 million followers. The total number of followers, likes, and comments was collected, processed, and analysed. The percentage of likes to followers and comments to likes was calculated. From a sample size of 10 brands, three of them that received more likes compared to the total number of followers were selected for further analysis of the comments.

In the *analysis of comments*, a representative sample of comments under brand-tagged posts was collected. Every 10th comment under 20 posts of each of the 3 leading brands based on the popularity analysis was evaluated and analysed. Despite the fact that English is not an official language in the Netherlands and Sweden, influencers from Europe often maintain accounts in English in order to attract more audience, so all collected data is presented in English and consists of original comments.

Comment ratings are important to evaluate, as they are considered the main source for analysing user opinions about the product and initiating discussions. In order to fully understand the behaviour of the public commenting on social networks, the text content of the comments was evaluated. They were divided into seven different topics: like the product (e.g., 'I really like these shoes!'); express sympathy for the influencer/photo (e.g., 'You are so beautiful!'; 'Nice pic!!'); ask the price of the product (e.g., 'How much did you pay for these shoes??'); clarify additional information about the product (material, size, colour) (e.g., 'Are they made of leather?'; 'Other colors available???'); express their willingness to buy the product (e.g., 'Wanna get these shoes!!!!'); ask for advice/additional photos (e.g., 'More photo in this outfit pls!'); do not like the product (e.g., 'Weirdo shoes.'). The results show whether followers have a positive or negative perception of the goods.

Some comments were excluded from the sample because they were inappropriate. The text of such comments includes rude or humorous expressions that do not relate specifically to the advertised product. Such comments also include expressing an opinion about how the photo was taken and what editing/filtering was done on it. Comments also were filtered out if the followers simply thanked the influencer.

Comments listed above have been excluded to gain a better understanding of the reactions of people to the advertised product. The percentage of irrelevant comments that were not related to

the studied posts was 19. The comments were selected manually. All calculations were made using Microsoft Excel.

In conclusion, the information in the theoretical part of the thesis was compared with the practical one, as an outcome of which the final results were obtained.

The recommendations for further research were based on the conclusions of the analysis and generalization of the knowledge obtained as a result of the theoretical and practical part of the thesis.

## **3 Literature Review**

### **3.1 Consumer Behaviour**

Studying consumer behaviour is vital because this is the way how marketers can understand what influences consumers buying decisions. By understanding how consumers choose a product they will fill within the gap in the market and identify the products that are needed or obsolete. Studying consumer behaviour also helps marketers decide the best possible way to present their products that generates a maximum impact on consumers. However, what is the meaning of consumer behaviour? Consumer behaviour - the decisions that people make to buy or not to buy a product and the things that influence their decisions (Cambridge Dictionary, 2001). Consumer behaviour consists of ideas from several sciences including psychology, economics, biology, and chemistry.

A consumer behaviour analysis should reveal:

- 1) What consumers think and the way they feel about various alternatives (brands, products, etc.);
  - 2) What influences consumers to decide on between various options;
  - 3) Behaviour of consumers while researching and shopping;
  - 4) How the environment of consumers (family, friends, media, etc.) influences their behaviour.
- (Foxall, 2001)

#### **3.1.1 Factors influencing consumer behaviour**

Consumer behaviour is commonly influenced by four categories of factors, more information about each of them will be discussed below.

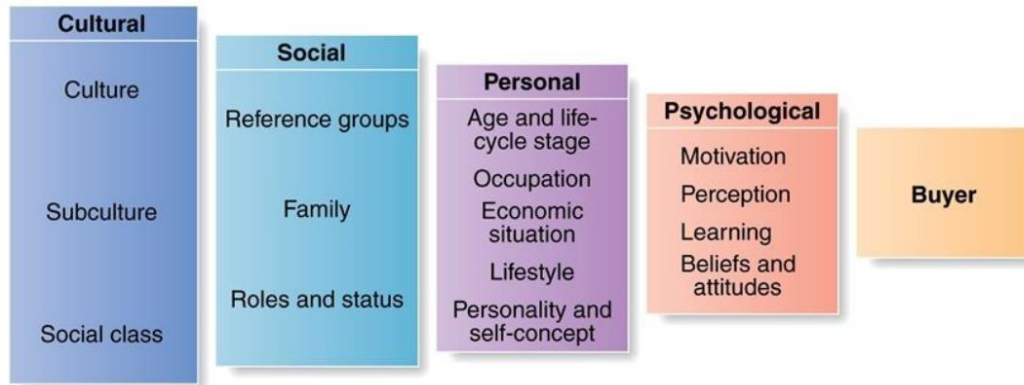
The problem-solving consumer process is influenced by many complex factors. For example, men and women use different cosmetics, which means that the needs for cosmetic products are also different; a consumer with huge past experience in purchasing the product of this category may well approach the problem differently from one with no experience.

Such influences must be understood to draw realistic conclusions about consumer behavior. For further discussion, it will be more convenient to group these influences into related sets: situational, external, and internal, which have an impact on the consumer's problem-solving process.

Situational influences include the consumers' immediate buying task, the market offerings that are available to consumers, and demographic traits. External influences which include cultural



and social factors deal with factors outside the individual that have a strong bearing on personal behaviours. Internal influences which include personal and psychological factors relate to the consumers' personality traits (Kotler & Armstrong, Principles of Marketing, 2015). The figure below shows in more detail what these factors include:



**Figure 1, Factors influencing Consumer Behaviour. Source: Kotler & Armstrong, Principles of Marketing, 2015**

Each of these factors has a powerful influence on consumer behavior. More about this influence will be discussed below, where a minimum of two points of each factor will be described.

### 3.1.1.1 Cultural factors

Cultural factors include culture, subculture, and social class.

*Culture* is a fundamental determinant of a persons' wants and behaviors. It consists of child-set values, perceptions, preferences, and behavior. A large group of people with a similar heritage represents the culture of a person. Culture exerts a strong influence on a persons' needs and wants because through the culture, we learned how to live, what to value, and how to conduct ourselves in society. Customs are traditional ways of behaving in specific situations, approved by the culture. Many customs are the reason to spend money, while culture dictates what to buy to honor these customs. Therefore, it is necessary for marketing to understand customs. It is worth noting that for marketers, at any point, it is very important to understand the local culture, its customs, and values.

Overall, culture is how people make sense of their society, its institutions, and social order. Culture frames how people communicate, how they express what is correct and incorrect, what is preferable and abominable (Ali & N, 2016).

*Subculture* consists of nationalities, religions, racial groups, and geographic regions. Subcultures can offer great opportunities for marketers to make a huge impact on the population, that may

feel underserved by companies operating in the mainstream market. People with strong subcultural identity are more likely to be attracted to organizations that they seem to understand, which means that these companies speak their subcultural language and meet their subcultural needs (Durmaz, Celik, & Oruk, 2011).

*Social class* is determined by the combination of factors, including family background, wealth, income, education, occupation, power, and prestige. This shapes peoples’ perceptions of their desires and needs, influencing consumer behaviour as well as culture. Usually, people belonging to the same social class are similar. They have similar tastes in fashion, shop in the same type of stores, attend the same schools, and so on. The most common social classification system is shown below:

| Group              | %   | Characteristics  |
|--------------------|-----|--|
| Upper Class        | 1%  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heirs, celebrities, top corporate executives</li> <li>• \$500,000+ income</li> <li>• Elite education is common</li> </ul>   |
| Upper Middle Class | 15% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managers, professionals</li> <li>• \$100,000+ income</li> <li>• Highly educated; college and graduate degrees likely</li> </ul>   |
| Lower Middle Class | 32% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skilled contractors, craftspeople, artisans, semi-professionals; autonomy in work environment common</li> <li>• \$35,000-\$75,000 income</li> <li>• Some college, training, secondary education likely</li> </ul> |
| Working Class      | 32% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clerical, blue- and pink-collar workers; job security is often a problem</li> <li>• \$16,000-\$30,000 income</li> <li>• High school education</li> </ul>  |
| Lower Class        | 20% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poorly-paid positions and/or reliance on government assistance</li> <li>• Some high school education</li> </ul>   |

**Figure 2, Social classification system. Source: Thompson & Hickey, 2005**

For marketers, taking social class into account can be very useful in segmentation and targeting. It provides information about how clients see themselves and their peers, their life experience, income level, expectations, etc (Williams, 2002).

### 3.1.1.2 Social factors

Social factors represent one more important set that influences consumer behavior. In particular, people and groups influencing one another through reference groups, family, roles, and status. Consumer behaviour can be effected through friendship, by the groups a person comes into contact with, face-to-face interaction, and even indirect contact. Marketers often call these reference groups.

A *reference group* may be either formal or informal. Examples include churches, professional groups, clubs, schools, online social networks, playgroups, and even a group of friends and acquaintances. The groups may influence individuals. They also may be influenced by groups, that they would like to belong to one day. Such groups, as well as opinion leaders, are important concepts in digital marketing, where consumers connect to various online communities and social networks (Eszter, 2008). Marketers need to understand which reference groups influence their target segments and who are opinion leaders within these groups. These leaders can be bloggers or people who often post on various social networks. Then marketing activities can be aimed at winning the leaders of public opinion. Working with online reference groups is successful if marketers make sure that opinion leaders in a particular segment "like" the product, "follow" the brand, and publish favorable reviews in their blogs (Ali & N, 2016).

The *family* is one of the most important reference groups for a person. The opinions of family members often influence consumer behaviour, that is why understanding the family consumer decision-making dynamics around the product is essential. For sure, the decision-making process in each family is different, but marketers need to understand the general tendencies around it (Eszter, 2008).

### **3.1.1.3 Personal factors**

Personal factors are individual characteristics and traits like age, life stage, occupation, economic situation, lifestyle, and personality.

*Personality* is a generalization of all the traits that make a person unique. There can be no two identical personalities, but multiple attempts have been made to classify people with similar traits. The most popular personality types were suggested by Carl Jung, which are variations on the work of Sigmund Freud, Jungs' teacher. According to the scientist, there are two personality categories: extrovert and introvert. An extrovert is a sociable person who can easily communicate with other people. An introvert is characterized as closed, detached from others. However, several more complex classifications have been developed over the years.

Various personality types are likely to answer in several ways to different market offerings. As an example, an extrovert may enjoy the shopping experience and rely more on personal observation. During this case, in-store promotion becomes a significant communication tool. Knowing the fundamental personality traits of target customers may be useful for managers in designing the marketing mix.

One of the newer and increasingly important sets of factors that are being used to know more about consumer behaviour is *lifestyle*. In this context, lifestyle refers to the potential customers' pattern of living in the world combined along with his or her psychographics, which is a set of attitudes, opinions, aspirations, and interests (Rehman, Rossman, Bin Mohamed Zabri, & Binti Ismail, 2017). Marketers are often interested in lifestyle as a segmentation schema because it helps reveal a more vivid picture of consumers. As marketers want to create good emotional connections between the brands they promote and the consumers they serve, they are selling more than just product features. They are selling a sensitivity, an attitude, and a set of values they hope will resonate strongly with the target segments they wish to achieve (Hoyer & MacInnis, 1997).

#### **3.1.1.4 Psychological factors**

Psychological factors include work of the mind and psyche: motivation, attitudes, and beliefs. A motive is an inner drive or pressure to take action to satisfy a need. A highly motivated person is a very ambitious and purposeful individual. A person has many needs at any given time, but not all of them are urgent enough to start motivating this person to take an action. At the same time, there are other needs, that instantly trigger motivation to perform an action. The forces that create a sense of motivation and urgency may be internal (people get hungry), environmental (people see an advertisement for a Big Mac), or psychological (thinking about food makes people hungry) (Rungsrisawat, Joemsittiprasert, & Jermsittiparsert, 2019).

In marketing practice, *motivation* helps marketing managers to understand how desire plays in a specific purchasing situation — what triggers clients to set goals, take an action, and solve their problems. The most well-known theory about individual motivation is the hierarchy of needs by A. H. Maslow. The scientist has developed a five-level model of human needs, where all levels relate to each other. At low levels, there are basic survival-oriented needs, which then build up to high emotional needs, such as love, self-esteem, and self-fulfillment. The model is shown below:



**Figure 3, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Source: Burlison & Thoron, 2014**

To consider Maslow's hierarchy of needs in the context of marketing and segmentation, it is useful to determine the overall level of needs for a particular segment. Powerful and strong marketing may operate at any level of Maslow's hierarchy (Burlison & Thoron, 2014).

Beliefs are constant ideas that people temporarily have in their minds to facilitate the decision-making process. People have beliefs and attitudes about all sorts of things: politics, religion, family, food, brands, etc. There are positive, negative, or neutral beliefs and attitudes; they also may be based on opinion or fact. Marketers need to understand what beliefs and attitudes influence consumer behaviour and decision-making. If an incorrect belief exists among the target audience, marketing efforts may be needed to change people's minds (Ali & N, 2016). As an example, in 1993, rumors spread widely about a syringe supposedly being found inside a can of Diet Pepsi. The entire incident turned out to be a hoax, however, PepsiCo responded not only with immediate and strong public statements but also with videos and a public relations campaign to reassure consumers that Pepsi products are safe and quell the rumors (Burnett, 2011).

### **3.2 Decision-Making Process**

Trewatha & Newport defines the decision-making process as follows: "Decision-making involves the selection of a course of action from among two or more possible alternatives to arrive at a solution for a given problem" (Trewatha & Newport, 1982). Consumers are guided by the decision-making process to make the right choice among the products that are available in

the market. The basic steps that take place in the consumer decision-making process are presented below (Kotler & Keller, Marketing Management, 2012):



**Figure 4, Five-stage model of the consumer buying process. Source: Kotler & Keller, Marketing Management, 2012**

### 3.2.1 Steps of the decision-making process

According to Jobber (2012), people who make a decision with a more complex view on this process, tend to take more time on how to spend their money, while those who do not share the same values, spend less time on that. The standard consumer decision-making process consists of five steps. Let's take a closer look at each of them.

The first step in the consumer decision-making process is *a recognition* of the need. It is the most important element, a trigger point of all the buying decisions, which leads towards the actual buying of the product or service. Many marketing solutions are supported by identifying the needs of the target market.

The second step is a pre-purchase search. After identifying the needs, the consumer wants to know *all the information about the product* before paying money for it. People become skeptical about alternatives, so they have to be confident in their purchase choice and, therefore, they want to know everything about it. In this step of the consumer decision-making process, the consumer identifies all the positive and negatives aspects of a new purchase. Online shopping sites and Instagram shopping accounts are very popular nowadays, which makes consumers far more informed about products. Consumers receive information from several different directions. Some of them are mentioned below:

- 1) Personal contacts: consumers often discuss their needs and interests in a variety of products with their family members, friends, colleagues and make a purchase based on their opinion and recommendations. This is the most working source of information that has the greatest influence on consumers' minds.
- 2) Commercial information sources: the most important types of this section are electronic media, social networks, TV advertisements, newsletters, sale persons, and public displays.

- 3) Printed sources: newspapers and magazines.
- 4) Previous experience: the consumers' personal experience in purchasing and using the product.

The next step is the *evaluation of alternatives*. At this stage, the consumer explores such important factors as product price, product quantity, its quality, value-added features, etc. After need recognition and collecting useful information, the consumer chooses the best variant of all products available in the market based on his income, taste, style, and preferences in general.

The fourth step is the *actual purchase stage*, where the customer decides what to buy. After fully evaluating the product factors, the consumer makes a logical purchase decision based on his preferences and desires.

At the final stage, which is called *post-purchase evaluation*, the consumer estimates the purchased product and analyzes his self-emotional state: whether he achieves satisfaction or not. Timely and well-thought decision-making is extremely important for success in today's time, so the use of the logical approach to this is very important (Kotler & Keller, Marketing Management, 2012).

### **3.2.2 Factors of the decision-making process**

There are several important factors that influence the decision-making process. This may include, for example, past experience of a person, various cognitive biases, individual differences, escalating commitment, belief in personal responsibility, etc.

Past experiences can impact future decision-making. When people quickly make a positive decision, most often their choices are because they have already had a similar situation (Jullisson, Karlsson, & Garling, 2005). On the other hand, people tend to avoid repeating past mistakes. If a choice has brought negative emotions in the past, a person is less likely to repeat it. In addition to past experience, some cognitive biases also influence decision-making. Cognitive biases are thinking patterns based on observations and generalizations that may lead to memory errors, inaccurate judgments, and faulty logic. Examples may include belief bias, risky information that people tend to miss, confirmation bias, retrospective bias, etc. In decision making, cognitive biases influence people by causing them to over-rely or lend more credence to expected observations and previous knowledge, while dismissing information or observations that are perceived as uncertain, without looking at the bigger picture. While this influence may

lead to poor decisions sometimes, the cognitive biases enable individuals to make efficient solutions (Shah & Oppenheimer, 2008).

The next factor that influences decisions is the *escalation of obligations*, based on which people make choices. This means that people put more effort and invest more time and money in the decision to which they are committed. In this case, people feel responsible for all these expenses and are therefore willing to take risks. Research has indicated that age, socioeconomic status (SES), and cognitive abilities influence decision-making. Since cognitive functions decrease with age, decision-making performance may also decrease. Older people are often very self-confident in their decision-making ability, which hinders their ability to find and apply strategies (de Bruin, Parker, & Fischhoff, 2007).

### **3.3 Models of Communication**

In 1948, the American scientist H. Lasswell proposed the most well-known model of the communication process. It suggests the message flow in a pluralistic society with multiple audiences. The model is revealed as the answer to these questions: *Who? According to what? On what channel? To whom? With what effect?* Following this structure, Lasswell identifies the following sections of communication research, each of which provides an answer to a relevant question:

- Analysis of communication process management: when answering the question "who?", the factors that open and direct the act of communication itself are considered (first of all, the communicator itself).
- Analysis of the content of transmitted messages, which also includes statistical analysis of the frequency of references to certain facts and events in the mass media.
- Analysis of the means and channels through which messages are transmitted (analysis of the work of mass media); identification of means that are adequate to the nature of the transmitted messages and are most acceptable to the recipient.
- Analysis of the audience (mass, specialized), which is vital for effective communication; sociological services are involved in solving this problem.
- Analysis of the results of communication impact; the effectiveness of communication was evaluated based on the interest in the content of co-communication.

In 1968, Lasswell offered a more detailed version of his model. It also provides a study of the communication process by answering the following questions:



1. *Says who?* - analysis of the management of the communication process; refers to the control of information.
2. *What reports?* - analysis of the content of messages; refers to the essence of the message investigated by content analysis.
3. *To whom?* - audience analysis; characterizes the audience for which co-communication is intended.
4. *On what channel?* - analysis of the tool; indicates the specifics of the channel that carries the message.
5. *With what effect?* - analysis of the result: the recipients' consciousness and/or behaviour has not changed.

The Lasswell Model is still fundamental to the construction of any communication in the media since any message answers the five questions highlighted in this model.

In 1949, Claude Shannon and Warner Weaver proposed their Communication Model. It has a graphical similarity to the previous one and based on an analogy with telephone communication:

- The source - is the person who makes the call (sends the message).
- Message - the information transmitted.
- Telephone transmitter - an encoding device that converts sound waves into electrical impulses.
- Telephone wire - channel.
- Telephone receiver (second unit) - a decoder that converts electrical impulses into sound waves; receiver - the person to whom the message is addressed.

In this case, the conversation may be accompanied by constant interference (noise) that occurs on the communication line. It is clear that in this situation, the amount of information transmitted over the communication line should be as large as possible. The advantage of this model is that with its appearance there was an idea of the speed and amount of information transmitted. The Shannon-Weaver Communication Model is presented below:

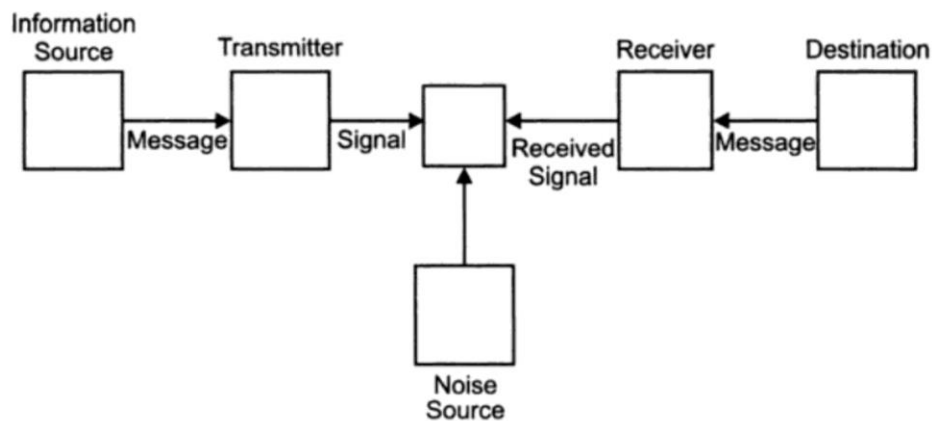


Figure 5, The Shannon-Weaver Communication Model. Source: Narula, 2006

The De Fleur model takes into account the main drawback of the linear Shannon-Weaver model - the lack of feedback. The inability of communication participants to realize the messages that were sent and received, and which do not always match is the cause of many communication difficulties. In particular, De Fleur notes that in the communicative process, the initial idea (meaning) is transformed into a "message", which the sender then translates into "information" sent over the channel to the recipient. According to De Fleur, complete correspondence between transmitted and received information is very rare (Narula, 2006).

Out of several models of communication that exist, David Berols' "SMCR" model is the most common and preferred, which seems to help most other models expand their horizons on what good communication means. It is called by the name of its elements in the form of the abbreviation SMCR:

**S** - the *source* (the creator of the message; the source can be an organization, an individual, or a group of individuals).

**M** - the *message* (the information that the source transmits to the recipient).

**C** - the *channel* (means by which the message is transmitted from source to destination).

**C** - channels are usually divided into:

- mass communication media
- interpersonal channels
- mass communication
- interpersonal channels

**R** - the *recipient* (the component for which, in fact, communication takes place; the recipient can be either an individual or a group of individuals, as well as numerically large, dispersed mass audiences).

These models are the main ones in the communication process, they are actively used in mass communication, as well as successfully function in the process of communication between people (Turaga, 2016).

### 3.4. Marketing Communication

To understand what marketing communication means, it is good to understand the marketing process firstly. The marketing process is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large. The graph below represents that marketing communication is actually a part of the marketing process:



Figure 6, Marketing process. Source: Kotler & Keller, Marketing Management, 2012

Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller define marketing communications as the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, and remind their customers - directly and indirectly - of products and brands they sell. Marketing communications answer the questions: why/how/where/when and by whom the product should be used. To answer these questions, there is a concept, called *Marketing Communication Mix*. It includes advertising, sales promotion, events and experiences, public relations and publicity, direct marketing, interactive marketing, word-of-mouth marketing, and personal selling (Kotler & Keller, Marketing Management, 2012):



**Figure 7, Marketing communication mix. Source: Units, 2020**

1. Advertisement is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of goods, services, or ideas by an identified sponsor. This is one of the most used methods of communication, which easily covers a huge number of people.
2. Sales Promotion includes several short-term incentives that help retain existing customers as well as attract new ones. Some of the sales promotion tools are discounts, coupons, free Buy-one-get-one schemes, etc.
3. Events and experiences: some companies sponsor sports, non-profit, or social events to subconsciously strengthen their brand and create a long-term association.
4. Public relations and publicity: in order to create a positive image in the market, companies participate in social events. For example, charity, building public amenities, planting trees, etc.
5. Direct marketing: companies do not involve any third parties to communicate directly with potential customers. They use email and mobile phones.
6. Interactive marketing: in recent years, this type of marketing communication has become very popular. The customer interacts and receives responses from companies online. Amazon is one of the best examples of this type of marketing, where customers can select and then view their order again.
7. Word-of-mouth marketing: the most widely used method of marketing communication, when the client shares his experience about recent acquisitions with relatives, friends, and colleagues. Brand image directly depends on what customers think and say about it, that is why this type of communication is very important for companies.

8. Personal sales: this is a traditional method of marketing communication, that is carried out directly face to face or via email between sellers and customers, which is why this type of communication is one of the most reliable.

Thus, the complex of marketing communications includes various tools that the company uses to inform and remind the client about the products or services it provides (Kotler & Keller, Marketing Management, 2012).

### **3.5 Electronic Word-of-mouth**

One of the most reliable information generated in a blog is word-of-mouth information obtained through commercials or advertisements, which are considered as more formal marketing channels. An oral message created through a blog is usually quite convincing and has been proven to be one of the most influential factors in decision-making (Halvorsen, 2013).

Electronic oral communication is any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company that is available to many people and institutions over the Internet. Electronic word-of-mouth information is now found in many Internet media services, including forums, blogs, websites, and other online communities. Members of online communities often have excellent knowledge about the products they tell their followers about. They also help inexperienced potential customers with solving problems with doubts about buying these products (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Walsh, 2004).

To make a purchase, people first try to find out as much information about a product or service as possible by browsing websites, blogs, and other resources where the product is discussed. Potential buyers pay special attention to reviews. With the fact that consumers are influenced by the opinions and experiences of other people, electronic word-of-mouth has a huge impact on the purchase decision-making process (Doh & Hwang, 2009).

It is important to understand the difference between traditional and electronic word-of-mouth. Traditional word-of-mouth communication usually involves the exchange of information between two consumers, while an electronic one between several consumers (Kulmala, 2011). As mentioned earlier, word-of-mouth has always been considered the main and most effective method of spreading information, and with the advent of the Internet, its importance has increased even more.

Electronic word-of-mouth communication has a more effective persuasion effect, as it takes place in an online community and provides information about the use of a particular product, service, or brand, mainly focusing on the user. Consumers are always looking for any tips that

help them trust the message transmitter in an online environment, since they are most likely not familiar with each other personally, as is usually the case in traditional word-of-mouth. For example, people now trust reviews of advertised products not by a professional marketer, but by an ordinary person with a large audience, or to be more precise, a blogger (Youn & Lee, 2009). Professional marketers write good or bad reviews about a product or service and get paid for that, while real consumers usually write a real, truthful opinion about the products they purchase. This is the key difference between advertising products from the brand itself and advertising the same products from a blogger, a person people trust to. This is proof that blogs have more influence than brand websites.

### **3.6 Instagram**

Instagram is a smartphone app that allows people to upload photos and videos that last no more than one minute to share with their followers. It is possible to add a description (caption) to a photo or video, a hashtag, and geolocation to make posts searchable. A hashtag is a way to highlight a word by using the # sign in front of that word. All photos with the same hashtag can be found in one place (Instagram, 2015).

Instagram is one of the most appropriate platforms for influencer marketing. Instagram blogs have two main variations. It can be personal diaries in which the page founders talk about their lives or business accounts of stores and organizations for the purpose of sales. Accounts are managed by one person, but there is the opportunity to interact with others through comments under the posts or indirect correspondence (Ward & Ostrom, 2006).

Nowadays, Instagram defines as a platform that sets trends and has a strong influence on peoples' understanding of what is popular in the world in various fields. The app is more focused on the younger generation. Since everything is changing and developing at a fast pace, the main key to success for the younger generation is convenience and speed. This is what Instagram provides them with.

#### **3.6.1 Instagram as a marketing tool**

Marketing is a well-improved method or action that frequently changes the rules based on the requirement of promoting and selling products and services. Traditional marketing strategies such as newspaper and television advertisements are considered outdated because they do not have the same impact on customers as before. However, the popularity of online services has increased as never before (Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012).

Safko (2012) states that there are four essential factors for successfully building a social media marketing strategy:

- collaboration,
- education,
- entertainment,
- communication.

All these factors are used in different ways to attract new followers and display their activity on the page in the form of likes and comments. Collaboration is used for open questions to followers. Education may include more detailed information about the product or service that the company wants to sell. Entertainment involves funny pictures or interesting, unusual stories. Communication between the brand and followers is also very important because it increases the activity in the account and the degree of trust in the brand.

The transmission of information in the social network Instagram can be based on word-of-mouth, which is free advertising, or on advertising paid by the brand. In any of these cases, the brand and reputation of the company are extremely important. "Your brand is what other people say about you when you are not in the room." - Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon. The brand of the company is based on the overall impressions that customers have received from the products or services provided by the company.

Brands have two important functions. The first is to make sure that customers believe in a particular product by connecting it to a specific company. Second, brands help their customers organize their purchases. Information about services and products comes from a variety of sources, including advertising, word-of-mouth, sales staff, and packaging. The sum of these impressions is the brand image (Keegan & Green, 2017).

Mangold and Faulds (2009) also provided some advice on how companies should use social media to their advantage. In a community where feedback exists, customers are more likely to communicate with each other and the brand itself, so providing feedback is important. Providing as much information about the product as possible to make customers feel more knowledgeable makes it more likely that customers will share it with others. People like to feel special, so they need exclusivity. For example, companies can offer special products and services to a certain group of customers, thereby distinguishing them from the rest.

Union Metrics (2016) works with social media analysis to help companies optimize their social media activities. Using an analysis of companies' Instagram accounts, they found out that brands upload photos to the social network on average 1.5 times a day, and most of them upload one or two photos a day. This affects the increase of activity in the account, which is very important because it is necessary to ensure that the growth of followers and, therefore, potential buyers do not stop.

### **3.6.2 Influence marketing**

*Influencers* are individuals, who have the power to affect the decisions of others because of their (real or perceived) authority, knowledge, position, or relationship. Keller and Fay (2016) define influencers as: “everyday consumers who are substantially more likely than the average to seek out information and to share ideas and recommendations with other people. They do this both through volunteering their opinions about products and services that they feel passionate about, and by being turned to for their knowledge, advice, and insights” (Keller & Fay, 2016).

*Social Influence Marketing* is a technique that employs social media and social influencers to achieve an organizations' marketing and business needs. Social media refers to content created by everyday people using highly accessible and scalable technologies such as blogs, message boards, podcasts, microblogs, bookmarks, social networks, communities, wikis, and vlogs. Influencers are defined as everyday people who have an outsized influence on their peers by how much content they share online (Singh, 2012).

To generate a positive attitude, a brand can use *paid*, *owned*, and *earned* media:

- *Paid media* refers to sponsored brand-related posts that are generated and paid for by the relevant company. In other words, companies pay for posts with photos of their product that are shown in the news feed on platforms like Instagram. Such media is often referred to as "promoted" or "sponsored" social media posts.
- *Owned media* refers to posts in social media, related to a brand, which is generated by the company and posted in the social media channel the company controls. So, all free messages that are created by the company belong to the owned media. Such media are displayed in the news feed only when a potential buyer becomes a follower of the companys' account through the Instagram platform (or any social media platform).
- *Earned media* refers to brand-related posts in social media that are not directly generated by the company but rather by an influencer. By making brand-related content on the account,



they share it with their entire audience. Inasmuch influencers have a high degree of trust from their Instagram followers, they play a large and important role in making these peoples' purchasing decisions. Earned media is often associated with an influencer, but this does not have a negative impact on the attitude of customers to the brand, and rather the opposite (Lovett & Staelin, 2016).

There are three sources that define the value of influence marketing: reach, relevance, and resonance. Reach is a measurement of the number of people who see a bloggers' posts. Influencers can reach millions of people through their social blogs. As a rule, influencers advertise only relevant information to their audience and come up with original effective content to advertise a particular brand. Bloggers do not promote products or services of brands that are not related to them. Resonance counts the number of actions performed by followers in relation to the content published by the influencer. If the content resonates with subscribers, it will make a big wave for further distribution and therefore increase reach. Someone uses influence marketing to create social conversations around the brand, someone to establish trust in the market, and someone to stimulate sales of their products and services. Therefore, the value of influence marketing can be measured in several ways (Sudha & Dr. Sheena, 2017).

On the figure below it is possible to see an illustrative example of how influence marketing works:



**Figure 8, Brand post opinion. Source: Sudha & Sheena, 2017**

### 3.6.3 Types of influencers

To understand how an influencer impacts any industry, it is useful to know what types of influencers exist. *Traditional influencers* are celebrities in a particular field or ordinary PR agencies. The second type is *digital influencers* who encourage thought leadership in a particular space. The next type is *influencers with connections*, who have hundreds of friends on Instagram

among all their followers. The last type is *influencers by topic*. They are opinion leaders in a particular topic, such as fashion for example.

Direct marketing is unlikely to be as effective as it used to be, so the evaluation of branded content strategies is necessary. When a company targets the younger generation, things get even more complicated, as millennials are very demanding of advertising content and do not get persuaded even by traditionally popular celebrities. Therefore, a brand that starts with influence marketing firstly must know and understand its audience (Sedeke, 2013).

## **4 Specification of the selected Industry**

### **4.1 Fashion Industry**

The fashion industry is more dependent on influence marketing than any other, which makes it an interesting topic to make a research.

Revenue in the fashion segment is projected to reach US\$759,466m in 2021. Revenue is expected to show an annual growth rate (CAGR 2021-2025) of 7.18%, resulting in a projected market volume of US\$1,002,215m by 2025.

In the fashion segment, the global share of online revenue reached 20% in 2018, and the segment continues to grow today, helped by the regions of East and Southeast Asia with their growing middle class and lagging offline shopping infrastructure. One of the leading trends is the direct integration of shopping functionality into the display of content on social networks, allowing quickly "inspire and sell" customer conversions (for example, Instagram Checkout). The audience is increasingly switching from desktop to mobile, and improving mobile browsing, so checkout is becoming crucial (Statista, 2021).

In the fashion industry, social media platforms can be used to interact with the consumer, as a means of networking with others in the industry, and as a way of building an online presence. The fashion industry offers many ways of collaboration between influencers and brands. This is not limited to just Instagram posts, but it can include Instagram takeovers, event hosting, modeling, or even product design. Involving influencers early in the creative process can pay off, as they know their audience and offer ideas and strategies that are effective for them. According to Sedeke (2013), identification with loyal customers is very important for any success because young designers want to be heard all over the world. For such designers whose budgets remain

low, an inexpensive form of distribution and self-promotion such as online media is especially important. Influencers try to find high-quality information about products and trends in order to write a post and attract as large an audience as possible.

#### **4.1.1 Fashion influencers**

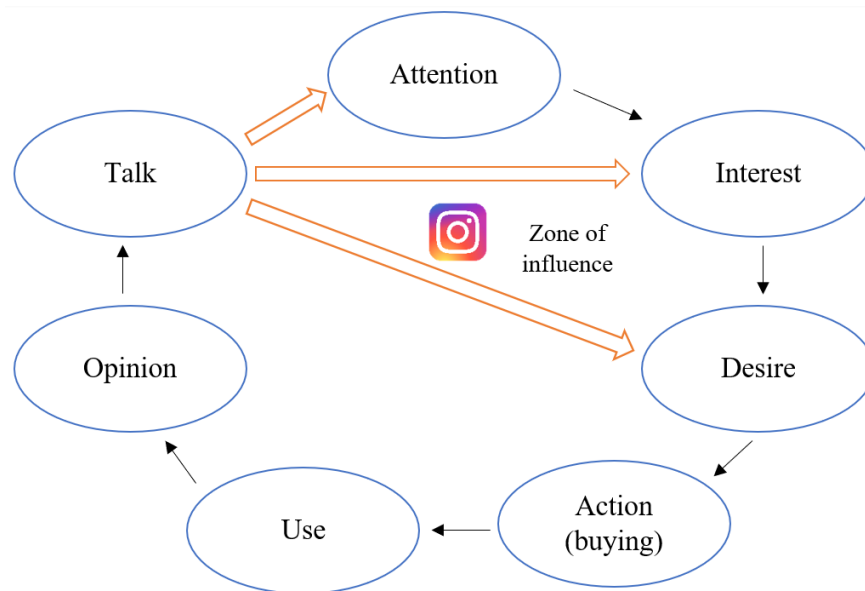
According to Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Langner (2010), there are three main types of social influencers in the fashion world:

- Super-spreaders of fashion
- Narrative fashion experts
- Helpful friends

The first type is the farthest from a true understanding of fashion out of all three ones, while narrative fashion experts are really excited about fashion, and getting new purchases brings them real pleasure. Helpful friends are primarily concerned about the risk associated with the purchase, so they can have different effects on consumers.

Instagram serves as a tool for influencers to publish reviews and recommendations for online consumers, as well as a form of marketing that encourages and convinces consumers to purchase products that are new for them and they have never had. Instagram influencers can promote discounts, advertise on their behalf, and provide direct links to the online store or the main Instagram account of the brand itself while maintaining a neutral point of view. This is another advantage of social accounts as a marketing tool. In the modern world of online stores, it is typical for consumers to completely ignore the message due to the straightforwardness of product promotion. This is the reason why fashion blogs are highly valued by brand representatives on Instagram and other social networks (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Langner, 2010).

The sequence of peoples' actions that are affected by Instagram influencers in the fashion market is illustrated below:



**Figure 9, Impact of Instagram influencers in fashion market. Created by author**

It all starts with an influencer telling his audience about a particular product or brand. Then, followers can pay attention to the product, become interested in it, and, as a result, have a desire to buy it. As the diagram above shows, the words of influencers affect the attention, interest, and desire of the followers. Then, there is a part that does not depend on an influencer: action, use, opinion. It is the way how from the last stage it all returns to the first one, which is talk. After all, people always share their opinions, so it all starts again.

#### **4.1.2 Fashion influencers on Decision Making**

Understanding the decision-making process within the fashion industry is very important because fashion has economic and social value, and also allows people to express themselves and create an identity. Fashion is of great importance to consumers. Buying fashion goods is a special task that requires detailed participation of the consumer. The decision of a person to purchase is affected by information from various sources available in society, such as influencers, magazines, family, friends, advertising, or the Internet. In the modern world, such influencers as bloggers, journalists, and celebrities are considered the most powerful force in the fashion market. People consider them experts in the fashion industry and often try to imitate or copy their style as much as possible.

Fashion influencers can more or less directly or indirectly impact the fashion industry. They may use Instagram to advertise their likes and dislikes and influence the way in which certain brands or products are presented and experienced. Besides, fashion Instagram accounts may begin new trends to an industry or discuss matters which companies may not want to be publicly discussed such as ethics or environmental factors.

In modern society, even seekers of new fashion trends in clothing are affected not only by the representative of the brand itself but also by influencers who help advertise the product of this brand. Influencers constantly communicate with their followers, so people trust their opinion and recommendations, considering them experts in a certain area, depending on the subject of the bloggers' account. In this way, influencers have a great impact on the buying decision their followers make, dictating the "must-have" fashion and creating trends (Sudha & Sheena, 2017).

## **4.2 Footwear market**

For the study, it was decided to take the footwear market. The global footwear market is segmented into type, material, end-user, distribution channel, and region. By type, the market is categorized into athletic and nonathletic. Depending on the material, it is bifurcated into leather and non-leather. Based on distribution channels, it is classified into hypermarket/supermarket, specialty stores, brand outlets, online sales channels, and others. Revenue in the footwear market amounts to US\$467,807m in 2021. The market is expected to grow annually by 4.83% (CAGR 2021-2025). In relation to total population figures, per person revenues of US\$62.03 are generated in 2021 (Statista, 2021).

# **5 Practical Part**

## **5.1 Niche footwear brands**

The word "niche" is defined as a small section of the market for a particular kind of product or service (Oxford Dictionary, 2021). Cambridge dictionary (2021) determines this word as an opportunity for a business to offer a product or service that is not offered by other businesses.

Niche footwear brands are actively developing in the Netherlands and Sweden, these countries were taken for further research. The sample size consists of 10 companies, 5 of which were established in the Netherlands and 5 in Sweden. Brands are considered niche because they present only footwear, and their distribution method is limited. All these brands distribute their products via the Internet, mostly via social networks. Instagram was taken as a platform for analyzing how influencers affect the popularity of companies.

Brands are presented in the table below:

| Netherlands       | Sweden              |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Axel Arigato   | 6. Mason Garments   |
| 2. CQP            | 7. Mercer Amsterdam |
| 3. ETQ            | 8. Morjas           |
| 4. Eytys          | 9. Myrqvist         |
| 5. Filling Pieces | 10. NUBIKK          |

Table 1

## 5.2 Popularity Analysis

In this analysis, the total number of followers, likes, and comments was collected, processed, and analysed. The number of followers for each niche fashion brand ranged from 1516 to 6,200,000. The number of likes ranged from 1 to 92,007, and the number of comments ranged from 0 to 863.

The percentage of the number of likes to followers was revealed, which indicates the activity of the influencer audience. The 'Top 3' brands with the highest percentage were transferred to the next stage of the study. On the table below it is possible to see that those brands were Axel Arigato, ETQ, and Morjas.

| Brand            | Total followers | Total likes | % of likes compared to followers |
|------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------------------------|
| Axel Arigato     | 3,269,000       | 145,478     | 4,45                             |
| CQP              | 3,925,500       | 76,997      | 1,96                             |
| ETQ              | 651,230         | 31,576      | 4,85                             |
| Eytys            | 3,414,248       | 79,176      | 2,32                             |
| Filling Pieces   | 9,587,200       | 191,022     | 1,99                             |
| Mason Garments   | 1,909,800       | 63,391      | 3,32                             |
| Mercer Amsterdam | 2,545,754       | 52,853      | 2,08                             |
| Morjas           | 739,514         | 24,983      | 3,38                             |
| Myrqvist         | 1,355,943       | 38,116      | 2,81                             |

|              |            |         |      |
|--------------|------------|---------|------|
| NUBIKK       | 4,136,715  | 79,699  | 1,93 |
| <b>Total</b> | 31,534,904 | 783,291 | 2,48 |

**Table 2**

According to the results of the analysis, it can be noticed that a larger number of followers does not guarantee a larger number of likes.

Posts with the Filling Pieces brand mark reached a record number of people – 9,587,200, but in relation to the number of likes scored, the percentage was very small - only 1.99. At the same time, ETQ reached fewer people than all other brands (651,230), but 31,576 of them put a like. This brought the brand to an absolutely leading position with 4.85%. This means that the bloggers who advertised the brand have an active audience. These influencers are the ones marketers should contact to advertise their products.

All brands had at least 1% likes compared to the total number of followers, while no brand exceeded the mark of 5% likes.

On the table below there is a ratio between those people who commented on a post, to those who liked it:

| Brand               | Total likes | Total comments | % of comments compared to likes |
|---------------------|-------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Axel Arigato</b> | 145,478     | 4211           | <b>2,89</b>                     |
| CQP                 | 76,997      | 983            | 1,28                            |
| <b>ETQ</b>          | 31,576      | 1588           | <b>5,03</b>                     |
| Eytys               | 79,176      | 1071           | 1,35                            |
| Filling Pieces      | 191,022     | 1882           | 0,99                            |
| Mason Garments      | 63,391      | 1395           | 2,20                            |
| Mercer Amsterdam    | 52,853      | 1410           | 2,67                            |
| <b>Morjas</b>       | 24,983      | 779            | <b>3,12</b>                     |
| Myrqvist            | 38,116      | 827            | 2,17                            |

|              |         |       |      |
|--------------|---------|-------|------|
| NUBIKK       | 79,699  | 2242  | 2,81 |
| <b>Total</b> | 783,291 | 16388 | 2,09 |

**Table 3**

According to the results, the leading positions were taken by the same brands: Axel Arigato, ETQ, and Morjas, which once again proves that the number of people interested in the brand's products does not depend on how many followers an influencer has. Although ETQ again emerged as the absolute leader (5.03%), the Top two following brands swapped places. The percentage of Morjas was 3.12% when Axel Arigato gained 2.89%, which put this brand in the third position in the top three.

This difference can be explained by the fact that the blogger's target audience was more suitable for the brand's products. Each brand is aimed at a specific target audience, that is why analysing the audience of the influencer to whom brands turn for advertising is very important.

### **5.3 Comment Analysis**

A representative sample of comments in English under brand-tagged posts was collected at this stage of the study. Despite the fact that English is not an official language in the Netherlands and Sweden, almost 90% of the general population of the countries speaks on it. In social networks, influencers from Europe often maintain accounts in English in order to attract more audience, so most of the analysed comments, as well as the product description by influencers, were in English.

On the table below it is possible to see the total number of comments that were made for each brand, the number of total 10th comments, and the total relevant comments. Comments in another language (not English) were considered inappropriate, so they were subtracted from the total number of comments covered.

| Brands       | Total comments | Each 10th comment | Total relevant comments |
|--------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Axel Arigato | 4211           | 421               | 349                     |
| ETQ          | 1588           | 159               | 123                     |
| Morjas       | 779            | 78                | 54                      |
| <b>Total</b> | 6578           | 658               | 526                     |

**Table 4**



## ETQ

The ETQ brand is an absolute leader. The ratio of likes to followers is 4,85% and the ratio of comments to likes is 5,03%. In table 4, it is possible to see, that the brand received 1588 comments in total. During the implementation of modifications to evaluate only relevant comments, their number was reduced to 123. Comments were categorized into seven different categories: like the product; express sympathy for the influencer/photo; ask the price of the product; clarify additional information about the product (for example, material, size, colour); expressed their willingness to buy the product; ask for advice/additional photos and do not like the product, which were compiled after analysing all of them.

| Comments division   | Number of relevant comments | % of relevant comments |
|---|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Like the product  | 32                          | 26,0                   |
| Express sympathy for the influencer/photo   | 58                          | 47,2                   |
| Ask the price of the product  | 2                           | 1,6                    |
| Clarify additional information about the product (for example, material, size, color) | 27                          | 22,0                   |
| Expressed their willingness to buy the product  | 0                           | 0,0                    |
| Ask for advice/additional photos  | 4                           | 3,3                    |
| Do not like the product   | 0                           | 0,0                    |
| <b>Total</b>  | 123                         | 100                    |

**Table 5**

People mainly express their sympathy for the influencer or what they like about the photo (for example frame setting, colour correction, or filters). This type makes up 47,2% of the total relevant comments. People who send a positive comment about the product were 26%, while 22% asked for additional information. 3.3% asked the influencer for advice (for example about the total outfit, opinions about other shoe models, or request a review on another product of the brand). 1,6% asked how much the product costs. No one said they do not like the product but either no one expressed the willingness to buy it.

## Morjas

Morjas takes second place in the 'Top 3' leading brands. The ratio of likes to followers is 3,38% and the ratio of comments to likes is 3,12%. The sample size of 20 videos had a total of 2,559

comments. One post did not have enough comments to include in the study. After reducing comments that did not relate to the idea of the research, the number of analysed comments was 54.

| Comments division   | Number of relevant comments | % of relevant comments |
|---|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Like the product  | 21                          | 38,9                   |
| Express sympathy for the influencer/photo   | 19                          | 35,2                   |
| Ask the price of the product  | 0                           | 0,0                    |
| Clarified additional information about the product (for example, material, size, color) | 11                          | 20,4                   |
| Expressed their willingness to buy the product  | 0                           | 0,0                    |
| Ask for advice/additional photos  | 3                           | 5,6                    |
| Do not like the product   | 0                           | 0,0                    |
| <b>Total</b>  | 54                          | 100                    |

**Table 6**

People who liked the product decided to leave a corresponding comment. The number of such followers was 21. Slightly fewer people, namely 19, expressed their positive opinion about the influencer who advertised this product. Only 5,6% of people asked for advice or additional photo of the brands' products. Categories such as "ask the price of the product", "express their willingness to buy the product", and "do not like the product" did not get any comments, so their percentage is zero.

### **Axel Arigato**

Axel Arigato brand ranks the last place in the 'Top 3' with 4.45% likes in the ratio to followers and 2.89% of comments in the ratio to likes. Each of the 20 posts contains a minimum of 10 comments. The total number of comments is 4211. Inappropriate comments were reduced, so the total number of relevant ones was 349.

| Comments division | Number of relevant comments | % of relevant comments |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Like the product  | 182                         | 52,1                   |

|  |     |      |
|--|-----|------|
| Express sympathy for the influencer/photo  | 14  | 4,0  |
| Ask the price of the product   | 59  | 16,9 |
| Clarify additional information about the product (for example, material, size, colour) | 82  | 23,5 |
| Expressed their willingness to buy the product   | 7   | 2,0  |
| Ask for advice/additional photos   | 5   | 1,4  |
| Do not like the product  | 0   | 0,0  |
| <b>Total</b>   | 349 | 100  |

**Table 7**

The largest number of comments left (182) was that followers liked the product, which is more than half (52.1%) of the number of analysed comments. 82 people (23.5%) specified information about the product (for example, asking about the material or the availability of other sizes or colours), while 59 people (16.9%) asked about the price of the product. Only 2% of all comments showed the followers' desire to buy the product. No comments were included in the "do not like the product" category. After analysing the table, it can be concluded that in general, followers were interested in the advertised product.

## 5.4 Total results

60 posts had a total of 6578 comments. It was decided to analyse of each 10<sup>th</sup> comment, so the sample size has become 658. From that number 132 comments were inappropriate. In this way, the sample size of analysed comments was 526. Although, 2 posts were reduced from the analysis since they did not have enough information, which means that the condition that a post must contain at least 10 comments was not met.

| Comments division   | Total number of analysed comments | Total % of analysed comments |
|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Like the product  | 235                               | 44,7                         |
| Express sympathy for the influencer/photo   | 91                                | 17,3                         |
| Ask the price of the product  | 61                                | 11,6                         |
| Clarify additional information about the product (for example, material, size, color) | 120                               | 22,8                         |
| Expressed their willingness to buy the product  | 7                                 | 1,3                          |

|                                  |     |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Ask for advice/additional photos | 12  | 2,3 |
| Do not like the product          | 0   | 0   |
| <b>Total</b>                     | 526 | 100 |

The category containing the highest number of comments was "liked the product". It included 235 comments, which is still less than half of all the analysed ones (44.7%). 22.8% were comments with clarification additional information about the product. The third most popular comment was an expression of sympathy for the influencer as a person/his appearance or for the photo itself, which was 17.3%. 61 followers asked for the price of the product, and 7 people from the total number of those leaving comments expressed a desire to buy it. 12 people, which is 2.3%, asked the influencer for advice or recommendation. What is interesting to note is that the number of negative comments about the product that relates to the "did not like the product" section is 0%. This means that no one has expressed badly about the product.

In this regard, it is possible to conclude that the products of the three analysed brands left a good impression on followers since the largest number of comments were positive.

## 5.5 Discussion

The study above examined the impact of social media marketing, particularly the presence of influencers on Instagram, on customer relationships, and purchase intent. Based on the results of the analysis, we can conclude that followers respond positively to sponsored content. Interest in the product of some people is confirmed by the fact that they leave comments under posts with a brand mark, expressing their opinion and clarifying information about the product. Such people are more likely to purchase the product of the presented brand.

In general, comments can be divided into two categories: about the product and the influencer.

In order to understand what the general opinion about the brand is formed, marketers should analyse the number of positive comments in comparison with the total number of comments left. Similarly, influencers who are interested in statistics of their level of audience engagement can calculate the ratio of the total number of comments left to positive ones addressed to them.

## 6 Conclusion

Influencers who promote products and brands have become a part of our daily life. The modern society actively uses social networks, bumping into advertisements every time they appear

online. Influencers promote various products. This can be footwear, clothing, cosmetics, or services. Influence marketing brings many benefits to the brand, the most important of which is a positive impact on product sales. However, it is also important to be aware of the risks associated with working with bloggers. Brand marketers need to properly evaluate the audience of the influencer they turn to for advertising. The two main points to pay special attention to are that the majority of blogger followers should be the target audience of the brand, as well as how active this audience is. As it was found out, the number of followers of the brand does not guarantee that all of them saw the post. Often, the number of people who responded to a post with a brand mark is much less than the total number of people following the influencer. That is why, it is important to analyse the account, and not rely only on the number of followers. It will be useful for marketers to request influencer statistics on views and the number of likes and followers.

At the end of the analysis, the results show that SMM for niche footwear brands is a significantly effective marketing tool, and the Instagram platform is well suited for influencing the intensity of purchases and customer relationships.

## **Limitations**

This study, like any other, is not free of limitations. The results obtained should be interpreted and taken with caution for the following reasons. First, the main limitation is that the analysis was carried out only for two countries, the choice of which was based on the rapid development of niche shoe brands there. In addition, due to the extension of the shoe market, only 10 brands were taken for analysis. However, the results still provide valuable information and a better understanding of the importance of advertising brand products among influencers. Secondly, it is important to note that the analysed posts were reduced to 20 for each brand, and every 10th comment was taken into account, which can increase the error of the analysis. However, this number definitely provides a rough understanding of how people react to the brand's products. Third, the number of subscribers of a blogger does not guarantee that each of them viewed a post with a brand mark. To see statistics about how many people viewed a post is a privilege granted only to the influencer himself. Thus, the number of people who viewed the post may be less than the number of bloggers' followers.

## Recommendations for further research

Future research exploring the hypothesis of increasing positive brand perception under the influence of online marketing may contribute to the construction of the most effective marketing communications. The result can be the ratio of the brand perception by the consumer and likes/comments on posts. It will help marketers to identify the percentage of the active audience of influencers and, as a result, understand which of them to contact to advertise brands' products.

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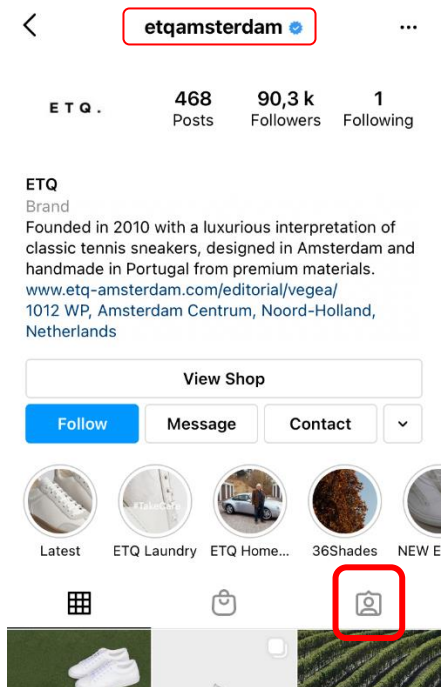
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## 8 Appendices

1) Account of the brand → photos with brand mark:



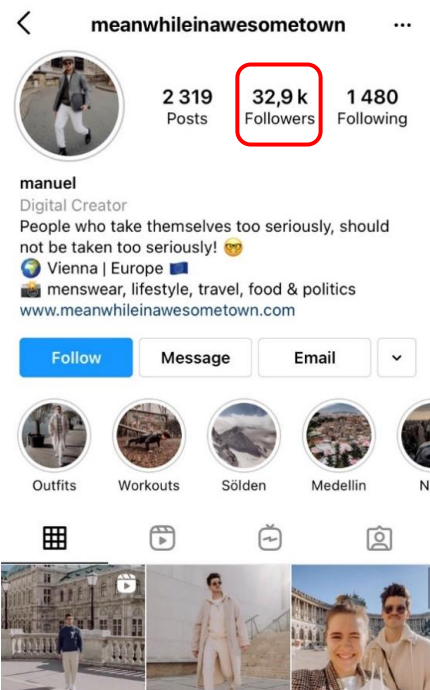
2) The number of likes and comments on the post of the influencer:



### 3) The 10<sup>th</sup> comment:



### 4) The number of followers:



| Brands                 | Number of followers | Number of likes | Number of comments |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| <b>1. Axel Arigato</b> | 8 500               | 1 336           | 51                 |
| Axel Arigato           | 78 000              | 1 408           | 24                 |
| Axel Arigato           | 35 000              | 2 065           | 112                |
| Axel Arigato           | 5 600               | 6 005           | 51                 |
| Axel Arigato           | 37 000              | 92 007          | 1761               |
| Axel Arigato           | 19 000              | 1 595           | 266                |
| Axel Arigato           | 33 000              | 1 338           | 103                |
| Axel Arigato           | 37 000              | 1 878           | 79                 |
| Axel Arigato           | 19 000              | 8 339           | 176                |
| Axel Arigato           | 2200000             | 2 107           | 35                 |
| Axel Arigato           | 624 000             | 5 889           | 202                |
| Axel Arigato           | 6 300               | 1 382           | 293                |
| Axel Arigato           | 5 600               | 1 569           | 92                 |
| Axel Arigato           | 19 000              | 1 366           | 172                |
| Axel Arigato           | 19 000              | 1 297           | 77                 |
| Axel Arigato           | 35 000              | 3 556           | 141                |
| Axel Arigato           | 44 000              | 3 291           | 110                |
| Axel Arigato           | 11 000              | 1 426           | 28                 |
| Axel Arigato           | 19 000              | 2 921           | 238                |
| Axel Arigato           | 14 000              | 4 703           | 200                |
| <b>2. CQP</b>          | 789 000             | 6 860           | 72                 |
| CQP                    | 99 200              | 1 264           | 62                 |
| CQP                    | 61 100              | 1 519           | 8                  |
| CQP                    | 99 400              | 1 416           | 48                 |
| CQP                    | 15 100              | 1 035           | 34                 |
| CQP                    | 61 200              | 1 550           | 16                 |
| CQP                    | 98 400              | 2 937           | 51                 |
| CQP                    | 67 600              | 2 274           | 21                 |
| CQP                    | 64 500              | 1 002           | 21                 |
| CQP                    | 48 200              | 3 133           | 54                 |
| CQP                    | 70 200              | 1 160           | 11                 |
| CQP                    | 53 400              | 2 421           | 24                 |
| CQP                    | 44 300              | 4 714           | 57                 |
| CQP                    | 787 000             | 14 239          | 150                |
| CQP                    | 46 800              | 1 008           | 5                  |
| CQP                    | 774 000             | 11 407          | 131                |
| CQP                    | 301 000             | 2 342           | 1                  |

|                 |         |        |     |
|-----------------|---------|--------|-----|
| CQP             | 60 600  | 1 003  | 4   |
| CQP             | 54 500  | 14 513 | 209 |
| CQP             | 330 000 | 1 200  | 4   |
| <b>3. ETQ</b>   | 48 300  | 1 244  | 7   |
| ETQ             | 13 700  | 1 779  | 90  |
| ETQ             | 84 700  | 2 614  | 139 |
| ETQ             | 32 700  | 1 811  | 203 |
| ETQ             | 32 900  | 1 112  | 34  |
| ETQ             | 28 300  | 1 097  | 17  |
| ETQ             | 88 200  | 2 366  | 32  |
| ETQ             | 20 900  | 1 632  | 42  |
| ETQ             | 48 700  | 1 814  | 48  |
| ETQ             | 7 900   | 1 733  | 147 |
| ETQ             | 32 700  | 1 092  | 35  |
| ETQ             | 88 200  | 1 036  | 52  |
| ETQ             | 1 516   | 1 024  | 25  |
| ETQ             | 7 900   | 2 094  | 85  |
| ETQ             | 20 900  | 1 005  | 50  |
| ETQ             | 32 700  | 1 002  | 29  |
| ETQ             | 48 400  | 3 925  | 23  |
| ETQ             | 2 057   | 1 088  | 55  |
| ETQ             | 8 355   | 1 044  | 245 |
| ETQ             | 2 202   | 1 064  | 230 |
| <b>4. Eytys</b> | 141 000 | 5 095  | 118 |
| Eytys           | 661 000 | 8 380  | 34  |
| Eytys           | 165 000 | 2 916  | 11  |
| Eytys           | 12 700  | 1 029  | 17  |
| Eytys           | 5 732   | 1 041  | 17  |
| Eytys           | 6 016   | 1 047  | 57  |
| Eytys           | 10 400  | 1 004  | 29  |
| Eytys           | 520 000 | 4 497  | 63  |
| Eytys           | 153 000 | 1 020  | 0   |
| Eytys           | 460 000 | 19 217 | 108 |
| Eytys           | 177 000 | 4 222  | 98  |
| Eytys           | 224 000 | 8 547  | 150 |
| Eytys           | 13 200  | 1 003  | 166 |
| Eytys           | 97 200  | 1 361  | 47  |
| Eytys           | 37 400  | 1 141  | 16  |
| Eytys           | 10 000  | 1 096  | 21  |

|                          |           |        |     |
|--------------------------|-----------|--------|-----|
| Eytys                    | 10 500    | 1 010  | 22  |
| Eytys                    | 348 000   | 3 983  | 27  |
| Eytys                    | 315 000   | 10 348 | 52  |
| Eytys                    | 47 100    | 1 219  | 18  |
| <b>5. Filling Pieces</b> | 52 600    | 1 017  | 53  |
| Filling Pieces           | 376 000   | 4 304  | 19  |
| Filling Pieces           | 22 000    | 3 591  | 23  |
| Filling Pieces           | 244 000   | 14 103 | 183 |
| Filling Pieces           | 69 900    | 2 658  | 41  |
| Filling Pieces           | 372 000   | 12 982 | 164 |
| Filling Pieces           | 21 000    | 1 759  | 104 |
| Filling Pieces           | 292 000   | 14 193 | 107 |
| Filling Pieces           | 816 000   | 17 524 | 143 |
| Filling Pieces           | 16 700    | 1 073  | 52  |
| Filling Pieces           | 160 000   | 5 377  | 143 |
| Filling Pieces           | 13 800    | 1 627  | 26  |
| Filling Pieces           | 38 800    | 4 127  | 42  |
| Filling Pieces           | 20 300    | 1 263  | 81  |
| Filling Pieces           | 40 300    | 4 437  | 82  |
| Filling Pieces           | 46 000    | 2 754  | 73  |
| Filling Pieces           | 384 000   | 6 700  | 48  |
| Filling Pieces           | 315 000   | 3 203  | 33  |
| Filling Pieces           | 86 800    | 5 214  | 26  |
| Filling Pieces           | 6 200 000 | 83 116 | 244 |
| <b>6. Mason Garments</b> | 278 000   | 5 024  | 233 |
| Mason Garments           | 10 800    | 1 007  | 76  |
| Mason Garments           | 10 700    | 2 003  | 56  |
| Mason Garments           | 287 000   | 2 415  | 33  |
| Mason Garments           | 17 100    | 3 519  | 68  |
| Mason Garments           | 191 000   | 5 570  | 27  |
| Mason Garments           | 33 300    | 2 765  | 14  |
| Mason Garments           | 21 800    | 2 723  | 9   |
| Mason Garments           | 48 700    | 2 808  | 51  |
| Mason Garments           | 34 800    | 1 622  | 17  |
| Mason Garments           | 136 000   | 3 193  | 26  |
| Mason Garments           | 191 000   | 3 859  | 63  |
| Mason Garments           | 10 700    | 1 467  | 57  |
| Mason Garments           | 14 900    | 1 020  | 27  |
| Mason Garments           | 31 000    | 1 145  | 53  |

|                            |         |        |     |
|----------------------------|---------|--------|-----|
| Mason Garments             | 3 900   | 3 541  | 127 |
| Mason Garments             | 33 300  | 2 020  | 24  |
| Mason Garments             | 10 800  | 4 163  | 64  |
| Mason Garments             | 267 000 | 8 704  | 53  |
| Mason Garments             | 278 000 | 4 823  | 317 |
| <b>7. Mercer Amsterdam</b> | 35 800  | 4 047  | 62  |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 80 000  | 6 544  | 89  |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 61 200  | 1 638  | 1   |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 956 000 | 3 598  | 76  |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 76 000  | 2 696  | 27  |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 1 909   | 1 092  | 46  |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 2 881   | 1 048  | 74  |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 32 700  | 1 220  | 15  |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 6 154   | 2 146  | 591 |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 71 000  | 1 006  | 29  |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 575 000 | 6 280  | 134 |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 75 400  | 1 003  | 6   |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 7 190   | 1 026  | 5   |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 5 690   | 1 503  | 30  |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 61 200  | 1 823  | 4   |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 7 544   | 1 652  | 6   |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 466 000 | 10 040 | 49  |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 16 100  | 1 728  | 84  |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 2 014   | 1 171  | 23  |
| Mercer Amsterdam           | 5 972   | 1 592  | 59  |
| <b>8. Morjas</b>           | 19 300  | 1 021  | 27  |
| Morjas                     | 53 200  | 1 305  | 40  |
| Morjas                     | 21 000  | 1 002  | 20  |
| Morjas                     | 32 400  | 1 312  | 103 |
| Morjas                     | 52 300  | 1 256  | 19  |
| Morjas                     | 32 400  | 1 097  | 88  |
| Morjas                     | 19 600  | 1 620  | 25  |
| Morjas                     | 23 300  | 1 009  | 50  |
| Morjas                     | 24 800  | 1 002  | 34  |
| Morjas                     | 54 800  | 1 091  | 25  |
| Morjas                     | 19 500  | 1 064  | 46  |
| Morjas                     | 92 600  | 3 013  | 23  |
| Morjas                     | 54 800  | 1 008  | 2   |
| Morjas                     | 25 600  | 1 029  | 46  |

|                    |         |        |     |
|--------------------|---------|--------|-----|
| Morjas             | 7 314   | 1 003  | 70  |
| Morjas             | 20 700  | 1 192  | 41  |
| Morjas             | 52 300  | 1 185  | 20  |
| Morjas             | 54 600  | 1 171  | 33  |
| Morjas             | 23 300  | 1 093  | 53  |
| Morjas             | 55 700  | 1 510  | 14  |
| <b>9. Myrqvist</b> | 19 500  | 1 005  | 66  |
| Myrqvist           | 53 200  | 1 216  | 44  |
| Myrqvist           | 14 200  | 1 283  | 9   |
| Myrqvist           | 4 443   | 1 007  | 7   |
| Myrqvist           | 20 000  | 1 018  | 23  |
| Myrqvist           | 54 300  | 1 406  | 35  |
| Myrqvist           | 23 000  | 1 054  | 66  |
| Myrqvist           | 344 000 | 10 343 | 134 |
| Myrqvist           | 55 000  | 1 582  | 79  |
| Myrqvist           | 14 500  | 1 617  | 11  |
| Myrqvist           | 50 500  | 1 476  | 57  |
| Myrqvist           | 39 700  | 1 049  | 29  |
| Myrqvist           | 126 000 | 1 017  | 1   |
| Myrqvist           | 10 100  | 3 257  | 22  |
| Myrqvist           | 19 300  | 1 078  | 52  |
| Myrqvist           | 12 400  | 1 056  | 49  |
| Myrqvist           | 24 000  | 1 084  | 80  |
| Myrqvist           | 20 200  | 1 212  | 20  |
| Myrqvist           | 416 000 | 4 568  | 22  |
| Myrqvist           | 35 600  | 788    | 21  |
| <b>10. NUBIKK</b>  | 855 000 | 1 086  | 13  |
| NUBIKK             | 32 800  | 1 036  | 50  |
| NUBIKK             | 110 000 | 14 843 | 640 |
| NUBIKK             | 569 000 | 8 942  | 97  |
| NUBIKK             | 18 400  | 1 061  | 108 |
| NUBIKK             | 450 000 | 8 934  | 52  |
| NUBIKK             | 282 000 | 2 586  | 58  |
| NUBIKK             | 483 000 | 6 966  | 225 |
| NUBIKK             | 1 608   | 1 067  | 20  |
| NUBIKK             | 110 000 | 16 474 | 286 |
| NUBIKK             | 32 800  | 1 015  | 109 |
| NUBIKK             | 8 209   | 1 046  | 59  |
| NUBIKK             | 900 000 | 4 620  | 69  |

|        |         |       |     |
|--------|---------|-------|-----|
| NUBIKK | 38 800  | 1 049 | 5   |
| NUBIKK | 140 000 | 3 280 | 29  |
| NUBIKK | 10 800  | 1 002 | 101 |
| NUBIKK | 28 700  | 1 576 | 124 |
| NUBIKK | 10 000  | 1 086 | 45  |
| NUBIKK | 4 998   | 1 006 | 117 |
| NUBIKK | 50 600  | 1 024 | 35  |