To whom do we listen, and why?

An exploratory study into how young adult consumers experience TikTok electronic word-of-mouth product recommendations

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**AUTHOR:** Clara Dahlgren & Leon Enshagen

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Authors: Clara Dahlgren & Leon Enshagen

Tutor: Ulf Aagerup

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Abstract

Background: Over time, social media platforms have become a part of people’s daily lives. Social media allows consumers to share thoughts, ideas, and experiences with other consumers, and eWOM evolved. Lately, TikTok has become one of the biggest social media platforms and, in turn, one of the biggest for eWOM; consumers use the app to share content, including product evaluation and recommendations. But there is limited understanding of how eWOM affects consumers’ purchasing behaviour on a platform like TikTok.

Purpose: The purpose of the research is to explore the area of young adults’ consumer purchasing behaviour based on their experience of TikTok eWOM regarding beauty products and how the products’ virality affects their purchasing behaviour.

Method: The study follows an interpretivist philosophy with an inductive research approach, as the aim is to understand and explore how eWOM affects consumer purchasing behaviour. Further, data were collected through four focus groups. Data were later analysed through inductive coding.

Conclusion: The study concluded that four significant characteristics and evaluation factors of eWOM on TikTok affect the consumer’s purchase behaviour. The characteristics are the content creators’ effect on the video message, quality, quantity, and following trends. Where quantity and following trends lead to virality and FOMO, which influences purchase behaviour. eWOM on TikTok was perceived to cause more impulsive purchases than on other social media platforms because of its algorithm and user platform trust. Impulsive purchases, in turn, influenced consumer purchase behaviour.
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Clara Dahlgren
Leon Enshagen
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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This chapter discusses the current situation regarding social media, TikTok, electronic word-of-mouth, and the fear of missing out. Starting by briefly introducing the history of social media and its effect on society, followed by social media as an opinion exchange platform and how the differences between the algorithm of TikTok and traditional social media such as Instagram and Facebook affect the trustworthiness of influencers. There is a lack of research regarding TikTok product recommendations, the effect product virality, short-form videos, and FOMO has on consumer purchase behaviour. Further, the chapter will present the purpose of the thesis and the research questions.

1.1 Background

Online social media platforms have come and gone since the beginning of the internet, with users wanting to be a part of the latest fad, create social networks and for personal entertainment (Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2015). The rise of social media and its incorporation into people’s daily lives has had varying effects, both negative and positive, such as addiction and psychological distress (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021; Chen et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2021), as well as positive effects of self-esteem enhancement and broader audience reach for marketers (Guinta & John, 2018; Ziv & Kiasi, 2016). Social media platforms allow consumers, producers, and influencers to share beliefs and perceptions, spread a message, and help other consumers make more informed purchasing decisions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Information shared between users on social media is called electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), written by other consumers. eWOM from reputable and trusted people is considered among the most critical factors contributing to consumer purchasing behaviour when evaluating a product (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014). Influencers on social media networks such as Instagram and Facebook are essential advocates of eWOM, both negative and positive, as they have further reach than the typical user (Zhou et al., 2021).

Myspace was among the first social media platforms to gain widespread provenance; it was the most popular social media platform in 2006 and held that position until 2008 when Facebook overtook it (Edosomwan et al., 2011). Since Facebook overtook Myspace, it has stayed the largest social media platform, with 2.9B active users as of January 2022 (Statista,
A relatively recent addition to the selection of social media platforms is TikTok. It was founded by ByteDance in 2016 in China (as Douyin), and 2017 it was launched outside of China (Feldkamp, 2021). The platform gained popularity during the Covid-19 pandemic as countries entered lockdown and people were forced to connect online (Feldkamp, 2021). In January 2018, TikTok had a monthly active user base of 55 million; since then, it has grown exponentially to 1 billion active monthly users as of September 2021 (Statista, 2021).

TikTok’s format of short videos recommended based on user interactions within app content leads to a personalised “For You” (TikTok’s version of a recommended page) page reflecting the user’s interest (Klug et al., 2021). Due to the personalised scrolling page showing content the user is interested in, it is more likely that the users are shown products that align with their interests. Other social media websites fill the user's start page with what they are “following” (Instagram) or being “subscribed” to (YouTube); this is different from TikTok’s approach to recommending content since it is based on interaction and less on networks and connections (Bhandari & Bimo, 2020). On TikTok, the “For You” page depends more on the user's algorithmic interaction, making it possible for anyone to show up in anyone’s feed anywhere (Wang, 2022; Zhang & Liu, 2021).

As an effect of eWOM, some products can go “viral”, meaning “quickly and widely spread or popularised especially using social media” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). One such example is The Pink Stuff, a British abrasive cleaning paste that went largely unnoticed internationally until it gained popularity on TikTok’s #CleanTok algorithm subcategory in 2020 under its hashtag #thepinkstuff. Since then, it has amassed 643.2M views (TikTok, n.d.-b). As a result of The Pink Stuff’s virality, sales soared, and the British company expanded to international retailers. #CleanTok and #thepinkstuff are TikTok hashtags that fulfil the same purpose as hashtags on Instagram, a way for users and the algorithm to categorise posts and their subsequent topics (Omena et al., 2020; Zote, March 3, 2022). Trying to capitalise on the effect of the virality of products, Amazon has created an “Internet Famous!” page which categorises the latest products to become viral on social media (Amazon.com Inc, n.d.). The same categorisation also exists on the Swedish e-commerce site CDON, with the name “Viral Products” [Own Translation] and the subheading “TikTok made me buy it” (CDON AB, n.d.). The description “TikTok made me buy it” on CDON comes from the hashtag with the same name (#TikTokMadeMeBuyIt) on TikTok, and it has 41.6B views as of 10th February 2023 (TikTok, n.d.-c).
Influencers are often considered role models by their followers, and as such, are people that consumers wish to imitate when choosing what products to purchase and deciding what is trendy and sought after (Dinh & Lee, 2022). An issue when forming consumer purchasing decisions based on influencer eWOM is that since influencers have more opinion leverage, companies often want to receive positive WOM from the influencers in exchange for compensation (Evans et al., 2017). As influencers can be sponsored, it has become increasingly essential to disclose the compensation or lack thereof to the audience to be perceived as trustworthy and honest when stating their opinion (Stubb et al., 2019). Receiving continuous reinforcement of positive eWOM on social media platforms may lead to a fear of missing out effect (FOMO), where consumers are afraid of not being a part of the experience of purchasing and using a product (Lichy et al., 2023). FOMO increases the likelihood of a consumer purchasing a specified product if the consumers’ opinion towards the product has been continuously influenced in online environments (Dinh & Lee, 2022; Kim et al., 2020). As influencers traditionally endorse products via network-based social media, it is unknown what effect the personalised scrolling page, based on user interaction, has on product recommendations and their potential virality.

1.2 Problematisation

Social media marketing is a proven way to reach more customers (Liu et al., 2015). It has increased importance for producers and companies to understand consumers' opinions (Tamrin & Huda, 2021). Since trust can be created through influencers, increased purchase behaviour and decisions arise among consumers depending on those influencers. In other words, faith and trust in online reviewers have a more substantial impact on decisions and behaviours to purchase a product than traditional marketing (Nuseir, 2019). One important media on which consumers base their purchase decision is YouTube, a platform where content creators can post in-depth video reviews about products, their features and what they think to build trust. On YouTube and Instagram, influencers can be sponsored to spread positive WOM because a few people have far reach on the platforms. There are accounts specialising in in-depth reviews, thus, keeping their trustworthiness as content creators (Kim & Kim, 2021). In their terms of service, YouTube is legally being treated more as a traditional media by Google, forcing clear sponsorship and ad disclosures in the videos (Google, 2023).
Because eWOM has shown great effectiveness, and positive outcomes, a growing interest among professional and academic communities have arisen, and there is an increased curiosity in studying the subject (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Furthermore, consumer purchasing behaviour is studied from the perspective of trust in online opinions and information presented in social media (Nuseir, 2019). Trust plays a significant part in sellers making buyers feel confident when purchasing their products online, as online purchases come with more risk than offline since you do not see the physical product until after you pay (Agesti et al., 2021). Thus, trust is among the most influential factors in e-commerce (Dwidienawati et al., 2020). This is in line with what Agesti (2021) found: that a positive effect of trust positively impacts purchasing decisions. Cheung (2009) found eWOM as one of the factors leading to improved trust and intention to shop in online environments. Therefore, trustworthiness plays a significant role in online word-of-mouth as it lays the foundation for the effect word-of-mouth has on consumer purchase intention and decision-making (Liu et al., 2015). Since trust is gained through contact with the user or influencer, it is difficult to understand how consumers can trust an average user’s product recommendation in a short format video.

When consumers seek information online, they turn to people with high online status. In other words, consumers turn to influencers for information. Therefore, companies often use the power and reach of influencers when it comes to online advertisement in exchange for compensation (Liu et al., 2015). On the other hand, Lee and Youn (2009) concluded that consumers usually have greater trust in anonymous people online and are less likely to trust TV advertisements, magazines and billboards. Also, Alghizzawi (2019) found that eWOM is more effective when perceived as personal rather than commercial. Hence, online platforms and the internet has become a vital part of the business since consumers and influencers are the sources of information sharing (Verma & Yadav, 2021). Moreover, it has become essential for companies and organisations to view influencers as valuable sources in eWOM marketing (Liu et al., 2015). However, the effect of viral but lower online status eWOM remains largely unstudied (Jensen et al., 2013), and there are limited empirical studies on viral sharing behaviour and consumer purchase behaviour as a result of TikTok (Chu et al., 2022).

When users follow a viral trend, it is seen as a product to test and a way for consumers to gain internet fame. According to Dinh and Lee (2022), The FOMO effect arises from the anxiety of not seizing the trend and consequently forfeiting the opportunity to emerge as the next influencer. Combining the impact of viral products with the FOMO, consumers are twice as persuaded to follow the trend, once by the potential promise of becoming an influencer and
secondly when trying to gain the expressed satisfaction and happiness from purchasing a product, as found by Good and Hyman (2021). One issue is that the statement above, which is based on the conclusions by Good and Hyman (2021) and Dinh and Lee (2022), is that their studies were performed on network-based social media platforms where influencer opinions lay heavy, and a one-time famous post or video means potential long-term fame. However, this is the contrary on TikTok, as the video and creator turnover is multitudes faster, and a one-time hit to stardom will only last as long as the algorithm decides (Zhang & Liu, 2021). One may then wonder what makes people feel the need to post and participate in viral content when the promise of fame is ever so present but still very uncertain.

Ko and Wu (2017) found product reviews as one of the ways for YouTubers to increase their viewer loyalty, create better relationships and be perceived as trustworthy. Therefore, they are the primary way for YouTubers to better their channel and for consumers and viewers to gain vital information to form their opinion. Loyalty and trustworthiness are largely unexplored factors regarding TikTok when consumers use the site for information gathering. Therefore, it is an additional channel for influencers and content creators to further their reach (Silaban et al., 2022). Furthermore, the TikTok video length limit has changed multiple times, from 15 seconds to 1 minute, 3 minutes, and 10 minutes (Malik, February 28, 2022). Compared to YouTube, where the creators gain trustworthiness and loyalty from their viewers because of in-depth reviews about products on the site, the video length limit affects the in-depth reviews on TikTok. Despite the longer time limit, videos are generally a maximum of a few minutes because of the short attention span of its users (Qin et al., 2022). The understanding of how shorter videos, up to 3 minutes, can be impactful and engaging enough to influence purchase intention is therefore attractive both to consumers and corporations since publisher credibility and the informativeness of the review is what traditionally influence the intention of the consumer (Zhai et al., 2022). But in the short format TikTok environment, there needs to be something to catch the viewers’ attention and to keep their attention during the entire video, which rules out traditional in-depth review content from mainstream TikTok (Qin et al., 2022). What these factors are and how consumers experience them is the topic this report will try to understand.
1.3 Purpose
The research aims to explore young adults’ consumer purchasing behaviour based on their experience of TikTok eWOM regarding beauty products and how the products’ virality affects their purchasing behaviour.

1.4 Research Question
To fulfil the purpose of the report, the following research question will be asked:

**RQ:** How do consumers experience electronic word-of-mouth product recommendations on TikTok, and how does it affect consumer purchase behaviour?

1.5 Delimitation
This report will be limited to the consumer perspective of the social media platform TikTok and exclude other platforms for consumer word-of-mouth. Furthermore, the content focus on TikTok is beauty products and other categories on TikTok will not be of focus.

1.6 Definitions
Social Media
Social media includes various user-driven platforms that facilitate the diffusion of compelling content, dialogue creation, and communication to a broader audience. It is a digital space created by the people and for the people. It provides an environment that is conducive for interactions, content creation and content collaboration, where networking can occur for different reach and with different purposes (for instance, social networking (Facebook), collaborative projects (Wikipedia), and content community (YouTube) (Alves et al., 2016; Chan & Guillet, 2011; Kapoor et al., 2018; Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Algorithm
Social media platforms use a predefined set of rules in their machine-learning platforms. These rules are called algorithms and determine the priorities of the machine-learning platform (Balaji et al., 2021). Algorithms, therefore, refer to the outlined set of instructions, rules, and calculations for the computer to follow when working towards the goal set by the developer.
FOMO

Fear of missing out is when a person aspiring to be a part of a group or is part of a group they want to impress by following their norms, beliefs and behaviours because of the persons underlying psycho-social fear of being left outside the group, the fear of being alienated from the group and the fear of falling behind and not being up to date to what is popular within the group (Alt, 2015; Bearden et al., 1989; Kang & Ma, 2020).

WOM

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is referred to the definition by Verma and Yadav (2021). The author described it as follows; “WOM can be any oral and personal communication, positive or negative, about a brand, product, service, or organisation, in which the receiver of the message perceives the sender to have a non-commercial intention.” (p. 112).

eWOM

Electronic word-of-mouth, also referred to as eWOM, occurs when consumers spread information (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014), opinions, and recommendations (Verma & Yadav, 2021) online and on social media platforms (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014). In other words, as stated by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p. 39), eWOM can be “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customer about a product of a company that is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet”.

vWOM

vWOM is eWOM in video format, further specified as video-based product information created by users and published on video platforms with the intent of sharing. vWOM can be generated directly from a company-related user (sponsored) or from an unrelated user (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020)

Influencer

Influencers are ordinary internet users with a large enough following to have an opinion-leading position based on networked connections, personal characteristics and perceived trust (Abidin, 2015; Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014; Freberg et al., 2011; Katz, 1957).

Content Creator

“[c]reators may or may not be famous, but the goods and services they produce and market are of their own making. An even more concise way to put it is that Creators create content. Influencers may create content, but they also utilize content created by others.” (Florida, 2022, p.9).
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This chapter will extensively discuss the existing research and literature on social media, TikTok, consumer purchasing behaviour, WOM, eWOM, viral marketing and products, influencers, and the fear of missing out effect.

2.1 Consumer Purchase Behaviour

According to Rickwood and White (2009), consumer purchasing behaviour analysis is vital in marketing and its activities. An analysis of consumer purchasing behaviour is necessary to understand consumers’ psychological processes, including needs and motivations. (Fan et al., 2012). However, cultural characteristics make consumer purchasing behaviours different across the world. By identifying the different consumer purchasing behaviours, consumers can understand how they make decisions and what affects their behaviours (Zhong et al., 2019).

When consumers make purchases online, the environment creates a simplified and reduced decision-making process and decreases the effort among consumers. The online space provides a large selection of products, excellent information screening and product comparison (Alba & Lynch, 1997). It is essential to know that when consumers purchase products online, they cannot physically see, feel, or touch them (Agesti et al., 2021). Hence, their decision is only made with the help of information from other sources than physically examining the product. On the other hand, shopping in the online environment can reduce the cost of information seeking and therefore create an effortless decision-making process (Park & Kim, 2003). In addition, consumers are accustomed to using online reviews as information in their decision-making process to purchase a product online (Mo et al., 2015). The accessibility of online shopping also creates the advantage of shoppers not having to adjust to a specific social environment and its normative behaviour (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). Hence, accessibility and convenience are connected to the freedom to shop online. Moreover, according to Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2001), the availability of information is a critical factor that needs to be considered in consumer purchasing behaviour, especially in the electronic commerce environment.
2.1.1 Impulsive Purchases

The effect of impulsive purchases on social media has been studied by multiple authors (Aw, 2019; Lina et al., 2022; Shamim & Islam, 2022). They stated that the trustworthiness of the message deliverer positively contributed to the impulsive purchase behaviour of the recipient. Lina et al. (2022) and Aw (2019) concluded that ease and purchase speed were important when consumers act impulsively, and retailers should minimise any hurdles that may occur. Shamim and Islam (2022) investigated the mediating role of influencers on a social networking site and concluded that trustworthiness, message credibility and media credibility positively affected impulsive buying. The studies were, however, conducted on social networking sites, which are sites whose primary function is to network, which is not the primary function of TikTok. Moreover, as TikTok is a platform for personalised entertainment more than influencer following, the applicability of those studies is unclear on TikTok since the focus of the platforms is different.

2.2 Social Media

The topic of social media has been in the eyes of academic studies since its inception, returning roughly 5.5 million results in ProQuest via the search “Social Media”. As such social media has attained a variety of definitions for what it constitutes, with one early definition by Boyd and Ellison (2007) being:

\[
\text{Social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 211)}
\]

Boyd and Ellison used the term “social network sites” instead of social media because it was the dominant term to describe applications and networks where users could interact when the definition was written (Aichner et al., 2021).

A more recent definition is the one by Kaplan and Haenlein: “Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (2010, p. 61). However, its shortcoming is that it does not explicitly mention any of the social media platforms it considers but just that it is a “group of Internet-based applications”, nor do they include social media platforms which follow the Web 3.0 architecture of being decentralised
and focusing on user integrity (Rudman & Bruwer, 2016). Moreover, not specifying the group of applications that the definition regards implies that it applies to any platform where the following part of the statement is applicable: “that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”. This creates difficulty in defining what social media is not since any platform that has user-generated content accessible by the public can be classified as social media by definition (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Additionally, a more recent definition of social media is the one by Kapoor et al. (2018); unlike Boyd and Ellison (2007), it does not limit social media to Web 2.0. Instead, it includes the ambiguity of content creation and its interaction between users, their networks, and the broader audience. The definition is as follows:

_Social media is made up of various user-driven platforms that facilitate the diffusion of compelling content, dialogue creation, and communication to a broader audience. It is essentially a digital space created by the people and for the people, and provides an environment that is conducive for interactions and networking to occur at different levels (for instance, personal, professional, business, marketing, political, and societal). (Kapoor et al., 2018, p. 536)_

Kapoor et al. (2018) include the levels of information spreading through their different examples and the condition that users produce social media content for the people. However, the target audience is varied depending on reach. Similar to Kaplan and Haenlein’s (2010) definition, Kapoor et al. (2018) have the same issue of being almost all-inclusive. Although, unlike Kaplan and Haenlein, they differentiate between the networking levels, the available platforms can be categorised accordingly. Another form of social media categorisation based on the levels of communication and the user's end goal with the platform is the one brought up by Alves et al. (2016). Some of these categorisations which are of interest to this report are: “blogs and microblogs (such as Twitter) … social networking sites (such as MySpace and Facebook), … , collaborative projects (such as Wikipedia), content community sites (e.g., YouTube, Flickr)” (Alves et al., 2016, p.1029; Chan & Guillet, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Combining the different levels of social media and the categorisations based on the use cases that social media has portrays an inclusive yet restrictive definition with a wide range of applications. However, they are differentiated by what they are used for and, as such, explain their comparability.
This leads to the social media definition that will be used further in this report which is built on the one by Kapoor et al. (2018):

Social media is made up of various user-driven platforms that facilitate the diffusion of compelling content, dialogue creation, and communication to a broader audience. It is essentially a digital space created by and for the people. It provides an environment that is conducive for interactions, content creation, content collaboration and networking to occur for different reach and with different purposes (for instance, social networking (Facebook), collaborative projects (Wikipedia), and content community (YouTube)).

Due to the previous social media definitions including a wide range of applications, it was necessary to include the different use cases of these applications and not only label them all under the same umbrella of “social media”. Therefore, despite being social media applications, their importance of social media part varies, and user approach differs (Alves et al., 2016).

2.2.1 Influencers

People with intermediating power existed before the rise of the internet and have acted as a filter between the mass communication of political entities, mass media and firms to the audience. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) formed the idea of opinion leaders and describe the intermediaries as a stage in Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) “Two-stage flow of communication” depicts how mass media information gets interpreted, filtered and spread to the public. The first stage in the model describes the media flow of communication reaching the opinion leaders. Then, through the second stage of interpersonal means, it conveys them to the audience and outsiders (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The opinion leader’s effectiveness is determined by three common characteristics and behaviours: “personification of certain values (who one is); competence (what one knows); and strategic social location (whom one knows)” (Katz, 1957, p. 73). Furthermore, due to the reach of these people, they “carry authority” and, through their “actions, influence other people’s opinions or actions” (Nikola, 2019, p. 75).

Until recently, physical proximity and face-to-face contact were necessary for opinion leaders’ existence. But with the development of the world wide web and its Web 2.0 architecture, where anyone can contribute anywhere, face-to-face interactions are no longer the sole deciding factor for personal communication (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014).

Along with the reduced importance of face-to-face interaction for opinion leaders, their reach has increased dramatically, leading to a new term replacing opinion leaders,
“influencers” (Nikola, 2019). The term does not only mean an opinion leader who uses social media to mediate information but also those using face-to-face communication (Katz, 1957).

A broad definition of what a social media influencer does is explained by Freberg et al. (2011) “Social media influencers (SMIs) represent a new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media” (p. 90). The definition by Freberg et al. (2011) includes the importance of attitude shaping through endorsement via blogs, tweets and other social media. Still, influencers act not only as an endorser in the sense that they state what they believe about something but also as a filter which is stated by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1957). Katz and Lazarsfeld’s (1955) interpreted what they called opinion leaders in the 50s, before the creation of the internet. Their idea that the public looks for opinion leaders for information sorting and opinion forming has become ever so prevalent today when everyone has access to information from everywhere (Winter & Neubbaum, 2016). This is where Freberg et al. (2011) definition and interpretation fall short since it leaves out the importance of influencers as information filters and guides in the vast sea of information that is the internet. One of their functions is endorsement and attitude shaping, among many others. A definition which relates to a broader range of influencer tasks is provided by Abidin (2015):

*Influencers are everyday, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their followers in digital and physical spaces and monetise their following by integrating “advertorials” into their blog or social media posts.* (p. 1)

Abidin describes the social standing of influencers as “ordinary Internet users”, which includes the possibility for any user with a large enough following to be classified as an influencer. Although, contrary to both Katz (1957) and Freberg et al. (2011), Abidin (2015) does not include an influencer's effect on information sharing, filtering and guiding, focusing on an influencer's image and how they monetise their following. Whereas Katz’s (1957) older definition of an influencer (opinion leader) does not mention the monetisation of their influencing (opinion leading), they are two sides of one coin.

Modern influencers need some of the characteristics portrayed by Katz (1957) to be useful for companies to monetise the influencer, which monetises their following (Enke & Borchers, 2019). From the consumer side, however, Katz (1957) characteristics have become ever so
important, especially “who one is” as one of the critical modern persuading factors of eWOM is trust, which is built on who the person is (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014; Stubb et al., 2019). Although the monetisation aspect of influencers is essential from a corporate point of view as to be potential sources of positive word-of-mouth in exchange for sponsorship funds, this is less important from a consumer point of view since consumers want the most honest and genuine opinion from the influencer to form their own opinion (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014). Furthermore, including that an influencer must monetise their following to be classified as such would exclude, for example, YouTube content creators with significant opinion-forming capabilities that do not have sponsored video segments and solely rely on YouTubes ad revenue from being classified as influencers (Abidin, 2015). This would mean that influencers, which significantly affect users’ opinions, would be excluded from the term if they do not monetise their following directly, despite their influence. Anyone contributing posts, videos or texts to a social media platform is classified as a content creator because they contribute to content creation on the site. In contrast, influencers must have opinion-forming capabilities classified as such. The definition proposed by Florida (2022) defines it in depth: “[c]reators may or may not be famous, but the goods and services they produce and market are of their own making. An even more concise way to put it is that Creators create content. Influencers may create content, but they also utilize content created by others.” (p.9)

Combining the above perspectives and excluding restraints unfit to the current state of the internet, social media influencers arrive to be defined as ordinary internet users that have gathered a large enough following to have an opinion-leading position based on network connections, personal characteristics and perceived trust (Abidin, 2015; Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014; Freberg et al., 2011; Katz, 1957).

2.2.1.1 Influencers’ Effect on Consumer Purchasing Behaviour

Influencers positively affect consumers' purchase behaviours due to the parasocial relationships created between them. This is because the influencers’ followers view them as friends and, in turn, follow their product recommendations as if they came from a friend (Lee, 2021). Influencers are therefore perceived as close personal friends by the consumers and therefore consider their recommendations as personal recommendations. Personal recommendations coming from a friend were concluded by Alghizzawi (2019) to be more convincing, especially if it was coming from a trusted friend.
Influencers' influence on consumers' purchase behaviour and propensity to follow the advice is determined by the influencer’s perceived expertise, trustworthiness and physical attractiveness (Jin & Phua, 2014; Kim & Kim, 2021; Ohanian, 1990). Perceived expertise regards the extent to which the influencer is perceived to be a reliable source of correct and applicable assessments about the products or the event, whereas trustworthiness regards the influencer’s capability and intent only to deliver the assessment that they consider most valid (Gomes et al., 2022; Jin & Phua, 2014; Kim & Kim, 2021; Lee, 2021; Ohanian, 1990). Finally, attractiveness regards the physical attractiveness of the source and, in return, affects the likeability of the influencer (Lee, 2021).

2.2.2 Social Media as an Evaluation Platform

Social media has become essential for communicating effectively with consumers (Kulkarni et al., 2020). Social media users share their experiences of brands and companies with other followers and friends (Motoki et al., 2020), and viral behaviour has become an important activity that creates consumer engagement. Chu (2022) also suggests that online viral behavioural intentions are recognised as a proxy for offline purchase behaviour. Sharing opinions among consumers on social media significantly affects consumer purchase intentions compared to traditional advertisement (Chu et al., 2022). Hence, sharing content substantially affects brand awareness and purchase intentions among consumers on social media (Motoki et al., 2020). In previous research conducted by Mehta and Funde (2014), it has been identified that consumers turn to social media platforms when they need a tool in their decision-making process and to gather information.

Social media platforms provide a space where users can write, discuss, and express themselves in any manner, shape or form they choose, and it is a crucial way to gain honest opinions about products and companies (Mehta & Funde, 2014). This is because social media is an easily accessible, widespread forum where everyone can be heard and listened to. For example, Li et al. (2022) found that new user satisfaction levels can be predicted based on post-use satisfaction reviews by other consumers stated on social media. Furthermore, Kreft and Karwats (2017) study concluded that Facebook friends and previous consumers are the most reliable and accurate way to get product recommendations, not bloggers and vloggers.

Mangold and Smith (2012) identified social media reviews as one of the core ways to sell products to the millennial generation as it is one of the millennials' main ways to make product evaluations. But in recent years, social media platforms have mainly been forums where viral
marketing has been adapted to Generation Y (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021). Still, it has been recognised that social media is open to more than just the younger generations (Gao et al., 2020). Social media platforms have also been identified as a way for companies and consumers to analyse the reaction and reception users have towards new product launches, as they provide easy ways for users to state their opinion (Lipizzi et al., 2015).

The simplicity of social media usage as an opinion-sharing platform has become central to forming new purchase perceptions towards products because of the sheer quantity of reviews. Due to the internet’s collection of a wide variety of information, there is quantity and quality. Quality has been determined to contribute to the content creator's trustworthiness and how it affects the video's information usefulness (Huang et al., 2022).

2.2.3 Short Format Video Platforms

There are multiple short-format video platforms, with the most popular being TikTok, Instagram Reels and YouTube shorts (Cucu, 2023). YouTube Shorts is similar to TikTok, focusing on short format videos but with a limit of 60 seconds; the difference, however, is the less effective algorithm, which is more based on short format videos. There is also the Instagram Reels section of Instagram, similar to both TikTok and YouTube Shorts, with a strong focus on short format videos. Instagram states that all videos under 15 minutes and uploaded through the app will be shared as Reels and that they can be cross-shared to Facebook (Meta, n.d.). As such, certain characteristics of TikTok coincide with that of other short-format video platforms. These characteristics are focused on shorter videos, endless scrolling, and ease of moving on to the next video (Klug et al., 2021; Meta, n.d.; YouTube, n.d.). Compared to traditionally based networking social media platforms, short-format video platforms are like YouTube but shorter, compressed, and endless. Instead of presenting the user with the posts of their network, the users are presented with a personalised “For You” page (TikTok) and “Recommended” page (Instagram and YouTube), which is an endless (Bhandari & Bimo, 2020) hard to anticipate (Simpson & Semaan, 2021) auto-looped page of videos for the user to swipe through.

Categorising short-format social media platforms into the above examples (Alves et al., 2016) is a grey area because of their multipurpose use cases and various functions. For example, the platforms could be classified as “blogs and microblogs” because of the ease of posting content to the platform that relates to the users’ lives. On the other hand, they could also be classified as “collaborative projects” because of users’ abilities to “Stitch” (TikTok) or
“Remix” (Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts) each other’s videos, which means to add more content to the original video and, in turn, create a new standard video based on the contribution (Instagram, n.d.; TikTok, n.d.-a). Lastly, it could be characterised as a content community site because the platforms’ subcategories, based on hashtags, create subcommunities. This creates an overlapping categorisation, resulting in the platforms being collaborative community blogs because of the contributions anyone can make to anyone’s community blog post.

2.2.4 TikTok Compared to Other Social Media

What differentiates TikTok from other short-format video platforms is its focus on videos recommended by its algorithm, which must be entertaining and have substance in the eyes of its users in a short period. Compared to other social media platforms, the platform’s main selling point is its algorithm, which determines what the user sees when opening and using the app (Zhang & Liu, 2021). Social media sites are synonymously referred to as social networking sites in academic writing, which are platforms whose primary focus is social networking (Bhandari & Bimo, 2020). Whereas users of Facebook, Instagram and other mainly socially networked social media sites use the platforms to stay connected to their social networks and inform their connections of what they are doing, which is also what they see when using the app; what their connections are doing. Papachirizzi (2011) coins it as the “Networked Self”, a platform where one can see and interact with all the networks they have and whom they know. The networked self of socialisation and connecting is found to be the primary motivation for using Facebook, Instagram, and similar network-based platforms (Dewi & Sari, 2022; Tosun, 2012).

On the other hand, TikTok’s algorithm and use case put little regard on whom its users know and focus on the interests and interactions performed in the app (Wang, 2022). This shift in content recommendations creates a different app scene where the user is subject to content that the platform deems interesting and in line with the user’s interest; the content shown is therefore decided by the platform and not by the user. TikTok is not the only platform with such a focus; YouTube and TikTok are both platforms which Bhandari (2020) would classify as “Algorithmized Self” since their main focus is showing videos which their users deem interesting, which is decided by their interactions.

TikTok and YouTube are similar in the way that they are video-sharing platforms which focus on showing interesting content to their users based on user input; this means that no two users’ recommendation pages are the same (Roth et al., 2020; Wang, 2022; Zhang & Liu, 2021).
However, despite the similarity of showing algorithm-focused content, the two platforms also have differences; YouTube is an older, originally desktop-based platform which came out in 2005 that, similarly to TikTok, focuses on user-generated, uploaded and edited content that can be viewed by anyone (Traynor, 2020). In addition, TikTok and other short-format platforms emphasise short videos that deliver quick gratification and keep the user engaged; if the video is not to the users liking, the next one is a single swipe away (Wang, 2020). On the other hand, YouTube focuses on longer format videos due to its monetisation policy that makes 6 to 15-minute videos the optimal length for the maximum number of advertisements (Clark, n.d.; Miley, 2022, February 17).

2.2.4.1 TikTok’s Algorithm

Most recommendation-based social media platforms use a predefined set of rules in how their machine-learning platforms operate; these rules are algorithms and determine the priorities of the machine-learning platform (Balaji et al., 2021). These rules differentiate different platforms’ algorithms from one another as they prioritise different machine learning variables. TikTok has created a powerful algorithm that has become its unique selling point compared to other social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook (Zhang & Liu, 2021). In addition, YouTube also uses a recommendation system based on an algorithm. Still, their prioritisation lies in the increase of “Longer watch time”, “Video shares”, “Engagement metrics”, and “Watch history” (Google, n.d.). On the contrary, TikTok has managed to create the most “aggressive” and “addictive” algorithm with its different priorities (Schellewald, 2022; Siles, 2023). TikTok itself states briefly that they base recommendations on several factors, including: “User interactions”, “Video information”, and “Device and account settings” (TikTok, 2020, June 18) with varyingly weighted factors. A more informative statement of how TikTok’s algorithm works are provided by Kang and Lou (2022) as:

* TikTok applies natural language processing to identify textual and audio elements (e.g., sounds) of the videos users enjoyed, computer vision to classify the videos’ visual components, and analysis of the hashtags and captions connected to such videos.
* TikTok’s algorithm is so powerful and aggressive that it can learn the vulnerabilities and interests of a user in less than 40 minutes. (p. 4)

Therefore, TikTok’s selection and recommendations process is significantly different from that of YouTube despite both being video-sharing platforms with user recommendations as a core feature. Moreover, both platforms have a feature to follow content creators on the
platforms. However, while YouTube considers how often a user watches a specific creator (Google, n.d.), TikTok states to be more interested in the content created than the content creator (Siles et al., 2022). This means that content the platform classifies as good can appear in anyone’s feed regardless of whether the user follows the creator or the number of followers the creator has. As such, anyone could become an influencer, no matter the followers, if they create algorithmically good content (TikTok, 2020, June 18).

Bhandari and Bimo (2020) bring up the idea of the “algorithmized self” due to TikTok’s personalised algorithm, where the “algorithmized self” depicts the user and the user's interests. Additionally, Lee et al. (2022) concluded that TikTok users felt the algorithm successfully aligned with their interests depending on their interactions with the platform. It morphed over time depending on the changes in user interest that might occur. Furthermore, users could recognise a part of themselves in others due to them sharing the same interest and, in turn, feel a connection to those users (Lee et al., 2022).

YouTube and TikTok have become the most popular video platforms, and they both use an algorithm to recommend content to their users (Guinaudeau et al., 2022; Statista, 2022). However, the platforms diverge when it comes to what they favour in their algorithm, where YouTube includes subscribing and previously watched videos from that creator to form the recommendations, TikTok does not include whom the user follows (TikTok, 2020, June 18; YouTube, n.d.). The effect of weighing in the number of followers in recommendations is that, despite YouTube's algorithm-based recommendations system, the creators' networks create considerable sway over their possibilities to go viral. This, in turn, means that already established creators are favoured instead of those without an extensive network (Guinaudeau et al., 2022). Further, they state that videos tend to be longer on YouTube, meaning that users are more likely to watch creators they already know if they will watch a longer video (Guinaudeau et al., 2022). Newly created TikTok accounts and creators are, therefore, more likely to go viral than newly created YouTube accounts. This means that people are more willing to create their videos on TikTok due to the higher possibility of virality without the need to develop networks. Furthermore, Guinaudeau et al. (2022) reinforced this in their study when they found that total views on TikTok are significantly less correlated to the number of followers/subscribers as opposed to YouTube, meaning creators on TikTok can have further reach no matter their followers/subscribers.
Comparing TikTok to Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts shows that TikTok has the highest engagement rate; its users post twice as many comments and upload twice as many videos (Cucu, 2023). Additionally, Meta also considers followers in the recommendation of reels on both Instagram and Facebook reels (creators, August 4, 2021; Meta, n.d.), while YouTube uses the same recommendation system for Shorts as well as standard YouTube videos (YouTube, n.d.). The ultimate effect of TikTok’s different algorithmic determinants and their better ability to encourage users to contribute their videos and content leads to the platform having more possibility for viral content to be created when compared to YouTube, YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels (Guinaudeau et al., 2022).

2.3 Word of Mouth

Word of mouth was introduced more than 60 years ago (Brooks, 1958) but gained more recognition and significance when the internet became a known phenomenon (Dellarocas, 2003). In addition, traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) was the earliest communication between people and sharing of opinions and recommendations (Verma & Yadav, 2021). As technology has advanced, so has the ability for consumers to share consumption-related opinions, hence creating eWOM. Furthermore, WOM has increased in popularity and has become more valuable than traditional advertisement. WOM is critical in shaping consumer behaviour and attitude (Sen & Lerman, 2007; Siddiqui et al., 2021). As a result, WOM has a vital role in online purchases and businesses (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). In addition, it has been concluded that WOM is one of the most trusted sources of information for consumers in their decision-making process (Nielsen, 2015).

Throughout the years, there have been several different descriptions of WOM (Verma & Yadav, 2021). A description of WOM, described as vivid and novel, was created earlier by Anderson and Sullivan (1993). They stated that positive WOM could be referred to as a good experience, whereas negative WOM could be referred to as a bad experience with a product or company. Another definition of WOM, written by Al-Ja’afreh and Al-Adaileh (2020) with inspiration from Arndt (1967), says, “Word of mouth can be defined as communication among people where the person receives some non-commercial message regarding brands, products or services. In other words, sharing and exchanging information about consumption experience” (p. 158). This description goes hand in hand with the one made by Babić Rosario
et al. (2016), who describe WOM as “the act of consumers providing information about goods, services, brands, or companies to other consumers” (p. 297).

Moreover, as social media is growing fast (Chen & Yuan, 2020), people worldwide can interact and share opinions, recommendations, and ideas (Tsai & Bui, 2021). The importance of online WOM has thus increased and become an essential part of information seeking for consumers (Chen & Yuan, 2020) and as a buying influence (Babić Rosario et al., 2020). In several articles, the significance of WOM has been observed (Chen & Yuan, 2020). For example, Chevalier and Maylin (2006) investigated the effect of WOM on sales regarding online book reviews, and Gopinath and Krishnamurthi (2014) investigated the relationship between the content of online WOM, advertising, and brand performance. Both studies (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Gopin et al., 2014) concluded that positive WOM led to a direct increase in sales due to consumers trusting the reviews as honest opinions.

2.3.1 Electronic Word of Mouth

Social media has given the power to consumers to share opinions and recommendations and communicate not only via traditional omnichannel communication but multi-channel as well, reaching a wider audience. As social media platforms become more important, so is eWOM communication (Verma & Yadav, 2021). Further, the internet and the online space are continuously simplifying and increasing the opportunities for consumers to share experiences and opinions through comments (Lu & Bai, 2021). If these comments and opinions are used correctly, they can provide insight into how consumers behave. One of these important insights is known to be eWOM (Tobon & García-Madariaga, 2021). Moreover, as information technology advances, social media and online platforms’ meaning and use have become increasingly more significant when forming brand and product opinions. Thus, early communication has transformed into a technological channel (Nuseir, 2019).

eWOM explains a general way of sharing information, in this case, from one person to another in an electronic setting. Thus, according to Babić Rosario et al. (2020), it is used outside of marketing content. Therefore, they mean that eWOM is not consumer-generated content with commercial implications (e.g., Daugherty et al., 2008). On the other hand, Babić Rosario et al. (2020) also argue that consumer-generated content about a specific product should be seen as eWOM. They suggest that even recommendations not directly connected to a specific product should be considered eWOM. Babić Rosario et al. (2016) has also described eWOM as information communicated through the internet, through different types of reviews, posts,
videos etc. In addition, Babić Rosario et al. (2016) state that eWOM can be described as “one of the most significant developments in contemporary consumer behaviour” (p. 297).

Opinions have been found to emerge from likes, comments, shares, and more (Donthu et al., 2021). Consequently, positive social media and Internet responses influence consumer purchase behaviour (Tamrin & Huda, 2021). Hence, a broad reach and positive responses are necessary for beneficial eWOM (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021). Puriwat and Tripopsakul (2021) observed that negative online responses are more damaging, leading to a negative image and overall consumer perception. Wang (2013) states that negative information and responses weigh more than positive ones, thus creating unfavourable product associations. Nevertheless, effective viral marketing and positive responses can connect with more consumers and improve product awareness and perception (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021).

There has been much discussion regarding the difference between eWOM and traditional WOM, and four elements describe the discussion topics (Babić Rosario et al., 2020). The elements are referred to as communication network, time and location, accommodating many formats, and the online context. First, when comparing the two, the communication network is more extensive for eWOM as it can reach the entire internet and the people on it (Babić Rosario et al., 2020). Secondly, regarding time and location, the information spread online is usually kept online for a long time; thus, eWOM can always be available (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). In addition, as eWOM previously was seen through the scope of consumer-to-consumer, it has emerged and become broader because it now includes online consumer-generated communication (Babić Rosario et al., 2020). Moreover, this type of eWOM is also more directed at marketers, but at the same time, visible to the consumer (Kim & Slotegraaf, 2016). Furthermore, the third element discusses that eWOM can be in several formats, whereas traditional WOM is usually limited to spoken and written formats (Schweidel & Moe, 2014). Finally, the fourth element, Babić Rosario et al. (2016), argued that eWOM is fixed in an online context, and it shapes its credibility and effectiveness.

Furthermore, when exploring eWOM, a difference must be set between eWOM and critics’ reviews. Floyd et al. (2014) describe eWOM as something the consumers generate, as previously stated by Daugherty et al. (2008), whereas independent third-party experts do critics’ reviews. Moreover, the authors suggest that third-party expertise has a more significant impact on the consumer when making a purchase decision than eWOM. This means the expertise of critics is more likely to demonstrate credibility in their message to the consumer.
On the other hand, Gvili and Levy (2021) found a direct connection between the adoption of eWOM and its effect on consumer purchasing decisions and intentions.

Babić Rosario et al. (2020) explain that with a rise in influencer marketing, the difference between a consumer and a critic is not as distinct anymore. In other words, many influencers go from being regular customers to creating professional reviews where money is generated. However, the authors also state that reviews made by an influencer should not be seen as eWOM but rather as a form of advertising.

Nowadays, consumers use different channels when seeking information about a product or when purchasing a product. These channels can be both online and offline. Thanks to eWOM, consumers can get a comparative and deeper evaluation of the product they are searching for (Verma & Yadav, 2021). Kim et al. (2019) discuss that the information provided by eWOM and online reviews allows for a better understanding of the dynamics of purchasing behaviours. Gao (2018) investigated the comparative advantages of online restaurant review eWOM and how managers can use it to leverage the perceived quality of services and market positioning in the eyes of the consumer. In other words, consumers tend to rely on online reviews when purchasing a specific product. Overall, Kim et al. (2019) and Gao (2018) suggest that understanding eWOM and reviews can create value for the business and insight into consumers’ perceptions.

2.3.2 Video-Based Electronic Word-of-Mouth as a Product Evaluation

Online shopping for products has the advantage of being convenient but the disadvantage of being uncertain. The uncertainty of the product due to the lack of physical examination as opposed to brick-and-mortar stores, uncertainty towards the sellers’ intention to deliver the product and uncertainty of lacking a store clerk to talk to (Cheng et al., 2022). Trying to decrease the uncertainties, consumers turn to other consumers who have made a similar purchase decision and use their experiences to guide what they may experience (Floyd et al., 2014). User-generated eWOM in the form of reviews is available on many sites, from 1–5-star rating systems to open-ended comments, images, and videos. Consumers are provided with a wide range of reviews and review systems to base their purchasing decision. Compared to text-based reviews, user-generated video reviews make it possible to show the product in action, increasing the persuasiveness of the review (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020).

eWOM, when mediated in a video format, is called vWOM (Zhai et al., 2022). Zhai et al. (2022) further define it as video-based product reviews created by users and published on video platforms such as YouTube or TikTok.
platforms. vWOM can be generated directly from a company-related user (sponsored) or an unrelated user (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020). Among the most effective and influential forms of vWOM are product videos that demonstrate the features, uses and experience of the product, as opposed to product appearance videos whose main point is to impress the customer with visuals (Cheng et al., 2022). As such, the benefits of demonstrational videos regarding products are that they can provide ample information to the consumer and outweigh uncertainty gaps in an online shopping environment (Hao et al., 2019).

Moreover, Hao et al. (2019) found that the vWOM had no significant effect on the perceived risk of shopping in an online environment but that the video demonstration had information quality and quantity, which outweighed the risk of making the purchase. This is especially applicable to first-time shoppers on the site or of the product since their perceived risk and uncertainty are higher when compared to an experienced shopper (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020).

2.3.3 User-Generated Video-Based Electronic word-of-mouth as Product Evaluation

Pfeuffer et al. (2021) found that company-related user-generated content was more effective in consumer persuasiveness when the sponsorship affiliation was disclosed, further stating that it was due to increasing the trustworthiness and credibility of the reviewer in question. Diwanji and Cortese (2020) concluded that consumers had a favourable attitude toward user-generated vWOM, meaning they were more likely to use the information in their purchasing intention. The reason why consumers trust user-generated content as opposed to brand-related content is that:

... [C]onsumers generate and share review videos with others because they have a genuine desire to help other consumers with their purchasing decisions or to save them from negative brand-related experiences. (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020, p. 7)

The benefit is, therefore, an actual interest in helping other consumers in their purchasing decisions which means they are more likely to state their genuine opinions (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020). Furthermore, the effect of sponsorship disclosures in brand-related user-generated vWOM helps consumers consider the video's persuasive intent without making its information unusable when forming or changing purchasing intent (Pfeuffer et al., 2021). The quality and in-depth are other factors determining the consumers’ perceived usefulness and helpfulness of the video review. High-quality reviews are more effective due to the perceived emotional closeness to the reviewer (Zhai et al., 2022).
Quality in-depth vWOM leads to the trustworthiness and helpfulness of the video review, but going in-depth takes time, leading to longer videos (Cheng et al., 2022). TikTok, Instagram Reels and Snapchat are platforms where it is easy and accessible to post videos, but they are limited in length, which leads to a necessity to be short and concise (Malik, February 28, 2022; Meta, n.d.). Zhai et al. (2022) found that due to the conciseness and surface-level information in short-format video reviews, they were insufficient for customers interested in the product as they were already familiar with its uses. Short-format video reviews, according to Zhai et al. (2022), fill a gap where the consumers need some information to be satisfied enough to make the purchase but where the consumer is not interested enough to look for information elsewhere.

2.4 Viral Content

Viral content is the widespread diffusion of information regarding the subject matter of a video, image or post, making others feel the need to contribute to the same subject matter in their own creations (Wang et al., 2019). Berger and Milkman (2012) have documented characteristics of viral content. For example, they suggested that people share negative rather than positive experiences. On the other hand, the author’s research indicates that positive experiences, content, and news spread more and become more viral. Moreover, they suggest that “positive content is more likely to be highly shared” (Berger & Milkman, 2012, p. 201).

2.4.1 Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is not a new phenomenon, as it has been discussed in the literature for more than 20 years. However, the concept of viral marketing was first introduced in 1996 by Rayport (Hendijani Fard & Marvi, 2020). As previously mentioned, online social media platforms are becoming more present in our lives. It has become an essential information platform that influences the use and adoption of different products (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003). According to Subramani and Rajagopalan (2003), viral marketing can be described as “the tactic of creating a process where interested people can market to each other” (p. 1). The authors, therefore, suggest that viral marketing is a means that can help spread the word about products. In other words, viral marketing can also be referred to as widely spread WOM. Generally, viral marketing is more effective (Motoki et al., 2020), more accessible and faster (Alghizzawi, 2019), and less expensive than traditional advertising (Motoki et al., 2020).
Another advantage of this type of marketing is the potential to reach a specific target group as networks emerge from common interests with friends (Bhattacharya et al., 2019). Thus, viral marketing ties together with the social process of consumers and social media users sharing opinions and recommendations (Alghizzawi, 2019). Viral marketing can be described as a virus that spreads from one person to another within a network (Gil-Or, 2010). And as Bhattacharya et al. (2019) suggest that viral marketing can be compared to infectious sharing disease. A contagious pattern can be observed where the need for sharing exponentially spreads between hosts.

2.4.2 Viral Products

Since viral marketing regards a campaign designed by a marketeer, its applicability on social media is dependent on the reach of the account which created the campaign and how much attention the social media algorithm gives that particular video. This presents another option, that of product virality which is the product itself having features or design choices that erupt emotions or perceived benefit of use in the viewer. Its better suitability is because viral marketing is the virality of the campaign about the product, not the product itself (Dinh & Mai, 2016).

Viral marketing regards the decisions made by the marketeer, which influences the users’ motivations to forward content to other people and what aims the marketeer has regarding user interaction. Moreover, the marketing campaign is more often based on emotions or entertainment to be perceived by the users as worth sharing with their network (Ho & Dempsey, 2010; Reichstein & Brusch, 2019).

Viral products, on the other hand, are the products themselves going viral and not the campaign around the product; therefore, the virality lasts longer than the campaign's runtime since the virality source is the product features (Aral & Walker, 2011). Since the platform algorithms cycle videos large and fast, it is more beneficial if the product itself is what is causing virality and not the campaign. Creators and users will then create videos about the product if considered interesting enough, leading to the repeated spread of the product (Nguyen & Chaudhuri, 2019). The current trend shows that viral and video advertising is the most engaging as consumers are encouraged to share the message with their social media networks and spread their opinion. Suppose content creators and consumers understand the psychological user need for virality participation. In that case, it will be an essential tool in
understanding future viral marketing campaigns and how they are structured to influence consumers (Kulkarni et al., 2020).

2.4.3 Algorithmic Virality

Traditionally viral content with the intention of being shared between users is different from the approach that TikTok, YouTube and Instagram Reels, among other algorithmically based platforms, use to spread virality. The difference can be found in the usage of the services and how connections are formed (Gil-Or, 2010). Considering Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat as an example, they are all network-based social media platforms whose primary function is to connect and stay in touch with friends (Bhandari & Bimo, 2020). This results in people using the platform to share content with their network; the content is then shared in more and more networks until it has become viral (Ho & Dempsey, 2010). Virality on network-based platforms is the sharing of content between users, which in turn creates the spread of information. It is ultimately up to the user to determine what content is entertaining, interesting, or informative enough to share with their network. Consequently, the user decides to share or not to share (Reichstein & Brusch, 2019).

There are two platform types, according to Bhandari and Bimo (2020), one described as the “algorithmized self” (i.e., TikTok, YouTube, Instagram Reels), where the content feed is a depiction of the users' interests, and the “networked self”, which contains content from the users' network. Comparing the two shows that the difference lies in the content shown and who made the decision to show that content. “[N]etworked self” platforms show content shared and created by the user’s network (Bhattacharya et al., 2019), while “algorithmized self” platforms show content depending on what the algorithm deems worthy of sharing. Therefore, the virality created on platforms with algorithmic recommendations comes from the algorithm deciding to show a type of content to many people, not from many people sharing the content to their networks (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003). Due to this difference, the authors deemed it necessary to distinguish the two, further calling virality caused by an algorithm as “algorithmic virality”.

2.5 FOMO

Due to the social nature of humans, we inherently care about what others are doing and wish to stay connected to the experiences people close to oneself have (Argan et al., 2022). If left out of the experiences, people fear missing something important, called the fear of missing
out effect, abbreviated FOMO. Carson (2017) found that FOMO created psychological anxiety and obsessive symptoms, leading to excessive, compulsive or impulsive behaviours. Other researchers found FOMO to be a multidimensional occurrence where both social interaction (need to belong) and social anxiety (social pain) were contributing factors to the feeling (Abel et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2016). FOMO can be further distinguished into two underlying psycho-social motivations, the desire for belonging and the anxiety of isolation (Kang et al., 2019). The desire for belonging refers to the need for interpersonal attachments and recognition from others to express one's symbolic interpretation of personality regarding prestige, social connectedness and praise from others (Kang & Ma, 2020). The second underlying motivation, the anxiety of isolation, is explained by Alt (2015) as an unstable anticipation of being left outside the mainstream group, which includes feelings of falling behind, being ignored and being alienated from the group. The group in question is the social group that a person belongs to or aspires to belong to, which makes the person inclined to be influenced by its norms, beliefs and behaviours (Bearden et al., 1989).

This means that a person who aspires to be a part of a group or is part of a group they want to impress will follow their norms, beliefs and behaviours because of the persons underlying psycho-social fear of being left outside the group, the fear of being alienated from the group and the fear of falling behind and not being up to date to what is popular (Alt, 2015; Bearden et al., 1989; Kang & Ma, 2020). The susceptibility to FOMO is different between people and relates to the person's independence and their individualistic behaviour, which affects how effective outside influences are in determining their decisions (Argan et al., 2022). Tying FOMO in with consumer behaviour creates consumer-centric FOMO, which is when a consumer makes purchasing decisions to follow the trend of a group not to be left behind or alienated (Kang et al., 2019).

2.6 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework developed from the literature review included the factors believed to be a part of the consumer’s purchase behaviour on a video platform. eWOM was concluded by Cheng (2022), Zhai (2022) and Diwanji and Cortese (2020), among others (Babić Rosario et al., 2016; Gao et al., 2018; Gvili & Levy, 2021; Kim et al., 2019; Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021; Verma & Yadav, 2021; Zhao et al., 2020) to be the main influences of consumers purchase behaviour. eWOM was then further subcategorised into the spreader of
eWOM; influencers, as stated by multiple authors (Abidin, 2015; Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014; Dinh & Lee, 2022; Freberg et al., 2011; Lee, 2021). Furthermore, due to influencers having different characteristics, which all contribute to the way consumers interpret their message, it was necessary to include them as well; these factors are Trustworthiness, Physical Attractiveness and Expertise (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014; Lee, 2021).

The last two factors which affect consumers’ purchase behaviour are quality and quantity. Quality has been proven to be a significant contributor to the eWOM effect on consumers’ purchase behaviour via YouTube, Instagram and review sites; it has also been determined to contribute to the trustworthiness of the reviewer in question due to their perceived expertise (Huang et al., 2022). The quantity of informational videos contributes to consumer purchase behaviour due to the wide variety of views and experiences, which are weighed together by the consumer making the decision (Li et al., 2022; Lipizzi et al., 2015). The effect of a vast quantity of many similar videos is that the subject matter can go viral, which is to be widely spread and shared among users (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Ho & Dempsey, 2010), but in the case of TikTok and other short-format video platforms which rely on algorithms (Instagram Reels, YouTube shorts), it is algorithmic virality and thus diffused by the algorithm and not users (Bhattacharya et al., 2019; Reichstein & Brusch, 2019). A consumer who wants to be a part of a group that follows a trend feels the need to follow the trend to be a part of the group (Kang et al., 2019). This is due to the fear of missing out effect, which occurs when the consumer is afraid of being alienated from a group or movement where it seems to be expected to partake in the activity or to have a specific product (Alt, 2015; Bearden et al., 1989; Kang & Ma, 2020).
Combining the above factors, which all contribute to consumer purchase behaviour, creates the following framework below:

**Figure 1**

*Theoretical Framework Created from the Literature Review*

Note. Combined qualities of consumer purchase behaviour based on the literature review. The dashed arrow indicates that “Quantity” can lead to “Virality”. The same concerns “Virality” possibly leading to “FOMO”.
Chapter 3 – Methodology and Method

The following chapter will present the methodology and method used in the report. First, an insight into the research philosophy and approach will be presented, followed by the research strategy. Furthermore, the method and its vital parts will be presented where an insight into the design, data collection, data analysis, research quality and ethical consideration is shown.

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Interpretivist Research Philosophy

The authors of the following report have adopted the interpretivist approach, as the research was conducted through in-depth discussions between participants in focus groups, and the approach was found to be suitable (Nunan et al., 2020). Thereby joining the differences among the answers within the group through a subjective perspective (Bhattacherjee, 2012). In addition, the interpretivist paradigm has a qualitative and subjectivistic approach, which was suitable for the purpose (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Nunan et al., 2020). Furthermore, the underpinning of the interpretivist approach is that personal perceptions shape social reality, making it subjective rather than objective. This underpinning created a foundation for the researchers to understand and adapt to different perceptions and perspectives that surfaced during the discussions (Collis & Hussey, 2014). By utilising this approach, the authors found key characteristics that describe the reasons for consumers' purchase decisions and behaviour when using TikTok and, in addition, created an appropriate conceptual framework describing how eWOM on TikTok affects purchase behaviour.

Several philosophical assumptions are associated with the interpretivist paradigm to be considered when researching as it lays a foundation for how the study was being carried out. First, through an ontological assumption, the nature of reality (Collis & Hussey, 2014), interpretivism sees reality as a dynamic nature (Nunan et al., 2020), and it recognises multiple realities to be considered (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Hence, reality is seen as subjective, and it can be perceived differently among individuals and does not need a set form. Thus, by the conducted focus group interviews, different realities and perceptions have been discovered in connection to the studied phenomenon. With an ontological assumption, the authors could
better understand how participants experienced and perceived eWOM on TikTok. As a focus group discussion invites different perceptions to surface, engaging discussions arose, and the authors received a broader understanding of the reality the participants saw (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

Furthermore, another assumption that needs to be considered is the epistemological assumption associated with what is accepted as valid knowledge, but also how the knowledge is communicated to others (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Saunders et al., 2019). Through this assumption, the distance between the researcher and the subject of the matter was minimised by the interpretivist (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Collis and Hussey (2014) further state that “knowledge comes from subjective evidence from participants”— moreover, Nunan et al. (2020) suggest that participants are seen more as peers rather than objects through the eyes of an interpretivist. Thus, the interpretivist epistemology aligns with the research conducted, as participants of the focus groups contribute knowledge.

3.1.2 Inductive Research Approach

The authors used an inductive approach while conducting the research. The inductive approach is connected to the interpretivist paradigm, so it was highly suitable for the study (Nunan et al., 2020). As stated by Nunan et al. (2020), “The interpretivist seeks to establish the legitimacy of their approach through induction” (p. 156). Through inductive research, an area of interest is recognised where there is a limited number of frameworks or no frameworks present. Before the data collection, a theoretical framework was created as a summary of the current literature found by the authors. Hence, a framework was not presented to be of support when the focus group discussions were conducted. On the other hand, the theoretical framework created from the literature was, in combination with the collected data, further developed to create a conceptual framework and a theory based on the findings and conclusions of the study. Hence, a conceptual framework was developed after more profound observations and understandings were made. Therefore, the study took an inductive approach as the research did not have a specific theory from the beginning but built a conceptual framework in conjunction with the focus group discussions. Moreover, as Collis and Hussey (2014) stated, a theory is developed from observations in inductive research, thus, being of great fit with the focus group approach.

Furthermore, Collis and Hussey (2014) explain that “general inferences are induced from particular instances”. This aligns with the inductive approach, as a theoretical framework was
seen as restricting the research. Hence, in the case of this study, a conceptual framework was created after the data collection. In addition, this approach let the authors use creativity and research to understand and interpret the discussions. The theory was also created with the help of the occurrence and interconnection of the social phenomenon. Besides, the researchers developed a conceptual framework based on the observations encountered (Nunan et al., 2020), in this case, from the focus group discussions. Moreover, this allowed the authors to interpret and develop an understanding of the social phenomenon (Collis & Hussey, 2014) of eWOM and how it affects consumer purchasing behaviour.

3.1.3 Research Strategy

The strategy followed by the authors was identified with the interpretivist paradigm as they sought to develop an understanding of different perceptions and perspectives of the social phenomenon through discussions within the focus groups (Bhattacherjee, 2012). In combination with the interpretivist paradigm, an inductive approach was used.

The interpretivist paradigm and the inductive approach are closely connected to qualitative research (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Nunan et al., 2020). Through qualitative research, the participants express their perception of a social phenomenon. Hence, qualitative research has flexibility in comparison to quantitative research. The goal was to summarise the participants’ experiences and feelings in their terms (Nunan et al., 2020). With this stated, the research by the authors was conducted by collecting qualitative data to address the research question. Further, as Collis and Hussey (2014) said, qualitative data is usually analysed using interpretative methods as the two complement each other, aligning with the conducted research.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Qualitative Data Collection

Data collection can be conducted through either a direct approach or an indirect approach. In the case of this study, a direct approach was used as it refers to focus groups and in-depth discussions (Nunan et al., 2020). This report's data collection technique has been through focus group discussions with people with sufficient experience purchasing beauty products or cosmetic products recommended on TikTok. The research sought to understand the social phenomenon of consumer purchase behaviour because of TikTok eWOM. This was conducted with the help of the interpretivist paradigm through an inductive approach, and therefore the focus group discussions contributed to creating this understanding (Collis & Hussey, 2014).
There are both advantages and disadvantages with focus group data collection. As focus groups let the participants share opinions and compare their answers and positions (Acocella, 2012). The method for data collection aligned with the research strategy as the authors sought to understand a social phenomenon, and the participants were the source of information. In addition, as the authors set the criteria to have bought a beauty product through recommendations on TikTok to be able to partake in the focus group, it was made sure that the participants were interested in the topic of research. On the other hand, disadvantages exist; the presence of other people can lead to participants having expressed more socially desirable answers because of the possible judgement from others. Thus, a focus group does not always lead to a deep understanding of the phenomenon. But, in the case of the study, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages; the simplicity of the method advocates for the reason it was chosen (Acocella, 2012).

In the focus groups, several questions were presented (Appendix A), and an understanding of feelings and emotions towards eWOM on TikTok was gathered. Hence, the gathering could conclude with new data within the field of study (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Collis and Hussey (2014) further explain that through a focus group, researchers can gather data in terms of the feelings and opinions that the participants have regarding the social subject matter. In addition, a focus group is a combination of discussions and observations of the group. The aim was to let the participants share their experiences in detail and add to other participants’ contributions. Therefore, it was important that the moderators, in the case of this study, the authors, could oscillate between controlling and letting the participants discuss on their own (Agar & MacDonald, 1995).

3.2.2 Sampling

When conducting qualitative research, working with a smaller sample is beneficial to study the phenomenon in depth. In addition, sampling in qualitative research is usually purposive (Miles et al., 2014). Sampling was conducted through a survey sent to Jönköping International Business School students. The students were asked if they had purchased a beauty or cosmetic product recommended through TikTok and if they would consider partaking in one of the focus groups. They were considered participants with sufficient experience within the field if agreeing to participate and having purchased a beauty product because of TikTok recommendations (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Subsequently, with the answers received, the students willing to participate were contacted by the authors and were given suggestions on the time and date for the focus group.
Initially, when the survey was distributed, there were not sufficient people answering or willing to partake, hence, the initiation of snowball sampling, a form of convenience sampling. However, the authors were involved in the sampling process at the start and, through personal contacts and referrals (Nunan et al., 2020), were able to collect enough participants for the focus groups. Therefore, it was decided to use the snowball sampling method as there were difficulties in accessing people suitable for the study (Naderifar et al., 2017). In addition, the decision was made since snowball sampling aligns with the research approach being inductive (Miles et al., 2014).

3.2.3 Focus Group Layout

Eventually, the groups were formed, and the participants were informed. It was decided that four focus groups would be conducted to reach saturation (Guest et al., 2017; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). In addition, each one of the groups consisted of 4-5 people (Table 1), which is considered a sufficient number of participants (Krueger, 2014). Furthermore, the research authors portrayed the focus group's moderators. Half of the participants in the first focus group participated through Microsoft Teams, and half met with the moderators face-to-face. The second and third groups met face-to-face, and the fourth focus group was held online on Microsoft Teams. The participants were allowed to attend the focus group interview face-to-face or online. This was to make it as convenient as possible if they could not participate one way or the other, thus being able to join from anywhere (Archibald et al., 2019). On the other hand, the study by Archibald et al. (2019) found that the benefits outweigh the challenges encountered when conducting focus groups online. Such as being convenient and easy to use, hence, being suitable for collecting qualitative data.

To facilitate a comfortable discussion environment and with all participants being native Swedish speakers, it was decided that the focus groups would be conducted in Swedish. The native language of the participants was assumed to be the one they were most comfortable with and would not create a language barrier for expression. During the sessions, one of the authors led the interview by asking questions (Appendix A). The moderator also ensured that everyone could come forward with their thoughts and answers, and follow-up questions were asked if necessary. When questions were asked to the group, the second author took notes and handled the session recording. If anything was unclear or needed further questioning, the second author pitched in to keep the conversation going.
The focus groups were conducted between the 2nd of April and the 6th of April 2023. The group session consisted of 23 questions created in advance as an outline for the interview (Appendix A). However, the questions were adapted depending on the group's discussions, and all discussions continued until getting saturated. This was done to make sure questions were not repetitive when discussed and for the authors to probe into new areas of discussion that may appear. Even though interviews were held face-to-face, online, or mixed, the interview outline was conducted similarly.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Focus group code</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>FG1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2/4-2023</td>
<td>01:07:44</td>
<td>Teams &amp; in-person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>FG2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3/4-2023</td>
<td>01:14:44</td>
<td>In-person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>FG3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5/4-2023</td>
<td>00:40:23</td>
<td>In-person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>FG4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6/4-2023</td>
<td>01:21:00</td>
<td>Teams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.4 Data Analysis

Bhattacherjee (2012) and other authors (Nunan et al., 2020) state that qualitative analysis can be done using interview data. Hence, this type of analysis is dependable on analytical skills among the researchers. Compared to quantitative analysis, a qualitative analysis focuses on understanding a social phenomenon and not explaining the phenomenon.

When analysing qualitative data, there are different stages to go through. These stages were followed throughout the process of analysing the data for the study as it created structure and a clear understanding for the authors. The first stage was data assembling (Nunan et al., 2020), where the authors, as previously stated, conducted four focus groups to collect data. The data was both recorded, and notes were also taken.

Furthermore, the second stage includes reducing data which means that data should be selected, classified, and connected if it shows significance for the study. In other words, the second stage includes transcribing and coding the data (Nunan et al., 2020). The data transcription was done digitally after the focus groups had been conducted. Therefore, the authors could manually go through the document afterwards to ensure the transcription was correct; this also helped simplify the next coding process.
The coding was conducted through First Cycle Coding and Second Cycle Coding. Through the First Cycle Coding, codes could be assigned to specific parts of the data (Miles et al., 2014). As codes stem from the phrases and terms of the participants, inductive coding was of relevance (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). In addition, inductive coding was conducted, starting with open coding (Nunan et al., 2020). Similarities in different statements were discovered in the First Cycle Coding process, and further on, they were categorised into sub-categories. As the sub-categories were depicted from the transcript, the authors could ensure that the codes closely connected with the collected data, as Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019) stated. This way, the coding could stay relevant to what the participants said in the interviews. Further, Second Cycle Coding was conducted, and the First Cycle codes were organised into smaller segments (Gioia et al., 2013; Miles et al., 2014), and the coding became more focused (Nunan et al., 2020). Moreover, each sub-category was allocated a specific category after finding patterns from the first cycle. Lastly, the final coding themes were depicted (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). In Chapter 4, a graphic summary of the codes can be found in Table 2.

A decision was made not to use computer-assisted programs for data analysis. Although advantages such as speed, the possibility to sort through data in large volumes, rigour, and being able to count the number of times a topic occurred, it was decided not to use the method. Because of this, the authors could understand certain words, tone of voice, and gestures made by the participants, whereas they would be lost in the mechanic process. In addition, an overview of the data could be visualised by analysing data without computer assistance (Nunan et al., 2020).

Continuously the third stage includes displaying data. In the case of this study, the data will be displayed in the form of verbatim quotes. This was decided so readers could understand the participants’ feelings, thoughts, and emotions towards the phenomenon in question of the research. The fourth and last stage is verifying the collected data, which is not applicable in this case because similar data investigations were not found in the literature review, nor was it possible to triangulate the data as there was only one data source, the focus groups (Nunan et al., 2020).

3.2.5 Research Quality

When the research analysis method is chosen and applied, the authors must be able to evaluate their analysis (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Further, Collis and Hussey (2014) state that a quality assessment can be made by understanding different criteria to evaluate the interpretivist
study. Four criteria were established by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four criteria are connected to trustworthiness principles (Nassaji, 2020). Hence, the four criteria are described in the context of the study and how the authors have established trustworthiness throughout the research process.

3.2.5.1 Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility concerns the way that the topic of the research is identified and described in a way that is viewed to be believable. Nassaji (2020) describes it as the truthfulness of the findings and how it can reflect the reality of the phenomenon in question. To accomplish this, the authors must understand the context and processes associated with the research and ensure they are as complete as possible (Nassaji, 2020).

Both authors were involved in the collection, transcription, and analysis process to ensure the study's credibility. The coding was conducted separately and independently to get both perspectives and to compare if there were any disagreements in the interpretation of the participants' answers. Furthermore, in the empirical findings section, the quotes and discussions, along with the coding interpretations, are included to provide examples of what was said and how the authors coded it.

The interviews were in Swedish, so the authors had to translate each quote to be as accurate and authentic as possible. Thus, some words have not been directly translated to create flow and understanding in the phrases and to convey the meaning of what was said. Ultimately, the most vital part was ensuring the quote's purpose was delivered as the participant stated. Hence, securing the credibility of the research study.

3.2.5.2 Transferability

When talking about transferability in the case of research quality, it can be referred to the possibility of the findings and conclusion being transferable to a situation of a similar context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nassaji, 2020). Although, it is important to know that since qualitative research usually does not represent the larger population. The empirical findings cannot be generalised in the same way as with a quantitative study, but it is more focused and in-depth on what is experienced by the participants (Nassaji, 2020). Nevertheless, the research is transferable due to the transparency of the research process and its steps. This makes it possible to conduct the same research in a similar context but with different backgrounds, providing a broader perspective of the research field.
3.2.5.3 Dependability

In qualitative research, dependability refers to how the study is reported and documented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nassaji, 2020). Moreover, Nassaji (2020) states that others should be able to interpret the data similarly to the authors themselves when reviewing it. Reviewing and documenting research activities, conclusions, or changes that appear when the research is in progress can reinforce the dependability of the research (Nassaji, 2020).

To make the research dependable and similarly interpretable when reviewing, each of the steps the authors took was documented and included in the methods section, and the decisions made were presented and supported by research. Furthermore, the coding sub-categories, categories and themes are presented and explained by quotes to increase the dependability and allow readers to interpret the data similarly to the authors. Moreover, dependability can also be ensured as similarities in the answers between the participants can be confirmed through the data collection (Miles et al., 2014).

3.2.5.4 Confirmability

In the case of qualitative research, confirmability refers to if the data and findings of the study can be confirmed by others (Nassaji, 2020). The authors can ensure confirmability as the methods and procedures are described in detail in Chapter 3 – Methodology and Method. Thus, a reader can replicate the study and follow each step taken by (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles et al., 2014).

An inherent issue counteracting confirmability when conducting qualitative research is that the findings depend on the interviews or focus groups. That means the same participant might respond differently despite all other variables being the same. Therefore, although the final answers and findings might differ, it is important to document each stage and decision made to reduce the outstanding variables and to get closer to a possible similar answer when following the same process. Therefore, an explanation of the stages and processes of this report have been explained and documented to support future research (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles et al., 2014).

3.2.6 Ethical Consideration

Ethical consideration is vital when considering how to present and report results and findings (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Therefore, guidelines for ethical research have been created, and Bell and Bryman (2007) summarised a list of principles connected to ethics. The list includes harm to participants, dignity, informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity,
deception, affiliation, honesty and transparency, reciprocity, and misrepresentation. Further, the guidelines were considered to ensure that actions, decisions, and processes align with ethical research.

Harm to participants was an important aspect of the study, as the authors wanted to create a safe space to express themselves to others. The participants were also seen as themselves and not as a means for the sake of the study, as stated important by Bell and Bryman (2007). Therefore, the participants could decide whether to participate in person or online to avoid harm and risk. In this way, the participants could participate where they felt most comfortable. In addition, the authors also let the participants know the number of people in each group to prepare them for the possible extent to the number of people to talk and express feelings with. With all this in mind, dignity was respected, thus, not creating anxiety and discomfort (Bell & Bryman, 2007) among the participants of the focus groups.

Furthermore, when the participants accepted partaking in the focus groups, after answering the survey that was distributed, they consented to the data being a part of the research. To further ensure consent, the authors asked once more before the focus group session started whether all the participants understood and were still willing to partake.

Moreover, anonymity refers to protecting the individuals partaking in the study (Bell & Bryman, 2007) and how they can be related to the information collected (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). In the research, the participants who decided to partake in the focus group were also informed that the anonymity and privacy of the participants could not be guaranteed until after the focus group had taken its place. This was because emails were needed to contact the participants for the time and date of the focus group. Although, the storage of data was in accordance with GDPR, as the emails would only be used to get in contact with the participants. In addition, the authors informed the participants before the meeting started that the focus group results were anonymous and would only be used for research purposes. This was an important aspect, as participants might not want the data to be traceable or connected to them (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Therefore, the participants had the chance to leave or not partake before or during the discussion, as it was voluntary participation. Moreover, it lets the researchers avoid victimisation of the participants as no data can be directly connected to a specific individual (Bell & Bryman, 2007). To keep the participants' anonymity but still create a feeling of who is behind the statements in the findings part, a decision was made to create an alias for the participants involved (Appendix B). With the help of an alias, the participants could keep their
anonymity, thus feeling more comfortable and not feeling any pressure to perform but also providing a fictional picture of the participants (Amo et al., 2020).

To avoid deception, the authors made sure to have an open conversation with the participants, as this also results in honesty and transparency. In addition, honesty and transparency are important factors in ethical consideration, as it determines fair and correct reporting (Bell & Bryman, 2007). The participants were informed about the research topic as they answered the survey whether they wanted to participate or not. On the other hand, the participants were not allowed to see the questions for the focus groups beforehand, as the authors wanted honest answers and open conversations among the participants. In terms of transparency, the authors stated clearly that the focus group recordings would only be used for the purpose of the research and would be deleted thereafter.

Affiliation was an ethical consideration evident in the case of the study as both the authors had family members in one of the focus groups and several friends participating. However, even though this was evident, it did not change how the focus group was conducted or how the questions were asked. Hence, it did not unfairly influence the research. On the other hand, having these connections lead to participant being more comfortable and relaxed and, in turn, providing a more open discussion.

Reciprocity is provided where the participants’ purchasing behaviour is analysed, allowing them to understand their purchasing behaviour and how they make decisions. Furthermore, due to the research investigating how consumers experience eWOM on TikTok, they will get an overview of how the platform influences them and their purchase decisions. Therefore, the participants and researchers mutually benefit from the research, one from the academic and one from the personal perspectives.

According to Bell and Bryman (2007), misrepresentation is an important ethical consideration, referring to misunderstanding, misleading, or false reporting of the research findings. To avoid this, both authors were involved throughout the research process, ensuring that empirical findings, analysis, and the conclusion were formulated and presented correctly.
The following chapter presents the empirical findings of the research themes that arose during the focus group discussions. The overarching themes are presented and divided into categories and sub-categories, which are described and supported by quotes.

Table 2
Coding of the Focus Group Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creators as a source of inspiration</td>
<td>Reasons to Listen to the Content Creator</td>
<td>The Content Creators' Effect on the Video Message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creators having knowledge of the subject</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creators being critical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creators being genuine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust of sponsored and #ad content</td>
<td>Distrust Towards the Content Creator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not trust big influencers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De-influencing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting someone with a similar lifestyle</td>
<td>Similarities to the Content Creator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical alikeness to oneself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More trusting of regular people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone tests it for you (seeing it in action)</td>
<td>Product Showcase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct effect of the product (before and after)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal recommendation</td>
<td>Genuineness of the Video</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Not trying to sell a product</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raw videos with minimal editing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Easy to watch a lot of informative videos</td>
<td>Opinions About the Product</td>
<td>Quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments are seen as from regular people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of videos available</td>
<td>Factual Information About the Product</td>
<td>Quantity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using TikTok as a search engine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Following the bigger mass of TikTok</td>
<td>Belief and Hope in Numbers</td>
<td>Following Trends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling like a part of a community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questioning what one should like</td>
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<tr>
<td>More likely to buy a product if virality caused it to run out of stock</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear of missing a good product</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Product could be a success</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making one's own purchase decision</td>
<td>Cannot Blame the Masses for the Bad Experience</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cannot blame a specific person on TikTok</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do not trust store employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Subconsciousness leading to purchase</td>
<td>Psychological Qualities of Impulsive Purchases</td>
<td>Impulsive Purchases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a product runs out at home, they are likely to restock with one seen on TikTok</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spontaneous decision making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ease of purchase - no customs fee</td>
<td>Monetary Qualities of Impulsive Purchases</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Exists in stores - the store Normal’s TikTok corner</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Following the coding process presented in 3.2.4, the focus group discussions were sub-categorised by similar statements by other participants and focus groups to create a collective category subsequently thematised to develop an overarching theme. The information was gathered about how consumers evaluate and interpret TikTok eWOM and their following consumer purchase behaviour. The coding and thematic application revealed five themes regarding interviewees' use, interpretation, and decision-making: the content creators’ effect on the video message, quality (of the video/comments), quantity (of videos/comments), following trends and impulsive purchases. The underlying sub-categories will also be presented using quotes from the focus groups corresponding to the categories and themes. A representation of these themes and their categories can be seen in Table 2.

4.1 The Content Creators’ Effect on the Video Message

Table 3

*Summary of “The Content Creators’ Effect on the Video Message”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creators as a source of inspiration</th>
<th>Creators having knowledge of the subject</th>
<th>Creators being critical</th>
<th>Creators being genuine</th>
<th>Reasons to Listen to the Content Creator</th>
<th>Distrust Towards the Content Creator</th>
<th>Similarities to the Content Creator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>The Content Creators’ Effect on the Video Message</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4.1.1 Reasons to Listen to the Content Creator

The category “Reasons to Listen to the Content Creator” is comprised of four sub-categories: “Creators as a source of inspiration”, “Creators having knowledge of the subject”, “Creators being critical”, and “Creators being genuine”, which is reflected by the data collected.

Creators, as a source of inspiration, were discussed by all focus groups, and all participants agreed within the groups. However, there was a difference in how they interpreted influencers with many followers as sources of inspiration. They stated the following:
*Depends on the vibe of the person and what type of relationship you have with them (big influencer) … if you have followed them for a very long time, then you want to have their lifestyle.* – Stina

*I would say that for me personally, it is not influencers that inspire me, but maybe like you say, Clean Girl (Trend), a woman that has her life in order and is so capable in her skincare routine. Knows her stuff.* – Elin

A participant in FG2 continues by discussing feeling the need to have a content creator’s entire routine for it to work as well on her as it does on the content creator:

*Now I have fixated on flowers, and I follow a girl that is really good with Dahlias, and I look up to her because she is good at it and not because she has a lot of followers.* – Victoria

The contrary opinion was a participant in FG3 where she said that:

*Sometimes when I don’t know what to wear, I often go onto an influencer’s account and look at what they are wearing and take inspiration from that.* – Emma

Overall, most groups stated that they take inspiration from the content creator. Still, the influencer size is less important for three out of four groups since they state that they are more interested in the content creator’s ability and knowledge of the subject they are presenting. A participant in FG3 said that she takes inspiration from big influencers when she lacks it herself. Due to the knowledge of the subject matter being important to the focus group participants, it was also discussed that critical content creators were more worthy of their trust as they were not perceived as trying to sell the viewers things but rather recommended products because they believed them to be good. FG2 discusses:

*(She was) the first person who gave CAIA (Cosmetic Brand) critique, and it has been tough on her career because of that.* – Andrea

*Tough cooperatively, at least. I have heard that they (CAIA) don’t send things to her, but she wants to try them to give her opinion.* – Annie

*And she started a public fight with Bianca (owner of CAIA and a big influencer/celebrity) because of it. That made me write to her and say that she was strong and that I am so happy that she is honest.* – Andrea
But this is exciting because the skin care specialist that I talked about; he built his career on being critical of skincare brands. And now the skincare brands have realised this that if he (content creator) says something is good then people will buy our products because they are genuinely good. – Julia

FG3 had a similar discussion regarding specified content creator accounts:

I feel like the ones I trust the most are the ones that have specified their account for e.g., makeup content because then I know this person has good knowledge and wouldn’t give bad recommendations. – Vendela

The focus groups had an overall similar opinion regarding knowledgeable content that had specified their account because they felt creators with too broad content could not possibly know about all the topics they were discussing. Another reason they trusted specified accounts more was that the specified content creators had more to lose if they recommended a bad product. After all, their whole account is about being perceived as knowledgeable in that field.

Lastly, genuineness was an important quality of trusted content creators as the focus group participants believed there were a lot of biased opinions online that were trying to sell them products. A participant in FG1 stated:

If it is a regular person’s opinion and just a genuine recommendation, then I feel like MY SISTER, I NEED TO BUY THIS – Elin

Honestly, yes, especially when it is a person that isn’t an influencer, and their video has just skyrocketed and have a lot of likes and comments, and the person just really wanted to give their genuine opinion about something they have discovered. – Stina

Regular people coming in and showing their skincare routine and having a genuine interest and then just saying, this is really good do like this, and really explaining. It makes me feel like the person is really passionate about this they are genuine and know their stuff. – Andrea

I think that it’s about being genuine, that if you use it in your everyday life, then you like the product, but if you have been told by a company to show that mascara or that product, then it might not be your own genuine opinions, and that affects my purchase intention. – Victoria
I feel like it can become too much advertisement, so If I see other things they do (big influencers) I don’t know, drop their kids off to kindergarten, and then they recommend something, then it feels more genuine. – Sara

The overarching theme of the focus groups was that they all discussed that there were a lot of opinions that were not the creator's own, especially in the case of influencers. Therefore, they were in search of genuine product recommendations. They stated that this was because genuine product recommendations were perceived as being closer to the experience of the product they were looking at when compared to a recommendation that was influenced by sponsors.

4.1.2 Distrust Towards the Content Creator

The category “Distrust Toward the Content Creator” consists of three sub-categories: “Distrust of sponsored and #ad content”, “Do not trust big influencers”, and “De-influencing”. The focus group participants believed bigger influencers that monetised their following were trying to deceive them and recommended products because they were sponsored and not because the product was good. FG1P1 states:

If I see “ad”, like #adwithNelly or #adwithGinaTricot, then I just think, oh no this is propaganda – Elin

A participant in FG2 reflected on a moment when she lost all trust in a big influencer because she deceived her followers.

One of TikToks biggest makeup influencers ... made an ad for a mascara, where she was like, “this is the best one ever” and then in the next video, she wears false lashes, and everyone that uses makeup knows that they are false lashes because no one gets that from a mascara. And from one day to another, no one believed her. – Julia

Andrea adds:

I also notice when influencers promote products on TikTok, and they have the exact same energy level in every TikTok about every product. I get like, “you can’t love all of these products”. It becomes very see-through (that they are promoting something) - Andrea
FG2 discussed an influencer that went from being small with few followers to getting bigger and losing her honesty and trustworthiness in the process, stating it as a natural transition because they need to grow.

*This is two years ago; she was a small influencer that sat in her home and studied and said like, “this is what I found”, but now it is much more about how her day is, and she has started a golf channel.* – Andrea

*There is like an influencer (roadmap) like, it starts very genuine and recommends things, and then you must take the road of taking sponsors to even be able to grow.* – Annie

*I think I can guess whom you mean; Bianca Ingrosso, Linn Ahlborg. They are those that do it. And now the collaboration is there, and I’m like, I always see it’s a collaboration, don’t think you can trick me!* – Julia

The entire FG3 perceived sponsored videos as something which could only contain positive messages and not any critique towards the brand:

*Some influencers they do it only because they are sponsored, it is another thing because it feels like they can’t say anything bad then, right?* – Emma

FG4 were also distrusting and showed scepticism toward sponsored content:

*If you have been told by a brand to show a mascara ... then it might not be your genuine favourite product, and then it affects my purchase behaviour.* – Victoria

There was also an overall opinion of not listening to influencers’ calls to purchase because they were perceived as less trustworthy than regular users. This led to the discovery of the de-influencing trend, which some groups discussed.

*One of the biggest trends on TikTok now is de-influencing, which is when you look at what viral products are actually bad.* – Julia

*During a couple of months, there was this de-influencing trend where people bought products they saw on TikTok and said if it was bad and not worth the money* – Alice

4.1.3 Similarities to the Content Creator

The category “Similarities to the Content Creator” is divided into the sub-categories of: “Trusting someone with a similar lifestyle”, “Physical alikeness to oneself”, and “More trusting
of regular people”, where the focus group participants said they used these factors to evaluate the product and the message of the creator.

Trusting someone with a similar lifestyle was discussed as an important quality regarding the content creator as they were believed to recommend products from a similar point of view as the participants. TikTok was viewed as a platform not dominated by big influencers and more as a platform for the public and the regular person.

... it is a platform for the public (everyone) even if there are those that dominate, it doesn’t really matter because the algorithm picks those with not so many followers. – Julia

But TikTok has made so very regular people, i.e., people that like to clean, have one million followers suddenly and earn money on it and become influencers. – Matilda

You see them (TikTok users) as your friends, and you trust your friends – Linnea

FG4 discussed the effect of big influencers recommending products as opposed to regular people:

If Bianca Ingrosso has a mascara for 600kr, then it is because she is Sweden’s most successful woman, she can like live after those assets. And as a student, you can’t buy a mascara for that much. – Emma

FG1 brought up another example:

Bianca Ingrosso did a food haul where she bought blueberries for like 500kr, and people were like, go away, you don’t belong here – Maja

Instagram influencers, when they are trying to create a goddamn name for themselves, I feel like, this isn’t your platform I don’t trust you here – Stina

The importance of physical alikeness to oneself was also considered a significant quality of the content creators the participants listened to. This was because they thought that if something worked on someone physically alike themselves, then it was more likely that the product they recommended and its benefits would work for them as well.

Makeup products, then maybe similar colours, hair colour or eye colour then, it affects me what I choose. – Emma

And then it suits them, and then it will most likely suit me – Sanna
If there is someone that has curly hair and I have curly hair, and she got her curls like that, then maybe I should also try it too. – Thea

It was also discussed throughout all the focus groups that regular people were more trusted than big influencers and famous people. The participants viewed themselves as regular people and, therefore, were more likely to feel a connection to the average TikTok content creators.

A lot of mini and micro-influencers are being created ... you find a lot of similarities (between the creator and the user), and I feel like God I am so like her, we look the same, we have the same skin type she uses this, it must be really good for me too. – Maja

4.2 Quality

Table 4

Summary of “Quality”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Product Showcase</th>
<th>Genuineness of the Video</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Someone tests it for you (seeing it in action)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct effect of the product (before and after)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal recommendation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Not trying to sell a product</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raw videos with minimal editing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1 Product Showcase

The category “Product Showcase” includes the subcategories of: “Someone tests it for you (seeing it in action)” and “Direct effect of the product (before and after)”. These qualities of product evaluation through video formats were evident in the focus groups as reflected upon in all sessions.

Maja in FG1 reflected on makeup application videos:

**Focusing on skin care products, ... you see a[n] (direct) effect. You see someone apply something, and it looks fresh (nice).** – Maja

Another participant in FG2 said she used TikTok to gather videos where they display the product:

**If there is something I will buy, I go there (TikTok), then even before I google it. Because I like, want to see it in action.** – Annie
When asked what made the participants buy products because of TikTok, they answered that seeing it in action and the products’ direct effect were the two most important ways the participants had evaluated the products before they bought them.

*Showing how it looks.* – Sanna

*And also, effect.* – Emma

*I bought a foundation, and I saw when they applied it and saw how it looked that it looked natural and had a glow, and that was what I was looking for.* – Vendela

*And, yes, how the person's hair looks, if it looks super fresh and nice, then I also want it.* – Andrea

*She did like spray tan testing and was honest, and then you could really get the full picture of how it would turn out.* – Andrea

*When we talk skincare, then they are like this product is good because blabla, and then they show results, and when it comes to makeup, it is when they show how it looks.* – Alice

A participant in FG2 said that if they were to evaluate expensive products, then the type of product would determine if she trusted TikTok or not to recommend good products:

*If I were to buy hair care like straighteners and similar tools, then it would be better to look on TikTok than to go to the store and buy an expensive hair dryer or something similar from like Åhlens, then I would rather do it after watching TikTok because there you see a demonstration of it.* – Andrea

4.2.2 Genuineness of the Video

This category, named “Genuineness of the Video”, is further sub-categorised into “Personal recommendation”, “Not trying to sell a product”, and “Raw videos with minimal editing”.

Due to TikTok’s algorithmic recommendation system, everyone’s “For You” page is different; participants felt like products recommended on the app were taking their preferences and issues into account:

*I feel like it is like a personal consultation. Because I have [a skin condition] and therefore I can’t use everything, and then I get like, “this is very good for [skin*
condition], and then I get the #skincondition all the time. And then I don’t want to risk it and buy something else because there is no one that can tell me that these products are good for [skin condition]. Compared with TikTok, which tells me exactly what these products are good for [skin condition], I get a consultation. – Andrea

Maja said that TikTok brings forward products that their friends had recommended. Still, they forgot to evaluate, which in turn makes it feel like TikTok recommends the same as their friends, and that gets combined into a buying behaviour:

For me, it can be like Elin and Stina says: “have you seen this new thing?” And then I put it in the back of my head, but I don’t buy it. Then I see it on TikTok again, and that affects me to buy the product, compared to it only being recommended by a friend. – Maja

The focus groups had an overall preference towards evaluating videos where the conveyor and video were not trying to outright sell the viewer a product and where the products were displayed naturally. An example is brought up and discussed in FG1:

... get ready with me, you know that concept. Then they use products, and you see them getting used in a natural way as opposed to someone saying omg this is the best product buy it now. And it is mostly those videos (natural videos) that affects me I believe that I see someone that’s putting on her makeup, and I see that her rouge is looking good. – Maja

Yes, it often starts in a quite unassuming end where someone just has a nice rouge, and then I search the comments because she doesn’t even say what rouge it is. – Stina

FG4 had a similar perception towards videos that were trying to sell the products more outright:

I would say, especially when they are using it in their day-to-day life, that you get more affected by it. It makes me more eager to buy, otherwise, it feels more forced, like Sofia said. – Matilda

If you use it (product) in your day-to-day life, then you genuinely like the product. But if you have been told by a company to show a mascara and one... whatever, then it might not be your genuine favourite products you encourage us to buy. – Victoria
FG3 discussed how links in the post affect their perception of the content creator’s intent to sell:

*Sometimes ... there is a link in the text, and then it gets very like, this is advertisement. But if someone just shows something and talks about it, then it’s not as. Buy now.* – Sara

*It feels more like a friend recommending a product.* – Sanna

FG2 reflected upon their interpretation of routine and how it affected their purchasing behaviour.

*On TikTok, they show a lot of routines, hair care or skincare, and then you want their routine as well. And they are like, I do this every morning, and it has revolutionised my life. Then I’m like; this may revolutionise my life too.* – Andrea

*It gets more authentic if a skincare or makeup routine doesn’t have the same brand. Then even if you were sponsored by them all then these are the best ones you picked, then it’s not as biased.* – Julia

More broadly, it was considered important that the message was perceived as genuine among the large number of ads that the participants felt were trying to get them to buy. As such, three out of four focus groups considered videos with minimal editing more authentic and genuine, whereas the focus group with a contrary opinion believed more professional videos were more genuine.

*Regarding those things, I can feel like it feels more believable when it’s a simpler video because then there isn’t someone that has put a lot of time into editing and such because you can make so much on the computer nowadays.* – Carl

*I really feel that regarding makeup and such that if you see a very good-looking video, then like you see if someone put time and energy into the editing to try and get a nice video. Then it feels like they are trying to hide the truth about the product. ... I will never see myself in that studio lighting when I put on makeup, and it feels more relatable if someone just puts it on, and it looks nice.* – Maja

*If it is an influencer that gets paid by advertising products ... compared to someone just recording a video and is like, “oh right, my new lipstick” and then shows it, and it looks nice, then it feels more authentic.* – Stina
FG2 discusses what type of video has the most effect on them:

*The one that sits down in front of the camera and just straight-up talks.* – Julia

*I agree. We are generally very anti-advertisement. If it is sponsored and very flashy, then I’m like not interested. Compared to someone that is genuine and like this product is good and has shown that my skin has become so much better, and you see it’s not sponsored, then that’s when you get inspired for real.* – Thea

FG4:

*I think I have more trust in someone that just sits down and says exactly their opinion.*

– Sofia

*I would say I get more affected by someone that doesn’t do an arranged [and organised] video because then it's perceived as more salesy, and that the purpose is to get me to buy it. And I want to make my own choices.* – Linnea

Focus group FG3 had a whole different perspective towards the time put into videos, they did not consider edited and more professional videos and more deceiving but as more trustworthy because of the increase in time and effort.

*Also, like how the TikTok [video] is designed, if it is like professional and professionally edited, then you get more sold. Then if it is some amateur that recorded the same product.* – Sanna

*It is also how serious the person is like, if they are serious, then it feels like you trust that person more. Put in more time.* – Emma

*Especially if you see that the video has good quality.* – Sanna

4.3 Quantity

**Table 5**

*Summary of “Quantity”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easy to watch a lot of informative videos</th>
<th>Opinions About the Product</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comments are seen as from regular people</td>
<td>Factual Information About the Product</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of videos available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Using TikTok as a search engine</td>
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4.3.1 Opinions About the Product

The category “Opinions About the Product” is sub-categorised into: “Easy to watch a lot of informative videos” and “Comments are seen as from regular people”.

The focus groups all discussed the ease of using TikTok as an important factor in why they consume informative videos on the platform and not elsewhere; they considered the speed and conciseness of the videos on the platform as a unique selling point.

*Before TikTok, I would’ve gone to YouTube ... but now YouTube feels super far-fetched to search for information on because the videos are too long to keep my attention. ... I would also say a lot of the information exists on TikTok, it is a collection of all types of information, there are shortened YouTube clips.* – Maja

*I can learn more about a product via TikTok compared to YouTube where all videos are 10 minutes, and they go very in-depth, and I don’t care, for example, what substances are in the product. ... If I search on TikTok, I can fast-forward and skip. I get a lot more information and don’t lose interest. ... There are those that go in-depth, but they are shorter and simpler.* – Stina

A participant in FG2 reflected on the ease of consuming videos on TikTok:

*... [Y]ou can consume more opinions in a shorter time span, they often test more than one product on YouTube for 10 minutes. It is easier to burn through 15 TikTok videos than to look through a YouTube video.* – Julia

*If multiple videos say the same thing, that this product is really good, and it is very easy to get your hands on so many videos in a very short time.* – Thea

FG3 and FG4 discussed the ease of consuming a wide variety of videos and getting a broad sense of opinions regarding the product. The comment section on TikTok was also discussed as an important source of information adding to the overall quantity of opinions which would affect their purchase behaviour of the product in question, Sofia states:

*Because there (comment section) I can find people like me. Like if Bianca Ingrosso would recommend a product and the comment section says the same or the opposite then I would listen more to the comment section because they are on the same level as me, fellow human beings, in a different way.* – Sofia

FG1 discussed similarly:
TikTok really has a commenting culture, especially because you know people are harsh. They say what they think ... . But in general, you watch many comments, and I believe that’s where the purchasing power is. – Maja

I trust more in the TikTok user than, i.e. YouTube because there aren’t that many that have a YouTube account. – Elin

The other groups also had similar views about the effect comments had on their perception:

If you watch one video or 50 videos, if you watch one video and the comments say it’s good, then you get more affected by that. – Moa

I watch the comments regardless. I am quite picky if there is even a single one that ... states, “don’t fall for this” or “this is not good at all”, then I would say it affects me quite a lot. – Sanna

I feel like that’s where you can get your hands on the negative if there is something negative with it (product). – Annie

A participant in FG2 brought up that the video statement and the comments should be in agreement to convince them to buy the product:

It doesn’t need to be some special person that says it (recommends a product), maybe that the comments agree. – Annie

4.3.2 Factual Information About the Product

The category “Factual Information About the Product” consists of “Number of videos available” and “Using TikTok as a search engine”.

It was unearthed that the participants perceived one of the benefits of using TikTok for product interests, was that the platform considered what the user was interested in and prospecting to buy because the platform then provided more information to satisfy the user. A participant said that despite not being an impulsive buyer of products, using TikTok for information gathering had made her able to compress the otherwise six-month evaluation period to three days:

I count spontaneous even though I have thought about it for three days. ... If I were to look at it in-store, then it would most likely take six months before I purchase it. But on TikTok, I get it all the time, so I guess my evaluation period gets a bit shorter – Andrea
Another participant in FG2:

*After I searched for it (on TikTok), then it has appeared a lot (on their “For You” page) and now I want to buy it more than ever.* – Julia

FG1 as a whole had a similar experience of products of interest appearing on their “For You” page:

*When I look for a product on TikTok then I feel like it is everywhere in my feed. Then I get a clear picture of what people think of the product, which in turn ends up with me buying it.* – Stina

*I have absolutely ordered skin care products, but then it is like the others say, I see it multiple times in my feed, and then I look for more information, even on YouTube, to get an in-depth opinion, and then lastly buy it.* – Elin

A participant in FG3 felt quantity was a central part of convincing them:

*I believe I am like one of those that if I see something multiple times, then I get convinced.* – Vendela

Participants in FG4 had a different approach where they often used TikTok to gather videos but also combined it more broadly with other video sites like YouTube before they made a purchase:

*I often look for a bit more information before I purchase. So, it's not likely I just see a product then: ok, now I want it. But I would look for both good and bad opinions of the products features.* – Alice

Alice also said that she used TikTok like a search engine when gathering information which the rest of the focus group agreed with:

*It’s easy that I use TikTok, like Google, to look for information.* – Alice

This was also said in FG2:

*It has become a replacement for Google or YouTube.* – Julia

 Whereas a participant in FG3 said they would start searching on TikTok to then move on to other platforms:
It feels like you should start on TikTok. If I were to buy something, then, what pros and cons are brought forward and then Google for the thing mentioned, it (TikTok) is a very good way to get a quick overview of what people think. – Sara

4.4 Following Trends

Table 6

Summary of “Following Trends”

| Following the bigger mass of TikTok | Belief and Hope in Numbers |
| Feeling like a part of a community | Following Trends |
| Questioning what one should like | |
| More likely to buy a product if virality caused it to run out of stock | |
| Fear of missing a good product | |
| Product could be a success | Cannot Blame the Masses for the Bad Experience |
| Making one's own purchase decision | |
| Cannot blame a specific person on TikTok | |
| Do not trust store employees | |

4.4.1 Belief and Hope in Numbers

Sub-categories included in the category “Belief and Hope in Numbers” are: “Following the bigger mass of TikTok”, “Feeling like a part of a community”, “Questioning what one should like”, “More likely to buy a product if virality caused it to run out of stock”, “Fear of missing a good product” and “Product could be a success”.

A common subject of discussion between the participants in all groups was that following the bigger mass of TikTok, and specific trends affects the consumer. Whether you want to buy a product you like, a product you do not think you like, or simply products you do not like but think you need because of recommendations through TikTok videos.

It’s always like that with trends, one second, you might think it’s so damn ugly, it might be a make-up look or something, ..., but when everyone has it, now I suddenly love it. You’re a little bit sceptical at first, but since everyone continues (doing the make-up look), I want it, and I really like it. Subconsciously, it tells you all the time when you see it on TikTok that everyone is doing it ..., then I also think it’s good too. - Andrea
Another participant in the group agreed and added that TikTok is a powerful platform for mass-producing trends.

*But that is the way trends work. It feels like TikTok is better at mass-producing it (trends).* – Julia

Furthermore, Julia gave an example of a product that used to be popular, it became unfashionable but has now come back into style. Thus, changing the perception of the product because of TikTok and wanting to follow a trend.

*It’s (shirt) becoming trendy. I have rejected it now for several years since it became out of trend, but now that it is starting to come back again and when I have seen it for a while … , now I think it’s nice, and now I want it.* – Julia

The same participant then summarised what was discussed and stated that TikTok videos sometimes make us think we need something because it is trendy. Moreover, making us purchase products because other people have them, and they are trendy.

*But just like how all trends work, just that it goes faster (on TikTok) … , I should like it because everyone else does.* – Julia

Through the focus groups, it was evident that several participants found that if more people recommended products, they were more easily convinced to purchase the product. Hence, believing and hoping in numbers.

*When many people are satisfied and have a positive impression of it (the product), that is usually what persuades me.* – Carl

*In the next video, someone else is doing it (recommending a product), … then it’s not just one person who thinks so, but several do, then it becomes repetitive, and because you are recommended by several people multiple times, then the interest is aroused even more, and finally you can’t resist.* – Andrea

*Yes, I would say so to some degree. I didn’t buy it (the product) when I saw the first video, but then when there were more videos like the one I first watched, where more and more people really started recommending it, I thought it was worth trying.* – Sara

In connection to following recommendations and trusting a bigger crowd number, participants also felt like they sometimes questioned whether they liked a certain product, even
though it was evident in the conversations that they were hesitant. In other words, they are questioning what they should like or should not, according to what is seen on TikTok.

*I really thought about buying that (fragrance), and it comes in different scents. The one that is most popular is probably vanilla … I haven’t been a fan of vanilla scents, but … I convinced myself that it smells good … Everyone thinks vanilla smells good, and then apparently, I want to smell like vanilla, even though I may not necessarily think vanilla is an incredible smell.* – Stina

*If red lipstick starts trending on TikTok, maybe I will start wearing red lipstick even though I wouldn’t claim to have had it otherwise.* – Maja

One participant also stated that you might come to a point where you think something works for you just because it works for other people on TikTok.

*But it’s just like the curly hair method, and people who don’t really have curly hair still feel I’ll probably try it too, maybe I have curly hair too. Even if you don’t see yourself as someone with curly hair, you are manipulated into thinking that: I probably also have curly hair. Just because everyone else is testing it.* – Annie

Moreover, in a later focus group session, FG3, two participants expressed how FOMO can change their purchase behaviour, as they might miss out on a good product. One of the participants also felt like FOMO was connected to viral products that tend to run out of stock.

*If there are lots of people saying that this product is good …, then I will probably try it because you want to see how it works on yourself. If it is as good as all the others say.* – Moa

*It’s like when you see (on TikTok) a product that’s hard to get hold of …, then I can feel FOMO, … or if it’s something that runs out of stock quickly.* – Sanna

Continuously, the topic of virality was discussed among the participants, and it was evident that they would feel more inclined to purchase a viral product which caused it to be a sought-after product. In addition, participants concluded that if a product is hard to get, or if there are only a few left in stock, they wanted it more, and it became more attractive.

*Damn, then I am quick during my checkout* – Stina

*If it’s available, but it’s sold out, then you want it even more …, and then it (the product) becomes even more attractive.* – Andrea
I go in and check (the website where you purchase the product) quite often to see if it’s there, but if it’s out of stock, I want it even more. – Annie

If it’s something that sells out constantly all the time, then it’s something that’s very popular, and then I think you’re drawn to it even more because either it’s very good or it’s not. Somehow it attracts more, and you want to be quick to purchase. – Thea

In addition to wanting something because it is hard to get hold of, participants felt FOMO if it was a product they already knew about or used in their everyday life.

If it’s something I liked before it went viral. – Annie

Thus, participants needed to buy the product before it ran out of stock.

Yes, I have, sometimes. Not very often, but it has happened. – Julia

They (bronzing drops) came into stock, and then, even though I had some left, I felt that I had to buy new ones, that is because I knew that everyone else would throw themselves over it … Then maybe I should order it now, now, now, and then I got stressed knowing that it’s a hype …, and then they became more attractive in my eyes. – Stina

I don’t want to spend a day without it (face cream), it was very popular for a while, and it wasn’t going to come back in stock …, so I bought three. – Annie

In the last focus group, the same conclusion was drawn, but the participants said they were more prone to buy it if it was a product they had previously wanted or needed.

I would definitely say that I am affected. If there are few in stock, for example, and if it’s something that I’m actually looking at and want, then I’m fast at purchasing. – Linnea

Whereby Matilda agrees and concludes:

If it’s something I already want or know I’m planning to buy. – Matilda

Finally, one of the participants in FG2 summarised the theme of “Following trends”.

It also happens that you start to follow a trend quickly, and then maybe when you get it (the product) and then, say two weeks later, there is some criticism about it, and then you become like this: ah, it has happened to me too … Then you are in the same community again, and once again, you’re in the same boat again, thinking this wasn’t good. But then you choose to try something new and start following the next trend, it’s
like constantly following different cycles (participant referring to trend cycles). – Andrea

4.4.2 Cannot Blame the Masses for the Bad Experience

The category “Cannot Blame the Masses for the Bad Experience” is further sub-categorised into: “Making one’s own purchase decision”, “Cannot blame a specific person on TikTok”, and “Do not trust store employees”.

Further, the participants were asked whether they would trust going to a physical store and asking for recommendations from staff or if they would rather use TikTok videos to be recommended products. In addition, they were also asked if they would be more disappointed if they had made a bad purchase from a physical store or listened to TikTok videos. Participants stated that they had different feelings depending on where they got their recommendation.

Yes, but I will probably be more disappointed. For example, if I know I’m buying a new foundation and the person recommending it says it’s a good budget foundation, it works well for this and this, then I don’t expect it to perform like a 500 SEK foundation. At the same time, if I go to Kicks and I ask for advice from a sales associate about a foundation, pay 300-400 SEK, and then I come home, and it turns out it is rubbish, then I will go mad. – Julia

When I’ve been to Kicks and come home, and I haven’t been satisfied with my purchase, then I said: I’m not going here again. – Annie

I still make a choice when there is someone who recommends something to the general public on TikTok, then it is still my choice if I buy something, but if I go to Kicks, then it should be good. – Annie

Even though someone has recommended it, it feels more like my own initiative in comparison to if I have gotten professional help (in-store). – Julia

In FG2, the participants also discussed that they usually blame themselves if a product is not up to the standard recommended in TikTok videos. However, they meant you could not blame a specific creator on TikTok since multiple videos recommending a product are usually uploaded.

But since there are so many people (who recommend on TikTok), you can’t blame one person. – Andrea
Further, the group also concluded that you would rather say that the products did not work on you rather than blame someone else, and vice versa.

_The more videos you’ve seen where it works for others, it would probably have turned out that way, it probably doesn’t work for me, then, or you blame the product itself._ – Julia

_But that is probably the outcome when you’ve seen so many people do it (recommend a product). Then some beauty expert comes around and goes through the ingredients and their effect, and then it also happens that the advantages weigh more than the disadvantages, it’s a person telling you that it might not work for everyone, but it might work for you._ – Andrea

Maja also discussed whether she would blame herself or the product and drew a connection to viral products.

_But this is the particular thing with viral products, when something goes viral, everyone suddenly has it (the product), and then it’s not such a big deal if you’re dissatisfied because then it’s like this, it didn’t work for me, and you become a little more accepting._ – Maja

Some participants also discussed that, in the end, they want to be able to make their own choices when deciding what to purchase. Hence a decision to purchase is yours even though you have been recommended something on TikTok.

... _but I tend to look at reviews, and when many people agree, when they have the same thought about something, I still want to form my own opinion._ – Carl

_I want to make my own choice._ – Linnea
4.5 Impulsive Purchases

Table 7

Summary of “Impulsive Purchases”

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<th>Subconsciousness leading to purchase</th>
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4.5.1 Psychological Qualities of Impulsive Purchases

The category of “Psychological Qualities of Impulsive Purchases” is sub-categorised into: “Subconsciousness leading to purchase”, “If a product runs out at home, they are likely to restock with one seen on TikTok”, and “Spontaneous decision making”.

During the sessions, the focus groups were asked if they had ever made a spontaneous purchase due to a TikTok video recommendation. Between the groups and the participants, the answers varied. Carl, Elin, and Maja said they did not usually make spontaneous purchases because of TikTok video recommendations.

As I mentioned before as well, I like to keep track of what it is I’m buying, and that it (a purchase) should be carefully considered as well. Therefore, I rarely make very spontaneous purchases ... . – Carl

I can also be spontaneous, you may have thought about the product a few times, then you see: now we have a 30 % discount, ... then it’s time to buy it. – Elin

I can also be a spontaneous consumer. Otherwise, I’m probably more spontaneous when it comes to a situation like this, if you tell me this is so good, you have to buy it. And I will do it because I trust you. But if I see a product on TikTok once, then I wouldn’t buy it right away, on TikTok, it needs to be shown more times. – Maja

Further on, one of the participants did not see herself as a spontaneous shopper in the sense that an impulsive purchase was made.

I am not much of a spontaneous shopper, actually, but that probably has more to do with my personality. But of course, there are some things that I bought that maybe weren’t necessary, but it was never spontaneous in that way. – Julia
Additionally, in the same focus group, another thought was brought up by another participant having a different view of a spontaneous purchase. As also mentioned in the “Quantity” part of the empirical findings.

When I count a purchase as spontaneous, I’ve still thought about it for three days. It may not be spontaneous, but for me, who usually goes and ... look at the same product in a store, then it would probably take six months before I bought it, but now it only took three days. – Andrea

In FG3, everyone said that they more or less had purchased products spontaneously as they were recommended on TikTok.

So, you scroll, and you see something (product): ah nice, that looks good on that person. You go in and check what it costs and see that it doesn’t cost that much. I’ll buy it and test it. That’s how I am, anyway. – Moa

Whereby one of the participants said that a purchase might not be spontaneous if it is a more expensive product.

I think it depends a lot on the price. If it’s like a mascara and a lot of people say it’s good, and then it’s really not, then maybe it’s not the whole world, but if it’s something that’s expensive, you might look it up a bit more, and wait for a little (to purchase). – Sara

Two participants in FG2 connected availability to spontaneity. Whereby one of them stated that a specific store could trigger spontaneous purchases.

But the availability definitely plays a role, especially if it’s a more spontaneous purchase, then I would say, if it’s not available, it won’t be a spontaneous purchase. – Julia

And then, for me, it’s many products from Normal, ... and then you don’t think at all (when purchasing), and then it’s very spontaneous. And then when you order things, that’s when I think it through a bit more because I don’t like ordering things ... . But I would still say that it is more spontaneous than a regular purchase. – Thea

Furthermore, several participants concluded that your subconscious plays a vital part in the purchases you make through TikTok recommendations. They meant that you see things over a long period of time, multiple times, and your brain saves it for you. Hence, when you need a
specific product or are purchasing something, you remember the specific product, which often leads to a purchase. Stina state that because of this, your purchase might not be that spontaneous after all.

*I would say that I have made some spontaneous ones (purchases). Still, at the same time, I would say that they are absolutely not spontaneous because you have been influenced for a very long time, so you have already formed your opinion about it subconsciously, I think. But then maybe I’m shopping for new make-up, and then I see one of the TikTok products that have been in my feed for a long time, and I haven’t thought about buying it, but then I get like this: I’ll try …, so it slips into the shopping cart, but then you have already an opinion about the product.* – Stina

Other participants stated:

*For me, it has also been that I may have seen something many times on TikTok and become interested in it and then when I’m at the store … and see it, then I become like this: oh right, this one was supposed to be good, now that I’m here I’ll purchase it.* – Vendela

*It feels like I never buy anything right away, but maybe it was that I was somehow influenced more subconsciously, and then later on, when I’m looking for a skin cream, it comes to mind, and then I buy it.* – Linnea

*That’s what I’ve seen the most (cleaning products), it’s not spontaneous purchases, but it’s more like you’re influenced subconsciously.* – Matilda

4.5.2 Monetary Qualities of Impulsive Purchases

The final category, “Monetary Qualities of Impulsive Purchase”, is further divided into: “Ease of purchase – no customs fee” and “Exists in stores – the store Normal’s TikTok corner”.

The participants were asked if the product's availability would affect their purchase behaviour, and most participants agreed. Several people stated that where the product would be shipped from was important, as they wanted to avoid unnecessary costs, such as duty, taxes or return costs.

*There are many times I have seen products that are from the US or some other country, and then there is shipping … then, it can influence my decision.* – Elin
There are also a lot of US products that might be very difficult to get hold of in Sweden. Then maybe I do a further search, and if I don’t find it then, then I don’t bother anymore. I haven’t found that many things that I want. It should be fairly easy to get hold of. After all, I don’t order anything if there might be a duty on it. – Annie

When it’s from the US, there might be some sort of duty, and that might stop me anyway. – Moa

If it’s like one-day delivery, then you end up like this: oh, that’s nice. But if it’s that you have to pay tax, then you do an extra check. Is this something I really want? – Sofia

Or if you know you can’t return it because then it will cost … , like clothes. – Stina

On the other hand, some participants would consider purchasing from European countries if it was something they wanted. It was a conversation between Annie and Julia:

It has to be the Swedish market, maybe England can be fine as well. – Annie

The European market is fine. – Julia

But not the US. – Annie

Furthermore, the participants were also asked if the product's availability in stores mattered to them in making a purchase. It was evident that most participants in each focus group agreed. In addition, Sofia stated:

Normal has created its own corner of TikTok products. – Sofia

Yes, then it is easily accessible (products at Normal), and that’s nice. – Sofia

FG2 further discussed how far you would go to purchase a product depending on availability.

If they are not included in the recommended bar when you search for the product online, saying: it’s available on Lyko … . So that you can compare the prices and see if you have to pay for shipping or something if it (the product) is not included, then I don’t do many more searches, to be honest. – Annie

I’ll probably go a little further if it’s something I really want … , but it’s a lot about looking at what kind of page that sells it if you don’t really know what it is, or if it has bad reviews on Trustpilot, it’s crucial. – Julia
Chapter 5 – Analysis

The following chapter will include an analysis of the empirical findings from the previous chapter. Then, an analysis of the outcomes from the focus groups will make a connection between the literature and the empirical findings.

5.1 The Content Creators’ Effect on Video Message

The focus groups stated that TikTok is closer to the user than YouTube and other social media platforms. Therefore, it is important to note that influencers have different perceived positions on the platforms. This was determined to be because of algorithmic differences and perceptual differences. As stated in the “TikTok’s Algorithm” heading, the fundamental difference between the two platforms is that TikTok puts less focus on whom the user follows when recommending videos and, in turn, focuses on what the platform’s algorithm believes the user would like (Kang et al., 2022; Zhang & Liu, 2021). As such, the traditional perspective of influencers (Abidin, 2015; Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014) needing a large following does not apply to TikTok due to content being recommended by the algorithm. The reliance on the algorithm was present in the focus groups, where some participants did not follow anyone on the platform. In contrast, all participants noted they got new creators in their feed almost always.

It was stated during the discussions that traditional influencers with many followers and an extravagant lifestyle, which are sought after on other platforms, were less trustworthy and did not belong on TikTok in the eyes of the participants. As a result, what was traditionally considered important factors of influencers by Ohanian (1990), Kim and Kim (2021) and Jin and Phua (2014) (perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and physical attractiveness) were not reflected upon in the focus group discussions, especially the physical attractiveness quality. Instead, the focus groups said that people with similar lifestyles, people who look like them and regular people, were more likely to convince them to purchase a product. They believed it was because ordinary people are more likely to value money the same as them. Therefore, if they are physically alike, evaluating the product on the other person is possible.

The focus groups presented multiple reasons for listening to a content creator’s recommendation of a product; they stated creators as inspiration, having knowledge, being
critical and being genuine as important qualities. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1957) stated that what they called opinion leaders had the crucial task of filtering, similar to what was found in the focus groups as “creators being critical”. The participants felt that critical content creators were more trustworthy and said their genuine opinion as they were not afraid to oppress their opinion when something was bad.

The participants stated that they were sceptical towards traditional influencers on TikTok and any type of ad or sponsored content because they felt the platform was closer to the average consumer and the videos produced were made by the average consumer. This was brought up in relation to a trend on TikTok called “de-influencing”, which means to scrutinise products that influencers have endorsed to see if the influencer was recommending a good product. However, this phenomenon did not appear in the literature review or was unearthed in academic papers. Therefore, the phenomenon was assumed to be new, undiscovered, and unstudied, providing a possible area of future research.

TikTok and its users’ approach to influencers are perceived as different from other platforms; the difference is being generally anti-influencers and believing them to deceive the users into purchasing bad products. The platform’s regular users have taken it into their own hands to “de-influence” products and scrutinise the statements made by the influencers trying to sell them. Because of the algorithm, a regular person’s potential reach is similar to that of a famous influencer, which means they can compete in spreading messages. As such, TikTok allows regular users to spread their message and reach physically similar people and people with a similar lifestyle while scrutinising influencers’ opinions and sponsored posts.

Apart from the qualities originally stated by Ohanian (1990) among others (Jin & Phua, 2014; Kim & Kim, 2021), influencers also gain sway over their followers’ opinions due to the parasocial relationship that arises between an influencer and their followers (Lee, 2021). The relationship occurs due to the largely unidirectional flow of experiences, information, and opinions from the influencer to their followers. The result is a one-sided relationship where the follower views the influencer as their friend and feels a part of the influencer’s life despite the influencer not knowing who the viewer is (Lee, 2021). The traditionally important qualities of physical attractiveness (Jin & Phua, 2014; Kim & Kim, 2021; Ohanian, 1990) and who one is (Katz, 1957) seem to have escalated to the point where physically perfect and famous people are less trustworthy in the eyes of the focus groups. The influencers are trying to portray themselves as perfect people with perfect and ideal lifestyles, which lead to participants feeling
that the influencers were out of touch and, in turn, deteriorating the parasocial friendship. Instead, the focus groups viewed regular peoples’ opinions as more honest and genuine since they were not trying to portray the image of being perfect and, therefore, could state what they truly believe. The perceived effect was that the eWOM stated by the regular person was seen as less skewed and more in line with the actual truth and experiences that a purchaser of the recommended product would have, which is also what was found by Diwanji and Cortese (2020) and Alghizzawi (2019).

5.2 Quality

Cheng et al. (2022) concluded that videos needed to be longer to sufficiently fill the information gap in consumers' minds when evaluating products, TikTok videos, being short-format, would therefore be perceived as inadequate. However, the focus group believed it to be the complete opposite because of the compact nature of TikTok videos; their shortness came from reducing unnecessary parts and not the actual informative nature of the video. In turn, the focus groups believed TikTok to be a good source of information because the creator went straight to the point.

The focus groups also stated that a beneficial part of evaluating products using TikTok eWOM was that the content creator most often demonstrated the product in action, showing its qualities and features while talking about their experiences. This was found by Cheng et al. (2022) to be an effective way to reduce the uncertainties of purchasing something without physical evaluation of it beforehand. In addition, the focus groups considered showing the direct effect of the product as the most informative way to form their own opinions of the product and reducing the feeling of the content creator being “salesy”. The importance of not being “salesy” was considered a valuable factor among the focus groups, which often coincided with big influencers; they, therefore, considered raw videos with minimal editing to be closer to the truth of the product than highly edited and professional ones. This finding was contrary to Zhai et al. (2022) and Cheng et al. (2022), who found that high-quality, in-depth reviews were more effective due to perceived emotional closeness to the reviewer. A possible explanation for the difference could be TikTok users being perceived as closer to the creators than traditional platforms on which the studies were made and therefore preferring raw and unedited footage as a result.
TikTok’s algorithm also contributed to the overall quality of the videos on the focus group participants’ “For You” page as they were recommended products that aligned with their interests. They also felt that TikTok tended to show them videos of products that coincided with what their friends had recommended to them in person, reinforcing the feeling of needing to purchase the product since they had heard it from multiple sources. It was also stated that the algorithm had managed to take the specific needs of the participants into account, which therefore created the feeling of TikTok showing personalised recommendations of products that suited the particular needs. As such, TikTok has managed to convert the “algorithmized self”, coined by Bhandari and Bimo (2020), to product recommendations, where not only is the feed a depiction of the interests the user has, but it also contains algorithmically recommended products that the user may be interested in. This, in turn, theoretically reduces the need for product searching and evaluation by the consumer because it all happens automatically by the TikTok algorithm when using the platform.

In conclusion, TikTok provides the user with product evaluation sources in the sense of product demonstrations, personal testing and before and afters, and the platform contains raw and honest opinions created by other users. Consumer-generated reviews are created by a genuine desire to help others with purchasing decisions (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020). TikTok also algorithmically personalises what products the platform recommends based on consumer interaction, creating a customised feed of entertainment, information, and product recommendations.

5.3 Quantity
Consumers purchasing products online face the challenge that they cannot physically touch, see, or feel the product they are evaluating. Therefore, they often rely on other consumers’ experiences with the product for their opinion formation. Online consumer purchase behaviour is different from physical store evaluation because it decreases information seeking but also increases the uncertainty of the product (Alba & Lynch, 1997; Diwanji & Cortese, 2020; Park & Kim, 2003; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). The focus groups considered eWOM and product reviews to be a central contributor to reducing uncertainty in the consumer purchase process because previous consumers’ experiences were believed to be most like one’s own.
In-depth, detailed, and long reviews were considered important reducers in product uncertainty (Cheng et al., 2022; Zhai et al., 2022). However, the focus groups considered it less important regarding product evaluations on TikTok. The participants stated that because TikTok was seen as a platform for regular people, it was less likely that the content creator would promote a product because of a profit motive and instead would promote products because of a genuine will to help others. It was also discussed that if a content creator were to promote a bad product because of a profit motive, the comments would heavily scrutinise the product and state their bad experiences with it. The reason for this was believed to be the comment sections’ user interactability which was not present on other platforms, according to the participants. The comment section was considered a central part of the participants' product evaluation because they were perceived as “raw” and “on the same level as me” and included many opinions regarding the product.

In contrast to Zhai et al. (2022), the participants did not feel that short-format videos on TikTok were insufficient when evaluating high-interest products. Instead, they considered the broad selection of short but concise videos easier to consume because they could watch more opinions in a shorter time compared to a YouTube video. As such TikTok acted as a review site for multiple participants, where they would search for a product and then watch many videos from many creators in the time it would typically take them to watch one video on YouTube. This leads to the purchase decision including more opinions and experiences to form one’s own, further decreasing uncertainty as consumers use previous consumers’ experiences as a guide (Floyd et al., 2014).

TikTok’s algorithm that focuses on user interaction, video information and device and account settings (TikTok, 2020, June 18) was believed by the participants to increase the speed they form purchase decisions. For example, one participant stated that it usually took her six months before she felt like she had evaluated a product enough to purchase, but with TikTok, she decided after three days. Furthermore, because TikTok considered the interactions of the users when recommending videos, its algorithm can detect when users are interested in a product and, in turn, show more videos of the product in question on their “For You” page (Kang et al., 2022). The result in the eyes of the participants was that as soon as they interacted with a video about a product, they were subjected to even more similar videos, which decreased their cost of information seeking because the algorithm sought them.
The participant's perception of TikTok as a platform for and by the regular user contributed to the belief that the average content creator posted honest and genuine recommendations without a profit motive behind them. Therefore, the length of a video and knowledge of the content creator was less important if the user was subjected to enough opinions about the product and concise, informative videos about the product from multiple creators and comments. If the content creator tried to deceive their viewers, the participants viewed the comment section as a final filter of wrongful information because they were also regular people with experiences with the product. TikTok also acted as a constant stream of compressed and concise opinions where the users could quickly wade through product demonstrations and experiences from multiple people. Lastly, the algorithmic core of TikTok made the platform notice product interests via interaction by its users and, in turn, show additional product videos, reducing the cost of information seeking for the user.

5.4 Following Trends

In the literature review, Alt (2015) suggested that not feeling like a part of the mainstream group could create feelings of anxiety and isolation. Kang et al. (2019) further connect this to one of the feelings of FOMO. Moreover, they also suggest that consumer-centric FOMO impacts purchase decisions. This could be one of the reasons why the participants of the focus groups felt the need to follow a trend and trust the number of people recommending, as Kang et al. (2019) suggest that this type of purchase decision can be made by following trends. One of the participants also stated that TikTok is a powerful platform for trends, and they are easily spread, which is also why consumers might feel the impact and need to follow. As discussed in the focus groups, if a product became trendy and popular, the participants felt the need to buy it not to feel left out (Alt, 2015; Kang & Ma, 2020), as many people had recommended the product. Thus, eWOM can affect consumer purchase behaviour, but it also strengthens Diwanji and Cortese’s (2020) argument that consumers tend to have a positive attitude towards user-generated vWOM.

Participants stated that they started questioning what they like when watching TikTok videos. Through the focus groups, it was evident that recommendations made by many people had affected the participants and their purchase decision and behaviour. Moreover, it was stated that convincing yourself that something would work for you and that you might like it many
times resulted in purchases that were not necessary, to begin with. Once again, leading back to the feeling of belonging and not being left out (Alt, 2015; Kang & Ma, 2020).

As stated in the theoretical framework (Figure 1), FOMO is one of the influencing factors of consumer purchase behaviour. Literature suggests that motivations for the feeling of FOMO can be the feeling of belonging or avoidance of isolation and anxiety (Kang et al., 2019). In the same sense that consumer-centric FOMO plays a vital role in consumer purchase behaviour among the focus group participants, FOMO generally adds to the stress of wanting and needing a specific product. According to the participants, the stress was more prevalent if the product had gone viral and the availability of it was a problem. Thus, a feeling of FOMO was experienced among the groups. It could be suggested that this FOMO stems from the sense of belonging (Kang & Ma, 2020) or aspiring to a certain behaviour of the group (Alt, 2015). Participants stated they were more prone to purchase based on the product's virality. Often, being a product that has been trending for a long time as viral products do (Aral & Walker, 2011), the participants want to feel like a part of the social group (Kang et al., 2019). Thus, widespread eWOM, in the form of virality (Nguyen & Chaudhuri, 2019), affects FOMO, influencing consumer purchase behaviour.

Furthermore, participants discussed whom they were blaming if they had a bad outcome or experience with a product they had purchased online because of TikTok video recommendations. But, during the sessions, the topic of store employees and their trust in them also surfaced. The literature states that there are advantages and disadvantages when purchasing products online; it is more convenient but also more uncertain (Cheng et al., 2022). In the light of uncertainty, participants believed that there was always a form of uncertainty when deciding whether or not to purchase something they saw on TikTok. But, in hindsight, they stated that even though uncertainty existed, it was always their own decision if they decided to purchase. Thus, uncertainty, according to Cheng et al. (2022), is experienced, but the blame was placed on themselves rather than on the person that recommended it on TikTok. This could be a result of the fact that eWOM can reach more people and thereby influence them (Babić Rosario et al., 2020), as the participants stated that they trust a recommendation if it was evident that many people felt the same because they trusted the social group and wanted to feel belonging to the group (Alt, 2015; Kang & Ma, 2020). On the other hand, the opposite was said when it came to in-store personnel. The literature states that one part of the uncertainty is the consumer's inability to talk to a sales associate when buying a product (Cheng et al., 2022). Several participants stated that they would rather listen to eWOM and recommendations
from TikTok, where people might have the same experience of purchase decision (Floyd et al., 2014) than go to a physical store and buy a product. This was a result of not getting the right kind of help or the product not living up to the standard that was expressed by the sales associate. Thus, some participants would rather experience uncertainty from an online purchase than receive wrongful recommendations from someone who is meant to be an expert (i.e., a store employee).

5.5 Impulsive Purchase

The focus group participants said that TikTok eWOM had a unique effect, making them impulsively want to purchase a product. As stated in the literature review, the effect of impulsive purchases on social media has been studied (Aw, 2019; Lina et al., 2022; Shamim & Islam, 2022), but only considering social network sites, hence, not including TikTok (Shamim & Islam, 2022). On the other hand, no literature directly linked algorithmically centred platforms to an increase in impulsive purchases. Although, it was highlighted by the focus groups. Thus, the theme affects purchase behaviour but in another sense than what was concluded by Shamim and Islam (2022). It was stated that the participants occasionally experienced a surge in purchase intention because of eWOM on TikTok and felt a strong need to purchase. Shamim and Islam (2022) concluded that impulsive purchases stemmed from needing to purchase an item the influencer endorsed. The conclusion's applicability is believed to be unsuitable for TikTok because the focus groups considered influencer-endorsed products less trustworthy and credible than products endorsed by the TikTok community. Therefore, the view toward influencers on TikTok made other factors affect impulsive purchases and not those unearthed by Shamim and Islam (2022) and Lina et al. (2022).

A study conducted by Carson (2017) found that FOMO can create obsessive symptoms, leading to impulsive behaviours. The focus group participants did not reflect this as they felt eWOM led to impulsive purchases and that FOMO was accumulated over time. Therefore, FOMO did not lead to impulsive purchase but, on the contrary, could be a closing factor when ultimately making a decision they had been considering for a long time. As a result of TikTok showing user-customised videos, the participants felt like their “For You” contained a good mix of product recommendations and entertainment. Mixing products and entertainment made them feel like TikTok planted products in their subconsciousness which made them restock with the TikTok recommended product if they needed to replace one at home. This also
contributed to spontaneous purchase decisions in physical stores, where the participants bought additional products they initially did not intend to purchase when entering the store. Still, they bought them because of the ease of purchase and seeing them on TikTok.

Moreover, it was observed that the participants experienced more spontaneous purchases because of recommendations on TikTok, some more and some less. It was added that purchases were more spontaneous when the price was low; they tended not to make spontaneous purchases if the price was higher. In addition to the psychological qualities of impulsive purchases, it was also observed that the participants would refrain from purchasing products if there were indications of a customs fee or if it was difficult to purchase (Alba & Lynch, 1997; Aw, 2019). They meant that customs fees would make the product harder to purchase and get hold of. In other words, participants valued the ease of purchasing a product rather than going miles to get one that becomes expensive. The participants, therefore, would get a surge in purchase intention which would quickly dwindle if any obstacles hindered their spontaneous purchase, such as customs, lack of stock or long delivery time. Therefore, spontaneous purchases must be easy for the consumer not to lose focus or intention, as any obstacle might question their initial need or want of the product, often making them realise that they have no need for it.

5.6 Conceptual Framework from Analysis

A summary of the above analysis of what the participants discussed in the focus groups regarding how they experienced eWOM on TikTok led to the proposal of a new conceptual framework. The coding uses themes as qualities of eWOM on TikTok and the sub-categories as characteristics of the qualities provided the following: “Content Creator”, “Quality”, “Quantity”, and “Following Trends”. Additionally, “Virality” and “FOMO” were discussed as potential contributing factors to the participants purchasing behaviour. Being shown a product and seeing it recommended multiple times gave the perception of it being viral, especially when the participant felt they could trust the masses of TikTok users. Therefore, the aspect of “Virality” was included as a theoretical effect of “Quantity” and “Following Trends”. The participants further stated that virality influenced their purchase behaviour. Furthermore, virality was discussed as sometimes leading to FOMO amongst the participants, where the fear of missing a good product would affect their purchase behaviour additionally. “Impulsive Purchases” was a characteristic the participants considered increasingly present on TikTok,
where the eWOM would lead to subconscious remembrance of products seen on the platform, triggering impulsive purchases when in contact with the product. “Virality” and “FOMO” was considered to influence “Impulsive Purchases” in certain situations. When “Impulsive Purchases” were performed, it was perceived to affect consumer purchase behaviour directly.

**Figure 2**

*Conceptual Framework Created from the Analysis*

![Diagram](image-url)

*Note.* Because “Quantity” and “Following Trends” led to “Virality” in certain situations, the arrows were dashed; the same applies to “Virality”, situationally leading to “FOMO” and “Virality” and “FOMO” leading to “Impulsive Purchases”. But when something had reached “Virality”, it was perceived to influence purchase behaviour, and the same goes for when “FOMO” and “Impulsive Purchases” was experienced.
In the following chapter, a conclusion based on the empirical findings and the analysis will be presented. The conclusion will serve to answer the purpose and research question of the study. Furthermore, theoretical contributions, managerial implications, limitations, and future research will be presented.

6.1 Conclusion

The report aimed to explore how young consumers experience electronic word-of-mouth recommendations on TikTok regarding their purchasing behaviour by answering the research question: How do consumers experience electronic word-of-mouth product recommendations on TikTok, and how does it affect consumer purchase behaviour? The focus groups, in combination with previous research, led to four qualities of eWOM that were experienced, “The Content Creators’ Effect on the Video Message”, “Quality”, “Quantity”, and “Following Trends”. In addition, these qualities sometimes led to “Impulsive Purchases”, “Virality”, and “FOMO”, which also were perceived to influence consumer purchase behaviour. The participants did not perceive virality to have much influence on their purchasing behaviour, but they tended to follow trends to test new products.

Four focus groups were conducted, contributing to a new understanding of how influencers and content creators on TikTok are perceived. In the eyes of the participants, TikTok is a platform for the regular user and not big influencers. As such, new reasons to follow the influencers’ recommendations were proposed, such as having a similar lifestyle, knowing the subject and being physically similar to the user. Furthermore, the participants felt TikTok helped them scrutinise and question product recommendations made by big influencers, which was called the “de-influencing” phenomenon.

Product showcases, and genuine videos were how the participants stated they were most convinced by videos on TikTok, especially if they had minimal editing and were not openly trying to sell a product. The unique selling point of TikTok was how short, concise, and informational videos were and how easy it was to watch a lot of opinions and factual information on the platform; using it instead of Google was also common. In addition, because of how TikTok’s algorithm recommended videos to its users, the participants stated they were
more likely to follow trends as they appeared on their “For You”. The new phenomenon of algorithmic virality was introduced as a result of TikTok videos going viral because of the algorithm showing videos to a broader audience and not because of users sharing them.

Another effect of TikTok being a platform for the average person was that there was a sense of community among its users and that they were testing trending products together. Not wanting to be left out and fearing missing a good product, the participants stated they were purchasing products in the hopes of it being a success. But if the product was not up to standard, they blamed themselves because it was their own purchasing decision, and it was hard to blame the TikTok community; they were, therefore, prone to follow the next trend with little question.

Through the research, it can also be concluded that FOMO affects consumer purchasing behaviour. It was evident that most participants felt inner stress in purchasing products from recommendations on TikTok, especially if a product went viral and its popularity grew. In addition, participants also stated that FOMO was something accumulated over time, thus, not emerging from impulsive purchases.

Lastly, impulsive purchases because of eWOM were perceived as especially prevalent because of TikTok eWOM. The participants felt the combination of entertainment, informational videos, and product recommendations on the platform made the product recommendations linger in their subconscious until they reencountered the product. The effect was that they made spontaneous and impulsive purchases when they saw the product in-store or on an online marketplace. It was then discussed that because of the impulsivity of the decisions, it was important that there was no reason to question the decision, such as delivery or customs fees. The subconscious and impulsive purchase behaviour was also perceived to be present when restocking products, as they were more likely to replace what had run out with something seen on TikTok.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical contribution of the report that was unearthed during the analysis was the phenomena of de-influencing, where consumers question the reliability of influencers and directly oppose their recommendations. This vastly differed from the previous theoretical findings, where prominent influencers’ recommendations were more convincing than regular users. A reason could be the differences in platforms, as the focus groups believed TikTok to be a platform for and by the average user, which could have led to influencers being seen as
not belonging there. However, the phenomenon might be present on other platforms and is worthy of investigation. This led to new qualities that are believed to affect the sway of the content creators’ recommendations, these are: physical alikeness to the viewer, having a similar lifestyle, the content creator being critical, lack of monetary incentive and the creator being a regular person. Where Instagram and YouTube users-based trust on in-depths of the reviews and the content creator having a large following, TikTok users wanted the person recommending the product to be a regular person with a short and concise review. It is therefore concluded that TikTok users rely on different qualities for trusting the content creator compared to other social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. There was an overall sense of community among the users on the platform, which created a form of trust in each other, increasing the likelihood of following the platform’s product recommendations.

The investigation into TikTok as a social media revealed another important theoretical contribution: algorithmic virality. Algorithmic virality stems from the difference in algorithms and platform use regarding Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube when compared to TikTok. Instagram and Facebook are network-based social media platforms whose primary use is staying connected to the person’s network. Therefore, the platform feed mainly contains posts from friends and family with any other account the user follows. YouTube is the closest to TikTok, where the user’s feed is sourced from the interests and interactions the user has made. The difference between the platforms is that YouTube emphasises whom the user follows, while TikTok has little regard for whom the user follows. The effect is that a TikTok user’s experience is decided by the algorithm and much less by the user. Where traditional virality comes from users sharing content on networking platforms, algorithmic virality stems from the platform’s algorithm showing the same content to a broad group of people, making it go viral. In conclusion, traditional virality is users sharing content with one another, creating a domino effect of content sharing. Algorithmic virality is when the algorithm decides that a type of content should be shown to many peoples’ feeds, which spreads the message.

The report also unearthed the phenomenon of de-influencing, when influencers’ recommendations are scrutinised because they are influencers, and the platform users believe they will deceive them. From the combination of theory and empirical findings, the creation of a conceptual framework which is customised to the experiences of eWOM on TikTok was created. This new framework considers the participants’ experiences and is an overview of what was unearthed in the study.
6.3 Societal Implications

As a result of the study, it can be identified that TikTok has characteristics leading to overconsumption, thus negatively impacting society. Through TikTok, consumers are met with thousands of product recommendations daily, creating an urge to purchase and to feel up-to-date with trending products. With the aid of this study, the subject can be highlighted and given more attention. In addition, increased awareness of the problem could create an understanding which could, later, be an incentive to find ways to eliminate overconsumption. The research can also serve as a beginning to create more awareness on the platform itself by addressing the dilemma.

6.4 Managerial Implications

The report explored the purchasing behaviour of young adults on the platform TikTok concerning eWOM product recommendations. It was concluded that a way for companies to utilise TikTok as a platform to spread information is to create a product that regular consumers are likely to endorse to one another. Because of the users’ perception of the platform, it is essential that regular users like the product for it to gain traction on the platform. Furthermore, the algorithm of TikTok creates the possibility for an ordinary person to reach a wide audience. As such, the use of sponsoring big influencers with much following is of less importance regarding TikTok. Rather, companies wanting to capitalise on TikTok’s user base and algorithm should try to create a product that is likely to bring attention and make users create recommendations about it. If successful, the company and brand will get free recommendations from the consumers, which furthers the reach of the company’s message to a broader audience.

Another important managerial implication is the user perception of TikTok, where it is considered as the users’ platform and not the influencers. The implication is that people seen as less honest, genuine, or authentic are experienced as trying to deceive the users. In turn, influencers trying to create a façade of perfection regarding their appearance and lifestyle lose reliability on the platform. As the users consider regular genuine people with a similar lifestyle to them to be more honest, authentic, and better at evaluating products in a way that applies to the average consumer’s lifestyle and needs. Additionally, influencers on TikTok must seem honest and authentic to not lose all trustworthiness and influence on the platform, as they are under constant scrutiny by the users.
The quality characteristic of eWOM is an interesting managerial contribution, as the participants believed videos that were not outright selling products to be more effective in influencing their consumer purchase behaviour. As such, unlike most other communication channels, endorsing consumers to purchase is believed to have the opposite effect on TikTok. Furthermore, demonstrating the use of the product and its direct effect was considered a more influential way to convince TikTok users. Additionally, sending products to content creators and explicitly stating that they are free to express their opinion about the product, good or bad, was recognised as a convincing way to affect consumer purchase behaviour instead of sponsored content. Free expression was especially important because sponsored content was seen as less trustworthy, more so than on other platforms, and content creators gained trustworthiness by criticising bad products.

Moreover, the distrust toward store employees’ recommendations is something of consideration as they were believed to be solely and directly responsible if the consumer had a bad purchasing experience because of their product recommendation. To capitalise on TikTok users’ impulsive purchases, companies should minimise purchase hurdles, such as shipping and customs fees. Lastly, as TikTok was able to engrain products in the user’s subconsciousness, it is a good platform for brands to appear on if they wish to replace their competitors in the subconscious minds of the consumers.

6.5 Limitations

Several limitations have surfaced during the process of the study that the authors have reflected on. One of the most evident limitations was that only one male participant was among the four focus groups. The authors attempted to find male participants for the study after not receiving enough participants from the survey. Still, it was difficult finding male participants who had purchased products because of recommendations on TikTok. Thus, it could be believed that the study's conclusion may not apply to the male beauty market.

Another situation that could have created a limitation in the research was the conduction of the research groups as they were held online, in-person, and a combination of the two. One could argue that participation and discussion might not be as strong and open as a discussion with a face-to-face focus group. By allowing for focus groups to be conducted online, participants can partake from wherever they feel comfortable.
Furthermore, as the focus group discussions were held in Swedish, the translated quotes could be an interpretation of the authors, hence, being a limitation in the study. On the other hand, as stated in ethical consideration, it was always important for the authors to ensure that the participants' message came across as accurately and authentically as possible. Thus, honouring the statements of the participants. Additionally, visual cues and expressions might have been lost in the recording of the focus groups unless noted by the transcribing author, the effect would be a less accurate depiction of the participants' precise experiences.

Another limitation discovered through the process was that there was no possibility of getting a more comprehensive understanding of how the algorithm works on TikTok as it is not public knowledge. Thus, the authors were not able to gain a complete understanding of the differences in TikTok’s algorithm compared to other platforms, as there might be other factors of TikTok that are not known to the public and, therefore, cannot be used in the report.

6.6 Future Research

The report focused on content creator recommendations in general and did not make a distinction between recommendations from accounts specialising in certain types of critique. As such, it is an interesting area of future research to investigate if there are differences in user evaluation of the product recommendation when it is said by an account that specialises in content critique instead of critique and recommendations stemming from regular users. This would further map the area of content creator recommendations and how users are evaluating messages from different types of accounts.

To increase the confirmability of the findings and theoretical contributions, testing whether they are applicable and relevant in a similar context but with participants of different backgrounds is recommended. As it is a possibility that cultural, geographical, or societal differences could have affected the applicability and generalisation of the conclusions made in this report.

The report investigated the platform of TikTok and how consumers experience eWOM on the platform. Due to TikTok being an entirely separate entity from the Chinese equivalent, Douyin, but with the same functionality, it would be interesting to see if the users of the two platforms had the same experience. Suppose the users experienced the platforms’ eWOM differently or similarly would provide an important understanding of how the same social media might evolve in two different settings.
As previously mentioned, this study focused on the consumer perspective and how consumers are affected by eWOM on TikTok, an idea for future research is to research the company side. The current research concluded that eWOM affects consumer behaviour when it comes to purchasing decisions. But, on the other hand, similar research could be conducted where the company is in focus instead. Thus, getting an understanding of how a company, brand image and awareness can be affected by eWOM, and the importance of platforms such as TikTok.

It is also proposed that a quantitative study testing the conceptual framework is performed, where hypotheses and theories can be proven or disproven. This would extend the area of research regarding TikTok and if the participant’s experiences can be applied to a broader sample size.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Questions for Focus Groups

Focus group questions - English

1. Could you please introduce yourselves?
2. Are you familiar with TikTok and how it recommends videos to its users?
3. If NO – How does TikTok recommend videos based on what you interacted with and how much interest, you showed when it presented you with a certain topic?
4. Have you purchased any products that you saw on TikTok?
5. Do you have any examples?
6. Did you get the interest in the product from TikTok or did you have an interest in it before you saw it on TikTok?
7. What made you purchase these products? Seeing it in action? Someone stating its characteristics?
8. Does the video have more of an impact if it doesn’t outright endorse you to buy?
9. Would you say that the purchases you made were spontaneous?
10. Have any of the not been spontaneous?
11. Does the availability of the product affect your purchase decision?
12. Does FOMO affect your purchasing choices? If so in what way?
13. Have you bought products because you were afraid they would run out of stock?
14. Can you recall the scenario?
15. Do you get more FOMO if the product in question has gone viral?
16. Does the person recommending the product affect the way you evaluate the video?
17. If an influencer were to recommend the product, would you trust them more or less?
18. What different from the experience you thought you would have?
19. Do you think watching more TikTok videos about the product would have helped you form a different opinion?
20. If you were considering purchasing an expensive product, would you search TikTok for information or go elsewhere?
21. Have you ever bought something expensive because of TikTok recommendations?
22. Have you posted a haul or similar videos on TikTok of the products you bought?
23. If yes, what made you post the video?

Focus group questions - Swedish

1. Kan ni börja med att introducera er själva?
2. Är ni medvetna om hur TikTok rekommenderar videos till sina användare?
3. Om Nej – TikTok rekommenderar video baserat på vad ni interagerar med och hur stort intresse nivånade när det presenterades ett visst ämne?
4. Om Nej – Konsumentkänslomätningen är hur konsumenter beter sig vid köp, det inkluderar hur människor utvärderar produkter online och offline och vad som skapar ett behov av att köpa något?
5. Har ni köpt någon produkt som ni sett på TikTok?
6. Har ni något exempel?
7. Blev ni intresserade av produkten via TikTok eller hade ni intresset redan innan ni såg video på TikTok?
8. Vad fick er att köpa produkten? Att man fick se den i stort sett? Att någon berättade om egenkappa?
9. Här video mer påverkan/effekt om den inte direktt rekommenderar dig att köpa?
10. Skulle ni säga att köpen ni gjort har varit spontan?
11. Har ni köpt något som inte varit spontan?
12. Påverkar tillgängligheten av produkten ditt köpsbeslut?
13. Pävaokar FOMO dina köpsbeslut? Och i så fall på vilka sätt?
14. Har ni någonsin köpt en produkt för att ni var rädda att den skulle ta slut?
15. Kommer du hålla varför?
16. Får ni FOMO om produkten ifråga blivit viral?
17. Påverkar personer som rekommenderar produkten hur du utvärderar videos?
18. Om en influencer skulle rekommendera en produkt, skulle ni lika på dem mer eller mindre?
19. Har ni haft några långa köpsprocesser efter att ni har köpt på TikTok?
20. Vad skulle ni förbereda er vid köpet att sikta efter information på TikTok?
21. Har ni någonsin köpt något dyr kort på grund av en TikTok rekommendation?
22. Har ni någonsin lagt upp en produkt i liknande video på TikTok med produkten ni köpte?
23. Om ja, vad fick er att lägga upp den?

Har ni köpt en produkt för att ni ville vara med i modellgruppen?
Skulle ni överväga att köpa en viral produkt och göra inlägg om den för att få exponering?
## Appendix B: Focus Group Participants

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<th>Focus Group</th>
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