Modern-Day Socialization Agents: The Connection Between Social Media Influencers, Materialism, and Purchase Intentions of Finnish Young People

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This paper investigates how following social media influencers is associated with Finnish adolescents' materialistic values and purchase intentions. Although the interlinkages between social media, materialism, and purchase intentions have been presented in previous studies, little is known about how following social media influencers is connected to their followers' materialistic values and purchase intentions. Cultivation theory and consumer socialization theory were applied to understand the cultivation process in young people's materialism and the antecedents of their purchase intentions. Finnish participants (n = 800), aged 15-19 were interviewed by phone. The sample was based on a nationally representative sample by age (by one year), gender and area of residence. Regression analysis was used as our statistical model. Frequent following of Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers was positively related to materialism. Active followers of YouTubers had higher purchase intentions, but they were no more materialistic than their peers. This is one of the earliest studies, which has underlined the role of different influencers as disseminators of materialistic values, and measured the influence capability of an individual influencer on the followers' purchase intentions.

Keywords: materialism, purchase intention, social media influencer, consumer socialization, adolescents

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Research suggest that materialistic values among young people have been increasing during the past decades (Richins, 2017; Twenge & Kasser, 2013). The rise of commercialised content on social media at the same time has raised questions about the possible effects of this content on the increase of materialistic values. For instance, it has been argued that the media's role in internalizing materialistic values among children and young people has been growing along with the increasing exposure to digital media (Richins, 2017). Materialism refers to the three-dimensional consumer value including the central role of possessions in life, possessions as

a source of happiness, and possessions as an indicator of success (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Cultivation theory suggests that media users adopt the ideologies presented in the media (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). In parallel, it has been reported that the usage of traditional media (Shrum et al., 2011) and social media (Thoumrungroje, 2018) are associated with young people's level of materialism.

However, materialistic values are not adopted solely by the media. It is well acknowledged that peers and parents have a significant impact on children's and young people's materialistic values (Chaplin & John, 2010). This transmission can be seen through the lens of consumer socialization (CS) in which children and adolescents learn consumer skills and attitudes from, for example, peers and television (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). The CS process can also take place virtually (Lueg et al., 2006), which is not surprising given that young people are increasingly interacting with peers online. In addition, young people's consumer behaviour has been increasingly affected by social media influencers – bloggers, YouTubers, Instagram celebrities in recent years. Therefore, the influence of social media influencers has been acknowledged by both companies and academics (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Reinikainen et al., 2020). Companies try to attract young consumers, and thus, the companies are collaborating with influencers as their strategic partners to reach these consumer groups (Borchers & Enke, 2021; Enke & Borchers, 2019). Likewise, some research has even provided a *"how-to guide"* for companies to be successful with influencers (Haenlein et al., 2020).

Although materialism is associated with social media (Thoumrungroje, 2018), and influencers appear to affect consumers' purchase intentions, there has been far too little research on how following social media influencers on various platforms is related to the materialistic values and purchasing intentions of their followers. Further, given that research has associated materialism with detrimental attributes such as lower well-being and lower life-satisfaction (Dittmar et al., 2014; Lipovcan et al., 2015), it is important to explore the potential sources of materialistic attitudes.

To the authors' knowledge, only a single study (Lou & Kim, 2019) has considered social media influencers' impact on their followers' materialism and purchase intention. However, previous studies did not examine what role the platform types used by influencers played in these relationships. That is, social media is not a monolith but rather includes multiple platforms that are used in various ways by young users which calls

attention to study the role of such platforms in developing consumers' materialistic values and purchase intentions. To address this gap, we take an explorative approach to study how following social media influencers on different platforms such as Youtubers or Instagrammers is related to the young followers' level of materialism and purchase intentions. More specifically, we explore if the relationships between young people and the influencers are determined by the types of social media platforms (e.g., YouTube, Instagram or TikTok) on which the influencers and the followers interact. Our study was carried out in Finland, where adolescents are very active social media users, as 85% of 15-19-year-olds reported using Snapchat, while 81% of adolescents used Instagram (Kohvakka & Saarenmaa, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW
The dissemination of materialistic values

Materialism refers to the mindset that highlights the role of the purchases and acquisition for achieving happiness (Richins & Dawson, 1992). It is one's disposition to over-emphasise the material goods as a part of their life goals (Richins, 2004). It seems that scholars also place a great emphasis on investigating materialism in terms of young people, especially when considering that materialism scales have been developed for the younger age groups (Kühne & Opree, 2019). Previous studies suggest that one can adopt materialistic values through social interaction (Churchill & Moschis, 1979), traditional media (Shrum et al., 2011), and social media (Kamal et al., 2013; Thoumrungroje, 2018). Relatedly, scholars have clarified this process of adoption of materialistic values with consumer socialization theory (CS) (Moschis & Churchill, 1978) and cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

Consumer socialization theory

Consumer socialization is a process through which young people learn consumer skills, attitudes and values from socialization agents such as peers and family (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). Churchill and Moschis (1979) presented the actual socialization process in which one may learn, for example, materialistic values or a specific behaviour through reinforcements, modelling, and social interaction. Modelling refers to the process where a learner emulates the behavior of a socialization agent, while their behaviour can be negatively or positively reinforced (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). Social interaction was

loosely defined by Churchill and Moschis (1979), but they perceived it as a combination of reinforcements and imitations, and that social norms within interaction processes between agent and learner (e.g., frugality is preferred) shape the learners' behaviour and attitudes (Churchill & Moschis, 1979; de Gregorio & Sung, 2010). As Bush and colleagues (1999) summarised, the socialization agents transmit the behavioral models, attitudes, and values to the learners. Thus, in addition to materialistic values, the socialization approach serves as a basis to understand how purchase intentions may be transformed from the influencers to their followers as a result of the socialization process.

Cultivation theory

Cultivation process suggests that people absorb the social reality presented on television; frequent exposure to violent content presented on television was correlated with their audiences' exaggerated perceptions of the amount of violence in the USA (Gerbner et al., 2002). The cultivation process includes first-order effects and second-order effects: first-order effects illustrate how mass media consumption affects people's estimates of the probability or frequency of (e.g., crime) while second-order effects describe how media affects people's attitudes and values (e.g., materialism) (Shrum et al, 2011; Stein et al., 2021). In terms of second-order effects, Shrum and Lee (2012) suggested that the more people watch a certain content (e.g., television), the more their attitudes and values will align with that content. Likewise, research showed the more frequently people watched television the higher their materialistic values were (Shrum et al., 2005; Shrum et al., 2011; Shrum & Lee, 2012). Opree and colleagues (2014) also found a longitudinal effect of tv-advertisements on children's materialism. Researchers have also applied cultivation theory to the social media context and showed how higher Instagram (Hwang & Jeong, 2020) and Facebook (Hermann et al., 2020) usage was related to higher materialistic values. Furthermore, it is notable that even a short exposure to materialistic content can affect a viewer's materialistic values, though temporarily (Shrum et al., 2011). However, given that materialism is a personal value (Shrum et al., 2011) and that personal values are enduring (Shrum & McCarthy, 1997; Shrum et al., 2011) a repeated exposure to materialistic content can potentially have long-term cultivation effect on viewers.

At first, cultivation analysis was merely focused on the message system analysis, and instead of specific programmes (e.g., soap opera or crime shows), its main goal was to

examine the broader patterns of representations integrated throughout television content (Gerbner et al., 2002). Later, a majority of cultivation research has taken a content or genre-specific approach (Potter, 2014). This has raised a debate as to whether genre-specific cultivation research is in harmony with the tenets of the original theory, and whether it is to be seen as a cultivation process at all (Morgan et al., 2014; Potter, 2014). Regardless of this debate, as our research field is increasingly moving toward accepting genre and programme effects as a part of the cultivation process (Record, 2018), we position this study as cultivation research.

Materialism and social media

Social media has been defined as web-based tools and applications where people both consume and create content and cultivate social connections (Hoffman et al., 2013). During the past decade, social media has become largely commercialised. For example, in Germany, the usage of affiliate links on YouTube videos more than tripled during 2009-2017 (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). The number of brand-sponsored influencer posts has also multiplied between 2016 and 2020 (Statista, 2020). Thus, social media appears to be an efficient channel for the dissemination of materialistic values. Previous studies have suggested that social media usage and intensity had an impact on the users' level of materialism (Kamal et al., 2013; Thoumrungroje, 2018). Hwang and Jeong (2020) supported this argument by showing how Instagram usage had a cultivation effect on users' materialistic values. However, it remains unclear as to whether materialistic people use more social network sites (SNS), or whether social media itself spreads materialistic values. For example, Chu and colleagues (2016) argued that higher materialism will lead to increased SNS usage due to their willingness to engage in social comparison.

Social media influencers can potentially transmit materialistic values to their followers. Dhanesh and Duthler (2019) suggested that social media influencers are people who use personal branding to create relationships with their followers on social media, and who affect their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour. Influencers' commercial nature is also conspicuous. A recent literature review showed that a majority of the studies on social media influencers between 2011-2020 were focused on their commercial potential (Hudders et al., 2020). Also, interviews with business representatives revealed the influencers' important role as companies' strategic partners (Borchers & Enke, 2021). The

influencers can, for instance, promote a product of a certain company and get that product in return for an endorsement (Hudders et al., 2020). Based on the above-mentioned literature, we regard social media influencers as commercially oriented individuals who are able to affect their followers' attitudes, values, behaviour, and knowledge, and who are in touch with their followers on social media.

However, little is known about how following social media influencers relates to the followers' materialistic values. According to a recent study, adolescents' perceived parasocial relationship with social media influencers was related to materialism and purchase intentions (Lou & Kim, 2019). The parasocial relationship refers to an illusion of an actual face-to-face relationship with a media persona (Horton & Wohl, 1956). As the influencers' role in young people's daily lives is remarkable (Lou & Kim, 2019), it appears to be inevitable that they learn values, behaviours, and intentions that influencers represent. We suggest that social media influencers can, for example, reveal their polished and glamorous lifestyles on social media. As a result, active followers are repetitively exposed to the influencers' materialistic content, which in line with cultivation theory, affects their adoption of materialistic values. From the socialization perspective, the followers learn materialistic values from the influencers through the socialization process.

Social media influencers' impact on purchase behaviour

A number of studies have found that social media influencers can affect their followers' purchase intentions through various mechanisms (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Schouten et al., 2020; Trivedi & Sama, 2019). For example, consumers' attitudes towards influencer, such as perceived authenticity (Pöyry et al., 2019), and perceived attractiveness were related to higher purchase intention (Taillon et al., 2020; Weismueller et al., 2020). Trivedi and Sama (2019), in turn, found that influencers had an indirect impact on consumers' purchase intention via brand attitude and brand admiration. This study, in turn, explores the differences between social media platforms used by influencers (e.g., YouTube and Instagram) and their connections to the followers' purchase intentions Such impact of social media influencers on consumers' purchase intentions and behaviour can be seen through the socialization perspective. In earlier studies, peers, parents, and television, for instance, were considered as socialization agents that shaped consumers attitudes (Bush et al., 1999). Today, social media influencers can be seen as potential socialization agents. For example, Nafees and colleagues (2021) perceived social media

influencers as socialization agents and found that influencers affected their followers' attitudes toward endorsed brands. Likewise, we suggest that influencers can be seen as socialization agents, as they may affect their followers' purchase intentions. For example, modelling is one socialization mechanism by which people acquire consumption-related knowledge and attitudes from socialization agents through observational learning and imitation (Churchill & Moschis, 1979; de Gregorio & Sun, 2010). Thus, when an influencer promotes a certain product with a favourable attitude, their followers may learn attitudes and norms related to a given product which, in turn, generate purchase intentions (e.g. Ajzen, 2011). Lastly, it is also noteworthy that materialistic values have predicted higher purchase intentions (Kamal et al., 2013; Lou & Kim, 2019).

Why would a platform matter?

The connections between following social media influencers, materialism, and purchase intentions are presumably dependent on the platform where the influencers operate since influencers' content varies by platform (Haenlein et al., 2020) (see Appendix A for a detailed description of the platforms). However, due to the lack of previous studies on these relations, only general assumptions can be made. Although researchers have not paid much attention to the materialistic side of TikTok or Snapchat, journalists have found that materialistic content is very popular on TikTok (Widdicombe, 2020) and Snapchat (Moss, 2014). Needless to say, all platforms have different types of influencers whose content varies. For example, many popular TikTok influencers such as (@khaby.lame) or (@jennifererica) are famous for their short dance and comedy videos. Nevertheless, Instagram has been connected to impression management (Tian et al., 2019), polished pictures (Lup et al., 2015), and glamorous and luxury lifestyles (Hwang & Jeong, 2020; Marwick, 2015). To illustrate this, Kylie Jenner (@kyliejenner) is one of the most famous Instagrammer in the world, whose Instagram feed conspicuously portrays a glamorous and wealthy lifestyle including luxury shoes, cars, and private jets. Interestingly, she is also extremely popular on Snapchat. In sum, we assume that following influencers on these instant platforms (Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat) is positively related to materialism. Moreover, as Instagram has a lot of product placement (Jin et al., 2019), and TikTok is well-known for its product-centred challenges, such as the Samsung Galaxy mobile phone challenge #GalaxyA, these platforms may also yield higher

purchase intentions. Also, Shahpasandi and colleagues (2020) found that a hedonic Instagram browsing led to the feelings of pleasure and flow experience which further enhanced impulsive buying behaviour.

YouTube has a lot of product promotion (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2019), and so does Instagram, but YouTube has longer videos allowing more detailed product reviews (Brown, 2019). As an illustration, the YouTube channel called unbox therapy by Lewis Hilsenteger has four billion total views and 18 million subscribers, in which the boxes of technological products are opened and described. Research also suggests a potential link between following YouTubers and purchase intention. That is, higher usage of YouTube (and Facebook) has been linked to more positive attitudes toward marketing on social media (Akar & Topçu, 2011). In the same manner, Anubha and Shome (2021) found that consumers' perceived advertisement-value on YouTube had a direct effect on purchase intentions but also an indirect effect via positive attitudes toward advertisement. Lastly, Lee and Watkins (2016) found that a parasocial relationship with YouTubers was indirectly related to purchase intentions via brand perceptions. Therefore, it can be assumed that following YouTubers has a positive connection to purchase intention (see Reinikainen et al., 2020). Also, when one is constantly exposed to the products on YouTube, it may enhance the importance of possessions in one's life, and lead to materialism. Of course, many YouTubers such as one of the most popular YouTuber PewDiePie focuses on entertainment (e.g., gaming) rather than products. However, sometimes products are tacitly endorsed. That is, the gaming videos can also be seen as product reviews as the games are carefully reviewed and played, which might attract followers to acquire these games.

Following LinkedIn influencers or game-streamers (other influencers) is not presumably related to materialism or purchase intentions as LinkedIn is a professional work-oriented platform, where glamorous lifestyles or luxury products are not present to the same extent as on Instagram or TikTok, for instance. Regardless of the above-mentioned argument that following PewDiePie for instance, may engender purchase intention in some cases, we do not believe this to be very common. Also, following bloggers is less likely to be related to materialism or purchase intentions than following YouTubers or Instagrammers for instance, as their written content is not as interactive, compelling, and engaging as video content.

METHODS

Based on the theoretical framework and questions raised from previous studies, our specified research questions are:

RQ1: How is following social media influencers in different platforms connected to young people's level of materialism and their purchase intentions when socio-demographics are controlled for?

RQ2: How are the connections between following social media influencers, materialism, and purchase intentions dependant on the type of platforms where influencers operate, such as YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat?

A research company was assigned to conduct a survey that was carried out in winter 2019-2020. The target group consisted of adolescents aged from 15 to 19 who lived in Finland. According to the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, young people at the age of 15 or older are allowed to participate in surveys without parental consent. Data were collected with structured telephone interviews that lasted approximately 30 minutes. The sample of the study was randomly selected from the Finnish Population Register and is nationally representative by age (by one year), gender, and area of residence. Those who completed the survey received a gift for participation from the research company. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study. The data did not contain any variables by which the participants could be identified, and no other information was combined with the survey data. The final data contained 800 cases, where 98% of the young participants reported using social media. However, a subpopulation ($n = 686$) was used in the analysis among those respondents who reported having followed social media influencers at least once during the past year. Those who had not followed any social media influencers ($n = 114$) were excluded from further analysis. The data and the variables used in the analyses contained a few missing values (see Tables 1 and 2). Listwise deletion was used to handle missing data in the regression analysis (OLS), (final $n = 676$). Stata was used to perform all statistical analyses.

Measurements

The following variables were used in our analyses (see Table 1 and Table 2). Only observed variables (mean aggregated composite or raw) were used in our statistical

modelling. Please, see Appendix A for more detailed information on all measurements used in this study.

Materialism. Participants' materialistic values were assessed by using a shortened 6-item version adopted from Richin's scale of materialism (Richins, 2004). The adaptation of this scale has also showed good reliability across different age groups (Kühne & Opree, 2019). The scale showed good reliability in this study, Cronbach α=.72.

Purchase intention. Purchase intention was assessed by using a 3-item scale, adapted from previous studies (Chakraborty, 2019; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Lee et al., 2015). The original items were modified so that they were compatible with our research aim, Cronbach α=.77.

Economic situation of the family. Young people's socio-economic background may affect their level of materialism. For example, adolescents from poorer families scored higher than their more affluent counterparts on the measures of materialism (Chaplin et al., 2014). Therefore, the family's economic situation was used as a control variable.

Following social media influencers. Influencers were identified according to their platforms such as YouTubers and Instagrammers. Influencers were chosen for this study according to their estimated popularity (e.g., Smith & Anderson, 2018) among young people. Influencers were grouped into categories by the nature of their platform. The categories were: 1) YouTubers; 2) Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat influencers; 3) bloggers; and 4) other influencers including LinkedIn influencers and game streamers (e.g., Twitch) (see the full rationale for categorization in appendix A). Participants were first asked to report whether they followed social media influencers such as Instagrammers, bloggers, and YouTubers. Those who answered yes were then asked to report how often they followed the following influencers: 1) YouTubers 2) Instagram, TikTok, or Snapchat influencers, 3) Bloggers, 4) Other influencers such as LinkedIn influencers or game streamers. The used scale was: 1= Only a few times a year, 2= Monthly, 3= Weekly, 4= Daily or almost daily. In the analysis, the following frequency was converted into dummy variables by having "only a few times a year" as a reference group. As the distance between time points $(1-4)$ in the scale was not equal, it was statistically sufficient to treat the followership as categorical.

Gender. Gender was chosen to be a control variable since some studies have suggested that men have scored higher than women on materialism (Kamineni, 2005). On

the other hand, women have been reported to be more prone to hedonic consumption and more committed to luxury brands and fashion that influencers typically present (Tifferet & Herstein, 2012).

Age. Since age affects the consumer socialization process (Moschis & Churchill, 1978), age was involved in our sample as a control variable.

Table 1
Continuous Variables

Variable	n	Scale	Mean	SD
Materialism	686	1-5	2.66	0.84
Purchase Intention	686	1-5	2.27	1.01
Age	686	15-19	16.98	1.41
Family's economic situation	686	1-5	3.85	0.76

Table 2
Categorical variables (%)

Scale/Variable	YouTubers	Instagram/TikTok/Snapchat Inf[a]	Bloggers[b]	Other influencers[c]
Following intensity	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1=Only a few times a year	3.6	17.4	71	62.2
2=Monthly	18.7	10.4	16.9	15.3
3=Weekly	32.0	17.9	8.8	15.1
4=Daily or almost daily	45.7	54.3	3.2	7.4
Gender[d]	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Notes. Total N=686, [a]Missing N=2 [b]Missing N=5 [c]Missing N=5, [d]Girls = 53.4, Boys = 46.6

Analysis strategy and methods

First, a t-test with robust standard errors was used as a preliminary analysis to see whether those who followed social media influencers and those who did not differ in their materialism. Our aim was to obtain more detailed information about these groups.

Regression analysis was then used to explore how following influencers on different platforms is connected to materialism and purchase intentions, when gender, age, and the economic situation of the family were controlled for. Also, the relationship between materialism and purchase intention was tested. Unstandardised coefficients were used and standard robust errors were used to manage the possible non-normality of the statistical testing. In addition to a single parameter test (t-test), joint hypothesis test (F-test) (robust Wald) was executed to obtain more accurate results and to test the overall significance. That is, some independent variables might have significant t-statistics when tested individually but appear to be insignificant when tested jointly (F-statistics), or vice versa (Wooldridge, 2020, p. 149). Hence, following all influencer types (categorised by platform) were tested separately and all influencers' specific parameters were assumed to be zero to test the overall significance of variables.

RESULTS
Following social media influencers and materialism

The t-test showed that those who followed social media influencers (n = 686) scored higher on materialism (M = 2.66) than those who did not (n = 114) (M = 2.50), but the result was not statistically significant (p = .058). Even if we did not find statistically significant differences in materialism between these groups, it does not rule out the further examination of the relationship between materialistic values, purchase intentions, and following social media influencers. That is, those who did not follow influencers could have gained materialistic values from other sources. Also, those who did not follow influencers would not have been able to answer the questions regarding purchase intentions as they were related to influencers (See appendix A). Consequently, we executed a further analysis only for those who followed social media influencers to obtain more accurate information about the connections between following social media influencers, materialism, and purchase intentions.

Table 3 illustrates the relationship between following a specific influencer and one's level of materialism. The results indicate that following Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers is positively connected to materialism. More specifically, the results revealed that those who followed the aforementioned influencers every week ($b = 0.37$ $p <. 001$), and daily or almost daily ($b = 0.46$, $p <. 001$), differed significantly from the passive followers

in their materialism. Thus, more active Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok followers were more materialistic than their passive counterparts. More surprisingly, Table 3 illustrates that the active and passive followers of YouTubers, bloggers, and other influencers did not differ significantly from each other in terms of materialism. Interestingly, boys were more materialistic than girls (b = -0.35, $p <$. 001). However, neither family's economic situation nor age predicted materialism. Lastly, joint hypothesis tests (see the results in Appendix B) showed that only the following of Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers was a statistically significant ($p <$. 001) predictor of materialism.

Table 3 *Regression analysis of materialism*

Dependent: Materialism	B (Unstandardised)	Robust SE	t	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	p>t
YouTubers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	-0.09	0.18	-0.05	-0.36	0.34	0.958
Weekly	-0.06	0.17	-0.33	-0.39	0.28	0.742
Daily or almost daily	-0.03	0.17	-0.18	-0.36	0.30	0.858
Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	0.23	0.12	1.89	-0.01	0.46	0.059
Weekly	0.37	0.11	3.52	0.16	0.58	0.000***
Daily or almost daily	0.46	0.09	5.43	0.30	0.63	0.000***
Bloggers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	-0.07	0.08	-0.85	-0.23	0.09	0.395
Weekly	0.12	0.13	0.93	-0.13	0.36	0.353
Daily or almost daily	-0.23	0.16	-1.45	-0.55	0.08	0.148
Other Influencers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	0.14	0.09	1.54	-0.04	0.31	0.123
Weekly	0.10	0.09	1.12	-0.08	0.28	0.265
Daily or almost daily	0.21	0.12	1.86	-0.01	0.44	0.063
Gender						
Boys	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Girls	-0.35	0.07	-4.97	-0.49	-0.21	0.000***
Age	0.00	0.02	0.16	-0.04	0.05	0.873
Family's economic situation	-0.02	0.04	-0.40	-0.10	0.07	0.688
Cons.	2.50	0.47	5.29	1.57	3.43	0.000

Notes. n = 676, R-Squared=0.10. *** $p <$ .001.

Following social media influencers and purchase intentions

The results of the relationship between following social media influencers and purchase intention are presented in Table 4. The results reveal that those who followed YouTubers every week ($b = 0.51$, $p =. 003$), and daily or almost daily ($b = 0.61$, $p <. 001$) differed significantly from passive followers. Interestingly, statistically significant differences were also found between those who followed other influencers daily or almost daily and the passive ones ($b = 0.39$, $p = .013$). The passive group also differed significantly in purchase intention, solely from those who followed bloggers every month ($b = 0.23$, $p = .024$), but not from the other, more active groups. Furthermore, materialism ($b = 0.34$, $p <. 001$) predicted higher purchase intentions. Lastly, gender, family's economic situation, or age did not predict higher purchase intention.

Similar to materialism, additional joint hypothesis tests were executed (see Appendix B). Only following YouTubers was found to be a significant (overall) predictor of purchase intentions ($p <. 001$) This specifies the results of single parameter testing. Thus, only a clear and consistent relationship regarding single and joint hypothesis testing was with following YouTubers and purchase intention. In contrast to our expectations, a connection between following instant platform influencers (Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat) and purchase intentions was not statistically significant.

Table 4 *Regression analysis of purchase intentions*

Dependent: Purchase Intention	B (Unstandardised)	Robust SE	t	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	p>t
YouTubers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	0.34	0.18	1.85	-0.02	0.69	0.064
Weekly	0.51	0.17	2.94	0.17	0.85	0.003**
Daily or almost daily	0.61	0.17	3.54	0.27	0.95	0.000***
Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	0.01	0.14	0.10	-0.27	0.29	0.923
Weekly	-0.03	0.12	-0.27	-0.27	0.21	0.789
Daily or almost daily	0.13	0.10	1.30	-0.07	0.33	0.195
Bloggers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	0.23	0.10	2.26	0.03	0.43	0.024*
Weekly	0.17	0.13	1.33	-0.08	0.43	0.184
Daily or almost daily	0.32	0.22	1.42	-0.12	0.77	0.155
Other Influencers						
Only a few times a year	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Monthly	0.08	0.12	0.69	-0.15	0.31	0.493
Weekly	0.15	0.11	1.35	-0.07	0.37	0.176
Daily or almost daily	0.39	0.16	2.48	0.08	0.70	0.013
Gender						
Boys	(ref.)	(ref.)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Girls	0.12	0.08	1.39	-0.05	0.28	0.165
Age	-0.02	0.03	-0.59	-0.07	0.04	0.557
Family's economic situation	0.05	0.05	0.96	-0.05	0.15	0.337
Materialism	0.34	0.05	6.78	0.24	0.43	0.000***
Cons.	0.68	0.55	1.24	-0.40	1.77	0.217

Notes. $n = 676$, R-Squared=0.15. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

DISCUSSION

To date, very few studies have explored how consumers' purchase intentions and materialistic values are related to specific platforms. This study addresses this gap in research as follows: we assumed that following YouTubers and instant platform influencers (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok) would be connected to purchase intention and materialism. Surprisingly, we found something more specific. Those who followed more

actively Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat influencers had more materialistic values than their passive counterparts. However, active and passive followers of instant platform influencers did not differ in their purchase intentions. These findings are consistent with the previous studies that have reported the relationship between materialism, traditional media usage (Opree et al., 2014) overall social media usage (Hwang & Jeong, 2020; Kamal et al., 2013; Thoumrungroje, 2018), and following social media influencers (Lou & Kim, 2019).

In turn, the active followers of YouTubers had higher purchase intentions than passive ones. However, in contrast to our assumptions, passive and active followers of YouTubers did not differ in their materialistic values. These findings support the previous research which suggests that influencers can affect followers' purchase intention (Lou & Kim, 2019; Rasmussen et al., 2021; Schouten et al., 2020). We also found that materialism predicted higher purchase intention, which agrees with Kamal and colleagues (2013) and Lou and Kim (2019). In addition, our finding that boys scored higher on materialism than girls, is in line with the findings of Kamineni (2005). Overall, our findings are in line with Lou and Kim (2019) who found that following social media influencers was connected to materialism and purchase intention. However, they did not examine what role the platform types used by influencers played in these relationships. Therefore, this study adds to previous findings by showing how following instant platform influencers (Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat) was related to higher materialism while active following of YouTubers was connected to higher purchase intentions.

Our research was framed by consumer socialization (CS) theory (Moschis & Churchill, 1978), and Cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). The latter was used to explain the larger process of transmission of materialistic values from the influencers to their followers. Our finding that active followers of instant platform influencers (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok) had a higher level of materialism compared to the passive followers is in line with the idea of the genre-specific cultivation process (especially when this difference was not found in other platforms).

CS-theory was used to explain how followers of influencers develop purchase intentions and materialistic values. The socialization process proposes that individuals learn values and behaviours from the socialization through imitation, reinforcement, and interaction (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). We found that social media influencers can play a

pivotal role as socialization agents. Thus, when one actively follows product reviews by YouTubers, for instance, followers might want to have the same products as the socialization agent in order to be like them (Churchill & Moschis, 1979; Rasmussen et al., 2021). Moreover, when interacting with influencers (e.g., Instagrammer), followers might absorb the social norms and materialistic values presented by social media influencers, for example, that being wealthy and having luxury products is worthwhile. Applying the conclusion by de Gregorio and Sung (2010): followers' attitudes are shaped by influencers they are interacting with. The followers generate both materialistic values and purchase intentions that can be seen as outcomes of the socialization process.

Differences between influencers

Research shows that product promotion, product placement, and product reviews are increasingly popular on YouTube (Fitriani et al., 2020; Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2019) and that YouTube is an appealing platform for advertisers (Gerhards, 2019). Also, given that YouTubers' review videos affect viewers' purchase intentions (Lee & Watkins, 2016) our findings that active YouTube followers had higher purchase intentions than passive followers is in line with previous studies. Also followers might create stronger relationships with YouTubers than Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok influencers. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found a connection between the engagement with YouTubers and Instagrammers, but they did not specify their differences. Although we did not measure participants' engagement levels, we suggest that the followers of YouTubers watch longer videos than the followers of Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok followers. Therefore, they become familiar with the influencer in a different way and are more likely to engage with them, which has been associated with purchase intentions (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Lou & Kim, 2019). For example, Kurtin and colleagues (2018) found that higher exposure to YouTube was related to stronger parasocial relationships with YouTubers. In parallel, it is possible that since YouTubers' videos are longer than videos by other influencers, it indicates higher exposure, which might result in a stronger parasocial relationship. This might explain higher purchase intentions. On the other hand, higher exposure can also imply greater overall consumption of YouTube content, not just longer videos. YouTubers might also endorse products more straightforwardly and extensively than other influencers due to their content: professional product reviews and unboxing videos

(Fitriani et al., 2020). YouTubers can also be more authentic than Instagrammers, for instance, who are more inclined to impression management (Tian et al., 2019), and thus, YouTubers might generate higher purchase intentions.

That is not to say that YouTubers do not disseminate materialistic values, but rather, it might be far easier to be exposed to materialistic values by following Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok influencers. For example, conspicuous materialistic content has been trending on TikTok (Widdicombe, 2020) and Snapchat (Moss, 2014). Moreover, Instagram has been described as an excessively materialistic platform (Hwang & Jeong, 2020), and its pictures are typically polished and filtered (Lup et al., 2015). Also, Instagram includes a lot of conspicuous consumption and luxury accounts, which are highly appreciated by young people (Marwick, 2015). Industry reports have also claimed that visual appeal and attractiveness are more important than personality on Instagram, whereas YouTube is less about aesthetics and thrives more on the personality and relatability of the YouTuber (Brown, 2019). Moreover, Tian and colleagues (2019) proposed that Instagrammers are more inclined to impression management than YouTubers. Thus, the threshold to post short and not necessarily truthful materialistic content, can be lower on these instant platforms compared to YouTube.

Furthermore, it may be that following YouTubers was not related to materialistic values because of the nature of their content. Videos by YouTubers can indeed be product centred, but product reviews, for instance, are usually quite professional and focused on the details of a certain product (Fitriani et al., 2020; Pfeuffer et al., 2021). In contrast, glamorous and polished lifestyles are typical characteristics of Instagram (Hwang & Jeong, 2020) and TikTok (Widdicombe, 2020), and the focus on these platforms are not necessarily placed on the products' attributes, but on the centrality of these acquisitions in their lives.

At the single parameter level, active followers of bloggers and other influencers differed from the passive ones in their purchase intention. However, when parameters were tested jointly, bloggers and other influencers did not predict purchase intentions statistically significantly (see Wooldridge 2012, 149-150).

Theoretical contribution

Hermann and colleagues (2020) claimed that research of cultivation effects has mainly focused on traditional media. Our study, in turn, suggests the applicability of the

cultivation theory in social media, especially by showing how young consumers' active following of social media influencers were related to higher materialism. Compared to passive followers, active followers' exposure to materialistic content is higher, and thus the cultivation effect as well. However, as discussed earlier, it remains controversial whether a genre-specific approach can be perceived as a part of cultivation theory. As it seems that our research field accepts the genre-specific approach (Record, 2018), and the majority of the cultivation studies have taken this approach (Potter, 2014), we see this approach providing a complementary perspective to the original theory. While CS-theory (Moschis & Churchill, 1978), has been applied to internet studies (Lueg et al., 2006), and social media (Nafees et al., 2021), the current study enhances our understanding of how social media influencers can act as socialization agents. Influencers transmit behavioural models, values, and attitudes to their followers, which can have a significant effect on their consumer behaviour. Critical implications should be considered as influencers can disseminate values and world views that are too much based on materialistic elements.

Practical implications

Although many social media influencers are commercially motivated and co-operate with companies and brands, and even if they disseminate materialistic world views, their influence could also be utilised for more idealistic purposes. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, Finnish social media influencers were authorised by the government to spread the evidence-based knowledge about the virus (Henley, 2020). In sum, today's social media influencers are able to affect almost all kinds of values and behaviours of children and young people. The increasing societal and commercial power of influencers is something that companies and policy makers should be better aware of in the future.

Limitations

Due to the correlational nature of this study, we cannot determine a causal relationship between following social media influencers and the outcomes. Thus, it is open to question as to whether more materialistic people follow social media influencers for social comparison purposes (Chu et al., 2016), or whether influencers cultivate materialistic values. It is also likely that this relationship is bidirectional. We also acknowledge that as we focused on the social media influencers, we did not control for whether participants' materialistic values and purchase intentions were merely absorbed

from the influencers and not from the television or parents for instance. It is also notable that people may be also unintentionally exposed to the influencers' content. For example, the Instagram algorithm can recommend content to its users by influencers they do not actively follow. However, as it is difficult to measure reliably to what extent this happens, we focused on those consumers' materialistic values and purchase intentions who reported following influencers. This study is also limited by the lack of information about who were the influencers that participants followed and what actual content the participants were exposed to. In the future conducting comparative research designs are needed. Future studies could also benefit by assessing why participants followed the influencers (e.g., for entertainment or genuine interest) and whether this would play a role in materialism and purchase intentions. Future studies should also examine the effect of following influencers on followers' actual buying behavior.

Conclusion

This study adds to our current understanding of the role of social media influencers in adolescents' materialism and consumer behaviour. While previous studies have shown that endorsements by social media influencers are associated with higher levels of purchase intention (Lee & Watkins, 2016) and trust toward the endorsed brands (Reinikainen et al., 2020), knowledge of the connection between following social media influencers and young people's materialistic values has been scarce. Our findings showed that following instant platform influencers (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok) was positively related to higher materialistic values, and following YouTubers was, in turn, connected to higher purchase intentions. As different social media platforms operate in different ways, deeper knowledge is needed about how social media influencers communicate with young people on different platforms. Thereby we can better comprehend the true impact of the influencers on young people's behaviour, values and world views -now and in the future.

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Funding and Acknowledgements

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Appendix A

Measurements

Materialism. Participants' materialistic values were assessed by using a shortened 6-item version adopted from Richin's scale of materialism (Richins, 2004). The adaptation of this scale has also showed a good reliability across different age groups (Kühne & Opree, 2019. The participants were presented the following statements: "I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes", "I like to have a lot of luxury in my life", "The things I own tell a lot about how well I'm doing in life", "Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure", "I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things", and "I'd be happier if I owned nicer things". These items were summed up to composite variable. A 5-point Likert scale was used (1=totally disagree and 5=totally agree). Cronbach α=.72

Purchase intention. Purchase intention was assessed by using a 3-item scale, adapted from previous studies (Chakraborty, 2019; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Lee et al., 2015). The original

items were modified so that they were compatible with our research aim. That is, the purchase intention statements had to be related to social media influencers. The final scale included 3-items: "I attempt to purchase products and services recommended by a social media influencer I appreciate", "I would be ready to recommend a product or a service to others that is recommended by a social media influencer I appreciate", and "Social media influencers help me to decide what to buy". These items were summed up to a composite variable. A 5-point Likert scale was used (1=totally disagree and 5=totally agree). Cronbach α=.765. We also analyzed exploratively whether those who followed influencers and those who did not differ in their purchase intentions. The results showed that followers had higher purchase intentions (M = 2.27) than those who did not follow (M = 1.87) ($p <$. 001). However, we did not include this result in our manuscript because we thought that participants who did not follow any social media influencers would not be able to answer credibly to the questions regarding purchase intentions because they were related to the social media influencers.

Economic situation of the family. Young people's socio-economic background may affect their level of materialism. For example, adolescents from poorer families scored higher than their more affluent counterparts on the measures of materialism (Chaplin et al., 2014). Therefore, the family's economic situation was used as a control variable. The respondents were asked, "How would you describe your family's economic situation" (1-5 Likert scale with 1=very poor and 5=excellent). Although 20% of the respondents were officially adults (aged 19), a great majority of young people in that age group still live in their parental homes.

Following social media influencers. Influencers were identified according to their platform such as YouTubers and Instagrammers. Influencers were chosen for this study according to their estimated popularity among young people (e.g., Smith & Anderson, 2018). Influencers were grouped into categories by the nature of their platform. Categories were: 1) YouTubers; 2) Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat influencers; 3) bloggers; and 4) other influencers including LinkedIn influencers and game streamers (e.g., Twitch). YouTube is a video-based social media platform, that has a relatively long videos (over 10 minutes on average), a large variety of topics, and over two billion users. Instagram is a hybrid platform, including short videos, video stories, reels and pictures. Instagram has a lot of topics and approximately 1 billion users. TikTok is a short video platform including a lot of topics and has over 1 billion monthly users. Snapchat is a platform including short videos and pictures which automatically disappear after 24 hours, and has a lot of different topics and over 250 million daily users. Bloggers share their writings and pictures in different places on social media. Their topics and number of followers can vary a lot. LinkedIn-influencer: someone who has a lot of followers and influence capability on LinkedIn, which is a professional job-related platform, and includes pictures, writings and short videos. Game-streamers, in turn, stream their online gaming sessions, for example, through Twitch, in which followers may chat with a streamer.

The data was gathered in 2019, and then the maximum length of Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat videos was one minute. They were thus treated as instant platforms and were put into same category. In turn, the average length of YouTube videos was over 10 minutes and therefore YouTubers were treated as a

single category. Bloggers formed a single category as their content is mostly in written format. Other influencers (e.g., LinkedIn influencers and game streamers) were combined into a single category, as their nature differed from other categories and their popularity was assumed to be moderate. The respondents were then asked what particular influencers (e.g., YouTubers) they followed and how often by using a 1‑ 4‑point scale: 1=Only a few times a year, 2=Monthly, 3=Weekly, 4=Daily, or almost daily. In the analysis, the following frequency was converted into dummy variables by having "only a few times a year" as a reference group. As the distance between timepoints (1 ‑ 4) in the scale was not equal, it was statistically sufficient to treat the followership as categorical.

Appendix B
Results of f‑statistics

Table 5.1
Following social media influencers and materialism

Dependent: materialism	df	F	p>F
YouTubers	3	0.11	0.957
Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers	3	10.33	0.000***
Bloggers	3	1.31	0.271
Other Influencers	3	1.57	0.194

Notes. All denominators = 660. *** p < .001.

Table 5.2
Following social media influencers and purchase intentions

Dependent: purchase intentions	df	F	p>F
YouTubers	3	5.44	0.000***
Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok influencers	3	1.18	0.316
Bloggers	3	2.47	0.061
Other Influencers	3	2.26	0.080

Notes. All denominators = 659. *** p < .001.